



# Who Worships in Racial-Ethnic Presbyterian Congregations?



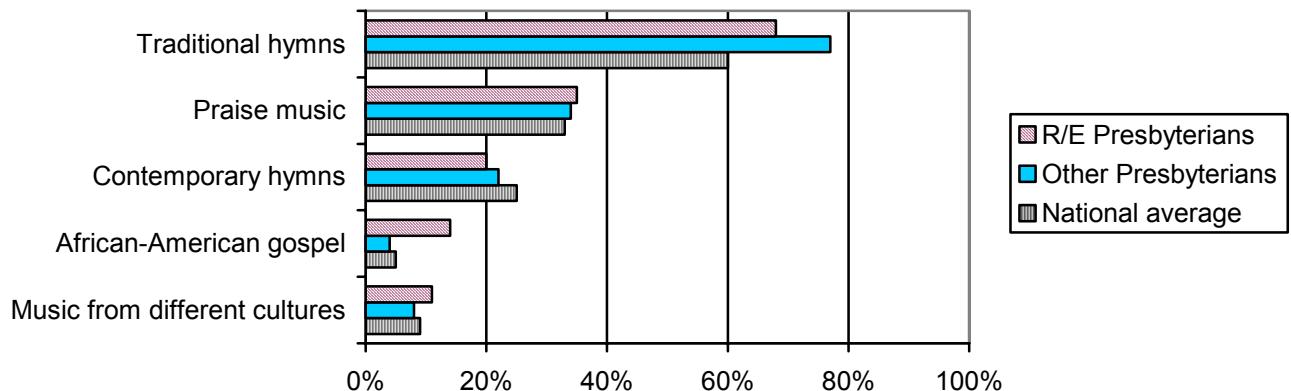
In April 2001, a random sample of congregations across the country participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey—the largest survey of worshipers and congregations ever conducted. Results provide the first accurate look at worshipers in America. With support from the Research Services, Racial-Ethnic, and Evangelism offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 13,043 worshipers in a random sample of 171 predominately racial-ethnic or multicultural congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) were included, along with 47,423 worshipers in a random sample of 523 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations. (Predominately racial-ethnic congregations are those in which at least half of members are identified as racial ethnics. Multicultural congregations are those in which at least 20% of members are not white.) Comparing the answers of these three groups (national average, racial-ethnic Presbyterians, and other Presbyterians) helps us learn about the unique strengths of racial-ethnic congregations in the denomination.

## Building Spiritual Connections

Spiritual Connections are made through worshipers’ private devotions and their participation in congregational activities such as worship.

- Like other worshipers, many worshipers in PC(USA) racial-ethnic congregations have active devotional lives. Almost half (46%) spend time every day or almost every day in private devotional activities (prayer, meditation, Bible reading), and another 20% do so a few times a week.
- More than half of worshipers in PC(USA) racial-ethnic churches (55%) have experienced *much growth* in their faith in the previous year, including 36% who attribute their spiritual growth to activities of their congregation. These percentages are about the same as for worshipers in the other samples.
- Most worshipers in PC(USA) racial-ethnic congregations report that the services and other activities of their congregation help them with everyday life either to *a great extent* (47%) or to *some extent* (42%). Further, 82% say their spiritual needs are being met there. These percentages are about the same for worshipers in the other samples.
- When asked how frequently they have each of eight experiences during worship in their congregation, most worshipers in all samples report experiencing God’s presence, inspiration, joy, and awe or mystery either *always* or *usually*.
- When compared to worshipers in other PC(USA) congregations, those in racial-ethnic ones are less likely to prefer traditional hymns in worship, and more likely to prefer African-American gospel music and music from a variety of cultures. Similar percentages in each sample prefer praise music and contemporary hymns. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1  
Musical Preferences

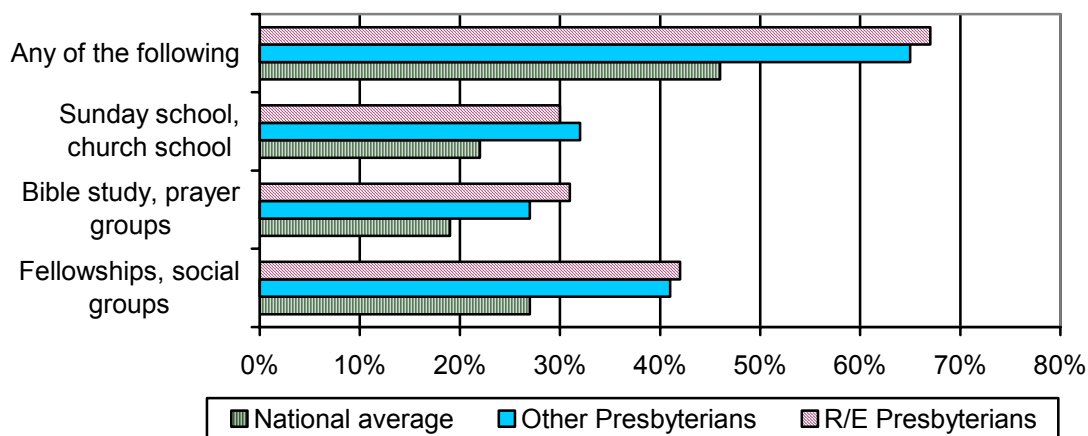


## Building Inside Connections

Worshippers connect with others in the congregation by participating in group activities (such as church school, prayer and study groups, and fellowships and clubs), serving in leadership roles, and providing financial support.

- Like worshippers in other PC(USA) churches, those in racial-ethnic ones are more likely to be involved in a small group in their congregation. Nationally, just 46% of worshippers join in small groups. Among Presbyterian worshippers, 67% in racial-ethnic congregations do so. (See Figure 2.) In all three groups, the largest percentages of worshippers participate in fellowships and social groups.
- Worshippers in Presbyterian congregations are more likely than the national average to hold at least one leadership position there (58% in other PC(USA) churches and 38% in the national average are leaders). This is true in racial-ethnic Presbyterian congregations, too, where 61% take on leadership roles like serving on the governing board or a committee, leading or assisting in worship, or leading a group.
- About half of worshippers in Presbyterian congregations say their sense of belonging to their congregation is strong and growing (52% in racial-ethnic churches and 49% in other PC(USA) churches). These percentages are a bit higher than the national average where 46% say their sense of belonging is strong and growing.
- Worshippers in Presbyterian congregations are more likely to have friends in their congregation. Three-quarters say some or all of their close friends also are part of their congregation (73% in racial-ethnic and 75% in other PC(USA) congregations), compared to 67% in the national average.
- More than half of Presbyterian worshippers give at least 5% of their income to the church (55% in racial-ethnic congregations and 54% in other PC(USA) churches). About 46% in the national average give at that level. Less than 20% in any of the three samples give 10% or more.
- Most worshippers attend services at their congregations *usually every week or more than once a week*. In the national average, 79% do. In Presbyterian congregations, the figure is 77% (for both racial-ethnic and other PC(USA) congregations).
- It is more common in Presbyterian congregations than in the national average for worshippers to be members of the congregation. Eight in ten in all types of Presbyterian congregations (82%) are members; 77% in the national average are members. About 2% of worshippers are in the process of becoming members.
- Worshippers in racial-ethnic congregations are more likely to say their participation has increased in the last two years (32% say so) than are worshippers in the national average (27% say so). Worshippers in other Presbyterian congregations are in the middle (29% say so). Almost half in each sample say they are currently participating about the same as two years ago.

**Figure 2**  
Involvement in Small Groups

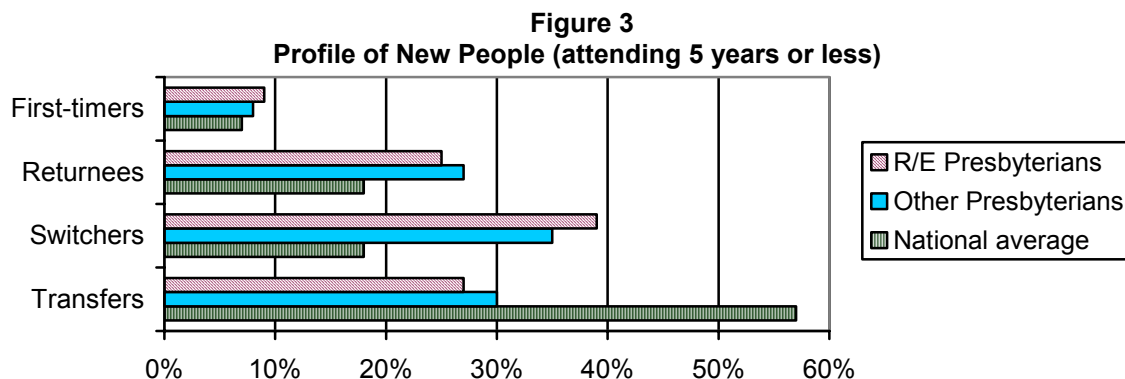


## Building Outside Connections

How do racial-ethnic congregations in the PC(USA) connect to the community and to non-members? Outside Connections consist of inviting others to attend, caring for neighbors, and welcoming new people.

- No more than half of worshipers in each of the three samples report inviting to worship in the last year someone who doesn't currently attend (national average—46%; racial-ethnic Presbyterians—50%; other Presbyterians—47%).
- Worshipers in PC(USA) racial-ethnic churches are more likely than others to say they're regularly involved in the evangelism or outreach activities of their congregation. While 22% of worshipers in PC(USA) racial-ethnic congregations are reaching out to their communities in this way, 13% in the national average and 18% in other Presbyterian congregations do so.
- Worshipers in PC(USA) churches (both the racial-ethnic sample and other PC(USA) churches) are more likely than worshipers in the national average to be involved in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities—both through their congregation and through groups or agencies *not* connected to their congregation.
- Racial-ethnic Presbyterians are less likely than other Presbyterians to have donated or prepared food for others (52% vs. 58%), to have voted in the last presidential election (78% vs. 86%), and to have donated money to charitable organizations other than their church (74% vs. 82%).
- Presbyterian congregations have fewer new people—those attending for five years or less—in their pews than do congregations in the national average. One-third of worshipers in the national average (34%) are new people. This compares to 30% in racial-ethnic PC(USA) churches and 29% in other Presbyterian churches.
- The faith background of new people in Presbyterian congregations is also different from that in the national average. New people come from four different backgrounds: *first-timers*, who have never regularly attended anywhere; *returnees*, who are coming back after not attending for several years; *switchers*, who previously participated in a congregation of another denomination or faith group; and *transfers*, who were participating in another congregation of the same denomination or faith group immediately prior to coming to their current congregation. Presbyterian churches attract more returnees and switchers and fewer transfers than the national average. (See Figure 3.)
- Racial-ethnic Presbyterians give to their communities in other ways, as well. Compared to other Presbyterians, they are more likely to have loaned money to someone outside the family (30% vs. 23%), to have cared for someone who was sick (26% vs. 22%), and to have helped someone find a job (22% vs. 18%).
- Racial-ethnic Presbyterian congregations draw worshipers from a greater distance than do other Presbyterian congregations. While 61% of worshipers in other PC(USA) churches travel no more than 10 minutes to worship, only 55% in the national average and in racial-ethnic PC(USA) congregations can get to worship in that time.

| Worshipers Involved in Community Service |            |             |               |
|--|------------|-------------|---------------|
|  | Nat'l Avg. | R/E PC(USA) | Other PC(USA) |
| Through the congregation.....            | 18%        | 31%         | 30%           |
| Through other groups or agencies .....   | 30%        | 42%         | 43%           |



## Building Identity Connections

Worshippers have an individual identity based on their age, education, and other factors. Worshipers also have a congregational identity that includes what they value and their dreams for the future.

- Like in other types of congregations, there are fewer men (37%) than women (63%) in racial-ethnic Presbyterian congregations.
- In other Presbyterian churches, 97% of worshipers are white; in the national average the figure is 78%. In contrast, racial-ethnic Presbyterian churches include more diversity among their worshipers:

|                      | Nat'l<br>Avg. | R/E<br>PC(USA) | Other<br>PC(USA) |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| White .....          | 78%           | 63%            | 97%              |
| Black .....          | 5%            | 22%            | 1%               |
| Asian .....          | 4%            | 8%             | 1%               |
| Hispanic .....       | 13%           | 6%             | 1%               |
| Native American..... | 1%            | 2%             | 1%               |
| Other .....          | 2%            | 2%             | 1%               |

- Further, 15% of worshipers in racial-ethnic PC(USA) congregations were born outside the U.S. Only 4% of other Presbyterians and 13% in the national average were born outside this country.
- In terms of age, racial-ethnic PC(USA) churches are fairly similar to the national average and somewhat younger than other Presbyterian churches. Seven in ten worshipers (71%) in racial-ethnic PC(USA) churches and in the national average are 45 years of age or older. Among other Presbyterian churches the figure is 75%. For every one worshiper in a racial-ethnic PC(USA) church under the age of 25, there are five who are 65 or older.
- Presbyterian congregations—both racial-ethnic and other ones—have larger percentages of worshipers with college degrees (51% and 49%, respectively) when compared to the national average (37%).
- Racial-ethnic PC(USA) congregations have about as many married worshipers as the national average (65% in the national average; 63% in racial-ethnic PC(USA) churches). Among worshipers in other Presbyterian congregations, 70% are married.
- Fewer Presbyterians live in households that include children (39% in racial-ethnic PC(USA) churches and 38% in other Presbyterian churches). In the national average, 47% report having children at home.
- Racial-ethnic PC(USA) churches and other Presbyterian churches are somewhat less likely than the national average to be ready for change. Six in ten worshipers in the national average (61%) agree that “this congregation is always ready to try something new”; 54% in racial-ethnic PC(USA) congregations and 52% in other Presbyterian churches agree.
- Like other Presbyterian congregations, racial-ethnic PC(USA) congregations are more likely than the national average to claim a clear vision for the future. While 65% of worshipers in other Presbyterian and in PC(USA) racial-ethnic churches say their congregation has a clear vision, goals, or direction for ministry and mission **and** they are committed to them, only 59% in the national average responded similarly.

**Want more information?** Our Web site ([www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)) provides more information about the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. Results for the national average are detailed in *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations* (published by Westminster John Knox Press—call 1-800-277-2872 to order). Results for Presbyterian congregations are detailed in *A Field Guide to Presbyterian Congregations* (published by U.S. Congregations, PC(USA) Research Services Office—call 1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040 to order).

**Want to learn the strengths of your congregation?** Compare your congregation to the national average—or to the Presbyterian average—by taking a snapshot of your worshipers. Call 1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040 to learn about using the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in your congregation. Or see the section titled “Can My Congregation Take Part?” on our Web site ([www.USCongregations.org](http://www.USCongregations.org)).

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