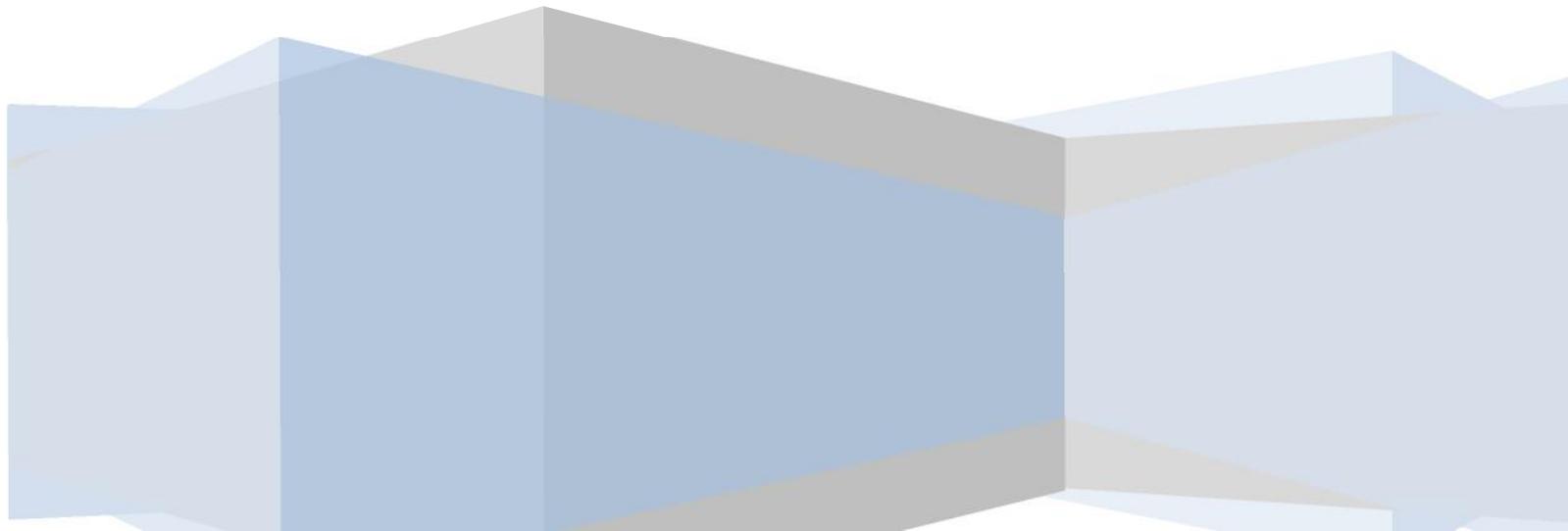




Lesson Plan: Demographics

For Christian schools and home schools in Canada
(Grades 10 – 12)





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Demographics: The Birth Rate in the World, the West, and the Church

[Note: This lesson plan is meant to accompany the movie *Demographic Winter*, available as a DVD or at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZeyYIsGdAA>.]

Two 50 minute lessons (Plus an optional third class to discuss the questionnaires that students completed with some senior citizens)

Level – Grades 10 - 12

Applicable Courses: Social Studies, Worldview Studies, Sociology

Overview – Adapted from the Article “**Family Planning: on a big scale**” *Reformed Perspective Magazine*, July/August 2008. Go to www.arpacanada.ca to read the full article.

Individualism has almost always been a problem in democratic countries. But its effects on marriage and the family really took hold around the time of the Sexual Revolution of the 60’s. Canada’s Supreme Court and our Parliament have gone along with this mantra of choice and autonomy. Now, one generation later, we can see the effects of this ethic beginning to take hold throughout the world. The birth rate in the West is falling rapidly, meaning that we no longer have enough children to replace us. The consequences of this are staggering.

For a population to stay stable in our part of the world, every woman must have an average of 2.1 children to replace herself, her husband, and those children who die before being old enough to reproduce. Canada’s birth rate is about 1.5 children per woman. In other words, if it weren’t for immigration, our population would be rapidly shrinking. And a much higher percentage of the population would be elderly and unable to contribute to the economy (or pay taxes). This isn’t causing immediate problems for Canada because there is no shortage of people from other nations who want to move here and enjoy our freedoms and privileges.

But what happens when birth rates around the world begin to drop? According to the documentary *Demographic Winter* “Worldwide, birthrates have been halved in the past 50 years. There are now 59 nations, with 44% of the world’s population, with below-replacement fertility. Sometime in this century, the world’s population will begin to decline. At a certain point, the decline will become rapid. We may even reach population free-fall in our lifetimes.”

According to UN statistics, Italy’s rate is 1.2 and Spain is at 1.1. With numbers that low, their entire population can almost be halved within a lifetime, immigration aside. What about Holland? Although the Dutch have a reputation for big families, they aren’t much better off than Canada, with a birth rate of 1.72. Australia is only a hair higher at 1.75.

What is causing the population meltdown in the West? A number of factors are contributing. First, people are waiting longer to get married. Careers and education are becoming more of a priority. Second, even couples who are married are waiting longer to have children. The average age of women giving birth for the first time in Canada is 28 years old. Once again, the priority seems to be getting established, having a higher standard of living, and a career. Third, contraceptives are not just about family planning, they are also changing society. The birth control pill was introduced to Canada in 1961 – the same year that the birth rate began to fall. Sadly abortion is also being used as a form of birth control and the nearly 100,000 abortions per year in Canada alone are a big reason why our birth rate is so low. Add to all of this the increasing disregard for the traditional family unit and the objectification of sex and the result is a rapid decrease in the number of babies being born.

Not every country has such a low birth rate. A country like Afghanistan's birth rate is 7.48! Saudi Arabia's is 4.09 and Iraq's is 4.83. As Mark Steyn made clear in his book *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*, there are obvious demographical consequences to this imbalance. Muslim nations have high birth rates and are growing much faster than Western secular nations. So when secular countries such as Holland and France need immigrants to grow, they inevitably bring in more Muslims which results in serious clashes. The "tolerant" West suddenly is exposed as not being so tolerant after all.

Countries like Canada provide government pensions for seniors. How is it possible to maintain this when the number of seniors skyrockets and the number of tax payers decreases significantly? And it is not only pensions that will be affected. Our health care system is already strained – just imagine the effects of an increase in seniors and a decrease in health care providers. Many other aspects of the welfare state rely on younger people to keep the economy going. How can an economy be maintained with fewer workers? And with all of the new pressure on the economy, who will look after the growing number of seniors? Will euthanasia become a convenient way to address this problem?

The Role of Reformed Families

It is striking that the very first command that humanity received from God was to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). Malachi 2:15 also spells this out: "Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring." God wants us, as the human race, to have children and populate the world.

It is encouraging to see that the Reformed church in Canada has grown by leaps and bounds, largely internally. One has only to look at the huge family reunions that happen every summer. But it doesn't take an expert for us to observe that the birth rate is also falling within the church. As a former pastor of mine would say, "When it rains in the world, it drips in the church." Although it used to be common for families to have many children, the numbers seem to be dropping (even though they are still larger than typical Canadian families). Part of this is due to changing circumstances. We are no longer first or second generation immigrants. Many more young people in the church pursue postsecondary education, which often delays marriage and children. Real estate prices are high in the cities which makes owning a large home more difficult. And many more women are working, making it more difficult to have more children.

But perhaps it is our attitudes that have changed along with the circumstances. A house for a family with six children today is a whole lot bigger than 50 years ago. Expenses are higher today, but these expenses include luxuries that would have never been considered by previous generations. Although it used to be the norm that children helped work for the family, the standard today seems to be that

our teens have an incredible disposable income which is used for clothes, cell phones, movies, and cars. And there is much more pressure for mothers to have a part-time or full-time job to contribute to the family income.

God will bless each family with or without children as He determines. But He also gives us a responsibility to make wise choices when we are able. We like to think of ourselves as exceptions to the norm. But our individual choices ultimately shape our society. It is not a Biblical command to have big families. But it is important that we evaluate our motives for choosing to start and stop having children. After all, our children are God's children. Few contributions are more valuable to society than raising God-fearing children in our communities, our churches, and our world.

For Further Study:

Demographic Winter – A new documentary which examines the trend of falling birth rates throughout the Western world. The accompanying website (www.demographicwinter.com) has many frequently asked questions and further resources on this topic.

The Future Belongs to Islam:

(http://www.macleans.ca/culture/books/article.jsp?content=20061023_134898_134898)

This article by Mark Steyn is an excerpt from his book *America Alone* which considers the consequences of global demographics and the rise of Islam. Both Steyn and *Macleans* magazine were tried before a Human Rights Tribunal for publishing this article.

Procedure

- 1) Watch the documentary “Demographic Winter.” It is 56 minutes long.
- 2) Have all students read the full article “Family Planning on a big scale” as homework before next class.
- 3) In the next class, sum up some of the arguments from the documentary
- 4) Read the Bible texts that discuss parental responsibility (such as Genesis 1:28, 33:5, Psalm 127:3-5, 128:1-4.).
- 5) Ask students to list consequences of a falling birth rate. Divide these consequences into three groups: international consequences, consequences in Canada, and consequences in the church.
- 6) Using the list of consequences in the church, ask students to think of things that can be done to change this (if negative) or promote it (if positive).
- 7) **Optional Assignment:** With student participation (in class), make a questionnaire that students can take with them and interview a senior citizen(s) in their church who had a large family or was raised in a large family. The questionnaire should be made in such a way as to spark some discussion between the students and the seniors about what changes have happened over the decades, what it meant to the seniors to be part of a large family, and what the seniors think are the challenges or reasons why families are shrinking today.

Give the students two weeks to conduct the interview, write down some of the responses they received. Time permitting, have the students discuss their findings in a future class.