

## Elements of church life that may contribute to wellbeing

**Purpose:** To survey pastors on church activities that might contribute to well-being.

**Methods:** Pastors were surveyed regarding: teaching/worship; service outside church; and communication within church. The questions were developed from Scriptural references to spiritually or service encouraged church activities.

**Results:** There were 105/976 (11%) responses. Pastors indicated teaching/worship, educational and small group meetings all positively affected well-being of attendees. The most positive aspects of teaching/worship activities were praise, prayer, sermons and baptismal services and were the highest rated of all assessed church activities. For service outside the church the activities were positive for church life with teaching the gospel/Bible. For church administration issues and communication patterns the highest rated response were the attendees' relationship with the pastors, but also along with other church leaders and associate pastors.

**Conclusions:** A variety of activities inside the church, but especially the spiritual aspects associated with church attendance, may contribute to well-being of members.

### RESULTS

This survey was sent to 976 pastors of whom 105 (11%) responded. The background characteristics are shown in Table 1. Most of the respondents were from the West (40%), pastored a congregation with <100 people (32%), were non-denominational (43%), attended The Master's Seminary (48%), pastored their church >20 years (36%) and held the position of head pastor (77%). When asked 'How do worship, educational and small group meetings affect the well-being of attendees?' the pastors indicated that every aspect of the three elements of the church life were positive for a person's well-being with only very few respondents indicating a negative effects, or no effects, from such spiritually based activities. The most positive aspects of these activities were praise, prayer, sermons and baptismal services ( $P < 0.0001$ ) and were the highest rated measures for the entire study ( $n = 58$  to  $75$  rated 'very positive'). Please see Table 2 for complete responses. When asked 'How does service outside the church affect the well-being of attendees?' pastors again indicated these activities were positive for the church with teaching the gospel/Bible as most advantageous (51% very positive,  $P = 0.05$ ). This was not significant between responses after the Bonferroni correction. Please see Table 3 for complete responses. When asked 'How does the church's administration and communication affect the well-being of attendees?' again responses were positive for every question. Respondents perceived the most positive aspect in this section was the attendees' relationship with themselves as a pastor (39% very positive), but also along with other church leaders and associate pastors ( $P < 0.0001$ ). Please see Table 4 for complete responses. The linear regression model to determine risk for providing 'very positive' ratings compared to the demographic characteristics showed that pastors of small church congregations (<100) had a propensity for 'very positive' ratings ( $P = 0.0451$ ). Please see Table 5 for list of measured variables.

**Table 1: Respondent characteristics (N = 105)**

Question	Choices	Responses	Percentage
Geographical region	Northeast	22	21
	South	15	14
	Midwest	26	25
	West	42	40
Church attendance	<100	34	32
	100-200	26	25
	200-500	20	19
	500-1000	10	10
	>1000	15	14
Denomination	Non-denominational	45	43
	Evangelical Free Church of America	13	12
	Baptist	22	21
	Other (incidence less than 5)	24	23
	Blank	1	1
Seminary	The Master's Seminary	50	48
	Denver Seminary	13	12
	Westminster Theological Seminary	9	9

	Other (incidence less than 5)	31	30
	Blank	2	2
Years pastored a church	1-5	19	18
	6-10	17	16
	11-20	30	29
	>20	38	36
Position	Head pastor	81	77
	Associate pastor	11	11
	Other (incidence less than 5)	12	12

**Table 2: How do worship, educational and small group meetings affect the well-being of attendees?**

(Respondents chose their level of agreement on a scale from 0-6: very negative, negative, minimally negative, no effect, minimally positive, positive, very positive)

	Very positive		Positive	
	Responses	Percent	Responses	Percent
Praise (including musical worship)	58	55%	40	38%
Prayer	59	56%	35	33%
Liturgical readings	6	6%	22	21%
Sermons	75	71%	24	23%
Hearing the gospel explained	67	64%	30	29%
Amount of church responsibility by members	32	30%	53	50%
Baptismal services	59	56%	26	25%
Celebration of communion	49	47%	40	38%
Amount of time spent at church weekly	18	17%	42	40%
Socializing with other worshipers	42	40%	52	50%
Social structure within your church	21	20%	45	43%
Children's programs	31	30%	42	40%
Small groups	41	39%	30	29%
Sunday school	23	22%	44	42%

**Table 3: How does outside service affect the well-being of attendees?**

(Respondents chose their level of agreement on a scale from 0-6: very negative, negative, minimally negative, no effect, minimally positive, positive, very positive)

	Very positive		Positive	
	Responses	Percent	Responses	Percent
Social assistance (to poor, single mothers, etc.)	41	39%	33	31%
Teaching the Bible	48	46%	41	39%
Teaching the gospel	54	51%	37	35%
Local missions outreach	41	39%	46	44%
Distant missions outreach	29	28%	48	46%

**Table 4: How does the church's administration and communication affect the well-being of attendees?**

(Respondents chose their level of agreement on a scale from 0-6: very negative, negative, minimally negative, no effect, minimally positive, positive, very positive)

	Very positive		Positive	
	Responses	Percent	Responses	Percent
Member relationship with the head pastor	41	39%	52	50%
Member relationship with the associate pastor(s)	26	25%	44	42%
Relationship with lay leaders	26	25%	62	59%
Church non-spiritual committees/functions	4	4%	33	31%
Manner of conflict resolution among members/officers/staff	36	34%	51	49%
Church's social media profile	11	10%	28	27%
How members speak about each other/staff	35	33%	50	48%
Church meetings	15	14%	49	47%
Church physical plant problems/issues	4	4%	25	24%
Church physical plant appearance/space	8	8%	41	39%

**Table 5: Linear regression results showing 'very positive' ratings compared to demography**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>P-value</b>
Location [Midwest]	0.8207
Location [Northeast]	0.6585
Location [South]	0.1849
Size [100-200]	0.9842
Size [200-500]	0.2649
Size [500-1000]	0.3689
Size [<100]	0.0451
Denomination [Anglican]	0.9915
Denomination [Baptist]	0.3747
Denomination [Brethren]	0.56
Denomination [Evangelical Covenant]	0.2338
Denomination [Evangelical Free Church of America]	0.8094
Denomination [Non-denominational]	0.6052
Denomination [Orthodox Presbyterian]	0.9077
Denomination [Other]	0.6023
School [Denver Seminary]	0.9691
School [N/A]	0.8094
School [Other]	0.5392
School [The Master's Seminary]	0.2207
Years [11-20]	0.8254
Years [>20]	0.6902
Years [1-5]	0.7385
Position [Adult education]	0.7499
Position [Associate/Assistant]	0.8585
Position [Children/Youth]	0.4321

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