

Do You Know...

Who Attends United Methodist Churches?

**A Study of Attendance at United Methodist Churches
in Cooperation with the
U.S. Congregational Life Survey Project
U.S. Congregations, Louisville, Kentucky**

Prepared by

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Introduction to the United Methodist Congregational Life Survey

The United Methodist Congregational Life Survey presents data collected from The U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS) conducted in April 2001. The USCLS is the largest and most representative profile of worshipers and their congregations ever developed in the United States. More than 350,000 worshipers in over 2,000 congregations in the United States created this snapshot. Within The United Methodist Church, over 15,000 worshipers in over 150 congregations provided our snapshot.

The two primary goals of the U.S. project are to:

1. Provide a close look at congregational vitality to help congregations understand how they can renew and enrich their mission; and,
2. Describe the American religious landscape in the new millenium based on input from worshipers in a random sample of congregations across the United States.

With these two goals in mind, this report of United Methodist data enables United Methodist leaders and congregations to compare themselves against the national average.

This report is separated into four areas based on the four building blocks of congregational vitality as determined by the USCLS:

- [Building Spiritual Connections](#) spotlights worship and faith in United Methodist congregations
- [Building Inside Connections](#) describes worshipers' activities within United Methodist congregations and the ways they relate to one another.
- [Building Outside Connections](#) reveals how United Methodist congregations and its worshipers reach out to those and serve those in the community.
- [Building Identity Connections](#) helps understand who worships in United Methodist churches and how they see their congregation's future.

For further information on the [United Methodist Congregational Life Survey](http://www.gcom-umc.org/research/research_life_survey.shtml) visit: http://www.gcom-umc.org/research/research_life_survey.shtml.

For further information on the [U.S. Congregational Life Survey](http://www.uscongregations.org) visit: www.uscongregations.org or refer to [A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations](#) by Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, Westminster John Knox Press, April 2002.

This report was prepared by Craig This, Director of Research, and Karen M. Smith, Information Services Coordinator, General Council on Ministries, 601 West Riverview Avenue, Dayton, Ohio 45406-5543. All data used in this report was acquired from U.S. Congregations, Louisville, Kentucky. Comments and questions regarding the report may be directed to Craig This via letter or via e-mail at research@gcom-umc.org.

Key: ■ The United Methodist Church
■ The National Average

Source data: U.S. Congregational Life Survey
U.S. Congregations, Louisville, Kentucky

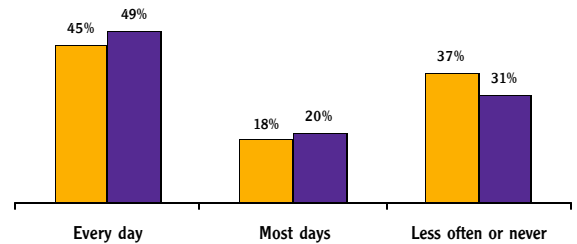


Building Spiritual Connections

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to breaking of bread, and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

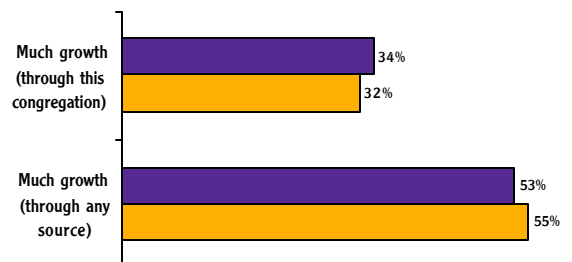
1 Private devotions. Nearly one-half of United Methodist worshipers surveyed spend time every day in private devotional activities such as prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible alone. About one-third of United Methodist worshipers do so infrequently or never.

How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible alone)?



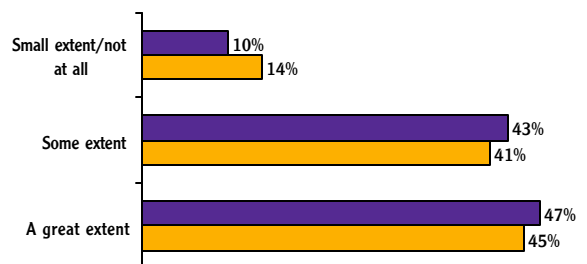
2 Growing in Faith. Slightly more than half of worshipers surveyed nationwide and within The United Methodist Church report they experienced much growth in their faith over the last year, through any source. Among those who reported much spiritual growth, United Methodist worshipers (like most nationwide) say their spiritual growth came through their congregation. Only nineteen percent (19%) said it came through other groups or congregations or through their own private activities.

Q. Over the last year, how much have you grown in your faith?



3 Help with Everyday Living. Nearly half of United Methodist worshipers surveyed report that their congregational worship services or activities help to “a great extent” with everyday living. Slightly fewer find worship services and congregational activities helpful to “some extent”.

Q. To what extent do the worship services or activities of this congregation help with everyday living?



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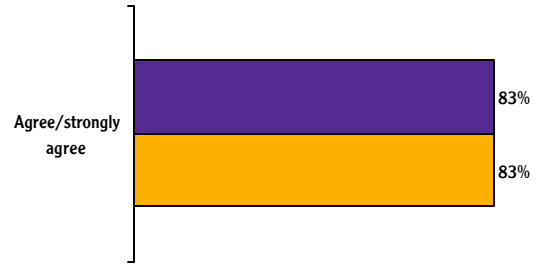
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Do You Know Who Attends United Methodist Churches?

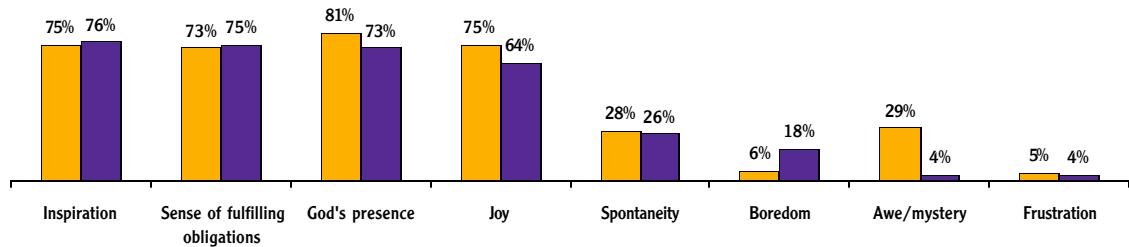
4 Meeting Spiritual Needs. Most worshipers nationwide and within The United Methodist Church feel that their congregations meet their spiritual needs.

Q. My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation (percent who “agree” or “strongly agree”).



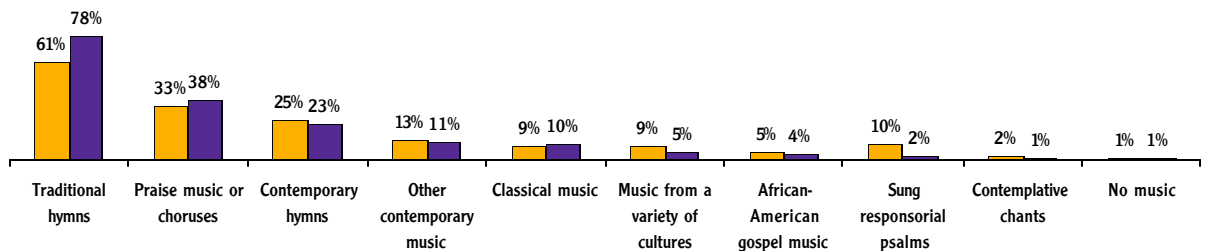
5 Worship Experiences. Nationwide, survey respondents favorably rated the quality of their worship experiences as meaningful and uplifting. The majority of United Methodist worshipers agree. Few feel bored or frustrated on a continuous basis, although United Methodist worshipers are three times as likely to be bored and only one-eighth likely to experience a sense of awe or mystery during worship services than the typical attender.

Q. How often do you experience the following during worship services at this congregation (percent who say “always” or “usually”)?



6 Making Music. United Methodist worshipers tend to be more conservative than the typical attender in their musical preferences. They prefer traditional hymns and praise music or choruses more than any other choice presented.

Q. While you may value many different styles of music, which of the following do you prefer in worship?



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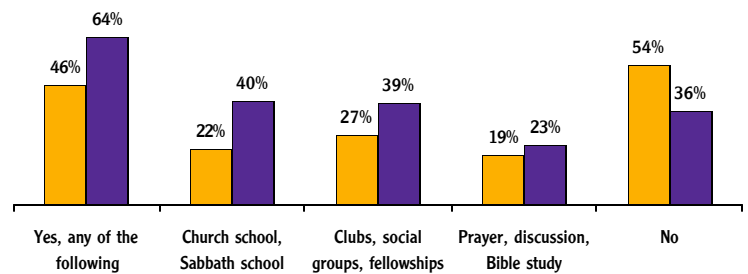
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Building Inside Connections

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

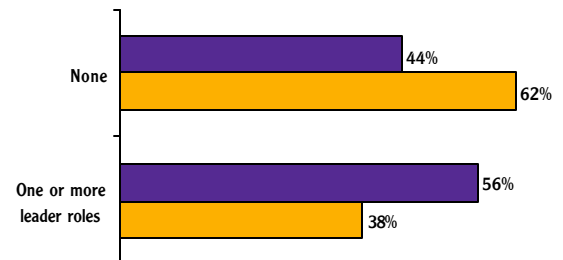
1 Involving Worshipers. Nearly two-thirds of United Methodist worshipers participate in their congregations’ small groups activities, compared to nearly half of respondents nationwide. Nearly twice as many United Methodist worshipers surveyed participate in church/Sunday school activities and a third again as many in clubs, social groups, and fellowships as the national percentages.

Q: Are you regularly involved in any group activities within your congregation?



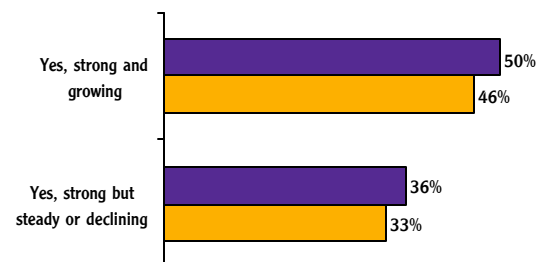
2 Involving Leaders. Over half of United Methodist worshipers reported holding at least one leadership role in their congregations (such as governing board, committee, choir, usher, church school leader, etc.), compared to only 38% of worshipers nationwide.

Q: Do you currently have any of the following roles here (governing board, committee, task force, lead or assist in worship, group leaders, choir or other musician, teacher, or other)?



3 Belonging Here. Over three-quarters of United Methodist worshipers feel a strong sense of belonging to their congregations, with half reporting that their sense of belonging is growing.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?



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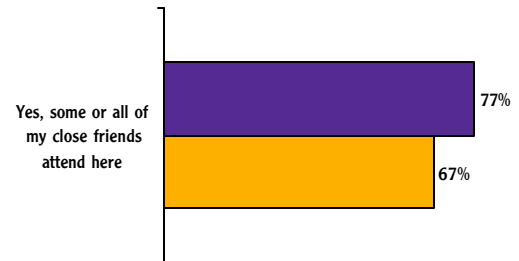
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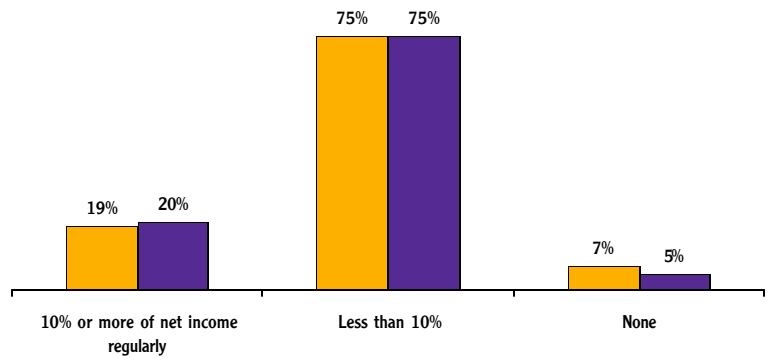
4 Making Friends. With the emphasis on being a “connectional” church, it is not surprising that United Methodist worshipers develop friendships with other members of their congregations. Three out of four United Methodist worshipers report that some or all of their close friends attend their congregations.

Q: Do you have any close friends in this congregation?



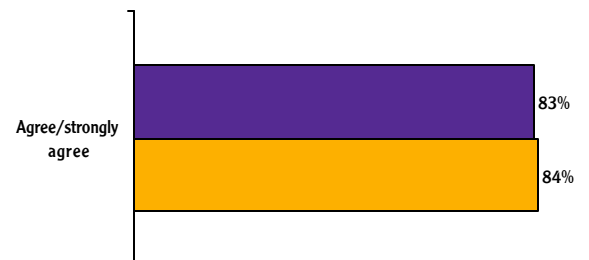
5 Giving. Financial support connects people to the congregation and its mission. Nearly all United Methodist worshipers surveyed give to the church, with one out of five respondents reporting that they give ten percent or more of their income.

Q: About how much do you give financially to this congregation?



6 Being a Team. Congregational vitality closely relates to the connection between a pastor/minister and his or her congregation. Nationwide and within The United Methodist Church, the majority of worshipers feel that church leadership is a good match with their congregations.

Q: Do you agree or disagree: “In general, there is a good match between our pastor and our congregation?” (Percent who “agree” or “strongly agree”.)



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Building Outside Connections

“The the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 26:37-40 NIV)

1 Inviting Others. Slightly over half of United Methodist worshipers report they have invited others to attend worship services within the past twelve months.

Q: Would you be prepared to invite to a worship service here any of your friends and relatives who do not now attend a congregation?



2 Reaching Out. From among fourteen evangelistic activities and twenty-three social service or community activities, congregations selected those in which they were involved in the previous year. The top six activities engaged in by United Methodist congregations are listed below.

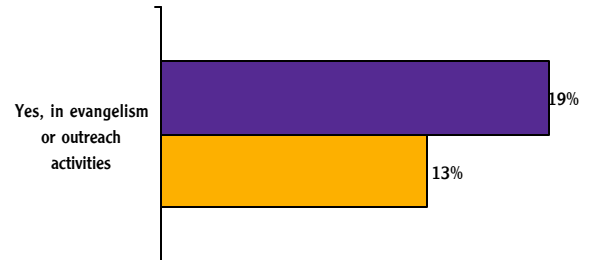
Evangelistic Activities

- Encourage members to invite others
- Newsletters, letters, flyers
- Letter or other material to visitors
- Special event to meet people
- Paid advertisement in newspaper, magazine
- Personal contact/visits

Social Service Activities

- Emergency relief/material assistance
- Social, recreational, or leisure activities
- Other programs for children/youth
- Counseling or support groups
- Other senior citizen programs
- Day care or preschool programs

Q: Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community?



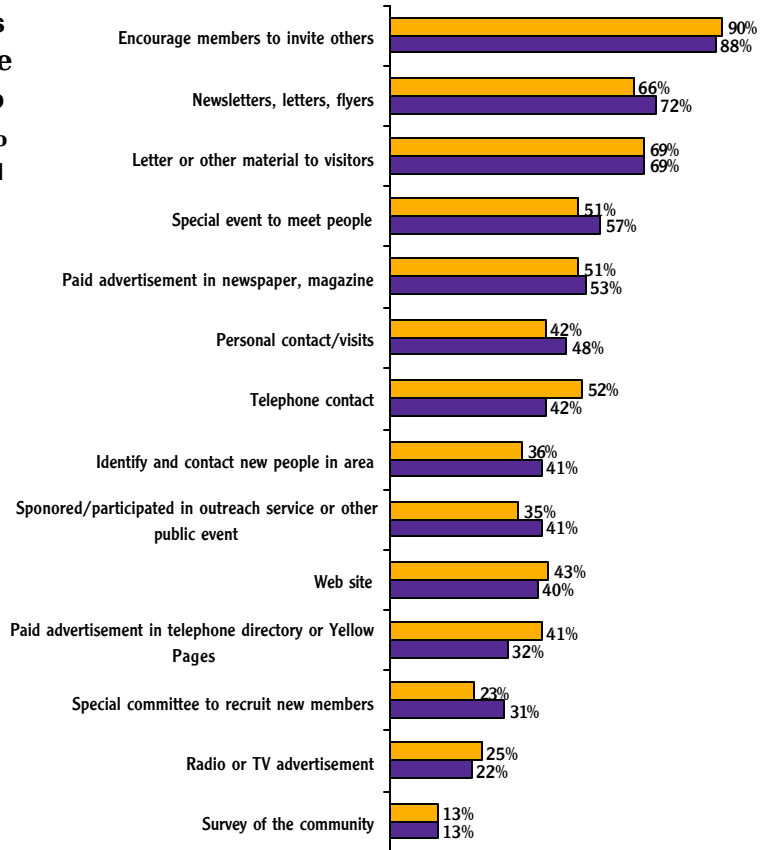
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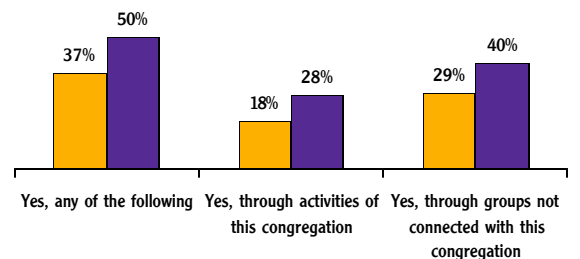
3 Inviting Others. From a list of fourteen possible activities, a typical U.S. congregation is most likely to engage in the following: encourage people already in the congregation to invite a new person, 90%; send a letter or other material to people who visited the congregation, 69%; mail or distribute newsletters, letters, or flyers, 66%; place a paid advertisement in a newspaper or magazine, 51%; hold an activity (e.g., fair, supper) to meet people in the neighborhood, 51%; have someone from the congregation telephone people who visited the congregation, 51%. United Methodist congregations selected the same top five evangelistic activities.

Q: In the past 12 months, has this congregation done any of the following to reach out to nonmembers? (Percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one response.)



4 Serving the Community. More than the national average, half of United Methodist worshipers are engaged in community services, social justice, or advocacy activities, with three in ten being involved through their congregations and four in ten through groups not connected to their congregations.

Q: Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups?



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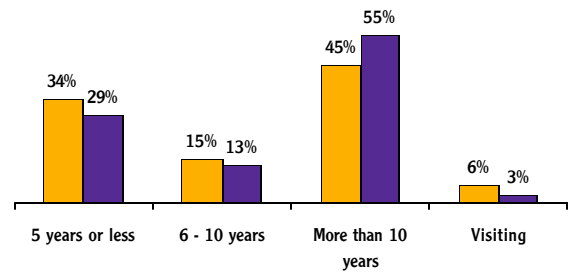
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5 Welcoming New People. Of every ten worshipers who make up United Methodist congregations, three have attended worship services at those churches for less than five years. Slightly over half of United Methodist worshipers have attended their congregation's services for more than ten years.

Q: How long have you been going to worship services or activities at this congregation?



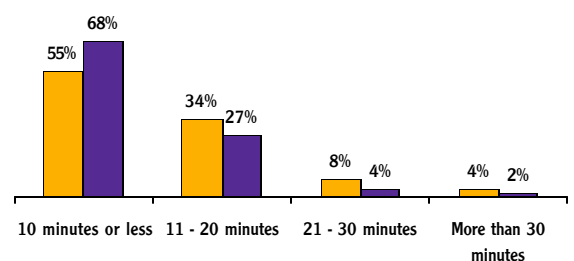
6 Knowing New People. From where do new worshipers in United Methodist congregations come? The fewest new worshipers are those who have never regularly attended anywhere (“first-timers”). The most transfer from other congregations of the same denomination. Other new worshipers are those who come back to the denomination after an extended absence (“returnees”) and those who previously participated in another faith denomination (“switchers”).

Q: New people (attending your congregation for no more than five years):



7 Getting Here. More than half of United Methodist worshipers travel ten minutes or less to attend worship services. Less than ten percent of United Methodist worshipers travel more than twenty minutes to church.

Q: How long does it usually take for you to get here?



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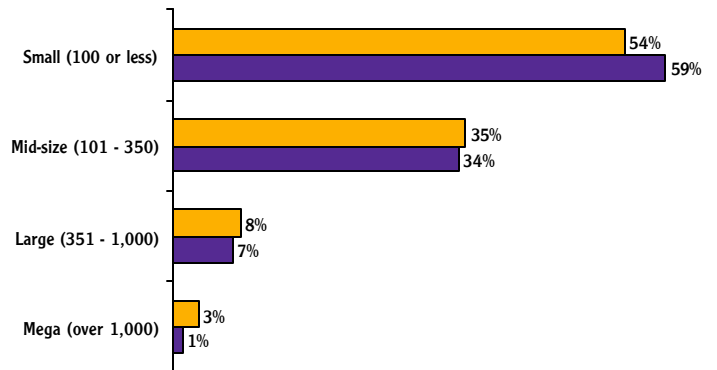
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Building Identity Connections

“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

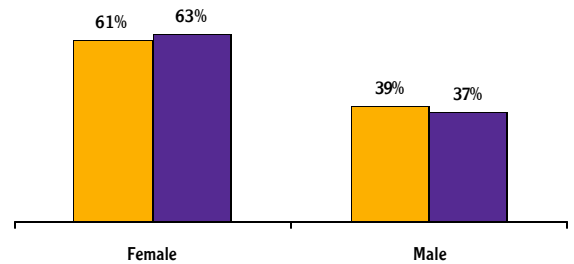
1 Congregation Size. Over half of congregations nationwide have fewer than one hundred members. Over half of United Methodist congregations also have fewer than 100 regularly attending worshipers and only one-third as many congregations with more than 1,000 in regular attendance as the national average.

Q: Worship attendance in the United States:



2 Gender Profile. Women are the backbone of the typical congregation. The makeup of United Methodist congregations closely mirrors the national average: two-thirds of the worshipers surveyed are women.

Q: What is your gender?



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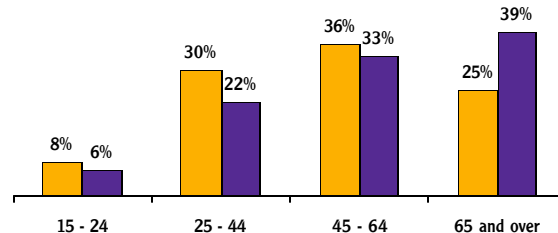
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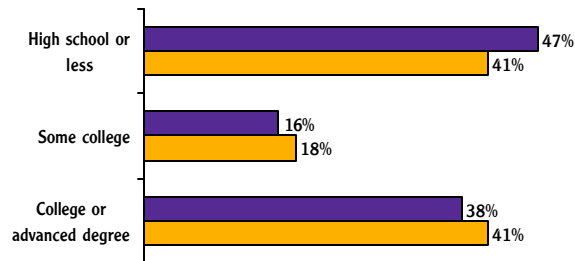
3 Age Profile. Worshipers nationwide are aging, but the population of United Methodist congregations is already gray. For every young adult under twenty-five years old, there are six senior citizens. There are almost twice as many senior citizens occupying United Methodist church pews than there are adults aged twenty-five to forty-four. In typical congregations, those aged forty-five to sixty-four make up the largest group.

Q: What is your age group?



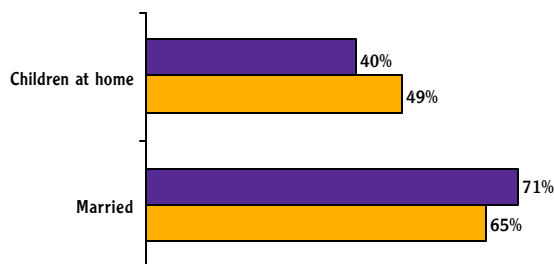
4 Educational Background. Worshipers in the United States tend to be well educated (41%), compared to the U.S. Census data (23%). The same holds true for United Methodist worshipers, over half of whom are educated beyond the high school level.

Q: What is the level of your education?



5 Household Types. Most worshipers in the United States are married, including United Methodists. Four in ten United Methodist worshipers also have children living at home, one-quarter less than the national average.

Q: What is your household status?



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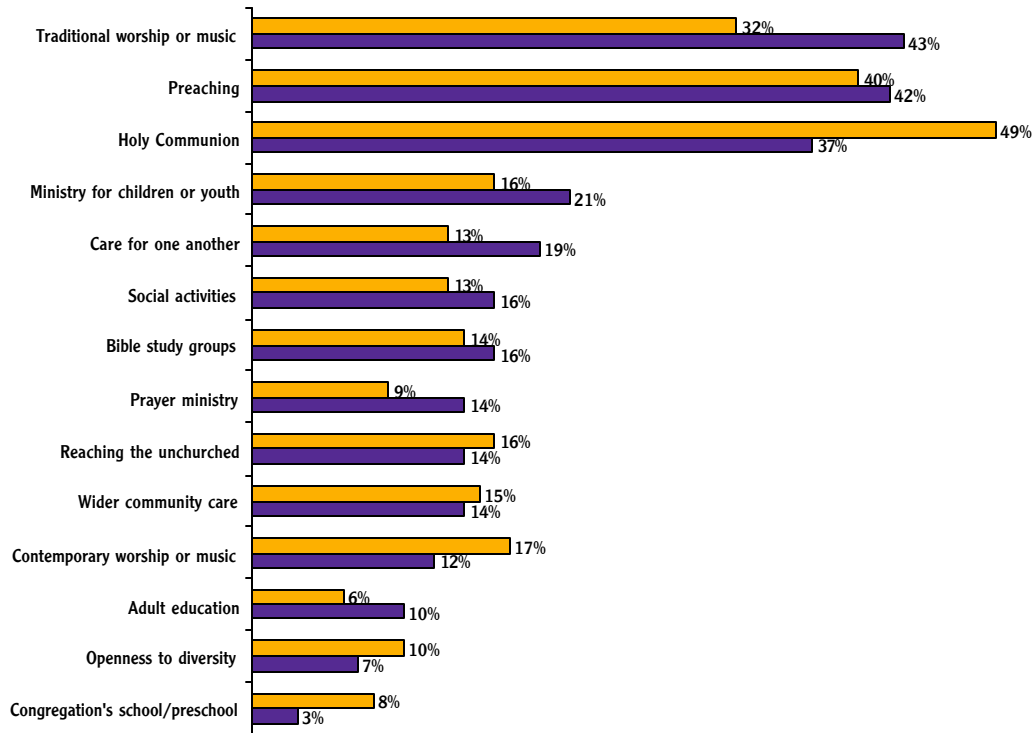
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6 What United Methodists Value. Out of fourteen possible options, worshipers in the typical congregation and worshipers in United Methodist churches most value traditional worship or music, preaching, and Holy Communion, although the order of preference differs. United Methodist worshipers, however, place greater importance upon ministry for children and youth, care for one another, and education than do typical attendees.

Q: Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value?
(Percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could select more than one response.)



7 Seeing Possibilities. Hope and positive attitudes characterize United Methodist congregations. They are almost as likely as the typical congregation to welcome change and new directions.

Q: This congregation is always ready to try something new (Percent who "agree" or "strongly agree".)



Q: I have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future. (Percent who "agree" or "strongly agree".)



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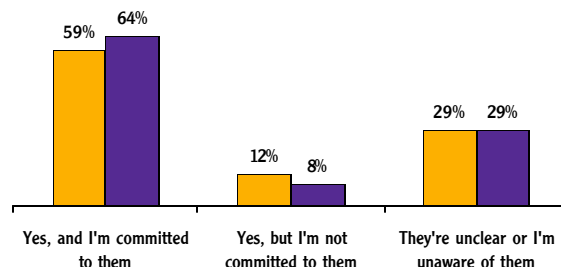


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8 Commitment to the Future. Reflecting their overall positive attitude, two-thirds of United Methodist congregations report they have a clear vision, goals, or direction for their ministry and mission and are committed to them. The percentage of United Methodist congregations that say those goals are unclear or that they are not committed to those goals equals the national percentage of worshipers suffering the same apathy (29%).

Q: Does this congregation have a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission?



Summary

The United Methodist Church professes itself to be a “connectional” church and the survey results clearly indicate that its congregations act as they believe. United Methodists report higher percentages of faith-based activity, social and community service, and leadership roles within their congregations than does the “typical” congregation in the United States. The typical congregation might favor a more contemporary or eclectic selection of music and worship styles, but United Methodists generally prefer their traditions and continue to find those traditions uplifting and meaningful.

“Connectionalism”, to The United Methodist Church, entails building relationships within and beyond congregational and denominational boundaries. United Methodists are no less likely than the typical congregation to invite and welcome others to join in worship with them and they are more likely than the typical congregation to be involved in community and social service activities.

As with the typical congregation, United Methodist churches are small and the majority of newcomers to those congregations are people transferring churches from within that denomination. The people filling those church pews are most likely to be women, well educated, and aged forty-five years or older. If a denomination’s future rests upon the shoulders of the young, then The United Methodist Church must intensify its efforts to attract and involve young adults who make up the smallest portion of its population.

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