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Continuity and Change in American Congregations: Introducing the Second Wave of the National Congregations Study*

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The second wave of the National Congregations Study (NCS-II) was conducted in 2006-07. The 2006 General Social Survey asked respondents who attend religious services to name their religious congregation. This new nationally representative cross-section of congregations was supplemented with a randomly selected sample of congregations who participated in the 1998 NCS. Data about these congregations was collected via a 45-minute interview with one key informant from 1,506 congregations. Information was gathered about multiple aspects of congregations' social composition, structure, activities, and programming. Approximately 60 percent of the NCS-II questionnaire replicates items from 1998. Each congregation was geocoded, and data from the 2000 United States census have been appended. This article describes NCS-II methodology, reports results from many of the variables measured in both waves, and highlights trends involving congregational use of computer technology, worship styles, clergy age, and the demographic composition of congregations and their neighborhoods.

Congregations remain the most significant social form of American religion. Thanks to a near explosion of research on congregations in recent years, we now know a lot about them. We know their typical patterns of connection to other religious and community organizations (Ammerman 2005), their place in our

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social welfare system (Chaves 2004; Cnaan 2002), their political activities (Beyerlein and Chaves 2003), how they struggle to meet the needs of contemporary families (Edgell 2006), how they achieve, or fail to achieve, racial and ethnic diversity (Emerson 2006), the conflicts they experience (Becker 1999), the extent to which they demographically reflect their neighborhoods (Woolever and Bruce 2008), how American congregations compare to congregations in other countries (Bruce, et al. 2006), and much more.

The 1998 National Congregations Study (NCS) increased our knowledge about many aspects of congregations, including their race and gender dynamics (Adams 2007; Emerson 2006; Edwards 2008; Konieczny and Chaves 2000), worship practices (Chaves 2004), and forms of civic engagement (Chaves 2004; Chaves, et al. 2002). It provided a basis for the best available estimate of the number of congregations in the United States (Hadaway and Marler 2005) and allowed us to establish for the first time an annual mortality rate for congregations (Anderson, et al. 2008).

Wave II of the NCS (NCS-II) was conducted in 2006-07, providing a new opportunity to track continuity and change among American congregations. In this article we describe NCS-II methodology, present descriptive statistics for most items measured in both waves, and highlight four kinds of change since 1998. Nine years is not a long time in the realm of religious change. This relatively short time span makes these four changes that much more compelling, especially against the backdrop of substantial continuity (some of which is surprising) also evident in these data.

THE NCS-II

The NCS-II essentially replicated the 1998 NCS (Chaves, et al. 1999), with some differences and enhancements. In this section we describe key features of the NCS-II. Appendix A provides more methodological detail.

The Sample

The General Social Survey (GSS) is an in-person survey of a nationally representative sample of noninstitutionalized, English- or Spanish-speaking adults (Davis, et al. 2007). We asked respondents to the 2006 GSS who said they attended religious services at least once a year to tell us where they attend. The congregations named by these respondents constitute a new nationally representative sample of religious congregations in the United States. In addition to this new cross-section of congregations, we added a panel component to the NCS-II by drawing a stratified random sample of 326 congregations that participated in the 1998 NCS. Data were gathered from 1,506 congregations: 252 from the panel sample, 1,250 that were newly nominated, and four that were in the panel sample and also were newly nominated.

Data Collection

Data were gathered via a 45-minute interview with one key informant, usually a clergyperson, from each congregation. We attempted to conduct these interviews by telephone, but we visited congregations and conducted in-person interviews if necessary. Data were gathered between May 2006 and March 2007.

NCS-II data collection differed from NCS-I data collection in three important respects. First, because the 2006 GSS for the first time conducted interviews in Spanish, we translated the NCS-II questionnaire into Spanish and conducted 11 interviews in Spanish. Second, more summertime interviews were conducted in Wave II: 34 percent compared with 20 percent in 1998. Since many congregational activities are seasonal, analysts should ensure that differences between the two waves do not reflect a higher percentage of summer interviews in Wave II. For example, the percent of attenders in congregations that had a choir at its most recent main worship service is 72 percent in 1998 and 58 percent in 2006-07. This is partially a summer effect. Excluding summer services, the numbers are 74 percent in 1998 and 62 percent in 2006-07. This decline still is statistically significant, but less dramatic than it first appears.

Third, a different data collection strategy (described in Appendix A) produced more in-person interviews in Wave II: 22.5 percent versus 7.5 percent in 1998. Since congregations that were harder to locate and persuade to participate were more likely to be interviewed in person, the larger number of in-person interviews in Wave II raises the possibility that the Wave II sample includes more such congregations. Thus, change over time could be confounded with differences in sample composition.

For example, the percent of congregations led by African American clergy is 20 percent in 1998 and 25 percent in 2006-07. That is a statistically significant difference, but it just misses statistical significance ($p = .06$) after we control for the greater number of in-person interviews in Wave II. This suggests that what initially appears to be an increase since 1998 in the number of African-American-led congregations may in part reflect the 2006-07 field strategy that produced more in-person interviews. The statistically significant increase in the percentage of predominantly African American congregations, however, remains significant even after this control, though it too is smaller. The key point is that analysts should be aware of the possibility that change over time could be confounded with mode-of-administration differences or with differences in sample composition produced by a different field strategy.¹

¹This analysis does not imply that the NCS-II slightly over-represents African American congregations. Such congregations may instead be slightly under-represented in the 1998 NCS. In either case, the difference probably is not large enough to be of concern except when assessing change over time.

Weighting the Data

The probability that a congregation appears in the cross-sectional sample is proportional to its size. Because congregations are nominated by individuals attached to them, larger congregations are more likely to be in the sample than smaller congregations. Although larger congregations are over-represented in the NCS sample, they are over-represented by a known degree that can be undone with weights. Retaining or undoing this over-representation corresponds to viewing the data either from the perspective of attenders at the average congregation or from the perspective of the average congregation, without respect to its size.

A contrived example may help clarify this feature of the NCS sample. Suppose that the universe contains only two congregations, one with 1,000 regular attenders and the other with 100 regular attenders. Suppose further that the 1,000-person congregation supports a food pantry and the 100-person congregation does not. We can express this reality in one of two ways. We can say that 91 percent of the people are in a congregation that supports a food pantry ($1,000/1,100$), or we can say that 50 percent of the congregations support a food pantry ($1/2$). Both of these are meaningful numbers. Ignoring the over-representation of larger congregations, a percentage or mean from the NCS is analogous to the 91 percent in this example. Weighted inversely proportional to congregational size, a percentage or mean is analogous to the 50 percent in this example. The first number views congregations from the perspective of the average attender, which gives greater weight to congregations with more people in them; the second number views them from the perspective of the average congregation, ignoring size differences.

In both NCS waves, weights adjust for duplicate nominations and for the probability-proportional-to-size feature of the sample. NCS-II weights have two additional components. One additional component reflects the two-stage sampling design that the GSS began using in 2004. At a certain point in the GSS data collection process, a random half of the remaining cases were dropped from the sample. This cost-cutting design means that each GSS respondent interviewed in this second stage of data collection—after a random half of the remaining cases were dropped—represents him- or herself and someone else who was dropped from the sample. Data gathered from these respondents therefore must be weighted up in order for the final GSS sample to be nationally representative. In the NCS-II sample, congregations nominated by these respondents also must be weighted up.

Another new component to the NCS-II weights is required because congregations established after 1998 could not have been included in the panel sample. Adjusting for the disproportional presence of older congregations in the panel makes the full Wave II sample, including the panel cases, representative of the 2006-07 congregational population.

Response Rate and Nonresponse Bias

The cooperation rate for the panel sample was 81 percent; the cooperation rate for the new cross-sectional sample was 85 percent. The overall response rate, calculated conservatively but not taking account of the GSS's own response rate, was 78 percent. Taking into account the GSS's 71 percent response rate reduces the NCS-II response rate to 58 percent. We care about a response rate, however, only as a proxy for nonresponse bias. Direct assessments of nonresponse bias, described in Appendix A, give little reason for concern.

Overall, the NCS-II sample is much like the 1998 NCS sample. The NCS-II sample is bigger, and it includes a panel component. When weighted properly, the full Wave II sample of 1,506 congregations represents the 2006-07 population of congregations. Taken together, the two waves of the NCS allow us to examine continuity and change in American congregations. We turn now to such an examination.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

Sixty percent of the NCS-II questionnaire replicates the 1998 questionnaire. We take advantage of this replication to assess continuity and change in American congregations since 1998. Appendix B provides descriptive statistics for many variables measured in both waves of the NCS. Because we conduct multiple significance tests, and because weighting the data inflates standard errors, we adopt a conservative approach to assessing change: we interpret a difference between 1998 and 2006-07 as reflecting a real change only if the difference is significant at least at the .01 level or if several related items all point to the same underlying change. We also have confirmed that none of the differences that we highlight in the text are produced by the data collection differences described above.²

Continuity

Nine years is not a long time in the realm of religious change, and we expected to observe much continuity. This expectation was indeed borne out, with no change since 1998 in average size, internal conflict that led some people to leave the congregation, over-representation of women, extent of political activity (with the exception of participation in voter registration efforts, which has increased), percent of congregations led by women, involvement in social services, and other characteristics.

²For each difference that we highlight in the text, we confirmed that the observed change over time still is significant at least at the .05 level for either congregations or attenders after controlling simultaneously for interview mode (telephone or in-person), season (summer or not summer), and language (English or Spanish, including interviews with congregations nominated by Spanish-speaking GSS respondents even if the NCS interview was in English).

Some of this continuity may be surprising. Even though the number of megachurches continues to increase, and even though the trend towards increasing concentration of people in the largest churches continues as well, the median congregation is the same size today as it was in 1998 (75-80 regular participants) and the median person still attends a congregation that is the same size as it was in 1998 (400 regular participants). Even though conflicts within American religion seem to be tearing some denominations apart, congregations' overall conflict level is about what it was in 1998, with 26 percent of congregations experiencing a conflict in the last two years that led some people to leave. (Interestingly, only two percent of congregations reported a conflict over homosexuality.) Even though both major political parties continue their efforts to mobilize congregations, congregations in 2006-07 reported approximately the same levels of political involvement that they reported in 1998. And even after the Bush administration's faith-based initiative, there is no increase since 1998 in congregations' involvement in social services, receipt of public funds for their social service work, or collaborations with government.

We should digress here to note that the table in Appendix B understates congregations' involvement in social services. Qualitatively, virtually all congregations engage in some sort of social services or social ministries, and numerical estimates of this activity are sensitive to question wording and the extent of probing. The primary social services question in the NCS leads respondents to say "yes" mainly if they engage in these activities in a relatively formal way. Without additional probing, more informal activities remain under-reported, so the 45.4 percent of congregations doing social services reported in Appendix B should be considered an estimate of the percent of congregations engaging in these activities in a more formal way. The NCS-II questionnaire included more probes than did the 1998 survey, and this additional probing led more congregations to report social service activity. Including responses to all of our probes, 82 percent of all congregations reported social service activities, 11 percent have a quarter-time staff person devoted to social services, and four percent received government funds. In order to examine change over time, however, we constructed the questionnaire to allow us to simulate the less probing way of asking about social services that was implemented in 1998. Because we focus here on change over time, the NCS-II numbers reported in Appendix B are calculated to be comparable to the NCS-I numbers.

Returning to the theme of continuity, aggregate stability can mask variable trends among subgroups. Consider, for example, clergy gender. There is no overall increase since 1998 in the percent of congregations with female head clergy. In 1998, 10 percent of congregations were led by women; in 2006-07, eight percent were led by women. That difference is not statistically significant. Only five percent of people attend a congregation led by a woman.

However, this aggregate stability disguises countervailing trends within particular denominations and religious traditions. Congregations in more liberal

denominations, and congregations described by informants as more theologically liberal, are more likely to have a female head clergyperson now than they were in 1998. In 1998, for example, 24 percent of congregations whose key informant described them as “theologically more on the liberal side” were led by female clergy; in 2006-07, 38 percent were led by female clergy. Of course, only a small minority of American congregations (containing about nine percent of attenders) self-describe as liberal.

At the same time, congregations in some conservative denominations, and congregations in any denomination described by informants as more theologically conservative, are no more likely—and in some subgroups less likely—to have a female head clergyperson now than they were in 1998. The NCS sample is too small for all of these within-tradition trends to be statistically significant, so our confidence that the pastoral role continues to feminize at least within the most theologically liberal congregations rests mainly on data gathered by denominations. Denominational data from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the United Methodist Church (UMC), and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA) all show that the number of churches led by women increased between 1998 and 2006-07: from 12.6 percent to 22.5 percent in the ELCA, from 16.5 percent to 22.8 percent in the UMC, and from 15.4 percent to 20.6 percent in the PCUSA.³

Increases in some denominations, however, apparently do not outweigh stability or decline in other denominations. The result is overall stability at the national level. Interestingly, the percent of women enrolled in Master of Divinity programs also stopped increasing in recent years. According to the biennial *Fact Book* published by the Association for Theological Education, the percent of female M.Div. students rose quickly from the 1970s into the mid-1990s, from 5 percent in 1972 to 16 percent in 1980 to 28 percent in 1995. The rate of increase then slowed, peaking at 31.5 percent in 2002, after which the percentage of women fell slightly in each successive year to 30.6 percent in 2006. Other evidence suggests that women who receive the M.Div. are less likely than men to pursue pastoral ministry, and those who pursue pastoral ministry are less satisfied with some aspects of their lives than men and more likely than men to leave the profession (Association of Theological Schools 2003:18; Carroll 2006:68, 175; cf. Hoge and Wenger 2005:45-46).

Putting all this together, it seems likely that the continuing trend towards more female clergy in some denominations is driven by retirements of a disproportionately male older cohort more than by ongoing increases in the percent of new clergy who are female. Moreover, these increases in some parts of American religion apparently are not large enough to produce an overall national increase in the percentage of congregations led by women.

³Kenneth Inskip and Marty Smith (ELCA), Scott Brewer (UMC), and Jack Marcum and Ida Smith-Williams (PCUSA) shared their denominational data with us.

We offer this detail on female clergy in part to highlight the complexity of interpreting national trends with the NCS. The NCS is designed to track national, aggregate trends; data from other sources, used in conjunction with the NCS, can help clarify variations among subgroups. The NCS is a powerful telescope; supplementing it with other evidence further sharpens its focus.

Change

Even in the midst of substantial continuity, we observe four kinds of changes between 1998 and 2006-07. These changes involve congregations' use of computer technology, worship styles, head clergy age, and the demographic composition of congregations and their neighborhoods.

Technology. Of everything that was measured in both waves of the NCS, congregations' computer technology use changed most. The number of congregations with websites increased from 17 percent in 1998 to 44 percent in 2006-07. The number using email to communicate with members increased from 21 percent to 59 percent. And the number using visual projection equipment in their main worship service increased from 12 percent to 27 percent. These are very large increases. They imply, for example, that each year since 1998 another 10,000 congregations created a web site. Seventy-four percent of attenders are now in congregations with websites, 79 percent are in congregations that communicate with members via email, and 32 percent are in congregations using visual projection equipment in the main worship service.

Congregations apparently have enthusiastically embraced new information technologies, and this trend raises important questions. Thinking just about the increased use of web sites, many questions come to mind: Is congregations' increasing cyber visibility changing the way people look for, assess, and choose a congregation? How do congregations decide what to emphasize about themselves on their websites? Since the profusion of congregational web sites makes congregations more visible to each other as well as to current and prospective members, will congregations monitor and influence each other more? Will this increased visibility reduce diversity in congregational practice and theology? Creating and maintaining a web site requires resources, whether in volunteer time, staff time, or money. How does increasing technology use affect time and money allocations within congregations? Is computer technology increasing the cost of running a congregation? Research on this phenomenon has begun (Scheitle 2005; Thumma 2006), but more is needed.

Worship Informality. Increased informality in worship is a second trend evident in these data. Sixteen questions about each congregation's most recent main worship service were repeated in both waves. For each worship practice, if there is change since 1998 it is in the informal direction. More worship services contain drums, jumping or shouting or dancing, raising hands in praise, calling out amen, visual projection equipment, applause, and speaking by people other than leaders. Fewer services include choirs, and fewer people attend services that use

a written program. About the same number of services include a sermon or speech, singing, time to greet one another, silent prayer or meditation, reading or reciting together, or speaking in tongues. The changes are not dramatic (except the increased use of visual projection equipment), but the consistency of the pattern across this set of worship practices increases our confidence that this trend is real.

Most of this increasing informality is occurring among Protestants—Catholic churches have increased only their use of visual projection equipment and drums—and the increase in jumping, shouting, and dancing seems to be concentrated among black churches. Overall, however, there seems to be a fairly general trend at work here, probably reflecting a broader trend in American culture towards informality.

Clergy Age. Congregational leaders—meaning head clergy in multi-staff congregations, sole clergy in single-staff congregations, or the person named as the religious leader in congregations without a clergyperson—are older, on average, than they were in 1998. The median age of head clergy in American congregations has increased from 48 in 1998 to 53 in 2006. And the percent of people in congregations led by someone 50 or younger has declined from 48 percent in 1998 to 39 percent today. This is a large change in only nine years. By way of comparison, according to the GSS, the average age of the American public (limiting attention only to the over-25 population) has increased just one year since 1998, from 47.5 to 48.5. This clergy aging is happening across the religious spectrum, though it is happening faster for Catholic and liberal/mainline congregations than for others. The average age of head clergy in liberal/mainline congregations increased six years since 1998, from 49 to 55; among clergy in predominantly African American congregations, median age increased only two years. It appears that the increasing number of second-career clergy and the simultaneous decline in the number of people going to seminary immediately after college are producing a rather rapidly aging American pastorate.⁴

Member and Community Demographics. The social composition of congregations and their neighborhoods has changed since 1998. From one perspective, the largest change concerns income: people in congregations earn more money today than they did in 1998. In 1998, the average person attended a congregation in which 20 percent of the people had annual household incomes below \$25,000; in 2006-07, only 10 percent were in such low income households. In 1998, only five percent of people in the average person's congregation had annual household incomes above \$100,000; that number doubled to 10 percent in 2006-07. The percent of attenders with 4-year college degrees also has increased.

⁴Readers of the table in Appendix B may notice a larger proportion of African American and Hispanic clergy in 2006-07 than in 1998. As we noted earlier, this aggregate difference probably reflects a different sample composition rather than real change, though there is a hint of real increase in African American and Hispanic clergy in Catholic parishes, perhaps reflecting the increasing presence of immigrant priests.

From another perspective, however, these shifts represent no change at all. They do not take inflation into account, and they mirror very closely income and education trends in the general population.⁵ These increases do not mean, therefore, that American religion has moved up the social class ladder in the last decade. Rather than representing the upward mobility of American religion, these results suggest instead that American congregations fit into the social class structure much as they did in 1998.⁶

We also observe change in the age and ethnic make-up of American congregations. In the average congregation, 30 percent of the people are older than 60, compared with 25 percent in 1998. And while the average person still attends a congregation in which one quarter of the adults are younger than 35, only 20 percent of the people in the average congregation are that young, compared with 25 percent in 1998. Older people are, of course, over-represented in American congregations, and young adults are under-represented, but congregations are aging somewhat faster than the society as a whole. This shift probably reflects a combination of increasing longevity and declining participation in congregations by young adults.⁷

Recent immigration to the United States clearly has shaped congregations' social composition. We do not observe significant increases since 1998 in the proportion of predominantly Latino or Asian congregations, but predominantly white and non-Hispanic congregations are more ethnically diverse than they were in 1998. The number of people in congregations with no Latinos, for example, decreased from 43 percent in 1998 to 36 percent in 2006-07. The number with no Asians decreased from 59 percent to 50 percent. The number with no recent immigrants decreased from 61 percent to 49 percent. Looking at this phenomenon another way, the number of people in completely white and non-Hispanic congregations decreased from 20 percent in 1998 to 14 percent in 2006-07. Beyond immigrant congregations, recent immigration has created at least some ethnic diversity within a larger number of predominantly white congregations.

⁵In inflation-adjusted dollars, \$100,000 in 1998 is equivalent to \$127,203 in 2007; \$25,000 in 1998 is equivalent to \$31,800 in 2007. According to the GSS, the percent of people in the general population with annual family income above \$110,000 increased from six percent in 1998 to 13 percent in 2006. The percent with annual family incomes below \$25,000 decreased from 30 percent in 1998 to 22 percent in 2006. As a methodological aside, the striking similarity between these GSS trends and trends in congregations' social composition as reported by a single key informant in each congregation increases our confidence in the validity of key informant reports on this subject.

⁶But compare Putnam and Campbell (forthcoming), who emphasize an increasingly positive correlation between religious service attendance and educational attainment, combining it with other evidence to suggest that attendance has declined in recent decades among the white working class.

⁷See Fischer and Hout (2006:63-64) for more on increasing longevity, and Wuthnow (2007:Ch. 3) on declining participation among young adults.

These same societal developments also are changing congregations' neighborhoods. Although it still is the case that only 10 percent of religious service attenders go to congregations located in poverty-stricken census tracts, the number in congregations located in tracts where more than half the residents have some college education increased from 35 percent in 1998 to 49 percent in 2006-07. The number of people whose congregations are in tracts in which at least 5 percent of the residents are Hispanic increased from 29 percent to 40 percent; the number in tracts in which at least 5 percent of the residents have immigrated since 1980 more than doubled from 15 percent to 34 percent. In addition to increasing educational attainment and immigration, the long term depopulation of rural areas also is reflected here: the number of people whose congregations are in rural census tracts declined from 23 percent in 1998 to 18 percent in 2006-07.

Overall, the demographic changes evident within congregations and their neighborhoods mainly mirror demographic changes in the American population as a whole. The social space in which congregations reside has changed since 1998, and congregations' demographic composition has changed with it. It does not appear, however, that congregations have repositioned themselves within this social space. If congregations are boats floating on the demographic sea, they have changed their locations mainly by drifting with the currents and the tides, not by steaming to a different part of the sea. Only when it comes to their age structure does it appear that congregations are ahead of a demographic trend. Like their clergy, congregations seem to be aging faster than the surrounding population.

CONCLUSION

The trends we have highlighted are not the only changes evident in the NCS data. To mention just a few additional examples, the liberal mainline continues its relative decline, and more congregations are unassociated with a denomination. More congregations also participate in voter registration efforts and have book groups. We urge a conservative approach to interpreting significant differences between Wave I and Wave II as evidence of real change between 1998 and 2006-07. There are just two data points for each item, the large NCS sample makes substantively small differences reach statistical significance by conventional standards, and we have calculated multiple t-tests. Analysts also should consider carefully how the application of weights affects standard errors. We are confident about the four trends we have emphasized because in these areas we see large increases, consistency across several related items, or consistency with evidence of change from other sources. We hope that readers will discern other interesting trends and explore them with these data.

The NCS panel data can be used to deepen our understanding of the aggregate trends we have described. Does aggregate stability sometimes disguise sub-

stantial flux among congregations? To what extent is aggregate change produced by cohort succession—differences between newly founded and older congregations—and to what extent have existing congregations changed their practices? How do congregations that persistently engage in social services or political activities, for example, or that persistently experience conflict, differ from congregations reporting these activities or experiences in 1998 but not in 2006-07 (or vice versa)? We hope researchers will use the panel to pursue questions like these.

We have emphasized NCS-II findings concerning continuity and change, but the NCS-II also contains much new material, including information about multiple worship services, intracongregational conflict, staffing, youth programs, health programs, religious identity, and congregations' positions on cohabitation, homosexuality, and abortion. The NCS-II also contains responses to new open-ended questions about the subjects of intracongregational conflicts and the issues on which congregations lobbied elected officials or participated in demonstrations or marches. We encourage researchers to use the NCS-II to explore these and other subjects.

Although we believe that the four trends we highlight here are real trends, we are mindful that nine years is not a long time, and that a change between 1998 and 2006-07 may with hindsight be understood as an unusual moment rather than a trend. Two data points is not the firmest possible hook on which to hang a trend. Still, as James Davis, the founder of the General Social Survey, noted in his proposal to fund the very first GSS, you have to start somewhere. The 1998 NCS gave us a baseline, and the 2006-07 NCS enables us to begin to track change. We will have to wait for Wave III to settle some of the questions raised by the results reported here.

APPENDIX A

NCS-II METHODOLOGY

This Appendix provides additional methodological details about the NCS-II.

The Sample

The 2006 GSS contained four subsamples. Respondents in subsamples A, B, and C who said they attended religious services at least once a year were asked to nominate a congregation. Of the 2,992 respondents in these subsamples, 2,087 initially said that they attended religious services at least once a year. Of these, 177 backtracked on their attendance report when asked to name their congregation. Of the remaining 1,910 GSS respondents from whom a congregational nomination was sought, 164 did not name a congregation; 30 mentioned a congregation that was closed, out of the country, or not really a congregation; and

236 nominated congregations that were nominated by at least one other GSS respondent. Overall, 1,480 unique congregations were nominated. Of the 1,480 congregations from whom interviews were sought, 223 declined to participate and three were not locatable. Data were gathered from the remaining 1,254.

In addition to this new congregational cross-section, we added a panel component to the NCS-II by drawing a stratified random sample of 326 congregations who participated in the 1998 NCS. We created eight strata and drew a simple random sample of congregations from within each of these strata. We stratified the 1998 sample by race, urban/rural location, size, and religious tradition. All predominantly African American Christian congregations were in one stratum. The other seven strata were: non-Christian, rural Protestant, Catholic with fewer than 1,000 regularly participating adults, Catholic with 1,000 or more people, urban Protestant with fewer than 200 people, urban Protestant with 200-999 people, and urban Protestant with 1,000 or more people. Comparing the 326 sampled congregations to the full 1998 sample showed that the panel cases resembled the full sample in all important respects. Eight of these sampled congregations were closed, three could not be located, 58 declined to participate, and one was a Masonic Temple that we did not pursue. Data were gathered from the remaining 256 congregations. Four of these congregations also were nominated anew in 2006 and are counted above, so the panel effort added 252 congregations to the total sample.

In addition to the four congregations that were part of the panel sample and newly nominated in 2006, six other congregations nominated in 2006 were also in the 1998 sample but not randomly selected for the panel. So the NCS-II sample contains 262 cases on which we also have 1998 data. Purists working with the panel sample may want to exclude the six cases that were not randomly selected for inclusion in the panel.

Data Collection

As in 1998, we gathered data via a 45-minute interview with one key informant, usually a clergyperson, from each congregation. Our efforts to persuade congregations to participate were greatly helped by endorsements from 19 individuals in 11 denominations.

NCS-II data collection differed from NCS-I data collection in three important respects: some interviews were done in Spanish, there were more summer interviews, and there were more in-person interviews. Only the third of these differences requires more elaboration than we provide in the article's main text.

A different data collection strategy produced more in-person interviews in Wave II: 22.5 percent versus 7.5 percent in 1998. In 1998, all NCS cases were allocated immediately to field staff around the country who were relatively close to their assigned congregations. In 2006-07, we began data collection from phone banks in Chicago and Arizona. Two-thirds of the interviews were completed from these phone banks. The only cases assigned to interviewers in the field were congregations that we were unable to interview from these phone banks.

Consequently, congregations assigned to the field were the most difficult cases; in many instances they were congregations in which a leader or gatekeeper had expressed reluctance to participate when reached by someone in a phone bank. Field interviewers thus had to work very hard to locate these congregations and persuade them to participate. In 1998, field workers often would visit a congregation early in the recruiting process in order to persuade a leader to participate, but then conduct the interview later by telephone. In 2006-07, because field interviewers were often visiting congregations that already had been called several times by the phone bank, and who often had put off the phone-bank interviewer, field interviewers were more prone to do an interview in person rather than make an appointment to do it later by phone.

Analysts studying change over time should confirm that observed differences are not confounded with any of these differences between the two samples.

Coding Open-Ended Responses

The 2006-07 questionnaire included 21 open-ended items, some of which replicated 1998 items. Responses to each open-ended item were coded independently by two people. Coding schemes were refined until we achieved acceptable intercoder reliability. Remaining disagreements were adjudicated by a third person. We achieved intercoder agreement of at least 90 percent for 17 of the 21 open-ended items; no item had less than 82 percent agreement.

Several sets of 1998 open-ended responses were recoded to ensure comparability between 1998 and 2006-07. Because our more rigorous Wave II coding procedure led to refined coding schemes, the combined NCS data set contains variables different from those contained in the 1998 data for social service programs, congregational groups, and several other items based on open-ended responses.

Weighting the Data

Users should become familiar with the eight weights included in the NCS-II data set. In general, analysts will weight the data by W2 when examining the data from the average congregation's perspective and by W3 when examining the data from the average attendee's perspective. As with all surveys, analysts also might consider adjusting standard errors to account for NCS design effects. The NCS-II weights are described in detail on the NCS web site: www.soc.duke.edu/natcong.

Response Rate and Nonresponse Bias

The overall response rate of 78 percent is the RR3 response rate developed by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (2008:35). This conservatively calculated response rate includes in the denominator unlocatable congregations, congregations that declined to participate, and phantom congregations that might have been nominated by GSS respondents who declined to nominate a congregation. It also adjusts the response rate to take account of the fact that some of the unlocatable and phantom congregations would have been

either out of scope or duplicates. We do not think the small amount of non-response bias present in the GSS translates into significant non-response bias in the congregations sample. Still, incorporating the GSS's own 71 percent weighted response rate reduces the NCS-II response rate to 58 percent.

Wuthnow (2004:38) correctly pointed out that the NCS-I's 80 percent response rate ignores the 1998 GSS's 76 percent response rate. Because he underestimated the number of congregations nominated by multiple people, he incorrectly asserted that taking this into account reduced the 1998 NCS response rate to 48 percent. Incorporating the 1998 GSS response rate reduces the 1998 NCS response rate to 60 percent.

We care about a response rate only as a proxy for nonresponse bias. Direct assessments of nonresponse bias in the NCS give little reason for concern. We assess nonresponse bias in several ways. First, focusing on the cross-sectional part of the NCS-II sample, we compare information from responding congregations to information from the full set of congregations that we would have had if we had achieved a 100 percent response rate. We know something about many of these non-responding congregations (for example, those who declined to participate). We do not know anything directly about other congregations (for example, those that we could not locate or that would have been nominated by GSS respondents who declined to nominate one), but we know the geographical region and, usually, the religious tradition of the GSS respondent who nominated or should have nominated a congregation. In these instances we imputed the GSS respondent's region and religious tradition to the non-responding congregation and added that phantom congregation to our sample. We then compared the region and religious tradition distributions from our actual sample to the distributions in the ideal sample that would have resulted from a 100 percent response rate. These comparisons assess bias introduced into the NCS-II cross-sectional sample from GSS respondent refusals to name a congregation and from nominated congregations' noncooperation.

As was the case in 1998, our actual and ideal samples differ little. (Relevant tables are available on the *Sociology of Religion* website.) The actual and ideal regional distributions differ by more than 1 percentage point in only two categories. The actual sample has 22.2 percent of cases in the South Atlantic and 11.2 percent in the West South Central, compared with 23.6 and 12.3 percent, respectively, in the ideal sample.

The actual and ideal religious tradition distributions also are nearly identical, though we note two differences. The NCS-II cross-sectional sample slightly under-represents Catholics (27.5 percent in the actual sample versus 29.1 percent in the ideal sample). NCS-II interviewers believed that Catholic churches were more reluctant to participate. In response to this feedback, we devoted extra effort to persuading Catholic churches to participate. These distributions indicate that that extra effort was justified and largely successful.

The NCS-II cross-sectional sample also slightly over-represents mainline and liberal Protestants relative to conservative and evangelical Protestants. Taken

together, the actual sample has 2.5 percentage points more Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and congregations in other mainline or liberal traditions than does the ideal sample (22.9 percent versus 20.4 percent). Relatedly, the actual sample has 2.2 percentage points fewer Baptist, Pentecostal, and congregations in other conservative, evangelical, or sectarian traditions (32.8 percent versus 35 percent). However, the cross-sectional sample also shows a 1.5 percentage point over-representation of congregations that are Christian, but which we cannot confidently categorize as either mainline or evangelical. If we assume that nearly all of the over-representation of "Other Christian, not elsewhere classified" is evangelical or conservative Protestant congregations, then the NCS-II over-represents mainline and liberal congregations only by approximately one percentage point.

Another way we assessed nonresponse bias was to compare the 256 responding panel cases to the 61 non-responding congregations. When we examined 225 closed-ended items on the 1998 survey, non-responding panel congregations differed significantly from respondents on only 18 items. Almost all of these differences reflect two kinds of under-representation in the panel sample: African American congregations and small congregations. Neither of these biases is substantial. For example, although non-responding congregations in the panel are twice as likely as responding congregations to be led by an African American clergy person (24 percent versus 12 percent), in the full 1998 sample only 13 percent of congregations are led by African Americans. The nonresponse bias in the panel sample amounts to only a one percentage point under-representation of these congregations. Some of the specific items produce differences bigger than this, but none are more than a few percentage points.

Overall, then, we find little non-response bias either in the new cross-sectional sample or in the panel sample. Just as the 1998 NCS constituted a nationally representative sample of religious congregations in 1998, the NCS-II constitutes a nationally representative sample of American religious congregations in 2006-07. Univariate statistics and two-variable cross-tabulations are available on the NCS website: www.soc.duke.edu/natcong. The full NCS-II dataset will be available in July 2009 from the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.thearda.com).

APPENDIX B

SELECTED STATISTICS FROM THE NATIONAL CONGREGATIONS STUDY

This table provides descriptive statistics for many items contained in both NCS waves. A single asterisk (*) indicates a difference between 1998 and 2006-07 that achieves a .01 level of statistical significance. Two asterisks (**) indicate

a difference significant at the .001 level. When we report medians, asterisks refer to the results of the statistical difference between means. Sometimes a mean difference between 1998 and 2006-07 is statistically significant even when the median is unchanged. In these instances, we omit the asterisks.

The numbers in this table do not adjust for the increased Wave II number of in-person interviews, summer interviews, or interviews conducted in Spanish or with congregations nominated by Spanish-speaking GSS respondents. We use a slightly updated version of the 1998 dataset, so the 1998 numbers below may not exactly match numbers produced from the publicly available 1998 data set.

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
AGE AND SIZE				
Median founding date	1924	1940**	1938	1944**
Number of people associated in any way with the congregations' religious life				
Mean	2,558	2,399	414	395
Median	750	700	150	150
Number of people regularly participating in the congregation's religious life				
Mean	1,183	1,167	185	184
Median	400	400	80	75
Number of <i>adults</i> regularly participating in the congregation's religious life				
Mean	779	794	120	124
Median	275	280	50	50
RELIGIOUS TRADITION^c				
Roman Catholic	28.7	28.0	6.3	5.3
White conservative/evangelical	33.4	37.6	46.7	48.9
White liberal/mainline	23.7	19.7	25.0	18.9**
African American Protestant	10.8	11.4	16.4	23.5**
Non-Christian	3.4	3.3	5.1	3.4
Percent with no denominational affiliation	10.4	14.0*	19.0	21.1
BUILDING AND FINANCE				
Percent owning their own building	94.9	94.9	87.7	89.7
Percent meeting in a:				
Church, temple, or mosque	92.9	97.3**	87.3	92.7**

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
School	3.3	0.7**	5.0	1.0**
Other kind of building	3.8	1.9*	7.7	6.3
Percent with a formal written budget	87.7	88.8	72.8	75.3
Median income in past year	\$259,500	\$300,000**	\$60,000	\$90,000
Median income from individuals in past year	\$230,000	\$270,525**	\$55,000	\$75,000*
Median budget for past year	\$250,000	\$280,000**	\$60,000	\$86,246
Percent receiving income in the past year from sale or rent of building or property	37.9	30.6**	23.9	21.3
Percent giving money to denomination in the past year	82.8	80.2	73.6	74.2
Median amount given to denominations in past year ^d	\$20,783	\$20,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Percent with an endowment, savings account, or reserve fund	73.9	73.3	59.8	57.3
Median amount in endowment, savings, or reserve ^e	\$70,000	\$90,000	\$19,679	\$30,000
Percent using any type of service offered by a denomination, other religious organization, or an outside consultant	44.1	45.3	31.2	32.8
LEADERSHIP				
Percent with a head clergy person or leader	95.5	97.0	92.3	95.0*
Percent where head clergy person or leader is female	5.6	4.7	10.7	7.9
Percent with head clergy person or leader of each race or ethnicity:				
White	82.2	77.6*	76.0	68.1**
Black	12.2	13.3	19.0	25.5*
Hispanic	2.1	3.2	2.0	1.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.3	2.5	1.7	1.7
Other	2.5	3.9	1.6	3.2*
Median year senior clergy person took this position	1992	2000**	1994	2001**
Median age of senior clergy person	51	54**	48	53**

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
STAFF				
Percent with no paid staff ^f	6.9	5.1	22.5	13.4**
Percent with no full-time staff ^f	14.6	11.5	39.3	34.6*
Percent with 1 full-time staff person	20.4	22.6	34.5	36.0
Percent with 2 or more full-time staff people	64.9	65.9	26.3	29.4*
Percent with no part-time staff	17.0	16.7	41.6	34.6**
Percent with 1 part-time staff person	10.0	9.7	17.3	18.4
Percent with 2 or more part-time staff people	73.1	73.6	41.1	47.0**
WORSHIP				
Percent with 1 service in typical week	14.3	14.5	26.6	28.5
Percent with 2 or more services in typical week	85.6	85.3	72.8	71.4
Median length of most recent main service (minutes)	70	70	75	75
Median length of most recent sermon (minutes)	20	20	25	30*
Median number of minutes of music at most recent main service	20	20	20	20
Median number of socializing minutes before/after typical service	30	30	30	30
Median attendance at most recent main service	230	200	70	65
Percent of most recent main services with each characteristic:				
Sermon or speech	97.1	98.0	95.3	95.4
Singing by congregation	98.1	97.1	96.8	97.2
Singing by choir	72.3	58.0**	53.9	44.1**
Time to greet one another	84.6	86.7	78.4	80.7
Silent prayer/meditation	80.6	82.3	73.3	73.8
People saying "amen"	52.8	60.4**	60.7	70.7**
Applause	58.7	59.1	54.6	61.3**
Written order of service	84.2	75.4**	72.0	67.8
Visual projection equipment	14.9	32.3**	11.9	26.5**
People read or recite something together	75.1	71.2	63.7	59.4

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
Jump, shout, or dance spontaneously	13.1	17.2*	19.2	25.8**
Raise hands in praise	48.1	55.2**	44.5	56.7**
Use drums	25.1	37.4**	19.6	33.5**
Percent with the following in any worship in past year:				
Speak in tongues	19.5	20.7	23.9	27.0
People told of opportunities for political activity	36.8	29.5**	26.2	21.4**
Time for people other than leaders to testify	72.1	78.7**	77.6	85.0**
Percent with joint worship service in last year	66.3	56.3**	66.3	69.4
Percent with joint worship in last year with congregation with different racial/ethnic make-up	30.8	25.8*	28.3	28.8
DOCTRINE				
Percent considering Bible to be literal and inerrant	62.9	70.6**	75.9	82.6**
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>politically</i> :				
More on the conservative side	55.2	54.1	62.0	58.1
Right in the middle	37.0	38.7	30.7	34.6
More on the liberal side	7.8	7.2	7.3	7.4
Percent saying their congregation would be considered <i>theologically</i> :				
More on the conservative side	52.7	57.8*	59.8	62.7
Right in the middle	37.6	33.4	29.9	29.5
More on the liberal side	9.8	8.8	10.3	7.7*
GROUPS AND SPEAKERS				
Percent with religious education classes ^g	96.9	97.0	91.2	89.3
Percent with a group in the past year focused on the following:				
Politics	12.5	15.4	6.4	6.2
Book discussion	42.1	62.0**	29.0	45.1**
Parenting	61.8	62.9	39.0	39.4

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
Voter registration	12.3	27.3**	8.3	17.8**
English as a second language	9.0	14.2**	3.6	5.8*
Practice gifts of spirit	19.7	15.6*	13.4	11.1
Prospective/new member class	79.7	76.6	56.2	60.2*
Class to train new teachers	67.6	65.1	38.0	39.5
Discuss/learn about another religion	29.7	37.4**	20.3	25.2
Lobbying	12.0	14.5	4.4	7.9**
Demonstrating/attending rallies or marches	21.5	20.2	9.2	8.3
Assess community needs	48.2	57.1**	36.8	48.4**
Percent distributing voter guides ^h	26.4	25.6	17.0	17.2
Percent with an elementary or high school	23.5	20.9	6.2	4.6
Percent having any visiting speakers in the past year	89.7	86.2*	83.1	81.4
Speaker was:				
Elected government official	12.3	12.3	6.6	8.2
Denominational representative	61.9	64.3	51.9	55.8
Representatives of social service organization	39.4	46.5**	22.2	30.6**
Someone running for office	6.4	6.5	4.6	5.5
SOCIAL SERVICES				
Percent with social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing programs of any sort ⁱ	75.3	62.1**	58.4	45.4**
Median amount spent on social service programs in the past year ^j	\$5,000	\$6,004	\$1,229	\$2,000
Percent with anyone on paid staff spending more than 25% of their time on congregation's social service projects ^j	17.5	23.3**	11.9	15.0
Percent with anyone from the congregation doing volunteer work for congregation's social service projects ^j	93.7	95.3	89.7	92.8

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
Median number of congregational volunteers working on congregation's social service projects ^j	25	40	10	15
Percent of those who collaborate with government on social service projects ^j	23.0	13.9**	24.1	14.1
Percent with outside funding support for social service programs ^j	17.7	18.3	18.4	17.7
Percent with outside funding support from local, state, or federal government ^j	4.9	7.4	5.2	7.9
Percent with a policy against receiving government support	14.5	17.3	16.8	16.0
Percent who would apply for government money to support human services programs	48.0	48.9	39.3	47.2**
CONFLICT				
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years for which a special meeting was called	26.6	21.3**	28.7	23.6*
Percent experiencing a conflict within the last two years that led some people to leave the congregation	26.4	24.7	27.0	26.4
TECHNOLOGY				
Percent using email to communicate with members	31.0	79.0**	21.2	59.1**
Percent with a website	28.7	74.2**	17.1	44.3**
SOCIAL COMPOSITION				
Median percent of regular participants living within a ten minute drive	60	70**	60	70**
Median percent of regular participants with household income under \$25,000/year	20	10**	30	20**

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
Median percent of regular participants with household income higher than \$100,000/year	5	10**	0	2**
Median percent of regular participants with a college degree	30	40*	15	20*
Median percent of regular participants greater than 60 years old	25	30**	25	30**
Median percent of regular participants less than 35 years old	25	25	25	20**
Median percent of regular participants who are female	60	60	60	60
Median percent of regular participants living in households with two parents and at least one child	50	50	40	30**
Percent of congregations at least 80% white and non-Hispanic	71.6	65.6**	71.3	62.6**
Percent of congregations at least 80% black	12.4	12.0	17.4	23.8**
Percent of congregations more than 0% Hispanic	57.0	64.0**	33.3	35.7
Percent of congregations more than 0% Asian or Pacific Islander	41.0	49.7**	18.2	22.6*
Percent of congregations with more than 0% immigrated to the U.S. in past five years	39.4	50.6**	17.9	20.4
NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS				
Percent in census tracts with 50% or more adults with some college education	35.3	49.2**	19.7	32.0**
Percent in census tracts with at least 30% of individuals below the poverty line	10.1	10.4	11.8	14.1
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% of individuals immigrating since 1980	15.2	33.9**	13.2	23.5**

	ATTENDERS' PERSPECTIVE ^a		CONGREGATIONS' PERSPECTIVE ^b	
	1998	2006-07	1998	2006-07
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% Hispanics	29.2	39.6**	25.4	28.2
Percent in census tracts with at least 80% African-Americans	5.0	4.0	3.7	5.2
Percent in census tracts with at least 5% unemployment	27.0	24.2	31.1	30.5
Percent in predominantly urban census tracts	60.9	66.8*	41.8	44.1
Percent in predominantly rural census tracts	23.3	17.8*	43.4	32.6**

^aMeans and medians in the "attenders" column refer to the congregation attended by the average attender of religious services. Percentages give the percentage of religious service attenders in congregations with the stated characteristic. The data here are weighted by W3.

^bMeans and medians in the "congregations" column refer to the average congregation. Percentages give the percentage of congregations with the stated characteristic. The data here are weighted by W2.

^cThe "African American Protestant" category includes all predominantly African American Protestant churches, whatever their denominational affiliation. Predominantly white Protestant congregations that are unaffiliated with any denomination are included in the conservative/evangelical category unless we have good reason to include them elsewhere.

^dCalculated only for the subset of congregations who gave any money to their denominations.

^eCalculated only for the subset of congregations with an endowment, savings, or reserve account.

^fAlthough respondents were asked in both waves how many people work in the congregation as paid staff, in 2006-07 the question was prefaced with "including you" (if the respondent was an employee), and interviewers were trained in 2006-07 to probe to make sure that informants included themselves. We believe this difference is behind the decrease in the percent of congregations with no paid or full-time staff.

^gThe 1998 questionnaire included a single item asking about religious education classes for children, teens, and adults. The 2006-07 questionnaire included five questions asking about classes for different age groups. The 2006-07 numbers reported here are from an aggregation of the 2006-07 responses that is comparable to the 1998 single item.

^hIn 1998 respondents were asked if their congregation had *ever* distributed voter guides; in 2006-07, respondents were asked if their congregation had distributed voter guides *within the past two years*.

ⁱThe 2006-07 social service results reported in this table are calculated to be comparable to the 1998 results. The overall percent of congregations reporting social service activity is considerably higher when we include responses to the additional probes implemented in the NCS-II. After all probes, 82 percent of congregations, containing 90 percent of attenders, are in congregations doing social services.

^jThese numbers are calculated only for the subset of congregations who participated in or sponsored social service activities, and the 2006-07 results are calculated to be comparable to the 1998 results.

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