

## **HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS IN COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD) has recently released some of the data from its participation along with forty other faith groups in the Cooperative Congregational Studies Project (CCSP). The dissemination of the findings from this ground-breaking study has been given the title: Faith Communities Today (FACT).

Earlier reports summarized some of the findings and also reported on relationships between healthy, growing congregations and certain congregational attitudes and practices. The data set is so massive that it is impossible to analyze all possible relationships in any one report, and, indeed, the full findings may never be completely mined. This report, however moves to a different area. While previous accounts dealt with relationships between healthy congregations and internal congregational characteristics, this paper attempts to explore correlations between healthy, growing congregations and the community context in which those congregations are located.

### **Dependent and Independent Variables**

It was necessary to choose some dependent variables from the CCSP survey that would describe healthy, growing congregations. While a number of possibilities is possible, we selected the following eight items:

1. Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive: VITAL
2. Our congregation has a clear sense of mission and purpose: PURPOSE
3. Our congregation's programs and activities are well-organized: WELLORG
4. Change in percentage of regularly participating adults over the past five years: GROWPLAT
5. Percentage of members engaged in activities outside of worship: FAITHWORK
6. Perceived potential of congregation for real growth: POTENTL

The last two variables were created by dividing book membership into participation.

7. Regularly participating adults as percentage of membership: PCTPARAD
8. Regularly participating youth as percentage of membership: PCTPARYT

The independent variables refer to data from the 2000 year United States census. The FACT central office selected a number of categories which might influence congregational life. These were age, race/ethnicity, education, income, housing, household size and employment. Each congregation had reported the postal zip code in which it was located. The census data for

that zip code was attached to the file of that congregation. Then several type of analyses were performed to relate census with healthy congregations. One of these involved comparing the **means** of the congregational responses on each dependent variable with the census data. The procedure here was **ONE-WAY ANOVA** (Analysis of Variance). A second statistic compared the average of each individual response with the census data using **CROSSTABULATIONS**. In each case it must be remembered that the census data given for congregations is NOT the percentages of church membership but the percentages of people who live in the zip code in which the church is located. Also, while many comparisons were examined, only those that are statistically significant will be reported.

### **The ANOVAs on Congregational Means**

#### Percent of population aged 0-9 (small children)

Significant with POTENTL: .001

Means:

0-10%: 3.39  
11-15%: 3.70  
16-20%: 4.18  
21% + : 4.50

The linear progression reveals that the higher the percentage of young children in the community, the greater the congregation perceives potential for growth.

Significant with PCTPARAD: .014

Means:

0-10%: 54.1  
11-15%: 50.6  
16-20%: 57.5  
21% +: 93.6

These means are not completely linear, and the fourth category contains only three congregations. However, the tendency is to have a higher percentage of the adult membership participating regularly in communities with higher percentages of young children.

#### Percent of population aged 60-74 (mature adults)

Significant with VITAL: .026

Means:

0-10%: 2.37  
11-15%: 2.63  
16-20%: 2.77  
21% + : 2.29

This is linear up to 20% and then drops off, but the fourth category contains only seven congregations. For the most part, congregations in communities with higher percentages in the 60-74 age bracket see their congregations as more spiritually and vitally alive.

Significant with FAITHWRK: .008

Means:

0-10%: 2.94

11-15%: 3.11

16-20%: 3.23

21% + : 2.29

We can ignore the drop off in the 21% plus category with only seven congregations. For the most part, congregations in communities with higher percentages in the 60-74 age bracket see their congregations as having higher percentages who engage in activities outside of worship that strengthen their faith.

Significant with POTENTL: .001

Means:

0-10%: 3.94

11-15%: 3.65

16-20%: 2.85

21% + : 3.57

We can ignore the drop off in the 21% plus category with only seven congregations. For the most part, congregations in communities with lower percentages in the 60-74 age bracket see their congregations as having greater potential for real growth.

#### Percent of population aged 75 and above (older senior citizens)

Significant with POTENTL: .026

Means:

0-10%: 3.82

11-15%: 3.07

16% + : 4.33

Only three congregations are in communities of over 15% aged 75 and above. Basically, more growth potential is perceived in communities with lower percentages of these very senior citizens.

### Median age of population in whole years

Significant with POTENTL: .000

Means:

Up thru 24: 3.67  
25-29: 4.04  
30-34: 4.10  
35-39: 3.67  
40 + : 3.29

This curvilinear pattern shows that congregations see the best potential for real growth when they are located in communities with median ages of 25-34. Drop offs occur in both younger and older neighborhoods.

### Percent of community that is Hispanic

Significant with WELLORG: .037

Means:

0-10%: 2.43  
11-15%: 1.92  
16-20%: 2.38  
21-40%: 2.34  
41-60%: 2.17  
61-80%: 1.75  
81% + : 2.67

Significant with POTENTL: .032

Means:

0-10%: 3.65  
11-15%: 4.04  
16-20%: 3.88  
21-40%: 3.98  
41-60%: 4.50  
61-80%: 4.25  
81% + : 3.33

The last two categories have a total of only seven congregations. In spite of some fluctuation, congregations in heavier Hispanic communities tend to perceive greater potential for real growth.

Significant with PCTPARAD: .000

Means:

0-10%: 51.3  
11-15%: 60.1  
16-20%: 76.4  
21-40%: 48.4  
41-60%: 37.6  
61-80%: 91.0  
81% + : 86.1

The last two categories have a total of only seven congregations. Percentage of regularly participating members tends to rise in communities where Hispanics comprise up to 20% of the population and then begins to decline.

#### Percentage of population that is Asian

Significant with GROWPLAT: .045

Means:

0-10%: 2.49  
11-15% 3.09  
16% + : 3.27

Straight linear. The higher the proportion of Asians in the population the more likely the congregation has increased its percentage of regularly participating adults in the last five years.

#### Percentage of population that is White

Significant with POTENTL: .001

Means:

0-10%: 4.38  
11-15%: 4.00  
16-20%: 4.00  
21-40%: 4.14  
41-60%: 3.80  
61-80%: 3.94  
81-90%: 3.92  
90% + : 3.38

While there is some unevenness, basically the higher percentage of whites in the population, the less perceived potential for growth by the congregation.

Significant with PERPARAD: .023

Means:

0-10%: 84.5  
11-15%: 48.9  
16-20%: 66.3  
21-40%: 48.8  
41-60%: 44.0  
61-80%: 53.4  
81-90%: 52.9  
90% + : 51.9

While there is some unevenness, basically the higher percentage of whites in the population, the smaller the percentage of members who actively participate in the congregation.

Percentage of those over 24 who have not finished high school

Significant with VITAL: .039

Means:

0-10%: 2.35  
11-15%: 2.51  
16-20%: 2.68  
21% + : 2.42

The differences are not large, but congregations located in communities with lower educational attainment are likely to rate their vitality and spirituality somewhat higher.

Percentage of those over 24 who have graduated from high school but not gone to college

Significant with VITAL: .046

Means:

0-40%: 2.33  
41-60%: 2.38  
61-80%: 2.61

The differences are not large, but congregations located in communities with median educational attainment are likely to rate their vitality and spirituality somewhat higher.

Significant with PURPOSE: .051

Means:

0-40%: 2.00  
41-60%: 2.32  
61-80%: 2.55

Actually, this one just misses being significant, but it is so close that I am including it. The differences are not large, but congregations located in communities with median educational attainment are likely to rate their sense of purpose and mission somewhat higher.

Percentage of those over 24 who have a college degree or higher

Significant with POTENTL: .005

Means:

0-10%: 3.68  
11-15%: 3.37  
16-20%: 3.81  
21-40%: 3.90  
41% + : 4.21

Congregations located in communities with higher educational level are more likely to perceive a potential for real growth. The one aberration is in the 0-10% category.

Percentage of households with income less than \$20,000 annually

Significant with VITAL: .020

Means:

0-10%: 2.13  
11-15%: 2.47  
16-20%: 2.46  
21-40%: 2.59  
41% + : 2.26

The differences are not large, but congregations located in communities with lower household income are likely to rate their vitality and spirituality somewhat higher.

Percentage of households with income more than \$75,000 annually

Significant with VITAL: .001

Means:

0-10%: 2.48  
11-15%: 2.75  
16-20%: 2.43  
21-40%: 2.38  
41% + : 1.95

The differences are not large, but congregations located in communities with higher household income are likely to rate their vitality and spirituality somewhat lower.

Significant with POTENTL: .005

Means:

0-10%: 3.64  
11-15%: 3.55  
16-20%: 3.74  
21-40%: 4.10  
41% + : 4.00

The differences are not large, but congregations located in communities with higher household income are likely to rate their potential for real growth somewhat higher.

#### Percentage of workers with white collar jobs

Significant with POTENTL: .012

Means:

0-40%: 3.44  
41-60%: 3.80  
61% + : 3.98

Congregations located in communities with a higher percentage of white collar workers perceive more opportunity for real growth.

#### Percentage of population that rent their homes

Significant with POTENTL: .017

Means:

0-10%: 3.25  
11-15%: 3.50  
16-20%: 3.68  
21-40%: 3.77  
41-60%: 4.13  
61% + : 3.40

Except for the final category which contains only eleven congregations, the linear trend is up. As the percentage of those in the community that rent their homes rises, the tendency for congregations to perceive their potential for real growth also rises.



### Average household size

Significant with VITAL: .032

Means:

Below 2.2: 2.42  
2.3-2.4: 2.58  
2.5-2.6: 2.55  
2.7-2.8: 2.64  
2.9-3.0: 2.26  
3.1 + : 2.10

This is a difficult analysis to interpret since the means are not linear. Congregations in communities with households of 2.3 to 2.8 are most likely to perceive their congregations as spiritually vital and alive. They are less likely in communities with household sizes either more or less than that.

Significant with POTENTL: .001

Means:

Below 2.2: 3.68  
2.3-2.4: 3.70  
2.5-2.6: 3.49  
2.7-2.8: 3.79  
2.9-3.0: 4.26  
3.1 + : 4.23

With some aberrations congregations in communities with larger-sized households tend to perceive more potential for real growth.

### Percentage presently employed

Significant with POTENTL: .003

Means:

0-40%: 3.00  
41-60%: 3.50  
61% + : 3.88

Congregations located in communities with a higher percentage of employment perceive more opportunity for real growth.

## CROSSTABULATIONS

For the crosstabulations the last two dependent variables, PCTPARAD and PCTPARYT were not used because they are continuous rather than discrete data. Below are listed the various categories for the 2000 census data with any of the six dependent variables with which they are significantly correlated using the Chi Square statistic. The actual tables will not be shown because they would take many pages and because they are hard to interpret when a table may be as large as five by six (30 cells). So only the level of significance will be given with comments where appropriate. Non-significant correlations will not be listed.

### Percentage of population change from 1990 to 2000

GROWPLAT	.014
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Higher percentages of participating adults are related to growing populations

### Percentage of population in various age groups

#### **Ages 0-9**

PURPOSE	.019
WELLORG	.037

Having more children in the community is associated with congregations with a clear sense of mission and well-organized activities.

#### **Ages 18-34**

POTENTL	.000
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Congregations in communities with higher percentages of this age group perceive their church has higher potential for real growth.

#### **Ages 60-74**

VITAL	.016
GROWPLAT	.030
FAITHWRK	.010
POTENTL	.020

Populations higher in this age group contain congregations that are less vital, that see less potential for growth, that are declining in percentage of active participants, BUT who have a greater percentage of the members engaged in outside activities.

**Ages 75 and over**  
 POTENTL .013

Congregations in older communities do not perceive as much potential for real growth

**Median age in whole years**  
 FAITHWRK .027  
 POTENTL .002

Younger median ages in the community are associated with sharing activities outside of worship and perceiving potential for real growth.

Percentage of various ethnic groups in the community

**Hispanic**  
 WELLORG .010

**Asian**  
 WELLORG .005  
 GROWPLAT .005

**White**  
 POTENTL ..005

A larger percentage of Hispanics or Asians in the population is associated with congregations that have well-organized activities. However, Asian increase seems to correlate with a lower percentage of the members participating. The White are very difficult to interpret because of the large table (8 by 5), but there seems to be some lack of faith in potential with a rise in the percentage of Caucasians.

Percentage at various levels of education

**High school graduate–no college**  
 POTENTL .009

**College degree or more**  
 POTENTL .021

Both educational levels favor optimism.

Percentage in various income levels

**Less than \$20,000**

VITAL	.001
WELLORG	.038

Congregations in communities with a high percentage of low-income inhabitants tend to be higher on spiritual vitality and well-organized programs.

**Over \$75,000**

VITAL	.026
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Higher-income communities tend to be related to congregations with a higher sense of spirituality and vitality.

**White-collar workers**

POTENTL	.051
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This one just missed significance, but the tendency is for higher percentages of white-collar workers in the population to be associated with greater perceived potential for real growth.

Average household size

POTENTL	.007
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In communities where the household size is larger the tendency is for congregations to see themselves as having more potential for real growth.

Percentage over 15 years old that is married

POTENTL	.001
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There is some tendency for congregations to rate their growth potential higher in communities with lower percentages of the population that are married.

Percentage over 15 years old that is employed

POTENTL	.001
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There is some tendency for congregations to rate their growth potential higher in communities with higher percentages of the population that are employed.

## Conclusions

Such an wide variety of statistics is difficult to summerize. One way to view the outcome is to note which census data appear most often in correlations with characteristics of healthy and growing congregations. Which of the independent variables are the best predictors?

The most often census category is age with 14 selections. This is followed by income at 7, ethnicity at 6, education at 5, average household size and employment at 2 each, and percent married and population change at 1 each.

We might also note which measures of congregational health and growth were selected most often. Which dependent variables can census data best predict? The overwhelming winner is the perceived potential for real growth (POTENTL) with 24 citings. This is followed by congregations that are spiritually vital and alive (VITAL) at 9, programs and activities that are well-organized (WELLORG) at 5, increase during the past five years of the percentage of members actively participating (GROWPLAT) at 4, percentage of adult membership that actively participates (PERPARAD) and percentage of membership active outside of worship (FAITHWRK) at 3 each, and congregations that have a clear sense of mission and purpose (PURPOSE) at 2. In evaluating note that PERPARAD was utilized only in the ANOVAs and not in the cross-tabulations.

Hopefully, this report added to earlier ones will assist NAD leadership in better understanding the local congregations in this Division and in laying plans to strengthen congregational life.

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