

2009 US Congregational Life Survey: Highlights of Results Sunshine Cathedral Metropolitan Community Church Fort Lauderdale, Florida

By Rev. Elder Don Eastman; September 23, 2009

Introduction

The National Congregational Life Survey began in 1991 as a study of 310,000 congregants in the churches of 19 religious denominations in Australia. In 1996 it was repeated in Australia. Since then it has been also conducted in New Zealand and England. In 2001 it was introduced in the United States as the *US Congregational Life Survey*.

Beginning in April 2001, more than 300,000 worshipers in over 2000 American congregations were invited to complete a questionnaire during a worship service. Since the first study in the USA, additional congregations have been invited to participate in the survey.

In 2008-2009, the US Congregational Life Survey was repeated in 1,200 randomly selected congregations. Sunshine Cathedral was one of the congregations selected to participate in this survey. The survey questionnaire was completed by 319 congregants during Sunday worship services on March 1, 2009.

The following online links offer more information on the US Congregational Life Survey:

<http://www.uscongregations.org/>

http://hrr.hartsem.edu/cong/research_congnllife.html

The results of this survey provide valuable information to help congregations better understand themselves, identify their strengths, and stimulate their efforts to create a positive future.

Highlights of Survey Results at the Sunshine Cathedral

The US Congregational Life Survey is a snapshot survey. By offering an opportunity to worship attendees on one weekend to complete the questionnaire it gives a picture of the congregation on that day.

The following are some bullet point highlights of the results of the survey. For detail on all results see the survey report available in a PDF file. Also, a more detailed discussion of survey results is presented in another document available as a PDF file. Note: Sometimes the percentages do not total 100% due to rounding or multiple choices by respondents.

Composition of the Congregation

- Most respondents attend regularly; 92% indicated they attend two or more times per month.
- 16% of congregants have attended less than 1 year; 40% from 2 to 5 years; and 43% 6 or more years
- 18% of the congregants are under the age of 44; 54% are ages 45-64; 29% are age 65 and above.

- 12% of the congregants are female; 88% are male
- 87% of the congregants are Caucasian/White; 7% Hispanic; 4% Black/African American; the remainder other races
- 53% of congregants previously attended churches of Eucharistic traditions (observing Holy Communion every Sunday) such as Catholic, Episcopal and some Lutheran churches

Participation in Worship

- 89% of congregants always or usually experience inspiration and joy during worship services
- 91% of congregants indicate that worship and activities of this congregation help them with everyday living.
- Traditional hymns (55%), Praise music or choruses (28%) and Contemporary hymns (26%) are the most preferred styles of music in congregational worship.
- The three aspects of this congregation most valued by congregants are openness to social diversity (51%), sermons, preaching or homilies (45%) and sharing in Holy Communion (45%). However, the two options of traditional worship/music (32%) and contemporary worship/music (19%) are reflected in this congregation's blended worship/music. If "music in worship" had been the option the response would have likely been among those choices most valued.
- 64% of congregants have invited friends or relatives to attend a worship service in this congregation during the past year; an additional 28% would be willing to do so.

Beliefs, Values and Spiritual Practices

- Congregants describe their position on theological issues as very liberal (16%), liberal (38%), in the middle (35%), conservative (9%), or very conservative (2%)
- 60% of congregants agree that "God is directly involved in worldly affairs", 29% are neutral or unsure and 11% disagree.
- 75% of congregants agree that "all the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth"; 12% are neutral or unsure; 13% disagree
- 65% of congregants disagree that "only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved". 19% are neutral or unsure and 15% agree.
- 58% of congregants frequently spend time in spiritual practices of prayer, meditation or reading the Bible; another 27% do so less frequently; 14% do so hardly ever or never.
- 87% of congregants agree that "my spiritual needs are being met in this congregation"; 11% are neutral or unsure; 2% disagree

Leadership and Direction

- 91% of congregants agree that "there is a good match between our congregation and our pastor", 7% are neutral or unsure and 2% disagree.
- 87% of congregants agree that they "have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future", 13% are neutral or unsure and no respondents disagreed.
- 89% of congregants feel the congregation has a clear vision, goals or direction for its ministry and mission although 10% are not committed to them. 12% see no clear vision, goals or direction.

- 52% of congregants see this congregation as moving in new directions, another 14% see it as deciding on new directions; 10% see it as maintaining past directions or needing to go back to the way things were done in the past. 2% say “we need to rethink where we are heading”, and 20% don’t know.

Community Involvement and Social Justice

- 75% of the congregants are not involved regularly in activities of this congregation to reach out to the wider community; 7% are involved in evangelism/outreach activities; 17% are involved in community service, justice or advocacy activities.
- 34% of congregants are involved with social service or charity groups not connected to this congregation; 11% are involved with advocacy, justice or lobbying groups. 61% of the congregants are not involved in such groups.
- 70% of congregants donated money within the past year to charitable organizations other than this congregation
- 86% of the congregants voted in the 2008 presidential election
- 51% of the congregants donated or prepare food for someone outside their family or this congregation

Participation in Congregational Life

- 76% of congregants are not involved in any group activities of this congregation, such as prayer, study, fellowship or social groups.
- 79% of congregants indicate that they have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation; another 8% indicate that they do not such a sense but are happy as they are. 6% of the respondents said they did not have a sense of belonging but they are new in the congregation.
- Compared to 2 years ago 25% of congregants are participating more in the activities of the congregation; 48% are participating at the same level; 12% are participating less; and 15% have been coming less than 2 years.
- 70% of congregants indicate that they do not have any roles in the ministries or groups of the congregation.
- 68% of congregants indicate they have some close friends in this congregation; another 9% say most of their closest friends are part of this congregation.