

## **U.S. Congregational Life Survey: What Did We Learn About Congregations?**

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Over 300,000 worshipers in over 2,000 congregations across America participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in April 2001. Three types of surveys were completed in each participating congregation: (a) an attendee survey completed by all worshipers age 15 and older who attended worship services during the weekend of April 29, 2001; (b) a Congregational Profile describing the congregation's facilities, staff, programs, and worship services completed by one person in the congregation; and (c) a Leader Survey completed by the pastor, priest, minister, rabbi, or other leader. Together the information collected provides the opportunity to look at these three dimensions and their interrelationships. This paper uses information from the Congregational Profile to compare congregations across denominational families.

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago identified a random sample of U.S. congregations attended by individuals who participated in the General Social Survey (GSS) in the year 2000. All GSS participants who reported that they attended worship at least once in the prior year were asked to name the place where they worshiped. Since the GSS involves a national random sample of individuals, congregations identified by GSS participants comprise a national random sample of congregations. NORC researchers verified that each nominated congregation was an actual congregation, removed duplicate congregations, and then invited each congregation to participate in the survey. Participating congregations (n=430) comprise the random sample described here.

Denominations were also invited and encouraged to draw a random sample of their congregations. Denominational samples were large enough so that the results are representative of worshipers and congregations in each denomination. This allows denominations to compare their "typical" congregation and worshiper to congregations and worshipers in other denominations. Denominations participating in this oversampling procedure were: Church of the Nazarene, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Southern Baptist Convention, United Methodist Church (UMC), and United Church of Christ (UCC). Results from these oversamples are not included here.

Results from the Congregational Profile were weighted to eliminate bias due to unequal probabilities of selection. Because the chance of being selected for the GSS is proportional to the number attending the congregation, larger congregations were more likely to be sampled. The weights developed by NORC and used in all figures presented here adjusted for congregational size and for non-response.

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey was conducted with generous funding from Lilly Endowment and the Louisville Institute and with major support from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Additional information about methodology and results is available on our Website: [www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)

Deborah A. Bruce ([dbruce@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:dbruce@ctr.pcusa.org)), paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2002. Source: U.S. Congregational Life Survey, 2001. Note. All figures are weighted. Denominational families: Catholic, n=100; Mainline Protestant, n=180; Conservative Protestant, n=129; Historically Black, n=9; Other Congregations, n=12 (unweighted Ns).

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## Denominational Families

### Catholic Churches:

Roman Catholic

### Mainline Protestant Churches:

American Baptist Churches USA  
Baptist Bible Fellowship, International  
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Episcopal/Anglican (unspecified)  
Episcopal Church  
Lutheran (unspecified)  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
United Methodist Church

Unity of the Brethren (Moravian)  
Greek Orthodox  
Presbyterian (unspecified)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
Christian Reformed Church in North America  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Church of Christ

### Conservative Protestant Churches:

Seventh-day Adventist  
Baptist (unspecified)  
Conservative Baptist Association of America  
Free Will Baptist  
United Baptist  
General Association of Regular Baptist Church  
Southern Baptist Convention  
Christian and Missionary Alliances  
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ  
Churches of Christ  
Christian Churches of North America  
Church of God  
Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)  
Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)  
Church of the Nazarene  
Conservative Congregational Christian Conference

Foursquare Gospel  
Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod  
Mennonite (unspecified)  
Mennonite Church  
Free Methodist Church of North America  
Missionary  
Pentecostal (unspecified)  
Assemblies of God  
United Pentecostal Church, International  
Presbyterian Church in America  
Unity School of Christianity  
Wesleyan Church  
Non-denominational  
Non-denominational Evangelical  
Non-denominational Pentecostal

### Historically Black Churches:

National Baptist Convention, USA  
Church of God in Christ

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

### Other Congregations:

Buddhist Communities  
Judaism (unspecified)  
Conservative Judaism  
Reform Judaism

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day  
Saints  
Non-denominational, Non-Christian

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**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of U.S. Congregations, by Denominational Family**

	Catholic Churches	Mainline Protestant Churches	Conservative Protestant Churches	Historically Black Churches	Other Congregations	All Congregations
<b>Facilities:</b>						
Primary worship service held in a church, synagogue, or temple .....	98%	92%	94%	100%	6%	90%
Congregation or denomination owns building .....	100%	94%	93%	100%	100%	94% ns
Facilities used/rented by community groups at least weekly .....	42%	63%	16%	0%	68%	39%
<b>Affiliation:</b>						
Affiliated with denomination, convention, association of congregations .....	100%	96%	78%	100%	100%	89%
<b>Provide religious education classes:</b>						
For children (<12) .....	98%	89%	93%	100%	82%	92%
For youth (12-18) .....	93%	78%	90%	100%	82%	85%
For adults .....	83%	83%	95%	100%	100%	89%
<b>Technology:</b>						
Use internet or email to communicate with worshippers .....	30%	64%	36%	33%	11%	45%
<b>Political orientation of congregation:</b>						
On conservative side .....	57%	41%	86%	17%	89%	64%
In the middle .....	31%	40%	13%	67%	6%	26%
On liberal side .....	11%	19%	1%	17%	6%	10%
<b>Theological orientation of congregation:</b>						
On conservative side .....	32%	31%	89%	67%	72%	59%
In the middle .....	56%	45%	10%	33%	22%	29%
On liberal side .....	12%	23%	1%	0%	6%	11%
<b>Financial situation:</b>						
Increasing financial base .....	19%	33%	30%	50%	5%	29%
Stable financial base .....	57%	39%	58%	50%	95%	52%
Declining financial base or seriously threatened .....	24%	28%	11%	0%	0%	19%

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**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of U.S. Congregations, Means by Denominational Family**

	Catholic Churches	Mainline Protestant Churches	Conservative Protestant Churches	Historically Black Churches	Other Congregations	All Congregations
<b>Age:</b>						
Year congregation was founded .....	1926	1891	1934	1910	1966	1917
<b>Size:</b>						
Approximate seating capacity						
where worship is held .....	457	236	232	450	199	258
Average weekly worship attendance, 2000 ...	715	125	123	253	52	186
Total number of people (children and adults) participating .....	836	213	141	257	156	244
Total number of children participating.....	226	62	49	80	86	73
<b>Religious education classes:</b>						
Number of children (<12) participating..	119	26	22	26	39	35
Number of youth (12-18) participating.....	56	13	14	26	20	19
Number of adults participating .....	17	28	46	60	31	35
<b>Worship services:</b>						
Number of worship services offered each week.....	8.5	1.9	3.0	1.4	1.7	3.1
<b>Strictness:</b>						
Number of prohibitions reported <sup>1</sup> .....	1.5	1.2	3.2	2.5	3.8	2.3
<b>Congregational programs:</b>						
Number of outreach activities reported <sup>2</sup> .....	4.2	6.6	6.0	6.5	4.4	5.9
Number of community services reported <sup>3</sup> ....	7.4	5.4	3.0	8.8	3.8	4.5

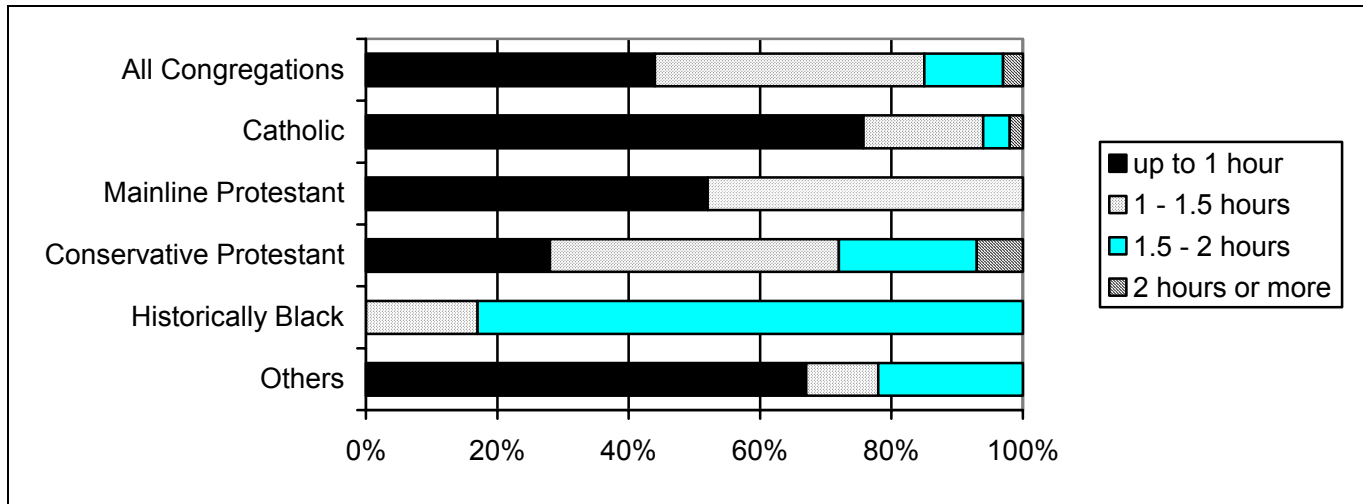
<sup>1</sup> Nine possible prohibitions: homosexuality; cohabitation before marriage; gambling; alcohol; smoking; contributions; dancing; foods; dress, hairstyle, make-up (listed here in order from most often prohibited to least often prohibited).

<sup>2</sup> 14 possible outreach activities: encouraged people to invite others, letters sent to visitors, mailing flyers, newspaper/magazine ads, congregational website, telephone book ads, telephone visitors, neighborhood activity, visits with visitors, contact people new to the area, outreach event, radio/TV ads, recruitment committee, community survey (listed here in order from most common to least common overall).

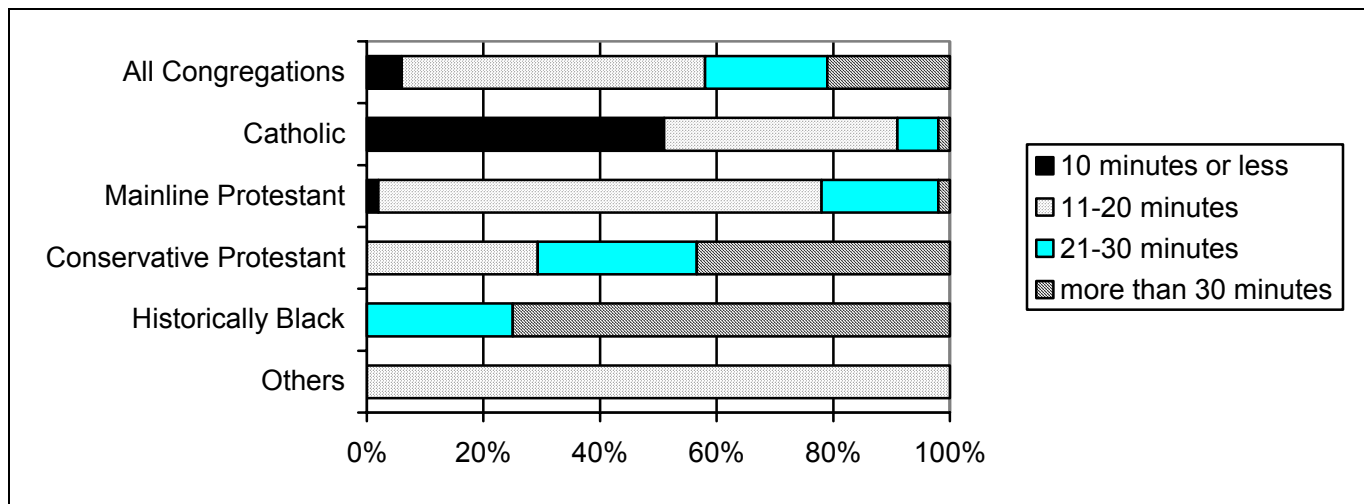
<sup>3</sup> 23 possible community services: emergency relief, counseling/support groups, other social/recreational activities, health programs, other youth programs, arts/music, child care programs, other senior programs (not housing), sports, prison ministry, hobbies and crafts, other welfare/service activities, abuse/recovery programs, voter registration or education, housing for others (not seniors), social justice work, community organizing, elementary school, care for people with disabilities, immigrant support services, housing for seniors, help for unemployed, animal welfare or environmental activities (listed here in order from most common to least common overall).

# U.S. Congregational Life Survey: What Did We Learn About Congregations?

**Figure 1**  
Length of Largest Worship Service, by Denominational Family



**Figure 2**  
Length of Sermon or Homily by Denominational Family



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**Table 3**  
**Elements Included in the Congregation's Largest Worship Service, By Denominational Family**

	Catholic Churches	Mainline Protestant Churches	Conservative Protestant Churches	Historically Black Churches	Other Congregations	All Congregations	
<b>More than half of congregations in all denominational families include:</b>							
Sermon or homily.....	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	ns
Collection of money.....	100%	99%	92%	100%	67%	95%	
Singing by congregation.....	100%	100%	83%	100%	100%	92%	ns
Singing by choir/soloist.....	93%	89%	77%	100%	79%	84%	
Communion.....	100%	82%	78%	100%	68%	82%	
Hymn books.....	89%	86%	77%	83%	90%	82%	ns
Piano.....	70%	84%	84%	83%	72%	82%	ns
People greeting each other.....	91%	80%	79%	83%	94%	81%	ns
Time for children.....	52%	80%	56%	67%	68%	65%	
<b>More than half of congregations in a majority of denominational families include:</b>							
Speaking in unison.....	93%	90%	46%	100%	78%	70%	
Laughter.....	46%	83%	64%	100%	11%	68%	
Applause.....	41%	67%	65%	100%	21%	62%	
Organ.....	82%	71%	46%	83%	74%	61%	
Participation by teens.....	61%	57%	46%	100%	74%	54%	
Silent prayer/meditation.....	70%	75%	32%	67%	26%	53%	
<b>Less than half of congregations in a majority of denominational families include:</b>							
Calling out Amen.....	43%	22%	69%	100%	22%	47%	
Visual projection equipment.....	9%	16%	45%	40%	84%	32%	
Drums or guitar.....	41%	16%	42%	83%	21%	31%	
Raising hands in praise.....	18%	7%	53%	83%	0%	30%	
Jumping, shouting, dancing.....	9%	0%	18%	83%	0%	10%	
<b>Less than half of congregations in all denominational families include:</b>							
Incense.....	41%	2%	0%	0%	21%	6%	

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