

## MINISTRY AREA PROFILE

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GREATER COLUMBIA · SOUTH CAROLINA

# Richland & Lexington Counties

A demographic, cultural and spiritual survey of the Midlands — one metropolitan mission field, held together across a river.

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### PREPARED FOR

#### SAMPLE CLIENT

one city. one church. one mission.

### STUDY AREA

#### 748,000 people

1,456 square miles · South Carolina's 2nd- and 6th-largest counties

### COMPILED

#### September 2026

U.S. Census / ACS · 2020 U.S. Religion Census · Pew

## START HERE

Every man, woman and child in Greater Columbia deserves repeated opportunities to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Here is the size of that assignment, stated as plainly as the data allows.

# 319,000

That is roughly how many people across Richland and Lexington Counties were **not counted as an adherent of any congregation — of any faith** — in the 2020 U.S. Religion Census. On today's population the figure is closer to **335,000**. ESTIMATED

**And Columbia is a church city.** That is what makes this number worth putting on the first page. The Midlands' religious adherence rate — about 55% — runs above the South Carolina average and far above the national one. More than 670 congregations sit inside these two counties from just their twenty largest bodies alone.

This is not a region that failed to build churches. It is a region where a third of a million people live outside all of them.

## READ THIS CAREFULLY

"Adherent" is a generous category — members, their children who are not members, and regular participants. It is not attendance and it is certainly not discipleship. If 55% of the Midlands clears *that* bar, the share actually walking with Jesus is meaningfully smaller. **319,000 is the floor of the assignment, not the ceiling.**

*Derived from 2020 U.S. Religion Census county adherent totals measured against 2020 census population for both counties. See Method, p. 26.*

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**This report is built to be handed to a room of pastors.** Sections 09 through 12 are the working end of it — the parts designed to be argued over, marked up and turned into assignments. Everything before that exists to make those four sections defensible.

SECTION 01

# The Shape of the Ground

Greater Columbia is a capital city, a garrison, a flagship university and a fast-growing suburb, stacked on top of one another in 1,456 square miles.

Richland County holds roughly **430,700 people** across 757 square miles — Columbia, the state capital, at its center; Fort Jackson on its eastern flank; the University of South Carolina's flagship campus downtown; Blythewood and Northeast Richland growing hard; and genuinely rural country north and east of that. Lexington County holds about **313,800** across 699 square miles — Lexington, Irmo, Cayce, West Columbia, Chapin, Gilbert, Batesburg-Leesville, Lake Murray, and farmland beyond. MEASURED

## Two very different growth stories

Lexington County has grown **8.0% since the 2020 census** — from 293,991 to roughly 317,600 — continuing a run that has more than doubled the county since 1980. Richland grew about **3.5%** over the same period. That divergence is the engine behind almost every other contrast in this report: Lexington is absorbing households, Richland is absorbing *people* who do not stay.

LEXINGTON COUNTY POPULATION, 1980–2025



Decennial census counts and 2025 Population Estimates Program.

MEASURED

### CONSIDERATION

A network that plants where the rooftops are will end up almost entirely in Lexington and Northeast Richland. That instinct is not wrong — new subdivisions do need churches. But it is also the path of least resistance, and it leaves the harder, older, denser and more transient half of this metro to whoever happens to already be there. INTERPRETIVE

# Four fields, one city

Greater Columbia is one mission field the way a hand is one thing. The parts do different work.

## The Core

Columbia city • Two Notch • North Columbia • the university district

Youngest, poorest, densest and most mobile part of the metro. Majority Black. Renter-heavy — Richland's homeownership runs about 60%, well below the state's 72%. Home to historically Black congregations with more than a century of institutional depth, and to thousands of students and young adults who arrive with no local church attachment at all.

## The Garrison

Fort Jackson and the neighborhoods around it

The Army's principal initial-entry training installation sits inside Richland County. **9.2% of Richland residents are veterans** — one and a half times the national rate. Soldiers, trainees, drill sergeants, spouses and retirees form a population that is constantly refreshing and structurally underserved by civilian congregations.

### FIELD WORK

Drive all four in one afternoon: Two Notch to Fort Jackson gate to Chapin to Gilbert. Two hours. Write down what changes — the storefronts, the church signs, the number of people outdoors, the age of the buildings. That drive will tell your network more than this page can.

## The Growth Belt

Lexington • Chapin • Irmo • Northeast Richland • Blythewood

Where the rooftops are going up. Older median age, higher incomes, higher homeownership, newer schools, and the heaviest concentration of existing evangelical infrastructure in the Midlands. Blythewood alone went from 2,041 residents in 2010 to 4,758 in 2020 to roughly 6,700 today.

## The Edge

Gilbert • Batesburg-Leesville • Eastover • Hopkins • rural Richland

Small towns and farmland on both ends of the metro, with aging buildings, thin services, real distance from the city's institutions, and — in rural Richland especially — pockets of persistent poverty that the county's overall numbers wash out entirely. The least-discussed field in the Midlands.

## SECTION 06

# One of the most churchied metros in America is not a reached metro.

## ~391,000

ADHERENTS COUNTED,  
BOTH COUNTIES

## 672+

CONGREGATIONS, TOP  
20 BODIES ALONE

## 319,338

RESIDENTS CLAIMED  
BY NONE OF THEM

### THE ADHERENCE RATE IS GENUINELY HIGH

Richland runs about 57% and Lexington about 53%, against 52.7% for South Carolina and 48.6% for the United States. By the standard measure, the Midlands is more churchied than the state and much more churchied than the country.

This is not a struggling region that let its churches die. It is a region that built them, kept them, filled them — and still has a third of a million people outside.

### THE REFRAME

If 672 congregations have not reached these 319,000 people, the constraint was never the number of churches.

The constraint is **who those churches are structurally built to receive**. Greater Columbia has largely solved the supply problem and hardly touched the reach problem.

INTERPRETIVE

The rest of Section 06 answers the obvious follow-up: *who exactly is gathered, and into what?* The two county tables that follow are the most useful pages in this report for a room of pastors deciding where their network is already strong and where it is simply absent.

*"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."*

MATTHEW 9:37

# Who is gathered: Richland County

The twenty largest religious bodies at the 2020 count. Total adherents approximately **235,400** of 416,147 residents.

| RELIGIOUS BODY                            | CONGREGATIONS | ADHERENTS     |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Non-denominational Christian</b>       | <b>115</b>    | <b>53,262</b> |
| <b>Southern Baptist Convention</b>        | <b>79</b>     | <b>40,209</b> |
| Catholic Church                           | 7             | 25,888        |
| United Methodist Church                   | 38            | 17,031        |
| Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ | 4             | 16,780        |
| Progressive National Baptist Convention   | 5             | 8,780         |
| Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)              | 13            | 7,957         |
| African Methodist Episcopal Church        | 25            | 7,672         |
| Episcopal Church                          | 12            | 7,434         |
| National Baptist Convention, USA          | 9             | 5,918         |
| Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)        | 18            | 5,134         |
| Latter-day Saints                         | 7             | 4,310         |
| Jehovah's Witnesses                       | 18            | 3,878         |
| Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)      | 8             | 2,986         |
| Presbyterian Church in America            | 12            | 2,856         |
| Church of God in Christ (COGIC)           | 6             | 2,730         |
| Mahayana Buddhist                         | 2             | 2,220         |
| Muslim (estimate)                         | 7             | 2,175         |
| Christian & Missionary Alliance           | 1             | 2,005         |
| Hindu temples                             | 1             | 1,731         |

2020 U.S. Religion Census (ASARB).

MEASURED

**Three things this table says.** Non-denominational Christianity is the largest single body in Richland County and, at 115 congregations, by far the most crowded lane in the metro. The historically Black Protestant bodies together account for roughly **41,900 adherents across 49 congregations** — more than the Catholic Church. And Bible Way, an Apostolic body with only four congregations in the county, reports nearly 16,800 adherents; a handful of very large Black congregations carry an enormous share of Columbia's church life.

# Sources, method & honest caveats

Figures are drawn from the most recent public sources available in September 2026. Because sources use different survey years, geographies and methods, some numbers are given as ranges or approximations, and totals from different surveys will not always reconcile. Demographic estimates carry margins of error; religious-adherence counts depend on self-reporting by religious bodies and systematically undercount house churches, storefront congregations and Spanish-language fellowships. **Read every adherence figure as a floor.** Every interpretive passage is labelled.

## PRINCIPAL SOURCES

- **U.S. Census Bureau** — 2020 Decennial Census; American Community Survey one-year and five-year estimates, 2022–2024, via Census Reporter and Data USA; Population Estimates Program through 2025.
- **2020 U.S. Religion Census** — Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), Richland and Lexington County congregational membership reports, accessed via the Association of Religion Data Archives and published summaries of the ASARB county tables.
- **Pew Research Center** — Religious Landscape Study, national affiliation and generational results; 2007 and 2014 studies for trend comparison.
- **South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office** — state census data center population estimates by race, ethnicity and county.
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## ON THE DERIVED FIGURES

County adherent totals are derived from published 2020 Religion Census shares: Richland's non-denominational total of 53,262 representing 22.6% of all county adherents yields roughly 235,400 adherents against a 2020 population of 416,147, or about 57%. Lexington's Southern Baptist total of 39,493 representing 25.4% yields roughly 155,400 against 293,991, or about 53%. Combined, that is approximately 390,800 adherents against 710,138 residents — leaving **319,338 unclaimed**. Applied to 2024–25 populations, the figure exceeds 335,000. Congregation counts reflect the top twenty bodies in each county only; true totals are higher. ESTIMATED

## WHAT THIS REPORT CANNOT TELL YOU

It has no tract-level household composition, no county health indicators, no licensed lifestyle segmentation, no worship-attendance figures — nobody has those last two — and no neighborhood-level religious data, because the Religion Census reports by county. It also cannot tell you which of your neighbors is awake at three in the morning, or what the Holy Spirit is already doing on a street where nobody filled out a survey. **It describes a place; it cannot introduce you to a person.** Correct it freely — a map that is never marked up was never used.