

## Episcopal Congregations Overview: Findings from the 2008 Faith Communities Today Survey

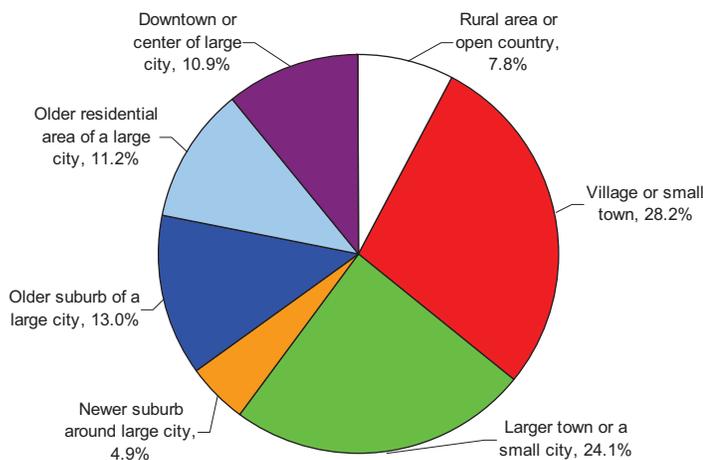
*A congregational research report from the Evangelism and Congregational Life Center, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. By C. Kirk Hadaway, March 2009.*

### Parishes and Their Settings

- The largest proportion (52%) of Episcopal congregations is located in villages, towns and small cities with a population of less than 50,000. Overall, 28% are located in villages or towns of less than 10,000 and 24% are in larger towns or small cities.
- Larger cities with a population of 50,000 or more are home to 40% of Episcopal congregations. Only 4.9% are in newer suburbs.

Figure 1

#### Location of Episcopal Congregations



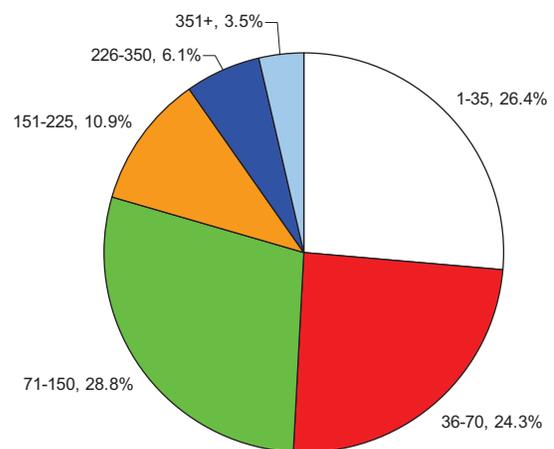
- A majority (53%) of Episcopal parishes and missions were founded before 1901. The post-war baby boom years (1946-1965) saw a boom in new church development as many parishes (19% of all congregations) were organized in that twenty year period. Only 4% of Episcopal congregations were founded from 1990 to 2007.
- The median seating capacity of parish worship facilities is 175 persons. Only 13% of Episcopal congregations have facilities that seat more than 300 people, while one in five seats 100 or fewer.

### Worship

- Half of Episcopal congregations (50.7%) are small or family-sized congregations where average worship attendance is 70 persons or less (2007 Parochial Report data). Pastoral-sized congregations make up the next largest proportion of parishes and missions (28.8%). Corporate-sized congregations with 351 or more in worship represent only 3.5% of Episcopal congregations.
- The median Episcopal congregation had 69 persons in worship in 2007 according to the annual Parochial Report.

Figure 2

#### Average Sunday Worship Attendance



- The largest proportion of Episcopal congregations (41%) offers two worship services each weekend. 65% offer two or more services each weekend, with 35% offering only one service. Of the congregations that report more than one weekend worship service, most (72%) say that worship style varies among their services, at least to some degree.
- Of congregations with a single worship service each weekend, three quarters report that attendance is 40% or less of capacity.

➤ Of congregations with *more than one* worship service each weekend, 11% report that aggregate worship attendance equals or exceeds their seating capacity. Only about one quarter indicate that total attendance is 40% or less of capacity.

➤ Majorities of congregations report that worship *often* or *always* includes:

- Eucharist (99%)
- A printed order of service (95%)
- Kneeling by the congregation (76%)
- Choir (67%)
- Prayers for healing (53%)

. . . but only small minorities report that worship always or often includes:

- Visual projection equipment (6%)
- Drums or other percussion equipment (7%)
- Incense (5%)

➤ Only 11% of congregations report that one or more of their weekend worship services changed a lot in format or style during the last five years. Most churches report that worship has either changed a little (40%) or changed moderately (26%).

➤ Congregations were *most* likely to say the following descriptors characterized their worship services “very well”:

- Filled with a sense of God’s presence (38%)
- Welcoming to newcomers (34%)
- Joyful (29%)

. . . and congregations were *least* likely to say the following descriptors characterized their worship services “very well”:

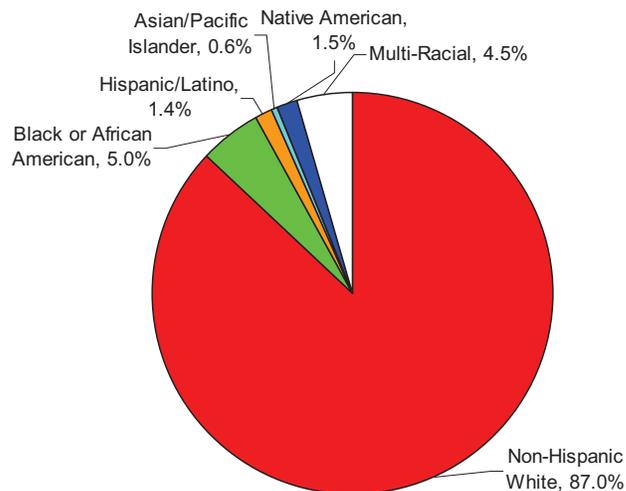
- Contemporary (4%)
- Thought-provoking (22%)
- Predictable (23%)

**Participants and Members**

➤ The median Episcopal congregation had 168 active members in 2007 (from Parochial Reports).

➤ Most (87.0%) Episcopal congregations are at least 60% white/European American. Another 5.0% of Episcopal congregations are predominantly African American or Black. In 4.5% of Episcopal churches no racial/ethnic group predominates.

**Figure 3**  
**Predominant Racial/Ethnic Makeup of Episcopal Congregations**

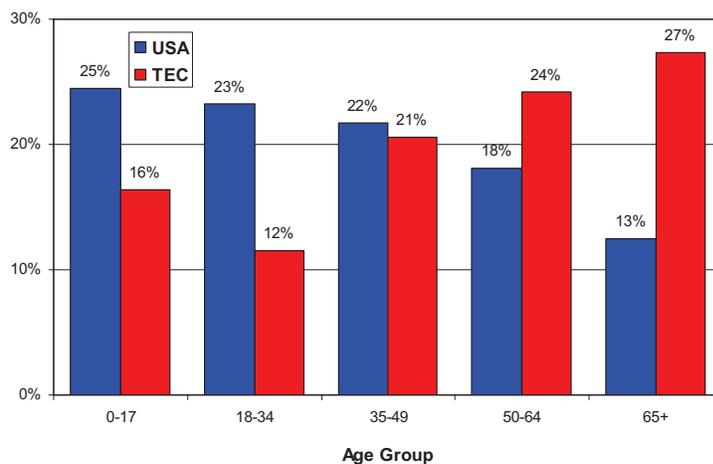


➤ The membership of the median Episcopal congregation was 60% female.

➤ A majority (62%) of Episcopal parishes and missions report that more than half of their members are age 50+.

➤ Episcopalians tend to be older than the general population. Overall, 27% of Episcopal members are age 65+, as compared to only 13% of the U.S. population in 2008. The Episcopal Church has proportionately fewer children, youth and younger adults.

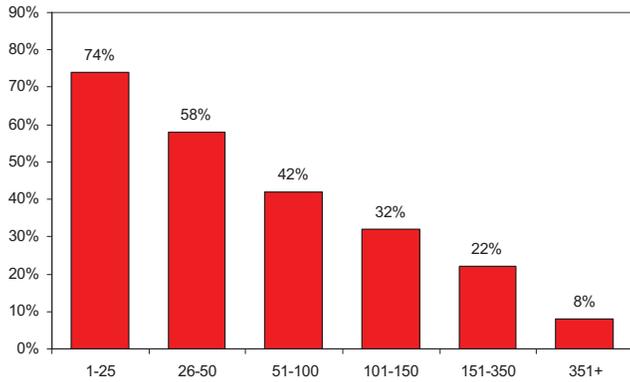
**Figure 4**  
**Age Structure of the USA and TEC: 2008**



➤ Episcopal parishes and missions with greater proportions of older members (age 65+) tend to be smaller in membership and are more often found in rural and small town settings.

Figure 5

Percentage of Parishes with at Least 35% Older (Age 65+) Members by Size (ASA)



**Conflict**

- 90% of Episcopal congregations reported having conflicts or disagreements in the last five years (up from 86% in 2000, but down slightly from 93% in 2005). 64% of churches reported at least one area of serious conflict.
- Declining congregations tended to have more overall conflict and more areas of serious conflict.
- Conflict over *leadership* and conflict over *worship* were the areas most strongly related to decline in attendance.
- Of congregations that had serious conflict:
  - Some members left the church: 89%
  - Some members withheld funds: 45%
  - A staff member was dismissed or reassigned: 18%

Figure 6

Conflict in Episcopal Parishes Over Last Five Years

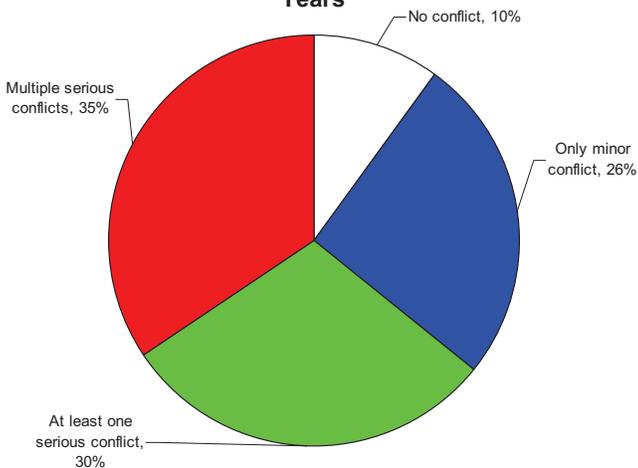
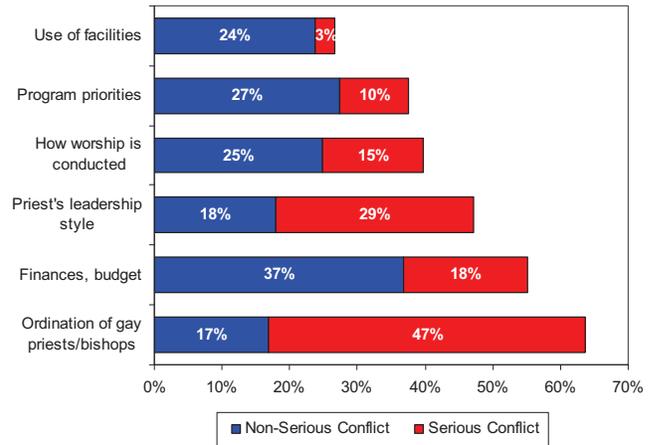


Figure 7

Sources of Conflict in Congregations in Last Five Years



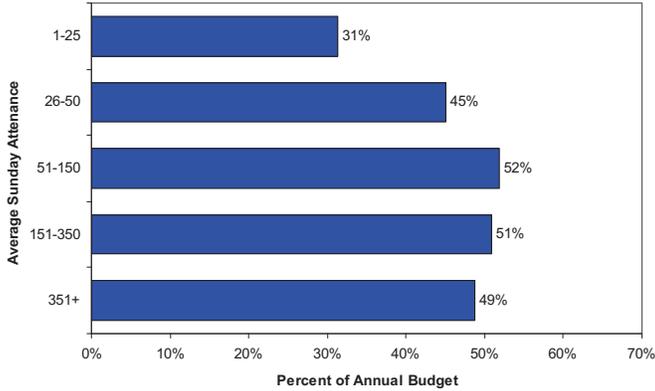
- The ordination of gay priests or bishops was the most frequently mentioned source of conflict.
- Other areas of conflict volunteered by congregations:
  - Conflict with diocese or Bishop
  - Music program or music director
  - Misconduct by clergy or members

**Finances**

- Nearly the same proportion of congregations describes the current financial health of their congregation as “excellent” as say they are “in serious difficulty” (7% and 8%, respectively).
- About one third of parishes and missions reported that their finances are “excellent” or “good” in 2008. The proportion with excellent or good financial health declined from 56% to 32% between 2000 and 2005 and then remained essentially unchanged for 2008 (33%). The proportion in some or serious financial difficulty almost doubled from 2000 to 2005, increasing from 13% to 25% and then remained unchanged for 2008.
- The typical (median) congregation reported total revenue for 2007 of \$168,806 and total operating revenue of \$145,166 (from Parochial Reports).
- The average expenditure for all staff salaries and benefits was 48% of budget in 2008. Smaller churches tend to spend a lower proportion of their budgets on staff salaries and benefits because such congregations tend to rely more heavily on part-time and volunteer staff.

Figure 8

Average Percent of Budget for Staff by Parish Size (ASA)



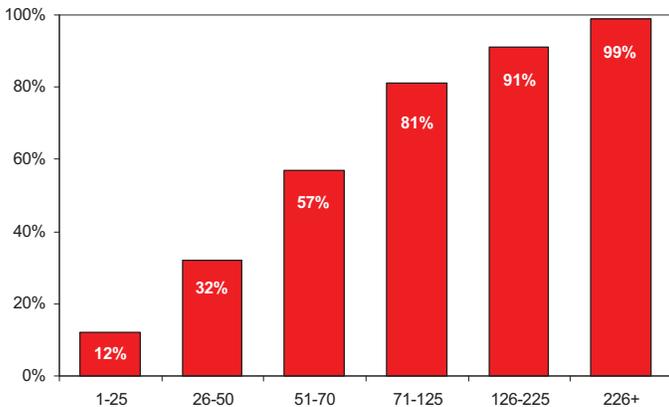
- Over one quarter (28%) of Episcopal congregations report having made a commitment to contribute 0.7% of their annual budget in support of the Millennium Development Goals in 2008. Only 7% of Episcopal congregations reported such a commitment in 2005.

**Leadership**

- Two thirds of Episcopal congregations (66%) report having a solo rector, vicar, deacon or priest-in-charge. Another 21% have multiple priests with one serving as senior minister. Only 6% of congregations have co-rectors, co-vicars or a ministry team (with no one designated as senior minister) and another 7% have no priest or deacon at the present time.

Figure 9

Percentage of Parishes with at Least One Full Time Paid Clergy by Size (ASA)



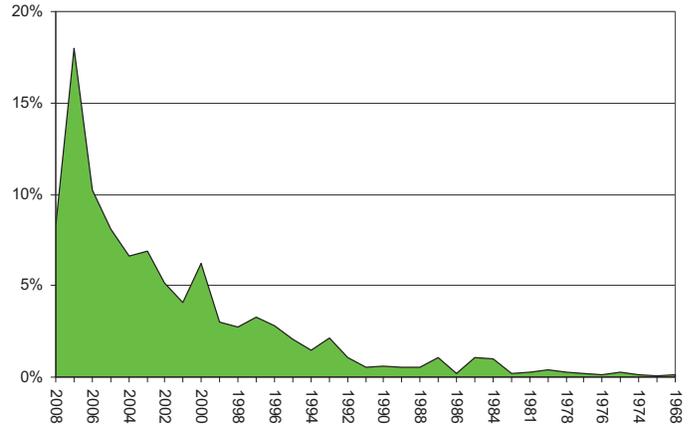
- Smaller parishes are much less likely to have full-time paid clergy than are larger parishes. Only about one third (34%) of parishes with attendance of 70 or less have full-time clergy.

- Overall, 63% of Episcopal parishes have at least one full-time paid clergy. Another 25% are served by part-time clergy, unpaid clergy, retired priests, or by seminary students. The remainder report having no clergy at all or that they are served by supply or interim priests.

- The typical (median) rector or vicar is 58 years of age and was called to his or her congregation in 2004 (note: survey was completed in mid-2008). The median age of clergy in this survey is higher than the figure typically referenced for Episcopal parish clergy because the FACT survey includes priests who are part-time or retired. 37% of clergy were called in 2006, 2007 or in the first half of 2008.

Figure 10

Year Called to Current Parish (Percent of Clergy)



- 30% of rectors and vicars are female. 19% of clergy report having a doctoral degree.

- Areas of ministry where clergy spend the *most* time:
  - Planning and leading worship
  - Teaching people about the faith and the Bible
  - Pastoral care
  - Administration & committee meetings
  - Developing and promoting a vision & purpose

- Areas of ministry where clergy spend the *least* time include: contacting inactive persons in the congregation (least overall); dealing with conflict; organizing and leading small groups; and evangelism and recruitment.

- 69% of clergy participate annually in continuing education & 77% of clergy have met regularly with other ministers in a small group for support.

## Programs, Practices and Ministries

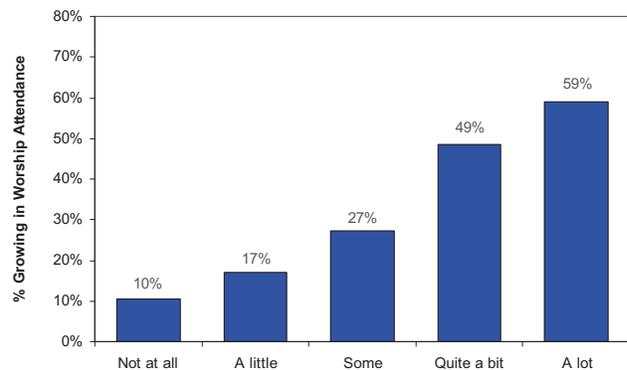
- Programs and activities most often listed by parishes as a “specialty” or “a lot of emphasis”:
  - Church School (listed by 62%)
  - Community service activities (59%)
  - Music program (57%)
  - Bible study groups (44%)
  - Fellowships, trips, social activities (42%)
  - Prayer, meditation, spiritual development (37%)
- Programs that larger percentages of congregations do not offer at all include:
  - Sports activities (89% do not offer)
  - Health programs (75%)
  - Young single adult activities (71%)
  - Parenting or marriage enrichment (70%)
  - Support groups (48%)
- A slight majority of Episcopal congregations (51%) have an organized youth group and almost half (47%) indicate that they have a youth minister or youth ministry coordinator. These percentages may seem high since 11% of Episcopal congregations report that they have no youth in the church and 58% have 10 or fewer youth among their active members or regular participants. Only 20% of Episcopal congregations have 20 or more youth actively involved.
- Activities for youth with the highest levels of congregational participation include:
  - Youth retreats, conferences & camps (56%)
  - Organized youth group (51%)
  - Youth minister or leader who coordinates activities for youth (47%)
  - Congregational events planned or led by youth (45%)
  - Mission trips for youth (43%)
  - Youth choir or other musical groups (31%)
- A substantial majority (73%) of Episcopal parishes and missions report having established or updated a web site in the past year. Another 10% plan to establish a web site soon, and 8% have a web site, but haven’t updated it in the past year. Only 9% do not have a web site and do not plan to establish one in the near future. In 2005 a slightly smaller percentage (68%) of congregations indicated that they had established or updated a web site in the past year.

## Recruitment and Evangelism

- Relatively few Episcopal churches report that their members are heavily involved in recruiting new members. Only 21% say their members are involved “quite a bit” or “a lot.” The more typical involvement is “a little” (32%) or “some” (41%).
- Churches with greater involvement in recruitment activity are more likely to have experienced growth in worship attendance.

Figure 11

**Percentage of Parishes with Growth (2002-2007) by Recruitment Involvement**



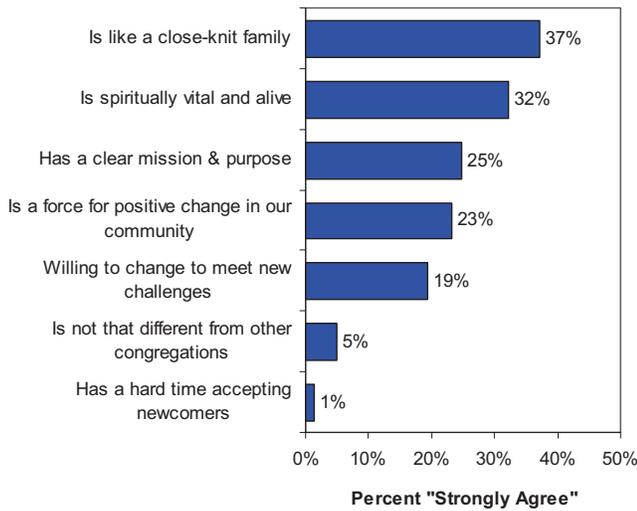
- The most frequently mentioned method of contacting worship visitors is by mail:
  - We contact visitors by mail (68%)
  - We contact visitors by phone (45%)
  - We send materials to visitors (42%)
  - We contact visitors by personal visit (32%)
  - We contact visitors by email (27%)
- Only a few Episcopal congregations (6%) say that they rarely, if ever, have any visitors to their worship services and only 9% say that they rarely, if ever, contact the visitors that they have. Churches that have few visitors or do not contact their visitors tend to decline.
- Most Episcopal congregations say they would either definitely (48%) or probably (31%) contact an active member who stopped attending.
- The vast majority of Episcopal congregations (82%) conducted special events or programs to attract people from the community. Congregations that did not do so were more likely to decline in worship attendance.

**Congregational Identity**

- Among the characteristics that can be used to describe Episcopal congregations, the top one out of seven possibilities listed in Figure 11 was “is like a close-knit family.” In addition to the 37% who strongly agree with this statement, another 50% somewhat agree. Very few congregations say they are “not that different from other congregations” in their community or that they have “a hard time accepting newcomers.”

**Figure 12**

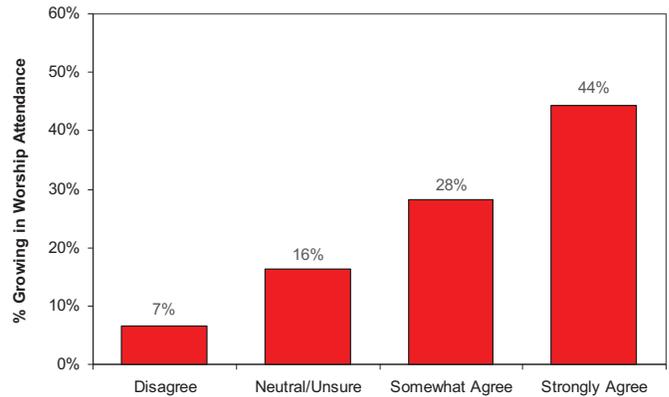
**Congregational Characteristics**



- Congregations that say they are like a “close knit family” tend to be smaller churches and are more likely to be located in rural areas and small towns.
- Being a “close knit family” is unrelated to growth or decline in worship attendance.
- Growing congregations were most likely to strongly agree that they have “a clear mission and purpose,” are “a force for positive change” in their communities, and are “spiritually vital and alive.”
- Congregations that have “a hard time accepting newcomers” and say that they are “not that different from other congregations” in their community are more likely to decline in average worship attendance.

**Figure 13**

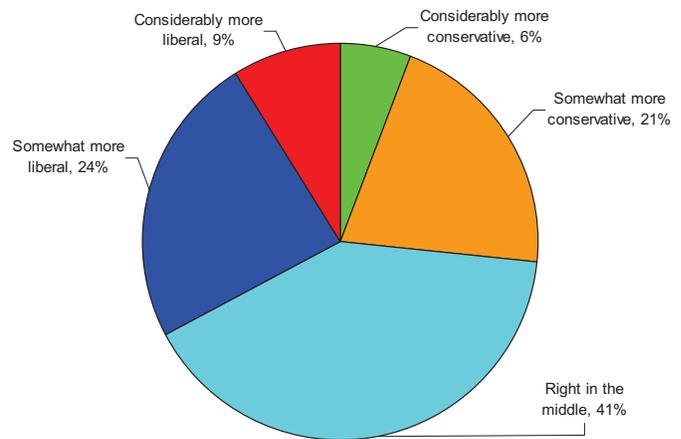
**Percentage of Parishes with Growth (2002-2007) by "Has a Clear Mission and Purpose"**



- Episcopal congregations are varied in their theological outlook. However, relatively few say that are considerably more liberal or considerably more conservative than other Episcopal parishes. Most are either “right in the middle” or somewhat more conservative or liberal.

**Figure 14**

**Theological Liberalism & Conservatism (Compared to Other Episcopal Congregations)**



- Conservative Episcopal congregations were much more likely to have experienced serious conflict during the last five years over the ordination of gay clergy than moderate or liberal congregations.
- Congregations that are considerably more liberal were most likely to grow, followed by congregations that are considerably more conservative.

**Episcopal Congregations Overview** is based on responses from 783 Episcopal parishes and missions that completed the 2008 Faith Communities Today Survey (71% response rate). The data were weighted by size and region to be representative of all Episcopal congregations. A more detailed report of findings will be published and posted on the Episcopal Church web site later in 2009. See [www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm)