



FAITH
Communities
TODAY

American Congregations 2005

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American Congregations 2005 was written by David A. Roozen, Director, The Hartford Institute for Religion Research and Professor of Religion & Society, Hartford Seminary. He has been involved with CCSP/FACT since its inception in 1996. For a list of publications and contact information visit his web site at: <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/about/roozen.htm>.

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Graphic Design by Richard Houseal

American Congregations 2005

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Introduction

F*aith Communities in the United States Today* was launched in 2000 as the largest national survey of congregations ever conducted in the United States. The study of 14,301 local churches, synagogues, parishes, temples and mosques provided a public profile of the organizational backbone of religion in America—congregations—at the beginning of a new millennium. The informal coalition of denominations and faith groups that sponsored the statistical portrait was so pleased with the insights and appreciation generated that they formalized their continuing efforts as *The Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership*, hosted by Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research. The primary purpose of *CCSP* is the development of research based resources for congregational development. An on-going purpose is advancing the public's understanding of one of the most numerous voluntary organizations in the U.S.—our religious congregations.

It is our hope to conduct a mega-survey like **FACT2000** at the turn of every decade, coinciding with the U.S. Census, and in fact planning has begun for 2010. But just as the Census Bureau conducts regular national surveys between its large-scale decadal enumerations, it is our intent to conduct several, more typically sized, national surveys, in intervening years. **FACT2005**, the results of which are presented in this report, is the first of these. Its goal, as well as that of the **FACT** series of national surveys more generally, is to track changes in U.S. congregations and plumb the dynamics of selected congregational practices and challenges.

For more information about *The Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership*, including links to member denominations and faith groups and their **FACT** related reports and publications, please visit our website: **fact.hartsem.edu**. Online copies of all **CCSP/FACT** publications are also available on the website, including:

- **Faith Communities Today 2000** (March, 2001)
- **Meet Your Neighbors: Interfaith FACTs** (July, 2003)
- Insights Into: **Financial Giving** (June, 2006)
- **FACTs on Growth** (December, 2006)
- Insights Into: **Congregational Conflict** (August, 2007)
- Insights Into: **Numerical Growth** (September, 2007)

Project Background

The **FACT2005** survey questionnaire was designed by the Research Task Force of The Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP). A copy of the questionnaire is available on the **FACT** website (fact.hartsem.edu) and should be consulted for exact question and response category wordings. The Institute for Social Research at Calvin College conducted the survey. The questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 3,000 congregations, and the accompanying cover letter also included the option of completing the questionnaire online.

The sample was originally generated by American Church Lists. Random replacements for non-responding congregations were drawn from an American Church Lists shadow sample and from denominational yearbook samples.

884 usable questionnaires were received. To enhance national representation, responses were weighted to the population parameters for region and faith family presented by Hadaway and Marler [C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measure, *Journal for the Scientific Study of*

Religion (2005) 44(3): 307-322, Table 2], and for size of congregation and rural/city/suburban location found in the **FACT2000** national survey of 14,301 congregations (fact.hartsem.edu/research/index.html). Sampling error for such a survey can only be estimated. We estimate it to be +/- 4% at the 95% confidence level.

In several places in the following report we present comparisons across faith families. These comparisons typically are among Oldline Protestants, Other Protestants and Catholic & Orthodox. A more specific definition of these families can be found at right. The total of 884 usable questionnaires does include Jewish, Muslim and other non-Christian congregations, but in a sample of this size they are too few and diverse to reliably report as a distinct group. They are included in the figures representing the total sample; but we are unable to include them in our faith family comparisons. The **FACT2000** survey, in contrast, did include meaningful samples of Baha'is, Jewish and Muslim congregations, and one can find references to reports on these faith families on the **FACT** website. Similarly, one can find references to reports on the **FACT2000** survey of Historically Black Protestant denominations on the **FACT** website.

A survey the size of **FACT2005** must use faith families because it does not include sufficient numbers of congregations from any single denomination for separate analysis. However, several CCSP member denominations conducted oversamples of their congregations to provide the base for their own reporting. These included The Church of the Nazarene, The Episcopal Church, and The Unitarian Universalist Association. References to these specific denominational reports can be found on the **FACT** website.

Definitions

Faith Families: We follow the definitions of Faith Families found in Hadaway and Marler [C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measure, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2005)], which are relatively typical for the social sciences. Our “Other Protestant” is a combination of their “Conservative/Evangelical” and “Other Christian.” It includes not only the larger conservative and evangelical denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, but also, for example, the Historical Black denominations, Jehovah’s Witness and Latter Day Saints. What they label “Mainline Protestantism” we label “Oldline Protestantism” because we believe our label is more descriptively accurate. Following Hadaway and Marler, our Oldline Protestant denominations are limited to American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist.

High Vitality or Identity: Several places in this report refer to congregations scoring “High” on some aspect of vitality or identity. Operationally, “High” refers to those congregations that responded “Strongly Agree” to a question like: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Our Congregation... (Is like a close-knit family; Is Spiritually vital and alive; etc.)—Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral/Unsure, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree. ‘Moderate’ in the text refers to those that responded “Somewhat Agree.”

High Emphasis: Several places in this report refer to congregations giving “High Emphasis” to home or personal practice. Operationally, “High Emphasis” refers to those congregations that responded “A lot” to a question like: How much does your congregation emphasize the following home or personal practices? Personal Devotions, Family Scripture Study, etc.—Not At All, A Little, Some, Quite A Bit, A Lot.

Faith Communities Today At A Glance: Overall Profile of American Congregations

Region: The regional distribution of congregations in the United States is similar to that of the general population, with one exception. The 2000 US Census shows that just over 20% of Americans live in the Midwest and another 20% in the West. Comparatively speaking, there are fewer congregations than one would expect in the West and more congregations than one would expect in the Midwest.

Period of Founding: Given the prominent role of religion in the founding of our country and in the lives of the waves of immigrants that followed, it is hardly a surprise to find that a majority of American congregations date from before WWII. Similarly, the rapid parallel growth of congregations and suburbs following WWII is familiar to many. What may be surprising is that the rapid rate of new congregational development, overall, has continued at the post-WWII rate right up to the present.

Location: The majority of congregations are in small town and country areas; the majority of Americans live in cities of more than 50,000 and their related suburbs. Correspondingly, the median size of small town and country congregations is only about half that of city and suburban congregations. Other research suggests there is roughly one congregation per every 500 people living in small town and country areas; roughly one congregation per every 1,500 people in metropolitan areas. Surprisingly, the percent of the population that is “unchurched” is nearly identical in each type of place.

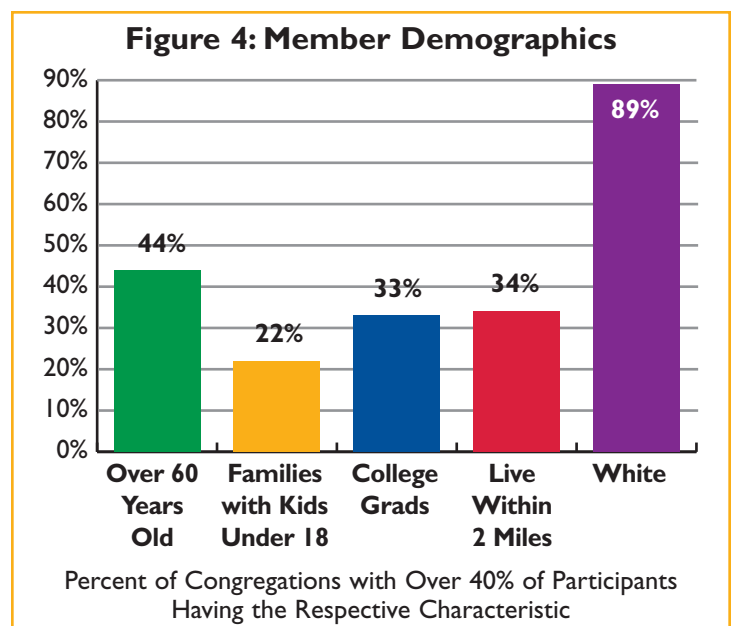
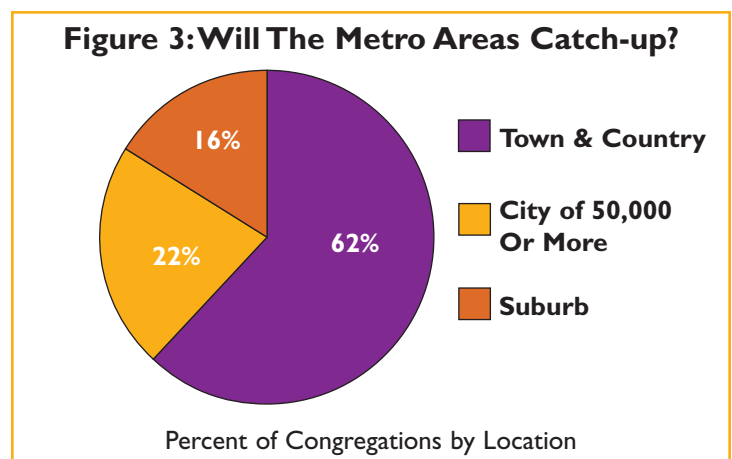
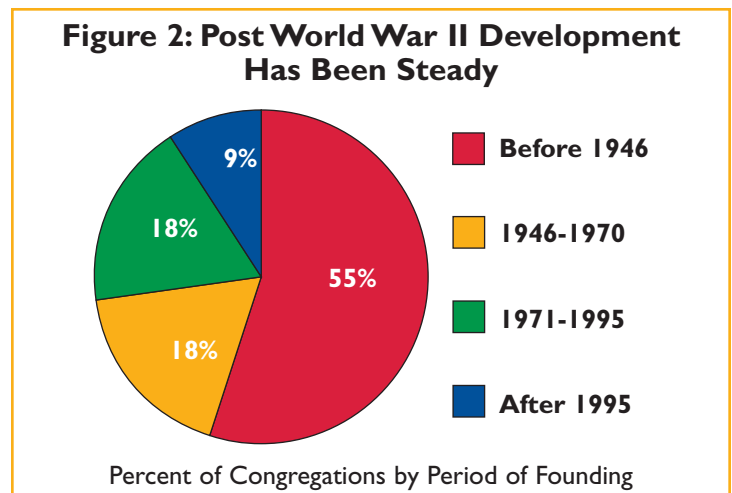
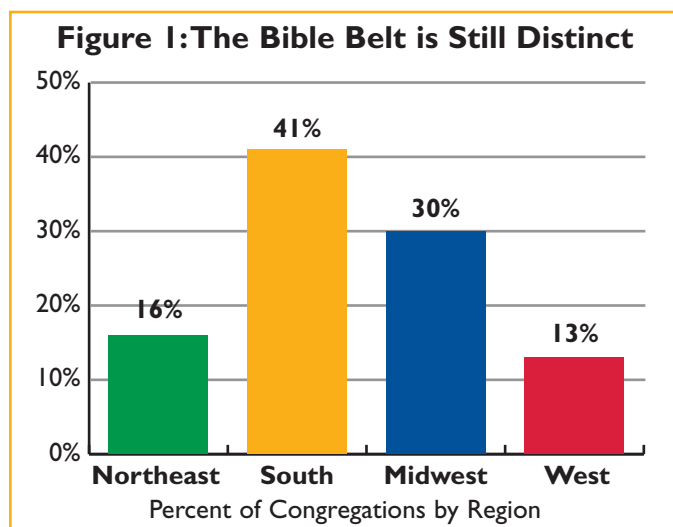
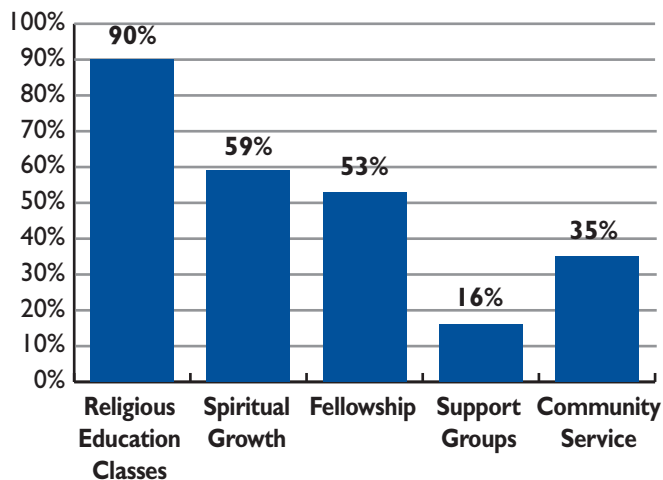
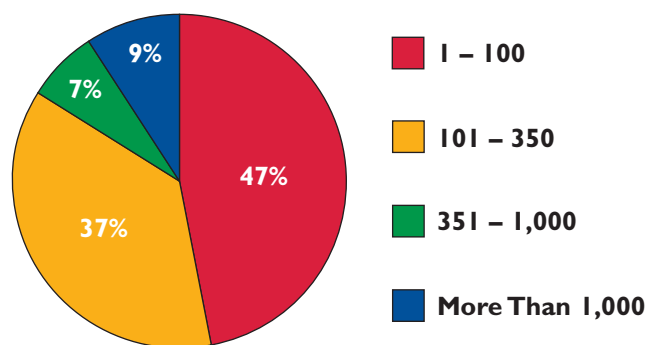


Figure 5: Education Almost as Foundational as Worship



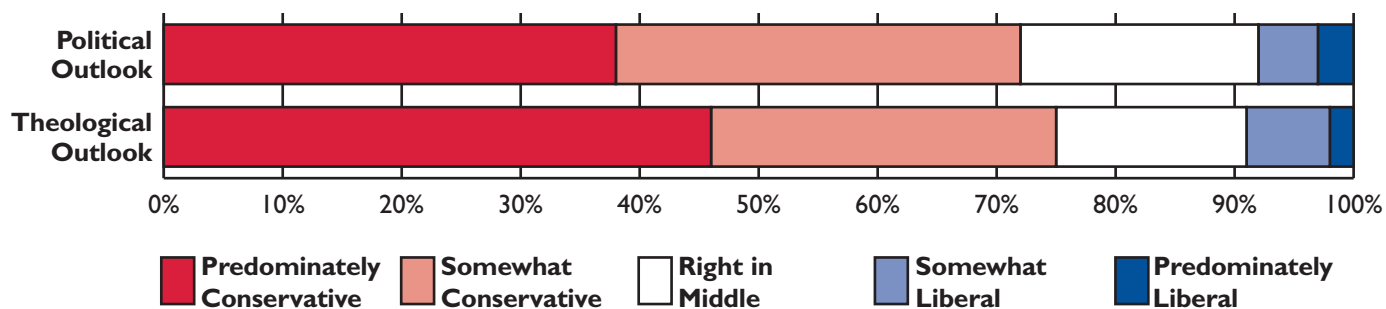
Percent of Congregations Indicating that the Respective Program Area is a Key Activity

Figure 6: Small Still Dominates



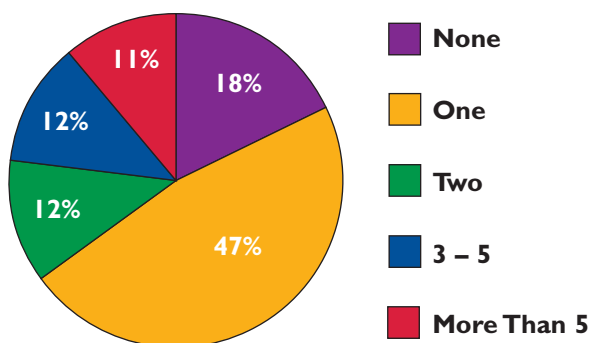
Percent of Congregations by Weekly Worship Attendance

Figure 7: More Conservative Than Many Think



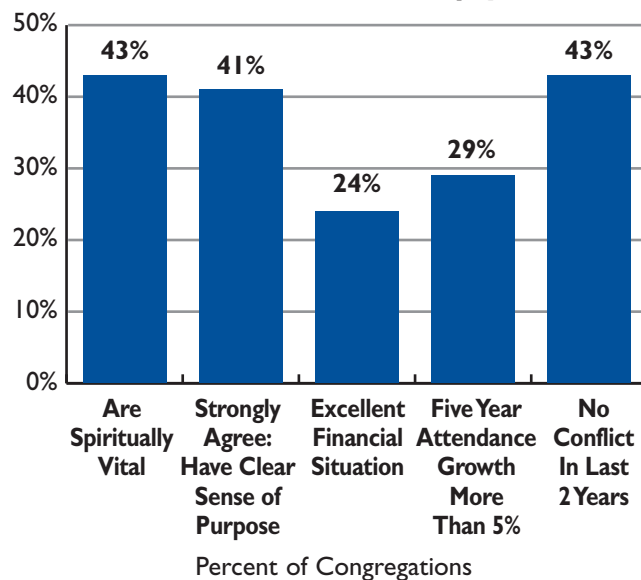
Percent of Congregations in which the Majority of Participants Hold the Respective Outlooks

Figure 8: A Plurality With One



Percent of Congregations by Number of Full Time Professional Staff

Figure 9: Measures of Vitality – Half Full or Half Empty?



Percent of Congregations

Oldline Protestant Congregations At A Glance

Figure 10: Classical Worship Music?

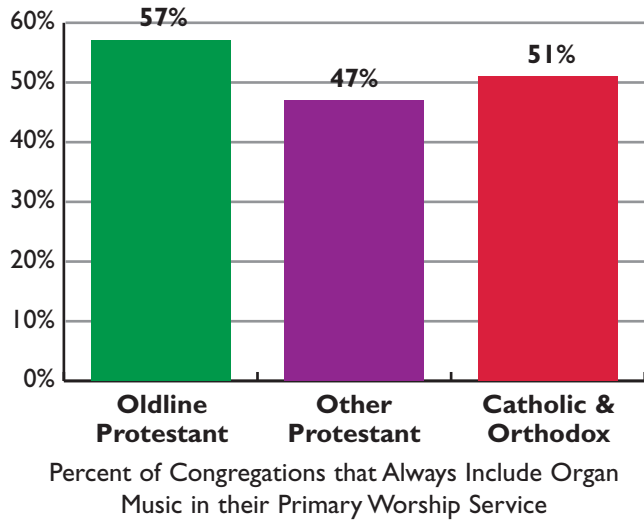


Figure 13: Weak in the West

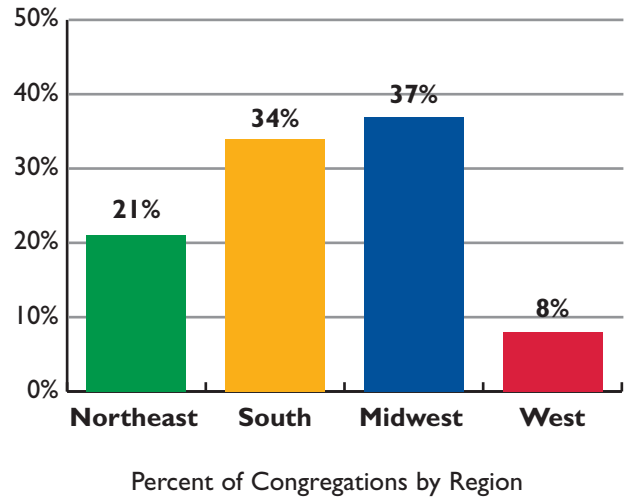


Figure 11: Strength in Community Service

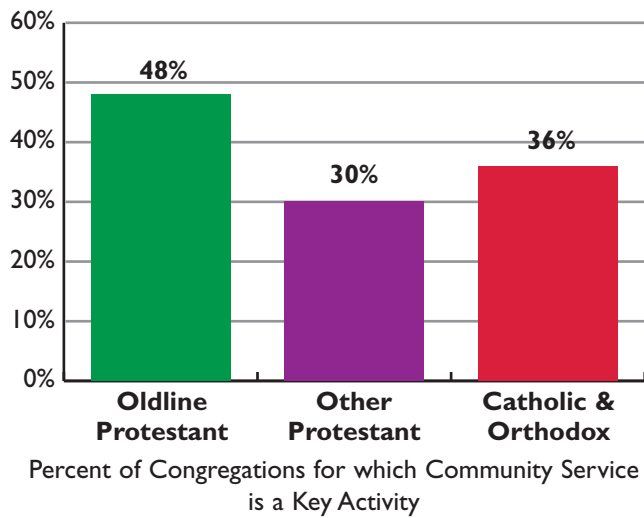


Figure 14: Declining New Development

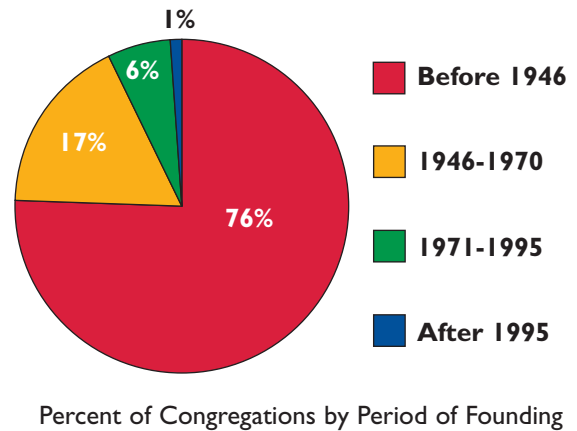


Figure 12: Lingering Town and Country Legacy

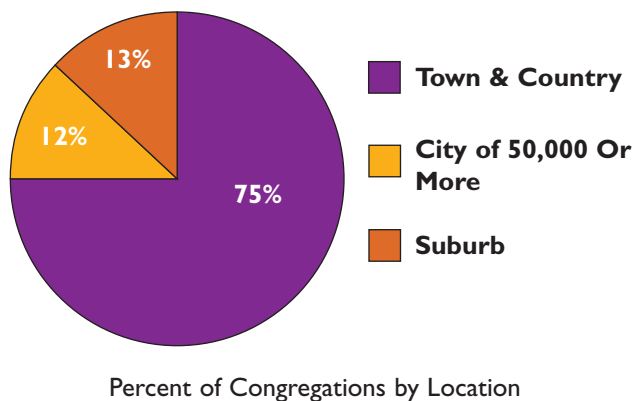


Figure 15: Older, Whiter, Better Educated

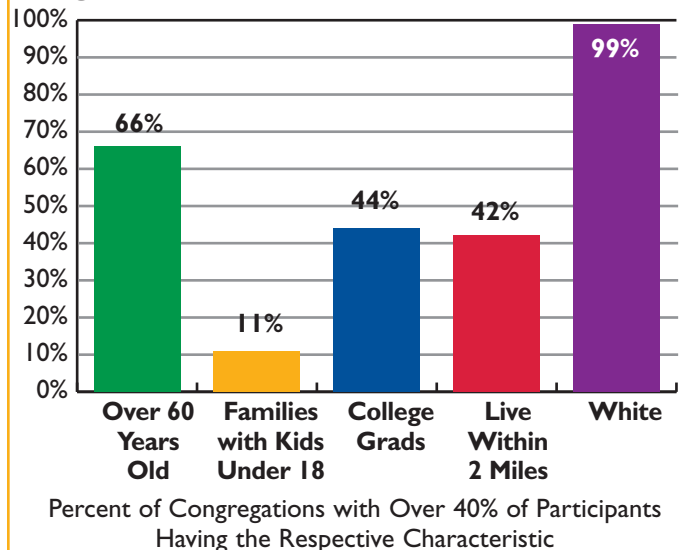


Figure 16: Fellowship a Program Strength

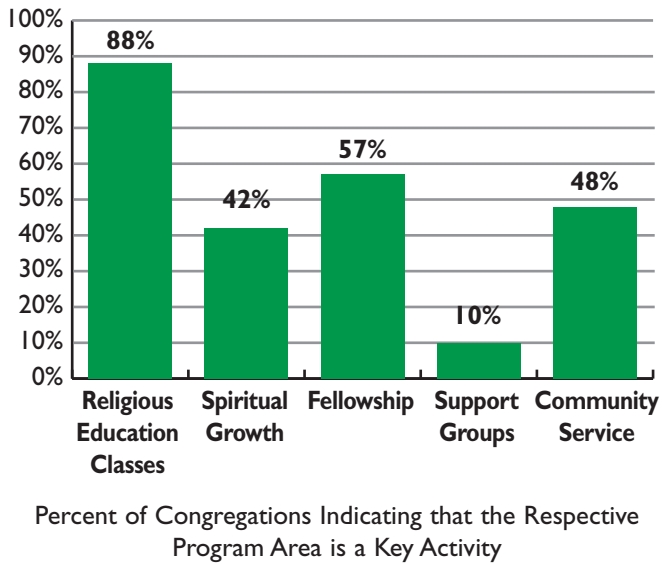


Figure 17: Small Still Dominates

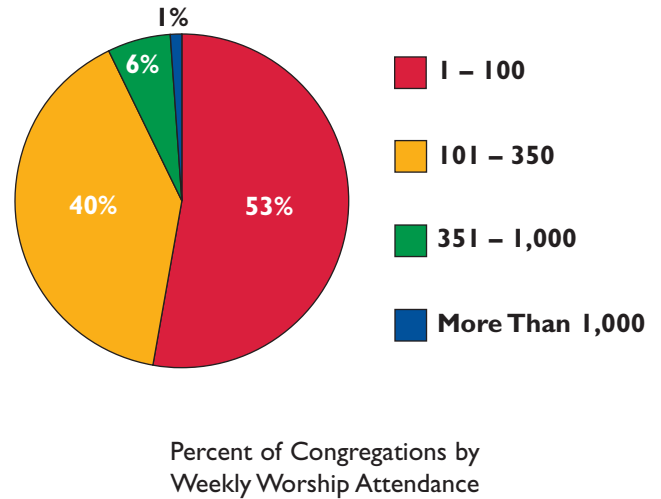


Figure 18: More Conservative Than Many Think

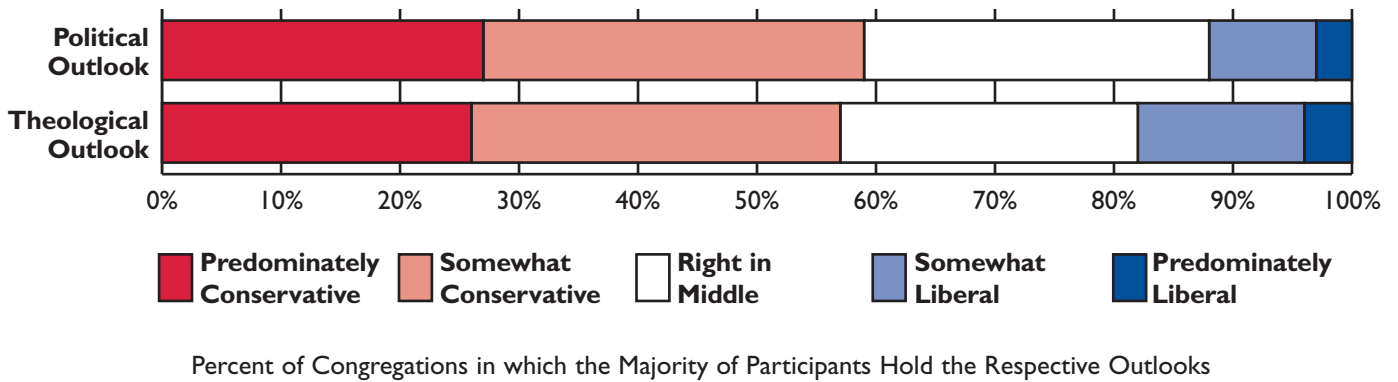


Figure 19: Worrisome "None's"

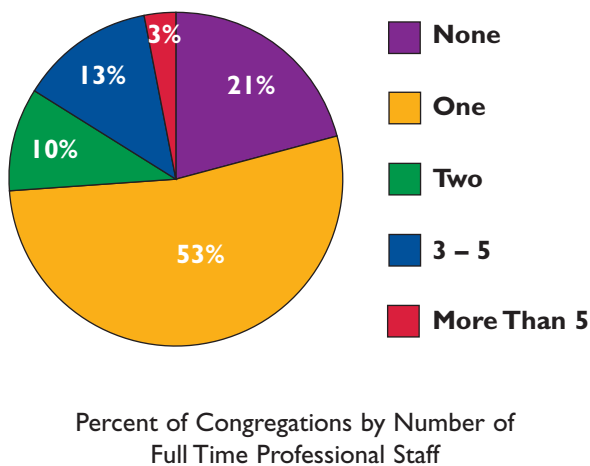
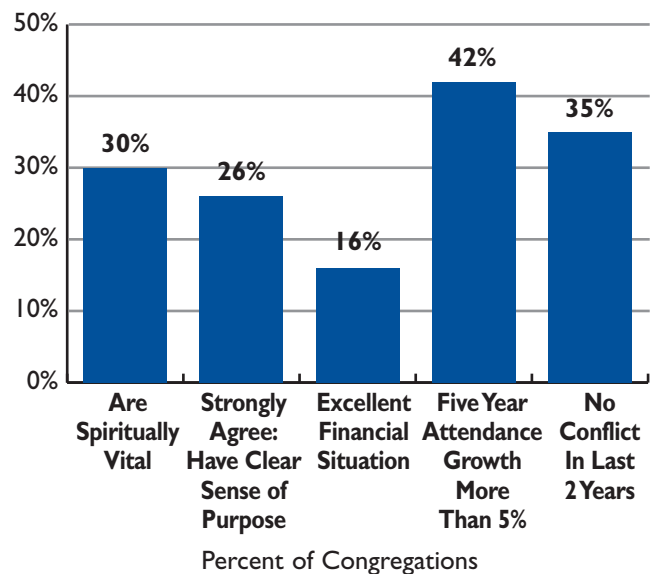


Figure 20: Measures of Vitality – Cause for Concern?



Other Protestant Congregations At A Glance

Figure 21: Inspiring Worship

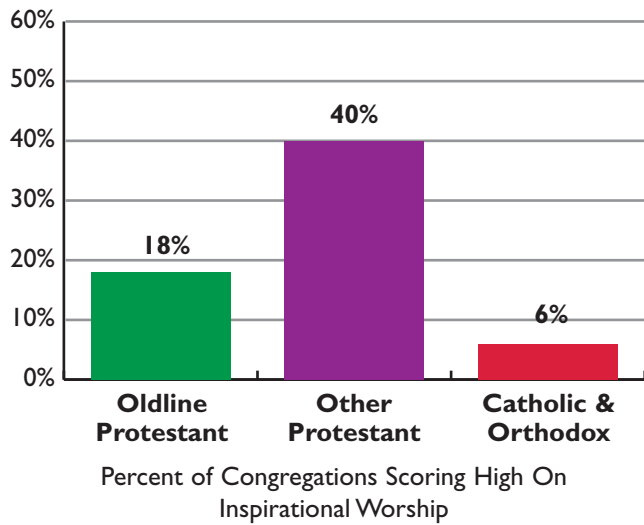


Figure 24: Still Dominant in the South

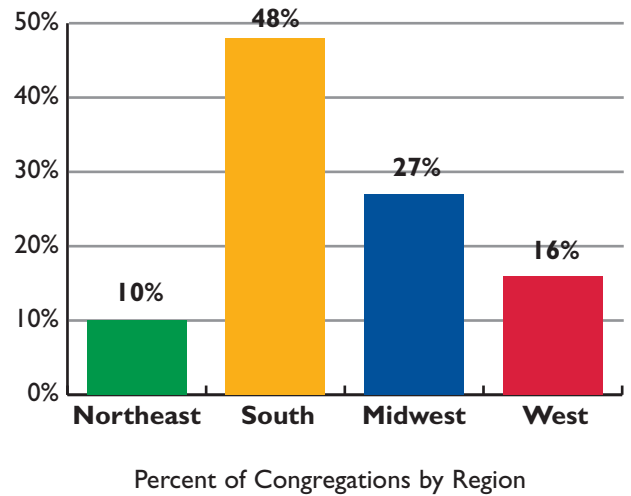


Figure 22: Strength in Evangelism

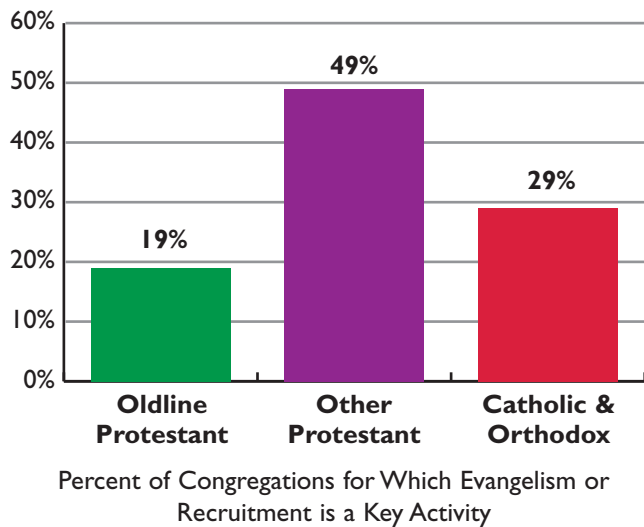


Figure 25: Growing through New Churches

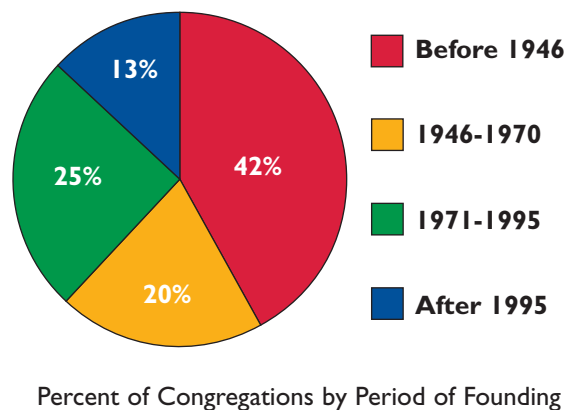


Figure 23: Increasing Metro Presence

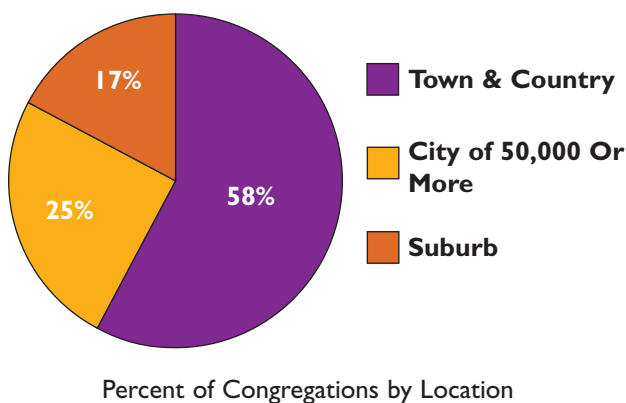


Figure 26: Younger, Less Educated, Commuters

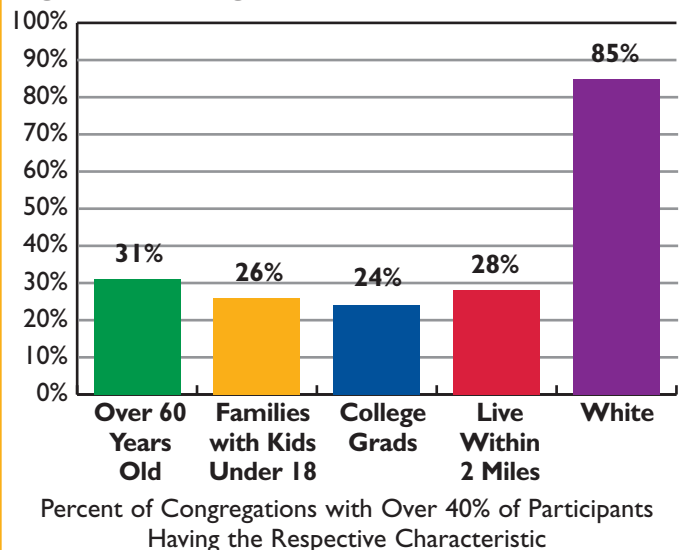


Figure 27: Highest of Any Faith Family on Spiritual Growth

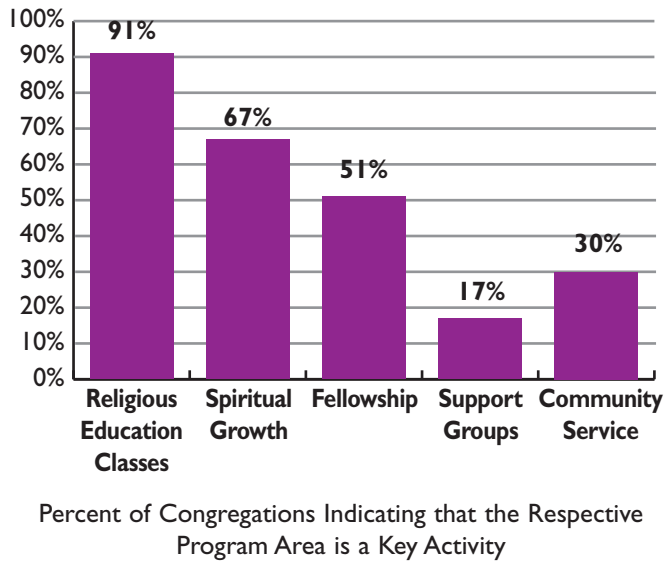


Figure 28: Small Still Dominates

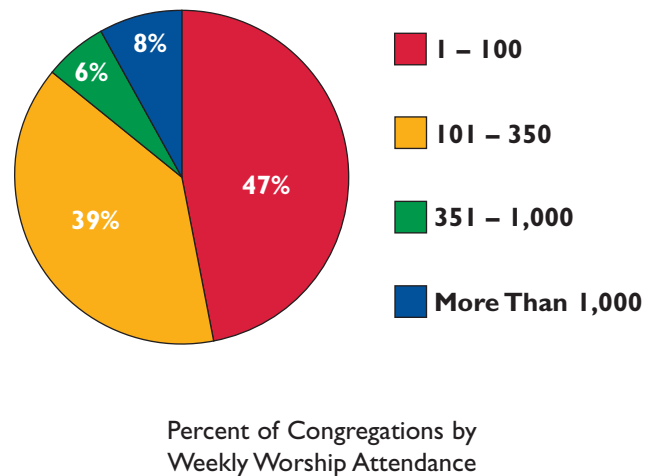


Figure 29: No Surprise

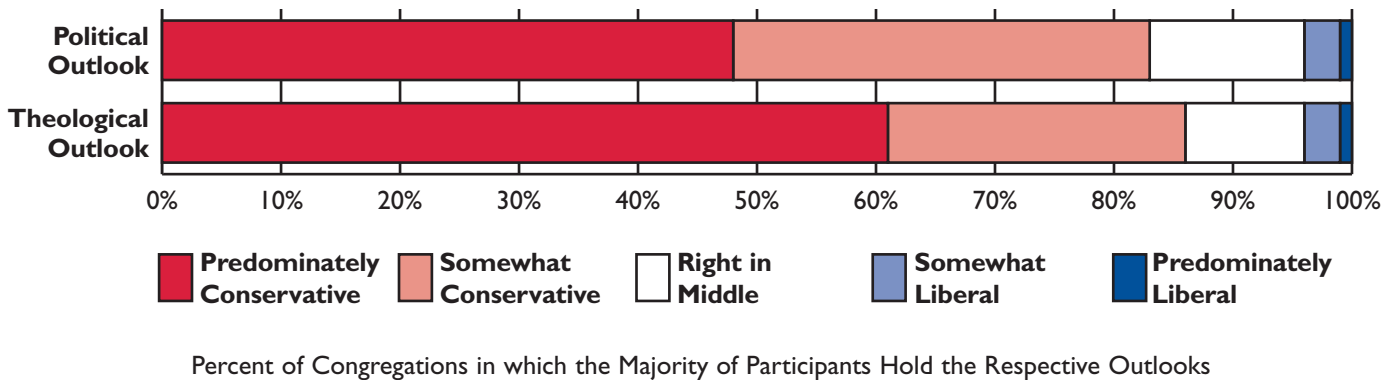


Figure 30: A Plurality With One

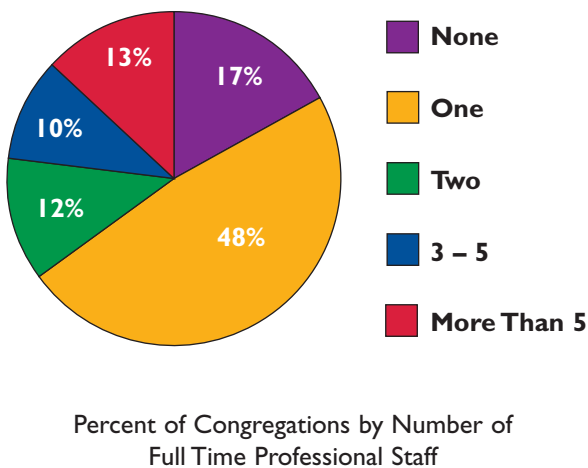
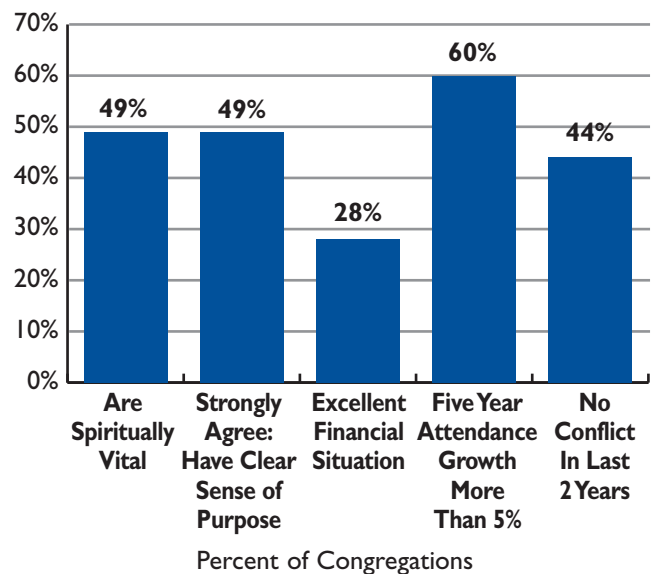


Figure 31: Measures of Vitality – Better than the Rest



Catholic and Orthodox Congregations At A Glance

Figure 32: Formal Liturgical Worship

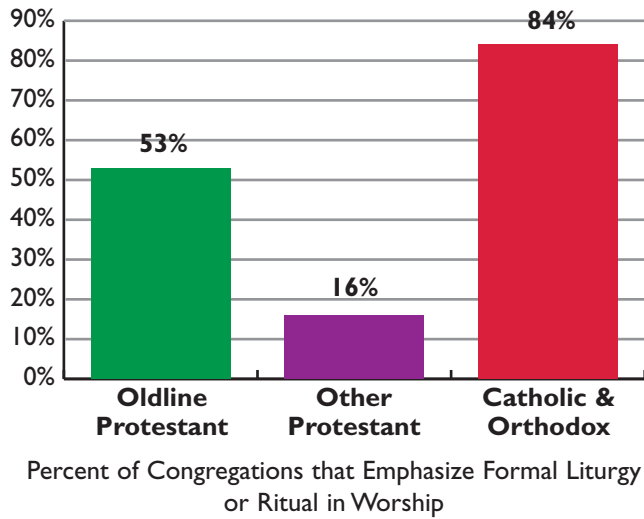


Figure 35: Strong in the Industrial North

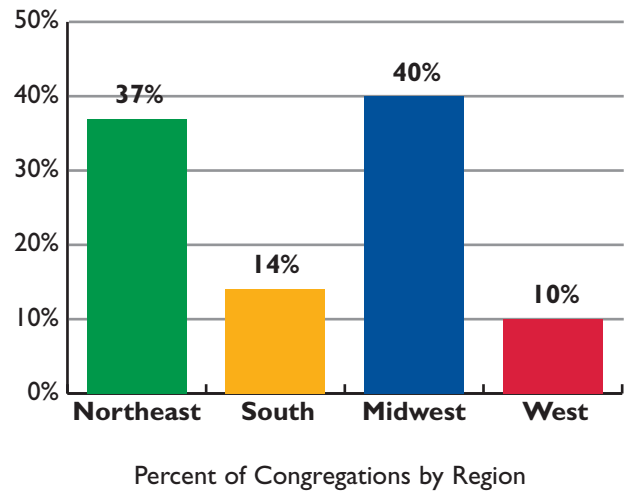


Figure 33: Strong Sense of Sabbath

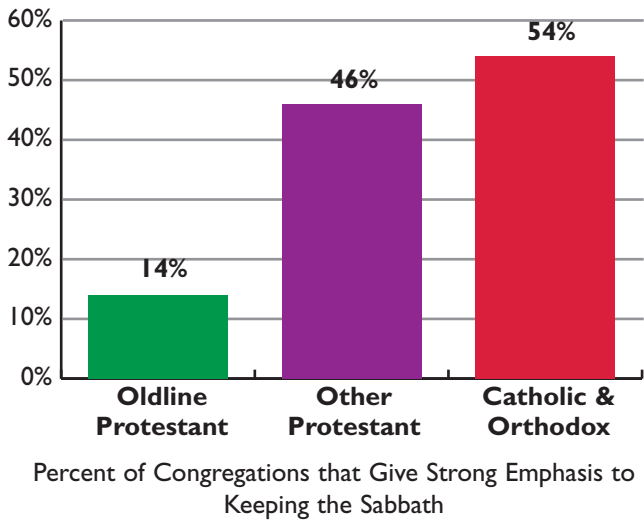


Figure 36: Old But Steady

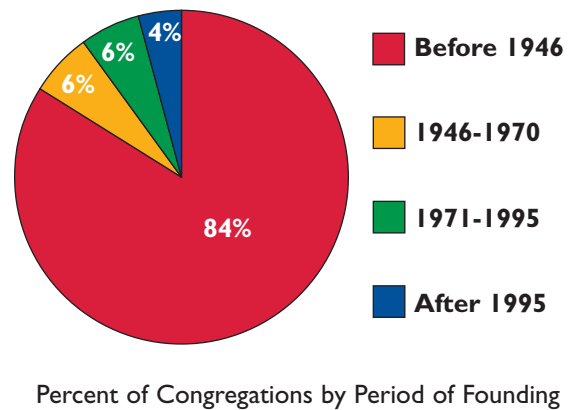


Figure 34: More Small Town than Country

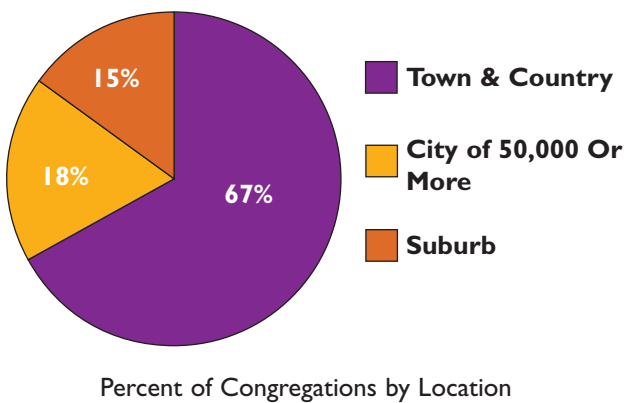


Figure 37: Younger, Neighborhood, Families

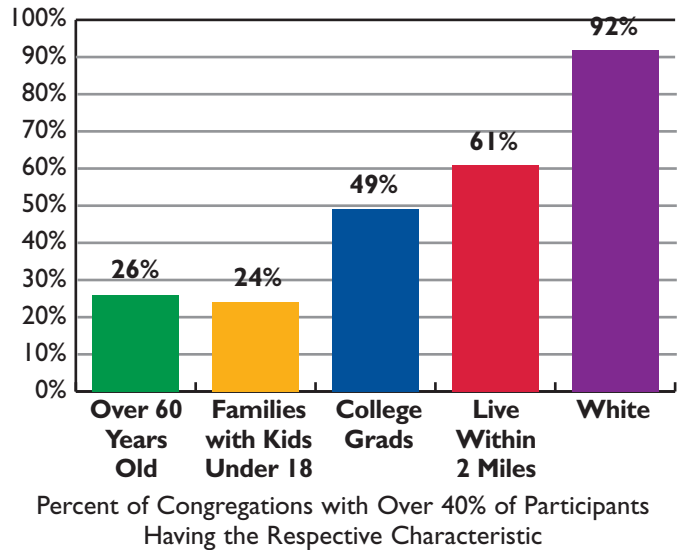
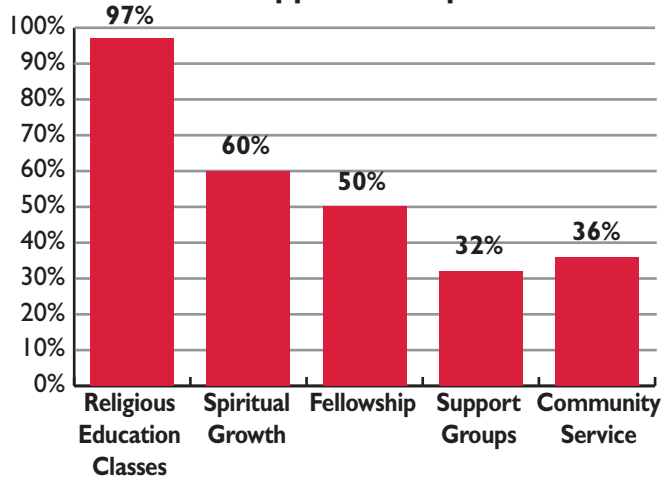
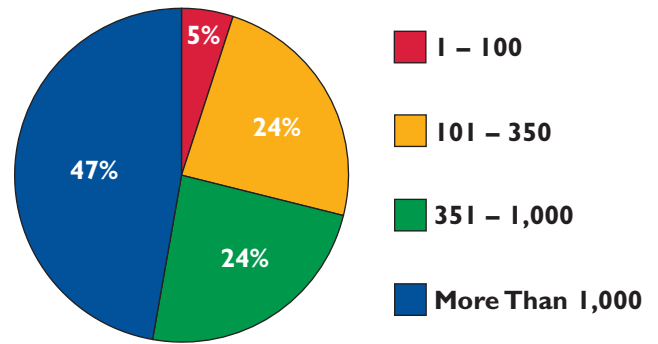


Figure 38: Highest of Any Faith Family in Support Groups



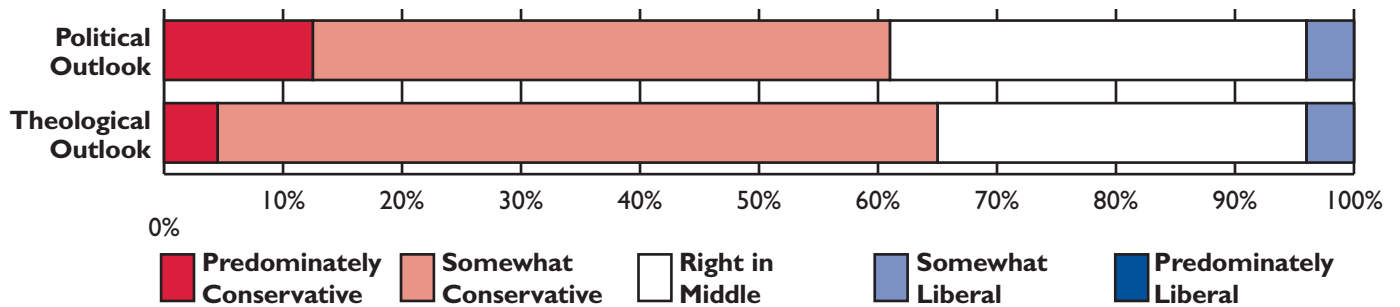
Percent of Congregations Indicating that the Respective Program Area is a Key Activity

Figure 39: Larger Parishes the Norm



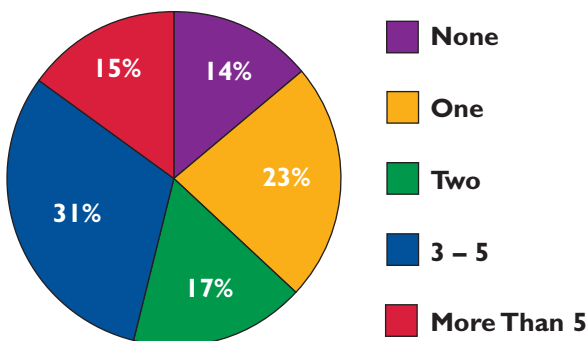
Percent of Congregations by Weekly Worship Attendance

Figure 40: Moderately Conservative to Middle



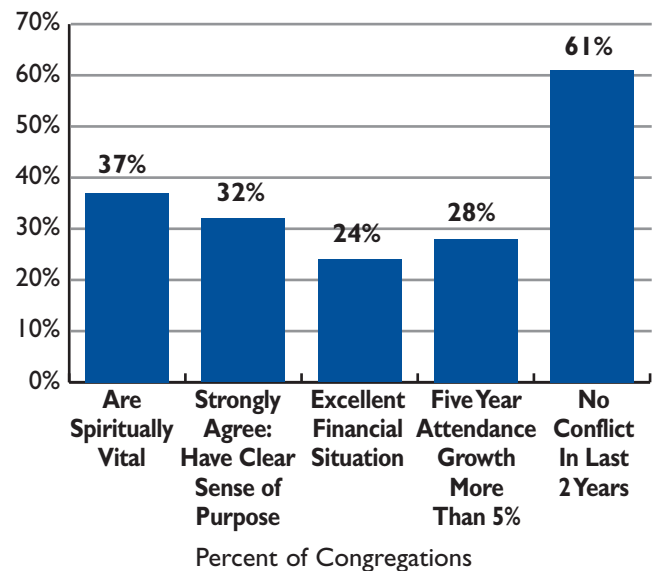
Percent of Congregations in which the Majority of Participants Hold the Respective Outlooks

Figure 41: Larger Parishes, More Staff



Percent of Congregations by Number of Full Time Professional Staff

Figure 42: Measures of Vitality – Where Has All the Conflict Gone?



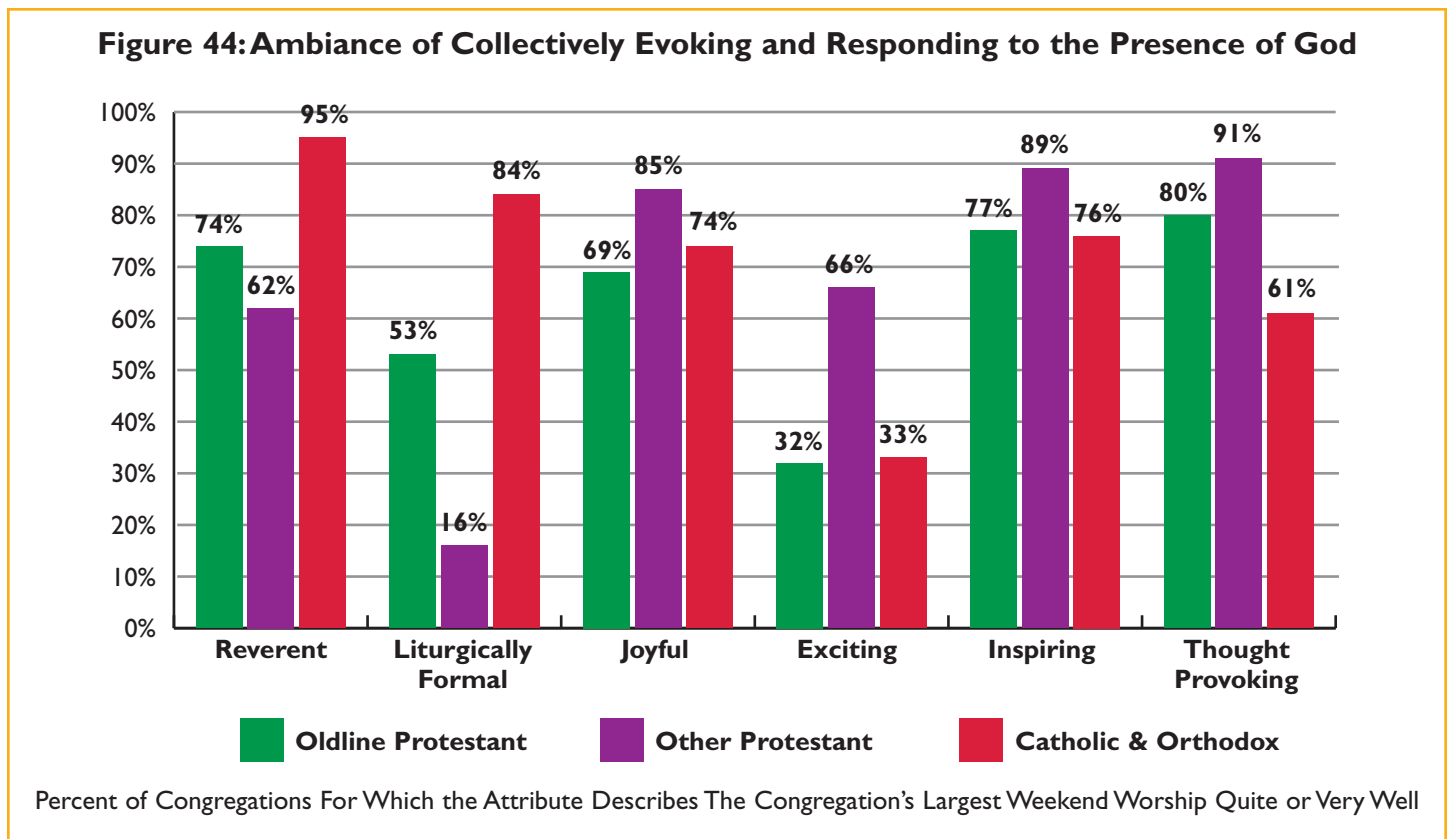
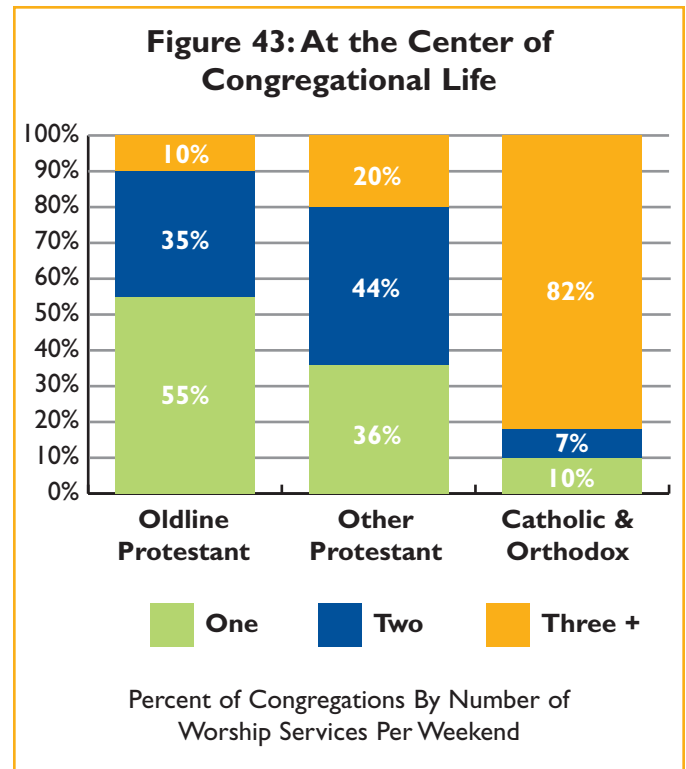
Percent of Congregations

Worship

It is not uncommon to call the physical place of a congregation a “house of worship.” There was a time early in America’s history when the collective experience and praise of God was the near exclusive use of such space. Today, a wide spectrum of group activities is not uncommon ranging from fellowship to mission. However, worship remains at the center of congregational life across all faith traditions and is the one collective practice shared by all congregations in our survey.

The number of worship services held each weekend varies, however, by faith family as seen in Figure 43. Much of this variation is due to differences in the typical size of congregations across faith families. But even when size is taken into consideration, the family differences persist.

More dramatic and more telling of theological differences are the faith family differences evident in Figure 44 in the attitude and ambiance of collectively evoking and responding to God’s presence in worship.

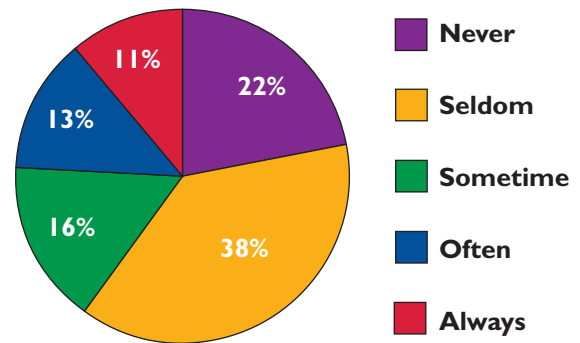


Prayer is a universal element of worship in American congregations, and sermons or near equivalents are virtually universal. Beyond this, the vehicles for communing with God and like-minded believers can vary significantly from family to family, and sometimes even among congregations within a family. The difference across Christian families in the frequency of the Eucharist or communion, evident in Figure 45, are as stark as they are theologically significant. And even within Oldline Protestantism, this practice is a regular part of, for example, Episcopal and Lutheran worship; but less frequent among, for example, Methodists and Lutherans.

Music is a near universal element of American worship, but as evident in Figures 45 and 46, its style varies considerably.

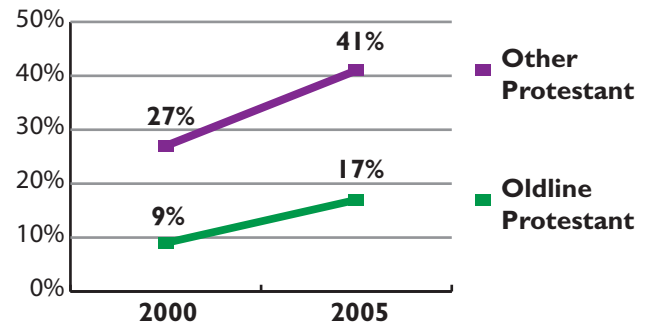
Figures 46 and 47 report on the use of electric guitar or bass in worship because of its close association with the emergence of what is more broadly called “contemporary worship.” As we will see momentarily, it is highly related to congregational adaptiveness and vitality. For present purposes, it is significant to note that it is rapidly becoming the norm within Other Protestantism, but also growing within Oldline Protestantism.

Figure 46: Contemporary Not Yet Pervasive



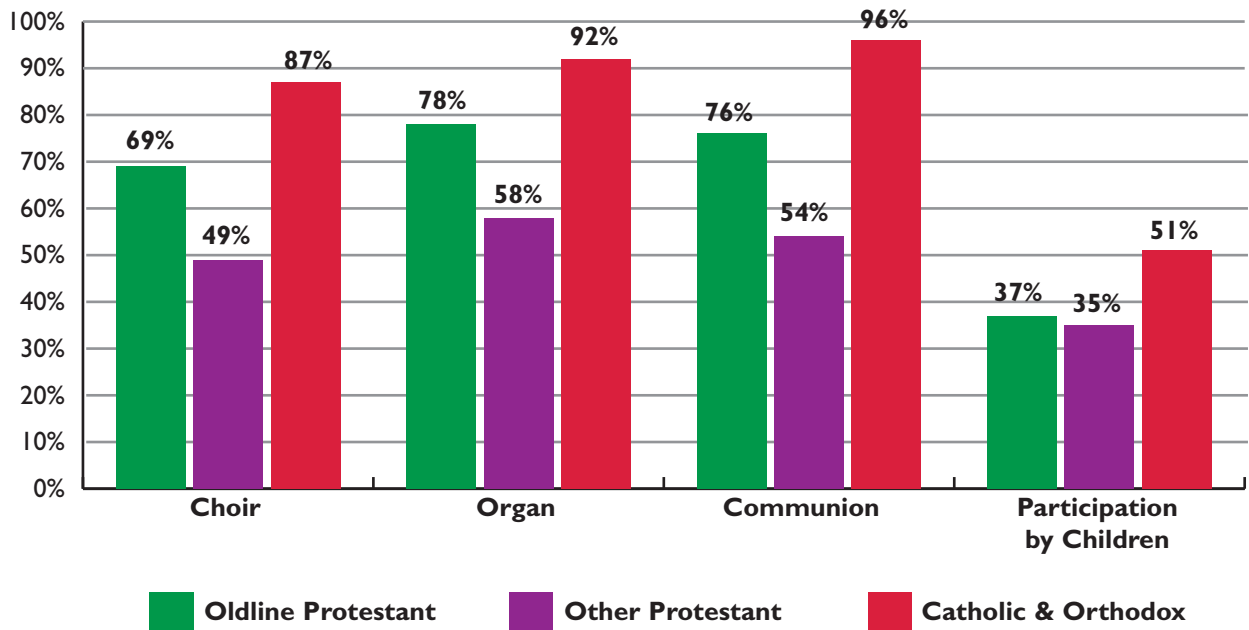
Percent of Congregations for How Often Electric Guitar or Bass is Part of Worship

Figure 47: But Clearly Increasing



Percent of Congregations that Used Electric Guitar or Bass in Worship: 2000 and 2005

Figure 45: Elements of Collective Expression

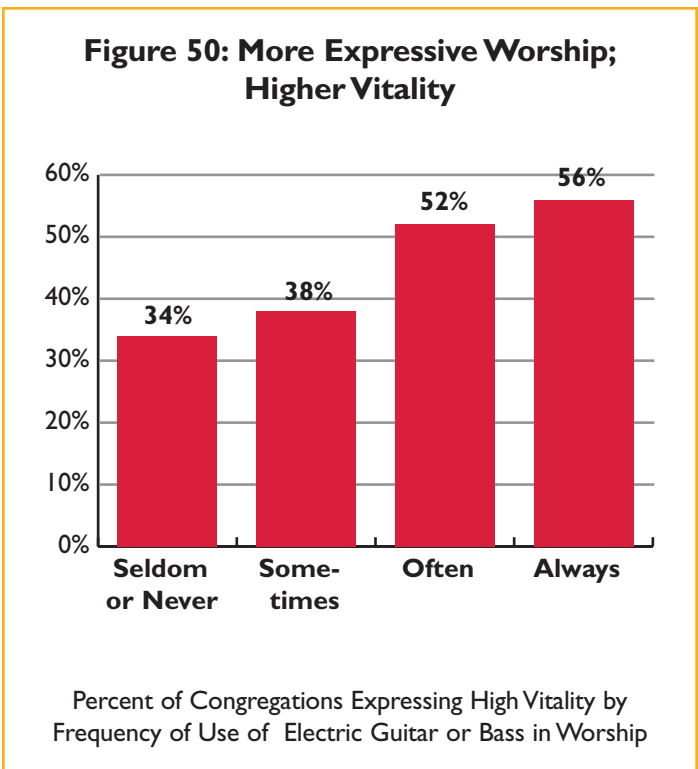
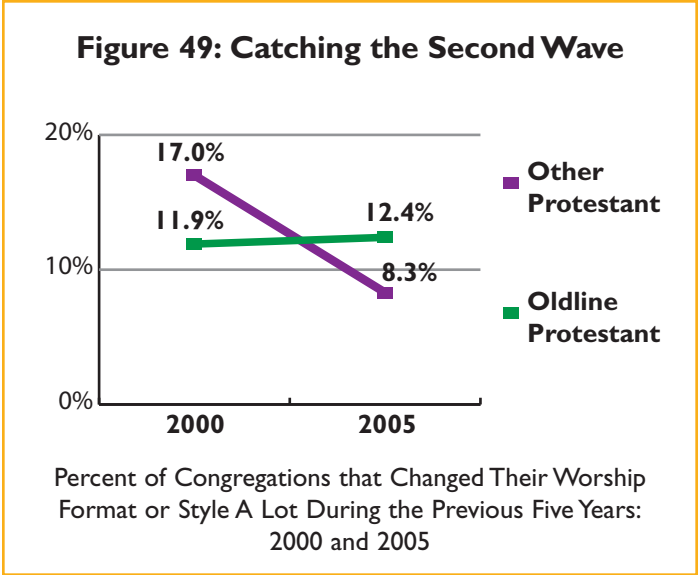
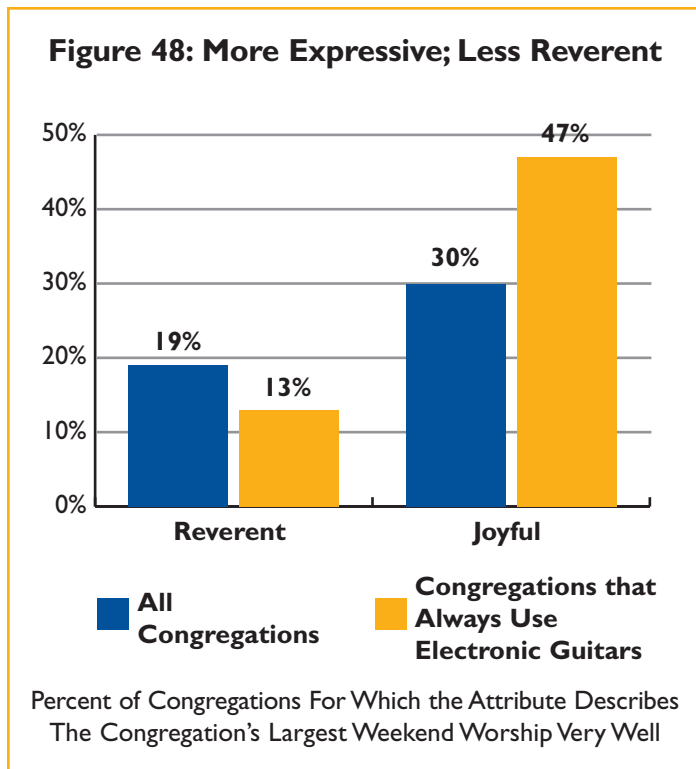


Percent of Congregations For Which the Practice is Always or Often a Part Of The Congregation's Largest Weekend Worship

Lyle Schaller, one of Protestantism’s foremost church consultants, recently had a tee-shirt made that says: “If you think people *think* their religion, *you are wrong!*” It is his way of expressing what other religious trend watchers call an increasing shift from cognitive to expressive forms of religious expression, a shift related to the increasing attention to spirituality in American religion today. The increase in contemporary worship appears to be a central, congregational form of this trend (See Figure 48).

Figure 49 suggests that our Other Protestant Family drove the first wave in the adaptation of more contemporary forms of worship, but after an initial surge its rates of change are slowing. Oldline Protestantism was a bit slow off the mark, has a longer way to go, but is keeping up its pace.

Figure 50 takes us to the bottom line. Why the fuss over contemporary forms of worship? Because, overall, they have a greater affiliation with congregational vitality. Even in Oldline Protestantism, congregations that use blended or contemporary forms of worship are significantly more likely to express high vitality than congregations that do not.



Spiritual Practices

The cultural changes that swept from the periphery to the core of American society in the late 1960s were accompanied by, as previously noted, an increasing attention to spiritual practices. By the 1980s “spirituality” had moved to the heart of our religious vernacular and the more expressive streams of American Christianity such as Pentecostalism and the new evangelicalism topped the growth charts. By the turn of the century, even many Oldline Protestants were lauding devotional and contemplative practices as the path to congregational renewal.

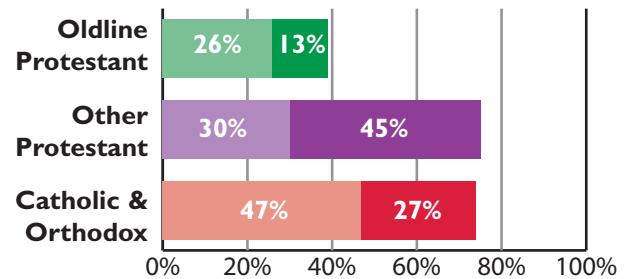
That Oldline Protestantism continues to lag other Christian families in its emphasis on spiritual practices may be the most prominent feature of the figures to the right. Devotional disciplines and scripture study, both personal and family, are a strength of our Other Protestant family, as is tithing and sacrificial giving. Catholics and Orthodox also maintain a rich tradition of devotional practice, and an especially strong sense of Sabbath.

That congregational vitality and spiritual practices are intricately linked is clearly supported by the FACT2005 data. Overall, as seen in Figure 52, congregations with a very high emphasis on spiritual practices are twice as likely to have high vitality as congregations that give less emphasis to such practices. Also noteworthy is that while the amount of emphasis on spiritual practices varies by faith family, the 2-to-1 high vitality ratio is generally true across the FACT2005 faith families.

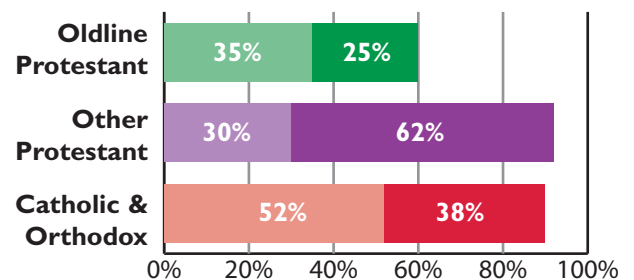
Long-term trend data on the characteristics of American congregations do not exist. However, since the advent of national congregational surveys the broader social trend data that links spirituality to the cultural changes of the late 1960s and the recent literature citing spiritual practices as a source of congregational renewal might suggest a recent ascendance. A comparison of FACT2000 and FACT2005 data, unfortunately, does not support such a conclusion. It shows (Fig 53) no statistically significant change, and if any change at all, a slight dip.

Figure 51: Congregational Emphasis On
(Percent of Congregations)

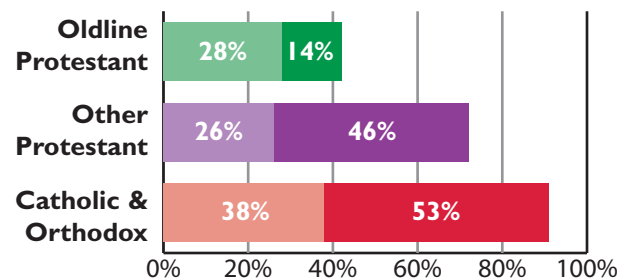
Family Devotions and Scripture Study



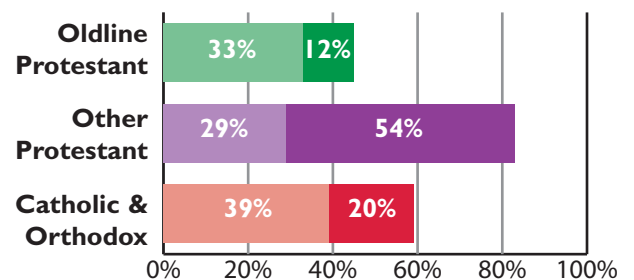
Personal Devotions and Scripture Study



Keeping the Sabbath Holy



Tithing or Sacrificial Giving

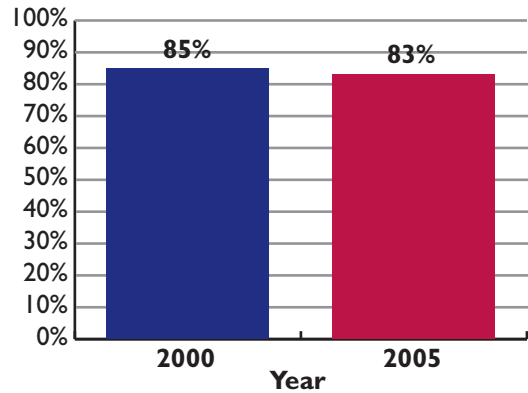


High Very High

Faith family influences on congregational spiritual practices appear to dominate social contextual influences and organizational influences. The one major exception is region of the country and this is one of the few instances in which the West leads the way in regard to religious expression (Fig 54). Not only is this true overall, but it is also true within each faith family.

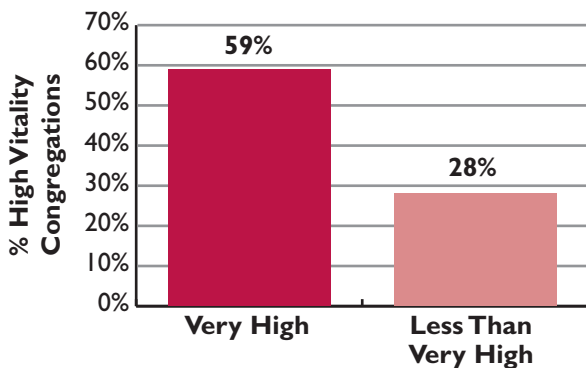
Sacrificial giving, like a high emphasis of most spiritual disciplines, is strongly related to congregational vitality. What the data cannot easily sort out is whether or the extent to which sacrifice leads to vitality (left panel of Fig 55 – as rational choice theorists would argue), or vitality leads to sacrificial support (right panel – as many stewardship consultants would argue). The truth is likely that this varies by faith family, and that in all cases there is some mutually reinforcing interaction.

Figure 53: Long Term Trend or Temporary Dip?



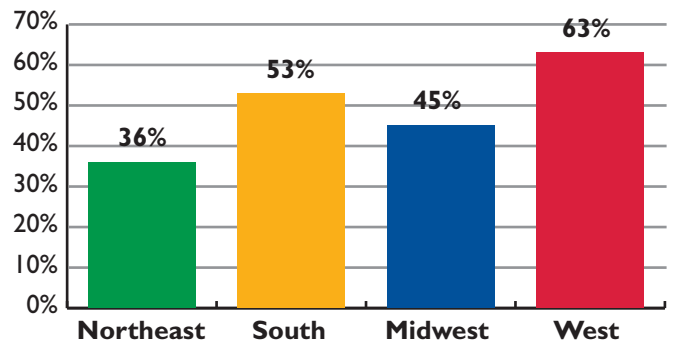
Percent of Congregations Giving High Emphasis To Personal Devotions or Scripture Study

Figure 52: Vitality & Spiritual Practices



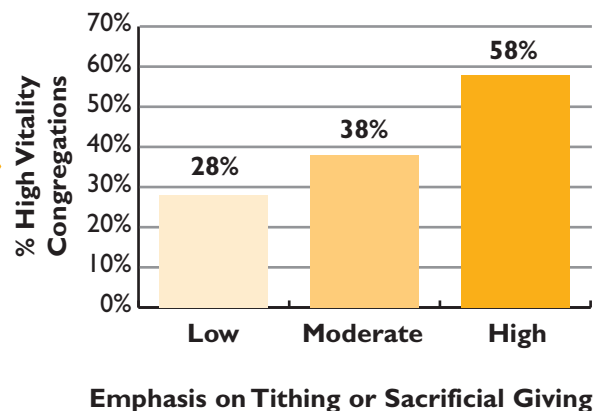
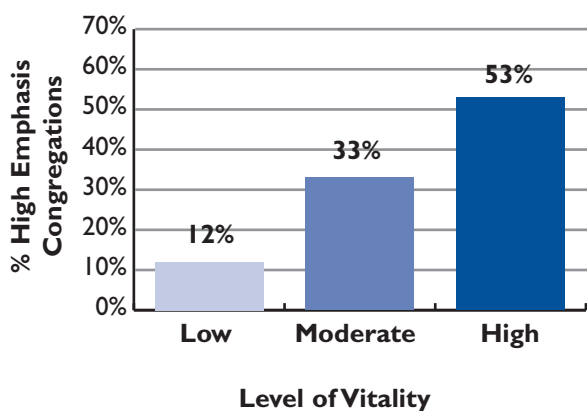
Percent High Vitality Congregations by the Emphasis Given to Personal Devotions and Scripture Study

Figure 54: Contemplative West?



Percent of Congregations Giving High Emphasis To Personal Devotions or Scripture Study

Figure 55: Cause, Effect or Mutually Reinforcing Interaction



Interfaith Involvement

One unanticipated consequence in the immediate aftermath of the tragic events of September 11 was an upturn in interfaith awareness and interfaith engagements. And beyond the traditionally presumed melting pot of Protestant, Catholic and Jew, America's religious consciousness now included *Islam*.

The interfaith surge immediately after September 11 was unmistakable. But by the following year many social commentators were talking about a return to the general interfaith indifference of pre-2001. A comparison of *FACT2005* to a baseline of interfaith involvement attained in *FACT2000* show that that is not the case (Fig 56). To the contrary, ***the increased attention given by communities of faith to interfaith engagements since September 11 continues to be dramatic.***

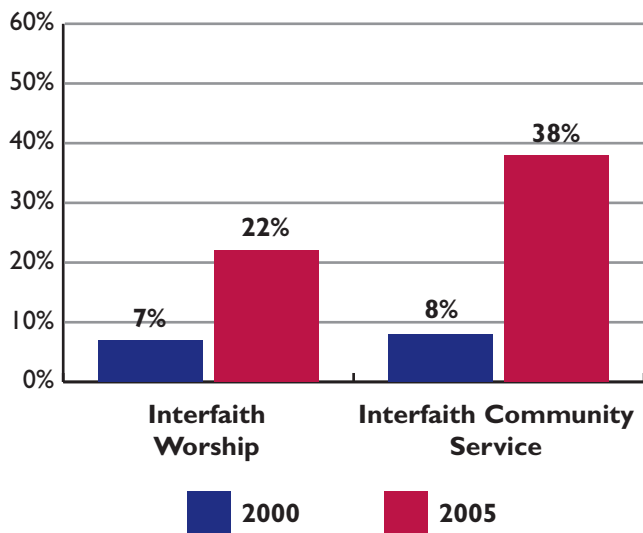
FACT2000 found that only 7% of congregations reported participating in interfaith worship in the 12 months prior to the survey, while only 8% reported joining in interfaith community service activities. By the time of *FACT2005*,

interfaith activity among faith communities had more than tripled. The survey found that just over 2 in 10 (22%) congregations reported participating in an interfaith worship service in the past year (up from 7% in *FACT2000*). Nearly 4 in 10 (38%) congregations reported joining in interfaith community service activities (up from 8%).

FACT2005 also shows (Fig 57) that interfaith worship is significantly higher for Oldline Protestant congregations (30%) than for Other Protestant (17%), and slightly higher among Oldline Protestants than for the Catholic and Orthodox faith family (28%).

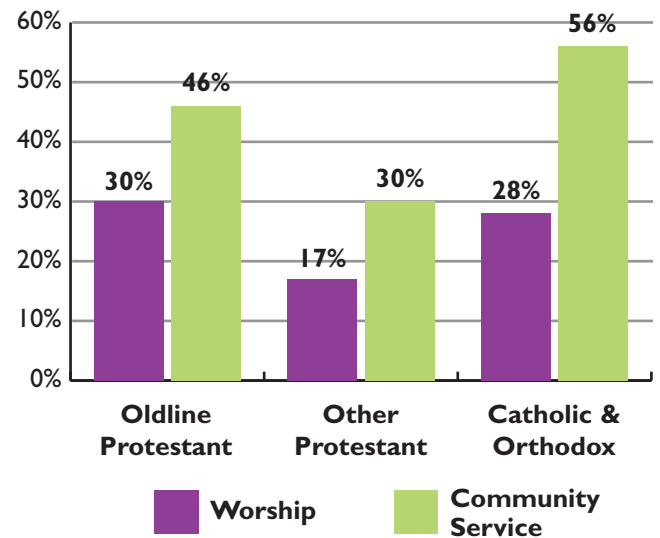
In terms of interfaith community service activities the faith family pattern runs from Catholic and Orthodox (56%), followed by Oldline Protestant (46%) and Other Protestant (30%). That the relative ranking of Catholic and Orthodox interfaith involvement in community service is higher than for interfaith worship makes sense because of the unique sacramental practice and theology that defines worship in this tradition.

Figure 56: A Surge of Another Kind



Percent of Congregations Involved in the Respective Kind of Interfaith Encounter

Figure 57: Sharing More Outside of Worship



Percent of Congregations Involved in the Respective Kind of Interfaith Encounter

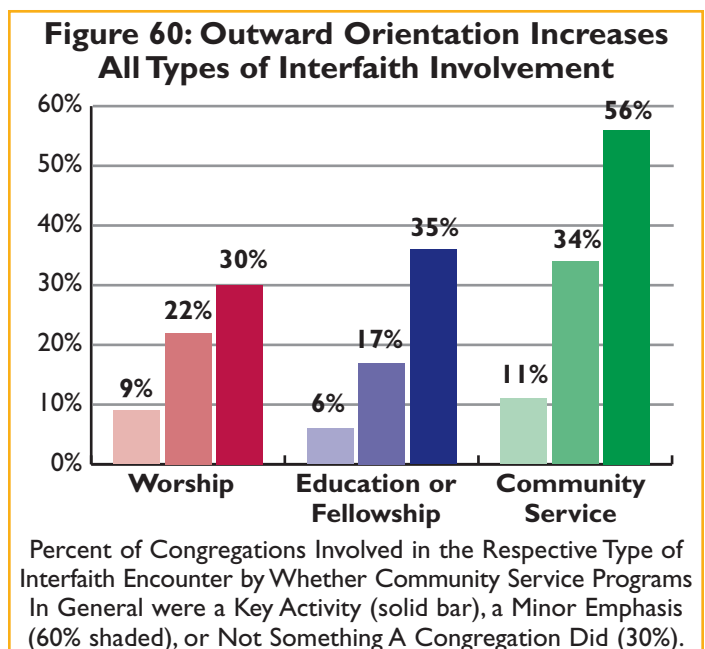
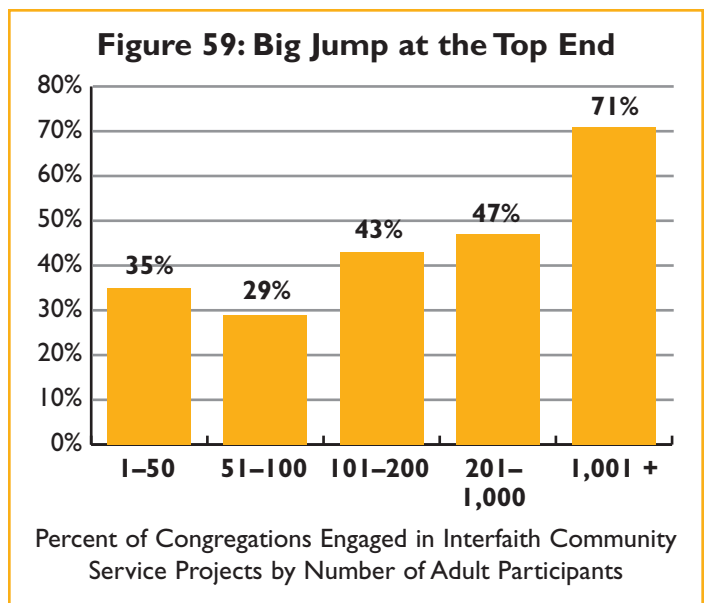
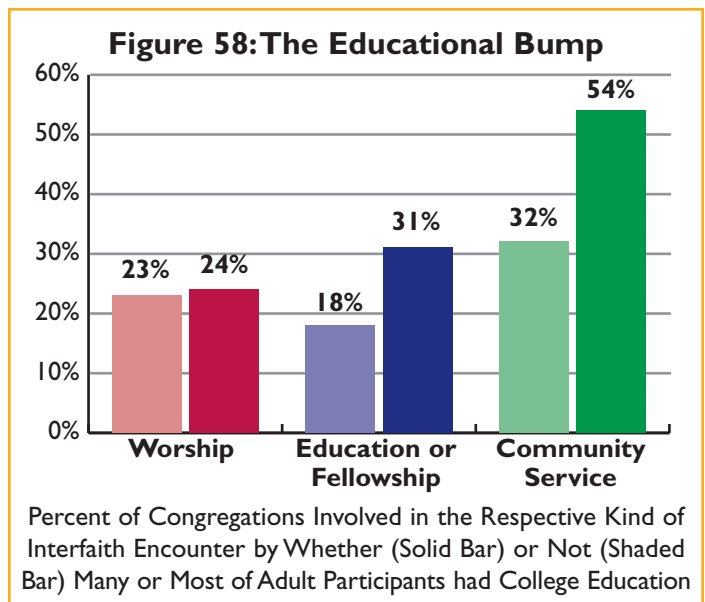
FACT2005 analysis not shown here indicates that interfaith involvement does not vary significantly by a congregation's level of spiritual vitality. But it does vary by several demographic markers, such as the educational level of a congregation's participants. The effect of education, however, differs by type of interfaith activity (Fig 58). Having a college educated membership makes no significant difference in regard to a congregation's involvement in interfaith worship, but it makes a highly significant difference in regard to educational or fellowship activities and community service activities.

Levels of interfaith worship do not vary greatly by region of the country, although and not surprisingly it is slightly lower in regions of evangelical strength (the South and West – both at 21% of congregations) and higher in regions with higher concentrations of mainline Protestant congregations (the Northeast – 26%; and the Midwest – 23%).

Size of membership makes little difference for involvement in interfaith worship. For involvement in interfaith education or fellowship activities and for involvement in interfaith community service activities (Fig 59), however, there is a noticeable increase when congregations reach 1,000 adult participants.

Since large congregations typically have large and diverse programs, that larger congregations are more involved in interfaith community service activities suggests that congregations that already do lots of other kinds of programming may be those most predisposed toward interfaith activities. That turns out not to be the case with respect to inwardly oriented programming such as, for example, religious education classes and prayer groups, neither individually or collectively.

A congregation's general involvement in community service activities, however, was another matter. Not only is a congregation's general level of involvement in community service programs highly related to involvement in interfaith community service activities (Fig 60), which one might expect, but such an outward orientation is also strongly related to involvement in interfaith worship and interfaith educational and fellowship activities.



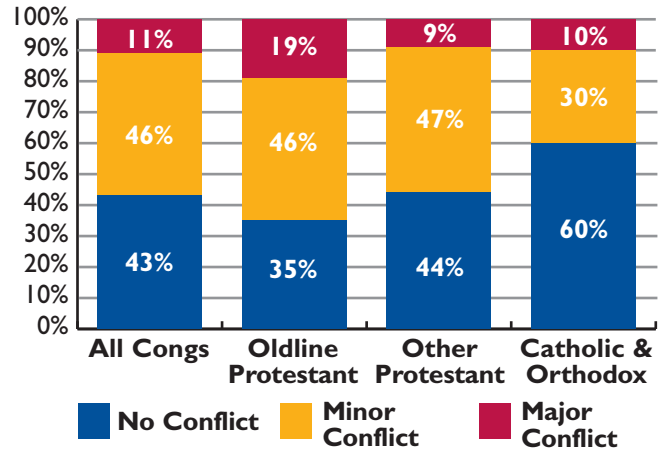
Conflict

Congregational conflict is a near fact of life. A stunning 75% of congregations reported some level of conflict in the five years previous to the *FACT2000* survey. *FACT2005* approached conflict in a slightly different way, and only inquired about the two years prior to the survey. Using this shorter timeframe, it still found a majority of congregations (57%) reporting either minor or major conflict. The extent and severity of conflict, however, varies somewhat by faith family (Fig 61). In particular, there is more conflict and more severe conflict, for example, within Oldline Protestantism, than within our Other Protestant category of congregations.

Persons of faith tend to view conflict through a negative lens, and it frequently does have negative consequences. More than two thirds (69%) of congregations reporting any conflict also report loss of members because of it (Fig 62), one quarter (25%) report that a leader (usually clergy) retired, resigned, was fired, or otherwise “left” the congregation; and just over a third (39%) report that some members withheld contributions to the congregation. While all three of these “consequences” are prevalent in all of our faith families, Figure 62 suggests that there may be family “preferences.” To overstate slightly, one could say that member mobility is a preferred “Other Protestant” response; rotating leadership is a preferred Catholic/Orthodox response; and withholding money is the preferred Oldline response.

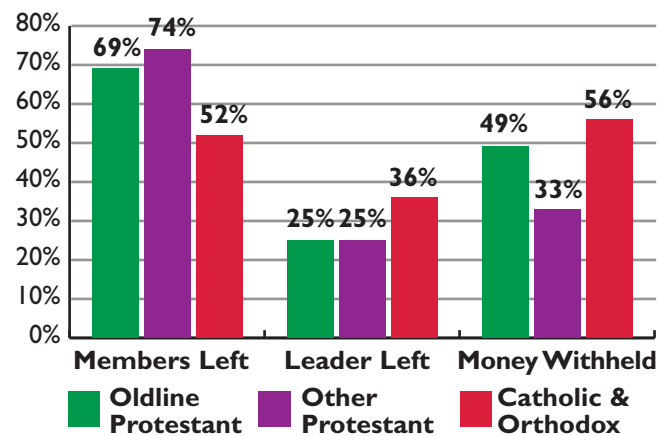
Another cost of conflict is its diminishing effect on congregational vitality. The left set of bars in Figure 63 show, for example, that half (50%) of congregations with no conflict score high on spiritual vitality. The percent of congregations scoring high on spiritual vitality drops to 39% among congregations reporting minor conflicts; and the percent of congregations scoring high on spiritual vitality drops again to 30% among congregations reporting major conflicts.

Figure 61: Conflict Is A Fact of Life



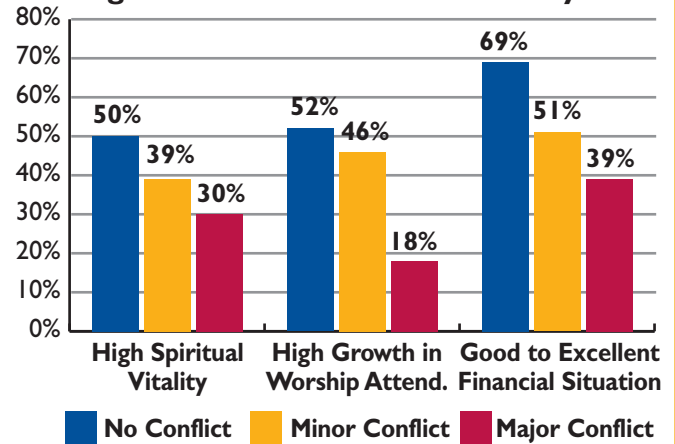
Percent of Congregations Level of Conflict in the Two Years Prior to the Survey By Faith Family

Figure 62: Negative Consequences of Conflict



Percent of Congregations that had the Respective Consequence of those Congregations that Reported a Minor or Major Conflict.

Figure 63: Conflict Erodes Vitality



Percent of Congregations Level of Conflict By High, Moderate or Low Level of Respective Vitality Measure

Conflict does erode vitality. But as we saw in regard to spiritual practices, the relationship of conflict and vitality is more complex than that. Specifically, vitality can have a mitigating or preventative effect against conflict. That is, vital congregations are less likely to have conflict and the conflict is less likely to be severe if it does appear, as is evident in Figure 64. Almost half (49%) of high vitality congregations report no conflict in the previous two years and only 8% report a major conflict. In contrast, only 26% of low vitality congregations are conflict free and a full fifth (21%) report a major conflict. And although we don't show the data here the mitigating effect against conflict is even stronger for financial health and for numerical growth.

Vitality is not the only aspect of congregational life that *FACT2005* data shows reduces the risk and severity of conflict. Another is openness to change (Fig 65). The more open to change the less the conflict. However, a congregation's clarity of mission and purpose appears to have an even stronger inoculating effect (Fig 66). Indeed, this effect is a smidgen stronger than for spiritual vitality and stronger than for any other of the identity and vitality factors in the *FACT2005* survey except for financial health.

For a quick introduction to and resources for managing conflict in congregations see, *Insights Into Congregational Conflict*, online at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

Figure 65: Openness Reduces Sting of Conflict

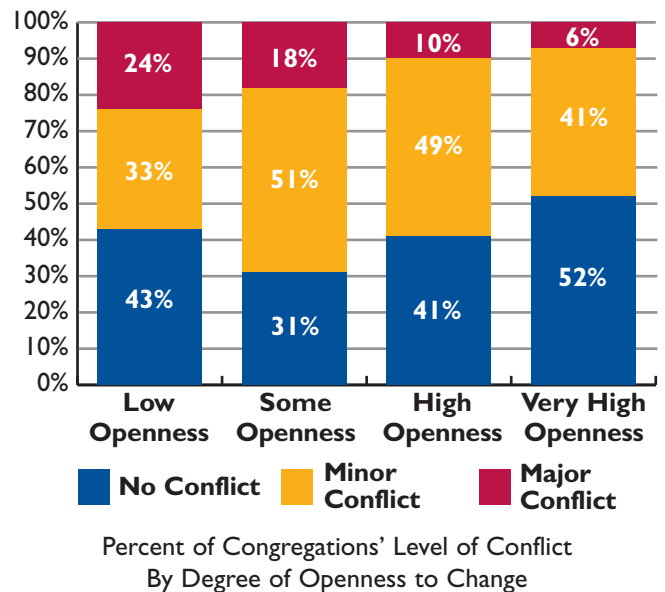


Figure 64: Spiritual Vitality Mitigates Conflict

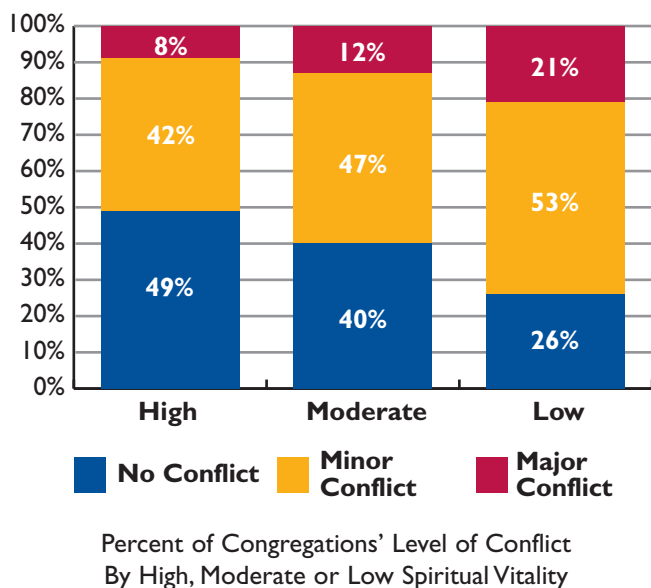
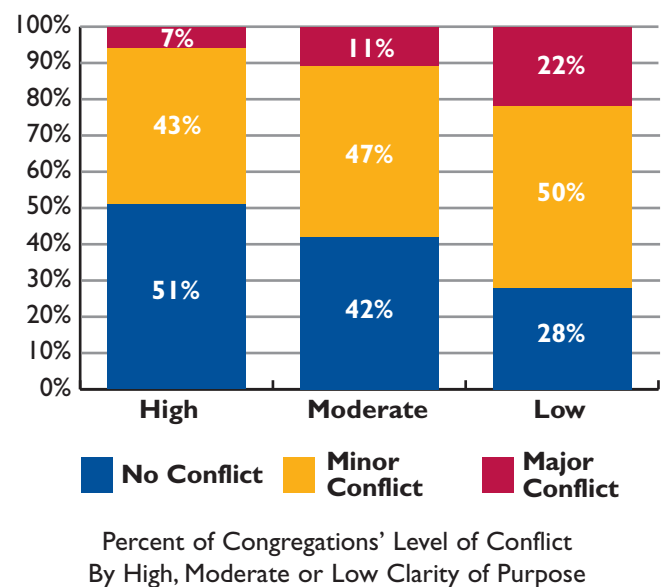


Figure 66: Clarity of Purpose Strongest Antidote for Conflict



Leadership

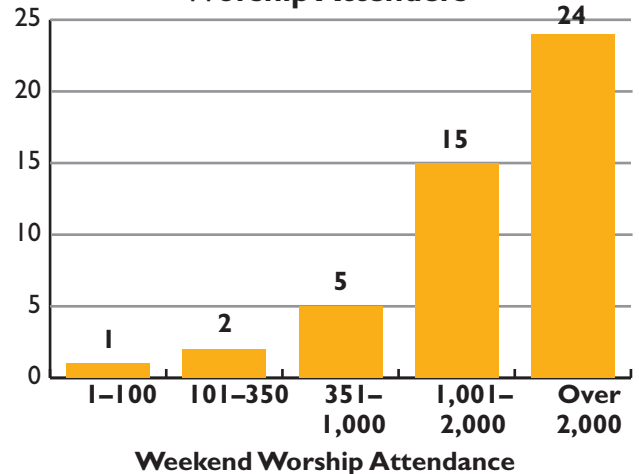
A sizeable majority of congregations within all faith families in the U.S. today have a paid, full time principal leader (sole or senior minister, pastor, priest, rabbi, imam). Indeed, it is the rule rather than the exception within our Catholic and Orthodox family, and over 75% with Oldline Protestantism. What is most interesting within the Other Protestant family is the relatively high percentage of clergy who are full time leaders, but also have other employment. Leader employment status varies a bit by rural, city, suburban location, but this is almost entirely due to size of membership. Only half of congregations with an average weekly worship attendance of less than 100 have full-time clergy leadership.

As would be expected, the number of full-time staff (of all kinds) increases with the size of a congregation. But Figure 68 suggests that, as a general pattern, congregations have one full-time staff person per 100 average weekly worship attenders.

With a tone somewhere between perplexity and panic a recent, national ministry magazine asked: Where are the younger clergy? The *FACT2005* clergy age profile shown in Fig 69

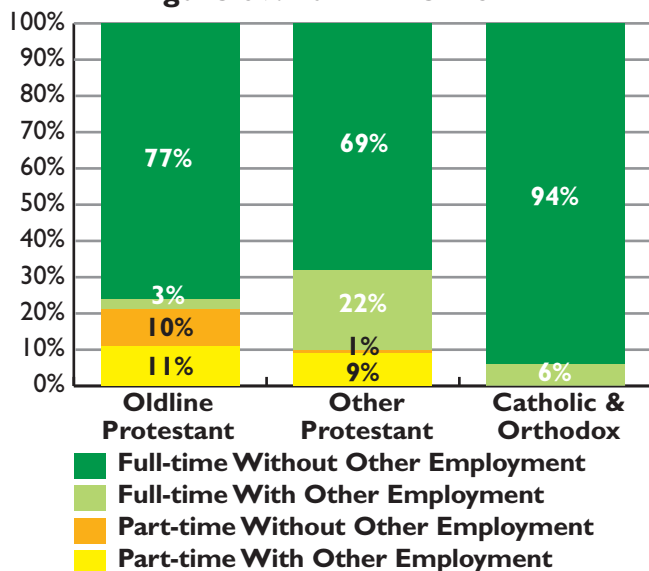
clearly shows a senior skew, especially within our Catholic/Orthodox family. But without the comparative context of trend data, it misses the urgency of crisis experienced today within many denominations that are able to track their own clergy demographics. The worry is two-fold. One is how to reverse the decline in younger and entry level clergy. The second is how to better equip lay and alternative types of leaders for congregations without the clergy leadership they desire.

Figure 68: One Per Hundred Worship Attenders



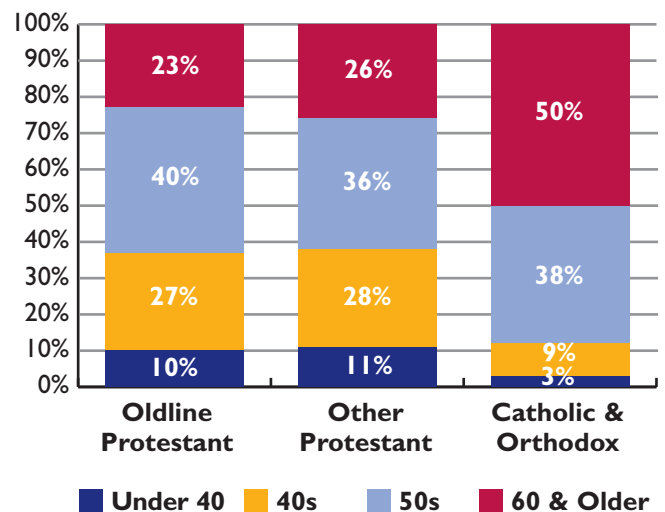
Median Number of Paid, Full-time Staff Members By Average Weekly Worship Attendance

Figure 67: Full-Time Norm



Percent of Congregations: Employment Status of Congregations' Principal Leader

Figure 69: Where are the Younger Clergy?



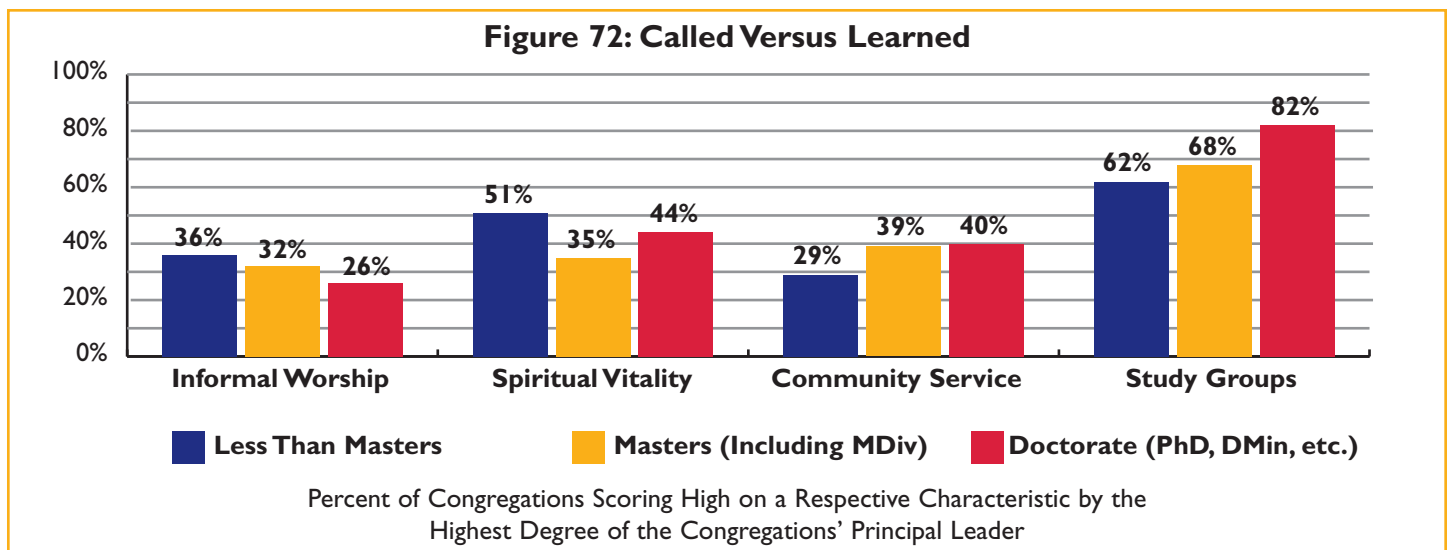
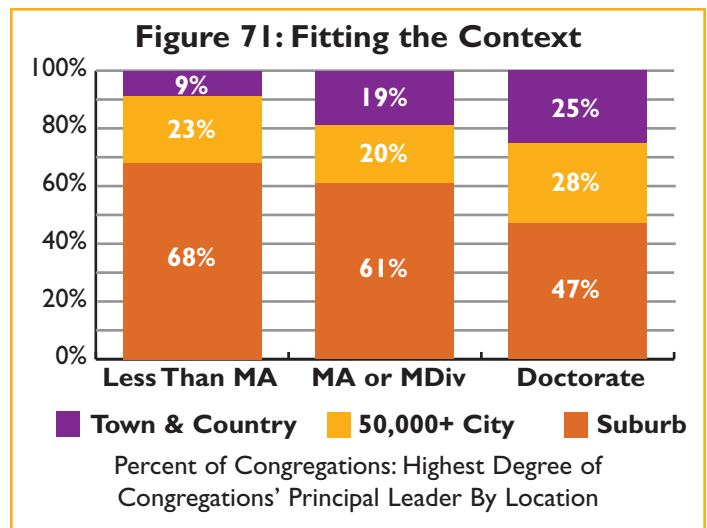
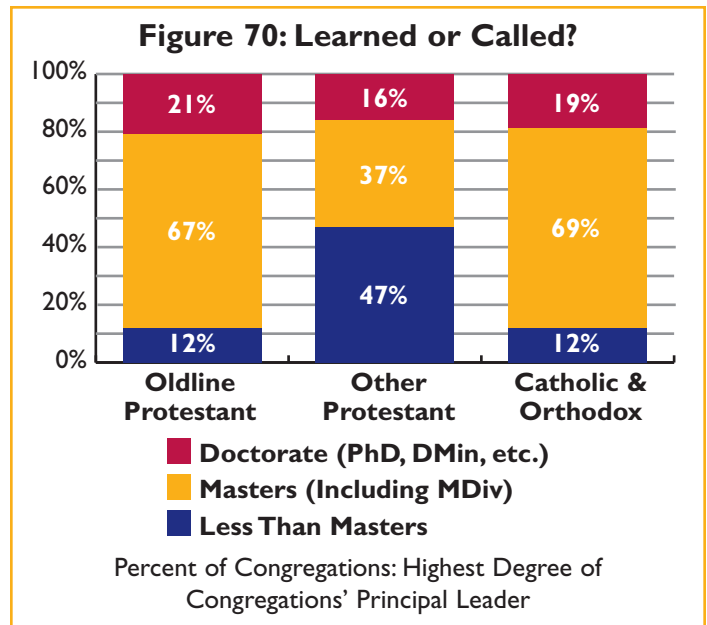
Percent of Congregations: Age of Congregations' Principal Leader

Faith traditions that typically require a Masters of Divinity degree for its congregations' principle leaders are said to emphasize a "learned" clergy. Other traditions rely more exclusively on sense of a person's "call" by God and fit to a particular congregation. As evident in Figure 70, Oldline Protestantism and our Catholic/Orthodox Family stress a learned clergy. In contrast, our Other Protestant group tends toward a "called" clergy, but even within this family a majority of clergy have advanced degrees.

Larger, more affluent and better-educated congregations tend to have clergy with more education; this is true in all faith families. As shown in Figure 71 this tendency manifests itself in the fact that suburban congregations tend to have the highest educated leaders.

Many, especially Protestant denominations, are currently debating the merits of a learned versus called leadership. Figure 72 examines this question from the perspective of a variety of congregational outcomes. The results are very mixed. Perhaps not surprising, congregations of less educated clergy tend to be more informal (left panel), while congregations of more educated clergy tend to give more emphasis to study and discussion groups (right panel). More challenging, congregations whose clergy have less than a masters degree score higher not only in spiritual vitality (left center panel), but on all the FACT2005 questions dealing with spirituality (e.g., prayer and meditation groups; emphasis on personal and family devotional practices). In contrast, congregations whose clergy have

advanced degrees tend to give more emphasis to outward reaching activities such as community service (right center panel) and evangelism.



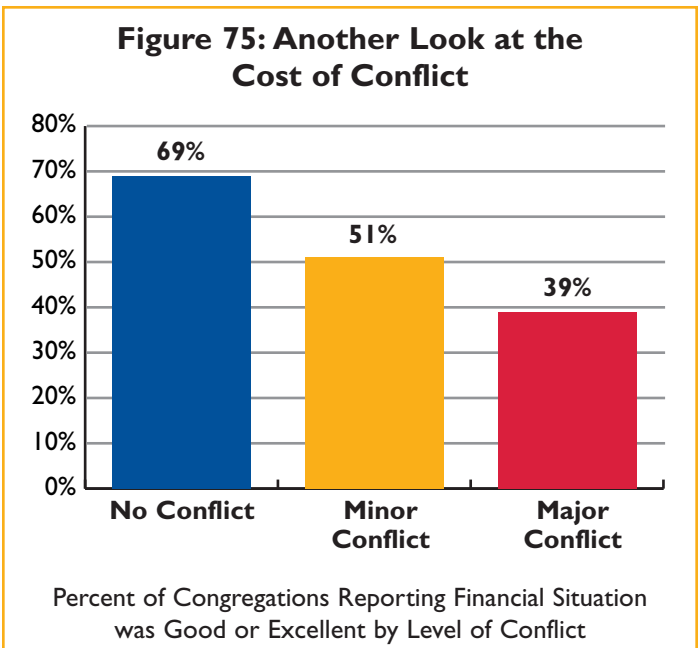
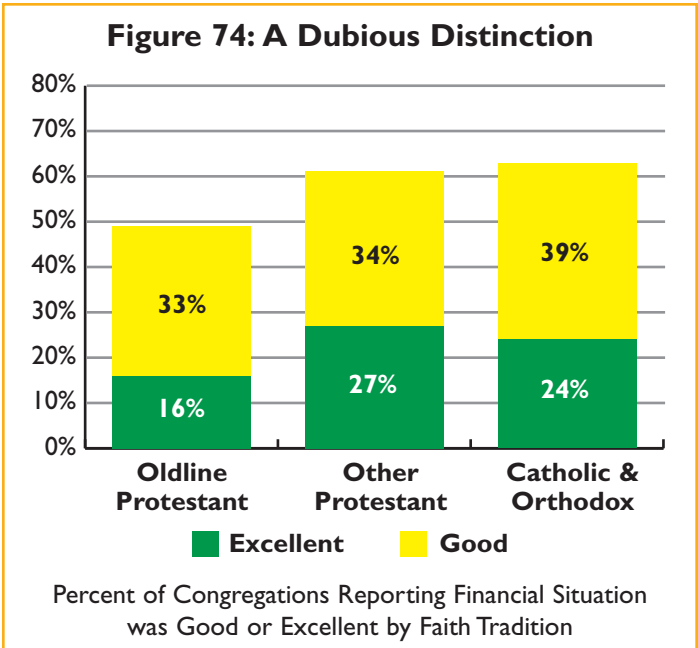
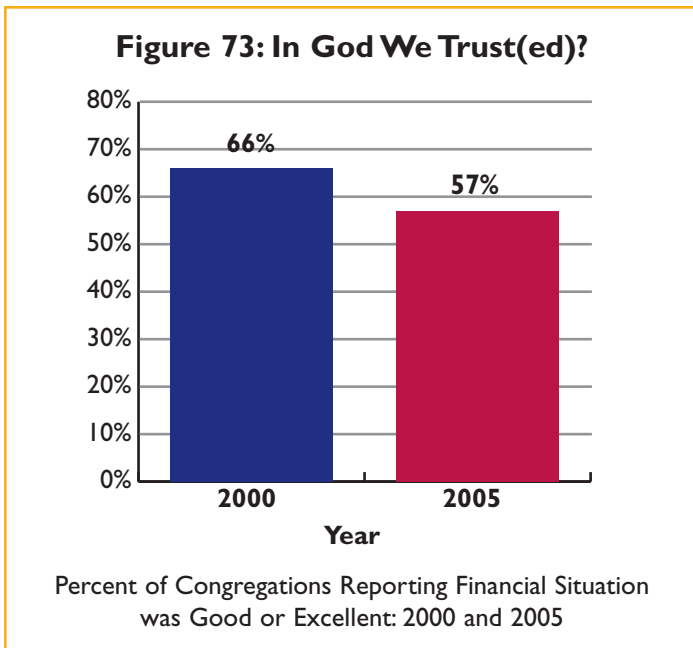
Finances

One of the most noted sources for information on religious giving is called the “Empty Tomb.” Recent downward trends make one wonder if the name is prophetic or ironic? Figure 73 clearly suggests that congregations are increasingly feeling the strain.

With a steady half century of membership losses the financial pinch has been especially sharp within Oldline Protestantism, and recent national conflicts have exacerbated the struggle to the point where less than half of Oldline Protestant congregations report good or excellent financial health (Fig 74). Figure 75 reinforces the finding from our previous discussion of conflict that conflict and resources have an interactive relationship. On the one hand conflict clearly reduces a congregation’s ability to secure resources. Just as importantly, strained resources increase the likelihood of congregational conflict.

Size of membership has surprisingly little effect on a congregation’s financial health except at the very lower end (data not shown).

Only 16 percent of congregations with average weekly worship attendance of 100 or less report excellent finances, for example, while the comparable figure hovers around 30% across larger size categories. Rural, city, suburban location has no notable effect on financial health beyond that related to size.



The vast majority of a congregation's financial resources come from individual participant contributions, rather than from other sources such as investments, rents or grants (Figure 76). Indeed, the figure shows that such other sources of income total less than \$28,000 for 75% of American congregations.

Figure 76 also suggests that half of adult participants contribute less than \$1,500 to their congregations and half more than this amount.

The higher the level of per participant contributions, the better a congregation's financial situation (Figure 77). However, the effect is not particularly large until one reaches the top quartile of per participant giving.

Per member giving, however, is not necessarily an indicator of member commitment. Indeed, past research has shown that the greatest determinant of per member giving is not member commitment, but rather family income. The major exception to this is that, as indicated in Figure 78, there are significant differences across faith families in contribution rates and these become even more significant when family income is controlled.

For a quick introduction to and resources for stewardship programs see, *Insights Into Financial Giving*, online at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

Figure 77: Smaller Effect than Expected?

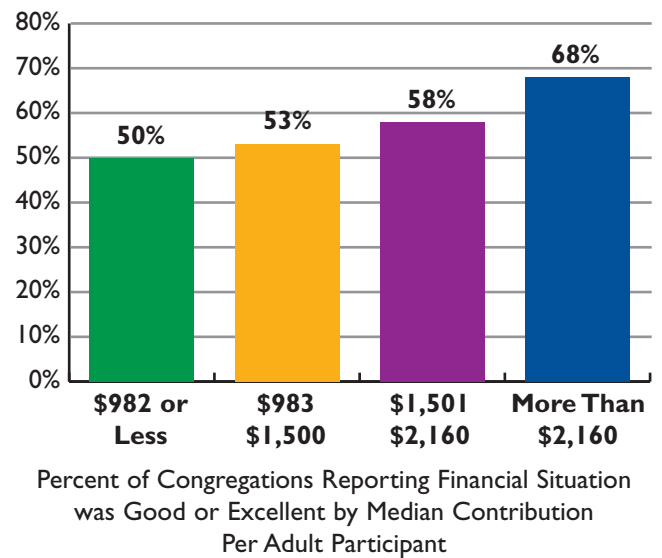
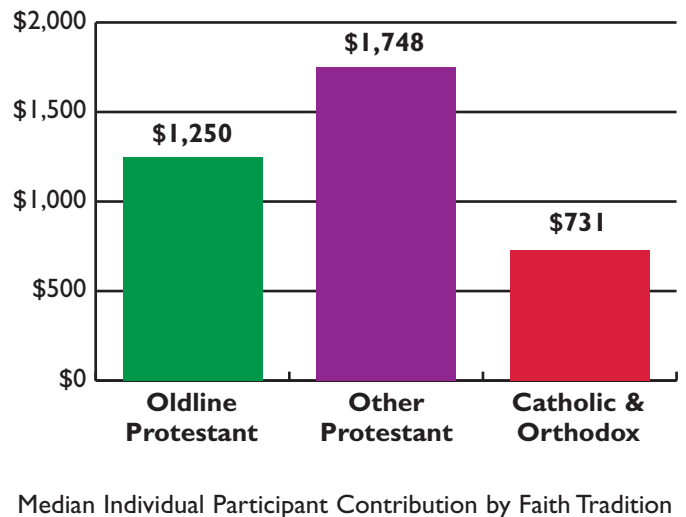


Figure 76: Participants Pay Vast Majority of Congregation's Freight

Congregational Income			
	Income: Individual Contributions	Per Adult Participant	Income: Other Sources
3rc Quartile	\$335,627	\$2,160	\$28,000
Median	\$140,000	\$1,500	
1st Quartile	\$73,635	\$982	

Quartile Cut Points for Median Congregational Income from Individual Contributions and Other Sources, and for Per Adult Contributions

Figure 78: Cultural Differences



Electronic Communications

Desktop computers only became commercially available in the mid-1970s; internet access in the early 1990s.

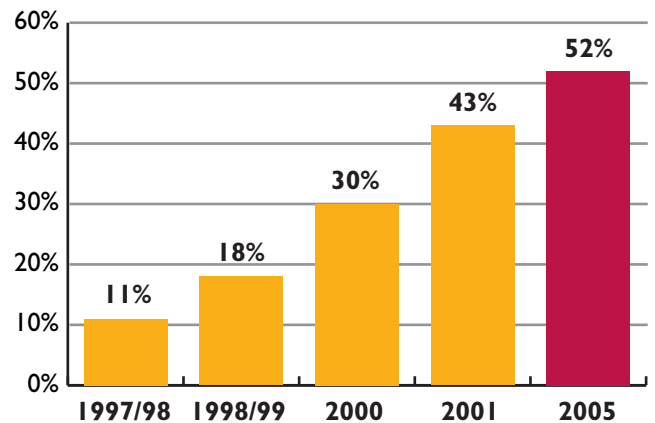
Although congregations are not known for being early adapters of modern technology, Figure 79 shows that electronic technology has now become normal even within U.S. congregations. Indeed, the rapid rise in the number of congregations with websites shown in Figure 80 would seem quite remarkable if we didn't live in a world that just went from iPod to iPhone in five years.

Larger congregations are more likely to have adapted electronic technology than smaller congregations, as would be expected (Figure 81). More surprising, perhaps, is that over a third of congregations with average weekly worship under 100 have websites and over half use a member database. Electronic usage within congregations also increases as the average education of members increases, and being located in the suburbs adds an additional and independent pull toward the electronic. Differences in usage by faith family are small with Oldline Protestantism holding a slight

edge over the Catholic/Orthodox family even when size is controlled, and with the Other Protestant family running a close third.

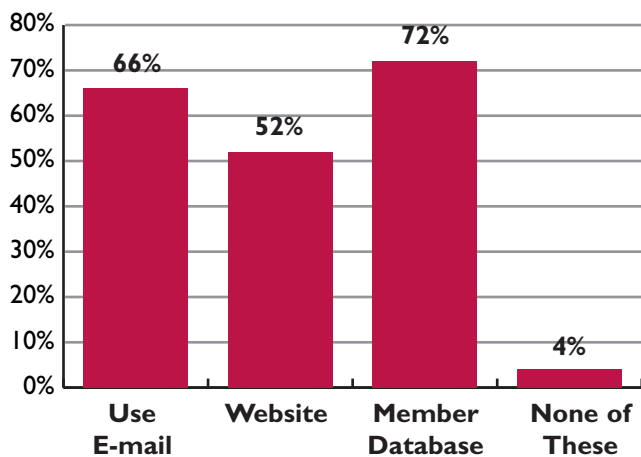
It may be too soon to know how electronic technology will affect congregational life, but the following section of Growth suggests it already is making a difference.

Figure 80: From 0 to 50 in Fifteen Years



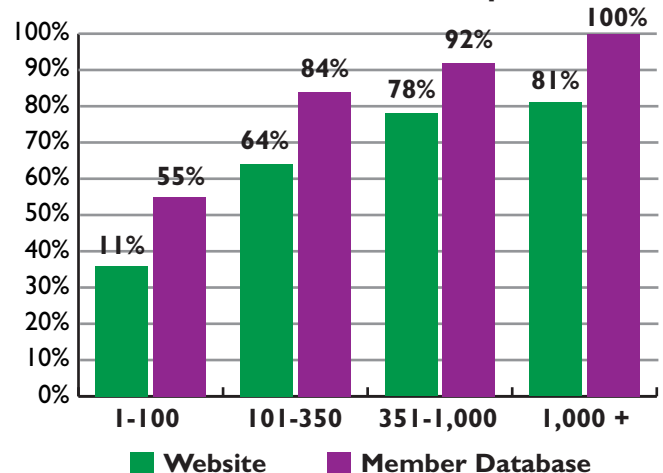
Percent of Congregations with Websites, 1997 - 2001 Data is from *Religion and the Internet* by Scott Thumma http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article6.html

Figure 79: The "New" is Now Normal



Percent of Congregations Having or Using the Respective Electronic Technology

Figure 81: Electronic Adaptation Almost as Broad as Well as Deep



Percent of Congregations Using Member Databases and Having Websites by Average Weekly Worship Attendance

Identity and Vitality

The *At A Glance* sections at the beginning of this report introduced several items that address vitality and identity:

Vitality:

- Spiritual Vitality, Financial Health and Conflict – each further elaborated in its own section
- Change in worship attendance – further elaborated in the following section on growth

Identity:

- Conservative to Liberal Theological Outlook of the majority of members
- Conservative to Liberal Political Outlook of the majority of members
- And, of course, Faith Family itself

The sections showed, for example, that the theological and political outlooks of congregations tilt decidedly toward the conservative side, and although there is some variation by denominational family, it is not as great as one might expect. Even a majority of Oldline Protestant congregations indicate that their members fall to the somewhat conservative side of the scale.

A congregation's identity, like a human personality, is its distinct combination of habitual

predispositions. Figure 82 shows denominational family differences for several additional, important traits. Two points of distinction jump out for the Oldline. One is that it scores the lowest across the three characteristics. Second is that its congregations appear more invested in communal bonds (close-knit family) than purpose driven or adapting to the rapidity of social change characteristic of today's world. The Other Protestant family is unique in its strong balance between communal and purpose, the Catholic/Orthodox family in their perceived openness to change.

The strength of communal bonds varies greatly by size of congregation, as one might expect. For example, while well over half of congregations with a weekly average worship attendance of less than 100 score high on close-knit family feeling, less than 10% of congregations with a weekly average worship attendance of more than 1,000 score high. The denominational family differences for close-knit family feeling shown in Figure 82 hold across size differences. But regardless of size and regardless of denominational family, congregations with large numbers of college graduates tend to have less strong communal bonds (Figure 83).

Figure 82: An Identity is a Distinct Set of Enduring Characteristics

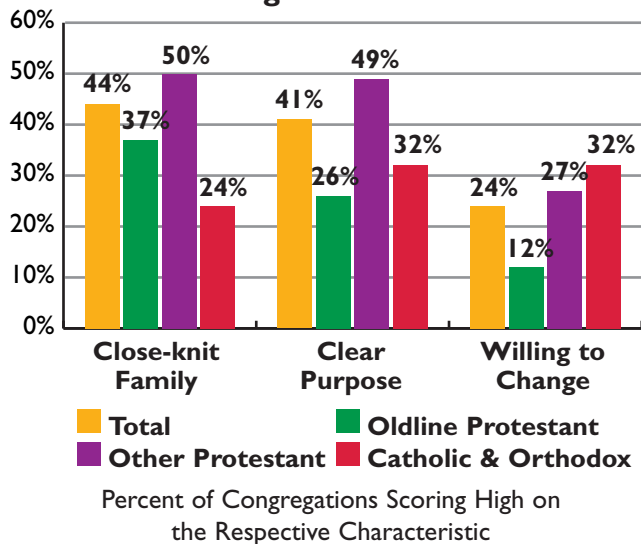
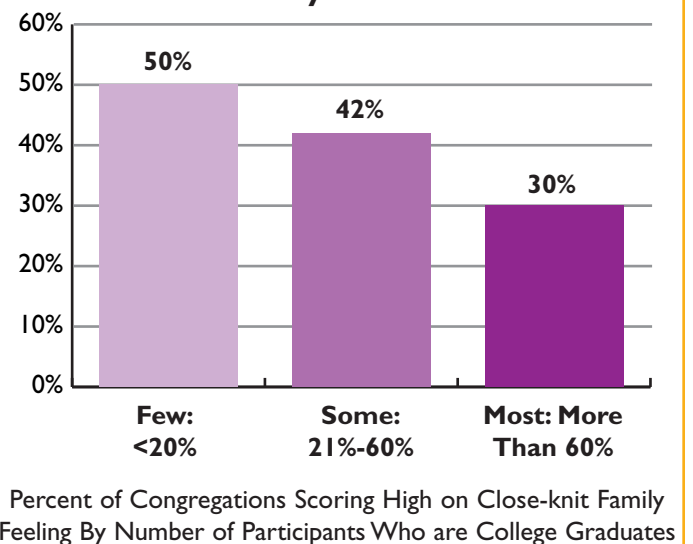


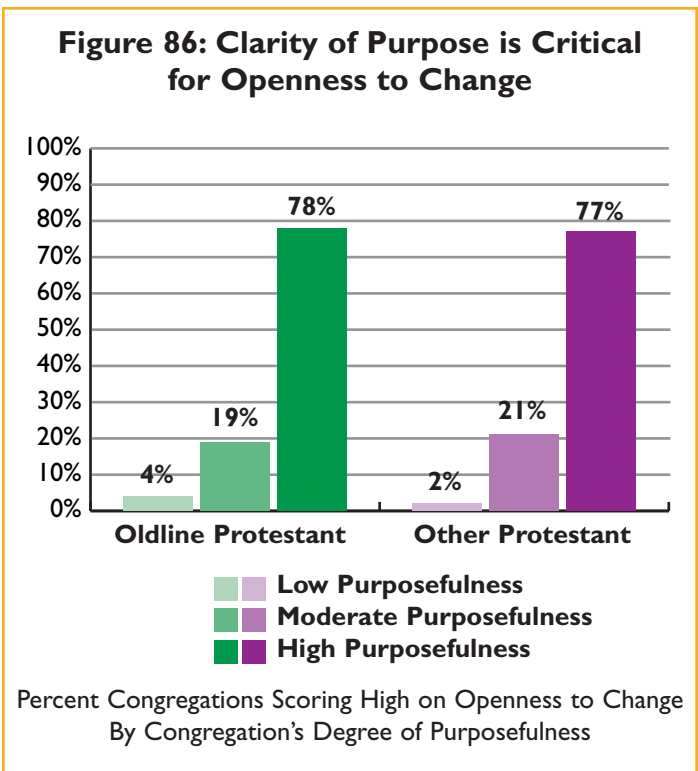
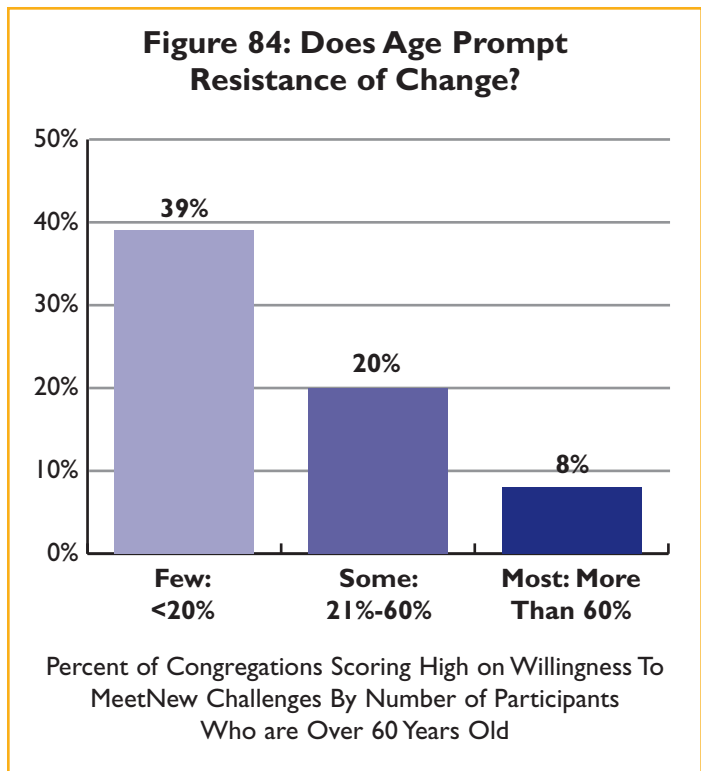
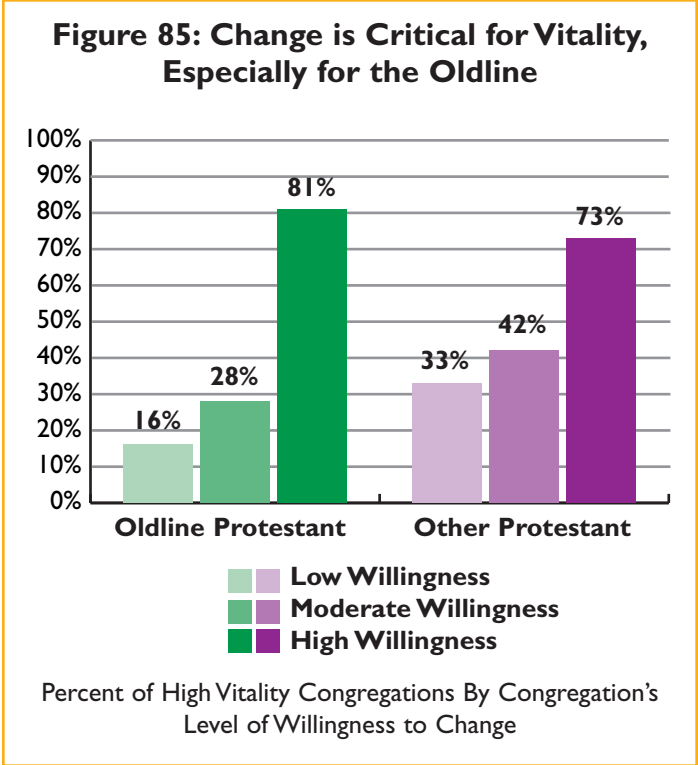
Figure 83: Are the College Educated Differently Connected?



The *At A Glance* sections show that the membership of Oldline Protestant congregations is significantly older than for other faith families. Might this account for the comparatively low percentage of Oldline congregations with a strong disposition toward changing (Fig 82)? Figure 84 certainly confirms the stereotype that age of membership lessens the urgency a congregation feels about adaptive change. But even when age of membership is controlled, Oldline congregations still show less of an openness to change.

The lack of urgency about change appears to come at a significant cost in vitality as shown in Figure 85. This is especially true for Oldline Protestantism, but also for Other Protestants, although to a slightly lesser extent.

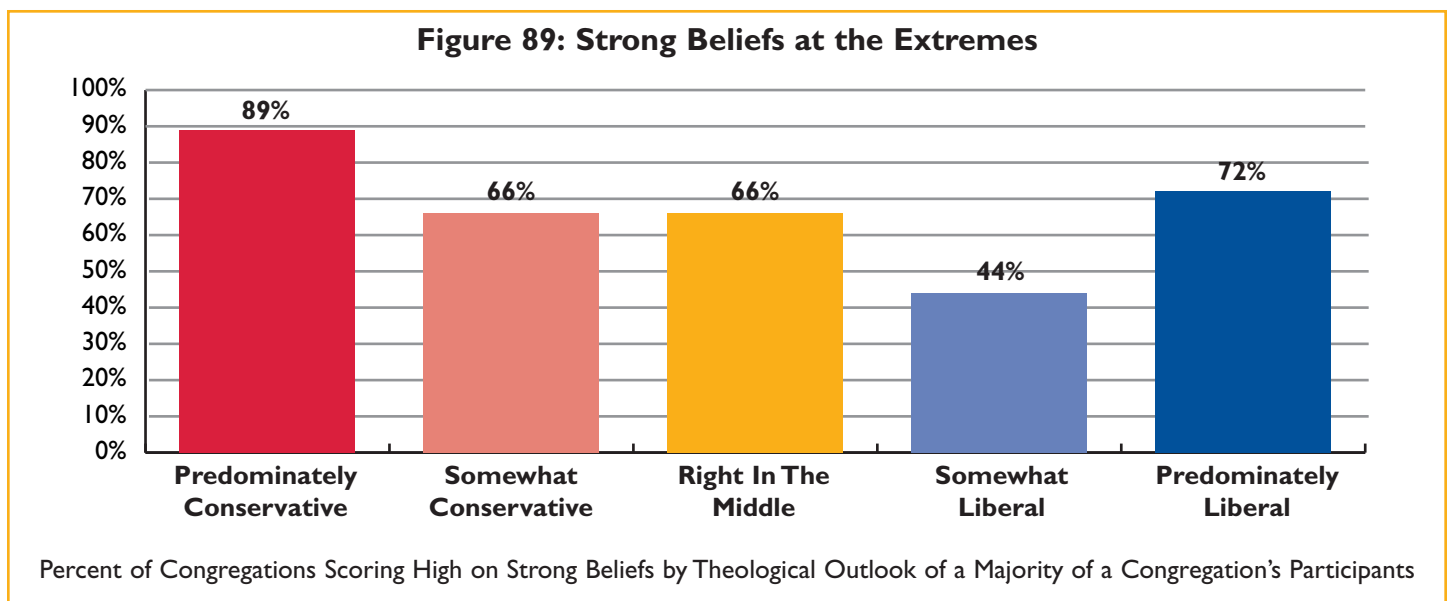
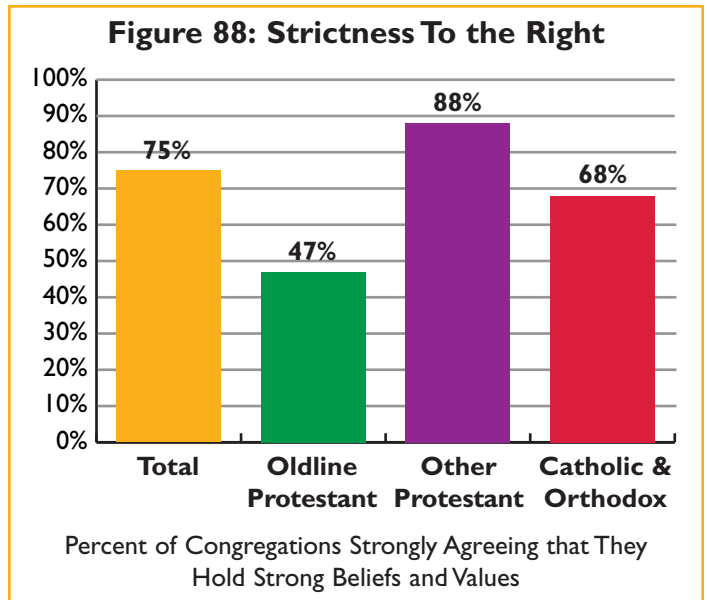
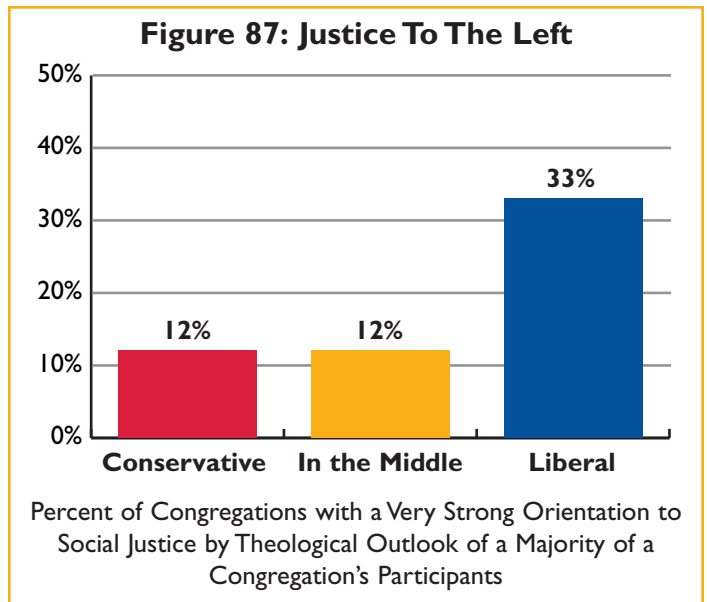
One reads a great deal about the “Purposeful Church” these days. Figure 86 suggests why this may be the case. Openness to change seems strongly related to vitality as just noted. Figure 86 suggests that clarity of purpose may be important for navigating through change.



Theological as well as political stereotypes tend to identify social justice with liberal. Theologically this relates to liberalism's priority for equality and "this worldly" concerns. Figure 87 shows that there is considerable truth in the stereotype, at least in regard to the predispositions of American congregations.

Almost a half century ago Dean Kelley published his now-classic, but continually controversial study, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (1972). The title is actually misleading since his major argument is that organizationally strict congregations will grow, one component of strictness being unwavering belief. The publisher's marketing decision to use "Conservative" rather than "Strict" in the title followed from Kelley's observation that while he had seen many conservative churches that were strict, and while it was theoretically possible for liberal churches to be strict, he couldn't recall ever actually finding one.

Figure 88 shows that the conservative weight to our Other Protestant family clearly comes with a propensity for strong belief. However, Figure 89 suggests that Kelley did not look hard enough for strong belief liberal congregations. Indeed, the figure shows that one finds a propensity for strong belief at both the extremes of the conservative/liberal spectrum.

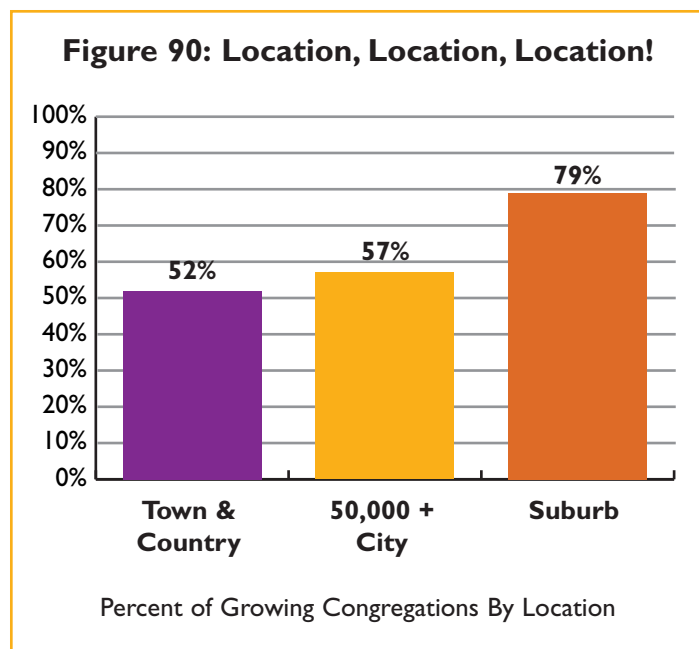


Growth

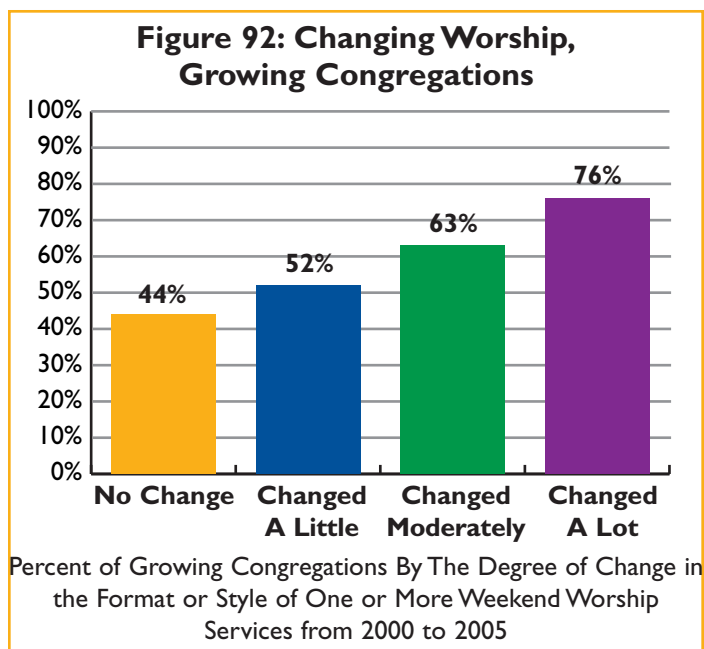
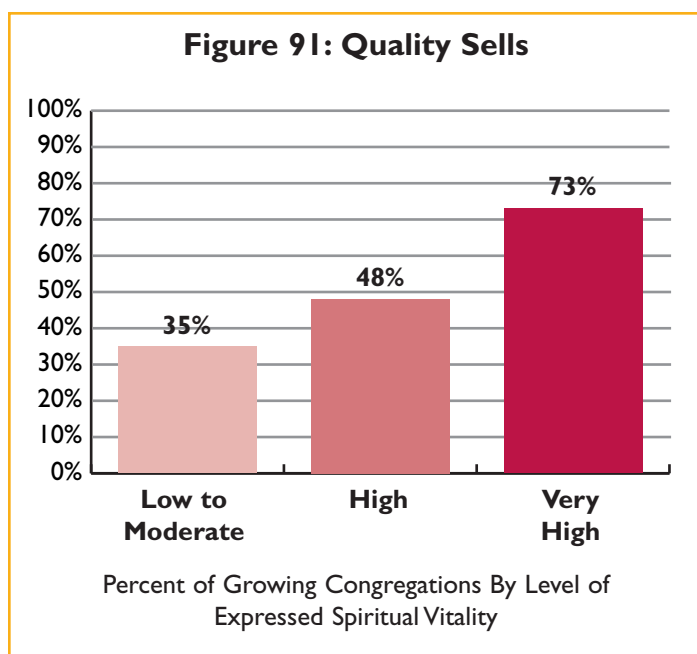
The most radical thing about Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* was not its bating of liberal/conservative conflicts, but rather its suggestion that growth was rooted in the internal beliefs and practices of congregations, and therefore under a congregation's control. Previous studies of membership and participation tended to conclude that congregations were captive to changes in their social contexts.

Figure 90 clearly shows that Kelley was not entirely right. Location has a significant effect on a congregation's potential for numerical growth, and the single most significant demographic factor related to location appears to be the changing number of households in the immediate area.

Nevertheless, recent research shows a significant change over the past forty years in our understanding of growth *from demographic captivity to adaptive capacity*. It now appears that one of the reasons external factors of social change appeared as the dominant driver of growth and decline was the inability of congregations to adapt their internal style, program and message to the changing world around them.



Numerical growth was a special focus of the FACT2005 survey and a more detailed report on these findings has already been published, *FACTs On Growth* (<http://fact.hartsem.edu/>). Its main story is that of the effect of internal congregational characteristics on growth, of which we highlight only a few. In each of the graphics the measure of growth is a 2% or greater increase in worship attendance from 2000 to 2005.



Spiritual vitality is a priority theological outcome and many argue that worship is the primary task of congregations. It should come as good news, therefore, that both are integrally tied to numerical growth (Figs 91 and 92). Indeed, *FACTs on Growth* shows that several aspects of worship are strongly related to growth. We note degree of change here not only to flag the importance of worship but also the importance of adaptive capacity.

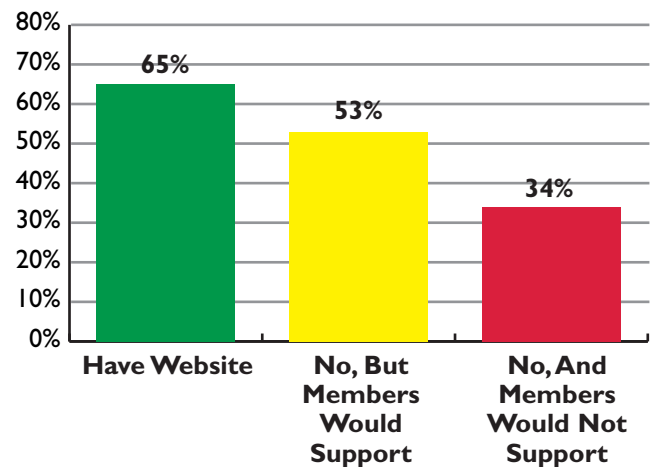
We live in a frustratingly partisan political climate, ripe with disagreements and conflicts that reach right down into our congregations. As noted in a previous section, over 50% of American congregations had experienced some kind of conflict in the two years prior to FACT2005. As also noted in that previous section, although conflict can have positive effects there is no question that it can also have costs. Figure 93 shows that one of these costs is blocking growth.

A consistent finding in growth research is that most formal, recruitment-related activities such as advertising, special events and canvassing have little or no general effect. However, FACT2005 discovered one recruitment activity that is strongly related to growth. It is, as shown in Figure 94, having a web site for the congregation — another indicator of the importance of adaptive capacity.

Still another thing a congregation can do to increase its growth potential is to get a lot of members involved in recruitment (Fig 95). It sounds so simple and obvious, but only about 10% of American congregations say a lot of their members are involved in recruitment, and only about a third more say a moderate number of members are.

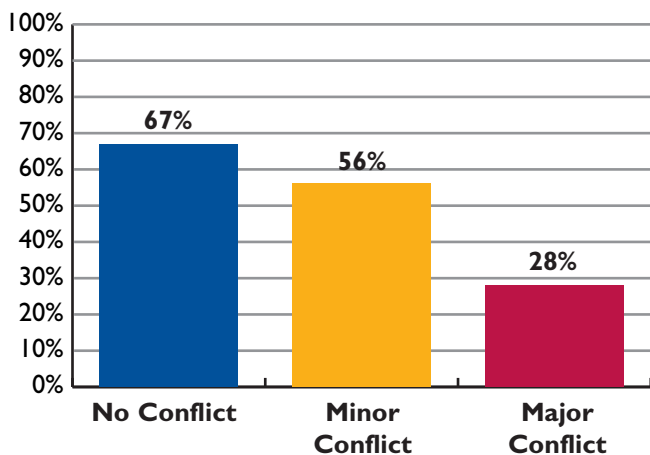
For a quick introduction to and resources for numerical growth see, *Insights Into Congregational Growth*, online at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

Figure 94: Do I Hear an Amen for the Web!



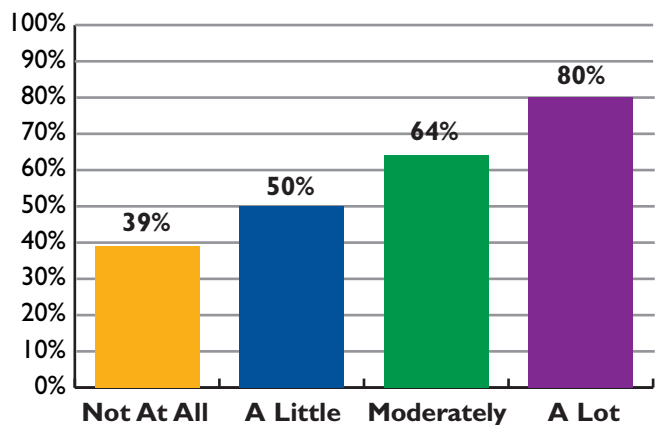
Percent of Growing Congregations By Having a Website to Reach Out to Nonmembers or to Make One's Congregation Better Known in the Community

Figure 93: Another Cost of Conflict



Percent of Growing Congregations By Presence of Conflict in the Previous Two Years

Figure 95: A Lot of Member Involvement in Recruitment, A Lot of Growth



Percent of Growing Congregations By the Extent a Congregation's Members Are Involved in Recruiting New Members

Greatest Challenges

One disadvantage of taking a national survey is that answers typically have to be selected from a predetermined and usually short list of possible responses. This means that respondents rarely get to use their own words and frame their own answers without an initial prompting. Respondents' answers can only be as good as the researchers' leanings and sense of the range of possibility. With input from over twenty denominations and faith groups we're not overly worried about the latter in the FACT surveys. Nevertheless, it is important to give congregations their own voice in at least a few instances, especially given the wide range of faith traditions represented among American congregations.

One "answer-in-your-own-words" question included in FACT2005 simply asked: ***What is the most important issue or challenge currently facing your congregation?*** We included it in part because we want to ask in

future surveys how well congregations are dealing with these areas of special concern to them. We also included it because the pioneering polling organizations, such as the Gallup Poll, have used similar open-ended, feeling barometer questions for more than 70 years to track how Americans experience and respond to social change. National surveys of congregations are a new development and we feel it important to create a solid baseline at the outset for on-going tracking.

Ninety percent of FACT2005 respondents wrote in an answer to the ***most important issue or challenge*** question.¹ Answers were subsequently grouped thematically using content analysis. The top five thematic categories are listed below.

¹Unlike all of the rest of the statistics in this report, the following distribution uses unweighted data, which means that Evangelical Protestant and small, town and country congregations are likely under-represented.

Most Important Issues and Challenges Faced By Faith Communities Today

Number 1: Membership growth (15% of responding congregations)

Number 2: Increasing or maintaining the activity level and participation of existing members (13%)

Number 3: (tie at 12%)

Finances and the need to raise more money or reallocate funds

Changing demographics

Number 5: Buildings and the need for more or renovated space (11%)

Where My Congregation Fits In

My congregation is in the following category:

- Oldline Protestant
- Other Protestant
- Catholic & Orthodox
- Other

My congregation is most *like* other congregations in its category in these ways:

My congregation is most *unlike* other congregations in its category in these ways:

The finding that surprised me most in this publication was:

The FACTs from this report I need to communicate to others in my congregation are:

The most important issues and challenges my congregation faces are:

The Planning Process

- Who are we?*Mission & Values
- Where are we?*Assessment
- Where are we going?* . . .Vision & Priorities
- How are we going to get there?*Planning & Goals
- When will it be done?* . . .Scheduling
- Who is responsible for what?*Delegating
- How much will it cost?* . . .Budgeting
- Did we do it?*Evaluating



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Faith Communities Today and the **Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership** are not-for-profit entities affiliated with the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary

Faith Communities Today (FACT) research and publications are collaborative products of a coalition of American faith communities known as the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP). Researchers, consultants and program staff from a wide spectrum of religious groups and organizations contributed to the FACT2005 survey, including:

- American Bible Society
- Bahá'í Faith in the United States
- Christian Reformed Church
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Church of the Nazarene
- Churches of Christ
- Episcopal Church
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Interdenominational Theological Center (Representing 7 Historically Black Denominations)
- Islamic Society of North America
- Leadership Network
- Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod
- Mennonite Church USA
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Reformed Church in America
- Roman Catholic Church
- Synagogue 3000/S3K Synagogue Studies Institute
- Seventh-day Adventist Church
- Southern Baptist Convention
- Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas
- Unitarian Universalist Association
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church

FACT/CCSP strives to offer research-based resources for congregational development that are useful across faith traditions, believing that all communities of faith encounter common issues and benefit from one another's experiences. We welcome your response to our efforts. Please direct responses and inquiries to: fact@hartsem.edu.

Visit the FACT/CCSP website at <http://FACT.hartsem.edu> for more information about our research and publications.