

VISIONS + DECISIONS

## DecisionsPoll

Survey results for First Church  
Churchville, US

# Getting to know your congregation

Simply by looking around you during worship, you could survey your congregation. You might notice that members are young and have lots of children, or that they are older and few have children with them. Through long association with the congregation, you may also remember something about each of them: Where they work, what they believe, how they feel about your church.

Quite often, this is all you ever need to know about your congregation. But not always. There are times when a church needs to learn much, much more about itself. For example, when a church is engaged in planning for the future. Then the church is redefining itself. Or when the congregation finds itself in crisis. Then it is rebuilding.

In both instances, a good congregational survey may be part of the process:

- **Redefine.** All is going reasonably well, but you need to take the measure of the congregation. Trying to envision where the church should be in the future, you've turned to a congregational survey as a tool in a process to understand where your congregation is now, and how you may need to redefine yourself as you move through this new century.

- **Rebuild.** Your congregation is at a critical juncture. Because of radical transition around your church, conflict that lingers on, struggles over leadership, or a loss of organizational vigor, your church is now on shaky ground. To rebuild, you've turned to a congregational survey as a way to learn impartially about members and what they're thinking.

Doing a survey is an excellent way to improve the ministry of your church. A congregational survey is an important tool. It collects needed data about members, and assesses church programs and ministry. The data is reliable, and unbiased by our personal consideration.

As a tool, it has four valuable facets:

- **First,** the congregational survey is comprehensive. It is wide-ranging. You may know generally who belongs to your church, what they're like and how they think. But like everyone, your knowledge is limited by your awareness. You simply don't know everyone or everything well enough.

- **Second,** the results of the survey are

“qualitative.” They're actual numbers, not our general sense of how things stack up. The survey reveals exactly how many people live near the church, exactly how many like traditional choral music, and exactly how often people come to worship.

- **Third,** the survey is confidential. People can put down what they believe without fear of being judged. They are not silenced by the forceful opinions of others.

- **Fourth,** the survey is impartial. What we know about our church, its programs, and people is at least subtly affected by our feelings. It's our church, after all, and it's hard to be objective. Survey results are unswayed by personal convictions.

This survey, whose data appears on the following pages, yields a tremendous amount of information about your congregation. This information will be helpful to the church in many different ways and for many years to come. Whether you are at a critical time in your life as a church, or trying to get a solid feel for which way to go in the future, this survey should provide most of what you need to know.

Having solid, dependable information about your congregation is well worth the effort. A survey is hard work. But it is also exciting. Your congregation is about to embark on a new course, whether it is about to rebuild or looking to redefine. You may find that -- regardless of the actual answers -- the process itself will be a key energizing event in the life of your congregation.



How does your congregation compare with other congregations? That's tough to say. In reality, there is no such thing as a typical congregation. Congregations vary because of their theological beliefs, the part of the country they are located in, and by the denomination of which they are part. Even churches of the same denomination in the same place with the same theological beliefs are often unlike. The important thing here is not to use this survey to see how your congregation “stacks up” against other congregations, but to use it to understand what your congregation is like. However, the following report does include some comparisons with national data. Most of that data is from the Gallup Survey, the General Social Survey and the U.S. Congregational Life Survey.

# Highlights from your survey

These are 10 key points about your congregation that the DecisionsPoll revealed.

- People attend worship more than people do nationally. About 78% take part in your services at least two or three times a month.
- The two most important things that people appreciate about your congregation is: Being part of worship and Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist or the Lord's Supper.
- The two types of music most preferred by people in your congregation are: Traditional and Contemporary.
- The best thing that people experience during worship is A sense of God's presence. The worst thing is Distractions.
- In your congregation, about 85% of people say they engage in devotional activities such as private Bible reading and prayer as much as once a week.
- About 75% of people in your congregation feel that it is essential or very important that Christians engage in regular prayer.
- About 30% people in your congregation hold to the strictest interpretations of the Bible. That makes the congregation less strict than most congregations.
- The 55% of people in your congregation were born before 1940. That makes the congregation older than most congregations.
- About 55% of people say their household has one or more children in it.
- About 45% of people say that they take 10 minutes or less to get to your congregation, a figure that is about the same when compared with other congregations.

# Relationship to your congregation

The first section of the survey asked questions about people's participation in your congregation: Whether they are members, how often they attend, how much they give, and how strongly they feel part of the congregation.

## I. What is your involvement in this congregation?

1. What is your relationship to this congregation? This question tells whether the people who answered the survey are visitors, regulars but non-members or full members. Usually only a small percentage of attenders in a congregation are not members.

	Pct.
I am a member .....	85%
I attend here, but I am not a member .....	10%
I am here to visit this congregation .....	5%

2. How often do you attend services at this church? This question tells you the frequency of attendance at worship services. Based on other surveys, the average for most churches is to have about 45% of their members attend two or more times a month, but this figure varies widely according to denominational background.

	Pct.
Once a week or more .....	43%
Two or three times a month .....	35%
Once a month or less .....	22%

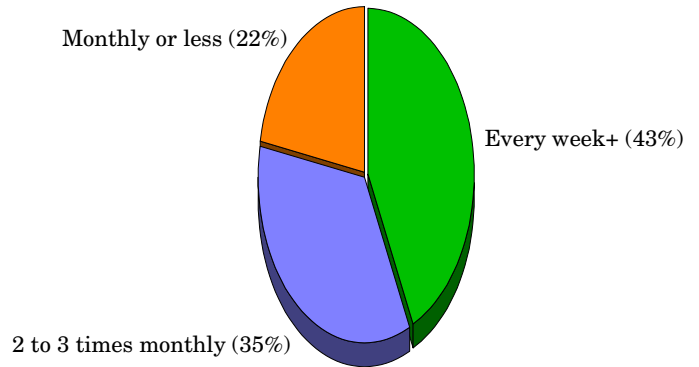
3. About how much money do you give to this church per month? This question measures the level of regular and special giving to the church as reported by the person filling out the survey. You may want to compare these figures with the amount of income per household members reported. Most givers typically contribute in the middle range of contributions, with some giving large amounts and some giving little or none.

	Pct.
None .....	8%
Less than \$10 .....	12%
\$10 to \$40 .....	22%
\$41 to \$80 .....	24%
\$81 to \$120 .....	19%
\$121 to \$200 .....	10%
\$201 or more .....	5%

4. What is your sense of belonging to this congregation? Not everybody in your congregation feels strongly attached to it. This question measures the degree to which people feel part of your congregation as reported by people who answered the survey. Overall, people generally say respond on the positive side of this

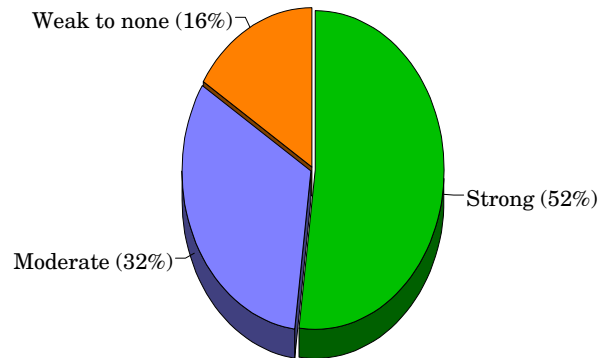
## How often people attend

Frequency of worship attendance



## Attachment to the congregation

How strong is the sense of belonging



question, usually claiming strong attachments. If they had no sense of belonging to your congregation, they wouldn't be there to answer the survey, after all.

	Pct.
I have a strong sense of belonging .....	52%
I have a moderate sense of belonging .....	32%
I have a weak-to-no sense of belonging .....	16%

# Appreciation of your congregation

The second section of the survey asked questions about what people like or don't like about your congregation. The next section will explore appreciation for, as well as preferences for, how your worship service is conducted.

## II. What do you appreciate about your congregation?

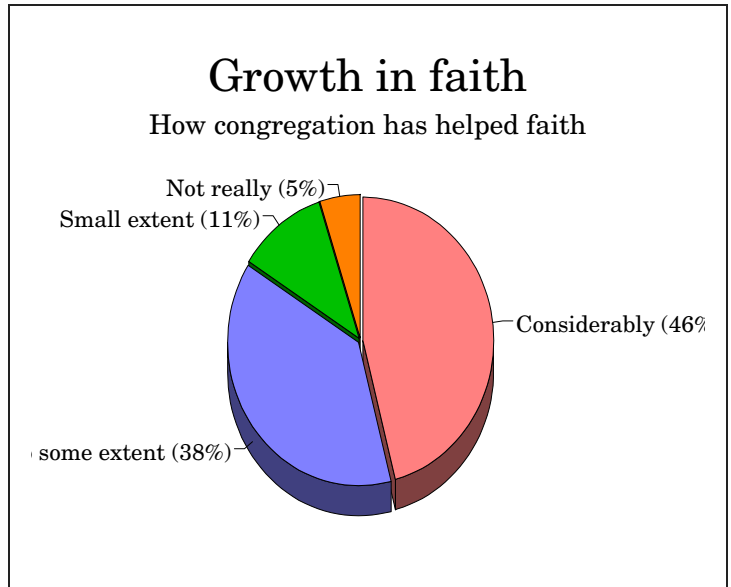
5. What do you appreciate most about worship in your congregation? People were asked to check no more than four boxes of items they felt the most strongly about -- that's why the percentages for each item total more than 100%. This question provides an idea of what people most like about your congregation out of a list of items.

	Pct.
Being with people I feel close to .....	42%
Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist or the Lord's Supper .....	85%
Being with people who share my outlook .....	28%
Hearing sermons, preaching or homilies .....	80%
Being part of worship .....	88%
Wider community care or social justice emphasis ...	12%
Listening to music .....	32%
Being with people I can openly share my problems with .....	26%

6. What do you appreciate most about the programs of your congregation? Again, people were asked to check no more than four boxes of items they felt the most strongly about -- that's why here, too, the percentages for each item total more than 100%.

	Pct.
Taking part in ministries that help people in need .....	23%
Congregational worship .....	85%
Youth programs and activities .....	22%
Christian education classes or other programs for children .....	65%
Christian education classes or other programs for adults .....	53%
Bible study, prayer groups, other discussion groups .....	44%
Openness to social diversity .....	22%
Group events, activities and fellowship times .....	28%

7. Has your congregation contributed to your growth in faith over the past 12 months? This question tells how much your congregation contributes to the spiritual and religious growth of its participants. Typically, most attenders will say that the



congregation has contributed to their spiritual growth. Of course, if the congregation hadn't, they probably wouldn't have stuck around long enough to say that it hadn't on this survey.

	Pct.
Yes, considerably .....	46%
Yes, to some extent .....	38%
Only to a small extent .....	11%
No, not really .....	5%

8. Within the past five years have you felt that your congregation has experienced disagreements in the following areas? This question is complicated. It asks people whether conflict has occurred recently in your congregation over a selected list of issues. The question also ask people to rate how bad the conflict was if it occurred. Overall, few people nationally usually report conflict in their congregations. Of course, if your congregation has had conflict recently, many people are going to say that it has happened in your congregation.

	Pct. No	Pct. Yes, serious	Pct. Yes, not serious
Theology .....	90%	0%	10%
Money/finances/ budget/endowment .....	66%	15%	19%
How worship is conducted .....	75%	20%	5%
Program and mission priorities ...	90%	0%	10%
Decision making process .....	80%	10%	10%
Pastor's leadership style .....	60%	10%	30%
Pastor's personal behavior .....	98%	0%	2%
Member's personal behavior .....	95%	0%	5%

# What people want in their worship

The third section of the survey asked several questions about worship. These questions explore how worship is conducted and what music should be played or sung.

### III. What are your worship preferences?

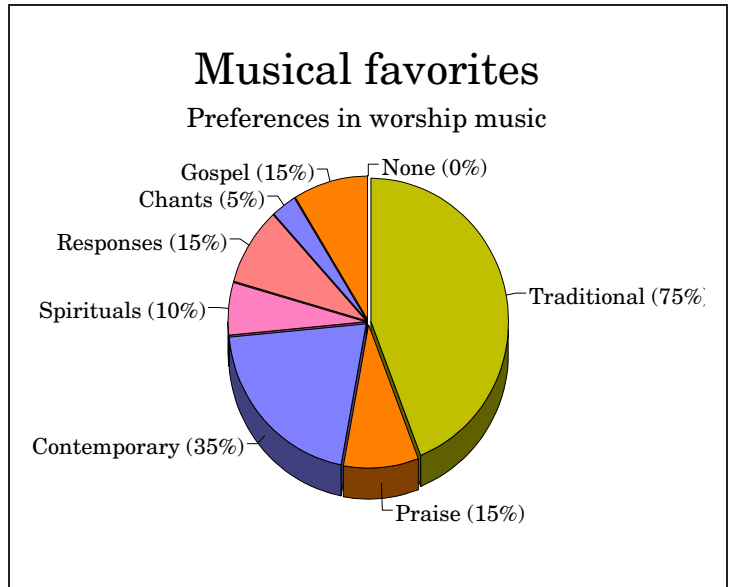
9. What type of preaching do you like to have included in your worship experience in your congregation? People were asked to check no more than four boxes of items they felt the most strongly about -- that's why the percentages for each item total more than 100%. This question focuses on the desired content of preaching in worship services.

	Pct.
Preaching based upon scripture .....	85%
Preaching that includes life experiences .....	66%
Preaching that deals with social issues .....	32%
Preaching that emphasizes creeds and tradition .....	12%
Preaching that is intellectually challenging .....	76%
Preaching that speaks to my emotions .....	12%
Preaching that helps me live my life .....	43%
Preaching that uses literary references .....	12%

10. What do you like to have included in your worship experiences in your congregation? People were asked to check no more than four boxes of items they felt the most strongly about -- that's why the percentages for each item total more than 100%. This question focuses on what kinds of activities people felt should occur in the worship.

	Pct.
Having lay leadership .....	75%
Having a time for greeting and welcoming .....	75%
Having a time for personal sharing of joys and concerns .....	66%
Having dance, drama, or movement .....	25%
Having music .....	95%
Having a time for passing the peace .....	65%
Having candles and/or incense .....	12%
Having announcements about personal needs .....	47%
Having prayers for persons in need .....	90%

11. Which of the following kinds of music do you prefer for congregational singing in your congregation? People were asked to check no more than three boxes of items they felt the most strongly about -- that's why the percentages for each item total more than 100%. This question asks about people's preference in worship music. The response you get may be mixed and not clear cut between one type of music and other. In general, younger attenders prefer newer forms of church music, while



older attenders prefer traditional forms. Because church members tend to be older, traditional hymns are usually the most popular form of church music.

	Pct.
Traditional hymns .....	75%
Praise music .....	15%
Contemporary hymns .....	35%
Spirituals .....	10%
Sung responses .....	15%
Contemporary chants (e.g. Taize or Iona) .....	5%
Gospel music .....	15%
No singing .....	0%

12. Which of the following kinds of other music do you prefer in congregational worship? People were asked to check no more than four boxes of items they felt the most strongly about -- that's why the percentages for each item total more than 100%. This question addresses what kinds of instruments ought to be used in worship. The response may be mixed and not clear cut.

	Pct.
Piano or organ .....	85%
Choir with classical or traditional music .....	92%
Choir with contemporary music .....	45%
Guitar .....	23%
Drums or other percussion .....	20%
Other instrumental music .....	32%
No music .....	22%

13. How often do you have the following positive experiences in worship in your congregation? This question is the first of two

parts, this part designed to find what people feel in worship, focusing on the positive. A high proportion of people usually report that they experience God's presence and inspiration.

	Pct. Always	Pct. Usually	Pct. Seldom to never
<b>A sense of God's presence</b> .....	65%	20%	15%
<b>Inspiration</b> .....	40%	15%	45%
<b>Intellectual challenge</b> .....	12%	30%	58%
<b>Awe or mystery</b> .....	12%	20%	68%
<b>Joy</b> .....	35%	10%	55%

14. How often do you have the following less than positive experiences in worship in your congregation? This question is the second of two parts, this part designed to find what people feel in worship, focusing on the negative. Typically, the percentage who report negative experiences is low, with boredom being the most pronounced. However, if people did not like the worship service, they probably would stop attending, and would not have answered this survey.

	Pct. Always	Pct. Usually	Pct. Seldom to never
<b>Boredom</b> .....	0%	15%	85%
<b>Frustration</b> .....	0%	12%	88%
<b>Disagreement w/worship leader</b> ...	0%	10%	90%
<b>Distractions</b> .....	10%	15%	75%
<b>Anger</b> .....	0%	10%	90%
<b>Impatience</b> .....	0%	10%	90%



# How people practice their faith

The fourth section asked questions about how people practiced their faith. What were the groups they belonged to, how many hours did they spend volunteering for the congregation and how much time was spent on devotions and Bible reading?

## IV. What are your religious practices?

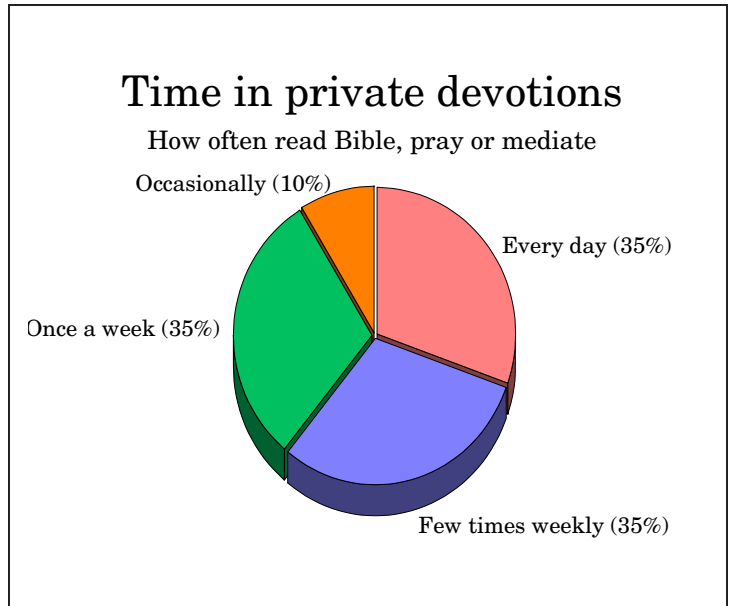
15. What groups of your congregation have you actively participated within the past year? The total for this question will exceed 100% because people were asked to check all the activities in which they take part. Typically, Bible study, prayer groups and men's and women's groups are the most common types of church activities outside of worship in a congregation.

	Pct.
A governing board or council .....	20%
A committee or task group .....	25%
A men's or women's group .....	40%
A choir/musical ensemble .....	20%
A prayer and/or a meditation group .....	15%
A support group and/or a 12-step program .....	15%
A Bible study group .....	55%
A discussion or study group other than Bible .....	15%
A sport or recreation group .....	30%
A community service sponsored by the church .....	50%

16. Within the past few months, how many hours per month on average have you given as a volunteer in your congregations programs of worship, education supportive ministries, and social service, etc? This question measures how active people are in your congregation. Are they involved in other activities in the church other than just attend worship or Bible study?

	Pct.
None .....	20%
1 to 4 hours .....	50%
5 to 8 hours .....	15%
9 to 12 hours .....	10%
13 hours or more .....	5%

17. How often do you spend time in individual devotional activities such as prayer, meditation, and reading the Bible every day or almost every day? This question addresses how much time people spend on personal religious activities other than attend worship, Christian education and Bible studies. Most attenders should report that they engage in such activities at least a few times a week. Very few generally say that they never engage in prayer, mediation or reading the Bible.



	Pct.
Every day or almost every day .....	35%
A few times a week .....	35%
Once a week .....	15%
Occasionally .....	10%
Never .....	10%

# What people believe in your congregation

The fifth section turns to the beliefs of people in the congregation. It asked what activities mattered most in congregations, what was the proper view of the Bible, and how people felt about other religions.

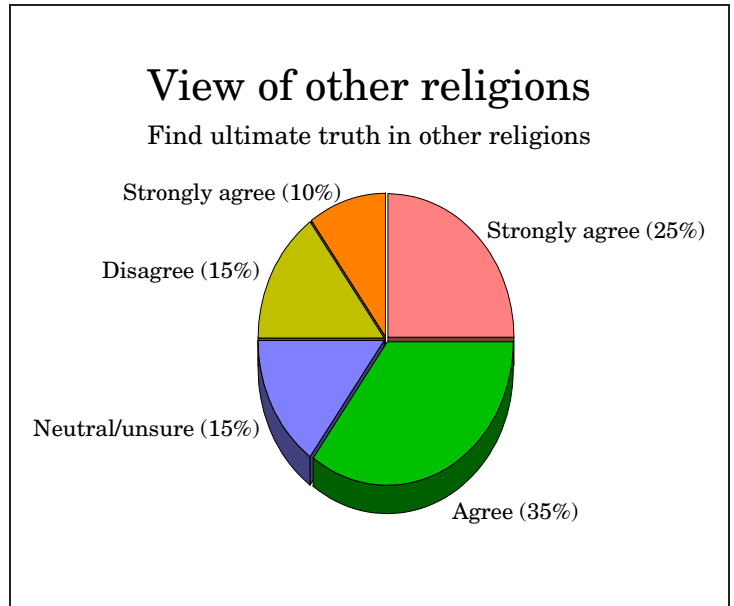
## V. What are your religious beliefs?

18. How important do you think it is for Christians to do each of the following? This question will help your congregation understand what people think are the activities people hold to be the best expression of their faith.

	Pct. Not at all important	Pct. Somewhat important	Pct. Very important	Pct. Esse ntial
Spend time in prayer . . . .	0%	25%	35%	40%
Spend time in Bible reading	10%	25%	30%	35%
Actively seek social and economic justice . . . .	50%	20%	10%	20%
Take care of the sick and needy . . . . .	10%	25%	40%	25%
Attend church regularly . .	20%	20%	40%	20%
Avoid sins and temptations	20%	10%	30%	40%
Seek to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ . . .	15%	15%	50%	20%
Practice Christian values at work, home, and school . .	20%	25%	25%	30%
Maintain loving and stable family relationships . . . . .	15%	30%	30%	25%
Be a good citizen . . . . .	30%	10%	10%	50%

19. Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible? This question is often used in surveys to measure how people feel about the Bible. The first response is often identified with people who feel the Bible inerrant. The last response is of course the least strong response, indicating people may not value the Bible even over other religious and philosophical texts. Nationally, people tend to choose the second statement more often than they other statement. About a fifth or so each choose the first and third statement. Very few people pick the last two statements.

	Pct.
The Bible is the word of God, . . . . . to be taken literally word for word.	30%
The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted . . . . . in the light of historical and cultural context.	30%
The Bible is not the word of God, . . . . . but contains God's word to us.	15%
The Bible is not the word of God, . . . . .	15%



but is a valuable book.  
The Bible is an ancient book . . . . . 10%  
with little value today.

20. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "All different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth?" This question is often used in surveys, too. It measures how accepting people are of religious pluralism. It does not necessarily mean that the person who answered the question in the affirmative values their own religion any less. It just means they believe people have the right to believe in other religions. Nationally, most people agree that other religions are equally good ways to find truth. However, a substantial portion also disagree with that statement. Response to this question will of course vary according to your theological background.

	Pct.
Strongly agree . . . . .	25%
Agree . . . . .	35%
Neutral or unsure . . . . .	35%
Disagree . . . . .	10%
Strongly disagree . . . . .	10%

# About people in your congregation

The final section of the survey asked questions about people's age, education, occupation, and so forth. This data should provide a clear picture of the type of persons demographically who attends your church.

21. In what year were you born? This question provides data on the age of people in your congregation. The average age of people in congregation tends to be older than in the general population. About three-fifths of attenders are over age 45, compared with about two-fifths of U.S. population (with children age 14 and under are excluded).

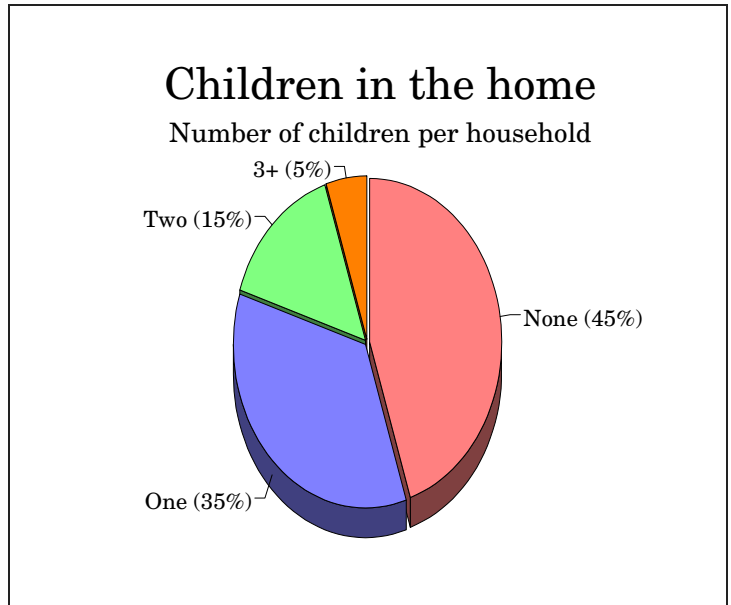
	Pct.	Age range
Before 1930	30%	Over age 75
1930 to 1939	25%	65 to 74
1940 to 1949	10%	55 to 64
1950 to 1959	10%	45 to 54
1960 to 1969	10%	35 to 44
1970 to 1979	0%	25 to 34
1980 to 1989	10%	15 to 24
1990 or later	5%	Under age 15

22. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? This questions tells the amount of schooling possessed by people in your congregation. Overall, people in congregations are usually better educated than the general population, according to national surveys. A third or more report having college degrees, compared with a quarter of the adult U.S. population.

	Pct.
Did not complete high school	25%
High school or equivalent (GED)	5%
Some college	15%
Technical/vocational certificate or diploma	5%
Associate degree	15%
Bachelor's degree	20%
Master's degree	0%
Professional school degree	10%
Doctoral degree	5%

23. What is your current employment status? This questions how many people in your congregation are full-time and self-employed workers, retirees, stay-at-home parents, or students.

	Pct.
Full-time	35%
Part-time	5%
Self-employed	10%
Unemployed	0%
Retired	25%
Taking care of family and home	20%



Student	5%
Other	0%

24. What is your usual or main occupation?

	Pct.
Clerk, secretary/administrative support	20%
Executive, manager, or administrator	10%
Farming, forestry or fishing	10%
Household service	0%
Machine operator, assembler, or fabricator	20%
Mechanic, construction, or repair	20%
Military, police, other protective service	0%
Professional	10%
Sales	10%
Technician or technologist	0%
Transportation or hauling	0%
Other	0%R

25. What is your gender? A common facet of congregations is that members and attenders are more often women than men. This difference is long-standing: Women have always participated more in religious bodies than men. The older the members of a congregation, too, the more likely the ratio of women to men will be extremely unbalanced. That is because women tend to live long than men.

	Pct.
Male	40%
Female	60%

26. What is your martial status? This questions and the next

provide a picture of your congregation domestically. Needless to say, most people in congregations are married, in fact, a greater proportion than among the U.S. population (of which 54% of people 15 years of age or older are married).

	<b>Pct.</b>
<b>Single/never married</b> .....	<b>10%</b>
<b>Married</b> .....	<b>65%</b>
<b>Other partnership</b> .....	<b>0%</b>
<b>Divorced</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>Separated</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>Widowed</b> .....	<b>15%</b>

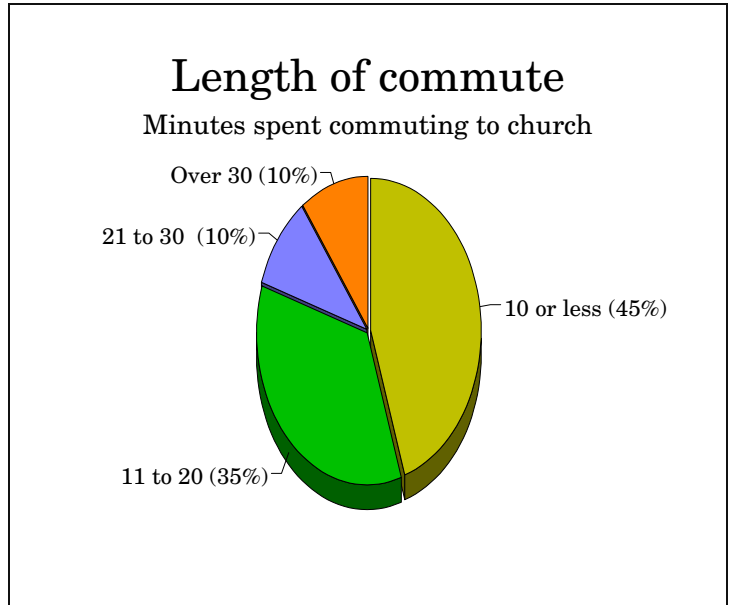
27. How many children 18 years and under that live in your household? If your congregation has older people or many very young people, the number of children in households may be small. If the congregations has many young to middle-aged adults, the number of children may be high. People who attend church are more likely than the general population to have children living at home. Over a third of U.S. households in 2000 had children at home. Among church attenders, the proportion approaches half or more households with children.

	<b>Pct.</b>
<b>None</b> .....	<b>45%</b>
<b>One</b> .....	<b>35%</b>
<b>Two</b> .....	<b>15%</b>
<b>Three or more</b> .....	<b>5%</b>

28. What is your household income? Some people are reluctant to answer questions of this nature, so the actual number who answered this question in your congregation may be fewer than for the rest of the questions. Because church attenders are better educated than the general population, household income among church attenders also tends to be higher than among the general population. In 2000, about two-fifths of U.S. households earned more than \$50,000. Among church attenders that proportion is nearly half of all households.

	<b>Pct.</b>
<b>Less than \$15,000</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>\$15,000-\$24,999</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>\$25,000-\$34,999</b> .....	<b>20%</b>
<b>\$35,000-\$49,999</b> .....	<b>30%</b>
<b>\$50,000-\$74,999</b> .....	<b>10%</b>
<b>\$75,000- \$99,999</b> .....	<b>10%</b>
<b>\$100,000-\$124,999</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>\$125,000-\$149,999</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>\$150,000-\$199,999</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>\$200,000 or more</b> .....	<b>5%</b>

29. What is your racial or ethnic background? This question provides a picture of the ethnic makeup of your congregation. Congregations in the United States tend to be one ethnic background, though there are a number of exceptions. If fact,



any congregation that has a tenth or more of its members that are of another race or ethnicity is considered diverse.

	<b>Pct.</b>
<b>White, European-American</b> .....	<b>85%</b>
<b>Black, African-American</b> .....	<b>0%</b>
<b>Hispanic, Latino</b> .....	<b>0%</b>
<b>Native American, American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut</b> ..	<b>5%</b>
<b>Asian, Asian American</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</b> .....	<b>0%</b>
<b>Multiple races</b> .....	<b>5%</b>
<b>Other</b> .....	<b>0%</b>

30. How many minutes does it usually take to travel from your home to the place where your congregation worships? This question helps to picture how spread out are people in your congregation. People traveling 30 minutes or more by car may be 15 miles or more from your building, but people who spend less than 10 minutes by live close to the facility. In general, most people report taking 10 minutes or less to get to their congregation, but your particular situation will vary according to your specific location and how easy it is to get to places.

	<b>Pct.</b>
<b>Less than 10 minutes</b> .....	<b>45%</b>
<b>11 to 20 minutes</b> .....	<b>35%</b>
<b>21 to 30 minutes</b> .....	<b>10%</b>
<b>Over 30 minutes</b> .....	<b>10%</b>