

American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21st Century



Contents

What Are Our Most Important Observations?	2
Size and Concentration	2
Worship	4
Leadership	5
Diversity	6
Technology	7
Aging	9
Social Class	10
Social Service Involvement	11
“Liberalism” and the Protestant Mainline	13
Tolerance and Inclusiveness	15
Conflict	17
Political Involvement	18
More Findings from the National Congregations Study	19
Conclusion	20
Appendix: Tables	21
Table 1	22
Table 2	27

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See <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/> for more information about the National Congregations Study.

American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21st Century

A Report from the National Congregations Study

What is religion in the United States like today? This is a difficult question to answer in part because views on religion depend on your perspective. What one person sees as a big change another might view as a small one. What one sees as a desirable change, another might see as unwanted. In addition, the United States is a religiously pluralistic society. It embraces hundreds of Christian denominations, several strands of Judaism, and dozens more varieties of non-western religions, some of whose adherents have sustained their faiths here for generations, while still others have built new institutions and houses of worship.

How do we make sense of it all? The National Congregations Study can help.

What is the National Congregations Study?

The National Congregations Study (NCS) is a source of reliable information about congregations. Based on two nationally representative surveys of congregations from across the religious spectrum, the first in 1998 and the second in 2006-07, NCS findings can inform those with deep interests in the state of American congregations as well as those with only a passing interest in religion. Because the NCS has been fielded twice, we can begin to track how congregations have changed in the last decade. These data will keep sociologists and professional religious observers busy for years, and they will inform all manner of religious leaders, from small-town clergy and megachurch pastors to seminary presidents and denomination heads.

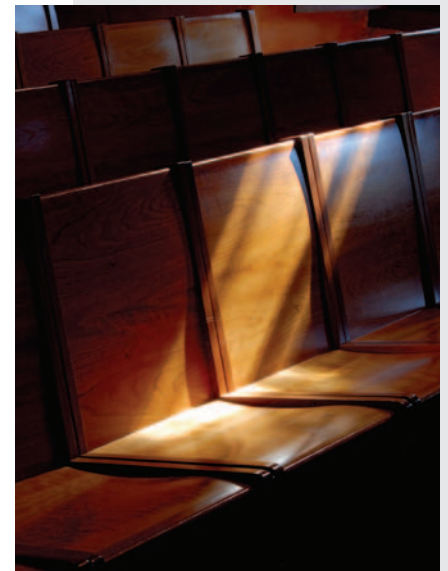
There are many other surveys that explore America's religious landscape. But most other surveys ask people about their own individual religious beliefs and practices. The NCS, by contrast, examines what people do together in congregations. What communities of faith do *together* tells us something important about the state of American religion, whatever the specific beliefs and practices of individuals in those communities.

Before 1998, a national snapshot of American congregations did not exist because there was no good way to construct a nationally representative sample of congregations. The problem was that there was not a definitive list of all congregations. Phonebooks do not work since many small congregations are unlisted or do not have phones. Some denominations keep very good lists of their congregations, but not all do, and many congregations are non-denominational. In 1998 and again in 2006, the General Social Survey (GSS) – a well-known national survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago – asked respondents who said they attend religious services where they worship. The congregations named by GSS respondents are a representative cross-section of American congregations. NCS staff contacted those congregations and interviewed someone, usually a clergy person or other leader, about the congregation's people, programs, and characteristics. Eighty percent of nominated congregations cooperated with us in 1998, and 78% did so in 2006-07.

Between the two waves of the NCS, we now know about the demographics, leadership, worship, programming, and surrounding neighborhoods of 2,740 congregations. This study gives us a broad and varied cross-section of American religious life, and it allows us to offer some grounded observations about the state of congregational life in this country.

The NCS in Brief:

- Wave I, 1998
- Wave II, 2006-07
- Nationally representative survey
- Congregations from across the religious spectrum
- 78% response rate
- 2,740 congregations total



What Are Our Most Important Observations?

This report highlights some of the National Congregations Study's most important findings, including:

- Most congregations are small but most people are in large congregations.
- Worship services are becoming more informal.
- Congregational leaders are still overwhelmingly male.
- Predominantly white congregations are more ethnically diverse.
- Congregations embrace technology.
- Congregations and clergy are getting older.
- Congregations' position in the social class structure remains unchanged.
- Congregations' involvement in social service activities remains unchanged.
- Only a small minority of congregations describe themselves as theologically "liberal," even within the Protestant mainline.
- Congregations are more tolerant and inclusive than we might expect them to be, even when it comes to hot-button issues.
- There has been no significant increase in congregational conflict since 1998.
- Congregations' involvement in political activities is largely unchanged since 1998.

Worship services are becoming more informal.



Not all of these findings are surprising, and many readers probably will find that some trends reflect their own experiences. Still, the NCS findings help us distinguish truth from myth about American congregations, and they help us assess the extent to which this or that feature of congregational life permeates the religious landscape. These findings also will help readers place their own experiences in a larger perspective.

While this report highlights some of the most important findings from the NCS, it only scratches the surface. Please see the NCS website for more information: <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong>.

Most Congregations are Small but Most People are in Large Congregations

Size is among the most important characteristics of any organization, including congregations. It affects everything else. More people mean more resources, more staff, and more programming. More people also bring more complexity: different kinds of staff, more administration and coordination, bureaucracy, formality, and a loss of the personal touch.

There is a lot to say about congregational size, but one fact is fundamental: Most congregations in the United States are small, but most people are in large congregations. Despite the recent proliferation of very large Protestant churches we call megachurches, the size of the average congregation has not changed since 1998.

- In both 1998 and 2006-07, the average *congregation* had just 75 regular participants.
- In both 1998 and 2006-07, the average *attendee* worshiped in a congregation with about 400 regular participants.



Please visit the NCS website where you can conduct your own research using the survey data:
<http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong>

These results may seem incompatible at first, but they are not. Most congregations remain small, with 90% having 350 or fewer people. Even though there are relatively few large congregations with many members, sizable budgets, and numerous staff, these congregations are large enough that they actually contain most churchgoers. Even though the average congregation has only 75 regular participants and an annual budget of \$90,000, the average person is in a congregation with 400 people and a budget of \$280,000.

To get a feel for just how concentrated people are in the largest congregations, imagine that we have lined up all congregations in the United States, from the smallest to the largest. Imagine that you are walking up this line, starting with the smallest. When you get to a congregation with 400 people, you would have walked past about half of all churchgoers, but more than 90% of all congregations! Or imagine walking down this line of congregations from the other direction, starting with the very largest. When you get to that same 400-person congregation, you would have walked past only about 10% of all congregations but half of all churchgoers.

In a nutshell, the largest 10% of congregations contain about half of all churchgoers. Most denominations, even the largest ones, could gather comfortably the pastors of congregations representing more than half of their people in a medium-to-large hotel ballroom. And it is not just people. Money and staff also are concentrated in the largest congregations.

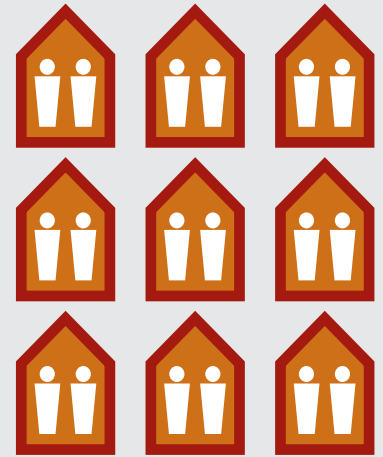
This basic fact has tremendous implications for American religion. It means that most seminarians come from large churches (since that's where most people are), but most clergy jobs are in small churches. It means that pastors of the largest churches wield political power inside denominations that may be proportional to the size of their congregations but disproportional from a one-congregation, one-vote point of view. It means that denominational officials can serve the most people by concentrating their attention on just the largest churches. But that strategy can leave most congregations out of the picture. When confronted with a policy decision, should you ask what the impact might be on most churches, or what the impact might be on most churchgoers? That is a tough question.

Even though the average size of congregations has not changed recently, more and more people are concentrated in the very largest congregations. We all know about megachurches, but they are only the tip of the iceberg. The movement of people from smaller to larger churches is much broader and deeper than the proliferation of stereotypical megachurches.

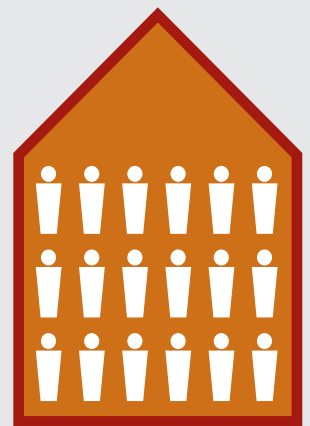
The concentration of people in larger congregations means that national statistics about congregations can be presented from one of two perspectives. Do we want to know about what happens in the average congregation, or are we more interested in the experiences of the average attendee? This is an important distinction to keep in mind while reading this report, which presents information from both perspectives.



Most Congregations are Small but...

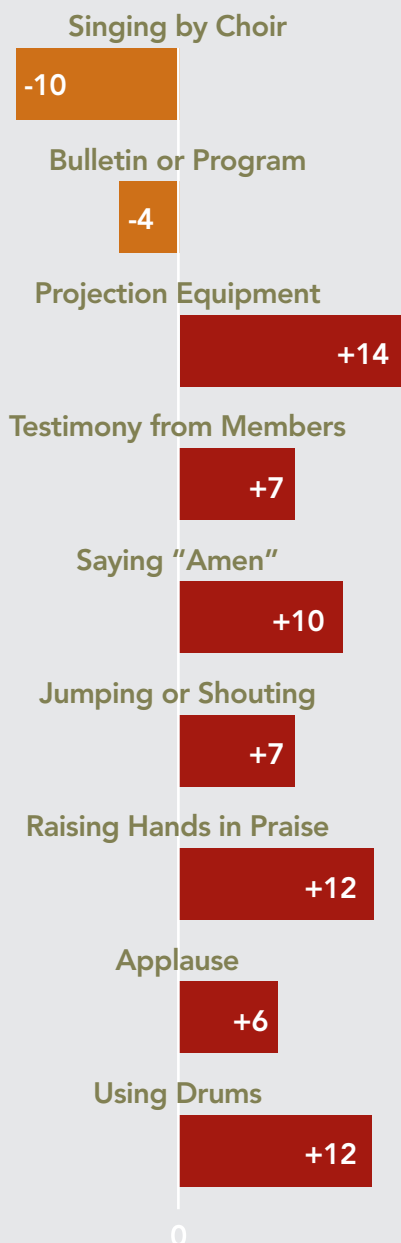


Most People are in Large Congregations



The largest 10 percent of churches contain half of all churchgoers.

Percentage Point
Change in
Indicators of
Worship (In)Formality,
1998 to 2006-07



Worship Services are More Informal

Many elements of congregational life and religious expression are becoming more informal. The NCS asked 16 questions in 1998 and in 2006-07 about things that happened during worship service. Without exception, if there is change, it is toward informality:

- Fewer congregations incorporate choir singing into worship, falling from 54% in 1998 to 44% in 2006-07.
- The number of congregations that use a printed bulletin dropped from 72% to 68%.
- Far more use visual projection equipment in worship, increasing dramatically from only 12% to 27%.
- The number of congregations in which someone other than the leader speaks at worship about their own religious experience increased from 78% to 85%.
- More congregations report people spontaneously saying "amen," jumping from 61% to 71%.
- More report people jumping, shouting, or dancing spontaneously, up from 19% to 26%.
- The number of congregations in which people raise their hands in praise grew from 45% to 57%.
- More congregations report applause breaking out, rising from 55% to 61%.
- The number of congregations that use drums increased from 20% to 33%.

This trend towards informality does not occur at the same pace and in the same way within every religious group. The numbers above ignore some interesting nuance and detail. Most of the increase in informality occurs among Protestants. Catholic churches have increased only their use of visual projection equipment and drums, while the increase in jumping, shouting, and dancing remains concentrated in predominantly African American churches. Still, there is a fairly general trend here.

Why is this happening? It is tempting to conclude that Pentecostal-style worship has widened its influence. But speaking in tongues, a hallmark of Pentecostalism, has not increased. More likely, congregations share in a broader cultural trend towards informality. People dress more informally at work, social events, and even church or synagogue. When talking with each other, we are less likely to use titles like Mr. or Mrs., Doctor, or Professor, and more likely to use a first name, or even a nickname. This worship trend also might reflect what some consider a long-term trend in American religion away from an emphasis on belief and doctrine and towards an emphasis on experience and emotion. Whatever the cause, informality is on the rise in American congregations.

Beyond the informality trend, it is interesting to note that, in 2006-07, only 15% of congregations say they recently changed the number of worship services they hold in a typical week. Of those that made a change:

- Three-quarters added rather than subtracted a service.
- Twenty-six percent made the change to provide an alternative worship style.
- Seventeen percent made it because of attendance changes.
- Ten percent made it because of seasonal change.
- Four percent made it for staffing reasons.
- Three percent made it because they needed a bilingual service.

Seminary enrollments are 30% female, but female leadership of congregations will remain well below 30% for the foreseeable future.

Congregational Leaders are Still Overwhelmingly Male

Despite large percentages of female seminarians and increased numbers of female clergy in some denominations, women lead only a small minority of American congregations:

- About 5% of people attend congregations led by women.
- Women lead approximately 8% of congregations.

Congregations that describe themselves as theologically liberal are much more likely than other congregations to be led by women, and female leadership in these congregations has increased since 1998. Self-described liberal congregations were led by women 23% of the time in 1998 and 37% of the time in 2006-07. Theologically conservative congregations are no more likely – perhaps even less likely – to see women in head clergy positions today than they were in 1998.

Why are there still so few congregations led by female clergy? Several factors probably are important. First, even though the percentage of women enrolling in Master of Divinity programs grew dramatically in recent decades, that percentage peaked in 2002 at 31.5% and fell slightly to 30.6% by 2006, according to the Association of Theological Schools. Second, women with a Masters of Divinity degree are less likely to pursue pastoral ministry than men, and when they do work as pastors they are less likely to report satisfaction with their jobs than their male colleagues. Third, and perhaps most important, several major religious groups still do not permit women to lead congregations, and, even within denominations that ordained women for decades, many congregations are still reluctant to hire women as their main clergy person.

As Jackson Carroll reported in his 2006 book, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, female clergy now earn the same salaries as male clergy when they work in congregations of comparable size and location. But women still do not land the most desirable congregational jobs at the same rate as men.

What does this mean for the future of women in congregational leadership? Overall, seminary enrollments have stayed high in recent years only because women have replaced the declining number of men wanting to pursue a career in congregational leadership. The percentage of congregations led by women should increase in the coming years as clergy from younger, more female cohorts replace clergy from older, almost completely male ones. But the presence of women in congregational leadership will be widely variable across denominations and religious groups, and the overall percentage of congregations led by women likely will remain well below 30% for the foreseeable future.



Percent of All Congregations Led by Female Clergy by Theological Orientation, 2006-07

More Conservative

5

Right in the Middle

7

More Liberal

37

Percent of Congregations Led by Female Clergy in Selected Denominations

PC (USA)

15

21

UMC

17

23

ELCA

13

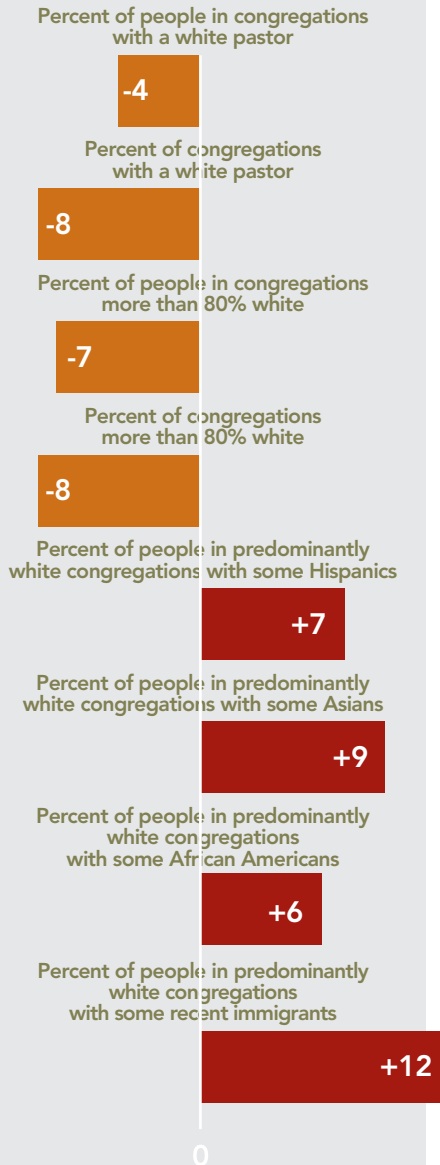
23

1998

2006-07

Source: Denominational data

Percentage Point Change in Selected Demographic Characteristics, 1998 to 2006-07



Predominantly White Congregations are (Slightly) More Diverse

The clergy in some denominations is somewhat less male and white than it used to be. Consider these changes between 1998 and 2006-07:

- The percent of people who attend congregations with a white pastor dropped from 82 to 78%. This decline is driven almost entirely by changes within Catholic parishes.
- The percent of congregations with a white senior pastor dipped from 76 to 68%. This decline also has occurred almost entirely within Catholic parishes.
- Catholic parishes are more likely to be led by African American, Latino, or Asian priests than they used to be.

Perhaps more significantly, congregations themselves are becoming less white. In particular, *predominantly white* congregations are becoming less white. In the period between 1998 and 2006-07:

- The percent of congregations with more than 80% white participation dropped from 72 to 63%.
- The percent of people who attend congregations in which more than 80% of participants are white and non-Hispanic dropped from 72 to 66%.
- The percent of attendees in predominantly white congregations with at least *some* Hispanic participants increased from 57 to 64%.
- The percent of attendees in predominantly white congregations with at least *some* recent immigrants bumped up from 39 to 51%.
- The percent of attendees in predominantly white congregations with at least *some* Asian participants increased from 41 to 50%.

These changes in part reflect recent immigration, but something more is afoot. The percent of attendees in predominantly white congregations with *some* African American attendees also increased, from 60% to 66%.



In short, there are fewer all white congregations in the United States today. More predominantly white congregations have at least some Latino, Asian, or African American presence. Interestingly, the same can not be said for predominantly African American congregations, which saw no change in non-black participation between 1998 and 2006-2007.

We must ask what it means for faith communities when they embrace technology so wholeheartedly.

This underscores an important point: the significance of the trend among predominantly white congregations should not be overstated. It definitely is too soon to discard the old saw that 11 a.m. Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week. The vast majority of American congregations are still racially homogenous, but there has also been noticeable progress. Our congregations, like our society, are still far from a place in which color and nationality are invisible, but there has been some positive change. Somewhat like interracial marriage, which is increasing but still rare, a growing minority presence in predominantly white congregations represents some progress in a society in which ethnicity and race still divide us.

It also is worth asking whether even a few African Americans, Hispanics, or recent immigrants in a congregation affect that congregation's life in important ways. John Green, a University of Akron professor and a leading expert on religion and politics, argues that congregations are easier to politicize when they are more homogeneous. Is a clergy person with even one black family in the pews likely to talk in quite the same way about race and social welfare issues as he would if that family was not there? Is a congregation with even one Latino family likely to approach immigration reform in quite the same way? How this increasing pluralism might change congregations deserves additional research and reflection.

Congregations Embrace Technology

One tremendous change in congregational life in the last decade has been the widespread adoption of computer technology. This is no great surprise, but we must ask what it means for faith communities when they embrace technology so wholeheartedly.

The use of visual projection equipment more than doubled in the last decade:

- In 1998, 15% of people attended congregations that used visual projection equipment; by 2006-07, that number rose to 32%.
- Only 12% of congregations used visual projection equipment in 1998; that number also doubled by 2006-07, reaching 27%.

Website development more than doubled in the last decade, while the use of email almost tripled:

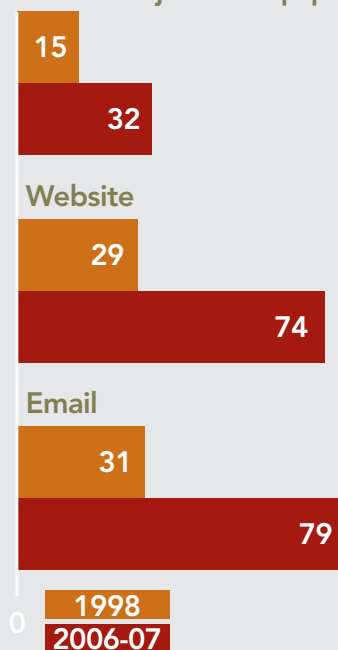
- Fewer than half of all congregations, 44%, have a website, but 74% of all attendees are in those congregations. In 1998, those numbers were only 17% and 29%, respectively.
- In 2006-07, 59% of congregations use email to communicate with regular participants, but 79% of attendees are in those congregations. In 1998, those numbers were only 21% and 31%, respectively.

These figures imply that in each year since 1998, some 10,000 congregations created a website. Nothing else increased so dramatically.

Congregations from across the social and religious spectrum embrace these technologies, but at different rates. Synagogues and more liberal Protestant congregations lead the way in using email and starting websites, while African American Protestant congregations lag behind. There is a digital divide even within the religious world.

What do we make of this? How has the increasing use of visual projection equipment affected the art and craft of preaching? Does preparing a slide show lead preachers to think more about how to organize a sermon? Or do slide shows reduce preaching to bite-sized

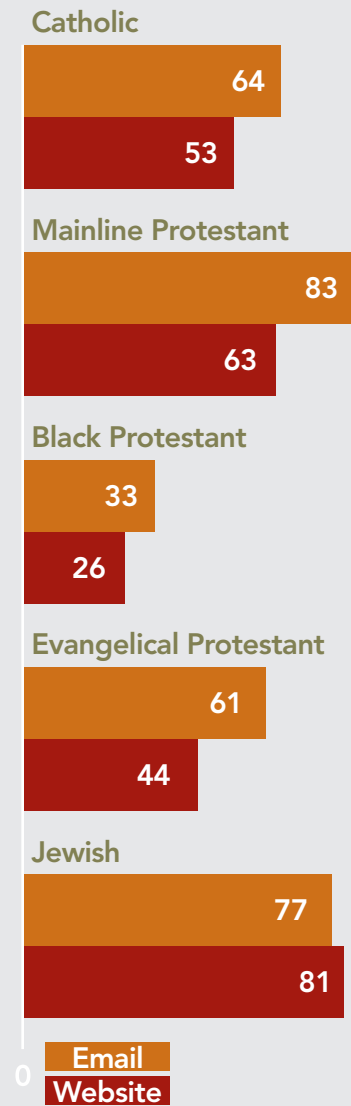
Percent of People in Congregations that Use Computer Technology, 1998 and 2006-07
Visual Projection Equip.



Percent of Congregations that Use Computer Technology, 1998 and 2006-07
Visual Projection Equip.



**Percent of All
Congregations Using
Computer Technology
By Religious Tradition,
2006-07**



chunks that can be easily projected onto a screen? Does technology make it more difficult to inspire rather than instruct?

The NCS did not ask about congregations' use of other technologies, like sophisticated voice mail systems or computer programs for managing Sunday School attendance and small groups. But we wonder if very large Protestant churches, which have proliferated since the 1970s, would look the same without technological advances of this sort.

New technologies also make new congregational forms possible. The multi-site congregation is one example; here congregations gather to listen to or watch a sermon given from a different location. These other sites have their own local community life – a worship service, announcements, baptisms, some music – but the sermon arrives digitally. Are groups connected in this way a single congregation or multiple congregations? What is gained and lost in this arrangement?

These trends suggest implications for many aspects of congregational life. How do congregations manage and pay for new technologies? How does it affect where people decide to attend? How do congregations decide what to emphasize about themselves on their websites? Since websites make congregations more visible to each other, will clergy and other congregational leaders monitor and influence each other more than before? Will there be even faster and more widespread mimicking of successful congregations? Will congregations find creative uses for social networking websites like Facebook and MySpace? Will they conduct Bible studies online? Provide pastoral care? Maintain friendships? Already some people claim to be members of virtual congregations. They claim to use new technology the way early Protestants used the printing press – the message remains the same, only the medium has changed. Will congregations' use of email create or exacerbate digital divides, since some members still do not have access to email? How will these members stay in the loop when congregations turn to electronic forms of communication?

Congregations will continue to adopt new technologies. These numbers will climb higher in the coming years, probably reaching the saturation point before too long. And new technologies always produce unintended social effects. This was true of innovations like the printing press and the telephone long before it was true of the microchip. Some worried that written texts would have deleterious consequences for memory and oral debate. The printing press made Bibles available to the average person, but it also made books less valuable as objects. The important questions about congregations' use of computer technologies are not why they do it or whether the trend will continue. The important questions concern the consequences for congregations. Will technology make congregations more efficient and innovative, or will it impose new costs without providing clear benefits? Will there be qualitative change in how congregations operate in ways that we do not yet anticipate? Will digital divides be created or exacerbated across and within congregations? These are the things to watch in the coming years.



Older people long have been over-represented in American congregations because religious participation increases with age.

Congregations and Clergy are Aging

Congregations worried about decline often express that concern in terms of aging participants. Findings from the NCS suggest that congregations are indeed older, although the long-term implications of this trend – one that may foreshadow rather than mirror larger cultural changes – remain unclear.

Congregations are getting older:

- In 2006-07, 30% of regular attenders in the average congregation were older than age 60, compared with 25% in 1998.
- The percent of regular adult participants younger than age 35 in the average congregation dropped from 25% to 20%.

Older people long have been over-represented in American congregations because religious participation increases with age. Women also long have been disproportionately active in congregations. But unlike women, the over-representation of older people seems to be increasing. This probably stems from people living longer and young adults participating less than they once did. Young adults participate less in part because they marry later and are more likely to be childless. Married people with children are among the most likely to be involved with congregations.

In some ways this trend might be good for congregations. Some congregations in every denomination have benefitted financially from the comfortable retirements of their aging members. Older upper middle class members whose children are now self-sufficient often have more income to put in the plate and more time to spend on congregational projects. When that generation passes from the scene, how will they be replaced? Will the generation that follows them be quite as active and loyal to their congregations? Will their retirements be as financially comfortable? We do not know, but there are reasons to worry.

Congregations' programming reflects the relative absence of young adults:

- Eighty-two percent of congregations provide religious education for those age 12 and younger.
- Sixty-four percent offer classes for 13-14 year olds.
- Fifty-three percent offer classes for 15-19 year olds.
- Only 37% offer classes for young adults or college students.

Many young adults will return to congregations after they marry and have children of their own. But recent generations return at lower rates than before – even at that point in their lives.

Clergy age faster than the population at large:

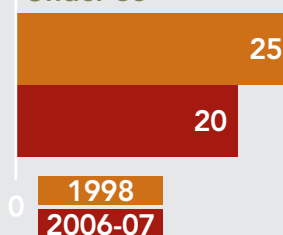
- The senior clergyperson in the average congregation was 48 years old in 1998 and 53 years old in 2006-07. Meanwhile, the average age of the over-25 American public increased only one year, from age 48 to 49.
- The percent of people in congregations led by someone age 50 or younger has declined from 49% in 1998 to 42% today – a remarkable change in only nine years.

Percent of People Over 60 Years Old and Under 35 Years Old in Congregations, 1998 and 2006-07

Over 60



Under 35



Percent of All Congregations Offering Religious Education to Specific Age Groups, 2006-07

Under 12



13 to 14



15 to 19

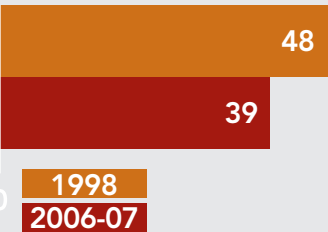


Young adult/College



Percent of People in Congregations that are Led by a Clergy Person Under Age 50, 1998 and 2006-07

Clergyperson Under 50



Clergy aging has occurred across the religious spectrum but happened faster for Catholics and mainline Protestants. The average age of clergy in white mainline Protestant congregations increased from 48 to 57 years, while in African American congregations it increased only three years.

The increase in the number of second-career clergy and the decrease in the number of young people who go to seminary straight from college help to produce a clergy aging faster than the American public as a whole. The long-term implications of this trend for congregations, and for the clergy as a profession, are not clear.



Congregations' Social Class Position is Stable

Congregations' socioeconomic position in American society remains unchanged since 1998.

- People in congregations make more money in 2006-07 than they did in 1998.
 - In 1998, the average person attended a congregation in which 20% of people had annual incomes below \$25,000 – a number that dropped to 10% in 2006-07.
 - In 1998, the average person attended a congregation in which 5% of people had annual income above \$100,000 – a number that doubled to 10% by 2006-07.
- People in congregations were, on average, more educated in 2006-07 than they were in 1998.
 - In 1998, the average attendee was in a congregation in which 30% of people were college graduates; by 2006-07, that number had risen to 40%.

These numerical changes, however, do not reflect any real social change. They do not take inflation into account. Moreover, they closely mirror income and educational trends in the general population. There has not been upward or downward social mobility among American congregations in the last decade. Rather, American congregations fit in to the social class structure the same way they did in 1998.

What does this stability mean?

Observers and scholars of American religion often discuss the extent to which mainstream American religion reflects and/or shapes broader culture. Do congregations mainly mirror society, or do they influence society in important ways? Do congregations mainly reinforce the status quo, or are they prophetic?

Socioeconomically, congregations appear to mirror broader social trends. And this is true in other arenas. For example, the NCS data show more ethnic diversity in congregations, but this reflects increased diversity throughout American society. Worship services are more informal, but this could reflect a larger trend toward informality in American culture. Congregations show huge increases in their use of information and computer technologies, much like other organizations and households across the country. In all of these ways, congregations reflect rather than resist the world around them. They are followers more than leaders. They are rearguard more than vanguard. Only when it comes to the relatively rapid aging of their leaders and their people does it appear that congregations are ahead of a demographic or cultural trend.

American congregations fit in to the social class structure the same way they did in 1998.

Certainly some congregations lead rather than follow, and we may be overlooking ways in which even the average congregation bucks cultural and social currents. Overall, though, it seems that American congregations tell us more about where American culture is or has been than where it is going. Perhaps this is inevitable in a voluntary religious system. American congregations are essentially voluntary associations whose long-term survival depends on local support. This is a source of great strength in American religion, but it might also lead to religion that mirrors more than it shapes culture.

Congregations' Social Service Involvement Is Unchanged

Virtually all congregations do something that we might consider social or human service or ministry for people outside the congregation:

- Eighty-two percent of congregations participate or sponsor such programs, including 90% of regular attenders.

However, congregational involvement in this kind of work has not increased since 1998.

Since 1998, some political leaders have made major efforts to increase congregations' social service involvement and the extent to which congregations receive government funding to conduct this important work. Both Democratic and Republican leaders have in some way endorsed and promoted these efforts, sometimes called the "faith-based initiative." The media paid a tremendous amount of attention to these efforts, reporting mainly on the debates and controversies they provoked. Some critics worried about the further erosion of divides between church and state, while others were concerned about government funding coming with too many strings attached. The debate produced more heat than light, however, not least because religious organizations, including congregations, long have played a role in our social welfare system and have received public money to support their own human services programs. Still, inspired by the faith-based initiative, government officials at every level looked for ways to increase congregations' and other religious organizations' involvement in social services, including publicly funded programs.

What effect did this all have on congregational life? Very little. Neither the overall percent of congregations that report social services, nor the percent who received government funding has increased since 1998. Not even the level of collaboration (whether or not money is involved) between congregations and government or secular nonprofit organizations has risen.

Most congregations conduct some kind of social services, however minor, but in 2006-07:

- Only 15% of congregations had a staff person working at least quarter-time on these programs.
- Only 8% received government funds.
- Six percent of congregational social service programs involved collaborations with government agencies.
- One in 5 programs involved collaborations with secular nonprofit organizations.

In 2006-07, 4% of congregations said that they had applied for a government grant in the last two years, and 6% said they had established a separate nonprofit organization in the last two years to conduct human service programs. The NCS did not ask these questions in 1998, so we cannot assess change over time, but given the absence of change on the social service questions we did ask, we believe it is unlikely that these numbers were lower in 1998 than they are today.

Percent of Congregations that Participate in Social Services and are Involved in Selected Activities, 2006-07

Staff Person Working at least Quarter-Time on Social Service Projects

15

Received Government Funding for Projects

8

Government Collaboration on Projects

6

Secular Non-profit Collaboration on Projects

18

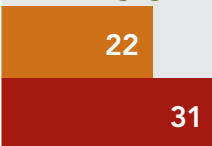
Note: Percents are of those congregations that reported participation in some social service activity.

**Percent of All
Congregations Showing
Interest in Social
Service Involvement,
1998 and 2006-07**

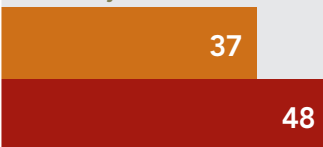
Interest in Government Money
for Programs



Social Service Speaker
Visited Congregation



Congregation Performed a
Community Needs Assessment



0
1998
2006-07

The faith-based initiative increased congregations' interest in social service programs, but not their level of activity.

Reasonable people can disagree about whether these numbers represent a glass half-full (“look how much congregations contribute to our social welfare system!”) or half-empty (“why don’t congregations do more?”). Our main point, though, is that the amount of water in the glass has not changed since 1998.

Despite this stability in congregational social service activity, congregational *interest* in social services seems to have increased since 1998. The number of congregations that would like to apply for government money to support social service programs increased from 39% in 1998 to 47% in 2006-07. The number of all congregations who hosted a speaker from a social service organization increased from 22 to 31%. And the number who recently conducted a community needs assessment jumped from 37 to 48%. These are impressive increases, probably representing an increased level of congregational interest in social services generated by all the media attention paid to faith-based initiatives and by the mistaken belief by some congregational leaders that there would be government money specifically set aside to support congregations’ human service activities. The bottom line here is that the faith-based initiative increased congregations’ interest in social service programs, but not their level of activity.

The faith-based initiative aside, there are some typical patterns to congregations’ human service projects and social ministries.

Congregations most commonly serve emergency needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Of congregations that report social service programs:

- About half reported food programs (feeding the hungry, working in soup kitchens, etc.).
- One-quarter reported home building, repair, or maintenance programs.
- Twenty percent reported clothing programs.
- Fifteen percent reported serving the homeless.

More broadly, congregations are perhaps society’s best providers of small groups of volunteers to carry out well-defined, limited tasks on a periodic basis – tasks such as serving meals one evening a week at the homeless shelter, spending 10 Saturdays rehabbing a house, spending a week in the summer painting a school, or helping to clean up after a disaster.

Congregations, on average, do not spend large amounts of their resources on human service programs.

Not including the value of staff, volunteer time, or in-kind contributions, the active congregation attended by the average person spent only \$5,000 directly on these programs in 2006-07. The small-group voluntarism in which congregations specialize cannot solve social problems such as poverty, unemployment, drug addiction, or ex-felon reintegration. Nor can it be expanded beyond its current levels – there is no vast reservoir of



The presumed equivalence between "mainline" and "liberal" labels should be reevaluated.

congregational resources, either human or financial, to support such an expansion. Still, these activities represent a tremendous contribution.

Self-described "Liberal" Congregations are a Minority, Even Within the Protestant Mainline

In 2006-07, 91% of American congregations and 69% of attendees are Protestant. For Catholics, those numbers are 6% and 28%; for Jews, 1% and 2%; and for something other than Christian or Jewish, 2% and 2%. This basic distribution has not changed much since 1998, though the percentage of independent congregations is increasing.

Non-denominationalism is increasing:

- In 2006-07, more congregations were unaffiliated than were affiliated with any specific denomination. The largest denomination in terms of people is Catholicism, but the largest denomination in terms of congregations is the Southern Baptist Convention, with 11% of all congregations. Twenty percent of all congregations are affiliated with no denomination.
- The percent of congregations with no denominational affiliation increased from 18 to 20%. That is not a statistically significant increase, but the percent of people in congregations with no denominational affiliation increased from 10 to 14%, which is a statistically significant increase.

These days, however, it seems that denominational differences, and even differences between religious groups, are overshadowed by the disagreements between liberals and conservatives within religious groups. Debates about the status of the Bible, the role of women, the inclusion of homosexuals, and other issues, occur between liberals and conservatives within religious groups as much as – and maybe more than – they occur between different religious groups.

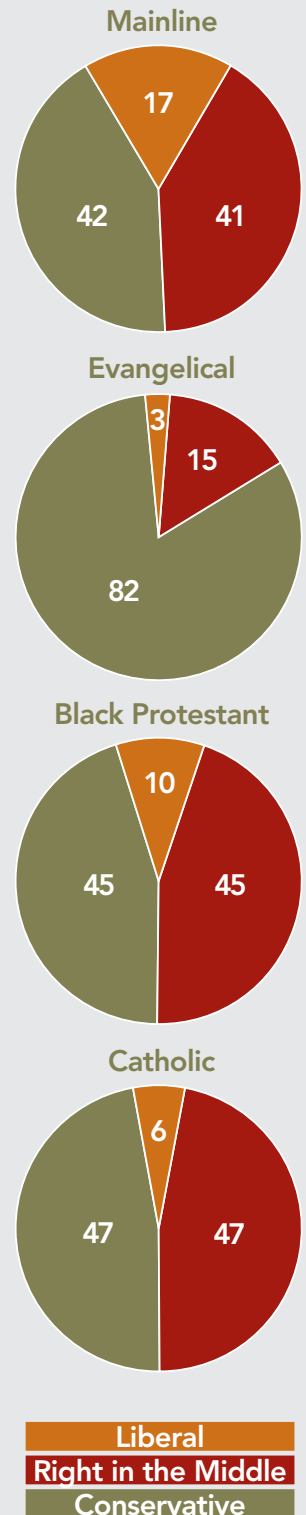
In this context, it is interesting to note that self-described theological liberals are a minority:

- Only 9% of congregations describe themselves as theologically liberal.
- Not even in the Protestant mainline do a majority of churches describe themselves as theologically liberal. Combining NCS data from 1998 and 2006-07:
 - Only 17% of congregations in predominantly white, traditionally mainline, denominations say they are theologically "more on the liberal side."
 - Forty-one percent characterize themselves as "right in the middle."
 - Forty-two percent say they are "more on the conservative side."

To be sure, mainline denominations remain significantly more liberal than white evangelical denominations (only 3% of which self-describe as liberal), Catholics (only 6%), and even Black Protestants (only 10%). Nonetheless, it is striking that less than one-quarter of mainline congregations are described as theologically liberal by their leaders. The pattern is similar for political liberalism. The presumed equivalence between "mainline" and "liberal" might need to be reevaluated.

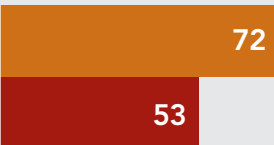
If self-described theological liberalism is a minority identity within American religion, self-described theological conservatism has gained some momentum: The percent of people in congregations that characterize themselves as theologically conservative increased from 53% in 1998 to 58% in 2006-07.

Congregations' Theological Orientation by Religious Tradition, 1998 and 2006-07 Combined

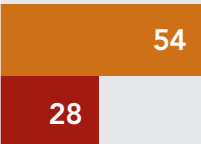


Percent of All Congregations Conferring Membership & Leadership Privileges to Selected Groups, 2006-07

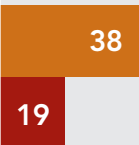
Someone who Drinks
Alcohol in Moderation



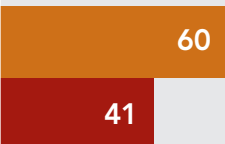
Heterosexuals Who
Are Cohabiting



Gay/Lesbian Couples in
Committed Relationships



Someone who Supports a
Woman's Right to Choose
with Respect to Abortion



Someone who Supports a Right
to Life with Respect to Abortion



0
Membership
Leadership



But the relatively small number of congregations willing to call themselves theologically liberal does not provide an accurate reflection of the prevalence of religiously liberal ideas among Americans. In a 2007 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 70% of Americans who are religiously affiliated agreed that many religions can lead to eternal life, and 68% agreed that there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of their religion. Almost half – 47% – said that their church or denomination should adjust its traditional beliefs and practices in light of new circumstances or adopt modern beliefs and practices. According to the General Social Survey, only 12% of Americans say that there is truth in only one religion. Indeed, only 29% of Protestant *evangelicals* say this. Only 34% of Americans say that they believe the Bible is the word of God – and that number

has been declining, slowly but steadily, for decades. When we examine the prevalence of liberal ideas and practices in American religion rather than self-described theological liberalism, we get a different picture, one in which liberalism seems a more potent cultural presence, even within traditionally conservative religious traditions.

Whatever the connection between theological liberalism and the Protestant mainline, there also are questions about the usefulness of the term “mainline.” Can denominations commonly thought of as the mainline – Methodists, some Presbyterians, Episcopalians, some Lutherans, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America, American Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and some other, smaller, groups – still claim that label? Evangelical denominations have long been the mainline in some parts of the country; for example, the Southern Baptist Convention in the South and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the upper Midwest. If we use numbers rather than perceived social influence to define “mainline,” American mainline religion is Catholic, Baptist, and non-denominational.

On the other hand, there are important theological ideas and cultural priorities shared by traditionally defined mainline denominations. These churches are most committed to ecumenicalism, have pushed hardest for inclusivity in their leadership (first for African Americans and women, and now, with serious ongoing debates, for gays and lesbians), and identify with the National Council of Churches. Moreover, when they mobilize politically, these churches still tend to position themselves on the liberal side of policy debates. Whatever terms are used, it is worth noting that, numerically, the traditional Protestant mainline is not the default religion in America. It is not even the default *Protestant* religion in America, and has not been for about two decades.

*Who can be a member in good standing?
Who can be a lay leader?
Some interesting patterns emerged.*

Congregations Are More Tolerant and Inclusive Than We Might Expect Them To Be

Beyond liberal and conservative labels, the NCS tapped into congregational practices of inclusivity and exclusivity by asking questions such as: Who can be a full-fledged member in good standing? Who can be a lay leader? Some interesting patterns emerged. The traditional Protestant insistence on teetotaling, for example, now characterizes only a minority of congregations, and more congregations than we might expect express tolerance and inclusivity even when it comes to hot-button issues.

• Alcohol:

- Seventy-two percent of congregations, containing 85% of congregation attendees, allow moderate drinkers to be full-fledged members.
- Fifty-three percent of congregations, containing 71% of congregation participants, allow moderate drinkers to hold volunteer leadership positions.

• Cohabitation:

- Fifty-four percent of congregations, with 65% of participants, allow cohabiting heterosexual couples to be full-fledged members.
- Twenty-eight percent, with 31% of attendees, allow cohabiting heterosexual couples to hold volunteer leadership positions.

• Sexual orientation:

- Thirty-eight percent of congregations, with 49% of attendees, allow gay and lesbian couples in committed relationships to be full-fledged members.
- Nineteen percent, with 23% of participants, allow gay and lesbian couples in committed relationships to hold volunteer leadership positions.

• Abortion (Pro-Choice):

- Sixty percent of congregations, with 66% of attendees, allow pro-choice individuals to be full-fledged members.
- Forty-one percent, with 41% of attendees, allow pro-choice individuals to hold volunteer leadership positions.



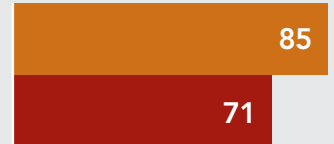
• Abortion (Pro-Life):

- Eighty-six percent of congregations, with 91% of participants, allow pro-life individuals to be full-fledged members.
- Eighty-two percent, containing 86% of attendees, allow pro-life individuals to hold volunteer leadership positions.

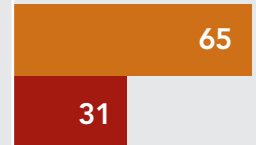
Congregations are, of course, more inclusive in membership than in leadership, but even there the number of inclusive congregations is surprisingly high. Tolerance of homosexuality – perhaps the most divisive issue today in American religion – is also high, with one

Percent of People in Congregations Conferring Membership & Leadership Privileges to Selected Groups, 2006-07

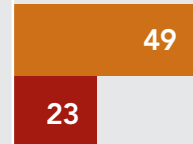
Someone who Drinks Alcohol in Moderation



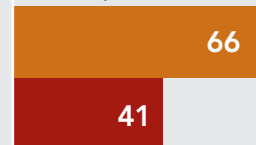
Heterosexuals Who Are Cohabiting



Gay/Lesbian Couples in Committed Relationships



Someone who Supports a Woman's Right to Choose with Respect to Abortion



Someone who Supports a Right to Life with Respect to Abortion



0 Membership Leadership

Percent of Congregations That Do Not Allow Women to Participate in Selected Activities, 2006-07

Serve as a Member of the Governing Board

15

Be a Senior Clergy Person

51

Preach at a Main Service

33

Teach a Class with Adult Men in it

13

Serve in All Volunteer Leadership Positions

26

Percent of People in Congregations That Do Not Allow Women to Participate in Selected Activities, 2006-07

Serve as a Member of the Governing Board

13

Be a Senior Clergy Person

59

Preach at a Main Service

43

Teach a Class with Adult Men in it

11

Serve in All Volunteer Leadership Positions

20

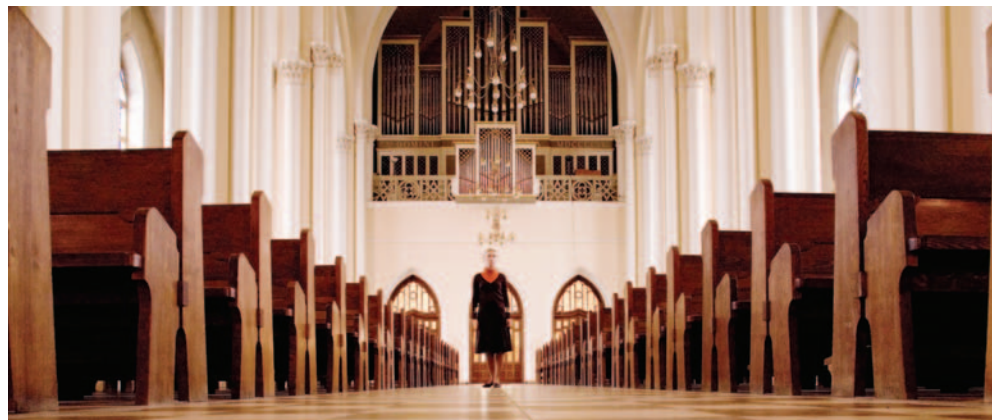
in five congregations allowing individuals in an openly homosexual couple to serve in volunteer leadership.

We should not overstate American religion's inclusivity, however. The difference between joining and leading is an important one, and restrictions on who can lead remain common. Beyond the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church, gays and lesbians may unambiguously lead only within Reform Judaism, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Unitarian and Universalist Association, and a few other smaller groups. Moreover, even the welcoming of cohabiting or gay and lesbian participants may indicate a desire to change people rather than embrace them. Only 6% of congregations, after all, have adopted written statements officially welcoming gays and lesbians.

Women still do not enjoy full inclusion everywhere in American religion:

- Fifteen percent of congregations, containing 13% of attendees, do not allow women to serve in their governing body.
- Fifty-one percent, with 59% of participants, do not allow women to be full-fledged senior clergy.
- Thirty-three percent, containing 43% of attendees, do not allow women to preach at a main worship service.
- Thirteen percent, containing 11% of attendees, do not allow women to teach a class containing adult men.
- Twenty-six percent, with 20% of participants, exclude women from some volunteer leadership positions.

None of this means that congregations that use these litmus tests have no drinking, cohabiting, gay, or pro-choice participants or leaders; nor does it mean that there are no leadership opportunities for women among groups that limit those opportunities. We also should not assume that congregations that do not impose these litmus tests are truly and fully inclusive and welcoming of all who come. There surely are congregations which consider themselves fully inclusive but in which a gay couple would not feel fully welcome or women would encounter obstacles to leadership. The gap between ideals and practices often is a large one. Mainline or evangelical, liberal or conservative, inclusive or exclusive – these labels may describe ideals more accurately than practices. Still, these ideals constitute important lines of division within American religion and, more broadly, within American culture.



Fewer than one in 10 congregations experience what we might call persistent conflict.

Conflict is Not Increasing

Media reports suggest religious life must be rife with conflict, but this is not the case:

- About one-quarter of American congregations had a conflict within the last two years serious enough to call a special meeting – 29% in 1998 and 24% in 2006-07.
- About one-quarter had a conflict in the last two years over which some people left the congregation – 27% in 1998 and 26% in 2006-07.
- In 2006-07, 9% had a conflict in the last two years that led a clergy person or other religious leader to leave the congregation.
- Of the congregations that participated in both waves of the NCS:
 - Seven percent reported conflict at both times.
 - Thirty-seven percent reported conflict in one or the other year.

Fewer than one in 10 congregations experience what we might call persistent conflict. One in 4 congregations experience some sort of conflict over a two-year period. Two in five experience some sort of conflict over a four-year period. Is this a glass half-full or half-empty? Optimists might focus on the relative rarity of persistent conflict and point out that some congregational conflicts might be necessary and healthy. Pessimists might focus on the nearly 40% that experience a relatively serious conflict over four years, believing that too much energy is spent on internal squabbling.

Both optimists and pessimists, however, probably would do well to recognize the distinction between congregations experiencing occasional conflict and those suffering from persistent conflict. For one thing, the persistently conflicted congregations account for a disproportionate share of all congregational conflict. This is why the percentage of congregations with conflict over a four-year period is less than half the percentage of those with conflict over a two-year period. Even though persistently conflicted congregations make up only 7% of all congregations, they account for between 35 and 40% of all the conflict.

The persistently conflicted congregations surely take up a disproportionate share of whatever staff, consulting, training, conflict-resolution, or other resources congregations, denominations, congregational consultants, and other religious leaders devote to dealing with conflict. Understanding the difference between occasional and persistent conflict is part of the challenge of responding effectively to congregational conflict.

These conflicts have many sources.

Of congregations that reported any conflict in 2006-07:

- Thirty-five percent said their conflicts were about clergy.
- Twelve percent said they were about “leadership,” which may or may not refer to clergy leadership.
- Eight percent said they were about money.
- Two percent said they were about education or schools.
- Four percent said they were about homosexuality.
- Forty-eight percent of reported conflicts were placed in a catch-all “other” category, which means that many reflect a hodge-podge of subjects, from “separation from another Methodist church in town” to “personality clashing.”

Percent of All Congregations Reporting Conflict, 2006-07

Conflict That Required a Special Meeting

24

Conflict That Led to People Leaving the Congregation

26

Conflict That Led Leaders to Leave the Congregation

9

0

Percent of Congregations That Reported Conflict and Reported Arguing Over Specific Issues, 2006-07

Clergy

35

Leadership

12

Money

8

Education / Schools

2

Homosexuality

4

Note: Percents are of those congregations that reported any kind of conflict.

0

Ideological conflict happens... at the denominational level.

Perhaps most surprising was that only 4% of congregations who reported conflict said it was about homosexuality. Since only about 25% report a conflict, only about 1% of American congregations, containing about 2% of attendees, had a serious conflict over homosexuality in the past two years.

Why is this number so low? Stories about Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others debating gay and lesbian rights pervade news media. Indeed, one sometimes wonders if there is any conflict within American religion that is not about homosexuality.

Part of the explanation is that conflicts over gay and lesbian ordination and inclusivity rile the regional and national structures of some denominations more than local congregations. Indeed, national conflicts probably cause rather than reflect conflicts within congregations, meaning that congregations would argue about homosexuality even less if denominations did not sometimes force them to take sides.

Another part of the explanation is that people who feel strongly about this issue probably have found a congregation that shares their views, whatever they are. People are free in our voluntary religious culture to select congregations they like and in which they feel comfortable, so conflicts within congregations on ideological issues are less common than they might otherwise be. Ideological conflict happens instead at the denominational level.



Percent of All Congregations Participating in Selected Political Activities, 1998 and 2006-07 Combined

Distributed Voter Guides

17

Marched or Demonstrated

9

Lobbied Elected Officials

6

Political Candidate was Guest Speaker

5

Congregations' Political Involvement is Stable – with One Exception

The connection between religion and politics is another subject that gets a lot of media attention.

Most congregations are not politically active, and congregations' involvement in politics generally has not increased since 1998.

Combining 1998 and 2006-07 data:

- Seventeen percent of congregations, containing 26% of attendees, distributed voter guides.
 - Only about half of voter guides came from Religious Right organizations such as Focus on the Family. Mainline Protestants, black Protestants, and Catholics all have their own versions of voter guides.
- Nine percent of congregations, with 21% of attendees, marched or demonstrated.
- Six percent, with 13% of attendees, lobbied elected officials.
- Five percent, with 6% of attendees, invited political candidates to speak.

What issues move people from the sanctuary to the streets, or into the offices of elected officials?



Congregations most frequently demonstrated, marched, or lobbied elected officials on abortion, international issues, poverty, and gay and lesbian rights:

Congregations who demonstrated, marched, or lobbied reported a focus on these issues:

- Abortion (33%)
- International issues, including war and peace (19%)
- Poverty (17%)
- Homosexuality (16%)
- Education (10%)
- Immigration (9%)
- Death Penalty (4%)
- Workers' rights (3%)
- Stem cell research (2%)

- Notwithstanding substantial media coverage of religious debates over euthanasia and the environment, fewer than 1% named each of these issues.

Keep in mind that these percentages refer only to the issues on which politically active congregations engage. Remember also that only 13% of all congregations demonstrated, marched, or lobbied in 2006-07. That means that, although 33% of these congregations were active on abortion, only 4% of all congregations (33% of 13%) demonstrated, marched, or lobbied on this issue. And that is the most common issue on which congregations were politically active.

Of all political activities asked about in both 1998 and 2006-07, voter registration is the only activity on which congregations changed their level of involvement. It is unclear what this increase means, but it is interesting that congregations' political attention focused on new voters more than it had before.

Congregations' voter registration efforts more than doubled:

- The percent of attendees in congregations conducting voter registration more than doubled, from 12% to 27%.
- The percent of congregations conducting voter registration jumped from 8% to 18%.

More Findings from the National Congregations Study

We have highlighted some of the most interesting NCS findings, but there are many additional ones that we do not have the space to pursue here. For example:

A surprising number of congregations have been busy starting other congregations.

Fifteen percent of congregations, containing 19% of attendees, said they helped start a new congregation in the last two years. Even if these numbers overstate reality (perhaps our informants said yes to this question if they supported an overseas congregation rather than started a new congregation in the United States), we wonder if church planting is shifting from a primarily denominational effort toward a more congregational effort.

Percent of Congregations that Demonstrated or Lobbied Elected Officials and Said Their Activity Was Focused on Selected Issues, 2006-07

Abortion

33

Internat'l Issues

19

Poverty

17

Gay and Lesbian Issues

16

Education

10

Immigration

9

Note: Percents are of those congregations that reported demonstrating or lobbying.

Percent of Congregations Participating in Voter Registration, 1998 and 2006-07

Voter Registration

8

18

1998

2006-07

Is your congregation typical or atypical? Does it exemplify current trends, or is it resisting those trends?



As the U.S. population continues its long-term shift from rural to urban areas, so too are our places of worship.

In just nine years, the number of people who attend congregations in predominantly urban areas increased from 61% in 1998 to 67% in 2006-07. The number of people who attend congregations in rural areas fell from 23 to 18%, while the percent of congregations in rural areas fell even faster, from 43 to 33%. Congregations may be opening new doors in America's suburbs, but doors are closing in rural communities. There is good reason for worry about the plight of the rural church in America.

Small groups or people meeting around a common interest are ubiquitous in congregations, but the purposes of these groups change in ways that reflect broader culture.

Between 1998 and 2006-07, for example, the percent of attendees in congregations in which people met to discuss or learn about a different religion increased from 30 to 37% – perhaps reflecting a post-9/11 interest in Islam.

In 2006-07, 62% of attendees were in congregations with book discussion groups, up from 42% in 1998. Whether reflecting religious bestsellers such as Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* or Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, or perhaps a more general, Oprah-inspired general interest in book groups, congregations seem to be encouraging more reading (or, at least, more talking about reading) than they did before.

More congregations are nondenominational, but reports of the death of denominations are exaggerated.

In 2006-07, more than half of all congregations, containing 64% of all attendees, were visited by a denominational representative who spoke to the congregation. Those numbers have not declined since 1998. And denominational representatives were much more common visiting speakers at congregations than representatives of social service organizations (31%), government officials (8%), or candidates for public office (6%). Moreover, when congregations turned to outside consultants for help with finances, personnel, member education, strategic planning, or other issues, three-quarters of the time they received that help from their denominations. We should not overstate the case. The relationship between congregations and denominations continues to be in flux and, when adjusting for inflation, the average congregation gave less of its money to its denomination in 2006-07 than it did in 1998. But it is too soon to say that we are in a post-denominational society.

Conclusion

Many people are familiar with at least one religious congregation – their own. But you gain important perspective from seeing your own congregation within a larger context. Is your congregation typical or atypical? Does it exemplify current trends, or is it resisting those trends? The NCS provides the context that makes it possible to answer these questions, and others. We have highlighted some of the most important findings, but there are many more in the two tables at the end of this report, and even more on the NCS website. We hope you find something in this report that is informative, thought-provoking, or useful in the ongoing effort to better understand American religion.

Appendix: Tables

We present two tables. Table 1, “Continuity and Change in American Congregations,” facilitates comparisons over time and gives percentages for virtually all items asked in both NCS surveys. Table 2, “NCS-II Basic Frequencies,” gives percentages for almost every item on the Wave II questionnaire and provides a simple overview of the 2006-07 data.

The tables contain many endnotes. While some of these notes provide clarification on item wording or other issues across surveys, the vast majority of these notes indicate the denominators for given percentages. It is important to keep these denominators in mind since interpretations and impressions about the meaning of a percentage change with its denominator. For example, on page 27, the “Congregations’ Perspective” column shows that 30.6 percent remodeled their building in the past year; however, note e tells us that this is not 30.6 percent of *all* congregations, but 30.6 percent of congregations who own the building where they meet. The percent for all congregations is 27.4 (30.6% × 89.7%). This might not seem like much of a change, but consider the next item. The same page and column in Table 2 show that 56.4 percent remodeled their building to improve accessibility for people with physical disabilities. However, note f tells us that this is not 56.4 percent of *all* congregations, but 56.4 percent of congregations who own the building where they meet *and* did remodeling in the past year. The percent for all congregations is 15.5 (56.4% × 30.6% × 89.7%). Thus, instead of concluding that a majority of American congregations are remodeling to improve handicapped-accessibility, we conclude that fewer than 2 in 10 congregations are making this improvement. The appropriate interpretation of this percentage depends entirely on its denominator.

There are two kinds of numbers provided in Tables 1 and 2, labeled “Attendees’ Perspective” and “Congregations’ Perspective.” Both sets of numbers are meaningful, but they provide slightly different perspectives on the NCS data. Look at the attendees’ column if you want to know about the characteristics of the congregation attended by the *average worship service attendee* or the *percent of persons in U.S. congregations* of a certain type. Look at the congregations’ column if you want to know about the characteristics of the *average congregation* or the *percent of congregations* of a certain type.

A contrived example helps clarify the difference between these two perspectives: Suppose that the universe contains only two congregations, one with 1,000 regular attendees and the other with 100 regular attendees. Suppose further that the 1,000-person congregation supports a food pantry and the 100-person congregation does not. We can express this reality in one of two ways. We can say that 91 percent of the people are in a congregation that supports a food pantry (1,000/1,100), or we can say that 50 percent of the congregations support a food pantry (1/2). Both of these are meaningful numbers. The first number views congregations from the perspective of the average attendee, and the second number views them from the perspective of the average congregation.

Here is another example using actual NCS data: In exploring the facts about the gender of congregations’ senior leaders, you might be interested in the percent of people who attend U.S. congregations that are led by male or female senior clergy. The attendees’ perspective column on page 28 shows that 95.4 percent of U.S. worshippers are in congregations led by a male clergy person and 4.6 percent are in congregations with a female clergy person. On the other hand, you might be interested in the percent of congregations that are led by males or females. The congregations’ perspective column on page 28 of Table 2 shows that 91.8 percent of congregations have male senior clergy while 7.9 percent have female senior clergy.

Table 1: Continuity and Change in American Congregations

This table provides descriptive statistics for many items contained in both NCS waves. A single asterisk (*) indicates a difference between 1998 and 2006-07 that achieves a .01 level of statistical significance. Two asterisks (**) indicate a difference significant at the .001 level. When we report medians, asterisks refer to the results of the statistical difference between means. Sometimes a mean difference between 1998 and 2006-07 is statistically significant even when the median is unchanged. In these instances, we omit the asterisks.

The numbers in this table do not adjust for the increased Wave II number of in-person interviews, summer interviews, or interviews conducted in Spanish or with congregations nominated by Spanish-speaking GSS respondents. We use a slightly updated version of the 1998 dataset, so the 1998 numbers below may not exactly match numbers produced from the publicly available 1998 data set.

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
AGE AND SIZE				
Median founding date	1924	1940**	1938	1944**
Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life				
Mean	2564	2384	413	393
Median	750	700	150	150
Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life				
Mean	1187	1169	184	184
Median	400	400	80	75
Number of <i>adults</i> regularly participating in the congregation's religious life				
Mean	786	790	119	123
Median	275	280	50	50
RELIGIOUS TRADITION^c				
Roman Catholic	28.8	27.9	7.3	6.0
White evangelical/conservative	33.4	37.7	45.7	48.7
White moderate/liberal	23.7	19.6	25.9	18.7**
African American Protestant	10.8	11.4	16.2	23.4**
Non-Christian	3.4	3.3	4.9	3.1
Percent with no denominational affiliation	10.4	13.9*	18.1	20.4
BUILDING AND FINANCE				
Percent owning their own building	94.9	94.9	87.6	89.7
Percent meeting in a:				
Church, temple, or mosque	92.9	97.3**	87.3	92.7**
School	3.3	0.7**	5.0	1.0**
Other kind of building	3.8	2.0*	7.8	6.3
Percent with a formal written budget	87.7	88.8	72.8	75.3
Median income in past year	\$259,500	\$300,000**	\$60,000	\$90,000
Median income from individuals in past year	\$230,000	\$270,525**	\$55,000	\$75,000*
Median budget for past year	\$250,000	\$280,000**	\$60,000	\$86,246
Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property	37.9	30.6**	24.0	21.3
Percent giving money to denomination in the past year	82.8	80.2	73.6	74.2
Median amount given to denominations in past year ^d	\$20,783	\$20,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund	73.9	73.3	59.8	57.3
Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ^e	\$70,000	\$90,000	\$19,679	\$30,000
Percent using any type of service offered by a denomination, other religious organization, or an outside consultant	44.1	45.3	31.2	32.6

Table 1: Continuity and Change in American Congregations (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
LEADERSHIP				
Percent with a head clergy person or leader	95.5	97.0	92.3	95.0*
Percent where head clergy person or leader is female	5.6	4.6	10.6	7.9
Percent with head clergyperson or leader of each race or ethnicity:				
White	82.2	77.6*	76.0	68.1**
Black	11.9	12.9	18.6	25.0*
Hispanic	2.1	3.2	2.1	1.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.3	2.5	1.7	1.7
Other	2.5	3.9	1.6	3.2*
Median year senior clergy person took this position	1992	2000**	1994	2001**
Median age of senior clergy person	51	54**	48	53**
STAFF				
Percent with no paid staff ^f	6.9	5.1	22.3	13.1**
Percent with no full-time staff ^f	14.7	11.5	39.3	34.6*
Percent with 1 full-time staff person	20.4	22.6	34.5	36.0
Percent with 2 or more full-time staff people	65.0	65.9	26.3	29.4*
Percent with no part-time staff	17.0	16.7	41.6	34.5**
Percent with 1 part-time staff person	10.0	9.7	17.3	18.4
Percent with 2 or more part-time staff people	73.0	73.6	41.1	47.1**
WORSHIP				
Percent with 1 service in typical week	14.3	14.5	26.6	28.5
Percent with 2 or more services in typical week	85.6	85.3	72.8	71.4
Median length of most recent main service (minutes)	70	70	75	75**
Median length of most recent sermon (minutes)	20	20	25	30*
Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service	20	20	20	20
Median number of socializing minutes before/after typical service	30	30	30	30
Median attendance at most recent main service	230	200	70	65
Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic:				
Sermon or speech	97.2	98.0	95.3	95.3
Singing by congregation	98.1	97.1	96.8	97.2
Singing by choir	72.3	58.0**	53.9	44.1**
Time to greet one another	84.6	86.7	78.4	80.7
Silent prayer/meditation	80.6	82.3	73.3	73.8
People saying "amen"	52.8	60.4**	60.7	70.7**
Applause	58.7	59.1	54.6	61.3**
Written order of service	84.2	75.4**	72.0	67.8
Visual projection equipment	14.8	32.4**	11.9	26.5**
People read or recite something together	75.1	71.2	63.7	59.4
Jump, shout, or dance spontaneously	13.1	17.3*	19.2	25.8**
Raise hands in praise	48.1	55.2**	44.6	56.7**
Use drums	25.1	36.4**	19.9	32.5**

Table 1: Continuity and Change in American Congregations (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
Percent with the following in any worship in past year:				
Speak in tongues	19.5	20.6	24.0	27.0
People told of opportunities for political activity	36.8	29.5**	26.2	21.4**
Time for people other than leaders to testify	72.1	78.7**	77.6	85.0**
Percent with joint worship service in last year	66.4	56.3**	66.3	69.4
Percent with joint worship in last year with congregation with different racial/ethnic make-up ^s	46.7	46.0*	42.4	41.6
DOCTRINE				
Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant	63.0	70.7**	76.2	82.6**
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>politically</i> :				
More on the conservative side	55.2	54.1	62.0	58.1
Right in the middle	37.0	38.7	30.6	34.6
More on the liberal side	7.8	7.2	7.4	7.7
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i> :				
More on the conservative side	52.7	57.8*	59.8	62.8
Right in the middle	37.6	33.4	29.9	29.5
More on the liberal side	9.8	8.8	10.3	7.7*
GROUPS AND SPEAKERS				
Percent with religious education classes ^h	96.9	97.0	91.1	89.3
Percent with a group in the past year focused on the following:				
Politics	12.5	15.5	6.4	6.3
Book discussion	42.0	62.0**	29.0	45.1**
Parenting	61.8	62.9	39.0	39.4
Voter registration	12.4	27.3**	8.3	17.8**
English as a second language	9.0	14.2**	3.6	5.8*
Practice gifts of spirit	19.7	15.6*	13.4	11.1
Prospective/new member class	79.6	76.7	56.2	60.1*
Class to train new teachers	67.6	65.1	38.0	39.4
Discuss/learn about another religion	29.8	37.4**	20.3	25.2
Lobbying	12.0	14.5	4.4	7.8**
Demonstrating/attending rallies or marches	21.5	20.2	9.2	8.3
Assess community needs	48.1	57.1**	36.9	48.4**
Percent distributing voter guides ⁱ	26.5	25.6	17.0	17.6
Percent with an elementary or high school	23.4	20.9	6.1	4.3
Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year	89.6	86.2*	83.1	81.4
Speaker was: ^j				
Elected government official	13.8	14.3	8.0	10.1
Denominational representative	69.2	74.6	62.5	68.6
Representatives of social service organization	44.0	54.0**	26.6	37.6**
Someone running for office	7.1	7.5	5.5	6.8

Table 1: Continuity and Change in American Congregations (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
SOCIAL SERVICES				
Percent with social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing programs of any sort ^k	75.4	62.1**	58.4	45.4**
Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year ^l	\$5,000	\$6,004	\$1,229	\$2,000
Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects ^l	17.5	23.3**	11.9	15.0
Percent with anyone from the congregation doing volunteer work for congregation's social service projects ^l	93.7	95.3	89.7	92.8
Median number of congregational volunteers working on congregation's social service projects ^l	25	40	10	15
Percent with outside funding support for social service programs ^l	17.7	18.3	18.4	17.7
Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government ^l	4.9	7.4	5.2	7.9
Percent with a policy against receiving government support	14.5	17.3	16.8	16.0
Percent who would apply for government money to support human services programs	48.0	48.9	39.3	47.2**
CONFLICT				
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years for which a special meeting was called	26.6	21.3**	28.7	23.6*
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years that led some people to leave the congregation	26.4	24.7	27.1	26.4
TECHNOLOGY				
Percent using email to communicate with members	31.0	79.0**	21.3	59.2**
Percent with a website	28.7	74.3**	17.1	44.3**
SOCIAL COMPOSITION				
Median percent of regular participants living within a ten minute drive	60	70**	60	70**
Median percent of regular participants with household income under \$25,000/year	20	10**	30	20**
Median percent of regular participants with household income higher than \$100,000/year	5	10**	0	2**
Median percent of regular participants with a college degree	30	40*	15.4	20*
Median percent of regular participants greater than 60 years old	25	30**	25	30**
Median percent of regular participants less than 35 years old	25	25	25	20**
Median percent of regular participants who are female	60	60	60	60
Median percent of regular participants living in households with two parents and at least one child	50	50	40	30**
Percent of congregations at least 80% white and non-Hispanic	71.6	65.6**	71.2	62.6**
Percent of congregations at least 80% black	15.6	13.8	19.1	24.8**
Percent of congregations more than 0% Hispanic	57.0	64.0**	33.3	35.7
Percent of congregations more than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander	41.0	49.7**	18.2	22.6*
Percent of congregations with more than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years	39.4	50.7**	17.9	20.4

Table 1: Continuity and Change in American Congregations (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS				
Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line	10.1	10.4	11.8	14.1
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% of individuals immigrating since 1980	15.2	33.9**	12.3	23.5**
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics	29.2	39.6**	25.4	28.2
Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans	5.0	4.0	3.7	5.2
Percent in predominantly urban census tracts	60.9	66.8*	41.8	44.1
Percent in predominantly rural census tracts	23.3	17.8*	43.4	32.6**

- a Means and medians in the “attenders” column refer to the congregation attended by the average participant of religious services. Percentages give the percentage of religious service attenders in congregations with the stated characteristic.
- b Means and medians in the “congregations” column refer to the average congregation. Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic.
- c The largest groups in the moderate/liberal category are, in size order beginning with the largest, the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, and United Church of Christ. The largest groups in the evangelical/conservative category are nondenominational congregations, the Southern Baptist Convention, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, Assemblies of God, and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. No other group in either category is represented by more than 15 congregations in the NCS sample. The African American Protestant category includes all predominantly African American Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. Predominantly white Protestant congregations that are unaffiliated with any denomination are included in the conservative/evangelical category unless we have good reason to include them elsewhere.
- d Calculated only for those congregations that gave any money to their denominations.
- e Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.
- f Although respondents were asked in both waves how many people work in the congregation as paid staff, in 2006-07 the question was prefaced with “including you” (if the respondent was an employee), and interviewers were trained in 2006-07 to probe to make sure that informants included themselves. We believe this difference is behind the decrease in the percent of congregations with no paid or full-time staff.
- g Calculated only for those congregations that participated in a joint worship service.
- h The 1998 questionnaire included a single item asking about religious education classes for children, teens, and adults. The 2006-07 questionnaire included five questions asking about classes for different age groups. The 2006-07 numbers reported here are from an aggregation of the 2006-07 responses that is comparable to the 1998 single item.
- i In 1998 respondents were asked if their congregation had *ever* distributed voter guides; in 2006-07, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides *within the past two years*.
- j Calculated only for those congregations that had visiting speakers in the last year.
- k The 2006-07 social service results reported in this table are calculated to be comparable to the 1998 results. The overall percent of congregations reporting social service activity is considerably higher when we include responses to the additional inquiries implemented in the NCS-II. After all inquiries, 82 percent of congregations, containing 90 percent of attenders, conduct social services.
- l These numbers are calculated only for those congregations who participated in or sponsored social service activities. The 2006-07 results are calculated to be comparable to the 1998 results.

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
AGE AND SIZE		
Median founding date	1940	1944
Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life:		
Mean	2384	393
Median	700	150
Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life:		
Mean	1169	184
Median	400	75
Number of <i>adults</i> regularly participating in the congregation's religious life:		
Mean	790	123
Median	280	50
Change in the number of regularly participating adults in the last two years:		
Decreased more than 10%	5.6	9.1
Decreased less than 10%	8.9	8.0
Remained about the same	36.2	40.3
Increased less than 10%	16.3	13.5
Increased more than 10%	32.9	29.1
RELIGIOUS TRADITION^c		
Percent with no denominational affiliation	13.9	20.4
Percent associated with each denomination or tradition:		
Roman Catholic	27.9	6.0
Baptist conventions/denominations	20.7	30.1
Methodist denominations	9.1	8.9
Lutheran/Episcopal denominations	7.9	7.1
Pentecostal	5.6	15.3
Denominations in the reformed tradition	4.5	4.9
Other Christian	20.9	24.7
Jewish	1.6	1.4
Non-Christian and Non-Jewish	1.7	1.8
Percent belonging to each broad religious tradition: ^d		
Roman Catholic	27.9	6.0
Black Protestant	11.4	23.4
White Evangelical/Conservative Protestant	37.7	48.7
White Moderate/Liberal Protestant	19.6	18.7
Non-Christian	3.3	3.1
BUILDING AND FINANCE		
Percent owning their own building	94.9	89.7
Percent remodeling building in past year ^e	31.9	30.6
Percent remodeling to improve accessibility for people with physical disabilities ^f	61.0	56.4

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
Percent meeting in a:		
Church, temple, or mosque	97.3	92.7
School	0.7	1.0
Storefront	0.5	1.9
Other kind of building	1.5	4.4
Percent with a formal written budget	88.8	75.3
Median income in past year	\$300,000	\$90,000
Median income from individuals in past year	\$270,525	\$75,000
Median budget for past year	\$280,000	\$86,246
Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property	30.6	21.3
Median income from sale or rent of building or property [§]	\$6,000	\$5,000
Percent giving money to denomination in the past year	80.2	74.2
Median amount given to denominations in past year ^h	\$20,000	\$5,000
Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund	73.3	57.3
Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ⁱ	\$90,000	\$30,000
CONSULTANT SERVICES		
Percent using any service offered by a denomination, other religious organization, or an outside consultant	45.3	32.6
Percent using: ^j		
Financial management services	15.0	11.1
Personnel training services	7.4	11.6
Member education services	15.1	17.2
Building or facilities services	6.7	2.4
Congregational growth services	2.1	1.0
Strategic planning services	13.9	11.2
Technical or computer services	2.2	3.0
Percent using a service provided by their denomination or religious group ^l	69.8	79.1
LEADERSHIP		
Percent with a head clergy person or leader	97.0	95.0
Percent with full-time clergy person	87.0	63.2
Percent with female head clergy person or leader	4.6	7.9
Percent with head clergy person or leader of each race or ethnicity:		
White	77.6	68.1
Black	12.9	25.0
Hispanic	3.2	1.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.5	1.7
Other	3.9	3.2
Median year head clergy person took this position	2000	2001
Median age of head clergy person	54	53
Percent with head clergy person who graduated from a seminary or theological school	83.7	61.9

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
Percent with head clergy person currently attending a seminary or theological school	13.0	11.7
Percent with head clergy person who has been ordained to full clergy status	97.1	94.0
Percent with head clergy person who participated in the congregation before becoming its leader	19.0	23.3
Percent who were members before becoming leaders ^k	13.9	15.1
Percent with paid clergy person	92.5	80.7
Percent with clergy person receiving paid sabbatical leave of at least one month every seven years	40.7	20.1
Percent with clergy person that serves another congregation	11.2	13.6
Percent with clergy person who holds another job	17.4	37.0
STAFF		
Percent with no paid staff	5.1	13.1
Percent with no full-time staff	11.5	34.6
Percent with 1 full-time staff person	22.6	36.0
Percent with 2 or more full-time staff people	65.9	29.4
Median number of full-time paid staff	3.0	1.0
Median number of full-time paid ministerial staff	2.0	1.0
Percent with full-time staff people with each job title: ^l		
Music Ministry staff	37.0	34.3
Youth/children's Pastor	35.3	30.6
Associate/assistant Pastor	36.7	27.0
Director of Religious Education	25.3	8.8
Full-time staff characteristics (not including head clergy person): ^m		
Median percent male	50.0	50.0
Median percent graduated from seminary or theological school	33.3	33.3
Median percent attending a seminary of theological school	0.0	0.0
Median percent ordained to full clergy status	33.3	33.3
Median percent who were regular participants before becoming staff	33.3	24.9
Percent whose number of full-time paid staff has:		
Increased in the past year	17.5	6.8
Stayed the same in the past year	74.5	86.9
Decreased in the past year	7.9	6.3
Percent of congregations searching for a full-time staff person	16.6	10.8
Percent searching for a: ⁿ		
Youth Minister	17.0	13.8
Senior Pastor	13.5	14.5
Associate Pastor	10.1	5.9
Administrative support	7.6	4.9
Music Ministry staff	10.1	22.1
Percent with no part-time staff	16.7	34.5
Percent with 1 part-time staff person	9.7	18.4
Percent with 2 or more part-time staff people	73.6	47.1

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
WORSHIP		
Percent with 1 service in typical week	14.5	28.5
Percent with 2 or more services in typical week	85.3	71.4
Percent whose number of services has:		
Increased in the past year	13.4	11.4
Remained the same in the past year	82.5	84.4
Decreased in the past year	4.1	4.3
Percent whose number of services changed for each reason: ^o		
Change in attendance	29.1	17.1
Add schedule options	12.5	18.2
Provide alternate worship style	17.6	26.4
Staffing issues	7.0	4.1
Seasonal change	11.0	9.7
Needed bilingual service	5.9	3.4
Other	16.8	21.0
Median length of most recent main service (minutes)	70.0	75.0
Median length of most recent sermon (minutes)	20.0	30.0
Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service	20.0	20.0
Median number of socializing minutes before/after typical service	30.0	30.0
Median attendance at most recent main service	200.0	65.0
Median total attendance at <i>all</i> services during the past weekend	325.0	70.0
Median number of regularly participating adults attending more than one service in the past week	30.0	12.0
Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic:		
Sermon or speech	98.0	95.3
Speaker came down from the chancel during sermon	43.4	50.6
Singing by congregation	97.1	97.2
Singing by choir	58.0	44.1
Time to greet one another	86.7	80.7
Silent prayer/meditation	82.3	73.8
Joining hands	38.0	34.0
Leader wears robe or special garments	52.2	32.1
People saying "amen"	60.4	70.7
Applause	59.1	61.3
Written order of service	75.4	67.8
Visual projection equipment	32.4	26.5
People read/recite something together	71.2	59.4
Jump, shout, or dance spontaneously	17.3	25.8
Raise hands in praise	55.2	56.7
Monetary offering collected	90.6	88.5
Drums used	36.4	32.5
Guitar used	43.7	33.5

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
Percent with the following in any worship in the past year:		
Speaking in tongues	20.6	27.0
People told of opportunities for political activity	29.5	21.4
People told of opportunities for volunteer activity	96.2	93.6
Time for people other than leaders to testify	78.7	85.0
Percent displaying American flag in main worship space	61.5	60.4
Percent reporting important differences between services in typical weekend	50.1	47.9
Important difference is: ^p		
Language	16.3	5.8
Level of formality	58.7	63.0
Music	43.5	26.2
Targets specific group	18.3	11.8
Other	2.8	2.4
Percent with Spanish or bilingual services	16.3	6.3
Percent with joint worship service in past year:		
With congregation of different racial/ethnic make-up ^q	46.0	41.6
With a Jewish congregation ^q	8.1	4.0
With a Muslim congregation ^q	4.6	2.2
DOCTRINE AND CULTURE		
Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant	70.7	82.6
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>politically</i> :		
More on the conservative side	54.1	58.1
Right in the middle	38.7	34.6
More on the liberal side	7.2	7.4
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i> :		
More on the conservative side	57.8	62.8
Right in the middle	33.4	29.5
More on the liberal side	8.8	7.7
Percent of Protestants reporting each religious identity or culture:		
Fundamentalist	10.4	15.7
Evangelical	45.3	43.9
Mainline	22.0	17.3
Liberal	3.0	3.4
None	19.4	19.8
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND YOUTH		
Percent with religious education classes for:		
Children 12 years and younger	93.8	81.6
Teenagers 13-14 years old	83.1	64.2
Teenagers 15-19 years old	70.5	53.3
Young adults or college students	44.6	36.5
Adults of any age	85.2	77.6

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
Number of regularly participating teenagers:		
Mean	100	20
Median	30	10
Percent with a Youth Minister	77.2	55.6
Percent with a youth group	82.6	62.2
Percent with a teenage choir or musical group	49.7	34.2
Percent with teens participating in retreats, conferences or camps in past year	82.9	63.3
Percent with teens participating in service or volunteer projects in past year	81.7	59.6
Percent with teens speaking or reading during regular worship services in past year	83.3	71.4
Percent with teens planning, leading, or giving presentations at events in past year	64.6	50.0
Percent with teens serving on governing committees, commissions, or boards	34.0	22.4
Percent organizing events to meet the needs of teenagers who are <i>not</i> part of the congregation in past year	51.8	45.3
Percent with anyone entering seminary, theological school, or other religious training in past two years	48.5	30.1
GROUPS AND SPEAKERS		
Percent with a group in the past year focused on the following:		
Politics	15.5	6.3
Book discussion	62.0	45.1
Parenting	62.9	39.4
Marriage	59.3	36.2
Voter registration	27.3	17.8
English as a second language	14.2	5.8
Practice gifts of spirit	15.6	11.1
Prospective/new member class	76.7	60.1
Class to train new teachers	65.1	39.4
Discuss/learn about another religion	37.4	25.2
Religious or charitable work abroad	64.4	45.9
Volunteer or service project with another faith community	51.9	34.8
Assess community needs	57.1	48.4
Strategic planning and future goal of congregation	89.0	82.4
Travel in U.S. to assist people in need	49.8	30.9
Travel abroad to assist people in need	42.2	27.5
Get out the vote	25.0	22.8
Percent with organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs	41.3	22.0
Percent with organized effort to help members of congregation	89.2	80.8
Median number of members helped in the past year ^c	20.0	9.0
Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year	86.2	81.4
Speaker was: ^s		
Elected government official	14.3	10.1
Denominational representative	74.6	68.6
Representatives of social service organization	54.0	37.6
Someone running for office	7.5	6.8

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
SOCIAL SERVICES		
Percent reporting participation in social service programs (all inquiries)	90.4	81.8
Median number of social service programs (all inquiries)	3.0	2.0
Percent with program focused on: [†]		
Victims of rape or domestic violence	5.3	4.9
Cleaning highways or parks	5.5	4.5
Clothing, blankets, rummage sales	21.9	20.0
College students or young adults	1.4	1.0
Disaster relief	16.8	13.2
Non-religious education or training	18.2	14.0
Senior citizens	13.9	15.8
Issues of race or ethnicity	3.4	1.7
Feeding the hungry	60.8	51.5
Males or females in particular	16.8	13.0
Habitat for Humanity projects	15.1	7.6
Individuals' physical health needs	25.5	24.4
Homeless or transients	22.2	14.8
Home building, repair, maintenance	40.4	24.3
Immigrants, migrants, or refugees	3.9	1.5
Beneficiaries outside the U.S.	16.4	13.2
Job placement	3.1	1.9
Youth and children	36.2	32.3
People in legal trouble or their families	6.8	6.4
Explicit religious content	17.6	22.5
Crime prevention and victims, police and fire departments	2.1	2.1
Substance abusers	4.6	3.9
Household items and money for rent or utilities	12.5	11.1
St. Vincent de Paul	5.1	0.7
Volunteering	6.6	4.1
Percent collaborating on social service projects [†]	72.5	68.1
Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year [†]	\$5,000	\$1,400
Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects [†]	20.9	13.6
Percent with anyone from the congregation doing volunteer work for congregation's social service projects [†]	93.1	88.5
Median number of congregational volunteers working on congregation's social service projects [†]	30.0	15.0
Percent with outside funding support for social service programs ^v	16.5	13.2
Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government ^v	5.8	5.0
Percent with a policy against receiving government support	17.3	16.0
Percent who would apply for government money to support human services programs	48.9	47.2
Percent applied for a grant from government agency in past 2 years	9.5	3.6
Percent established a separate nonprofit organization to conduct human services or outreach ministries in past two years	10.1	6.1

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
CONFLICT		
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years for which a special meeting was called	21.3	23.6
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years that led some people to leave the congregation	24.7	26.4
People who left started a new congregation ^w	6.1	6.8
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years that led to the departure of a clergy person or other religious leader	8.4	8.7
Conflict was about: ^x		
Education/schools	7.2	1.5
Homosexuality	6.7	4.0
Leaders or leadership	11.0	11.8
Money	8.0	8.3
A clergy person	23.4	34.6
Some other issue	51.5	48.0
TECHNOLOGY		
Percent using email to communicate with members	79.0	59.2
Percent with a website	74.3	44.3
Percent able to accept donations via credit card or electronic transfer of funds	27.7	11.5
SOCIAL COMPOSITION		
Median percent of regular participants who are female	60.0	60.0
Median percent of regular participants with a college degree	40.0	20.0
Median percent of regular participants greater than 60 years old	30.0	30.0
Median percent of regular participants less than 35 years old	25.0	20.0
Median percent of regular participants living within a ten minute drive of meeting place	70.0	70.0
Median percent of regular participants living more than a 30 minute drive from meeting place	5.0	5.0
Median percent of regular participants with household income under \$25,000/year	10.0	20.0
Median percent of regular participants with household income higher than \$100,000/year	10.0	2.0
Percent of congregations at least 80% white and non-Hispanic	65.6	62.6
Percent of congregations at least 80% black	13.8	24.8
Percent of congregations more than 0% Hispanic	64.0	35.7
Percent of congregations more than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander	49.7	22.6
Percent of congregations more than 0% American Indian	21.0	11.1
Percent of congregations with more than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in the past five years	50.7	20.4
Median percent of regular participants living in households with two parents and children at home	50.0	30.0
Median percent of regular participants holding a leadership role in the past year	20.0	30.0

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
EXPECTATIONS		
Percent granting full-fledged membership to:		
Someone who drinks alcohol in moderation	85.0	71.9
An unmarried couple who live together	64.9	53.9
An openly gay or lesbian couple in a committed relationship	49.1	37.9
Someone who publicly supports a woman's right to choose	66.1	59.6
Someone who publicly supports the right to life	90.8	86.4
Percent granting volunteer leadership positions to:		
Someone who drinks alcohol in moderation	70.7	52.7
An unmarried couple who live together	31.1	27.8
An openly gay or lesbian couple in a committed relationship	22.6	18.9
Someone who publicly supports a woman's right to choose	40.6	41.2
Someone who publicly supports the right to life	85.8	82.1
Percent allowing women to:		
Hold all volunteer leadership positions that men can hold	79.7	73.9
Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body	86.2	84.2
Teach by themselves a class with adult men in it	87.9	83.9
Preach at a main worship service	56.8	65.5
Be head clergyperson or primary religious leader	39.4	46.9
Percent that have adopted written statements officially welcoming gays and lesbians	8.3	5.8
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES		
Percent distributing voter guides ^v	25.6	17.6
Percent whose guides were authored by organizations on the religious right	18.2	30.1
Group met in the past year to lobby an elected official	14.5	7.8
Group met in the past year to participate in demonstration or march	20.2	8.3
Group lobbied/marched for: ^z		
Abortion	53.4	32.9
International aid/Human rights/Peace/War	12.7	19.1
Poverty, welfare/Social services support	15.7	17.0
Gay and lesbian issues	13.7	15.8
Immigration	18.1	8.8
Education	10.1	10.1
Death penalty	6.1	3.6
Support for workers' rights	2.8	2.5
Stem cell research	5.0	1.7
Support for environment	0.7	0.7
Euthanasia/assisted suicide	0.9	0.2

Table 2: 2006-07 National Congregations Study Basic Frequencies (continued)

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱ	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ⁱⁱ
GEOGRAPHY		
Percent in each region: ^{aa}		
Northeast and Mid-Atlantic	15.4	12.9
East North Central and West North Central	24.4	25.0
South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central	38.7	47.7
Mountain and Pacific	21.5	14.4
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS		
Percent in census tracts where at least 30% of individuals are below the poverty line	10.4	14.1
Percent in census tracts where at least 5% of individuals immigrated since 1990	23.6	16.1
Percent in census tracts where at least 5% of people are Hispanic	39.6	28.2
Percent in census tracts where at least 80% of people are African-American	4.0	5.2
Percent in predominantly urban census tracts	66.8	44.1
Percent in predominantly rural census tracts	17.8	32.6
OTHER		
Percent with an elementary or high school	20.9	4.7
Percent providing materials and programs for home-schooling	15.8	6.3
Percent who have intentionally planted or helped start a new congregation in past two years	19.2	15.4
Percent with members serving on denominational committees	77.9	66.1
Percent with program or activity directed towards persons with HIV or AIDS	9.7	5.3
Percent with member publicly acknowledging HIV infection	9.4	4.4

- a Means and medians in the “attenders” column refer to the congregation attended by the average participant of religious services. Percentages give the percentage of religious service attenders in congregations with the stated characteristic.
- b Means and medians in the “congregations” column refer to the average congregation. Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic.
- c Non-Christian congregations are categorized as such even if they said they have no denomination.
- d The largest groups in the moderate/liberal category are, in size order beginning with the largest, the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, and United Church of Christ. The largest groups in the evangelical/conservative category are nondenominational congregations, the Southern Baptist Convention, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, Assemblies of God, and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. No other group in either category is represented by more than 15 congregations in the NCS sample. The African American Protestant category includes all predominantly African American Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. Predominantly white Protestant congregations that are unaffiliated with any denomination are included in the conservative/evangelical category unless we have good reason to include them elsewhere.
- e Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building.
- f Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building and reported remodeling that building in the past year.
- g Calculated only for those congregations with income from the sale or rent of their building or property.
- h Calculated only for those congregations who gave any money to their denominations.
- i Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.
- j Calculated only for those congregations that used an outside consultant.
- k Calculated only for those congregations with clergy who participated in the congregation before becoming its leader.
- l Calculated only for those congregations that have at least one full-time staff person.

- m Calculated only for those congregations with two or more ministerial staff.
- n Calculated only for those congregations that are searching for a full-time staff person.
- o Calculated only for those congregations whose number of services has changed in the past year.
- p Calculated only for those congregations that report important differences between weekend services.
- q Calculated only for those congregations that participated in a joint worship service in the past year.
- r Calculated only for those congregations that have an organized effort to help members.
- s Calculated only for those congregations that had a visiting speaker in the past year.
- t Calculated for those congregations that participated in social service, community development, neighborhood organizing programs, or human services and outreach ministries in the past year.
- u Calculated only for those congregations who participated in social service, community development, neighborhood organizing programs, or human services and outreach ministries in the past year *and* had people from the congregation doing volunteer work for at least one project.
- v Calculated only for those congregations who participated in social service, community development, neighborhood organizing programs, or human services and outreach ministries in the past year.
- w Calculated only for those congregations that experienced conflict over which people left the congregation.
- x Calculated only for those congregations that experienced conflict.
- y In 1998 respondents were asked if their congregation had *ever* distributed voter guides; in 2006-07, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides *within the past two years*.
- z Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials or demonstrated/marched.
- aa Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states are ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA. East North Central and West North Central states are OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS. South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central states are DE, MD, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL, KY, TE, AL, MS, AR, LA, OK, TX. Mountain and Pacific states are MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV, WA, OR, CA, AK, HI.



