



MOVEMENT | **DFW**

State of DFW Report
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A Garden in the Wilderness of DFW

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Introduction

Some want freedom from religion but our founders enshrined freedom of religion. The cultural narrative says we need to keep the church out of the state but the founding narrative was that we need to protect the church from the state. The infamous separating wall was initially coined [by Roger Williams](#) in 1644 and popularized by [Thomas Jefferson](#) in 1802. The wall was intended to keep the “wilderness of the state” out of the “garden of the church.” Why protect the church? Because the founders believed religion inculcated virtue and virtue was a good ally for a limited government. John Adams went so far as to note that the Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.

Today skepticism and scandals could account for this flip regarding the garden of the church and the wilderness of the state. In 2003, [Gallup](#) found that 50 percent of Americans had a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of trust in organized religion. Today, that number has dropped to 38 percent. Christians make up 65 percent of the U.S. adult population, down from 77 percent in 2009. At the same time, those who don’t identify with any religion—often known as “nones”—now make up more than a quarter of the population, compared with 17 percent a decade ago. Only 45 percent of adults said they attended church at least once a month, down from 52 percent in 2009.

The Christian population is shrinking, their influence is questioned, but their call remains the same: to be a fragrant aroma in the wilderness of the state ([2 Cor. 2:14-16](#)). Within this paper, there will be an overview of areas where the church can influence the community for the better. Specifically, attention will be given to education, poverty, hunger, human trafficking, homelessness, and crime in Dallas, Tarrant, Collin, and Denton counties.

Education

Education, according to John Henry Newman, is the thread on which received knowledge, jewels of the great tradition, can be strung. Teachers personally sacrifice in the present to brighten our collective future. [94 percent](#) of public school teachers reported paying for supplies without reimbursement. On average, they spent \$479. A recent [study](#) showed that teachers work more unpaid overtime than any other profession, with 61 percent of teachers working as many as 13 extra hours every week.

But teachers can’t do this alone. [Research indicates](#) that active parents positively impact their student’s test scores, improve social skills, and boost graduation rates for the entire school. In the recipe for student success, teachers are the secret sauce but parents are the main ingredients.

In [Dallas ISD](#), there are 156,726 students. Graduation rates in area schools increased from 84 percent in 2007 to 86 percent in 2016. Regarding 3rd grade reading levels, schools in Dallas County have seen a jump of 5 percentage points in that metric over the past 5 years. Only [40 percent](#) of Dallas County third-graders meet the current standards. According to [Texas Tribune](#), 63.2 percent of Dallas ISD students were considered at risk of dropping out of school.

Fort Worth ISD had 86,039 students as of the 2017-2018 school year. Earlier this year, Fort Worth ISD introduced the 100 X 25 FWTX initiative, which has set a goal of ensuring that 100 percent of third-graders are reading on grade level or above by 2025. [The Read Fort Worth](#) recently celebrated significant progress toward our shared 100x25 goal. 35 percent of third-graders were reading on grade level as of the May 2018 STAAR exam, up 7 percentage points since 2015. [Regarding graduation rates and dropout rates](#), in 2010 FWISD boasted a 79.4 percent graduation rate and 2.8 percent dropout rate. In 2017, the graduation rate was 86.7 percent and the dropout rate was 2.9 percent.

For the class of 2015, [McKinney ISD](#) had an on-time graduation rate of 96.4 percent. Last year, they posted their highest graduation rate: 98.2 percent. Their dropout rate in 2010 was 0.3 percent. In 2017, that number was 0.2 percent.

Regarding Denton ISD, they had a 0.3 dropout rate in 2017-28. It was 0.4 in 2010. And concerning their graduation rate, it was 98 percent in 2010 and 87 percent in 2016.

Poverty

In the Scriptures, Jesus told his followers you will always have the poor with you ([John 12:8](#)). This was less a prediction and more a call to action, channeling [Deut. 15:7-11](#) for those who had ears to hear. Jonah Goldberg illuminates in his latest book [The Suicide of the West](#) that our free market capitalistic system has been the greatest alleviator of poverty in the history of the world. Friedrich A. Hayek noted: "Our faith in freedom does not rest on the foreseeable results in particular circumstances but on the belief that it will, on balance, release more forces for the good than for the bad." Or as Jesus said, to whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48).

Here in Dallas, the poverty rate is [21.8 percent](#). One out of every 4.6 residents of Dallas lives in poverty. [Since 2000](#), the number of people in poverty in Dallas has increased approximately 39.1 percent, while the City's total population increased by only about 7.6 percent. Over [280,000 people](#) in Dallas live in poverty, according to the most recent estimates, and that figure's grown more than five times faster than the city's population rise. According to a [D Magazine](#) article: "Dallas has the highest number of people living 185 percent below the poverty line of any American city and the second highest number of people living 100 percent below the poverty line."

[In Tarrant County](#), the county had 291,534 people living in poverty in 2014. In 2013, it had 286,019. The [estimates released last year](#) by the Census Bureau showed that the percent of

people whose income was below the poverty level increased in Fort Worth from 12.9 percent in 2017 to 15.6 percent in 2018 — slightly higher than the statewide figure of 14.9 percent for Texas last year. [The median household](#) income rose in Tarrant County from \$65,052 in 2017 to \$66,063 in 2018. Meanwhile, it dropped slightly in Fort Worth from \$60,205 in 2017 to \$58,448 in 2018.

The [percentage](#) of kids growing up in poor Fort Worth neighborhoods has jumped 9 percent in the last five years, increasing at a faster rate than other Texas cities. More than a quarter of children in Fort Worth are now growing up in high-poverty neighborhoods. The problem disproportionately affects black and Hispanic children, according to [a WFAA report](#). 33 percent of children in those groups in Tarrant County live in poverty, compared to 18 percent for whites, with lasting consequences.

Relative to Collin County, [6.86 percent](#) of the population lives below the poverty line. This is below the national average of 13.4 percent. In 2014, that number was [7.9 percent](#). Relative to the child poverty rate in Collin County, there was an increase of 153.2 percent between 2000 and 2011. However, [the county child poverty](#) rate in 2011 was 16.7 percentage points lower than the child poverty rate for the state.

And concerning [Denton County](#), 53,400 people lived below the poverty line in 2010. By 2017, that number was 58,411. There was an increase of 129 percent between 2000 and 2011 concerning child poverty rate in Denton County, while the population of children increased 56 percent.

Hunger

Food was God's first gift to us and he remind us to think about him every chance we eat and drink ([Gen. 1:29](#)). Norman Wirzba says food is "God's love made edible." In [a poll of 5,000 Americans across all 50 states](#), 72 percent of New Yorkers admitted they get angry or "in a mood" when hungry — the highest percentage of any state. [Peak 'hangry' time](#) is Monday at 2:15pm. [10 percent have stolen](#) food from a work colleague because they were hangry. [22 percent](#) have cried. When you get hangry, you may need to feed your spirit more than your stomach. We don't live on bread alone, but some are struggling to find bread.

[In Dallas](#), the food insecurity rate in 2012 was 20 percent. By 2017, that number had dropped to 17.2 percent. [In Fort Worth](#), the food insecurity rate in 2012 was 18 percent. By 2017, that number had dropped to 16 percent. [In Collin County](#), the food insecurity rate in 2012 was 15.3 percent. By 2017, that number had dropped to 14.2 percent. And relative to [Denton County](#), the food insecurity rate was 15.8 percent in 2012. By 2017, that number had dropped to 14.3 percent.

Human Trafficking

Sex trafficking dehumanizes victims and mars a society. [400,000 people](#) are enslaved here in the US. [1 in 7](#) American men have purchased sex in their lifetime. It is a [\\$100 billion industry](#). [According to UNICEF](#), every 2 minutes a child is being prepared for exploitation. A drug is used only once and must be replaced but a child is used over and over and over again. Such grotesque acts take a victim's dignity and leaves them with shame. In the Bible, we read about a slave named Onesimus. Paul wanted him but [Philemon](#) owned him. So in an effort to free him, Paul asked [Philemon](#) to release Onesimus and charge it to his account. Philemon was in debt to Paul but Paul realized that we all owe a glorious debt to a liberating God. There are 400,000 people like Onesimus in the US this morning but how many Pauls?

Texas ranks as the #2 state in the country in regard to the number of cases received by the Human Trafficking Hotline reporting the sexual exploitation of minors. The Texas Office of the Governor Criminal Justice Division's funded a study entitled: "Human Trafficking by the Numbers: The Initial Benchmark of Prevalence and Economic Impact for Texas." In Texas, there are 78,996 child sex trafficking victims.

The DFW functions as one part of the Texas Triangle, an expanse encompassing the Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio metro areas. Texas' four largest metros represent 68 percent of Texas jobs and 73 percent of the state's income. 6 of the 10 fastest-growing counties in the Texas Triangle are located in North Texas. Utilizing the estimated 78,996 Texas victims data and comparing it on a high level with population percentages, Traffick911 estimates there may be a victim population of over 44,300 within these counties. Dallas and Houston were named 2 of the top 10 cities in the nation with the highest number of calls into the National Human Trafficking Hotline. One study funded by the Dallas Women's Foundation found that up to 400 minors are being marketed for sex in Dallas on any given night.

Foster Care

There are [443,000](#) children waiting to be adopted here in the US. [On average](#), children remain in state care for roughly 2 years. But what if the church took these kids off the state's hands? There may be 443,000 children but there are [300,000 churches](#) and [240 million Christians](#) here in the US. Children are gifts from the Lord. Some gifts may be too much at the moment but you never throw away a gift. Rather you re-gift, finding someone who will cherish the gift. Adoption is an earthly echo of a heavenly reality. Adoption brings close those who were once far away. A parent chooses a child, prepares for the child, and brings the child in as one of their own. It is costly but worth it. Some adoptive families will pay up to [\\$40,000](#) for their child, but God gave his life so that he might adopt us as sons and daughters ([Eph. 1:5](#)). In his abounding love, he brought near those who were once far away ([Eph. 2:13](#)). He has prepared a place for us and wants to bring us home to him ([John 14:3](#)). But while we wait here on Earth, he calls us to make ourselves at home – or perhaps to open up our homes.

In Dallas, Texas, there are currently 3928 children in the foster care system in “Region 003.” This region contains the counties: Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Fannin, Grayson, Hood, Hunt, Johnson, Kaufman, Navarro, Palo, Pinto, Parker, Rockwall, Somervell, Tarrant, and Wise. As of August 2019, there are 5935 living arrangements in Region 003. In August 2014, there was 5932.

In Dallas County, based upon information from the Texas DFPS, there were a total of 1400 children in the foster care system in August 2014. In August 2019, we see an increase from 1400 (2014) to 1481 (2019). In Tarrant County, there were a total of 899 children in the foster care system in August 2014. Comparing this statistic to August 2019, we see an increase from 899 (2014) to 928 (2019).

In Collin County, based upon information from the Texas DFPS, there were a total of 157 children in the foster care system in August 2014. In August 2019, we see an increase to 176. Relative to Denton County, there were a total of 188 children in the foster care system in August 2014. Comparing this statistic to August 2019, we see an increase from 188 (2014) to 349 (2019).

Another statistic to be aware of is that as of August 2019, out of all the children in the foster care system from Region 003, 2,212 children have been placed out of their original county; placing them in an entirely new area away from their normal lifestyle. Overall, in the last five years in the four counties detailed above, statistics show that 290 children have been added to the foster care system since August 2014.

Homelessness

Homeless people are less a liability and more an asset in our communities. The [national rate of homelessness](#) rose by 0.3 percent last year to 552,830 people. 31 states saw decreases in homelessness while 19 states reported increases, largely due to rising rent costs and natural disasters. [Research](#) shows that a \$100 increase in rent is associated with a 15 percent increase in homelessness. In their book [Madness in the Streets](#), Rael Isaac and Virginia Armat found that up to 40 percent of homeless people suffer from a major mental illness. Every day, the National Human Trafficking Hotline receives an average of [150 calls](#). [1 in 5](#) homeless youth is a human trafficking victim.

While not every homeless person suffers with a mental illness, many homeless people lack social capital. If you lost your job, you probably have savings, extended family members, or a friend’s couch to keep you off the street – benefits of social capital. We can help the homeless but we must not forget that the homeless can also help us. You may entertain an angel while you exercise your salvation ([Heb. 13:2, Phil. 2:12](#)).

[In Dallas](#), homelessness has increased 21 percent over the past year thanks to a combination of high rates of poverty and shortages of affordable housing. In Dallas and Collin Counties, there were 3,314 homeless people in 2014. By 2017, that number was 3,789. Regarding Texas, there

has been a drop. In 2014, there were 28,495 people experiencing homelessness. In 2018, that number had dropped to 25,310.

Crime

Fight crime by planting flowers. [Research out of Michigan](#) found that sprucing up community areas with flowers has the propensity to reduce violence. [A study out of Yale](#) concluded that the more closely knit people reported their neighborhood to be, the less exposure to violence they had. Sociologists call this [collective efficacy](#), referring to the ability of community members to achieve common goals and preserve shared values. The 1995 Chicago heat wave epitomized this concept. [739 people died](#) over a 5 day period in Chicago. In a [classic study](#) by sociologist Eric Klinenberg, he showed the importance of neighbors during this tragic time. Even though North and South Lawndale are demographically comparable, more than 6 times as many people died in the North than the South. He concluded that the social fabric was the differentiating factor.

As Christians, we are good neighbors because our God is a great neighbor. He watches over us, unconditionally loves us, and was willing to share more than a cup of sugar with us. You may not know your neighbor or like your neighbor but that shouldn't stop you from being a good neighbor ([Jer. 31:3](#), [1 Jn. 3:20](#), [Mt. 22:36-39](#)).

Dallas has one of the highest crime rates in America, according to [Neighborhood Scout](#). They have a crime rate of 40 per 1,000 residents. The chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime in Dallas is 1 in 25. However violent crime in the city is down 22 percent so far this year, compared with the same [period last year](#). In 2018, Dallas had [196 homicides](#). This year, we are on pace for [approximately 220](#) – the most in a decade.

Part of this reason may be the lack of officers. The Dallas Police Department employs approximately 3,000 officers. 3 years ago, that number was more than 3,500. According to [Texas Tribune](#), this may be due to [failing pension plans and low pay](#) in comparison to that of neighboring cities. Among the highest priority calls, Dallas police have a goal of responding in 8 minutes or less. Right now, that number is more than 9 minutes. Concerning 911 calls, that number is more than [11 minutes](#).

[Fort Worth](#) has a crime rate of 38 per 1,000 residents. The chance of becoming a victim of either a violent or property crime in Fort Worth is 1 in 26. From [2016 to 2017](#) in Fort Worth, crime data shows that overall crime rate fell 2 percent, but violent crime rate rose 5.5 percent. [Relative to Plano](#), their crime rate is 19 per 1,000 residents. The chance of becoming a victim sits at 1 in 25. [Forbes](#), for the second year in a row, ranked Plano as the safest city in the US with a population over 250,000. And [concerning Denton](#), their crime rate is 27 per 1,000 residents. The chance of becoming a victim of either a violent or property crime in Denton is 1 in 37.

Church

It Is Well with my soul but not so with my church building. There are more than 1,400 religious buildings for sale in the US. In the past 5 years, more than 6,800 religious buildings have been sold. Some are sold and others are repurposed. [A University of Pennsylvania](#) study of older urban churches found that 89 percent of total visits to these buildings were to take part in something other than worship. Nearly 90 percent of beneficiaries weren't church members. While some may discount the physical building, consider this: 13 percent of teenagers said they decided to become a Christian after a visit to a church building.

Data released by the [General Social Survey](#) — an ongoing study which has monitored US trends, attitudes and behaviors since 1972 — reveals that the number of Americans who identify as non-religious (aka “nones”) is now about equal to the number of Catholics (23 percent) and evangelicals (22.5 percent) in this country. Since about 2005, those who check “none” under the religious affiliation category have seen a major growth in numbers — jumping from nearly 15 percent of the population to now roughly 23 percent.

Numbers regarding churches in the DFW were particularly hard to determine. While the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) does not represent the entirety of the church demographic in the DFW, it does localize the issue and provide a reciprocal projection. In 2014, there were 63 BGCT churches in Collin County, 341 in Dallas County, 65 in Denton County, and 254 in Tarrant County. By 2019, there were 98 in Collin County, 486 in Dallas County, 98 in Denton County, and 341 in Tarrant County.

Conclusion

The great American experiment has been predicated upon the need for virtue. The Founders knew that religion had the propensity to produce the virtue necessary in order to support the nation, especially in its infancy. The Constitution guaranteed the free exercise of religion while equally prohibiting the state sponsorship of it. This mutually beneficial relationship was never intended to have a wall to separate the two from interacting one with another. Rather, the faux Jeffersonian wall was meant to allow the state to benefit from the church relative to virtue, and keep the church free from the burdensome entanglements of the state.

If the research is any indication, when Christians actively follow their religious teachings, [neighborhoods become safer](#), [communities prosper](#), [families stay together](#), and [happiness abounds](#). Christians believe God has awakened us from spiritual death so that we might shine a light for his glory and the world's good, using our skills to bless our local neighborhoods. We are a resurrection people, having been awakened by God in order to awake the world to the glorious riches of Christ our King – out of the garden and into the wilderness.