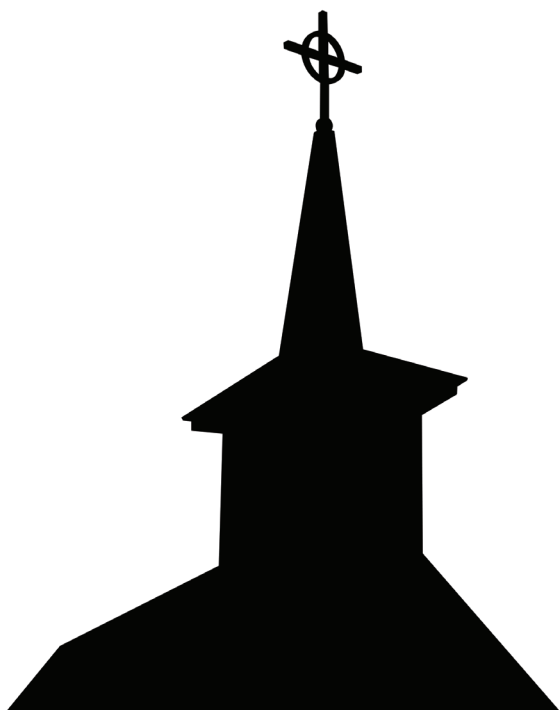


A Field Guide to Presbyterian Congregations

Who's Going Where and Why



Deborah Bruce *and* Cynthia Woolever



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A Field Guide to Presbyterian Congregations and Worshipers

Who's Going Where and Why

What do 40,000 worshipers in 521 PC(USA) congregations have to say? A lot of things you might not expect. This is their story.

This field guide profiles Presbyterian churches and worshipers in four areas:

- **Building Spiritual Connections** spotlights worship and faith development.
- **Building Inside Connections** describes worshipers' activities in the congregation.
- **Building Outside Connections** reveals how congregations and worshipers reach out to and serve those in the community.
- **Building Identity Connections** shows who worshipers are and how they see their congregation's future.

In each area, we compare Presbyterians to worshipers in a representative sample of congregations from across the country that participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. These comparison congregations include Presbyterians and a broad variety of denominations and faith groups that reflect America's diverse religious life today. (See page 25 for more details.)

We also highlight key ways in which PC(USA) worshipers and congregations have changed since the U.S. Congregational Life Survey was first conducted in 2001.

Are you a typical Presbyterian? Do any of these statements describe you?

- I've been attending my congregation for more than 5 years.
- I participate in some type of group in my congregation (e.g., Sunday school, prayer or fellowship group, Bible study).
- I serve in a leadership position in my church.
- I regularly give 5% or more of my income to the church.
- What I like best about my church is the pastor's sermons.
- I'm involved in at least one community social service or advocacy group.
- I voted in the last presidential election.

If some of these statements don't describe you, you're part of the great diversity of the Presbyterian Church! Keep reading to learn more.

Is your congregation a typical Presbyterian congregation? Do any of these describe your church?

- Founded before 1940.
- Holds just one weekly service, which runs about an hour and averages fewer than 100 worshippers.
- Regularly includes traditional music in worship.
- Offers church school for children, youth, and adults.
- Offers small groups such as Bible study or fellowship groups for worshippers.
- Conducts an annual stewardship campaign.

If some of these statements don't describe your congregation, your church is part of the great diversity of the PC(USA)! Keep reading to learn more.

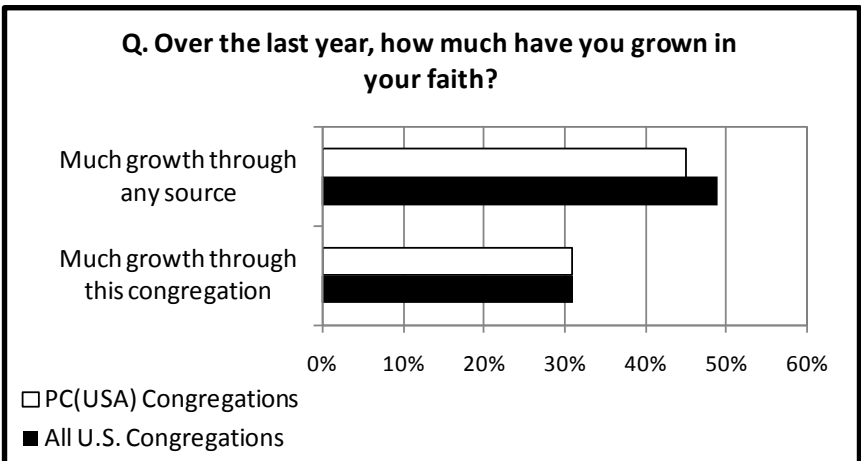
For further information about the key findings from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, visit our website: www.USCongregations.org or refer to *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations: Who's Going Where and Why*, Second edition, published by Westminster John Knox Press (Second edition, 2010)—call 1-800-277-2872 to order. Proceeds from book sales go to a good cause—the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)!

Building Spiritual Connections

Spiritual connections are made through worshipers' private devotional activities and their participation in congregational activities such as worship. How are congregations cultivating faith and responding to the spiritual needs of their worshipers?

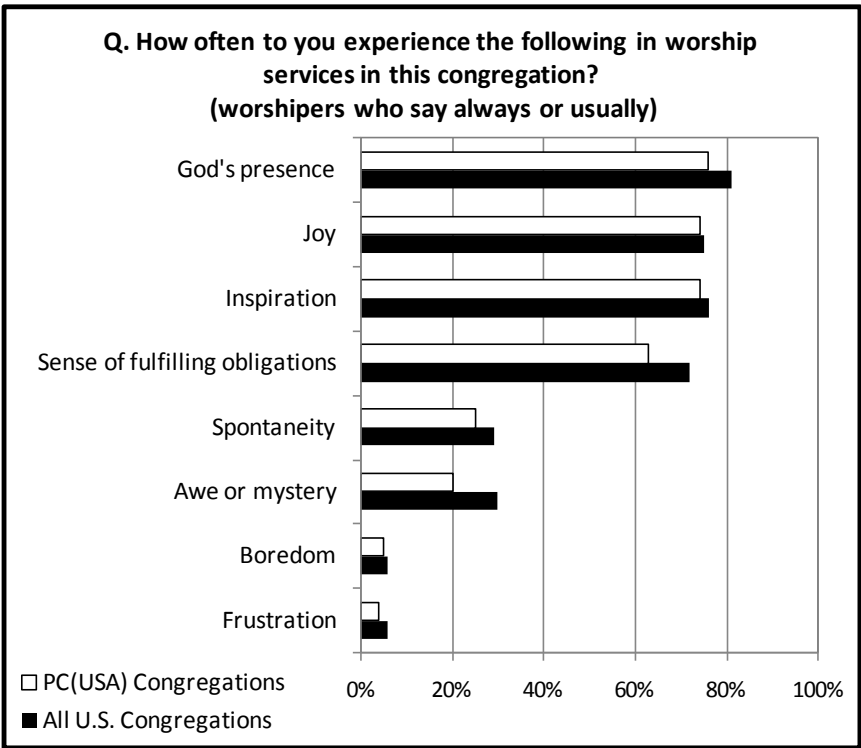
Private Devotions. Almost half of the people in PC(USA) congregations spend time *every day* in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible alone), and another 21% do so a few times a week. PC(USA) worshipers are similar to other worshipers in the amount of time spent in these activities (the national average for all U.S. congregations is 67% who spend time in private devotional activities a few times a week or more often; 66% of Presbyterian worshipers do so).

Growing in Faith. Almost half of the people in U.S. congregations (49%) and in PC(USA) congregations (45%) report they have experienced *much growth* in their faith over the last year—growth that occurred through participation in their congregation, other organizations, or their own activities. Another 47% report *some* spiritual growth in the previous year. One-third of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations say their spiritual growth comes from involvement in their own congregation. Few PC(USA) worshipers report growing in their faith through other groups (5%) or through their own private activities (9%).



Worship Experiences. Worshipers were asked how often they have had eight experiences during worship in their congregation. In PC(USA) congregations, the largest number of worshipers regularly experience God’s presence during worship. Many also experience inspiration and joy. Yet, spontaneity is a relatively uncommon experience in Presbyterian worship. “Decently and in order” seems to apply to our worship as well as our polity.

Fortunately, only a small percentage of worshipers “usually” or “always” experience boredom or frustration. These results are close to the national averages for all congregations.



Help with Everyday Living. The majority of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations (58%) report that they are helped “to a great extent” by worship or congregational activities, and 34% are helped to “some extent.” This is comparable to the national average of 56% who report finding worship services or activities helpful “to a great extent” with everyday living, and 32% who say to “some extent.”

Meeting Spiritual Needs. Like the majority of worshipers in the U.S., 83% of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations feel that their congregation effectively meets their spiritual needs.

Making Music. What types of music do worshipers prefer? Three-quarters of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations prefer traditional hymns during worship. From a list of 10 possibilities, no other music style was chosen by more than half of those who sit in Presbyterian pews. Other preferences include praise music or choruses (28%) and contemporary hymns (21%). (Note that worshipers were asked to mark two preferences from the list.) These other preferences are typical of worshipers across the country, with one exception—Presbyterian worshipers are more likely than other worshipers to prefer classical music.

Q: While you may value many different styles of music, which of the following do you prefer in congregational worship? (Mark up to two.)

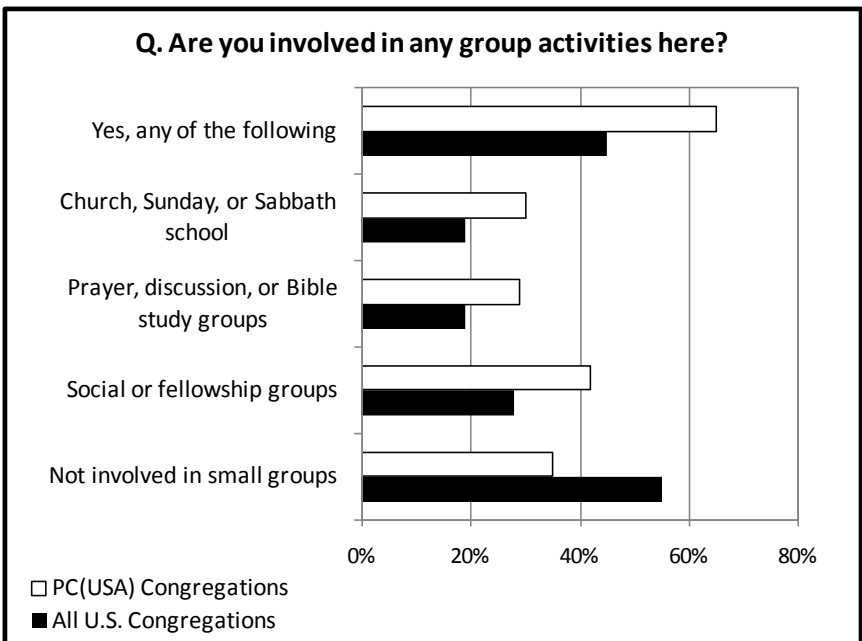
	PC(USA) Worshipers	All Worshipers
Traditional hymns	75%	56%
Praise music or choruses.....	28%	31%
Contemporary hymns.....	21%	26%
Gospel music.....	18%	15%
Classical music.....	16%	9%
Contemporary music other than hymns.....	11%	15%
Music or songs from a variety of cultures	9%	9%
Sung responsorial psalms.....	2%	8%
Contemplative chants	2%	2%

Coming to the Faith. About half of Presbyterian worshipers (48%) say they had a conversion experience or a moment of decisive faith commitment. The remaining half say “no” (30%) or are not sure (22%). This is similar to the overall U.S. picture, where 47% report a conversion experience; 29% say they have not experienced a conversion or moment of faith commitment; and 24% are not sure.

Building Inside Connections

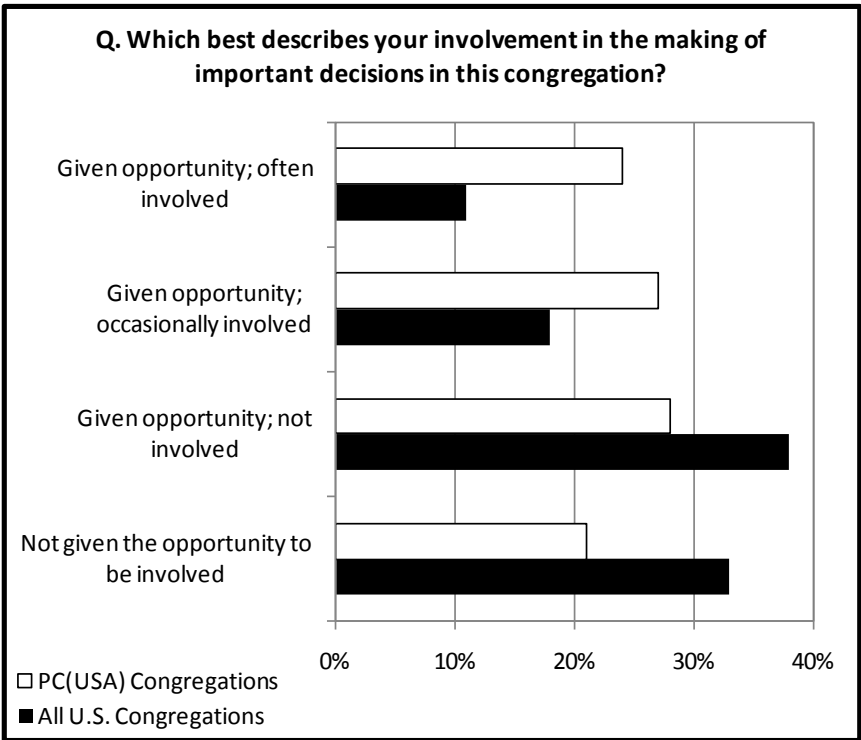
Worshippers connect with others in the congregation through group activities (such as church school, prayer and study groups, and fellowships or clubs), serving in leadership roles, and financial support.

Involvement in Groups. In what ways are worshippers involved in PC(USA) congregations in addition to attending services? Overall, 65% of worshippers in PC(USA) congregations participate in small group activities—substantially more than is typical across all faith groups (nationally only 45% are engaged in small group activities). Compared to the national averages, worshippers in PC(USA) congregations are more likely to take part in educational activities like Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school (30% in PC(USA) congregations do); prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups (29%); and fellowships, clubs, or other social groups (42%). Among Presbyterian worshippers, as well as among all worshippers, the highest rates of involvement are for social or fellowship groups.

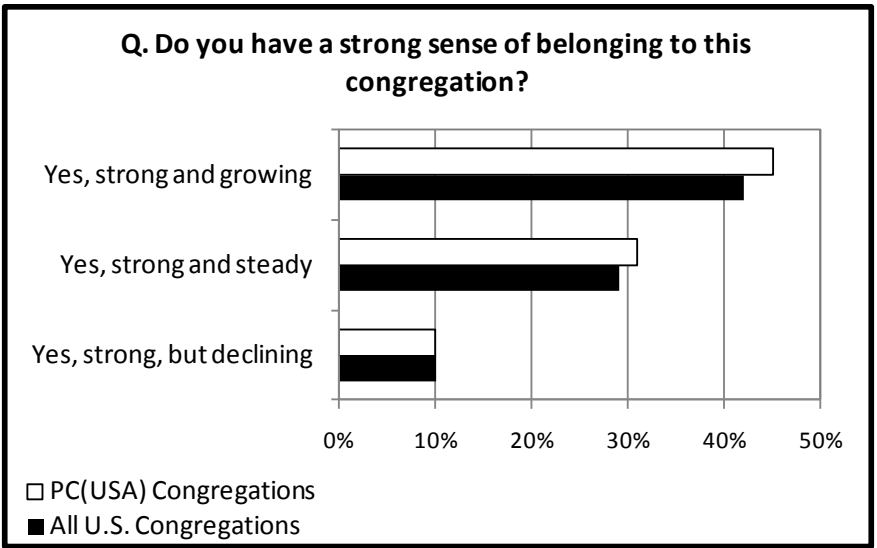


Involvement as Leaders. Presbyterians excel in this area, as well: 58% of worshipers hold at least one leadership position in their congregation (such as governing board member, committee member, choir or usher, church school teacher, small group leader). Only 40% of worshipers across the United States serve as leaders in their congregations. However, Presbyterians are similar to worshipers in other mainline Protestant denominations, where 55% hold leadership positions.

Involvement in Decision Making. Two-thirds of worshipers overall (67%), and 79% in Presbyterian congregations, say they've been given the opportunity to be involved in congregational decision making. However, less than one-third of U.S. worshipers overall (29%) say they do so even occasionally. In Presbyterian congregations, in contrast, half (51%) of worshipers take part in making important decisions—either often or occasionally.



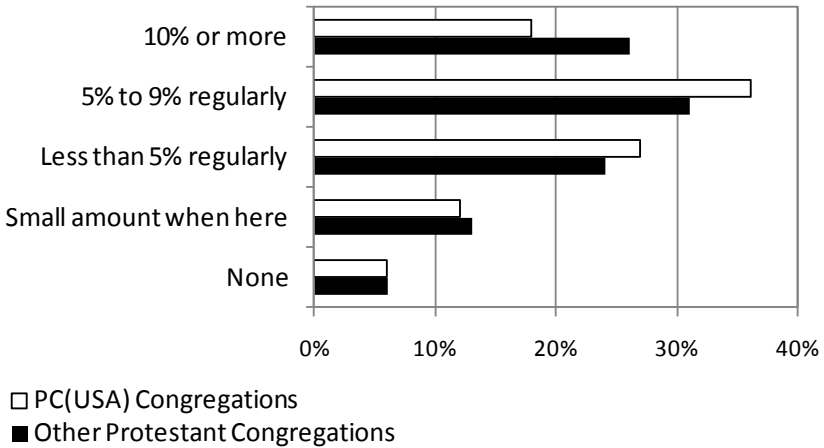
Belonging Here. Most worshipers in PC(USA) congregations (86%) report a strong sense of belonging to their congregation, which is somewhat greater than the typical U.S. congregation (81%). Overall, 45% in PC(USA) congregations say their strong sense of belonging has been growing, one-third say it is steady (31%), and one in ten say it is declining (10%).



Making Friends. Three out of four PC(USA) worshipers (76%) say some or all of their close friends attend the same congregation. This is somewhat higher than the national picture where two out of three worshipers (67%) say they have at least some close friends in their congregation.

Giving. Financial support connects people to the congregation and its mission. In PC(USA) congregations, 94% of worshipers make financial contributions to the congregation, including 18% who report regularly giving 10% or more of their net income to their congregation, and 36% who regularly give 5% to 9%. Nationally, 26% of all Protestant worshipers give 10% or more of their net income, and 31% give between 5% and 9%. (Giving patterns in Catholic parishes are substantially different.) The contrast between mainline and conservative Protestant worshipers in the percentage who give 10% or more is striking—only 16% of mainline Protestants give at this level compared to 44% of conservative Protestant worshipers.

Q. About how much do you give financially to this congregation?



Being a Team. Do worshipers feel there is a connection between their pastor and the worshipers in their congregation? Nearly all worshipers in PC(USA) congregations (86%) agree with the statement, “In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister, pastor, or priest.” Across all worshipers in the U.S., a similar percentage agree with this statement. One-half in both groups “strongly agree.”

Becoming a Member. Overall, 81% of worshipers in Presbyterian pews are members of their congregation. Another 2% are in the process of becoming members. That leaves 10% who regularly participate, but are not members. These results are similar to those for worshipers from all faith groups. The remaining Presbyterian worshipers are visitors (3%) or people who are not members and attend only occasionally (3%).

Experiencing Conflict. Three-quarters of worshipers in PC(USA) churches report no conflict (39%) or minor conflict (35%) in their congregation in the previous two years. Yet, 11% say their church experienced major conflict in that period. (The remaining 16% said they didn’t know.) Across all U.S. congregations, the percentages reporting no conflict are slightly higher (47% report no conflict, 24% report minor conflict, and 8% report serious conflict). More PC(USA) worshipers report conflict.

Building Outside Connections

How do PC(USA) congregations and their worshipers connect with the community and non-members? Outside Connections consist of worshipers' efforts to invite others to participate, care for neighbors, and welcome new people.

Inviting Others. In the past 12 months, less than half of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations (44%) invited to their worship services a friend or relative who does not attend a congregation at the current time. This is about the same as in the average U.S. congregation (43%).

Reaching Out. How many worshipers contribute to their congregation's outreach or evangelism efforts? In PC(USA) congregations, one in five join activities to reach out to the wider community. This percentage is only slightly higher than the national picture where 17% report being involved in evangelism or outreach activities.

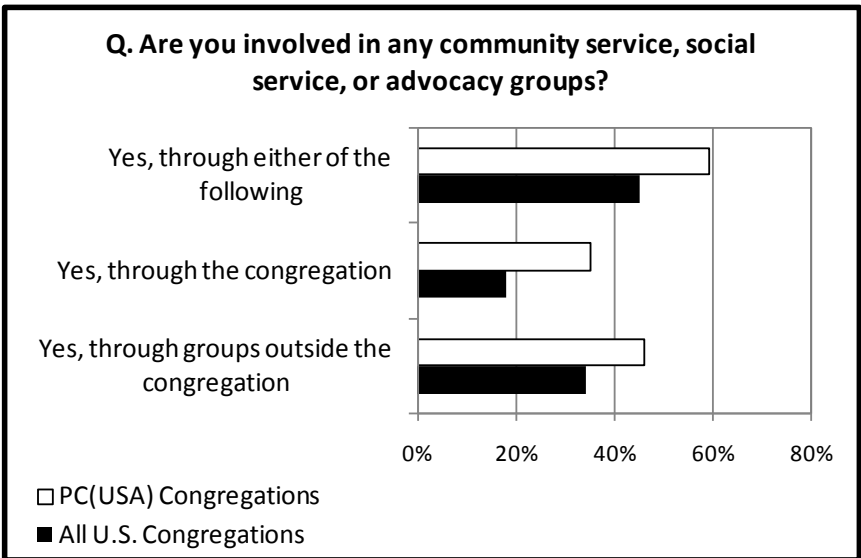
The Congregation's Inviting Activities. From a list of 15 possible activities, a typical PC(USA) congregation reports using five strategies to reach out to non-members in the previous year. The most common include encouraging people to invite others (88%), mailing visitors a letter (81%), maintaining a website (71%), mailing newsletters (70%), placing an ad in the newspaper or magazine (60%), and holding an activity to meet people in the neighborhood (50%). Nationally, the typical U.S. congregation lists seven outreach strategies. The most common strategies are encouraging people in the congregation to invite someone new (reported by 87% of congregations), establishing or maintaining a website (77%), mailing letters to visitors (76%), mailing newsletters or flyers (70%), and holding an activity to meet neighborhood people (58%). Presbyterian congregations use similar strategies, often at similar rates.

Congregational Outreach Activities

(Done in past 12 months to reach out to potential new members)

	PC(USA) Congregations	All U.S. Congregations
Encouraged people already in the congregation to invite a new person	88%	87%
Sent a letter or material to people who visited your congregation	81%	76%
Established or maintained a website for the congregation.....	71%	77%
Mailed or distributed newsletters, letters, or flyers	70%	70%
Placed a paid ad in a newspaper or magazine	60%	51%
Had an activity (e.g., fair, chili supper) to meet people in the neighborhood.....	50%	58%
Had someone from the congregation telephone people who visited your congregation	43%	45%
Sponsored or participated in a worship service or other public event intended to bring people into your congregation	41%	46%
Placed a paid ad in the phone book or yellow pages	40%	36%
Had a special committee to work on recruiting new members.....	37%	30%
Tried to identify and contact people who recently moved to the area	32%	30%
Had someone from the congregation go to the home of people who visited your congregation	31%	32%
Sent an email to people who visited the congregation	29%	29%
Advertised on radio or TV	13%	15%
Conducted or used a survey of the community.....	12%	7%

Serving the Community. Almost six in ten PC(USA) worshipers take part in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities. One-third overall join in community service activities organized through their congregation (35% in PC(USA) congregations take part in such groups). Even more (46% in PC(USA) congregations) participate in social service or advocacy groups *not* connected to their congregation. This is another area where Presbyterians excel. Just 18% of worshipers overall are involved in service or advocacy through their congregation, and 34% serve their communities through groups not connected to their congregation.



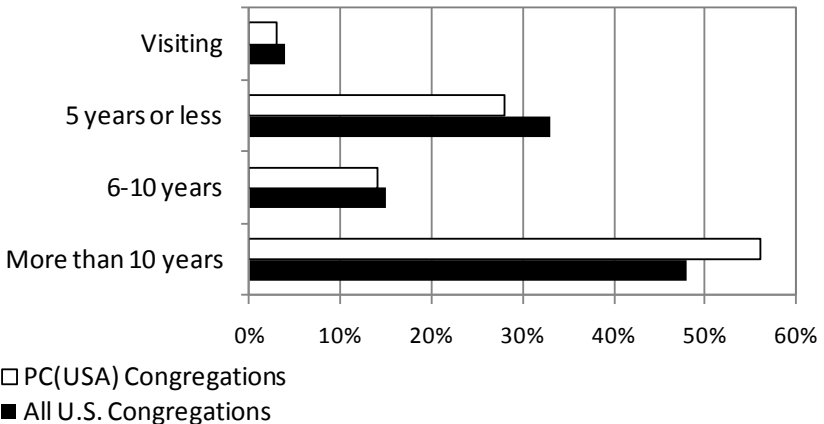
Good Neighbors; Good Citizens. Worshipers in Presbyterian pews are especially good neighbors and good citizens. They are more likely to have made a contribution to a charitable organization other than their congregation, prepared or given food to someone outside their family or congregation, worked on community problems or issues, and contributed money to a political party or candidate. Given that just 50% of the American adult population voted in the last presidential election, it is particularly noteworthy that worshipers in general (83%), and Presbyterians in particular (88%), voted at such high rates.

**Q. In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following?
(Mark all that apply.)**

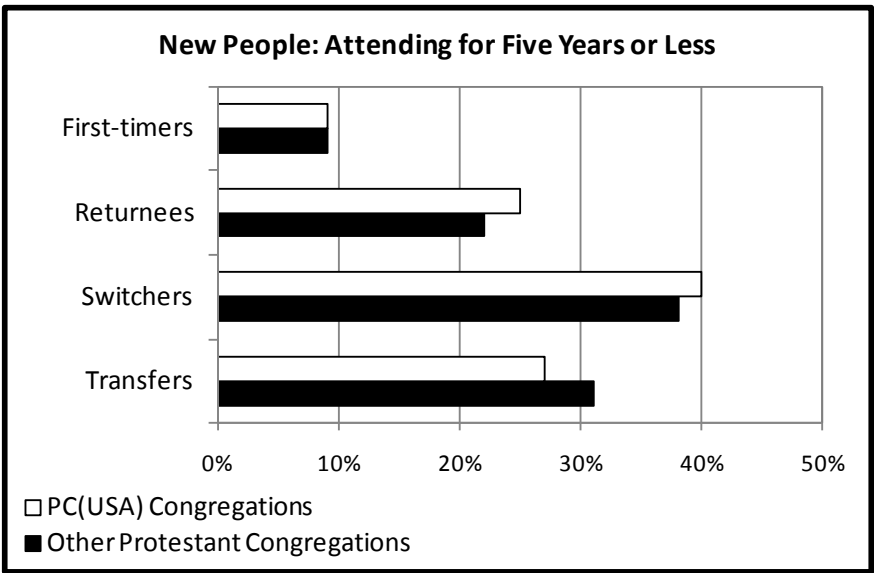
	PC(USA) Worshippers	All Worshippers
Voted (or will vote) in 2008 presidential election	88%	83%
Contributed to a charitable organization other than your congregation.....	79%	73%
Prepared or gave food	58%	50%
Loaned money	24%	28%
Helped someone find a job	19%	23%
Cared for someone who was sick	22%	22%
Worked on solving community problem.....	25%	20%
Contacted official about a public issue	21%	18%
Contributed money to a political party or candidate	22%	16%
Went on a mission or service trip	9%	6%

Welcoming New People. Almost three in ten people attending worship services at PC(USA) congregations (28%) have been coming for five years or less—slightly less than the national figure (33%). Visitors make up only 3% of worshippers in PC(USA) congregations, about the same as the national average.

Q. How long have you been going to worship services or activities at this congregation?



Types of New People. What type of faith background is typical of new people in PC(USA) congregations? New people (those attending five years or less) come from four different faith backgrounds: *First-timers* (9% in PC(USA) congregations) are those who have never regularly attended anywhere; *Returnees* (25%) are those who are coming back after not attending anywhere for several years; *Switchers* (40%) are those who previously participated in another congregation with a different faith tradition; and *Transfers* (27%) are those who were participating in another PC(USA) congregation immediately prior to attending their current PC(USA) congregation. Presbyterian congregations do a better job than other types of Protestant congregations in attracting *Returnees* and *Switchers*, but all types of congregations have difficulty attracting *First-timers*.



Getting There. Do worshipers come from the immediate community or do they travel some distance to attend? Most PC(USA) congregations are neighborhood churches—more than half of people in PC(USA) congregations (58%) take 10 minutes or less to get to worship services, and nearly everyone in PC(USA) congregations (90%) travels 20 minutes or less to attend services. Across all American congregations, the story is the same—56% arrive in 10 minutes or less.

Building Identity Connections

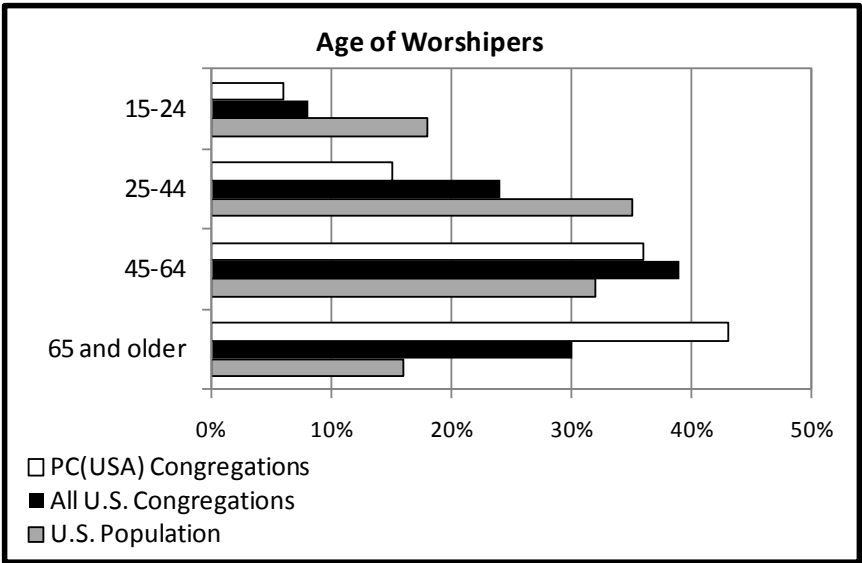
Worshippers have an individual identity based on their age, education, and other factors. Worshipers also have a congregational identity that includes what they value as a faith community and their dreams for the congregation's future.

Congregational Size. Small congregations dot the landscape, but most worshipers find themselves in large congregations. The average PC(USA) congregation has 78 in worship—somewhat smaller than the national average of 95 in worship. One-quarter of PC(USA) congregations have fewer than 50 in worship, and a large majority (86%) have fewer than 200 attendees.¹

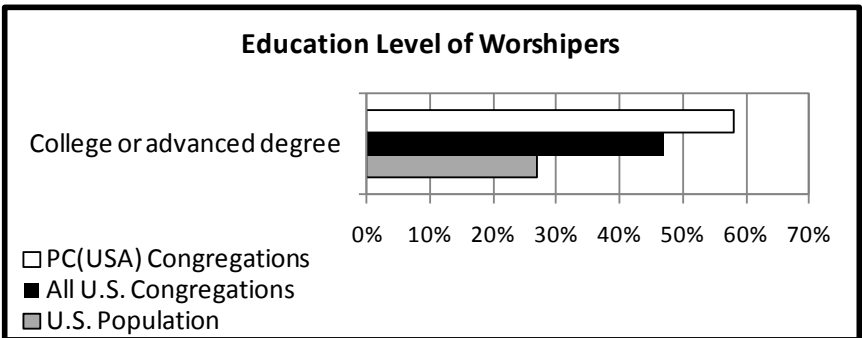
Gender Profile. There are fewer men (38%) than women (62%) in the typical Presbyterian congregation. Women outnumber men in all other types of congregations by the same amount. Even though women live longer than men, this life expectancy gap does not explain the difference. In fact, there are more women than men in the pews in every age category.

Age Profile. In most congregations, those worshipers between 45 and 64 years of age make up the largest group (39%). But in PC(USA) congregations people 65 years of age and older comprise the largest age group (43%). In PC(USA) congregations, for every worshiper under the age of 25, there are more than six worshipers over the age of 65. The average (median) age of worshipers in PC(USA) congregations is 61. This is older than the national average for all congregations, which is 54, and older than the national average for the U.S. population (15 years of age and older), which is 44.

¹ According to *Comparative Statistics 2009* (published by Research Services), the median worship attendance for Presbyterian congregations is now 65, and 41% of congregations average 50 or fewer in worship. Therefore, the PC(USA) congregations described in this Field Guide are slightly larger than churches across the denomination.



Educational Background. Worshipers in the U.S. tend to be well-educated. The U.S. Census shows that about 27% of people (age 25 and older) across the country have a college degree. Among worshipers in the same age range, the figure is 47%. In PC(USA) congregations, 58% report a college or graduate degree.



Household Types. Most worshipers in America are married, and this is true in PC(USA) congregations as well (68% here are married). Overall, 43% of worshipers have children living at home, which is more than the results for PC(USA) congregations (34%). Again, worshipers differ from typical Americans. The U.S. Census indicates that only 50% of the population in this country

are currently married, and about one-third have children living at home.

What Worshipers Value. From a list of 14 possibilities, the things PC(USA) worshipers most value in their congregation are traditional worship, preaching, celebrating the Lord’s Supper, wider community care or social justice emphasis, care for one another, and ministry for children or youth. Although the order is somewhat different, these are the same things valued by worshipers in other types of congregations.

Seeing Possibilities. How open are worshipers in PC(USA) congregations to change and new directions? About half of the worshipers in PC(USA) congregations (54%) believe their congregation is always ready to try something new. Seven out of ten worshipers (69%) also express a sense of excitement about the congregation’s future. In the national picture of all U.S. congregations, worshipers are more likely to describe their congregation as willing to try new things (62%) and excited about the future (76%).

Committing to the Future. Do worshipers in PC(USA) congregations claim a clear vision, goals, or direction for their congregation’s ministry and mission? Most worshipers in PC(USA) congregations believe there is a clear vision or direction for the future (75% say “yes,” including 69% who are committed to that vision). However, others are not sure that the vision is clear or that it exists (25%). The national average shows most worshipers in U.S. congregations share similar views about their congregation’s future (77% believe there is a clear vision, including 66% who are committed to the congregation’s vision).

The View from the Pews

While about half of all Presbyterian congregations are small (100 or fewer in worship), *most worshipers* are in large Presbyterian congregations.

The largest 10% of Presbyterian congregations draw about 42% of all worshipers. Another 40% of PC(USA) congregations (those in the mid-size range) serve 44% of worshipers. The remaining 50% of PC(USA) congregations—the smallest ones—involve only 14% of worshipers.

How Have Presbyterian Worshipers Changed?

Comparing responses of 40,000 worshipers in PC(USA) churches who participated in 2008 and 2009 with the results from 50,000 worshipers who took part in 2001 reveals several ways in which worshipers are changing.

Their Demographic Profile. Presbyterian worshipers are older as a group now than they were in 2001. The average age of Presbyterians rose from 58 to 61, with people over 65 years of age comprising the largest age group. Closely linked with this trend, fewer PC(USA) worshipers now come from families with children at home (down from 38% in 2001 to 34% now).

Presbyterians continue to outdistance the general population in educational attainment. While only 27% of the U.S. population has a college or more advanced degree, 58% of Presbyterian worshipers do. This represents an increase from 2001 when 49% of PC(USA) worshipers had a college or more advanced degree (All figures are for those age 25 and older.)

Their Outreach to the Community. While Presbyterians have traditionally sought to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods, towns, and cities, those efforts have expanded since 2001. Now more than one-third (35%) join in community service activities organized through their congregations (about 30% did so in 2001). Almost half (46%) contribute through social service or advocacy groups *not* linked to their church (about 43% did so in 2001). These behaviors reflect worshipers' changing values. The percentage of worshipers who say the wider community care exhibited by the congregation is one of the two most valued aspects of their congregation rose to 22% (from 17% in 2001).

Their Growth in Faith. In 2001 half of Presbyterian worshipers (51%) said they had experienced much growth in their faith—through their congregation, other churches or groups, or their own activities. Now fewer than half (45%) report they have experienced much growth in their faith. Declines emerged in the spiritual growth worshipers attributed to participation in their own congregation (from 33% in 2001 to 31% today), to their own

private spiritual activities (from 11% to 9%), and to participation in other groups or congregations (from 7% to 5%).

PC(USA) Worshipers: Change Since 2001*

Change:	2001	2008/09
45 and older.....	75%	79%
Children living at home.....	38%	34%
College educated.....	49%	58%
Participate in the congregation's social service activities.....	30%	35%
Participate in other social service activities.....	43%	46%
Value congregation's community care.....	17%	22%
Growth in faith over the past year:		
Much growth due to any source.....	51%	45%
Much growth due to congregation.....	33%	31%
No Change:		
Female.....	62%	62%
Married.....	70%	68%
Employed full- or part-time.....	48%	48%
Retired.....	38%	40%
Attend worship services weekly.....	77%	76%
Member of the congregation.....	82%	81%
Give 5% or more to the congregation.....	53%	54%
Hold a leadership role in the congregation.....	57%	58%
Always or usually experience God's presence in the congregation's worship services.....	73%	76%
Report spiritual needs are being met in the congregation.....	83%	83%

* Based on worshipers' responses.

How Have Presbyterian Congregations Changed?

In 2001, 523 PC(USA) congregations participated; in 2008 and 2009, 521 did so. What changes are occurring in congregational programs and services?

Forms of Outreach. Many more congregations now use a website to reach new people and keep members informed (71%; up sharply from 43% in 2001). Fewer congregations telephone or visit people who visit the congregation now than did in 2001. Congregations may be relying more now on email and other forms of communication to stay in touch with visitors.

Presbyterian churches have shifted the focus of their community activities slightly away from direct emergency relief measures (providing meals, food, clothing for needy people)—78% of congregations report this type of assistance now compared to 87% in 2001—and toward other types of community activities. For example, more congregations now provide health-related programs (40% compared to 33% of congregations in 2001), animal welfare or environmental activities (11% compared to 4% in 2001), hobby and craft groups (36% vs. 24% in 2001), and arts or cultural programs (44% vs. 38% in 2001).

Fewer Resources. Congregations face bigger economic challenges today than in 2001. One in four congregations reported an increasing financial base in 2001. That percentage dwindled to only 15% today who say their resources are growing. One-third of congregations now report a declining financial base (20% in 2001). Also, more congregational leaders now report conflict that resulted in people leaving the congregation (41% vs. 28% in 2001). (Few worshippers (6%) were aware of such conflict.)

Worship. Worship has changed on several fronts. While traditional worship and music is still the norm, more Presbyterian churches include praise music in worship today than in 2001. Fewer congregations have singing by a choir or soloist during worship. And Presbyterians have warmed to the idea of using visual projection equipment in worship. That warmth has spread to another ritual, as well—congregations now provide time in

worship for people to greet one another. All of these changes hint at a turn toward more contemporary or less formal worship styles. At the same time, worship services are less likely to include laughter and applause. And participation by teens in worship has become less common than in 2001—a finding that perhaps shouldn't be surprising given the increasing age of Presbyterians.

PC(USA) Congregations: Change Since 2001*

Change:	2001	2008/09
Use congregational website.....	43%	71%
Congregational service activities:		
Meals, food, clothing for the needy.....	87%	78%
Health-related programs.....	33%	40%
Environmental/animal welfare activities.....	4%	11%
Hobby and craft groups.....	24%	36%
Arts or cultural programs.....	38%	44%
Financial situation:		
Increasing financial base.....	26%	15%
Stable financial base.....	48%	47%
Declining financial base.....	20%	32%
Financial situation is seriously threatened.....	5%	6%
Conflict in the past 5 years where people left.....	28%	41%
Worship includes:		
Traditional music.....	94%	99%
Contemporary hymns.....	55%	56%
Classical music.....	48%	51%
Praise music.....	40%	46%
Singing by a choir or soloist.....	88%	81%
Time for people to greet one another.....	74%	81%
Laughter.....	55%	40%
Applause.....	55%	40%
Participation by teens.....	49%	30%
Visual projection equipment.....	9%	22%

* Based on responses of the key leader in each congregation who provided information about the church.

Summary

Congregations and worshipers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have many strengths when compared to national averages for other types of congregations:

- Larger percentages of PC(USA) worshipers are involved in small group activities in their congregations and in community service or advocacy activities.
- More worshipers are involved in other activities to improve their communities.
- More worshipers serve in leadership roles in their congregations.
- Worshipers in PC(USA) congregations are more educated than typical worshipers.

Nonetheless, PC(USA) congregations face several challenges:

- Presbyterian worshipers are older than typical worshipers and getting older.
- Like in other denominations and faith groups, men are under-represented in the pews.
- Few worshipers are involved in outreach efforts or evangelism activities of their congregation.
- Most new people in PC(USA) congregations have come to their church from other congregations; few are first-timers who have no previous religious affiliation.
- Most congregations are small with fewer than 100 in worship.
- Increasing numbers of PC(USA) congregations face a declining financial situation.

What Matters?

Why identify the uniqueness of Presbyterian worshipers and congregations? The answer goes to the heart of our most important questions: What is God calling PC(USA) congregations to do? What is God calling your church to do and be as a congregation?

This brief report is an invitation for Presbyterians to focus on our strengths and to build on our competencies. Using our strengths in ministry is one way to return thanks to God for these gifts. Can we resist the tendency to focus on present problems in order to imaginatively create the future? Do we believe the best years of our congregation's ministry are in the future? Where in the midst of our "present" are we already moving forward to claim a more positive future?

Presbyterians can build on the strengths of discipleship education, the resources of talented leaders and monetary giving, new people in the pews with diverse faith backgrounds, and high levels of civic and community involvement both individually and as congregations. These are areas where our congregations and worshipers are already strong.

The challenge is to use these strengths to address important questions:

- Where would we like to be stronger?
- What one or two actions could we take to become more effective in our ministry?

What Are Your Congregation's Strengths?

Our research focuses on what makes congregations strong. We discovered ten dimensions of congregational vitality. Strong congregations: (1) help their worshipers grow spiritually, (2) provide meaningful worship, (3) are places where worshipers participate in the congregation in many ways, (4) give worshipers a sense of belonging, (5) care for children and youth, (6) focus on the community, (7) help worshipers share their faith with others, (8) welcome new people, (9) rely on empowering congregational leadership, and (10) have a positive outlook on the future.

Ten Strengths of Congregations

Growing Spiritually: Where many worshipers are growing in their faith and feel the congregation meets their spiritual needs.

Meaningful Worship: Where many worshipers experience God's presence, joy, inspiration, and awe in worship services and feel worship helps them with everyday life.

Participation in the Congregation: Where many worshipers attend services weekly and are involved in the congregation in many other ways.

Sense of Belonging: Where many worshipers have a strong sense of belonging and say most of their closest friends attend the same congregation.

Caring for Children and Youth: Where many worshipers are satisfied with the offerings for children and youth and have children living at home who also attend there.

Focusing on the Community: Where many worshipers are involved in social service or advocacy activities and work to make their community a better place to live.

Ten Strengths of Congregations (continued)

Sharing Faith: Where many worshipers are involved in evangelism activities and invite friends or relatives to worship.

Welcoming New People: Where many worshipers began attending in the past five years.

Empowering Leadership: Where many worshipers feel the congregation's leaders inspire others to action and take into account worshipers' ideas.

Looking to the Future: Where many worshipers feel committed to the congregation's vision and are excited about the congregation's future.

From *Beyond the Ordinary: Ten Strengths of U.S. Congregations* by Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

What is the U.S. Congregational Life Survey?

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey, conducted initially in 2001 and again in 2008 and 2009, records the voices of 500,000 people in more than 5,000 congregations. It remains the largest and most representative profile of worshipers and their congregations ever conducted, including Presbyterian participants and a broad variety of other faith groups and denominations—from Methodist to Mormon, from Catholic to Baptist—including many non-denominational congregations. In participating congregations, all worshipers age 15 and older completed a survey in worship. A *Field Guide to U.S. Congregations*, second edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) describes the latest findings.

In the most recent survey (conducted in the fall of 2008 and the spring of 2009), 40,555 worshipers in a random sample of 521 PC(USA) congregations participated. Their voices are reflected here.

How are the fastest-growing Presbyterian churches different from other congregations?

A national study of fast-growing PC(USA) churches reveals they do a good job in several areas.

1. These churches **focus on the spiritual development of their worshipers**. Many of their worshipers are involved in activities that help them grow in faith and discipleship.
2. Worshipers believe that **all participants are part of the church's leadership**. Empowering leaders inspire others to take action, make certain that everyone's gifts are valued, and employ those gifts in the church's work.
3. Fast-growing congregations **actively welcome new people** to attend and participate in the congregation. This means that they use multiple efforts to increase the number of visitors and take additional steps to ensure that those visitors are warmly welcomed, continue attending, and become active participants.

From D. Bruce, C. Woolever, K. Wulff, and I. Smith-Williams, "Fast-growing churches: What distinguishes them from others." *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, Vol. 27, No. 1, April 2006, pp. 111-116.

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 get information about using the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in your congregation, or see the section titled "Conduct Your Own Survey" on our website (www.UScongregations.org).

Presbyterian Myth Traps*

Myth 1: Congregations grow by attracting new people who have not been attending services anywhere.

Truth: Only 9% of new worshipers in Presbyterian churches are getting involved in a congregation for the first time ever. Fewer than one-third are transfers from another Presbyterian congregation. The largest numbers of newcomers are “switchers” from another denomination or faith tradition.

Myth 2: Congregations have a hard time adapting to a changing world because most worshipers are not open to change.

Truth: Many worshipers say their congregation is willing to try new things, and more than half believe their congregation is already moving in new directions.

Myth 3: Most worshipers attend small congregations.

Truth: Most congregations are small, but most worshipers attend large congregations.

Myth 4: Presbyterians travel great distances to attend services.

Truth: Nearly all worshipers in Presbyterian congregations travel 20 minutes or less to attend services.

Myth 5: Most people find worship boring.

Truth: Only 5% of worshipers in Presbyterian churches say they experience boredom in worship on a regular basis.

Myth 6: Because worshipers are deeply involved in their congregations, they aren't very active in their communities.

Truth: Half of Presbyterian worshipers take part in community service or advocacy activities—either through their congregation or through community-based groups.

***What Are *Myth Traps*?** Myths are tempting assumptions about congregational life. If we believe a myth trap, we will use the same old methods to achieve the same old results. Myths immobilize us and block us from our most important question: What is God calling us to be and do as a church in this place?

Interested in Learning More About Your Congregation?

- ✓ **10-Year-Trend Report for Congregations**—available for free: www.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends
- ✓ **Neighborhood Demographic Report**—provides a quick look at the people who live in the area around your church; Free: www.pcusa.org/research/demographics
- ✓ Research Services can help you conduct a church survey to learn more about your worshipers and identify your congregation's strengths. Call 1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040 and ask about the **U.S. Congregational Life Survey** or visit: www.USCongregations.org



100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202
1-888-728-7228 ext. 2040
research@pcusa.org

www.USCongregations.org

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