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GATHERINGS *of* HOPE

How Religious Congregations Contribute to the Quality of Life in Kent County

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Report on the 2007 Kent County Congregations Study

November 2008

Center for Social Research

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Center for Social Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Men pray at a "Brother to Brotha" meeting at Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

Overview

Religious congregations are defined by their focus on worship, religious beliefs and teachings—but they can also be a safety net for people who need material and emotional support. The Kent County Congregations Study (KCCS) documents how congregations of diverse faith traditions fulfill these roles in Kent County, Michigan, an area that includes about 600,000 people in the city of Grand Rapids, its suburbs, and surrounding towns and rural areas.

To date, the KCCS is the most comprehensive study of religious congregations and how they contribute to the quality of life in Kent County. Inspired by the philanthropic vision of Doug and Maria DeVos, the project affirms the need for educational, community and religious sectors to collaborate in efforts to improve the lives of children and their families.

Objectives and Methodology

Drawing on extensive prior research that explores the relationship between congregations and social welfare, the KCCS has four objectives: (1) to document the social and educational services that Kent County congregations actually provide; (2) to collect demographic and contextual information about religious leaders, congregations, and their civic and community engagement; (3) to facilitate comparison of Kent County to the nation; and (4) to estimate the "replacement value" of the top three social or educational services provided by each congregation.

A broad group of religious leaders and academic advisors gave their input to the KCCS. Researchers from the Calvin College Center for Social Research, the Grand Valley State University Community Research Institute, and the Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation at RDV Corporation conducted the study in two phases from mid-2006 to late 2007. First, the research team undertook a comprehensive census of Kent County congregations and second, they surveyed congregational leaders in face-to-face and telephone interviews.

Kent County is home to 720 religious congregations of diverse faith traditions including Christian, Muslim, Jewish and others. An outstanding 81 percent of congregations contacted by the research team—583 congregations in all—participated in the study.

Key Findings

The Kent County Congregations Study produced a wealth of data on religious congregations and their contributions to the local community. Among the key findings in this report are these:

- **Kent County is an unusually religious community.** Compared to congregations across the country, Kent County residents are significantly more likely to attend religious services. Kent County congregations are larger in size, have more leaders, are better funded, and are more likely to have participated in or supported a social service program.
- **Hundreds of congregations are located in areas of poverty and great need.** Compared to majority White congregations, Black and Hispanic congregations in the county average three to four times the proportion of people with household incomes under $25,000.
- **Local congregations transfer $75.6 million annually** to denominations and to international, domestic and county aid and missions—but only 14 percent is clearly designated for Kent County.
- **Worship services in Kent County take place in 28 different languages,** reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity. At times multiple languages are spoken in the same congregation.
- **Religious attendance is strongly associated with service to others.** Almost 5,200 people from Kent County congregations—including paid staff and volunteers—participate in community service activities. Congregation leaders spend time worth $8.8 million annually on civic and social efforts.
- **Congregations supply 2,827 volunteers for educational programs,** but only a third of congregations report any involvement with public schools.
- **Kent County congregations offer higher numbers of social service programs** than comparable national averages—2,338 programs in all. Religious participation is not required by 70 percent of these programs.
- **Other institutions would have to generate from $95 million to $118 million to replace the services and programs** that Kent County congregations provide annually in their community-serving ministries.

The report also includes vision statements from Kent County religious leaders, 92 percent of whom expressed interest in engaging in broad-based efforts to improve community well-being.

Recommendations

Kent County's religious congregations face many challenges. These include the need to participate in networks and build partnerships, a hunger for leadership and skills training that would strengthen service efforts, limited human and financial resources, and duplication of programs among congregations.

To address these and other issues, the report concludes with a list of 20 recommendations summarized below:

- **Congregations and faith-based organizations** need to identify community needs and assess their own strengths and weaknesses as they pursue service projects. The report recommends that they encourage lay leadership, increase networking, seek training, and build their resource development capacity to make community-serving ministries more effective. Congregations should strengthen families and collaborate with public and private sector partners to advance the educational lives of children, following best practices in the area of child welfare.
- **Denominations, seminaries, colleges and universities** are encouraged to articulate a theology of social responsibility, increase educational opportunities for religious leaders, help leaders build practical skills relevant to social ministry, and support college students who volunteer with local congregations.
- **Foundations and donors** might wish to create opportunities that allow the faith and funding communities to get better acquainted. The report recommends that they consider developing training programs to build leadership and organizational capacity among congregational leaders. Grants and technical assistant programs would also serve this purpose.
- **Government agencies, policymakers and other nonprofit service organizations** should increase their outreach efforts to the religious community and work together on appropriate projects. Public and private agencies can help strengthen congregations' capacity to provide services. Public schools might encourage volunteering and partnerships with local congregations.

As gatherings of hope, religious congregations have a major role to play in improving the lives of children and families in Kent County. Without the spiritual and material assistance that congregations offer—and will continue to provide in the years ahead—many vulnerable people might not survive. By finding ways to enhance the leadership and organizational capacity of its congregations, a most valuable asset, Kent County can advance the future health and well-being of its residents.

Doug and Maria DeVos

PREFACE *by Doug and Maria DeVos*

We are delighted to see the findings from the Kent County Congregations Study in the pages of this report. As members of this community, we are proud and excited to share it with others. Our family foundation has adopted the goal of seeing all children in Kent County ready by age 18 for college, the work force, and life. Reaching this audacious goal will require close collaboration by many sectors, including philanthropic, governmental, community, educational and religious organizations. As places of worship and places of hope and care for the less fortunate, we believe that religious congregations have an especially important role to play in improving the lives of families and children in communities of need.

Congregations provide ready-made networks of people that nurture values, practices and habits that contribute to the health and economic well-being of their members and the communities they serve. We know that congregations are assets to our community and are integrally connected to the social fabric of neighborhoods. Yet so far, we have not had a solid base of information for understanding the depth and scope of their contributions or of their potential. The Kent County Congregations Study now gives us those facts, focusing especially on the social services that congregations provide. To date, it is the most comprehensive study of its kind.

As Christians, we respect and value the diversity of religious faiths in our community. We know that religion matters in many peoples' lives, regardless of their faith tradition, and the things that separate us pale in comparison to the enormity of the challenges we face together—from school failure to teen pregnancy, to illiteracy, crime, access to health care, domestic violence, disengagement, and many others.

We have been richly blessed, and we feel a responsibility to be generous with our community. But we also believe that solutions to these challenges depend not only on economic resources but on people coming together to embrace social responsibility and a common bond of humanity that calls them to serve others. This might mean organizing volunteers in a church basement to ensure that all the kids in a congregation and neighborhood are reading at grade level. Or offering classes that help parents care for their children more responsibly. Or providing opportunities for business leaders to mentor teenagers who are at risk of dropping out of school. Or creating ways for religious leaders to network with each other and share stories of success and failure. Solutions also come about when congregations with greater resources partner with others who have less, when congregations from one faith tradition enter into dialogue with those of another, when congregations from one racial or ethnic group collaborate with congregations of another, and so forth.

One of our philanthropic goals is to build the capacity of both large and small religious congregations to take greater action and become actively involved in solutions that matter. Working with a broad array of institutions in Kent County, we want to meet that goal, and we've

proposed some preliminary steps in the **Afterword** to this report. The Kent County Congregations Study is the cornerstone of future strategic efforts on behalf of our most vulnerable children and families. As a result, we have many aspirations for this report. First, we hope that it will challenge and inspire congregations and their leaders to connect with others and forge a clear, common vision to address the needs of our community. Despite all the social outreach that has been documented and the many ways that congregations make a difference, there is room for improvement. Results can be better. We can be more strategic, more collaborative, and share proven approaches to ensure greater impact.

Second, we hope that the findings are widely discussed within and among congregations in Kent County and beyond, leading to an affirmation and expansion of their commitment to community service. And we hope this report provides the civic, philanthropic and government sectors with a better understanding and appreciation of the role that religious congregations play in enhancing the quality of life in our community. Ambivalence around issues of separation between church and state, or a fear of favoring certain religious groups over others, have sometimes prevented direct engagement with these grassroots organizations in the past.

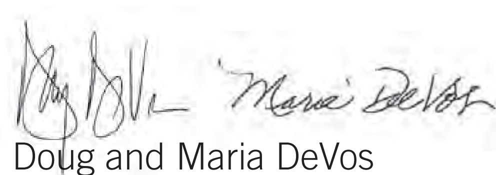
Third, we hope this report will inform strategic planning as part of a broad-based effort to create a brighter future for youth in our community. The database created as part of this study is meant to give visibility to the work of congregations and to encourage networking among congregations and with outside agencies. By sharing ideas, information, and best practices, and by fostering relationships among peers located in the same neighborhoods, we cannot help but improve the services provided.

In the end, the best research, the best programs, and the best funding will never succeed unless they engage people who are on the ground and imbedded in neighborhoods, people who know their neighbor's children and who have influence over kids because they have personal relationships with them. Behind all the activities and programs chronicled in these pages are individual heroes and heroines who volunteer their talents, time and resources to serve the neediest in our midst in just this way. Yet to solve the problems that we face as a community, we need a bold, sustained and collective effort to care for our children over time. When congregations organize their activities, take them to scale, and share what they've learned with others, the costs come down, the benefits go up, and the positive changes are seen not just in a single child or family, but in neighborhoods and ultimately, entire communities.

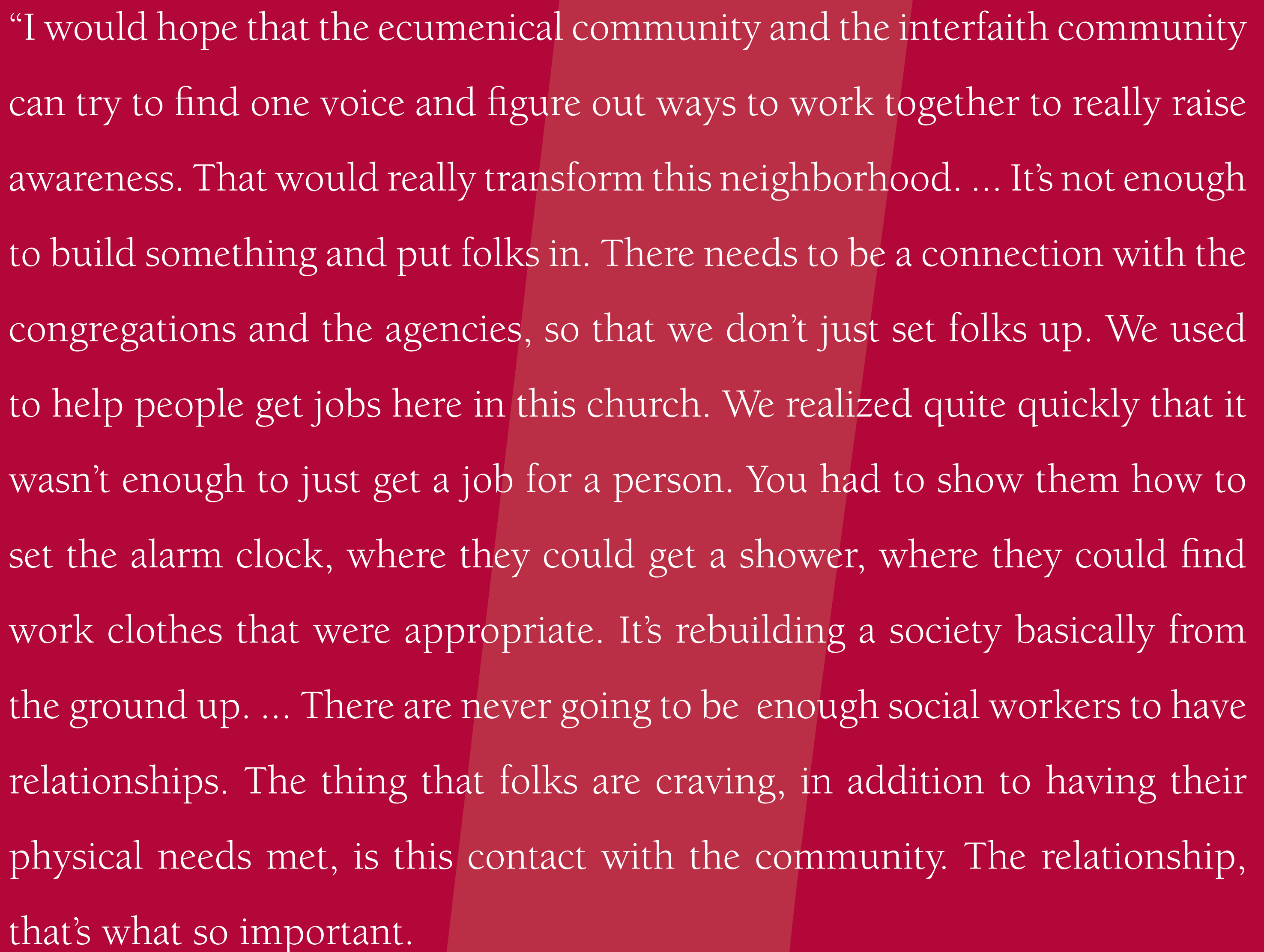
The Kent County Congregations Study will no doubt raise more questions and possibly spawn new research. But more important than the research is what happens next, in terms of the collective action that will define us if we are serious about the mission to care for our children. Ten years down the road, we'll be able to gather and say, "Hey, all those numbers improved because we took action ten years ago. And we can improve even further if we continue to learn and challenge ourselves to get better."

Finally, we want to express our sincere appreciation to the 583 religious leaders who generously gave of their time to be interviewed and make this project a success. Our gratitude also goes to our staff at RDV Corporation and the members of the research and religious leaders' advisory committees. We thank Dr. Neil Carlson and his staff at the Center for Social Research at Calvin College, who managed the data collection and analysis, as well as the 13 Calvin College students and eight community liaisons who diligently interviewed hundreds of religious leaders face-to-face. To all who contributed to the success of this study, we express our deep appreciation.

We hope that this initial report will affirm and provide visibility for the good work of religious communities—and that congregations, as places of hope and care, will realize their tremendous potential to do even more for the least among us.



Doug and Maria DeVos



"I would hope that the ecumenical community and the interfaith community can try to find one voice and figure out ways to work together to really raise awareness. That would really transform this neighborhood. ... It's not enough to build something and put folks in. There needs to be a connection with the congregations and the agencies, so that we don't just set folks up. We used to help people get jobs here in this church. We realized quite quickly that it wasn't enough to just get a job for a person. You had to show them how to set the alarm clock, where they could get a shower, where they could find work clothes that were appropriate. It's rebuilding a society basically from the ground up. ... There are never going to be enough social workers to have relationships. The thing that folks are craving, in addition to having their physical needs met, is this contact with the community. The relationship, that's what so important.

—a pastor in central Grand Rapids

1 INTRODUCTION

Worship at Brown Hutcherson Ministries in Grand Rapids, MI.

In this chapter

- *The KCCS is the most comprehensive study to date of congregations in Kent County.*
- *It draws on extensive prior research, especially the 2006 National Congregations Study.*
- *Kent County, Michigan was home to 720 religious congregations in 2007.*
- *Eighty-one percent of these congregations participated in the study.*

Documenting the important role of congregations

Religious congregations are defined by their focus on worship and religious beliefs and teachings. That role alone is a critical contribution to the welfare of human beings in community. But congregations can also be a safety net for people who need material and emotional support. Their leaders can communicate a vision for the future that creates hope and purpose beyond their walls and memberships. They may bridge social gaps by offering a meeting space for diverse people whose sole common bond is their similar expression of their faith tradition. They may foster the arts, nurture children, guard sacred texts and histories, and tap the talents of the elderly. They may be places of organized resistance to injustice and sources of policy change, addressing issues from local gang violence and public transportation to national-scale health care, immigration and peace movements.

The Kent County Congregations Study (KCCS) documents how much our congregations fill these roles today and seeks to reveal the opportunities we have as a community to increase their contributions in the future. To date, it is the most comprehensive study of its kind, focusing on congregations of diverse faith traditions—Christian, Muslim, Jewish and others—in Kent County, Michigan, an area that includes about 600,000 people in the city of Grand Rapids, its suburbs, and surrounding towns and rural areas.

Philanthropic sponsorship

The KCCS was inspired by the philanthropic vision of Doug and Maria DeVos to improve the lives of young people and to see them well-prepared for higher education and gainful employment. Their philanthropic strategy affirms the need for educational, community and religious sectors to collaborate and focus efforts on improving the lives of children. The Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation's commitment to congregations certainly emerges from the DeVos' strong personal faith. But it is also driven by the knowledge that congregations are social institutions that are "close to the ground," uniquely positioned to understand and intervene in situations of need.

Doug and Maria DeVos believe that "effective philanthropy has to begin from a basis of facts, not uninformed opinions." The study seeks to establish these facts, focusing on how Kent County congregations serve their constituents and their community, how they network with other congregations and social service agencies, and how they affect the lives of children.

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Advisors and community collaborators

The vision for the KCCS has attracted strong support from important philanthropic and religious groups in the county. The Heart of West Michigan United Way, represented by its vice president for community investment Rev. Tony Campbell, has enthusiastically endorsed the project as an important path to effective growth. In July 2007, Campbell told the *Grand Rapids Press*, "What we've done in the nonprofit sector is funded what we hoped would work. This project helps us know what is really working out there in the community."[1]

The KCCS has also had the advice and support of a broad range of ministerial associations and representatives of faith groups, along with a group of academic advisors. (See sidebar.)

The research team for the KCCS is a partnership between staff members of the Calvin College Center for Social Research (CSR), of the Grand Valley State University Community Research Institute (CRI) and of the Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation at RDV Corporation. (See sidebar, next page.)

A rich and growing research tradition

Since the 1990s, scholars have engaged in a surge of new research on the social and welfare service roles of congregations. Recent studies have examined:

- the connections of congregations to community organizations,[2]
- the factors influencing their vitality and growth,[3]
- their civic and political activities,[4]
- their approach to race relations,[5]
- the effects of internal conflict,[6]
- how congregations support and strengthen contemporary families,[7]
- the value of congregation-based health ministries,[8]
- and how congregations deal with changing community environments.[9]

Studies have covered the size spectrum from storefronts to megachurches[10] and examined congregations that are African American,[11] Latino,[12] multicultural[13] and immigrant.[14]

Most relevant to our research are several studies that explore the relationship between congregations and social welfare.[15] As detailed below, the KCCS draws extensively on these studies, particularly those that document congregations' social service capacity.[16]

Research objectives

Through social-scientific survey interview methods, the Kent County Congregations Study aims to shine a light on congregations' organizational structure and social impact. Our research objectives include:

1. To document **the social and educational services that Kent County congregations actually provide**, both through formal programs and informal activities;
2. To enhance the first goal by collecting **demographic and contextual information** about religious leaders, congregational human resources, civic engagement, inter-congregational and community networking, and so forth;
3. To facilitate **comparison of Kent County to the nation** by using survey questions, wherever feasible, from reputable national studies of congregations, primarily the 2006 National Congregations Study II (NCS-II) led by Mark Chaves;[17]
4. To enable rough **estimation of the "replacement value"** of the top three social or educational services provided by each congregation, similar to that provided by Ram Cnaan's study of Philadelphia in the 1990s.[18]

Why study congregations?

Here are four major reasons we conducted an unusually large and extensive study of local congregations:

Social capital

A leading scholar calls local congregations "one of the last bastions of civic engagement and personal bonding."[19] Networks have value: strong social bonds in congregations are "capital" that helps poor families gain access to economic resources such as jobs, loans and housing.

The helping culture

An ethic of helping others is a core principle of many faiths and thus of congregations. Religious teachings and traditions inspire service to the less fortunate; even where such service currently falls short, change agents can appeal to religious doctrines of service and self-sacrifice to access a powerful source of accountability and motivation. Scholars have documented the prevalence of congregational social service provision, especially in poor urban neighborhoods.[20]

A treasure trove of voluntarism

Congregations are the largest and richest reservoir of volunteers in America today.[21] This is especially true in the Hispanic and African American communities, where over half of all the volunteering work force is religious in nature.[22]

Relationships with youth

Religious congregations are one of few organizational types in which youth participation remains relatively active.[23] The evidence shows that congregational membership reduces school drop-out rates and improves academic performance, especially among disadvantaged, urban and minority-race children.[24] "Regular religious service attendance, high subjective importance of faith and many years spent participating in religious youth groups are clearly associated with safer, healthier and more constructive lifestyles for U.S. teenagers."[25]

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Key background studies

The KCCS benefits from three key studies:

Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (GGRCS)

In the spring of 2006, the Community Research Institute (CRI) at Grand Valley State University fielded the Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (GGRCS), a random-sample telephone survey of Kent County residents. Enhancement funding from the Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation enabled the addition of questions about religious and charitable involvement, as well as oversamples of African Americans and Hispanics.

National Congregations Study (NCS-II)

To facilitate comparison of Kent County with a national profile, the KCCS' questionnaire for clergy replicates a large number of questions from the National Congregations Study II (NCS-II), the most comprehensive and extensive study of American congregations to date.[26] NCS-II was fielded in 2006 as a follow-up to the first NCS from 1998. Principal investigator Mark Chaves of Duke University and his assistant Shawna Anderson have graciously assisted the KCCS team with selected NCS-II data.

National Telephone Survey of Pastors (NTSP)

The KCCS also replicates a number of questions on the well-being of pastors from a survey that informs Jack Carroll's 2006 book *God's Potters*, including items about stress, signs of gratitude from members, and time for spouse and children.

See **Appendix A** for more details on these studies.

High participation countywide

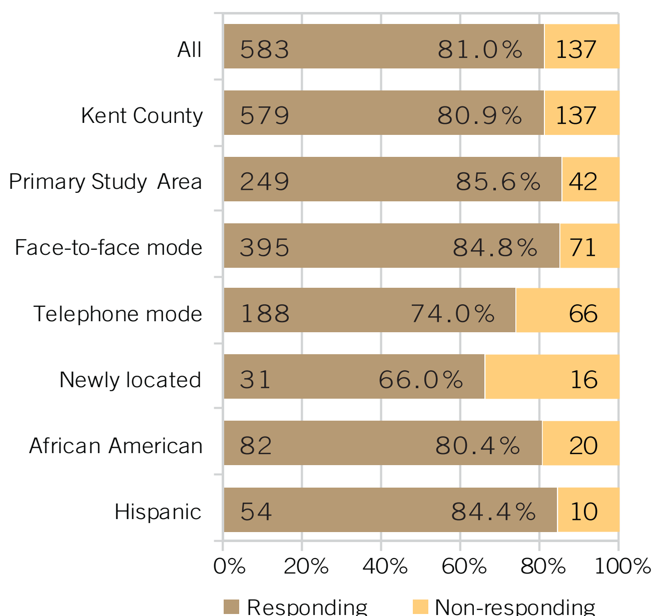


Figure 1 Response rate by group

Research methods

The core activity of the KCCS took place in two phases:

Congregational census

Beginning in summer 2006, the KCCS began an exhaustive effort to identify a master list of congregations in Kent County.[27] Grand Valley CRI and RDV Corporation staff and volunteers canvassed roads and walkable districts in over 300 square miles of the county, focusing on lower-income areas first. This search located many previously undocumented congregations. Meanwhile, Calvin CSR staff built a database and consolidated lists from multiple sources, including GRACE's directory, denominational lists, Yellow Pages and religious marketing mailing lists. The resulting list included over 900 possible congregations.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews

The KCCS launched an extensive survey of congregational leaders from June to December 2007. We identified a "primary study area" (PSA) based on U.S. Census block groups containing public schools with high percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The PSA includes much of central Grand Rapids as well as Sparta and Cedar Springs in the north. (See map in **Figure 8.**)

All congregations in the PSA and a random subsample of congregations outside the PSA were asked to participate in face-to-face interviews including extended detail on social program replacement costs and vision statements. Thirteen Calvin College students joined eight African American and Hispanic leaders in conducting 395 interviews. Remaining congregations were assigned to participate in shorter telephone interviews by the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research in Akron, Ohio. In all, 188 congregations responded by telephone.

Pursuing interviews helped us delete hundreds of outdated records and add 47 new congregations. A master list of 720 congregations was finalized as of December 2007. The 583 completed interviews represent an outstanding 81 percent response rate county-wide, with high participation from all key groups. (See **Figure 1.**) Many thanks are due to the religious leaders of the county for their courteous participation.

An overview of this report

This report presents the findings of the Kent County Congregations Study as follows:

2. Religion in Kent County

This chapter explores the religious demographics of the county, with special attention to congregations' locations and poverty levels, the diversity of ethnicity and income in congregations, and the rates of religious participation across various groups and religious traditions.

3. Religious leaders

We examine the general demographics and professional attributes of leaders. Clergy education, employment status, satisfaction in ministry and family relationships are important topics.

4. All congregations great and small

Considering the internal structure of congregations, these pages document the number of participants and staff members, growth patterns, financial support and outflows, worship services and religious education.

5. Social composition and theology

This chapter summarizes leaders' estimates of the gender, age, education and income of congregation members, including whether they live near the congregation and their place on a theological spectrum from conservative to liberal.

6. Social and civic engagement

We look at the role of religious leaders in civic and political action, finding jobs for others, engaging in community service, and collaboration.

7. Congregations and education

We explore how Kent County residents relate religion and education, particularly attitudes toward public schools and vouchers. We then turn to congregations' involvement with public and private schools, including volunteer activity and financial support.

8. Social service provision by congregations

The 583 participating congregations reported 2,338 distinct programs and activities and checked thousands upon thousands of boxes on a longer list of activities. We present the breadth and extent of these activities and point to some service areas where growth might help.

9. Program details and replacement value

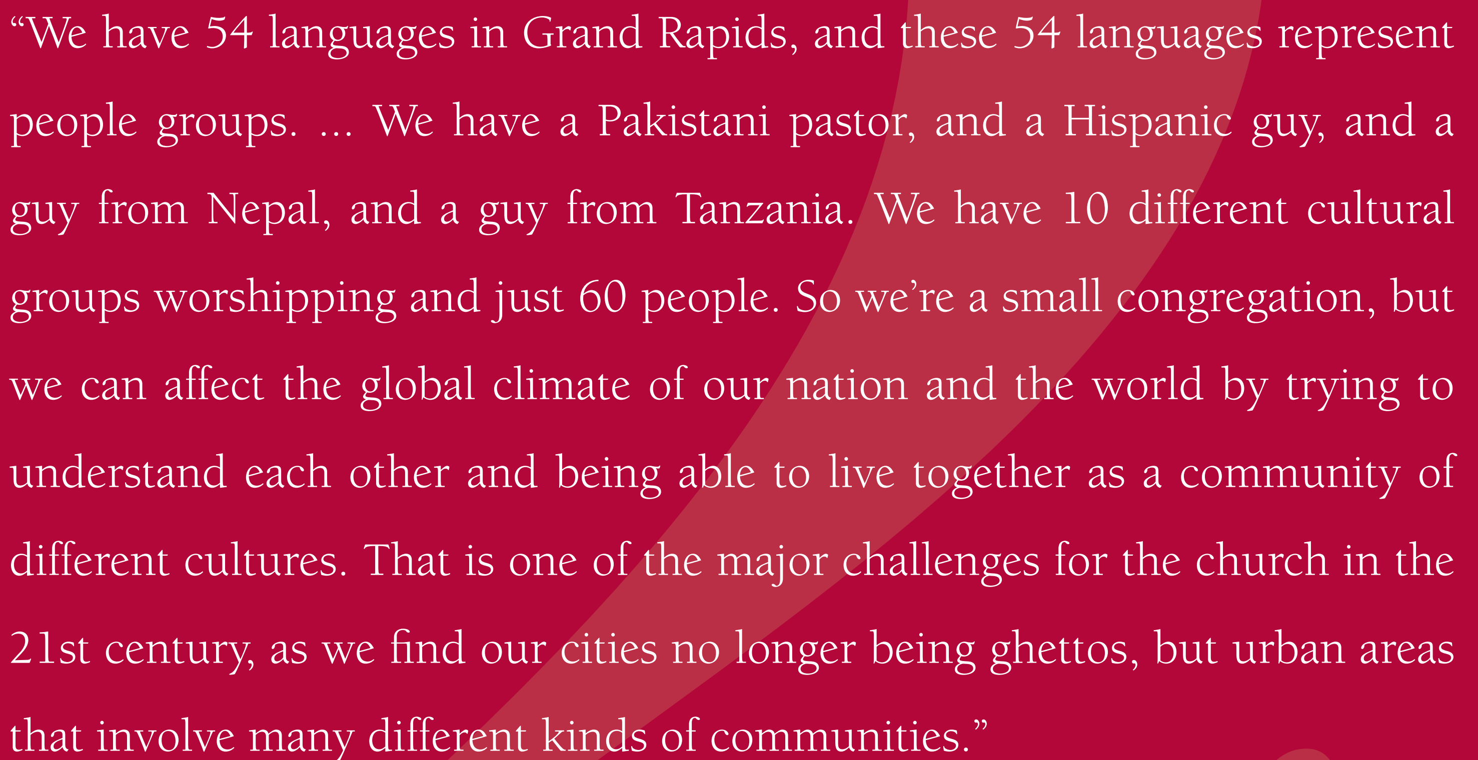
Drawing on detailed information about 847 specific congregational services, we generate estimates of how much direct and in-kind revenue other institutions would have to generate to replace the total work of congregations.

10. Visions for the future

Brief, open-ended interviews with clergy documented their visions for improving the quality of life in their neighborhoods. This chapter organizes these statements by category and notes leaders' stated plans for future social programs.

11. Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter highlights major findings and suggests ways to strengthen the serving capacity of our congregations.



"We have 54 languages in Grand Rapids, and these 54 languages represent people groups. ... We have a Pakistani pastor, and a Hispanic guy, and a guy from Nepal, and a guy from Tanzania. We have 10 different cultural groups worshipping and just 60 people. So we're a small congregation, but we can affect the global climate of our nation and the world by trying to understand each other and being able to live together as a community of different cultures. That is one of the major challenges for the church in the 21st century, as we find our cities no longer being ghettos, but urban areas that involve many different kinds of communities."

—a pastor sharing his vision for his community

2 RELIGION IN KENT COUNTY

Kent County, Michigan (population about 600,000) includes the city of Grand Rapids (population about 184,000), most of the city's suburbs, and a wide swath of small towns and rural areas. The county is a particularly interesting subject for research on congregations and social service due to its relatively high level of religiosity and a notable number of government and nonprofit partnerships and experimental efforts in welfare provision.

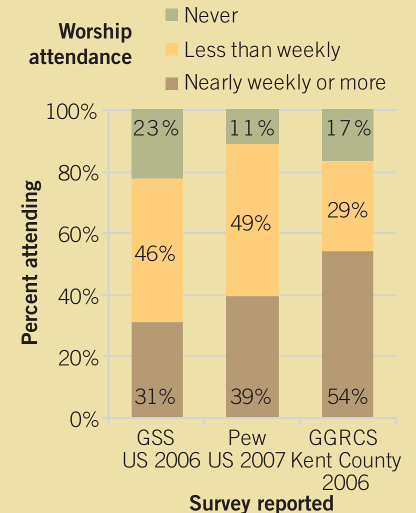
High religiosity

By most accounts, Kent County is an unusually religious community. In the Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (GGRCS), the proportion reporting attending religious services weekly or more often was 54 percent. (See rightmost chart column in **Figure 2.**) That figure is higher than national estimates of religious attendance, which range from 31 to 39 percent.[1] Fifty-nine percent of Kent County respondents also reported attending a place of worship "in the last week." A similar question in the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) found just 35 percent nationally saying yes.[2]

Kent County also ranks fairly highly in terms of congregations per thousand residents. In 2000, the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS) found 442 congregations in Kent County on official lists (a far cry from our street-based count of 720), a rate of 0.77 congregations per 1,000 population. Among 112 U.S. counties with at least 500,000 people, Kent County ranked ninth on this measure.[3]

The Missionary Church of Christ "God Raises the Fallen," in northwest Grand Rapids

Local religious attendance reports exceed U.S. averages



Sources:
Pew Religious Landscape Study 2007, General Social Survey 2006, GGRCS 2006

Figure 2 Frequency of individual religious service attendance from national and local surveys.

In this chapter

- *Several measures of religiosity are higher in Kent County than U.S. averages.*
- *68,349 children were reported as regular participants in local congregations.*
- *Hundreds of congregations, especially Black and Hispanic congregations, are located in areas of poverty and great need.*

Over a quarter of responding congregations have a non-white primary ethnicity

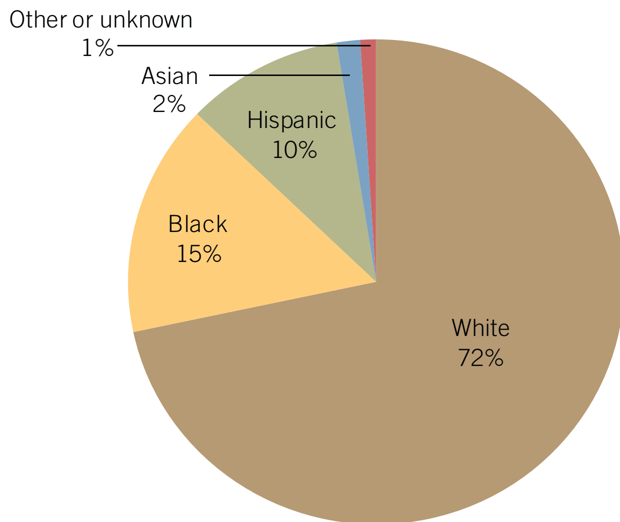


Figure 3 Primary ethnicity of congregation

Sixty percent of congregations have under 150 regular adult participants

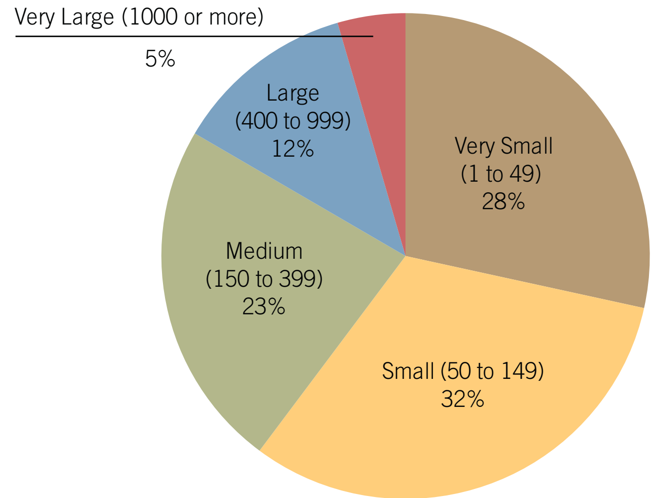


Figure 4 Congregation size in participating adults

Black and Hispanic congregations are smaller

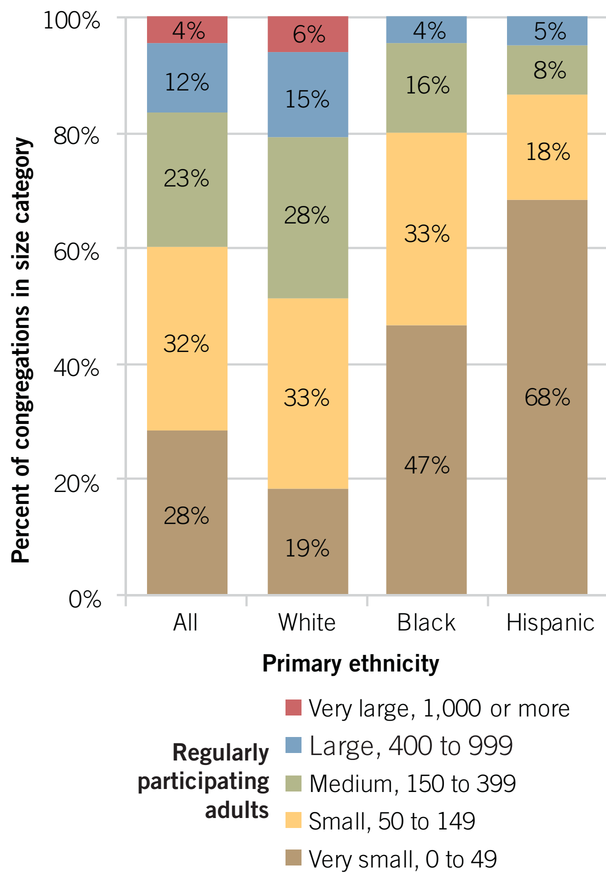


Figure 5 Congregational size by primary ethnicity

Size and primary ethnicity

We have grouped Kent County congregations by primary ethnic group, using the KCCS survey data, expert informants from the community and congregational publicity (**Figure 3**).[4] Nonwhite congregations account for over a quarter of the responding congregations and for a disproportionate share of smaller congregations. Note that for brevity, we will sometimes use the terms "Black" and "African American" interchangeably, though a small share of the "Black" congregations may be simply "African" in nature. "Hispanic" and "Latino" are also used interchangeably.

Congregations were also grouped by size, using the reported number of regularly participating adults (**Figure 4**). Sixty percent of the responding congregations have fewer than 150 regular adult participants. The typical (median) Kent County response reported 100 regular adult participants; though small, this figure is much larger than the estimated national median of just 50 adults found in the 2006 NCS-II.[5] Overall, the KCCS informants reported 443,586 people associated with their congregations in any way, 147,370 regularly participating adults, 64,662 regularly participating children, and 176,976 persons in attendance at worship services during the weekend prior to their interview. Forty percent of the regular adult participants attend one of the top 26 congregations with 1,000 or more persons.

As **Figure 5** shows, Black and Hispanic congregations are more likely to be small; over two-thirds of Hispanic congregations have fewer than 50 regular participating adults.

Historical religious traditions

Though Kent County residents are primarily members of Christian denominations and churches, the religious landscape is diverse and complex, with 92 denominations and organized groups represented in the congregational respondents, along with numerous independent congregations and informal faith groupings. The KCCS data embraces all religious traditions found in Kent County, from the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Worldwide Church of God. Along with Christian pastors and priests from mainline, evangelical, Reformed, Catholic and Orthodox traditions, we interviewed Baha'i community members, Buddhist priests, Islamic imams, Jewish rabbis, Latter-Day Saints bishops, metaphysical teachers and Unitarian Universalist leaders.

In the GGRCS survey of residents, 24 percent described themselves as "Catholic" and 61 percent as "Christian" (Protestant, Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, etc.). About 10 percent profess atheism, agnosticism, no religion or abstract "spirituality." Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus together account for about 1.5 percent of the population.

We categorized our KCCS respondents into six large "traditions," adding some local flavor to the standard groupings often employed by social scientists. The groupings include both arbitrarily subtle distinctions and a few unexpected groupings, but they do reflect historical origins.

See **Appendix B** for full details on religious tradition categories. We break down the Evangelical tradition into three parts:

- The **Evangelical** tradition includes denominations such as the General Association of Regular Baptists (GARB, 18 responding congregations) and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS, 12 congregations). It also includes numerous independent Bible churches and nondenominational community churches.
- The **Reformed** tradition includes Reformed and Presbyterian denominations such as the Christian Reformed Church (CRC, 71 congregations) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA, 40 congregations).
- The **Pentecostal or Charismatic** tradition includes congregations from Pentecostal denominations such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC, 16) and the Assemblies of God (10), along with independent churches mentioning Pentecostal or Charismatic beliefs.

The remaining categories are:

- The **Catholic or Orthodox** category, which includes 33 Roman Catholic and four Orthodox congregations.
- The **Mainline and other Protestant** tradition, including the United Methodist Church (31 congregations), the United Church of Christ (11 congregations) and the Episcopal Church (7 congregations), along with a variety of remaining Protestant congregations.
- The **Other** category, which groups non- and para-Christian faiths, including Judaism (3 congregations), Islam (3), Latter-Day Saints (4), Jehovah's Witnesses (3), Buddhists (1) and Hindus (1).

Figure 6 shows that Evangelical, Reformed and Pentecostal congregations together account for almost three-quarters of the congregations and nearly 70 percent of reported participation and weekend attendance. Catholic or Orthodox congregations form about 6 percent of the congregation count but reported almost one-fifth of adult participation, nearly a quarter of associated persons and weekend attendance, and 28 percent of the children, not far shy of the Evangelical tradition. The child-per-adult ratio is highest (0.70 children per adult) in Catholic and Orthodox congregations. Mainline congregations have the low value of 0.28 children per adult.

Figure 7 (following page) shows the breakdown of congregation counts in each religious tradition by the primary ethnicity of the congregation. Evangelical congregations are the most numerous tradition among White and Black congregations, while Pentecostal congregations account for over half of the Hispanic group.

Evangelical children are most numerous, but Catholics report more children per congregation

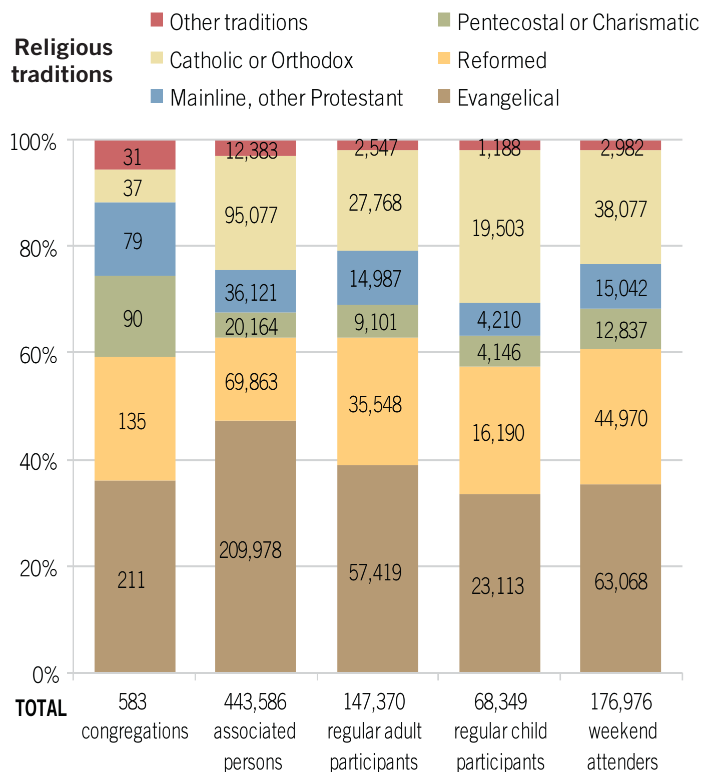


Figure 6 Five counts of religious traditions

Pentecostal gatherings are a majority among Hispanic congregations

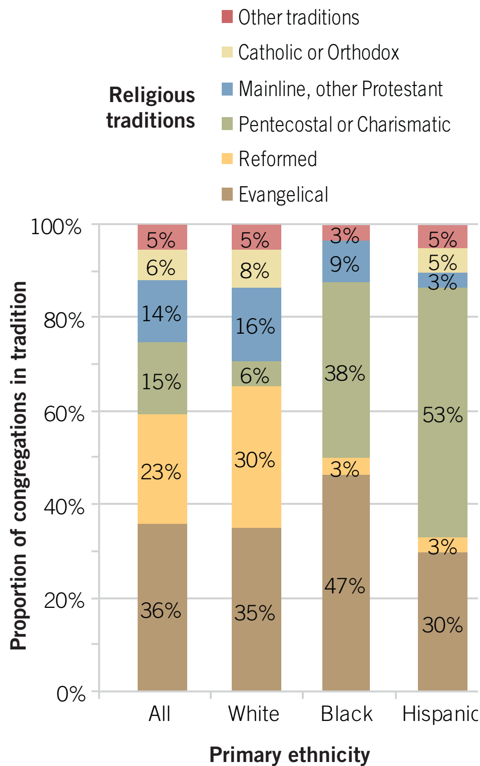


Figure 7 Religious traditions by primary ethnicity

Poverty surrounds urban, minority congregations

Kent County's demographics differ from U.S. national statistics, but not dramatically. As shown in **Table 1**, the county has a smaller proportion of minority residents than the national average, but these proportions are significant and growing. The Hispanic or Latino population in particular increased from 7 percent of county population in 2000 to an estimated 9 percent in 2006.

The county is also fairly typical in terms of poverty levels, with about 10 percent of families and 13 percent of individuals below the federal poverty line in 2006. However, these figures are likely worsening at present due to rising unemployment.

Another measure of poverty comes from public schools data. According to National Center for Education Statistics data for the 2004-2005 school year, Kent County public schools enrolled 105,152 students. Over 35 percent of these students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches; this compares to an average of 34 percent eligible statewide and 37 percent nationwide.[6]

For this study, we used a geographic information system to map both public schools and congregations. The KCCS covers the entire county, but we paid special attention to a primary study area (PSA) containing the highest percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The map in **Figure 8** shows the boundaries of the PSA and the level of poverty of local public schools, along with congregations coded by primary ethnicity. Sixty-five percent of the 26,583 public school students in the PSA were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches in 2004-2005, compared to just 25 percent of the 78,569 students enrolled outside the PSA.

The concentration of poverty in areas with Black and Hispanic congregations is evident. The median majority-White congregation's nearest public school has 30 percent subsidized lunch eligibility; for Black congregations, the median is 88 percent; for Hispanic congregations, the median is 95 percent eligibility.

County poverty rate is near national, state averages, but rate is high in Grand Rapids

2006 Demographic Estimates	United States	Michigan	Kent County	Grand Rapids
White	73.9%	79.5%	82.1%	67.8%
Black or African American	12.4%	14.1%	9.2%	21.8%
Asian	4.4%	2.3%	2.2%	0.9%
Others	9.3%	4.1%	6.5%	9.5%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	14.8%	3.9%	9.0%	16.1%
Families below poverty level	9.7%	9.6%	9.8%	18.8%
Individuals below poverty level	12.9%	13.5%	13.3%	23.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey; factfinder.census.gov

Table 1 Demographic estimates on race, ethnicity and poverty

African American and Hispanic congregations are concentrated in areas of high poverty

Congregations by Primary Ethnicity

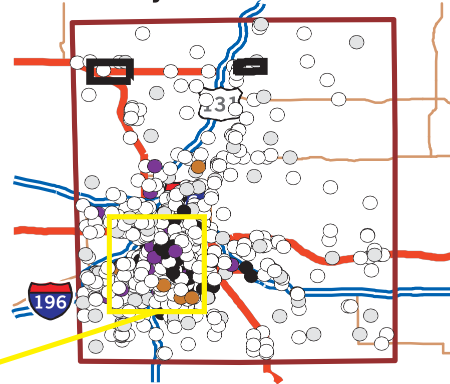
- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Other or Unknown (usually white)

Primary Study Area

Public School Lunch Subsidies
Percent Eligible

- 0% - 14.2%
- 14.3% - 28.4%
- 28.5% - 42.6%
- 42.7% - 56.8%
- 56.9% - 71.1%
- 71.2% - 85.3%
- 85.4% - 99.5%

Kent County



Central Grand Rapids metro area

0 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles

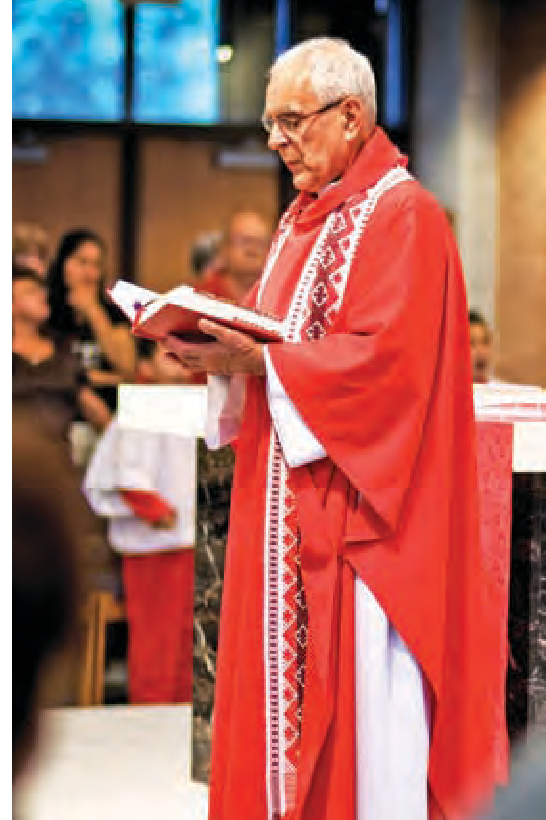
Map by Neil Carlson, September 2008. Sources: KCCS, National Center for Education Statistics 2004-2005 CCD

Figure 8 Map of congregations by ethnicity with public-school poverty

“I have a wonderful forum, which is that I get to stand up and talk to a large number of people for 45 minutes 38 to 40 times a year. So I think the barriers [to achieving my vision] would have to do with my focus and how I cast vision. How, without being highly judgmental of people with two vacation homes, do I talk about God’s movement in my heart, without doing it in a way that condemns and shames, in a way that guides people to rethink? My goal is that people live more simply. Some people will be totally unpersuaded and some people will be radically reshaped in the way they view [wealth].”

—*the leader of a large congregation*

3 RELIGIOUS LEADERS



Leading the congregation at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in Grand Rapids.

Our data shows that religious leaders (the "clergy"[1]) in Kent County have a wide range of life experiences. Most were educated in seminaries with extensive training in management, preaching and interpretation of texts. Many others are "self-made," entrepreneurial leaders whose ministry is unpaid or underpaid. Some are unable to fulfill their calling because their congregations are simply too poor to support them.

Ministry places multiple, sometimes conflicting demands on religious leaders. Leaders may be expected to preach well, administer programs, manage finances well, and make connections with the community. They may be expected to function as teachers, organizers, counselors, activists, promoters, social workers and journalists. Some must stretch themselves to communicate with highly educated congregations, while others are challenged to adapt their sophisticated training to under-educated populations. Some push themselves too hard, leading to dissatisfaction with religious ministry and family tensions with spouses and children.

People may join congregations simply because a religious leader has inspired them, giving them a new vision of self or moving them to loftier goals beyond self-interest. Leaders galvanize people around common goals, at times around seemingly trivial matters of doctrine, and at times around life-and-death struggles to save individuals and families from physical and moral dissolution. Religious leaders are key to mobilizing the community for civic engagement and social service provision. Leadership is crucial to whether or not a congregation embraces the mission of serving its surrounding community.

In this chapter, we focus attention on the religious leaders in Kent County: their demographics, ministry satisfaction, financial stability, education, interests and involvement in ministerial associations.[2]

In this chapter

- *Kent County religious leaders are slightly younger than national averages, yet average 19 years of experience in ministry.*
- *Vocational satisfaction is high and family life is good.*
- *Black and Hispanic leaders expressed strong interest in training opportunities.*
- *Over half of religious leaders do not participate in a ministerial association.*

Mainline and Catholic or Orthodox clergy are older on average; Hispanic leaders are youngest

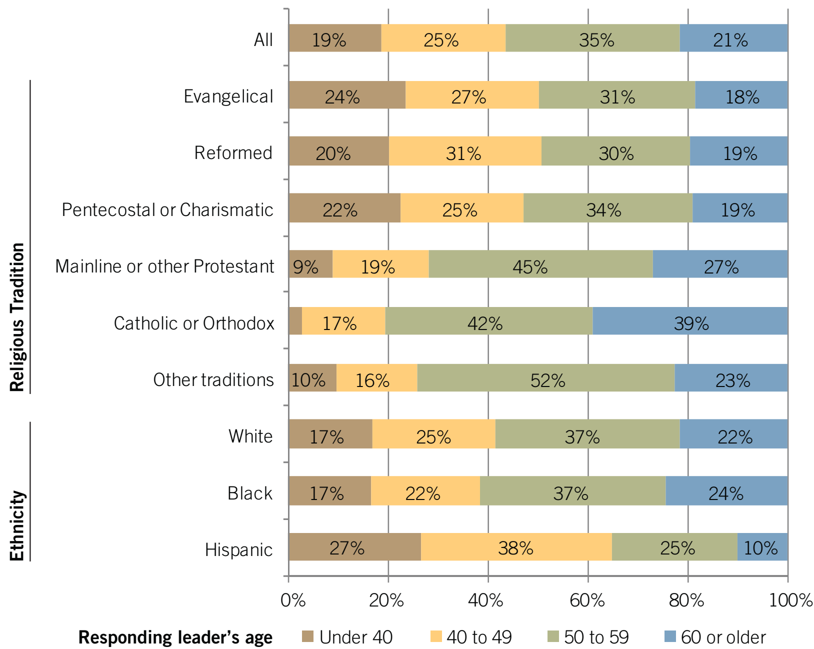


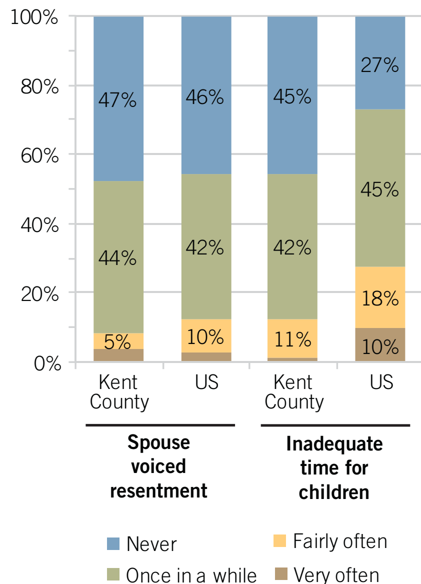
Figure 9 Age groups by tradition and ethnicity

Age, tradition and ethnicity

Leaders come in all ages. The youngest leader we interviewed was 21 years old; the oldest was 87. Averaging 50.6 years old, the Kent County religious leaders we spoke to are somewhat younger than the NCS-II national estimate of 53.3. **Figure 9** shows that 56 percent of the responding leaders are 50 years old or older. Mirroring national trends, Mainline and Catholic or Orthodox congregations have the oldest clergy on average, while Pentecostal, Evangelical and Reformed clergy are all slightly younger than the average.[3] Age varies more widely by ethnicity; the youngest leaders are Hispanic (average age 45.6), while Black leaders are slightly older than Whites (51.7 and 51.1 years on average, respectively).

The predominance of older clergy nationally is partly a result of a larger number of second-career leaders entering ministry and seminary.[4] While we do not have explicit data on second-career ministry in the KCCS, the average Kent County religious leader has been in ministry for 19 years and with his or her current congregation for 11 years, making our local leaders an experienced group.

Family life of local religious leaders improves slightly on U.S. averages



Sources: KCCS 2007; Carroll, God's Potters

Figure 10 Satisfaction with family time, Kent County compared to U.S.

Women in leadership

Nationally, the percentage of women ministers has grown from 6 percent in 1983 to 11 percent in 2001.[5] NCS-II tabulates just under 8 percent women in their 2006 sample; even in urban areas, the proportion was nearly 9 percent. The KCCS interviewed 81 women who have active roles in their congregations. Forty-nine percent (40 total) of these women are senior clergy or religious leaders, compared to 86 percent of the men. Female senior clergy are most common in Black congregations (15 percent, 11 total) and the Mainline tradition (16 percent, 11 total).[6]

Family life

Eighty-nine percent of responding leaders are married, and 90 percent reported having children. Just 8 percent had neither spouse nor children. Following in the steps of the Pulpit and Pew Project's National Telephone Survey of Pastors,[7] KCCS asked married respondents whether their spouses "voiced resentment about the amount of time that your ministry takes up" and, for respondents with children, how often they perceived that their work "did not permit you to devote adequate time to your children." **Figure 10** shows that Kent County religious leaders reported perceptions very similar to the national figures for spousal resentment, but were dramatically more likely than the national average to report giving adequate time to their children.[8]

Pay and benefits

In Kent County, 80 percent of religious leaders said that they were paid for their work in their congregations.[9] However, significant differences emerged when we compared the ethnic groups on this question. Eighty-nine percent of Whites indicated that they get paid for their work in their congregations, compared to just 58 percent of African Americans and 52 percent of Hispanic leaders. Similar figures have been found nationally.[10]

One indicator of financial stability is provision for retirement. We asked only the 466 paid leaders about their retirement and health benefits. Seventy-nine percent of paid religious leaders in Kent County reported having a pension or retirement plan; of these, 81 percent were provided primarily by the congregation or a higher religious body. Thirteen percent fund their own retirement plan, 4 percent receive it from another employer, and 2 percent depend on spousal plans.[11]

Most religious traditions provide retirement benefits at high rates (90 percent of leaders or more), while the more loosely-knit Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations have just 42 percent of leaders reporting retirement benefits and Evangelicals have 75 percent.

One recent study judged that older Black leaders continue working because they lack retirement benefits.[12] That claim is certainly plausible in Kent County, where almost half of Black and Hispanic pastors (46 and 48 percent, respectively) reported not having any pension or retirement benefits from any source. Only 15 percent of White pastors said they lacked retirement support.

Similar to the other financial indicators, 79 percent of leaders reported that they receive health care benefits or insurance. This includes 85 percent of Whites, compared to 54 percent of African Americans and 55 percent of Hispanics. The Pentecostal or Charismatic and Other traditions were less likely to have health care benefits or insurance (52 percent and 60 percent respectively), a situation that leads many congregation leaders to search for a second paying job.

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Pastor Samuel Sanchez teaching at La Iglesia Luz del Mundo ("Light of the World Church") in Grand Rapids.

Satisfaction with work

Despite the complexities and stresses of ministry, the majority of religious leaders in Kent County seem very satisfied with their current ministry positions. Overall, 77 percent indicated that they were "very satisfied" with their current ministry position; 21 percent said "somewhat satisfied." Altogether 98 percent of all religious leaders in Kent County expressed general satisfaction, a percentage identical to national figures of clergy in America.[13]

We asked leaders, "In the last five years, how often have you thought of leaving ministry in a congregation to enter another type of ministry?" The majority of leaders (54 percent) indicated that they had "never" considered leaving congregational ministry, while 38 percent said that they consider it "once in a while," and 7 percent said that they had considered it "fairly" or "very often." How about leaving ministry to enter a secular occupation? Again, by significant margins (72 percent), leaders said that they had never considered leaving ministry to pursue a "secular" occupation, while 24 percent said "once in a while," and only 4 percent indicated thinking about leaving for a secular occupation "fairly" or "very often."

Workload: multiple congregations and dual vocations

Full employment in ministry is a key indicator of financial stability for religious leaders. Kent County's picture is fairly good: 79 percent of leaders responding to our survey work full time. Of the part-timers, almost one-third were age 60 or older. The typical leader reported working 50 hours a week for his or her congregation. Just over half of full-time leaders have at least one other full-time staff member working with them.

"Bi-vocational" leaders balance their work at a congregation with a second job in another field, because they need the income. Nationally, 37 percent of clergy answered yes to the question, "Do you hold another job besides working for this or other congregations?" In Kent County, only 28 percent said yes, well below the national norm.

Over half (55 percent) of these bi-vocational leaders work more than 30 hours weekly at other jobs, yet still report working an average of 25 hours weekly for their congregations. The median bi-vocational leader reports working 10 hours a week more than the 50 hours the median single-job leader reported.

Figure 11 combines the bi-vocational figures with another factor, serving multiple congregations. Ten percent of KCCS respondents reported serving multiple congregations, again below the NCS-II national estimate of 14 percent. Taken together, 65 percent overall serve just one congregation full-time, from a minimum of just 29 percent in the "Other traditions" group to a maximum of 79 percent in the Reformed tradition. Just 31 percent of Hispanics and 43 percent of Black leaders enjoy a single-congregation, single-vocation position.

We might reasonably expect dual vocations to place additional stress on family and psyche. Surprisingly, the bi-vocational leaders were no more likely to report family tension or job dissatisfaction than the rest. The evidence from KCCS suggests the reverse: full-time leaders in ministry experience greater "stress because of the challenges they face in their congregation"

"I am bi-vocational, so that often limits some of the planning and ability to do things..."

–a pastor in Grandville, MI

Multiple-congregation and bi-vocational leaders are concentrated in Black and Hispanic ethnicity, Pentecostal and Other traditions

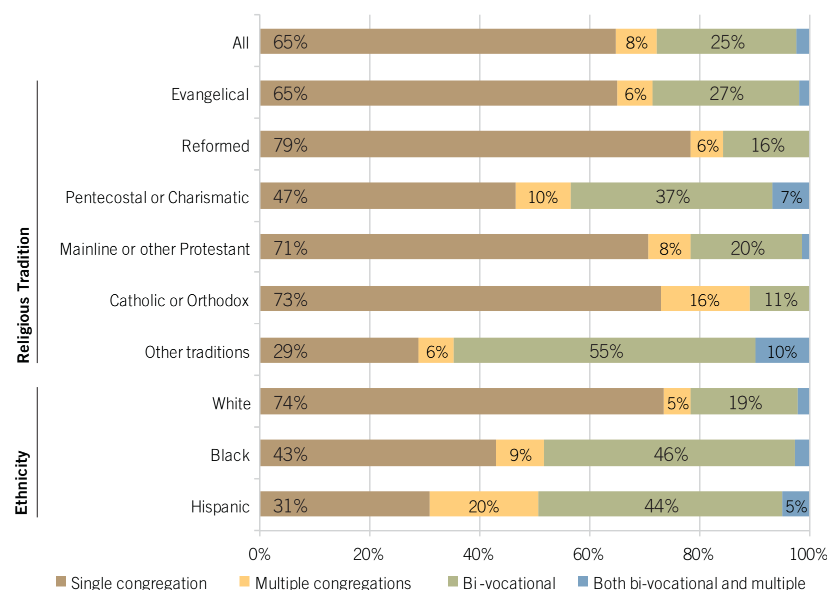


Figure 11 Leaders' workloads by tradition and ethnicity

than do bi-vocational leaders. Perhaps greater availability leads to greater demands on their time; full-time leaders also have larger congregations and more congregants to attend to.

This data suggests that bi-vocational leaders, who are disproportionately Black and Hispanic, have a high level of commitment to ministry that is strongly shared by their families. While we did not ask directly if the spouse also serves as a co-pastor (a practice common among African American and Hispanic congregations), we suspect that co-pastor arrangements among spouses might contribute to the overall levels of satisfaction reported by bi-vocational pastors. At the very least, despite the extra strain that a second job brings, bi-vocational leaders appear to be weathering the stresses and challenges relatively well.

Leaders' educational levels

The training and education of religious leaders is of particular importance to ministerial effectiveness and excellence, as well as a congregation's community impact and involvement. The more education religious leaders have, the more able they are to meet the social needs of their parishioners, and the more likely they are to mobilize their congregations to serve their communities through social service programs.[14] Religious leaders arrive at their positions primarily as a response to a deep sense of calling and commitment to serve their communities of faith. Educationally, there are many paths toward ministry, but the one most often traveled is through theological training institutions—seminaries or schools of theology.

General education levels

We asked the KCCS respondents about the highest educational degree completed and the highest degree they hope to attain. As shown in **Figure 12**, 58 percent of leaders surveyed have earned graduate degrees, adding together 11 percent with doctoral or professional degrees, 38 percent with Master's of Divinity or similar religious master's-level degrees, and 9 percent with non-religious Master's degrees. Fully two-thirds (67 percent) of White leaders have graduate degrees of some kind, while less than one-third of Blacks and about a quarter of Hispanics do (31 percent and 26 percent, respectively).

When it comes to aspirations, roughly half of leaders across all ethnic groups aspire to attain a graduate degree, whether this is an initial degree or a higher-level degree such as a doctorate. Black and Hispanic leaders, though starting from a lower level on average, were significantly more likely to hope for a doctoral or professional degree.

Almost three-fifths overall have graduate degrees, but less than one-third of Black and Hispanic leaders do

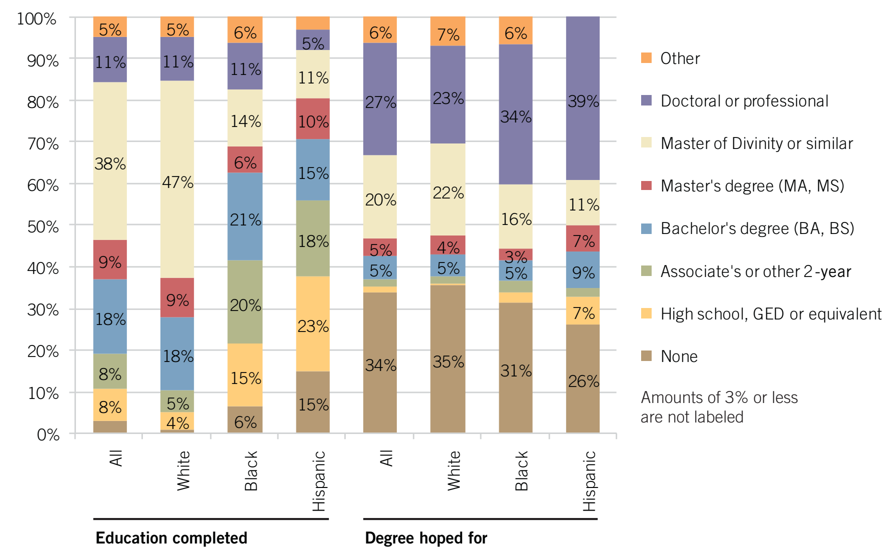


Figure 12 Levels of education achieved and aspired to, by ethnicity

Overall, just over half have ministerial graduate degrees

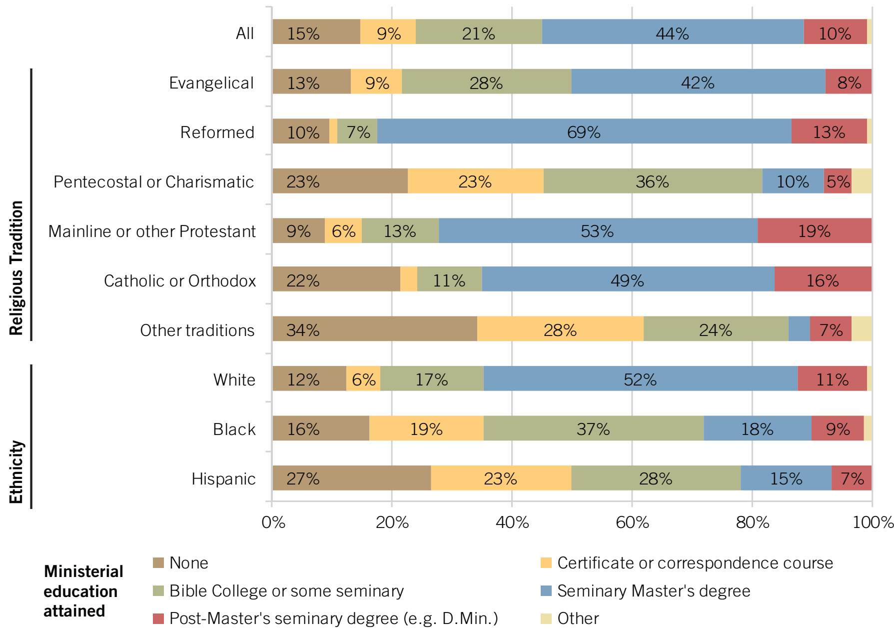


Figure 13 Ministerial education by tradition and ethnicity

Black and Hispanic leaders express stronger-than-average interest in all types of training

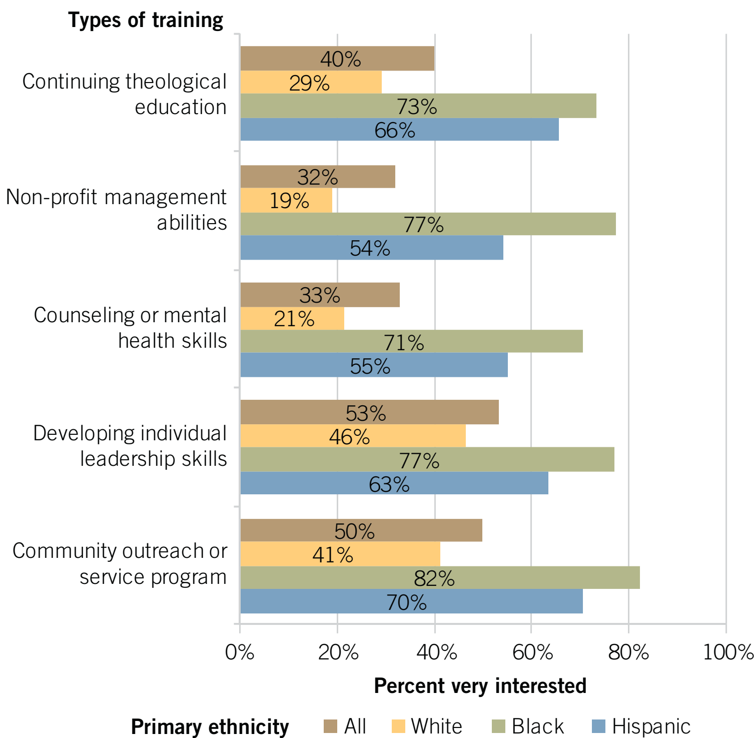


Figure 14 Percent very interested in forms of training by ethnicity

Ministerial education levels

Recognizing that there may be a difference between having an education and being trained for the ministry, we asked for the highest level of ministerial education religious leaders had completed. As shown in **Figure 13**, over half of all county religious leaders (54 percent) have received graduate-level theological training, most of these holders of Master's of Divinity degrees or the equivalent.[15] The Reformed tradition has by far the largest proportion of graduate-educated ministers, while the Pentecostal or Charismatic and Other groups have the smallest proportion of highly-educated ministers. Over a quarter of Hispanic leaders have no ministerial education, compared to 16 percent of Black leaders and 12 percent of White leaders. Sixty-three percent of White leaders have a graduate ministerial degree, compared to 27 percent of Black leaders and 22 percent of Hispanic leaders.[16]

Training interests

We asked interviewees whether or not they would be interested in continuing theological education in such areas as preaching, congregational growth, and applied theology. There was an overwhelming interest in such opportunities, with 78 percent of the leaders interviewed expressing interest. As might be expected, the two ethnic groups with most interest in continuing theological education were African American and Hispanic leaders.

Increasingly, religious leaders' roles are more complex and demanding of their time and skills. In addition to their ministerial tasks such as preaching, teaching and managing a congregation, they often play the role of social workers, community development agents, counselors, translators, business managers and advocates. These roles are particularly evident among those leading smaller, less prosperous congregations. Ministry skills

taught at seminaries are often not sufficient to address the increasing challenges facing religious leaders.

Understanding this reality, the KCCS sought to identify what additional training needs might interest religious leaders. We asked religious leaders to indicate their level of interest in receiving further training in practical areas related to ministry, such as nonprofit management, counseling, leadership and how to start community outreach programs. Overall, the leaders expressed interest in all of these areas, as shown in **Figure 14**. Black and Hispanic leaders were significantly more likely to express interest in each area of training.

Ministerial associations

Pastoral associations are networks in which religious leaders strengthen bonds and friendships, support one another, and coalesce around important issues.[17] We asked religious leaders to list the names of "ministerial, interdenominational, interfaith, or other religious associations with which you personally interact." **Table 2** shows the list of ministerial associations named by the leaders in Kent County. The association most mentioned was Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE) followed by Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, a predominantly African American network of pastors. The *Asociación de Pastores Hispanos de Grand Rapids* is a small, recently revived Hispanic association.

While leaders mentioned a wide range of associations in response to our question, including colleges, denominational bodies, social service networks and so forth, few of these could be considered clergy-to-clergy support and networking groups. The majority of congregational leaders are not part of any pastoral association network.

This lack of connectivity might hamper ministry efforts. We know that participation in networks can help strengthen an organization and its leadership by connecting them with others and establishing relationships.[18] Networks also provide access to resources. Most community-based initiatives supported by civic, government or philanthropic organizations prefer to engage with organizations that are part of networks. Networks can take initiatives to scale and maximize the outreach potential of any community-wide effort.

GRACE and IDMA top list of associations

Pastoral Associations	Mentions
Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism	47
Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance	32
Rockford Area Ministerial Association	14
Willow Creek Association	12
North Kent Ministerial Association	11
Byron Area Ministerial Association	9
Interfaith Dialogue	8
Cedar Springs Area Ministerial Association	7
Metro Ministry	6
Michigan Organizing Project	6
Concerned Clergy of West Michigan	5
Asociación de Pastores Hispanos de Grand Rapids	4
Lowell Area Ministerial Alliance	3
Inner City Christian Federation	3
Korean Pastors Association	3

Table 2 Ministerial associations mentioned by religious leaders

Worshippers at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids

In this chapter

- *The typical congregation has 100 adults, 30 school-age children and 10 infants and preschoolers.*
- *Of $75.6 million transferred to denominations, international, domestic and Kent County aid and missions, just 14 percent was clearly designated for Kent County.*
- *A third of congregations do not target teens ages 15 to 19 for religious education. Half do not target college-age adults.*

4 ALL CONGREGATIONS GREAT AND SMALL

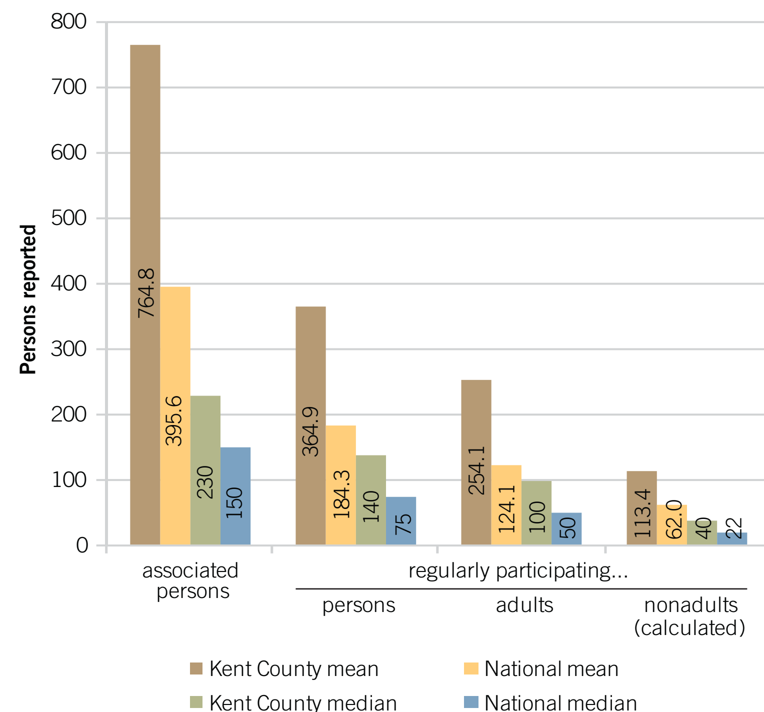
Congregations, like individuals, come in all sizes and shapes and have different personalities, views and cultures. In this chapter, we explore congregational size, staffing levels, financial health and giving patterns, along with frequency of worship experiences and religious education offerings.

Multiple measures of congregation size

Previously, in **Figure 6**, we introduced some estimates of congregational sizes and attendance patterns by religious tradition in Kent County. Now we'll dig deeper into that data. Mirroring questions from the 2006 National Congregations Study (NCS-II), we asked Kent County congregational leaders about size in five different ways. We asked for:

1. an estimate of **all persons associated** in any way, "counting both adults and children, counting both regular and irregular participants, counting both official or registered members and also participating nonmembers;"
2. an estimate of **regular participants** in religious life, both adults and children;
3. an estimate of **regularly participating adults**, age 18 and older.

Local congregational size estimates exceed national averages



Sources: KCCS 2007, NCS-II 2006

Figure 15 Kent County and national estimates of congregation size

These three questions mirrored the national questions from NCS-II and allowed us to calculate the number of non-adults.[1] **Figure 15** shows that Kent County estimates on all measures exceed those provided by the National Congregations Study by sizeable amounts. For example, the average (the mean—see note at right) number of associated persons in the county is 764.8, compared to just 395.6 nationally. The typical (that is, median) Kent County congregation reported 230 associated persons, compared to 150 for the national estimate.

In **Table 3**, we find a total of 443,586 associated persons were reported, a substantial proportion of the 600,000 residents of Kent County, even allowing for some double-counting across congregations and for inclusion of visitors from other counties. Regular participants number significantly fewer than associated persons. A total of 212,032 regular adult and child participants were reported, slightly less than half the total from the associated question. As shown in **Figure 15**, the Kent County mean and median (364.9 and 140, respectively) again exceed national estimates (184.3 and 75, respectively).

Black congregations have a median size of 133 persons associated in any way, a median of 78 regularly participating adults and children, and 13,210 total regularly participating members. Among Hispanics, the median number for associated people is just 80 per congregation, with 48 people regularly attending and a total of 6,162 regularly participating people.

To count children more directly, we added two more questions to the NCS-II set:

- "How many school-age children—ages 5 to 17—would you say regularly participate in the religious life of your congregation?"
- "How many infant or preschool children—ages 0 to 4—would you say are regularly present in your congregation?"

The average (mean) congregation reported 92.5 school-age children, with a median of 30, and 29.6 regularly present infant or preschool children, with a median of 10.

Black and Hispanic congregations are smaller but still substantial

	Primary ethnicity:	All	White	Black	Hispanic
	Count of congregations	583	418	90	60
Medians	Associated persons	230	300	133	80
	Regularly participating…				
	adults and children	140	200	78	48
	adults (18 and older)	100	134	50	30
	school-age children (5-17)	30	40	25	15
	infants and preschoolers	10	12	7	9
Totals	Associated persons	443,586	388,806	33,967	14,126
	Regularly participating…				
	adults and children	212,032	189,319	13,210	6,162
	adults (18 and older)	147,370	131,960	8,855	4,297
	school-age children (5-17)	53,359	47,061	3,436	2,022
	infants and preschoolers	17,005	14,821	949	962

Table 3 Size figures by ethnicity

A note on means and medians:

Figure 14 refers to two different kinds of averages: "**means**" and "**medians**."

A **mean** value is the usual kind of average: add everyone up and divide by the number of people. But means tend to be sensitive to a few large values, and Kent County features some very large congregations that make all the averages look a lot higher than the typical congregation.

The **median** is just that: a "typical" case. Sort all of the congregations by size, then take the middle one, and you have found the median; it's also the same as the "50th percentile." Half the cases are bigger, and half are smaller. The median congregation in the county has 230 associated persons, while the mean congregation has 764. We report only medians in **Table 3**.

More Kent County congregations report growth

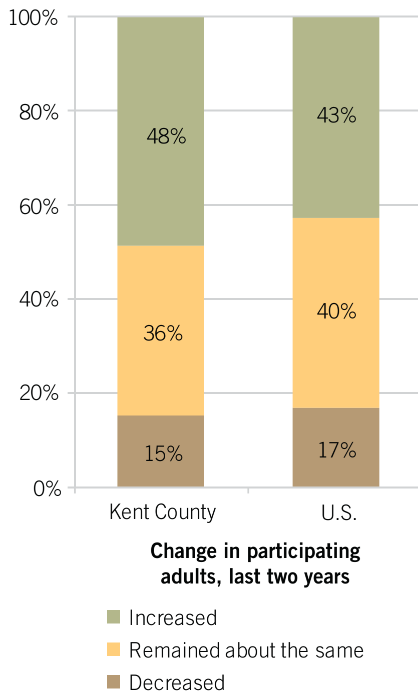


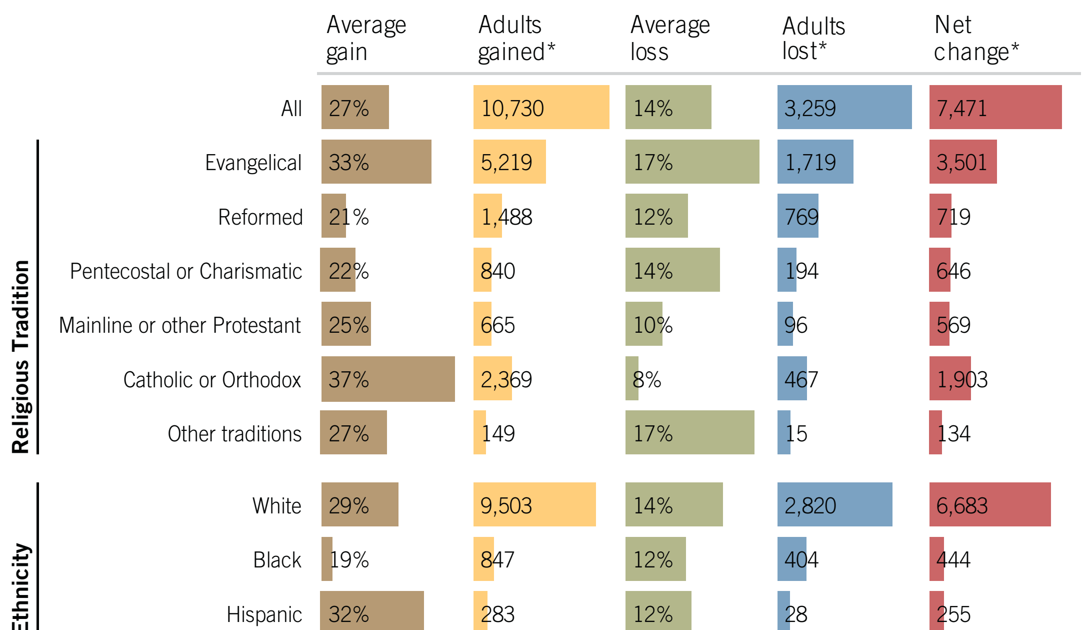
Figure 16 Congregational growth, Kent County vs. U.S.

Growth patterns

A fundamental measure of religious vitality among congregations is numerical growth. We asked religious leaders, "Compared with two years ago—that is, this time of year in 2005—has the number of regularly participating adults increased, decreased, or remained about the same?" As shown in **Figure 16**, almost half (48 percent) of the congregations reported increased adult participation, significantly more than the NCS-II national estimate of 42 percent. Black congregations were the most likely to report an increase (57 percent), followed by Hispanic congregations (52 percent). Among denominational families, a majority (59 percent) of Pentecostal congregations experienced an increase followed by just half (49 percent) of Evangelicals. Catholic or Orthodox congregations were least likely to report any increase (35 percent). The vast majority (82 percent) of those congregations that experienced increase reported growing by 10 percent or more over the last two years, while 18 percent of those that decreased did so by 10 percent or more.

We then asked for the actual percent of growth or decline experienced by those congregations that indicated an "increase" or "decrease" in growth in the last two years. **Figure 17** shows these figures and extrapolates the raw number of people implied by these estimates.[2] Among congregations reporting growth, the overall average was 27 percent increase, while congregations reporting a decline averaged 13 percent decrease. Hispanic congregations reported the largest percentages of growth, with an average 32 percent growth rate, followed by White congregations at an average of 20 percent, and Black congregations with an average of 19 percent growth. Though least likely to report an increase, the 13 Catholic and Orthodox congregations that did grow also reported the highest average growth rate. One Evangelical congregation reported adding 1,500 adults over two years, accounting for a sizeable proportion of the total.

Catholics and Hispanics reported greater average percentage growth, Evangelicals more growth in absolute numbers



** net change in participating adults implied by percent change*

Figure 17 Growth and decline in participating adults by religious tradition and primary ethnicity, Kent County

Staffing

In addition to the main religious leaders or principal pastors, most congregations have additional staff that assist with management and mission work. We asked key leaders to identify how many people currently work in their congregations as full-time paid staff, as part-time paid staff, and as volunteers. A total of 1,619 full-time paid staff were reported, with an average of 2.8 full-time paid staff per congregation. That figure is almost one additional full-time person per congregation more than the national estimate of 1.93 from NCS-II.

Figure 18 breaks down full-time staff by primary congregational ethnicity. Given the smaller membership base among African American and Hispanic congregations, it is not surprising that the majority of Black and Hispanic congregations (54 percent and 65 percent, respectively) do not have any full-time paid staff. Over half of all of the minority congregations in Kent County do not have a paid full-time religious leader.

Patterns in part-time staff are similar. Congregations reported a total of 2,371 part-time paid staff members, with an average of four per congregation. Half of congregations have six or more unpaid volunteers doing staff-equivalent work, with a total of 13,526 volunteers overall. Black and Hispanic congregations are more likely to have at least one unpaid "volunteer staffer" (93 and 95 percent, respectively) than White congregations (84 percent).

Few full-time staff in Black and Hispanic congregations

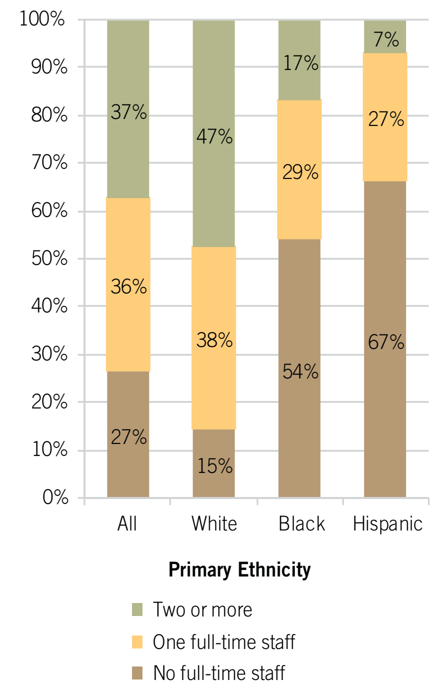


Figure 18 Full-time staff count by primary ethnicity

Financing the mission

Finances are an important dimension of organizational stability. Confidentially, we asked our respondents about budgets, revenues and expenditures from a variety of angles. Eighty-four percent of congregations reported having a written annual budget; only 71 percent of Black and 54 percent of Hispanic congregations have written budgets, versus 91 percent of White congregations. Capacity-building for financial management could benefit 92 congregations without budgets. Such capacity is important not only for organizational efficiency, but also for accountability for donations from faithful members.

Kent County congregations are better funded than the national averages. The median Kent County congregation reported revenue from all sources as $180,000, compared to an NCS-II estimate of $90,000 for the median U.S. congregation. Of course, Kent County congregations are larger on average, and so would be expected to have greater revenues. But when we divide total revenue from individual contributions into the number of regularly participating adults, we learn that the median Kent County congregation receives $1,525 in contributions per adult participant, almost $300 more than the median U.S. congregation ($1,230 per NCS-II).[3]

Table 4 breaks down revenue figures by primary ethnicity. Black and Hispanic congregations are smaller and poorer, but taken together they command almost $15 million in total annual revenue. The median Black congregation receives $1,154 per regular adult participant, compared to $995 for Hispanic congregations and $1,667 for White congregations.

Minority congregations are poor but generous

	Total income from all sources, $			*Individual donations per regular adult participant, $*	
Ethnicity	**Mean**	**Median**	**Total**	**Mean**	**Med.**
White	498,979	250,000	193,104,908	1,861	1,667
Black	163,470	70,000	11,606,373	1,750	1,154
Hispanic	71,391	30,500	3,141,225	1,219	995
All	405,958	180,000	209,068,306	1,770	1,525

Table 4 Total income and contributions per adult participant by primary ethnicity

Hispanic congregations struggle most with stability

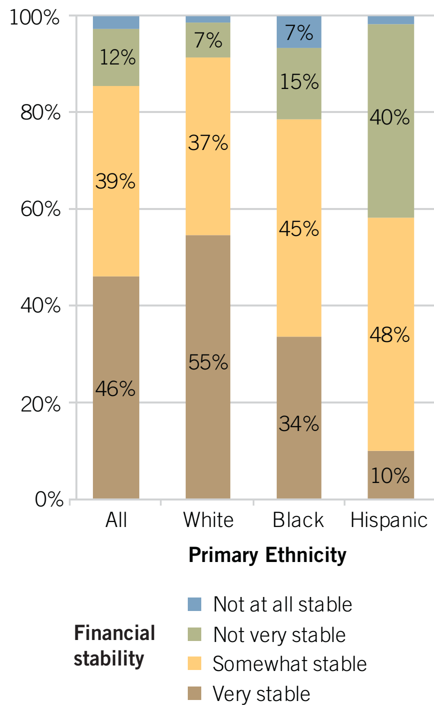


Figure 19 Perceived financial stability by primary ethnicity

Financial stability

Alongside the raw numbers, we asked religious leaders for a subjective judgment of their financial stability. As shown in **Figure 19**, most either described their congregations' finances as "very stable" (46 percent) or "somewhat stable" (39 percent). Just 3 percent were "not at all stable." Among Black congregations, 79 percent were very or somewhat stable, falling to just 58 percent of Hispanic congregations.

Endowments, savings accounts and other reserves play a role in the stability of a congregation. Over six in ten congregations (65 percent) indicated having "an endowment, savings account or other reserve fund;" therefore, just over a third do not have such funds. A significant majority of Mainline and Catholic congregations are likely to have endowment, savings accounts or other reserve funds (82 and 81 percent, respectively). Sixty-four percent of Evangelical and 61 percent of Reformed congregations have such funds. Only half (51 percent) of Pentecostals have such funds. Sixty-three percent of Black congregations have such funds (close to the overall average), but just 41 percent of Hispanic congregations do.

Charitable giving patterns

The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University estimates that Americans gave over $88 billion to religious institutions in 2004, representing over 35 percent of all charitable contributions. Congregations receive the lion's share of those funds and use some of them to support local, domestic and international outreach, mission and service activities.

Since denominational bodies are often a vehicle for charitable efforts, we asked congregational leaders to tell us first about any giving to a denomination or convention in their last fiscal year.

Local budget proportions are largest among Catholics, other traditions and Blacks

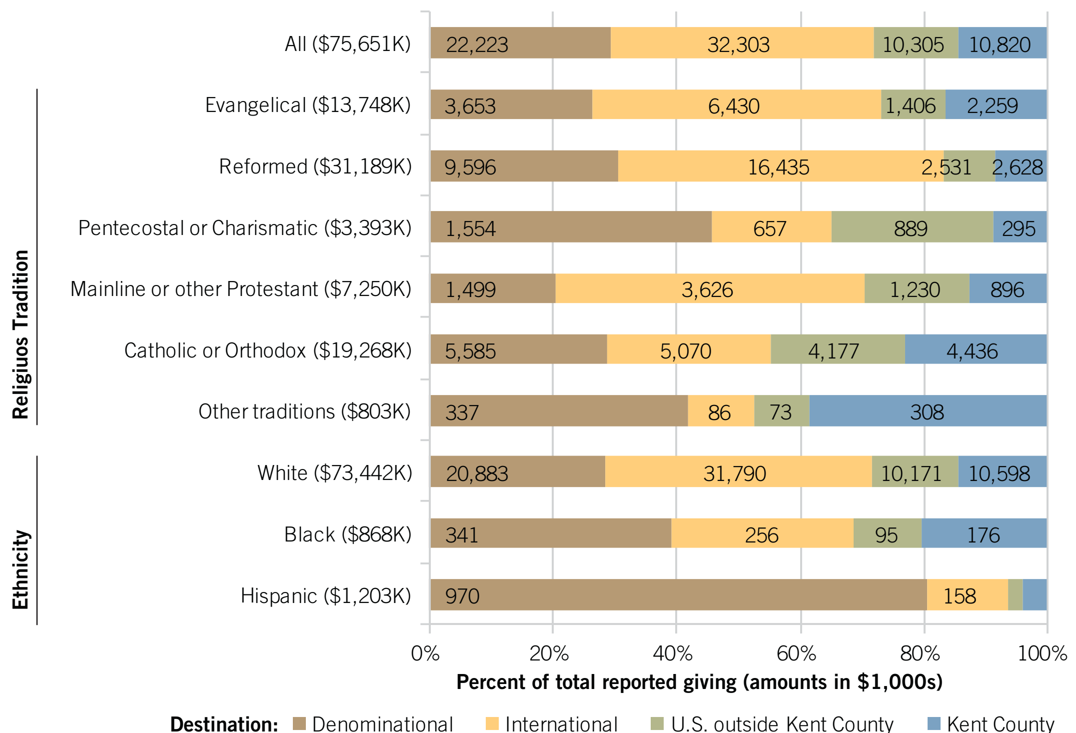


Figure 20 Congregational giving totals by religious tradition and primary ethnicity

Then we asked about giving to projects, individual missionaries, aid workers, outreach, missions, relief or development work in each of three geographies: international, U.S. outside Kent County, and in Kent County. In some important cases (especially Roman Catholic parishes), such expenses are channeled primarily through denominational or other higher bodies, so it is necessary to take the geographic numbers with some caution. About three in four congregations supported a denomination or convention. Eight in ten congregations gave internationally, two in three gave to non-local domestic projects, and seven in ten supported some Kent County outreach.

As illustrated in **Figure 20**, a total of $22,222,920 annually was transferred by congregations to denominations and conventions, or just under 30 percent of the $75,651,210 total from all four categories. The median congregation sent $12,000. Another $32.3 million was given to international work (median $10,000), $10.3 million to U.S. works outside Kent County (median $5,000), and $10.8 million (just over 14 percent) to projects and outreach inside Kent County (median $5,000).

Among religious traditions, Reformed congregations gave the lion's share of the total, with $31.2 million in total giving, or 41 percent of the total. They also gave the most, proportionally, to international ministry (53 percent), and the lowest proportion inside Kent County ($2.6 million, 8.4 percent). However, Reformed giving per capita[4] inside Kent County was about equal to the overall average of $73. The low proportion was due to extremely high levels of denominational and international spending ($270 and $462 per capita, respectively). Catholic and Orthodox congregations reported both the largest absolute amount ($4.4 million) and the largest share (23 percent) of giving inside Kent County, and also had the top-ranking per capita amount of $160. The "Other traditions" category is small, but spent nearly 40 percent locally.

Black congregations reported under $1 million in total giving on these measures, but spent an above-average 20 percent locally. Hispanic congregations' figures were skewed by relatively large denominational transfers by several congregations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Worship services abound

We asked religious leaders, "In a typical week, how many worship services does your congregation hold?" In a typical week, 1,581 worship experiences take place in these congregations, a total of 6,324 per month or 82,212 distinct worship events per year. On average, a typical Kent County congregation organizes 2.7 worship experiences per week, slightly less than the NCS-II national estimate of 2.9. It takes considerable effort and time to organize and execute such experiences, which usually include a formal presentation, music, reading of sacred text, and socializing with other believers.

Almost 40 percent worship at least three times a week

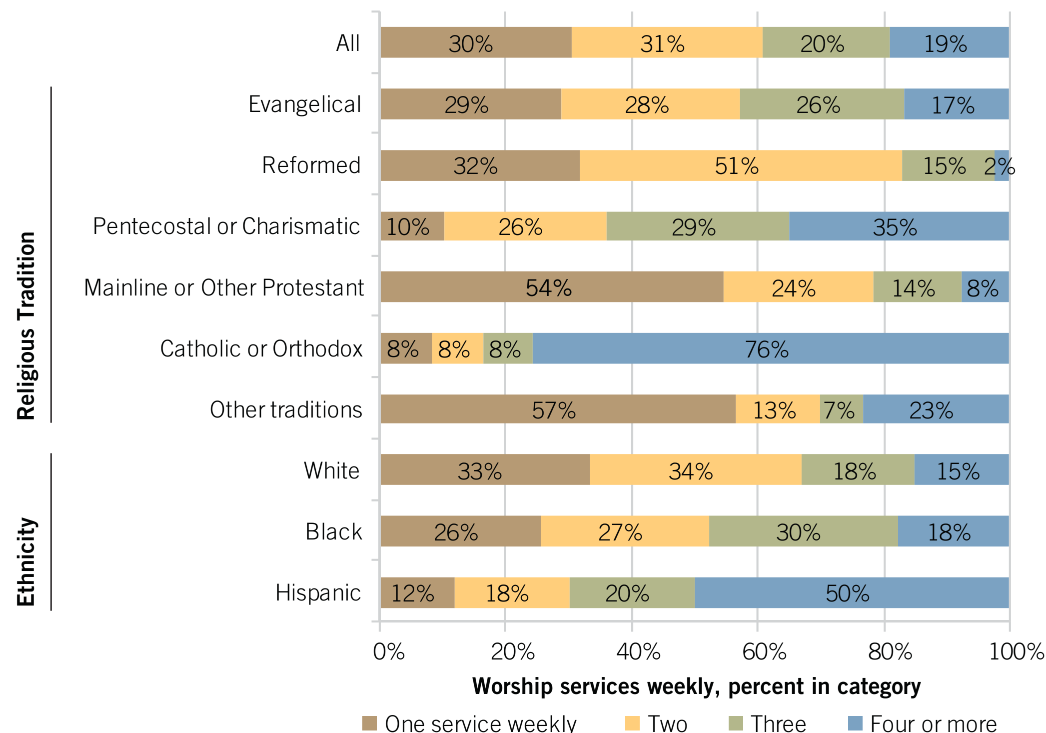


Figure 21 Weekly worship services by religious tradition and primary ethnicity

Worship services in Kent County take place in 28 different languages, reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity. At times multiple languages are spoken in the same congregation. Leaders reported that worship services are conducted in

English, Spanish, Arabic, Korean, Hebrew, sign language, Vietnamese and Latvian.

Dozens of congregations also use languages such as **Chinese**, **Dinka** and **Nuer** (Sudanese languages), **Ebonics**, **Farsi** (Persian), **French, Greek, Hindi, Italian,** "**Mim**" (an Indian dialect), **Q'anjob'al** (a Guatemalan Mayan dialect), **Romanian, Russian**, **Sanskrit**, **Swahili**, **Thai**, **Ukrainian** and **Urdu**.

A significant number of people attend these religious services. We asked leaders, "What was the total attendance, including both adults and children, at all of the worship services that took place this past weekend, including services on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday?" The total attendance reported was 176,976, with an average of 305 people and a median of 130 people. (See **Figure 6** for a breakdown of weekend attendance by religious tradition.)

How often a congregation meets to experience worship differs significantly according to its religious tradition and primary ethnic background. **Figure 21** (previous page) shows that Catholic and Orthodox congregations hold the most frequent services (76 percent hold four or more per week), followed by Pentecostals and Charismatics (35 percent hold four or more). Over half of Mainline and other Protestant congregations and a third of Reformed congregations hold only one service per week.

A third of all White congregations meet only once a week, compared to a quarter of Black and an eighth of Hispanic congregations. White congregations are more likely to have two worship experiences on their Sabbath day than are Black or Hispanic congregations. Notably, minority congregations are most likely to meet three or more times a week. About half (48 percent) of African American congregations and over two-thirds (70 percent) of Hispanic congregations meet three or more times per week. The most notable finding is the number of worship experiences taking place in Hispanic congregations. Half hold *four* or more worship experiences per week. Yet of the 30 Hispanic leaders reporting four or more services per week, 12 were bi-vocational—making Hispanic congregation leaders very busy, but dedicated, individuals.

Religious education for all ages

One of the important functions of congregations of all religious traditions is nurturing religious values and traditions in younger generations. Providing religious education to children of all age groups—sometimes called Sunday School, Sabbath School or Catechesis—is central to the mission of many congregations. Religious education programs often take place on a weekly basis before or after the main worship experience. They involve many volunteers as leaders and mentors who function as music directors, story tellers and models of proper behavior. For many leaders, their responsibilities extend outside of the congregation's walls, involving outings, camping trips, or social or recreational activities which are all designed to provide positive experiences for children.

The majority of Kent County congregations have religious education programming for their youth ranging from toddlers to teens.

Religious education is offered for most groups, but young adults lag

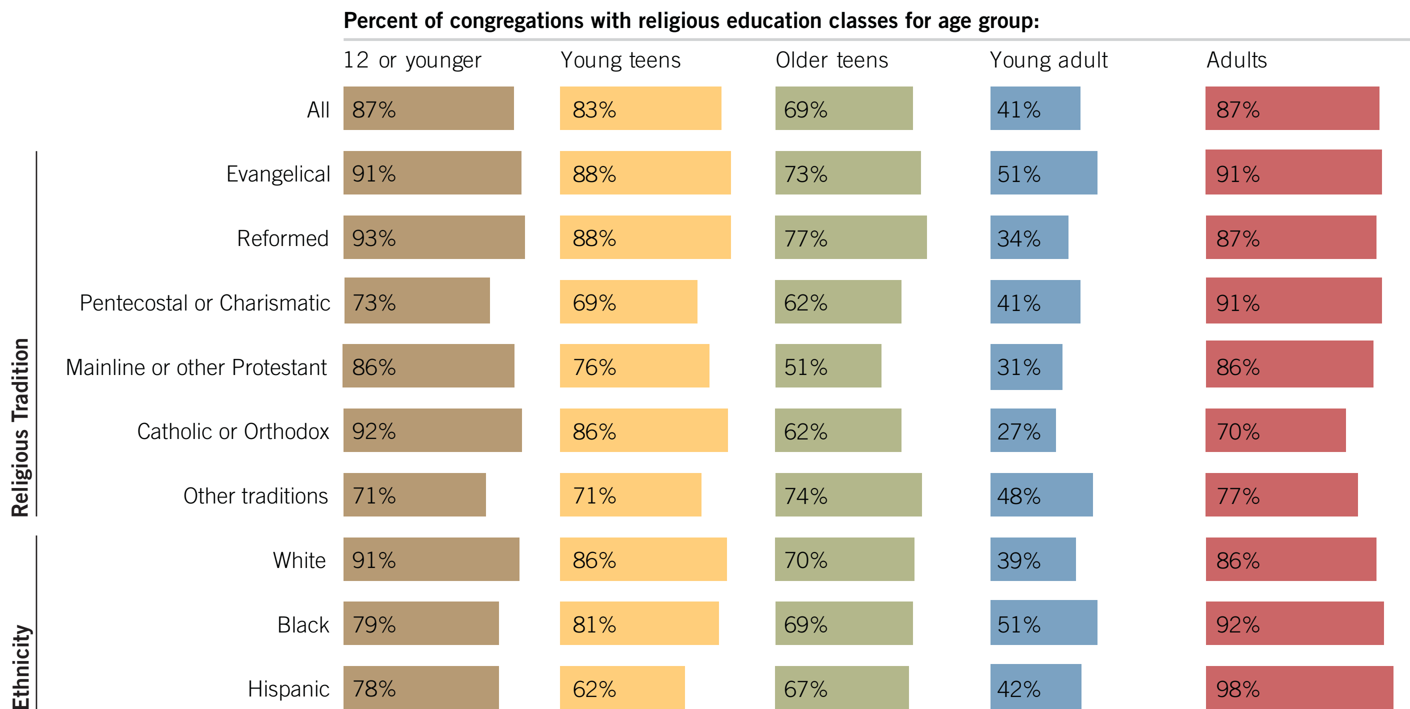


Figure 22 Religious education offerings by age group, religious tradition and ethnicity

(See **Figure 22.**) However, the older the children are, the less religious education programming is provided. For example, 31 percent of congregations do not provide religious education to teens between the critical ages of 15 to 19. Even more, 59 percent, do not provide programming for college-age young people. Religious education resumes for adults in 87 percent of congregations.

The lack of religious education targeted to college-age adults may be a contributing factor to decline in attendance in some congregations. Of those that reported such education, 55 percent reported growth, compared to 43 percent of those without college-age education.

Figure 22 highlights important differences across the denominational families and ethnicities. Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations are least likely to provide religious education programming for young children and young teens. Mainline and other Protestant congregations were least likely to provide religious programming for older teens. Reformed congregations provide the most educational programming for their members with the exception of college-age young people, where only 34 percent provide religious education programming for that age bracket. Among Catholics, most congregations educate young children and young teens, but coverage drops for older teens to 62 percent and dramatically falls to 27 percent for college-age young people. Evangelicals, like the Reformed tradition, have high levels of religious education programming, and are most likely to offer programming for college-age young people (51 percent).

Religious education is provided similarly across congregations of all ethnic groups, but there are differences worth noting. Among children age 12 and younger, Black and Hispanic congregations are somewhat less likely than White congregations to provide religious education. Almost four in ten Hispanic congregations don’t provide any religious education programming to young teens. College-age young people do not receive a lot of attention from any ethnic group, but Black congregations lead the way with 51 percent reporting programming.

Children at Madison Square Church, Grand Rapids

5 SOCIAL COMPOSITION AND THEOLOGY

Congregations are social organizations where diverse people voluntarily associate to exercise their religious commitments, strengthen their beliefs, and contribute through their time, talent and resources to the mission of the organization. Congregations as volunteer organizations are socially structured around educational, ethnic, age, ethnic and social economic lines.[1]

In this chapter, we explore the social characteristics of congregations such as age, gender, education and social class. We show how congregations from different ethnic backgrounds and denominational families differ according to these social characteristics. In addition, we explore the mission orientation of congregations—whether they focus on fostering individual morality or social justice. We then explore how congregations view the Bible, and where they fall on a theological continuum, from conservative to moderate to liberal.

We asked interviewees a series of questions that measure the social composition of the congregations such as social economic status, gender, educational levels, theological perspectives and ethnic composition. They were asked specifically about regular adult participants and the estimated percentage (or actual number) of participants who fall into specific categories. We asked, for example, "What percentage of the regular adult participants would you say are female?" "What percent have four-year college degrees?" These questions helped us to estimate, for example, how many participants live in the same neighborhood where the congregation is located, the gender breakdown of the majority of people attending congregations, and class and racial differences. Are certain social classes more likely to attend some congregations over others? Where do college graduates congregate? **Table 5** documents the average of leaders' estimated percentages in each category.

In this chapter

- *The average congregation reports 43 percent of its adults have four-year college degrees.*
- *Compared to White congregations, Black and Hispanic congregations average about three to four times the proportion of people with incomes under $25,000.*
- *A focus on individual morality usually takes precedence over a focus on social justice, even among congregations where theological liberals are in the majority.*

Gender and age

Women's participation in Kent County congregations is significant. As shown in the first cell at upper left of **Table 5**, the average congregation county-wide has regular adult participants who are about 59 percent female. The colors show highs and lows. Among religious traditions, Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations reported the highest average percent female at 67 percent, while the Other traditions category was lowest at 54 percent. Among ethnicities, Black congregations had the highest female proportion at 71 percent, while White congregations averaged lowest with 57 percent. Six percent of congregations are more than half male; 26 percent are evenly split.

Ethnic minority congregations attract a younger population than White congregations. Leaving the reader to follow along in **Table 5**, we can note that Mainline and White congregations reported the highest proportions of participants over 60 years old, while Pentecostal and Hispanic congregations, respectively, reported the lowest. Of course, this pattern is exactly reversed for the percentage under 35 years of age.

Female congregants abound, education is needed, income varies widely

What percentage of the regular adult participants would you say [are/have]… **Average percent**	All	Religious Tradition: Evangelical	Reformed	Pentecostal or Charismatic	Mainline or Other Protestant	Catholic or Orthodox	Other traditions	Primary Ethnicity: White	Black	Hispanic
female	59	58	57	67	60	58	54	57	71	62
over 60 years old	25	21	28	12	39	34	19	29	16	10
under 35 years old	32	33	30	40	23	35	26	28	36	49
four-year college degrees	34	31	43	14	43	40	46	42	16	11
college students	8	8	8	7	8	6	7	7	9	7
household income:										
under $25,000	26	27	17	43	21	24	24	16	43	67
over $100,000	10	8	12	3	12	16	19	12	5	1
attend worship every week	74	75	76	78	66	66	72	73	78	73
live in the neighborhood	43	43	41	38	47	46	48	45	37	40
White and non-Hispanic	69	67	89	27	81	83	64	92	11	9
Black or African American	17	21	5	35	13	2	15	4	84	2
Hispanic or Latino	12	10	3	38	4	11	11	3	3	93
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	3	3	1	3	5	5	2	1	0
new converts or previously not religious	16	21	11	19	11	8	22	14	23	24
theologically:										
conservative	59	68	60	70	37	38	34	59	47	74
moderate	28	24	29	20	39	46	34	29	29	17
liberal	13	10	11	10	25	15	27	12	24	7

colors mark highs and lows within column groups for each row

Table 5 Average congregation's percentage of 16 social composition categories

“People need to understand that justice is important to God, just as much as morality.”

–pastor of a Kent County congregation

Social class distribution

The religious leaders interviewed report that, on average, 34 percent of their members have a four-year college degree. (See the “four-year college degrees” row of **Table 5.**) Congregations in the “Other traditions” group have the highest average rate of college-educated members at 46 percent, followed by the Reformed and Mainline traditions with 43 percent. Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations have the lowest average rate at 14 percent. White congregations average 41 percent college-educated participants, while Hispanic and Black congregations are almost four times less likely to have college-educated members (11 percent and 16 percent, respectively).

Black and Hispanic congregations have higher proportions of individuals and families who are low-income, defined here as earning less than $25,000 annually. Poverty levels are significantly higher among Hispanic congregants than any other group in Kent County. The average Hispanic congregation reports two-thirds of regular adult participants earning less than $25,000 and just 1 percent earning $100,000 or more per year. The average primarily Black or African-American congregation reports 42 percent earning less than $25,000 and only 5 percent earning $100,000 or more. The socioeconomic story is dramatically different in predominantly White congregations where, on average, 12 percent of the members earn over $100,000 and only 16 percent of the members earn under $25,000.

Pentecostals have the highest average proportion of members who earn less than $25,000 a year (43 percent) and average only 3 percent of earners over $100,000. Reformed and Mainline denominations have the lowest levels of poor people in their congregations (17 percent and 21 percent, respectively). At the highest-earning levels, congregations from the “Other traditions” group have the highest average proportion of over $100,000 earners at 16 percent, followed by Reformed and Mainline congregations averaging 12 percent.

Kids wait for youth group at Brown Hutcherson Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI

Living in the neighborhood

Congregations are truly community institutions. By and large, Kent County congregation members live close to their places of worship. And 55 percent of responding religious leaders in Kent County say they personally live in the neighborhood[2] in which their congregations are located. As for participants, at the average congregation, 43 percent of regularly participating adults live in the congregation's neighborhood. (See the "live in the neighborhood" row of **Table 5**.) About half of the members from Mainline denominations live in the same neighborhood as their congregation. Catholics follow with 46 percent of their members. The denominational group least likely to live in the same neighborhood where they worship is Pentecostals, with 38 percent of members at the average congregation living in the same neighborhood. Ethnic groups differ little, though the average Black congregation's percentage (37 percent) is lower than the overall average.

Though there is relatively little variation in averages across traditions and ethnicities, there is plenty of variation within groups—99 "commuter congregations" (17 percent) report that fewer than 10 percent of their participants live nearby, while 76 "neighborhood congregations" (13 percent) report that 90 percent or more live nearby. Both these commuter and neighborhood categories include congregations of all sizes and types.

The theological spectrum

All congregations adopt particular theological perspectives informed by their religious tradition—whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish—or, for Christians, by their denominational heritage, be it Reformed, Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal or Mainline. Theological ideology can determine a lot about a congregation, influencing aspects such as whether women are allowed leadership positions within congregations, or whether they focus primarily on individual morality or on social justice.[3]

We asked leaders to tell us what proportions of their regular adult participants were theologically conservative, moderate or liberal. (See the "theologically:" rows of **Table 5**.) The overall averages were 59 percent conservative, 28 percent moderate and 13 percent liberal. Pentecostal congregations averaged the most conservative, at 70 percent, while the "Other traditions" group was least conservative and most liberal, followed closely by Mainline congregations on both counts. Catholic congregations were most likely to report relatively high proportions of theologically moderate members.

Among ethnic groups, Hispanic leaders defined their congregations as by far the most conservative, averaging 74 percent. Black leaders saw their congregations as the least conservative at 47 percent and

Priority for social justice is a minority position, even among liberal-majority congregations

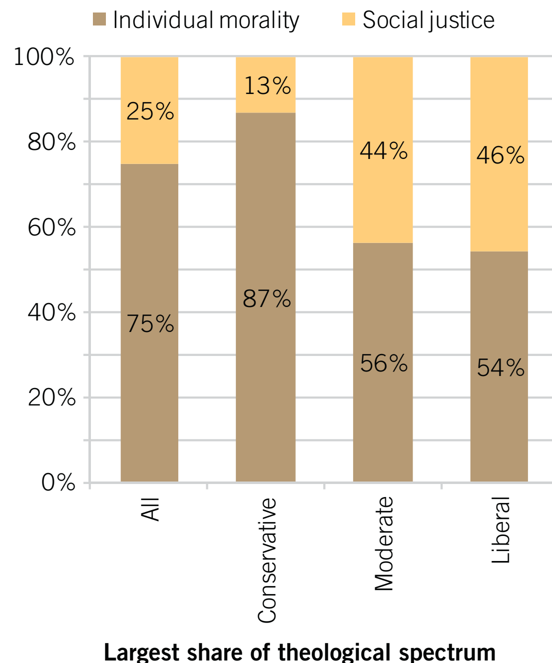
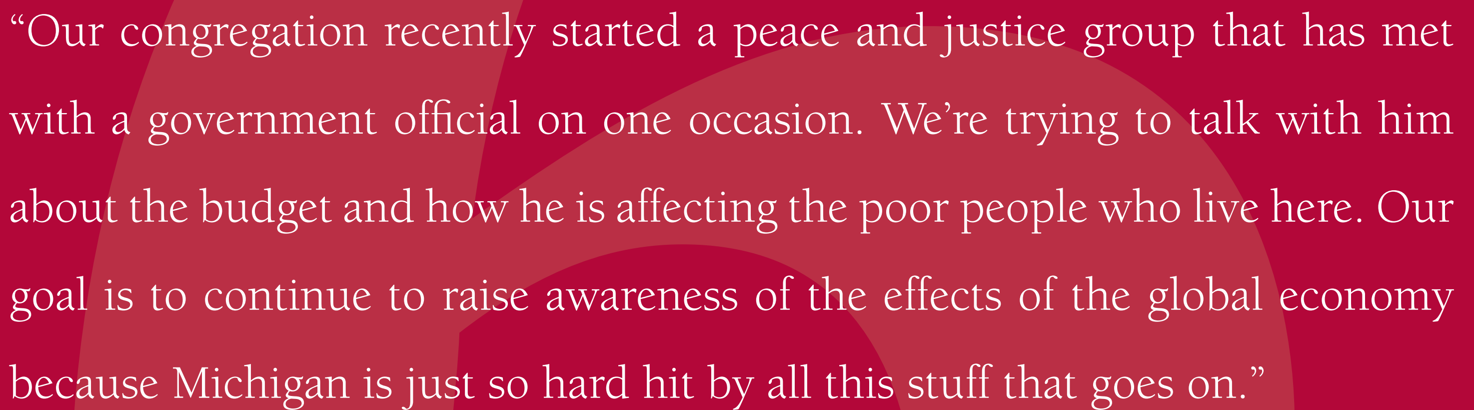


Figure 23 Priority for individual morality or social justice, by theological ideology

the most liberal at 24 percent, while White leaders reported their congregations as including 29 percent moderates, on average.

Figure 23 shows the relationship between theological leanings in the congregation and the leader's perception of whether the congregation (not just the leader alone) prefers to focus on individual morality or social justice. Theological ideology does make a significant difference in a congregation's general orientation. Overall, three-quarters of responding leaders said their congregation favors a focus on individual morality, with a corresponding one-quarter minority favoring social justice first. Where conservatives were the largest share of participants, 87 percent favor individual morality; where liberals were the largest group, a focus on social justice is still less likely at 46 percent. About 11 percent of leaders, relatively evenly distributed across groups, preferred not to choose between these two categories.



"Our congregation recently started a peace and justice group that has met with a government official on one occasion. We're trying to talk with him about the budget and how he is affecting the poor people who live here. Our goal is to continue to raise awareness of the effects of the global economy because Michigan is just so hard hit by all this stuff that goes on."

—a female religious leader in Kent County

6 SOCIAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Religiously-motivated activism is a mainstay of American democracy.

Religion is a rich source of habits and actions that often lead to civic involvement.[1] The role of congregations in mobilizing civic and social engagement has been well documented. Robert Putnam argues that "faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America."[2] Recent research demonstrates the beneficial economic, educational and social impact of congregations in disadvantaged minority communities.[3] Studies have highlighted the importance of religion as a social safety net among Blacks[4] and immigrant communities.[5]

Congregations incubate and generate skills that can be transferred to broader civic life.[6] Congregants may lead a Bible study class, work with others in congregational committees, or contact government officials or nonreligious agencies about congregational issues. Sidney Verba and his colleagues found that religious attendance strongly influences social and civic involvement, particularly among minority communities. Latino and Black communities are resource-poor in education and finances, but congregations provide a critical context for developing and nurturing skills needed to engage in the broader community.[7]

This chapter explores the role that religious faith and congregations play in the civic life of Kent County. We explore the relationship between religion and civic involvement among Kent County residents, examine the unique contribution that religious involvement makes in the civic lives of citizens, and consider the role of civic engagement among religious leaders and their congregations. Finally, we examine the willingness of leaders to engage in efforts to improve the quality of life in their community.

In this chapter

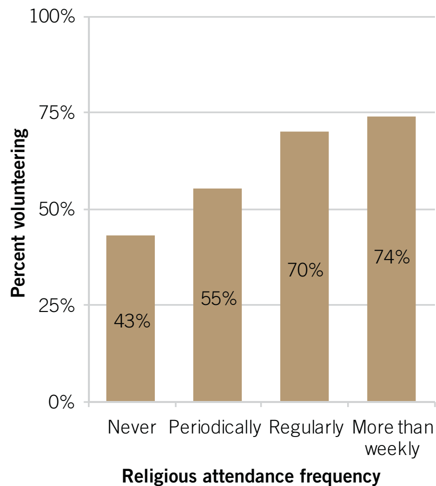
- *Religious attendance is strongly associated with volunteering.*
- *Leaders spent time worth $8.8 million annually in service to community and social needs.*
- *Leaders say 261 full-time staff and 441 part-time staff are assigned primarily to community service.*
- *Over 19,000 educators and health care professionals are regular participants at congregations.*
- *Ninety-two percent of leaders expressed willingness to engage in community-wide collaboration.*

Volunteer recruitment

One way that religious institutions contribute to community well-being is by mobilizing volunteers. According to Putnam, religious volunteering represents as much as 50 percent of the total volunteering that takes place in the United States, and it is the primary source of volunteers in the poorest communities.[8] We have some local confirmation of these findings from the Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (GGRCS; see **Chapter 1** and **Appendix A** for details). As shown in **Figure 24** (following page), Kent County residents who attended religious services "more than weekly" were 31 percentage points more likely to report volunteer work than those who say they never attend.

It's not surprising that religious attendance should yield volunteering: 92 percent of religious leaders answered in the affirmative to our question, "In the last 12 months, have people at worship services been told of opportunities to volunteer to provide assistance for people outside your congregation who are in need?"

Frequent attenders are more likely to volunteer



Source: GGRCS 2006

Figure 24 Percent of Kent County residents volunteering, by frequency of religious attendance

Leaders' involvement in civic affairs and meeting needs

It is one thing to announce opportunities to engage in service and another to engage in such service yourself. Are religious leaders engaged in their communities, either by participating in organizations or by providing direct support to individuals in need? To find answers to the first part of that question, we asked religious leaders from Kent County how many hours a week they spend participating in civic affairs or community organizations. Individually, religious leaders spend an average of 3.5 hours a week participating in various civic-related events or serving in community organizations—a collective total of 1,951 hours a week (**Table 6**). It would take almost 50 full-time employees on our community payroll to substitute for what religious leaders contribute to various civic and community organizations. Clearly, Kent County religious leaders provide important services and assets to organizations, including leadership skills, knowledge of the community, moral vision, charisma and networks.

Minority communities, whose voices are often underrepresented within civic and community organizations, are particularly aided by clergy engagement. **Table 6** shows differences between ethnicities. Black religious leaders dedicate almost twice as much time as the average leader, 6.8 hours per week, to civic affairs or community organizations. These findings are consistent with other time management studies of clergy, which found that on average Black pastors spend 23 hours more per week than do White pastors (72 hours vs. 49 hours, respectively) in various ministry tasks.[9] The level of commitment demonstrated by Black clergy is remarkable, especially since they receive lower salaries and have fewer benefits than their White counterparts.

To get a sense of how leaders directly serve individuals who may or may not be members of their congregations, we also asked, "How many hours per week do you personally spend helping people with social needs?" Social needs were defined as "any assistance to find food, clothing or shelter, provide transportation or child care, negotiate the legal system, obtain work or training, and so forth." Leaders are nearly twice as likely to spend time helping people with their social needs as with civic affairs or in community organizations. The leaders we interviewed, on average, spend 6.9 hours a week helping people with social needs. Collectively, they spent 3,939 hours per week supporting and helping individuals in need.

Clergy, especially Black clergy, contribute significant time to community welfare

		Civic affairs or community organizations		Personally help meeting needs			*Monetary estimates*	
Leaders' hours per week	**Count**	**Mean**	**Total**	**Mean**	**Total**	**Total hours weekly**	**Annual value ($30/hour, 50 weeks)**	**Value per leader per year**
White	413	2.8	1,118	4.9	2,000	3,118	$4,677,555	$11,326
Black	80	6.8	519	16.4	1,249	1,768	$2,651,250	$33,141
Hispanic	61	3.5	202	8.9	533	735	$1,107,750	$18,061
All	583	3.5	1,952	6.9	3,939	5,891	$8,836,305	$15,157

Table 6 Leadership hours per week in civic affairs, community organizations and meeting needs personally

When we examined the amount of time spent helping people in need by ethnicity and race, the differences were striking. Black leaders spend the most time helping people with their social needs, an average of 16.4 hours per week, followed by Hispanics at 8.9 hours per week. White leaders dedicate 4.9 hours weekly. As we reported earlier, a significant proportion of the members within Black and Hispanic congregations are poor and more likely to experience need.

Combining both kinds of clergy service activities (that is, working with organizations and helping individuals meet their social needs), we reach a total of 5,891 hours per week. Leaders spend two-thirds of this total giving direct, personal aid with social needs. At $30 an hour, it would cost $8.8 million per year to generate this service to the community. Clergy service is equivalent to an extra 147 full-time community workers dedicated to alleviating the social needs of individuals, paid by congregational resources alone. Further, we've calculated this contribution only for our informants, without considering members or additional staff at larger congregations, who also contribute many hours to serving the community.

Searching for work

Facilitating job opportunities, particularly in a state like Michigan, which suffers from the highest unemployment rate in the country, is of great importance to families. Few studies have sought to document the role that religious institutions and their leaders play in facilitating access to people in need to the labor market. To what degree are religious leaders involved in helping people get a job? We asked our interviewees to tell us if they "personally get involved in helping people from your congregation or parish find jobs?" Sixty-four percent said yes.

We then asked, "About how many people did you help find a job in the last 12 months?" The average response per leader was five people, with a maximum of 120 people. Collectively, the leaders helped a total of 1,892 people get a job in the previous year. Predictably, Black and Latino leaders averaged more than twice as many people helped (6.8 and 5.8 per year, respectively, versus 2.7 for White leaders).

The KCCS did not survey regularly attending adults about how many jobs they had helped others to find, but a related study of Latino congregations in Chicago did. They found that 61 percent of frequently attending Latino adults "sometimes" helped someone find a job, and 15 percent "often" did. Over a third of the 2,061 regularly attending adults in the Chicago study said they had received assistance from their congregation in getting a job. The Chicago findings suggest that congregation members are probably an important source of employment assistance for the poor here in Kent County as well.[10]

Assigned to community service

Another asset available within congregations is people, both paid workers and volunteers, who are primarily assigned to community service. Collectively, congregations in Kent County financially support 261 full-time and 441 part-time people who are assigned specifically to oversee community service efforts (**Table 7**). When we add the 4,470 volunteers to the mix, the total amount increases dramatically to 5,172 people from congregations that are participating in community service efforts.

Over 700 identifiable staff assigned to community service

Assigned primarily to community service	Average	Maximum	Sum
Full-time staff	0.5	20	261
Part-time staff	0.8	150	441
Volunteers	8.1	2,000	4,470
Total	9.3	2,170	5,172

Table 7 Congregational personnel and volunteers assigned to community service

Thousands of teachers and health care workers in the pews

	Educators			Health care workers		
	Mean	**Total**	**Per 1,000 adults**	**Mean**	**Total**	**Per 1,000 adults**
White	22.3	8,987	68.1	19.2	7,843	59.4
Black	5.6	506	57.1	4.1	366	41.3
Hispanic	2.6	155	36.1	1.5	86	20.0
All	17.2	9,741	66.1	14.7	8,400	57.0

Table 8 Educators and health care professionals by congregation's primary ethnicity

Professional human resources in education and health care

Congregations are primarily meeting places for worship and fellowship. They are also places where people of many backgrounds, education levels and social classes meet. Consistent with the overall interest of KCCS—to examine the role of congregations in the educational life of children—we asked religious leaders how many educators and health care professionals they estimated were members of their congregations. Knowing how many educators and health care professionals are members would give us more insight as to the internal resources potentially available to congregations to serve their communities.

Table 8 shows the number of health care professionals and educators by the ethnic/racial background of congregations. Our respondents estimated that there are 9,741 educators (teachers, school administrators and professors) who are members of Kent County congregations, an average of 17 per congregation. The total estimate of healthcare professionals (nurses, medical technicians, physicians, and so forth) who attend Kent County congregations is 8,400, an average of 15 per congregation.

Civic engagement and activism

While congregations are primarily organizations of worship,[11] we have demonstrated that they are also civic institutions that engage with other civic institutions and causes on a broad basis. We have just established that religious leaders spend a significant amount of time in civic-related activities and organizations. Now we investigate the level of direct contact that religious leaders have with civic and political leaders.

Political efficacy: a sense of influence

First, do religious leaders perceive "political efficacy," a sense that their congregations can be influential in the broader community? We asked religious leaders: "How much influence do you think a congregation or parish like yours can have over local or city government decisions?" A third of religious leaders indicated that their congregations' influence on their local or city government was "very little" or "none at all." Two-thirds felt that congregations could have an influence: 49 percent said that they had "some" influence, and 16 percent said "a lot."

We find significant differences when the ethnic or racial background of leaders is considered (**Figure 25**). Leaders of primarily Black congregations were the most likely to say that their congregations could have influence in their local civic government, with 28 percent saying "a lot," compared to 15 percent of leaders of White congregations and 10 percent of leaders of

Black leaders are most confident of influence, Hispanic leaders least so

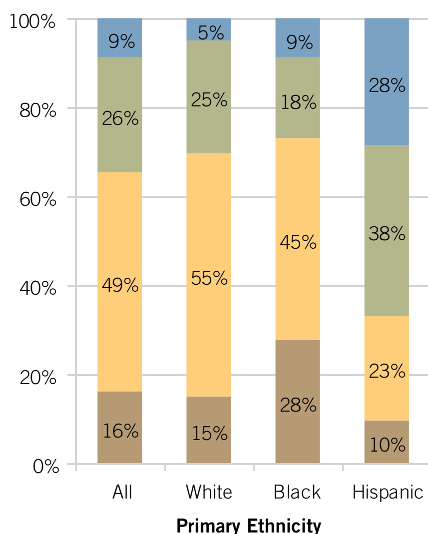


Figure 25 Political efficacy by primary ethnicity

Hispanic congregations. At the other extreme, pastors of Hispanic congregations were the most likely to say that their congregations had no influence, with 38 percent saying "very little" and a quarter of them saying "none at all."

Language limitation among Hispanic congregations likely restricts their ability to "influence local and city government." Leaders and their congregations are often monolingual Spanish speakers; 76 percent of the Hispanic leaders in our study responded in Spanish, 86 percent of their congregations conduct their worship in Spanish, and only 28 percent of their congregations use English in worship services.

Contacting public officials

Contacting public representatives is a first step in any civic engagement process. We asked religious leaders if, "as a religious leader," they had "contacted a public representative on the issues of concern to your congregation or parish and/or community." The majority of religious leaders (56 percent) indicated that they had contacted a public representative. Leaders of both White and Black congregations are similarly likely to contact public officials (60 and 61 percent, respectively), while only 31 percent of leaders of Hispanic congregations do so. Further differences were identified by the religious faith tradition of leaders. From most to least likely to contact public representatives, faith traditions order themselves as follows: Mainline, 77 percent; Catholic or Orthodox, 65 percent; Reformed, 59 percent; Evangelical, 53 percent; Other traditions, 47 percent; Pentecostal or Charismatic, 46 percent.

Which public representatives did religious leaders contact? **Figure 26** shows the distribution. State senators or representatives were most likely to be contacted by religious leaders, with 40 percent of all leaders saying that they have made contact. Black leaders were the most likely to contact all kinds of public officials except federal officials, whom a third of Whites contacted. Overall, Hispanics were less likely to contact public officials at any level.

We presented a list of reasons for contact: housing, public safety, neighborhood revitalization, city services, education, health care, jobs, public transportation, immigration, youth and foreign policy. The three top issues cited among the religious leaders who contacted public officials were education (13 percent), public safety (12 percent), and housing (12 percent). There were no significant differences between the groups for the issues of city services, public transportation and immigration. Black leaders were at least twice as likely as Whites and Hispanics to lobby on behalf of all issues (housing, public safety, neighborhood revitalization, education, health care, jobs and youth), with the exception of foreign policy.

Protests and marches

When critical issues arise in the community, religious leaders and congregations sometimes engage in collective protests to call attention to an injustice or a cause worthy of public demonstration. We asked leaders: "In the last 12 months, have there been any groups or meetings or classes or events specifically to organize or participate in a demonstration or march either in support of or opposition to some public issue or policy?" Of the 583 leaders interviewed, 110 or 19 percent indicated that they had organized or participated in a demonstration or march in the last year. Although the

State representatives are most likely to hear from leaders

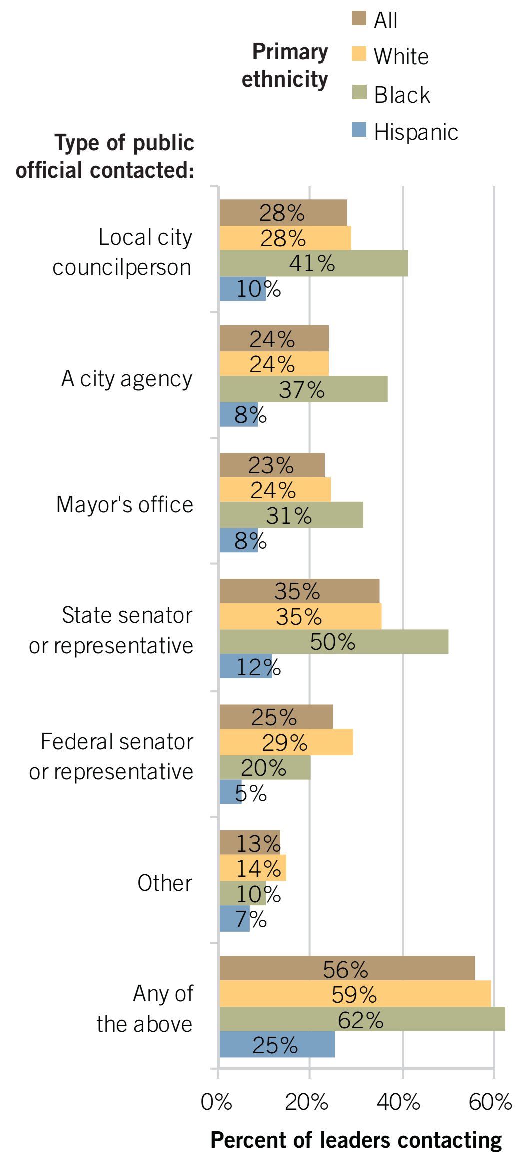


Figure 26 Types of public officials contacted by religious leaders, grouped by congregation's primary ethnicity

numbers of those protesting are small, those most likely to get involved in a demonstration or march are leaders of Black congregations (35 percent), followed by Hispanic congregations (30 percent) and White religious leaders (14 percent).

Topping the list of issues that spurred demonstrations were: violence in the community (39 mentions); immigration (28 mentions); abortion (26 mentions); hunger and health (three mentions); and poverty (two mentions).

> "The new thing that I see being established in our ministry is teaching a total balance to life, from education, to government, to making our people more aware of the society they live in, instead of just within the four walls that they come to on a Sunday or Wednesday, to make them more aware of their life."
>
> *–an African American leader in Grand Rapids*

Would you collaborate to benefit the community?

The emerging portrait of congregations in Kent County so far is that of leaders and congregants who are civically engaged and making a significant contribution to the quality of life in our community. Is there an interest in doing even more to serve and support the community?

Social scientists use the term "collective efficacy" to mean the level of trust and closeness experienced by a community and its willingness to engage in collective action for the common good.[12] Accordingly, we were interested in whether Kent County congregational leaders were "interested and willing...to engage in community-wide collective efforts to improve the community's well-being." The majority (60 percent) of the leaders said that they would be "very interested;" just 3 percent said "not at all interested." **Figure 27** documents the distribution of responses.

Leaders of Black congregations, at 88 percent, were the most likely to say "very interested," followed by leaders of White (55 percent) and Hispanic congregations (53 percent). Seventy-three percent of Mainline leaders said that they would be "very interested" in engaging in community-wide collective efforts to improve the community's well-being, followed by Pentecostals or Charismatics (70 percent), Reformed (62 percent), Other traditions (60 percent), Evangelicals (53 percent), and Catholics or Orthodox (46 percent). As one might expect, urban congregations are substantially more likely than their suburban counterparts to be "very interested" in community-wide collective efforts.

Joint service projects

A final way in which congregations pursue community-wide efforts to improve the community is to collaborate with other congregations in a service project or outreach ministry. Overall, almost half of all congregations (46 percent) collaborate with other congregations in a "joint human service project." Which congregations are more likely to collaborate? Half of all White congregations collaborate, while 42 percent of African American and only 28 percent of Hispanic congregations collaborate. On the other hand, the denominational family least likely to collaborate was Pentecostals, with only 29 percent saying that they collaborated with others. The most collaborative denominational family was the Reformed tradition, with 58 percent saying that they do "joint human service projects or outreach ministry" with other congregations in their community, followed by 54 percent of the Mainline tradition, 51 percent of the Catholic, and 41 percent of Evangelical congregations.

The will to collaborate is strong, especially in the inner city

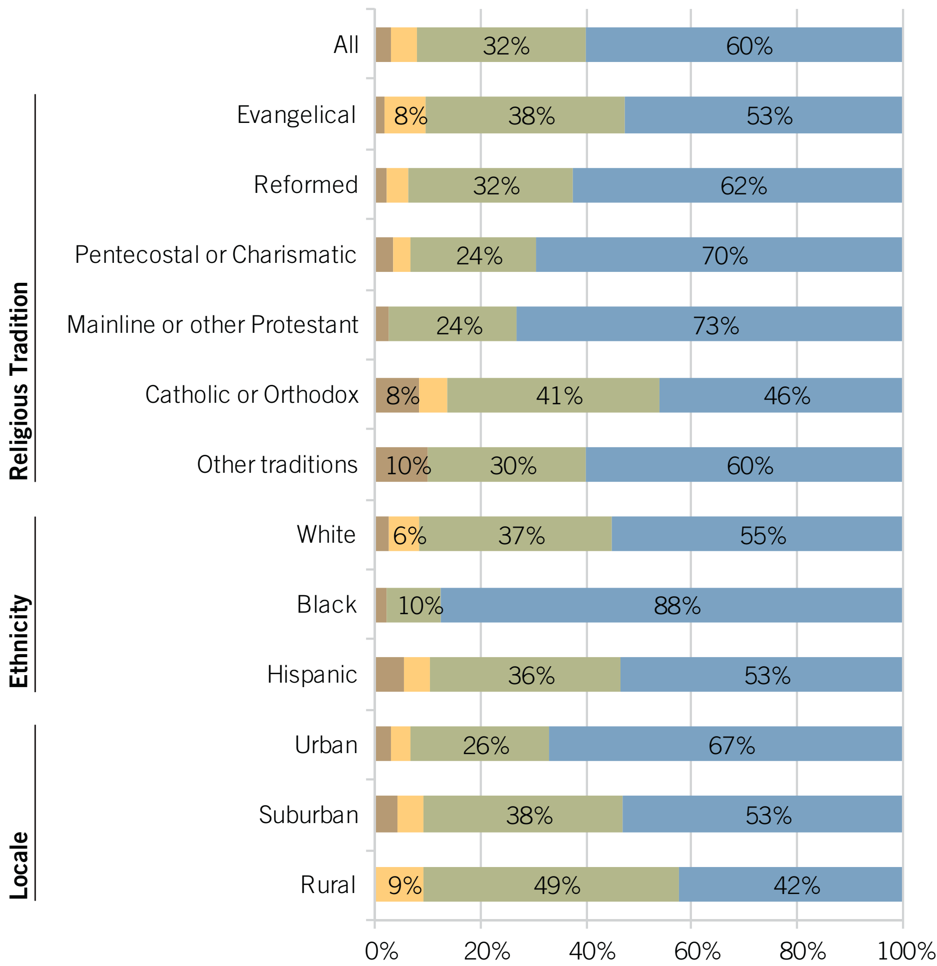


Figure 27 Willingness to collaborate for community well-being by religious tradition, ethnicity and locale

7

“We have an emerging vision to support public education and to find ways that we can ensure that the children who attend public school here will have as much of an opportunity to prosper financially, socially and politically as anyone else.”

—a Grand Rapids minister describing his vision for his congregation’s involvement in education

7 CONGREGATIONS AND EDUCATION

This chapter has three major parts. First, we review some prior research confirming that congregations provide poor families with invaluable educational resources, through the quality of relationships among peers, mentoring relationships with adults, extracurricular activities, and religious belief systems. Second, we use the 2006 Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey to explore the relationship between religion and education among the general population of adults. Third, we turn to Kent County Congregations Study data and explore congregations' activities with schools and children.

Prior research

Religion has been shown to play a significant positive role in the lives of young people. Half of American adolescents regularly participate in some kind of religious organization, making congregations potentially influential in the lives of youth.[1] Religious participation is associated with a wide range of positive developmental outcomes, such as improving psychological well-being, health-enhancing behaviors and reduction of delinquency and other high risk behaviors.[2]

We are particularly interested in whether religious participation improves educational outcomes for children. Recent research answers in the affirmative, particularly for minorities and those living in urban settings.[3] Nationwide research has found that religious involvement predicts greater educational expectations, higher standardized test scores, more time spent on homework, less truancy, and a lower likelihood of dropping out of high school.[4] Meanwhile, several studies suggest that religious involvement enhances education for particular groups of adolescents as well: higher academic achievement for minority children; greater verbal ability among girls; higher grades among rural teens; higher grades for immigrant children; and higher grades for Latino children.[5] Religious involvement may be particularly important to the educational lives of disadvantaged youth.[6] Religious effects on academic outcomes are greater among youth who live in urban areas and in high-poverty neighborhoods.[7]

A dense web of resources for youth

Congregational involvement provides young people with a dense web of relationships with adults and other children ("social capital"), which reinforces positive values. [8] The rich social context enhances educational skills and encourages learning and self-improvement.[9] Congregations provide children with opportunities to create friendships with peers who share a common outlook. Youth who are religiously involved are also more likely to be involved in positive extracurricular activities. As one high-achieving Latina stated:

Young adult education program at Iglesia Pentecostes Mi Ebenezer, Grand Rapids

In this chapter

- *Extensive prior research shows religious participation by children improves educational outcomes.*
- *Kent County residents approve both public schools' moral teaching and the idea of vouchers.*
- *Despite the need, just one-third of congregations report any involvement with public schools.*
- *Congregations sponsor a wide array of educational programs and supply 2,827 volunteers.*

"Growing up my mom always took me and my sister to church. [S]he always had us involved in youth groups [and] Sunday school and we went on trips with our church groups and that always helped me keep on a straight path." [10]

Congregations offer a vibrant array of extracurricular activities targeted at school-age children. These activities enhance learning, reinforce pro-social behaviors, strengthen peer networks and facilitate cross generational mentoring relationships. Activities include sports programs, reading clubs, visits to museums, music classes, camping events, swimming classes at the YMCA, spelling bees and community service activities.

Poor urban families are more likely to live in concentrated poor and segregated neighborhoods, have limited financial options for extracurricular activities, and have limited social interaction with people outside of their racial or social class.[11] Congregations, consequently, can provide poor families with the activities, resources and relationships that middle- and upper-class families often take for granted. Such assets can contribute to the academic achievement of their children, directly or indirectly.[12] Of particular importance are relationships with adult volunteers and mentors, who represent a wide variety of educational levels, labor skills, knowledge, life experiences and cultural outlooks.[13] Accordingly, congregations and religious belief systems help to construct in the lives of young people a protective canopy against oppositional culture and behavior such as gang membership, drug use and truancy. This helps urban youth develop a level of resiliency that allows them to resist harmful peer influences.[14]

Religious motivation for education

Religious content communicated in most congregations encourages educational ambition. Religious leaders often articulate a vision of the good life that includes personal achievement, responsibility for one's actions, preparation for greater service, and making good use of time. Educational programming such as catechism, Sabbath or Sunday school reinforces skills such as reading, memorization, acting through drama, and learning musical skills that can lead to increased academic achievement.[15] The benefits of religious involvement can be illustrated through the words of a high school student:

"Ever since I was in the ninth grade, I have been going to church regularly. I also sing in the church choir. The people at church have always been friendly and supportive of me. I feel like I really belong. I have also met a lot of people at church. I have a lot of friends from different backgrounds. I have Hispanic, White, Asian and Black friends. We all treat each other as friends and we keep each other in line. I really think going to church has helped me become a better student."[16]

A children's program at the United Jewish School in Grand Rapids

Religion and education among Kent County residents

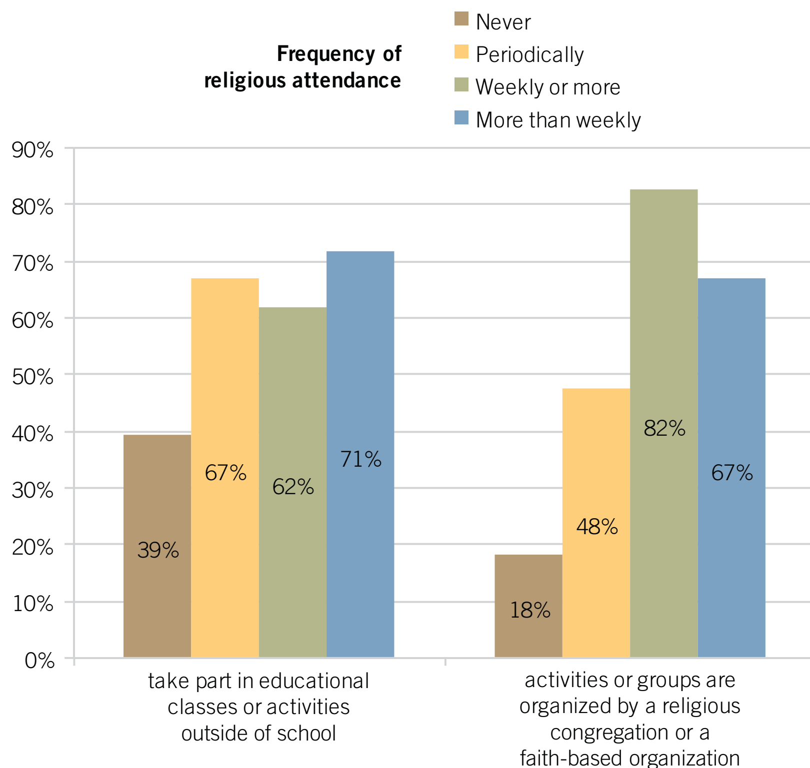
In 2006, the Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey (GGRCS) approached the topic of education through two routes: educational activities and attitudes toward schools.

Educational activities in general

The GGRCS measured educational activities by asking respondents if their children took part in educational classes or activities outside of school, and whether or not those activities were organized by a religious organization. Sixty percent of the 455 parents surveyed[17] reported that their children participated in educational activities. Two-thirds of these further reported that the educational activities were organized by a religious organization, meaning 40 percent of all parents reported at least some religious activities and only 20 percent reported only non-religious activities.

A marked difference exists between those who never attend religious services and those who do attend services periodically in regards to their child's participation in educational activities (**Figure 28**). The GGRCS found that 71 percent of parents who attended a religious service more than once weekly in the previous year said that their children participated in educational activities outside of school, and two-thirds of those parents said the activities were organized by a religious organization. At the other end of the spectrum, just 39 percent of parents who never attended a religious service in the last year said that their children participated in educational activities outside of school, and only 18 percent of that group said the activities were organized by a religious organization.

Children of frequent religious attenders do more activities outside school



Source: GGRCS 2006

Figure 28 Children of residents' religious and non-religious educational activities outside school by religious service attendance

More White parents say they read to their children daily

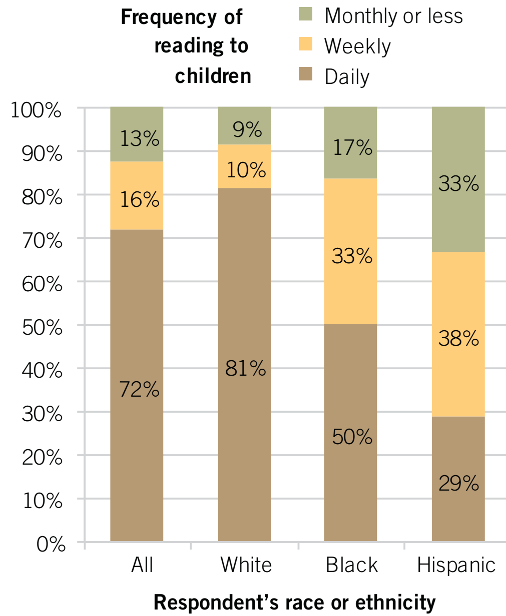


Figure 29 Frequency of parents' reading to children by ethnicity

Strong approval of public school morality

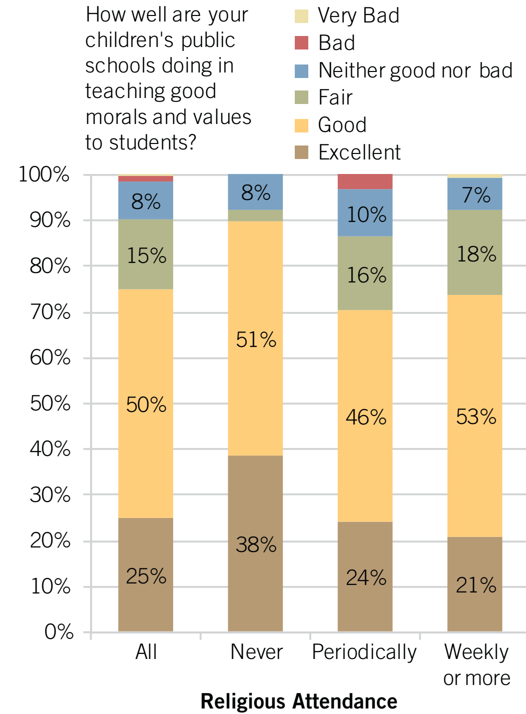


Figure 30 Parents' evaluation of public school teaching of morals by religious attendance

Reading to children

The GGRCS survey also assesseed of the relationship between how often parents read to their children and their racial and ethnic categories. White parents were significantly more likely to read to their children on a daily basis than did parents in other racial or ethnic categories. As shown in **Figure 29**, 81 percent of White parents reported reading to their children daily, compared to 50 percent of African American parents, 31 percent of Hispanic parents, and 71 percent of parents of other races or ethnicities. Although White respondents reported that they read to their children significantly more often than did other races, the difference may be due entirely to other factors such as income levels and literacy rates. No statistical differences were discovered between those who attend religious services and those who do not, so we cannot say whether religious attendance has an effect on how often parents read to children.

Educational outreach by congregations

In the GGRCS, congregational educational outreach was measured by whether or not a respondent's congregation was involved in organized efforts to improve schools and education. Overall, 61 percent of respondents in Kent County reported that their congregation was involved in organized efforts to improve children's education, including mentoring, tutoring, reading and so forth. Twenty-five percent reported that their congregation was not involved in any of these activities, and 14 percent either did not know or did not respond. Christians were significantly more likely to report involvement in educational outreach than were other religions. Among Christians, 78 percent of Catholics reported that their congregation was involved in educational activities, as did 77 percent of Mainline Protestants, 69 percent of Black Protestants, 64 percent of Evangelicals, and 68 percent of other Christians. There were no major differences among respondents by ethnicity.

Vouchers favored by majorities across the board

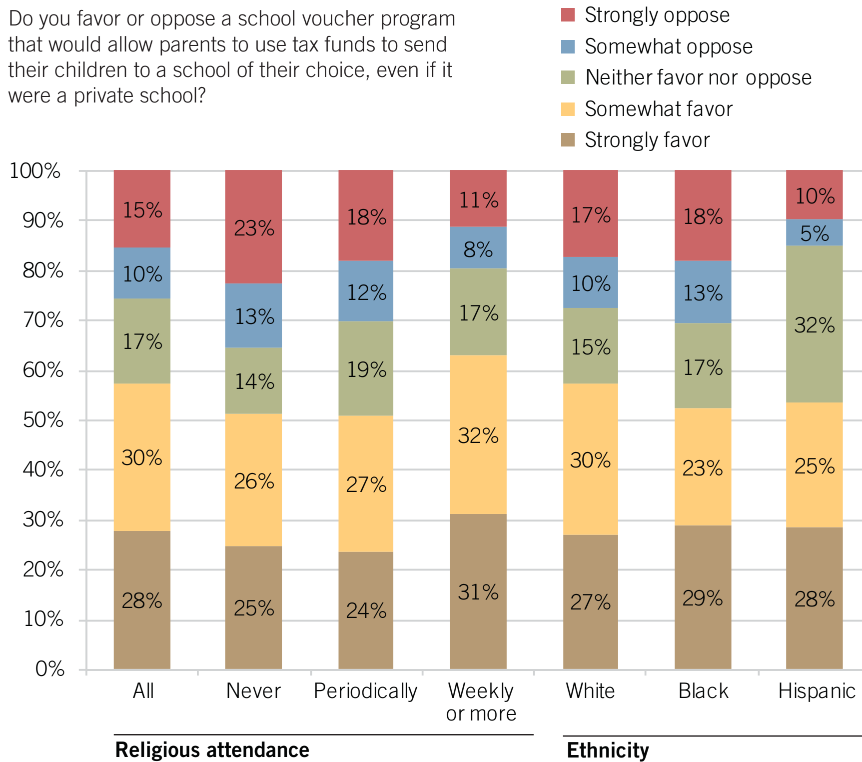


Figure 31 Opinion of publicly-funded school vouchers by religious attendance and ethnicity

Attitudes toward public schools and private school vouchers

Finally, residents were asked about their attitudes toward two controversial topics: teaching of morals at public schools and private school vouchers.

There is no tide of discontent with moral teaching in the public schools. Parents overwhelmingly reported that the public schools did a good or excellent job, and almost none said "bad" or "very bad." Overall, 75 percent reported that public schools did a good job, 23 percent said they did a fair job, and 2 percent thought they did a poor job with moral teaching. No strong differences in opinions of morals emerged between racial or ethnic groups, but there were differences by frequency of religious attendance. As shown in **Figure 30**, almost 90 percent of responding parents who never attend religious services said that the public schools did a good or excellent job at teaching morals, compared to 75 percent of the overall sample, 74 percent of those who attend weekly or more often, and 70 percent of those who attend periodically.

Kent County residents were asked whether or not they favored private school vouchers (which would be funded by tax revenue). About half (51 percent) of the respondents said they supported school vouchers. Fifteen percent were neutral, 24 percent opposed school vouchers, and 10 percent did not know or refused to answer. As found in **Figure 31**, respondents who attend religious services weekly or more often favored vouchers by a wide 44 point margin (63 percent supporting versus 19 percent opposed).[18] The gap is narrower, but still in favor by 15 points, among those who never attend religious services (51 percent supporting vouchers versus 36 percent opposed).

Among those who answered the question, support for vouchers came from all ethnicities. Majorities of White respondents (52 percent), African Americans (52 percent), and Hispanics (53 percent) favored vouchers.[19] As might be expected, an overwhelming majority of responding parents (85 percent) who send their children to private schools expressed support for school vouchers.[20] Over three-quarters (78 percent) of parents who send their children to charter schools also supported vouchers, as did 71 percent of parents whose children were not in school. Well over half of responding public school parents (62 percent) also said they support vouchers.

Congregational support for education and schools

Too often, congregations and schools are neighborhood institutions that share a common geography but do not collaborate. Yet given the increasing demand for tutors, after school programming, summer learning opportunities, financial support for learning resources and more, public schools need the support of families and other neighborhood organizations, especially congregations. Turning back now to the KCCS survey of religious leaders, we investigate some of the internal resources available in congregations to support educational efforts. We also ask how congregations are networked with local educational institutions, especially public schools.

Educators on hand

The leaders we surveyed reported a total of 9,741 educators in regular attendance at their congregations. (See **Chapter 6**.) While they are valuable as skilled volunteers, these educators are also a potentially powerful source of persuasion and information about schools for their fellow believers.

Education committees

One way congregations address the educational needs of their children is by establishing education committees. Over half (55 percent) of the congregations we surveyed reported doing so; larger congregations are more likely to have committees. We do not have information about the functions of these committees. They probably include management of the Sunday or Sabbath School programs—related to catechetical religious instruction—selection of curriculum, selection and training of teachers. They may support a congregation's Christian school, or they may address general educational needs of children, whether in private or public schools. Analysis shows that the presence of an education committee is unrelated to the congregation's support of its own Christian school and to the depth of engagement with schools, suggesting that these committees provide broader education-related support to children in their congregations.

A congregation's racial composition does seem to influence whether it has an education committee. The KCCS found that 63 percent of White congregations have an education committee compared to 38 percent of Black and 27 percent of Hispanic congregations. An education committee can signal to congregational members and leaders that the educational lives of children matter enough to organize, assign leadership and identify tasks.

Congregational engagement with public schools focuses on volunteers

		Percent involved...		*Total*		
		with any school	**with a public school**	**Kids attending the named public school**	**Volunteers**	**Financial support**
	All	43%	33%	3,212	2,827	$ 197,855
Religious tradition	Evangelical	39%	30%	1,393	718	$ 84,000
	Reformed	67%	50%	394	1,539	$ 25,300
	Pentecostal or Charismatic	14%	13%	91	65	$ 12,700
	Mainline or other Protestant	46%	46%	232	332	$ 55,855
	Catholic or Orthodox	68%	22%	1,102	159	$ 0
	Other traditions	16%	13%	0	14	$ 20,000
Ethnicity	White	50%	37%	2,544	2,670	$ 174,255
	Black	30%	28%	159	114	$ 23,600
	Hispanic	20%	13%	508	42	$ 0

Table 9 Congregations' engagement with public schools by religious tradition and ethnicity

Involvement with schools

We asked congregational leaders to tell us whether their congregations were "involved with any local primary or secondary schools in terms of finances or volunteering." If they said yes, we asked for the name, location and type (public, private, religious) of the school with which they are most involved; the amount of financial support, if any; the number and function of volunteers, if any; and the number of children from the congregation attending the school, if any. If the first school mentioned was not public, we asked which *public* school the congregation was most involved with, and repeated the questions above if any public school was mentioned.

Table 9 documents the responses. Overall, 43 percent of congregations confirmed involvement with a school of any kind; 151 unique schools were mentioned. Two-thirds of congregations in Kent County are not in any way involved with a public school. Lack of involvement cuts across all ethnic and denominational groups. Of almost 150,000 regular adult participants, about 2,800 are volunteering in public schools (about 2 percent). The average number of volunteers per involved congregation was 17, with a maximum of 256 volunteers from one congregation. Almost $200,000 in annual financial support benefitted these public schools, about a tenth of 1 percent of total congregational budgets countywide. Over 90 percent of this support came from just 12 congregations giving $2,000 or more; over 50 percent came from just two congregations.

Evangelical congregations contributed the most funds in absolute terms, but they are also much more numerous. Reformed and Mainline congregations were most likely to be involved with public schools and contributed the most per congregation in volunteers and cash. Catholic congregations naturally focus their attention on Catholic schools, which received over $8 million in support, compared to just $1.5 million from the more numerous Reformed congregations for private schools.

Though primarily Black and Hispanic congregations are generally located closest to the neediest public schools, they were much less likely than primarily White congregations to be involved with a public school. Only 25 Black congregations (28 percent) and seven Hispanic congregations (12 percent) say they are involved.

Of over 68,000 regular child participants in congregations (refer to **Figure 6**), 3,212 attend the public schools with which congregations report involvement. The fact that a congregation's children attend a particular public school doesn't seem to be a strong reason for a congregation's involvement with that school. Understanding the factors that lead a congregation to partner with a public school requires further analysis.

In addition to financial assistance and volunteers, congregations involved with public schools also support special projects or events. Forty-three percent of the involved congregations (81 cases) reported some sort of special project or event with public schools. These projects involved purchasing books or school supplies, field trips, backpack give-aways, back-to-school parties, or other special events.

Volunteer functions

We wanted to know what volunteers who work with children were doing. So we allowed an open-ended response to this question: "What do the volunteers do?" We then clustered all of their responses into categories described in **Table 10**. The majority of congregations provide direct assistance to children: mentoring, classroom assistance and homework help. Volunteers also provide assistance with food, sports, congregational activities and fundraising on behalf of special school projects.

Mentoring tops volunteer activities in public schools

Volunteers activities in public schools	Congregations
Mentoring	64
Classroom Assistance	29
Food	25
Homework Help	25
Sports	14
Fundraising	11
Religious	9
Miscellaneous	80

Table 10 Volunteer activity types in public schools

Vacation Bible School leads list of education-related services

Education-related service	Count	Percent of congregations providing service: All	White	Black	Hispanic
Vacation Bible School	212	54%	57%	51%	47%
Summer programs	176	45%	51%	44%	23%
Mentoring	168	43%	44%	57%	17%
Recreational programs	140	35%	37%	45%	20%
Scholarship for students	127	32%	38%	37%	5%
Tutoring	126	32%	33%	45%	8%
Music performances for the public	105	27%	31%	30%	7%
Music groups	99	25%	26%	26%	20%
Drama or theater	75	19%	18%	24%	13%
Music classes	66	17%	14%	16%	25%
Sex education	58	15%	12%	32%	5%
Special education, special needs	47	12%	16%	10%	0%
Day care (preschool)	46	12%	12%	12%	12%
Adult or youth literacy program	44	11%	7%	26%	5%
After-school care	42	11%	10%	17%	3%
Computer training	42	11%	7%	26%	3%
Programs for gang members	39	10%	7%	24%	5%
Art classes (all ages)	33	8%	9%	11%	3%
GED (high school equivalency)	26	7%	3%	18%	5%
FACTS program	22	6%	3%	16%	5%
Drop-out prevention	20	5%	3%	16%	2%
Before-school care	17	4%	4%	7%	3%
Juvenile delinquency programs	10	3%	1%	6%	3%

Figure 32 Education-related services provided by primary ethnicity (395 face-to-face interviews only)

Educational activities by congregations

As mentioned earlier, the GGRCS revealed that 59 percent of Kent County parents said their children participated in educational activities, and two-thirds of those parents reported that the educational activities were organized by a religious organization. In the Kent County Congregations Study, we presented the 395 face-to-face interviewees with a list of social services, including educational services.[21] **Figure 32** lists education-related services reported by congregations.

The top two programs, Vacation Bible School (VBS) and summer programs, are seasonal in nature but are conducted by around half of congregations (54 and 45 percent, respectively). VBS is a short-term program, limited in its ability to sustain relationships and build skills in children over time. It does, however, serve as an initial place of contact to establish relationships with families in the community that can lead to other levels of involvement.

Both mentoring, carried out by 43 percent of the congregations, and tutoring students, done by 32 percent of congregations, are clearly important activities. They support the lives of children and build relationships with adult figures that can provide valuable life and career guidance.[22] Black congregations are more likely to provide mentoring and tutoring services than White congregations, while Hispanics are less likely. Language and cultural barriers might again explain Hispanic congregations' low level of involvement in these activities. We don't know how these tutoring or mentoring activities are structured or if they involve partnerships with other organizations.

The FACTS program (now called "Schools of Hope") is an in-school tutoring program in the Grand Rapids Public Schools that is managed and directed by The Heart of West Michigan United Way. (See sidebar on page 76 in **Chapter 11**.) Volunteers are recruited and trained as reading tutors to work with children in Grades 1 to 3 in 15 schools. Tutors spend 30 minutes a week reinforcing the reading skills of kids. We asked interviewees about their congregations' involvement with the FACTS program. A total of 22 congregations indicated that they participate. Thirteen of these are Black congregations, six are White and three are Hispanic congregations. While volunteers for this program are also recruited across the business and civic sectors, we believe more congregations could get involved, particularly since volunteers are more likely to be recruited from religious organizations than any other type of community organization.[23]

A significant share of the congregations interviewed across all ethnic groups provide recreational activities. The educational benefit of these programs, however, is less certain. Congregations often use recreational activities to build relationships and trust with young people, which can lead to greater involvement in other youth-related activities sponsored by congregations.

Scholarship provision was reported by 127 congregations (32 percent), mostly White and Black; Hispanic congregations were significantly less likely to do so. In addition to providing incentives for kids, scholarships reinforce the value of education and create higher expectations.

Artistic and cultural programs and services are provided by large numbers of congregations targeting young people and the broader community, including public music performances, music groups, drama and theater, music classes and art classes. This confirms existing research showing that the arts play a central role in the culture of American congregations.[24] The arts have been shown to benefit children academically, instilling discipline, positive habits, access to positive peer groups, and skills that can translate into the academic sphere that help improve academic performance.[25]

An important service for young people is sex education. A minority of congregations, 58, provide sex education, and these are mostly Black congregations. Few White and even fewer Hispanic congregations do so. Services for special needs children are provided by 47 congregations, mainly White and Black.

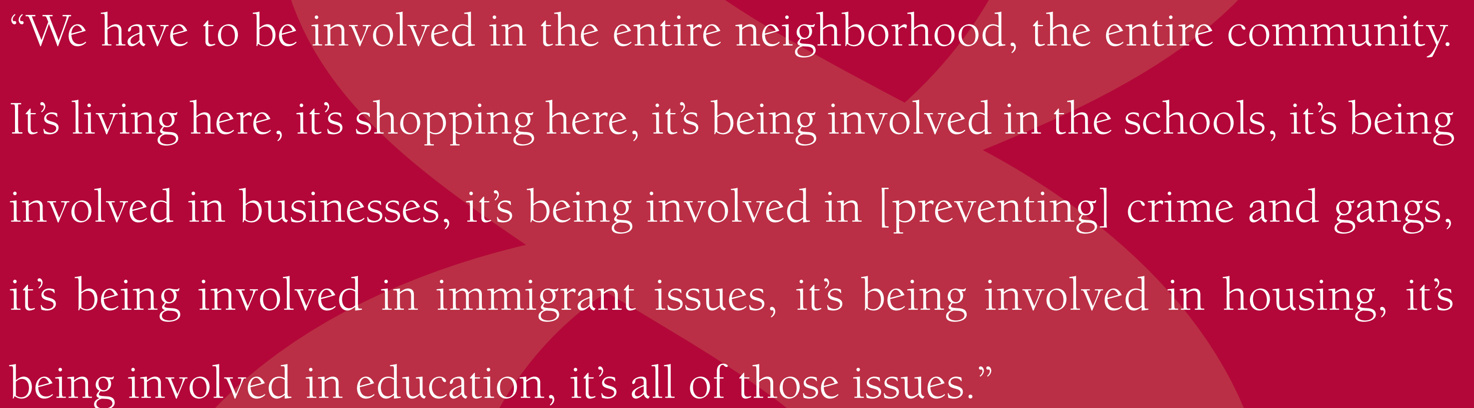
Care for children before and after school is particularly important in poorer communities, where many single parents live and many family members work extended hours. High-quality day care or after school programs in urban settings can improve academic achievement.[26] Despite the need, it was surprising to see how few congregations provide day care, after-school care or before-school care. Black congregations are most likely to provide after-school care, while Hispanic congregations are least likely to do so.

Keeping teens in schools helps prevent delinquency and gang membership and is critically important for urban families, whose kids are more likely to be exposed to oppositional cultures and anti-social behavior. When young people do drop out of school, they need help to complete their education, obtain a GED and get computer training. We listed a series of programs targeting at-risk young people, including programs or services for gang members, high school equivalency (GED), computer training, drop-out prevention and juvenile delinquency programs. Few congregations across all groups are involved in these services. Black congregations are generally much more likely than White and Hispanic congregations to be involved in these services.

What now?

The engagement of congregations in these areas is encouraging, particularly in larger-scale programs like Kids Hope and Schools of Hope. Yet the needs far outweigh the current contributions of congregations, and too few congregations of all ethnicities are engaged with public schools.

Unearthing the potential of congregations to improve the academic lives of disadvantaged youth should be at the top of the agenda for community-wide effort. Great potential exists in the thick web of relationships fostered by congregations; in the trust, genuine care and relationship building that occurs across generational, class and ethnic lines; in the peer influences with young people who share common values; in an ideology that advances responsibility, personal care and hope; and in the intellectual skills acquired through habits, reading and extracurricular activities. In the end, congregations provide a protective canopy that enhances academic achievement for those who need it most.



"We have to be involved in the entire neighborhood, the entire community. It's living here, it's shopping here, it's being involved in the schools, it's being involved in businesses, it's being involved in [preventing] crime and gangs, it's being involved in immigrant issues, it's being involved in housing, it's being involved in education, it's all of those issues."

—pastor commenting on social programs

8 SOCIAL SERVICE PROVISION BY CONGREGATIONS

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Members serving at Westminster Presbyterian Church's food pantry, Grand Rapids

Interest in the role of congregations as social service providers has risen over the decade, with major research directed at documenting the extent and breadth of such services.[1] The surge of research on faith-based organizations was partly a response to the 1996 Charitable Choice Act, which opened the doors for government funding of faith-based organizations, within the broader context of an increasing devolution of social services to the state and local levels.[2]

The Kent County Congregations Study sought to expand our understanding of the social services that congregations provide by replicating or adapting the methods of three previous studies that explored the social service role of congregations.[3]

Measuring social service programming

Congregations typically conduct their work informally, in ways that resist quantification. Further, religious leaders may use language for their work that is different from the language of social science or the welfare system.[4] Capturing what congregations do on behalf of the community is riddled with complexity and requires particular sensitivity to unique language and cultural cues, as well as follow-up questioning and varied approaches to asking the questions. Fortunately, we have learned much from recent studies of American congregations.[5] Combining techniques that draw from several different studies, we gave religious leaders ample opportunity to mention all of their congregations' work in the community.

Our purpose in this chapter is to describe the social serving capacity of congregations in Kent County, addressing several questions: What is the internal capacity of congregations to serve both members and non-members who are in need? How many congregations serve people outside of their congregation? What type of social services do congregations provide to their surrounding communities?

In this chapter

- *Kent County congregations provided direct aid to 18,482 of their own members in the previous 12 months.*
- *Congregations reported higher numbers of social service programs than comparable national averages—2,338 programs in all.*
- *Seventy-three congregations started a nonprofit human service or outreach organization within the last two years.*
- *Just over half of congregations mentioned referring people to ACCESS, the best-known nonprofit welfare organization in the county. Few mentioned any government agency.*

Pentecostals, Hispanics top share of participants receiving help from congregation

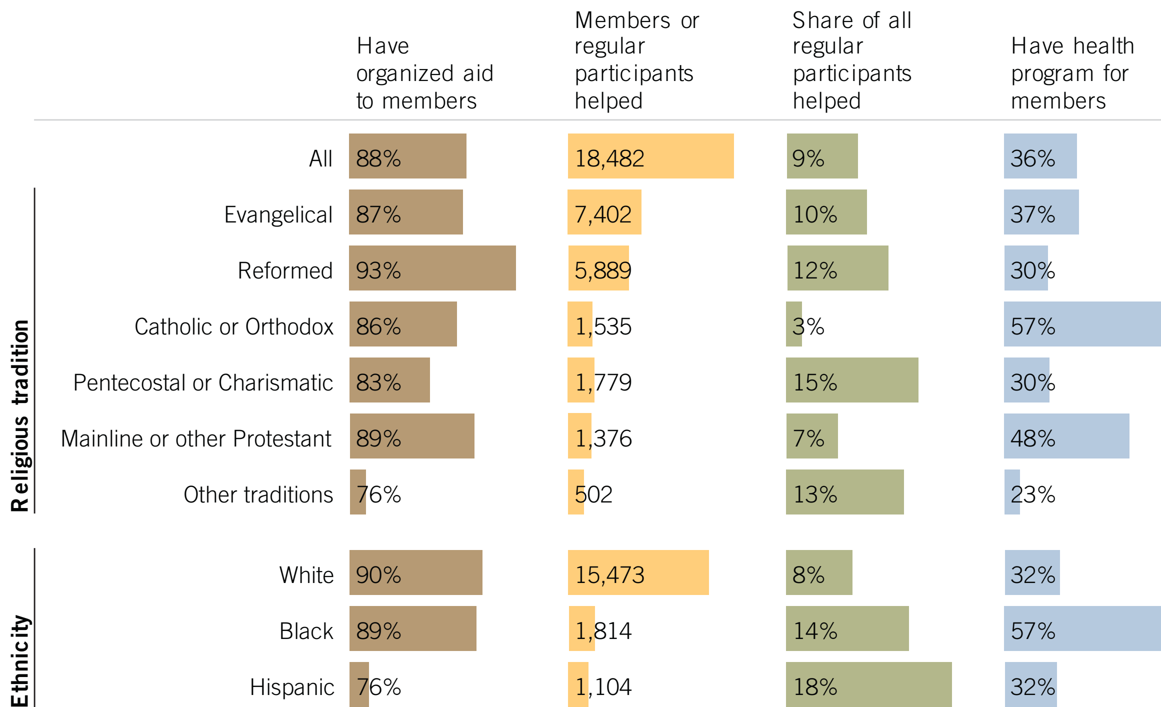


Figure 33 Congregational aid to members by tradition and ethnicity

Service to members

Figure 33 illustrates the results from three questions posed to congregations about their assistance to their own regular participants.

First, in order to understand the internal serving capacity of congregations, we asked religious leaders if their congregations "have any organized effort, designated person, or committee whose purpose is to coordinate or provide help to members..." A large majority (88 percent) of the religious leaders reported internal, organized efforts to help members of their congregations who face needs like "cooking meals for a new mother or someone just home from the hospital, or providing financial assistance to someone who needs it." Reformed congregations were most likely to answer "yes" (93 percent), probably referring to traditional boards of deacons assigned to service and benevolence.

For those who said yes, we also asked, "In the last 12 months, how many people who are members or regular congregation participants received this sort of help from the congregation?" Collectively, religious leaders reported that their congregations helped a total of 18,482 people in this way, an average of 38 people helped per congregation. As a share of all regularly participating adults and children, this is 9 percent. Pentecostals and Hispanics topped the shares helped with 15 and 18 percent, respectively.

We further asked leaders if they had "any organized effort, designated person, or committee whose purpose is to provide your members with health-focused programs such as blood pressure checks, health education classes, or disease prevention information"? Over a third of all congregations (36 percent) indicated that they had such an organized effort around health care areas, with some difference by the primary ethnicity of the congregation. African American congregations were almost twice as likely as their White and Hispanic counterparts to have organized efforts around health care issues (57 percent, 32 percent, and 32 percent, respectively).

As previously reported in **Table 5**, over a quarter of the average congregation's adults live in low-income households earning under $25,000 a year, with much higher proportions in African American and Hispanic congregations (43 and 67 percent, respectively). These low-income constituents face a number of challenges related to basic needs and health care, in turn placing demands upon the religious leaders and their congregations to assist so many poor families. Congregations intentionally organize to support significant numbers of individuals from within their own congregations.

Social service beyond the membership

Following the National Congregations Study (NCS),[6] we used two questions to get at the amount of social service programs provided by congregations. The first question asked leaders the following question: "Has your congregation participated in or supported social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects of any sort within the past 12 months?"[7] A majority of congregations (59 percent) of Kent County indicated that they have participated or supported a social service program, compared to 45 percent of congregations in the 2006 NCS. The difference is primarily, but not entirely, due to the larger-than-national-average size of Kent County congregations.

The first data series in **Figure 34** charts the local figures. Among religious traditions, Reformed congregations led with 71 percent answering in the affirmative, followed closely by Mainline congregations. Notably, 60 percent of Black congregations in Kent County, compared to 38 percent of Black congregations in the NCS-II, say that they have participated or supported social service, community development or neighborhood organizing projects in the last year. Hispanic congregations were similar; 49 percent of Kent County Hispanic congregations said that they participated in social service programs, compared to 34 percent in the NCS-II.

To widen the scope of possible social services, the NCS and the KCCS both asked a second question of those who answered no to the previous question: "Within the past 12 months, has your congregation engaged in any human service projects, outreach ministries, or other activities intended to help people who are not members of your congregation?" Answering yes to one of these two questions were an additional 156 leaders (27 percent more), for a total of 86 percent of congregations affirming one of these two questions.

Reformed congregations most likely to report social service

Has your congregation [in the last 12 months] ...

1). ... participated in or supported social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects?

2). ... engaged in any human service projects, outreach ministries, or other activities intended to help people who are not members?

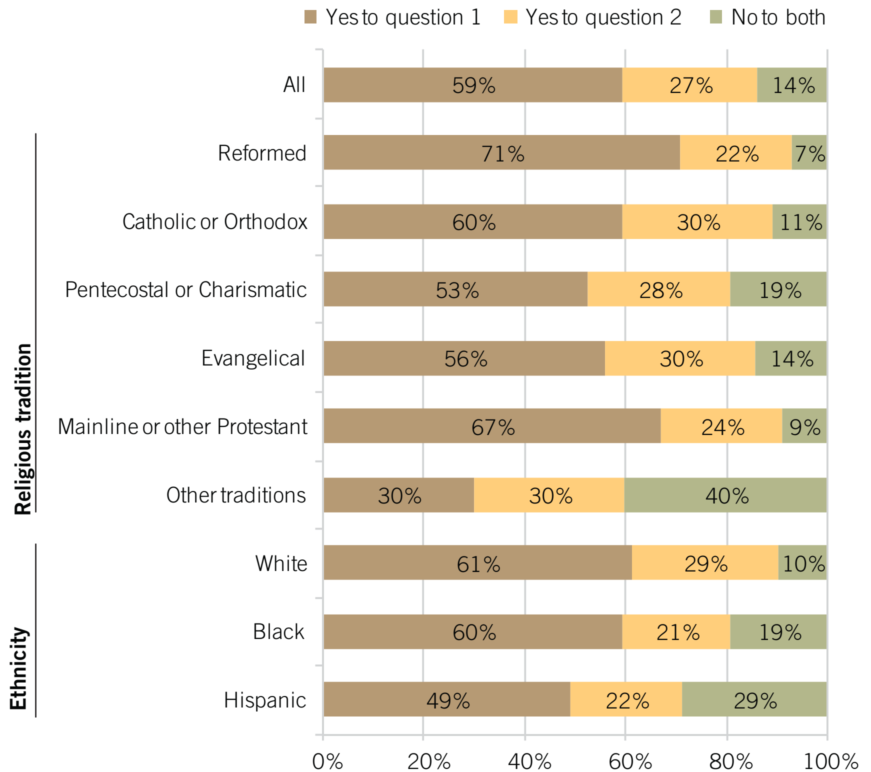


Figure 34 Proportions reporting social services by religious tradition and primary ethnicity

Social service programs abound in Kent County congregations

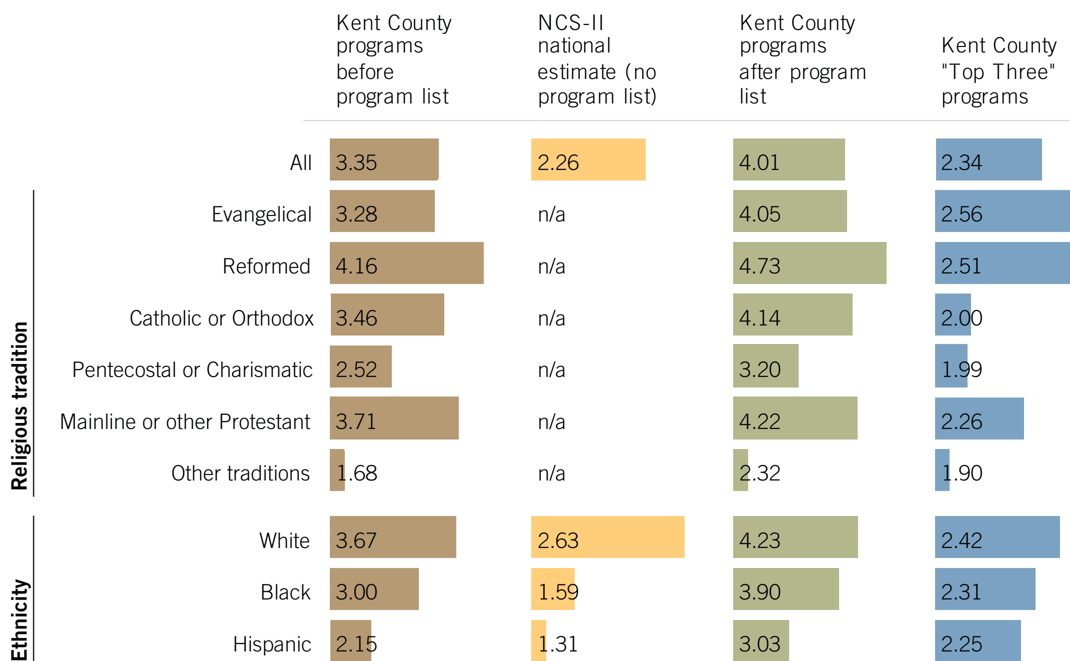


Figure 35 Social service program counts by religious tradition and primary ethnicity

Congregational programs

Following the two questions just discussed, congregational leaders who affirmed either of the two questions were asked, "What projects or programs has your congregation sponsored or participated in?" Interviewers then used a chart format to list the congregation's programs, along with whether each was a program solely of that congregation or a collaboration, and if the latter, who the two most important collaborators were.

The 583 responding congregations listed a total of 2,338 social program mentions, an average of 4.01 programs per congregation. (See the "Kent County programs after program list" column of **Figure 35**.) The count would have been 1,954, an average 3.35 programs per congregation,[8] had we not shown the 395 face-to-face respondents the list of program types and inquired about their top three programs. The additional efforts garnered 384 additional programs, nearly one full additional program from every congregation interviewed face-to-face. Either average is much higher than the national estimate of 2.26 programs from the NCS-II, which did not prompt with the extensive list of program types.[9]

Black and Hispanic congregations in Kent County on average had 3.9 and 3.03 programs per congregation, respectively. Prior to prompting with the list, these averages were 3.0 and 2.15, respectively, in contrast to the national averages for Black and Hispanic congregations of 1.59 and 1.31, respectively.

The majority of congregations (55 percent) mentioned three or fewer programs; another 32 percent mentioned providing four to seven programs, and 10 percent mentioned eight to eleven programs. Only three percent mentioned providing 12 or more programs, up to a maximum count of 16.

If we consider only the comprehensive face-to-face interviews, the average is 4.46 programs per congregation for 247 cases in the primary study area and a whopping 4.85 per congregation for the 148 cases outside the study area.

Kinds of social service programs

We can classify congregations' work for each method, open-ended responses and choices from our program list.

Open-ended response categories

Table 11 summarizes our categorization of the open-ended program responses.[10] Categories are not mutually exclusive—a program could fall into as many categories as are relevant. For example, 500 congregations mentioned a program that we included in the "Children" category; 410 of these were also listed in at least one other category. Based on its description, one congregation's ministry to women was included in six categories: Children, Clothing, Counseling, Food and Nutrition, Gender-Based, and Health.

Programs for children are most common on open-ended list

Service Categories	Description	Programs
Children	Programs for children under the age of 18, including infant needs, adoption, diaper or toy drives, after-school programs, day care centers, juvenile delinquent services, scouts, summer camp, teen pregnancy, Vacation Bible School	500
Food and Nutrition	Programs including food for the needy, soup kitchens, events like "Walk for Hunger," community gardens	430
Religious	Programs with explicit religious content, including giving money to other congregations, Bible camp, concerts for Christ, spiritual support, "Sunday School"	281
Other	Programs that did not fit under any other category	261
Education	Programs mentioning schools, libraries, book drives, HIV/AIDS programs, job training, tutoring, life-skills, school supplies, adopt-a-school, Head Start, preschool, ESL	228
Health	Programs that address health needs or benefit sick people, including blood drives, prescriptions, health fairs, CPR training, hospice or nursing, pregnancy, visiting sick and shut-in, housing, transportation, insurance	224
Housing	Programs for home building, repair, shelters or support of shelters, maintenance, Habitat for Humanity, low-income housing, painting, group homes, orphanages	193
Community	Programs including community and community building activities, activities to facilitate neighborhood interaction	165
Gender-Based	Programs for specifically either males or females, including pregnancy aid, help for unwed mothers, alternatives to abortion, Boy and Girl Scouts	122
International	Programs where the beneficiary is outside the U.S., including international charities, ministries or missionaries	114
Clothing	Programs involving clothes, blankets, rummage sales, thrift stores	91
Volunteer	Programs that include mention of volunteers	80
Recreation	Programs with recreational or sports activities	70
Habitat for Humanity	Construction of homes for low-income residents	67
Counseling	Counseling	67
Mentoring	Programs with mentoring of any sort	64
Ethnicity, Race and Language	Programs addressing issues of ethnic identity, anti-racism, pro-diversity, ESL	59
Immigrant	Programs for immigrants, migrants, refugees, ESL, citizenship	56
Prison	Programs for those in trouble with the law, prison ministry, juvenile delinquent ministry, moral training, anger management, prison family support	56
Home and Household	Programs providing furniture, household items, money for rent, utilities	56
Elderly	Programs for elderly and retirees including nursing home support	52
Security	Programs related to crime prevention, crime victims, police and fire departments, neighborhood watch, military personnel/service	43
Homeless	Programs for homeless or transients	39
Finance and Debt	Programs involving budgeting, financial education, debt reduction	38
Substance Abuse	Programs for substance abusers including AA, NA, drug prevention	35
Jobs	Programs including job training, job support, city work camps	33
Cleanup and Environment	Programs including clean highways, parks, neighborhoods, beautification projects, tree-planting	25
Disaster	Programs including disaster relief for fires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes	24
Transportation	Programs with mention of transportation, driving, loaning or giving a vehicle	22
Abuse Prevention and Treatment	Programs for victims of rape or domestic violence, crisis centers	20
Politics and Social Justice	Programs involving political activity, polling sites, justice issues	12
College and Young Adult	Programs for young adults ages 18 and up	9

Table 11 Social service programs by category

Categories from the program list

In addition to the open-ended mentions, we asked the 395 leaders interviewed face-to-face to review a list of 113 social service programs and note the programs that were being provided by the congregation.[11] The method of presenting a list of programs in a face-to-face interview allows leaders to recall programs and is more likely to include both informal and formal programs.[12]

Ninety-one percent of the responding congregations provided one or more social service programs. Collectively, they checked a total of 9,502 boxes from the checklist, an average of 16 per congregation. These figures are similar to counts that other studies have found elsewhere.[13]

Table 12 documents how many congregations mentioned each of our 113 list items. The top nine service categories, carried out by at least 50 percent of the 395 face-to-face congregations, were the following: counseling for individuals or families (80 percent); premarital counseling/ marriage enrichment/marriage encounter (80 percent); visitation to the sick or homebound (76 percent); emergency individual assistance (66 percent); clothing donations (64 percent); food pantries (63 percent); donations to congregations and religious organizations (56 percent); Vacation Bible School (54 percent); and transportation for seniors (51 percent).

As found previously with the open-ended method, the most common overarching category is services for children, including Vacation Bible Schools, summer programs, mentoring, recreation programs, scholarships, tutoring and sports activities. If we combine all of the child and youth service programs in one category, we obtain a total of 1,248 mentions, 13 percent of the total.

Congregations very commonly provide personal and family support through counseling services, including marriage preparation, counseling and training. Given how much individual and family counseling congregations are offering, it is no surprise that religious leaders expressed high interest in furthering their training in this area, as reported in **Chapter 3**. This finding is consistent with other studies.[14] Also significant are the visits and meals that sick people and the elderly receive from congregations. The value of staying connected with the elderly cannot be underestimated, for it can make the difference between life and death when access to medications is limited, basic needs are not met or bad weather threatens an older person's safety or mobility.[15]

Congregations provide significant support to the poor through emergency financial aid, food pantries, meal preparation, transportation and clothing assistance. It is hard to quantify the impact of this service, but a hypothetical example can illustrate the magnitude of this support. Consider, for example, the 262 congregations that report providing emergency financial aid to people in need. A common form of emergency financial assistance is rent support to prevent eviction. While we don't have exact figures, a conservative assumption for an average cost would be between $200 to $500 per occasion. If we further estimate conservatively that the 262 congregations provide financial emergency support to one family per year, our estimate of total annual assistance would fall between $52,400 and $130,500. Also important is the contribution that congregations make to transport the elderly to and from medical appointments, to worship events, and to meet other transportation needs. Fuel costs, volunteer drivers' time, and vehicle wear and tear costs can add up dramatically.

A cursory look at the breakdown by primary ethnicity (not shown here) reveals some important differences. For example, Black congregations have a relatively high proportion of members involved in mentoring children. Similarly, with transportation of the elderly, prison ministry

Counseling and visitation top checklist of congregational services

Program type	Count	%
Counseling for individuals or families	317	80%
Premarital counseling/marriage enrichment/encounter	317	80%
Visitation to sick/homebound	299	76%
Emergency individual financial assistance	262	66%
Clothing donations	256	65%
Food pantries	248	63%
Donations to congregations/ religious organizations	221	56%
Vacation Bible School	212	54%
Transportation (seniors)	200	51%
Disaster relief	186	47%
Summer programs (children and youth)	176	45%
Mentoring (children and youth)	168	43%
Prison chaplaincy/ministry	166	42%
Personal financial management	158	40%
Holiday celebrations	146	37%
Recreational programs (children and youth)	140	35%
Provision of meals (seniors)	128	32%
Scholarship for students	127	32%
Tutoring (children and youth)	126	32%
Services for people with disabilities	121	31%
Domestic violence prevention	117	30%
Visitations buddy programs (seniors)	116	29%
Music performances for the public	105	27%
Sports activities	103	26%
Neighborhood cleanup and beautification	102	26%
Prevention of child abuse	100	25%
Volunteer labor for construction	100	25%
Economic support	99	25%
Music groups	99	25%
Services to families of prisoners	99	25%
Recreation activities (seniors)	98	25%
Blood pressure screenings	95	24%
Traditional family values	87	22%
Pro-life advocacy	86	22%
Block parties	86	22%
Racism/race reconciliation	84	21%
Economic assistance (immigrants)	81	21%
Nutrition information	80	20%
Translation	79	20%
Job placement (immigration)	79	20%
Street outreach (night ministry, mobile food units)	78	20%
Community development	78	20%
Purchasing a house	78	20%
Building personal credit	77	20%
Housing	76	19%
Job placement	76	19%
Drama or theater	75	19%
Reentry support services (prison)	70	18%
Shelter (low-income)	69	18%
Exercise programs	68	17%
Social services to prisoners	66	17%
Music classes	66	17%
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)	66	17%
Retirement planning	65	17%
Domestic violence	65	17%
Education	63	16%
Investing	60	15%
Homeowner/tenant repairs	60	15%
Career counseling	59	15%
Health care	58	15%
Sex education	58	15%
Soup kitchen	57	14%
Cultural festival	56	14%
Women's issues	56	14%
Nutrition classes/health education	55	14%
Immigration/immigrant rights	50	13%
Housing (immigration)	49	12%
Special education or special needs	47	12%
Saving for children's education	47	12%
Day care (preschool)	46	12%
Legal assistance (immigrants)	46	12%
Housing rehabilitation	45	11%
Adult or youth literacy program	44	11%
Affordable housing construction	43	11%
Gangs	43	11%
After-school care	42	11%
Cholesterol screenings	42	11%
Neighborhood watch	42	11%
Computer training	42	11%
Pregnancy and maternity program	40	10%
Programs or services for gang members	39	10%
Thrift store	38	10%
Tutoring for adults	38	10%
Co-ops (such as food, babysitting, health)	38	10%
Diabetes screening	37	9%
Legal aid (criminal justice and corrections)	36	9%
Civil rights	35	9%
Art classes (all ages)	33	8%
Exercise (seniors)	30	8%
Welfare	30	8%
Immunizations	30	8%
Job training	28	7%
School choice/school voucher	28	7%
Immigration workshops	27	7%
Mortgage loans for housing	27	7%
GED (high school equivalency)	26	7%
Gay, lesbian and transgender issues	26	7%
Community security (CAPS)	25	6%
Entrepreneurial training/small business incubation	25	6%
Smoking cessation program	24	6%
FACTS program	22	6%
Drop-in health center/clinic	21	5%
Rights of disabled	21	5%
Police brutality	21	5%
Drop-out prevention	20	5%
Abortion rights	18	5%
Before-school care	17	4%
HIV/AIDS programs	17	4%
Voter registration	14	4%
Worker rights (e.g. day labor)	13	3%
Commercial ventures (retail business, etc.)	12	3%
Juvenile delinquency programs	10	3%
Day care (older persons)	9	2%

Table 12 Program list options ranked by frequency mentioned

efforts, training on personal financial management, recreation programs for children and youth and tutoring, Black congregations are proportionately more involved in these services than White and Hispanic congregations.

Networking with social service agencies

Congregations are very likely to carry out their social service programming in partnership with other congregations or community agencies.[16] We asked religious leaders to identify up to three names of "agencies or nonprofit organizations to which you most often refer needy persons or with which you most often cooperate." **Table 13** ranks the organizations mentioned by at least 10 leaders. It is an extensive list of some of the largest and best-known community-serving organizations, including many faith-based organizations. The top organizations are all non-profits that exist to support the poor in Kent County through anti-hunger initiatives, job services for the unemployed, homeless shelters, food pantries, housing support for low-income families, advocacy against economic injustice, referral services, child counseling, and much more.

ACCESS of West Michigan, the most frequently mentioned agency, is organized as "a network of congregations, individuals and the community at large working together to meet needs in Kent County." Clearly there is room for congregations' connections with ACCESS to grow, as just 42 percent of leaders mentioned the network.

Most distressing is the extremely low profile of government agencies as destinations for the needy. The Family Independence Agency, which provides critical services to the needy, was mentioned by just 14 religious leaders. Bridges need to be built.

Congregational creation of non-profit organizations

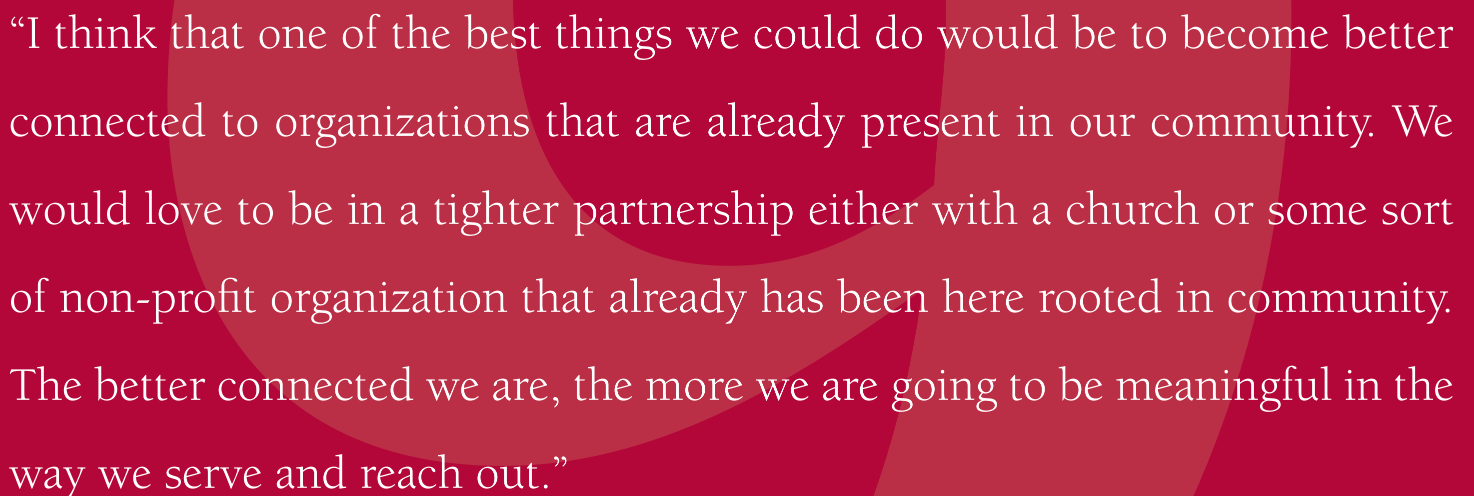
One way that congregations organize their community ministry efforts to have a positive impact on the broader community is by establishing a separate nonprofit organization. A nonprofit structure helps with fundraising efforts, increasing buy-in from a larger pool of supporters. It formalizes and professionalizes the services given, and it is more likely to ensure sustainability for the long-term.[17]

We asked religious leaders, "Within the last two years, has your congregation established a separate nonprofit organization to conduct human service projects or outreach ministries?" A total of 73 congregations (13 percent) indicated that they had started a nonprofit organization in the last two years. This is more than double the 6 percent national rate found in NCS-II data. Of congregations that started a separate nonprofit in Kent County, 55 percent were primarily White, 31 percent primarily Black, and 11 percent primarily Hispanic. Black congregations in Kent County are almost three times more likely to have recently started a nonprofit than their peers around the nation: 26 percent had done so in Kent County, compared to 9 percent of the Black cases in NCS-II. Hispanic congregations reflected the local average: 13 percent of Kent County Hispanic congregations sought to start a new nonprofit, compared to 8 percent in NCS-II. Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations were most likely to start a nonprofit (22 percent did so), while the other traditions were least likely (zero percent). Just 6 percent of Catholic and Orthodox congregations (two cases) reported starting nonprofits, probably because their mother churches have already built a substantial nonprofit infrastructure (such as Catholic Social Services).

ACCESS of West Michigan tops list of referral agencies for congregations

Organization Name	Mentions
ACCESS of West Michigan	244
Mel Trotter Ministries	150
Salvation Army	92
Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE)	83
Habitat for Humanity	79
Second Harvest Gleaners	76
North Kent Service Center	55
Dégagé Ministries	40
North End Community Ministry	40
Love INC	40
United Way	36
Pine Rest	35
Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance	34
Guiding Light Missions	34
John Knox Food Pantry	33
211 (United Way hotline)	31
Kids Hope USA	29
United Church Outreach Ministry	29
God's Kitchen	29
Flat River Outreach Ministry	29
In the Image	27
Byron Community Ministries	24
Urban League	24
Inner City Christian Federation	22
Baxter Community Center	21
Safe Haven Ministries	21
Catholic Social Services	20
Interfaith Hospitality Network	20
Bethany Christian Services	20
Alpha Women's Center	19
Pregnancy Resource Center	18
Other Way Ministries	17
Christian Counseling Center	16
Rockford Area Ministerial Association	16
Alcoholics Anonymous	15
Volunteers In Service	15
American Red Cross	14
Family Independence Agency	14
A.C.C.E.S.S. 6 (Ada/Cascade/Lowell)	13
Willow Creek Association	13
Byron Center Ministries	12
Lutheran Social Services	12
Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy	12
St. Vincent de Paul	12
Cedar Springs Area Ministerial Association	11
Michigan Organizing Project	11
Garfield Park Neighborhood Association	11
Restorers, Inc	11
North Kent Ministerial Association	11
Roosevelt Park Ministries	10
Alpha Family Center	10
HOPE Network	10
Byron Area Ministerial Association	10

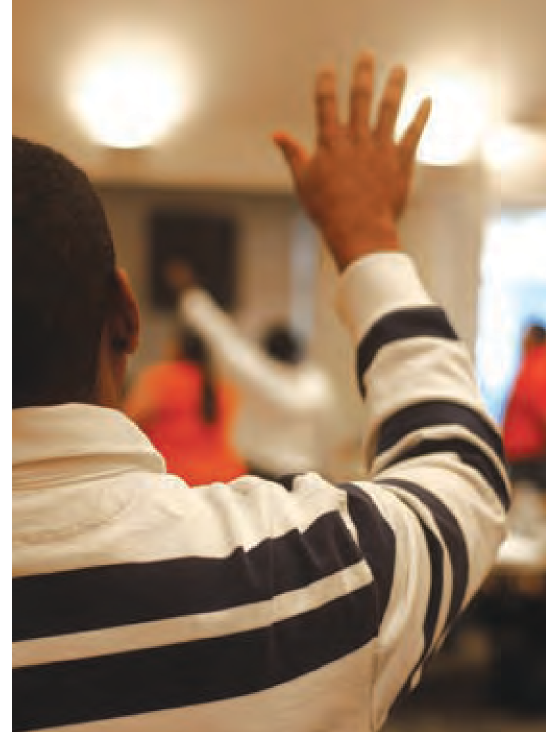
Table 13 Agencies to which congregations most often refer people in need



"I think that one of the best things we could do would be to become better connected to organizations that are already present in our community. We would love to be in a tighter partnership either with a church or some sort of non-profit organization that already has been here rooted in community. The better connected we are, the more we are going to be meaningful in the way we serve and reach out."

—a Reformed pastor in Grand Rapids

9 PROGRAM DETAILS AND REPLACEMENT VALUE



A participant worships during services at the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative (DVULI), a training program for youth ministers.

In the previous chapter, we measured and described the breadth and scope of social service provision by congregations, building on two prior research projects.[1] The two methods discussed in **Chapter 8** surfaced the broad array of services provided, but did not give us much depth. Here we go deeper, examining how the programs are supported; whom they serve; whether religious participation is required to benefit; whether programs are provided by the congregation alone or in partnership with others; and how much it costs congregations and their members, directly and indirectly, to provide services.

Selecting the top three programs

In Ram Cnaan's pioneering study of Philadelphia, he and his team asked religious leaders to name the top five programs that congregations provided and then asked a series of in-depth questions about each of those top programs. We adapted Cnaan's method, asking the 395 face-to-face interviewees to name up to *three* top social service programs and answer 35 questions about each program. The criteria for inclusion in the top three were posed to interviewees as follows:

> *You have mentioned several social ministries and programs that your congregation or parish has run or worked on during the last 12 months. I want to ask some questions about the programs that are the most important to you, giving priority to those programs that:*
>
> 1. *have the* **largest budgets** *and/or hired staff, OR*
> 2. *use up* **physical space** *in the congregation's buildings or another property, OR*
> 3. *require* **tuition or payment** *for services.*
>
> *Please name what you believe are the top three programs by the criteria I just mentioned, most important first.*

This approach helps focus on larger, more formal programs, though many small, informal programs were still included among the top three. The 395 face-to-face interviewees (247 of them from the primary study area) collectively identified 847 "top three" social programs.

In this chapter

- *Congregations collectively offered detailed reports on 847 social service programs.*
- *Religious participation is not required by 70 percent of these programs.*
- *Congregations provide 75 percent of staff and volunteers for social service programs, but supply only 21 percent of the beneficiaries.*
- *The annual, county-wide replacement value of these programs is estimated roughly between $95 million and $118 million.*

Programs for children are most frequent among "top three" programs that congregations provide

Category	All Programs	Top 3	Percent of 847
Children	500	258	30%
Food and Nutrition	430	156	18%
Religious	281	148	17%
Education	228	119	14%
Health	224	77	9%
Other	261	62	7%
Community	165	56	7%
Housing	193	43	5%
Counseling	67	43	5%
Gender-Based	122	42	5%
International	114	33	4%
Mentoring	64	31	4%
Clothing	91	30	4%
Volunteer	80	29	3%
Prison	56	27	3%
Elderly	52	26	3%
Recreation	70	24	3%
Ethnicity, Race and Language	59	24	3%
Home and Household	56	22	3%
Immigrant	56	21	2%
Substance Abuse	35	21	2%
Finance and Debt	38	20	2%
Jobs	33	17	2%
Homeless	39	13	2%
Security	43	12	1%
Transportation	22	11	1%
College and Young Adult	9	7	1%
Politics and Social Justice	12	6	1%
Habitat for Humanity	67	4	0%
Abuse Prevention and Treatment	20	4	0%
Disaster	24	2	0%
Cleanup and Environment	25	1	0%

Table 14 Top three social service programs that congregations provide, by category

Table 14 shows how these "top three" programs relate to the total list of programs and categories originally presented in **Table 11**. (Remember that any program may fall into more than one category.) Programs for children are an even greater proportion of the top three cases, making up 30 percent of the 847 cases; the "food and nutrition" category is second, religious programs are third and educational programs are fourth.

Attributes of services

We asked congregations for dozens of details on their programs, including frequency and location of service offerings, the maturity of the program, and religious participation requirements.

Frequency and location

The 847 top programs are offered fairly regularly. Half are provided on a daily or weekly basis, while 18 percent are provided on a monthly basis and 31 percent are provided seasonally. The bulk of social services (60 percent) are provided entirely in a space or building owned by the congregations; the rest take place partly or entirely in other locations, such as schools, prisons, hospitals, parks, "walking around the neighborhood" and so forth.

Maturity

The average program has been provided for 13 years, with a median of five years and a maximum of 185 years (a Catholic school). Seventeen percent of programs are a year old or less; about 30 percent are 10 years old or older.

Two further indicators of programs' organizational maturity are separate nonprofit incorporation and formal budgeting processes. A separate nonprofit is often a sign of capacity, but only 15 percent of these "top three" programs have a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit status from the congregation. Of these, 11 percent are independent, while 4 percent use a designation through their diocese or denomination.

Project budgets indicate organizational commitment and accountability by tracking income sources and expenses. Over half (57 percent) of the selected programs do not have a yearly written budget, while 43 percent do. Programs in the latter category had an average budget of $56,102 and a median of $5,000. The total of reported budgets from all 847 programs was $16,942,797. There is ample opportunity to improve the organizational structures and operations of many congregation-based social service programs in Kent County.

Religious participation requirements

A key issue that arises whenever religious institutions provide social services is whether or not program beneficiaries are required to engage in religious activities. The majority of the top three programs (70 percent) do not require beneficiaries to engage in religious activities.

The 30 percent of programs that do require religious participation mainly involve religious education, evangelism and international missions trips.[2] Religious participation requirements are most likely among programs for children; 51 percent, 130 of 256 programs, require religious participation, such as Vacation Bible School and teen evangelism programs. Prison or corrections-related ministries are next most likely to require religious participation; 48 percent, 13 of 27 programs, do so.

Organizational and community collaboration

Most congregational programs are conducted by the congregation alone. Sixty-nine percent of these 847 programs are said to be supported by the congregation alone, while 31 percent involve collaboration. However, if we count programs whose names imply collaboration with a named organization, such as “Mel Trotter” or “Habitat for Humanity”, the rate is much higher, with 47 percent collaborating.[3] The most frequently mentioned collaborators are nonprofit organizations, with 344 mentions among top three programs. Cooperation with other congregations is relatively rare, with just 48 intercongregational collaborations mentioned among all top three programs. Mentions of cooperation with schools are even rarer, accounting for just under three percent (24 programs).

Not only are congregations the sole supporters of most programs, but they also provide the majority of the human resources. Staff and volunteers for social service programs come mainly from congregational membership. Collectively, a total of 32,552 individuals (both staff and volunteers) are involved in providing the 847 programs identified in the “top three.” Of these, 24,273 individuals (75 percent) are members of congregations, while 8,281 people (25 percent) are from the community-at-large—not members of congregations. (See **Figure 36** below.) Black congregations have the largest proportion of providers from outside the congregation (47 percent), while Hispanic congregations have the lowest proportion (11 percent). Leaders also report that about two-thirds (65 percent) of the providers of the top three programs are trained to provide the particular service that they are offering; the remaining third is not trained. Forty-one percent of congregations indicated that they have plans to seek additional training.

Beneficiaries and child welfare

The vast majority of the beneficiaries of these programs are not congregation members. The total number of people who reportedly benefited from the top three programs is 180,696 (**Figure 35**). Of these, 38,628 people (21 percent) were members of congregations, while 142,068 (79 percent) were individuals from the community at large. In contrast with their proportion of service providers, Black congregations have a slightly lower than average proportion of beneficiaries from the community at large.

Service providers are mostly congregational, beneficiaries mostly community at large

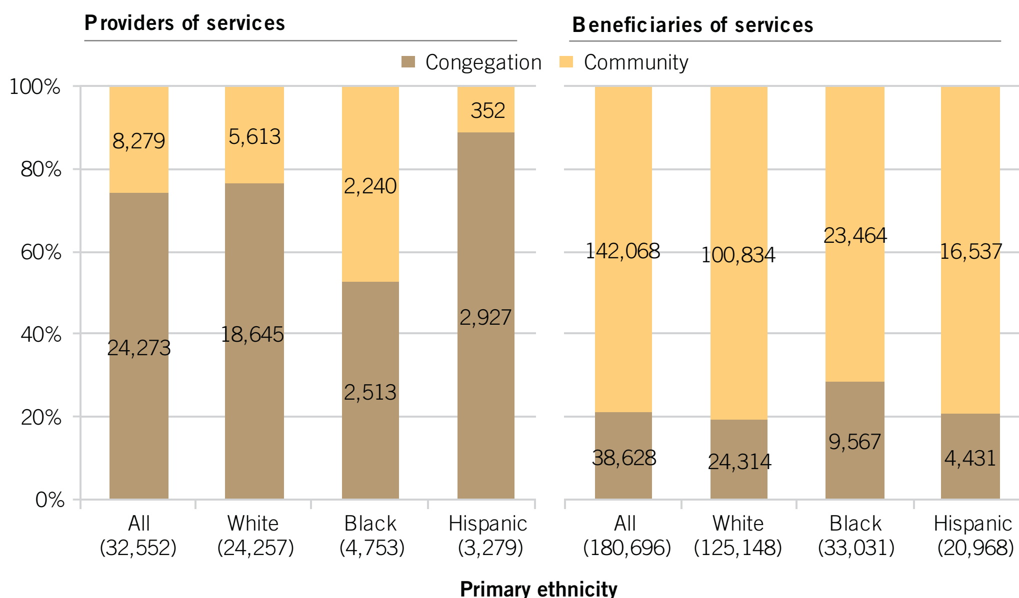


Figure 36 Program providers and beneficiaries by congregation’s primary ethnicity

Many programs are thought to benefit everyone

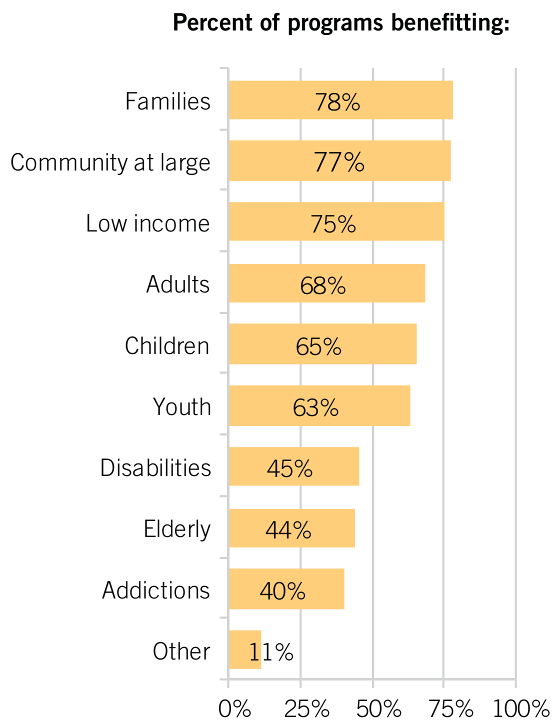


Figure 37 Percent of programs benefitting demographic groups

Who are these beneficiaries? We asked leaders, "Who primarily benefits from this ministry, service or program?" and offered nine "check all that apply" options plus an "other" category. **Figure 37** illustrates their answers: "Families" was most commonly affirmed, followed by "community at large" and "people with low income or the poor."

Are congregations checking the backgrounds of the adults who work with children? Most are, but a significant share are not. We asked whether programs "require supervision of children under age 18 in the absence of their parents or legal guardians." Forty-six percent of the top three programs do. For these programs, we followed up with "Do you conduct background checks for staff and volunteers?" Almost three in four (74 percent) said yes, that they did conduct background checks on the staff that worked with children. However, the remaining one quarter share represents 100 programs that did not screen volunteers. Some of these programs are probably not reasonable candidates for formal screening, but the list does include nine Vacation Bible Schools and other programs for which screening is important.

Replacement value calculations

In his study of Philadelphia congregations, Ram Cnaan defined "replacement value" as "calculating how much it would cost other parts of the civil or government sector to provide the same services or programs if the community-serving ministries ceased to do so."[4] Cnaan constructed a replacement value index from a battery of measures. In the Kent County Congregations Study, we used a very similar calculation to arrive at an estimated replacement value for congregations' social service work in Kent County, adding up the following measures:

1. direct financial support from the congregations;
2. in-kind support (that is, transportation, food, clothing, printing, telephone, postage);
3. the value of utilities used by the program;
4. the number of hours clergy spend in support of program;
5. the number of hours spent by congregational employees;
6. the number of hours donated by volunteers;
7. and the estimated cost to rent similar space;

and subtracting direct or indirect revenues received by the congregation as a result of the program:

1. external revenue that supports the program;
2. rent paid to the congregation by the program;
3. and the value of in-kind support provided to the congregation by the program.

Estimates for replacement value components

Table 15 presents the results of our calculations, computed for 767 of the 847 "top three" programs.[5] Overall, we estimate the average program would cost over $70,000 annually to replace. The average congregation provides annual value across all its programs in the neighborhood of $138,000. Naturally, large congregations supply the lion's share; the typical (median) congregation's total replacement value for programs is much lower at about $45,000. Volunteer time is the most expensive to replace: the average program annually receives $22,149 worth of volunteer time, using Independent Sector's 2007 valuation of volunteer labor at $19.51 per hour.[6] Cash expenses are the next most costly category at $15,671 per congregation, followed by rent for equivalent space and in-kind goods and services. Clergy and staff hours are moderately costly components of the total.[7]

Estimated replacement value of social services per congregation is about $138,000

			Average annual cost...	
Measures (pro-rated for use of time and space)	**Programs reporting**	**Add or subtract?**	**...per program**	**...per congregation**
1. Cash amount congregations spend on the program (cash outlays)	73%	+	$15,671	$30,401
2. Dollar value of **in-kind goods and services** provided for the program (such as office equipment, food, transportation, publicity)	58%	+	$9,495	$18,420
3. Dollar value of the building **utilities** (water/gas/electricity)	53%	+	$6,332	$12,284
4. Clergy hours spent on program ($30/hour)	76%	+	$5,678	$11,024
5. Staff hours spent on program ($15/hour)	54%	+	$6,949	$13,481
6. Volunteer hours spent on program ($19.51/hour)	90%	+	$22,149	$42,970
7. The total **value of equivalent space if rented** outside of the congregation's space	56%	+	$10,423	$20,220
8. Any revenue from **external support** (government agencies, private foundations, user fees)	17%	–	$4,908	$9,522
9. Rent paid to the congregation by the program	2%	–	$74	$142
10. In-kind material resources the congregation receives from the program (parallel to item 2 above)	11%	–	$542	$1,052
Total replacement value averaged across individual programs and congregations		**=**	**$71,172**	**$138,199**

Table 15 Replacement value calculations for 767 "top three" social service programs

Totals for the face-to-face sample

Total replacement value for the 395 congregations interviewed face-to-face is nearly $55 million annually, as shown in the first numerical row of **Table 16**.[8] Congregations from non-Christian traditions account for the most replacement cost per congregation at $232,248 each, and the most per capita at $2,731.[9] They were followed by Reformed congregations with about $193,000 each and a per capita value of $819. The numerous Evangelical congregations contribute the most as a total, exceeding $19 million annually.

Despite their smaller numbers and lower income, Black congregations contribute about $8 million and Hispanics over $4.2 million, respectively, in the annual value of their programs, and provide nearly twice as much per capita ($945 and $987, respectively) as their White counterparts ($523 per capita). Minority congregations substitute time and energy to provide services that wealthier White congregations simply purchase.

Total replacement value is $54.6 million annually for top three programs spoken about in face-to-face interviews

		Replacement value		
	Congregations	**Average, $**	**Total, $**	**$ per capita**
All	395	138,199	54,588,648	571
Religious traditions				
Evangelical	143	135,243	19,339,784	439
Reformed	84	192,826	16,197,423	819
Pentecostal or Charismatic	77	65,725	5,060,796	635
Mainline or other Protestant	45	106,188	4,778,478	471
Catholic or Orthodox	21	162,189	3,405,978	296
Other traditions	25	232,248	5,806,188	2,731
Primary ethnicity				
White	239	176,157	42,101,506	522
Black	82	96,961	7,950,774	945
Hispanic	60	70,658	4,239,474	987
Size in adult participants				
Very small (0-49)	133	36,373	4,837,549	2,648
Small (50-149)	121	129,858	15,712,859	2,010
Medium (150-399)	83	151,892	12,607,010	740
Large (400-999)	41	310,183	12,717,503	603
Very large (1,000+)	14	622,409	8,713,726	182
Location				
Urban	289	118,944	34,374,878	581
Suburban	86	217,921	18,741,204	573

Table 16 Replacement value averages and totals by religious tradition, primary ethnicity, congregation size and urban or suburban location—for congregations participating in face-to-face interviews

Fourteen of the largest congregations that we interviewed face-to-face, which have 1,000 or more members, are massive contributors to public welfare, but their per capita contribution is very small at $182 per regularly participating adult. The replacement cost for the services they provide averages $622,000 each, accounting for $8.7 million of the $54.6 million total (about 16 percent). Meanwhile, the 133 very small congregations contributed $4.8 million in value and have very high per capita replacement values above $2,600.

The suburban congregations included in our urban-centric face-to-face sample are wealthier and average about $217,000 in replacement value each, but their $573 per capita estimate is about equal to that of urban congregations.

Eliminating various types of explicitly religious programs cuts the total replacement value by no more than half.[10]

A county-wide estimate of $88.8 million for programs

Again, these estimates are for just 395 of the 720 congregations we identified county-wide; an estimate of total replacement value for congregational services county-wide requires that we estimate both the contribution of the 188 congregations taking the shorter telephone interview and that of the 137 that did not participate at all. Excluding the 137 non-responding congregations altogether, we get a county-wide estimate of program replacement costs totaling $88.8 million, a figure we employ further below. A rough estimate for the nonresponding congregations would increase the total replacement cost further to $95.7 million annually.[11]

About conservative estimates

All these estimates are fairly conservative. We calculated replacement costs only for the top three programs, though two-thirds of the congregations provided more than three programs. Furthermore, we didn't figure the costs associated with providing the extensive list of less formal services described in **Chapter 7**, which generate significant basic support for individuals and families and average of 16 per congregation. Nor did we include the critical community services provided by organizations that congregations have created as separate non-profit agencies.

Finally, we are estimating the cost to replace these services, not their true worth to the county. Studies that explore that impact of religion more generally on urban communities have shown that religion helps to reduce violence, substance abuse, unemployment of young males, and drop-out rates. Religious congregations positively affect persons who live in communities with a high density of such ministries, even when they do not directly receive any of the services.[12] The true worth of congregations to our community is likely much higher than the dollar value calculated here.

Total annual replacement value estimates range from $95.5 to $118.7 million

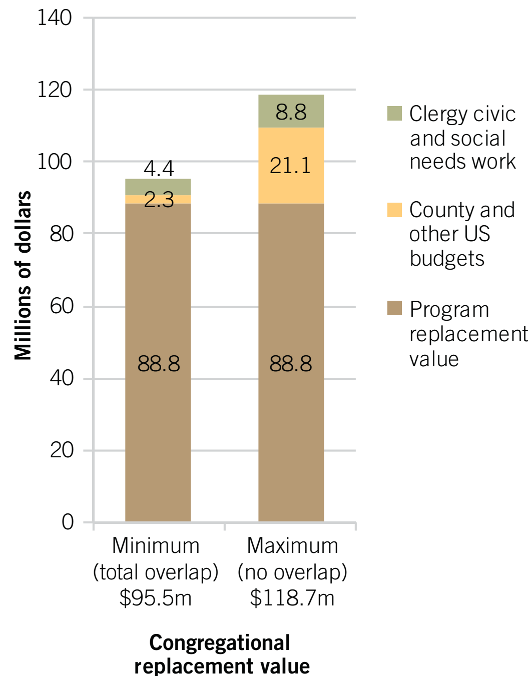


Figure 38 Total annual estimated replacement value for congregational programs, budgets and clergy service

Summing up congregational services

How much, then, would it cost government or civil society to replace the services that Kent County congregations annually provide through their programs? Is is possible to arrive at a realistic estimate? We have already calculated that it would cost $88.8 million annually to replace the social service programs offered by the 583 congregations participating in the KCCS. To that figure we can also add the direct financial contributions that congregations make to causes outside ($10.3 million) and inside ($10.8 million) Kent County, described in **Chapter 4**, plus an estimated $8.8 million to cover the time that clergy spend in civic affairs, community organizations, and ministering directly to people's social needs, as noted in **Chapter 6**. When adding these contributions together, we do run the risk of double-counting some of the time or dollars spent. Taking that possibility into account, **Figure 38** offers both minimum and maximum estimates of the total replacement value of services provided annually by the 583 congregations we surveyed. In sum, it would cost at least $95 million to $118 million to replace the social programs and services that Kent County congregations offer each year to members and the community.

10

“Somebody said some years ago, ‘What would happen to this community if tomorrow your church wasn’t there? Would they miss you?’ I would want this church to be missed because we’ve been providing encouragement, assistance [and] support to them and to their community. Congregations of this community need ... to become aware of what those needs are, so that we can provide [for] those needs.”

—a Kent County congregational leader

10 VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This chapter puts some rhetorical flesh on the numerical bones of our report. In **Chapter 6**, we reported that 92 percent of religious leaders expressed interest, usually strong interest, in engaging in "community-wide collective efforts to improve the community's well-being." What might that interest produce in practice? What are congregational leaders most eager to do? What do they plan for the future? We share some of their answers here.

To enrich our findings beyond numbers and checkboxes and to crown lengthy face-to-face interviews with some of that inspirational preaching ministers do best, we asked religious leaders to articulate their visions for the future of their congregations' service to the community. Quotes from these interviews have introduced several chapters. While a few clergy members' visions emphasized individual conversion alone—such as "I can't clean up the pool, but I can become a fisher of men"—the majority expressed a desire for their congregations not only to strengthen spiritual commitments but to act as agents of renewal within their own communities. As one pastor stated:

> *I believe that if a person becomes a disciple of Christ, it will affect every area of their life. I believe that it can revolutionize your marriage, reshape your relationship with your neighbors, reshape the way you treat people at work, particularly that of living a servant lifestyle. I'm not interested [merely] in people doing additional religious activities.*

Considering the urgent nature of issues and needs facing members of their communities, leaders appear to share broad consensus that congregations are called to do more than preach to people within their own four walls. This idea was captured well by an African American, Pentecostal pastor:

> *I believe the church now no longer [can] be just about church business. The church I came out of was nothing but church business; the pastor there now believes in zero social programs—does not want to hurt or help the people, just take the tithes, teach them, minister to them, and that's enough. That's not enough!*

Like many of his peers in ministry, this pastor has a vision for sports activities, education and mentoring to serve kids and counter the negative influences in his poverty-stricken neighborhood. The following pages provide more excerpts from vision statements of religious leaders.

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St. Mary's Catholic Church in Grand Rapids points skyward from First Street NW. In the background is St. Adalbert's Basilica on Fourth Street NW, also a Roman Catholic institution.

In this chapter

- *Many religious leaders have ambitious visions to serve the community.*
- *Children and education are common themes in the vision statements of about a quarter of the leaders we interviewed.*
- *Among barriers to achieving community well-being, leaders cite internal cultural resistance to outreach and scarcity of volunteers.*
- *Leaders perceive some unique challenges, such as competition among congregations to provide the same service.*

Vision statements

This evidence of religious leaders' interest in material and social outreach emerged from their responses to three different questions (listed below) about their future visions for their congregations:

1. Please tell me about **your vision to improve the quality of life** in your congregation's neighborhood or elsewhere in Kent County.
2. What is the **most important new thing** your congregation could do in the future to help achieve this vision?
3. Now please tell me about some **limits or barriers** you perceive to achieving the vision you've just described and your congregation's role in it.

We recorded these mini-interviews and transcribed the contents into a database. Then we perused the statements of all 395 face-to-face respondents and summarized them below.

Themes in vision statements

To get a closer look at common themes, we selected a random sample of 100 out of the 395 leaders interviewed, including leaders of 17 primarily Black congregations and 10 primarily Hispanic congregations. We also decided to look for evidence of interest in helping children and supporting education. Two student research assistants categorized these statements by the following themes:

- Community and neighborhood[1]
- Children and youth
- Education and schools
- Evangelism or religious conversion
- Moral formation
- Volunteers
- Monetary income to the congregation
- Monetary expenses and gifts
- Internal issues within the congregation

Figure 38 illustrates how these themes turned up in leaders' extended answers to the three questions above.[2] A concern for the community was expressed in 77 of the 100 vision statements, followed by evangelism with 49 of 100 statements. Moral formation (some concern for teaching people to behave morally) was spotted in 29 percent of vision statements, while children and education were mentioned in 26 percent and 23 percent, respectively.

When asked what one new thing they could do to achieve their visions, just 17 percent of leaders mentioned children and just 12 percent mentioned education. Meanwhile, almost half mentioned some matter internal to their congregation. Internal issues like conflict, aging congregations and member apathy surged further into the forefront when barriers to vision were discussed, with 65 percent of the respondents mentioning them. Concern about recruiting enough volunteers to serve was slightly more frequently cited as a barrier than concern about having enough income.

Concern for community

Many religious leaders want to see their communities become healthier and happier and are encouraging their congregations to be at the service of the community. Consider this excerpt from the vision statement of an African American pastor:

> *One of the big things that we push here and one of my things is community Christian development. Several people from our church have gone to John Perkins' training, and we came back with a renewed sense that we have to be involved in the entire neighborhood, in the entire community. It's living here, it's shopping here, it's being involved in the schools, it's being involved in businesses, it's being involved in [preventing] crime and gangs, it's being involved in immigrant issues, it's being involved in housing, it's being involved in developing opportunities for people to meet together for cultural things, it's being involved in education, it's all those issues. You can't just stop worrying about one. They are all part of each other. [We are] helping our community, which was once a scary place for people to come 15 years ago, to now be a place where people want to come.*

Community and evangelism top vision topics; internal issues and volunteers are common barriers

Themes	Question: Vision statement	New thing to do	Barriers
Community	77%	51%	34%
Evangelism	49%	32%	19%
Moral formation	29%	12%	14%
Children	26%	17%	7%
Education	23%	12%	7%
Internal issues	22%	47%	65%
Monetary income	13%	6%	38%
Monetary expense	6%	3%	8%
Volunteers	2%	8%	43%

Figure 39 Common topics identified in 100 randomly-sampled vision statements

A Hispanic pastor at a Seventh-day Adventist congregation cited the following goals:

a) A better-educated and responsible community.

b) A community that knows Jesus and prepares for his Second Coming.

c) A community that decreases violence, crime and abuse and increases respect, tolerance, responsibility and involvement in social and moral issues.

The pastor of a primarily White church in the inner city cites the importance of relationships with the Black residents of the neighborhood:

> *I would like to see the interface between our congregation—most of whom do not live in this area—and our neighborhood increase significantly. The most successful efforts that we've experienced have been times when we could develop deep relationships with people in the neighborhood.*
>
> *For instance, our Adopt-a-Block program really goes a long way to increasing that interface. Our mission as a church is to be a living testimony to God's grace and justice in the city. In order to be a living testimony, you actually have to know people, and people have to know you. We are finding through things like Adopt-a-Block that we are not alone in that mission. There are other people of faith in our community who share that with us. We're discovering who they are and developing some kind of spiritual alliance with them.*
>
> *I would like to see our church become not just a church* in *its community but a church* of *its community, where people actually look at [our congregation] and say, "We know that church. We've been there, that's our church" to some degree, whether it is from worship or from regular participation in some program.*

The impulse to reach out is not only a Christian one. The rabbi of a Jewish synagogue said,

> *Our congregation is very blessed, and I believe we could do a much better job reaching out to those in need in the greater Grand Rapids community who don't have the same blessings that we have. There's no reason that we cannot commit ourselves to work in partnership with others in our city who are in need of some of the services and the gifts that we have. Hopefully, in the future, we can find ways to be better neighbors and to reach our hands out to those who aren't necessarily members of the Jewish community but those who are just in need, those who are hungry and those who can benefit from some of the things we have to offer.*

Interest in children and education

Education, including public education, is on the visionary radar for at least a quarter of congregations. One White pastor describes his own congregation's belief in the importance of education:

> *Our vision for improving the quality of life is to make sure that we start by listening to what the needs are within our community. For a long time, we've assumed that we knew what the needs were and just did things. Then, over time, we found out that wasn't really what was being asked for.*
>
> *The biggest thing that we're planning on doing right now is just listening and getting into our community, spending time with people, getting to know them. In doing that, we've found that there are a lot of single parents within our community, there are a lot of parents where both parents work, so then there are students or children being left home alone. We're realizing that that's a major need.*
>
> *Our vision is to work with the public school systems, with [the schools] struggling right now, not only with enrollment but also financially. It's our desire to find a way that we can couple and work with the public school system to help provide quality education for students that will possibly help get a lot of these students out of the cycle of ... poverty, to help them to get educated.*

Another church is "working hard" to connect with youth:

> *We have a strong mandate to reach the school systems of Kent County. We are really working hard to build up our youth, our middle school, and our children's department, offering things that will attract them into the church to give them a safe place for fellowship. We have been recently purchasing game systems, game tables, things that will draw the youth of the community, things that we believe will take them from those danger hours between school and home into the church.*

Education isn't just for kids. This Black pastor wants to educate adults:

> *One of the things that I know to be real to us is that education is the key, and so my vision is to place a skill center in the midst of the community, the Black community. ... It would be a place where we would teach people basic skills.*

For instance, if a home owner buys a new home, the first thing that they would need to know is how to maintain the home. So we would teach them basic carpenter skills. We would teach women basic things they need to know as far as homemaking. If they can't afford going to the stores, they'd know how to make their own clothing and stuff like that, just basic things that a skill center could do. [We'd] also provide education as far as a place where a person can get their GED...

A White church is partnering with the Hispanic church that shares its building to expand preschool and day care offerings:

One of the visions I have would be for expanding our preschool to work hand in hand with our Hispanic church and see where the needs are in terms of preschool, subsidizing school for the community, as well as expanding our preschool into a daycare. That is currently being discussed by our preschool council as well as our preschool director and the Senior Pastor and myself.

Barriers to achieving vision

When asked what stands in the way of their vision for the community, congregational leaders are most concerned about the internal health and culture of their congregations. Complacency, resistance to change, the busyness of the young, the aging of the core volunteers and conflicts over generational differences are all mentioned. Faithfulness to religious principles is mentioned as well. Consider this representative comment from a United Methodist pastor:

Some of the barriers and limitations are due to the fact that a lot of people have compartmentalized the meaning of their faith. It's a little box that sets up here in the corner, and we can go to that when we need to, and we can [leave] that [behind] when we don't have to. They compartmentalize [their faith] rather than understanding that the purpose of Jesus Christ is an all-encompassing life, it's what we breathe, it's what we see, it's how we feel. It's recognizing that he is in every person we meet and we have the opportunity to help draw him out and to relate to that person wherever they're at.

Language barriers, cultural barriers, racism and social class differences are fairly frequently cited. One leader of a traditionally English-speaking church says, "because our community is probably almost 50 percent Hispanic, language is probably our biggest barrier." Another pastor noted his congregation's "mentality" was a barrier:

Internally, we have to really raise the people's vision. We've got to get out of our comfort levels. With our canvassing [efforts], we've had some people from the community come. We had [a family] come who had no church background, and they had three kids that ran around here and were, you know, were terrors (laughter). The sad thing was our people's response. "Why can't [these parents] get a grip on their kids?" Well, if we're going to reach the community, then that's what you're going to get. ... This is no longer a suburban area—it has become very urbanized, very multi-ethnic and so forth. And if this is where God wants us, then internally as a church we have a lot of soul searching to do.

One pastor points out that exhaustion is a barrier to the mobilization of the congregational human resources in health and education professions that we documented in **Chapter 6**:

A huge percentage of the members of this congregation are involved in education and in social services, and they are quite frankly burned out when they come home at night. How do we develop a volunteer core of people that is willing to be trained and to invest in that same ... cross section of our community that the vast majority of this congregation are [already] working [with] 40 to 50 to 60 to 70 hours a week anyway? There's some times I wish this congregation was filled with salesmen, rather than doctors and therapists and teachers and social workers.

Finances are often mentioned as a barrier, but often only before shifting on to other topics. Many need money, but few meditate much on how to get it. One inner-city pastor identified a novel financial issue in providing social services—competition:

Our neighborhood is changing. We have, for example, a clothing closet. In 1993, when it would open at 10 o'clock in the morning, there would be 50 people standing outside waiting to come in to buy clothing at 10 cents an item, and they would make a $100 in a day, because there were not very many clothing closets at that time. So we were meeting a genuine need.

Well, now there's clothing closets all over. Is the time spent in that really meeting the need? Is that where we should be focusing our energy? The same thing holds true for our food pantry. When we started it, there was no other food pantry in the area. Well, now there's several. And now we find ourselves battling the line between helping people and enabling them. By that I mean, we have people come in you

know, alcohol on their breath and they have no desire for anything spiritual, they are simply here to get food so they can continue on in the life they are living.

So, we are looking at that: would we be better served as a church to stop serving the public in that way? Maintain the food cupboard for our own congregation and for those that we meet in the community as we go, and then maybe take some of those resources and donate it to the Kent County food service—you know, the Second Harvest Gleaners or something like that? So, those are some of the things as we look to the future—ministry has to change as the neighborhood changes, so we're just trying to figure out what that means to us.

These are precisely the kinds of challenges we hope this study will help begin to address.

New programs planned

Before taking these broad vision statements, we had earlier asked leaders, "What additional social services, if any, does your congregation or parish plan to add in the next 12 months?" 161 respondents mentioned specific future programs their congregation planned to create to meet the needs of the community. As shown in **Table 17**, educational programs of various kinds are by far the most common proposed addition, with 60 mentions, including nine tutoring programs. "Volunteering in schools" and "English as a Second Language instruction" were also common ideas for programs in the Education category. In the Health category, many congregations hoped to provide programs that could offer basic services (such as blood pressure and cholesterol screenings) to substitute for expensive doctor's office check-ups. In the "Community" category, programs to reach out to local residents were frequently mentioned, as leaders often cited a lack of neighborhood cultural unity as an obstacle to ministry.

Despite the wide scope of social services that already are being offered by congregations, the future vision of clergy is not static. Instead, the goals of clergy appear malleable, adaptive and responsive to the needs of their own congregations and surrounding communities. There seems to be tremendous potential for congregations in Kent County to meet the needs of their communities in the coming years.

Education tops list of specific proposals for new programs

Category	Programs planned	Most Common Idea (Mentions)
Education	60	"Tutoring" (9)
Health	24	"Health Screening" (6)
Community	24	"Outreach" (6)
Children	20	"Day/Child Care" (9)
Food	17	"Food Pantry" (7)
Religious	16	"Evangelism/Ministry" (5)
Finance	15	"Financial Literacy" (4)
Prison	14	"Prison Ministry" (7)
Housing	12	"Need-Based Housing" (5)
Abuse	8	"Domestic Violence Prev." (5)
Elderly	8	"Visitation" (2)
Mentoring	8	"Mentoring Programs" (8)

Table 17 Specific future programs planned by congregations

11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter

- *Prior research has established the importance of "authoritative communities" that provide both connectedness and structure for youth.*
- *Kent County has unique religious characteristics that can strengthen efforts to serve vulnerable children and families.*
- *We offer 20 recommendations for congregations and other community institutions.*
- *We encourage congregations to prepare themselves to focus on the well-being of children and on strong families and schools.*
- *We encourage schools, foundations and government agencies to open doors to collaboration with congregations.*

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In this final chapter we remove our hats as social scientists and don the hats of advocates in the hope of strengthening community-serving ministries directed at Kent County's most vulnerable children and their families. We move from theory and findings to actionable steps that we hope will make a measurable difference in our community. This report makes the case that congregations are an integral part of the web of institutions that together comprise the ecology of the social service delivery system, working alongside the civic, government, nonprofit and political institutions that seek to ensure a high quality of life for citizens in Kent County. Recognizing this fact, we hope to inspire those who care about our county to discuss these findings, ponder their implications, and emerge with a bold, imaginative and challenging vision for future action.

Young people flourish in communities that are singularly focused on children as assets worth investing in. Thriving communities exist where families are strong and neighborhoods extend a helping hand to those in need, where young people have meaningful relationships with adults. Adults can function as mentors to buffer against negative peer pressures, inspire children to seek higher and more noble goals, guide them through day-to-day issues they face, connect them to potential employers, affirm and celebrate their dignity and accomplishments, and instill respect and appreciation for nurturing their faith and engagement with a congregation.

Congregations as "authoritative communities"

Congregations are reservoirs, filled with adults who are predisposed to developing empathetic relationships with young people. Of all the institutions in our society, congregations are the most likely to supply a volunteer workforce—ready, trained and able to embrace the task of guiding and mentoring young people, particularly those most at risk. Perhaps the greatest strength of congregations is their capacity to build meaningful relationships. Congregations are "authoritative communities" that provide both connectedness and structure.[1] Recent scientific evidence argues for the need for authoritative communities to flourish, for they are the only communities in which children and young people are likely to thrive and succeed.[2]

The distinguished panel of 33 experts who authored the report *Hardwired to Connect* lists ten characteristics of an authoritative community: (1) "it is a social institution that includes children and youth; (2) it treats children as ends in themselves; (3) it is warm and nurturing; (4) it establishes clear limits and expectations; (5) the core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists; (6) it is multi-generational; (7) it has a long-term focus; (8) it reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person; (9) it encourages spiritual and religious development; (10) it is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor."[3] These experts offer authoritative community "as an analytic and diagnostic tool [that] seeks to spell out those basic group traits or qualities that, across a

wide diversity of social institutions, appear to be most likely to improve probabilities [of success for] U.S. children and youth."[4] From our vantage point, there is no other social institution that fits so perfectly the definition of an authoritative community—and holds so much promise for improving the life chances of children and young people—as congregations.

In short, children and youth are wired to connect—and to the extent that they are connected with others who help to reinforce positive values and who provide a moral compass, they will align themselves to embrace life-enhancing values and actions.[5]

The unique religious character of Kent County

Congregations, as authoritative communities, inspire people to move beyond themselves to improve the lives of children. And that is exactly what happened to Nancy Schondelmayer.[6] Motivated by a sermon she heard at church, Nancy responded to the call to get involved in helping children. Realizing that many young people make decisions early in life that ruin their future chances, she decided to mentor and support an organization dedicated to enhancing the well-being of children—the Boys and Girls Club of Grand Rapids Youth Commonwealth. Whether working behind the desk on administrative tasks or joining after-school activities like crafts and games, Nancy spends significant time during the school year and in the summer volunteering to help kids.

Like Nancy, there are hundreds, indeed, thousands of volunteer heroes and heroines from all walks of life who give their time, talents and resources to support kids and families in Kent County. There are religious leaders who care enough to be trained and to articulate from the pulpit the need, indeed the moral imperative, to give of our time and resources. There is potential in Kent County to mobilize a greater number of volunteers like Nancy. There is the potential to create a movement of caring within the religious community that is singularly focused on the educational, social and spiritual well-being of young people in our community.

We live in a county with a unique set of religious characteristics that have the potential of precipitating greater public good. Kent County residents are significantly more likely to attend religious services than Americans nationally. Compared to congregations across the country, Kent County congregations are larger in size, have more leaders, are better funded, and are more likely to have participated in or supported a social service program. Kent County congregations are also more likely than congregations nationally to sponsor nearly one full additional social program, and twice as likely to set up a separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Notably, Black congregations in Kent County are almost twice as likely as Black congregations nationally to say that they have participated in or supported social service, community development or neighborhood organizing projects. Together with Hispanic congregations, they are twice as likely to sponsor a social program. In addition, Black congregations are almost three times more likely to have recently started a nonprofit.

These distinct characteristics of religious institutions provide a promising foundation from which to build a coordinated, strategic and comprehensive social service effort that is singularly focused on improving the lives of young people in Kent County. Moving toward that goal, the Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation has proposed to enter into a long-term, collaborative partnership for strengthening the capacity of congregations to serve the county's most vulnerable children and families (See the **Afterword** to this report for additional information.) When we add to these efforts the overwhelming interest expressed by all religious leaders—particularly those representing congregations located in the urban core—to "engage in community-wide collective efforts to improve the community's well-being," the stage is set for what we hope will be a large mobilization of people and resources to embrace this mission.

Challenges

This report shows that religious congregations are unusually robust in Kent County compared to national averages, and that they are providing substantial, valuable and often indispensable social services to residents of the county. Congregations testify that their leaders spend thousands of hours each week meeting social needs and that they have small armies of staff dedicated primarily to community service.

But there are many problems to solve. We have found fairly thin participation in interdenominational and pastoral networks, a hunger for leadership training in skills applicable to service provision, and very low proportions of congregational budgets allocated to programs in Kent County. Despite today's strong army of local volunteers, our respondents were very concerned about the sustainability of the existing volunteer base and the availability of volunteers for new ventures. Furthermore, few congregations, particularly Black and Hispanic, support educational institutions. Black and Hispanic religious leaders sense a need to increase their own education.

Partnerships with public social service agencies could also be improved. Just 42 percent of the 583 participating congregations mentioned ACCESS, the county's premier coordinator of congregation-based social services, and government agencies have a very low profile on the list of agencies to which congregations refer the poor

Online Resources for Congregations Providing Social Services

CALVIN COLLEGE:
Kent County Congregations Study
www.calvin.edu/go/kccs

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW) social sciences information
www.calvin.edu/worship/idis/soc

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY:
Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Non-Profit Leadership
www.gvsu.edu/jcp

Community Research Institute (CRI)
www.cridata.org

HEART OF WEST MICHIGAN UNITED WAY:
Community Resource Directory
www.refersoftware.com/hwmi/

Schools of Hope Reading Program
www.waybetterunitedway.org/program-soh.php

ACCESS of West Michigan
accessofwestmichigan.org/

Faith and Service Technical Education Network (FASTEN)
www.fastennetwork.org

Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)
www.ccda.org

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)
www.dsni.org

Faith in Action
www.putyourfaithinaction.org

Mellon Bank Report "Discover Total Resources: A Guide for Nonprofits"
www.mellon.com/communityaffairs/guide/DTR.pdf

and vulnerable. Our list of 2,338 congregational programs is impressive, but it also includes a great deal of duplicated effort. Identifying such duplication and substituting collaboration could transform our county.

Wealth disparities between Whites and minorities and between urban and suburban areas are accompanied by differences in the ways congregations seek to address social needs. Primarily Black and Hispanic congregations in low-income areas are contributing a small fraction of the total religious funding for services, yet they contribute almost twice the program replacement value per adult participant that their White counterparts do. White congregations depend more on their financial resources to address social needs, while African American and Latino congregations depend more on human resources.

Recommendations for action

What can we do as a community—a very religious community—to improve the quality of life in Kent County, especially for children in low-income households? In this final section we provide recommendations and action steps for religious, educational, philanthropic and governmental sectors. While not exhaustive, the list highlights areas of focus that can significantly help congregations to serve vulnerable populations more effectively. These recommendations are presented in the order of the groups they target: congregations and faith-based organizations (whom we address directly); denominations, seminaries, colleges and universities; foundations and donors; and government agencies, policymakers, and nonprofit service organizations.

Recommendations for congregations and faith-based organizations

1. **Identify and assess community needs:** Excellent community ministry efforts begin with a thorough assessment of the actual needs of the community served. If you lead or belong to a congregation, gather information about the people you wish to serve through interviews, surveys and contact with key community leaders. Access community information from the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University and investigate Kent County congregations and their social service programs online at the KCCS web site. (See sidebar.)

2. **Assess your congregation's strengths and weaknesses:** Understanding available congregational resources and the abilities of congregants—and mobilizing church volunteers to use their gifts—are keys to effective community ministry. If you're a leader, determine what human skills and talents you can count on as you begin or expand a social ministry. Assess the degree to which your congregation has the 10 characteristics of an authoritative community, as described earlier in this chapter.

3. **Encourage lay leadership:** Since congregations are the primary sources for the volunteering workforce in any community, leaders have an urgent responsibility to train and inspire laymen and women who share a passion for service. Encourage a participatory style of leadership to inspire lay-people, and delegate responsibility to lay leaders.

4. **Increase networking:** Religious leaders who are networked with other congregations and community organizations are less likely to burn out and more likely to succeed in community serving efforts. Establish relationships with other congregations, faith-based organizations, non-profits and government agencies in order to build trust, increase the impact of service activities and avoid duplication of effort. Try to connect with people from different faith traditions, races, ethnicities and economic backgrounds to your own.

5. **Seek training:** Many religious leaders need access to relevant training and educational opportunities that would make them more effective. English language skills, formal theological education, and training in non-profit management are all critical areas to develop. Leaders, paid staff and volunteers should seek opportunities for formal and informal training.

6. **Increase resource development capacity:** One of the most common needs expressed by religious leaders is to strengthen stewardship efforts and expand their congregations' resources to support community ministry efforts. Network with local organizations that can support your fundraising efforts and with intermediaries who can help you access additional resources. (See sidebar.)

7. **Strengthen families:** Sponsor programs that prepare couples well for marriage, improve marital relationships, support single parent households, and instill greater appreciation for intact families and their positive impact on children.

8. **Advance the educational lives of children:** Play a key role in reinforcing habits of mind and heart that enhance educational achievement. Develop results-driven educational programming experiences for children, from preschool, to after-school, to summer programs. Train and support parents as a child's first teachers. Find ways to support educational institutions (both private and public) in the community.

9. **Follow best practices in programming for children:** Pay close attention to best practices in the child welfare, developmental and educational fields. Ensure the highest quality of services by conducting background checks on adult volunteers and running safe and, where appropriate, accredited programs.

Recommendations for denominations, seminaries, colleges and universities

10. **Articulate a theology of social responsibility:** To mobilize congregations and leaders so that they embrace ministries to serve the most vulnerable, denominations must clearly articulate a theology of social engagement and responsibility, rooted in and relevant to each congregation's religious tradition.

11. **Increase training opportunities for religious leaders:** Colleges, universities, community colleges, schools of religion, seminaries, Bible institutes and diocesan training programs need to embrace the task of educating religious leaders. Working collaboratively with denominations, local networks of religious leaders or individual congregations, they can develop programs, facilitate access and provide financial support to make higher levels of informal and formal theological education available to religious leaders.

12. **Help leaders to build practical skills:** While formal theological education is important, there is overwhelming interest among congregation leaders, staff and volunteers in developing practical skills relevant to social ministry. Whether the goal is to improve counseling and mental health services, professionalize administrative staff, help pastors hone their leadership skills, or assist volunteers to meet an immediate need in their neighborhood, "hands-on" training programs that emphasize non-profit management skills will greatly enhance the community-serving capacity of congregations.

13. **Get college-age students involved:** Colleges and universities can encourage their students to support local congregations by volunteering, especially in programs targeting children and youth. The service experience benefits both sides.

Recommendations for foundations and donors

14. **Create opportunities to get acquainted with the faith community:** Congregations have an untapped potential to affect the social good, but they often lack the capacity to access private financial resources to carry out their community ministries. At the same time, many funders are not familiar with the religious community or its work. So that both sides can get better acquainted, we recommend that local foundations consider working through interdenominational and pastoral networks, seminaries and Bible institutes, and diocesan training programs to gain access to grassroots leaders and organize listening sessions.

15. **Develop training programs:** Local foundations—in collaboration with other intermediaries or educational institutions—might consider developing leadership training and organizational capacity building programs in the basic skill areas of social service management, and particularly in the areas of resource development, grant writing and outcome assessment. Given the educational disparities among Kent County congregational leaders, a special effort could be made to target leaders who are less educated and trained.

16. **Establish a grants program:** Foundations may wish to establish a grants and technical assistance program to help build organizational capacity in faith communities, especially to serve the needs of children. Data from the KCCS and other sources could be used to determine whether a proposal offers the right program in the right place at the right time.

Recommendations for government agencies, policymakers and other nonprofit service organizations

17. **Increase outreach efforts to the religious community:** Through volunteers and grassroots programs, congregations make a major contribution to social service provision efforts in Kent County. Recognizing this reality, we recommend that government agencies and other nonprofit service organizations intentionally seek opportunities to network with religious leaders.

18. **Work together on appropriate projects:** Where resources are available and collaboration makes sense, congregations can connect with partners in the public and nonprofit sectors to provide services jointly. This is particularly important for the health, social welfare, mental health and educational systems, where religious communities may be especially effective in reaching vulnerable youth and their families.

19. **Strengthen capacity building efforts:** We recommend that government agencies, in partnership with foundations and other non-profit organizations, facilitate access to technical assistance and training for religious leaders. Once policymakers learn what congregations are offering in various program areas, they can help them to improve their work and meet regulatory standards.

Recommendations for public school personnel:

20. **Welcome congregations to public schools:** Public schools need volunteers, and congregations want to help. After getting training on legal standards and ways to handle religious difference in a fair and welcoming manner, we recommend that schools seek volunteers from congregations. Where appropriate, faith-based organizations can connect public school kids with after-school programs and other services that they offer.

Final word

While our list of recommendations is far from comprehensive, it does enumerate practical, realistic steps that can significantly assist congregations in their community-serving ministries. Without the spiritual and material assistance that congregations in Kent County provide—and will continue to provide in the years ahead—many vulnerable people might not survive.

Congregations, as gatherings of hope, are the first-response organizations providing basic services to vulnerable populations. We can improve the future health of our neighborhoods by finding ways to enhance the leadership and the organizational capacity of these groups, leveraging support from denominations, seminaries, colleges and universities, foundations and government agencies.

There is an African proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”[7] In Kent County, how far we go as a community will depend on how we collaborate to connect with young people and have a positive impact on their lives—unleashing the power of authoritative communities to do what they do best.

We welcome your feedback
by e-mail at csr@calvin.edu
or by phone at 616 526-6173.

AFTERWORD

Vision 2025

The Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation

Looking ahead, the Douglas and Maria DeVos Foundation would like to engage in partnership with congregations in serving the needs of children and their families in Kent County. The purpose of this partnership is to see all children ready by age 18 for college, the workforce and life. We also hope other local and national philanthropic and non-profit organizations will join us in this mission.

Our goal is to develop a capacity-building plan that will strengthen the ability of religious leaders and their congregations to meet the educational and social needs of children and their families. Too many children and young people in our county are growing up outside of the grasp and protection of supportive communities. To address this situation, we need to shore up our communities through congregations, an invaluable asset.

This plan could involve the following objectives:

1. Supporting educational, leadership and skill development experiences for religious leaders and congregational members.
2. Training religious leaders and their staff on best practices in relevant fields such as literacy, human development, parenting and others.
3. Convening congregational leaders for inspirational, informational and technical assistance opportunities.
4. Encouraging collaboration and networking among congregations and with other social service agencies in the community.
5. Providing funding to supplement and take to scale effective congregational efforts to help improve the lives of children.

We look forward to working with a broad group of collaborators to achieve these goals and to serve our county's children well.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1. Honey 2007, p. A17.
2. Ammerman 2005.
3. Woolever and Bruce 2002, 2004, 2008; Hadaway 2007.
4. Beyerlein and Chaves 2003; Smidt 2004; Wald, Owens, and Hill 1988; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995.
5. Emerson and Smith 2000.
6. Becker 1999.
7. Edgell 2006.
8. Catanzaro *et al* 2007.
9. Ammerman 1999.
10. Kinney and Winter 2006; Thumma and Travis 2007.
11. Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Smith 2003.
12. Crane 2003; Hernández *et al* 2007; Treviño 2006.
13. Emerson and Woo 2006.
14. Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Kniss and Numrich 2007; Warner and Wittner 1998.
15. Chaves and Tsitsos, 2001; Chaves 2004, Cnaan *et al* 2002; 2006; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993; Unruh and Sider 2005; Warren 2001.
16. Cnaan 2002, 2006; Chaves 2004; Chaves and Anderson 2008.
17. Chaves and Anderson 2008.
18. Cnaan 2006.
19. Cnaan 2006, p. 64.
20. Cnaan, 2002, 2006; Chaves, 2004; Chaves and Tsitsos, 2001; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993.
21. Putnam 2000; Campbell and Yonish 2003.
22. Hernández *et al* 2007; Harris 2003.
23. Smith and Denton 2005.
24. On drop-out rates, see Scharf 1998; on high-poverty neighborhoods, see Regnerus and Elder 2003a, 2003b; on urban areas, see Jeynes 2003a, Regnerus 2000, and Sikkink forthcoming 2009; on minorities, see Jeynes 2003a and Sikkink and Hernández 2003.
25. Smith and Faris 2002, p. 8,9.
26. Chaves and Anderson 2008.
27. We considered congregations to be a group that meets regularly on an on-going basis, comes together primarily for worship, meets and worships at a designated place and has an offical name and formal structure that conveys its purpose. An identifiable leader is important but may be informal, since several religious communities (Brethren and Baha'i, for example) explicitly avoid naming any formal leadership positions.

CHAPTER 2
Religion in Kent County

1. Question wording and answer choices differ somewhat across the three referenced studies, which affects percentages. However, it still seems evident that Kent County residents are more likely to offer a report of high-frequency attendance at services.
   a. **GSS** numbers group 2006 responses to the ATTEND variable, which asks "How often do you attend religious services?" with answer options "Never, less than once a year, once a year, several times a year, once a month, two to three times a month, nearly every week, every week, or more than once a week." The chart groups the last three options as the "nearly weekly or more" category (including "nearly every week"), then groups the rest except for "never" as the middle "less than weekly" category.
   b. The **Pew Religious Landscape** figures data are from religions.pewforum.org, taking the national frequency of religious attendance. The question was "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services- more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?" The chart groups the first two options in "nearly weekly or more" and the rest, except "never", as "less than weekly."
   c. The **GGRCS** question was "In the past 12 months, how often did you attend religious worship services, not including weddings or funerals?" Answer options were "never, a few times a year, once a month, two or three times a month, once a week, twice a week, or three times a week or more."
2. The GSS question from 1998 asked, "Now I'm going to ask you about things you did during the last seven days. I'm only interested in what you did during the last seven days. From last (DAY OF WEEK) to today did you... Attend religious services?" Answer options were simply yes and no. GGRCS asked, "During the past week, did you go to church, temple, or another place of worship for services or other activities?" also with yes or no answer options. The inclusion of "other activities" may inflate the GGRCS numbers.
3. Based on RCMS 2000 data downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives (*www.thearda.com*). We divided the TOTCG variable into the POP200 variable and filtered for counties where POP200 was greater than or equal to 500,000.
4. These categories necessarily obscure some significant diversity within congregations; about 10 percent of congregations have more than 25 percent members from groups other than the primary group.
5. This estimate employs the NCS-II "W2" weight, which compensates for the survey's sample bias toward larger congregations.
6. This calculation is created from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) for 2004-2005. We added up the TOTLCH column for all public schools in each block group, then divided that amount into the sum of the MEMBER column for each block group. The result is the percentage of public school students attending schools in that block group who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

CHAPTER 3
Religious Leaders

1. For the sake of variety, we will sometimes use the words "clergy" and "pastors" to refer to religious leaders, recognizing that not all our religious leaders would consider themselves pastors or members of the clergy.
2. Ten percent (10.4) of respondents were not clergy or ordained pastors.
3. Note that the data reflects the chief or senior leader of each congregation whenever possible, but that respondent was not always available. The average age of all clergy would surely be much younger, if associate and assistant leaders were all counted.
4. Carroll 2006.
5. Carroll 2006.
6. Obviously, given current Catholic and Orthodox rules for ordination, our six women informants in that tradition are lay leaders involved in delivery of social services, not ordained clergy.
7. Carroll 2006.
8. As with any self-reported data, such findings always raise the question whether Kent County leaders actually spend enough time with their children; they might rather be too optimistic about how much time is enough.
9. We did not ask religious leaders for their household income, so we are not able to report personal financial information. However, for an excellent recent discussion on the salary trends of clergy in America, see McMillan and Price 2003.
10. Carroll 2006.
11. Eight percent of those with pension plans did not answer.
12. Mamiya 2006.
13. Carroll 2006.
14. Carroll 2006; Cnaan, Hernández, and McGrew 2006; Harper 1999; Mamiya 2006; Peña *et al*, 2005, 2006
15. Eighty-three respondents were coded as "other, specify," but many of the specified degrees were easily recoded back into the original categories. "Other" respondents who mentioned ordination training were recoded as "certificate or correspondence"; respondents

who mentioned Bachelor's degrees as a form of ministerial education were recoded as equivalent to "Bible college or some seminary."

16. Originally respondents reported their highest level of education, sometimes overlooking a Master's of Divinity or similar religious degrees. These responses were reported in Figure 11. The additional Master's of Divinity degrees were included in Figure 12.
17. Peña *et al* 2006; Carroll 2006.
18. Cross and Parker 2004.

CHAPTER 4
All Congregations Great and Small

1. Subtracting the "adults" measure from the "all adults and children" measure yields an estimate of regular non-adult (presumably child) participants. This calculation yields nonsensical results of less than zero for nine KCCS cases and 13 NCS-II cases, which we have treated as missing data not used in calculating means and medians. These respondents may have been confused by the inclusive language about including unofficial members in the first of the two questions and offered an estimate only of nonmember regular participants.
2. These calculations are informative, but do not have anything like the accuracy of an actual census. Congregations that said they "remained about the same" probably experienced some change, but are not included. Any congregations that closed altogether could not be interviewed, so significant losses in participation are missing or "censored."
3. This number is a rare case where not weighting NCS-II data yields the same finding; the unweighted national estimate for contributions per member is $1,143.
4. We divided giving totals in each category into the number of regularly participating adults.

CHAPTER 5
Social Composition and Theology

1. Park and Reimer 2002.
2. Given the difficulty of estimating distances and dealing with disparate municipal and popular ideas of what a neighborhood is, we encouraged respondents simply to select their own definitions of "neighborhood" for purposes of answering this question. Some may be quite small, others quite large; most probably have very fuzzy edges.
3. Roozen, McKinney and Carroll 1984.

CHAPTER 6
Social and Civic Engagement

1. Putnam 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995.
2. Putnam 2000.
3. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Chaves and Tsitsos 2001; Cnaan 2002; Sikkink and Hernández 2003.
4. Billingsley 1999; Harris 1999 and 2003; Smith 2003;
5. Warner and Wittner 1998, Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, Cnaan, Hernández, and McGrew 2006.
6. Putnam 2000, Wuthnow 1999.
7. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995.
8. Putnam 2000.
9. Mamiya 2006.
10. Burwell *et al*, Chicago Latino Congregations Study 2003-2007 data, forthcoming
11. Chaves, 2006.
12. Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001.

CHAPTER 7
Congregations and Education

1. Smith *et al* 2002; Smith and Denton 2005.
2. On psychological well-being: Wright, Frost, and Wisecarver 1993; Donahue and Benson 1995; on health: Jessor, Turbin, and Costa 1998; on deliquency and high-risk behaviors: Cochran and Akers 1989; Donahue and Benson 1995.
3. Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernández 2008.
4. Regnerus 2000; Muller and Ellison 2001.
5. Respectively for each phrase ending in a semicolon: Jeynes 1999; Parcel and Geschwender 1995; Elder and Conger 2000; Bankston and Zhou 2002; Sikkink and Hernández 2003.
6. Cook 2000; Jeynes 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Muller and Ellison 2001; Park 2001; Sikkink and Hernández 2003.
7. Jeynes 2003a; Regnerus and Elder 2003b.
8. Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernández 2008.
9. Antrop-González, Velez, Garrett 2005.
10. Quoted in Antrop-González *et al* 2005, p. 84
11. Conley 1999.
12. Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995; Flores-González 2000.
13. Wuthnow 2002.
14. Cook 2000.
15. Regnerus 2000.
16. Quoted in Antrop-González *et al*, 2008, p. 152.
17. This is the equivalent of 376 parents when the data is weighted to compensate for the oversamples of African Americans and Latinos.
18. These figures exclude the 10 percent who did not answer.
19. Just over a quarter of the Hispanic population responded "don't know" (22 percent) or refused (4 percent).
20. Again, "don't know" and refused responses are excluded. Too few home-schooling parents (four) responded to warrant a separate category.
21. A fuller discussion of the complete list of social services is provided in **Chapter 9**.
22. Herrera *et al* 2007.
23. Putnam 2000; Brooks 2006.
24. Chaves 2004; Wuthnow 2003.
25. Deasy 2002.
26. Halpern 1999.

CHAPTER 8
Social Service Provision by Congregations

1. Chaves 2004; Cnaan et al 2006, 2007.
2. DiIulio 2007.
3. Chaves 2004; Chaves and Anderson 2008; Cnaan et al 2006; Burwell, Hernández, Smith forthcoming.
4. For example, one Latino pastor in Chicago, interviewed by author Hernández, did not define his congregation's summer soccer league for community kids as a "social program." From his point of view, what they were doing was a "youth ministry program," and they would never categorize or label it as a "social service program." Yet the congregation carried out the program on a weekly basis over a two-month period in the summers; provided the sports equipment; recruited adult volunteers as coaches and mentors; provided refreshments and pizza every weekend; and, at the end of the summer, celebrated individual and team accomplishments with a party in the church basement. The only religious content is an opening prayer at the beginning of every game. This program went unreported until Hernández prompted the pastor with a list of programs including sports programs for youth; then the pastor recognized that their soccer summer league counted as a "social service program" as the researchers had defined it.
5. From Mark Chaves' National Congregations Study (NCS-II; Chaves and Anderson 2008), we drew the strategy of asking for a broad, open-ended list of programs from the religious leader's recall, with minimal prompting. From Ram Cnaan's work in Philadelphia (Cnaan 2006) and its adaptation by Hernández' Chicago Latino Congregations Study, we drew the strategy of presenting a list of program types (Cnaan had 126, we offer 113), followed by a list of "top programs" with detailed questions about each (Cnaan asked for the top five, we did the top three). All 583 responding congregations provided the list of programs from memory; the 395 face-to-face interviews also included the printed list and Top Three Programs sections.
6. Chaves and Anderson 2008.
7. The question also included the instructions, "Please don't include projects that use or rent space in your building but have no other connection to your congregation."
8. This number is a tentative estimate and is subject to revision in later publications as we continue to investigate. However, we are confident that the number will not change drastically.
9. Preliminary analysis suggests that the Kent County program count is still measurably higher than the national average even when we compare congregations with similar size, urban locale, interview mode (telephone or face-to-face), and race.
10. Special thanks to Mark Chaves and Shawna Anderson for their assistance adapting the NCS-II coding methods for KCCS; to Calvin student research assistant Gwen Einfeld for database setup and coding of 2,822 categorizations; to Sara Achauer and Michael Evans-Totoe for their assistance with 714 more categorizations; and to Nathan Medeiros-Ward for his able coordination.

11. Interviewees were instructed as follows: "I will show you a list of many types of social services that congregations may provide. I would like you to tell me which of these social services your local congregation has provided within the last 12 months. When I ask about ministries, services or programs, I am referring to activities that meet at least one of the following requirements:
    1. are provided on an ongoing basis (either daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly),
    2. are organized at some level, for example, having a committee or individual who leads or directs it,
    3. involves at least minimum costs to the congregation, OR
    4. use space in the buildings owned or rented by the congregation."
12. Cnaan 2002, 2006; Burwell, Hernández and Smith forthcoming.
13. Cnaan 2002, 2006; Cnaan and Boddie 2001; Wuthnow 2000.
14. Chaves 2004; Cnaan 2002, 2006.
15. Klinenberg 2002.
16. Chaves and Tsitsos 2001; Chaves 2004; Ammerman 2005.
17. Skjegstad 2002.

CHAPTER 9

Program Details and Replacement Value

Special thanks are due to Brian Odegaard for his work on Chapters 9 and 10.

1. Chaves 2004; Cnaan 2006.
2. In the case of missions trips, it may sometimes be the Kent County volunteers travelling, not the citizens of the remote country, for whom religious participation is required.
3. The figure of 70 percent provided solo is based entirely on the religious leaders' actual answers. However, in some cases where the leader reported that the congregation works alone, the name of the program itself suggests at least some collaboration with a nonprofit organization, such as Habitat for Humanity or Prison Ministry Fellowship's Angel Tree program, etc. We have included these identifiable organizations as collaborators for purposes of counting types of collaborators.
4. Cnaan, Hernández, McGrew, 2006, p. 25. For consistency with Cnaan's work, we say "replacement value" here. But it might be preferable to say "replacement cost" instead of "value," since "value" has a connotation of actual worth, as opposed to mere quantification of a program's monetary and in-kind inputs. Our data doesn't quantify the value to society of each program. Admittedly, we can't document whether any program is effective in achieving any value at all; that research is a task for later in-depth case studies of particular programs. Indeed, one philanthropic purpose of this project is to begin helping congregations increase their value-to-cost ratio, squeezing more value for the needy out of the same costly inputs.
5. We excluded 52 programs where the revenues exceed the congregation's costs; these are generally "pass-through" services where the congregation is simply a distributor of external revenues to aid recipients, not a recipient of revenue from the program. To focus on domestic welfare, we excluded an additional 28 "top three" programs that are "international" in character, leaving 767 programs.
6. See http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html.
7. Our rates for clergy ($30/hour) and staff ($15/hour) are simply very conservative estimates. Please recall that these estimates are of total cost, not simply gross wages. A minister or staff person who earns $20 per hour costs an employer as much as $25 to $30 per hour if the employer's share of taxes, insurance and pension contributions is included.
8. Larger programs from larger congregations contribute dramatically to this $54 million total. For a more conservative figure yet, we forced all the top 5 percent of programs on any measure to take the value of the 95th percentile. This results in a total estimate of about $41 million, about three-fourths of the original total. However, examination of individual large programs suggests that the replacement value for many would be greatly underestimated by this trimming of extreme values, so we are presenting the higher figures in the text.
9. Just two congregations account for most of the "Other traditions" large scope.
10. Some readers might prefer that we exclude religious programs from consideration. Excluding those we categorized as religious in purpose, such as missionary and evangelistic work, religious education, and so forth, reduces our total estimate to $42.3 million. Restricting the estimate to services for which no religious participation is required comes to $34.0 million. Taking both criteria and removing all those that are either apparently religious in intent or that explicitly require religious participation makes the total $28.5 million, 52 percent of the original $54.9 million estimate. Public-private partnerships that restrict religious expression too severely may risk cutting the value of available congregational services in half.
11. The telephone interviewees can be reliably estimated to match the $182,375 average for their peers outside the primary study area that were randomly assigned to face-to-face mode, adding an additional $34.3 million to our estimate. The 137 nonrespondents are smaller in membership and come disproportionately from less engaged traditions; we do not have a good way to estimate their replacement value, but if we guess a very conservative average replacement value of $50,000 each, we obtain another $6.9 million.
12. Regnerus and Elder 2003a.

CHAPTER 10

Visions for the Future

1. This theme was coded only if the respondent went beyond simply repeating back the original question wording.
2. We have counted a theme as present in a statement if either of the student coders perceived it. The agreement between coders is fairly low, so this should be regarded as an exploratory analysis.

CHAPTER 11

Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Institute for American Values 2003.
2. Kline 2008.
3. Institute for American Values. 2003., p. 34
4. Institute for American Values. 2003., p. 35
5. Karen 2008; Benson 2008.
6. Fettig 2008.
7. Cacioppo and Patrick 2008.

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APPENDIX A: RELATED STUDIES

Important surveys informing this report

Study	GGRCS	NCS-II	NTSP
Full name	Greater Grand Rapids Community Survey	National Congregations Study II	National Telephone Survey of Pastors
Dates	May and June 2006	2006-2007	2001
Principal Investigators	Community Research Institute & Delta Strategy	Mark Chaves Duke University	Jack Carroll Duke University
Conducted by	Grand Valley State University Community Research Institute (CRI)	University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center (NORC)	University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center (NORC)
Mode	Telephone	Mixed face-to-face and telephone	Telephone
Target respondents	Kent County residents, oversampled for African Americans and Hispanics	Informants from congregations mentioned by respondents to the General Social Survey (GSS), a stratified random-sample survey of U.S. residents.	Pastors of Christian churches mentioned by respondents to the 2001 General Social Survey.
Response count (response rate, if known)	1,351	1,480 (80%)	832 (72%)

Study	Philadelphia	GSS	Pew
Full name	Philadelphia Census of Congregations	General Social Survey	U.S. Religious Landscape Survey
Dates	1999-2001	2006 (covers 1972-2008)	2007
Principal Investigators	Ram A. Cnaan University of Pennsylvania	James A. Davis, Tom W. Smith, Peter V. Marsden	Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center
Conducted by	University of Pennsylvania	University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center (NORC)	Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI)
Mode	Face-to-face interviews	Face-to-face interviews (computer-assisted)	Telephone
Target respondents	Local religious congregations in Philadelphia	Random sample of residents of the United States	Random sample of residents of the United States
Response count (response rate)	1,376 (65%)	4,510	36,000 (national and local strata)

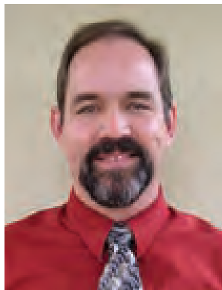
APPENDIX B: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

We grouped congregations loosely into religious traditions by denomination as shown below. Evangelical denominations were supplied by Dr. Corwin Smidt at Calvin College. Non-denominational congregations were assigned based on their name or self-description from the interview.

Denominations by Religious Tradition	Count
Evangelical	***211***
Association of General Baptists	1
Baptist Bible Fellowship	1
Baptist General Conference	5
Christian & Churches of Christ	1
Christian & Missionary Alliance	1
Church of The Brethren	1
Church of The Nazarene	6
Conservative Baptist Association of America	2
Conservative Grace Brethren Churches In America	1
Evangelical Covenant Church	4
Evangelical Free Church	2
Evangelical Lutheran Church In America	12
Free Methodist Church of North America	4
General Association of Regular Baptist Churches	17
Independent Fundamental Churches	7
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod	12
National Baptist Convention of America	1
National Baptist Convention-USA	3
Plymouth Brethren	1
Salvation Army	2
Seventh-day Adventist Church	13
Southern Baptist Convention	4
United Brethren In Christ	1
Wesleyan Church	8
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran	3
Independent or non-denominational	98
Reformed	***135***
Christian Reformed Church	71
Canadian and American Reformed Churches	1
Heritage Reformed Congregations	1
Netherlands Reformed Congregations	1
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	4
Presbyterian Church (USA)	7
Presbyterian Church In America	1
Protestant Reformed Churches	3
Reformed Church In America	42
United Reformed Churches In North America	2
Non-denominational	2
Pentecostal or Charismatic	***90***
Alpha y Omega Inc	2
Apostolic Assembly	1
Assemblies of God	10
Association of Vineyard Churches	2
Church of God (Cleveland, TN)	2
Church of God (Original)	2
Church of God In Christ	14
Concilio Centro de la Verdad	1
Full Gospel Fellowship	1
Home Ministry Fellowship	1
Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal MI	2
La Iglesia Luz del Mundo	1
Mision Principe de Paz	1
Missionary Church	1
Non Denominational Churches	1
Pentecostal Assemblies of The World	4
Pentecostal Church of God	11
United Pentecostal Church	5
Nondenominational or independent	38
Mainline or Other Protestant	***79***
African Methodist Episcopal Church	2
African Methodist Episcopal Zion	1
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	2
Christian Life Fellowship Ministries In America	1
Church of God (Anderson, IN)	4
Church of God General Conference	2
Conservative Congregation Christian Con	1
Episcopal Church	7
Friends (Quakers)	1
Grace Gospel Fellowship	3
International Council Community Churches	1
Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church	1
Mount Calvary Holy Church of America	1
Non Denominational Churches	3
Rock International Inc.	1
United Church of Christ/ Congregational	11
United Methodist Church	32
Worldwide Church of God	1
Other	4
Catholic or Orthodox	***37***
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdioce	1
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America	1
Roman Catholic Church	32
Romanian Orthodox Episcopate (Orthodox)	1
Russian Orthodox Church	1
Ukrainian Catholic Church	1
Other traditions	***31***
Baha'i Faith	2
Buddhist Temples	1
Christian Science Churches	2
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	3
Community of Christ - Latter Day Saints	3
Jehovah's Witnesses	3
Judaism - Conservative (USCJ)	1
Judaism - Reform (URJ)	1
Islamic or Muslim	3
Unitarian Universalist Association	1
Independent or other	11

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

Edwin I. Hernández, Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame and M.Div. from Andrews University, is Foundations Research Director for RDV Corporation, and Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Latino Religion, Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. As a sociologist of religion, his research has focused on Latino religious experience, theological education, congregational studies, and the role that religious leaders play in sustaining the life and commitment of socially engaged congregations. His most recent books include Emergent Voices, Urgent Choices: Essays on Latino/a Religious Leadership (co-authored with Milagros Peña and Kenneth G. Davis, 2006), Reconstructing the Sacred Tower: Challenge and Promise of Latina/o Theological Education (co-authored with Kenneth G. Davis, 2003). Dr. Hernández dedicates this report to the memory of his father, Pastor Fred E. Hernández, "who passed away while we were still collecting data for the KCCS (November 2007) and who instilled in me a love, respect, and appreciation for congregations in all of their limits and glory."



Neil Carlson, Ph.D. from Duke University, is a political scientist and research technology specialist. As the Assistant Director of the Center for Social Research at Calvin College, his expertise ranges from general support for research design and project management to online survey programming, database design, geographic information systems (GIS), and statistical modeling. Dr. Carlson joined the CSR in 2004. His research interests include voluntary associations (such as congregations!), organizational governance and collective decision-making systems. In addition to the KCCS, his recent major projects include: the Faith Communities Today 2005 survey on behalf of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP); the Christian Reformed Church 150th Anniversary Survey, with Dr. Rodger Rice; and the Portraits of American Life Teens survey, with Dr. Marjorie Gunnoe. Dr. Carlson dedicates this report "to my sons of thunder, Jay and Colin: may you grow into model citizens of a community that shows grace and compassion to 'the least of these.'"

Nathan Medeiros-Ward served as Research Associate at the Center for Social Research at Calvin College from February 2007 to June 2008. He studied Psychology at Calvin College and has since joined the Ph.D. program in Cognitive Psychology at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

Amanda Stek is Research Associate at the Center for Social Research at Calvin College. She studied Political Science at Calvin College and plans to go on to a graduate program in International Policy/Affairs.

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