

Congregations in 21st Century America



2021

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgments | 1 |
| Introduction | 2 |
| What Is the National Congregations Study? | 3 |
| What Are Our Most Important Observations? | 4 |
| Religious Traditions and Denominations | 5 |
| Size | 10 |
| Worship | 17 |
| Technology | 20 |
| Leadership | 28 |
| Age | 42 |
| Race and Ethnicity | 44 |
| Civic Engagement | 48 |
| Politics | 52 |
| Inclusivity | 59 |
| More Findings from the National Congregations Study | 64 |
| Conclusion | 66 |
| Appendix: | 68 |
| Table 1. Continuity and Change: Congregations' Perspective | 69 |
| Table 2. Continuity and Change: Attendees' Perspective | 88 |
| Table 3. 2018–19 NCS Basic Findings | 107 |
| Table 4. Characteristics of Ministerial Staff, 2018–19 | 132 |

Acknowledgments

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Thousands of congregations have participated in the NCS since 1998. Their willingness to share their stories with us makes this research possible.

- See <https://sites.duke.edu/ncsweb> for more information about the National Congregations Study.
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Congregations In 21st Century America

A REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY

Introduction

What is religion in the United States like today? This is a difficult question to address 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 Islam, various Buddhist and Hindu traditions, and dozens of other groups. Within these major religions there are differences across local groups connected to race and ethnicity, social class, region, congregation size, theology, and many other things.

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

THE NCS IN BRIEF

- **Wave I**, 1998
- **Wave II**, 2006–07
- **Wave III**, 2012
- **Wave IV**, 2018–19
- Nationally representative survey
- Congregations from across the religious spectrum
- 5,333 participating congregations

What Is the National Congregations Study?

The National Congregations Study (NCS) is a source of reliable information about congregations. Based on four nationally representative surveys of congregations from across the religious spectrum – the first in 1998, and then in 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19 – NCS findings encompass a wide range of congregations' characteristics and activities. Because the same questions have been asked in multiple waves of the NCS, we can track how congregations have changed over time. These data are widely used by social scientists, journalists, and 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 representative national sample of congregations. The problem is that no definitive list of all congregations exists. In 1998, 2006, 2012, and again in 2018 the General Social Survey – a well-known national survey conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago – asked respondents who said they attend religious services where they

worship. The congregations named by these people are a representative cross-section of American congregations. NORC then contacted those congregations and interviewed someone, usually a clergyperson or other leader, about the congregation's people, programs, and characteristics. Between 73% and 86% of named congregations cooperated with us in each of the four NCS waves. Between the four waves of the NCS, we now know about the demographics, leadership situation, worship life, programming, surrounding neighborhood, and much more, of 5,333 congregations.¹

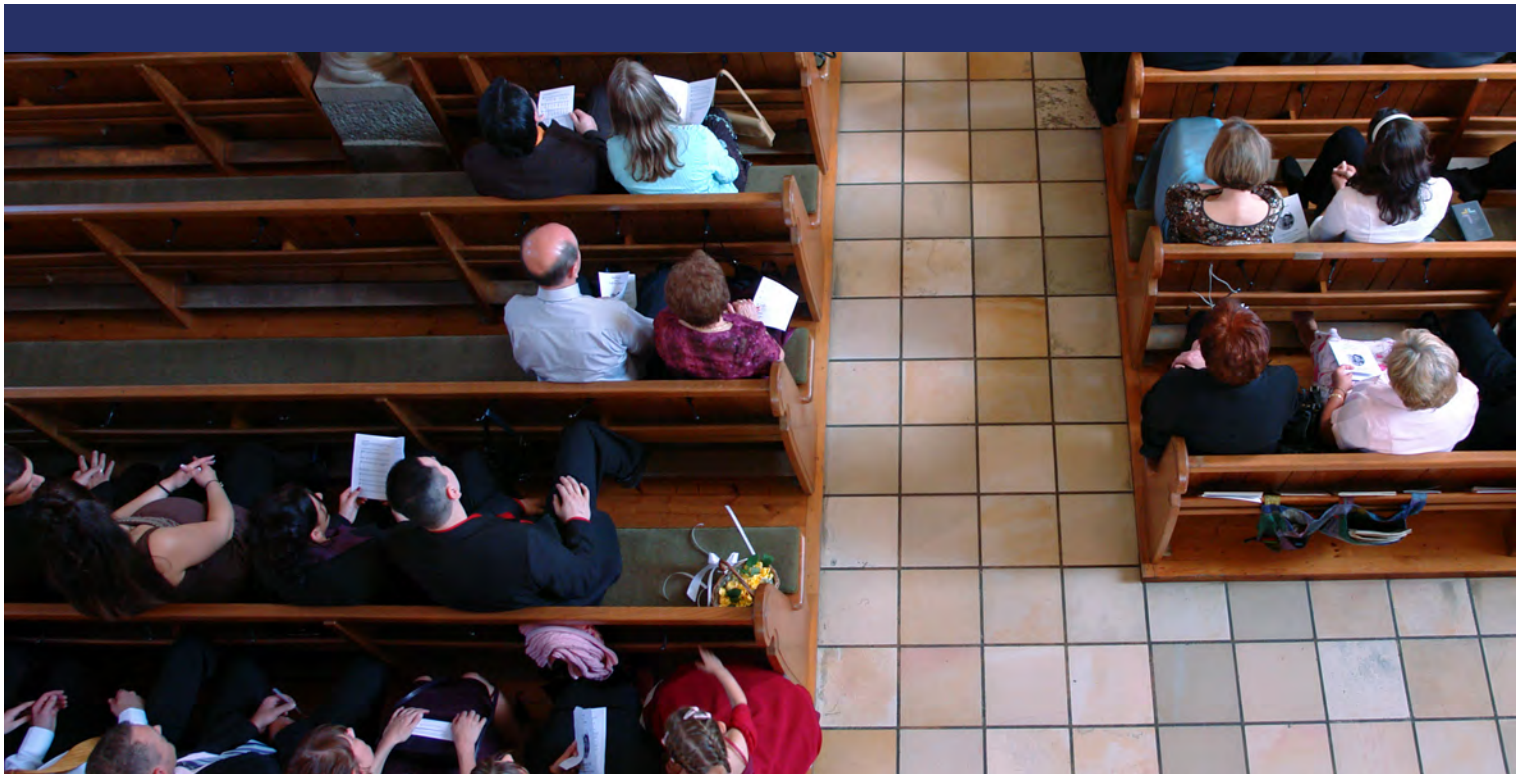
Overall, the NCS provides a portrait of a broad and varied cross-section of American religious life, and it allows us to offer grounded observations about the state of congregational life. NCS findings help us distinguish truth from myth about American congregations, and they help us assess the extent 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.

Throughout this report, all of the numerical differences that we emphasize are statistically significant at least at the .05 level.

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: <https://sites.duke.edu/ncsweb/>.

What Are Our Most Important Observations?

- ✧ Religious diversity is steadily increasing. Taken together, there are now about as many synagogues, mosques, and Buddhist or Hindu temples in the U.S. (9% of all congregations) as there are Catholic parishes (6% of all congregations).
- ✧ Most congregations are small but most people are in large congregations.
- ✧ People in smaller congregations give more money to their churches than do people in larger congregations.
- ✧ Eleven percent of churchgoers worship in multi-site congregations.
- ✧ Worship services have become more informal and expressive across all Christian traditions.
- ✧ Many congregations have incorporated new technologies, including smartphones, into their worship services.
- ✧ American solo or senior pastoral leaders are older, more female, and more likely to be people of color than they were in 1998.
- ✧ Fourteen percent of congregations are led by women.
- ✧ Nineteen percent of congregations are led by volunteer senior or solo pastoral leaders.
- ✧ Secondary ministerial staff—assistants, associates, and specialists in music, religious education, or other areas—constitute two-fifths (41%) of the full-time ministerial work force and two-thirds (70%) of the part-time ministerial work force.
- ✧ One in five (18%) congregational leaders serve multiple congregations; one in three (35%) are bi-vocational.
- ✧ Compared to solo and senior pastoral leaders, secondary ministerial staff are more female, younger, less likely to be seminary educated, and more likely to have been hired from within the congregation.
- ✧ There is increasing racial and ethnic diversity over time both among and within American congregations.
- ✧ Food assistance is by far the most common kind of social service activity pursued by congregations, with half (48%) of congregations that engage in social services listing food assistance among their four most important programs.
- ✧ Acceptance of female lay leadership is widespread, with 89% of congregations allowing women to serve on the governing board.
- ✧ Congregational acceptance of gays and lesbians as members and lay leaders has increased substantially in recent years, with a majority (54%) allowing openly gay or lesbian people to be full-fledged members and about one-third (30%) allowing openly gay or lesbian people to hold lay leadership positions. These acceptance levels vary widely across religious traditions.
- ✧ One quarter (25%) of congregations teach the prosperity gospel—that God gives financial wealth and physical health to those with enough faith.



Religious Traditions and Denominations

The American religious landscape is always changing. In recent years, surveys of individuals have documented declining membership in predominantly white mainline Protestant denominations, increasing presence of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other religious groups beyond Christianity and Judaism, and dramatic increase in the “nones” – people with no religious affiliation. The first two of these trends have obvious counterparts among congregations: fewer people in mainline Protestant congregations and more non-Christian congregations.

The NCS shows that congregations also have their own type of “none”: congregations that claim no denominational affiliation. Previous NCS surveys documented an increase in congregations without a denominational affiliation from 18% in 1998 to 24% in 2012.

It appears that this trend towards more independent congregations may have plateaued, with no additional increase, and possibly a decline, in unaffiliated congregations between 2012 and 2018-19.

Non-denominationalism occurs mainly among white evangelicals and Black Protestants, with about one-quarter of each group claiming no official denominational connection in 2018-19. Independent congregations also tend to be newer than others, with the median congregation founded only 40 years ago, versus 82 years ago for affiliated congregations. Relatedly, predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations are the oldest congregations in the country. In 2018-19, the median congregation of any sort was founded 59 years ago, but the median mainline congregation was founded 126 years ago.

The median Catholic parish also was older than average (80 years old), while congregations within other religious families were much younger: only 47 years old for Black Protestants and 45 years old for white evangelicals. Indeed, over all four NCS waves, the number of congregations established in the past 10 years has been consistently higher for white evangelicals (16%) and Black Protestants (13%) than for Catholics (7%) or predominantly white mainline denominations (2%). This surely reflects a culture of church planting and religious entrepreneurship among white evangelical and Black Protestants that is not as strong within other groups. The consequence is more churning within these traditions: more new congregations appearing each year, but also a more rapidly changing set of congregations within those traditions since not all new congregations last for many years.

Black Protestant and white evangelical churches are more likely to be led by their founding pastors than congregations in other groups.

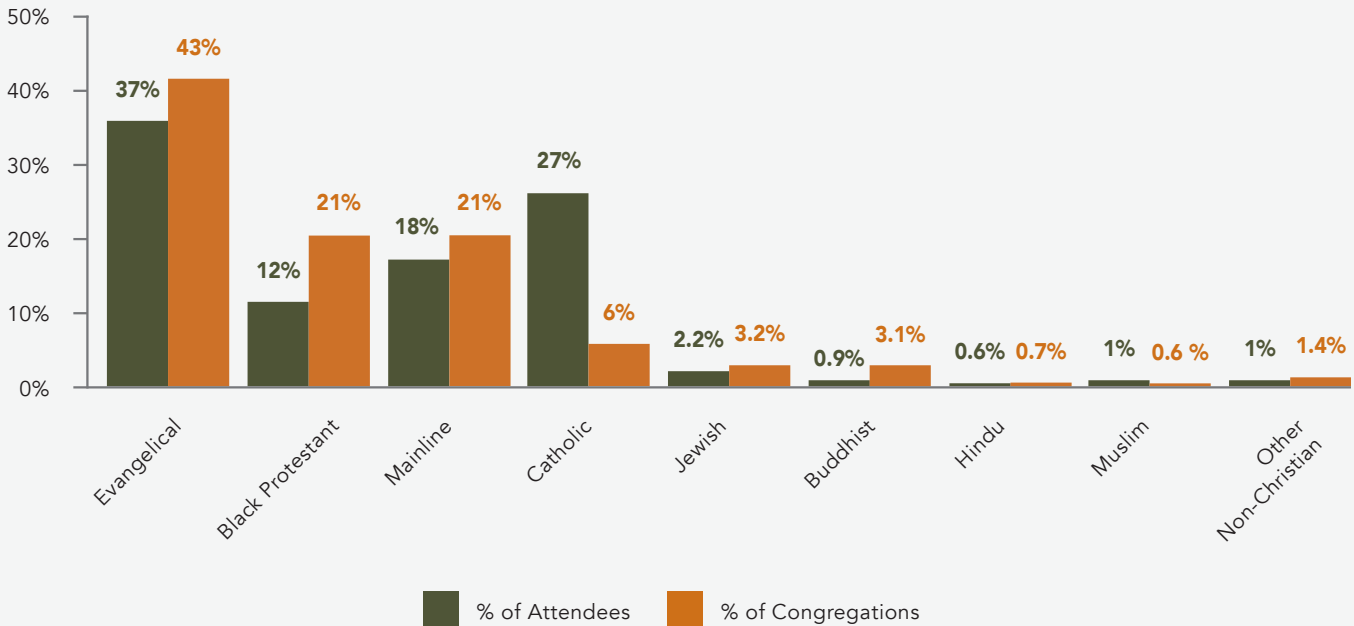
This culture of church planting also creates an interesting difference in congregational leadership patterns across religious groups. Averaging across all four NCS surveys, 22% of white evangelical and 27% of Black Protestant churches are led by their founding pastors, compared to only 6% among Catholics and 1% among predominantly white mainline churches. Not incidentally, the moderately high

percentage of young churches led by founding pastors among Catholics probably reflects a recent wave of parish mergers rather than entirely new church starts. Mergers also create new congregations, but they create them by combining already existing churches rather than by starting one from scratch.

If we place congregations and their people within nine major religious categories, the largest is white evangelical Protestants, comprising 43% of all congregations and 37% of all those who attended religious services in 2018-19. Roman Catholics have the biggest difference between their share of congregations and their share of people, with 27% of the churchgoing population in Catholic churches that constitute only 6% of all congregations. That's of course because Catholic churches are, on average, much bigger than congregations within any other tradition. (This distinction between a percentage of *congregations* and a percentage of those who *attend religious services* is important to keep in mind throughout this report, which presents information from both perspectives. See the beginning of the Appendix for a detailed explanation of this distinction.)

Twenty-one percent of congregations are Black Protestant, 21% are predominantly white mainline Protestant, 3.2% are Jewish, 3.1% are Buddhist, 0.7% are Hindu, 0.6% are Muslim, and 1.4% identify with some other non-Christian religious tradition. Throughout this report, we include non-Christian congregations in the aggregate statistics, but we usually do not separate them out for focused analysis because there are not enough non-Christian congregations in the NCS sample to justify doing so.

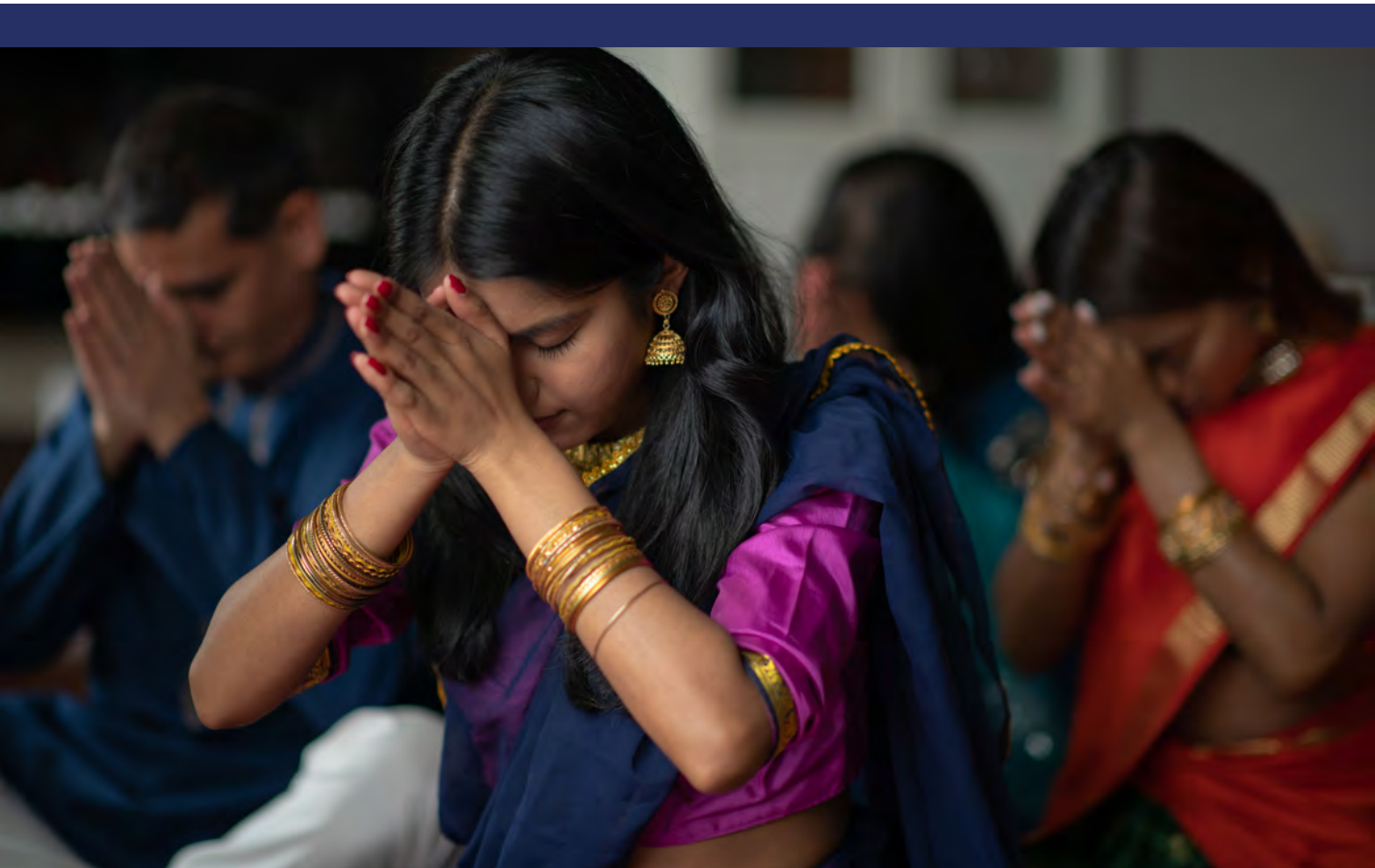
Percentage of congregations and attendees in each religious group, 2018–19



The largest single denomination in the evangelical Protestant category is the Southern Baptist Convention, with 9% of all congregations and 8% of all attendees. The largest denomination within the mainline Protestant category is the United Methodist Church, with 9% of congregations and 7% of attendees. No other denomination has more than 4% of all the congregations in the country, but other sizable groups within the evangelical category include Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Seventh-day Adventist Church. Predominantly white non-denominational Protestant congregations also are placed here. Other sizable groups in the mainline category include Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Episcopal Church,

United Church of Christ, and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. The largest Black Protestant denominations are the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Church of God in Christ.²

Religious diversity is steadily increasing. Taken together, there are now about as many synagogues, mosques, and Buddhist or Hindu temples in the U.S. as there are Catholic churches.

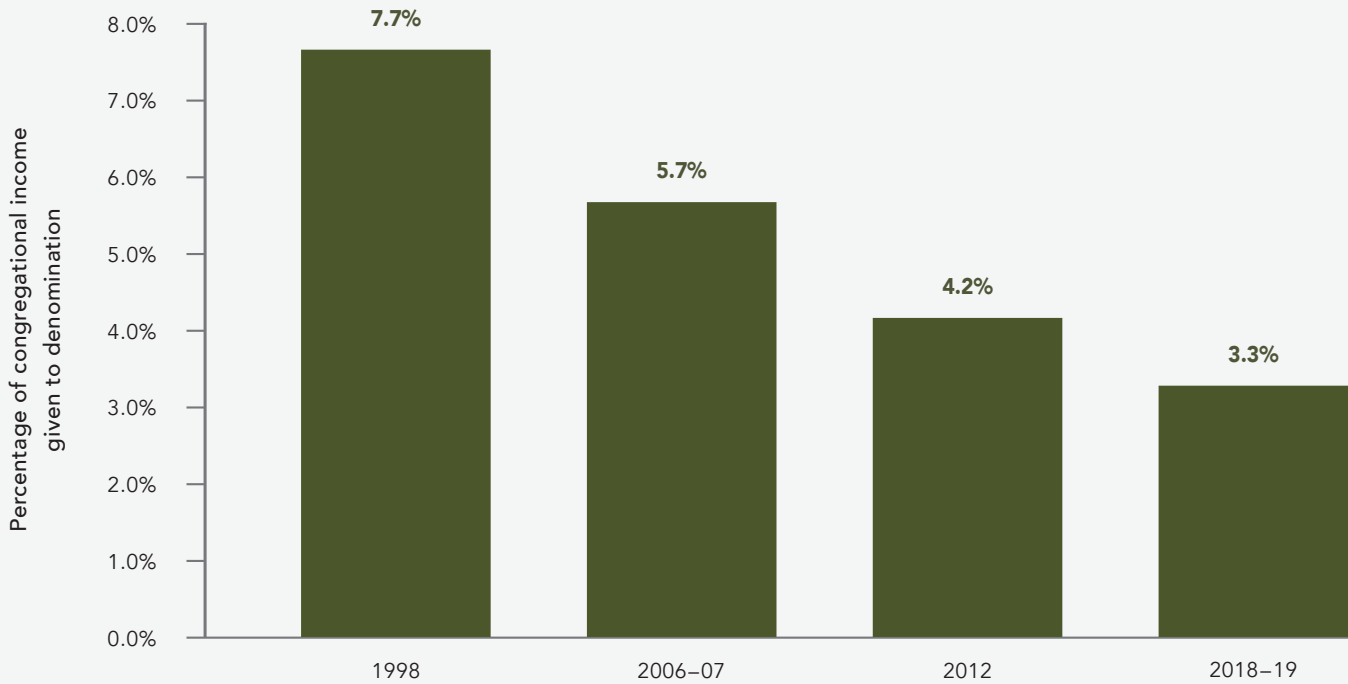


The distribution of congregations across major religious groups has not changed dramatically since 1998, but one trend stands out: more non-Christian congregations. The proportion of non-Christian congregations nearly doubled between 1998 and 2018-19, from 5% of all religious congregations in 1998 to 9% in 2018-19. The big increase in Buddhist temples in the 2018-19 data (to 3% of all congregations) may be a statistical anomaly, but overall it is clear that the American religious landscape continues to diversify. Indeed, it appears that there are now about as many non-Christian congregations in the United States (9%) as Roman Catholic parishes (6%).

Observers of American religion sometimes talk about the weakening of denominational identities. Identifying with a particular denomination—feeling strongly that one is

Presbyterian, say, rather than Methodist—certainly has declined among individuals. There are more non-denominational congregations today than there were in 1998, and some congregations downplay their denominational identities even when they have one. Still, a large majority (82%) of congregations remain attached to a denomination, convention, association, or a similar kind of larger religious group. Moreover, these attachments often represent real connections. In 2018-19, half (48%) of denominationally affiliated congregations hosted a denominational representative as a visiting speaker, and denomination representatives were much more common visiting speakers than representatives of social service organizations (31%), government officials (7%), or candidates for public office (6%).

Declining giving to denominations as a percentage of congregational income, for all affiliated congregations.



Financial ties between congregations and denominations also remain significant, though there are signs of fraying. Four out of five (80%) affiliated congregations financially supported their denominations in 2018-19, but these contributions as a proportion of congregational income have declined since 1998 as the ever-increasing costs of running a local congregation lead congregations to retain more money for internal operations. The median denominationally affiliated congregation contributed 8% of its income to its denomination in 1998, declining to 3% in 2018-19.

Congregational giving to their denominations has declined.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, larger congregations are more likely to contribute to their denominations and to give larger amounts when they do contribute. Overall, denominational connections remain important to most congregations, but congregations' financial support of their denominations has waned, placing financial pressure on a range of regional and national denominational bodies.

Size

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

There is a lot to say about congregational size, but one fact is fundamental: most congregations are small, but most people are in large congregations. In 2018-19, the median *congregation* had only 70 regular participants, counting both adults and children, and an annual budget of \$100,000. At the same time, the average *attendee* worshipped in a congregation with 360 regular participants and a budget of \$450,000.

Most congregations are small but most people are in large congregations.

How can both of these facts be true? The key to understanding this apparent paradox is that there are relatively few large congregations with many members, numerous staff, and sizeable budgets, but these very large congregations are big enough that they contain most of the churchgoers.

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 along this line, starting on the end with the smallest congregations. When you get to a congregation with 360 people, you would have walked past about half of all churchgoers, but more than 90% (91%, to be exact) of all congregations. Or imagine walking along this line of congregations from the other direction, starting with the very largest. When you get to that same 360-person congregation, you would have walked past only about 9% of all congregations, but half of all churchgoers.

In a nutshell, the largest 9% of congregations contain about half of all churchgoers. Most denominations, even the largest ones, could comfortably gather the pastors of congregations representing more than half of their people in a medium-to-large hotel ballroom. And it is not just people who are concentrated in this way. 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. About 70% of full-time ministerial staff and about 80% of part-time ministerial staff are employed by congregations with fewer than 360 people. Viewed another way, only about one quarter of clergy serve in the largest 9% of congregations that contain about half of all churchgoers. The largest congregations have a disproportionate share of all clergy jobs, but they still have only a minority of all clergy jobs.

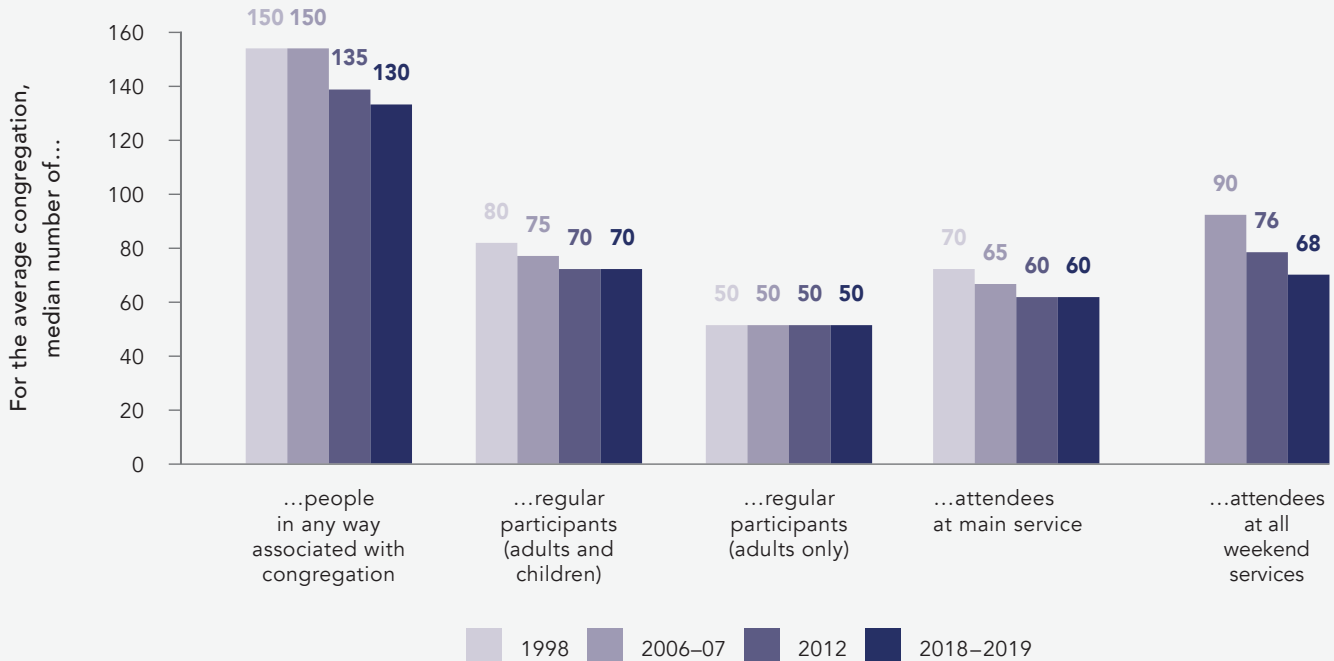


This concentration also means that pastors of the largest churches wield political power inside denominations that may be proportional to the size of their congregations but disproportional from a one-congregation, one-vote point of view. And it means that denominational officials can serve the most people by concentrating their attention on 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.

Another key fact about congregation size is that the average congregation is slightly

smaller today than it was in 1998. The number of regular participants has declined from 80 to 70, and attendance at all weekend services has declined from 90 to 68. These are not dramatic declines in average congregation size, but they are consistent with other research showing a slow but steady decline in religious participation in recent decades. The prominence of megachurches in many communities does not contradict or counteract this decline in average congregation size because the growth of megachurches represents people moving from smaller to larger churches. Indeed, megachurch growth contributes to rather than counteracts the trend towards decreasing average congregation size.

Declining average congregation size.



How Does Size Affect Congregations?

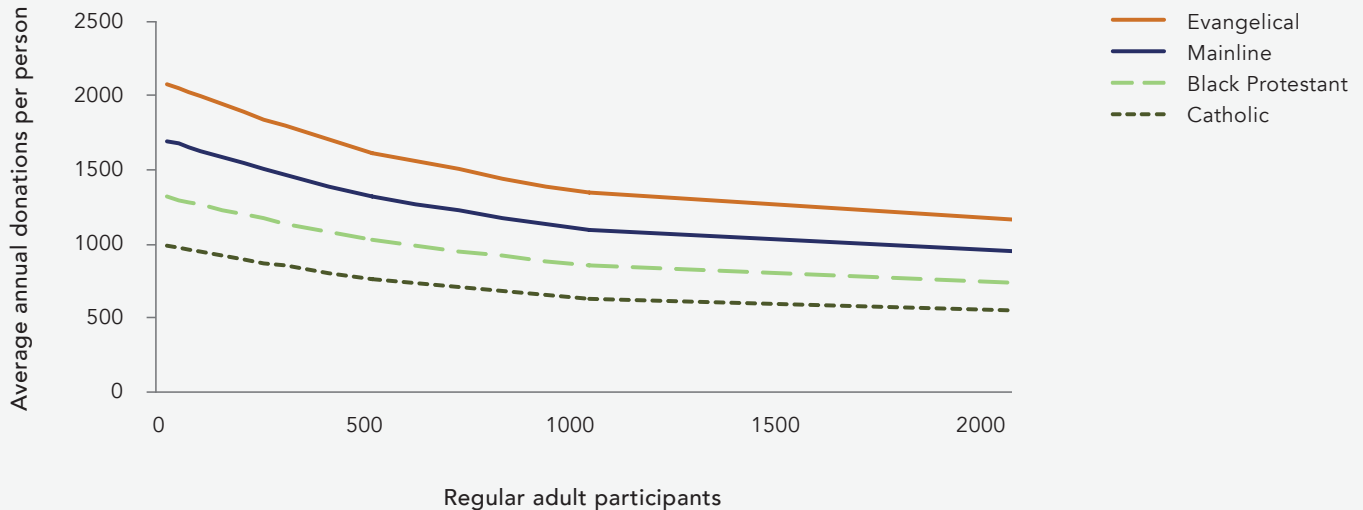
Size affects congregations in some obvious ways, but also in some less obvious ways. One important question is whether people in large congregations feel the same sense of commitment to their congregations that people in smaller congregations feel. Smaller congregations, for example, have to rely on many people pulling some weight. Larger congregations, by contrast, have a larger pool of people from which they can draw volunteers and contributors, so they can thrive with more people whose participation is limited to attending worship services. Does this reality produce different patterns of participation and financial support in large and small congregations?

Yes, it does. As the graph on the next page shows, people in smaller congregations give more. As is well known, Protestants give more to their churches than do Roman Catholics, and, among Protestants, evangelicals give more than mainline Protestants and white Protestants give more than Black Protestants. However, within each of these groups, people in smaller churches give more than people in larger churches.

For example, an evangelical congregation of 100 adults receives an average per capita contribution of about \$2,000 while a congregation of 400 receives \$1,700 and a congregation of 1,000 receives \$1,350.

People in larger congregations give less.

This graph is based on analyses that control for the socio-economic status of a congregation's people as well as their age demographics. It shows the situation in 2018–19, but patterns in 1998, 2006–07, and 2012 are qualitatively the same.



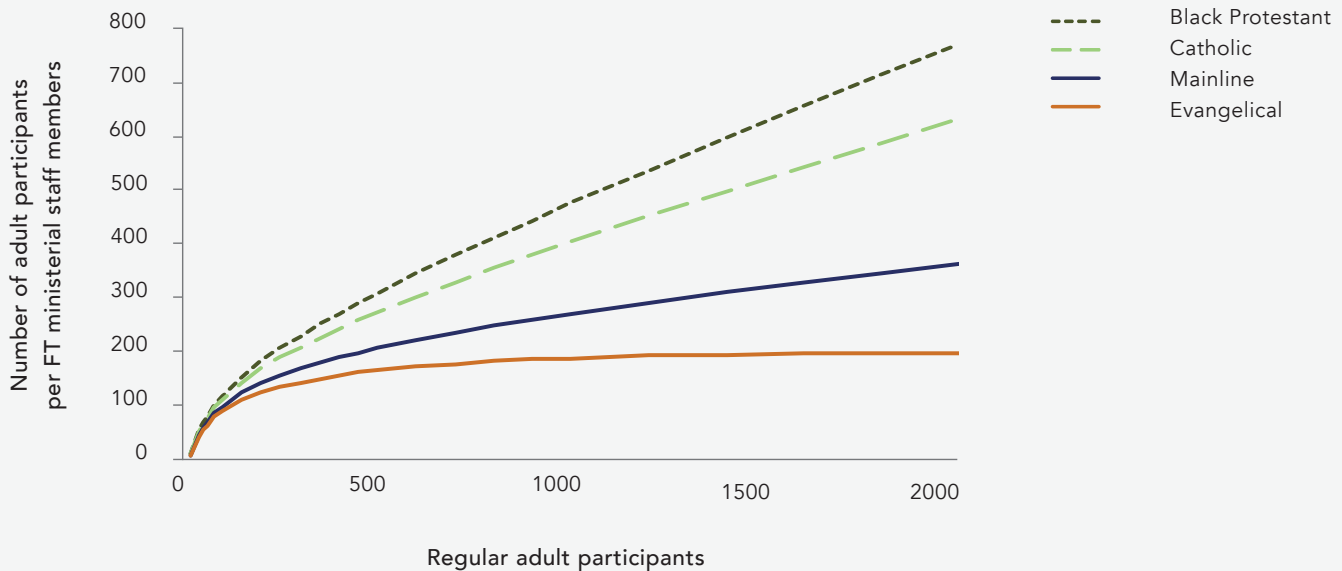
The analogous numbers for Catholic parishes are \$950, \$800, and \$650. Overall, a congregation of 100 adults receives about 17% more per capita than a congregation with 400 adults. The lines level off at about 1,000 regular adult participants. The graph only displays the relationship until a congregation size of 2,000 adults because there are few congregations larger than that in the NCS sample, so we are less confident about the shape of the lines beyond that point.

We do not know if there is something about larger congregations that causes people to give less than they would give if they were in a smaller

congregation, or if people inclined to give less are drawn to larger congregations. Perhaps members of smaller congregations perceive (rightly or wrongly) that their congregations have more financial need than people in larger congregations perceive. Or perhaps larger congregations require less financial commitment from their members because they are more efficient. Perhaps members of larger congregations are somehow less personally invested in their congregations, or perhaps they are just as invested, but a particular level of commitment translates into more financial support for a smaller congregation than it does for a larger congregation.

Larger congregations have more people per full-time staff member.

This graph uses combined 2006–07, 2012, and 2018–19 NCS data. It includes only the 60% of congregations that have at least one full-time ministerial staff member, and the lines are based on analyses that control for the socioeconomic status of the congregation's people.



Whatever the dynamics behind this relationship, it is clear that people in smaller congregations give more to their churches than do people in larger congregations. Not incidentally, other research shows that people in smaller congregations also participate more in the life of their congregation than do people in larger congregations.³

Larger congregations have more people per full-time clergy person.

Another interesting issue is how congregational size affects staffing. Do larger congregations get by with fewer staff per capita, or does staff size simply increase proportionally with congregation size? The figure above addresses this issue by showing how the number of regular adult participants per full-time ministerial staff member (i.e., clergy) changes with congregational size.

There are interesting differences across religious traditions, but there is also a basic similarity: Larger congregations have more people per full-time clergy person. The participant-to-staff ratio increases sharply for all groups up to congregations having about 200 regularly participating adults.

This is because, up to about 200 adults, the vast majority of congregations with any full-time staff have just one full-time clergy person. The participant-to-staff ratio continues to increase beyond 200 adults, but less sharply, and at different rates for different groups. For evangelical Protestants it levels out by about 600 adults, meaning that, above that size, evangelical churches add full-time staff to keep their participant-to-staff ratio constant, while other groups add fewer staff as size increases, resulting in higher ratios at larger sizes.

More generally, larger white Protestant churches have more full-time ministerial staff than Catholic churches or Black Protestant churches. A white Protestant church with 200 regularly participating adults, for example, has an average of 1.7 full-time ministers, or one minister for every 120 adults. A Catholic church of that size has an average of only 1.2 full-time ministerial staff -- one for every 164 adults. And a Black Protestant church of that size has only 1.1 full-time ministers, or one for every 178 adults. This difference is even more pronounced in larger churches. A white Protestant church with 500 adults has an average of 3.1 full-time ministers, or one minister for every 161 people, while a Catholic church of that size has an average of only 1.9 full-time ministerial staff -- one for every 269 people. (There are too few Black churches of this size in the NCS sample to calculate a meaningful ratio for very large Black churches.)

Part-time clergy also fill important roles in congregations. There are no noticeable differences between religious traditions in the rate at which part-time staff increases with size. Looking just at the 48% of congregations that employ at least one part-time ministerial staff

member, a congregation with 100 adults has, on average, 1.4 part-time clergy, for a ratio of 71 adults per part-time ministerial staff member. A congregation with 200 adults has 1.6 part-time clergy (one per every 120 adults), and a congregation with 500 adults has 1.9 part-time clergy (one per every 258 adults). As with full-time staff, churches add part-time staff as they get larger, but at a decreasing rate.

The upshot here is that larger congregations get by with fewer staff per capita. Does this mean that they enjoy economies of scale that make them more efficient? It is difficult to say. To be more efficient means that we do more (or the same) with less; doing less with less is not increasing efficiency. If having more participants per staff member means that people are served less well in larger than in smaller congregations, then a higher participant-to-staff ratio represents no gain in efficiency. Another complicating factor is that people probably expect (or are taught to expect) different things from clergy in large congregations than they expect from clergy in smaller congregations. If people in large congregations do not expect the same level of personal attention from the pastor that people in small congregations expect, for example, then receiving less attention in a large congregation does not necessarily mean they are served less well. Overall, the pattern in the figure reflecting the relationship between congregation size and the number of full-time staff members probably reflects differences between small and large congregations in how staffs are organized and how they use their time more than it reflects differences in efficiency. Moreover, since clergy are better paid in larger congregations, it is not clear that larger

congregations spend proportionally less on staff even though they have fewer staff per capita. They may even spend proportionally more. We do not have the data to assess that.

Multisite Congregations

The creation and proliferation of multisite congregations is another interesting and relatively recent development driven by large congregations. In 2018-19, 6% of all congregations but 14% of congregations with at least 500 adult participants had multiple locations. Eleven percent of people attended a multisite congregation. Technology helps multisite congregations offer a common experience across sites. About a third of multisite attendees (37%) heard the same sermon heard by people in the other locations, and about one quarter (28%) heard at least some of the same music. One third (36%) of multisite churchgoers attend services that

project images of the worship leaders, and almost half (45%) attend services that played video clips during worship.

11% of churchgoers worship in multisite congregations.

The stereotypical multisite congregation is a large and growing Protestant church, but the recent wave of Catholic parish mergers has created parishes that contain several church buildings and worshipping communities—a type of multisite parish. In 2018-19, three quarters (77%) of Catholic churches with fewer than 100 regularly attending adults were part of such a multisite parish. A multisite organizational structure thus has become more common among both Protestant and Catholic churches, sometimes associated with growing membership and sometimes with declining membership.



Overall, size is an important factor in congregational life. Especially in an era of increasing concentration of people in larger churches, it is worth trying to understand the many ways in which it matters.



Worship

Congregations' central activity is corporate worship. In many ways, worship services are the same now as they have been for a long time. The typical worship service lasts about 75 minutes, with a half-hour sermon or speech and 20 minutes of music, though with substantial variation across groups. On one end of the spectrum, the median Catholic service lasts about an hour, with a 10-minute sermon and 20 minutes of music. On the other end of the spectrum, the median Black Protestant service lasts two hours, with a 30-minute sermon and 30 minutes of music. Whatever their length, sermons and congregational singing of some kind are virtually universal across Christian congregations, and they are very common among non-Christian congregations. Muslims do not generally sing in worship services, and Buddhists and Hindus do not generally have formal teaching, but about 8 in 10 (79%) non-Christian congregations reported having a sermon or teaching in their worship service, and 7 in 10 (70%) reported congregational singing of some kind.

There are ways, though, in which the nature of worship services has changed considerably in recent decades. One of the most fascinating and important changes is that more congregations have embraced a more informal and enthusiastic worship style. Contemporary musical styles, spontaneous speaking from people in the pews, unscripted bodily movements, and other developments that make worship more expressive and participatory have become steadily more common since 1998, and they are now more prevalent than ever.

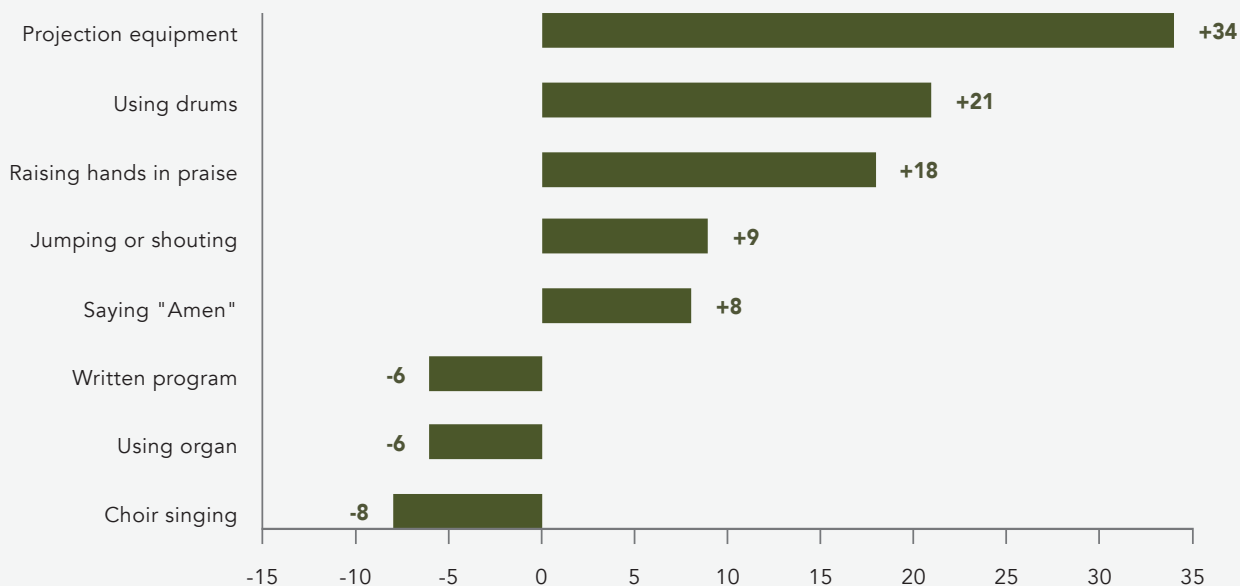
Worship services have become more informal and expressive.

The NCS asked questions in at least two of its surveys about more than 20 different practices that may or may not happen in a congregation's main worship service. In general, if there is change in a worship practice it is in the direction of more informality or enthusiasm.

For example, looking at change from 1998 to 2018-2019:

- Many more congregations use projection equipment in worship, rising dramatically from 12% to 46%.
- More congregations use drums in worship, rising from 20% to 41%.
- The number of congregations in which people raise their hands in praise increased from 45% to 63%.
- More worship services have people jumping, shouting, or dancing spontaneously, up from 19% to 28%.
- The number of congregations in which people spontaneously say "Amen" grew from 61% to 69%.
- Fewer congregations have a written order of service, dropping from 72% to 66%.
- Fewer use an organ in worship, falling from 53% to 47%.
- Fewer incorporate choirs in their worship. Ignoring surveys conducted in July and August, when choirs often take a summer break, the percentage of congregations with choirs singing at the main worship service fell from 54% to 46%.

Percentage point change from 1998 to 2018-19 in selected worship practices.





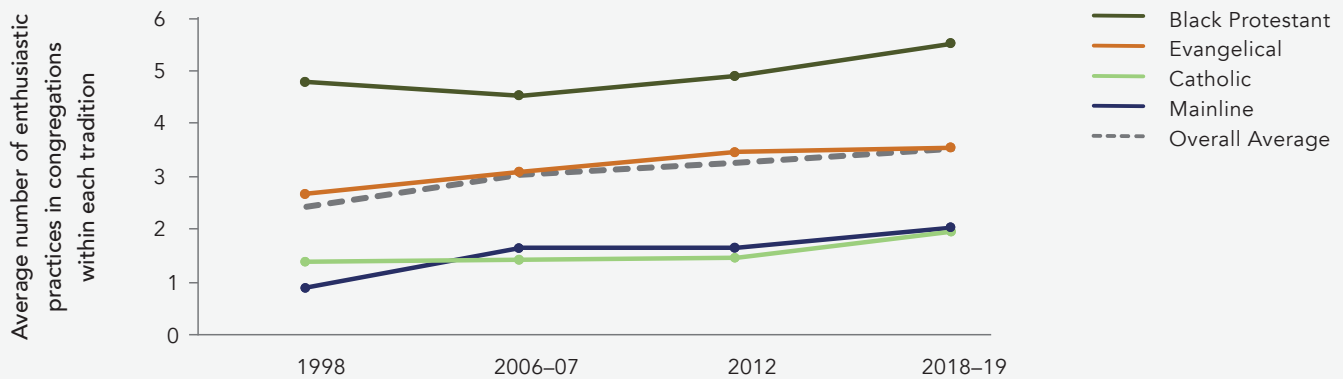
Religious groups of course vary substantially in their worship styles, but the perhaps surprising fact is that the shift towards more informality and expressiveness has occurred across the Christian spectrum. While some groups have moved faster than others in this direction, and groups vary in which specific worship practices they have adopted or dropped, worship in each broad Christian tradition has become more informal and enthusiastic since 1998.

Why is this change happening? It could be that Pentecostal-style worship has spread beyond traditionally Pentecostal groups, but these worship changes seem broader than just more Pentecostalism. Another possibility is that these changes reflect the increasing influence of an evangelical “contemporary” worship style, a style often associated with megachurches but not limited to them. Yet another possibility

is that congregations share in a wider cultural trend towards informality. People dress more informally at work and social events as well as when attending religious services. 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, even when children are talking with adults. These possible causes are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they can be mutually reinforcing. Whatever its source, this trend is part of a decades-long shift in American religion away from an emphasis on belief and doctrine and towards an emphasis on experience, emotion, and the search for a kind of worship with broad appeal in a time of ever less salient denominationally specific liturgy. Whatever the cause of this trend, it is clear that enthusiastic worship has become more prominent in American congregations, and its rise has not yet plateaued.

Increasing enthusiastic worship style across religious traditions.

Note: This “enthusiastic practices” scale includes these seven worship practices: saying “Amen,” jumping or shouting, applauding, raising hands in praise, using drums, using visual projection equipment, and speaking in tongues.



Technology

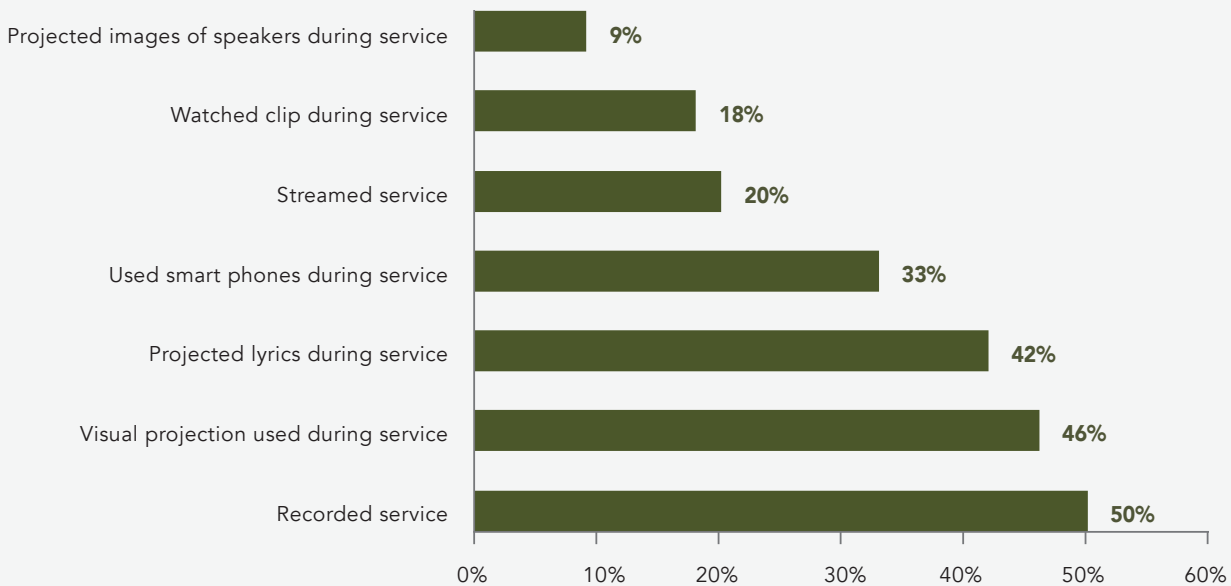
Technological developments during the digital era have reshaped daily life, including religious life, in many ways. Religious people of all ages use the internet to read scriptures, pursue religious education, or seek out like-minded others in virtual religious communities. In a world in which many people use new communications technologies for religious purposes, it is not surprising that congregations have incorporated new technologies to enhance their worship and their public presence. Indeed, technology use has changed faster than any other congregational characteristic or activity measured by the NCS. New technologies have permeated congregations in ways that have changed the worship experience and reshaped how congregations and clergy connect with their people.

Worship-Related Technology

Many worship services have been transformed by technology. As we mentioned earlier in connection with worship becoming more informal, using visual projection during worship has increased almost four-fold in twenty years, from 12% in 1998 to 46% in 2018-19.

Moreover, the early use of this technology to project song lyrics, scripture passages, and sermon outlines has evolved to include video clips (18% of congregations) and enlarged images of speakers and musicians (9% of congregations). Use of this technology varies widely across religious groups. While two-thirds (68%) of evangelical congregations used visual projection during their worship service, only

Percentage of congregations using each technology during worship services, 2018–19.



13% of Roman Catholic congregations did so. Further, using projection equipment seems to be more about worship style than congregation size, as even 41% of congregations with fewer than 100 regularly attending parishioners used this technology during their services.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic led virtually all congregations to adopt technology that allowed individuals not attending services to watch or engage with worship services, half (50%) of all religious congregations already were recording parts of their service for people to listen to or watch at a later time. One in five (20%) broadcasted or streamed their worship service live in 2018-19, before the pandemic struck, and one in three (32%) posted these recordings or broadcasts on their website. There were substantial differences across

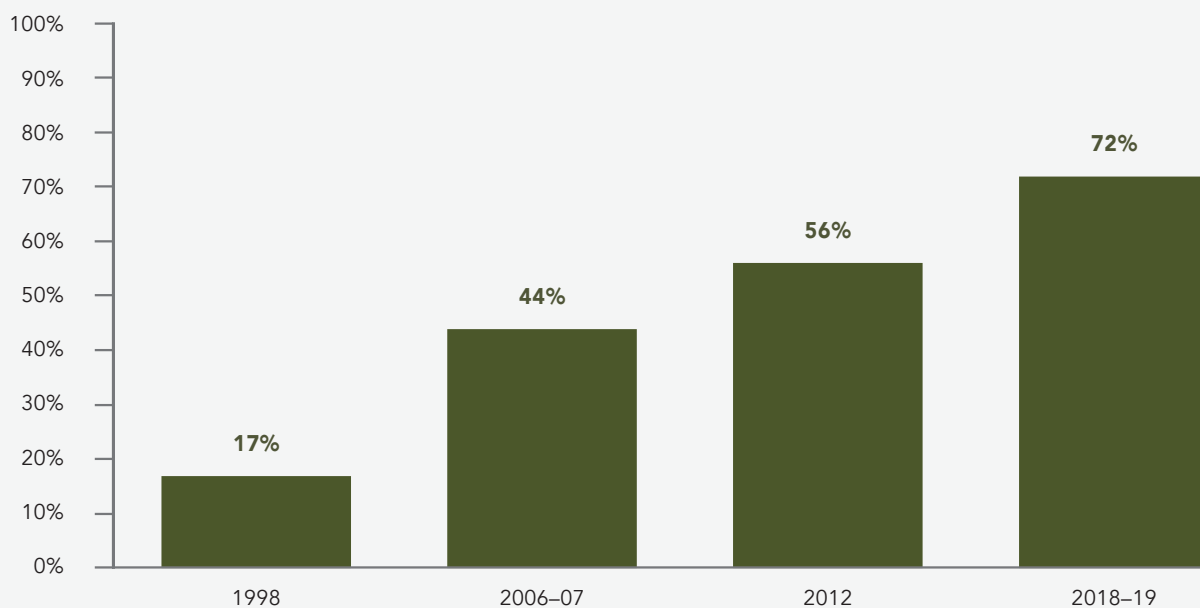
religious groups in 2018-19 in the prevalence of recording, streaming, or posting recordings of their services. We document those differences below in the section on the digital divide among congregations.

Encouraging people to use smartphones during worship services is perhaps the latest technological enhancement of religious gatherings. Smartphones are now ubiquitous in American life, and we know that people commonly use these devices for religious purposes such as listening to religious podcasts or using specially designed apps to read scripture. However, the fourth wave of the NCS documented the extent to which congregations are using smartphones in various ways to enhance the experience of people physically present at a worship service.

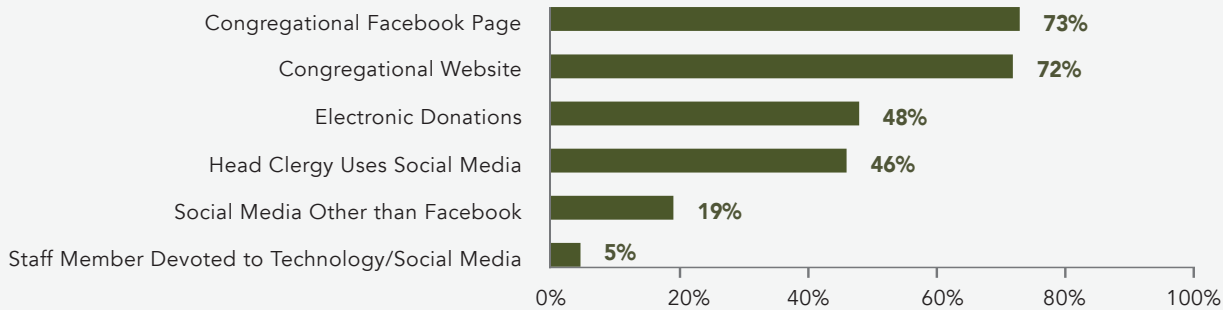
Remarkably, in 2018-19, one-third (33%) of congregations encouraged people to use smartphones during worship. The most common use of smartphones during worship was to access the scripture reading, with 57% of congregations that use smartphones during worship using them in this way. But smartphones also were used to invite people to record part of the service (29% of congregations using smartphones), use social media during the service (16%), donate money (15%), engage with the sermon in some way, such as by filling in an online listener guide associated with the sermon (13%), and engage with the service's music, such as by following along with the lyrics of songs and hymns on the congregation's app (5%).

Interestingly, large congregations do not incorporate smart phones at higher rates than small congregations—the only technology-in-worship practice asked about in 2018-19 for which this is true. Apparently it is easy even for small congregations to incorporate this technology into worship. No expensive screens, projectors, or sound systems are needed, no special preparation of attractive slides or relevant video clips is required, and no special expertise is necessary to make it work. Virtually every congregation can count on many people in attendance having smartphones in their pockets, so congregations of any size and resource level can easily incorporate them into worship. Like the spread of video projection in recent decades, it seems that congregations are

Percentage of congregations with websites, 1998–2019.



Percentage of congregations using each technology, 2018–19.



now building smartphones into their worship at high and probably increasing rates, with some congregations even replacing a traditional moment of silence with a moment for social media, when parishioners are invited to post or share about the service on the social media platform of their choice.

Technology Outside Worship

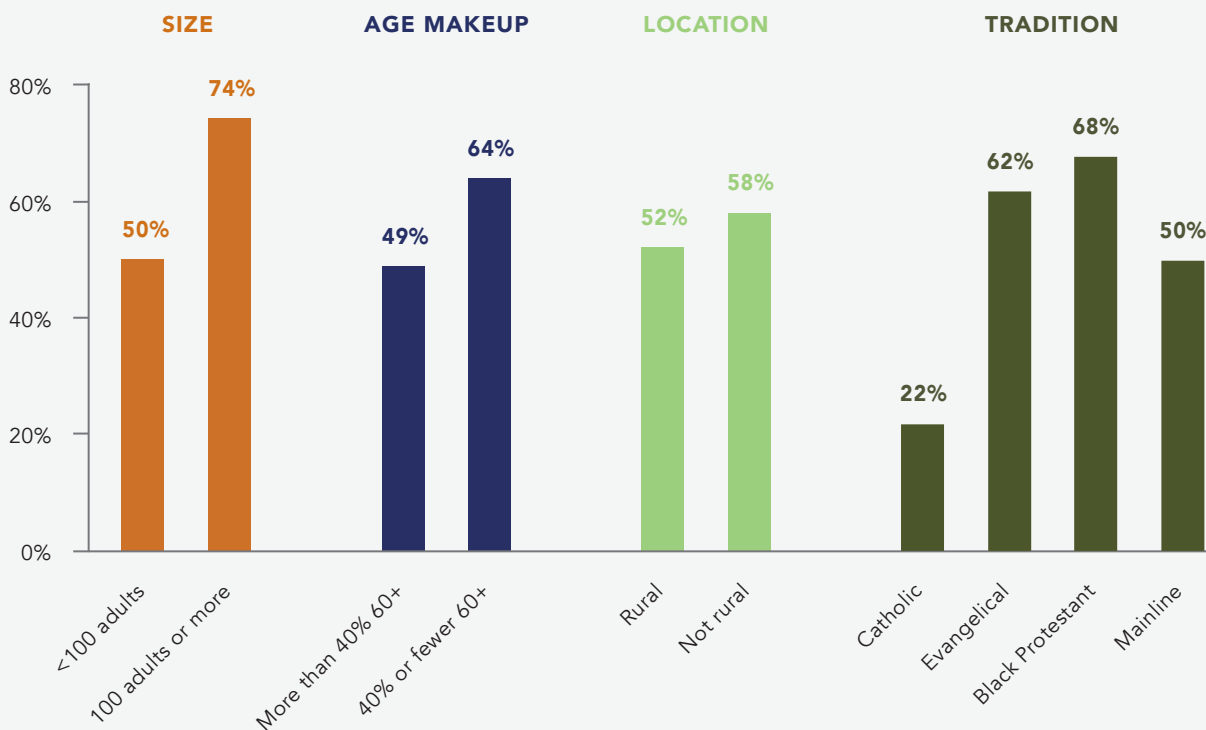
Congregations of course have adopted modern communications technologies for purposes other than enhancing their worship services. Almost three-quarters (72%) of religious congregations had websites in 2018-19, a substantial increase since 1998, when only 17% of religious congregations had a website. Similarly, 73% of religious congregations now have a Facebook page, and 19% use social media other than Facebook, such as Twitter or Instagram. In all, in 2018-19, 87% of congregations used a website, Facebook page, another social media account, or a combination of these ways to reach members and potential

members. Beyond the congregation's social media presence, 46% of solo or lead clergy in congregations used Facebook, blogging, or other social media in their congregational work. And, in another technological capacity that became especially important during the pandemic, 48% were able to receive donations electronically in 2018-19.

Someone has to install, update, operate, and maintain much of the technology congregations are using. Most congregations still rely on volunteers to carry much of this load, but, in 2018-19, 5% of congregations had a paid staff member who spent more than one quarter of their work time managing the congregation's social media presence, website, or apps.

It seems safe to say that more and more congregations will feel the need to invest in this sort of staff capacity as time goes on. As in many other kinds of organizations, new technological capacities bring new costs.

Percentage of congregations that were streaming, recording, or posting worship services in 2018–19.



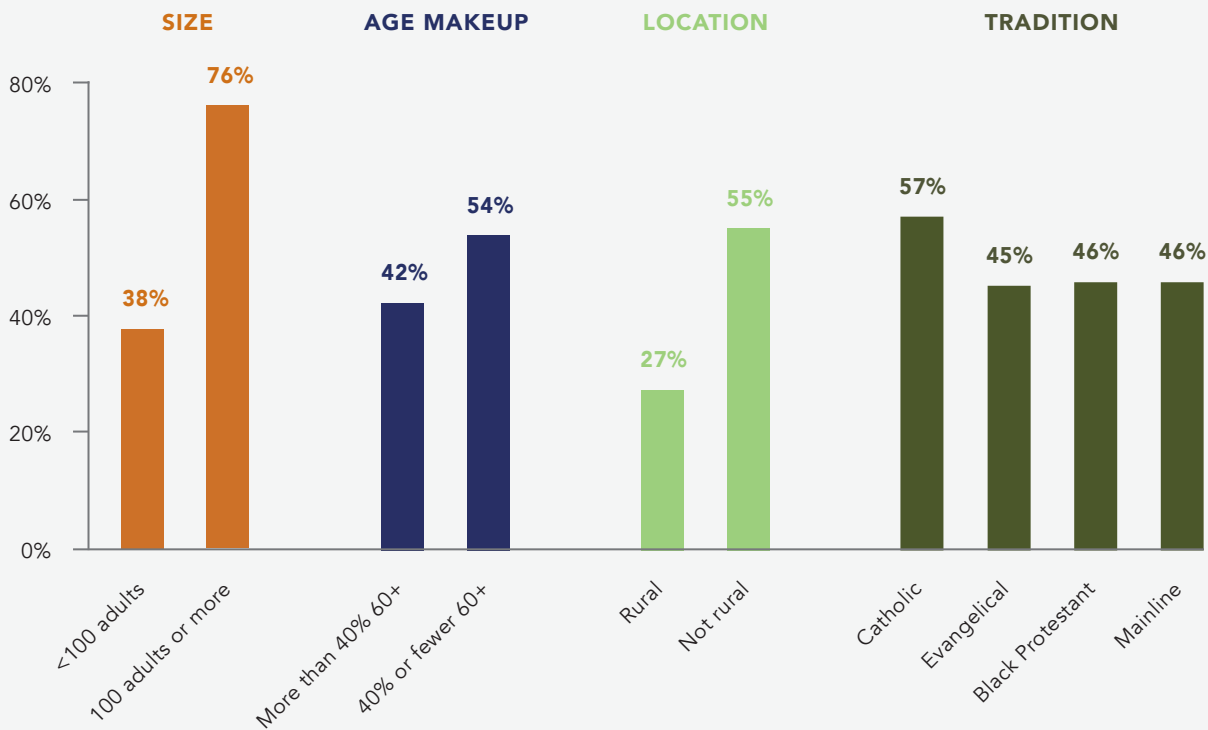
The Digital Divide on the Eve of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic upended social life, including religious life. Congregations everywhere were faced with the challenge of maintaining a religious community with little-to-no in-person gathering. Technology helped congregations meet this challenge.

Many congregations, even the least technologically savvy of them, adapted quickly to the new reality created by the pandemic. Many clergy and lay leaders quickly learned

how to use Zoom and YouTube, and how to set up an electronic donation system and encourage people to use it. At the same time, some congregations were better prepared than others for this challenge. We documented earlier that half of all religious congregations already in 2018-19 were recording parts of their service for people to listen to or watch at a later time, one in five already were broadcasting or live streaming their worship service, and 48% already were able to accept electronic donations. Presumably, congregations already doing these things before the pandemic were better able to manage the transition to

Percentage of congregations able to receive electronic donations, 2018–19.



a time when they became a necessity. Such congregations already were engaging in online religion to some extent prior to the pandemic, so shifting to virtual services would have been less of a hurdle. Other congregations needed to quickly scramble to go online. In other words, the pandemic highlighted the digital divide among congregations.

Not surprisingly, larger congregations were a lot more likely than smaller ones to be already streaming, broadcasting, or recording their services in 2018-19. Nearly three quarters (74%) of congregations with over 100 adults had some

sort of streaming or recording system prior to the pandemic, but only half (50%) of smaller congregations had such a system in place. The age makeup of the congregation also mattered. Two thirds (64%) of congregations in which 40% or fewer of the people were at least 60 years old streamed or recorded services before the pandemic, compared to only half (49%) of those in which more than 40% of the people were that old. Rural congregations were slightly less likely to be streaming or recording their services in 2018-19 than non-rural congregations, but that difference is not statistically significant.



Perhaps more surprising is that predominantly Black Protestant congregations were more likely than congregations in other Christian groups to have streamed, recorded, or posted their worship services to their website before the pandemic made this practice nearly universal. Two thirds of Black Protestant congregations streamed, recorded, or posted their services (68%) in 2018–19. Predominantly white evangelical congregations also were streaming, recording, or posting their services at high rates (62% of congregations) even before the pandemic struck. Mainline Protestant churches were less likely to already be streaming or recording their services (50%), and Catholics were the least likely to be doing this prior to the pandemic. Only 22% of Catholic churches had streamed, recorded, or posted recordings of recent services in 2018-19. Interestingly, while there

are too few Jewish congregations in the sample to be precise, it appears that synagogues were recording, streaming, or posting their services at a rate similar to that of Catholic churches. So Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues, in general, faced more of an adjustment when the pandemic forced congregations to shift to exclusively virtual worship.

Another kind of digital divide that the pandemic highlighted concerns congregations' ability to receive electronic donations. Small congregations and rural congregations were half as likely as their larger and urban or suburban counterparts to be able to receive financial donations electronically on the eve of the pandemic. While 76% of congregations with 100 or more regularly attending adults and 55% of suburban or urban congregations were

able to receive electronic donations in 2018-19, only 38% of congregations with fewer than 100 regularly attending adults and only 27% of rural congregations had that capacity. Small and rural congregations were particularly disadvantaged. Among congregations that were both small and rural in 2018-19, only 23% were able to receive donations through electronic means, compared to 55% of other congregations. Congregations with more older parishioners also were noticeably less likely to be able to receive donations electronically. There were no significant differences among Christian traditions in having an electronic donation system set up prior to the pandemic, as about half of the congregations in each Christian tradition had such a system set up.

Here again there are not enough Jewish congregations in the sample to be precise, but it appears that synagogues were more likely than other kinds of congregations to have an electronic donation system in place in 2018-19. There are not enough mosques, Hindu or

Buddhist temples, or congregations in other religious groups in the NCS sample to say anything meaningful about their technological capacities in 2018-19.

These digital divides on the eve of the pandemic suggest that adapting to pandemic conditions would have been easier for some types of congregations than for others. We do not yet know, however, how strongly, if at all, these pandemic-eve inequalities shaped congregations' ability to serve their people and maintain their religious communities during the pandemic. Still less do we know what, if any, long-term marks the pandemic will leave on congregations. Will online access to worship services remain ubiquitous or return to its pre-pandemic rates? If congregations continue to livestream their services at very high rates, with what consequences for religious participation and giving? Answering these and other questions about the pandemic's medium-to-long-term impact on American religion will require ongoing research.



Congregations have adopted new communication technologies very quickly, raising many important questions. Are these technologies creating new kinds of religious experiences and identities? Are they changing the nature of religious participation by altering the ways that people seek out and interact with congregations? Are they changing the ways that clergy serve their people and build religious communities? Will there be long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on any of this? These are the kinds of developments observers of American religion will be watching in the coming years.



Leadership

The solo pastor may be the image that comes to mind when we think about the typical religious congregation and its leadership, and, indeed, most congregations (54%) are led by a full-time, part-time, or unpaid solo leader with no additional paid ministerial staff. Sixteen percent of congregations employ two ministerial staff (including the primary leader), and another 28% employ 3 or more. The remaining 2% of congregations either have no official leader or some other sort of leadership situation.

Assistant, associate, and specialized ministers are important to many congregations, and they constitute a majority of the ministerial work force. They hold 54% of all ministerial positions: 41% of full-time positions and 70% of all part-time positions. This section of the

report provides an overview of congregational staff configurations and examines stability and change in pastoral leaders' ethnicity, gender, and educational attainment.

Two terminological clarifications are necessary here. First, when talking about a congregation's primary leader, we encompass both situations in which the congregation has only one leader and situations in which there are several ministerial staff, with one person designated as the senior leader. While the vast majority of congregations have a clergyperson as their primary leader, some are led by lay people, especially in congregations with part-time rather than full-time leaders. This is how it can be, for example, that there are a few Catholic parishes in the NCS which are led by women, or how it can be that



there are some congregational leaders without graduate degrees even in traditions in which all ordained clergy have such degrees. We will use the terms “senior clergy,” “head clergy,” or “pastoral leader,” as shorthand to refer to the primary pastoral leader. This is regardless of whether that person is the sole leader or head of a multi-person staff, whether or not that person is paid, and whether or not that leader is an ordained clergyperson.

Secondary ministerial staff constitute half of the full-time ministerial work force and two-thirds of the part-time ministerial work force.

Second, “ministerial staff” encompasses paid clergy as well as other paid staff who are primarily engaged in the congregation’s religious mission, whether or not they are ordained clergy. Specifically, we asked NCS congregations to tell us about “ministerial or other religious staff, such as youth ministers, other pastors, pastoral counselors, directors of religious education, music ministers, and so on.” We asked them not to count “secretaries, janitors, school teachers, or other full-time employees not primarily engaged in religious work.” Inspection of the job titles held by those listed as ministerial staff by congregational informants confirms that this definition was closely followed. We sometimes will use “clergy” as shorthand for these ministerial staff members, even though they may not be ordained clergy.



Staff Configurations

There is a lot of variety among congregations in how they are staffed, and in how that staff is organized. While the majority (58%) of congregations with solo leaders, senior leaders of a larger staff, or two co-leaders employ a paid full-time primary leader, 23% are led by a paid part-time leader, and 19% are led by unpaid volunteers.

Only about three-fifths of congregations employ a paid full-time leader. One-fifth have a paid part-time leader, and another fifth are led by unpaid volunteers.

Having a part-time or volunteer leader sometimes is a theological choice, as for Mormons, but more often it is because a congregation cannot afford a full-time leader, as for many Protestant churches, or because there are not enough qualified leaders to serve all churches, as in the Roman Catholic Church. In any event, smaller congregations, of course, are much less likely to have a full-time leader. Only 48% of congregations with fewer than 100 regularly participating adults have a full-time paid leader, compared with 79% of congregations with 100–199 participants and 95% of congregations with at least 200 participants.

Religious groups vary in the extent to which their congregations are led by paid full-time leaders. Almost all (91%) head clergy in Catholic parishes serve full-time and are paid, as are about three quarters (70%) of head clergy in predominantly white mainline Protestant churches.



By contrast, only about half the primary leaders of predominantly white evangelical churches (55%) and Black Protestant churches (50%) serve as full-time paid leaders. Volunteer or unpaid head clergy tend to have less formal education and are most common in smaller and less well-off congregations. Volunteer leaders also are more likely to be female.

Making Ends Meet

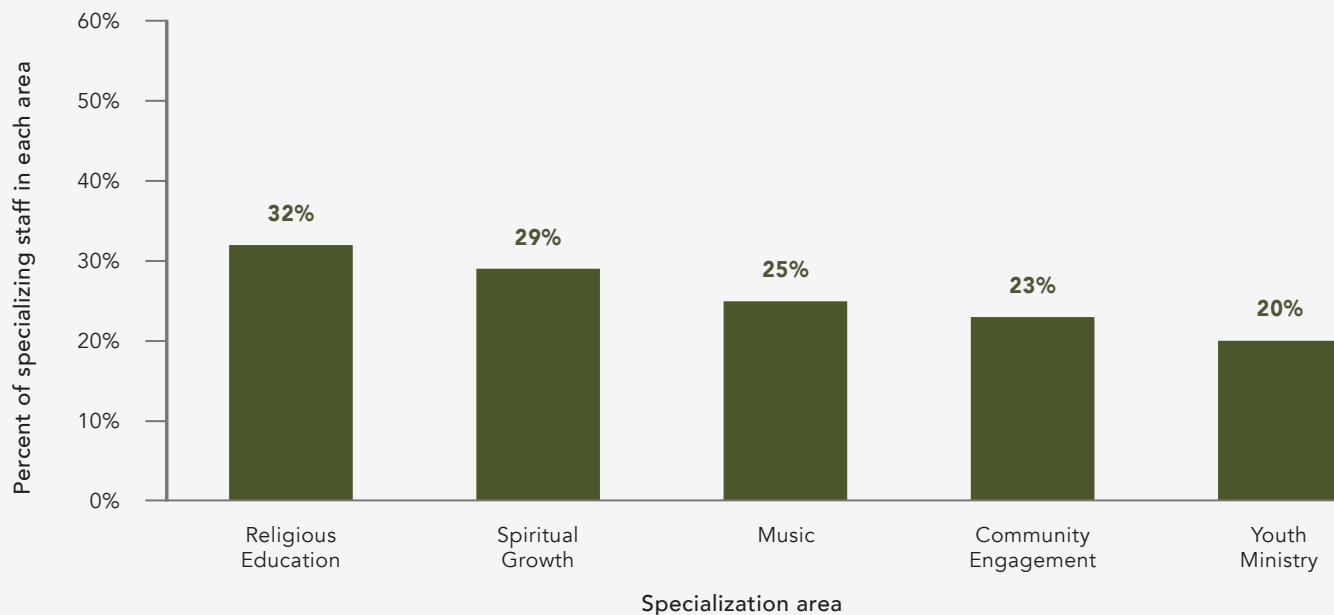
Pastoral leaders who do not serve a single congregation full-time generally make ends meet either by serving several congregations or holding another job altogether. Twenty-seven percent of part-time senior or solo clergy serve multiple congregations while 65% hold a job aside from congregational ministry. Remarkably, a sizable number even of full-time paid pastoral leaders either serve other congregations (14%) or hold another job beyond

their pastoral position (17%). Overall, 18% of solo or senior pastoral leaders served multiple congregations, and 35% were bi-vocational.

Serving more than one congregation is much more common for Roman Catholics (43% of head clergy) than for evangelical Protestants (14%). Mainline Protestants (23%) and Black Protestants (16%) fall in between. Jobs outside the ministry, by contrast, are much more common among Black Protestants (40% of leaders) and white evangelicals (46%), and rarer for mainline Protestant (14%) and Roman Catholic (11%) ministers and priests. These numbers include both full-time and part-time leaders, and they are higher, sometimes much higher, for part-time pastoral leaders. Overall, two-thirds (65%) of part-time leaders hold another job.

Five most common full-time staff specializations, 2018–19.

These numbers add to more than 100 because staff members may specialize in more than one area.



Generalists and Specialists

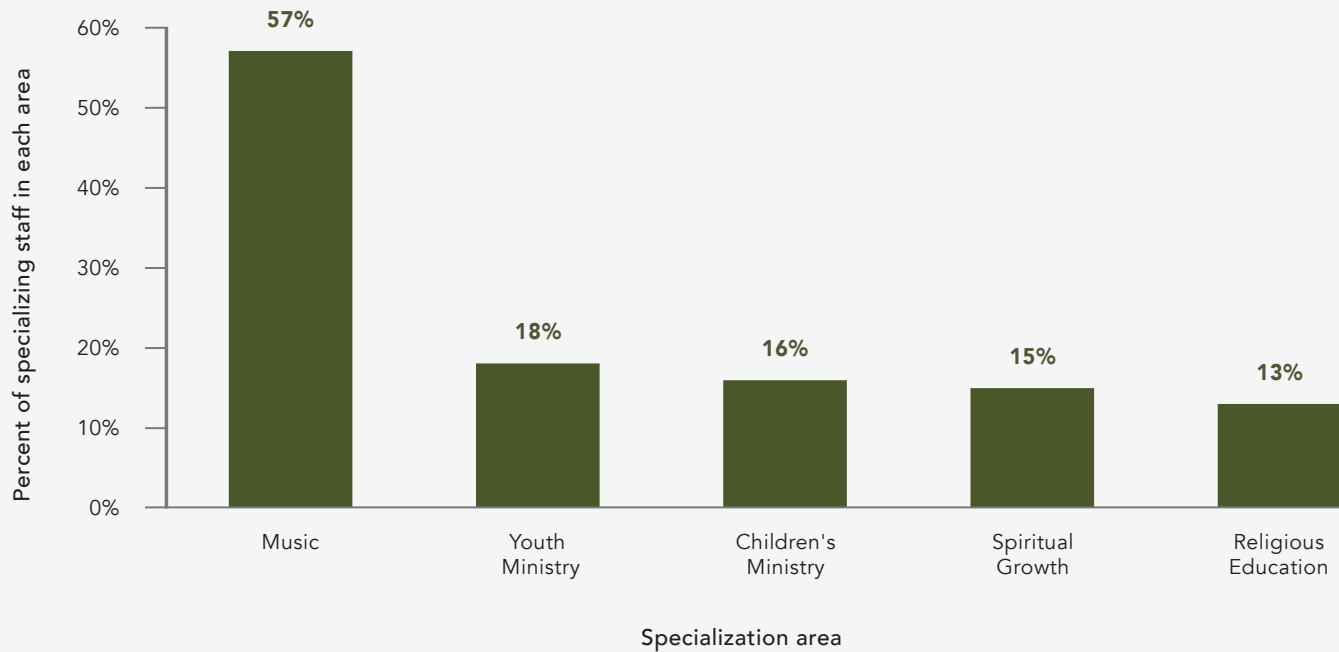
Solo or head clergy usually are generalists, engaging in various kinds of activities and occupying many different roles, which may include preacher, teacher, liturgist, counselor, administrator, social worker, mentor, community organizer, and crisis responder. By contrast, ministerial staff beyond the primary leader, and especially part-time staff beyond the primary leader, are more likely to specialize in specific areas of congregational work. About half (55%) of full-time ministerial staff beyond the primary leader specialize, while three-quarters (74%) of part-time ministerial staff beyond the primary leader specialize.

Focusing on ministerial staff other than the primary leader, the typical areas of specialization also vary depending on whether such staff members are full-time or part-time. Religious education is the most common specialization of full-time ministerial staff, with one-third (32%) of full-time specialist staff in that area. Spiritual growth, music ministry, community engagement, and youth ministry are other relatively common areas of specialization for ministerial staff members who work full-time.

Part-time secondary ministerial leaders are most often musicians, with 57% of those who

Five most common part-time staff specializations, 2018–19.

These numbers add to more than 100 because staff members may specialize in more than one area.



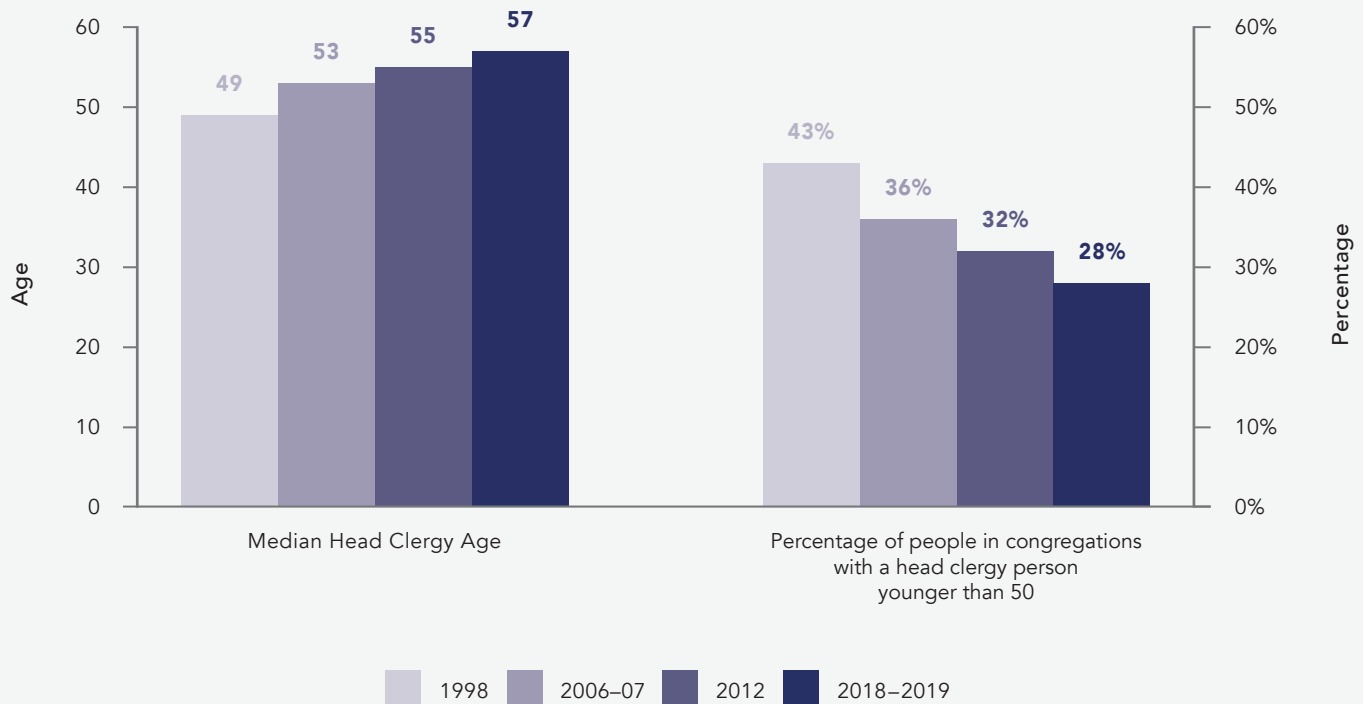
specialize focusing on music ministry. Musicians are by far the most common kind of specialist among part-time staff, but other relatively common specialist areas for part-time staff are youth ministry, children's ministry, spiritual growth, and religious education.

Interestingly, as congregations have enhanced their technological capacities, a relatively new staff specialist has emerged: someone who focuses on technology. As we mentioned earlier, 5% of congregations have a staff person who spends at least one quarter of their time focusing on technology. When we include staff members

who focus on technology but perhaps not for as much as one quarter of their time, that number increases to 9%. Worship-related technology specialists are now about as common in congregations as those who focus on family ministry, indicating that managing technology is a growing priority for congregations.

In sum, congregational staffing is more complex and variable than it might appear at first glance. Congregations employ a mix of full-time and part-time generalists and specialists who together do much of the work of running congregations.

An aging clergy



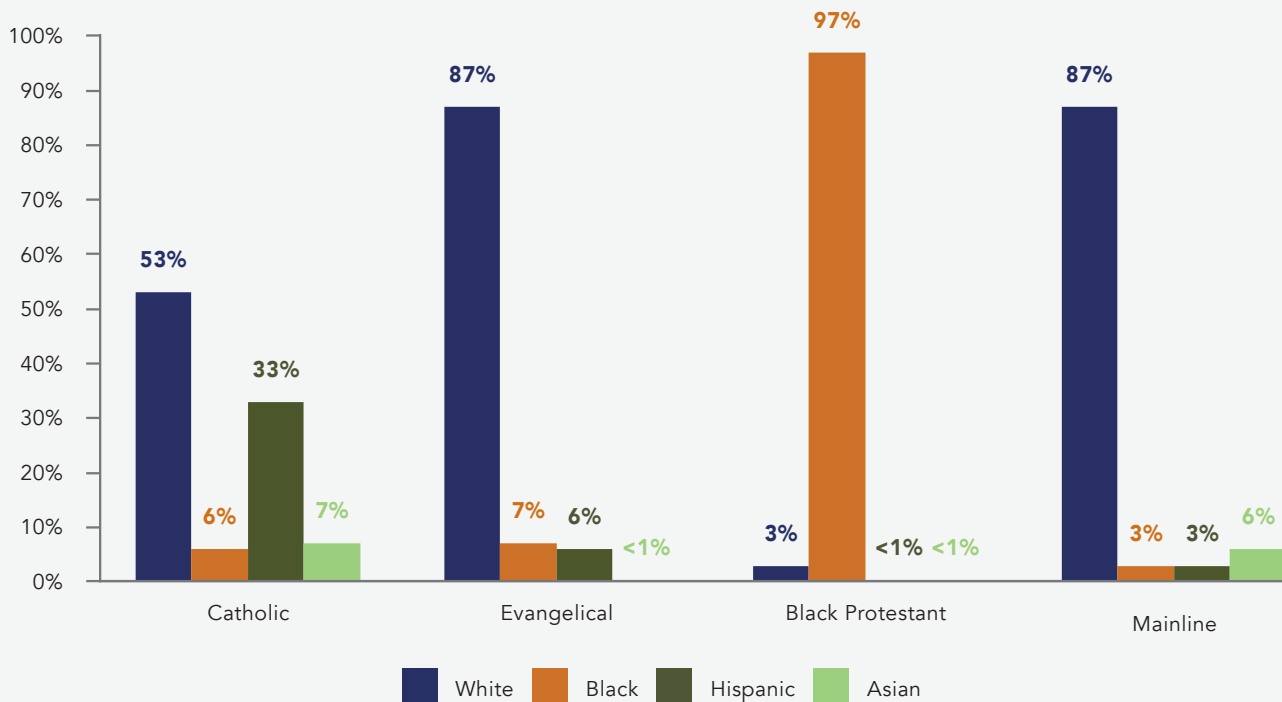
Aging Pastoral Leaders

The clergy are graying. Fewer young people choosing religious leadership as a career and growing numbers of second-career clergy combine to produce an aging clergy. The median age of people leading congregations was 57 in 2018-19, up from 49 in 1998. Perhaps most strikingly, in 2018-19, only about one quarter (28%) of people were in congregations where the head clergyperson was younger than 50, down from 43% in 1998 -- a remarkable change over twenty years. This graying of the clergy is evident across the religious spectrum.

Ethnic Diversity Among Pastoral Leaders

The American pastorate is racially and ethnically diverse: 64% of solo or senior leaders are white and non-Hispanic, 26% are Black, 5% are Hispanic, and 4% are Asian. But these aggregate numbers disguise the fact that Catholic priests are much more diverse than Protestant ministers. In 2018-19, only 53% of Catholic primary congregational leaders were white and non-Hispanic, while 33% were Hispanic, 6% were Black, and 7% were Asian. This of course reflects the fact that a large proportion of American Catholics are Hispanic. Still, the Catholic priesthood in the U.S. has become less predominantly white remarkably fast.

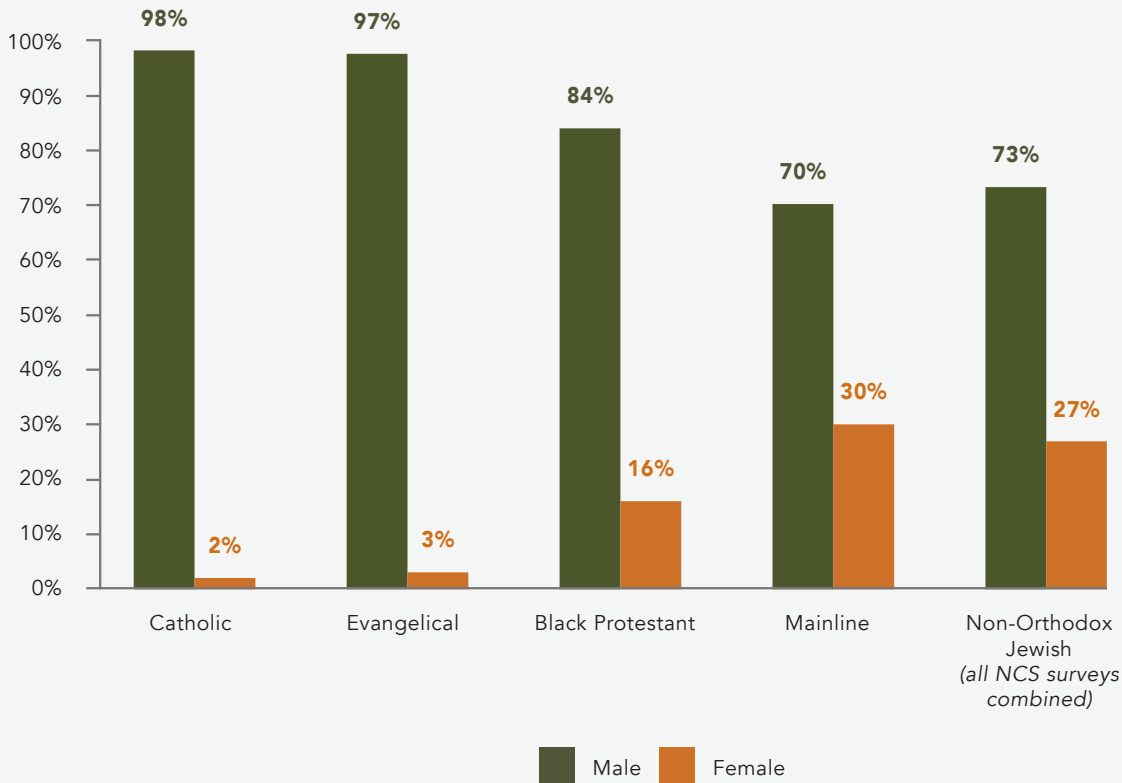
Percentage of head clergy of each race or ethnicity, 2018–19.



In 1998, virtually all (97%) Catholic church primary leaders were white and non-Hispanic. Today, as we mentioned, only about half are. Moreover, since Hispanic and Asian Catholic clergy often are immigrants, Roman Catholic head clergy also are much more likely to be born outside the United States (50% of Catholic head clergy) than head clergy in the other Christian groups (about 10% in each group). Only leaders of Muslim mosques and Hindu and Buddhist temples have comparably high rates of leaders born outside the United States.

Black Protestant congregations have the most racially homogeneous clergy, with virtually all (97%) congregations led by African Americans. Similarly, predominantly white evangelical and mainline Protestant head clergy are overwhelmingly white and non-Hispanic (87% in both groups), with little sign of change since 1998. The secondary ministerial staff of evangelical Protestant churches is somewhat more diverse than the evangelical head clergy, but, overall, Catholics have a more racially and ethnically diverse group of congregational leaders than any other group.

Percentage of male and female head clergy in each religious tradition, 2018–19.



Gender of Pastoral Leaders

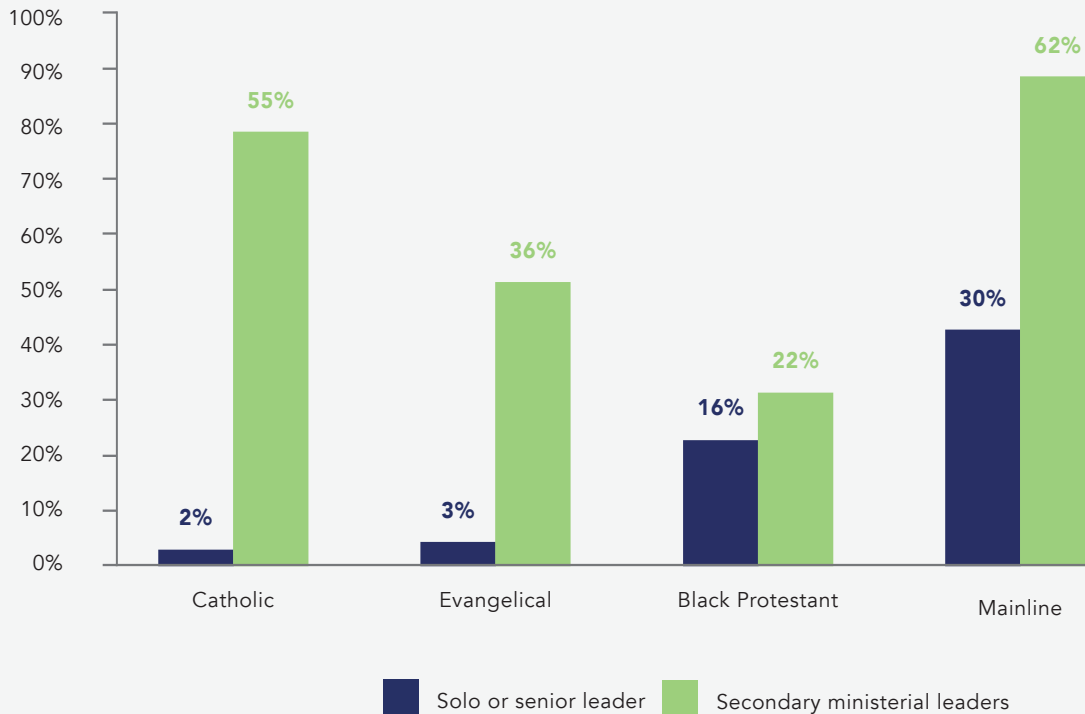
Despite increased numbers of female clergy in some denominations, women lead only a small minority of American congregations: 14%. That is an increase since 1998, but not as much of an increase as one might expect.

Women lead 14% of congregations.

Of course, the presence of female leaders varies substantially across religious groups.

Mainline and Black Protestant churches, and Jewish synagogues, are much more likely than evangelical Protestant congregations to be led by women. In 2018-19, 30% of predominantly white mainline Protestant and 16% of Black Protestant congregations were led by women. Combining the data from all four NCS waves to increase the sample size, about 1 in 4 Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jewish synagogues were led by women, a rate that probably is higher in 2018-19, but we do not have enough synagogues in the NCS to examine each year separately.

Percentage of senior and secondary ministerial leaders who are female in each religious tradition, 2018–19.



By contrast, only 3% of predominantly white evangelical congregations were led by women in 2018–19. And, of course, female leadership in Roman Catholic congregations remains near zero (2%). It is not literally zero because some priestless parishes are led by women, who usually are members of religious orders.

The picture is much different when we look at secondary leaders. Thirty-five percent of full-time and 46% of part-time secondary ministerial staff are female—significantly higher than the 14% of solo or senior pastoral leaders who are female.

Women are more commonly secondary rather than primary ministerial staff within all major religious traditions. They do much important work within congregations even as they remain under-represented among head clergy. An important question is whether clergywomen earn salaries comparable to clergymen when they have similar education and experience and serve congregations of similar size and member income level. Research findings are mixed on this point.

Why are so few congregations led by female clergy? Why isn't the percentage of congregations



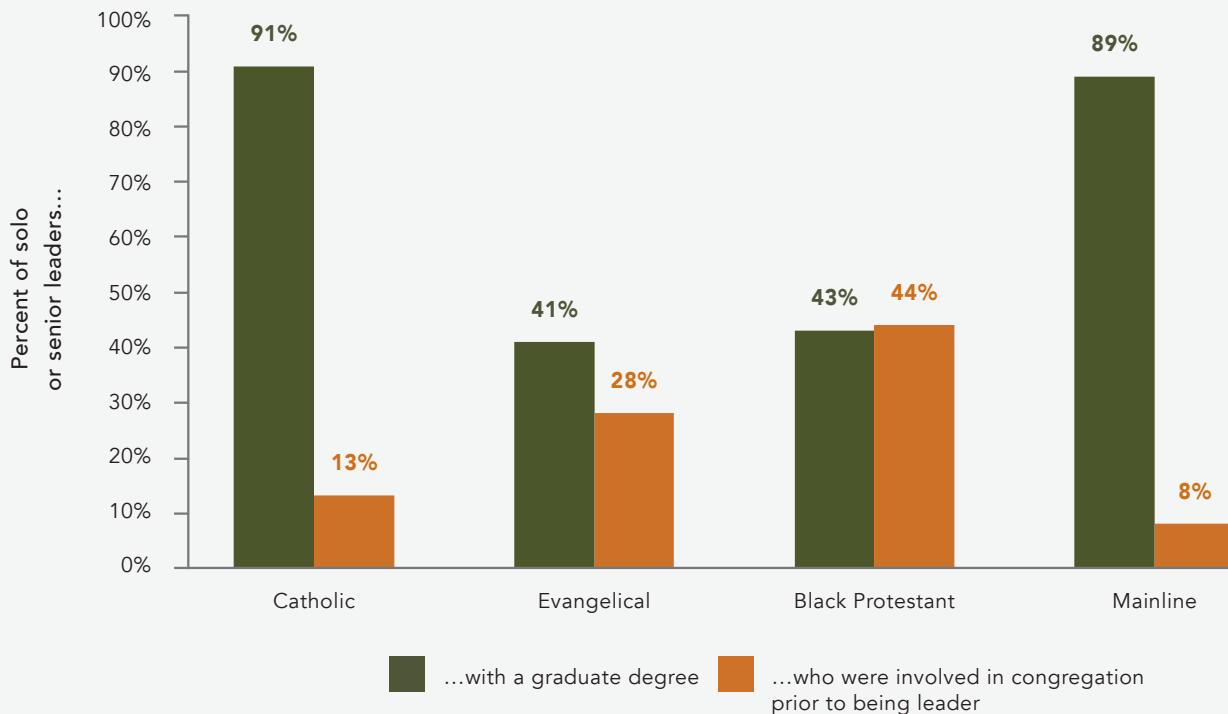
led by women growing more quickly? Several factors are important. First, even though the percentage of women enrolling in Master of Divinity programs is much higher than it was 50 years ago, that percentage peaked in 2002 at 31.5% before falling slightly and hovering around 30% since then, according to the Association of Theological Schools. Second, women with Masters of Divinity degrees are less likely to pursue pastoral ministry than men, although other research has shown that, when women do work as pastors, they report higher levels of job satisfaction than their male colleagues. Third, and perhaps most important, several major religious groups do not permit women to lead congregations, and, even within denominations that have ordained women for decades, many congregations remain reluctant to hire women as their primary leader.

Overall, it appears that the percentage of congregations led by women has increased slowly in recent years. This trend probably will continue in the coming years as clergy from younger, more female cohorts replace clergy from older, more male ones. But the presence of women in congregational leadership will continue to 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.

Education among Pastoral Leaders

In general, clergy are a highly educated segment of American society, with a little over half (55% in 2018-19) of solo or senior pastoral leaders holding graduate degrees. As with

Professionalization of senior and solo clergy as shown by graduate education and prior involvement in the congregation, 2018–19.



other features of congregations and those who lead them, clergy education level is highly variable across denominations and religious traditions. Roman Catholic congregations have the most highly educated congregational leaders (91% have graduate degrees), closely followed by mainline Protestant congregations (89% with graduate degrees). Solo or senior pastoral leaders of Black Protestant and white evangelical congregations, by contrast, are least likely to have graduate degrees (43% and 41%, respectively), and about 1 in 3 in each group do not have a four-year college degree (36% and

28%, respectively). Across all traditions, the more highly educated clergy tend to lead larger congregations: 71% of leaders in congregations with more than 100 regular adult attendees have graduate degrees, compared with 49% of solo or senior pastors in smaller congregations.

Within every tradition, secondary ministerial staff are less well-educated, on average, than solo or senior pastoral leaders. In 2018-19, 39% of full-time secondary ministerial staff and 21% of part-time ministerial staff had a degree

from a seminary, theological school, or other religious training institution. Note that these are not directly comparable to the head clergy percentages in the previous paragraph because the head clergy percentages refer to graduate degrees while these secondary clergy values refer to credentials that are not necessarily graduate degrees. The percentage of secondary ministerial staff with graduate degrees likely would be lower than the percentage with any sort of religious leadership credential. Interestingly, evangelical secondary leaders are the most likely to have theological degrees, followed by Catholic and mainline secondary leaders. Black Protestants are the least likely secondary leaders to have a theological degree.

The prevalence of clergy with graduate degrees indicates a certain kind of professionalization of the clergy role. Another indicator of clergy professionalization is whether or not congregational leaders are drawn from people who already are part of the congregation. In 2018-19, 27% of solo or senior clergy were part of the congregation before becoming the leader of the congregation. This varies significantly across religious groups. Forty-four percent of Black Protestant senior leaders were a part of the congregation before leading it, along with 28% of evangelical leaders. Catholic and mainline solo and senior leaders were part of the congregation they lead at much lower levels (13% and 8%, respectively). Not surprisingly, the religious traditions most likely to draw leaders from within the congregation also are the least likely to have senior leaders with graduate degrees. The NCS data hint at a slight increase over time in congregations drawing their main leaders from within the congregation, but we do

not have enough information to conclude with confidence that we see such a trend.

Ministerial staff beyond the primary leader are much more likely to be drawn from within the congregation. Among all congregations, 40% of full-time and 61% of part-time secondary ministerial staff in 2018-19 were members of the congregation they currently serve before they started working there. The differences across religious groups are similar to those we saw for primary leaders. The secondary ministerial staff within Black Protestant congregations are most likely to have been drawn from within the congregation (about three quarters of both full- and part-time secondary ministerial staff). Mainline Protestant congregations are the least likely to hire secondary ministerial staff from within: 28% of full-time and 44% of part-time secondary ministerial staff.

Overall, ministerial staff within mainline Protestant and Catholic churches are more professionalized – more highly educated and less likely to be drawn from within the congregations that they serve – than the ministerial staff within evangelical and Black Protestant churches. Of course, formal training and prior involvement in the congregation are not mutually exclusive paths to ministerial work. Large congregations are more likely to have people with seminary training among their members who they can draw on for staff positions, and some congregations try to identify future leaders and help them obtain formal training for ministerial work.

In general, though, there seem to be two different models of ministerial work operating within American congregations, one that emphasizes formal education and one that

emphasizes personal connection to the congregation and on-the-job training. Different religious groups lean towards one or the other of these models. These differences are somewhat visible when looking at solo or senior

pastoral leaders, but they are especially evident when looking at secondary ministerial staff.



So, pastoral leaders of American congregations are, as an occupational group, older, somewhat more ethnically diverse, and somewhat more female in 2018-19 than they were in 1998. There also is a lot of variation across religious groups in the ethnic, gender, and educational composition of clergy, as well as in the prevalence of leaders who serve multiple congregations or are bi-vocational. Demographically, the secondary ministerial labor force within American congregations is quite different from solo and senior pastoral leaders, raising the question of whether, in time, congregations' primary leaders will look more like today's assistant, associate, and specialized ministers. Or will a combination of theological, economic, and sociological factors continue to prompt congregations to look to different types of people as secondary ministerial staff than for primary religious leaders?

Knowing something about the demographics of pastoral leaders and the range of staff configurations within congregations should help congregations situate themselves within the broader landscape of American religion. It may also help congregational leaders better understand the context within which they work and minister.



Age

A key cause of slowly declining religious participation in the United States is less participation by younger generations. In addition to producing a slow decline in the size of the average congregation and a graying clergy, this generational dynamic means that people in the pews also are graying. In 2018-19, 43% of the adults in the average congregation were over 60 years old, up from 29% in 1998. And 24% of the adults in the average congregation in 2018-19 were younger than 35, down from 30% twenty years earlier.

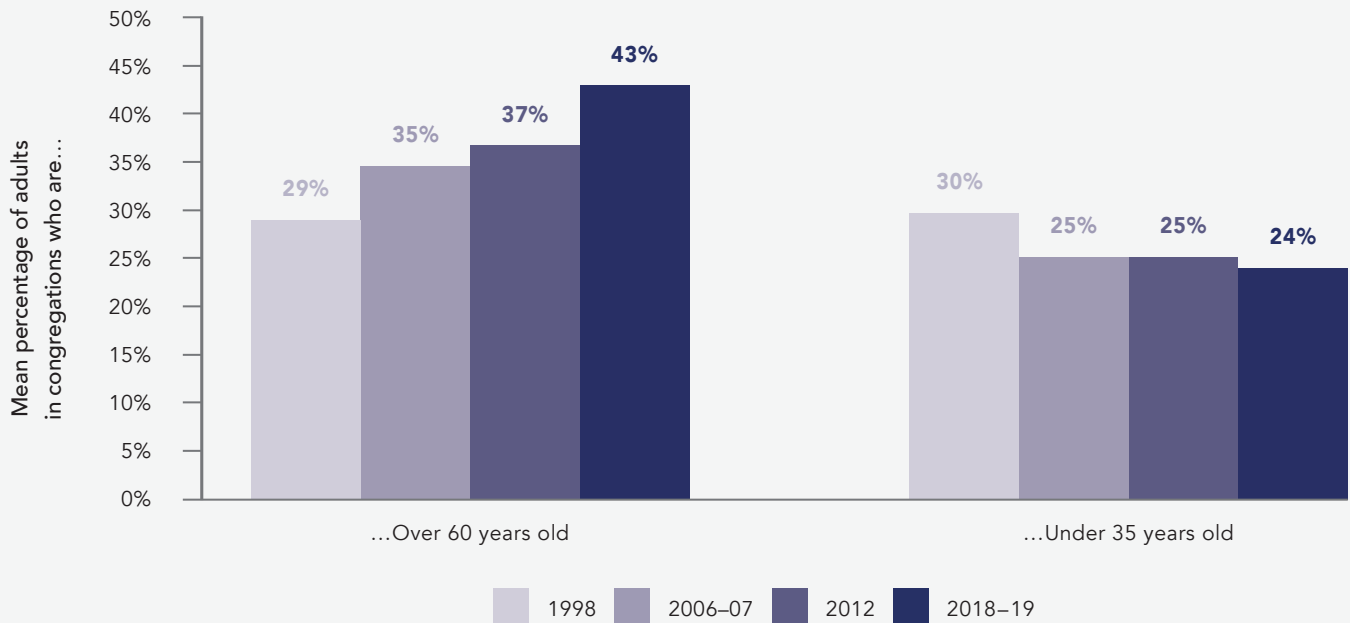
Religious groups vary in the age profile of their people, with predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations having more older people relative to other groups. Fifty-seven percent of adults in a typical mainline congregation are over 60 years of age, compared with 51%, 45%, 39%, and 32% in Roman Catholic, non-Christian, white evangelical, and Black Protestant congregations,

respectively. Looking at the other end of the age spectrum, in 2018-19 children comprised 18% of regular attendees for a typical mainline congregation compared to an average of 26% in other traditions. Importantly, though, the trend towards more old and fewer young people in congregations cuts across religious groups.

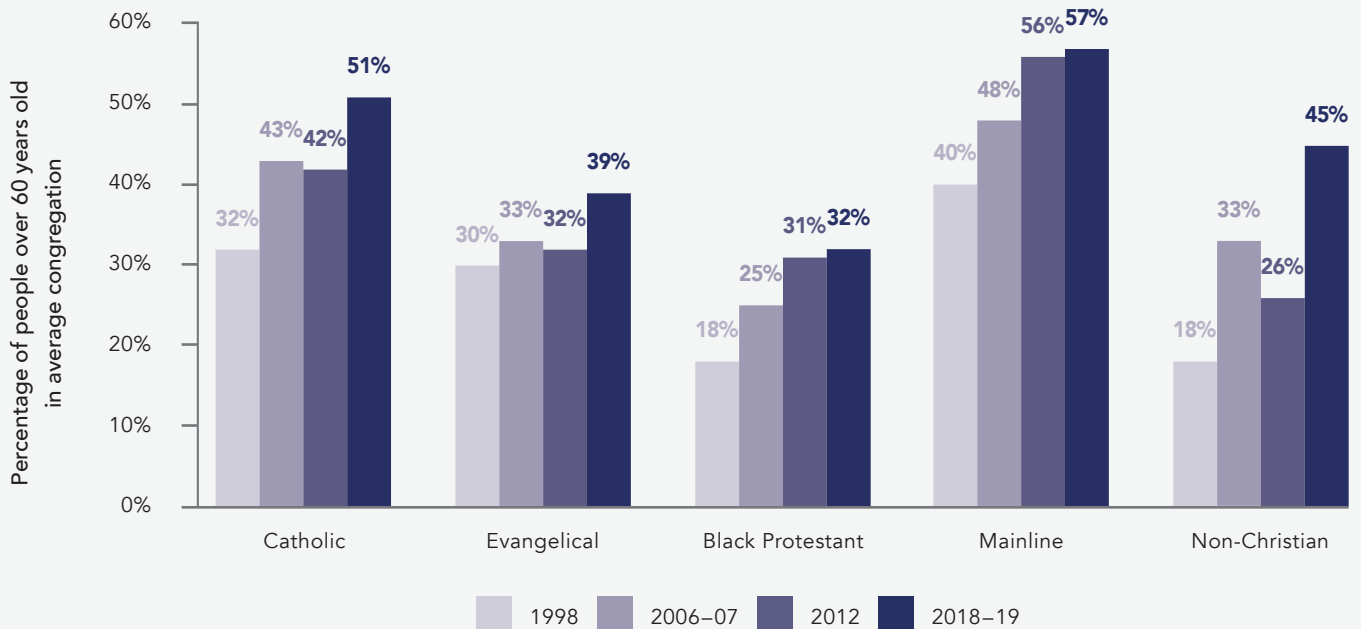
There are not enough synagogues, mosques, or Buddhist and Hindu temples to examine separately, but taken together these congregations also are graying. Mainline Protestant congregations may have the oldest members, on average, but the aging of the religiously active population is evident across the religious spectrum.

Clearly, lower religious participation among younger generations is having a dramatic effect on the age profile of both religious leaders and people in the pews.

More older people and fewer younger people in congregations.



The religiously active population is aging.





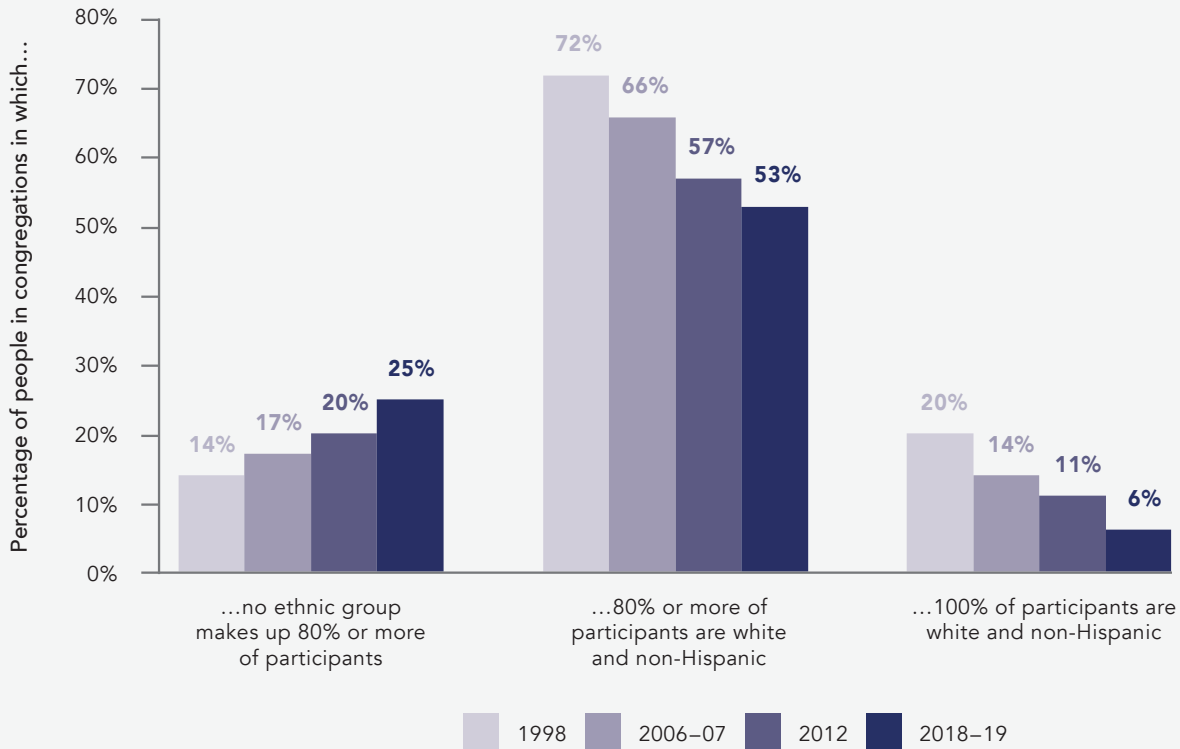
Race and Ethnicity

American congregations have become more ethnically diverse over the last 20 years. The NCS helps us to better understand the nature of that increased diversity. A key point is that there are two senses in which American congregations have become more racially and ethnically diverse. First, the population of congregations has itself become more diverse. There are more predominantly Hispanic and predominantly Asian congregations now than there were 20 years ago. (By “predominantly” we mean at least 80% of the regular adult participants are of that ethnicity.) In 2018-19, 5% of congregations were predominantly Hispanic and 3% were predominantly Asian, up from about 1% for both groups in 1998. The proportion of predominantly Black congregations has been steady at about 20% of congregations. Most remarkably, the proportion of predominantly white and non-Hispanic congregations has

declined dramatically, from 71% in 1998 to 53% in 2018-19. Today, only about half of all congregations are predominantly white and non-Hispanic.

This decline in predominantly white congregations points to the second sense in which American congregations have become more racially and ethnically diverse: increasing diversity within individual congregations. In 1998, only 14% of people attended a congregation in which no ethnic group constituted at least 80% of regular adult attendees. In 2018-19, 25% of people attended such a mixed congregation. This is a steady and notable increase in the percentage of congregations in which no one group has an overwhelming majority of the people. Moreover, only 6% of American religious service attendees were in an all-white congregation in 2018-19,

Increasing ethnic diversity within congregations.



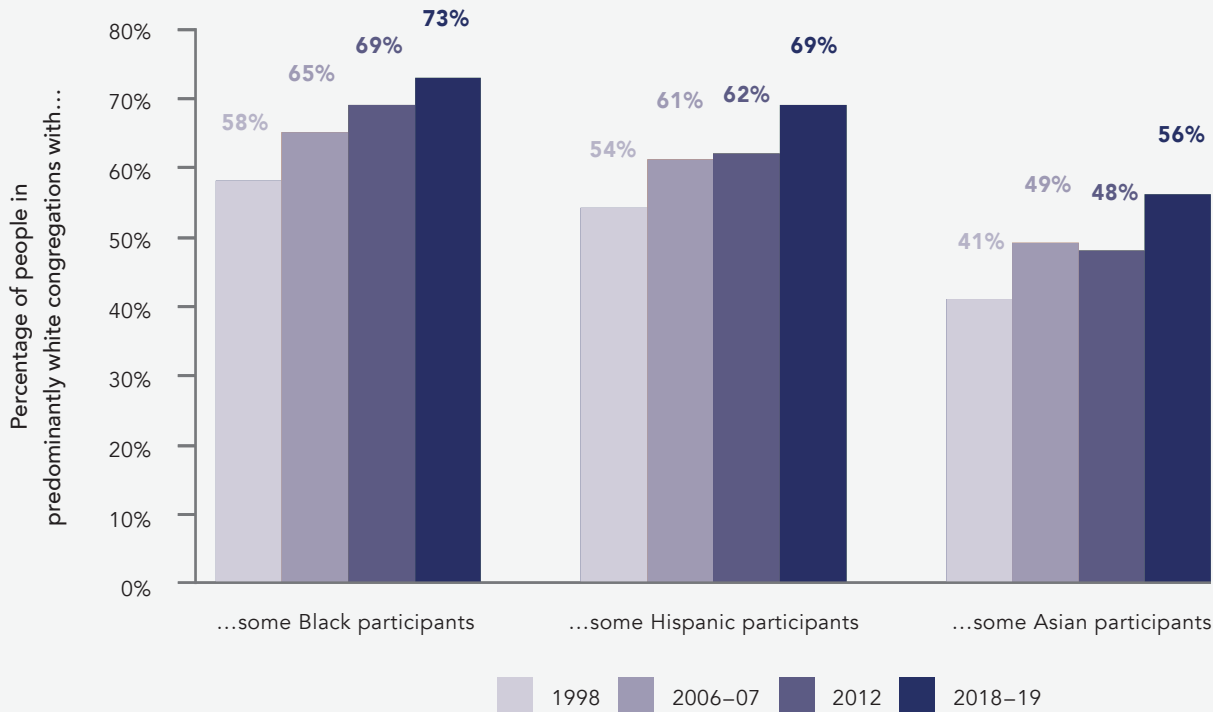
down from 20% in 1998. More than ever before, Americans are worshipping in places with at least some racial and ethnic diversity.

Focusing on predominantly white congregations – those where at least 80% of adults are white and non-Hispanic – we can see that, even when congregations remain predominantly white, they were less white in 2018-19 than they were in earlier years. The presence of Latinos, Asians, and Black people in predominantly white congregations has increased steadily since 1998. In 2018-19, a majority of churchgoers in predominantly white congregations were in congregations with some Black people (73%),

Only 6% of churchgoers were in an all-white congregation in 2018-19.

Hispanics (69%), and Asians (56%). Indeed, the vast majority of people who attend predominantly white congregations (88%) were in congregations with some ethnic minority presence. Catholic churches, on average, have been more ethnically diverse than Protestant churches for a long time, and they remain so, but both have become more diverse over the last 20 years.

Increasing minority presence in predominantly white congregations.



To fill out the picture, predominantly Black Protestant churches generally are less racially diverse than predominantly white congregations. There is a hint in the data of a recent increase in racial and ethnic diversity within predominantly Black congregations, but we do not have enough data to be confident about whether or not this is happening.

While these trends represent meaningful change, we do not want to overstate the magnitude or significance of increasing ethnic diversity within American congregations. Four out of five (83%) American congregations, containing 75% of religious service attendees, remain overwhelmingly white or Black or Hispanic or Asian.

Still, driven by developments such as immigration, increased interracial marriage, and increased educational attainment among African Americans, there is noticeably more diversity. A growing minority presence in predominantly white congregations represents progress in a society in which race and ethnicity still divide us.

There are some systematic differences between congregations that are more and less ethnically diverse. Diverse congregations—meaning congregations in which no one racial or ethnic group comprises 80% or more of the people—are larger. In 2018-19, ethnically diverse congregations had a mean of about 170 regularly attending adults compared to only about 100



adults for racially homogenous congregations. Diverse congregations also tend to have more young people. In 2018-19, 15% of diverse congregations had a majority of their membership over the age of 60, compared with 35% of racially homogenous congregations that were made up of mostly people 60-years-old or older.

The increasing ethnic diversity in American congregations is related to another development: the increasing presence of immigrants, especially within Catholicism. In 2018-19, 84% of Catholics worshipped in congregations with at least some recent immigrants, compared to only 50% for white evangelicals, 35% for white mainline Protestants, and 20% for Black Protestants. This heavy presence of immigrants in Catholic churches is of course because most recent immigrants are from Latin America, and most of those immigrants are Catholic. One concrete consequence of more immigrants from Latin America in congregations is more worship services in Spanish or bilingual in Spanish and English. In 2018-19, 44% of Catholic congregations (containing half of Catholic attendees) had a Spanish or bilingual service, up from 26% in 2006. Spanish or Spanish-English bilingual services are much

more common in Catholic churches than within other religious traditions, but there is a hint that their prevalence also may have increased among evangelical churches. In 2018-19, 13% of evangelical congregations, 4% of Black Protestant congregations, and 3% of mainline Protestants reported having a worship service at least partly in Spanish.

The increase in one particular form of diversity within congregations that we have highlighted—more predominantly white congregations with a small number of minority people—raises an obvious question: Does the presence of even a few Black people, Hispanics, Asians, or recent immigrants in a predominantly white congregation affect that congregation's life in important ways? Will a white clergyman with even one Black family in the pews talk about race, about the relationships between communities and the police, or about other racially charged issues in quite the same way as he or she would if that family was not there? Will the congregation with even one Latino family approach immigration reform in quite the same way? How this particular form of increasing pluralism might change (or not change) congregations deserves additional research and reflection.

Civic Engagement

Congregations mainly focus on collective worship, religious education, and pastoral care of their members. At the same time, however, almost all also serve the needy in some fashion, and about half are politically engaged in some fashion, promoting social or cultural change they deem desirable, resisting social or cultural change they deem undesirable, or just encouraging their members to vote. In this section we explore these aspects of congregations' civic engagement.

Social Services

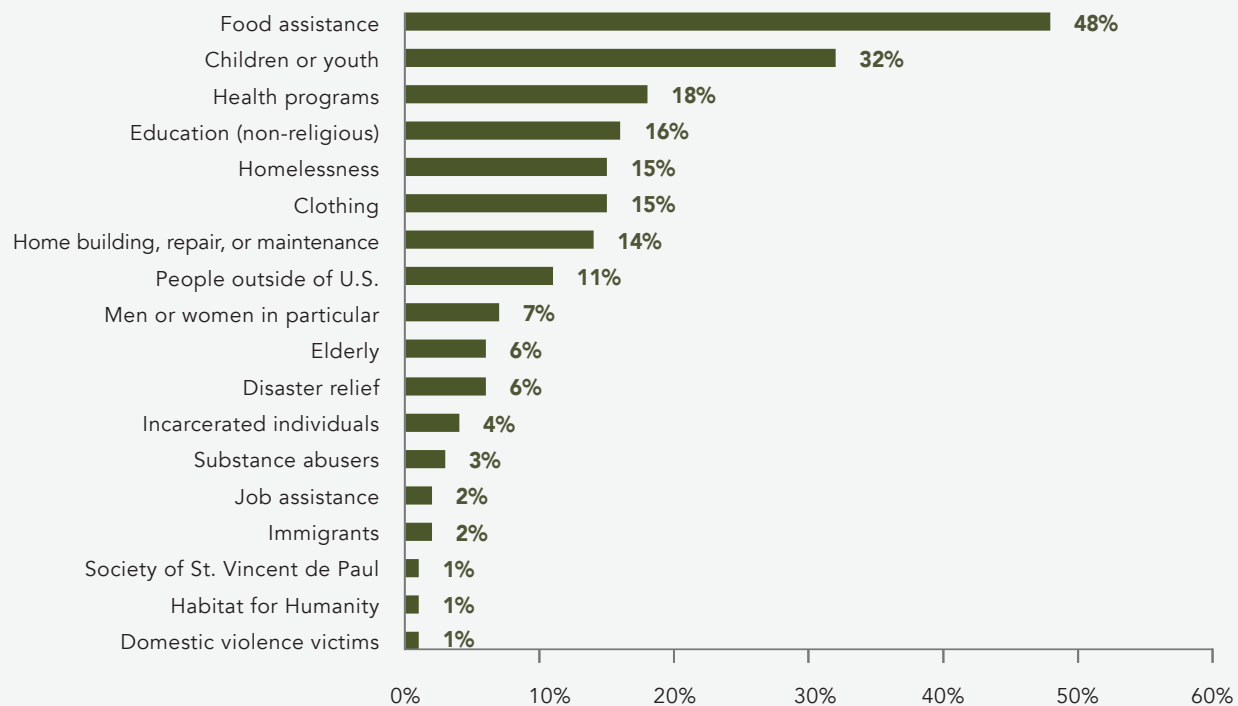
Serving the needy in some capacity is by far the most common way in which congregations are civically engaged beyond their walls. In 2018-19, the vast majority of congregations (84%) reported some involvement in social or human services, community development, or other projects and activities intended to help people outside the congregation, including sending small groups of their members to assist people in need either within the U.S. or internationally. Since larger congregations do more social service work, this means that virtually all Americans (91%) who attend religious services attend a congregation that is somehow active in this way.

Congregations engage in a great variety of social service activities, but some types of activities are much more common than others. The single most common kind of helping activity involves food assistance, with half (48%) of all congregations – 60% of congregations active in social service – mentioning feeding the

hungry among their four most important social service programs. Programs specifically aimed at children or youth (32% of all congregations), addressing health needs (18%), offering education or training other than religious education (16%), serving the homeless (15%), providing clothing or blankets to people (15%), and building or repairing homes (14%) also were among the more commonly mentioned activities, though they were much less common than food assistance. More rarely mentioned by congregations as one of their most important four social service projects are those requiring longer-term commitments and more intensive interaction with the needy. Programs aimed at helping prisoners, substance abusers, the unemployed, immigrants, and victims of domestic violence, for example, each were listed by fewer than 5% of congregations as one of their most important four programs, and only 11% of congregations place any one of these activities on their top-four list.

Virtually all Americans who attend religious services attend a congregation that is somehow involved in social or human service, community development, or other projects and activities helping people outside the congregation.

Percentage of congregations mentioning each program type or target population among their top four social service activities, 2018–19.



Categories like “food assistance” or “home building, repair, or maintenance” encompass a great deal of variation both in the nature of the specific activity and in the intensity of congregational involvement in that arena. Food assistance, for example, includes donating money to a community food bank, participating in a Crop Walk fundraiser, supplying volunteers who serve dinner at a homeless shelter once a month, or operating a food pantry or soup kitchen. Congregations might address housing needs by organizing a team of volunteers to participate in a Habitat for Humanity project, or they might partner with city government to build affordable housing. Health programs

include providing wheelchair ramps or home cleaning for disabled people, hosting health fairs or speakers on health-related issues, or supporting water projects in poor countries. In general, congregations’ social service activities fall on the less intensive side of this range. Only 15% of congregations have at least one staff member devoting at least a quarter of their work time to social service projects. And, even excluding congregations that say they do no social services, the median congregation in 2018-19 spent only \$2,640 directly on its social service activities, which amounts to only about 2% of the median congregation’s budget.

The typical way in which congregations pursue social services is by organizing small groups of volunteers to carry out well-defined tasks on a periodic basis.

These might sound like small numbers, but they do not include special offerings congregations often gather for specific charitable purposes, the dollar value of their in-kind contributions to community organizations, the dollar value of staff time in congregations where staff work on social service projects, or the dollar value of the time congregation members spend volunteering in community organizations. In fact, congregations' absolute contributions to community well-being are substantial. If 15% of the more than 300,000 congregations in the United States have a staff person devoting quarter time to social services, that means that approximately 45,000 congregations are engaged in that way. And, of course, congregations also support social service work through donations to denominational social service organizations like Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and Jewish Family Services.

Overall, though, the typical and probably most important way in which congregations pursue social service activity is by organizing small groups of volunteers to carry out well-defined tasks on a periodic basis: fifteen people spending several Saturdays renovating a house, five people cooking and serving dinner to the homeless one night a week, ten young people

spending a summer week painting a school, ten people traveling to the sight of a natural disaster to provide assistance for a week, and so on. In this light, it is no accident that congregations are particularly active in areas like food assistance, serving the homeless, and home repair in which small groups of volunteers focused on a bounded task can be put to best use. Congregations are very good – perhaps uniquely good in American society – at mobilizing small groups of volunteers for this kind of work.

A Closer Look at Congregations' Health-Promoting Activities

We noted earlier that, when asked about their four most important social service activities in an open-ended way, 18% of congregations mentioned some sort of health-promoting program. Congregations mentioned a wide range of health-promoting activities, including offering CPR training, running workshops on caring for people with dementia or Alzheimer's, sponsoring eye and dental exams, soliciting bone marrow donations, and more.

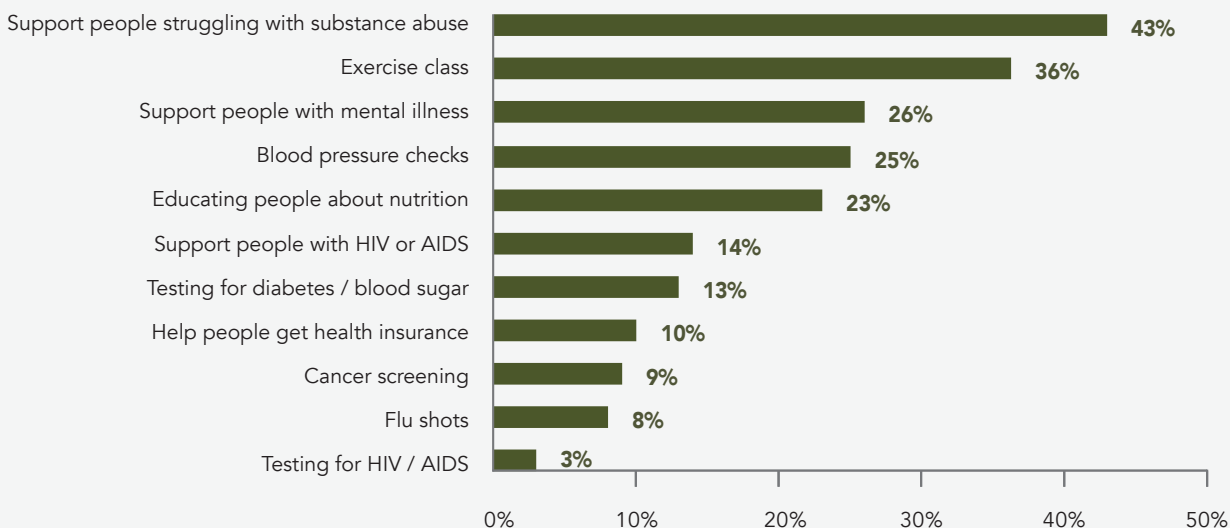
In addition to the health-promoting activities congregations mentioned when asked in an open-ended way, we also asked congregations directly about certain types of health programs. Not surprisingly, congregations emerge as even more actively involved in promoting good health when asked about it directly. Indeed, a majority of congregations (65%) reported engaging in at least one of eleven specific kinds of health-promoting activities we asked about directly. We include here offering support to people struggling with substance abuse, people with mental illness, and people

with HIV or AIDS. These are among the most common of congregations' health-related activities, especially having a group, class, or event for individuals struggling with drug or alcohol addiction (43% of congregations) or mental illness (26%). But a notable minority of congregations also engaged in activities within the last year aimed directly at promoting physical health. Over a third of congregations (36%) had a group promoting exercise or physical activity of some kind. One in four offered blood pressure checks or educated people about nutrition or healthy eating habits (25% and 23%, respectively). About one in ten offered diabetes testing (13%), help with getting health insurance (10%), cancer screening (9%), or flu shots (8%). Importantly, Black Protestant churches are much more likely than white

congregations to offer health-related services, with four of out five (82%) engaging in at least one of the eleven activities we asked about directly. A majority of predominantly white congregations -- about 60% -- engaged in at least one of these activities, but not as large a majority as among Black churches.

Recall that these results are from 2018-19. We know that many congregations served as COVID vaccination sites in 2021. Future research will be needed to document how widespread that particular type of congregational involvement was, but congregations clearly often promote good health in concrete ways for their people and the people in their communities.

Percentage of congregations offering each type of health-promoting activity, 2018–19.



Politics

Congregations' political activity may receive more media attention than their social service work, but fewer congregations are politically active than do social services. Still, many congregations are politically active in some fashion. More than half (57%) of congregations (containing 62% of attendees) engaged in at least one of the twelve political activities the NCS asked congregations about in 2018-19. This represents a substantial level of political engagement by American congregations, with the most common activities involving electoral mobilization. Approximately one quarter of congregations recently engaged in efforts to get out the vote (26%), distribute voter guides (24%), or register voters (23%). Less common political activities include lobbying elected officials (10% of congregations), and hosting an elected official (7%) or political candidate (7%) as a visiting speaker.⁵

The 2018-19 NCS asked about two kinds of congregational political activities that were not asked about in earlier NCS surveys but were receiving substantial media attention in 2018: congregations declaring themselves sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants, and publicly endorsing or opposing a political candidate even though doing so could place congregations' status as recipients of tax-deductible donations at risk.

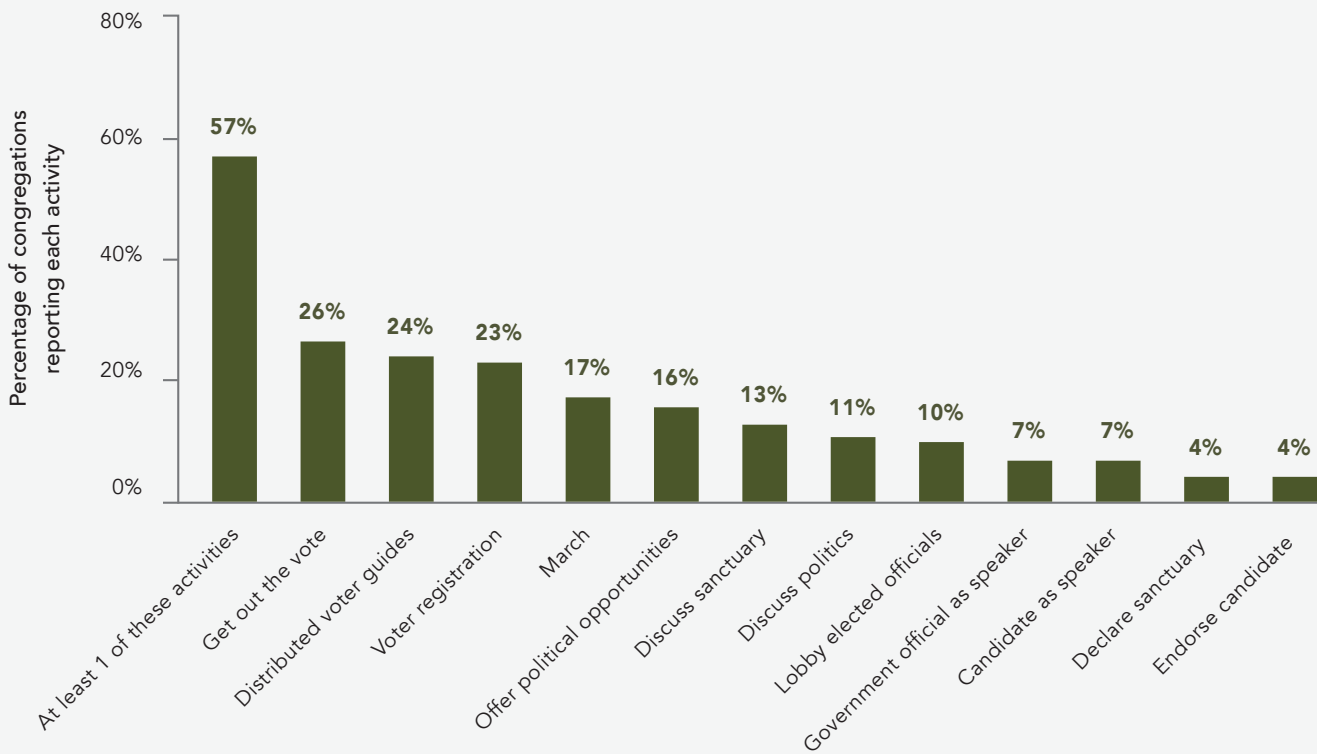
Neither of these actions are common. Only 13% of congregations discussed becoming a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants, and only 4% took the step of declaring themselves as one. Sanctuary congregations are overwhelmingly Catholic. One third (32%)

of Catholic churches reported declaring themselves as sanctuaries, while no more than 5% of the congregations within any other religious group had done so. One fifth (22%) of predominantly white mainline Protestant churches had discussed becoming sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants, but only 4% declared themselves as such. Of course, declaring oneself a sanctuary does not necessarily mean that a congregation is actively sheltering undocumented immigrants. The NCS did not ask congregations if they were doing that, but other sources suggest that actually housing an undocumented immigrant was very rare, with fewer than 100 congregations nationwide taking that significant step.

About half of congregations report involvement in some form of political activity.

Also rare are congregations that have taken the risky step of outright endorsing or opposing political candidates even though doing so puts their non-profit tax status at risk. Only 4% of congregations reported doing that in 2018-19. This probably understates the true prevalence of endorsing candidates, since we suspect that some congregations and clergy who in fact have done this were not comfortable saying they did so when asked about it. Still, it seems that only a small minority of American clergy and congregations have risked Internal Revenue Service (IRS) sanctions to engage in this sort of explicitly partisan political activity.

Participation in political activities within the last year, 2018–19.



Perhaps more interesting than documenting the very small minority of congregations that defy IRS rules to endorse candidates is assessing how many congregations would do this if those rules changed. The NCS-IV addressed this by asking congregations that had not publicly endorsed political candidates if they would do so if this action would not put their tax status at risk. Seventeen percent of congregations that had not already publicly endorsed candidates said yes, they would. Combining congregations that already endorse candidates with those that would if they could, one in five congregations (21%) would endorse a political candidate

publicly if relevant tax laws were changed. While a large majority of congregations (79%) have not publicly endorsed a candidate and would not even if they legally could, a nontrivial minority say they would act in this explicitly partisan way if tax rules constraining this activity were relaxed.

Ironically, the congregations most likely to publicly endorse or oppose political candidates are not the ones advocates for tax law changes often envision freeing to engage in this partisan activity. Among Christian churches, predominantly Black congregations are, by far, the most likely currently to endorse candidates.



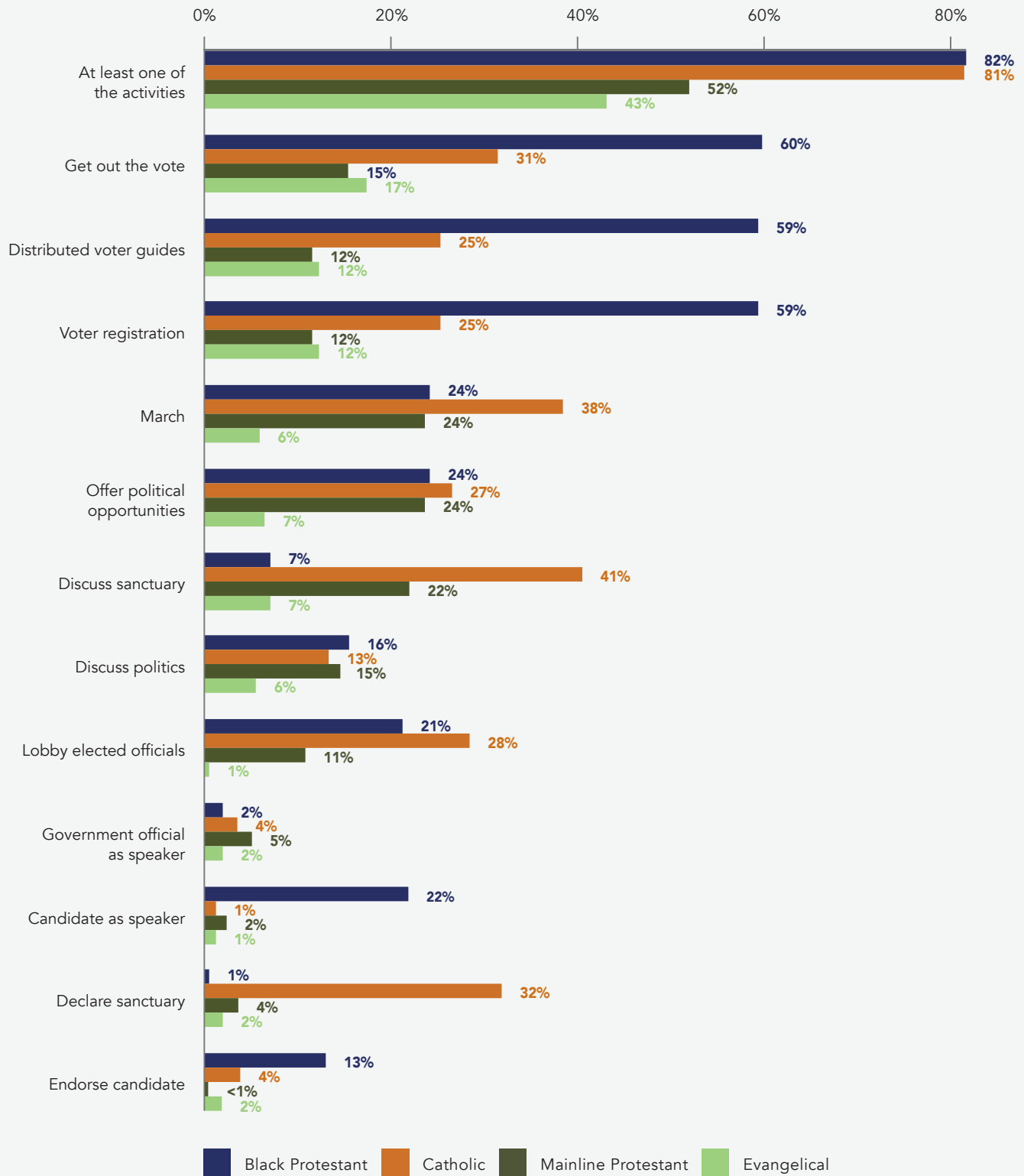
Thirteen percent say they have done so, compared to not more than 4% within any other Christian group. Moreover, Black churches that have not endorsed candidates are again, by far, the most likely to say that they would endorse a candidate if they could, with 28% of those not endorsing saying they would if they could, compared with 15% or fewer of white evangelical, Catholic, and white mainline Protestant churches who do not already endorse candidates saying they would do so if tax laws changed.

From another perspective, a remarkable 45% of key informants who described their congregations as politically liberal also said they thought their congregations would publicly support or oppose political candidates if doing so would not put their tax status at risk. Only 11% of politically conservative congregations and 15% of congregations described as politically right in the middle said this. Overall, it seems that changing tax law to permit congregations to endorse candidates without

putting their tax status at risk would indeed generate more public partisan political activity by congregations, but it would increase that activity more on the political left than on the political right.

There are other important differences between religious groups in both the extent and character of their congregations' political involvement. Black Protestant and Catholic congregations were the most likely to be politically active, in the sense of reporting at least one type of political activity in 2018-19 (82% and 81% respectively). Mainline and evangelical Protestant congregations were less likely to engage in any political activities (52% and 43%, respectively). Although there are too few Jewish synagogues in the NCS sample to have confidence in specific numbers, there are enough in the sample to say that synagogues' level of political involvement is about as high as it is for Black Protestant and Catholic churches.

Congregational participation in political activities, by religious tradition, 2018–19.



One in five congregations would endorse a political candidate publicly if relevant tax laws were changed.

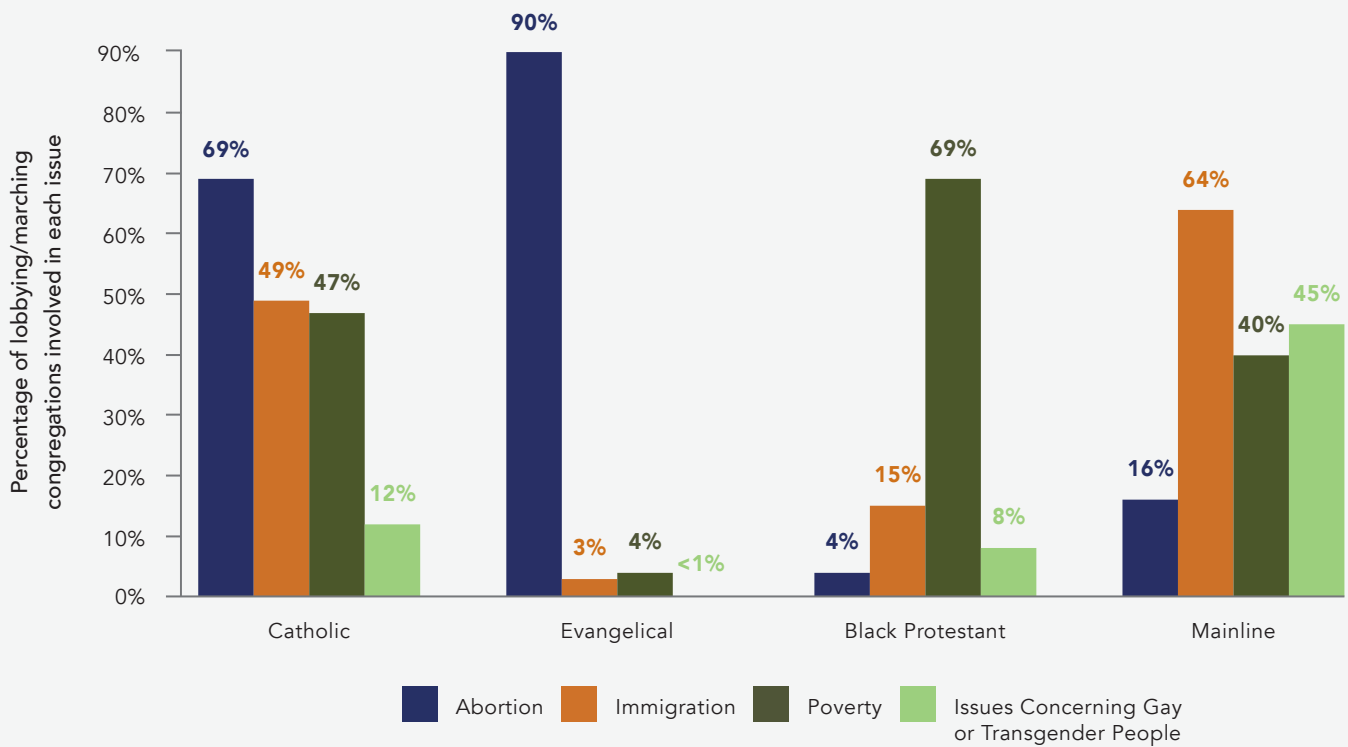
Congregations within different religious groups tend to favor some types of political activity more than others. Roman Catholic churches especially stand out when it comes to participating in demonstrations or marches and lobbying elected officials. Black Protestant congregations are particularly likely to participate in electoral politics, hosting more political candidates and government officials as speakers than other groups, and registering voters and distributing voter guides much more than other traditions. Mainline and evangelical Protestants engage in politics less often than Catholics and Black Protestants, but when they do, mainline churches are most likely to alert their people about opportunities for political involvement (for example, encouraging people to participate in an upcoming political meeting or event), and evangelical churches are most likely to distribute voter guides. None of these political activities are completely monopolized by a single religious tradition, but clear modalities are present.

What issues do politically active congregations address? The 2018-19 NCS asked congregations that lobbied elected officials or participated in a demonstration or march if they lobbied or marched about four of the most commonly mentioned issues in past NCS surveys: poverty, immigration, abortion, and the rights of gay, lesbian, or transgender people. The results are informative. When congregations lobbied or

marched in 2018-19, they were most likely to do so concerning poverty or economic inequality (48% of congregations that marched or lobbied) or immigration (39%). Congregations that lobbied or marched were less likely to do so concerning abortion (28%) or gay rights (18%). Remember that these numbers are a percentage of the 21% of congregations that lobbied or marched about something. Calculated as a percentage of all congregations, only 10% lobbied or marched about poverty and only 4% about issues concerning gay, lesbian, or transgender people.

Religious groups tended to focus on different issues when they lobbied or marched. For example, while 90% of lobbying or marching evangelical Protestant congregations did so concerning abortion, fewer than 5% of lobbying or marching Evangelical congregations did so about poverty, immigration, or issues concerning gay, lesbian, or transgender people. By contrast, Black Protestant congregations that lobbied or marched were much more focused on poverty issues (69% of congregations that lobbied or marched) than on any other issue. Like evangelical congregations, when Roman Catholic congregations lobbied or marched it was often around abortion (69% of congregations that lobbied or marched), but Catholics also often lobbied or marched about poverty (47%) and immigration (49% of congregations that lobbied or marched). Mainline Protestants also often lobbied or marched concerning immigration (64% of congregations that lobbied or marched), while close to half of those lobbying or marching did so concerning gay rights (45%) or poverty (40%).

Issues about which congregations lobbied government officials or joined marches and demonstrations in 2018–19, by religious tradition.



When congregations lobbied elected officials or participated in demonstrations or marches in 2018–19, the issues they most commonly engaged were poverty and immigration.

Congregation-based lobbying and demonstrating tends to be extremely one-sided. Although many churchgoing Americans are pro-choice, congregation-based activism about abortion is overwhelmingly on the pro-life side, with 84% of congregations that lobbied or marched concerning abortion advocating on the pro-life side. Although many churchgoing Americans believe in restricting immigrants' rights, congregation-based activism on immigration is almost entirely on the pro-immigrant side, with 97% of congregations that are active on this issue advocating in support of immigrants. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the extent to

which immigration issues were in the news in recent years, congregations were more likely to be politically active on immigration in 2018-19 than they were in 2012. In 2018-19, 8% of all congregations lobbied or marched in support of immigrants, up from 2% in 2012.

In 2012, congregational lobbying and marching for or against same-sex marriage was an exception to this one-sidedness, with congregations active on this issue about equally split between the two sides. This changed in 2018-19. Now, when congregations said that they lobbied or marched on issues related to gay, lesbian, or transgender people (i.e., a broader set of issues than just same-sex marriage), virtually all (91%) of the congregation-based activity on these issues was in support

of expanded rights for gay, lesbian, and transgender people. Religious opposition to more protection of gay and transgender people is well-known and well-publicized, and many churchgoing people oppose such enhanced protection. But, just as congregation-based political action on abortion is almost entirely on the pro-life side even though there are many pro-choice people in the pews, congregation-based political action on issues concerning gay and transgender people is now almost entirely on the side of supporting more rights for gay and transgender people even though there are many people in the pews who oppose expanding such rights. This is an important corrective to conventional wisdom about how religion and politics intersect on this issue.



Overall, it seems fair to say that, when congregations turn their attention to their surrounding communities, they focus more on serving the needy than trying to effect systemic change. And the most typical way in which congregations serve the needy outside their walls is by organizing small groups of volunteers to carry out well-defined tasks on a periodic basis. Congregations are very good at providing small groups of volunteers, and doing this over and over again, for a variety of specific purposes. This may be congregations' special niche in the complex web of extended families, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and informal social networks that constitute a community's social services system. Since delivering social services rarely, if ever, is a congregation's primary mission, and since congregation members are not immune to the time crunches created by family and work pressures faced by many Americans, it makes sense that this emerges as a particularly common way for congregations to serve their communities.



Inclusivity

The cultural and theological divide between theologically and politically liberal and conservative denominations and congregations is a well-established fact of American religion, with conservative congregations outnumbering liberal ones by a substantial margin. In 2018-19, leaders of 54% of congregations said that their congregations were theologically “more on the conservative side,” 34% said that their congregations were “right in the middle,” and only 12% said that their congregations were “more on the liberal side.” One in five (19%) said their congregations were extremely conservative; only one in twenty (5%) said they were extremely liberal.

One in five congregations said they were extremely conservative; only one in twenty said they were extremely liberal.

Looking beyond these self-descriptions to congregational practices, two of the clearest markers of being liberal or conservative are the extent to which women exercise formal public leadership, and whether or not individuals who identify as homosexual are welcome as members or leaders. Whether or not women and gay or lesbian individuals are ordained to full clergy status, and whether or not they can serve in lay leadership roles, are issues that often are settled at the denominational rather than the congregational level, at least for congregations affiliated with denominations. But there still is considerable variation among congregations in the norms and practices regarding lay leadership even within denominations that officially welcome or officially prohibit women and gay and lesbian people as lay leaders. In this section we describe some of this variation, and significant change over time, in congregations’ inclusion of women and homosexuals. Overall, there is a clear trend towards greater inclusiveness of both women and gay and lesbian people, albeit with substantial variation across religious groups.

Women and Congregational Leadership

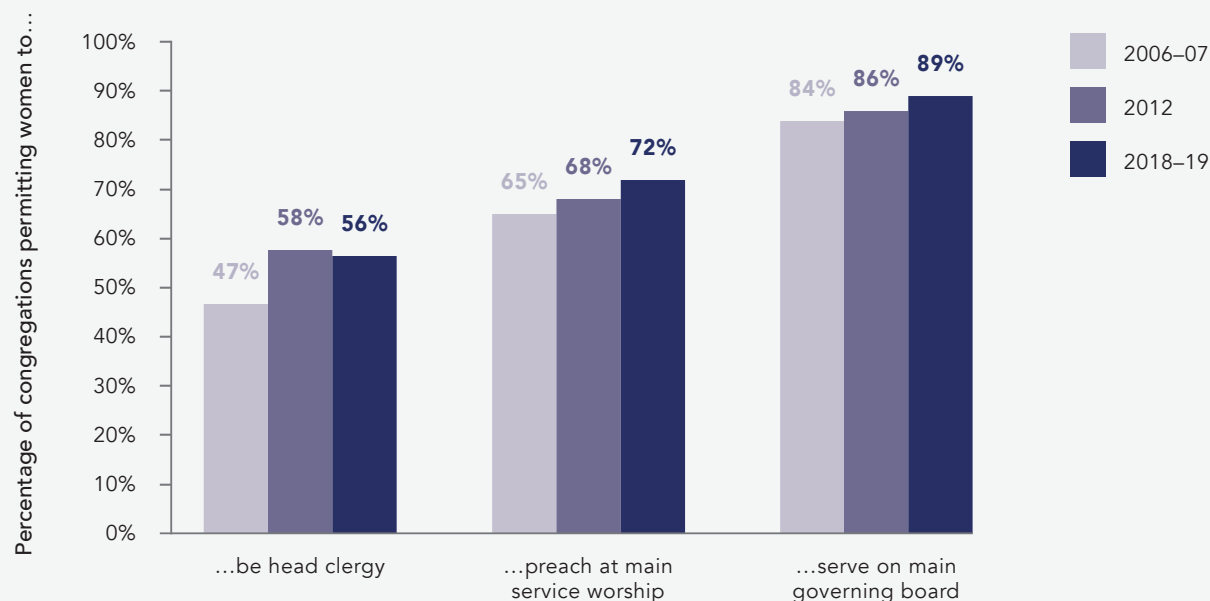
As we documented earlier in this report, women lead a slowly growing but still small minority of American congregations. At the same time, by asking congregations if a woman could serve as the head clergy person of their congregation, we see that acceptance in principle of female pastoral leaders is much more common than the presence of female pastoral leaders, and it has increased since 2006. In 2018-19, key informants reported that women could in principle be the sole or senior pastoral leader in 56% of congregations, up from 47% in 2006. This change mainly indicates increased acceptance of female leaders at the congregational level among Protestants but, at the same time, there are large differences among Protestants

in the acceptance of female head clergy.

Nearly all (95%) congregations within mainline denominations accept female leaders in principle, compared to 66% of Black Protestant churches and only 33% of white evangelical churches.

Unsurprisingly, congregations are more accepting of women exercising leadership in ways other than full pastoral status. In 2018-19, 72% of congregations allowed women to preach at a main worship service and 89% allowed women to serve on the congregation's governing body. The trend is towards greater inclusion of women in these lay leadership roles, although it may be that gender equality has extended about as far as it will go when it comes to serving on governing boards, with only about 10% of congregations disallowing women from those roles.

Increasing acceptance of female leadership.



Religious tradition differences in accepting women in lay leadership positions mainly mirror their differences in accepting women as head clergy. Nearly all predominantly white mainline Protestant congregations allow women to serve in any of these lay leadership capacities, and white evangelical Protestant churches are the most restrictive, with one in five (19%) prohibiting women from serving on a governing board and almost half (43%) prohibiting women from preaching at a main worship service. Black Protestant churches approach mainline churches in their levels of gender inclusiveness for lay leadership. The Catholic pattern stands out because most Catholic parishes welcome women as lay leaders (with 74% allowing women to serve on the governing board of the congregation) while universally excluding women from the priesthood and almost universally from preaching.

Acceptance of Gays and Lesbians

Increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians is of course one of the most well-known public opinion shifts in recent years. This change also is happening at a remarkably fast pace within religious congregations. Since 2006, the NCS has asked whether or not an openly gay or lesbian couple in a committed relationship would be permitted to be full-fledged members of the congregation, and whether or not such people would be permitted to hold all volunteer leadership positions open to other members. In just the relatively short time span from 2006 to 2018-19, the number of congregations whose leaders said that gays and lesbians could be full-fledged members increased from 37% to 54%. The number of congregations whose leaders said that no volunteer leadership positions were

closed to gays and lesbians increased from 18% to 30%. In 2018-19, 16% of congregations said they would allow a wedding of two people of the same sex to take place in their building.

Like with female leaders, these aggregate statistics hide major differences across religious groups in their acceptance of gays and lesbians. For example, while every religious tradition has shown increases between 2006 and 2018-19 in their acceptance of gays and lesbians as full-fledged members of their congregation, Catholic parishes are less likely to express acceptance of gay and lesbian lay leaders in 2018-19 (26%) than they were in 2006 (39%). This decline may reflect a backlash among some Catholic Church leaders against the legalization of gay marriage, a backlash evident in well-publicized instances of long-term teachers in Catholic schools losing their jobs, and long-term members denied communion, after marrying a same-sex partner. This result should not be interpreted as declining acceptance of gay and lesbian members and volunteer leaders among the Catholic rank and file, who, in line with national public opinion trends, have become more accepting of homosexuality.

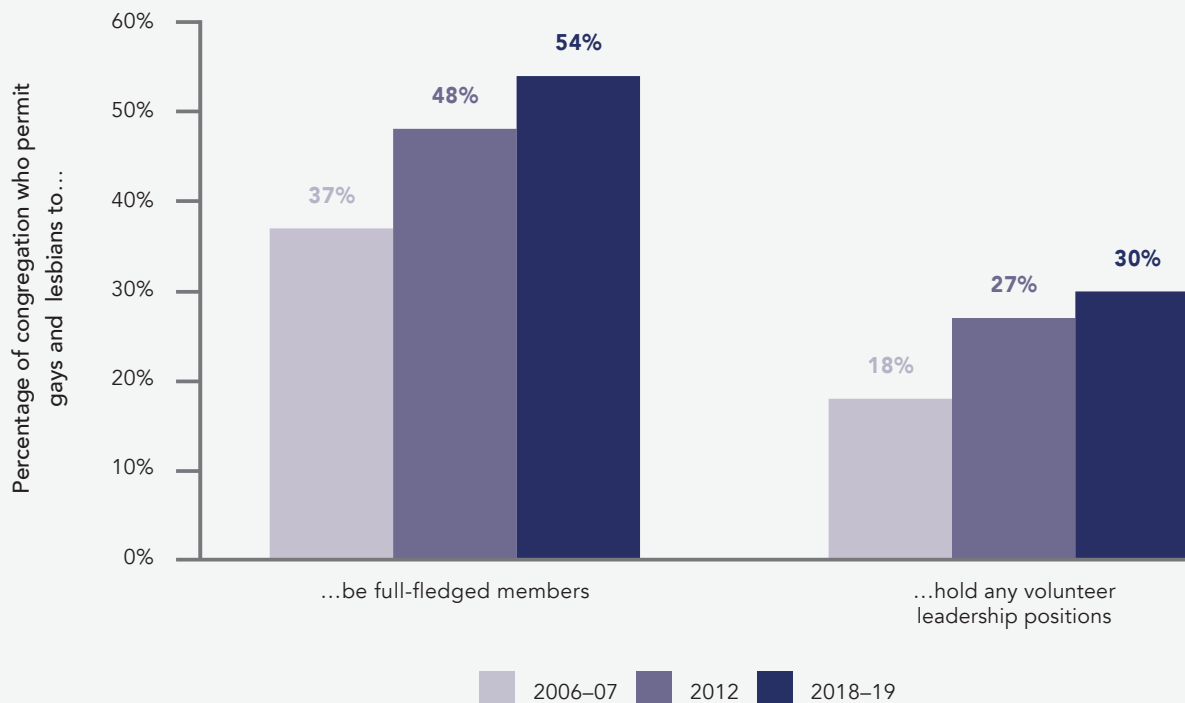
Predominantly white evangelical Protestant churches are the least likely to accept gays and lesbians as full-fledged members, with 23% saying so in 2018-19. There may be greater acceptance of gay members among evangelical churches (up from 16% in 2006, an increase that is not statistically significant), but there is not even a hint of increased acceptance of gay and lesbian lay leaders. In 2018-19, only 5% of these churches said that gay and lesbian people in a committed relationship could hold any volunteer leadership positions open to others.

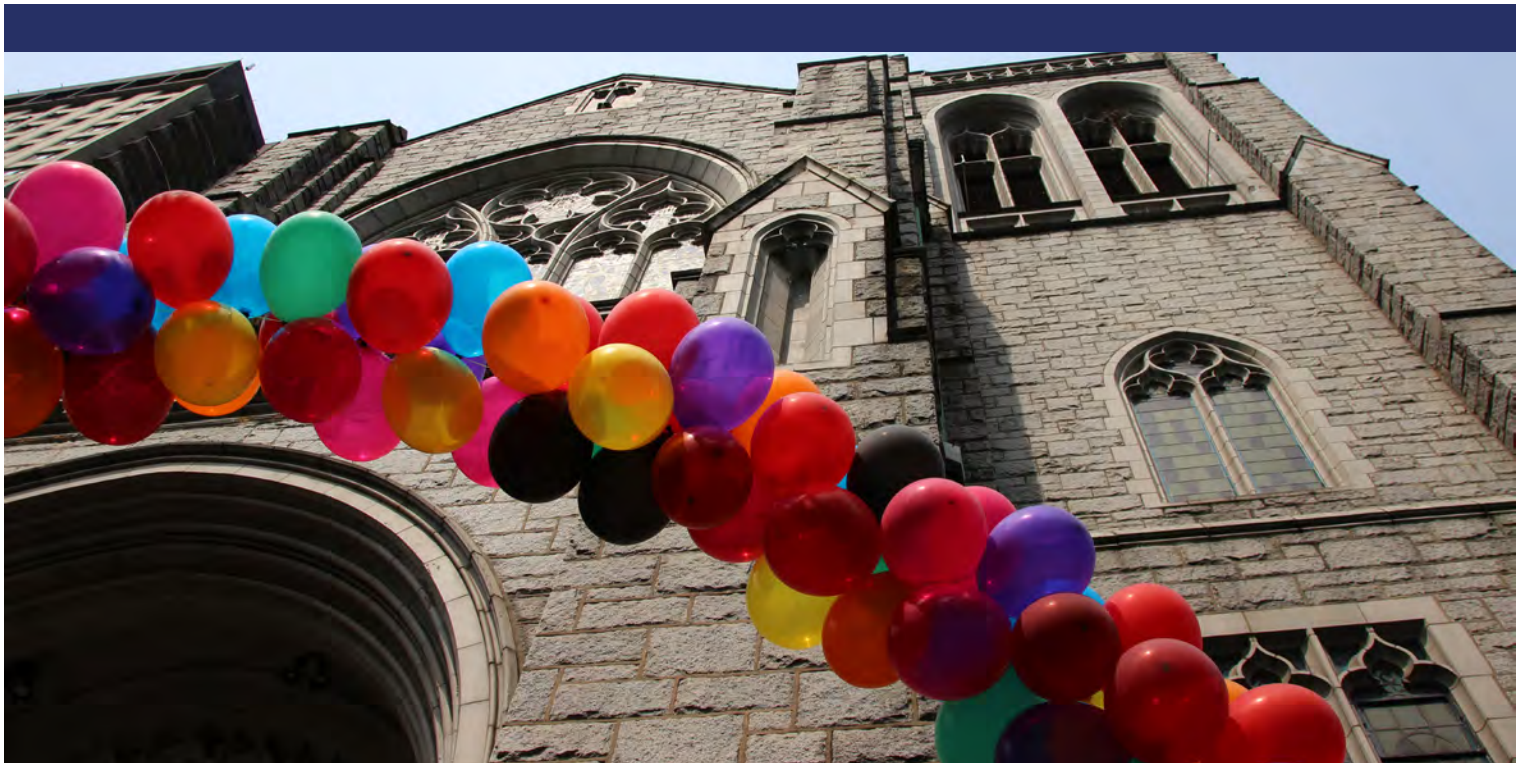
Substantially more predominantly white mainline and Black Protestant churches accept gay and lesbian leaders today than did so in 2006. The number of mainline Protestant churches accepting gays and lesbians as full-fledged members increased from 67% in 2006 to 82% in 2018-19. Black Protestant acceptance of gay and lesbian members increased from 44% to 61%. Similarly, gays and lesbians are more commonly accepted now as volunteer leaders in both these types of congregations than they were in 2006. The acceptance rate increased from 54% in 2006 to 69% in 2018-19 among predominantly white mainline Protestant churches, and it increased from 7% to 22% among Black Protestant

churches. Interestingly, the bulk of these changes occurred between 2006 and 2012, with very little additional movement after that.

Congregational acceptance of gays and lesbians as members and lay leaders has increased substantially in recent years, but acceptance levels vary widely across religious traditions.

Increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians.





The religious differences are especially pronounced when it comes to allowing same-sex weddings in a congregation's building. Two of five (42%) predominantly white mainline Protestant churches said in 2018-19 that they would allow this, while only 5% of Black Protestant churches, and virtually no predominantly white evangelical or Catholic churches said they would allow it.

As usual, there are not enough synagogues, mosques, or Hindu and Buddhist temples to be confident in exact numbers, but it appears that synagogues and Hindu and Buddhist temples are more like mainline Protestants in the levels at which they would allow same-sex marriages in their buildings, while mosques are more like evangelical Protestants and Catholics in disallowing it nearly (perhaps literally) universally.



None of this means that congregations that say they restrict homosexuals have no gay or lesbian 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 have no official restrictions are truly and fully inclusive and welcoming of all who come. There surely are congregations that consider themselves fully inclusive but in which a gay couple would not feel welcome or women would encounter obstacles to leadership. Mainline or evangelical, liberal or conservative, inclusive or exclusive—these labels may sometimes describe ideals more accurately than practices, and the gap between ideals and practices often is a large one. Still, there are real differences in practice, and together these practices and ideals constitute important lines of division within American religion and, more broadly, within American culture.

More Findings from the National Congregations Study

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

✧ **One quarter of congregations report that they teach the prosperity gospel.**

Twenty-five percent of congregations reported that they teach that God gives financial wealth and good physical health to those with enough faith. Remarkably, more than half (58%) of Black Protestant congregations and one in five (21%) predominantly white evangelical congregations report teaching the prosperity gospel, while only one in ten (11%) Catholic churches and virtually no (2%) predominantly white mainline Protestants teach this.

✧ **An increasing but still small minority of predominantly white congregations are explicitly addressing racial issues in their congregations.**

In 2018-19, 22% of predominantly white congregations held a group, meeting, class, or event in the last year to discuss race relations, up from 13% in 1998. In 2018-19, only 9% of predominantly white congregations held a group, meeting, class, or event to discuss issues specifically related to race and the police, and only 7% reported having an organized effort, designated person, or committee whose purpose was to increase racial or ethnic diversity in their congregation.

✧ **More congregations are focused on the environment.**

In 2018-19, one in five (18%) congregations held a group, meeting, class, or event in the last year to discuss issues related to the environment. That's a substantial increase from only 7% of congregations focusing on that issue in 1998. More generally, 15% of congregations in 2018-19 held a group, meeting, class, or event in the last year to discuss some sort of scientific issue or the relationship between science and religion.



✧ **Many congregations respond to natural disasters.**

Fifty-eight percent of congregations reported in 2018-19 that within the past two years they had participated in efforts to help people respond to or recover from a natural disaster such as an earthquake, flood, tornado or wildfire. When congregations respond to natural disasters, they mainly do so by raising or contributing money to support the relief effort, or by donating food, clothing, or furniture. Four of five (82%) congregations involved in disaster relief raised or contributed money; more than half (57%) donated food or other supplies. But some congregations participated more extensively in disaster relief. One quarter (27%) of involved congregations sent a team to the disaster area to help with clean-up or provide other sorts of assistance, and 7% of involved congregations provided temporary shelter or transitional housing for people affected by a disaster. Note that these are percentages of the 58% of congregations that are involved in disaster relief in some way. Examined more globally, 47% of all congregations raised or contributed money for disaster relief, 33% donated food, clothing, or furniture, 16% sent a team to a disaster area, and 4% provided shelter to people affected by a disaster.



Conclusion

Many people are familiar with at least one religious congregation—their own. But an important perspective is gained from seeing one's 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 context that makes it possible to answer these questions and others. We have highlighted some of the most interesting and important findings, but there are many more in the tables at the end of this report, and even more waiting to be discovered in the data. We hope you find something in this report that is informative, thought-provoking, or useful in the ongoing effort to better understand American religion.

LEARN MORE

Please visit our website where you can learn more about the NCS and conduct your own research using the survey data:

<https://sites.duke.edu/ncsweb>

Endnotes

- 1 In 1998, 1,234 congregations participated in the NCS. The numbers participating in successive NCS waves were 1,506 in 2006–07, 1,331 in 2012, and 1,262 in 2018–19, for a total of 5,333 congregations. Some congregations participated in more than one NCS wave, so the NCS contains information from 4,496 unique congregations.
- 2 We place predominantly Black Protestant congregations in the Black Protestant category whatever their denominational affiliation. So our Evangelical and Mainline categories contain only predominantly non-Black congregations.
- 3 David Eagle. 2016. "The Negative Relationship between Size and the Probability of Weekly Attendance in Churches in the United States." *Socius* 2:1–10.
- 4 Elaine McDuff. 2001. "The Gender Paradox in Work Satisfaction and the Protestant Clergy." *Sociology of Religion* 62:1–21.
- 5 Parts of this section are adapted from Kraig Beyerlein and Mark Chaves, 2020, "The Political Mobilization of America's Congregations," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59:663–674.

Appendix: Tables

This appendix contains four tables. Tables 1 and 2, “Continuity and Change in American Congregations,” facilitate comparisons over time, giving results for virtually all items asked in more than one NCS wave. Table 3, “2018–19 National Congregations Study Basic Findings,” gives results for almost every item on the Wave IV questionnaire and provides a simple overview of the 2018–19 data. Table 4, “Characteristics of Ministerial Staff, 2018-19,” provides information about the congregational labor force, taken as a whole.

Tables 1–3 contain two kinds of numbers: those from the congregations’ perspective and those from the attendees’ perspective. Both sets of numbers are meaningful, and they provide slightly different views of the average congregation. Look at the congregations’ perspective results if you want to know about the characteristics of the average congregation or the percent of congregations of a certain type. Look at the attendees’ perspective results 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.

A contrived example helps clarify the difference between these two perspectives. Suppose that the country 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 50% of the congregations support a food pantry (1/2), or we can say that 91% of people are in a congregation that supports a food pantry (1,000/1,100). Both of these are meaningful numbers. The first number views congregations from the perspective of the average congregation; the second views them from the perspective of the average attendee.

Here is another example using actual NCS data.

You might be interested in the percent of *congregations* that are led by women. Table 1 and the congregations’ perspective column in Table 3 both show that 13.8% of congregations in 2018-19 were led by a woman. On the other hand, you might be interested in the percent of *people* who attend congregations that are led by women. Table 2 and the attendees’ perspective column in Table 3 both show that, in 2018-19, 8.1% of worshippers were in congregations led by a woman. This percentage is smaller than the percentage of congregations led by a female clergy person because the congregations led by women tend to be smaller.

The tables include many endnotes. While some of these notes provide clarification on item wording or other issues across surveys, most indicate the subset of congregations for which a given number is calculated. It is important to pay close attention to these notes because the correct interpretation of these statistics depends on which congregations are included in the calculation. For example, Table 3 shows that 38.9% of congregations participated in 2018–19 in lobbying or marching activities related to immigration. However, note 23 tells us that this is not 38.9% of all congregations, but 38.9% of *congregations that participated in any lobbying or marching*. Only 8% of all congregations lobbied or marched about immigration (38.9% of the 20.6% who lobbied or marched). Thus, instead of concluding that more than one-third of American congregations have recently marched or lobbied about immigration, we conclude that only 1 in 12 congregations did this in 2018-19. Interpreting this percentage correctly requires knowing the subset of congregations to which it applies.

Table 1

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

This table provides statistics for many items contained in more than one NCS wave. The "Trend" column indicates whether there is a statistically significant linear trend on that item between the first and most recent times the item was included in the NCS.¹ An upwardly sloping arrow (↗) indicates that there is a statistically significant positive trend for that item, a downwardly sloping arrow (↘) indicates that there is a statistically significant negative trend, and "ns" (meaning "not significant") indicates that there is no statistically significant linear trend on that item. The statistical significance of trends was assessed using means even when only medians are reported.² "NA" indicates that a statistical assessment of a trend reported as a median was not applicable because we assessed it on a separately reported mean. Sometimes a mean trend is statistically significant even when the medians are unchanged.

These tables are based on slightly updated versions of the 1998, 2006–07, and 2012 datasets, so these numbers may not exactly match values produced from previously available datasets. Means and medians refer to the average congregation.³ Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic. Sample sizes are 1,234 in 1998, 1,506 in 2006–07, 1,331 in 2012, and 1,262 in 2018–19.

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| AGE AND SIZE | | | | | |
| Median founding date | 1938 | 1944 | 1954 | 1959 |  |
| Median congregation age (years) | 60 | 62 | 58 | 59 | ns |
| Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life⁴ | | | | | |
| Mean | 414 | 396 | 404 | 460 | ns |
| Median | 150 | 150 | 135 | 130 | NA |
| Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life | | | | | |
| Mean | 185 | 184 | 183 | 187 | ns |
| Median | 80 | 75 | 70 | 70 | NA |
| Number of adults regularly participating in the congregation's religious life | | | | | |
| Mean | 120 | 124 | 120 | 118 | ns |
| Median | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | NA |
| Number of adults regularly participating in the congregation's religious life two years ago | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | -- | 126 | 145 | NA |
| Median | -- | -- | 50 | 50 | NA |
| Percent for whom the number of regularly participating adults in the last two years has: | | | | | |
| Increased | -- | 42.5 | 26.6 | 32.5 |  |
| Remained about the same | -- | 40.3 | 35.7 | 28.4 |  |
| Decreased | -- | 17.2 | 37.7 | 39.1 |  |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| RELIGIOUS TRADITION⁵ | | | | | |
| Roman Catholic | 7.3 | 6.0 | 5.5 | 6.1 | ns |
| Predominantly white evangelical/ conservative Protestant | 45.7 | 47.8 | 46.1 | 42.7 | ns |
| Predominantly white moderate/liberal Protestant | 26.3 | 19.7 | 20.4 | 20.9 | ns |
| Black Protestant | 15.8 | 23.4 | 21.4 | 21.3 | ns |
| Non-Christian | 4.9 | 3.1 | 6.7 | 9.0 | ↗ |
| Percent with no denominational affiliation | 18.1 | 20.4 | 23.5 | 18.0 | ns |
| BUILDING AND FINANCE | | | | | |
| Percent owning their own building | 87.6 | 89.7 | 84.6 | 84.2 | ns |
| Percent meeting in a: | | | | | |
| Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque | 87.3 | 92.7 | 88.9 | 89.3 | ns |
| School | 5.0 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 1.3 | ↘ |
| Other kind of building | 7.8 | 6.3 | 9.3 | 9.5 | ns |
| Percent whose building is used by other groups⁶ | 50.1 | -- | -- | 52.1 | ns |
| For those whose building is used by other groups, median number of outside groups using the building ⁷ | 3 | -- | -- | 4 | ↗ |
| Of those whose building is used by other groups, percent with another congregation using their building for worship services ⁸ | -- | -- | 9.7 | 7.9 | ns |
| Percent where other congregation is primarily recent immigrants to the U.S. ⁹ | -- | -- | 39.3 | 47.8 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|---|
| Percent with weekly worship services at more than one location¹⁰ | -- | -- | 3.4 | 10.6 |  |
| Percent with a formal written budget | 72.8 | 75.3 | 76.4 | 75.9 | ns |
| Median income in past year | \$60,000 | \$96,000 | \$95,000 | \$105,000 |  |
| Median income from two years ago | -- | -- | \$100,000 | \$100,000 | ns |
| Median income from individuals in past year | \$55,000 | \$85,000 | \$84,000 | \$100,000 |  |
| Median budget for past year | \$60,000 | \$94,000 | \$85,000 | \$100,000 |  |
| Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property¹¹ | 24.0 | 21.3 | 22.3 | 34.9 |  |
| Median amount of income from rental or sale of building or property in past year ¹² | \$1,500 | \$7,000 | \$5,000 | \$6,000 | ns |
| Percent giving money to denomination in the past year | 73.6 | 74.2 | 62.7 | 68.4 |  |
| Median amount given to denominations in past year ¹³ | \$5,000 | \$7,000 | \$7,500 | \$7,200 |  |
| Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund | 59.8 | 57.3 | 60.5 | 66.5 | ns |
| Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ¹⁴ | \$20,000 | \$30,000 | \$33,000 | \$50,000 |  |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|--------------------|-------|
| LEADERSHIP | | | | | |
| Percent with a head clergy person or leader | 92.3 | 95.0 | 94.2 | 93.8 | ns |
| Percent with full-time head clergy person or leader¹⁵ | -- | 63.2 | 71.4 | 70.1 | ↗ |
| Percent with female head clergy person or leader | 10.6 | 7.9 | 11.4 | 13.8 ¹⁶ | ns |
| Percent with head clergy person born in the United States | -- | -- | 90.5 | 85.1 | ns |
| Percent with head clergy person or leader of each race or ethnicity | | | | | |
| White | 76.9 | 69.2 | 67.5 | 64.6 | ↘ |
| Black | 18.6 | 25.0 | 23.3 | 25.9 | ns |
| Hispanic | 1.8 | 1.9 | 5.7 | 5.2 | ↗ |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1.7 | 2.5 | 2.7 | 4.2 | ns |
| Other | 0.9 | 1.4 | 0.9 | 0.1 | ns |
| Median number of years senior clergy person in current position | 4.0 | 5.0 | 6.0 | 6.0 | ↗ |
| Median age of senior clergy person | 49 | 53 | 55 | 57 | ↗ |
| Percent for whom head clergy person has highest education level of: | | | | | |
| Less than a bachelor's degree | 28.1 | -- | 28.4 | 23.7 | ns |
| Bachelor's degree | 19.8 | -- | 22.9 | 20.9 | ns |
| Graduate degree | 52.2 | -- | 48.7 | 55.4 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with head clergy person having following characteristics: | | | | | |
| Graduated from seminary or theological school | -- | 61.9 | -- | 67.5 | ns |
| Currently attends seminary or theological school | -- | 4.8 | 7.0 | 6.4 | ns |
| Ordained to full clergy status | -- | 94.0 | 92.6 | -- | ns |
| Paid for work in congregation | -- | 80.7 | 86.3 | 81.3 | ns |
| Also serves another congregation | -- | 13.6 | 16.3 | 18.3 | ns |
| Also holds another job | -- | 37.0 | 34.3 | 35.0 | ns |
| Was a regular participant in the congregation before becoming the head clergy person | -- | 23.3 | -- | 26.9 | ns |
| PAID STAFF | | | | | |
| Percent with the following characteristics: | | | | | |
| No paid staff ¹⁷ | 23.0 | 13.5 | 16.1 | 14.3 | ↘ |
| No full-time staff | 39.7 | 34.6 | 35.9 | 37.2 | ns |
| One full-time staff person | 34.5 | 36.0 | 39.7 | 36.2 | ns |
| Two or more full-time staff people | 25.9 | 29.4 | 24.5 | 26.6 | ns |
| No full-time ministerial staff ¹⁸ | -- | 36.8 | 37.6 | 39.7 | ns |
| One full-time ministerial staff person | -- | 43.8 | 46.2 | 42.0 | ns |
| Two or more full-time ministerial staff people | -- | 19.5 | 16.2 | 18.4 | ns |
| No part-time staff | 41.6 | 34.5 | 36.2 | 32.6 | ↘ |
| One part-time staff person | 17.3 | 18.4 | 18.3 | 18.9 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Two or more part-time staff people | 41.1 | 47.1 | 45.4 | 48.5 | ns |
| No part-time ministerial staff | -- | -- | 56.0 | 49.4 | ns |
| One part-time ministerial staff person | -- | -- | 29.2 | 29.7 | ns |
| Two or more part-time ministerial staff people | -- | -- | 14.8 | 20.9 |  |
| Number of full-time paid staff¹⁹ | | | | | |
| Mean | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.8 | ns |
| Median | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | NA |
| Number of full-time paid ministerial staff | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | 1.1 | 1.0 | 1.1 | ns |
| Median | -- | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | NA |
| Number of part-time paid staff | | | | | |
| Mean | 2.2 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 2.5 | ns |
| Median | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | NA |
| Number of part-time paid ministerial staff | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | -- | 0.8 | 1.0 |  |
| Median | -- | -- | 0.0 | 1.0 | NA |
| Percent currently searching for a full-time staff person²⁰ | | | | | |
| | -- | 10.8 | -- | 9.7 | ns |
| Percent for whom the number of full-time paid staff in past year has: | | | | | |
| Increased | -- | 6.8 | 5.3 | 4.7 | ns |
| Stayed the same | -- | 86.9 | 90.9 | 90.6 | ns |
| Decreased | -- | 6.3 | 3.8 | 4.7 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with youth minister²¹ | -- | 55.6 | 54.9 | -- | ns |
| WORSHIP | | | | | |
| Percent with one service in typical week | 26.6 | 28.5 | 38.1 | 38.3 | ↗ |
| Percent with two or more services in typical week | 72.8 | 71.4 | 61.9 | 60.5 | ↘ |
| Percent reporting important differences between services on typical weekend²² | -- | 47.9 | 30.3 | 36.2 | ↘ |
| Important differences consisted of:²³ | | | | | |
| Level of formality | -- | -- | 69.3 | 71.4 | ns |
| Language(s) used | -- | -- | 10.5 | 12.0 | ns |
| Kind of music | -- | -- | 46.3 | 54.9 | ns |
| Percent participating in a joint worship service with another congregation | 66.7 | 69.4 | -- | 62.6 | ns |
| Percent participating in a joint worship service with a congregation with a different racial or ethnic make-up | 28.3 | 28.8 | -- | 31.4 | ns |
| Median length of most recent main service (minutes) | 75 | 75 | 75 | 80 | ns |
| Median length of most recent sermon (minutes) | 25 | 30 | 30 | 30 | ns |
| Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | ns |
| Median number of socializing minutes before/after typical service | 30 | 30 | 30 | -- | ns |
| Median attendance at most recent main service | 70 | 65 | 60 | 60 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE










| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Median total attendance (adults and children) at all services during the past weekend | -- | 90 | 76 | 70 | ns |
| Median number of regularly participating adults attending more than one service in past week²⁴ | 15 | 25 | 25 | -- |  |
| Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic: | | | | | |
| Sermon or speech | 95.3 | 95.3 | 96.5 | 96.2 | ns |
| Speaker came down from the chancel during sermon | -- | 50.6 | 48.6 | -- | ns |
| Singing by congregation | 96.8 | 97.2 | 96.4 | 96.3 | ns |
| Singing by choir ²⁵ | 53.9 | 44.1 | 45.3 | 41.9 |  |
| Time to greet one another | 78.4 | 80.7 | 81.4 | 79.3 | ns |
| Congregants joining hands | -- | 34.0 | 40.3 | -- | ns |
| Leader wearing robe or special garments | -- | 32.1 | 30.2 | 38.7 | ns |
| People saying "amen" | 60.7 | 70.7 | 66.7 | 69.0 | ns |
| Applause | 54.6 | 61.3 | 65.3 | 58.5 | ns |
| Adults jump, shout, or dance spontaneously | 19.2 | 25.8 | 26.5 | 27.9 |  |
| Raise hands in praise | 44.6 | 56.7 | 59.4 | 62.7 |  |
| Written order of service | 72.0 | 67.8 | 62.2 | 66.0 |  |
| Visual projection equipment | 11.9 | 26.5 | 35.3 | 46.0 |  |
| Projected song lyrics | -- | -- | 31.5 | 42.1 |  |
| Organ used | 53.0 | -- | 42.0 | 46.8 |  |
| Drums used | 19.9 | 32.5 | 34.3 | 40.8 |  |
| Guitar used | -- | 33.5 | 29.3 | 35.3 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with the following in any worship in past year: | | | | | |
| Speaking in tongues ²⁶ | 24.0 | 27.0 | 30.0 | 29.4 | ns |
| People told of opportunities for political activity | 26.2 | 21.4 | 14.5 | 15.6 | ↘ |
| People told of opportunities for volunteer activity | -- | 93.6 | 91.8 | -- | ns |
| Time for people other than leaders to testify | 77.6 | 85.0 | 84.9 | -- | ↗ |
| Percent with Spanish or bilingual services | -- | 6.3 | 8.8 | 10.0 | ↗ |
| DOCTRINE & CULTURE | | | | | |
| Percent encouraging use of NIV Bible rather than other translations²⁷ | 20.8 | -- | 21.2 | -- | ns |
| Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant²⁸ | 76.2 | 82.6 | 83.7 | 82.3 | ↗ |
| Percent saying their congregation would be considered politically: | | | | | |
| More on the conservative side | 62.0 | 58.1 | 54.9 | 45.8 | ↘ |
| Right in the middle | 30.6 | 34.6 | 33.7 | 39.1 | ↗ |
| More on the liberal side | 7.4 | 7.4 | 11.5 | 15.1 | ↗ |
| Percent saying their congregation would be considered theologically: | | | | | |
| More on the conservative side | 59.8 | 62.8 | 62.8 | 54.1 | ns |
| Right in the middle | 29.9 | 29.5 | 25.0 | 33.9 | ns |
| More on the liberal side | 10.3 | 7.7 | 12.2 | 12.0 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| GROUPS & SPEAKERS | | | | | |
| Percent with a group or event in the past year focused on the following: | | | | | |
| Discussing politics | 6.4 | 6.3 | 5.8 | 10.6 | ↗ |
| Voter registration | 8.3 | 17.8 | 11.1 | 22.9 | ↗ |
| Getting out the vote during an election | -- | 22.8 | 19.8 | 26.5 | ns |
| English as a second language | 3.6 | 5.8 | 4.8 | 4.8 | ns |
| Offering services for immigrants ²⁹ | -- | -- | 9.5 | 14.3 | ↗ |
| Receiving/practicing gifts of the spirit | 13.2 | 11.4 | 17.0 | 16.4 | ns |
| Training new teachers | 38.0 | 39.4 | 41.3 | -- | ns |
| Discussing/learning about another religion | 20.3 | 25.2 | 25.9 | 24.7 | ns |
| Discussing/learning about managing personal finances | 21.9 | -- | 30.6 | 32.6 | ↗ |
| Discussing management of congregation's money | 46.9 | -- | 66.2 | -- | ↗ |
| Assessing community needs | 36.9 | 48.4 | 56.7 | 54.0 | ↗ |
| Support for people living with HIV or AIDS | -- | -- | 7.5 | 13.9 | ↗ |
| Helping people who are unemployed find or train for a job | -- | -- | 34.9 | 26.6 | ↘ |
| Support for people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse | -- | -- | 37.6 | 42.8 | ns |
| Support for people with mental illness | -- | -- | 23.0 | 26.2 | ns |
| Support for military veterans and their families | -- | -- | 27.3 | 29.0 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE








| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Volunteer/service project with people from another faith | -- | 34.8 | 51.5 | 48.2 |  |
| Strategic planning and future goals of congregation | -- | 82.4 | 86.1 | -- | ns |
| Exercising or promoting physical activity | -- | -- | 29.1 | 36.2 |  |
| Traveling in U.S. to assist people in need | -- | 30.9 | 34.2 | 25.3 | ns |
| Traveling abroad to assist people in need | -- | 25.2 | 27.3 | 27.5 | ns |
| Discussing issues related to the environment | 7.4 | -- | -- | 17.6 |  |
| Discussing issues related to race and race relations | 16.3 | -- | -- | 28.8 |  |
| Percent with organized effort to help members of congregation | -- | 80.8 | 80.0 | -- | ns |
| Percent with organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs | -- | 22.0 | 28.1 | -- |  |
| Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year | 83.2 | 81.4 | 78.6 | 76.4 |  |
| Speaker was: ³⁰ | | | | | |
| Elected government official | 8.0 | 10.1 | 6.6 | 8.9 | ns |
| Denominational representative | 62.4 | 68.6 | 71.4 | 57.0 | ns |
| Representative of social service organization | 26.7 | 37.6 | 39.9 | 37.1 |  |
| Someone running for office | 5.5 | 6.8 | 6.7 | 8.5 | ns |
| Percent with members serving on denominational committees in past year | -- | 66.1 | 62.8 | -- | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| POLITICAL ACTIVITIES | | | | | |
| Percent distributing voter guides³¹ | 17.0 | 17.2 | 12.9 | 24.0 | ns |
| Group met in past year to lobby an elected official | 4.4 | 7.9 | 6.6 | 9.8 | ↗ |
| Group met in past year to participate in demonstration or march | 9.2 | 8.3 | 12.5 | 17.3 | ↗ |
| Lobbying/marching was related to: ³² | | | | | |
| Immigration | -- | -- | 13.0 | 38.9 | ↗ |
| Abortion | -- | -- | 33.3 | 28.0 | ns |
| Poverty | -- | -- | 37.4 | -- | NA |
| Poverty or economic inequality | -- | -- | -- | 48.2 | NA |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | | | | |
| Percent who applied in past two years for a government grant | -- | 3.6 | 4.9 | 4.0 | ns |
| Percent who have started a separate non-profit organization in past two years for human services or outreach ministries | -- | 6.1 | 8.9 | 7.2 | ns |
| Percent participating in any social service programs in past year | -- | 80.8 | 83.1 | 79.6 | ns |
| Number of projects or programs ³³ | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | -- | 5.7 | 5.0 | ns |
| Median | -- | -- | 3 | 3 | NA |
| Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year | -- | \$1,400 | \$1,500 | \$2,640 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects | -- | 13.6 | 16.9 | 19.1 | ns |
| Percent with outside funding support for social service programs | -- | 13.3 | 10.8 | 14.7 | ns |
| Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government | -- | 5.0 | 1.9 | 3.2 | ns |
| SOCIAL COMPOSITION | | | | | |
| Median percent of regular adult participants: | | | | | |
| Who are female | 60.0 | 60.0 | 60.0 | 60.0 | ns |
| With a four-year college degree or higher education | 15.4 | 20.0 | 25.0 | 30.4 | ↗ |
| Over 60 years old | 25.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 40.0 | ↗ |
| Under 35 years old | 25.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | ↘ |
| Who live more than a 30-minute drive from meeting place | 5.0 | 5.0 | 5.0 | -- | ns |
| With household income under \$25,000/year | 30.0 | 20.0 | -- | -- | ↘ |
| With household income under \$35,000/year | -- | -- | 30.0 | 20.0 | ↘ |
| With household income higher than \$100,000/year | 0.0 | 2.0 | -- | -- | ↗ |
| With household income higher than \$140,000/year | -- | -- | 1.0 | 5.0 | ↗ |
| Living in households with two parents and at least one child | 40.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 | ↘ |
| Serving in leadership role in past year | 33.3 | 30.0 | 28.6 | 30.0 | ↘ |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE






| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Percent with regular adult participant composition: | | | | | |
| At least 80% white and non-Hispanic | 71.2 | 62.6 | 57.1 | 53.4 |  |
| At least 80% Black | 17.0 | 23.8 | 21.2 | 21.6 | ns |
| More than 0% Hispanic | 33.3 | 35.7 | 37.6 | 51.0 |  |
| At least 80% Hispanic | 1.4 | 2.2 | 6.0 | 5.0 |  |
| More than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander | 18.2 | 22.6 | 23.9 | 31.2 |  |
| More than 0% American Indian | -- | 11.1 | 11.2 | -- | ns |
| More than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years | 17.9 | 20.4 | 18.4 | 27.7 |  |
| Number of regularly participating teenagers | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | 19.9 | 22.3 | 17.5 | ns |
| Median | -- | 10.0 | 8.0 | 8.0 | ns |
| MEMBERS & LAY LEADERS | | | | | |
| Percent allowing someone who drinks alcohol in moderation to: | | | | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | -- | 71.7 | -- | 84.7 |  |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | -- | 52.6 | -- | 64.5 |  |
| Percent allowing an unmarried couple who live together to: | | | | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | -- | 53.7 | -- | 68.4 |  |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | -- | 27.6 | -- | 39.8 |  |
| Percent allowing openly gay or lesbian couple in committed relationship to: | | | | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | -- | 37.4 | 48.0 | 53.7 |  |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE



| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | -- | 17.8 | 26.5 | 29.8 |  |
| Percent allowing women to: | | | | | |
| Hold all volunteer leadership positions that men can hold | -- | 73.7 | 79.3 | -- | ns |
| Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body | -- | 84.0 | 86.4 | 88.8 | ns |
| Teach by themselves a class with adult men in it | -- | 83.7 | 85.7 | -- | ns |
| Preach at a main worship service | -- | 65.3 | 67.8 | 71.8 | ns |
| Be head clergyperson or primary religious leader | -- | 46.8 | 57.7 | 56.4 |  |
| GEOGRAPHY | | | | | |
| Percent in each region³⁴ | | | | | |
| Northeast and Mid-Atlantic | 12.7 | 12.9 | 12.1 | 13.1 | ns |
| East North Central and West North Central | 20.1 | 25.0 | 23.2 | 23.8 | ns |
| South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central | 48.8 | 47.7 | 50.5 | 46.4 | ns |
| Mountain and Pacific | 18.4 | 14.4 | 14.1 | 16.8 | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line | 11.8 | 14.1 | 17.1 | 15.3 | ns |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics | 25.4 | 28.2 | 50.2 | 59.6 | ↗ |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans | 3.7 | 5.2 | 2.8 | 3.9 | ns |
| Percent in predominantly urban census tracts | 41.8 | 44.1 | 50.2 | 59.8 | ↗ |
| Percent in predominantly rural census tracts | 43.4 | 32.6 | 31.7 | 24.7 | ↘ |
| OTHER | | | | | |
| Percent with an elementary or high school | 6.1 | 4.7 | 5.6 | 3.7 | ↘ |
| Percent with a website | 17.1 | 44.3 | 55.7 | 71.6 | ↗ |
| Percent with a Facebook page | -- | -- | 40.1 | 72.5 | ↗ |
| Percent affiliated with nationally recognized community organizing group, organization, or network | -- | -- | 25.5 | 18.9 | ns |
| Percent with a member publicly acknowledging HIV infection | -- | 4.4 | 7.3 | -- | ns |

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

Notes

- 1 Trends were assessed by regressing each item on survey year. Ordinary least squares regression was used for continuous variables; logistic regression was used for binary variables. A statistically significant trend means that the coefficient associated with survey year was different from zero at least at the .05 alpha-level.
- 2 The value of the weighted median is the first observed value which is greater than 50% of the weighted data. Other methods for calculating the weighted median may yield slightly different results for some variables.
- 3 To get results that represent the average congregation, data are weighted to discount the fact that larger congregations are more likely to be included in the NCS sample. Weights also take into account other relevant characteristics of the survey. The weighting variable used for this table is called WT_ALL4_CONG_DUP in the publicly available dataset. For more information on weights, see the detailed documentation of NCS weights available at <https://sites.duke.edu/ncsweb/files/2020/10/WeightsDocument.pdf>.
- 4 One extreme outlying observation in 2012 has been removed from this and the following two size variables.
- 5 The largest denominations in the predominantly white moderate/liberal category are the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Unitarian Universalist Association. The largest denominations in the predominantly white evangelical/conservative category are the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh Day Adventists, Churches of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Evangelical Free Church, Baptist General Conference, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed Church, Freewill Baptist, Church of God (Anderson), and Church of the Foursquare Gospel. The Black Protestant category includes all predominantly Black Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. The largest denominations in this category are the National Baptist Convention, USA, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Missionary Baptist, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. 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. Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation, so the categories in the Religious Tradition section sum to more than 100% when including those with no denominational affiliation.
- 6 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building.
- 7 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building and report other groups using their building.
- 8 Calculated only for those congregations that owned their own building. In 2018-19, this question was only asked of congregations that also indicated other groups used their building.
- 9 Calculated only for those congregations that reported another congregation used their building for worship services.
- 10 The 2018-19 NCS included two different indicators of being a multisite congregation. The first measure (called MULTISITE_1 in the cumulative dataset) is comparable to the question in the 2012 NCS and codes congregations as multisite if they report having multiple locations. The second measure (called MULTISITE_2 in the cumulative dataset) is only available in the 2018-19 NCS. MULTISITE_2 addresses likely over-reporting of multisite status by only including congregations that confirm in a follow-up question that not all of their religious services take place on the same campus. In order to make comparisons between years, the values shown here are from MULTISITE_1. Note that the proportion of congregations that are multisite here is likely an over-estimate. See Table 3 for the percentage of multisite congregations produced by MULTISITE_2.
- 11 In 1998 and 2006, this question asked about both rental and sale income, but in 2012 and 2018-19 it asked only about rental income.
- 12 Calculated only for those congregations that earned rental or sale income from property in past year.
- 13 Calculated only for those congregations that gave any money to their denominations.
- 14 Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.

TABLE 1. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE

- 15 This and all following head clergy person characteristics are calculated only for those congregations that have a head clergy person. Details about co-leaders were gathered for the first time in 2018-19. In congregations with co-leaders, and with the exception of gender, the 2018-19 statistics about leader characteristics reflect the characteristics of the first leader reported. See the next note for details about clergy gender.
- 16 Details about co-leaders were gathered for the first time in 2018-19. In 2018-19, a congregation with co-leaders is considered to have a female leader if any of its co-leaders is female. That means that the reported 2018-19 percentage of congregations led by women (13.8%) is not exactly comparable to the percentages in earlier NCS waves, which did not consider co-leaders. But the difference is very small. If only the gender of the first co-leader mentioned in 2018-19 is considered, 13.5% of congregations in 2018-19 were led by women.
- 17 Although respondents were asked in all waves how many people work in the congregation as paid staff, in 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19 the question was prefaced with "including you" (if the respondent was an employee), and interviewers were trained in 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-2019 to probe to make sure that informants included themselves. We believe this difference is behind the initial decrease in the percent of congregations with no paid staff.
- 18 Ministerial staff members are those primarily engaged in religious work, that is, not secretaries or custodians.
- 19 One congregation with extreme values on staff variables in 2012 was removed from this analysis and other calculations of mean and median staff members per congregation.
- 20 In 2006-07, the question asked if the congregation was searching for a full-time staff person of any sort. In 2018-19, the question asked if the congregation was searching for a full-time ministerial staff person.
- 21 Congregations were asked if they have a youth minister or other leader specially designated to coordinate activities for youth. The question did not specify that the youth minister had to be paid.
- 22 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 23 The following items related to important differences in worship services were only calculated for those congregations that report important differences in their worship services.
- 24 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 25 Choirs often take the summer off, and some NCS waves included more summer interviews than others. The decline in choir singing at the main worship service remains statistically significant even when July and August NCS interviews are ignored. The choir-singing percentages when summer months are excluded are 54.4, 49.7, 42.8, and 46.2 for NCS Waves I thru IV, respectively.
- 26 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 27 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 28 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 29 In 2018-19, but not in 2012, this question included "English language instruction" as an example of a service for immigrants.
- 30 Calculated only for those congregations that hosted a visiting speaker in the past year.
- 31 In 1998, respondents were asked if their congregation had ever distributed voter guides. In 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides within the past two years.
- 32 Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials or demonstrated/marched.
- 33 This item and the following social service values are calculated only for those congregations that participated in social service programs or projects in the past year.
- 34 Northeast states are ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT. Mid-Atlantic states are NY, NJ, PA. East North Central states are OH, IN, IL, MI, WI. West North Central states are MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS. South Atlantic states are DE, MD, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL. East South Central states are KY, TN, AL, MS. West South Central states are AR, LA, OK, TX. Mountain states are MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV. Pacific states are WA, OR, CA, AK, HI.

Table 2

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

This table provides statistics for many items contained in more than one NCS wave. The "Trend" column indicates whether there is a statistically significant linear trend on that item between the first and most recent times the item was included in the NCS.¹ An upwardly sloping arrow (↗) indicates that there is a statistically significant positive trend for that item, a downwardly sloping arrow (↘) indicates that there is a statistically significant negative trend, and "ns" (meaning "not significant") indicates that there is no statistically significant linear trend on that item. The statistical significance of trends was assessed using means even when only medians are reported.² "NA" indicates that a statistical assessment of a trend reported as a median was not applicable because we assessed it on a separately reported mean. Sometimes a mean trend is statistically significant even when the medians are unchanged.

These tables are based on slightly updated versions of the 1998, 2006–07, and 2012 datasets, so these numbers may not exactly match values produced from previously available datasets. Means and medians refer to the congregation attended by the average religious service attendee.³ Percentages give the percentage of attendees in congregations with the stated characteristic. Sample sizes are 1,234 in 1998, 1,506 in 2006-07, 1,331 in 2012, and 1,262 in 2018-19.

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE






| | 1998 | 2006–07 | 2012 | 2018–19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| AGE AND SIZE | | | | | |
| Median founding date | 1924 | 1940 | 1945 | 1953 |  |
| Median congregation age (years) | 74 | 66 | 67 | 65 | ns |
| Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life⁴ | | | | | |
| Mean | 2558 | 2399 | 3278 | 3036 |  |
| Median | 750 | 700 | 800 | 650 | NA |
| Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life | | | | | |
| Mean | 1183 | 1167 | 1540 | 1373 |  |
| Median | 400 | 400 | 400 | 363 | NA |
| Number of adults regularly participating in the congregation's religious life | | | | | |
| Mean | 779 | 794 | 1068 | 948 |  |
| Median | 275 | 280 | 310 | 250 | NA |
| Number of adults regularly participating in the congregation's religious life two years ago | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | -- | 1024 | 1028 | ns |
| Median | -- | -- | 300 | 250 | NA |
| Percent for whom the number of regularly participating adults in the last two years has: | | | | | |
| Increased | -- | 49.2 | 36.5 | 34.9 |  |
| Remained about the same | -- | 36.2 | 34.0 | 32.3 | ns |
| Decreased | -- | 14.6 | 29.6 | 32.8 |  |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| RELIGIOUS TRADITION⁵ | | | | | |
| Roman Catholic | 28.8 | 27.9 | 27.7 | 26.7 | ns |
| Predominantly white evangelical/ conservative Protestant | 33.4 | 37.3 | 37.6 | 37.2 | ns |
| Predominantly white moderate/liberal Protestant | 24.0 | 20.0 | 17.2 | 18.2 | ↘ |
| Black Protestant | 10.5 | 11.4 | 12.9 | 12.3 | ns |
| Non-Christian | 3.4 | 3.3 | 4.7 | 5.7 | ↗ |
| Percent with no denominational affiliation | 10.4 | 14.0 | 15.0 | 14.6 | ↗ |
| BUILDING AND FINANCE | | | | | |
| Percent owning their own building | 94.9 | 94.9 | 92.6 | 90.9 | ns |
| Percent meeting in a: | | | | | |
| Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque | 92.9 | 97.3 | 95.7 | 94.3 | ns |
| School | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.0 | ↘ |
| Other kind of building | 3.8 | 2.0 | 3.3 | 4.7 | ns |
| Percent whose building is used by other groups⁶ | 71.0 | -- | -- | 66.4 | ↘ |
| For those whose building is used by other groups, median number of outside groups using the building ⁷ | 5 | -- | -- | 6 | ↗ |
| Of those whose building is used by other groups, percent with another congregation using their building for worship services ⁸ | -- | -- | 8.3 | 9.3 | ns |
| Percent where other congregation is primarily recent immigrants to the U.S. ⁹ | -- | -- | 51.9 | 47.2 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---|
| Percent with weekly worship services at more than one location¹⁰ | -- | -- | 10.3 | 17.0 |  |
| Percent with a formal written budget | 87.7 | 88.8 | 90.8 | 90.2 |  |
| Median income in past year | \$260,000 | \$380,000 | \$450,000 | \$470,000 |  |
| Median income from two years ago | -- | -- | \$450,000 | \$460,000 | ns |
| Median income from individuals in past year | \$230,000 | \$330,000 | \$400,000 | \$400,000 |  |
| Median budget for past year | \$250,000 | \$350,000 | \$450,000 | \$450,000 |  |
| Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property¹¹ | 38.2 | 30.6 | 35.2 | 42.6 |  |
| Median amount of income from rental or sale of building or property in past year ¹² | \$4,845 | \$9,000 | \$10,000 | \$9,000 | ns |
| Percent giving money to denomination in the past year | 82.8 | 80.2 | 74.8 | 77.5 |  |
| Median amount given to denominations in past year ¹³ | \$20,700 | \$25,000 | \$32,000 | \$36,000 |  |
| Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund | 73.9 | 73.3 | 77.2 | 75.9 | ns |
| Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ¹⁴ | \$70,000 | \$100,000 | \$150,000 | \$200,000 |  |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|-------------------|-------|
| LEADERSHIP | | | | | |
| Percent with a head clergy person or leader | 95.5 | 97.0 | 95.7 | 95.4 | ns |
| Percent with full-time head clergy person or leader ¹⁵ | -- | 87.0 | 89.9 | 88.3 | ns |
| Percent with female head clergy person or leader | 5.5 | 4.6 | 6.2 | 8.1 ¹⁶ | ↗ |
| Percent with head clergy person born in the United States | -- | -- | 88.0 | 84.4 | ↘ |
| Percent with head clergy person or leader of each race or ethnicity: | | | | | |
| White | 83.9 | 79.5 | 75.5 | 72.1 | ↘ |
| Black | 11.9 | 13.0 | 14.6 | 16.1 | ↗ |
| Hispanic | 2.1 | 3.3 | 6.0 | 6.9 | ↗ |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1.4 | 3.1 | 3.5 | 4.7 | ↗ |
| Other | 0.7 | 1.1 | 0.5 | 0.2 | ↘ |
| Median number of years senior clergy person in current position | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.0 | ↗ |
| Median age of senior clergy person | 51 | 54 | 55 | 55 | ↗ |
| Percent for whom head clergy person has highest education level of: | | | | | |
| Less than a bachelor's degree | 10.8 | -- | 13.0 | 11.6 | ns |
| Bachelor's degree | 15.0 | -- | 15.4 | 15.2 | ns |
| Graduate degree | 74.1 | -- | 71.6 | 73.2 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|--|
| Percent with head clergy person having following characteristics: | | | | | |
| Graduated from seminary or theological school | -- | 83.7 | -- | 79.8 |  |
| Currently attends seminary or theological school | -- | 2.2 | 7.6 | 2.9 | ns |
| Ordained to full clergy status | -- | 97.1 | 96.9 | -- | ns |
| Paid for work in congregation | -- | 92.5 | 94.3 | 91.6 | ns |
| Also serves another congregation | -- | 11.2 | 11.1 | 10.4 | ns |
| Also holds another job | -- | 17.4 | 17.7 | 18.8 | ns |
| Was a regular participant in the congregation before becoming the head clergy person | -- | 19.0 | -- | 23.5 |  |
| PAID STAFF | | | | | |
| Percent with the following characteristics: | | | | | |
| No paid staff ¹⁷ | 7.1 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.9 | ns |
| No full-time staff | 14.8 | 11.5 | 11.9 | 13.3 | ns |
| One full-time staff person | 20.4 | 22.6 | 21.5 | 21.9 | ns |
| Two or more full-time staff people | 64.8 | 65.9 | 66.6 | 64.8 | ns |
| No full-time ministerial staff ¹⁸ | -- | 12.6 | 13.0 | 14.6 | ns |
| One full-time ministerial staff person | -- | 32.9 | 31.9 | 31.8 | ns |
| Two or more full-time ministerial staff people | -- | 54.5 | 55.1 | 53.5 | ns |
| No part-time staff | 17.0 | 16.7 | 15.4 | 15.6 | ns |
| One part-time staff person | 10.0 | 9.7 | 10.1 | 10.3 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Two or more part-time staff people | 73.0 | 73.6 | 74.5 | 74.1 | ns |
| No part-time ministerial staff | -- | -- | 43.9 | 38.6 | ↘ |
| One part-time ministerial staff person | -- | -- | 23.0 | 22.1 | ns |
| Two or more part-time ministerial staff people | -- | -- | 33.1 | 39.3 | ↗ |
| Number of full-time paid staff¹⁹ | | | | | |
| Mean | 7.7 | 9.1 | 9.4 | 9.7 | ↗ |
| Median | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | NA |
| Number of full-time paid ministerial staff | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | 3.6 | 4.4 | 4.4 | ns |
| Median | -- | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 | NA |
| Number of part-time paid staff | | | | | |
| Mean | 5.9 | 5.8 | 7.4 | 7.5 | ↗ |
| Median | 3.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 | NA |
| Number of part-time paid ministerial staff | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | -- | 2.1 | 2.5 | ns |
| Median | -- | -- | 1.0 | 1.0 | NA |
| Percent currently searching for a full-time staff person²⁰ | | | | | |
| | -- | 16.6 | -- | 14.1 | ns |
| Percent for whom the number of full-time paid staff in past year has: | | | | | |
| Increased | -- | 17.5 | 14.2 | 15.4 | ns |
| Stayed the same | -- | 74.5 | 76.1 | 76.2 | ns |
| Decreased | -- | 7.9 | 9.7 | 8.4 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with youth minister²¹ | -- | 77.2 | 76.6 | -- | ns |
| WORSHIP | | | | | |
| Percent with one service in typical week | 14.3 | 14.5 | 17.8 | 19.2 | ↗ |
| Percent with two or more services in typical week | 85.6 | 85.3 | 82.2 | 80.6 | ↘ |
| Percent reporting important differences between services on typical weekend²² | -- | 50.1 | 42.3 | 39.2 | ↗ |
| Important differences consisted of: ²³ | | | | | |
| Level of formality | -- | -- | 57.4 | 59.7 | ns |
| Language(s) used | -- | -- | 35.2 | 30.1 | ns |
| Kind of music | -- | -- | 71.9 | 68.9 | ns |
| Percent participating in a joint worship service with another congregation | 66.5 | 56.3 | -- | 54.1 | ↘ |
| Percent participating in a joint worship service with a congregation with a different racial or ethnic make-up | 30.8 | 25.8 | -- | 31.2 | ns |
| Median length of most recent main service (minutes) | 70 | 70 | 70 | 70 | ns |
| Median length of most recent sermon (minutes) | 20 | 20 | 22 | 23 | ↗ |
| Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | ns |
| Median number of socializing minutes before/after typical service | 30 | 30 | 30 | -- | ns |
| Median attendance at most recent main service | 230 | 200 | 225 | 190 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Median total attendance (adults and children) at all services during the past weekend | -- | 350 | 400 | 300 | ns |
| Median number of regularly participating adults attending more than one service in past week²⁴ | 50 | 45 | 50 | -- | ns |
| Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic: | | | | | |
| Sermon or speech | 97.2 | 98.0 | 98.4 | 97.5 | ns |
| Speaker came down from the chancel during sermon | -- | 43.4 | 42.3 | -- | ns |
| Singing by congregation | 98.1 | 97.1 | 98.4 | 97.2 | ns |
| Singing by choir ²⁵ | 72.3 | 58.0 | 57.2 | 53.8 | ↘ |
| Time to greet one another | 84.6 | 86.7 | 88.2 | 81.4 | ns |
| Congregants joining hands | -- | 38.0 | 43.2 | -- | ↗ |
| Leader wearing robe or special garments | -- | 52.2 | 46.3 | 49.2 | ns |
| People saying "amen" | 52.8 | 60.4 | 59.5 | 64.7 | ↗ |
| Applause | 58.7 | 59.1 | 62.2 | 62.0 | ns |
| Adults jump, shout, or dance spontaneously | 13.1 | 17.3 | 22.1 | 20.9 | ↗ |
| Raise hands in praise | 48.1 | 55.2 | 59.0 | 62.3 | ↗ |
| Written order of service | 84.2 | 75.4 | 69.1 | 68.3 | ↘ |
| Visual projection equipment | 14.8 | 32.4 | 45.0 | 51.7 | ↗ |
| Projected song lyrics | -- | -- | 42.1 | 49.0 | ↗ |
| Organ | 70.1 | -- | 56.0 | 52.4 | ↘ |
| Drums | 25.1 | 36.4 | 45.5 | 49.1 | ↗ |
| Guitar | -- | 43.7 | 49.2 | 50.3 | ↗ |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with the following in any worship in past year: | | | | | |
| Speaking in tongues ²⁶ | 19.5 | 20.6 | 24.7 | 22.0 | ns |
| People told of opportunities for political activity | 36.8 | 29.5 | 24.3 | 19.7 | ↘ |
| People told of opportunities for volunteer activity | -- | 96.2 | 95.3 | -- | ns |
| Time for people other than leaders to testify | 72.1 | 78.7 | 74.4 | -- | ns |
| Percent with Spanish or bilingual services | -- | 16.3 | 19.4 | 20.5 | ↗ |
| DOCTRINE AND CULTURE | | | | | |
| Percent encouraging use of NIV Bible rather than other translations²⁷ | 21.9 | -- | 15.8 | -- | ↘ |
| Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant²⁸ | 63.0 | 70.7 | 71.8 | 75.7 | ↗ |
| Percent saying their congregation would be considered politically: | | | | | |
| More on the conservative side | 55.2 | 54.1 | 52.2 | 44.8 | ↘ |
| Right in the middle | 37.0 | 38.7 | 37.8 | 41.5 | ns |
| More on the liberal side | 7.8 | 7.2 | 10.0 | 13.8 | ↗ |
| Percent saying their congregation would be considered theologically: | | | | | |
| More on the conservative side | 52.7 | 57.8 | 59.0 | 53.4 | ns |
| Right in the middle | 37.6 | 33.4 | 28.8 | 35.2 | ns |
| More on the liberal side | 9.8 | 8.8 | 12.2 | 11.4 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|---|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| GROUPS AND SPEAKERS | | | | | |
| Percent with a group or event in the past year focused on the following: | | | | | |
| Discussing politics | 12.5 | 15.5 | 13.2 | 14.0 | ns |
| Voter registration | 12.4 | 27.3 | 23.4 | 27.0 | ↗ |
| Getting out the vote during an election | -- | 25.0 | 26.4 | 27.7 | ns |
| English as a second language | 9.0 | 14.2 | 15.5 | -- | ↗ |
| Offering services for immigrants ²⁹ | -- | -- | 22.9 | 27.3 | ↗ |
| Receiving/practicing gifts of the spirit | 19.9 | 16.1 | 19.6 | 19.7 | ns |
| Training new teachers | 67.6 | 65.1 | 69.1 | -- | ns |
| Discussing/learning about another religion | 29.8 | 37.4 | 37.8 | 30.2 | ns |
| Discussing/learning about managing personal finances | 33.1 | -- | 47.7 | 45.2 | ↗ |
| Discussing management of congregation's money | 55.6 | -- | 72.2 | -- | ↗ |
| Assessing community needs | 48.1 | 57.1 | 67.8 | 63.2 | ↗ |
| Support for people living with HIV or AIDS | -- | -- | 12.0 | 16.9 | ↗ |
| Helping people who are unemployed find or train for a job | -- | -- | 51.0 | 32.0 | ↘ |
| Support for people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse | -- | -- | 52.1 | 58.3 | ↗ |
| Support for people with mental illness | -- | -- | 31.4 | 37.1 | ↗ |
| Support for military veterans and their families | -- | -- | 40.2 | 37.8 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Volunteer/service project with people from another faith | -- | 51.9 | 65.5 | 59.6 | ↗ |
| Strategic planning and future goals of congregation | -- | 89.0 | 93.8 | -- | ↗ |
| Exercising or promoting physical activity | -- | -- | 47.7 | 48.1 | ns |
| Traveling in U.S. to assist people in need | -- | 49.8 | 44.7 | 42.0 | ↘ |
| Traveling abroad to assist people in need | -- | 42.2 | 41.8 | 42.0 | ns |
| Discussing issues related to the environment | 13.6 | -- | -- | 26.0 | ↗ |
| Discussing issues related to race and race relations | 22.2 | -- | -- | 36.0 | ↗ |
| Percent with organized effort to help members of congregation | -- | 89.1 | 85.4 | -- | ↘ |
| Percent with organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs | -- | 41.3 | 42.8 | -- | ns |
| Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year | 89.6 | 86.2 | 86.7 | 82.0 | ↘ |
| Speaker was: ³⁰ | | | | | |
| Elected government official | 13.8 | 14.3 | 12.9 | 12.3 | ns |
| Denominational representative | 69.2 | 74.6 | 70.9 | 64.1 | ↘ |
| Representative of social service organization | 44.0 | 54.0 | 54.9 | 46.8 | ns |
| Someone running for office | 7.1 | 7.5 | 6.9 | 7.2 | ns |
| Percent with members serving on denominational committees in past year | -- | 77.9 | 75.4 | -- | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|----------|----------|-------|
| POLITICAL ACTIVITIES | | | | | |
| Percent distributing voter guides³¹ | 26.5 | 25.6 | 24.2 | 25.0 | ns |
| Group met in past year to lobby an elected official | 12.0 | 14.5 | 15.7 | 15.2 | ↗ |
| Group met in past year to participate in demonstration or march | 21.5 | 20.2 | 24.8 | 27.2 | ↗ |
| Lobbying/marching was related to:³² | | | | | |
| Immigration | -- | -- | 24.1 | 35.4 | ↗ |
| Abortion | -- | -- | 63.4 | 52.0 | ↘ |
| Poverty | -- | -- | 42.0 | -- | NA |
| Poverty or economic inequality | -- | -- | -- | 41.7 | NA |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | | | | |
| Percent who applied in past two years for a government grant | -- | 9.5 | 9.2 | 7.1 | ns |
| Percent who have started a separate non-profit organization in past two years for human services or outreach ministries | -- | 10.1 | 12.3 | 9.3 | ns |
| Percent participating in any social service programs in past year | -- | 89.3 | 91.7 | 88.5 | ns |
| Number of programs or projects³³ | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | -- | 14.3 | 10.6 | ns |
| Median | -- | -- | 4 | 4 | NA |
| Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year | -- | \$5,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|-------|
| Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects | -- | 20.8 | 23.5 | 22.5 | ns |
| Percent with outside funding support for social service programs | -- | 16.5 | 14.3 | 17.8 | ns |
| Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government | -- | 5.8 | 3.9 | 4.8 | ns |
| SOCIAL COMPOSITION | | | | | |
| Median percent of regular adult participants: | | | | | |
| Who are female | 60.0 | 60.0 | 60.0 | 60.0 | ns |
| With a four-year college degree or higher education | 30.0 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 50.0 | ↗ |
| Over 60 years old | 25.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 36.0 | ↗ |
| Under 35 years old | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 | 25.0 | ↘ |
| Who live more than a 30-minute drive from meeting place | 5.0 | 5.0 | 5.0 | -- | ns |
| With household income under \$25,000/year | 20.0 | 10.0 | -- | -- | ↘ |
| With household income under \$35,000/year | -- | -- | 20.0 | 20.0 | ↘ |
| With household income higher than \$100,000/year | 5.0 | 10.0 | -- | -- | ↗ |
| With household income higher than \$140,000/year | -- | -- | 10.0 | 10.0 | ↗ |
| Living in households with two parents and at least one child | 50.0 | 50.0 | 45.0 | 40.0 | ↘ |
| Serving in leadership role in past year | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE




| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Percent with regular adult participant composition: | | | | | |
| At least 80% white and non-Hispanic | 71.6 | 65.6 | 57.4 | 52.5 |  |
| At least 80% Black | 12.1 | 12.0 | 13.6 | 13.2 | ns |
| More than 0% Hispanic | 57.0 | 64.0 | 65.4 | 73.7 |  |
| At least 80% Hispanic | 1.5 | 4.0 | 7.7 | 7.1 |  |
| More than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander | 41.0 | 49.7 | 48.8 | 55.0 |  |
| More than 0% American Indian | -- | 21.0 | 15.8 | -- |  |
| More than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years | 39.4 | 50.7 | 48.1 | 53.0 |  |
| Number of regularly participating teenagers | | | | | |
| Mean | -- | 100 | 144 | 112 | ns |
| Median | -- | 30 | 35 | 30 | NA |
| MEMBERS AND LAY LEADERS | | | | | |
| Percent allowing someone who drinks alcohol in moderation to: | | | | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | -- | 84.9 | -- | 90.9 |  |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | -- | 70.6 | -- | 77.2 |  |
| Percent allowing an unmarried couple who live together to: | | | | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | -- | 64.8 | -- | 73.9 |  |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | -- | 31.0 | -- | 39.6 |  |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE







| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| Percent allowing openly gay or lesbian couple in committed relationship to: | | | | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | -- | 48.8 | 51.1 | 59.1 |  |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | -- | 21.9 | 27.0 | 29.4 |  |
| Percent allowing women to: | | | | | |
| Hold all volunteer leadership positions that men can hold | -- | 79.6 | 82.0 | -- | ns |
| Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body | -- | 86.1 | 87.8 | 90.7 |  |
| Teach by themselves a class with adult men in it | -- | 87.8 | 89.7 | -- | ns |
| Preach at a main worship service | -- | 56.7 | 53.6 | 59.1 | ns |
| Be head clergyperson or primary religious leader | -- | 39.3 | 42.3 | 45.8 |  |
| GEOGRAPHY | | | | | |
| Percent in each region³⁴ | | | | | |
| Northeast and Mid-Atlantic | 19.5 | 15.4 | 12.8 | 12.9 |  |
| East North Central and West North Central | 24.3 | 24.4 | 26.0 | 24.6 | ns |
| South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central | 38.5 | 38.7 | 42.2 | 42.2 |  |
| Mountain and Pacific | 17.7 | 21.5 | 19.1 | 20.4 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE







| | 1998 | 2006-07 | 2012 | 2018-19 | TREND |
|--|------|---------|------|---------|---|
| NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line | 10.1 | 10.4 | 14.4 | 15.2 |  |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics | 29.2 | 39.6 | 55.8 | 64.0 |  |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans | 5.0 | 4.0 | 3.6 | 3.8 | ns |
| Percent in predominantly urban census tracts | 60.9 | 66.8 | 73.1 | 76.9 |  |
| Percent in predominantly rural census tracts | 23.3 | 17.8 | 14.7 | 13.1 |  |
| OTHER | | | | | |
| Percent with an elementary or high school | 23.4 | 20.9 | 23.5 | 18.7 | ns |
| Percent with a website | 28.7 | 74.3 | 83.0 | 87.4 |  |
| Percent with a Facebook page | -- | -- | 55.9 | 83.3 |  |
| Percent with member publicly acknowledging HIV infection | -- | 9.4 | 11.6 | -- | ns |
| Percent affiliated with nationally recognized community organizing group, organization, or network. | -- | -- | 33.4 | 24.8 | ns |

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

Notes

- 1 Trends were assessed by regressing each item on survey year. Ordinary least squares regression was used for continuous variables; logistic regression was used for binary variables. A statistically significant trend means that the coefficient associated with survey year was different from zero at least at the .05 alpha-level.
- 2 The value of the weighted median is the first observed value which is greater than 50% of the weighted data. Other methods for calculating the weighted median may yield slightly different results for some variables.
- 3 To get results that represent the average attendee, data are weighted to preserve the fact that larger congregations are more likely to be included in the NCS sample. Weights also take into account other relevant characteristics of the survey. The weighting variable used for this table is called WT_ALL4_ATTENDEE in the publicly available dataset. For more information on weights, see the detailed documentation of NCS weights available at <https://sites.duke.edu/ncsweb/files/2020/10/WeightsDocument.pdf>.
- 4 One extreme outlying observation in 2012 has been removed from this and the following two size variables.
- 5 The largest denominations in the predominantly white moderate/liberal category are the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Unitarian Universalist Association. The largest denominations in the predominantly white evangelical/conservative category are the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh Day Adventists, Churches of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Evangelical Free Church, Baptist General Conference, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed Church, Freewill Baptist, Church of God (Anderson), and Church of the Foursquare Gospel. The Black Protestant category includes all predominantly Black Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. The largest denominations in this category are the National Baptist Convention, USA, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Missionary Baptist, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. 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. Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation, so the categories in the Religious Tradition section sum to more than 100% when including those with no denominational affiliation.
- 6 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building.
- 7 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building and report other groups using their building.
- 8 Calculated only for those congregations that owned their own building. In 2018-19, this question was only asked of congregations that also indicated other groups used their building.
- 9 Calculated only for those congregations that reported another congregation used their building for worship services.
- 10 The 2018-19 NCS included two different indicators of being a multisite congregation. The first measure (called MULTISITE_1 in the cumulative dataset) is comparable to the question in the 2012 NCS and codes congregations as multisite if they report having multiple locations. The second measure (called MULTISITE_2 in the cumulative dataset) is only available in the 2018-19 NCS. MULTISITE_2 addresses likely over-reporting of multisite status by only including congregations that confirm in a follow-up question that not all of their religious services take place on the same campus. In order to make comparisons between years, the values shown here are from MULTISITE_1. Note that the proportion of congregations that are multisite here is likely an over-estimate. See Table 3 for the percentage of multisite congregations produced by MULTISITE_2.
- 11 In 1998 and 2006, this question asked about both rental and sale income, but in 2012 and 2018-19 it asked only about rental income.
- 12 Calculated only for those congregations that earned rental or sale income from property in past year.
- 13 Calculated only for those congregations that gave any money to their denominations.
- 14 Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.

TABLE 2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS: ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE

- 15 This and all following head clergy person characteristics are calculated only for those congregations that have a head clergy person. Details about co-leaders were gathered for the first time in 2018-19. In congregations with co-leaders, and with the exception of gender, the 2018-19 statistics about leader characteristics reflect the characteristics of the first leader reported. See the next note for details about clergy gender.
- 16 Details about co-leaders were gathered for the first time in 2018-19. In 2018-19, a congregation with co-leaders is considered to have a female leader if any of its co-leaders is female. That means that the reported 2018-19 percentage of attendees in congregations led by women (8.1%) is not exactly comparable to the percentages in earlier NCS waves, which did not consider co-leaders. But the difference is very small. If only the gender of the first co-leader mentioned in 2018-19 is considered, 7.4% of attendees in 2018-19 were in congregations led by women.
- 17 Although respondents were asked in all waves how many people work in the congregation as paid staff, in 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19 the question was prefaced with "including you" (if the respondent was an employee), and interviewers were trained in 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19 to probe to make sure that informants included themselves. We believe this difference is behind the initial decrease in the percent of congregations with no paid staff.
- 18 Ministerial staff members are those primarily engaged in religious work, that is, not secretaries or custodians.
- 19 One congregation with extreme values on staff variables in 2012 was removed from this analysis and other calculations of mean and median staff members per congregation.
- 20 In 2006-07, the question asked if the congregation was searching for a full-time staff person of any sort. In 2018-19, the question asked if the congregation was searching for a full-time ministerial staff person.
- 21 Congregations were asked if they have a youth minister or other leader specially designated to coordinate activities for youth. The question did not specify that the youth minister had to be paid.
- 22 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 23 The following items related to important differences in worship services were only calculated for those congregations that report important differences in their worship services.
- 24 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 25 Choirs often take the summer off, and some NCS waves included more summer interviews than others. The decline in choir singing at the main worship service remains statistically significant even when July and August NCS interviews are ignored. The choir-singing percentages when summer months are excluded are 72.3, 58.0, 57.2, and 53.8 for NCS Waves I thru IV, respectively.
- 26 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 27 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 28 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 29 In 2018-19, but not in 2012, this question included "English language instruction" as an example of a service for immigrants.
- 30 Calculated only for those congregations that hosted a visiting speaker in the past year.
- 31 In 1998, respondents were asked if their congregation had ever distributed voter guides. In 2006-07, 2012, and 2018-19, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides within the past two years.
- 32 Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials or demonstrated/marched.
- 33 This item and the following social service values are calculated only for those congregations that participated in social service programs or projects in the past year.
- 34 Northeast states are ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT. Mid-Atlantic states are NY, NJ, PA. East North Central states are OH, IN, IL, MI, WI. West North Central states are MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS. South Atlantic states are DE, MD, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL. East South Central states are KY, TN, AL, MS. West South Central states are AR, LA, OK, TX. Mountain states are MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV. Pacific states are WA, OR, CA, AK, HI.

Table 3

2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

This table provides statistics for almost all items contained in the 2018-19 NCS (Wave IV). Values for each variable are presented from two different perspectives. In the "Congregations' Perspective" column, means and medians refer to the average congregation, and percentages refer to the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic. In the "Attendees' Perspective" column, means and medians refer to the congregation attended by the average religious service attendee, and percentages give the percentage of attendees in congregations with the stated characteristic. The 2018-19 NCS contains data from 1,262 congregations.

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| AGE AND SIZE | | |
| Median founding date | 1959 | 1953 |
| Median congregation age (years) | 59 | 65 |
| Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life | | |
| Mean | 460 | 3036 |
| Median | 130 | 650 |
| Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life | | |
| Mean | 187 | 1373 |
| Median | 70 | 363 |
| Number of adults regularly participating in the congregation's religious life | | |
| Mean | 118 | 948 |
| Median | 50 | 250 |
| Number of adults regularly participating in the congregation's religious life two years ago | | |
| Mean | 145 | 1028 |
| Median | 50 | 250 |
| Percentage for whom the number of regularly participating adults has: | | |
| Increased | 32.5 | 34.9 |
| Remained the same | 28.4 | 32.3 |
| Decreased | 39.1 | 32.8 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| RELIGIOUS TRADITION | | |
| Percent with no denominational affiliation | 18.0 | 14.6 |
| Percent associated with each denomination or tradition:¹ | | |
| Roman Catholic | 6.1 | 26.7 |
| Baptist conventions/denominations | 20.4 | 16.0 |
| Methodist denominations | 12.3 | 8.9 |
| Lutheran/Episcopal denominations | 6.6 | 6.7 |
| Pentecostal | 13.3 | 8.2 |
| Presbyterian/Reformed | 6.8 | 5.8 |
| Other Christian | 25.5 | 22.0 |
| Jewish | 3.2 | 2.2 |
| Muslim | 0.5 | 0.9 |
| Buddhist | 3.1 | 0.8 |
| Hindu | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| Other non-Christian | 1.4 | 1.0 |
| Percent belonging to each broad religious group:² | | |
| Roman Catholic | 6.1 | 26.7 |
| Predominantly white evangelical/ conservative Protestant | 42.7 | 37.2 |
| Predominantly white moderate/ liberal Protestant | 20.9 | 18.2 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Black Protestant | 21.3 | 12.3 |
| Non-Christian | 9.0 | 5.7 |
| BUILDING AND FINANCE | | |
| Percent owning their building | 84.2 | 90.9 |
| Median year building was built ³ | 1961 | 1962 |
| Percent meeting in a: | | |
| Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque | 89.3 | 94.3 |
| School | 1.3 | 1.0 |
| Storefront | 3.1 | 1.4 |
| Other kind of building | 6.3 | 3.3 |
| Percent whose building is used by other groups⁴ | 52.1 | 66.4 |
| For those whose building is used by other groups, median number of outside groups using the building ⁵ | 4 | 6 |
| Of those whose building is used by other groups, percent with another congregation using their building for worship services ⁶ | 15.2 | 14.0 |
| Percent where other congregation is primarily recent immigrants to the U.S. ⁷ | 47.8 | 47.2 |
| Percent with worship services at more than one location⁸ | 6.3 | 11.4 |
| Median number of locations ⁹ | 2.0 | 3.0 |
| Percent who have the same sermon for different locations | 15.7 | 36.9 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Percent who have the same music for different locations | 29.6 | 27.5 |
| Percent with a formal written budget | 75.9 | 90.2 |
| Median income in past year | \$105,000 | \$470,000 |
| Median income from two years ago | \$100,000 | \$460,000 |
| Median income from individuals in past year | \$100,000 | \$400,000 |
| Median budget for the past year | \$100,000 | \$450,000 |
| Percent receiving income in the past year from rental of building or property | 34.9 | 42.6 |
| Median income from rental of building or property in past fiscal year ¹⁰ | \$6,000 | \$9,000 |
| Percent giving money to denomination in the past year | 68.4 | 77.5 |
| Median amount given to denomination in past year ¹¹ | \$7,200 | \$36,000 |
| Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund | 66.5 | 75.9 |
| Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ¹² | \$50,000 | \$200,000 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| LEADERSHIP | | |
| Percent with a head clergy person or leader | 93.8 | 95.4 |
| Percent with coleaders | 2.8 | 2.3 |
| Percent with no leaders | 0.9 | 0.4 |
| Percent with full-time head clergy person or leader ¹³ | 70.1 | 88.3 |
| Percent with female head clergy person or leader ¹⁴ | 13.8 | 8.1 |
| Percent with head clergy person or leader of each race or ethnicity: | | |
| White | 64.6 | 72.1 |
| Black | 25.9 | 16.1 |
| Hispanic | 5.2 | 6.9 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 4.2 | 4.7 |
| Other | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Percent with head clergy person born in U.S. | 85.1 | 84.4 |
| Percent with a head clergy person who is married | 82.4 | 67.8 |
| Median number of years head clergy person in current position | 6.0 | 6.0 |
| Median age of head clergy person | 57 | 55 |
| Percent for whom head clergy person has highest education level of: | | |
| Less than a bachelor's degree | 23.7 | 11.6 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Bachelor's degree | 20.9 | 15.2 |
| Graduate degree | 55.4 | 73.2 |
| Percent with a head clergy person having the following characteristics: | | |
| Graduated from seminary or theological school | 67.5 | 79.8 |
| Currently attends seminary or theological school | 6.4 | 2.9 |
| Paid for work in congregation | 81.3 | 91.6 |
| Also serves another congregation | 18.3 | 10.4 |
| Also holds another job | 35.0 | 18.8 |
| Was a regular participant in the congregation before becoming the head clergy person | 26.9 | 23.5 |
| PAID STAFF | | |
| Percent with the following characteristics: | | |
| No paid staff | 14.3 | 5.9 |
| No full-time staff | 37.2 | 13.3 |
| One full-time staff person | 36.2 | 21.9 |
| Two or more full-time staff people | 26.6 | 64.8 |
| No full-time ministerial staff ¹⁵ | 39.7 | 14.6 |
| One full-time ministerial staff person | 42.0 | 31.8 |
| Two or more full-time ministerial staff people | 18.4 | 53.5 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| No part-time staff | 32.6 | 15.6 |
| One part-time staff person | 18.9 | 10.3 |
| Two or more part-time staff people | 48.5 | 74.1 |
| No part-time ministerial staff | 49.4 | 38.6 |
| One part-time ministerial staff person | 29.7 | 22.1 |
| Two or more part-time ministerial staff people | 20.9 | 39.3 |
| Number of full-time paid staff | | |
| Mean | 1.8 | 9.7 |
| Median | 1.0 | 3.0 |
| Number of full-time paid ministerial staff | | |
| Mean | 1.1 | 4.4 |
| Median | 1.0 | 2.0 |
| Number of part-time paid staff | | |
| Mean | 2.5 | 7.5 |
| Median | 1.0 | 4.0 |
| Number of part-time paid ministerial staff | | |
| Mean | 1.0 | 2.5 |
| Median | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Percent currently searching for a full-time ministerial staff person | 9.7 | 14.1 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Percent for whom the number of full-time paid staff in the past year has: | | |
| Increased | 4.7 | 15.4 |
| Stayed the same | 90.6 | 76.2 |
| Decreased | 4.7 | 8.4 |
| WORSHIP | | |
| Percent with one service in typical week | 38.3 | 19.2 |
| Percent with two or more services in a typical week | 60.5 | 80.6 |
| Percent reporting important differences between services in a typical weekend ¹⁶ | 36.2 | 39.2 |
| Important differences consisted of: ¹⁷ | | |
| Level of formality | 71.4 | 59.7 |
| Languages used during service | 12.0 | 30.1 |
| Kind of music during service | 54.9 | 68.9 |
| Percent with a worship service on days other than Friday, Saturday, or Sunday | 70.6 | 70.8 |
| Median number of people who attend a weekday service without also attending on the weekend. ¹⁸ | 10 | 15 |
| Percent participating in a joint worship service with another congregation | 62.6 | 54.1 |
| Percent participating in a joint worship service with a congregation with a different racial or ethnic make-up | 31.4 | 31.2 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Median length of most recent main service (minutes) | 80 | 70 |
| Median length of most recent sermon (minutes) | 30 | 23 |
| Median number of minutes of music at most recent service | 20 | 20 |
| Median attendance at most recent main service | 60 | 190 |
| Median total attendance (adults and children) at all services during the past weekend | 70 | 300 |
| Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic: | | |
| Sermon or speech | 96.2 | 97.5 |
| Singing by congregation | 96.3 | 97.2 |
| Singing by choir ¹⁹ | 41.9 | 53.8 |
| Time to greet one another | 79.3 | 81.4 |
| Leader wearing robe or special garments | 38.7 | 49.2 |
| People saying "amen" | 69.0 | 64.7 |
| Applause | 58.5 | 62.0 |
| Adults jumping, shouting, or dancing spontaneously | 27.9 | 20.9 |
| Raising hands in praise | 62.7 | 62.3 |
| Written order of service | 66.0 | 68.3 |
| Song lyrics projected on wall or screen | 42.1 | 49.0 |
| Organ | 46.8 | 52.4 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Drums | 40.8 | 49.1 |
| Guitar | 35.3 | 50.3 |
| Percent with the following at any worship in the past year: | | |
| Speaking in tongues ²⁰ | 29.4 | 22.0 |
| People told of opportunities for political activity | 15.6 | 19.7 |
| Time for people other than leaders to share joys, thoughts, or concerns | 64.4 | 40.8 |
| DOCTRINE AND CULTURE | | |
| Percent considering the Bible to be literal and inerrant²¹ | 82.3 | 75.7 |
| Percent teaching that God gives financial wealth and good health to those with enough faith²² | 25.0 | 15.3 |
| Percent saying their congregation would be considered politically: | | |
| Extremely conservative | 11.0 | 7.8 |
| Moderately conservative | 29.0 | 32.2 |
| Slightly conservative | 5.5 | 4.5 |
| Right in the middle | 39.4 | 41.7 |
| Slightly liberal | 1.1 | 1.6 |
| Moderately liberal | 9.4 | 9.7 |
| Extremely liberal | 1.3 | 2.6 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i>: | | |
| Extremely conservative | 19.0 | 13.9 |
| Moderately conservative | 30.9 | 34.2 |
| Slightly conservative | 3.8 | 4.9 |
| Right in the middle | 34.2 | 35.5 |
| Slightly liberal | 1.8 | 2.7 |
| Moderately liberal | 5.4 | 5.4 |
| Extremely liberal | 4.9 | 3.4 |
| GROUPS AND SPEAKERS | | |
| Percent with a group or event in the past year focused on the following: | | |
| Discussing politics | 10.6 | 14.0 |
| Voter registration | 22.9 | 27.0 |
| Getting out the vote during an election | 26.5 | 27.7 |
| Offering services for immigrants | 14.3 | 27.3 |
| Receiving/practicing gifts of the spirit | 16.4 | 19.7 |
| Discussing/learning about another religion | 24.7 | 30.2 |
| Discussing/learning about managing personal finances | 32.6 | 45.2 |
| Assessing community needs | 54.0 | 63.2 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Participating in a volunteer activity or service project with people from another faith | 48.2 | 59.6 |
| Travelling in U.S. to assist people in need | 25.3 | 42.0 |
| Travelling abroad to assist people in need | 27.5 | 42.0 |
| Supporting military veterans and their families | 29.0 | 37.8 |
| Exercising or promoting physical activity | 36.2 | 48.1 |
| Helping people who are unemployed find or train for a job | 26.6 | 32.0 |
| Support for people living with HIV or AIDS | 13.9 | 16.9 |
| Support for people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse | 42.8 | 58.3 |
| Support for people with mental illness | 26.2 | 37.1 |
| Support for recently divorced people | 23.5 | 39.3 |
| Organizing or participating in a blood drive | 18.6 | 37.9 |
| Discussing issues related to race and race relations | 28.8 | 36.0 |
| Discussing issues related to race and the police | 18.8 | 21.5 |
| Discussing issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity | 19.4 | 25.3 |
| Learning about living wills, advanced medical directives, or other end-of-life-issues | 20.3 | 32.8 |
| Workshop or event for religious leaders not part of the congregation | 30.6 | 41.3 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Discussing scientific issues or the relationship between science and religion | 14.6 | 25.4 |
| Discussing issues related to the environment | 17.6 | 26.0 |
| Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year | 76.4 | 82.0 |
| Speaker was: ²³ | | |
| Elected government official | 8.9 | 12.3 |
| Denominational representative | 57.0 | 64.1 |
| Representative of social service organization | 37.1 | 46.8 |
| Someone running for office | 8.5 | 7.2 |
| POLITICAL ACTIVITIES | | |
| Percent distributing voter guides within the past 2 years | 24.0 | 25.0 |
| Percent with a group in the past year to lobby an elected official | 9.8 | 15.2 |
| Percent with a group in the past year to participate in a demonstration or march | 17.3 | 27.2 |
| Lobbying/marching was related to: ²⁴ | | |
| Poverty or economic inequality | 48.2 | 41.7 |
| Immigration | 38.9 | 35.4 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on immigration that supported immigrants/immigration ²⁵ | 96.8 | 99.0 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on immigration that encouraged stricter immigration enforcement | 3.2 | 1.0 |
| Abortion | 28.0 | 52.0 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on abortion that were pro-life ²⁶ | 83.8 | 96.6 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on abortion that were pro-choice | 16.2 | 3.4 |
| Issues concerning LGBT people | 18.8 | 14.1 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on LGBT issues that supported more rights for LGBT people ²⁷ | 90.8 | 94.4 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on LGBT issues that opposed more rights for LGBT people | 9.2 | 5.6 |
| Environmental issues | 30.6 | 21.4 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on environmental issues in favor of protecting the environment ²⁸ | 92.8 | 97.4 |
| Percent of those lobbying/marching on environmental issues to oppose environmental regulations | 7.2 | 2.6 |
| Percent publicly supporting or opposing a candidate for office in the past two years | 4.3 | 2.2 |
| Percent who would have supported or opposed a candidate for office if doing so would not put the congregation's tax status at risk ²⁹ | 17.2 | 13.0 |
| Percent declaring themselves to be sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants | 4.1 | 3.5 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Percent who discussed becoming a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants ³⁰ | 9.0 | 11.3 |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | |
| Percent who applied in past two years for a government grant | 4.0 | 7.1 |
| Percent who have started a separate non-profit in the last two years | 7.2 | 9.3 |
| Percent participating in any social service programs in the past year | 79.6 | 88.5 |
| Median number of social service programs ³¹ | 3 | 4 |
| Median number of social service programs completely run by congregation | 2 | 3 |
| Percent with one of top four programs focused on: | | |
| Victims of rape or domestic violence | 1.5 | 2.5 |
| Clothing, blankets, rummage sales | 14.6 | 16.3 |
| Disaster relief | 5.5 | 6.5 |
| Support for schools/non-religious education or training | 15.5 | 18.8 |
| Senior citizens | 6.5 | 7.5 |
| Feeding the hungry | 48.1 | 57.3 |
| Males or females in particular | 7.0 | 11.1 |
| Individuals' physical health needs | 18.0 | 20.5 |
| People who are homeless | 14.9 | 23.6 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Home building, repair, maintenance | 13.7 | 21.4 |
| Habitat for Humanity projects | 1.5 | 4.0 |
| Immigrants, migrants, or refugees | 2.4 | 5.4 |
| Beneficiaries outside the U.S. | 11.0 | 16.3 |
| Job placement | 1.7 | 2.6 |
| Youth and children | 32.0 | 36.9 |
| People in legal trouble or their families | 3.8 | 5.1 |
| People struggling with substance abuse | 2.9 | 3.4 |
| St. Vincent de Paul | 0.8 | 3.9 |
| Percent with all of their social service projects involving collaboration | 48.1 | 44.5 |
| Percent collaborating on social service projects with: ³² | | |
| Other congregations | 65.7 | 70.8 |
| A nonprofit service organization | 69.6 | 80.1 |
| An office or program of the same denomination or religious group | 43.5 | 54.2 |
| A public elementary, middle, or high school | 33.9 | 43.8 |
| A college or university | 10.3 | 17.3 |
| A business | 22.8 | 31.7 |
| A local, state, or federal government agency or program | 29.1 | 33.4 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year | \$2,640 | \$10,000 |
| Percent with a paid staff person spending more than 25% of their time on social service projects | 19.1 | 22.5 |
| Percent with outside funding support for social service programs | 14.7 | 17.8 |
| Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government | 3.2 | 4.8 |
| Percent sponsoring any refugees | 6.6 | 8.5 |
| Percent who discussed sponsoring any refugees ³³ | 7.2 | 10.3 |
| Percent helping people respond to or recover from a natural disaster | 58.2 | 71.4 |
| Natural disaster help consisted of: ³⁴ | | |
| Raising or contributing money | 82.0 | 90.6 |
| Donating food, clothing, or furniture | 57.4 | 53.7 |
| Providing temporary shelter | 7.2 | 9.3 |
| Sending a team to a disaster area | 27.1 | 33.6 |
| HEALTH PROGRAMS | | |
| Percent with any health-focused programs | 33.2 | 42.9 |
| Health-focused program involved:³⁵ | | |
| Blood pressure checks | 74.5 | 75.7 |
| Screening for any type of cancer | 27.0 | 28.3 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Offering flu shots | 23.7 | 34.2 |
| Testing for diabetes or checking blood sugar levels | 40.4 | 40.8 |
| Testing for HIV or AIDS | 8.9 | 11.1 |
| Helping people get health insurance or Medicaid | 29.6 | 25.7 |
| Educating people about nutrition or healthy eating habits | 69.6 | 65.6 |
| TECHNOLOGY | | |
| Percent with a website | 71.6 | 87.4 |
| Percent with a Facebook page | 72.5 | 83.3 |
| Percent live streaming their service | 20.2 | 28.0 |
| Percent recording the service for later listening or watching | 49.7 | 57.2 |
| Percent with recordings of their worship services available on their website | 31.9 | 52.6 |
| Percent with a system to allow people to make financial donations electronically | 48.2 | 72.7 |
| Percent that make or recommend apps for people to use on their phones or tablets | 22.9 | 40.0 |
| Percent encouraging smartphone use during worship services | 33.0 | 32.7 |
| Percent with smartphones used in the service to: ³⁶ | | |
| Read scripture | 56.8 | 50.9 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Donate money to the congregation | 15.0 | 23.7 |
| Interact with social media | 16.4 | 11.0 |
| Take pictures, video, or sound recordings | 29.4 | 16.0 |
| Engage with the sermon or message | 13.3 | 20.3 |
| Engage or interact with the music | 5.3 | 4.0 |
| Main worship service included: | | |
| Visual projection equipment | 46.0 | 51.7 |
| Watching video clips | 18.2 | 25.2 |
| Cameras to project images of speakers in the room | 8.8 | 16.8 |
| Percent with a head clergy person who uses the following to communicate with the congregation: | | |
| Facebook | 40.4 | 36.4 |
| Social media accounts other than Facebook | 17.8 | 19.5 |
| Blog | 12.2 | 12.3 |
| Percent with a paid staff person spending at least 25% of their time managing social media | 4.5 | 19.2 |
| SOCIAL COMPOSITION | | |
| Median percent of regular adult participants: | | |
| Who are female | 60.0 | 60.0 |
| With at least a four-year college degree | 30.4 | 50.0 |
| Over 60 years old | 40.0 | 36.0 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Under 35 years old | 20.0 | 25.0 |
| With annual household income under \$35,000 | 20.0 | 20.0 |
| With annual household income higher than \$140,000 | 5.0 | 10.0 |
| Living in households with two parents and at least one child | 30.0 | 40.0 |
| Serving in leadership role in past year | 30.0 | 20.0 |
| Percent with regular adult participant composition: | | |
| At least 80% white and non-Hispanic | 53.4 | 52.5 |
| At least 80% Black | 21.6 | 13.2 |
| More than 0% Hispanic | 51.0 | 73.7 |
| At least 80% Hispanic | 5.0 | 7.1 |
| More than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander | 31.2 | 55.0 |
| More than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years | 27.7 | 53.0 |
| No one ethnic group comprises 80% or more of the people | 15.1 | 24.3 |
| Number of regularly participating teenagers | | |
| Mean | 17.5 | 112 |
| Median | 8 | 30 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Percent of people who only attend services without participating in other ways in the congregation's life | | |
| Mean | 20.9 | 27.1 |
| Median | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| MEMBERS AND LAY LEADERS | | |
| Percent allowing someone who drinks alcohol in moderation to: | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | 84.7 | 90.9 |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | 64.5 | 77.2 |
| Percent allowing an unmarried couple who live together to: | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | 68.4 | 73.9 |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | 39.8 | 39.6 |
| Percent allowing openly gay or lesbian couple in committed relationship to: | | |
| Hold full-fledged membership | 53.7 | 59.1 |
| Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members | 29.8 | 29.4 |
| Percent allowing a same-sex wedding to take place in their building³⁷ | 15.8 | 12.7 |
| Percent allowing women to: | | |
| Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body | 88.8 | 90.7 |
| Preach at a main worship service | 71.9 | 59.1 |
| Be head clergy person or primary religious leader | 56.4 | 45.8 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

| | CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE | ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| GEOGRAPHY | | |
| Percent in each region:³⁸ | | |
| Northeast and Mid-Atlantic | 13.1 | 12.9 |
| East North Central and West North Central | 23.8 | 24.6 |
| South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central | 46.4 | 42.2 |
| Mountain and Pacific | 16.8 | 20.4 |
| NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS | | |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line | 15.3 | 15.2 |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics | 59.6 | 64.0 |
| Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans | 3.9 | 3.8 |
| Percent in predominantly urban census tracts | 59.8 | 76.9 |
| Percent in predominantly rural census tracts | 24.7 | 13.1 |
| OTHER | | |
| Percent with an elementary or high school | 3.7 | 18.7 |
| Percent affiliated with nationally recognized community organizing group, organization, or network. | 18.9 | 24.8 |
| Percent with an organized effort, designated person, or committee to increase racial or ethnic diversity within the congregation | 9.7 | 14.1 |

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

Notes

- 1 Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation, so the numbers in this section sum to more than 100% when including those with no denominational affiliation.
- 2 The largest denominations in the predominantly white moderate/liberal category are the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Unitarian Universalist Association. The largest denominations in the predominantly white evangelical/conservative category are the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah’s Witness, Seventh Day Adventists, Churches of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Evangelical Free Church, Baptist General Conference, Christian Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed Church, Freewill Baptist, Church of God (Anderson), and Church of the Foursquare Gospel. The Black Protestant category includes all predominantly Black Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. The largest denominations in this category are the National Baptist Convention, USA, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Missionary Baptist, National Baptist Convention of America, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. 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. Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation, so the numbers in this section sum to more than 100% when including those with no denominational affiliation.
- 3 Calculated only for those congregations that own their building.
- 4 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building.
- 5 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building and report other groups using their building.
- 6 Calculated only for those congregations that own their own building and report other groups using their building.
- 7 Calculated only for those congregations whose buildings are used by another congregation for worship services.
- 8 The 2018-19 NCS included two different indicators of being a multisite congregation. The first measure (called MULTISITE_1 in the cumulative dataset) is comparable to the question in the 2012 NCS and codes congregations as multisite if they report having multiple locations. The second measure (called MULTISITE_2 in the cumulative dataset) is only available in the 2018-19 NCS. MULTISITE_2 addresses likely over-reporting of multisite status by only including congregations that confirm in a follow-up question that not all of their religious services take place on the same campus. The values shown here are from the stricter, and probably more accurate, MULTISITE_2. Note that these values are not directly comparable to multisite values from the 2012 NCS.
- 9 This and the following two items are calculated only for those congregations that have worship services at more than one location.
- 10 Calculated only for those congregations with income from the sale or rent of their building or property.
- 11 Calculated only for those congregations that gave any money to their denomination.
- 12 Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.
- 13 This and all following head clergyperson characteristics are calculated only for those congregations that have a head clergyperson. In congregations with co-leaders, the statistics about leader characteristics, with the exception of gender, reflect the characteristics of the first leader reported.
- 14 A congregation with co-leaders is considered to have a female leader if any of its co-leaders is female.
- 15 Ministerial staff members are those primarily engaged in religious work, that is, not secretaries or custodians.
- 16 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 17 Calculated only for those congregations that report important differences between weekend services.

TABLE 3. 2018–19 NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY: BASIC FINDINGS

- 18 Calculated only for those congregations that reported having a worship service on days other than Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.
- 19 When July and August NCS interviews are ignored, these percentages are 46.2% from the congregations' perspective and 53.8% from the attendees' perspective.
- 20 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 21 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 22 Calculated only for Christian congregations.
- 23 Calculated only for those congregations that had a visiting speaker in the past year.
- 24 Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched.
- 25 This and the following item are calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched on issues related to immigration.
- 26 This and the following item are calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched on issues related to abortion.
- 27 This and the following item are calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched on issues concerning gay, lesbian, or transgender people.
- 28 This and the following item are calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched on issues related to the environment.
- 29 Calculated only for those congregations that reported not publicly supporting or opposing a political candidate.
- 30 Calculated only for those congregations that had not declared themselves to be sanctuaries.
- 31 This item and the following social service variables are calculated only for those congregations that participated in social service programs and projects in the past year.
- 32 The following items on collaborations are calculated only for those congregations that participated in social service programs and projects in the past year.
- 33 Calculated only for those congregations that had not sponsored any refugees.
- 34 The following natural disaster relief items were calculated only for those congregations that reported helping in response to a natural disaster.
- 35 Calculated only for those congregations with health-focused programs.
- 36 The following items relating to smartphone use were only calculated for those congregations that reported encouraging participants to use smartphones during the service.
- 37 Calculated only for those congregations that own their building.
- 38 Northeast states are ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT. Mid-Atlantic states are NY, NJ, PA. East North Central states are OH, IN, IL, MI, WI. West North Central states are MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS. South Atlantic states are DE, MD, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL. East South Central states are KY, TN, AL, MS. West South Central states are AR, LA, OK, TX. Mountain states are MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV. Pacific states are WA, OR, CA, AK, HI.

Table 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF MINISTERIAL STAFF, 2018-19

This table provides statistics concerning certain characteristics of clergy and others who do ministerial work in congregations. It gives the percentages of all relevant staff in the labor force with each characteristic. For example, if there were only two congregations, one with two male full-time assistant ministers and another with one female full-time assistant minister, this would mean that the full-time secondary ministerial labor force, taken as a whole, is two-thirds male.

We provide percentages for three categories of ministerial leaders. "Solo or Senior Leaders" refers to a congregation's primary leader, whether a solo leader or the senior leader of a multi-person staff. The "Solo or Senior Leader" percentages given here may differ slightly from analogous percentages in earlier tables because co-leaders are included in the denominators here. See Tables 1–3 for more information on the senior and solo leaders of congregations.

"Secondary Ministerial Staff" refers to clergy and other paid staff primarily engaged in the congregation's religious mission, but not including the congregation's senior leader. The NCS asked congregations to tell us about "ministerial or other religious staff, such as youth ministers, other pastors, pastoral counselors, directors of religious education, music ministers, and so on." The NCS did not specify how many hours constituted full- or part-time positions. Instead, we asked congregations to specify staff members as full-time or part-time as they saw fit. We assumed that solo or senior leaders would not specialize in any one area of congregational work, so we asked about areas of specialization only for the congregation's secondary ministerial staff.

TABLE 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF MINISTERIAL STAFF, 2018–19

| | SOLO OR SENIOR LEADERS | FULL-TIME SECONDARY MINISTERIAL STAFF | PART-TIME SECONDARY MINISTERIAL STAFF |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| PERCENT OF EACH TYPE OF MINISTERIAL STAFF WITH THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS | | | |
| Race or ethnicity: | | | |
| White | 64.4 | 71.5 | 69.7 |
| Black | 26.2 | 11.8 | 20.5 |
| Hispanic | 5.3 | 10.4 | 7.1 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 4.2 | 6.3 | 2.7 |
| Under 40 years of age | 9.5 | 50.4 | 42.2 |
| Male | 86.3 | 64.6 | 54.1 |
| Graduated from seminary or theological school | 67.6 | 39.0 | 20.5 |
| Without a seminary degree, but currently attend seminary or theological school | 6.3 | 10.6 | 7.3 |
| Were regular members or participants before current position | 26.7 | 39.3 | 61.1 |
| Specialize in one or more areas of ministry | -- | 62.9 | 73.8 |
| Of those who specialize, percent who specialize in: ¹ | | | |
| Religious Education | -- | 32.3 | 13.5 |

TABLE 4. CHARACTERISTICS OF MINISTERIAL STAFF, 2018–19

| | SOLO OR SENIOR LEADERS | FULL-TIME SECONDARY MINISTERIAL STAFF | PART-TIME SECONDARY MINISTERIAL STAFF |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Spiritual Growth | -- | 28.7 | 15.1 |
| Music | -- | 24.5 | 56.5 |
| Community Engagement | -- | 23.4 | 9.0 |
| Youth Ministry | -- | 20.3 | 17.7 |
| Children's Ministry | -- | 18.1 | 15.6 |
| Psychological Counseling | -- | 18.1 | 1.9 |
| Volunteer Coordination | -- | 16.7 | 9.1 |
| Outreach | -- | 15.6 | 12.0 |
| Young Adult Ministry | -- | 14.8 | 7.5 |
| Pastoral Care | -- | 13.9 | 9.1 |
| Administration | -- | 12.3 | 5.5 |
| Family Ministry | -- | 10.6 | 7.0 |
| Media | -- | 7.0 | 5.4 |
| Worship Technology | -- | 6.4 | 8.2 |
| Technology, not worship-related | -- | 4.5 | 3.7 |

1 Respondents could indicate that secondary staff specialize in multiple areas of ministry.

