

FROM RISK TO OPPORTUNITIES:

**THE CASE FOR CONGREGATIONAL RENEWAL
IN THE DIOCESE OF BETHLEHEM**



**CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE
JANUARY 25, 2010**

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Introduction

Loren B. Mead, founder and president emeritus of the Alban Institute, has written that “[The Church]...is often caught up in standards of success that relate to institutional viability, not faithfulness of ministry.”¹ The purpose of this working paper for the Committee on Congregational Development of the Diocese of Bethlehem is to make a case that will allow the Committee to discern and foster those standards, practices, and resources that will foster “faithfulness of ministry” in every congregation of the Diocese.

The object of this paper is to put before the Committee the case that it can become the catalyst and agent for a multi-year program that will inspire, motivate, and shepherd all congregations of the diocese to renewal and transformation, and provide for many the path to move from risk to opportunities.

The case suggests that the mission and instrumentality of the Committee will

- Strengthen and encourage all parishes, especially those that have exhibited vitality;
- Inspire and provide tangible resources to those congregations “at risk” or “under review” (Canons XXVIII & XXIX); and,
- Provide self-realization and eventuality to those congregations that have lost all sense of purpose or vitality (Canon XXX).

What follows is an outline for the discussion of the “mission” of the Committee, operating assumptions, process, structure, goals, objectives, evaluation --- and, implications.

“Will you proclaim by work and example the Good News of God in Christ?”

“I will, with God’s help.” (BCP, Baptismal Covenant, p. 305)

¹ Loren B. Mead, “Few Members, Many Gifts,” *Inside the Small Church* (The Alban Institute, 2002). Originally published in *Action Information* 9, no. 3 (May/June): pp. 1-3.

Background

State of the Church Report

The recent report on the State of the Church in the Diocese of Bethlehem paints a clear, sobering – and challenging – picture. Looking at the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) alone, the report states that congregations “with an ASA below 75 [attendees] make up 47% of all Episcopal Churches and 15% of the ‘worshippers.’” The recently published national ASA for congregations 1-70 is 50.7% (see Figure 2 in Appendix).²

The report makes a general observation that “for a parish to have the ability to maintain itself and have the opportunity to grow it should have an energized, full time priest, an annual budget of approximately \$150,000 and an active outreach program. Of the 42 parishes with an ASA below 75 a majority does not meet these criteria.” The report does not reveal the percentages of the major items of the average parish budget: clergy salary and compensation, and facilities, outreach, etc.

It is often reported that clergy compensation and facilities dominate the local budget. The National Church reports that the average percentage of a budget for clergy by parish size could be as high as 52% for congregations with an ASA between 51-150. Put along alongside the \$150,000 stated above, and factoring in fixed costs, such items as “outreach” and “education/formation” will occupy a very small percentage. Clergy compensation and upkeep of facilities may be a major factor for the majority of the parishes in the diocese. The national average percentage of budget for staff by parish size (ASA) can be found in the Appendix, Figure 8.³

The report does provide a positive reporting that “16 parishes showed varying degrees of growth over the four year period and some were significant [8 of the parishes had growth

² The complete reports of the new statistical data may be found at www.episcopalchurch.org/research.htm

³ Ibid., Figure 8.

rates in excess of 20%].” The report suggests “[a] more in-depth study should be initiated to determine the factors which resulted in the wide variance of performance since they occurred in all size categories and across a wide geographical area, including six high growth parishes in counties where population is declining.” More on this “recommendation” will be found below [# 9, see p. 14].

National Church Strategic Planning Survey Report

On October 1, 2009, the National church released its Strategic Planning Survey Report.⁴ The findings from the survey will contribute to the development of a Strategic Plan for the Episcopal Church Center and Executive Council as well as a larger overall communication strategy for The Episcopal Church [TEC]. The Report summary states “[o]verall, the five most important goal areas, marked as “very important” by a clear majority of the total sample are, in descending order:

1. Reaching youth and young adults
2. Evangelism/Proclaiming the Good News of Christ
3. Worship, music and liturgy
4. Leadership
- 5. Strengthening congregations.”** (My bolding)

The implications are clear that “strengthening congregations” will be a major policy and programmatic priority in TEC over the coming years.

Diocese of Bethlehem Congregational Development Committee

In the late 1980’s, congregational development was the function of a subcommittee of the Diocesan Renewal and Evangelism Committee. At the same time there was another committee known as the Grant-In-Aid Committee, whose function was to provide grants

⁴ Complete results from the strategic planning survey along with other resources are available at www.episcopalchurch.org/strategicplan/

to parishes that were unable to provide clerical leadership through its own resources. It was decided to combine the Grant-In-Aid Committee and the congregational development subcommittee of the Evangelism and Renewal Committee into a new Committee known as the Congregational Development Committee. The mission of the Committee was threefold: 1) to support dependent congregations through financial grants; 2) to support congregations in long-range planning; and 3) to foster the development of new congregations.

The Committee sought to carry out this mission in the following ways:

- provide cash grants to congregations which were not self-supporting;
- provide consultants to congregations to assist in long-range planning and development;
- identify, plan and develop new congregations; and
- provide programs and resources for congregations to engage in congregational development.

Programs and resources used over the years include several Diocesan-wide workshops facilitated by national organizations (such as the Congregational Development Institute) on the subject of congregational development; establishment of New Initiative Grants, which were grants to congregations to establish new programs in the area of congregational development; and establishment of a relationship with Percept, a national organization which provides a wide variety of religion-focused demographic information and related programs for parishes. In addition, the Committee established a new congregation in Womelsdorf named St. Nicholas, following extensive meetings with interested parties in the region and using Percept data. Unfortunately, the initiative was not ultimately successful.

In addition, the Committee provided consultations with congregations on the subject of long-range and strategic planning, visioning and establishing mission statements. This

normally took the form of one- or two-day retreats with Vestry or other members of the congregation. Between five and ten consultancies with congregations took place each year.

In the early 2000's the pro-active activities of the Congregational Development Committee declined, primarily because of the reduction of available Diocesan staff time, reduced membership on the Committee and lack of Committee leadership.

The Drafting Team

Over the past two months a “drafting team,” made up of Scott Allen, Charles Cesaretti, and Ty Welles, convened four mini-consultations with representative participants for across the diocese. They met Bishop Paul and members of the Diocesan Staff, with the Chairs of various Diocesan Committee and Commission, with the rectors of congregations that exhibit health and vitality, and with the rectors and wardens of parishes identified as “at risk” or “under review.”

The purpose of these mini-consultations was to engage the “stakeholders” in the ministry and process of the Congregational Committee. The stated goal was “to provide information, background, and suggestions to the reconstituted Committee on Congregational Development as it prepares its mission statement, purview, and initiatives.”

What was heard and suggested has helped focus and frame this working paper. We are indebted to all the participants in these mini-consultations. The Diocese is blessed with the vision, mission, and energy of countless of its members – lay and clergy.

The Mission and Naming

It is helpful to be reminded of the mission and vision statements of the Diocese of Bethlehem, and be in alignment with them.

Diocesan Vision

We seek to create communities of faith where all God's people can deepen their relationship with Jesus. We seek so to live that the Holy Spirit might use us to draw others to Christ. We seek to welcome others to the fellowship of God's church.

This vision will lead us

- To live lives of prayer, service and compassion as we work to build a world of justice and peace.
- To proclaim the importance of our life together in Christ.
- To be open to change as the Holy Spirit prompts us.
- To celebrate our Anglican identity

Mission Statement

Live God's love. Tell what you have seen and heard.

The Catechism in the Prayer Book⁵ is clear about the mission of the Church and there is wisdom in adopting that mission statement for the Committee. Here is a suggested amalgam of the three relevant paragraphs:

The Committee adopts [lifts up?] the mission statement of the Prayer Book: The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The mission is pursued as it prays, worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love. This mission is carried out through the ministry of all its members.

⁵ Book of Common Prayer, pg. 855.

As we will see below, this statement clearly states the relational theology of mission (relation with God, within the congregation, and with the community), avoiding the institutional or management models. It will become evident that, as we move to explore the vision of renewal and transformational, this language will keep everything in focus. It is crucial for the Committee to discuss this suggestion at the very top of formative process.

This mission statement is --- our first and primary relationship is with God; the second relationship is within action of worship and proclamation of the community; and, the third is the vocation of all within the world. Through statement the Committee declares its faithfulness of mission and ministry, and it invites the entire diocese to participate as partners.

The second item, along with its mission statement, is the value of naming itself: **The Committee on Congregational Renewal (CCR)**. This would align itself with both the mission statements in the Prayer Book and the Diocese, and forthrightly name the goal and process. The word “development” has many values, however, it also has some baggage. Along with the jargon of management models, it has taken, along with its partner “growth,” a distinctly quantitative aspect. This perception has overshadowed the qualitative – faithfulness of ministry - which we find mentioned above in the quote from Loren Mead. Renewal is a solid theological term and consistent with the Prayer Book definition of mission. It will also predicate the process.

Some Fundamental Assumptions

1/ **The bedrock of sustainable Christian action is a spiritual life.** Martha Grace Reese makes a compelling case that prayer and the spiritual life must start, direct, and sustain all congregational life.⁶

⁶ Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel* (Chalice Press, 2007).

2/ **Congregations must focus on their strengths, what they do well, rather than on their weaknesses.** This and the following two assumptions (#s 3 & 4) are gleaned from Clay Smith's helpful article in *Inside the Small Church*.⁷

3/ **Congregations can greatly strengthen their witness when they link up with neighboring congregations in cooperative ventures.**

4/ **Congregations do better when they do not become dependent upon outside sources.**

5/ **Many clergy are ill prepared to lead a small rural or village church.**⁸

6/ **Every congregation in the diocese must be included in the renewal and transformational process at the appropriate level.**

The Process

The process is grounded in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP, p. 304ff.) and should be presented that way at every opportunity.

Building on the mission statement, the Baptismal Covenant, and the stated assumptions, the CCR is encouraged to contemplate and adopt a process that has these elements and stages:

- Prayer
- Congregational Discernment
- Strategic Planning (Goals, objectives, benchmarks)

⁷ Clay Smith, "Ten Ways to Build a Healthier Congregation," *Inside the Small Church*, *op. cit.*

⁸ Gary E. Farley, "Fifteen Steps for Leading a Stable Rural Church Off the Plateau," *Inside the Small Church*, *op. cit.*

- Partnerships
- Mutual Ministry
- Covenanting
- Periodic Review & Evaluation

1/ PRAYER

“I am clear that the only way to do ministry successfully, to lead a church or to live a life in today’s United States is to pray deeply.”⁹

The first, and in many ways the most important, stage of turning risk into opportunity is to create a context of prayer. The reasons for this should be obvious to us, but it is helpful for us to be conscious of the process in which we are engaged. We need to set the seriousness of the time and tasks ahead within the framework of prayer. Also we need to differentiate this process from the secular, management style by infusing it with our prayerful listening to God for direction. Reese reminds us that “[prayer] is more about receiving from God than it is about asking God for things or working hard at intercession. Prayer involves effort, habit, and focus; but it results in lightness and energy and excitement.”¹⁰

In one of her interviews with pastors across the nation and denominations, Reese quotes one pastor regarding her/his perception of prayer in doing evangelism:

“Pope John XXIII said to ‘keep a window open for the Spirit.’ That’s one of the images I’m working with – to keep a window open for the Spirit to do something. Things are changing. There’s a real concern among pastors for evangelism. That’s different. The competition is gone. We’re in this together. I think the Spirit’s doing that.”¹¹

⁹ Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel*, p. 42

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The first step is to open the process, open the congregations, open parishioners to the working of the Spirit.

Some things that might be considered:

- The preparation of a prayer that can be used at services of worship, for private prayer, or prayer groups. Also, a litany to the Holy Spirit for discernment, e.g. V/ *Come, Spirit of wisdom, and teach us to value the highest gift; R/ Come, Holy Spirit. V/ Send forth your Spirit and we shall be renewed; R/ And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
- A day of guided prayer, meditation, and reflection can be scheduled for all clergy.
- The Bishop can call a diocesan-wide meeting to begin the process with prayer and invocation of the Holy Spirit.
- Every congregation is urged to establish a prayer group to pray for the renewal and transformation of all the congregations of the diocese. Material can be provided to these groups.

2/ CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Beginning with prayer, the process moves to congregational discernment. This may happen in a number of ways. This discernment state is based on the assumption stated above: **Congregations must focus on their strengths, what they do well, rather than on their weaknesses.**

One possible way for congregational discernment is through “Asset Mapping.”

When the starting point is the recognition of the abundance of God’s gifts and talents, the discussion the congregation can “find an exciting, new and positive energy to break out of the negative cycles of need, dependency, and the inaction that people in congregations sometimes experience.”¹²

Asset Mapping not only creates a positive process, it provides clear data, relational opportunities, and, most especially, it unleashes the creative imagination of people and congregations to “what can be.” It is the shoehorn to envisioning the future.

There are many theologically grounded books to aid the parish in the mapping process. Snow’s book is quoted above and in the footnote. However, there are others, including *Holy Conversations* by Gilbert R. Rendle and Alice Mann (Alban Institute). Although this is of the “problem solving” model, it is very helpful in its structure. It gets at the process by asking three crucial questions:

- ✓ Who are we?
- ✓ What has God called us to do or be?
- ✓ Who is my neighbor?

It is important to see the discernment process as a part of the Baptismal Covenant.

3/ STRATEGIC PLANNING

“[S]trategic planning is a structured conversation about what a group of people believe God calls them to be or to do.”¹³

It is important to read and carefully and dissect this definition.

First, it is vital to hear this is a very structured process. There must be a careful plan to allow data and feelings to surface for consideration. The process must be accepted as a

¹² Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts* (Alban Institute: 2004), pg. xiii.

¹³ Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations* (Alban Institute: 2003), pg. 3.

pathway to explore identity and purpose. It must bring together the past and a vision of the future to enable a consciousness of the options for the present.

Second, it is group conversation. Conversation is the operative word. It is in dialogue, in conversation that creative thinking happens. In conversation, members of the group tell their stories, their recall of the past history of the congregation and their life within it. They reveal the values of the community and they uncover those moments when God's call to mission was clear to them.

The data that is shared with the group is not merely analyzed, but it is discussed for meaning beyond the hard and impersonal numbers on a graph. The conversation will uncover what is important and relevant.

The conversation not only rehearses the past, but it begins to evoke the future. The conversation must be an opening of the unconscious to allow the stimulation of inspiration and imagination. It is an opening to hear what "God calls us to be or to do."

So, strategic planning has its stages, tools, and information to fashion a plan, but it must never forget that it is a group conversation – a conversation of the faithful and faith-filled.

4/ PARTNERSHIPS

Having moved through the discernment of identity – "who we are?" – and through the robust group conversation of a strategic planning process -- "what has God called us to do or be? – the next stage is to identify, and link to, strategic partners.

Katherine Tyler Scott, in her new book *Transforming Leadership*, reminds us that our sense of identity and mission are linked to broad sense of belonging. She writes: "A wider view enables a community to feel a sense of identity, of cultural coherence and

belonging, while also seeing that the body of Christ exists to serve a much larger world than just that inside the church walls.”¹⁴

The asset mapping will have surfaced those organizations and groups within the wider community who share the same values and similar missions, such as the local food bank or agency on aging. How can a “strategic” partnership or alliance be forged with them so that the shared mission can be achieved?

If the asset mapping exposes a need without a local response, how can your congregation forge an alliance to address the gap? In this instance you can be the catalyst. This is the opportunity to exercise a ministry of hospitality, when your facilities can be a great gift to the community to house a needed outreach program.

Strategic Partnerships might be with other Episcopal Congregations in your area. The strategic planning process will have identified the key assets of your congregation. And, it will identify new goals and challenges. The immediate response may be to discount the opportunities because the idea of engaging a partner congregation(s) may not have been considered.

Katherine Tyler Scott quotes John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, “We must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body.”¹⁵

The path to the future might run through a strategic partnership with other Episcopal Congregations in your area. Getting to know the mission of these congregations may be vital for your planning and mission.

¹⁴ Katherine Tyler Scott, *Transforming Leadership* (Church Publishing, 2010), pg 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 51.

The Diocese and its staff may also be an important partner in your congregation's strategic plan.

Cast your net wide for strategic partners in mission.

5/ MUTUAL MINISTRY

Mission requires leadership. That leadership is both lay and ordained.

In order for a congregation to be mission-focused the leaders themselves must be mission-focused and united. Mutual ministry is unified leadership where lay and clergy each supports and compliments the other.

The Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer is clear and concise:

“Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission”?

“A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.”¹⁶

What is mutual ministry”?

“Mutual ministry is a radical reframing of the idea that strong individuals are solely responsible for the well-being of the whole community. The individual approach has often resulted in clergy isolation and burnout, or blaming—either of the community by its clergy, or clergy by the community. The “strong individual leader” approach also misses the abundant talent available to the community when ministry is seen as a common effort. All members of the Christian community, not just the ordained clergy, are called to be ministers.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*, pg. 855

¹⁷ Samuel P. Magill, “Living Into Our ministries: The Mutual Ministry Cycle” (The Episcopal Church Foundation, 2003), pg. 12.

Leadership characteristics and attributes of both the laity and the clergy must be developed if we are to have more effective leaders and effective congregations.

“The problem is that congregations (like most dioceses, seminaries, and other church organizations) do not do enough to enhance the leadership of their leaders”¹⁸

The key to mutual ministry is to embrace the concept that the goal is sacramental leadership. It is “sacramental” because it nurtures both the outer and inner self. Not only is it a taking on of new skills and tasks of leading others, but also it is an inner, spiritual expression of faith. It is the awareness and actualization that one’s life is a gift from God that is shared with the world.

Mutual ministry brings together the sacramental leadership of both laity and clergy as one. “Leadership as sacrament integrates the different realms of our lives – the personal and the professional, the individual and the institutional, the private and the public, the subjective and the objective,” writes Katherine Tyler Scott. “It enables people to live out their lives ‘in whole cloth.’” to be fully who they are called to be – a spiritual practice in and of itself. A result is that our actions are more aligned with our words.”¹⁹

This is what the Catechism means when it states: The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members. It assumes that all the members are engaged in mutual ministry.

6/ COVENANTING

Baptism brings us into the New Covenant.

“Q. What is the New Covenant?”

¹⁸ James Lemler, *Transforming Congregations* (Church Publishing, 2008), pg. 102.

¹⁹ Katherine Tyler Scott, op. cit., page 91.

A. The New Covenant is the new relationship with God given by Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to the apostles; and, through them, to all who believe in him.”²⁰

The process we have been talking about, as stated above (pg. 9), is grounded in the Baptismal Covenant.²¹ Our baptisms seal our covenant with God (The Apostles’ Creed), and with our neighbors -- “all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?”

The goal is to renew through our prayer; discussion and discernment; and, our consciousness of our community and world the new bonds that hold us together as the Body of Christ.

Just as we “renew” our Baptismal Vows at certain, specified liturgical times, so this process engages us in renewal and transformation as a diocese. In it we affirm anew and align our faith on the one, holy, creator God who “adopts us as his children and makes us as his children and makes us members of Christ’s Body, the Church, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.”²² And, with God’s help, we receive the New Commandment that we love one another as Christ loved us.²³

Grounding our work in the Baptismal Covenant affirms that God is always at work in our lives and communities. We need to hear and hold on to this fact, especially when we are often surrounded by doubt and fear. James Lemler states it beautifully:

God’s purpose and mission are active. That is a foundational tenet, and it is equally substantial as a tenet of spirituality. God’s activity is not hemmed in or bounded by anything in the world or the church. This has always been the case, but it is particularly significant for us to remember as we enter the twenty-first century. In a time of such immense change and transition, it behooves us to look even more carefully for God’s presence and action.

²⁰ *BCP*, pg. 850.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 304-305.

²² *Ibid.*, pg. 858.

²³ *Ibid.*, pg. 851.

Instead of assuming that God is absent due to this rapid change, we would do better to focus on God in the change, to the ways that God is transforming the world, the church, and human beings.²⁴

This process of assuming the presence and action of God requires a commitment by all parties to be faithful partners – in all the phases: reparatory, data collecting, and shaping the future.

It is strongly suggested that there be a “commissioning/covenanting” service for both the leadership and the congregations.

7/ REVIEW & EVALUATION

So what?

After you have prayed, collected the data, had many meetings, listened to peoples personal and institutional stories, you have come to the end of the process. It is important to enter the “so what” phase – that important and valuable time when you need to identify your learnings and own the product of all your work. This is the time for review and evaluation.

The process is not over until it is over – when the important insights or information are collected, reviewed, and evaluated for ACTION.

A focused review and evaluation will surface new ideas and convictions. It will begin the process of prioritization, lifting up implications for current programs, suggesting new approaches and dropping unsuccessful ones, naming the gaps (evangelism, stewardship, faith formation), and lifting up potential leadership.

²⁴ Lemler, op. cit., pg. 152

It is best to record the product of the review and evaluation for communication with entire congregation, and provide agenda items for vestry retreats, or sharing in the context of new relationships with neighboring congregations to build up the Body of Christ.

The review and evaluation is not only important as a bookend to the strategic planning process, but it creates an important document for future planning, setting of benchmarks, and the regular periodic evaluation of progress.

The review and evaluation is the tool that will enable measurement of the longterm effectiveness and efficacy of congregational mission and ministry by asking the questions such as:

- Is the program *consistent* with the congregational mission;
- Is it *consonant* with the anticipated response to internal and external changes;
- Has it created an *advantage*, or just maintained the status quo;
- Has it been *feasible* and not overtaxed available resources nor created unsolvable problems?

Summary and recapitulation

The prayer and discernment process opens the pathway to the next phases of the process.

Once the mapping of internal and external assets has been accomplished, the congregation can move forward with a strategic plan that has goals, objectives, and benchmarks.

To actualize the strategic plan, the congregation then identifies the most appropriate partners (stakeholders), other congregations, and especially the most significant one – the relationship with the parish clergy, no matter what the status of that person is (rector, priest-in-charge, supply, part-time, etc.).

Many congregations in the diocese have already done serious and successful strategic plans. A number of credible instruments and organizations have been imported to assist this process. There is much experience and expertise already in the diocese. However, there is reported a necessity to identify, or create, a strategic planning instrument that would reap a common baseline of information and data, as well as be systemic and unify the diocesan effort. Although there is a value to diversity of methodology, there needs to be a larger set of goals, strategies, and benchmarks upon which the local congregations can align themselves.

The clergy dynamic is vital to the parish on many levels. A full exploration of the mutual ministry model is appropriate and vital at this juncture of partnerships and covenants. See below for more on the ordained clergy category.

It is vital to build it at the top a timeline, benchmarks, and review and evaluation for all the phases.

Implications

The case carries many implications that are obvious, and some yet unforeseen.

Implications for the Committee on Congregational Renewal:

- 1/ The mission and process set out for the Committee would need a full-time staff person;
- 2/ There would need to be a budget for the multi-year program;
- 3/ The process would be greatly enhanced by the establishment of a Coordinating Committee that brings together, on a monthly basis, the various Diocesan Committees such as Evangelism, Stewardship, World Mission, Development, Youth, with the

inclusion of others as necessary and appropriate, with the staff person for Renewal and Transformation as the convener. This committee would be for communication, coordination, and consultation to effect the unified, systemic approach diocesan-wide. Coordination should be a major function of the Committee, which will require interaction with, for instance, the Standing Committee, the Diocesan Council, the Incorporated Trustees, and especially the Diocesan Staff, especially in regards to deployment (see below). This would align all areas to the mission statement;

4/ The reordering of the Grants-in-Aid Program to be proactive in the areas of health, development, sustainability and vitality.

5/ Establish aggressive linkage to the National Church's Strategic Planning, especially in the area of strengthening congregations [p. 3 above];

6/ Explore the availability of resources, such as the Roanridge Foundation and Trust, for leadership training of those in rural and small communities;

7/ Many participants of the mini-consultations indicated the need for a clearinghouse for printed resources, and availability of resources for leadership training. They note the helpfulness of consulting with diocesan committees and consultants, as well as with each other;

8/ The Diocese might wish to subscribe to Percept for assistance with demographic data, which might be especially helpful with the data of the 2010 Census; and,

9/ The State of the Church report [p. 3-4 above] suggests a study of the 8 parishes in the diocese showing significant growth. This study should be a priority of the CCR and precede – and inform – it's goals, program, and process.

Implications for congregations and other diocesan programs:

10/ The program focuses on creating and maintaining health and vitality in all congregations. Those deemed otherwise by their own mapping or the enforcement of Canons XXVIII-XXX, will be subject to the action of the appropriate diocesan instrumentality for closure. It is suggested that a “hospice” program with a clear protocol be put in place.

11/ The identification or creation of a diocesan instrument for strategic planning. This may be used in congregations to assist them in the process and create a sense of unity and partnership. The Diocese may deem it helpful to establish goals upon which local mission statements, goals, objectives, and benchmarks might be aligned;

12/ One of the key elements of a systemic and unified diocesan plan is the full participation and effectiveness of all the clergy, regardless of their position in the parish;

It would not serve the diocese well to ignore the opinion quoted above that “[many] ministers are ill-prepared to lead a small rural church;”

There is much wisdom in meditating on these characteristics of the well-equipped pastors of small congregations:

- know how to live and work in rural culture
- understand the nature of the small church
- know how to do administration in a small church
- know how to develop church program with limited resources
- know how to manage conflicts.²⁵

It might serve the Committee well to contemplate a series of clergy days to address the dynamics of ministry in small and/or rural congregations. There is some value in regular meetings of clergy and congregations predicated by their location and size. There might

²⁵ Sherry Walrath and Douglas Alan Walrath, “Supporting Small Congregations and Their Pastors,” Inside *the Small Church*, op, cit., p. 28

be an annual meeting of clergy/congregations with an ASA over 75, and one for those under 75. The agenda and focus would be appropriate to the participants. A course on ministering in the small and rural parish might be a part of the Bishop's School.

The annual Saturday workshops of the diocese might focus on a number of issues that effect the small congregation with homogenous groupings by ASA for wardens, treasurers, music, etc.

The adoption of a mutual ministry model will open up the issue of compensation, as will the process of annual review and evaluation based on measurable benchmarks, objectives, and goals. The discussion of clergy salary and annual increases will be tested by the emphasis on demonstrable achievements, not on Diocesan Convention annual determination of cost of living increases. Forewarned is forearmed. And,

13/ There is the possibility that there needs to be a rethinking of the clergy leadership in parishes. Given the reality of the both the availability and cost of clergy, it may not be deemed important that all parishes have "regular" clergy supply. There may be the need to contemplate a Plan B to provide training for lay leadership of worship, either from the congregation or otherwise, with scheduled clergy presence for presiding at the Eucharist. This may mean a diocesan-wide program of lay reader training, and utilization of prepared sermons for the lay reader.

The Beginning

“...if your faith community is hopelessly stuck in the mud – let’s face it, some are --- then don’t let that get you down. You have a kitchen table, right? Then invite some friends over and get them talking. Ask them about their faith stories. Ask them about their beliefs about God. Ask them about what kind of world they see, and what kind they dream of, and what they’re doing about it, and how God might fit in. Make it clear there aren’t ‘right answers’ --- just honest answers – and see what happens. See what God does around your table.” Brian McLaren²⁶

The Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, January 25, 2010

²⁶ Quoted in *Unbinding the Gospel*, op. cit., p. 148.

APPENDIX

Figure 2

Average Sunday Worship Attendance

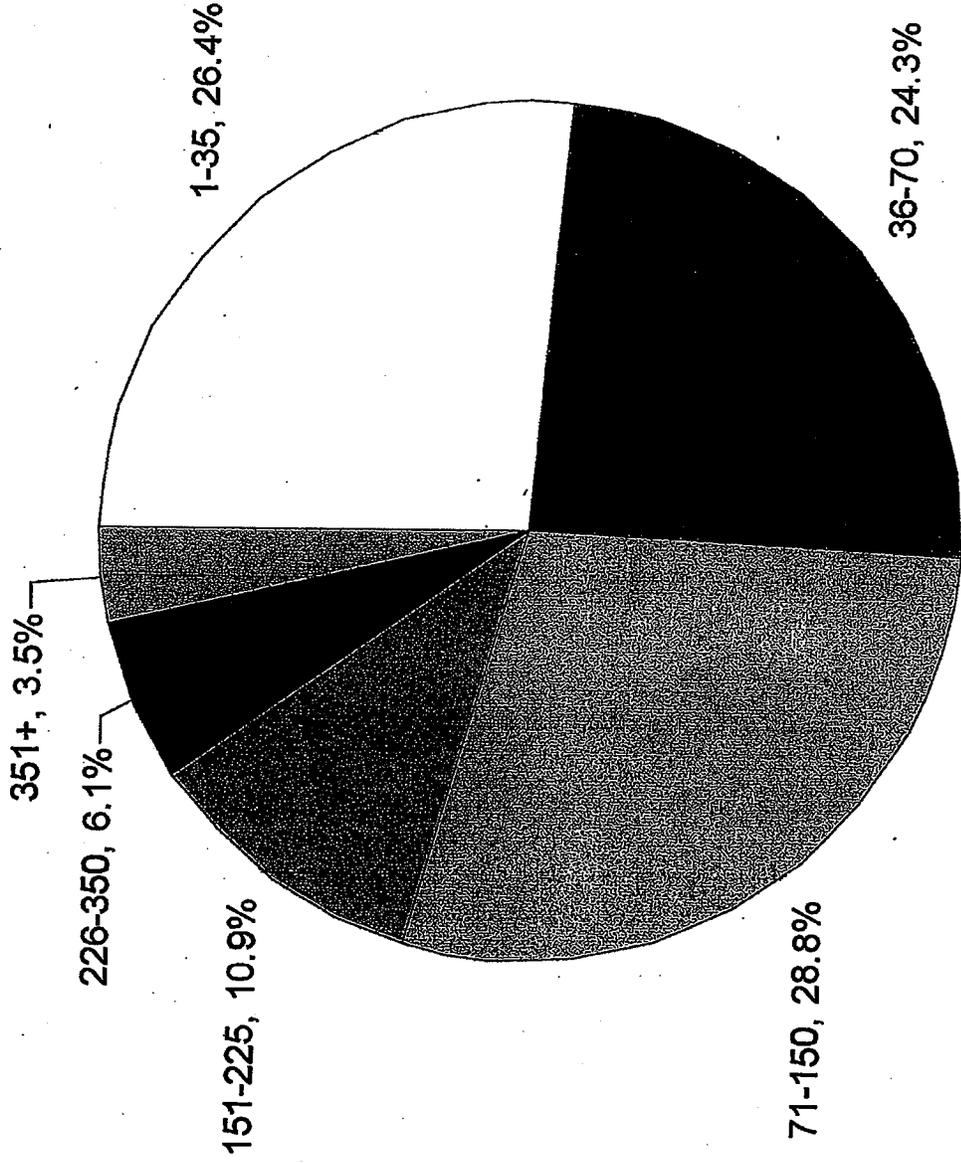


Figure 4
Age Structure of the USA and TEC: 2008

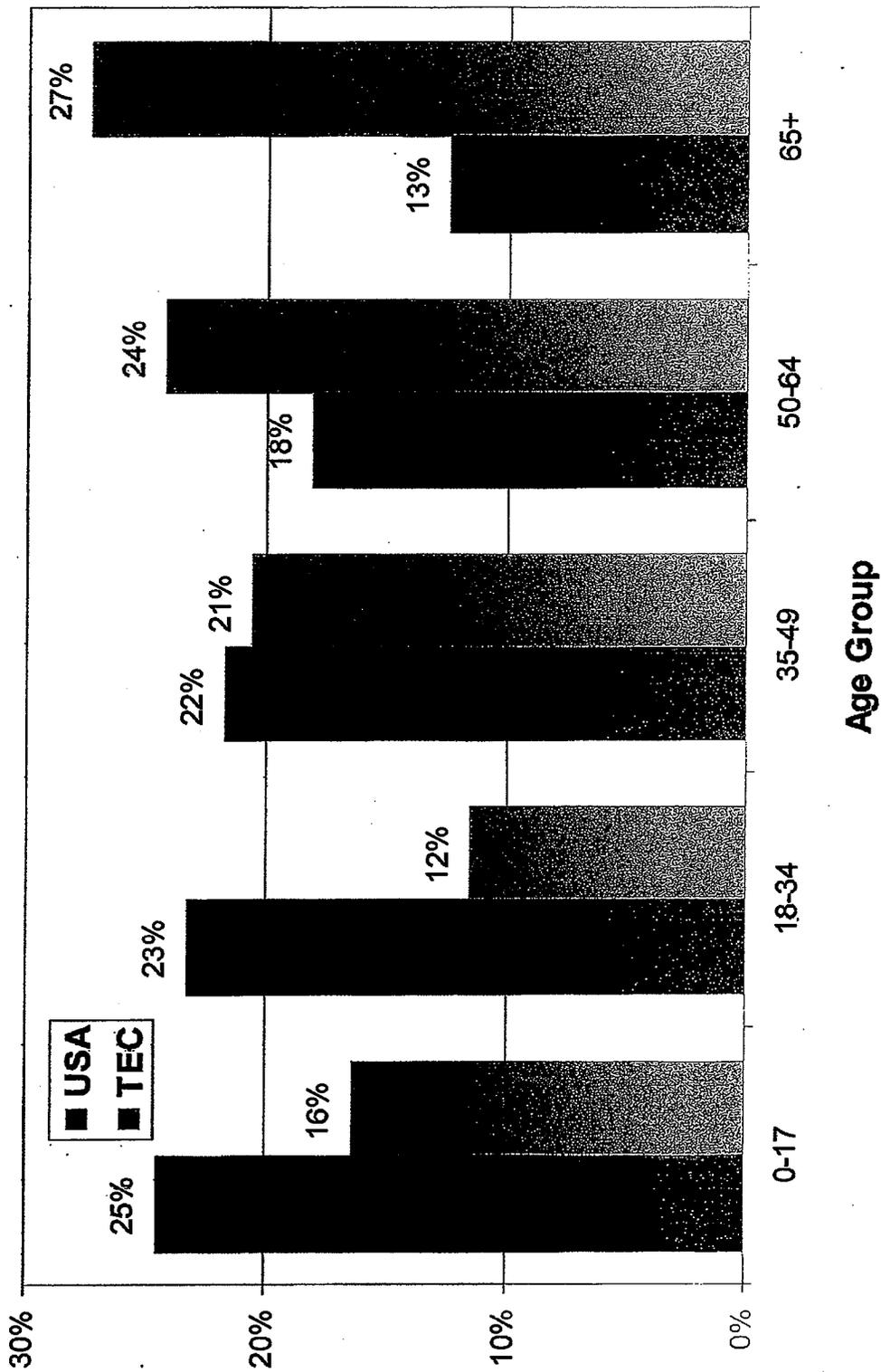


Figure 5

Percentage of Parishes with at Least 35% Older (Age 65+) Members by Size (ASA)

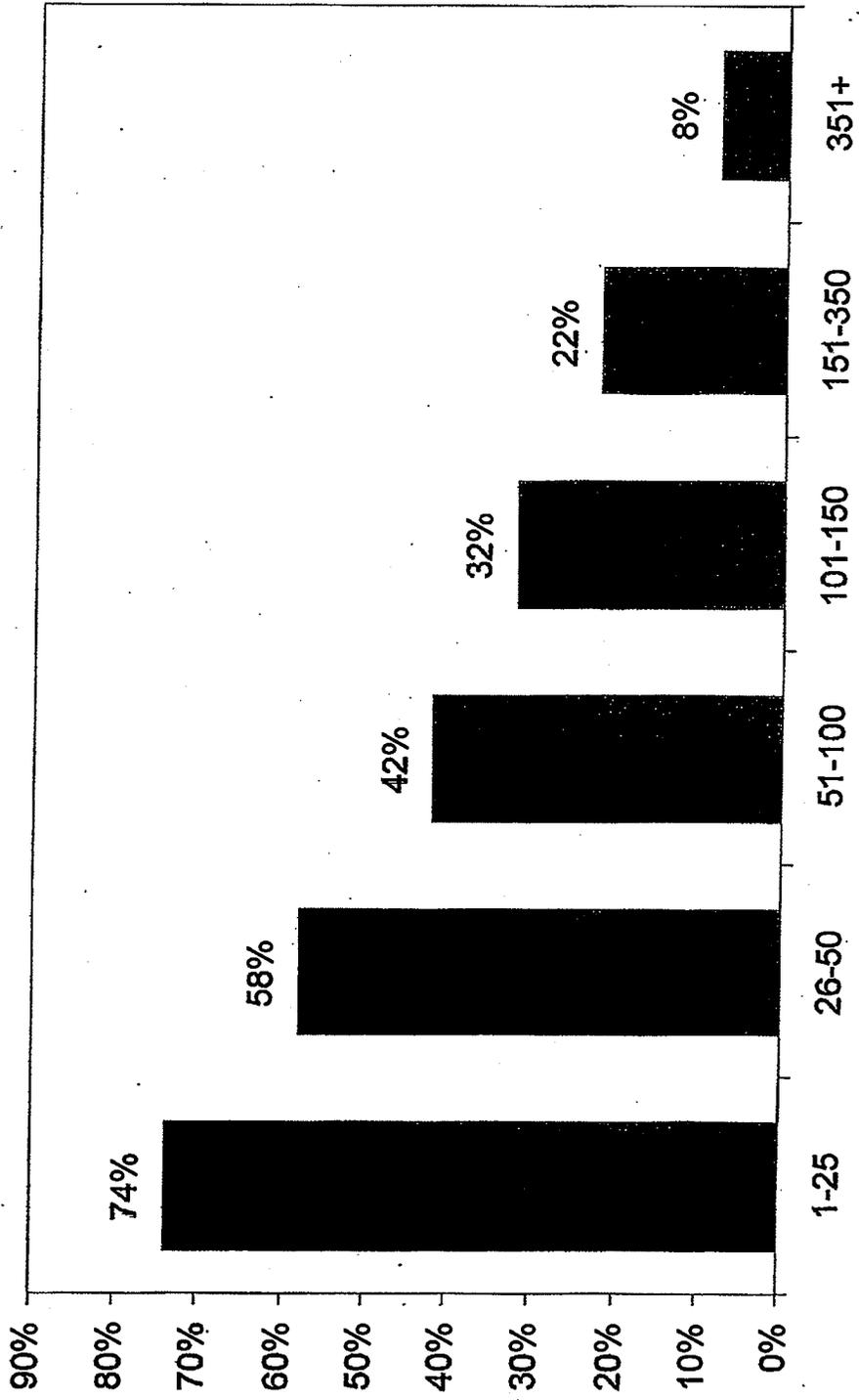


Figure 8

Average Percent of Budget for Staff by Parish Size (ASA)

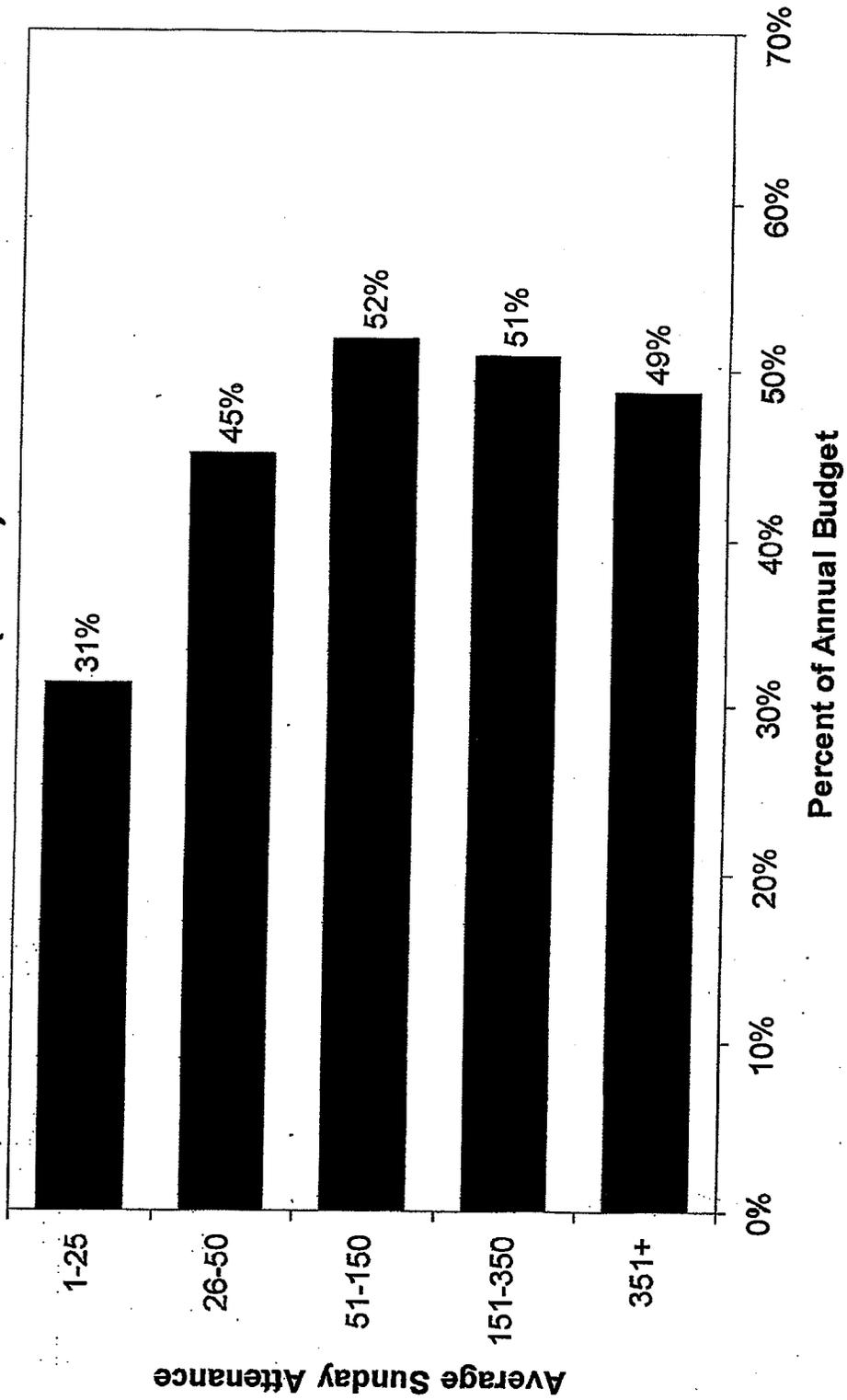


Figure 9

Percentage of Parishes with at Least One Full Time Paid Clergy by Size (ASA)

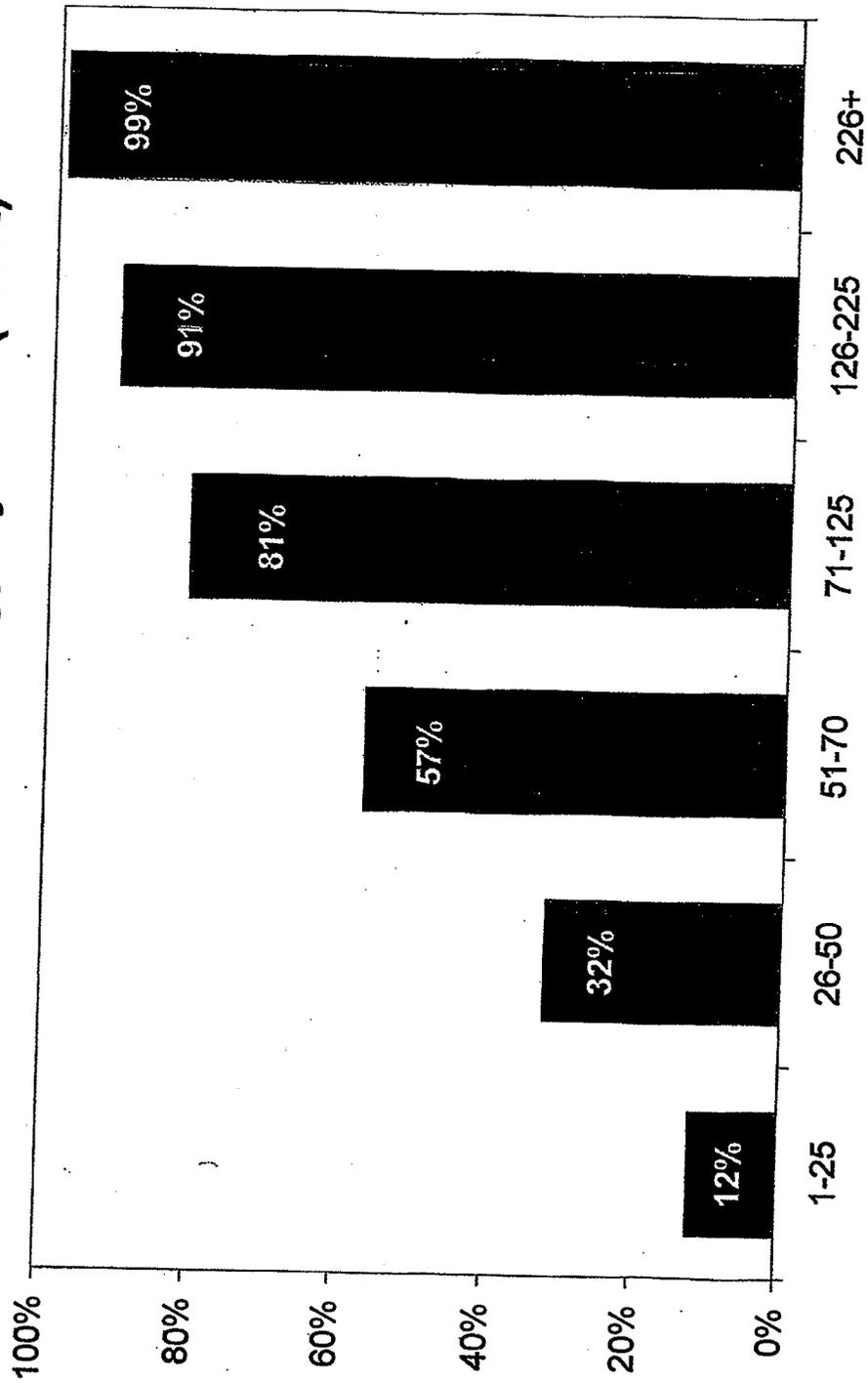


Figure 11

Percentage of Parishes with Growth (2002-2007) by Recruitment Involvement

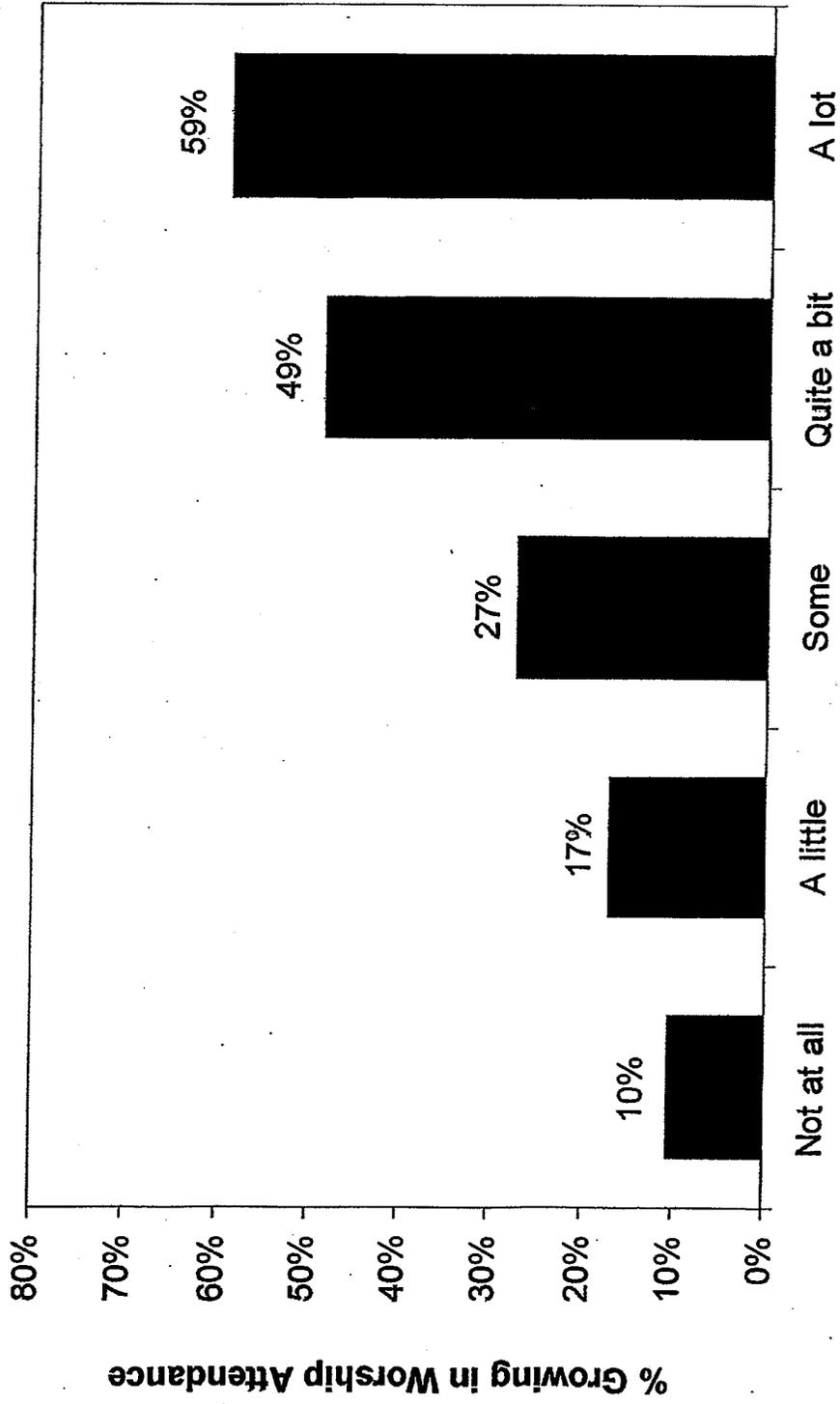


Figure 12

Congregational Characteristics

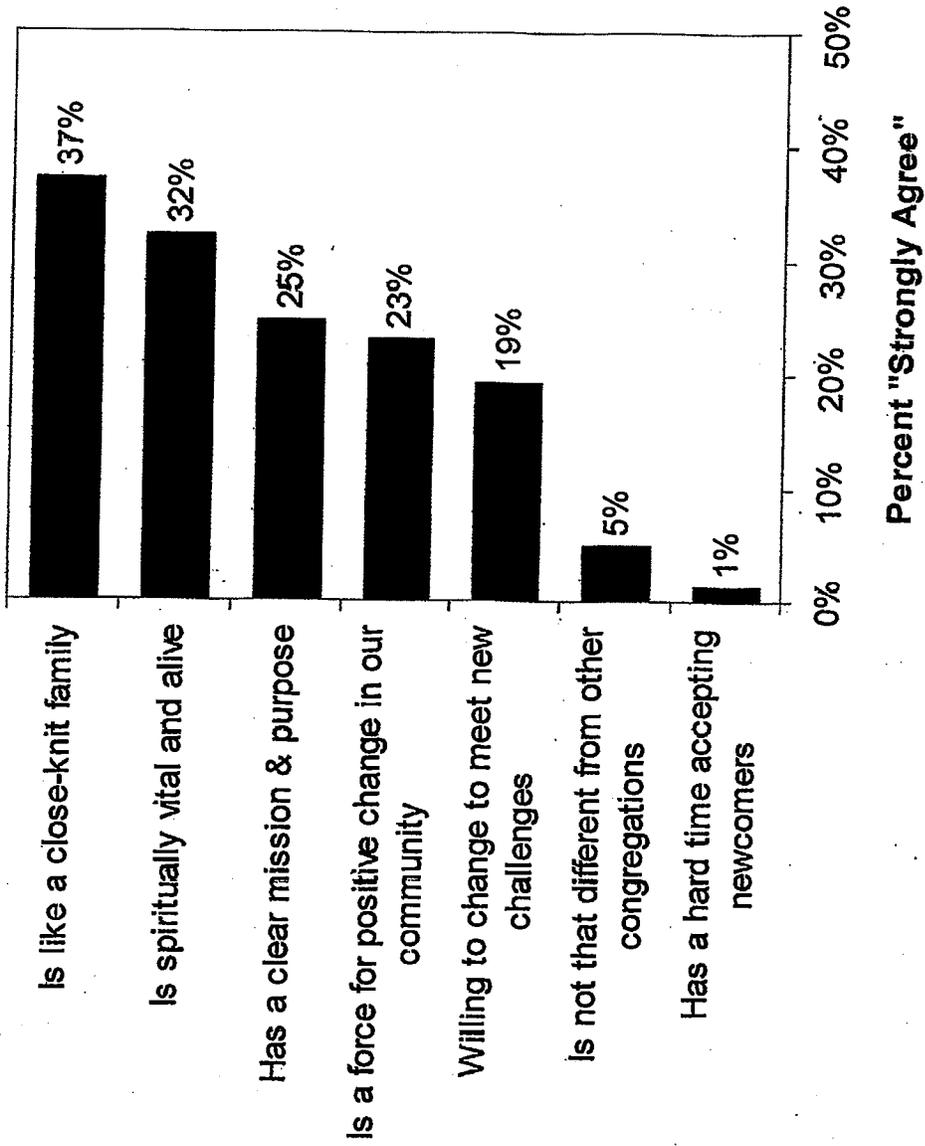


Figure 13

Percentage of Parishes with Growth (2002-2007) by "Has a Clear Mission and Purpose"

