

LATINO CONGREGATIONS:

Trends from the Faith Communities Today (FACT) and Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations (EPIC) Studies

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Faith
Communities
Today



EXPLORING THE
PANDEMIC IMPACT
ON CONGREGATIONS

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This report provides an initial summary of the state of Latino congregations in the U.S. and is based on results from the 2020 Faith Communities Today Survey and the Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations National Research Project. Both initiatives are organized by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research in collaboration with religious and denominational organizations, tracking trends in the U.S. religious landscape since 2000.

KEY FINDINGS IN THIS REPORT INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Seven out of every ten participants attend the largest Latino faith communities of 250 or more congregants.
- A majority of Latino congregations have experienced growth or remained stable in attendance over the past five years.
- Latino congregations are half as likely to own their own facilities and almost three times more likely to worship in the same building as other congregations.
- On average, participants of Latino congregations are younger and have fewer senior adults than other congregations.
- In general, Latino faith communities are more actively engaged in activities beyond their congregation than other congregations.
- Regardless of whether Latino congregational leaders are full-time or part-time, over one third have paid employment outside of their congregation. Overall, two in ten leaders are unpaid for their congregational roles.
- Latino faith communities rely more heavily than others on informal means of technology-based communication (social media, texting, apps) rather than more formal means (email, e-newsletters, websites) to foster connections within and beyond their congregations.
- Nearly quadruple the average percentage of Latino congregations' income comes from fundraising when compared with other congregations' income.
- Latino congregations that report relative attendance stability over the last five years have a much higher per capita than either growing or declining congregations. Stable congregations are also more likely to pay rent rather than own their facilities.
- Post-lockdown, more Latino congregations reported financial difficulties than pre-lockdown, and online giving decreased despite an increase in congregations having an online giving option.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, there are roughly 62.1 million Latinos in the United States, representing 18.7% of the total population. Latinos are also the fastest-growing racial-ethnic group, increasing 23% from 2010 to 2020 and constituting more than half of total U.S. population growth in that decade.

OVERVIEW

Latinos represent a critical aspect of American religious life, and studying Latino congregations provides an important avenue for learning more about the faith practices and beliefs of this growing community.

Latinos are people who generally trace their heritage to countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Spain. Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Venezuelans, Hondurans, Peruvians, Argentines, and a whole host of other nationality-based groups have a significant presence in the United States, each with their own histories, inter-ethnic dynamics, and cultural traditions. As a result, while Latinos might be presented in research studies as a racial-ethnic monolith, they are a widely diverse grouping of many peoples and cultures.

At present, no universally accepted moniker for this varied group of individuals exists. Persons may refer to themselves as Latino, Hispanic, Latin American, or Latinxs/Latine/Latin@ (as more gender-inclusive terms), or with other more ethnically-based identities like Chicano, Hispano, Boriqua, and so on. Latinos may speak a variety of languages, including English, Spanish, Portuguese, or any host of Indigenous languages. In addition, Latinos in the U.S. are quite multiracial, with 20.3 million Latinos (32.7%) reporting more than one race in the 2020 Census in addition to Hispanic or Latino. Some individuals are recent immigrants, while others have been living here for generations, many prior to the founding of the United States itself.



Kermes fair, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Denver, CO

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Because of this diversity, it can be difficult to gain a comprehensive picture of Latino congregational life. Nonetheless, large-scale research surveys are important tools in understanding some key trends among Latinos, including differences between the majority of Latinos and other congregations. Two related research efforts, the Faith Communities Today (FACT) National Survey of Congregations and the Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations (EPIC) National Project, have each collected relevant data regarding racial-ethnic congregations, including Latino congregations.

In 2020, FACT collected data from a total of 15,278 religious communities, its largest survey to date. The first wave of the EPIC survey, conducted in 2021, garnered 2,074 responses, still a sizable number. For the FACT and EPIC surveys, the number of majority Latino congregations was 276 (1.8%) and 30 (1.4%), respectively. While these figures are not as substantial as hoped when compared with the population at large, it is important to remember that Latinos can be found in all types of congregations, not only those categorized as majority Latino faith communities that have 50% or more Latino participants. As such, this research only offers us a glimpse into a particular critical mass of Latino religious life, not the whole of Latino congregational participation.

Additionally, however, both the FACT and EPIC research projects are intended to accurately represent a profile of the nation's congregations, weighted to reflect the proportion of religious communities by region, size, and denominational distribution. As a result, the findings from these two surveys can be generalized to reflect the overarching trends of Latino congregations, as well as key differences with other congregations.



The EPIC project also conducted a number of regionally-based ethnographic case studies, eight of which were Latino congregations. Congregational leader and participant surveys were distributed for each of these, with participant responses totaling 120. The results of these surveys provide an important perspective on the opinions of Latino congregants themselves, especially regarding disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With roughly half of the FACT data collected before the pandemic, and all of the EPIC data collected a year or more after the global shutdown in March 2020, trends regarding attendance, finances, outreach, religious education, and other aspects of congregational life offer a glimpse into understanding how this global event might have impacted Latino congregations and what the future might look like for these faith communities as a result.

There are two major sections to this report. The first section provides a picture of the majority Latino congregational life in terms of affiliation, attendance, size, location, participants, worship, other activities, leadership, technology, mission, vitality, and conflict. The second section lays out a more detailed view of the financial aspects of Latino congregations, highlighting both hopeful and challenging prospects for sustained financial health.



Comunidad Divino Salvador, Aurora, CO
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A SNAPSHOT OF MAJORITY LATINO CONGREGATIONS

Affiliation, Attendance, and Size

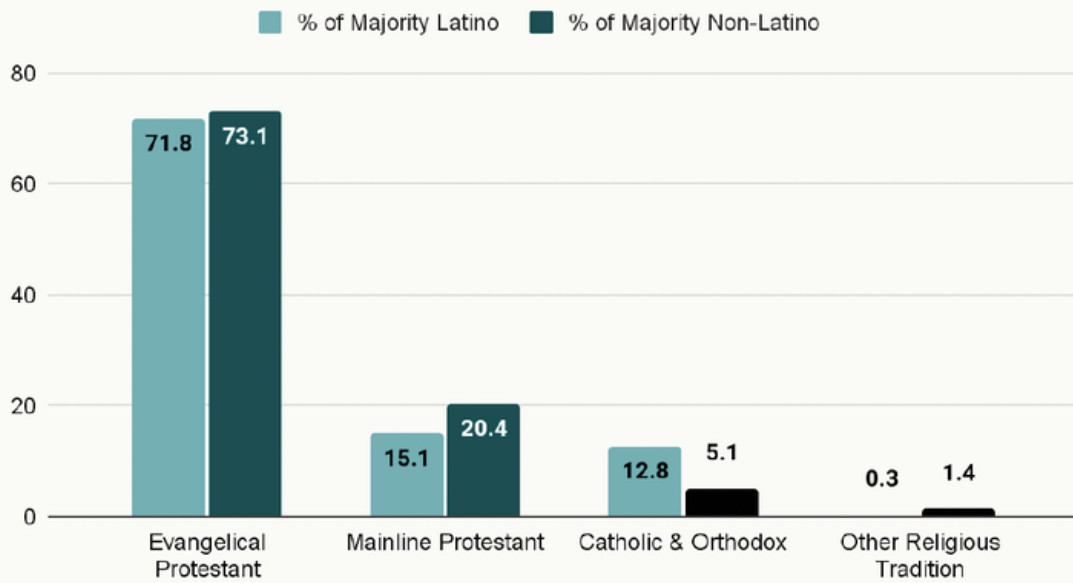
Seven out of ten majority Latino congregations (71.8%)—faith communities where Latinos comprise at least 50% of all participants—are Evangelical Protestant in affiliation. This is followed by 15.1% that are Mainline Protestant, 12.8% that are Catholic and Orthodox, and 0.3% that are affiliated with another religious tradition (Baha'i, Muslim, Jewish, etc., with this percentage likely reflecting an undercount). Unsurprisingly, the percentage of Latino Catholic (and Orthodox) congregations in the U.S. is more than twice that of non-Latino Catholic congregations (5.1%).



St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Denver, CO
Photo Attributions to Grego Peña-Camprubí

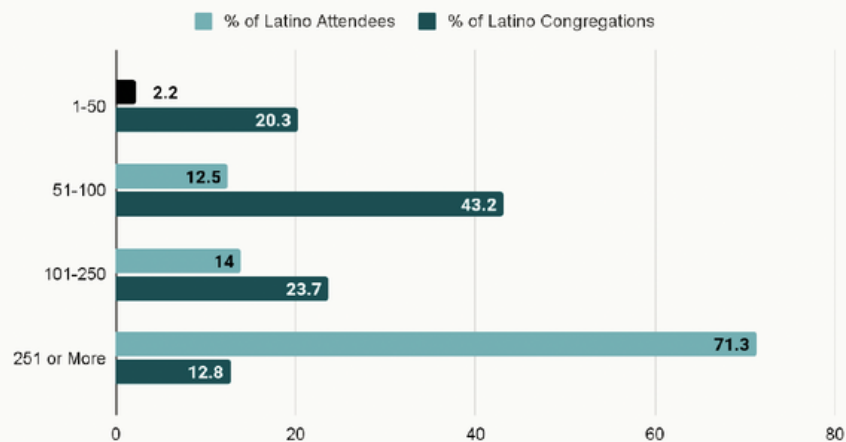
When it comes to the percentage of participants within each of these religious families, however, Catholic churches are home to 33.8% of all Latino congregational worshipers, roughly 2.5 times the total percentage of Catholic churches (12.8%). Evangelical Protestant churches—71.8% of all Latino churches—are home to 61.7% of Latino congregational worshipers, and Mainline Protestant churches are home to only 4.4% of worshipers (even though 15.1% of all churches are Mainline Protestant). On the whole, Latino congregations tend to be larger than non-Latino congregations, with only two in ten Latino congregations worshiping 1-50 people compared to roughly four in ten non-Latino congregations worshiping 1-50 people. Latino faith communities also have a median of 80 for weekly worship attendance, which is higher than non-Latino congregations at a median of 65 attendees (with means of 275 and 227, respectively).

Religious Affiliations of Congregations



Regarding size, Latino congregations experience similar trends to U.S. congregations as a whole, with the vast majority of worshipers attending the largest congregations. Roughly seven out of every ten worshipers attend congregations of over 250, though they only constitute 12.8% of all majority Latino faith communities. Conversely, only 15.7% of worshipers attend faith communities of 100 or less, but they comprise nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of all majority Latino congregations.

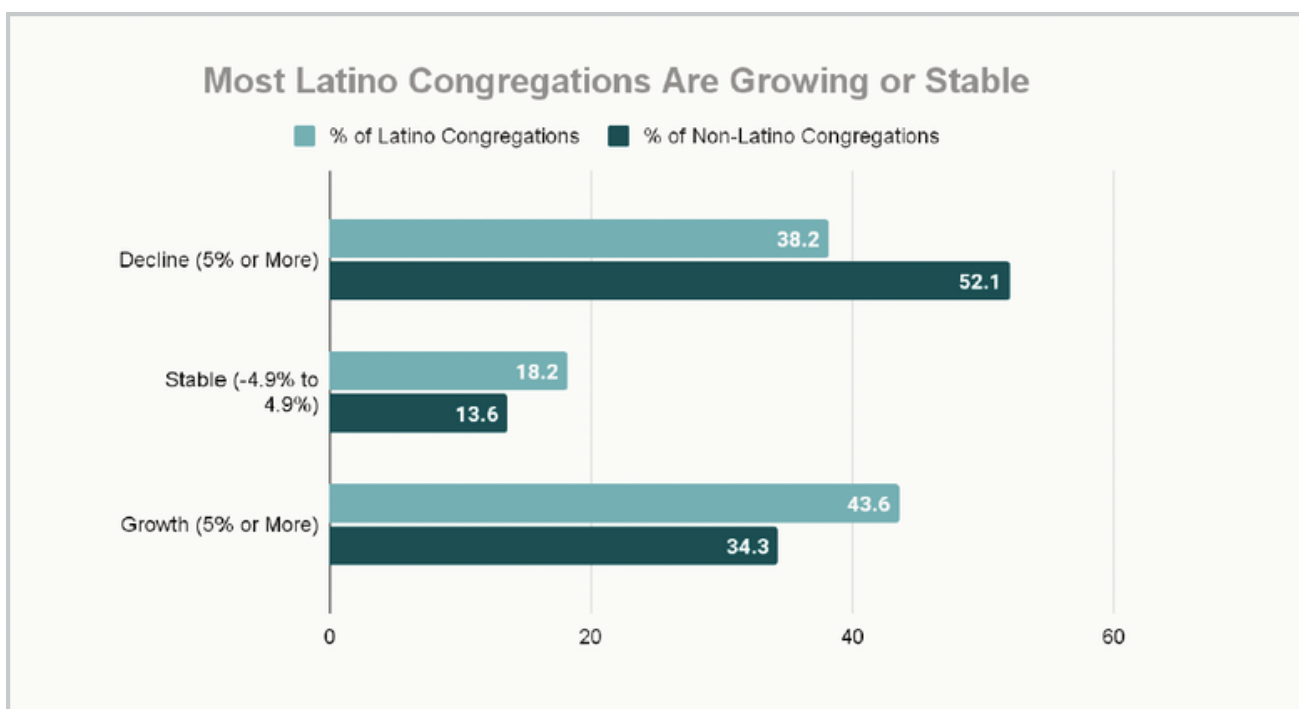
People More Likely to Attend Large Congregations





Baptism Service, Comunidad Divino Salvador- Aurora, CO
Photo Attributions to Grego Peña-Camprubí

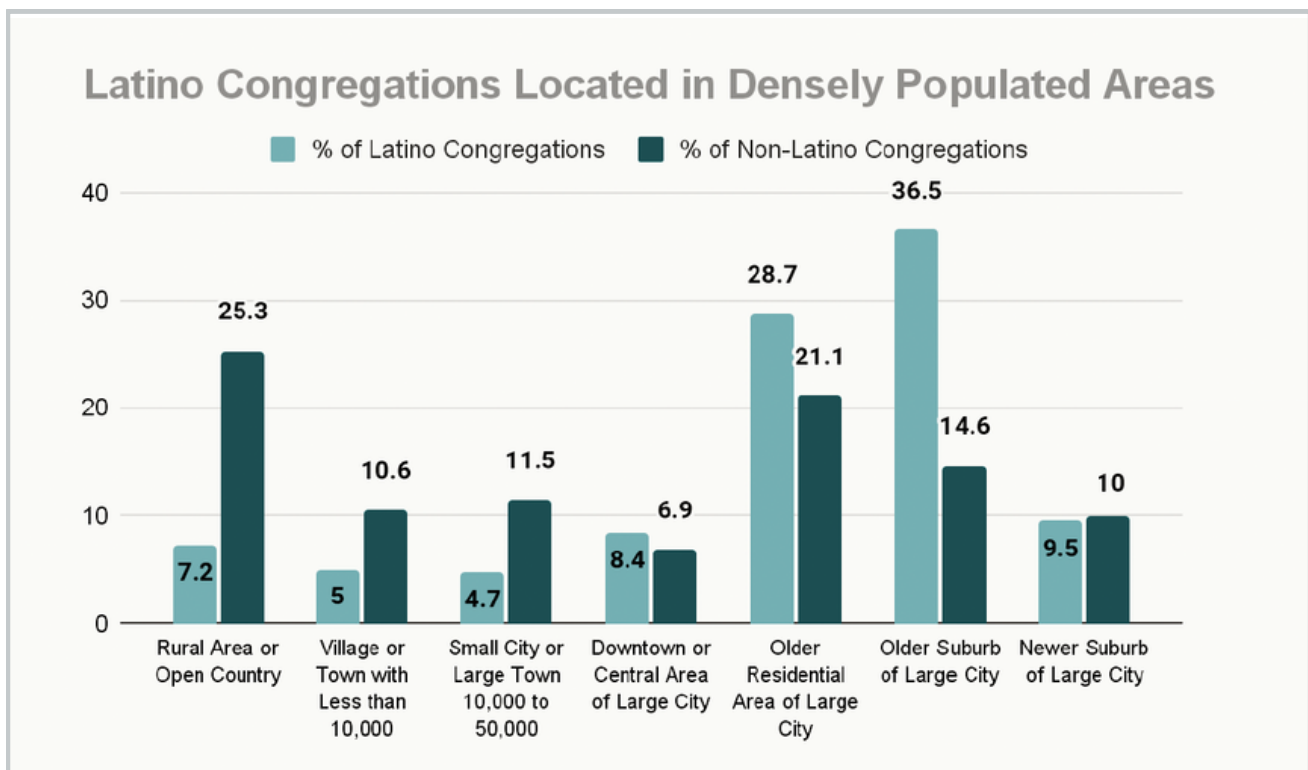
Like the U.S. Latino population at large, these congregations are experiencing growth on the whole. Approximately four in ten (43.6%) Latino faith communities experienced attendance growth of more than 5.0% over the last five years, and 18.2% remain relatively stable. These faith communities are not immune from decline altogether, however, as 38.2% experienced an attendance decline of more than 5.0% over the last five years as well. Still, the overarching picture for majority Latino congregations looks more promising than for other congregations; but time will tell whether dynamics of increasing non-affiliation and secularism will ultimately impact these faith communities.



LOCATION

Regionally, 60.0% of Latino congregations are located in the South, compared to roughly half of all non-Latino congregations. A greater percentage of Latino faith communities can be found in the Western U.S. region than non-Latino faith communities (21.0% compared to 14.3%), which correlates with the greater number of Latinos in that region of the country. Only 10.0% of Latino congregations are located in the Northeast and 9.1% are located in the North Central region. Relatedly, roughly half (50.6%) of all Latino congregations are located in areas in which the population is also majority Latino, with 28.0% of Latino faith communities in majority white population areas and 20.6% in majority Black population areas.

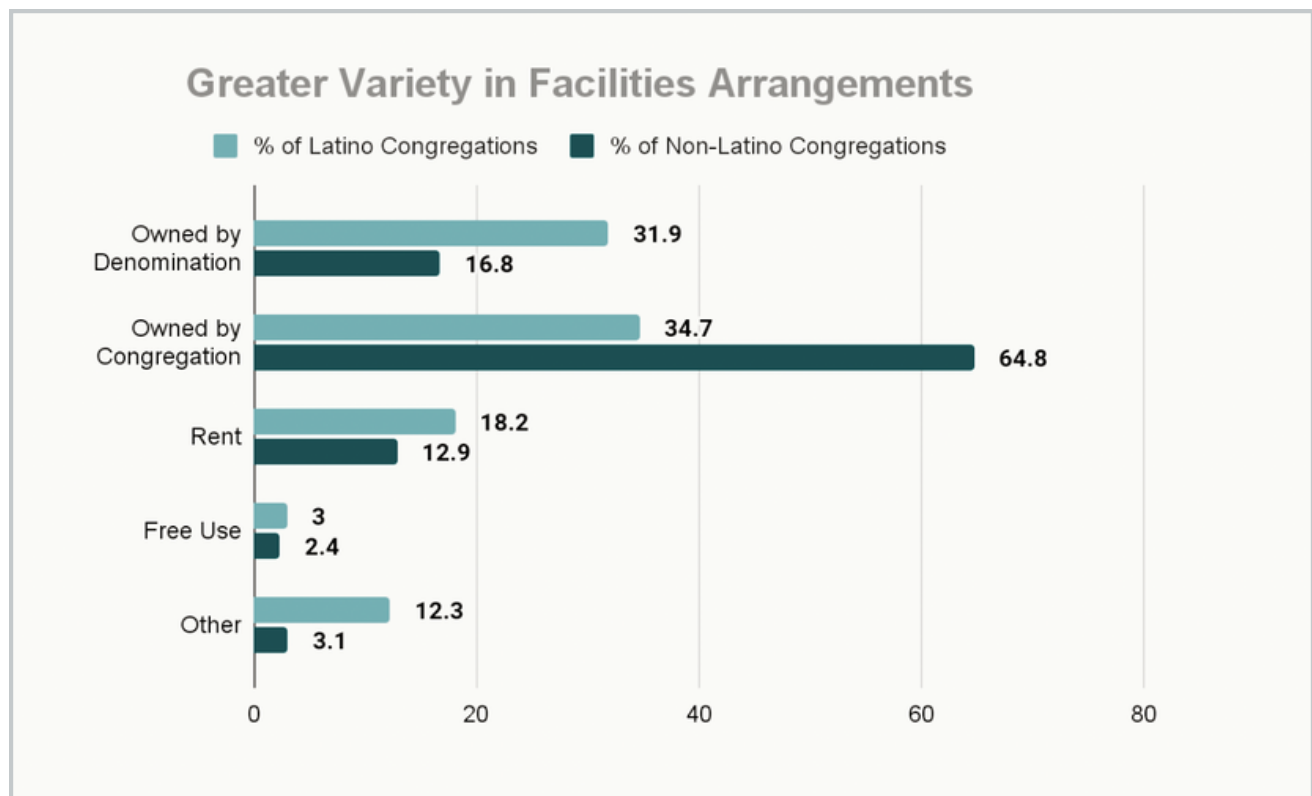
Nearly two-thirds (65.2%) of Latino congregations are located in older residential areas of large cities or older suburbs around large cities. This is in stark contrast to only one-third of non-Latino congregations being located in these areas. When compared with population changes across all areas, Latino congregations generally appear to be proportionally concentrated in places of overall population growth, except in newer suburbs around large cities, the area of greatest population growth. Interestingly, both majority Latino and majority non-Latino faith communities lack a presence in this area, representing only 9.5% and 10.0% of these congregations, respectively.



Of course, given the ways that the COVID-19 global pandemic is continuing to impact how participants engage with their faith communities, the physical presence of a congregation or a building where one lives may not be as important a factor for some. While 68.3% of non-Latino congregational participants live within fifteen minutes of their faith communities, the same is true for a little over half (55.0%) of Latino congregational participants, suggesting longer commutes or greater instances of online participation, among other things.

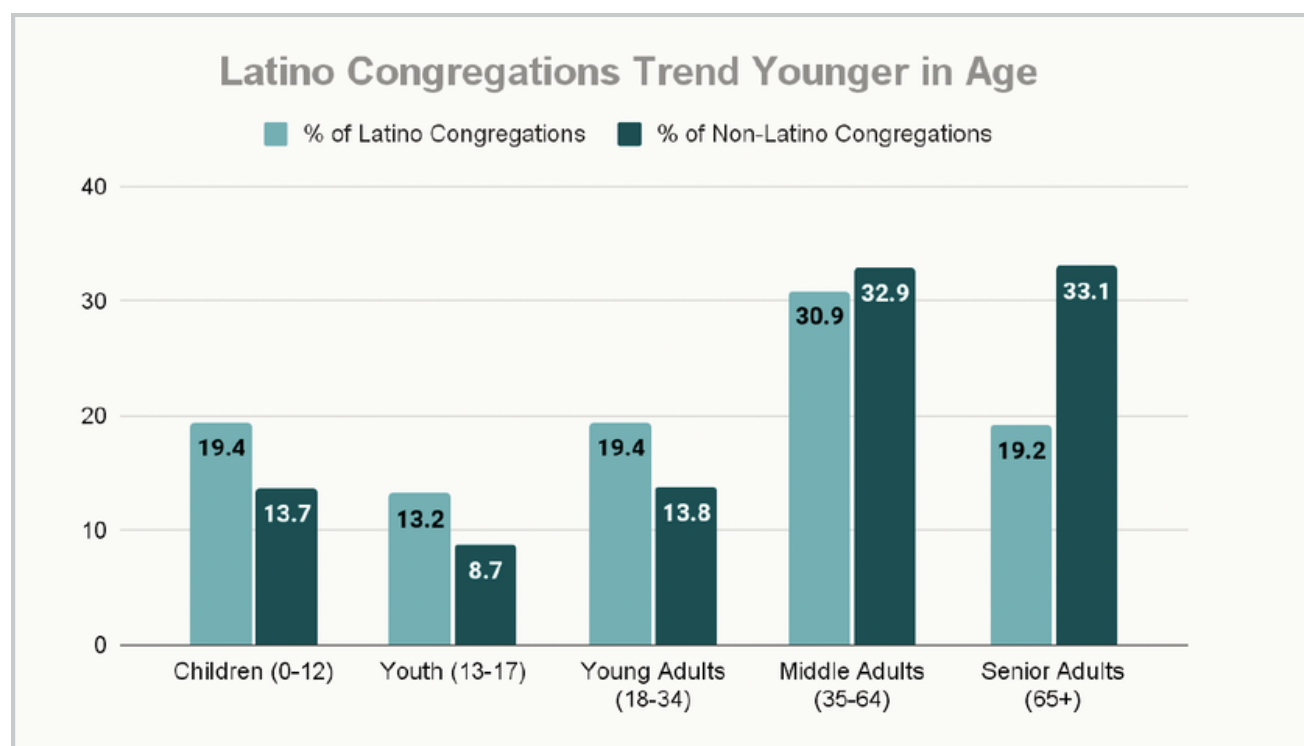
Nonetheless, the primacy of a physical location remains a relatively fixed aspect of congregation life, at least in the present moment, with the vast majority of congregations reporting a location where worship is held. Interestingly, four out of every ten congregations worship in a different location than when they were founded, Latino or otherwise. The nature of a congregation's relationship to its primary place of worship, however, differs greatly between Latino and non-Latino faith communities. As newer congregations with a median founding date of 1991 (over fifty years later than other congregations), the majority of Latino faith communities report are nearly half as likely to own their own facilities (34.7%) than other congregations (64.8%). This is coupled with increased renting of facilities (18.2%), ownership by the denomination (31.9% and common for Catholic parishes), and the occurrence of other arrangements (12.3%) such as free usage of facilities or meetings in homes.

Regardless of locational arrangement, Latino congregations also report that the facilities where they worship house daycares or preschools (17.7%), as well as other congregations (51.5%), at much greater rates than other congregations (9.3% and 17.4%, respectively).



PARTICIPANTS

According to 2020 U.S. Census figures, one in every four children is of Hispanic/Latino origin. These trends are generally reflected in majority Latino congregations as well. On average, children and youth make up nearly one-third (32.7%) of all who regularly participate in Latino congregations, compared to 22.5% in all other congregations. On the other end of the spectrum, Latino congregations have fewer percentages of senior adults than other congregations, confirming that these faith communities trend younger overall.



While Latino congregations are comparable to other congregations in terms of having more female (54.1%) than male participants, a lesser percentage are college graduates (24.0% versus 41.6% of non-Latino congregations). In addition, a greater percentage live below the poverty line (17.7%) than in the majority of non-Latino faith communities (12.7%). Given these educational and economic realities, it makes sense that volunteerism within one's congregation is not as prevalent among participants in majority Latino communities (34.8%) as in other congregations (43.7%), as volunteerism connotes that individuals have free time to engage in such activities beyond immediate financial and familial duties.



(Above) Comunidad Divino Salvador, Aurora, CO. Photo Attribution to Grego Peña-Camprubi



Bloomfield Congregational Church- Bloomfield, CT
Photo attribution to Colleen Hill

Compounding these factors is the issue of citizenship and immigration status. Roughly half (49.3%) of participants in Latino faith communities are American-born, and 27.7% are identified as recent immigrants (0-5 years in the U.S.). This is compared with all other congregations that report an average of 87.4% American-born and 3.8% recent immigrant participants. However, while Latinos are often identified as a primarily immigrant population in the media and in society more generally, it is important to note that Latinos have been a declining share of the recent immigrant population since 2000.

Religious or denominational switching is more prevalent among participants in Latino congregations, with faith communities reporting an average of only one-third (33.4%) of participants being lifelong members of their denomination, compared with 45.8% of participants in other faith communities. While this data does not provide additional nuance, other studies suggest that an increasing share of Latinos are identifying as Protestant and switching from Catholicism.

WORSHIP AND ACTIVITIES

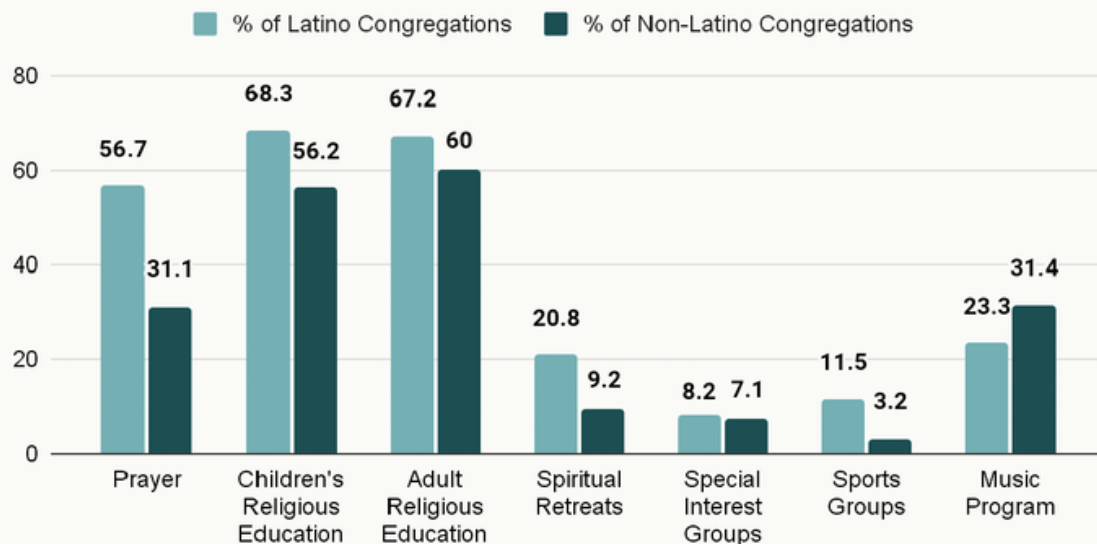


Worship in majority Latino congregations is as varied in format and expression as in other congregations and is largely related to religious or denominational affiliation. That being said, it is interesting to note that Latino faith communities reported their worship as “a lot” more contemporary (60.7%), innovative (54.1%), and inclusive of children (38.5%) and youth (42.4%) than other congregations. Along with this, Latino faith communities have a greater tendency to use electric guitars (45.4%).

Prayer and a focus on spirituality are important facets of Latino congregational life, with over half (56.7%) indicating “a lot” of emphasis on prayer and twice the percentage (20.8%) of the same level of emphasis on spiritual retreats as other congregations. Over two-thirds of Latino faith communities also place “a lot” of emphasis on both children’s and adult religious education. Notably, while nearly one in four (23.3%) Latino congregations report “a lot” of emphasis on music programs, this is the one area in which other congregations more frequently indicate the same level of emphasis (31.4%).

Bloomfield Congregational Church, Bloomfield, CT
Photo attribution to Colleen Hill

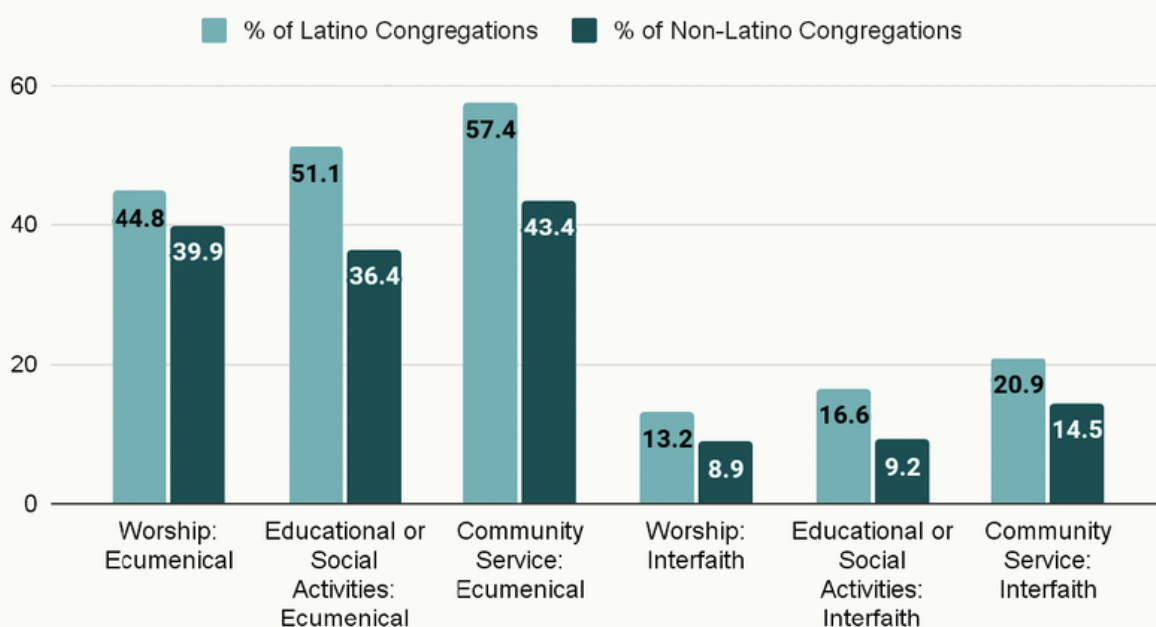
Latino Congregations Emphasize Spirituality and Religious Education



The importance of spirituality is also evident through “a lot” of emphasis by Latino congregations on personal religious practices such as prayer, meditation, scripture study, and devotions (52.0%), observing special practices or restrictions on one’s holy days (33.4%), living out faith in all aspects of daily life (59.0%), and even fasting (16.9%), all of which occur at greater rates within these faith communities than in others on the whole. Talking about one’s faith—whether as a parent to a child (34.5%) or with someone not a part of one’s congregations (32.4%)—is also emphasized “a lot.”

When it comes to broader kinds of activities beyond the congregation, Latino faith communities are more active than other congregations as a whole, which is interesting given that volunteering regularly within the congregation is not as prevalent in these faith communities. Half (50.2%) of majority Latino congregations place “a lot” of emphasis on community service activities, compared to 33.3% of all other congregations. Youth (37.1%) and young adult (22.6%) community activities, as well as global ministry activities (32.2%), are also emphasized “a lot.” Nearly half (48.2%) of Latino congregations report at least “some” emphasis on social justice/advocacy groups or activities, compared to 29.7% of all other congregations. Moreover, their engagement with other Christian groups and other faith traditions through worship, educational and social activities, and community service reflects deep ecumenical and interfaith commitments, though it is important to note that not all Latino congregations participate in these activities.

Latino Congregations Engage with Other Faith Groups



While the nature and scope of activities and emphases among majority Latino congregations vary greatly given geographic region, population, and other factors, these faith communities are vibrant participants in—and contributors to—their local communities, regions, and the world. It may be the case that Latinos find greater value in putting their time and efforts into activities that enrich the community as a whole rather than individual efforts to sustain their own congregations. Perhaps, however, the distinction between one's congregation and one's community is not as definitive as it seems.

LEADERSHIP



Comunidad Divino Salvador Aurora, CO
Photo Attribution to Grego Peña-Camprubí

In terms of Latino congregational leadership, the vast majority are male (96.6%) with a median age of 56. This is somewhat similar to all U.S. congregations, which reported 90.0% male leadership and a median age of 57. Notably, the racial-ethnic identities of senior leaders are fairly diverse, as only 41.7% are Latino. A roughly similar percentage (40.0%) of majority Latino congregational leaders are white (non-Latino), 11.0% are Black/African American, and 7.1% are Asian. It is critical to remember that the threshold for majority Latino congregations is having at least 50% Latino participants, so these faith communities may be more racially-ethnically diverse than other congregations. As a result, it is possible that the leadership may represent other racial-ethnic identities present within the faith community.

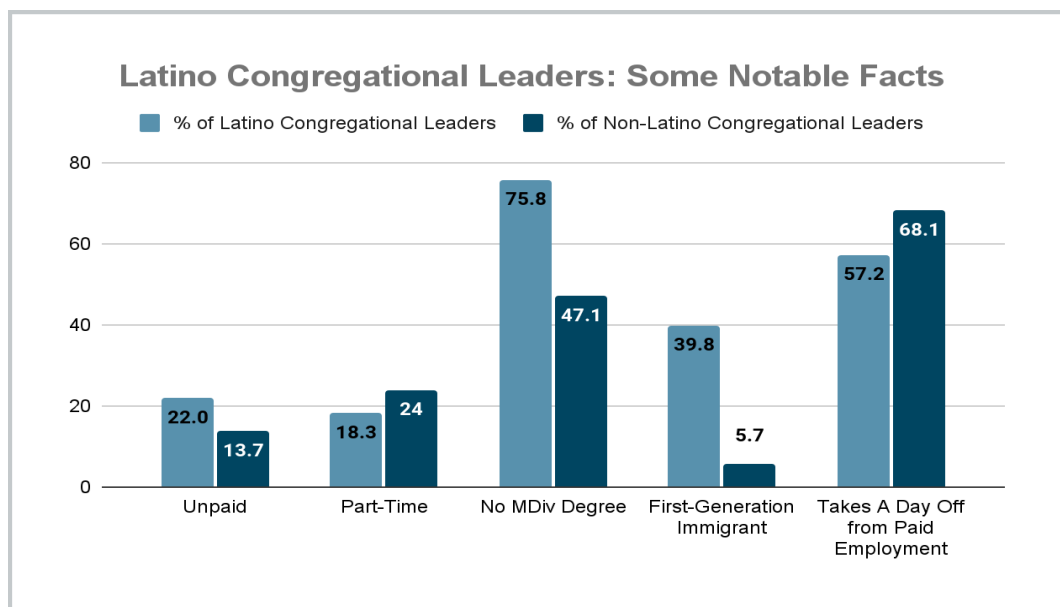
The configuration of leadership within Latino congregations is quite varied, with the majority (72.0%) of congregations either having a solo clergy leader or a senior clergy leader with one or more assistant or associate leaders. Various other models, though not as prevalent, consist of co-leadership, lay leadership, or a combination of clergy and lay leadership. Interestingly, mainline Protestant majority Latino congregations have a greater prevalence of co-leadership models than other denominational traditions, with 30.4% of these congregations indicating two or more individuals sharing leadership equally. In general, the variety of leadership models reported in Latino congregations extends to other congregations across the board, particularly as the landscape of leadership in U.S. congregational life continues to shift.

Eight in ten (81.7%) leaders are full-time, which is slightly higher than in other congregations (76.0%). Part-time leaders work in their ministry roles a median of 20 hours per week. Regardless of whether Latino congregational leaders are full-time or part-time, over one-third (37.4%) have paid employment outside of their congregation. Approximately 13.1% of these leaders serve another congregation or congregations (which is nearly identical to leaders in majority non-Latino congregations), and 5.6% serve as chaplains in addition to their present congregational role (approximately half the percentage of leaders in non-Latino congregations at 10.5%). Interestingly, 13.8% were previously retired from ministry, compared to 10.5% of leaders in the majority of non-Latino congregations.

For those individuals with employment beyond their present congregational leadership position, the median number of hours in their other employment role is 40 per week (mean = 37.2). For the majority of non-Latino congregational leaders, their outside employment amounts to only 25 hours per week (mean = 27.6). This may be due partly to the fact that a greater percentage (22.0%) of Latino faith community leaders are not paid for their ministry leadership role in comparison with other congregational leaders (13.7%), though this is concentrated largely within Evangelical Protestant Latino congregations.

When it comes to theological education, three out of every four (75.8%) Latino congregational leaders do not have a Master of Divinity degree, which is considered the professional degree for U.S. clergy leaders. This is in stark contrast to nearly half (47.1%) of all other congregational leaders possessing this degree and might account for a significant portion of these leaders having paid employment beyond the congregation. Because these faith community leaders are more likely to not be paid for their congregational work, they are also less likely to take a day off from paid employment, with a little more than half (57.2%) able to do this on a weekly basis compared to other congregational leaders (68.1%).

Most noticeable among the majority of Latino congregational leaders is that a significant percentage (39.8%) are first-generation immigrants. Taken together with the data on education, compensation, employment status, and a need for other employment, it is likely the case that there exist barriers for a segment of these leaders to attain full-time professional employment in their congregations. This is also likely compounded by a congregation's capacity to financially support its leader(s).



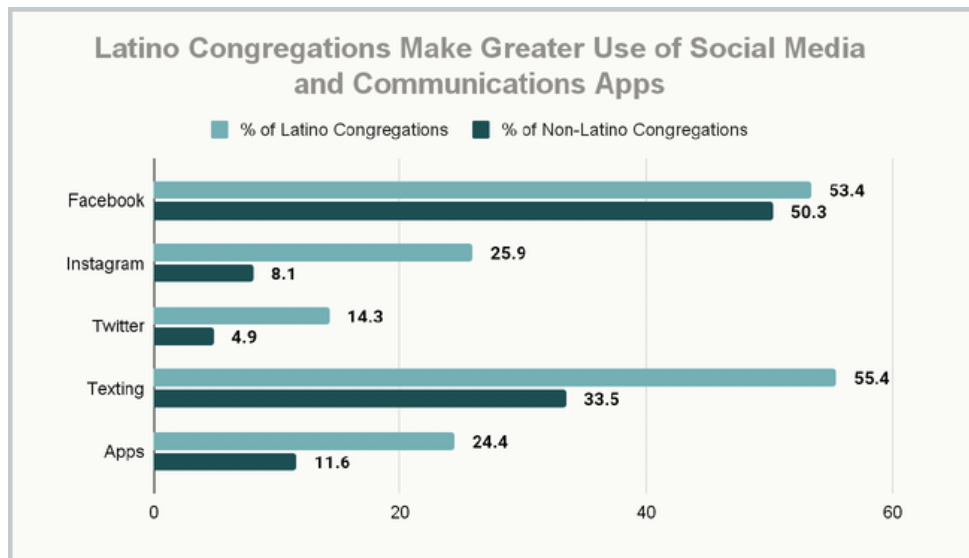
TECHNOLOGY



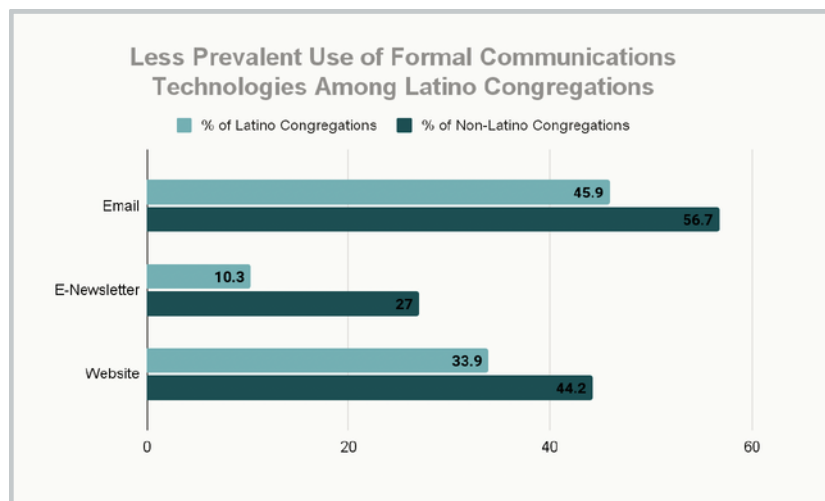
Bloomfield Congregational Church, Bloomfield, CT
Photo attribution to Colleen Hill

The COVID-19 global pandemic brought with it significant changes to congregational life, including adaptations to new technologies on the whole. The majority of Latino congregations are no exception to these adaptations, though some technologies are used more frequently and more broadly than among other congregations. While most of these findings do not make a definitive distinction between pre- and post-COVID realities, they can be taken in sum to constitute a critical moment in time when the use of technology is impacting congregational life as we know it.

Overall, Latino congregations report a slightly higher use of technology than other congregations combined, employing a median “moderate” use versus a median “modest” use among the latter. Latino faith communities indicate using “a lot” of social media such as Facebook (53.4%), Instagram (25.9%), and Twitter (14.3%) when pandemic, than other technologies. Summarily, it appears that the majority Latino faith communities—which trend younger than other congregations—rely more heavily than others on compared to the same amount of use of these platforms by non-Latino faith communities. The same is true for texting, with “a lot” of use in Latino faith communities (55.4%) being much more prevalent than in all other congregations (33.5%). This includes apps for communication, whether congregational, denominational, or global (like WhatsApp), which are utilized “a lot” in 24.4% of Latino congregations and only 11.6% in all other congregations. According to Latino congregational participants themselves, their use of Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms is higher (47.9% “very frequently” or “frequently”), at least prior to the informal means of technology-based communication to foster connections within and beyond their congregations.



Conversely, more *formal* modes of electronic communication such as email, websites, and e-newsletters and websites are not used as widely in Latino congregations as in other congregations, though they are still used “alot” among a considerable share of majority Latino faith communities (45.9% for email, 33.9% for websites, and 10.3% for e-newsletters).



More visually oriented electronic tools are used “a lot” in comparable distributions of both Latino and non-Latino congregations. Roughly three out of ten faith communities as a whole report “a lot” of use of live streaming, four out of ten for video projection during worship, and one out of ten for online meeting platforms such as Zoom, Skype, GoTo Meeting, and so on. Before the pandemic, only 39.0% of majority Latino congregations made frequent use of live streaming. However, the pandemic increased the prevalence of use to half (50.2%) of these congregations.

Even with the frequency and prevalence of technology use among Latino faith communities, the overwhelming majority (86.7%) of congregants themselves prefer in-person engagement when it comes to worship. While Latino congregants rate their at-home internet connection and access before the pandemic with a median between “good” and “very good,” their connection and access dropped to a median of simply “good” during the pandemic, perhaps given increased use globally. The variety of technologies employed by congregations will likely continue to shift in the future, as newer platforms and modes of communication gain popularity.

MISSION, VITALITY, AND CONFLICT

Mission, purpose, and a congregation's outlook on its future are important factors that shape a faith community's overall sense of vitality and sustainability. Majority Latino congregations are more likely to agree more strongly than other congregations as a whole that they have a clear sense of mission and purpose, are striving to be diverse, are spiritually vital and alive, are good at incorporating new people into the congregation, are willing to change to meet new challenges, and are actively involved in their local communities. In addition, a congregation's clear sense of mission and purpose—as well as its sense of spiritual vitality and aliveness—are positively correlated with increased per capita giving in majority Latino congregations.

Surprisingly, however, these elements of clear mission and spiritual vitality do not correlate with congregational growth or decline as they do for the totality of all other congregations.

Like other organizations, congregations also experience conflict. While 87.0% of Latino congregations report experiencing either no conflict or minor conflict, one in ten (10.9%) experience major conflict. Conflict can impact things like spiritual vitality, as well as the ability to attract new people.

Increased congregational conflict is related to:

- **Decreased spiritual vitality**
- **Decreased ability to actively look for new members**
- **Decreased success in incorporating new people into the congregation**
 - **Decreased ability to work toward diversity**
 - **Decline in attendance and participation**

It is noteworthy, however, that conflict in majority Latino congregations seems to impact them less severely overall than majority non-Latino congregations with regard to spiritual vitality and other factors.

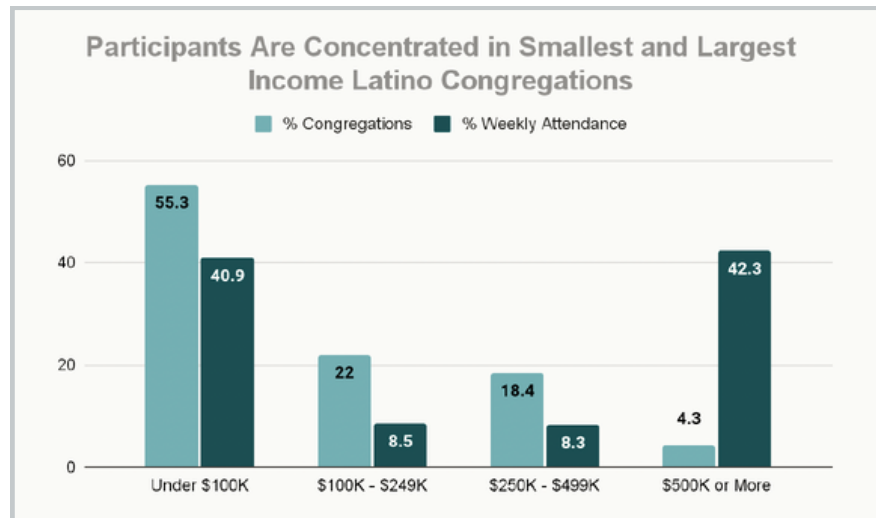
FINANCES IN LATINO CONGREGATIONS: PRESENT REALITIES AND FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

The financial picture in majority Latino congregations reveals some bright spots, as well as some potential challenges for future sustainability. As newer worshipping communities, and as faith communities where a greater percentage of members earn less income and have less education, Latino congregations report a median annual income of \$100,000, which is \$20,000 less than the overall median, though they have higher weekly attendance than non-Latino congregations. As a result, per capita giving in Latino faith communities by average attendance is \$1,250 (versus \$2,000 for all congregations).

For congregations across the board, financial income, expenditures, and other resources are mediated by size. The same is true of the majority of Latino congregations. For the smallest congregations, the median income is only \$28,990 but increases as average weekly worship attendance increases.

Average Weekly Attendance	Median Annual Income
1-50	\$28,990
51-100	\$100,000
101-250	\$265,090
251-500	\$487,343
501-1,800	\$1,548,469
1,801 or More	\$3,740,744

The concentration of congregations and participants by annual income offers a slightly different perspective. Over half (55.3%) of Latino congregations report under \$100,000 in income, but they comprise 40.9% of all weekly attendees. On the other end of the income bracket, while only 4.3% of Latino congregations report an income of over \$500,000, they comprise 42.3% of all attendees. This is similar to broader trends regarding the size and concentration of participants, as the largest U.S. congregations have the greatest share of attendees, even though there are relatively fewer larger congregations.



On average, 73.5% of income for Latino congregations comes from participant contributions such as tithes, pledges, and offerings, 17.1% from fundraising events, and 4.7% from rental income. The rest, 4.7%, are a combination of endowments, investments, school tuition (if the congregation has a school), capital campaigns, and other income such as grants or loans. Interestingly, only an average of 4.0% of total U.S. congregations' incomes are derived from fundraising events, so the ability to garner funds through creative means seems to be unique to majority Latino congregations.

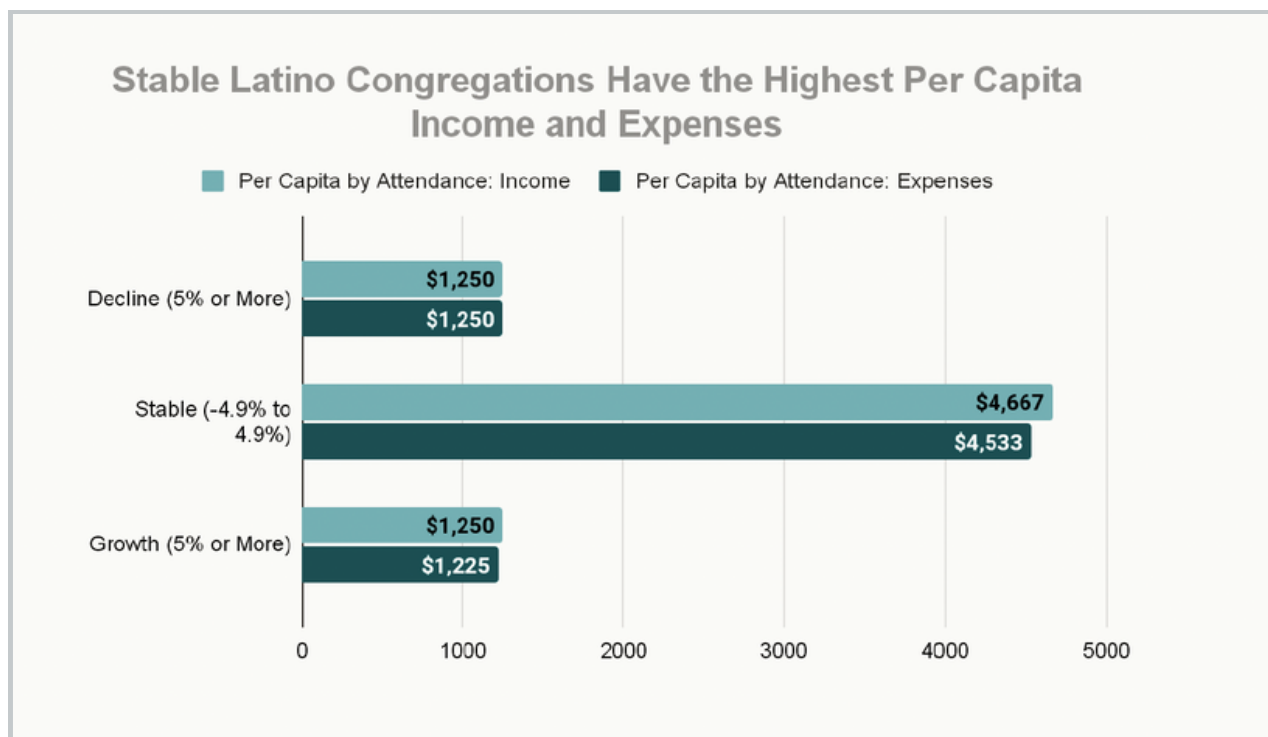
Expenses by average worship attendance are also proportional to the size and exceed median income only in Latino congregations of 251-500 and 501-1,800 where deficit budgets tend to be more common. (no data was available for congregations with 1,800 or more attendees.)

Average Weekly Attendance	Median Annual Expenses
1-50	\$27,000
51-100	\$100,000
101-250	\$250,000
251-500	\$662,362
501-1,800	\$1,696,680

The greatest expense for Latino congregations is staffing (40.7%), followed by buildings and operations (26.5%). Program expenses comprise 15.2%, and mission and benevolence (including denominational assessments or fees) comprise 10.0% of all expenses on average, with roughly 7.6% categorized as other expenses. This is comparable to how all congregations allocate their expenses, though slightly more is designated for staffing (44.0%).

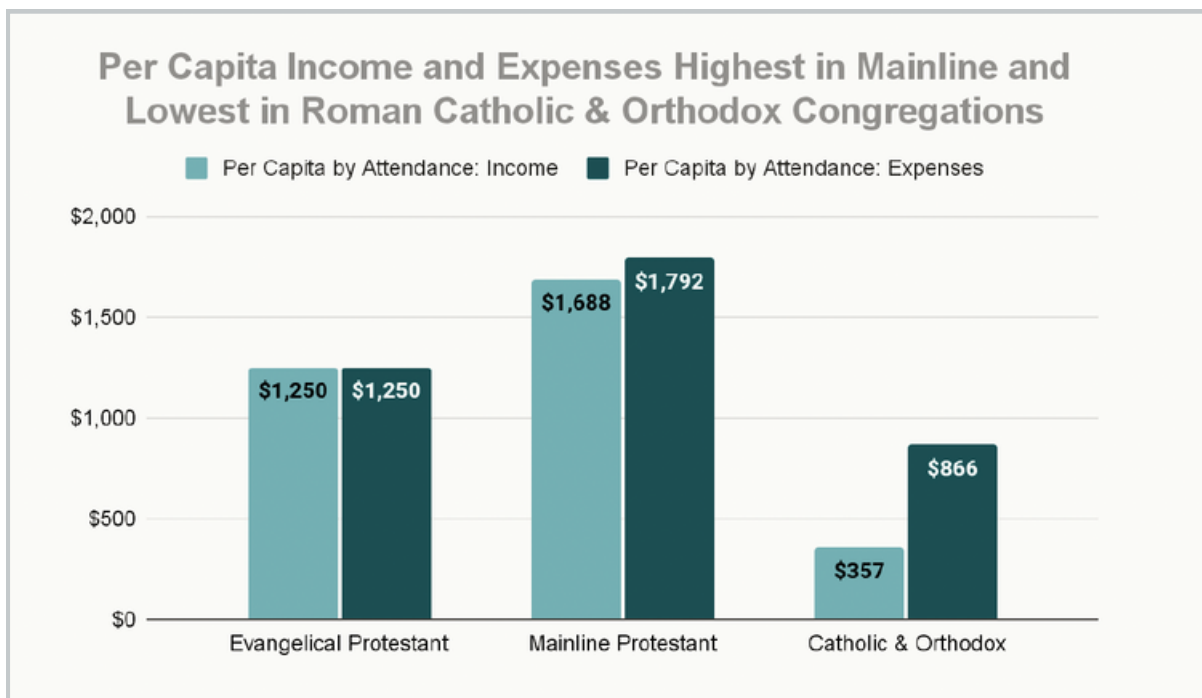
Considering income and expenses through the lens of congregational growth and decline, majority Latino faith communities that report relative stability in attendance over the past five years have much higher per capita rates than those in declining and growing congregations combined. Stable congregations have a per capita income of \$4,667 and per capita expenses of \$4,533, which places a heavy burden on participants to maintain current staffing levels and building operations. Notably, stable Latino congregations are the most likely to rent their facilities, with over half (54.4%) indicating that they do not own their space or have free use of it. This poses a challenge for the long-term financial sustainability of Latino congregations that have to pay for space on a regular basis, as they are neither accruing equity or savings for the future nor allocating funding to other parts of their ministries such as increased staffing or programs, both of which impact present and future thriving.

In addition, stable Latino congregations are most likely to have full-time leaders (with 96.9% reporting this). If per capita costs become unsustainable for these faith communities, they may need to consider moving staff to part-time status. This, once again, impacts the congregation as a whole with regard to long-term sustainability.



Religious Family	Median Annual Income	Median Annual Expenses
Evangelical Protestant	\$100,000	\$100,000
Mainline Protestant	\$74,234	\$78,558
Catholic & Orthodox	\$140,000	\$151,000

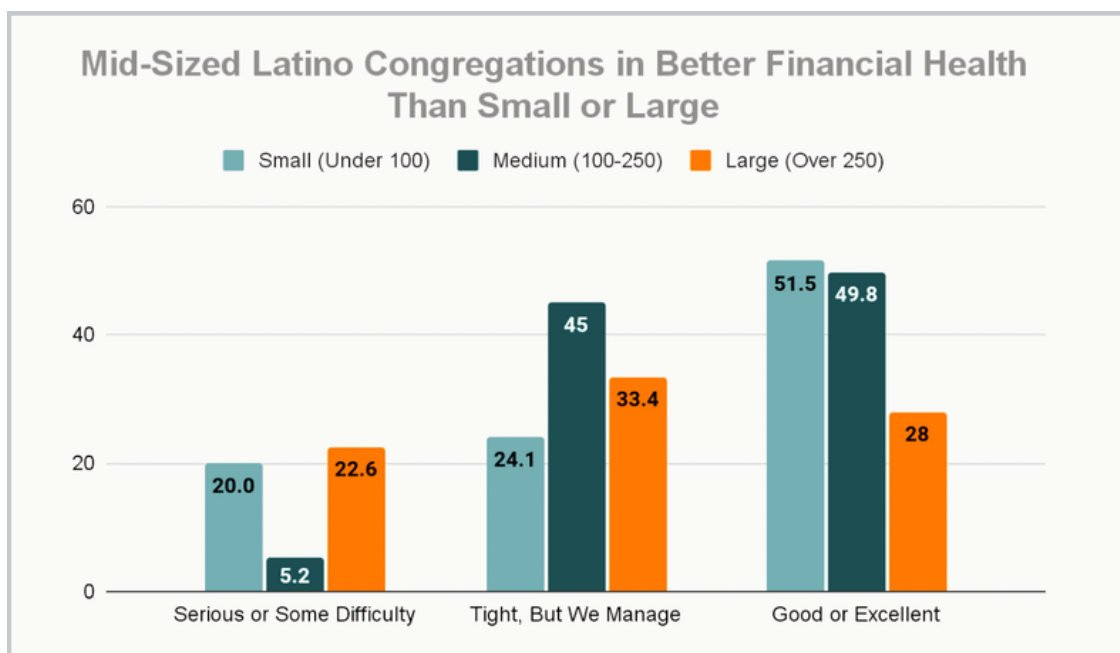
When viewing income and expenses by a religious family, Mainline Protestant Latino congregations have the smallest median annual income (\$74,234) and expenses (\$78,558) but the highest per capita income (\$1,688) and expenses (\$1,792). Roman Catholic and Orthodox Latino congregations report the largest median annual income (\$140,000) and expenses (\$151,000) but have the lowest per capita income (\$357) and expenses (\$866). Evangelical Protestant figures lie in between the polarities of these other religious families.



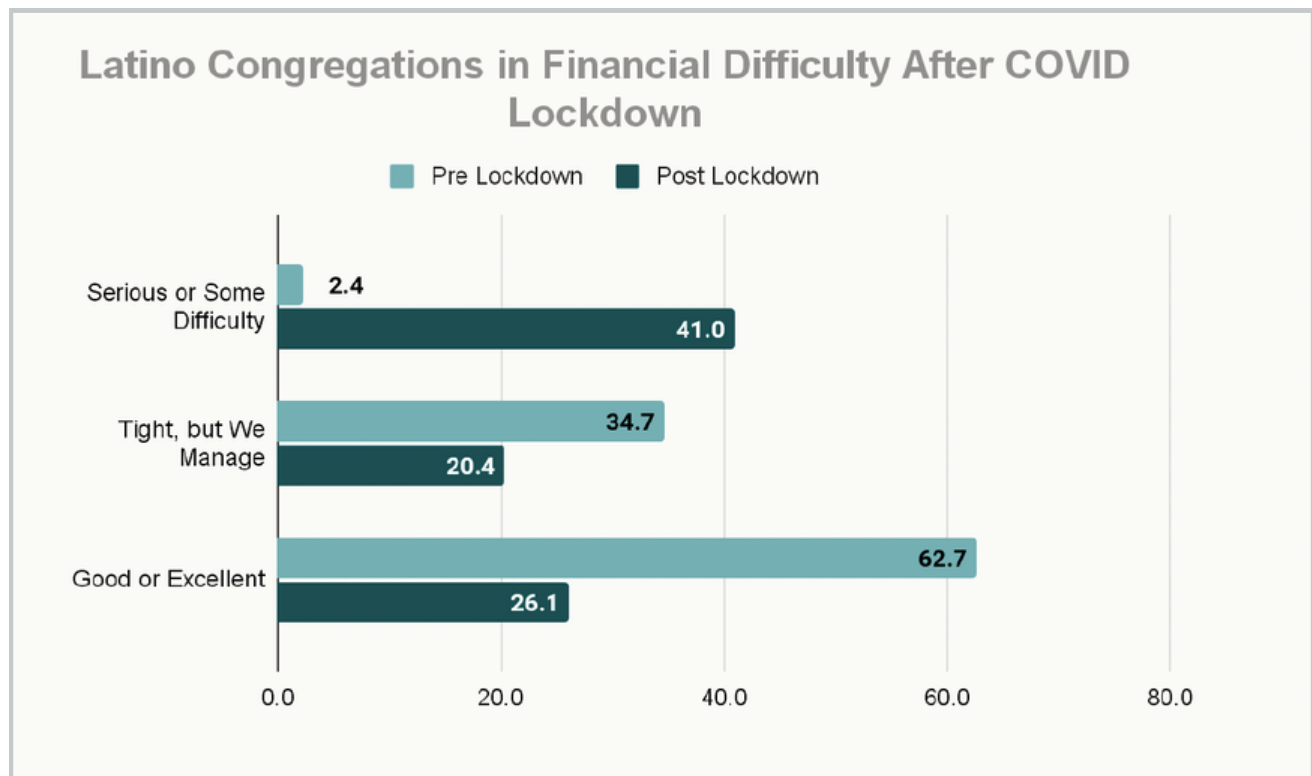
A congregation's assessment of its own financial health is critical, especially in planning for long-term sustainability. In general, Latino congregations report that their financial health is better today than it was five years ago. While fewer faith communities (3.5%) would rate their health today as "excellent" compared to five years ago (14.9%), a significantly higher percentage (45.7%) indicate that their financial health is "good" in juxtaposition to five years ago (10.7%).

Description	% Today	% Five Years Ago
In Serious Difficulty	4.7	4.4
In Some Difficulty	12.2	19.4
Tight, but We Manage	29.4	44.5
Good	45.7	10.7
Excellent	3.5	14.9
N/A	4.4	6.0

By size, medium-sized majority Latino congregations report being in better financial health than smaller or larger congregations. This is consistent with trends for all U.S. congregations. Larger Latino faith communities report with greater frequency than other sizes having serious or some financial difficulty (22.6%). For these congregations, it is unknown the cause of such difficulties; however, it is likely that staffing and building maintenance costs are contributors.



The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted how Latino congregations reported on their financial health. Pre-lockdown, 62.7% of faith communities indicated that their financial health was “good” or “excellent.” Post lockdown, only 26.1% of congregations indicated the same, and 42.0% reported that they had “serious” or “some” difficulty. This trend is mirrored across all U.S. congregations, but it is reflected more drastically within Latino faith communities. This poses another significant challenge for these congregations, as Latinos and other communities of color were impacted more seriously by the pandemic health-wise than majority white communities. How denominations and other religious bodies are addressing the financial challenges facing Latino congregations most impacted by COVID-19 should be a conversation of priority.



Perhaps part of the reason for such increased financial difficulty from pre to post-lockdown in majority Latino congregations was the loss of income in the form of giving. Overall income decreased from a median of \$113,611 pre-lockdown to \$40,000 post-lockdown. This decrease is a likely factor in dramatic drops in the use of online giving. Interestingly, while the percentage of Latino congregations that reported utilizing online giving increased similarly to all U.S. congregations (from 50.0% pre-lockdown to 68.0% post-lockdown), the percentage of both participants who used online giving and the percentage of regular monthly income from online giving decreased dramatically for Latino faith communities. An average of 33.0% of participants gave online pre-lockdown, and this decreased to 21.3% post-lockdown. Pre-lockdown, Latino congregations reported that an average of 32.7% of all giving was done online; but post-lockdown, an average of only 11.7% of giving was completed online.

Online Giving in Latino Congregations Pre and Post-Lockdown		
%	Pre Lockdown	Post Lockdown
Participants Give Online	33.0	21.3
Total Monthly Giving Is Online	32.7	11.7



The majority of Latino faith communities are as diverse financially as they are in other ways, and these differences can be parsed by size, religious family, and growth/decline, among other characteristics. Despite the challenges brought by a global pandemic, on the whole, these congregations remain in good financial health and display a great deal of resilience. Given the tenuous financial state of many Latino congregations for the long term, however, finding ways to gain equity and secure more stable means of income will be important considerations for leaders, participants, and the denominations or traditions that support them.

Photos shown in this in report represent Denver area Latino congregations, provided Grego Peña-Camprubí as part of EPIC Regional Case Study research conducted in 2022.

Given the broad diversity of Latino congregations related to racial-ethnic demographics, tradition, size, location, worship, activities, leadership, technology use, finances, and a whole host of other factors, it might be considered an impossible task to identify overarching trends. As is the case with statistical analyses for any racial-ethnic grouping, one must be careful to identify unique trends and patterns without essentializing these as innate or prescriptive to that particular group.

SNOWISNOT CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, this report identified a number of distinct differences between Latino congregations and other congregations (which includes all other cases in the datasets analyzed). Growth in attendance, younger participants, active community engagement, prevalent spiritual practices and social media use, and spiritual vitality, among other things, signal that Latino congregations are a dynamic part of religious life in the U.S. How these faith communities continue to adapt to meet new opportunities posed by this growing segment of the population remains to be seen, but it is clear that Latino congregations are on the rise within American religious life.

These congregations are not without their challenges, however. With a substantive contingent of leaders being employed beyond their faith communities and unpaid in their ministry roles, many congregations renting their facilities, most having lower average income and higher per capita expenses, and giving severely decreased post lockdown, congregations—as well as religious and denominational bodies—must begin to address some of these systemic issues in order to ensure continued vitality and viability.

Given both the positive features and the potential challenges posed in this report, how might Latino congregations and their leaders plan for the future? How might religious and denominational bodies support them in becoming even more vital and sustainable? These are the questions raised by the findings of this report. If positive trends are further supported and challenges are addressed with creative solutions (along with haste), there is no telling what the future holds for Latino congregational life in the U.S.



EXPLORING ^{THE}
PANDEMIC IMPACT
ON CONGREGATIONS

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The Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations (EPIC) research is generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. The Endowment endeavors to help people fully develop their potential, families to prosper, and communities to thrive. It pursues these goals by providing grants to a diverse range of charitable groups. Grantmaking is guided by two principles: honoring tradition while embracing necessary innovation.

Lilly Endowment's primary aim in religion is to deepen and enrich the religious lives of Christians in the United States, principally by supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations.

Lilly Endowment values the broad diversity of Christian traditions and congregations today and endeavors to support them in a wide variety of contexts. They seek to ensure that all types of congregations have a steady stream of wise, faithful, diverse and well-prepared leaders. They work to strengthen theological schools as well as religious institutions and networks that nurture pastors and support the ministries of congregations. They support efforts that help Christians draw on the wisdom of their theological traditions as they strive to understand and respond to contemporary challenges and live their faith more fully. They are especially interested in efforts that nurture the religious lives of children, youth and young adults and share the beauty and vibrancy of Christian faith with a new generation.

Lilly Endowment also works to foster public understanding about religion. While they seek to lift up the contributions that people of all religious faiths make to greater civic well-being, they also encourage fair and accurate portrayals of both the negative and positive effects of religion on the world.

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For over 40 years, the Hartford Institute for Religion Research has conducted rigorous, applied research to provide religious leaders and faith organizations with data to guide planning and decisions. As part of Hartford International University, it uniquely focuses on studying congregations. The Institute anticipates emerging issues facing congregations and creatively shares findings that leaders can apply to address organizational needs. Hartford Institute has

brought together more than 40 participants from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Bahá'í, and Orthodox Church organizations in the Faith Communities Today partnership to develop cooperative congregational survey research. The resulting

national data enables pastors, church leaders, and scholars to make instructive comparisons among congregations and denominations. Currently, the Institute's five-year "Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations" project is researching,

collecting, and disseminating data about the changes and possible long-term implications COVID-19 has on religious life across the United States. If you care about the future of vibrant religious institutions, we invite you into the conversation. Join us by participating in our research or utilizing our resources.

The Institute's work focuses on four key areas:

Research: The Institute conducts rigorous research studies to gather data and identify trends related to faith communities. Major research projects have examined topics like women clergy, church membership patterns, seminaries, denominations, and congregations nationwide. The Institute helped pioneer survey methods for studying congregations and is currently gathering expansive data on congregations across faiths.

Communication: Getting findings out to the public is a priority. Institute research has led to published books in recent years, and national media outlets like The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and ABC News regularly rely on and quote Institute experts to interpret religious life. The Institute also has an active website visited by thousands monthly to access reports, survey findings and facilitate idea exchange.

Education: In addition to classrooms at Hartford International University, Institute staff partner with other seminaries, universities, and agencies in sharing research learnings more broadly through workshops, retreats, and leadership development programs for religious leaders and academics.

Consultation: The Institute offers assessment tools like the Parish Profile and Pastoral Search inventories used by hundreds of individual churches over decades to study their congregations and identify needs.