



FAITH
Communities
TODAY

A Report on Religion in the United States Today

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Section 1:

Introduction

Faith Communities in the United States Today is the largest survey of congregations ever conducted in the United States. It also is the most inclusive, denominationally sanctioned program of interfaith cooperation. The project was initiated to enhance the capacity of participating religious denominations and faith groups to conduct and use congregational studies. It is intended to provide a public profile of the organizational backbone of religion in America – congregations – at the beginning of a new millennium.

In this report, we present an overview of the survey findings. These initial findings are both reassuring and disturbing.

Overview

It is reassuring:

- That the great majority of faith communities are vital and alive.
- That half the faith communities see themselves as growing in numbers, especially those using or blending contemporary forms of worship and those located in newer suburbs.
- That the faith communities in the United States are making major contributions to the welfare of their communities through a combination of social and spiritual ministries.
- That 41 denominations and faith groups worked together, in interfaith cooperation, to complete this survey. Their coming together for a common purpose is unprecedented.

It is disturbing:

- That many congregations have the commitment to undertake social welfare programs – and the space – but lack the infrastructure.
- That congregations that enact their faith without explicit expectations for members experience less vitality and more conflict.
- That congregations, to remain vital, must change but that change can prove costly – leading to conflict that impacts member growth, new volunteers and financial support.
- That congregations of seminary-educated leaders, in particular, are unready to address issues of change.

** Each denomination or faith group drew its own sample of congregations – minimally intended to provide an error rate of plus or minus four percentage points. Return rates were very good, averaging just over 50 percent. In total, the 26 individual surveys included answers from 14,301 congregations.*

For purposes of overall national analysis, we combined the 26 FACT sub-surveys in such a way that, through the use of statistical weights, each denomination or faith group's congregations are represented in the FACT weighted data proportionate to their representation in the total population of FACT participant congregations in the United States.

Project Background

The *Faith Communities Today* data brings together 26 individual surveys of congregations representing 41 denominations and faith groups (see Figure 1.1). Project participants developed a common core questionnaire. Groups then conducted their own, typically mail, surveys of a sample of congregations. Usually, the congregation's leader completed the questionnaire.*

The project's common core questionnaire includes more than 200 questions covering six broad areas:

- Worship and identity
- Location and facilities
- Internal and mission oriented programs
- Leadership and organizational dynamics
- Participants
- Finances

We added 1980 and 1990 United States Census data for the zip code in which a congregation was located to its survey data as well as 2000 and 2005 estimates and 2010 projections.

Although all denominations and faith groups in the United States had the opportunity to participate in the project, not all of them did. The proportion of U.S. congregations represented in FACT is not possible to determine with precision because there is no accurate count of the total number of congregations in the United States. Estimates typically range from 300,000

to 350,000. Using a mid-point estimate of 325,000 total congregations means that the 260,000 congregations in FACT denominations and faith groups represent 80% of U.S. congregations. However, since most of the denominations and faith groups with the largest memberships participated in FACT, we estimate that the survey data applies to about 90% of worshippers in the United States. Among the larger U.S. denominations not represented in FACT are: Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Salvation Army, Church of God, United Pentecostal Church Inc., and Baptist Bible Fellowship International.

The 41 denominations and faith groups had the opportunity to adapt the common core questionnaire to their own traditions. Some translated words and phrases into the idiom of their traditions – for example, minister, priest, rabbi, imam etc. Some did not use questions that did not apply in their tradition or where expediency necessitated.** In this report, we use the wordings and questions in the common core questionnaire. A question by question listing of denominations and faith groups not having data for particular questionnaire items can be found on the project website, fact.hartsem.edu.

Individual denomination or faith group findings are not contained in this report. If you are interested in the results for a specific denomination or faith group, contact the respective denomination or group. Contact persons and web links are posted on the website.

*** Not all of the 26 surveys used to compile this report asked all of the questions in the common core questionnaire. While a complete listing of missing items for each of the separate surveys is contained on the FACT website – fact.hartsem.edu – we note here the most significant missing questions.*

Roman Catholic: *Welcoming change, preserving racial/ethnic/national heritage, change in worship, sermon emphases, components of worship (except music), sources of religious authority, emphasis on sexual abstinence, personal witness evangelism, and ministerial education of congregation's leader.*

Historically Black Denominations: *Serving as moral beacon to community, welcoming change, openness in dealing with conflict, preserving racial/ethnic/national heritage, clarity of purpose, change in worship, sermon emphases, components of worship (including music), rural to suburban location, condition of building, home*

practices and emphases, approaches to evangelism, working with other congregations, and growth.

Muslim: *Expressing denominational heritage, serving as moral beacon to community, openness in dealing with conflict, change in worship, sermon emphases, components of worship (including music), rural to suburban location, condition of building, approaches to evangelism, and ministerial education of congregation's leader.*

Bahá'is: *Expressing denominational heritage, change in worship, sermon emphases, and ministerial education of congregation's leader.*

The reasons for changes in the common core questionnaire vary, from time constraints to inapplicability of the question to research priorities. Because the surveys varied in what they asked, the broad implications drawn from the overall data of this report may not apply to a particular group.

Figure 1.1
FACT Denominations and Faith Groups

<i>Number of Congregations Returning Survey</i>	
American Baptist Churches USA	748
Assemblies of God	619
Bahá'is of the United States	327
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	283
Christian Reformed Church	515
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . .	969
Church of the Nazarene	436
Churches of Christ (Non-Instrumental)	289
Episcopal Church	726
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	832
Historically Black Denominations (ITC)*	1863
<i>African Methodist Episcopal Church</i>	
<i>African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church</i>	
<i>Christian Methodist Episcopal Church</i>	
<i>Church of God in Christ</i>	
<i>National Baptist Convention of America</i>	
<i>National Baptist Convention U.S.A.</i>	
<i>Progressive National Baptist Convention</i>	
Independent Christian Churches (Instrumental) . . .	349
Jewish (Cohen Center)*	228
<i>Conservative Jewish</i>	
<i>Reform Jewish</i>	
Mega-churches	153
Mennonite Church USA	400
Muslim (CAIR)*	416
Nondenominational	133
Orthodox Christian (SCOBA)*	346
<i>Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America</i>	
<i>American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox</i>	
<i>Greek Catholic Diocese</i>	
<i>Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese</i>	
<i>of North America</i>	
<i>Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church</i>	
<i>Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America</i>	
<i>Orthodox Church in America</i>	
<i>Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese</i>	
<i>in America and Canada</i>	
<i>Serbian Orthodox Church in America</i>	
<i>Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the U.S.A.</i>	
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	541
Reformed Church in America	399
Roman Catholic Church	714
Seventh-day Adventist Church	406
Southern Baptist Convention	710
Unitarian Universalist Association	497
United Church of Christ	801
United Methodist Church	601
TOTAL	14,301

* Several schools or organizations helped conduct the surveys. These included: ITC (the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia), Cohen Center (the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts), CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations, Washington, D.C.) and SCOBA (the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, New York, New York).

The report does note similarities or differences among denominations and faith groups. Protestant participants are divided into four groups commonly used in categorizations of American religion:

- **Liberal Protestant:** Episcopal, Presbyterian, Unitarian-Universalist, United Church of Christ
- **Moderate Protestant:** American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran, Mennonite, Reformed Church in America, United Methodist
- **Evangelical Protestant:** Assemblies of God, Christian Reformed, Nazarene, Churches of Christ, Independent Christian Churches (Instrumental), Mega-churches, Nondenominational Protestant, Seventh-day Adventist, Southern Baptist
- **Historically Black Protestant denominations**

We also recognize the common lineage of Roman Catholics and various Orthodox bodies. Finally, we combine Bahá'is, Mormon, Jewish and Muslim as contributors to the United States' religious mosaic with significant World presence.

The Hartford Institute for Religion Research (HIRR) at Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, initiated the FACT project. In total, more than 100 persons from the 41 denominations and faith groups have, and continue, to work on the project. A complete list is available on the project website.

The Hartford Institute manages the project's common efforts, including the website and the grant funding provided through the generosity of the Lilly Endowment. Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, HIRR staff and faculty at Hartford Seminary, serve as the project's co-directors. Scott Thumma, faculty associate at HIRR, serves as project webmaster. J. Martin Bailey serves as the project's media consultant.

Not all of the FACT survey questions are reported here, and frequently the report does not include the specific wording of a question or answer. The reader is invited to the project website for these details: fact.harstem.edu. The website contains a complete list of questions and responses for the common core questionnaire. The website also contains **Interact with Fact**, an interactive introduction for individuals and a workbook for congregational groups. This interactive resource contains 45 of the core survey questions with denominational data and other comparisons. The questions are divided into five modules:

- Public Worship
- Spiritual Growth
- Inviting and Including
- Managing and Leading
- Community Outreach

The website and workbook also provide links to denominational websites for additional details about specific denominational findings.

Definitions

Throughout this report, we use several key definitions. Awareness of these definitions will help in understanding the report:

SIZE:

Size has a significant effect on many aspects of congregational life and organization. As measured in the survey, size refers to the number of “regularly participating adults” in a congregation.

LOCATION:

Location was measured as:

- Rural or open country
- Town or village of less than 10,000

(If in or around a city of 10,000 or more:)

- In the central or downtown area
- In another area of the city
- In an older suburb around the city
- In a new suburb around the city

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Demographic characteristics were measured by asking respondents whether the estimated percent of regularly participating adults in their congregations, for each characteristic, was:

- None to Some: 0 - 40%
- About Half: 41 - 60%
- Most to All: 61 - 100%

HIGH, MODERATE OR LOW:

What does it mean when we say a congregation scored high, moderate or low? Many questions asked for responses on a five-point scale. Two examples:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not At All | <input type="checkbox"/> Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly | <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat | <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quite Well | <input type="checkbox"/> Often |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very Well | <input type="checkbox"/> Always |

“Low” is a combination of the two lowest or most negative responses on the five-point scales. “Moderate” is the middle response. “High” is a combination of the two highest or most positive responses.

GROWTH:

When the report says that congregations are growing, this includes the top two responses to the question:

“Since 1995, has the number of regularly participating adults in your congregation:”

- Increased 10% or more
- Increased 5% to 9%
- Stayed about the same (+/- 4%)
- Decreased 5% to 9%
- Decreased 10% or more

VITALITY, UNITY and COHESION:

These terms refer to the following characteristics.

- Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive
- Our congregation has a strong racial/ethnic or national heritage that it is trying to preserve
- Our congregation clearly expresses its denominational heritage
- Our congregation has a clear sense of mission and purpose
- Members are excited about the future of our congregation
- Our congregation is a moral beacon in the community
- Our congregation emphasizes abstaining from premarital sex
- Our congregation has explicit/definite expectations for members that are strictly enforced

For ease of presentation, we use the first characteristic – spiritually vital and alive – to measure vitality unless otherwise noted in the report.

CHANGE:

Change is a major theme in the report. Key change questions include:

“In comparison to the style of your primary worship service five years ago, would you say the style of your current primary worship service:”

- Is basically the same
- Changed a little
- Changed somewhat
- Changed a great deal

“How well does the following describe your congregation? Our congregation welcomes innovation and change:”

- Very well
- Quite well
- Somewhat
- Slightly
- Not at all

Faith Communities Today: The Basic Demographics

When the public thinks of congregations, the image that typically comes to mind is a mega-church or a high-steeple urban church. The reality, however, is that half of the congregations in the United States have fewer than 100 regularly participating adults (Figure 1.2) and just over half are located in small town and rural settings (Figure 1.3). Indeed, a full quarter of congregations has fewer than 50 regularly participating adults, while less than 10 percent have more than 1,000.

Figure 1.2
Half of Congregations Have Fewer Than 100 Regularly Participating Adults

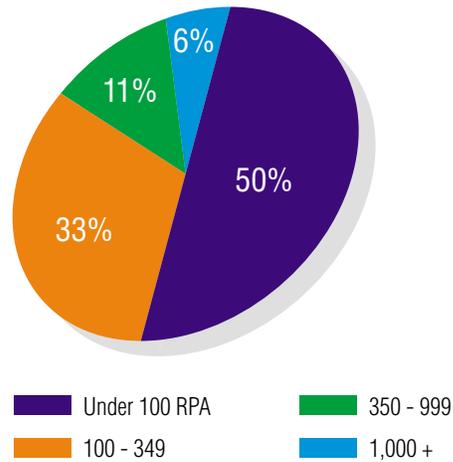
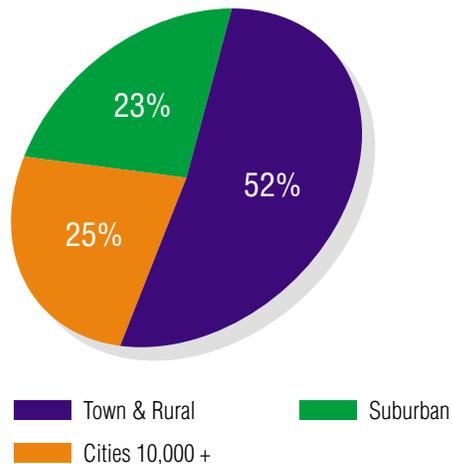


Figure 1.3
Over Half of Congregations Are Located in Town & Rural Settings



The number of participants varies considerably by location and also by denominational group (Figure 1.4). The large size of Roman Catholic parishes is especially dramatic. The smaller size of rural and small town congregations – contrasted with the larger size of those located in newer suburbs – is consistent across denominations and faith groups.

Moderate Protestant congregations generally are smaller, which is consistent with the fact that these congregations are heavily concentrated in town and rural settings (Figure 1.5). Evangelical Protestant churches also are concentrated in town and rural settings. However, in contrast to other Protestant groups, Evangelical Protestants have a significant and growing presence in the suburbs. But it is Jewish, Bahá'is and Mormon congregations that are most concentrated in the suburbs, with more than 40 percent of the congregations of each group having a suburban setting.

Figure 1.4
Size Varies by Location and Denominational Group

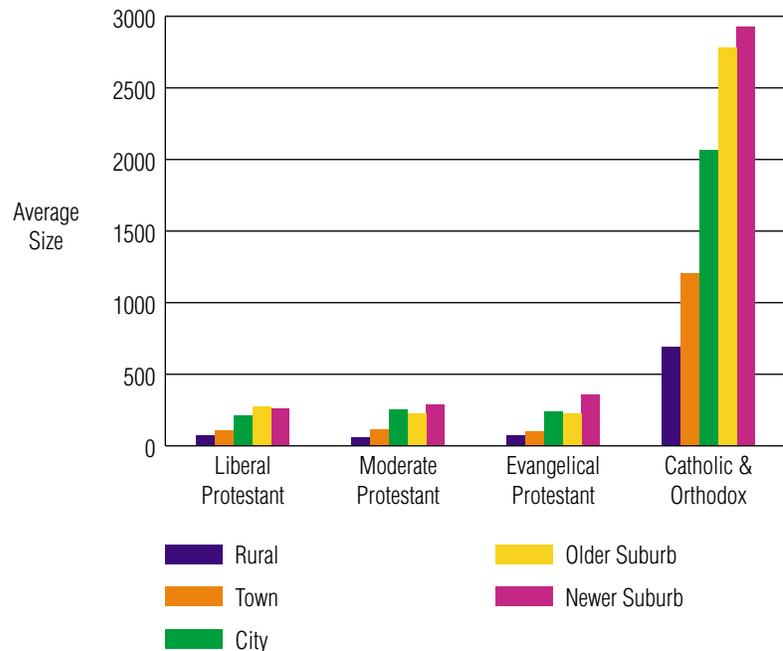
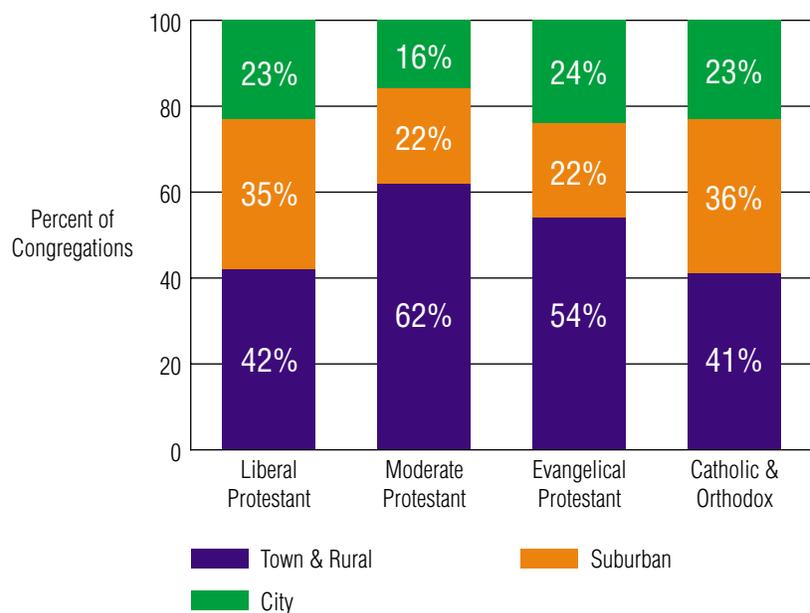


Figure 1.5
Town & Rural Dominates Moderate Protestantism



Religion and community were inseparable for the waves of immigrants that founded and then populated the United States. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of United States congregations pre-date World War II (Figure 1.6). Also not surprising is a burst of new church development in the immediate post-war period, a period that combined economic expansion and the need for community-providing institutions in the rapidly developing suburbs.

Perhaps less obvious is the dramatic shift over time in the geographic locus of new congregations. Congregational development in the West surpassed even the South in the last decade (Figure 1.7). This trend is something religious establishments, whose mindsets have yet to make the Westward shift, should note.

Figure 1.6
Over Half of Congregations Organized Before 1945

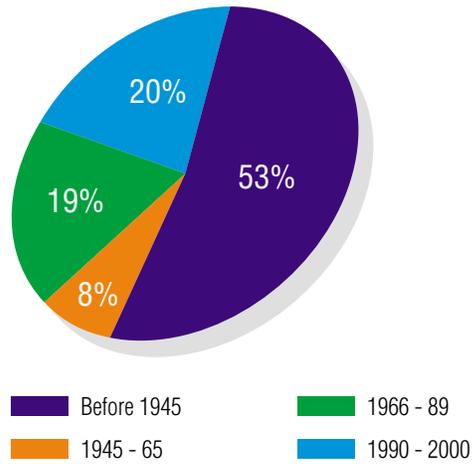
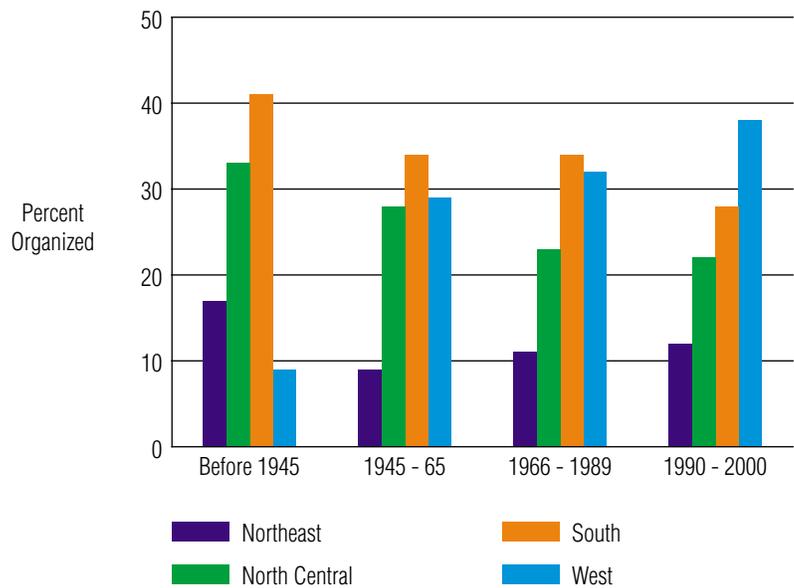
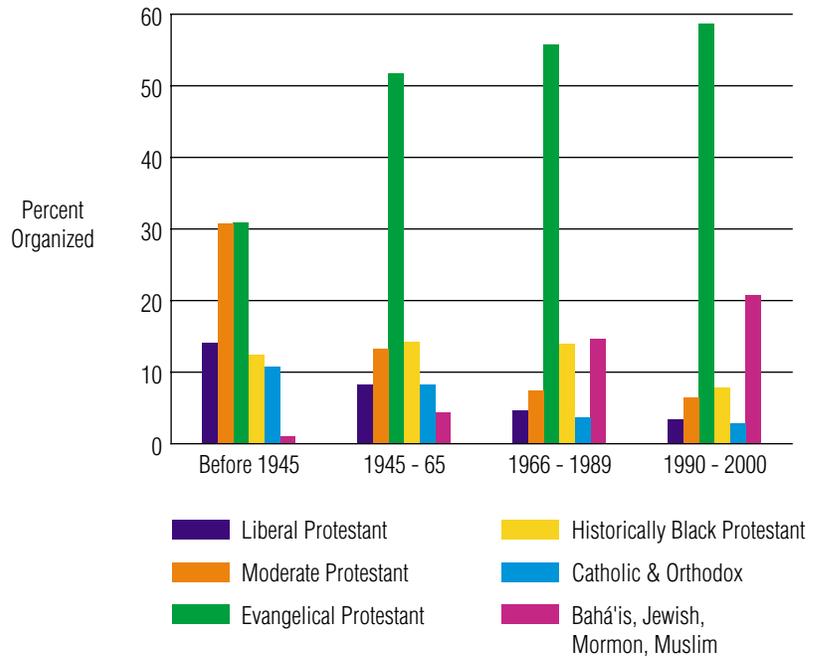


Figure 1.7
Westward Ho



The downturn in new church development in mainline Protestantism and surge in Evangelical Protestantism is familiar to most religious trend trackers. But they also should note the downturn among the Roman Catholic/Orthodox and the surge in the founding of congregations among Bahá'is, Muslims and Mormons over the last 20 years. This trend is rapidly putting a new face on American religion (Figure 1.8).

Figure 1.8
A New Face for American Religion



A common adage connecting congregational life to the legacy of racism in the United States observes that Sunday morning is the most segregated time of the week. At first glance the racial profile of congregations seems to reinforce this myth. Seventy-six percent of congregations report that most or all of their regularly participating adults are white. Overlaying census data onto the FACT survey, however, yields a significant, although not overly encouraging, correction: Sunday morning is neither more (nor less) segregated than Saturday night. Specifically, congregations' participants represent a mirror image of the racial composition of the zip codes in which their congregations are located. Specifically, 75 percent of congregational zip codes are most or all white. (Figures 1.9a and 1.9b present various demographic characteristics of congregational members.)

That congregational participants reflect the demographic characteristics of their congregation's location is consistent with the traditional development of geographic parishes. Not surprisingly, the survey found that parishioners generally have a short commute to worship – one that is considerably less than a typical commute to work.

Congregational participants are more likely to be female and older than the general population. The fact that congregational participants are more likely to be married and to be in households with children than the general population offers support for those who have noted the close connection between organized religious involvement and traditional notions of family.

Characteristics of Regularly Participating Adults

Figure 1.9a

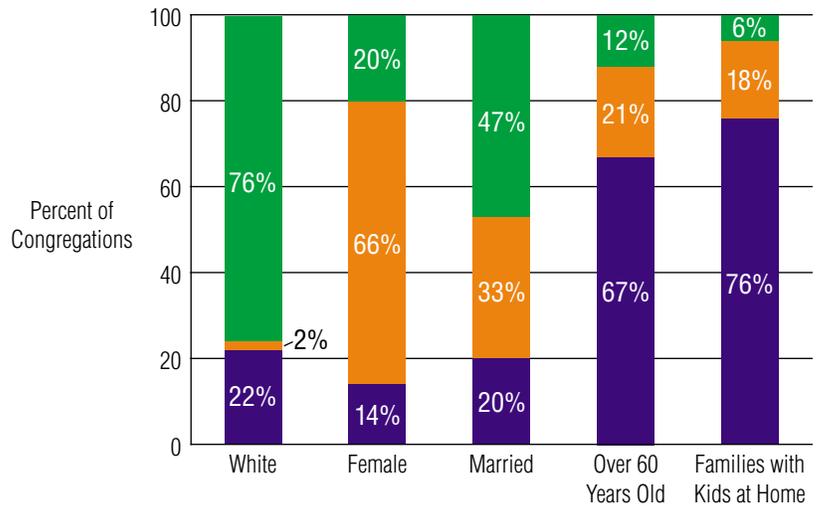
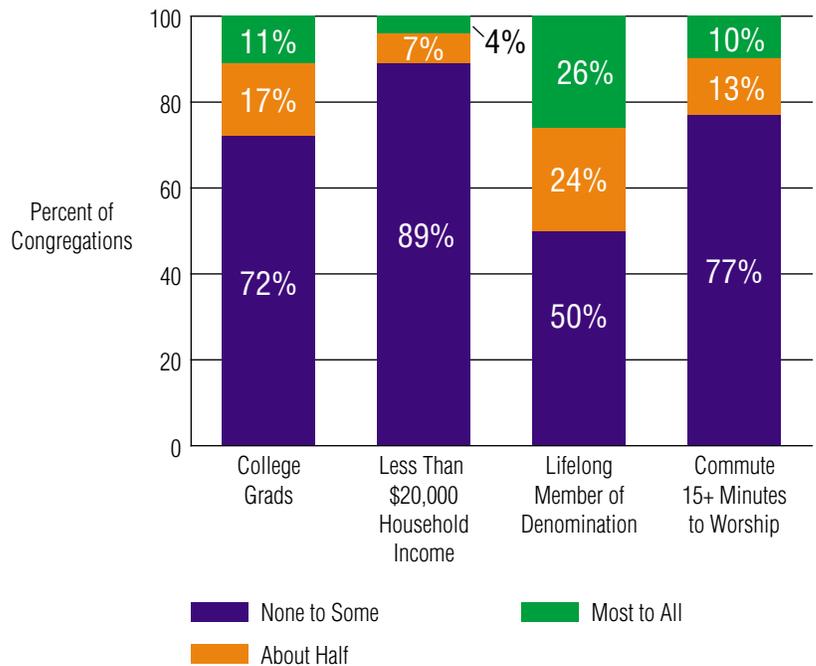


Figure 1.9b



The survey also shows that:

- Participants in FACT congregations are more likely to be college graduates than the general population.
- But they also are slightly more likely than the general population to be in households with annual incomes less than \$20,000.
- Among congregations organized since 1990, there is a higher proportion of participants who commute more than 15 minutes to worship. Religious community is increasingly less equal to residential community.
- Size of congregation matters when it comes to gender – the larger the congregation, the more males it has. This differential is found for both Protestants and Catholics.
- Similarly, the larger the congregation, the greater the proportion of young adult participants, again for both Protestants and Catholics.
- Slightly more than 25 percent of congregations report that a majority of their regularly participating adults are lifelong members of the congregation’s denomination.

The effect of location is especially dramatic in regard to lifelong denominational members. The proportion of participants who are lifelong denominational members decreases steadily as one moves from rural to town to city to new suburban locations. The pattern of progressive differences in participant profiles as one moves from rural to new suburban locations is also stark for educational levels, age, child-present families, and household income (Figures 1.10, 1.11 and 1.12).

Figure 1.10
Different Demographic Profiles:
Rural vs New Suburb Congregations

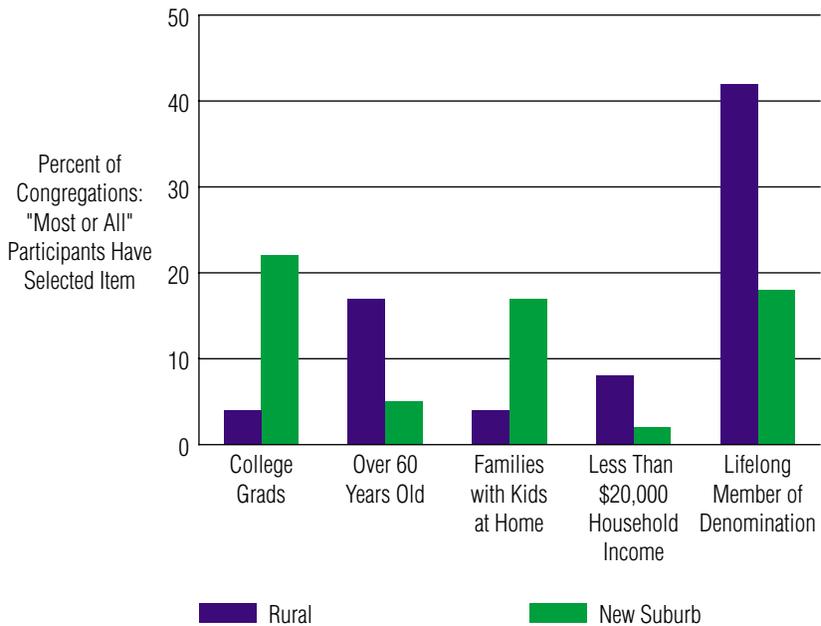
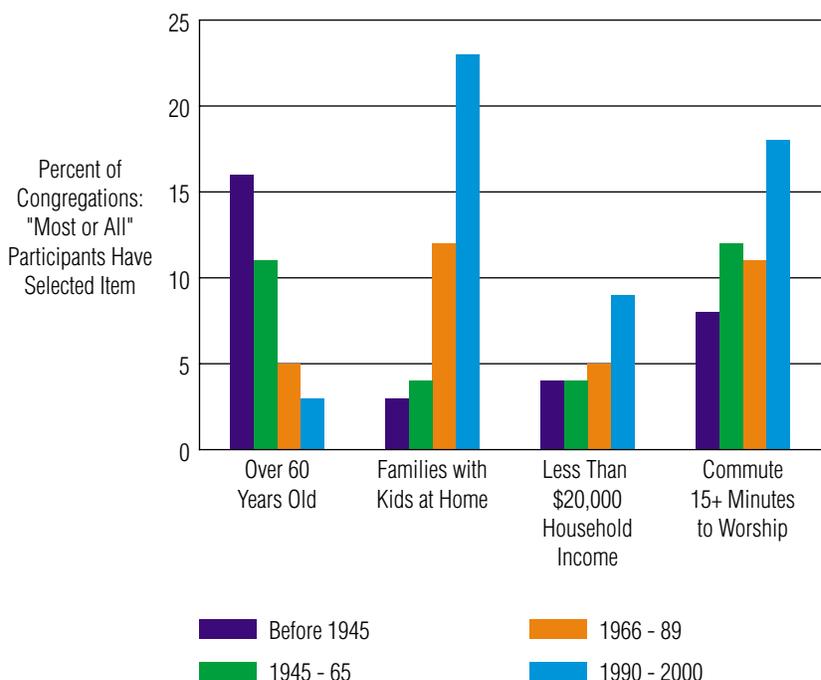


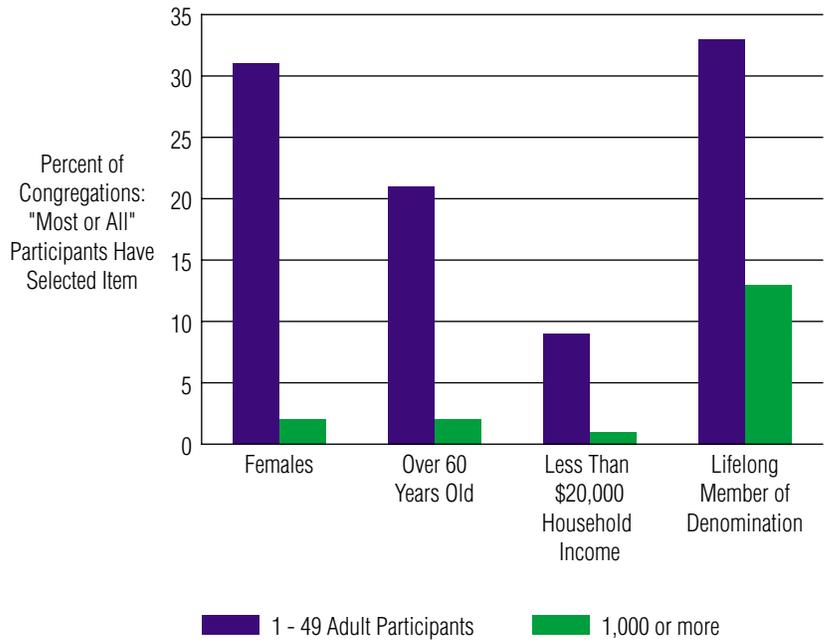
Figure 1.11
Different Demographic Profiles:
Older vs Newer Congregations



Other notable differences in participant characteristics among denominational groups include:

- Liberal Protestant congregations tend to have higher proportions of college graduates.
- Evangelical Protestant congregations tend to have more young adults and families with children.
- Congregations in the Historically Black denominations tend to have more participants from low-income households.
- Congregations in the Roman Catholic/Orthodox group tend to have fewer long commuters.

Figure 1.12
Different Demographic Profiles:
Smallest vs Largest Congregations

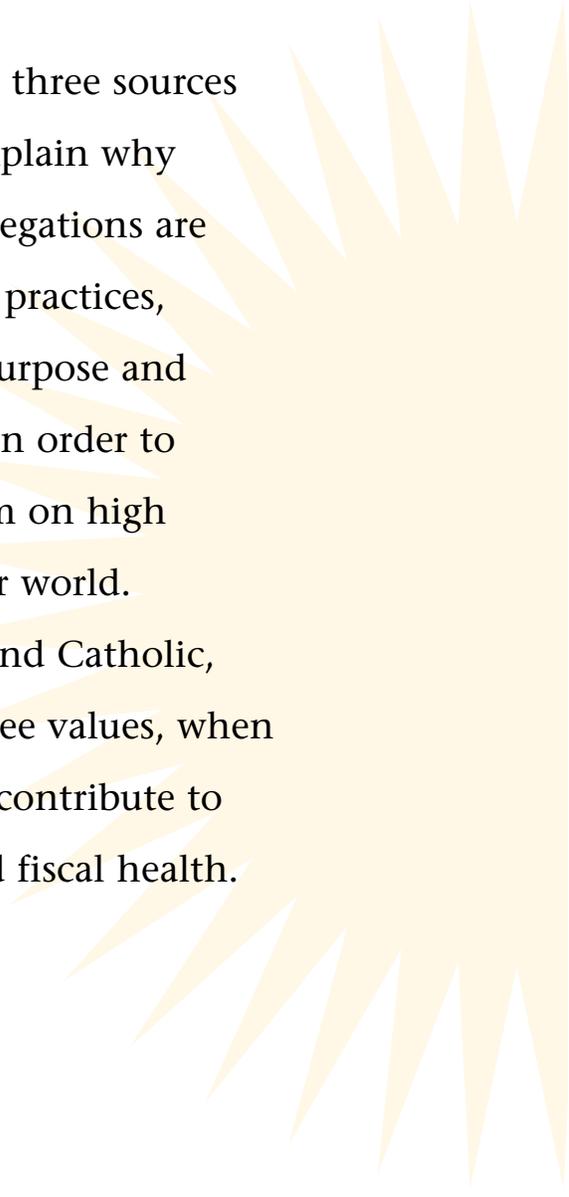


Section 2:

Sources of Unity and Cohesion



Heritage, vision and moral commitment are three sources of cohesion for congregations. They help explain why congregations can remain vital. Some congregations are anchored in their accumulated past of faith practices, culture and tradition. Others emphasize a purpose and vision in their ministry that values change in order to meet the future. Still others place a premium on high moral standards for themselves and for their world. Across liberal and conservative, Protestant and Catholic, Christian and non-Christian lines, these three values, when located in favorable social conditions, help contribute to congregational stability, vitality, growth and fiscal health.



Denominational Loyalty and Religious Authority

Denominations emerged in Colonial America as ethnic communities, and the affinity between racial/ethnic and religious identity in the American context replayed itself through most subsequent immigrations (see Figure 2.1). The convergence of ethnic and religious identities is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they can be mutually reinforcing. Just over 60 percent of majority Latino congregations, for example, and half of majority Black congregations are intentional about using their religious community as a resource for preserving their racial/ethnic heritage (Figure 2.2). On the other hand, a distinct racial/ethnic identity can present a barrier to potential new members. Majority-white congregations with a distinct national identity (“white with sub-group” in figures) are especially conscious about their need to increase their diversity.

Figure 2.1
Majority Race/Ethnicity of Regularly Participating Adults

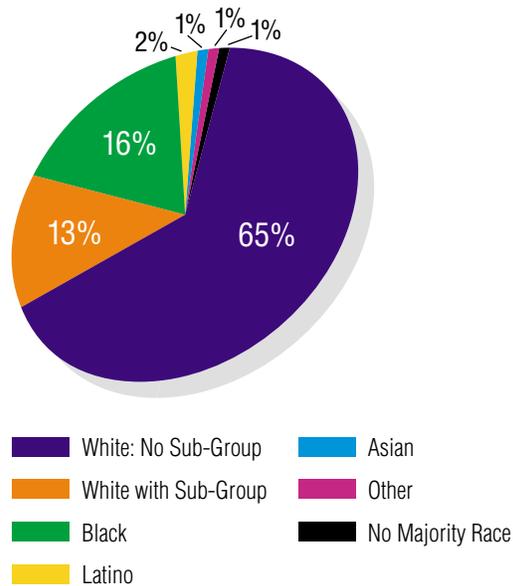
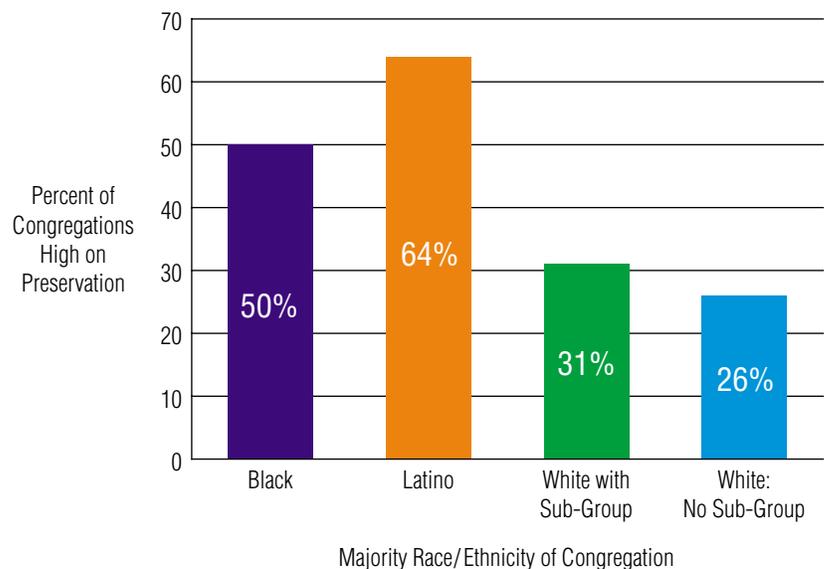


Figure 2.2
Preserving Racial/Ethnic/National Heritage



Sociologists report that denominationalism is declining in significance for congregational identity. But 62 percent of congregations say they reflect clear expressions of their denominational heritage (Figure 2.3). One also finds that the expression of denominational heritage tends to be stronger in those congregations with a distinctive racial/ethnic/national identity (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.3
How Well Congregations Express Denominational Heritage

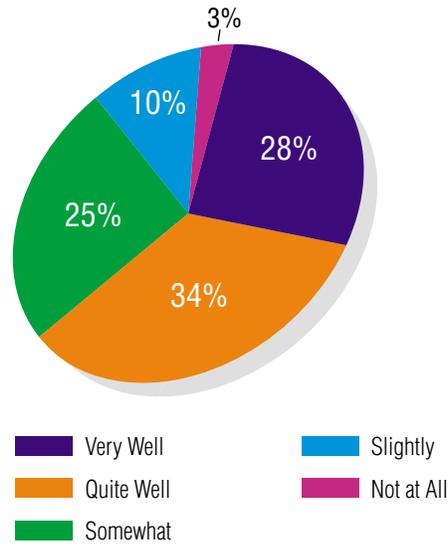
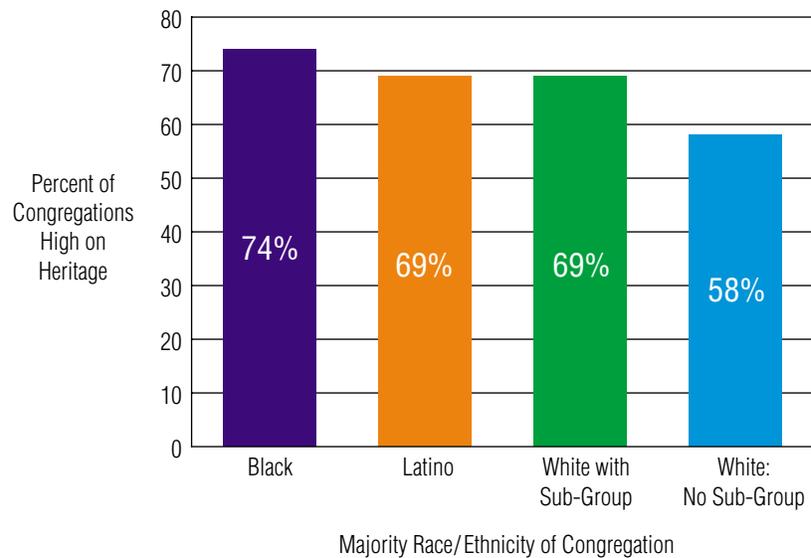


Figure 2.4
Majority Racial/Ethnic/National Congregations Higher on Denominational Heritage

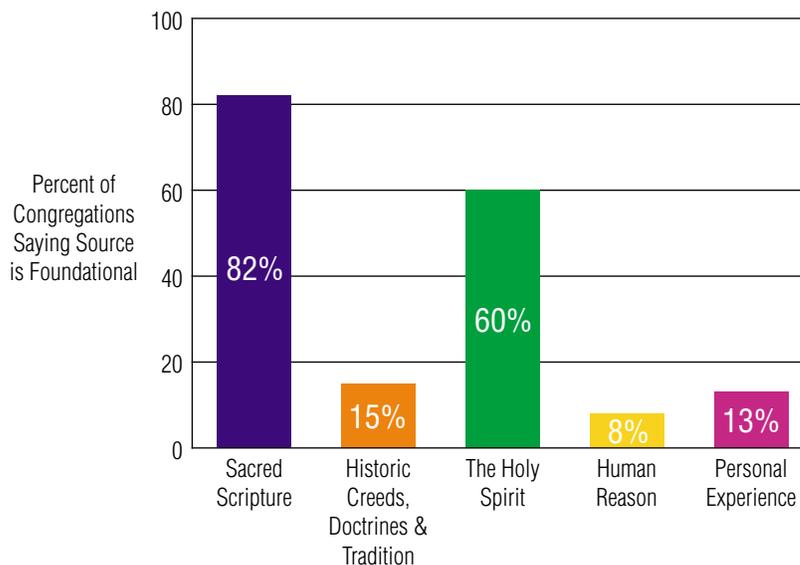


With a survey's aura of scientific objectivity, we may forget that congregations are religious associations and their ultimate source of unity and purpose emanates from their relationship to the transcendent. In this regard, the foundational importance of sacred scripture is nearly universal (Figure 2.5). (Note: the Roman Catholic survey did not ask the religious authority set of questions.) The Holy Spirit also is acknowledged as a foundational source of religious authority in six of ten congregations, and while creeds, doctrines, reason and personal experience are important for large numbers of congregations, they are acknowledged as foundational in relatively few.

Among the specific findings, which are consistent with these groups' self-understandings:

- Baptists and Muslims are particularly oriented toward scripture.
- Orthodox Christians, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Mormons are particularly oriented toward creeds, doctrine and/or tradition.
- The Assemblies of God and Nazarene are oriented toward the Holy Spirit.
- Jewish groups and Unitarian Universalists orient themselves toward human reason.

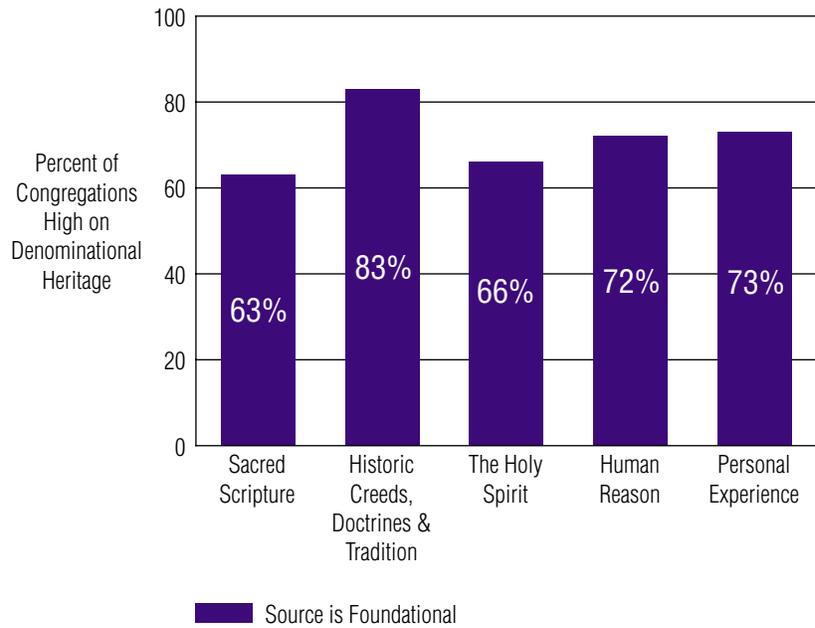
Figure 2.5
Sources of Religious Authority



Perhaps the most interesting relationship among the various sources of religious authority is revealed in congregations with a strong commitment to denominational heritage. These congregations have unusually high commitment to the foundational authority of creeds, doctrines and tradition (Figure 2.6).

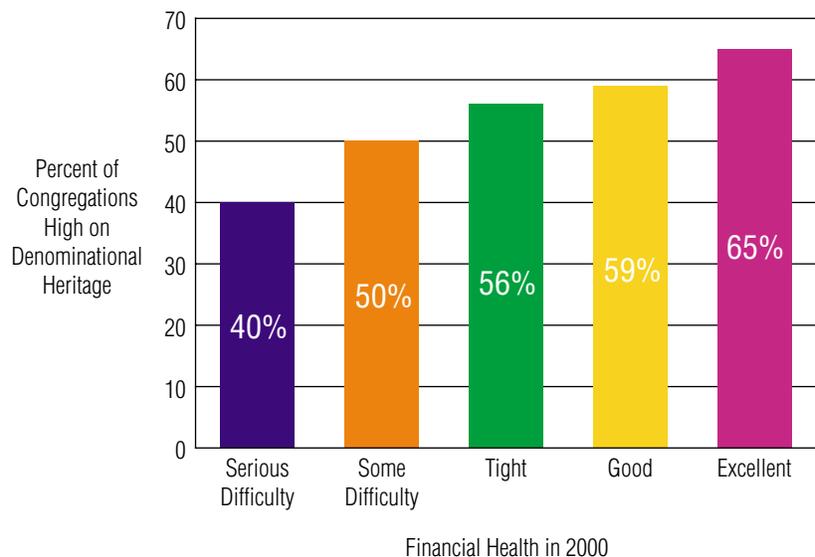
The strength of denominational ties varies across the spectrum of participating groups. In broad strokes, congregations of Historically Black Denominations rate denominational connections the highest, while Liberal Protestant congregations report the lowest commitments to denominational ties. Although the structure and meaning of these commitments differs in the various faith communities, congregations that maintain connections with their denominational tradition and organization share at least one notable characteristic – financial stability (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.6
Turn Toward Tradition Enhances
Denominational Heritage



No Roman Catholic data available for this set of comparisons.

Figure 2.7
Denominational Heritage
Related to Financial Health



Clarity of Purpose

Congregations with a clear sense of purpose feel vital and alive (Figure 2.8). In contrast to feelings of unity based on heritage (the past), this center of cohesion looks to the future. This positive assessment extends across the spectrum of denominational groups.

Older, smaller, town and rural churches are less likely to claim a sense of purpose and vitality. But even in these conditions, more than half report that they feel vital and alive, and over half report being a moral beacon for their communities (Figure 2.9). Feelings of vitality occur most frequently in traditional Black congregations and significantly less often in Liberal Protestant congregations.

Although new suburban areas are financially and numerically more favorable to congregational growth, many faith communities in areas of declining populations still report high vitality. Larger, newer and growing congregations most clearly report feelings of being vital and alive. When conditions are less favorable, it is congregations that are clear in membership expectations and rooted in their denominational heritage that report vitality.

Figure 2.8
Vitality and Vision

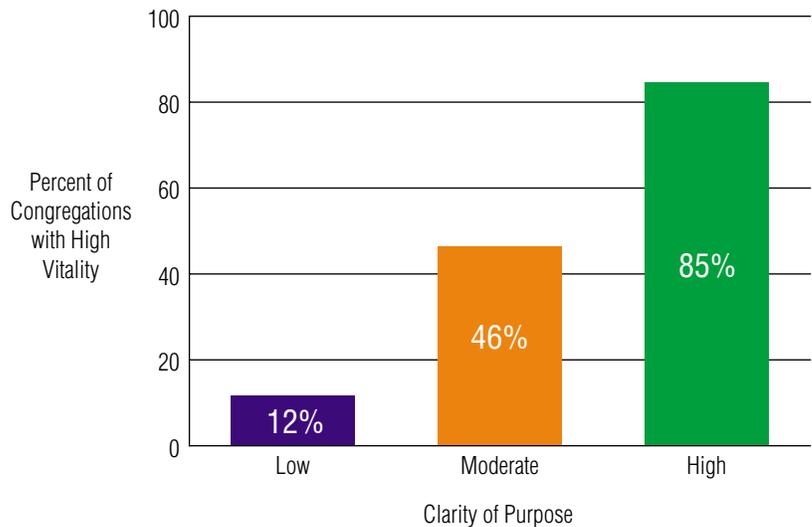
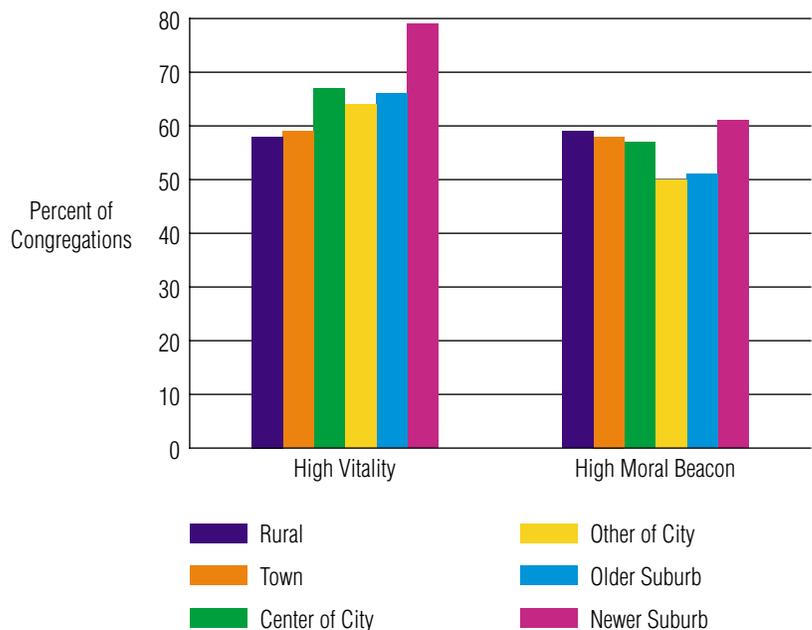


Figure 2.9
Vitality and Life in All Locations



Vital, purposeful congregations also have a more positive assessment about their future. Such optimism occurs most often in Historically Black churches, and significantly less often in Moderate Protestant congregations. Not surprisingly, the confidence of congregations in their future is closely tied to their ability to attract and mobilize the energies of their youth. Newer and larger congregations in growing suburban communities report a higher percentage of active high school youth (Figure 2.10). The ability to attract teenagers and youth also contributes to membership growth.

Purpose-driven vitality also can be measured by the quality and quantity of financial support that members give a congregation. Size makes a significant difference here. New churches, especially when they are small, report a precarious financial situation, while older, larger congregations, especially in suburbs, feel their financial health is stronger.

At the same time, struggling congregations also suffer from the perceived absence of sufficient volunteers, as if a critical mass is essential for basic program activities (Figure 2.11). All these limitations militate against rural and small town congregations. Yet, almost 60 percent believe that they are vital and a moral beacon in their world.

Figure 2.10
Teens, the Future and the Suburbs

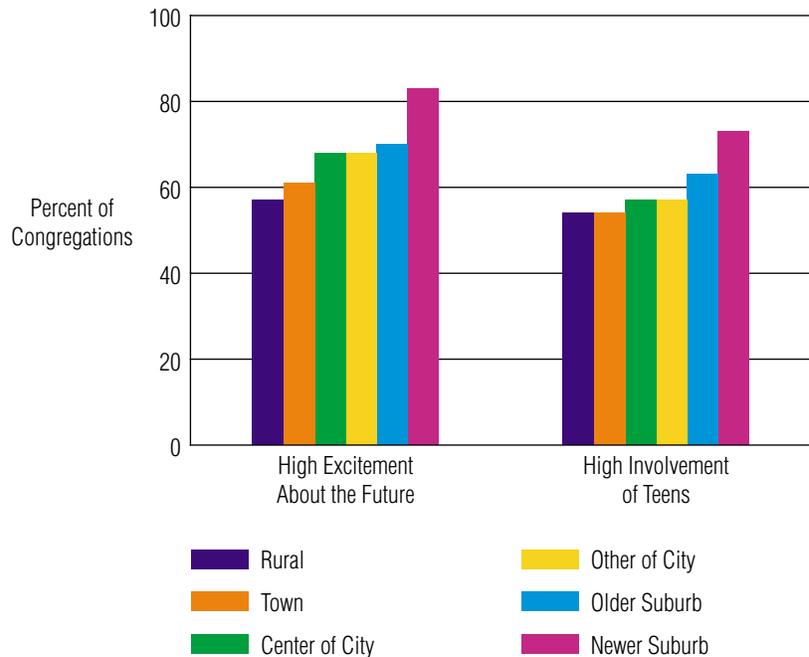
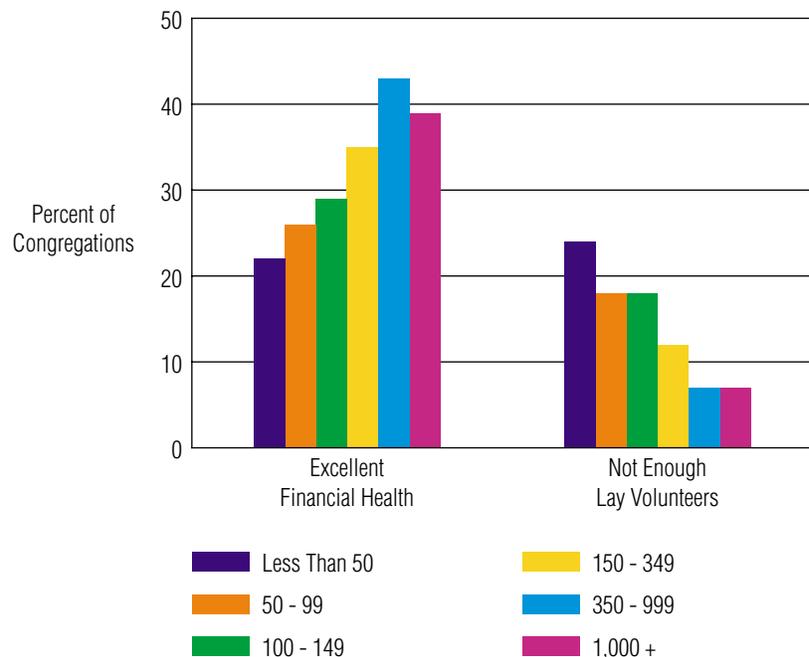


Figure 2.11
Funds and Folks Together



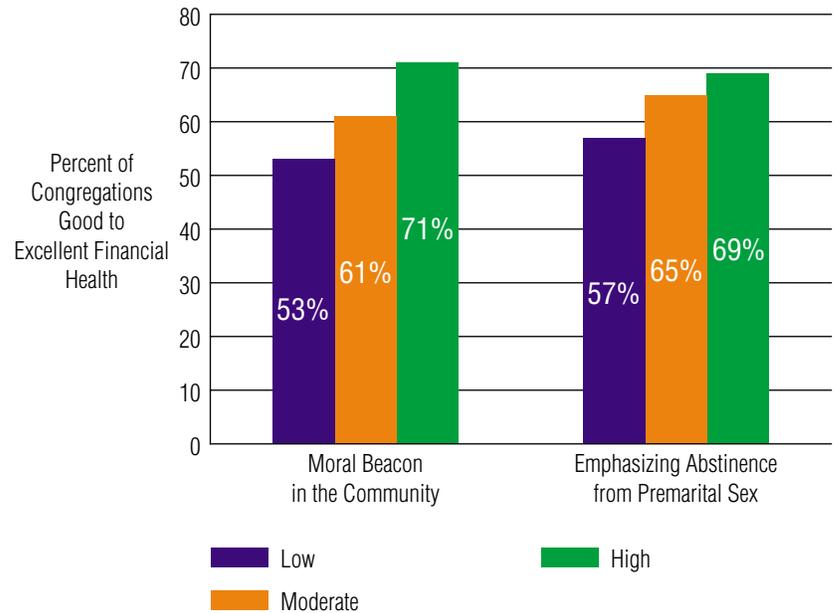
High Moral and Community Standards

Standards of personal morality and public justice offer a third source of cohesion that can be foundational for faith communities.

Moral boundaries make a difference. Two out of three congregations that emphasize personal and public morality also report healthy finances and membership growth (Figure 2.12). Congregations that place less emphasis on these standards are more likely to report plateaued or declining membership.

A large majority of the most vital congregations report that they have a clarity of purpose and explicit member expectations that are strictly enforced. This is especially true among newly organized congregations in Western states. As congregations age, this clarity declines consistently and progressively – suggesting that expectations become more implicit with the institutional aging process.

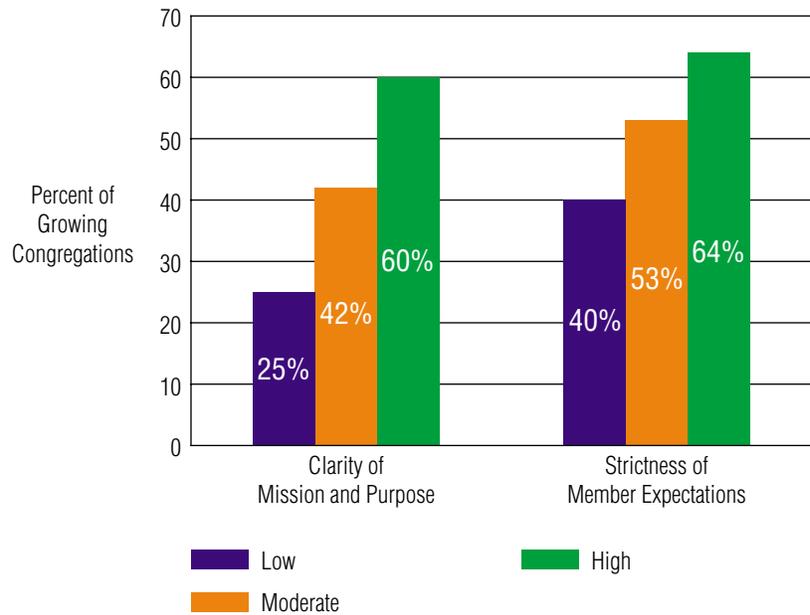
Figure 2.12
Moral Boundaries Make a Financial Difference



Both purpose and strictness are directly related to membership growth and financial health (Figure 2.13). Larger congregations are more likely to be clear about their purpose.

Congregations are more likely to draw moral boundaries if they are located in newer suburbs, towns and rural areas. Congregations in older suburbs and cities were less openly demanding. Larger congregations are more likely to emphasize personal morality, but the claim to be a moral beacon was not related to congregational age or size. Evangelical Protestants, especially in the South, are more likely to establish demands in personal morality and to see themselves as a moral beacon to the community. Liberal Protestants are less likely to express these expectations. Congregations that draw moral boundaries report stronger financial commitment of their members.

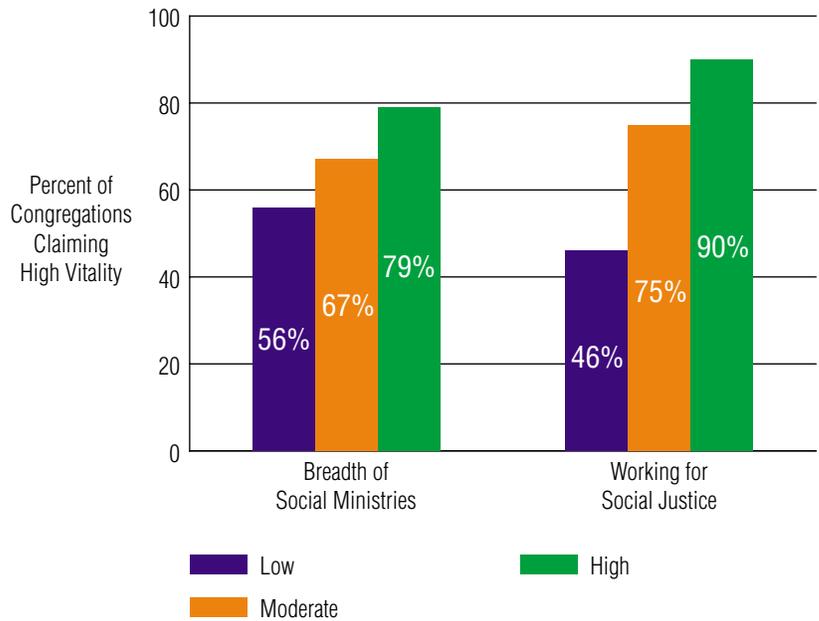
Figure 2.13
Clarity and Strictness Contribute to Growth



Beyond personal morality, some congregations have strong, faith-based standards that enable them to engage their communities (Figure 2.14). They are willing to fight for issues of social justice, and to develop appropriate outreach ministries. Since many are lacking in financial resources, they would seem excellent candidates for government supported “charitable choice” programs of social concern. This pattern of social involvement contributing to congregational growth is sustained across denominational groups, although particular faith communities place special emphasis on different aspects of community needs.

In summary, faith communities gain identity from a common heritage and culture, purposeful work toward a common future and the values they hold for themselves and their communities. These themes provide centers of unity and cohesion.

Figure 2.14
Social Involvement Enhances Vitality



Section 3:

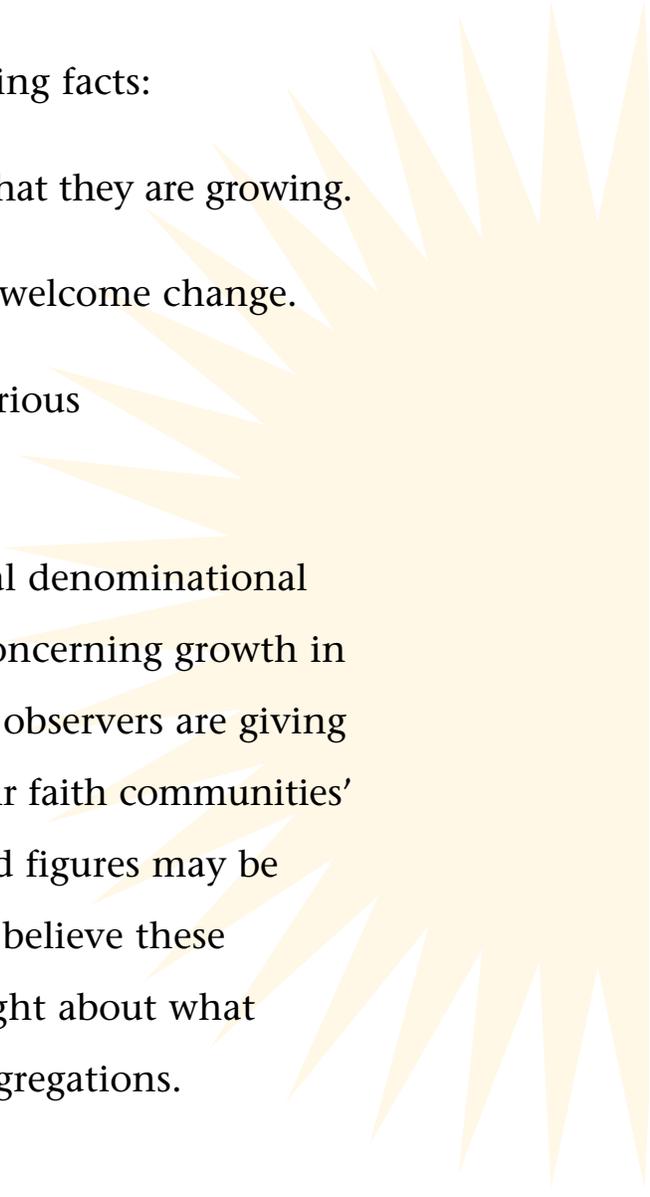
Growth, Change and Conflict



In this section, we discuss three surprising facts:

- Fifty percent of congregations report that they are growing.
- Most congregations report that they welcome change.
- Changes in worship often prompt serious congregational conflict.

Data from other sources (such as annual denominational reports) suggest a slight “halo effect” concerning growth in this report, that is, that congregational observers are giving the most favorable interpretation of their faith communities’ real conditions. Although their reported figures may be slightly – but not greatly – inflated, we believe these observers are providing significant insight about what works, and what does not, in their congregations.



Growth

Fifty one percent of congregations report that they have grown in the previous five years (see Figure 3.1). Although Historically Black Denominations used a somewhat different question, the direction and vitality of their growth is essentially the same.

Congregations grow in different ways. Our data shows that they grow by:

- Cultural affinity, finding “our kind of people”
- Community involvement, keeping in touch
- Organizational focus, vision in action
- Offering both care and discipline for members
- Finding inspiration in worship
- Promotional programs, which may not produce growth but strengthen congregational vitality

Congregations grow in locations where they find like-minded people in the demographics of their communities. New suburban communities especially are favorable to growth of faith communities, where religious participation is supported by family composition, higher educational levels and income, available teenagers and young adults, and a higher percentage of male participants (Figure 3.2). Opposite demographic factors are associated with membership decline, such as lower education, lower income, more elderly, more women, and, for congregations, more lifelong members.

Figure 3.1
Half of Congregations Are Growing in Size

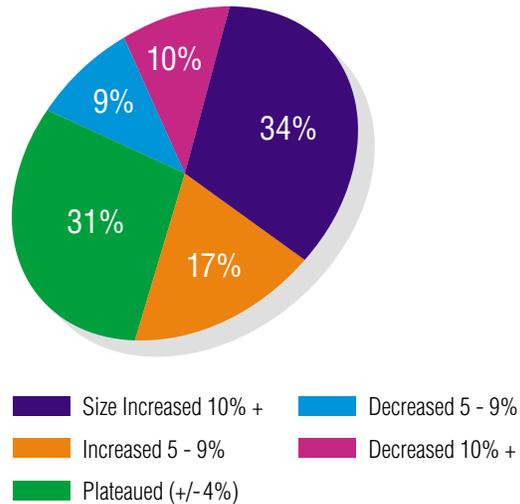
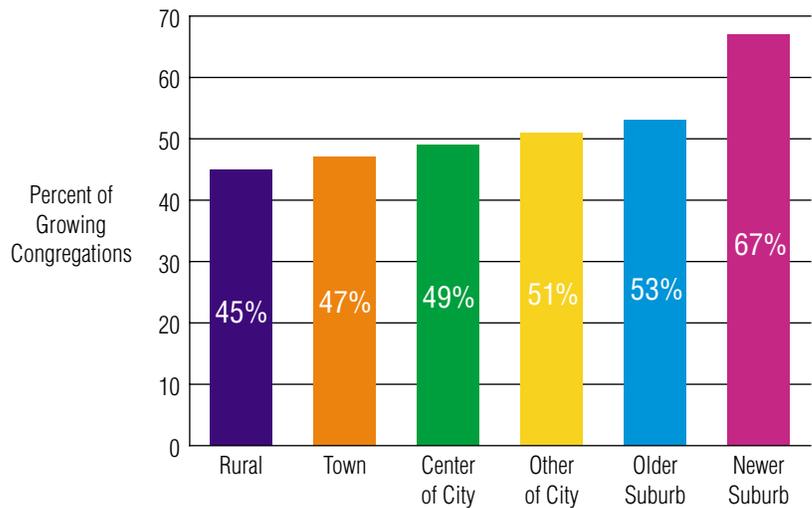


Figure 3.2
Growth Everywhere, Especially in Suburbs



Congregations with high concentrations of families with children are growing – up to a point (Figure 3.3). (Those few congregations with 80 percent or more families with children show markedly less growth.)

Contrary to some published experts, congregations with a strong commitment to social justice and with direct participation in community outreach ministries are more likely to be growing than other congregations (Figure 3.4). This pattern of social involvement contributing to congregational growth is true across all denominational groups. But recently organized growing congregations tend to have fewer outreach ministries than older growing congregations that are firmly established. It takes these new congregations time to mobilize their outreach.

Figure 3.3
Family Based Congregations Sustain Member Growth

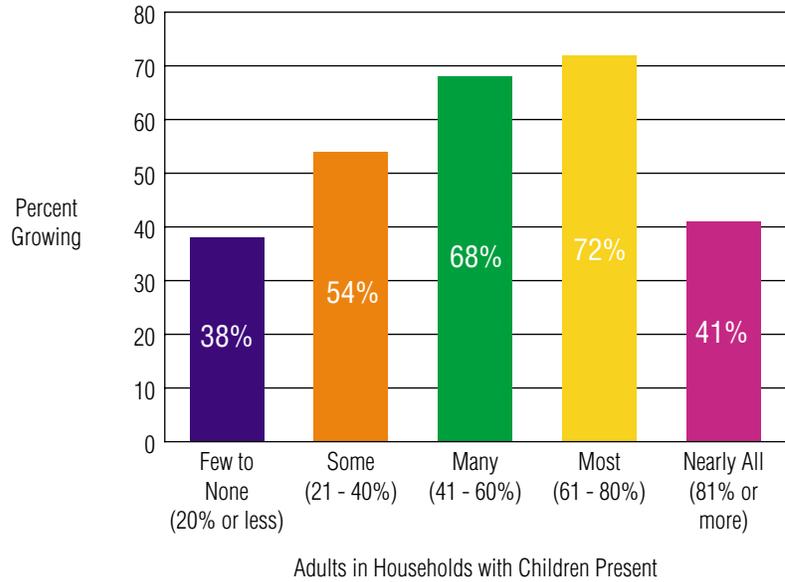
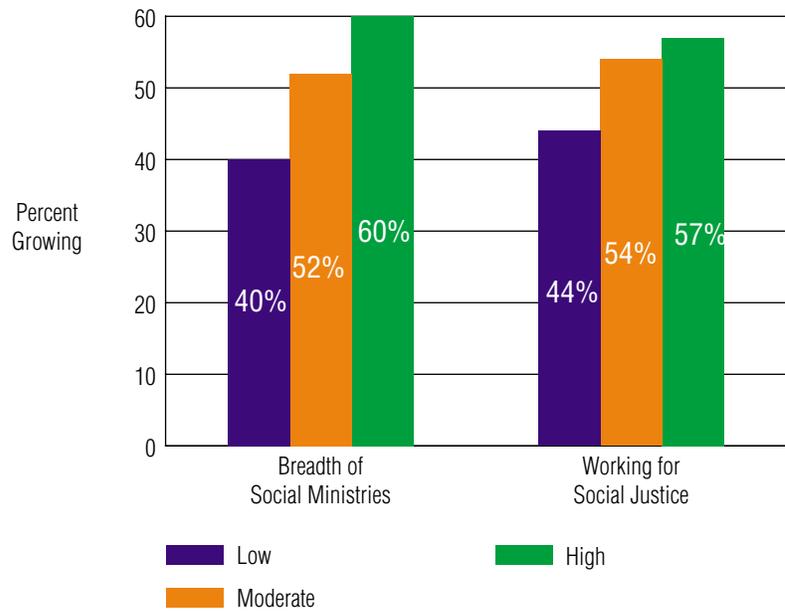


Figure 3.4
Community Outreach Contributes to Growth



Growing congregations, as noted earlier, reflect a combination of factors that include denominational loyalty, congregational vitality, confidence in the future, and serving as a moral beacon to the community. Additionally, both a clear sense of mission and a crisp organizational style have a powerful, positive influence on the capacity of congregations to attract and sustain new members (Figure 3.5).

A combined emphasis on discipline and personal relationships contributes to member growth (Figure 3.6). The bonding of members into the group also is essential in the character of growing congregations. Congregational leaders must show that they know and care about their members.

Figure 3.5
Focused Congregations Grow

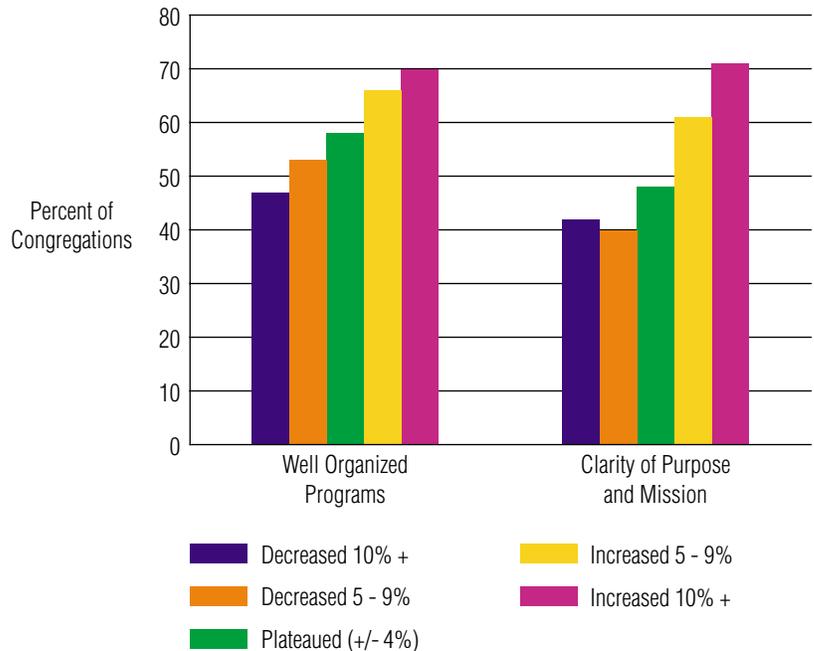
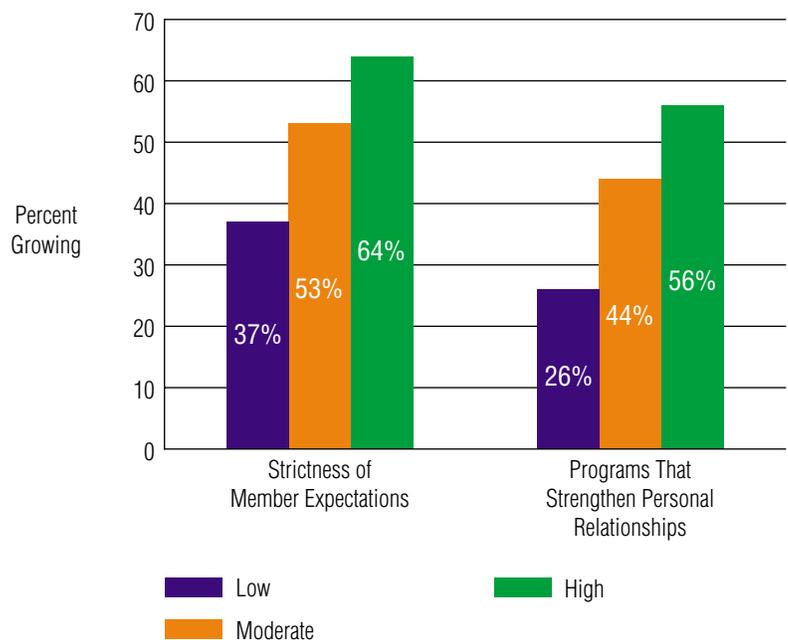


Figure 3.6
Tough Love Works Too



Uplifting worship and spiritual nurture make a genuine contribution to congregational growth in every denominational group (Figure 3.7). In a later section on worship, we will learn that the factors that contribute to a satisfying worship experience are significantly different among faith groups and among generations. Protestant groups that have emphasized contemporary worship and electronic musical instruments, rather than traditional forms, show a dramatic increase in their appeal to new members, for example (Figure 3.8).

Of the ten promotional programs listed in the survey, the largest majority of congregations report that they most frequently engage in clergy calling on prospects, laity calling on prospects, encouraging members to witness to others about their own faith, and using newspaper ads. Larger congregations are more likely to use mailings and mass media, city and suburban congregations lean toward revivals and big events, and Evangelical Protestant churches are more likely to be engaged in evangelical campaigns.

Figure 3.7
Good Worship Gives Growth

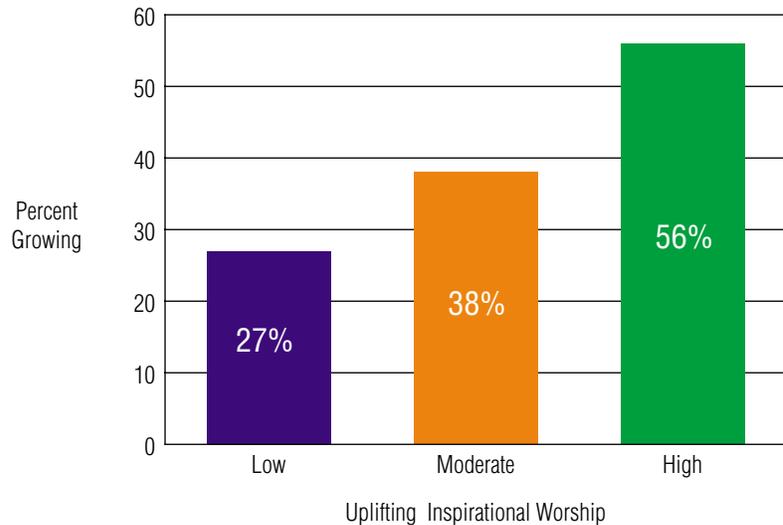
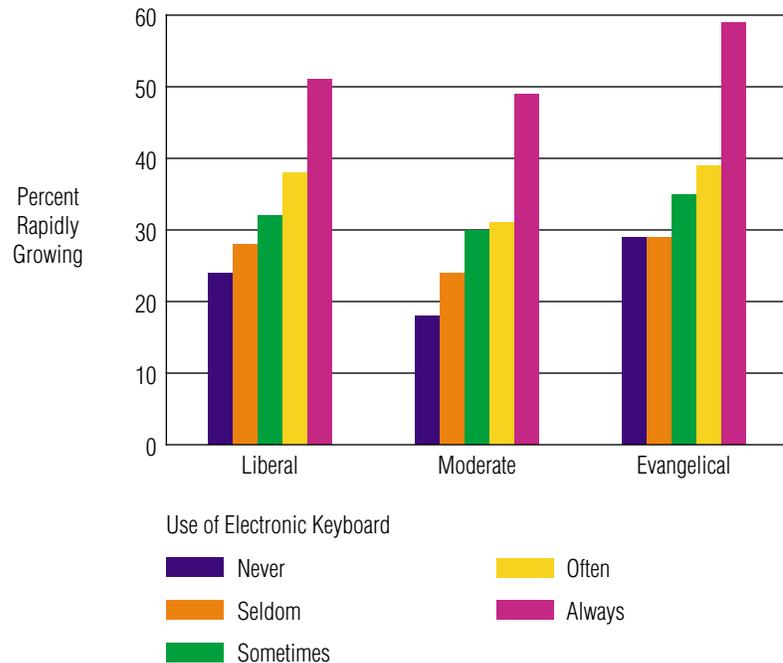


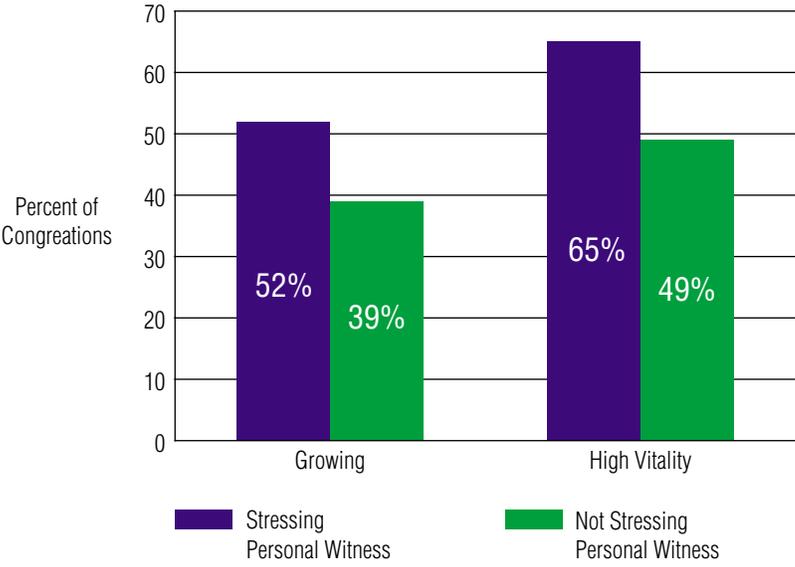
Figure 3.8
Contemporary Worship Supports Protestant Church Growth



P.T Barnum, the famous circus entrepreneur (but not remembered for his religious zeal), admitted that he knew that at least half of his advertising was wasted, but he did not know which half. The results of this survey suggest a similar conclusion. Although selected promotional programs apparently are effective for various faith groups in particular communities, in the aggregate none of the various programs for promoting congregational growth appear more than marginally effective. Thus it is difficult to pinpoint which promotional activities are likely to result in congregational growth

However, participation in promotional programs often impacts congregational vitality more than growth. That is, the major impact of promotional programs is typically their positive effect on the energy and commitment of members. For example, the use of several promotional programs – radio advertising, evangelistic campaigns, personal witness, revivals and big events – is directly associated with congregations reporting high vitality (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9
Promotional Efforts Strengthen
Vitality More Than They Impact Growth



Change

Larger congregations are more likely than others to welcome change (Figure 3.10), especially if they are Evangelical and located in growing suburban areas or Western states. *(Note: The Historically Black and Roman Catholic denominations did not ask the change questions.)* Smaller and declining congregations, especially in towns and rural areas, do not feel as receptive to innovation.

Congregational age also makes a difference (Figure 3.11). Older congregations have more established patterns, and seem less willing or able to make changes, while more recently organized congregations appear more responsive to change.

Figure 3.10
Increased Size Enhances Openness to Innovation

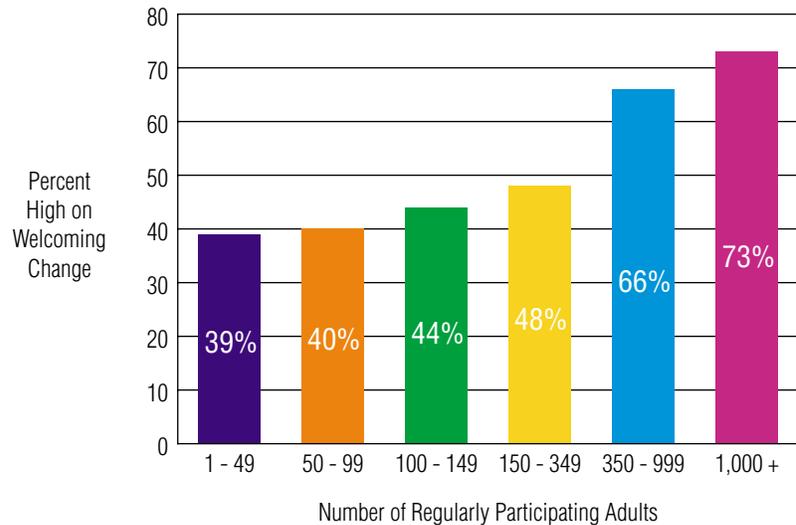
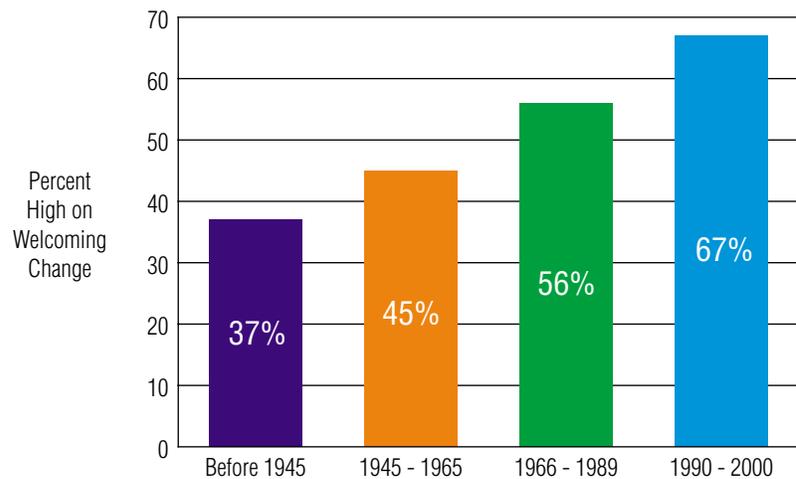


Figure 3.11
Congregational Age Inhibits Openness to Innovation



Change happens when congregations receive new members. All groups report an acceptance of these new members. But Historically Black churches report more acceptance than other Christian groups. And acceptance of new members is rated even more highly among some World religions (Bahá'is, Mormon, and Muslim), which include faith groups that are growing at an exceptionally rapid rate (Figure 3.12).

Location makes a major difference as well. Congregations in suburbs are more likely to be growing, while those in rural areas are apt to be losing members, regardless of their openness to change or willingness to accept new members.

Where populations make it possible, change for many congregations also means an effort to increase their racial/ethnic diversity. Congregations most committed to increasing diversity are in the centers of metropolitan areas, while faith communities least committed to increasing their racial-ethnic diversity are located in rural areas, villages and towns, where the opportunities are fewer (Figure 3.13). By denomination, the Catholics report the highest level of effort to increase the inclusiveness of their congregations.

Figure 3.12
Assimilating Others Varies by Denominational Group

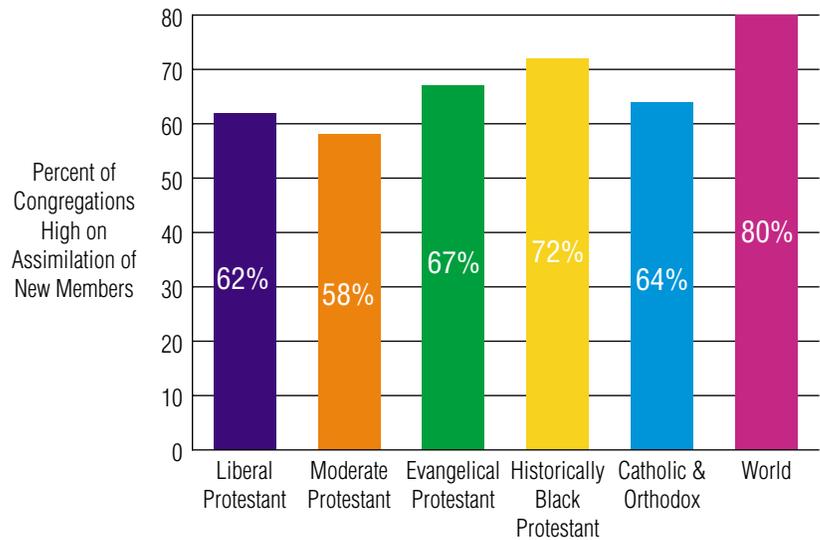
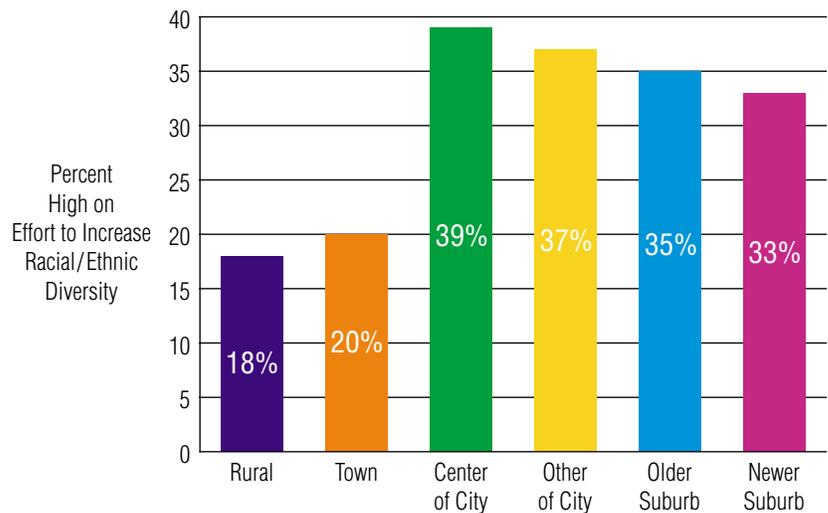


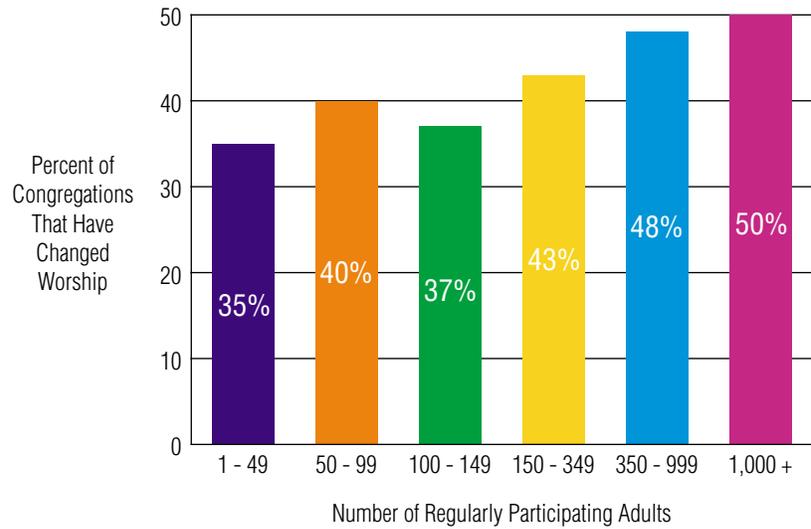
Figure 3.13
Opportunity Shapes Attitudes



Changes in congregational worship, like growth, are associated with size and location, apparently as congregations respond to changing community and cultural conditions.

Congregations are more likely to have changed their worship in the past five years if they are larger, older and located in metropolitan areas (Figure 3.14). Evangelicals are the most likely to have changed worship, while Liberal Protestants are the least likely. Congregational change in worship reflects a major strategy by congregations to adapt to socially transitional communities.

Figure 3.14
Congregations Adapt or Decline



Conflict

This study provides an unusually comprehensive window on the worship expressions of faith communities that were organized in different generations during the past century. Although comparable Roman Catholic and Historically Black denominational data are missing, we believe that worship particularly reflects generational trends and changing emphases transcend denominational differences in the religious landscape of the United States.

Congregations, like children, are as much a product of their generation as they are a result of their theological parents. Generations make a difference. Worship styles dramatically reflect the decade when the congregation was organized. That is, congregations that were organized more recently show progressively different emphases in worship from those organized in three previous historical periods. They report differences in such practices as using creeds and statements of faith, lighting candles or playing the piano or organ in worship (Figures 3.15a - 3.15c).

Generational change has led to a decline in traditional practices of worship and the emergence of new patterns, especially in musical expression. These include using the electronic keyboard, electric guitar or other more contemporary instruments.

Old Traditions in Tension with New Worship Expression

Figure 3.15a

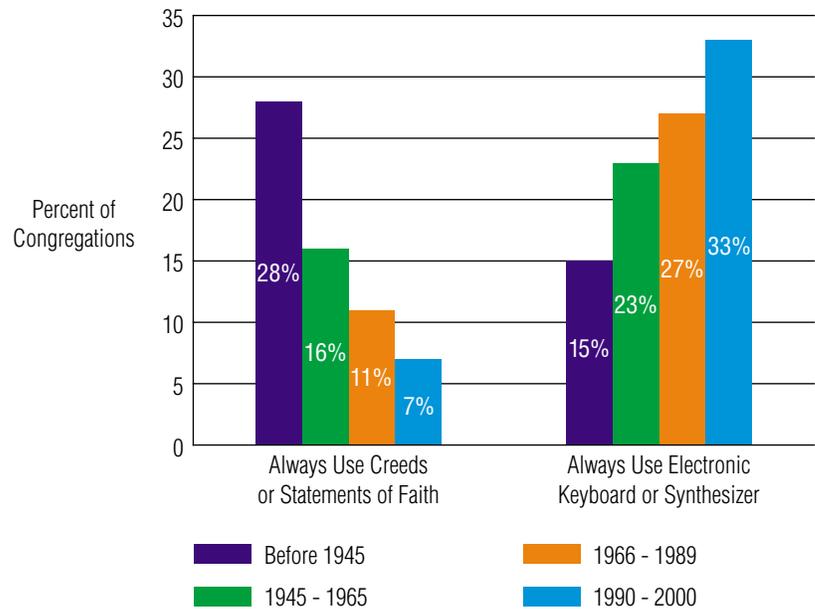


Figure 3.15b

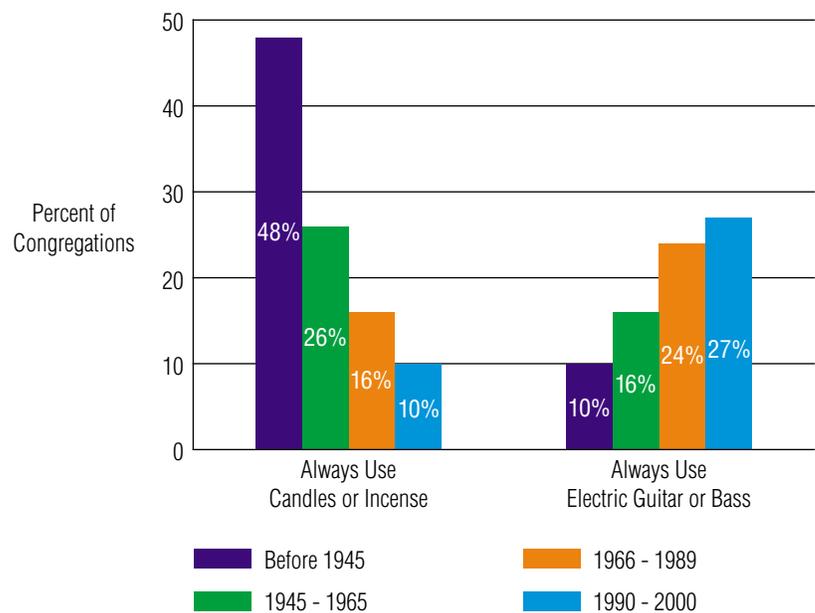
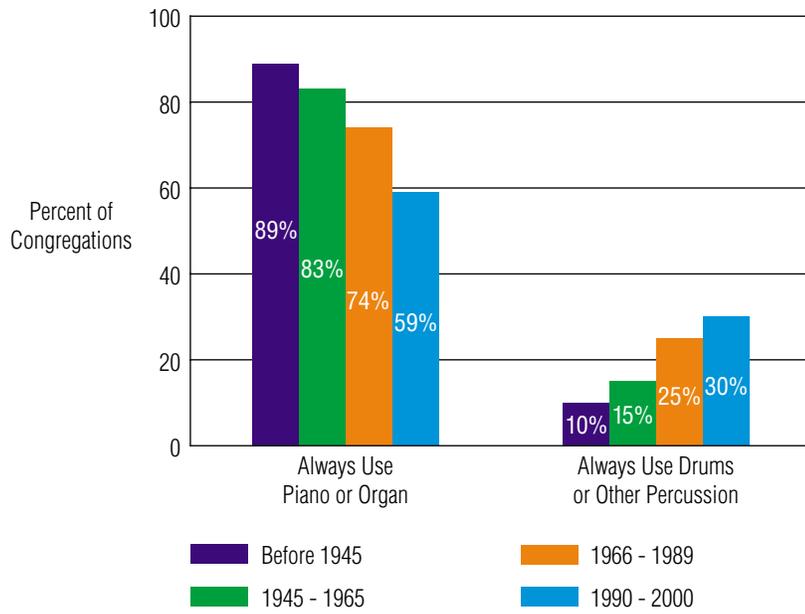
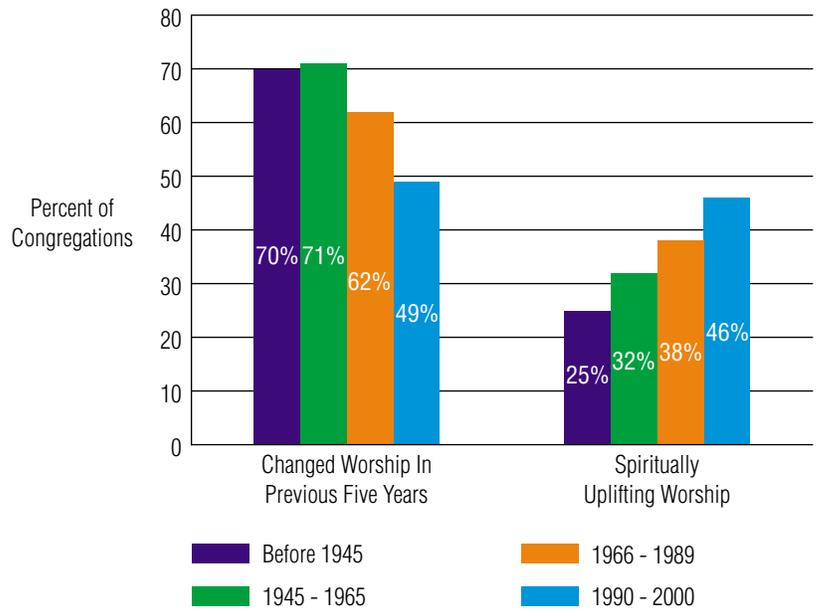


Figure 3.15c



Congregational age directly influences the rating of worship as spiritually uplifting. Older congregations are more likely to have changed their worship in the past five years (Figure 3.16), perhaps because the congregations more recently formed feel that their worship is already contemporary. At the same time, more recently formed congregations are more willing to rate the spiritual uplift of their worship as very high, while earlier generations are somewhat more reserved. Thus, younger congregations think their worship is more spiritually uplifting, while older congregations are more willing to change. Change has a positive effect on these older congregations. Those older congregations that make changes are more likely to rate their worship as more spiritually uplifting.

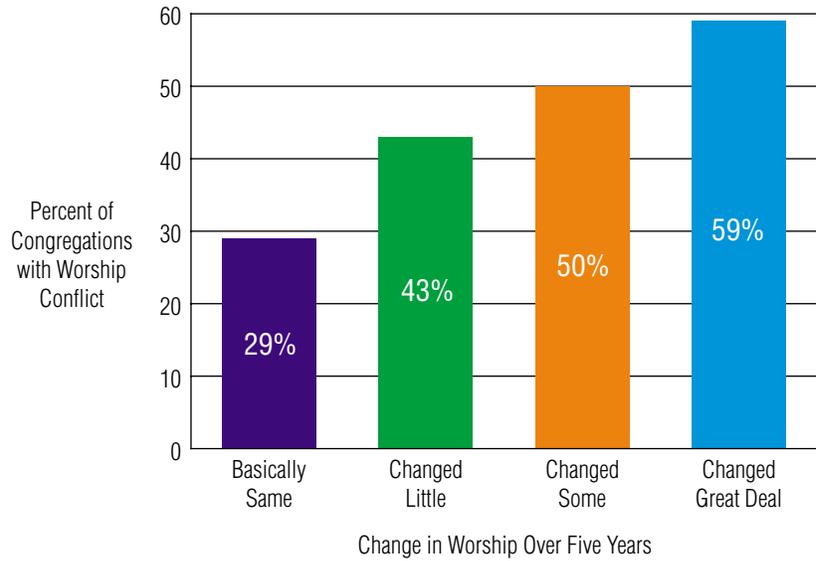
Figure 3.16
Older Congregations More Likely to Change Worship



But the process of change may be difficult for leaders and disruptive to the congregation (Figure 3.17).

The impact of change in contemporary worship is clear throughout this report. Changes in worship patterns, especially in using new instruments (electric guitar and electronic keyboard, for example) have a strong, positive association with congregational vitality, member growth, financial stability and other signs of a healthy congregation. Although we cannot tell if these particular symbols of change will be a passing fad or enduring aspect of worship, they point to a dynamic of change to which some congregations are responding.

Figure 3.17
Changing Worship Sparks Conflict

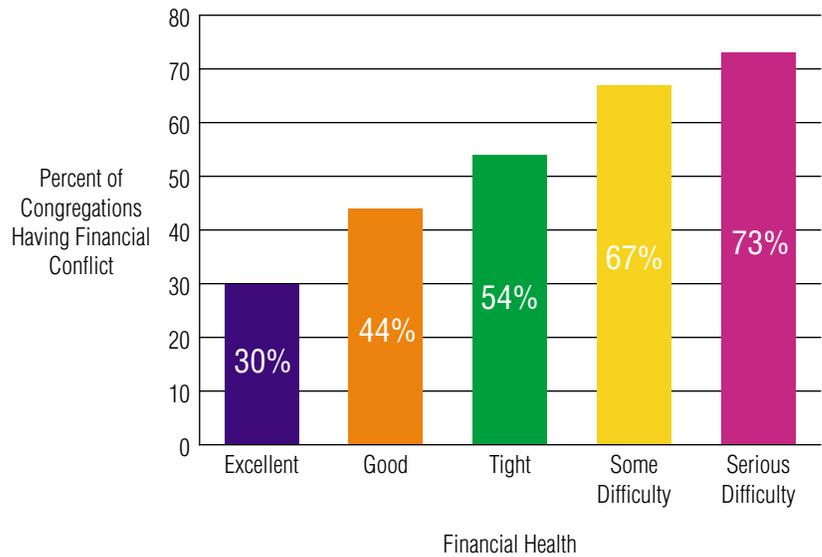


But change does not come without the emotional cost of conflict. The tensions around change are compounded when congregations are faced with dwindling financial resources. Congregations report an increase in conflict as their resources become more limited (Figure 3.18). Or perhaps their resources become more limited because they engage in conflict.

Conflicts around worship are more likely to occur in center city congregations, where social diversity is higher and finances are less available. Conflicts also are more evident in congregations located in new suburban areas, where the funding may not be as limited (depending on congregational size and age) but the pressures to reach contemporary audiences are even stronger.

In summary, growth, change and conflict are interrelated. Congregations see themselves as growing by cultural heritage, by intentional and focused sense of mission and by affirming standards of personal morality and social justice. They see themselves as willing to change, especially where they can imagine the alternatives. They are aware that the process of change may bring significant conflict. We suspect that conflict may serve as a natural part of the process that makes change and growth more possible.

Figure 3.18
Conflict Increases with Financial Crises

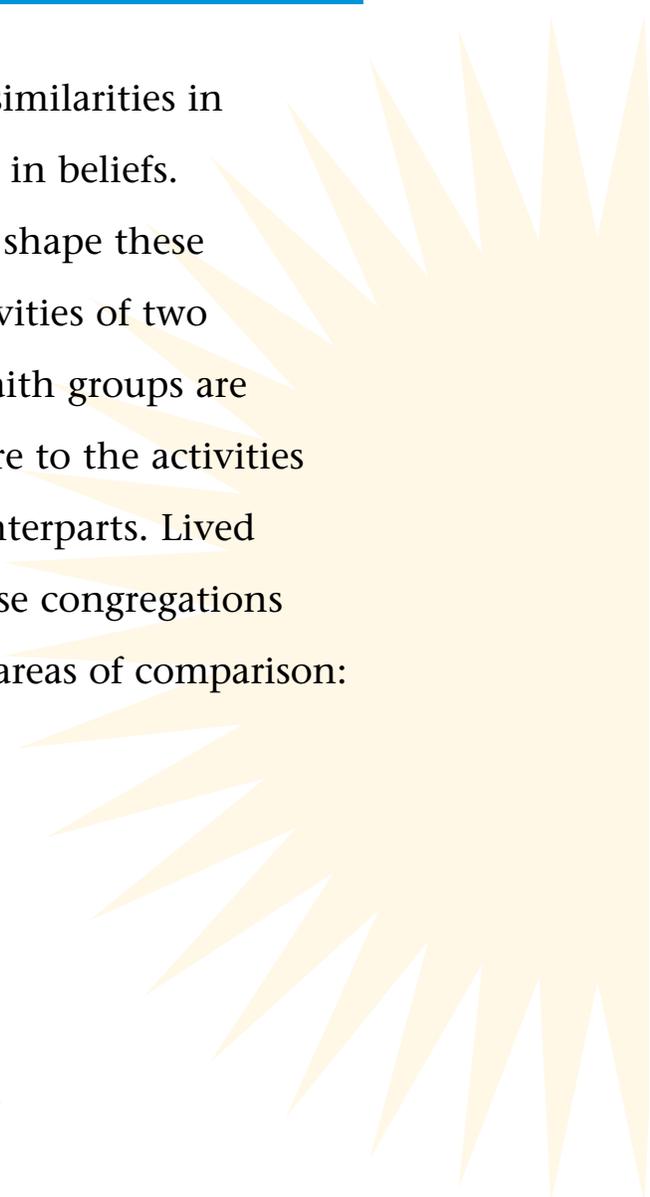


Section 4:

Congregational Life



Many congregations show remarkable similarities in their activities, despite wide differences in beliefs. Congregational size and location often shape these similarities. Thus, for example, the activities of two small rural congregations of different faith groups are more similar to each other than they are to the activities of their suburban denominational counterparts. Lived religion in local communities gives these congregations their enduring strengths. We note four areas of comparison:

- Worship and Spiritual Nurture
 - Congregational Activities
 - Community Outreach
 - Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations
- 

Worship and Spiritual Nurture

Worship is a primary task of congregations, reflecting the unique character of individual congregations.

Congregations provide a vast array of alternative approaches in worship (see Figure 4.1).

Among the different worship emphases and approaches, however, the vast majority of participating congregations reports a common emphasis on “God’s love and care” and on relating this to “practical advice for daily life.” Although the ritual, leadership, content, energy and participation is vastly different among these groups, the great majority feel that their worship is spiritually uplifting and nurtures their spiritual growth.

We already noted that the introduction of new musical instruments marked one aspect of change in congregations organized since 1945. More than merely new styles of musical presentation, these new musical styles are accompanied by a profound shift in the location of religious authority (Figure 4.2). The authority of scripture remains high for all groups. But among the congregations that use electronic instruments, there also is a radical increase in the authority of the Holy Spirit, and a dramatic decrease in the emphasis on creeds and human reason. In contrast, congregations that put a priority on denominational heritage place a higher authority in historic creeds, doctrines and tradition. The immediacy of the Holy Spirit seems parallel to contemporary worship practices such as use of electronic instruments.

Figure 4.1
Worship Elements

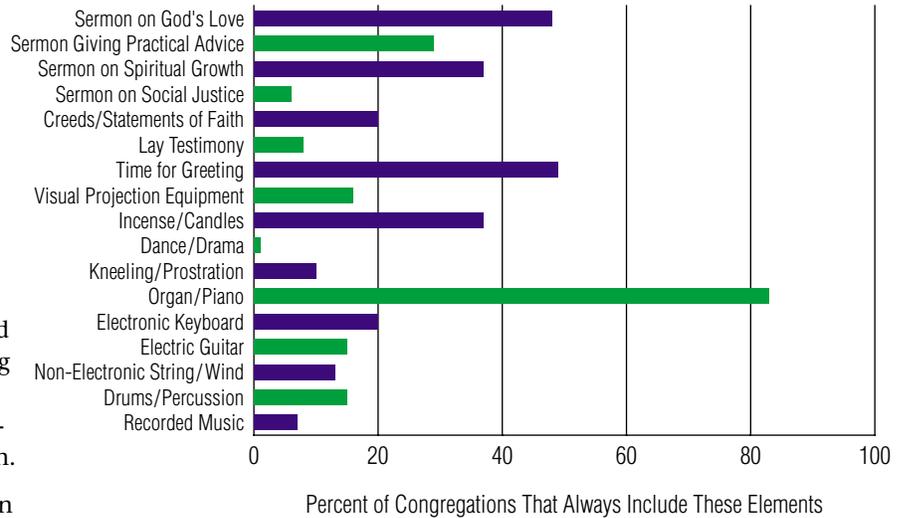
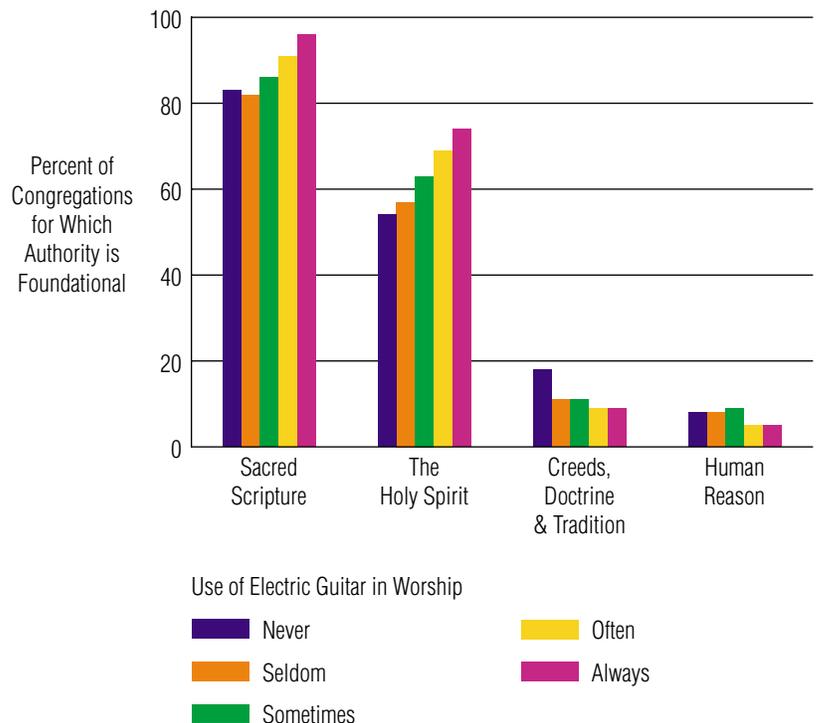
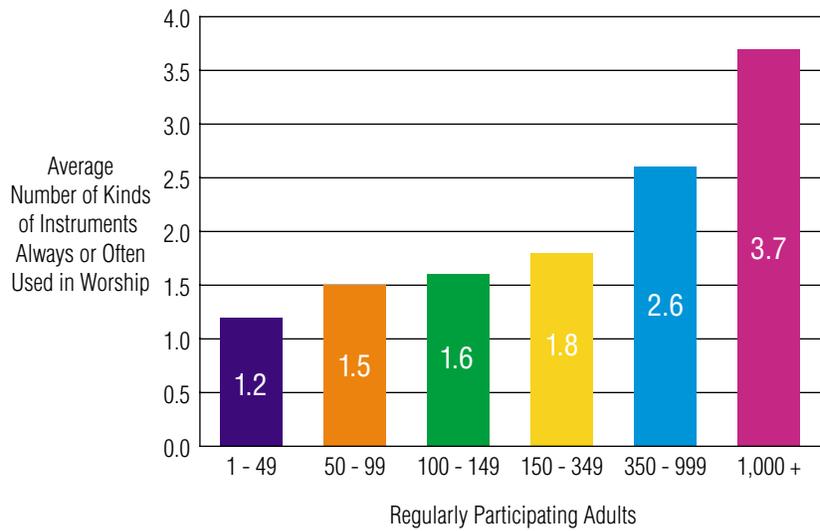


Figure 4.2
Relationship of Sources of Religious Authority to Contemporary Worship



Larger congregations of every faith group use a broad array of alternatives to provide their members with a rich diet of music and other energizing worship experiences (Figure 4.3). Growth occurs when this diversity of nurturing worship accompanies good organization, caring for members and clear vision.

Figure 4.3
Diversity of Worship Music
Increases with Size



Congregations, regardless of size, find strength by encouraging particular religious values and home practices among their members (Figure 4.4). Although with different meanings and levels of importance, these values are broadly practiced among distinctively different groups. The majority of congregations, for example, encourage personal and family devotions – with different content. Keeping the Sabbath has a strong association with religious commitment, even though it is a different day of the week – Friday, Saturday or Sunday – for different faith groups. The extent to which a congregation emphasizes keeping the Sabbath varies dramatically by faith group (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.4
Practices of the Home and Heart

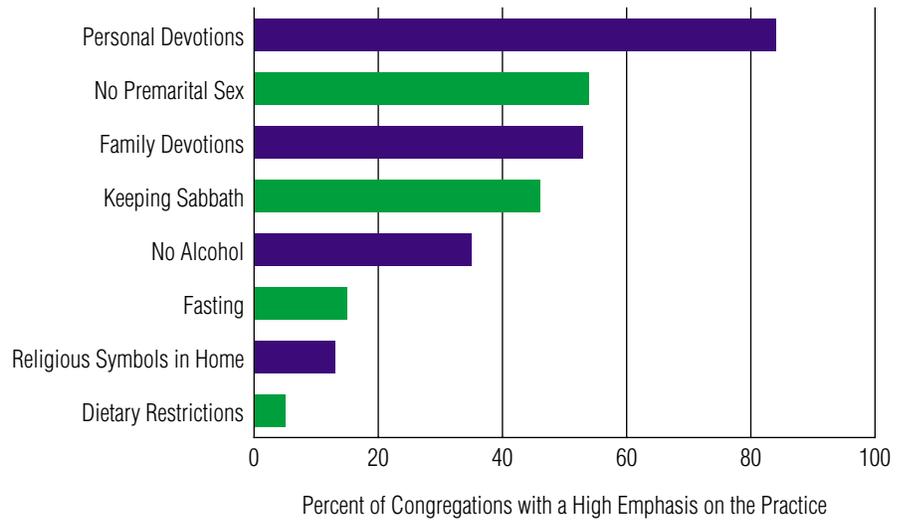
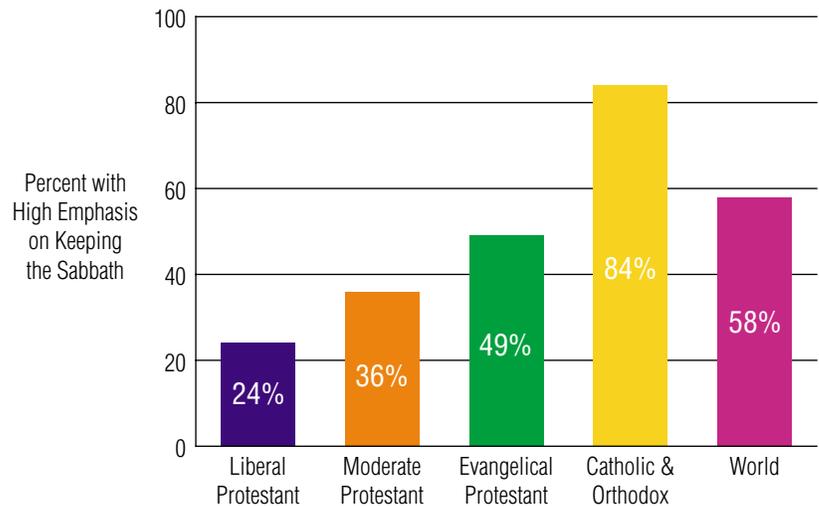


Figure 4.5
Preserving the Sabbath



Congregational Activities

In addition to worship, the common member-oriented program activities of congregations have remarkable similarities. Programs to encourage spiritual nurture (such as education, Scripture study, prayer and meditation) are most common, while programs for social and personal enrichment (self help, book/issue discussions, sports teams) are less frequent, but not unimportant (Figure 4.6).

Although the content may be different, the programs serve a few, commonly held goals: namely, spiritual growth for the members, artistic expression of the faith and support for teenagers, young adults and parents/families. Providing members the opportunity for community service – reported by 85 percent of the congregations – apparently expresses both spiritual compassion and social concern. Fewer than half the congregations reported programs on self-development, sports, and physical fitness.

Denominations show distinctive patterns that reflect their religious and social heritage. For example:

- Catholic/Orthodox congregations more frequently sponsor programs of theological or doctrinal training, spiritual retreats and programs for young adults and marriage enrichment.
- Historically Black churches are more likely to emphasize prayer groups and opportunities for community service.
- Liberal and Moderate Protestants more distinctively support opportunities for community services and the arts.
- Evangelical Protestants are high in support of prayer groups.

Figure 4.6
Congregational Activities

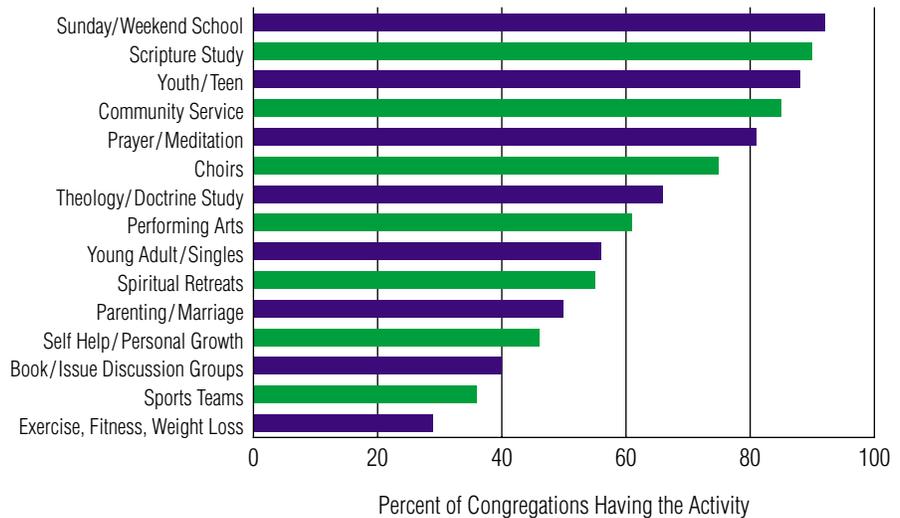
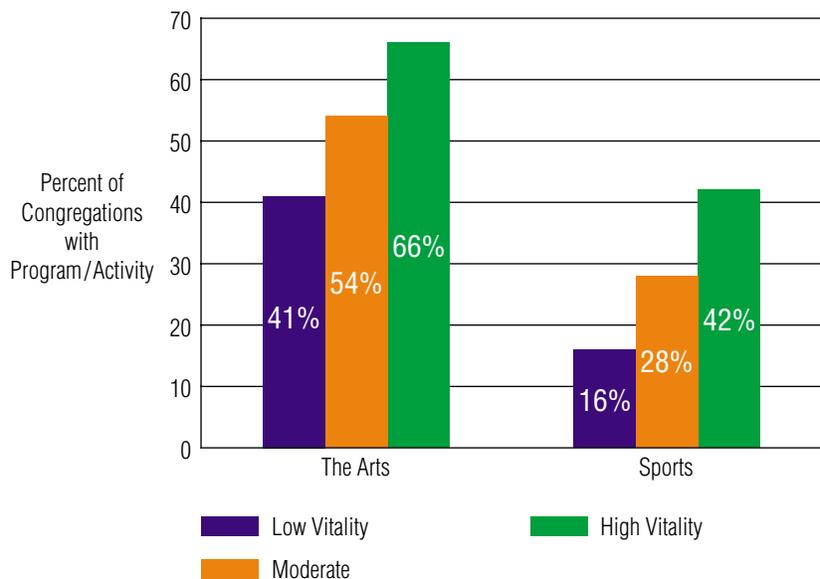


Figure 4.7
Vital Congregations Encourage Both Body and Spirit



Congregations reporting high vitality sponsor more programs for spiritual nurture. In fact, congregations with higher scores on vitality also are more likely to sponsor prayer groups, retreats, and parent/marriage enrichment programs – which in turn can escalate the feelings of congregational vitality. But this kind of energy is not limited to spiritual nurture. These same congregations are more likely to support all sorts of artistic and even athletic activities (Figure 4.7).

In developing member-oriented programs, size (along with community location) makes the most significant difference (Figure 4.8). While Sunday School (or equivalent), Scripture study and prayer groups are the most universal programs (over 80 percent even among the smallest congregations), other programs for spiritual development seem to require a minimum critical mass of participants, funding and building space to sustain the activity. Larger congregations, therefore, have the option of developing a much broader range of programs (for example, arts, music, and drama) (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.8
Programs/Activities in Theology and Spiritual Retreats by Size

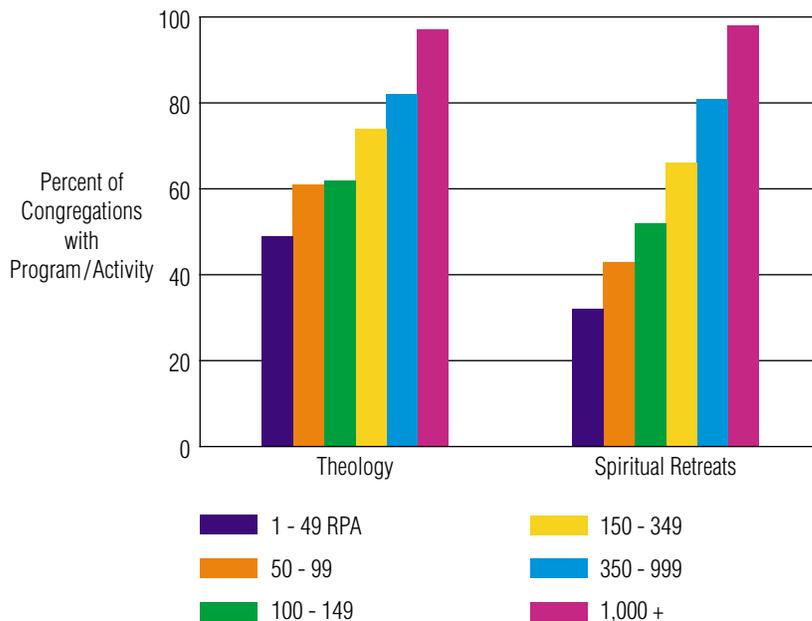
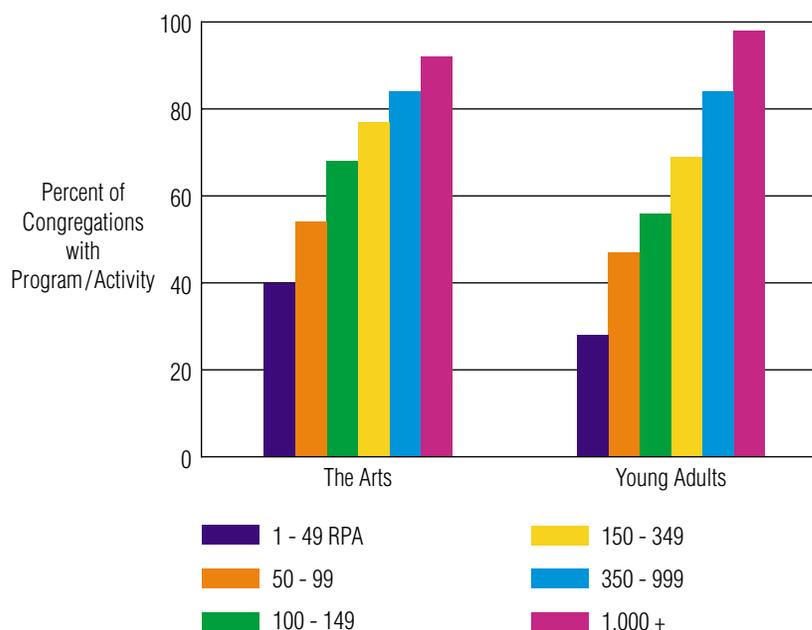


Figure 4.9
Programs/Activities in the Arts and for Young Adults by Size



The breadth of programs in which a congregation is involved is directly related to congregational wealth and resources, human and material (Figure 4.10). Center city churches rival the new suburban congregations in the breadth of programs they offer, while a narrower range of programs are offered by congregations in rural and town settings.

Congregations with the broadest offerings of programs report greater vitality among their members. This combination of program choices and congregational vitality appears to have the effect of attracting new members to the congregation. Thus growth is associated with breadth of programs overall. More programs appear to help congregations grow, which is an option more available to larger congregations. Figure 4.11 illustrates these points.

Figure 4.10
Programs Reflect Resources

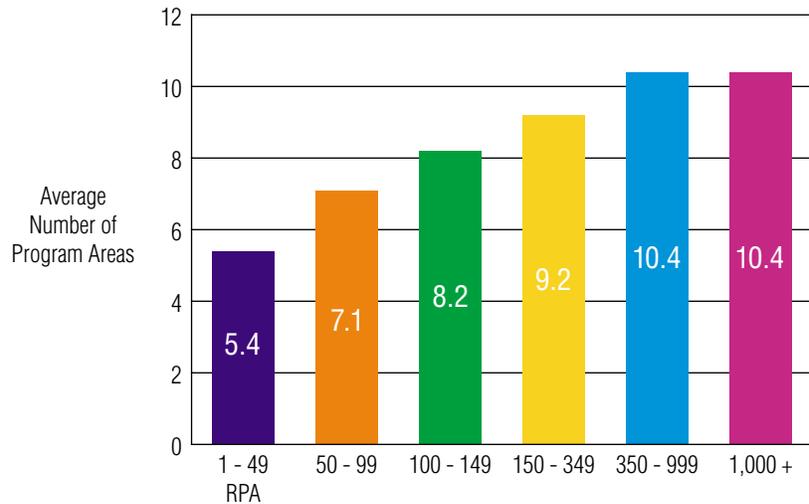
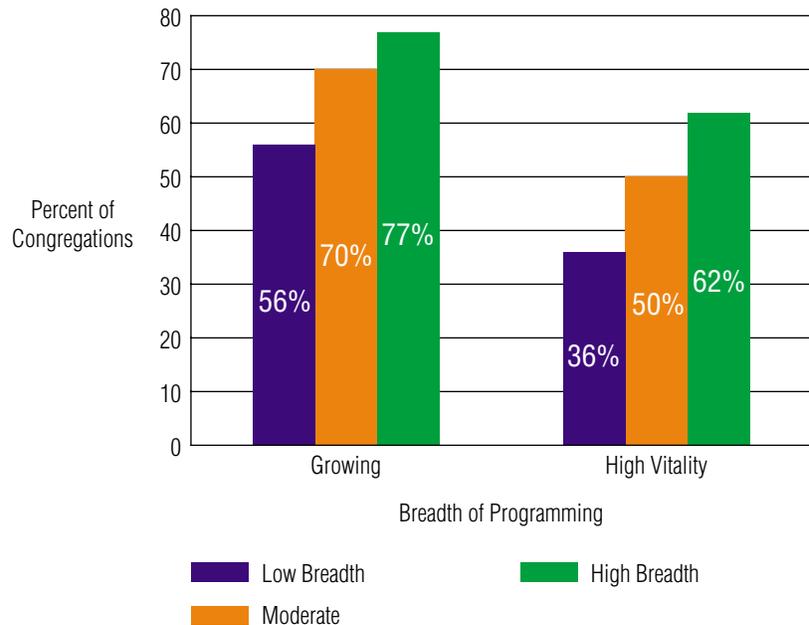


Figure 4.11
Programs Strengthen Vitality and Produce Resources



Community Outreach

Congregations develop a variety of ways to assist people in times of special need, sometimes helping their own members, but also reaching out to help others in their communities. These include services that congregations provide directly, and outreach programs that they share with other congregations and faith-based agencies (Figure 4.12).

(Note: Historically Black Denominations are included in the overview, but not in data about location.)

Congregational outreach programs provide a national, personal network of human services extending to virtually every community (Figure 4.13). More than two out of three congregations reports sponsoring or supporting a thrift shop, for example, and more than one out of three are involved in tutoring. Their response would suggest more than 200,000 congregations supporting thrift shops and more than 120,000 congregations helping to tutor children and youth nationwide. Even if we modify these projections by assuming that about a third of these congregations combine with others to provide shared services, the contribution to the welfare of communities is far greater than many estimates suggest.

Figure 4.12
Social Outreach Programs

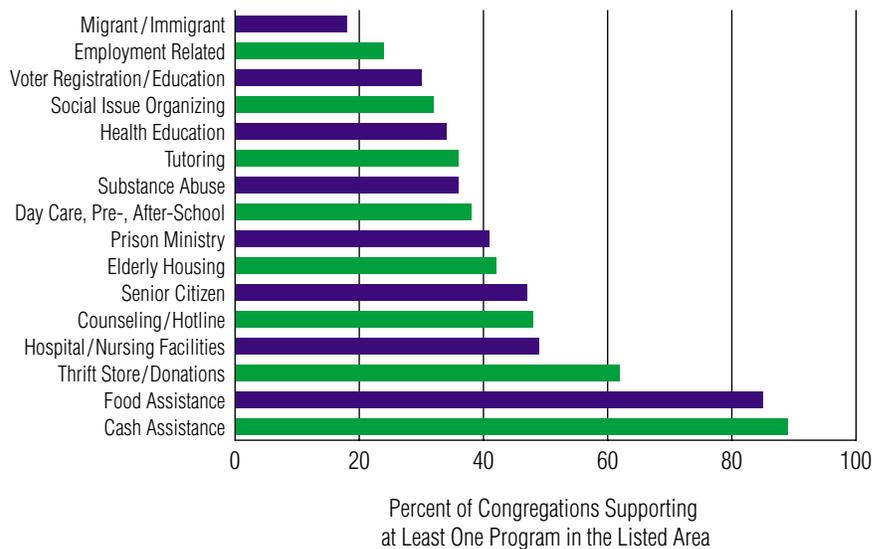
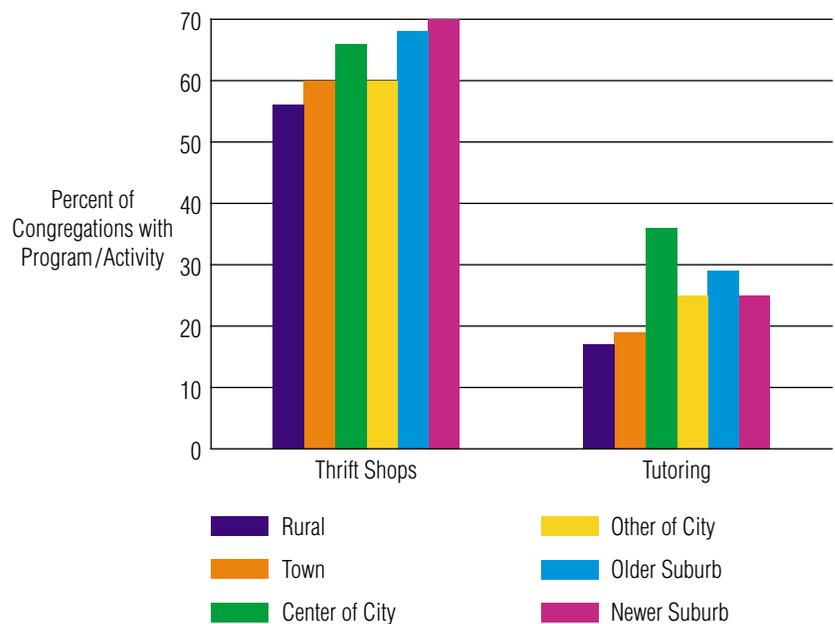


Figure 4.13
Congregational Ministries
in Every Corner of the Country



Some outreach activities, like day care and health clinics, are well advertised and many are required to meet government standards (Figure 4.14). At the same time the majority of these human services are provided less formally in congregational facilities using local staff and lay volunteers, frequently at minimal or no cost to the public or the recipient. These programs often are located in remote or impoverished communities, where other services are absent or would be more expensive than the recipient can afford.

Congregations typically are approached for crisis care. Congregations most frequently provide services for individuals and families in emergency situations – cash, food, clothing and shelter. Faith communities are often the places where members share their moments of crisis and despair. These congregations also serve as the beacons of hope that strangers approach as a last resort, presenting needs that often push congregations to organize new forms of service and social justice.

Outreach ministries receive a major commitment of energy and other resources. Listed by 85 percent of congregations as one of their member-oriented activities, providing opportunities for community service appears more frequently than prayer groups, choirs, and theological study programs. Because of the importance given to this commitment to community, we may infer that, for many participants, community outreach is as much an expression of faith as participation in prayer groups, liturgical practice or doctrinal study. Congregations working for social justice and with a broad array of outreach ministries are more likely to express vitality (Figure 4.15).

Figure 4.14
Faith Based Ministries with Government Connections

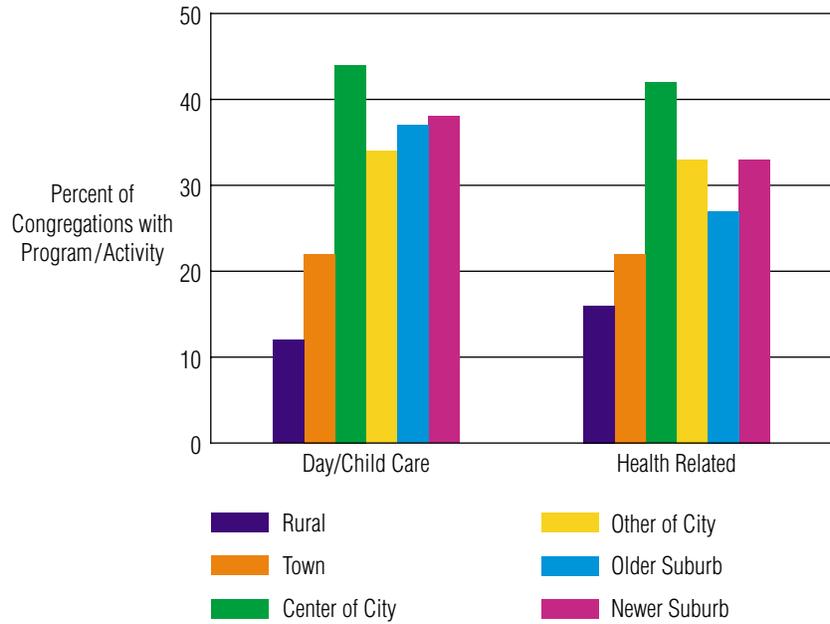
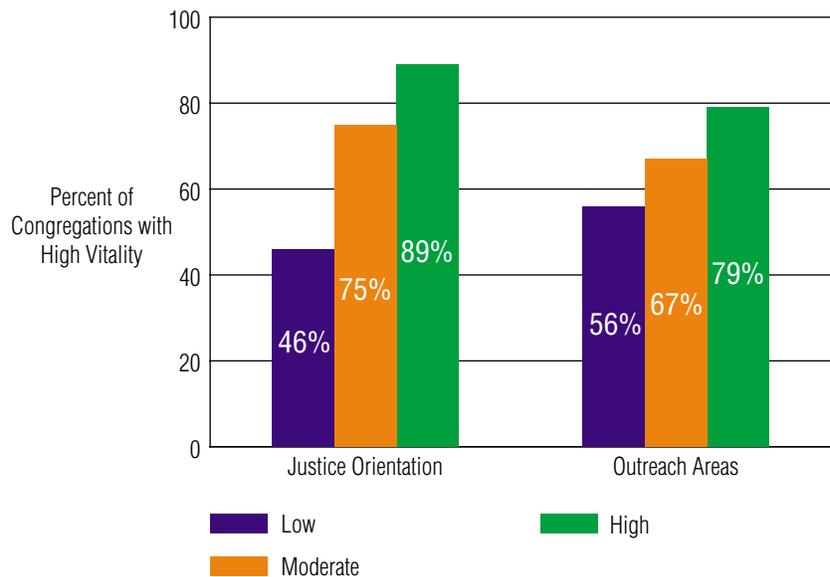


Figure 4.15
Vital Congregations Show Justice and Compassion



Congregational size has the predictable effect on social ministries, with larger congregations generating more programs and speaking to more issues. Perhaps surprisingly, older congregations do not differ from more recently organized groups in the number or kinds of social ministries (except that the most recently organized congregations are less likely to be involved).

Since community ministries are designed to respond to community needs, location of the congregation has a dominating effect on developing particular ministries. Congregations in the center city are clearly more involved in supporting social ministry programs (Figure 4.16), while rural areas show a lower level of program response. Support for soup kitchens in the new suburban areas seems surprising, and probably reflects the frequency of volunteering for soup kitchens from suburban congregations to other parts of the metropolitan area, thereby providing their members opportunities to enact their faith in service.

Although the majority of congregations develops resources to respond to basic human needs in emergency situations, denominational preferences emerge around particular ministries. The accompanying chart, showing the total number of programs supported by each denominational group, reflects both the faith commitments of their congregations and their location in communities of need (Figure 4.17).

Figure 4.16
Congregational Ministries Reflect Community Needs

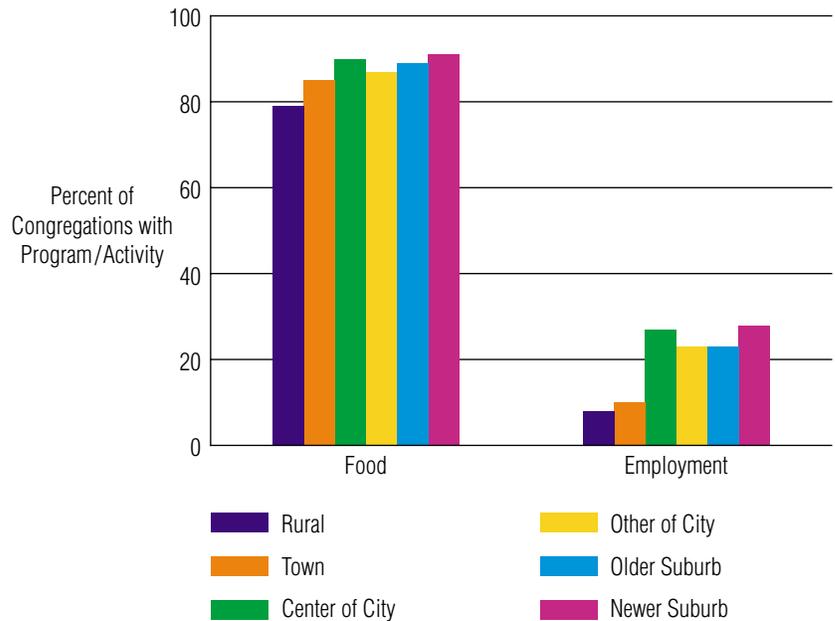
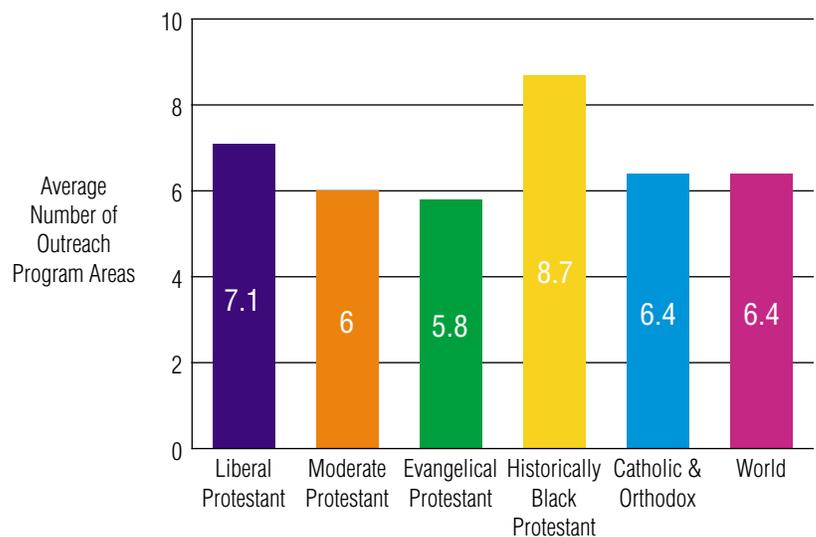


Figure 4.17
Faith Groups and Range of Outreach Ministries



When it comes to the willingness of congregations to go beyond service and become involved in organized social issue advocacy or community organizing, Historically Black churches rate both issues more highly than all other faith groups (Figure 4.18).

Partnerships are important to make community outreach happen. In developing partnerships, congregations are not restricted to working within their own denominational contacts. In fact, coalitions for social ministry are much more likely to cross denominational boundaries than remain within the same faith community (Figure 4.19). These partnerships occur more frequently in metropolitan areas. Fewer, but still a significant number of congregations, form inter-faith alliances to achieve these social ministries.

Figure 4.18
Faith Communities Differ in Justice Priorities

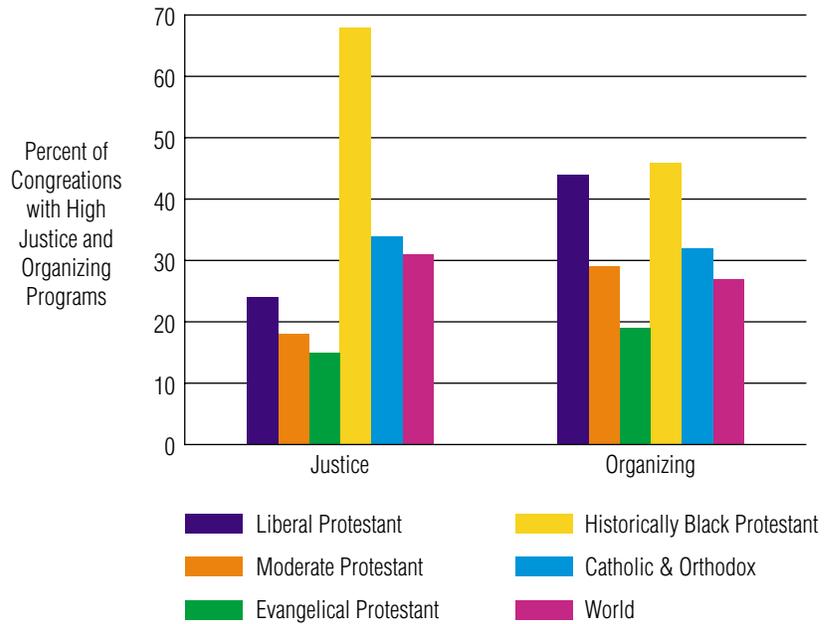
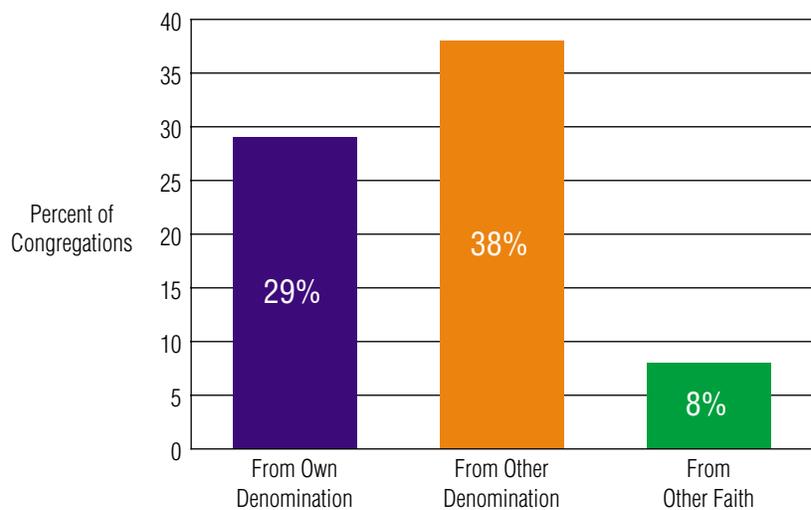


Figure 4.19
Social Ministry Partnerships:
More Ecumenical than Denominational



Ecumenical and Interfaith Relationships

Shared worship, even more than common community programs, provides the arena for crossing boundaries of historical denominational separation. Forty-five percent of Christian congregations share in ecumenical worship. Far fewer, eight percent of all congregations, share interfaith relationships (Figure 4.20).

Because of the breadth of participation in this study, comparative responses to denominational, ecumenical and interfaith relationships assume special significance. Christian congregations more frequently worship with ecumenical groups than with other congregations of their own denomination. However, fewer congregations have worshiped with another faith. Congregations appear slightly more likely to work together than to worship together across faith traditions.

Catholic/Orthodox congregations joined with Liberal and Moderate Protestants to be the most active participants in ecumenical activities, including the development of local councils of churches, synagogues, mosques, and other religious bodies (Figure 4.21).

(Note: Historically Black churches are omitted since they substituted a different question, concerning inter-racial rather than inter-faith events.)

In summary, worship as the corporate act of sharing a sense of God provides the foundational activity among congregations, within themselves and with others. These faith communities also provide a wide array of educational and fellowship events within their congregation, depending on their location and institutional resources. High on their priorities for congregational life are the outreach programs by which congregations express their faith in action.

Figure 4.20
Worshipping and Social Outreach with Other Congregations

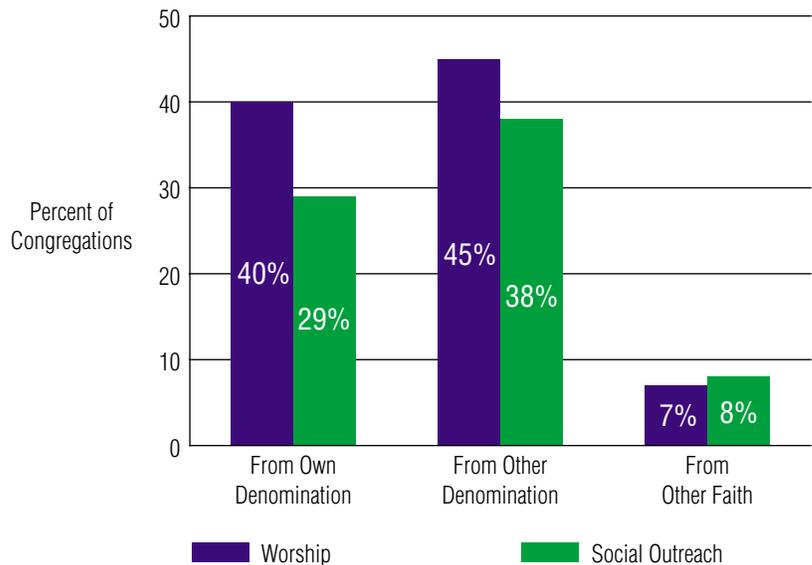
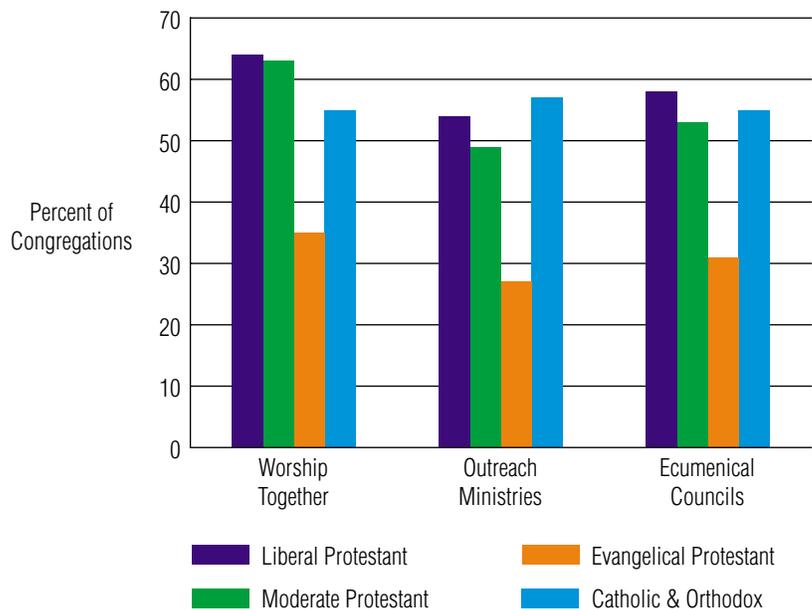


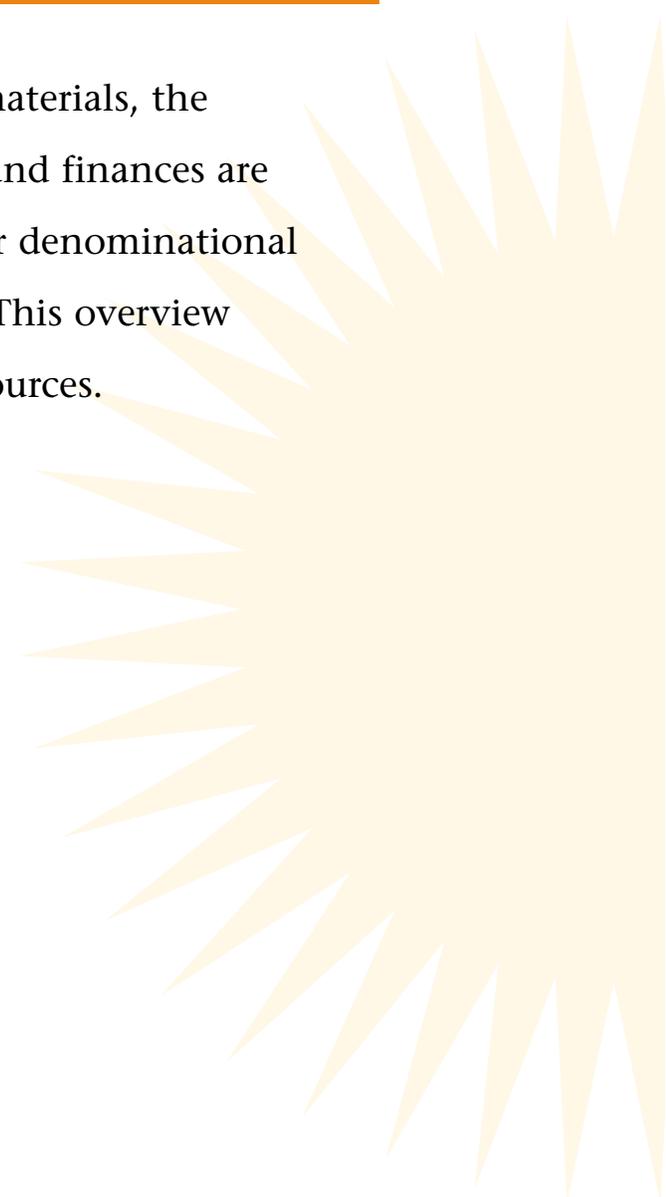
Figure 4.21
Worship, Outreach and Councils with Congregations of Other Denominations



Section 5:

Congregational Resources

Where congregations purchase their materials, the condition of congregational facilities and finances are elements that are especially helpful for denominational planning and allocation of resources. This overview provides a graphic profile of these resources.



Denominational Materials

Purchase of denominational materials provides an important measure of denominational commitment. Six out of ten congregations purchase their worship, educational, stewardship and evangelism materials exclusively or primarily from denominational sources. Older and smaller congregations are more likely to purchase materials primarily from their denominations than are younger and larger congregations (see Figure 5.1). Among the faith groups, Catholic/Orthodox are most likely to purchase from their own denomination, Evangelical Protestants least likely.

However, vital congregations are slightly more likely to buy outside their denomination (Figure 5.2), perhaps to support their breadth of programs and growing membership.

Figure 5.1
Buying Denominational Material by Size

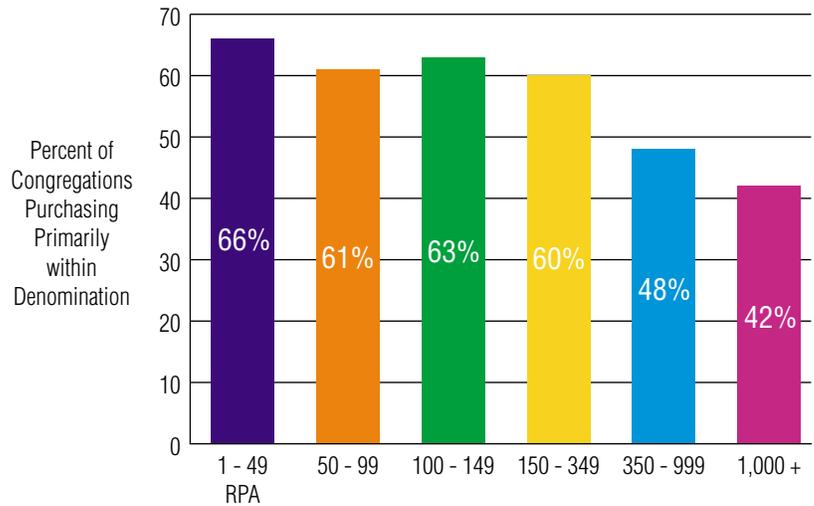
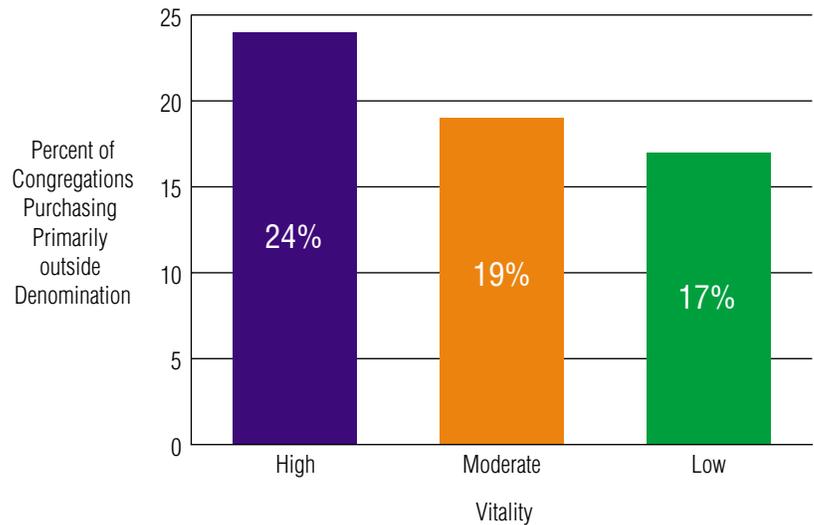


Figure 5.2
High Vitality Congregations Slightly More Likely to Buy Outside Denomination



Facilities

With the vitality and growth shown by congregations, it is not surprising that many report a need for additional space. Although worship space is reported as a less critical need – perhaps because it is a priority in initial construction – almost half of congregations are in some or significant need of additional space for education and fellowship (Figure 5.3).

Congregations feeling the greatest pressure for additional space are located in the growing suburbs (Figure 5.4). The most crowded facilities are directly associated with membership growth. Heavy use of the building is linked to increasing financial health, sense of vitality and number of regularly participating adults.

Figure 5.3
Space Needed for Education and Fellowship

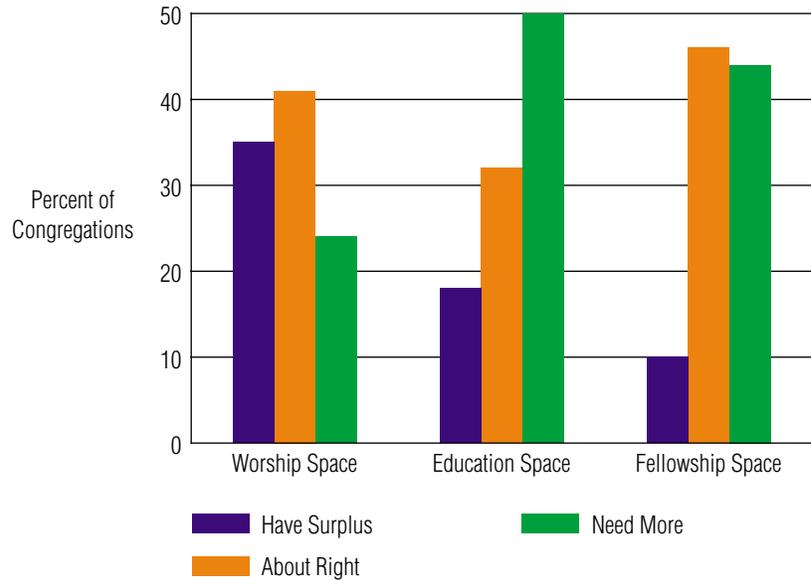
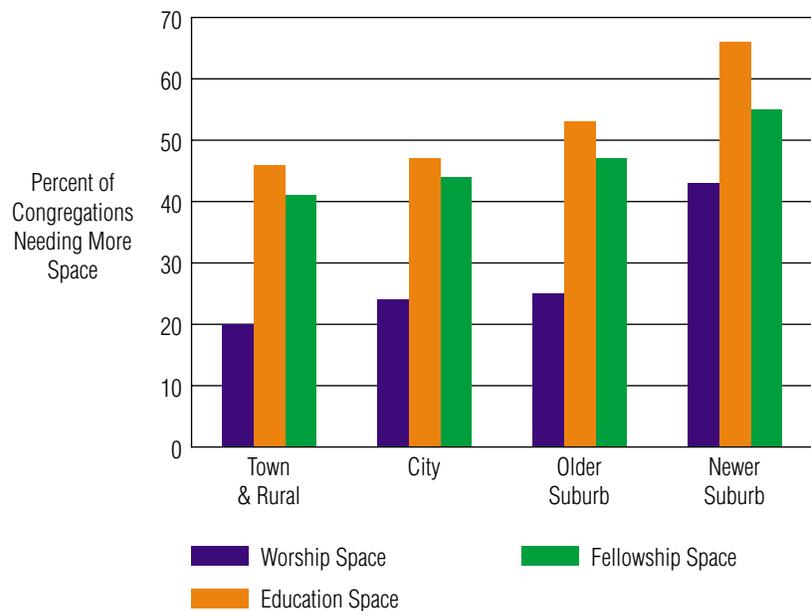
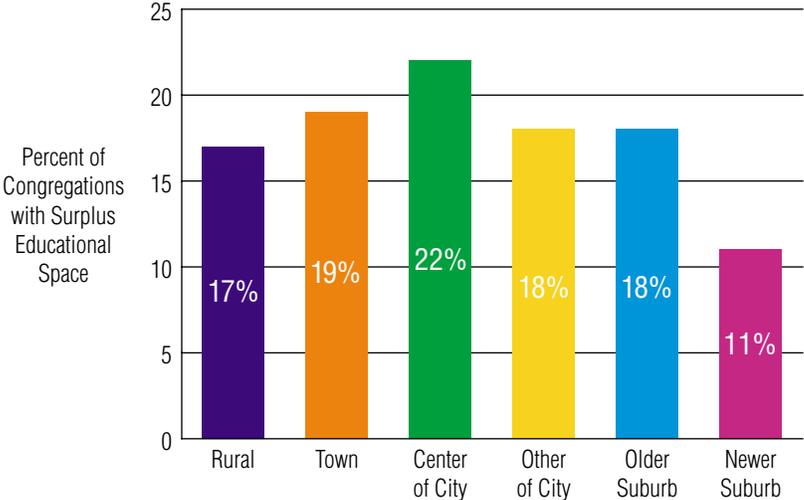


Figure 5.4
Space Pressure in Newer Suburbs



Many congregations outside the suburbs report more space than they need. Fortunately, many of the congregations with additional or unused room are located in communities of greatest need for human services in rural and central city settings (Figure 5.5). They are uniquely situated to respond with space and facilities to provide faith-based social ministries to strengthen their communities, where no other such buildings may be available.

Figure 5.5
Surplus Educational Space Most Available in Central City Settings



The need for additional parking presents a very different profile than the need for building space. In all, 45 percent of congregations report the need for additional parking. Older congregations, that typically have sufficient or surplus building space, are often land locked in their aging neighborhoods without parking space to accommodate their increasingly commuter congregation (Figure 5.6). As a region, the Northeast feels the parking crunch most sharply (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.6
Parking an Acute Problem in Central City Settings

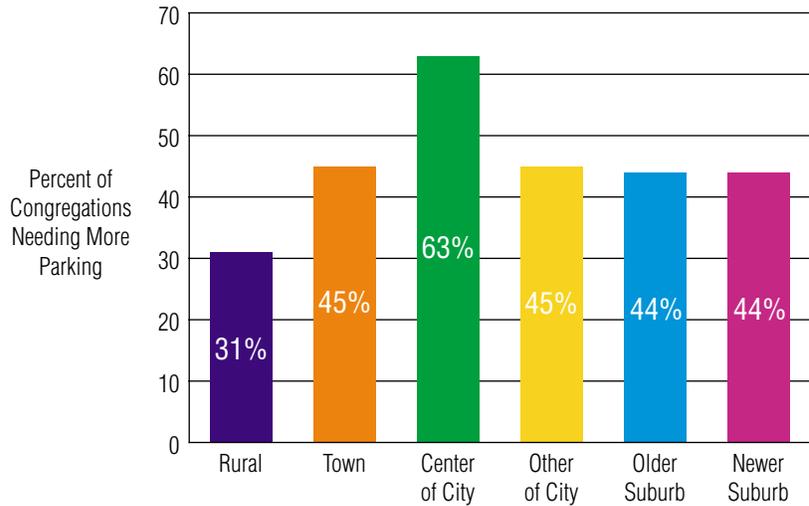
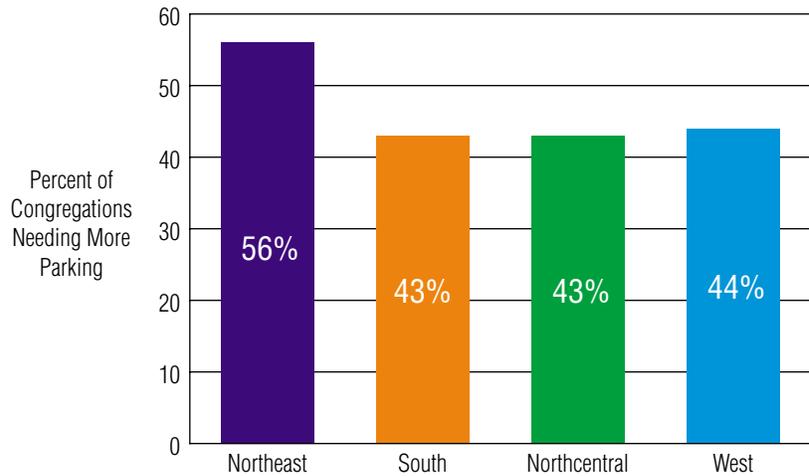


Figure 5.7
Older Northeast Feels Parking Crunch



The physical condition of congregational buildings is more solid than troubled. Some congregations, however, do face challenges in regard to the maintenance of their buildings. Problems are more evident in smaller congregations that are lacking resources and larger congregations that are overused than in mid-sized congregations (Figure 5.8). The stronger the denominational tie, the better the condition of a congregation's buildings. Perhaps this is an expression of denominational pride (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.8
Physical Condition Slips
at the Extremes of Size

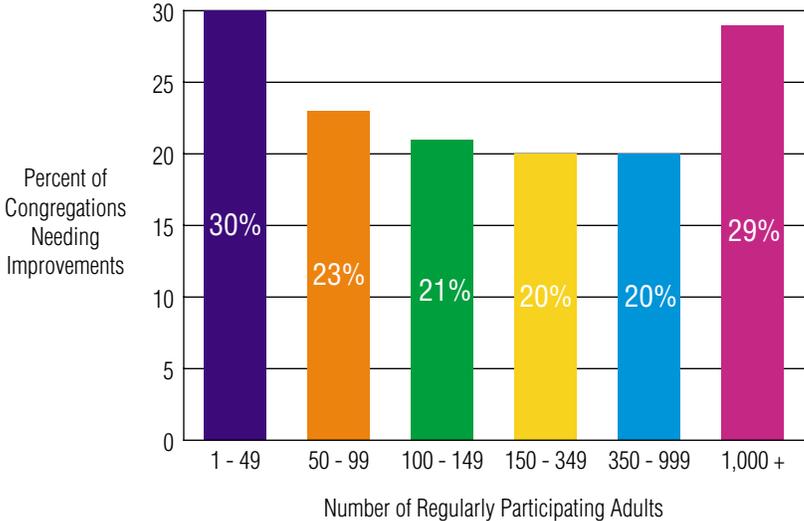
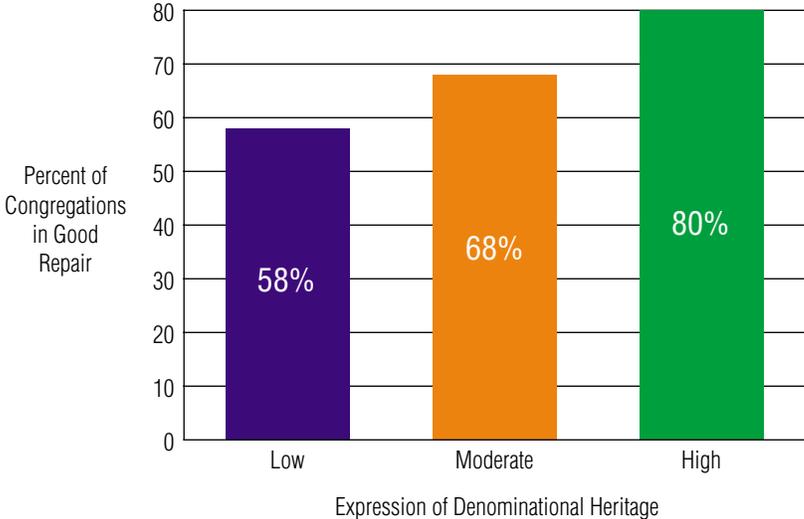


Figure 5.9
Physical Condition Related
to Denominational Pride



Finances

To summarize financial information already noted, three themes of unity and cohesion show strong relationships to financial health of congregations:

- Denominational loyalty
- Focused organization
- High moral standards

Figures 5.10 and 5.11 illustrate these points.

Figure 5.10

Financial Health by Investment in Tradition

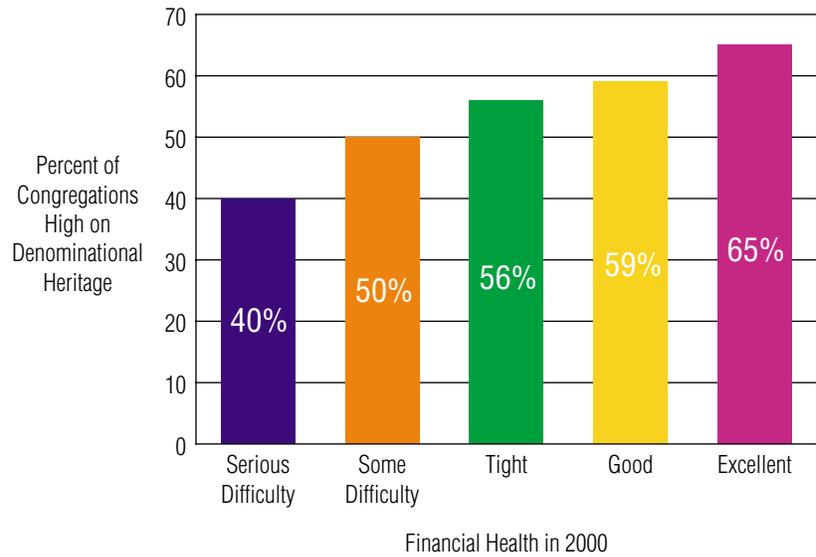
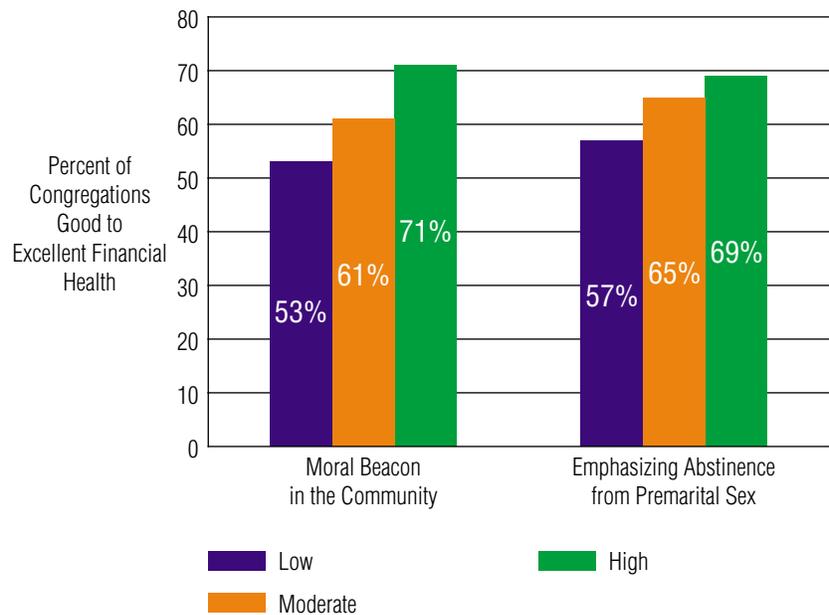


Figure 5.11

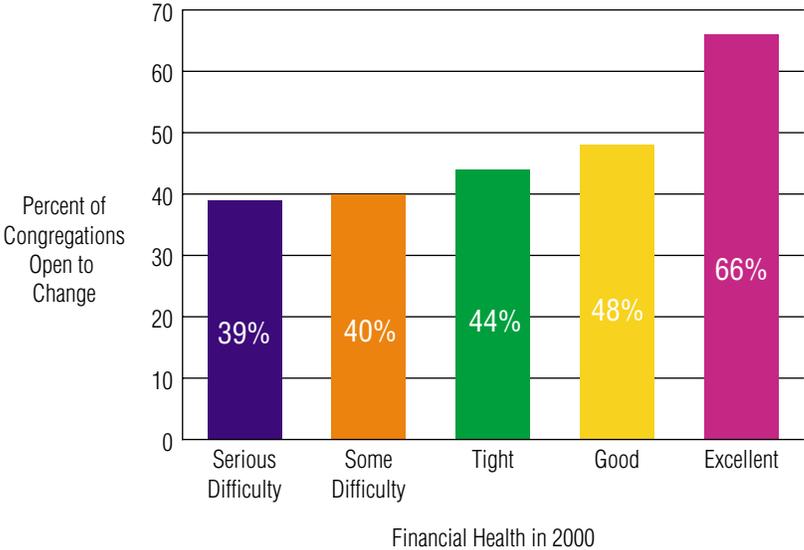
Financial Health by Emphasis on Moral Expectations



Significantly different financial procedures used by survey participants make comparisons problematic. Particularly in this sensitive area, readers should consult the FACT website with links to denominational information.

In the context of our general discussion, however, we note that faith communities with solid financial support are more open to change (Figure 5.12), experience fewer conflicts, and are more prepared to adapt to new conditions.

Figure 5.12
Financial Health
Increases Openness to Change



Section 6: Leadership

Based on this report, religious leadership should be recognized for its significant contribution to the vitality and growth of congregations. Leaders should be applauded for guiding a remarkably complex array of worship, educational, fellowship and outreach activities. They should be commended for their personal and congregational contributions to the spiritual, social and physical welfare of their communities, often beyond their job description.

Yet this report raises significant questions about the preparedness of congregations and their leaders to deal effectively with changing conditions.

Conflict Challenges Leadership

As discussed previously, the majority of congregations are vital and alive. Nevertheless, some report that they have lost the energy that comes with clear vision. Age of congregation is one factor that places a drag on a congregation's sense of energy and purpose (see Figure 6.1). Leaders in such congregations face the challenge to recover a fresh sense of mission and purpose, to help the congregation "to dream again."

Location is another factor that can burden congregations (Figure 6.2). New suburban areas clearly have more resources of family life, youth, facilities and finances to support congregations. By comparison, other locations struggle. But even a majority of these congregations "keep the faith."

Figure 6.1
Clear Vision Declines with Age

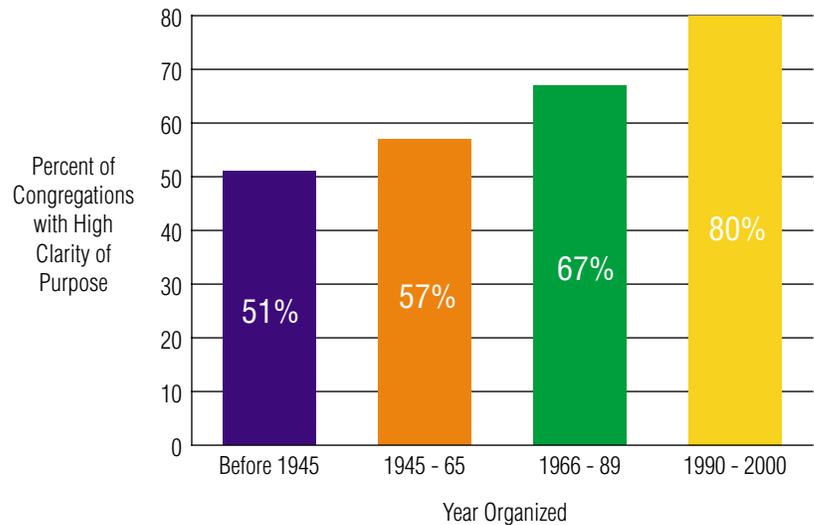
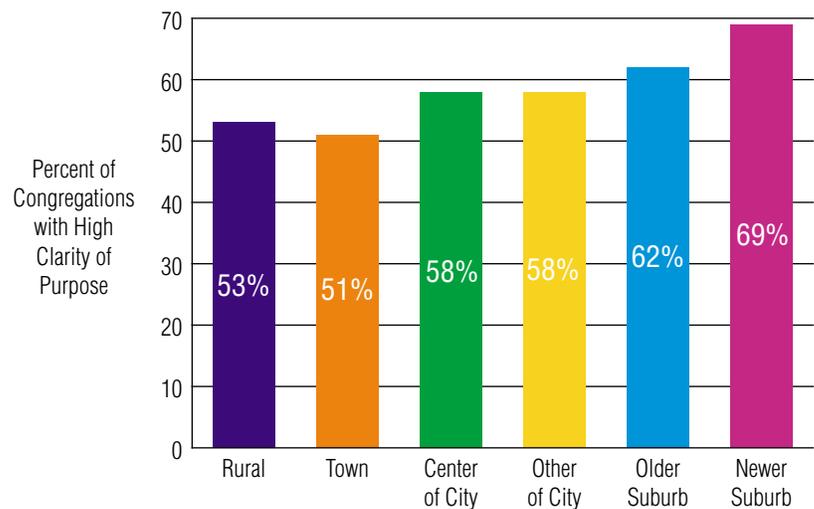


Figure 6.2
Place Can Erode the Energy of Vision



Congregations suffer more when they experience conflict than age or location (Figure 6.3). Lingering conflict is strongly associated with declining vitality and declining membership. Conflict tends to cast a shadow across the activities and ethos of the congregation as a whole, even the capacity to enlist volunteers.

Openness in dealing with conflict is strongly associated with vitality (Figure 6.4). To recover a sense of mission and purpose, congregational leaders can encourage more open communication among members.

Figure 6.3
Conflict Erodes Vitality

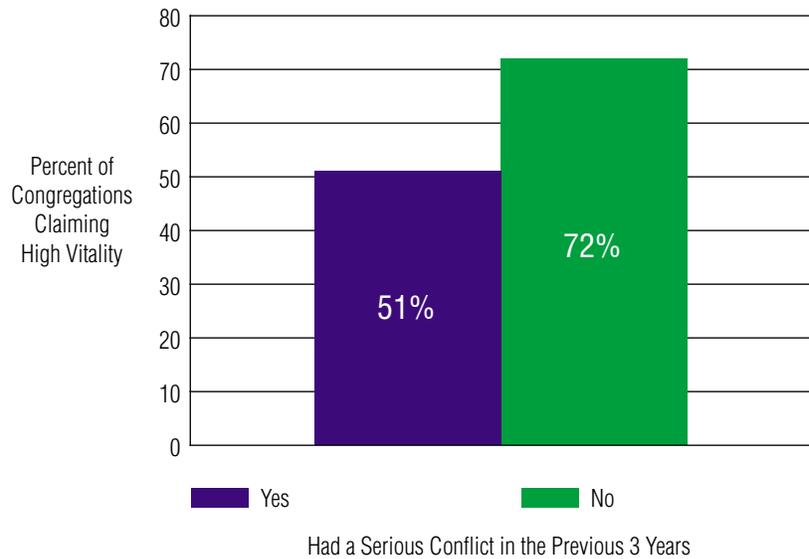
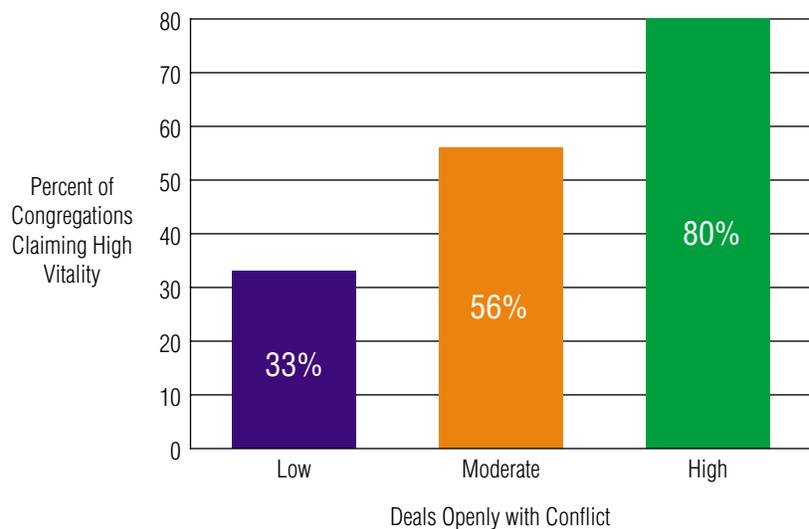
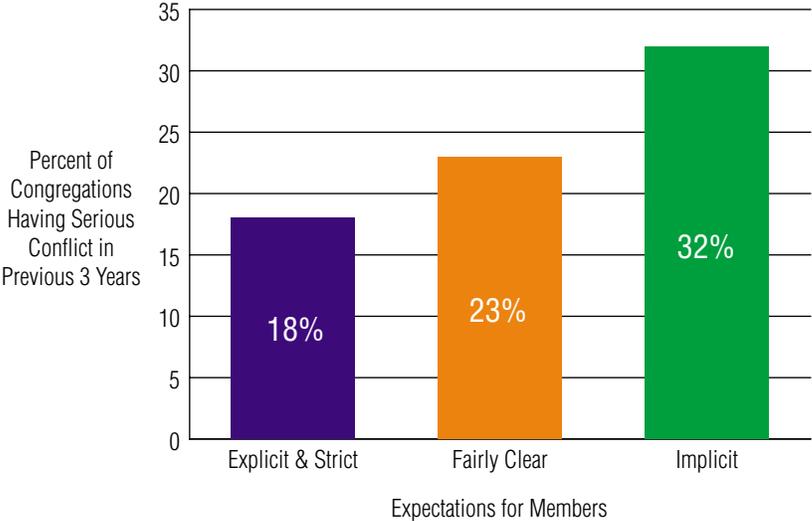


Figure 6.4
Openness in Dealing with Conflict Relates to Vitality



Capable leadership that enables openness in dealing with conflict can dramatically neutralize and perhaps even constructively use the energy of strong feelings that are typically present in bitter disagreements (Figure 6.5). Relatedly, congregations in which member expectations and communal goals are clear are much more likely to deal openly with disagreements and conflicts.

Figure 6.5
Clarity Reduces Level of Serious Conflict



Indeed, openness in dealing with conflict does not imply a lack of standards or a loss of discipline. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case. Congregations that have unclear or implicit expectations for members are far more likely to experience higher levels of conflict (Figure 6.6). Effective leadership in congregations is not simply a matter of openness in dealing with conflict, but helping them recognize and express their purpose in action (Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.6
Clear Expectations Help
Congregations Deal Openly with Conflict

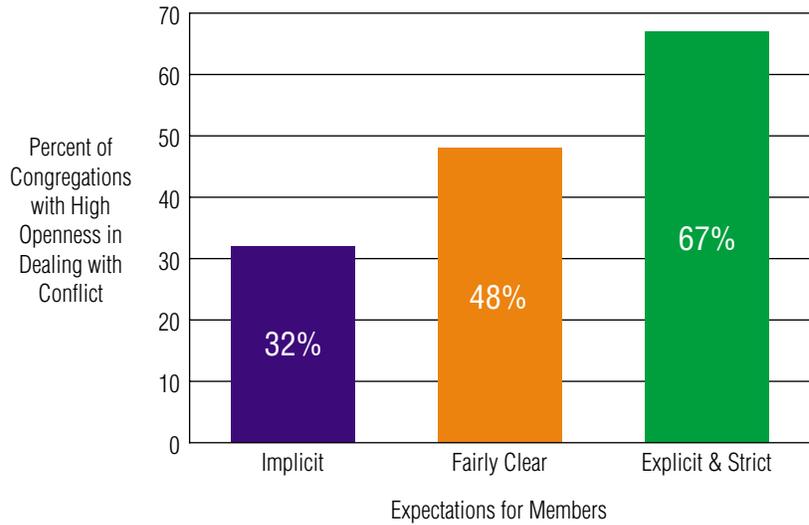
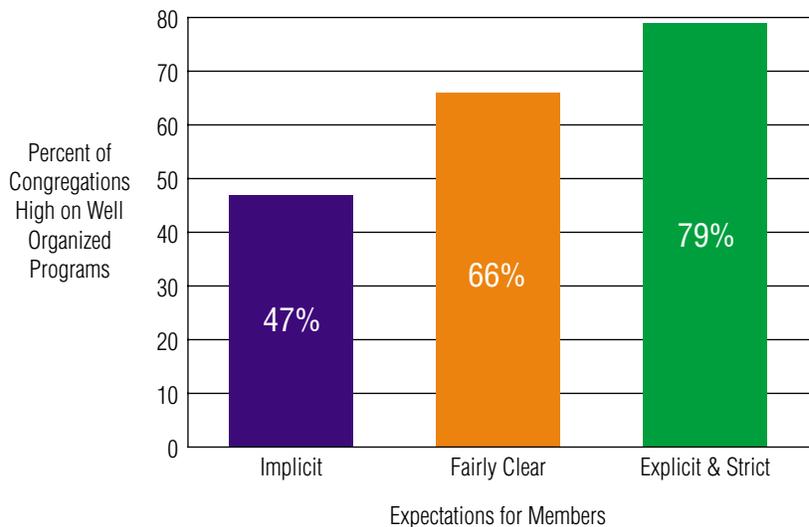


Figure 6.7
Clear Expectations Help
Congregations be Well Organized



Religious Leaders

The 41 faith communities represented in FACT have different structures and different names for their designated leaders – pastor, priest, rabbi, imam, and reader. But only two percent of congregations are without a designated religious leader, including part time, interim, and volunteer. Figure 6.8 shows a breakdown of educational achievement for religious leaders. *(Note: The Roman Catholic, Muslim and Bahá'is surveys did not include questions on clergy education.)*

The age of leaders ranged from 24 to 87, with an average age of 51.3 years old. Most clergy (89 percent) are paid, but the presence of volunteer leaders (currently 11 percent) will likely increase because it is associated with some of the fastest growing faith traditions (for instance, Muslim and Mormon).

As a whole, clergy with more formal education tend to serve larger congregations with longer tenures (Figure 6.9). The patterns of clergy serving congregations – full time, part time, multiple staff, yoked parish – vary greatly between faith groups, locations and congregational membership size.

Figure 6.8
Leader's Ministerial Education

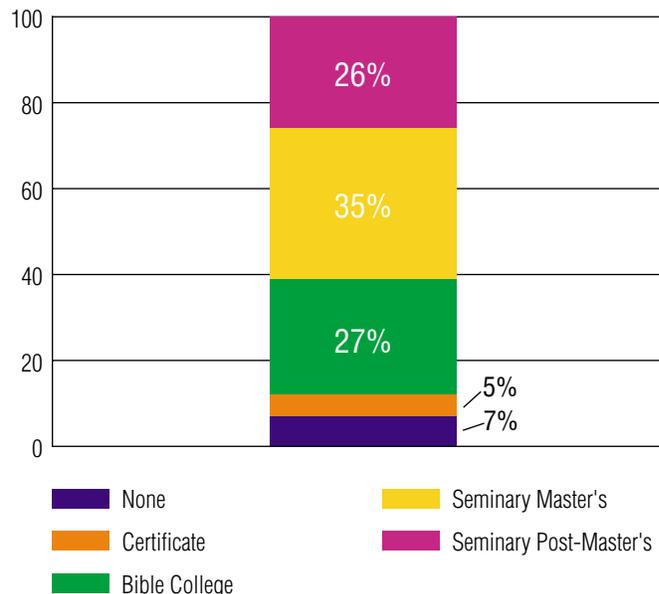
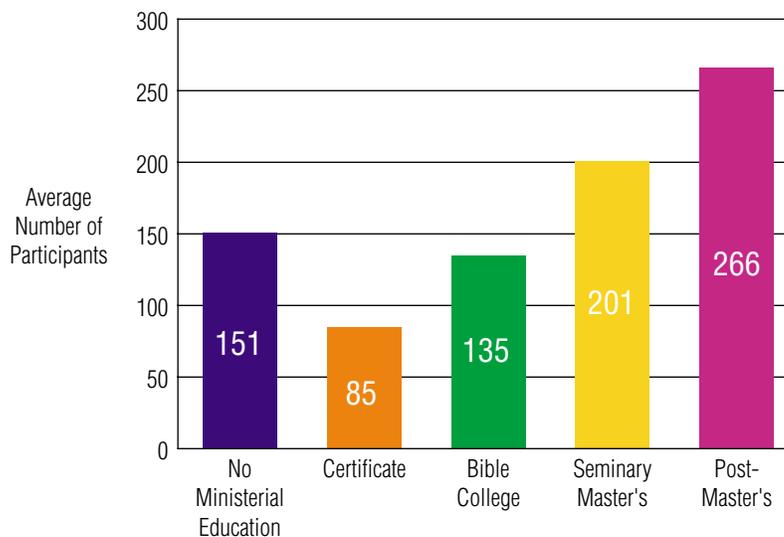
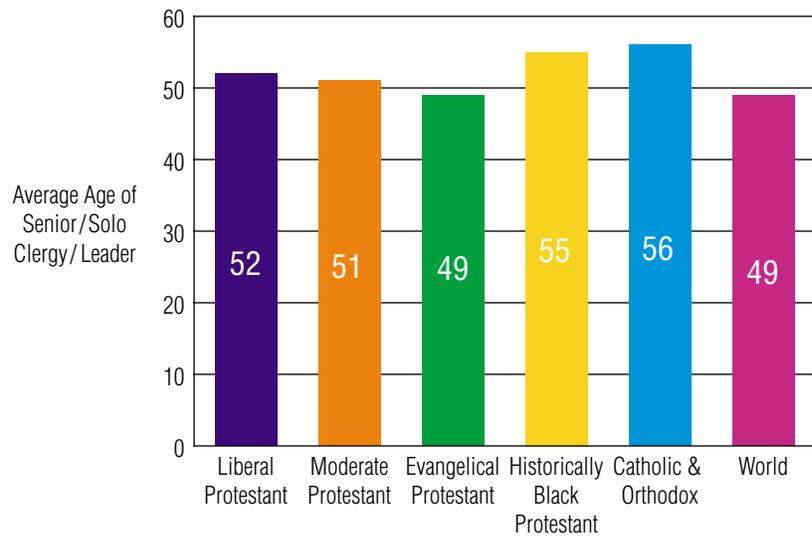


Figure 6.9
Size of Congregation
Increases with Ministerial Education



Denominations and faith groups are constantly challenged to find and educate new religious leadership for their congregations. Aging leadership affects every group, but the challenge is particularly pronounced in some groups (Figure 6.10). Indeed, the average religious leader of the Catholic/Orthodox and Historically Black denominational groups is less than a decade away from the typical retirement age of 65, while the Evangelical Protestant and World groups' leaders have 50 percent more time until they reach 65.

Figure 6.10
Age of Senior/Solo Leader Varies
by Denominational Group



Seminary Education

Education for religious leaders provides a unique challenge. Higher education, and particularly seminary Master's and post-Master's education, seems to have a noticeable effect on the style of sermon presentation. The references such pastors use in their sermon are more likely to be drawn from literature and news events. At the same time, seminary graduates are more likely to engage in ecumenical worship and community social ministries (Figure 6.11).

However, broad educational experience in the congregation, and perhaps even seminary education, seems to have a negative impact on many basic religious values. Churches served by seminary graduates are less likely to maintain traditional religious-moral values and also are less likely to be committed to preserving denominational heritage (Figure 6.12).

Further, clergy with a seminary education are no more likely than other clergy to be in congregations that have a strong social justice orientation and are very much less likely to be in congregations that deal openly with conflict and disagreement (Figure 6.13).

Figure 6.11
Seminary Education Supports Ecumenical Ministries and Media References in Sermons

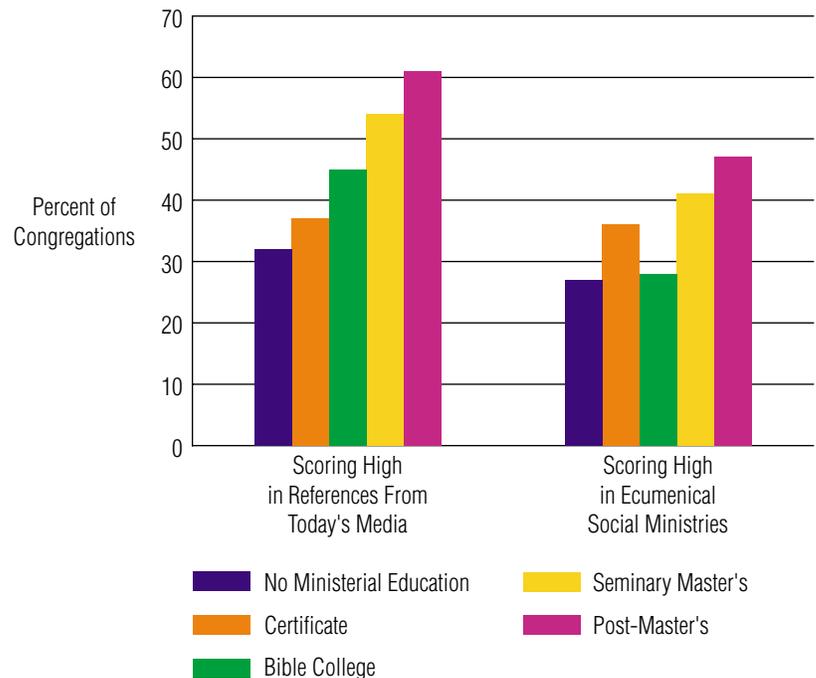
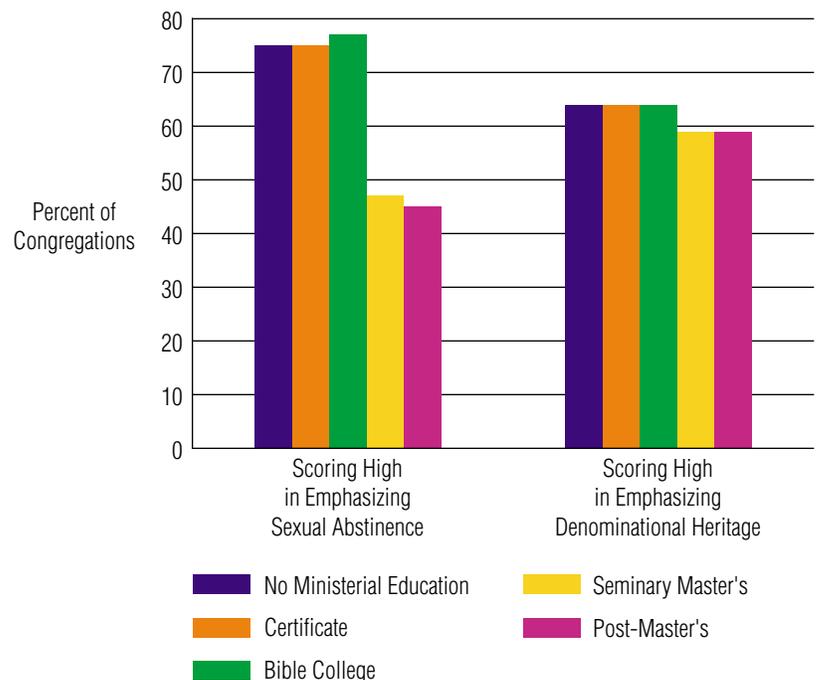


Figure 6.12
Ministerial Education and Traditionalism Move in Opposition



Seminary graduates are more likely to serve congregations with implicit rather than clear values and are no more likely (and if anything slightly less likely) than non-seminary graduates to be located in congregations that are:

- Vital and alive
- Growing in members
- Using contemporary worship*
- Clear about purpose and mission*
- Well organized

*(Figure 6.14)

To appropriately understand these responses, we must recognize that they have been most frequently provided by the pivotal, paid religious leader – in many cases the clergy themselves. It is possible that seminary graduates have used different standards than non-seminary graduates throughout these and other responses in the survey. Or it may be the congregation’s structure or denominational culture rather than the leader’s education that makes for the differences. More and careful study is needed.

But the fact remains that, according to the survey, congregations with leaders who have a seminary education are, as a group, far more likely to report that in their congregations they perceive less clarity of purpose; more and different kinds of conflict; less person-to-person communication; less confidence in the future and more threat from changes in worship.

In the denominations most directly affected and most directly responsible for theological education, these findings would suggest the need for a careful review of the educational process of leadership preparation.

Figure 6.13
Social Justice and Open Dealing with Conflict as Compared with Seminary Education

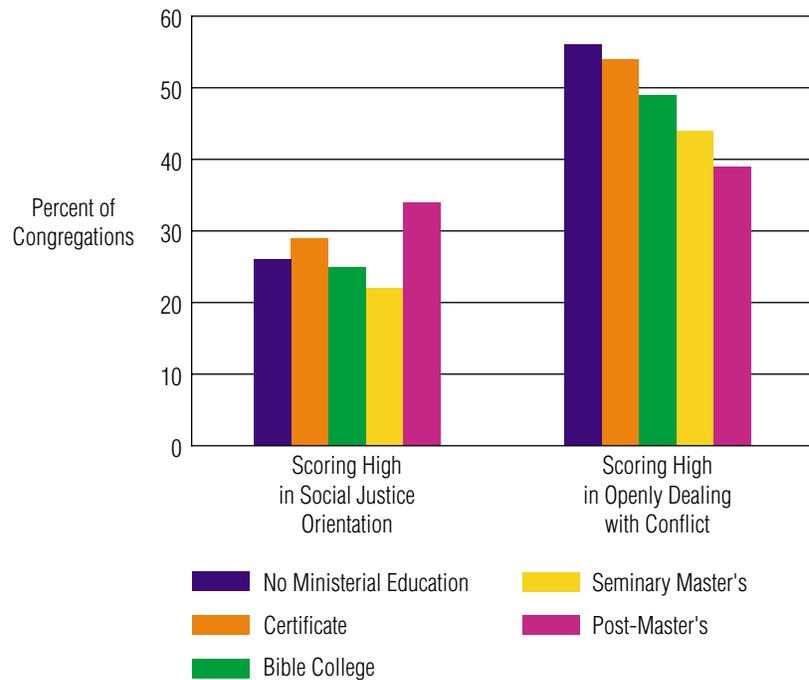
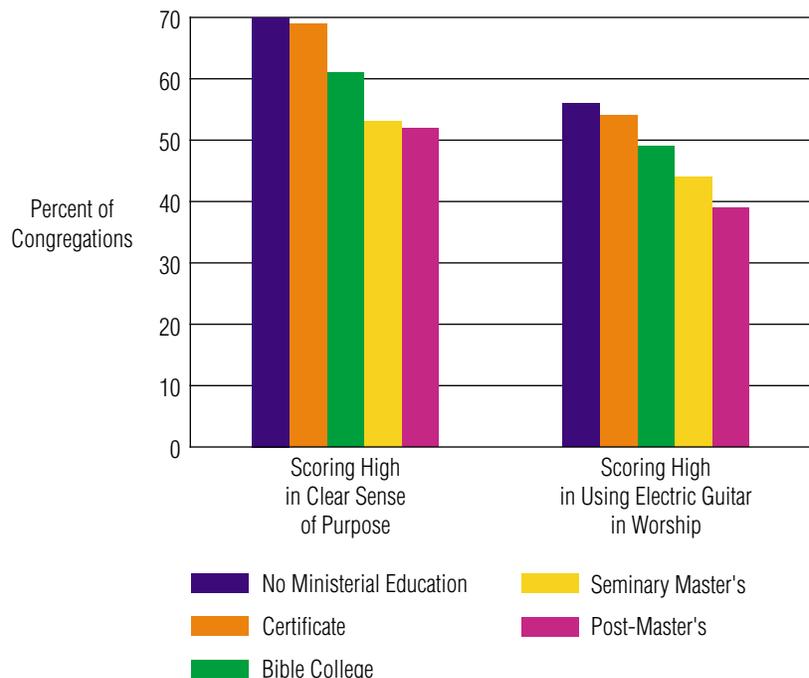


Figure 6.14
Sense of Purpose and Contemporary Worship Decline with Increased Ministerial Education



In Conclusion



Through this survey, congregations report that they are confident about the future. They seek to keep up through a complex network of worship, educational, fellowship and outreach activities, often in difficult conditions with meager resources. They make major contributions to the spiritual and social welfare of their communities. Without the texture of these faith communities woven into the life of virtually every corner of our society, the culture of the United States would be far less than our best.



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