

FAMILY MINISTRY SURVEY REPORT TO CONGREGATIONS

Family Matters Task Force

June 2003

Appreciation to Respondents

FMTF members express sincere appreciation to the religious professionals in the 105 congregations who responded to the Family Ministry Survey. That's 10% of the congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. We thank those who filled out the survey and whose comments and feedback indicate to the FMTF that they took it seriously. We thank those who filled out the questionnaire and who told us that they were grateful to be able to reflect on the issues of concern to families and the various and diverse families in their congregation. We thank those who told us that we failed to include their family in our questions. We humbly acknowledge that we could not address every form or family in this instrument. It is our hope that this is a place to begin.

We are gratified to hear from educators that the questionnaire was itself an educational tool that encouraged them to rethink the needs of families with and without children within their congregations. Educators and ministers told us about their ways of rethinking family ministry and how they might better serve the needs of their families and what tools and resources might help them.

It has been a challenging and educational experience for the FMTF members soliciting responses to the survey over an 18-month period until we achieved a respectable 10% return. It raised our consciousness about the wide range (from excellent to minimal) of congregational experience in welcoming and ministering to diverse UU families and their needs. We especially believe and sincerely hope that the honesty and truth-telling revealed in this survey will be a blessing to those who provide ministry to our families, to our congregations, and to their families and congregants.

Families in Context

We cannot talk about *family* or *family values* or *family ministry* without defining what we mean by these words and the perspective Unitarian Universalists bring to these universally used but cultural- and faith-bound terms. For over two millennia, religious communities have defined their view of family as a microcosm and fundamental life form of their faith tradition. There are attempts by religious leaders in the United States on the right and on the left to influence social policy concerning who can be recognized as "family" continue a long tradition of religious organizations seeking to shape culture (who could/could not marry, how and when spouses could engage in sexual intimacy, how children were disciplined, who could divorce and for what reasons).

While recognizing our Judeo-Christian roots, we in the Unitarian Universalist community have a special mission with families because our concept of family is broader than most faith communities can celebrate. UU families come with diverse styles and different shapes. We have mothers working while fathers keep house and fathers working while mothers keep house and both mothers and fathers working away from home. We have single parents and second marriages bringing children together from unrelated backgrounds. We have gay and lesbian couples and parents and families. We have childless couples and unmarried couples, with and

without children. We have adoptive families. We have biracial families and multicultural families. We have interfaith families of many persuasions. We have single person families and families where the parent and children live geographically dispersed. We have multigenerational families and extended families. We have friends as family.

In the United States most family relationships are defined either by biological relatedness (parent/child, sibling, grandparent, et al) or by adoption. Our Unitarian Universalist families are increasingly defined by commitment, by covenantal promises, rather than by legal structures. In our UU congregations we believe we have the opportunity and the responsibility to nurture our families and our family values with the rich diversity of families who add love and often new generations to our communities.

Unitarian Universalist families are diverse but not unusual in America. Our families identify themselves and define their family values as reflections of our religious pluralism, our faith's living tradition, and our UU Principles. Like our faith, our definition of family is constantly evolving. Yet the family values that we celebrate remain consistent – love, justice, freedom, respect, responsibility, courage, reason, equity, reciprocity, gratitude, and reverence. We focus on the processes of family interactions with one another and on the family's interactions with the larger community in our family relationships. By emphasizing the processes instead of structures, we concentrate on practices such as communication, appreciation, commitment, developing roles and responsibilities with one another, and coping with change. Through these processes and practices we embody our family values and family faith.

Ministry with families in Unitarian Universalist congregations is most evident in our rites of passage celebrations, from child dedication ceremonies to coming of age programs to wedding/ union ceremonies to memorial services. Family ministry is not just an array of programs that address family issues, although it certainly includes such programs. Family ministry takes place in intergenerational worship, family life educational programs, social justice and family advocacy projects, support groups for families in transition or crises, intergenerational recreation and social events, and pastoral care with families. Family ministry is multifaceted and can be the perspective that infuses the life and work of the whole congregation.

Family Matters Task Force

The UUA Family Matters Task Force was created in 1998 as an attempt to bolster our ministry to families. Our work on covenanting in *Fulfilling the Promise* led us to focus on family issues at the 1999 Salt Lake City General Assembly. We thought for Unitarian Universalists to begin to define the word *family*, to articulate what it means to live our UU *family values*, and to carry that *family ministry* forward in our congregations, an ideal place was “family friendly” Salt Lake City. Through a combination of events and programs, we integrated our focus on family issues with our work to support families across lines of sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, economic class, ability, and gender. During the Monday plenary FMTF began the process of self-definition around family and family values including testimonials from some of our diverse UU families. Then all participants proceeded to a breakout room (based on various family identities, such as multiracial/multicultural families, gay and lesbian families, single-parent families, multigenerational families, two-parent families, interfaith families, adoptive families, and open rooms, too) to discuss three questions: How do we define family? What are our UU family values? How are we doing ministry with families?

From the results of this rich GA dialogue, the FMTF began to identify needs and concerns of families in UU congregations and developed some resources, programs and advocacy to serve UU families. In the following year a congregational assessment tool for ministry with families was developed. In March 2001 our Family Ministry Survey was mailed to the religious professionals in every UU congregation. Accompanying the assessment tool was the FMTF Matrix Model, a resource we developed to guide us in designing comprehensive and thoughtful responses to the needs of UU families in the coming years. Through the support, education, advocacy, and transformation defined in this matrix model, FMTF plans to make measured progress toward transforming our congregations into faith-empowered family-affirming communities.

Some resources available to UU families include an annual UU Family Network Clearinghouse packet, such as 1999 "Families and Worship," 2000 "Family Life Education," 2001 "Family Justice Advocacy," 2002 "Generations of Faith," and 2003 "Small Group Ministry With Families." On the UUA families Web site (www.uua.org/families) there is a collection of resources for congregations to use in their ministry with families. These Web resources are organized into the following categories: intergenerational community, family justice, social service, resources, family issues, rites of passage, witness and celebration, family life stages, families at home, and FMTF. In 2003 the FMTF *Taking It Home: Families and Faith* pamphlet series was launched.

The current working definitions in the FMTF vocabulary include:

- ◆ **Family** is a network of sustaining relationships that meet member's needs for belonging and attachment; meaning and purpose; care, help and resources.
- ◆ **Family Ministry** is everything a congregation does as a community with mission and covenant that attempts to embody the characteristics of the Beloved Community (Community of Love and Justice).
- ◆ **Family Faith** are the shared beliefs and values that provide the family with a common understanding of what their experience means and what they are to do in response.
- ◆ **Family-Affirming Congregations** continuously examine all of their activities for ways they can provision and sustain the families in the congregation and those in the community they seek to include as these families grow in faith, love, and justice.

Family Ministry Survey: Summary of Responses

The Family Ministry Survey was initially mailed in March 2001 to the religious professionals in every UU congregation. It was also distributed at the 2001 General Assembly in Cleveland, Ohio, and the 2002 General assembly in Quebec, Canada. Our goal was to obtain one response from each congregation, and the respondent could carry any role within that congregation, as long as they felt they had an awareness of the nature of families within their congregation and felt comfortable in completing the survey tool. As of November 2002, 105 responses were collected from unique congregations, representing 10% of our member's congregations.

To analyze the data collected, surveys were separated by size into small, mid-sized and large congregations. Demographics were then reviewed by congregational size. As the non-demographic responses collected were similar regardless of congregational size, the majority of the data was reviewed as a whole with the goal of providing readers with a sense of congregational and denominational family identity.

Religious Education Directors comprised the majority of survey respondents at 68 (64%), with ministers, (20), Program Coordinators (6), Ministers of Religious Education (4) and various other congregational members such as RE Administrators, Church Presidents, and staff assistants making up the remainder (7). The average amount of time respondents have served their congregations was 6 years, and congregations ranged in size from 29 to 990.

Therefore, 75% of the Family Ministry Survey respondents were religious educators. Many respondents expressed concern that they did not have exact knowledge of the families in their congregation, but their religious educator would know best the kinds of families in their congregation. Religious educators skewed the survey responses to families with children because their working relationship with children and youth included these families in their congregation.

Question #1: How many kinds of families are in your congregation?

Responses in the 10 different categories are shown in the graphs at the end of this report. See *Small/Midsize/Large Congregations Family Demographics* on pages 11, 12 and 13. Note the differences in responses when analyzed by congregational size – small, midsize, large. Further analysis by geographical location – NE/SE/NW/SW and urban/suburban/rural - are to be forth coming.

Nine large congregations (over 550 members) responded to the survey. Large congregations tended to average 8 adoptive families, 15 blended families, 10 families with special needs, 39 families with youth, 7 gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered families, 28 interfaith and 11 multicultural families, 17 single parent and 78 two parent families, and 21 single adults with geographically dispersed families.

Fifty-two small congregations (under 125 members) comprised 41% of the survey respondents, and tended to have 2 adoptive families, 3 blended families, 3 families with special needs, 10 families with youth, 3 g/l/b/t families, 6 interfaith and 3 multicultural families, 4 single parent and 20 two-parent families, and 10 single adults with geographically dispersed families.

Forty-four mid-sized congregations comprised the remainder and majority of the survey respondents. Of these congregations, there tended to be 5 adoptive families, 7 blended families, 6 families with special needs, 22 families with youth, 5 g/l/b/t, 12 interfaith and 6 multicultural families, 10 single parent and 41 two-parent families, and 15 single adults with geographically dispersed families.

The family members in each category are self-reported by the congregation's respondent. A graphic overview of the survey by congregational size and reported family numbers is on page 14.

Some respondents noted that there were no categories for single adult families (with GDC or no children), empty nesters and widows/ers, foster care families, transracial adoptive families, long-term committed couples, multigenerational families, or grandparents raising grandchildren. For many respondents a glossary of terms would have been helpful, such as special needs, interfaith, blended, multicultural, GDC (geographically dispersed children) and others.

Two by products of the census activity reported by respondents was an increased awareness of the types of families within their congregations and a heightened sensitivity to the importance of developing programs and resources to meet the specific needs of families that they serve.

Question #2: How are families welcomed and made to feel at home in your congregation?

When congregations were asked how families were welcomed and made to feel at home, their responses were remarkably consistent. The majority of the respondents indicated that hospitality practices and rituals (73%) pastoral and prophetic greetings from the pulpit (68%) and accessibility for all ages and abilities (65%) are the primary means by which families are welcomed. A *Welcome UU Family* packet is used by 27% of congregations.

Many congregations experience physical building constraints, such as sanctuary upstairs and RE classrooms downstairs or worship space in a different building than RE space, which challenges family togetherness. There were family orientations in 47.1% of our congregations and religious professionals said that they were not practiced frequently, but were excellent when done.

Question #3: What strengths do you see in families within your congregation?

Family strengths in congregations include family involvement in congregation and community life (92%), expressions of affection and appreciation (87%), and positive communication within families (85%). Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that the time that families spend together is a strength demonstrated within their congregations. In contrast, 65% of respondents identified a lack of recreational time together as a major internal family challenge.

Numerous comments relating to this question named qualities, such as acceptance and tolerance as well as highly intelligent and creative, as family strengths. There were expressed needs for resources to nurture family strengths, such as marital counseling, couples/partners enrichment, and Extended/Cluster Family programs.

Question #4: What are some of the societal/cultural stresses that families in your congregation experience in their lives?

Economic stressors were identified by 80% of the respondents when asked what some of the societal and cultural stressors affect families in congregations. Balancing economic stressors, respondents indicated that availability and/or access to family resources and services, and education (29% and 34% respectively) did not have the same negative impact on families within our congregations.

An overwhelming majority of respondents named *time* as the greatest stress on the families in their congregation, including the tandem constraints of overworked, overscheduled parents and children. Geographical distance from extended family and cultural discrimination against their family (gay/lesbian, multicultural, interfaith) were also named as stresses.

Question #5: What are some of the internal family challenges that families in your congregation experience in their lives?

Divorce is a significant and prominent stressor among families within our denomination (89%), followed closely by crisis and transitions, loss and death (85%). Thirty-one percent of respondents indicated that housing and welfare is a significant stressor in the lives of their families.

Many respondents named the challenges of family identity issues, such as custody, transracial adoption, and elder care. Other challenges named were substance abuse, depression, learning disabilities, mental illness, and intergenerational conflict.

Question #6: How does your congregation advocate for and address the needs of the diversity of families?

To advocate for and address the needs of diversity in families, respondents utilized inclusive worships and intergenerational fellowship events (89% and 86%). In contrast, support groups and extended family groups (38% and 24%) were used less frequently. While most respondents identified multiracial and/or g/l/b/t families in their demographics, 62% of respondents indicated the use of the Welcoming Congregation program, and even fewer (21%) reported use of Journey Towards Wholeness initiatives and programs. See the series of graphs representing these statistics on pages 15 and 16.

Many congregations named their small group ministry or covenant group programs to address the diverse family needs. Pastoral care networks by religious professionals and lay leaders in their congregation were named by some respondents to address the needs of families.

Question # 7: What resources are available from your congregation to strengthen and support families at home?

Respondents demonstrated limited awareness of a number of resources currently available to help strengthen and support families at home. The most common resources from outside of the congregation is the use of Inward Springs and UU&ME periodicals (58%) and parenting courses as the most common internal resource (51%). The Welcome Family packet and UU Faith for Families resources (13%), and the Family Life Education (11%) and Family Worship packets (10%) from the UU Family Network were rarely identified as resources that respondents are aware are available to congregations.

Programs that were named by many respondents to support their families include Coming of Age program, *Our Whole Lives* curriculum, Bridging ceremony, and parenting courses. A few congregations named their RE library and the Family Page in their newsletter as supporting families at home.

Question # 8: What resources for families that you have developed for your congregation are you willing to share with UUA Family Matters Task Force?

Some of the resources named have been included in UU Family Network Clearinghouse Packets, especially 2000 *Family Life Education*, 2001 *Family Justice Advocacy*, and 2002 *Generations of Faith*. Other resources have been shared through REACH packets and in UU Faith Works online publications. Many congregations named the following programs: Secret Pals program, Family Fun/Game Night, intergenerational worship services, Family vespers, UU Family Camp/Retreat.

Question # 9: How does your congregation nurture the Unitarian Universalist faith of families in your congregation?

When asked how congregations nurture the Unitarian Universalist faith of their families, respondents pointed to intergenerational programs (83%), family worship and family UU social action projects and programs (63%) each). Family pastoral care (33%) and family RE programs (31%) were less prevalent resources with UU Congregations. See the graphs representing these percentages on page 17.

Rites of passage celebrations were named by respondents most often as ways their congregation nurtured faith in their families, from Baby/Child Dedications to Coming of Age programs to Marriage/Union ceremonies to Memorial Services. Many respondents named the

pastoral care of families that is ongoing in their congregation by religious professionals as a primary way to nurture faith in families.

Question # 10: What services and support do your families receive from congregational leaders?

Worship services are identified as the primary service or support provided to families by congregational leaders (96%) with Rites of Passage ceremonies and pastoral care and counseling (87% each) also widely used. Intergenerational programs are commonly identified as services available to families (85%), while RE lifespan resources and community educational events, and socially responsible programs and projects (71% and 70%) are also widely available resources. While significantly less used by congregations, support groups also provide a valuable service to families in congregations (41%).

Some respondents named specific services that their families received from congregational leaders, such as sermons on family issues, covenant groups, and Coming of Age programs. Others named fellowship events, such as circle dinners and family potlucks.

Question # 11: What does the congregation do that is most helpful to your families?

More than 75% of the respondents named specific services and programs of their congregation, such as intergenerational worship services, rites of passage celebrations, intergenerational social events, and pastoral care. Many respondents talked about congregational attitudes and practices being helpful to families, such as inclusive attitude, acceptance of others, safe environment, and a sense of community. A few respondents wrote about their intergenerational social responsibility projects and programs and their small group ministry with family or neighborhood groups.

Question #12: What could the congregation do that would help families live their Unitarian Universalist faith more fully?

When asked what congregations could do that would help families live their Unitarian Universalist Faith more fully, respondents indicated that parent support groups (72%) and family outreach (56%) could help them reach this goal. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that their families would benefit from more social justice projects and resources. Worship and spiritual resources, and intergenerational programs outside of Sunday mornings were identified by 54% of respondents, and 48% indicated that their families would benefit from more educational opportunities.

Many respondents named specific programs and resources that would help their families live their faith more fully, such as small group ministry with families, religious education programming that addresses cultural/racial identity, more social justice programs, inclusive faith-based Coming of Age programs, and intergenerational worship and spiritual resources. Other helpful resources mentioned range from family UU stories to weekday programs/center for children and youth to programs for adoptive families to boys-men's groups.

Congregations with Promising Practices

The following congregations have created and implemented some outstanding programs and best practices and they have shared them with the FMTF:

Wholly Family Service from San Diego, CA congregation is an annual worship service of three or four diverse families celebrating their unique family, their family values, and their family faith.

Family Nights from UU Church of Geneva, IL is a program celebrating the diversity of families in their congregation and promoting intergenerational responsibility.

Welcome Families packet from UU Church in Charleston, SC is given to every new family to acquaint them with our UU faith and the services of this congregation.

Intergenerational Stories from UU Congregation in Marquette, MI is a resource of children's books developed by their RE leaders and given to families to use at home to inspire conversation and family faith development.

Family Moment from the UU Fellowship in Bennington, VT is an opportunity for different families to light the chalice during the Sunday worship service and tell about their family and their family values.

Neighborhood Network from UU Church Las Vegas, NV is a program for UU families in various neighborhoods to gather many times through out the year for potlucks and picnics, discussion and recreation, social service and social action projects, parenting support and faith development.

Reflective Questions for UU Congregations and their Ministry with Families

1. Are the percentages of diverse families in the survey report (and categorized into large/mid-size/small congregations) reflected in your congregation? Where are the greatest similarities? Where are the largest differences?
2. What hospitality practices are available to families in your congregation?
3. Are the strengths of the families in your congregation similar to or different than the family strengths named by respondents of the survey? Explain.
4. Do the highest stressors of time and money to your congregation's families reflect the survey respondent's stressors?
5. Are the internal family challenges hidden stressors in your congregation or recognized challenges receiving professional attention by your religious leaders?
6. What opportunities are available to Unitarian Universalists in your congregation to advocate for the diversity of UU families and UU family values?
7. What resources to support and strengthen families in your congregation are readily available and practiced?
8. Have you visited the UUA Web site – www.uua.org/families – for resources for your congregation's families? What resources would be helpful to your families?

9. What rite of passage celebrations are integrated into your congregation's liturgical year? What role and responsibilities do families play in these celebrations?
10. Name one or two ways that families in your congregation receive vital support from your congregation's leaders.
11. What opportunities for families in your congregation are most helpful to them? What is your congregation's "growing edge" in their ministry with families?
12. Is the language of faith articulated around family life and family issues in your congregation? Why or why not? What would strengthen a UU family faith language?

Conclusions and Overarching Questions

The survey process defined the work of the FMTF for more than two years. Our work demanded that we know and celebrate the families in our UU congregations, that we articulate working definitions around family and family ministry, that we learn ways to reach out to families in order to respond to their expressed needs, that we design resources and implement strategies to achieve our goals, and that we take time to reflect on the state of UU families and their faith and thereby identify and define our FMTF mission in faith language.

Through our resources FMTF has noted some paradigm shifts in UU concepts of family ministry:

- From defining family by biology or legal structures to defining family by covenant,
- From defining family ministry by the programs a congregation offers to defining family ministry by a support/education/advocacy/transformation model that shapes every aspect of congregational life,
- From assessing families using psychological language to assessing families using UU faith language, including suffering and redemption, blessing and curse, grace and mystery,
- From conceptualizing individual development as an underlying process of faith development to conceptualizing faith as a dimension of family life (as well as individual experience),
- From envisioning human development as a process of leaving the family in the process of maturing to envisioning families as significant contexts for individual maturation, spiritually and ethically over the lifespan.

The FMTF resources, especially the Matrix Model of Family Ministry, Family Ministry Survey, FMTF Bookmarks, and *Taking It Home: Families and Faith* pamphlet series, intentionally seek to influence congregational life in ways that encourage the development and transformation of families. These resources have the goal of strengthening families so that they can deepen and develop their faith, can be effective witnesses of their faith, and can minister to one another in their congregation and their communities.

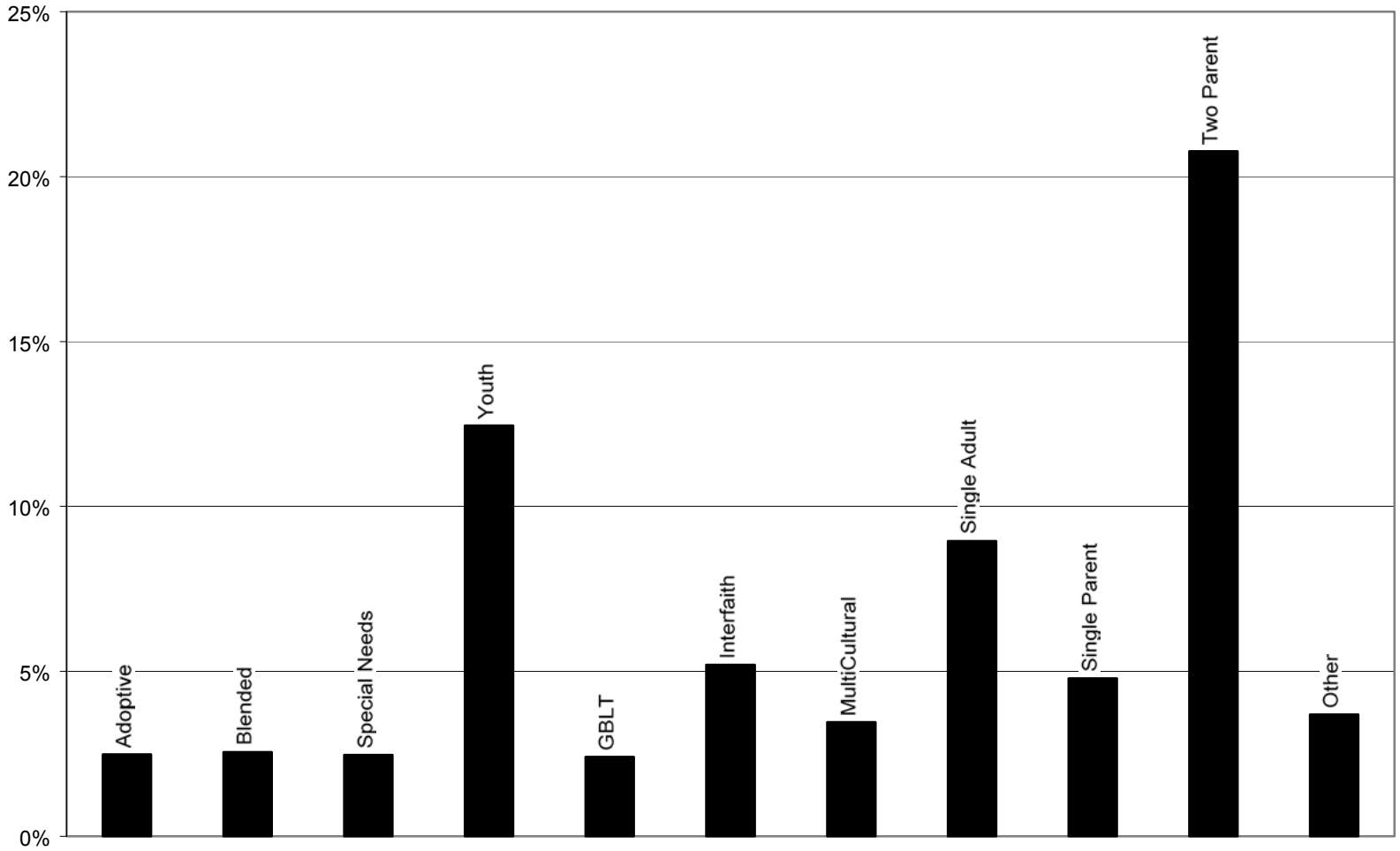
The themes that emerged from the Family Ministry Survey responses are powerful messages to the FMTF, to professional religious leaders, to UU congregations, and to the whole UUA. Memorable first impressions noted by FMTF members include the following:

- There is a difference between our current culture of how we do church and the congregational responses needed by families coming to our congregations.
- There are areas of family vulnerability that are unacknowledged - housing, time, money, mental health.
- People are yearning to go deeper into their faith in addressing issues facing families. They want to break the culture of success and become real in supporting themselves and one another as they really are.

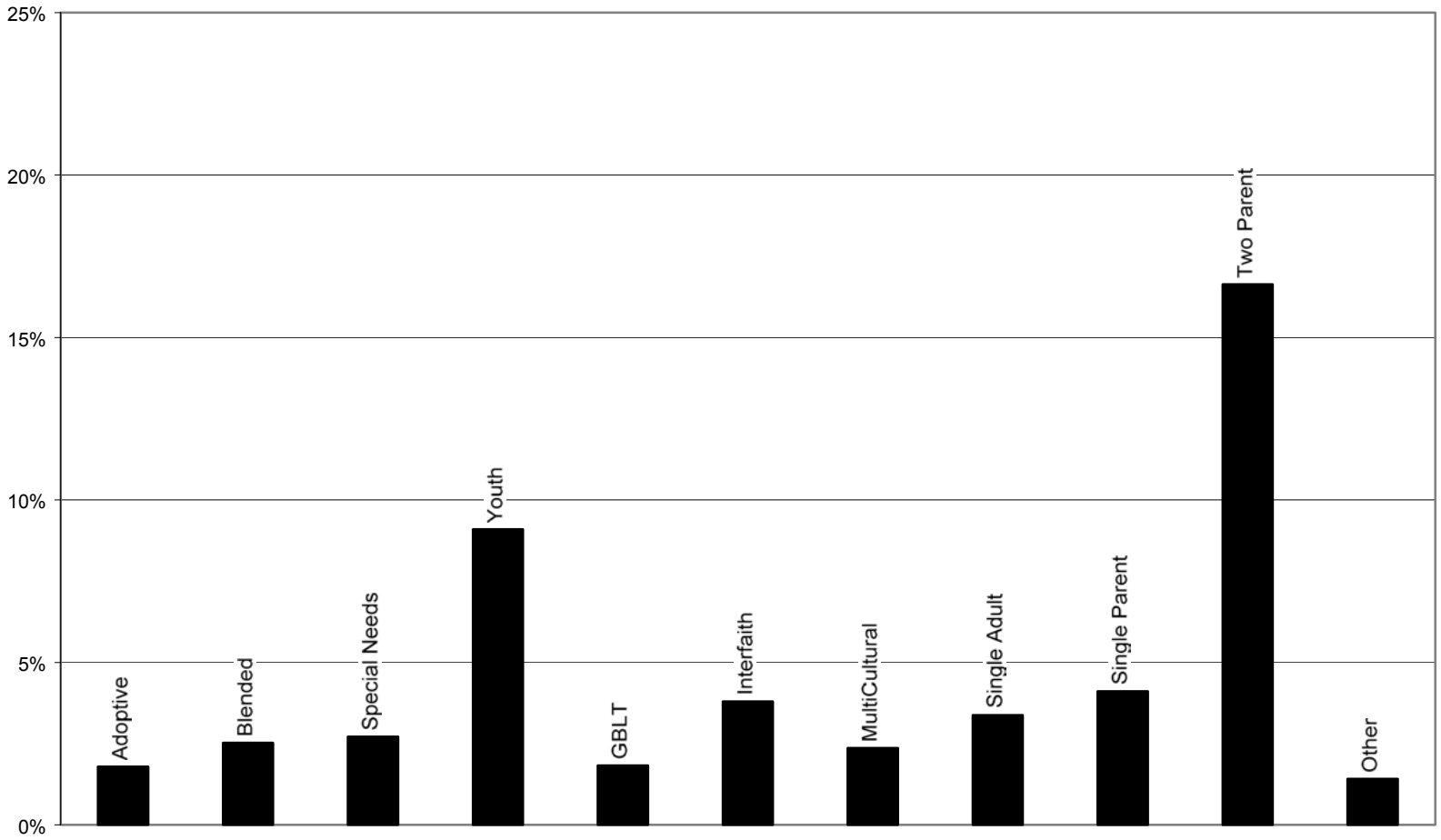
Reflecting on these themes and recognizing the response from only 10% of our congregations, we need to ask ourselves some overarching questions:

- What do the families in our congregations really look like? What are our guiding principles for family ministry?
- In order to support the diverse families in our congregations what trainings/ education/ resources do we need to provide?
- What curricula and resources are available for families on faith development and UU identity?
- What current family issues call for UU advocacy work and leadership?
- How can we promote the concept and practice of intergenerational responsibility in UU congregations?
- How do we empower families to share and live their UU faith?

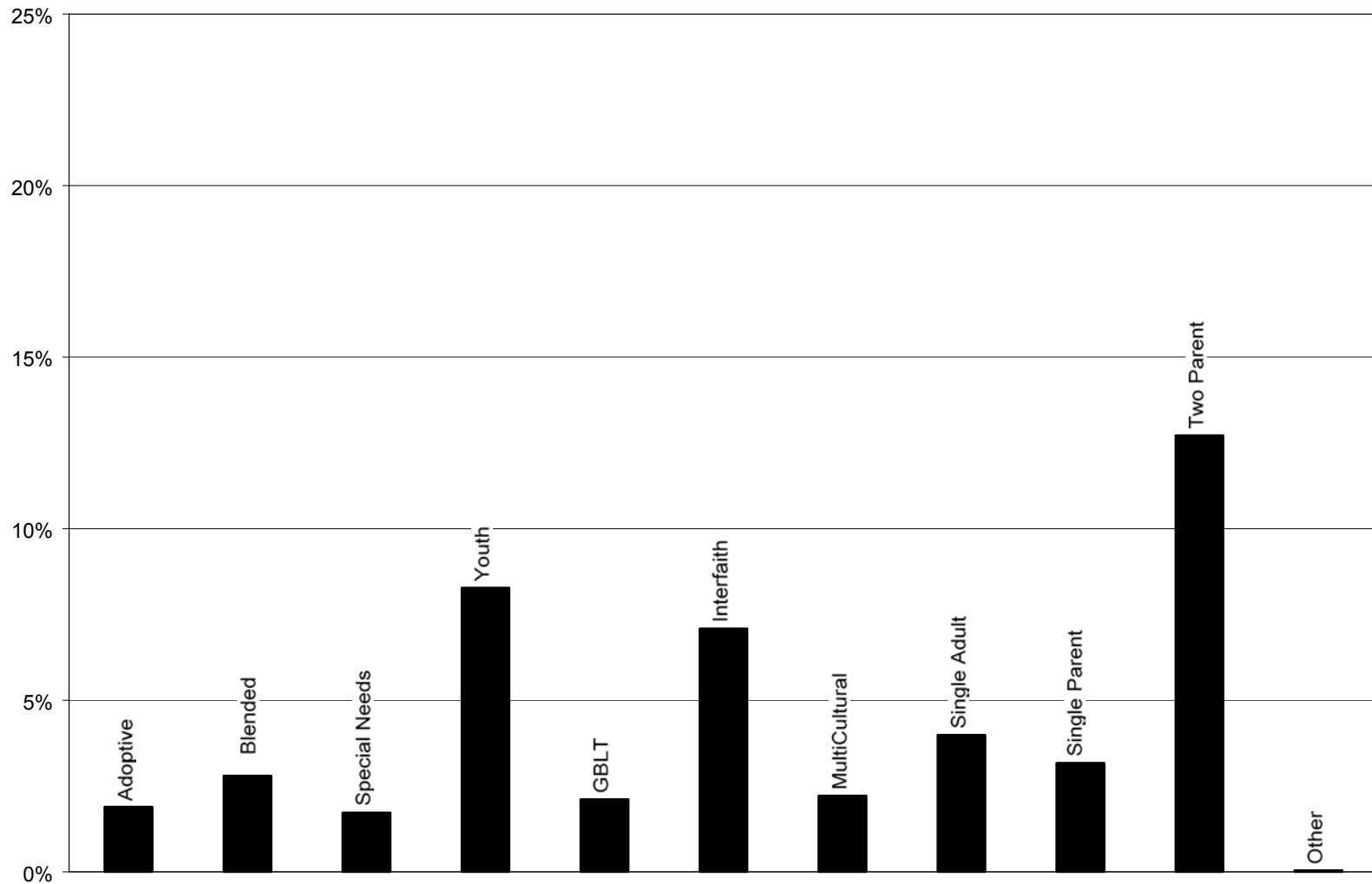
Small Congregation Family Demographics



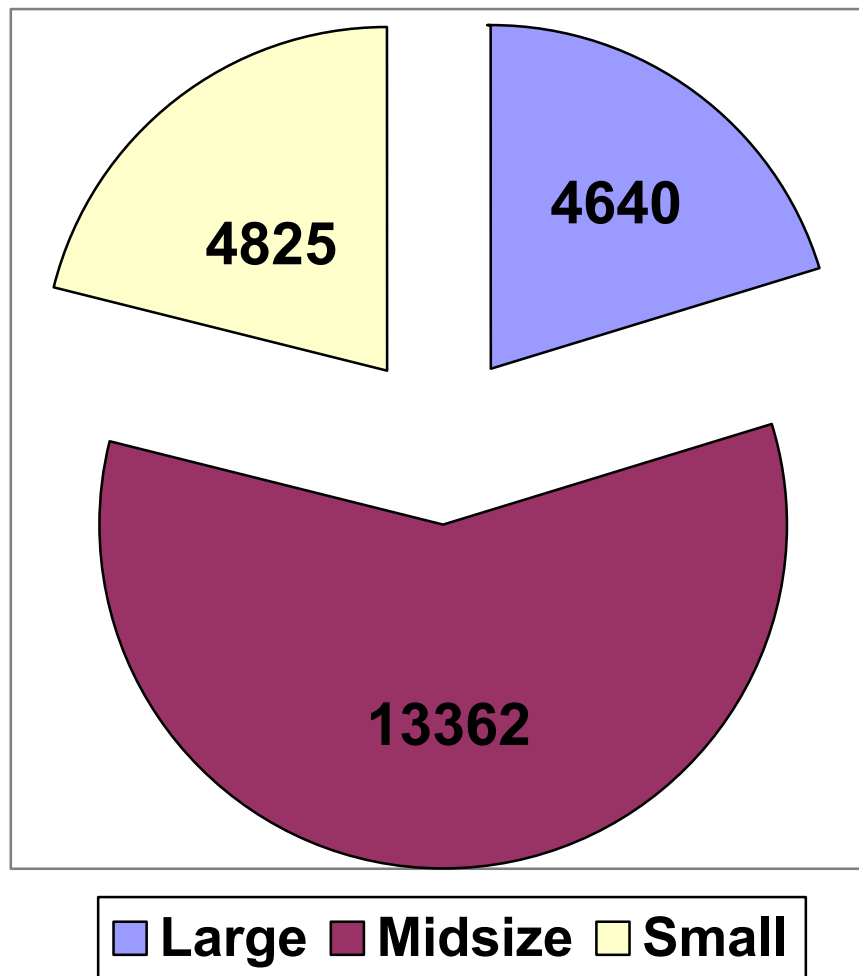
Midsize Congregation Family Demographics



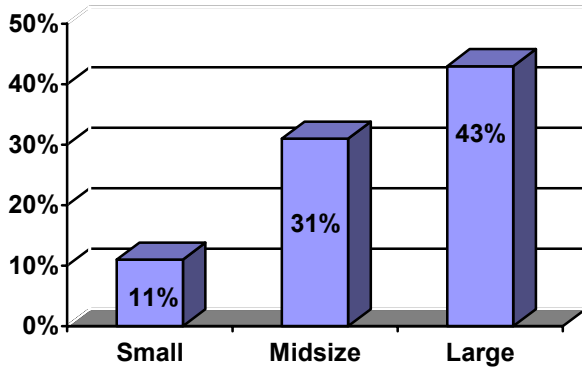
Large Congregation Family Demographics



Survey Make Up By Size of Congregations: Family Numbers are Self-Reported

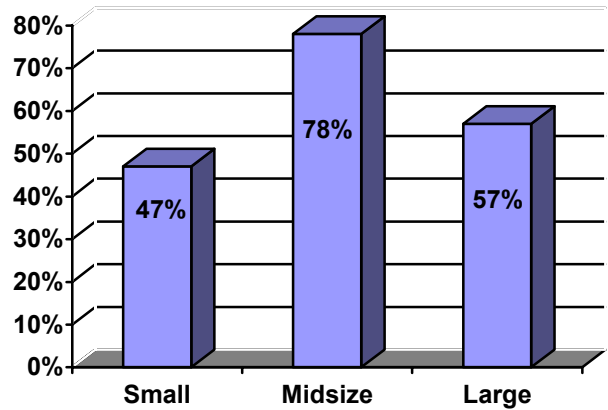


Advocacy for Journey Towards Wholeness



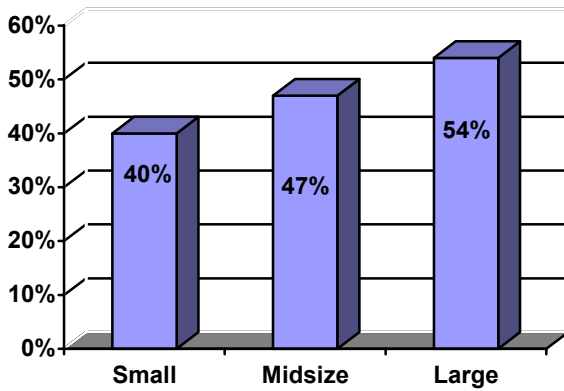
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Welcoming Congregation



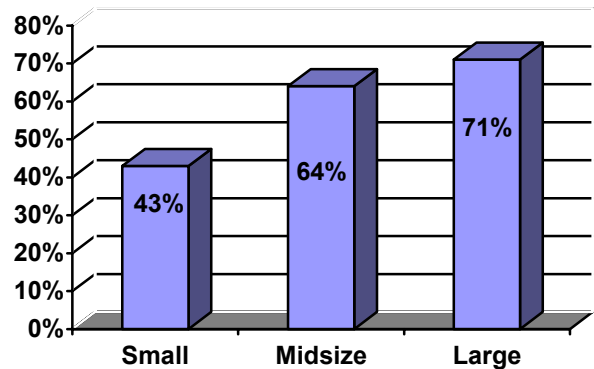
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Accessible Congregation



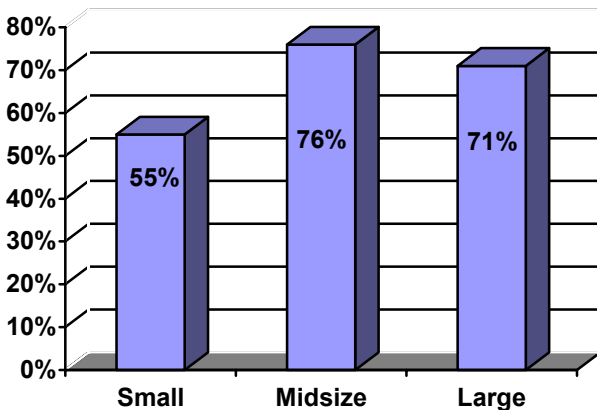
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Anti-Racism/Racial Community Advocacy



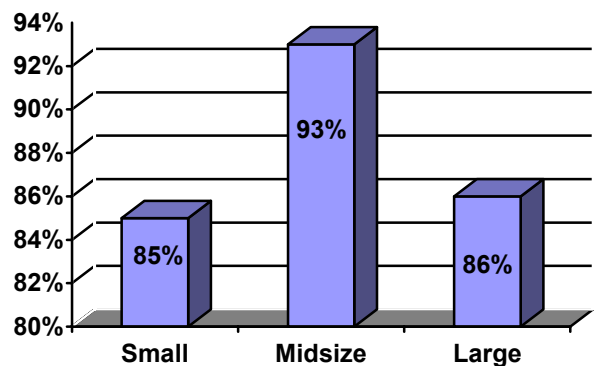
Percentage of Sample Congregations

GBLT/Social Justice Advocacy



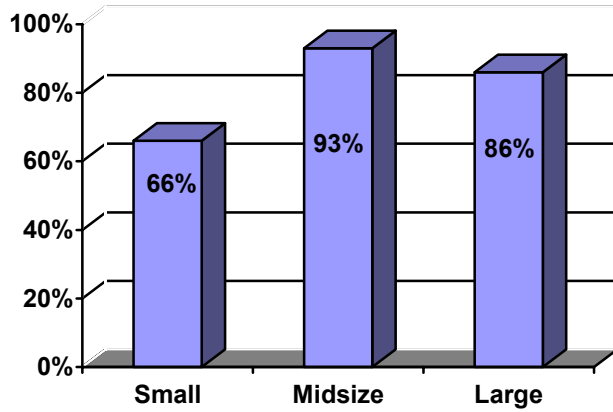
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Inclusive Intergenerational Worship



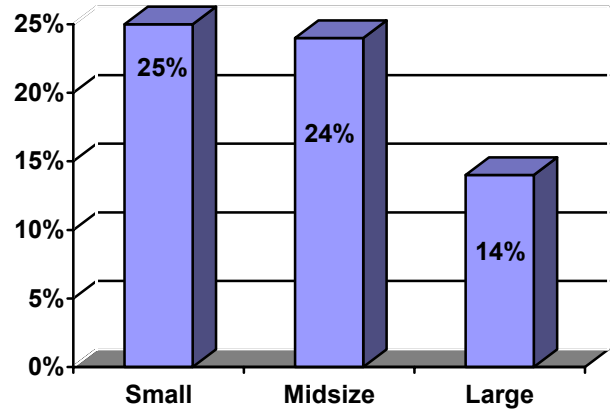
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Multicultural Education



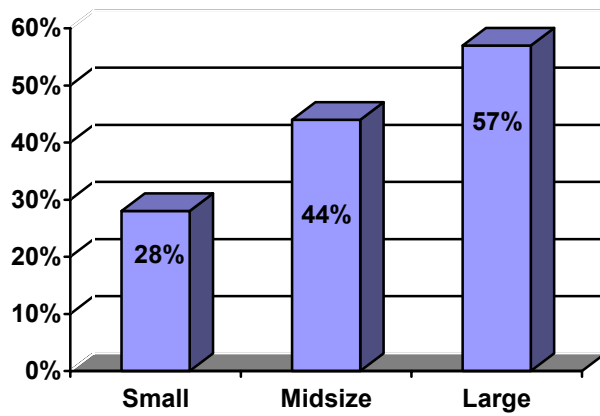
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Extended Family Groups



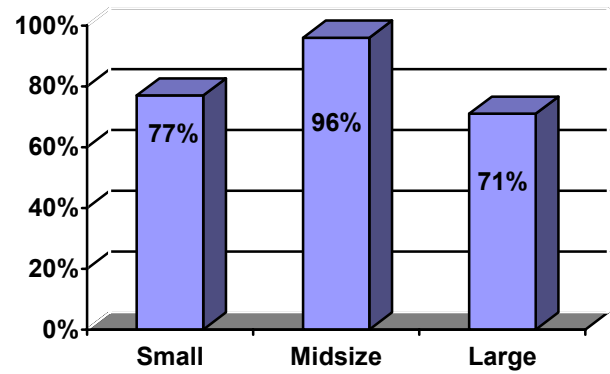
Percentage of Sample Congregations

Support Groups



Percentage of Sample Congregations

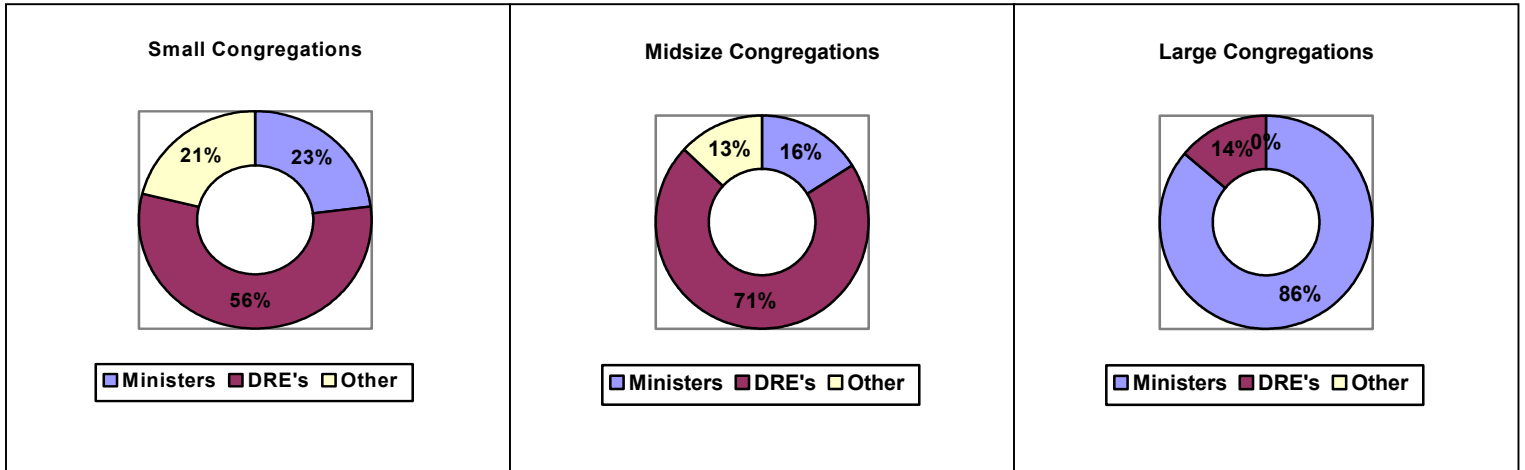
Intergenerational Fellowship Events



Percentage of Sample Congregations

How Different Respondent Groups View the Nurturing of UU Faith in Congregations:

Respondent Types



Methods of Nurturing UU Faith

