

A press release from the Hartford Seminary:

Worship, Websites, Conflict Affect Growth in Congregations

December 11, 2006 - Contemporary worship, geographic location, a website and the absence of conflict are key factors in why some congregations in America are growing, according to the latest national survey of U.S. faith communities.

The survey, sponsored by the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership, found that wanting to grow is not enough. Congregations that grow must plan for growth: "Congregations that developed a plan to recruit members in the last year were much more likely to grow than congregations that had not."

The survey findings are available in a newly released report, "FACTs on Growth." The data was taken from the Faith Communities Today 2005 (FACT2005) survey of 884 randomly sampled congregations of all faith traditions in the United States. The survey updates results from a survey taken in 2000, and is the latest in CCSP's series of trend-tracking national surveys of U.S. congregations.

David A. Roozen, Director of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership and Professor of Religion and Society at Hartford Seminary, said that, "If you are at all interested in research on 'church' growth, this brief report is must reading. It tests the continuing salience of long 'taken for granted' principles of growth (e.g., location, conservative theology) as well as the more recently proposed (e.g., contemporary worship, spiritual practices and purposefulness)."

"Perhaps most importantly, it suggests several newly emergent dynamics to consider (e.g., the potential for growth in downtown areas and within multi racial/ethnic congregations). It is a helpful and important follow-up to the "Pockets of Vitality" analysis of the groundbreaking FACT2000 national survey," Roozen said.

Among the findings in the new FACTs on Growth report:

- Congregations that change worship format and style are more likely to grow. More than half the congregations that use contemporary styles of worship have experienced substantial growth since 2000. Frequency is important as well: The more worship services a congregation holds, the more likely it is to have grown.
- Congregations located in new suburbs are more likely to experience growth. But surprisingly the second best area for growth is the downtown of metropolitan areas.
- Congregations that have experienced major conflict are quite likely to have declined in attendance. The strongest correlate of growth is the absence of serious conflict.

- Congregations that have started or maintained a website in the past year are most likely to grow. The effort to have a website indicates that the congregation is outward looking and willing to change by non-traditional means.
- While most congregations in America are composed of a single racial/ethnic group, those that are multi-racial are most likely to have experienced strong growth in worship attendance.
- More important than theological orientation is the religious character of the congregation and clarity of mission and purpose. Growing churches are clear about why they exist and about what they are to be doing - "purpose-driven growth."
- Congregations that involve children in worship are more likely to experience significant growth. Also, important to growth is the ability of congregations to attract young adults and children with families.
- Almost all congregations say they want to grow, but it takes intentionality and action for growth to occur. Congregations that developed a plan to recruit members in the last year were more likely to grow than congregations that had not. Particularly helpful in achieving growth are sponsorship of a program or event to attract non-members or the existence of support groups.

The report was written by C. Kirk Hadaway, Director of Research at the Episcopal Church Center in New York.

A link to view "FACTs on Growth" online is available at:
<http://fact.hartsem.edu/products/index.html>.

Full color, printed copies can be ordered at the same web address. Single copies of the 17-page booklet cost \$8.50 including postage and handling; discounts are available on multiple copies. For special orders and questions, contact Mary Jane Ross, at Hartford Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religion Research, (860) 509-9543 or mross@hartsem.edu.

Faith Communities Today surveys and publications are products of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership, a collaborative, multifaith coalition of American faith communities affiliated with Hartford Seminary's Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Researchers, consultants and program staff representing 39 denominations and faith groups contributed to the FACT2005 survey.

FACT/CCSP strives to offer research-based resources for congregational development that are useful across faith traditions, believing that all communities of faith encounter common issues and benefit from one another's experiences. It also informs the public about the contributions of congregations to American society and about the changes affecting and emanating from one of America's major sources of voluntary association - local congregations. For more information on CCSP, visit fact.hartsem.edu.

About Hartford Seminary and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research: Hartford Seminary focuses on interfaith relations, congregational studies and faith in practice. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research has a 30-year record of rigorous, policy-relevant research, anticipation of emerging issues and commitment to the creative dissemination of learning.

For more on the Seminary and the Institute, visit the websites (<http://www.hartsem.edu/> or hrr.hartsem.edu) or contact David Barrett at (860) 509-9519 or dbarrett@hartsem.edu.

David Roozen, Director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary, is available for interviews at: roozen@hartsem.edu or (860) 509-9546.

C. Kirk Hadaway, Director of Research at Episcopal Church Center, New York, can be reached for interviews at: khadaway@episcopalchurch.org or (212) 922-5331.
