Ironwood Church Contextual Profile

Updated February 2022

Profile Statement #1

People in the Southeast Valley have a consumer identity and many choices. They have big homes, multiple vehicles, on-demand expectations, and disposable income, with many dual-income families. They can open-enroll kids across school boundaries or choose between 5-10 nearby charter schools. Church is also viewed as something to attend that meets spiritual needs and wants but can be easily discarded or transitioned.

Ministry Implications:

- People tend to "consume" churches and church programs, picking and choosing the ones they feel will help them along the way. They do this instead of identifying with the church community as a whole, allowing others to play a role in their decision-making, or being accountable for holiness and lifestyle. They need to be challenged to see church more as an interdependent family.
- Churches with multiple options tend to find more people opting. Churches must balance "meeting people where they're at" by offering multiple options while also challenging their consumerism by providing some high-commitment experiences.
- In a highly marketed world, genuine hospitality and generosity can be a sweet surprise. The church has an opportunity to show unconditional love and care that isn't just trying to recruit people to our tribe or close a deal.
- To challenge consumerism, churches must develop strategies and pathways to help move people from consuming ministry to owning ministry and serving others.
- Since meaningful relationships can neutralize some of the consumer instinct, assimilation is very important. As people feel more loyal to relationships, their commitment deepens.
- Churches should consider how to create environments that feel restful and replenishing in a world that is always moving too fast and asking for more.

Profile Statement #2

People in the southeast valley are mostly new to the area. They are new to the Phoenix metro area (in general) and the Southeast Valley (in particular). Their roots lie elsewhere, either in other parts of the country or city, but they are excited to live here and, in the case of homeowners, may have had to compete to get a ho*me here.*

Ministry Implications:

- Competence and passion in leadership are more valued than tenure. New leaders can be elevated, established and transitioned relatively easily as long as they are effective.
- People need meaningful relationships because they often do not have family or long-time friends nearby. The church has an opportunity to connect people into community and friendship in a significant way. Without these kind of relationships (even despite them sometimes) people will easily move between churches or out of church altogether.
- Because of shallow roots and a consumer culture, what matters most is what the church can do for me now. This perspective, while natural, must be challenged. For those who are excited to be here, there is an opportunity to motivate them to invest in a longer-term future that involves the church.

Profile Statement #3

People have (or aspire to have) marriage, family and children play a significant role in their lives. They value children's educational, social, artistic and athletic experiences and are willing to sacrifice greatly to enable them.

Ministry Implications:

- Many people will not seriously consider involvement in church because of their many pre-existing time commitments and activities. Additionally, in families, if one person objects to or dislikes church, he or she often has disproportionate influence.
- For people to keep participating, church must be viewed as providing a positive experience for children. Kids programs must be fun, helpful and positive.
- Healthy marriage and family is a felt-need that the church should address.
- Families who are immersed in sports…
- While marriage and family are inherently good things, people must be challenged to avoid turning them into idols — especially as their children approach adolescence and opportunities for highly specialized extracurriculars threaten church involvement.

Profile Statement #4

Though most people in the Southeast Valley live upper middle class lifestyles, they vary greatly in terms of educational background and experience. There is a significant gap in education and intellectual sophistication between people whose lifestyles might otherwise look quite similar.

Ministry Implications:

- Preaching and teaching can find it difficult to hit the "sweet spot" in terms of depth. Many listeners will find sermons either too heady or too simple. Advanced arguments must be communicated in simple terms.
- Pastors will often be among the most educated in the congregation and must work to relate to the "ordinary guy."
- Churches need diversity of education and sensibility in various pastoral staff and leadership teams. Without this diversity, it will be easy to alienate significant chunks of the community or congregation.
- A variety of educational and follow-up experiences (like podcasts) must be provided that allow those who want to go deeper the opportunity to do so.

Profile Statement #5

Many people in the Southeast Valley are dechurched and a growing percentage are unchurched. People are familiar with low-commitment religious experiences, tend to expect that church is low-commitment, and have very little context for orienting one's entire life around faith.

Ministry Implications:

- People are open to church—especially in times of crisis and pain—but are skeptical about whether it will be relevant in the rest of life. They tend to come in and out of a church over time depending on the challenges in their life situation.
- Few people are very acquainted with the Bible, but many are interested in learning more. Churches that can teach the Scriptures in an interesting way can provide a felt-need for people who are curious about faith.
- People are suspicious of the relationship between church and money, as it often triggers bad memories of mismanagement or over-emphasis.
- Many people come into church with distrust of authority, which extends to the church. Combined with #1, they want to consume church experiences more than they want to be led by pastors and leaders. Trust in leadership is fragile and easily lost.

Profile Statement #6

Many people in the Southeast Valley have a love/hate relationship with technology, especially when it comes to their children. Their devices are constant companions, helping them feel both more connected and more disconnected from embodied relationships. They simultaneously can't imagine living without digital technology and also lament how it negatively impacts their relationships and families — especially their children's development.

Ministry Implications:

- Churches and their ministries must speak fluently in the language of digital technology—intuitive, mobile-friendly websites, engaging social media, thoughtful graphic design, and compelling email communication are necessary to engage with churched or unchurched people. Poorly developed digital communication will be ineffective (merely drowned out in the white noise) or irritating (adding to the feeling of being assaulted by media).
- Churches must leverage technology in their ministry systems, but must beware that an over-reliance on technology can feel impersonal and frustrating (like the customer support phone line that tries to automate support when you just want to talk to a person).
- Churches have an opportunity to leverage analog—touch, face-to-face conversation, handwritten notes, phone calls, 'in the room' physical presence, etc.—to provide what is sorely lacking in a digital age.

Profile Statement #7

Many people in the Southeast Valley are dealing with significant emotional and mental health issues. They are fluent in therapeutic language, eager to self-diagnose, and likely to have some experience with psychiatric medication. Despite their high incomes and successful jobs (or maybe because of them), they are emotionally fragile. They want the church to speak to these issues, but are hesitant to trust the church's approach.

Ministry Implications:

- Church leaders need to be passably fluent in the language of emotion, mental health, and trauma so they can understand and use the terms both appreciatively and critically.

- Partnership and relationship between the church leadership and the mental health community is important for both shepherding people effectively and also for providing equipping opportunities.
- Churches that speak openly about mental health issues and provide equipping and resources around them — especially when connected to a trained "expert" — will have significant opportunities for reaching people in areas of felt need.
- Emotional wellbeing in general and positive emotions in particular have a totalizing effect. In a world where algorithms cater and addictions placate, church leaders will have to work especially hard leading people into uncomfortable emotional realities for the purposes of grief and growth.
- Pastors and lay counselors need to develop clear systems and communication regarding the limits and boundaries of their expertise and care.

Profile Statement #8

Growing numbers of people in the Southeast Valley work primarily or often from home. They spend hours daily on video calls and are more isolated from unchosen relationships than ever before. This is a relatively new dynamic with many people still figuring out how to make it work. As real-life relationships decrease in value, they are more tempted to believe that the "real world" is synonymous with the online world.

Ministry Implications:

- With less commuting, churches can offer programming in the evenings without being such a burden to their people's family lives.
- With the buffer between home and work removed, people need equipping in areas of family, marriage, work/life balance, margin, and Sabbath.
- Creating opportunities for real life relationships can provide extra value to those who are often only working remotely.