



## Episcopal Congregations Overview: Findings from the 2010 Faith Communities Today Survey

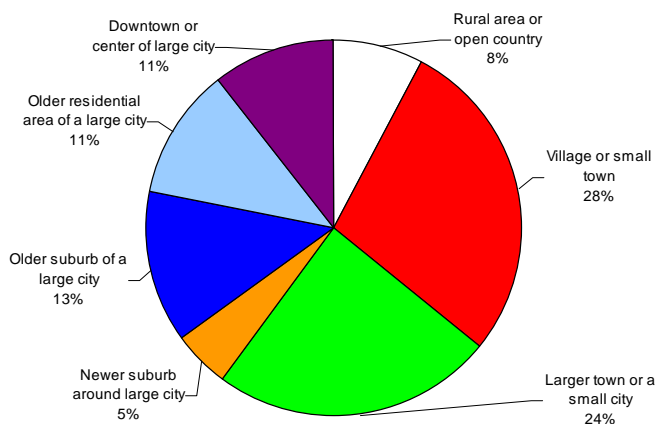
A congregational research report from Congregational and Diocesan Ministries, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017. By C. Kirk Hadaway, March 2011. <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm>

### Parishes and Their Settings

- The largest proportion (52%) of Episcopal congregations can be found 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 persons 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 8% are in rural areas or open country.

Figure 1

Location of Episcopal Congregations



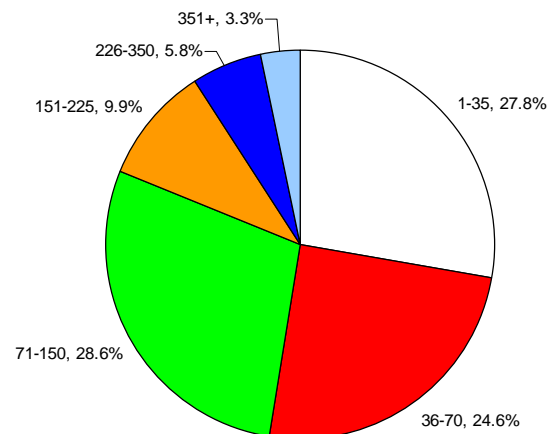
- A majority (53%) of Episcopal parishes and missions were founded before 1901. The post-war baby boom years (1946-1965) saw a huge rise in new church development as many parishes (18% of all congregations) were organized during those twenty years. Only 3% of Episcopal congregations were founded from 1993 to 2009.
- The typical (median) worship space seats 170 persons. Only 15% of Episcopal congregations have a worship space that seats more than 300 people. One in five seats 100 or fewer.

### Worship

- Over half of Episcopal congregations (52.4%) are small, family-sized congregations where average worship attendance is 70 persons or less (2009 Parochial Report data). Pastoral-sized congregations make up the next largest proportion of parishes and missions (28.6%). Corporate-sized congregations with 351 or more in worship represent only 3.3% of Episcopal congregations.
- The median Episcopal parish had 66 persons at Sunday worship in 2009 according to the annual Parochial Report—down from 72 in 2006 and 77 in 2003.

Figure 2

Average Sunday Worship Attendance



- The largest proportion of Episcopal congregations (41%) offers two worship services each weekend. 62% offer two or more services each weekend, with 38% offering only one service. Of the congregations that report more than one weekend worship service, the vast majority (85%) say that worship style varies among their services, at least to some degree.
- Of congregations with a single worship service each weekend, 50% report that the service is less than one third full.

➤ Only 15% of Episcopal congregations indicated that their current worship space is less than they need. Most say their current facility is “just about right” (47%) or more than we need (38%).

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

- Eucharist (99%)
- Organ music (91%)
- Kneeling by the congregation (80%)
- Choir (72%)

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

- Electric guitars (9%)
- Drums or other percussion equipment (7%)
- Incense (5%)
- Visual projection equipment (4%)

➤ Well over half of Episcopal churches reported that the style and format of worship did not change (36%) or only changed only a little (25%) over the last 5 years. Major changes were made by other congregations through adding a new service (12%) or by alterations to existing worship services (8%).

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

- Filled with a sense of God’s presence (36%)
- Joyful (34%)
- Reverent (25%)

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

- Innovative (4%)
- Inspirational (17%)
- Thought-provoking (23%)

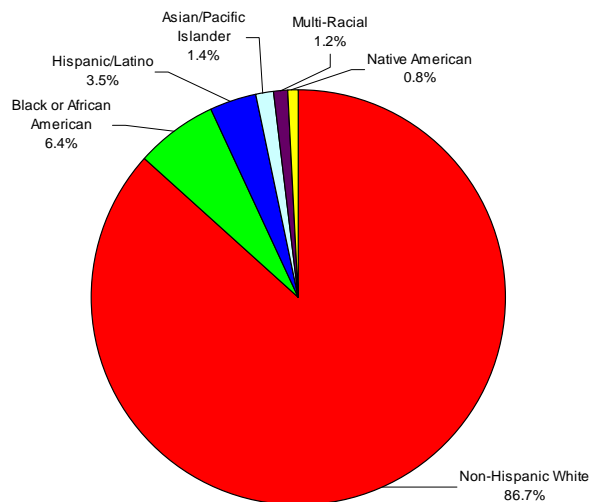
**Participants and Members**

➤ The median Episcopal congregation had 160 active members in 2009, down from 182 in 2003.

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

➤ The majority of Episcopalians are white/European American (86.7%). The second largest racial/ethnic population is African American or Black (6.4%), followed by Latinos (3.5%).

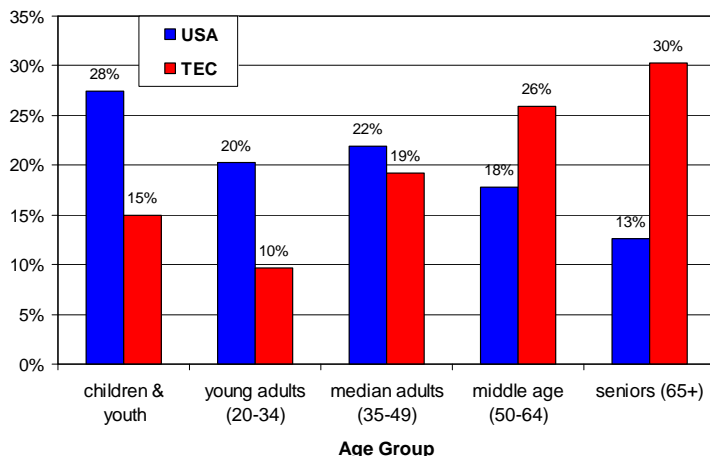
**Figure 3**  
**Episcopal Domestic Racial/Ethnic Membership**



➤ In 94% of Episcopal congregations one racial/ethnic group predominates. 86.2% of Episcopal congregations are mostly white, 5.6% are multi-racial, and 4.9% are predominantly Black.

➤ The large majority (69%) of Episcopal congregations report that more than half of their members are age 50+.

**Figure 4**  
**Age Structure of the USA and TEC: 2010**

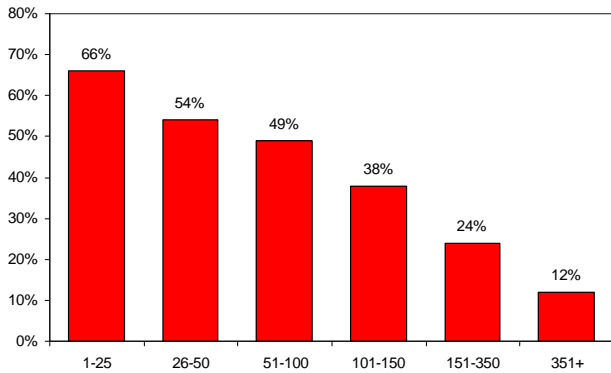


➤ Episcopalians tend to be older than the general population. Overall, 30% of Episcopal members are age 65+, as compared to only 13% of the U.S. population. The Episcopal Church has proportionately fewer children, youth and young adults.

➤ Episcopal parishes and missions with greater proportions of older members (age 65+) tend to be smaller in average attendance 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)

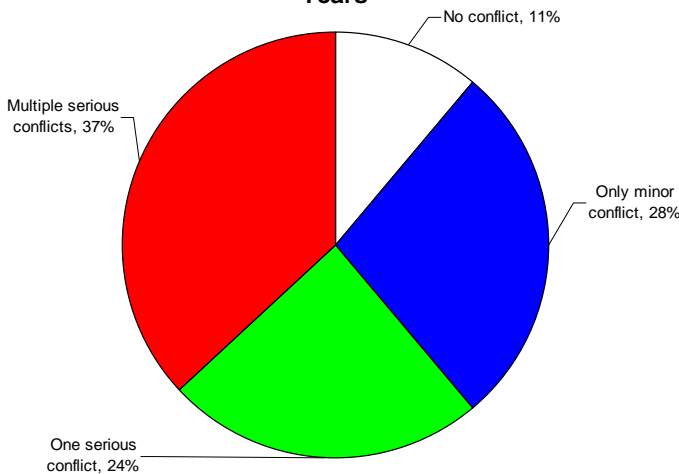


**Conflict**

- 89% 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 and 90% in 2008). At least one area of serious conflict was reported by 61% of churches.

Figure 6

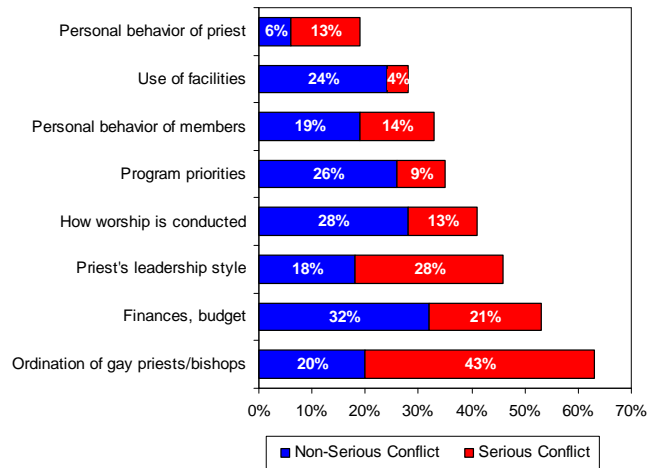
Conflict in Episcopal Parishes Over Last Five Years



- Declining congregations tended to have more overall conflict and more areas of serious conflict.
- Conflict over *leadership* and conflict over *finances* were the areas most strongly related to decline in average Sunday attendance.
- Of congregations that had serious conflict:
  - Some members left the church: 93%
  - Some members withheld funds: 50%
  - A staff member was dismissed or resigned: 26%

Figure 7

Sources of Conflict in Congregations in Last Five Years



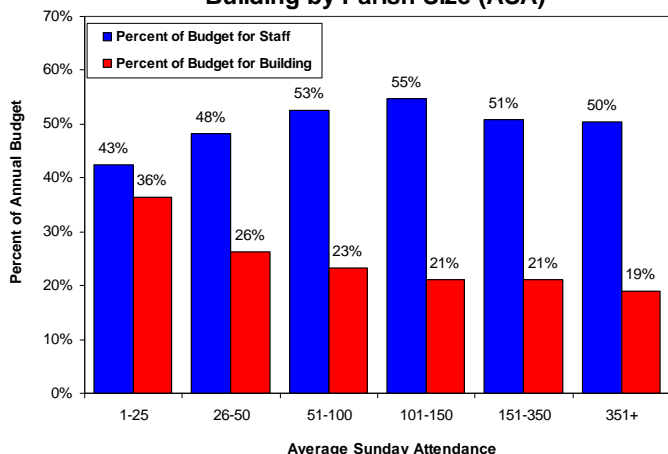
- The ordination of gay priests or bishops was the most frequently mentioned source of conflict.
- Other areas of conflict volunteered by congregations:
  - Vestry or lay leadership
  - Youth ministry
  - “National Church” politics

**Finances**

- Slightly more congregations report that their finances are “in serious difficulty” (9%) than say their finances are “excellent” (8%).
- Only 28% of parishes and missions reported that their finances were “excellent” or “good” in 2010. In 2000, the proportion in excellent or good financial condition was much higher (56%) than it was in 2005 or 2008 (32% and 33%, respectively) and than it is now. The proportion in serious or some financial difficulty almost doubled from 2000 to 2005, increasing from 13% to 25%; it remained unchanged in 2008, and increased to 28% in 2010.
- A majority of parishes (70%) indicated that their income declined during the 2008-09 “great recession.”
- The median expenditure for all staff salaries and benefits was 51% of budget in 2010. Small churches tend to spend a lower proportion of their budgets on staff because they often rely more heavily on part-time, lay, and volunteer staff. Congregations averaging 101-150 in average Sunday attendance tend to spend the most, 55% on average.

Figure 8

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



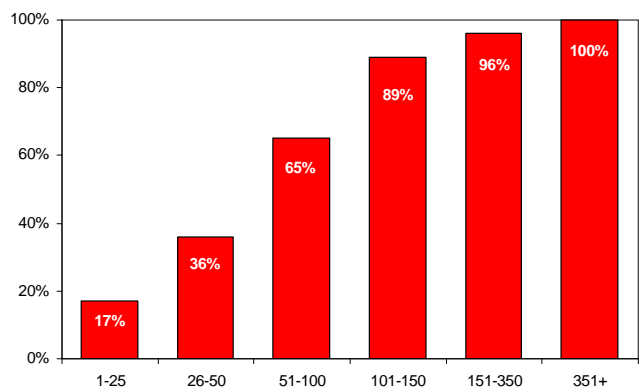
- The larger the parish, the smaller the proportion of income that is spent on utilities and maintaining facilities. The largest congregations also spend proportionally more on missions.
- Around one quarter (26%) of congregations report having made a commitment to contribute 0.7% of their annual budget in support of the Millennium Development Goals in 2010, down slightly from 28% in 2008. Only 7% of congregations reported such a commitment in 2005.

**Leadership**

- Almost three-fourths of Episcopal parishes (72%) report having a solo rector, vicar, dean or priest-in-charge. Another 18% have multiple priests with one serving as senior minister. Only 5% of congregations have co-rectors, co-vicars or a ministry team (with no one serving as senior minister); another 5% currently have no clergy

Figure 9

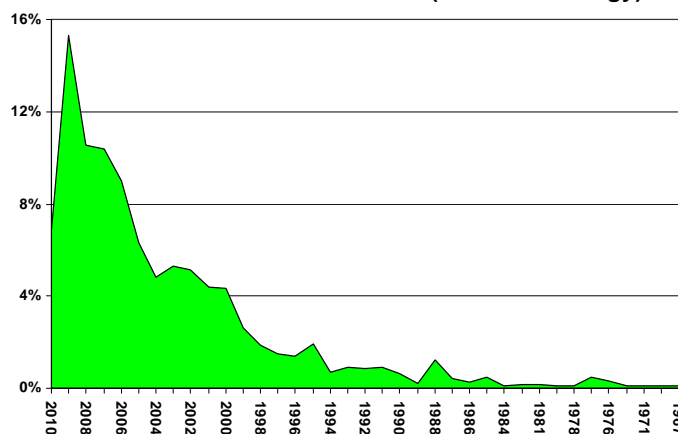
**Percentage of Parishes with at Least One Full Time Paid Clergy by Size (ASA)**



- Smaller parishes are much less likely to have full-time paid clergy than are larger parishes. Only about one third (37%) of parishes with attendance of 70 or less have full-time paid clergy.
- Overall, 63% of Episcopal parishes have at least one full-time paid clergy. Part-time clergy serve another 29% of congregations. The remainder report having no clergy at all or that they are served by unpaid priests.
- The typical (median) rector or vicar is 58 years of age and was called to his or her congregation in 2006 (note: survey was completed in mid-2010). 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. 33% of clergy were called in 2008, 2009 or in the first half of 2010.

Figure 10

**Year Called to Current Parish (Percent of Clergy)**



- 31% of rectors and vicars are female. 18% of clergy leaders report having a doctoral degree.
- Areas of ministry where clergy spend “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of time:
  - Planning and leading worship (89%)
  - Teaching people about the faith and the Bible (73%)
  - Pastoral care (72%)
  - Developing and promoting a vision & purpose (69%)
  - Administration and committee meetings (68%)
- Areas of ministry where clergy spend the *least* time include: dealing with conflict (least overall); engaging youth & young adults; evangelism & recruitment; and organizing & leading small groups.

## Programs, Practices and Ministries

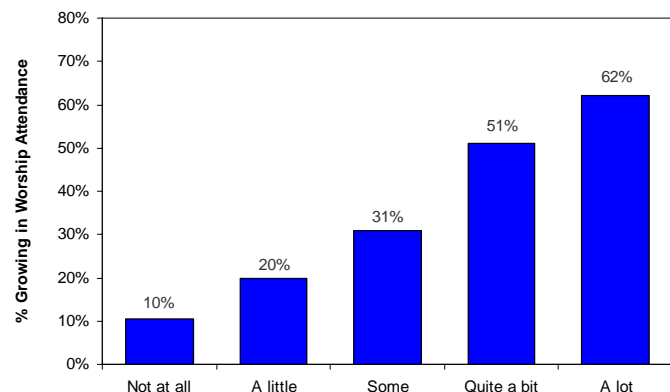
- Programs and activities most often listed by parishes as a “specialty” or “a lot of emphasis”:
  - Community service activities (listed by 67%)
  - Church school (62%)
  - Music program (57%)
  - Fellowships, trips, social activities (49%)
  - Bible study groups (46%)
  - Adult religious formation (46%)
- Programs that larger percentages of congregations do not offer at all include:
  - Sports activities (83% do not offer)
  - Parenting or marriage enrichment (70%)
  - Relationship with overseas diocese (57%)
  - Young adult activities (51%)
  - Spiritual retreats (47%)
  - Support groups (43%)
- Most Episcopal parishes are embracing the use of new or newer communication technology. Almost all (95%) of Episcopal congregations use email to communicate with members. Having a website is almost as widespread. In 2010 86% of Episcopal parishes and missions said their congregation used a website, up from 81% in 2008 and 76% in 2005.
- The use of social media has exploded in recent years and 41% of Episcopal congregations indicated that they used Facebook or other social media in 2010. Blogs and Podcasts do not have the same level of use. Only 11% and 6% of congregations use them, respectively. As to other newer technologies, congregations frequently wrote in “electronic newsletters” (including Constant Contact), “texting,” and “Twitter.”
- Ministries most often provided (by the parish or with another group for members and people in the community) included:
  - Cash assistance for individuals or families (listed by 89% of congregations)
  - Food pantry or soup kitchen (86%)
  - Elderly or home-bound programs (52%)
  - Organized social issue advocacy (33%)
  - Day care or pre-school programs (30%)
  - Health programs (28%)
  - Tutoring or literacy programs (19%)

## Recruitment and Evangelism

- Relatively few Episcopal churches reported that their members were heavily involved in recruiting new members. Only 20% say their members are involved “quite a bit” or “a lot.” The more typical involvement is “a little” (36%) or “some” (40%).
- Churches with greater involvement in recruitment activity are more likely to have experienced growth in worship attendance.

Figure 11

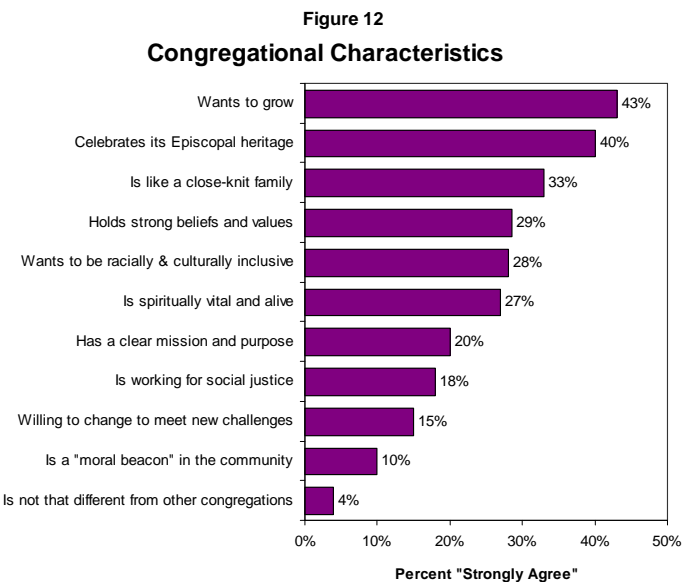
**Percentage of Parishes with Growth (2004-2009) by Recruitment Involvement**



- The most frequently mentioned method of contacting worship visitors is by mail:
  - We contact visitors by mail (60%)
  - We contact visitors by phone (48%)
  - We contact visitors by email (39%)
  - We send materials to visitors (38%)
  - We contact visitors by personal visit (33%)
- Only a few Episcopal congregations (8%) say that they rarely, if ever, have any visitors to their worship services and only 10% 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 in average Sunday attendance.
- The vast majority of Episcopal congregations (91%) conducted special events or programs to attract people from the community, although 37% did so only once or twice in the past year. Congregations that did not reach out into their community in this manner were more likely to decline in worship attendance.

## Congregational Identity

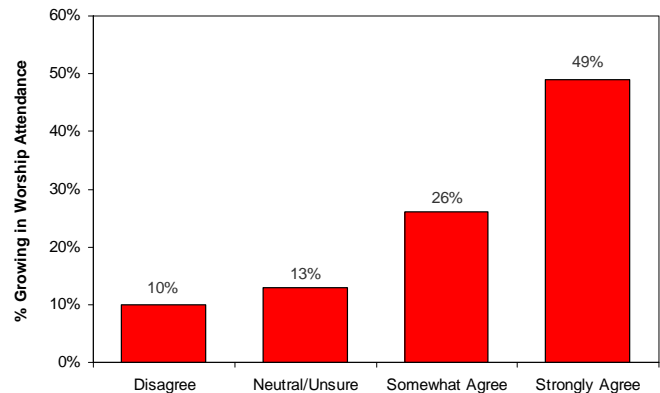
- Among the characteristics that can be used to describe Episcopal congregations, the one most frequently selected out of eleven possibilities in Figure 12 was “wants to grow.” In addition to the 43% who “strongly agree” with this statement, another 46% “agree.” Wanting to grow is related to growth, but does not ensure growth. However, not caring about growth nearly ensures decline.



- Growing congregations were most likely to strongly agree that they are “spiritually vital and alive” (see Figure 13), have a “strong mission and purpose,” are “moral beacons” in their communities, and are “willing to change to meet new challenges.”
- 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 only marginally related to growth in worship attendance, as is celebrating one’s Episcopal heritage.
- Congregations that say that they are “not that different from other congregations” in their community are much more likely to *decline* in average worship attendance.

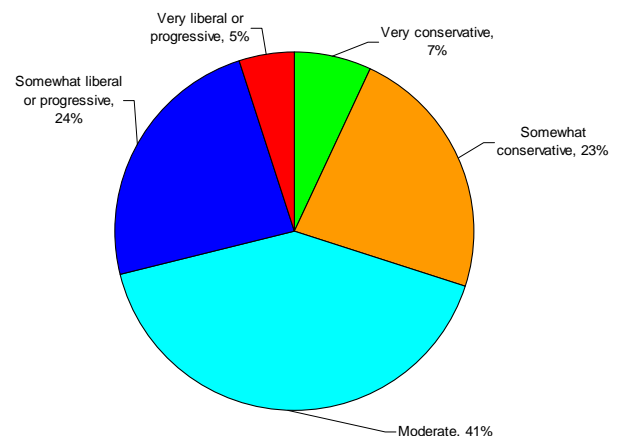
Figure 13

**Percentage of Parishes with Growth (2004-2009) by "Is Spiritually Vital and Alive"**



- Episcopal congregations are varied in their theological outlook. However, relatively few say that they are very liberal or very conservative. Most are either “moderate” or somewhat conservative or liberal.

**Figure 14**  
**Theological Liberalism & Conservatism**



- Conservative Episcopal congregations were *much* more likely to have experienced serious conflict during the last five years regarding the ordination of gay clergy than more liberal congregations.
- Congregations that are “very liberal” were most likely to have grown in worship attendance (38%) followed by congregations that are “somewhat liberal” (32%) or “very conservative” (30%). The relationship is not strong, but it is consistent with previous findings.

**Episcopal Congregations Overview** is based on responses from 837 Episcopal parishes and missions that completed the 2010 Faith Communities Today Survey (76% 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 2011. See [www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm)