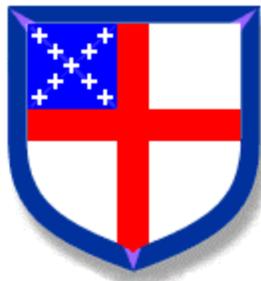


Episcopal Church



New Church Development: A Research Report

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This report reflects the general context of the Episcopal Church. Research on churches from specific cultural groups is in process and will be available in early 2002.

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**If you want to grow something to last a season—
plant flowers.**

**If you want to grow something to last a lifetime—
plant trees.**

**If you want to grow something to last through eternity—
plant churches.**

Anonymous, quoted in Hesselgrave (1980:38)

While admittedly sentimental and overly simplistic, this adage about church planting employs a biological metaphor that is quite apt. Church planting—now generally termed new church development (NCD)—is an organic process that has a beginning, that varies depending upon the character of the “seed” itself, that is sensitive to a number of contextual variables, that is helped by specific attention to the nature and flux of its context in relation to its ability to thrive, and whose progress is gauged by growth toward fulfillment of its initial intention and design. The surveys on which this report is based were an effort to measure the factors upon

which a successful new church planting depend.¹ The results provide clear and interpretable evidence about what matters most for new Episcopal parishes.

To extend the initial metaphor in another direction, the results of our analysis of Episcopal new churches find their closest analogy in Jesus' parable of the sower. In each "unsuccessful" case, the sower failed to produce a crop because **the seed did not take sufficient root** to become established and so resist natural impediments and take advantage of encountered opportunities in its continuing efforts to flourish. Not surprisingly, the strongest correlate of new church success was the initial size of congregation—its strength a few months after the first public worship service. Other factors that contribute to success in "taking root" include: systematic efforts to track visitors and prospects; recruitment and training of effective lay leaders; a community context that is well-educated and affluent; an intentional ministry focused on the unchurched; careful and purposeful site selection; and a vision that is clearly articulated by a pastor good at starting groups "from scratch" and shared by laity. In the end, doing the work of outreach and welcoming—and doing it together, both pastor and laity—in a context that is intimately "known" by church leaders is most important for a strong new church start. Clearly, the ongoing articulation and clarification of a congregation's vision and direction enhance this joint work. Knowing "who" you are and "where" you are going are key but ultimately are fallow without intentional strategies about "how" you will get there and the actual engagement in activities that move a church in the right direction.

Key Factors for New Church Success

- Careful site selection
- A community context where the population is well-educated and relatively affluent
- Effective recruitment and training of lay leaders

¹ "Success" in this case means that the new church reached a large enough size to achieve self-

- Shared vision and direction
- A younger minister who is good at starting groups from “scratch”
- A focus on reaching unchurched community residents
- Systematic efforts to track visitors and prospects

Methods

In the spring of 2000 three surveys were sent to all Episcopal churches organized between 1980 and 1995. One survey was sent to the founding pastor of the parish and another to the current pastor. Five key lay leaders in each parish also received questionnaires. Although the three questionnaires shared some questions, each was different, with most of the questions designed to draw information specific to the respondent’s experience as either a founding pastor, lay leader or current pastor of a new church.

The first section of this report summarizes results from the **founding pastor survey**. Specifically, we examine factors related to success in developing a strong, stable parish within a seven-year time frame—from the first worship service to seven years following that event. Parish strength and stability were measured by worship attendance at the end of the seven-year period, based on the assumption that the number of active participants is related to the ability of a new church to exist as a self-supporting congregation. The parish strength variable was composed of four categories: 1) smallest and weakest new churches (average worship attendance of 75 persons or less); 2) small and somewhat weak new churches (average worship attendance of 76 to 150); 3) larger and moderately strong new churches (average worship attendance of 151 to 249); and 4) largest and strongest new churches (average worship attendance of 250+). Surveys were returned by 105 of the founding pastors. Of these, four parishes were founded prior to 1980 and seven others lacked enough recent membership and attendance data to assess support within seven years.

their strength. Analysis was conducted on the remaining 94 founding pastor surveys. Survey data were merged with U.S. Census information at the zip code level. Survey data were also merged with parochial report data in order to measure change in membership and average worship attendance from the initial start through the subsequent seven years of parish life.

The Founding Pastor Survey

Analysis of the founding pastor survey is divided into four broad sections. The first examines the demographics of the zip code area in which the new church is currently located. The second section focuses on characteristics of the founding pastor and lay leaders at the time the new church was organized. The third section considers key aspects of the initial start such as size, site selection and so forth. Finally, the fourth part explores strategic approaches to new parish development.

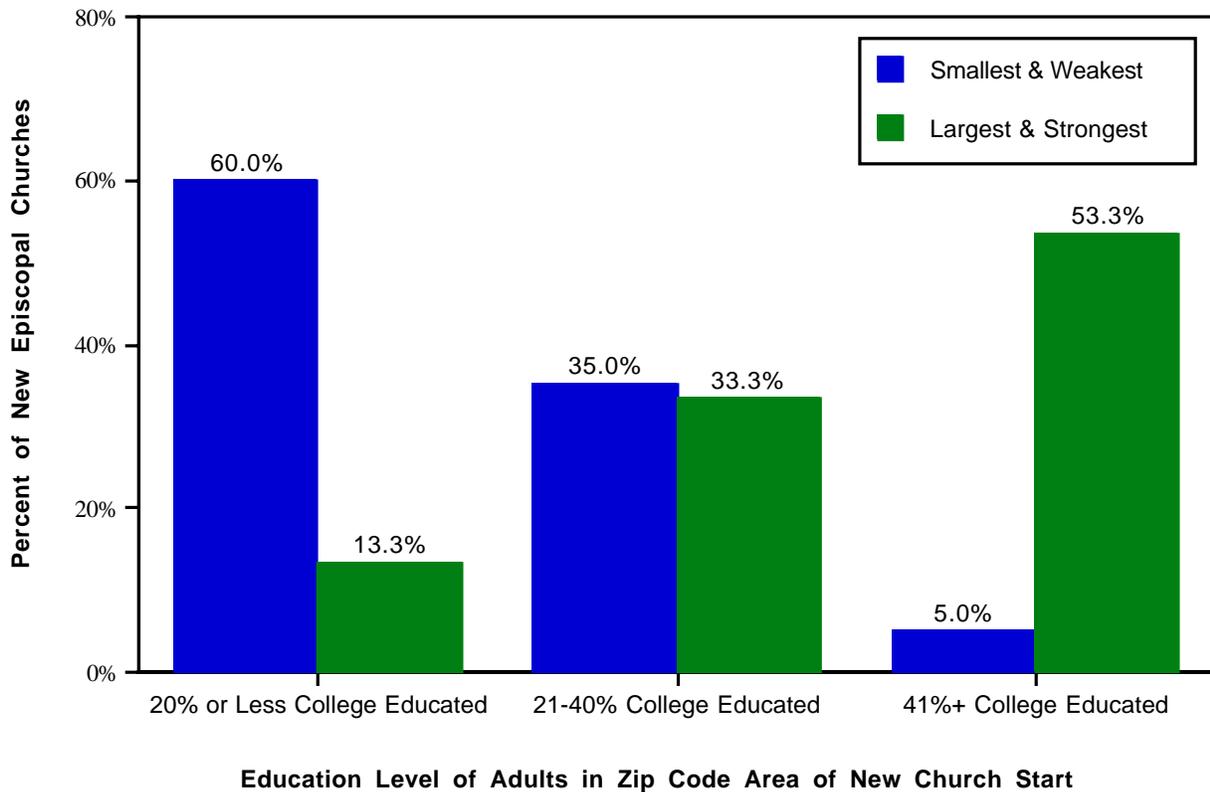
Community Demographics. The character of the community in which a church is located is very important—in fact, it has a greater impact on a new church than on an established congregation. It was not surprising therefore, that many demographic variables produced quite strong, statistically significant correlations with new church success. Areas that are most conducive to the success of Episcopal church planting are those where a lot of new housing was constructed recently and where the population is well-educated, well-off, white-collar and (younger) middle-aged.

The first chart shows the relationship between higher education and NCD success. Each chart included in this section of the report shows sets of bars representing new churches that fared the worst and the best during the first seven years of their existence (categories 1 and 4 of our parish strength and stability variable). Figure 1, below, shows that the smallest and weakest new churches tend to be located in areas where relatively few adults have a college degree (20%

or less of adult residents 25 years old and older). Over half (60%) of Episcopal new church starts with average worship attendance of 75 persons or less seven years after they were organized were located in such areas. By contrast, very few successful new churches are

Figure 1

Education in Local Community and New Church Success



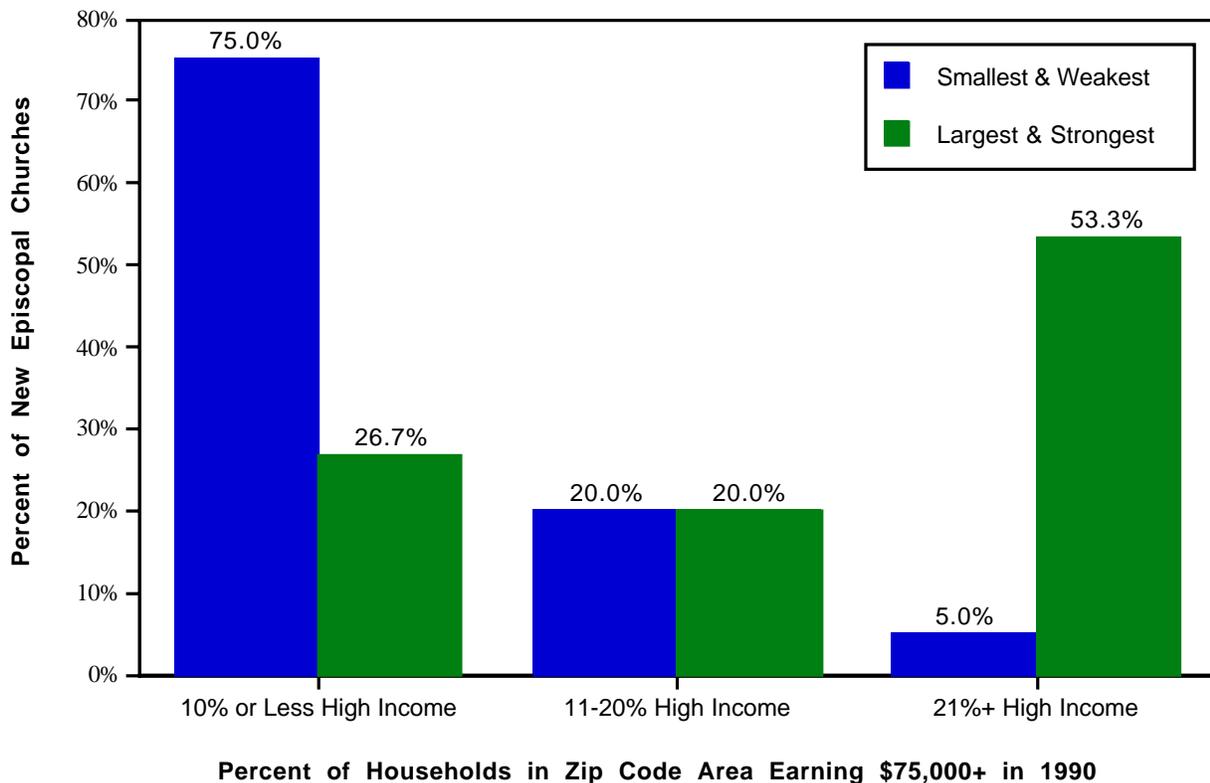
located in areas where the college-educated population is small (only 13.3%). The middle two categories of new church performance are not displayed in order to show the difference between the most successful and least successful new churches. This difference reflects the correlation or statistical association between success and, in this case, the educational level of the population. The larger was the difference between the columns, the larger the association and the greater the impact on new church performance. Moving from left to right in the chart, we see that there is little difference in the likelihood of new churches to be successful or unsuccessful in areas with a

moderately high level of college-educated constituents. However, communities where over forty percent of adults were college-educated (in 1990) were home to 53.3% of successful new church starts (with average worship attendance of 250+ persons) and to only 5% of the smallest and weakest new church starts.

Household income also showed a strong relationship with success/nonsuccess of new church starts. New Episcopal churches were most successful where more than twenty percent of households reported incomes of \$75,000+ in 1990. Over half of successful new churches were located in such areas. Lower percentages of wealthier households produced decreasing levels of NCD success (see Figure 2.). This does not mean that new church success is impossible in areas that are less affluent. It does mean that there is a much greater likelihood of success in areas where a substantial proportion of the population is middle class and upper middle class.

Figure 2

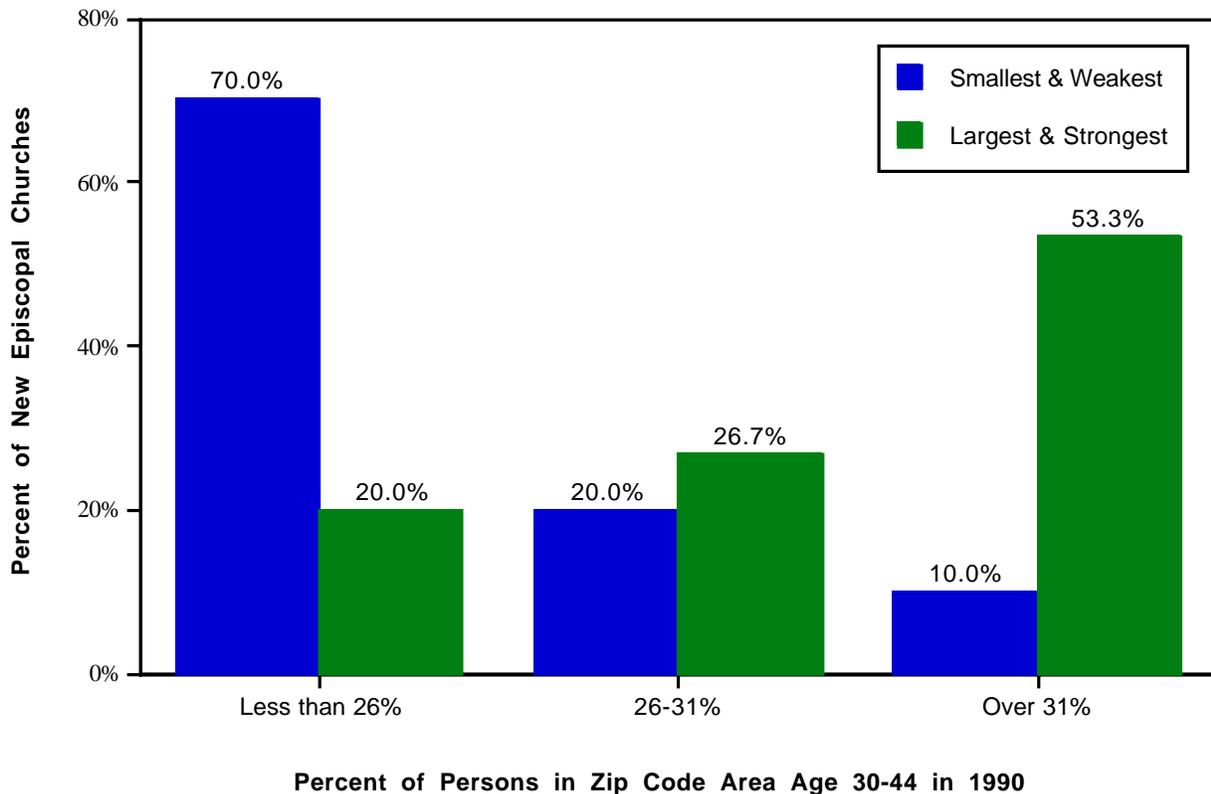
High Income in Local Community and New Church Success



Persons with larger incomes tend to live in communities with more expensive housing. Not surprisingly then, we found a strong correlation between housing values and new church success. Episcopal new church starts tend to fare poorest in areas with a larger proportion of less expensive housing (valued under \$75,000 in 1990). Further, the relative age of housing matters greatly. Whereas population growth was only moderately related to new church success, new housing construction and the age of the housing stock was very strongly related to the growth of new congregations. In other words, *Episcopal new church starts tend to do better where newer, somewhat more expensive housing is being constructed*. This does not mean that new church sites should be restricted to areas with **very** expensive new housing, only that success is unlikely in the types of communities that have inexpensive housing and where the housing stock is older.

Figure 3

Younger Middle Age Adults in Local Community and New Church Success



A final demographic variable related to new church success was the age structure of the population in the community. A particularly important age cohort is the adult population, thirty to forty-four years of age. It is during these years that nuclear families are most concerned with childbearing, child rearing and career building. Many middle class families also “trade up” in the housing market during these years, moving to larger homes in the suburbs. As seen in Figure 3 above, 53.3% of successful new church starts were in neighborhoods with a larger proportion of residents in the 30 to 44-age category. Conversely, neighborhoods where this population was smaller were home to only 20% of successful new churches.

The founding pastor survey also included two (necessarily subjective) demographic questions and both asked the rector to characterize the setting of the new church start. Question wording problems and possible lack of familiarity with community demographics on the part of the founding pastor reduced the correlation of these questions with new church success. Still, the survey data indicated that the best areas for success were suburbs—particularly newer suburbs—and the areas least conducive to success were small cities, towns and villages. These findings are consistent with the more objective data from the United States Census.

It should be no surprise that new Episcopal churches tend to do better in areas where there is an increasing supply of people who are similar to most Episcopalians. This does not mean that new church development should be restricted to areas where there are “people just like us,” nor does it preclude the establishment of successful churches elsewhere. All other things being equal, however, it has been easier to establish successful Episcopal churches in relatively affluent, growing suburban developments (regardless of the racial/ethnic makeup of such areas).

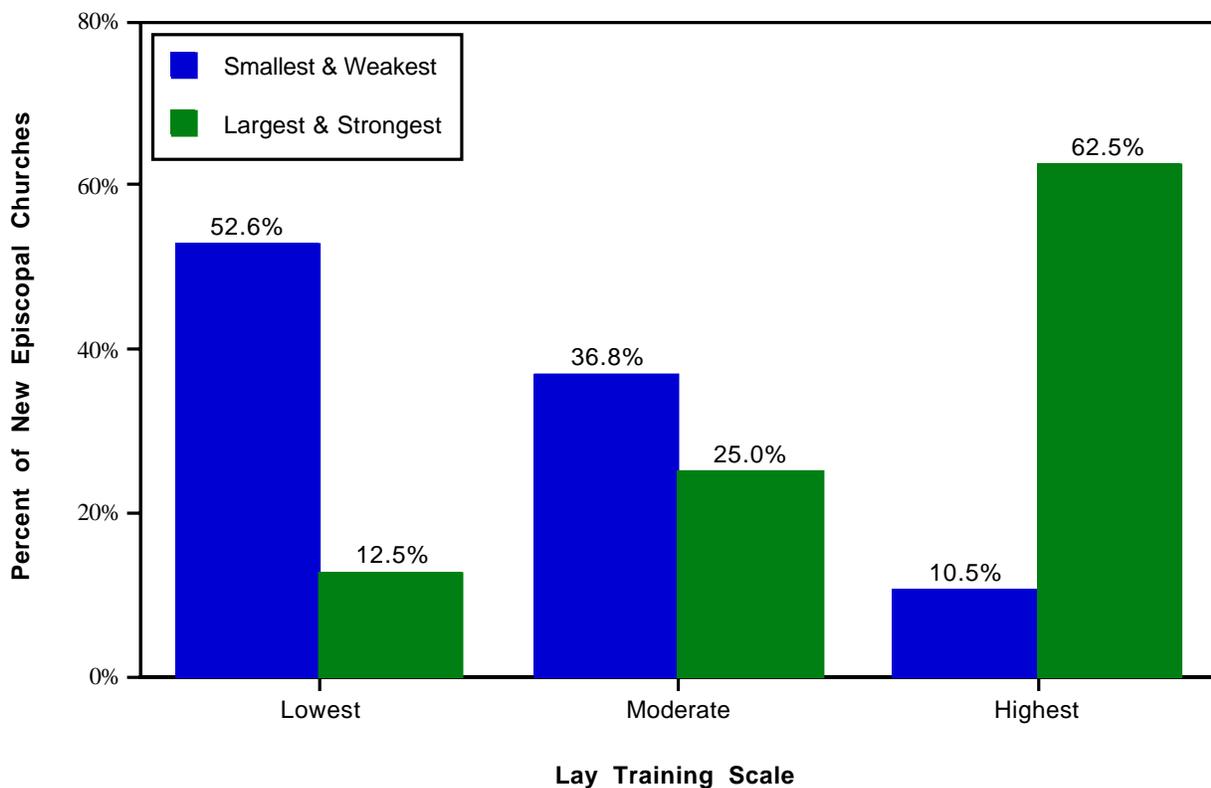
Characteristics of the Founding Pastor and Lay Leaders. Successful Episcopal new church starts tend to be led by pastors who are good at starting groups “from scratch” and by laity who are well trained. Interestingly, our analysis shows that while a relatively young and confident pastor is important for new church success, a core group of laity with practical evangelism and

outreach skills is even more crucial. Thus, the successful organizing pastor must know how to recruit potential lay leaders and to train them in the tasks necessary to grow a new church.

Figure 4 illustrates the importance of lay training and experience for new church starts. Churches with high levels of lay training tend to be successful. But what is perhaps most telling is the fact that so few successful new church starts were found to be congregations that report the lowest level of lay training and experience. Does the type of training and experience matter? Analysis of the founding pastor survey reveals that leader training and experience in practical evangelism, outreach development, and conflict resolution (in that order) are most important for new church success. The questions asked to the founding pastor about the experience and training of the original lay leaders did not presume that the founding pastor provided all or even most of that training. But whether the pastor helped train original lay leaders or helped recruit

Figure 4

Lay Training and New Church Success

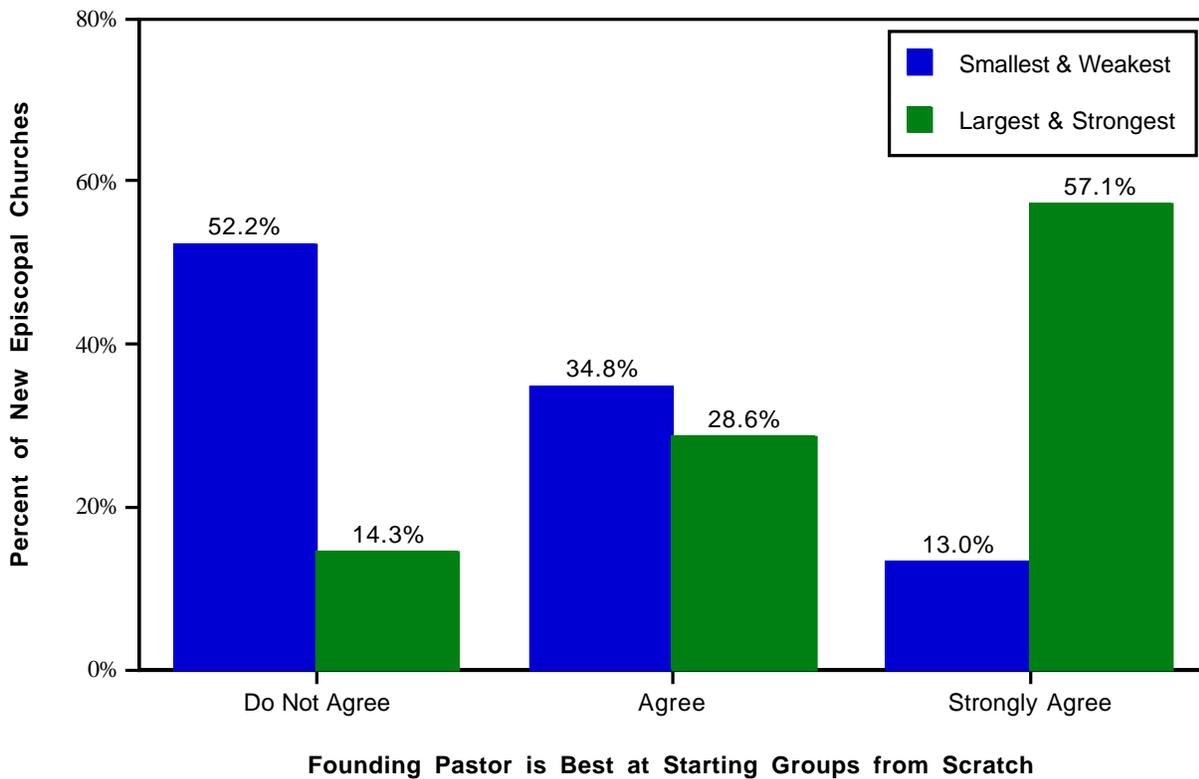


lay leaders with existing skills, the fact remains that the quality of lay leadership is key to new church success.

Successful new churches tend to be led by pastors who are confident in their ability to start a group “from scratch.” The reverse also is true. Pastors who have less confidence about this ability tend to start unsuccessful new churches (see Figure 5.). Of course, initial confidence and positive experience are mutually reinforcing. In other words, confident pastors tend to be successful and more successful pastors are confident. Furthermore, the experience of successfully starting a church from scratch would certainly influence one’s evaluation of competence in that area.

Figure 5

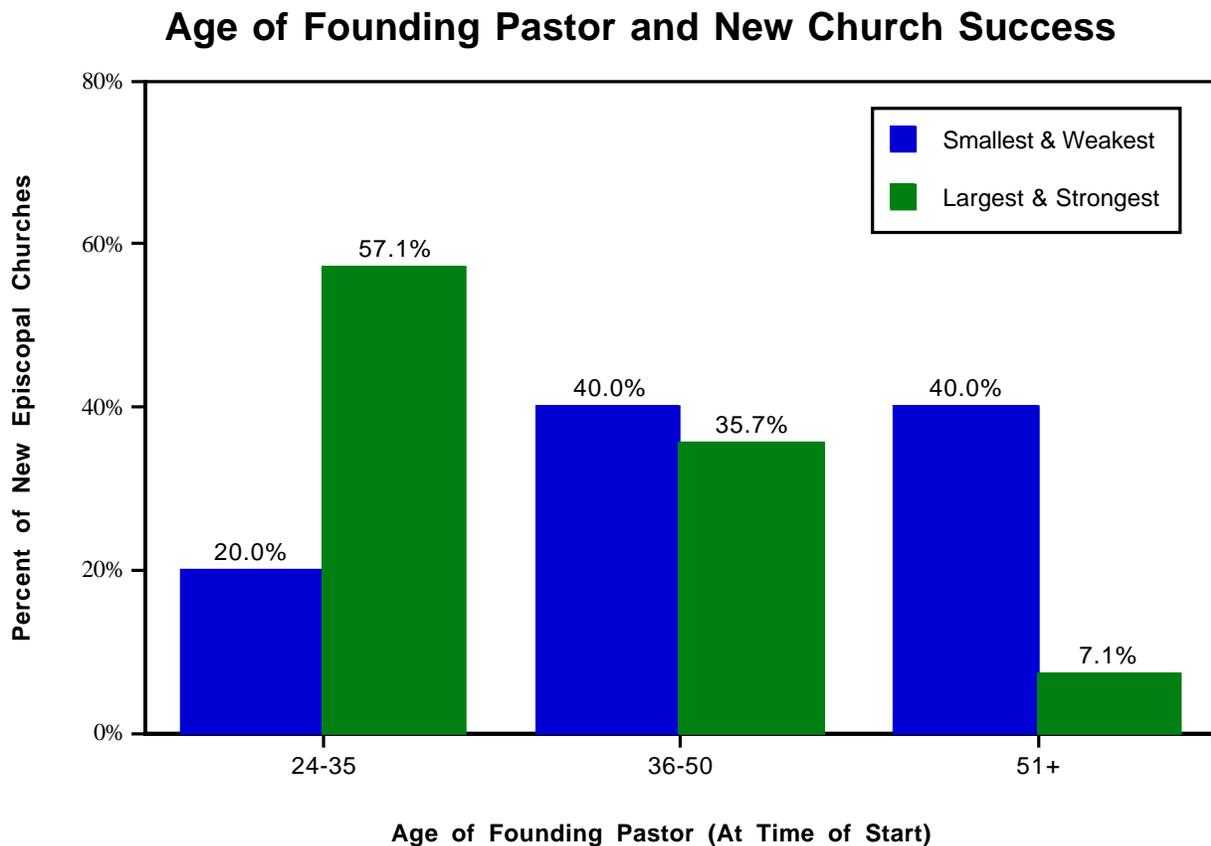
Starting Groups From Scratch and New Church Success



Not surprisingly, analysis of other factors related to characteristics of the founding pastors shows that those who are successful in planting strong new churches possess a clear

sense of direction and are not merely people-pleasers. Like their constituency (in the local community), successful pastors tend to be young to middle-aged (see Figure 6.) and like their lay leaders they are personally involved in evangelism and outreach.

Figure 6

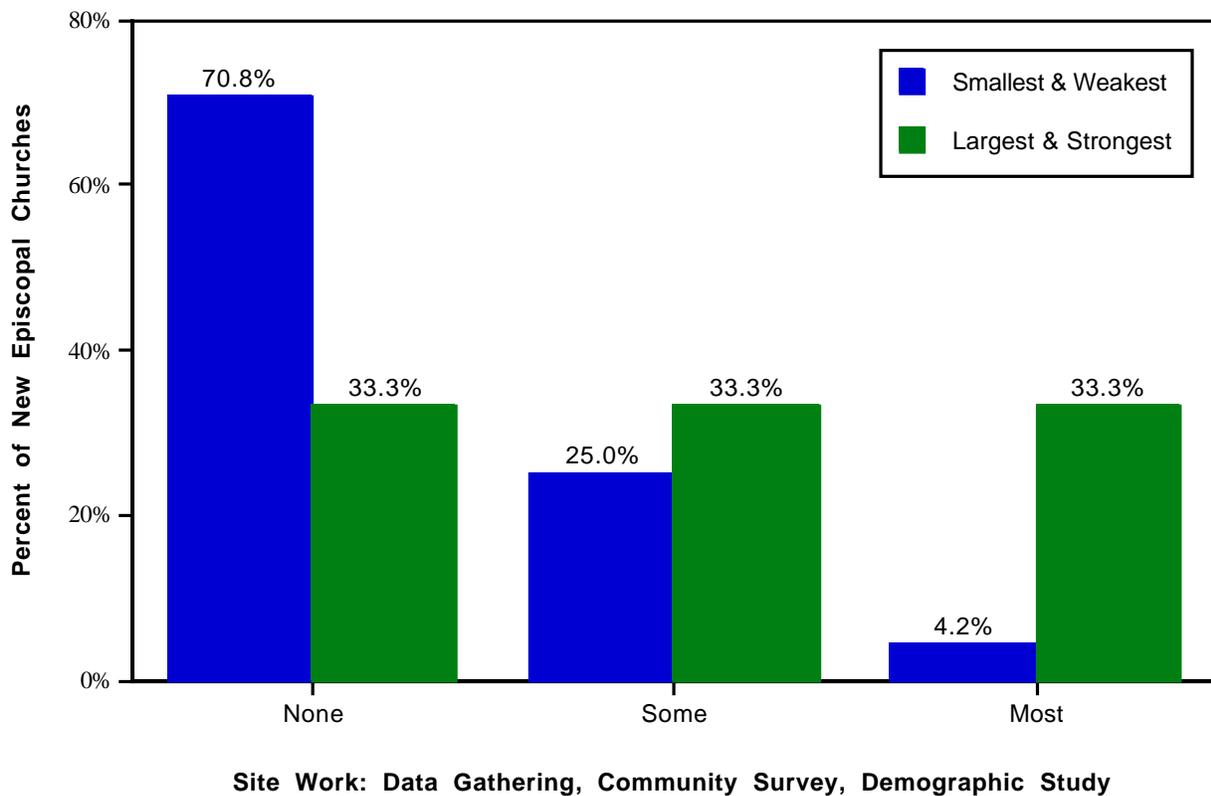


Characteristics of the Initial Start. Analysis of the founding pastor survey shows that successful Episcopal new churches are the products of careful study of the local community and a clear direction or “vision” for the congregation. Obviously, knowing the community and articulating a vision for the new congregation is important for recruiting and cultivating lay leaders. Successful recruitment, further, yields more initial members and the strongest correlate of later success is early numerical strength. Knowing “who” you are and “where” you are going is critical **from** the start and **for** the start.

Figure 7 shows the strong relationship between site work and successful new church starts. Churches that did no site study were much more likely to be unsuccessful than churches that did at least two of the following site activities: preliminary local data gathering, community canvas or survey, and extensive demographic study. As with many other factors discussed in this report, doing something that is helpful does not ensure success, but not doing essential things may almost assure failure. A new church may eventually be organized through slipshod efforts at church planting, but such a church is unlikely to thrive.

Figure 7

Site Selection Study and New Church Success

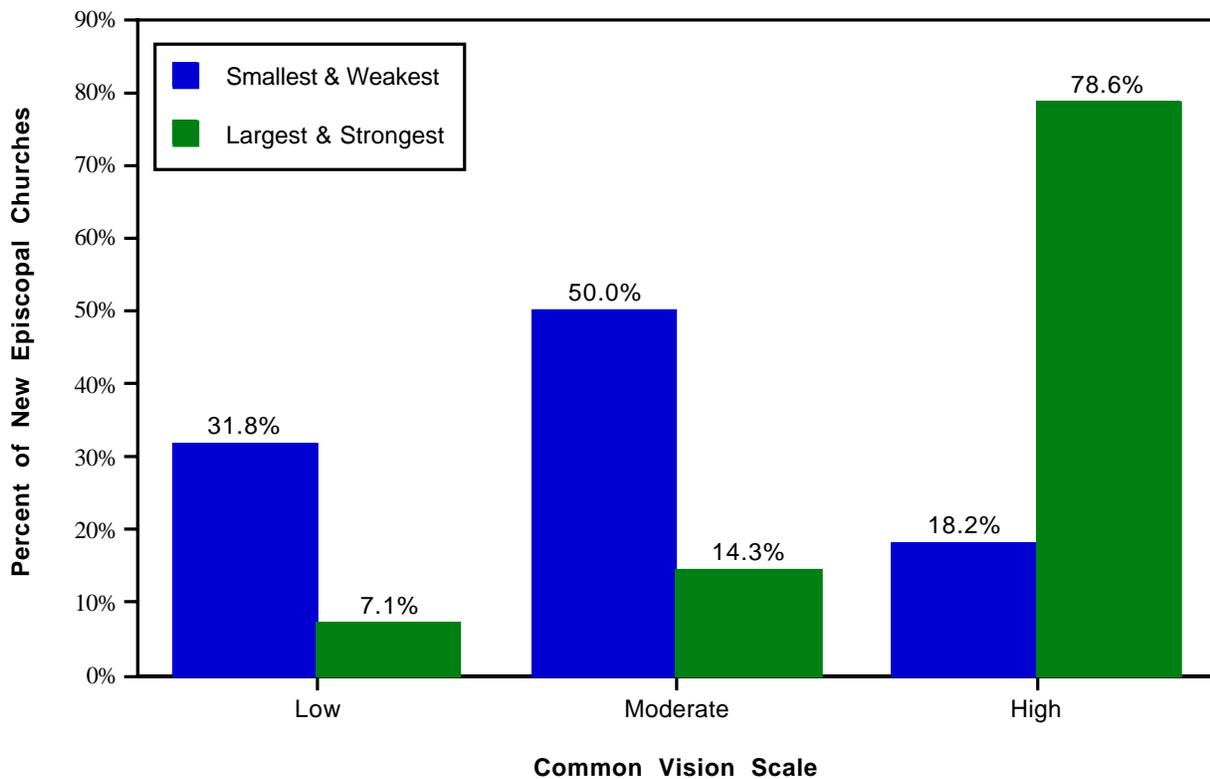


“Vision” is also an important characteristic of successful new church starts (see Figure 8.). A common vision and high priority given to articulating direction clearly help a new church

succeed. The impact of proper site selection is to prevent problems. The impact of a common vision is more positive. It helps a new church grow, rather than merely staving off stagnation. As shown in Figure 8, nearly 80% of the largest and strongest new churches scored high on the common vision scale. This scale reflects responses to two questions: one, that the founding pastor gave priority to clearly articulating a vision for the congregation and two, that leaders shared the same vision for the church’s future. Interestingly, further analysis shows that while it is important for the pastor to articulate a vision **it is even more critical that leaders share it**. The data also indicate that the success of new churches tends to be bolstered by help from Diocesan staff. As above, survey analysis underlines the fact that starting an Episcopal church is not a “one-man” (or one woman) show.

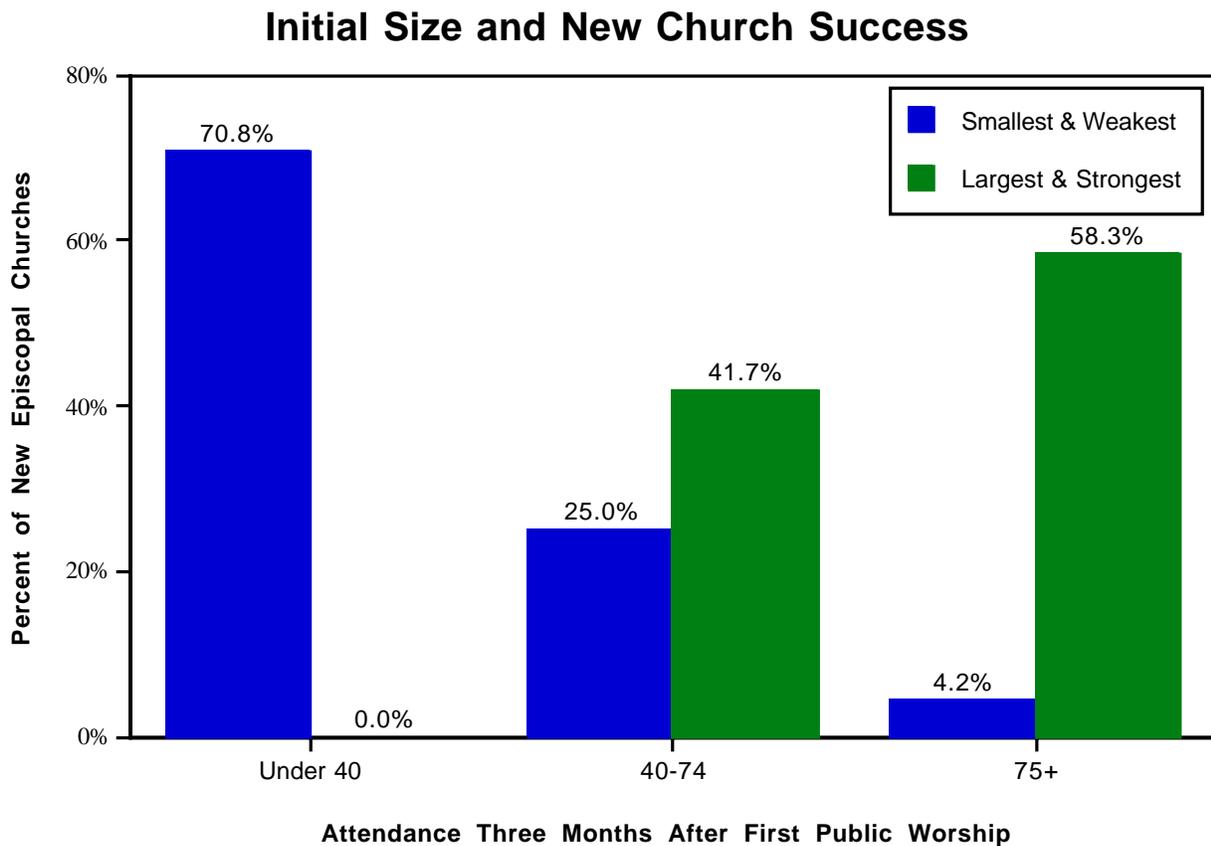
Figure 8

Vision, Direction and New Church Success



Last, but not least among characteristics of the new church start, is the very strong relationship between new church success and the initial size of the congregation (specifically, three months after the first service). Nearly three quarters of new churches that remain very weak began with a worship attendance of less than 40 (see Figure 9). Of particular interest is that fact that initial congregational size has a kind of “all or nothing” relationship to new church success. No successful churches reported an initial size of less than 40 and only 4.2% of unsuccessful churches reported an initial size of 75 or more. Churches with initial size in the middle range are something of a toss-up in terms of later success.

Figure 9



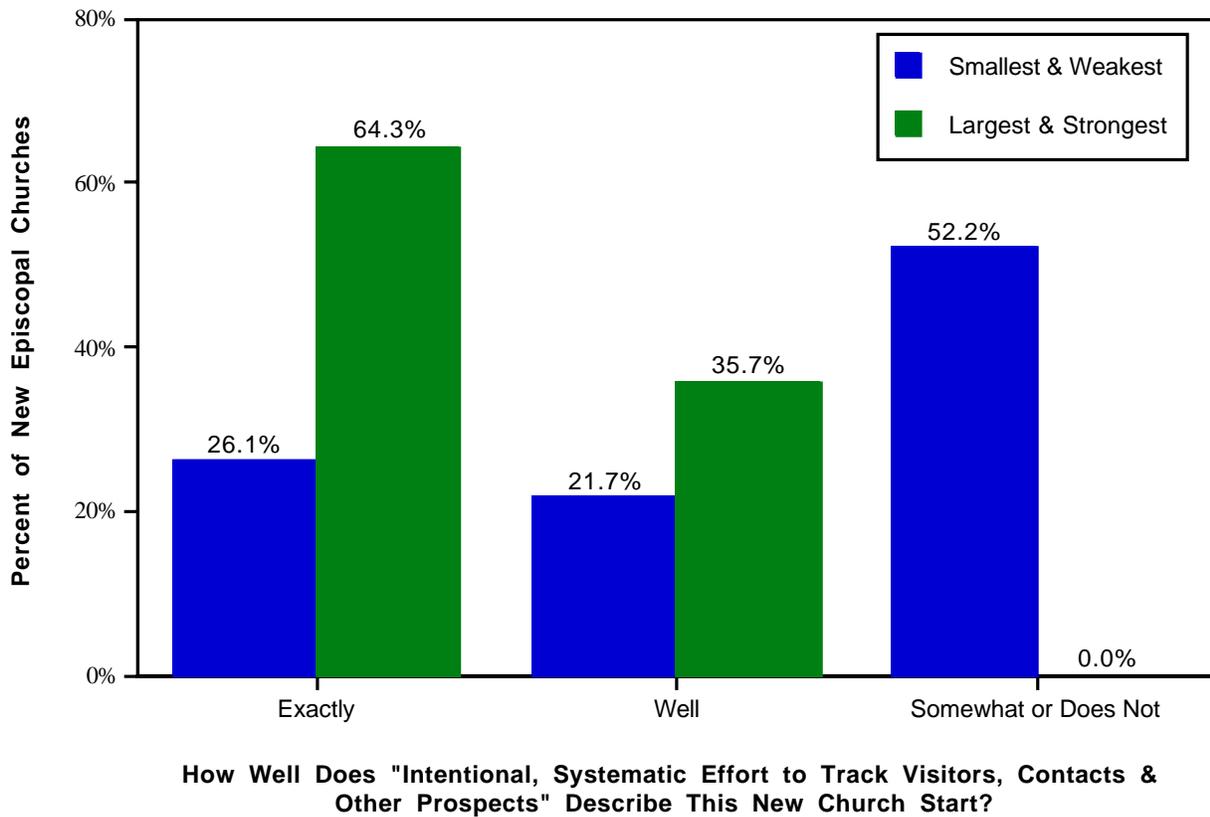
Our finding vis-à-vis initial congregational size and new church success was first hypothesized by Lyle Schaller (1991), who argued that new churches grow faster if they start larger. In an earlier article we tested this proposition with mixed results (see Marler and

Hadaway 1993). We found that smaller church starts tend to grow faster in conservative Protestant denominations but that larger initial starts grow faster in mainline groups (specifically, among Presbyterians and American Baptists). Why? The analysis suggested that conservative Protestant denominations possess a kind of “movement” quality that defies contextual constraints. Further, these conservative denominations also tend to produce higher proportions of very large or “mega” churches that help rather than hinder the growth of the denomination’s other churches in the area. We suggested, therefore, that these larger churches serve as important models and provide needed inspiration for recruiting church planters, specifically and developing smaller starts, generally. The implication for the present study is two-fold: one, that Episcopal new church starts, much as other mainline NCDs, do better if the initial start is larger and two, that even mainline NCD may be helped, as more conservative NCD is, by spotlighting very successful Episcopal churches as models for inspiration (more than imitation).

Strategies of New Church Development. “Who” congregations are as defined by their community constituency and their leadership and “where” they are going in terms of mission and vision are crucial for success in new church development. A strong start with strong leaders who look beyond themselves is not enough, however. These data further show that clear strategies of “how” the “who” get “where” are required. **An intentional outreach strategy that focuses on reaching the unchurched through systematic efforts to track visitors and prospects is paramount.** Casting a vision is not enough. Doing the hard, cooperative work of casting a net and bringing in a “countable catch,” is required. That is why the strongest relationship in these data between church **actions** and new church development is, first, initial size and second, a systematic effort to track visitors and other prospects (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Keeping Track of Prospects and New Church Success



Figures 10 through 12 illustrate the importance of systematic outreach efforts directed at unchurched people and involving lay leadership in those efforts. In all three charts, it can be seen that the most successful new churches report intentional and cooperative outreach strategies and the least successful churches tend to do very little in this area. Also striking is the fact that almost all of most effective churches tend report at least a moderate effort. Figure 10, the most extreme example, shows that all of the founding pastors from new churches that are now the largest and strongest reported that they used “intentional and systematic efforts to track visitors, contacts and other prospects.”

Figure 11

Reaching Unchurched Focus and New Church Success

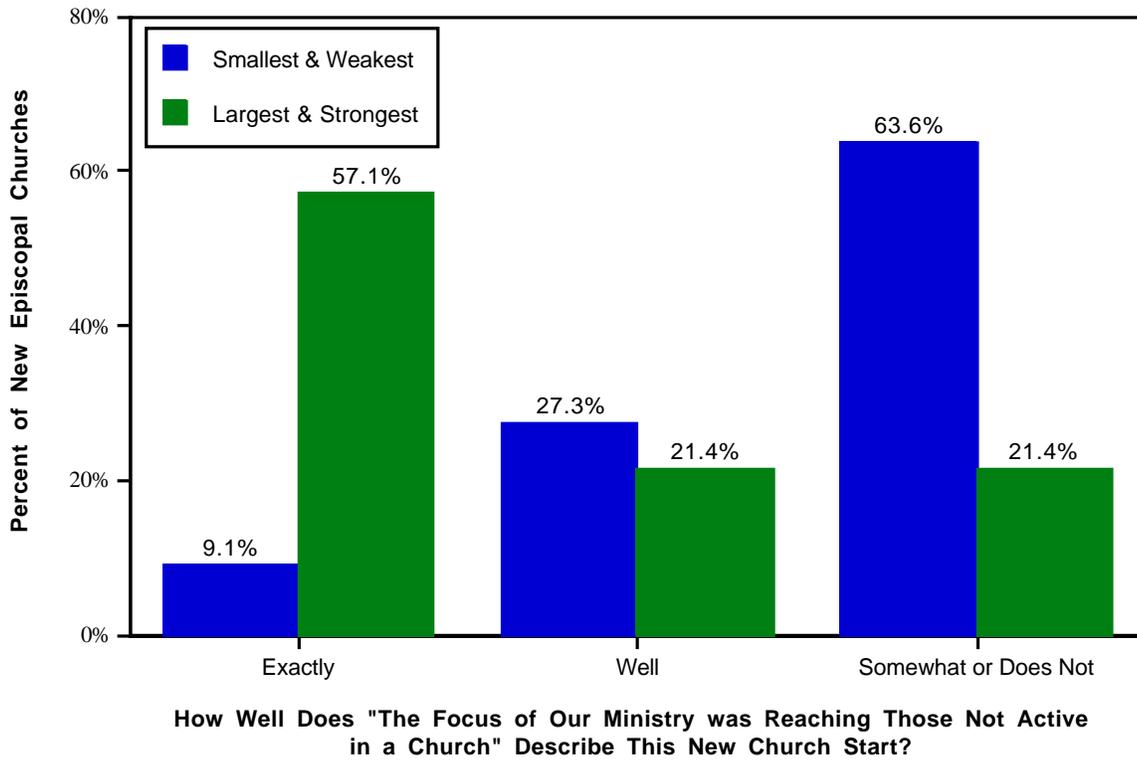
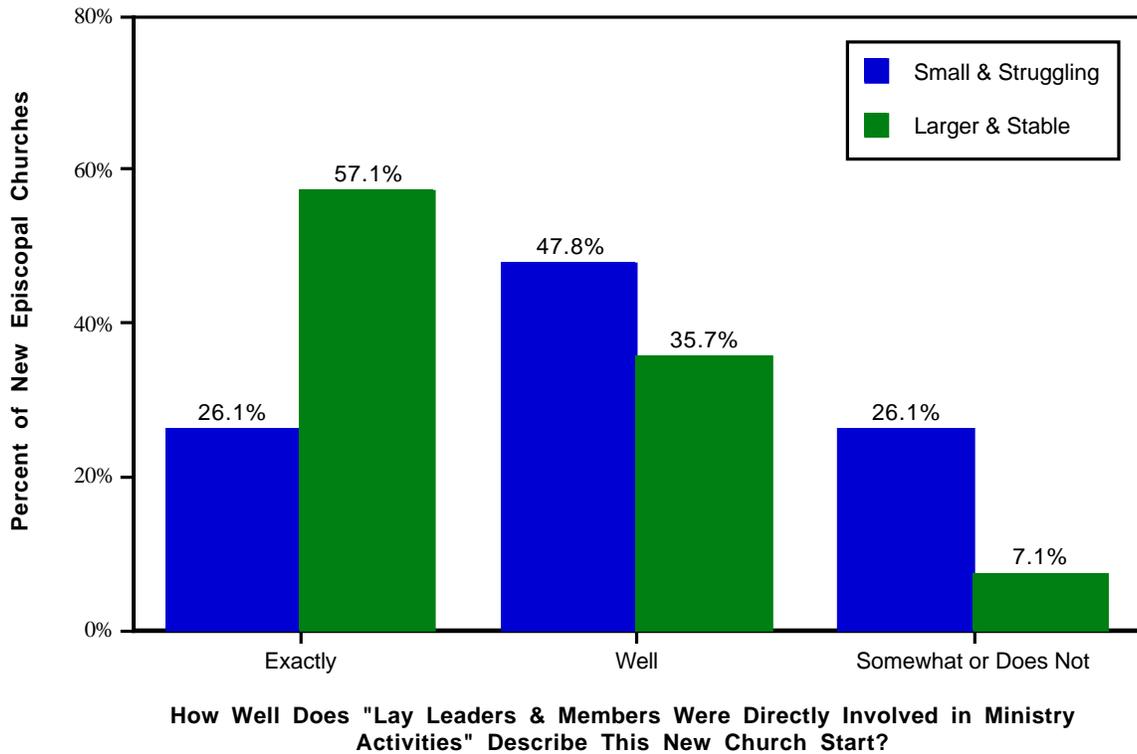


Figure 12

Ministry by Laity and New Church Success



Intentional and cooperative outreach efforts are more important than any other active new church development strategy, according to these data. Other related but less central factors include: a core group of lay people who prayed with the pastor, priority given to developing goals and objectives, and personal (direct) contact with potential members via phone, mail or visit. Other (less direct) publicity efforts, such as radio, TV, print advertising, community service, and so forth were unrelated to new church growth. The data also show that the development and use of new member classes is related to new church success. In the context of such classes, activities that seem to matter include explaining the vision and direction of the congregation and having staff and laity describe how the church works.

Generally speaking, new churches that grow in size and involvement, and do so from the start, are good at recruiting and assimilating new members. They do this by conviction, through education, and as a cooperative project involving the pastor and laity. As soon as someone becomes a formal part of “who” a church is, it is imperative that they share a conviction about “where” that congregation is going and they understand (and become involved in) “how” the church plans to get there.

The Current Pastor Survey

The current pastor survey dealt with many of the same general issues as the founding pastor survey, but the current pastor survey was somewhat less focused. Some questions asked about what the church was like when the current pastor arrived. Other questions asked about the first two years after that date. And still other questions asked about what the church is doing **now**. In a sense, this questionnaire was something of a “reality check” for the founding pastor questionnaire. The problem was that the hoped-for outcome of the factors measured was

unclear. Obviously, it did not make sense to examine the relationship between current pastor responses and new church success. In most cases the current pastor arrived well into or after the seven-year time frame for success that was used in the previous section. So we turned to two other outcome variables for our analysis of this survey. First, we looked at growth/decline in membership and worship attendance from 1994 to 1999. Second, we examined the degree of agreement between founding pastors and current pastors on certain items that were highly related to NCD success on the founding pastors survey.

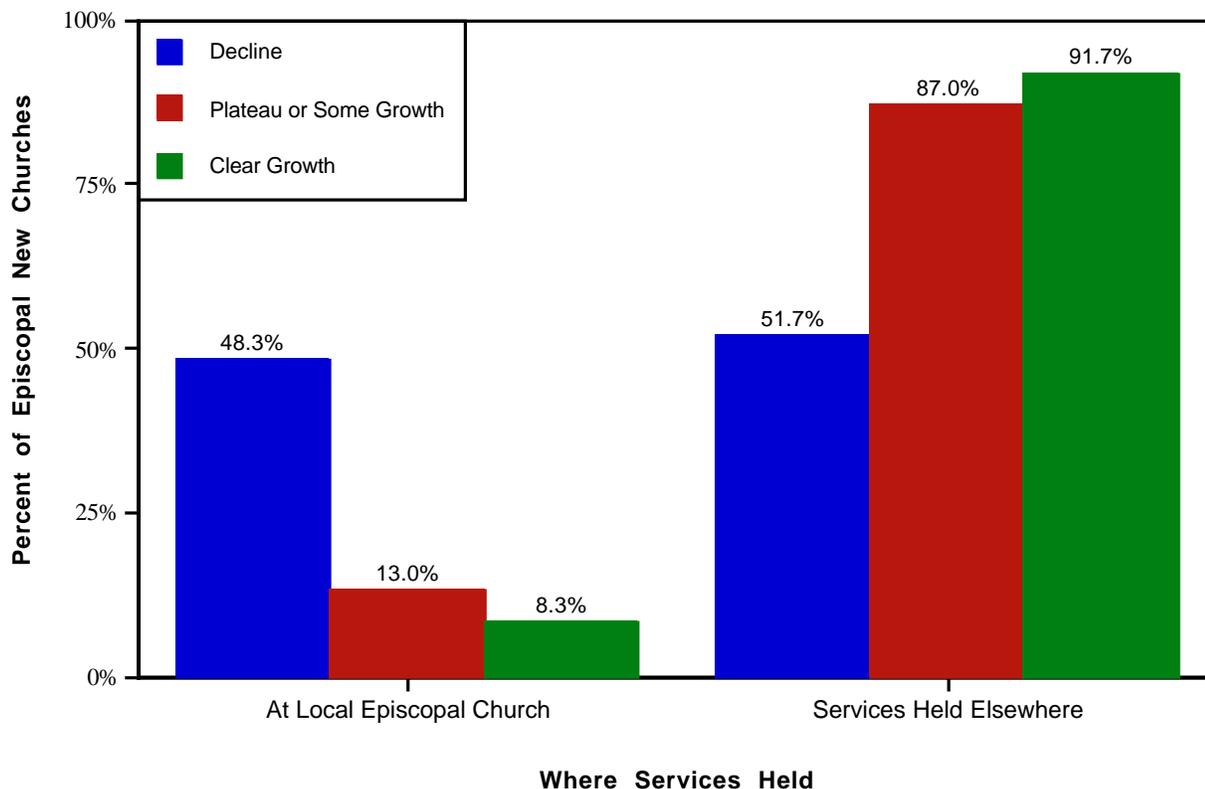
A total of 124 founding pastor surveys were returned to the Episcopal Church Center for data entry and analysis. That more current pastor surveys than founding pastor surveys were returned was not surprising given the difficulty involved in locating some founding pastors, as well as disagreement over who exactly was the official founding pastor of some new churches.

Growth/Decline. Relatively few questions on the current pastor survey were significantly or strongly related to the recent growth of Episcopal new church starts. As expected, demographic variables were related to growth/decline, but not as strongly as they were to the initial formation of a strong new church. The character of the local context has a great deal to do with whether a new church start “takes root,” but once a new church is established, its continued growth or lack thereof is more a function of what is happening within the organism itself.

One question that was related to the recent **decline** of new Episcopal churches was where current services are held. As can be seen in Figure 13, new churches that continue to hold services using the facilities of another Episcopal church are much more likely to have declined in membership and attendance than churches which hold their services elsewhere. It is likely that this relationship is as much a result of failure to thrive as it is a cause of decline. Churches that are doing well are unlikely to remain in a setting that cannot help but confuse their identity and undermine their ability to advertise their presence in the community.

Figure 13

Where Current Services are Held and Recent Growth/Decline



Following an “intentional growth strategy” also was related to growth. The current pastors of growing churches were more likely to say that the congregation had followed such a strategy since they arrived than were the pastors of declining congregations. The relationship is not extremely strong, however, and it may reflect a tendency to reinterpret past actions in light of present results. (See Figure 14)

Somewhat more interesting as a correlate of growth was a question about maintaining “numerous points of contact with the local community” during the first two years after the current pastor arrived. As can be seen in Figure 15, growing churches tend to maintain a close relationship with the local community, whereas declining churches are particularly unlikely to have a connection of this type. This question was related to NCD success on the founding

pastor survey too, but the relationship with current growth is much stronger. It may be that such contacts are something of a given among very new churches and that variation in the degree of connection only occurs later. Churches that maintain contact with the local community continue to grow; whereas churches that turn inward tend to plateau or decline. Interestingly, there was a great deal of agreement between founding pastors and current pastors in response to this question. That is, when the founding and current pastor of the same church were asked about maintaining numerous points of contact with the local community, they tended to give similar answers. We can conclude, therefore, that stronger community relationships tend to be maintained over time and that the effect they have on new church success increases as the church ages.

Figure 14

Following an Intentional Growth Strategy and Recent Growth/Decline

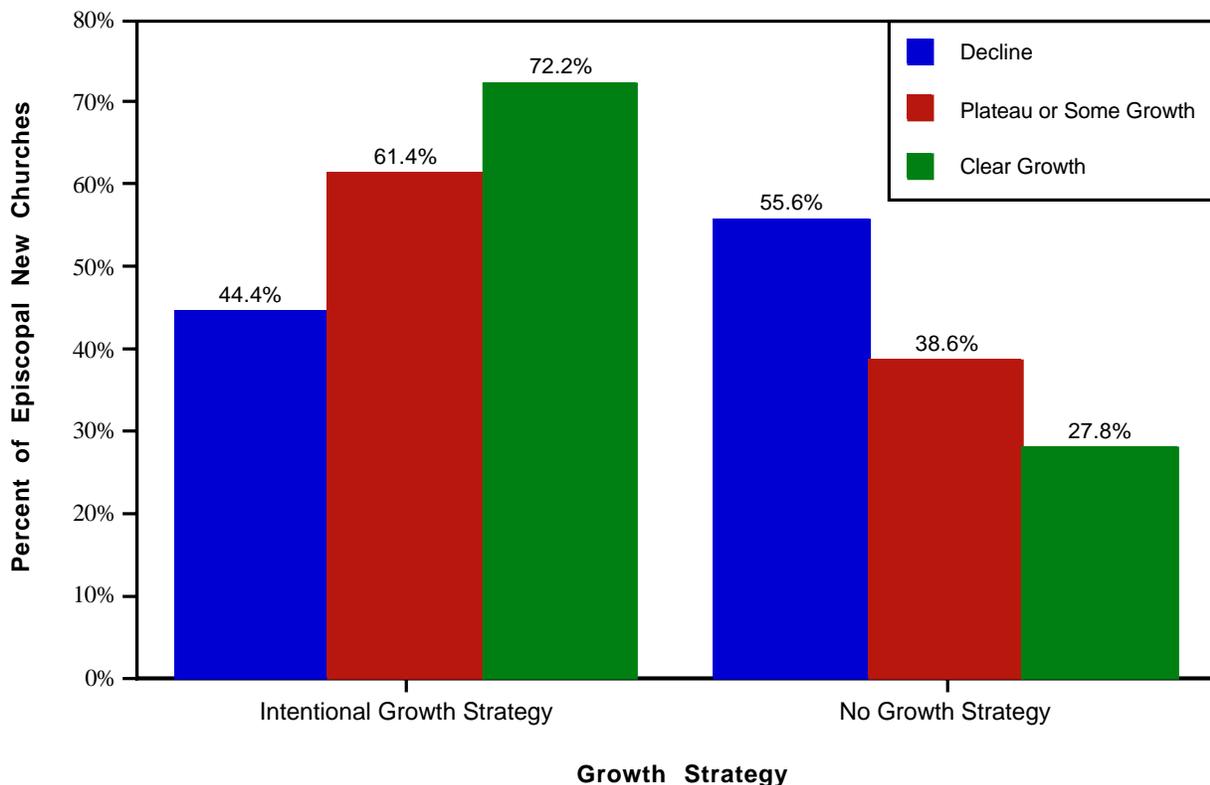
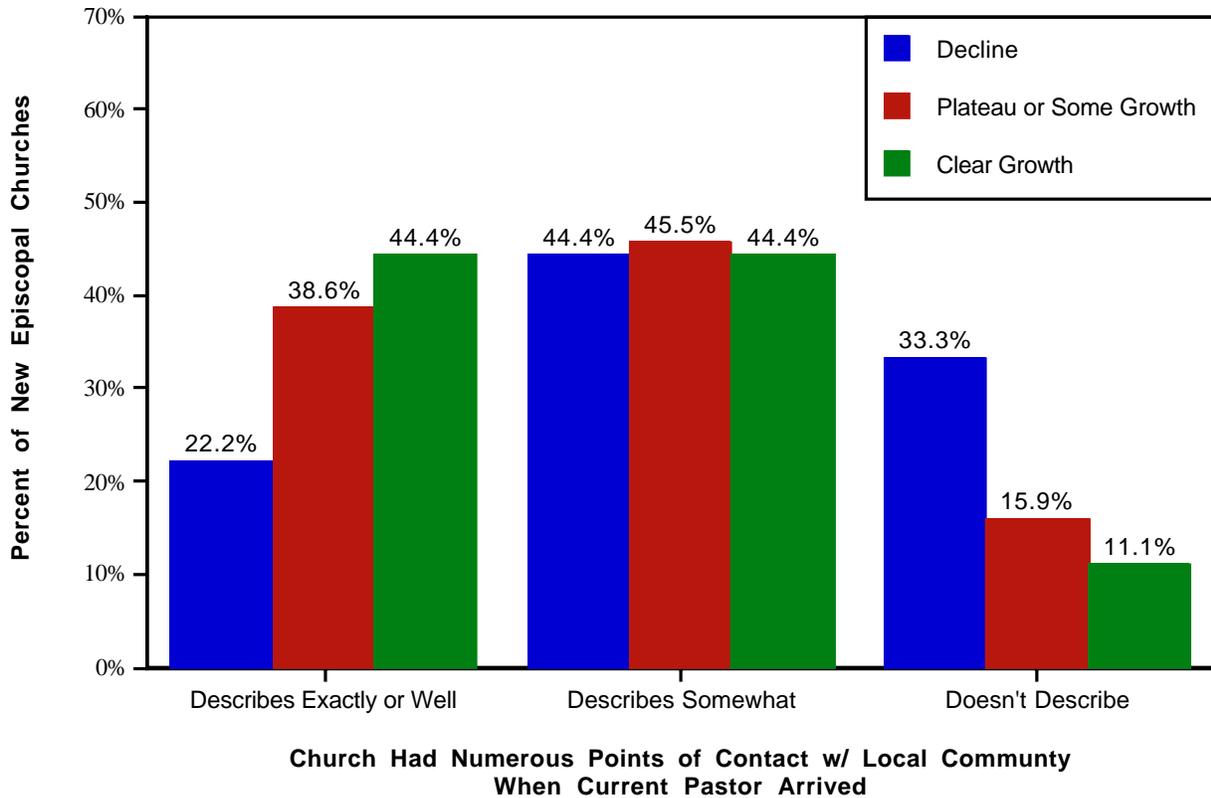


Figure 15

Numerous Points of Contact with Local Community and Recent Growth/Decline



Other significant growth/decline correlates were as follows:

1. Help from the diocese or national denominational office was related to decline rather than growth (probably because struggling churches needed more help than did successful new church starts).
2. Recruiting new members for organization/ministry responsibilities very early was related to growth.
3. Current pastors who said “I like to be challenged “ and “I have the energy to take on additional tasks” tended to be in declining or plateaued churches rather than growing congregations. Apparently pastors of growing churches have more than enough problems and things to do with their time and energy.

4. Current pastors who say that “sharing with unchurched people our faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ” is “very important” are more likely to be found in plateaued and declining churches. The pastors of growing churches are more likely to say that doing so is “important” not that it is “not very important” or “not at all important.” The issue is one of stress and also possibly the evangelical tone of the question.

Founding Pastor—Current Pastor Agreement. In fifty-nine cases, surveys were returned by both the current *and* founding pastor. For these churches we were able to compare the similarity of responses. We examined the similarity in two areas: 1) questions about the training and experience of lay leaders; and 2) congregational identity/ministry focus questions (focus on reaching inactive persons; sharing the same vision; tracking prospects; points of contact with the local community, etc.). Both sets of questions included items that were strongly related to new church success.

We found strong agreement between the founding and current pastor regarding the degree to which lay leaders were trained in outreach programs. Substantial agreement also was found regarding training/experience in conflict resolution, congregational planning, congregational development and business/management. Other lay training/experience questions showed lower levels of commonality. It should be noted, however, that the founding pastor survey referred to the training of the **original** lay leaders and the current pastor survey asked about the lay leaders of the church when the current pastor arrived. So they were not necessarily evaluating the training/experience of the same people.

Strong agreement was found regarding all of the identity/ministry focus questions except for two items (“reaching those not active in a church” and “church leaders shared the same vision for the church’s future”). Agreement was particularly strong for “numerous points of contact with the local community,” “members were a major source for unchurched prospects,” “intentional, systematic efforts to track visitors, contacts and other prospects,” and “lay leaders

and members were directly involved in ministry activities.” Agreement was substantial for “lay leaders received practical training in their respective responsibilities” and “I had a core lay group who regularly prayed with/for me.” These questions referred to the first two years of the life of the new church in the founding pastor survey and to the first two years after the current pastor arrived in the current pastor survey.

Overall, we concluded that the degree of commonality between the founding and current pastor was remarkable, particularly for the identity/ministry focus questions.

Lay Leader Survey

The lay leader survey was distributed to up to five lay members who were knowledgeable about the new church and preferably were members at the time that the church was founded. A total of 551 lay leaders completed forms, representing 151 new church starts.

Given that the *church* was the primary unit of analysis in this project rather than individual members it was necessary to aggregate or combine lay responses to the lay leader survey. That is, we computed the mean (average) score for each church for each question on the survey.

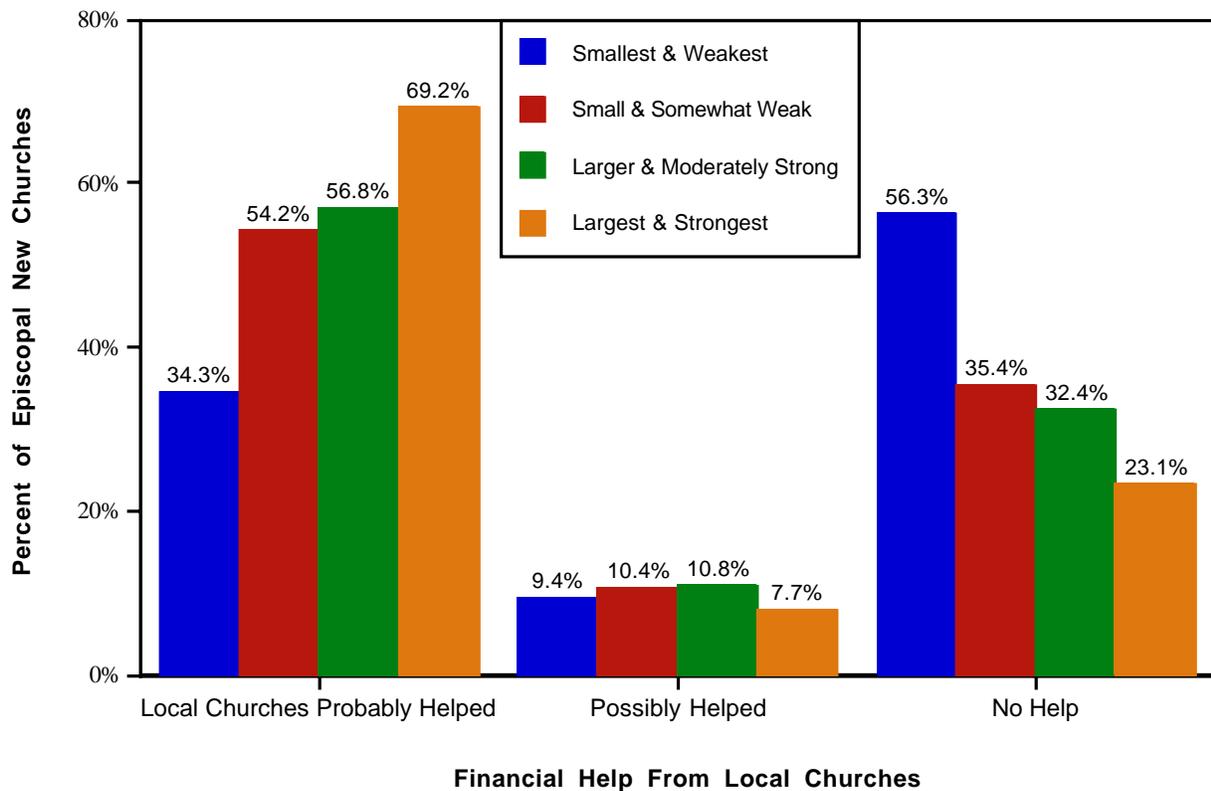
Since ideally the lay respondents were members of the church during its founding years, it seemed appropriate to treat their aggregated responses in the same manner as responses from the founding pastors. We examined the relationship of aggregated survey responses to the success in establishing larger, stronger new churches (rather than looking at recent growth).

Financial Assistance. Lay responses to the survey indicated that financial assistance from local churches and the diocese was related to the success of new Episcopal churches. Figure 16 shows the relationship between financial help from local churches and NCD success. Lay leaders in

successful new church starts were much more likely to indicate that other churches had provided financial assistance than were less successful new church starts.

Figure 16

**Financial Assistance From Other Local Churches
(According to Lay Leaders) and New Church Success**



The same relationship between *local church* financial assistance and NCD success was found in the founding pastor survey, although it was not as strong. No such relationship was found between NCD success and financial assistance from the **diocese** in the founding pastor survey. Indeed, on the founding pastor survey the correlation was reversed, so that financial assistance from the diocese was associated with lack of success. This correlation was not statistically significant, however.

Training of Laity. Lay training and experience was found to be very important to new church success in the founding pastor survey. The same was true for the lay leader survey, although the

specific questions varied in importance. In the founding pastor survey, the key questions were about practical evangelism skills, outreach programs, conflict resolution, and new church development experience (in that order). For the lay leader survey, the key questions were small group development experience, practical evangelism skills (again), business/management experience, and congregational planning (in that order). The key point, however, is that out of all the many questions in the two surveys, lay leader training and experience was found to be very important on both. Furthermore, there was strong agreement between founding pastors and lay leaders on the extent to which lay leaders had experience and training in practical evangelism skills—the one area that was significantly correlated with new church success on both surveys.

Figure 17

**Experience & Training in Small Group Development
(According to Lay Leaders) and New Church Success**

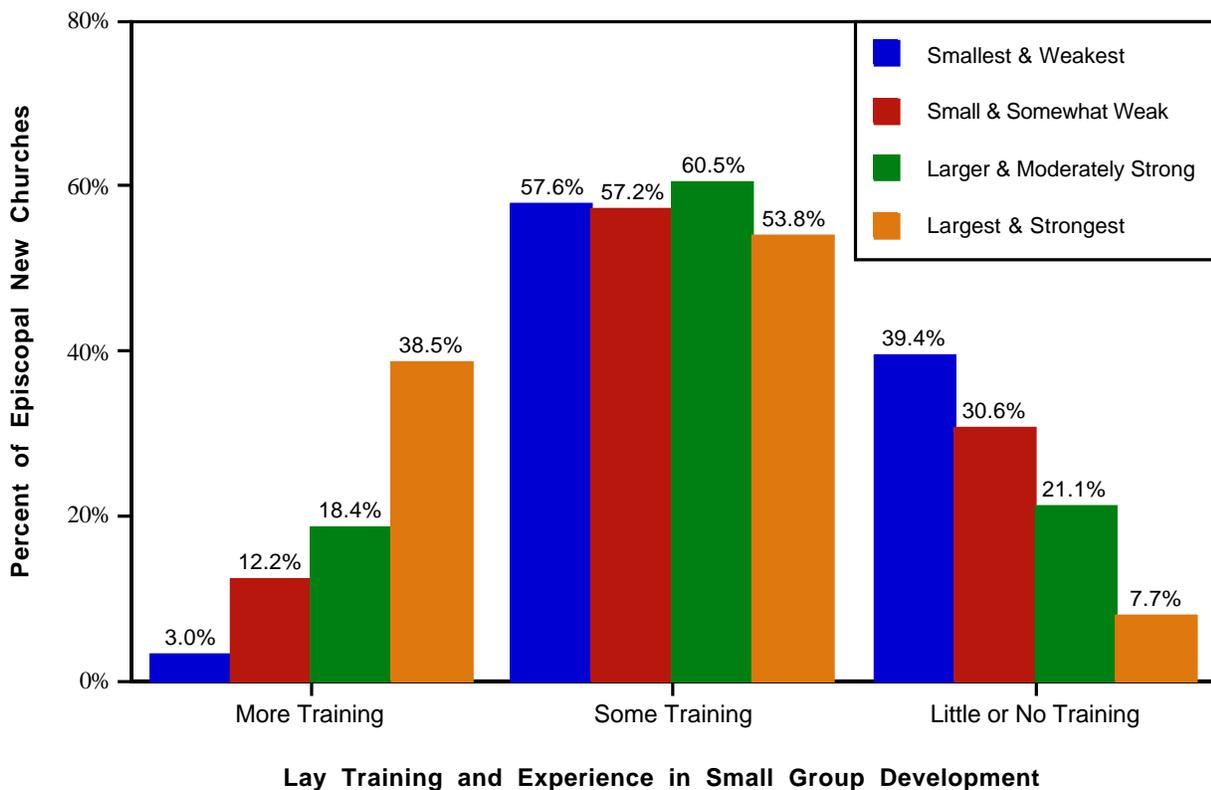
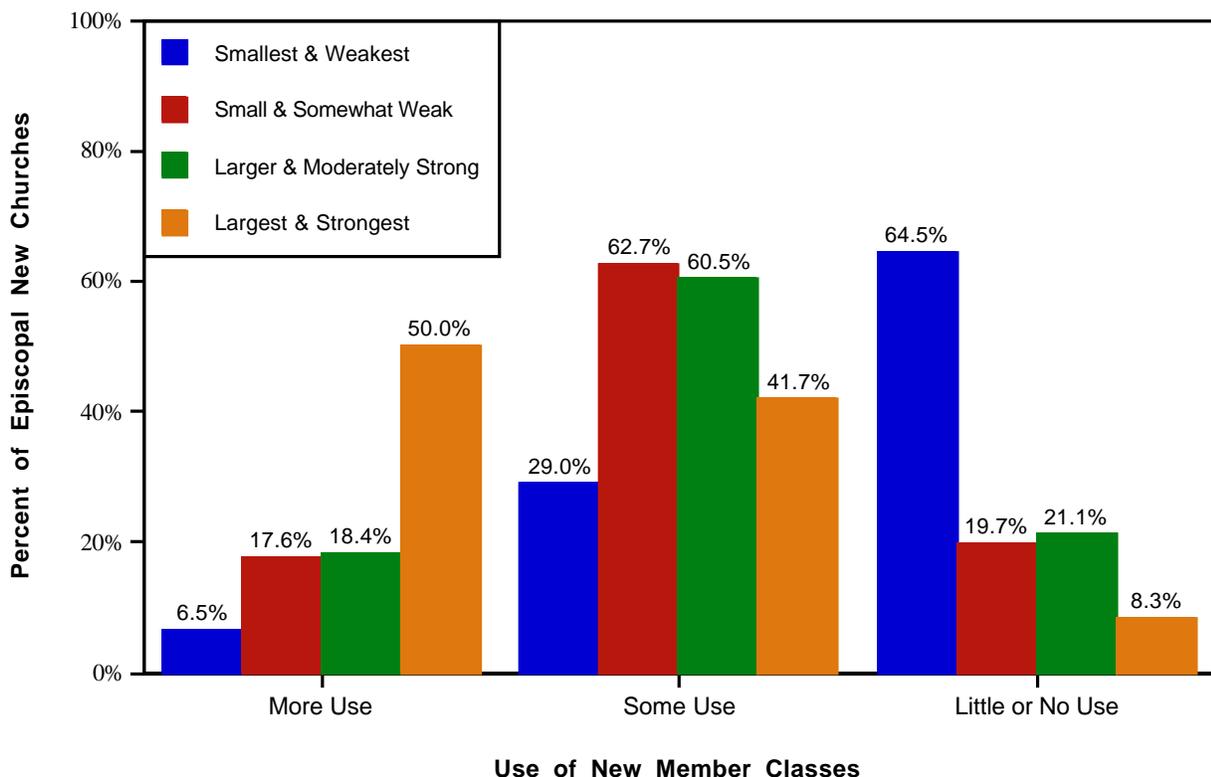


Figure 17 (above) shows the relationship between the strongest correlate of new church success among the lay leader training/experience questions on the lay leader survey. As can be seen, for very successful new church starts there was a much greater likelihood that lay leaders to say they had some or a great deal of experience/training in small group development. Most new churches fell in the middle range, however, with lay leaders indicating either lower levels of experience and training or lack of commonality in their opinions about this area (resulting in a middle-range average score among lay leaders).

New Member Assimilation. The importance of small groups to new church success was seen again in a series of questions about new member assimilation. Two questions, one about new member classes and another about small group opportunities were very strongly related to new church success in the lay leader survey. An additional new member assimilation question,

Figure 18

Use of New Member Classes to Assimilate New Members (According to Lay Leaders) and New Church Success

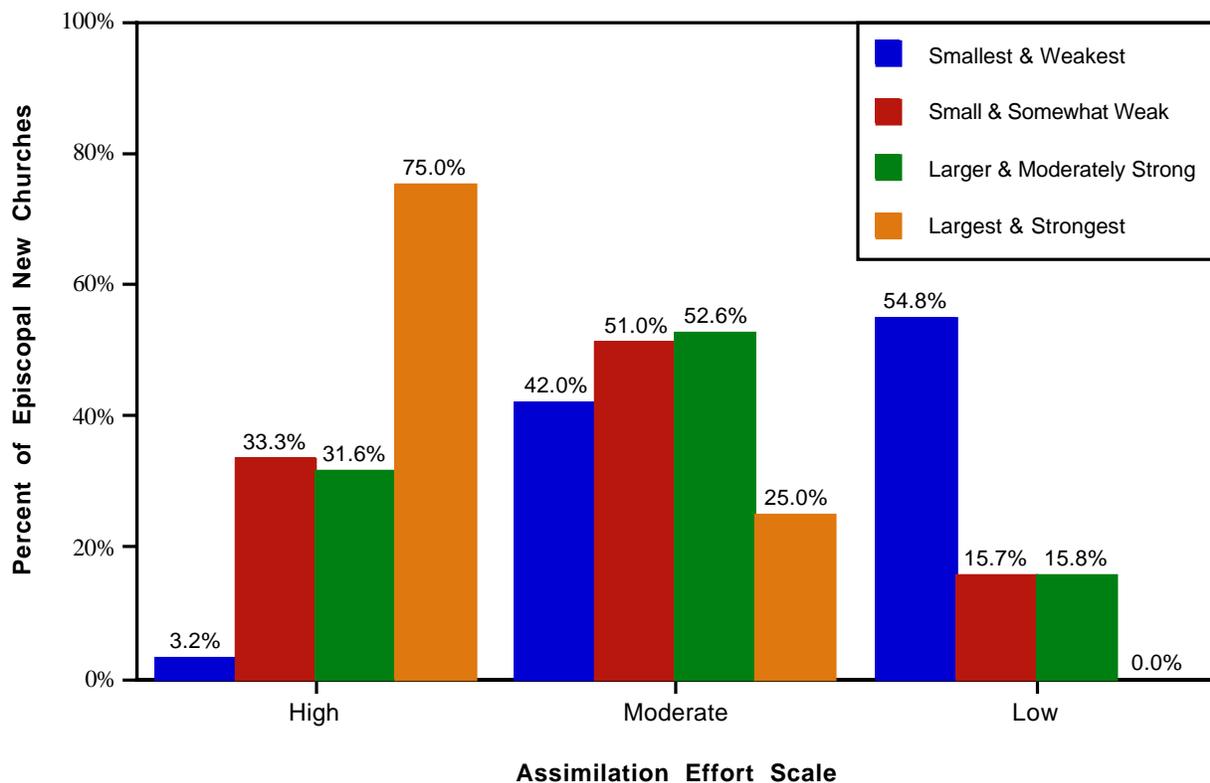


dealing with assigning a sponsor to each new member was moderately (and significantly) related to NCD success.

Figure 18 (above) shows the relationship between using new member classes for assimilation and NCD success in the lay leader survey. Figure 19 combines the three new member assimilation questions into an assimilation effort scale. This scale is more strongly related to NCD success than any other question or series of questions on the lay leader survey. There is an additive relationship among new member classes, small group opportunities and new member sponsorship. The more a church does these things, the more likely is the new church to succeed. Lay leaders and founding pastors were in close agreement regarding the congregation’s use of new member classes (probably because of its objective nature). There was less agreement on the two other assimilation questions.

Figure 19

**Assimilation Efforts (According to Lay Leaders)
and New Church Success**



Church Identity/Ministry Focus. All of the identity/ministry focus questions on the lay leader survey were significantly related to the success of Episcopal new churches, except for the question about a focus on reaching those not active in the church. This question was positively associated with NCD success, but not strongly. More powerful correlates of success included the following statements: “our members were a major source for unchurched prospects,” “church leaders shared the same vision for the church’s future,” and “the church had numerous points of contact with the local community.”

Figure 20 shows the relationship between numerous points of contact with the local community and new church success. Churches where lay leaders indicate that such points of contact exist were more likely to be successful than churches where lay leaders suggested that the local community connection was more tenuous.

Figure 20

Points of Contact With Local Community (According to Lay Leaders) and New Church Success

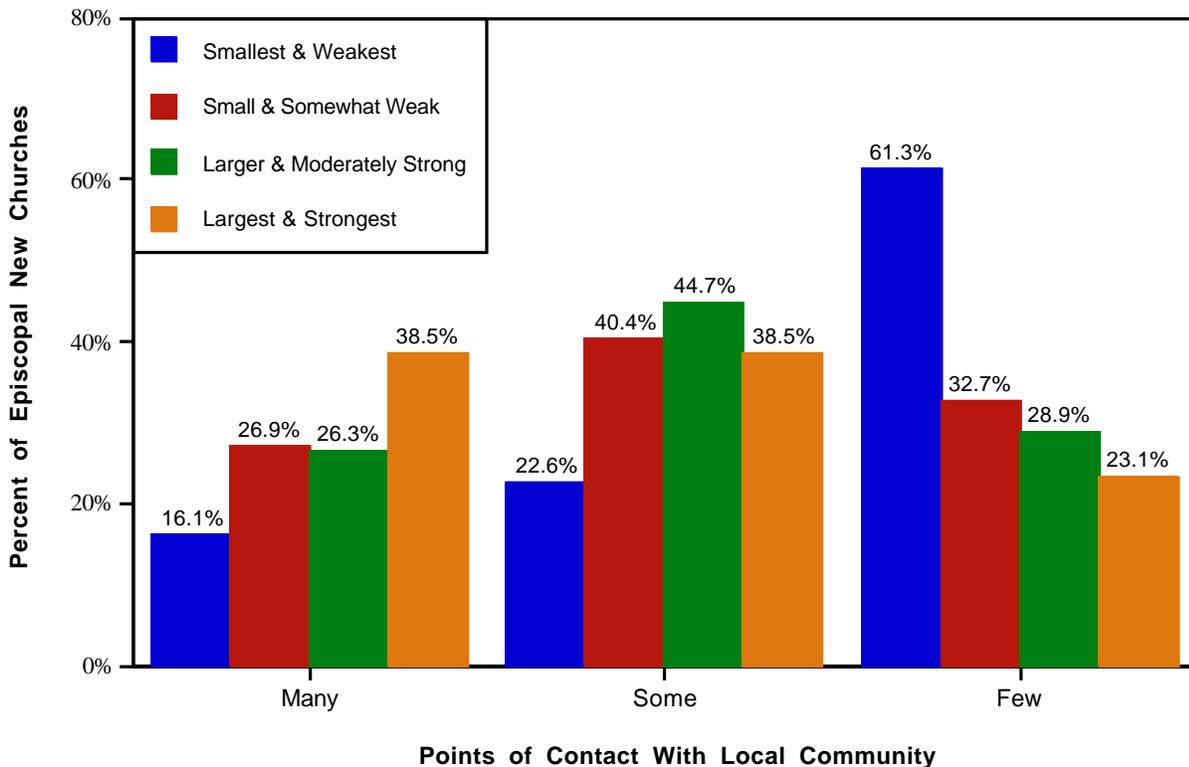
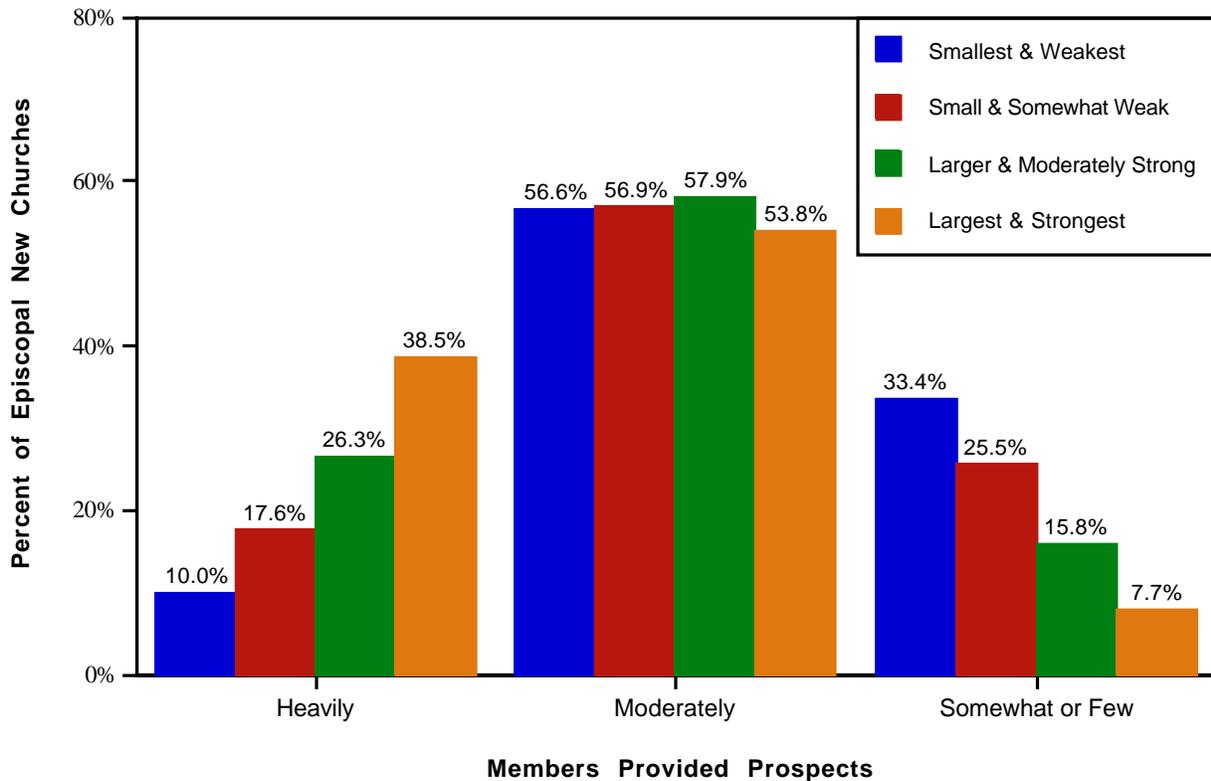


Figure 21 looks at whether lay leaders think that the members of the church were a major source of unchurched prospects. As can be seen in the chart, more successful new church starts tend to exhibit a higher rate of assent to this question. Using members as a source of unchurched prospects also was related to NCD success on the founding pastor questionnaire. The relationship was not as strong as other aspects of identity/ministry focus on that survey, however. Still, there was a significant level of commonality between lay leader responses and founding pastor responses regarding this question. In fact, there was significant agreement between lay leaders and founding pastors on **all** of the identity/ministry focus questions.

Figure 21

Members Were a Major Source of Prospects (According to Lay Leaders) and New Church Success



Conclusions

New churches are started in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Not all of the churches we start will be successful, however. Gone are the days when any new church was likely to survive and even thrive. Today, new church development is difficult; and making the process even more risky is the fact that building costs and ministerial support expenses require a larger size than was necessary in earlier eras.

The results of this study of new church development suggest factors that are related to new church success. We detail things that were helpful and unhelpful for new Episcopal congregations in the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so we are not suggesting that every successful new church **must** have all of the characteristics that we have identified in order to thrive. Each new church is a unique incarnation and it is not necessary, for instance, for every new church to be planted in expanding, affluent suburbs. Still, we should be aware that a new church planted with adequate site selection efforts in an expanding, affluent suburb is much more likely to survive and thrive than one planted in a small, non-growing, blue-collar town. We should note that these results apply to predominantly white new church starts. A few churches with large non-white racial/ethnic memberships are included in this study, but the vast majority of churches are predominantly white.

The required characteristics for an effective new church pastor are not as clear as we might like for them to be. It helps to be younger, clearly. Gender doesn't seem to matter, nor does being a charismatic, evangelistic "soul winner." The role of ministerial training and experience is not definite. What begins to emerge, however, is that the successful new church pastor is driven to get this new thing going. He or she is good at starting groups from scratch and at setting an agenda for the group that is being formed. A key character trait, therefore, is the ability to recruit, organize and train laity, so that the group begins doing the task of ministry together, rather than the pastor alone.

Many questions on the three surveys presume that evangelism is key to new church success. And although some questions lend support to that presumption (particularly lay training in practical evangelism skills), overall the results were more consistent with an outward-oriented, welcoming attitude than to evangelism as it is colloquially understood. Successful new church starts let people know they are there through direct contact. They send things to homes; they call people on the phone; and they visit people in the community (more than likely in a non-threatening manner). A successful new church start is organized because there was a need for it in the community. It reaches out to people who have not found a church where they can feel at home, and it responds in the most obvious way when newcomers come to visit: it keeps track of them, contacts them and sends them literature and invitations to special events. When newcomers join the new church it uses new member classes and other small groups to assimilate them.

Doing the things that must be done to start and grow a new church requires a certain amount of training and experience on the part of lay leaders. Nearly everything helps one way or another: evangelism, small group development, conflict resolution, planning, new church development skills, outreach programs, organizational development, and business management skills. Obviously, some things require more training than others. Above all it would seem that a key skill for new church pastors would be the ability to help people identify and use their gifts—whether those gifts are based on past experience (in business, for instance) or require a certain amount of training to enhance what they already know.

Finally, it helps to start strong. Efforts that lead to a larger initial size are not wasted.

Comments on Initial Project Hypotheses

A series of 10 hypotheses were outlined early in the project in order to guide survey development (at least to some extent). For the sake of clarity we chose a thematic approach to the presentation of data rather than basing our report on the hypotheses. But because non-

relationships are sometimes as instructive as strong relationships, we list the hypothesis below along with comments about how they were either supported or not supported by the data from new Episcopal churches.

H1. Effective Clergy leadership is critical to the development of effective new churches.

1a. NCD Clergy who have completed some formal assessment have a higher probability of being successful than non-assessed Clergy.

There was no relationship between formal assessment or screening and new church success.

2a. The assignment process impacts the eventual success of NCD clergy.

Placement through the “normal procedure used by our denomination for clergy placement” was associated with NCD success, but the relationship was weak and not statistically significant. The question about volunteering or being recommended as a new church development pastor also was unrelated to success. There was a significant relationship between new church success and intentional efforts to match personal gifts with the particular church call. Founding pastors who said, “no intentional efforts were made” were more likely to have been pastors of new churches that remained small and weak.

H2. Effective NCD clergy exhibit a set of competencies and behaviors that cross denominational/ethnic boundaries.

2a. Clergy who are able to articulate a compelling vision for the ministry of the NCD are more likely to develop an effective new start.

The vision question did not say anything about a “compelling” vision, but articulating a vision was related to new church success. However, it was more important for church leaders to share the same vision than for the pastor to “clearly articulate a vision.”

2b. Clergy who exhibit key leadership qualities (willingness to take risks, to be coached, to “give away” ministry and emphasize relational incorporation into the NCD fellowship) are more likely to develop an effective new start.

Most of the questions about the founding pastor’s personal ministerial style were unrelated to

NCD success. Questions like “I frequently ask advice of more experienced pastors” did not discriminate between more and less successful new church starts. Successful founding pastors did say they were best at starting groups from scratch, however. Questions related to “giving away” ministry were related to success for the most part.

2c. Clergy who focus their activity on evangelistic outreach are more likely to develop an effective new start.

Successful founding pastors did not tend to fit the evangelical “soul winner” mode and several pastors made comments that the language of the evangelism questions did not fit the Episcopal church very well. Questions about priority given to “sharing our faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ” or “making disciples of the unchurched” were unrelated to NCD success. Similarly, the question about when was the last time you assisted a person in making a first-time affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior was not related to NCD success. However, the question about how many people the founding pastor assisted in making “first time commitments” was associated to NCD success. Ministers who said “none” were more likely to have been pastors of unsuccessful new church starts.

The success of a new church start clearly has more to do with what the church as a whole does in terms of evangelism and outreach as led by the pastor, rather than the individual evangelistic efforts and orientation of the founding pastor.

2d. Clergy who demonstrate a genuine affinity for the local context/culture are more likely to develop an effective new start.

The only question that was close to this issue dealt with the church rather than the clergy person. This question, “the church had numerous points of contact with the local community” was related to growth on the current pastor survey and to NCD success on the lay leader survey. A weak (non-significant) but positive relationship with NCD success was found for this question on the founding pastor survey.

H3. NCD clergy who define evangelism holistically are more likely to develop effective new starts.

3a. Clergy who focus on bringing people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ are more likely to develop effective new starts.

This sub-hypothesis does not seem to be related to a holistic conception of evangelism. See 2c

above for comments about personal evangelism on the part of the founding pastor and new church success.

3b. Clergy who received formative training in the theology/methods of evangelism are more likely to develop effective new starts than those who lack such training.

There was no relationship between experience and training in evangelism and NCD success. There was a weak and insignificant relationship between several background evangelism emphasis issues (emphasis in seminary, emphasis by a pastor or spiritual mentor, etc.) and NCD success.

3c. Clergy who effectively disciple new members from converts to ministry participants are more likely to develop an effective new start.

This issue was not directly tested. “Recruiting new members for organization/ministry responsibilities very early” was related to NCD success on the lay leader survey.

H4. Effective lay leadership is critical to the development of effective new churches.

4a. Lay leaders with some intentional training will be more successful than those without training.

The impact of lay training was strongly supported

4b. Lay leaders actively recruited by the founding pastor will be more successful than volunteers.

Questions that got at this issue did so only indirectly. They were not related to NCD success. The important issue seems to be the skills and experience of lay leaders, not how they came into the church.

H5. NCDs whose ministry focus continues to be those not currently members will be more successful than those whose focus turns inward toward institutional and programmatic maintenance.

5a. The most successful new starts will focus on the non-churched.

A focus on the unchurched (on the part of the church) was strongly related to NCD success.

5b. Moderately successful new starts will focus on the formerly churched.

This issue was not tested. We doubt that any NCD intentionally targets the “formerly churched” to the exclusion of the “non-churched.” Furthermore, studies of the unchurched population show that nearly everyone in America who does not attend church is “formerly churched” in some way or another (even if only through childhood involvement in the church).

H6. NCDs who receive resource support from the local judicatory will be more successful than other NCDs.

The role (positive or negative) of the local judicatory in helping a new church succeed was not clear from survey results.

H7. NCDs that follow a multi-year plan will be more successful than those who do not have or follow such a plan.

7a. NCDs with a strategy plan will be more likely to grow than those who omit such a plan.

There was no real support for this hypothesis.

7b. NCDs with a missional vision to intentionally grow will be more likely to be successful.

NCDs where lay leaders share the same vision are more likely to be successful. “A missional vision to intentionally grow” was not tested.

H8. Local demographic context will have a critical impact on NCD success.

8a. NCDs in high growth or transition communities who focus on the new growth residents or a significant segment of the residents will grow more rapidly than those in low/moderate growth areas.

Population growth was related to NCD success. The relationship between new housing starts and success was stronger, however. The impact of “transition” was not clear. Other studies have shown that most forms of transition (other than population growth through new housing) are detrimental to church membership growth.

8b. NCDs that focus on cultural affinity groups in their local community will grow more rapidly than NCDs that do not focus on such groups.

Having numerous points of contact with the local community was associated with growth on the current pastor survey and NCD success on the lay leader survey. The relationship was positive but weak on the founding pastor survey.

H9. NCDs with numerous ways of attracting the unchurched will be more successful than those with few points of entry.

The impact of having “numerous ways” was unclear in the survey. Some ways churches use to publicize the church were related to failure rather than success. The best ways were telemarketing, direct mail and door-to-door visits. Alone, each of these items was weakly associated with NCD success. However, when combined in a scale they were moderately and significantly related to the development of a strong new church.

H10. Those NCDs with the most assets (i.e., combine good leadership, good demographic prospects and appropriate resource support) will be the most successful.

This is likely to be true, but there were not enough Episcopal new churches to test it adequately. Multivariate analysis is required.

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