

American Congregations 2010

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American Congregations Reach Out To Other Faith Traditions:

A Decade of Change

2000 - 2010



www.FaithCommunitiesToday.org

American Congregations Reach Out To Other Faith Traditions: A Decade of Change: 2000 - 2010

One legacy of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 is a dramatic, percentage increase in American congregations' interfaith involvement. In the past 10 years religious communities' involvement in interfaith worship has doubled and involvement in interfaith community service activities has nearly tripled.

This considerable percentage increase, however, shouldn't overshadow the fact that a majority of congregations still have a long way to go in reaching out to other faith traditions. Only a little over half of American congregations ever share worship with other congregations, and a majority of these still only do so within their broad faith tradition (e.g., Christian with Christian, Jewish with Jewish and Muslim with Muslim). But a little more than one in ten (13.9%) surveyed in 2010 indicated they had shared worship across faith traditions in the past year; up from a near negligible 6.8% in 2000 (Figure 1). There is more multifaith cooperation among congregations in providing community service (20.4% of congregations in 2010, as shown in Figure 2), but this still represents less than a third of those congregations cooperatively engaged in community service.

Congregations were also asked, in 2010, about their involvement in joint celebrations with other faith traditions (14.0%) and about their involvement in educational or fellowship activities across faith traditions (10.2%). Of the four possible interfaith activities asked about, 10% of congregations were involved in one, 11% in two or three, and 6% in all four. Seventy-three percent were not involved in any, compared to 86% in 2000.

Theology, a positive view of diversity, a culture that supports change, and leadership that advocates for new ways to relate to the broader community are critical pushes toward greater multifaith involvement, as is elaborated below. A congregation's location and demographics, less so.

These figures and the following analysis are based on the *Faith Communities Today 2010 (FACT²⁰¹⁰)* national survey of 11,077 randomly sampled congregations. Combined with trend data from the original *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* study the total analysis is based on 25,378 congregations. Statistics reported for a single year are from the 2010 survey. The 2000 and 2010 surveys provide a unique perspective on the impact of September 11, 2001 and a decade of change in terms of interfaith involvement among congregations. It also highlights the slowly and perhaps halting recognition by America's congregations of the increasingly multi-faith diversity of American religion. The final page of

Figure 1: A Doubling of American Congregations' Involvement in Interfaith Worship Since Sept. 11, 2001

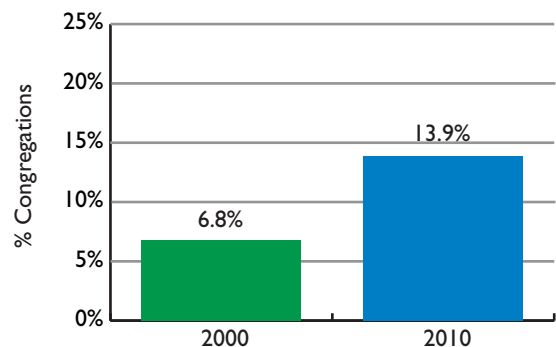
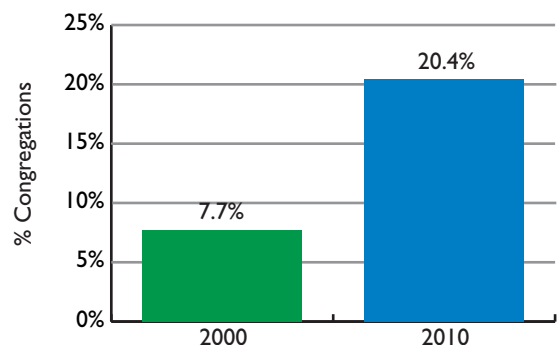


Figure 2: A Near Tripling of American Congregations' Involvement in Interfaith Community Service Activity Over the Same Time



this report contains a fuller description of the Faith Communities Today project with additional details at www.faithcommunitiestoday.org.

In this report we describe the total national findings and, where relevant, findings for Oldline Protestant and Evangelical Protestant congregations (see the appendix for the definition of these groups). We limit ourselves to these two large groups for two reasons. Within the survey's sponsoring coalition, the *Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership*, it is an individual denomination or faith group's responsibility to interpret its own findings. Second, any commonly used clustering of denominations and faith groups beyond Oldline and Evangelical Protestant artificially combines groups, typically, too different to be meaningfully analyzed together. We do, however, list findings for individual denominations and faith groups for several of this report's key variables in the appendix.

Theology

Religion not only makes a difference in theory, but also in practice. That Evangelical Protestant and Oldline Protestant congregations differ in their involvement in interfaith worship as shown in Figure 3, therefore, should hardly be surprising. Nor does it seem surprising that Oldline Protestantism widened its edge over Evangelical Protestantism over the course of the decade, although ever so slightly — from 5.7% to 7.3% for involvement in interfaith worship. What might be surprising is that the involvement of Evangelical Protestant congregations increased as much as it did — from roughly 4% in 2000 to 12% in 2010 for interfaith worship. One finds an almost identical pattern of difference and change as found in Figure 3 for interfaith worship for cooperative involvement

in community service activities — to 25.4 % for Oldline Protestant congregations in 2010, and to 18.8% for Evangelical Protestant congregations.

Denominational family is important, but as shown in Figure 4, theology is actually more important than family in its effect on interfaith engagement. The most liberal congregations of any family are the most engaged, the most conservative congregations the least engaged, and the biggest jump is found between “somewhat” and “very” liberal. Figure 4 shows involvement in interfaith worship. Similar patterns are found for other types of interfaith engagement, with the theological effect on involvement in cooperative community service activities being especially strong. This is perhaps because of a stronger sectarian orientation at the most conservative edge of Protestant theology.

Figure 4 also serves as a reminder that denominational family is not a perfect proxy for a congregation's theology. For example, 12% of Oldline Protestant congregations said they were very conservative in the *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ survey, and 5% of Evangelical congregations said they were either somewhat or very liberal.

Figure 3: Oldline Protestantism Widened its Cooperative Edge Over Evangelical Protestantism; But Involvement in Interfaith Worship Increased Across All Faith Families

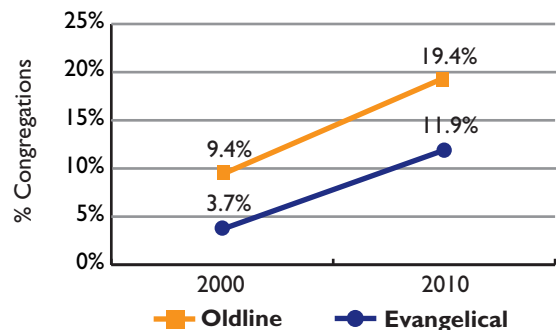
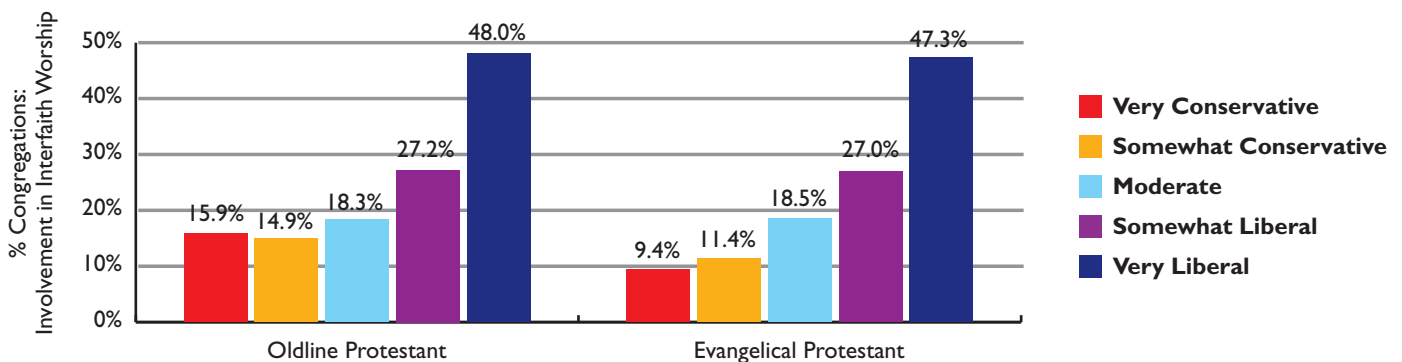


Figure 4: However, Theology is more Important than Denominational Family for Involvement in Interfaith Worship



Demographics and Location

The demographics of a congregation's members and the demographics of a congregation's geographic location influence a great number of things about a congregation's life, not least being its spiritual vitality, financial health and membership growth. However, demographics and geography only marginally shape a congregation's involvement in interfaith activities. Perhaps most surprising in this is that neither the size of a congregation nor the age or education of its members has any notable effect.

There is an east coast tilt to interfaith involvement, as seen in Figure 5 for interfaith worship. One finds a similar pattern for other types of interfaith activities. The high level of activity found in the Northeast is largely because the Northeast is home to a disproportionate percentage of Oldline Protestant congregations. The low level in the West is partly due to the opposite, namely that Western congregations are disproportionately Evangelical Protestant. It is also due, in part, to the fact that Western Evangelical Protestant congregations are even more theologically conservative than Evangelical Protestant congregations in any other parts of the country except the North Central region.

Congregations located in big cities and the older suburbs of big cities are more inclined to interfaith activities of all kinds than congregations in other locations, as again shown for interfaith worship in Figure 6. In part this is due to the fact that big city and related suburban congregations tend to be more liberal than their counterparts in other locations for most religious traditions. Another part of the reason appears to be that big cities and their related older suburbs are more racially and ethnically diverse than other locations, such diversity being a relatively good indicator of increased religious diversity.

Interestingly, congregations located in new suburbs have disproportionately low levels of interfaith activity. Congregations in the new suburbs are more likely to be Evangelical Protestant, but this only accounts for a small portion of the disproportionate low levels of interfaith activity found there. New suburbs are more diverse than small city, town and country locations, so a lack of diversity doesn't help explain the low level of interfaith activity either. The question is intriguing and begs further exploration.

Figure 5: There's an East Coast Tilt in Involvement in Interfaith Worship

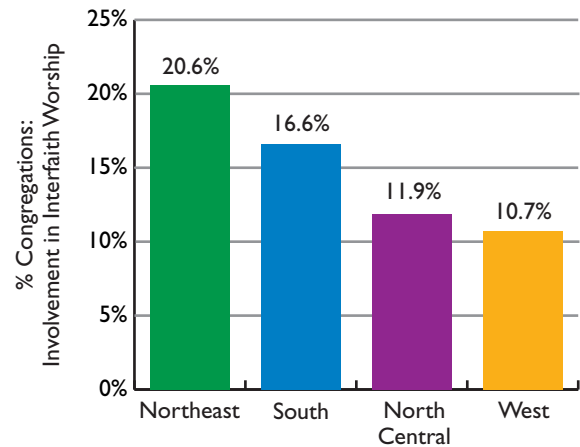


Figure 6: Big City Diversity is Also a Catalyst for Interfaith Worship

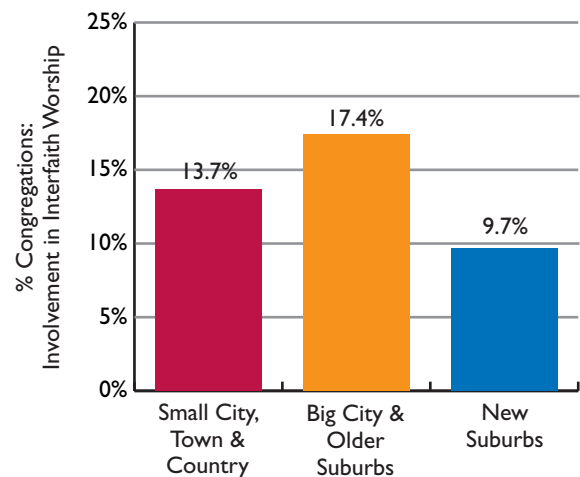
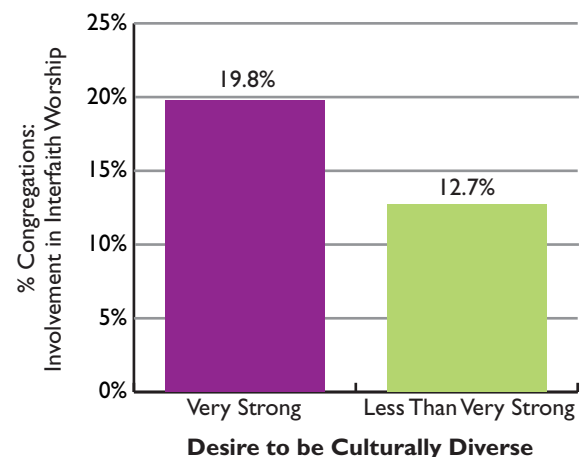


Figure 7: Why? Perhaps Because A Congregation's Openness to Diversity Boosts Involvement in Interfaith Worship



Openness to the New and Different

The diversity of a congregation's locale is not the only aspect of diversity that serves as a catalyst for interfaith involvement. As seen in Figure 7, a congregation's openness to diversity is also a key factor. One finds a similar pattern to Figure 7's focus on interfaith worship for other types of interfaith involvement. The impact of such openness also holds across faith families. And, it is largely independent of the diversity of a congregation's locale. In fact, the affect of such openness is slightly greater in low diversity areas than high diversity areas, perhaps because in low diversity areas one has to work harder for it to happen.

Openness to diversity is not the only kind of congregational predisposition important for becoming involved in interfaith activities. Openness to change is also. Figure 8 shows the affect of an appreciation for change on interfaith involvement using the innovativeness of a congregation's worship as the measure of change, and the picture is quite dramatic. A similar pattern is found using other measures of openness to change and other types of interfaith involvement. The relationship also holds across faith families, and in fact remains robust across a wide range of multivariate analyses.

An Emphasis on Civic Participation

One might expect that theological orientation would have the strongest affect on a congregation's reach across faith traditions, positive and negative. Multivariate statistical analyses of the *FACT²⁰¹⁰* data show that theology is, indeed, one of the top three factors in predicting interfaith involvement. The other two of the top three top factors both point to

a congregation's general valuing of a public, civic presence. One of these is the breadth of a congregation's general participation in cooperative community service ministries (CCM) such as food pantries and employment counseling.

The 2010 survey asked about participation in nine different CCM ministries. Combining the scores on these nine created a scale that measures the "breadth" of a congregation's involvement in such service ministries. Note that this measure not only taps into a congregation's connection to its community through social service-type ministries, but also taps into a congregation's predisposition to work cooperatively with other congregations. A second, parallel measure examines a congregation's efforts to provide social service ministries directly by itself. It is significant to note that the relationship of the cooperative ministry measure with interfaith activity is nearly twice as strong as for the direct provider measure.

Figure 8: Openness to Change Provides an even Bigger Bump-up for Involvement in Interfaith Worship

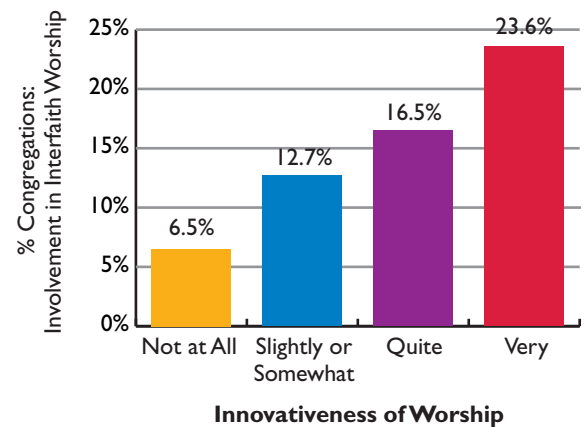
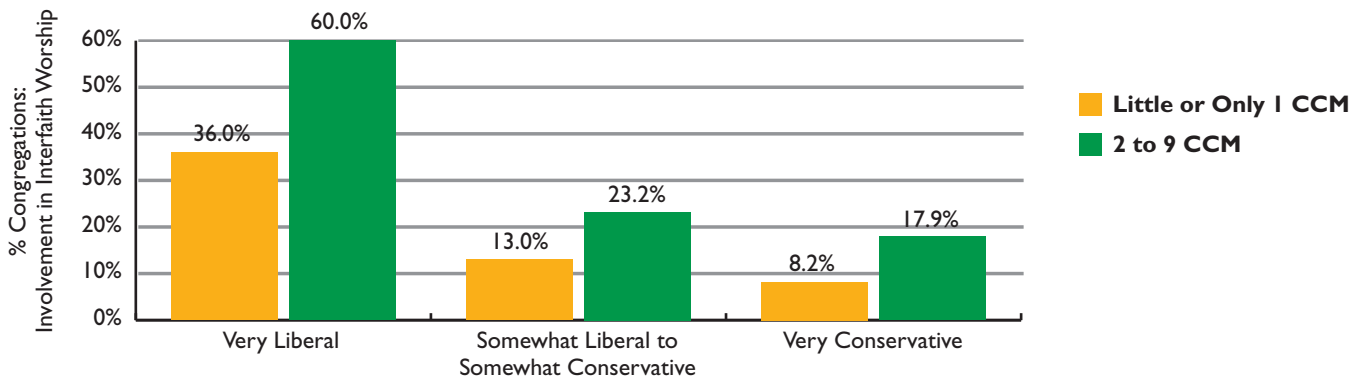


Figure 9: Breadth of Involvement in Cooperative Community Ministry (CCM) Carries Interfaith Involvement Along With It, Regardless of Theological Orientation (Interfaith Worship Involvement Shown in Figure)



Cooperative engagement is not as wide spread as many think. We found that only about a fourth of congregations in the *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ survey were involved in 2 or more such ministries, compared to nearly two-thirds that provided such kinds of social ministry directly by themselves. More importantly for present purposes, of those involved in two or more cooperative community service ministries, 24% had participated in an interfaith worship service in the past year, compared to only 12% of those involved in only one or no cooperative community ministry. And this is for interfaith worship. The effect is, as one might expect, considerably greater for interfaith community service work (34% vs 17%).

In Figure 4 we showed the strong effect of theology on interfaith practice and as just noted theology is the second most strongly influential factor in the *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ survey. What we see in Figure 9 is that the general cooperative community service bump in interfaith activity holds regardless of a congregation's liberal or conservative theology. The same is true for other types of interfaith involvement.

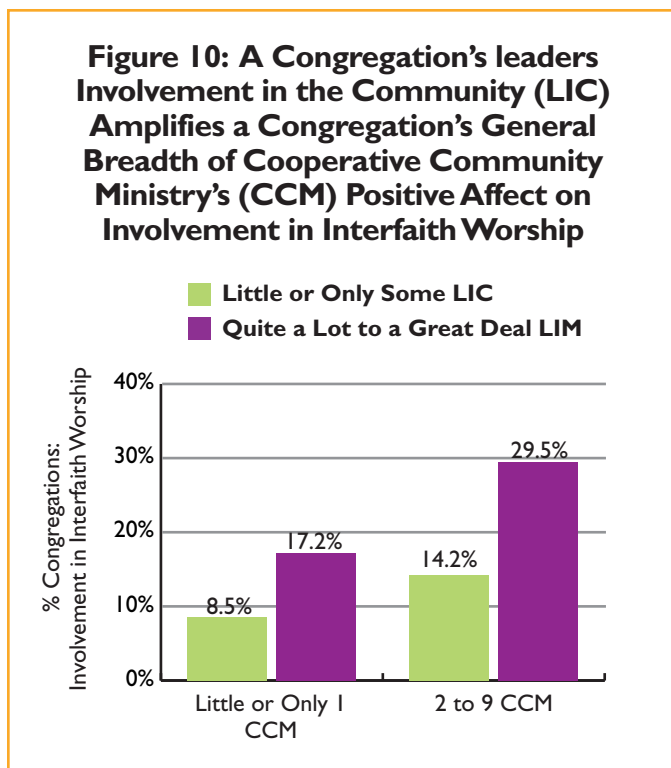
Another dimension of a congregation's civic participation is the leader's representation of the congregation in civic events — from educational forums to religious invocations at civic events. The emphasis that a congregation's leader places on such a public presence turns out to be more strongly related to his or her congregation's interfaith activity than any other of the 200 plus items in *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ survey. Such behavior both gives expression to a

congregation's value of a public presence and pulls the congregation deeper into such activity.

Congregations whose leaders give “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of emphasis to representing their congregations in the community are twice as likely to be involved in interfaith activities — whether interfaith worship (21% vs 10%); interfaith celebrations (20% vs 11%); interfaith educational and fellowship events (16% vs 7%); or interfaith community service (27% vs 17%). What is more, as shown in Figure 10, this public leader effect is even distinct from the also strong affect of a congregation's breadth of cooperative social service ministry for interfaith involvement.

In summary: One legacy of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 has been an increased involvement of American congregations across faith traditions in the past decade. It remains relatively infrequent and only a fraction of intra-faith congregational interaction — 14% of American congregations involved in interfaith worship in 2010 compared to 7% in 2000; 15% engaged in interfaith educational or fellowship events; 14% in interfaith celebrations and 21% in interfaith community service ministries.

Liberal theology, a positive view of diversity, a culture that supports change, and leadership that advocates for new ways to relate to the broader community are critical pushes toward greater interfaith involvement. A congregation's location and demographics, less so.



Appendix

FACT²⁰¹⁰ Denomination and Faith Group Partner Surveys

Named partner conducted or contracted for survey. For Partner contact information and links to partner reports on their respective surveys see www.faithcommunitiestoday.org.

Involved in Interfaith Activity During the Past 12 Months			Theological Outlook	Leader
Worship Services	Community Service Activities		Somewhat or Very Conservative*	In Community A Great Deal**
50%	53%	American Baptist Churches USA ^{O1}	57%	20%
8%	16%	Assemblies of God ^E	80%	33%
42%	27%	Baha'is of the United States	18%	6%
23%	29%	Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ^O	39%	23%
4%	13%	Christian Reformed Church ^E	72%	9%
2%	17%	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints ^E	90%	3%
7%	12%	Church of the Nazarene ^E	81%	23%
0%	12%	Churches of Christ ^E	83%	17%
46%	52%	Conservative Judaism ²	26%	20%
12%	25%	Episcopal Church ^O	28%	15%
12%	20%	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ^O	43%	15%
24%	28%	Historically Black Denominations ^{E3}	37%	46%
1%	8%	Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod ^E	82%	10%
13%	20%	Mennonite Church USA ^O	47%	14%
— 76% —		Muslim ⁴	31%	NA
7%	12%	Nondenominational ^{E5}	88%	NA
9%	15%	Orthodox Christian ⁶	70%	18%
11%	17%	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ^O	44%	16%
14%	18%	Reformed Church in America ^O	61%	17%
65%	74%	Reform Judaism ²	4%	28%
11%	16%	Roman Catholic Church ⁷	50%	17%
3%	8%	Seventh-day Adventist Church ^E	65%	12%
5%	10%	Southern Baptist Convention ^E	93%	23%
50%	76%	Unitarian Universalist Association ^O	0%	11%
18%	23%	United Church of Christ ^O	29%	16%
16%	20%	United Methodist Church ^O	57%	17%
24%	32%	Non-Partner Denominations/Traditions ^{E8}	67%	29%

* *Theological outlook* of the majority of your regularly participating adults?

** How much time does your principal leader spend in representing the congregation in the community?

Protestant Families: ^EEvangelical; ^OOldline

¹ Response rate warrants caution.

² Conducted by Synagogue 3000. Includes the Conservative and Reform Traditions.

³ Conducted by the Interdenominational Theological Center. Response rate warrants caution.

⁴ Conducted by the Islamic Society of America. Interfaith Question: During the past 12 months, has your Masjid been involved in any interfaith activities? -- % Yes. Did not ask leader time use set of questions.

⁵ Conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Response rate warrants caution. Did not ask leader time use set of questions.

⁶ Conducted by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America. Includes the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Orthodox Church in America.

⁷ Conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

⁸ Conducted by a sub-contractor of the Cooperative Congregational partnership. Response rate warrants caution.

The Faith Communities Today Surveys

The *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ national data set brings together the 26 individual surveys of congregations listed on the previous page. Twenty-four were conducted by or for partner denominations and faith groups, representing 32 of the country's largest denominations and traditions. Partners developed a common core questionnaire of just over 150 questions consisting of items from the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰, *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵ and *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ surveys. Copies of all *FACT* questionnaires are available at www.faithcommunitiestoday.org. They should be referred to for the exact wording of items used in this report.

Using the common questionnaire, CCSP partners conducted their own, typically by mail or online, survey of a representative, random national sample of their own congregations. Usually a congregation's leader completed the questionnaire. CCSP also conducted a national survey of nondenominational congregations based on a random sample drawn from several mailing and marketing lists purchased from national vendors. Finally, CCSP contracted with a denominational agency to survey a sample of non-partner denomination congregations, also based on a random sample drawn from several mailing and marketing lists.

For purposes of the overall national analysis, the 26 sub-surveys were combined in such a way that, through the use of statistical weights, each partner denomination and faith group and the non-partner cluster of congregations are represented in the national *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ data proportionate to its representation in the total population of congregations in the United States. This aggregated dataset includes responses from 11,077 congregations, and over 120 denominations. Return rates were good for surveys of this type — in the 40% range. Sub-surveys with lower return rates are noted in the appendix. Sampling error for a survey such as *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ can only be roughly estimated. We believe a conservative estimate is +/- 4% at the 95% confidence level.

In a few instances a partner faith group had to make the difficult choice to omit a set of questions in order to maximize return rate. This was a major challenge for the pioneering 2000 *FACT* survey of congregations in the Historically Black denominations. Unfortunately, the interfaith involvement items were one victim of the dilemma. Accordingly, in order to make appropriate comparisons between the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ and *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ national samples in this report the responses of congregations in the Historically Black denominations are also omitted from the *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ figures.

The groundbreaking *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ survey used the

same methodology as *FACT*²⁰¹⁰. With responses from 14,301 congregations it remains the largest national survey of congregations ever conducted in the U.S. CCSP intends to conduct coalition-based mega-surveys such as *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ and *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ at the turn of each decade. Additionally, just as the U.S. Census Bureau conducts regular national surveys between its large-scale decadal enumerations, CCSP is committed to conducting more normally sized national surveys of congregations between decades. *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵ was the first of these; *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ the second. The purpose of these interim surveys is to track short-term changes in a limited number of key areas of congregational life and structure, and to plumb the dynamics of selected congregational practices and challenges. Congregational growth was the focal area for *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵; energizing congregational members and clergy continuing education focal areas for *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸.

The Faith Communities Today Project

The *FACT series* of national surveys of American Congregations is a project of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP). CCSP is a multi-faith coalition of denominations and religious groups hosted by Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research. CCSP denominations and religious groups participating in *FACT*²⁰¹⁰ are listed on the previous page. The primary purposes of CCSP are developing research-based resources for congregational development and advancing the public understanding of the most numerous voluntary organization in the U.S. — our religious congregations. More information about CCSP, its partners, its publications, the *FACT* surveys and how to subscribe to its monthly newsletter is available at www.faithcommunitiestoday.org.

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Research

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