A Guide for Pin Maps: Helping Congregations Understand Where Their Members Live and How That Can Shape Their Ministry

Developed by
Jennifer McClure

Religious congregations often want to understand where their members live in relation to their building. Doing so can be helpful for many reasons, including determining where to serve in the community, where to organize home-based Bible studies or small groups, and where to relocate, if a congregation is considering moving to a new location.

This guide helps congregations to create maps of member households, examine where their members live, and interpret and apply this information.

Mapping Congregation Members

Some congregations learn more about where their members live by obtaining a large map of their area, displaying it on a bulletin board, and asking members to use pins to mark where they live. For this reason, some people call these maps “pin maps.” There are also a number of online tools that congregations can use to create virtual pin maps.

Mapping Software

While many software programs and websites offer mapping services, BatchGeo provides one of the most user-friendly mapping services. It can easily import data from an Excel spreadsheet and plot it on a Google map. BatchGeo is free for users, within certain limits. BatchGeo allows users to pin up to 250 addresses in the same map. Congregations that have more than 250 addresses may want to look into BatchGeo Pro, which costs $99/month. BatchGeo Pro allows users to map up to 20,000 addresses and provides faster geocoding, enhanced security, more options for exporting maps, and higher resolution maps.

Sample Data

In demonstrating how to use BatchGeo, this guide utilizes address data from about 60 members of a local congregation in Birmingham, AL. The name of the local congregation and its location have been changed to protect the anonymity of the congregation and its members. This guide will refer to this congregation as “Birmingham First Church.”

Preparing Data for BatchGeo

How can I prepare my congregation’s data for BatchGeo?

BatchGeo imports data from an Excel spreadsheet. In preparing the sample dataset, users should organize data into the following columns:

•   Address (street address)
•   City
- State
- Zip code

If applicable, users can also add additional columns for each address:
- Name(s)
- Group number
- Website
- Email address

The Excel spreadsheet for this demonstration has the following columns: address, city, state, and group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Zipcode</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Zipcode</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After setting up the Excel spreadsheet, you can enter or copy/paste address data from another source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
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Lastly, it can also be helpful to add a “Group” column that codes all member addresses as “1” and the congregation’s address as “2.” When you provide multiple groups of addresses, BatchGeo will distinguish between different groups with different colors of pins. Designating a different group for the congregation’s address helps to distinguish between what pins are member addresses and what pin is the congregation’s address.
Using BatchGeo

Now that your data is ready to import into BatchGeo, what do you do?

1. Go to [http://www.batchgeo.com](http://www.batchgeo.com)

2. Copy and paste data from Excel into the box
   a. In Excel, select all of the cells that contain data and the column titles.
   b. Press Ctrl-C.
   c. On BatchGeo’s website, click the box underneath “Paste your location data below to map it” that contains sample data from Apple stores.
   d. Press Ctrl-V.

3. Once the congregation’s data appears in this box, click on the green button “Map Now.”

4. BatchGeo will begin to geocode the address data. This may take a few minutes. If, at any point, you need to change the address data, you can stop the geocoding.

5. After BatchGeo has finished geocoding the addresses, a map will appear. Click on “Save & Continue” under the map.

6. Before saving the map, BatchGeo provides an opportunity to customize the map.
   a. Title (for example, “Pin Map of Birmingham First Church”)
b. Description (for example, “This map shows where members of Birmingham First Church live in relation to Birmingham First Church’s building. Pins for member households are colored red, and the pin for the congregation’s location is blue.”)

c. Email – If you provide your email address, BatchGeo will allow you to edit your map at a later time.

d. You can decide if your pin map will be publicly posted on BatchGeo’s website or if you would like their map saved to a unique and private webpage. Due to privacy concerns, many congregations may want to choose the “Unlisted” option, which gives the map a private and unique webpage.

e. You must also read and agree to BatchGeo’s Terms of Service.

f. Once you save the map (when choosing the “Unlisted” sharing option), you can access the map through a unique webpage.
Interpreting Pin Maps

So, now that you have generated a map, what does it mean?

In interpreting pin maps, there are three important things to notice:

1. Distance from the congregation and location in the broader community
   - Where do people live in relation to the congregation’s building?
   - How far do they need to travel to the congregation?

2. Clusters of member households (i.e., areas where many members live)
   - Are there different clusters of member households?
   - How close are these clusters to the congregation’s building?

3. Sparse areas (i.e., areas where few members live)
   - Are there areas where member households are sparse?
   - Where are these sparse areas in relation to the congregation’s building?

The following sample interpretation is based on the map from Birmingham First Church.

First, it is important to understand where members live in relation to the congregation’s building. Birmingham First Church’s building is in downtown Birmingham. Some members live quite
close to the congregation, while others live farther away in outlying suburbs. Members tend to live to the south, east, or northeast of the congregation.

There are distinct clusters of members who live close to each other. Clusters include:
- Downtown Birmingham
- Homewood, a suburb south of Birmingham
- Vestavia Hills, a suburb south of Homewood
- Hoover, a suburb south of Vestavia Hills
- East of downtown Birmingham along I-20
- Northeast of downtown Birmingham in Trussville, Center Point, and Grayson Valley

There are also areas where members are rather sparse. Sparse areas include:
- Southwest of downtown Birmingham around Pleasant Grove, Concord, and Hueytown
- Southeast of downtown Birmingham around Meadowbrook and Lake Purdy
- North of downtown Birmingham in Gardendale

After interpreting the map, it is time to discuss applications for the congregation.

**Applications from Pin Maps**

You have made a pin map and interpreted it. What can you do with this information?

There are many ways in which congregations can use information from pin maps. This guide focuses on three applications:

1. Organizing home-based ministries (Bible studies, small groups, etc.)
2. Community service and outreach
3. Relocating the congregation

First, many congregations have home-based ministries, like Bible studies or small groups. Pin maps can help congregations to determine where clusters of members live and whether current groups are accessible or relatively close to all members. Pin maps can also help congregations to decide where to start new groups.

Second, many congregations engage in community service or outreach, but not every congregation serves in the neighborhood where their building is located. Congregations can use pin maps to see where clusters of members live. It may be easier for congregations to serve in neighborhoods where they already have a cluster of members.

Third, some congregations build a new building or move to a different building. While there are many questions and concerns about where to move (financial costs, land or building availability, etc.), congregations should also consider where their members live. Pin maps help congregations to see whether locations are located centrally to where their members live and whether locations are in an area where members are clustered or sparse.