



A Report on Episcopal Churches in the United States

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Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society
The Episcopal Church**

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Contents

Section 1: Introduction 3

Definitions

Section 2: Our Place and Presence 6

Age and Region
Location and Size
Community Contact

Section 3: Who Attends Our Churches? 15

Episcopal Distinctives
Race, Age and Income

Section 4: The Way We Worship 21

Sanctuaries and Seating
Worship Character
Innovation and Change in Worship

Section 5: Looking in the Mirror 32

Celebrating Our Heritage
The Church as Family
Morality, Liberality and Authority

Section 6: The Things We Do 41

Practices
Programs
Ministries
Evangelism & Recruitment

Section 7: Conflict and Growth 54

Conflict
Growth and Decline

Section 8: How We are Led 67

Characteristics of Clergy
Exercising Leadership
Finding Lay Leaders

Section 9: Finances and Budget 76

Financial Health
How We Spend Our Money

Conclusions 83

Section 1:

Introduction



The Episcopal Church participated in a massive study of religious life in America called Faith Communities Today (FACT)--the largest and most broadly based survey of religious institutions ever conducted in this country. Over 14 thousand congregations (churches, synagogues and mosques) in 41 different faith groups were included, representing over 90 percent of the worshipers in the United States.

This report presents an overview of survey results for the Episcopal Church. It is based on questionnaire responses received from more than seven hundred Episcopal parishes with comparative data supplied by other mainline and conservative Protestant congregations.

The 9-page questionnaire used in this study was mailed in the spring of 2000 to a stratified random sample of Episcopal churches drawn from the 1998 Parochial Report database. A total of 726 responded for an effective response rate of 68%. In most cases the survey form was completed by congregation's rector. Additional information on Episcopal congregations and their settings were provided by Parochial Reports and Census data at the zip code level.

The survey results tell us a great deal about Episcopal churches in the United States. They provide a profile of Episcopal congregations and also speak to sources of vitality and growth.

Definitions

Most of the information contained in this report is about Episcopal congregations. However, some of the charts note similarities or differences among denominations. In such cases Episcopal responses are compared to churches in all other participating Mainline denominations and Conservative Protestant denominations. Mainline and Conservative denominations are categorized in the following manner:

- **Mainline Protestant:** American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran (ELCA), Presbyterian, Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, United Methodist
- **Conservative Protestant:** Assemblies of God, Christian Reformed (CRC), Nazarene, Churches of Christ, Independent Christian Churches (instrumental), Mega-churches, Nondenominational Protestant, Seventh Day Adventist, Southern Baptist

Growth (and decline) in size were measured in various ways. The survey included a self-report question which read: “Since 1995, has the number of regularly participating adults in your congregation:”

- Increased 10% or more
- Increased 5% to 9%
- Stayed about the same (+/- 4%)
- Decreased 5% to 9%
- Decreased 10% or more

Unfortunately, many congregations that decreased in worship or baptized membership by more than 4% chose the “stayed the same” response rather than accurately reporting that they had declined. So in most cases this report uses change in average worship attendance from Parochial Reports rather than the FACT growth/decline self-report variable.

Not all of the FACT survey questions are reported here, and frequently the report does not include the specific wording of a question or answer. The reader is invited to the project web site (fact.hartsem.edu) or to the Episcopal web site (www.episcopalchurch.org/congdev/) for these details. The project web site has information on the overall project and an interactive workbook. The Episcopal web site includes the Episcopal version of the questionnaire (along with a summary of answers from Episcopal churches to each question) and a 4-page summary report.

The change in average worship attendance variable from Parochial Reports was the percent change in average worship attendance from 1994 to 1999 categorized to match the five responses on the growth/decline self-report question. In other words, churches are categorized as increasing by 10% or more in average worship attendance, increasing by 4% to 9% in average worship attendance, and so on. In a few charts in section 7, however, churches are classified in only three categories (Growing, Plateaued or Declining). **Growing churches** are those which grew 10% or more in average worship attendance. **Declining churches** are those that declined 10% or more; and **plateaued churches** are those that grew or declined by less than 10% from 1994 to 1999 in average worship attendance.

Congregational strength and vitality were measured using an index created by combining responses to several survey questions along with the Parochial Report-based change in worship attendance. Here are the items used to create the **Strong Church Index**:

- Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive
- Our congregation helps members deepen their relationship with God
- We have a clear sense of mission and purpose
- How would you describe your congregation's financial health?
- Percent change in average worship attendance (1994 to 1999)

In the case of the first three items in the index, persons filling out the survey were asked how well the statement describes their congregation. Possible responses were: "not at all," "slightly," "somewhat," "quite well," and "very well." Possible responses to the fourth question about the congregation's financial health were: "in serious difficulty," "in some difficulty," "tight, but we manage," "good," and "excellent." As mentioned earlier, percent change in average worship attendance also included five categories, ranging from decreased 10% or more to increased 10% or more. The strong church index ranged from a low of 5 (scored low on all five items) to 25 (scored high on all five). The index was collapsed into five categories, with the strongest churches scoring from 22 to 25 on the index and the weakest churches scoring from 5 to 14. A total of 16.8% of Episcopal churches were in the strongest category and 19.5% were in the weakest.

Section 2:

Our Place and Presence



Episcopal congregations are religious organizations that were founded at a specific place and time. They exist as unique incarnations of the church and minister to people in their surrounding communities. Some are large; others are small. Some are old; others are young. Some are located in the center of large cities; others can be found in the midst of rural communities and farms.

In this section the place and presence of Episcopal churches in their communities is addressed. It provides a first-ever profile of Episcopal congregations.

Age and Region

The Episcopal Church grew up with America and includes many very old congregations, with some organized as early as the 1600s. Slightly over half (56%) of the Episcopal churches participating in the Faith Communities Today Project were organized during the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, with 20% organized before 1851. Figure 2.01 shows that 18% of Episcopal churches were organized during the “baby boom” years following World War II through the mid-1960s. New churches, those formed from 1986 to 2000, account for only 4% of Episcopal churches in the study.

Younger Episcopal churches tend to be stronger, scoring higher in the Strong Church Index (a composite measure composed of percent change in worship attendance, financial health, clarity of mission and purpose, spiritual vitality, and a question about helping “members deepen their relationship with God”) than did older churches. As shown in figure 2.02, 46% of the youngest churches were rated in the “strongest” category. It should be noted, however, that even though the two youngest sets of churches were strongest overall, only 12% of Episcopal congregations were formed during these years.

Churches formed from 1901 to 1945 were the least likely to be in the strongest category. In fact, the oldest Episcopal churches (those formed prior to 1901) tended to be stronger on average than churches formed from 1901 to 1965.

Figure 2.01
Over Half of Episcopal Churches Organized Before 1901

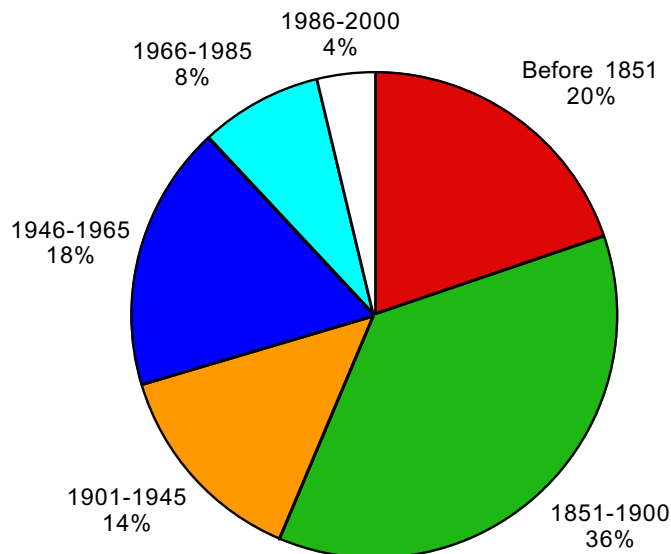


Figure 2.02
Younger Churches are Stronger

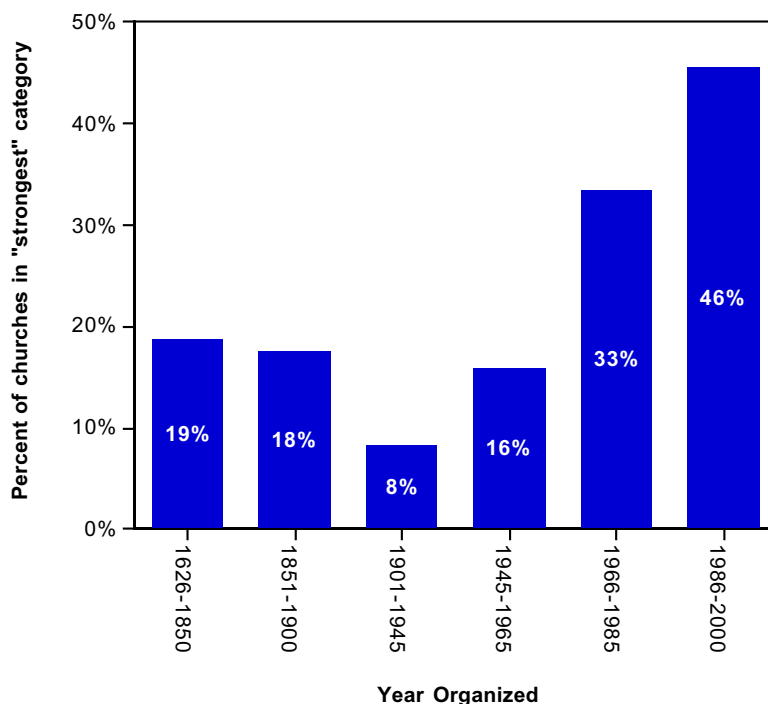
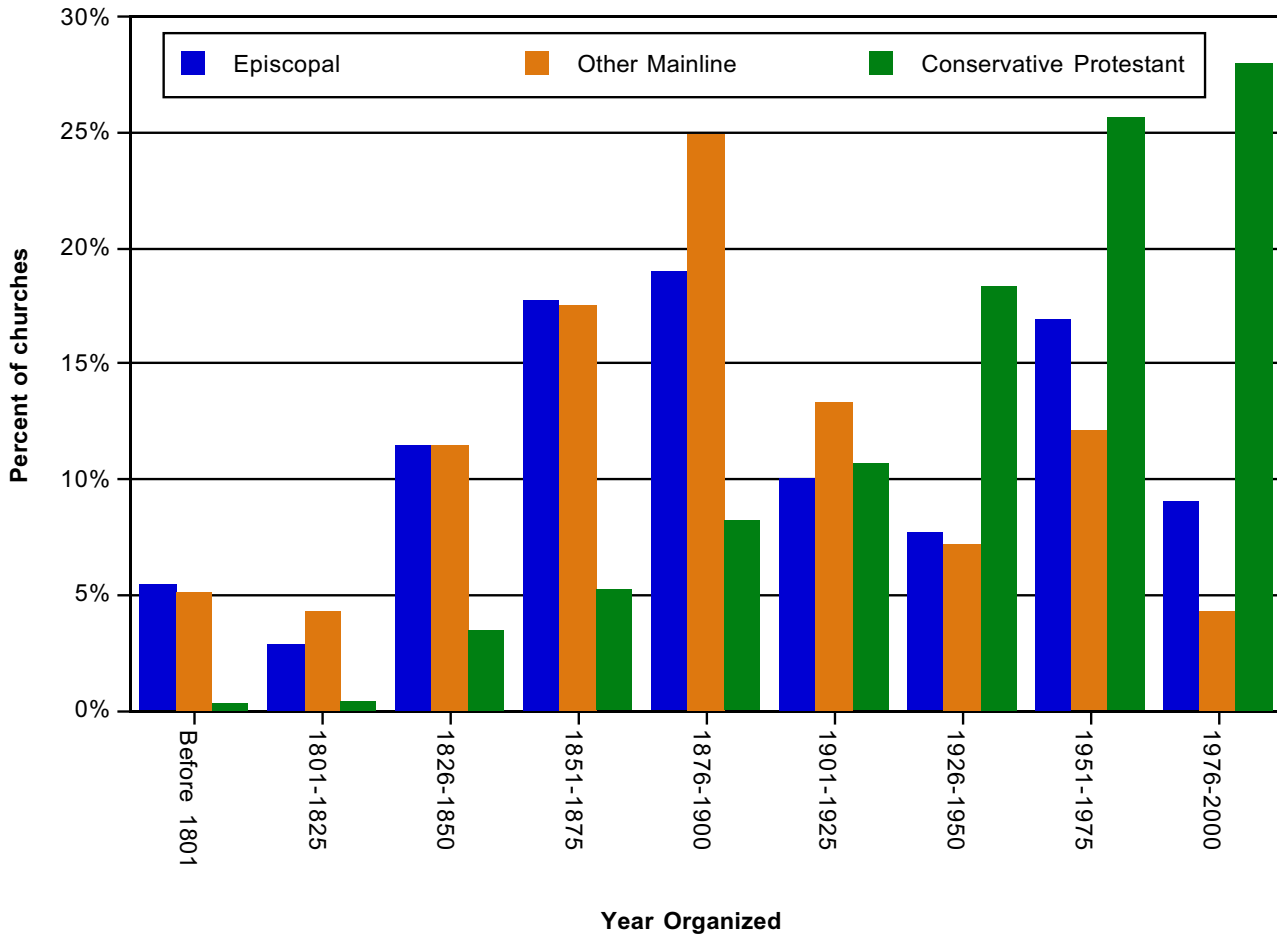
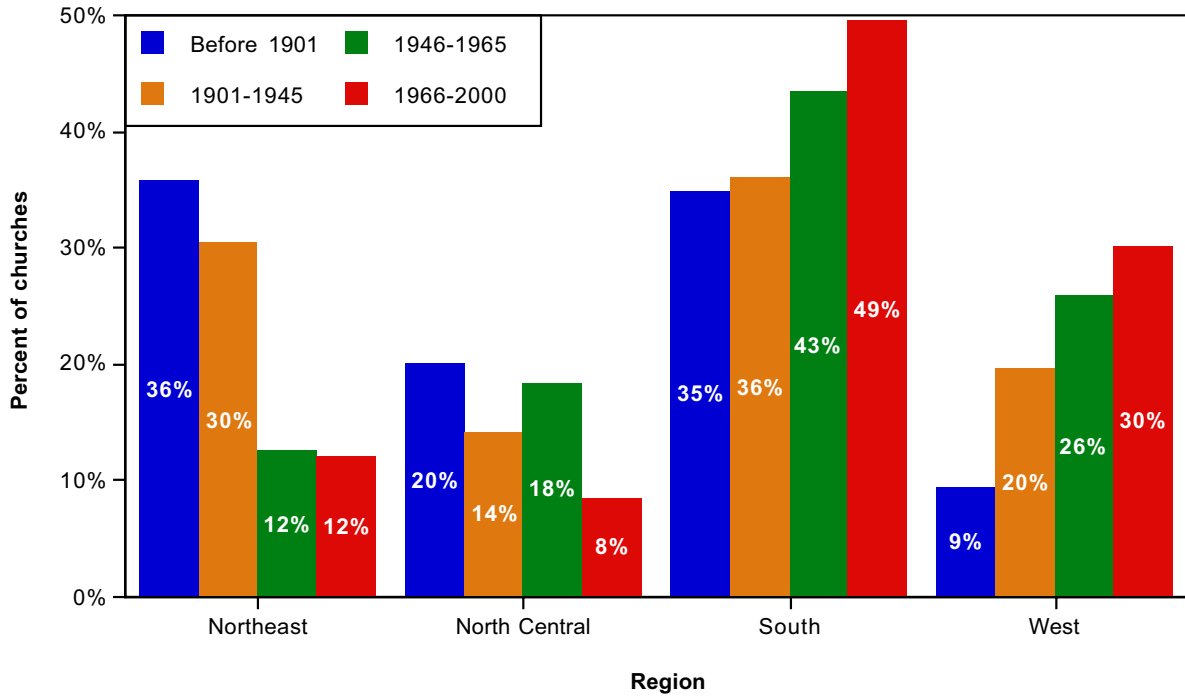


Figure 2.03
Year Organized by Denominational Group



The age profile of the Episcopal Church is similar to that of other mainline Protestant denominations (American Baptist, Disciples of Christ, ELCA, Methodist, Presbyterian, RCA, and UCC) through the mid-1870s. Thereafter, the Episcopal Church diverges from other mainline groups. We have proportionately fewer congregations formed from 1876 to 1925 and proportionately more from 1926 to the present. 34% of Episcopal churches were formed from 1926 to 2000, as compared to 24% of the churches in other mainline denominations. Obviously, however, the churches in conservative Protestant denominations tend to be much younger on average than those in the mainline (including the Episcopal Church). Indeed, the proportion of conservative churches formed in each quarter-century increases steadily from 1801 to the present. The largest proportion of Episcopal and other mainline churches were formed from 1876 to 1900. The largest proportion of churches in conservative denominations were formed from 1976 to 2000. Since newer churches tend to grow more rapidly than older churches, the growth of the conservative Protestant sector and the decline of the mainline can be explained in part by the age profile of their respective congregations.

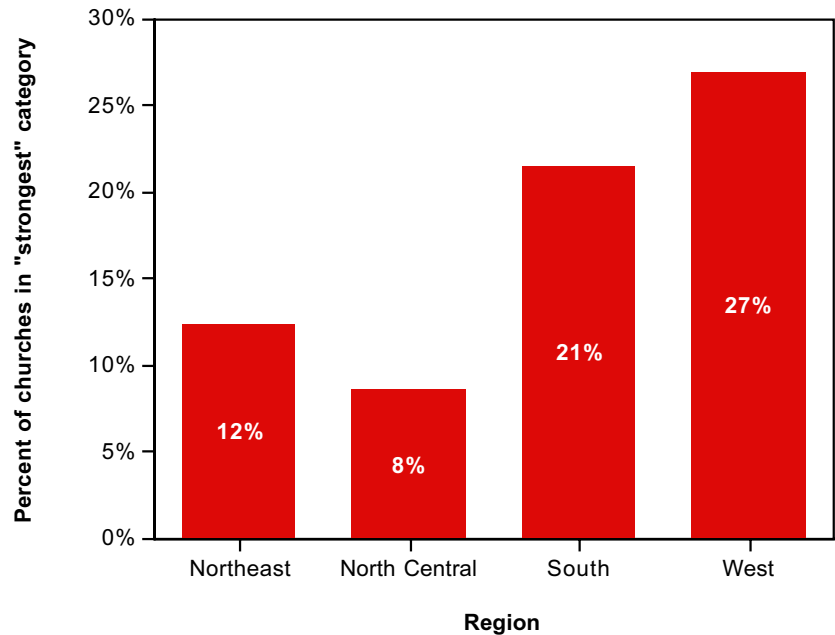
Figure 2.04
Westward Ho



Episcopal churches formed prior to 1901 tend to be located in either the Northeast census region (New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) or the South (from Delaware to Florida to Kentucky and Texas). Since 1945, proportionately more churches have been organized in the West than in the two northern regions. As shown in Figure 2.04, the proportion of churches organized in the South and West increased steadily.

Episcopal churches in the West and South tend to be stronger on average than churches in the two northern regions—particularly churches in the North Central region, where only 8% of churches were in the “strongest” category. Churches in the South and West tend to be younger and these regions have experienced much greater population growth than the Northeast and North Central regions. The South also retains a more church-supportive culture than other regions.

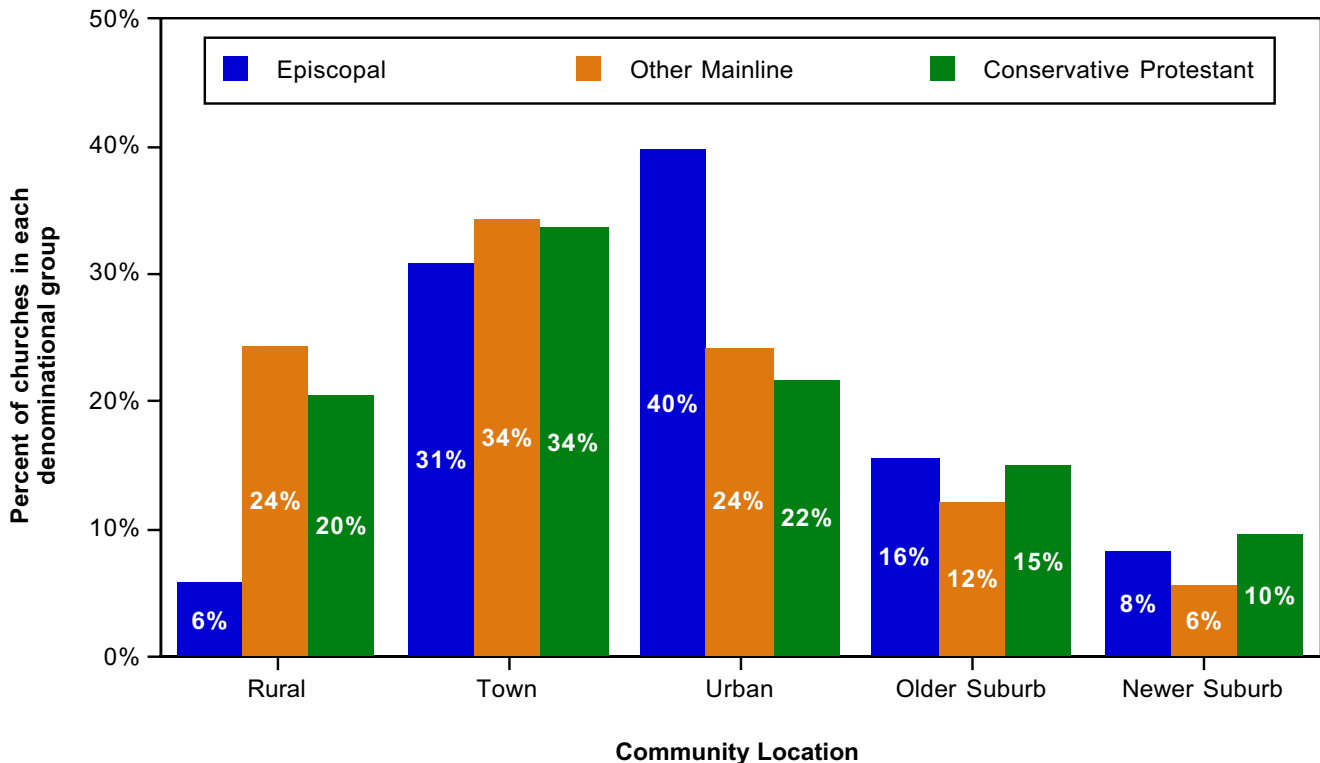
Figure 2.05
The West is Best



Location and Size

Episcopal churches tend to be located in towns and cities. Very few (only 6%) are located in rural or open country settings. In their non-rural profile, Episcopal churches differ markedly from other mainline churches and conservative Protestant churches (which are dominated by United Methodist and Southern Baptist churches, respectively). The largest numbers of Episcopal churches are found in urban locations: downtown, inner city and older neighborhoods in cities with 10,000 or more population. The proportion of Episcopal churches in older suburbs is similar to that of conservative Protestants. In newer suburbs, the Episcopal Church falls between other mainline denominations and the conservatives. The location profile of the Episcopal Church is similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, which also tends to be more urban and less rural.

Figure 2.06
More Urban; Less Rural



Episcopal churches tend to be stronger in newer suburbs than in any other rural/urban location. Very few churches (only 10%) that were located in rural areas were rated as “strongest” on the strong church index. Population growth is strongest in newer suburbs and churches tend to be younger in these areas too. Membership growth through the influx of new residents and the natural vitality of young organizations tends to produce a positive self-image that affects all areas of church life.

Episcopal churches are more likely to be found in areas that have higher than average education, income and housing value than churches in other mainline and conservative Protestant denominations. Figure 2.08 shows that 56% of Episcopal churches were located in zip code areas where over 20% of adult residents had college degrees, as compared to 31% of mainline churches and 35% of conservative Protestant churches.

Not only do Episcopal churches tend to be located in more educated, affluent areas, they also tend to be stronger in such places. As seen in figure 2.09, Episcopal churches located in communities where the population is highly educated are much more likely to score high on the strong church index. The same relationship also can be found for income, housing value, white collar occupations, population growth and new housing construction. The age, gender, marital status and racial profile of the community were unrelated to the strength of Episcopal churches, however.

Figure 2.07
It's Better in the 'Burbs

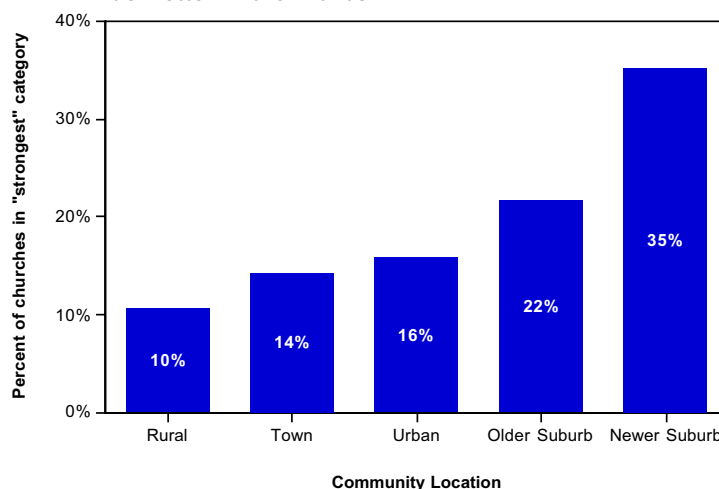


Figure 2.08
Education and Denomination

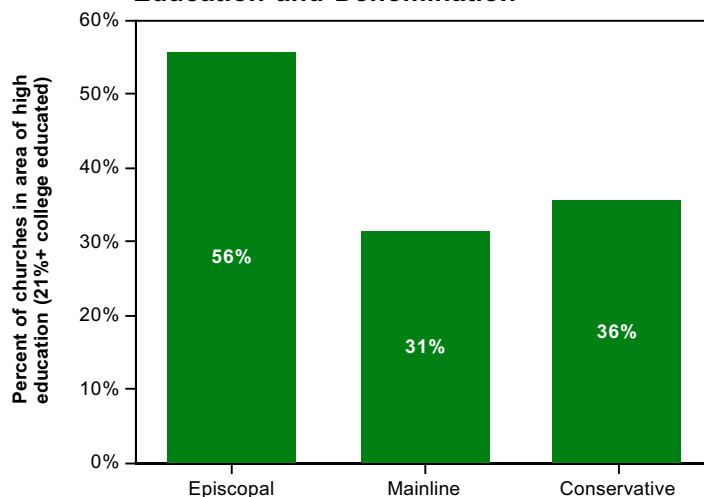
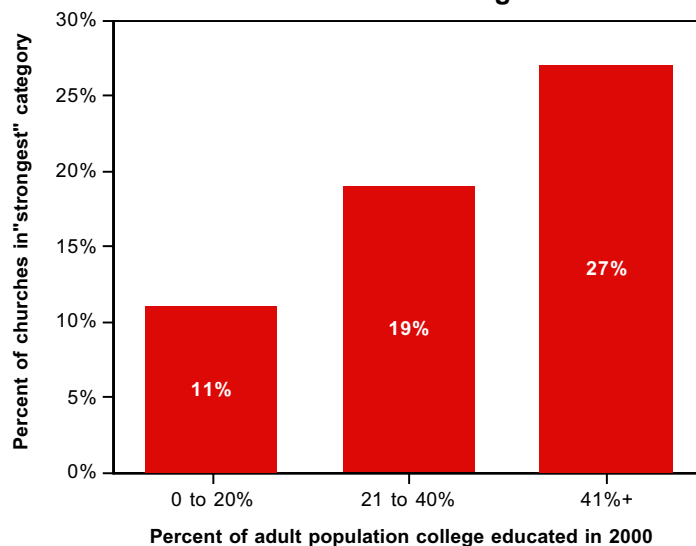
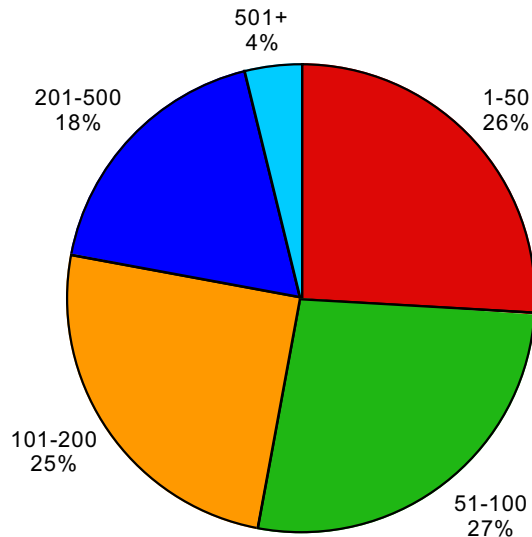


Figure 2.09
Education and Church Strength



The mega-church is not the norm in America and certainly not in the Episcopal Church. Most Episcopal congregations (78%) have 200 or fewer active adults and slightly over half (53%) have 100 or fewer active adults, according to the FACT survey. Worship attendance data from Parochial Reports shows that 84% of Episcopal congregations average 200 or fewer in their worship services (1-50, 27%; 51-100, 30%; 101-200, 27%). Only 1.3% of Episcopal congregations participating in the FACT survey reported average weekly worship attendance of more than 500 persons in their 1999 Parochial Report.

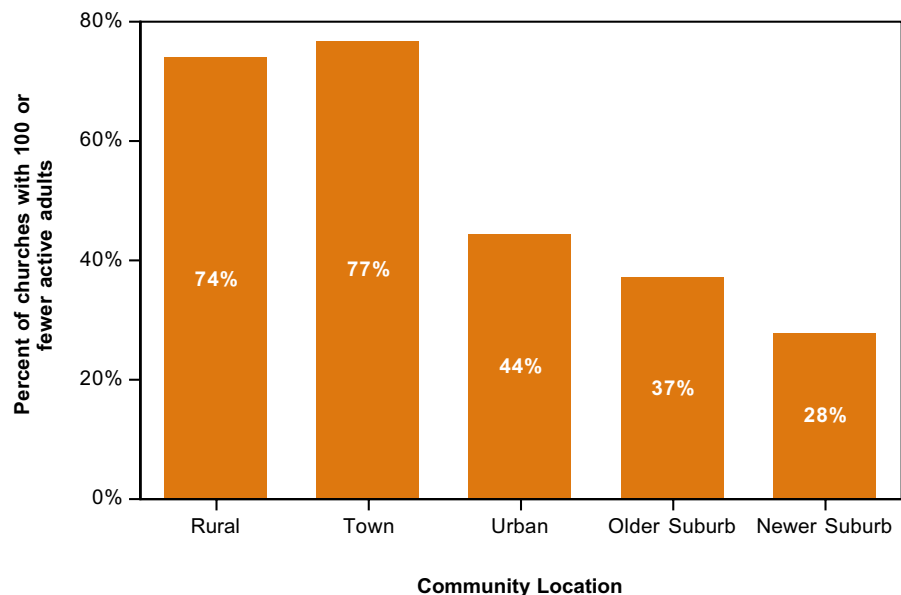
Figure 2.10
Over Half of Churches Have 100 or Fewer Active Adults



Compared to other denominations, Episcopal churches are more likely to fall in the middle size categories. Other mainline Protestants have 33% of their churches in the smallest (1-50) category of active adults and conservative Protestants have even more very small churches (37%), as compared to 26% in the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church has more congregations in the three middle categories than the other two denominational groups and slightly fewer very large churches.

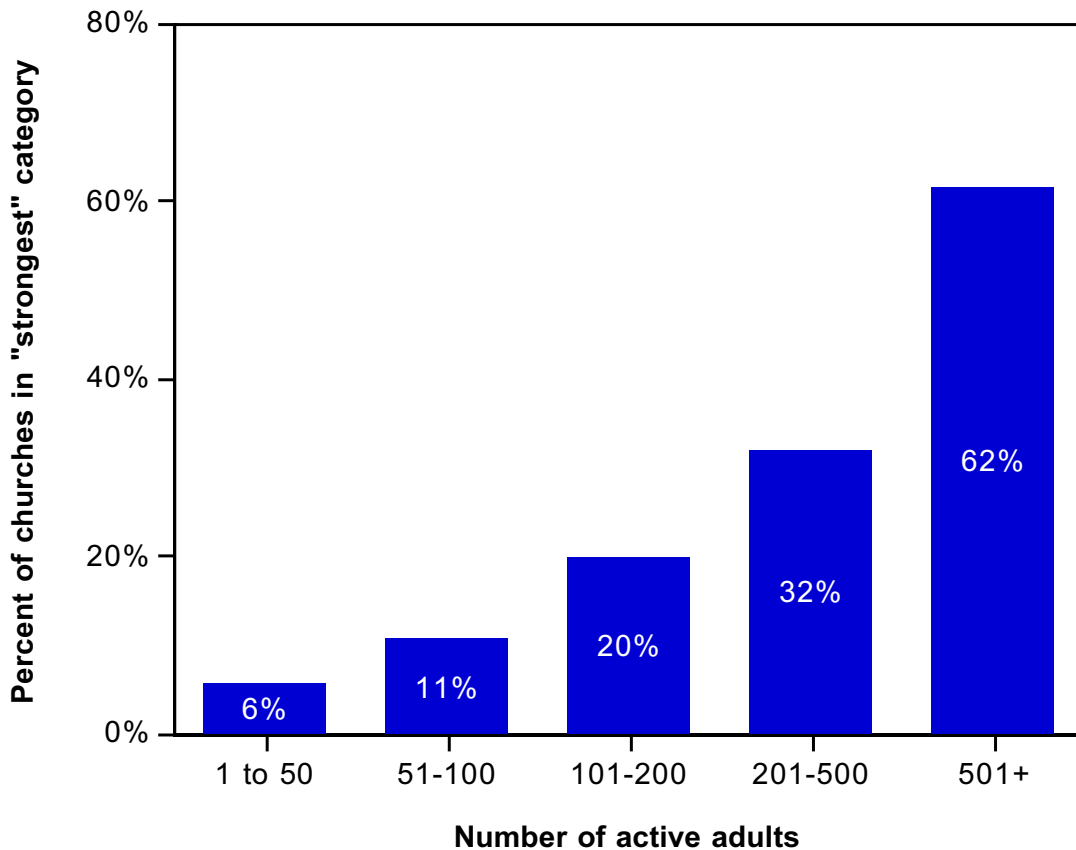
Not surprisingly, rural areas and small towns tend to be home to smaller Episcopal churches. As seen in Figure 2.11, over 70 percent of Episcopal congregations in rural areas and towns have 100 or fewer active adult participants. In urban neighborhoods the percentage of small churches drops to 44%. Newer suburbs have the smallest percentage of churches with 100 or fewer active adults (only 28% of churches in newer suburbs are of this size).

Figure 2.11
Small Towns & Small Churches



Larger churches tend to be stronger, as measured by the strong church index. In part, this is because in order to be large, churches must have grown (although in some cases that growth was in the distant past). In general, however, larger churches have varied, active programs, multiple staff positions, good finances and a greater sense of purpose and direction. Conversely, smaller churches (and particularly those that are *very* small) are typically declining or plateaued and they have minimal programs and ministries, a sole staff position (sometimes unpaid), inadequate finances, and an uncertainty about the future. Larger churches are not “better” than small churches, but they have more resources and do more things and thus they also tend to be “stronger.”

Figure 2.12
Larger Churches are Stronger



Community Contact

Even though churches are located in villages, towns and neighborhoods, they are not always an integral part of the community in which they find themselves. The FACT survey asked key informants to indicate how well the community around their church was “informed about the activities taking place in our congregation.” Interestingly, very few congregations said “very well” or “not at all.” The largest percentage of church leaders (40%) responded “somewhat,” followed in turn by “slightly” and “quite well.”

Figure 2.14 shows that it makes a difference to stay in touch with one’s community. In fact, it hurts a great deal to be **out of touch**. Churches responding that the community is not at all informed about their activities and the larger number of churches who are only slightly connected are much more likely to be among the “weakest” Episcopal congregations.

Size matters, as does place, but ultimately, a congregation’s **presence** in its community is the critical issue.

Figure 2.13
How Well is the Community Informed About Church Activities?

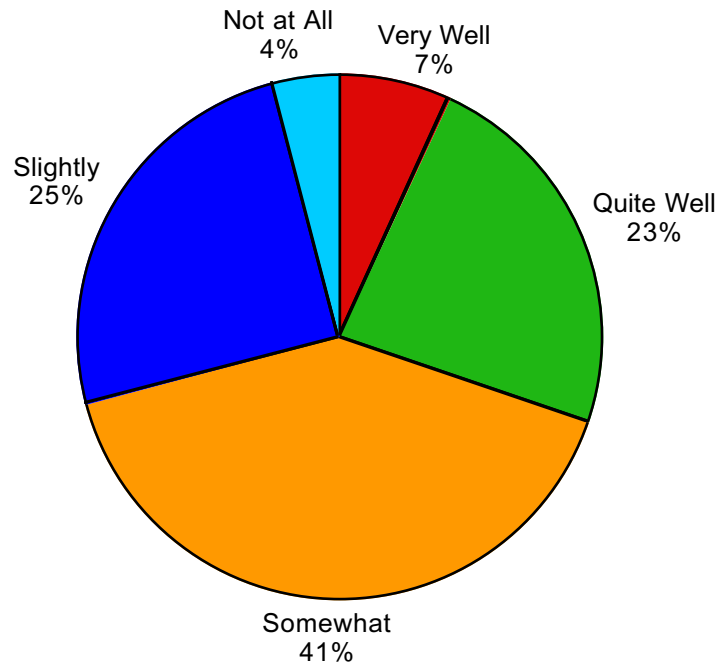
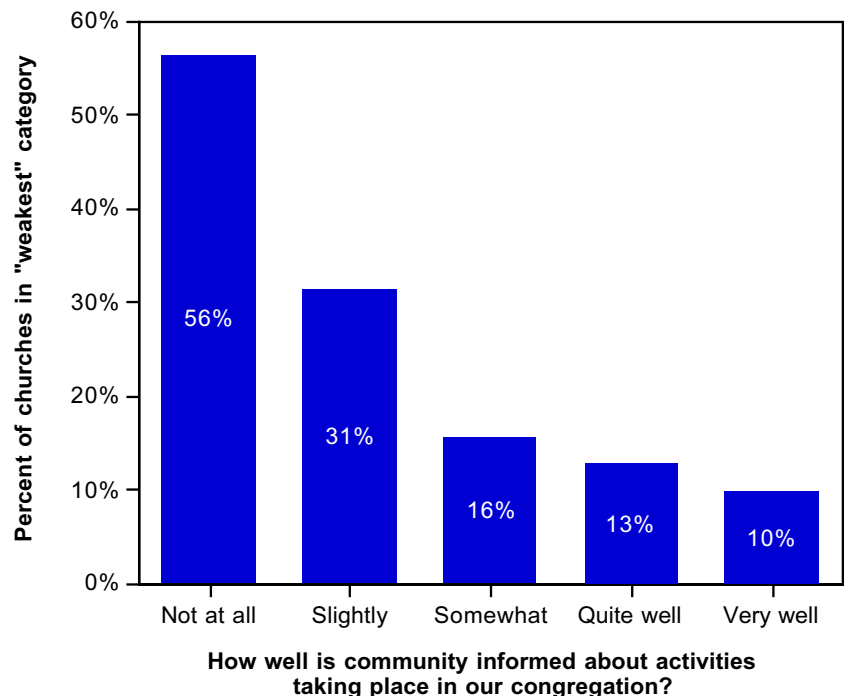


Figure 2.14
It Hurts to be Out of Touch



Section 3:

Who Attends Our Churches?



The Faith Communities Today survey was not a census of Episcopal church members. Instead, it asked a key leader in each church to look at their congregation and describe its active participants. So even though it is not possible, for instance, to determine the exact percentage of active Episcopalians who are over the age of 60, it is possible to say a great deal about the distribution of older persons among Episcopal churches.

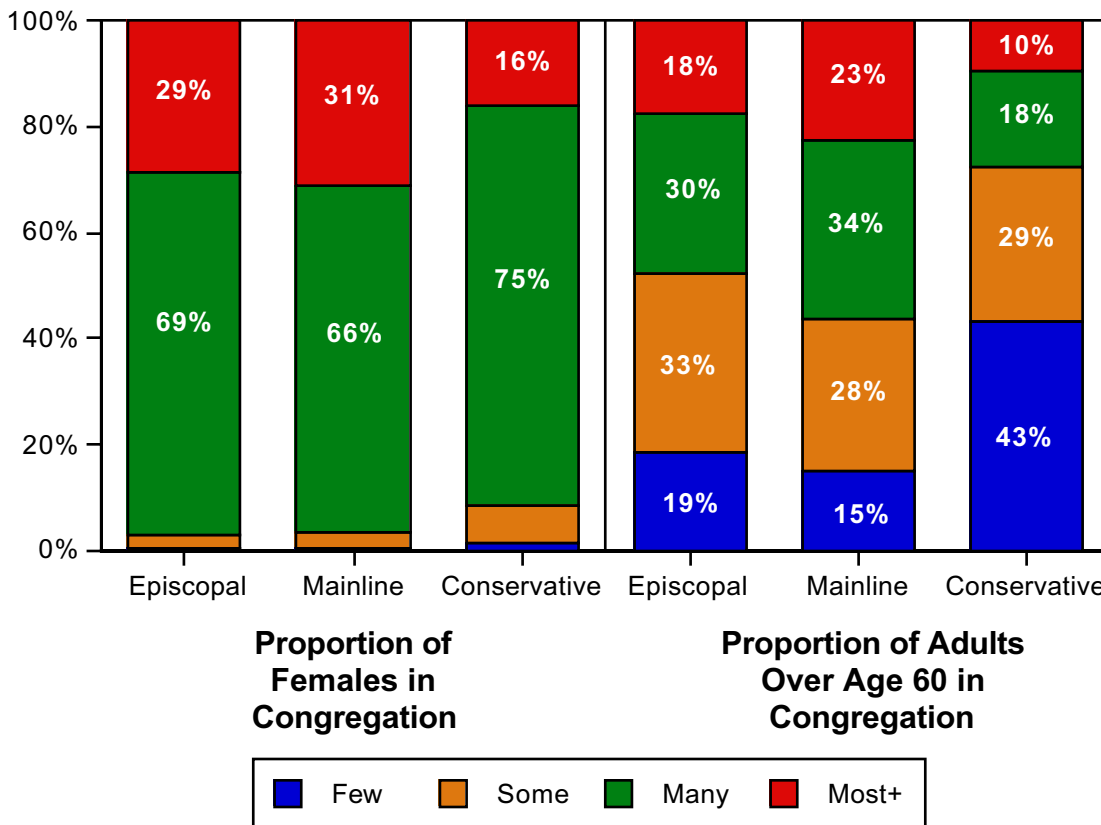
In this section information on church demography is presented on gender, age, education, income, and race. In addition, we look at the length of time people have been related to the Episcopal Church and attending specific Episcopal congregations. To make these data more meaningful the Episcopal Church is compared to other mainline and conservative Protestant denominations. Finally, the issue of congregational demographics and vitality is addressed.

Episcopal Distinctives

Each congregation was asked to describe the demographic makeup of their active adults. So in the case of gender they were asked, “Of your total number of regularly participating adults, what percent would you estimate are female?” The seven response categories ranged from “none” to “all or nearly all (81-100%).” In each of the Figures in this section, the first three categories [none, hardly any (1-10%) and few (11-20%)] are combined into one category that is labeled “few.” The category “some” refers to 21 to 40% of a congregation’s regularly participating adults; “many” refers to 41-60%; and “most+” to 61-100%.

As can be seen in Figure 3.1 below, most churches in all denominational groups tend to have “many” females. That is, 40 to 60% of their active adults are female. What Figure 3.1 also shows is that Episcopal churches and other mainline Protestant churches are more likely than conservative Protestant churches to have a disproportionate number of female members. The same is true, but even more extreme, for the proportion of participants over the age of 60. Many conservative churches report that less than 21% of their members are older adults, but very few Episcopal or other mainline churches can make the same claim. Also apparent in the chart is the fact that the situation is less serious for the Episcopal Church than it is for the mainline generally.

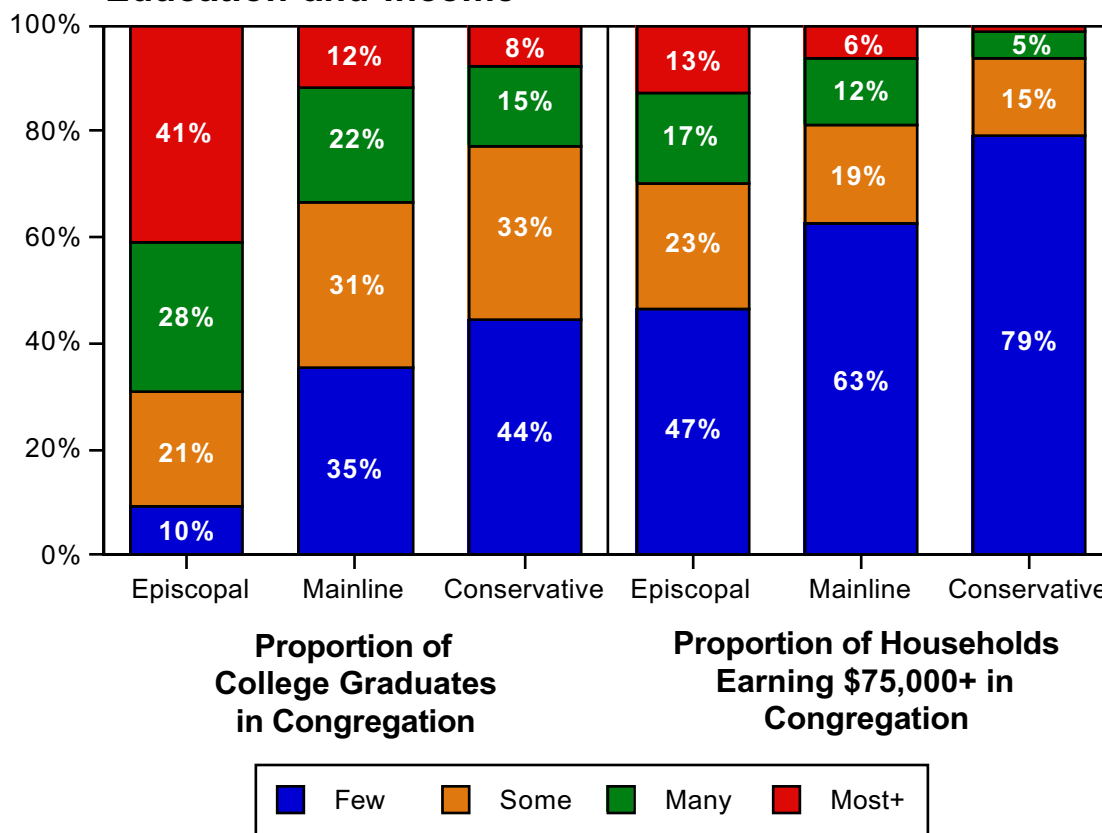
Figure 3.1
Characteristics of Participating Adults:
Gender and Age



Episcopal congregations diverge more strongly from other mainline churches in terms of education and income. The image of Episcopalians as more highly educated and affluent than the general population is real. It may be somewhat surprising, however, to see the degree of difference between the Episcopal Church and the mainline. Other mainline denominations are more similar to the conservatives than they are to the Episcopal Church in terms of education. Over 40% of Episcopal congregations report that most to all of their regular adult participants are college graduates. Among other mainline bodies the percentage is only 11.9% and among conservatives it drops to 7.9%.

Income repeats the pattern of education. Most churches in mainline and conservative denominations report that few of their households earned over \$75,000 in 2000, but that was not the case in the Episcopal Church. Slightly over 30% Episcopal congregations report many or most of their households earn over \$75,000 as compared to 19% of mainline and 6% of conservative congregations. When we look at households earning \$20,000 or less (not shown here) the pattern reverses. The Episcopal Church has very few churches with a large proportion of low income households. Conservative denominations have many more.

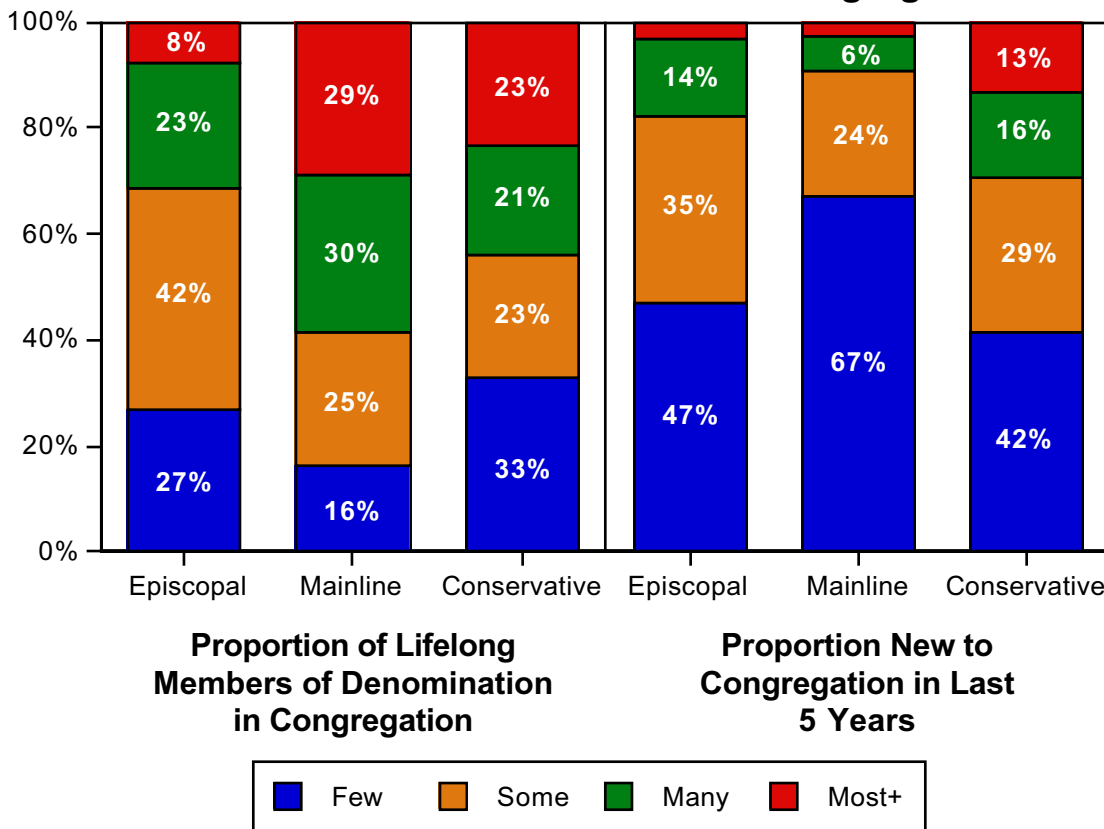
Figure 3.2
Characteristics of Participating Adults:
Education and Income



The Episcopal Church is often seen by insiders and outsiders as a denomination of elites, where most people are born into membership rather than choosing it for themselves. Thus, the terms “cradle Episcopalian” and “dyed in the wool” Episcopalian are sometimes heard. To be sure, all denominations have a large proportion of members who are the children of members. But the Episcopal Church has proportionately fewer such members than most other denominations. Figure 3.3 shows that only a small percentage of Episcopal churches (7.6%) report that most to all of their active adult participants are lifelong Episcopalians. The proportion of lifelong members is much higher in other mainline denominations (29.1%) and for conservative Protestants (23.5%). The largest proportion of Episcopal churches (42%) report that they have “some” lifelong members among their active participants. These data reinforce research findings on denominational mobility which suggest that the Episcopal Church is a “destination denomination” for many non-Episcopalians who join as adults. They are attracted by the liturgy, identity and status.

The right side of Figure 3.3 deals with recent additions to the congregation rather than to the denomination. As can be seen below, conservative churches have the largest proportion of new members. The mainline has very few newcomers, with Episcopal churches falling in the middle. Not surprisingly, new members are a very strong correlate of growth in worship attendance.

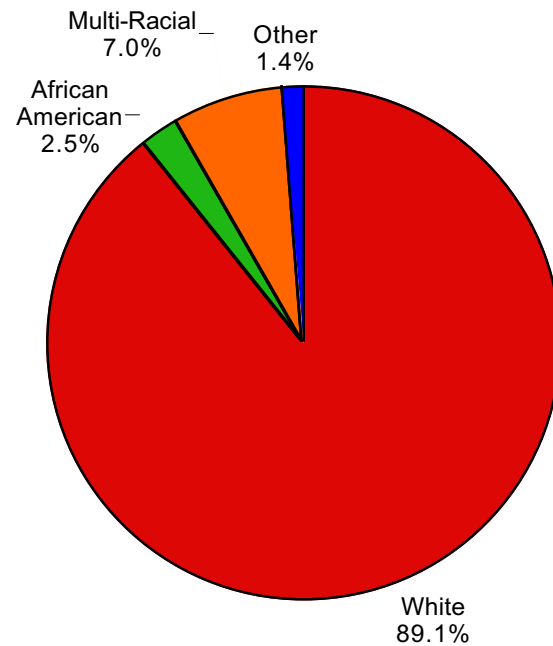
Figure 3.3
Characteristics of Participating Adults:
Cradle Members and Newcomers to Congregation



Race, Age and Income

A common adage in America is that Sunday is the most segregated day of the week--reflecting the fact that most people worship in congregations that are mono-racial. Figure 3.4 seems to confirm that adage. Indeed, most churches in America are not integrated in any meaningful way. The only religious bodies participating in FACT that report a large proportion of multiracial churches were the Muslims (49% multi-racial) and the Seventh Day Adventists (35%). Other denominations with fairly large proportions of multiracial congregations were the Baha'i (20%), Roman Catholics (14%), Mega-churches (13%), and Assemblies of God (10%). The Episcopal Church falls in the middle range of denominations in terms of racial diversity.

Figure 3.4
Predominant Racial Makeup of Episcopal Churches



For the most part, the mono-racial character of most churches, and particularly Protestant churches, is a legacy of residential segregation and the fact that most Protestant congregations tend to draw their members from a limited area (people commute to work much greater distances than they do to church). Churches reflect their communities and until communities become more racially diverse, it is unlikely that churches will actualize denominational goals for becoming multiracial and multi-cultural.

Compared to the general population, people who attend church, synagogue or mosque regularly are more likely to be married, to have children in the home, to be older and to be more highly educated. The Episcopal Church reflects this trend with respect to marital status, age and education. However, the older age profile of Episcopal church members and mainline members in general means that the proportion with children in the home is relatively low, and similar to the general population.

The demographic character of congregations has implications for church life that are often quite dramatic. This can be seen clearly when we look at congregational strength and vitality among churches with larger and smaller proportions of older persons and wealthier persons.

Figure 3.5 shows the downside of congregations that have a disproportionate share of older persons. Episcopal churches saying that many (41-60%) or most to all (61-100%) of their active participants are over 60 years of age are much more likely to fall into the “weakest” category on the Church Strength Index. It is not that older people “cause” a church to be weak, but rather that a church, like any other living thing, must be renewed in order to thrive. Many churches lose their ability to attract newcomers and such churches eventually become dominated by elderly members, who have great loyalty, but decreasing vitality.

Stronger Episcopal churches tend to have larger proportions of members with high income. Churches with few high income members tend to be very weak. Episcopalians are more affluent on average than any other Christian denomination, so to a certain extent Figure 3.6 reflects the ability of churches to reach the natural constituency of the Episcopal Church. It also reflects the character of demographic settings with higher income (growing, highly educated, suburban communities).

Figure 3.5
Churches Dominated by Elderly are Weaker

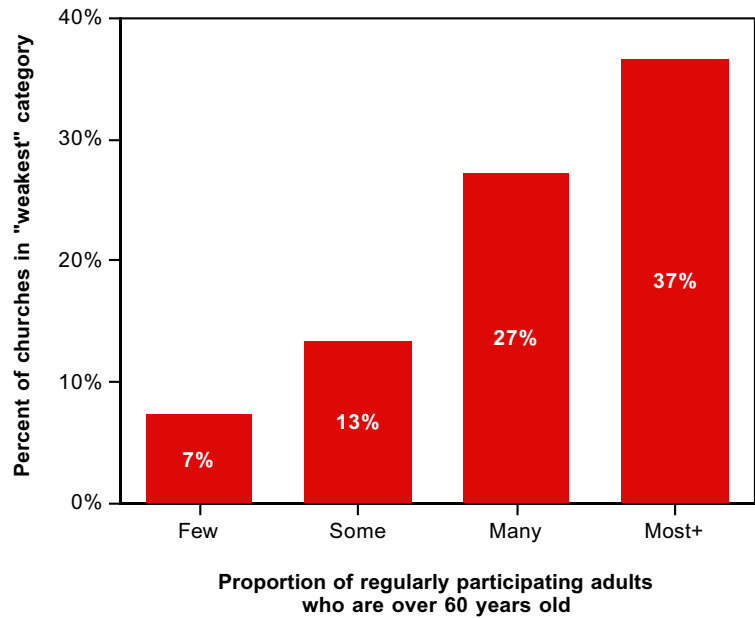
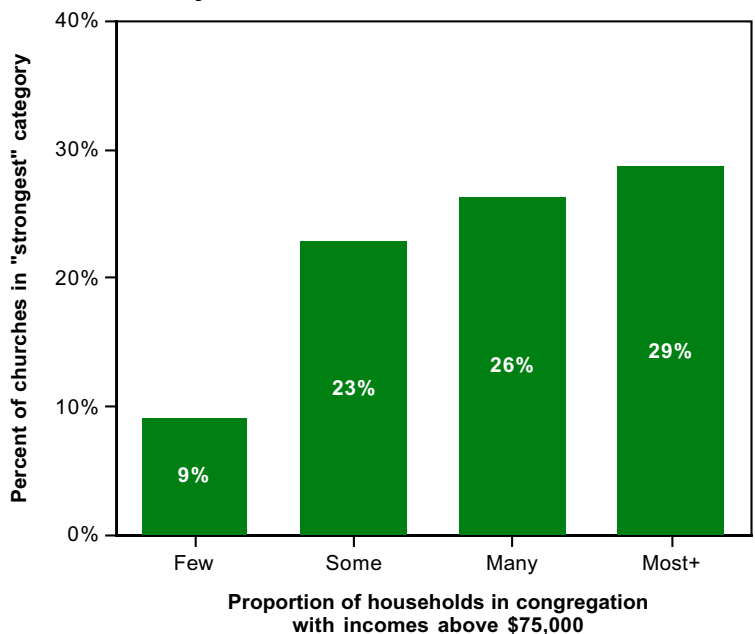


Figure 3.6
Money Doesn't Hurt



Section 4:

The Way We Worship



Worship is central to the life of all Christian congregations. This is certainly true in the Episcopal Church and indeed it may be more true for Episcopal congregations than for most other Protestant denominations in the United States.

In this section we look at the physical setting for worship in Episcopal congregations, the character of worship as it takes place from week to week, and how worship changes in style and character.

Sanctuaries and Seating

Episcopal congregations worship in a wide variety of church buildings: quite large, quite small and everything in between. The median Episcopal church that participated in the FACT survey seats 180 persons. The smallest seats 30 and the largest 1,100. As can be seen in Figure 4.01 the largest proportion of Episcopal churches seat between 151 to 300 persons with sizable proportions also seating 30 to 100 and 101 to 300. Churches seating over 500 are very rare in the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church is unusual among mainline Protestant denominations in the United States in that most congregations hold more than one worship service. Only 30% of Episcopal churches hold one service, as compared to 64% of other mainline congregations. 46% of Episcopal congregations hold two services, 15% hold 3 and 9% hold four or more. Conservative Protestant churches also tend to hold more than one service each weekend (only 23% hold a single service). However, most conservative churches hold a second service on Sunday evening (which is attended largely by the same people as the Sunday a.m. service). Episcopal churches tend to hold multiple Sunday morning services which are attended by different groups of people.

It might be thought that churches with smaller facilities would need to hold multiple worship services in order to seat all of their congregants. But this is not the case. Figure 4.02 clearly shows that the larger the worship facility, the more services a church tends to have. A majority (53%) of churches seating 300 or more persons hold at least three services and only 3% hold only one. By contrast, most churches (69%) with seating for 100 or less hold only one service.

Figure 4.01
Seating Capacity of Episcopal Churches

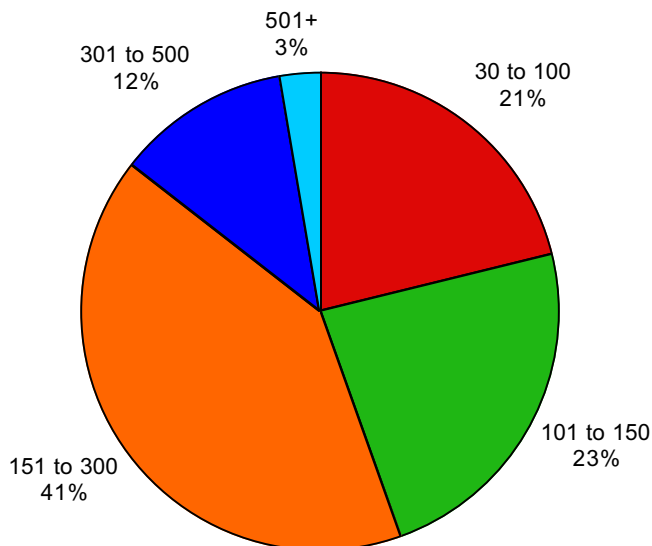
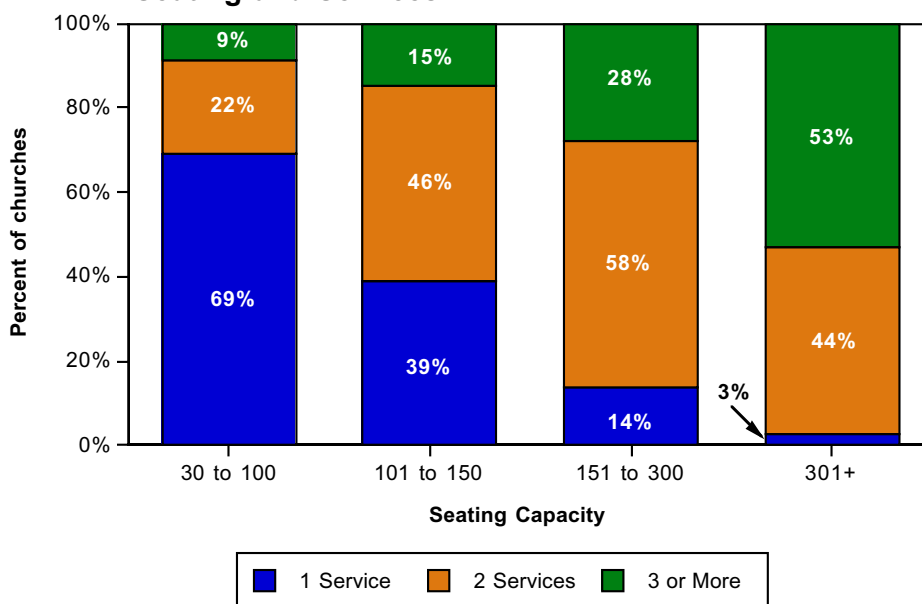
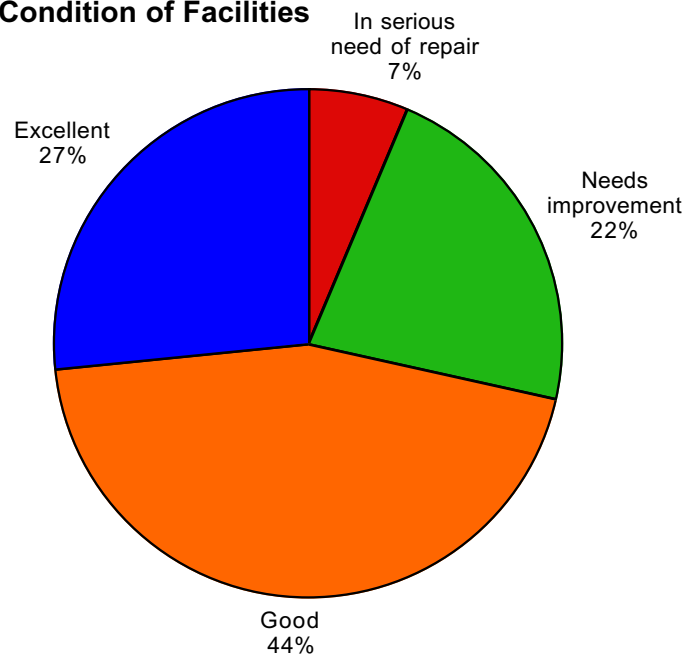


Figure 4.02
Seating and Services



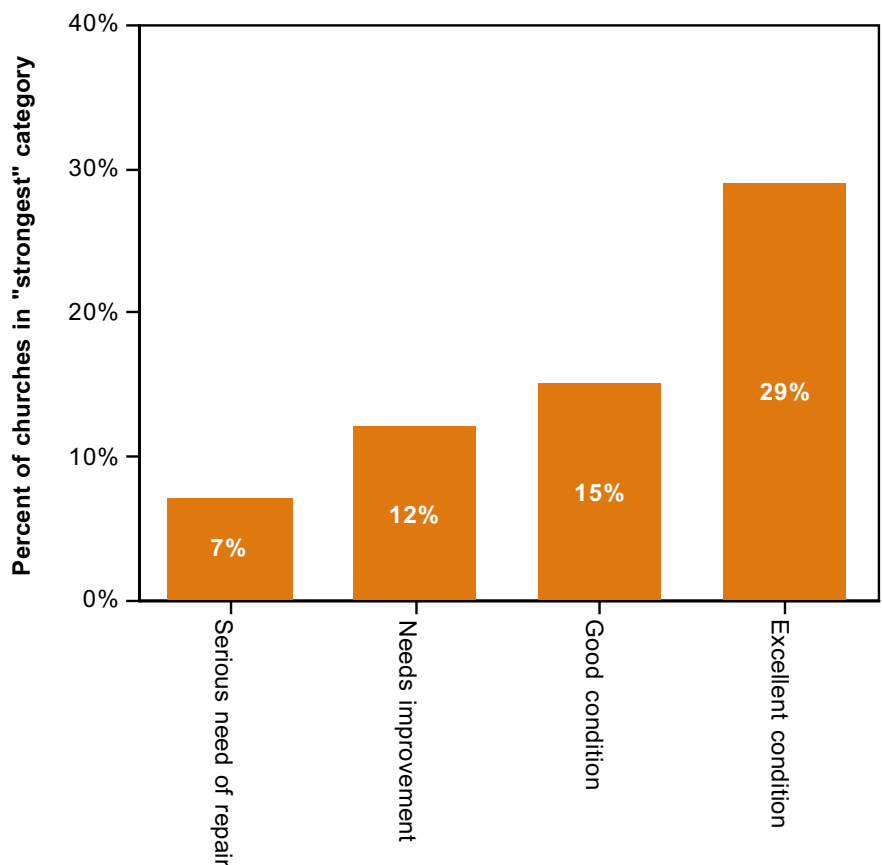
Episcopal churches vary in the condition of their worship facilities. Most, however, are in good or excellent condition. Only 22% of rectors say that their facilities are in need of improvement and another 7 percent say that their facilities are in serious need of improvement and repair. Not surprisingly, newer churches are more likely to say that their facilities are in excellent condition than are older churches. Furthermore, the condition of church facilities is related to church strength. In Figure 4.04 it can be seen that 29% of churches who say their facilities are in “excellent” condition score in the strongest category on the index of church strength. Only 7% of churches in serious need of repairs are in the strongest category.

Figure 4.03
Condition of Facilities



It is too much to say that keeping one’s worship facility in good condition causes a church to be strong. The direction of causation undoubtedly goes both ways. That is, strong congregations have a lot of resources and a lot of pride in their church. Thus they are both able and motivated to keep their facility in good repair. But it is also true that people tend to be attracted to attractive churches. So a well-maintained church that reinforces an image of vitality helps a church be vital.

Figure 4.04
Church Strength and Condition of Facilities



Some churches are full to overflowing, whereas others are nearly empty. The Episcopal Church has equal quantities of each. Figure 4.05 shows that 6% of Episcopal churches have standing room only and 6% are less than 20% full at their service with the largest attendance.

It probably goes without saying that churches that are full tend to be strong and growing—even though lack of space may restrain growth (eventually). The fact remains, however, that strong, growing churches tend to be very full and as can be seen in Figure 4.06 churches that are in dire need of more worship space tend to be very strong.

One conclusion can be made from these charts is that adequate space is not a prerequisite for vitality and growth. Growing churches find a way to accommodate more people through multiple worship services and expanding their facilities. In general, plateaued churches do not need more space in order to grow. Rather they need to become more vital congregations.

Figure 4.05
Packing the Pews

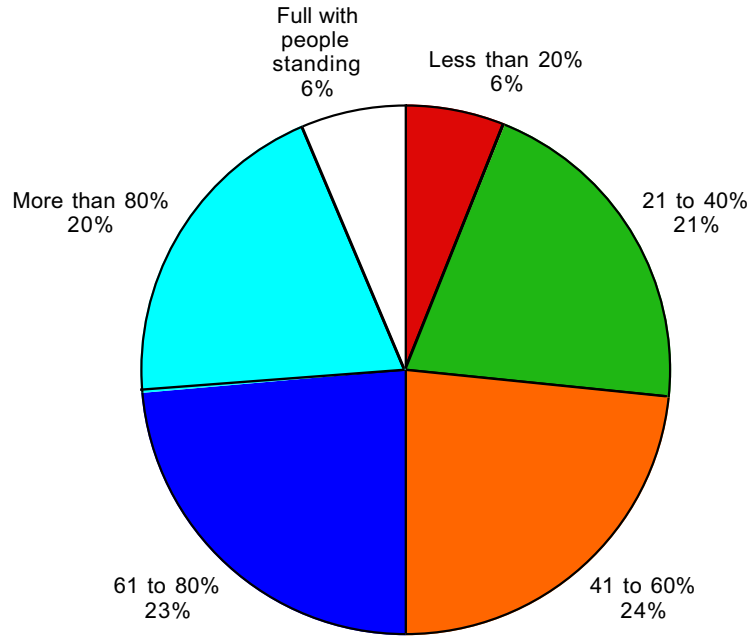
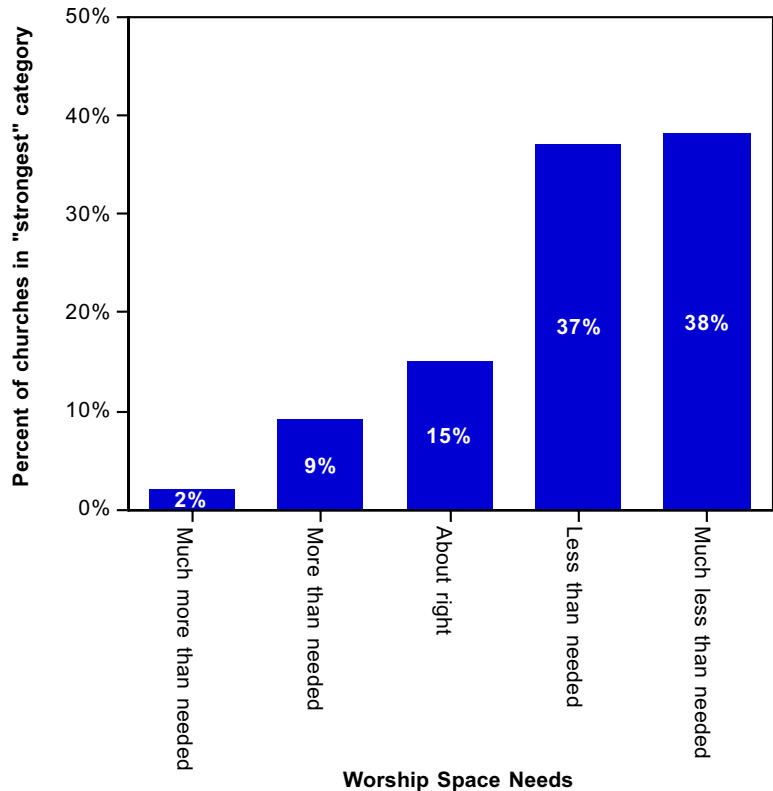


Figure 4.06
Space Constraints and Church Strength



Worship Character

Worship affects people differently, according to their needs, backgrounds, and openness. It is necessarily a subjective experience. Still, worship services in churches are objectively different, even in their subjective character. Among Episcopal churches, perhaps more than in most denominations, there tends to be a commonality in the liturgy. Thus we see in Figure 4.07 that the phrase “includes formal liturgy” characterizes worship quite well or very well in 94% of Episcopal congregations. Worship in Episcopal congregations also has a sense of God’s presence and the people attending are friendly. In most cases it also is joyful and fairly predictable.

Worship in Episcopal congregations is not likely to be very innovative or informal. A sense of “expectancy”—that something exciting may happen at any minute in worship—characterizes some, but not a majority of Episcopal congregations. Unlike other liberal mainline denominations, inclusive language does not seem to be a priority in many Episcopal congregations.

Many worship characteristics are related to congregational strength. Figure 4.08 shows that joyful churches tend to be strong congregations. Also highly related to church strength were characterizations of worship as exciting, expectant, friendly, and that it has “a sense of God’s presence.”

Figure 4.07
How Rectors Describe Their Worship Services

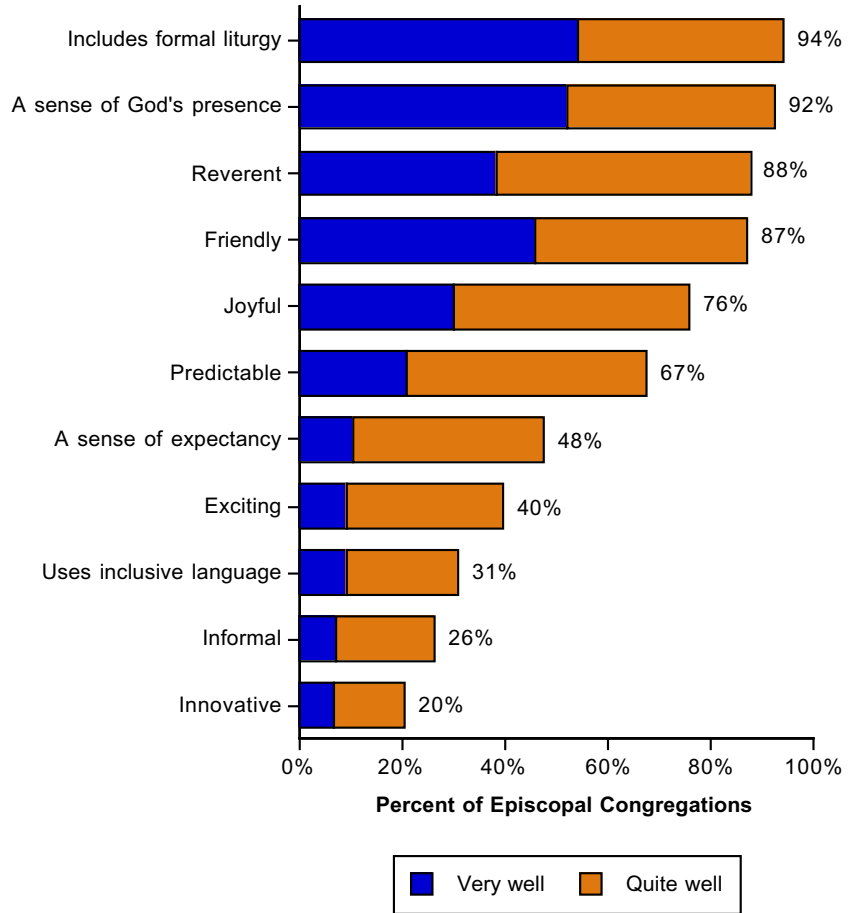
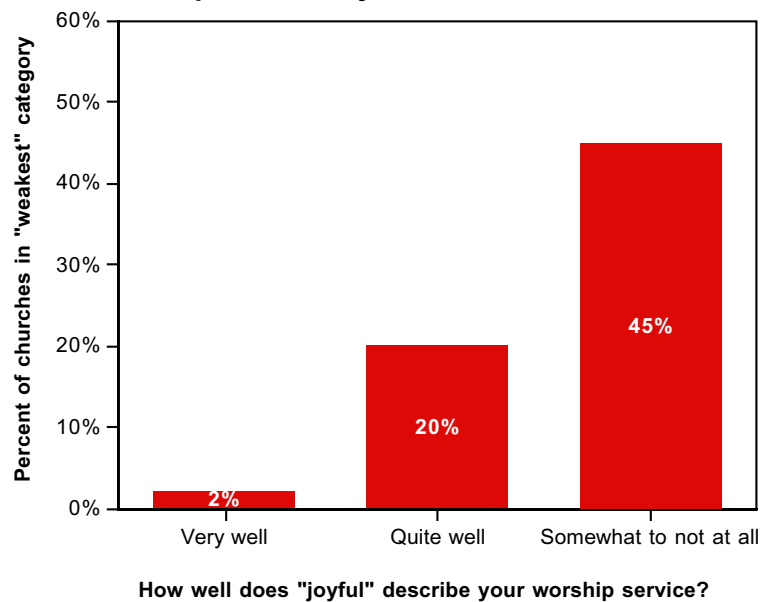


Figure 4.08
It Helps to be Joyful



It is difficult to characterize the focus and content of sermons and homilies delivered in churches across America. Nevertheless, in Figure 4.09 we can see responses of rectors to two sets of questions, one dealing with the stress or focus of the sermon and the second with content (stories, references, illustrations, explanations). Clearly, Episcopal priests tend to preach sermons that stress God’s love and care and personal spiritual growth. Many rectors use personal stories or first hand experiences to add life to the messages they bring. The top three responses from other mainline churches included the two top Episcopal responses, followed by practical advice for daily living. Conservative church pastors stressed personal salvation (95%), followed by personal spiritual growth and God’s love and care.

The strongest relationship between an area of sermon emphasis and church strength among Episcopal churches was the use of personal stories or firsthand experiences. Among churches where the rector always uses such illustrations, 33% were very strong congregations, as compared to only 6% where the rector seldom or never used personal illustrations. Also helpful were practical advice for daily living and preaching about personal spiritual growth.

Figure 4.09
Focus and Content of Rector's Sermons

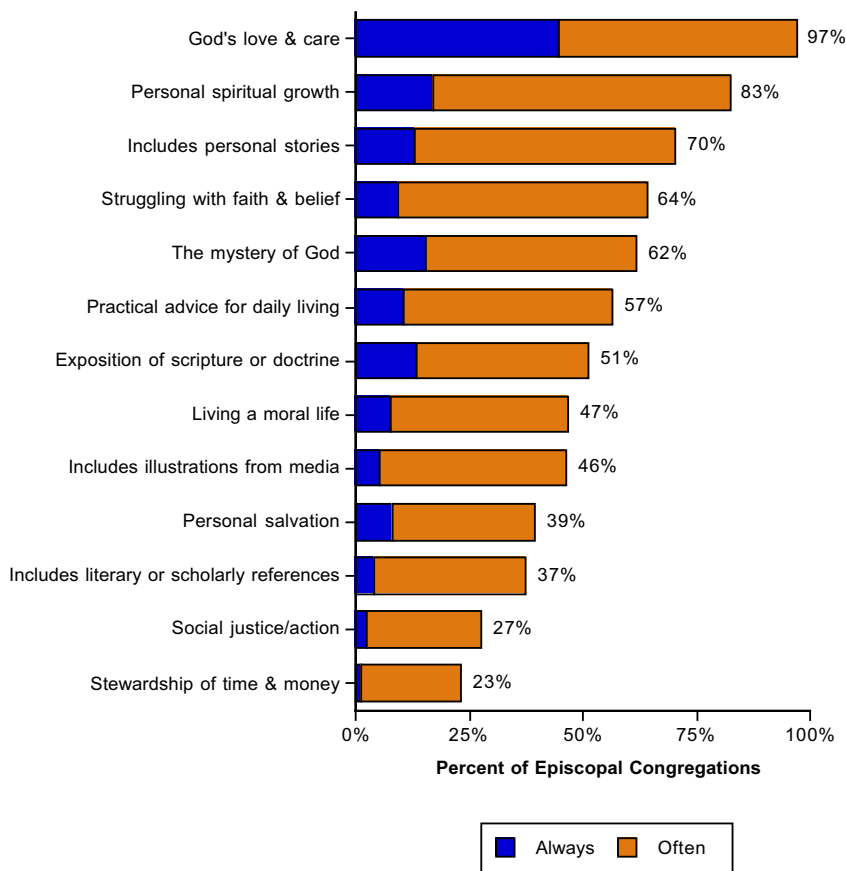
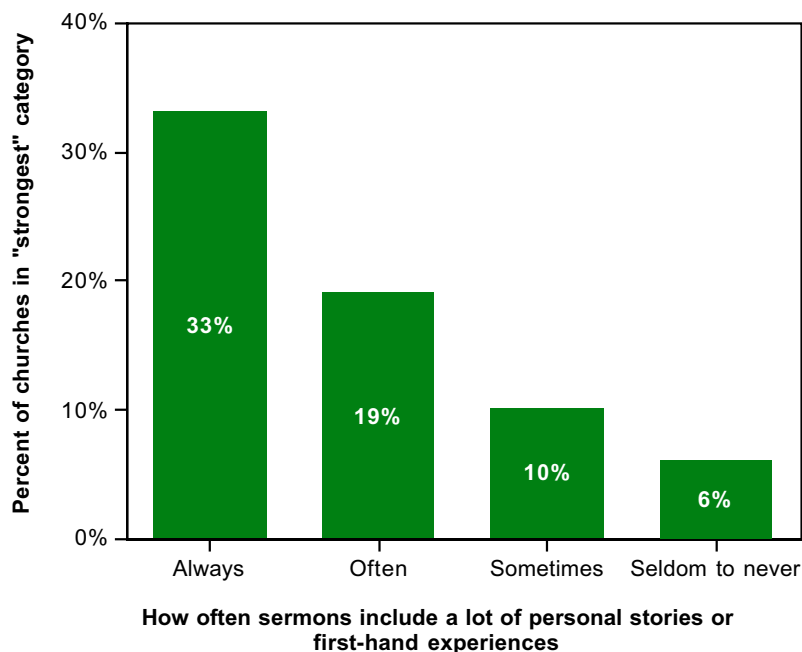


Figure 4.10
The Personal Touch



Innovation and Change in Worship

Innovation in worship is not characteristic of Episcopal churches. Relatively few are experimenting with elements of so-called “contemporary worship.” Singing praise choruses projected on screens to the music of rock bands is not a frequent sight in the Episcopal Church. Instead, the vast majority of Episcopal congregations read or recite creeds or statements of faith (98%), pass the peace (96%), use organ and/or piano music (94%), kneel during worship (87%), and light incense and/or candles (82%). The most frequently mentioned “less traditional” worship element in Figure 4.11, nonelectronic strings or wind instruments, is used always or often by only 19% of Episcopal congregations and sometimes by 41% more.

The “contemporary worship” items in Figure 4.11 form a clear, tight scale in most denominations. That is, churches that use guitars, drums and keyboards also tend to use visual projection equipment. In the Episcopal Church, however, *all* of the items in Figure 4.12 form an even better scale, with the exception of prerecorded music in worship. Thus in the Episcopal Church the issue is not contemporary versus traditional worship. Instead, the issue is incorporating or not incorporating *any* nontraditional elements in worship. Not surprisingly, churches in newer suburbs are much more

likely to use nontraditional worship elements than churches in any other area, followed by older suburbs and urban areas (downtown, inner city, and urban neighborhoods). Rural churches and churches in small towns are least likely to use nontraditional worship elements.

Figure 4.11
Use of Less Traditional Worship Elements

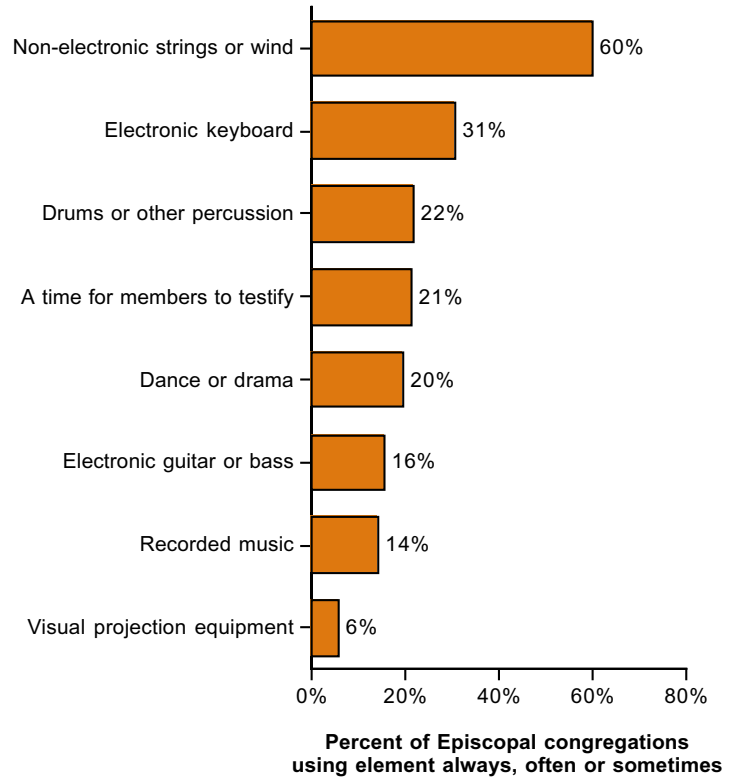
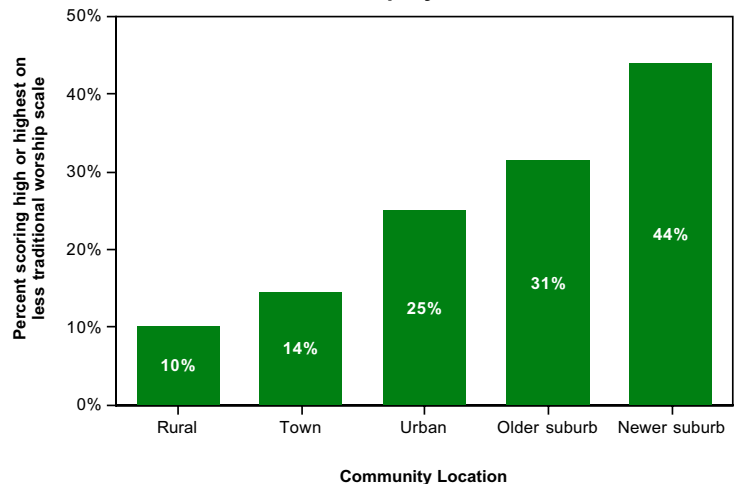
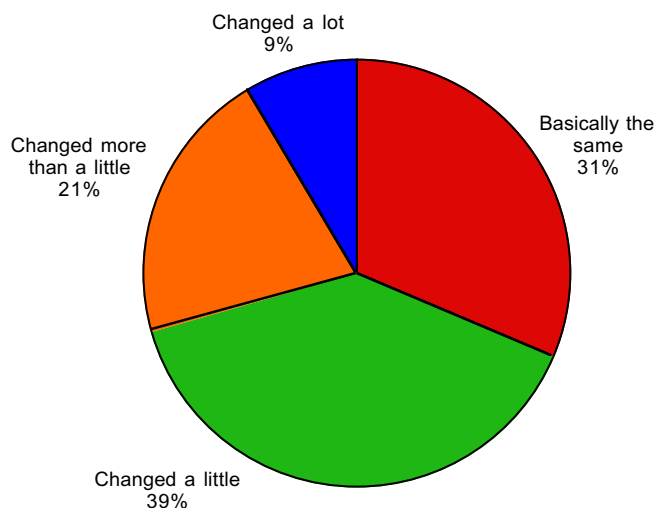


Figure 4.12
Less Traditional Worship by Church Location



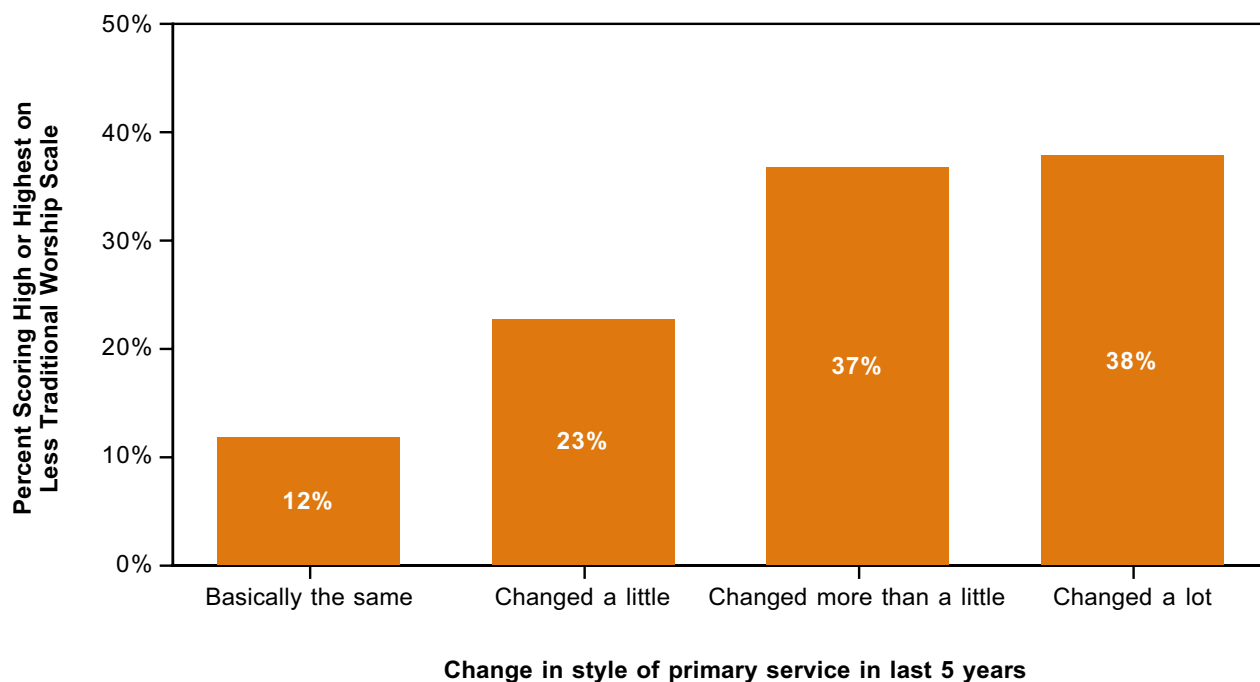
Despite the fixed appearance of worship in the Episcopal Church and other denominations that emphasize an order of service with Liturgy of the Word (Synaxis) followed by the Eucharist, the fact is that the way we worship does change even as churches try to maintain a measure of consistency. But some churches change their worship more rapidly than others. Figure 4.13 shows that 30% of Episcopal churches say they changed the style of worship in their primary worship service a lot or more than a little over the last five years. Another 39% say that some change has taken place, and the remainder, 31%, said their primary worship service in 2000 was basically the same as it was in 1995.

Figure 4.13
Change in Worship Style



Frequently, the direction of change among churches that changed a lot or more than a little was toward less traditional worship elements. Figure 4.14 below shows that churches that changed their worship services substantially also scored higher on the less traditional worship scale. By contrast, churches that said their worship services were basically the same tended to score very low on the scale.

Figure 4.14
Less Traditional Worship by Change in Worship Style



The use of less traditional worship (and especially contemporary worship) is often seen as a means by which non-growing churches can attract younger families and become healthier congregations. Does this work for Episcopal congregations? The answer is somewhat complicated.

Churches that changed their style of worship tend to score higher on the less traditional worship scale (Figure 4.14) and churches that score high on the less traditional worship scale tend to be stronger than churches that score low (Figure 4.15). However, changing worship style is completely unrelated to church strength. That is, churches that make substantial changes in their worship are as likely to be very weak as they are to be very strong. So change and particularly deliberate change in worship is not a panacea. It may help but it also may cause problems.

Change in the direction of including less traditional worship elements is related to congregational strength, but not as strongly as simply *having* the elements of less traditional worship. So the learning here is not to pursue less traditional worship in the hope of reviving a lifeless church. Instead, churches should be open to the possibility of innovation in worship and let that openness change what they do in a more natural fashion.

Of the less traditional worship elements considered above, the one most strongly related to congregational strength was the use of drums. Unlike the other nontraditional worship elements, drums are used in rock music, gospel music and orchestras. In each case they contribute to Episcopal worship that is nontraditional, but they also represent very different worship styles.

Figure 4.15
Church Strength by Less Traditional Worship

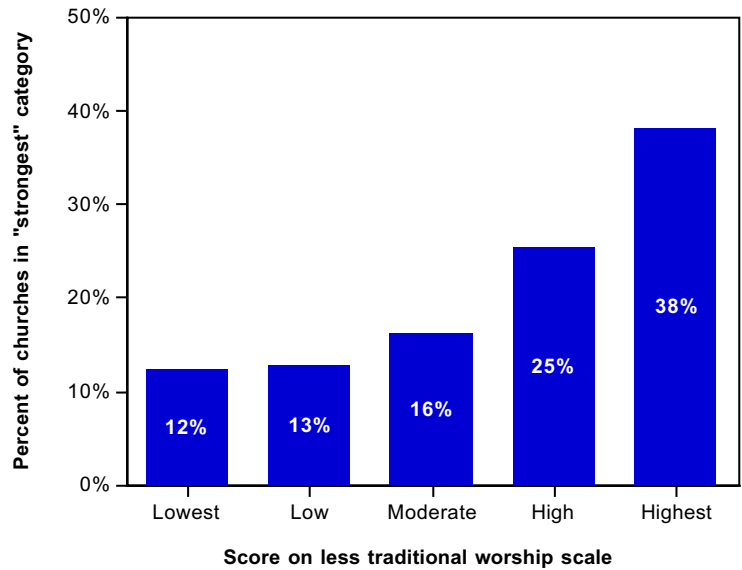
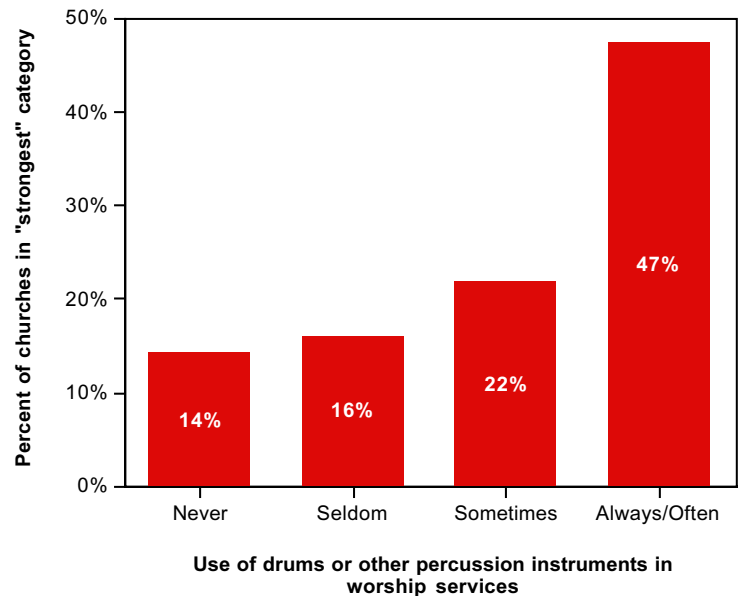


Figure 4.16
Church Strength by Use of Drums in Worship



In terms of forming a strong congregation, the key worship characteristic is a subjective sense that worship is “inspirational and uplifting.” Those participating in the liturgy help give each other a taste of God’s Realm. Churches that do this well seem different and that difference translates into congregational strength. Figure 4.17 shows this relationship.

Worship necessarily changes slowly because it means so much to people. But even the most “inspirational and uplifting” service cannot remain static if it is to retain the character that makes it vital. Figure 4.18 shows that churches that welcome new ways of doing worship and ministry also tend to have the most vital worship experiences.

Figure 4.17
Inspirational Worship is Essential to Church Strength

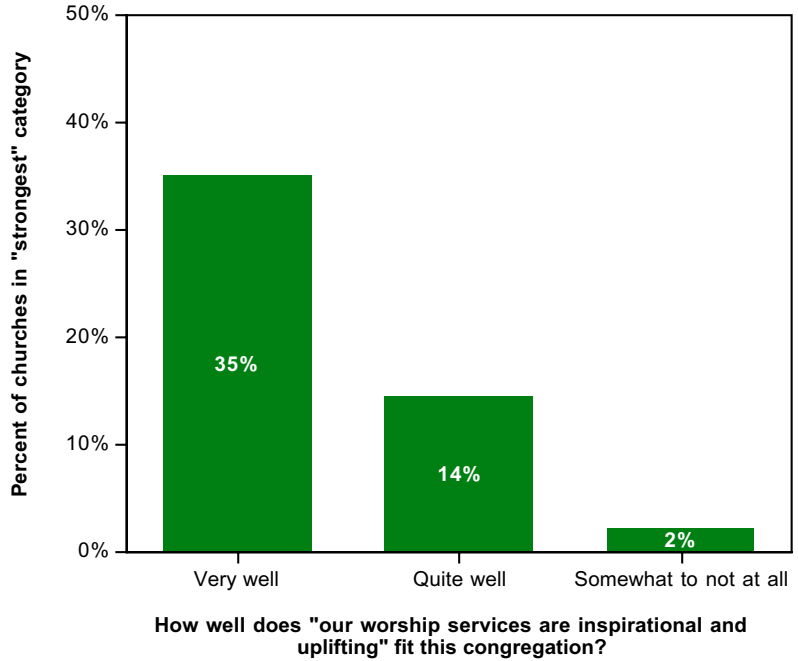
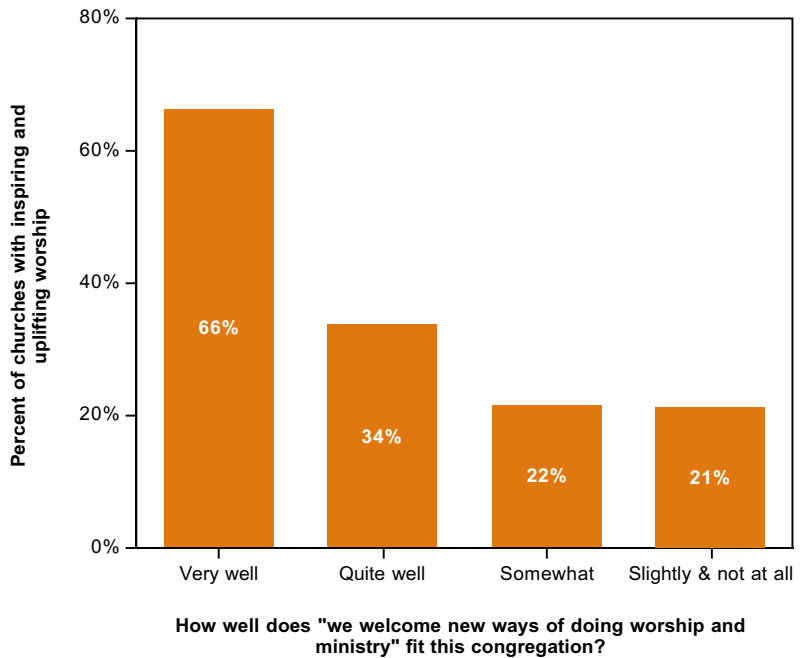
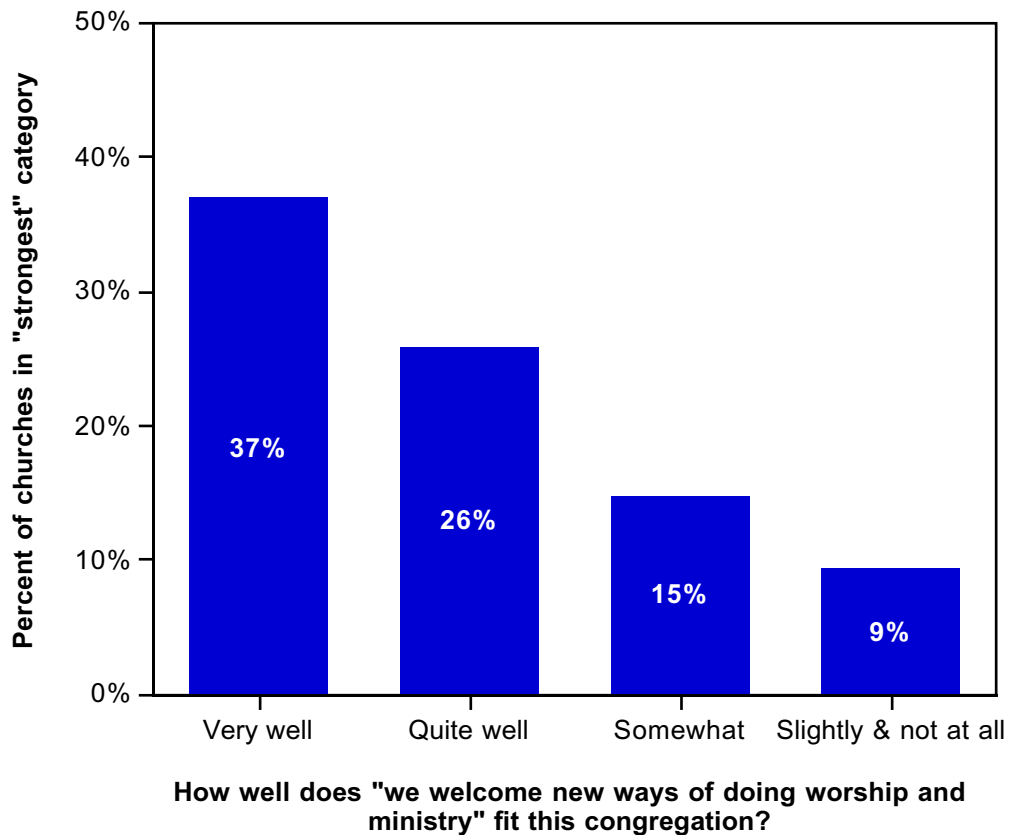


Figure 4.18
Innovative Churches Tend to Worship Well



Strong, vital churches are not strong and vital because they adopt the newest trend in corporate worship. Instead, like all living things, they change because change is a natural process. They are open to innovation, to new ways of doing worship and ministry. They do not adopt these new ways mindlessly, but they also do not try to freeze their pattern of worship and ministry once they find something that fits their congregation at the present time. Churches that are open to change tend to be strong.

Figure 4.19
Church Strength and Worship Innovation



Section 5:

Looking in the Mirror



Churches differ according to age, region, rural/urban location and in the makeup of their members. And as seen in the previous section, churches differ in the way they worship. In this section another area of difference is considered: the way churches see themselves, or their identity. We look at the degree to which being Episcopal is central to their identity, the family-like nature of many congregations, sources of authority that help define who they are and their theological orientation.

Celebrating Our Heritage

The rise of nondenominational churches and the erosion of denominational identity among most mainline denominations has led some observers to proclaim: “the day of the denomination is dead.” Is a strong denominational connection still present among Episcopal churches and if so does it still matter?

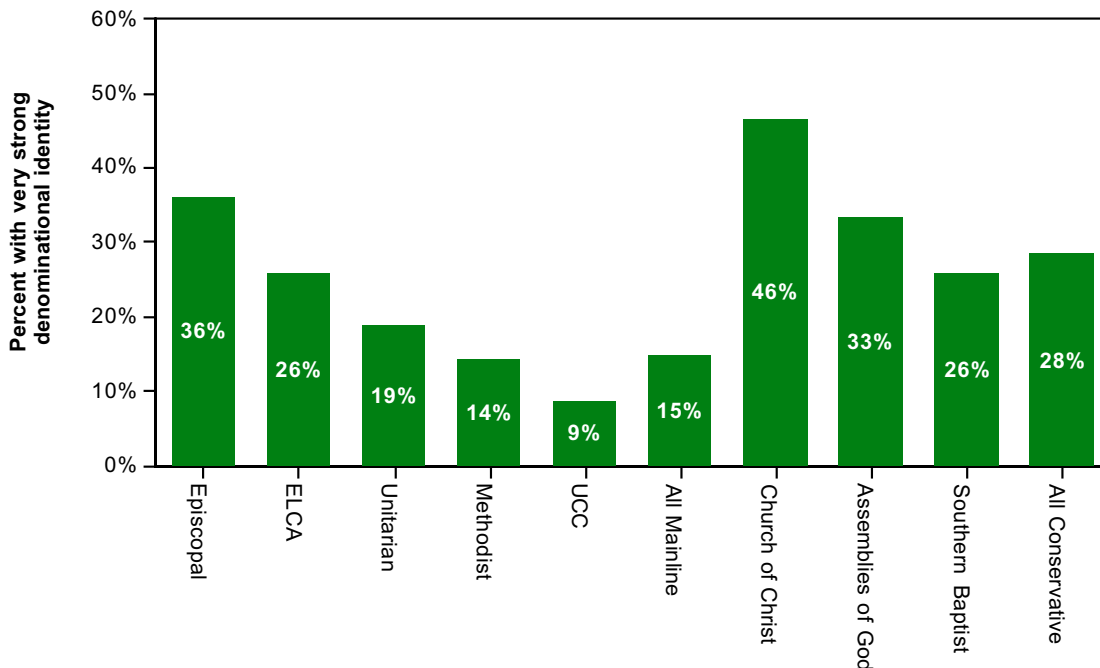
The FACT survey asked leaders in Episcopal churches to indicate to what extent the phrase “our congregation celebrates its Episcopal heritage” describes who they are. The vast majority said the phrase described them either *very well* (36%) or *quite well* (43%). Apparently, almost all Episcopal congregations see being Episcopalian as central to their identity--a connection that is celebrated rather than down-played. The same cannot be said for most other mainline denominations. As shown in Figure 5.02 below, very few United Church of Christ or United Methodist congregation celebrate their denominational connection to such an extent. Denominational identity levels are higher for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Unitarians, but overall the proportion of mainline churches who say they celebrate their denominational heritage is only 15% (the Unitarian Universalist Association is not considered part of the mainline in this report).

The Episcopal Church is quite distinctive among mainline churches in maintaining a strong denominational identity. It is more similar, in fact, to *sectarian* conservative denominations like the Church of Christ and the Assemblies of God. Overall, 28% of conservative Protestant churches indicated a very strong denominational connection, well below Episcopal churches.

Figure 5.01
Celebrating Denominational Identity



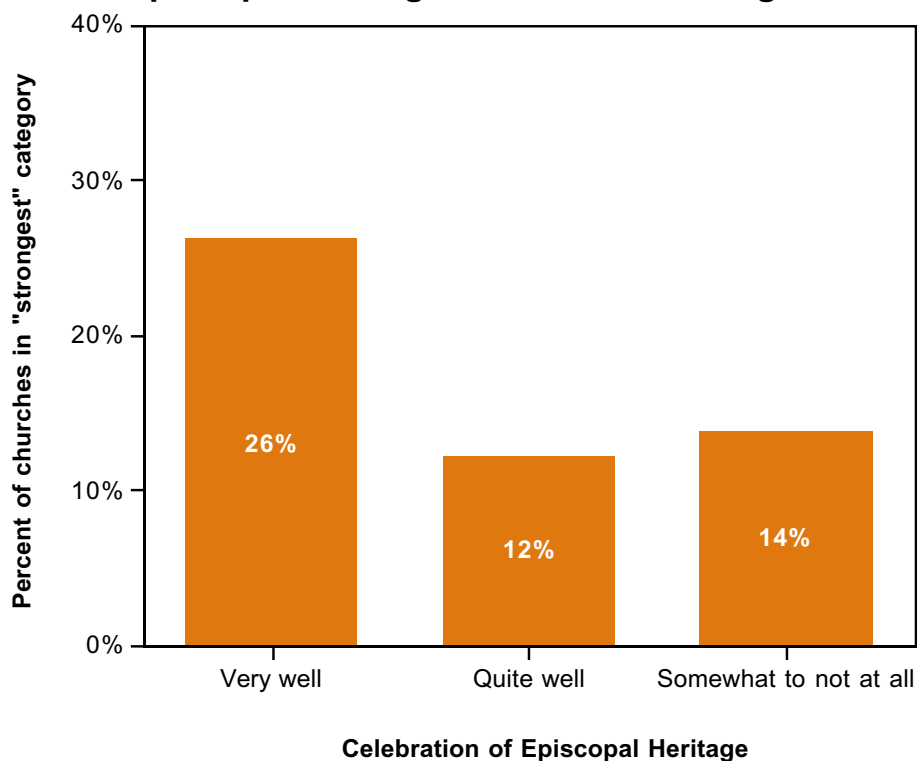
Figure 5.02
Strongest Identity in the Mainline



Does a strong denominational identity help or hurt Episcopal congregations? It may be somewhat surprising to some, but a strong identity seems to help. Figure 5.03 shows that the percent of very strong congregations (scoring “strongest” on the strong church index) is much higher among congregations that say celebrating their Episcopal identity describes them “very well.” Little difference exists between churches saying the phrase describes them “quite well,” “somewhat,” “slightly,” or “not at all.”

A strong denominational connection also predicts where Episcopal congregations purchase their program materials and supplies. Churches saying that celebrating their Episcopal heritage describes them very well or quite well were much more likely to purchase these resources either “exclusively” or “primarily” from the Episcopal Church than were churches who said a strong denominational connection described them somewhat, slightly or not at all.

Figure 5.03
Episcopal Heritage and Church Strength



The Church as Family

All churches value having a sense of community and mutual support among their members. In some churches, however, the interpersonal connection is particularly strong and such congregations resemble “close knit families.” Being a family-like church is not related to being a strong church (either positively or negatively), but a familial character does form a major part of many congregation’s identity.

In Figure 5.04 we see that most Episcopal congregations have a fairly strong sense of being a family. Still, only 20% say that “a close knit family” describes them “very well.” Not surprisingly, churches in smaller towns and rural areas are much more likely to seem like close knit families. In these areas the church is much more of a community institution than is the case in urban and suburban locations.

Services and size also matter in terms of maintaining or working against a particularly strong familial sense. As shown in Figure 5.06, a single service where everyone sees everyone else every week is very supportive of being a “close knit family.” On the other hand, multiple services (and large size) work against a strong sense of being a “family.”

Figure 5.04
Congregation is Like a Close-Knit Family

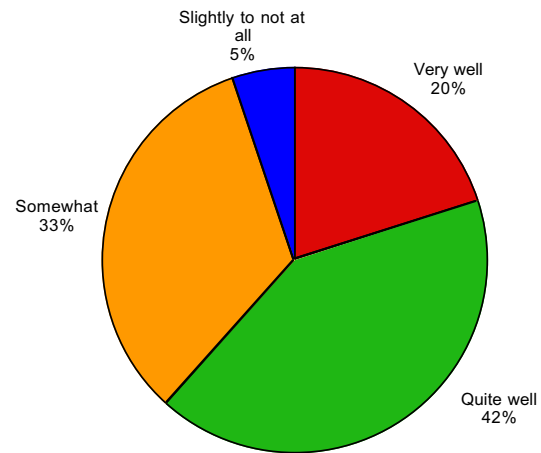


Figure 5.05
Rural Churches are Like Close-Knit Families

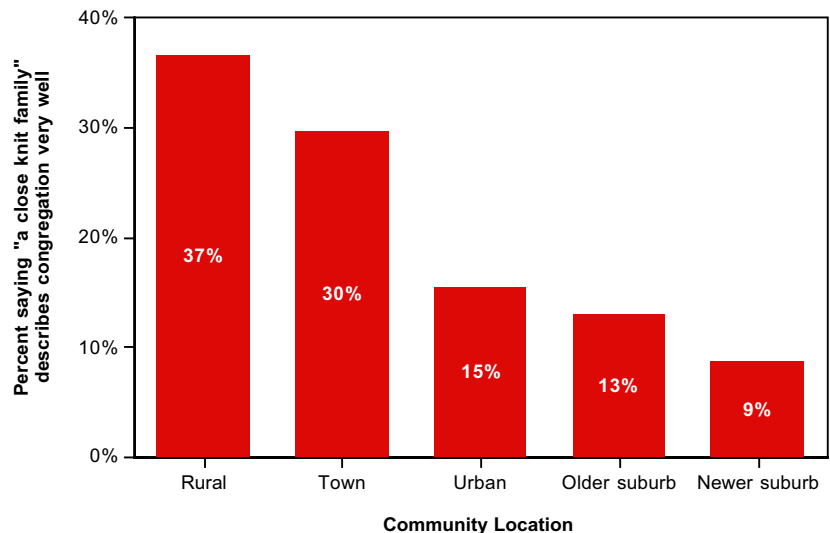
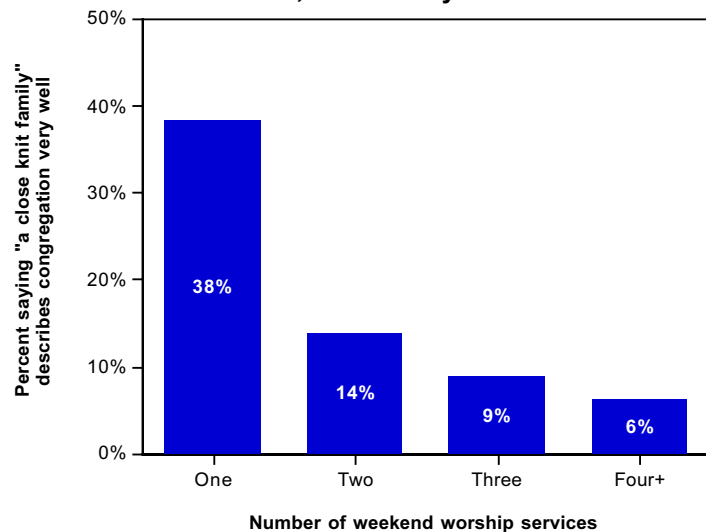


Figure 5.06
One Service, One Family



Morality, Liberality and Authority

Another very subjective part of a congregation's identity is the degree to which they project a moral presence in the community. Indeed, for many parents the primary function of the church is in shaping the moral values of children and maintaining a moral alternative to the secular culture. Being an institution that can shine as a "moral beacon" in one's community requires more internal cohesion and a sense of group culture than is present in many churches, however. Thus, it was not surprising that seeing one's congregation as a moral beacon was also strongly related to being a close knit family (Figure 5.07).

Being a close knit family refers to an inward focus and is unrelated to growth or church strength. Being a moral beacon implies an outward focus and is strongly related to both church strength and growth. Figure 5.08 shows that Episcopal congregations that see themselves as moral beacons tend to be stronger churches.

Which churches in America tend to see themselves as strong moral beacons? Figure 5.09 shows that churches in conservative denominations were twice as likely to say being a moral beacon describes them "very well."

Interestingly, the relationship between being a moral beacon and attendance growth was strongest for Episcopal congregations and weakest for conservative Protestant congregations, with a moderate relationship for other mainline Protestants.

Figure 5.07
Identity as a "Moral Beacon" and Family-Like Status

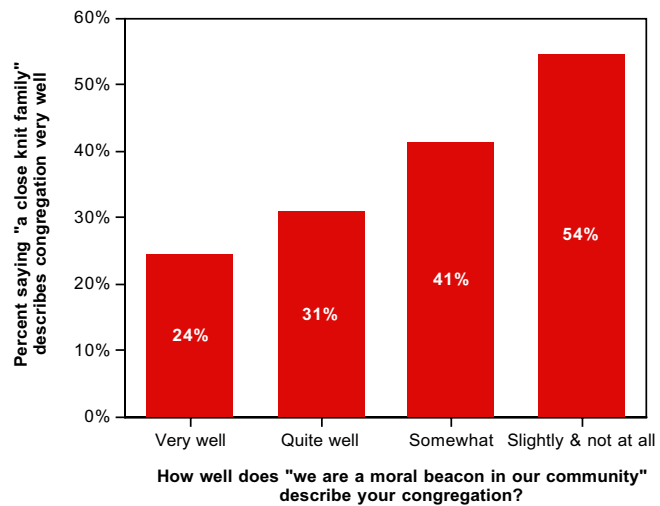


Figure 5.08
A Strong Moral Presence

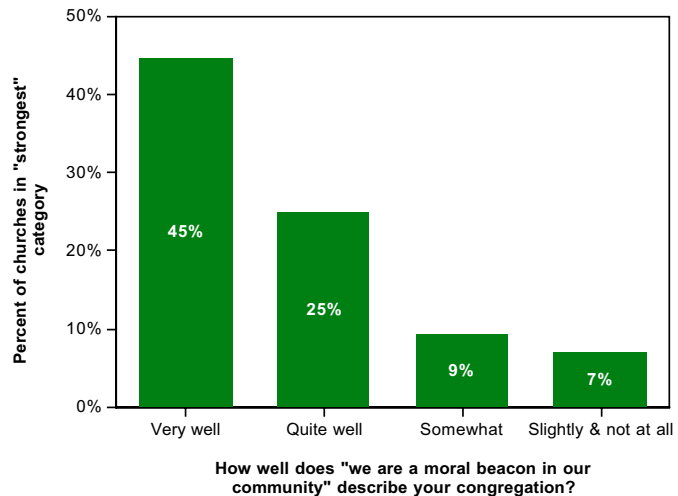
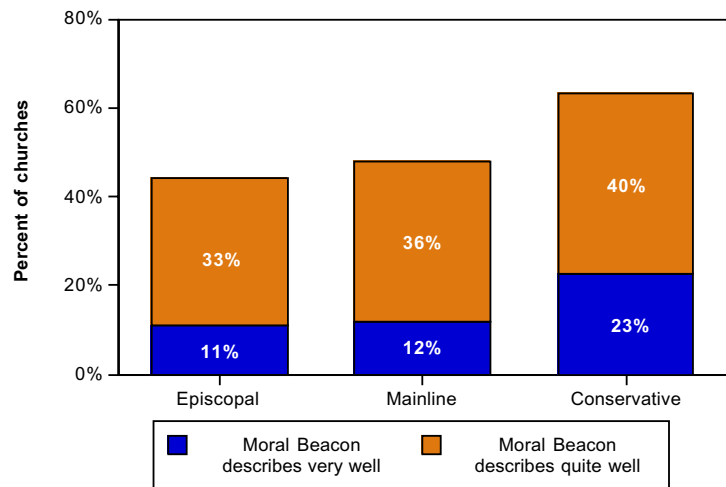


Figure 5.09
Moral Identity by Denomination



Ever since the publication of *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* in the 1970s issues of “strictness” and theological conservatism have created controversy. Are strict churches stronger than more socially lenient churches and can churches that take a more theologically liberal position grow and prosper in the current religious “marketplace”? As with most things, the answers are not simple.

The FACT survey asked church leaders if their congregation had: 1) definite expectations for members that are strictly enforced; 2) fairly clear expectations for members, but the enforcement of these expectations is not very strict; and 3) only implicit expectations for members that are seldom, if ever, enforced. Very few

Episcopal church leaders chose the most strict option (only 1.5%). For mainline churches generally, only 3.3% were very strict and even in conservative Protestant denominations very strict churches were a minority (12.2%). Most conservative Protestant churches (70%) were in the middle strictness category, as compared to roughly half of Episcopal churches and other mainline congregations.

So is strictness associated with congregational strength and vitality? For most other mainline denominations they are somewhat related, but for the Episcopal Church it is the middle category of strictness, churches with fairly clear expectations, that are most likely to be strong.

Figure 5.10
Strictness in Episcopal Congregations

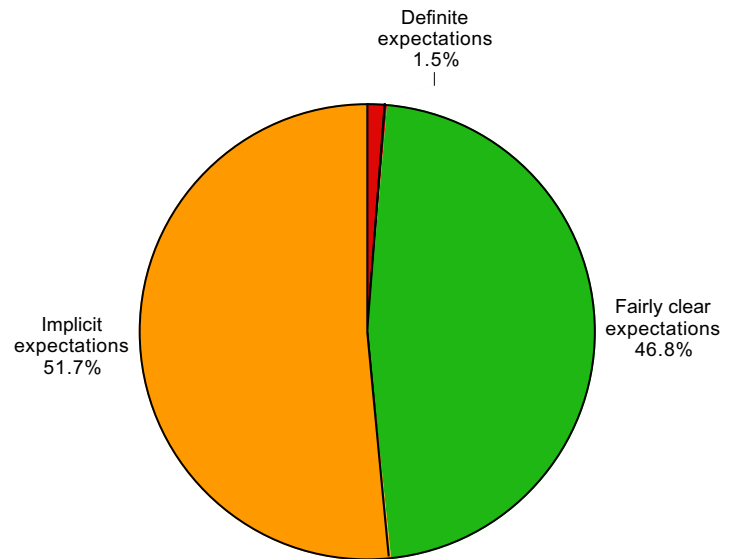
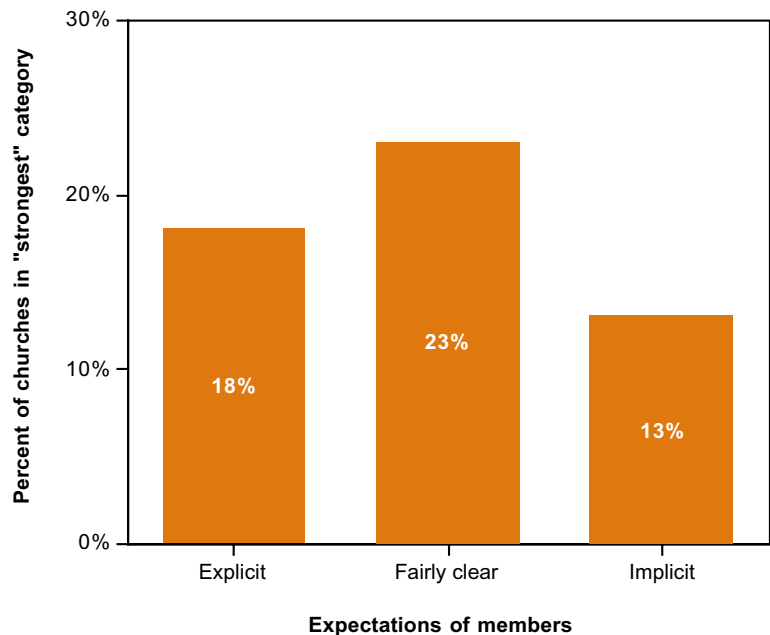
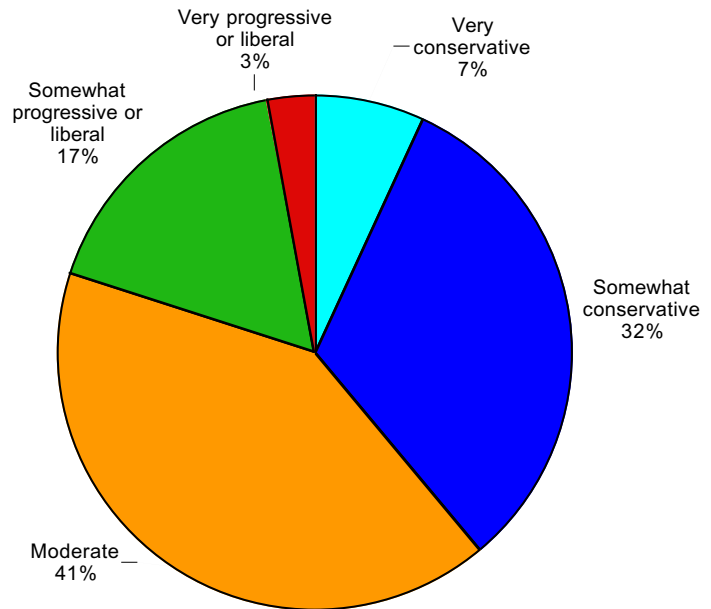


Figure 5.11
Strictness and Strength



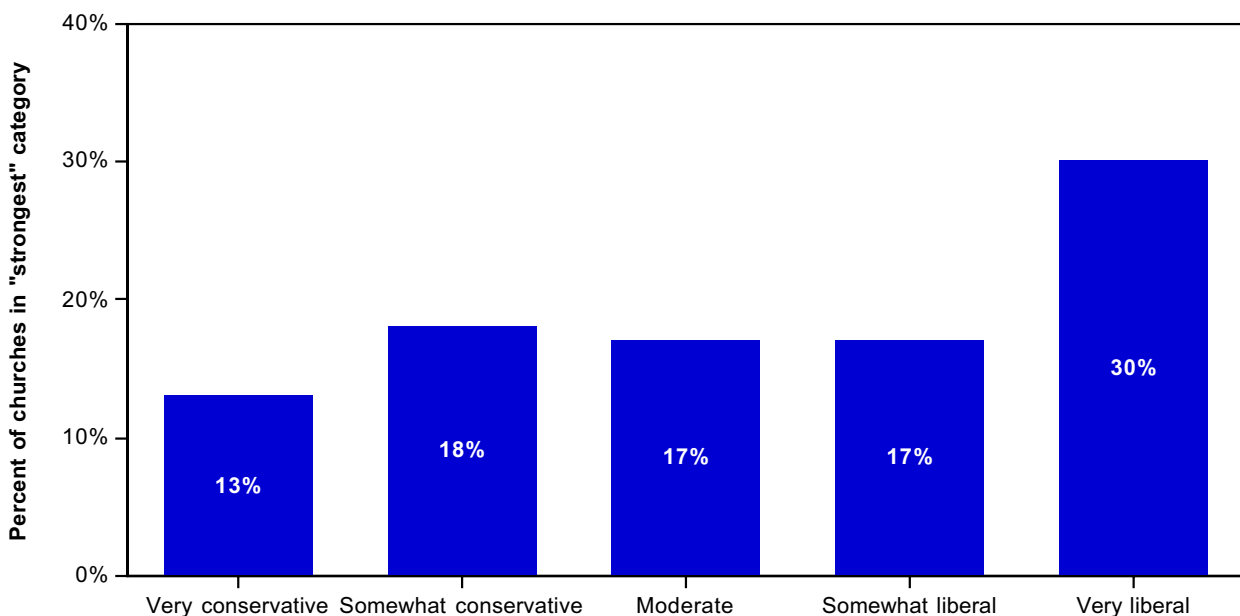
If the most lenient churches are least likely to be strong, does it follow that the most liberal Episcopal churches are the weakest? No. As shown in Figure 5.13, the most liberal or progressive Episcopal churches are the most vital and the most conservative churches score lowest on the strong church index. The pattern in the United Church of Christ, a very liberal denomination, is identical to that of the Episcopal Church. For mainline churches generally the pattern is somewhat different. Very liberal churches score highest on the church strength index but very conservative congregations are second in strength.

Figure 5.12
Liberalism and Conservatism



Obviously, both very liberal and very conservative Episcopal churches (those doing best and worst, respectively) are in the minority. Most Episcopal churches are somewhat liberal, moderate or somewhat conservative. Each of these groups scores about the same on the church strength index.

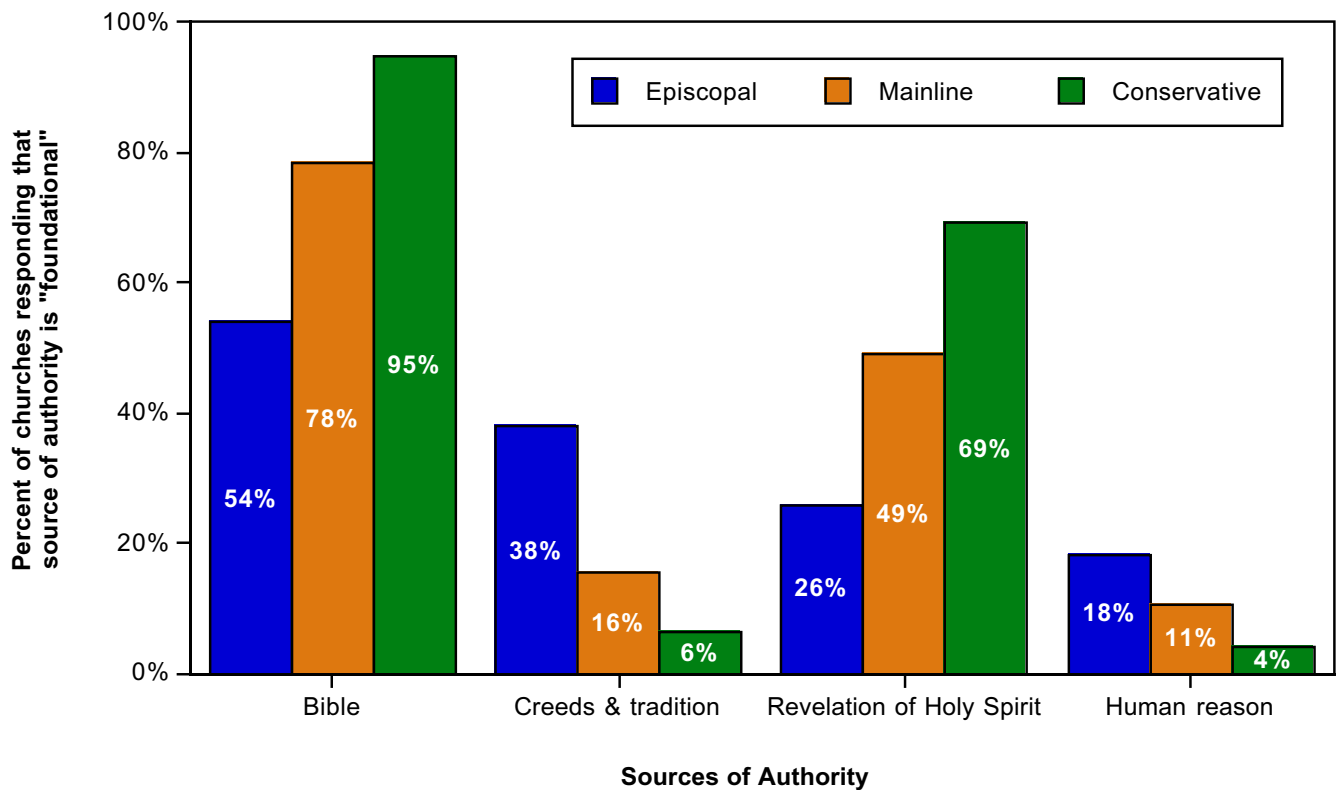
Figure 5.13
Liberalism and Church Strength



A critical aspect of a congregation's theological orientation is the source of authority that guides their worship and teaching. Church leaders were asked about the role of 1) the Bible; 2) historic creeds, doctrines and tradition; 3) revelation of the Holy Spirit; 4) human reason; and 5) personal intuition or enlightenment as sources of authority. Were they foundational, very important, somewhat important or of little or no importance? Each source of authority was considered separately, so one could choose all or none as foundational. Most Christian congregations list the Bible as foundational, including 54% of Episcopal congregations. However, as seen in Figure 5.13 Episcopal rectors were much less likely to say the Bible was a foundational source of authority than were other mainline and conservative Protestant pastors. Similarly, Episcopal rectors were much less likely to say the revelation of the Holy Spirit was a foundational source of authority.

Episcopal congregations, to a much greater extent than other Protestant congregations, chose creeds, doctrines and tradition as a foundational source of authority. The only other Protestant denomination that had many churches choose this source of authority as foundational was the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (and an even larger proportion of Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches [82%] consider creeds to be a foundational source of authority). Human reason was also chosen as a foundational source of authority by more leaders in the Episcopal Church than in other mainline and conservative denominations.

Figure 5.14
Foundational Sources of Authority by Denomination



Does source of authority matter? One of the most interesting aspects of the sources of authority issue is the fact that all of the questions were related to church strength in much the same way. That is to say, congregations where the Bible is seen as foundational are more likely to be strong; but the same is also true for creeds, the Holy Spirit and human reason. In other words rectors who tend to say any of the first four areas are less than “foundational” tend to be in weaker churches. The strongest relationship, however, is for the question on the authority given revelation by the Holy Spirit. The kind of congregational identity that values revelation by the Holy Spirit tends to be found in stronger Episcopal congregations.

A follow-up question to the authority series asked rectors to choose which source of authority was **most important** to his or her congregation’s worship and teaching. As can be seen in Figure 5.16, the largest proportion of congregations chose the Bible, followed by creeds and tradition, revelation of the Holy Spirit, human reason, and personal intuition or enlightenment.

Congregations that choose creeds, doctrines and tradition over other sources of authority were least likely to score in the highest category on the church strength scale. Churches selecting the Holy Spirit or human reason were more likely to be strong, followed by churches that identified the Bible as their most important source of authority. Churches that selected creeds & tradition tended to be *older* and also scored lower on our index of nontraditional worship.

Figure 5.15
Authority of Holy Spirit and Church Strength

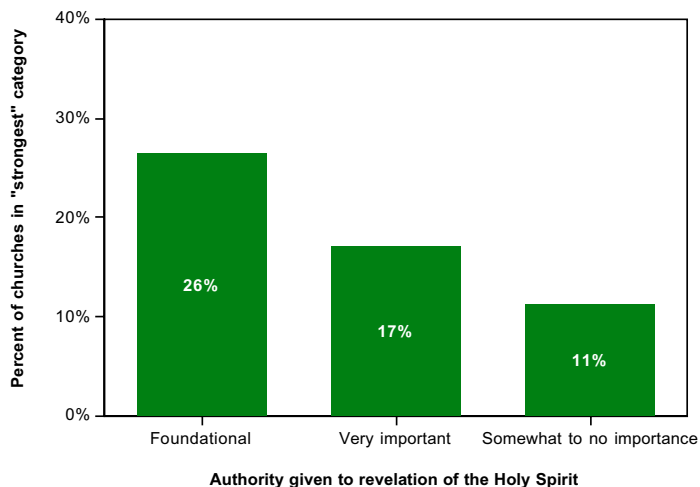


Figure 5.16
Most Important Source of Authority

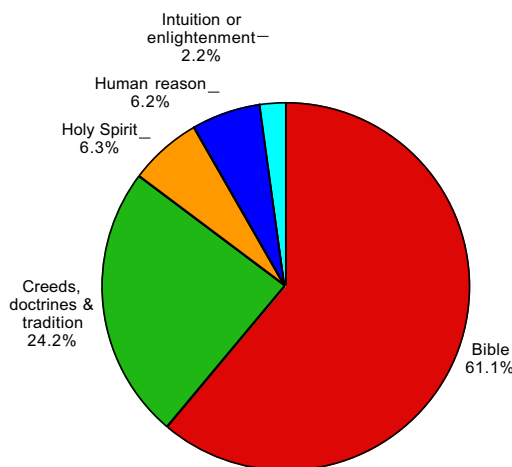
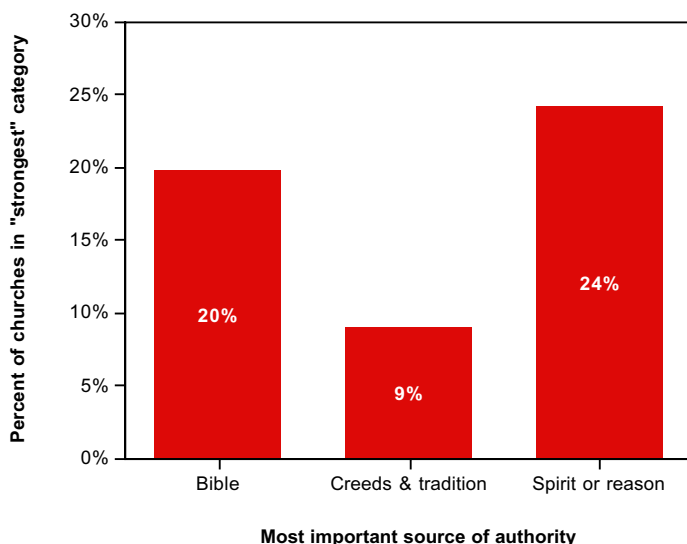


Figure 5.16
Primary Source of Authority and Church Strength



Section 6:

The Things We Do



Churches do more than hold worship services and conduct business meetings. They also conduct programs and participate in ministries. They do things that people in the church and outside the church find meaningful and valuable. Churches also encourage their members to engage in religious practices outside formal worship on Sunday. And churches do outreach, evangelism and recruitment. They let people know that they are there and that others are welcome.

In this section we look at what churches do and what they encourage their members to do. First we deal with a small set of religious practices that are valued by most churches and stressed by some: prayer, Bible study, family devotions and Sabbath keeping. Second, traditional church programs are considered, most of which are done for members and participants. Third, we look at “ministries” broadly defined--helping activities that are done mostly for persons outside our congregations. And finally, we take a close look at efforts to invite those outside into our congregations.

Practices

All churches encourage their members to engage in religious or spiritual practices as part of living out and strengthening their faith. The two practices that receive the most encouragement from Episcopal congregations are personal prayer and Bible study. Figure 6.01 shows that 69% of Episcopal congregations put a great deal or quite a bit of emphasis on personal prayer and meditation. Studying the Bible received a lot of emphasis in 62% of Episcopal congregations.

All of the activities listed in Figure 6.01 were associated with church strength. The greater the emphasis, the more likely a church was to be strong. However, the connection to church strength was much more substantial for **personal prayer** and **family devotions** than for studying the Bible or keeping the Sabbath day Holy. As shown in Figure 6.02, praying churches tend to be stronger churches. Strong churches are strong because they encourage their members to practice their faith in their daily lives.

Figure 6.01
Emphasis on Religious Practices in Episcopal Congregations

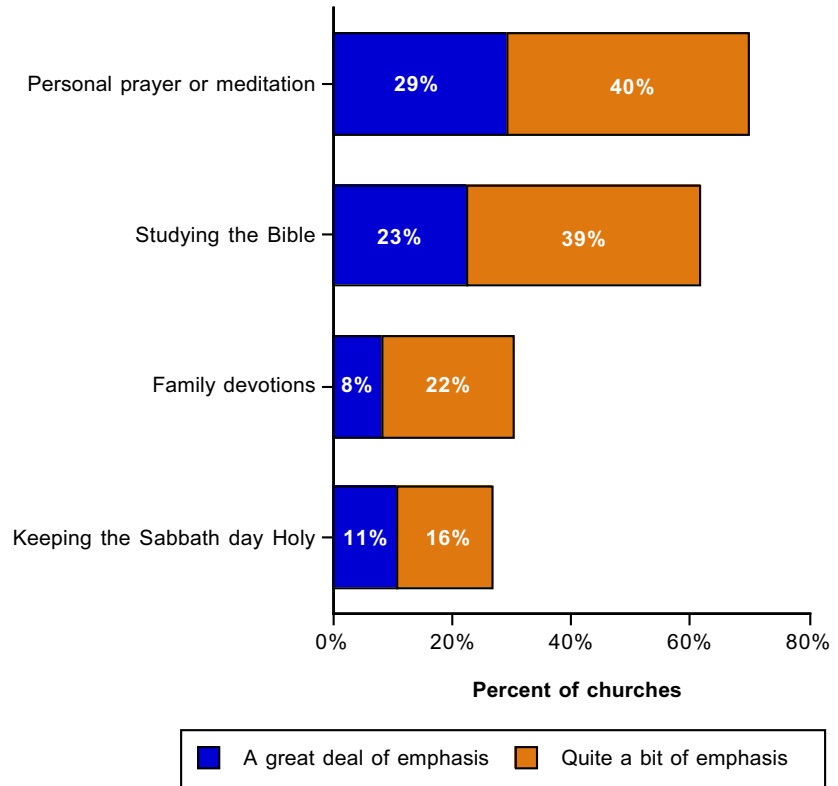
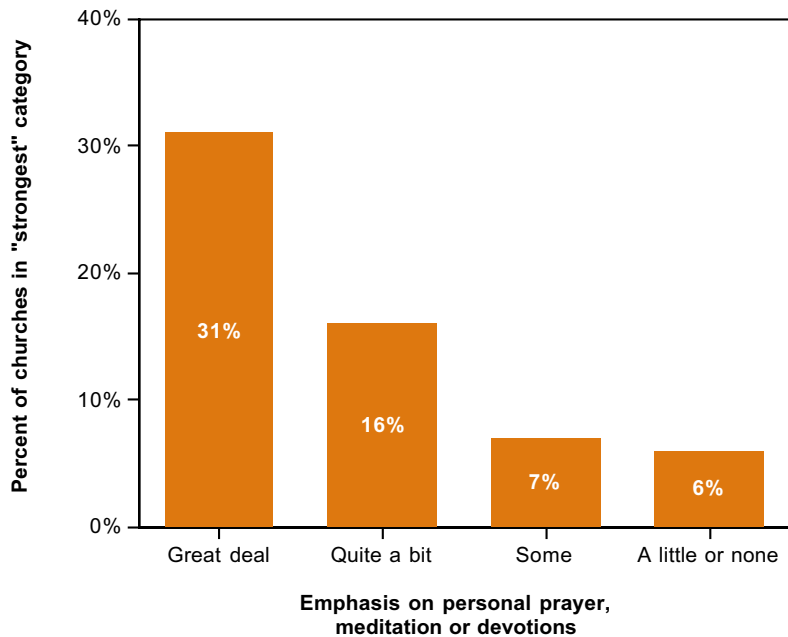
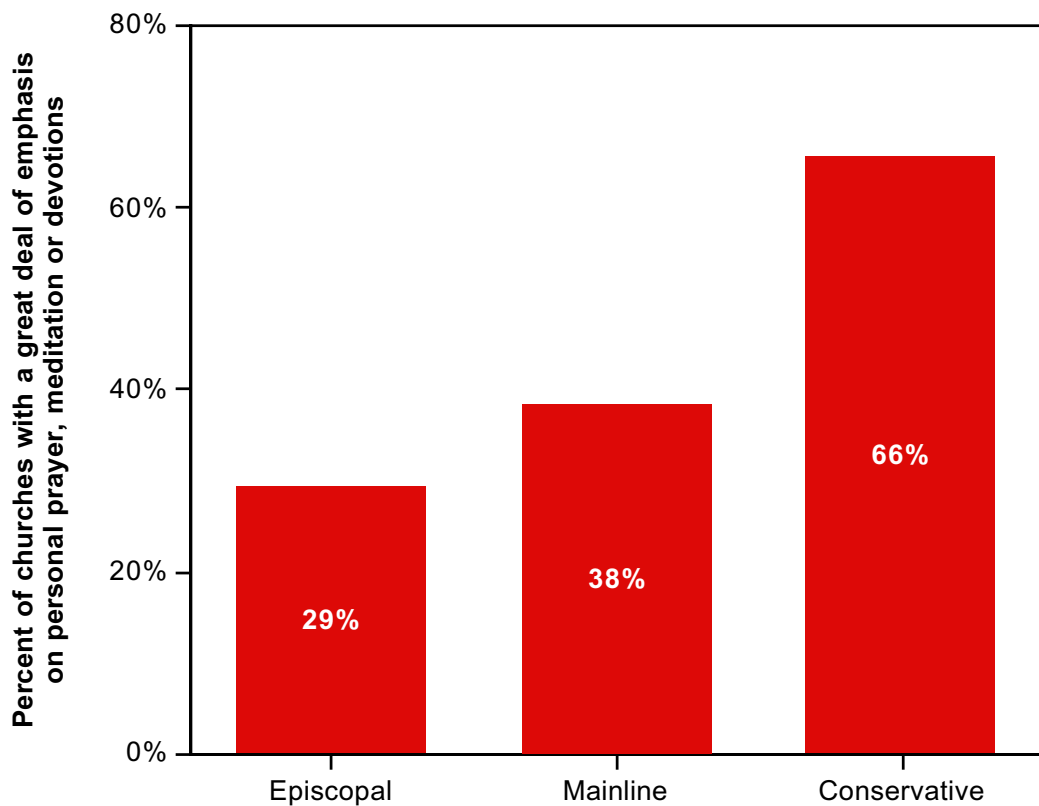


Figure 6.02
Praying Churches are Strong Churches



Despite the strong correlation with church strength, Episcopal churches, on average, place *less emphasis* on personal prayer, meditation and devotions than other mainline and conservative Protestant denominations. Figure 6.03 shows that 38% of mainline and 66% of conservative churches put a great deal of emphasis on personal prayer, as compared to only 29% of Episcopal congregations. The Episcopal Church is similar to the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ in having less emphasis on personal prayer. Part of this may be the liberal Protestant tradition that the Episcopal church shares with the Presbyterian Church and the UCC. Personal pietism is not emphasized as much as in more conservative groups. At the same time, the Episcopal Church is similar to the Roman Catholic Church in stressing corporate worship and the Eucharist--communal action--over individual acts that are more central to Reformed Protestantism.

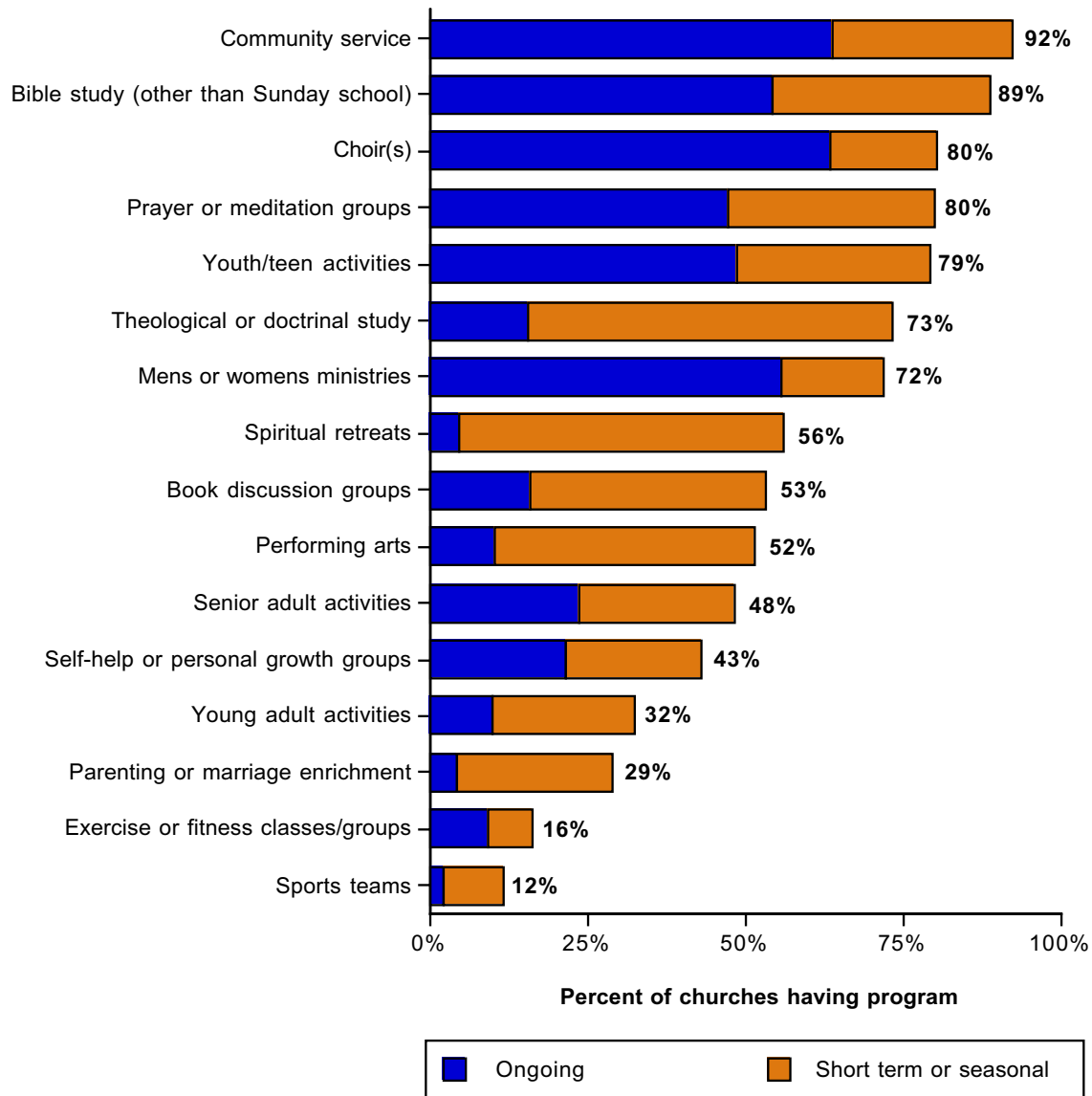
Figure 6.03
Devotionalism by Denomination



Programs

There is no end to the programs that churches can adopt as their own and new ideas crop up continuously. Figure 6.04 reflects an effort to group programs into general areas and ask churches about their involvement in each one. In the figure below, the blue segments indicate the percentage of churches that engage in the program throughout the year, whereas the gold segments represent other churches that do not have an *ongoing* program but conduct the program on a seasonal or short-term basis. Community service, choirs, Bible study, and men’s or women’s ministries are the four most regular ongoing programs in Episcopal congregations. Theological or doctrinal study groups and spiritual retreats are done by a majority of Episcopal congregations, but tend to be short term. Few Episcopal congregations have sports teams or fitness classes. More churches, but still surprisingly few, say they have young adult or parenting/marriage enrichment programs.

Figure 6.04
Program Involvement of Episcopal Congregations



All of the programs listed in Figure 6.04 are associated with church strength and the more programs a church does, the more likely it is to be strong. Size has a lot to do with this relationship, however. Larger churches have more programs because they have more people to serve and they have more resources. The most substantial program-related correlates of church strength were parenting or marriage enrichment activities, youth/teen activities, young adult activities, spiritual retreats and theological or doctrinal study.

As we have seen earlier, churches that have a lot of young families, youth and young adults tend to be stronger, so it was no surprise that churches with programs for these groups also tend to be strong. A more interesting result was for theological or doctrinal study.

Figure 6.05
Theological Study Groups and Church Strength

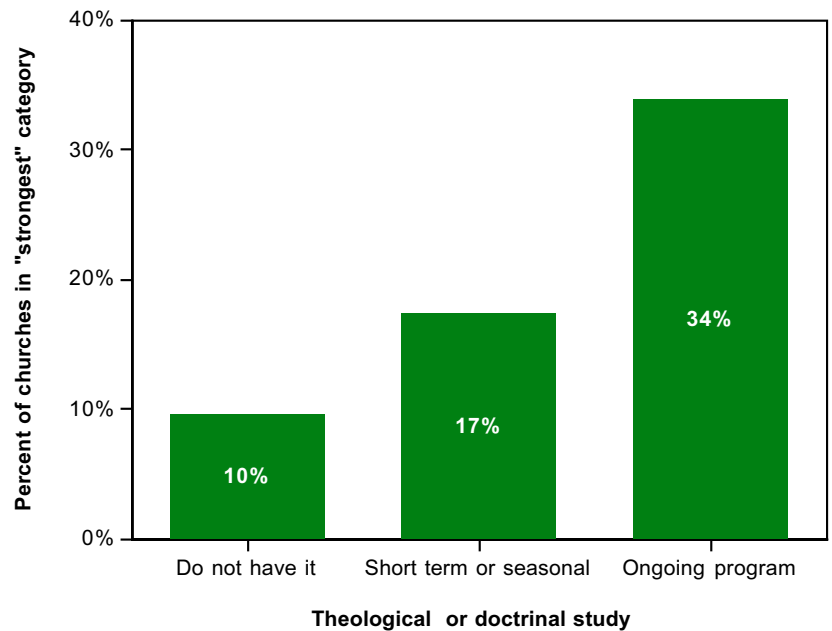
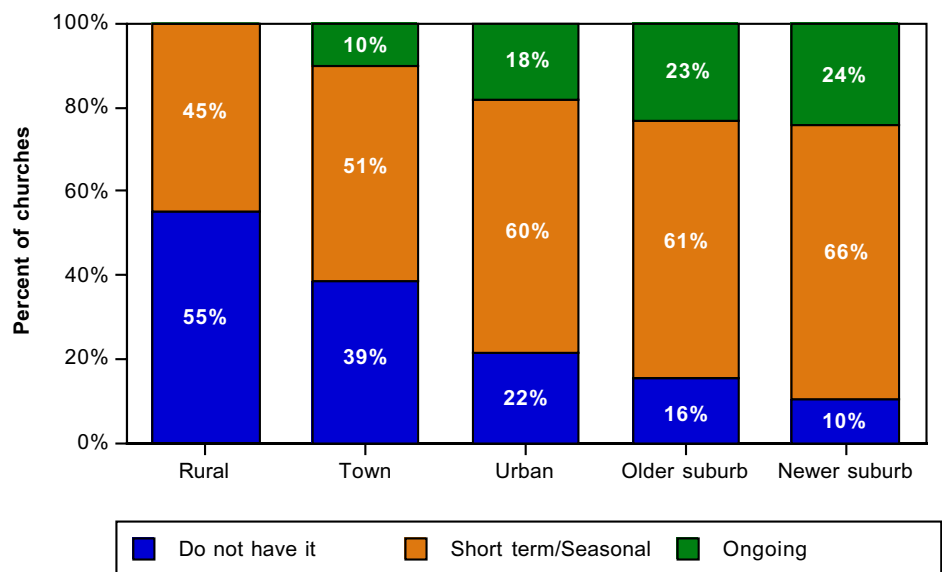


Figure 6.05 indicates that churches with an ongoing program of theological or doctrinal study are much more likely to be in the strongest category on our church strength index. Such churches apparently take teaching and struggling with the substance of their faith very seriously.

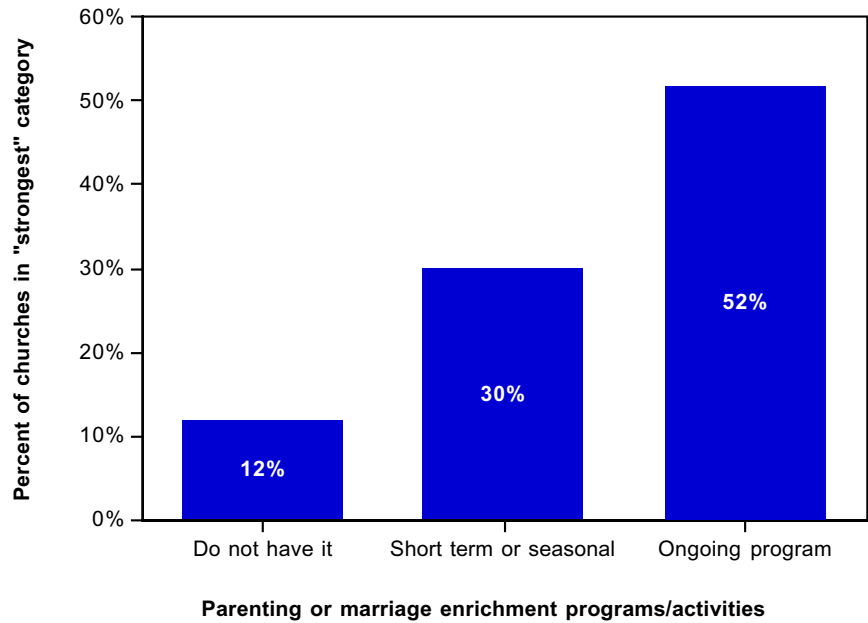
This seriousness and the community that study groups help form tends to build stronger churches. Figure 6.06 shows that theological and doctrinal study (ongoing and short-term) tends to happen much more frequently in urban and suburban Episcopal congregations. Part of this is size, but city churches also tend to see their role and purpose differently than do congregations in more rural areas.

Figure 6.06
Theological Study by Rural/Urban Location



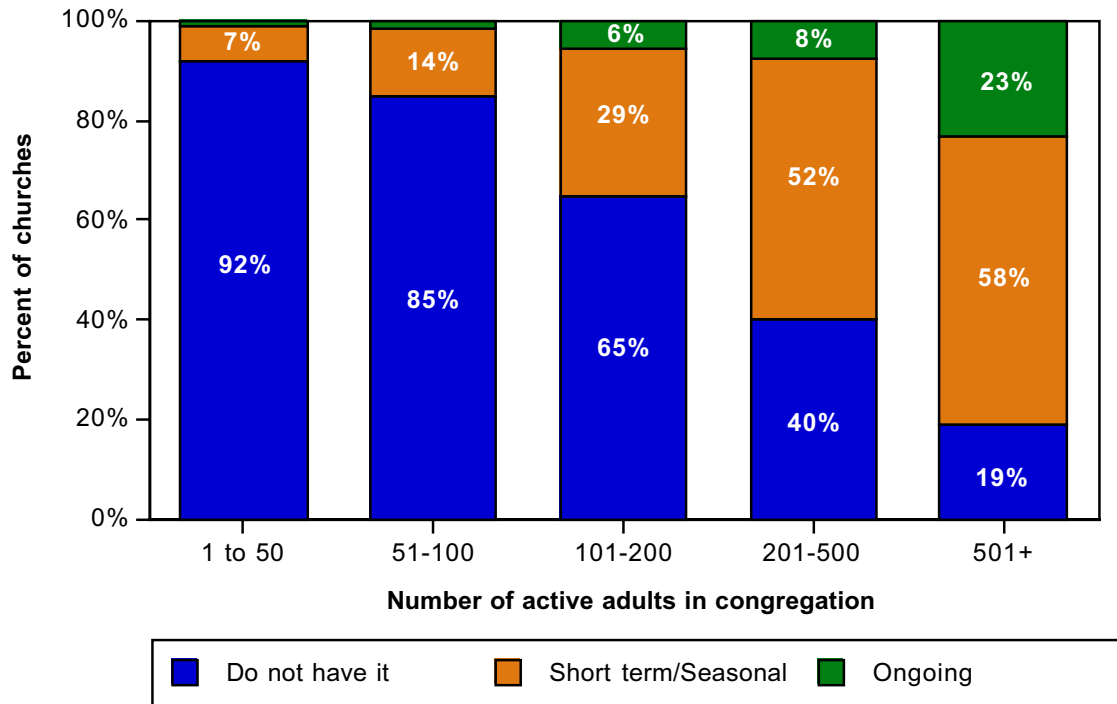
The most substantial relationship between any program and church strength was found for having parenting or marriage enrichment programs or activities. Figure 6.07 shows that over half of the churches (52%) with an ongoing program in this area were among the strongest Episcopal congregations, as compared to only 12% of churches that lacked the program.

Figure 6.07
Family-Oriented Programs and Church Strength



What sort of churches are more likely to have family-related programs? For one thing, they tend to be larger. Very few churches with 100 active adults or less did anything in this area, as compared to most churches with over 200 active adults. Clearly, larger churches tend to have more families with children who may need programs in this area. But it is stronger churches that tend to respond to needs when they see them.

Figure 6.08
Family-Oriented Programs by Church Size

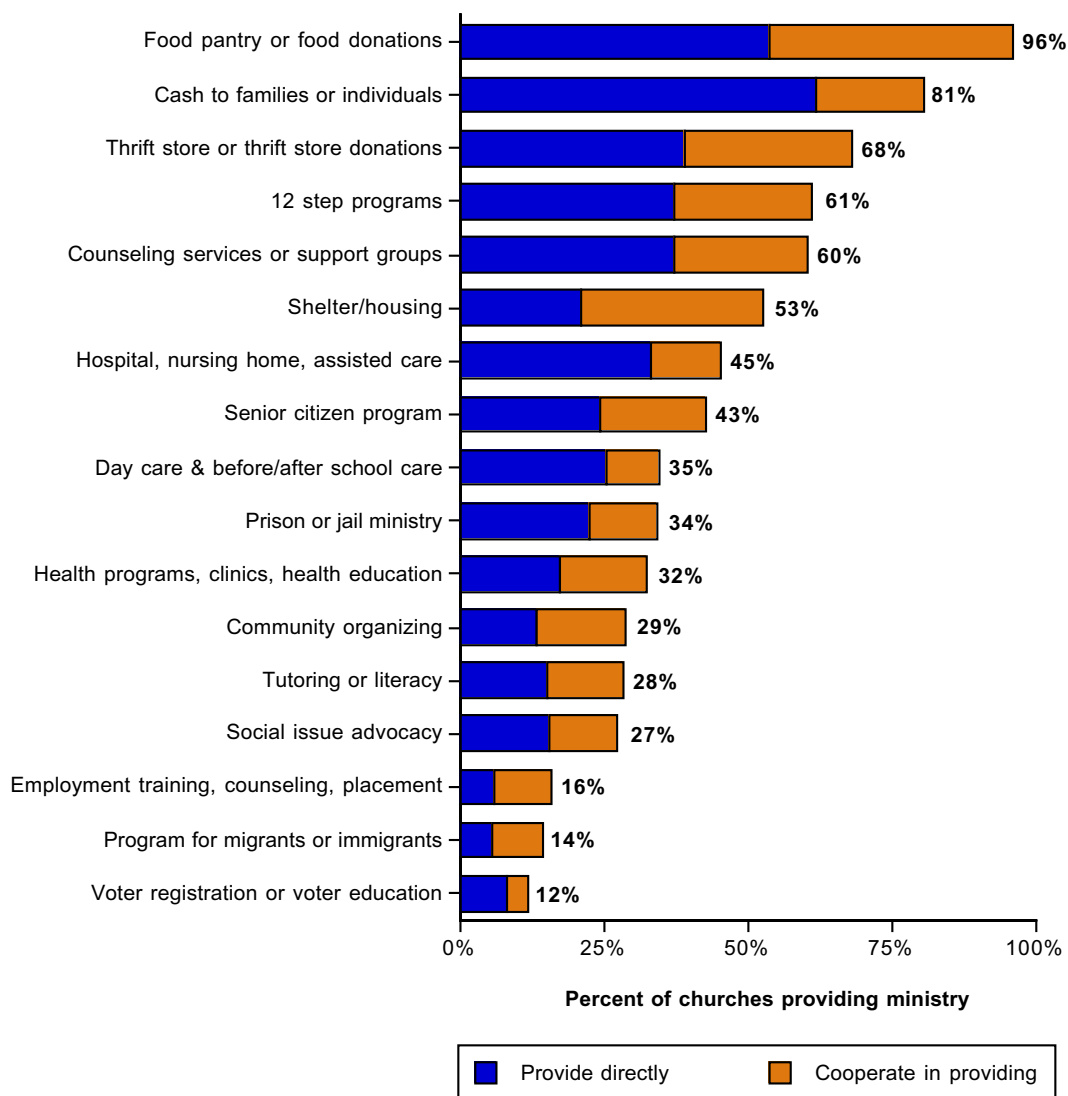


Ministries

There is not a hard and fast distinction between a “program” and a “ministry.” As seen in the previous section, “community service” was a program in which most Episcopal congregations were involved. In this section we break down what churches mean by such community service. What do churches do for the needs of persons outside their congregation?

Churches do some ministry outreach on their own but do other things in cooperation with other congregations or agencies. Figure 6.09 shows that almost all Episcopal congregations have or contribute to food pantries in their community. The largest direct area of ministry is cash gifts (or vouchers) to individuals or families in order to meet acute needs. Large numbers of Episcopal congregations also support thrift stores, hold or support 12-step or other counseling/support groups, and provide temporary or permanent shelter or housing for those in need. Much less typical are voter education, immigrant programs, employment training and social action efforts such as social issue advocacy and community organizing.

Figure 6.09
Ministry Involvement of Episcopal Congregations



As was the case with all of the programs, all of the ministries were also related to church strength. Churches that did any of them were more likely to be strong than churches that did not. The relationships were somewhat less substantial than for the programs, however. Among the ministries listed, the strongest correlations with church strength were for prison or jail ministry, cash or vouchers to families or individuals and temporary or permanent shelter.

A much more substantial correlation with church strength was produced by another FACT survey item which asked if the statement, "our congregation is working for social justice" describes your congregation. Figure 6.10 indicates that churches that say the statement fits them "very well" are much more likely to be in the strongest category of our church strength scale than churches that say the statement describes them less well.

Figure 6.11 shows that relatively few Episcopal congregations say that working for social justice fits them very well. More typical are churches that say it describes them "quite well," "somewhat" or "slightly."

Figure 6.10
Social Justice Emphasis and Strength

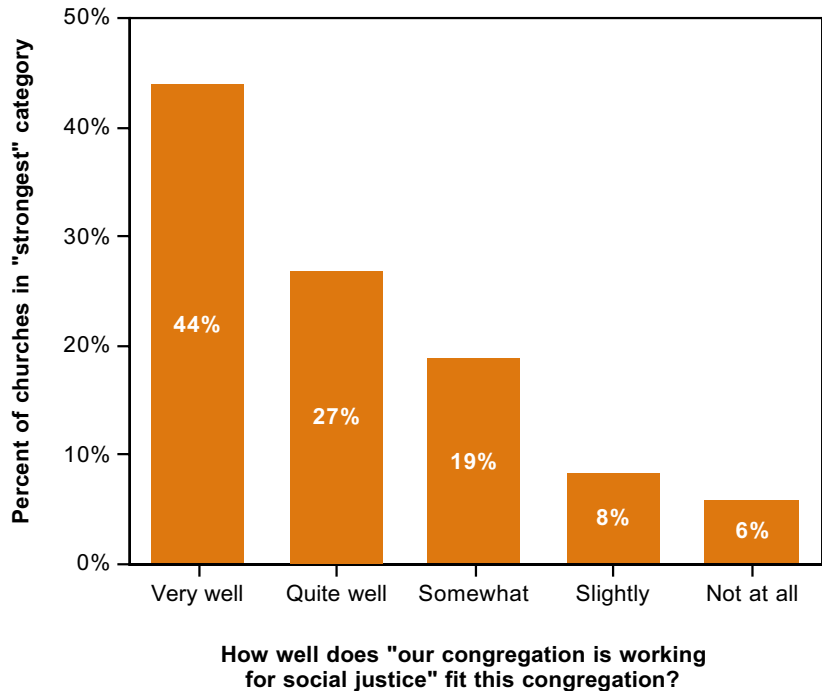
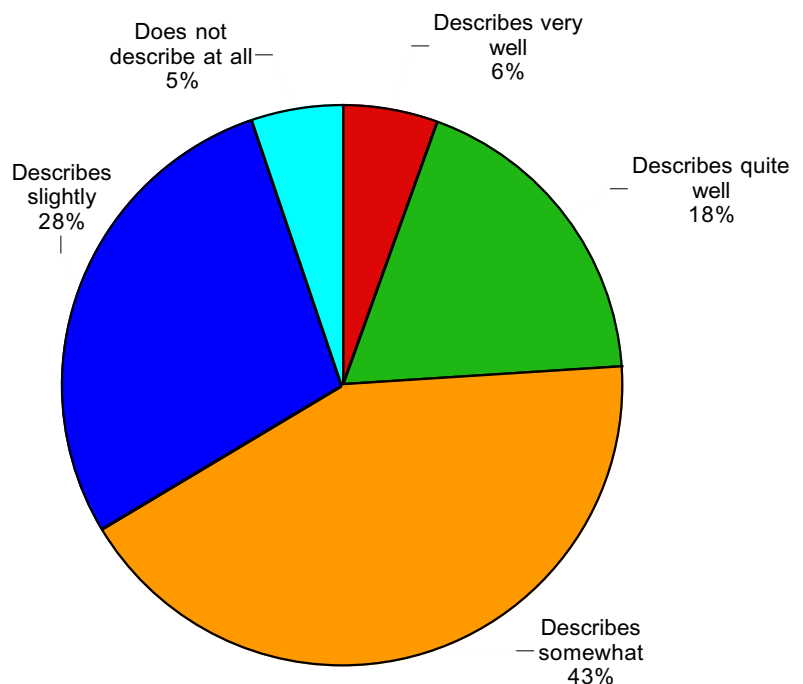


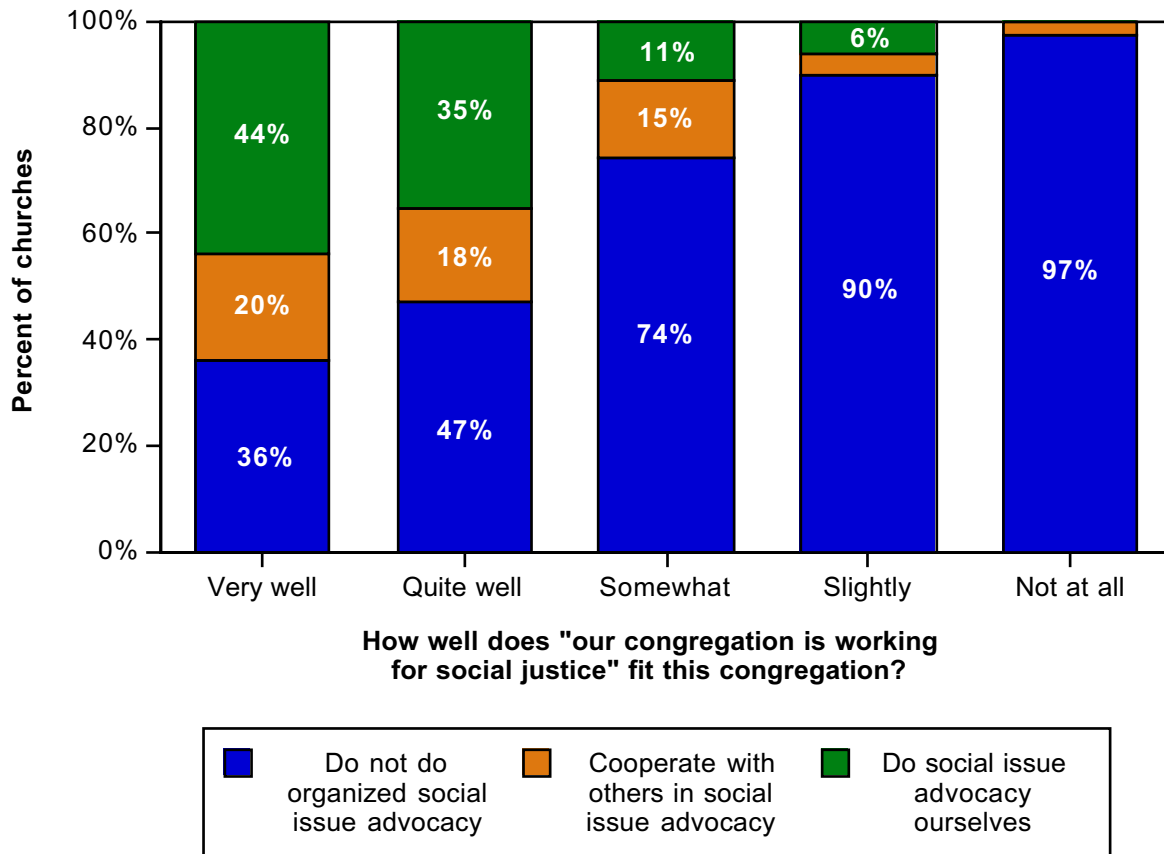
Figure 6.11
Working For Social Justice



Does a general orientation toward social justice actually translate into social justice activity? In Figure 6.12 we see that it does. Churches that say working toward social justice describes them very well or quite well were much more likely to also say their congregation was engaged in organized social issue advocacy (see the list of ministries in Figure 6.09). A similar relationship exists between working for social justice and community organizing.

Conventional wisdom would have it that being a “liberal,” social justice-oriented church is antithetical to church strength and growth. This is not the case, however, for Episcopal and other liberal mainline denominations. Churches that are spiritually alive **and** justice oriented tend to be the strongest congregations.

Figure 6.12
Social Issue Advocacy by "Working for Social Justice"



Evangelism & Recruitment

In general, mainline churches do not do evangelism in the form of door to door visitation, street preaching or other more evangelical/sectarian approaches to spreading the gospel or reaching the “un-churched.” That does not mean, however, that Episcopal and other mainline congregations lack any form of evangelism (broadly defined) or recruitment. As can be seen in Figure 6.13, most Episcopal congregations say their members are involved in recruitment activity to some extent or to a slight extent. Hardly any say their congregations are not involved in recruitment at all or are involved to a very great extent.

Strong churches have something valuable to offer and feel an obligation to tell others about it--to say, “We’re here for you” to people. Thus, the extent of member involvement in recruitment is highly correlated with church strength (see Figure 6.14). Where involvement is very great, 60% of the churches are strong. Where involvement in recruitment is nonexistent, none of the churches is very strong.

Figure 6.13
Involvement of Members in Recruitment

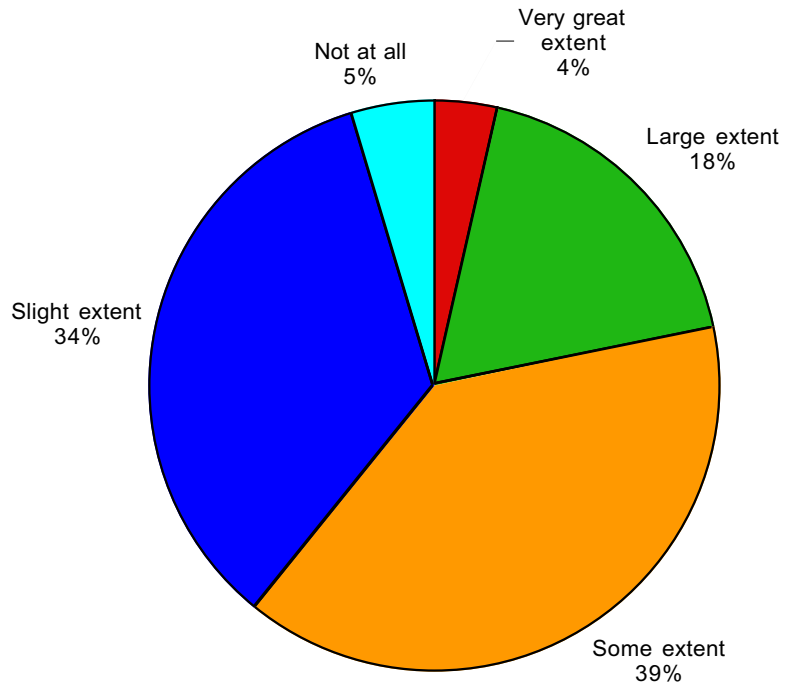
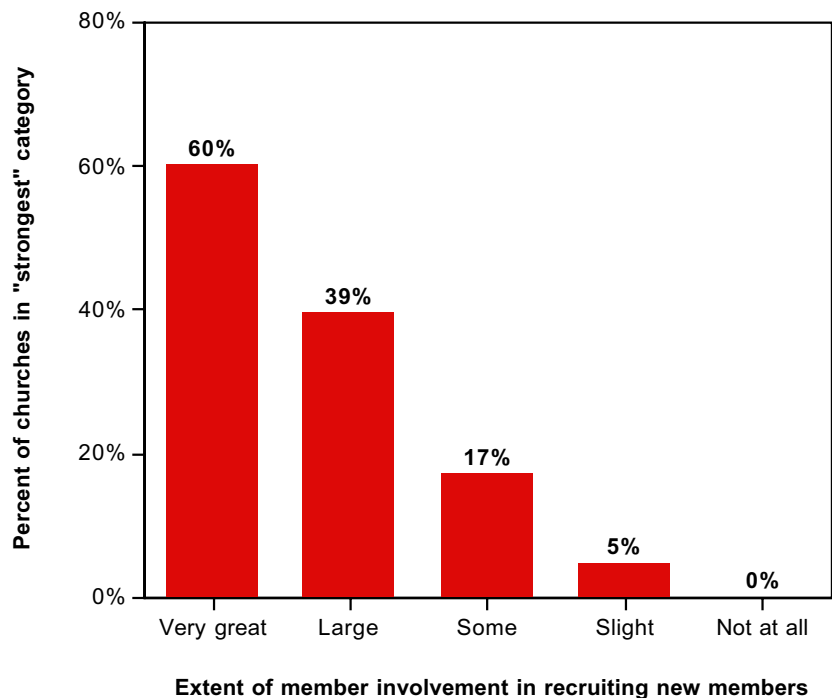


Figure 6.14
Recruitment Involvement and Church Strength



Stronger churches tend to contact people who move into the community and persons who visit their worship services. In general, such contacts are well received when done with sensitivity and without pressure. They are seen as welcoming activities, rather than as aggressive evangelism.

Figure 6.15 shows that the ministerial staff of almost 20% of Episcopal congregations make no phone calls or visits to prospective members, worship visitors or newcomers to the community in an average month. Most churches make at least one such contact and many make more. Obviously, larger churches with more than one ministerial staff person tend to make more calls and visits than small congregations with only a single rector or vicar. Still, it would appear that making such contacts is an essential strategy for the strong church, large or small.

Figure 6.15
Contacts with Prospects by Ministerial Staff
(Average Month)

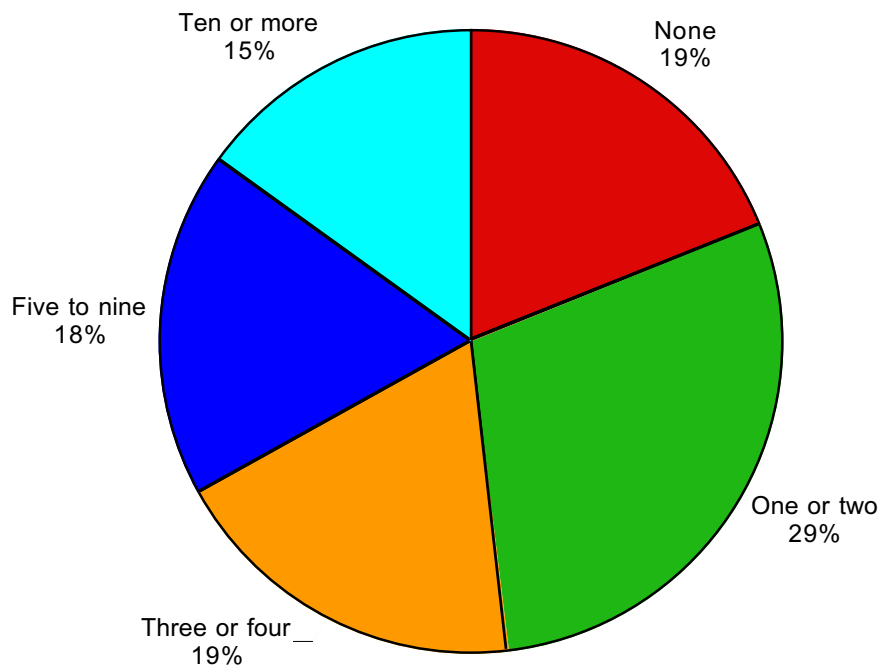
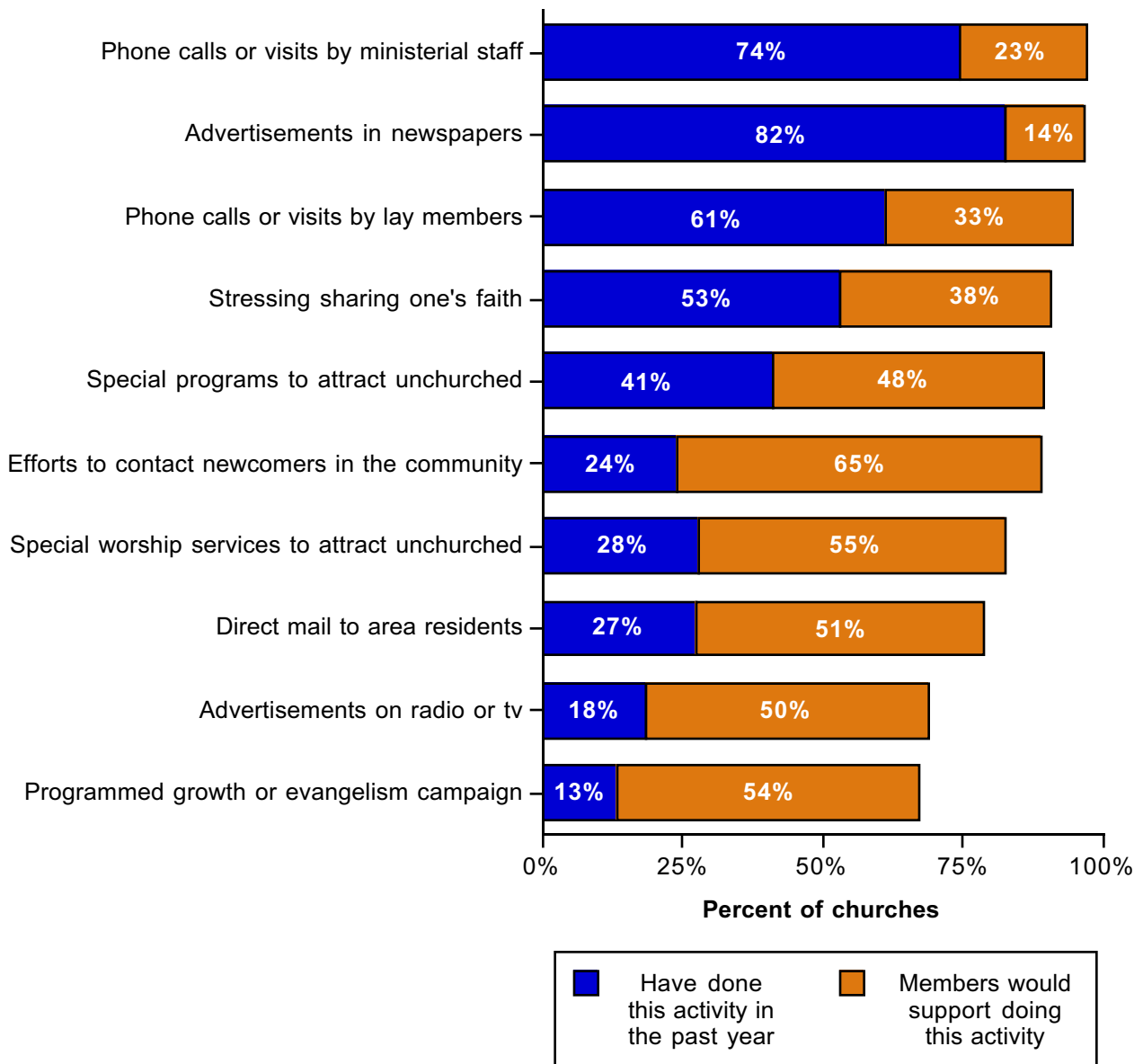


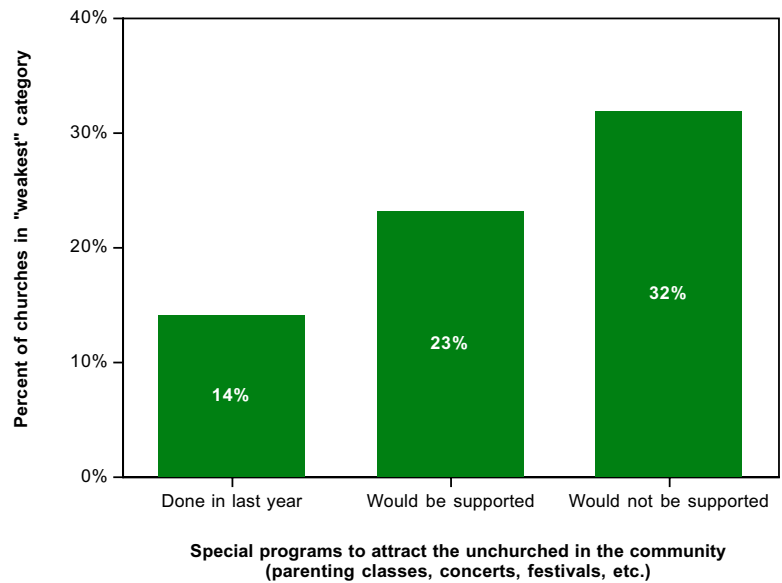
Figure 6.16 lists various organized and informal evangelism strategies that are used by churches in America. Almost three quarters of Episcopal congregations use phone calls or visits by ministerial staff as an approach to evangelism or recruitment. Another 23% of survey respondents say that members of their congregation would support this activity by their minister. Indeed, all of the activities would be supported by a majority of Episcopal congregations, even those that are rarely done. The activity that is least frequently done and would receive most support by members is the simple step of contacting newcomers in the community. Only 24% of Episcopal congregations do this activity, but 65% say their members would support it.

Figure 6.16
Actual and Possible Evangelism/Recruitment Activities



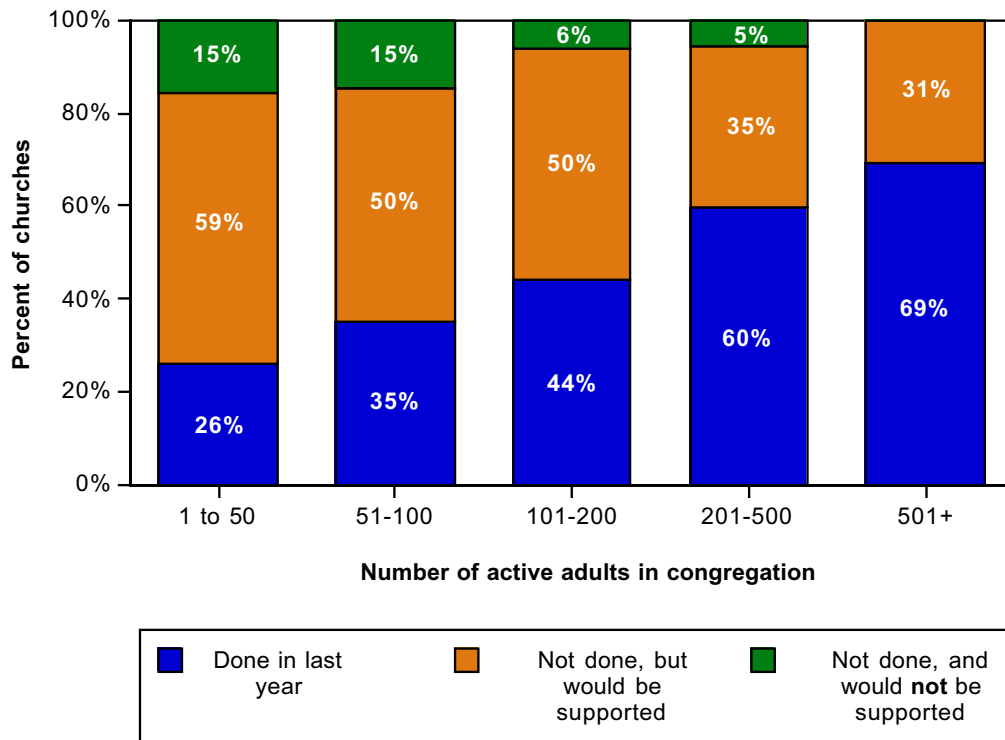
As might be expected, all of the evangelism/recruitment activities listed in Figure 6.16 were related to being a stronger church. However, the most substantial correlate of church strength was produced by “special programs intended to attract unchurched persons in the community.” Holding parenting classes, concerts, art festivals and the like attracts people into the church who might ordinarily not attend a worship service on their own. Doing this is related to strength, but **not** doing it is even more strongly related to weakness (see Figure 6.17).

Figure 6.17
Special Programs to Attract Unchurched and Church Weakness



Larger churches are much more likely to have held special programs to attract unchurched residents in the community than are smaller congregations. Small churches (100 or fewer active adults) are least likely to have held such programs and most likely to say their members would not support them. However, very few churches in all size categories report that their members would not support holding special programs to attract the unchurched.

Figure 6.18
Special Programs to Attract Unchurched by Church Size



Section 7:

Conflict and Growth



Two facts of life in many congregations are conflict and decline. Their opposites, harmony and growth, are what all congregations would prefer, but too often congregations find themselves embroiled in disagreements and losing members. Usually, the two go together, but that is not always the case. Conflict is sometimes necessary in order for a congregation to move into a new stage of life and the resolution of conflict may be more important than whether a church is able to avoid conflict altogether.

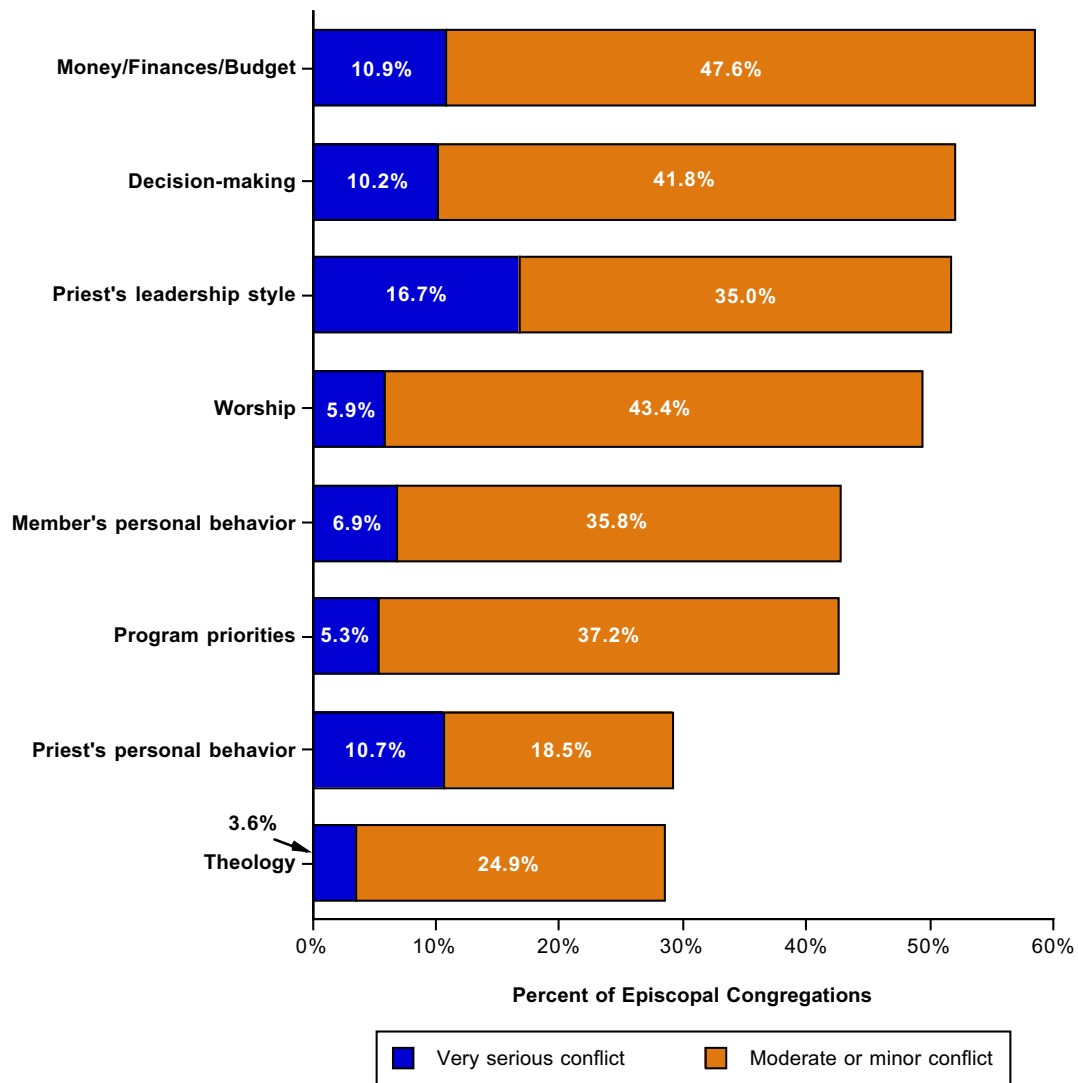
Growth in membership can result from many factors in addition to congregational harmony and in this section we consider it apart from the larger issue of church strength. Not all strong churches are growing and not all growing churches are strong. Here we look at the strongest correlates of growth and decline drawing from all areas of church life.

Conflict

Only 14% of Episcopal congregations reported that they experienced no conflict during the past five years. Another 24% experienced only minor conflict. At least one moderate conflict occurred in 30% of Episcopal congregations, and 32% had at least one very serious conflict. The areas of conflict examined in the FACT survey are listed below in Figure 7.01, in rank order of conflict prevalence. The blue section of each bar shows the percentage of Episcopal congregations with serious conflict in that area, whereas the orange segments record moderate or minor conflict.

Money provides the source of most conflict in Episcopal congregations, followed by conflict over “who should make a decision.” The third most frequent area of conflict, “Priest’s leadership style” is also the area where the most serious conflict tends to occur, followed by money, the priest’s personal behavior, and decision making. Conflict (of any severity) is least prevalent about theology.

Figure 7.01
Sources of Conflict During Past 5 Years



Conflict over a priest's leadership style is not only the most frequent area of serious conflict in Episcopal congregations, it also is the most disruptive among the sources of conflict listed in Figure 7.01. Of churches with serious conflict in this area during the last five years, only 4% are very strong congregations. And as can be seen in Figure 7.02, even moderate conflict over the priest's leadership style undermines the strength of congregations.

Conflict is resolved in different ways. In some cases, there are no serious consequences, but in other cases people may leave the church, reduce their involvement or stop giving. Sometimes there is no resolution. Conflicts continue to simmer, threatening to boil over at any minute.

Figure 7.03 shows that some negative outcome is the most frequent result of conflict. In many other churches there has been no resolution to the conflict. It continues most frequently as "minor" conflict, but 5% of Episcopal congregations are still in serious conflict.

Figure 7.02
Conflict Over Priest's Leadership Style Undermines Congregational Strength

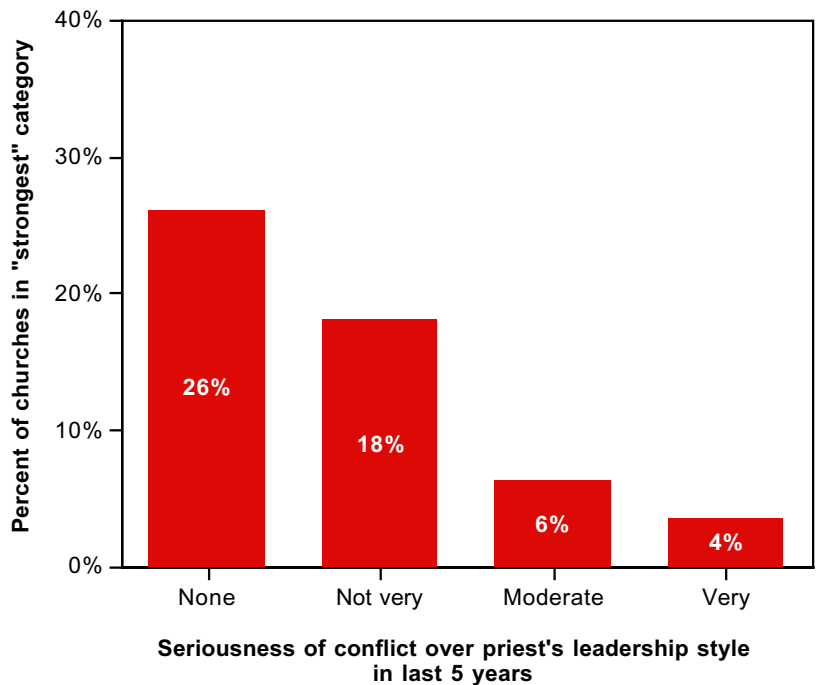
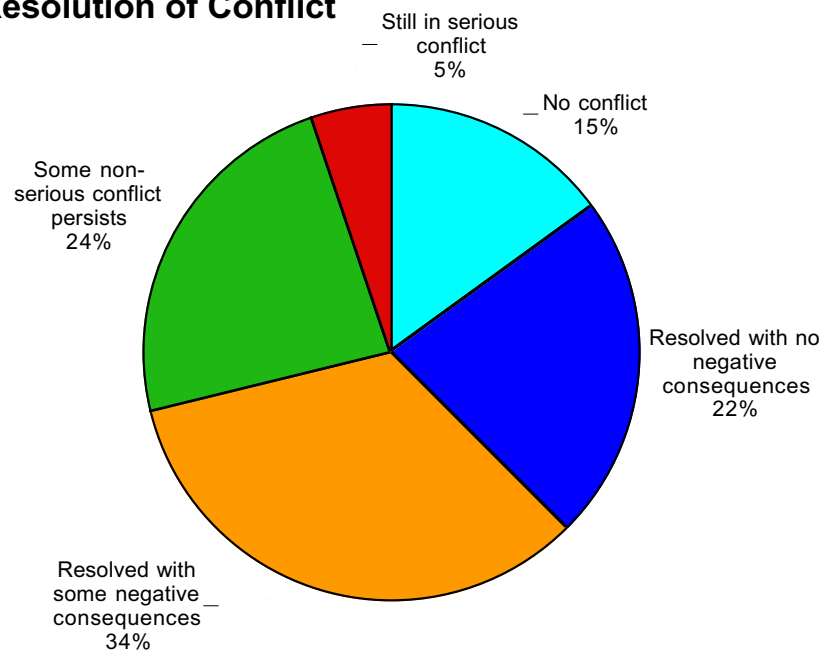


Figure 7.03
Resolution of Conflict



How conflict is resolved affects the strength of congregations. Clearly, no conflict in any area is best (albeit rare). However, as Figure 7.04 shows, churches that experienced conflict and that resolved it peacefully were almost as likely to be in the “strongest” category as churches that experienced no conflict at all. Less positive resolution of conflict tends to be associated with weakness rather than strength, particularly among those congregations that are still in the midst of serious conflict.

Figure 7.05 considers the more general question of how a congregation deals with conflict. Are disagreements and conflicts dealt with openly or in some other, less healthy, manner? Slightly over half of Episcopal congregations respond that “disagreements and conflicts are dealt with openly here” describes them very well or quite well. Only 12% say that the phrase describes them slightly or not at all.

Not surprisingly, the question in Figure 7.05 is correlated with church strength in much the same manner as the conflict resolution question in Figure 7.04. Churches that resolve conflict in a healthy manner tend to be strong, healthy churches.

Figure 7.04
Conflict Resolution and Strength

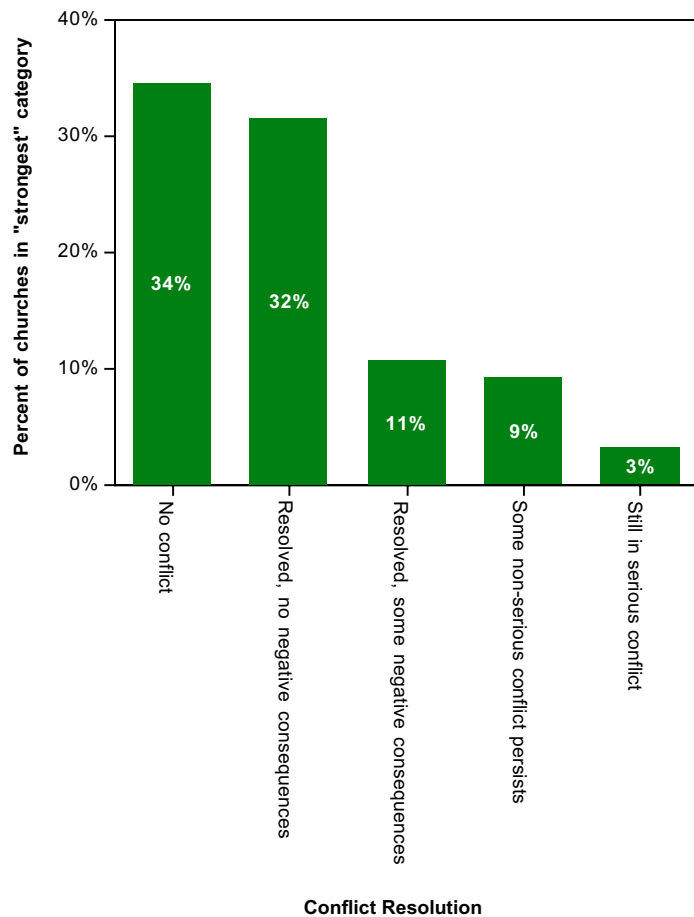
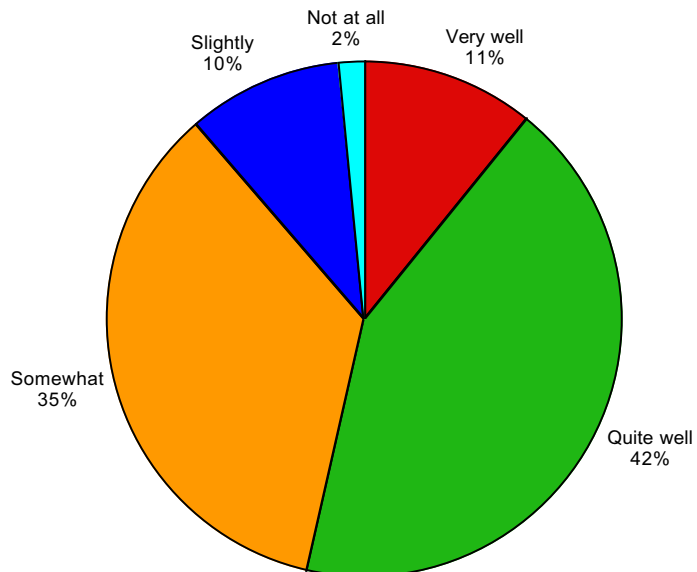
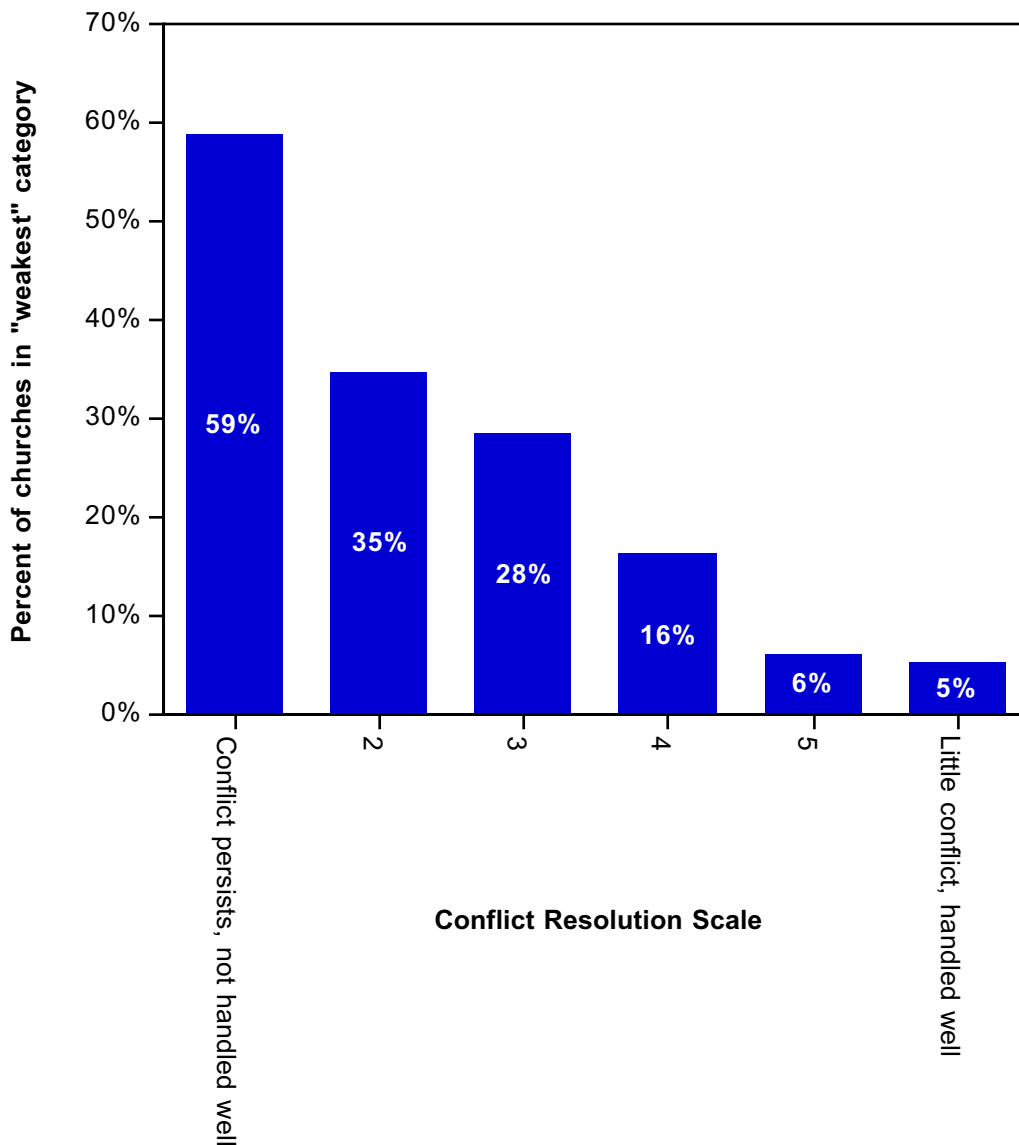


Figure 7.05 How Well Does "Disagreements and Conflicts are Dealt with Openly Here" Describe Your Congregation?



A chart showing the relationship between dealing with conflict openly is not included here. Instead, responses to that question and the previous question about resolution of actual conflict are combined into a single “conflict resolution scale.” Churches that score “low” on the scale had little or no conflict and tend to handle conflict openly. Churches that score “high” on the scale have experienced conflict, conflict persists, and they also admit that disagreements and conflict are not handled openly. The conflict resolution scale is very highly related to the church strength scale, particularly in terms of discriminating *church weakness*. Figure 7.06 shows that churches scoring low on the scale tend to be very weak. The less well a church handles conflict, the more likely it is to be in the “weakest” category on the church strength index.

Figure 7.06
Poor Conflict Resolution Results in Weak Churches



Growth and Decline

Despite the problems experienced by most congregations, the fact is that most people (including parish rectors) have a very positive image of their churches. When things are going well, that image is reinforced, but when things are not going so well, there is a tendency to deny reality or to treat the current pattern as an aberration that will soon be reversed.

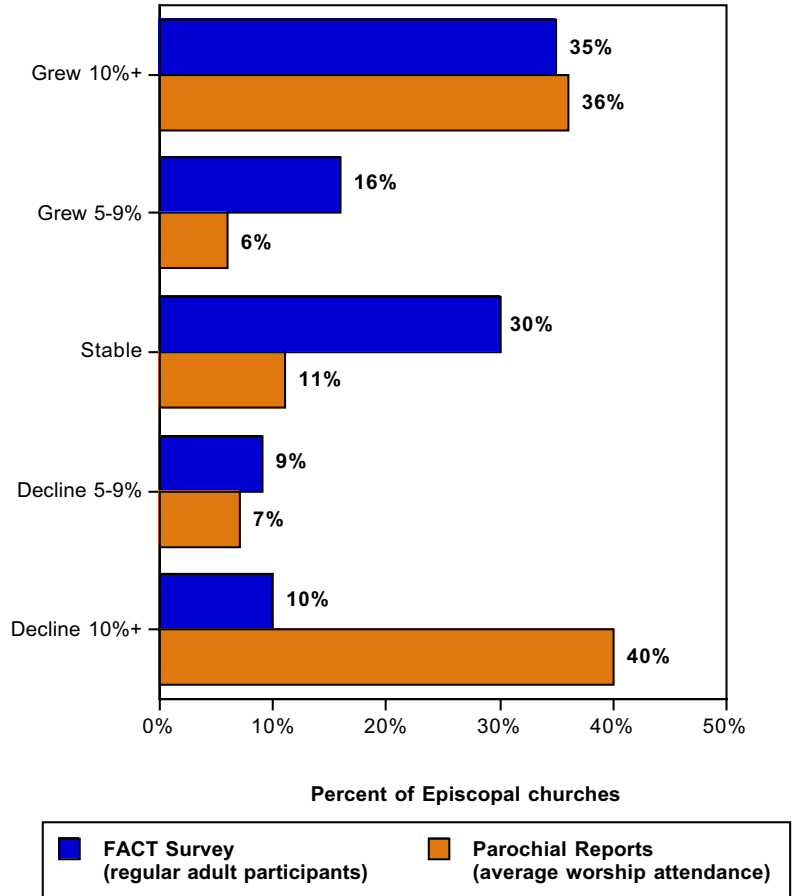
Figure 7.07 compares responses from the FACT survey on change in active adult participants to Parochial Report data on change in average worship attendance. As can be seen in the top two bars, the proportion of congregations who see themselves as growing by 10% or more is practically identical to the percentage who are actually growing by that much in worship attendance.

Most congregations report that the number of regularly participating adults has either increased (52%) or stayed about the same (30%) compared to five years ago.

Parochial Report data on average worship attendance shows a less rosy picture: 42% increased, 11% were stable and 47% declined. Looking at figure 7.07 it is obvious that few church leaders are willing to admit that their congregations have declined substantially during the previous five years. 40% of Episcopal congregations declined by 10% or more, but only 10% of congregations report declines at that level. Instead, many declining churches report that they are stable and some stable churches report that they have seen a little growth. It should be noted that this same pattern exists in all denominations that have been examined, from the most conservative to the most liberal. Apparently it reflects a basic human tendency: the desire to see things as better than they really are.

Compared to other mainline denominations, Episcopal congregations are much more likely to be growing. In fact, the percentage of growing Episcopal churches is about the same as the percentage of growing Southern Baptist churches.

Figure 7.07
Growth & Decline in the FACT Survey and Episcopal Parochial Reports



The remainder of this section examines the strongest correlates of growth. Throughout, it should be noted that growth tends to lead to a positive self image, so it cannot always be said that one of these factors caused churches to grow. Rather, growth and that factor tend to go together.

In Figure 7.08, however, the direction of causation is much clearer than for the other charts in this section. Growing churches don't cause new housing to be built, so new housing must help churches grow.

These data are from the census bureau, so we are not getting biased observations about this issue. Sheer population growth is also related to church growth, but the relationship is not as strong as it is with new housing. Growth through new housing tends to be growth of a homogeneous sort that encourages community formation. That type of growth is related to church growth in all predominantly white Protestant denominations.

One of the strongest correlates of growth in the FACT survey is the proportion of active adults who have begun attending the church in the last five years. In order to grow, a church needs new members and also to retain those new people as active participants. Obviously, attracting newcomers is easier in an area where new residents are moving in. Growth is difficult (but not impossible) in areas where the population is stable or declining. But even in a growing area, church growth depends on the openness of a congregation to new people--something that is not always characteristic of Christian congregations.

Figure 7.08
New Housing Helps Churches Grow

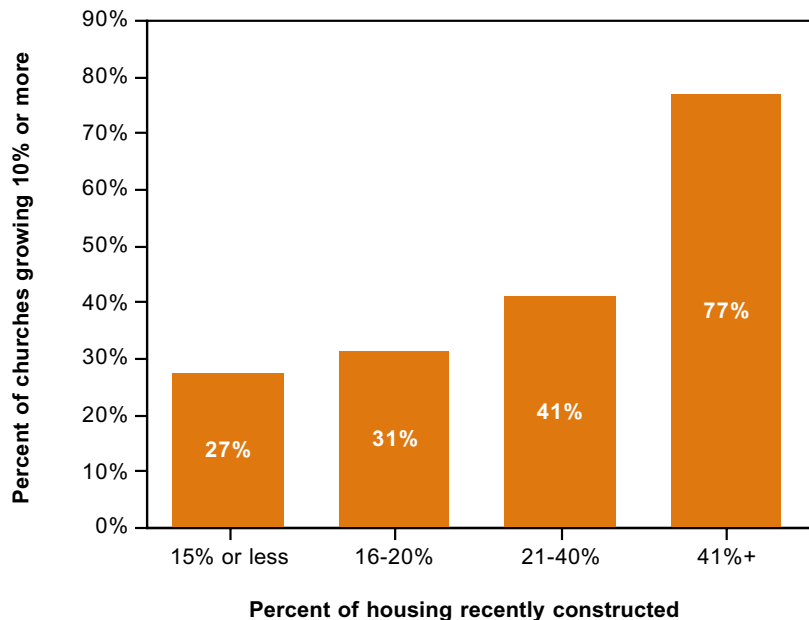
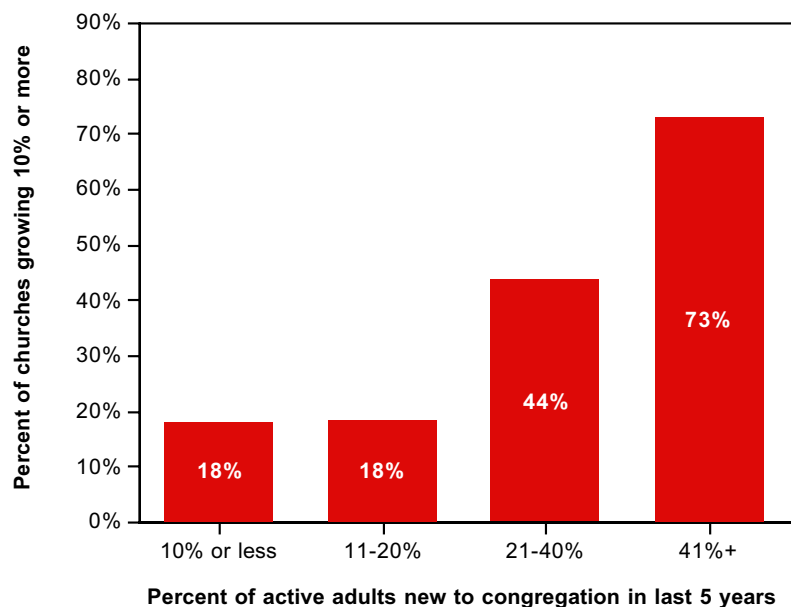


Figure 7.09
New People Help Churches Grow



Churches tend to be family-friendly (sometimes overly so, to the exclusion of single persons). Families with children often seek out the church in order to expose their children to Christian values. Growing suburbs tend to be populated by large numbers of families with children. For all these reasons, churches with a large proportion of families with children tend to be growing. Churches with few young families, and particularly churches with a large proportion of elderly members, are more likely to decline in average worship attendance.

Churches that report having parenting or marriage enrichment programs or activities are much more likely to be growing (and to avoid decline) than are churches which lack such activities. All of the 16 church programs (from Bible studies and spiritual retreats to sports teams and exercise groups) were related to church growth. Parenting and marriage enrichment programs produced the strongest relationship with growth because growing congregations provide activities that their members need and such activities are needed most by churches with younger families.

Growing churches (and particularly large growing churches) tend to do more things. Because they are growing they have more resources, but it is also true that programs provide ways for new people to become involved in the life of the congregation.

Figure 7.10
Younger Families and Church Growth

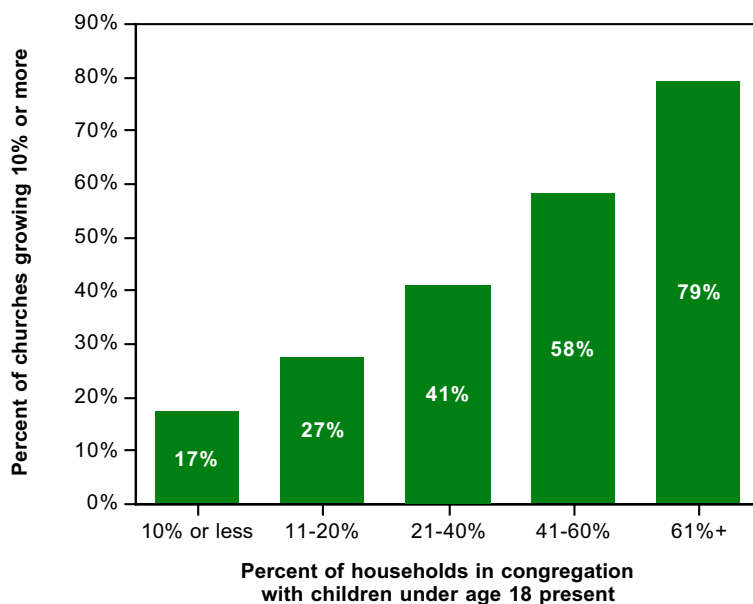
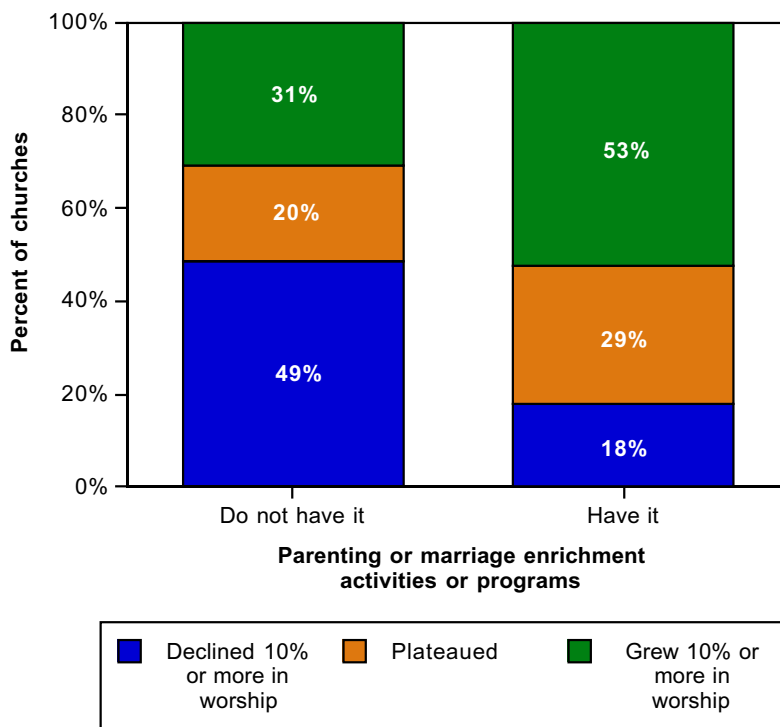


Figure 7.11
Marriage, Parenting and Church Growth



The FACT survey included a large number of questions about evangelism, outreach and recruitment. Doing all these things was related to growth, but in most cases the relationship was not very strong. However, one of the strongest correlates of growth was a more general question about the involvement of church members in recruitment activities.

Churches reporting that their members were involved to a large extent or a very great extent were much more likely to grow than churches reporting less member involvement in recruitment. What people mean by “recruitment” is not completely clear, but we can presume that it refers to a wide range of formal and informal activities and a general openness to newcomers. Mainline churches by and large do not do a great deal of “organized evangelism,” nor are they comfortable with too much promotion. Still, growing churches find ways to let the community know they are there and members communicate that their congregation means a great deal to their lives.

Another very strong correlate of growth was providing many opportunities for members to learn about their faith. Of those churches that said doing so described them “very well,” 60% were growing, as compared to only 24% who said doing so described them slightly or not at all. All of the questions regarding helping members grow in faith, become closer to God, etc. were strongly related to church growth. It helps to do the things that churches are supposed to do.

Figure 7.12
Recruitment and Growth

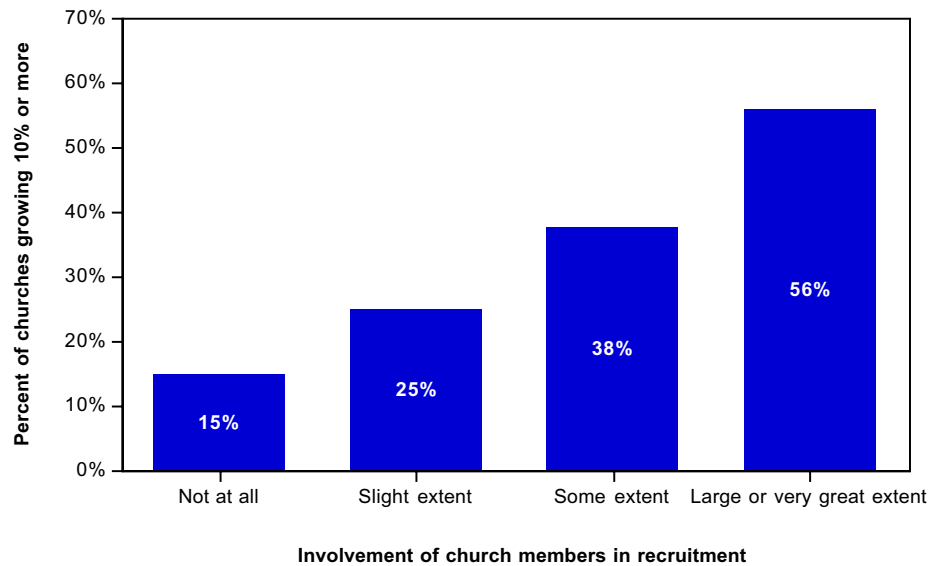
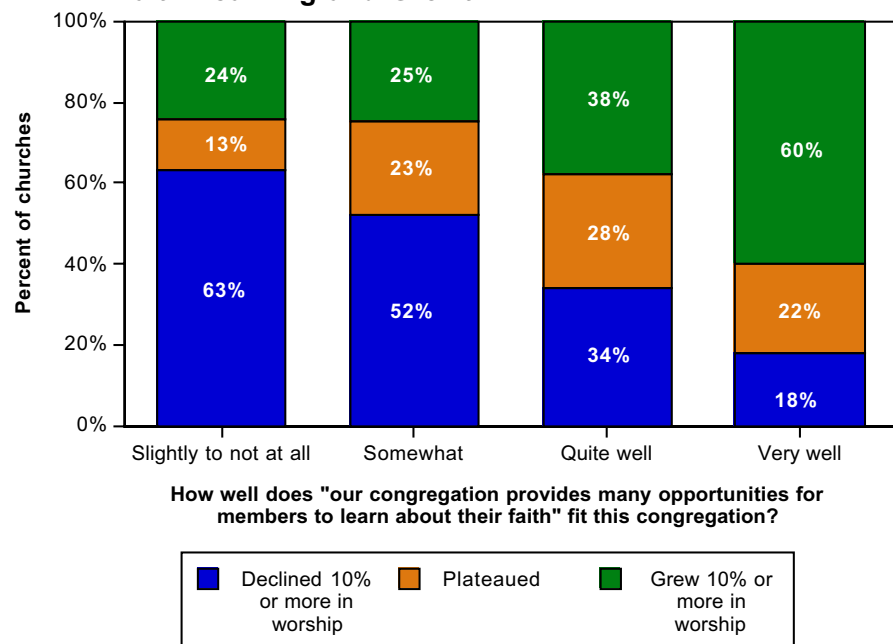


Figure 7.13
Faith Learning and Growth



One of the primary things churches do is worship and the character of that worship is strongly related to growth. Churches that say their worship is “joyful” are much more likely to grow than churches that say being “joyful” in worship fits them only slightly or not at all. Other adjectives describing worship that were strongly related to growth were “exciting” and “friendly.” Not quite as strong, but still associated with growth were “innovative,” “a sense of God’s presence,” and “a sense of expectancy.” Growing churches are full of life. That life is apparent in worship.

Not only do growing churches have joyful, exciting, friendly worship; their worship services also tend to be full. Here again there is the issue of chicken or egg. Clearly, churches had to grow to become full. Fullness, however, is related to a sense of excitement and community. Growing churches tend to be full and to need more space for worship. When they add services or additional space they tend to grow to fill it up.

Figure 7.14
Making a Joyful Noise

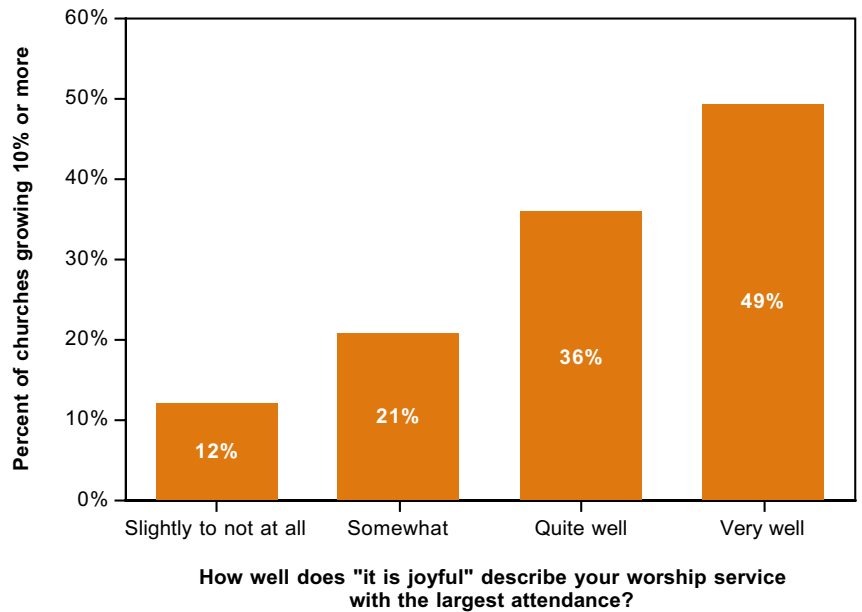
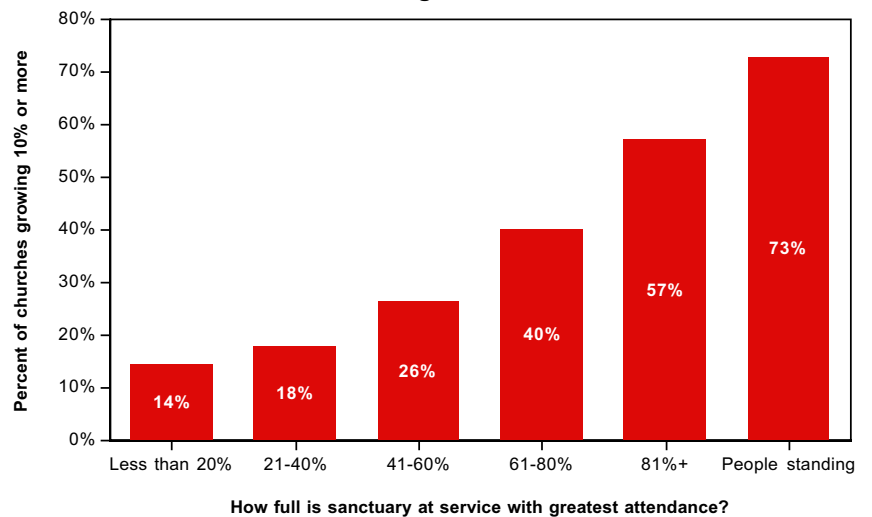
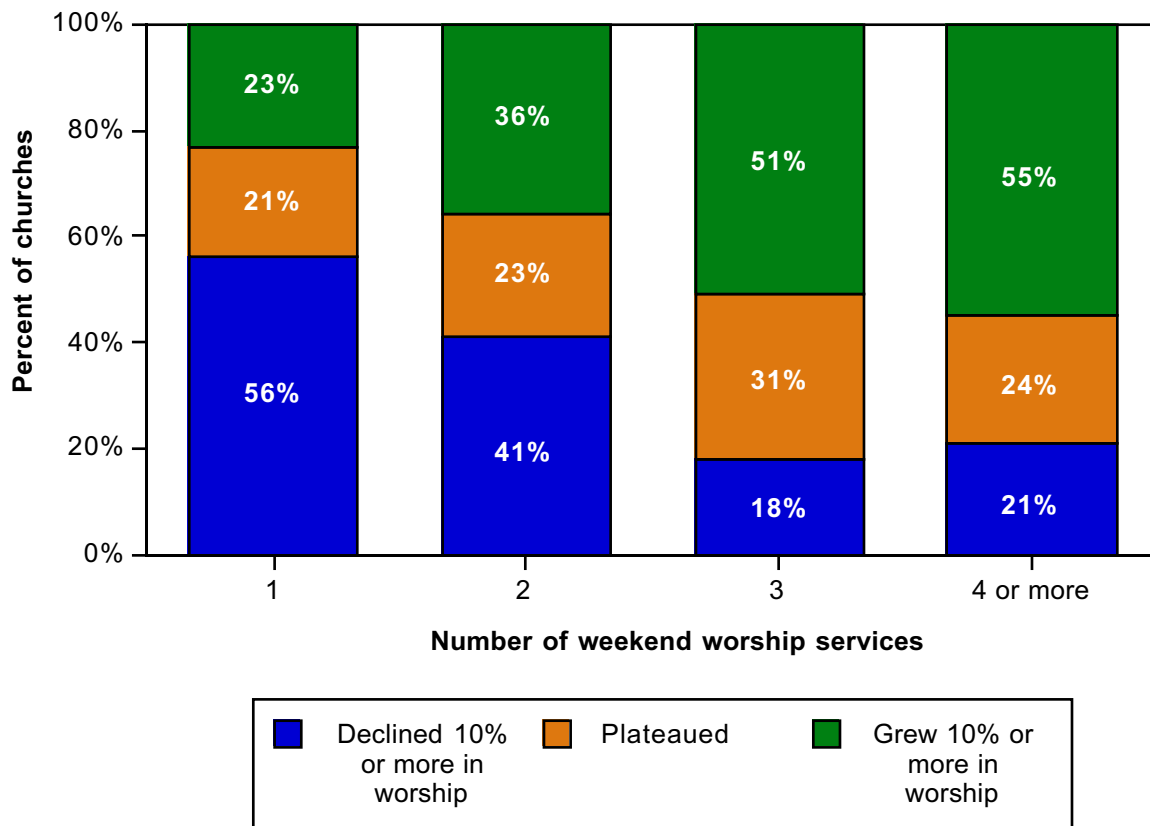


Figure 7.15
Full Churches are Growing Churches



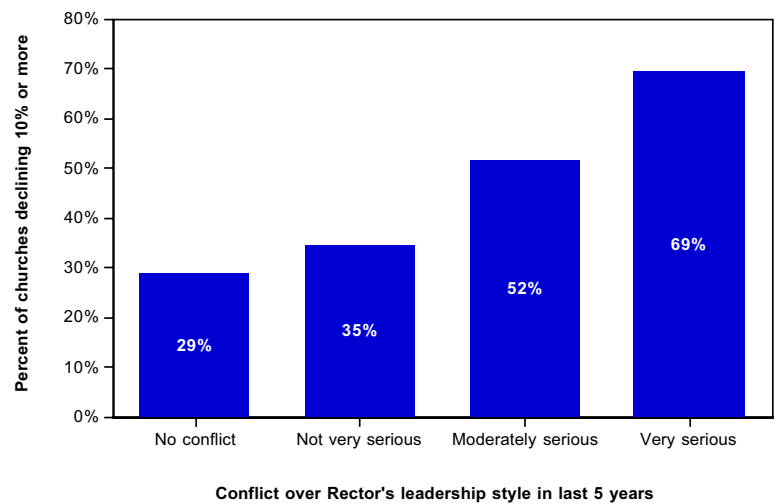
In Figure 7.16 we see that the more services a church holds the more likely it is to be growing. Two services is the norm in Episcopal congregations (unlike other mainline denominations where only one service is typical), and churches with two worship services are more likely to grow and are less likely to decline than churches with only one weekend worship service. Even more likely to grow are churches with three or more services. The difference between having three services and more than three is inconsequential. Growing churches need more services to accommodate more people, but having more services also allows people to attend when they are most able and for a church to have services with different styles.

Figure 7.16
More Services, More Growth



Earlier we saw the potentially disruptive influence of conflict over a rector's leadership style. Here we see it again in terms of decline in worship attendance. Churches that experienced very serious conflict during the last five years over their rector's leadership style tend to have declined in average worship attendance. Also quite disruptive to growth was conflict over a rector's personal behavior, church finances, and worship.

Figure 7.17
Conflict Over Leadership and Decline

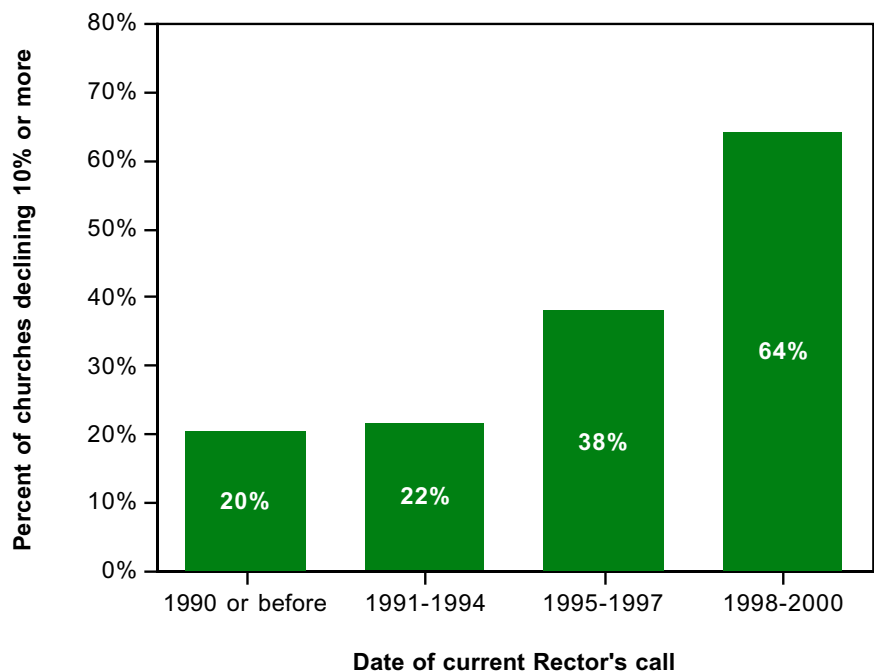


Clergy were asked to describe their strengths and weaknesses in certain areas (preaching, hard work, administration, etc.) and given the subjective, self-evaluation required, it was not surprising to find relatively low correlations between these rating and growth. Strongest among them were vision, charisma, enthusiasm, knowing how to get people to work together, and knowing how to get things done.

A number of more objective questions were asked about clergy leadership and most were modestly correlated with growth, such as having younger clergy and full time clergy.

A much stronger relationship with growth (or rather, avoiding decline) was found with date of call. Recently called ministers were much more likely to be in declining churches than were rectors who had been in the church more than three years. In general, churches with a recently called minister are more likely to be churches that do not keep their ministers for very long. Other factors are also involved, however, including the number of years necessary to revitalize a stagnant church and the tendency of members to leave (or join) a church when a new minister arrives.

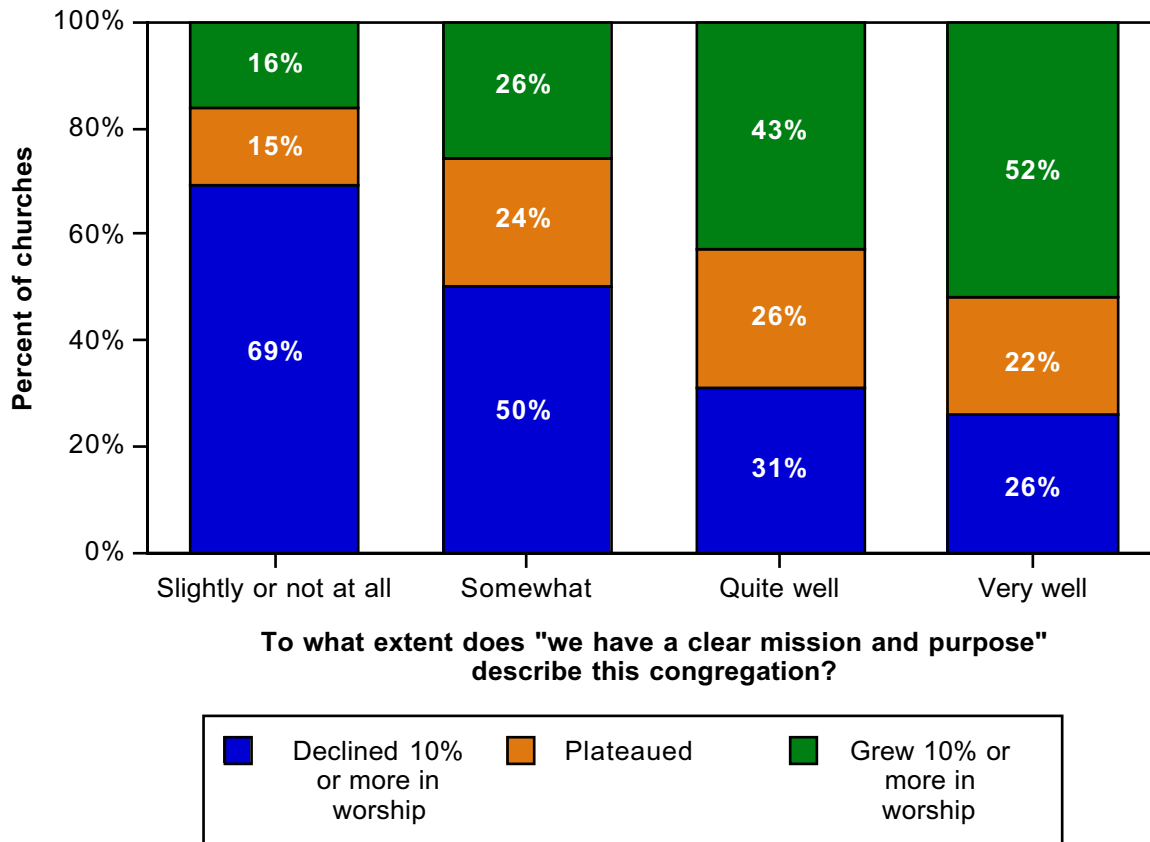
Figure 7.18
Recent Call and Decline



Finally, the FACT survey asked a great many questions about congregational identity. Most of these questions were related to growth, particularly those that could be seen as outcomes of growth rather than factors that might lead to growth. Thus it was no surprise to find that growing churches were more “excited about the future” than were declining churches. Figure 7.19 shows the relationship between an identity question that is perhaps more likely to lead to growth than to be a result of it. Churches that are clear about their mission and purpose are more likely to be growing congregations. This relationship is consistent with all of the literature on church growth and vitality. Healthy churches know why they exist. They do not take their purpose of “being the church” for granted and evolve into social clubs with a chapel and chaplain.

Also strongly related to growth was a sense that the congregation is “spiritually vital and alive” and that the church helps members deepen their relationships with God. These two questions were included in our strong church index.

Figure 7.19
It Helps to Know Your Purpose



Section 8:

How We are Led



Churches are communities that are led. Leadership is a function, an action, that is performed by many different people in a church. Clearly, however, the character and quality of pastoral leadership is critical to the direction and nurture of any church. For that reason, most of the information in this section deals with clergy rather than laity.

It should be noted that in most churches the questions were answered by the rector, vicar or dean. Thus, subjective evaluative questions about one's own preaching, leadership style and character are somewhat problematic. Some people may underestimate their own ability, while others may overstate their effectiveness. Even so, the fact that the overall results are interpretable and correlated with church strength suggests that reality is apparent despite the subjectivity.

Characteristics of Clergy

Episcopal parish clergy tend to be middle age and older. In Figure 8.01 the ages of clergy are shown in 5-year increments (except for the youngest and oldest age categories). As can be seen, the two largest categories are age 51 to 55 and 56 to 60. Close behind are clergy 46 to 50 years of age. Very few Episcopal rectors and vicars are age 40 years or under--a pattern that is also present in other mainline denominations. Due to the aging of the baby boom generation and increasing age of seminarians, the median age of parish ministers has risen alarmingly in recent years.

Figure 8.01
Clergy by Age Category

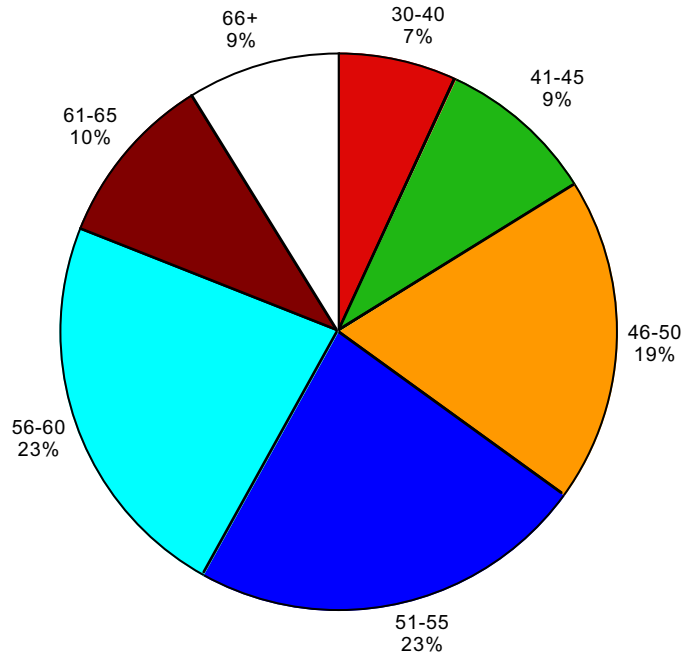
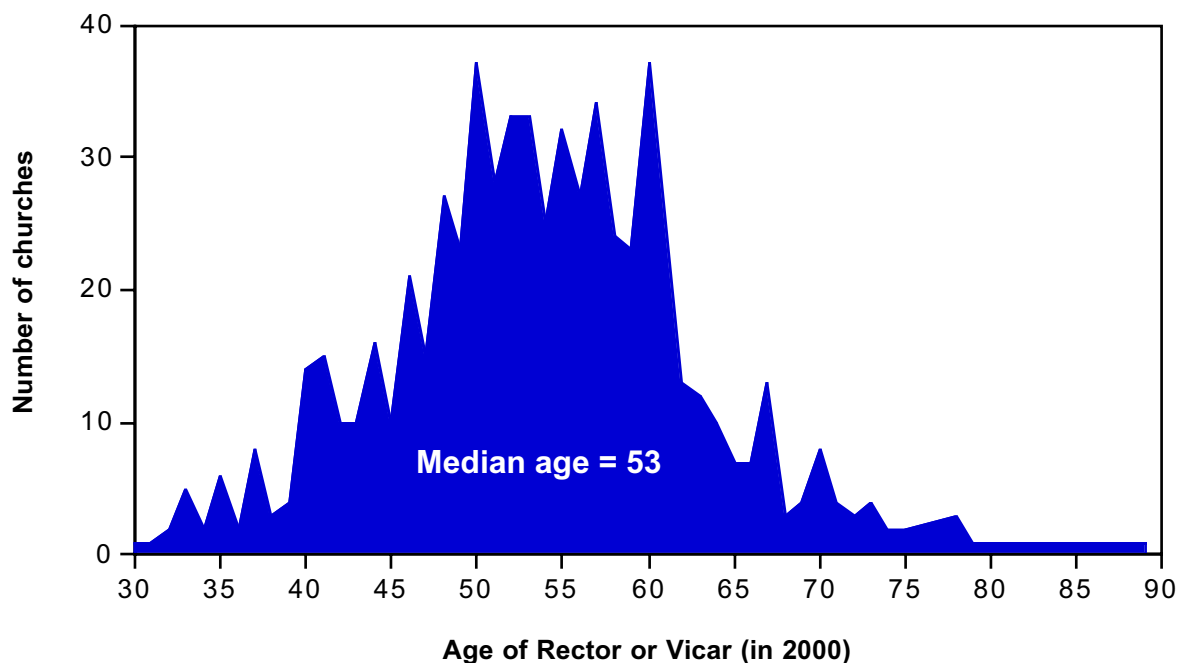


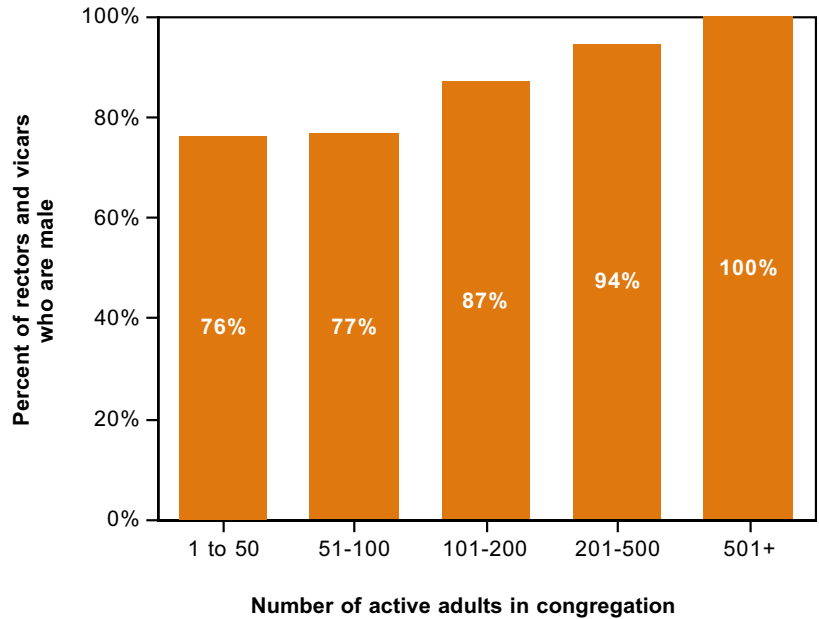
Figure 8.02 below shows that the age range of parish clergy is clustered rather tightly around the median age of 53 years. As the center of the “wave” moves closer to 65 the shortage of clergy that is felt most seriously now in rural communities and smaller towns is likely to spread throughout the Episcopal Church.

Figure 8.02
Another Image of Age



Of rectors and vicars responding to the FACT survey, 83% identified themselves as male. These figures do not include other church staff positions. Figure 8.03 shows a correlation between gender of the rector and church size. Larger Episcopal churches are much more likely to be pastored by male priests than are smaller parishes. And since larger churches tend to be stronger, female clergy tend to be in churches that are weaker on average.

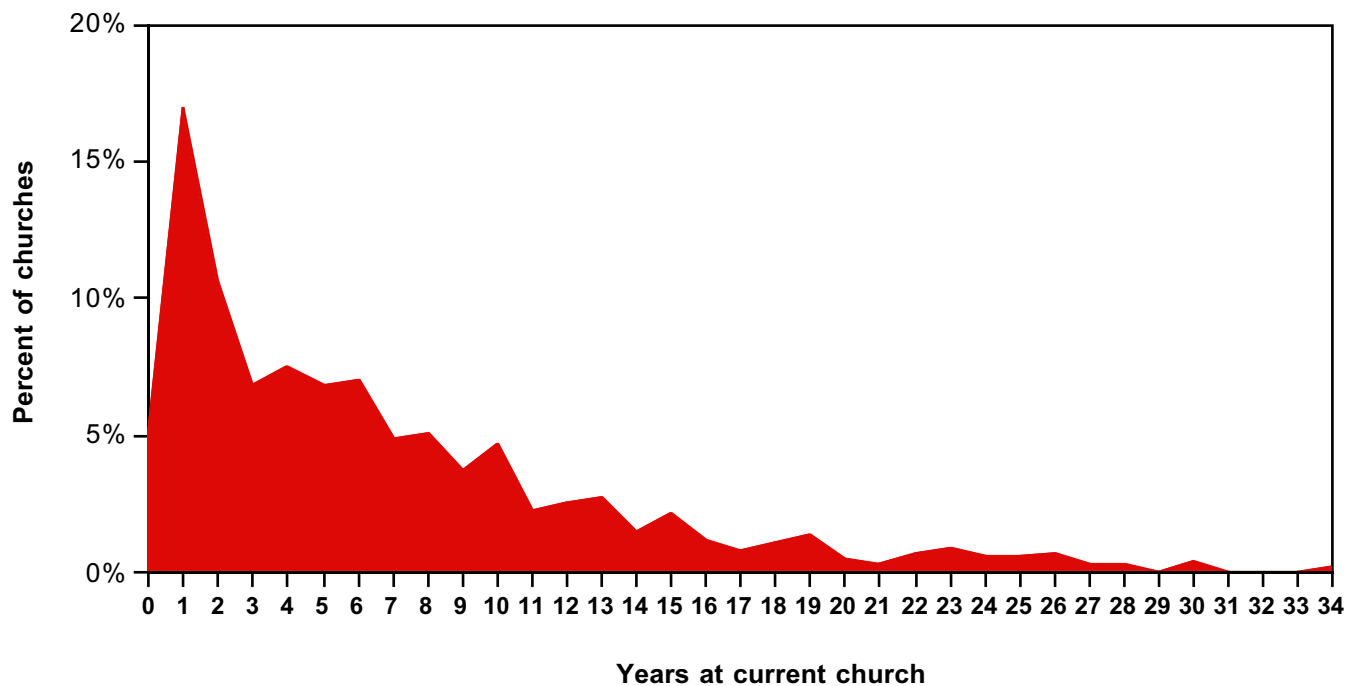
Figure 8.03
Gender of Rector or Vicar by Church Size



The median year of call to the church was 1995, or five years prior to the survey. Figure 8.04 shows that the largest proportion of clergy were called quite recently, but that many Episcopal clergy have been with their congregations for many years.

5.1% were called during the year the survey was mailed (2000), 16.9% in 1999, 10.6% in 1998 and 6.8% in 1997. Another 14.3% were called in 1995 or 1996; 25.3% were called from 1990 to 1994; and 21.1% were called from 1966 to 1989.

Figure 8.04
Tenure of Current Rector or Vicar



A strong relationship exists between tenure of the current priest and church strength. Figure 8.05 shows that churches which called their priest very recently are much less likely to be very strong, as compared to churches where the rector or vicar has been resident for six years or more (called in 1994 or earlier). This finding is consistent with other research showing that short tenures are problematic and that effectiveness increases with tenure, but not indefinitely. Many churches experience a certain amount of membership turnover after a new minister arrives. Some people take the occasion to drop out, while others may increase their involvement. The net effect is lack of stability for a few years after a minister leaves, which is reflected in these data on church weakness.

Figure 8.06 shows that most Episcopal churches (69%) have had only one or two rectors or vicars during the last ten years. Three is less typical, whereas four or more is rare.

Figure 8.05
Tenure of Current Rector or Vicar by Church Strength

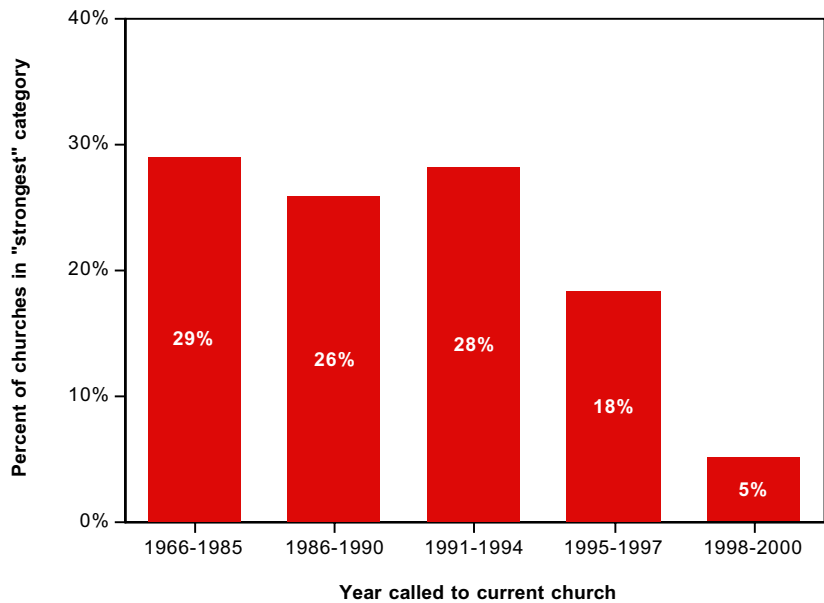
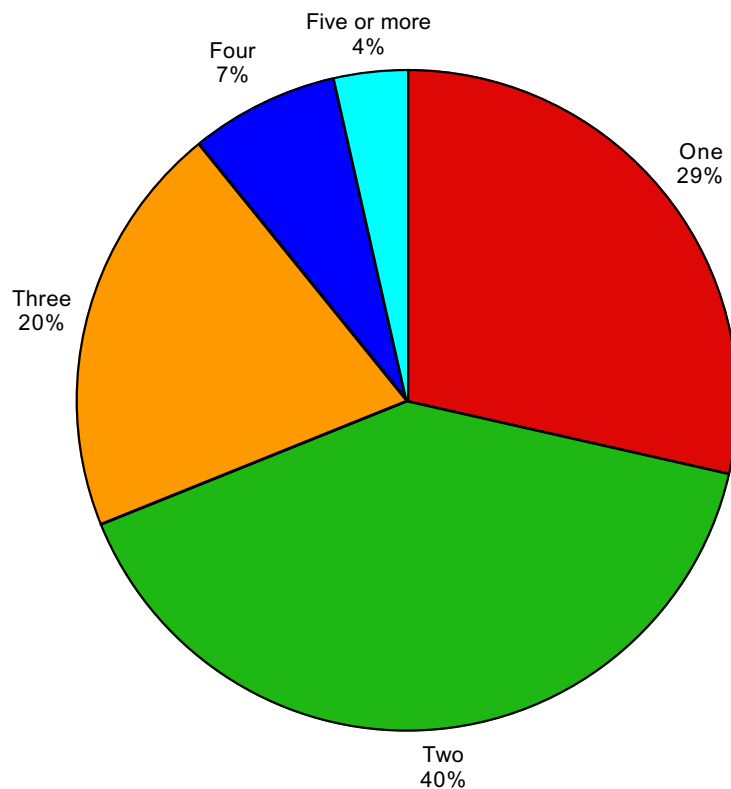
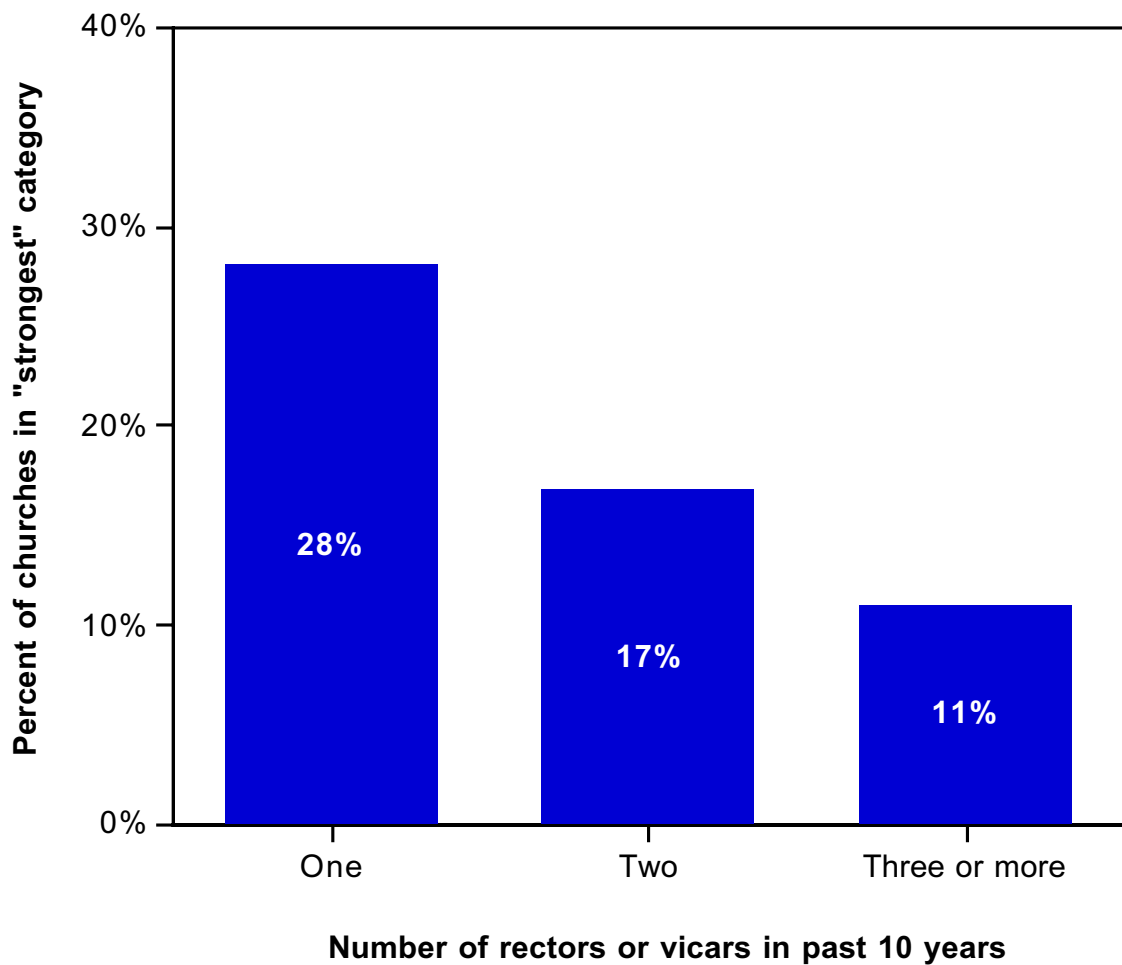


Figure 8.06
Number of Rectors or Vicars in Past 10 Years



Given the results in Figure 8.05 between ministerial tenure and church strength, it was not surprising to find that ministerial turnover was also related to strength. Figure 8.07 indicates that churches with only one rector or vicar during the past ten years were much more likely to be in the “strongest” category on our index of church strength than churches with more than one.

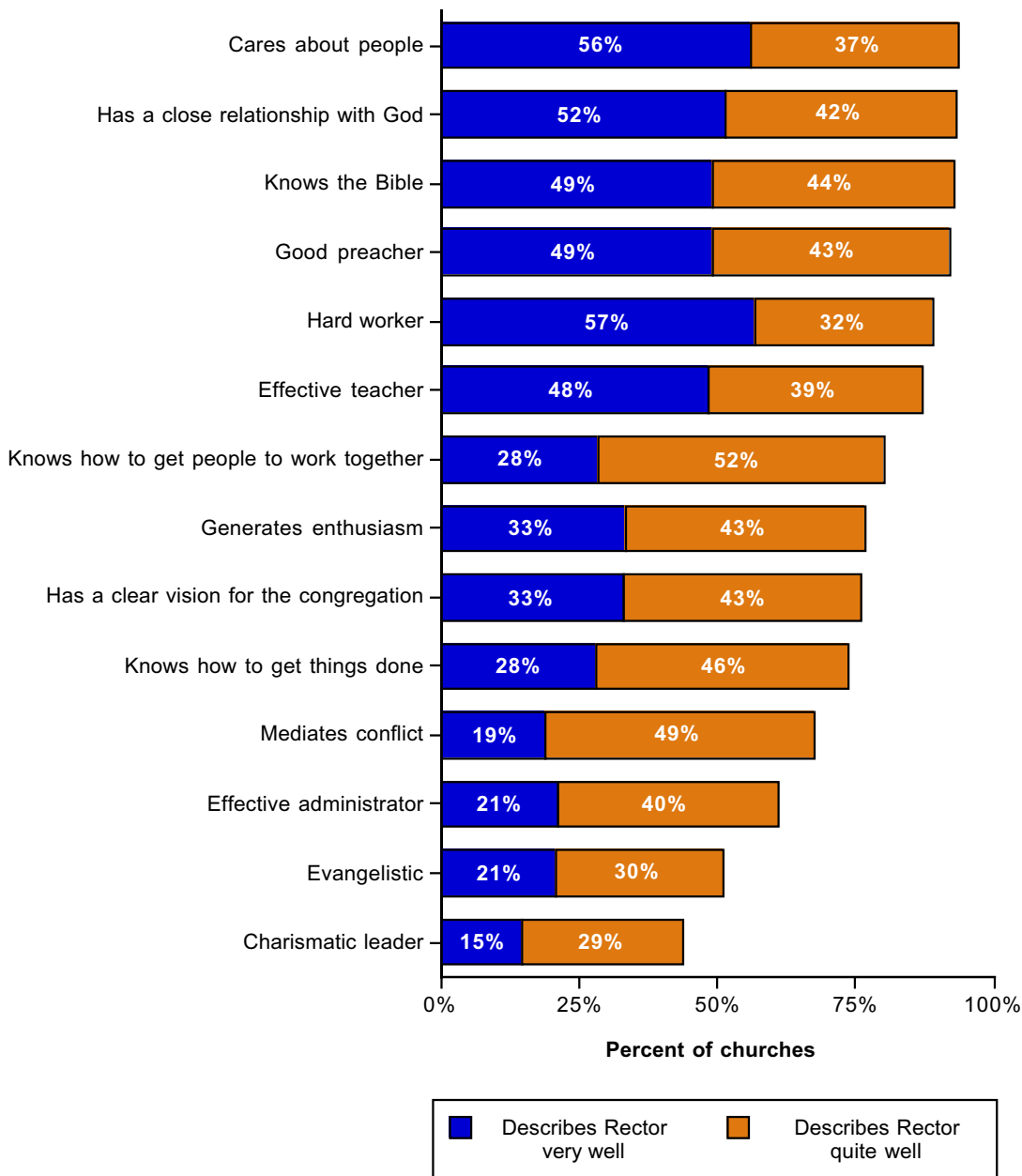
Figure 8.07
Ministerial Turnover and Church Strength



Exercising Leadership

Up to this point the data on parish priests has been quite objective: age, gender, tenure and turnover. Now we turn to much more subjective information. The FACT survey asked the person filling out the questionnaire to indicate how well most church members would “rate” their rector or vicar in a number of areas. All of the qualities could be construed as “good” aspects of parish leadership and over half of the respondents indicated the quality described their rector or vicar “very well” or “quite well,” except for being a “charismatic leader.” Episcopal parish clergy care about people, are close to God, know the Bible, rate their preaching highly, work hard and teach well. They are much less likely to be charismatic leaders, evangelistic or particularly good administrators.

Figure 8.08
How Members View Rector or Vicar (According to Respondent)



All of the characteristics listed in Figure 8.08 tended to encourage congregational strength and almost all were associated with growth in average worship attendance. Some characteristics of pastoral leadership were more strongly correlated with church strength than others, however. These factors included: “knows how to get people to work together,” “generates enthusiasm,” “has a clear vision for the congregation,” “knows how to get things done,” and “charismatic leader.” The things that Episcopal church leaders do best are *not* the things that are most associated with church strength. Episcopal clergy tend to provide the basics of pastoral leadership, rather than the qualities that help a church become very strong.

Figures 8.09 and 8.10 show the strong relationship between church strength and two areas of leadership: knowing how to get people to work together and having a clear vision for the congregation. It helps to know where you are going and you can’t get there without the congregation working together on common purposes, as a community.

Figure 8.09
Leadership, Cooperation and Church Weakness

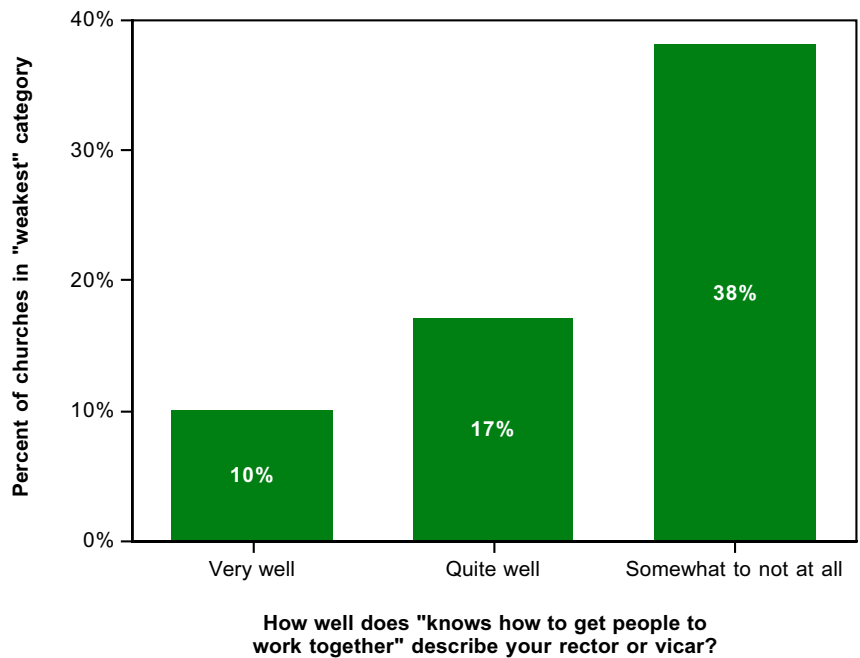
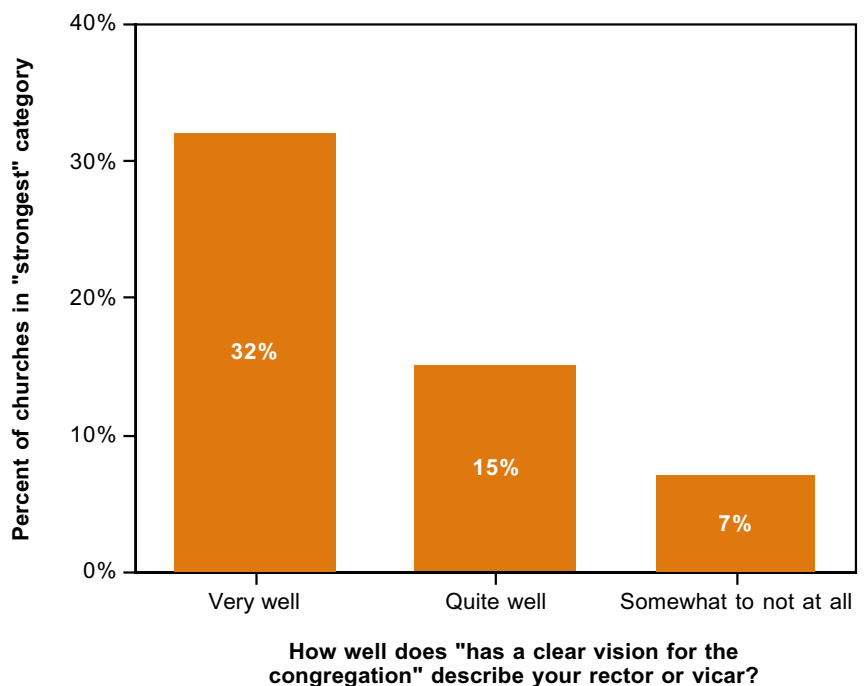


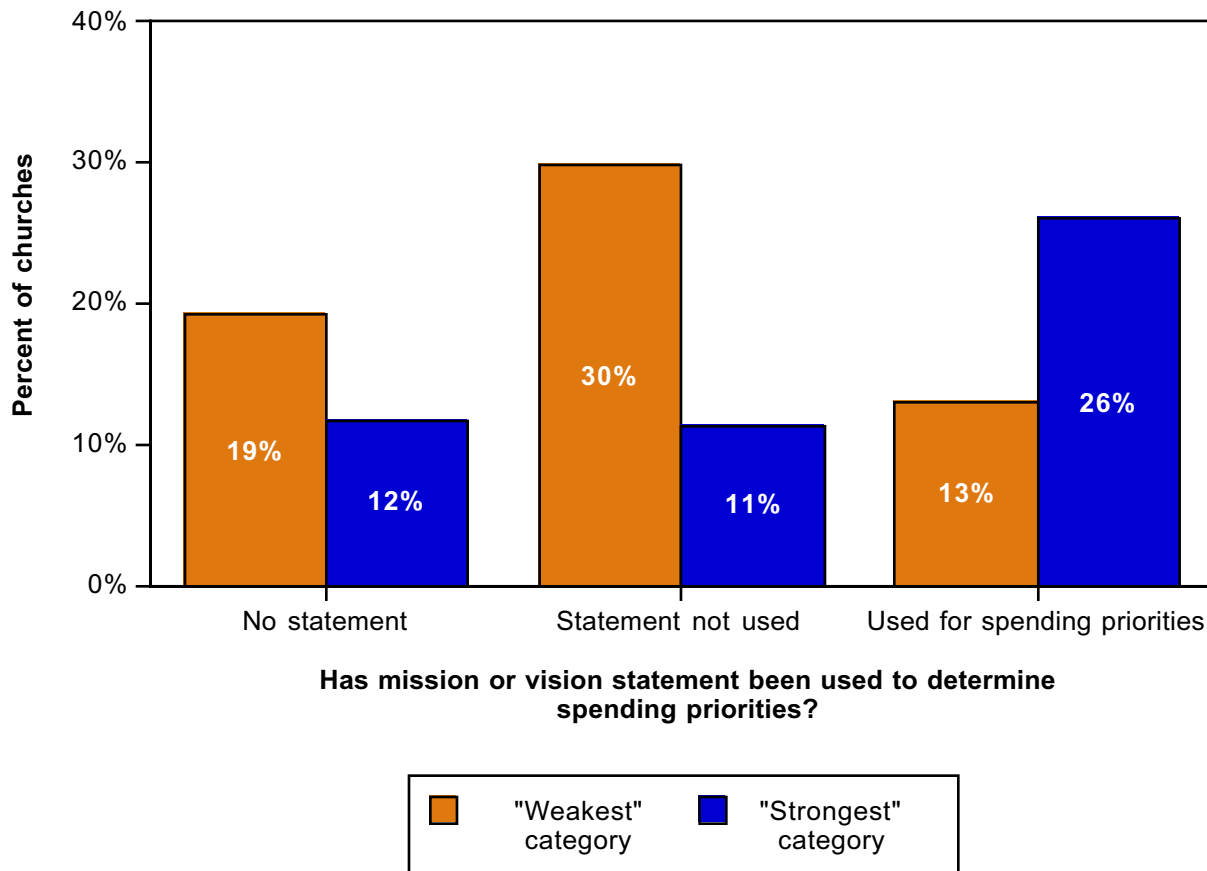
Figure 8.10
Leadership, Vision and Church Strength



The vast majority of Episcopal congregations (83%) have articulated their purpose and direction in the form of a mission or vision statement. Does having such a statement matter? As is true with all organizations, it all depends on whether the statement is used to reinforce a congregation's identity and to focus efforts on joint purposes or if it resides on a shelf as evidence of a completed bureaucratic task.

The FACT survey asked if most members know the statement and whether the statement is publicly displayed, has been used to determine spending priorities, and has been used to resolve disputes. The strongest relationships between how churches use their mission or vision statement and church strength were for members knowing the statement and whether the statement has been used to determine spending priorities. Figure 8.11 shows that churches that have a mission or vision statement and use it to determine spending priorities tend to be the strongest congregations. Conversely, those that have a mission or vision statement and don't use it tend to be weaker. They are weaker, on average, than churches that have no mission or vision statement at all. As is the case with all organizations, the weakest ones are those that focus more on appearances than on the substance of their purpose.

Figure 8.11
Use of Mission/Vision Statement and Church Strength



Finding Lay Leaders

Churches have many leaders and most are not clergy. The majority of Episcopal congregations have some difficulty recruiting enough people to serve in volunteer leadership roles. For the most part, however, churches eventually find people to serve. Only 9% say that they simply can't find enough volunteer leaders. Part of the issue is size. Another is history. Churches with the biggest problem finding enough lay leaders are numerically small congregations with larger facilities. All churches have certain positions that must be filled and small congregations are sometimes stretched in their ability to "cover the bases." Most problematic are churches that were once large and have retained an unwieldy committee structure. They have too many positions to fill.

Churches that have no problem recruiting volunteer leaders are much more likely to be strong than churches that have problems in this area. In general, churches that are strong and growing are always in need of more leaders, so it might be thought that doing so would be a struggle. The fact of the matter is that people tend to volunteer to help in areas that they find exciting and central to their personal interests and calling. Stronger churches have a greater sense of purpose and direction. People want to contribute to what they are doing.

Figure 8.12
Finding Lay Leaders

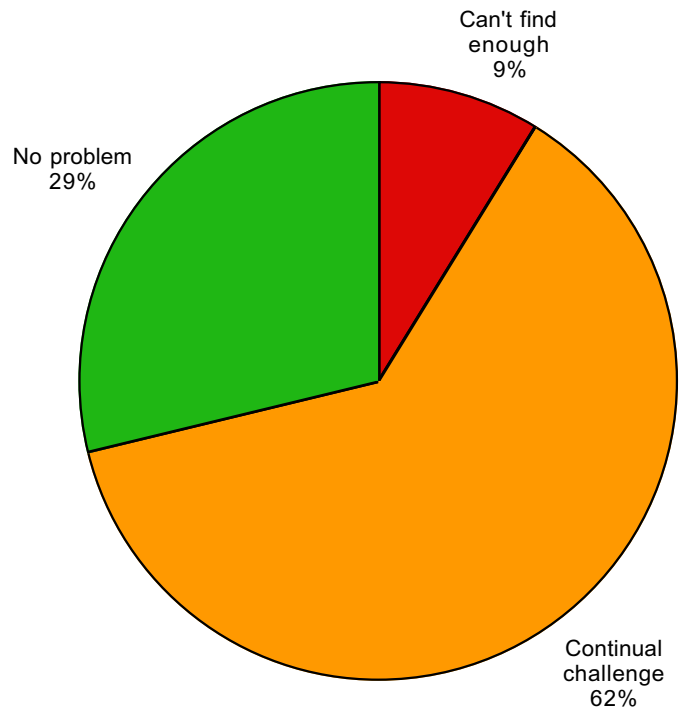
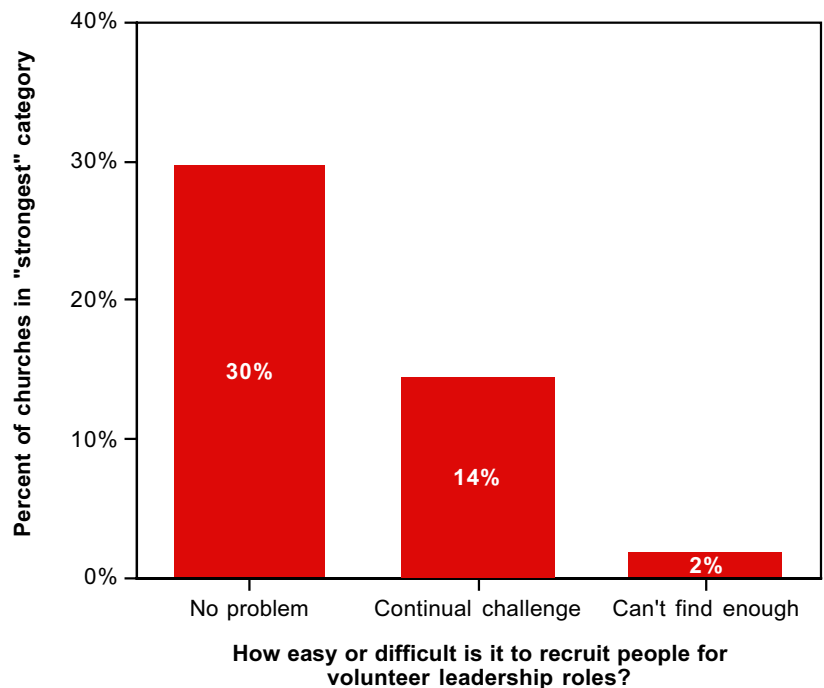


Figure 8.13
Volunteer Leadership Recruitment and Church Strength



Section 9:

Finances and Budget

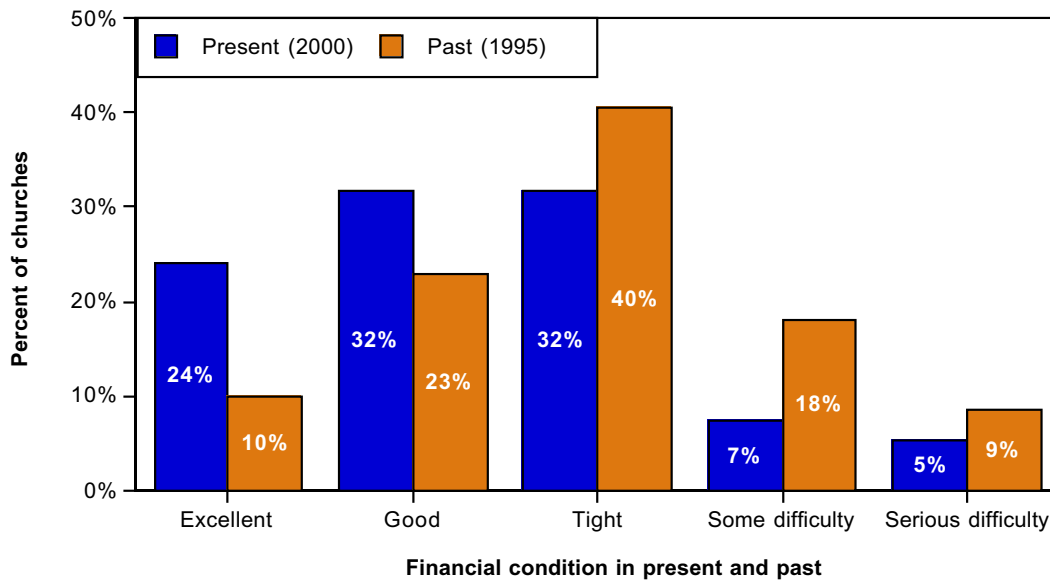


Churches are communities that worship. But they also are organizations with budgets that require money to operate. In this section two aspects of church finances are considered: the financial condition of Episcopal congregations and how they spend their money.

Financial Health

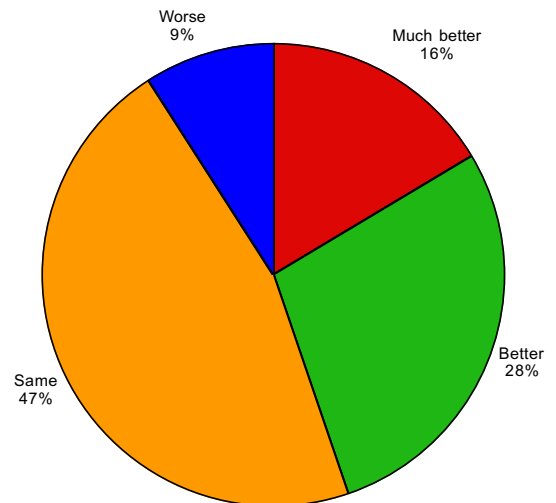
Most Episcopal congregations (56%) report that they are in *good* or *excellent* financial condition. Many others (32%) report that their financial health is “tight, but we manage.” Very few say that they are in either some or serious difficulty. Furthermore, other mainline and conservative Protestant congregations report that they are in *even better* financial condition than Episcopal churches: 62% of mainline and 70% of conservative churches report that they are in good or excellent financial condition.

Figure 9.1
Financial Condition of Episcopal Congregations



The financial condition of Episcopal congregations apparently is very good and Figure 9.1 shows it also improved greatly during the past five years. The percentage of Episcopal churches in good or excellent financial condition increased by 23 percentage points from 1995 to 2000--an even greater gain than among other mainline and conservative Protestant churches (which recorded respective increases of 21 and 15 percentage points). Figure 9.2 shows that 16% of Episcopal congregations increased by at least two categories (from tight to excellent, for example) and another 28% increased by one category.

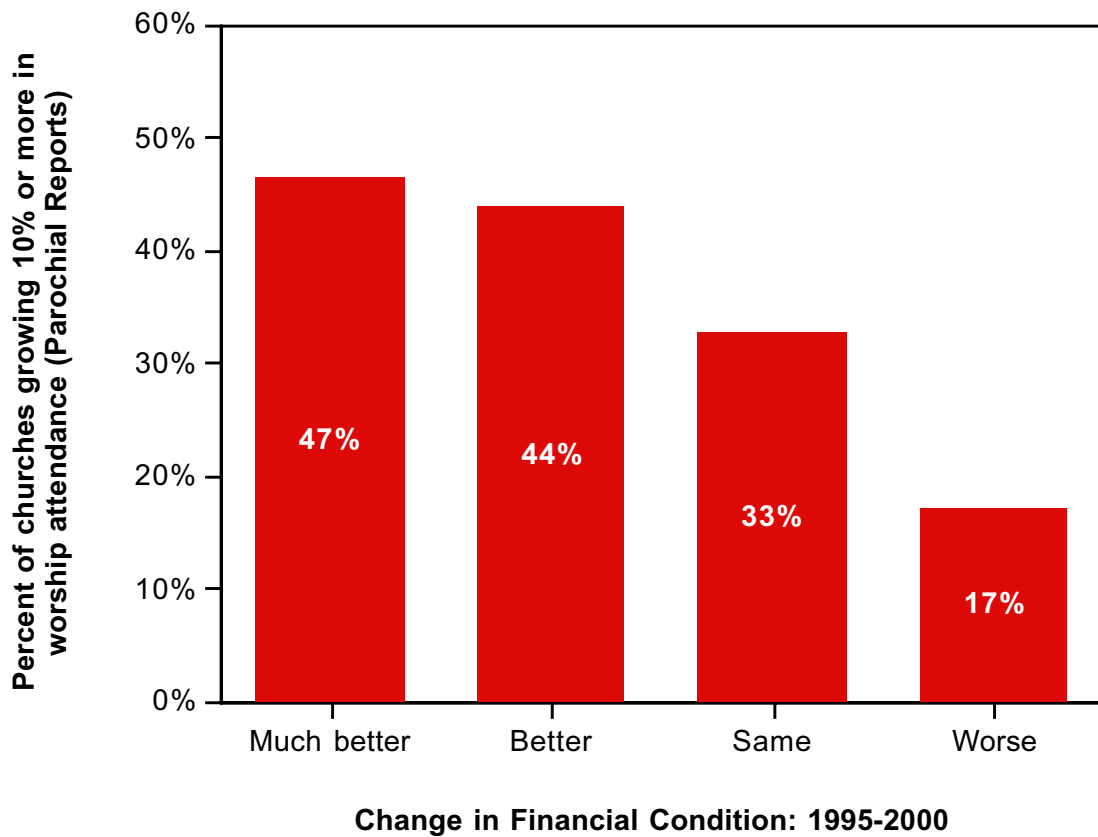
Figure 9.2
Change in Financial Condition



As with self-reports of growth in section 7, these data on increases in financial health are probably somewhat exaggerated. The economy was in very good shape during this period, of course, but such a large-scale change in the financial fortunes of American congregations seems unlikely.

Exaggerated or not, positive change in financial health is associated with growth among Episcopal congregations. Figure 9.3 shows that churches that report doing better financially are also more likely to have experienced growth in average worship attendance (using Parochial Report data). So even if not all of the churches reporting financial improvement are doing better, many are, and one major reason for improvement is that they have more people attending and giving.

Figure 9.3
Change in Finances and Growth



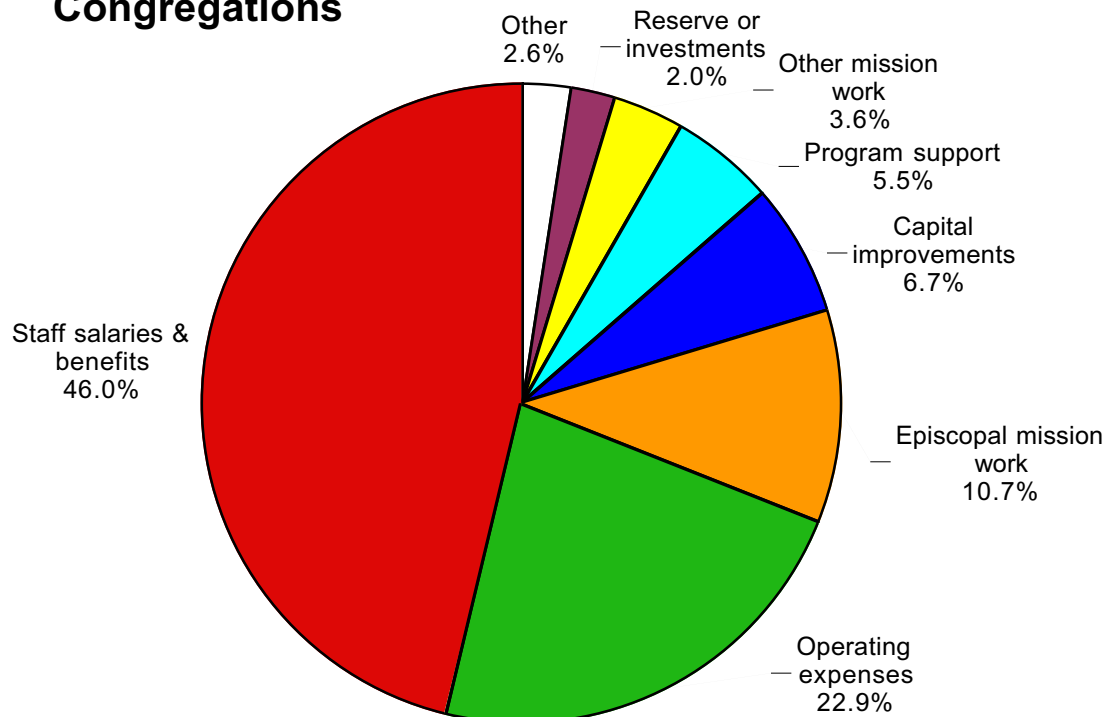
How We Spend Our Money

Financial condition is an indicator of health. Growing churches with a strong sense of purpose tend to be churches in good financial shape. A less obvious issue related to the finances of Episcopal congregations is how they spend their money. All churches were asked what percentage of their total expenses were used in the areas that can be seen in Figure 9.4. The largest expense category was staff salaries and benefits. The average Episcopal church spends 46% of its annual budget in this one area. Operating expenses were the next largest budget item, one that includes maintenance of building and grounds, utilities, mortgage, insurance and routine equipment costs. The average church spends nearly 23% of its budget in this area. Another 6.7% is spent by the average church on capital improvements, such as new buildings and renovations of existing facilities. Many churches also add to their endowment or financial reserves each year.

Overall, the average Episcopal church spends 77.6% of its budget on staff salaries, buildings, and investments. That leaves only 22.4% for program support and materials (for church school, evangelism, fellowship, etc.), missions (Episcopal and other local and national missions) and all other expenses (school, day care, other).

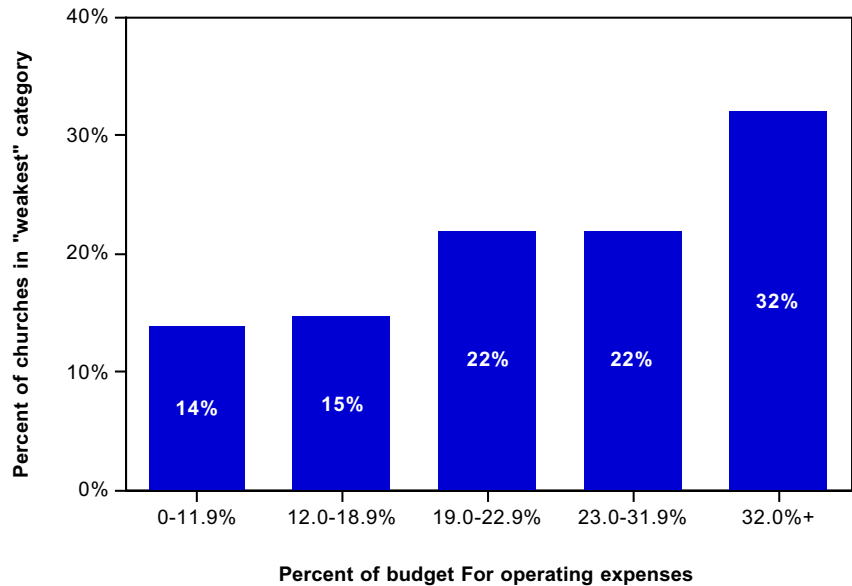
Where a church spends its money is related to strength. The areas associated with congregational *weakness* include staff salaries, operating expenses, and reserves or investments. That is, the greater the proportion of its budget is for these areas, the weaker it tends to be. All of the other areas of expenditure are related to strength (or lack of weakness).

Figure 9.4
Average Expenditures for Episcopal Congregations



The strongest correlate of weakness was the percent of budget spent for operating expenses. As shown in Figure 9.5, churches that spend a larger proportion of their annual budget on operating expenses are much more likely to fall into the “weakest” category on the strong church index than churches that spend less. Particularly likely to be very weak are churches that spend 32% or more of their budgets in this category.

Figure 9.5
Operating Expenses and Church Weakness



The reverse of the pattern in Figure 9.5 is seen in Figure 9.6. Churches that spend a larger proportion of their budget on program expenses (other than staff salaries) are much less likely to be in the weakest category.

As with most things related to congregational strength, causation does not flow in only one direction. Churches that are weak financially are forced to use most of their income to

support their rector and find that they must cut back in other areas. Conversely, churches that are doing well financially can afford to do more than pay a rector and heat the church on Sunday morning. Nevertheless, churches sometimes forget that staff does not equal program or ministry. Having a healthy church requires doing things that healthy churches do, rather than just simply keeping the doors open for services each week.

Figure 9.6
Program Expenses and Church Weakness

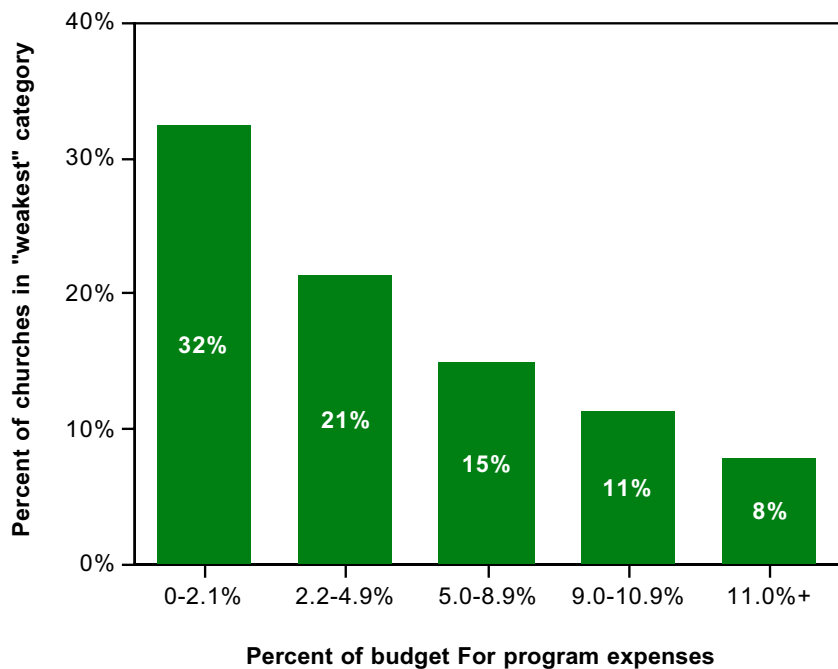


Figure 9.7 shows the relationship between financial strength and percent of budget spent on staff salaries. Clearly, churches that are in worse financial condition are much more likely to spend a large proportion of their budget on staff salaries. Here we see that 34% of Episcopal churches reporting that their financial condition is difficult (either in some or serious difficulty) spend 60% or more of their income on staff salaries, as compared to only 10% of churches that are in excellent financial shape. Churches that are suffering financially are forced to spend a larger proportion of their budget on salaries and often have little left to spend in other areas.

For the most part, larger churches have greater resources. Small congregations have a very difficult time paying a full time minister and keeping up with the expenses of their building. Even those that rely on part-time or volunteer staff must pay for utilities, insurance, and other costs that all property-owners incur. The proportion of resources directed at operating expenses tends to be very high in small congregations and much lower in large congregations. Figure 9.8 shows that 37% of very small churches spend 32% or more of their budgets on operating expenses, as compared to only 4% of large churches.

Figure 9.7
Financial Health and Staff Salaries

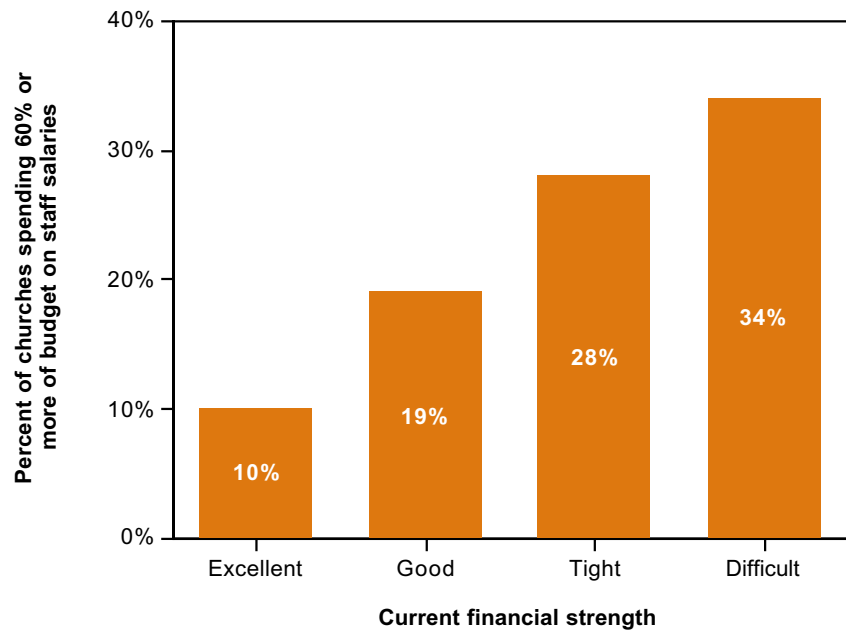
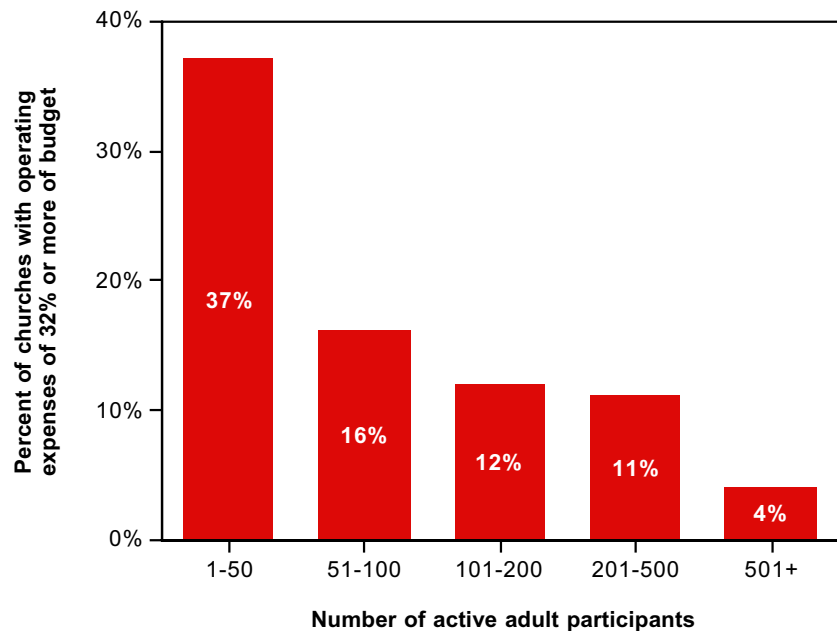
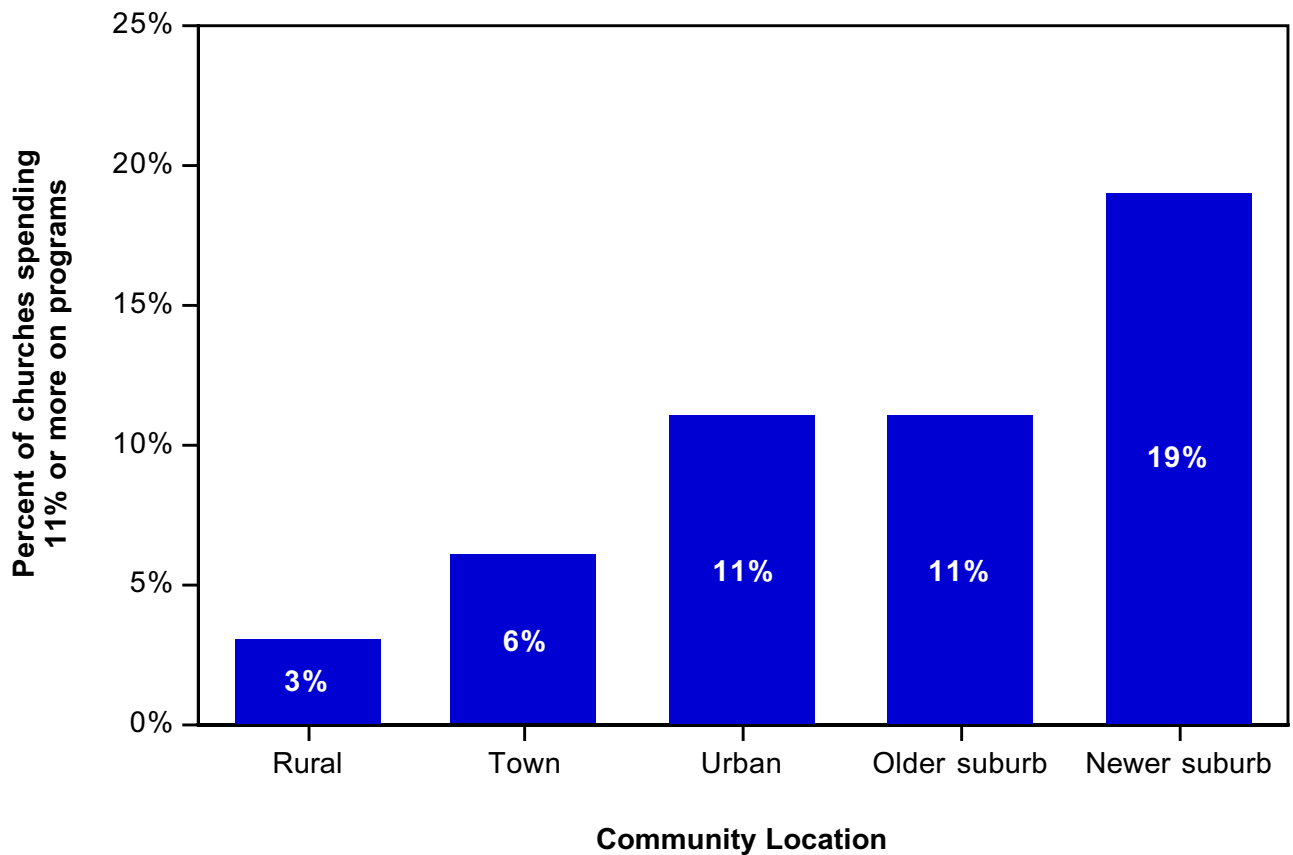


Figure 9.8
Active Adults and High Operating Expenses



Financial needs also vary by congregational setting. Figure 9.9 shows that churches in newer suburbs are disproportionately likely to spend a large proportion of their income on programs (not including staff salaries). Churches tend to be larger in suburbs and congregations are more diverse in terms of the age of members, so to a certain extent suburban churches have both greater resources and greater need for an extensive range of programs. Still, a small budget for programs means that churches are doing only the basics, paying for staff and paying for utilities. Healthy churches do much more.

Figure 9.9
Rural/Urban Location and High Program Expenses



Conclusions



The Episcopal Church is unique among mainline Protestant denominations in that it has a clear identity which is celebrated by almost all of its churches and a large number of healthy, growing congregations. Indeed, the growth/decline profile of the Episcopal Church is much more similar to larger evangelical denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, than it is to the rest of the Protestant mainline. Despite these positive features, certain problems or “serious realities” are also apparent in the data contained in this report. Specifically, the Episcopal Church has many small, weak congregations that are attended and supported by an aging (and largely female) membership. These churches remain financially viable due to the generosity and commitment of these members and the fact that Episcopalians tend to be much more affluent, on average, than most Americans. The aging of the Episcopal Church and the weakening of smaller congregations in small towns and older urban neighborhoods can only be expected to worsen, given the demographics of the population, the minimal evangelism efforts of most Episcopal congregations, and the small numbers of new churches being started in expanding suburban areas.

The Episcopal Church has an advantage in that it could respond to its serious realities by expanding on its strong points, rather than trying to somehow turn weaknesses into strengths. Episcopal churches are known for their liturgy and for the fact that the Episcopal Church is a progressive denomination, populated (for the most part) by educated, open-minded people. The strongest Episcopal congregations do liturgy well and are able to project a moral presence in the community without resorting to a dogmatic theology. Episcopal congregations are attractive to unchurched and formerly churched adults who want to experience the sacred and grow in their faith in a context devoid of condemnation. Multiple worship services in most Episcopal churches that allow for flexibility of attendance are also positive features. Given these facts, it is somewhat amazing that most Episcopal congregations don’t engage in regular efforts to tell newcomers to the community that the church is there and they are welcome.

Although all or nearly all Episcopal churches emphasize worship, a minority (albeit the strongest churches among the minority) help members grow in their faith by a regular emphasis on spiritual practices (prayer, meditation, etc.) and ongoing, serious adult educational opportunities such as theological study groups. Transforming worship creates interest in these practices and there is no reason why Episcopal churches cannot do more to facilitate the formation of communities with the capacity to change lives.

The challenge facing the churches is to find a balance between doing things in new ways and retaining the distinctive gifts of the Anglican communion. Our creeds, liturgy and tradition make us who we are, but openness to change and the movement of the Spirit are required if we are to remain alive and thus active participants in God’s Realm.

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