

Understanding Episcopal Congregations: Results From the 2000 Faith Communities Today Survey

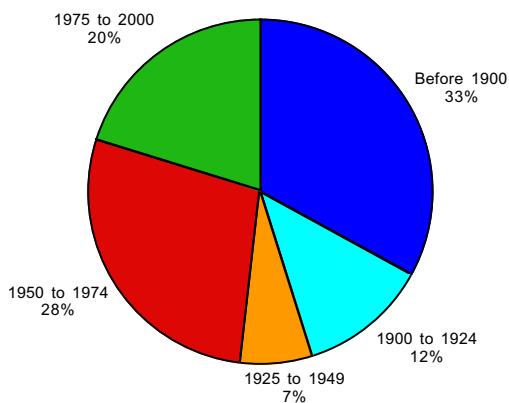
A Congregational Development publication, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, The Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. (800) 334-7626

Facilities

- A majority (52%) of Episcopal congregations worship in sanctuaries constructed before 1950, with many (33% overall) worshipping in sanctuaries built before 1900. One in five congregations have sanctuaries built after 1974.

Figure 1

Year First Worshipped in Current Sanctuary



- The median seating capacity in sanctuaries is 180 persons. Only 14% of Episcopal congregations have sanctuaries that seat more than 300 people, while one in five seat 100 or fewer. Half of the reporting churches seat between 126 and 300 persons.
- Most Episcopal congregations report adequate space for *worship* and *fellowship*. But 24% indicate that they need more room for worship, and 40%, more room for fellowship. Majorities report the need for more parking space (57%) and more educational space (54%).
- Growing congregations are much more likely to report that they need more room for worship, parking, fellowship, and education than plateaued and declining churches.

- One in eight congregations share worship space with another congregation.
- Most congregations (71%) use facilities that are in good or excellent condition, a few (6%), however, are in *serious* need of improvement and repair.

Location

- A majority of Episcopal congregations are located in cities (64%) of 10,000 or more population, including 22% which are located in or near a city of 250,000 or more population. Small towns are home to 30% of Episcopal congregations, but only 6% are in rural areas or open country.
- Of congregations in or near a city of at least 10,000 population:
 - 30% are located in the downtown or inner city area
 - 33% are located in other parts of the city
 - 24% are located in an older suburb
 - 13% are located in a newer suburb

Worship

- All but one reporting church offers an opportunity for worship on Sunday morning (it worships in the evening). Average attendance on Sunday mornings for Episcopal congregations is 129 people (including all morning services).
- Most Episcopal churches (70%) offer two or more services on the weekend. Worship style varies among services in two thirds of the congregations that report more than one weekend service.
- One half of Episcopal churches report that their largest service is over 60% full at the service with the largest attendance, including 27% that are more than 80% full. Growing congregations are most likely to be very full, some with standing room only.

➤ Majorities of congregations report that worship always or often includes:

- reading/recitation of creeds or statement of faith (98%)
- organ and/or piano music (94%)
- kneeling by the congregation (87%)
- use of incense or candles (82%)

. . . but only small minorities report that worship always or usually includes:

- dance or drama (2%)
- recorded music (3%)
- visual projection equipment (3%)
- a time for members to testify about their faith (5%)

➤ Only 9% of congregations report that their primary worship service has changed a lot in the last five years. Most churches report that worship has either changed a little (39%) or is basically the same (32%).

➤ 61% of respondents name the Bible as the most important authority for their congregation’s worship and teaching, while 24% name historic creeds, doctrines, and tradition.

Participants and Members

➤ The percentages of congregations reporting that most, nearly all, or all of their adult participants:

- are married: 45%
- are college graduates: 41%
- are female: 29%
- are age 60 or older: 18%
- live very near the church: 15%
- live in households with more than \$75,000 annual incomes: 13%
- live in households with less than \$20,000 annual incomes: 2%

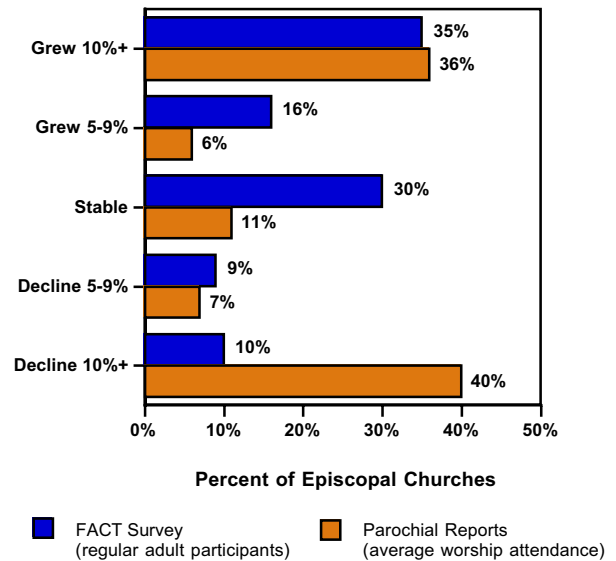
➤ Counting everyone involved in congregational life, including both members and non-members (however irregular their participation), yields a median estimate of 200 persons per congregation.

➤ The median estimate of *regular* adult participants is 100, while the median number of regular participants under age 18 is 25.

➤ Most congregations report that the number of regularly-participating adults has either increased (52%) or stayed about the same (30%) compared to five years ago. Parochial Report data on average worship attendance shows a less rosy picture: 42% increased, 11% were stable, and 47% declined.

Figure 2

**Change in Participation:
FACT and Parochial Reports**



➤ Most (89%) Episcopal congregations are at least 70% white/European American. Another 2.5% of Episcopal congregations are predominantly African American or Black. In 7% of Episcopal churches no racial/ethnic group predominates. These churches can be considered multi-racial.

Congregational Programs

➤ Programs that a majority of congregations offer year-round include:

- community service (reported by 64%)
- choir(s) (64%)
- men’s/women’s ministries (56%)
- Bible study (54%)

➤ The most frequently offered short-term programs include:

- spiritual retreats (reported by 45%)
- performing arts other than choir (33%)
- theological or doctrinal study (28%)

Outreach to Visitors

- Almost all congregations (96%) try to identify visitors to their worship services through a registration book or visitor's card, and most (69%) contact visitors in person or by phone within a few days or a week of the visit. Another 14% send greetings by letter.
- In a typical month, the pastoral staff averages (median) three visits or phone calls to "prospective members, worship visitors, or newcomers in the community."
- One in four congregations (23%) provide "special parking or seating" for visitors.
- Current members are "involved in recruiting new members" not at all or only to a slight extent in 39% of Episcopal congregations. Only a fifth of respondents report that laity are involved in new member outreach to a very great extent (4%) or a large extent (18%).

Service to the Community

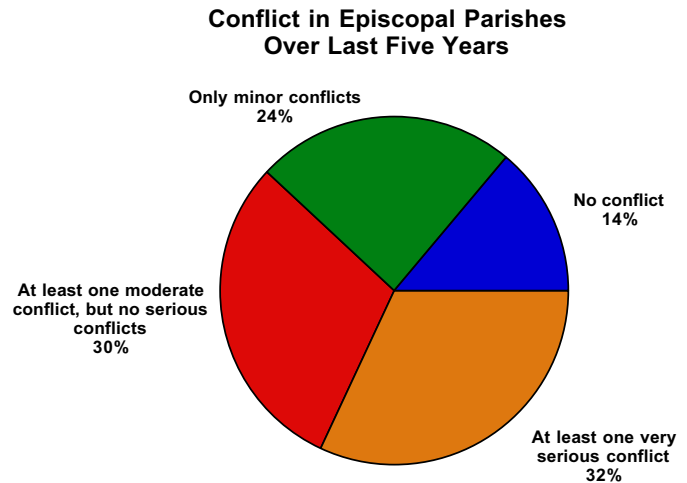
- Almost all congregations (96%) provide some sort of food assistance to the needy in their communities, often (63% so report) in cooperation with another agency or congregation.
- Other service programs that involve at least half of congregations, whether independently or cooperatively, include:
 - cash or vouchers given to families or individuals (81% so report)
 - thrift store or thrift store donations (68%)
 - substance abuse & 12-step recovery programs (62%)
 - counseling services or support groups (61%)
 - temporary or permanent housing/shelter (53%)
- The typical (median) congregation serves 60 people a month in its community programs.

Conflict

- 86% of congregations had conflict in the last five years. 32% of churches reported very serious conflict.

- Of congregations that had serious conflict, that conflict:
 - is ongoing in 6%
 - remains, but is no longer serious in 28%
 - was resolved with no negative consequences in 26%
 - was resolved with some negative consequences in 40%

Figure 3



- The causes of very serious conflict were:
 - priest's leadership style (17% so report)
 - money/finances/budget (11%)
 - priest's personal behavior (11%)
 - who makes a decision (10%)
 - member's personal behavior (7%)
 - how worship is conducted (6%)
 - program/mission priorities (5%)
 - theology (4%)

Ecumenical/Interfaith Involvement

- 82% of congregations participated in activities with congregations of another denomination or faith tradition. Most involved other Christian bodies; only one in four congregations reported interfaith activities.
- The most common ecumenical activity was participation in "councils of churches or ministerial associations" (64%). Majorities also reported participation in joint worship services with other denominations or faith traditions (61%), "joint service projects" (57%), and "joint celebrations or programs other than worship" (52%).

Finances

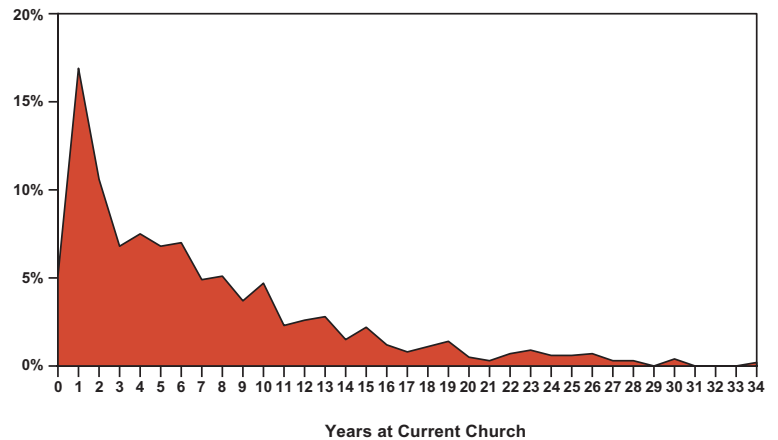
- A quarter of respondents describe the current financial health of their congregation as excellent, and another third as good. Only 5% say they are “in serious difficulty.”
- The typical (median) congregation reports total annual receipts for 1999 of \$138,069.
- A majority (68%) of congregations received some income in 1999 from endowments, but of those that did the majority (59%) received 10% or less of total congregational income from endowment funds.
- The average expenditures for selected budget categories in 1999 were:
 - 46% for staff salaries and benefits
 - 23% for utilities, building upkeep, and other congregational operations
 - 11% for Episcopal mission work
 - 7% for capital improvements
 - 6% for program support and materials
 - 3% for other local mission work
 - 2%, money put into reserve or investments

Leadership

- The vast majority of responding congregations (92%) report having a senior or solo rector or vicar. Most (88%) describe the pastor as holding a regular call rather than being temporary/interim.
- 28% of respondents describe their call to that congregation as part time. Many (43%) of these ministers report that they also serve at least one other congregation.
- The typical (median) rector or vicar is 53 years of age and has been at the congregation five years. 83% are male. 17% have a doctoral degree.

Figure 4

Tenure of Current Rector or Vicar



- Descriptors which a majority of Episcopal rectors and vicars say fit them very well include:
 - hard worker (57% say fits very well)
 - cares about people (56%)
 - has a close relationship with God (52%)
- Descriptors which Episcopal rectors and vicars say fit them least well were charismatic leader, evangelistic, and effective administrator.
- Two-thirds of congregations report that recruiting volunteer leaders is a continual challenge even though they eventually find enough willing people. Another 9% can't find enough people who are willing to serve.

Resources

- Around half of congregations purchase worship, educational, and other resources either exclusively (4%) or primarily from within the Episcopal Church (48%). Many others (40%) strike a pretty even balance between Episcopal and other sources. Only 1% of congregations obtain materials exclusively from outside the Episcopal Church.



In 2000, 41 denominations and faith groups participated in Faith Communities Today (FACT), the largest survey ever conducted of congregations in the United States. This report highlights findings from the 726 Episcopal congregations that completed a FACT questionnaire (out of 1,100 randomly selected parishes). Surveys were completed in most cases by the rector or vicar with the assistance of lay leaders. Go to www.episcopalchurch.org/congr/ to see the FACT questionnaire and responses of Episcopal congregations. A report on all faith groups can be found at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.