

**Responsive Congregational Identity:  
Identity Strength and Diversity as Correlates of Vitality**

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Congregational identity, the sense of “who we are and what are we about,” varies from congregation to congregation. This paper describes patterns of identity within and between congregations. Using items from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, a positive, future-directed identity index was created. It is hypothesized that this type of congregational identity is related to theology, congregational size, and the age profile of the worshipers. Through multiple regression analyses, additional factors are explored that may predict a future-directed identity, including levels of worshiper involvement, percentage of new people in the congregation, ratio of female worshipers, and numerical growth in attendance. Theology and the age profile of the congregation remain important predictors of a positive congregational identity when controlling for other factors. And for all faith groups, higher levels of worshiper involvement are related to a more future-directed identity. Congregational size is an important predictor of identity for Mainline Protestant churches only. A future-directed identity is a significant predictor of higher levels of congregational spiritual vitality but not of congregational community involvement.

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**Table 1**  
**Congregational Identity Measures**

[CRV: Coefficient of Relative Variation (Standard deviation / Mean); closer to 1.00 reflects greater diversity.]

**Vision Commitment:**

Worshippers who feel the congregation has a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission and they are strongly committed to them (% yes).

**Future Focused:**

Worshippers who have a sense of excitement about their congregation's future (% strongly agree).

**New Direction:**

Worshippers who feel the congregation is currently moving in new directions (% strongly agree).

**Change Readiness:**

Worshippers who feel the congregation is always ready to try something new (% strongly agree and agree).

**Identity Index (Cronbach's coefficient alpha = .82)**

**Table 2**  
**Correlations of Identity Index and Identity Measures**

	Identity Index	Vision Commitment	Future Focus	New Direction	Change Readiness
Identity Index	1.00				
Vision Commitment	.68***	1.00			
Future Focus	.83***	.48***	1.00		
New Direction	.70***	.20***	.54***	1.00	
Change Readiness	.66 ***	.23 ***	.38 ***	.25***	1.00

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Table 3  
Congregational Identity and Faith Group

	<b>Catholic</b>		<b>Mainline Protestant</b>		<b>Conservative Protestant</b>	
	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV
Vision Commitment ***	25.8	.48	31.9	.41	54.6	.30
Future Focused ***	33.6	.14	23.4	.62	39.6	.47
New Direction ***	26.5	.42	31.1	.50	34.1	.65
Change Readiness **	49.7	.08	54.2	.30	58.5	.39
<b>Identity Index</b> ***	<b>33.9</b>	<b>.18</b>	<b>35.2</b>	<b>.34</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>.27</b>

Table 4  
Congregational Identity and Size (Average Worship Attendance)

	<b>Small (1 – 100)</b>		<b>Midsized (101 – 350)</b>		<b>Large (351 or more)</b>	
	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV
Vision Commitment ***	45.9	.46	39.2	.39	33.9	.45
Future Focused n.s.	30.8	.61	33.9	.49	36.6	.35
New Direction ***	28.6	.71	36.3	.42	36.2	.46
Change Readiness n.s.	56.5	.39	55.4	.27	54.5	.21
<b>Identity Index</b> n.s.	<b>40.4</b>	<b>.35</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>.30</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>.30</b>

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Table 5  
 Congregational Identity Index, Faith Group, and Size

	Small (1 – 100)		Midsize (101 – 350)		Large (351 or more)	
	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV
<b>Catholic</b> (n.s.)	34.1	.08	33.6	.26	34.1	.13
<b>Mainline Protestant</b> (*)	32.9	.38	37.9	.29	39.7	.23
<b>Conservative Protestant</b> (n.s.)	46.2	.28	46.9	.25	53.1	.27

Table 6  
 Congregational Identity and Age Profile

	Younger Worshippers		Older Worshippers	
	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV
Vision Commitment **	45.3	.37	39.6	.52
Future Focused ***	39.6	.48	26.2	.50
New Direction ***	40.4	.43	24.6	.68
Change Readiness *	57.8	.32	53.9	.36
<b>Identity Index</b> ***	<b>45.8</b>	<b>.30</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>.30</b>

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Table 7  
 Congregational Identity Index, Faith Group, and Size

	<b>Younger Worshippers</b>		<b>Older Worshippers</b>	
	Mean	CRV	Mean	CRV
Catholic (**)	36.3	.18	31.6	.15
Mainline Protestant (n.s.)	38.1	.30	34.1	.36
Conservative Protestant (***)	50.3	.27	40.7	.22

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Table 8  
Multiple Regression: Identity as Predicted by Congregational Characteristics

	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Mainline Protestant</b>	<b>Conservative Protestant</b>
Level of Involvement	<b>.640***</b>	<b>.200***</b>	<b>.681***</b>
% New People	.186 n.s.	<b>.352***</b>	<b>.223***</b>
Average Age	-.256 n.s.	<b>-.240**</b>	<b>-.334***</b>
% Female	-.038 n.s.	.088 n.s.	<b>.202***</b>
Congregational Growth	.033 n.s.	<b>.137*</b>	<b>.158***</b>
Size	.106 n.s.	<b>.195**</b>	<b>.210***</b>
Constant	n.s.	n.s.	<b>***</b>
Adjusted R Square	.389	.298	.426
N of Congregations	100	180	129

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Table 9  
Multiple Regression: Identity as Predictor—Level of Involvement

	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Mainline Protestant</b>	<b>Conservative Protestant</b>
Congregational Identity	<b>.394***</b>	<b>.224**</b>	<b>.563***</b>
% New People	-.120 n.s.	-.166 n.s.	<b>-.181**</b>
Average Age	.140 n.s.	<b>.334***</b>	<b>.380***</b>
% Female	<b>.538***</b>	.110 n.s.	<b>-.245***</b>
Congregational Growth	.071 n.s.	<b>.150*</b>	<b>-.139*</b>
Size	-.107 n.s.	-.111 n.s.	<b>-.240***</b>
Constant	<b>***</b>	n.s.	<b>***</b>
Adjusted R Square	.624	.213	.525
N of Congregations	100	180	129

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Table 10  
Multiple Regression: Identity as Predictor—Spiritual Vitality

	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Mainline Protestant</b>	<b>Conservative Protestant</b>
Congregational Identity	.430***	.154*	.352***
Level of Involvement	.464**	.588***	.405***
% New People	.195 n.s.	-.019 n.s.	.205***
Average Age	-.039 n.s.	.190**	.131*
% Female	.124 n.s.	.128*	.134*
Congregational Growth	-.359***	.065 n.s.	-.148*
Size	-.012 n.s.	.162**	-.178***
Constant	**	*	n.s.
Adjusted R Square	.690	.576	.524
N of Congregations	100	180	129

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Table 11  
Multiple Regression: Identity as Predictor—Community Involvement

	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Mainline Protestant</b>	<b>Conservative Protestant</b>
Congregational Identity	.281 n.s.	.390***	.001 n.s.
Level of Involvement	-.041 n.s.	-.287***	-.038 n.s.
% New People	-.287 n.s.	.227*	-.121 n.s.
Average Age	-.197 n.s.	.219*	-.028 n.s.
% Female	-.121 n.s.	-.083 n.s.	-.117 n.s.
Congregational Growth	-.409**	-.047 n.s.	-.048 n.s.
Size	-.121 n.s.	-.072 n.s.	.222**
Constant	**	**	***
Adjusted R Square	.143	.234	.027
N of Congregations	100	180	129

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