

# MEGACHURCHES TODAY SURVEY 2005

There are many misconceptions about megachurches, inaccuracies that this research and the activities of the sponsoring organizations hope to dispel. Our two organizations have teamed up to do this research project because we are very anxious to provide correct and accurate information about megachurches in the United States. Churches large and small have much to gain from an accurate national picture of large churches throughout the country.

To read more about the study, the authors of the research, or the sponsoring organizations go to <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/> or [www.leadnet.org](http://www.leadnet.org)

If you have questions, please direct them to

**Scott Thumma, PhD**  
**Hartford Institute for Religion Research**  
77 Sherman St.  
Hartford, CT 06105  
[sthumma@hartsem.edu](mailto:sthumma@hartsem.edu)

[Warren.Bird@leadnet.org](mailto:Warren.Bird@leadnet.org)

**Dave Travis and Warren Bird**  
**Leadership Network**  
2501 Cedar Springs, Suite 200  
Dallas, Texas 75201  
[Dave.Travis@leadnet.org](mailto:Dave.Travis@leadnet.org)

In early 2005, Scott Thumma, the primary investigator of the Megachurches Today 2000 study joined with Warren Bird and Dave Travis of the Leadership Network to redo the earlier study in a more comprehensive manner. We combined our separate databases of known megachurches, and then augmented these with lists of possible churches over 2000 in attendance from seven additional sources. The resulting list of potential candidates totaled 1838. A paper and online questionnaire was constructed that paralleled parts of the previous Megachurch survey as well as matching a national survey entitled Faith Communities Today 2005. The survey was mailed to 1236 and emailed to 600 for whom we had accurate email addresses. Several email reminders were later sent both to the 600 and approximately 900 other churches to addresses found on their web sites. Additional efforts such as press releases in the Leadership Network newsletter and other Christian and secular publications, articles about the study and reminders to networks of megachurch pastors were used to spread the word about the study. The result was a total of 667 full and partial responses or a 36% response rate. The total number of fully completed surveys was 529 with 133 of these having attendance of less than 2000. Total number of confirmed, complete surveys of megachurch with attendance of 1800 or more persons is 406. The information in this report is based on the analysis of questionnaires from these 406 churches.

Along with this survey effort, we attempted to contact and confirm several facts about all the other churches in the total list of 1838 in order to determine, as accurately as possible, the entire population of megachurches in the country. This effort entailed sending emails, checking web sites, communicating with many denominational research offices and calling well over 500 churches. This procedure resulted in confirmation of 1210 congregations who reported having average worship of 2000 or more attenders. If one adds those churches within 200 persons of the 2000 mark, then the total rises to 1319. At present we still have 120 unconfirmed churches on a list.

Because we undertook the considerable effort to confirm the total population of megachurches in the United States, we have been able to weight the survey respondent questionnaires to approximate the total population (say more?) We are certain that the findings generally represent the total group of megachurches in the U.S.

\*\* See the profile of the total population of Megachurches in the United States. A listing of all the megachurches in the country can be found at [http://hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith\\_megachurches\\_database.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_database.html).

The survey used for this study has many questions in common with the Faith Communities Today FACT2005 research, a larger national random survey of congregations. The results of that survey will be released by Hartford Institute for Religion Research and CCSP in March 2006 <http://FACT.hartsem.edu>. At that time additional analysis will be done to compare the megachurch findings with a sampling of smaller congregations.

Items listed below may not total to 100% due to rounding, multiple answers in a question or missing cases.

### A. Your Congregation's Worship

1. How often does your congregation hold worship services at its primary campus?

- 30% One day each week
- 45% Two days each week
- 21% Three or more days each week
- 4% Some other pattern

2. How many worship services does your congregation usually hold each weekend (not including special services, weddings, or funerals)? 53% offer 4 or more

3. Are these services:

- 52% All very similar in style
- 23% 1 or more are somewhat different in style
- 25% 1 or more are very different in style

4. Do you hold services at satellite locations? 27% Yes 46% No 27% Not yet but thinking about it.

IF YES, a) How many satellite campuses do you have? 72% have one or two.

What is the total number of services offered at all these satellite campuses? 76% have 5 or less.

Are these services:

- 51% All very similar in style
- 20% 1 or more are somewhat different in style
- 29% 1 or more are very different in style

5. How well do the following describe the largest worship service in your congregation?

| <i>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</i>                  | NOT AT ALL | SLIGHTLY | SOMEWHAT | QUITE WELL | VERY WELL |
|--|------------|----------|----------|------------|-----------|
| A. Reverent .....                              | 5%         | 17%      | 33%      | 29%        | 16%       |
| B. Informal .....                              | 3          | 13       | 30       | 34         | 20        |
| C. Filled with a sense of God's presence ..... | 0          | 1        | 13       | 33         | 53        |
| D. Joyful .....                                | 0          | 1        | 9        | 40         | 50        |
| E. Formal liturgy or ritual .....              | 62         | 23       | 8        | 5          | 2         |
| F. Exciting .....                              | 0          | 2        | 14       | 41         | 43        |
| G. Inspirational .....                         | 0          | 0        | 10       | 38         | 52        |
| H. Thought-provoking .....                     | 0          | 2        | 8        | 45         | 45        |

6. How often are the following a part of your congregation's worship services?

| <i>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</i>                   | NEVER | SELDOM | SOMETIMES | OFTEN | ALWAYS |
|---|-------|--------|-----------|-------|--------|
| A. Choir .....                                  | 10%   | 17%    | 20%       | 23%   | 30%    |
| B. Piano .....                                  | 3     | 4      | 9         | 21    | 63     |
| C. Electric guitar or bass .....                | 2     | 1      | 4         | 13    | 80     |
| D. Drums or other percussion instruments .....  | 1     | 0      | 5         | 12    | 82     |
| E. Visual projection equipment .....            | 2     | 1      | 2         | 4     | 91     |
| F. Communion, Lord's Supper, or Sacrament ..... | 1     | 11     | 48        | 22    | 18     |

7. **During the past 5 years**, has your congregation changed the format or style of one or more weekend worship services?
- 15% No change
  - 26% Changed a little
  - 36% Changed some
  - 23% Changed a lot

**B. Your Congregation's Programs**

1. **During the past 12 months**, did your congregation have any of the following programs or activities? **If yes**, is it a relatively minor emphasis or a key program or activity of your congregation?

| <b>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</b>  | <b>NO</b> | <b>MINOR EMPHASIS</b> | <b>KEY ACTIVITY</b> |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| A. Religious education classes (e.g., Sunday school, Sabbath school, church school).....     | 7%        | 22%                   | 71%                 |
| B. Prayer, meditation, or faith sharing groups.....  | 2         | 32                    | 66                  |
| C. Study or discussion groups.....   | 1         | 20                    | 79                  |
| D. Fellowships, clubs, or other social activities .....                                      | 4         | 45                    | 51                  |
| E. Support groups (e.g., bereavement, marriage, divorced, wellness, recovery, 12-step) ..... | 3         | 38                    | 60                  |
| F. Evangelism or recruitment activities .....  | 5         | 37                    | 58                  |
| G. Social service activities .....   | 6         | 54                    | 40                  |
| H. Choir(s) or other music programs .....  | 11        | 36                    | 54                  |
| I. Fundraising activities (including capital campaigns).....                                 | 24        | 36                    | 39                  |

2. **During the past 12 months**, did your congregation do any of the following to reach out to nonmembers or to make your congregation better known in the community?

| <b>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</b>                                      | <b>YES, DONE IN LAST 12 MONTHS</b> | <b>NO, BUT OUR MEMBERS WOULD SUPPORT THIS</b> | <b>WOULD NOT SUPPORT THIS</b> |
|--|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| A. Advertised on radio or TV or in a newspaper .....               | 75%                                | 19%   | 6%                            |
| B. Mailed or distributed newsletters, letters, or flyers .....     | 77                                 | 17  | 6                             |
| C. Established or maintained a web site for the congregation ..... | 96                                 | 2   | 3                             |
| D. Developed a plan to recruit new members .....                   | 60                                 | 34  | 6                             |
| E. Contacted people who recently moved into the area .....         | 41                                 | 55  | 4                             |
| F. Encouraged members to tell nonmembers about their faith.....    | 93                                 | 5   | 3                             |
| G. Encouraged members to invite others to worship services .....   | 94                                 | 3   | 3                             |
| H. Sponsored a program or event to attract visitors.....           | 84                                 | 12  | 3                             |

3. How are visitors contacted after they attend your worship services? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- 1% We rarely, if ever, have any visitors
- 7% We rarely, if ever, contact our visitors
- 77% We contact our visitors by mail
- 70% We contact our visitors by phone
- 38% We contact our visitors by e-mail
- 29% We contact our visitors by personal visit

4. About how many **visits or phone calls** do leaders of your congregation usually make each month to prospective members, worship visitors, or newcomers to the community? Average= 145 median = 64

5. To what extent are your congregation's members involved in recruiting new members?  
 3% Not at all  
 14% A little  
 37% Some  
 47% A lot
6. Once a person shows interest in your congregation, are there any planned procedures to help that newcomer become integrated into the congregation? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**
- 52% Follow-up visits by clergy, lay leaders, or members  
 58% Designated people extend hospitality and invite them for meals  
 78% An orientation class for new members  
 88% Invitation to participate in a fellowship or other small group  
 69% Invitation to volunteer for service in the congregation or the community  
 22% Other activities  
 3% No planned procedures or activities

7. Does **your congregation** have any of the following? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**
- 75% A congregational email account  
 95% A congregational web page or web site  
 99% A computerized database that holds the names and addresses of your members or attenders  
 51% A special section of your web site for members only

**C. Your Congregation's Identity**

1. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

| <i>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</i>                        | STRONGLY<br>DISAGREE | SOMEWHAT<br>DISAGREE | NEUTRAL/<br>UNSURE | SOMEWHAT<br>AGREE | STRONGLY<br>AGREE |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Our congregation:                                    |                      |                      |                    |                   |                   |
| A. Is like a close-knit family .....                 | 2%                   | 11%                  | 15%                | 54%               | 18%               |
| B. Is spiritually vital and alive .....              | 1                    | 2                    | 2                  | 30                | 65                |
| C. Has a clear mission and purpose .....             | 2                    | 3                    | 5                  | 21                | 70                |
| D. Is working for social justice .....               | 5                    | 17                   | 30                 | 33                | 16                |
| E. Is willing to change to meet new challenges ..... | 1                    | 2                    | 7                  | 36                | 54                |
| F. Holds strong beliefs and values.....              | 1                    | 1                    | 2                  | 18                | 78                |
| G. Welcomes innovation and change.....               | 1                    | 5                    | 9                  | 34                | 52                |

2. How much does your congregation emphasize the following **home or personal practices** in its worship and education?

| <i>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</i>                          | NOT AT<br>ALL | A<br>LITTLE | SOME | QUITE<br>A BIT | A<br>LOT |
|--|---------------|-------------|------|----------------|----------|
| A. Personal prayer, meditation or devotions .....      | 0             | 2           | 12   | 35             | 51       |
| B. Personal scripture study .....                      | 0             | 2           | 9    | 34             | 54       |
| C. Family devotions .....                              | 3             | 12          | 33   | 26             | 27       |
| D. Tithing or sacrificial giving.....                  | 0             | 3           | 19   | 31             | 47       |
| E. Keeping the Sabbath or other worship day holy ..... | 14            | 20          | 27   | 22             | 18       |

3. Which label is the closest description of the **theological identity of the majority** of your church's regularly participating adults? *CHECK ONE ONLY*
- 2% Fundamentalist
  - 56% Evangelical
  - 8% Pentecostal
  - 8% Charismatic
  - 7% Moderate
  - 5% Traditional
  - 7% Seeker
  - 7% Other

4. Which label is the closest description of the **political outlook of the majority** of your congregation's regularly participating adults? *CHECK ONE ONLY*
- 51% Predominantly conservative
  - 33% Somewhat on the conservative side
  - 11% Right in the middle
  - 4% Somewhat on the liberal side
  - 2% Predominantly liberal

**D. Your Congregation's Participants**

1. How many people in total (counting adults, youth, and children) **regularly participate** in the worship services and other activities of your congregation at all sites (including those who are not official members)?
- Average = 2871      Median = 2200      Adults (age 18 and older)
- Average = 451      Median = 300      Youth (age 12 – 17)
- Average = 716      Median = 550      Children (age 0 – 11)

2. **Of the total number of regularly participating adults**, what **percent** would you estimate are:

| <i>CHECK ONE ON EACH LINE</i>              | NONE | HARDLY ANY | FEW    | SOME   | MANY   | MOST   | ALL OR NEARLY ALL |
|--|------|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|
|  | 0%   | 1-10%      | 11-20% | 21-40% | 41-60% | 61-80% | 81-100%           |
| A. Female .....                            | 0%   | 0%         | 0%     | 4%     | 88%    | 8%     | 1%                |
| B. College graduates.....                  | 0    | 2          | 5      | 29     | 38     | 20     | 7                 |
| C. Age 35 or younger .....                 | 0    | 0          | 7      | 46     | 35     | 11     | 1                 |
| D. Over 60 years old.....                  | 0    | 25         | 41     | 25     | 8      | 0      | 1                 |
| E. New to your congregation                |      |            |        |        |        |        |                   |
| In the last five years .....               | 0    | 0          | 13     | 43     | 27     | 12     | 4                 |
| F. Living in the immediate area            |      |            |        |        |        |        |                   |
| around your place of worship.....          | 0    | 4          | 7      | 29     | 29     | 22     | 7                 |
| G. In households with children             |      |            |        |        |        |        |                   |
| under 18 at home.....                      | 0    | 1          | 7      | 31     | 45     | 15     | 2                 |
| H. Hispanic or Latino/a .....              | 4    | 66         | 20     | 8      | 2      | 0      | 0                 |
| I. Black or African American .....         | 2    | 68         | 16     | 3      | 2      | 1      | 8                 |
| J. White .....                             | 1    | 8          | 1      | 6      | 10     | 33     | 42                |
| K. Asian .....                             | 13   | 74         | 10     | 2      | 1      | 0      | 1                 |
| L. Native Hawaiian or American Indian..... | 48   | 49         | 2      | 1      | 0      | 0      | 0                 |
| M. Biracial or multiracial.....            | 9    | 75         | 12     | 2      | 1      | 1      | 0                 |
| N. Participates in small groups.....       | 2    | 2          | 12     | 37     | 31     | 14     | 3                 |
| O. New members who are New Converts ....   | 0    | 18         | 34     | 30     | 15     | 4      | 0                 |

3. What is the total percentage of attenders in your church that are not of the majority racial/ethnic group? Ave. 19%  
34% have less than 10% minority – 36% have 20% minority presence or more – 10% have no racial majority
4. Is your congregation making efforts to become intentionally multi-ethnic? 56% yes  
If YES: In what ways:

5. **So far this year and for each of the last 5 years**, what is your best estimate of the **average weekly attendance** (adults and children) at your congregation's weekend worship services (Include all satellite locations if applicable)?  
Use the average attendance for **all** worship services combined.

|                     |               |   |
|---------------------|---------------|---|
| 2005 Average = 3584 | Median = 2900 | 1800 – 1999 = 6%                            |
| 2004 Average = 3181 | Median = 2600 | 2000 – 4999 = 78%                           |
| 2003 Average = 2908 | Median = 2426 | 5000 – 9999 = 13%                           |
| 2002 Average = 2703 | Median = 2200 | 10,000 or more = 3%                         |
| 2001 Average = 2485 | Median = 2094 |   |
| 2000 Average = 2279 | Median = 1900 | <b>Average five year growth rate is 57%</b> |

### E. Your Congregation's Leadership

Please describe the senior or lead pastor of your congregation.

- Age Average = 50 years old
- Pastor's Race/ethnicity White = 89% African American = 8% Hispanic/Latino = 1% Asian = 1% Multiracial = 1%
- Highest level of education:
  - 2% High school diploma or GED
  - 6% Some college or technical school
  - 19% College Bachelor's degree
  - 37% Masters Degree (including M.Div)
  - 35% Doctoral Degree (Ph.D., D.Min. – excluding honorary doctorate)
- This person became the senior pastor in what year? 33% prior to 1989 and 35% since 1995 Median = 1992
- Did the church's most dramatic growth occur during the tenure of this senior pastor? 83% Yes
- During the past 10 years**, how many senior pastors (including the current one and all interims) have served this congregation? Average = 1.4
- How many **paid leadership staff positions** do you have in your congregation?  
Count only full- and part-time leadership staff, not clerical or maintenance staff; count all positions whether currently filled or not.  
Total full-time Average = 20 Median = 16  
Total part-time Average = 9 Median = 5
- How many **paid administrative or support staff positions** do you have in your congregation?  
Count only full- and part-time administrative, clerical or maintenance staff; count all positions whether filled or not.  
Total full-time Average = 22 Median = 14  
Total part-time Average = 15 Median = 9
- What is approximately the total number of volunteers at the church who work more than 5 hours a week?  
Average = 284 Median = 101

10. Do you have members that volunteer between 20 and 40 hours a week to the Church? 63% Yes  
 IF YES, What is the approximate number of persons doing this? Average = 35 Median = 10
11. What percent of the congregation do you estimate volunteer weekly for service in the Community?  
 Average = 21% Median = 15%
12. **During the past two years**, has your congregation experienced any disagreements or conflicts?  
 52% No conflict I am aware of  
 40% Some minor conflict  
 8% Major conflict

**F. Your Congregation's Finances**

1. How would you describe your congregation's financial situation?  
 1% In serious difficulty  
 1% In some difficulty  
 19% Tight, but we manage  
 48% Good  
 31% Excellent
2. What is the total amount of income your congregation received from all sources during your most recent fiscal year?  
 \$ Average = \$6,021,254 Median = \$4,585,263
3. What is the total amount of expenditures of your congregation during your most recent fiscal year?  
 \$ Average = \$5,567,157 Median = \$4,250,000

**G. Your Congregation's History and Affiliation**

1. In what year was your congregation officially organized or founded? Average = 1951 Median = 1965
2. What zip code is your church's primary campus located in?  
 REGION – Northeast - 6% South – 49% Northcentral – 20% West – 25%
3. Is your congregation formally affiliated with a denomination?  
 58% Yes  
 41% No  
 1% Not sure
3. If yes, to what denomination(s) does your congregation belong?
- |                               |      |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Nondenomination               | 36%  |
| Southern Baptist              | 20%  |
| United Methodist              | 9%   |
| Assemblies of God             | 5%   |
| Christian Church, unspecified | 4%   |
| Baptist, unspecified          | 3%   |
| Evangelical Free              | 2.6% |
| Four Square                   | 2%   |

5. **During the past 20 years**, has your congregation experienced any of the following? (We believe there were coding problems on the online version of the survey therefore although they were told to select as many as applied, only the last choice made actually registered. Thus the No category and the most recent time period are the most reliable answers.

|   | NO  | 1985-1989 | 1990-1994 | 1995-1999 | 2000-2005 |
|---|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| A. Merged with another congregation                                   | 96% | 1%        | 1%        | 1%        | 2%        |
| B. Absorbed another congregation that was closed                      | 90% | 0%        | 2%        | 2%        | 5%        |
| C. Split into two or more independent churches                        | 89% | 3%        | 2%        | 3%        | 3%        |
| D. Helped plant or grow a new congregation                            | 30% | 12%       | 10%       | 10%       | 37%       |
| E. Started a satellite location or remote campus                      | 70% | 1%        | 1%        | 6%        | 22%       |
| F. Changed denominational affiliation                                 | 96% | 0%        | 1%        | 1%        | 3%        |
| G. Became an independent congregation                                 | 92% | 2%        | 2%        | 1%        | 3%        |
| H. Changed the name of the church                                     | 79% | 5%        | 4%        | 4%        | 9%        |
| I. Started a Network of like-minded congregations                     | 78% | 3%        | 0%        | 6%        | 13%       |
| J. Partnered with other churches in an international missions project | 28% | 11%       | 6%        | 9%        | 46%       |
| K. Partnered with other churches in a local community service project | 21% | 11%       | 5%        | 10%       | 54%       |
| L. Partnered with other churches in a political involvement activity  | 76% | 2%        | 3%        | 3%        | 16%       |

6. Is your place of worship located in:  
 13% A downtown or central area of the city  
 14% An older residential area in the city  
 29% An older suburb around the city  
 45% A newer suburb around the city

7. What is the approximate seating capacity of the space where your largest worship service is held?  
 50% under 1400 seats 5% 3000 seats or more Average = 1709 Median = 1400

8. What is the total seating capacity of all your overflow rooms and satellite locations that you consider a part of your church? (including facilities that you rent, if any) Average = 1804 Median = 1418

9. Do you use a multiple venue worship service format (where multiple services with a distinctive style and focus are held simultaneously in the same or other building)? 34% Yes

10. What is the role of the person who completed the majority of this form?  
 40% Leader of the congregation  
 50% Administrator or other paid staff member  
 2% Clerk, treasurer, or other lay leader  
 8% Other