

Religious Congregations in 21st Century America



2015

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

Religious Congregations in 21st Century America

A Report from the National Congregations Study

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, and dozens more varieties of non-western religions, some of whose adherents have sustained their faiths here for generations, while still others have built new institutions and houses of worship.

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

What is the National Congregations Study?

The National Congregations Study (NCS) is a source of reliable information about congregations. Based on three nationally representative surveys of congregations from across the religious spectrum—the first in 1998, the second in 2006–07, and a third in 2012—NCS findings can inform those with deep interests in the state of American congregations as well as those with only a passing interest in religion. Because the same questions have been asked in multiple waves of the NCS, we can also track how congregations have changed over time. These data will keep sociologists and professional religious observers busy for years, and they will inform all manner of religious leaders, from small-town clergy and megachurch pastors to seminary presidents and denomination heads.

There are many other surveys that explore America's religious landscape. But most other surveys ask people only 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 was that no definitive list of all congregations existed. Phonebooks do not work since many small congregations are unlisted or do not have phones. Some denominations keep very good lists of their congregations, but not all do, and many congregations are non-denominational. In 1998, 2006, and again in 2012, 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. The NCS then contacted those congregations and interviewed someone, usually a clergy person or other leader, about the congregation's people, programs, and characteristics. More than 80% of named congregations cooperated with us in each of the three NCS waves. Between the three waves of the NCS we now know about the demographics, leadership situation, worship life, programming, surrounding neighborhood, and much more, of 3,815 congregations.

The NCS in Brief:

- Wave I, 1998
- Wave II, 2006–07
- Wave III, 2012
- Nationally representative survey
- Congregations from across the religious spectrum
- 3,815 congregations total



Overall, the NCS gives us a broad and varied cross-section of American religious life, and it allows us to offer some grounded observations about the state of congregational life in this country. NCS findings help us distinguish truth from myth about American congregations, and they help us assess the extent to which this or that feature of congregational life permeates the religious landscape. These findings also will help readers place their own experiences in a larger perspective.

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

What Are Our Most Important Observations?

- The number of congregations claiming no denominational affiliation increased from 18% in 1998 to 24% in 2012.
- White mainline congregations, and the people in those congregations, are older than the congregations and people of other religious traditions.
- Most congregations are small but most people are in large congregations.
- People are increasingly concentrated in very large congregations. The average congregation is getting smaller, but the average churchgoer attends a larger congregation.
- People in smaller congregations give more money to their churches than do people in larger congregations.
- Worship services have become more informal and expressive.
- 10% of churchgoers worship in multi-site congregations.
- American solo or senior pastoral leaders are more ethnically diverse and older, but not more female, than they were in 1998.
- Thirteen percent (13%) of congregations are led by volunteer senior or solo pastoral leaders.
- Assistant and associate ministers and specialized congregational staff constitute 42% of the full-time ministerial work force and three-quarters (74%) of the part-time ministerial work force.
- 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 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 more than half (52%) of all congregations listing food assistance among their four most important social service programs.
- When congregations lobby elected officials or participate in demonstrations or marches, the issues they most commonly engage are poverty, abortion, and same-sex marriage.
- Acceptance of female lay leadership is very widespread, with 79% of congregations allowing women to hold any volunteer position a man can hold, and 86% allowing women to serve on the main governing board.
- Congregational acceptance of gays and lesbians as members and lay leaders increased substantially between 2006 and 2012, but acceptance levels vary widely across religious traditions.



The three largest religious denominations in the United States are Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, and United Methodist, respectively containing 28%, 8%, and 6% of all adults regularly involved in a congregation.

Religious Traditions and Denominations

The American religious landscape is always changing. In recent years, surveys of individuals have documented declining membership in 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 mainline Protestant congregations and more non-Christian congregations.

The NCS shows that congregations also are seeing an increase in their own type of “none”: congregations that claim no denominational affiliation. Unaffiliated congregations increased from 18% in 1998 to 24% in 2012, and the share of churchgoers in those independent congregations increased from 10% in 1998 to 15% in 2012. (Throughout this report, all of the numerical differences that we emphasize are statistically significant at least at the 0.05 level.)

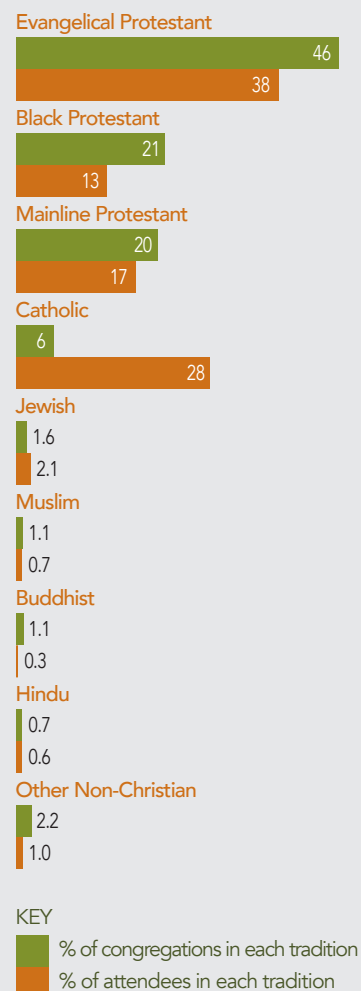
Non-denominationalism occurs mainly among white evangelical and black Protestant traditions, with 30% of white evangelical Protestant and 25% of black Protestant congregations claiming no official denominational connection in 2012. Independent congregations also tend to be newer than others, with the median congregation founded only 25 years ago versus 82 years ago for affiliated congregations.

If we place congregations and their people within nine major religious categories, the largest is white evangelical Protestants, comprising 46% of all congregations and 38% of all those who attend religious services in 2012. Roman Catholics have the biggest difference between their share of congregations and their share of people, with 28% of the churchgoing population in Catholic churches that constitute only 6% of all congregations. That is of course because Catholic parishes are, on average, much bigger than congregations within any other tradition. Twenty-one percent (21%) of congregations are black Protestant, 20% are white mainline Protestant, 1.6% are Jewish, 1.1% are Muslim, 1.1% are Buddhist, 0.7% are Hindu, and 2.2% 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.

The largest single denomination in the evangelical Protestant category is the Southern Baptist Convention, with 10% 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 6% 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, and Seventh-day Adventist. Predominantly-white nondenominational 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.

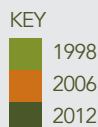
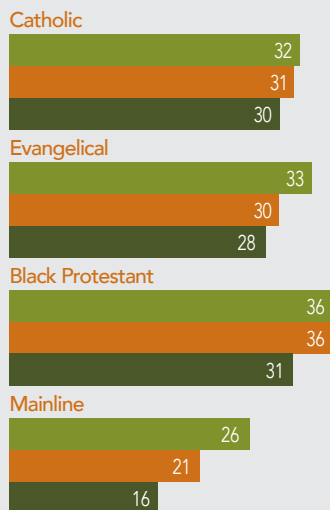
The distribution of congregations across major religious groups has not changed dramatically since 1998, but one trend stands out: fewer mainline Protestant congregations (26% in 1998 and 20% in 2012) and attendees (24% to 17%). The proportion of non-Christian congregations also grew, but that increase does not reach statistical significance in these data.

Distribution of American congregations and attendees among different religious traditions, 2012



*This report presents information from two perspectives:
 1) the average congregation, and
 2) the average attendee.*

Children as a percentage of regular attendees in the average congregation



Beyond these shifting percentages, age differences across different types of congregations provide another indication of the shifting congregational landscape. White mainline Protestant congregations are the oldest congregations in the country in two different senses. Their *congregations* are older, and their *people* are older. In 2012, the median congregation of any sort was founded 58 years ago, but the median mainline congregation was 122 years old. The average Catholic parish was somewhat younger than that (96 years old), while congregations within other religious families were much younger: 68 years old for black Protestants, and only 30 years old for white evangelicals. Indeed, over all three NCS waves, the number of congregations established in the past 10 years has been consistently higher for white evangelicals (16%) and black Protestants (15%) than for Catholics (3%) or 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.

This culture of church planting also creates an interesting difference in congregational leadership patterns across religious groups. Averaging across all three NCS surveys, 21% of white evangelical and 27% of black Protestant churches are led by their founding pastors, compared to only 3% among Catholics and 1% among white mainline churches.

White mainline congregations also are filled with older people relative to other groups. Fifty-six percent (56%) of adults in a typical mainline congregation are over 60 years of age, compared with 42%, 32%, and 31% in Roman Catholic, white evangelical, and black Protestant congregations, respectively. Looking at the other end of the age spectrum, in 2012 children comprised 16% of regular attendees for a typical mainline congregation compared to an average of 29% in other Christian traditions. While the proportion of children in churches has declined the fastest since 1998 in white mainline congregations, no Christian group has escaped this trend. It appears that all congregations are aging, but white mainline congregations are older than others and aging at a faster rate.

We have seen that an increasing minority of congregations are unaffiliated with any larger denomination, but it is worth emphasizing that most congregations remain attached to a denomination, convention, association, or a similar kind of larger religious group. Moreover, many congregations remain strongly connected to their denomi-

nations. In 2012, 66% of denominationally affiliated congregations were visited by a denominational representative who spoke to the congregation, a number that has not declined since 1998. And denominational representatives were much more common visiting speakers at affiliated congregations than representatives of social service organizations (36%), government officials (6%), or candidates for public office (6%). Moreover, the 2006 NCS showed that, when congregations turned to outside consultants for help with finances, personnel, member education, strategic planning, or other issues, three-quarters of the time they received that help from their denominations.



Overall, churches and churchgoers are aging, and congregations have become less connected to denominations over time.

Financial ties between congregations and denominations also remain significant, although there are signs of fraying. Over 80% of affiliated congregations financially support their denominations, but this contribution as a proportion of congregational income has declined between 1998 and 2012. The ever increasing cost of running a local congregation leads congregations to retain more money for internal operations. The stress felt by congregations during the 2007–09 Great Recession is another part of this story, as median income for denominationally-affiliated congregations, expressed in constant 2012 dollars, decreased from \$114,000 in 2006 to \$108,000 in 2012. The typical congregation contributed \$4,000 to their denomination in 2012, with larger churches and mainline congregations more likely to contribute—and more likely to give a larger amount.



Overall, churches and churchgoers are aging, and congregations in America have become less connected to denominations over time. The decrease in denomination affiliation is primarily seen among the more entrepreneurially-minded evangelical and African American Protestants, for whom younger congregations are more often led by their founding pastor, than among Catholics or mainline Protestants. However, while the aging of churchgoers is more pronounced in mainline congregations, no group is immune to the general trend of fewer children since 1998. This trend reflects underlying demographic changes in American society: smaller families as a result of delaying marriage until later in life, and more people who do not have children. That is a trend likely to continue to influence American congregations, and is one to watch in the long term.

Size and Concentration

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

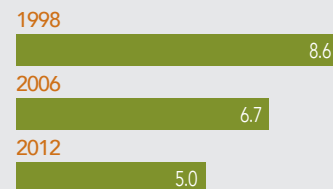
There is a lot to say about congregational size, but one fact is fundamental: Most congregations in the United States are small, but most people are in large congregations. In 2012, the average *congregation* had only 70 regular participants, counting both adults and children, and an annual budget of \$85,000. At the same time, the average *attendee* worshipped in a congregation with about 400 regular participants and a budget of \$450,000.

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 actually 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 400 people, you would have walked past about half of all churchgoers, but more than 90% (93%, 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 400-person congregation, you would have walked past only about 7% of all congregations, but half of all churchgoers.

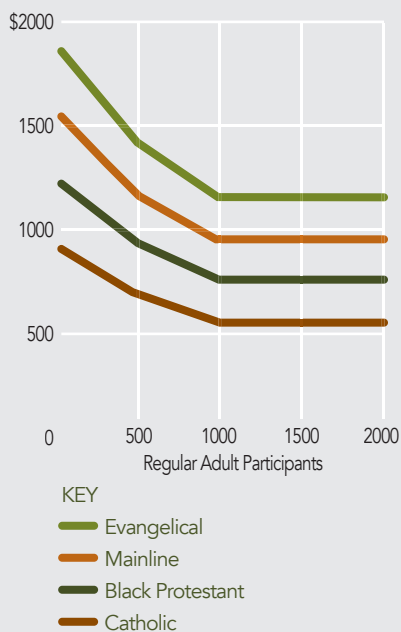
In a nutshell, the largest 7% of congregations contain about half of all churchgoers. Most denominations, even the largest ones, could comfortably gather the pastors of congregations representing more than half of their people in a medium-to-large hotel ballroom.

Percent of congregational income given to denominations



Note: These values only apply to denominationally-affiliated congregations.

Average annual donations per regular adult attendee for congregations of various sizes



Note: This figure shows the situation in 2012, but patterns in 1998 and 2006 are qualitatively the same.

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 smaller churches. About 70% of full-time ministerial staff and about 80% of part-time ministerial staff are employed by congregations with fewer than 400 people. Viewed another way, about three quarters of clergy serve in the set of congregations containing about half of all the people.

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.

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

What Has Changed Over Time?

It's not just that most people are in large congregations. That's always been true to some extent. But the concentration of people in the largest congregations has become more extreme in recent years, with the average congregation getting smaller while the average person attends a larger congregation. Between 1998 and 2012, the number of regular participants, including adults and children, in the median *congregation* decreased from 80 to 70 people. And median weekend attendance at all worship services declined from 100 people in 2006 to 76 people in 2012.

At the same time, the average *attendee* goes to a larger congregation in 2012 than he or she attended in 1998. The number of regularly participating people (adults and children) in the congregation attended by the average churchgoer remained constant at 400 during this period, but the median number of regularly participating adults increased from 275 in 1998 to 310 in 2012. And weekend worship service attendance at the average person's congregation increased from 350 to 400 people between 2006 and 2012.

The National Congregations Study (NCS) began only in 1998, but we know from other research that this trend towards more and more people in the largest churches began in the 1970s.¹ Megachurches receive a lot of attention, but they represent only the tip of the iceberg. The movement of people from smaller to larger churches is much broader and deeper than the proliferation of stereotypical megachurches. This trend has to level out at some point, but there is no sign yet that we have reached that plateau.

Does Size Matter?

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

*Larger congregations
have more people per
full-time clergyperson.*

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 figure on the facing page shows, the median annual per capita donation decreases as congregational size increases. As is well known, Protestants give more to their churches than do Roman Catholics, and, among Protestants, evangelicals give more than mainline Protestants and whites give more than blacks. However, within each of these groups, people in smaller churches give more than people in larger churches. (The lines in this graph are based on analyses that control for the socio-economic status of a congregation's people as well as their age demographics.)

For example, an evangelical congregation of 100 adults receives an average per capita contribution of \$1,750 while a congregation of 400 receives \$1,480 and a congregation of 1,000 receives \$1,140. The analogous numbers for Catholic parishes are \$850, \$720, and \$550. Overall, a congregation of 100 adults receives about 18% 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.

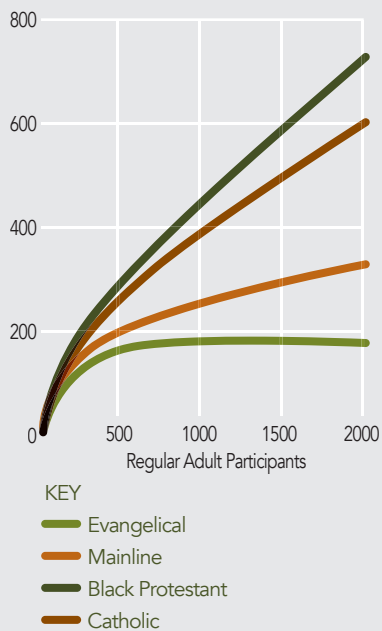
We do not know if there is something about larger congregations that causes people to give less than they would give if they were in a smaller congregation, or if people inclined to give less are drawn to larger congregations. Perhaps members of smaller congregations perceive (rightly or wrongly) that 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. 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.²

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 in proportion to congregation size? The figure on the following page 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. This graph only includes the 62% of congregations who have at least one full-time paid clergyperson, and the lines are based on analyses that control for socio-economic status and age structure of the congregation's people.

There are interesting differences across religious traditions, but there is also a basic similarity: Larger congregations have more people per full-time clergyperson.



Number of regularly participating adults per full-time ministerial staff member for congregations of various sizes



Note: Combined 2006 and 2012 data.

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, so that one person may serve 20, 100, or 175 parishioners, for example. 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.

In general, 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 1.6 full-time ministers, or one minister for every 126 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 176 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 159 people, while a Catholic church of that size has an average of only 1.9 full-time ministerial staff—one for every 263 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 numbers increase with size, but this might be because we have information about part-time staff only from the 2012 survey, so we are less able to discern differences between subgroups. In any event, looking just at the 43% 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 73 adults per part-time ministerial staff member. A congregation with 200 adults has 1.7 part-time clergy (one per every 118 adults), and a congregation with 500 adults has 2.0 part-time clergy (one per every 250 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 a large congregations do not expect the same level of personal attention from the pastor that people in a small congregation 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 on the left probably reflects differences between small and large congregations in how staff 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.



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

A typical worship service is 60 minutes long in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches and 90 minutes long in evangelical and black Protestant churches.

Worship

Congregations' central activity is corporate worship. This has not changed, but the nature of worship in American congregations has changed noticeably in recent years. One of the most fascinating and important changes is that worship services have become more informal in recent years, with more churches using contemporary music and musical styles, more spontaneous speaking from people in the pews, more unscripted bodily movement, and other developments that make worship more expressive and apparently focused on producing a certain kind of religious experience for participants.

The NCS asked questions in at least two of its surveys about 21 different things that may or may not happen in a congregation's main worship service. Without exception, if there is change over time in the prevalence of a particular worship practice, it is in the direction of more informality. For example, looking at change from 1998 to 2012:

- Fewer congregations incorporate choir singing into worship, falling from 54% to 45%.
- The number of congregations that use a printed bulletin dropped from 72% to 62%.
- Far more use visual projection equipment in worship, increasing dramatically from only 12% to 35%.
- The number of congregations in which someone other than the leader speaks at worship about their own religious experience increased from 78% to 85%.
- The number of congregations where people spontaneously say "Amen" grew from 61% to 67%.
- More have people jumping, shouting, or dancing spontaneously, up from 19% to 27%.
- The number of congregations in which people raise their hands in praise jumped from 45% to 59%.
- More congregations have applause breaking out, rising from 55% to 65%.
- The number of congregations that use drums increased from 20% to 34%.
- Fewer congregations use organs, falling from 53% to 42%.

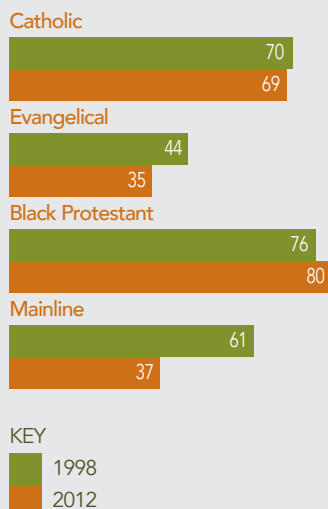
This trend towards informality has not occurred at the same pace and in the same way within every religious group. Most of the increase in informality has occurred among historically white Protestant groups. The use of organs, for example, decreased significantly only among evangelical congregations, while fewer choirs and more raising of hands happened only in evangelical and mainline Protestant congregations. Catholic congregations, by contrast, saw increases only in using more visual projection equipment and drums. They also were more likely in 2012 than in 1998 to have a time for people to greet one another, although greeting one another during the worship service did not increase in other traditions. And black Protestant congregations showed little change in any of these worship service features, with at least 80% of worship services across all years including a time for greeting one another, applause, jumping or dancing, spontaneously saying "Amen," raising hands, and testifying.

Why is this change happening? It may be that Pentecostal-style worship has widened its influence. Speaking in tongues, the hallmark of Pentecostal worship, has indeed trended upward (occurring in 24% of congregations in 1998 and 30% in 2012), but the worship changes seem broader than just more Pentecostalism. More likely, congregations share in a wider cultural trend towards informality. People dress more informally at work and social events as well as at

Percentage point change in selected worship service elements from 1998 to 2012



Percent of congregations with a choir



churches and synagogues. When talking with each other, we are less likely to use titles like Mr. or Mrs., Doctor, or Professor, and more likely to use a first name, or even a nickname. Another possibility, one consistent with the observation that these changes mainly happened within white Protestantism, is that they reflect the spread of an evangelical worship style that is helped along by its association with megachurches and contemporary worship music. Whatever its source, this trend partakes of a decades-long trend in American religion away from an emphasis on belief and doctrine and toward an emphasis on experience, emotion, and the search for a least-common-denominator kind of worship in a time of ever less salient denominationally specific liturgical and theological content. Yet another possible dynamic is that, between the consolidation of Catholic parishes in some dioceses and the shrinking of the Protestant mainline, there are simply fewer congregations with more formal worship styles. We are not in a position to sort all this out. Whatever the causes, informal worship has increased in American congregations, and its rise does not seem to have peaked.

Focus on Choirs

Digging a little deeper into one of these specific changes—the declining presence of choirs in worship services—illustrates some of the complexity behind the numbers above. The decline of choirs is worth examining in its own right because singing in the choir is one of the most common ways, along with Bible studies, for people to become more deeply involved in a congregation, and it is the single most common way for lay people to participate actively in gathered worship. Choirs often become their own communities within congregations, with participation in them as meaningful to choir members as their participation in the congregation as a whole. And choirs enhance worship services in ways that are not replaceable by other kinds of music. So choirs can be socially and liturgically important to congregations, and losing them represents a significant change.

A key observation here is that the decline of choirs has occurred only within historically white Protestant congregations—not in Catholic or black Protestant churches. In 2012, people in only about one third of white Protestant churches heard a choir sing at its most recent main worship service, compared to 80% of black Protestant churches and 69% of Catholic churches. White Protestant churches are much more different than they once were from black Protestant and Catholic churches when it comes to the presence of choirs.

This decline in choirs among white Protestant churches is not because of the declining average size of congregations. It is true that average congregation size is declining, and it is also true that, across all these religious traditions, larger congregations, especially those with paid music staff, are more likely than smaller congregations to have a choir. But the decline of choirs is especially evident among larger churches—those with 100 or more regularly participating adults. And the decline is particularly dramatic among larger white evangelical churches. A stable one-third of evangelical churches with fewer than 100 regularly participating adults have choirs (36% in 1998 and 35% in 2012). In larger evangelical churches, by contrast, 69% had a choir in 1998 but only 36% had one in 2012.

Interestingly, it appears that congregations without choirs are not simply substituting other kinds of music for choir singing. Instead, taking into account differences in size and religious tradition, worship services without a choir have, on average, about 4 fewer total minutes of music. The decline of choirs is not dramatic enough to produce an observable decline in the amount of music across all worship services—the average worship service contained about 20 minutes of music in all three NCS surveys. But there are hints that fewer choirs, at least in some contexts, mean less music in worship services, not just different kinds of music.

62% of congregations have more than one worship service in a typical week.

Other Things About Worship Services

The NCS tells us much about worship patterns beyond the informality trend and the declining use of choirs. Here are a few additional tidbits:

Length of Time Spent in Worship. The median worship service is 75 minutes long, but there is a lot of variation around this average. About one in four worship services are two hours or longer, while slightly more than one third (35%) keep regular worship times to an hour or less. Black Protestant and white evangelical services average about 90 minutes, compared to the 60-minute average service in Catholic and white mainline churches. Much of this 30-minute difference is taken up by longer sermons, which average 35 minutes in white evangelical and black Protestant churches and only 15 minutes in Catholic and white mainline Protestant churches. Congregation size does not seem to be related to service length, and there is no noticeable trend over time.

Multiple Worship Services. Sixty-two percent (62%) of congregations have more than one worship service in a typical week. Over time, however, multiple services have become less common, driven by changes among smaller congregations. In 1998, 70% of congregations with fewer than 150 regular adult participants had multiple services on a weekend, dropping to 57% in 2012. In contrast, the vast majority (nearly 90%) of congregations with more than 150 adults reported having multiple services in all three NCS surveys. In congregations that do have more than one weekly service, it seems that those services are more likely now to be similar in nature than they were in the past. In 2006, 48% of congregations with more than one service reported important differences between these services, but only 30% reported such differences in 2012. Perhaps the “worship wars” are less of an issue for congregations than they once were. However, when multiple services do differ from each other, it is mainly because of differences in formality and music. Twenty-two percent (22%) of congregations with more than one service in 2012 said that the level of informality was an important difference between the services and 15% said that the music was different. Language differences were much less common, reported by only 3% of congregations with more than one service.

Multisite Congregations. The development and proliferation of multisite congregations is an interesting recent development in American religion. Overall, 3.4% of congregations in 2012 were multisite; 10% of churchgoers were in those congregations. About half of these churchgoers hear the same sermon heard by people in the other locations, and one-third listen to or sing at least some of the same music. Not surprisingly, this phenomenon is driven by large congregations: 16.5% of congregations with at least 500 adult participants had multiple locations in 2012.



All in all, there is much variety—both across religious groups and over time—in the ways that Americans worship together. We have tried to document some of this variety here, emphasizing the spread of a more informal and expressive worship style. One would think that the rise of this particular worship style has to peak eventually as it reaches a saturation point, but it has not yet reached that point. Especially given the centrality of worship to congregational life, this is a trend worth watching in the years to come.





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 (56%) are led by a full- or part-time solo leader with no additional paid ministerial staff. But congregations with full-time, paid leaders are about equally split between those with just a solo leader (46%) and those with at least one additional paid ministerial staff person beyond the primary leader (54%). Twenty-four percent (24%) of congregations with paid leaders (20% of all congregations) employ two ministerial staff including the primary religious leader, and another 22% employ three or more. Assistant, associate, and specialized ministers are important to many congregations, and they constitute a majority of the ministerial work force. Overall, secondary leaders hold 56% of all ministerial positions: 42% of full-time positions and 74% of part-time positions.

This section of the report provides an overview of congregational staff configurations, assesses the extent to which pastoral leaders faced pay cuts in response to the Great Recession of 2007–09, and examines stability and change in pastoral leaders' ethnicity, gender, age, 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 that 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 sometimes 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 or not 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.

Second, *ministerial staff* encompasses paid head 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 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

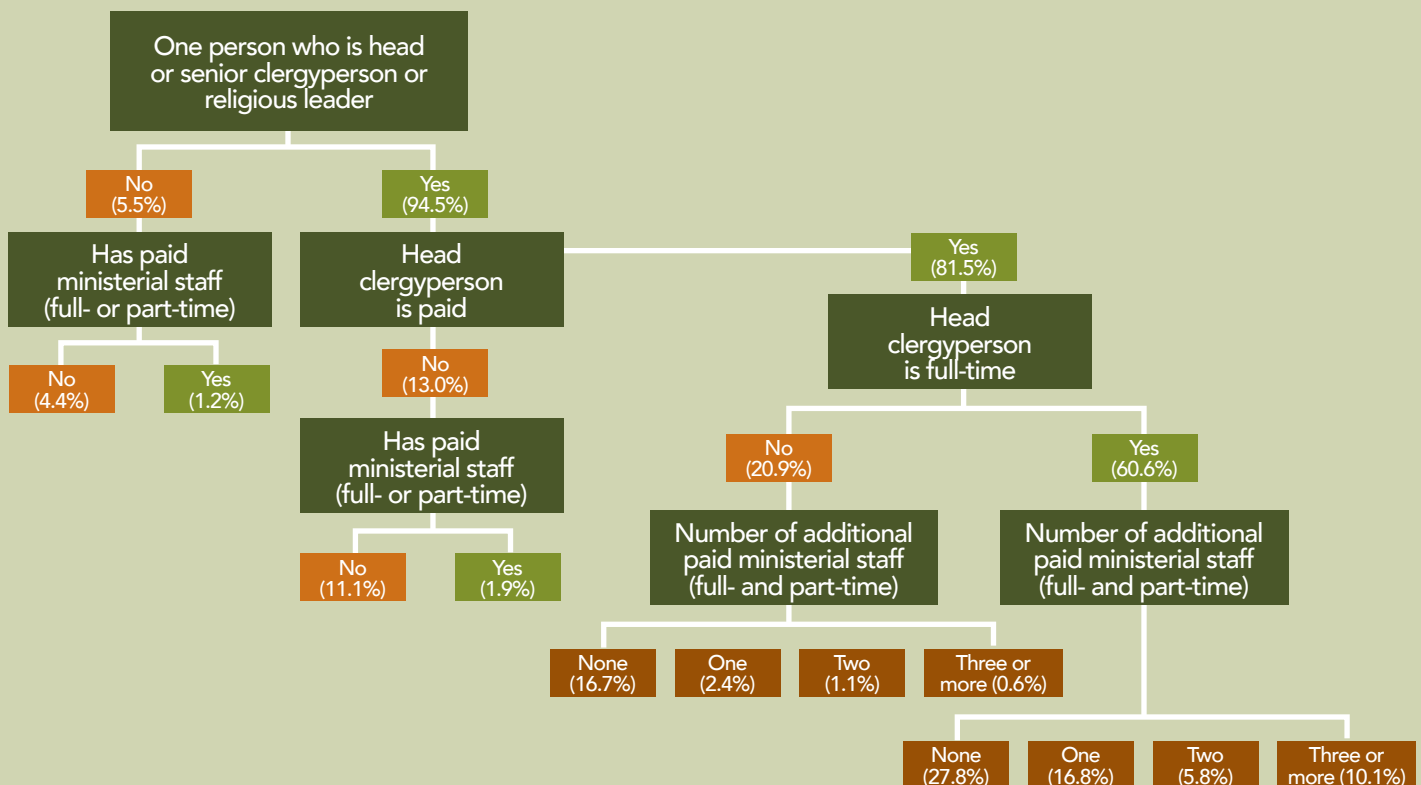
There is a lot of variety among congregations in how they are staffed, and in how those staff are organized. While the majority of congregations (61%) employ a full-time leader, 13% are led by unpaid volunteers, and 21% are led by a paid part-time leader. Having a part-time or volunteer leader is sometimes 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 53% of congregations with up to 100 regularly

More than half of congregations with a full-time paid pastoral leader have paid ministerial staff beyond the primary leader.

participating adults have a full-time paid leader, compared to 61% of congregations with 100–200 participants and 92% of congregations with at least 200 participants.

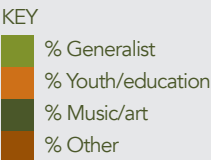
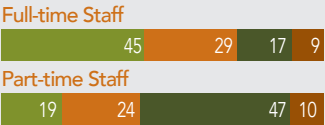
We observed earlier that most clergy are in congregations with fewer than 400 people. The largest 7% of congregations—those with more than 400 people—contain half of all churchgoers, 33% of all full-time ministerial staff, and 20% of all part-time ministerial staff (including primary clergy). However, these largest congregations contain a much larger proportion of all *secondary full-time* positions. Indeed, they contain a majority of such positions: 63%. They also contain a larger portion of all secondary part-time ministerial positions (27%), but this difference is not as dramatic since smaller congregations also employ many part-time staff.

Staff Configurations in American congregations, 2012. Percentages are of all congregations.



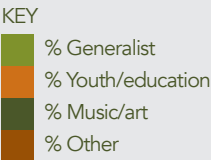
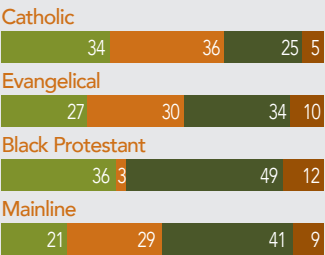
Religious groups vary in the extent to which their congregations are led by full-time leaders. Almost three-quarters of head clergy in Catholic parishes (74%) and in white evangelical churches (72%) work full time in that congregation, but fewer than half (47%) of head clergy in African American Protestant churches are full time. White mainline Protestants fall in between, with 62% of head clergy in a full-time position. Volunteer or unpaid head clergy tend to have less formal education and are most common in smaller and less affluent congregations. We see the most volunteer senior or solo clergy in black Protestant churches (22%) and the fewest in mainline (8%) and Catholic (9%) churches, with evangelical (14%) congregations falling in between. Volunteer leaders also are more likely to be female.

Job types held by secondary ministerial staff, 2012



Note: These values apply to congregations with up to three ministerial staff members.

Job types held by secondary ministerial staff, by religious tradition, 2012



Note: These values apply to congregations with up to three ministerial staff members. Full-time and part-time staff are combined.

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. Thirty percent (30%) of part-time senior or solo clergy serve multiple congregations while 58% hold a job aside from congregational ministry. Remarkably, a sizable number even of full-time paid pastoral leaders either serve other congregations (11%) or hold another job beyond their pastoral position (25%). Overall, 16% of solo or senior pastoral leaders serve multiple congregations, and 34% were bi-vocational. There were no time trends between 2006 and 2012 in the prevalence of congregations served by either bi-vocational or multi-congregation head clergy.

Serving more than one congregation is much more common for Roman Catholics (42% of all head clergy, whether full- or part-time) than for evangelical Protestants (6%). Mainline Protestants (25%) and African American Protestants (18%) fall in between. Jobs outside the ministry, by contrast, are much more common among African American Protestants (57% of all solo or head pastoral leaders, whether full- or part-time) and white evangelicals (39%), and more rare for mainline Protestant (15%) and Roman Catholic (13%) ministers and priests. All of these numbers are much higher, of course, for part-time pastoral leaders. Eighty-two percent (82%) of part-time leaders of Catholic parishes serve other congregations. The comparable numbers for mainline, black Protestant, and evangelical churches are 36%, 23%, and 21%, respectively. And 91% of part-time leaders of black Protestant churches have another job, compared with 75% for evangelical part-timers but only 15% and 9% for mainline and Catholic part-timers, respectively.

Generalists and Specialists

For congregations with up to three ministerial staff members (which includes more than 90% of all congregations), generalist assistant or associate ministers are by far the most common kind of full-time secondary position, making up 45% of all full-time secondary positions in these congregations. Positions focused on youth or religious education (29% of full-time secondary positions) and music or other arts (17%) are the most common kinds of specialist positions. No other type of specialist position makes up more than 3% of full-time secondary positions. It may be, though, that specialized positions such as those focusing on pastoral care, discipleship & small groups, outreach, or administration are more common in the minority of congregations with more than three ministerial staff members for which we don't have detailed staff information.

The generalist-specialist distribution is different for part-time and full-time secondary leaders. Part-time secondary ministerial leaders are most often musicians (47%), followed by staff focused on youth or religious education (24%), and then generalist ministers (19%). In short, most full-time secondary ministerial staff are generalists while most part-time secondary staff are specialists.

Religious traditions vary in their tendency to employ generalist ministers, musicians, or people focused on youth or religious education as secondary congregational staff members. When looking at all secondary ministerial staff (full-time and part-time combined), Protestant churches, especially black Protestant churches, employ relatively more musicians than Catholic parishes do, and staff focused on youth or education are least common in black Protestant churches. Distinguishing between staff focused on youth and staff focused on religious education reveals another interesting religious difference: white Protestant churches are more likely to have youth ministers rather than religious education specialists while the opposite is true for Catholic churches.

Ethnic diversity among clergy has increased especially dramatically for Roman Catholic priests.

In sum, congregational staffing is more complex and variable than it might appear at first glance, with almost half of all congregations employing more than one leader in a mix of full-time and part-time generalists and specialists who together do much of the work of running congregations.

Pay Cuts Rather Than Layoffs in Response to the Great Recession?

We cannot directly assess how congregations responded to the Great Recession of 2007–09, but there are hints in the NCS data that congregations, unlike many other employers, responded to the extra financial stress of those years with pay cuts rather than layoffs. We do not see any decline in the average number of either full-time or part-time staff between 2006 and 2012. At the same time, a noticeable minority of congregations reduced the pay of their primary leader: 14% of solo or senior pastoral leaders experienced a pay cut between 2010 and 2012. Pay cuts were more common among evangelical (16%) and black Protestant (23%) congregations than among Roman Catholic (5%) or mainline (6%) congregations. Interestingly, solo or senior pastoral leaders who had been at their congregations for a longer time were more likely to take a pay cut. For example, 25% of evangelical pastors with 10 or more years of tenure experienced a reduction in pay, compared to 15% of those who had been lead pastor for fewer than 10 years. Perhaps the deeper connection between long-time leaders and their congregations made them more likely to take a pay cut themselves rather than lay off or reduce the salaries of lower-paid staff. Clergy in smaller congregations also were more likely to take a pay cut during this time period, probably because smaller congregations have less of a financial cushion to draw on during economic hard times.

The NCS did not ask about clergy pay cuts in the 1998 or 2006 surveys, so we do not know if these pay-cut rates are in fact a response to the 2007–09 recession. It might instead be that about 14% of solo or senior pastoral leaders experience a pay reduction within any given two-year period. Future NCS surveys may be able to distinguish between these two possibilities.

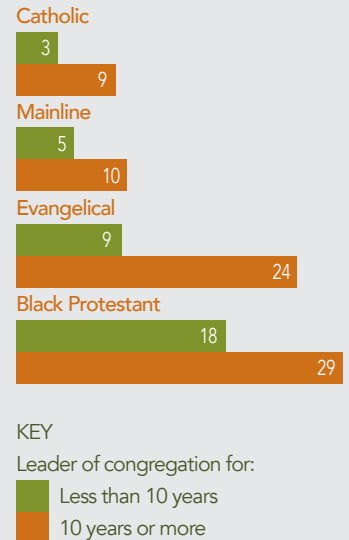
Ethnic Diversity Among Pastoral Leaders

Among historically white Christian religious traditions, Roman Catholic pastoral leaders—whether senior or secondary—are more ethnically diverse than Protestant leaders. This is mainly because Catholic churches themselves are more diverse than Protestant churches, on average. Catholics also stand out because their solo or senior leaders are more ethnically diverse than their secondary ministerial staff, while the opposite is true for Protestants. Overall, 13% of solo or senior pastoral leaders and 15% of secondary ministerial staff (whether

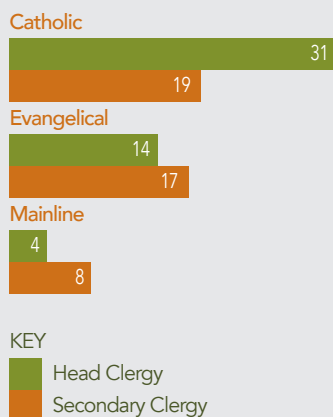


full- or part-time) within historically white religious traditions are African American, Hispanic, or Asian. Black Protestant congregations have the least ethnically diverse clergy, as virtually all (99%) of the solo or senior leaders as well as secondary clergy are African American. In a similar manner, mainline Protestant head clergy are almost entirely white and non-Hispanic (96%), although there is more diversity in their secondary clergy.

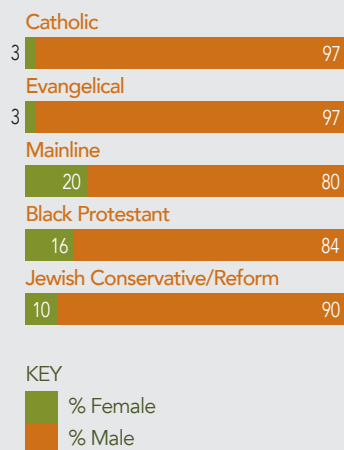
Percent of head clergy who took a paycut between 2010 and 2012



Percent of clergy within historically white religious traditions who are racial or ethnic minorities, 2012



Gender of solo or senior pastoral leaders, 1998, 2006, and 2012 combined



Overall, the percent of congregations with a white, non-Hispanic, senior leader dipped from 77% in 1998 to 67% in 2012. This decline was driven almost entirely by changes within Catholic parishes, in which the percent of congregations with a white, non-Hispanic leader decreased from 97% in 1998 to 69% in 2012. Many more Catholic parishes are now led by Hispanic and Asian clergy. Hispanics led only 2% of Catholic parishes in 1998, increasing to 17% in 2012. Asian-led Catholic parishes increased from a barely noticeable 1% in 1998 to 12% in 2012. Since these Hispanic and Asian leaders are often immigrants, Roman Catholic head clergy also are much more likely to be born outside the United States (34%) than those in evangelical (10%), mainline (3%), and African American (2%) congregations. Evangelical clergy also experienced some change in ethnic composition, most notably an increase in Hispanic leaders from 4% in 1998 to 10% in 2012.

Gender of Pastoral Leaders

Despite large percentages of female seminarians and increased numbers of female clergy in some denominations, women lead only a small minority of American congregations. Moreover, we do not detect any increase since 1998 in the overall percentage of congregations led by women. In 2012, women served as senior or solo pastoral leaders in only 11% of congregations, with these congregations containing just 6% of the people who attend religious services.

Of course, the presence of female leaders varies substantially across religious groups. Congregations within mainline Protestant and African American Protestant traditions are much more likely than evangelical Protestant congregations to be led by women. Combining data from all three NCS surveys, about 1 in 5 mainline and African American Protestant churches are led by women, compared to only 3% of congregations within evangelical traditions. And female leadership in Roman Catholic congregations remains near zero. (It is not literally zero because some priestless parishes are led by women, who usually are members of religious orders.) About 10% of Jewish Reform and Conservative synagogues are led by women.

The gender picture is much different when we look at secondary rather than primary ministerial staff. Forty-one percent (41%) of full-time and 53% of part-time secondary ministerial staff are female—significantly higher than the 11% of solo or senior pastoral leaders who are female. Although women are more commonly secondary rather than primary ministerial staff within all major religious traditions, white evangelical churches stand out for having fewer female secondary ministerial staff than congregations in other traditions. Women comprise only 27% of full-time secondary ministerial staff within white evangelical congregations, compared to 46% to 56% for other traditions. Looking at part-time positions, a minority are held by women in evangelical and black Protestant congregations (47% and 39%, respectively) while two-thirds of such positions are held by women in Roman Catholic (66%) and mainline Protestant (65%) congregations.

Even within religious traditions with sizable numbers of female clergy, female leaders are more common in smaller congregations. Just looking at mainline Protestant and African American Protestant congregations, where the vast majority of female pastoral leaders serve, only 12.4% of churches larger than 200 adults were led by a woman in 2012 (up from 6.1% in 1998). In comparison, 24.6% of congregations with fewer than 100 regular adult participants were led by women in 2012, almost exactly the same percentage of female-led small congregations in 1998 (24.3%). So it looks like women have made some inroads as pastoral leaders in large congregations, as illustrated by several well publi-

Women serve as senior or solo pastoral leaders in only 11% of U.S. congregations.

cized examples of women called to serve prominent congregations. And other research has shown that women earn salaries comparable to men if they have similar education and experience and if they lead congregations of similar size and member income level.³ But the overall percentage of congregations led by women is not higher today than it was in 1998, and the stained glass ceiling still makes it less likely for women to pastor the largest and best-paying congregations.

Overall, it is hard to miss the general pattern that lower status and lower paid ministerial positions are more heavily female. Women are more likely to lead smaller congregations. Secondary ministerial positions are much more likely than solo or senior pastoral positions to be held by women. And, among secondary positions, part-time positions are more likely than full-time positions to be held by women (except in black churches).

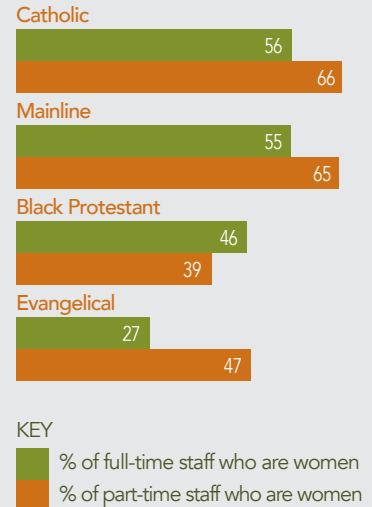
Why are so few congregations led by female clergy? Several factors are important. First, even though the percentage of women enrolling in Master of Divinity programs is much higher than it was 40 years ago, that percentage peaked in 2002 at 31.5% and even fell to 28.8% in 2014, according to the Association 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.⁴ 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 seems likely that the percentage of congregations led by women will increase slowly in the coming years as clergy from younger, more female cohorts replace clergy from older, almost completely male ones. But the presence of women in congregational leadership will 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. Consistent with developments in other occupations, the trend toward gender equality in American religion is uneven and stalled.

The Aging Clergy

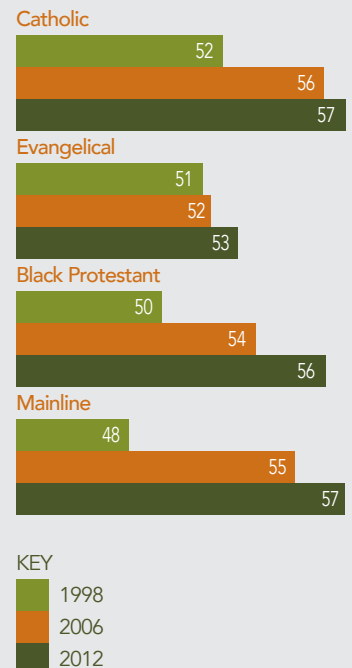
An increasing number of second-career clergy and a decreasing number of young people going to seminary straight from college help to produce a clergy population that is aging faster than the American public as a whole. Delayed retirements in response to the Great Recession also may have contributed to this clergy aging in recent years. The solo or senior leader in the average congregation was 49 years old in 1998, 53 years old in 2006, and 55 years old in 2012. In comparison, the average age of the over-25 American public increased by just three years between 2000 and 2012, from 46 to 49 years. The percent of people in congregations led by someone age 50 or younger declined from 48% in 1998 to 35% in 2012—a remarkable change in only fourteen years.

Solo and senior pastoral leaders are aging at different paces in different religious groups. Evangelical head clergy aged the least between 1998 and 2012, while those within mainline Protestant congregations aged the most—nine years—between 1998 and 2012. Catholic priests are as old as mainline and African American ministers in 2012, but they were older than other clergy to start with in 1998, so the change in average age during these years is not as large. Since Hispanic head clergy are significantly younger than those of other ethnicities (with an average age of 44 in 2012 across traditions), it seems likely that the Hispanic proportion of head clergy will continue to grow.

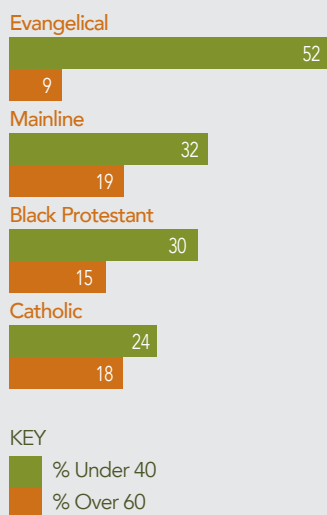
Women in secondary ministerial positions, 2012



Average age of senior and solo pastoral leaders



Age of secondary clergy, 2012



Secondary ministerial staff are younger on average than solo or senior pastoral leaders. While only 9% of solo or senior pastoral leaders were under 40 in 2012, two out of five (39%) secondary ministerial staff members are that young. At the other end of the age spectrum, 32% of solo or senior pastoral leaders were over 60 years old in 2012, compared to only 13% of secondary ministerial staff. With more than half of all secondary ministerial staff under 40 and fewer than one in ten over 60, evangelical congregations have the most youthful secondary ministerial staff. Catholics have the oldest secondary staff, with mainline and black Protestants in between.

Education among Pastoral Leaders

In general, clergy are a highly educated segment of American society, with about half (49% in 2012) of solo or senior pastoral leaders holding graduate degrees. While there is no change in this proportion between 1998 and 2012, the education level of clergy is highly variable across denominations and religious traditions. Roman Catholic congregations have the most highly educated congregational leaders (85% with graduate degrees in 2012), closely followed by mainline Protestant congregations (77%). On the other hand, solo or senior pastoral leaders of African American congregations are least likely to have graduate degrees (29% in 2012). Between those extremes, 41% of white evangelical congregational leaders hold a graduate degree. In evangelical and African American Protestant congregations about three out of ten head clergy have no formal education past a high school degree. 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 42% of solo or senior pastor leaders in smaller congregations.

Within every tradition, secondary ministerial staff are less well-educated, on average, than solo or senior pastoral leaders. In 2012, 42% of full-time secondary ministerial staff and 18% 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 percent of secondary ministerial staff with graduate degrees would be lower than the percent with any sort of religious leadership credential.

Religious differences in the educational level of secondary ministerial staff look much like the religious differences in the educational level of solo or senior pastoral leaders: Catholics and mainline Protestants have the most educated secondary staff while evangelicals and black Protestants have the least educated secondary staff. The NCS data hint at a possible decline over time in seminary education among full-time generalist secondary staff within evangelical congregations, but we do not have enough information to conclude with confidence that we see such a trend.

Across religious traditions, 49% of full-time and 55% of part-time secondary ministerial staff in 2012 were drawn from the congregations in which they currently work. (As with staff titles, we have information about secondary staff members' prior involvement in the congregation only for congregations with up to 3 ministerial staff members.) We have comparable information about solo and senior pastors only in 2006, when only 23% came from their current congregations. Furthermore, congregations with less educated secondary ministerial staff are more likely to draw such staff from within the congregation itself. The secondary ministerial staff within African American congregations are most likely to have been drawn from within

About half (49%) of senior or solo pastoral leaders hold graduate-level degrees.

the congregation, followed by the secondary staff within evangelical churches. Mainline Protestant congregations are the least likely to hire secondary ministerial staff from within.

Overall, secondary 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 secondary 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, and 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.

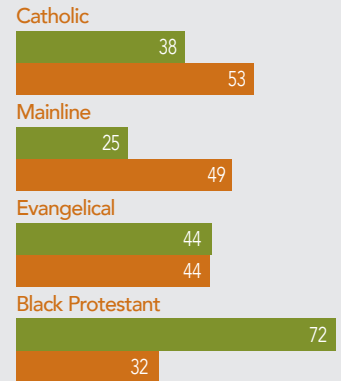


So, while it's still true that the majority of congregations are led by a white, middle-aged male, pastoral leaders of American congregations are an older and more ethnically diverse group in 2012 than they were in 1998. There also is a lot of variation across religious groups in the ethnic, gender, and educational composition of clergy, as well as in the prevalence of leaders who serve multiple congregations or are bi-vocational. Perhaps the most interesting and surprising finding about congregational leadership is how few women serve in lead pastoral positions even though dozens of religious denominations are in principle open to female leaders and even after several decades of relatively high female enrollment in seminaries. 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.



Previous congregational involvement and seminary education of full-time secondary ministerial staff



KEY

- % with prior involvement in congregation
- % with seminary degree

Note: These values apply to congregations with up to three full-time clergy. 2006 and 2012 data are combined.

Percent of people in congregations where ...

... no single ethnic group makes up 80% or more of the participants



... 80% or more of the participants are white and non-Hispanic



... 100% of participants are white and non-Hispanic



KEY



Percent of people in predominantly white congregations with ...

... at least some black participants



... at least some Hispanic participants



... at least some Asian participants



KEY



Race and Ethnicity

American congregations have become more ethnically diverse since 1998, and 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 ethnically diverse. First, the population of congregations has itself become more diverse. Most noticeably, there are more predominantly Hispanic congregations, with 8% of churchgoers attending predominantly Hispanic congregations in 2012, compared to only 1% in 1998. (By *predominantly* Hispanic we mean that 80% or more of the regular attendees are Hispanic.)

Even more remarkable, however, is the change that is occurring *within* congregations. In short, congregations have become more internally diverse since 1998. The percentage of people attending congregations in which no ethnic group constitutes at least 80% of the regular attendees increased from 15% in 1998 to 20% in 2012. This is a steady and notable increase in the percent of congregations in which no one group has an overwhelming majority of the people. Moreover, as of 2012 only 57% of people attended predominantly white congregations, down from 72% in 1998. Perhaps most striking, only 11% of American churchgoers were in an all-white congregation in 2012, in contrast with nearly 20% in 1998. That means that only about half as many people were in all-white congregations in 2012 than were in such homogeneous congregations as recently as 1998.

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 2012 than they were in earlier years. The presence of Latinos, Asians, and African Americans in predominantly white congregations has increased steadily since 1998. In 2012, clear majorities of churchgoers in predominantly white congregations were in congregations with at least some African Americans (69%) or Hispanics (62%), and almost half (48%) were in congregations with at least some Asians. In fact, 82% of attendees were in congregations with at least some non-white presence. These are all notable increases since 1998. The increase has occurred mostly among Protestants, who are catching up to Catholics, for whom 90% of parishioners in predominantly white churches were in congregations with at least some non-white people in both 1998 and 2012.

*Larger congregations and
congregations with fewer senior citizens
are more likely to be ethnically diverse.*

Interestingly, there is no corresponding increase in ethnic diversity within predominantly black congregations. In 2012, 65% of attendees in predominantly black churches were in congregations with at least some non-black participants, but this number has not increased over time. This means that churchgoers in predominantly white congregations are more likely to experience at least a small measure of ethnic diversity in worship than attendees of black congregations.

We do not want to overstate the magnitude or significance of increasing ethnic diversity within American congregations. Eighty-six percent (86%) of American congregations (containing 80% 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 race or ethnic group comprises more than 80% of the people—are larger. In 2012, people in congregations with at least 250 adults were twice as likely as people in smaller congregations to be in an ethnically diverse congregation (25% versus 12%). Diverse congregations also have more young people. In 2012, only 13% of people attending congregations in which most people were older than 60 were in diverse congregations, compared with 23% attending diverse congregations where fewer than half the people are that old. Interestingly, congregations with more low-income people were more ethnically diverse in 1998, but that difference all but disappeared in 2012 because ethnic diversity increased to a greater extent in wealthier congregations.

Different religious groups also manifest different diversity patterns. For example, the presence of immigrants increased over time in both Catholic and white Protestant congregations, but Catholic churches are much more likely to have recent immigrants than Protestant churches. As of 2012, 80% of Catholics were in a church with at least some recent immigrants, compared to only 43% for white evangelicals, 33% for white mainline Protestants, and 17% for black Protestants. This heavy presence of immigrants in Catholic churches is of course because most recent immigrants are from Latin America, especially Mexico, and most of those immigrants are Catholic.



The increase in the 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 African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, or recent immigrants in a predominantly white congregation affect that congregation's life in important ways? Will a clergyperson 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 could change (or not change) congregations deserves additional research and reflection.



Percent of congregations mentioning given social service program area among their top four, 2012



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 one third are politically active, engaging in efforts to promote or prevent social and cultural change. 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 2012, the vast majority of congregations (87%) 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 who attend religious services (94%) 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. More than half (52%) of all congregations—almost two-thirds (63%) of congregations active in social service—mention feeding the hungry among their four most important social service programs. Addressing health needs (21%), building or repairing homes (18%), and providing clothing or blankets to people (17%) also were among the more commonly mentioned activities, though they were much less common than food assistance. Even more rarely mentioned by congregations as one of their four most important social service projects are those requiring longer-term commitments and more intensive interaction with the needy. Programs aimed at helping prisoners, victims of domestic violence, the unemployed, substance abusers, and immigrants, for example, each are 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.



Categories like *food assistance* or *home building* 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 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

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.

for Humanity project, or they might partner with city government to build affordable housing. Health assistance includes 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 14% 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 who say that they do no social services, the median congregation in 2012 spent only \$1,500 directly on its social service activities, which amounts to about 1.8% of the average congregation's budget.

While these may be small numbers, note that they do not include special offerings collected for specific charitable purposes, the dollar value of in-kind contributions to community organizations, or the dollar value of staff time in congregations where staff work on social service projects. In fact, congregations' absolute contributions to community well-being are substantial. If 14% of the more than 300,000 congregations in the United States have a staff person devoting quarter time to social services, that means that more than 40,000 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.

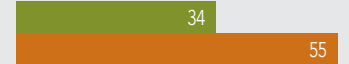
Overall, though, the typical and probably most important way in which congregations serve the needy outside their walls is by organizing small groups of volunteers to carry out well-defined tasks on a periodic basis: fifteen people spending several Saturdays renovating a house, five people cooking and 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 most active in areas like food assistance 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.

Politics

Congregations' political activity may receive more media attention than their social service work, but fewer congregations are politically active than do social services. In 2012, one-third (34%) of congregations (containing 55% of attendees) engaged in at least one of the eight political activities asked about in the NCS. Since larger congregations are more politically active than smaller congregations, and since the number of people exposed to political opportunities in their congregations is at least as important as the number of politically active congregations, we focus both on the percentage of congregations that engaged in various political activities within the past year (or within the past two years for voter guides) and the percentage of religiously active people who attend congregations engaging in each activity. The most common type of activities are making announcements about political opportunities during worship services (15% of all congregations, containing 24% of attendees), distributing voter guides (13% of congregations, containing 24% of attendees), participating in demonstrations or marches (13% of congregations, containing 25% of attendees), and registering voters (11% of congregations, containing 23% of attendees). The least common forms of political involvement are organizing a group meeting to discuss politics (6% of congregations, containing 13% of attendees) and hosting elected officials (5% of congregations, 11% of attendees) or political candidates (5% of congregations, 6% of attendees) as speakers.

Participation in political activities, 2012

Took part in at least 1 activity below



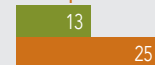
Offered opportunities for political activities at worship service



Distributed voter guides in past 2 years



Participated in demonstration or march



Helped register voters



Lobbied elected officials



Had group or meeting discussing politics



Government official as visiting speaker



Political candidate as visiting speaker



KEY



Percent of congregations participating in political activities, by religious tradition, 2012



KEY

- Catholic
- Black Protestant
- Mainline Protestant
- Evangelical Protestant



There are important differences between religious groups in both the extent and character of their congregations' political involvement. Catholic parishes were the most likely to be active, in the sense of reporting at least one type of political activity in 2012 (75%). Evangelical Protestant congregations were the least likely to be active (23%). Black (45%) and mainline (33%) Protestants fell in between. Although there are too few Jewish synagogues in the NCS sample to have great con-

fidence 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 Catholic parishes. While larger congregations are more engaged politically than smaller congregations, the religious tradition differences remain even when comparing similarly sized congregations.

Roman Catholic congregations outpaced congregations in other traditions on several types of activity, but they especially stand out when it comes to participating in demonstrations or marches and lobbying elected officials. African American congregations are particularly likely to participate in electoral politics, hosting more political candidates and government officials as speakers than other groups, and registering voters much more than white Protestant churches, and about as often as Catholic parishes. 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, and these patterns have not changed since the first NCS in 1998.

What issues do politically active congregations address? The 2006 NCS asked congregations that lobbied elected officials or participated in a demonstration to tell us in an open-ended way what issues they lobbied or marched about. The 2012 NCS then asked lobbying and marching congregations if they lobbied or marched about four of the most commonly mentioned issues in the 2006 survey: poverty, abortion, same-sex marriage, and immigration. The results for 2012 are informative. When congregations lobbied or marched, they did so in approximately equal measure around issues of poverty, abortion, and same-sex marriage, and less so about immigration. About one third of lobbying or marching congregations focused on poverty (37%), abortion (33%), or same-sex marriage (29%), while 13% focused on immigration. Remember that these numbers are a percentage of the 15% of congregations who lobbied or marched about *something*. Calculated as a percentage of *all* congregations, only 6% lobbied or marched about poverty and only 2% about immigration.

As with types of political activity, religious groups tended to focus on different issues when they lobbied or marched in 2012. Compared to other groups, Roman Catholic congregations were especially focused on abortion, and they lobbied or marched about immigration noticeably more than did congregations in other traditions. Evangelical Protestants were much more active on the issue of abortion than they were on any other issue, while black Protestants were more politically active on poverty-related issues than they

*Different religious groups
favor some types of
political action over others.*

were on any other issue. Mainline Protestants and Catholics outpaced other groups when it came to lobbying or marching on poverty-related issues. (Taken as a whole, the varied group of non-Christian congregations lobbied or marched about same-sex marriage at a much higher rate than did Christian congregations, which is why the overall involvement level on that issue is higher than that of any individual Christian religious tradition.)

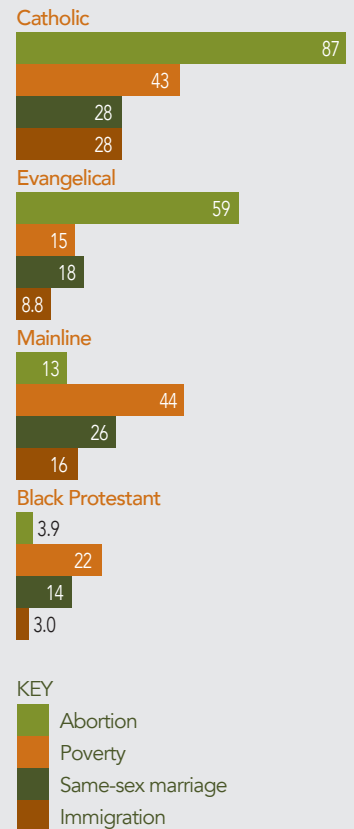
The open-ended issue responses in the 2006 NCS revealed another key feature of congregation-based political activity. With one important exception, congregation-based lobbying and demonstrating or marching tends to be extremely one-sided. Although many churchgoing Americans are pro-choice, congregation-based activism about abortion is almost entirely 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. The one exception to this one-sidedness is same-sex marriage and, more broadly, equal rights for gays and lesbians. On this issue, congregation-based political activism is about equally split between the two sides. Religious opposition to same-sex marriage is well-known and well-publicized, but, in fact, there is about as much congregation-based activism on the pro-gay side as there is on the anti-gay side. This is an important corrective to conventional wisdom about how religion and politics intersect on this issue.



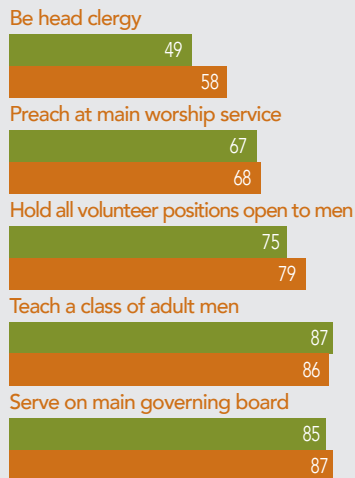
Overall, it seems fair to say that, when congregations turn their attention to their surrounding communities, they focus more on serving the needy than trying to effect systemic change. Congregations are very good at providing small groups of volunteers. Doing this over and over again, for a variety of purposes, may be congregations' special niche in the complex web of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, extended families, 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.



Percent of lobbying or marching congregations taking action on specified issues, by religious tradition, 2012



Percent of congregations allowing women to participate in given activities



KEY
 2006
 2012

Inclusivity

The cultural and theological divide between theologically and politically liberal and conservative denominations and congregations is a well-established fact of American religion. In 2012, leaders of 12% of congregations said that their congregations were theologically “more on the liberal side,” 63% said that their congregations were “more on the conservative side,” and 25% said that their congregations were “right in the middle.”

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 the extent to which gays and lesbians are welcomed as leaders. Whether or not women and homosexuals are ordained to full clergy status, and whether or not they can serve in some official 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 inclusivity, even within denominations that officially welcome or officially prohibit women and homosexuals 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 homosexuals, albeit with substantial variation across religious traditions.

Women and Congregational Leadership



As we documented earlier in this report, women lead only a small minority of American congregations, and we do not detect any increase since 1998 in the overall percentage of congregations led by women. 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 even since 2006. In 2012 women could in principle be the sole or senior pastoral leader in 58% of congregations, up from 49% of congregations. This change mainly indicated increased acceptance of female leaders at the congregational level among Protestants.

At the same time, there are large differences among Protestants in the acceptance of female head clergy. Ninety percent (90%) of congregations within mainline denominations accept female leaders in principle, compared to 70% of black Protestant churches and only 41% of white evangelical churches.

Unsurprisingly, congregations are more accepting of women exercising leadership in ways other than full pastoral status. In 2012, 68% of congregations allowed women to preach at a main worship service, 79% allowed women to hold any volunteer position a man can hold, 86% allowed women to teach classes containing adult men, and 86% allowed women to serve on the congregation’s main governing body. If there is a trend,

Women could, in principle, serve as senior or solo pastoral leaders at a majority (58%) of American congregations.

it is in the direction of 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 teaching classes and serving on governing boards, with only about 10% of congregations disallowing women from those roles.

Religious tradition differences in the acceptance of women in lay leadership positions mainly mirror their differences in accepting women as head clergy. Nearly all 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 about one-quarter prohibiting women even from serving on a governing board or teaching a class containing adult men. Black Protestant churches approach white mainline churches in their levels of gender inclusiveness for lay leadership. The Catholic pattern stands out because Catholic parishes are highly inclusive of women as lay leaders (with about 90% allowing women to serve in any lay leadership position, including the governing board and teaching classes containing men) while universally excluding women from the priesthood and (almost universally) also from preaching.

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 seems to be happening at a remarkably fast pace within religious congregations. The 2006 and 2012 NCS surveys 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 six years, the number of congregations whose leaders said that gays and lesbians could be full-fledged members increased from 37% to 48%. The number of congregations whose leaders said that no volunteer leadership positions were closed to gays and lesbians increased from 18% to 27%.

Like with gender inclusiveness, these aggregate statistics hide major differences across religious groups in their acceptance of gays and lesbians. In contrast to the overall trend, for example, there seems to be less acceptance of gays and lesbians among Catholic churches in 2012 than there was in 2006. The number of Catholic parishes whose leaders said that



Percent of congregations that permit gays and lesbians in committed relationships to ...



KEY
 2006
 2012



gays and lesbians could be full-fledged members decreased from 74% to 54%. The number of Catholic parishes whose leaders said that no volunteer leadership positions were closed to gays and lesbians declined from 39% to 26%. 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.

Evangelical Protestant churches are the least likely to accept gay and lesbian members (23%) and leaders (4%). 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 lay leaders. At the same time, however, the increased acceptance of gays and lesbians as members among black Protestant churches was remarkably large for just a six-year period: from 44% of congregations in 2006 to 62% in 2012. Acceptance also increased among mainline Protestant churches from 67% of congregations in 2006 to 76% in 2012. Similarly, gays and lesbians as volunteer leaders were increasingly accepted in black Protestant churches (from 7% in 2006 to 22% in 2012) and in mainline Protestant churches (from 54% in 2006 to 63% in 2012). Therefore, the growing acceptance of gays and lesbians in congregations as a whole is driven by changes among these two groups.



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 who consider themselves fully inclusive but in which a gay couple would not feel welcome or women would encounter obstacles to leadership. The gap between ideals and practices often is a large one. Mainline or evangelical, liberal or conservative, inclusive or exclusive—these labels may sometimes describe ideals more accurately than practices. 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 NCS findings, but there are many additional observations that we do not have space to pursue here in detail. For example:

Some congregations provide health services for their members and broader communities. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of congregations have some organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs, and 29% have a group that exercises together or otherwise promotes physical activity. Many congregations also have groups that support people with terminal illness or chronic health problems (47%), people struggling with drug or alcohol abuse (38%), people with mental illness (23%), and people with HIV / AIDS (7.5%).

More congregations are paying attention to management of congregational and personal finances. The number of congregations that held meetings within the past year to discuss managing congregational finances increased from 47% in 1998 to 66% in 2012. Similarly, the number of congregations with a group or meeting that focused on personal finance management increased from 22% of congregations in 1998 to 31% in 2012.

Spanish-speaking and Hispanic-heritage congregations have become a more important component of American Christianity, and there is substantial diversity among the congregations attended by Hispanics. To get a better idea of how Hispanic people and congregations fit within the larger religious picture, and to better document diversity among Hispanic congregations, the 2012 NCS included an oversample of congregations attended by Hispanics. Most Hispanic churchgoers are in Catholic churches (63%), but almost one third (31%) are in evangelical Protestant congregations. About half of Hispanic churchgoers (48%) attend predominantly Hispanic congregations, and about one-third (34%) attend a congregation with an Hispanic senior or solo pastoral leader. Nearly half (43%) attend a congregation with a Spanish or bilingual Spanish-English main worship service, and an additional 31% attend a congregation with at least one worship service in Spanish or bilingual Spanish-English.

International connections are significant for many congregations. Within the last year, almost one third (30%) of congregations, containing 50% of religious service attendees, hosted a visiting preacher or speaker from outside the United States. Many congregations (27%) sent a group abroad to help people in need, and 19% sent money directly to another congregation outside the United States. About 1 in 5 congregations (18%) have recent immigrants among their regular participants, and 10% of senior or solo pastoral leaders were born outside the United States.



Please visit our website where you can learn more about the NCS and conduct your own research using the survey data: www.soc.duke.edu/natcong

Conclusion

Many people are familiar with at least one religious congregation—their own. But you gain important perspective from seeing your own congregation within a larger context. Is your congregation typical or atypical? Does it exemplify current trends, or is it resisting those trends? The NCS provides the context that makes it possible to answer these questions and others. We have highlighted some of the most important findings, but there are many more in the four 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.



Notes

- ¹ Mark Chaves. 2006. "All Creatures Great and Small: Megachurches in Context." *Review of Religious Research*, 47:329–46.
- ² David Eagle. 2015. *Supersized Christianity: The Origins and Consequences of Protestant Megachurches*. PhD dissertation. Sociology, Duke University.
- ³ Jackson Carroll. 2006. *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, p. 70. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- ⁴ Elaine McDuff. 2001. "The Gender Paradox in Work Satisfaction and the Protestant Clergy," *Sociology of Religion*, 62:1–21.

Appendix: Tables

We present four tables. Tables 1 and 2, “Continuity and Change in American Congregations,” facilitate comparisons over time, giving values for virtually all items asked in 2012 and also asked in one or both of the earlier NCS survey waves. Table 3, “2012 National Congregations Study Basic Findings,” gives values for almost every item on the Wave III questionnaire and provides a simple overview of the 2012 data. In Table 4, “Characteristics of Assistant, Associate, and Other Ministerial Staff,” we present information about secondary staff at the level of the individual staff person.

There are two kinds of numbers provided in Tables 1, 2, and 3, labeled “Attendees’ Perspective” and “Congregations’ Perspective.” Both sets of numbers are meaningful, but they provide slightly different views of the NCS data. Look at the attendees’ perspective if you want to know about the characteristics of the congregation attended by the average worship service attendee or the percent of persons in U.S. congregations of a certain type. Look at the congregations’ perspective if you want to know about the characteristics of the average congregation or the percent of congregations of a certain type.

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

Here is another example using actual NCS data: In exploring the facts about the gender of congregations’ senior leaders, you might be interested in the percent of people who attend U.S. congregations that are led by female senior clergy. The attendees’ perspective column on the second page of both Tables 1 and 3 shows that as of 2012, 6.2% of U.S. worshippers are in congregations led by a female clergy person. On the other hand, you might be interested in the percent of *congregations* that are led by females. The congregations’ perspective column on the second page of Tables 2 and 3 shows that 11.4% of congregations have female senior clergy.

The tables also contain many endnotes. While some of these notes provide clarification on item wording or other issues across surveys, the vast majority of these notes indicate the denominators for given percentages. It is important to keep these denominators in mind since interpretations and impressions about the meaning of a percentage change with its denominator. For example, on page 52 in Table 3, the “Congregations’ Perspective” column shows that 33.3% of regular attendees are in congregations with lobbying or marching activities related to abortion; however, note 22 tells us that this is not 33.3% of all congregations, but 33.3% of congregations who participated in lobbying or marching activities. The percent for all congregations is 5.0 (33.3% of the 15.1% who lobbied and/or marched). Thus, instead of concluding that a rather significant number of American congregations have recently marched or lobbied about abortion, we conclude that only 1 in 20 congregations are involved in such activities. The appropriate interpretation of this percentage depends entirely on its denominator.

**Table 1. Continuity and Change in American Congregations:
Attendees' Perspective**

This table provides descriptive statistics for many items contained in multiple NCS waves. Values for a single variable in different years that are followed by different lower case letters are different from one another at the 0.05 level of statistical significance.¹ All comparisons are t-tests of means, even when medians are reported. Where no differences are statistically significant, letters are omitted. Sometimes a mean difference between years is statistically significant even when the median is unchanged.

We use a slightly updated version of the 1998 and 2006-07 datasets, so these numbers may not exactly match values produced from the previously available datasets. Means and medians refer to the congregation attended by the average participant (attendee) in religious services.² Percentages give the percentage of attendees in congregations with the stated characteristic.

	1998	2006-07	2012
AGE AND SIZE			
Median founding date	1924 ^a	1940 ^a	1946 ^b
Median congregation age (yrs)	74	66	66
Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life:			
Mean	2558 ^{ab}	2399 ^a	3278 ^b
Median	750	700	800
Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life: ³			
Mean	1183 ^a	1167 ^a	1540 ^b
Median	400	400	400
Number of <i>adults</i> regularly participating in the congregation's religious life:			
Mean	779 ^a	794 ^a	1068 ^b
Median	275	280	310
Percent for whom the number of regularly participating adults in the last two years has:			
Increased	--	49.2 ^a	36.5 ^b
Remained about the same	--	36.2	34.0
Decreased	--	14.6 ^a	29.5 ^b
RELIGIOUS TRADITION⁴			
Roman Catholic	28.8	27.9	27.7
White evangelical Protestant	33.4	37.3	37.6
White mainline Protestant	24.0 ^a	20.0 ^{ab}	17.1 ^b
Black Protestant	10.5	11.4	12.9
Jewish	1.6	1.6	2.1
Muslim	0.4	0.4	0.7
Buddhist	0.1	0.3	0.3
Hindu	0.2	0.4	0.6
Other non-Christian	1.1	0.6	1.0
Percent with no denominational affiliation	10.4 ^a	14.0 ^{ab}	15.0 ^b
BUILDING AND FINANCE			
Percent owning their own building	94.9	94.9	92.6
Percent meeting in a:			
Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque	92.9 ^a	97.3 ^b	95.7 ^{ab}
School	3.3 ^a	0.8 ^b	1.0 ^b
Other kind of building	3.8	2.0	3.3

Table 1. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Attendees' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Percent with a formal written budget	87.7	88.8	90.8
Median income in past year	\$260,000 ^a	\$380,000 ^b	\$450,000 ^c
Median income from individuals in past year	\$230,000 ^a	\$330,000 ^b	\$400,000 ^c
Median budget for past year	\$250,000 ^a	\$350,000 ^b	\$450,000 ^c
Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property ⁵	38.2 ^a	30.6 ^b	35.2
Median amount of income from rental or sale of building or property in past year ⁶	\$4,845	\$9,000	\$10,000
Percent giving money to denomination in the past year	82.8 ^a	80.2 ^a	74.8 ^{ab}
Median amount given to denominations in past year ⁷	\$20,800 ^a	\$25,000 ^{ab}	\$32,000 ^b
Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund	73.9	73.3	77.2
Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ⁸	\$70,000 ^a	\$100,000 ^{ab}	\$150,000 ^b
LEADERSHIP			
Percent with a head clergyperson or leader	95.5	97.0	95.7
Percent with full-time head clergyperson or leader ⁹	--	87.0	89.9
Percent with female head clergyperson or leader	5.5	4.6	6.2
Percent with head clergyperson or leader of each race or ethnicity:			
White	83.9 ^a	79.5 ^{ab}	75.5 ^b
Black	11.9	13.0	14.6
Hispanic	2.1 ^a	3.3 ^{ab}	6.0 ^b
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4 ^a	3.1 ^{ab}	3.5 ^b
Other	0.7	1.1	0.5
Median number of years senior clergyperson in current position ¹⁰	6.0 ^a	6.0 ^{ab}	6.0 ^b
Median age of senior clergyperson	51 ^a	54 ^b	55 ^b
Percent for whom head clergyperson has highest education level of:			
Less than high school	1.4	--	0.9
High school diploma or GED, with or without one or more years of college	9.4	--	12.1
Bachelor's degree	15.0	--	15.4
Graduate Degree	74.2	--	71.6
Percent for whom head clergyperson has following characteristics:			
Currently attends seminary or theological school	--	13.0	7.6
Ordained to full clergy status	--	97.1	96.9
Paid for work in congregation	--	92.5	94.3
Also serves another congregation	--	11.2	11.1
Also holds another job	--	17.4	17.7
PAID STAFF			
Percent with the following characteristics:			
No paid staff ¹¹	7.0	4.9	4.8
No full-time staff	14.7	11.5	11.9
1 full-time staff person	20.4	22.6	21.5
2 or more full-time staff people	64.9	65.9	66.6
No full-time ministerial staff ¹²	--	12.6	13.1
1 full-time ministerial staff person	--	33.4	32.2

Table 1. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Attendees' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
2 or more full-time ministerial staff people	--	54.0	54.7
No part-time staff	17.0	16.1	15.1
1 part-time staff person	10.0	10.3	10.3
2 or more part-time staff people	73.0	73.6	74.6
Number of full-time paid staff: ¹³			
Mean	7.8	9.1	9.5
Median	3.0	3.0	3.0
Number of full-time paid ministerial staff:			
Mean	--	3.6	4.4
Median	--	2.0	2.0
Number of part-time paid staff:			
Mean	5.9 ^a	5.8 ^a	7.4 ^b
Median	3.0	4.0	4.0
Percent for whom the number of full-time paid staff in past year has:			
Increased	--	17.5	14.3
Stayed the same	--	74.5	76.0
Decreased	--	7.9	9.7
WORSHIP			
Percent with 1 service in typical week	14.3	14.5	17.8
Percent with 2 or more services in typical week	85.6	85.3	82.2
Percent reporting important differences between services on typical weekend	--	50.1 ^a	42.3 ^b
Median length of most recent main service (minutes)	70	70	70
Median length of most recent sermon (minutes) ¹⁴	20 ^a	20 ^b	22 ^b
Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service	20	20	20
Median number of socializing minutes before / after typical service	30	30	30
Median attendance at most recent main service	230	200	225
Median total attendance (adults and children) at <i>all</i> services during the past weekend	--	350 ^a	400 ^b
Median number of regularly participating adults attending more than one service in past week ¹⁵	40	50	50
Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic:			
Sermon or speech	97.2	98.0	98.4
Speaker came down from the chancel during sermon	--	43.4	42.3
Singing by congregation	98.1	97.1	98.4
Singing by choir	72.3 ^a	58.0 ^b	57.2 ^b
Time to greet one another	84.6	86.7	88.2
Congregants joining hands	--	38.0	43.2
Leader wearing robe or special garments	--	52.2	46.3
People saying "Amen"	52.8 ^a	60.4 ^b	59.5 ^b
Applause	58.7	59.1	62.2
Adults jump, shout, or dance spontaneously	13.1 ^a	17.3 ^a	22.1 ^b

Table 1. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Attendees' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Raise hands in praise	48.1 ^a	55.2 ^b	59.0 ^b
Written order of service	84.2 ^a	75.4 ^b	69.1 ^c
Visual projection equipment	14.8 ^a	32.4 ^b	45.0 ^c
Organ used	70.1 ^a	--	56.0 ^b
Drums used	25.1 ^a	36.4 ^b	45.5 ^c
Guitar used	--	43.7	49.2
Percent with the following in any worship in past year:			
Speaking in tongues	19.5	20.6	24.6
People told of opportunities for political activity	36.8 ^a	29.5 ^b	24.3 ^c
People told of opportunities for volunteer activity	--	96.2	95.3
Time for people other than leaders to testify	72.1 ^a	78.7 ^b	74.4 ^{ab}
Percent with any Spanish or bilingual (Spanish/English) service in typical week	--	16.3	19.4
DOCTRINE AND CULTURE			
Percent encouraging use of NIV Bible rather than other translations	21.9 ^a	--	15.7 ^b
Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant	63.0 ^a	70.7 ^b	71.3 ^b
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>politically</i> :			
More on the conservative side	55.2	54.1	52.2
Right in the middle	37.0	38.7	37.8
More on the liberal side	7.8	7.2	10.0
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i> :			
More on the conservative side	52.7	57.8	59.0
Right in the middle	37.6 ^a	33.4 ^{ab}	28.8 ^b
More on the liberal side	9.8	8.8	12.2
GROUPS AND SPEAKERS			
Number of regularly participating teenagers:			
Mean	--	100 ^a	144 ^b
Median	--	30	35
Percent with youth minister	--	77.2	76.6
Percent with a group in the past year focused on the following:			
Discuss politics	12.5	15.5	13.2
Voter registration	12.4 ^a	27.3 ^b	23.4 ^b
Get out the vote during an election	--	25.0	26.4
English as a second language	9.0 ^a	14.2 ^b	15.5 ^b
Receive or practice gifts of spirit	19.7	15.6	19.0
Class to train new teachers	67.6	65.1	69.1
Discuss/learn about another religion	29.8 ^a	37.4 ^b	37.8 ^b
Discuss/learn about managing personal finances	33.1 ^a	--	47.7 ^b
Discuss management of congregation's money	55.6 ^a	--	72.2 ^b
Assess community needs	48.1 ^a	57.1 ^b	67.8 ^c
Volunteer or service project with people from another faith	--	51.9 ^a	65.5 ^b

Table 1. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Attendees' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Strategic planning and future goals of congregation	--	89.0 ^a	93.8 ^b
Travel in U.S. to assist people in need	--	49.8	44.7
Travel abroad to assist people in need	--	42.2	41.8
Percent with organized effort to help members of congregation	--	89.2	85.4
Percent with organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs	--	41.3	42.8
Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year	89.6	86.2	86.7
Speaker was: ¹⁶			
Elected government official	13.8	14.3	12.9
Denominational representative	69.2	74.6	70.9
Representative of social service organization	44.0 ^a	54.0 ^b	54.9 ^b
Someone running for office	7.1	7.5	6.9
Percent with members serving on denominational committees in past year	--	77.9	75.4
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES			
Percent distributing voter guides ¹⁷	26.5	25.6	24.2
Percent with a group in past year to lobby an elected official	12.0	14.5	15.7
Percent with a group in past year to participate in demonstration or march	21.5	20.2	24.8
Lobbying or marching related to: ¹⁸			
Immigration	--	18.1	24.1
Abortion	--	53.4	63.4
Poverty/welfare, social services support	--	15.7	--
Poverty	--	--	42.0
Gay and lesbian issues	--	13.7	--
Same-sex marriage	--	--	24.3
SOCIAL SERVICES			
Percent participating in any social service programs in past year	--	89.4	91.7
Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year ¹⁹	--	\$5,000 ^a	\$10,000 ^b
Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects	--	20.8	23.5
Percent with outside funding support for social service programs	--	16.5	14.3
Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government	--	5.8	3.9
Percent who have applied in past two years for a government grant	--	9.5	9.2
Percent who have started a separate non-profit organization in past two years for human services or outreach ministries	--	10.1	12.3
SOCIAL COMPOSITION			
Median percent of regular adult participants:			
Who are female ²⁰	60.0 ^a	60.0 ^{ab}	60.0 ^b
With at least a four-year college degree	30.0 ^a	40.0 ^b	40.0 ^b
Over 60 years old	25.0 ^a	30.0 ^b	30.0 ^b
Under 35 years old ²¹	25.0 ^a	25.0 ^b	25.0 ^b
Who live more than a 30 minute drive from meeting place	5.0	5.0	5.0
With household income under \$25,000/year	20.0 ^a	10.0 ^b	--
With household income under \$35,000/year	--	--	20.0

Table 1. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Attendees' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
With household income higher than \$100,000/year	5.0 ^a	10.0 ^b	--
With household income higher than \$140,000/year	--	--	10.0
Living in households with two parents and at least one child	50.0 ^a	50.0 ^{ab}	45.0 ^b
Serving in leadership role in past year	20.0	20.0	20.0
Percent with regular adult participant composition:			
At least 80% white and non-Hispanic	71.6 ^a	65.6 ^b	57.4 ^c
At least 80% black	12.1	12.0	13.6
More than 0% Hispanic	57.0 ^a	64.0 ^b	65.4 ^b
At least 80% Hispanic	1.5 ^a	4.0 ^b	7.7 ^c
More than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander	41.0 ^a	49.7 ^b	48.8 ^b
More than 0% American Indian	--	21.0	15.8
More than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years	39.4 ^a	50.7 ^b	48.1 ^b
MEMBERS AND LAY LEADERS			
Percent allowing openly gay or lesbian couple in committed relationship to:			
Hold full-fledged membership	--	48.8	51.1
Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members	--	21.9	27.0
Percent allowing women to:			
Hold all volunteer leadership positions that men can hold	--	79.6	82.0
Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body	--	86.1	87.8
Teach by themselves a class with adult men in it	--	87.8	89.7
Preach at a main worship service	--	56.7	53.6
Be head clergyperson or primary religious leader	--	39.3	42.3
GEOGRAPHY			
Percent in each region: ²²			
Northeast and Mid-Atlantic	19.5 ^a	15.4 ^{ab}	12.7 ^b
East North Central and West North Central	24.3	24.4	25.9
South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central	38.5	38.7	42.3
Mountain and Pacific	17.7	21.5	19.1
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS			
Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line	10.1 ^a	10.4 ^{ab}	14.4 ^b
Percent in census tracts where at least 5% of people are Hispanic	29.2 ^a	39.6 ^b	55.8 ^c
Percent in census tracts where at least 80% of people are African-American	5.0	4.0	3.6
Percent in predominantly urban census tracts	60.9 ^a	66.8 ^a	73.1 ^b
Percent in predominantly rural census tracts	23.3 ^a	17.8 ^b	14.7 ^b
OTHER			
Percent with an elementary or high school	23.4	20.9	23.5
Percent with a website	28.7 ^a	74.3 ^b	83.0 ^c
Percent with member publicly acknowledging HIV infection	--	9.4	11.6

- 1 For example, the average (mean) number of people regularly participating in the religious life of a congregation is not significantly different between 1998 and 2006, but 2012 is different from both previous waves. Hence, the 1998 and 2006 values are followed by the same letter (“a”), and 2012 is followed by a different one (“b”). In a different example, the percent of congregations with no denominational affiliation is not different between the years 1998 and 2006 (both followed by “a”) or between 2006 and 2012 (both followed by “b”), but 1998 and 2012 are significantly different from one another.
- 2 To get results that represent the average attendee, data weighting ignores the over-representation of larger congregations, but consider duplicate nominations (congregations nominated by more than one person in the GSS), the 2012 oversample of Hispanic congregations, and other relevant characteristics of the survey. The weighting variable used for this table is termed “wt_all3_attendee” in the publicly available dataset. For more information on weights, see the NCS Cumulative Codebook for Waves I, II, and III, available at <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/>.
- 3 One extreme outlying observation in 2012 has been removed from this and the following two size variables.
- 4 The largest groups in the mainline Protestant category are, in size order beginning with the largest, 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. The largest groups in the evangelical Protestant category are nondenominational congregations, the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Churches of Christ, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptist General Conference/Convention, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Evangelical Free Church, and Church of God (Anderson). The Black Protestant category includes all predominantly African American Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. The largest groups are the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Church of God in Christ, and African Methodist Episcopal. No other denomination or group in any of these categories is represented by more than 15 congregations in the NCS sample. Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation. For example, a majority-white, independent Baptist church can be placed into the evangelical Protestant category. Therefore, the categories in the Religious Tradition section sum to more than 100% when including those with “no denominational affiliation.”
- 5 In 1998 and 2006, this question asked about both rental and sale income, but in 2012 it asked only about rental income. Therefore, statistical comparison is only possible between the first two waves.
- 6 Calculated only for those congregations that earned rental or sale income from property in past year.
- 7 Calculated only for those congregations that gave any money to their denominations.
- 8 Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.
- 9 This and all following head clergyperson characteristics are calculated only for those congregations who have a head clergyperson.
- 10 While medians are the same, the mean for this variable is significantly higher in 2012 (9.3) than in 1998 (8.3). The mean for 2006 (8.9) is not significantly different from the other two years.
- 11 Although respondents were asked in all waves how many people work in the congregation as paid staff, in 2006-07 and 2012 the question was prefaced with “including you” (if the respondent was an employee), and interviewers were trained in 2006-07 and 2012 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.
- 12 Ministerial staff members are those primarily engaged in religious work, that is, not secretaries or custodians.
- 13 One congregation with extreme values in staff variables was removed from this analysis and other calculations of mean and median staff members per congregation.
- 14 While medians for 1998 and 2006 are the same, the mean for this variable is significantly higher in 2006 (25.4) than in 1998 (23.4). The mean for 2012 (26.0) is not significantly different from 2006.
- 15 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 16 Calculated only for those congregations that hosted a visiting speaker in the past year.
- 17 In 1998 respondents were asked if their congregation had ever distributed voter guides; in 2006-07 and 2012, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides *within the past two years*.
- 18 Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated/marched. In 1998, 2006, and 2012, respectively, this applied to 25.8%, 27.4%, and 29.2% of regular attendees.
- 19 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.
- 20 While medians are the same, the mean for this variable is significantly higher in 2012 (59.9%) than in 1998 (58.3%). The mean for 2006 (59.7%) is not significantly different from the other two years.
- 21 While medians are the same, the mean for this variable is significantly higher in 1998 (29.8%) than in 2006 (27.6%) and in 2012 (27.7%). The means for 2006 and 2012 are not significantly different from one another.
- 22 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:
Congregations' Perspective**

This table provides descriptive statistics for many items contained in more than one NCS wave. Values for a single variable in different years that are followed by different lower case letters are different from one another at the 0.05 level of statistical significance.¹ All comparisons are t-tests of means, even when medians are reported. Where no differences are statistically significant, letters are omitted. Sometimes a mean difference between years is statistically significant even when the median is unchanged.

We use a slightly updated version of the 1998 and 2006-07 datasets, so these numbers may not exactly match values produced from the previously available datasets. Means and medians refer to the average congregation.² Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic.

	1998	2006-07	2012
AGE AND SIZE			
Median founding date	1938 ^a	1944 ^a	1954 ^b
Median congregation age (yrs)	60	62	58
Number of people associated in any way with the congregation's religious life: ³			
Mean	414	396	404
Median	150	150	135
Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life:			
Mean	185	184	183
Median	80	75	70
Number of <i>adults</i> regularly participating in the congregation's religious life:			
Mean	120	124	120
Median	50	50	50
Percent for whom the number of regularly participating adults in the last two years has:			
Increased	--	42.5 ^a	26.3 ^b
Remained about the same	--	40.3	36.5
Decreased	--	17.2 ^a	37.3 ^b
RELIGIOUS TRADITION⁴			
Roman Catholic	7.3	6.0	5.5
White evangelical Protestant	45.7	47.8	46.1
White mainline Protestant	26.3	19.7	20.3
Black Protestant	15.8	23.4	21.4
Jewish	1.0	1.4	1.6
Muslim	0.9	0.4	1.1
Buddhist	0.0	0.1	1.1
Hindu	0.1	0.3	0.6
Other non-Christian	2.9	0.9	2.3
Percent with no denominational affiliation	18.1	20.4	23.5
BUILDING AND FINANCE			
Percent owning their own building	87.6	89.7	84.6
Percent meeting in a:			
Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque	87.3	92.7	88.9
School	5.0	1.0	1.8
Other kind of building	7.8	6.3	9.3

Table 2. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Congregations' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Percent with a formal written budget	72.8	75.3	76.4
Median income in past year	\$60,000 ^a	\$96,000 ^b	\$95,000 ^b
Median income from individuals in past year	\$55,000 ^a	\$85,000 ^b	\$84,000 ^b
Median budget for past year	\$60,000 ^a	\$94,000 ^b	\$85,000 ^b
Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property ⁵	24.0	21.3	22.3
Median amount of income from rental or sale of building or property in past year ⁶	\$1,500	\$7,000	\$5,000
Percent giving money to denomination in the past year	73.6 ^{ab}	74.2 ^a	62.7 ^b
Median amount given to denominations in past year ⁷	\$5,000	\$7,000	\$7,500
Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund	59.8	57.3	60.5
Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ⁸	\$20,000 ^a	\$30,000 ^{ab}	\$33,000 ^b
LEADERSHIP			
Percent with a head clergyperson or leader	92.3	95.0	94.2
Percent with full-time head clergyperson or leader ⁹	--	63.2	71.4
Percent with female head clergyperson or leader	10.6	7.9	11.4
Percent with head clergyperson or leader of each race or ethnicity:			
White	76.9	69.2	67.5
Black	18.6	25.0	23.3
Hispanic	1.8 ^{ab}	1.9 ^a	5.7 ^b
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.7	2.5	2.7
Other	0.9	1.4	0.9
Median number of years senior clergyperson in current position	4.0	5.0	6.0
Median age of senior clergyperson	49 ^a	53 ^b	55 ^c
Percent for whom head clergyperson has highest education level of:			
Less than high school	5.7	--	3.2
High school diploma or GED, with or without one or more years of college	22.3	--	25.2
Bachelor's degree	19.8	--	22.9
Graduate Degree	52.2	--	48.7
Percent with head clergyperson having following characteristics:			
Currently attends seminary or theological school	--	11.7	7.0
Ordained to full clergy status	--	94.0	92.6
Paid for work in congregation	--	80.7	86.2
Also serves another congregation	--	13.6	16.3
Also holds another job	--	37.0	34.3
PAID STAFF			
Percent with the following characteristics:			
No paid staff ¹⁰	22.6 ^a	12.4 ^b	13.0 ^{ab}
No full-time staff	39.3	34.6	35.9
1 full-time staff person	34.5	36.0	39.7
2 or more full-time staff people	26.2	29.4	24.4
No full-time ministerial staff ¹¹	--	36.8	37.8
1 full-time ministerial staff person	--	44.1	46.3

Table 2. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Congregations' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
2 or more full-time ministerial staff people	--	19.1	15.9
No part-time staff	41.6	32.7	33.1
1 part-time staff person	17.3	20.3	21.0
2 or more part-time staff people	41.1	47.0	45.9
Number of full-time paid staff: ¹²			
Mean	1.8	1.9	1.9
Median	1.0	1.0	1.0
Number of full-time paid ministerial staff:			
Mean	--	1.1	1.0
Median	--	1.0	1.0
Number of part-time paid staff:			
Mean	2.2	2.4	2.4
Median	1.0	1.0	1.0
Percent for whom the number of full-time paid staff in past year has:			
Increased	--	6.8	6.4
Stayed the same	--	86.9	89.9
Decreased	--	6.3	3.8
WORSHIP			
Percent with 1 service in typical week	26.6 ^a	28.5 ^{ab}	38.1 ^b
Percent with 2 or more services in typical week	72.8	71.4	61.9
Percent reporting important differences between services on typical weekend	--	47.9 ^a	30.3 ^b
Median length of most recent main service (minutes)	75	75	75
Median length of most recent sermon (minutes)	25 ^a	30 ^{ab}	30 ^b
Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service	20	20	20
Median number of socializing minutes before / after typical service	30	30	30
Median attendance at most recent main service	70	65	60
Median total attendance (adults and children) at <i>all</i> services during the past weekend	--	100	76
Median number of regularly participating adults attending more than one service in past week ¹³	15 ^a	25 ^{ab}	25 ^b
Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic:			
Sermon or speech	95.3	95.3	96.5
Speaker came down from the chancel during sermon	--	50.6	48.6
Singing by congregation	96.8	97.2	96.4
Singing by choir	53.9	44.1	45.3
Time to greet one another	78.4	80.7	81.4
Congregants joining hands	--	34.0	40.3
Leader wearing robe or special garments	--	32.1	30.2
People saying "Amen"	60.7 ^a	70.7 ^b	66.7 ^{ab}
Applause	54.6	61.3	65.3
Adults jump, shout, or dance spontaneously	19.2	25.8	26.5
Raise hands in praise	44.6 ^a	56.7 ^{ab}	59.4 ^b
Written order of service	72.0	67.8	62.2

Table 2. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Congregations' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Visual projection equipment	11.9 ^a	26.5 ^b	35.3 ^b
Organ used	53.0 ^a	--	42.0 ^b
Drums used	19.9 ^a	32.5 ^b	34.3 ^b
Guitar used	--	33.5	29.3
Percent with the following in any worship in past year:			
Speaking in tongues	24.0	27.0	29.8
People told of opportunities for political activity	26.2 ^a	21.4 ^{ab}	14.5 ^b
People told of opportunities for volunteer activity	--	93.6	91.8
Time for people other than leaders to testify	77.6	85.0	84.9
Percent with any Spanish or bilingual (Spanish/English) service in typical week	--	6.3	8.8
DOCTRINE AND CULTURE			
Percent encouraging use of NIV Bible rather than other translations	20.8	--	21.2
Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant	76.2	82.6	83.3
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>politically</i> :			
More on the conservative side	62.0	58.1	54.9
Right in the middle	30.6	34.6	33.7
More on the liberal side	7.4	7.4	11.5
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i> :			
More on the conservative side	59.8	62.8	62.8
Right in the middle	29.9	29.5	25.0
More on the liberal side	10.3	7.7	12.2
GROUPS AND SPEAKERS			
Number of regularly participating teenagers:			
Mean	--	19.9	22.3
Median	--	10.0	8.0
Percent with youth minister	--	55.6	54.9
Percent with a group in the past year focused on the following:			
Discuss politics	6.4	6.3	5.8
Voter registration	8.3 ^a	17.8 ^b	11.1 ^{ab}
Get out the vote during an election	--	22.8	19.8
English as a second language	3.6	5.8	4.8
Receive or practice gifts of spirit	13.4	11.1	15.9
Class to train new teachers	38.0	39.4	41.3
Discuss/learn about another religion	20.3	25.2	25.9
Discuss/learn about managing personal finances	21.9	--	30.6
Discuss management of congregation's money	46.9 ^a	--	66.2 ^b
Assess community needs	36.9 ^a	48.4 ^b	56.7 ^b
Volunteer or service project with people from another faith	--	34.8 ^a	51.5 ^b
Strategic planning and future goals of congregation	--	82.4	86.1
Travel in U.S. to assist people in need	--	30.9	34.2
Travel abroad to assist people in need	--	25.2	27.3

Table 2. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Congregations' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Percent with organized effort to help members of congregation	--	80.8	80.0
Percent with organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs	--	22.0	28.1
Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year	83.1	81.4	78.6
Speaker was: ¹⁴			
Elected government official	8.0	10.1	6.6
Denominational representative	62.4	68.6	71.4
Representative of social service organization	26.7 ^a	37.6 ^{ab}	39.9 ^b
Someone running for office	5.5	6.8	6.7
Percent with members serving on denominational committees in past year	--	66.1	62.8
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES			
Percent distributing voter guides ¹⁵	17.0	17.2	12.9
Percent with a group in past year to lobby an elected official	4.4	7.9	6.6
Percent with a group in past year to participate in demonstration or march	9.2	8.3	12.5
Lobbying or marching related to: ¹⁶			
Immigration	--	8.8	13.0
Abortion	--	32.9	33.3
Poverty/welfare, social services support	--	17.0	--
Poverty	--	--	37.4
Gay and lesbian issues	--	15.8	--
Same-sex marriage	--	--	29.0
SOCIAL SERVICES			
Percent participating in any social service programs in past year	--	80.8	83.1
Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year ¹⁷	--	\$1,400	\$1,500
Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects	--	13.6	16.9
Percent with outside funding support for social service programs	--	13.3	10.8
Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government	--	5.0	1.9
Percent who have applied in past two years for a government grant	--	3.6	4.9
Percent who have started a separate non-profit organization in past two years for human services or outreach ministries	--	6.1	8.9
SOCIAL COMPOSITION			
Median percent of regular adult participants:			
Who are female ¹⁸	60.0 ^a	60.0 ^b	60.0 ^b
With at least a four-year college degree	15.4 ^a	20.0 ^a	25.0 ^b
Over 60 years old	25.0 ^a	30.0 ^b	30.0 ^b
Under 35 years old	25.0 ^a	20.0 ^b	20.0 ^b
Who live more than a 30 minute drive from meeting place ¹⁹	5.0 ^a	5.0 ^{ab}	5.0 ^b
With household income under \$25,000/year	30.0 ^a	20.0 ^b	--
With household income under \$35,000/year	--	--	30.0
With household income higher than \$100,000/year	0.0 ^a	2.0 ^b	--
With household income higher than \$140,000/year	--	--	1.0

Table 2. Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Congregations' Perspective (continued)

	1998	2006–07	2012
Living in households with two parents and at least one child	40.0 ^a	30.0 ^b	30.0 ^b
Serving in leadership role in past year	33.3 ^a	30.0 ^b	28.6 ^b
Percent with regular adult participant composition:			
At least 80% white and non-Hispanic	71.2 ^a	62.6 ^{ab}	57.1 ^b
At least 80% black	17.0	23.8	21.2
More than 0% Hispanic	33.3	35.7	37.6
At least 80% Hispanic	1.4 ^a	2.2 ^a	6.0 ^b
More than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander	18.2	22.6	23.9
More than 0% American Indian	--	11.1	11.2
More than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years	17.9	20.4	18.4
MEMBERS AND LAY LEADERS			
Percent allowing openly gay or lesbian couple in committed relationship to:			
Hold full-fledged membership	--	37.4	48.0
Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members	--	17.8 ^a	26.5 ^b
Percent allowing women to:			
Hold all volunteer leadership positions that men can hold	--	73.7	79.3
Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body	--	84.0	86.4
Teach by themselves a class with adult men in it	--	83.7	85.7
Preach at a main worship service	--	65.3	67.8
Be head clergyperson or primary religious leader	--	46.8 ^a	57.7 ^b
GEOGRAPHY			
Percent in each region: ²⁰			
Northeast and Mid-Atlantic	12.7	12.9	12.1
East North Central and West North Central	20.1	25.0	22.9
South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central	48.8	47.7	50.8
Mountain and Pacific	18.5	14.4	14.2
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS			
Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line	11.8	14.1	17.1
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics	25.4 ^a	28.2 ^a	50.2 ^b
Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans	3.7	5.2	2.8
Percent in predominantly urban census tracts	41.8	44.1	50.2
Percent in predominantly rural census tracts	43.4 ^a	32.6 ^b	31.7 ^b
OTHER			
Percent with an elementary or high school	6.1	4.7	5.6
Percent with a website	17.1 ^a	44.3 ^b	55.7 ^b
Percent with member publicly acknowledging HIV infection	--	4.4	7.3

- 1 For example, income in the past year is not significantly different between 2006 and 2012, but 1998 is different from both following waves. Hence, the 2006 and 2012 values are followed by the same letter ("b"), and 1998 is followed by a different one ("a"). In a different example, the amount of money in congregational savings or endowment is not different between the years 1998 and 2006 (both followed by "a") or between 2006 and 2012 (both followed by "b"), but 1998 and 2012 are significantly different from one another.
- 2 To get results that represent the average congregation, data are weighted to account for a larger congregation having an increased probability of being in the survey. Therefore, using this weighting, the information from smaller congregations counts as much as that from larger ones. Weight adjustments also consider duplicate nominations (congregations nominated by more than one person in the GSS), the 2012 oversample of Hispanic congregations, and other relevant characteristics of the survey. The weighting variable used for this table is termed "wt_all3_cong_dup" in the publicly available dataset. For more information on weights, see the NCS Cumulative Codebook for Waves I, II, and III, available at <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/>.
- 3 One extreme outlying observation in 2012 has been removed from this and the following two size variables.
- 4 The largest groups in the mainline Protestant category are, in size order beginning with the largest, 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. The largest groups in the evangelical Protestant category are nondenominational congregations, the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Churches of Christ, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptist General Conference/Convention, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Evangelical Free Church, and Church of God (Anderson). The Black Protestant category includes all predominantly African American Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. The largest groups are the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Church of God in Christ, and African Methodist Episcopal. No other denomination or group in any of these categories is represented by more than 15 congregations in the NCS sample. Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation. For example, a majority-white, independent Baptist church can be placed into the evangelical Protestant category. Therefore, the categories in the Religious Tradition section sum to more than 100% when including those with "no denominational affiliation."
- 5 In 1998 and 2006, this question asked about both rental and sale income, but in 2012 it asked only about rental income.
- 6 Calculated only for those congregations that earned rental or sale income from property in past year.
- 7 Calculated only for those congregations that gave any money to their denominations.
- 8 Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.
- 9 This and all following head clergyperson characteristics are calculated only for those congregations who have a head clergyperson.
- 10 Although respondents were asked in all waves how many people work in the congregation as paid staff, in 2006-07 and 2012 the question was prefaced with "including you" (if the respondent was an employee), and interviewers were trained in 2006-07 and 2012 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.
- 11 Ministerial staff members are those primarily engaged in religious work, that is, not secretaries or custodians.
- 12 One congregation with extreme values in staff variables was removed from this analysis and other calculations of mean and median staff members per congregation.
- 13 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 14 Calculated only for those congregations that hosted a visiting speaker in the past year.
- 15 In 1998 respondents were asked if their congregation had ever distributed voter guides; in 2006-07 and 2012, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides *within the past two years*.
- 16 Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched. In 1998, 2006, and 2012, this was 11.0%, 13.4%, and 15.1%, respectively.
- 17 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.
- 18 While medians are the same, the mean for this variable is significantly lower in 1998 (58.7%) than in 2006 (63.0%) and 2012 (62.0%).
- 19 While medians are the same, the mean for this variable in 2012 (12.2%) is significantly lower than in 1998 (15.7%). The mean for 2006 (14.0%) is not significantly different from the other two years.
- 20 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. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings

This table provides descriptive statistics for all items contained in the 2012 NCS (Wave III). Values for each variable are presented from two different perspectives. In the “Attendees’ Perspective” column, the means and medians refer to the congregation attended by the average participant (attendee) in religious services. Percentages give the percentage of attendees in congregations with the stated characteristic. In the “Congregations’ Perspective” column, means and medians refer to the average congregation. Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic.

	ATTENDEES’ PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS’ PERSPECTIVE ²
AGE AND SIZE		
Median founding date	1946	1954
Median congregation age (yrs)	66	58
Number of people associated in any way with the congregation’s religious life: ³		
Mean	3278	404
Median	800	135
Number of people regularly participating in the congregation’s religious life:		
Mean	1540	183
Median	400	70
Number of <i>adults</i> regularly participating in the congregation’s religious life:		
Mean	1068	120
Median	310	50
Percent for whom the number of regularly participating adults in the last two years has:		
Increased	36.5	26.3
Remained about the same	34.0	36.5
Decreased	29.5	37.3
RELIGIOUS TRADITION⁴		
Percent with no denominational affiliation	15.0	23.5
Percent associated with each denomination or tradition: ⁵		
Roman Catholic	27.7	5.5
Baptist conventions / denominations	19.2	23.3
Methodist denominations	7.9	12.8
Lutheran / Episcopal denominations	6.4	6.2
Pentecostal	8.2	13.1
Presbyterian / Reformed	5.3	4.7
Other Christian	20.7	27.6
Jewish	2.1	1.6
Muslim	0.7	1.1
Buddhist	0.3	1.1
Hindu	0.6	0.6
Other non-Christian	1.0	2.3
Percent belonging to each broad religious tradition: ⁶		
Roman Catholic	27.7	5.5

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
White evangelical Protestant	37.6	46.1
White mainline Protestant	17.1	20.3
Black Protestant	12.9	21.4
Non-Christian	4.7	6.7
BUILDING AND FINANCE		
Percent owning their own building	92.6	84.6
Percent meeting in a:		
Church, synagogue, temple, or mosque	95.7	88.9
School	1.0	1.8
Storefront	0.7	2.9
Other kind of building	2.7	6.4
Percent whose building is also used by another congregation for worship services ⁷	8.3	9.7
Other congregation is primarily recent immigrants to U.S. (%) ⁸	51.9	39.3
Percent with worship services at more than one location:	10.3	3.4
Median number of locations ⁹	2.0	3.0
Percent who have the same sermon for different locations	50.0	58.6
Percent who have the same music for different locations	31.2	69.6
Percent with a formal written budget	90.8	76.4
Median income in past year	\$450,000	\$95,000
Median income from individuals in past year	\$400,000	\$84,000
Percent for whom income over past two fiscal years ago has:		
Increased	52.2	42.1
Stayed the same	27.1	31.3
Decreased	20.7	26.6
Median budget for past year	\$450,000	\$85,000
Percent who held a capital campaign in past five years	37.9	19.5
Median amount raised in capital campaign, past five years ¹⁰	\$700,000	\$87,000
Percent with mortgage, loan, or other outstanding debt	40.4	25.5
Median current balance on debt ¹¹	\$500,000	\$170,000
Percent receiving income in the past year from rental of building or property	35.2	22.3
Median income from rental of building or property in past fiscal year ¹²	\$10,000	\$5,000
Percent giving money to denomination in the past year	74.8	62.7
Median amount given to denominations in past year ¹³	\$32,000	\$7,500
Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund	77.2	60.5
Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ¹⁴	\$150,000	\$33,000
Percent sending money directly to any congregation outside the U.S.	30.2	18.7
LEADERSHIP		
Percent with a head clergyperson or leader	95.7	94.2
Percent with full-time head clergyperson or leader ¹⁵	89.9	71.4
Percent with female head clergyperson or leader	6.2	11.4

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
Percent with head clergyperson or leader of each race or ethnicity:		
White	75.5	67.5
Black	14.6	23.3
Hispanic	6.0	5.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	3.5	2.7
Other	0.5	0.9
Percent with head clergyperson born in U.S.	88.0	90.5
Median number of years head clergyperson in current position	6.0	6.0
Median age of senior clergyperson	55	55
Percent for whom head clergyperson has highest education level of:		
Less than high school	0.9	3.2
High school diploma or GED	10.0	20.1
Jr. College, Associate's degree, or Bible college diploma or certificate	2.1	5.1
Bachelor's degree	15.4	23.0
Graduate Degree	71.6	48.7
Median years of college and post-graduate education for head clergyperson	8.0	6.0
Percent with head clergyperson having following characteristics:		
Currently attends seminary or theological school	7.6	7.0
Ordained to full clergy status	96.9	92.6
Paid for work in congregation	94.3	86.2
Took pay cut in past two years	9.2	13.7
Also serves another congregation	11.1	16.3
Also holds another job	17.7	34.3
PAID STAFF		
Percent with the following characteristics:		
No paid staff	4.8	13.0
No full-time staff	11.9	35.9
1 full-time staff person	21.5	39.7
2 or more full-time staff people	66.6	24.4
No full-time ministerial staff	13.1	37.8
1 full-time ministerial staff person	32.2	46.3
2 or more full-time ministerial staff people	54.7	15.9
No part-time staff	15.1	33.1
1 part-time staff person	10.3	21.0
2 or more part-time staff people	74.6	45.9
No part-time ministerial staff	43.1	52.1
1 part-time ministerial staff person	24.0	33.3
2 or more part-time ministerial staff people	32.9	14.6
Number of full-time paid staff:		
Mean	9.5	1.9
Median	3.0	1.0

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
Number of full-time paid ministerial staff:		
Mean	4.4	1.0
Median	2.0	1.0
Number of part-time paid staff:		
Mean	7.4	2.4
Median	4.0	1.0
Number of part-time paid ministerial staff:		
Mean	2.1	0.8
Median	1.0	0.0
Percent for whom the number of full-time paid staff in the past year has:		
Increased	14.3	6.4
Stayed the same	76.0	89.9
Decreased	9.7	3.8
WORSHIP		
Percent with 1 service in typical week	17.8	38.1
Percent with 2 or more services in typical week	82.2	61.9
Percent reporting important differences between services in typical weekend ¹⁶	42.3	30.3
Important difference is: ¹⁷		
Level of formality	57.4	69.3
Languages used during service	35.2	10.5
Kind of music during service	71.9	46.3
Median length of most recent main service (minutes)	70	75
Median length of most recent sermon (minutes)	22	30
Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service	20	20
Median number of socializing minutes before / after typical service	30	30
Median attendance at most recent main service	225	60
Median total attendance (adults and children) at <i>all</i> services during the past weekend	400	76
Median number of regularly participating adults attending more than one service in past week ¹⁸	50	25
Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic:		
Sermon or speech	98.4	96.5
Speaker came down from the chancel during sermon	42.3	48.6
Singing by congregation	98.4	96.4
Singing by choir	57.2	45.3
Time to greet one another	88.2	81.4
Congregants joining hands	43.2	40.3
Leader wearing robe or special garments	46.3	30.2
People saying "Amen"	59.5	66.7
Applause	62.2	65.3
Adults jump, shout, or dance spontaneously	22.1	26.5

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
Raise hands in praise	59.0	59.4
Written order of service	69.1	62.2
Visual projection equipment	45.0	35.3
Song lyrics projected on wall or screen	42.1	31.5
Song lyrics provided on handout or flyer	31.6	26.1
Reading from the Bible	97.8	98.3
Watched video recorded at or broadcast from another location	7.2	3.0
Organ used	56.0	42.0
Drums used	45.5	34.3
Guitar used	49.2	29.3
Number of people paid to sing or perform at most recent main service:		
None	52.7	76.1
One	27.5	15.7
Two or more	19.8	8.2
Percent with the following in any worship in the past year:		
Speaking in tongues	24.6	29.8
People told of opportunities for political activity	24.3	14.5
People told of opportunities for volunteer activity	95.3	91.8
Time for people other than leaders to testify	74.4	84.9
Praying over or laying hands on people in effort to cure from injury or illness	60.1	57.8
Percent with the following characteristics:		
Copyright agreement to sing certain songs	73.8	51.1
Bibles in pews for people to use during services	49.8	66.3
Encourage people to bring their own Bibles to worship services	60.6	78.8
Follow lectionary or other schedule of scripture readings	53.0	40.3
Event in past year during which children in congregation recite scripture from memory	60.3	63.9
Percent with any Spanish or bilingual (Spanish/English) service in typical week	19.4	8.8
Percent with main service Spanish or bilingual (Spanish/English)	8.2	5.8
DOCTRINE AND CULTURE		
Percent encouraging use of NIV Bible rather than other translations	15.7	21.2
Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant	71.3	83.3
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>politically</i> :		
More on the conservative side	52.2	54.9
Right in the middle	37.8	33.7
More on the liberal side	10.0	11.5
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i> :		
More on the conservative side	59.0	62.8
Right in the middle	28.8	25.0
More on the liberal side	12.2	12.2

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
GROUPS AND SPEAKERS		
Number of regularly participating teenagers:		
Mean	144	22.3
Median	35	8.0
Percent with youth minister	76.6	54.9
Percent for whom one or more youth ministers: ¹⁹		
Are paid for work in congregation	66.4	36.1
Work full-time as youth leader(s) in congregation	41.6	17.1
Percent with a group in the past year focused on the following:		
Discuss politics	13.2	5.8
Read and discuss the Bible	95.9	90.4
Voter registration	23.4	11.1
Get out the vote during an election	26.4	19.8
English as a second language	15.5	4.8
Offer services for immigrants	22.9	9.5
Receive or practice gifts of spirit	19.0	15.9
Class to train new teachers	69.1	41.3
Discuss / learn about another religion	37.8	25.9
Discuss / learn about managing personal finances	47.7	30.6
Discuss management of congregation's money	72.2	66.2
Assess community needs	67.8	56.7
Volunteer or service project with people from another faith	65.5	51.5
Strategic planning and future goals of congregation	93.8	86.1
Travel in U.S. to assist people in need	44.7	34.2
Travel abroad to assist people in need	41.8	27.3
Specifically for women	86.5	74.9
Specifically for men	77.6	58.4
Support military veterans and their families	40.2	27.3
Exercise or promote physical activity	47.7	29.1
Help people who are unemployed	51.0	34.9
Support people with terminal illness or chronic health problems	61.6	46.5
Support people struggling with drug / alcohol abuse	52.1	37.6
Support people with mental illness	31.4	23.0
Support people living with HIV or AIDS	12.0	7.5
Prevent HIV transmission, teach prevention, or promote testing	12.2	8.6
Raise awareness about HIV / AIDS in other ways	12.6	7.4
Percent with organized effort to help members of congregation	85.4	80.0
Percent with organized effort to provide members with health-focused programs	42.8	28.1
Percent hosting clergyperson or preacher in past year who lives in another country	49.9	29.5
Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year	86.7	78.6

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
Speaker was: ²⁰		
Elected government official	12.9	6.6
Denominational representative	70.9	71.4
Representative of social service organization	54.9	39.9
Someone running for office	6.9	6.7
Percent with members serving on denominational committees in past year	75.4	62.8
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES		
Percent distributing voter guides ²¹	24.2	12.9
Percent with group in the past year to lobby an elected official	15.7	6.6
Percent with group in the past year to participate in demonstration or march	24.8	12.5
Lobbying or marching related to: ²²		
Immigration	24.1	13.0
Abortion	63.4	33.3
Poverty	42.0	37.4
Same-sex marriage	24.3	29.0
SOCIAL SERVICES		
Percent giving financial or in-kind donations to organization(s) that help people with HIV / AIDS or work to prevent transmission	12.4	7.6
Percent participating in any social service programs in the past year	91.7	83.1
Median number of social service programs (all inquiries) ²³	4.0	3.0
Percent with one of top four programs focused on:		
Victims of rape or domestic violence	3.8	2.5
Cleaning highways or parks	6.1	6.2
Clothing, blankets, rummage sales	22.7	20.9
College students or young adults	0.9	0.5
Disaster relief	4.4	6.4
Non-religious education or training	21.5	16.4
Senior citizens	11.3	10.0
Feeding the hungry	69.4	62.6
Males or females in particular	12.0	7.6
Habitat for Humanity projects	7.9	3.8
Individuals' physical health needs	27.0	25.4
Homeless or transients	22.4	14.2
Home building, repair, maintenance	32.0	21.8
Immigrants, migrants, or refugees	4.1	1.3
Beneficiaries outside the U.S.	8.7	7.6
Job placement	3.9	2.2
Youth and children	38.1	37.3
People in legal trouble or their families	3.8	2.4
Substance abusers	4.7	5.2
St. Vincent de Paul	4.8	0.1
Other	3.5	6.8

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
Percent collaborating on social service projects	81.0	74.5
Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year	\$10,000	\$1,500
Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects	23.5	16.9
Percent with outside funding support for social service programs	14.3	10.8
Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government	3.9	1.9
Percent who have applied in past two years for a government grant	9.2	4.9
Percent who have started a separate nonprofit organization in past two years for human services or outreach ministries	12.3	8.9
TECHNOLOGY		
Percent with a website	83.0	55.7
Percent with a Facebook page	55.9	40.1
SOCIAL COMPOSITION		
Median percent of regular adult participants:		
Who are female	60.0	60.0
With at least a four-year college degree	40.0	25.0
Over 60 years old	30.0	30.0
Under 35 years old	25.0	20.0
Who live more than a 30 minute drive from meeting place	5.0	5.0
With household income under \$35,000/year	20.0	30.0
With household income higher than \$140,000/year	10.0	1.0
Living in households with two parents and at least one child	45.0	30.0
Serving in leadership role in past year	20.0	28.6
Percent with regular adult participant composition:		
At least 80% white and non-Hispanic	57.4	57.1
At least 80% black	13.6	21.2
More than 0% Hispanic	65.4	37.6
At least 80% Hispanic	7.7	6.0
More than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander	48.8	23.9
More than 0% American Indian	15.8	11.2
More than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years	48.1	18.4
MEMBERS AND LAY LEADERS		
Percent allowing openly gay or lesbian couple in committed relationship to:		
Hold full-fledged membership	51.1	48.0
Hold any volunteer leadership positions open to other members	27.0	26.5
Percent allowing women to:		
Hold all volunteer leadership positions that men can hold	82.0	79.3
Serve as full-fledged members of main governing body	87.8	86.4
Teach by themselves a class with adult men in it	89.7	85.7
Preach at a main worship service	53.6	67.8
Be head clergyperson or primary religious leader	42.3	57.7

Table 3. 2012 National Congregations Study
Basic Findings (continued)

	ATTENDEES' PERSPECTIVE ¹	CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ²
GEOGRAPHY		
Percent in each region: ²⁴		
Northeast and Mid-Atlantic	12.7	12.1
East North Central and West North Central	25.9	22.9
South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central	42.3	50.8
Mountain and Pacific	19.1	14.2
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS		
Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line	14.4	17.1
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics	55.8	50.2
Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans	3.6	2.8
Percent in predominantly urban census tracts	73.1	50.2
Percent in predominantly rural census tracts	14.7	31.7
OTHER		
Percent with an elementary or high school	23.5	5.6
Percent with member publicly acknowledging HIV infection	11.6	7.3
Percent affiliated with nationally recognized community organizing group, organization or network	9.1	4.9

1 Means and medians in the “attendees” column refer to the congregation attended by the average participant (attendee) in religious services. Percentages give the percentage of attendees in congregations with the stated characteristic. For more information on weights, see the NCS Cumulative Codebook for Waves I, II, and III, available at <http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/>.

2 Means and medians in the “congregations” column refer to the average congregation. Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic.

3 One extreme outlying observation in 2012 has been removed from this and the following two size variables.

4 Non-Christian congregations are categorized as such even if they said they have no denomination.

5 Congregations without formal denominational affiliation are often associated with a given religious tradition, so this includes non-denominational congregations.

6 The largest groups in the mainline Protestant category are, in size order beginning with the largest, 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. The largest groups in the evangelical Protestant category are nondenominational congregations, the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Churches of Christ, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptist General Conference/Convention, Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Evangelical Free Church, and Church of God (Anderson). The Black Protestant category includes all predominantly African American Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. The largest groups are the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Church of God in Christ, and African Methodist Episcopal. No other denomination or group in any of these categories is represented by more than 15 congregations in the NCS sample. Congregations are placed within a religious tradition even if they do not have a formal denominational affiliation. For example, a majority-white, independent Baptist church can be placed into the evangelical Protestant category. Therefore, the categories in the Religious Tradition section sum to more than 100% when including those with “no denominational affiliation.”

7 Calculated only for those congregations who own their own building.

8 Calculated only for those congregations whose building is used by another congregation.

9 This and the following two items are calculated only for those congregations who have worship services at more than one location.

10 Calculated only for those congregations who held a capital campaign in past five years.

11 Calculated only for those congregations with mortgage, loan, or other outstanding debt.

12 Calculated only for those congregations with income from the sale or rent of their building or property.

- 13 Calculated only for those congregations who gave any money to their denominations.
- 14 Calculated only for those congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.
- 15 This item and following characteristics are calculated only for those congregations with one head clergyperson or leader.
- 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.
- 18 Calculated only for those congregations that report two or more services in a typical week.
- 19 Calculated only for those congregations with one or more youth ministers.
- 20 Calculated only for those congregations that had a visiting speaker in the past year.
- 21 In 1998 respondents were asked if their congregation had ever distributed voter guides; in 2006-07 and 2012, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides *within the past two years*.
- 22 Calculated only for those congregations that lobbied elected officials and/or demonstrated or marched. From the attendees' perspective, this is 29.2% and it is 15.1% from the congregations' perspective.
- 23 This item and the following social service values are calculated only for those congregations that participated in social service programs and projects in the past year.
- 24 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, TE, 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 Assistant, Associate, and Other Ministerial Staff

This table provides descriptive statistics for items pertaining to staff, with most variables describing staff other than head clergy. Since the total number of staff per congregation varies considerably, describing staff characteristics such as race, gender, or age as seen by the average congregation or the average attendee would likely give an inaccurate picture of the typical staff person. For example, if one congregation has four full-time staff, all of whom are male, and another congregation has one full-time staff member who is female, the average gender from the congregation perspective would (erroneously) be calculated as 50% female, where in fact 20% of all these staff members are female. Therefore, values given are the proportion of all relevant staff in the given categories.

Values for a single variable in different years that are followed by different lower case letters are different from one another at the 0.05 level of statistical significance.¹ Where no differences are statistically significant, letters are omitted.

	2006	2012
FULL-TIME STAFF		
Percent of all full-time staff whose positions are ministerial or religious in nature	55.5	54.5
Percent of full-time secondary staff (not including head clergy) whose positions are ministerial or religious in nature	35.5	33.4
Percent of full-time paid ministerial staff (not including head clergyperson) with following characteristics:		
Race or ethnicity:		
White	--	79.8
Black	--	10.2
Hispanic	--	7.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	--	2.7
Age category:		
Under 40	--	41.3
40 to 60	--	45.5
Over 60	--	13.2
Male	60.5	59.3
Graduated from seminary or theological school	45.5	42.4
Without seminary degree, but currently attend seminary/theological school	8.9	7.7
Ordained to full clergy status	46.3	51.0
Were regular members or participants before current position ²	38.3 ^a	48.9 ^b
With a pay cut in past 2 years	--	9.0
PART-TIME STAFF		
Percent of all part-time staff whose positions are ministerial or religious in nature	--	33.4
Percent of part-time secondary staff (not including head clergy) whose positions are ministerial or religious in nature	--	27.2
Percent of part-time paid ministerial staff (not including head clergyperson) with following characteristics:		
Race or ethnicity:		
White	--	68.2
Black	--	23.4
Hispanic	--	7.2
Asian/Pacific Islander	--	0.6
Age category:		
Under 40	--	37.7
40 to 60	--	48.9
Over 60	--	13.4

Table 4. Characteristics of Assistant, Associate, and Other Ministerial Staff (continued)

	2006	2012
Male	--	46.5
Graduated from seminary or theological school	--	17.9
Without seminary degree, but currently attend seminary /theological school	--	5.2
Ordained to full clergy status	--	19.2
Were regular members or participants before current position ³	--	55.3
With a pay cut in past 2 years	--	7.7

- 1 For example, the % of full-time secondary ministerial staff who are male is not significantly different between 2006 and 2012, so there are no letters following these values. However, the % of full-time secondary ministerial staff who were previously involved in the congregation increased between 2006 and 2012, and as this is a statistically significant difference, the values are followed by different letters ("a" and "b").
- 2 These values apply to staff in congregations with up to two full-time ministerial staff other than the head clergyperson in 2012 and up to five in 2006. This accounts for more than 94% of all congregations. The detailed information for this variable is not available for congregations with larger staffs.
- 3 This value applies to staff in congregations with one or two part-time ministerial staff other than the head clergyperson, more than 93% of all congregations. This detailed information for this variable is not available for congregations with larger staffs.



