The Rise of the “Nones”
http://www.pewforum.org/unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx
The 20% in the U.S. who are Nones include...

- A few atheists (about 2%)
- A few agnostics (about 4%)
- A lot of “nothing in particulars” (14%)
The Nones are a mixed-up bunch

- 66% say religion is not at all important
- 28% say they do not believe in God
- 59% say they never pray
- 38% say they are spiritual but not religious
- 43% say they are neither spiritual nor religious
“None” is an ambiguous category

› Only about half of them are consistent survey to survey.
  – Even if their beliefs and behaviors haven’t really changed

› The “liminal” nones move in and out of “preferences”
  › Let’s call these people “marginal” affiliates

The “stable nones” really are secular

› Are younger

› Attended less often when growing up

› Were more likely raised by parents who are “nones”

› Are married to another “none”
Disconnected Group #1
Not spiritual, not religious, not seeking

› No strong religious roots

› A strong aversion to the conservative political picture of what it means to be “religious.”
Disconnected Group #2
Nothing in Particulars

› On the margins for a variety of reasons

› Probably aren’t leading thriving spiritual lives
They have life wisdom we need to hear, but

Very few are deeply spiritual
The Fraying Connections
Challenge #1: Geographic & Job Mobility
Since WWII, a steady flow of people move in and out of communities every year.

Geographic Mobility 2005-09 U.S. Population (U. S. Census)
Roughly one third of 18-35 year olds move in each five-year period, half of them across county lines.
Fluidity of Jobs

› In their current job 2 years or less –
  – 66% of 21-29 year-olds
  – 42% of 30-39 year-olds

Robert Wuthnow, reported in After the Baby Boomers
It takes longer to “Become an Adult”

› Work fulltime & be financially independent

› Living away from parents’ home

› Married

› Starting to have children
Challenge #2: Community does not depend on Geography
Networks of friends and family are formed differently.

Twitter says to Facebook: ‘Why are you following me?’
And Facebook responds: ‘Because I like you.’
We are more connected than ever before

Over a much wider geography
Challenge #3: Households don’t fit the “church” mold
Household Composition, 2009

- Married with kids: 21%
- Married without kids: 29%
- Single parent: 9%
- Unmarried, no kids: 8%
- Other combinations: 6%
- Under 65 living alone: 17%
- Over 65 living alone: 10%
- Under 65 living alone: 17%
- Over 65 living alone: 10%
Connections are hard to make, but...
Local Congregations are more important than ever
Congregations serve the world’s needs
Congregations provide a place to belong

Especially for Minority Communities
Voluntary Gatherings

- Build “social capital” (resources that can be drawn on for the good of society)
  - Trust
  - Communication
  - Common labor
Voluntary Gatherings

› Provide opportunities to learn “civic skills”

– Expressing oneself in public – both orally and in writing

– Organizing meetings

– Presiding over meetings – debating & deciding
Religious Participants become good citizens and good neighbors
Learning to live by the Golden Rule

› Religious Teachings

› Models and Stories

› Networks and Information Sharing

› Practice

› Empowerment
Our Communities Need Congregations to Thrive
But So Does Our Faith
Why do unaffiliated people join?

Enjoy the religious services and style of worship 74%
Felt called by God 55%
Attracted by a particular minister or pastor 29%
Asked to join by a member of the religion 29%
Married someone from the religion 25%
Moved to a new community 17%
Became separated or divorced 6%
Someone they were close to passed away 6%

Spiritual concerns bring people to church

Spiritual communities sustain spiritual identity and practice
Spiritual Identities come in many Packages
› The “Spiritual Narratives in Everyday Life” project

(funded by the John Templeton Foundation)
Spiritual People are Moral People

› "To be there for people...as I grow spiritually -- and it’s a long journey -- that’s what it is about."
   – Phyllis Carrigan (Catholic, Boston)
“Everyone has something that is a gift that they can offer that is really distinctive of their personality, and those people I think are in a zone. It’s almost like spiritual alignment with that purpose.” – Alex Polani (seeker, Boston)
Experiencing a sense of awe

Describing snowmobiling in the backcountry in "pristine wilderness, and the closest I can come to serene, calm and beauty. Although I’m not spiritual, it was quite a spiritual experience." - Alicia Waters (secular Boston)
“Some people when they come up to me at Communion, I look at them and they look at me, and it just gives me shivers. And the weird thing is, I’ll ask them later, and they’ll look at me and go, 'yeah, me too.' And it’s kind of a cool thing that, for some reason, we’ve touched each other spiritually.” – Mary Margaret Perkins (Catholic, Atlanta)
Spirituality is about "being part of the order of the universe, part of God’s order of the universe." – Sam Levitt (Jew, Boston)
These are all “Extra-Theistic” ways of thinking about spirituality
There are also “Theistic” Spiritualities
Spirituality is about connection to God

"As a Christian man I’m aware of my spirituality, that is, my relationship with God, and that I have a friendship with him and I try to walk with him."

- Andrew Hsu (evangelical, Boston)
Spirituality is about mystery

”You know, there are so many things that can’t be explained scientifically....there are things out there that can’t be explained and let’s recognize it for what it is.” – Hank Matthews (Episcopalian, Boston)
Spirituality involves practices

› "I’m going back this evening to finish reading the Ensign because I do need to be spiritually fed. I’m so grateful for this church magazine and the wonderful articles there are in it." – Marjorie Buckley (Mormon, Boston)
The most common are prayer & meditation
Study of Scripture is typical for some, but not for all
Many, many other practices...

- Consulting with dead ancestors as spiritual guides.
- Consulting with a spiritual counselor or director.
- Going on a pilgrimage to Medadgorje or Lourdes.
- Sacred images in a home that creates a space for meditation or worship.
- Keeping a journal.
- Doing yoga.
- Participating in healing rituals.
- Wearing religious clothing or jewelry.
- Getting a tattoo or growing dreadlocks as a spiritual journey.
Four Spiritual Populations
The Spiritually Serious

› Active individual spiritual practices
› Active in attendance at worship
› Active in settings where they can talk about faith
› Have friends and family in their congregation
The Typical Members

› Occasional engagement in spiritual practices

› Fairly regular attendance at worship (especially appreciate preaching and music)
The Marginal Members

› Think of themselves as somewhat spiritual and engage in occasional spiritual practices

› Have a religious affiliation, but rarely or never attend

› Drifted away because of
  ❖ Disagreement with beliefs
  ❖ Church’s failure to care
  ❖ Changes in life situation
The Truly Disaffiliated

› Little or no interest in spirituality

› Have been outside religious communities since late childhood

› Never attend services and don’t view religion positively
Lessons Learned

ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Deeper communal involvement goes with

- More active individual spiritual life
- Which translates into a spiritually-infused everyday life.
Preaching and Music are the Threshold

Opportunities for Friendship, Learning, Service and Conversation are the Bricks and Mortar
Spiritual Lives need Spiritual Communities