

DISCIPLESHIP AND WORSHIP IN NEW WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES

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**RESEARCH
SERVICES**

OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

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DISCIPLESHIP & SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Although NWC leaders describe both discipleship and spiritual formation as types of personal growth, there are key distinctions in their descriptions of the two. When asked what discipleship means to them, leaders describe it as following Jesus, and use relational and communal terms to describe discipleship; for them, discipleship is about action and cultivating relationships with other people. Spiritual formation, on the other hand, is described as personal faith development, and involves disciplines that cultivate a personal relationship with God.

Five distinct types of spiritual practices emerged from the data: traditional, contemplative, outward focused, inward focused, and narrative. NWCS that engage in more traditional and outward-focused spirituality also tend to be more communal, whereas contemplative and inward-focused NWCS tend to incorporate more personal spiritual practices into their tradition.

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WORSHIP PRACTICES

Worshiping community leaders use worship as a means to help their participants understand scripture. Leaders' top priorities for the worshiping community are building relationships, worshipping together, and serving others: in short, to love each other and to love God.

Leaders are making worship more active by incorporating food, engaging in spiritual practices together, and cultivating the creativity of worshipers.

About 83% also offer sacraments. Common themes for communion include sharing a meal as a sacrament, including children, and practicing an open table, in which anyone can receive communion. Common themes for baptism include baptisms in nature and full immersion.



DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

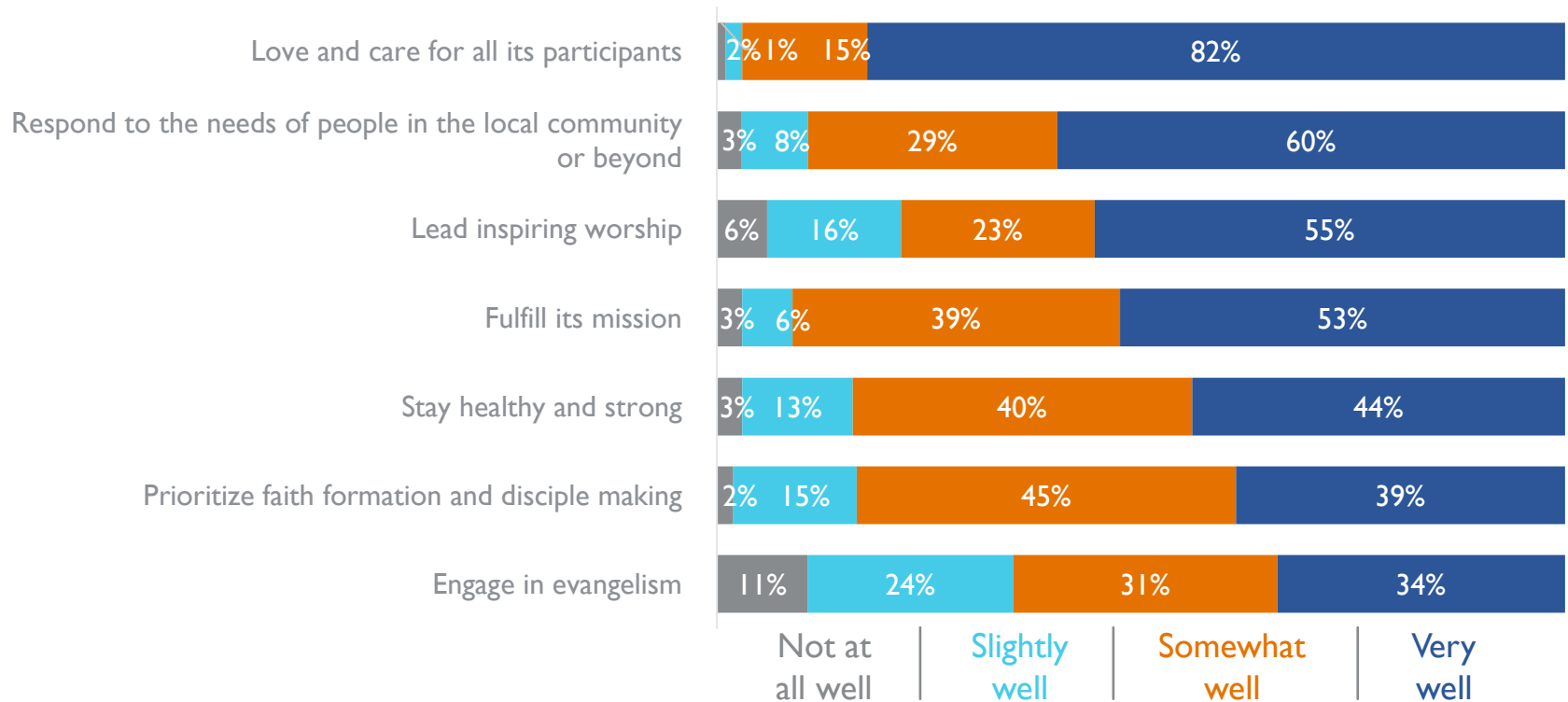
HOW DO NEW WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES (NWC) ENGAGE IN
DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION?

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

VITALITY AND NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

This report focuses on two of the seven marks of congregational vitality: discipleship and worship. In the first section, we cover discipleship, and in the second worship.

Leaders were asked to rate themselves on each of the seven marks with the following single-item questions. How well does your worshipping community...?

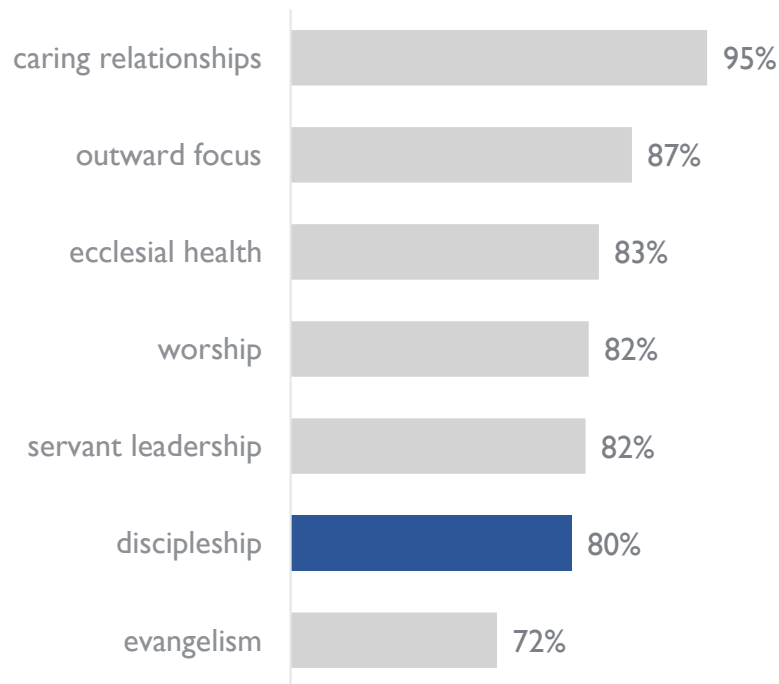


DISCIPLESHIP AND NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

Although most NWCs engage in discipleship, leaders do not rate it as their strongest mark of vitality.

When asked to rate how well their worshiping community prioritizes faith formation and discipleship, leaders give themselves an average score of 3.20 out of 4, which translates to a self-rating of **80%**

NWC scores on the seven marks of vitality



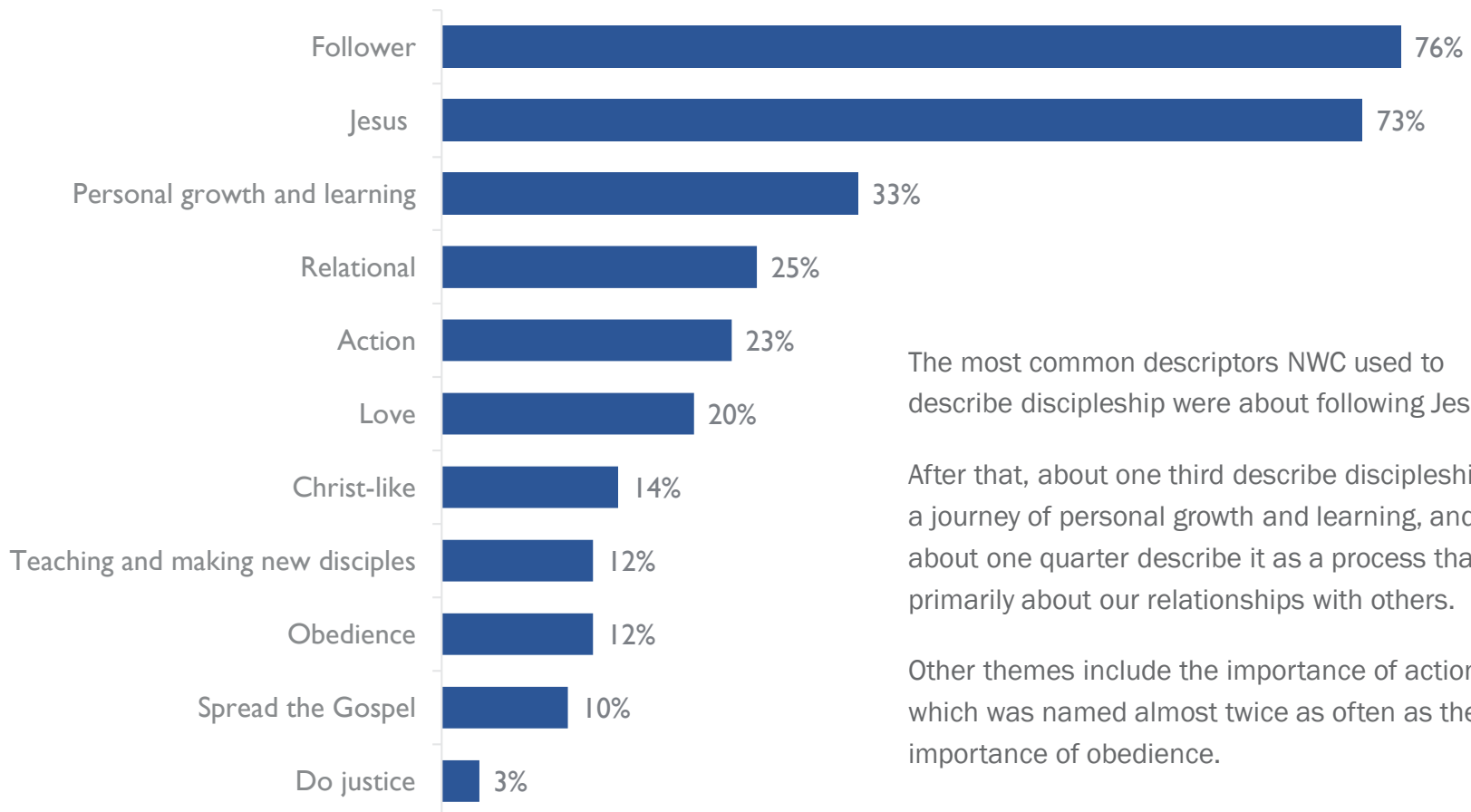
91% of new worshiping community leaders disciple participants in their community. The methods of discipling cited is, in order of prevalence: one-on-one mentoring (61%), followed by small groups (60%), Bible study (53%), service projects (36%), discipleship courses (16%), and confirmation classes (8%).

However, on average NWC leaders give themselves a relatively low rating regarding how well their worshiping community prioritizes faith formation and discipleship. In fact, the only mark of vitality they rate themselves lower on is evangelism.

Since this is a self-rating, it could be that leaders are simply harder on themselves regarding their discipleship efforts.

WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP MEAN TO NWC LEADERS?

New worshiping community leaders were asked to describe what discipleship means to them. The percentages in the following chart indicate the percentage of times a particular topic or theme showed up in the 93 responses. Most responses contained more than one theme.



The most common descriptors NWC used to describe discipleship were about following Jesus.

After that, about one third describe discipleship as a journey of personal growth and learning, and about one quarter describe it as a process that is primarily about our relationships with others.

Other themes include the importance of action, which was named almost twice as often as the importance of obedience.

WHAT DOES DISCIPLESHIP MEAN TO YOU?

"[to] be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

It means growing together towards Jesus.

It means worrying about the people God has placed besides me. In the spiritual and the physical. It means taking them through a process of understanding of faith and hope. Believing in God's will, but also physically working and making an action to do His will. It means a spiritual discipline exerting the person so that they give fruit in abundance.

Discipleship is a demonstration of our relationship with the Triune God, through the way we choose to spend our time, talents and treasures and the way we treat our neighbors.

Forming oneself and others into Christ's image.

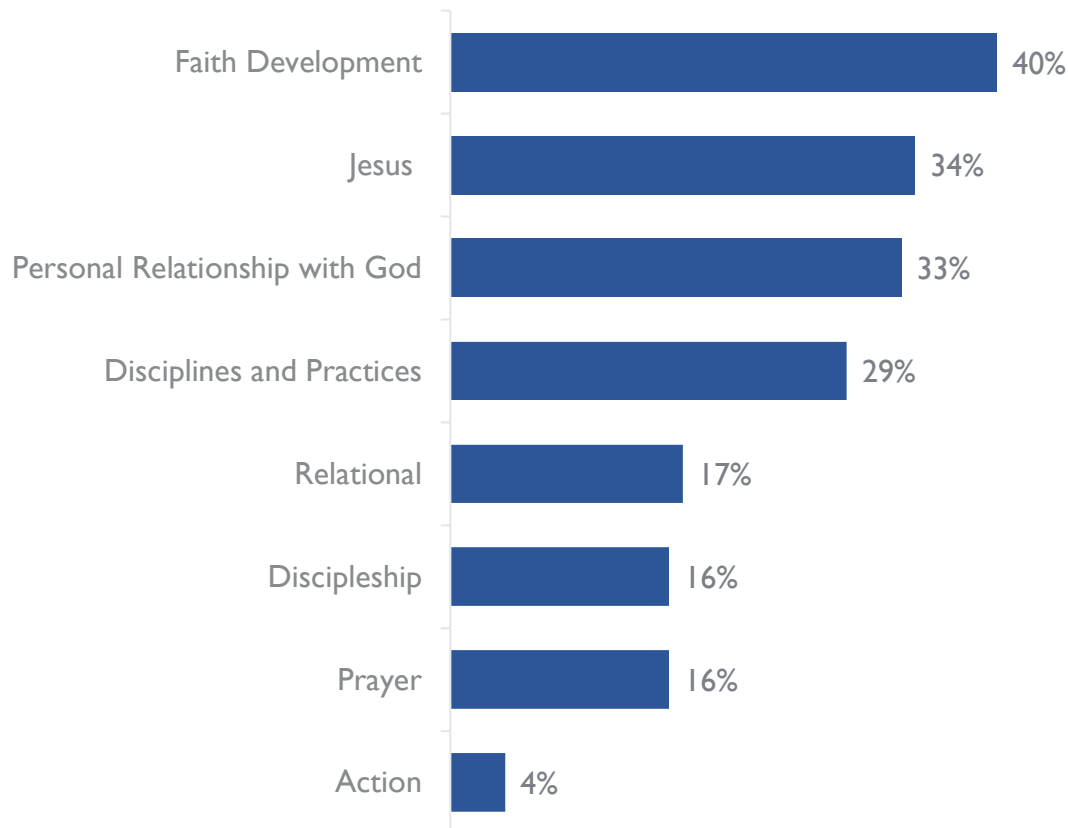
Discipleship is not just an individual pursuit; it is relational and deeply rooted in communal influence and formation. Disciples of Jesus therefore are learners and doers of God's love whose whole lives exemplify such love.

Discipleship means knowing Jesus (and being in the lifelong process of coming to know Jesus). Knowing Jesus means engaging with a world in need in ways consistent with Jesus actions and dispositions. We focus on Jesus's preference for the poor and oppressed, and say "to know Jesus is to do justice".

"He must become greater, I must become less" (John 3:30).

WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL FORMATION MEAN TO NWC LEADERS?

New worshiping community leaders were asked to describe what spiritual formation means to them. The percentages in the following chart indicate the percentage of times a particular topic or theme showed up in the 93 responses. Most responses contained more than one theme.



The most common way NWC leaders describe spiritual formation is as a process of faith development and learning.

After that, leaders focus on Jesus and the development of a person's personal relationship with God through the use of disciplines and practices.

Other themes include the importance of relationships, and connecting spiritual formation to discipleship (some describe it as a path to discipleship; others say these are the same thing).

WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL FORMATION MEAN TO YOU?

Spiritual formation to us is to provide a platform and avenues of communion with the Divine.

To grow in faith and grace...

The way we gather together in uncommon friendship and common discipleship

Spiritual formation is the intentional effort to form ourselves to what is pleasing to God. In the community this happens through conversations, prayers, and trying new things...but also in experiencing one another's circumstances and being there with each other.

The discipline of getting closer to God.

Spiritual formation is the exploration of our relationship with the Triune God, through prayer, study, meditation, discussion, etc.

Spiritual formation means growth and maturity toward doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

Spiritual Formation are the practices that form us into disciples. They're the daily habits, efforts, prayers and exercises that lead us into being formed in God's image and likeness. They're the rhythms we chose to be released from sin, shadow, addictions, compulsions, and attachments in order to be free in God's love, light, freedom and hope.

DISCIPLESHIP & SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

New worshiping community leaders were asked what practices their community engage in on a regular basis and most often. First, they were given a list to choose from to state their regular practices, then they were given space to write about their most common practices.

Practice	%
Prayer	91
Hospitality and welcoming the stranger	87
Study of Bible or spiritual leaders	85
Serving others	83
Making disciples	82
Celebrating the sacraments	80
Sharing the Good News	79
Being a good steward of the Earth	59
Meditation	58
Storytelling	54
Speaking truth to power	50
Simplicity	48
Honoring sabbath	47
Fasting	29
Solitude	25

The top three practices are prayer, hospitality, and study. The least common are solitude, fasting, and honoring the sabbath. Leaders also had an opportunity to write in other types of discipleship and spiritual formation practices their community engages in and 24 responded.

Other methods leaders wrote in include:

- *Shared meals*
- *Loving their neighbor*
- *Creative activities*
- *Being in community together*

When asked to write about what practices they engage in most often, the list was almost exactly the same. The largest difference was in the percentage that spoke of how they gather in worship; although this was not in the pre-determined list of discipleship and spiritual formation practices, 25% of leaders mention it as one of their most common practice.

DISCIPLESHIP & SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

Five themes emerged from the combination of discipleship and spiritual formation practices.

A closer examination of how communities engage in discipleship and spiritual formation practices shows that there is a pattern in the practices. Certain practices tend to group together.

An analysis of the data show that there are five groupings of discipleship and spiritual formation practices: traditional, contemplative, outward focused, inward focused, and narrative.

NWCS that engage in more traditional and outward-focused spirituality tend to be more communal in practice, whereas contemplative and inward-focused NWCS tend to incorporate more personal spiritual practices into their tradition.

Traditional

Prayer
Making disciples
Serving others
Study of Bible or spiritual leaders
Sharing the Good News
Celebrating the sacraments
Hospitality and welcoming the stranger

Contemplative

Simplicity
Meditation
Solitude
Sharing the Good News

Outward Focused

Being a good steward of the Earth
Speaking truth to power
Hospitality and welcoming the stranger
Meditation

Inward Focused

Solitude
Fasting
Honoring Sabbath
No hospitality or welcoming the stranger

Narrative

Storytelling
Honoring Sabbath

Results were derived from a principal components analysis; factor loadings over 0.4 were retained. The rotation converged in 6 iterations.

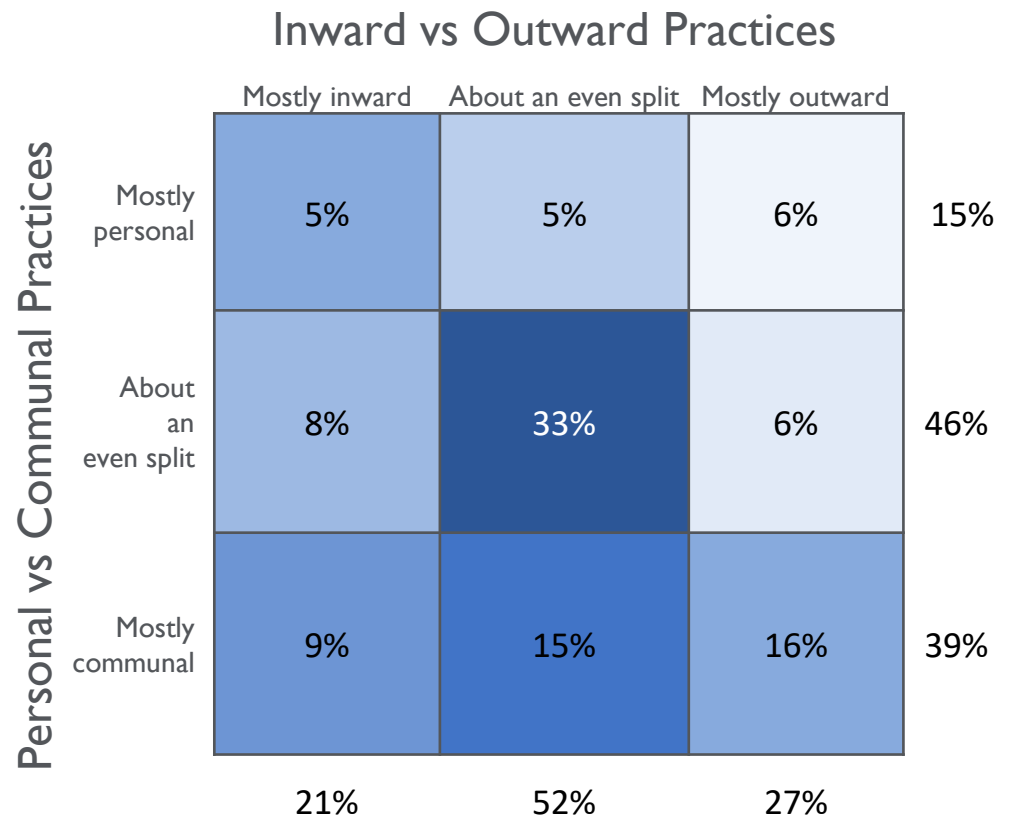
SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION

Discipleship and spiritual formation is incredibly varied. It comprises both outward practices, focused on action in the world, and inward practices, focused on interior spiritual life. It can also be personal (done alone) or communal (done with others).

Overall, 39% of leaders said their NWC focuses more on communal practices, and 15% stated they focus on personal. 46% said it was an even split.

In addition, 27% state that their communal practices are more outward focused, and 21% said more inward focused, with 52% saying there was an even split.

Although in general, inward is more common than outward orientations, and communal is more common than personal practices, the plurality of NWCs aim for an even split of personal-communal and inward-outward.



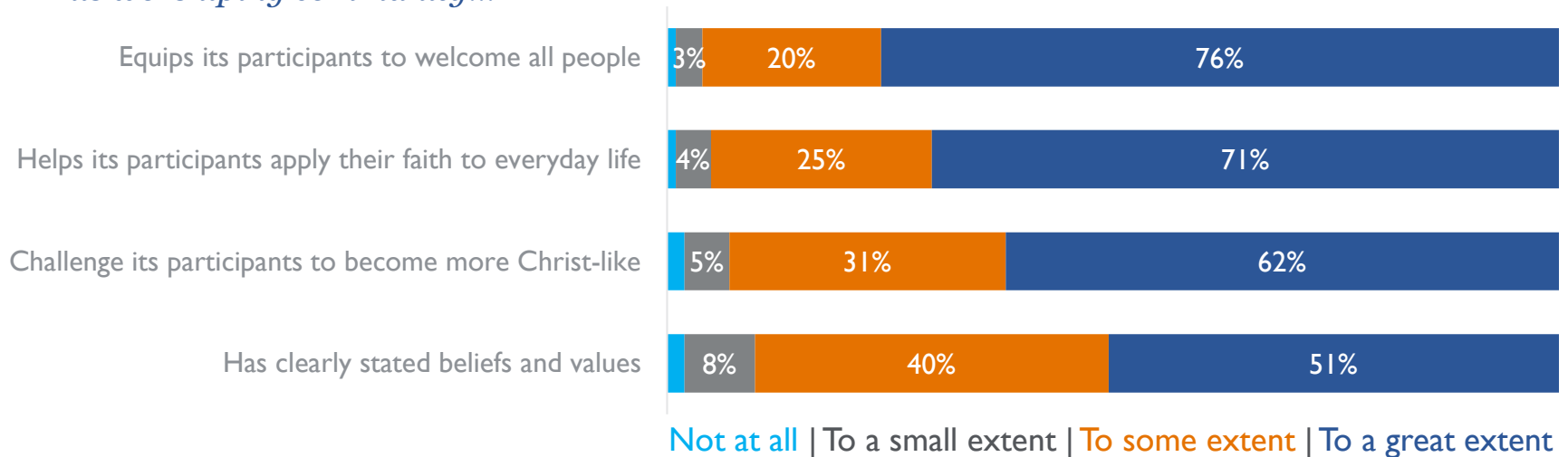
Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

NEW WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES VALUE HOSPITALITY

76% of new worshiping communities equip their participants to welcome all people ‘to a great extent’

Leaders do not generally rate themselves very strongly in terms of their community having clearly stated beliefs and values, which is not unexpected for a newly-formed group—especially one that is trying to reach people who do not have a history of going to church. However, these communities are nevertheless demonstrating their values in their responses to the other questions below. Over two thirds of new worshiping community leaders are working “to a great extent” to equip their participants to welcome all people, and almost as many are helping their participants apply their faith to everyday life. It could be argued that this strong support for being welcoming is, in fact, the most tangible statement of the beliefs and values of new worshiping communities being surveyed.

This worshiping community...



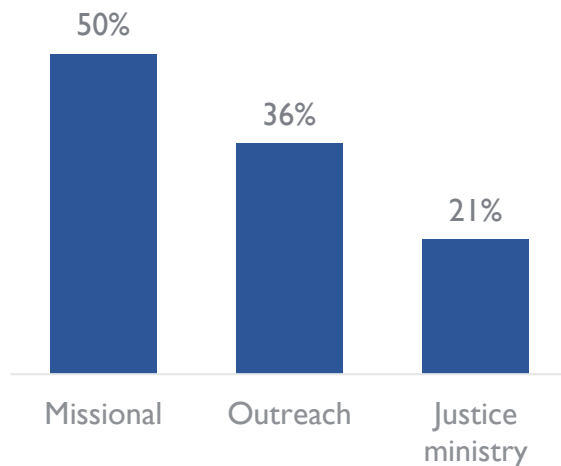
BREAKING OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH

New worshiping communities are being Jesus out in the world.

63% of new worshiping communities report having either a missional, outreach, or justice ministry focus

NWCs that do not focus on these things still do them—and they do not work alone, either. The vast majority (90%) of new worshiping communities work together with other community organizations and agencies.

Percentage of NWCs reporting missional, outreach, or justice ministry as a focus



Ways of working with other organizations include:

Ecumenical activities	42%
Providing food and shelter	42%
Justice	39%
Education	38%
Children's activities	36%
Arts	29%
Environment	19%
Sports activities	17%
Healthcare	12%
HIV/AIDS support networks	4%
Other:	26%

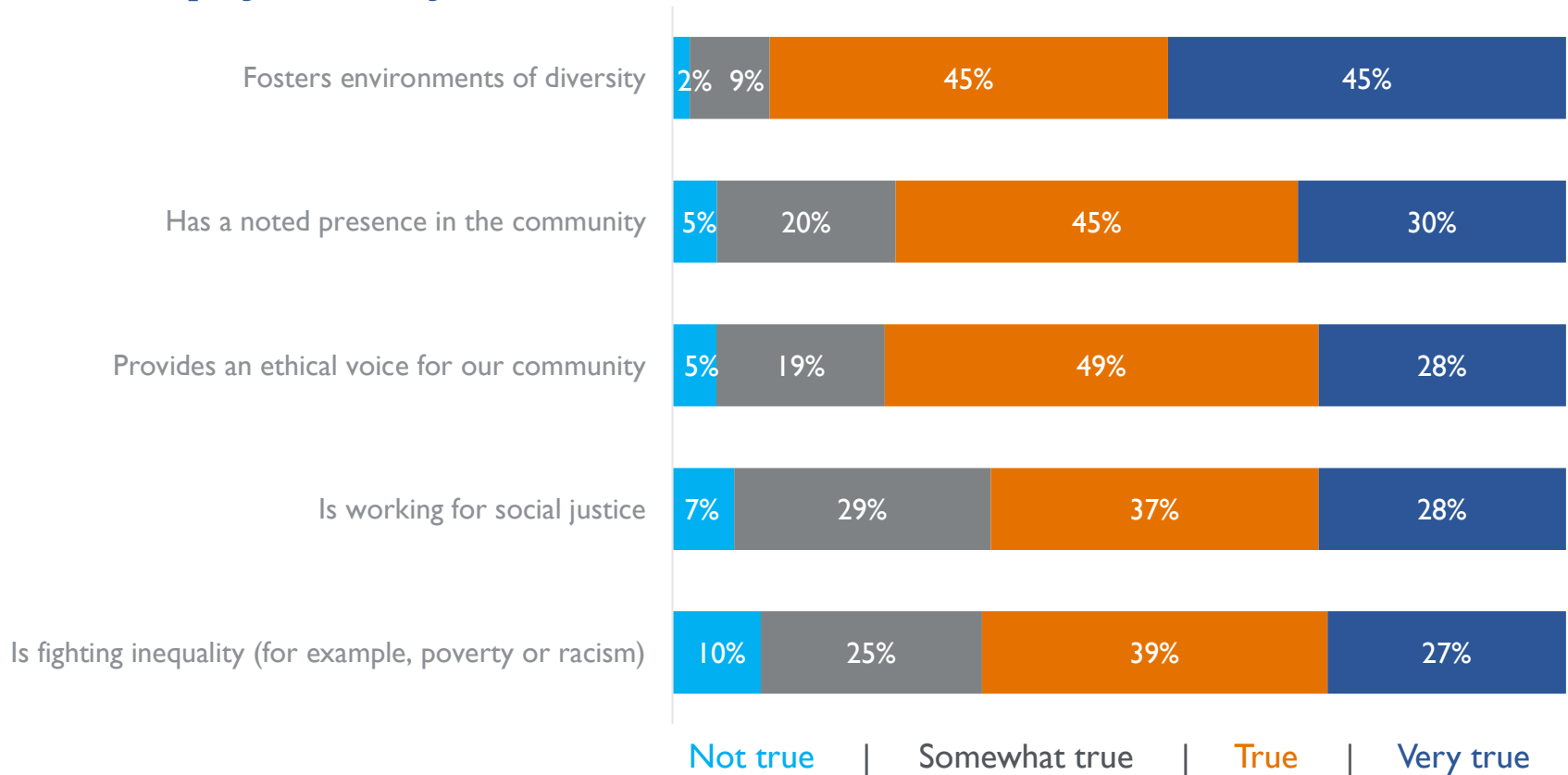
Specific work being done includes:

- Citizen re-entry programs
- Community farms
- Habitat for Humanity
- Helping at-risk teens
- Homeless advocacy
- Hurricane relief
- LGBTQ groups
- Political organizing
- Recovery groups
- Refugee support

OUTWARD FOCUS IN NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

New worshiping community leaders are more likely to report that they foster environments of diversity (90% say this is either “true” or “very true”) than they are to say that they are fighting inequality (66% say this is true or very true) or working for social justice (68% true or very true).

This worshiping community...





WORSHIP PRACTICES IN NWCS

THIS SECTION PROVIDES AN EXPLORATION OF HOW NEW WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES GATHER IN WORSHIP

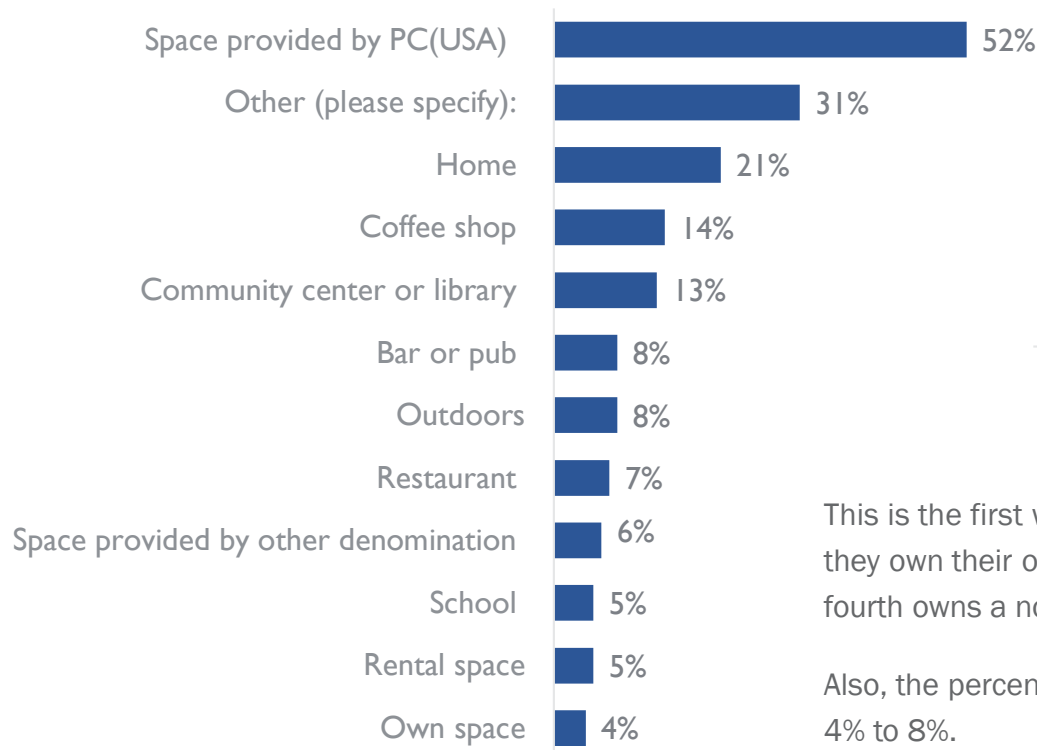
*Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs (Psalm 100:2)*

WHERE NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES GATHER

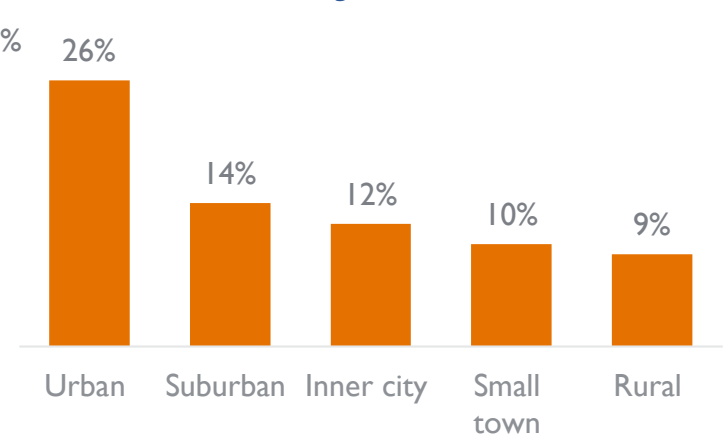
New worshipping communities can be found in many places.

87% of new worshipping communities have a regular gathering place

These gathering spaces include...



The most common place to find a NWC is in an urban setting



This is the first wave of the survey in which some NWCs stated that they own their own space. Three NWCs own a church building, and a fourth owns a non-church building.

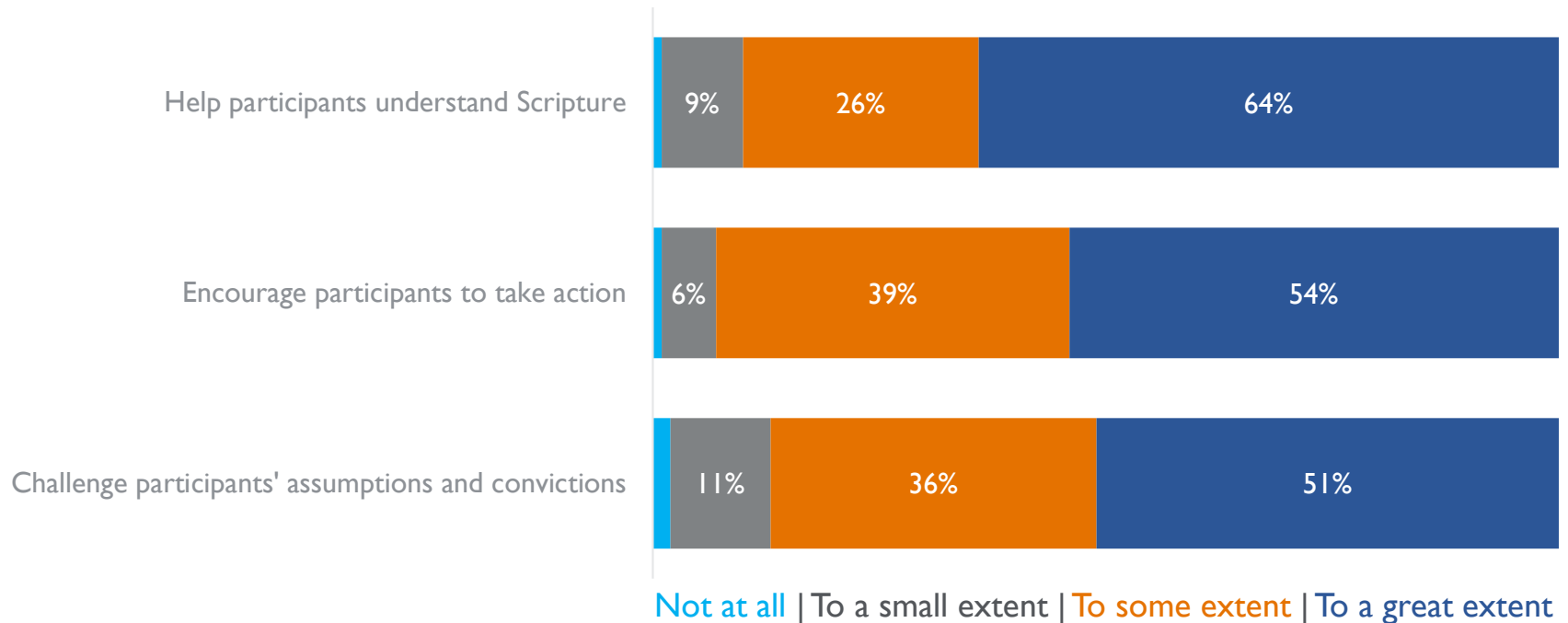
Also, the percentage that are meeting outdoors has doubled, from 4% to 8%.

WORSHIP SERVICES IN NEW WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES

New worshiping community leaders were asked to rate the extent to which their worship services are designed to do each of three things: help participants understand scripture, encourage participants to take action, and challenge participants' assumptions and convictions.

Although leaders rated all three of these goals highly, they rated “help participants understand Scripture” to be the greatest goal of their worship services.

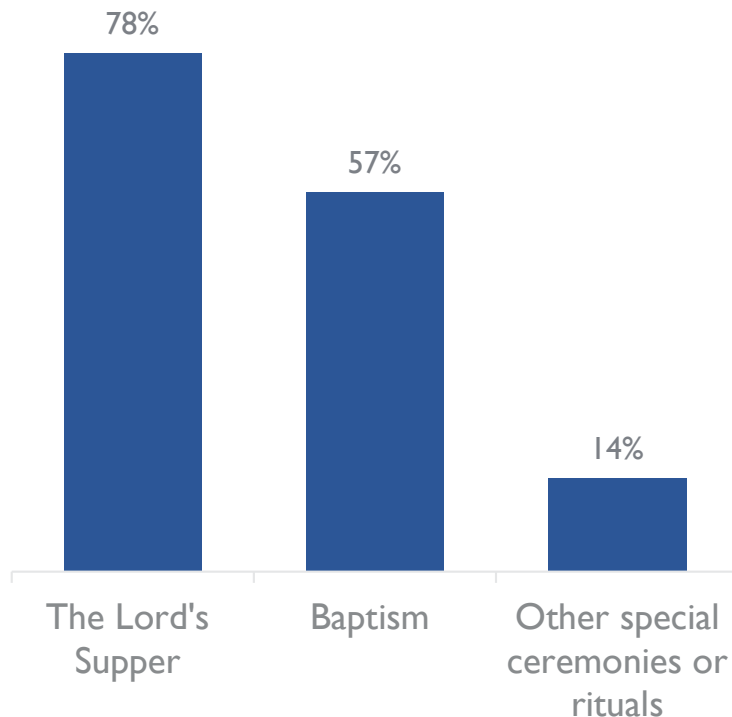
Worship services for this community are designed to...



CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENTS

New worshipping communities are participating in the sacraments, and they are baptizing many people that are confirmation age or older.

37% of baptisms in 2019 were of people age 12 or over



83% of new worshipping communities offer sacraments. Sacraments are most often administered by a teaching elder affiliated with the community (68%).

Over half (53%) of the communities reported that they had at least one baptism in the last year. In 2019, there were 110 baptisms for those 12 and younger, and 64 for those over 12.

In addition, 14% stated that they also have other special ceremonies or rituals. Some of the comments on these include:

- *We have celebrations/rituals 8 times a year for the equinox, solstice and half days.*
- *We have a welcoming circle and than a prayer circle that includes silent meditation and then sharing of prayers, stories, whatever iso people's hearts.*
- *Weddings, quinceañeras, memorial services*

HOW DO THEY OFFER SACRAMENTS?

35% of leaders say there is something unique or special about how the sacraments are offered in their community

We stand in a circle around the room as a symbol of being the Body of Jesus.

We're having 'Pickle Church' and Communion will take place in the midst of the Agape Feast which, in this case, will involve a bunch of chopped veggies.

We have freedom of being more creative in our gatherings in homes.

We have had one baptism, and wanted something close to immersion but didn't have a space to offer that, so we did it outside with a big bucket dumped over her head. It was awesome.

- **24%** describe a special method of administration
- **21%** state that they offer weekly communion
- **21%** state that communion occurs as part of a meal
- **21%** emphasize an open table for communion
- **15%** describe something special about the location
- **15%** describe something special about the meaning of the sacrament
- **15%** describe something special about the tools used

Our communion often times is our meal, as was the case with Jesus the night before he was betrayed. We speak of communion as being the church's reconciling act, where divisions are collapsed around the table.

The Vietnamese community enjoys immersion baptism, but we do it with a small font because is what we have. Immersion is part of our cultural understanding of the Sacrament.

The Words of Institution are usually offered in a narrative and sometimes conversational style and we use a plate and pitcher made by a local potter and a Mason jar for the cup in order to bring an element of cultural relevance to the sacrament.

WHAT DOES 'NONTRADITIONAL' MEAN?

New worshiping communities are doing new things and doing old things in new ways.

45% of leaders describe their worshiping community as *nontraditional*

When asked what makes their communities nontraditional, the top themes were:

- *Conversation instead of sermon*
- *Eating meals as part of worship*
- *Creativity and the arts included in worship*
- *Non-traditional venues or times*
- *Intentionally multicultural*
- *Lack of liturgy or alternative liturgy*

“Worship occurs outdoors when possible and locations vary. Worship style is multi-sensory using sidewalk chalk, bubbles, drumming, arts and other activities. Preaching is replaced by group sharing and reflection. Scripture readings are often paired with readings from other literary sources.”

“We are intentionally interracial and cross cultural. We form community around a shared meal and a question that arises out of our reading of scripture. We listen to each other and work to become friends.”

“We don't preach, rather we have an extended time of teaching and discussion or we engage in a spiritual practice together. Monthly we host community conversation nights to invite spiritually curious people into a discussion on culturally relevant topics that are often justice oriented.”

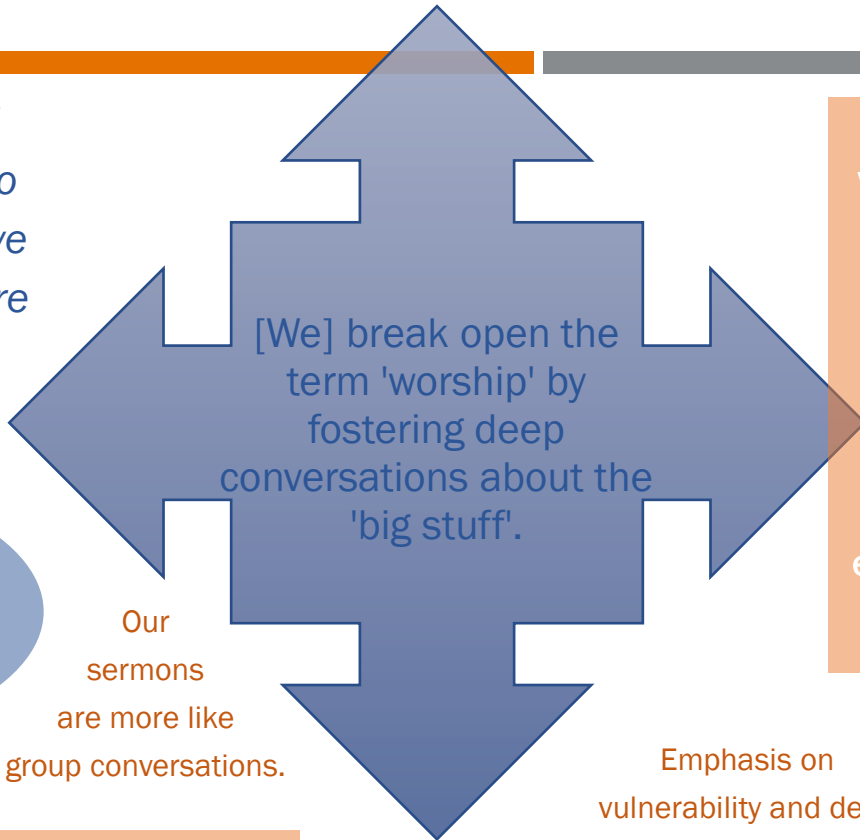
“We have done worship through poetry, drawing, crafting, and communal prayers and discussions.”

We gather in a cafe, around round tables, instead of on pews. It is also an open format since a majority have never been in church before, they are able to ask questions during the presentation of the Word.

We rotate through different worship styles honoring the physical, cerebral, spiritual and service in turn.

We are a community gathered specifically for doubters & disciples together.

People are experiencing and finding spirituality without any traditional markers of church (sermons, churches, 'worship' music, Sunday gatherings, explicitly Christian language, etc.)



Our sermons are more like group conversations.

Emphasis on vulnerability and deep sharing of life across boundaries.

Most of the folks we work with have been turned away from the church and so the way in has been through nontraditional worship. We have no bulletins and everything we do is sung.

Worship is participatory, involving many voices reading prayers and adding to the message.

Sermons can be interactive. Prayer of Confession is often a manual activity. There is movement in the service, and we try to be multisensory with the worship experience.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING IN WORSHIP?

Leaders are making worship more active by incorporating food, engaging in spiritual practices together, and cultivating the creativity of worshippers.

- Through their “Peas and Love” program, Okra Abbey is serving food to the elderly. They also host weekly potluck dinners, where worship and fellowship occurs. Their ministry is focused on food, but it also includes the arts. They have brought in community members to help with art installations and graffiti to decorate their space.
- The worship style at Reclamation Ministries is slightly alternative. Although it follows the lectionary, the style of liturgy is Celtic, and instead of a traditional sermon they have a conversation surrounding the Bible verses. To emphasize this non-traditional approach, worship is not held in a sanctuary with pews, but instead in a parlor with chairs.
- We can see similar trends in more traditional worshipping communities, as well. For example, the Riverfront is in a growing, upscale community. This worshipping community has no church building and no plans to have a building. Worship is in a pavilion in the summer and in a contemporary arts center in winter. Worship includes Methodists and Episcopalians too, and often centers around the arts.
- At Anchor City Church, pastor Jeya So uses art and creativity as a method of worship. She argues that by “bypassing the verbal centers,” we can access a deeper connection to the Holy Spirit, which exists within all of us. According to Jeya, hands-on activities “disrupt us enough to connect to the Creator” because creativity is the ability to steward our imagination to love people as we love ourselves. It creates a “heart-to-hand” connection. Jeya states that one of her challenges in this approach is that Asians are uncomfortable with creativity. She argues that her job as a pastor is not to disseminate information, but rather to cultivate the imagination: to help people see clearly into the fullness of their call, and to help people look for moments where the Divine is shining through.

THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM INTERVIEWS WITH NWC LEADERS

Interviews with new worshiping community leaders indicate a fundamental shift in how people approach religion within these communities. The “typical” NWC (if we can even say such a thing exists) does not focus on doctrine; its attention is instead toward *meaning*, *belonging*, and asking the deep *questions*.

These three spiritual needs are interrelated: people must feel that they truly belong before they feel safe enough to ask the deep questions, which are necessary to access meaning. New worshiping communities attempt to provide safe spaces that will facilitate unity in diversity; to build a community that includes children and all the “childish” gifts of creativity, openness, and play, and especially one that reaches out to the margins, because they believe that this is where they will find God.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY: leaders are striving to promote unity while preserving diversity, by doing things such as providing safe spaces for people to practice being neighbors. Churches are NOT considered to be safe spaces.

CHILDREN ARE CENTRAL: children are often viewed—and utilized—as a bridge to the broader community. Also, getting them involved meaningfully in the community and its worship gives them a sense of ownership of the community

ACTIVE WORSHIP: leaders are making worship more active by incorporating food, engaging in spiritual practices together, and cultivating the creativity of worshipers.

GOD IN THE MARGINS: And finally, we learned that new worshiping community leaders are reaching out to find God in the margins in a variety of ways, emphasizing what they believe to be not just the desirability, but also the necessity of social justice ministry.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This research was conducted in partnership with the 1001 NWC office of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

This study is part of a research project tracking the progress of these communities. The goals of this research are to:

1. Determine the level of success of the new worshipping communities and their leaders.
2. Understand the varied expressions of church that are present in new worshipping communities.
3. Learn how these communities are similar to and different from to mainstream congregations.
4. Identify markers or benchmarks that lead to continuing viability and sustainability of new worshipping communities, both within and outside the scope of the 1001 NWC program.

This research includes information from all five waves of an annual survey and six years of interviews of NWC leaders. Data was collected in 2015, 2016, 2017 (interviews only), 2018, 2019, and 2020.

The most recent survey was sent in April 2020. The survey was sent by email to all known leaders and shared on the 1001 Facebook page. Email invitations were sent to 445 leaders, and 114 responded to the survey, for a 26% response rate.

The 2018 leader survey was sent in March 2018 to 403 leaders for whom we had email addresses. Of these, six reported their community as inactive and 122 returned the survey for a response rate of 32%.

Other data on NWCs is gathered from the Highrise database maintained by the 1001 NWC office.

ABOUT 1001 NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

Igniting a movement in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to begin 1001 New Worshiping Communities (NWCs), using new and varied forms of church for our diverse and changing culture, and forming new disciples of Jesus, transforming our denomination, and impacting our world.
-the 1001 NWC office

1001 NWC (new worshiping communities) is a movement happening in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Across the PC(USA), God is raising up leaders in churches and presbyteries who are creating new worshiping communities.

They are taking on new and varied forms of church for our changing culture. Primarily they are seeking to make and form new disciples of Jesus Christ, to change and transform the world.

In June 2012, the 220th General Assembly declared a commitment to a churchwide movement that results in the creation of 1,001 worshiping communities over the next 10 years.

Since the beginning of the 1001 NWC initiative, 519 new worshiping communities have been raised up across the PC(USA), and an additional 76 pre-existing communities have joined the 1001-fold. Of these 595 communities, 481 (81%) are still active.

The 1001 NWC initiative includes new worshiping communities, new church developments, immigrant fellowships, and other expressions of church all under the umbrella of NWCs.

New worshiping communities, immigrant fellowships, and other expressions of church are initiated by a leader and may or may not have a goal of organizing as a congregation. New church developments, on the other hand, are initiated by the presbytery with the goal of becoming organized as a congregation.

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 A Corporation 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.



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Research Services