

Why do some congregations grow?

An interesting study has been done by the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership and Faith Communities Today. Their latest study, dated 2005, collected 884 questionnaires from churches, synagogues, temples and mosques to find out what the common factors were in growing congregations. Go to <http://fact.hartsem.edu/Press/churchgrowth.htm> for more details.

- Congregational location—where the number of households increases by a minimum of 1.8% per year, a majority of congregations grew. Congregations in the South also grew more than all others, probably because of the population growth there, but also it is one of the more religious regions of the country.
- Congregations in newer suburbs—because this is where population growth is occurring.
- The second best areas for growth are the central city or downtown—urban renewal has changed this dynamic. Caution: these are still more likely to decline. Check into the residential population growth in your area to assess growth potential—www.census.gov or your chamber of commerce.
- Younger congregations—those organized more recently tend to take their mission and vision less for granted, providing greater energy for growth.
- Ability to attract young adults and families with children, as well as men, and participation of children in worship. Congregations with more than 40% over 60 are unlikely to grow, because they tend to have characteristics that inhibit growth (lack of children, strong mission and purpose, vibrant worship, and often located in smaller towns or rural areas).
- Churches that are more exciting, innovative, and involved with inviting friends, family and acquaintances to church events tend to grow.
- Congregations on each end of the conservative/liberal spectrum—but it's not the theology. Most important are the clarity of mission and purpose.
- Members label them “spiritually vital and alive,” and those that have *less* sense of being a “close knit family.” Too much closeness takes away from the vision and mission-orientation.
- Willing to change, and have not experienced conflict in the last 2 years are more likely to grow.
- Multiple worship services—worship described as joyful, exciting, inspirational and thought-provoking (worship described as reverent, more likely to decline). Over half of groups using drums and/or electric guitars often or always in worship experienced substantial growth, compared to those that used them less. The use of visual projection equipment has a weaker correlation with growth.
- The extent to which a congregation wants to grow has nothing to do with growth, only the intentionality and action toward growth. What is spirit calling your congregation to do?

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