



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN MINORITY CONGREGATIONS

Roberto Fernández Morales, PhD
Susan Barnett, PhD
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**RESEARCH
SERVICES**



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Purpose and method for this study

The 225th General Assembly (2022) directed Research Services:

"to conduct a qualitative research study exploring the particularities and differences of Christian education and faith formation ministries and practices in racial ethnic minority congregations, for the purpose of informing the PMA offices related to Christian formation, as well as the cultural sensitivity and relevance for Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC) publications. These offices should report back to the 226th General Assembly (2024) as to how this information was disseminated and implemented"

In response to the mandate, Research Services developed a qualitative survey to better understand Christian Education and Faith Formation in racial/ethnic minority congregations. Data from the Session Annual Statistic Report data yielded 1,539 minority congregations. These congregations received the survey with 128 responding for an 8.4% response rate.

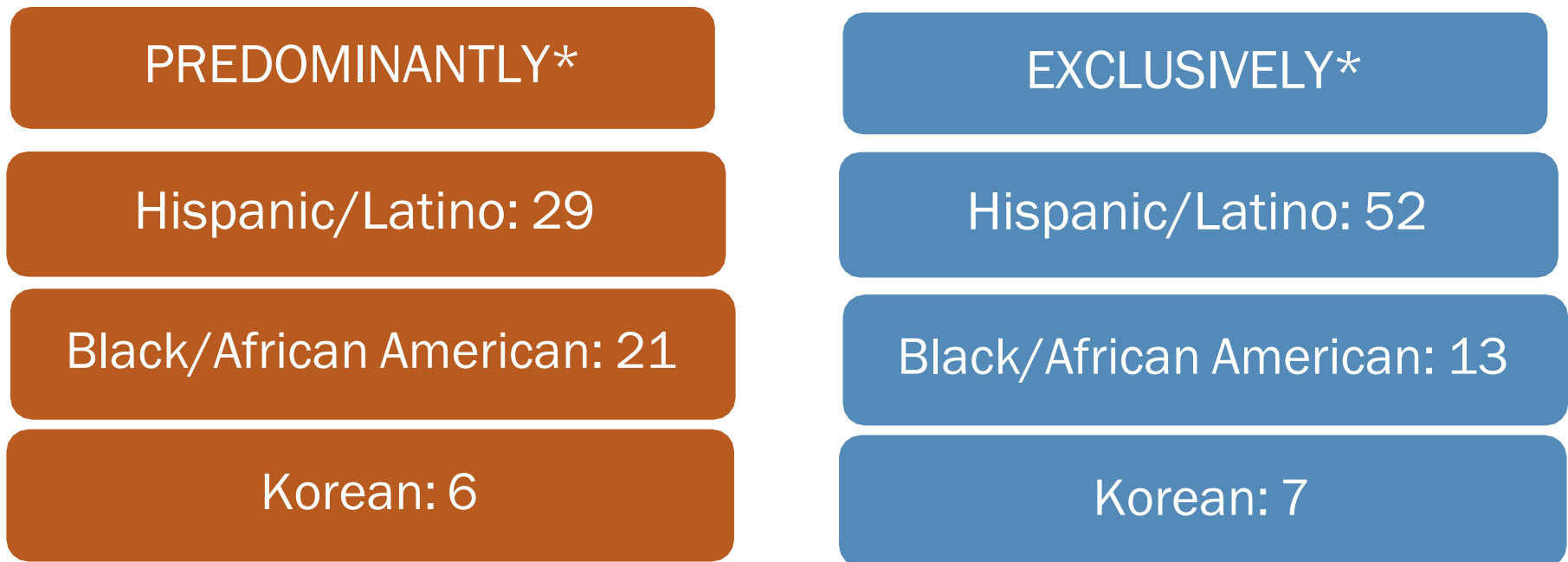
Christian Education and Congregations

This section contains demographics of congregations' size, location, racial composition, languages spoken, and how congregations engage in Christian Education.

Congregational Demographics

We asked respondents to describe the racial ethnic makeup of their congregation. Data shows that Hispanic and Latino congregations tend to be largely exclusively mono-racial congregations compared to Black and Korean congregations. Black/African American respondents are more likely to form part of congregations that are predominantly, but not exclusively, Black/African American. Lastly, Korean respondents seem fairly evenly distributed between predominantly and exclusively Korean congregations.

Of the 128 responding congregations, they identify as a:



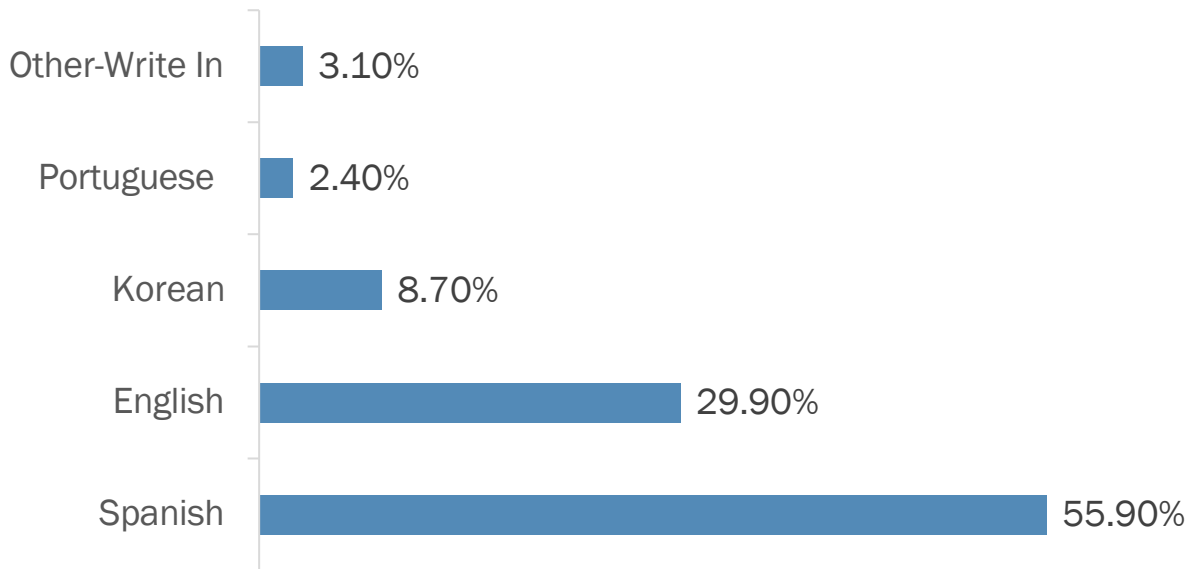
**"Predominantly" is defined as a congregation being comprised of at least 50% one ethnicity.*

"Exclusively" is defined as a congregation comprised of at least 80% of one ethnicity.

Primary Languages in Congregations

Spanish is the dominate non-English language spoken in PCUSA congregations. Very few respondents report their congregations to be bilingual.

Primary Languages in Congregation (n=127)

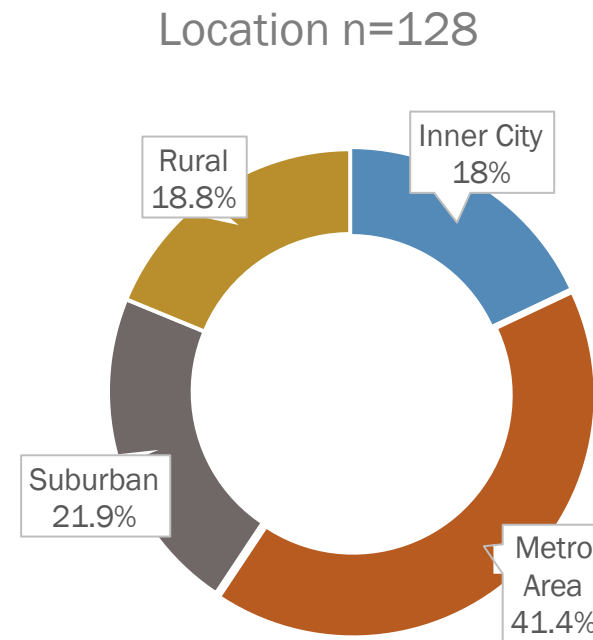
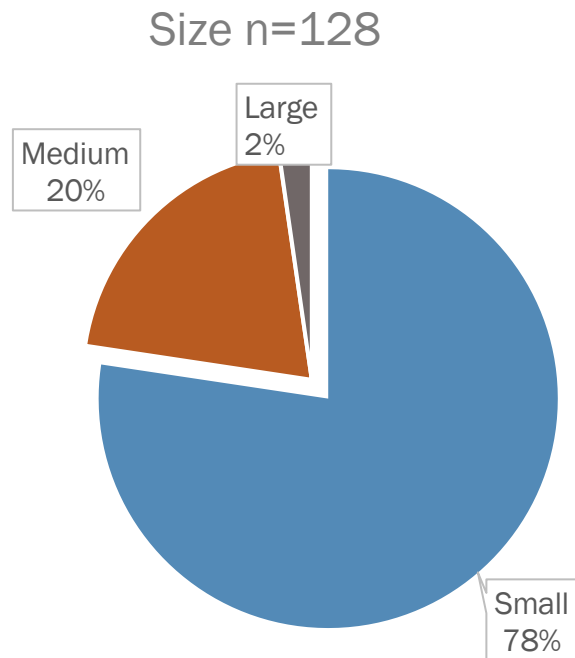


Bilingual Congregations

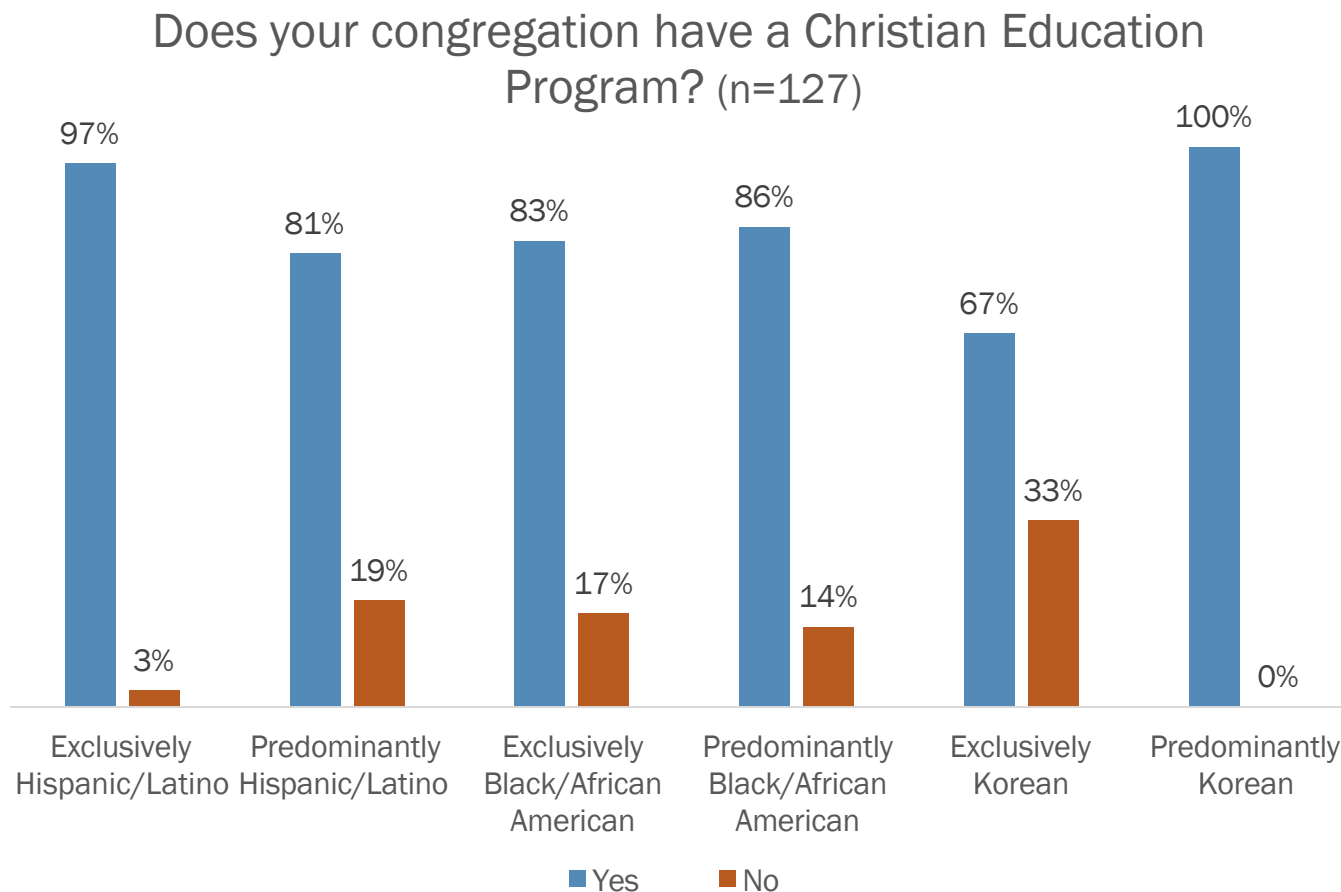
A small number of respondents (3%) stated that they speak two primary languages in their congregation. Of these, most bilingual congregations spoke English and Spanish. However, a few respondents stated that they speak English and Swahili.

Congregation Size & Location

We asked respondents to describe the size and location of their congregation. Overwhelmingly, most (78%) report participating in small congregations. Most (81%) respondents live in urban spaces comprising the metro area, the inner city, and suburbia. The largest subset of these (41.4%) are respondents who live in a metro area.



Christian Education Programs by Race/Ethnicity



The graph on the left depicts the presence of Christian Education Programs by Race. Most respondents are in a congregation that has a Christian Education program. However, we also see that some congregations are less likely to have these programs. One third (1/3) of the exclusively Korean congregations do not offer Christian Education programs, this is notably different from the others.

How congregations engage in Christian Education: Bible Study & Sunday School

When asked about how their congregations engage in Christian Education, respondents stated that classes were often separated by age and gender. The following quotes were taken verbatim from respondents.

“Adult Bible Study Women's "Book Club" Congregational Education Studies (Book, Polity, etc.) Youth Sunday Biblical engagement”

“Sunday School classes in English and Spanish. Presbyterian Women Horizons Lessons in English and in Spanish.”

“Lectionary Bible Study once a month on the first Sundays. Sunday School for the youth every Sunday. Prayer Meeting Thursday evenings. Lenten Bible Study and a thematic bible study during the year.”

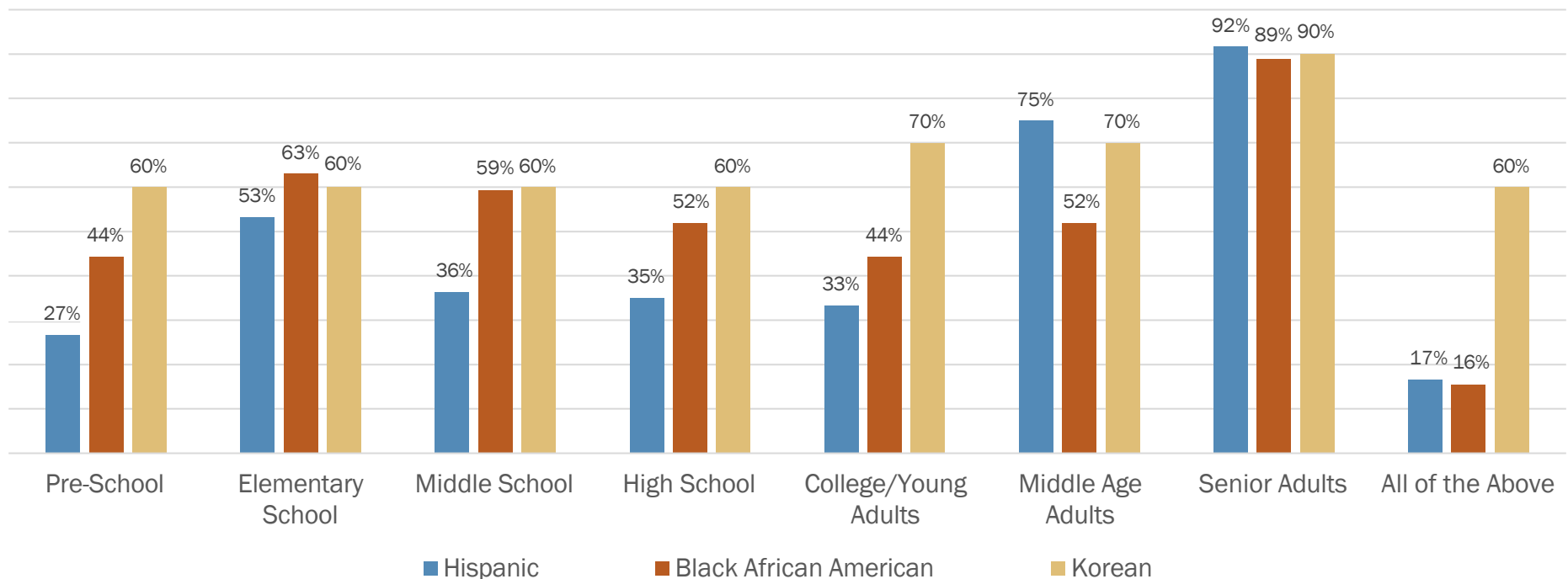
“어린이 주일학교 성경공부 장년 금요 성경공부” (Translation: Children’s Sunday School and Adult Bible Study, and Friday Bible Study)

This question also highlighted the times at which respondents typically met for their classes. Nearly all respondents mentioned that Christian Education programs met close to or during the weekends at frequencies equal to or greater than once a month.

Christian Education by Age Groups & Race/Ethnicity

Christian education programs appear to be offered across all age groups. As we consider the differences across the three racial/ethnic groups, pre-school offerings in Hispanic congregations is significantly lower than the others. This is seen again in the middle and high school groups. This may be in part due to what was learned from the Hispanic Leadership 2023 study. From that study, we know that issues related to social instability and safety due to immigration status, language access barriers, and resource cost may explain some of what is seen here.

Christian Education by Age Group and Congregational Race/Ethnicity



Resources and Staffing

This section includes results and analysis regarding the logistics of Christian Education, including education leaders and familiarity with PCUSA resources.

Resources and Staffing

89% of congregations offer Christian Education programs: Bible Study or Sunday School with different leadership models.

Ruling Elder or Lay Leader

Several congregations report Christian Education is led by laity.

25%

Senior Pastoral Leader

This can be the Minister of the Word and Sacrament or a Commissioned Ruling Elder

50%

Christian Educators

Paid or volunteer staff designated as Christian Educators by their primary congregation.

22%

Who leads Christian Education Programs?

For half of the congregations in this study, it is the senior pastoral leader. In the remaining congregations, it's a blend of staff and laity, with 3% being associate pastoral leaders or interims.

Resources that respondents want

In surveys to both the congregational leaders and frontline workers, respondents expressed the need for additional resources. Some resources were beyond the scope of this work such as more pastors, Christian educators, and some specific books. As for the materials they would like developers of Christian Education materials to create, they provided a challenging list. Here is a summary of what they requested:

- Flexible materials that can be adapted to different environments and multiple age groups
- Spanish materials for all age groups
- Materials that are adaptable for all levels of educational attainment.
- Affordable materials for the congregation with limited budgets
- More online materials such as videos and lessons in a PowerPoint format
- Culturally diverse interpretations of the Bible
- Resources for those adults and children who have difficulty reading and/or have intellectual challenges.
- Inclusion of African American hymns in hymnals
- More activities in youth materials
- Bible-centered lessons minus political messaging

What worked well in previous programs

We asked respondents who had experience in previous Christian Education programs to share what they saw as working well. Some respondents highlighted the need for contextualized education programs that spoke to the cultural context of participants. The following quotes were taken verbatim from respondents.

“Sometimes in a previous congregation, materials in other denominations were used, that were available in Spanish and adapted to the specific context of the community.”

“Use of culturally relevant resources that spoke to the life and challenges of congregation members (i.e., Urban Ministries curriculum).”

While others focused on the benefits of an open space of discussion.

“People love to study the bible and ask questions of what they don't understand”

“El permitir que hermanos y hermanas puedan exponer sus pensamiento en la conversaciones, dinámicas y compromiso religioso” (Translation: Allowing brothers and sisters to expose their thoughts in conversation, with a religious dynamic and commitment.)

Defining Christian education and faith formation

...come and see...

...ven y ve...

...와서 봐...

This section contains the respondents' interpretations of what Christian Education and Faith Formation mean to them.

What does “Christian Education” mean to you?

We wanted to give respondents the chance to interpret the term “Christian Education” in their own way. Respondents focused on an academic interpretation, highlighting the process of learning about theology and Biblical scholarship. Interestingly, Spanish-speaking respondents also mentioned using Christian Education for future generations.

“Learning the Bible and what the Lord calls us to do from a culturally diverse point of view as it pertains to the community”

“Teaching about God the Father, Son and Holy spirit and Gods relationship with humanity in the Bible as well as the teaching of Christian tenets, creeds, confessions and governance of the church.”

“Formal education about God and Jesus knowledge and how to act.”

“Educar al pueblo de Dios para la Obra del Ministerio” (Translation: Educating the people of God for the Work of the Ministry)

“기독교인으로 성장하는데 필요한 과정” (Translation: The process necessary to grow as a Christian.)

What does “Faith formation” mean to you?

Respondents gave their interpretation of the term “Faith formation”. They approached “faith formation” in a more spiritual and moral slant than the previous question on Christian Education.

“Faith formation to us means that there is a congregation or community that wants to grow in faith with God.”

“Faith formation, for me, is the connection of the person with God. Being aware of one's spiritual and emotional needs, and then understanding God's ways with an assurance grounded in faith.”

“Faith based values and ethics. That will help guide the people through life.”

“Ven y ve. Tenemos un maestro que nos llamó para ser sus discípulos, siempre siguiendo a Jesús y llamados a servirle.” (Translation: Come and see. We have a teacher that called us to be his disciples, always following Jesus and called to serve him.)

“믿음의 대상과 방법을 바로 알아서 정상적인 크리스도인이 되는 것” (Translation: Becoming a normal/strong/good/faithful Christian by knowing the object and method of faith.)

“Es la formación integral, en todas las áreas de su vida, (mental, emocional, física, familiar espiritual, relacional, legal y social) de cada creyente en su discipulado basados en la Escritura y realidad específica.”

Translation: The integral formation, in all areas of life (mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, relational, legal, and social) of each believer in their discipleship based on Scripture and reality.

“What does ‘faith formation’ mean to you?”

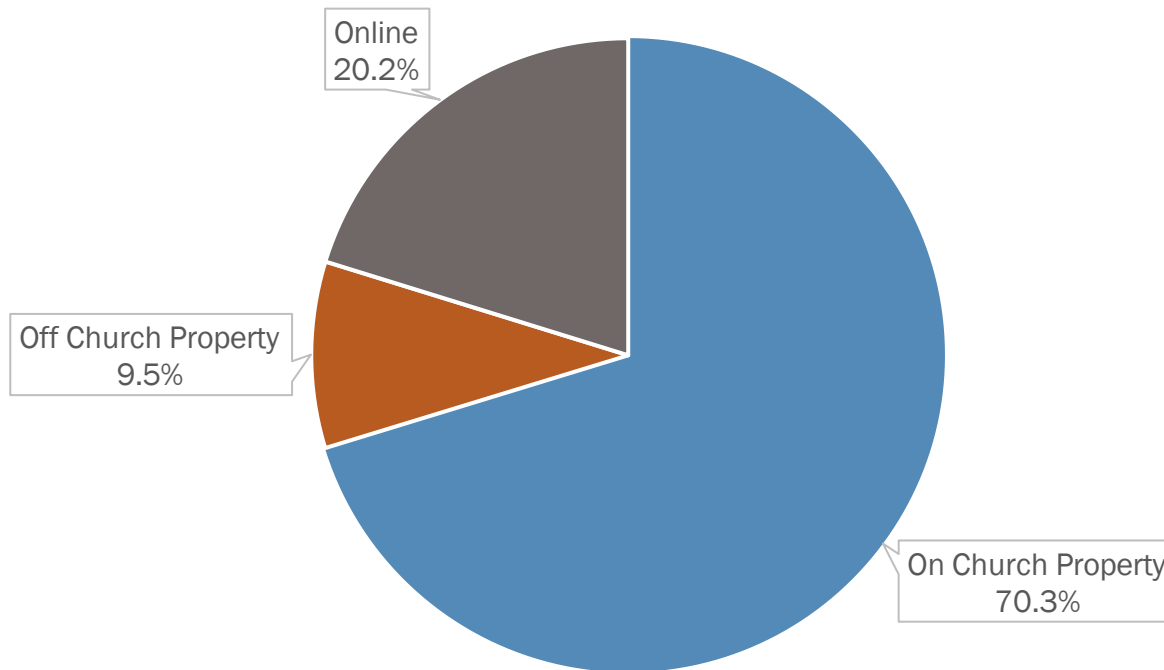
Education in the local congregation

This section includes results and analysis regarding where Christian Education takes place, as well as how congregations engage in their programs.

Christian Education Location

A large majority of Christian Education and faith formation programs happen on church property, with the second most frequent place is in online spaces.

Christian Education Location (n=84)



How does your congregation typically engage in Christian education?

Important note: All respondents to this question referred to Christian Education programs as either “Sunday School” or “Bible Studies”

We asked respondents to describe how their congregation typically engages in Christian education. Answers mostly focused on the time and place of Christian Education programs, while some also included mentions of discussion-focused lessons.

“Discussion, singing, prayer”

“Sunday morning before Service and sometimes during prayer services and in small particular groups.”

“We meet on Sunday morning for Sunday school and if they do not under[stand] or have questions on the topic we are discussing our congregation is more then[sic] free to ask questions. We also do this in our Bible studies.”

What is unique about how your congregation teaches the Bible?

We asked respondents if there was anything unique about how their congregation taught the Bible. Interestingly, a large number of respondents had some manner of activity or discussion-based approach to Christian Education that de-emphasized a teacher-student hierarchy

“My congregation is a mature group of seniors whose life experiences help them understand the true values of Christianity so that teaching them usually turns out to be a learning experience for me as well. Sunday School is only part of how we engage in Christian formation.”

“Due to the diverse nature of our congregation, teachings are augmented with real experiences from other cultures as well as inner city impacts”

“역사적인 면과 영적인 면의 조화” (Translation: Harmony of historical and spiritual aspects)
“Our congregation is unique in that we do workshops in other areas of community”

“The children are participating in Christian presentation, utilizing the text book Growing In God’s Love and YouTube Christian videos. The Holy Bible is the guide.”

“Es más conversatorio y menos maestro-estudiante.” (Translation: it is more conversational and less teacher-student.)

Culture in Christian education

We were curious to know if minority congregations included discussions of modern-day culture or current events in their Christian Education programs. Respondents largely stated that, while they try to avoid partisan politics in education programs, current events and cultural discussions inform their education programs.

“Absolutely...we talk about race relations from the pulpit and in house churches or smaller groups; same with politics and our biblical call to engage in politics (more than partisanship) and see how it relates to life in practical ways.”

“For the most part, our congregation avoids politics in our discourse. Culture manifests itself frequently in our discourse because of our diversity and how certain aspects of the Bible are interpreted in other cultures.”

“Although we are respectful of political views, I for one, like to put into context the current political climate and the issues that create it with the purpose of having a clearer view from the Christian perspective.”

“Discussion of race, colonization, equality and how politics affects life, ecology, laws and access to services.”

Pandemic Effects

This section includes brief discussion and data regarding how the COVID-19 Pandemic affected congregations' Christian Education programs.

Effects on Christian Education programs

COVID impacted all aspects of human life; the Church was not excluded. Many leaders struggled to meet the needs of their congregations. Some congregations developed new approaches to education and worship with online offerings. Other congregations that did not have access to those resources could not maintain and, ultimately, experienced loss.

ONLINE

“There was still a desire to participate in Bible Study and although many of our seniors struggled with the concept, others assisted in encouraging and teaching them how to use an alternate method to access both worship and Bible Study.”

“Our impact was positive because we had more online service and we tried to do once a week the Bible studies.”

“There was a full 6-month delay in producing online access, but a full recovery of participants who wanted to be engaged.”

LOSS

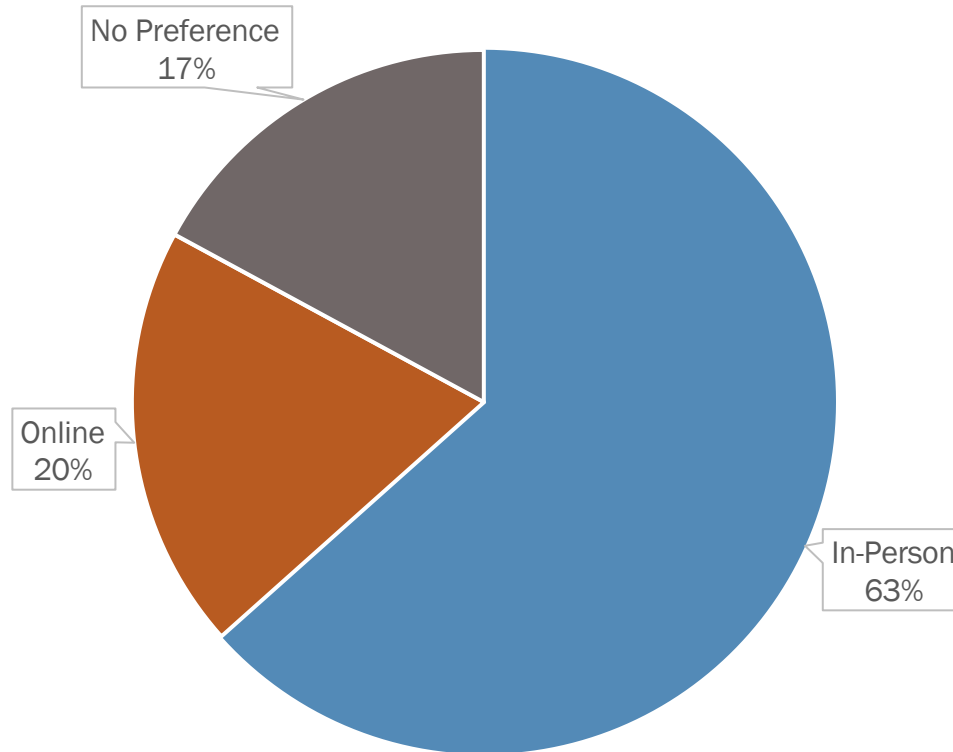
“People's participation and response went down drastically and we are still struggling.”

“We have lost many members. Most have not returned.”

Christian Education after COVID

Nearly two-thirds of respondents prefer Christian Education to be conducted through in-person lessons compared to online classes.

Christian Education Classes: Online vs In-Person (n=82)



What we learned

**Summaries of data and
future directions for
studies.**

Summary 1 of 2

Minority congregations are, on average, small congregations located within the metro areas and largely speak English or Spanish. Most responding congregations offer some form of Christian Education/Faith Formation programs with 50% of them being led by the senior pastoral leader.

Respondents prefer using their Bibles for Christian education and faith formation in addition to adding more culturally relevant materials and resources.

Having said that, they would like to have more online resources that can be printed locally. This finding prompted conversations with Presbyterian Publishing Company (PPC) staff to discuss the availability of online resources. Currently, PPC offers many resources online. This points to a knowledge gap between PCUSA and the end users about the availability of online resources.

Summary 2 of 2

Other material requests include more materials in Spanish, affordable, appropriate for individuals with different educational attainment and learning abilities, more activities in youth materials, and culturally diverse interpretations of the Bible.

In terms of Christian Education programs, respondents highlighted the benefits of discussion and participation-based methods. They incorporate current events and discussions about inequality to supplement their Christian education efforts.

COVID most severely affected struggling congregations. Those who could adapt often went online. Four years after the initial shutdown in March 2020, most respondents prefer in-person meetings but see the benefit and flexibility that virtual meeting spaces offer.

Going Forward

Studying minority congregations to better understand their particular needs will benefit the denomination, the congregations, and their local communities. As such, future study directions are suggested below.

1. Conducting studies on the state of minority congregations to better understand their everyday challenges and opportunities.
2. Examining the relationship between the National Offices and its various bodies (REWIM and the caucuses that represent the many racial/ethnic members) to the congregations they represent and how they can be better served.
3. On-going review of new language and culturally relevant materials as they are developed and used by racial/ethnic congregations is recommended.

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions using surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, presbyteries and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a ministry of the Administrative Services Group.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or research@pcusa.org.



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