

# **Faith Communities Today**

## **UU Survey Results Analyzed By Congregation Size**

**The Reverend Charlotte Cowtan  
January, 2002**

## Introduction

Early in the year 2000, Faith Community Today survey was sent to congregations representing over forty different faith groups in the United States. This was the largest survey of congregations, and is considered to be the most inclusive, denominationally sanctioned program of interfaith cooperation ever conducted in the United States.

The Faith Communities Today survey was sent to all UU congregations, and 523 (over 50%) of our congregations responded.

The Survey was divided into five sections:

1. Congregation's Location and Building
2. Congregational Worship
3. Congregation's Participants
4. Congregational Programs
5. Leadership and Organizational Dynamics

An extensive (56 page) report of the survey results, *Understanding Ourselves*, was produced by Larry Peers and Adam Stuhlfaut of the UUA Department of Congregational, District and Extension Services and distributed in June, 2001. The original report can be found on the UUA website at the following URL:

<http://www.uua.org/cde/education/fact.html>.

While the original *Understanding Ourselves* report provided useful information about UU congregations as a faith group and allowed comparisons with other faith groups, the data were not collected in a manner that allowed comparisons between groups within our UU tradition. This analysis is the first of a series of supplements to the original report. Its focus is on differences in the patterns of responses among different size categories of UU congregations.

In order to analyze the survey responses with regard to specific groupings among UU congregations (District, Congregation Size, Rapid Growth, etc.), each survey response had to be linked with a specific UU congregation, and then with existing UUA records. Because the survey did not ask for the responding congregation's name or address, matching FCT data with UUA information was not a 'clean' process. Since no Cong. ID was included in the FCT data, none of the matches can be considered to be "definite".

**Zip/postal code were used as the primary key** for matching FACT surveys with UUA data. Approximately 60% of the surveys provided exact matches on Zip/Postal code. Of the remaining 40%:

- The survey specified zip or postal code of the place the congregation met for worship. In many cases, this is not the mailing address code listed in the UUA directory.
- 12 respondents did not enter a zip/postal code
- Over 150 respondents entered codes that differed from those in the UUA data base. Some of these were obvious typographical errors; others provided geographical proximity with a congregation that provided a match using secondary criteria were matched by date of affiliation
- Congregations that shared the same postal code were also matched by secondary criteria.

**Date of affiliation, number of active adults, programmatic information and ministerial information (age, race, gender, and tenure) were used as secondary matches.**

493 of the surveys included in the original report were matched with sufficient confidence to be included in this analysis.

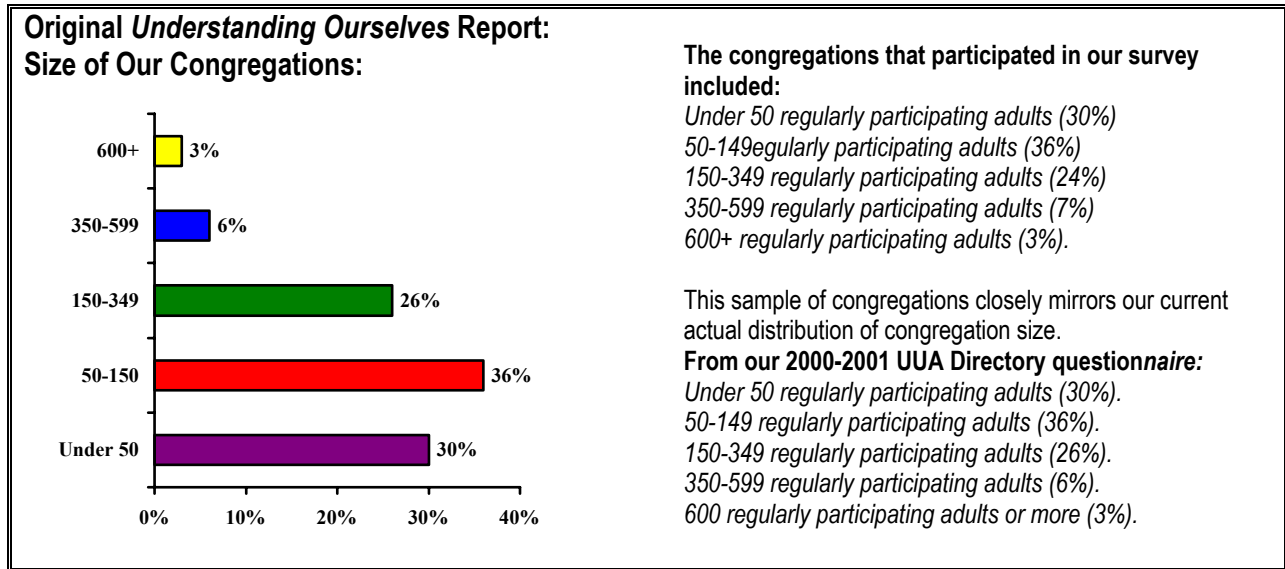
29 of the original surveys could not be matched with sufficient certainty to be included in this analysis.

I hope you find this report to be interesting (at least), informative, and perhaps even fun!

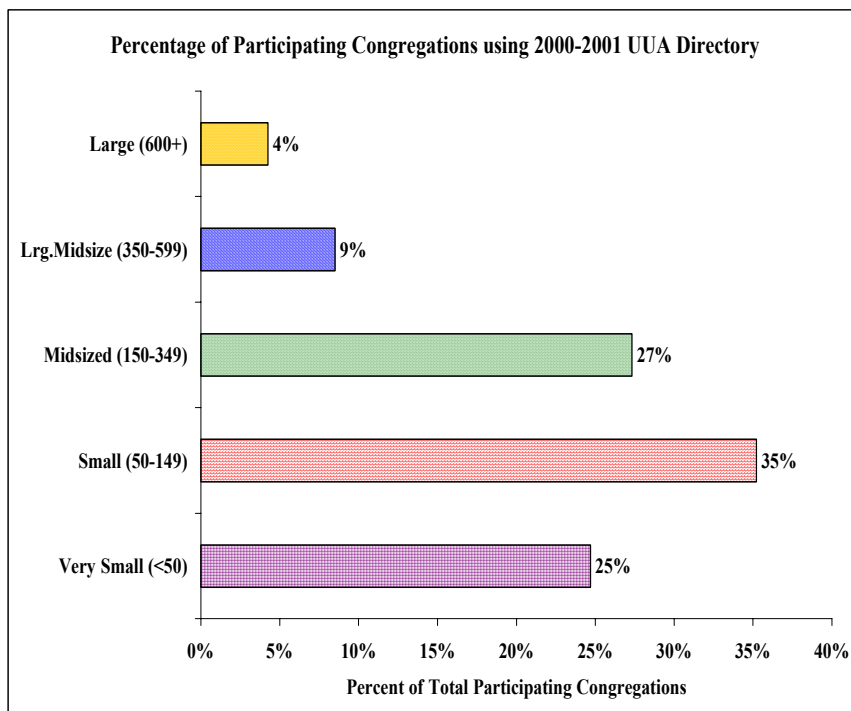
Send your comments and suggestions for how I might improve the presentation of this data to me, Charlotte Cowtan ([ccowtan@triadconsulting.com](mailto:ccowtan@triadconsulting.com)).

Faithfully,  
Charlotte Cowtan

### CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR REGULAR PARTICIPANTS



At first glance, the Faith Communities Today (FCT) survey sample closely mirrors the actual size distribution of all member congregations in the UUA. However, a closer look at the data shows that when congregations’ reported UUA adult membership numbers (from the 2000-2001 Directory) are used to determine congregation size (replacing the same congregations’ FCT reported ‘regularly participating adults’), the size proportions of the FCT sample change considerably. Using UUA membership numbers to determine the size category for FCT congregations, we find that larger membership congregations were more likely to respond to the survey than smaller membership congregations.



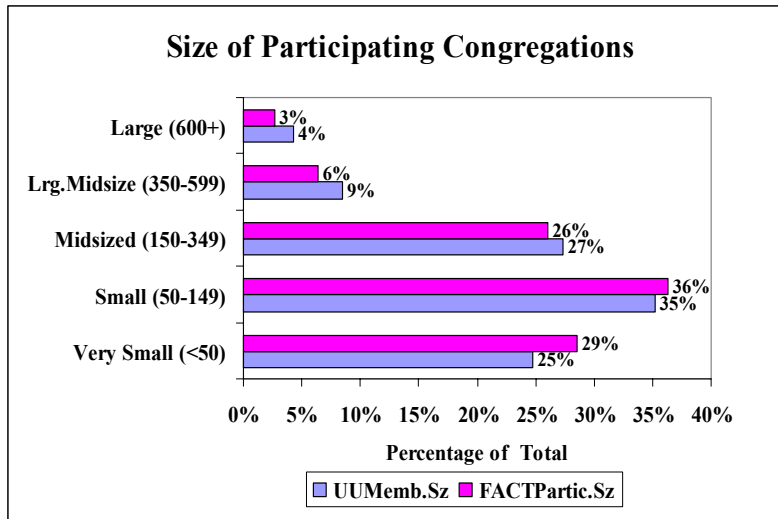
**FCT Congregations:**

- **< 50 members:**  
25% of survey participants (30% of UU Congregations)
- **50-149 members:**  
35% of survey participants (36% of UU Congregations)
- **150-349 members:**  
27% of survey participants (25% of UU Congregations)
- **350-599 members:**  
9% of survey participants (6% of UU Congregations)
- **600+ members:**  
4% of survey participants (3% of UU congregations)

*Original Understanding Ourselves Report: The largest congregation in our survey sample reported 1500 regularly participating adults. The smallest congregation reported 8. The median number of regularly participating adults of all congregations in our sample was 80 members.*

The original analysis of the *Faith Communities Today* data used “Regularly Participating Adults” to determine congregations’ size. A comparison of participating congregations’ reported adult membership (2000-2001 UUA Directory) shows a membership range of 2 - 1425 with a median membership of 109.

### UUA Directory Membership Compared with FCT “Participating Adults”



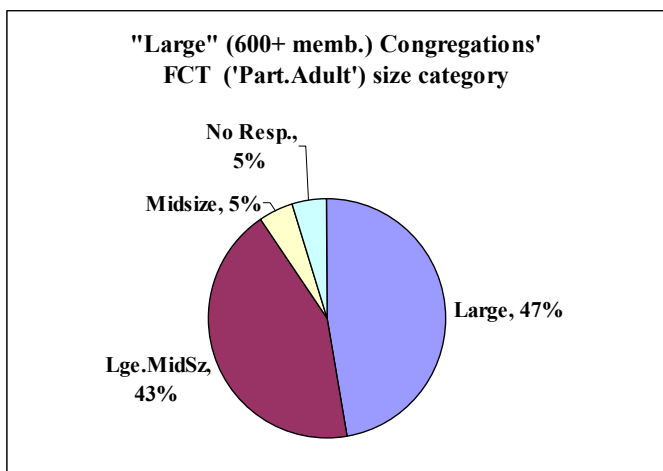
The numbers of congregations in each category vary significantly with the size measurement used:

- **UU Membership size** = ‘Adult Members’ reported in the 2000-01 UUA Directory
- **FCT Participant Size** = Number of regularly participating adults (response to survey question # III-2A)

The size measurement used determines not only the **total** number of congregations in each category, but also the composition of congregations **within** each category. Thus, although the same UUA and FCT size category often show similar results for the characteristic being analyzed, it is important to be aware that the results were likely not obtained from the same set of congregations.

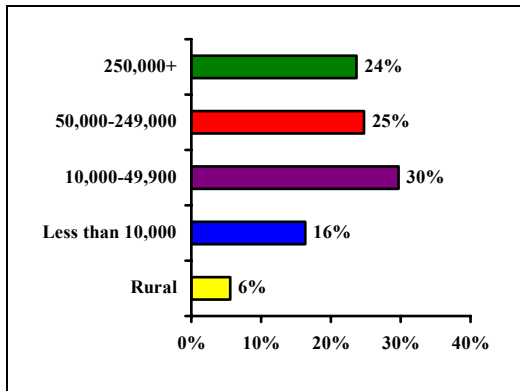
For example, this chart shows that fewer than 50% congregations considered “Large” by UUA records (600 or more members) were included in the FCT “Large” category (600+ “Regularly Participating Adults”) used in the 2001 *Understanding Ourselves* survey analysis.

In the 2002 report, references to congregation size categories indicate “UUA membership” or “FCT participating adults” to clarify which data were used to determine congregation size.



*Original Understanding Ourselves Report:*

*Location of Our Congregations*



**Our congregations tend to be located in the larger population areas:**

Almost half (49%) of our congregations are in cities with 50,000 or more population. Of these:

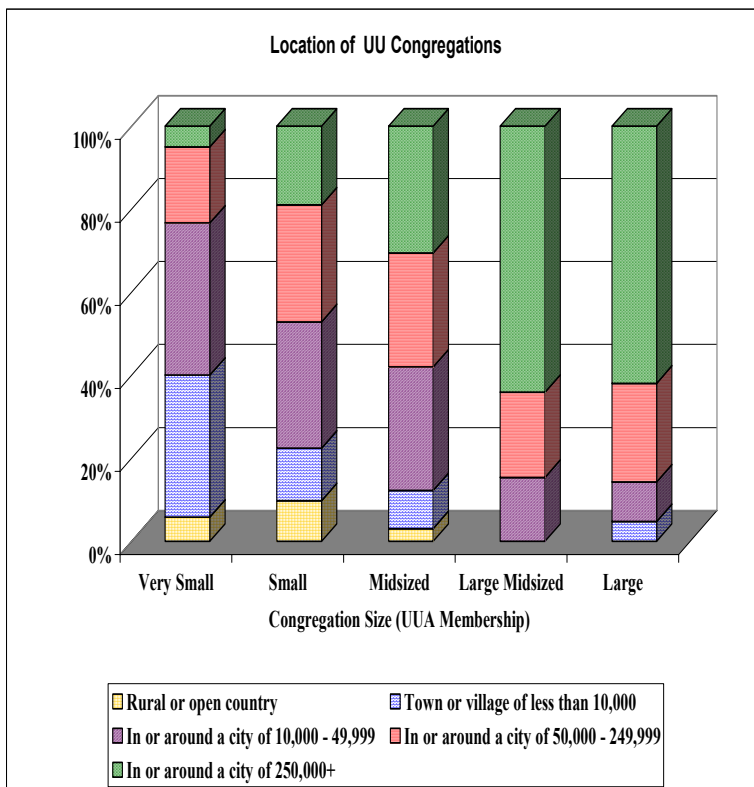
- 24% are located in areas with a population of 250,000 or more.
  - 25% are located in areas with a population of 50,000-249,000.
- The rest of our congregations are distributed in this way:
- 30% are located in areas with a population of 10,000-49,900.
  - 22% in areas less than 10,000 population.

**Comparison:** In the national sample, over half (52%) of the congregations are located in town and rural settings with

populations of less than 10,000. These town and rural areas have the lowest number of UU congregations.

**UU Congregation Location: Analysis by Congregation Size**

While 50% of all UU congregations are located in communities larger than 50,000, a closer look at the data shows that congregation location varies directly with congregation size:



The larger the congregation, the greater the likelihood that it will be located in a more highly populated area. Almost 90% of the Large Midsized and Large congregations (350+ members) described their location as cities or metropolitan areas with populations of 50,000, compared with fewer than 30% of Very Small Congregations (fewer than 50 members). Fewer than 10% of Very Small congregations will be found in large metropolitan areas, compared with almost 60% of Large Midsized and Large congregations; none of the large congregations (over 600 members) reported their location as “rural”.

**Original Understanding Ourselves Report:**

**How well does each of the following statements describe your congregation?**

Combining the “very well” and the “quite well” rankings, these characteristics are maintained as the most characteristic of Unitarian Universalist congregations:

- "Members are excited about the future of our church," (71.6%).
- "Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage," (68.0%).
- "Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive," (56.3%).
- "Our programs and activities are well organized,"(53.3%).

Combining the “slightly” and “not at all” rankings the characteristics chosen as least definitive of our UU congregations were:

- "Our congregation has a strong racial/ethnic or national heritage that it is trying to preserve," (86.9%).
- "The community around the church is well informed about the activities taking place in our congregation," (43.3%).
- "We are trying to increase our racial/ethnic diversity," (41.1%).

A noteworthy point is that 43% of our congregations do not feel that the community surrounding their congregation is informed about the activities offered by their congregation. At the same time, most of our congregations do not do much outreach or publicity in the community to inform the community about the congregation and its programs.

When the same responses are grouped by congregation size, clear differences emerge. The following chart lists the five most and least commonly self-ascribed descriptive statements for ‘large’ and ‘very small’ congregations

	<b>Large Congregations</b>	<b>Very Small Congregations</b>
<b>Most Characteristic</b> (Describes cong. ‘very well’ or ‘quite well’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Excited about the Future of the church: 90%</li> <li>▪ Inspiring, uplifting worship: 90%</li> <li>▪ Programs well organized: 81%</li> <li>▪ Spiritually vital and alive: 81%</li> <li>▪ Moral beacon in the larger community: 71%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incorporate new members well: 65%</li> <li>▪ Like a close knit family: 63%</li> <li>▪ Inspiring, uplifting worship: 63%</li> <li>▪ Celebrate UU heritage: 62%</li> <li>▪ Excited about the Future of the church: 62%</li> </ul>
<b>Least Characteristic:</b> (Describes cong. ‘slightly’ or ‘not at all’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preserve Ethnic/National Cong. Heritage: 90%</li> <li>▪ Like a close knit family: 62%</li> <li>▪ Trying to increase diversity: 33%</li> <li>▪ Larger Comm. well informed: 24%</li> <li>▪ Deal openly with conflict: 14%</li> <li>▪ Welcome new worship/ministry ideas: 14%</li> <li>▪ Celebrate UU Heritage: 14%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preserve Ethnic/National Cong. Heritage:86%</li> <li>▪ Trying to increase diversity: 48%</li> <li>▪ Larger Comm. well informed: 46%</li> <li>▪ Help deepen relationship with God/the Holy: 41%</li> <li>▪ Moral beacon in the larger community: 36%</li> </ul>

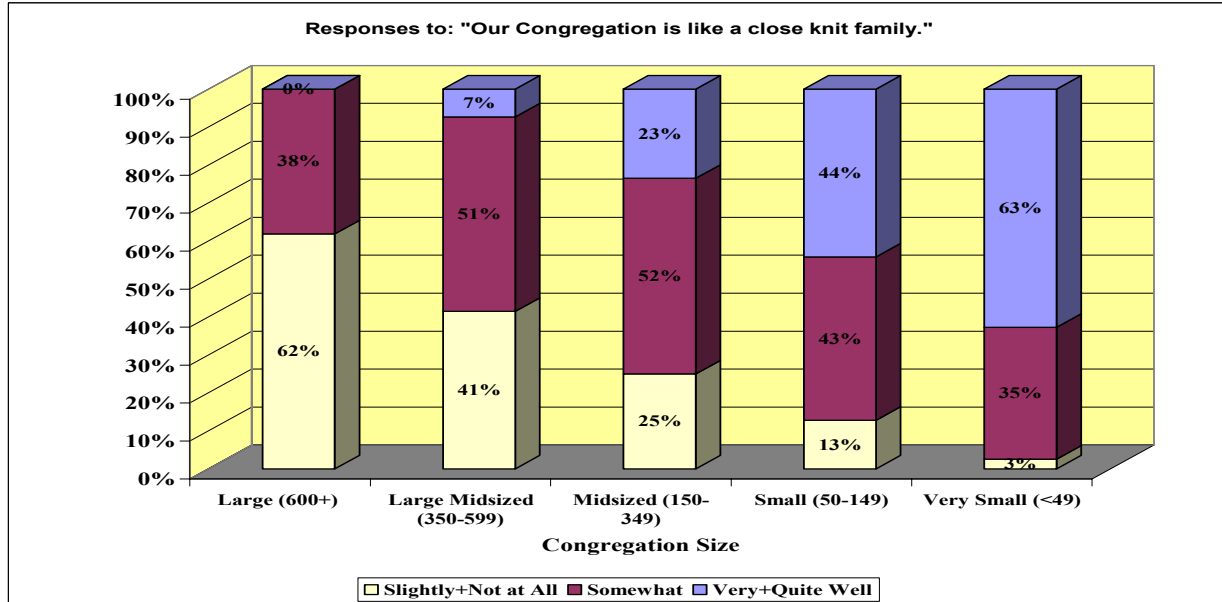
The following charts show of some of the most noteworthy differences in responses among differing sizes of congregations.

**Note: See Appendix A for lists of all responses based on congregational size**

## How well do the following statements describe your congregation?

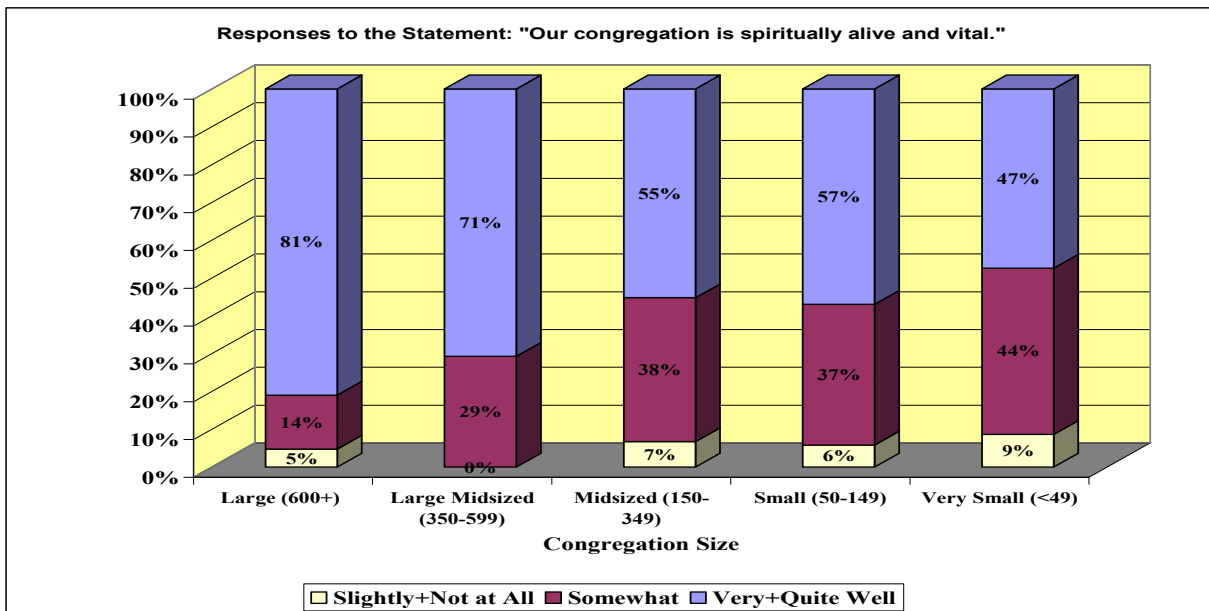
### Our congregation is like a close knit family.

- 38% of all congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 63% of the very small responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 0% of large congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement



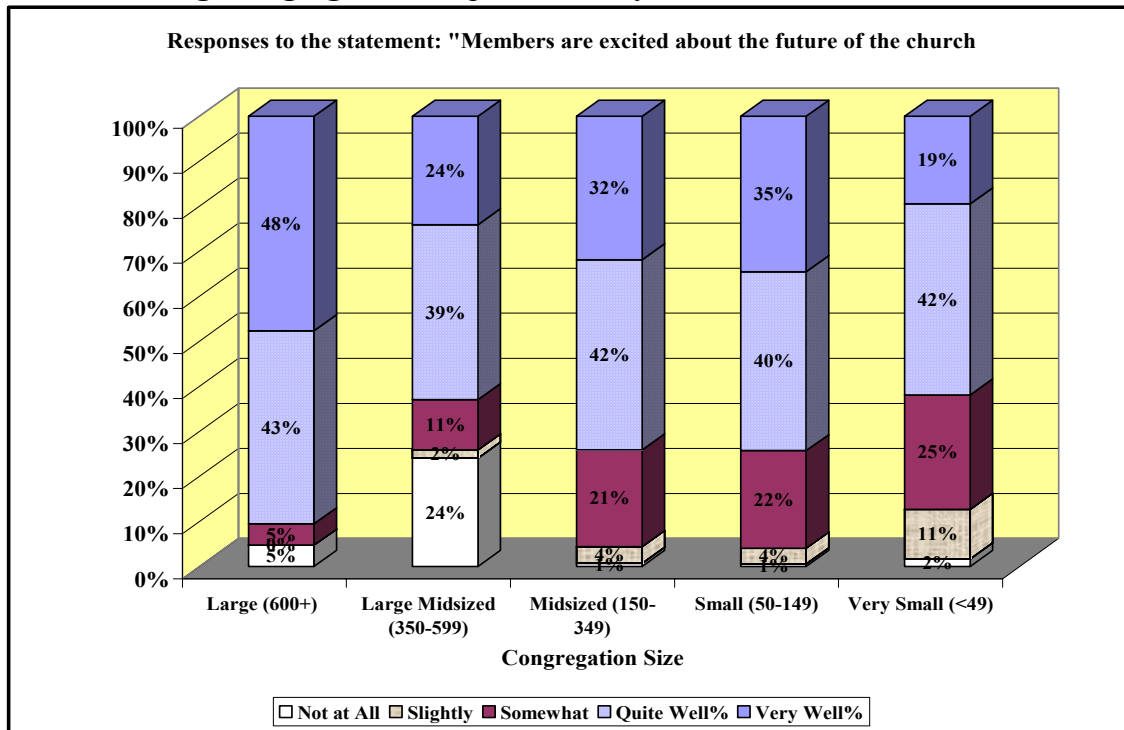
### Our Congregation is spiritually vital and alive

- 56% of all congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 81% of the very small responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 47% of large congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement



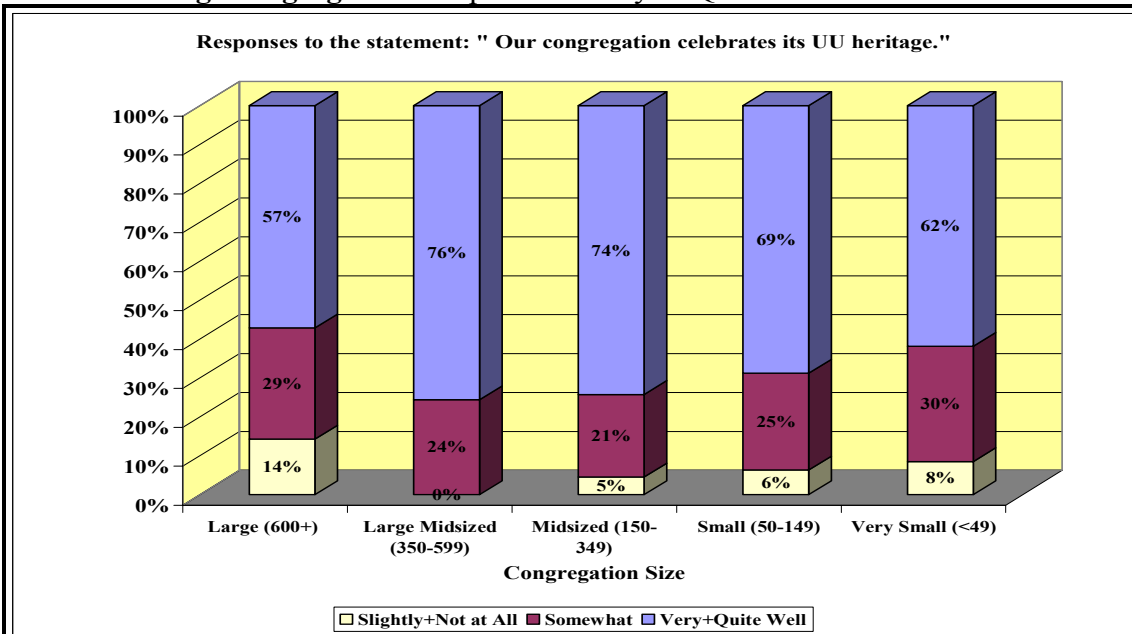
**Members are excited about the future of our church.**

- 72% of all congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 61% of the very small responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 91% of large congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement



**Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage.**

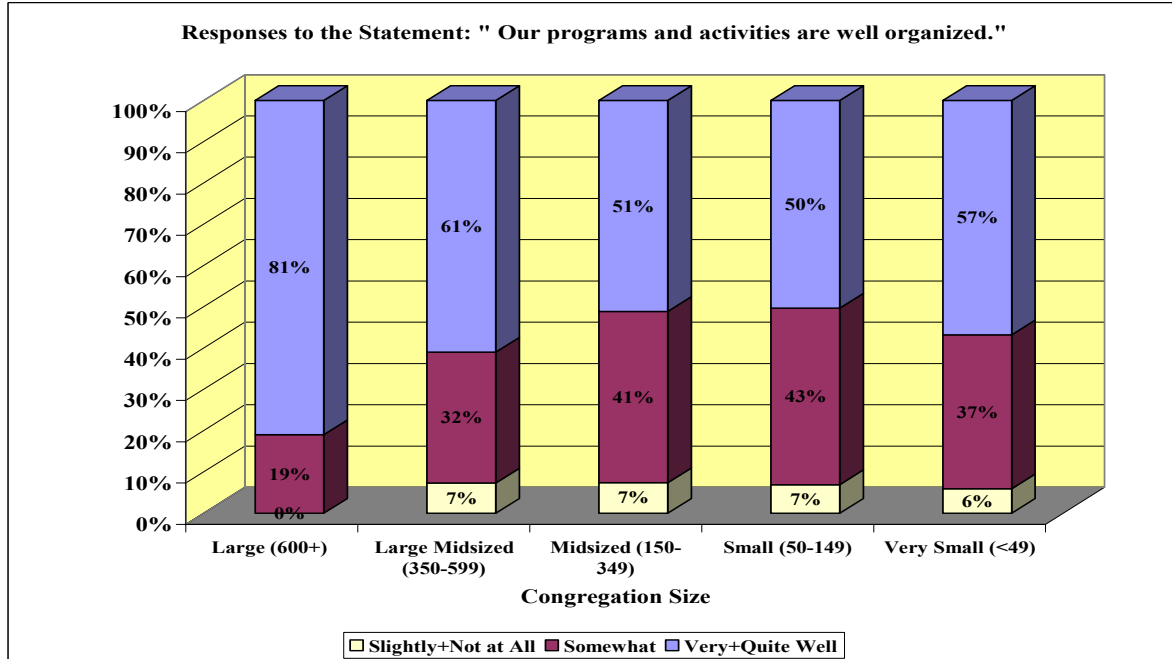
- 68% of all congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 62% of the very small responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- 37% of large congregations responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement.





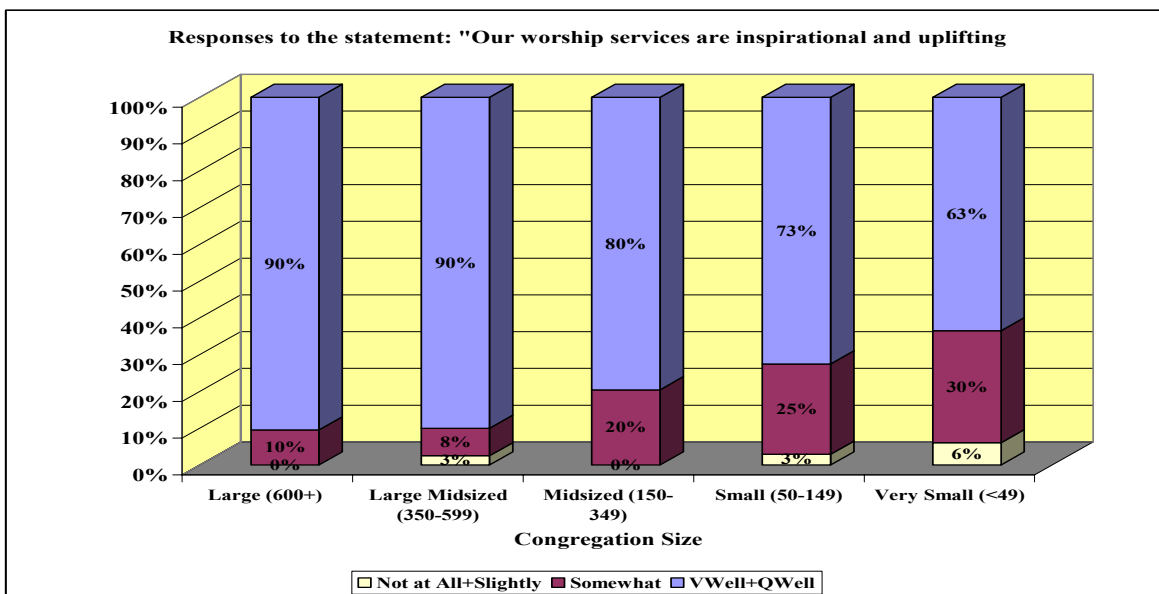
**Our programs and activities are well organized**

- **53% of all congregations** responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- **57% of the very small** responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement
- **81% of large congregations** responded “Very or Quite Well” to the statement



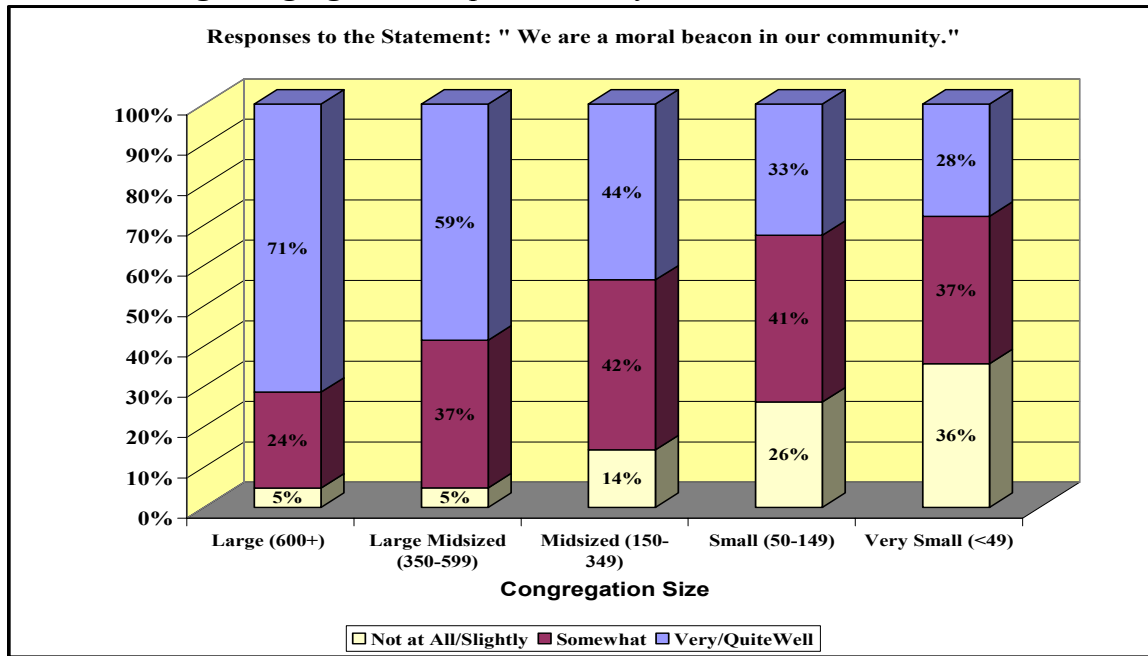
**Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting**

- **74% of all congregations** responded “Very or Quite Well”
- **63% of the very small** responded “Very or Quite Well”
- **90% of large congregations** responded “Very or Quite Well”



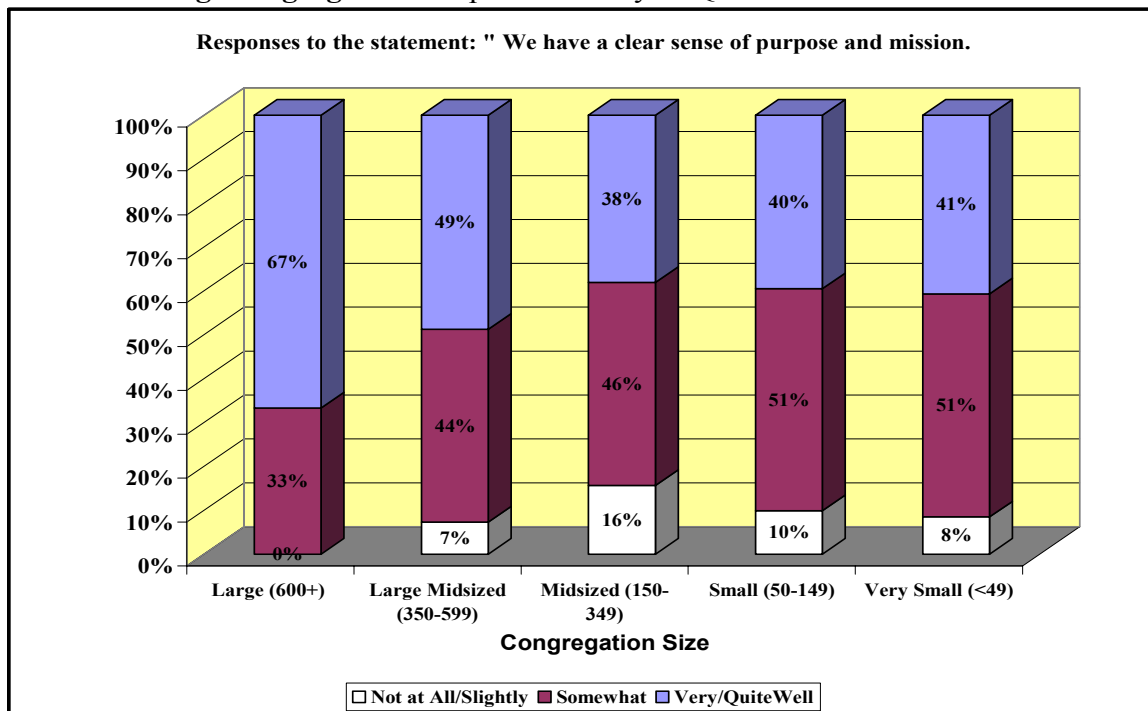
**We are a moral beacon in our community**

- 39% of all congregations responded “Very or Quite Well”
- 28% of the very small responded “Very or Quite Well”
- 71% of large congregations responded “Very or Quite Well”

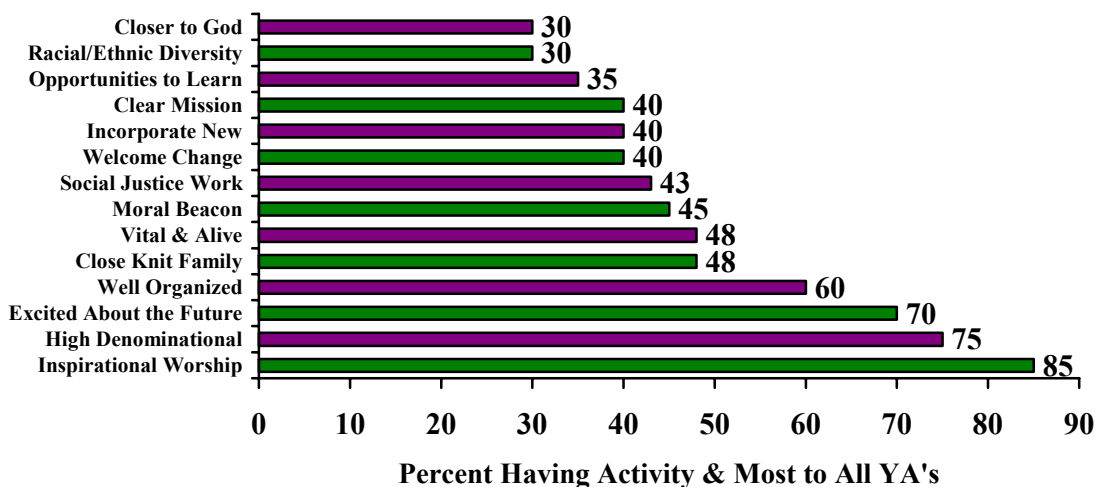


**We have a clear sense of mission and purpose.**

- 40% of all congregations responded “Very or Quite Well”
- 41% of the very small responded “Very or Quite Well”
- 67% of large congregations responded “Very or Quite Well”



**Original Report: Characteristics of Young Adult Populated Congregations:**



Among congregations that have a high percentage of young adults (60% or more of the membership) the statements chosen as most characteristic were:

1. "Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting," (85%).
2. "Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage," (75%).
3. "Members are excited about the future of our church," (70%).
4. "Our programs and activities are well organized," (60%).

The statements describing congregations with a young adult majority are found in all sizes of congregations and do not differ significantly from the group responses from all congregations. However, as the following table shows, most of these characteristics are more commonly found in midsized and large congregations.

Descriptive Statements	All Congs.	YA Congs. (n=22)	Most Likely Size Category
Deepen relationship with God/the Holy	25%	30%	350+ (39%)
Trying to increase racial/ethnic Diversity	21%	30%	350+ (36%)
Opportunities to learn about our Faith	42%	35%	350+ (53%)
Clear sense of purpose and mission	40%	40%	350+ (55%)
Incorporate new members well	52%	40%	>150 (59%)
Welcome new ministry/worship ideas	41%	40%	150-349 (40%)
Working for Social Justice	39%	43%	350+ (53%)
Moral beacon in the community	38%	45%	350+ (63%)
Spiritually vital and alive	56%	48%	350+ (74%)
Like a close knit family	39%	48%	>150 (52%)
Well organized programs	53%	60%	350+ (68%)
Excited about the congregations' future	72%	70%	150-349 (74%)
Celebrate our UU heritage	68%	75%	150-349 (74%)
Inspirational and uplifting worship services	74%	85%	350+ (90%)

Very few (22 of the 474 congregations that responded to the question) reported 60% or more of their regularly participating adults were under age 35. All of these congregations were included in the original *Understanding Ourselves* Report and in the previous table.

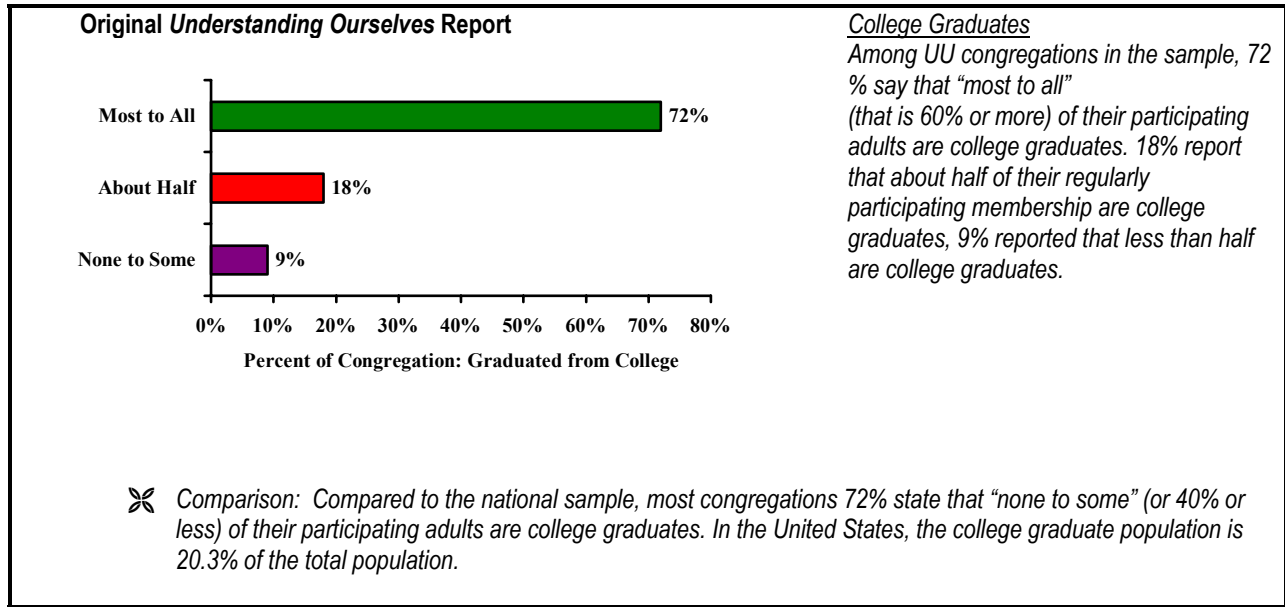
On closer examination of the data, the majority of the congregations that reported having more than 60% young adults seem to have misunderstood the question. The sum of young adults and adults over age 60 reported by fourteen of the “High % Young Adults” congregations was more than 100%.

	<b>% Young Adults Reported</b>	<b>% Adults Over Age 60 Reported</b>
2 congregations	81%-100%	81%-100%
3 congregations	81%-100%	61%-80%
3 congregations	81%-100%	41%-60%
2 congregations	61%-80%	61%-80%
4 congregations	61%-80%	41%-60%

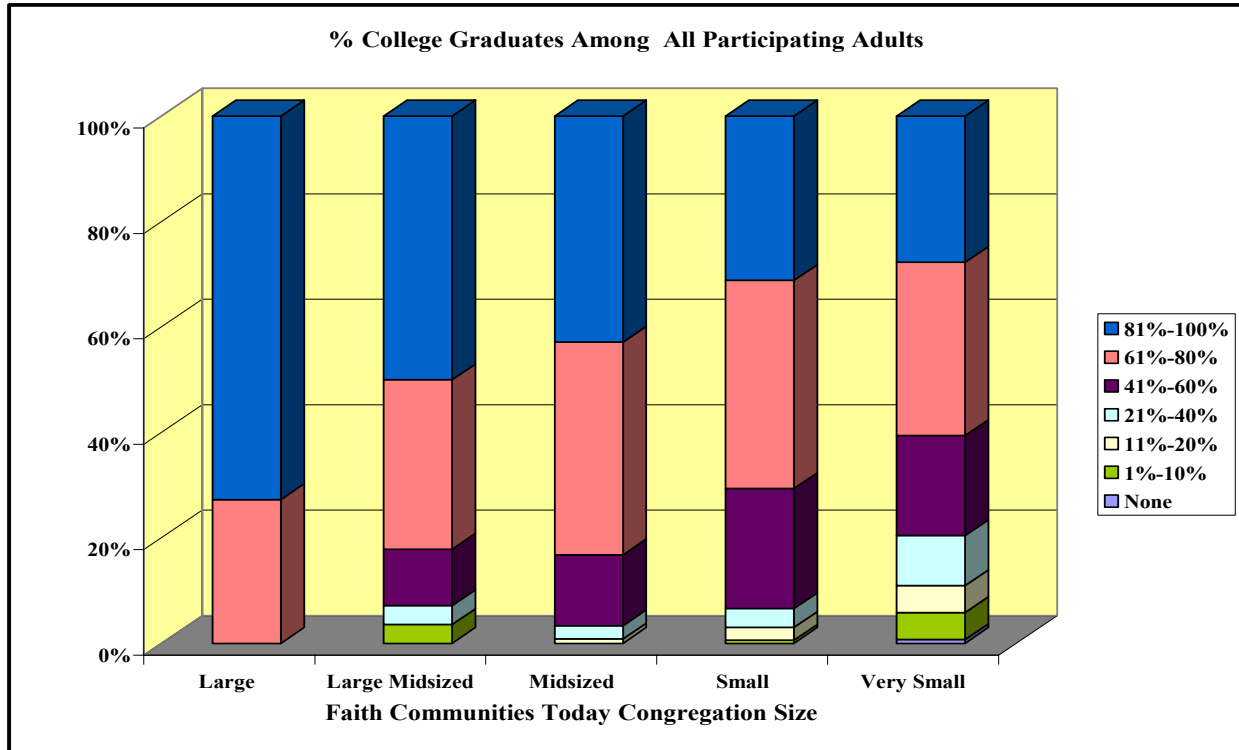
Because of the questionable validity of the above fourteen congregations’ responses, the following table has been prepared excluding their data.

<b>Congregations (n=8) Reporting 61% or More Young Adult Participants</b>			
<b>Descriptive Statements</b>	<b>Very/Quite Well</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Slightly/Not at all</b>
<b>Like a close knit family</b>	25%	50%	25%
<b>Spiritually vital and alive</b>	50%	50%	0%
<b>Works for social justice</b>	50%	50%	0%
<b>Helps deepen rel'ship with God/the Holy</b>	13%	38%	50%
<b>Trying to increase diversity</b>	38%	13%	50%
<b>Celebrates UU heritage</b>	75%	13%	13%
<b>Moral beacon in the community</b>	38%	50%	13%
<b>Welcome new ministry/worship ideas</b>	50%	38%	13%
<b>Deal openly with conflict</b>	43%	14%	43%
<b>Inspirational and uplifting worship</b>	71%	29%	0%
<b>Preserving national/ethnic heritage</b>	0%	13%	88%
<b>Members excited about congregation's future</b>	88%	13%	0%
<b>Newcomers easily incorporated</b>	38%	63%	0%
<b>Clear sense of mission and purpose</b>	38%	50%	13%
<b>Many opportunities to learn about faith</b>	38%	38%	25%
<b>Well organized programs</b>	50%	50%	0%
<b>Community well informed about us</b>	25%	13%	63%

*Note: See Appendix B for more detailed information about the characteristics of the eight congregations with more than 60% young adult participants.*



Analysis by congregational size indicates the percentage of regularly participating adults who are college graduates varies directly with congregation size:  
**The large the congregation, the higher the percentage of college graduates.**

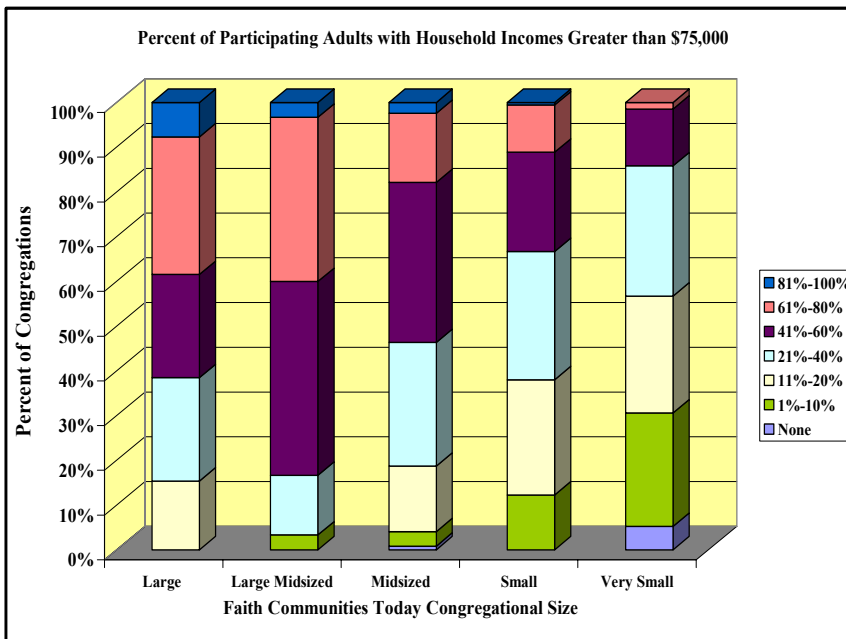


**Original Understanding Ourselves Report: Income Distribution**

In our UU sample, 97% of the congregations said that “none to some” (i.e., less than 40%) of their regularly participating membership have \$20,000 household income. 2% of our congregations report that about half of their membership have household incomes of \$20,000 or less.

63% of our congregations say that fewer than 40% of their congregation’s regularly participating members have household incomes of \$75,000 or more. 24% say that their regularly participating membership is about half (41-60%) with household incomes of \$75,000. 13% report that “most to all” of their membership (that is 61% and above) have household incomes of \$75,000.

A larger percentage (40%) of our largest congregations (350-599 and 600 and above membership) report that “most to all” of its membership (60% or more) have household incomes of \$75,000 and above. Our smaller congregations (under 350) report a smaller percentage (19% or less of their membership) of household incomes of \$75,000 or more.



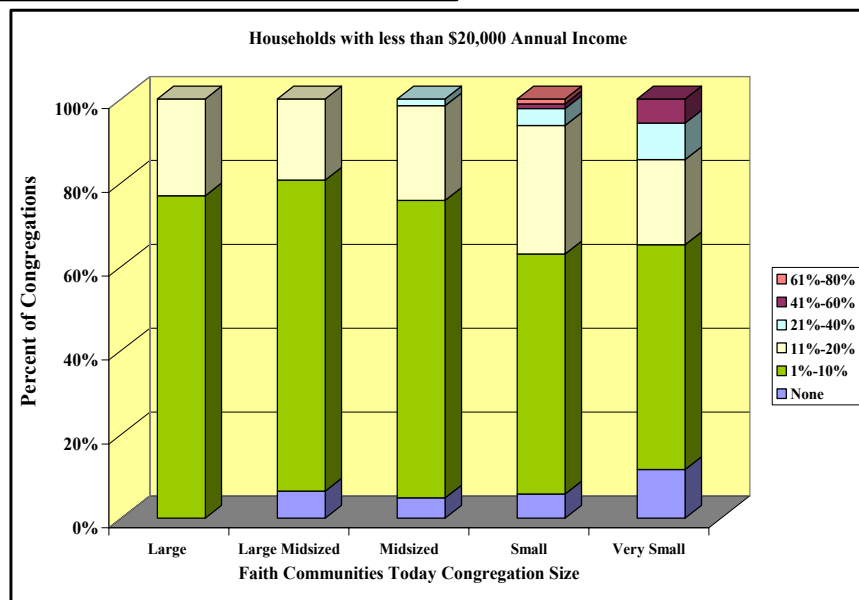
**Analysis by congregational size shows:**

- The **Very Small** category (fewer than 50 participating adults) is the only group with a significant number of congregations in which no household has a \$75,000+ annual income.
- The **Large** category (600+ participating adults) shows the most normal distribution of income among congregations, but reports no congregations with fewer than 10% of household incomes under \$75,000.

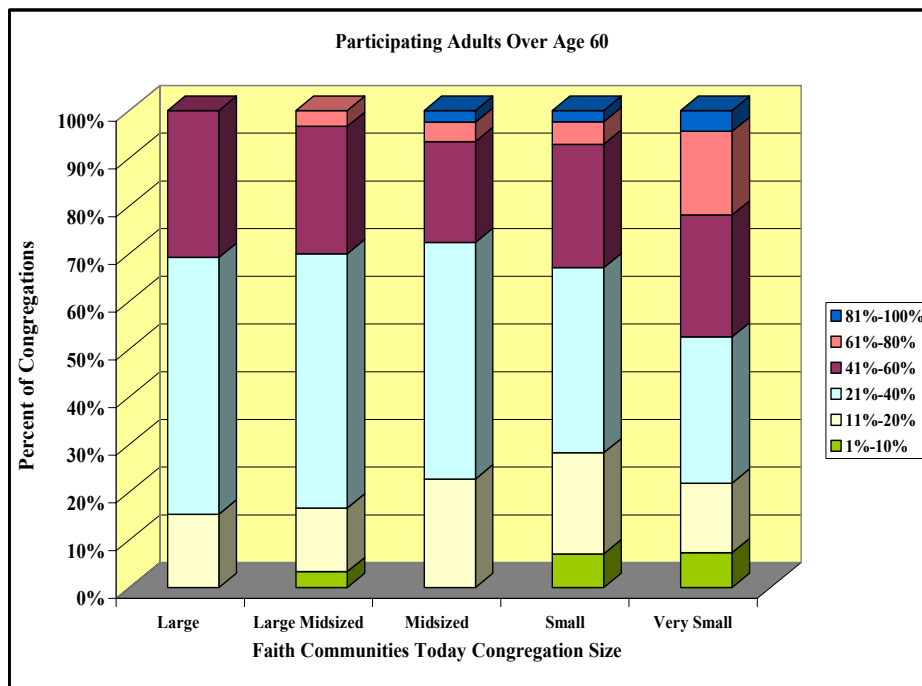
**All Large** Congregations report having some (1-20%) low income families.

**All Midsize and Small** congregational groups report some congregations with no low income families

**Only Small and Very Small** congregations report 40% or more low income households. This may be related to the fact that small congregations have a larger proportion of elderly adults. (See following chart)



### Participating Adults Age 60 and Older



**No Large or Midsize congregations reported over 80% of participating adults to be age 60 and older.**

**Small and Very Small congregations reports indicate that congregations of less than 150 participants are more likely than midsize or large congregations to have either very small (less than 10%) or very large (over 80%) proportions of adults over age 60.**

#### Original Understanding Ourselves Report: *Members Commute*

70% of our UU congregations reported that either “about half” or “most to all” of their membership commute more than 15 minutes to the congregation.

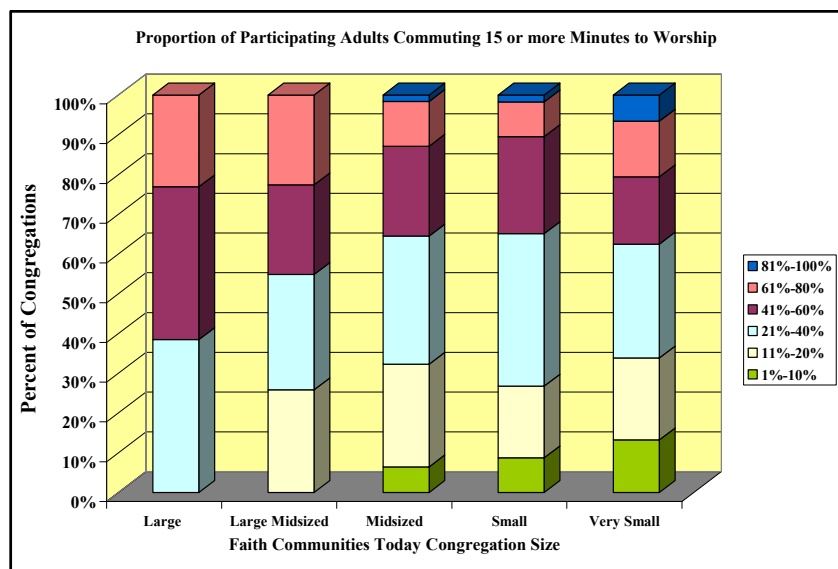
Comparison: Compared to the FACT national sample 77% of whom reported that “none to some” (or 40% or less of their membership) commute more than 15 minutes to worship, our membership tends to have higher percentages of the congregation that have longer commutes (perhaps due to the relatively lower number of UU congregations).

### Congregational Size Analysis of Participants’ Commute Time

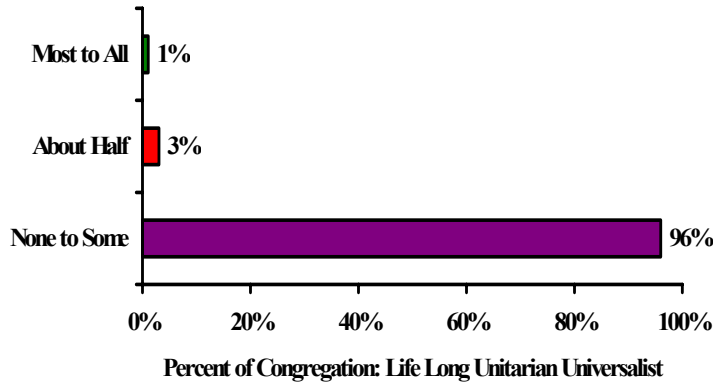
**Only congregations smaller than 350 reported very many (81%-100%) or very few (1%-10%) participants commuting more than 15 minutes to worship.**

**Over 70% all but Very Small congregations reported that 20%-60% of participants commute more than 15 minutes to worship.**

**Over 20% of Large and Large Midsize congregations reported 61%-80% of participants commute more than 15 minutes to worship.**



**Original Understanding Ourselves Report: Lifelong Member of Denomination**



*It is no surprise that we have a significant number of people who are not lifelong members of our denomination. 96% of our congregations reported that “none to some” (or less than 40%) of their membership are lifelong Unitarian Universalists. This is “good news” and “bad news.” The good news is that we are attracting a significant number of people who are new to Unitarian Universalism. The “bad news” is that we are not retaining many of our members who grow up in our faith.*

**Comparison:** *In the FACT national data, 50% of the congregations report that “none to some” (or 40% or less) of their congregation’s regularly participating members “grew up” in the faith of that congregation. 24% report that “at least half” of their members are lifelong members of their denomination and 26% percent of the congregations report that a majority of their regularly participating members are lifelong members of the congregation’s denomination.*

**Proportion of Life-long Unitarian-Universalists in Congregations of Differing Size**

- **Over 60% of Large** congregations report that 11% - 20% of participants are life-long UUs. The remaining 37% of large congregations reported 1%-10% lifelong UU participants.
- **Only Very Small** congregations reported having no life-long UUs. Very Small congregations were also the only group to report 81%-100% life-long UU participants.
- **No congregation of 350 or more** participants reported having 41% or more life-long UU participants.

