



# Faith Communities Today Newsletter

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## FACT2010

### 11,077 congregations; 123 denominations; first release timed for Easter

Last week (Feb 23-24) the steering committee for the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP) met in Louisville, Kentucky. Kirk Hadaway, chair of the CCSP Research Task Force and research director for The Episcopal Church, reported that all of the data collection for the Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2010 has been completed, the 25 separate partner surveys that comprise the inclusive national sample have been put together into the aggregate data set, and all that remains is a final cleaning and weighting of the data.

**Reports from some partner surveys have already been released, and the initial report from the aggregate national data set will begin in mid-April, just prior to Easter. In combination with the equally as massive FACT2010 study, the Faith Community Today effort is clearly the largest, on-going study of the changing nature of local religious communities in the U.S. The combination, further, provides the first ten-year look at congregational life and community activity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

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The aggregated FACT2010 data includes responses from 11,077 congregations from over 100 denominations and faith groups representing a full spectrum of America's multi-faith diversity. Each CCSP partner survey - including Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Latter-day Saints, Unitarian-Universalist, Baha'i, Jewish, Muslim - provides the respective partner the opportunity to analyze their congregations separately. The partner surveys have been supplemented by significant samples of independent, non-denominational local churches and of congregations from non-partnership denominational.

The Louisville meeting dealt with several technical issues such as weighting the segments to better represent the percentage of congregations in various denominational and faith groups, and including demographics in the data set. It refined the dissemination plan for the aggregate, national findings. The

initial, April, public release will focus on the impact of the economic downturn on local congregations across the United States. Releases will then continue on a monthly basis into early 2012, including focused looks at congregational growth, Internet use, worship, leadership, interfaith activities (timed to coincide with this September's tenth anniversary of 9/11), and decadal trends.

Equally important to the substance of the series of releases, according to David Roozen, chairman of CCSP and director of the Hartford Religion Research Institute, "is the wonderfully strategic and mult-layered approach to each release that the steering committee and dissemination/marketing task force have developed. Minimally, we anticipate each release to include a relatively short, graphic oriented report setting forth the basic survey findings to released electronically on the FACT web-site, a pre-lease targeting of high-visibility media a "news-paper" type story about the subject of the report written by a professional journalist for our release through the wire services, a traditional press release to an inclusive list of secular and religious media, the distribution of blogger notes, and one or more webinars targeted to different secular, religious and electronic media. In addition to informing the public about the changing nature and contributions of American congregations, the purpose of our media focused dissemination efforts for the FACT2010 national is, according to Roozen, "to stimulate lay and leadership interest in the results from the particular CCSP, denominational partner findings among their respective memberships because it is at this level that the data can most come to life through its use in enhancing the ministry of local congregations.

In this latter vain, Roozen also sends the following reminder the CCSP partners in the project that:

You are responsible for disseminating information from your faith's survey. We hope the national releases and national FACT website (FaithCommunitiesToday.org) help you. How we can be of further assistance will be a major topic at this summer's annual meeting. But for now, you are responsible for your data. The only qualification, as you voted at last summer's annual meeting, is that your reports and

releases include a statement linking your survey to the overall FACT 2010 project, such as the following *This study is part of the Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2010 project which includes data from more than 11,000 congregations in more than 100 denominations and faiths. More information about the larger study is available at: FaithCommunitiesToday.org).*

This newsletter will notify you of each release. We will also announce the release of the reports published by each denomination and faith group involved in this project.

### **Orthodox Conduct Census of Churches**

Among others, *Religion Watch* published a short news item on the U.S. Orthodox Christian Census directed by Alexei Krindatch, a partner in the Interfaith Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP) and researcher for the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America. [An 8-page report](#) by Krindatch is available.

### **Presbyterian Church USA First to Release FACT 2010**

The first release of a report from one of the denominations and faiths participating in the FACT 2010 project comes from the research office of the Presbyterian Church USA. A news release, a two-pager summary report and a full set of basic frequencies were sent to the media and can be [downloaded](#), reports Perry Chang of the PCUSA research staff and a member of the CCSP partnership. In the months ahead each of the other 26 surveys will be separately released by the partner organizations.

During February, the PCUSA research team also released full reports on the two Presbyterian Panel surveys completed in 2010. One survey focuses on [health](#) and the other covers [several topics](#), including hunger, poverty, peacemaking and Sabbath-keeping.

### **What Is a Webinar?**

Part of the dissemination plan for FACT 2010 includes news conferences and open briefings on the new survey data via Webinar. Which brings up the question, what is a "Webinar" anyway?

Actually, it is a coined word used by one company that provides what is more generically labeled "Web conferencing." It is something like a telephone conference call, but with the addition of visuals, although it does not include the jerky series of still photos provided by a Web cam or the very minimal video provided by services such as Skype. The advantage over Skype is that Web conferencing can handle many more participants.

If your expectations of video conferencing are based on the things you see on HD television, then you need to reduce your expectations: Web conferencing is not video conferencing and if your only exposure to video conferencing is television drama, then remember, TV is fiction, not the real thing. Nonetheless the combination of a telephone conference call with PowerPoint slides and the minimal cost make the Webinar the fastest-growing format for business and professional meetings today.

You can subscribe to a provider for as little as \$50 a month with an additional discount if you pay for an entire year up front. That gets you a capacity of 16 participants and you can use the system 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Simple software is downloaded to your computer and as long as you have Web access, you are good to go. You can schedule online meetings weeks and even months in advance, sending out Emails with a link to a pre-registration site. Or, you can schedule a meeting while the person suggesting its need is waiting on your cell phone-in a minute or two. You can send a text message to the people you need with the Web address and ID number for your particular meeting. Unlike phone conferences, there is no per minute charge with the meter running while the meeting goes on too long.

The fact that invitations to a Webinar can be sent out by Email and/or Fax and/or Voicemail and/or hard copy in advance, means that you can prepare a brief presentation and easily get a number of people to observe it for a reasonable period of time. They have no investment in travel time or expense. They can easily work it into the schedule of a normal work day, if you make choices about timing that are compatible with the kind of professional you want to talk to.

Web conferencing is fully interactive. People can ask questions and get immediate answers, and then ask follow-up questions. Open discussion is easy if the group is not too large. In fact, the size constraints on discussion are about the same as if the group were together in the same room. You can pass the facilitator controls around to various presenters if you have a panel or reports from various team members.

For the past two years, I have been using Webinar for training presentations for pastors and community project leaders, for assessment reports to congregational leadership teams, and for teaching courses for graduate students at two universities-Eastern University in Philadelphia and Andrews University near South Bend. I have had groups as small as a half dozen and as large as nearly 200. (The capacity for my provider is up to 1,000 participants.) I have found that I have to use a little time at the beginning to make sure newcomers know how to use the interactive controls, etc. Once in a while my provider has technical problems such as sound dropout. Participants send text messages to me through the Questions box on my system and I have to remember to tell everyone why I am pausing for a few seconds. My entire meeting needs to be outlined on PowerPoint slides; if the screen goes blank, participants assume the system has gone down. Otherwise, it is nearly the same thing as a typical meeting or class session.

This is a tool to reach out to people who you would never waste your time inviting to a meeting that requires them to spend money or time in travel. There is no cost to the participant in your meetings; not even the long distance phone charges for a teleconference. You pay the entire cost in your monthly service charge. If your presentation is brief-10 to 20 minutes of fast-paced PowerPoint data before you open it up to Q&A-then you can expect people who would never even drive across town or walk a few blocks to your news conference or briefing to check in. Some will and some won't, depending on their schedule and deadlines for the day, but more will participate than in previous methods. Some will spend a few minutes and then send you a text message asking for a copy of your PowerPoint slides. Some will hang on at the end and ask many questions. It depends on their schedule, personal style and

how intrigued they are with your topic.

The provider I use has a built-in library of graphics to make the announcements of Webinars more visual and a registration system that captures information about the participants. If it is used properly, it can be a highly personal and cost/effective method of communication.

Monte Sahlin  
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For further information about FACT, or to learn how to join the Cooperative Congregations Studies Partnership (CCSP), contact David Roozen at [roozen@hartsem.edu](mailto:roozen@hartsem.edu).

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