



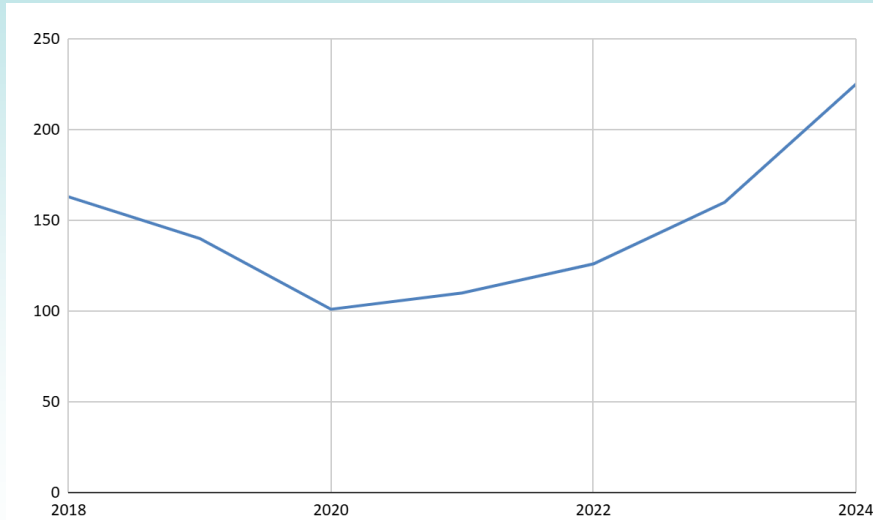
Preliminary Report

First Congregational Church of Old Lyme

CONVERGENCE

BY THE NUMBERS

- About 960 individuals participate or support in some way
- 200 average worship attendance f2f, 25 online - attendance dipped during the pandemic but has rebounded higher than 2018-2019 at this point

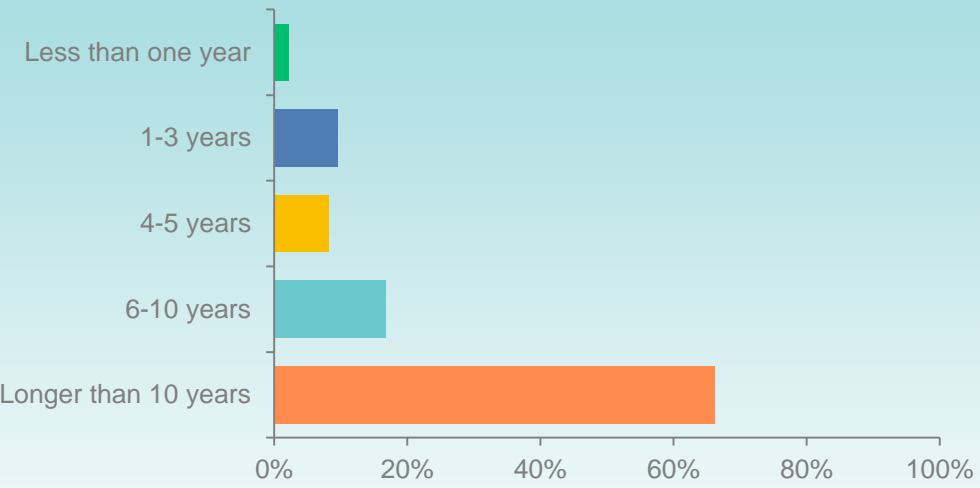


- 45-50 non-worship activities per month - about 200 attend these as well
 - AA - 8x/month
 - Yoga Group - 8x/month
 - Bible Study - 4x/month
 - Bible Study Offsite - 4x/month
 - Food Pantry - 4x/month
 - Diaper Bank - 1x/month
 - Ladies Who Stitch - 4x/month
 - Ladies Benev Society Lunch - 1x/month
 - LBS Board - 1x/month
 - Bd of Trustees - 1x/month
 - Senior Choir - 4x/month
 - Red Cross Blood Drive - 1x/month
 - Memorial Services - 2x/month
 - Musical Masterworks Concert - 2x/month
 - Board of Stewardship - 1x/month
 - Writers at the Well - 1x/month
 - Newsletter mailing group - 1x/month
 - Senior Center events - 3x/month
 - Youth Breakfast run to NYC - 1x/month
 - Organ Concert - 1x/month
 - Grief Group - 1x/month

- 240 responses to congregational survey.

Q1: How long have you attended worship, gatherings, or other events (online or face to face) with this congregation?

Answered: 236 Skipped: 4



Most respondents (66%) have participated for longer than 10 years. Only 12% (28 people) have participated for 3 years or less.

From the Leader Survey

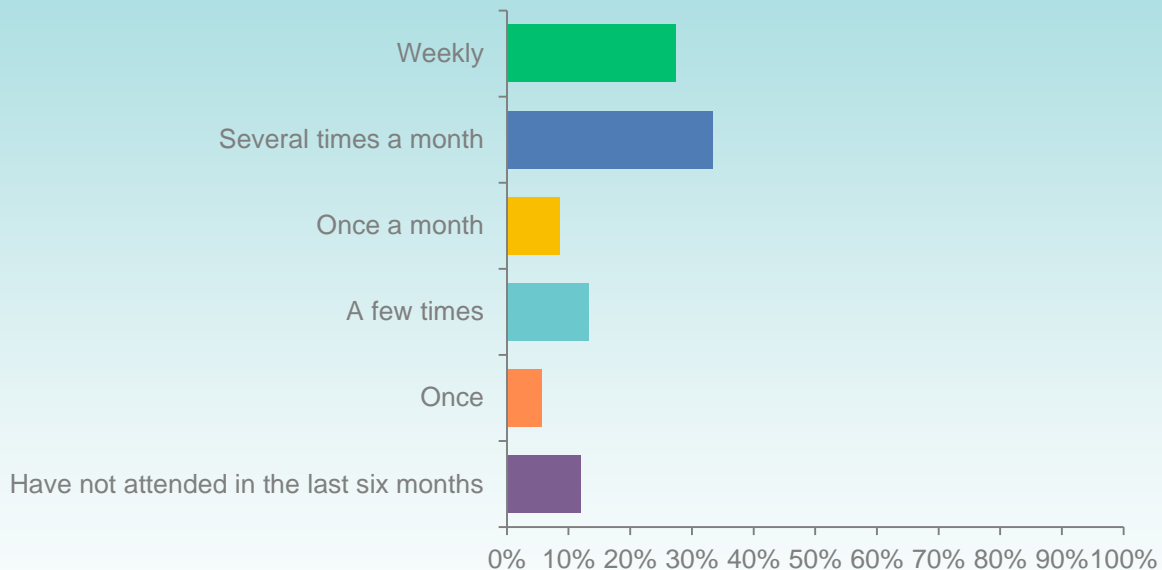
In 2023, 14 people joined/began participation in your congregation.

In past years, new members (not counting confirmands) have ranged from 17-35 per year. The number of new members per year has decreased year over year. Confirmands have also decreased year over year.

Q2: How often have you attended your congregation's gatherings/worship, programming and/or events (face to face or online) in the last six months?

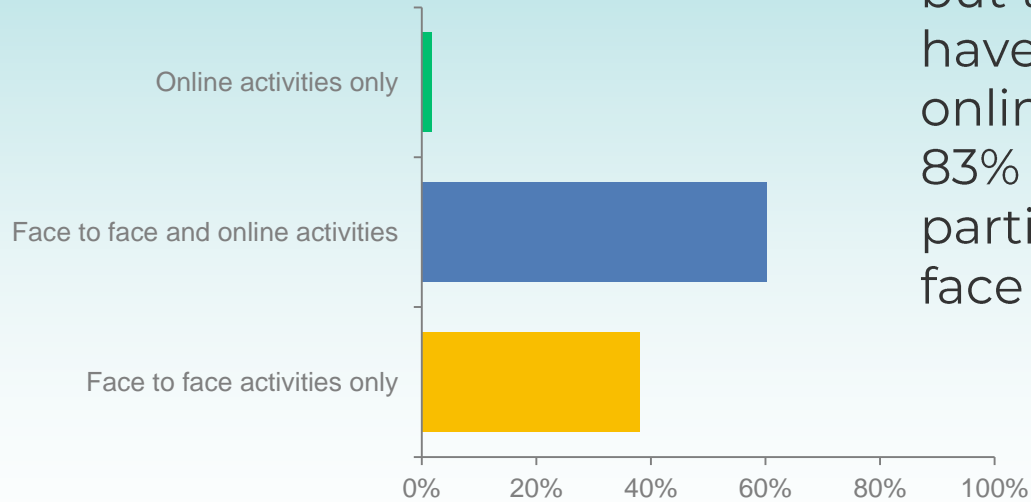
Answered: 236 Skipped: 4

The majority of survey respondents (61%) are attending at least several times a month. However, 12% (28 people) have not attended in the last six months, and another 19% (45 people) have only attended once or a few times. This is a significant portion of people who care enough to fill out a survey but no longer participate. In our detailed analysis, we will look at whether perspectives differ among those who participate regularly and those who do not.



Q6: During my time as a part of this congregation, I have participated in:

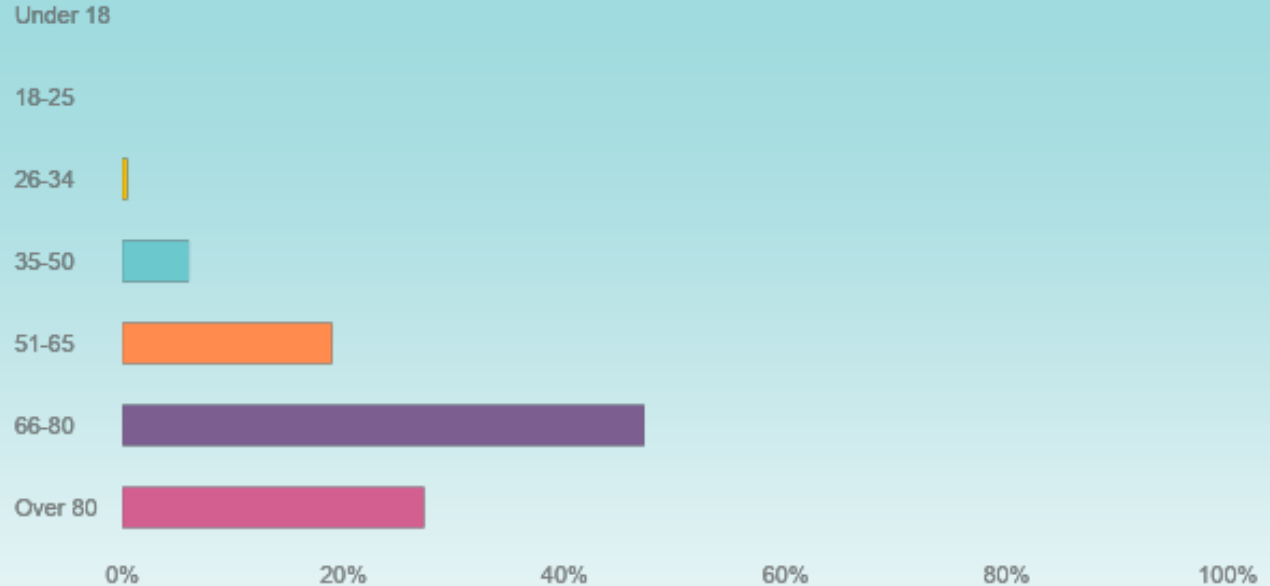
Answered: 231 Skipped: 9



You are a primarily face to face congregation, but the majority (60%) have participated online at some point. 83% most often participated face to face in recent months.

Q39: How old are you?

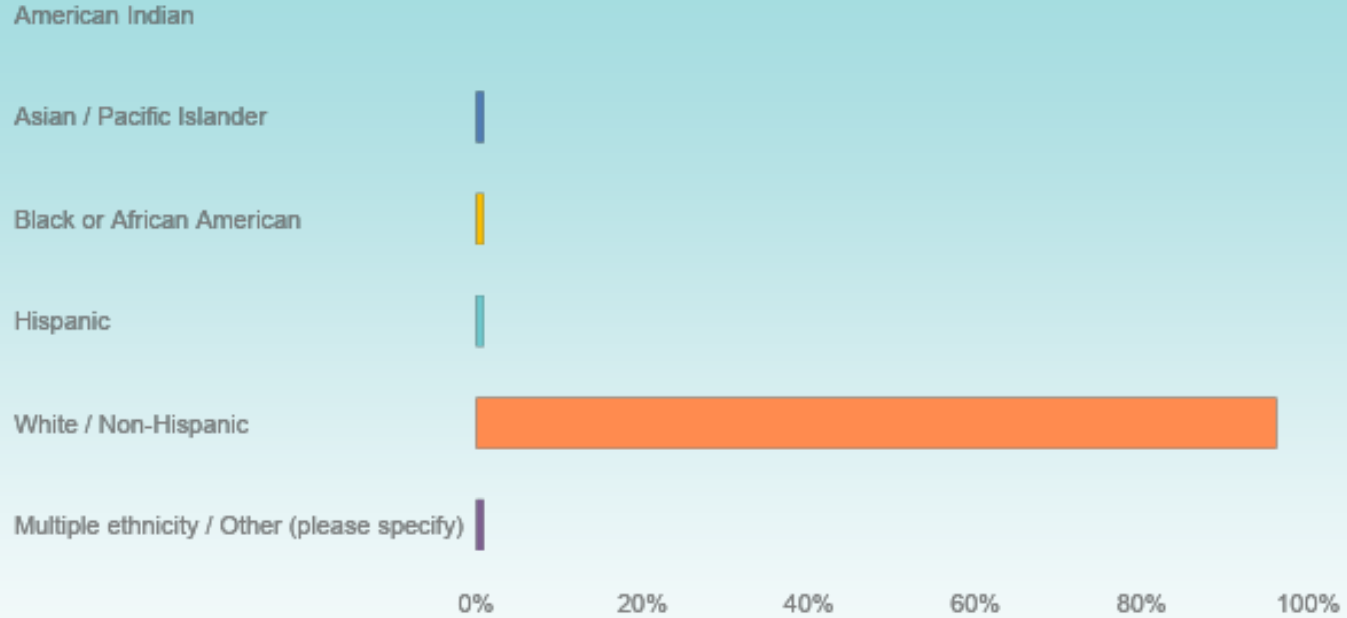
Answered: 219 Skipped: 21



While many people skip demographic questions on surveys, 219 of your respondents did share at least some demographic information. Your respondents were largely over 65 (74%) which is likely similar to your congregation as a whole. If there are under-represented age groups, we can help you discern how to gain their perspectives in this process.

Q40: Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)

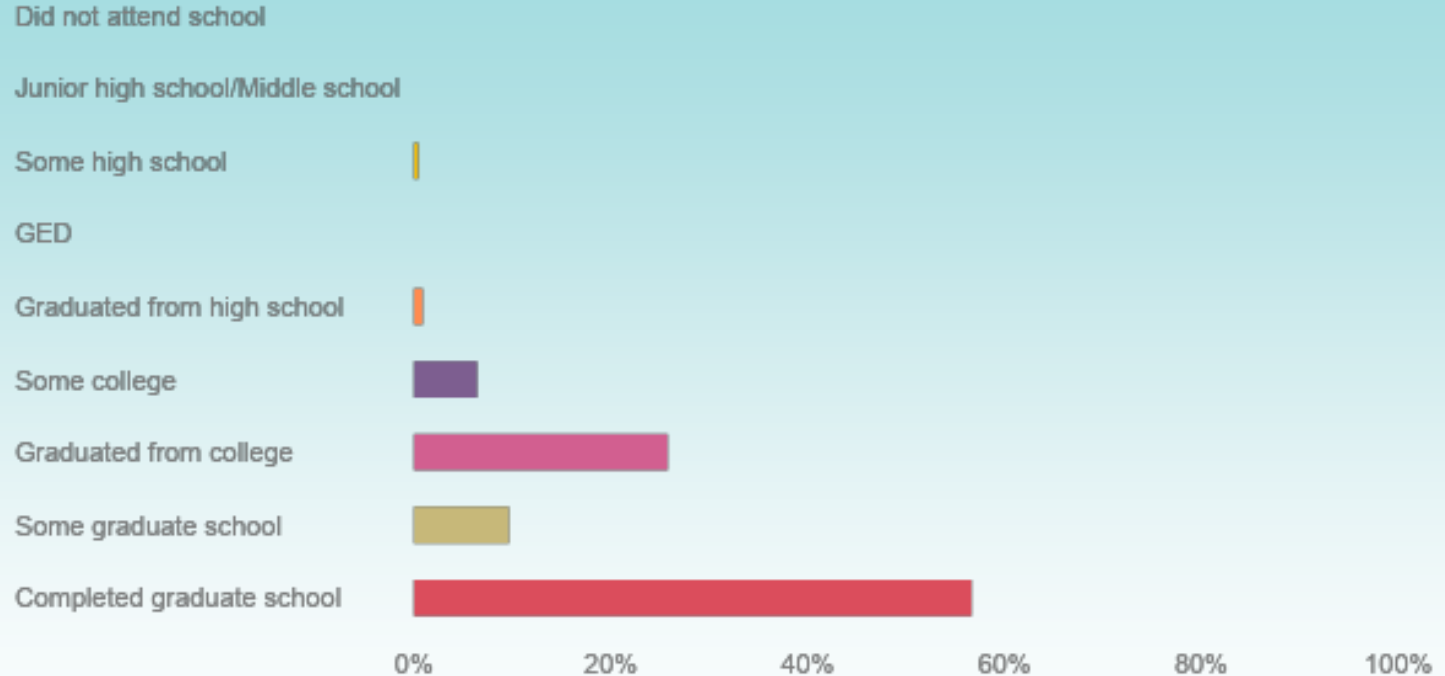
Answered: 215 Skipped: 25



Your respondents were predominantly White/Non-Hispanic (96%) which is likely similar to your congregation as a whole. If there are underrepresented groups, we can help you discern how to gain their perspectives as well.

Q41: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

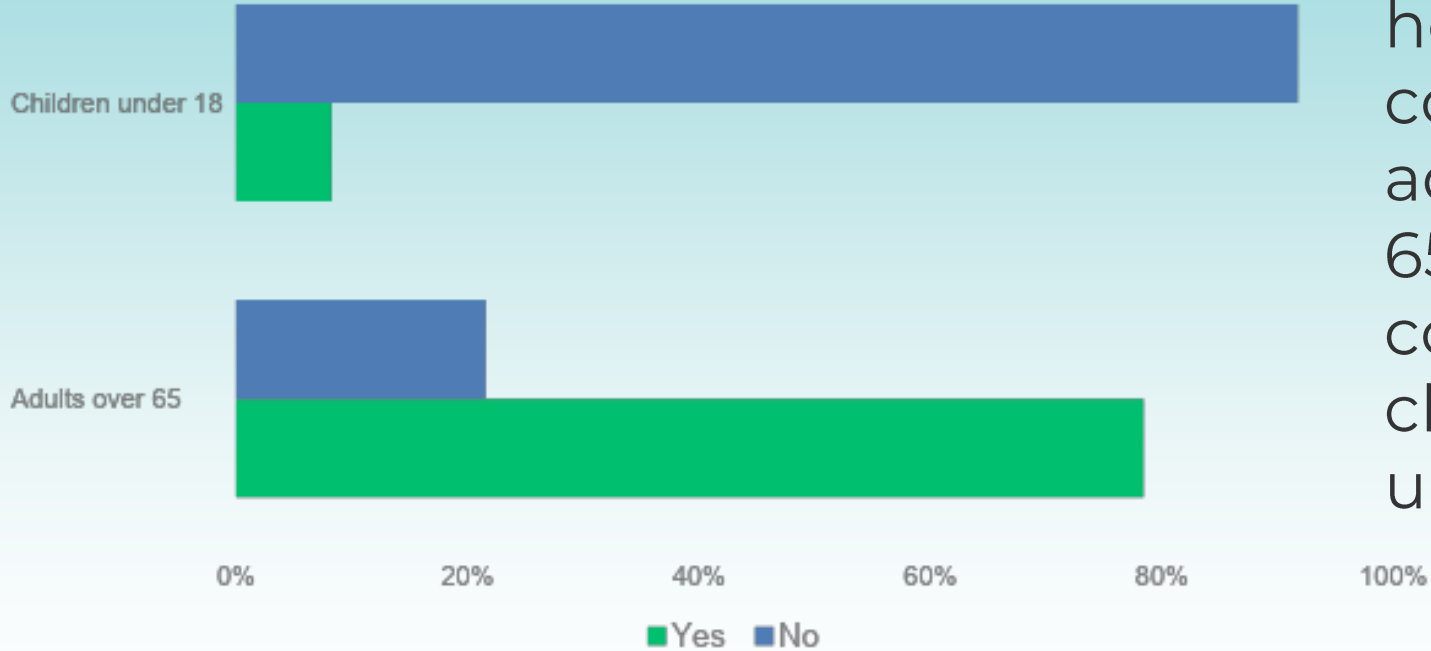
Answered: 220 Skipped: 20



Your respondents were highly educated, with 99% completing at least some college. The majority (66%) had completed at least some graduate school.

Q42: Does your household contain?

Answered: 214 Skipped: 26



78% of respondent households contained adults over 65, and 9% contained children under 18.

Q43: Would you identify yourself as:

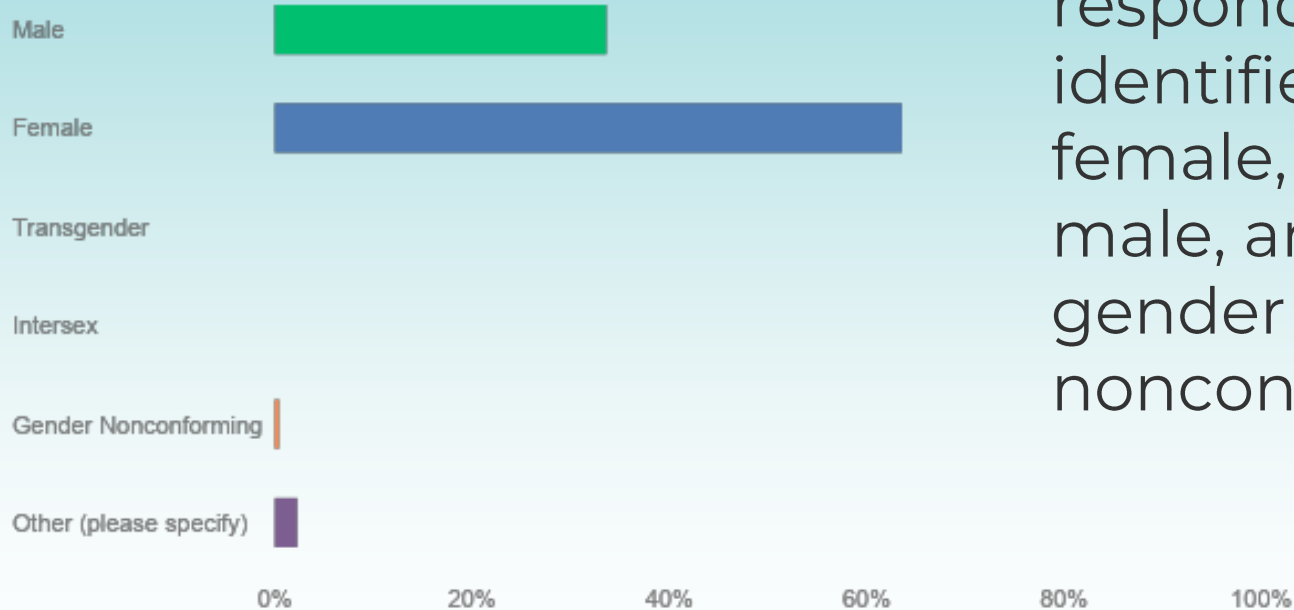
Answered: 214 Skipped: 26

94% of your respondents identified as heterosexual and 3% as LGBTQIA.



Q44: Would you identify yourself as:

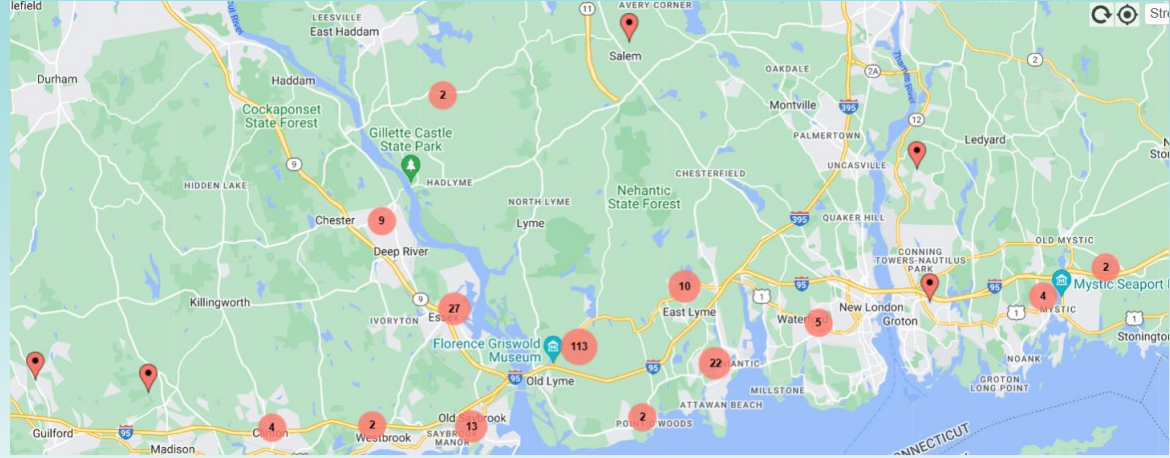
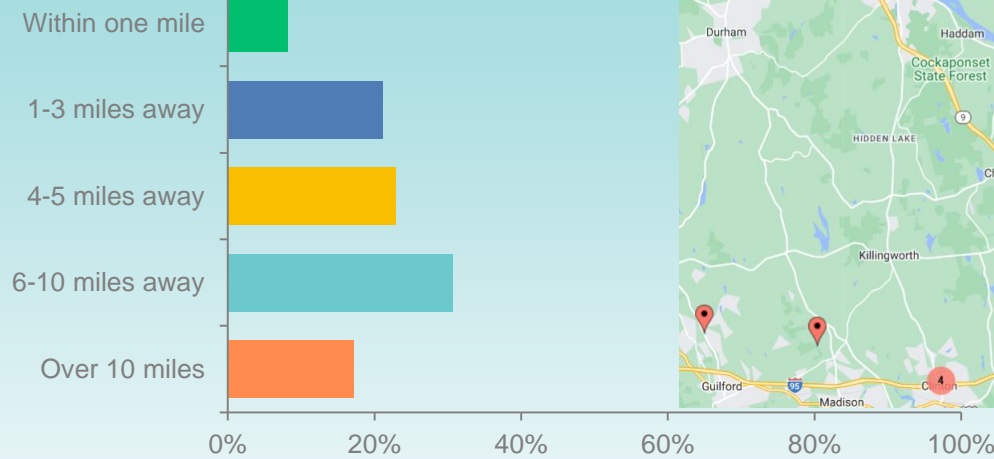
Answered: 220 Skipped: 20



63% of your respondents identified as female, 34% as male, and 3% as gender nonconforming.

Q4: Where do you live in relation to this congregation?

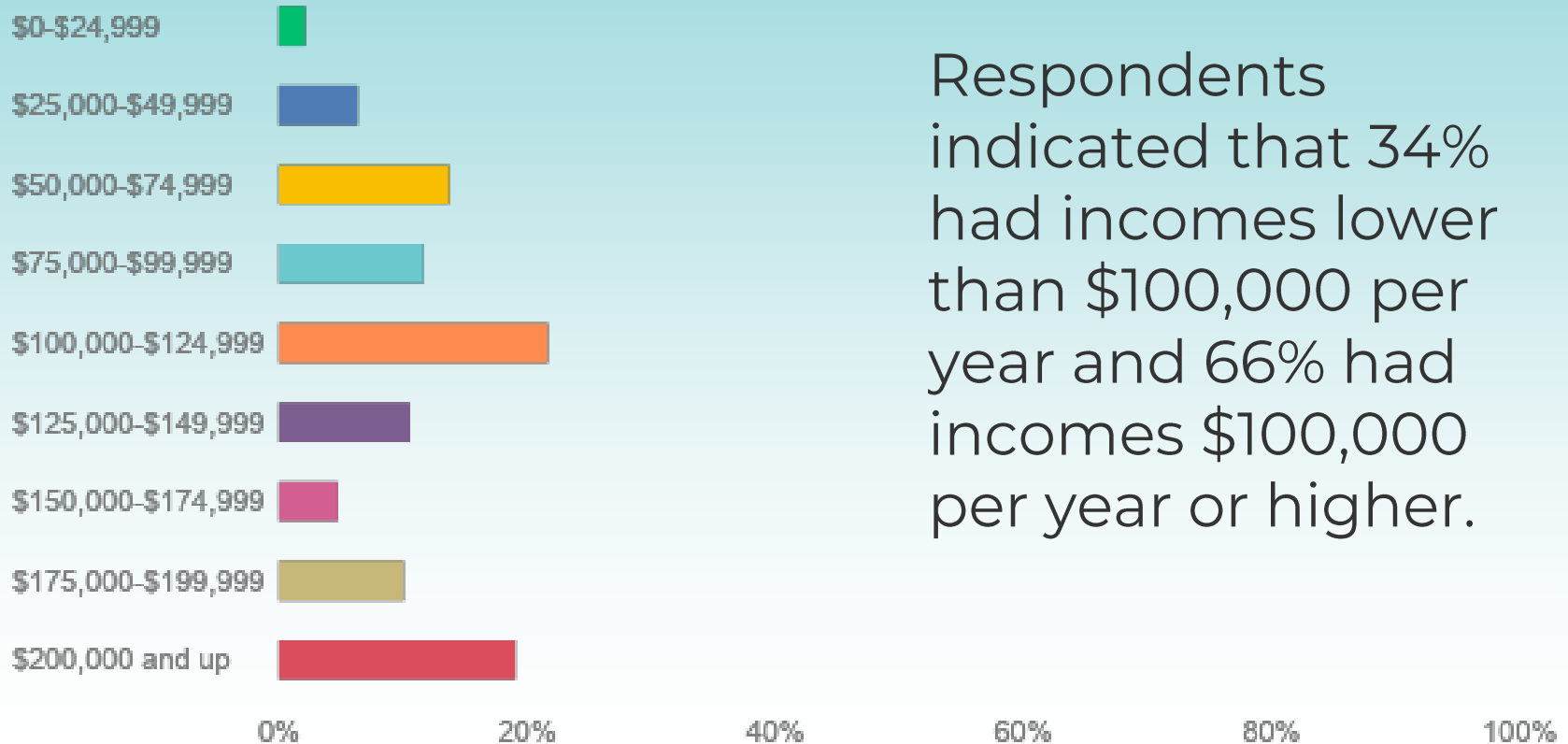
Answered: 234 Skipped: 5



Your congregation is quite geographically dispersed. 8% of your respondents lived within one mile of the church building, 22% lived 1-3 miles away, 23% lived 4-5 miles away, and 47% lived 6+ miles away. The above zip code map of respondents shows their geographic spread.

Q46: What is your approximate average household income?

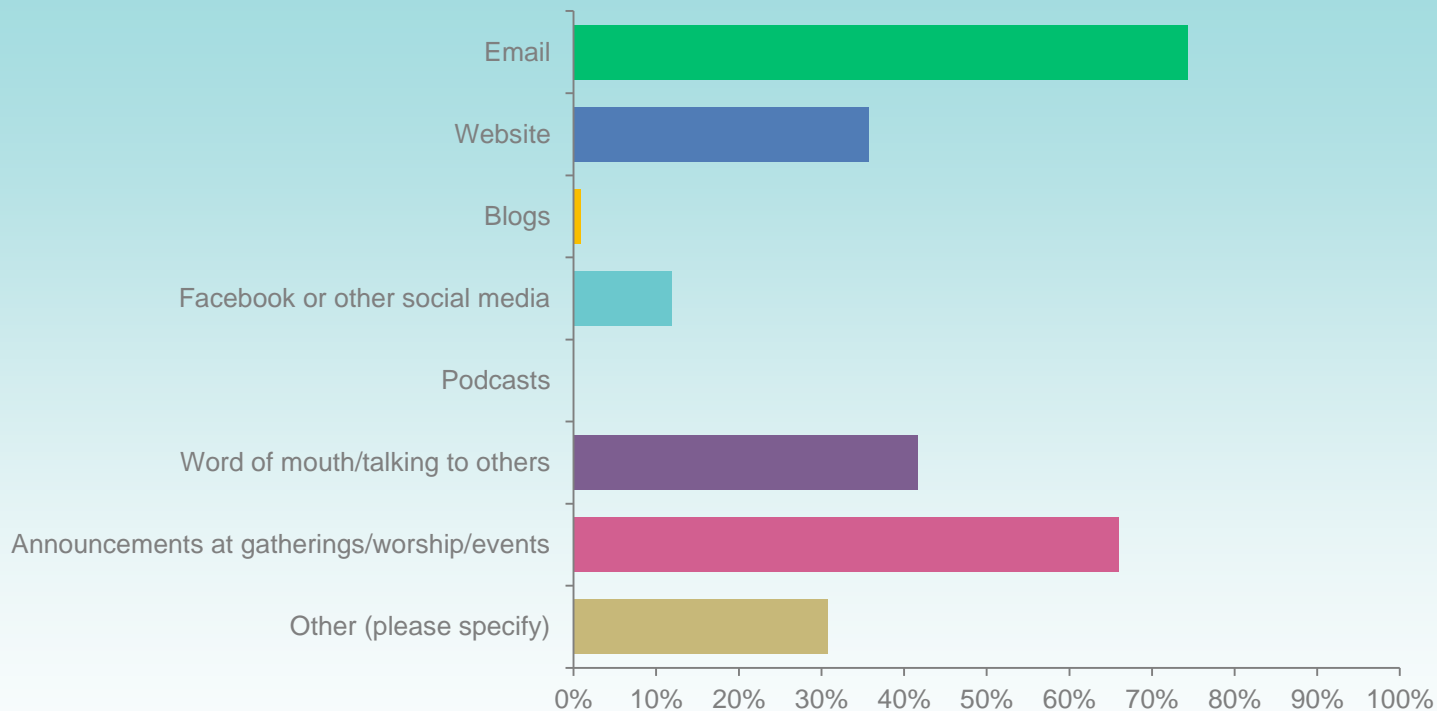
Answered: 190 Skipped: 50



Respondents indicated that 34% had incomes lower than \$100,000 per year and 66% had incomes \$100,000 per year or higher.

Q33: How do you most often hear about congregational announcements and events? (Check all that apply)

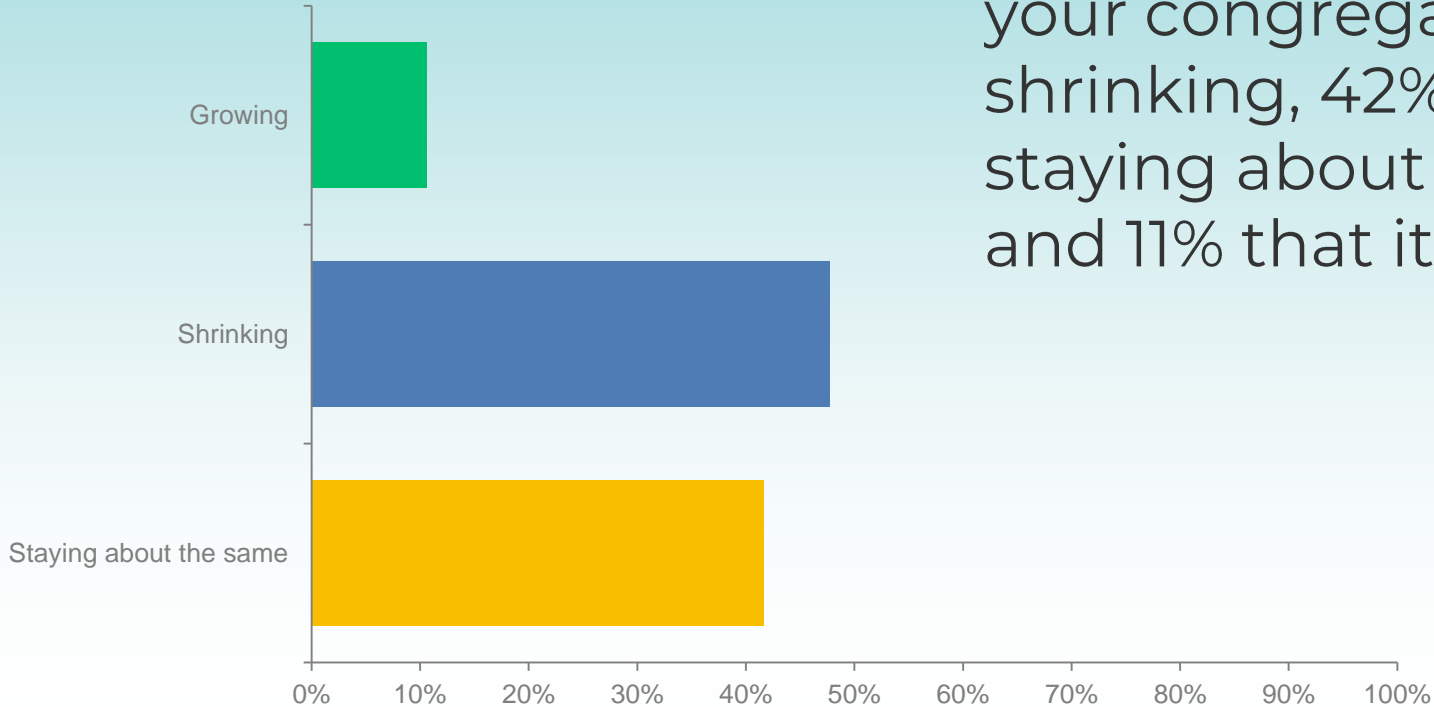
Answered: 221 Skipped: 19



The top ways respondents hear about church news and events are email (74%), announcements (66%), and word of mouth/talking to others (41%). The 31% other category was primarily mentions of the mailed newsletter.

Q14: Do you think your congregation is:

Answered: 219 Skipped: 21



47% of respondents feel your congregation is shrinking, 42% that it is staying about the same, and 11% that it is growing.

YOUR COMMUNITY

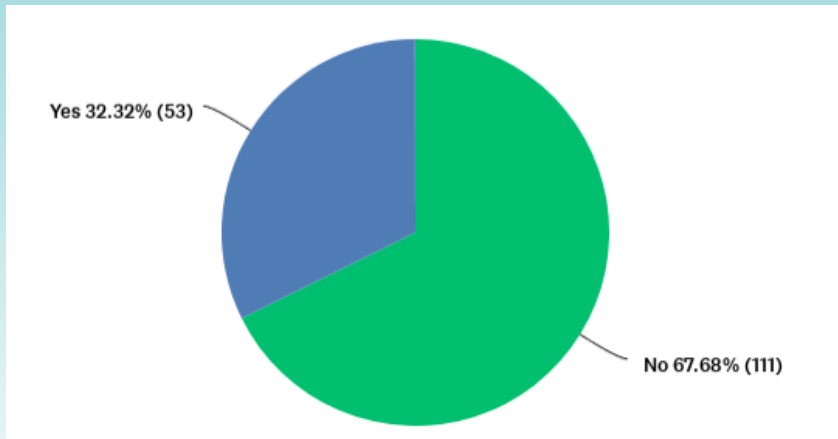
- 06371 Zip Code has approximately 10,000 residents and 3973 households.
- The median household income is \$122,000 per year, higher than CT as a whole.
- 55% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher
- Only 60% of residents are employed, and there are many retirees in the area.
- The median age is 49 years old, older than CT as a whole.
- The median home value is over \$500,000.
- 06371 is 94% White, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 0.5% Black, and 1% two or more races.

GENERATIONS

- **A key concern among your folks is the aging of your congregation. Your current members will age, that is a fact of life. Yet you wish for more young participants at this time.**
 - However, you must consider why you want more young people.
 - Are you simply seeking people to take on the workload and fund your congregation? That is not a very enticing invitation.
 - Young people are different than you and have their own needs. If you truly have a heart for young people and young families, asking how you can meet them where they are and help them with their needs is a good place to start.
- **Older congregations can be vital too!**
 - There are several keys:
 - Right-sizing for your current participation levels
 - Unifying around 2-3 focus areas per year
 - Streamlining and pruning all programs that don't support that focus.
 - An older congregation with a compelling mission is more likely to attract new participants of all ages, when compared with one that only has the mission of finding new members to replace the old on boards/committees and budgets.

POLARIZATION

Q35: During the past 2 years, has your congregation experienced any disagreements or conflicts?



Q38: How much training have you received on healthy engagement with differences or conflict within the past 5 years?

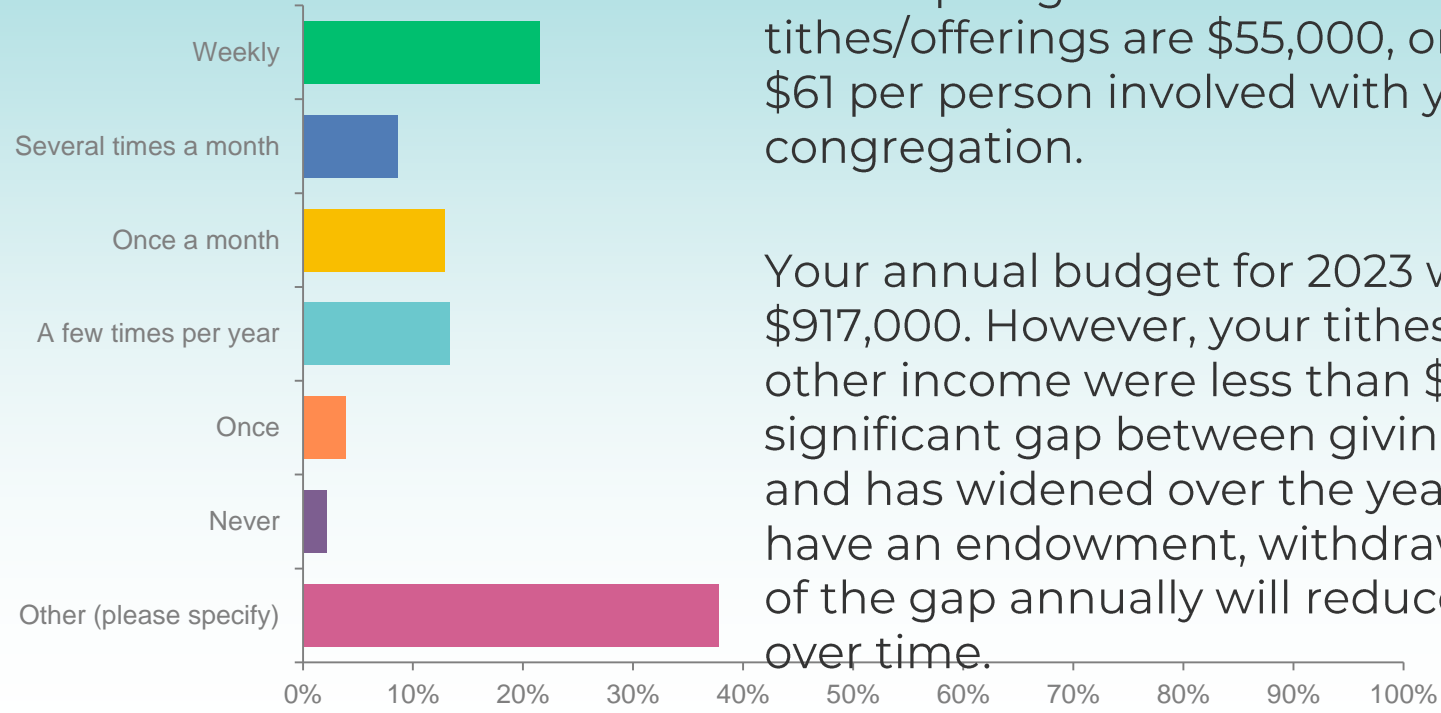


While conflict is not currently flaring up in your congregation, there are indicators in the data of some unhealed past conflict and unhealthy communications patterns around political differences. Our detailed analysis will describe how you might address this area.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

Q3: How often have you donated financially to this congregation in the last year?

Answered: 236 Skipped: 4

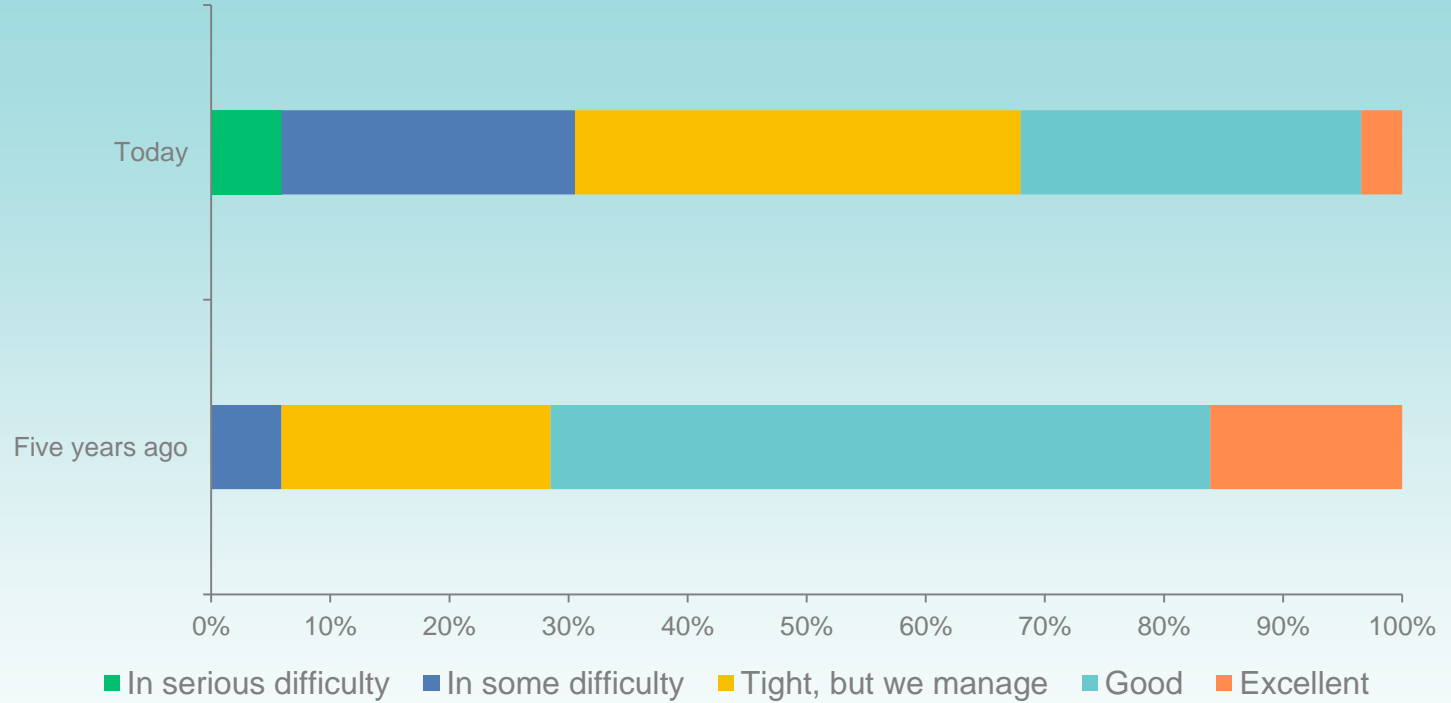


98% of respondents are giving regularly. The large other category was primarily mentions of annual pledge fulfillments. Average monthly tithes/offerings are \$55,000, or approximately \$61 per person involved with your congregation.

Your annual budget for 2023 was over \$917,000. However, your tithes, offerings, and other income were less than \$700,000. This is a significant gap between giving and budget and has widened over the years. While you have an endowment, withdrawing the amount of the gap annually will reduce its principal over time.

Q34: Overall, how would you describe your congregation's financial health?

Answered: 205 Skipped: 32



Most respondents (68%) described the church finances as tight or in difficult condition. Only 29% would have described them as tight or difficult 5 years ago.

CHANGE SKILLS

- Another key concern among your folks is attitudes toward change.
- **Good news: You (and any congregation) can build change readiness!**
 - Change is going to happen whether we like it or not.
 - God is in the change just as God is in the stillness.
 - While we may be weary of change, we can't try to hold our churches as places where no change happens to soothe our weary souls. If we do, we will cause congregational decline which is a change most of us don't want to see!
 - You will need to intentionally develop your change skills. There is no way to truly listen to what God is calling your church to do and be without being open to doing things in new ways.
 - The best way to build your change skills is to practice change. Change something or try something new every week in worship. Be explicit about why you are doing this - change is built into any spiritual journey, and finding God in change is something we all need to practice.

Participation/Connections

- **A final concern of your respondents is your current number of members and active participants.**
- Smaller numbers than in 1950 or 1990 are only a problem for vitality if you are trying to do too much for your size.
- What programs, activities and structures belong to a bygone era and are not a good fit for what God is calling you toward today?
- We all have individual callings but only some of that will be our collective calling. What are you all called to work on together to bring God's love to life in our world?
- All of those other programs, activities and structures will need to be paused, ended, or handed off to those most passionate about them to do as a non-congregational program. You can still pray for them and bring them casseroles when they are busy living out their calling!
- The collective calling you all have will need to be focused on 2-3 areas at most, with specific goals you are working toward in the near, medium, and long term.
- This will be hard, but you will find more enthusiastic participation with a clear focus, and new people will be more likely to join a group of people with a focused mission rather than a vague idea.



THANK YOU