

Segment **N48: Rural Southern Bliss**

Lower to middle-income multi-generational families living in small towns

Resource: Mosaic by Experian.

Religious Experience in a Nutshell

Religious perspective: *The Lord is My Shepherd*

Common Spiritual Issues: *Feelings of estrangement, anxieties about fate and emptiness*

Potential Influence

Lifestyle Compatibility	Family Group N Pastoral Pride	Frequent Neighbors
I30 Stockcars and State Parks	N46 True Grit Americans	J35 Rural Escape
R66 Dare to Dream	N47 Countrified Pragmatics	L43 Homemade Happiness
R67 Hope for Tomorrow	N48 Rural Southern Bliss	M44 Red White and Bluegrass
S68 Small Town Shallow Pockets	N49 Touch of Tradition	Q64 Town Elders

General Comments

Rural Southern Bliss gravitate toward established, more conservative churches. These are churches in which family (past and present) have been long time members. Churches tend to be very conscious of tradition, and are often vocal advocates for strong government that reduces crime, protects human rights, and provides opportunities for advancement into the middle class.

Many of the towns in which they live are struggling economically as urbanization and globalization have forced long standing industries to close or relocate. The church provides emotional and relational stability. It serves as a “rock” in changing times. It often provides social services and career counseling programs, along with day care or elder care for hardworking households.

Rural Southern Bliss are workaholics by necessity just to survive, but they are generally optimistic about the future and look to the church to sustain a positive vision. In some contexts there may be growing interest in bi-racial churches that provide positive role models for reconciliation and cooperation. They can become bridges between lifestyle segments in ideologically polarized communities.

General Comments

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How do I, as a leader, perceive the spiritual expectations of people in our community?

How can we, as a board, research and understand our community better?

How can we, as a church, build closer relationships with this lifestyle segment?

Color Key

High Priority

Medium Priority

Low Priority

Leadership Preferences

Resource: *Spiritual Leadership* by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press)

THE CONSTANT LEADERS		THE ORGANIC LEADERS		THE EXTREME LEADERS	
x	Caregiver		Discipler		Visionary
x	Enabler		Guru		Mentor
	CEO				Pilgrim

Rural Southern Bliss respects pastors, and it is important for pastors to sustain their respect. Pastors are strong role models for faith and values, and hold members accountable for their spiritual lives with confidence and credibility. Pastors are very knowledgeable about scripture, and more interested in practical applications to daily living than doctrines and abstractions. They are often excellent communicators, speaks motivationally using stories, personal experiences, and Biblical metaphors. They are regular visitors in homes, hospitals, and other public institutions, and network effectively among other social service and health care agencies.

Pastors have often graduated from a Bible College, or received training as lay pastors from established denominations, and have been ordained by a denomination or congregation. Pastors may be bi-vocational, which adds to their credibility in the community. They have good diplomatic skills, but are assertive leaders for strategic planning and leadership accountability. The pastor's family members are expected to model Christian attitudes and behavior patterns, and success as head of family reinforces authority within the church family.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe your pastor now?

How might your pastor adapt to be more empathic in the future?

How can you equip, train, and/or support your pastor in any transition?

Hospitality Preferences

Resource: *Worship Ways* by Thomas Bandy and Lucinda Holmes (Abingdon Press)

TRADITIONAL		MODERN		POSTMODERN	
x	The Basics	x	Multiple Choices	x	Take-Out
			Healthy Choices		

Rural Southern Bliss try hard to honor the Sabbath day. They come early to church for Sunday school, stay for worship, and linger for refreshments, lunch, fellowship, or recreation with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They like to wear their best clothes, be on their best behavior, and exercise their spiritual gifts for singing, teaching, care giving, praying, and so on.

Greeters are important, not so much to welcome newcomers (which are few), but to honor members and their extended families and occasionally help the elderly or young mothers negotiate steps and hallways. Refreshments should be available throughout the day. Refreshments include basic brewed coffee and tea (hot and cold), and lemonade or water. Food may be donated, but usually inexpensive treats from the supermarket. Make sure there is plenty of it, and whatever is left over can be sent home for snacks or frozen for next Sunday. Fellowship dinners are often jumbo sized orders of fast food (chicken, fries, etc.) rather than prepared meals. Depending on the region, there may be broiled crawfish, catfish, or other local delicacies.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe your hospitality ministries now?

How should hospitality ministries change to be more relevant to this lifestyle segment?

What additional training do greeters, ushers, and servers need to be more empathic?

Worship Preferences

Resource: *Worship Ways* by Thomas Bandy and Lucinda Holmes (Abingdon Press)

TRADITIONAL		MODERN		POSTMODERN	
x	Care-giving Worship	x	Inspirational Worship		Mission-Connectional Worship
	Educational Worship	x	Transformational Worship		Coaching Worship
	Healing Worship				

Rural Southern Bliss expect worship to be uplifting, joyful, and thankful. Worship also encourages participants to connect the Gospel with their hearts and worship may explore a whole range of emotions. Time is generally forgotten in worship. Preaching may continue for some time and the pastor may be inspired to follow an unexpected train of thought. People may come and go as needed, but no one is in a hurry to leave.

Worship is very participatory. Music is both performed and sung, and either way people react spontaneously to the lyrics and rhythm. Prayers initiated by the pastor or lay leader are enlarged and supplemented by spontaneous prayers or affirmations by other people. Scripture is highlighted throughout the service. Personal achievements and family celebrations are noted.

The sermon is passionate, motivational, and Bible based. It is applicable to daily living, and may refer to ongoing Bible study or small group conversations. Elders, deacons, or other lay leaders may stand with the preacher to lend vocal and emotional support to the message, and people will respond vocally to affirm key insights. Preacher and congregation tend to feed off one another's energy, and help one another concentrate on the wisdom and power of the Word. There may be one or two offerings, and perhaps the opportunity for an altar call or healing prayer.

Worship is often unsupported by any technology other than a piano or organ, although there may be a simple audio system. Video is uncommon. People may sit in pews or chairs, but there is often plenty of space to move about, and a spacious enough stage for pastors to move as they preach or choirs to sing.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe your worship service(s) now?

How should you customize one or more worship services to be relevant to this segment?

What additional training do preachers, musicians, readers need to meet expectations?

Education Preferences

Resource: See, Know, and Serve by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press)

FORM		CONTENT		GROUPING	
x	Curricular	x	Biblical	x	Generational
x	Experiential		Topical		Peer Group

Rural Southern Bliss are apt to spend a good portion of their Sunday at church. Sunday school often precedes worship for children and adults. Increasingly, however, adult Sunday school consists of older adults in traditional Bible study classes led by mature and highly respected matriarchs or patriarchs of the church. Younger adults may gather for fellowship and broader, more topical conversation in the kitchen, refreshment center, or outside. This ambiguity about young adult Christian education may or may not be resolved by midweek small group opportunities. Many younger adults are already committed to various forms of continuing education related to job proficiency or career advancement.

The children's Sunday school is fairly traditional, and mirrors the age-based K-8 classroom experience of public school. They study a curriculum based on scripture. The teachers are often matriarchs of the church and their apprentices, and this experiential mentoring is also the training process for new teachers. The Sunday school and the women's association together represent a significant influence in the life of the church.

The church usually supports a very strong teen youth program, and may pay a stipend to train and deploy a Youth Coordinator. The youth program is also fairly traditional, including key elements for recreation and fellowship, bible study and prayer, and local mission service. The emerging challenge is to provide relevant Christian education opportunities for post-teen young adults age 20-45 ... and often this is tied to a second challenge to create mentoring relationships between patriarchs of the church and young men. Some young men fill this gap with task groups and mission teams of the church, in which advanced mentoring in Christian living may be continued. Men's groups and youth groups often work together.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe children, youth, and adult education in your church now?

How would education strategies need to change to be relevant to this lifestyle segment?

What changes in leadership selection and training would make education more effective?

Small Group Preferences

Resource: See, Know, and Serve by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press)

LEADERSHIP		CONTENT	
x	Trained Leaders		Curriculum Study
	Rotated Leaders	x	Shared Affinity

Rural Southern Bliss value midweek small groups most when they are oriented to bible study, leadership training, or community service. They tend to prefer large groups (gender- or age-based, or mixed) for fun and fellowship. Large groups allow multi-generational families to participate together. Successful small groups tend to have designated leaders appointed and trained by the pastor. Groups that rely on rotating leadership do not tend to last very long. Unless there is a designated leader, accountability within the group for spiritual discipline and mutual support may break down. The pastor's involvement is a key to success. The pastor often mentors a small group of men and women to become more confident in spiritual leadership, and then deploys them to develop their own small groups. The pastor continues to meet with them for accountability and ongoing coaching.

Timing for small groups is very pragmatic. Many groups will gather in the early morning for breakfast before work, or during other natural breaks in the work day. Weekends or other days off work often prioritize family responsibilities and activities. Although group discussions emphasize scripture, group are shaped around a shared affinity (i.e. enthusiasm, activity, or need). The affinity may be very practical (like automobile maintenance or sports), or it may be urgent (like parenting or job resume coaching). Support groups are becoming more common to address temporary unemployment, divorce recovery, or addiction intervention.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How would you describe the Small Group strategy in your church now?

How would Small Group strategies need to change to be relevant to this lifestyle segment?

What changes in leadership and content would make Small Groups more effective?

Outreach Preferences

Resource: Strategic Thinking by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press)

	PERSONAL NEED	READINESS TO VOLUNTEER
Basic Survival	X	X
Health and Wellness	X	X
Quality of Life	X	X
Addiction Intervention		X
Interpersonal Relationships		X
Human Potential		X
Salvation and Human Destiny		X

Rural Southern Bliss have deep roots in the community, and can usually rely on extended family, friends, and neighbors to help them out in times of need. However, there are times when these networks do not have the resources or spiritual authority to help. Churches often provide opportunities for short term financial aid, legal aid, food, medical attention, and addiction intervention that is otherwise unavailable from personal or community networks. The church may create a Community Center where people can gather informally during the week, connect with advisors from the church, and find temporary help. They often partner with other organizations to advocate for policies related to human rights, immigration, health care, primary and secondary school education, and equal opportunity employment.

They organize in the community for crime prevention and safe environments. This may include task groups to clean up properties, escort children on Halloween night, coach parenting and household skills to young singles and couples, or offer family financial planning services. Health, diet, and nutrition are increasingly important health issues. Enabling, care giving pastors in growing churches often seek special training to organize and direct faith-based, non-profit organizations or Christian schools that are developed in association with the church.

Anything that encourages upward mobility, job placement, and career advancement is interesting to people in this segment. Churches develop links with community colleges or university scholarship programs, and like to encourage young adults to discern spiritual gifts and sharpen creative talents. People are willing to sacrifice personal and family time to get ahead, and the church can support them emotionally and spiritually as they go and grow. Young adults who relocate for education or jobs often maintain strong, continuous contacts with their home town and home church.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

What outreach categories does your church emphasize now?

What outreach categories would be more relevant to this lifestyle segment?

What outreach priorities and tactics should change for the church to bless this segment?

Facility Preferences

Resource: See, Know, and Serve by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press)

PROPERTY		TECHNOLOGY		SYMBOLISM	
x	Ecclesiastical	x	Modern	x	Classic Christendom
x	Utilitarian		Postmodern		Contemporary Post–Christendom

Rural Southern Bliss treasure the more ecclesiastical-looking church facilities they have always had, but if that building were destroyed they are apt to build a more multi-purpose facility in its place. Older buildings may include a mix of architectures and materials, with accumulated additions and renovations over the years carried out by volunteers. They are not averse to relocating to another church building if membership growth, or the need for specialized outreach space, requires it (and some creative financial management makes it possible). They might also relocate and build a utilitarian brick or cinder block structure, especially if this provides additional outdoor space for team sports, fellowship, and evangelical outreach. The kitchen may be the most up to date room in the building. People in this segment tend to eat fast or frozen food, so there is often a freezer and microwave available.

Worship space may also be a traditional sanctuary that has been retrofitted for inspirational or transformational worship. The hard wood is often removed from a chancel area to allow enlarged musical groups, and free the pastor from the pulpit to step forward to make eye contact. Pews may be replaced by chairs, center aisles widened and front rows removed to provide more space for interaction. Vestibules may be expanded for fellowship and kitchens may be upgraded for fellowship dinners.

Audio and video systems may not be necessary, but audio will have priority over video. Music is important, and electrical supplies may be upgraded for amplifiers and electronic keyboards. Internet is probably not important. If there is an office in the church building itself, it may well have computer and internet access, but files and records still tend to be hard copy and stored in filing cabinets. There also may be storage or display areas for memorials and precious symbols from the past.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

What renovations and/or upgrades need to be made in our church facility?

What symbols of faith would be most relevant to this lifestyle segment?

If we started another site of ministry for this segment, how should we design it?

Financial Preferences

Resource: See, Know, and Serve by Thomas Bandy (Abingdon Press)

GIVING TARGET		GIVING METHOD	
x	Unified Budgets and General Funds		Informed Philanthropy & Pledging
	Designated Programs & Mission Projects	x	Lifestyle Coaching & Family Financial Planning

Experian suggests that *Rural Southern Bliss* live on tight budgets. They also have increasing financial insecurity as once steady employment in manufacturing disappears, and are transitioning to new jobs and often working multiple part time jobs. However, they also have a philanthropic streak and will be generous toward churches and selected charitable organizations. Some older adults will practice tithing, and most families will support the church as generously as they can. They often “walk a second mile” to give extra to a special mission project, overcome an operations deficit, or make an urgent repair to the building. Donations are usually in cash or in-kind (labor, materials, expertise and resources). Many people in this segment appreciate coaching for Christian family financial planning, and may appreciate coaching for entrepreneurship and starting a business.

Rural Southern Bliss trust the church to spend money wisely, and members may not always demand an audited financial statement or even a detailed budget. They are motivated to give mainly by the spiritual credibility and vision of the pastor and core leaders. Leaders usually set a benchmark for financial giving, and declare their own financial commitment in advance of a fund raising campaign. The campaign is usually based on a number of rallies and prayer vigils through the year rather than home visits limited to one season of the year. They may find it hard to commit to an annual financial pledge, and financial projections may not be reliable beyond three months. People generally distrust banks, and probably won't pre-authorize withdrawals or use credit cards. They give generously what they can, when they can.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

What options in giving methods and giving targets do we offer now?

How do we design our annual stewardship campaign(s) now?

How should we revise our financial strategy to be more relevant to this segment?

Communication

Resource: Mosaic E–Handbook by Experian

CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC COMMUNICATION				TRADITIONAL CHURCH COMMUNICATION					
	Direct Mail Receptive	Mobile Telephone	Online Computer	x	Newspaper	x	Corded Telephone	x	Verbal Announcements
x	Email Receptive	Broadcast Cable TV	Internet Radio	x	Print	x	AM/FM Radio	x	Personal Visits

Rural Southern Bliss adopt technology as needed. They are becoming increasingly familiar with email and internet in order to search for jobs, shop, sports, or follow international events. The church should become more aggressive building email databases for better internal communication. Websites can be valuable if they provide resources for personal growth and career development. They are very responsive to television, and may be influenced by religious programming.

They will read hard copy print. They may read the pastor's sermon or use daily devotional guides, and they will certainly read the Bible and occasional commentaries. The church newsletter needs to be relatively short, and emphasize prayer concerns among the members and coming events. In church, they may or may not use printed orders of worship, and perhaps only a simply sheet of announcements may be handed out. They will rely on static billboards and outdoor signs for marketing. For special events, they will rent a mobile sign for the side of the road or front lawn of the church.

People mainly rely on oral communication in large gatherings and small groups to communicate information or learn new things. This can be reinforced by telephone calls to the home. Posters may be used in local diners, community centers, hospitals, and sports arenas to advertise opportunities to the community. They may also sponsor a booth at a local fair or hand out literature at a picnic.

Note: See the list of definitions at the end of this report to explain key terminology.

Discussion Questions:

How do we communicate among church participants now?

How do we communicate beyond our church to the community now?

How should we adapt communication strategies to be more effective for this segment?

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

POTENTIAL INFLUENCE

Lifestyle Compatibility	Daily behavioral habits overlap with common activities and similar priorities
Family Group	Grouping by key demographic factors like age, income, culture, family status, etc.
Frequent Neighbors	Often live near each other with shared recreational, health, or emergency services

LEADERSHIP

Constant Leaders	Traditional clergy focused on sustaining ministries & increasing members
Organic Leaders	Innovative leaders focused on church growth, new starts & multiplying followers
Extreme Leaders	Non-Institutional leaders focused on spiritual disciplines, high accountability, and pursuing perfection
Caregiver	Focus on visitation, counseling, pastoral prayer
Enabler	Focus on facilitating meetings, lay empowerment, mediation, liturgy
CEO	Focus on staff development, administration, fund raising, expository preaching
Discipler	Focus on seeker sensitivity, adult faith formation, guidance for Christian living
Guru	Focus on religious insight, holistic personal growth, spirituality, enlightenment
Visionary	Focus on big picture, major social change, motivational speaking
Mentor	Focus on self-awareness, individual meaning and purpose, vocational clarity
Pilgrim	Focus on cross-cultural sensitivity, inter-religious dialogue, strict spiritual discipline

HOSPITALITY

The Basics	Friendly untrained greeters, basic coffee and creamer, packaged food or sugary snacks
Multiple Choices	Trained greeters, multiple serving stations, great coffee, varieties of food
Healthy Choices	Trained greeters mirroring lifestyle diversity, healthy food options, allergen alerts
Take-Out	Coffee-to-go, bagged food, exit door hospitality, text message and social media

EDUCATION

Curricular	Printed books or study guides. Passive, intellectual, classroom. Maturity measured by acquired knowledge
Experiential	Activities. More music, images, movement, interaction. Maturity measured by behavior patterns, attitudes.
Biblical	Focuses on the Old and New Testaments. Maturity means Biblical literacy
Topical	Focuses on contemporary issues. Maturity means ethical integrity and enlightened behavior
Generational	Gathers people by age or grade in separate classrooms with age-appropriate resources.
Peer Group	Gathers people sharing affinities or common interests regardless of age.

SMALL GROUPS

Rotated Leaders	Participants take turns hosting and leading the group. Requires limited expertise and training.
Designated Leaders	Single leader guides the group from start to finish. Requires significant maturity and training.
Curriculum	Focus on a book, workbook, or structured program to guide structured discussion
Affinity	Focus on shared interest, enthusiasm, or activity to inspire informal discussion.

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS (cont.)

WORSHIP

Educational	Consistent liturgy, expository preaching, focus on doctrine, ethics, and history
Inspirational	Uplifting music, motivational speaking, focus on joy, optimism, and encouragement
Transformational	Spontaneous, expectant, personal transformations, Higher Power interventions
Coaching	Informal, dialogical, topical, practical coaching on how to live better & faithfully
Caregiving	Slow, meditative, family–feel with pastoral prayer, children’s time, senior celebrations
Healing	Quiet, prayerful, expectant of physical, mental, relational healing and hope
Mission–Connectional	Unity of action/reflection, all about outreach, volunteer empowerment

OUTREACH

Survival	Basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, jobs, basic health care
Recovery	Addiction intervention, 12 step support, and counseling services
Health	Mental and physical fitness, disease prevention, rehabilitation, therapy
Quality of Life	Social wellbeing, neighborhood safety, environment, immigration, peacemaking
Human Potential	Personal/vocational fulfillment, education, career help, human rights advocacy
Interpersonal	Intimacy, sexuality, family & marriage counseling, healthy friendships
Human Destiny	Repentance, conversion, witnessing, alignment with God’s purposes

FACILITIES

Ecclesiastical	Facility must “look like a church” with traditional architecture and furnishings
Utilitarian	Facility must be “user–friendly” and multi–purpose for public use
Christendom	Indoor/outdoor symbols associated with church history or denominational identity
Contemporary	Indoor/outdoor symbols from nature, indigenous cultures, alternative spiritualities
Modern	Technology primarily enhances print and oral communication
Postmodern	Technology primarily enhances multi–sensory interaction, internet, social media

FINANCES

Unified Budgets	Stability first. Give to a single general fund to pay staff and manage overhead costs
Designated Giving	Effectiveness first. Give to specific funds or causes by personal preference
Informed Philanthropy	Informed, independent, confidential financial commitments for a tax benefit
Lifestyle Coaching	Individual & household coaching for Christian family financial management

COMMUNICATION

Direct Mail Receptive	Pay attention to mass mailings to postal addresses.
Email Receptive	Pay attention to information delivered digitally to personal email addresses.
Mobile Telephone	Regularly rely on cell phones and smart phones for calling, texting, surfing, banking etc.
Broadcast Cable TV	Regularly rely on cable television for news, advertising, and entertainment.
Online Computer	Regularly go online by personal computer to surf websites, shop, bank, and use other services.
Internet Radio	Regularly subscribe to internet services for music, sports, and topical discussions.
Newspaper	Pay attention to printed newspapers for updates about church news or local, national, global events.
Print	Pay attention to printed church newsletters, bulletin inserts, brochures, and other handouts.
Corded Telephone	Regularly use ordinary telephones to communicate from home.
AM/FM Radio	Regularly use traditional radio to listen to music, commercials, and talk.
Verbal Announcements	Always rely on verbal announcements from the pulpit about church events or items of interest.
Personal Visits	Always expect personal visits at home by a representative of the church to share information.