



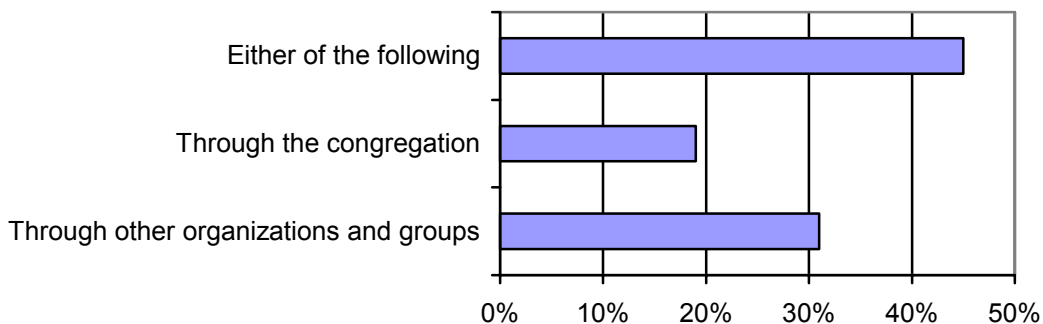
## How Are Worshipers Involved in the Community? Findings from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey

Congregations and worshipers focus on their communities in a wide variety of ways, from helping the poor and disadvantaged, to fighting injustice, to community organizing. Being part of a community of faith leads many worshipers to be involved in social service and social justice work. Sometimes the congregation coordinates their efforts. But just as often worshipers serve through their involvement in community groups. What did worshipers from over 2,000 congregations that participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey<sup>1</sup> tell us about their involvement in their communities?

### How Do Worshipers Serve Their Communities—Through Their Congregation or Through Other Organizations?

- Overall, 45% of worshipers are involved in community services, social service, or advocacy groups or activities. Many worshipers (19% overall) work *through the groups and activities organized by their congregation*. But even more worshipers (31% overall) serve through community groups or organizations. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1: Involvement in Service Activities**



### Who Serves the Community Through the Congregation?

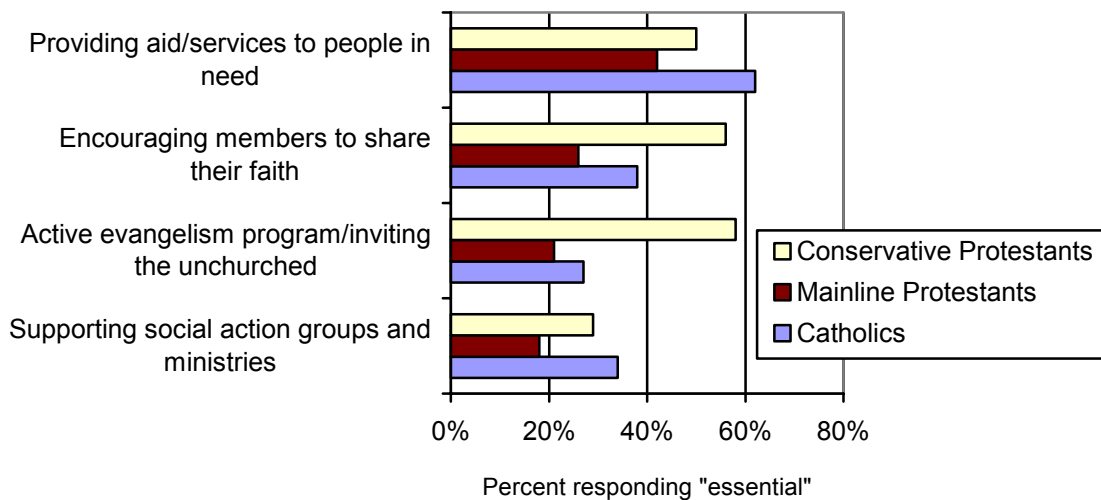
- The majority of worshipers (57%) report no volunteer time in the previous month through their current congregation on “programs or services to help people in need or to make the community a better place to live.” One-quarter (27%) worked up to 5 hours in such activities, 11% worked between 6 and 20 hours, and 4% gave more than 20 hours in service through their congregation.
- Characteristics of worshipers have surprisingly little impact on whether they volunteer time at their congregation or not. Younger worshipers (under 45 years of age) are only slightly less likely than older worshipers to volunteer through their congregations (38% of younger worshipers and 46% of older worshipers worked at least one hour in the previous month).

- Worshipers with the most education (master’s or other graduate degree) and the least (high school diploma or less) are a bit less likely to work on social service activities than are those with a bachelor’s or associate degree. Gender, being employed, and having children at home are not related to whether worshipers volunteer through their congregation to help others.
- Two congregational characteristics have a much larger impact on volunteering through the congregation: denomination and size. Worshipers in conservative and mainline Protestant congregations are more likely to volunteer at their church (55% and 53%, respectively, do) than are worshipers in Catholic parishes (36%).<sup>2</sup>
- Worshipers in smaller congregations (under 100 in worship) are more likely to assist in services to help people in need (62% do), than are worshipers in mid-size congregations (100 to 350 in worship; 58% do) or those in large congregations (with more than 350 in worship; 38%).

**What’s a Priority for the Congregation—Giving Aid or Sharing Faith?**

- Worshipers’ priorities for their congregation’s activities in the community fall more toward direct service and aid than toward evangelism and faith sharing. More than half (55%) indicate that “providing aid and services to people in need” should be an essential part of their congregation’s community involvement. Four in ten describe as essential “encouraging members to share their faith,” “an active evangelism program or inviting the unchurched,” and “supporting social action groups and ministries.”
- Conservative Protestants are much more likely than other worshipers to view active evangelism and faith sharing to be the essential aspects of their congregation’s involvement in the community (see Figure 2). Catholics, on the other hand, see helping those in need as the most essential priority.

**Figure 2: Priorities for the Congregation’s Community Involvement**



## Who Serves the Community Through Other Organizations?

- Almost one in three worshipers (31%) are involved in community service activities through groups or organizations outside their congregation—a percentage higher than that for involvement in congregation-based service activities.
- About half of worshipers (48%) report no volunteer time in the previous month apart from their current congregation’s programs “to help people in need or to make the community a better place to live.” One-third (33%) worked up to 5 hours in such activities, 14% worked between 6 and 20 hours, and 5% gave more than 20 hours in service apart from their congregation. These results are another indication that worshipers are more likely to volunteer to help others through groups or agencies outside their congregation than through their congregation’s activities.
- Those who volunteer more hours through the activities of their congregations also volunteer more through organizations outside their congregation. In fact, 31% of those who volunteered more than 20 hours for their congregation’s service activities in the previous month also volunteered more than 20 hours in service activities apart from the congregation. Furthermore, 64% of those who did *not* volunteer through their congregation also worked no hours as volunteers through other groups or organizations. Overall, 37% of worshipers worked no volunteer hours in the previous month—whether through their congregation or through other agencies.
- Several characteristics of worshipers have an impact on whether worshipers have volunteered with groups other than their congregation in the last month. Who is more likely to volunteer through other organizations?
  - ✓ Older worshipers (54% of those 45 years and older do; 47% of younger worshipers do)
  - ✓ Worshipers with children at home (46% vs. 50% for those without children at home)
  - ✓ More educated worshipers (57% of those with post high school education vs. 45% of others)
- Employment has a more complicated relationship to volunteerism through groups outside the congregation. Working outside the home has no impact on whether worshipers are involved in such service, but those who are employed volunteer fewer hours than others—17% of employed worshipers and 22% of others worked more than five hours in the previous month serving others. Men and women are similarly involved in service other than through congregational programs.
- Unlike community service done through the congregation, denomination and congregational size are unrelated to the time worshipers spend in service activities through groups not related to their congregation.

## What Else Do Worshipers Do for Their Communities—Aid or Advocacy?

- Worshipers also give to their communities and to people around them in many other ways (see Table 1). Large majorities of worshipers provide financial support to charitable organizations, and about half help to feed the hungry. While about half of the U.S. population reported voting in the prior presidential election, a large majority of worshipers (76%) did so.

**Table 1: Community Involvement**  
**In the last 12 months have you done any of the following?**  
**(Mark all that apply.)**

**Acts of Charity:**

Donated money to a charitable organization other than the congregation .....	73%
Donated or prepared food for someone outside your family or congregation .....	49%
Loaned money to someone outside your family .....	30%
Helped someone outside your family find a job .....	23%
Cared for someone outside your family who was very sick .....	22%

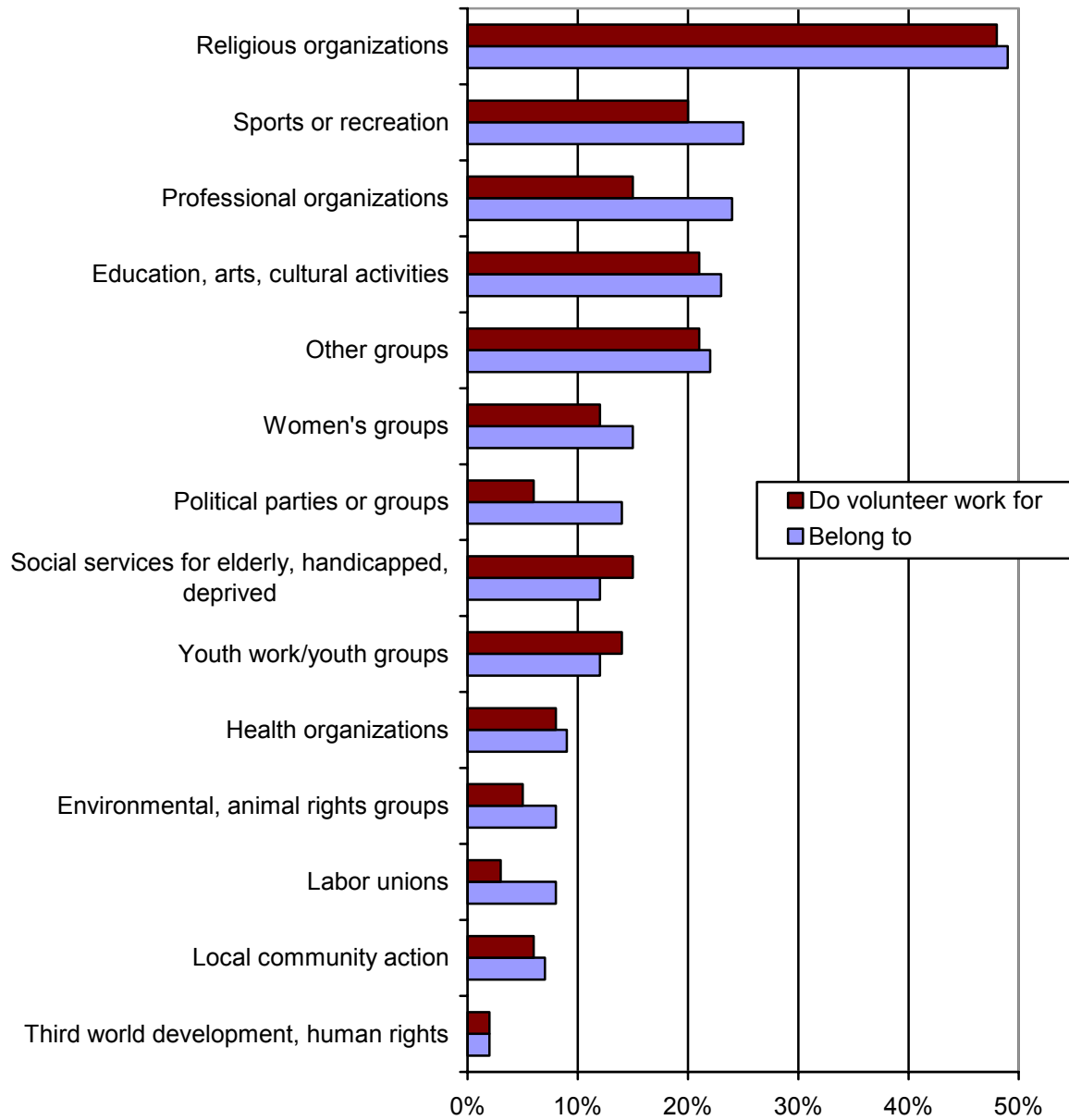
**Acts of Advocacy or Politics:**

Voted in the 2001 presidential election.....	76%
Worked with others to try to solve a community problem.....	21%
Contacted and elected official about a public issue .....	19%

**How Are Worshipers Involved in Other Faith-based or Secular Groups?**

- Worshipers are involved in a wide variety of voluntary organizations and activities, some of which are shown in Figure 3. While almost half report being members in and volunteering for religious or church organizations, it is unclear whether respondents were answering about their own congregation or about other such organizations (the question did not specify). About one-quarter belong to professional organizations, sports or recreation groups or organizations, and education or arts-related groups.
- Worshipers are somewhat more likely to belong to almost all organizations listed than to do volunteer work for each. The exceptions are “social welfare services for elderly, handicapped, or deprived people”—15% volunteer with such organizations, but only 12% are members—and “youth work”—14% volunteer, but only 12% belong.
- One-half of worshipers belong to one or two community organizations, but 23% are *not* involved with any voluntary organizations. Similarly, 46% volunteer for one or two organizations, and 38% do not volunteer their time with any of these types of organizations.

**Figure 3: Membership in and Service to Voluntary Organizations**



**Conclusion**

Worshippers are involved in their communities in a wide variety of ways. Large majorities are members of or give their time to at least one voluntary organization, and three-quarters give money to charitable organizations other than their congregations. Half helped to feed the hungry. One in five are involved in community service activities through their congregation.

Yet in the previous month only half spent time working with a voluntary organization, and somewhat fewer gave time through their congregation. A small core of worshipers appears to be heavily involved in serving those in need, both through their congregations and through other organizations.

Denomination plays a role in worshipers service through their congregations, but not in their service through other agencies. Those in Protestant congregations are more likely than Catholic worshipers to be involved their congregation's service activities.

Finally, denomination also influences how worshipers view their congregation's community involvement. Worshipers in conservative Protestant churches see community service as key to their congregation's evangelism activities, while Catholics see the focus as one of meeting people's needs.

## **Data Sources**

U.S. Congregational Life Survey (2001). Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce. Louisville, Kentucky: U.S. Congregations and Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

General Social Survey (2000). James Allan Davis and Tom W. Smith. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center.

## **To Cite this Source**

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<sup>1</sup> Over 300,000 worshipers in over 2,000 congregations took part in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in April 2001. Congregations were selected to be representative of all congregations across the country. For more information: [www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)

<sup>2</sup> Congregations were grouped into five categories based on their denomination or faith group: (1) Catholic, (2) mainline Protestant, (3) conservative Protestant, (4) congregations in historically Black denominations, and (5) others (non-Christian congregations). Most of the items on community included here were answered by a sample of respondents only (n=1,156), which results in sample sizes for historically Black denomination churches and non-Christian congregations that are too small for analysis. Thus, differences by faith group presented here include only the first three denominational families.