

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



*Marchetti's Constant:*  
What It Is and How It's  
Impacting Your Church

---

RICH BIRCH



Marchetti's Constant is a **proven principle of urban design that shows the average time a person spends commuting each day**, an approximate total of one hour. [ref] That's thirty minutes to work and thirty minutes back home.

The fascinating thing is that this principle has been historically proven time and again. **Regardless of the mode of transportation, people consistently take 30 minutes to travel to work.** Whether they were walking, riding on horseback, taking a buggy, driving a car or riding on the latest bullet train, it's always 30 minutes. For urban planners, this pattern has huge implications as it drives population density in urban and suburban areas because people are unlikely to move beyond a fixed radius of distance from their place of employment.

**What difference does this principle make for you and I as we lead in the local church?**

The vast majority of churches in our country are deeply impacted by car travel. It's one of those facts of daily life that is so obvious for most of us that we don't think about it. **There was a time when most people walked to their local parish, but that norm changed as the car became more widespread. This reality is important for us to remember** as our churches are affected by both the communities we serve as well as their transportation choices.

Here are a few ways that Marchetti's Constant can impact your church today:

## Campus Expansion Should Be Within 30 Minutes of Your Existing Site(s).

Considering the evidence of Marchetti's Constant, it shouldn't surprise you that statistically speaking the vast majority of multisite church campuses are found within 30 minutes of the other locations. [According to the latest Leadership Network research](#) on the multisite movement:

- 44% of campuses are 15 minutes or less in terms of travel time between each location.
- 45% of multisite locations are between 15 and 30 minutes of each other.

This means that 89% of all multisite campuses are within the Marchetti window.

Multisite campus expansion needs to be a regional impact strategy rather than something that allows your church to reach far distances. We often focus on the few "name brand" churches who have started campuses two or three states away; however, these few examples push against the normal trend society.

Prevailing multisite “hive” leadership teams use an existing location to build their volunteer core. (Statistically, they most often use the original location.) If you attempt to locate your new campus outside the 30-minute Marchetti window, you will have a harder time finding a large enough critical mass to acquire the team you need.

I’ve chatted with a number of entrepreneurial Lead Pastors over the years who have talked about wanting to start a campus “over there” (somewhere 1+ hours away). While the desire to flex some missionary zeal is noble, it really works against the built-in dynamics of your community.

**Start your campus expansion strategy by looking at every community within 30 minutes of your location today.** You can expand from there as your locations spread but don’t miss the opportunity to reach people within that primary “drive time.”

## Your Mass Media Promotion Should Be Narrowly Focused.

Have you ever wondered why local businesses still advertise on the radio? Why does “Crazy Ed’s Used Cars” always run those ads on the local country/western station during the morning commute?

Because it works.

The people listening to the radio are in their cars for about 30 minutes every day driving to work. The 30 minute blocks between 7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. are a golden time to reach a local community. The medium itself is particularly pointed because of its “terrestrial” nature; it reaches a defined area people live in or commute through every day.

In an age where digital media such as podcasts seem to be booming, radio is holding firm. In fact, listenership has only dropped 2% in 10 years. ([Don’t believe me? Read this report.](#)) **Turns out Crazy Ed isn’t so crazy after all.**



If your church is going to do any form of mass media promotion, including radio, television, online, or print ads, such as in newspapers or flyer drops, it needs to be tightly focused within the Marchetti window for your church. It would be a waste of your resources to attempt to reach people beyond 30 minutes away from your church.

The closer you target your location, the more effective all your media promotions will be. Do your mail drops at the 10,000 homes within your immediate neighborhood. Target your Facebook ads as tightly as possible to your zip code. Narrow the focus.

## Student Ministry Should Follow High School Districts.

How long does it take a student to commute to school every week?

School districts around the country are also built around the Marchetti Constant. The majority of high school students who walk to school are within a two mile range of their school. [\[ref\]](#) **This average student takes 30 minutes to walk to school.** Marchetti strikes again. It’s also true that there has been an increase over time of high school students driving to school, but what has also happened is an increase in teens picking up their friends on the way to school.

What does this mean for our student ministries?

We need to become more local in what we do. Unless you are willing to set up some sort of driving system to pick up every student, it can be difficult to get students to attend your programs unless they are within two miles of your location.

**If we really want to reach students who don't normally attend our churches, then we need to figure out how to be more local for them.** For the folks serving in "parachurch" ministries, they've known this all along. Often those ministries are built around the model of going directly to a high school and being present in that environment. That "contact" ministry that happens at basketball games and over ice cream on the way home is pivotal. [I think Young Life had it right all along.](#)

## If People Start Driving Less (Or More!), We Might Have a Problem.

Finally, there is evidence that Marchetti's Constant window might be changing.

[Check out this chart.](#)

The above chart notes that yearly miles per person peaked in June 2005 around 13,200 and then dipped all the way down to about 12,000 in March 2014. As of August 2018, it's a bit higher at almost 12,500 miles, but it's been leaning downward again and may decrease even further.

Just for fun: 12,500 miles multiplied by 200 work days equals 62.5 miles per day. On average, people drive 61 miles per hour in their car [\[ref\]](#) for an average of one hour a day. Marchetti! The interesting thing about that chart is that for the first time since the 1970s there is a clear downward trend in drive times. People are choosing to drive less, and it shows up in statistics. It's a provable fact.



If this window shrinks, it's going to put even more pressure on our churches to think more local and less regional. It's unlikely to collapse quickly because of the persistence of Marchetti's Constant. (It is a constant after all!) But truly, we need to keep an eye on this trend. Our ministry models are tied to the transportation that people take to get to us, and if that shifts it will have an impact on what we do.

If driverless cars become a thing and the speed limits on our highways jump by 50% because autonomous cars outperform human ability, we will see people from further distances come to our churches.

## What are your thoughts on Marchetti's Constant?

I'd love to hear about how you think your ministry is being impacted by Marchetti's constant. Can you see other impacts that this 30-minute commute is having on the way ministry is done at your church? Reach out and let us know your thoughts!

Visit [unSeminary.com](http://unSeminary.com) for more free resources!

The image shows a promotional graphic for UNseminary and Design Pickle. At the top, the UNseminary logo is displayed in blue and black text with a cluster of blue dots to its right. Below the logo, there are several green geometric shapes: a large triangle, a square, and a diamond. The central text reads "UNLIMITED GRAPHIC DESIGN HELP for only \$370 per month." Below this, it asks "Can someone say Amen?" and provides the website "LEARN MORE @ designpickle.com". At the bottom, the Design Pickle logo is shown, which consists of a circle containing a stylized 'DP' and the words "DESIGN PICKLE" next to it. There are also more green geometric shapes at the bottom right.