

RESEARCH REPORT

A PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH SERVICES, NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
SUMMER 2002

U.S. Congregational Life Survey:

WORSHIPERS IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONGREGATIONS

In April of 2001, nearly 300,000 worshipers, age 15 and older, in more than 2,000 congregations in the United States participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. This study includes information for nearly 20,000 Southern Baptist worshipers in approximately 200 Southern Baptist congregations. Southern Baptist congregations were selected to provide a representative sample of the approximately 5.2 million people who attend worship services in Southern Baptist churches and missions on a typical Sunday morning.¹

Congregations that participated in the study were provided summaries of the responses of their worshipers organized into four building blocks of congregational vitality. The four themes are:

Building Spiritual Connections—connections made with God through worshipers' private devotional activities and participation in congregational activities such as worship.

Building Inside Connections—relational connections made with others in the congregation through group activities (such as Sunday School, prayer and Bible study groups, and fellowships), serving in leadership positions, and providing financial support.

Building Outside Connections—relational connections made to the community at large and outreach to non-members.

Building Identity Connections—connections made with the overall purpose, vision, and values of the congregation.

This report has been designed to supplement the summaries provided to participating congregations by providing a picture of all Southern Baptist worshipers. Also, it can be used as a companion to the recently published *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations: Who's Going Where and Why* by Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky. 2002).

Based on responses to the survey, 81.7 percent of worship service attendees in Southern Baptist congregations are members of the church where surveyed. Given that they were both members and attendees, these respondents are primarily active Southern Baptist members. Another 7.4 percent of survey respondents indicated that while they were not members, they did regularly participate at the church and still another 2.2 percent indicated they were in the process of becoming a member. Thus, 91.4 percent of worship service attendees are members or regular participants in the congregation where enumerated. The remaining attendees either are not members and regular participants (5.6%), or did not respond to the question (3.1%).

¹ 1999 Annual Church Profile, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, Tenn.

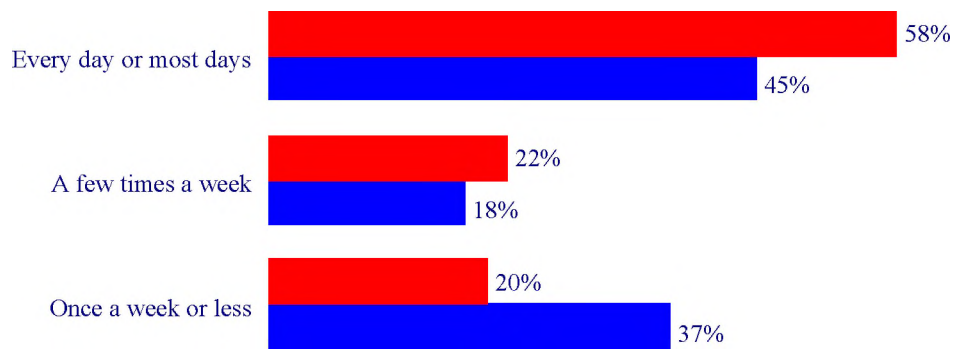
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- SBC
- All worshipers

BUILDING SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS

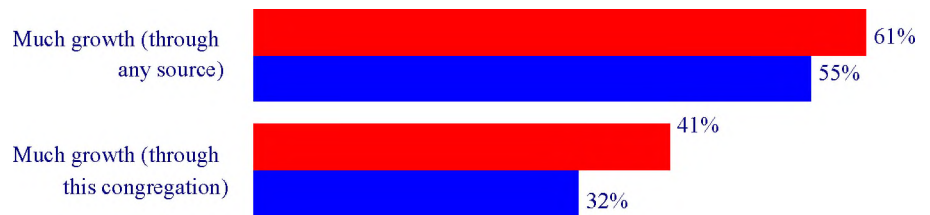
1 Private Devotions. Nearly 6 of 10 worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations indicate they spend some time every day or most days in private devotions. Nationally, 45 percent of respondents in all religious groups spend time every day or most days in private devotions.

How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)?



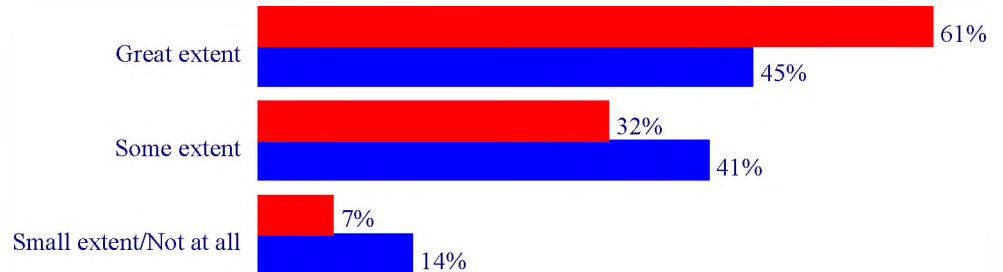
2 Growing in Faith. Six of 10 worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations indicate that they have experienced much spiritual growth during the past year. The local congregation was the primary source of this growth. Four of 10 worshipers responded that their growth came through their congregation while 9 percent indicated their growth came through another group or congregation and 11 percent attributed their growth to their own private activities.

Over the last year, how much have you grown in your faith?



3 Help with Everyday Living. Six of 10 Southern Baptist worshippers report that the worship services or other activities of their congregation greatly help them with everyday living.

To what extent do the worship services or activities of this congregation help you with everyday living?



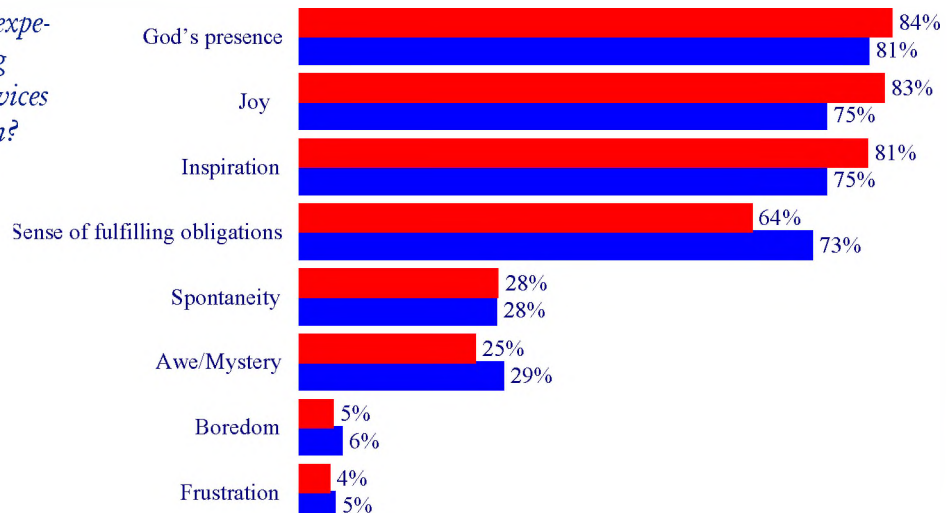
4 Meeting Spiritual Needs. Most worshippers in Southern Baptist congregations, 86 percent, feel that their spiritual needs are being met in the context of their congregation. This is close to the national average.

Do you agree or disagree: "My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation or parish"?



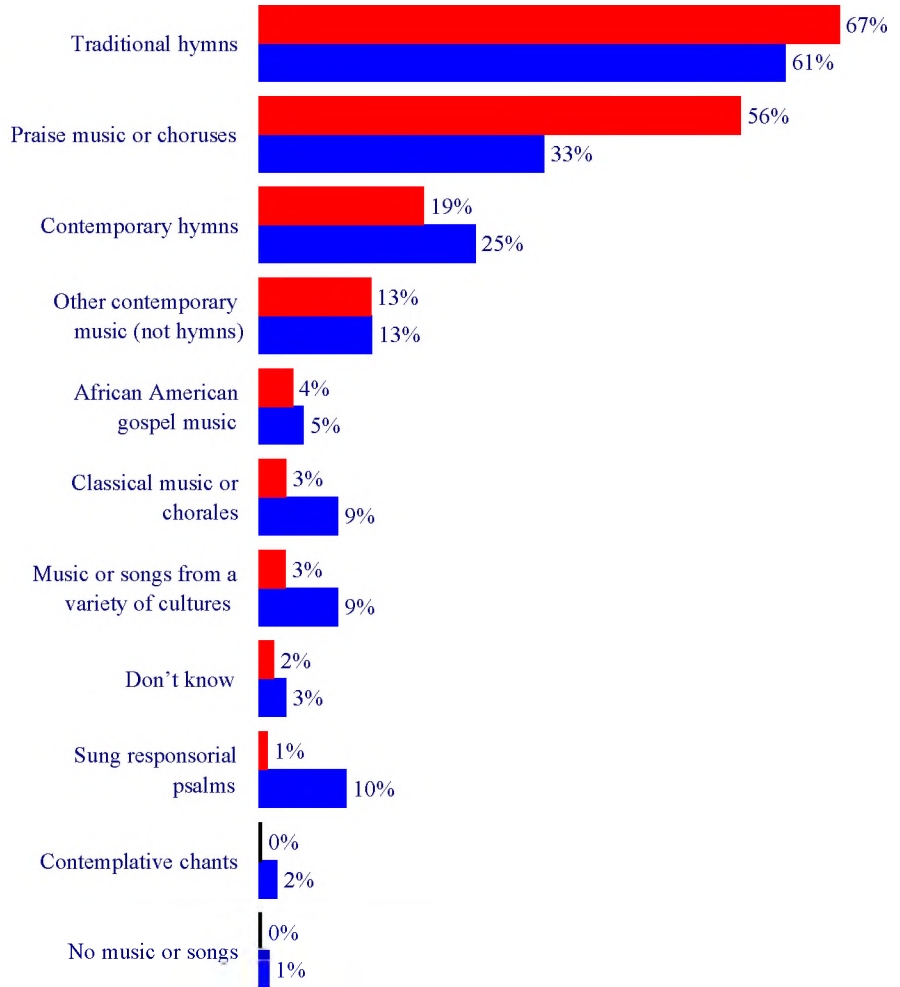
5 Worship Experiences. Four of 5 worshippers in Southern Baptist congregations “always” or “usually” experience a sense of God’s presence, joy, and inspiration during worship. Two-thirds indicate experiencing a sense of fulfilling an obligation. Only 1 in 20 is typically bored.

How often do you experience the following during worship services at this congregation?



6 Making Music. Music is an important part of Southern Baptist worship services. The majority of worshipers prefer traditional hymns (67%) and praise music or choruses (56%).

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



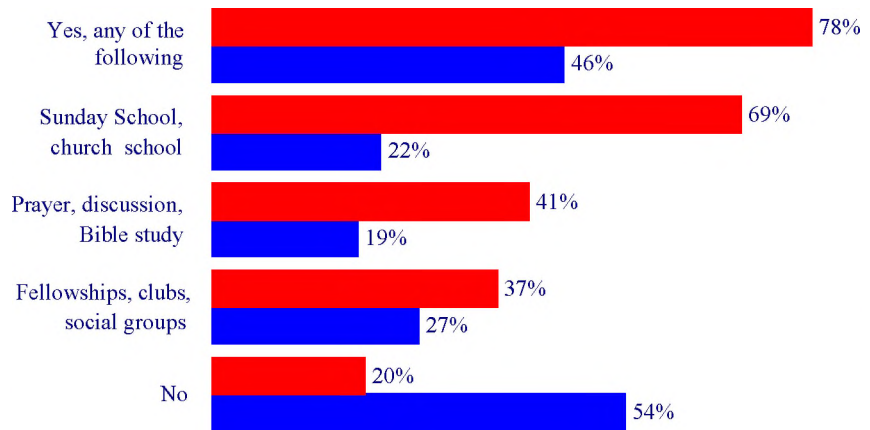
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- All worshipers

BUILDING INSIDE CONNECTIONS

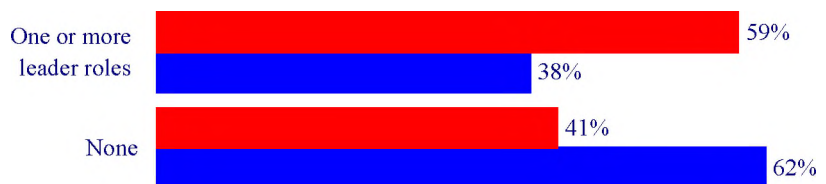
1 Involving Worshipers. Nearly 4 of 5 Southern Baptist worshipers are involved in group activities at their congregation. Worshipers are most likely to be involved in Sunday School. Southern Baptists are much more involved than worshipers as a whole.

Are you regularly involved in any group activities here? (Mark all that apply.)



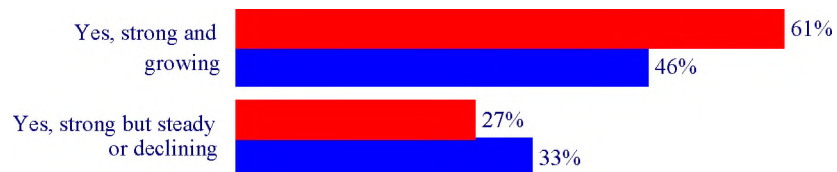
2 Involving Leaders. Six of 10 worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations have some type of leadership role in their congregation. This is another indication that Southern Baptists are more actively involved in their congregations than is the norm.

Do you currently have any of the following roles here? (Member of the governing board or a congregational committee or task force, leading/assisting in worship, officer/leader of men's, women's, youth, or other group, choir member, musician, choir director, Sunday school leader, other role not listed.)



3 Belonging Here. Most worshipers have a strong sense of belonging in their Southern Baptist congregation.

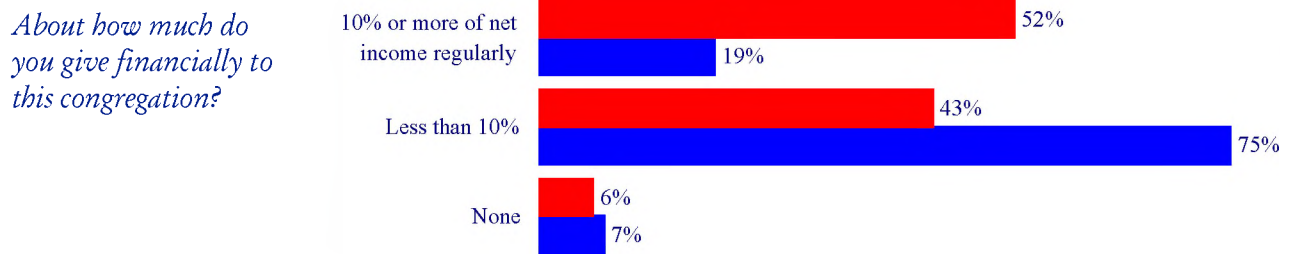
Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?



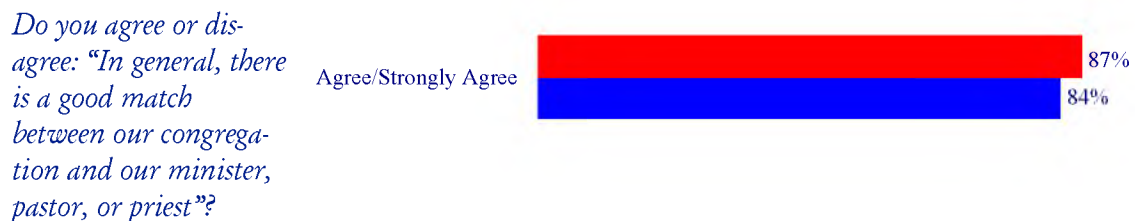
4 Making Friends. Four of five worshipers report that at least some of their close friends attend the same congregation. One fourth of worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations report most of their close friends are part of the congregation.



5 Giving. Financial support connects people to the congregation and its mission. Half of worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations report they give 10 percent or more of their income on a regular basis—this is more than double the national norm.



6 Being a Team. The overwhelming majority of Southern Baptist worshipers believe there is a good match between their pastor and the congregation. This is also true for worshipers in non-Southern Baptist congregations.



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- SBC
- All worshipers

BUILDING OUTSIDE CONNECTIONS

1 Inviting Others. Ninety-three percent of Southern Baptist worship service attendees reported that they would be willing to invite family and friends to a worship service. Seven of 10 reported they actually did so in the past year. Southern Baptists are significantly more likely to invite people to church than non-Southern Baptist worshipers.

Would you be prepared to invite to a worship service here any of your friends and relatives who do not now attend a congregation?



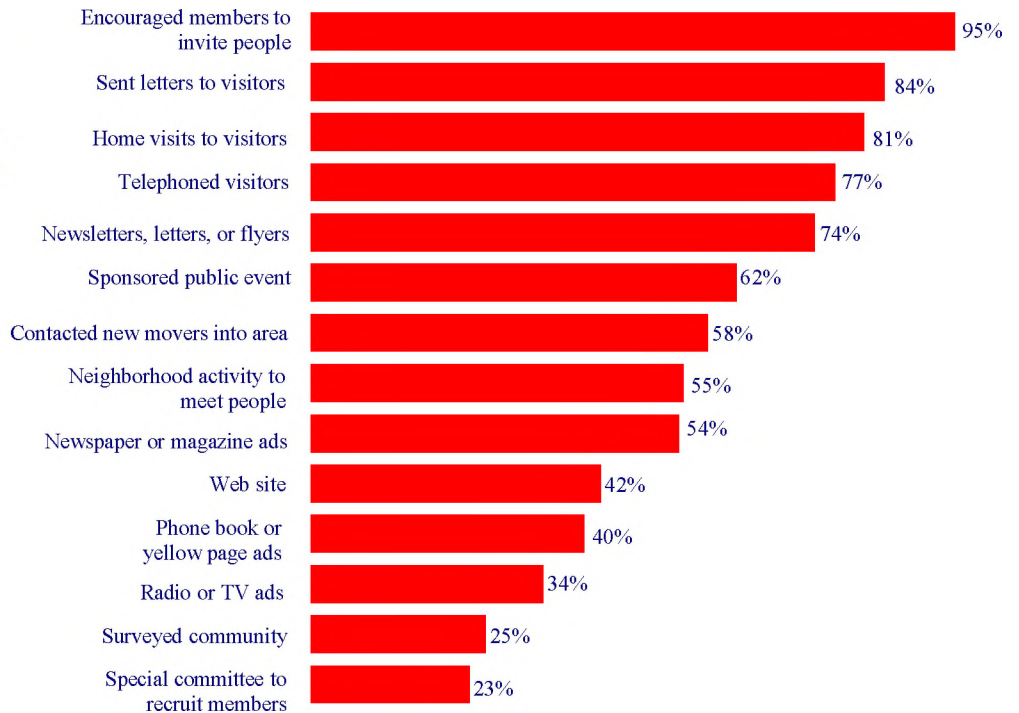
2 Reaching Out. Three of 10 Southern Baptist worshipers indicate that they regularly participate in evangelism or outreach activities of their congregation—more than twice the norm. A fourth of worshipers are involved in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities of their church. Half of Southern Baptist worshipers do not take part in church activities that relate to the community surrounding the congregation.

Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community?



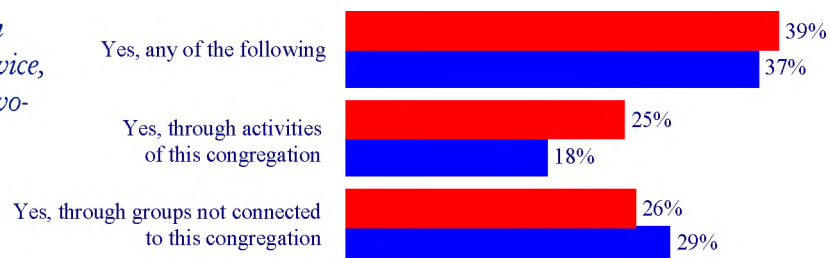
3 Your congregation’s Inviting Activities. A survey form with a list of 14 possible outreach activities was given to the pastor or another informant for each congregation. (This question was not asked of individual worshippers.) Out of the list of 14 activities, the typical Southern Baptist congregation employed 8 of them during the past year. The nearly universal strategy for Southern Baptist congregations is to encourage people already in the congregation to invite a new people. Other frequently used activities are sending letters to visitors, visiting them in their homes and telephoning them.

In the last 12 months, has this congregation done any of the following to reach out to nonmembers? (Mark all that apply.)



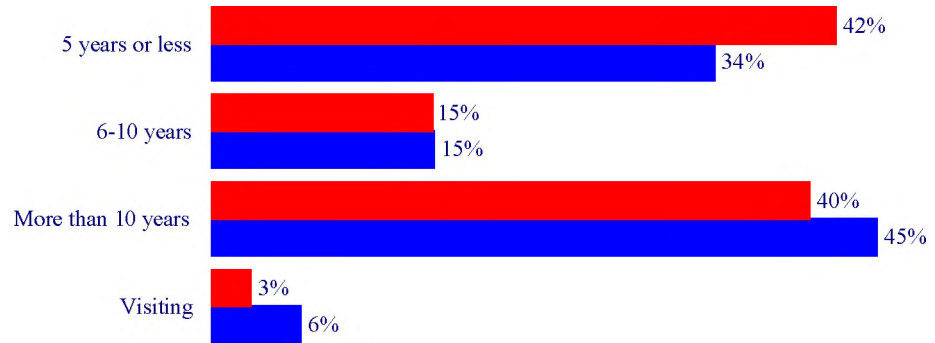
4 Serving the Community. Four out of 10 Southern Baptist worshippers are engaged in service to the community. They are equally split between working through the congregation and working with groups outside the congregation in order to provide this service. Southern Baptist worshippers are a little more likely to serve through their church than non-Southern Baptists.

Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups?



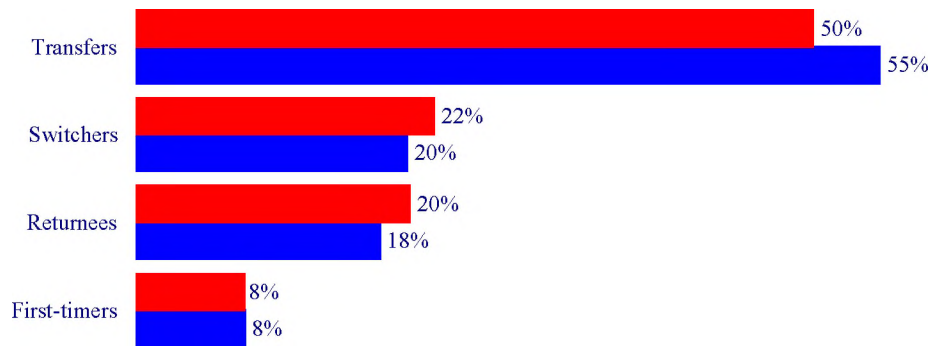
5 Welcoming New People. The percentage of people in a congregation who have been attending 5 years or less and the percentage of visitors are indicators of how open and receptive the congregation is to new folks. Forty-two percent of worshipers surveyed in Southern Baptist churches are new people. While this percentage seems high and is higher than the norm, the norm is that a third of all worshipers nationally have been in their congregation five or less years. Nationally, 6 percent of all worshipers are visitors compared to 3 percent of worshipers in Southern Baptist churches.

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



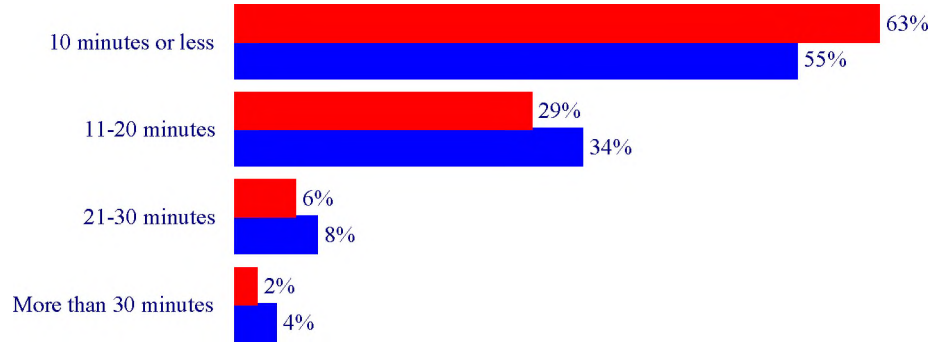
6 Knowing New People. New people, those attending congregations for 5 years or less, come from 4 different faith backgrounds. Transfers are those who were participating in another Southern Baptist church before attending their current church. Transfers make up half of all Southern Baptist newcomers. Switchers, those who came from other denominational background, comprise 22 percent of newcomers. Returnees are those who have returned to church after not attending anywhere for several years. They account for 1 of 5 newcomers. First-timers, which make up 8 percent of new people, are those who have never regularly attended anywhere. The composition of new people in Southern Baptist congregations is not very different from new worshipers in other religious groups. In particular, Southern Baptists are no more effective in reaching the unchurched (first-timers and returnees) than other religious groups.

The background of new people who have attended their congregation for 5 or less years.



7 Getting Here. Nearly two-thirds of Southern Baptist worship service attendees commute 10 minutes or less to their congregations. Southern Baptists seem a little less willing to commute greater distances than worshipers in other religious groups. Very few people are willing to commute more than 30 minutes to church.

How long does it usually take for you to get here?



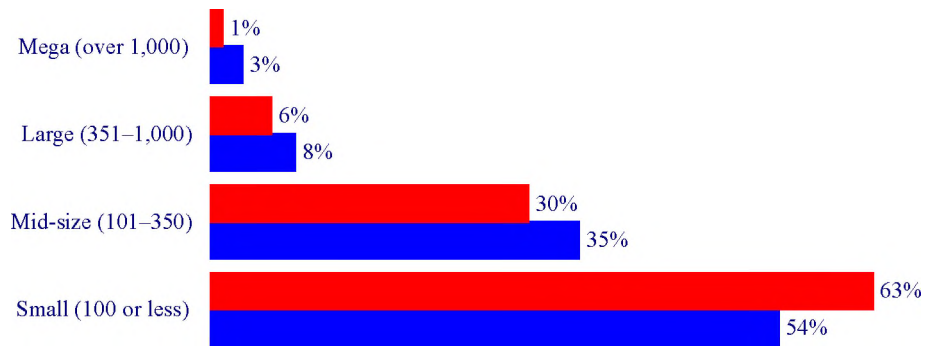
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BUILDING IDENTITY CONNECTIONS

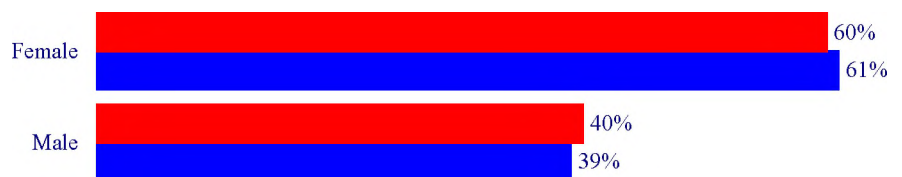
1 Your Size. Southern Baptist Congregations like congregations of most religious groups tend to be small. Nearly two-thirds of Southern Baptist congregations have 100 or less in worship on Sunday morning. At the other extreme, only 1 percent of Southern Baptist congregations have 1,000 or more in weekly worship. In contrast, worshipers are distributed differently. For example, while large and mega churches only account for 7 percent of Southern Baptist Congregations, they account for 38 percent of all worship service attendees. At the other end of the spectrum, the 63 percent of Southern Baptist congregations that have 100 or less in worship attendance account for only 23 percent of all worship service attendees.

Worship Service Attendance.

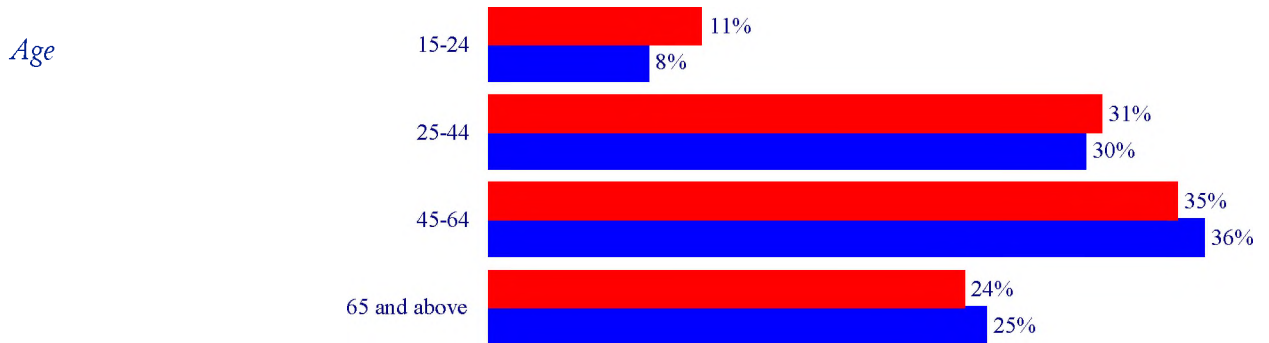


2 Your Gender Profile. Like all religious groups, Southern Baptist worshipers are predominately female.

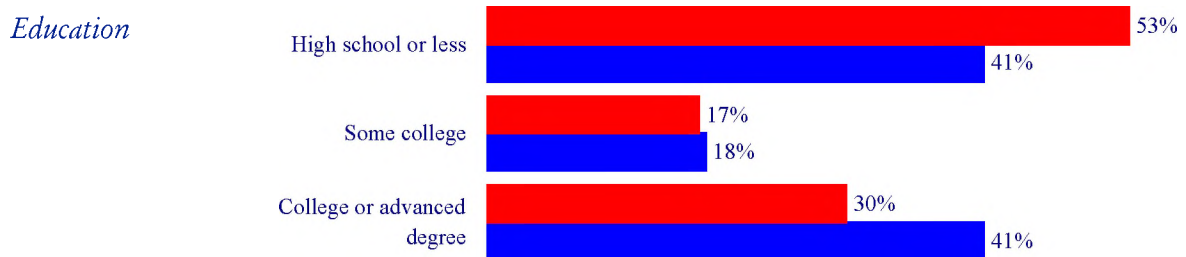
Gender



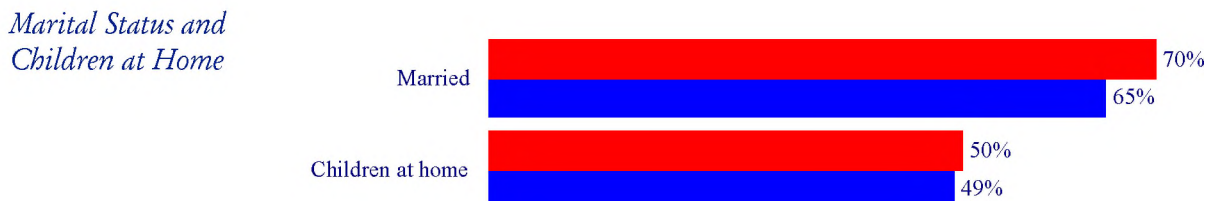
3 Your Age Profile. The U.S. Congregational Life survey was limited to persons age 15 and older attending a worship service. The age profile for Southern Baptist worshipers is slightly younger than the national profile for all worshipers. The average age of a Southern Baptist worshiper is 49 while the national average for all worshipers is 51.



4 Your Educational Background. Worshipers in the U.S. are well educated. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that 24 percent of the population, age 25 and older, has earned college bachelor’s or graduate level degrees. The U.S. Congregational Life survey reveals that 41 percent of all worshipers (also age 25 and older) are similarly educated. Worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations are less educated than worshipers in general.

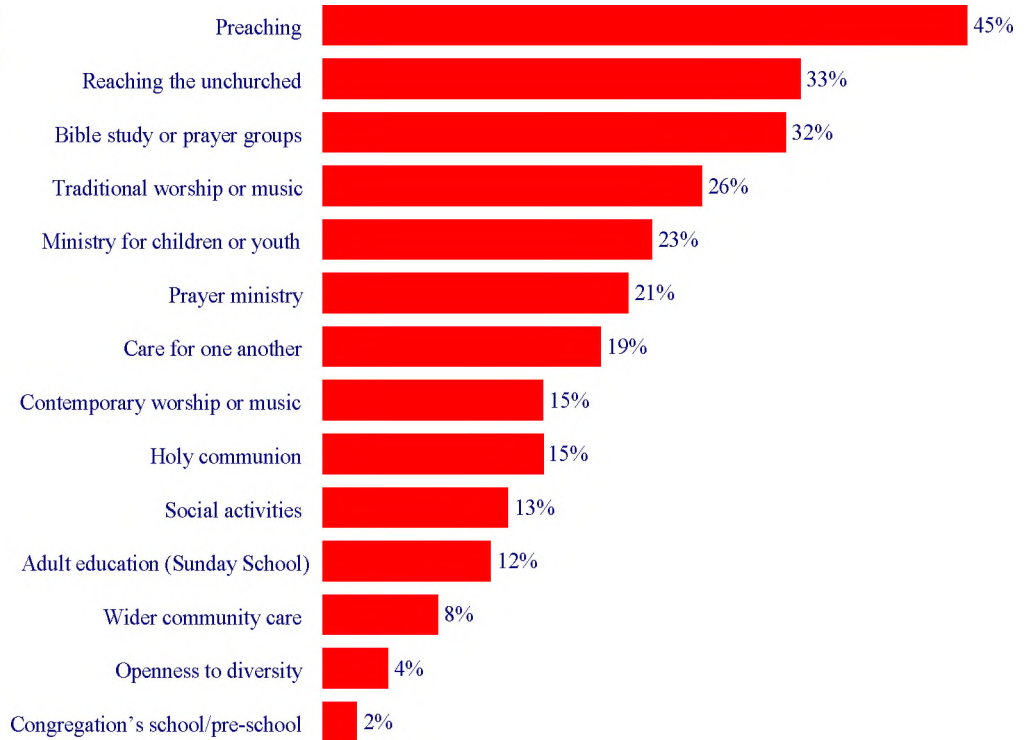


5 Your Household Types. Seven of 10 Southern Baptist worshipers are married. In comparison, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that 54 percent of the population (age 15 and older) is currently married. Fifty percent of Southern Baptist worshipers report they live in households where both adults and children are present.



6 What You Value. Southern Baptists tend to most value preaching, evangelism (reaching those who do not attend church), and participating in Bible study or prayer groups. In contrast, Southern Baptist worshipers are less interested in social issues and community ministry.

Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three options.)



7 Seeing Possibilities. Like all worshipers, most Southern Baptist worshipers report that they feel their congregation is open to change and the overwhelming majority indicate they personally have a sense of excitement about their congregation's future.

This congregation is always ready to try something new.

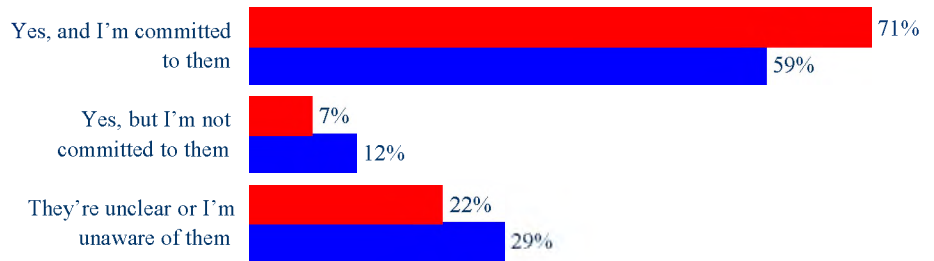


I have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future.



8 **Committing to the Future.** Eight of 10 worshipers in Southern Baptist congregations feel their congregation has vision, goals, and direction. Seven of 10 report they are committed to them.

Does this congregation have a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission?



U.S. Congregations, a religious research group staffed by religious researchers and sociologists, and funded by the Lilly Endowment and the Louisville Institute and supported by the Presbyterian Church (USA), conducted the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. The Research Team of the the North American Mission Board, SBC, assisted in recruiting Southern Baptist congregations for the study. Findings from the national study are posted at <http://www.uscongregations.org>, while results for Southern Baptists are posted at <http://www.namb.net/research>.



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