



## 2000 Survey of United Church of Christ Congregations

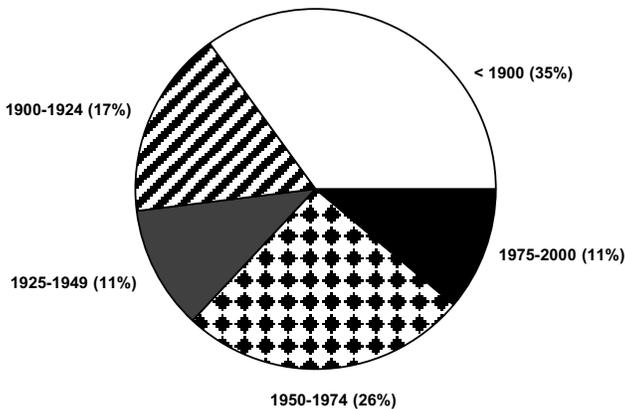
In 2000, 41 denominations and faith groups participated in Faith Communities Today (FACT), the largest survey ever conducted of congregations in the United States. This report highlights findings from the 801 UCC congregations that completed and returned a FACT questionnaire (out of a randomly selected list of 1,200 churches). Survey forms were completed in most cases by the pastor with the assistance of lay leaders. More information on the FACT study, including national ecumenical results and an interactive workbook, may be found at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

### Facilities

- A majority (63%) of UCC congregations worship in sanctuaries constructed before 1950, with many (35% overall) worshipping in sanctuaries built before 1900. Only 11% of UCC congregations have sanctuaries built after 1974.

Figure 1

#### Year First Worshipped in Current Sanctuary



- The median seating capacity in sanctuaries is 200 persons. Only 4% of congregations have sanctuaries that seat more than 500 people, while 11% seat 100 or fewer. The majority of reporting churches (64%) seat between 126 and 300 persons.
- Most UCC congregations report adequate space for *worship, education, and fellowship*. However, one half of UCC churches indicate that they need more room for *parking*. Substantial minorities report the need for more space for education (38%) and fellowship (32%). Only 12% of UCC congregations say they need more room for worship.

- One in seven congregations share worship space with another congregation.
- Most congregations (78%) use facilities that are in good or excellent condition, a very few (2%), however, are in *serious* need of improvement and repair.

### Location

- Slightly over half (52%) of UCC congregations are located in cities of 10,000 or more population, including 17% located in or near a city of 250,000 or more population. Small towns are home to 31% of UCC congregations and another 16% are in rural areas or open country.
- Of congregations in or near a city of at least 10,000 population:
  - 32% are located in the downtown or inner city area
  - 34% are located in other parts of the city
  - 24% are located in an older suburb
  - 9% are located in a newer suburb

### Worship

- Nearly all (99%) of the reporting churches offer an opportunity for worship on Sunday morning (the others worship on Sunday evening). Average attendance on Sunday mornings is 115 people (including all services).
- Most UCC churches (82%) hold a single worship service on the weekend. Worship style varies among services in most (62%) of the congregations that report more than one weekend service.
- One half of UCC churches report that their largest service is over 60% full at the service with the largest attendance, including 27% that are more than 80% full.

- Majorities of congregations report that worship always or often includes:
  - organ and/or piano music (98%)
  - use of incense or candles (72%)
  - a time during worship for people to greet one another (60%)

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

- kneeling (2%)
  - visual projection equipment (4%)
  - electric guitar or bass (4%)
  - dance or drama (5%)
- Only 10% of congregations report that their primary worship service has changed a lot in the last five years. Most report that worship has either changed a little (45%) or is basically the same (24%).
  - 78% of respondents name the Bible as the most important authority for their congregation's worship and teaching, while 9% name human reason.

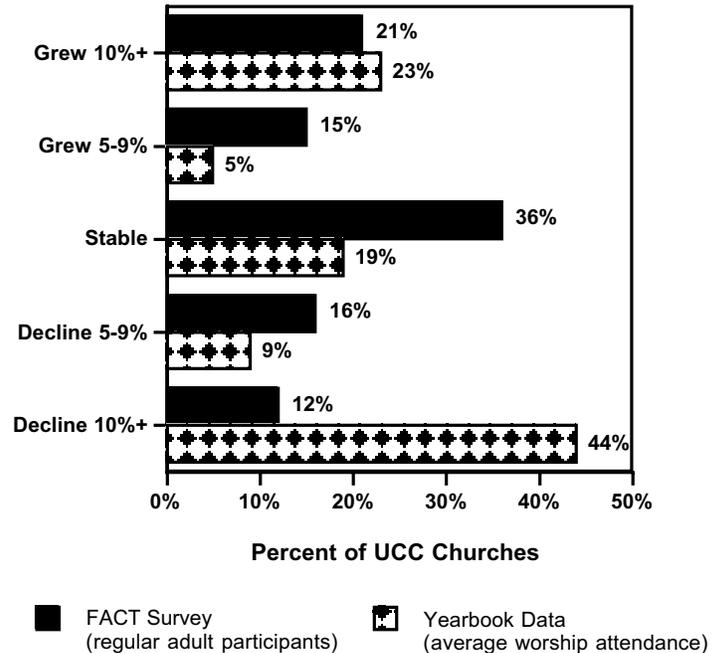
### Participants and Members

- The percentages of congregations reporting that most, nearly all, or all of their members:
  - are married: 41%
  - are female: 38%
  - are over 60 years old: 29%
  - are college graduates: 21%
  - are life-long UCC members: 19%
  - live in households with more than \$75,000 annual incomes: 6%
  - live in households with less than \$20,000 annual incomes: 3%
  - live in households with children under 18 present: 2%
- Counting everyone involved in congregational life, including both members and non-members (however irregular their participation), yields a median estimate of 178 persons per congregation.
- The median estimate of *regular* adult participants is 80, while the median number of regular participants under age 18 is 25.

- Most congregations report that the number of regularly-participating adults has either increased (36%) or stayed about the same (36%) compared to five years ago. UCC *Yearbook* data on average worship attendance shows a less rosy picture: 28% increased, 19% were stable, and 53% declined.

Figure 2

Change in Participation:  
FACT and Yearbook Data



- Most (89%) UCC churches are at least 70% white/European American. Another 4% are predominantly African American or Black. In 3% of UCC churches no racial/ethnic group predominates. These churches can be considered multi-racial.

### Congregational Programs

- Programs that UCC congregations are most likely to offer on a year-round basis include:
  - choir(s) (reported by 67%)
  - community service (50%)
  - youth/teen activities (50%)
  - Bible study (42%)
- The most frequently offered short-term programs include:
  - performing arts other than choir (reported by 39%)
  - spiritual retreats (34%)
  - community service (30%)

### ***Outreach to Visitors***

- Almost all congregations (96%) try to identify visitors to their worship services through a registration book or visitor's card, and most (57%) contact visitors in person or by phone within a few days or a week of the visit. Another 21% send greetings by letter.
- In a typical month, the pastoral staff averages (median) two visits or phone calls to "prospective members, worship visitors, or newcomers in the community."
- Relatively few UCC congregations (22%) provide "special parking or seating" for visitors.
- Current members are "involved in recruiting new members" not at all or only to a slight extent in 49% of UCC congregations. Only a sixth of respondents report that laity are involved in new member outreach to a very great extent (2%) or a large extent (14%).

### ***Service to the Community***

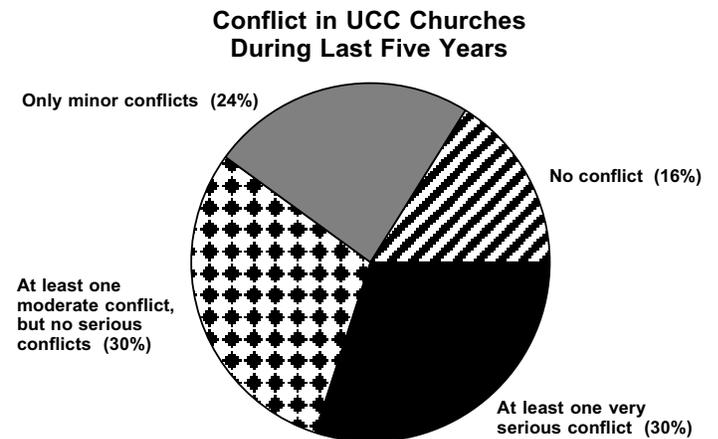
- Almost all congregations (96%) provide some sort of food assistance to the needy in their communities, often (67% so report) in cooperation with another agency or congregation.
- Other service programs that involve at least half of congregations, whether independently or cooperatively, include:
  - cash or vouchers given to families or individuals (79% so report)
  - thrift store or thrift store donations (64%)
  - counseling services or support groups (54%)
  - senior citizen programs other than housing (52%)
- The typical (median) congregation serves 50 people a month in its community programs.

### ***Conflict***

- 84% of congregations had conflict in the last five years. 30% of churches reported very serious conflict.

- Of congregations that had serious conflict, that conflict:
  - is ongoing in 9%
  - remains, but is no longer serious in 28%
  - was resolved with some negative consequences in 36%
  - was resolved with no negative consequences in 27%

Figure 3



- The causes of very serious conflict were:
  - pastor's leadership style (13% so report)
  - who makes a decision (11%)
  - pastor's personal behavior (10%)
  - member's personal behavior (8%)
  - money/finances/budget (7%)
  - theology (4%)
  - program/mission priorities (3%)
  - how worship is conducted (3%)

### ***Ecumenical/Interfaith Involvement***

- 89% of congregations participated in activities with congregations of another denomination or faith tradition. Most involved other Christian bodies; only 27% of UCC congregations reported interfaith activities.
- The most common ecumenical activity was participation in joint worship services with other denominations or faith traditions (77%). Majorities also reported participation in councils of churches or ministerial associations (64%), "joint service projects" (60%), and "joint celebrations or programs other than worship" (60%).

**Finances**

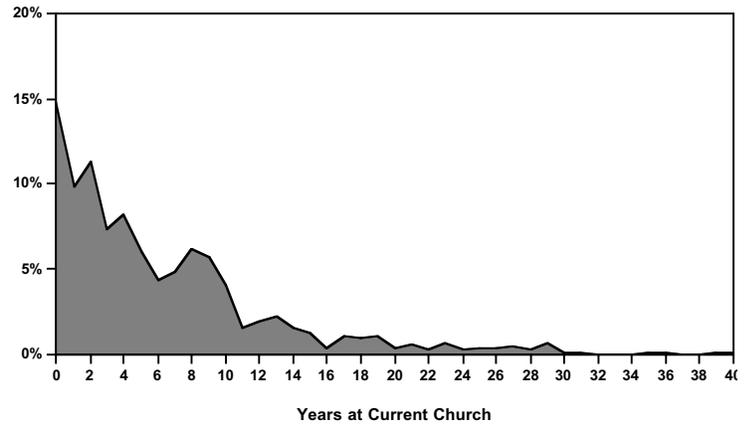
- Around one quarter (22%) of respondents describe the current financial health of their congregation as excellent, and another third as good. Only 3% say they are “in serious difficulty.”
- The typical (median) congregation reports total annual receipts for 1999 of \$104,374.
- A majority (67%) of congregations received some income in 1999 from endowments, but of those that did the majority (61%) received 10% or less of total congregational income from endowment funds.
- The average expenditures for selected budget categories in 1999 were:
  - 50% for staff salaries and benefits
  - 22% for utilities, building upkeep, and other congregational operations
  - 7% for UCC mission work
  - 6% for capital improvements
  - 6% for program support and materials
  - 3% for other local mission work
  - 2%, money put into reserve or investments

**Leadership**

- The vast majority responding congregations (94%) report having a senior or solo minister. Of these churches, most (88%) describe their pastor as holding a regular call rather than being temporary/interim.
- 24% of respondents describe their call to that congregation as part time. Many (36%) of these ministers report that they also serve at least one other congregation and/or work a secular job (36%).
- The typical (median) senior/solo pastor is 52 years of age and has been at the congregation four years. 76% are male. 12% have a doctoral degree.

Figure 4

Tenure of Current Pastor



- Descriptors which a majority of UCC pastors say fit them very well include:
  - cares about people (63%)
  - hard worker (55% say fits very well)
  - has a close relationship with God (53%)
- Descriptors which UCC pastors say fit them least well were charismatic leader, evangelistic, and mediates conflict.
- Two-thirds of congregations report that recruiting volunteer leaders is a continual challenge even though they eventually find enough willing people. Another 12% can't find enough people who are willing to serve.

**Resources**

- Many UCC congregations purchase worship, educational, and other resources either exclusively (3%) or primarily from within the United Church of Christ (36%). Many others (42%) strike a pretty even balance between UCC and other sources. Only 4% of congregations obtain materials exclusively from outside the UCC.



A Research Services Publication, Office of General Ministries, United Church of Christ

700 Prospect Avenue  
 Cleveland, OH 44115  
 (216) 736-2150