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Growing number of South Jerseyans are church shopping

A growing number of South Jerseyans are exploring religions beyond those they were raised in, or no religion at all

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For years, God was only something Dave Murphy read about. He left his childhood Methodist church long ago, and during a difficult period in his life, he decided a supreme being was imaginary.

Certainly, the supernatural often was the subject of great literature beloved by Murphy, now a retired high school English teacher. But that was the extent of his exploration. That is, until a few years ago, when the Hammonton resident gave himself an assignment.

He decided to visit every house of worship in his hometown,



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Pastor Kevin Brown leads the Perfecting Church, which meets at the TD Bank Arts Centre in Washington Township. Dave Murphy of Hammonton feels at home going from one house of worship to another. / JOHN ZIOMEK (above), ADAM MONACELLI (below left)/C

Written by
Kim Mulford
 Courier-Post Staff

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interviewing its clergy, researching its history and architecture, then distilling what he learned into an article for the local newspaper. He's done this with eight congregations, from Baptist to Jewish. He hasn't settled into any of them.

Still, all differences aside, Murphy thinks "that there is a transcendent God out there, that's also immanent within us, and unites everything. I think that's there."

Shifting landscape

The post-modern religious landscape in South Jersey continues to shift, as congregations of every persuasion shrink, collapse, pop

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- Circle of Hope holds public meetings on Sundays at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. at 3800 Marlton Pike, Pennsauken. Visit www.circleofhope.net or call (856) 720-0722.
- The Perfecting Church meets at 10 a.m. on Sundays at the TD Bank Arts Centre at the Washington Township High School, 519 Hurffville-Cross Keys Rd., Sewell. Visit www.theperfectingchurch.org or call (856) 817-6223.
- The Unitarian Church of Cherry Hill is at 401 N. Kings Highway, Cherry Hill. Visit www.uucch.org or call (856) 667-3618.

up and grow overnight. Though one in five Americans now report they are unaffiliated with any religion — and 88 percent of those say they aren't looking for one — there is a persistent and stubborn belief that God is out there, somewhere.

For a while, the spiritually unaffiliated were called “seekers” within the Christian community, a term that has since become passé, says Al Tizon, associate professor of holistic ministry at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University.

These days, they're called “Nones,” as in “none of the above.” It's a growing number, especially among young adults, according to a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center. About a third of Americans ages 18-22 don't identify with any religion, though most of them were raised in one.

“I don't doubt the statistics at all,” says Tizon. “I don't doubt that there are people who are leaving, or who are disgruntled with established religion, with the institutional church, and as a result, they no longer participate in those.”

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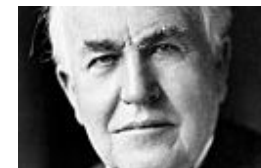
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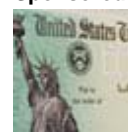
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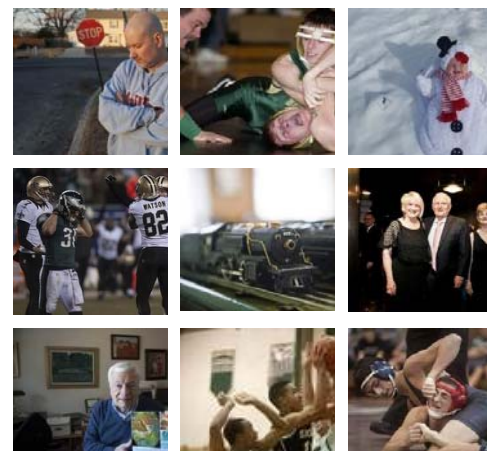
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