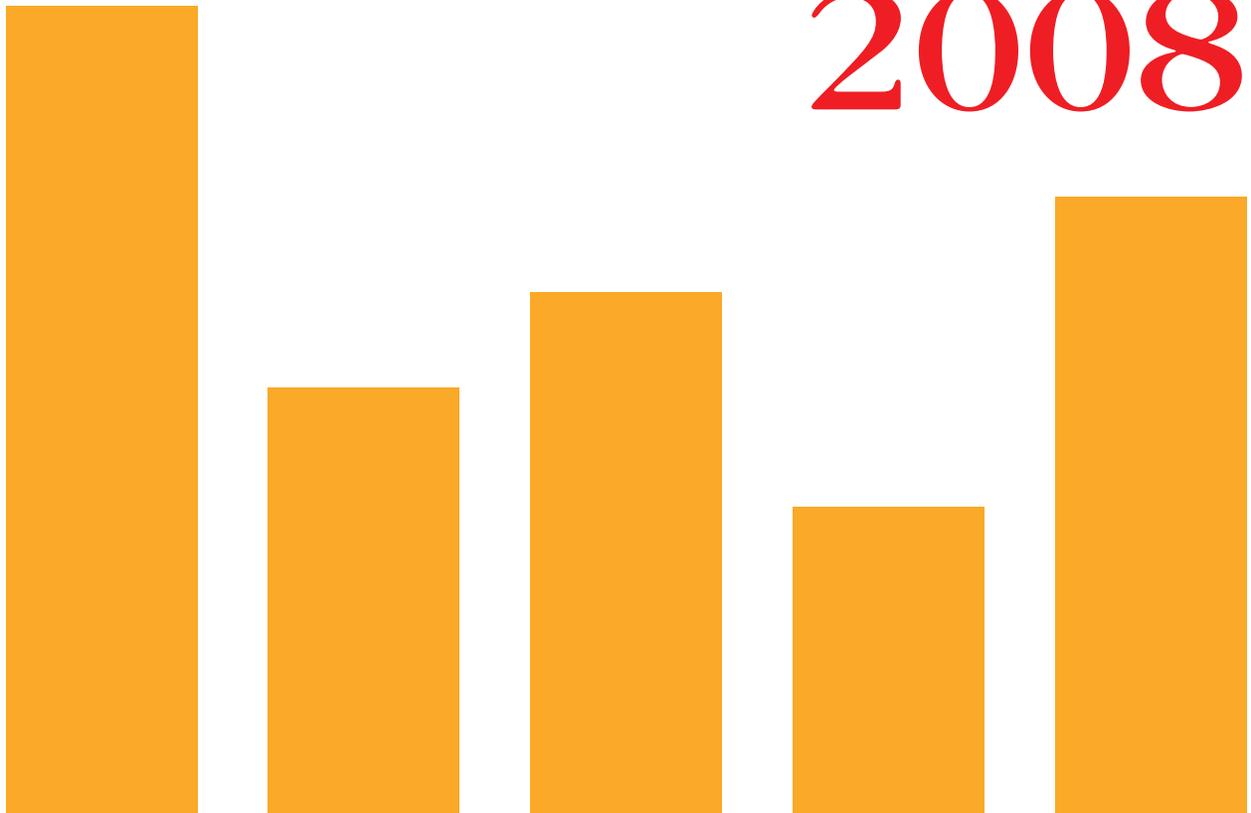




FAITH
Communities
TODAY

David A. Roozen

American Congregations 2008



American Congregations 2008 is the report on the Faith Communities Today 2008 (*FACT*²⁰⁰⁸) national survey of congregations conducted by the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP). CCSP is a multi-faith coalition of denominations and religious groups hosted by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary. The primary purpose of CCSP is the development of research based resources for congregational development. An on-going purpose is to advance the public's understanding of the most numerous voluntary organization in the U.S.—our religious congregations.

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Graphic Design by Richard Houseal

American Congregations 2008

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Introduction

The *Faith Communities Today (FACT)* series of national surveys of American congregations is sponsored by the *Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP)*. The series was launched in 2000 with the largest national survey of congregations ever conducted in the United States. The *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* study of 14,301 local churches, synagogues, parishes, temples and mosques provided a public profile of the organizational backbone of religion in America—congregations—at the beginning of a new millennium. It will be replicated in 2010, and like *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* the decadal replication will be a mega-survey timed to coincide with the decadal U.S. Census. In combination with *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* it will provide 10-year trends on over 150 aspects of congregational life and organization. Its report will be released Fall, 2011. Details will be available on the *FACT* website as they emerge.

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts regular national surveys between its large-scale decadal enumerations, and similarly CCSP is committed to conducting more typically sized, national surveys of congregations in intervening years. *FACT²⁰⁰⁵* was the first of these. *FACT²⁰⁰⁸*, the results of which are presented in this report, is the second. The purpose of these interim surveys is to track short-term changes in a limited number of key areas of congregational life and structure, and to plumb the dynamics of selected congregational practices and challenges. The focal area for *FACT²⁰⁰⁵* was congregational growth, the subject of a special report, *FACTs on Growth* (December, 2006). *American Congregations 2005* (June, 2007) contains an overview of 2005 findings, and begins with a two page graphic summary of demographics, program, identity and vitality for each faith family.

The following report on *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* foregoes

the demographic portrait, which has not changed significantly since 2005, in favor of a graphic summary of the *FACT* series' accumulating trend data, followed by more substantive overviews of 12 different areas of congregational life. The latter include the survey's three focal areas: attracting and tracking potential members; deepening lay leadership, and clergy leader time usage.

For more information about *The Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership*, including links to member denominations and faith groups and their *FACT* related reports and publications, please visit the *FACT* website:

www.faithcommunitiestoday.org. Online copies of all *CCSP/FACT* publications are also available on the website, including:

- *Faith Communities Today 2000* (March, 2001)
- *Meet Your Neighbors: Interfaith FACTs* (July, 2003)
- Insights Into: *Financial Giving* (June, 2006)
- *FACTs on Growth* (December, 2006)
- *American Congregations 2005* (June, 2007)
- Insights Into: *Congregational Conflict* (August, 2007)
- Insights Into: *Numerical Growth* (September, 2007)
- Insights Into: *The Compassionate Congregation* (February, 2010)

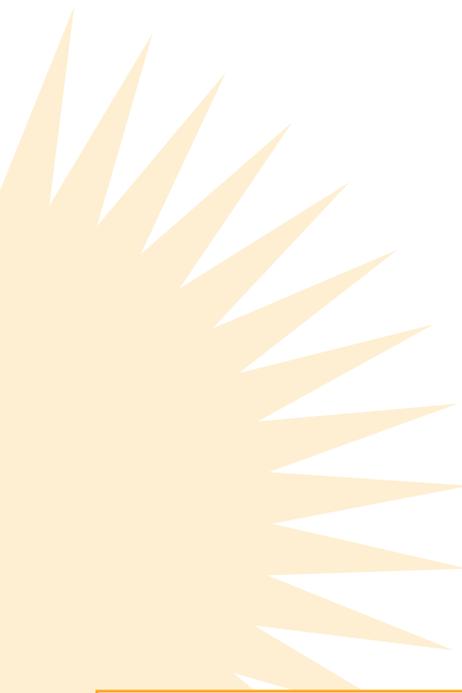
Project Background

The *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ survey questionnaire was designed by the CCSP Research Taskforce. A copy of the questionnaire is available on the *FACT* website and should be consulted for exact question and response category wordings. It is completed by a key informant in each surveyed congregation, most typically the senior or sole clergy leader. The survey is an aggregation of three different layers. One layer was a mail and web survey of a random sample of 3,000 U.S. congregations conducted for CCSP by the Research Services office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). A second layer was a telephone survey of a random sample of 1,000 congregations conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry. The third layer consists of a set of mini-surveys conducted by 12 of the CCSP partner denominations and faith groups. These mini-surveys used the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ questionnaire, but were conducted by the respective denomination or faith group as a supplement to the general samples. The supplemental surveys served a dual purpose. Not only were they aggregated into the overall national sample data set. They also provided the respective groups with sufficient numbers of congregations to conduct their own group analysis. The general survey sample was generated by the CCSP Research Taskforce from a larger random national sample of congregations purchased from MCH www.mailings.com.

The final aggregated data set contains questionnaires from 2,527 congregations. To better represent national population parameters a two stage weighting procedure was used. To mitigate the over-representation of those denominations and faith groups that contributed supplemental survey data, the total aggregated responses were weighted to the population

parameters for faith families presented by Hadaway and Marler [C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measure, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2005) 44(3): 307-322, Table 2]. Then to further enhance national representation, the total aggregated dataset was also weighted to size of congregation and rural/city/suburban location parameters found in the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ national survey of 14,301 congregations. This is the same weighting procedure used for *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵ and therefore has the added benefit of making our trend comparisons more robust.

In several places in the following report we present comparisons across faith families. These comparisons typically are among Oldline Protestants, Evangelical Protestants and Catholic & Orthodox. A more specific definition of these families can be found on page 4. The total of 2,527 usable questionnaires also includes Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i and other non-Christian congregations. Collectively, we refer to this grouping as World Religions. However, because of the group's diversity and small size, caution is in order in interpreting results for the group. The *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ survey, in contrast, did include meaningful samples of Baha'is, Jewish and Muslim congregations, and one can find references to reports on these Faith Families on the *FACT* website. Similarly, one can find references to reports on the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ of Historically Black Protestant denominations on the *FACT* website.



Links to denominational and faith group reports on *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ supplemental surveys will be posted on the *FACT* website as they become available. The CCSP partners that contributed supplemental survey data include: Baha'i Faith in the United States, Interdenominational Theological Center (representing 7 Historically Black Denominations), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church of the Nazarene, Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Seventh-day Adventist Church, Synagogue 3000, and the United Methodist Church.

Definitions

Faith Families: We follow the definitions of Faith Families found in Hadaway and Marler [C. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, *How Many Americans Attend Worship Each Week? An Alternative Approach to Measure*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2005)], which are relatively typical for the social sciences. Our “Evangelical Protestant” is a combination of their “Conservative/Evangelical” and “Other Christian.” It includes not only the larger conservative and evangelical denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, but also, for example, the Historical Black denominations, Jehovah’s Witness and Latter Day Saints. What they label “Mainline Protestantism” we label “Oldline Protestantism” because we believe our label is more descriptively accurate. Following Hadaway and Marler, our Oldline Protestant denominations are limited to the American Baptist Churches, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association.

High Spiritual Vitality refers to those congregations that responded “Strongly Agree” to the statement, “Our Congregation is spiritually vital and alive.” Other possible response categories included: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral/Unsure, and Somewhat Agree.

High Sense of God’s Presence in Worship refers to those congregations that responded “Very Well” to the question: How well does ‘Filled with a sense of God’s presence’ describe your congregation’s largest regular weekend worship service? Other possible response categories included: Not At All, Slightly, Somewhat, and Quite Well.

Very True of Us refers to congregations that either responded “Very Well” to a question about how well the respective characteristic describes the congregation (with other possible response categories including: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral/Unsure, and Somewhat Agree) or responded “Strongly Agree” to a question asking agreement or disagreement with a statement describing the congregation (with other possible response categories including: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neutral/Unsure, and Somewhat Agree).

I. Faith Communities Today: *Trends At A Glance*

The *FACT* trends for American congregations, which begin at the turn of the new century, have to be sobering. The clear and consistent short-term direction among the *FACT* vital signs (2005–2008) are negative—including worship attendance growth, spiritual vitality and sense of mission and purpose (Figure 1.1). The one exception is the presence of serious conflict, which basically remains unchanged at 25% of all congregations. As suggested by the eight-year decline in financial health seen in Figure 1.2, it is likely that the erosion of vitality dates to at least 2000. What makes this even more sobering is the fact that this pattern of decline, here shown for American congregations as a whole, also holds within each of *FACT*'s four primary denominational families—Oldline Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism, Catholic and Orthodox, and Other World Religions.

The cultural revolution carried by and within the baby boomers proved especially challenging for America's religious institutions as participation and membership rates dropped precipitously from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. The 90s brought an overall plateau, the result of slight increases among new immigrant groups and Evangelical Protestants that offset continued stagnation within Oldline Protestantism. In the absence of any true national sample of American congregations prior to 1999, it was presumed that these trends in membership and participation also accurately reflected the general state of our nation's faith communities—long-term Oldline decline, slowing Evangelical growth, immigrant fueled Catholic stability, and a growing, but still small presence of other world religions. Clearly the new century has brought a new turn in the trend. It is a

general turn downward; a slow, but across the board, retreat for America's congregations.

But not everything related to congregational vitality is trending downward. *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ and *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵ found that changing a congregation's style of worship is a catalyst for vitality. As shown in Figure 1.3 it appears that the percentage of congregations changing worship ticked up slightly from 2005 to 2008.

Figure 1.2 Eroding Financial Health

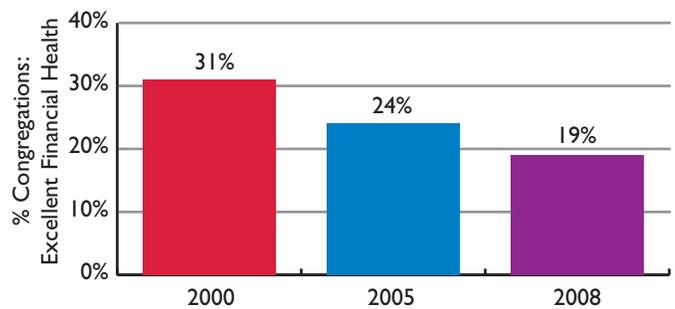


Figure 1.3 Contemporizing Worship

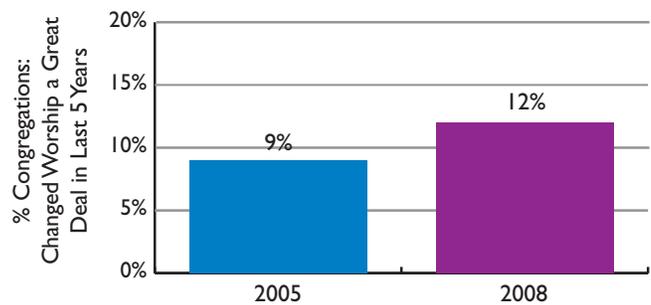
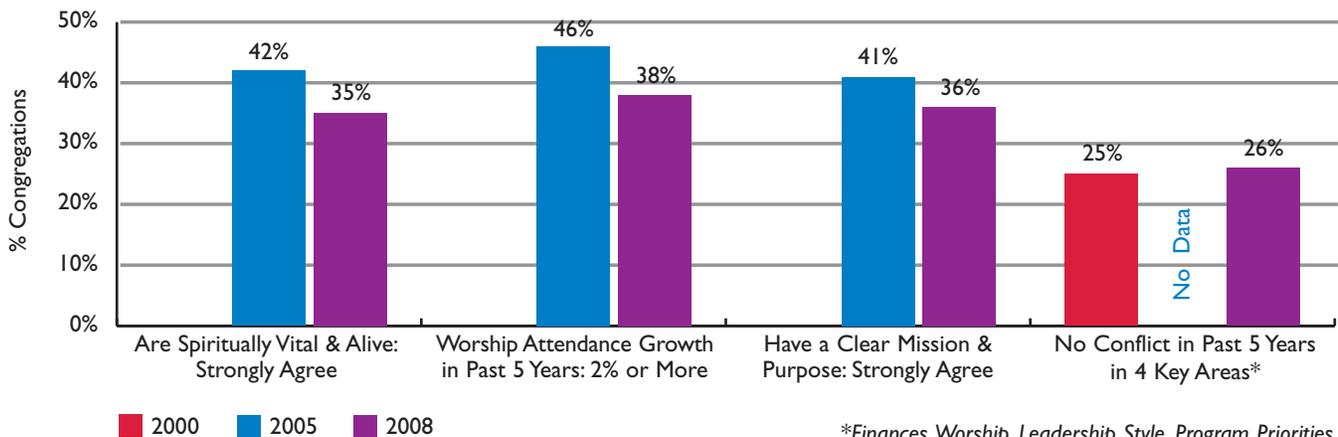


Figure 1.1 Vital Signs



*Finances, Worship, Leadership Style, Program Priorities

However, not all worship change provides a boost to vitality. Figure 1.4 shows the percentage of congregations that had a two percent or more growth in worship attendance from 2003 to 2008 for four types of congregations—those that say they have a traditional style of worship and haven't changed it in the previous five years; those that have a traditional style, but say there has been some change; those that say they have a contemporary style of worship and it hasn't changed in the past five years (early contemporary adaptors); and those that have changed in the past five years and currently have a contemporary style (recent adaptors). The affinity between contemporary worship and growth is clear. What is somewhat surprising is the very slight drop in worship attendance for those congregations that changed worship, but remained within a traditional style.

Instead of mail we now have email; instead of newspapers we now have the web; instead of books we now have Kindle; instead of TV or the movies we have Netflix; and instead of talking we now twitter—all in the last decade, some within the last two or three years. The technological change is astounding and it keeps coming. Perhaps even more astounding is the rapidity with which each new wave becomes commonplace. Less well known are the implications for the fabric of community and the nature of knowing. But for better or worse, Figure 1.4 shows that American congregations have gone electronic. Web access and one presumes its close concomitant, email, are more the norm than the exception. Perhaps more notable, especially among those of us that know what film strip and ditto machines are, is the rapid increase in the use of visual projection equipment in worship. Can it be surprising, therefore, that a newly emergent trend on the religious scene is satellite congregations in which sermons are beamed in from the mother congregation?

Less people in the pew apparently does not mean less of other kinds of congregational programming

as evidenced in Figure 1.6. What we do not know, unfortunately, is if the participation in such programs is increasing (despite a downturn in worship) or if there are fewer and fewer in more and more kinds of congregational activities. One surprise in the figure, especially given the centrality of scripture in every tradition, is that scripture study is the only kind of programming that appears to be waning.

Figure 1.4 Contemporary Worship and Change Helps Fill the Pews

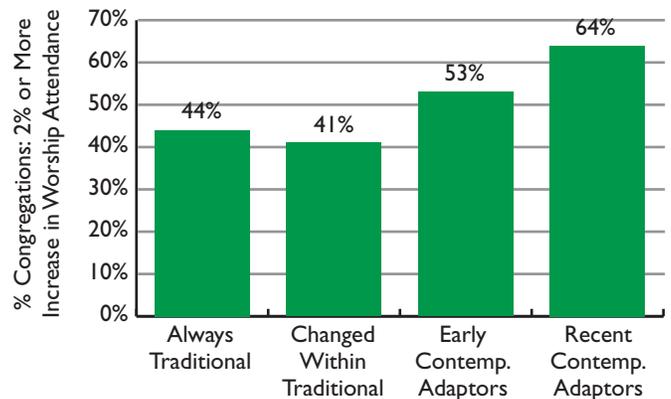


Figure 1.5 Religion Goes Electronic

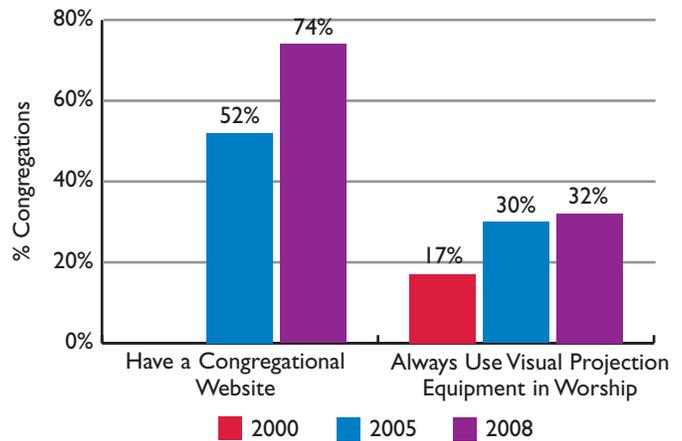
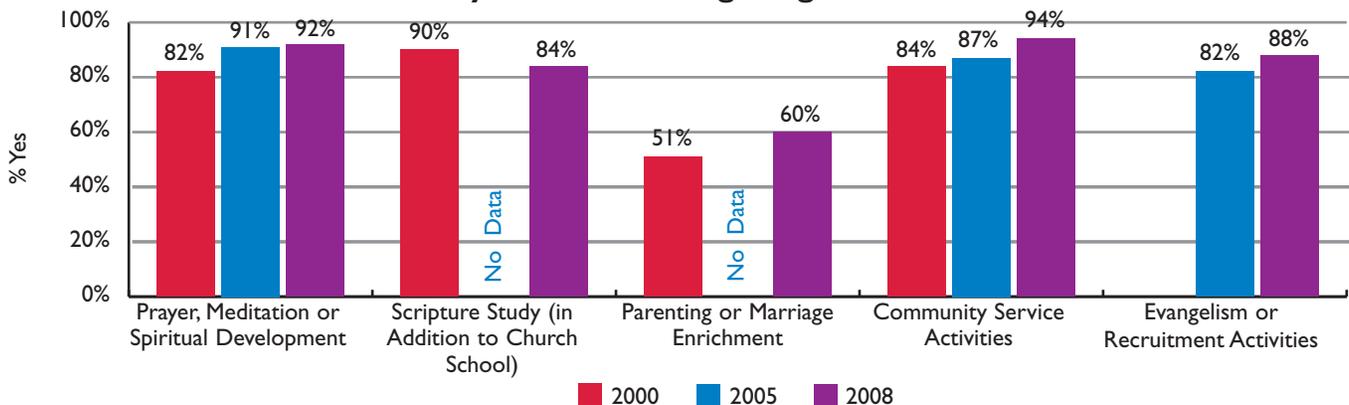


Figure 1.6 Programs: During the Past 12 Months Did Your Congregation Conduct Any of the Following Programs or Activities?



II. Worship

The collective acknowledgement, regard and response to God is a universal aspect of religious traditions. But as seen in Figure 1.1 of the trend section, the specifics of worship within American congregations have been in notable flux for more than a decade. The dominant direction of these changes has been more contemporary, and as is evident in Figure 1.2 in the trend section, contemporary forms of worship do help fill the pews.

Some have argued that the key characteristic of worship styles that are adaptive to the social changes of the last half century is an affective and experiential quality. Figure 2.1 shows unequivocally that there is a strong relationship between the experience of God's presence in worship and the spiritual vitality of a congregation. This is true across faith families, but is especially strong among Oldline Protestant congregations. Figure 2.2 shows, further, that contemporary worship is more conducive than other approaches to a strong sense of God's presence.

More than just contemporary flavor, however, Figure 2.3 suggests that the quality of worship is even more important for invoking the experience of God's presence. *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* asked how well three qualities typically associated with a positive worship experience described one's worship service—reverent, joyful and thought-provoking. "Very well" was the most positive possible response. In Figure 2.3, each of these qualities represents a dimension such that if a congregation responded that each quality described their worship "very well" they are included in the "Three" column in Figure 2.3. If they did not feel that any of the three qualities described their worship "very well" they fall into the "None" column. The result: The more dimensions done very well, the more likely a congregation is to have a high sense of God's presence in worship.

Figure 2.1 God's Presence in Worship a Key to Vitality

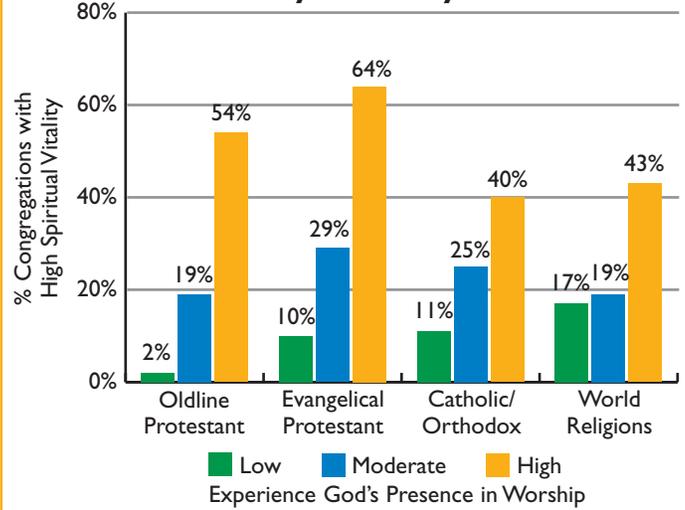


Figure 2.2 Contemporary Worship Increases Sense of God's Presence in Worship

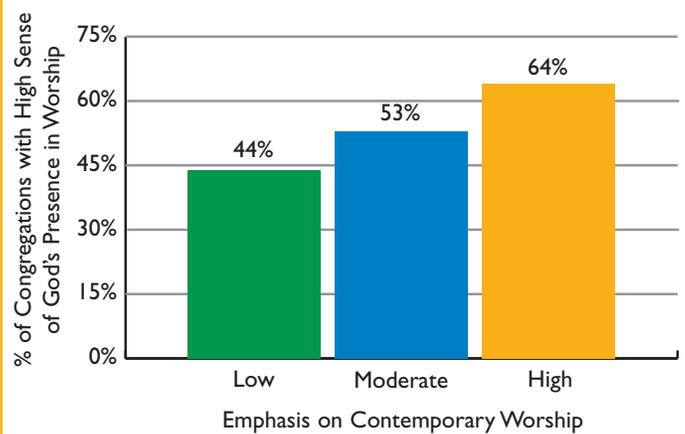
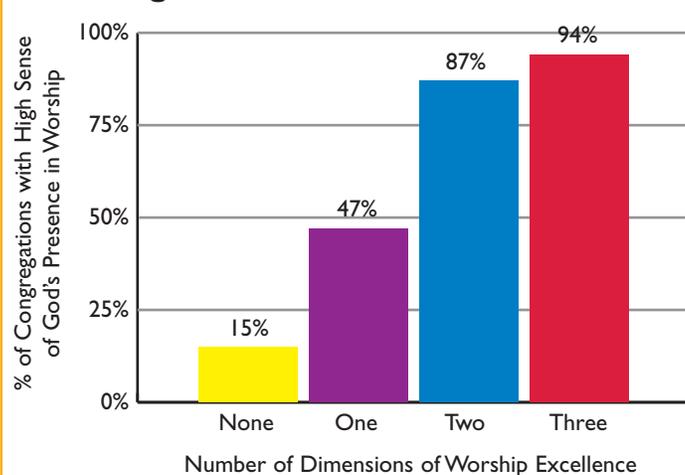


Figure 2.3 The More the Holier



Congregation watchers first noticed the now two decade surge in changing styles of worship within Evangelical Protestantism, and *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* confirmed that. But as seen in *FACT²⁰⁰⁵* and continuing in *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* the rate of change appears to have peaked within Evangelical Protestantism, but continues to accelerate within Oldline Protestantism as it catches up (see Figure 2.4). Perhaps most telling, despite the accelerating rate of change, Figure 2.5 shows that Oldline Protestantism continues to be the most traditional in worship.

Figures 2.6 and 2.7 elaborate on points noted in the trend section. Specifically, both contemporary and especially congregations that changed to contemporary worship in the past five years show elevated levels of Spiritual Vitality and of growth in worship attendance. In stark contrast, those congregations that changed to or within traditional styles of worship within the past five years show the lowest levels of vitality and growth, even lower than those that maintained a traditional style.

Figure 2.4 Oldline Change Accelerating

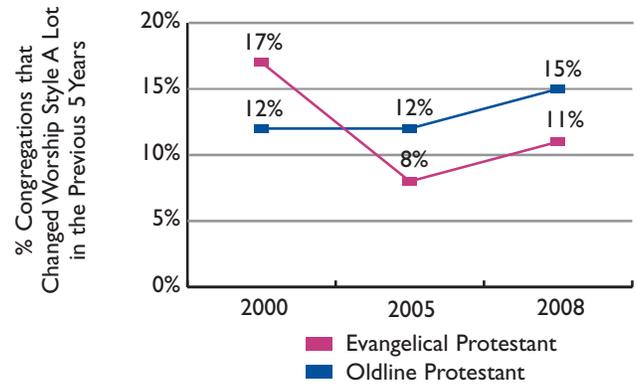


Figure 2.5 But Oldline Still More Traditional

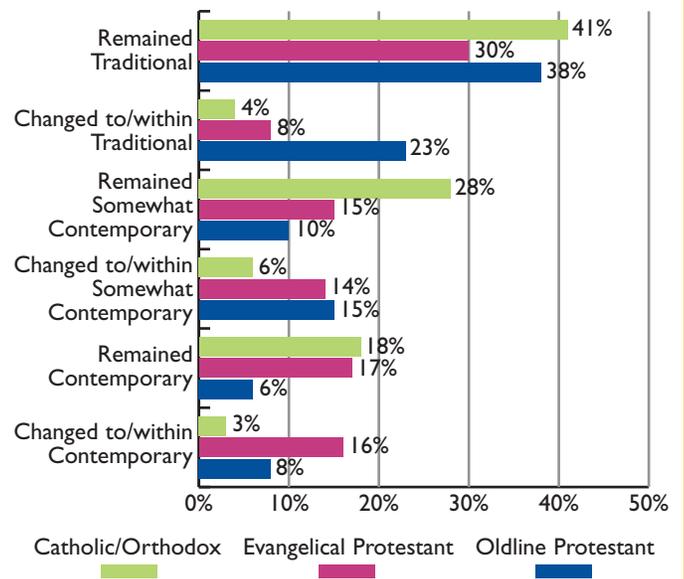


Figure 2.6 Contemporary Worship More Open to the Spiritual

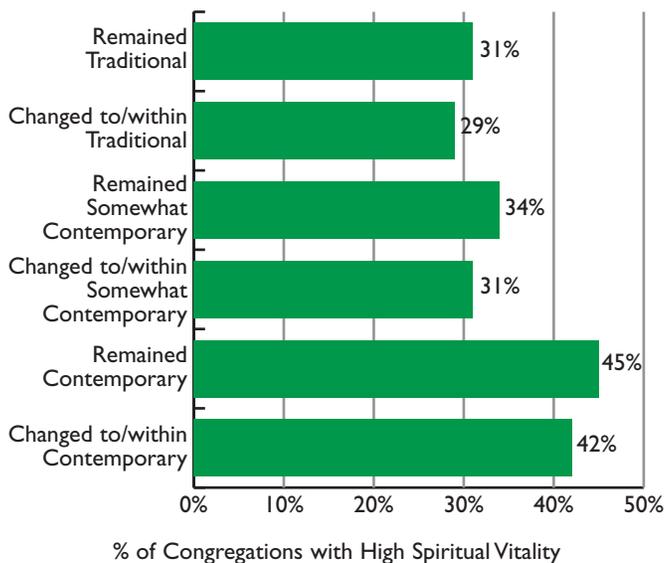
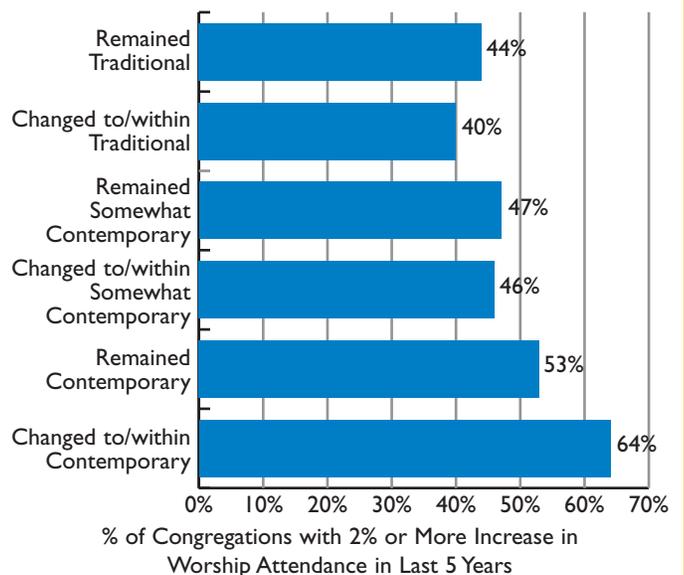


Figure 2.7 And Also More Effective for Filling the Pews



The common wisdom about worship change not only touts the adaptiveness of contemporary approaches, but also advises the advantages of multiple services, especially multiple services that are different in style from each other. The reasoning is that in a world of increasing diversity and increasing sense of entitlement to choice, the more options a congregations offers either in time or kind of service the greater the number of people one is likely to attract.

Against this common wisdom, Figure 2.8 shows that the majority of congregations in America have only one weekly worship service. This varies tremendously by size of congregation as one might expect, and when one recalls that the majority of congregations in the U.S. average less than 100 per week attending worship, the one worship majority is less stark. For example, over 90% of congregations with an average weekly attendance of more than 400 have multiple services, while only 18% of congregations with an average attendance of fewer than 50 have multiple services. Perhaps the only surprising and most interesting thing here is the 18% of very small congregations that have multiple services. Perhaps they are trying to apply the common wisdom.

Figure 2.9 suggests that a multiple service bump in participants is real, but not as great as some would expect. The figure also suggests that whatever bounce there is in participation has little if any carryover to spiritual vitality.

Figure 2.10 provides an even greater challenge to the common wisdom. Beyond the positive effect of multiple services for participation, there is virtually no difference between congregations whose multiple services are basically the same and those that are very different. The same is true for spiritual vitality.

Figure 2.8 One Still the Magic Number: Number of Worship Services On a Typical Weekend

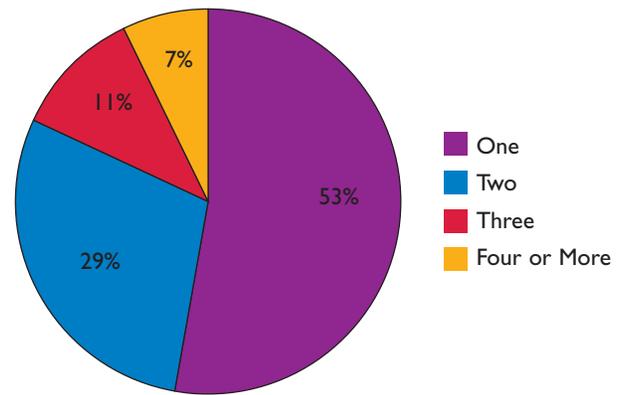


Figure 2.9 Multiple Service Bounce? Some!

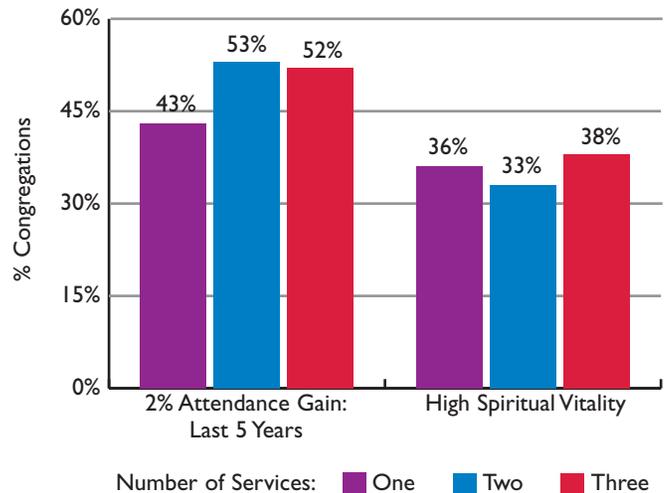
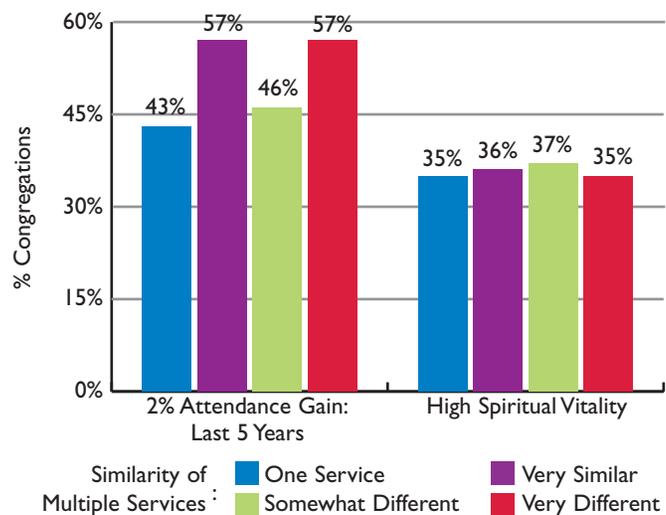


Figure 2.10 Diversity of Service Bounce? Not!



III. Identity

An identity is a distinct set of enduring characteristics and predispositions. For congregational identity, theological belief is a critical dimension and while liberal/conservative categorizations of belief lack nuance they do provide provocative differentiations in practice. The *FACT²⁰⁰⁵* finding that the majority of members in three-fourths of America's congregations are somewhat or predominantly conservative (Figure 3.1) certainly felt right in the middle of the Bush years. But what was surprising was that it was also true for over half of the congregations in what is typically considered to be "liberal" Oldline Protestantism, while only 18% of Oldline Protestant congregations said that a majority of their members were somewhat or very liberal.

FACT²⁰⁰⁸ tried a slightly different variation.

Congregations were asked how their participants' theological outlook compared to other congregations in their denomination. A plurality staked out the middle (Figure 3.2), with 40% saying "Right in the Middle." But among the remaining 60% there was a decided lean toward the "more or somewhat more conservative" side. Perhaps most interestingly, this roughly 40% middle, 40% conservative, 20% liberal distribution held within each of our three Christian faith families, but was closer to a 33/33/33% distribution for the non-Christian family.

FACT²⁰⁰⁵ found greater vitality at both the liberal and conservative extreme of its theological spectrum. *FACT²⁰⁰⁸*, as seen in Figure 3.3 presents further evidence in support of this general tendency. Figure 3.3 further shows that the vitality jump is most prominent for the most comparatively liberal congregations in the comparatively liberal, Oldline Protestantism.

Figure 3.1 Conservative Tilt: *FACT²⁰⁰⁵* Theological Outlook of Majority of Participants

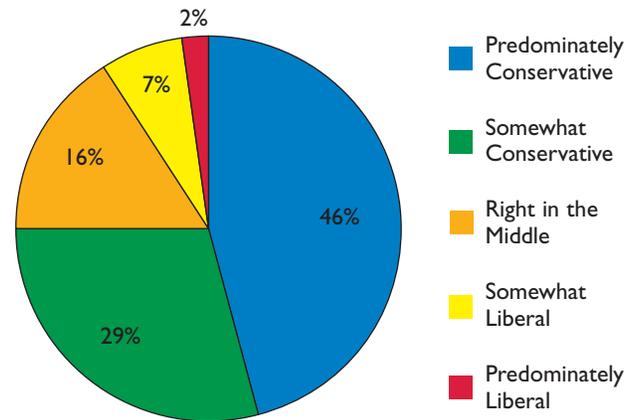


Figure 3.2 Even Relatively Speaking: *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* Theological Outlook of Participants Compared to Other Congregations in Denomination

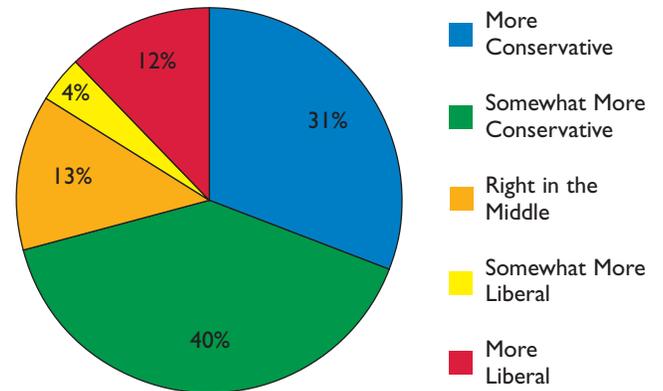


Figure 3.3 Vitality at the Extremes

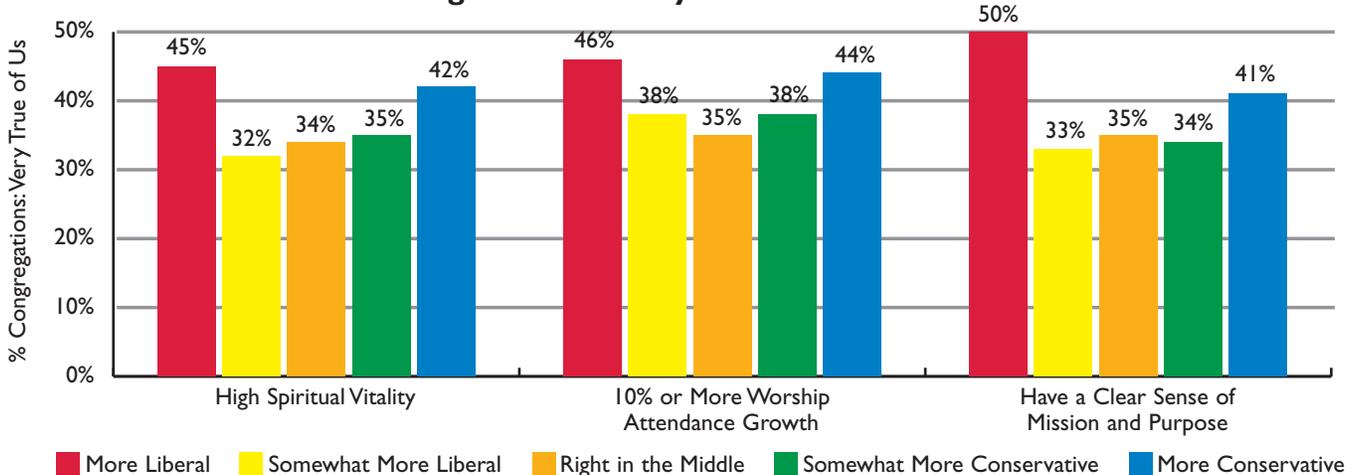


Figure 3.4 Conservative and Liberal Tendencies

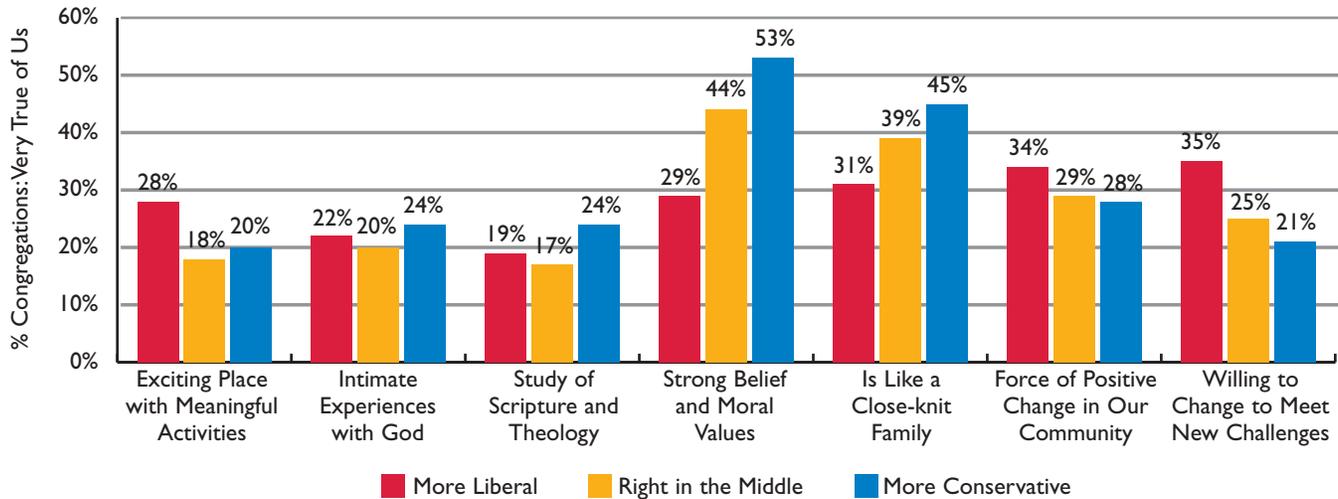


Figure 3.4 presents confirmation of what are commonly assumed to be liberal and conservative theological differences. Specifically:

- More liberal congregations place more emphasis on activities than do more conservative congregations, but conservative congregations place more emphasis on strong belief and values;
- Conservative congregations place more emphasis on the quality of their internal relationships than do liberal congregations, but liberal congregations place more emphasis on ministry to the world outside their doors;
- Liberal congregations are more open to change than conservative congregations, but conservative congregations place more emphasis on scripture and theology.

Most discussions of congregational identity focus on “content.” But what most organizational theorists say, and as suggested in Figure 3.3’s documentation of vitality at the extremes, is that strength of identity or distinctiveness of identity is equally or more important.

To further test this insight *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* asked congregations whether or not they were different than other congregations in their community. A slim majority felt they were somewhat or very different (Figure 3.5), 30% responded somewhat or very much the same and nearly 20% were not sure.

Figure 3.5 More Different Than the Same: Difference From Other Congregations In Our Community

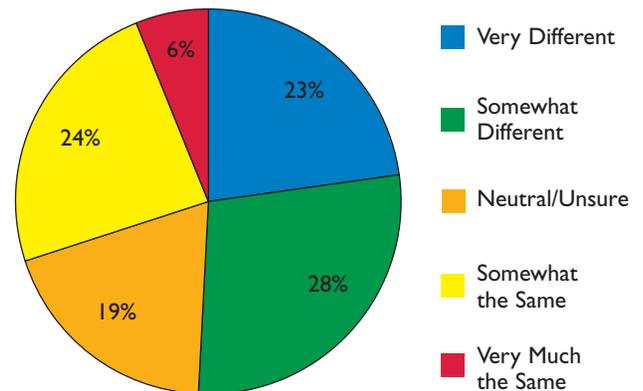


Figure 3.6 looks at a breakdown by denominational family. One finding stands out. Oldline Protestantism congregations are distinguished by their lack of distinctiveness. Indeed, only 14% have a strong sense of being different from other congregations, roughly half the percentage than for other faith families.

Location makes relatively little difference in a congregation's perception of its distinctiveness (Figure 3.7), nor does size. Among other things this means that that the Oldline gap in Figure 3.6 is not due to the Oldline's disproportionate number of rural and smaller congregations.

But two things about a congregation's sense of distinctness are readily apparent in Figures 3.8 and 3.9. First, a congregation's sense of distinctness is strongly related to having a clear sense of mission and purpose (Figure 3.8). Indeed, the relationship between purposefulness and distinctness is one of the strongest in our entire analysis of the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ responses.

More importantly, Figure 3.9 shows how dramatically a strong sense of self is related to spiritual vitality. Indeed, within each of our three Christian families twice as many congregations with a strong sense of self have high spiritual vitality. Similarly, although not quite as strong, there is also a stark positive relationship between strong sense of self and other measures of congregational vitality like financial health, worship attendance growth and lack of conflict.

Figure 3.7 Little Difference in Difference by Location

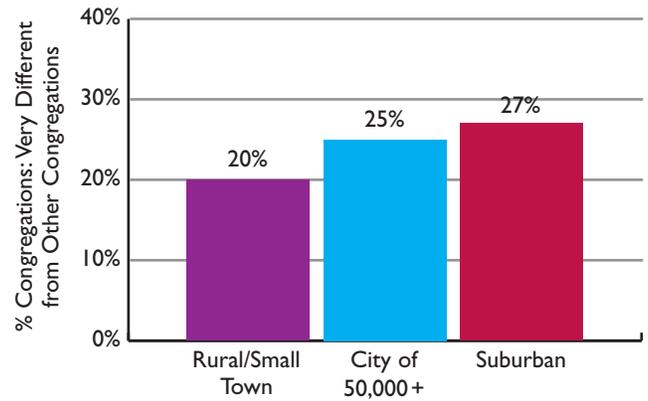


Figure 3.8 Big Difference in Difference by Sense of Mission

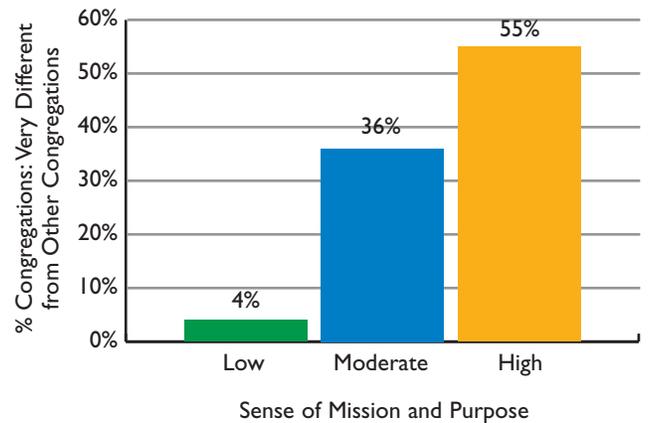


Figure 3.6 Except for the Oldline: Difference From Other Congregations in Our Community

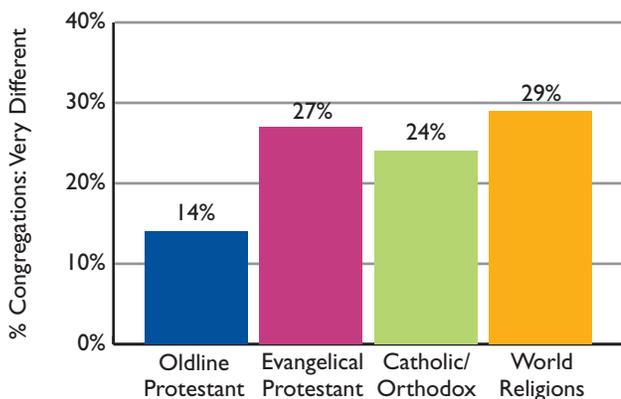
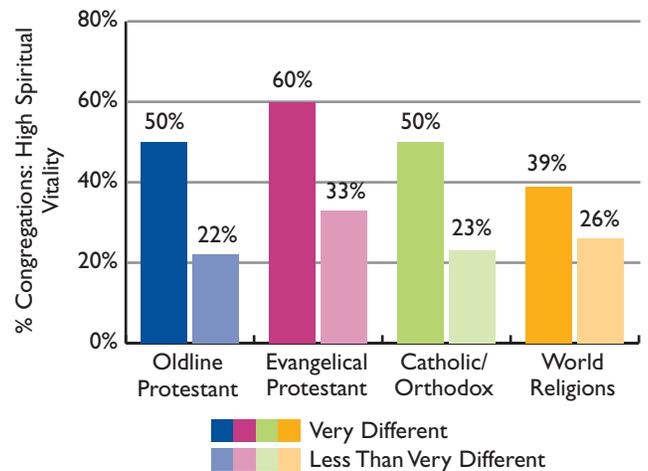


Figure 3.9 Difference Does Make a Difference



It is typical to think about a congregation's identity in terms of its beliefs and religious practices. But other distinguishing characteristics can be highly significant. The immediately previous discussion of the interrelationship among sense of purpose, sense of distinctiveness and high spiritual vitality further suggests that a congregation's awareness of its distinctiveness is perhaps more important than the mere fact of being different.

Fig 3.10 shows that the age structure of a congregation can be a distinguishing fact. Specifically the figure shows the percentage of congregations in which 26–50% and 50% or more adult participants are 65 years of age or older. What it finds is that—again in stark contrast to the other denominational families—nearly six of every ten congregations within Oldline Protestantism fall into one of these two categories; a figure nearly twice as great as any other family and nearly three times as great as for Evangelical Protestant congregations.

Figure 3.11 points to the significance of a congregation's age structure, again using percentage of seniors. Specifically, the more seniors the less the clarity about purpose. Equally important, the same is true for each of our other key indicators of congregational vitality—the more seniors the lower a congregation's spiritual vitality, the poorer financial health, the less growth, the less openness to change and the more conflict. Obviously there are vital congregations with a predominance of senior adults. But the pattern of challenge is strong and consistent. One wonders, therefore, why this remains one of the least discussed but most practically significant aspects of congregational life and identity, especially within Oldline Protestantism.

Figure 3.10 Oldline Participants are, Indeed, Older—Very Much Older

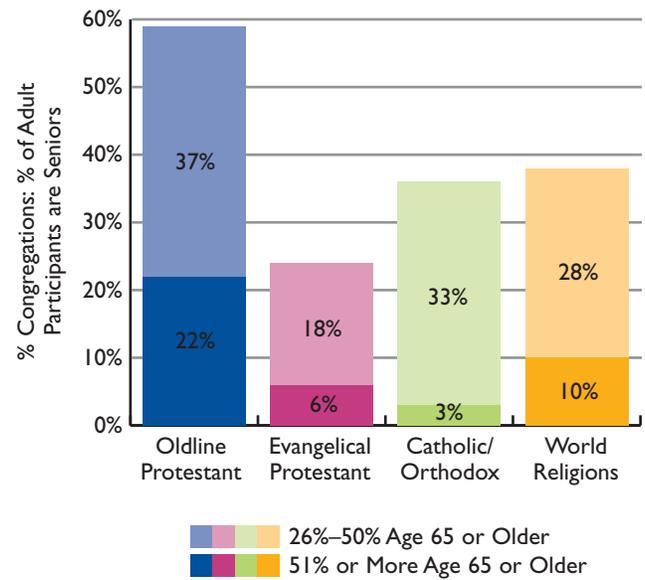
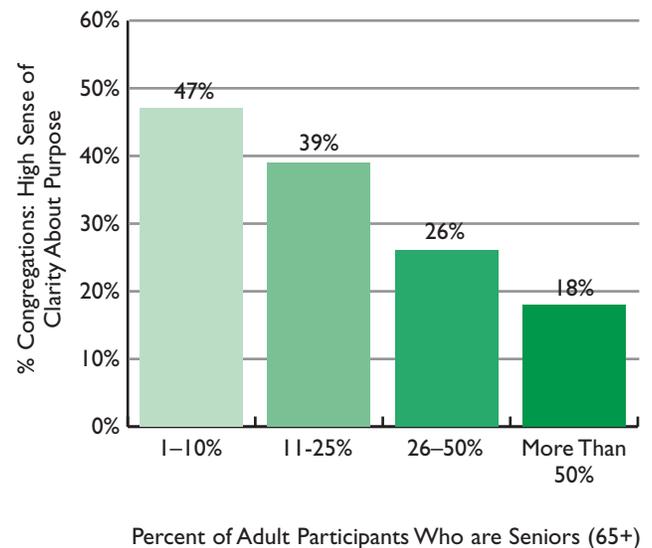


Figure 3.11 The More Seniors the Less Clarity About Purpose



IV. Program

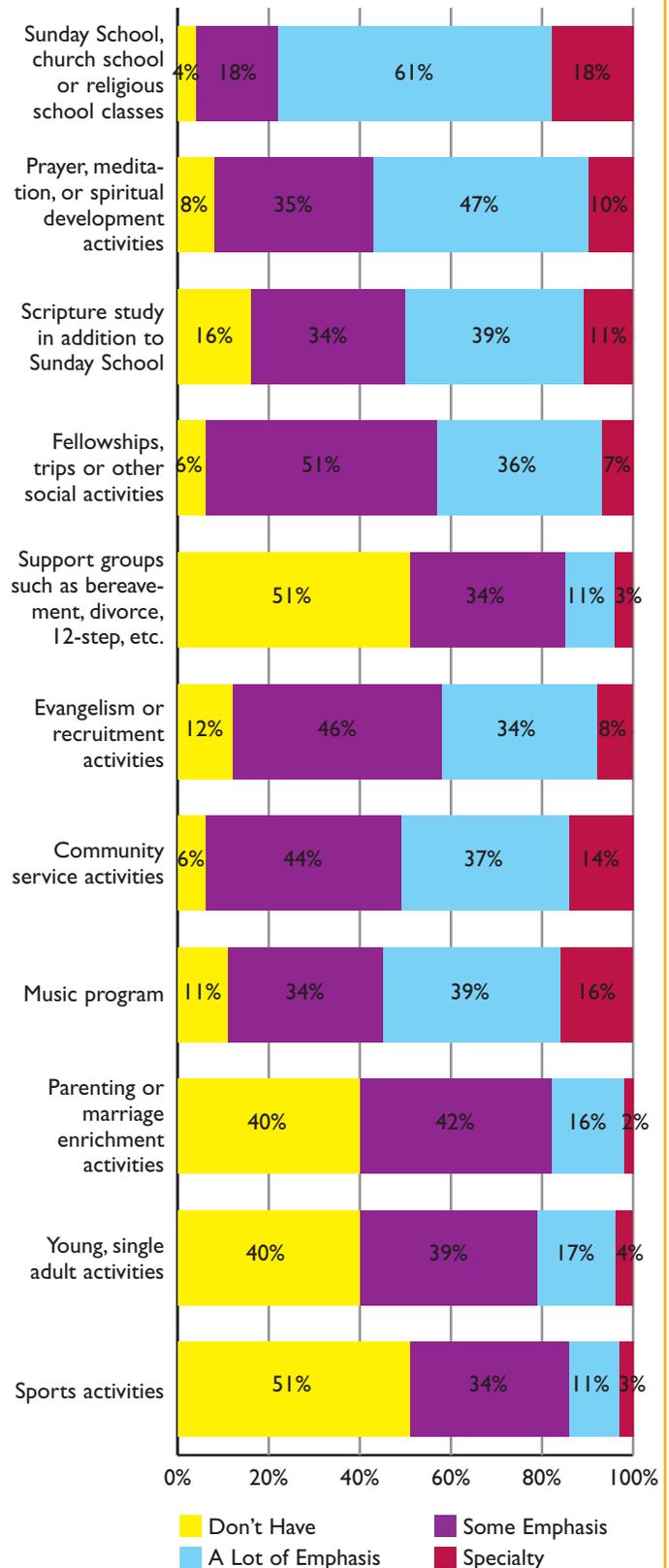
Program is one of those areas of congregational life that is frustratingly complicated to assess in a general purpose questionnaire. Not only is the range of program areas so broad that it is always a challenge to come up with a succinct, yet inclusive set of categories, but then, for example, a congregation might have multiple programs in a particular area, some programs might be one or a few sessions and others an entire year, some programs may have only a few participants and others many, and some programs may be targeted to specific groups and others open to everyone. Each *FACT* survey has approached the challenge somewhat differently trying to find a telling way to get a read on both the areas of programming and the emphasis given to each. The areas and range of emphasis for *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ are presented in Figure 4.1. The general findings are consistent with other surveys and past *FACT* profiles. Near universal attention is given to many areas; and considerably less attention given to many others.

What is unique to *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ is asking if a program area is a specialty of the congregation.

Figure 4.2 Denominational Family Whose Congregations are Most Likely to Specialize in Program Area

Sunday School, church school or religious school classes	Evangelical Protestant
Prayer, meditation, or spiritual development activities	Evangelical Protestant
Scripture study groups (in addition to Sunday School)	World Religions
Fellowships, trips or other social activities	Catholic / Orthodox
Support groups (such as bereavement, divorce, 12-step, etc.)	Evangelical Protestant
Evangelism or recruitment activities	Evangelical Protestant
Community service activities	Oldline Protestant
Music program	Oldline Protestant
Parenting or marriage enrichment activities	World Religions
Young, single adult activities	Evangelical Protestant
Sports activities (teams, recreation centers, tournaments, etc.)	Catholic / Orthodox

Figure 4.1 Lots of Programs, Few Specialties



The title of Figure 4.1 leaks the major finding: While there is lots of congregational programming, there is relatively little specialization. No area is specialized in by more than 20% of congregations. The three leading areas are “Church” School, Music and Community Service. Scripture study and spiritual practices constitute a second tier, followed by fellowship activities and evangelism. Nothing else appears as a specialty of more than 5% of congregations.

Combining all of the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ program areas, just over half of congregations do not specialize in any area, and no more than 1 in 10 congregations specialize in more than two areas. This is virtually the same within each denominational family.

Denominational families do differ, however, in the program areas in which their congregations are most likely to specialize. Those areas are shown in Figure 4.2. Perhaps the most important lesson of the figure is the reminder that scripture study and family are absolutely central in the life of the World Religions group.

The breadth of congregational programming jumps significantly once you get beyond the very smallest congregations (see Figure 4.3). Beyond that, however, the effect of size on breadth of programming is less consistent than one might think. Remember, by breadth we mean the number of different areas in which a congregation offers programs, which is what *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ asked. Other surveys have asked about the number of programs or activities offered in any given area, and the total number of offerings does increase consistently by size.

One may argue about whether vitality provides the energy for lots of programs, or lots of programs create a sense of vitality, but as seen in Figure 4.4, high vitality and lots of programming go hand in hand. This is true across denominational families, and it is most likely the case that the two feed off of each other. The one blip in the consistency of the vitality/programming relationship across denominational families in Figure 4.4 is the untypically high breadth of programming for “low vitality” congregations in our Catholic and Orthodox family. The anomaly awaits further examination.

Figure 4.3 Size Effect Unpredictable

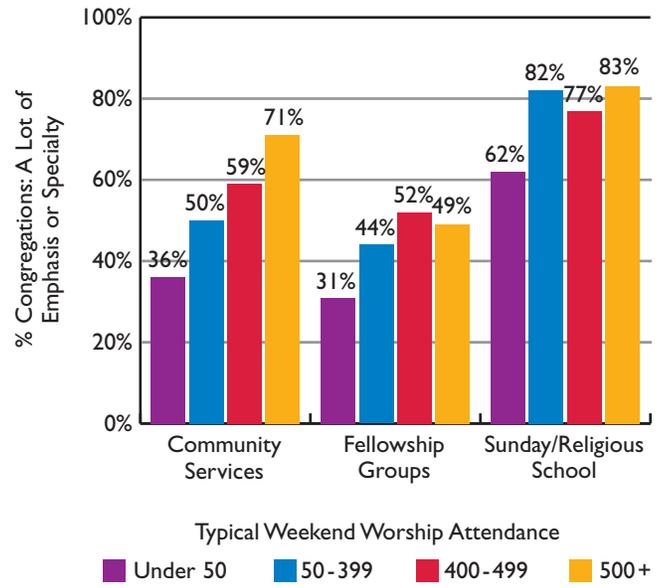
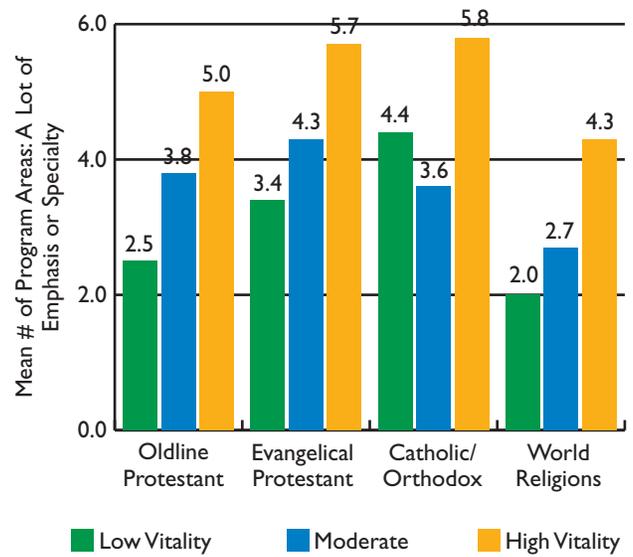


Figure 4.4 Vitality Flows With Program



V. Youth

Interest in many areas of congregational life cycle up and down over time. Youth ministry is one of these. Right now interest is rising. The reason may be because of increasing worries about flat to declining memberships and the perception that youth programming would stimulate growth. Interestingly, *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ finds that a positive relationship between youth programming and growth (For *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸, in worship attendance) only holds for our Evangelical Protestant and Catholic/Orthodox families, and even here it is not very strong. For Oldline Protestantism the relationship is actually negative, although again not very strong; and for our World Religions family the relationship is not significant.

Figure 5.1 shows the overall results for seven areas of youth involvement probed in *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸. Two primary tiers are evident. Just under eight of every ten congregations report youth ministers or coordinators; organized youth groups; and youth retreats, camps or conferences. Then just over four in ten congregations report choirs or musical groups; counseling programs; and youth involvement in congregational governance.

Figure 5.2 shows that the breadth of congregational youth involvements (number of youth program areas) varies significantly by denominational family. *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ further shows that different kinds of involvements spike within different families. Evangelical Protestant groups are most likely to have youth ministers/coordinators, organized youth groups and counseling programs. Catholic/Orthodox parishes are most likely to offer youth camps, conferences and retreats. World Religions are most likely to have musical programs for youth. Oldline Protestants are most likely to have congregational events planned or led by youth.

Figure 5.1 Activities for Youth

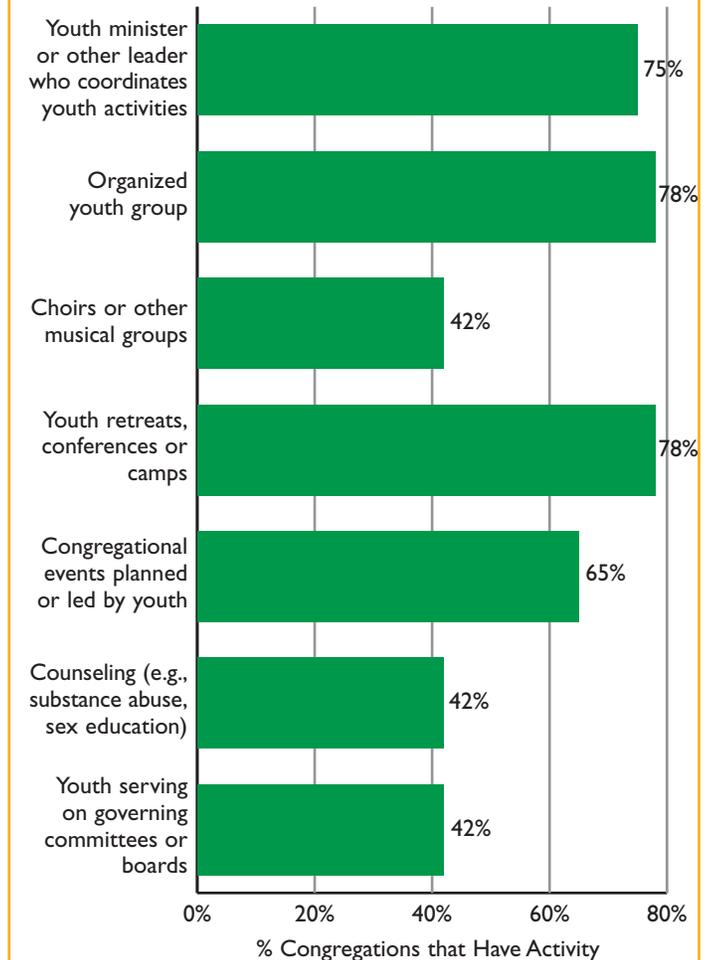
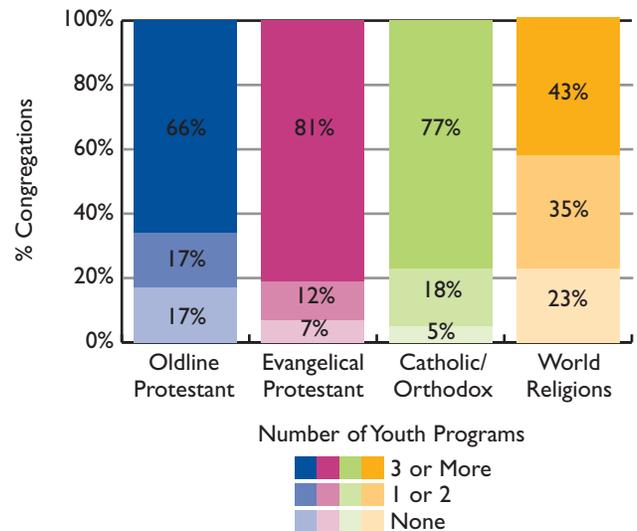


Figure 5.2 Denominational Family Makes a Difference



The patterns of relationship among youth involvement and denominational family, particularly when one recalls the disproportionately high proportions of small and of rural/small congregations within Oldline Protestantism, suggest that just like congregational programming in general size and location are related to youth ministry. This is true to a limited extent. But much more important than either size or location is the age structure of the congregation. As seen in Figure 5.3, the drop off is particularly great in congregations in which over half of regular adult participants are seniors (65+ years old), and this is true regardless of denominational family. It is one of the largely unspoken challenges of “senior” congregations.

The strong relationship between youth ministry and spiritual vitality is starkly visible in Figure 5.4, with it being especially strong within our Catholic/Orthodox family. The relationship holds with only a slight dip in strength even when age structure is controlled. The relationship, although with somewhat varying strengths, is also true for all our key vitality indicators. As was also the case for congregational programs in general, we do not know the extent to which vitality provides the energy for a breadth of youth involvement or youth involvement creates a sense of vitality, but most likely the two feed off of each other.

With few exceptions, all of the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ youth involvements are related to vitality for each of the denominational families. But the youth involvement most strongly related to vitality differs for most denominational family. For Oldline and Evangelical Protestant congregations it is youth counseling programs; for the World Religions family it is organized youth programs, and for the Catholic/Orthodox family it is youth serving on committees and boards.

While youth involvement in governance functions may be most strongly related to vitality within the Catholic/Orthodox family, Figure 5.5 shows that the practice is most prevalent, by a wide margin, within the World Religions family. But the most interesting thing about the figure may be what is not seen, indeed a reversal of what is seen in the figure. The figure shows that the practice is, if anything, more prevalent among Evangelical Protestant congregations than among Oldline Protestant congregations. But recall that having an age structure tilted toward seniors tends to depress youth programming and that Oldline Protestant congregations are considerably more likely than Evangelical Protestant congregations to be tilted toward seniors. Result: when you control on senior tilt, Oldline Protestant congregations are much more likely than Evangelical Protestant congregations to give youth a voice in governance.

Figure 5.3 Not Surprising—But Largely Unspoken

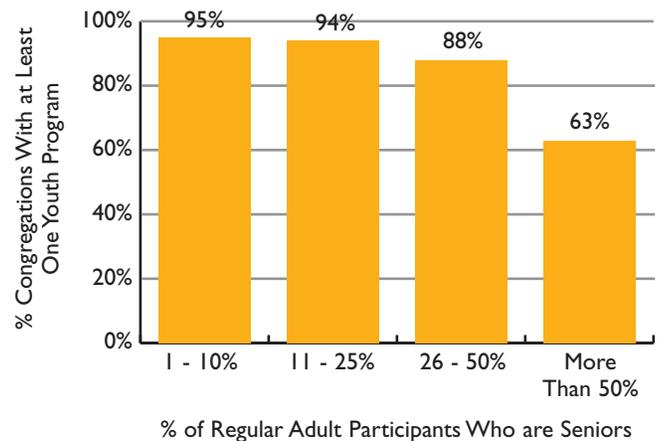


Figure 5.4 Vitality Flows With Youth Activities

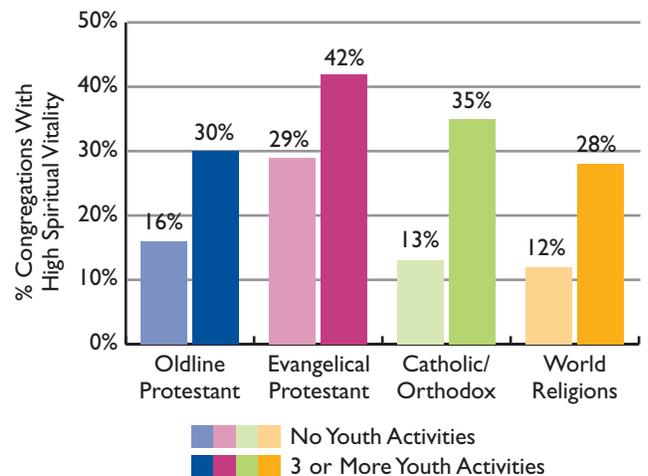
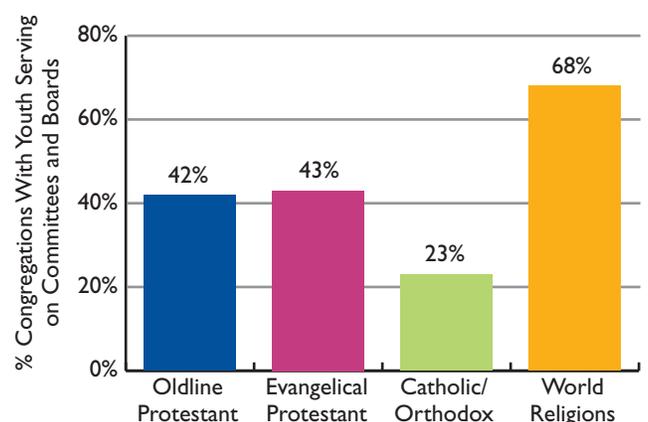


Figure 5.5 Giving Youth a Voice: It is Not What it Appears



VI. Attracting & Tracking New Members

The *Trends at a Glance* section reported a slight uptick in evangelism and recruitment activity from *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵ to *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸. Figure 6.1 shows that such activity does pay off. Twelve to 14% more Protestant congregations that reported high levels of evangelism or recruitment activities also reported worship attendance growth over the past five years than was the case for congregations with no or little evangelism or recruitment activities. For the Catholic/Orthodox and World Religions families the jump was around 20%. The payoff was about the same for city and for rural/small town congregations, but only half as great for congregations in the suburbs. The largest differentials, however, appear for size (Figure 6.2). There was only about an 8% jump in growth for congregations under 400 weekend worship attendees, but a jump of more than 30% for larger congregations (400 or more attendees).

Relatively few congregations report rarely, if ever, having visitors (only about 6% overall), although this jumps to just over 20% for the very smallest (under 50 attendees), especially small rural, congregations. Figure 6.3 reports on five typical methods used for contacting visitors. One clear finding is that, with the exception of personal visits, no one method seems better relative to attendance growth, and the exception (personal visits) appears to have no effect on attendance growth. But denominational family does make a difference, at least in terms of preferred method. For World Religions, phoning visitors is the follow-up method of choice. Catholic/Orthodox parishes are most likely to send material about the parish; Oldline Protestant congregations most frequently mail it in; and Evangelical Protestants' first option is the personal visit.

Figure 6.2 Especially for Larger Congregations

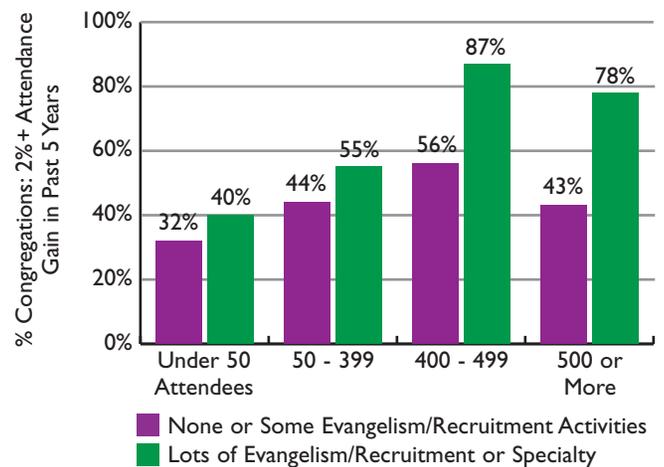


Figure 6.3 How Do You Contact Visitors? It Doesn't Make Much Difference

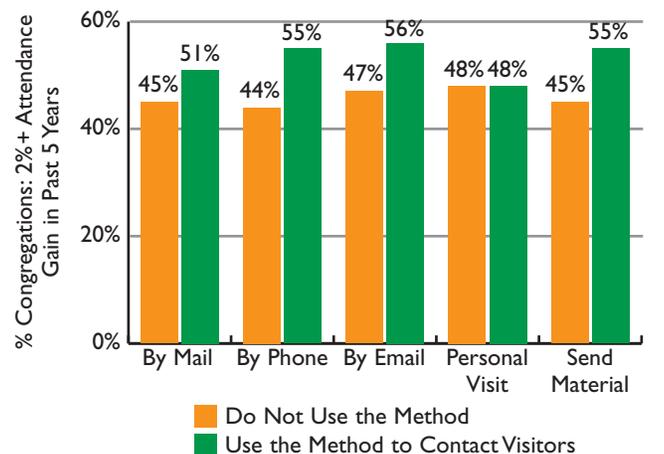


Figure 6.1 Evangelism and Recruitment Pay Off

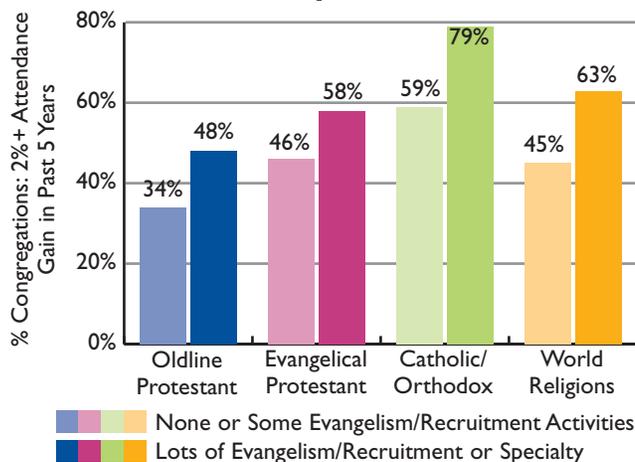
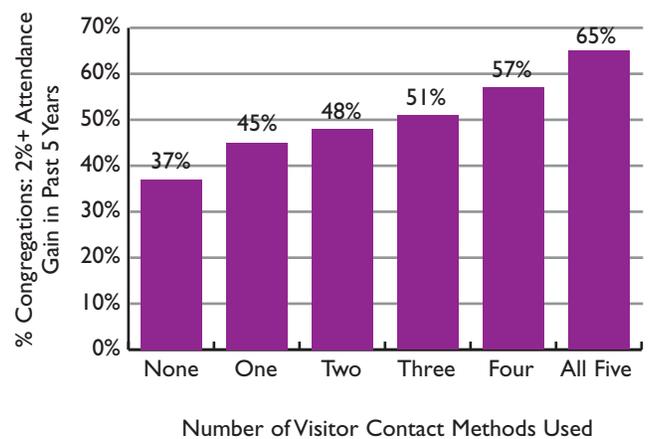


Figure 6.4 But the Number of Methods Does



Type of contact method doesn't appear to matter much, but the number of methods a congregation uses does. The more methods used produce a steady increase in the likelihood of growth. The multi-method payoff at its extreme (five methods vs. none—see Figure 6.4) shows nearly 30% more congregations with growing worship attendance. This is the overall figure. There is, however, considerable variation among denominational families in the multi-method payoff. The comparable differential for Oldline Protestant congregations drops to 23%, increases to 37% for Evangelical Protestant congregations and then jumps again to a whopping 50% among Catholic/Orthodox parishes.

The *Trends at a Glance* section noted the surge in congregations going electronic over the past decade. Figure 6.5 shows what a difference only 3 years has made in congregations' adaptation of electronic media for contacting visitors. Use of email for follow-up is lowest in rural and small town congregations and highest for suburban congregations, with city congregations falling in between. Perhaps relatedly, email use decreases as congregations become more senior (i.e., more of a congregation's adult participants are 65 or older).

Like buying a house, the common wisdom about church growth used to be, "*Location, location, location.*" We've come to realize that congregations are no longer totally, nor in most cases even largely, captive to the demographics of their location. This seems clear in Figure 6.6, which presents responses to a set of questions about neighborhood obstacles to attracting new people. Population changes still are a challenge for some congregations to be sure, but a general lack of interest in religion is certainly the major challenge perceived by many more. As might be expected, changing neighborhoods affect more congregations in the city than elsewhere, while stable to declining population is most challenging for rural and small town congregations, and mobility is especially challenging in the suburbs.

Figure 6.7 classically lends itself to a "half full" or "half empty" interpretation. On the one hand, those congregations less confronted by either competition or a changing neighborhood are more likely to grow. On the other hand, a full third of those congregations most challenged by a changing neighborhood experienced growth in worship attendance; and this increases to 40% for congregations most challenged by competition from nearby congregations.

Figure 6.5 From Mail to Email: The Impact of Electronic Technology

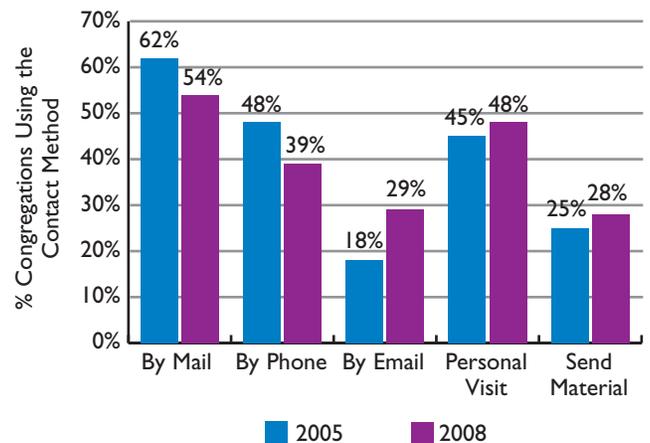


Figure 6.6 Are Neighborhood Obstacles Losing Their Sting?

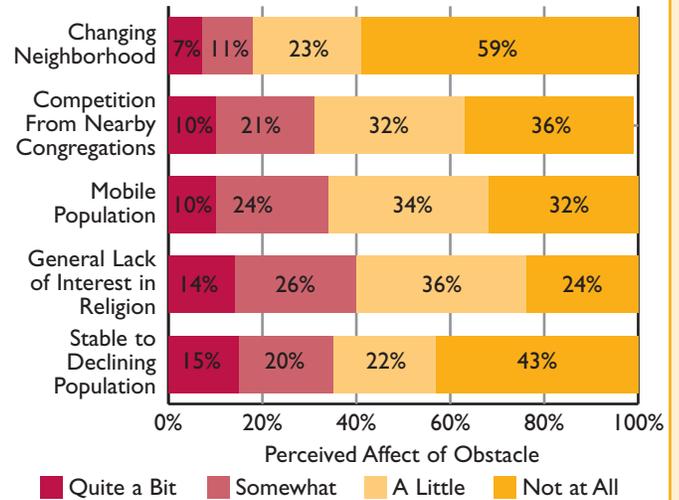
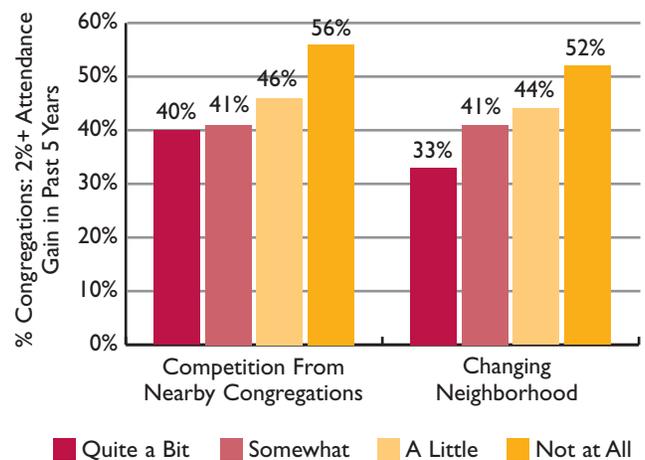


Figure 6.7 Obstacles Are Obstacles, Not Insurmountable Challenges



Marketing language has slowly infiltrated the congregational leadership lexicon. One such idea that is increasingly present is that of “the competition.” As seen in Figure 6.6, for example, nearly two-thirds of all congregations acknowledge feeling it at least a little in their efforts to attract new people. And as seen in Figure 6.8 it is felt considerably stronger within Oldline Protestantism than other Christian groups.

What we don’t know is who the Oldline feels competition from. One might recall from the *Identity* section that Oldline Protestant congregations are the least likely of any denominational family to have a sense of being different from other congregations in their community. It is plausible, therefore, that their sense of competition is driven by sameness, rather than distinctiveness (too many of us with basically the same product). Indeed, the *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* survey shows that the greater a congregation’s sense of being different and the greater a congregation’s clarity about its purpose, the less competition it feels from others.

What a congregation has to offer is clearly important to recruitment, as is the cumulative affect of recruitment efforts. Of the latter, Figure 6.9 confirms that member’s involvement in recruiting new people is arguably the most effective. Further analysis shows that members’ involvement is even more important for attendance growth in congregations without much or any sense of being distinct; and member involvement is more important within Oldline Protestantism than the other denominational families.

One of the most interesting findings from the research on Billy Graham’s evangelism crusades is that one of the crusades’ strongest measurable impacts was on the legions of local volunteers that assisted at each campaign and went through a rigorous training program. Figure 6.10 echoes that insight: Congregations with a lot of member involvement in recruitment are much more likely than other congregations to have a high corporate sense of spiritual vitality (although this is a bit of chicken and egg issue in that it also is probably true that members in spiritually vital congregations are more likely to involve themselves in recruitment).

Figure 6.8 The Oldline Feels the Competition

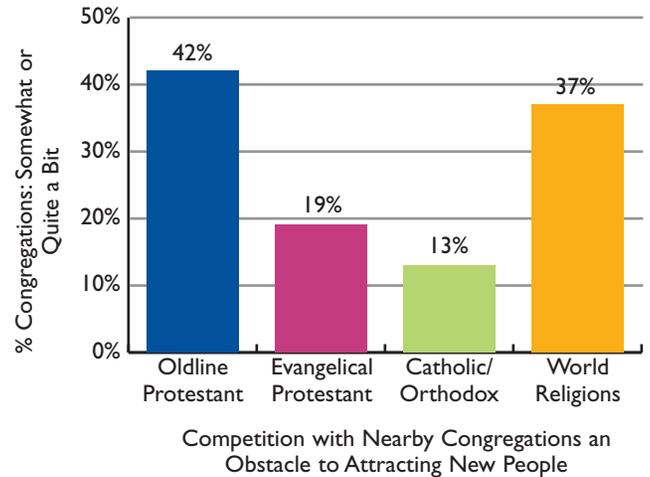


Figure 6.9 A Personal Touch: Members’ Recruiting Better Than Programs

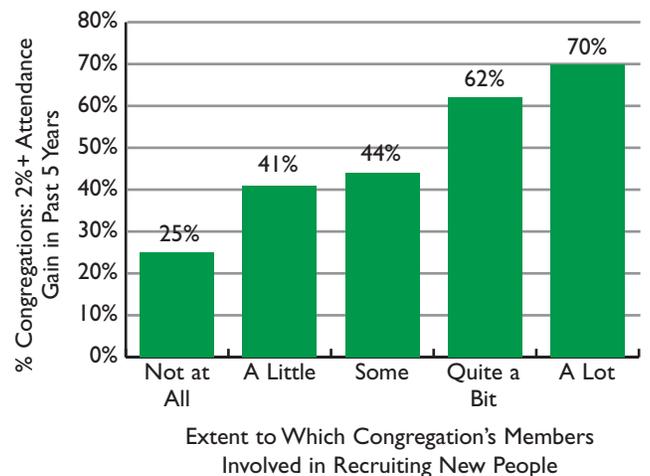
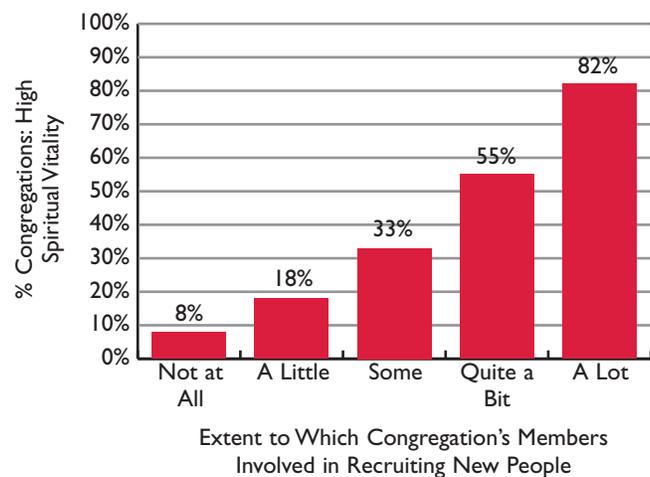


Figure 6.10 Members’ Recruiting Strongly Tied to Spiritual Vitality



VII. Assimilating New Members & Deepening Lay Leadership

A wise colleague and great storyteller used to differentiate between a congregation's parlor stories and its kitchen stories. Parlor stories are those told in those politely affable settings where members share with "outsiders." Kitchen stories are those unswerving, candid and sometimes gossipy musings that intimates share with other intimates. His point: You know you really belong when you are included in the kitchen conversations, and it usually doesn't happen quickly or without effort. *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ asked which of the pathways shown in Figure 7.1 congregations use to help newer participants become more integrated and accepted into the life of the congregation. The centrality of worship and the relational adhesion of involvement in a congregation's ongoing practices of fellowship stand out.

All of the pathways are used by one or another congregation within each denominational family. However, family preferences vary somewhat as seen in Figure 7.2. The exception is invitation to worship, which is the mainstay of all families.

*FACT*²⁰⁰⁸'s list of pathways also included an option for congregations to say that planned practices or procedures were not needed. As seen in the left panel of Figure 7.3, not many congregations felt this way, especially among larger congregations. The right panel in the figure further suggests that the larger a congregation, the more intentional it must be about providing programmatic pathways into congregational life. The panel reports specifically about inviting newer persons to join small groups. But the same pattern holds for all the pathways, again except worship which is the preferential option within congregations of all sizes.

Invitation to participate in class for new persons	Evangelical Protestant
Invitation to join a small group	Oldline Protestant
Invitation to worship	All Families
Regular fellowship activities	World Religions
Invitation to participate in community service	Oldline Protestant
Invitation to serve the congregation on boards, committees, etc.	Oldline & Evangelical Prot.

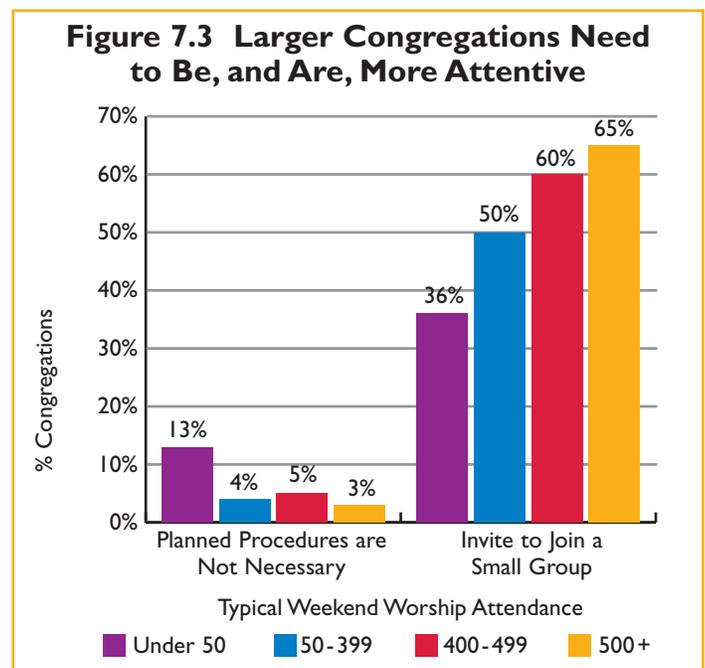
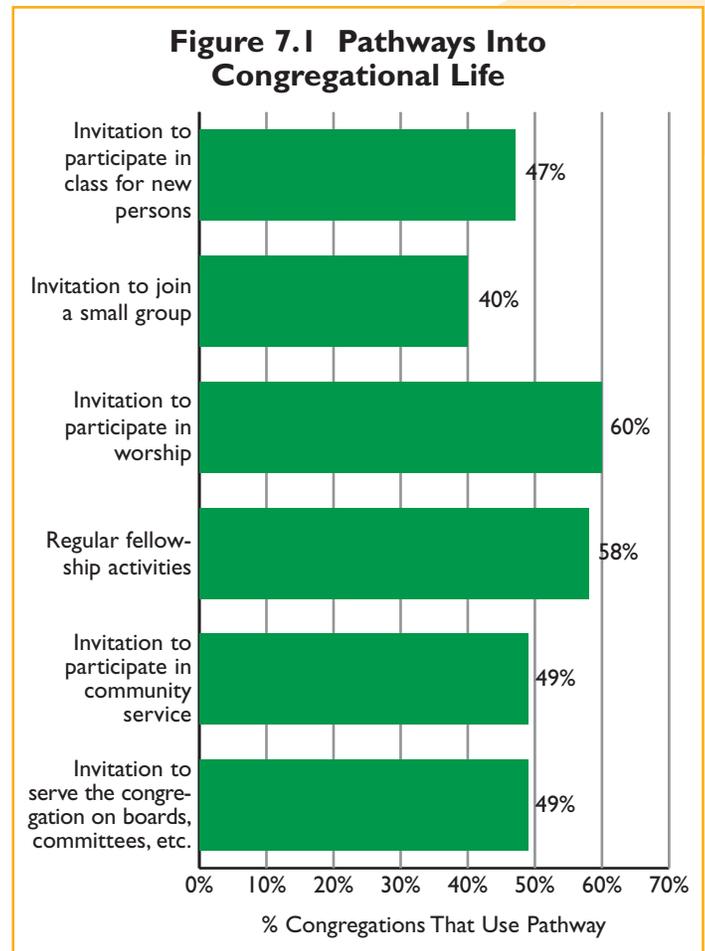


Figure 7.4 shows that congregations with high spiritual vitality are also more intentional in their attention to new persons than less spiritually vital congregations. This relationship between spiritual vitality and structured attentiveness is not only found across our denominational families, but the strength of the relationship is virtually the same across families. The relationship also is found for all size congregations except the very smallest (under 50 attendees), but appears to be especially strong in mid-sized congregations.

Another dimension of attentiveness probed in *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* is how likely it is that a congregation would contact an active member who stopped attending to find out why. A little over half of congregations responded that they would definitely contact the person in this situation and another quarter said they probably would.

Surprisingly, the practice of contacting members who stop attending is not consistently related to worship attendance growth across our denominational families (Figure 7.5). It is within Oldline Protestantism and our Catholic/Orthodox family. But it is not within our Evangelical Protestant family nor our World Religions family.

The practice of contacting members who stop attending is not consistently related to size. But there is a consistency in the inconsistency. There is no relationship found for any of our size categories under 300 attendees. But there is a positive relationship for all of our size categories over 300 attendees.

Given the positive impact of such a seemingly simple practice in larger congregations, the fact that congregations of over 500 attendees are significantly less likely to do it (Figure 7.6) suggests a potentially simple way such congregations could enhance their growth prospects.

Figure 7.4 Spiritually Vital Congregations Are More Attentive to New Persons

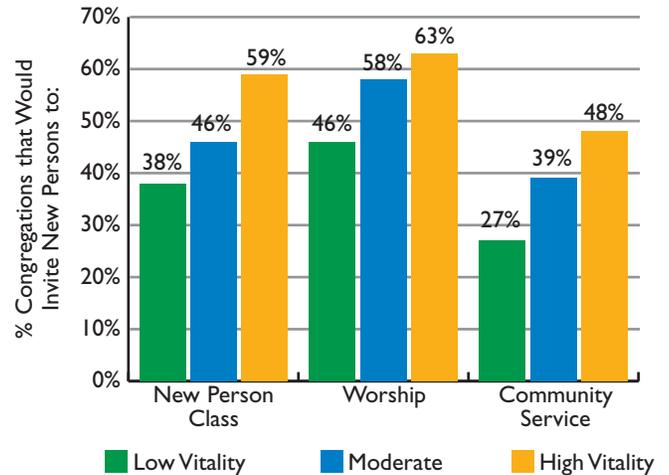


Figure 7.5 Inattention is an Issue Too

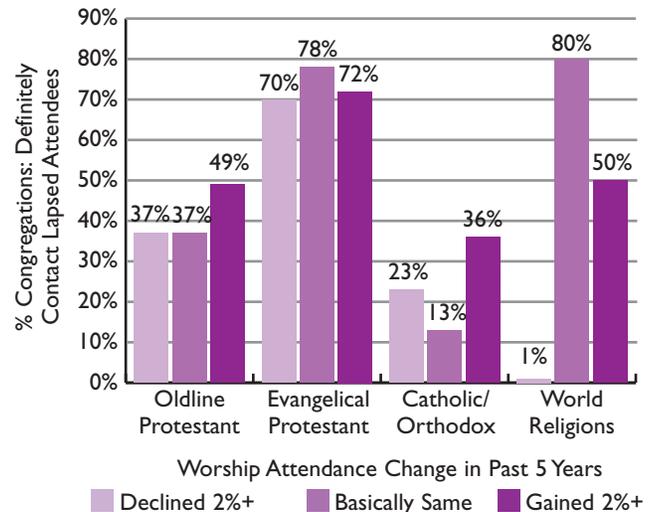
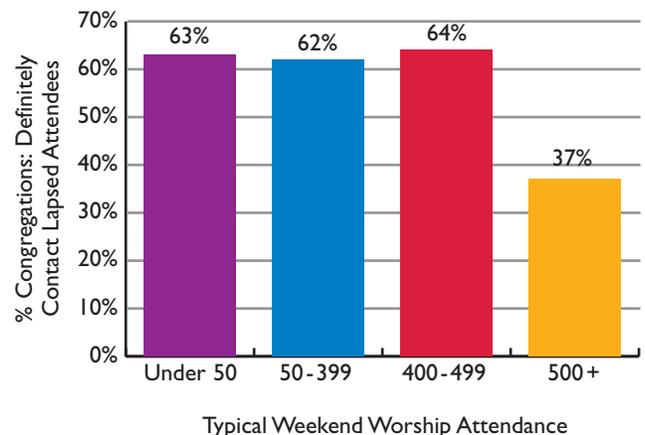


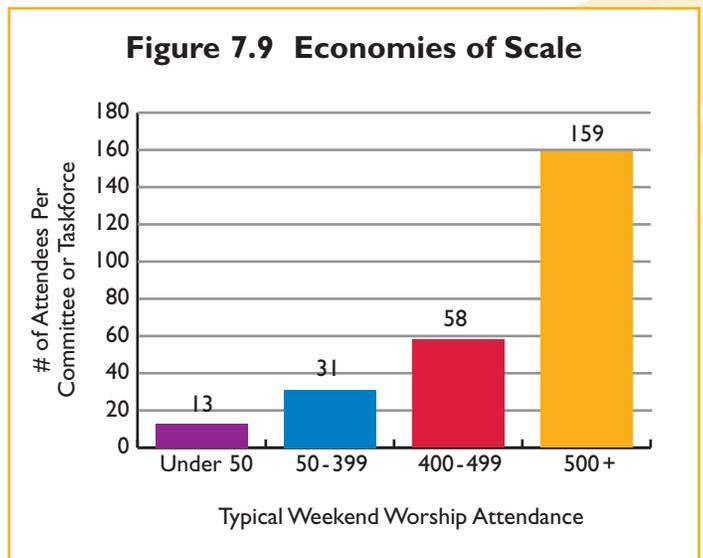
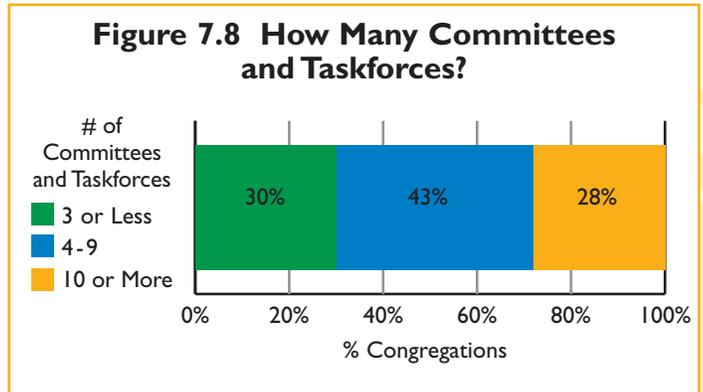
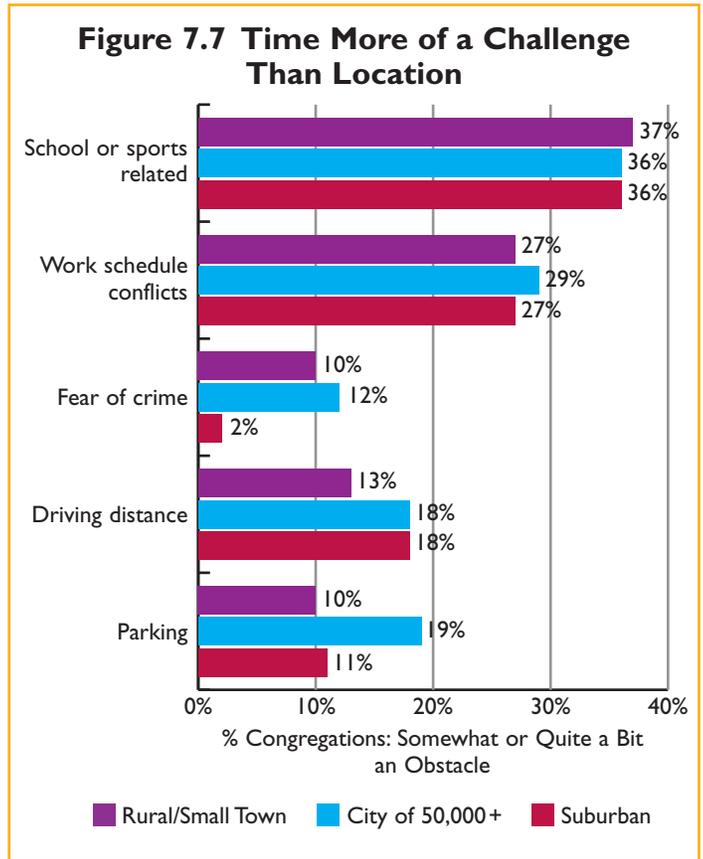
Figure 7.6 Larger Congregations Could Do Better!

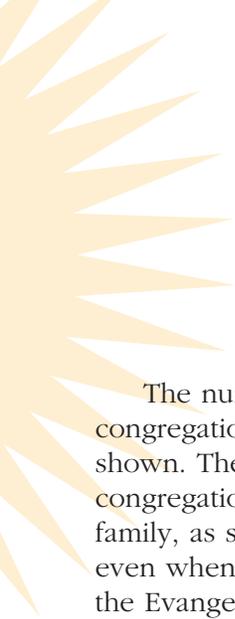


Just as there can be obstacles to attracting new people, there can also be obstacles that make it difficult for people to participate regularly in the life of their chosen congregation. *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* inquired about five such potential challenges to regular participation, shown in Figure 7.7. Clearly time—whether because of school and sports related activities or work schedules—presents more of a challenge than location factors, and this general pattern holds across denominational family, size and location. Indeed, differences by family, size and location are minimal with only a few exceptions. In Figure 7.7, for example, we see to no great surprise that crime is less of an issue for town and country congregations and parking is most problematic for city congregations. What is less clear is why work schedule conflicts are especially problematic for Catholic/Orthodox parishes, while Evangelical Protestant congregations are considerably less affected by school and sports activities than congregations in other families.

Deepening Lay Leadership: As preface to a consideration of lay leadership, *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* asked how many committees or taskforces congregations had. As seen in Figure 7.8, a near majority of congregations have between 4 and 9, with the median being 6. Anti-structure types will be glad to know that the number of committees, and taskforces is unrelated to either spiritual vitality or attendance growth. And while it doesn't appear to contribute to vitality, it is also true that it does not appear to block it.

The number of committees and taskforces is, as one would expect, strongly related to size—the more attendees the more committees and taskforces. However, as shown in Figure 7.9, there are, from one perspective, dramatic economies of scale. The smallest congregations average one committee or taskforce per every 13 attendees, the largest congregations only require one per every 159 attendees. Alternatively, one could argue that attendees in small congregations have a great deal more opportunity to serve.





The number of committees and taskforces a congregation has is strongly related to size, as just shown. The number of committees and taskforces a congregation has is also related to denominational family, as shown in Figure 7.10; and this is true even when size is controlled. Congregations within the Evangelical Protestant family are especially lean with regard to organizational structures, as are Catholic/Orthodox parishes. World Religions and, especially, Oldline Protestant congregations are more organizationally complex.

A frequently used indicator of organizational vitality is how easy or hard it is for congregations to find persons to serve in their organizational structures. The good news is that only one in ten congregations say they often can't find enough people to serve. Less encouraging is that only three in ten say they have no problem. For the remaining 60%, finding people to serve is a challenge, but they typically succeed.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, congregations with fewer committees are the most likely to struggle finding people to serve, as shown in Figure 7.11; and this is true regardless of size. What is not surprising is that congregations with declining worship attendance also are most likely to struggle finding people to serve (Figure 7.12). The latter is even more true for congregations with low spiritual vitality, and the negative relationship between vitality and finding people for organizational tasks is true regardless of size. Struggling to find members to serve is not related to denominational family when the number of committees, size and vitality are controlled.

Figure 7.10 Family Structure Complexity

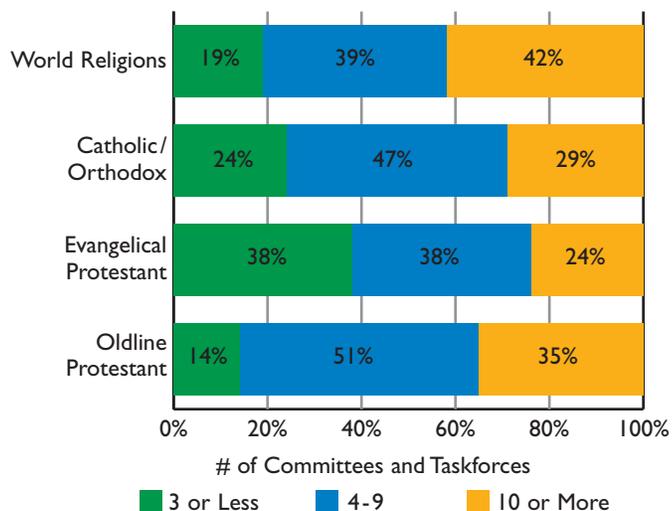


Figure 7.11 Fewer Committees, Harder to Find People to Serve

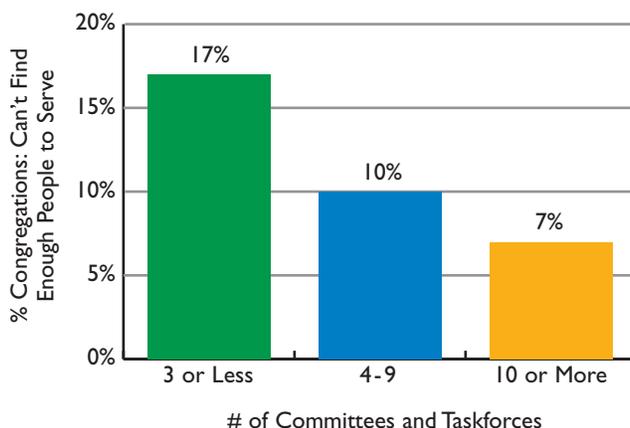
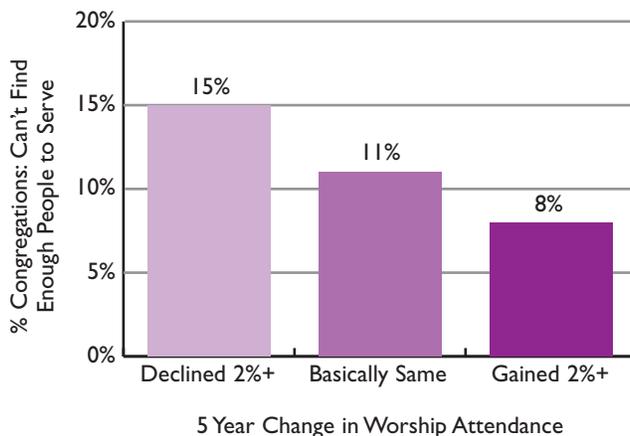


Figure 7.12 Declining Attendance, Harder to Find People to Serve



The frustration of not being able to find enough persons to serve a congregation's organizational structures is further compounded by two other organizational negatives. Congregations that struggle to find people to serve also are more likely to have the same people serving over and over again (lack of rotation among leaders), as shown in Figure 7.13. Still further, congregations that struggle to find people to serve are less likely to have lay leaders that represent the diversity of the congregation's participants in terms of age, race and gender, as shown in Figure 7.14. Both relationships hold across denominational families and size, although it is less strong with congregations with over 500 attendees and within our World Religions family.

Lay volunteers provide the primary "labor force" for the vast majority of congregations, which is why their "care and feeding" is such a critical issue. Accordingly, *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ asked if a congregation provides regular training for its volunteers and then asked if volunteers regularly receive recognition for their service. Surprisingly, less than half of congregations said that leaders were publically recognized and thanked on a regular basis and less than a quarter said they provided regular training sessions for new leaders, which probably partially explains why so many congregations have a hard time finding enough leaders. Indeed, as Figure 7.15 clearly shows, congregations that regularly do both are significantly less likely to have trouble recruiting lay leaders. Perhaps even more importantly, congregations that do both are more than twice as likely to be spiritually vital than those that do neither.

Figure 7.13 Negatives Compound Each Other

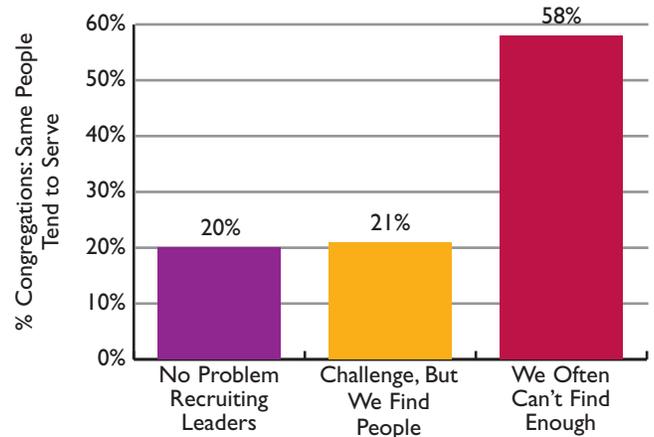


Figure 7.14 Negatives Compound Each Other, Take Two

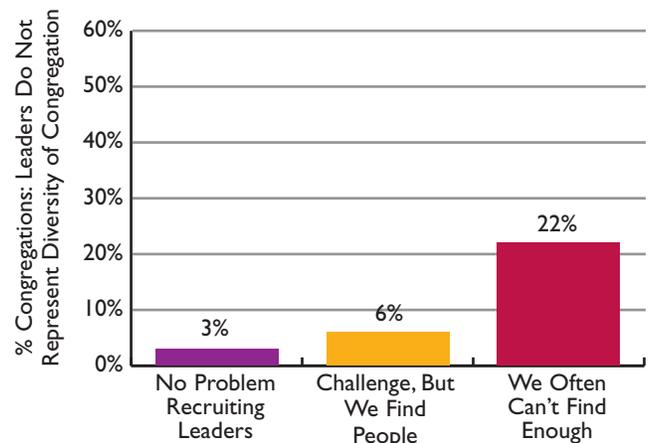
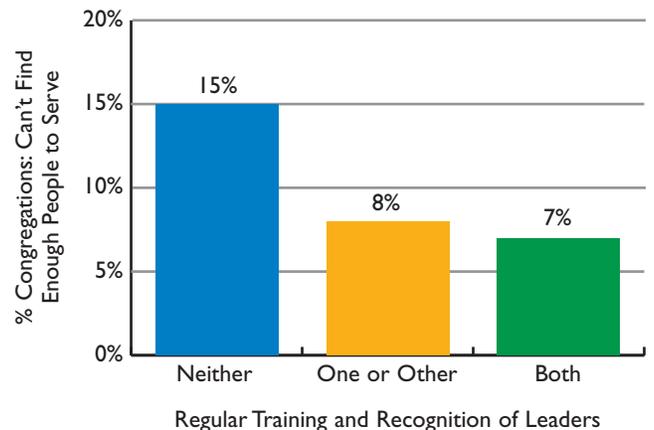


Figure 7.15 Regular Training and Recognition of Volunteers Reduces Struggle to Find Leaders



VIII. Conflict

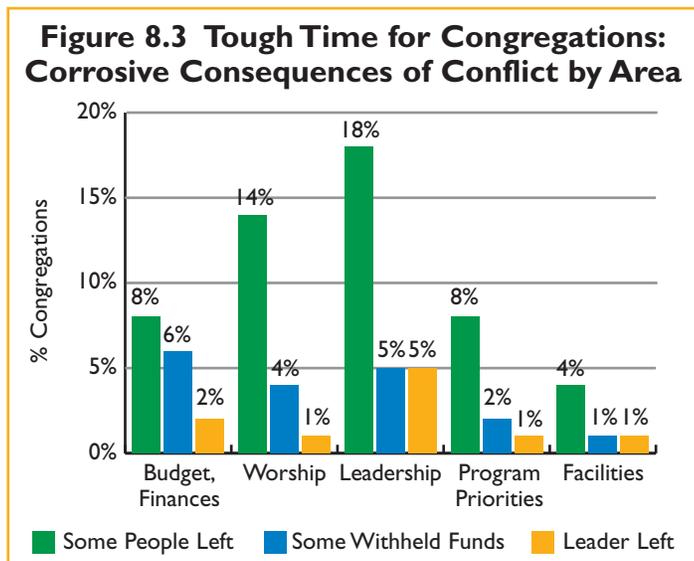
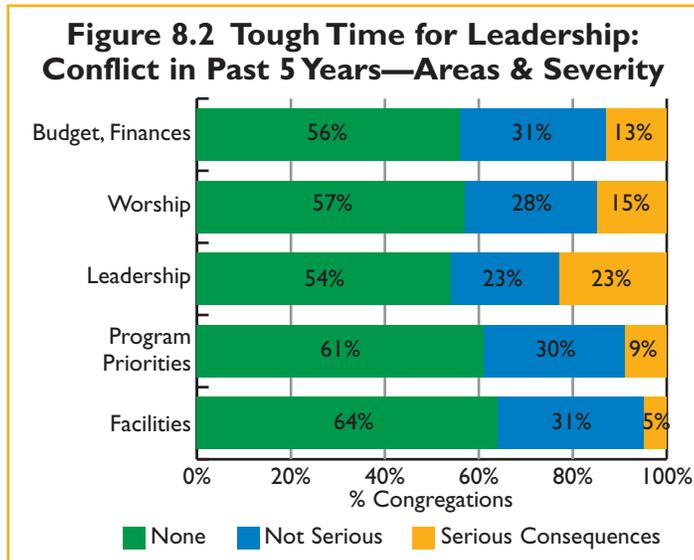
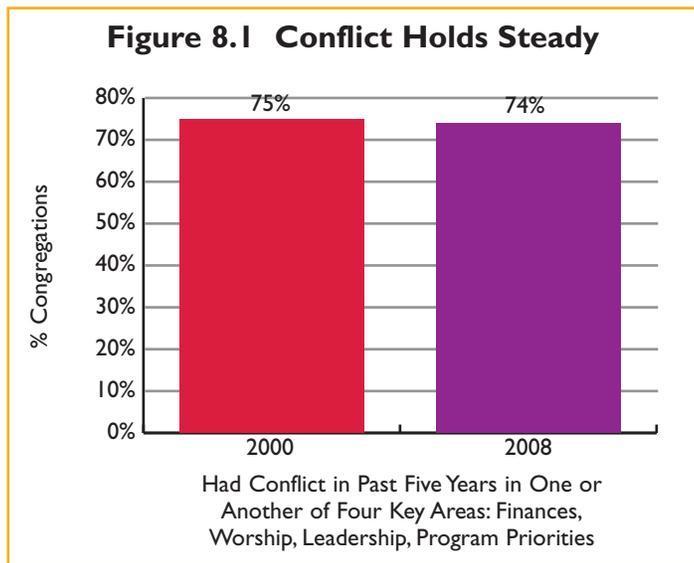
Between religion's prominence in international politics and the sexual politics invasive of so many of our country's national denominational meetings, one has to wonder why the sacred's pale of peace is so frequently riled with conflict. *FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ confirmed that America's congregations were not exempt from such contestation and that, as one might expect, conflict sapped vitality. The more serious the conflict the more corrosive it was of vitality. There is, therefore, both good and bad news in Figure 8.1. The bad news is that conflict remains nearly as pervasive in 2008 as it was in 2000. The good news is that the reach of conflict into America's congregations has not increased across the last eight years.

*FACT*²⁰⁰⁰ inquired into the nature of the conflict and found that money, worship and leadership were the big three for congregational fights. *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵ inquired into reactions to conflict and found members leaving was the leading negative consequence of conflict, followed by money being withheld. A leader leaving was a distant third.

*FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ looked at both the nature of and the negative consequences of conflict. The overall results are shown in Figures 8.2 and 8.3. In Figure 8.2 a serious conflict is defined as one in which some people left, a leader left or money was withheld. As in 2000, money, worship and leadership lead the way as the areas of congregational life most riled with conflict. The nuance added by the *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ data, however, is that conflict about leadership is the most likely to produce serious negative consequences.

Figure 8.3 shows that people leaving is the most likely response to serious conflict regardless of area, but especially when the conflict involves leadership issues or worship. Withholding contributions is not as prevalent a response as one might imagine, and a leader leaving is rare except, as one would expect, in conflicts about leadership.

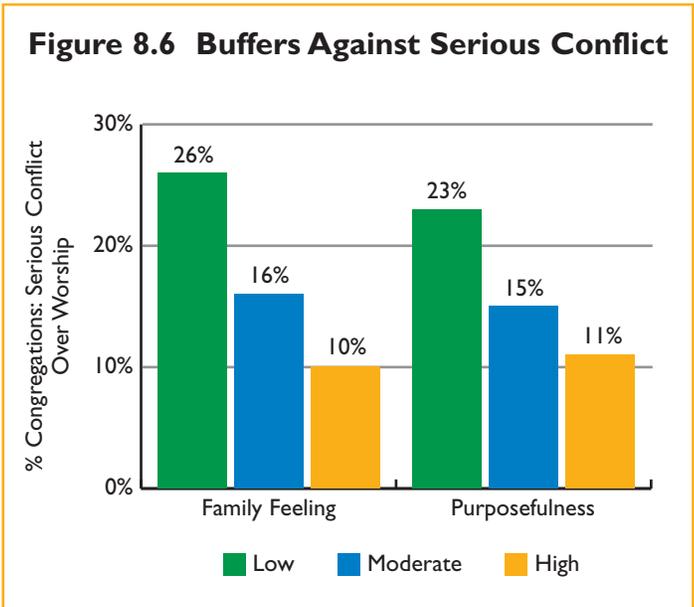
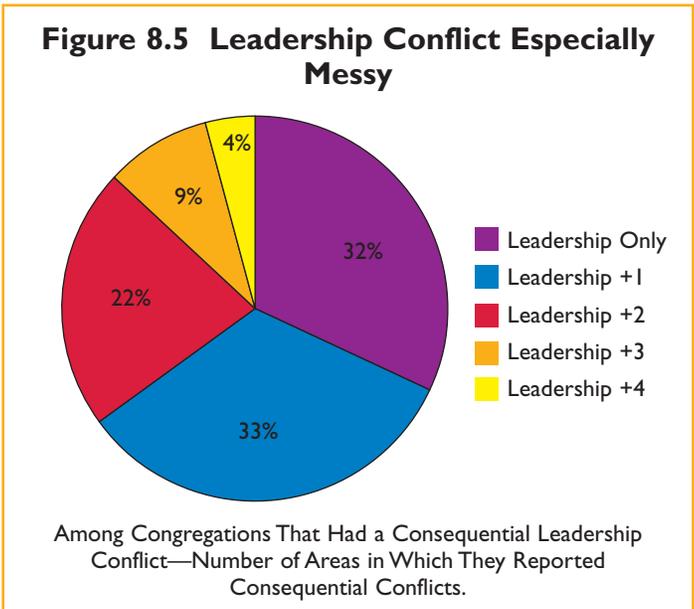
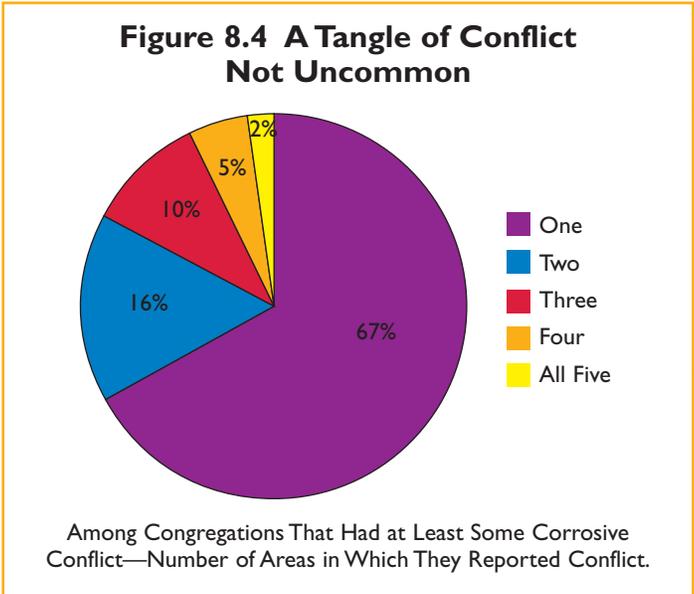
*FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ also found, consistent with the findings first reported in *FACT*²⁰⁰⁵, that within the general patterns shown in Figures 8.2 and 8.3, member mobility appears to be a preferred Evangelical Protestant response, rotating leadership a preferred Catholic/Orthodox response, and withholding money a preferred Oldline Protestant response.



Adding to the difficulty of dealing with serious conflict is the reality that rather than being narrowly focused it frequently reaches into a tangle of different areas. Figure 8.4 suggests that this is, in fact, the case for a third of all congregations faced with corrosive conflicts.

Figure 8.5 shows that this is especially true when leadership issues are involved. Indeed, serious leadership conflict gets conflated with conflict in one or more other areas two-thirds of the time. On second thought this is not really surprising since, especially clergy, leadership is intimately involved in most areas of congregational life and therefore a direct party to either the substance of a conflict or a congregation's efforts to manage one.

There is some positive news, however. As first identified in *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* and reaffirmed in *FACT²⁰⁰⁸*, there appear to be certain things a congregation can do, preventively, to decrease the likelihood of conflict. As shown in Figure 8.6, creating strong interpersonal bonds and purposefulness are two of these. The figure shows how the prevalence of serious conflict decreases as the prevalence of these characteristics increase. The focus on "serious conflict," adds an important nuance to the "preventative" analogy. It is not so much that such characteristics prevent conflicts. Rather, it seems that such things as strong interpersonal bonds and clarity about purpose help congregations manage inevitable conflicts and keep them from becoming serious.



IX. Fiscal Health & Conflict

Among the 2000 to 2008 trends in “Vital Signs” shown in the opening, *Trends At A Glance* section (Figure 1.3) we saw that the financial health of American congregations significantly eroded over the eight year period, and this was before the recession hit in late 2008. What is more, this decline in financial health was true within each of our four denominational families, although the overall financial health remains stronger within some families than others (Figure 9.1). In general, congregations within the Evangelical Protestant family are in the most positive fiscal circumstances, followed by the Catholic/Orthodox family, World Religions and Oldline Protestantism, in that order.

Figure’s 9.2–9.4 indicate the telling relationship between financial health and several indicators of congregational vitality. Figure’s 9.2 and 9.3 show, first, the extremely strong, positive relationship of financial health and spiritual vitality, and the equally strong, but negative correlation between financial health and conflict. The relationship between fiscal health and attendance growth is very similar to that for spiritual vitality. Further analysis also shows that these relationships hold across denominational families and size categories with one exception. The relationship between financial health and spiritual vitality does not appear to be significant for Protestant congregations of over 500 in worship attendance.

The common wisdom among congregational analysts and consultants is that mission giving is among the first things to be cut when budgets get squeezed. Although *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* did not ask about budget cutting priorities (*FACT²⁰¹⁰* will), Figure 9.4 certainly is consistent with the common wisdom. The right panel of the figure shows that the stronger a

Figure 9.1 Financial Health—Tight to Troubled Before the Recession

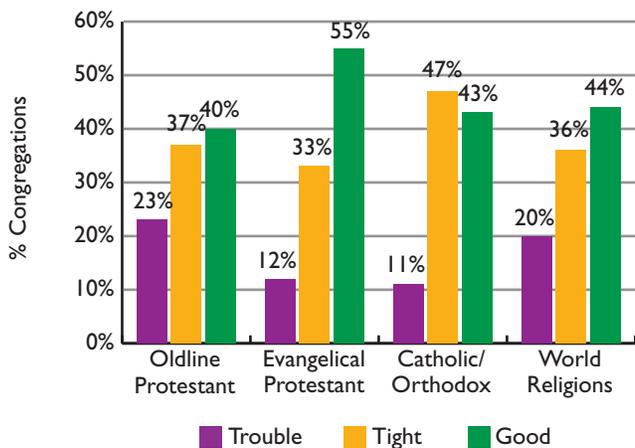


Figure 9.2 Financial Health and Spiritual Vitality

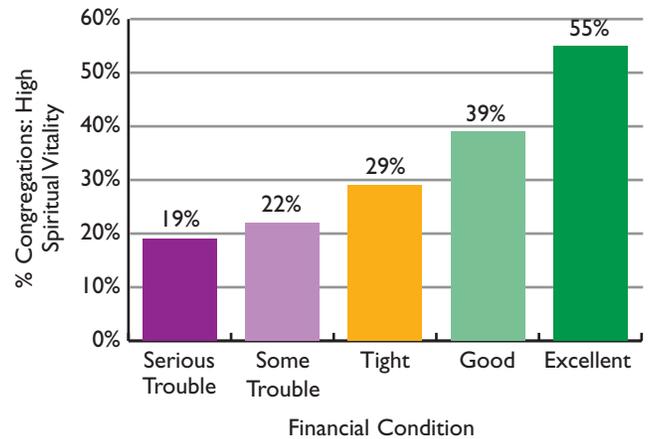


Figure 9.3 The Worse One’s Fiscal Health The Greater the Chance for Conflict

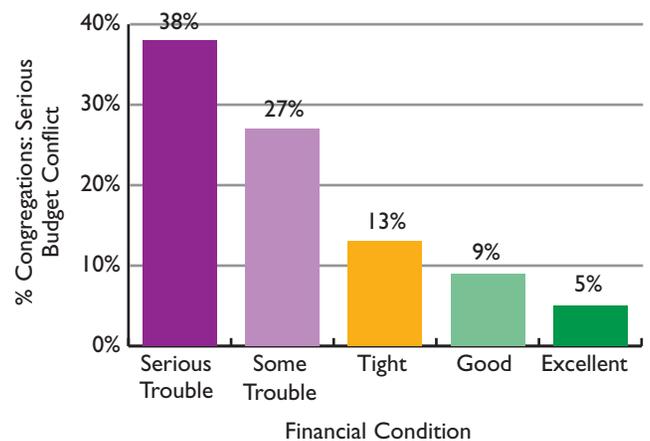
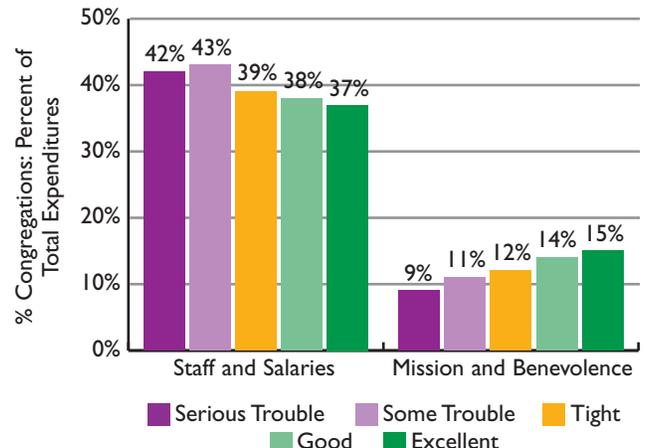


Figure 9.4 The Common Wisdom Confirmed—Unfortunately?



congregation's financial health, the greater the proportion of its budget it gives to mission. And again, this holds across denominational families and across size categories, except among the largest congregations.

Figures 9.5–9.8 amplify the findings about the relationship between fiscal health and vitality just presented except that Figures 9.5–9.7 look at whether or not a congregation's financial health got better or worse, rather than the current state of health. Figure 9.5 shows that the proportion of budget given to mission progressively increases as one moves from congregations whose financial health worsened over the previous five years, to those congregations whose fiscal health remained unchanged, to congregations whose financial situation got better. Figure 9.6 shows the relationship is even stronger for attendance growth. What is more, this positive relationship between increasing financial health and increasing vitality generally holds regardless of a congregation's current health.

Figure 9.7 shows a slight variation on this pattern. Specifically, worsening finances erode spiritual vitality, but improving finances don't necessarily bump up spiritual vitality.

Figure 9.8 presents, perhaps, the most interesting twist. It shows, as one would expect, that worsening financial conditions are especially ripe for serious conflict. However, even congregation's whose finances changed for the better are more likely to have experienced serious conflict than congregations whose finances did not change. This relationship also holds regardless of a congregation's current health.

Figure 9.6 Attendance and Finances Move Together

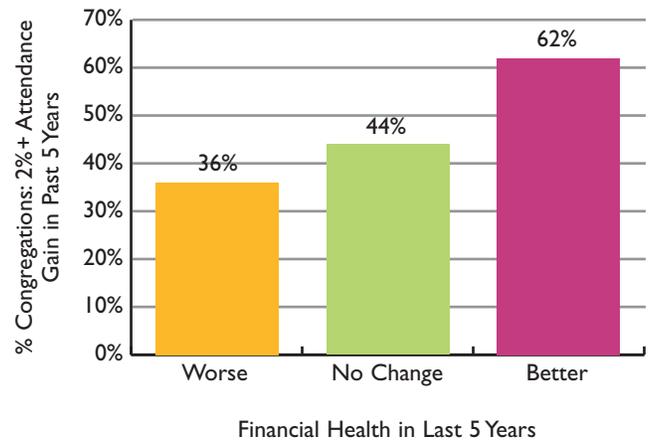


Figure 9.7 Spiritual Vitality and Finances: Downside Only

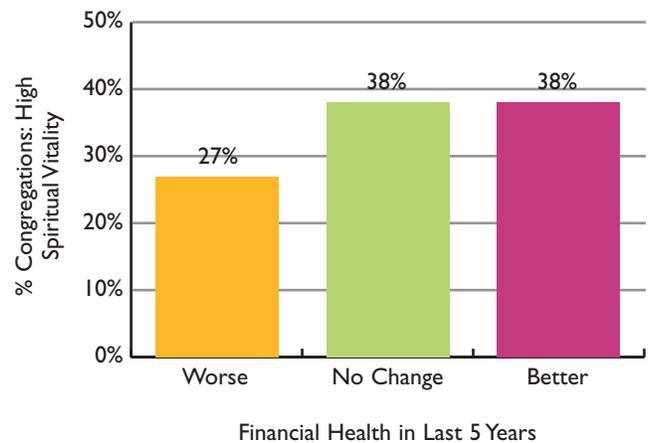


Figure 9.5 Changes in Financial Health Linked to Mission Generosity

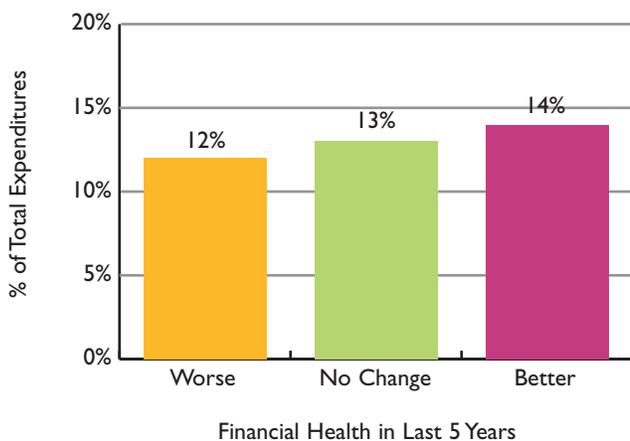
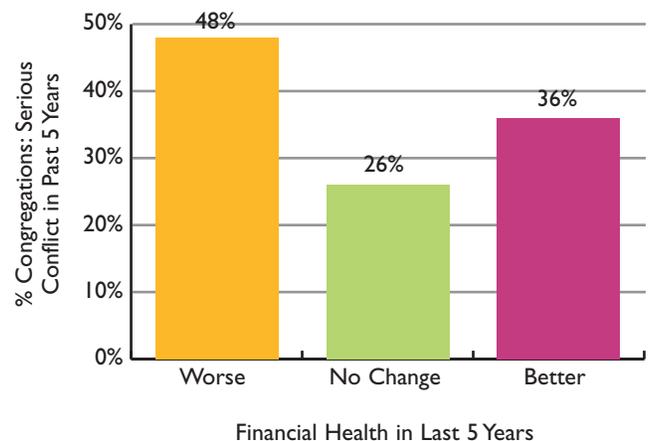


Figure 9.8 Change for the Better or for the Worse Increases the Potential for Conflict



X. Budget Profiles

The Gospel of Mathew provides a provocative lens for reading congregational budget profiles as it counsels, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” From this perspective one wonders if the fact that all denominational families give a higher proportion of their budgets to salaries and benefits is best interpreted as an investment in people, leadership or “self” (Figure 10.1)? And how many congregational fights have there been over buildings vs. mission?

Perhaps the most striking comparative feature among the denominational family budget profiles in Figure 10.1 is the significantly higher proportion of budget that goes toward salary and benefits in Oldline Protestant congregations (almost half), especially in contrast to Evangelical Protestant congregations (less than a third).

Given the Oldline’s predisposition toward an “educated” clergy and Evangelical Protestant’s penchant toward a “called” clergy (Figure 10.2), one might expect that educational level of the senior or sole leader would explain a good bit of the difference. Figure 10.3 shows that it doesn’t. The Oldline pays a higher percentage regardless of educational level.

Oldline congregations’ pay premium is even more stark when one recalls that Oldline congregations are, on average, considerably smaller than at least other Christian congregations, and, on average, have fewer full and part-time paid staff.

Figure 10.1 What Congregations Spend as a Proportion of Total Budget

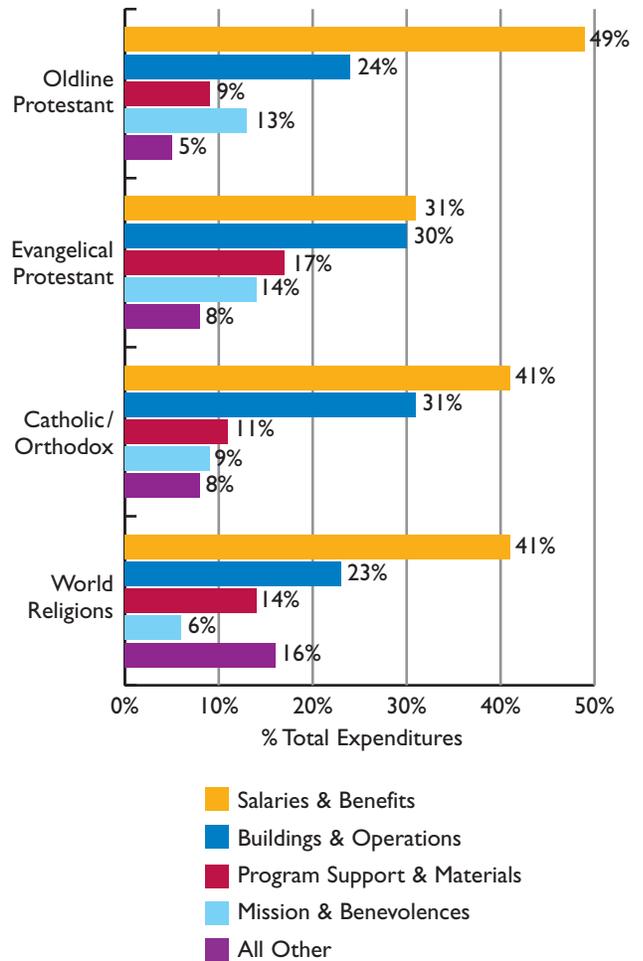


Figure 10.2 Called vs. Educated

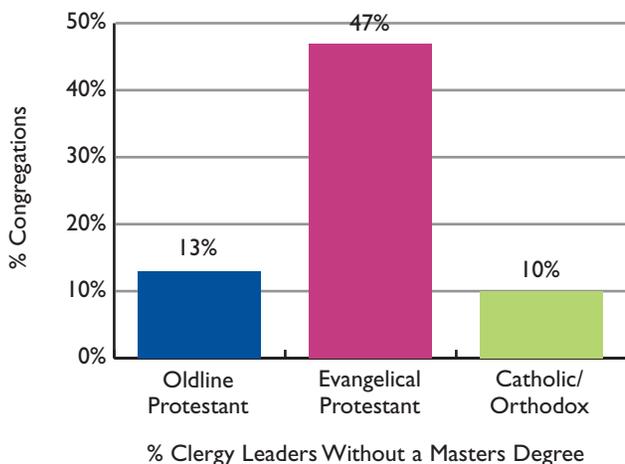


Figure 10.3 Oldline Pays More

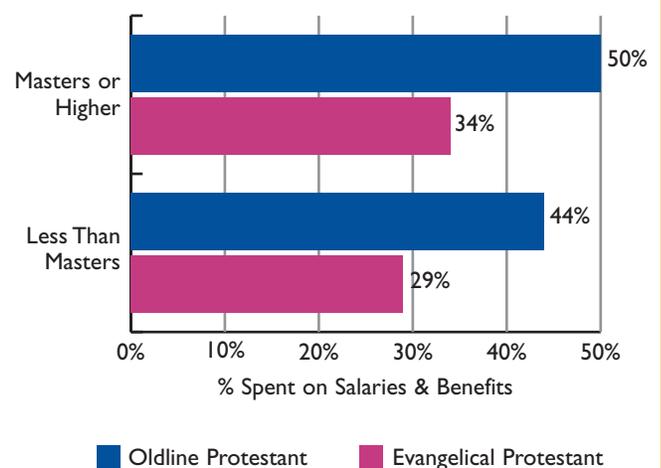




Figure 10.4 looks at the affect of size on salaries and on buildings/operations expenditures for all congregations in the *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* survey. Other than for the very smallest congregations, there is not much difference. The very smallest congregations invest proportionately less in leadership and more in buildings and operations. But could this be because small congregations are less likely to have full time clergy leadership?

Figure 10.5 shows that smaller congregations are, indeed, less likely to have full time clergy leadership.

Figure 10.6, therefore, again looks at the affect of size on staff support and building/operations expenses, except this time only for those congregations that have full time clergy leadership. The pattern is nearly identical to that found in Figure 10.4. The smallest congregations still invest proportionately less in leadership and more in buildings and operations than other size congregations, although the deficit in proportionate salary support is slightly less. So some of the overall small congregation deficit in proportionate salary support is due to their greater likelihood not to have full time clergy. But other factors are also at work.

Figure 10.5 Full Time, Paid Leadership by Weekend Worship Attendance

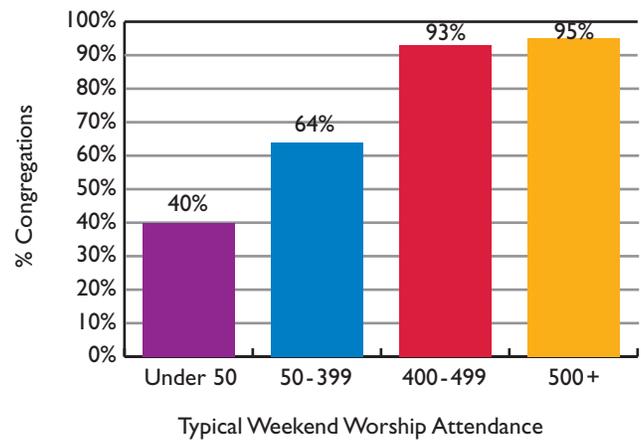


Figure 10.4 What Congregations Spend as a Proportion of Total Budget

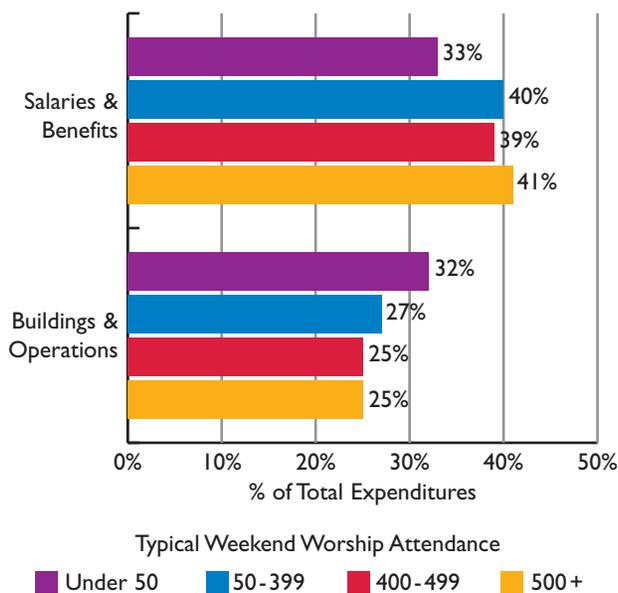
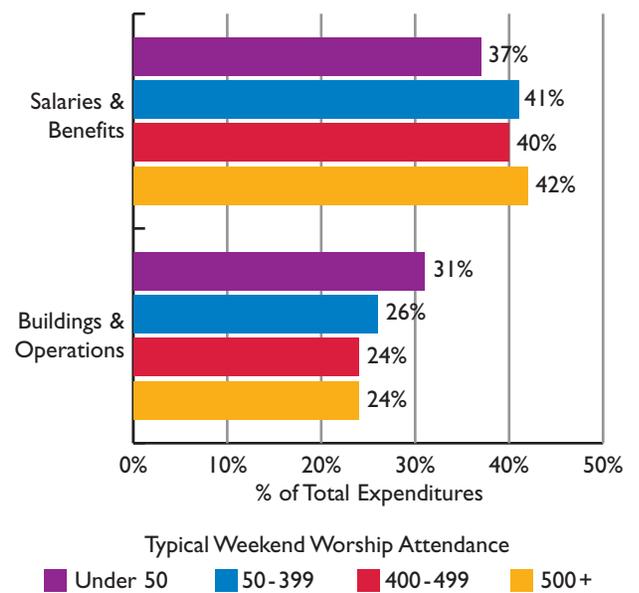


Figure 10.6 Only Congregations With Paid, Full Time Leadership



XI. Clergy Education & Congregational Health

The very last page of the *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* report contains what turned out to be its most controversial finding. It was that congregations with leaders who had a seminary education scored lower, overall, on a wide range of vital signs including growth, clarity of purpose, spiritual vitality, financial health, and openly dealing with conflict. Indeed, the only areas identified in the *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* report where congregations of seminary educated clergy scored higher than other congregations was emphasizing social justice and involvement in ecumenical social ministries.

The latter two undoubtedly helped fuel the main line of attack on the overall education/congregation relationship found in *FACT²⁰⁰⁰*. Specifically, it was the contention that since evangelical Protestantism emphasized a called ministry and liberal Protestantism an education ministry, the overall finding probably had more to do with denominational family differences (the evangelical family showing more vitality, in general) than educational differences.

Figures 11.1–11.4 revisit the issue using the *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* survey, but this time looking at Oldline and Evangelical Protestant's separately (*FACT²⁰⁰⁸* combines MDiv and other master degrees). Surprise for the critics! The seminary education drag is true within both families, although the difference is so small for Oldline Protestants for two of the four vital signs (spiritual vitality and financial health) as not to be statistically significant. However, “no difference” hardly seems something to write home about.

Critics of the *FACT²⁰⁰⁰* finding also suggested that the uncontrolled, negative relationship between education and vitality could be due to congregational size rather than education per se. Although the logic behind such a suggestion has always been less than clear, it doesn't matter because it is not true. Controlling on size, if anything, strengthens the relationship.

Figure 11.1 Where's the Payoff? Percent Congregations With No Serious Conflict

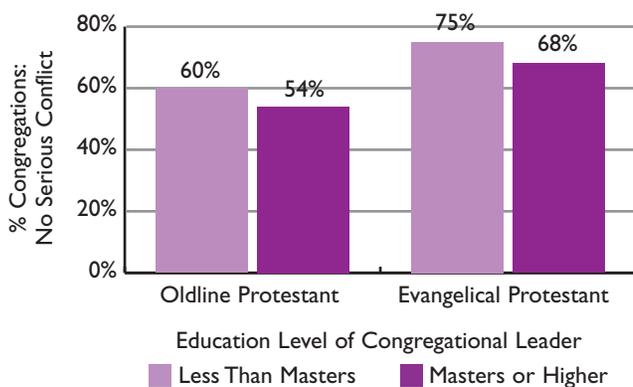


Figure 11.2 Percent Congregations With 2% or More Attendance Growth in Last 5 Years

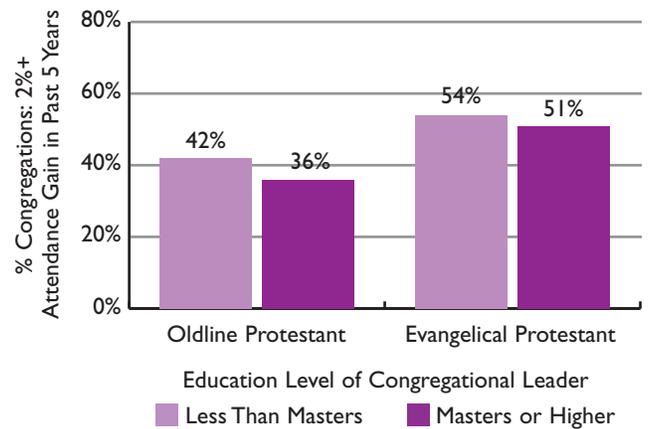


Figure 11.3 Percent Congregations With High Spiritual Vitality

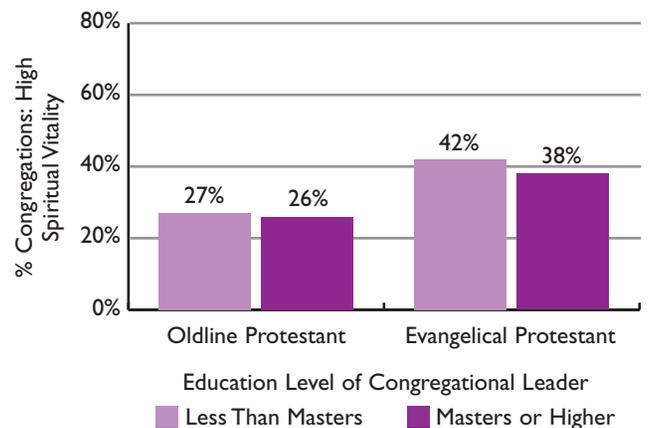
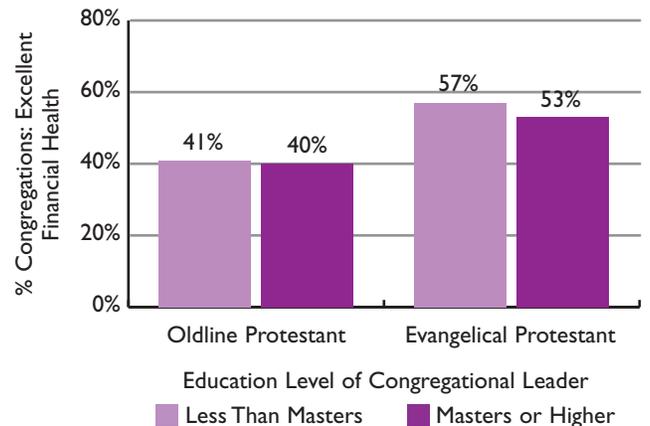


Figure 11.4 Percent Congregations Reporting Excellent Financial Health



In contrast to formal education, continuing education has a more noticeable and positive affect on congregational vitality. This is especially true, as shown in Figure 11.4 for congregations in our Evangelical Protestant and Catholic/Orthodox families with regard to spiritual vitality. A similar pattern is found for the absence of serious conflict and for financial health. Continuing education is not related one way or the other to growth in worship attendance across denominational families, and is not significantly related to any of our congregational vital signs for Oldline Protestants.

The absence of an Oldline vitality bump is a bit ironic since Oldline congregations and denominations are more likely than other families to provide financial support for continuing education for their clergy (Figure 11.6, left bars). Oldline congregations or denominations also are more likely to require continuing education. And, in fact, a higher proportion of Oldline leaders participate in continuing education than is the case for, at least, other Christian families (Figure 11.6, right bars). Indeed, it may be the more pervasive participation in continuing education within the Oldline that explains the lack of noticeable bump in vitality. That is, it may be that within the Oldline everyone goes or has to go, while in other traditions it tends to be just the most energetic and capable leaders that participate.

As one might suspect and as suggested in Figure 11.6, the more likely a congregation or denomination to provide financial support for continuing education, the more likely clergy are to participate by a wide margin. In addition to denominational family differences in financial support for continuing education, large congregations are significantly more likely to provide financial support and such support increases progressively by size. In an ironic twist to these general patterns, however, leaders of small congregations are as likely as leaders from large congregations to participate in continuing education. This means, of course, as Figure 11.7 confirms, that clergy leaders in small congregations are more likely to participate in continuing education without financial support from their congregation or denomination.

Why this latter fact is the case is unclear. One might suspect that clergy newer to the ministry would be more likely than more experienced clergy both to need continuing education in a supervised way and to be serving smaller congregations. It is true that clergy who have been in ministry 10 years or less are more likely than longer serving clergy to be in small congregations. The relationship between tenure in ministry and involvement in continuing education, however, is different within each denominational family. Within Oldline Protestantism there is no drop-off in continuing education until twenty or more years of ministry. In contrast, with the World Religion family it is those with twenty or more years of ministry that

are most engaged in continuing education. For the Catholic/Orthodox family there is no consistent pattern by tenure in ministry. Only within the Evangelical Protestant family do we find a progressive increase in continuing education as one is newer to the ministry.

Women clergy are more likely than their male peers to participate in continuing education, regardless of the size of the congregation they are serving.

Figure 11.5 Continuing Ed Bump in Congregation's Spiritual Vitality Varies

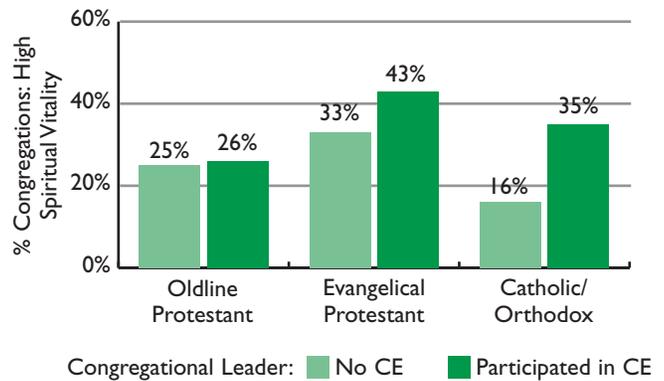


Figure 11.6 Pay and Go

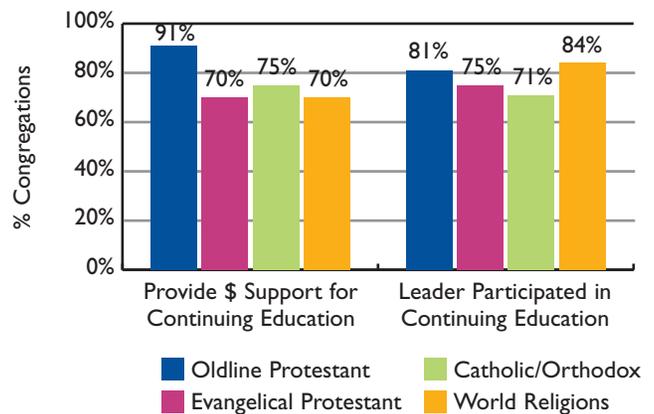
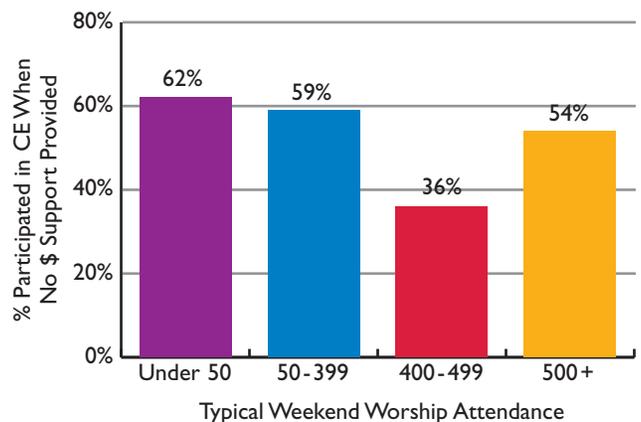


Figure 11.7 Who Pays Their Own Way?



XII. Clergy Time Usage

How clergy spend their time provides an interesting look at their priorities and those of their denominational families. *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* asked how much time and attention a congregation's leader spends in eleven tasks of ministry. The responses for our two Protestant families are shown below. Responses for our Catholic/Orthodox and World Religions families are found on the next page.

Worship and teaching about the faith are the top task priorities for both our Protestant families. But the Oldline puts higher priority on worship and the Evangelical Protestant's on teaching, and in

each instance the difference is highly significant.

Evangelical Protestant leaders are also much more likely than Oldline leaders to invest in evangelism, in recruiting and training lay leaders, and in contacting inactive leaders. They are slightly more likely to invest in developing and promoting the congregation's vision, in dealing with conflict, and in pastoral care.

Oldline leaders are slightly more likely than Evangelical Protestant leaders to invest in representing the congregation in the community and in administration.

Figure 12.1 Oldline Protestant Clergy Leaders: Time & Attention Given to Tasks of Ministry

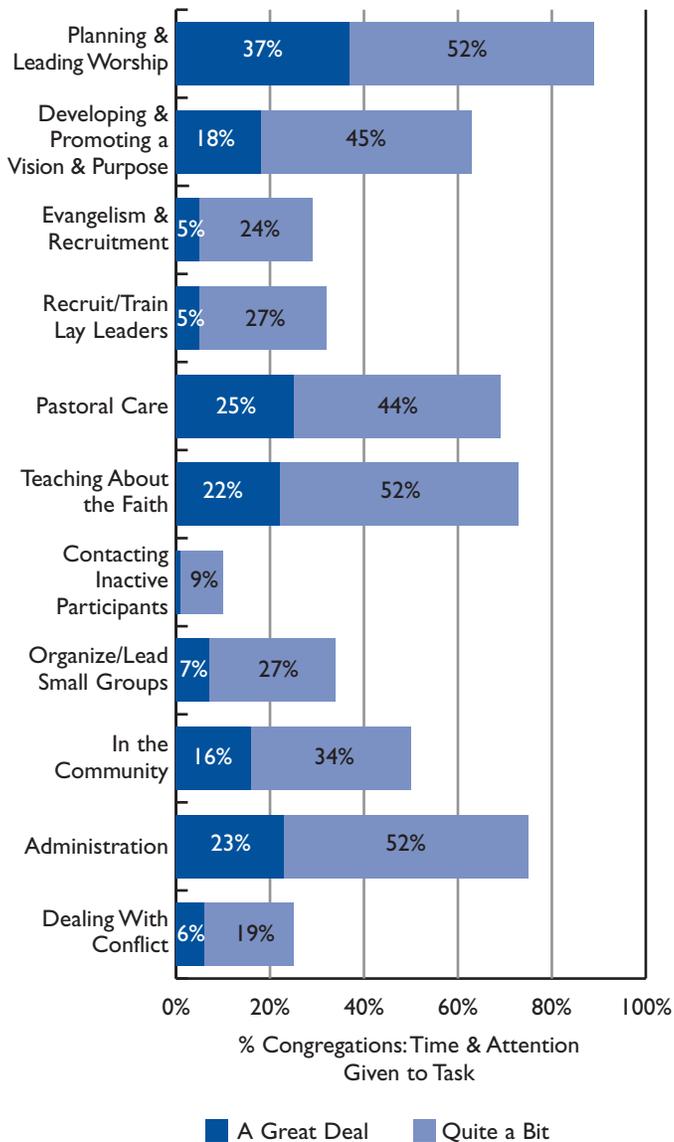
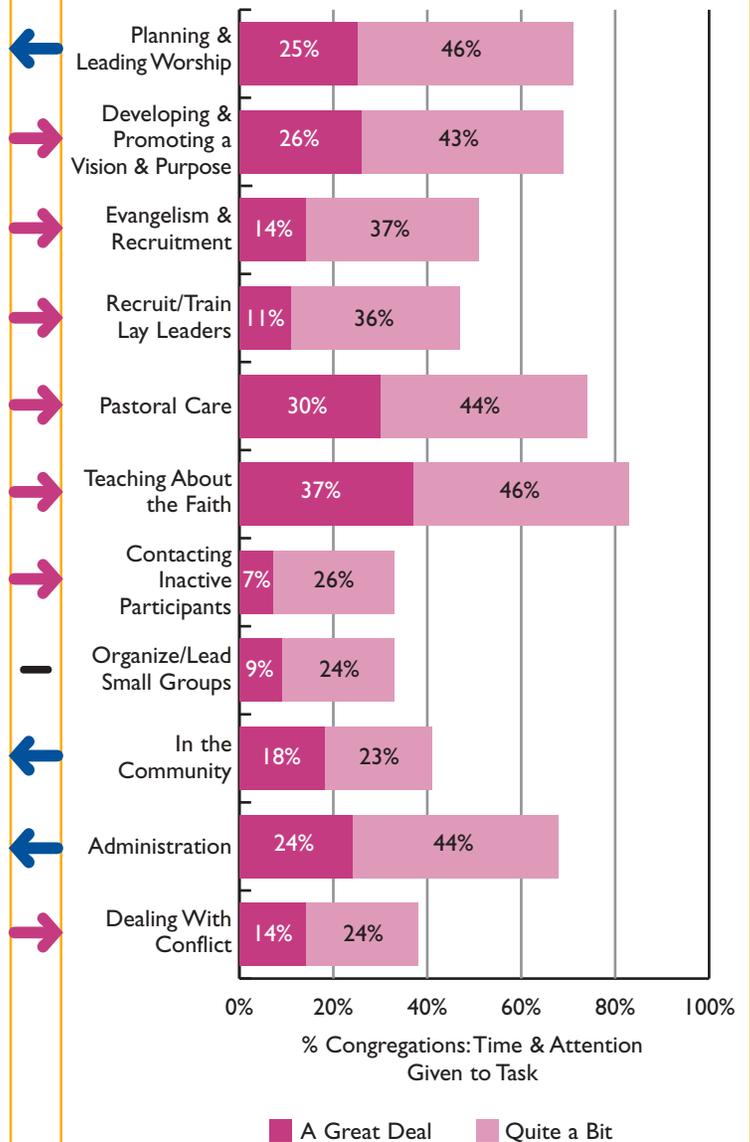


Figure 12.2 Evangelical Protestant Clergy Leaders: Time & Attention Given to Tasks of Ministry



The time/attention profile of Catholic/Orthodox leaders is distinct from the Protestant profiles in several significant ways. Most notable, and undoubtedly due to the fact that Catholic/Orthodox parishes are 3 to 4 times larger than Protestant congregations on average, Catholic/Orthodox leaders spend more time and attention on administration than any other task and any other family. They also give more time to dealing with conflict than any other family.

Catholic/Orthodox leaders share the priority that Protestant leaders give to worship and teaching, but unlike their Protestant peers they elevate pastoral care to equal status with teaching and worship. They are significantly less likely than their Protestant peers to invest in small group work.

While Catholic/Orthodox parishes are on average the largest, congregations within our World Religions are the smallest. This may help explain why their leadership invests least of any of our denominational families in small group work, in recruiting and training lay leaders, and in pastoral care. They share the priority to worship and teaching, however, found in other families. They invest more than other families in representing their congregations in the community.

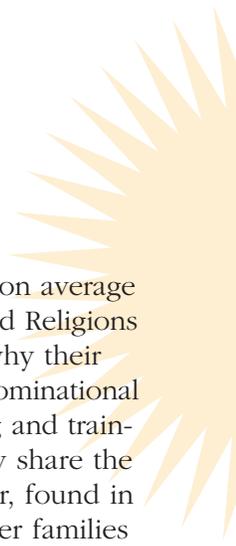


Figure 12.3 Catholic/Orthodox Clergy Leaders: Time & Attention Given to Tasks of Ministry

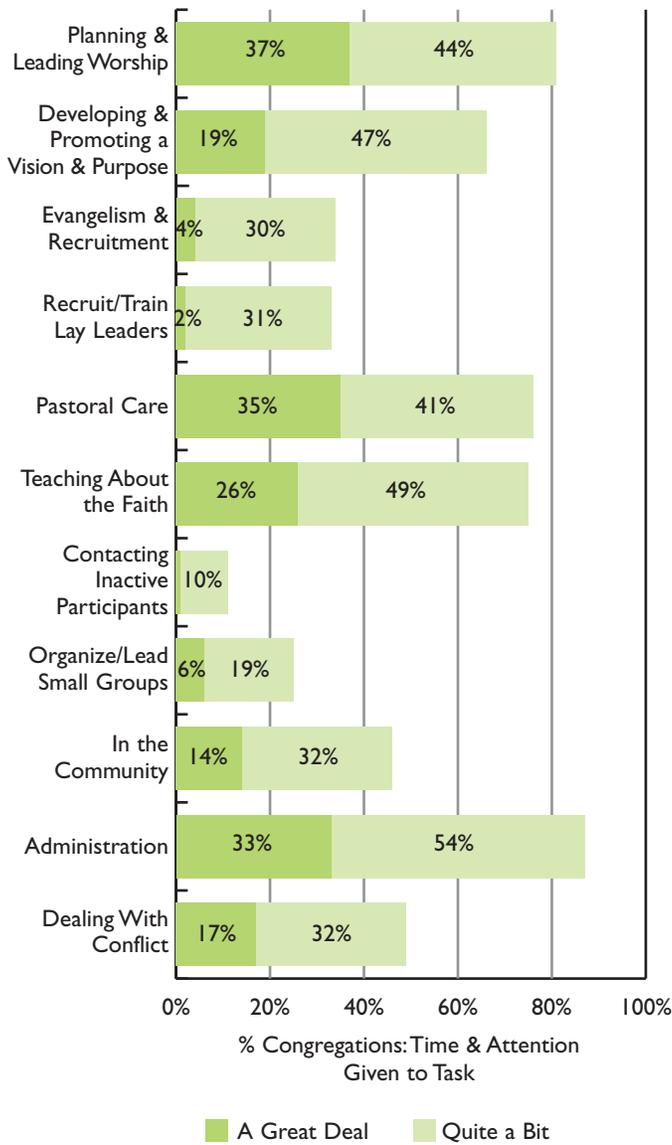
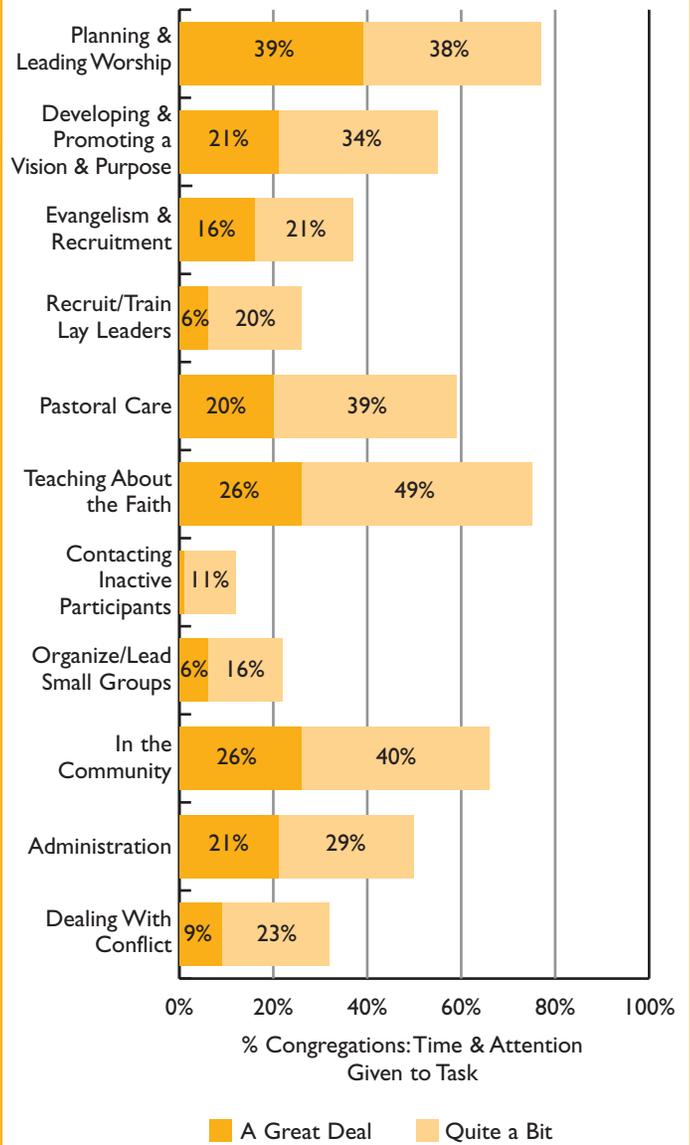


Figure 12.4 World Religions Clergy Leaders: Time & Attention Given to Tasks of Ministry



Congregational size has some affect on the time and attention that leaders give to various tasks of ministry, but less than one might think. As would be expected and as suggested previously, the time and attention invested in administration increases significantly the larger a congregation. As also might be expected so does a leader's investment in developing and promoting vision and purpose, and in dealing with conflict. More modest increases by size are found for teaching, lay training and representing the congregation in the community. Surprisingly, we find no tasks for which leaders' investment of time and attention increases as a congregation's size decreases.

We find no significant size differences for worship, working with small groups, pastoral care, evangelism or contacting inactive members.

In the *FACT²⁰⁰⁸* survey we found that just under two-thirds (63%) of congregations had full-time, paid leadership and just over a third had part-time leadership. With the likelihood that the current economic crisis will increase part-time leadership, a comparison of the time/attention that full and part-time leaders currently give our tasks of ministry provides a hint of what congregations moving to part-time leadership can expect. Figures 12.5 and 12.6 provide this comparison. As might be expected, part-time leaders invest more in recruiting and training lay leaders than do senior or sole, full-time leaders. Fortunately this latter effort appears to pay off because congregations with part-time leadership report less difficulty finding volunteers than do congregations with full-time leadership.

Figure 12.5 Fulltime, Paid Clergy Leaders: Time & Attention Given to Tasks of Ministry

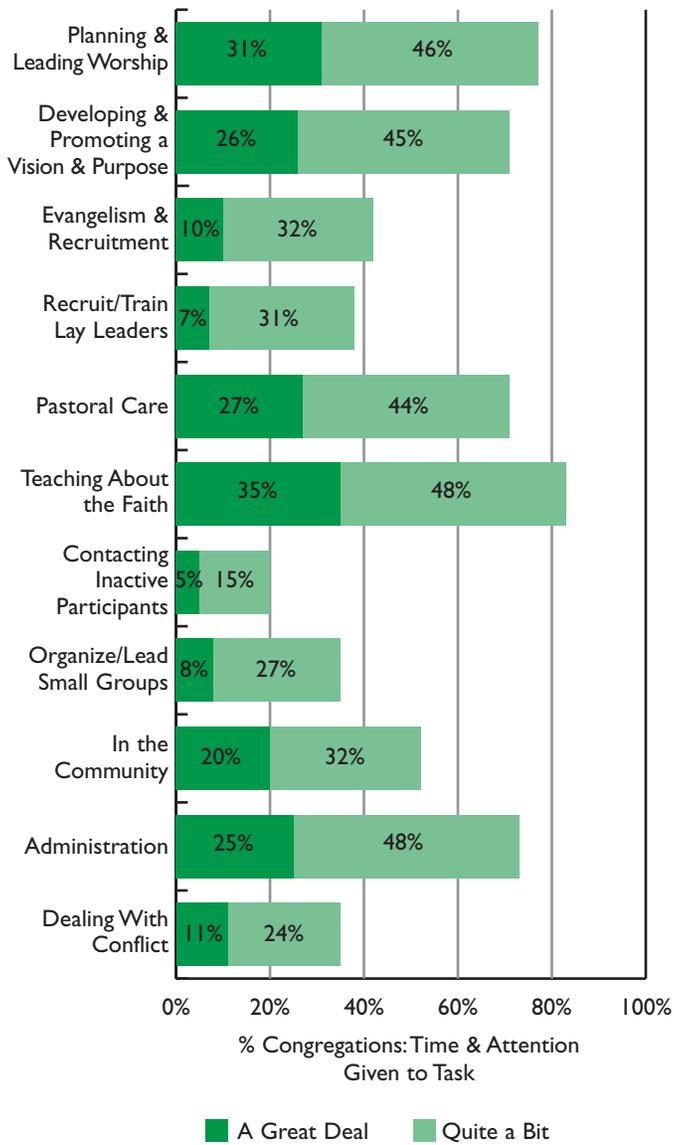
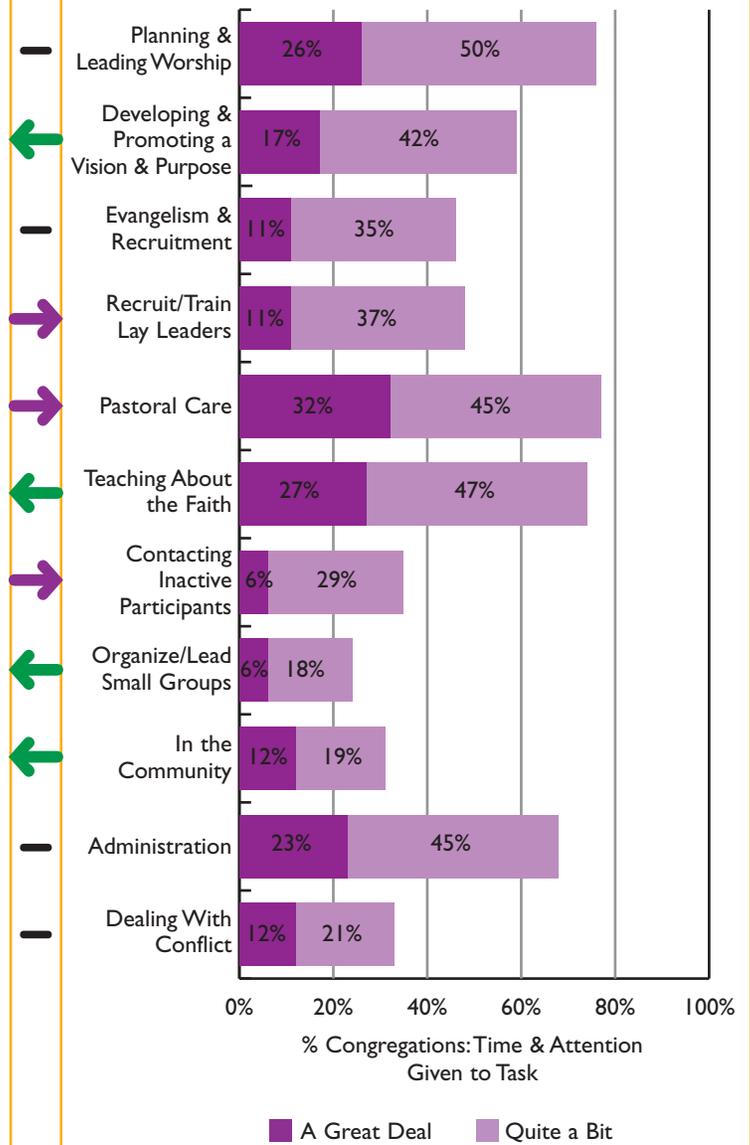


Figure 12.6 Other Than Fulltime, Paid Clergy Leaders: Time & Attention Given to Tasks of Ministry



Part-time leaders also invest more in pastoral care and contacting inactive members. They invest less, however, in working with a congregation's vision and purpose, in teaching, in working with small groups, and especially in representing the congregation in the community.

In the development of their "strength based approach" to leadership over the past decade, the Gallup organization has surveyed a million work teams, conducted more than 50,000 in-depth interviews with leaders, and even interviewed 20,000 followers around the world to ask exactly why they followed the most important leader in their life. Their latest, New York Times best selling business book claims their discoveries identify three keys to being a more effective leader: knowing your strengths, getting the right talent on your team, and meeting the basic needs of those who look to you for leadership.

Could it be merely coincidence that *FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ found that the time and attention leaders give to the following three tasks of ministry have a particularly strong relationship to the spiritual vitality of a congregation:

- Promoting vision (Figure 12.7),
- Evangelism (Figure 12.8), and
- Training lay leaders (Figure 12.9).

This was true regardless of denominational family.

*FACT*²⁰⁰⁸ also found that giving more attention to leading small groups and to contacting inactives was related to spiritual vitality, although more moderately than for the above.

Attention to four other leadership task areas showed a slightly more complex pattern. For each of worship planning, pastoral care, teaching and dealing with conflict, there was no relationship between attention and spiritual vitality among Oldline congregations, but a moderately strong relationship for each of the other three denominational families.

Only two areas had no significant relationship to spiritual vitality—administration and representing the congregation in the community.

The same general patterns of relationship were found between attention to tasks of ministry and attendance growth as were found for spiritual vitality, but considerably less pronounced. Relationships between attention to tasks of ministry and a congregation's financial health were generally insignificant when denominational family was controlled.

Figure 12.7 Vision and Vitality

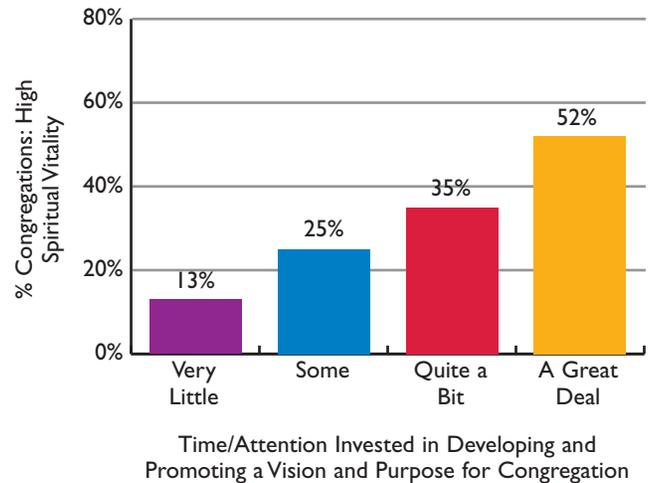


Figure 12.8 Witness and Vitality

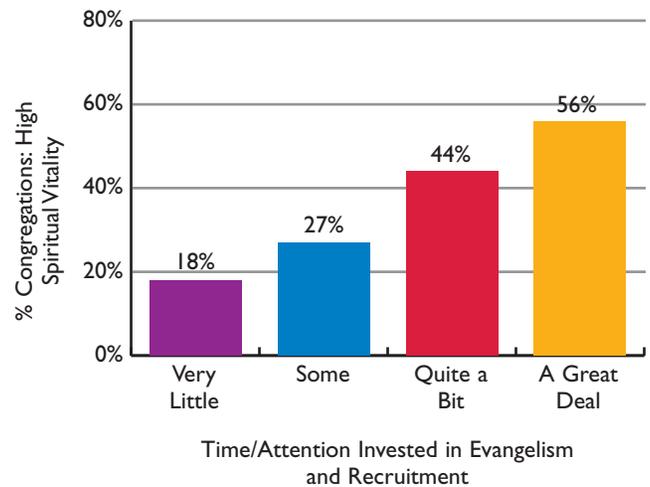
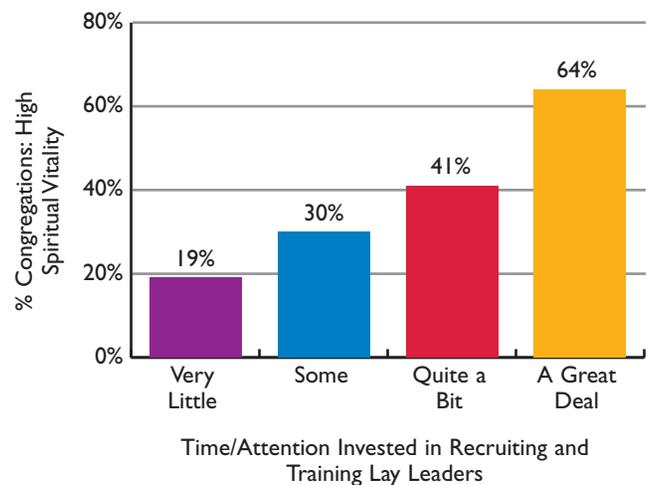


Figure 12.9 Lay Leadership Development and Vitality





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