



U.S. CONGREGATIONS

Research Services

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Ordinary . . .



Extraordinary!

**How can
congregations go
beyond the ordinary?**

A Focus on Strengths

Instead of focusing on weakness and what's wrong, we believe congregations can make more progress by identifying and focusing on strengths.



What is a Strong Congregation?

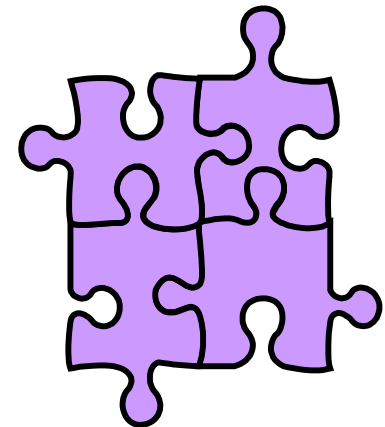
Congregations:

- Provide a sense of community
- Seek to educate worshipers about the faith
- Share their faith with others
- Serve others
- Convey the sense that life has meaning



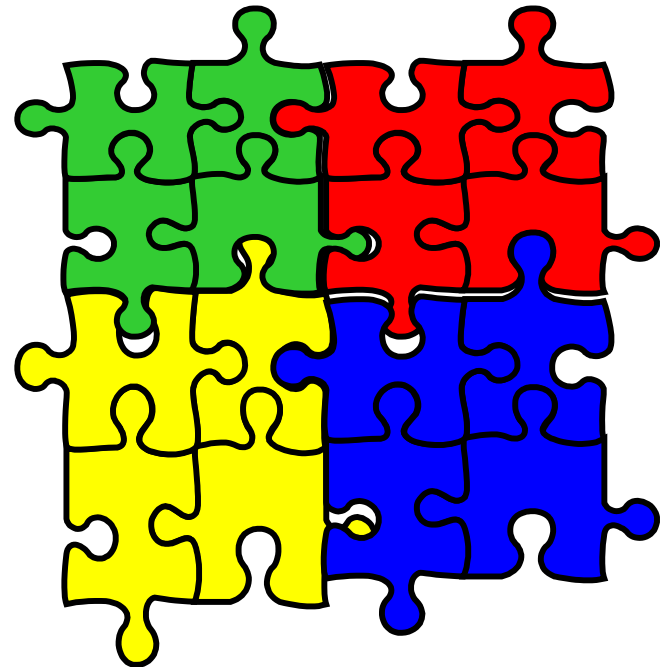
The Trump-Card Approach

- Congregational size
- Worship style
- Leadership
- Congregational mission
- The minimum factor
- Context



A Multi-Faceted Approach

- All congregations have strengths
- Congregations require multiple strengths



U.S. Congregational Life Survey



- 2,234 congregations
- 300,000 worshipers

U.S. Congregational Life Survey



- All 50 states
- All sizes of congregations
- Over 50 denominations and faith groups

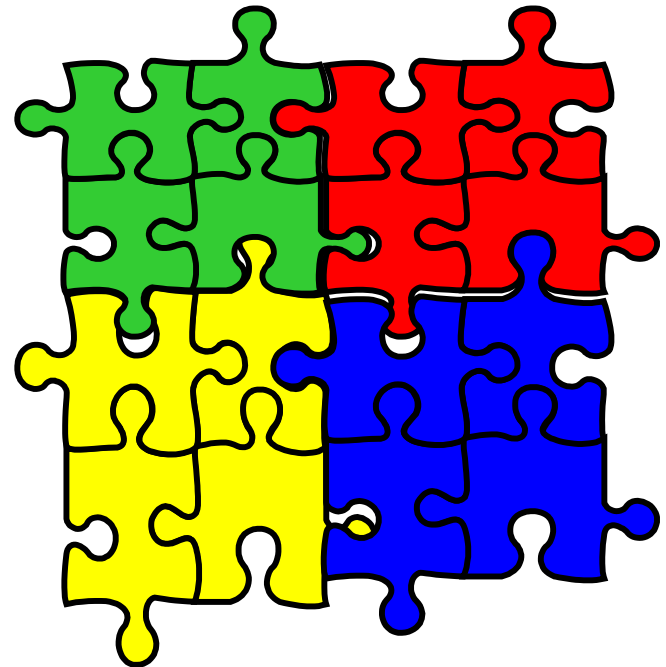
U.S. Congregational Life Survey



- Focus on worshipers
- Focus on more than numerical growth
- Focus on multiple strengths
- Focus on resources for congregations

Identifying Strengths

- Data based approach
- Identify 10 key strengths
- Examine factors related to those strengths



Myth #1

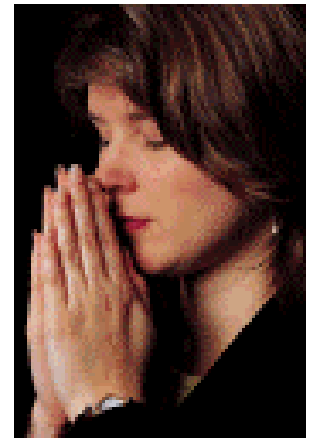
Mid-size congregations
do the best job of helping
their worshipers grow
spiritually.

Strength 1:

Growing Spiritually

Growing Spiritually

- Growth in faith through activities of the congregation
- Feeling that spiritual needs are being met in their congregation
- Time spent in private devotional activities



Growing Spiritually

- Small congregations excel!
- Conservative Protestant churches and churches in historically black denominations surpass mainline Protestants and Catholics

Myth #2

Meaningful worship is most likely to be found in large congregations.

Strength 2:

**Meaningful
Worship**

Meaningful Worship

- Experiences during worship: God's presence, inspiration, joy, and awe
- Value sermons and preaching
- Worship services help with daily life



Meaningful Worship

- Meaningful worship happens in congregations of all sizes
- Conservative Protestant churches and churches in historically black denominations surpass mainline Protestants and Catholics



CHURCH? WHY WOULD I
EXPOSE MYSELF TO THAT
BORING, MINDLESS TRASH?

Myth #3

More worshipers in mainline
Protestant congregations
actively participate there.

Strength 3:

**Participating in the
Congregation**

Participating Here

- Worship attendance
- Participation in small groups
- Serving as leaders
- Participating in congregational decision making
- Financial giving



Participating Here

- Participation is highest in the smallest congregations
- Worshipers in conservative Protestant and historically black congregations are participating more than worshipers elsewhere

Myth #4

Worshippers' sense of belonging is highest in Catholic parishes.

Strength 4:

**Having a Sense of
Belonging**

Having a Sense of Belonging

- Increasing participation
- Close friends in congregation
- Strong and growing sense of belonging



Having a Sense of Belonging

- Worshipers in small congregations experience a stronger sense of belonging
- The sense of belonging is strongest in conservative Protestant and historically black congregations
- Congregations with more young worshipers have a stronger sense of belonging.

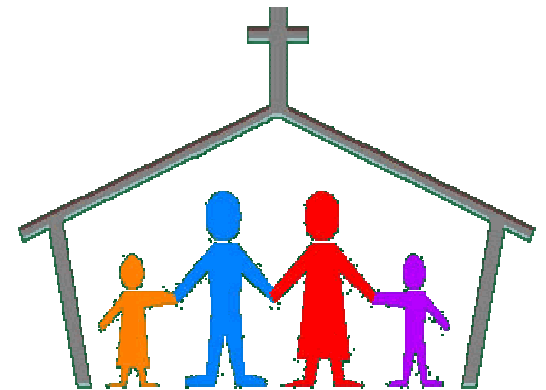
Myth #5

Small congregations are better able to care for their young people.

**Strength 5:
Caring for Young
People**

Caring for Young People

- Satisfied with programs for children and youth
- Value ministry for children/youth
- Retention of children



Caring for Young People

- Mid-size congregations excel at caring for children and youth
- Catholic parishes score lowest and conservative Protestant churches score highest on Caring for Young People
- Younger congregations are better at caring for youth

Myth #6

Conservative Protestant congregations excel in their involvement in the local community.

**Strength 6:
Focusing on the
Community**

Focusing on the Community

- Involved in community service groups
- Value wider community care and openness to social diversity
- Worked on community problems
- Charitable contributions
- Voting



Focusing on the Community

- Congregations of all sizes focus on their communities
- Mainline Protestant churches have the strongest community focus
- Congregations with older worshipers focus more on their communities

Myth #7

Worshippers in Catholic parishes are more comfortable reaching out to those who don't attend.

Strength 7: Sharing Faith

Sharing Faith

- Involvement in evangelism activities
- Comfort in talking about faith
- Inviting others to worship
- Value reaching the “unchurched”



Sharing Faith

- Small congregations are places where worshipers share their faith
- Worshipers in conservative Protestant and historically black denomination churches share their faith

HOW WAS THE
NEW CHURCH
DARLING?

GOOD... UM...
THEY'RE VERY
WELCOMING



Myth #8

Congregations whose worshipers are younger than average attract few new people.

Strength 8:

**Welcoming New
Worshipers**

Welcoming New Worshipers

- Worshipers who began attending the congregation in the last five years



Welcoming New Worshipers

- The rich don't get richer—there is no difference by size
- Conservative Protestants attract the most new people; historically black churches attract the fewest
- Younger congregations attract more new people

Welcoming New Worshipers

- Theology influences the types of new people:

Catholics—more transfers

Protestants—more switchers

Myth #9

Leaders in mainline Protestant churches are the most empowering congregational leaders.

**Strength 9:
Empowering
Leadership**

Empowering Leadership

- Leaders encourage people to use their gifts and talents
- Leader takes into account the ideas of worshipers
- Leader's style inspires others to action
- Good match between the congregation and the leader



Empowering Leadership

- Worshipers in small congregations feel most empowered
- Conservative Protestant and historically black churches have the most empowering leaders

Myth #10

Congregations with mature worshipers are more likely to have a strong vision for the future.

Strength 10:

**Looking to
the Future**

Looking to the Future

- A clear vision for the future
- Excitement about the congregation's future
- Congregation already moving in new directions
- Congregation is always ready to try something new



Looking to the Future

- Not related to size
- Conservative Protestant and historically black congregations have a stronger vision for the future
- Congregations with younger worshipers have a stronger vision for the future

BUT I LIKE IT IN HERE!
I DON'T WANT TO COME OUT.
WHAT'S THIS OBSESSION
WITH CHANGE ANYWAY?!?
GO AWAY AND LEAVE ME ALONE!



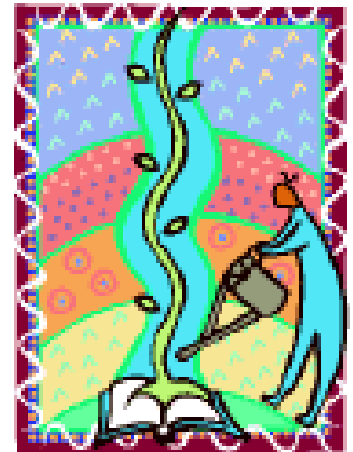
What's Left

But what about growth?

Growth

Positive Predictors:

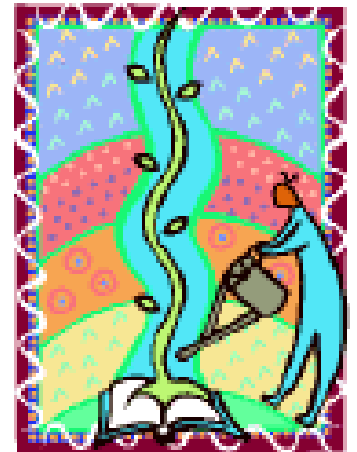
- Caring for Children and Youth
- Participating in the Congregation
- Welcoming New People



Growth

Negative Predictors:

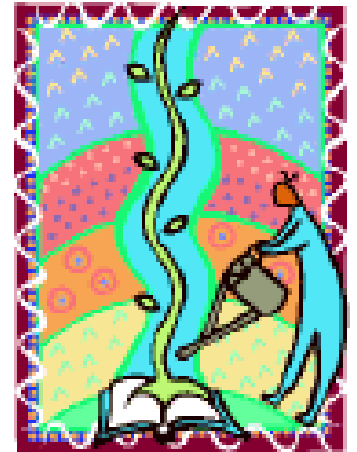
- Growing Spiritually
- Focusing on the Community
- Sharing Faith



Growth

Not Related:

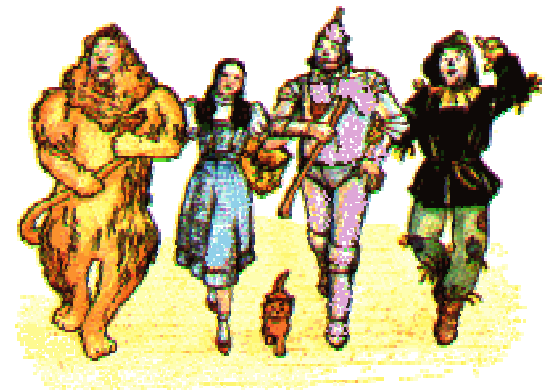
- Other strengths
- Size of congregation
- Average income of worshipers
- Average age of worshipers
- Faith group



**Putting it All
Together**

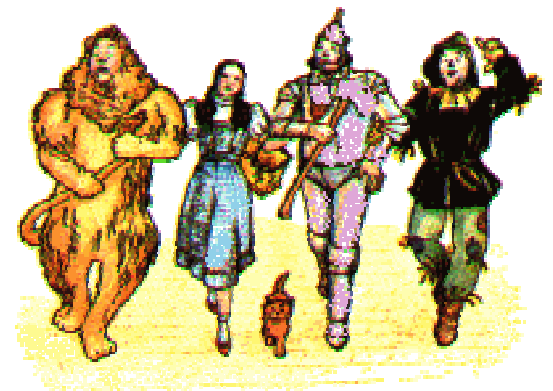
Putting it All Together

- Congregational life is not simple
- Congregations need multiple strengths
- Congregations can build on their strengths



Putting it All Together

Congregations need mind,
strength, and courage
to go . . .





**Beyond the
Ordinary!**

Learn More:

www.USCongregations.org

1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040



U.S. CONGREGATIONS

Research Services

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)