

# Summary of Responses for “Survey of Evangelism in Mainline Churches,” A Study of Mainline Churches Performing High Numbers of Adult Baptisms

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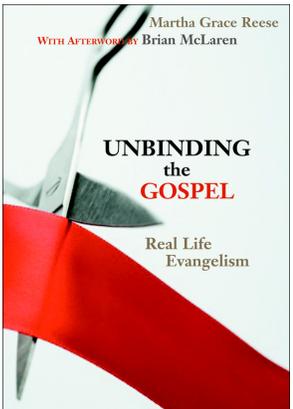
## **How do new members’ and leaders’ evangelism approaches compare?**

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## **Summary of Survey**

*This sociological study report looks at the beliefs, attitudes and activities of leaders and members in a group of mainline congregations that are doing highly effective evangelism with unchurched people. This study was part of a much larger, 4-year study of evangelism in 7 mainline denominations (the Mainline Evangelism Research Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.).*

Mainline Evangelism Project Survey Summary  
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Please see *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* by Martha Grace Reese, director of the Mainline Evangelism Project (Chalice Press, 2007) for a more practical, accessible and complete treatment of the findings of the Project. The book is written for use by congregational groups and pastors and arises out of a four-year project which encompassed well over 1000 interviews, this survey and over 50 site visits to vibrant mainline evangelistic churches.

## *Introduction*

This sociological report was prepared by Jacqueline E. Wenger of Catholic University with assistance from Martha Grace Reese, Project Director of the Mainline Evangelism Project, and J. Kristina Tenny-Brittian. It is one portion of the work of a four year study of highly effective evangelism in seven mainline US denominations. In addition to this report, Martha Grace Reese has written a book for practical use by pastors and congregational groups who want to do effective faith-sharing based on findings of the entire Mainline Evangelism Project.

*Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* will be available from Chalice Press in early January 2007. (Go to [www.GraceNet.info](http://www.GraceNet.info) for information about the book, or to [www.cbp21.com](http://www.cbp21.com) or [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com) to order it).

This report describes a portion of the Mainline Evangelism Project. It is a survey of characteristics, beliefs, opinions and activities of leaders and members of congregations that are doing a statistically excellent job of one rare and difficult type of evangelism—helping people with little or no church background into a Christian faith life. It is important to remember that once the congregations were identified, the survey looked at much more than evangelism of the unchurched. The survey looked at a full range of congregational and individuals' attitudes, motivations, and beliefs. Those results are reported here. We also interviewed over 600 members, staff and leaders of these congregations. The results of those interviews and the conclusions we drew from them and from this survey can be found in *Unbinding the Gospel*.

We discovered at the beginning of the four-year study that most of the statistically successful evangelism in mainline denominations is being done by southern and racial/ethnic

congregations. This raises concern, because most mainline congregations are primarily Caucasian and located outside the south. The survey was developed to look at excellent examples of evangelism from this large and in terms of evangelism, numerically unsuccessful part of our mainline communions. We hope that this will help other congregations that have a desire to share the faith.

### ***Highlights of the Findings***

This report focuses on differences in responses between and among those who completed the leader and new members versions of the Survey of Evangelism in Mainline Churches. Specifically, it will address differences between new Christians, new members with a church background, lay church leaders, and senior pastors. Some key findings include:

1. New members are found in congregations of all ages and nearly half are in congregations that are over 100 years old.
2. Key reasons people re-visited and eventually joined a church were the people, the pastor, and a feeling of acceptance.
3. New members who had been attending a church prior to joining their current church are noticeably different in their beliefs and religious practices from those who were not attending or who were looking for a church.
4. New members who were baptized before age eighteen differ in experience, behavior, and attitudes from new members baptized at age eighteen or older.
5. New members differ from leaders and senior pastors in many religious beliefs and behaviors. Even lay and ordained leadership of these most statistically

successful congregations are mis-estimating the faith questions their own new members consider most important.

6. Leaders' beliefs, behaviors and experiences differ depending on when they were born. Though Baby Boomers (born 1946 -1964) are the largest cohort in this survey and are distinct in some of their views and experiences, those born after 1964 exhibit the most differences.

### *Method*

The initial intention of gathering survey data for this study was to compare mainline congregations that are highly effective in reaching unchurched adults with more typical mainline congregations. Given available denominational statistics, adult baptisms are the best available measure for congregations that are evangelizing unchurched persons. Seven denominations were asked to participate.<sup>1</sup>

Several unsuccessful attempts were made to include a control group of congregations who were doing "typical" mainline evangelism. Pastors of representative congregations contacted expressed so much anxiety at the idea of participating in a survey of evangelism that we doubted we would be able to obtain a viable control group. We decided to drop the control group and survey only congregations that were doing statistically excellent evangelism of the unchurched, represented by high numbers of adult baptisms in relation to congregational size. Although United Methodist pastors were interviewed, UMC data was not included in survey results because they do not keep distinct records of adult baptisms.

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<sup>1</sup>American Baptist Churches USA, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and The United Methodist Church. The study focused on predominantly white congregations because the study designer had observed that African-American and ethnic churches in these denominations were experiencing more growth than white churches.

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Congregations were selected based on the following criteria: Each of the six participating denominations furnished researchers with lists of every primarily Caucasian congregation no located in the south that had baptized a minimum of 15 adults (age 18 and over) over their most recent three years of record keeping. (In essence, we were looking at the churches that had baptized an average of 5 adults a year for 3 years.) Some denominations furnished records from 2000-2002, others 2001-2003.

ELCA statistics were based on adults aged 16 and over. American Baptists and Disciples of Christ congregations are theologically committed to “believers’ baptism,” which has no specific age annotation. As a consequence, many of the baptisms listed include children raised in the church, but being baptized at a life stage comparable to confirmation in “infant baptism” denominations. Therefore, American Baptist and Disciples statisticians furnished lists of congregations with a minimum of 30 baptisms over the three year period rather than 15. Martha Grace Reese, the Project Director and J. Kristina Tenny-Brittian, also Disciples of Christ clergy, verified the actual number of adult baptisms by phone calls with congregational record-keepers to assure the total minimum number of 15 over-age-18 baptisms during the three year period.

The process of denominational data collection and verification was long and labor intensive. Reese and Tenny-Brittian called every congregation on the denominational lists up to three times. They were able to verify the accuracy of the statistics listed for almost all of the congregations. They discovered that many of the denominational lists were highly inaccurate. Some contained errors in numbers of baptisms. (On one list, 42 of the first 50 congregations listed had not done the number of baptisms claimed. Rather, the figure listed was the adult Sunday School attendance figure!)

On other lists, primarily racial-ethnic congregations had been accidentally included. Contrary to denominational theology and practice, some of the churches who listed numerous adult baptisms were counting “re-baptisms”—an adult baptism of someone who had been baptized as an infant in another Christian communion. These congregations were also dropped from the list, although pastors were almost always interviewed. In some cases, determinations of actual numbers of baptisms and exclusion of “re-baptisms” could not be determined before survey packets were returned.

Congregations on the list were deleted if the average annual number of baptisms over the three year period was less than 1% of the average worship attendance. Our intention was to find congregations that were doing significant numbers of adult baptisms, the statistical measure selected as an indicator of congregations that were doing an effective job reaching unchurched people. Baptising fewer than 1% of worship attendance was not the evangelistic excellence we sought.

*After final verification of lists, we determined that out of a pool of over 30,000 congregations, there were fewer than 150 primarily Caucasian congregations located outside the South in the six mainline denominations that had baptized at least 15 adults over a three year period (an average of 5 adult baptisms a year), where the actual number of adult baptisms can be considered a significant number, given the size of the congregation (annual baptisms at least 1% of average worship attendance).*

***Put simply, fewer than 150 congregations of 30,000 (only one half of one percent) performed a significant number of adult baptisms.***

Congregations were initially contacted by telephone to determine their willingness to participate. Pastors, and in some cases church secretaries and members were interviewed during this process. Pastors who agreed to participate in a written survey process were mailed a packet of surveys. Packets contained either five or six questionnaires: one for the pastor, one for the evangelism staff person or chairperson, one for a lay person doing evangelism, one for a new member who is a new Christian, one for a new member with a church background, and in selected situations, one for a past pastor during whose service the church had performed the many adult baptisms. A total of 169 packets were sent to congregations. Of these, 38 percent returned all of the questionnaires sent, the rest returned some of the questionnaires, an average of 44 percent of each targeted survey.

Thus, the data represent a small, distinct, and non-random group of congregations in mainline denominations that are doing an effective job evangelizing unchurched people. The limitations of the data do not allow for generalization to other or broader populations but they do describe attitudes, motivations, and beliefs among selected new Christians, church members and pastors of this group of mainline churches that are doing unique evangelism.<sup>2</sup> These data provide a starting point for examination of new church members and what attracts them to mainline Protestant churches and suggest areas for future research.

### *A Portrait of the New Members*

Two surveys were used for data collection, one for congregational leaders and one for new members. An overview (see Table 1) of the responses of new members shows that they are mostly married (81 percent), slightly more likely to be female than male (54 vs. 46 percent), and

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<sup>2</sup> The small number of cases precludes measurements of statistical significance. Response differences of fifteen percentage points or greater are selected for discussion.

more likely than not attended church at least occasionally at age 16 (72 percent). These congregations are mostly middle class (53 percent) and nearly half are suburban congregations in growing neighborhoods (48 percent). To our great surprise, nearly half (48 percent) belong to a congregation that is more than one hundred years old.

**Table 1: Demographics of New Members and their Congregations**

(In percents, N=123)

Gender		
	- Male	46
	- Female	54
Married		81
Age		
	- 40 or younger	50
	- 41-59	39
	- 60 or older	11
Church attendance at age 16		
	- Did not attend	28
	- Occasional	31
	- Weekly or more	41
Age of congregation		
	- 25 yrs. or less	15
	- 26-100 yrs.	36
	- > 100 yrs.	48

Suburban Congregation	48
Growing Neighborhood	48
Middle Class Congregation	53

Seventy-five percent of these congregations have experienced an increase in attendance at worship services in the past five years. For most, the average age of regular attenders is lower than it was five years ago: five years ago 74 percent of regular attenders were under age 60 with 21 percent over 60 (five percent didn't know); today, 95 percent of members of congregations in this study are under age 60.

### *Perceptions of New Members*

What drew these new members to their respective churches and what kept them coming back? Our survey asked new members an open-ended question “Why did you join this church?” Responses were numerous and wide-ranging. The top six reasons were the people (38 percent), the pastor (28 percent), the programs (18 percent), the worship (15 percent), family or friends (12 percent), and location (11 percent). Their reasons for returning after the first few visits were similar: the pastor (42 percent), feeling welcome and accepted (37 percent), the worship (20 percent), and the people (20 percent). What may be notable in its absence is that there is no mention of beliefs or of denomination. This finding concurs with earlier research findings that denominational ties are not as strong as they once were. Hoge, et al (1994), for example, found that programs, inspiring worship, and personal support were more important than denomination among Presbyterians.<sup>3</sup> We also asked why these new members visited this church for the first

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<sup>3</sup>Hoge, Dean R., Benton Johnston and Donald Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

time. As in the previous question, little motivation hinged on the denomination. Fewer than two percent indicated that they were drawn because of the denomination. The top four responses were: a friend or relative invited me (40 percent), I knew someone who attended (29 percent), message on the church sign (11 percent), and I had a need I couldn't meet (11percent). When asked 'what made you ready to join this church' the response most frequently given (51 percent) was there was "something missing my life." Others wanted to be connected to a church for a variety of reasons including to serve others, to feel a sense of belonging, and to have support. These findings indicate the importance of personal connections in a person's deciding to attend a church service. Personal interaction with people and the pastor were the most often stated reasons for returning to a church after initial visits and for joining a particular church.

### ***Beliefs and Attitudes of New Christians***

We wanted to know if there were unique characteristics among these new church members that would make them differ in their church needs, desires, and beliefs. The biggest predictor of differences among new members was whether they had been regularly attending another church prior to joining this one. Regular attenders comprised thirty-five percent of the new members and were older on average. New members in this category differed from new members who had not been attending church at all or who had been looking for a church. For example, 93 percent of the new members in our survey indicated that they attended church once a week or more in the past year. Those who had been attending church prior to joining this church were more likely to attend more than once a week (40 percent) than those who had not been attending (21 percent) and those who had been looking (16 percent).

Table 2 lists differences in beliefs and attitudes among new members who had been attending church regularly, those who had not been attending, and those who were looking. First, those who had not been attending church before joining their present church were less likely to have attended at age sixteen - 48 percent vs. 28 percent overall. Those who had been attending some church were more likely to have been baptized before age eighteen - 77 percent vs. 54 percent overall.<sup>4</sup> They were also more likely to disagree with the statement that “All major religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth” - 70 percent vs. 55 percent overall. Those who had been attending church were also more likely to read or listen to the Bible frequently - 73 percent vs. 48 percent for those who had not been attending. About half of the new members use the New International Version of the Bible and 84 percent said they had moved forward in their spiritual journey in the past year. Sixty-one percent of new members said they pray several times a day; those who had been attending church were more likely to pray that often (70 percent). The survey also asked in what ways new members had experienced God’s presence. From a list of fourteen possibilities eight were most often selected (50 percent or more chose these responses): ‘A sense of love or presence’ was cited most often (85 percent), followed by awe in worship, then answers to prayers, a sense of leading or divine direction, in nature, in conviction of sin and divine forgiveness, and while reading scripture. Some responses differed for those who had been attending or not attending church. Table 2 shows that those who had been looking for a church were most likely to experience God’s presence in community (55 percent) while those who had been attending were more likely than others to experience God’s

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<sup>4</sup> Further comparison of differences by age at baptism will be addressed below.

presence while reading scripture (63 percent) or through conviction of sin and Divine forgiveness (60 percent).

**Table 2**

**Beliefs and Attitudes of New Members and Differences Among Those Attending, not Attending, or Looking for a Church (in percents)**

<b>Beliefs and Attitudes</b>	<b>Just before joining this church were you:</b>			
	<b>All</b> (N=113)	<b>Attending</b> (N=40)	<b>Not attending</b> (N=40)	<b>Looking</b> (N=33)
Attendance at age 16 (did not attend)	28	13	<b>48</b>	16
Baptized before age 18	54	<b>77</b>	41	49
“All major religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth” (disagree or strongly disagree)	55	<b>70</b>	53	42
Read/ listen to the Bible (daily or several times week))	58	<b>73</b>	48	51
<i>How often do you pray?</i> - several times a day	61	<b>70</b>	55	58
<i>Ways you've experienced God's presence-</i> - in community	48	48	40	<b>55</b>
- conviction of sin and Divine forgiveness	53	<b>60</b>	50	42

- while reading scripture	50	<b>63</b>	45	40
<i>What helped you grow spiritually?</i>				
- small group/class	72	78	75	<b>61</b>
- sharing the Lord's Supper/Communion	50	<b>35</b>	55	61
- Private devotions	44	<b>58</b>	40	<b>33</b>
- Tithing	37	<b>45</b>	30	<b>27</b>
<i>What images of God come to mind most frequently?</i>				
- Father	72	73	78	<b>61</b>
- Savior	41	45	<b>23</b>	49
- Healer	17	10	<b>30</b>	12

What helped new members grow in the last year? From a checklist of possibilities “worship or sermons” was checked most often (91 percent), followed by a small group or class (72 percent), reading the Bible (70 percent), a Christian friend or family member ( 57 percent), sharing in the Lord’s Supper/ Communion (50 percent), private devotions (44 percent), and tithing (37 percent). Again, differences occurred among those who had been attending church and those who had not been attending or who had been looking. Those who had been looking (column three in Table 2) were less likely to name a small group or class, private devotions, or tithing than those who had been attending, but they were more likely to name “sharing in the Lord’s supper.” New members were asked which images of God come most frequently to mind when they think about God. The top three images of God were Father (72 percent), Lord (51 percent), Creator (45 percent), and Savior (41 percent). Differences across attendance patterns are listed in the last three rows of Table 2. Those who were looking for a church were least likely to hold the image of “Father” (61

percent); those not attending were least likely to have an image of “Savior,” (23 percent) and most likely to see God as healer (30 percent), differences worth noting despite their not being among the top choices overall.

New members also differed in their perceptions of their congregations’ openness to change. Those who had already been attending a church were also more likely than others to suggest changes (67 percent vs. 29 percent of those not attending and 34 percent of those who had been looking), even though 91 percent said their church is either very open or somewhat open to change. Fifty-eight percent of those who suggested changes said their idea was implemented. But when respondents were also asked to rate (on a scale of 1 to 10) their congregation’s openness to a new member starting a new ministry, those who had been looking for a church were most likely to rate their church as strong supporters (nine or higher) of new members starting new ministries (59 percent vs. 42 percent of those not attending and 27 percent of regular attenders). Overall, forty-one percent rated their church as very supportive (nine or higher) of new members starting new ministries.

New members were asked to select from a list of twelve items those aspects of being a Christian which are most significant in their own lives. Table 3 shows the percent “of great significance” from most often selected to least often selected. For seven of the items (shaded percentages) there were noticeable differences among those who had been attending, not attending, or looking. Those who had not been attending were less likely than regular attenders to name “connection with the Divine”( 63 percent), and “a way to serve others” (56 percent) as being of great significance. Those who had been looking were more likely than others to find “having a place to raise children” as of great significance (72 percent), and less likely than regular attenders to say “I have eternal life,” or “saves me from hell.” Those who had been attending were more likely than others to say “my world view is different from non-Christians” and “my life is empowered by the Holy Spirit.”

**Table 3**

**New Members Aspects of Being a Christian Which are Most Significant in Your Life (in percents)**

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Percent 'Of Great Significance'	All <sup>5</sup> (N=113)	Just before joining this church were you:		
		Attending (N=40)	Not attending (N=40)	Looking (N=33)
It give meaning and purpose to my life	86	92	80	85
Gives me a relationship with Jesus	86	87	87	82
My sins are forgiven	85	90	85	79
I have eternal life	82	92	80	<b>76</b>
Connects me with the Divine	75	83	<b>63</b>	81
My life is empowered by the Holy Spirit	74	82	74	<b>67</b>
I belong to a supportive community	65	66	68	70
Gives me a way to serve others	64	<b>71</b>	56	64
Saves me from Hell	61	<b>74</b>	56	58
I have a place to raise my children	61	60	57	<b>72</b>
I'm less selfish and self-absorbed	60	53	63	64
My world-view is different from non-Christians	48	<b>69</b>	37	36

New members were also asked to interpret the following scenario:

*Suppose your church is growing quickly. On the way to an important weekend retreat, several church leaders experience a series of mishaps, accidents and agitation. How might you interpret this?*

Four possible responses were offered: 1. Coincidence, there's no relationship between the events, 2.

Bad luck, 3. It might be spiritual warfare, 4. I don't know. Overall, 49 percent of new members said "it might

<sup>5</sup>Percentages may differ from overall percentages described elsewhere because "other" responses are not included.

be spiritual warfare,” 29 percent said “coincidence,” 17 percent said they didn’t know and five percent said “bad luck.” Those who had been attending church were more likely to say “spiritual warfare” (68 percent) compared to 46 percent of those who had been looking and 33 percent of those who had not been attending. Those who had not been attending were equally likely to respond “coincidence” as to say “spiritual warfare” - 33 percent for each.

These findings suggest that people who are attending church regularly have different motivations and expectations than those who are not currently church-goers. Recognizing these differences might be helpful in guiding evangelistic outreach and spiritual formation programs.

Another, although less potent, predictor of differences among new members is the age at which they were baptized. Examining differences between those who were baptized before age eighteen and those who were baptized at age eighteen or older provides additional insights into the beliefs and attitudes of new members. Table 4 shows that those baptized before age eighteen were more likely to be female, were more likely to have attended church at age sixteen, more likely to have been regular church attenders before joining this church, and more likely to pray several times a day than those who were baptized at age eighteen or later. Those baptized before age eighteen were more likely to say that “private devotions” helped them grow spiritually while those baptized at age eighteen or over were more likely to name “sharing in the Lord’s supper.” The two groups also differed in their images of God. Those baptized before age eighteen were more likely to think of God as Father or friend; those baptized later than eighteen were more likely to think of God as creator. Those baptized before age 18 were more likely to interpret “mishaps” as spiritual warfare and were more likely to make a suggestion for change. Those baptized before age eighteen were also more likely to say they experienced God in nature and to name “a place to raise my kids” as being an aspect of great significance in being a Christian. Overall those baptized before age 18 appear to be more “churched”—that is, they attend more, pray more, have “spiritual” interpretations of events, and are more likely to suggest changes.

#### **Table 4**

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**Beliefs and Attitudes of New Members and  
Differences Between those Baptized Before Age 18 or at Age 18 or After**

(in percents,)

<b>Beliefs and Attitudes</b>	<b>All</b>  (N=118)	<b>At what age were you baptized?</b>	
		<b>Before 18</b>  (N=64)	<b>18 or After</b>  (N=54)
Gender - male	46	38	57
- female	54	<b>63</b>	43
Attendance at age 16 (did not attend)	28	13	<b>43</b>
Regular church attendance just before joining this church	35	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>How often do you pray? - several times a day</i>	61	<b>67</b>	52
<i>What helped you grow spiritually?</i>			
- Sharing in the Lord's Supper/Communion	50	42	<b>59</b>
- Private devotions	44	<b>52</b>	37
<i>What images of God come to mind most frequently?</i>			
- Father	72	<b>78</b>	63
- Friend	36	<b>45</b>	24
- Creator	45	36	<b>56</b>
<i>How do you interpret mishaps or accidents?</i>			
(spiritual warfare)	49	60	<b>39</b>
<i>Have you ever suggested a change in the way something is done at your church? (Yes)</i>	41	51	<b>30</b>

<i>Most significant aspects of being a Christian</i>			
<i>(percent "Of great significance")</i>			
- I have a place to raise my kids	61	<b>70</b>	53
<i>Ways you've experienced God's love - in nature</i>	68	<b>77</b>	59

### *Evangelism Issues*

Whether or not new members had been attending church regularly prior to joining their current church was also a predictor of differences in evangelistic attitudes. Table 5 shows how new members' beliefs and behaviors varied in their approach to evangelism depending upon their prior church attendance patterns. When asked "what happens when people die?" 68 percent of new members said that they go to heaven or hell. Of those who had been attending church 80 percent said "They go to heaven or hell" versus 63 percent of those not attending at all and 60 percent of those who were looking. New members were also asked what the most pressing spiritual questions are for unchurched people. The two highest ranking responses were "How can a good and powerful God allow so much evil to happen?" (71 percent) and "Is there a God?" (42 percent). Those who were looking were most likely (39 percent) to name the first question. Regular attenders were least likely to name the second (25 percent). New members were asked to select their definition of evangelism from five possible choices. Two definitions emerged as favorites: 1. Evangelism is the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to repentance and to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord Savior (selected by 42 percent of respondents) and 2. Evangelism is the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to a life of meaning through a relationship with Jesus Christ (selected by 35 percent of respondents). Again, church attendance patterns showed marked differences. Fifty-eight percent of prior church attenders chose the first definition (vs. 30 percent of non-attenders and 41 percent of lookers). Only 18 percent of regular attenders chose the second definition compared with 53 percent of non-attenders and 31 percent of lookers.

**Table 5**  
**New Members Attitudes and Behaviors with Regard to Evangelism**  
**(in percents)<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Just before joining this church were</b>			
<b>you:</b>			
<b>All*</b>	<b>Attending</b>	<b>Not attending</b>	<b>Looking</b>
(N=113)	(N=40)	(N=40)	(N=33)

<sup>6</sup>Percentages may differ from overall percentages described elsewhere because “other” responses are not included.

<i>What happens when people die?</i> - they go to Heaven or Hell	68	<b>80</b>	63	60
<i>What would you say are the three most pressing spiritual questions that unchurched people have today?</i> Ranked as #1:				
- How can a good and powerful God allow so much evil to happen?	71	29	26	<b>39</b>
- Is there a God?	42	<b>25</b>	60	46
<i>Your definition of evangelism:</i>				
- Evangelism is the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to repentance and to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord Savior	42	<b>58</b>	30	41
- Evangelism is the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to a life of meaning through a relationship with Jesus Christ	35	18	<b>53</b>	31
<i>How personally motivated are you to do evangelism?</i>				
- strongly or moderately motivated	66	81	<b>50</b>	69
<i>Barriers to doing evangelism (A great barrier)</i>				
- I have faith but don't know how to talk about it	21	14	<b>36</b>	12
- I don't want to pressure others	34	22	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>
- I don't know how to do evangelism	20	6	31	24
- The person with whom I speak might ask a question I can't answer	25	9	<b>49</b>	14

We asked new members about their motivation to evangelize and what barriers keep them from doing evangelism. Sixty-six percent of new members said they were either strongly or moderately motivated to do evangelism with those who had not been attending least motivated (50 percent). Differences emerged across the three sub-groups in four areas. Those who had not been attending at all were more likely than others to say they “have faith but don’t know how to talk about it” and “the person with whom I speak might ask a question I couldn’t answer.” All four barriers listed in Table 5 were greater problems for those who had not

been attending church or who had been looking for a church than for regular church attenders. These differences indicate a need to recognize that new members who have been unchurched have unique beliefs, concerns, and motivational barriers related to evangelism. Training for evangelism cannot make assumptions about levels of comfort or even similar beliefs among new members.

***How do new members' and leaders' beliefs and behaviors compare?***

Many questions in our surveys were repeated in both leaders and new members questionnaires providing an opportunity to compare new members' beliefs and behaviors with the belief and behaviors of church leaders. Table 6 shows differences in behaviors and beliefs when comparing all church leaders with only senior pastors and with new members. Church backgrounds differed markedly. Thirty-nine percent of church leaders and 60 percent of senior pastors were currently in the same denomination they had attended at age 12. Only 17 percent of new members were now in the same denomination as at age 12. 18 percent said they did not attend church at all before age 12. Attendance at age 16 showed a similar pattern. Eighty-four percent of senior pastors went to church at least weekly as did 70 percent of all leaders but only 41 percent of new members attended with such frequency at age 16. Twenty-eight percent of new members said they did not attend at all at age 16. New members, then, are much less likely to have had a consistent experience of church belonging and attendance in their youth. This difference may account for some of the differences in belief and behaviors that are outlined in the rest of Table 6.

**Table 6**

**Beliefs and Behaviors of All Leaders, Senior Pastors, and New Members**

(in percents)

	<b>All Leaders</b> (N = 193)	<b>Sr. Pastors</b> (N = 66)	<b>New Members</b> (N = 123)
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<i>Denomination before age 12 - same as now</i>	39	60	<b>17</b>
- another mainline	30	19	<b>20</b>
<i>Church attendance at age 16</i>			
- weekly or more	70	84	<b>41</b>
- once a month or occasionally	16	9	<b>31</b>
- did not attend	13	6	<b>28</b>
<i>“All major religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth” (disagree or strongly disagree)</i>	77	89	<b>55</b>
Bible translation used most (NIV)	62	64	<b>51</b>
How often read/listen to Bible (daily)	53	62	<b>20</b>
Time spent in prayer (several times per day)	81	83	<b>61</b>
Believe in Jesus’ physical resurrection (yes)	93	94	97
Spiritual progress in the past year (forward)	88	92	84
How do you interpret mishaps or accidents (spiritual warfare)	67	66	<b>49</b>
<i>Your congregation’s approach to individual salvation</i>			
- more conversion focused	26	41	<b>15</b>
- more education focused	35	22	<b>43</b>
- an equal mix of both	39	36	43
<i>Names of God you think about most often (top four responses)</i>			
Father	65	61	72
Lord	59	59	51
Savior	57	53	<b>41</b>
Creator	52	39	45

Nearly all leaders (77 percent) and senior pastors (89 percent) disagreed or strongly disagreed that “All major religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.” Though a majority (55

Survey Summary

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percent) of new members held the same belief, the percentage was much smaller than the leaders. All three groups are likely to use the New International Version of the Bible but new members were considerably less likely to read or listen to the Bible daily (20 percent ) or to pray several times a day (61 percent). New members were as likely to believe in Jesus' physical resurrection as the leaders and nearly as likely to say that they have progressed forward in their spiritual lives in the past year. New members' interpretation of the "mishaps" scenario (see above) was less likely to be "spiritual warfare" (49 vs. 67 percent). We asked both groups to describe their congregation's approach to individual salvation. New members were more likely to say the approach is more education focused or an equal mix of conversion and education; only 15 percent thought the approach was more conversion focused compared with 41 percent of the senior pastors and 26 percent of all leaders.

At the bottom of Table 6 are the top four responses to "When you think about God, which of these images come most frequently to your mind?" (A checklist was provided and respondents were asked to select up to four responses.) Leaders, senior pastors, and new members chose the same four images but new members were less likely than leaders to choose "Savior" as a frequently experienced image of God.

Above in Table 3 we reported a list of aspects of being a Christian that are "of great significance" in one's life. Leaders' and senior pastors' responses to this list were similar to new members with two exceptions. New members were less likely to say "My world-view is different from non-Christians' " - 48 percent vs. 69 percent for leaders and 72 percent for senior pastors. Senior pastors were less likely to say "Saves me from Hell" - 46 percent vs. 58 percent for leaders and 61 percent for new members.

### ***How do new members' and leaders' evangelism approaches compare?***

How do new members compare with leaders and senior pastors on issues related to evangelism? On many questions related to evangelism leaders, senior pastors and new members responded similarly. They

believe that people go to heaven or hell when they die (64-65 percent), and they think the person of the Trinity most acceptable to non-Christians is either God/Father/Mother (47-55 percent) or Jesus/Christ (42-47 percent). Most say their church's primary focus of evangelism is "everyone" (68 percent for leaders and senior pastors and 82 percent for new members). Most define evangelism either as "the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to repentance and to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord And Savior" (36-42 percent) or as "the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to a life of meaning through a relationship with Jesus Christ" (33-39 percent).

What do respondents think are the most pressing questions for unchurched people today? About half of all leaders and new members agreed that "Why do I need God" was one of the top five pressing questions for unchurched people but on the other four top choices they differed considerably. Table 7 shows differences between leaders, senior pastors, and new members on pressing questions and other evangelism responses. On the top concern, "How can a good God allow evil?" senior pastors were less likely (55 percent) than either all leaders or new members (73 and 71 percent respectively) to anticipate this issue as a concern of unchurched persons.

The question of why one should be a Christian instead of being a devotee in another religion was of less concern to new members (37 percent) than leaders and senior pastors thought it was (52 and 56 percent). Senior pastors thought the question of having a better life was more pressing for unchurched people (47 percent) than did either all leaders (34 percent) or new members (26 percent). Finally, the question "Is there a God?" was of greater concern to new members (42 percent) than all leaders (28 percent) or senior pastors (18 percent) anticipated. These perceptions of what concerns unchurched people differ considerably between new members and leaders, raising critical questions of the accuracy of the evangelistic focus of even the most highly successful mainline congregations.

New members were less likely than others to say they were strongly motivated to do evangelism - 20 percent of new members vs. 58 percent for all leaders and 66 percent for senior pastors. New members were less likely to say they had shared their faith in the past three months and more likely to say they had

**Table 7**  
**Evangelism Issues**  
(in percents)

	<b>All Leaders</b> (N=193)	<b>Sr. pastors</b> (N=66)	<b>New Members</b> (N=123)
<i>Most pressing questions for unchurched people</i>			
- How can a good and powerful God allow so much evil to happen?	73	<b>55</b>	71
- Why should anyone be a Christian rather than any other religion?	52	56	<b>37</b>
- Could my life (or my children's lives) be better if I were a Christian?	34	<b>47</b>	26
- Is there a God?	28	18	<b>42</b>
<i>How personally motivated are you to do evangelism?</i>			
- strongly motivated	58	66	<b>20</b>
<i>Have you had a conversation about your faith with an unchurched person in the past three months?</i>			
- yes	84	94	79
<i>If yes, with how many people? - 5 or less</i>	63	58	<b>83</b>
<i>Primary duty of Christians</i>			
- Share the good news	51	59	<b>37</b>

- Follow Jesus' teachings	40	33	53
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talked with five or fewer people. (Leaders were more likely to have talked with more than five people). New members were also less likely than leaders to say that the primary duty of Christians is “helping others to commit their lives to Christ by sharing the good news” and more likely to say Christians’ duty is to “follow the teachings of Jesus as the basis for spiritual growth and service.” Respondents were also asked what barriers they face in doing evangelism. Leaders and senior pastors identified very few concerns that posed “a great barrier” to doing evangelism (10 percent or less for each of the nine listed barriers) but new members identified four areas that were “great barriers” for them. Barriers to evangelism for new members were: 1. I don’t want to pressure others (33 percent); 2. The person with whom I speak might ask a question I can’t answer (24 percent); 3. I have faith but don’t know how to talk about it (20 percent); and 4. I don’t know how to do evangelism (19 percent).

These differences between new members and leaders provide a wealth of information for congregational outreach to the unchurched and for ways to foster spiritual growth in new church members. New members are more likely to be in tune with the types of questions that concern the unchurched if they were recently unchurched themselves. Yet recognizing their new members’ limited experience and knowledge as Christians is essential to helping them grow and become more comfortable with evangelism.

***Differences in Leader Cohorts—Beliefs and Behaviors***

In trying to assess the beliefs and attitudes of leaders themselves we found age group to be a helpful predictor of differences. We compared responses of three cohorts: those born before 1946, those born as “Baby Boomers” (1946 to 1964), and those born after 1964. The Boomer generation has been a major influence on contemporary culture and is the largest cohort in this set of data, yet in this survey it is often

the younger generation - those born after 1964 - that differs from the other cohorts. Table 8 shows some differences in belief and behaviors across these three age groups.

**Table 8**  
**Comparisons of Beliefs and Behaviors of Leaders by Age Group**  
(in percents)

	All leaders (N=192)	Leaders born before 1946 (N=46)	Leaders born 1946- 1964 (N=116)	Leaders born after 1964 (N=30)
Read Bible daily	53	50	49	<b>70</b>
Attended a class/workshop on prayer in past three years	52	41	53	<b>66</b>
Believes in Jesus physical resurrection	93	85	94	<b>100</b>
<i>Major influences on your faith</i>				
- A Christian camp experience	40	48	<b>34</b>	50
- Growing up in a charismatic or evangelical church	23	35	<b>16</b>	31
- Experience of a different culture	23	15	22	<b>40</b>
<i>Aspects of being a Christian most significant in your life (Of great significance)</i>				
- My world-view is different from non-Christians	69	80	<b>63</b>	76
- Saves me from hell	58	63	<b>54</b>	69
- I belong to a supportive community	70	<b>57</b>	78	71
- I have eternal life	84	83	82	<b>97</b>
<i>When mishaps occur it could be</i>				
- spiritual warfare	67	<b>51</b>	73	73
- coincidence	24	<b>38</b>	17	23

Leaders born after 1964 are more likely to read their Bibles daily than other leaders (70 percent vs. 49-50 percent). They are more likely to have attended a class or workshop on prayer in the past three years

(66 percent compared to 41 percent of those born before 1946 and 53 percent for the Boomers) and more likely to believe in Jesus' physical resurrection (100 percent vs. 85 and 94 percent). They are more likely than other leaders to report "the experience of a different culture" as having a major influence on their faith (40 percent compared with 15 percent of older leaders and 22 percent of Boomers).

Boomer leaders identified different experiences that influenced their faith. They were less likely than others to report that a Christian camp experience or growing up in a charismatic culture were major influences on their faith (34 and 16 percent respectively). Older and younger cohorts were more alike in these experiences: half of the youngest cohort and nearly half of the older cohort were influenced by Christian camp. About one third of these older and younger age groups were influenced by their upbringing in a charismatic or evangelical church.

Responses to "What aspects of being a Christian are most significant in your life?" also revealed some differences across cohorts. Boomers were least likely to say their world-view is different from non-Christians or that being saved from hell is of great significance. Leaders born before 1946 are least likely to choose "I belong to a supportive community." Those born after 1964 are most likely to say that having eternal life is of great significance.

Interpretation of mishaps or difficulties also differs across cohorts; those born before 1946 were least likely to interpret mishaps as "spiritual warfare" and most likely to assume "coincidence, there's no relationship between the events."

Those born after 1964 might be described as more "other worldly." They are less like Boomers and more like older leaders in their faith influence and world-view but more like Boomers in their sense of community and spiritual interpretation of events.

### *Differences in Leader Cohorts - Evangelism Beliefs and Behaviors*

Across cohorts we also found differences in approaches to evangelism. Leaders born after 1964 again stood out as having beliefs and behaviors that were different from their older colleagues. Table 9 illustrates some of these differences. The first three items in Table 9 show that those born after 1964 were more likely than others to say that when people die they go to heaven or hell, to be strongly motivated to do evangelism, and to have had a conversation about their faith with an unchurched person in the past three months. These age groups also differed somewhat in their definitions of evangelism. Only 16 percent of the leaders born before 1946 defined evangelism as “. . . calling people to a life of meaning through a relationship with Jesus Christ” compared with 38 percent of those born after 1964 and 38 percent of Boomers.

Leaders born after 1964 again stood out from other leaders in their responses to the most pressing questions of unchurched people today. These youngest leaders were more likely to name “Why should I be a Christian rather than any other religion?” and less likely to name “Why do I need God?” (Both of these responses differ from what new members indicated in their responses - see Table 7, above). Differences across cohorts were also evident in leaders’ assessments of barriers to integrating new members into full congregational involvement. Those born after 1964 were more likely than other leaders to say that new members are very different from long-term members and less likely to say that some have social, relational or emotional problems or that they don’t participate enough.

Another difference across cohorts involved a question about denominational theologies of baptism. Leaders whose denominations practice a theology of infant baptism were asked if they believed infant

baptism is a barrier to evangelizing unchurched adults. Sixty-nine percent of leaders said it was not a barrier.

**Table 9**  
**Comparisons of Evangelism Beliefs of Leaders by Age Group**  
(in percents)

	All leaders (N=192)	Leaders born before 1946 (N=46)	Leaders born 1946- 1964 (N=116)	Leaders born after 1964 (N=30)
<i>When people die</i>				
- go to Heaven/Hell	65	59	64	<b>78</b>
Strongly motivated to do evangelism	58	51	59	<b>66</b>
Have you had a conversation about your faith with an unchurched person in the past three months?				
- yes	84	72	86	<b>93</b>
<i>Your definition of evangelism</i>				
- Evangelism is the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to repentance and to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord Savior	39	48	35	43
- Evangelism is the joyful sharing of the love of God, calling people to a life of meaning through a relationship with Jesus Christ	33	<b>16</b>	39	38
<i>The three most pressing spiritual questions of unchurched people</i>				
- why should anyone be a Christian rather than any other religion?	52	46	49	<b>73</b>
- why do I need God?	53	54	55	<b>40</b>
<i>Barriers to integrating new Christians into full congregational involvement</i>				
- New members are very different from the long-term members	19	15	17	<b>30</b>
- Some have social, relational, emotional problems	22	24	25	<b>10</b>
- They don't participate enough	27	20	35	<b>10</b>

Leaders born after 1964 were more likely to say it is not a barrier (79 percent vs. 67 percent for boomers and 64 percent for those born before 1946). Leaders whose denominations practice believer's baptism were asked if their theology was an aid to evangelizing unchurched adults. Seventy-eight percent responded that believer's baptism is an aid to evangelizing adults. Those born before 1946 were less likely to say yes (67 percent) than were the Boomers (83 percent) or the youngest cohort (80 percent).

### *Summary*

A picture emerges from these data which, though not definitive, suggests some areas of growth and understanding to pursue in the evangelization of unchurched adults by mainline denominations. First, the data point out that unchurched adults have very different perceptions of religion and spirituality than do regular church attenders. They are less likely than regular attenders to have been baptized before age 18 (and thus less likely to have grown up in and be familiar with the church), less likely to pray and read the Bible frequently, and less likely to grow through private devotions; they are more likely to view all major religions as equally good. They are less likely to hold beliefs that are common in church circles, especially among leaders and clergy. All these differences are indicators that without conscious recognition of these characteristics, assumptions could be made which would make it hard to reach unchurched adults and potentially stunt their growth once they did become Christians.

Second, new members differ from church leaders and senior pastors. While differences might be expected, the nature of the differences invites consideration. Not only do religious habits and knowledge differ but perspectives differ on the world and how the Christian relates to the world. New members differ in their experience of church, in their understanding of worldly events, and in their images of who God is. They see their congregation's approach to evangelism as more education and less conversion focused than do their leaders (especially senior pastors of these successful evangelistic churches) and they are less

motivated to do evangelism. They are more likely to define Christian duty as “following Jesus’ teachings” than as “sharing the good news.” They are more than twice as likely as senior pastors to think that one of the most urgent faith questions that occupies unchurched people today is “Is there a God?”

Finally, the data make us aware of differences in the leaders themselves. Baby boomers make up the largest portion (60 percent) of the leaders surveyed. The Boomer cohort is more likely to focus on community than on being saved from hell. In many ways they are more like those born before them than those born after them. The greatest number of differences are found in the youngest cohort, born after 1964, who read their Bibles more often, attend classes on prayer more frequently, find “having eternal life” of the highest significance, and have a greater expectation of heaven or hell when people die. Whether it is youth and enthusiasm that drives these answers or a different outlook on the Christian life cannot be determined here. What can be noted is that these varying perspectives influence how evangelism is carried out in the local church and how leaders’ views interrelate with the views of unchurched persons.

These data offer a glimpse into the life of the mainline church and its efforts in evangelism. We hope they will lend insight to the well-intentioned plans of congregations seeking to reach unchurched people today.