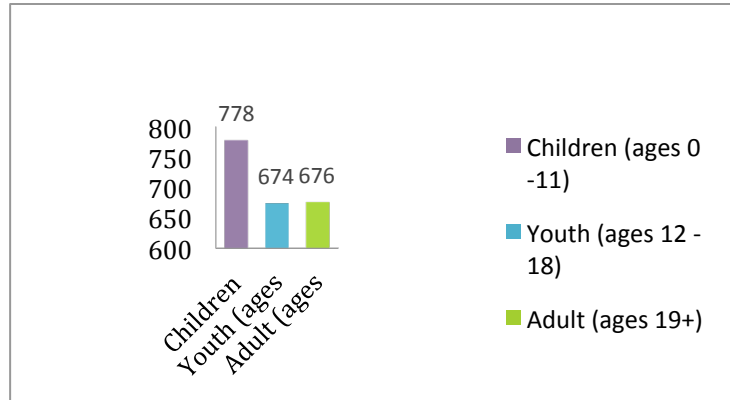


CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CURRICULUM SURVEY

June 2016

An on-line survey was held on a voluntary basis during June 2016 to learn what curricular programs were being used in congregations with children, youth, and adults. The survey was disseminated through e-mail and social media (predominately Facebook groups) and various organizational list-serves (Forma, APCE, CEF, AUCE, and the Christian Education Network of the ELCA). The construction and results of the survey was conducted by the research group of the Church Pension Group, the parent company of Church Publishing Incorporated. The analysis of the data is strictly mine, and I take all responsibility for its interpretation.

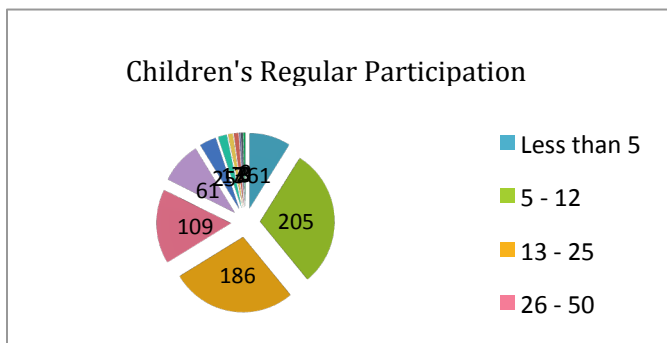
Sharon Ely Pearson 10/1/16



There were 895 respondents, with 620 completing the entire survey. 87% reported having a children's ministry program; 75% youth programming; 75% offer some form of adult education. Both lay (60%) and ordained (37%) persons took the survey. While shared across denominational lines, 70% of the respondents were Episcopalians. Demographics follow at the conclusion of this overview, with information and responses specifically from other denomination noted.

Children's Education

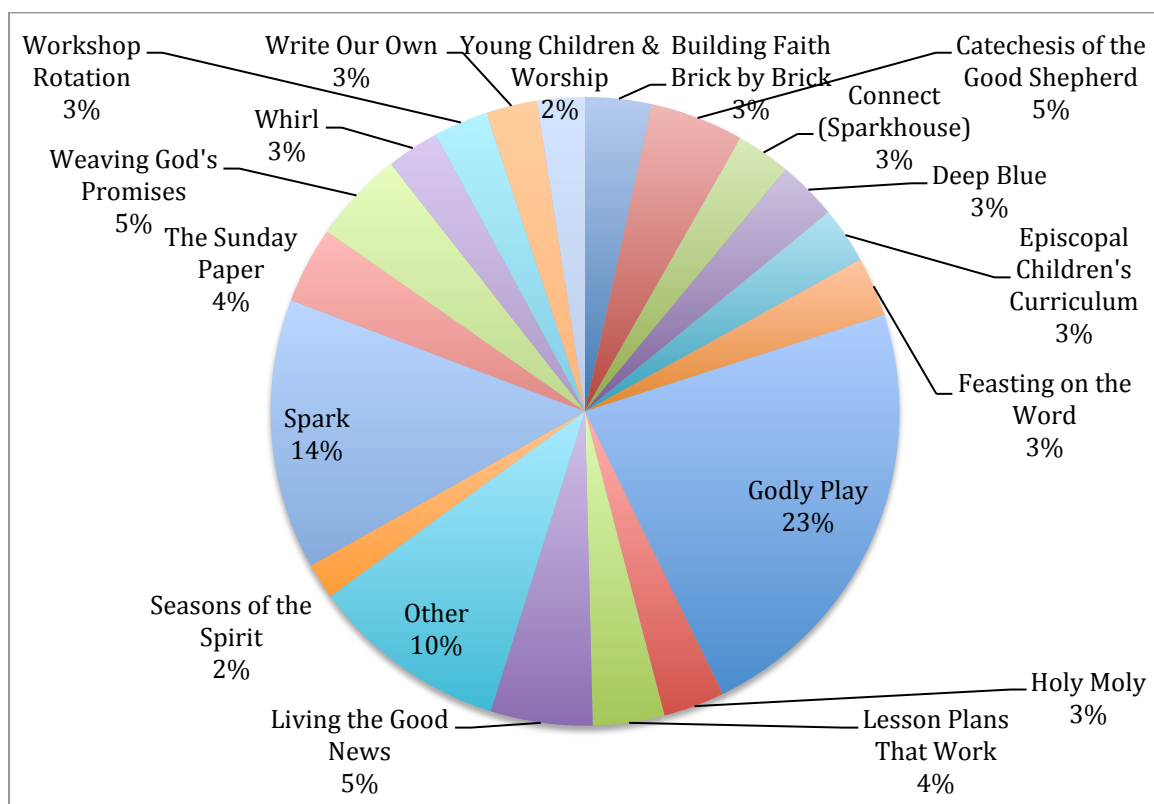
As in past surveys (2009, 2010, 2013), most churches offer some type of ministry with children. Correlating to the many studies that show the decline in church attendance (Gallop, Pew, Barna, denominational research studies) and how the majority of congregations have an average Sunday attendance is between 75-100, it is not surprising to see the decrease in the size of children's attendance.



Less than 5:	9%
5-12:	30%
13-25:	27%
26-50:	16%
51-75:	9%
76-100:	4%
More than 100:	3%

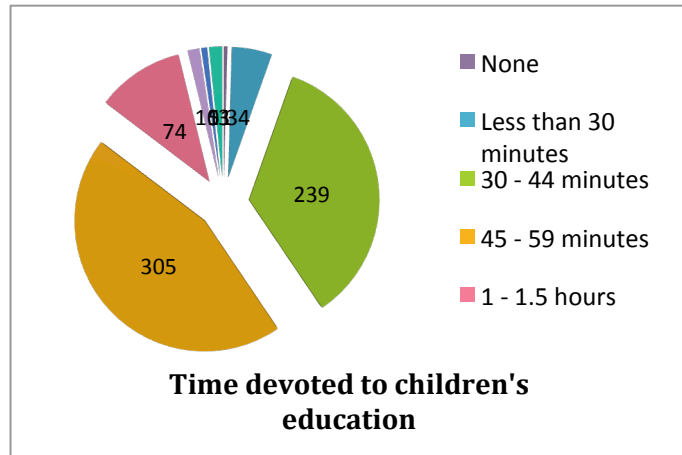
A theme that ran throughout comments on children's ministries: *"Parish demographics (size and average age) make it difficult to get consistent attendance."* Congregations use a variety of curricular materials. Besides *Godly Play* (23%) and versions of *Spark* (14%), most programs are used less frequently. Most do not use one resource alone and many supplement with writing their own or Internet searches. The top selected resources that were noted:

23%	Godly Play	3%	Deep Blue
14%	Spark	3%	Building Faith Brick by Brick
10%	Other (20 mentioned)	3%	Feasting on the Word
5%	Catechesis of the Good Shepherd	3%	Whirl
5%	Living the Good News	3%	Connect
5%	Weaving God's Promise	3%	Episcopal Children's Curriculum
4%	The Sunday Paper	3%	Holy Moly
4%	Lesson Plans That Work	2%	Young Children & Worship
3%	Workshop Rotation models	2%	Seasons of the Spirit



Anecdotally, many respondents shared their concern about conventional curriculum (classroom models) that *"continue to reinforce dated modes of teaching."* Calls for resources for children that help them reflect on worship as well as helping parents connect with their children at home were concerns. Inconsistency in attendance and the cost of materials are having an impact on what curricula churches are choosing to use. One comment in particular seemed to sum up what many shared:

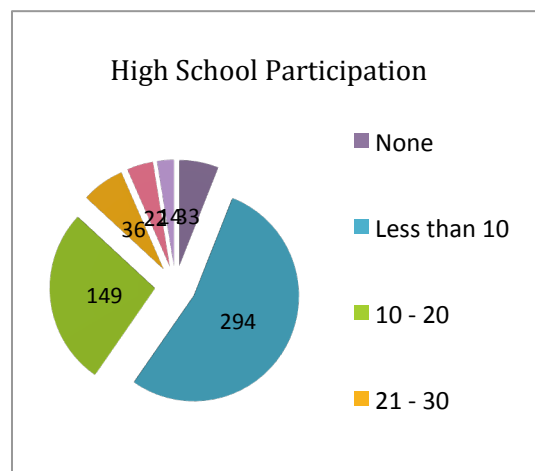
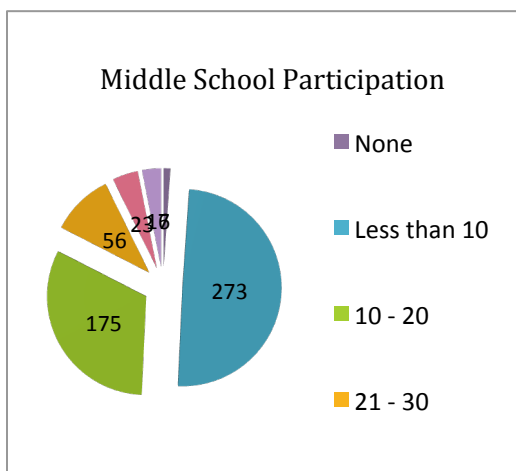
"I am concerned that children and youth are not being guided to a holistic view of spirituality and religion. I also feel that new methods and programs need to be taught so that students can use critical thinking and engage with God through their own personalities and experiences. Many teachers (in my parish) are still using old methods wherein children attended Sunday school and church every Sunday. Many who come to church today have different needs and are "unchurched."



As in past surveys, the time allotted for children's education continues to be the "45-minute" education hour.

Youth Education

Materials with youth (ages 13-18) continue to be varied, with churches using a mix of resources as well as writing their own. As with children's engagement, youth participate in small numbers, with fewer high school students than middle school students. Many shared that educational offerings for youth end after Confirmation.



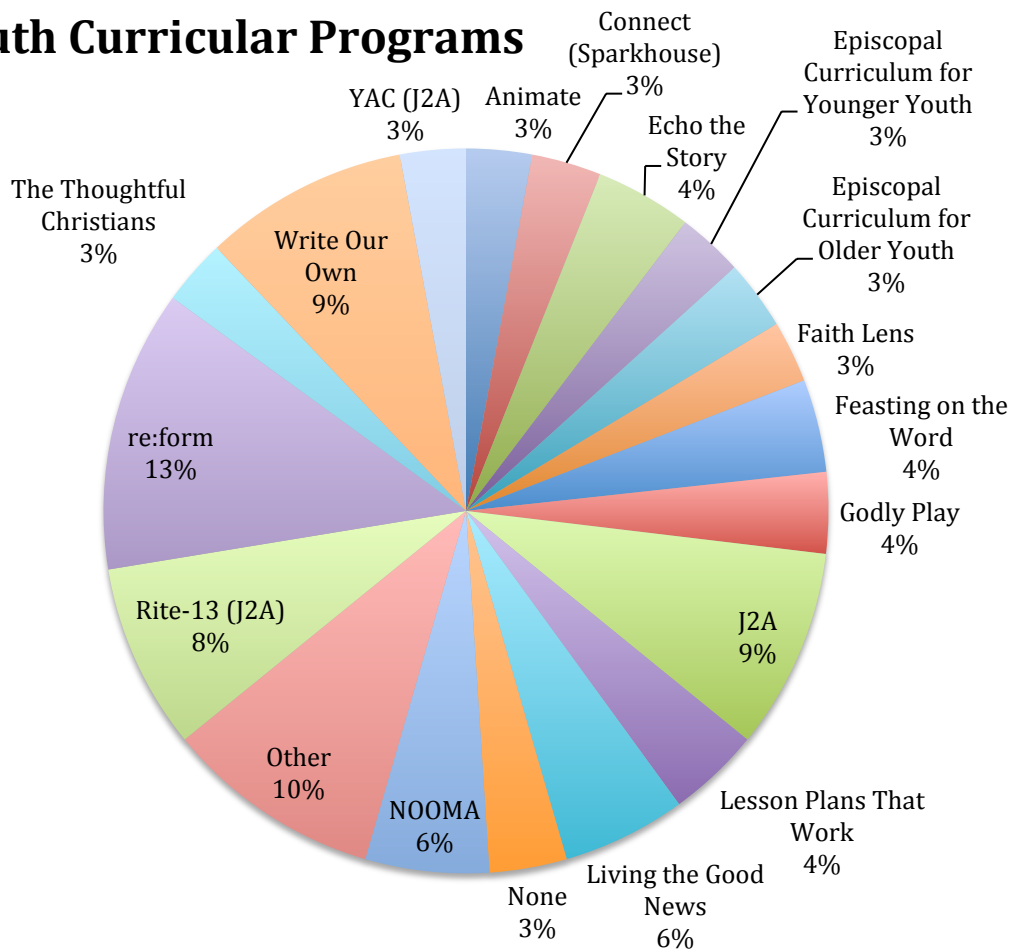
"Our struggle has always been to keep the children involved in church school once they get to middle school. They are pulled in so many directions, and Sunday mornings at church are harder and harder. We have tried other time frames, but there is no magic formula that works for everyone."

Youth ministry is offered during different times and for different lengths than children's ministry. Another comment, *"The challenge is to keep middle school students engaged with biblical study while providing them some fun time as well. Attendance is very sporadic because family activities and organized sports encroach on our time."*

Amount of time youth ministry is offered in a congregation:

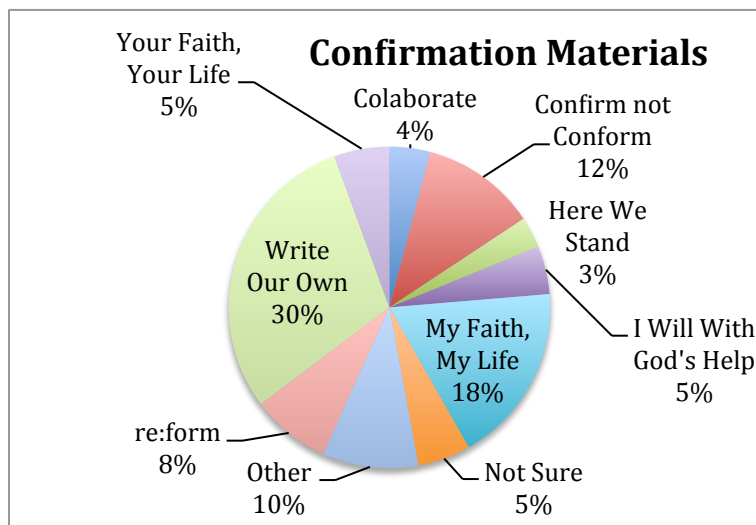


Youth Curricular Programs



Confirmation

Confirmation is often the only youth opportunity offered in a congregation, especially in small churches. Congregations look to their denominational publisher when seeking confirmation preparation materials, however, according to most lay respondents, preparation is conducted by clergy who, “create their own.” Many lay, including staff educators who participated in the survey, did not know what the clergy used or did in preparation classes.

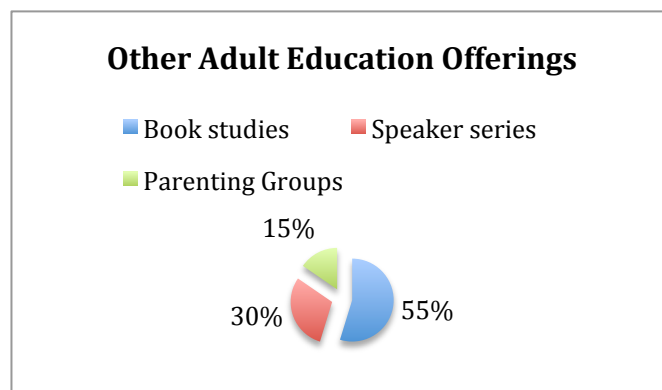


While survey respondents were predominately associated with an Episcopal Church, other denominations named their denominations' recommended curriculum as being used. (These are accounted for in the “Other” category, with the exception of *Co-lab-orate: Lutheran* at 4% and *Here We Stand* at 3%, both programs of the ELCA as well as Luther's

Catechism. *We Believe* was noted by Presbyterians.)

Adult Education

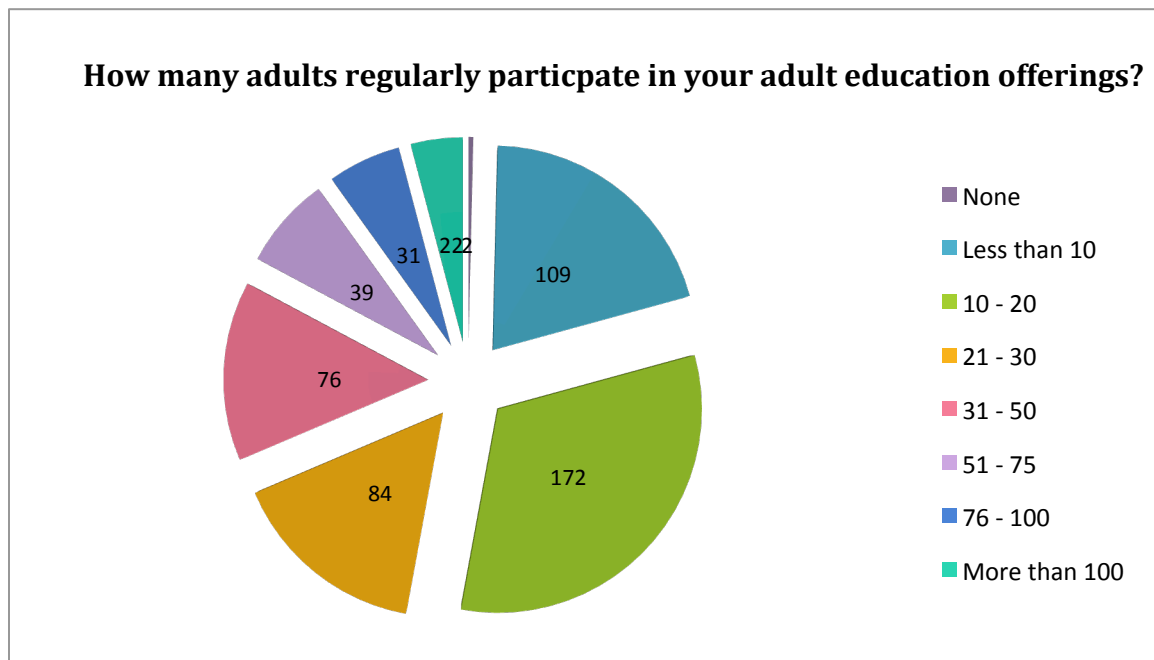
Most respondents answered that adult education was offered in at least one form in their congregation. Types mentioned include the rector's forum, bible study, and long-term studies such as *Education for Ministry* (EfM). DVD series were also noted as popular.



Toward the end of the survey an open-ended question was asked. One of largest themes mentioned was in regard to adult education. There is a strong sense of frustration noted by clergy and lay leaders alike about the desire (or lack thereof) of adults interested in any form of education.

“As a pastor, I’m very frustrated that adults refuse (in a rural setting) to come to church for anything other than one hour of worship every Sunday. Even Confirmation class is held during worship.”

“Everyone wants it, but nobody has time for it. For adult programs, I usually have strong attendance in the beginning, then it dwindles off after a few weeks and dies.”

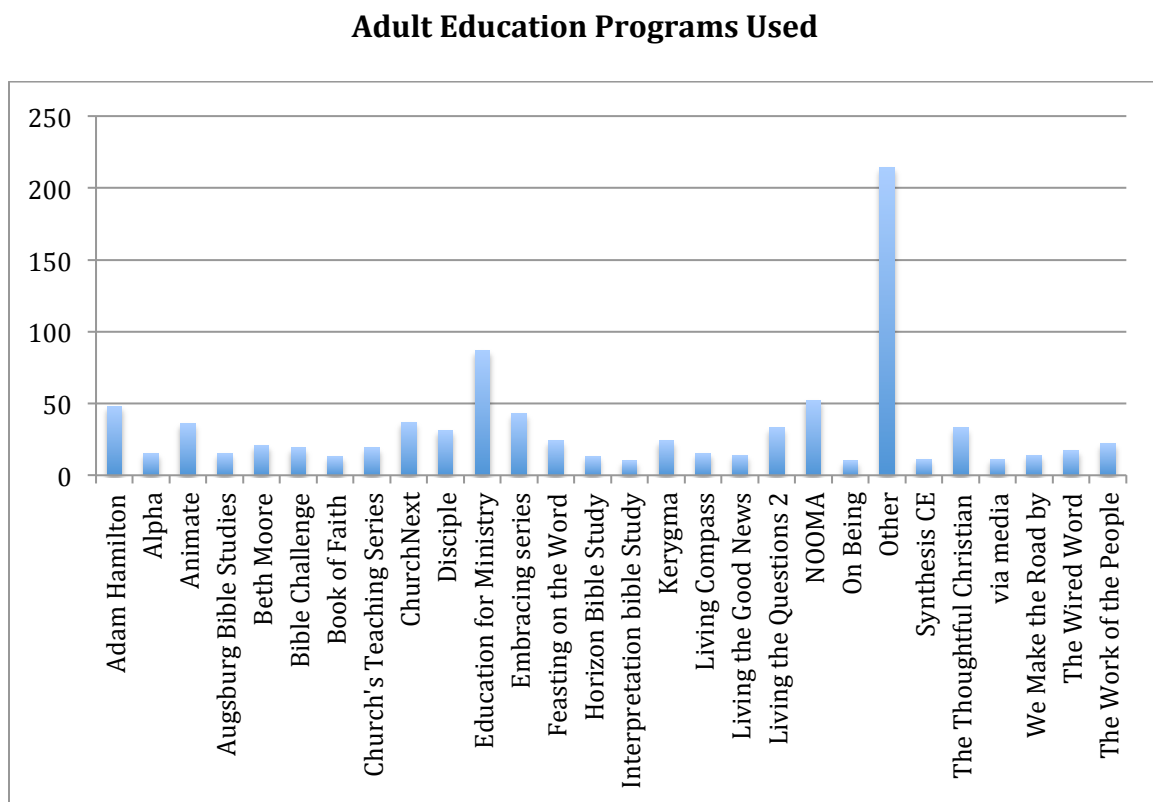
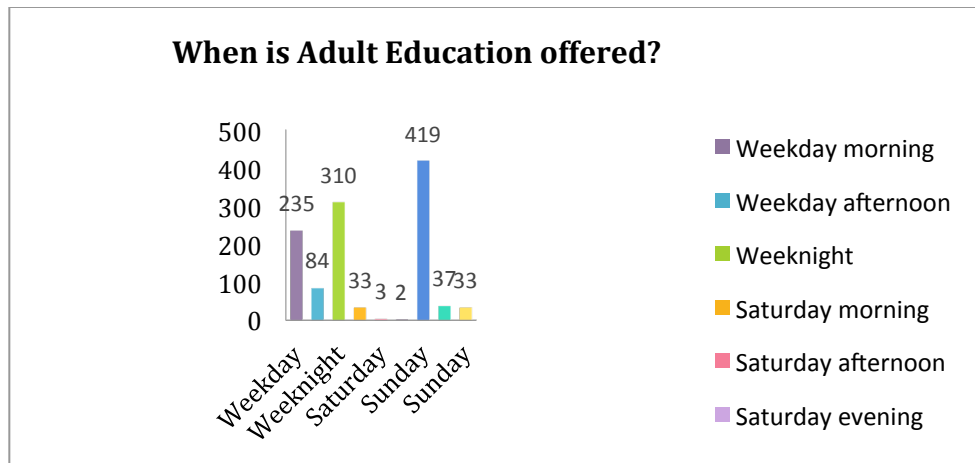


68% of congregations who offer adult education programming have less than thirty individuals who regularly participate in those offerings.

“Fewer and fewer will take the time to commit even to a 4- or 6-week education program. Education cannot be done in a single 45-minute to 1-hour session, let alone in sermon time.”

“How do you get people (adults, mainly) to WANT to be part of formation/education ministries ...that’s the major question.”

“In a parish in Florida with over 1,000 members, only about 50 participate in adult education from time to time.”



It should be noted that out of 535 responses to the adult portion of the survey, most published programs are used by less than 50 congregations each. The largest category, "Other" included 21 programs, many of which were unknown to this compiler or simply noted as Bible study, Lenten study, or Sunday forum.

Needs, Concerns, and Issues

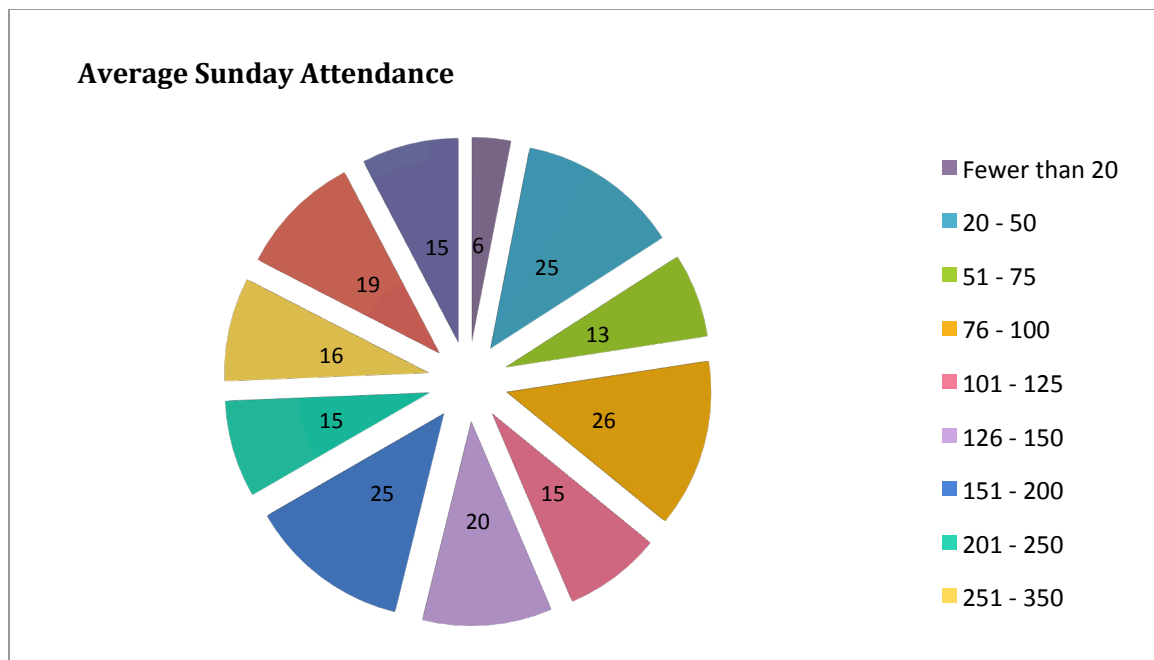
Over 270 individuals took the time to respond to: *Please share any needs or concerns you have about your congregational ministries.* All of these issues were mentioned in previous surveys. They can be categorized in the following areas:

Attendance

As previously noted, the size of a congregation is correlated to how many children and youth attend education programs as well as the financial burden imposed upon them in providing published materials. Seventy individuals noted that sporadic attendance, absence of young families, a decrease in commitment from families to attend Sunday morning education (either in addition to or in place of worship), conflicts with sports schedules, and dropping overall average Sunday worship attendance are a concern and frustration.

Related to this concern is the decreasing amount of time volunteers have to give to their congregation in the teaching ministry. Comments included:

- *"They call out at the last minute"*
- *"Getting volunteers to help and stay engaged"*
- *"Minimizing prep time to keep volunteers"*
- *"More teachers"*
- *"Not enough adult volunteers"*
- *"Recruiting and training of volunteers"*



Cost

With sporadic and/or dropping attendance, small congregations do not have the funds to purchase many programmatic materials. This has been a continuing issue in all past surveys.

Needed resources and training

Compared to previous surveys, there is an increase in the request for the following categories of materials:

- Bi-lingual materials to use with children and adults
- Intergenerational resources (for all learning together)
- Multi-age resources (for 'one room schoolhouse' models)
- Program materials for using with young adult populations (ages 18-25)
- DVD studies for youth and adults
- Support for young parents and grandparents to use at home
- Resources for volunteer teachers without having lengthy workshops for them to attend (Safe Church, Godly Play,
- Apps for phones that align with denominational theology (as opposed to non-denominational commercial products)
- Theologically, denominationally focused Confirmation and youth programs
- Resources to use with special needs children
- Ways to address the needs of adults at different stages of life (mid-life, seniors, etc.)
- Moving away from "paper" curriculum to digital platforms
- Conferences that focus just on "children's ministry" from a denomination (as opposed to the many non-denominational conferences offered across the country). Most denominational education conferences cover all ages and do not spend enough energy on children.

Vision and Support

This was hidden "between the lines" of many responses. Lay leaders felt that many clergy were following old "didactic" models of teacher or were not transparent with their staff educator about what programs, materials, or topics they were teaching.

Both clergy and lay staff noted a desire to have a holistic vision of education and formation for the entire church (denominationally) as well as within the congregation. The desire to provide theologically sound material with volunteer teachers who were new to the Christian faith was an expressed concern. Several noted that their congregation was attempting to develop a "comprehensive Christian nurture" vision or a plan to "continue to grow and change so that those who grow up in the church will remain faithful participants as adults."

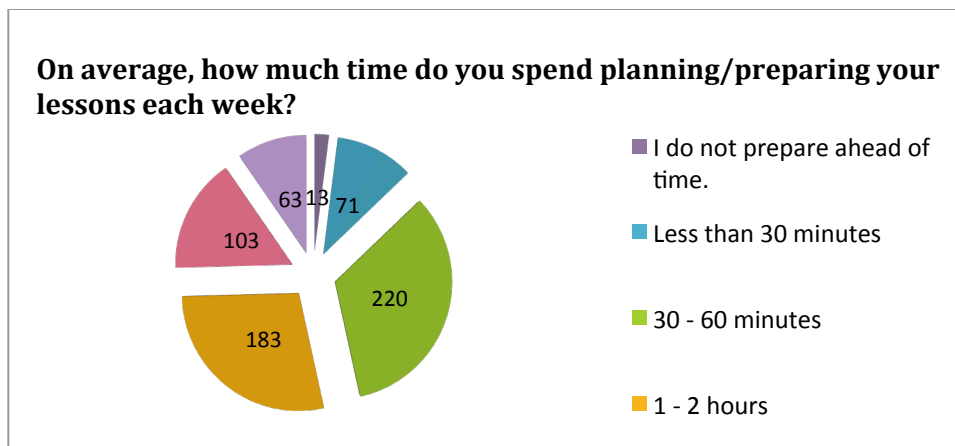
Creativity

While it would seem that all is frustrating and dire, many ideas of success stories and resources were also shared:

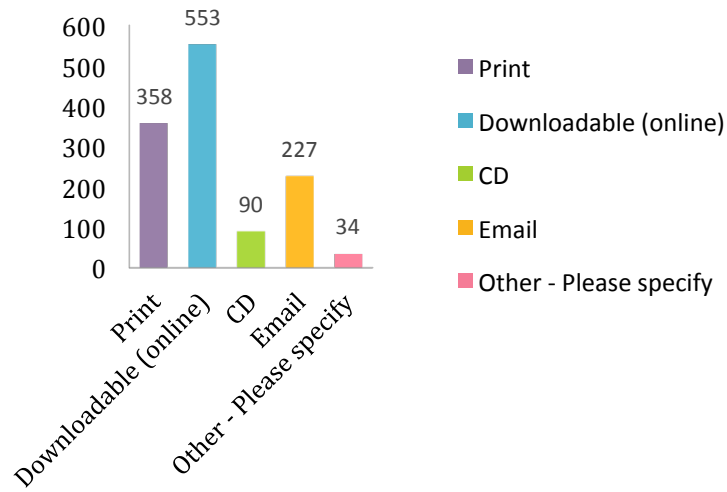
- Vibrant Faith ministries in helping shape a vision for education and formation for all ages
- Inviting volunteer teachers to be part of the curriculum selection process
- Group projects for 3rd – 5th graders
- Books with study guides and/or chapter questions (in the book or online)
- Being small makes us flexible and creative
- Society of St. John the Evangelist's video series (2016) *Growing a Way of Life*
- *Lent Madness*
- "Food, Fellowship, and a Flick" with all ages on Friday nights
- Interfaith youth group

Curriculum and Leader Realities

A number of questions in the survey were an attempt to get a glimpse of those who are leading educational ministries in congregations. How much time do they spend in planning programs and lessons? What is most helpful in today's curricular products? Where do you go for support in your ministry?

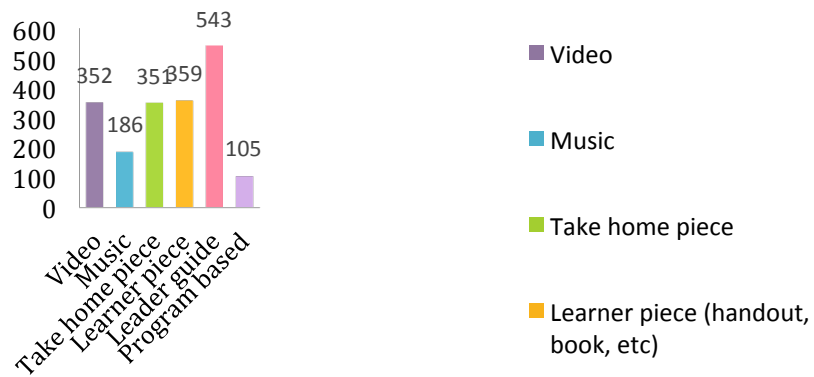


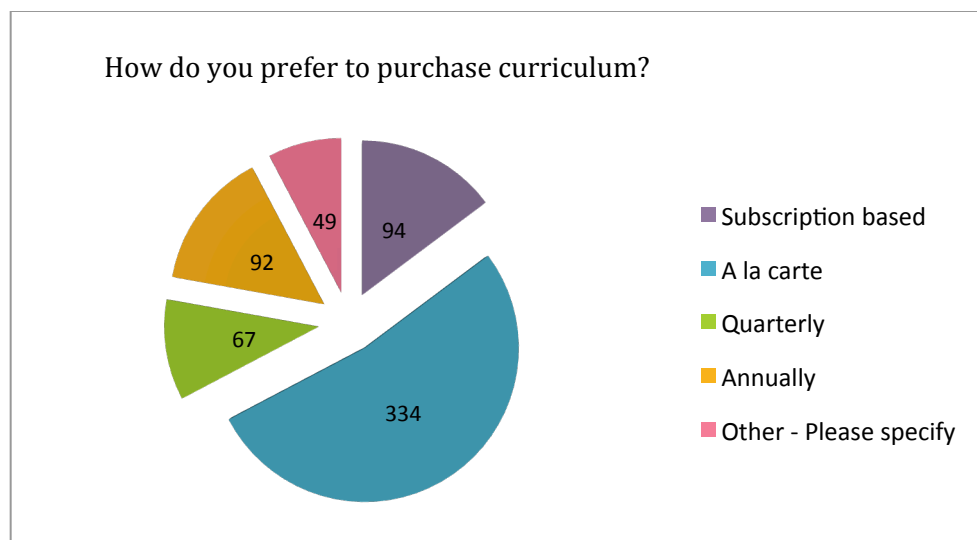
What medium/media do you prefer to receive lesson plans for your context?



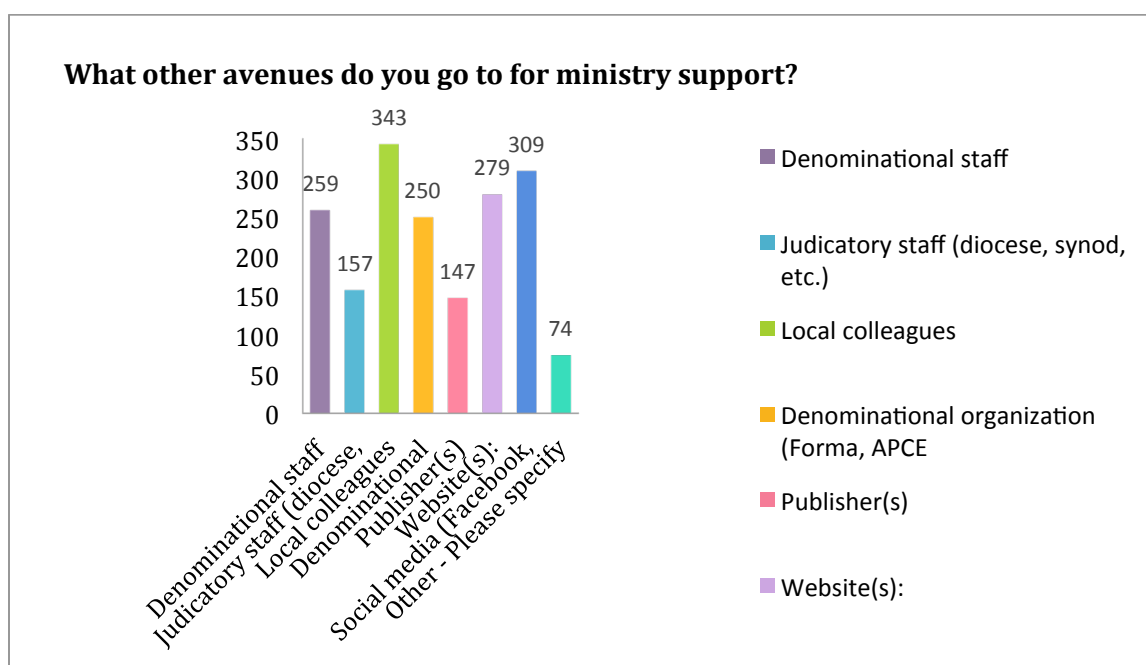
Other included: live streaming, YouTube, felt board figures, self-created

What component(s) do you desire a curriculum to have?





Other preferences included: books, as needed, permanent/reusable, no cost

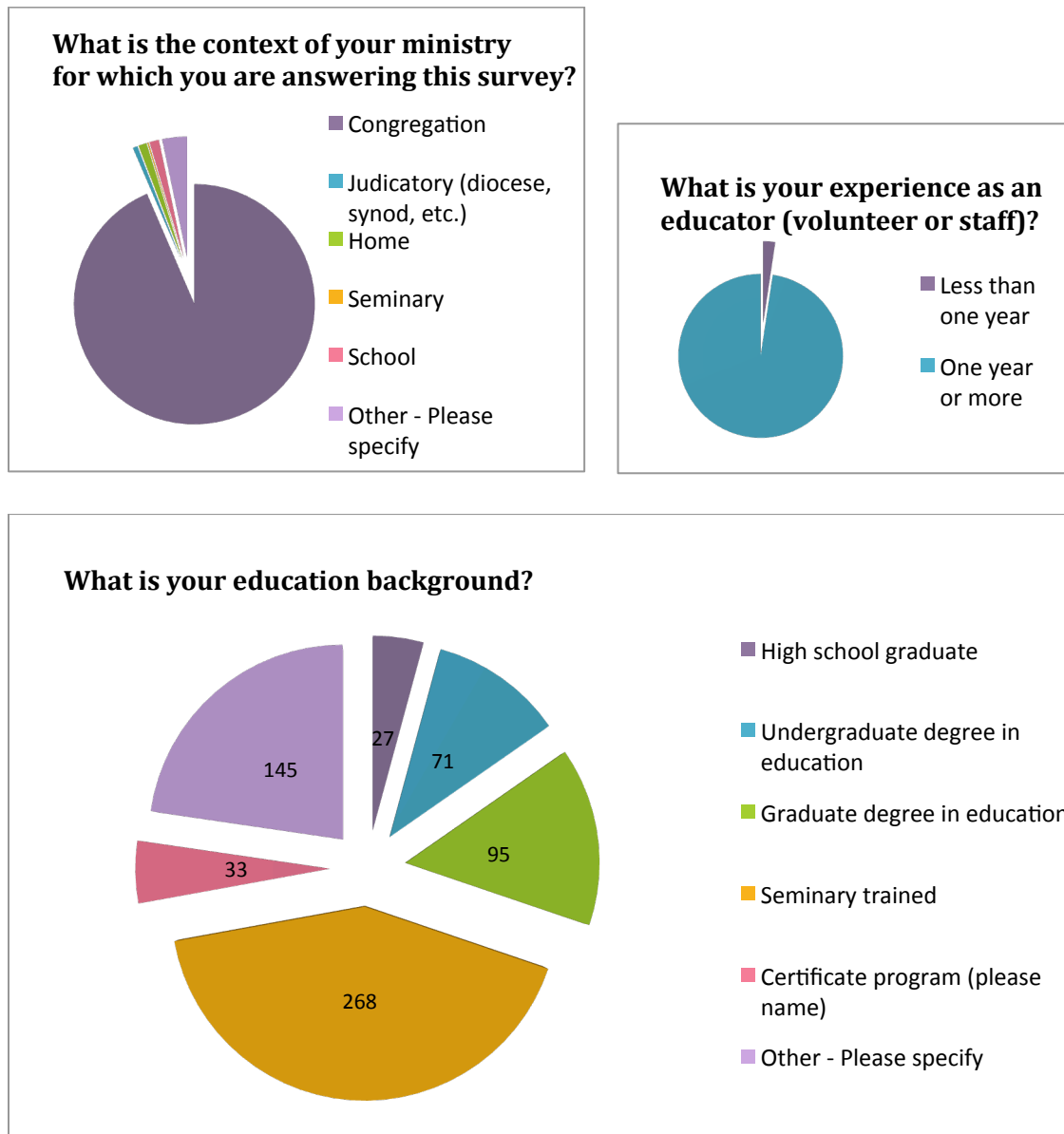


Publishers noted (in alphabetical order): Abingdon, Augsburg Fortress, Candle Press, Christian Book Distributors, Church Publishing, Cokesbury, Concordia, Faith Alive, Gospel Light, Group, Logos, Liturgy Training Publications, Ministry Architects, Morehouse, Paraclete Press, PCUSA, Sparkhouse, St. Mark's Press, StoryPath, UCC Resources, Veritas Press, and Westminster John Knox Press (WJK).

Websites (in addition to publisher's websites): Building Faith, Sermons 4 Kids, Vibrant Faith, Grow Christians, Barnabas in Churches, Pinterest, Worshipping with Children, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Forma, ChurchNext, Diocese of

Pennsylvania, Illustrated Children's Ministry, Living Compass, Kids Word, Ministry Matters, Prince of Peace Episcopal Church (GA), Text Week, Ministry to Children, and Flame.

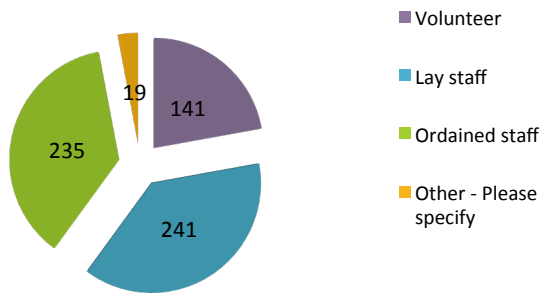
Demographics – Who took the survey?



Certifications named: Forma, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, DOCC, EfM, Healthy Congregations, ACE, UCC certification, PCUSA Certified Educator, Seminary of the Southwest, and Spiritual Guidance of Children (General Seminary)

Other education: local schools of ministry, graduate degrees in other fields (BA, BS), and post-degree work: MACE, MA, DMin, Ph.D, M.Div.

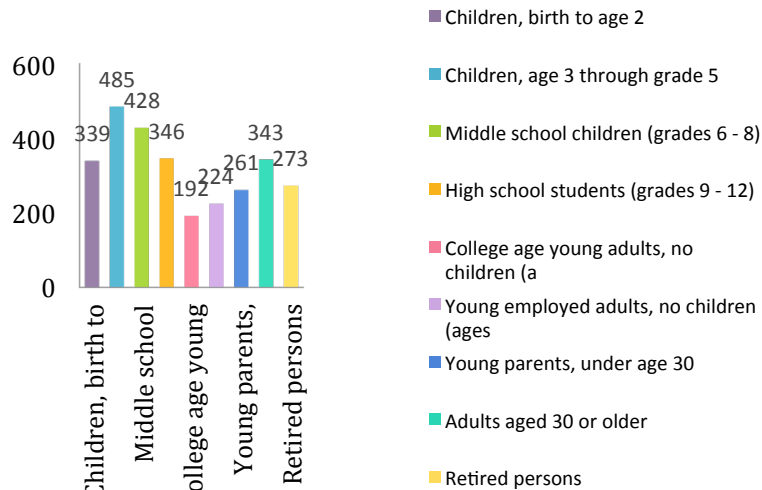
What is your role in formation ministries?



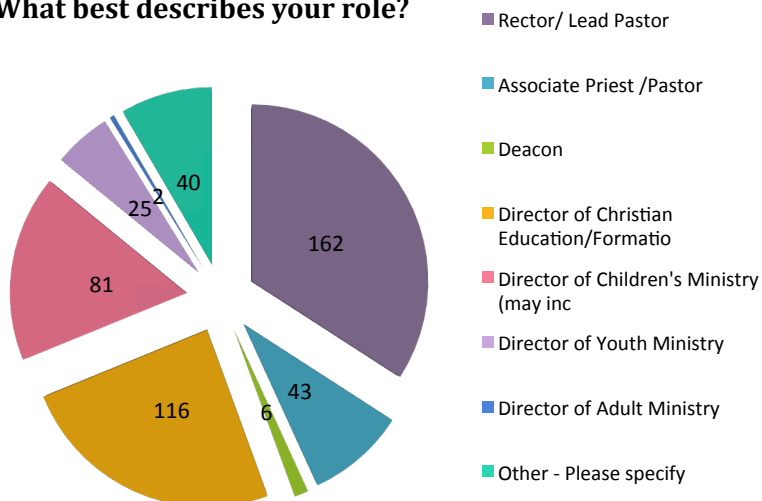
Other:

- Vestry member
- Catechist
- Consultant
- Christian education committee member

What age groups(s) do you have some responsibility for?



What best describes your role?



Other:

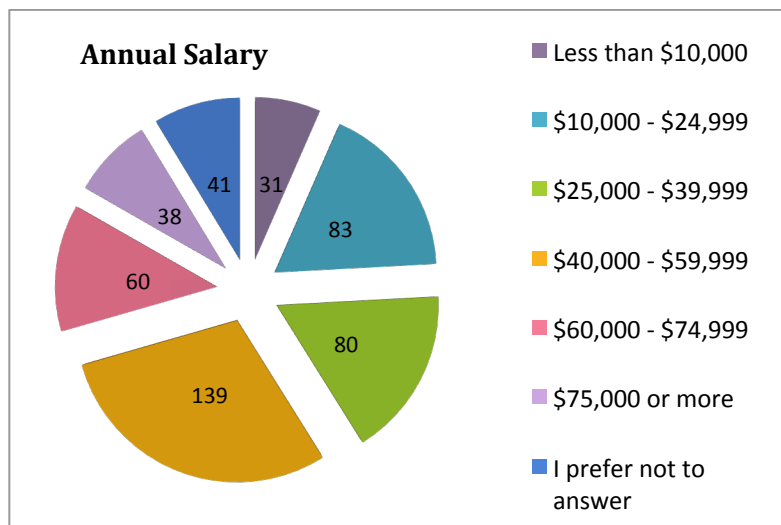
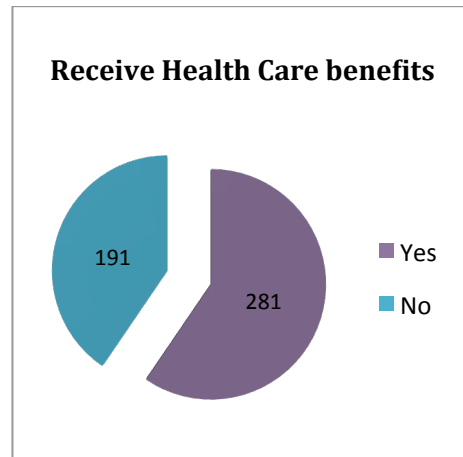
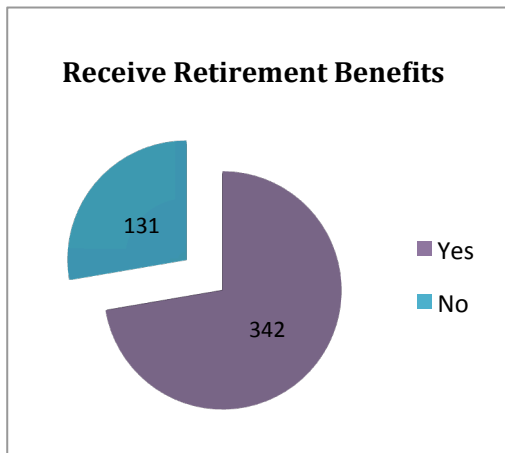
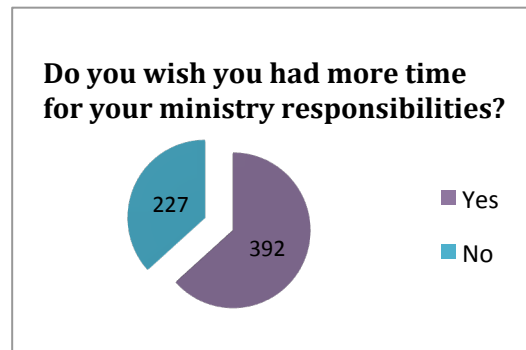
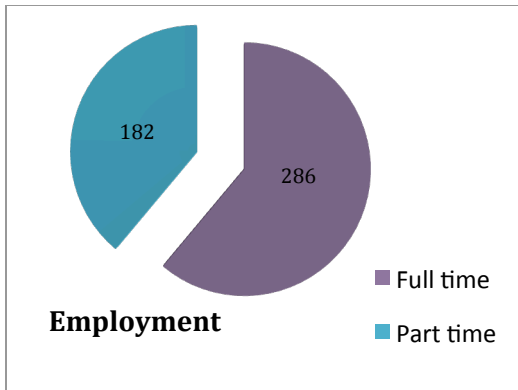
Director of:

- Children & Youth
- Discipleship
- Music Ministry
- Congregational Development

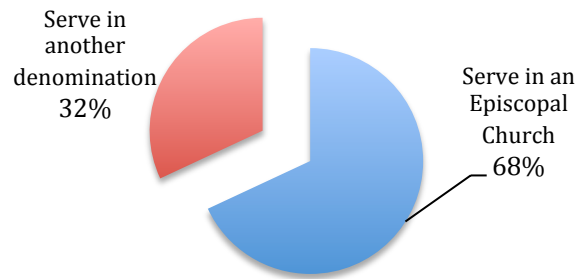
Minister of:

- Vocation
- Parish Life

Ministry Assistant
Nursery Director
Sunday School Teacher (paid)
Warden
Teacher



Denominational Affiliation



Other denominations represented in this survey:

