

**Wesley Theological Seminary  
Washington, DC**

**Openly Gay and Lesbian Pastors  
Called by  
Predominantly Straight UCC Congregations**

**A Research Project Submitted  
To the Faculty of Wesley Theological Seminary  
For the Degree of Doctor of Ministry**

**By  
David Paul Bahr**

**April 17, 2006**

## **Abstract**

*Openly Gay and Lesbian Pastors Called by Predominantly Straight*

*United Church of Christ Congregations*

This study of 62 churches finds that they have fared statistically better than the UCC on matters of membership, worship attendance, Sunday school attendance and stewardship. It finds that despite fears articulated by members, these congregations often experienced revitalization that reversed or slowed years of decline. It finds that, for the 59 pastors surveyed, their ministry as an out gay man or lesbian presents both unique joys and painful challenges. It finds that all parties must watch for potential issues to arise from members' unexamined and pastors' internalized homophobia. Finally, it provides advice for all parties involved.

## Acknowledgments

There are many people who helped me along the way, without whom this project would not be what it is. I am grateful to all the conference ministers and conference staff that helped identify participants. I thank Destiny Shellhammer from the UCC Research Office for supplying me with statistics that were not readily available. I am grateful for the always prompt information and support from Ann B. Day and Donna Enberg from the Open and Affirming Program. I thank all the staff from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team for providing statistics as well as so enthusiastically hosting my oral presentation at the UCC national offices: Peg Slater helped with the arrangements, Christy Trudo helped teach me and present the PowerPoint presentation, and Dick Sparrow supported the venture with advice and counsel. There were many others who showed their support with affirmations of my goals on the national staff of the UCC.

Without the fantastic response to my research inquiries by the clergy in the study, I would not have had much to say. I am not only grateful for the time and effort they took to answer all of my questions, I am thankful for their transformative ministry within the denomination. The UCC is incredibly fortunate to have the pastoral gifts of this esteemed, and growing, group.

Members of Archwood UCC have been completely supportive of my whole D.Min. journey, generously granting me time for all the work it has involved. During the weeks I was away for classes, my administrative assistant, Greg Becker, always handled things so competently that I never worried. During my sabbatical, leaders of the congregation stepped up and met every challenge. For everyone's understanding and support in the church, I am extremely grateful. I also thank Kate Dailey who helped edit the final text and Terri Hisel who helped with some of the Excel charts.

The Doctor of Ministry program at Wesley energized my ministry in new and exciting ways. Dr. Lew Parks, director of the D.Min. program at Wesley Theological Seminary, enthusiastically embraced my ideas for this project when first presented; Mary Moschella carefully read the draft.

Finally, it all begins with the support received by one's family. My parents' unwavering support of me as a gay man in ministry is a gift I know many others covet. Thank you.

# Contents

## Part I: Introduction

Chapter 1:	Why This Study?	8
	Getting Started	9
	Definitions and Abbreviations: LGBT and UCC	9
	Brief History of Ordination for Openly Gay UCC Pastors	11
	My Story: The Process of Being Called By a Church	13
	Methodology and Steps	16

## Part II: Theological Reflection

Chapter 2:	Esther and Vashti: Biblical Heroes for Gay Men and Lesbians Called to Ordained Ministry	22
	My Story: The Call to Ministry and Being Gay	27

## Part III: Commentary on the Results of the Survey

	A Profile	30
Chapter 3:	Pastors: Who Are They?	32
	3.1 Chart: Denomination In Which Pastor Was Raised	35
	3.2 Chart: Denomination In Which Pastor Was Ordained	36
	3.3 Chart: Years of Ordination	37
	3.4 Chart: Age of Pastors In Survey	38
	3.5 Chart: Number of Years Out	39
	Congregations: Who Are They?	40
	3.6 Chart: Original Denominational Affiliation	43
	3.7 Chart: Church Setting	44
	3.8 Chart: Number of Pastors in Each Conference	45
	3.9 Chart: ONA Status Before Calling Pastor	46
	3.10 Chart: ONA Status Today	47
	3.11 Chart: Search Committee Vote Margins	48
	3.12 Chart: Congregational Vote Margins	49
Chapter 4:	Congregations: Fears Cited and Outcomes	50
	- Loss of Membership	
	- Becoming a "Gay Church"	51
	- Loss of Income	52
	- The Pastor's "Gay Agenda"	54
	- Loss of Children and Families	55
	- Other Fears	56
	- Stated Objections	57
	4.1 Chart: Fears Expressed By Members	59
	4.2 Chart: Desire to Serve LGBT Congregation	60
	4.3 Chart: Reasons Non-LGBT People Join	61

4.4 Chart: Comments of Long Time Members	62
4.5 Chart: Primary Objections Raised	63
Chapter 5: Indicators of Health	64
- Worship Attendance	
- Summary by the Numbers	64
- Comparing to the Rest of the UCC	65
5.1 Chart: Peak and Current Membership	68
5.2 Chart: Peak and Current Worship Attendance	69
5.3 Chart: Peak and Current Sunday School Attendance	70
5.4 Chart: Effect on Income and Pledges	71
5.5 Chart: Percentage of LGBT Membership When Pastor Arrived	72
5.6 Chart: Percentage of New Members Who Are LGBT	73
5.7 Chart: Percentage of LGBT Members Today	74
5.8 Chart: Percentage of Growing – ONA, Non-ONA	75
5.9 Chart: Percentage of Declining – ONA, Non-ONA	76
5.10 Chart: Membership Growth/Decline – UCC, Study	77
5.11 Chart: Membership Statistics Comparison	78
5.12 Chart: Worship Growth/Decline – UCC, Study	79
5.13 Chart: Worship Statistics Comparison	80
5.14 Chart: Sunday School Growth/Decline – UCC, Study	81
5.15 Chart: Sunday School Statistics Comparison	82
5.16 Chart: Stewardship Growth/Decline – UCC, Study	83
5.17 Chart: Overall Percent. of Members Who Are LGBT	84
Chapter 6: Pastors: Apprehensions Cited and Impacts	85
- Tension and Acceptance	86
- Pressure to Monitor Speech	87
- Performance Standards	89
6.1 Chart: Apprehensions Felt by Incoming Pastors	91
6.2 Chart: Pressure to Self-Censure	92
6.2a Chart: Pressure from Members	92
6.3 Chart: Perceived Pressures – Internal/External	93
6.4 Chart: Is Pressure More Internal or External?	94
6.5 Chart: Leaving Ministry Because of Sexual Orientation	95
6.6 Chart: Comfort With Speaking Freely	96
Chapter 7: Understanding the Apprehensions	97
- Internalized and Unexamined Homophobia	
Interview: The Power of Homophobia in One Church	98
Chapter 8: Pastors and Congregations: Overcoming Concerns	102
- Addressing Members’ Fears and Objections	
- How to Handle and Overcome Pastors’ Fears	103
Interview: Can I Be Who I Am?	104

## **Part IV: Conclusions**

Chapter 9: Varying Dynamics	105
- Is Having a Gay Pastor What Made These Churches Grow?	
- Other Factors in Growth	106
- The Role of Open and Affirming	107
- Unique Hardships and Unique Joys	108
- To Be Open or Not	109
9.1 Chart: Is It “Better” to Be Open?	111
Chapter 10: Advice	112
- Words of Advice for Those Considering a Call	
- Words of Advice for Search Committees	113
- Words of Advice for Associations	114
Conclusion	114

## **Bibliography**

Works Cited	116
-------------	-----

## **Appendix**

Summary Responses to All Survey Questions	119
Tables	
Appendix 1.1 Membership Information For All Participating Churches	120
Churches That Reported Fear of Losing Members	
Did Anyone Leave Because Gay Pastor Called?	
Did Anyone Come Back?	
Year of Peak Membership	
Actual and Percentage Decline/Growth in Membership	
Membership When Pastor Arrived and Year	
Number of Members Today	
Number of New Members	
Actual and Percentage Growth/Decline in Membership	
Did Churches That Feared Losing Members Actually Lose?	
Other Factors Reported in Decline	
Appendix 1.2 Membership Figures For Churches That Reported Peak	122
Appendix 1.3 Membership For Churches That Did Not Include Peak	123
Appendix 2.1 Worship Attendance Figures For All Participating Churches	124
Appendix 2.2 Figures For Churches That Reported Peak	126
Appendix 2.3 Figures For Churches That Did Not Include Peak	127
Appendix 3.1 Sunday School Information For All Participating Churches	128
Churches That Reported Fear of Losing Children	
Year of Peak Attendance	
Actual and Percentage Decline/Growth in Attendance	
Attendance When Pastor Arrived	

Actual and Percentage Growth/Decline	
Did Fear of Losing Children Come True?	
Appendix 3.2 Sunday School Attendance - Churches That Reported Peak	130
Appendix 3.3 Figures For Churches That Did Not Include Peak	131
Appendix 4 LGBT Percentage of Membership	132
Did Churches Fear Gaining Too Many LGBT Members?	
LGBT Percentage of Membership When Pastor Arrived	
LGBT Percentage of New Members	
LGBT Percentage of Current Membership	
Blank Survey	
Letter Requesting Assistance from Conference Ministers	
Letter Requesting Support from Eligible Pastors	

# Part I: Introduction

## Chapter One: Introduction

### Why This Study

The title of this project describes, in part, me. I am an openly gay pastor who was called by a predominantly straight United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation thirteen years ago. At the time, I was the first such pastor in Ohio; there are now half-a-dozen in just the greater Cleveland area. Nationally, in the early 1990s one could still count on their fingers the number of pastors who fit the parameters of this study – the congregation must have known the candidates gay or lesbian sexual orientation before voting affirmatively on their call. Today I was able to contact more than 100, and there are certainly others who were not identified.

Based on my own experience, I had a series of questions. Among them, how have these congregations fared? What has it been like for the pastors? What were the fears and apprehensions felt by both congregations and pastors when they began their ministry together? How have these been addressed and, if they have been, overcome? What can we learn?

Being an openly gay or lesbian Christian is challenging in today's culture; the United States is being manipulated by the powerful forces of contemporary conservative Christianity, supported and reinforced by those with political power who seek to maintain their power by legitimizing anti-gay bias. In both church and society, simply being out is to take a risk. This, however, also makes the ministry of the pastors in this study that much more important. This is an historic moment; perhaps it may someday be seen as a turning point.

It is for both those who support and those who oppose openly gay and lesbian clergy that I conducted this study. I wanted to provide some "proof," however limited it may be, that churches not only do not fall apart when they knowingly call gay clergy but they find new life. This, as I suspected and confirmed, is not true in every case, but far more common than not. I also wanted to affirm those congregations who were among the first willing to risk crucifixion and who have now seen their church rise again to new ministry, therefore encouraging additional churches to do so as well.

But perhaps more importantly, this study is meant to affirm those brave pioneers who are among the first in the world, really, to be so audacious as to refuse to compromise their whole selves to serve the church, to the glory of God. Their ministry is both painful and liberating, as their responses show, but most would not trade it for a different calling. This study provides a glimpse at men and women striving to do their best to follow a call from God to serve as a pastor in Christ's Church during a turbulent and transforming time.

In the role of researcher I sought information; in the role of pastor, I hope for transformation. In the final analysis, the results really speak for themselves.



## **Getting Started**

I wrote much of this project while staying at a monastery in New Mexico. One day during a meal another guest asked what I was working on. “My Doctor of Ministry project,” I said, hoping that would be sufficient. “Oh, what’s it on?” she inquired. “Well...it’s...” and I had to decide if this person felt safe enough to share the real topic. I wasn’t sure so I simply said, “It’s about the effectiveness of pastors in ministry.” But she wanted to know more. “In what way; how are you measuring it?” I decided, in essence, to come out and share the title and focus of my work.

It is funny that after having been quite public about my sexual orientation for twenty years, there are continually moments in church settings like these when I have to decide whether to reveal my identity. In a serious researcher’s manner I said, “I have conducted a study about what effects, if any, there have been when a predominantly straight congregation has called an openly gay pastor,” but I did not tell her that I did this out of personal experience. She looked at me like she did not understand. “Openly gay pastors serving churches,” I reiterated. She looked dazed.

To help, I told her that in our denomination pastors could be gay, that there were hundreds. I also told her that my findings showed that the vast majority of those pastors surveyed reported, overall, a significant growth in membership, attendance and stewardship; and perhaps more surprisingly, lots of new families with children and growing Sunday schools. “With gay pastors,” I reminded her, “where the whole congregation knows it.” She never said a word. She continued to look confused, as though she was thinking, how could a pastor be gay? We went back to eating. She didn’t eat with me again during my stay.

On another day, two people happily engaged me about the findings; one even admired our church for taking such a risk. Given the opportunity, however, though I did not encounter any open hostility, I suspect there were many others who would have expressed a very dim view of these developments in Christianity for gay and lesbian people that I find exciting.

## **Definitions and Abbreviations**

Throughout this document you may see terms that are unfamiliar but that are common vocabulary for others, especially LGBT terms and UCC terms. I have also provided some explanations of the terms related to procedures to serve as a pastor or seek ordination in the UCC. Hopefully these explanations will serve you as you read the rest of this document, including the verbatim statements of the survey participants.

Note: “churches,” “congregations,” and “parishes” are synonymous and interchangeable in this paper; as are “minister,” “pastor,” and “clergy.”

## **LGBT**

This paper is focused on the experiences of openly gay and lesbian pastors, but when referring to the larger community or common issues, I use the acronym “LGBT.” LGBT refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons or community. Many younger persons use the term queer or queer community positively as more broadly representative and inclusive. This will be seen in a few of the verbatim responses from survey participants.

“Transgender” is inclusive of several groups who challenge traditional definitions of male/female and masculine/feminine. Only some of those who are transgender seek to surgically change their gender; some self-identify as gay or lesbian and some are straight. Because of the additional, and perhaps more complex, issues, they are not included in the limited scope of this project; nor are bisexuals.

“Straight” means heterosexual and to say a congregation is “predominantly straight” indicates that the majority of members are heterosexual, either as individuals or as traditional or conventional families. Depending on the openness of the church, there may be gay or lesbian members who are “out,” but LGBT persons may also feel it necessary to remain “closeted.”

To say someone is “openly gay” is inclusive of men and women, though many women prefer the term “lesbian.” I try to balance the use of openly gay and lesbian but shorten it at times for the sake of brevity. To say someone is “out” is synonymous with “openly gay” and means they publicly self-identify their same-sex sexual orientation. Some in the LGBT community prefer “same-gender loving.”

To say someone is “not out” can mean either they do not yet acknowledge their sexual orientation themselves, have not told anyone else or have told only a few. This is often synonymous with “closeted.” You might say “I came out of the closet” twenty years ago to indicate self-acceptance, but I’ve only been out to my parents (or children or congregation, etc.) for five years, an indication of the ongoing process of having to “come out” to people who do not yet know. Each time represents possible rejection and must be considered for potential cost, including safety.

## **UCC**

Congregations in the UCC – United Church of Christ – that have voted to affirm their welcome of persons regardless of sexual (and sometimes gender) orientation are called “ONA” – Open and Affirming. In similar fashion among other denominations, United Methodists have Reconciling Congregations, Presbyterians have More Light Congregations, and Lutheran congregations are called Reconciled in Christ. Disciples of Christ congregations also use the designation Open and Affirming but use the acronym “O&A.” Not all ONA churches will hire an openly gay pastor and not all churches that have called an openly gay pastor are ONA.

The UCC has a “call system” which contrasts with one where bishops or other authorities appoint a pastor to a particular church. When there is a clergy position open, a UCC congregation appoints a search committee that reviews the “profiles” – a kind of comprehensive resume that includes statements of faith and ministry in addition to job experience and education – of those who are seeking a parish to serve as pastor. Each congregation also prepares a profile about itself and what it is seeking in its new minister.

Churches are assisted in the process, which can take several months or years, by “association” or “conference ministers.” These are staffs who serve larger regional bodies that may help make a match by submitting certain profiles to search committees for their review. Some of those who assist with placement may or may not be supportive of the idea of openly gay and lesbian clergy and, though required if

requested to, may not circulate their profiles. While a church is looking for a new pastor, they will be served by an “interim pastor” – often someone specially trained for such work – that might be chosen by church leaders, such as a Council or Consistory, not the whole congregation.

When a search committee has decided upon a new pastor, it presents the candidate to the congregation. Methods of introduction vary, but ultimately the congregation will hear a “call sermon” and then vote. Every church has its own constitution and/or by-laws that stipulate the number of persons who must vote in the affirmative, such as a simple majority, two-thirds, or a higher percentage. If the candidate does not meet the required percentage, the search committee will start again or a new committee will be formed. The pastor who is “called” – church language for hired – will then serve as long as he or she and the congregation agree that it is a mutually beneficial ministry.

Now that a “call” has been extended, if the new pastor has not yet been ordained, and if the association where the candidate has been “in-care” – the process by which one is shepherded through seminary – agrees that all educational and/or other necessary preparations are complete “pending a call,” he or she may be ordained. There are still some associations, however, that will not do so, nor give “standing” – authorization to serve in that association – to already ordained openly gay clergy. While clergy are called by and are members of the churches they serve, their authorization to do ministry is held by the association in which they are located.

### **Brief History of Ordination for Gay Men and Lesbians in the UCC**

A national body of the UCC, the Council for Christian Social Action, first spoke out on civil rights for homosexuals in April, 1969, a few months *before* the Stonewall Uprising, an event that marks the modern era of gay rights in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Bill Johnson was the first openly gay man ordained in the UCC in 1972 in Northern California, though not through a call to serve a congregation; similarly, Rev. Anne Holmes was the first lesbian ordained in 1977 in Virginia. Not forgetting even earlier pioneers, the Rev. Robert Wood reports having lived with his male partner in parsonages throughout his ministry in the 1950s and 60s but it was not necessarily spoken of in those settings.<sup>2</sup>

Addressing the issue of openly gay men or lesbians called to the ministry, in 1973 the UCC Executive Council – the main deliberative body of the church between biennial meetings of the General Synod, the gathering of more than 700 delegates from every conference – recommended that when associations consider “a stated homosexual’s candidacy for ordination, the issue should not be his/her

---

<sup>1</sup> “Resolution on Homosexuals and the Law.” Adopted by the Council for Christian Social Action, United Church of Christ, April 12, 1969. A compilation of resolutions pertaining to LGBT issues are published in *That We May All Be One: 30 Years of United Church of Christ Social Justice Policy Statements on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns* available from Justice and Witness Ministries or United Church Resources, United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>2</sup> Additional information about the history of LGBT persons in the UCC can be found at [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org); Assistance with this section came from *And So We Speak: Experiences of Openly Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clergy and Seminarians in the United Church of Christ*, “Highlights of UCC History Regarding Openly Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clergy and In-Care Candidates,” ed. Ann B. Day, Holden, MA: The Open and Affirming Program of the Coalition, 1998, p. 136.

homosexuality as such, but rather, the candidate's total view of human sexuality and his/her understanding of the morality of its [expression]."<sup>3</sup> Various settings of the church continued to pass positive resolutions on issues of human sexuality and civil rights, including equal employment opportunity. Opposition built. In 1981 the Executive Council reaffirmed its 1973 action upon request to rescind it by the United Church People for Biblical Witness, now known as the Biblical Witness Fellowship, a group still opposed to actions on behalf of gay men and lesbians. Such positive developments formed the basis for a 1983 General Synod resolution that recommended that "in considering a candidate's qualifications for ministry, [their] sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination."<sup>4</sup> It passed with a 95% majority. As with all resolutions, this action was advisory and remained a decision only the 206 individual associations that make up the 39 conferences could make. This lack of uniformity across the denomination continues but has lessened greatly.

The Rev. Diane Darling is recognized as having been the first gay or lesbian clergyperson to be out of the closet in a parish position. In 1984 she made history by progressing from student intern to associate pastor and finally co-pastor in Modesto, California, as an out lesbian in a church that was largely aware of it.

A few others were able to make this transition or come out in the midst of their ministry. It wasn't until 1989, 17 years after the first ordination, that the Rev. Loey Powell was out through the entire search process and successfully called by a predominantly straight congregation – the United Church in Tallahassee, Florida. She is interviewed in chapter eight of this study.

Progress continued to be made to prepare the way for more openly gay and lesbian pastors. Perhaps the most significant advancement, though not specifically about clergy, was the 1985 General Synod resolution calling for all settings, including congregations, to become Open and Affirming.<sup>5</sup> It provided a process by which local churches could discuss and act on these matters.

Finally, as a reversal of the original intent of a Biblical Witness Fellowship resolution once again attempting to reverse course for the UCC, in 1991, the General Synod passed a resolution resolving that it "boldly affirms, celebrates and embraces the gifts for ministry of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) persons, and faithfully continue[s] to work for justice in our church and society" and "calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly LGB students in-care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified LGB candidates." It was now left to the local churches to live out this call. And, as this study illustrates, increasing numbers of churches are answering this call.

Successive Synods have continued to affirm the official place of LGBT persons (transgendered persons were specifically included in resolutions only

---

<sup>3</sup> "Human Sexuality and Ordination." Resolution adopted by the Executive Council, United Church of Christ, Omaha, Nebraska, October 28-31, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> "Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees within the United Church of Christ." Resolution adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, United Church of Christ, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> "Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming." Adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, United Church of Christ, 1995.

recently), the latest example being the 2005 vote, by an 80% margin, to support equal marriage rights for lesbians and gay men in both church and society.<sup>6</sup>

## **My Story**

As I already stated, the title of this project grew out of my personal experiences as one who is an openly gay pastor called by a predominantly straight congregation. Because part of this project is personal, I want to share some of my story. The questions chosen on the survey often reflect my own struggles and joys.

My profile was given to the search committee of Archwood UCC in Cleveland, Ohio, in February 1992 by the association minister. I was 26 years old at the time. Upon their review, I was invited to meet with the committee in June. We had a very positive interview. I felt like we agreed that their goals and my experiences made a good match of skills and needs. Then I did not hear a word for two months.

I started to think this silence might be a good thing. It was an urban church that once had over 1,000 members but now had around 30 in worship; all but a handful were at least 75 years old. Their Sunday school once boasted 300 children; they now had three. To keep the doors open they had begun spending the principle of their small endowment, more than \$50,000 of a \$200,000 endowment in three years. This was their third search committee. They voted against the first candidate, reportedly because the secretary didn't like him. The second candidate was called but then turned them down because the secretary told him he couldn't start until she was back from a brief medical leave. He realized she had too much power for him to be effective.

So, into a third year, a third committee was formed. This was now an even more demoralized congregation feeling that nobody wanted them, especially anyone with much experience. The association minister suggested they consider the profiles of some openly gay candidates. One might say they were desperate enough to agree or that God works in mysterious ways. Unfortunately for them, he showed them some stellar profiles but none of them was looking for a new church. They were a little mad, but their interest was piqued. My profile was in the next pile.

In August, I wrote to the search committee chairperson and asked for something in writing that indicated I was no longer being considered and the reason why. Within two weeks I received a letter that said indeed while many thought I possessed the skills they needed, they could not risk a major rift in such a small congregation. I appreciated their honesty and moved on.

Two weeks later I received a phone call asking me to re-enter their process. Having considered their shrinking and aging membership, declining income and host of other issues, I was not really interested anymore. They persisted and by October had arranged for a neutral pulpit, where the committee members came to another church to hear me preach. They then decided they wanted to present me to the congregation as their candidate. On December 12, I preached to 40 members. Among other challenges, I presented the vision of an Open and Affirming, multi-cultural church, with racial diversity that reflected the neighborhood.

---

<sup>6</sup> "In Support of Marriage Equality for All," Resolution adopted by the Twenty-fifth General Synod, United Church of Christ, 2005.

Following worship they held a congregational meeting. Some hostility was expected so a beloved older member took the questions instead of directing them to me. The committee believed this would insure a level of decorum. It did, for fifteen minutes. Then the real questions came about sexuality. I stayed calm and answered as best I could. When the questioning was over, I went to another room while the congregation debated among themselves. It took a long, long time; I felt like I wanted to leave. Then I heard a noise that sounded like a mix of screaming, applause and hysteria. The chairperson came in smiling; she explained that part of why it took so long is that they had to get a calculator. It was 27-13, exactly the two-thirds necessary. What was the noise? It was a mix of one happy woman talking too loudly into the microphone, another screaming they were going to hell, and the others clapping. Chaos, just as it sounded.

Then, with great trepidation, I had to meet everyone at coffee hour. As I stood in the fellowship hall preparing my coffee, the secretary made a bee-line over to me. She started yelling that I could “go home now and have sex with anything you want” and that, among other things, they would have to “keep the children away” from me. Those two lines I remember clearly. This was all in front of the whole group. I stayed cool and thanked her for her honesty, hoping that she had just proved they needed to remove her as secretary.

I went over to the middle of the room and a group of six older women created a half-circle around me and took my hand; “We’re glad you’re here.” And that is what they said to every visitor who came once I started.

On my first Sunday, January 17, 1993, two of the thirteen who voted against me came to worship. The others didn’t give me a chance. There were others, however, who had voted for me but after a few months said they just could not get past seeing me in the pulpit – “We like your sermons, but when I look up there I see a homosexual, not a pastor” – and did not come back. I visited a few of those who left but soon realized I needed my energy for other more pressing things. They were not going to budge.

For some, it was not just that I was a gay man. They blamed me for having the secretary pushed out before I started. I did not think I would have to. She was clearly out of line on the day of the vote, but that is how she treated everyone so they were not surprised by her behavior. It might be uncomfortable working with her, the Church Council said, but could I not give it six months? I made it clear to the Moderator it would not work, and though careful to say it, neither would I. This had to be settled before I came. She was retired for budgetary reasons and I agreed to be my own secretary. Most of those who left had already voted against me, as she wanted, but were bound to stay away because of what happened to her. However, the loss of that negative energy was palpable. We have come to call them “blessed subtractions.”

Though I had served as the pastor in other congregations, I had not yet been ordained, so a service was planned for February 7, 1993 – twelve months after they had first received my profile. A few days before, one of the pastors in our neighborhood ecumenical cluster of churches called to make an appointment. He handed me a letter that explained that he and his congregation could not just sit idly by. Their Council voted not to participate in any ecumenical events or services

where I would be present. They sent this letter to the other six churches in the cluster. He was very nice about it, smiling as he said he wanted to be my friend but could not accept my lifestyle. I told him I appreciated that he did this in person but that I had many pressing details with my ordination in a few days.

A reporter and photographer from the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* came and did a large story that appeared on the Saturday before my ordination. I was very pleased with the tenor of the story. I knew that it would have the effect of informing people who needed to hear a positive word about gay and lesbian Christians. For many it would be a word of hope. It would, as well, cause others to register their displeasure. With my ordination the next day, we prepared for protesters. Only one man showed. He had hand-printed note cards that said "God does not create people gay," as I had asserted in the article, and placed them on all the car windshields.

It was a glorious day. The church was full with visitors, several of whom later became members, all of whom would never have known without the assistance of the media. Though there were few protestors, I received lots of letters and cards, some congratulatory, others truly vile and hate-filled. One death threat was left on the answering machine. From the "friendly" pastor to the members who angrily left, to the open hostility of strangers, there was an emotional toll.

However, with the church members who remained and those who joined us, our ministry moved forward. We began to attract more visitors who became members but, with the age of the congregation, moves into nursing homes, and deaths, the size of the church didn't grow for several years. The rolls also had to be cleared. There were 180 on the books when I came but barely 40 active. We have taken in over 230 new members, but with constant transitions, still have 200 members. Membership numbers do not tell the whole story, of course. Worship attendance was 20-30 in 1993; we average around 80-90 adults today. There were three children in the nursery in 1993; there are now as many as 50 kids - from infants to high school-aged, with eight just confirmed last spring. There were no persons of color in 1993; today one-third of the congregation is African American, Hispanic, and Asian American. There was one gay member in 1993; one-half of the members today are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

We have had ebbs and flows – at times discouraging droughts. We still struggle financially. Though congregational giving was \$23,000 in 1993 and \$75,000 today, it is still not enough. We did, however, just complete a capital campaign and raised nearly \$150,000 for building repairs and improvements. We have also increased programming with a part-time Children's Minister and an interpreter for hearing impaired worshippers every Sunday.

Through my thirteen years with this congregation, I have been elated and disheartened, full of energy and sapped of life, but most of that is simply the experience of parish ministry. The worst of the painful moments related to my pastoral call and sexual orientation are memories. However, I can still be surprised outside the safety of my congregation, including such moments when I am reluctant to share because of having to yet again explain what so many fear. Yet, I cannot imagine doing anything else with my life. And I feel blessed that my sexual

orientation has made me, I believe, a better pastor with anyone who has ever felt marginalized.

### **Methodology and Steps Taken**

One of the first things I had to determine was my role in this study. Was I a dispassionate observer? Did I have some stake in the results? Could I hold up a mirror to those being studied without seeing myself as well? Previous forms of social research have proven inadequate to the need for description and disingenuous in realizing the role of the researcher. In reality, one of the insights from the research methodology of ethnography<sup>7</sup> used in this study is that the researcher gives shape to and constructs the reality described because it is filtered through his or her experience from the very beginning (including his or her pre-understandings and prejudices). In many ways it is a form of power that can disrupt accurate analysis if not recognized. Therefore, would I explicitly share my experience with the subject matter or simply detach myself and describe what the surveys contained? As I read and reflected upon each survey, I could not help but compare the information to my own experience and quickly realized that the reader would be helped by knowing my story. This also affects my writing style in this study. It is in a more conversational style than a strictly researchers tone.

Secondly, after considering my role regarding my motivations, should this study be used simply to describe reality, or should it be used to effect change? Many, including myself, might think it is ultimately a waste of time not to use the information in the service of some objective or goal beyond simple research information. Reflexivity says we are part of the social world we study – and can use it for good. Early on I felt that one of my goals should be to use the information to help new pastors understand some of the dynamics they might expect when entering (or considering a call to) their new setting. I also thought I might want to help those who assist with placement so they might help both pastor and congregation anticipate and deal with potential issues.

It was while writing the survey questions, however, that I confirmed that this information could, and should, be used for advocacy, to help advance the acceptance of gay and lesbian clergy. Although ethnography is more qualitative social research, descriptive, rather than the statistical testing of a theory, I also decided that I wanted the ability to point to concrete numbers whereby I could “prove” whether or not the impact of congregations calling openly gay clergy brought about their downfall or gave them new life.<sup>8</sup> It was a risky proposition. I could have found from the information that indeed the controversy caused more people to leave than come and precipitated the abandonment of these churches by families with children.

---

<sup>7</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Jane Heckles similarly conducted a survey in 1997 as part of her D.Min. thesis on the effects on stewardship in ONA congregations to “prove” that such a vote not only did no harm but improved stewardship in such congregations. Jane Elizabeth Heckles, “Stewardship Trends in Open and Affirming Churches of the United Church of Christ” (D.Min. thesis, Andover Newton Theological School, 1997).



The original idea of providing support to pastors and placement staff through information, therefore, took on the role of advocacy – among search committees considering such a call and the denomination – with perhaps even larger implications given the toxic political environment today for LGBT people. As I noted already, a researcher’s role is informational; a pastor’s role is transformational. I hope to serve both purposes in a way that is faithful to both science and advocacy.

### **Step One: Identify Survey Participants from Conferences**

I created a database of all 43 conference ministers serving in the 39 conferences of the UCC. I wrote a skeleton description of the project, given that its final goals had not yet been established, and sent a letter in the mail to all conference ministers, even those I suspected would not respond. I requested the names and contact information for all of their openly gay and lesbian pastors who had been called by predominantly straight congregations, reminding them I did not wish for the names of those who are closeted, therefore, not compromising anyone’s identity. I also indicated they need not be currently serving a local church. The information from someone who left a congregation because of a negative experience would be just as valuable as someone now in a parish. I wrote that I am also an openly gay pastor, so they would not be suspicious about the motives of the one asking, i.e., was I trying to do something damaging? By obtaining names through the conference ministers, I could ensure that I was not creating a biased list of only those whose stories were positive.

Giving them a deadline of one month, I followed up two weeks after the first letter with an email, after culling the conference web sites for the personal emails of those conference ministers who had not responded to the first letter. I sent one last email reminder a week later. In larger conferences, such as Massachusetts, the conference minister sent my request to each of the area/association ministers or, in Rocky Mountain, another knowledgeable contact person. I sent the request to each of the five association ministers in Ohio because the interim conference minister had just started and wouldn’t know the information.

I received replies from all but six conferences – an 85% response rate. From their reports, there are openly gay pastors called by predominantly straight congregations in 24 conferences, serving in 27 states, though some were mistaken about those who fit the parameters, including one woman who was surprised to be contacted since she is straight (and concerned about what the conference minister thought about her).

However, of the six conferences that did not respond, I know that there are in fact pastors who fit the study in at least two of them. Six conference ministers sent regrets, most expressing a hope that one day this will change. Since the time of the study, one of those conferences does now have an out lesbian pastor. Three conference ministers indicated that there are gay pastors who fit the study serving in their conference but did not provide any names. In a few cases, the conference minister first sent an email to the possible participants asking their permission to forward their name to me. I don’t know if there were any who did not agree; many certainly did.

From this information then, there are likely openly gay clergy called by or serving predominantly straight congregations in at least 30 of 39 conferences. And, of course, many more who are closeted in those and the other conferences. From information known at the time of the mailing, my survey was sent to pastors in 26 conferences.<sup>9</sup>

### **Step Two: Compile and Seek Additional Contact Information**

I created a contact database in Microsoft Excel of all the names of pastors and churches, addresses and emails provided to me from the conferences. In many cases, I had only been given the name of the person and their church so I had to find the other information in either the UCC Yearbook or their church's website, finding the links on www.ucc.org. I only had email addresses for nine persons. In addition to the 95 names provided by the conferences, a few more were given to me by survey participants. I also sent surveys to persons on the UCC national staff in Cleveland who either had previously been in parish ministry who fit the parameters of my study or who knew of others appropriate for the study. In all, 113 persons were contacted and received the survey.

### **Step 3: Determine and Limit/Focus Goals**

Among the first goals I identified was to determine what challenges and fears the pastors had faced with this call and what they and the congregation had done to address these that might be instructive for others. What, if anything, did they have in common? Can any advice be culled from their responses? What role, for instance, did the Open and Affirming (ONA) process play in the willingness to call an openly gay pastor?

Some questions addressed fears expressed by church members; some asked about apprehensions the pastor may have had about accepting this call and what affect that may have on their well-being. While reworking the questions I realized I needed to ensure that I did not focus only on the negative, such as fears and apprehensions, but also what might be uniquely positive, such as why non-LGBT people joined these churches. Many of these questions were necessarily open-ended.

In further developing the project, my second major goal became a challenge to an assumption held by those who oppose openly gay clergy: that calling a gay or lesbian pastor would cause a loss of members, including families with children, a loss of income and that, furthermore, the church would be "overrun" with LGBT people. To counter this argument, I sought statistical data from the survey participants. I also wanted to collect some demographic information on the pastors, such as whether they had been raised in the UCC, and about the congregations they serve, especially their location and original denominational affiliation.

### **Step 4: Create the Survey Instrument**

Creating the instrument by which I could meet my goals and which would not lean the answers was the most critical step. I had to determine what data I wanted and what questions would best serve that purpose. As part of that process, before I

---

<sup>9</sup> Chart 3.8

started to write, I interviewed four potential participants to listen for cues about what information would have been helpful for them and how that could best be ascertained by a survey. I tested some questions with them.

While writing the survey, I constantly tried to keep out extraneous information and create a survey whose length would not overwhelm the participants. I had to be careful not to ask leading questions, and as indicated, not focus only on the negative. As I went along, I repeatedly took the survey myself to determine if the sequence of questions and the scales made sense and then I made adjustments.

Once the survey was in semi-finished form, I asked two pastors to take it, one gay, one straight to determine whether it made sense to an “outsider.” Were the questions clear or were they leading? What did they think I could learn from the information? They suggested some changes, including information they thought would be interesting. I weighed their ideas and took some questions out to add others. I finally had someone in a Ph.D. study not related to church or ministry read it to determine its professionalism and the ability to understand the information from a non-church perspective. I ultimately made about 10 revisions and feel I was able to keep it as tight and faithful to my goals as possible.

Once it was in the mail and when I started compiling the data there were, of course, things I wished I had thought of including earlier. One important question missing was how many churches the pastor had served before coming out. I could extrapolate the information for some, such as those who had served only one church, but not for the group as a whole. I would also ask at what point in the search process they came out. Were they out on their profile, after they had spoken by phone with the search committee chair or after the first meeting with the committee? This could have provided very helpful advice for others. Finally, I would question how long their searches took?

### **Step 5: Send and Receive Surveys**

I mailed 104 surveys along with a cover letter explaining the project and seeking their assistance. I sent another nine, having no address, by email for a total of 113 distributed. I gave a one month deadline. Within one week I had already received 20 responses. Of those, a few contacted me because they were outside the parameters I had established: the whole congregation had not known at the time of their call, they had come out during their pastorate, or they were not gay or lesbian. One called and was upset with the tenor of the survey, which he thought was overly negative, and refused to participate.

About 10 days after the letter, I sent an email follow up. Several asked for new copies, having misplaced theirs. A very encouraging number said they would follow through and thanked me for the reminder. I sent one more reminder one week before the deadline. Ultimately, a week after the deadline and by the last day I could receive them before leaving for my sabbatical, 65 surveys were returned. Of those, three were removed because they were outside the parameters. Three pastors sent two surveys each for their experience at two different churches. Therefore, I received usable surveys representing 59 pastors and 62 churches. Nine persons had communicated they would send a survey but did not; six more sent surveys too late to incorporate into the data.

I received a survey or some form of communication from 85 pastors; I did not receive a survey or hear anything from 28. Therefore, the rate of response was 75%. For those who fit the criteria, in the time given, I could use 52% (59 pastors of 113) from the total number sent.

### **Step 6: Read, Compile and Summarize the Data**

The greatest pleasure of this project was reading the very heart-felt, sincere responses. One of the most challenging aspects, then, was determining how to authentically summarize and compile them in a usable form. The raw data and summary or verbatim answers for every question are found in the appendix. For those items that could be quantified, I used Microsoft Excel to create charts and graphs. Learning how was enjoyable and illustrated some interesting trends very clearly, beginning with the number of persons ordained but not raised in the UCC. How, though, should I show the open-ended information?

For the questions that include both a yes and no answer with a follow-up, such as question 14, “Do you believe their ONA status...?” and “How,” I used only brief written answers. I included only those in the summary that differed from the others. This was done on many questions. If someone answered a question with “other,” I included that information in the summary whenever possible.

I decided I could quantify some written answers, though somewhat inexactly, if I added their brief remarks representing the range of written answers, such as question number 23: “Do any of these concerns still exist?” I found groupings of not only yes or no but also with the peculiarity of “probably some” and “probably not” or “hardly any.” Including some of the comments that represented this range seemed necessary to be faithful to the quantifiable distinctions, though small, that they were communicating. Along with the numbers, I believe in this case these 13 clarifying statements represent the entire 62. This was done for several questions.

There were other answers, however, where I felt the response deserved to be printed verbatim, without my attempt to edit for length or clarity. For instance, on question 22, “How were the fears and objections addressed,” I felt that the unedited answers of just 34 participants was sufficient to cover the entire group. But for question 38, “Do you feel any growth...can be attributed to having a gay pastor,” I felt the words of every participant should be read. Most are quite humble and the extent of that would not be evident by summarizing.

I struggled to make this same decision for questions 53 and 54 – “How do/did you handle...such concerns” and “Do any...still exist?” Question 53 clearly gets to the heart of one of my goals – those things that can be learned and shared as advice for others. Everyone’s answer needed to be printed. But while question 54 could have easily been quantified, there are lots of yes and no answers, it was the repetition of these responses that provides a telling story and a helpful follow-up to the previous question. In this case, reading the repetition is more important than seeing the total number of people saying the same thing. If anything, I tried to err on the side of letting their words speak for themselves more often than not.

Many of the verbatim answers are identified by their id number (#1, #2, etc.), randomly assigned to every survey. In this way a reader can follow the responder’s train of thought throughout the survey. If an answer wasn’t given, their number is

not included for that question. I was watchful to edit out anything that could be used to identify the responder. Regarding the editing of answers, I rarely edited their answers for grammar; occasionally I did so for length, careful to keep the intent clear. For consistency when necessary, I changed abbreviations to a standard LGBT.

It is clear that participants in this study gave significant thought and time to their responses. For this, I am grateful.

### **Step 7: Communicate the Findings**

One of my goals is not only to write this report to obtain my Doctor of Ministry degree; I want to disseminate the information in as many helpful ways as possible. Seeing the patterns of growth in membership, attendance, stewardship and Sunday schools will help search committees and congregations that might be nervous about taking the risk of calling an openly gay or lesbian pastor. And to know that some of their fears and apprehensions are common to others entering a predominantly straight congregation for the first time, I believe, will be liberating for pastors who may feel themselves isolated in such settings. The awareness to be on watch for various forms of members' unexamined and pastors' internalized homophobia came, somewhat unexpectedly, as a result of interpreting the data.

The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team in Local Church Ministries at the UCC national headquarters, along with others from various ministries, received the project as an oral presentation with Power Point slides. The information can be used to support an already existing DVD resource for local church search committees that includes the positive experience of one church that surprised itself by calling an out lesbian pastor. The DVD also focuses on the calling of clergy who are of a different race or who are physically challenged. The findings of this study have been communicated in a series of three articles through the monthly publication of the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team to all judicatory staffs across the nation that assist with placement. I have also been invited to present at their annual meeting in December.

In addition, avenues for the dissemination of the findings are being considered with other partner ministries in the UCC, such as the Open and Affirming Program of the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns. A workshop for openly gay and lesbian pastors convened from around the country in October is in process.

## Part II: Theological Reflection

### Chapter Two: Esther and Vashti: Biblical Heroes for Gay Men and Lesbians Called to Ordained Ministry

Should I reveal myself, my identity? If so, to whom and when? Can I do more good by remaining hidden, at least until “just such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14) These are important questions that we answer, in varying ways at varying times in our lives, as we are able. They come to me as a few of the central points from the Book of Esther. As Esther and Vashti wrestle with their callings, I believe they can be instructive for gay men and lesbians called to ordained ministry. When should we wait, wondering if we are being prepared for something bigger? And when is enough, enough? What gives us the greatest sense of integrity? Or perhaps, who is best served? Both Esther and Vashti also present “models of resistance to wrong” – one of direct dissent and one of working within the system – and as we know, “over the long haul, a variety of approaches to challenging the status quo will be needed.”<sup>10</sup>

In order for Esther to become the new queen, her cousin and caretaker Mordecai told her not to reveal her identity as Jewish. They lived in a kingdom that seemed quite accepting of the many cultures and languages within its enormous geographic reach. One’s ethnic identity did not seem to be a liability. So why did Mordecai advise caution? As we know, the lives of minorities are always subject to whims and power struggles among those who rule. And in this story sure enough, some time later, one scheming man, Haman, who became a highly placed advisor to the king, sought and obtained the power that changed the fate of an entire people through an act of revenge against one man, Mordecai, who refused to bow before him. The ironic twist is that Haman was ultimately hung from the very structure he had built to destroy others. He was thwarted from carrying out his plans, and an entire race of people was saved, because in a daring and dangerous move, after meticulous preparation, Esther “came out” to the king and asked him to save her life and the lives of her people. (Esther 7:3) In doing so, she revealed her identity. And the king granted her petition, sort of. This would be the lovely, fairy-tale ending. He agreed to halt the impending order, but to do so he had 75,000 other innocent people killed first, for, in my opinion, similarly unjust reasons.

I believe the witness of Esther teaches us that there is indeed a time when hiding an identity serves a greater, though perhaps unknown, purpose or good. However, there also comes a point at which continuing to hide may permit the death and destruction not only of oneself but others as well; if only we could know when that time is upon us, before it is too late. Yet, we should be ready for that day. Upon reflection, Mordecai, who had twice told Esther not to reveal herself, famously says, “Perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this.” (Esther 4:14)

---

<sup>10</sup> Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), p. 64.

Esther is not the only hero of the story. The stage was set for her too. In many ways, these salvific actions of Esther were made possible only by the resolve of Queen Vashti not to be treated as the property of the king. King Ahasuerus liked to have the best things and show them off. After six months of partying around his kingdom to celebrate his reign, he began a week-long drinking binge at the palace during which he could really show off his excesses. He had many beautiful things to display, including, he decided, his queen. After seven days he summoned Vashti from the party she was holding for the women of the kingdom, requesting she wear (only) her crown. She knew the only purpose would be to display herself so men could ogle her in their drunken state and make the king feel superior. Rather, she refused, which made him look like a fool. His advisors counseled the king to have her banished, otherwise chaos would reign around the kingdom as women heard the story and felt they could stand up to their husbands too. Though the consequences were severe, Vashti would not be exploited. She gained the satisfaction of deciding for herself. We don't know what she had experienced with this king before, but enough was enough.

Could she have decided instead to go along for a greater good, figuring there was more she could do from her position within the palace in the long run and suffer only short term humiliation? Could she, as Audre Lorde asks, "dismantle the master's house using the master's tools?"<sup>11</sup> Lorde concluded that you cannot. And thinking you can, ultimately will not in the end be allowed by those in power. Vashti chose to retain her dignity, her sense of integrity. It was a big sacrifice, but it was the bravery of Queen Vashti that opens the way for Esther to win favor with the king. He sought a new queen, the most beautiful woman he could find; perhaps he hoped this one would be more accommodating. He didn't realize, however, that Esther proved just as strong and independent. Operating in a different way, she must have recognized Vashti's earlier actions as a possible consequence she too would face, but ultimately accepted the risk.

Those who are now serving as openly gay and lesbian ordained ministers in the UCC have needed the witness of both Esther and Vashti; or needed to be *both* Vashti and Esther. At some point, some men and women simply needed to say they would not be exploited by being allowed to serve in ministry only if they remained quiet. By coming out, saying no to the status quo, many of these persons sacrificed their own opportunities for ministry, at least in the parish. But the news of their actions would spread, perhaps emboldening others. Their sacrifice, like Vashti's, did open doors, if not for themselves.

There were others, those already serving from the closet or who were preparing for ministry, who, like Esther, listened to their own Mordecai. Do not reveal your identity. For some, this was the only choice to remain in ministry. Maybe there would be "just such a time" when they could come out and serve a church. Could they have wondered about some greater purpose in waiting? For many, hiding was simply the sacrifice they had to and were willing to accept; they felt their call to ministry, as such, outweighed anything else. The witness of Esther may teach us that there is a special reason to wait and prepare for a day of liberation. This waiting

---

<sup>11</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1984), p. 110.

is, in fact, still the overwhelming reality for most, waiting years for a call, endless search committee processes and stacks of rejection letters. But changes have begun. And all of us who are “Esther” must be ready, thanks to the “Vashti’s” who have gone before us. Or maybe we’ll need to become Vashti again.

Did Esther have a strategy? Or Mordecai, who advised her to remain silent? Did either of them know that not revealing her identity at first would serve a purpose later? Was it survival or could they have known about ultimate liberation? While she waited, Esther may have developed what in 1903 W.E.B. DuBois called a “double-consciousness,” in his groundbreaking work, *The Souls of Black Folk*.<sup>12</sup> Stated positively, it is essentially the ability, out of necessity, to navigate both one’s own culture and that of the dominant society. DuBois was writing about black and white realities, but we know the hegemony in this country has always been white, male, wealthy and heterosexual. Without being all of these things, DuBois’ double-consciousness is still one way to spiritually and psychologically cope with overt or underlying hostility. African Americans must assess both physical and psychic safety on a daily basis, unsure until at home or frequently in the refuge of the church, but which is not refuge for all.

In a different way, but still out of oppression, LGBT people of all colors use double-consciousness too, often resting on the need to remain invisible. *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* contributor Reginald Shepherd writes that sometimes the deeper reality is “I live between two worlds, but belonging in neither...just a list of things I should not be.”<sup>13</sup> One would hope that a double-consciousness helps a person hold themselves together, not setting aside one for the other as the required practice to be allowed entrance. Stephan Lee Dais, in the same collection, describes a common sentiment in the church: “I can be active, if I am silent. I can be active, if I am willing to ignore your smart remarks and nasty gestures. I can be active, if I am willing to ignore you ignoring me.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps it did seem to Esther like she was living in two worlds but belonging in none. She might have known that attempting to “pass” in silence is exhausting. But, Steven Swayne asserts, at some point we should not have to participate in our own “self-oppression.”<sup>15</sup> As Keith Boykin writes, “You cannot truly love yourself if you are permitted to love only a part of yourself.”<sup>16</sup>

Though instructive for individuals, DuBois was also writing about a collective, communal struggle to overcome shared suffering. For even if we are personally able to interact “successfully” in what are often demeaning situations, we remain connected and still exist within a Church and society built on prejudice. No matter how comfortable we become in our invisibility, we still are or can be excluded. At

---

<sup>12</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903; reprint, New York: Dover, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Reginald Shepherd, “On Not Being White,” *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, Joseph Beam, ed. (Boston: Allyson, 1986), p. 78-79.

<sup>14</sup> Stephan Lee Dais, “Don’t Turn Your Back On Me,” *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, Joseph Beam, ed. (Boston: Allyson, 1986), p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Swayne, “Remembering DuBois” at [www.thedartmouth.com](http://www.thedartmouth.com), November 20, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America* (New York: Anchor, 1996), p. 95.



times double-consciousness does function negatively, painfully requiring persons to choose between their loyalties.

This could be seen as a factor in Esther's continued willingness to keep her identity hidden, risking alienation by both sources of her identity – queen and Jew. How did she live in two worlds, maintain two loyalties, or cope with not feeling complete in her silence? How heavy did the need to be invisible, especially in a public position, weigh upon her? Double-consciousness can function as a strategy to overcome oppression, the ability to hold onto one's integrity until called upon. Or it can confuse us. Did she have a strategy, or was she just surviving as best she could in a society that could easily turn against her? Was she simply surviving her reality?

Liberation should be evident in scripture, but often it is hidden too, written behind the story. Commentator Itumeleng Mosala looks at the Book of Esther from a perspective of oppression, especially questioning the limited focus on survival, and tries to find a liberation motif. He first makes the point, from his context, that the "Bible is a thoroughly political document...attested to by its role in the Apartheid system in South Africa."<sup>17</sup> No other political or ideological system in the modern world, he says, is so "directly derived from the Bible." In other contexts, too, we know that particular biblical interpretations are frequently intermingled and reinforced in the culture when they suit the political aspirations of those in power. Often we simply participate in this reality for survival, not liberation.

It is this same unexamined prejudice that perpetuates a system of biblically assumed discrimination against LGBT people. It is easy to demonize those who would challenge such a system, simply by noting it exists. Such a dominant political system that oppresses is simply part of the background, but perhaps this is clearer for Vashti than for Esther. This insight or lens for interpreting the Bible, however, has only been made clear to us by liberation theologians in recent decades. Mosala believes it is unlikely that either Vashti's or Esther's story was written for the purpose of liberating its audience or even celebrating the accomplishments of their heroism. This should help us to realize that the male authors of Esther's story did not intend to make the revealing of her identity a personal triumph for the sake of her fulfillment. This remains a ploy for the continuation of the people regardless of the freedoms for women or others in non-dominant roles achieved by Esther's heroic actions. However, Esther does function to uplift oppressed people, even if not to inspire a political uprising.

Sidnie Ann White suggests the purpose of the story may have been as a teaching tool for how to live in a "situation of limited control, i.e., how to live a productive life in the Diaspora."<sup>18</sup> Or it could have been used to demonstrate how to maintain an ethical life, with the integrity of one's faith. This is a liberation theme of a different kind, according to Carol Bechtel, especially since the "attitude toward foreign rulers tends more toward accommodation than overthrow, more to do with

---

<sup>17</sup> Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa," *Semeia* 59 (1992), p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Sidnie Ann White, "Esther," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992), p. 126

personal antagonism than permanent national policy.”<sup>19</sup> Given that Esther is more a Jewish novel, or novella, than actual history,<sup>20</sup> though given a very specific political context, we are still left with questions about how it would have been meant for use in its day. Given its historical flavor, we might conclude it simply provides a perspective on the past of a courageous people, not a way to foment opposition.

My interest in Esther’s power to hide or conceal one’s identity must be always be kept in tension with the communal nature of Esther’s story. Her actions were more for her people than for herself. Therefore, we must be careful not to focus too much attention on her alone. Yet, I cannot read the text without appreciating her role. In similar ways but a very different fashion, Esther and Vashti both model a resistance that ultimately names and challenges a system that is oppressive. Amazingly, the men who decided to include it in the Bible must not have seen this.

Once again, how would the original hearers of the story have responded? Would they have even noticed the internal struggles and ultimate shift occurring within Esther? Her plea for her people comes as the climatic turning point, the point at which Haman’s fortunes are reversed, when she gained the king’s sympathy. But was this told so others, like ourselves, would do similarly? Should we also reveal a hidden identity, in our own particular settings?

The story is not universally loved. In fact, its placement in the Bible was very contentious and not accepted as canonical in Judaism until the third century C.E., the fourth century in the Western Church, and the eighth century in the Eastern Church.<sup>21</sup> In the Reformation, Martin Luther declared “he wished it did not exist.”<sup>22</sup> Some see it as God-less; not theological but for the sake of ethnic pride, Esther’s designation as Jewish more for her ethnicity than religion.<sup>23</sup> There is, in fact, little that is explicitly religious – no prayers or references to the law or covenant. There is not even one reference to God, though I, and others, cannot help but see the hand of God guiding the actions. The Greek version, the Septuagint, used by Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, attempts to fix the “problem” with editing, inserting six verses to speak about God more explicitly. Protestants (who do not view the Apocrypha as canonical) and Jews follow the Masoretic text, the Hebrew version passed down by the rabbis in whom God’s role is assumed – a similarly hidden identity. In Jewish scripture, it is part of the liturgical scrolls, therefore communal; though, it is also part of the larger genre of literature that echoes the hopefulness of the prophets or a song of faithfulness for deliverance.

I have a different problem. I love this story, but why did the reversal of fortune against scheming Haman have to turn into a death by blood-bath for 75,000. Presumably, the only way the king’s edict calling for the murder of Jews could be essentially “overturned” was to massacre the others enlisted, responding to “flyers” throughout the kingdom first. For such an impressive man with such a massive kingdom, he appears to have little power. In many ways he acted like a foolish

---

<sup>19</sup> Carol M. Bechtel, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Esther* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> White, p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> H. Neil Richardson, “The Book of Esther,” *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), p. 233.

<sup>23</sup> White, p. 125.

puppet of his advisors. They convinced him to banish Vashti and to hold a year-long beauty contest for her replacement. They convinced him to have Mordecai and all his people, the Jews, killed over a simple slight. The only thing he really did on his own was act on Esther's request, but he couldn't. He couldn't stop the massacre of her people without creating another one first. However, in reality it is interesting to note that by Esther's actions, the king experienced a moment of liberation. He acted for the first time without the consultations of his manipulating advisors.

Though the end is gruesome, I understand this story would have been cheered by those who were the most vulnerable. We should keep in mind that "different people have quite different views of who is an oppressor, who is a victim, and action needed to create greater safety."<sup>24</sup> They heard the news that their people were saved. This cannot be taken away from those whose story this really is. But, once we have recognized its purpose in the literature of a people and understood some of its role in the political context of its day, we can again return to its meaning for us. When the time calls for it, should we reveal our identity? Can we challenge an oppressive system by ending our silence?

I see in Esther's thoughts and action the exhortation of Audre Lorde, "Your silence will not protect you." When Lorde faced her mortality with the diagnosis of cancer, she said she most regretted her silences. "What," she asks, "are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?"<sup>25</sup>

As the queen, Esther would have probably been spared the slaughter, though not Mordecai against whom this whole thing started. He too plays a Vashti-like role in refusing an indignity. Though Esther might have been saved, could she have survived the grief? This also might be asked of Vashti. Could she suffer any longer the tyrannies of being the king's display? Esther and Vashti, on their own terms, had to speak. They had to risk "coming out" regardless of the consequences.

### **My Story: The Call to Ministry and Being Gay**

I relate to Esther. I began my call to ministry in the United Methodist Church. My call was verified and celebrated by everyone who knew me. But, I was also slowly coming to terms with my sexual orientation. How could these identities – gay and pastor – be reconciled? My Mordecai's, my campus minister and college pastor, both counseled me not to reveal my identity. They reasoned that the law in the United Methodist Book of Discipline prohibiting "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" from ministry was unjust. I, therefore, had the right to lie when asked at every candidacy interview for the next several years to come. This did not have integrity for me. I resolved not to meet with the Board of Ordained Ministry again. I would not lie and I would not live fearing that someone would discover my "secret," outing me at the worst possible time. Yet, I still followed my call to ministry, uncertain of its form.

---

<sup>24</sup> Sakenfeld, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence in Language and Action," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1984), p. 41.

Surprisingly, about 18 months later, at the point I truly embraced my sexual orientation and its uncertainties for further options in ministry, I received a telephone call about serving as an interim pastor in South Dakota during my senior year of college. It was for two congregations of the UCC, about which I knew almost nothing.<sup>26</sup> It was an excellent, fruitful year and confirmed to me that I should continue to pursue pastoral ministry, though I was still unsure how it could be done. I did not, however, tell them that I am gay – reveal my identity. I felt the greater good would be served by the experience and education. I also did not feel I was deceiving them for they were well served. Had I, for instance, decided I must be open about my sexual orientation with these churches, I would not have been called. And then, without that experience, would another church have risked calling me? It was that experience that later made me the best qualified candidate, who happened to be gay. Was that deceptive? Or is it what Esther, told not to reveal her identity, had to do in order to be in a place “for just such a time as this?”

I served in two other congregations during seminary. At one church, a multiracial, Reconciling Congregation in downtown Minneapolis, I was out.<sup>27</sup> It was a non-issue that allowed me to focus all my energy on many areas of ministry, including support for LGBT members. It was liberating. The other was very isolated on the plains in North Dakota.<sup>28</sup> Once again, I was not out, though the conference minister knew. My ministry was valid but it affected me personally. What do you say when they keep telling you about meeting a nice girl? For a few months, I could just laugh. For a few years, I might have been miserable. It is widely known that those enduring the isolation of the closet are at risk for depression, substance abuse and other psychological and/or physical issues.

I did not think of these choices, whether or not to be out, as a strategy. It was reality. It was simply what I felt called to do in each situation. I did not know that some day I would receive a call to a church as an openly gay man, but I did what was necessary to be ready, should the opportunity finally come. Ultimately, I did not wait as long as I thought I might have to.

In Esther, I personally find validation for the choices I made to be an openly gay man in ministry. I also believe this has made a difference for others, not by literally saving their lives as Esther, but providing a witness of hope for LGBT people to return home to their faith and love of God. It has also contributed to the momentum of the LGBT religious community claiming our place within the clergy.

It is a dream worth working for that we will no longer live a lie, and with time, we will no longer live in fear. For the gay community, the current political environment illustrates the need for people to reveal their identity, dangerous though it may be, in order to create a climate of understanding. As pastors, we can lead the way.

Frederick Douglas wrote, “I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and incur my own

---

<sup>26</sup> Letcher (SD) United Church of Christ and Loomis Congregational Church, Mitchell, SD.

<sup>27</sup> Wesley United Methodist Church, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>28</sup> Wishek United Church of Christ, Wishek, ND.

abhorrence.”<sup>29</sup> This was not just for personal satisfaction, but a risk for the sake of his people. In the end, for those called to Christian ministry, I believe coming out should not simply be to relieve the misery of our closet. The decision to come out should equally be for the sake of Christ’s gospel. Whatever mix of motives we may have, all of them reasonable, we are here to serve others, not ourselves. Yes, this must be done for our integrity and wholeness, challenging a system that unjustly calls for our silence and invisibility. But, Esther did not reveal her identity to the king to lift a burden from her heart but to save her people from destruction. I pray this guides our discernment about the time and place we choose for our moment(s) of revelation as well.

---

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, 1845. Quoted in Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America* (New York: Anchor, 1996), p. 269.

## Part III: Commentary on the Results

This is “just such a time” of discernment about our moments of revelation, a period when the persistence of pioneers, using various models of resistance, has begun to make a difference. It is truly amazing that LGBT people have not completely given up on the church. But as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “Many men [and women] continue to knock at the door of the church at midnight, even after the church has so bitterly disappointed them, because they know the bread of life is there.”<sup>30</sup> Though this is a day whose dawning is still only a hint of light, yet day shall come. It may still feel like a dark day for LGBT persons in the church but things are changing quite rapidly. The pace of churches calling openly gay and lesbian pastors has increased in every year since 2000. Even though far too few persons who are called to ministry are serving as they feel called by God in a parish, yet increasing numbers are, and doing so with obvious effectiveness. Their acts of faithfulness, despite anger or hatred directed at them or other consequences, are inspiring.

### A Profile

If we took the most frequent responses to questions in this survey, they would make up the profile of a pastor represented as follows:

The pastor is female, in her 40s and partnered in a relationship recognized by her members. She is in her first parish and has served as the first openly gay clergy of an Open and Affirming solo pastorate in suburban Massachusetts for about five years. The search committee voted unanimously to recommend her and more than 95% of the congregation voted to call her, even though they needed only a two-thirds vote. She was raised outside the UCC but switched to the UCC because of LGBT issues; was ordained UCC about five years ago, though out of the closet for more than ten years. She feels comfortable speaking about her personal life but also feels some internal pressure about speaking too frequently about LGBT issues. She may monitor or even censure herself but does not do so because of external pressure from members of the congregation.

The congregation was previously in serious decline – membership, attendance, stewardship, children in Sunday school – but since she arrived has seen increases in all areas, despite the fact that some members did leave. Though members initially expressed fears of further decline in those areas, and she had her own apprehensions about truly being accepted, these concerns were addressed proactively and do not exist anymore. The biggest objection voiced was their biblical interpretation of homosexuality but those persons did not similarly object to women in ministry on biblical grounds.

Besides losses, members feared she would attract too many LGBT people, but though some have joined, the church is still less than 10% LGBT. They feared she would bring a “homosexual agenda” or turn it into a “gay church” but she has

---

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Knock at Midnight” in *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, eds. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, (New York: Warner, 1998), p. 76.

consistently voiced that that is not her interest and with time, people have realized she has multiple social justice concerns and that she wants to serve a diverse congregation. Non-LGBT people have joined because of the warmth and openness to everyone, straight as well as gay, they feel. And long-time members feel there is new life and a renewed hope for the future.

She feels the church's growth has something to do with her sexual orientation but not everything. She received positive press in the local paper and has been welcomed by her local ministerium. At the beginning of her pastorate, she feared there would always be some tension around her sexuality but she handled it by doing her job well, and with the passage of time, these concerns have passed. She has no interest in serving an all-LGBT church in the future and has never seriously considered leaving pastoral ministry. In fact, she would make the same choice to be out about her sexual orientation again and advises others to "do it" and be honest with themselves when conducting their own search.

This profile was compiled from the most frequently given answers, but of 59 pastors, 27 are male; and of 62 churches, 42 are outside Massachusetts, and most are not suburban in liberal areas. Only half of the churches were Open and Affirming when they called an openly gay pastor and even today only 60% are ONA. Some churches expressed no fears and voiced no objections, but others faced a very difficult road and not every pastor would choose to be out about their orientation again. Not every church has grown and not every pastor feels accepted. Many pastors have received hate mail and experienced difficulty with neighboring churches. For at least one, the overall experience was so bad they left the church; another was asked to resign.

The good news, however, is that real progress is evident in the past decade, prior to which only a miniscule number of pastors served out of the closet. Overall, things are much better for both the pastors and the churches they serve. The following is a breakdown and commentary on the questions contained in the survey of openly gay and lesbian clergy called by predominantly straight congregations.

## Chapter 3: Pastors and Congregations

### The Pastors: Who Are They

#### Childhood Denomination

About seventy-five percent of the 59 pastors in this study were not raised in the UCC.<sup>31</sup> This confirms what many suspect as an increasing trend. In my UCC History and Polity class at a UCC-related seminary in 1988, 75% of the students were studying to become UCC pastors but were raised in other denominations. In that case, however, only a few were coming to the UCC specifically because of LGBT issues; often it was the denomination's wider embrace of peace and justice issues that brought people in.

The number of pastors raised in the United Methodist Church (UMC) is nearly the same as those raised in the UCC – 14 UMC to 17 UCC.<sup>32</sup> There were also nine Presbyterians, eight Baptists (American and Southern), four Lutherans (pre-ELCA merger) and three Roman Catholics. There were twelve pastors from one denomination each, ranging from the pentecostal Assembly of God to the highly liturgical Eastern Orthodox. The vast majority of those who moved to the UCC came from similar mainline, Protestant denominations, who are also experiencing membership declines but who exhibit less willingness to risk alienating people on both sides of the LGBT divide. Though not reflected in the number of pastors who switched denominations, large numbers of former Catholics are making it to our pews.

#### Denomination of Ordination

Though most of these pastors were not raised in the denomination, more than 75% were UCC by the time they were ordained.<sup>33</sup> Of those who received Privilege of Call – the process someone already ordained must go through before seeking a call in a UCC congregation – four were formerly Presbyterian ministers. Of those four, two involved ecclesiastical trials, with one person angrily reacting to the injustice by renouncing his ordination, which meant he had to go through the lengthy ordination process in the UCC instead of simply transferring his credentials. Two of those in systems with bishops were either told to leave or were, in their words, “kicked out” upon being outed; one also involved a painful ecclesiastical trial.

#### Reasons for Switching Denominations

Of those who left their childhood denomination, 20 did so primarily for reasons related to LGBT issues.<sup>34</sup> This was either not at all or only partially the reason for the other 15 who answered this question. That so many did not leave because of LGBT issues might surprise some who think that all the gay men and lesbians who go to the UCC do so because of its openness to LGBT people.

Among other reasons named, several spoke of theology, especially embracing the UCC's covenant theology. Others prefer its non-hierarchical system,

---

<sup>31</sup> Question 1, Chart 3.1

<sup>32</sup> Question 2

<sup>33</sup> Question 4, Chart 3.2

<sup>34</sup> Question 5



specifically citing issues with the United Methodist episcopacy and the authority of Catholic bishops. Two cited the ordination of women and one noted the shift to the right among Baptists.

Regardless of their reason for switching, only two – the Disciple and the Episcopalian – would have any possibility of being an out gay pastor in their previous denomination under current conditions in the United States.

### **Number of Years Ordained**

Twenty-nine of these pastors have been ordained ten years or less; and 29 ordained for more than ten years.<sup>35</sup> Only two had been ordained more than 30 years; two less than one year. The largest single group – 19 – is those ordained one to five years. Not surprisingly, of those ordained less than five years, many had never been forced to serve as a closeted pastor or did so only briefly. Sadly, those with the most experience served the majority of their career in the closet. The two who were ordained more than 30 years spent 31 and 33 of those years in the closet. Thankfully, they are now out and serving in a parish.

### **Position**

Thirty-one pastors were in solo pastorates, some full-time, some part-time; 14 are senior pastors in churches large enough to have multiple staff.<sup>36</sup> Ten are associate pastors, most in Christian education, an area where, ironically, concerns about working with children and youth are more frequently expressed.

All but ten were the first openly gay or lesbian pastor the congregation had experienced, but 25 themselves had been in more than one church as an out gay pastor.<sup>37</sup> Nine persons had been in more than two churches, often as interims.<sup>38</sup> One person, in fact, had served in eight interim positions, all out of the closet. By her positive example, she is paving the way for others to follow behind. This was identified several times as the first step for a congregation that considered calling a settled gay pastor because the church may have been more willing to take risks for a shorter period. In this study, only four persons are currently serving as interim pastors.

### **Gender and Race**

In the UCC as a whole, about 25% of pastors are female;<sup>39</sup> in the group for this study, over 50% are women. It has been theorized that churches may be more willing to hire an out lesbian than an openly gay man because there are traditionally fewer fears regarding pedophilia. This was not addressed by my survey, but interestingly, only ten people – seven men and three women – listed “issues related to children” as a top three concern by those who objected to their being hired.<sup>40</sup> In total, 32 in this study are women; 27 are men.

---

<sup>35</sup> Question 3, Chart 3.3

<sup>36</sup> Question 7

<sup>37</sup> Question 9

<sup>38</sup> Question 6

<sup>39</sup> UCC Research Services, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Question 20

Though not unexpected, a great disappointment was the absence of even one pastor of color identified for the study. Racial minority churches, of course, are only a small proportion of the UCC, of which 89% are predominantly white.<sup>41</sup> The exclusion of out-bisexuals for the purpose of this study had an impact here (which also excluded some European Americans who returned surveys). Similarly excluded from the study, there are closeted gay clergy in every racial demographic.

Though the pastors of the two largest congregations of our denomination<sup>42</sup> – both African American – are publicly supportive of gay men and lesbians, as are the majority of persons of color in positions of denominational leadership, this has not yet led to openly gay pastors in straight African American congregations. However, there is at least one out African American lesbian pastor who founded a church in San Francisco, but it is a predominantly LGBT congregation.<sup>43</sup> She and other pastors in it, and those who have started similar congregations elsewhere, including Chicago, are therefore outside the parameters of this study because my study focuses only on the impact in predominantly straight congregations that have called openly gay and lesbian clergy.

### **Age and Years Out of the Closet**

This group is significantly younger than the average of UCC pastors, a group which is quickly aging. In this study, 48% are in their 40's; in the UCC, the latest study indicates only 25% are in their 40's (declining from 33% in 1997).<sup>44</sup> Ten pastors in the study are under 40 years old; one younger than 30 (17% compared to 6% in the UCC as a whole). In contrast to the whole denomination, only three in the study are older than 60. In the UCC, in 2003, 25% of all active pastors are over 60; in this study, only 7%.

Somewhat mirroring the time-frame and changing acceptance of LGBT people in society, nearly 40% have been out ten years or less; about 40% have been out 20 years.<sup>45</sup> Five have been out more than 30 years, making them true Vashti-like pioneers in the LGBT movement, which, in the modern sense, began in 1969 with the refusal of some LGBT patrons of the Stonewall Inn to be bullied by the police or silenced anymore. Five have been out less than one year.

---

<sup>41</sup> UCC Research Services, 2003.

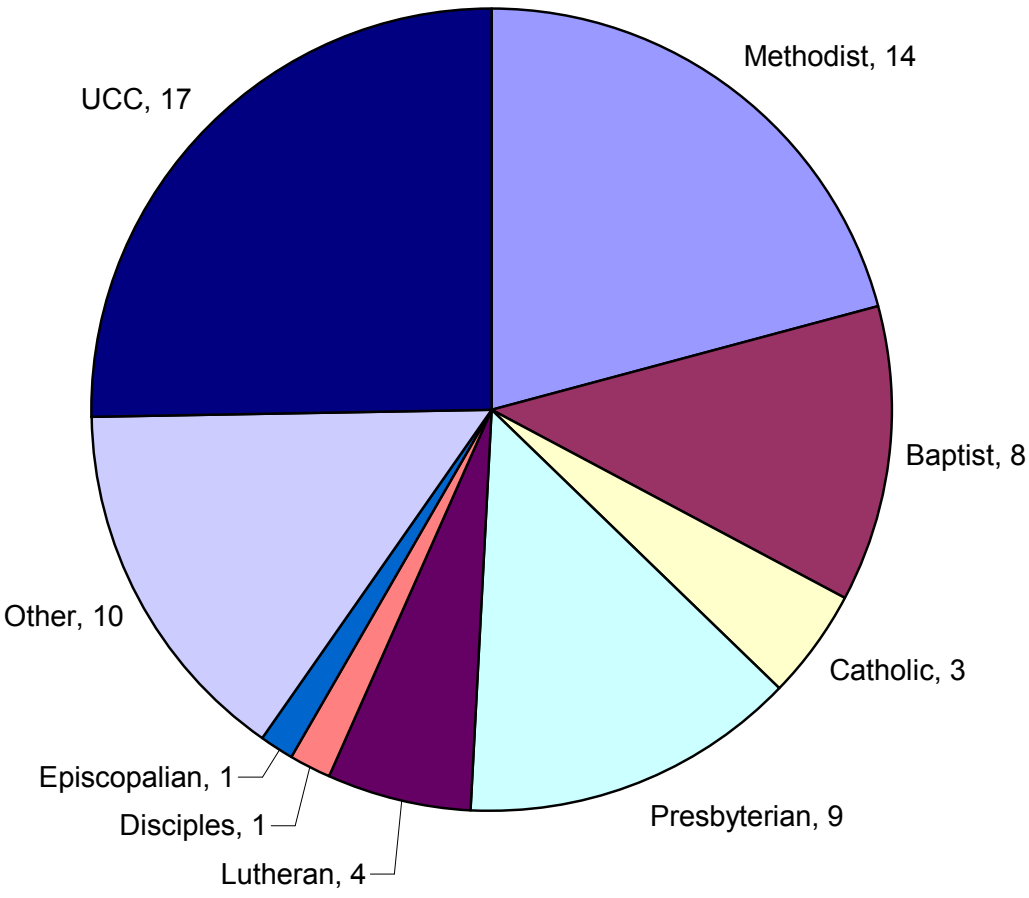
<sup>42</sup> Trinity UCC in Chicago and Victory UCC in Stone Mountain, Georgia.

<sup>43</sup> City of Refuge UCC

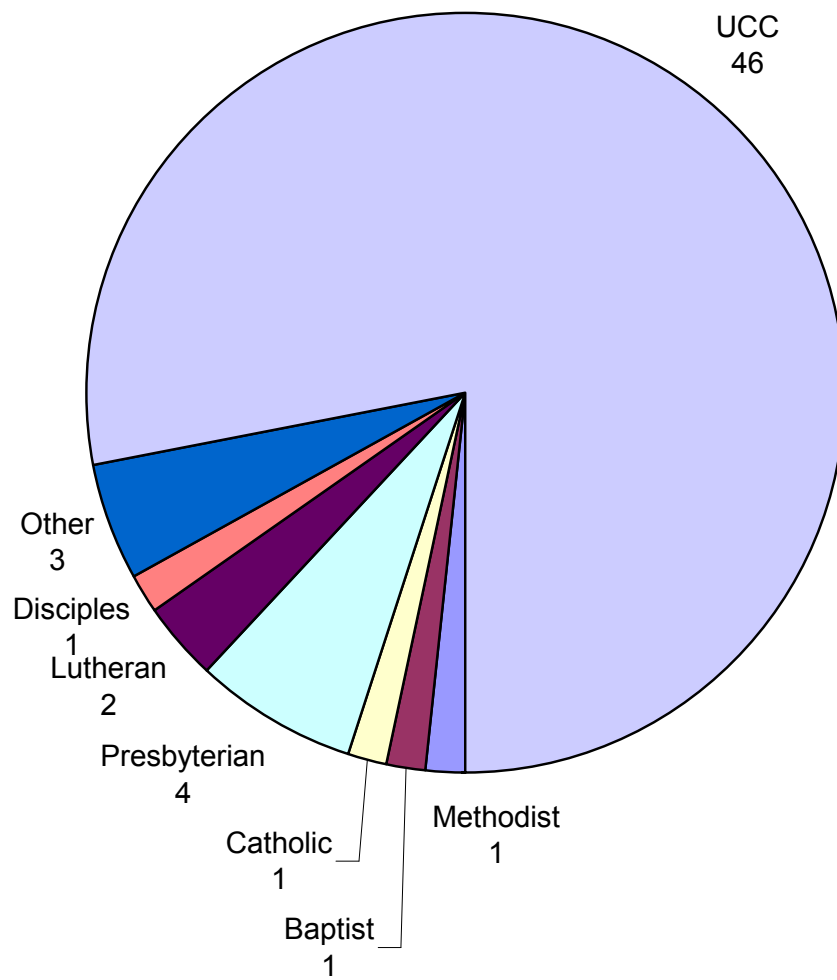
<sup>44</sup> Question 72.5; UCC Research Services, 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Question 72.6; Chart 3.5

**3.1: Denomination In Which Pastor Was Raised**

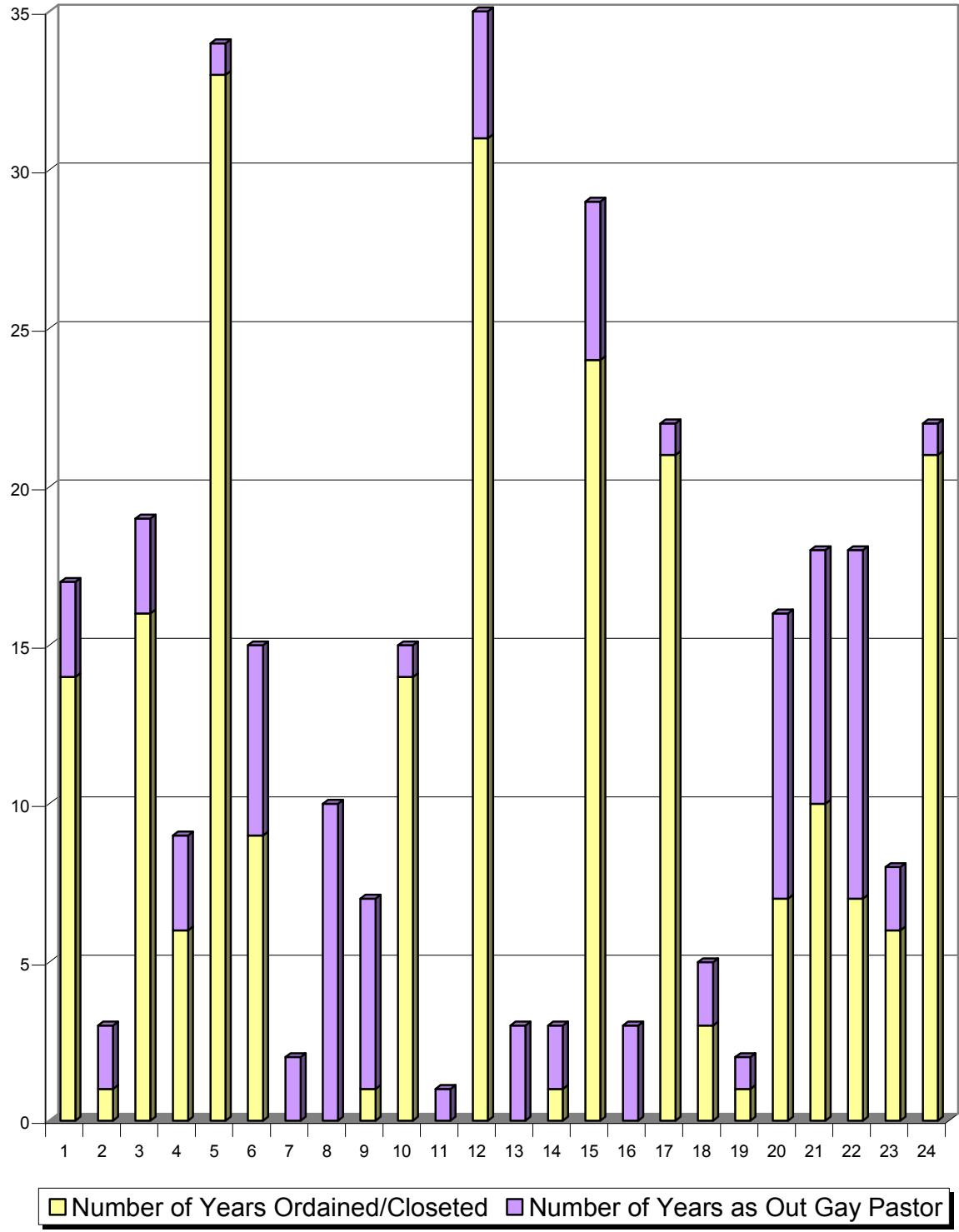


### 3.2: Denomination In Which Pastor Was Ordained

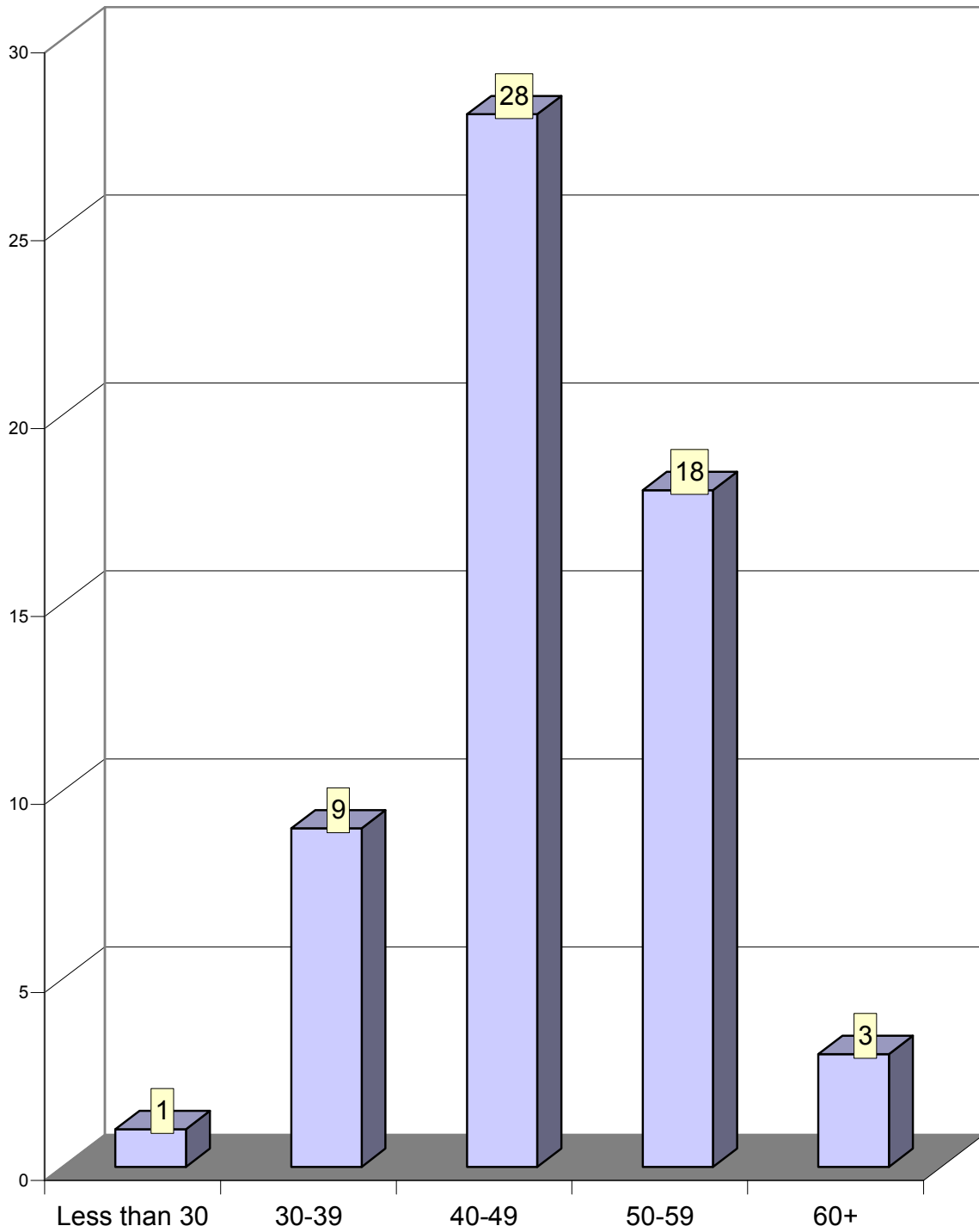


### 3.3: Years of Ordination

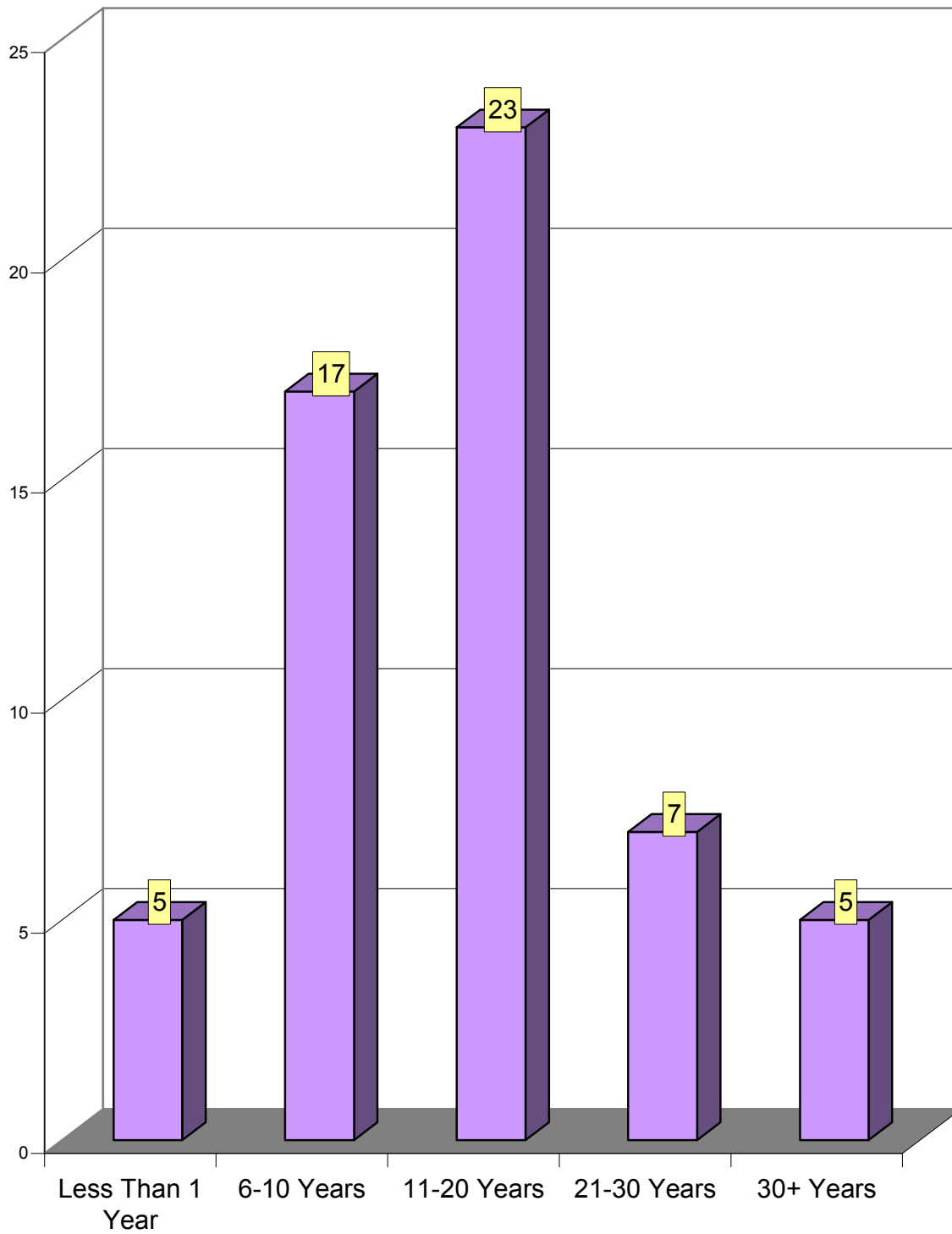
Pastors Who Have Been Out in Only One Congregation



### 3.4: Age of Pastors in Survey



### 3.5: Years Out of the Closet



## The Congregations: Who Are They

### Original Denominational Affiliation

Given the fact that the northeast United States are presently the most liberal states in the country and that the majority of our churches there were originally Congregational, it is not surprising that the largest number of churches – 44 of 62 – to call openly gay pastors were originally Congregational Christian (CC), even if certainly not all former CC congregations are liberal.<sup>46</sup> However, with only five churches represented, the disparity between CC and those that were Evangelical and Reformed (E & R) in background is much larger than anticipated, though this disparity is also true of Open and Affirming congregations.<sup>47</sup> Seven congregations in the study were formed after the merger in 1957; six were originally of another denomination or independent.

### Conferences

There are 39 UCC conferences in the 50 states plus Puerto Rico. Only six conference ministers did not respond to my request for names to participate in this study, though an individual pastor responded from one of them and a second conference does have called pastors who are openly gay. Six conference ministers offered regrets that there were no such pastors at that time, though in one case this has now changed; three said they had pastors but did not provide any contact information.

That means there are openly gay or lesbian pastors called by predominantly straight congregations in at least 30 of 39 conferences. Of the 62 churches represented in the study, the majority are in places one might expect – 20 in Massachusetts and 18 in northern and southern California; an additional nine are in other New England states.

However, the other 15 are spread across the country, in such diverse places as Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Some are in “unexpected” states such as Kentucky, Virginia, and Indiana. Eligible pastors were identified in the “red states” of South Dakota, Iowa and Kansas. I am also aware that in the past eligible out pastors have served in Utah and West Virginia thus paving the way for many more options besides the west or east coast for future openly gay clergy.

### Settings

One might expect that only congregations in large metropolitan areas would call openly gay pastors, particularly in the city itself. Two-thirds of the churches in this study called themselves either urban or suburban – of these slightly more than half are suburban.<sup>48</sup> This mirrors the UCC, where 66% of congregations are in metropolitan areas.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Question 72.2; Chart 3.6

<sup>47</sup> Ann B. Day, Coordinator of the UCCLGBTC's Open and Affirming Program, email correspondence, March 1, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Question 72; Chart 3.7

<sup>49</sup> UCC Research Services, 2003.



Given the stereotypes of suburban life, calling an openly gay pastor might seem out of the ordinary. One might also expect urban churches to call gay pastors because their options are more limited. The unexpected result of this question, however, is that so many churches are in rural, small town areas or in small cities – outside New England. Once again, this indicates a widening of opportunities for the future.

### **Open and Affirming Status**

Only 50% were officially ONA before calling a gay pastor; 40% were not.<sup>50</sup> To me, that so few were is surprising. It is also surprising that still today only 60% are ONA.<sup>51</sup> A few are in process and a few others are talking about beginning, but though it would seem advisable, being ONA is not an absolute prerequisite to calling a gay pastor. Ten churches said they had never even dealt with homosexuality before.<sup>52</sup> In the denomination as a whole, only ten percent of churches are officially ONA – 586 of 5,711 congregations.<sup>53</sup>

### **Search Committee and Congregational Vote Margins**

How difficult was it for search committees to come to a conclusion about whom to recommend to the congregation? Once they decided, it was nearly always unanimous; only four pastors did not receive 100% from committee members.<sup>54</sup> About two-thirds of the committees had no gay members; of those that did, twelve had one person, five had two people and two churches had more than two openly gay members on its search committee.<sup>55</sup>

One might expect a high number of divided votes once the congregation had an opportunity to vote on the recommended candidate. Sixteen candidates – over 25% – received a unanimous vote of the congregation.<sup>56</sup> Thirty-five pastors were called by a 90-99% affirmative vote; of those 23 received more than 95%. The other seven candidates received between two-thirds and 89%. However, not one constitution and/or bylaw of any congregation required more than an 80% vote.<sup>57</sup> Only four pastors received less than 80% affirmation. Twenty-one churches required more than two-thirds; 15 require only a simply majority. Of course, these numbers take into consideration only those churches that ultimately called an openly gay pastor. Other churches outside this study have failed to secure a sufficient vote. One church in the study, however, did indeed fail its first congregational vote but then completed the ONA process and voted again for the same candidate, this time with a sufficient number.

Many pastors wrote that though the congregation might have required, for instance, two-thirds vote, they had their own minimum number, such as 80% or

---

<sup>50</sup> Question 12; Chart 3.9

<sup>51</sup> Question 13; Chart 3.10

<sup>52</sup> Questions 10-11

<sup>53</sup> Open and Affirming Program, January 24, 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Question 15; Chart 3.11

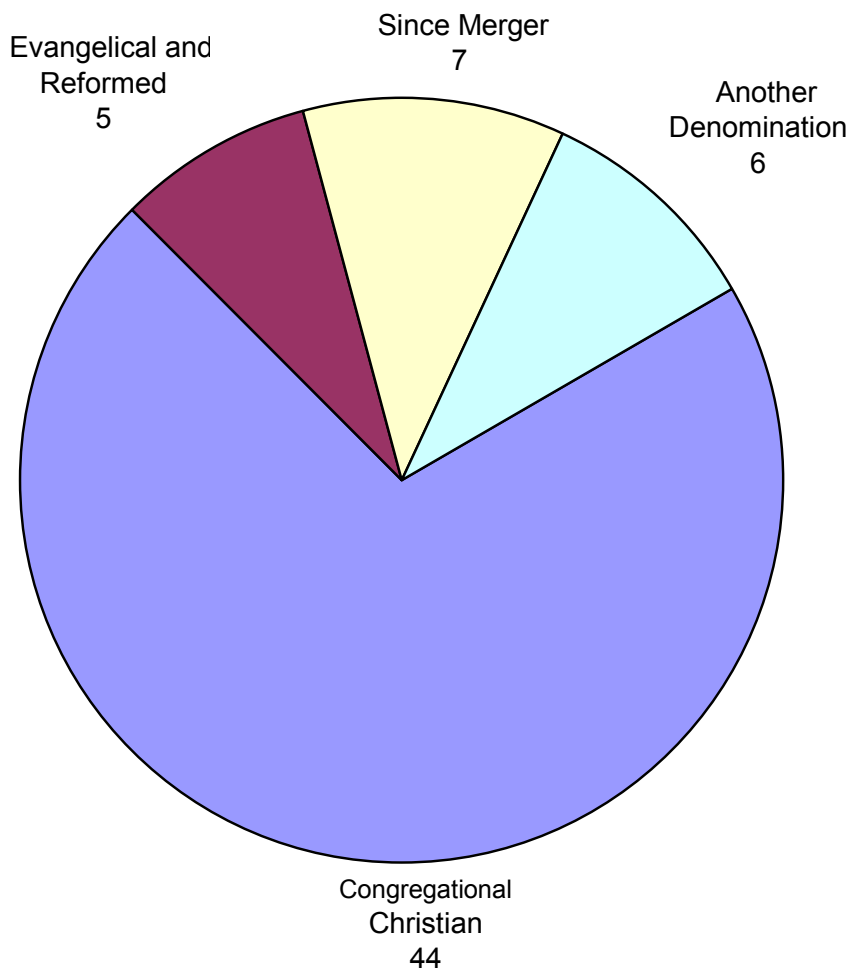
<sup>55</sup> Question 16

<sup>56</sup> Question 17; Chart 3.12

<sup>57</sup> Question 18

more. They did not want to enter a significantly conflicted situation and have that dominate the start of their new ministry.

**3.6: Original Denominational Affiliation of  
Congregations in the Study**



### 3.7: Church Setting

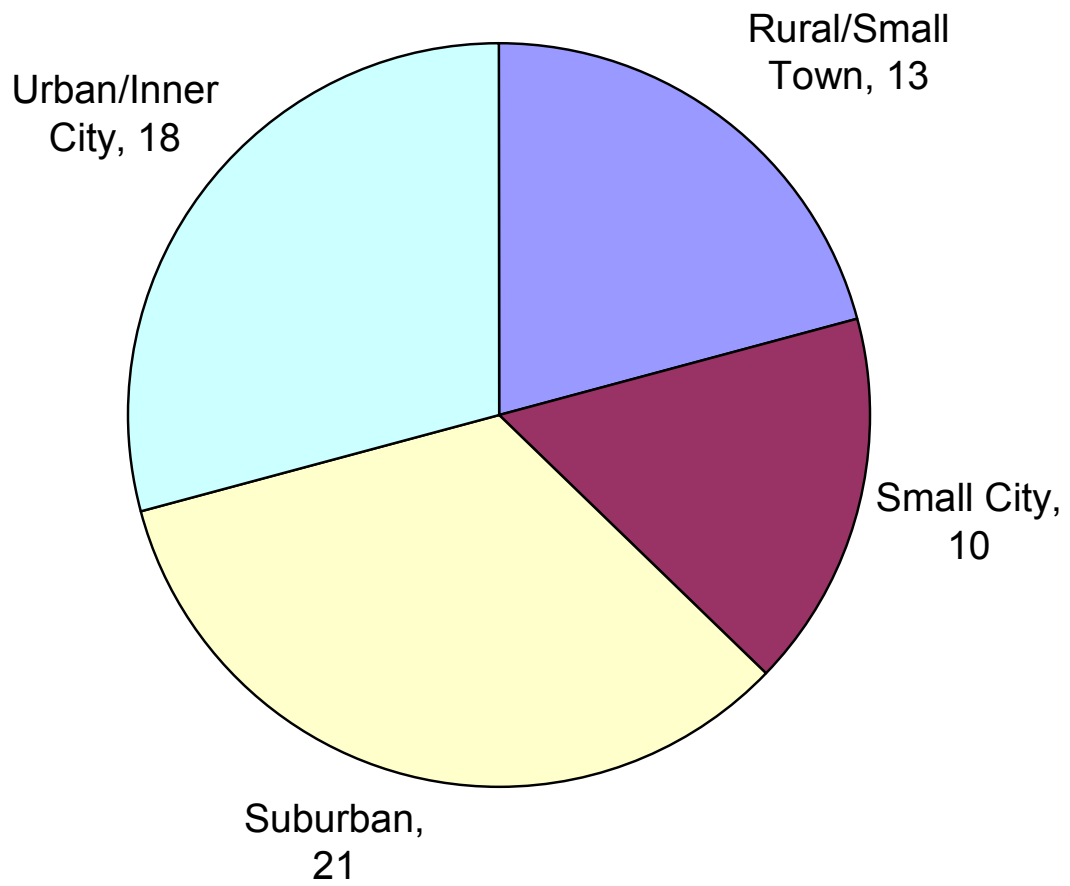


Chart 3.8

Names from CMs	Other Sources	In Study	UCC Conferences (States Where Names Identified)	Comments from CMs	Couldn't Use*
12		6	Northern California/Nevada	More not identified	
6		4	Southern California/Nevada		
0		0	Calvin Synod	No Response	
3		1	Central Atlantic (NJ, MD, VA)	More not identified	2
3		1	Central Pacific (OR)		
5		4	Connecticut	More, esp. interims	
1	1	2	Florida		
0		0	Hawaii		
5		4	Illinois		
0		0	Illinois South	No Response	
1	1	1	Indiana-Kentucky		1
1		0	Iowa		
1		0	Kansas-Oklahoma		
3		2	Maine		
20		14	Massachusetts		3
0	1	0	Michigan	No Response	1
1		1	Minnesota	More not identified	
1		0	Missouri-Mid South		
0	1	0	Montana-No. Wyoming		1
0		0	Nebraska	No Response	
0		0	New Hampshire	No Response	
1	3	0	New York	Probably 12 more Regrets	
0		0	Northern Plains		
7		6	Ohio (OH, KY)		1
10		4	Pacific Northwest (WA)		
0		0	Penn Central	Regrets	
0		0	Penn Northeast		
2		2	Penn Southeast		
0		0	Penn West	Regrets	
0		0	Puerto Rico	No Response	
0		0	Rhode Island	Yes, no names given	
3		3	Rocky Mountain (CO)	More not identified	
0		0	South Central	Yes, no names given	
1		0	South Dakota		
0		0	Southeast	Yes, no names given	
1		0	Southern California/Nevada		
3		2	Southwest (NM, AZ)		
1		1	Vermont		
3	1	4	Wisconsin		
95	8	62			9

95 names from conference ministers; 8 from additional sources

113 pastors received survey in 26 conferences; 4 others have pastors but didn't give names

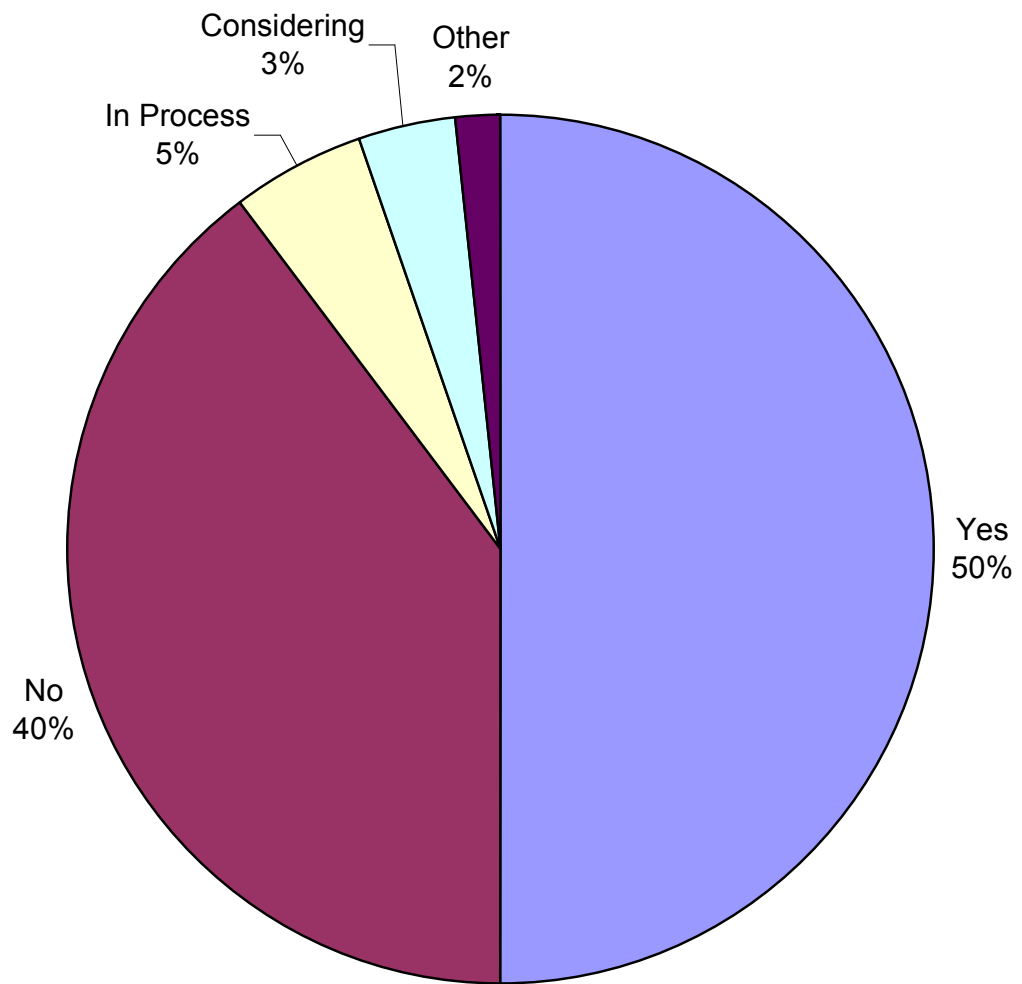
33 conferences responded in some way; 6 did not

Pastors identified by name in 29 states; 4 more states without names

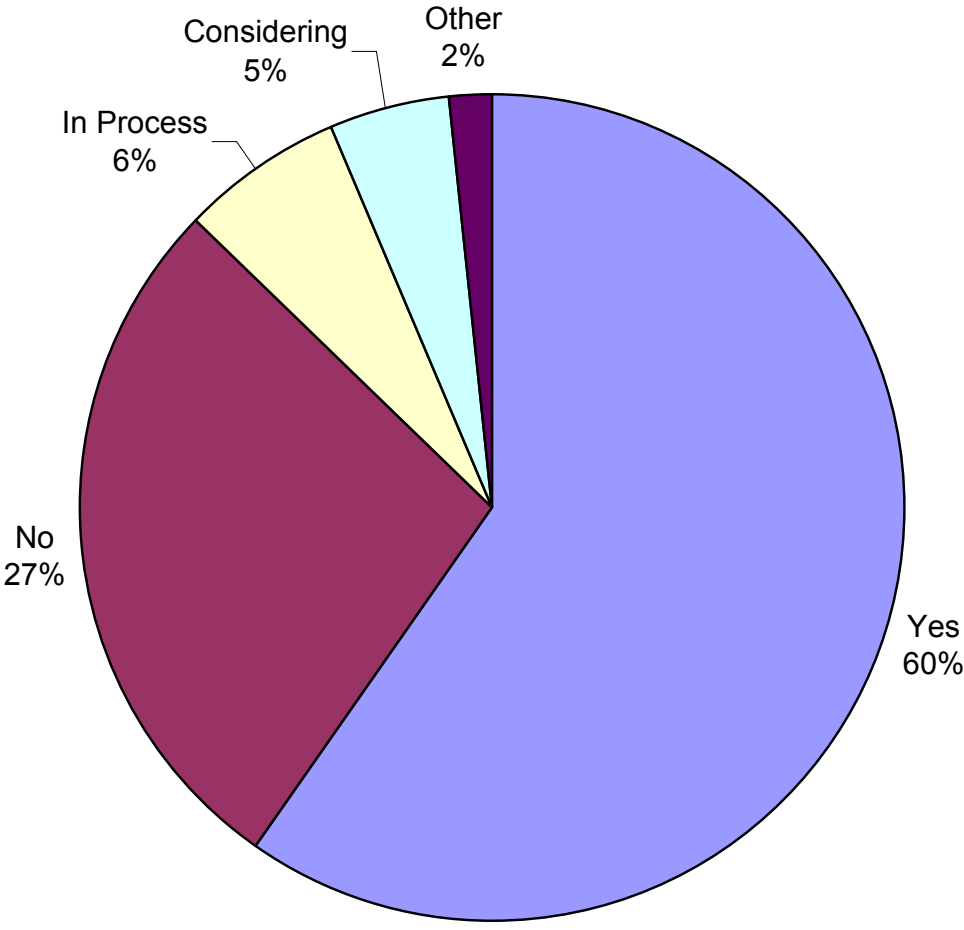
Not all names given by conference ministers fit parameters of the study

\* Some surveys returned were outside the parameters or received too late to incorporate data

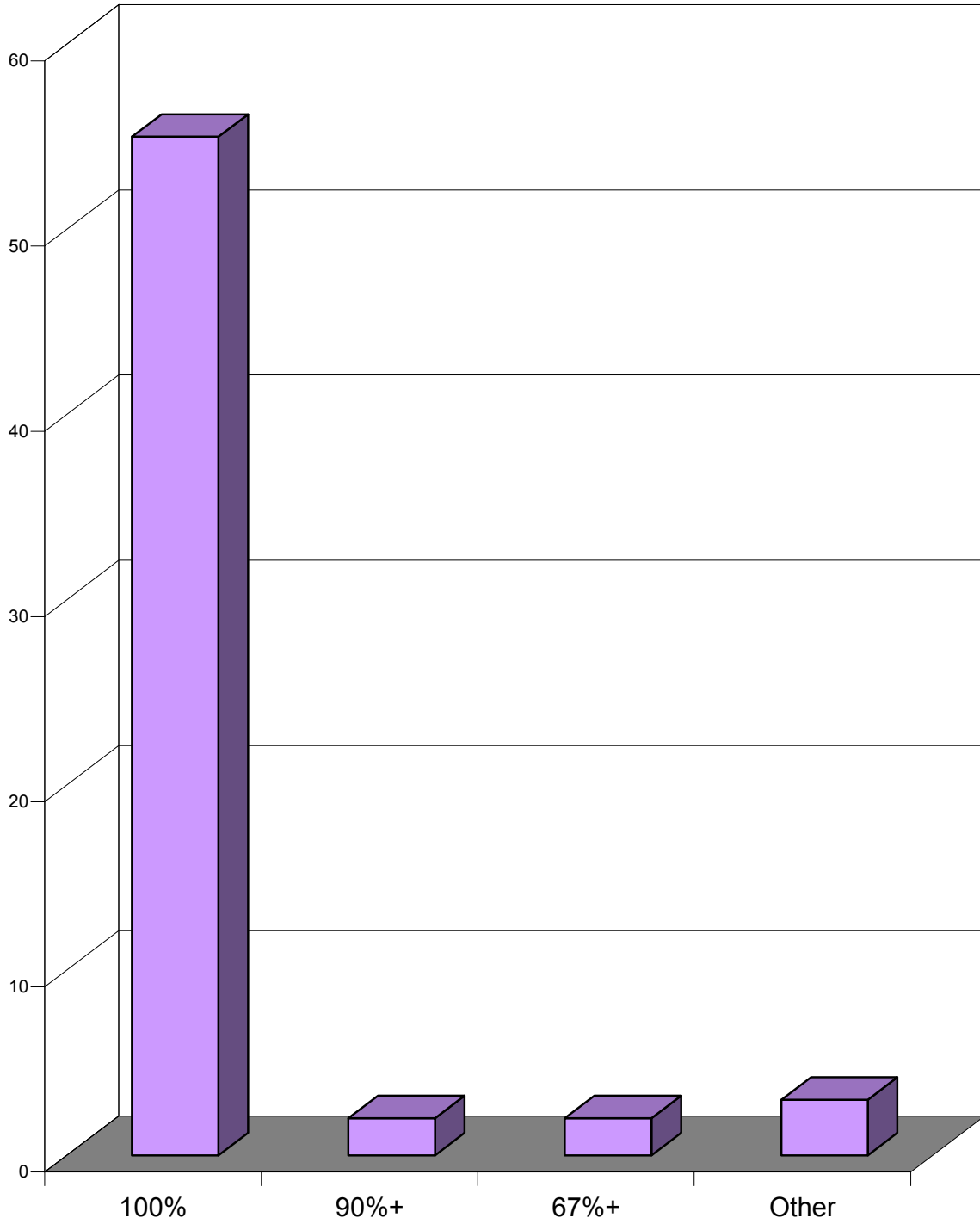
**3.9: Was the Church Open and Affirming Before the Pastor Arrived?**



**3.10: Is the Church Open and Affirming Today?**

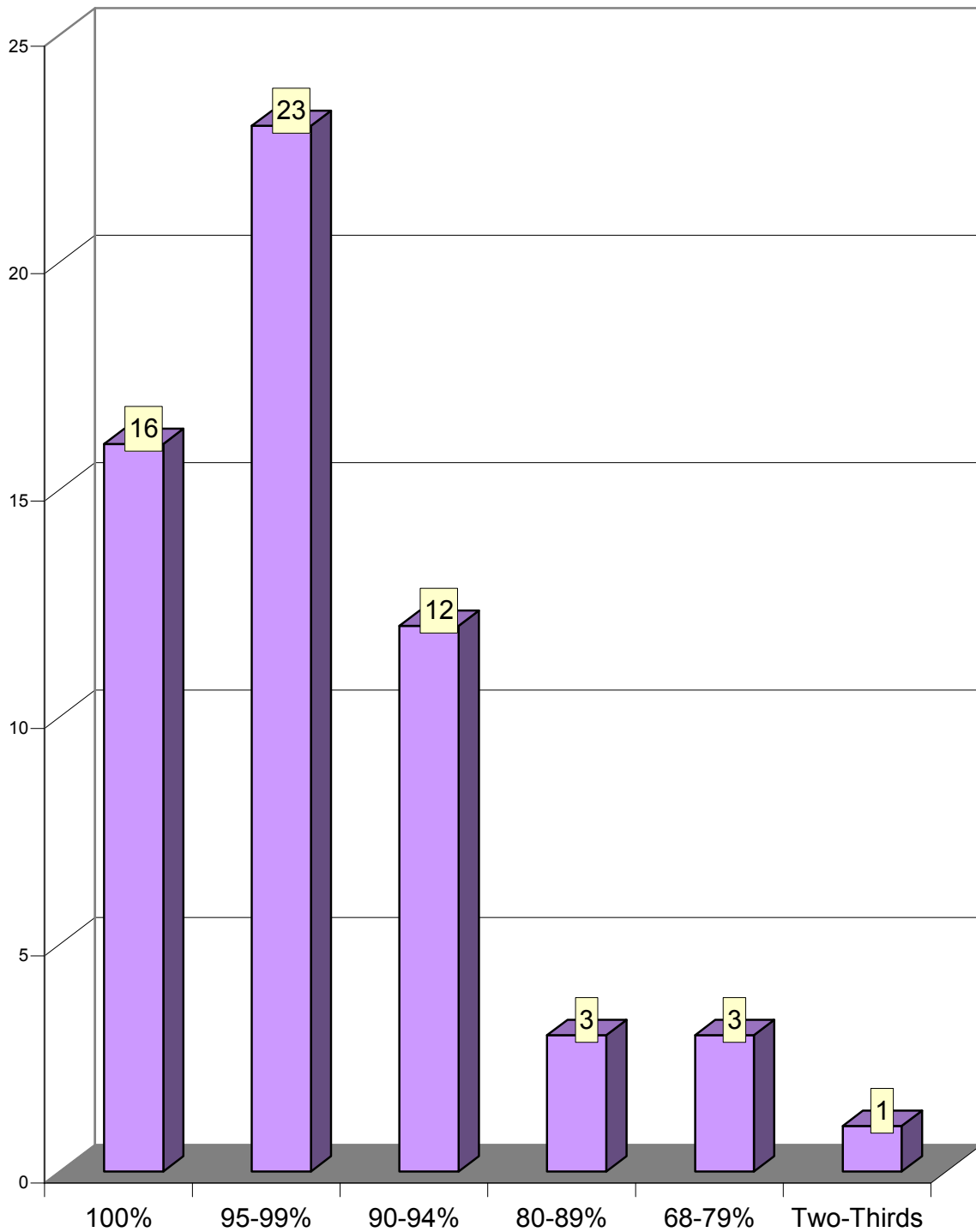


### 3.11: Search Committee Support





### 3.12: Percentage of Congregational Vote



## Chapter 4: The Congregations: Fears Cited and Outcomes

### Number One Fear Cited: Loss of Membership

As an almost knee-jerk reaction, the most common fear of calling a gay pastor is, “We’ll lose members.”<sup>58</sup> As a group of all 44 churches that reported a peak membership,<sup>59</sup> the combined total of their highest membership, frequently in the 1950s and 1960s, was just under 25,000. The same churches had lost 60% of their members by the time they called a gay pastor for a total just under 10,000; today they have almost 11,000, an 11% percent increase. As a total, they attracted almost 2,000 new members. For 30 of these 44 churches, this increase occurred in just five years.

Eleven churches did not provide a number for a peak year but gave the membership when the pastor arrived and today.<sup>60</sup> This group experienced a total gain of 14%, with only one church losing seven members. Total combined membership for all the churches in this study is up 11%; as a whole, the UCC has continued to decline by almost 8% from 2000 to 2004.<sup>61</sup>

Representing the number one fear reported in this study, members from 33 of 62 churches feared losing members upon calling an openly gay pastor.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, 29 did not. Of the 33 churches that did express the fear of losing members, however, only eleven actually lost at least one more member than they gained. Often this simply followed a trend of decline, exacerbated by deaths or clearing the rolls of inactive members. Of the total churches represented in the study, fourteen reported overall membership loss of at least *one member*.

Research Services in the UCC Office of General Ministries defines a declining church as one that has lost *more than 10%* of its members. By that definition, in this study, 18% have declined during the period they have had a gay pastor, compared to 34% of all congregations in the UCC from 1997-2002.<sup>63</sup>

When examining the numbers from the eleven churches that named membership loss as their fear *and* actually lost at least one member, it becomes clear that things were not going that well in these churches anyway. During their best years, mostly 1955-1970, they had an average of 684 members at their peak, 282 when the pastor arrived and 245 today. Obviously by comparison, their decline was much sharper before the gay pastor, though this is a different historical period for all churches in the U.S. All but two churches had less than half their peak memberships when the gay pastor arrived – for example, a 725 member church declined to 294, but has a membership of 263 today; a 2,300 membership church had declined to 1,110 and today has 1,000; a 200 member church declined to 100 and today has 65. The sharpest post-calling decline was from 700 members to 319

---

<sup>58</sup> Question 19; Chart 4.1

<sup>59</sup> Question 26-27; Appendix 1.2

<sup>60</sup> Appendix 1.3

<sup>61</sup> Chart 5.10

<sup>62</sup> Appendix 1.1

<sup>63</sup> UCC Statistical Handbook: 2003, Office of General Ministries, p. 5.

to 200 today. Like others, this case was reportedly due to the clearing of its rolls but in just two years has received 27 new members.

One church that feared losing members has surprisingly grown from 1,400 members in 2001 to 1,800 members today, clearly counter to their initial fears. Its membership was 1% LGBT in 2001 and is 1% LGBT today, illustrating that this growth was not due to being “overrun” with homosexuals, as they also feared. This is discussed later.

Forty-one (two-thirds) churches had at least one member leave citing the calling of a gay pastor.<sup>64</sup> In 14 of these churches, at least one of those persons returned; in 26 churches, no one did.<sup>65</sup> Those who returned cited two major reasons: the church stayed connected to them, including the pastor who reached out, and they realized their preconceived ideas were wrong.<sup>66</sup> Some missed their family; others have come around with those who stayed. Only eight of the 26 churches where no one returned ultimately had a total membership loss.

The fear of membership loss is clearly not the experience for the vast majority of churches. Seven churches had no loss or gain; 14 lost more members than they gained; 34 churches had a total membership gain; seven reported no numbers. One church was closed, due to unrelated factors, despite a small membership gain. It had 750 members in 1950, but only 12 in 2002 when they called a gay pastor. It took in nine new members but ultimately closed with 15.

### **Second Biggest Fear: Becoming a “Gay Church”**

Cited just slightly less than the fear of losing members was the fear of gaining members, of the wrong type. Fifth on the list was a similar concern stated differently: too many LGBT people will join.

When addressing the issue of membership loss, we can see that calling an openly gay pastor did not cause a loss in the majority of cases. Was the gain because of LGBT new members? And did these become “gay churches?” I asked for the percentage of membership that was LGBT before the pastor arrived, the percentage of new LGBT members, and the overall LGBT percentage of membership today.<sup>67</sup>

Twenty churches had no gay members when they called their pastor – which is surprising in itself. Twelve churches received no new LGBT members, except the pastor and maybe his or her partner. Seven churches still have no LGBT members today.

Only four churches were more than 10% LGBT when they called the pastor – one was 50%, one 40%, one 25% and one 20%. Of total new members received, seven received 50% LGBT or more – one 60% and one 75%. However, despite the number of new members, not even one in the study has become 50% LGBT today. For the one church whose new members were 75% LGBT, this still represents only 45% of the total number of members today. In the church whose *new* members

---

<sup>64</sup> Question 24

<sup>65</sup> Question 34

<sup>66</sup> Question 35

<sup>67</sup> See Questions 29-31; Charts 5.5-5.7; and Appendix 4

were 60% LGBT, they still make up only 20% of the total membership. That still may be “too many” for some people, but they have not “taken over” the church.

What is defined as too many cannot be determined but let’s postulate that this means more than 10%, considered the total number in the population. Only 13 of 62 churches now have more than a 10% LGBT membership – the largest with 45%, four with 40%, one with 30% and two with 25%. Six churches are 10% LGBT; 32 less than 10%. And again, seven churches have no LGBT members today.<sup>68</sup>

Thirty-four churches cited the fear of “too many” LGBT members. Nine of them ended up more than 10% LGBT; 25 did not. No church is currently more than 45% LGBT.

When defining a “gay church” as one in which membership is made up of 50% or more LGBT people, no congregation became a “gay church.” As to the definition of “too many LGBT members” we cannot be sure, (though it would make a good study someday) but the fact that only 13 of 62 churches (compared to 4 of 62 before the pastor arrived) are more than 10% LGBT today seems to indicate, to me, that the vast majority did not attract “too many.” In fact, such an attitude or fear of being “overrun” may preclude them from ever attracting too many LGBT people.

Obviously this also means that the majority of new members are heterosexual. The biggest reason non-LGBT people stated for joining was the overall welcoming nature of the church, its openness and warmth.<sup>69</sup> Even many long-time members describe the church as feeling healthier, with a better sense of well-being.<sup>70</sup> “People are more loving to one another,” said one.

The second biggest reason cited by non-LGBT people for joining has to do with an inclusive, progressive and/or liberal theology. The third reason may surprise some: people joined for the sake of their children, believing this is a good atmosphere for raising kids. This is addressed later. For ten people, it wasn’t primarily about hospitality or theology but simply good worship. “The Spirit is present,” said a new member. “There is spiritual depth,” said another.

Having gone through the changes, and for some challenges, that have come from having an openly gay pastor, one long-time straight member said the church “means something to them now,” another that they are “more invested” in the church. Yet others will cite what happens in all growing churches: “wistfulness for when we knew everyone.” Most frequently stated, however, is a feeling of new life, renewed hope, better well-being and that the church is increasingly active and lively. A long-time member said, “I don’t want to miss a Sunday.”

### **Fear Number Three: Loss of Income**

Only two of 62 churches reported a decline in stewardship pledges and offerings from the period the pastor started and today.<sup>71</sup> For twenty churches, things stayed mostly the same. However, 34 churches, more than half, saw an increase in income. Six churches did not report. One church reported a doubling of pledges,

---

<sup>68</sup> Chart 5.17

<sup>69</sup> Question 32; Chart 4.3

<sup>70</sup> Question 33; Chart 4.4

<sup>71</sup> Question 42; Chart 5.4

another stopped dipping into reserves and one wiped out a \$43,000 deficit. Two churches were able to add a capital campaign.

One of the challenges participants often noted is repeated in all kinds of churches, new members tend to give less than those more established. One church reported that pledges grew the first year but declined the second. Over time, will this be true for others as well? An overall loss of pledges and offerings following the call of an openly gay pastor was true for only two churches.

A similar conclusion was reached by a 1997 D.Min. study by Jane Heckles of stewardship in ONA churches.<sup>72</sup> Her thorough statistical analysis of primary data collected from churches compared to denominational statistics from the Yearbook published annually by the research office proved that ONA churches “consistently had greater increases in contributions that the national trend of the United Church of Christ for the same period.”<sup>73</sup> Further disseminating the information, she concluded in an article that her study shows that “church leaders should not ‘pit’ their concerns about the financial support necessary for ‘church survival’ against the Gospel call for full inclusion of LGBT persons.”<sup>74</sup>

The Open and Affirming Program of the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns periodically surveys ONA churches. A survey of 131 ONA churches in 2003 showed that the financial impact of an ONA vote in a little more than half of those churches “hasn’t noticeably changed things.”<sup>75</sup> This was based on an overall impression, as the document notes, rather than actual primary data. But, it also noted that fewer than 10 of 131 churches reported a mostly negative effect.

Still another opinion, though not UCC, is given by the author of *Qu(e)rying Evangelism: Growing a Community From the Outside In*.<sup>76</sup> For this openly gay United Church of Canada pastor, the presence of marginalized persons in the church attracted a disproportionate number of persons who are less conventional and/or in poverty and seemed to cause the church to be less attractive to those with larger incomes. In her case, the church was not as financially successful with a gay pastor or a growing LGBT congregation, though this is not representative of a larger study. Others in my study who serve in inner-city settings might agree.

This study did not focus its primary information on stewardship, as did Heckles, but adds to the growing data, including anecdotal, that ONA churches, and now the presence of openly gay pastors, are a positive development amidst much more gloomy statistics for the UCC as a whole. However, it is important to note that although contributions to Our Churches Wider Mission – basic support of the regional and national settings of the UCC – has continued to fall drastically, in part, theory says, due to anger with the UCC because of positive developments for LGBT

---

<sup>72</sup> Jane Elizabeth Heckles, “Stewardship Trends in Open and Affirming Churches of the United Church of Christ” (D. Min. thesis, Andover Newton Theological School, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> Heckles, p. 52.

<sup>74</sup> Jane Heckles, “ONA Churches Outperform UCC Trends in Stewardship and Membership,” *ONA Communiqué* 18, Spring 1997.

<sup>75</sup> ONA Program, UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns, “Open and Affirming: Inside and Out,” 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Cheri DiNovo, *Qu(e)rying Evangelism: Growing a Community from the Outside In* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005) p. 43.

persons, giving to local churches in the UCC has consistently grown despite other losses.<sup>77</sup>

#### **Fear Number Four: The Pastor's "Gay Agenda"**

While a few pastors stated that their call was in fact advancing the "cause" of LGBT rights in the church and society, a similar number specifically stated they were not doing this for the sake of a cause. One stated she could not "carry the mantle" of LGBT people on her shoulders even if she wanted to. Most seemed determined to prove they did not have an agenda. They stated they were very careful and conscious not to speak too often about LGBT issues, trying to carefully balance it with other social justice issues. Some even tried to monitor in their minds before speaking how often they had spoken about LGBT issues, though one lamented that even any mention of her partner in a sermon, for some, made it a "gay sermon." Only seven pastors felt no need to be so careful, to self-censure.<sup>78</sup> About half do this quite a bit; half do it sometimes; three are aware of always limiting their speech. This will be addressed further later in the section on the impacts on the pastor.

Another indication of a pastor's "agenda," or lack thereof, is that the vast majority do not want to serve a predominantly LGBT congregation.<sup>79</sup> This is true even, if at times, it might seem easier. Several respondents said quite succinctly, "people are people." Most said they feel called to a "diverse" population of people, helping to build bridges, not wanting to be part of a "gay ghetto." One said, "Sometimes I think it would be easier, but I think part of my call is to help people see gay pastors can lead in any setting. I hope my ministry will help straight people in their own learning." Could this be called an "agenda?"

If anything, the agenda of these pastors is to help people find joy – "the joy of truly being who God intends me to be;" "the joy of being yourself." I am sure that most would like to see the number of openly gay and lesbian pastors increase but this is helped, as several noted, by nothing less than being good pastors to everyone.

The lack of an agenda might also be illustrated by the fact that 40% of these churches are still not Open and Affirming. Another indication of an "agenda" might be the number of churches that allow the pastor to do same-sex weddings or have them in the church. Almost all pastors report officiating at same-sex unions/marriages; one does not, because only the senior pastor does them and three have not been asked.<sup>80</sup> However, only 41 reported officiating ceremonies on the church premises. Thirteen have never been asked but eight are still dealing with the issue.

Most policies and practices in place regarding same-sex unions already assumed the discretion of the pastor and considered his or her decision sufficient. Some members assumed that their affirmative ONA vote made this a non-issue. However, of the eight that have not had ceremonies in their church, several agreed it will first involve conferring with the Deacons or Church Council. Others said they will

---

<sup>77</sup> Chart 5.16

<sup>78</sup> Question 55; Chart 6.2

<sup>79</sup> Question 62

<sup>80</sup> Questions 49-51

now review their policies in light of the recent General Synod vote on marriage equality.<sup>81</sup> Only one church had expressed a definite opposition but this led to a year-long conversation and the agreement that the pastor does have discretion and can use the sanctuary.

A sad note in one church, however, is that the issue of same-sex marriage caused a “huge blow-out” that led to the resignation of a pastor. Though the church was Open and Affirming and had an established LGBT population, when two female members sought a wedding, another member voiced loud opposition and caused a major rift in the church proclaiming, “Not at the altar where my father’s casket lay.”

In terms of an “agenda,” it appears there has been no major increase to the number of churches that are officially Open and Affirming, no major increase in the number of pastors allowed to officiate at same-sex unions/marriages or use the church sanctuary to do so, little if any desire to force the church to hear too much about LGBT issues, and the pastors are likely to self-censure to help people be comfortable. In fact, from my perspective and taking into consideration the next set of questions for the pastors, it appears that the challenge or pressure is more difficult for the pastor than the congregation, though this perception may be colored by my own experiences.

### **Fear Number Five: Loss of Children and Families**

How has Sunday school attendance been affected by the call of an openly gay pastor?<sup>82</sup> The most dramatic increase has come here. The number of children attending Sunday school in these churches’ peak years was 5,586. By the time the gay pastor arrived, there had been an 81% decline to a total of 1,658 children; today there are 2,392 representing a 44% increase.<sup>83</sup> In averages, there were 180 children during the peak years, usually 1955-1970, only 31 when the pastor arrived and an average of 44 children today.

Since a gay pastor was called, there has been an increase of almost 650 children in 37 Sunday schools; twelve had the same number. One church is starting a new Sunday school; five had no Sunday school before or after and eight did not report. Only three churches saw a decline. The biggest loss, 25 children, occurred in a church that had already seen a decrease of 239 children from their peak year in 1958. Such a decline may be true for almost all U.S. churches but it should be noted that reversals of the trend were accomplished amidst a continuing decline in the majority of UCC congregations.

Twenty-one churches cited the loss of children and families as a fear. Of those who stated this fear, only one church actually lost children, again it was the one whose attendance had already plummeted over 80%.

In relation to the UCC as a whole, growth in Sunday school attendance in these churches with openly gay pastors far outnumbers the rest. According to

---

<sup>81</sup> “In Support of Marriage Equality for All,” Resolution adopted by the Twenty-Fifth General Synod, 2005.

<sup>82</sup> Questions 40-41; Appendix 3.1-3.3

<sup>83</sup> Chart 5.3

Research Services, while total attendance was up 44% in the churches in this study, nationally the number has continued to decrease, another 20% from 2000 to 2004.<sup>84</sup>

### **Other Fears Cited: Media, Friends and Ecumenical Relations**

The three other most cited fears had to do with how these church members felt they would be perceived by others. Thirteen felt the media would make this a big issue; thirteen feared they would be ridiculed by friends and family; six thought their ecumenical relations would be damaged.

Regarding the media: the arrival of a new pastor was covered on 33 occasions. Of these, 27 involved the local newspaper, one on television and one in United Church News. Twenty of the newspaper stories were characterized as positive; two were neutral; seven mentioned nothing of the pastor's sexual orientation. One was negative and resulted in a month of letters to the editor and two were considered sensational. The arrival of an openly gay pastor was not covered at all in 28 instances.<sup>85</sup>

Based on the reaction received in response to these reports, there was greater impact upon some individual pastors than their congregations. News, either formal or informal, led to 17 pastors receiving hate mail. Five received just one or two pieces; five got three to nine pieces; three have received more than ten letters and four pastors get some hate mail every year. Fortunately, 42 pastors have reported never receiving hate mail.<sup>86</sup>

Further illustrating the impact of the media, two pastors received death threats, either left on their answering machine or by mail (although these may have been the work of congregation members). And two church buildings have been vandalized in some way because of LGBT issues.<sup>87</sup> There were at least two additional incidents of vandalism and arson following the General Synod vote on marriage equality but these were not directly related to a congregation hiring an openly gay pastor.

I must say that I am surprised, and grateful, that the number of people receiving hate mail and death threats is lower than I expected. It is clear, however, that the fear of the media did not materialize for most of these local churches. The media has, of course, followed other LGBT/church issues such as the General Synod marriage equality vote, though their attention span is short.

Regarding ridicule from friends and family: There is no way to quantify this from the survey but one pastor cited that they were told of the fear that schoolchildren would be taunted by having a gay pastor. There was no indication, however, that this happened.

Regarding ecumenical relations: the overwhelming responses to the question of reaction from neighboring churches or the local ministerium were: positive, only positive, very positive, favorable, supportive, and welcoming.<sup>88</sup> There were others, however, who reported they were simply ignored or there was no reaction. In several

---

<sup>84</sup> UCC Research Services, 2000-2004. Charts 5.14 and 5.15

<sup>85</sup> Questions 43-44

<sup>86</sup> Question 45

<sup>87</sup> Questions 46-47

<sup>88</sup> Question 48



cases there was silence from the evangelicals, with whom there wasn't a relationship anyway. One group began to pray for salvation for the congregation. One group had a motion that attempted to expel the pastor and congregation but didn't get around to voting on it. One group refused membership but the group split and doesn't exist now. One ministerium cancelled a beloved annual choir festival because they didn't want this UCC church and pastor to participate.

One note of hypocrisy involved one of the conservative pastors who attempted to have a church expelled from the group. He was later dismissed from his church for having an extramarital affair with a female church member.

There were some negative experiences in ecumenical relations here but again quite minor compared to the total of all churches. In some cases, these pastors are now active in leadership roles for their local ministerium.

Other assorted issues expressed at the beginning of the pastorate included the fear of a conservative backlash in the community, the question of whether a new church start could be successful with a gay pastor, and the loss of male members. Two others fall into the category of every church having at least a few people who are always negative: "He's not like us" and "Unnamed members aren't happy." In several cases, pastors were told by church leaders to ignore such comments because these folks always find something to complain about. Leaders of another church said "Let the nay-sayers leave if they want to."

### **Stated Objections**

As we saw, many members reportedly expressed fears related to calling an openly gay pastor. What did they name as their primary objection?<sup>89</sup> Not surprisingly, biblical interpretation represented the largest number of objections, stated in 22 churches, but close behind, in 20 cases, people gave no concrete reason. The next highest response, at 18, was a discomfort with any discussion of sexuality; "morality" was cited in 17 cases. There were no objections stated in 16 congregations, just as we previously saw there were no fears expressed in 14 churches. Surprisingly, the smallest number of objections were the twelve churches that raised concerns related to children.

Biblical interpretation was not a primary objection in 40 of 62 churches, two-thirds of the group. There were no objections because of children in 50 churches. The pastors report that the biggest problem seems to be mere discomfort. In my opinion, some of that discomfort may simply stem from living in a cultural context that excels at scape-goating LGBT people, and their allies, for political gain. More often, however, people are uncomfortable or embarrassed by any discussion of sexuality and gay and lesbian persons are often objectified as one dimensional for their sexuality. To avoid being targeted in the political war or out of simple embarrassment, one stays silent. This is why, I believe, so many people did not or could not give a concrete reason for their objection. Such discomfort, though, can surely be addressed through the development of positive relationships with friends, family and other members in the church.

Biblical interpretation is a funny thing for the UCC. We do not generally appeal to the Bible to settle issues. We know, for instance, that women are called

---

<sup>89</sup> Question 20; Chart 4.5

by God to pastoral leadership, regardless of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:12; we know that slavery may have been practiced in some biblical cultures, but using this as a justification is outrageous. The average member may vaguely know that the Bible says something about same-sex sexual relations but not where nor exactly what. They have likely heard homosexuality condemned but do not want to be overly harsh and go so far as to call it an “abomination.” They might say it is “not in good taste” or even “not in God’s plan.” But they would be shocked to learn and surely not believe that “a man lying with a man” shall be put to death, as the literal reading of Leviticus 20:13 would conclude.

I believe some people think they are supposed to object to homosexuality because of the Bible, yet they do not see a connection to object to women in ministry on the same basis. That is why only four of the 18 objections to homosexuality keep it consistent.<sup>90</sup> Although to offset the text of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, there are many more positive references to women leaders in the early church, yet this is not acknowledged as such by literalists (or in many other denominations). Similarly, Jesus’ embrace of the outcasts in his society does not translate to an embrace of today’s outcasts, for this would require thoughtful reflection. Today’s culture wars seem to insist on certainty – absolute right or wrong. I believe this is also what causes people to object on the basis of morality. But if we recognized just how manipulated we are by political agendas, we would know the Bible addresses poverty and war far more emphatically than the sexuality of consenting adults. We would be better prepared to combat corporate greed and the loss of retirement pensions and health care if we truly engaged in a discussion of biblical morality. Instead LGBT people get used because we, as I describe it, “poll badly.” This plays into an already uninformed “doesn’t the Bible...?” and an uncomfortable “we don’t talk about that in good company.”

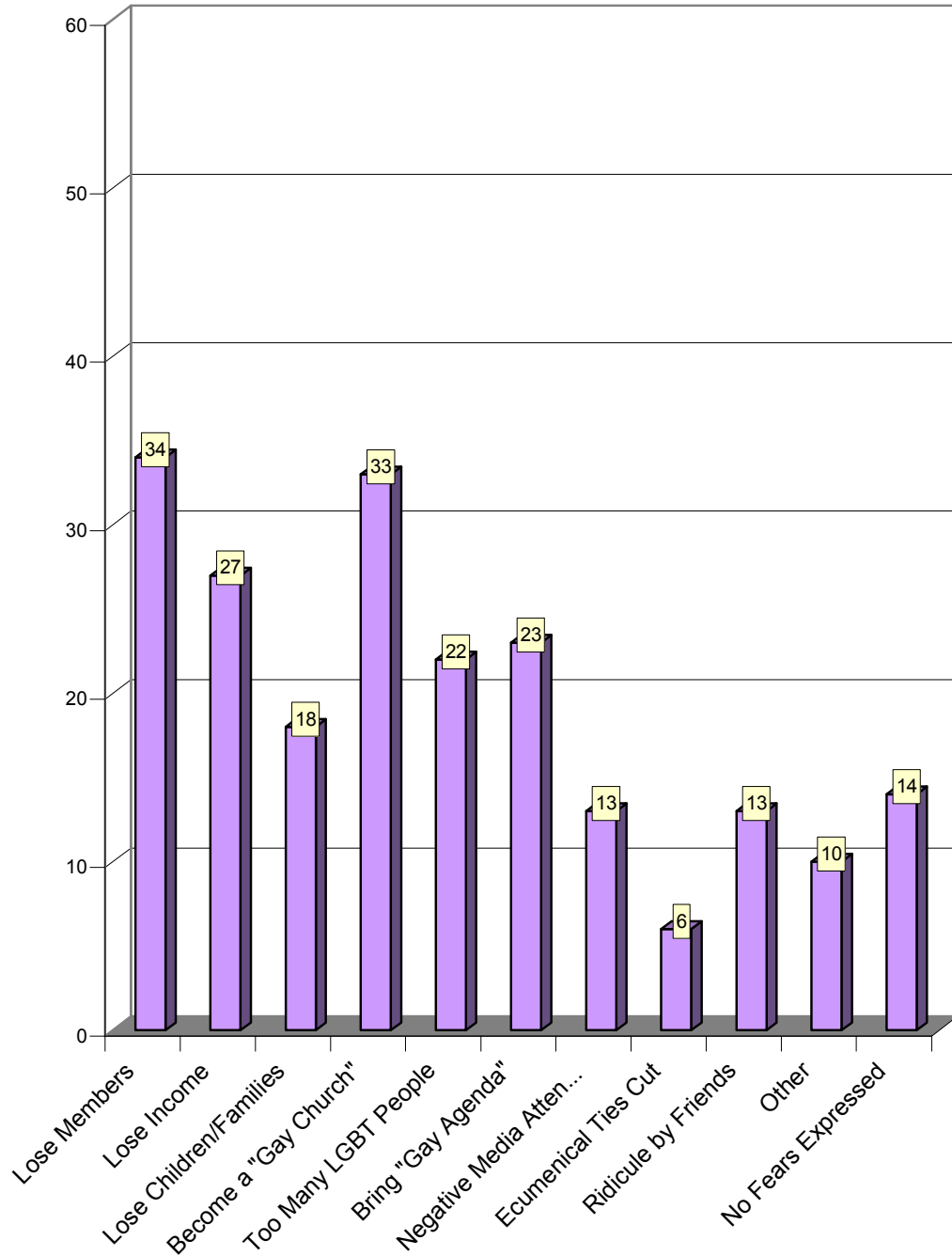
In my view, most churches should actually spend more time and energy protecting their children from predators who can too often get access to them, with poor or no screening, in churches that are desperate for anyone to help in poorly guarded classrooms or on outings. Churches should actually have a conversation about what pedophilia is, though it is a very uncomfortable and distasteful topic. If we did have those conversations, we would realize how we have wasted our time worrying about sexual orientation as a sign of pedophilia. With more facts and knowledge about sexual abuse, and frank discussion, we would serve our children well.

Among the few other objections heard by pastors in this survey is the one who was told the church can have gay members and leaders, but not pastors.

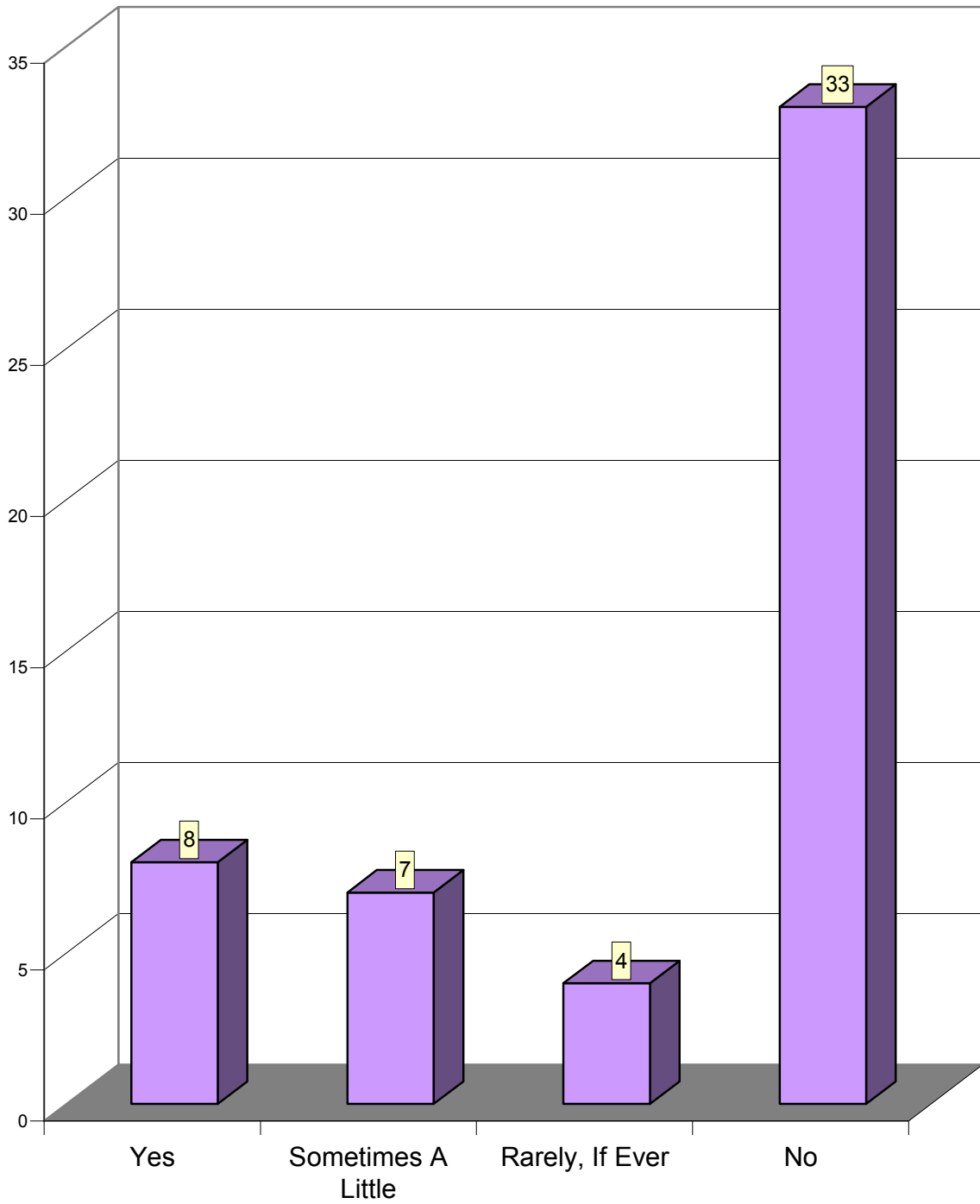
---

<sup>90</sup> Question 21

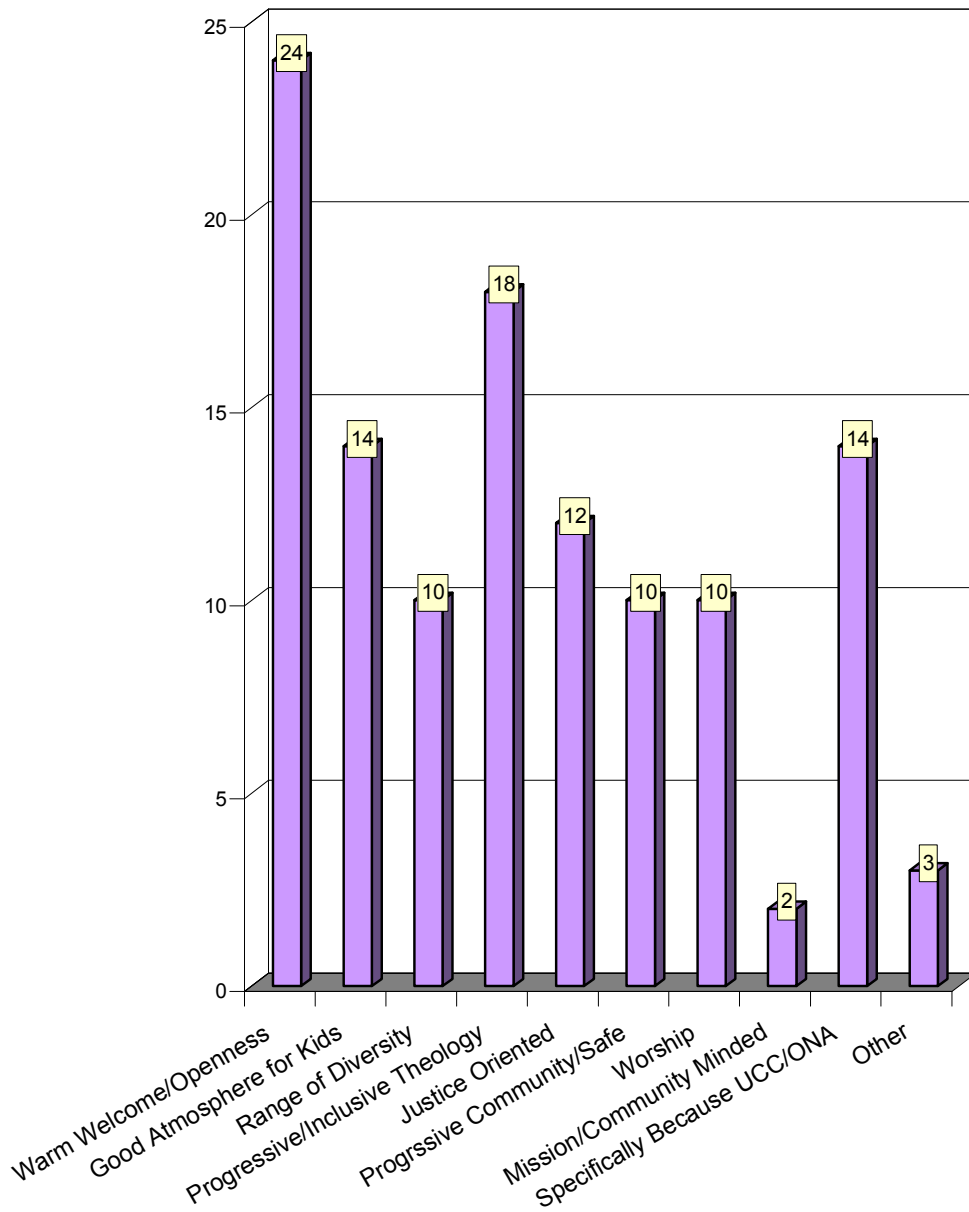
## 4.1: Fears Expressed by Church Members in Anticipation of a Gay Pastor



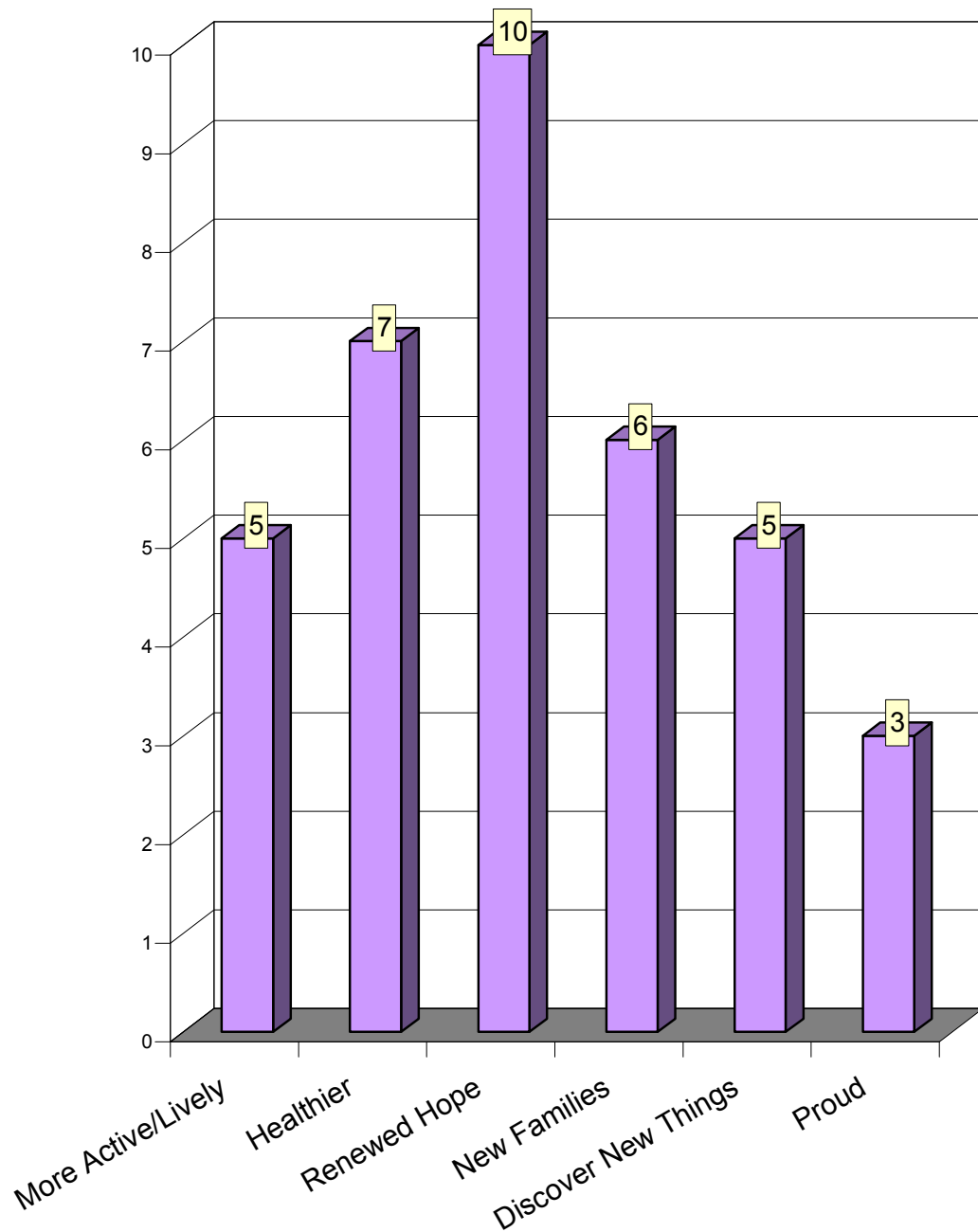
## 4.2: Do You Ever Desire To Serve an LGBT Congregation?



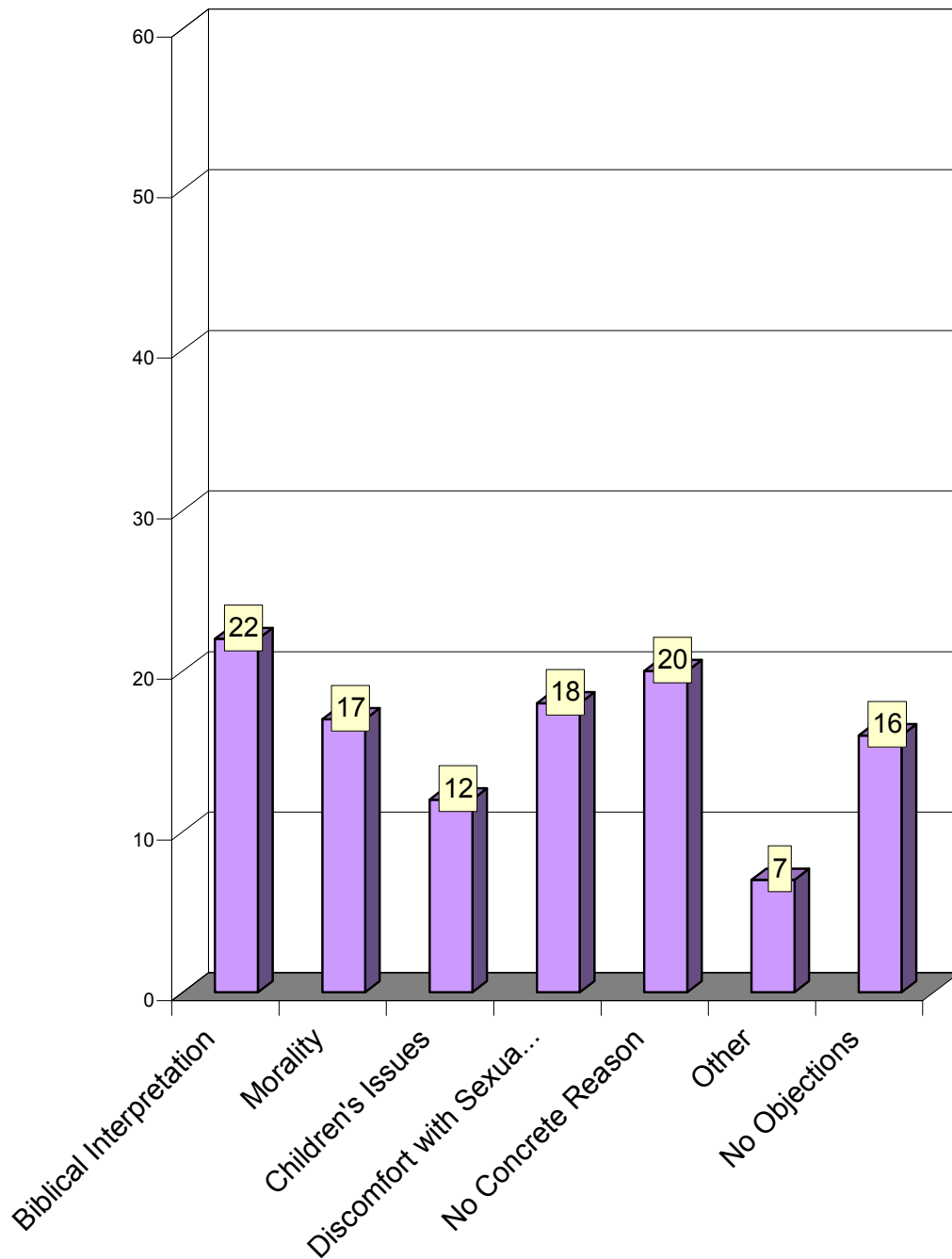
### 4.3: Reasons Given by Non-LGBT People for Joining the Church



## 4.4: Comments of Long Time Members



## 4.5: Primary Objections Raised About Calling a Pastor Who is Gay



## Chapter 5: Indicators of Health

### Worship Attendance

Despite the fears and objections of many, the majority of these congregations have either experienced revitalization or did not see the presence of an openly gay pastor significantly stunt their potential growth, with a few exceptions. One of the best indicators of a church's health is how many people are in church for Sunday services. Like the other categories of membership and Sunday school, large declines in worship attendance prior to the pastor's arrival were reversed in many cases.<sup>91</sup> Thirty-seven churches reported a peak worship attendance of 12,350 followed by a 76% decline to 2,970 prior to the pastor being called. Today this number has increased to 3,785, a growth rate of 27%.<sup>92</sup> Another way of looking at this: churches in this group had an average of 334 worshippers at their peak; they had 80 when the pastor arrived; they have 102 today. There were eight churches that did not report a peak attendance number but reported the number of worshippers when the pastor arrived and current attendance. This group also increased at a rate of 8%.<sup>93</sup> For all reporting churches in the study, the total rate of attendance growth was 22%.<sup>94</sup>

Only eight churches reported a decrease in attendance; of those, only three lost more than 10 worshippers. And, this does not take into consideration regular rates of attrition through death and transfer. One church that lost 20 worshippers after the pastor started was already missing 68% from its peak years (from 400 in 1968 to 130 in 1998), the result of a downtown location where no one lives anymore; another downtown church had previously declined 96%; two others were previously down more than 50%. In every case, the rate of decline was now slower. For example, the church already missing 68% of its worshippers now lost 15%; the church that declined 96% previously now lost 11%, or 5 people instead of 955.

One church lost 100 worshippers from the time they called gay associate pastors in 1994 to today, but they state that the primary issue was urbanization and difficulty getting to the church. They had already declined by 525 worshippers from 1975 to 1994.

Six churches had the same number on Sundays before and after. Thirty-eight churches grew in attendance under the leadership of an openly gay pastor, a total of 981 more worshippers for an average of 26 each (three less than 10; six more than 50). Of the eight churches that saw a decrease on Sundays, six lost a combined 53 worshippers; the total for all eight was 203 fewer worshippers. Their previous combined loss was 1,874.

### Summary by the Numbers

Membership – up 11% in combined total  
34 Increased (average of 54 members)  
14 Decreased (average of 43)

---

<sup>91</sup> Questions 36-37; Chart 5.2

<sup>92</sup> Appendix A2.2

<sup>93</sup> Appendix A2.3

<sup>94</sup> Appendix A2.1



7 No Change (zero growth/decline)

Worship Attendance – up 22% in combined total

38 Increased (average of 31 more worshippers)

8 Decreased (average of 26)

6 No Change

Sunday School Attendance – up 44% in combined total

37 Increased (average of 21 more)

3 Decreased (average of 11 fewer)

17 No Change

Stewardship – increased in 58% of the churches

34 Increased

2 Decreased

20 No Change

### **Comparing to the Rest of the UCC**

Churches are asked to report membership and financial data to the Office of General Ministries Research Services every year to publish in the Year Book. The 2003 Statistical Handbook included a report on membership trends in ONA and non-ONA churches from 1997-2002. I have used that study to make a comparison with the ONA and non-ONA churches in my study.<sup>95</sup> Other figures, noted below, are from 2000-2004 as reported to me by Destiny Shellhammer, head of Research Services.

Research Services defines a growing congregation as one whose membership has increased by 10% or more, a plateaued church has lost or gained fewer than 10%, and a declining church has lost 10% or more of its members during the period studied.<sup>96</sup> Their analysis reported that ONA churches fared better than non-ONA churches – more were growing than declining. Using this 10% categorization, the churches in this study with openly gay pastors, in a similar but not exact time frame, fared better than both ONA and non-ONA – a larger percentage were growing as opposed to plateaued or declining. Of churches that are not ONA, 15% grew; 25.5% of ONA churches grew; and 51% of churches in this study grew by more than 10%.<sup>97</sup> Of churches that have declined more than ten percent, 34% of ONA and non-ONA churches have declined in membership but only 18% of churches in this study lost at that rate.<sup>98</sup>

### **Summary by the Numbers Compared to the UCC**

All numbers regarding UCC statistics below are from the period 2000-2004.<sup>99</sup> The dates from my study are roughly the same (only 15, or 27%, of congregations

---

<sup>95</sup> *UCC Statistical Handbook: 2003*, Office of General Ministries, United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio, p. 36; Chart 5.8 and 5.9

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31

<sup>97</sup> Chart 5.8

<sup>98</sup> Chart 5.9

<sup>99</sup> Destiny Shellhammer, Minister for Research Information and Services, United Church of Christ Office of General Ministries, response to email request, March 1, 2006. Unfortunately, when

are pre-2000), mostly the late 1990s through mid-2005. The statistical analysis in this category is based on the 10% model from Research Services, unlike the summary above that is based on actual numbers, plus or minus one.

Membership<sup>100</sup> – up 11% in combined total; in the UCC, down nearly 8%  
51% from study grew 10% or more; UCC up in 12.2% of congregations  
18% from study declined 10% or more; UCC, 32.3% of all churches  
31% plateaued (plus or minus 9%); UCC, 55.4%

Worship Attendance<sup>101</sup> – up 22% in combined total; UCC down 30%  
70% of churches grew 10% or more; UCC up in 19% of churches  
14% of churches declined 10% or more; UCC down in 46%  
16% are plateaued; UCC 35%

Sunday School Attendance<sup>102</sup> – up 44% in combined total; UCC down 20%  
71% grew 10% or more; UCC 18.8%  
6% declined 10% or more; UCC 68.7%  
23% plateaued; UCC 12.5%

Stewardship<sup>103</sup> – increased in 58% of churches in my study; growing in 48% of the UCC as a whole. (See Heckles for more detailed analysis.)

---

comparing 1997-2002 to 2000-2004, only 12.2% churches are currently growing, as opposed to 15.6% in the earlier study. The same number are declining; the number plateaued has grown.

<sup>100</sup> Numbers are rounded where possible to add up to 100%; Chart 5.10 and 5.11

<sup>101</sup> Chart 5.12 and 5.13

<sup>102</sup> Chart 5.14 and 5.16

<sup>103</sup> Chart 5.17

## Summary

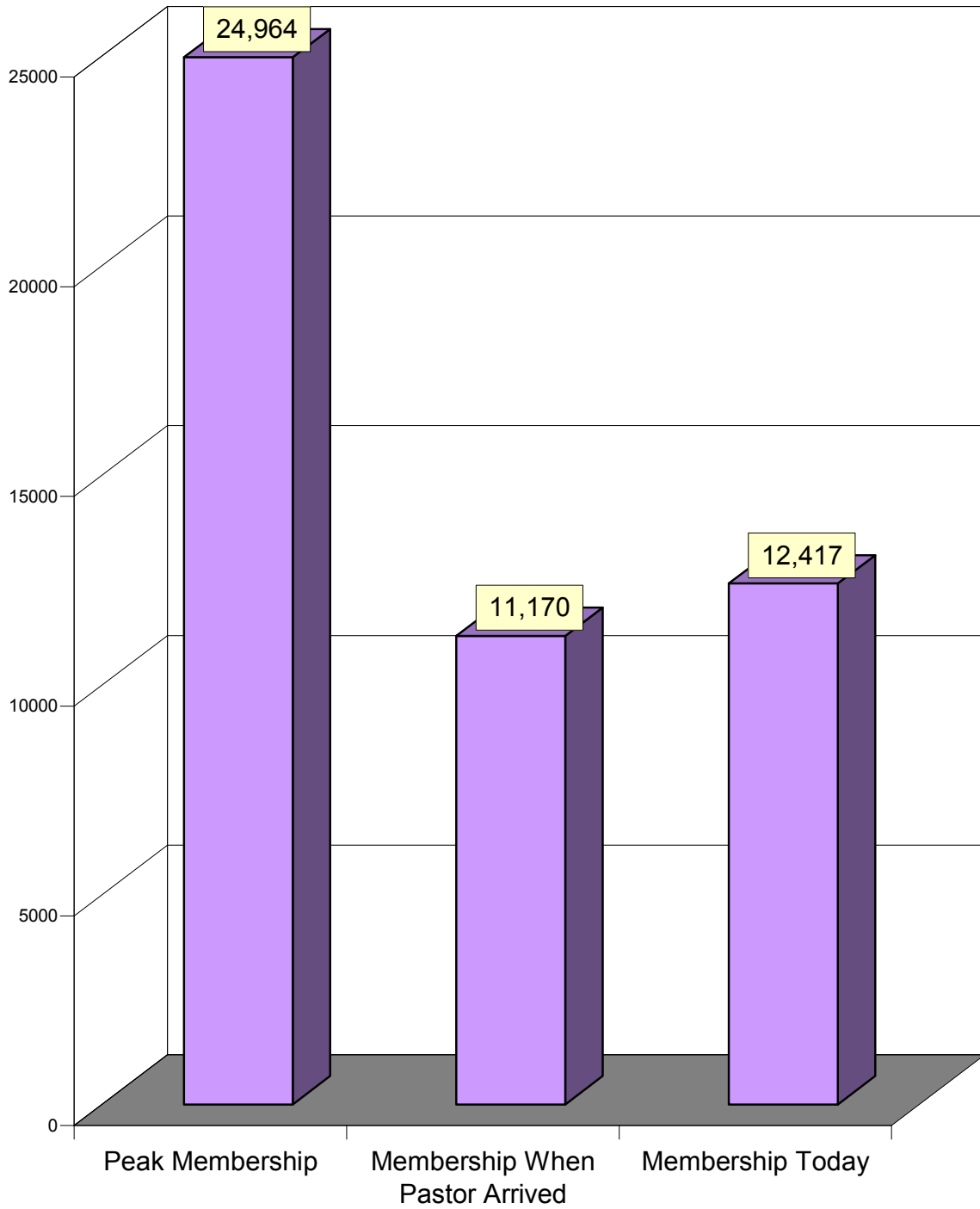
Looking at the first summary list of indicators of health, it appears that there were more decreases in the category of membership for churches in my study than in the other categories. We could theorize that this is a result of the fact that many of these churches have aging memberships, as is true throughout the denomination, and that this decrease has been fueled by death and the clearing of rolls. We also saw that the location of a church makes a difference as people continue to move out of inner cities (and for the UCC as a whole, from rural areas). Such indicators of health in a congregation as stewardship, Sunday school and worship attendance are likely more accurate reflections of how a church is actually doing.

It is obvious to me that the vast majority of churches did not ultimately suffer great losses by calling a gay pastor, and not necessarily because they were ready. Again, only half of them were already Open and Affirming; some had not even formally discussed homosexuality before calling their pastor. The numbers compared to the UCC as a whole are positive for these churches, but it is distressingly obvious that the denomination is in serious trouble with only 12% of its churches growing. But, it is also clear that not everything can be summed up by numbers. There is undoubtedly a human toll found in both the positive and negative experiences reported. About two-thirds of the churches had at least one person leave. That is painful for anyone who has been in a long-term relationship with a church. But in about one-third of those cases, at least one person later returned.

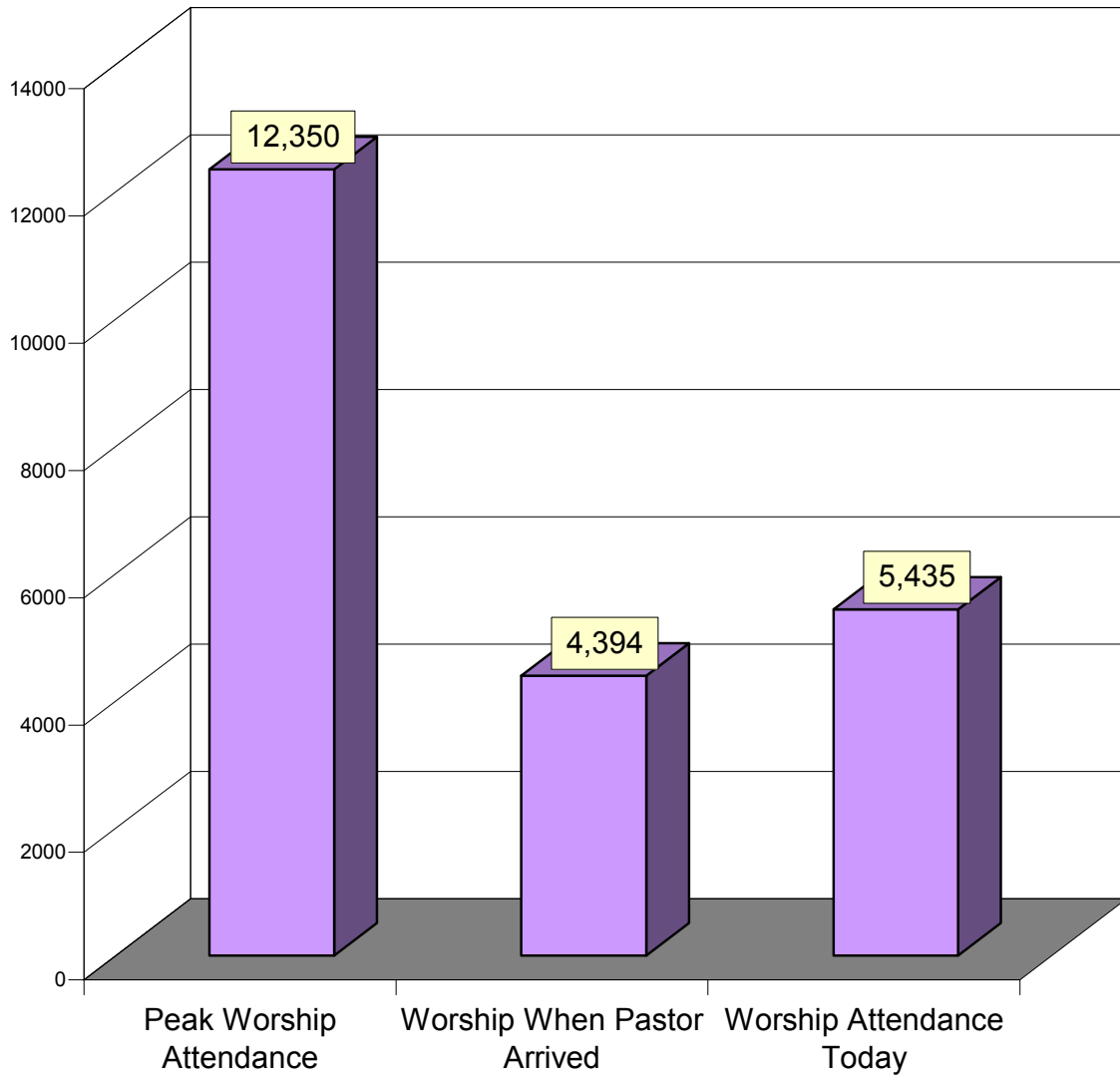
While many churches experienced a reversal of their declines, few will ever return to the size of their peak years when some had 1,000 or more members; few Sunday schools will likely have 300 children again. Yet some churches have not seen their peak as evidenced by those that are larger today than ever, one of which feared losing members but added 400 new members from 2001 to 2005. Some day we will also not worry as much about churches becoming a “gay church” or “too gay” and, as many congregations have discovered, simply rejoice that we worship God as a diverse community.

It is more difficult to quantify the impact of such factors as self-censorship or pressure from members on the pastors of these churches. There are both unique joys to being an openly gay or lesbian pastor called by a predominantly straight congregation and painful challenges, perhaps especially if one is the first openly gay pastor at that church. The 59 pastors represented in this survey are on the cutting edge and doing something very new, taking risks by being in ministry. While heterosexual pastors might receive hate mail or death threats due to stands the church may choose to take, the dreadful idea that a gay or lesbian pastor could expect this because of their very being is an unfair but real cost. That a pastor feels it necessary to watch his or her words to make sure everyone is comfortable around them takes a toll too and sometimes cannot be easily disentangled by the presence of both internalized homophobia and external forces, as we will see.

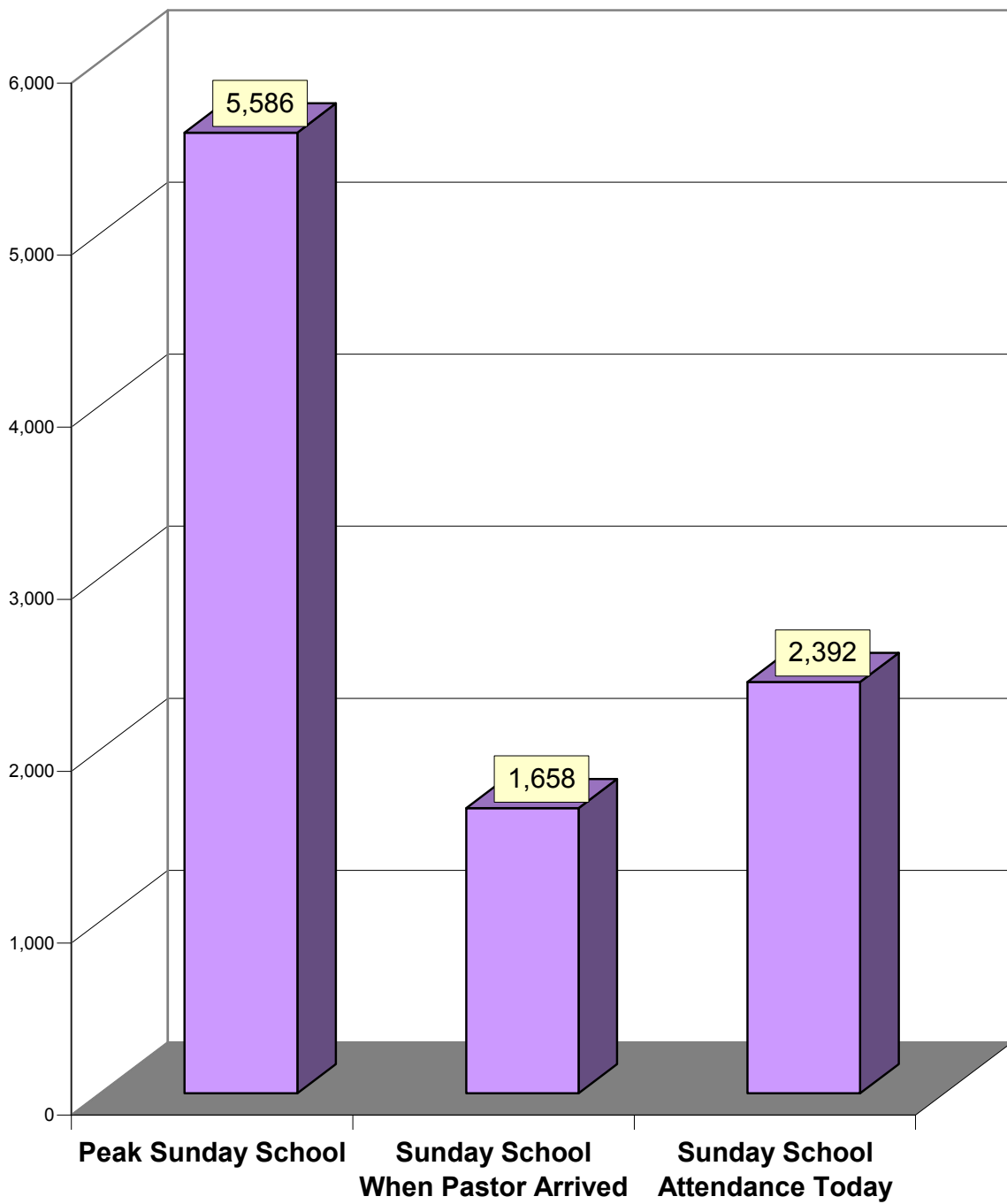
## 5.1: Peak and Current Membership



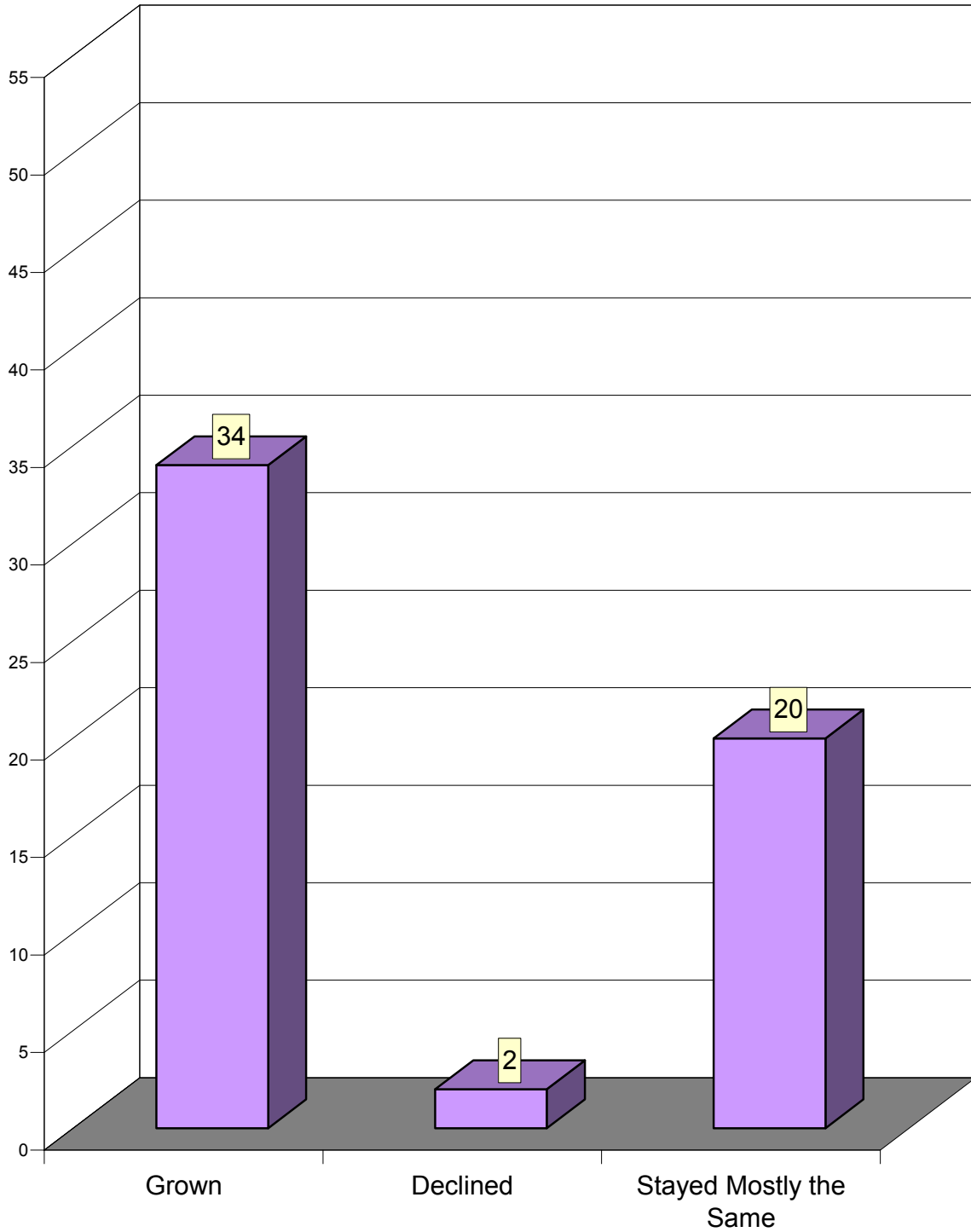
## 5.2: Peak and Current Worship Attendance



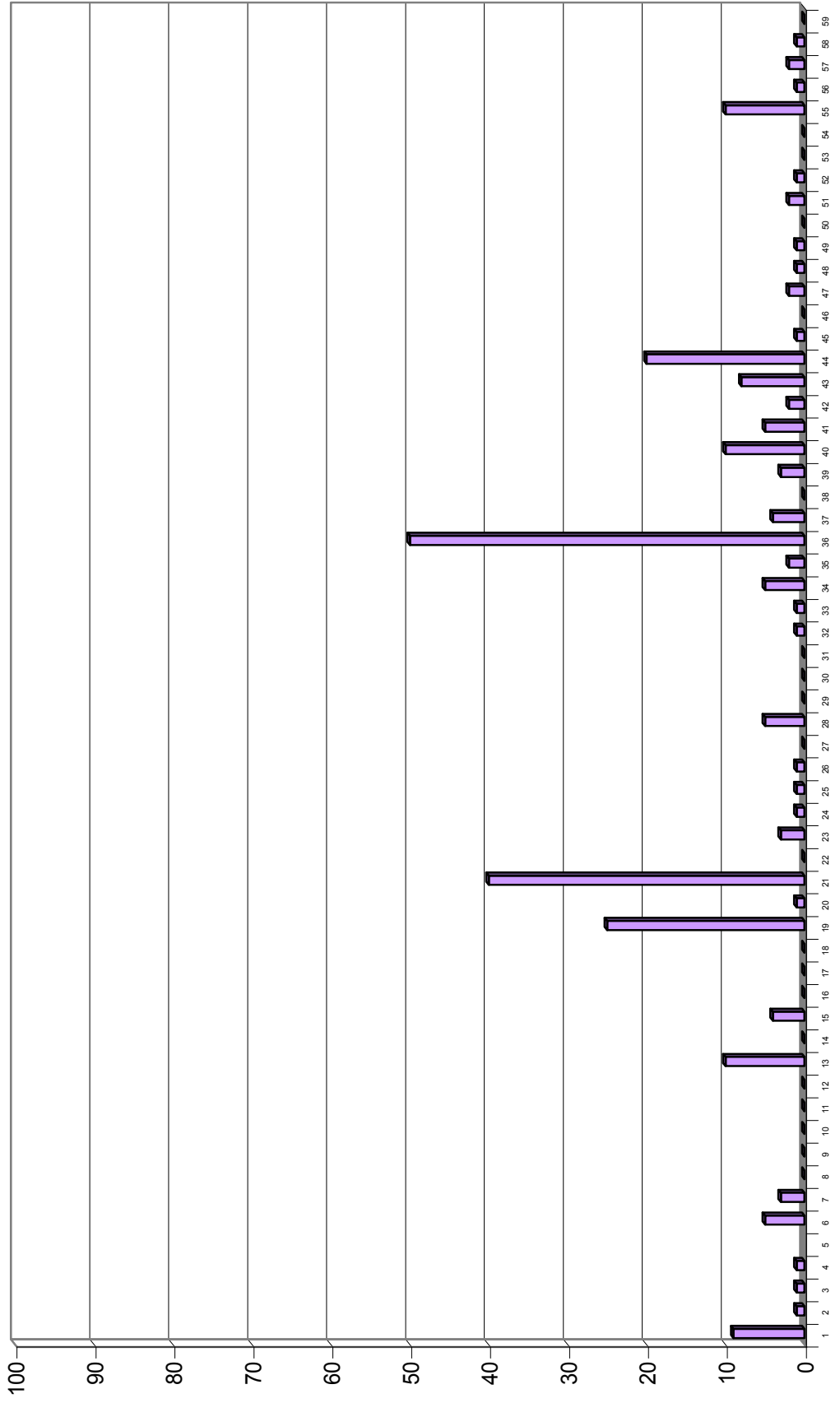
### 5.3: Peak and Current Sunday School Attendance



## 5.4: Effect on Income and Pledges

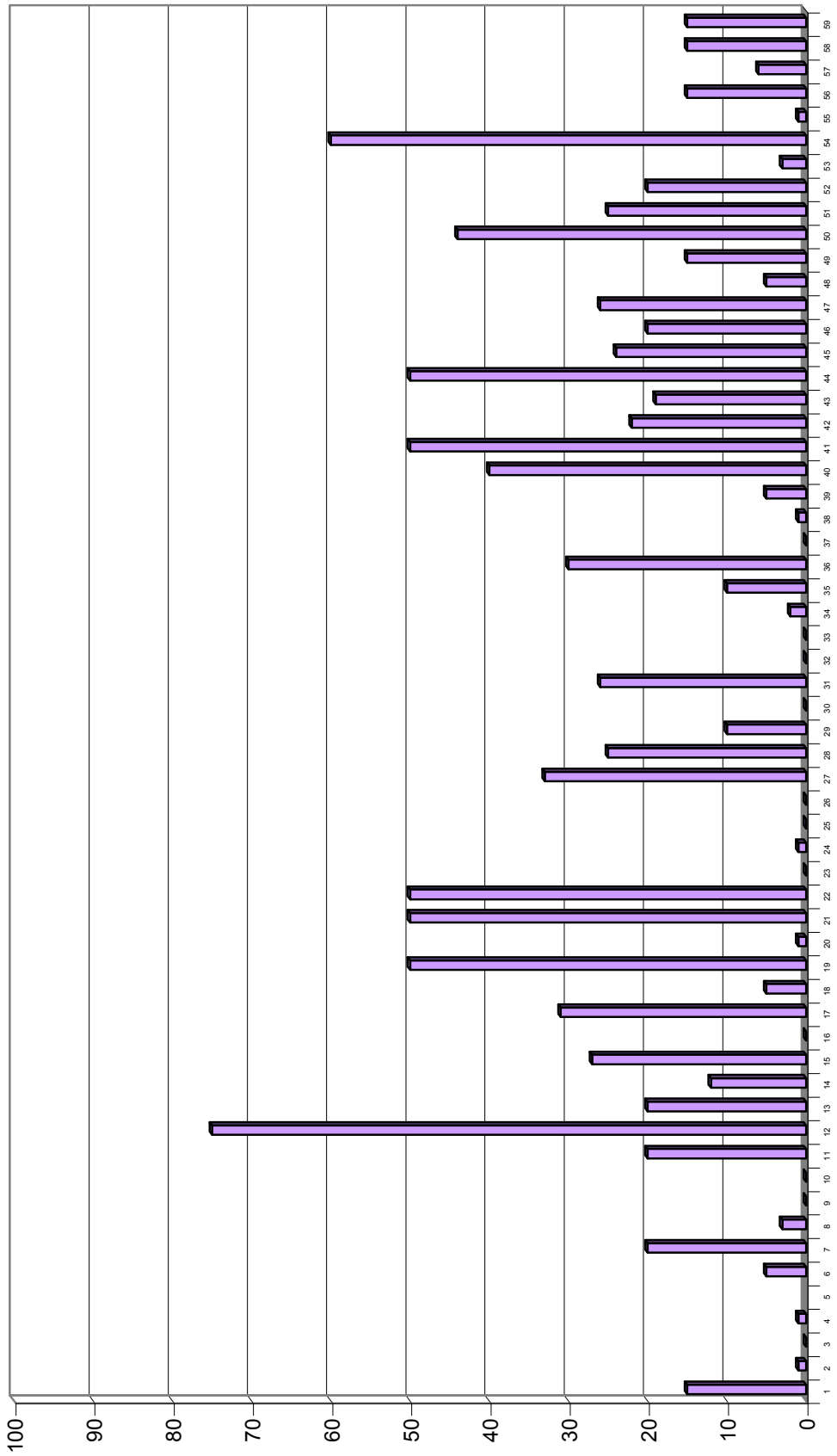


## 5.5: LGBT Percentage of Membership When Pastor Arrived

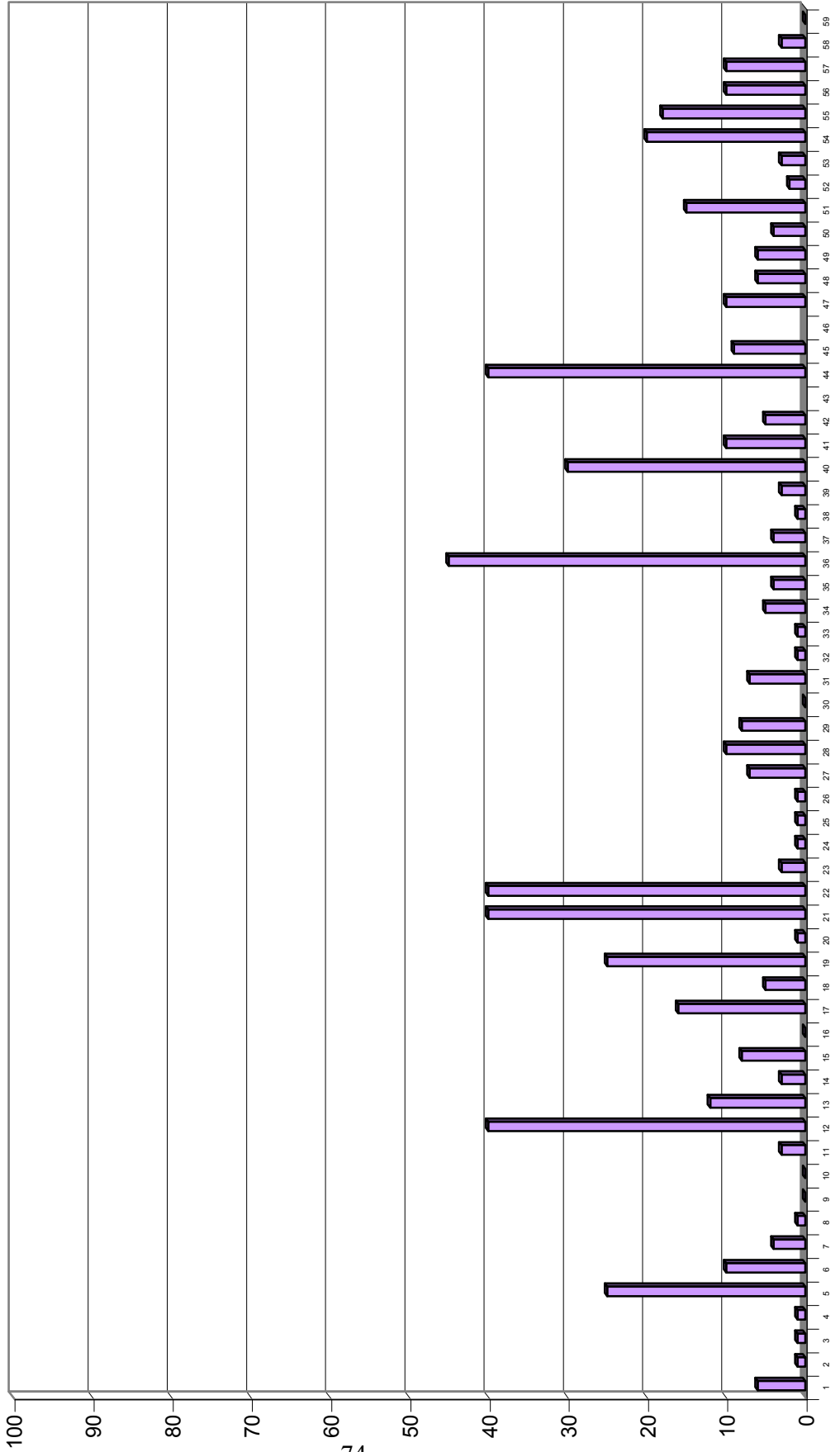




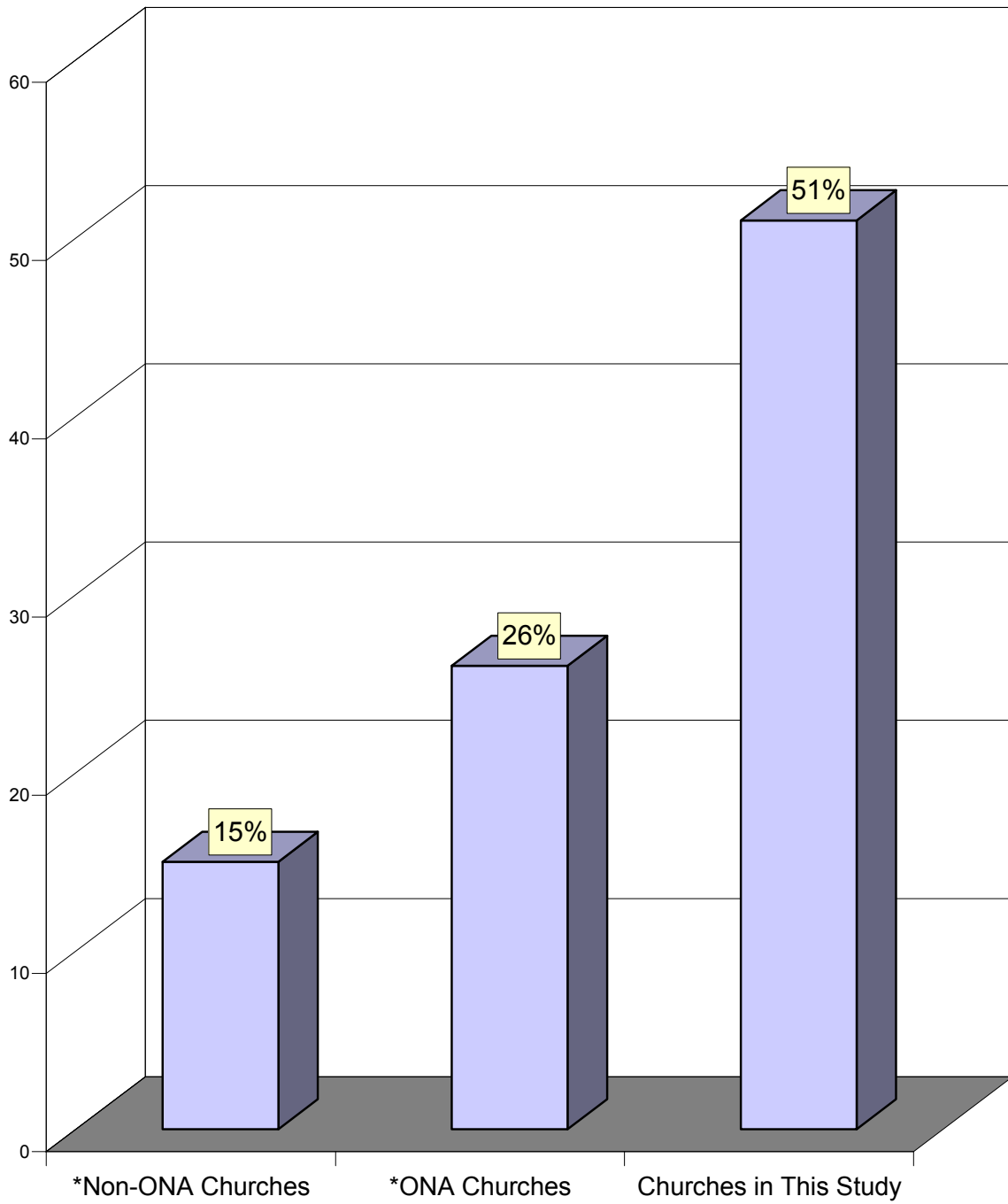
### 5.6: LGBT Percentage of New Members



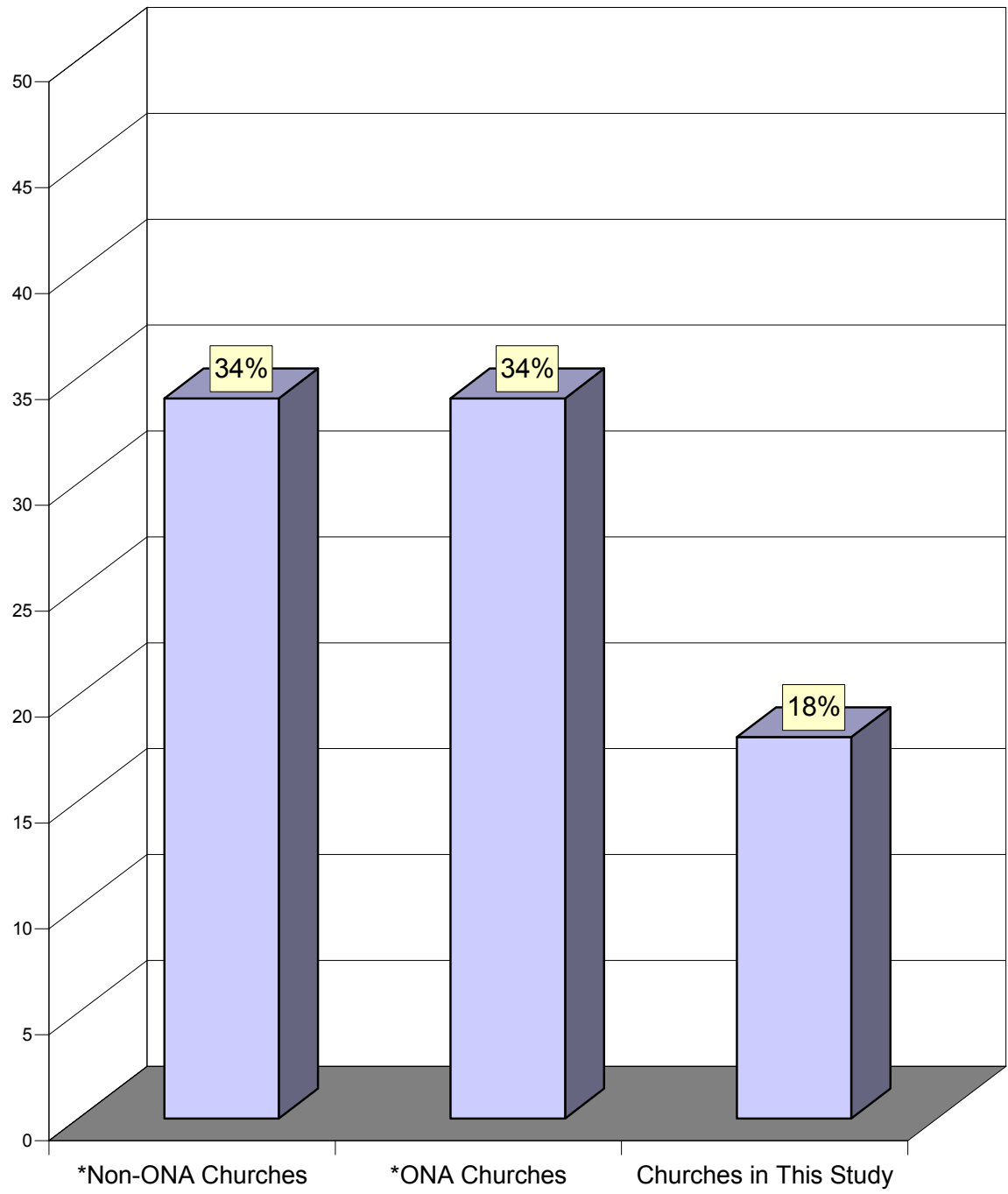
## 5.7: LGBT Percentage of Membership Today



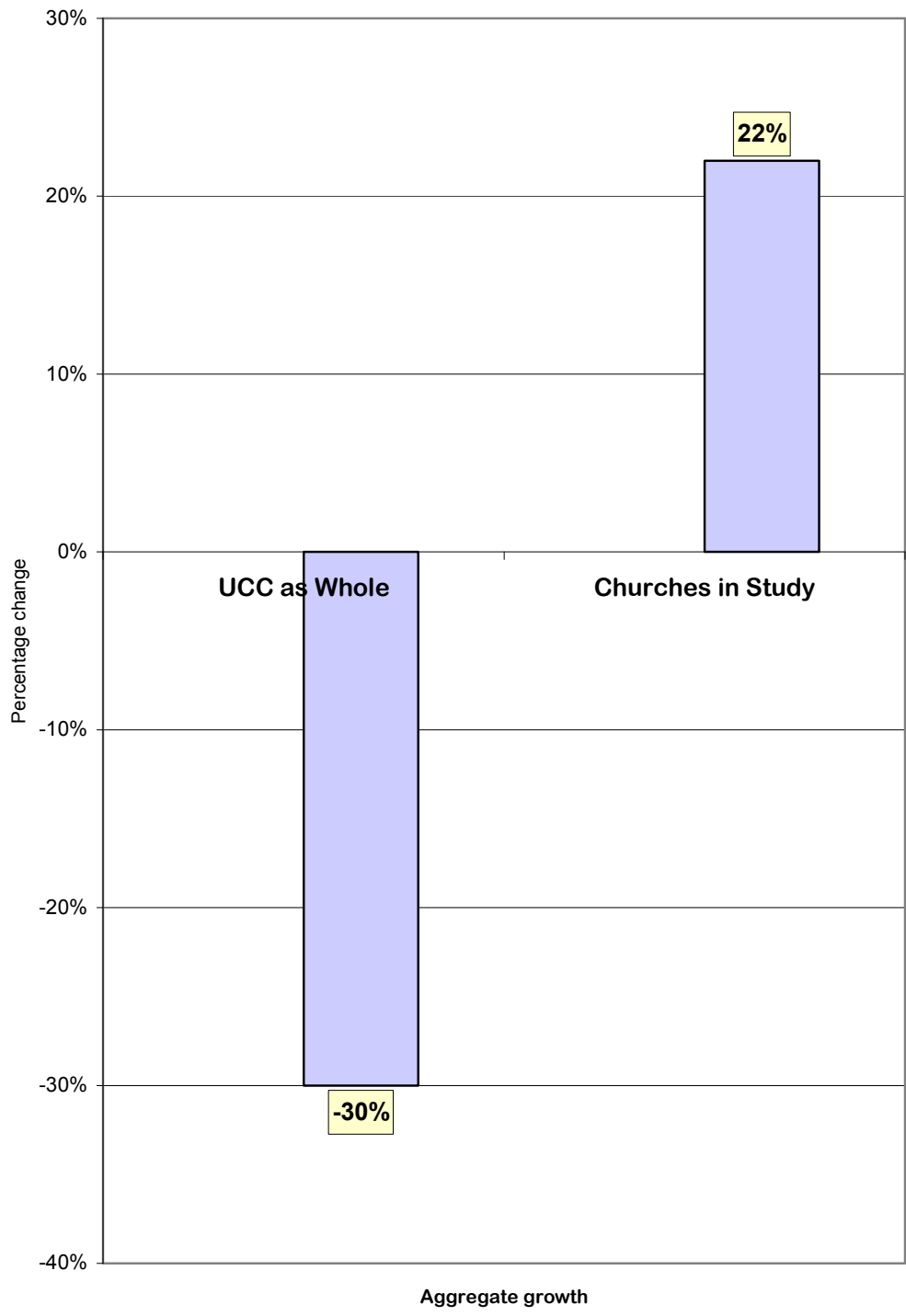
## 5.8: Percentage of Growing Churches



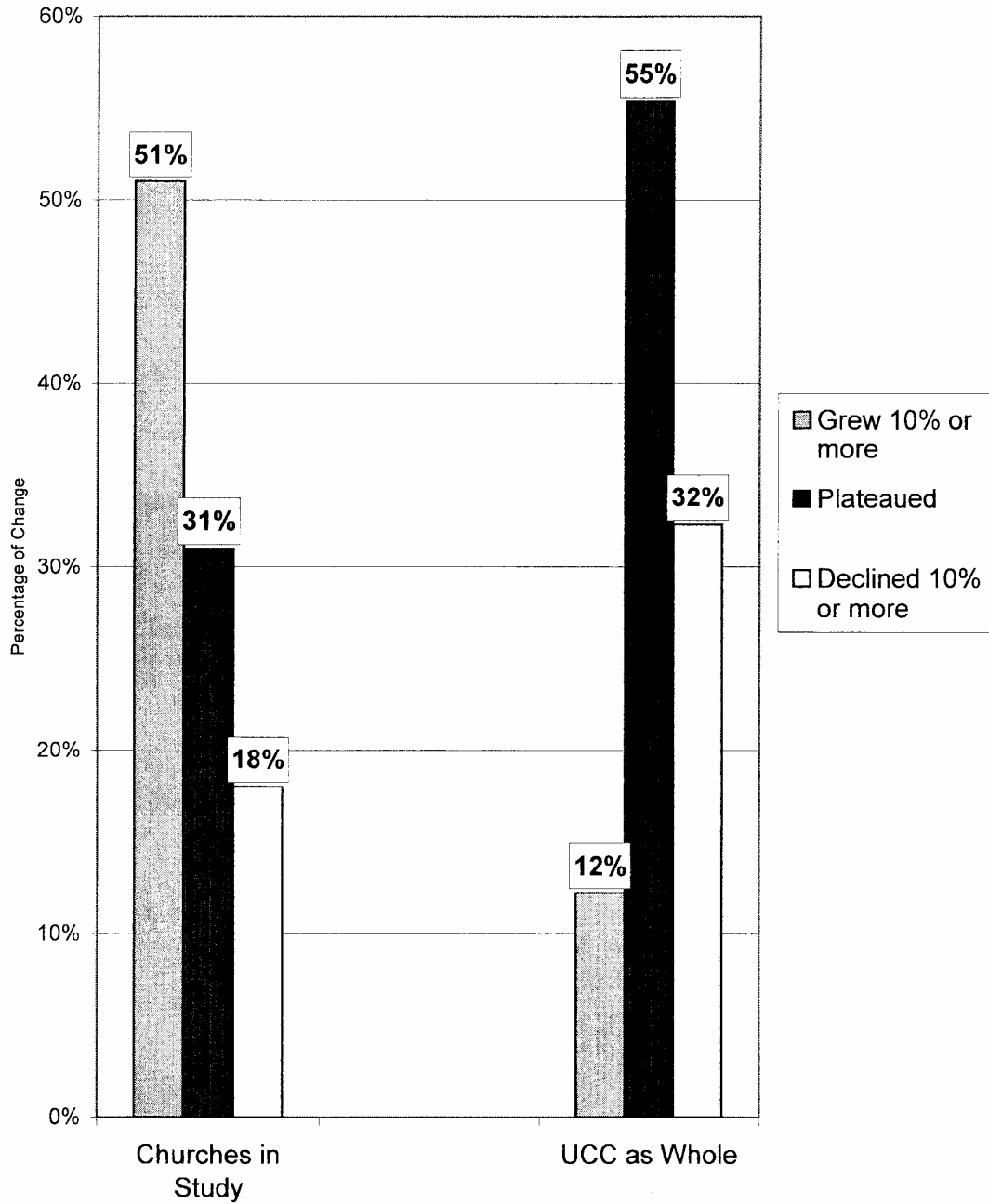
# 5.9: Percentage of Churches in Decline



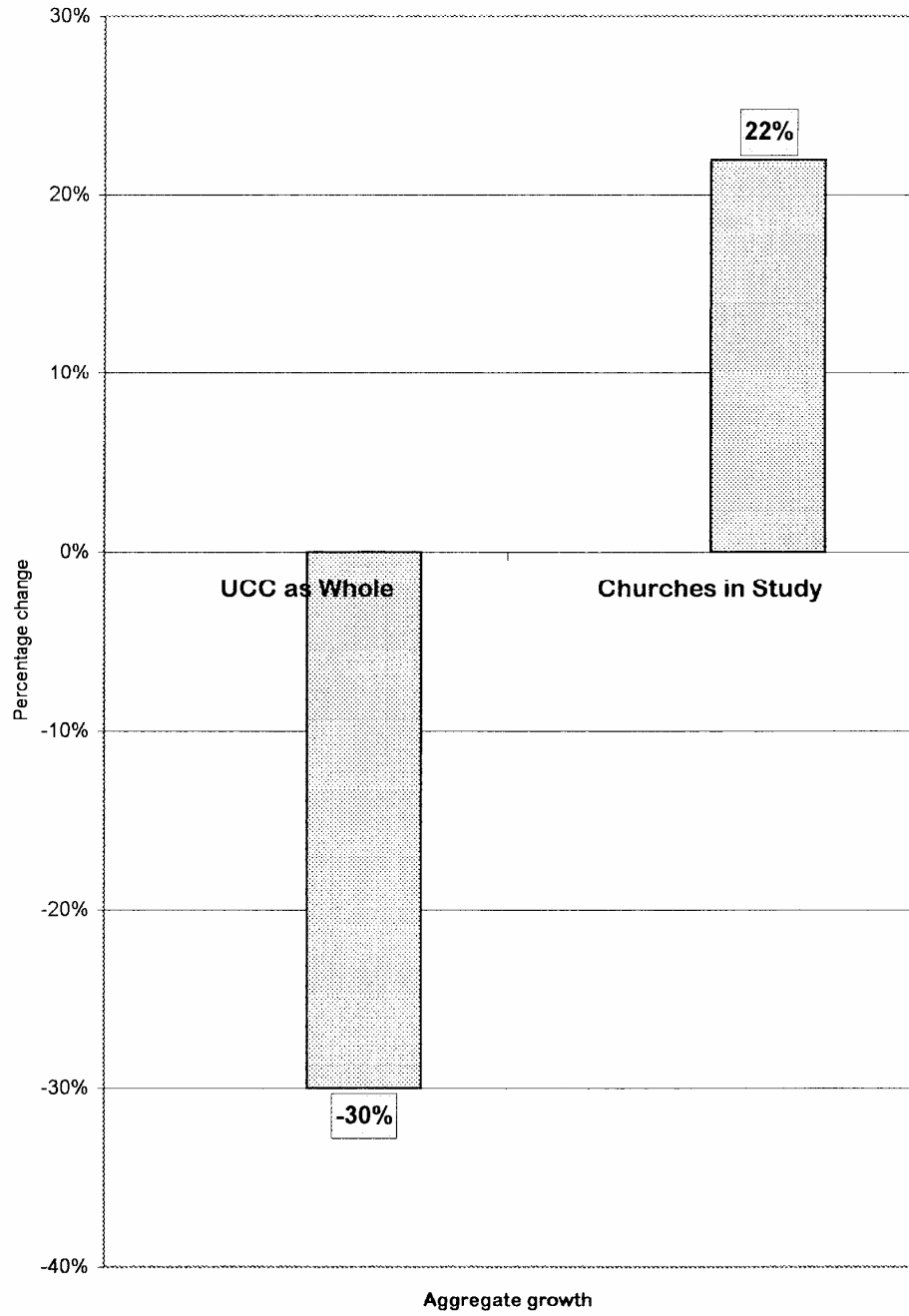
### 5.10: Membership Growth/Decline (2000-04 +/-2)



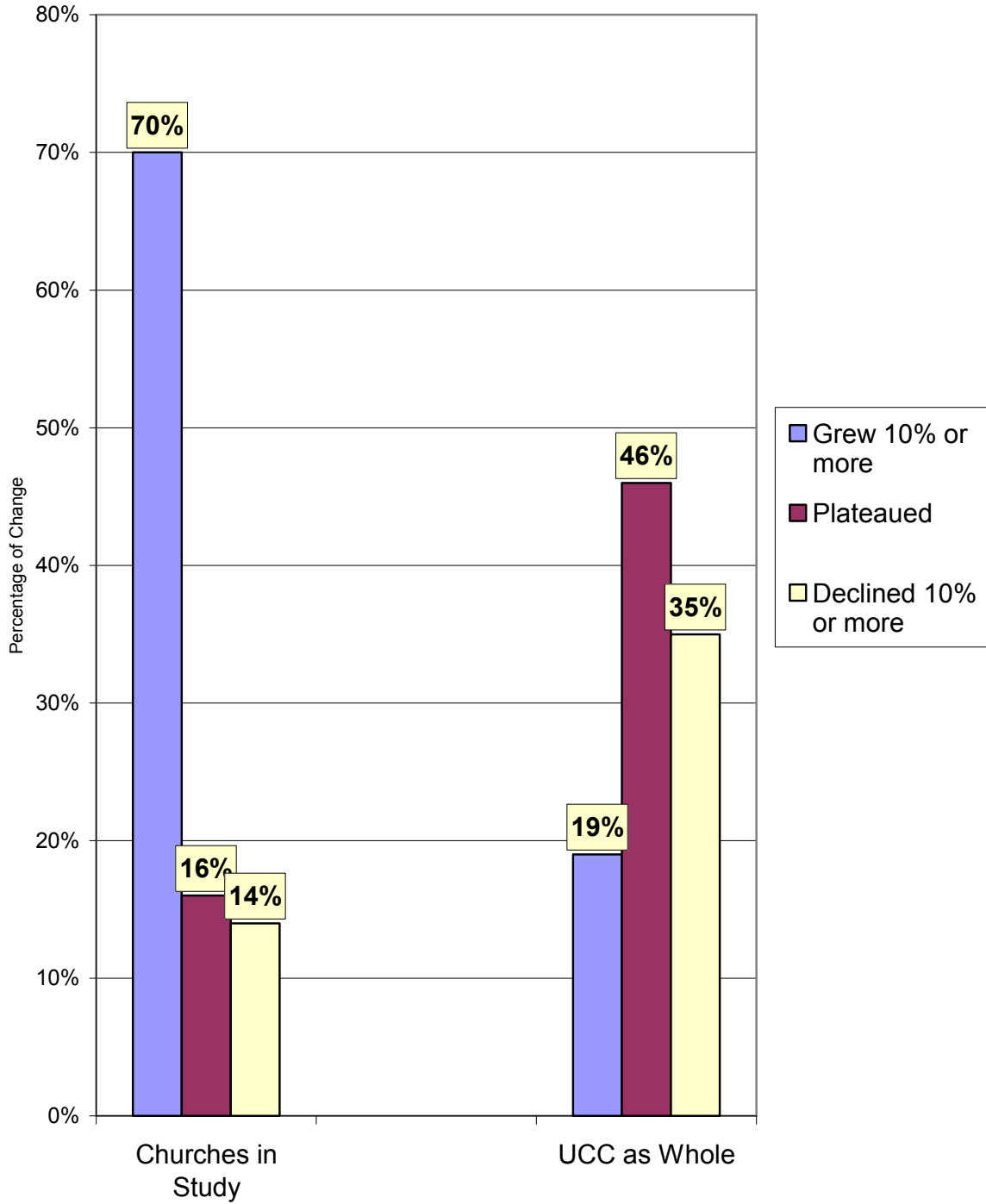
**5.11: Membership Comparison  
(2000-04 +/-2)**



**5.12: Worship Growth/Decline  
(2000-04 +/-2)**

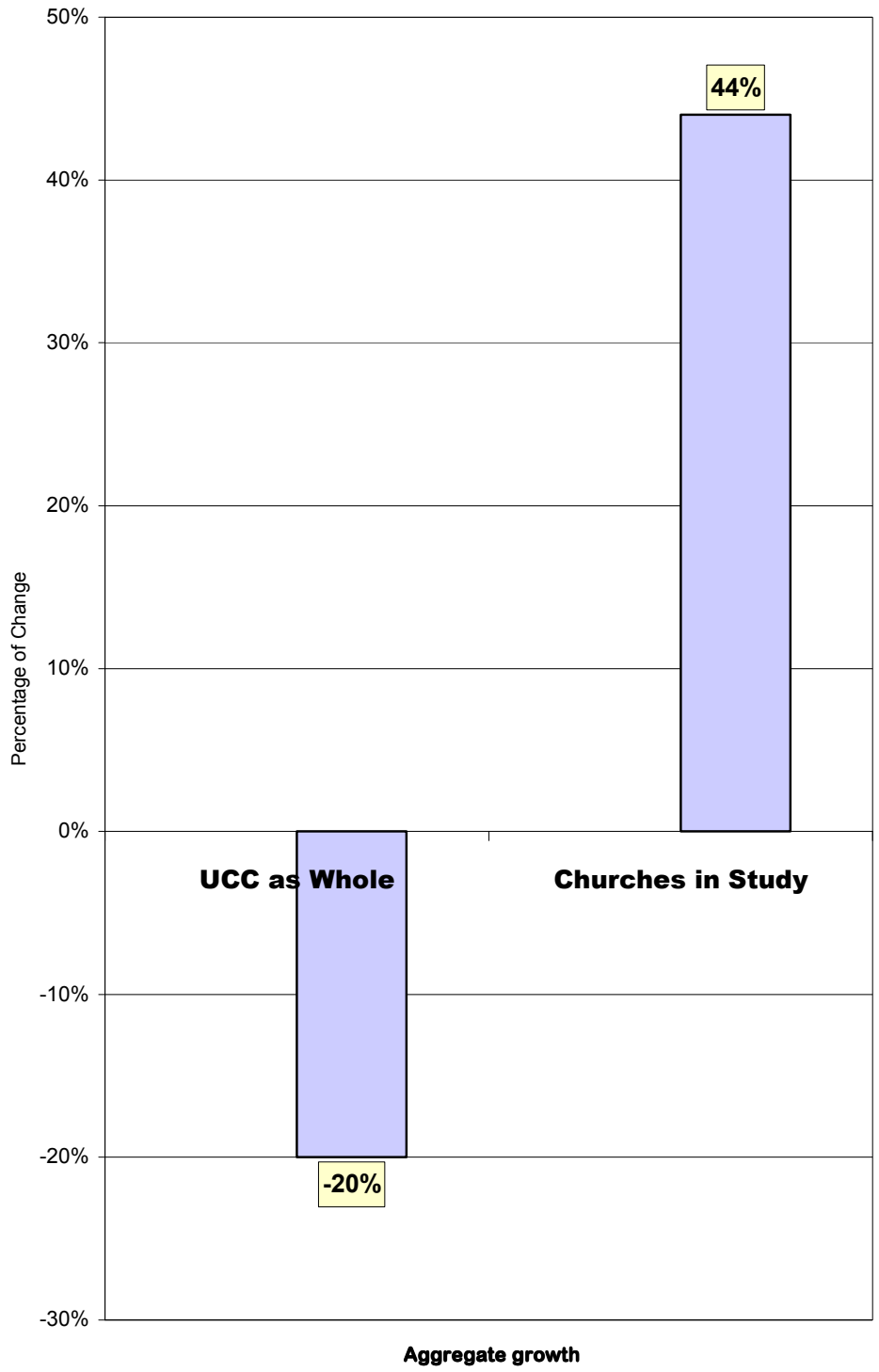


### 5.13: Worship Comparison (2000-04 +/-2)

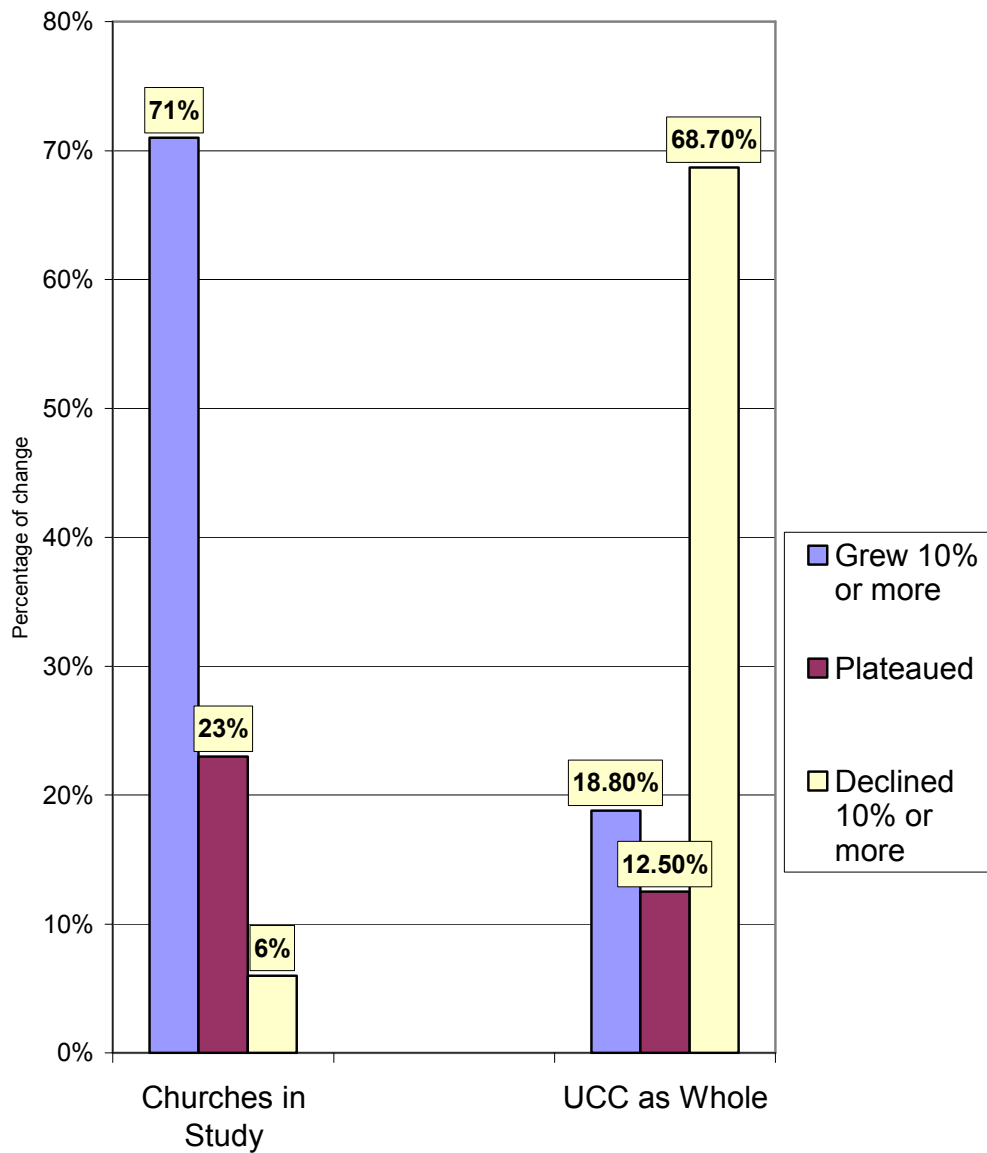




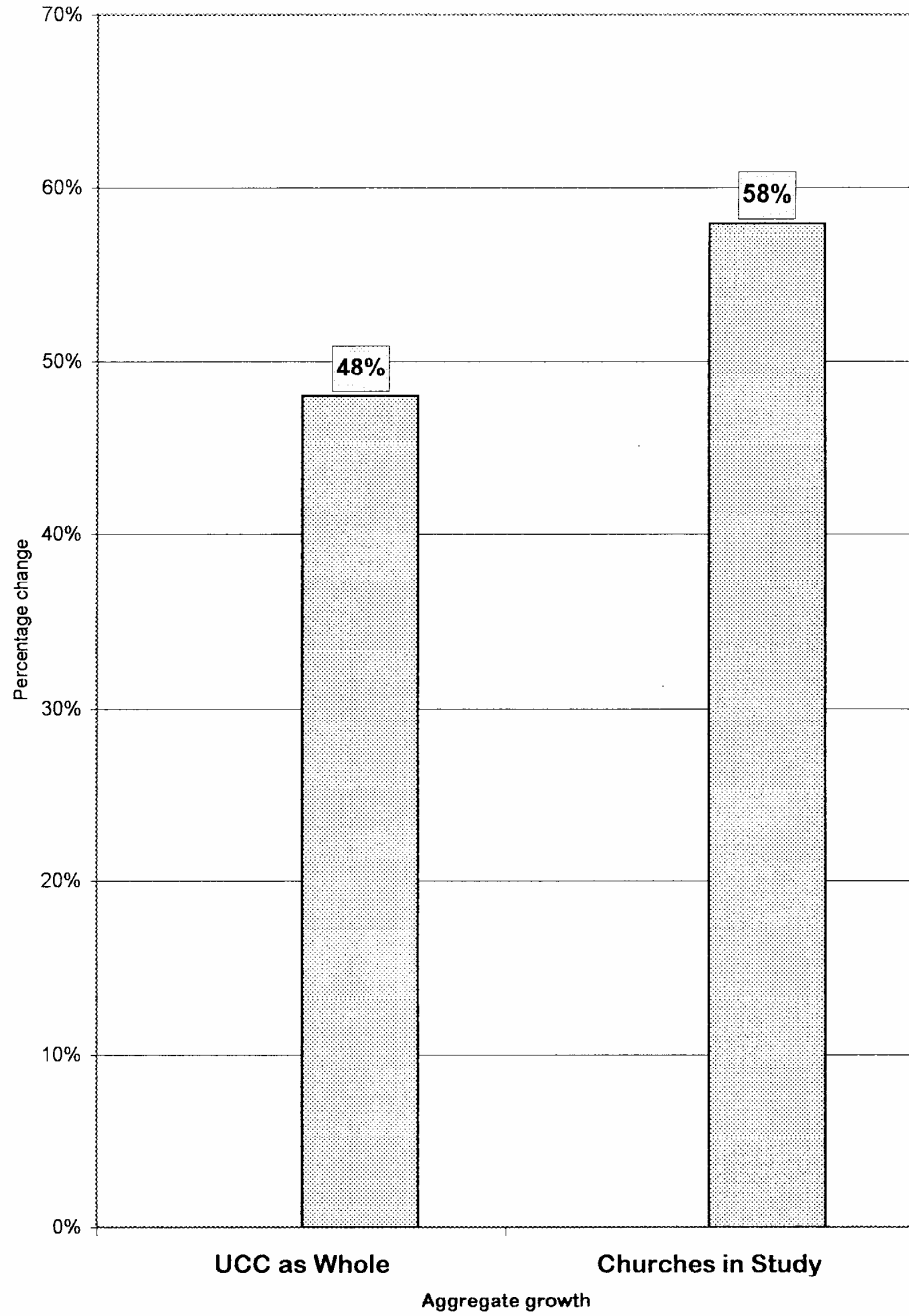
### 5.14: Sunday School (2000-04 +/-2)



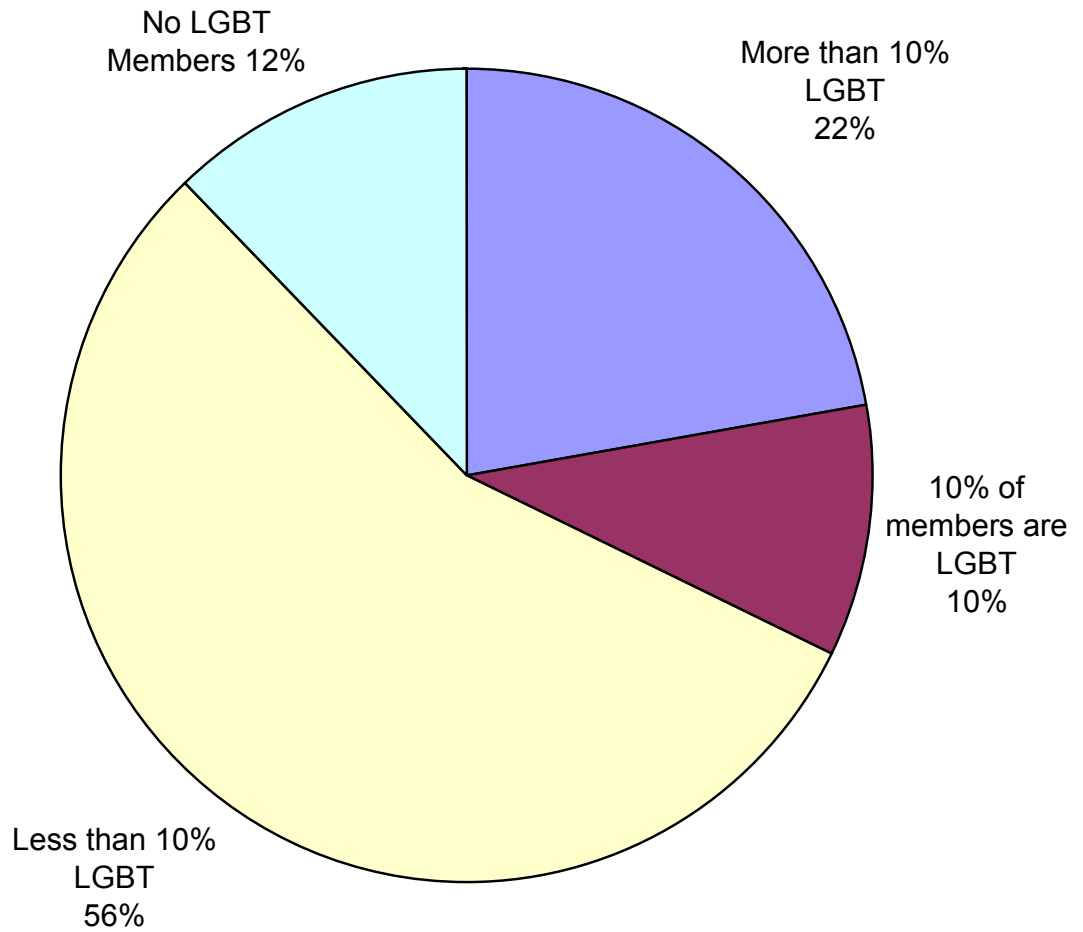
## 5.15: Sunday School Attendance Comparison (2000-04 +/-2)



**5.16: Stewardship Growth (2000-04 +/-2)**



**5.17: Overall Percentage of  
Congregational  
Membership Who are LGBT**



## Chapter 6: The Pastors: Apprehensions and Impacts

The search and call system of the UCC can be difficult for both pastors and churches. Searches of 18 months are not unusual. Additionally, it takes twice as long for straight women to find a call as men; it takes African American women an average of seven years to be called to a parish.<sup>104</sup> The length of time it took for the pastors in this study was not measured, but for many it involved many years of searching and countless search committee meetings. A few, however, experienced no unusual difficulty.

There are various theories about whether one should be out on the profile, out when talking with the search committee chair, or out following the first meeting with the search committee after they have gotten to know you. This is a very valid question and mirrors the consideration one must engage in the simple act of coming out in the first place. The closer one has personal contact with someone who is LGBT, the less likely the response will be condemnation. Discussing strategies that work, Dee Bridgewater states that “relevant research results have demonstrated that individuals who know a [LGBT] person tend to be less negative in their attitudes than individuals without such personal contact.”<sup>105</sup> With an increasing number of LGBT people choosing to be out, a direct correlation may be found in increasing tolerance and acceptance of LGBT people and the strengthening of allies in other arenas, such as politics. As long-term strategy for the church, an increasing number of lay members, individuals and their families, who publicly acknowledge and affirm an LGBT sexual or gender orientation will, I believe, cause a corresponding increase in the number of openly gay and lesbian pastors. Related to trust by virtue of closer personal relationships, the consideration of gay or lesbian pastoral candidates by other straight church members is, I believe, more likely to be taken seriously when they personally know and trust a member of the search committee. Despite the lack of established relationships at the time of a search process for the pastor him or herself, the current social climate reinforces the importance of honesty earlier rather than later.

Regardless of what is determined as the best for each individual, or simply what is possible, once the call has been accepted, each pastor still must decide how open they will be. Certainly, one could argue, this situation is vastly improved over being much more watchful from the closet. Yet, how much does the sometimes daily decision about openness and consideration of possible conflict weigh upon the individual. How has that pressure affected the pastors in this study? One way of looking at this is to name what apprehensions one may have felt when either considering the position or once they have started in the position and how this has ultimately played out.

---

<sup>104</sup> Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, January 24, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Dee Bridgewater, “Effective Coming Out: Self-Disclosure Strategies to Reduce Sexual Identity Bias,” in *Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia: Strategies That Work*, James T. Sears and Walter L. Williams, eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 65.

## Apprehension Number One: Tension and Acceptance

Two-thirds of the 59 pastors in this study reported that before they started, they worried there would always be some tension around their sexuality.<sup>106</sup> Almost the same number feared they would never be fully accepted. Both concerns ranked highest in the top three list of fears or apprehensions. Many stated they simply wanted to be seen as a pastor who is gay, not a gay pastor. How these fears were handled is addressed later.

Before addressing the specifics of being in a church, a tension for all gay men and lesbians is, as I noted above, the need to constantly come out to new people. The related uncertainty of risk is compounded by today's toxic political environment, evidenced by the power and preponderance of conservative, evangelical Christianity in our country, yet which, it must be acknowledged, has existed throughout history. Byrne Fone has written a comprehensive history of homophobia throughout the ages and documents how it has been "invented, fostered, and supported over time by different agencies of society – religion, government, law and science," but as evidenced by recent increases in overt legislative bias, such as marriage or adoption, "it tends to break out with special venom" as various societies have become more accepting, or at least less regressive.<sup>107</sup> We must remember that as homosexuality was increasingly accepted in Germany in the latter 1800s – "one of the most open and accepting societies toward homosexuals in Europe" – this led to a backlash that escalated to the attempted extermination of gays, with other 'undesirables,' by the Nazis.<sup>108</sup> In contrast to history, however, in the modern context the willingness for LGBT people to be open with families, neighbors and co-workers (or as their pastors) will yield an acceptance of homosexuality that will not, I believe, in the end be undone. And this will increasingly, though slowly, influence the church, at least in some cases. But today's vocal opposition and still limited interaction between LGBT people and some Christians might help explain the fear inherent in the constant need for self-disclosure.

Fear of safety is a factor. One pastor in the study, in fact, due to threatening comments made by some fundamentalist pastors in town, moved bedrooms to address his fear of the possibility of gunshots. Outside of a few areas of the country, life as an openly gay man or lesbian carries risks that must constantly be weighed. Besides violence, there is frequently concern that a homophobic person will make an accusation of sexual misconduct, especially with children or youth. In some settings, certain people are ready to pounce on anything as a pretext, or create one such as the example from the interview in chapter seven, for ending the pastor's ministry. One person asked, "Will they put me out in a few years or make it so uncomfortable we will feel forced to leave?" That kind of fear can make establishing "permanent" roots difficult.

Added to these fears and apprehensions is the issue of whether people will accept the pastor's partner or spouse. Twenty participants reported this. But,

---

<sup>106</sup> Question 52; Chart 6.1

<sup>107</sup> Byrne Fone, *Homophobia: A History*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> Chuck Stewart, *Sexually Stigmatized Communities: Reducing Heterosexism and Homophobia: An Awareness Training Manual*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999), p. 210.

though this was stated as an apprehension going in, of the 47 pastors who are partnered/married, just two reported that only a few members do not fully acknowledge the relationship.<sup>109</sup> One lamented that members do acknowledge the relationship but not the same as a heterosexual marriage. This might prove true for others as well. Yet, two couples were recently married in their churches; one church threw a “bachelor party.” Of the twelve who live in parsonages, only one reported that they faced issues related to their partner living with them.<sup>110</sup>

Among other apprehensions of acceptance, 18 feared that they might not be invited to some member’s homes, unlike straight clergy would. Sixteen feared that LGBT visitors to worship might be welcomed in an insensitive way.

### **Apprehension Number Two: Monitoring Speech**

Perhaps to lessen the possibility of conflict, 29 pastors reported fearing the need to monitor what they say in sermons or personal conversations. This can be exhausting. And no matter how careful, someone may always raise an objection. As one said earlier, “just saying my partner’s name in a sermon makes it a ‘gay sermon’ for some.” Addressing this as a teaching moment, however, as a good pastor, she helped church leaders understand that because LGBT issues are so culturally loaded and frequently presented in such a shrill way, they may be heard more loudly than other issues. For one month she made a list of how many times various issues were raised in worship by her and others during the announcements or prayers. They were able to see that LGBT matters were a small minority and noted the context. They realized the power of the culture to shape how we hear things and how it can reveal an unexamined homophobia.

Though the lives of LGBT people are considered a social justice issue for some, a cause to take up, it is not an “issue” for individual LGBT men and women whose very lives are at stake. When fighting against the notorious “one man, one woman” marriage amendments around the country, or more recently in Ohio, a bill introduced to prohibit LGBT families from adopting or fostering children, pastors often feel pressure to include it simply among a list of justice issues to prove they are not “single-issue.” This is presuming that congregations want to hear about anything related to social justice. Unfortunately, many understandably feel it more important to make the congregation feel comfortable than empower the congregation to affect social change for fear of being seen as self-serving. It is a balancing act that those who wish to serve in a predominantly straight congregation may have to master. That is why a few of these pastors would not mind serving a predominantly LGBT congregation, where there is no need to monitor in the same way, though there would be other issues, including the concern stated that LGBT congregations have “too many walking wounded” and lack balance and integration.<sup>111</sup> Again, however, the vast majority of pastors in the study feel their call is to be in mixed congregations and they are indeed concerned about a range of issues.

One of my questions was to what extent the participant felt the need to monitor or self-censure their speech, either in discussing their personal life or as part

---

<sup>109</sup> Questions 65-66

<sup>110</sup> Questions 67-68

<sup>111</sup> Question 62

of discussing LGBT issues in their pastoral role.<sup>112</sup> Seven pastors reported never having to worry about limiting themselves. Of the rest, 50% reported this need on the lower half of a scale from 1-10; fifty percent felt the need to self-censure more than that. (This is much clearer when looking at chart 6.2.) The biggest response, eleven each, is found at points three and eight on the scale. This is not unexpected as they attempt to lessen potential conflicts. However, their felt-need to self-censure is still higher than I anticipated and represents an area that should be improved. What is also surprising, on the other hand, is that most of the pressure to limit speech comes from the individual him or herself, not others in the congregation. While only seven pastors reported feeling no need to self-censure, 22 reported having no actual pressure to do so from their members.<sup>113</sup> And only one person felt “tremendous” pressure to limit their speech. Again, while 50% of the pastors reported a somewhat or higher level of need to self-censure, only 14% felt that same level of actual pressure from their members (choosing 6 through 10 on a scale of 1-10).

Why would someone choose to self-censure? Certainly of concern is one’s safety and security, but perhaps more germane is the added nebulous presence of internalized homophobia. The manifestation of this may be seen in the pastors who fear being labeled “one issue,” whether it is true or not, or those who are careful to avoid creating a pretext, not giving those who are malcontented any excuse for complaints. Several said that there is a limit, but they will probably not know what it is until crossed; therefore, they act with caution, likely fueling their own homophobia. Some have had actual bad experiences in previous churches; others work in environments, as we know, where people simply have an unstated discomfort with anything that includes the mention of sexuality.

The long-term effects of living in a venomous cultural environment may be less damaging than the continual internal questioning an LGBT person may, unknowingly, feel pressure to do. To live based on the fear of other irrational people’s fears may hinder one’s true self-acceptance. In contrast, to fear one’s physical safety might be more real than imagined; to fear losing one’s job might be more real than imagined; but fearing a lack of acceptance by others, such as church members, is always a moving target. It cannot be measured like something tangible such as an attack or loss of employment, but it’s very insidious nature may mask the risk of actual threat and therefore influence how much caution one should choose. And how much does one’s internalized homophobia muddy the distinctions of reality and imagination? When do we let go of acting so cautiously? One pastor saw this characteristic in a member who said he “was glad I wasn’t ‘radical.’ I laughed and realized that people were going to ‘see’ what they wanted.” One said, “I realize I’m projecting my internalized homophobia on others.” But, what is real? Sadly it is the internalized homophobia of other gay and lesbian members that also contributes. Gay members in four different churches reportedly expressed concern that there are too many LGBT people coming.

While many were aware of censoring themselves related to issues at times, this was not true of sharing one’s personal life, though the exact nature of this is not

---

<sup>112</sup> Question 55; Chart 6.2

<sup>113</sup> Question 56; Chart 6.3



known.<sup>114</sup> Thirty reported always speaking freely about their lives as an openly gay man or lesbian; another nineteen participants were at the top half of the scale. Only twelve reported on the bottom half of a scale of 1-10 that measured whether they never speak about their personal life or always speak freely. Not one person said they never speak about their personal life. That is certainly a huge burden lifted from being in the closet. The difference in responses between sharing one's personal life versus speaking more broadly about LGBT issues is intriguing and may indicate less internalized homophobia than feared. You might expect people would be more comfortable speaking about "objective" issues than themselves. It is also a progression, however. Homophobia is "unlearned" throughout life; and coming out is not one transformational act but a passage of "further integration."<sup>115</sup> One commented they are able to share "in personal conversations, but not from the pulpit, yet!" Still, reflecting on their growth in the area, one said, "I'm not as afraid of openness anymore." Others were careful to make the distinction that "I always consider the audience and my personal safety;" another "within professional boundaries/ethics, of course." Hope lies in the statement: "When I limit conversation, it's out of respect for others," as opposed to fear in doing so. In addition, their responses indicate that as mutual respect or trust grows, the need to censure one's self will lessen.

Yet, regarding the menacing homophobia, 19 pastors reported that the pressure to limit themselves is somewhat to mostly internal.<sup>116</sup> For thirteen, it was equally internal and external; seven considered their pressure mostly external. One pastor said that it is obviously hard to separate because "the external causes the internal – It's a trap." More encouraging, on the other hand, is that 21 said they felt no pressure at all. This may mean the impulse to self-censure will continue to lessen among the whole group and for future generations.

Time appears to be the key.<sup>117</sup> It is both the passage of time that helps members see their pastor as simply that, their pastor – not their gay pastor – as well as the passage of time that helps the pastors feel more comfortable with themselves, in the context of their pastoral roles. Many recognized coming out as a long, though liberating, process. One said, "I worried more in my first year than I do now;" another "It's only getting better." It is also true that "I'm more comfortable because I know them better" and "trust is increasing." Finally, regarding the apprehension that leads some pastors to monitor their speech, "Nothing I've said has changed a mind, but I know being who I am has forced people to examine their unfounded cultural hatred – in light of their love for me."

### **Apprehension Three: Performance Standards**

Almost half of the participants reported feeling pressure to do well so people cannot say gay ministers are a bad idea. They recognize their place in history and that the future for other gay pastors could be affected. This may have been or may still be true for women in ministry (and, as I listen to friends, is especially true for

---

<sup>114</sup> Question 57; Chart 6.6

<sup>115</sup> Bridgewater, p. 67.

<sup>116</sup> Question 58; Chart 6.4

<sup>117</sup> Follow-up questions 55-57

women in African American churches). It may also be true for anyone who is serving a congregation where they are the minority; however, in that case it may just affect that congregation, not the whole idea of such persons in the ministry.

To restate the magnitude of their place in history, it is true that these 59 pastors are among a miniscule number of clergy. Their new presence among nearly 5,800 churches in the UCC cannot be understated. They are few but their impact is enormous, and many, as did I, feel this pressure. People are paying attention, both those who are supportive and want them to do well and those who are detractors and hope for their failure. While this is true, as one said, “All we can do is be faithful” in their respective congregations. The future will play out as ultimately only God intends. I believe the fact that most of these congregations have thrived is important to note.

Eighteen people reported a fear that they will be judged by a different, and unfair, performance standard than other clergy. Others stated a fear of being judged under a pretext – minor issues carrying more weight here than in other settings. And, will I be accused of being “too gay?” That is certainly a difficult and unfair standard to measure. One pastor summed up, though, in these cases, “I can’t worry about something I have no control over.” Having a Pastor Parish (Pastoral) Relations Committee would help sort through these matters, though it is estimated only 50% of congregations in the UCC have them.<sup>118</sup>

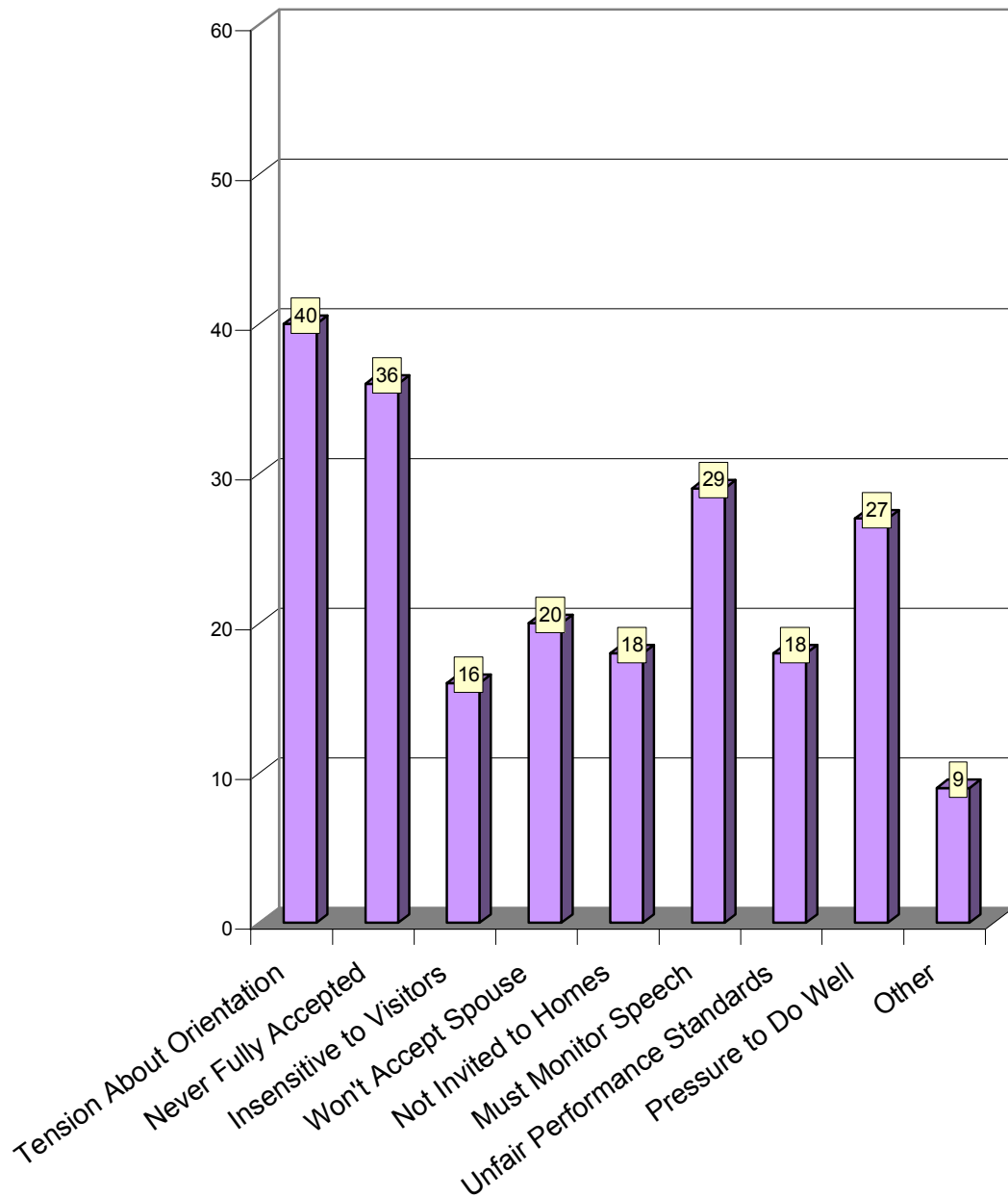
### **Other Apprehensions**

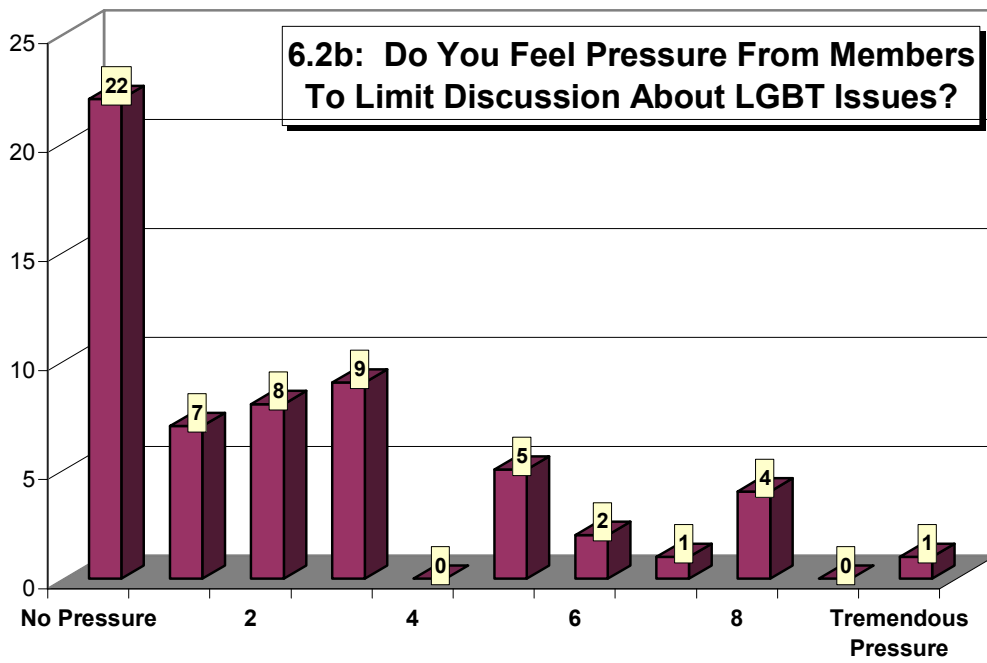
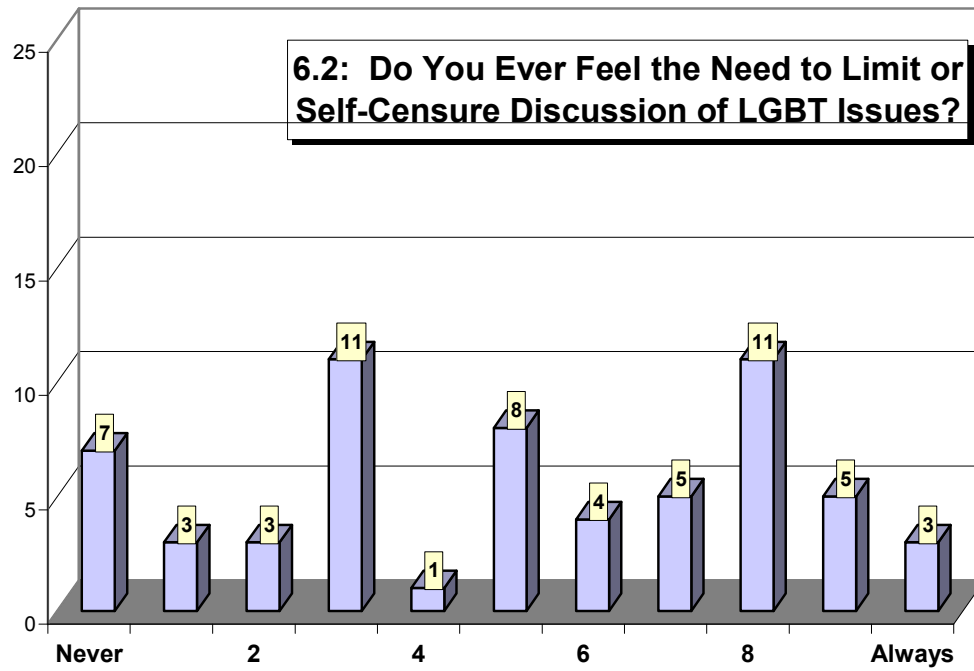
Specific to their sexual orientation, immense loneliness in rural communities and distance from an urban LGBT community were cited as apprehensions prior to accepting a call. There is tension for some who are not partnered but dating – “how do I introduce them?” There is also the pressure of living in a fishbowl, perhaps common to all clergy especially in parsonages; but again, due to today’s political environment and a general discomfort with sexuality, it is of a particularly charged nature here. And finally, before even starting her ministry, one asked, “Will the congregation think it was worth it in the end?”

---

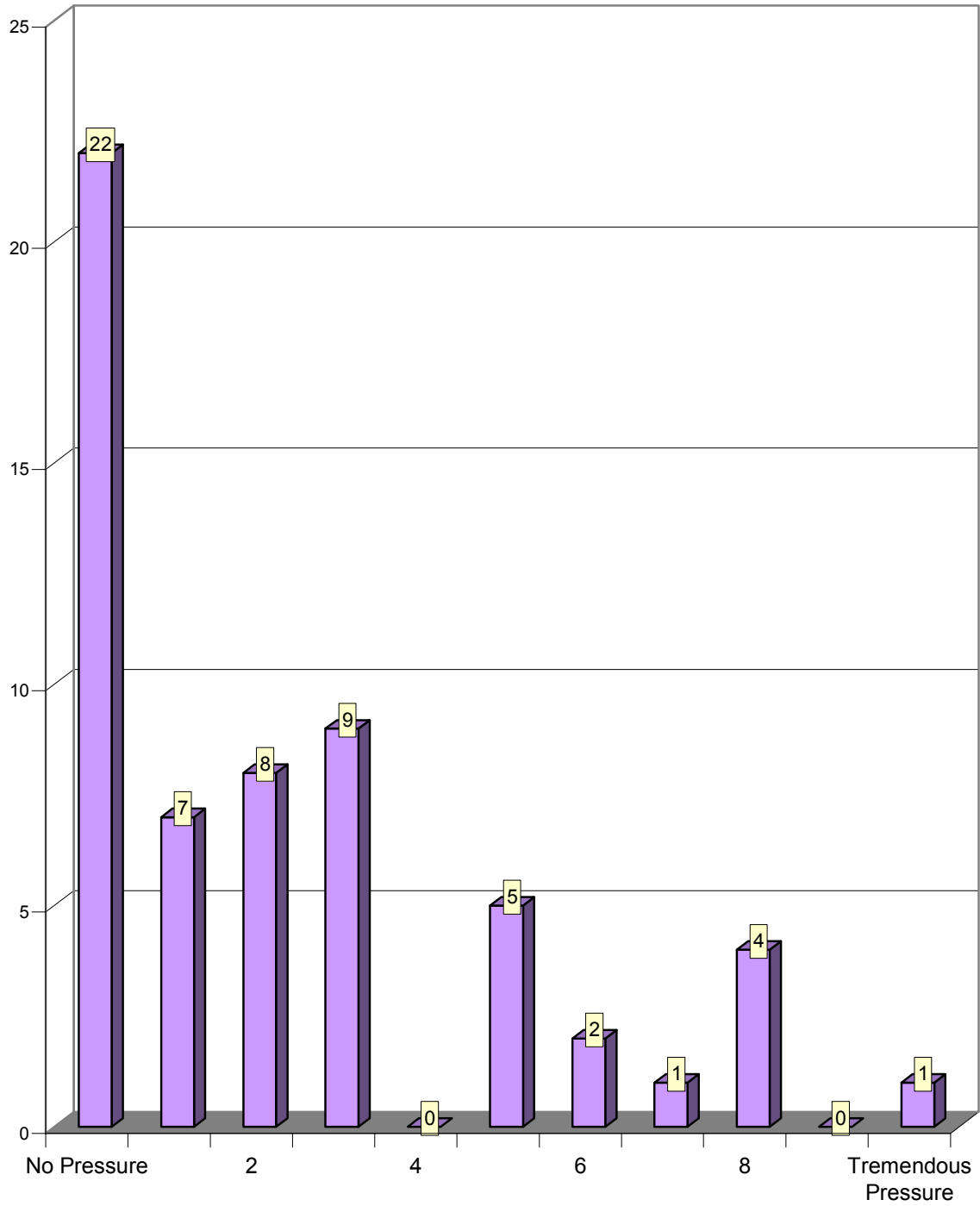
<sup>118</sup> Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, January 24, 2006.

## 6.1: Apprehensions Felt by Incoming Pastors

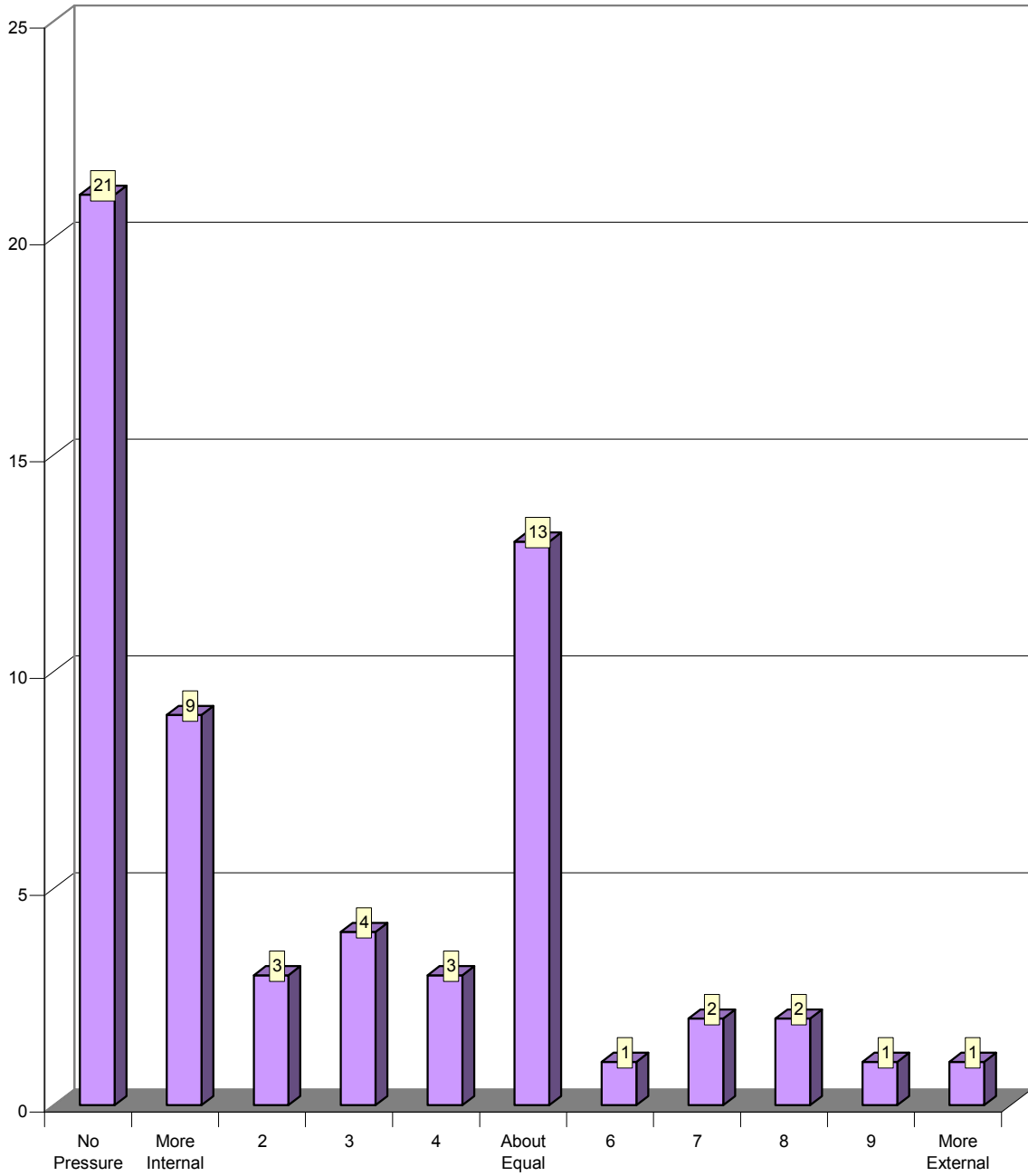




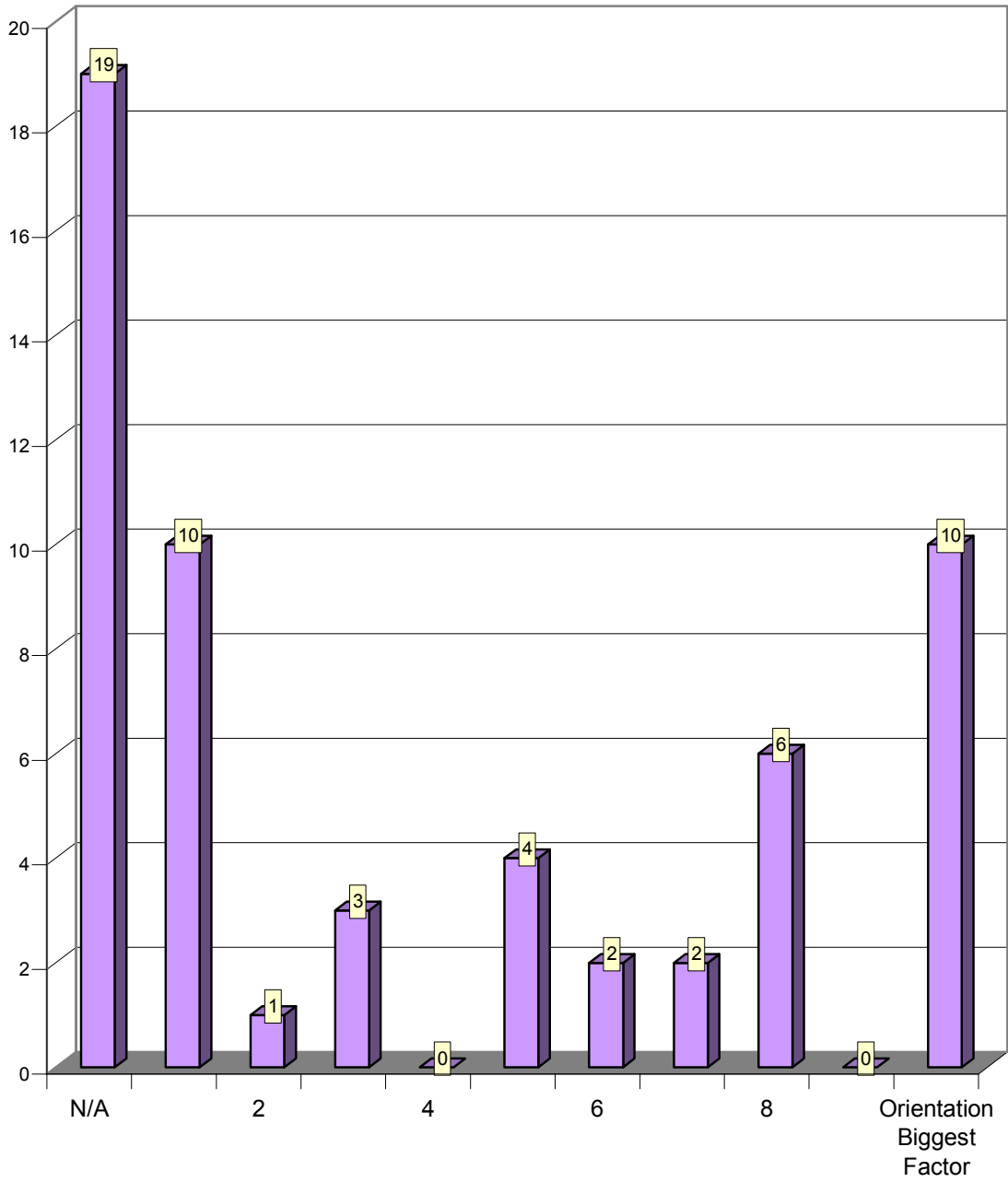
### 6.3: Do You Feel Pressure From Members To Limit Discussion About LGBT Issues?



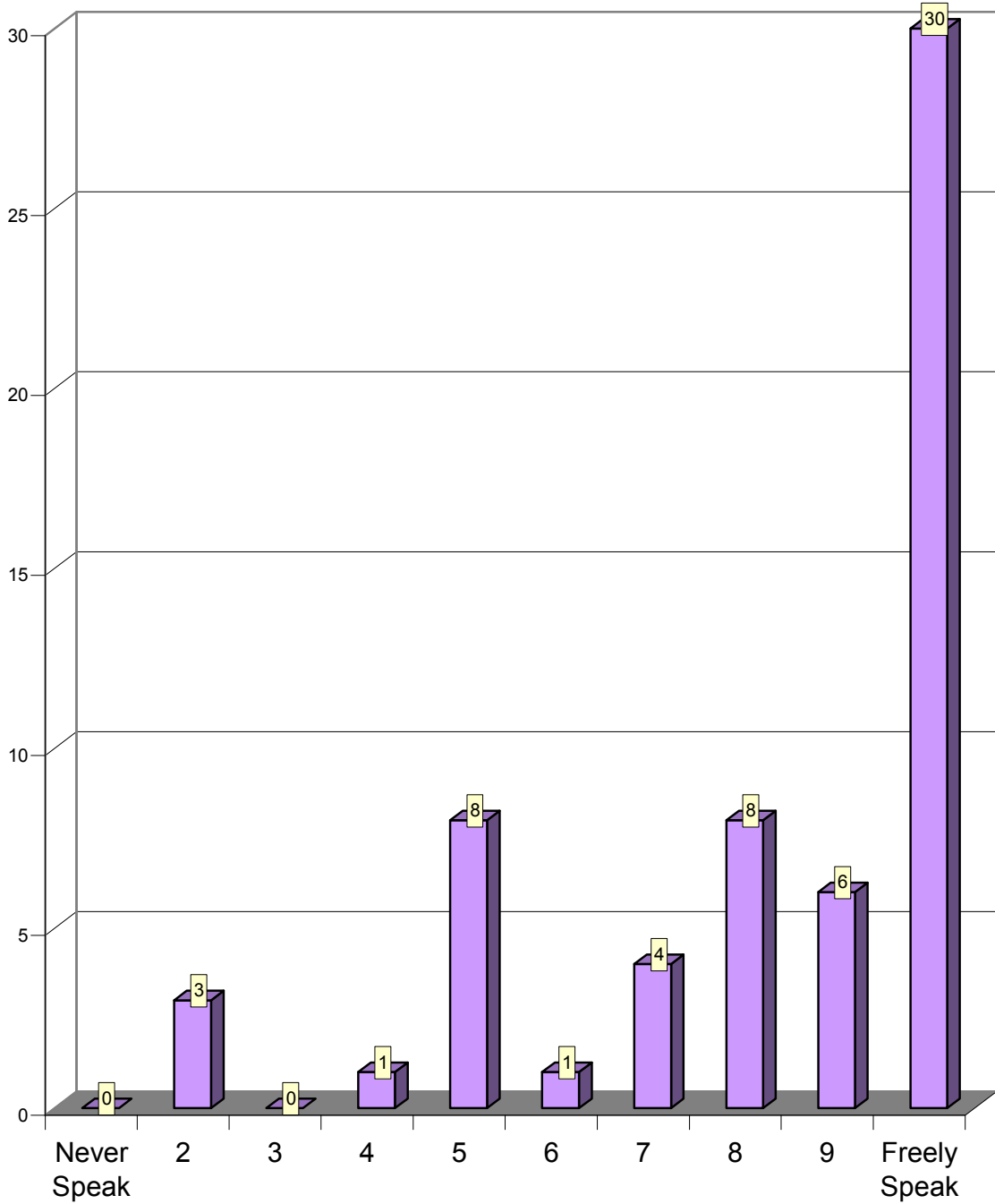
### 6.4: If You Feel Pressure, Is It More Internal or External?



**6.5: If You Have Seriously Considered Leaving the Ministry, How Much Is Related to Sexual Orientation?**



**6.6: Are You Comfortable Speaking About Your Life As An Openly Gay Man or Lesbian?**





## Chapter 7: Understanding the Apprehensions

### Internalized and Unexamined Homophobia

Homophobia is an irrational hatred or fear of homosexuals or homosexuality.<sup>119</sup> It involves “prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against sexual minorities.”<sup>120</sup> The word, coined in the 1960s, was first used in an article by K.T. Smith in 1971 and popularized by Dr. George Weinberg in 1972 in *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*.<sup>121</sup> It is usually thought of in relation to acts and attitudes that are anti-gay projected by heterosexuals, but gay men and lesbians are not immune to a range of such feelings or even actions. Heterosexism is a belief or action, “by omission or design,”<sup>122</sup> which “enforces and reinforces homophobia.”<sup>123</sup> It presumes that heterosexuality is either better or is the only acceptable reality. Society is built on the assumptions of heterosexuality, especially marriage and family. This is certainly true of the church as well. In many settings the nuclear family is practically an idol of worship. That LGBT people actually question this by their very lives makes them seem to stand in opposition to the shared values of society.

Children, including LGBT children, are raised in this context. But those who come to understand their differences must also be willing to withstand the pressure to not conform to at least some of these assumptions, such as wanting to date only someone who is “straight acting” or instructing someone not to act “too gay” or “too butch,” whatever that means in that context. Doing so, claiming oneself, is part of the coming out process. But, recognizing this internal pressure, Christian de la Huerta describes the first process as “coming in – plunging into the depths of ourselves to discover who we are and what lies beneath the murky waters of our conditioning.”<sup>124</sup> In that way, coming out is then about “healing ourselves” and therefore preparing to make a difference in the world.

It is hard, of course, to let go of all the childhood vestiges of such dominating values and social norms; and in the ongoing process of coming out, a person may not have fully yet overcome them. For some LGBT people, this residual resistance to full acceptance may result in an internalized or unexamined homophobia, always questioning some aspect of his or her nature but not recognizing it. Living in a homophobic society, we may feel anxiety to “go along to get along” and, therefore, downplay the importance of self-acceptance or expression in order to achieve approval by others.

In the extreme, someone who has internalized homophobia may develop a deep and intense hatred of oneself, trying to live as a heterosexual. Other forms are more subtle, such as questioning whether life would be easier as a straight person.

---

<sup>119</sup> *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. “homophobia.”

<sup>120</sup> James T. Sears, “Thinking Critically/Intervening Effectively,” *Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia: Strategies That Work*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>121</sup> Fone, p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> Sears, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> Leanne McCall Tigert, *Coming Out through Fire: Surviving the Trauma of Homophobia*, (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), p. 11.

<sup>124</sup> Christian de la Huerta, *Coming Out Spiritually: The Next Step* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999) p. 127.

A just-released film on the festival circuit raises this issue in a fascinating new way.<sup>125</sup> *Hard Pill* is about a gay man who is deeply unhappy with his life and when offered a pill to make him straight decides to do so. Essentially, he discovers it does not make his life any easier; he faces just a different, yet eerily similar, set of issues.

The internalized homophobia referred to by several pastors in this study is not this serious but recognizes that we may hold on to certain negative attitudes and accept a second-class citizenship in the church by not standing up for justice in order to accommodate the majority. One cannot function in the world without compromise, and certainly not as the pastor of a church, but to always assume that the heterosexual majority has the right to dictate the terms of what is acceptable conduct or speech may serve the function of diminishing the seriousness of prejudice and the impact on the personhood of each individual.

Straight people of good will may not think of themselves as homophobic, and many in the UCC would be offended to suggest that they are at times homophobic, but the reality is that just as LGBT people may have varying levels of internalized homophobia, others will likely have unexamined homophobia that stands in the way of their fully recognizing the cost of being an out gay man or lesbian in the church. These heterosexuals, who do not for the most part have to question their place or value in society, may be incapable of understanding the true magnitude of the hatred that can be directed at people even for the suspicion of homosexuality.

The following vignette of one of the pastors in the study illustrates the seriousness of stopping all forms of homophobia, from subtle forms to those that include a religious justification for hate crimes, from understanding pressure that is internal to the strength to endure that which is external. As Leanne Tigert cautions, challenging a system based on heterosexism by even raising the issue of it is to risk backlash.<sup>126</sup> But the story also illustrates how grace and transformation worked in the midst of terror and exhaustion for one who has now abandoned the closet.

### **The Power of Homophobia in One Church**

The Rev. Arlene Nehring was born and raised in the UCC in rural Iowa, and came out as a lesbian in her first year of college.<sup>127</sup> Except for being out to friends, and a few colleagues and parishioners, she remained mostly closeted during her first eight years in ordained ministry. In 1989, as an associate minister at The Old South Church in Boston, Arlene went to the senior minister to ask for his blessing to start a gay and lesbian fellowship. He asked her point blank: “Are you a lesbian?” Standing 6’8” tall, shaking his finger and asking with a forceful voice, Arlene found his mannerisms terrifying. When she responded, “Yes,” he replied with resignation, “Well, it’s OK. I still love you.”

Revealing her identity in that moment was a risky encounter; she probably would not have chosen it herself. She feared that a truthful answer might result in her firing and perhaps radically curtail her future opportunities for church service. In

---

<sup>125</sup> *Hard Pill*, 93 min., John Baumgartner, director, 2005, film.

<sup>126</sup> Leanne McCall Tigert, *Coming Out While Staying In: Struggles and Celebrations of Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals in the Church* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996) p. 146.

<sup>127</sup> Arlene Nehring, Pastor of Eden UCC in Hayward, California, interview by author, January 20, 2006.

the end, it did not, and her truth-telling was personally transforming for the senior minister. Even after Arlene had moved on, he progressed on a journey that led him from fear and resistance to offering a public ministry to lesbian and gay members, which included leading the congregation to becoming an ONA church, and to becoming an advocate and spokesperson for lesbian and gay rights in Boston.

In 1992, Arlene became the senior minister of The Park Church in Elmira, New York, and soon after began a relationship with her partner, Stephanie Spencer. Arlene was not out in her second call process either, but over time came out to a few of the church leaders and to the conference staff. She accepted the call to this church because it seemed like a good fit with her ministerial competencies and sense of mission. The search committee also said that they were hoping to begin the ONA process soon, and that they felt confident this process would result in a positive outcome.

The search committee and parish leadership, however, proved to be more progressive than the broader membership. The issue of Open and Affirming became a pretext for one of the members to begin terrorizing her and her partner, and drawing others in with him. This member and his small group of antagonists began to “blame” Arlene for “making” the church go through the ONA process, even though parish interest in the program had surfaced before her arrival and the process had been driven by a group of laity. An often repeated threat by the antagonistic members was, “She’s creating too much conflict. No one will contribute financially. We’ll become ‘the gay church.’ She’s going to bring the church down.”

Over time, the ring-leader of this antagonistic group began sending Arlene “anonymous” letters which ultimately escalated to the level of a death threat. These antagonists also disrupted a Sunday worship service by taking the microphone during the “Joys and Concerns” and using that occasion to critique and condemn the leadership of the church, and by inviting the local TV station to Sunday worship under false pretences.

A further aspect of the antagonist’s frenzy to create a pretext included an attempt to have Arlene defrocked, charging that she had mishandled church funds, even though the only persons with fiduciary authority in the church were elected laity. These charges were perceived by conference staff as a thinly veiled attempt to force Arlene to leave Park Church, if not the ministry, on account of being a lesbian, and after due investigation, she and the elected leaders of the church were fully exonerated. Shortly thereafter, a further attempt to defrock Arlene was made by another member of the antagonistic group, but the Conference refused to conduct an investigation because the previous investigation proved fallacious.

After the anonymous letter containing a death threat against Arlene was received by the Church Council members, Arlene and Stephanie stayed away from their home on several occasions, but Arlene continued to report for work at the church on a daily basis. The Council meanwhile sought the advice of conference staff, local lawyers, a private investigator, and an FBI handwriting analyst, and explored the possibility of hiring a personal body guard to protect Arlene and Stephanie. The fact that the county sheriff’s wife was a member of the church and a supporter of the “opposition” served to compound their fears and limit the resources of lay leaders in responding to the hysteria generated by a few.

The insidious nature of homophobia kept many well-meaning, supportive church leaders from recognizing the seriousness of the harassment, until matters had spiked to the level of death threats. Arlene observed, “These antagonists used the unexamined homophobia of our members to garner support, which resulted early on in the assumptions that ‘He doesn’t like her leadership style’ as opposed to realizing, ‘He hates her because he presumes she’s lesbian.’” Arlene said that over the course of the last 18 months of her service at Park Church, an increasingly disproportionate amount of her time became devoted to managing other people’s homophobia, by countering the antagonists’ attacks and helping her supporters understand the dynamics of homophobia at work within and among the membership—until at least 75 percent of her time each week was spent on this effort alone.

The stress, fatigue, and exhaustion of living under siege resulted in frequent nightmares, significant hair loss, rapid weight loss, a sense of failure, and a workaholic lifestyle for Arlene. Living in this climate was even more difficult for her partner, Stephanie, who became clinically depressed during this period. Looking back, Stephanie and Arlene understand now that being closeted not only veiled their relationship, but created a situation in which Stephanie felt invisible, voiceless, and powerless to affect the outcomes of the antagonists’ behavior.

Stephanie and Arlene also realize that though this conflict never came between the two of them, it did serve to isolate them further from family and from some of their closest friends. Given the stress they were under at the church, and the fact that most of their relatives and friends had done very little work on their own homophobia, neither felt that they had the energy to help others process what was going on, and they doubted their family’s ability to be supportive under these particularly difficult circumstances, so they simply opted not to share much of what they were enduring until they had made the decision to leave Park Church.

Despite the amount of hysteria generated by a few at Park Church and despite the amount of stress that Arlene and Stephanie underwent, the church did experience a significant turnaround during Arlene’s tenure. Over four years, the church added to its rolls 75 new members. They reversed a multi-year trend of deficit spending for operations; they successfully completed a \$500,000 capital campaign; they began work on a building renovation; and they significantly expanded the church’s educational and outreach programs.

Had those who wanted the church to become ONA done their homework on the power of hatred and the insidiousness of “isms,” before they began the ONA process, they might have been more effective in confronting early on the antagonists who truly did damage their church, and they might have been better equipped to support Arlene and Stephanie through this process. These leaders might have also realized that their desire for change would exact a high price for someone identified as lesbian or gay. But, well-meaning people do not often understand these challenges or their true costs. Those who, for instance, think it would be “cool” to have a gay or lesbian pastor may not appreciate the challenges that openly claiming this identity can represent for those whose very livelihoods depend on a combination of their own strength and the strength of advocates’ support. “It’s painful to be a

pioneer,” Arlene related, “painful and isolating, especially when one’s purpose and primary identity is as a pastor, and not as an activist.”

During this time Arlene said she had to answer the question, “What is my life going to be about?” She realized that facing evil, living with integrity, and loving her partner were more important aspirations than being cowed by the hatred and fear of others or the threats that truth-telling represented for her and her family.

Park Church has since become ONA, has learned some from these past experiences, and today has a much stronger witness of support for the LGBT communities in the Elmira area, but the price that Arlene and Stephanie paid for the congregation’s progress was high, and has not been acknowledged by most of the members.

Arlene decided to leave Park Church when it became clear that there was no end in sight to the escalating hysteria, and a few months later accepted a call to the UCC national staff. In her next role with CHHSM (Council for Health and Human Service Ministries), her well-meaning boss outed her to the entire national staff and CHHSM membership before she began work through a broadcast email, without checking with her to gain permission. This was especially stressful for Arlene and Stephanie coming from such a closeted life, and from such a horrible experience in Elmira. So much for anonymity. Arlene became a “poster child” for gay rights within the CHHSM membership. She did, in the end, find a more accepting context for service, and once again she proved herself to be effective in ministry.

After nearly seven years with CHHSM, Arlene was even more resolved in her sense of call to parish ministry, and she and Stephanie had healed enough to be able to trust a congregation again. Arlene pursued her call wholeheartedly as an out lesbian, and accepted an invitation to become senior pastor at Eden United Church of Christ in Hayward, California.

Arlene has been even more effective in her ministry with Eden Church as reflected in the congregation’s growth in spirit, membership, worship attendance, financial stability, and capital improvements. The primary difference for Arlene in this call has been her ability to focus her energies on the creative and broad roles of pastor and teacher, instead of the debilitating challenges of managing other people’s homophobia. Stephanie has been warmly welcomed and is seen as a valued partner in ministry with Arlene.

It has taken Arlene three years of service at Eden, she acknowledges, to stop wondering (every day) when someone or some small group of people would come after her again, or when, as she describes, “the insidious homophobia within some members will permeate the membership and require of her a Herculean response to quell.” The reminders of those old wounds and deep worries have surfaced on occasion as members have wondered aloud, including to her, whether their church has too many gay people on the staff, and whether they will become “the gay church.” So for Arlene, her current setting offers much greater freedom and opportunity for ministry, but it is not a place entirely free of apprehension or homophobia.

## Chapter 8: Pastors and Congregations: Overcoming Their Concerns

Gaining the necessary appreciation of homophobia for all parties involved will take effort on everyone's part but will likely result in a more secure environment for pastors and a less volatile one for members. The churches and pastors included in this study sought to address these issues in a variety of ways both before and after the pastor had arrived. But, having found a call or upon hiring a pastor, no pastor or church should assume that their work is done. In reality, coming out never ends and neither does the potential for conflict to arise, dealt with either internally or expressed externally. But every day also brings a measure of unexpected grace, for both pastors and members. Many of their fears and apprehensions turned out to be phantoms.

### Addressing Congregations' Fears and Objections

It appears that honest and intentional conversations made a big difference in introducing the congregation to the fact that the search committee's recommended candidate is openly gay.<sup>128</sup> In numerous cases, search committees worked hard, some even went so far as to contact every member of the church one-on-one. Forums, in-depth Bible studies, cottage meetings, and home visits were among strategies that helped to prepare the way. Interim pastors and senior pastors, where applicable, helped to set the tone and make the transition. Assistance from the association minister was mentioned.

Once they arrived, the pastors themselves were also busy – doing lots of visiting among members, making phone calls, being visible in the community, and doing a “good funeral.” One said that after officiating at several funerals for public figures soon after arriving, “the community realized that I was not a green-eyed monster. I was a good pastor.” In one case the pastor addressed their fears by telling them why he did not want to serve an LGBT church, how he understood his ministry to all members. They became less fearful that he had an “agenda.”

In two cases, leaders just felt that if members who objected wanted to go, they should. Mostly, however, when fears were unrealized, they simply moved on to being the church together. Time and relationship building made the difference. In two cases, participants reported that any issues related to the pastor's sexuality were not addressed because other more difficult problems of conflict had to be worked through, but these did not affect the pastor and parish relationship related to sexual orientation.

Do these concerns still exist? The answer was no or not applicable in 28 cases.<sup>129</sup> In five churches, the concerns remain or arose in a new way. One said, “Major conflict has subsided, but we'll see what's lingering;” another put it, “A few people still struggle, but they stay in covenant;” yet another said “The ‘anti-people’ left, but some may not be speaking out now.” There is still some discomfort around

---

<sup>128</sup> Question 22

<sup>129</sup> Question 23

sexuality, but mostly this has greatly diminished. One pastor was happy to report that “They see ME now and not a gay man.”

One pastor reported being surprised by reaction to the General Synod vote on marriage equality. It exposed some underlying issues in the church. In another church there was a “big fight” over the UCC’s God is Still Speaking TV ad that some felt was “intolerant.” This is one fascinating example of misunderstanding between LGBT and straight people. Some might call it unexamined homophobia or perhaps an opportunity for communication about different life experiences. Throughout the denomination it was widely reported that some heterosexuals felt the UCC was judging other denominations; many LGBT people simply identified with the experience of exclusion portrayed in the ad by bouncers keeping some people out of church. To them the ad was not primarily about judging but identifying the pain many LGBT people have felt from their previous church experiences. Most heterosexuals have not felt unwelcome and therefore may have felt themselves judged by the ad, unless, for example in some settings, they have been divorced.

In the study, other pastors reported that concerns might still exist, but they are not exactly sure. Five said they are not aware, they haven’t heard anything; three said there probably are still some issues, but two said there probably are not. Whether any concerns still exist, seven said there are hardly any, very little, seldom or they are greatly reduced. Four mentioned an occasional comment about not wanting to become a gay church, some by gay people themselves, which is another example of internalized homophobia. One church asked the pastor to resign.

### **How to Handle and Overcome Pastors’ Fears**

One of the best responses to the question of overcoming their fears and pressures is stated this way: “Strive to do the best job I can and remain faithful to God and my call, and my partner.”<sup>130</sup> The truth mixed with the reality of the pressure is also expressed like this: “Work harder than others – be more excellent – be always watchful and cautious.” Several wrote of having therapists, spiritual directors and good friends outside the congregation. Prayer and good self-care is essential. One wisely said, “I get out of town regularly for a break.” Another wise reflector said, “I have had to learn how to keep company with difficult feelings and know that people will continue to project their unexamined homophobia whether I’m a good preacher or a good person. Knowing that the homophobia is theirs is one thing, not internalizing it is one of my most challenging and consistent spiritual practices.” One recognized the potential to get trapped in mixing the member’s fears with the pastor’s apprehensions: “Internalized oppression is a strong thing.” Remembering the heterosexist design of society is helpful.

What gives us the capacity to get free? Maturity and boundaries were often cited. Some said that no issues ever materialized or that their fears were unfounded. Many others simply said the passage of time helped them become more comfortable with themselves and helped members see that their intentions were simply to be good pastors. One said, “I just became less anxious with time;” another, “I mostly did my best and tried to be authentic to myself and my God.”

---

<sup>130</sup> Question 54

To the question of how they have handled their pressures and concerns and whether these concerns still exist: Fifteen people said yes they do and fifteen people said no they don't; the rest gave variations on "not really" or "to an extent."<sup>131</sup> One said "I expect them to continue – it is part of being a public figure."

### **Interview: Can I Be Who I Am?**

The Rev. Loey Powell was called as the pastor of the United Church in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1989.<sup>132</sup> She was the first solo pastor to successfully go through the entire search process out of the closet. At that time, there were perhaps two other out lesbian pastors but they had already established relationships with their congregations, either before they came out or in some other staff position first. Loey was a stranger out on her profile.

Her search process lasted, with a couple of interruptions, for about seven years, from 1982-1989. For two of those years she was actually a part-time pastor for a newly forming LGBT congregation of the UCC in Oakland, California. "It was a unique church, made up of many people who were members of another congregation but also wanted an ONA setting." It was, however, ultimately not the parish setting Loey was seeking.

During the long search she had some promising interviews, including one church that in the end seemed more willing to call a closeted lesbian with no more experience. For those years of effort, Loey has a stack of "no thank you" letters, ten of which were kind enough to write a personal note of regret.

When she first heard about this church in Florida, she was not really interested in moving. But when she read the profile she thought she needed to meet these people. From the first encounter, she knew there was great potential. And they, too, felt a fit. There were four different "meet the candidate" forums so that people could get to know her – and she them. Her question throughout the visit was "Can I be who I am?" Members actually seemed relieved to be able to speak openly about her being a lesbian rather than to keep it a secret. For them it seemed to indicate a level of trust between her and the congregation. Loey remained there over seven years.

Although the congregation welcomed her warmly, others in the association did not. Shortly after arriving, Loey met with the association committee on ministry to receive her standing. There were no issues because they had apparently not read her profile on which she was clearly out. It wasn't until some of them read an article in United Church News about this church in Florida calling a lesbian pastor that some on the association committee did begin to object. They accused her of deceiving them for not having verbally told them she is a lesbian. They dragged her back in but all they could do was make her feel miserable. She had not "committed" an offense. It was, however, a lousy greeting by those who should have been there to welcome her into their midst. Thankfully, the experience at the church far outweighed their distasteful actions.

---

<sup>131</sup> Question 54

<sup>132</sup> Lois M. Powell, Minister and Team Leader in Human Rights, Justice for Women, and Transformation Ministry of Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio, interview by author, January 24, 2006.



## **Part IV: Conclusions**

### **Chapter 9: Varying Dynamics**

#### **Is Having a Gay Pastor What Made These Churches Grow?**

In other settings outside this study, I have asked why these churches have grown. The Rev. Dick Sparrow, minister and team leader for the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, offered this: first, the churches stand for something or, at times, against something; second, it is leadership. In many cases a declining church will attempt to stop the decline by shying away from controversial issues, trying to be “acceptable” to as many people as possible. But this seems to contribute to apathy, a feature that is generally unattractive to potential members and even uninspiring for long-time members who may drift away. Those looking for a spiritual home are not seeking conflict but a church that, recognizing the issues of the day, has shown the willingness and ability to address controversy well and come to consensus. Processes that include intentional questioning, and therefore talking with one another about matters of substance, creates a climate of understanding which grows to be inclusive of anyone who has felt excluded or rejected by the church. I believe that the churches who have called openly gay and lesbian pastors have modeled this by necessity. And it is this that led them to be successful.

In the spirit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, questioning and ultimately standing against the cultural and political hegemony is very much a Christian duty; and calling an openly gay pastor stands in opposition to the rhetoric of fear promulgated by the right-wing. This “standing against” is attractive to some people. But, from the opposite side, conservative Christians also grow from such principles (listen to how loudly the ruling right-wing claims their powerlessness while exerting control), and given their growing size and power today, with political and cultural hegemony, they have a larger constituency to attract. They claim the exclusive rights to morality and dare anyone to question it. And they try to convince those who wish access to power, or want to appear to have “good values,” that they must be associated with such Christianity.

However, I believe, things may change. Such churches and para-church organizations and the state are a bit too comfortable with each other these days, such as the new Supreme Court judge thanking the head of Focus on the Family for helping him get appointed and two Ohio churches that are now under investigation for campaigning for an ultra-conservative gubernatorial candidate. It will be interesting to watch if this coziness contributes to the kind of decline experienced by mainline churches that better fit the cultural norm of the 1950s.

To test the theory of “standing for something” and “good leadership,” I asked to what the pastors would attribute the growth, if any, of their congregations. I specifically asked if any growth or decline could be ascribed to having a gay pastor.<sup>133</sup> One said, “New members came initially because of who I am and the fact that they wanted a church that would call a gay man.” But only a few cited this; most gave credit to a wide range of factors. Of those who said yes, that growth could be attributed to the knowledge of their sexual orientation, one noted it gives the church

---

<sup>133</sup> Question 38

a “niche” market; another “some LGBT people have come because I’m gay.” One said the assistance of free coverage in the LGBT press was a significant benefit. But another held that “being a gay pastor makes growth slower and more difficult to achieve in our current cultural environment. It’s much easier to start a church and grow a church with conservative values.” With a different view, one pastor believes that the current environment actually helps because “calling me forced people to figure out where they stood on a range of social justice issues.” And that is what attracted new people. How different this might be from, say, a congregation that voted to be ONA with a straight pastor would probably be a matter of degrees. We did note earlier, however, that the churches in this study with gay pastors grew at a higher rate than those that are simply ONA.

Perhaps a better question would have been whether they felt having a gay pastor helped or hindered growth. In a number of churches I believe the answer would have been that it helped, when combined with such obvious other factors as being a good pastor. One said, “The growth doesn’t have to do with my queerness but my other gifts and to my unique calm and grace amidst conflict;” another “I’ve even heard folks say that the endurance, compassion, and the way I have had to know myself presents itself in a dynamic way.”

Obviously not all gay men and lesbians who feel a call to ministry will make good pastors. Standing for something is one thing. That those in this study are also good leaders is attested to by the fact that almost no one gave themselves the credit for their church’s growth; humility, accompanied by competency, is one of the highest marks of a leader in my opinion.

### **Other Factors in Growth**

When asked what factors made the biggest difference in the church’s growth, the most frequent response, from ten pastors, was increased evangelism efforts. Sometimes it is assumed that stands on controversial issues of social justice and evangelism are antithetical, but they are clearly not opposed in these cases. Other common factors stated were quality worship, preaching and increased outreach. As noted elsewhere, in many churches, long-time members felt an increased sense of liveliness which certainly contributes to an excitement that one wishes to share with others. One pastor said, “I’ve encouraged everyone to ask of all the people they know, ‘Do you have a church home?’ Pretty revolutionary for New England, I gather.”

Pastors of 17 churches also reported that the recent UCC television advertising campaign – God Is Still Speaking – and its ensuing controversy in the news media (some networks would not run the ad because it seemed to advocate a pro-gay point of view) made a difference for them.<sup>134</sup> For another eleven churches the difference gained was that it contributed to a greater pride in the UCC and a stronger identity. Still, another eleven churches said the campaign made no difference while 19 said they were not sure or that it was negligible or had minimal impact. Several pastors felt that the additional interest by the news media in the last

---

<sup>134</sup> Question 39

General Synod's vote on marriage equality helped those churches for whom this was good news to bring in potential members and visitors.

Many churches face a challenge different from the current political environment: aging memberships. Numerous churches need significant growth just to keep ahead of the death of their members let alone experience gain. And as one pastor wrote of the increased interest in his church when first called, "the novelty" wears off with time. If in the meantime worship has not improved and outreach has not increased, it won't matter at all that the pastor is openly gay. It would be interesting to see a follow-up study of these same churches in ten years. Do they continue to grow or plateau like many others in the UCC?

### **The Role of Open and Affirming**

As mentioned before, only half of the congregations in this study had first gone through the ONA process. Five more had begun talking about starting it or were in process but had not voted. Ten churches reportedly had not even discussed homosexuality before, let alone become ONA.<sup>135</sup>

Twenty-eight believe their church's ONA status had an effect on their readiness to call the pastor; eight do not believe it did. For those who answered yes, a common response was that it prepared the way, that it was consistent with their earlier vote, and that there was now more ease with the issue of sexuality. One said that "most homophobic people left at the ONA vote;" for another it "demystified gay people and created a norm of acceptance," key to any effective strategy for overcoming homophobia and heterosexism.

For those who do not believe that their ONA status – whether they were or not – made any difference, responses included "we're not ONA but liberal," "they are well-meaning," and "they thought they had open attitudes." But this also meant they did not know what the congregation's reaction would be, and the vote to call the pastor may have been premature. For one it caused a flurry of unexpected conflict because it had not been discussed in a context prior to considering the pastor. They may have discovered that being well-meaning and liberal do not translate into being ready, though perhaps we can never really be ready. Practical theologian Elaine Graham says that "engagement in new practice gives rise to new knowledge."<sup>136</sup> Therefore, perhaps we will never know what we are capable of until we are placed in a situation that tests us.

Of those churches that had dealt with issues of homosexuality before considering the pastor's call, 36 specified something related to ONA. Out of those, some were positive experiences and others were negative but still led to greater openness. In several churches the previous pastor had raised the issue in some way; in three that person came out while their pastor, two had openly gay interims. Several churches had gay members or had dealt with AIDS among members and staff. Once again, this illustrates the fact that coming out on a wider scale is necessary for greater transformation of church and society.

---

<sup>135</sup> Question 10-11

<sup>136</sup> Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), p. 99.

Some of the painful issues that led to transformation included one church that had fired their previous pastor for marching in a gay pride parade, one that voted against ONA and even one that voted against the openly gay pastor they later hired, once they went through the ONA process. Sometimes these issues are addressed when someone that everybody knows comes out, such as the case when the matter was settled as soon as the daughter of the church “matriarch” came out.

Going through the ONA process certainly cannot hurt the prospects of a congregation’s readiness to call a gay pastor. And it is better for issues that arise not to be about a specific person. But being ONA first has not predicted either their readiness or the effectiveness of the pastor later. As well, not all ONA churches are willing to hire a gay pastor and may resist voting should that become the presumption.

### **Unique Hardships and Unique Joys**

So much of what has been addressed in this study has concerned fears and apprehensions. There are certainly many difficulties that straight pastors, in the same way, never have to endure related to their sense of value and place in the church. Is there a blessing beyond simply the honor of serving as a pastor in Christ’s Church? Several people said “Absolutely!” there are unique joys to being an out pastor; a few said no.<sup>137</sup>

Many spoke of their ability or insight, because of their own marginalization, to relate with others on the margins. Standing with persecuted or disenfranchised persons of any kind, “they have someone they can relate to and share their experiences;” “you know the experience of being an outsider.” One said, “as a middle-class suburban white professional, anything that challenges my assumptions of privilege only makes me a better pastor.” For so many of the participants, it was this aspect – challenging personal growth, “being a positive role model,” “helping others in whatever various closets they live in” – that makes their ministry such a joy. One said, “I think I’ve been blessed to see life through ‘lenses’ I might otherwise not have had;” that is, if he had not had to come out as a gay man.

At the heart, finally being able to serve the church as an out pastor is “the joy of truly being who God intends me to be.” Others spoke of freedom, not having to live in fear, and “finally feeling ‘normal’ (which is a good thing).” They can now create “authentic relationships” as pastors with their congregants. Some were grateful, saying we “have a chance to really make a difference” and “get to serve as a change agent.” For one, the joy is “never getting hired by really conservative churches!” Another celebrated that this is the opportunity to be in “cutting edge mission/ministry.”

Eric H.F. Law calls what these pastors are articulating “creative marginality.”<sup>138</sup> He says that if we embrace this marginalization we can enhance our ministry to build bridges. And, he says, that is what spirituality is all about: making connections, not only among diverse groups but internally, “especially parts of

---

<sup>137</sup> Question 64

<sup>138</sup> Eric H.F. Law, “A Spirituality of Creative Marginality,” *Qu(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking (New York: Continuum, 1997), p. 344.

myself that I dislike or deny,”<sup>139</sup> thereby identifying internalized homophobia in order to release ourselves of the burden. Our willingness impacts more than just ourselves, however. Christian de la Huerta says that any kind of social activism, which would include, in my opinion, the fact that the simple act of ministry as an out person impacts social change, helps all marginalized persons. He calls LGBT people “catalytic transformers” who function as agents “to bring about reform, to incite social movements, to transform society, to be instruments or agents of change.”<sup>140</sup>

### **Is It Better To Be Open Or Not?**

Respondents were asked, following all the scales about their fears and apprehensions, “based on your experience, do you believe it is ‘better’ to be open or not.”<sup>141</sup> On a scale of 1-10, one being it is much more difficult and ten equaling much better/more liberating, all but seven pastors chose a ten; no one chose lower than an eight on the scale. Given the challenges faced, that is a remarkable response.

Though “it is difficult at times,” and “it makes for a harder search process,” yet, they felt, the negative is outweighed because “the fear of being outed is exhausting.” Others noted that it is not for everyone, that “it’s a matter of vocation,” and “I don’t presume this for others.” One said, “I understand the reasons not to be out, but I confess I feel one’s ministry becomes inauthentic,” though, as another noted, “it depends on the congregation (and part of the country.)” Put soberly, “It can be life threatening as well as life changing and must be undertaken as an individual risk. No one should be pressured.” Yet another said they would “rather be unemployed than closeted and working.” For one it has more personal integrity and is “also fairer to the congregation in the end.”

Perhaps summing up the group well: “Keeping it a secret is too much work! Ministry is hard enough already. And by being open, I can never be accused of misleading or deceiving the congregation. It also eliminates speculation about my personal life – although it does not eliminate gossip.”

Instead of asking whether the respondents thought being out was better than being closeted, I wonder what the responses would have been if I had asked whether they thought it would be better or easier to be a straight pastor. Do they have an advantage? Though based in heterosexism, it is not an unlikely thought, by someone either straight or gay. David Newhouse says he is frequently asked “Wouldn’t your life be simpler if you were not gay?”<sup>142</sup> But, he says, what does being non-gay even mean? How could we ever know since those feelings and experiences are as foreign as homosexuality would be to straight people? He sympathizes with the “enormous pressures” to conform that straight people must feel and concludes that being gay actually provides many more advantages, that is,

---

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p. 345.

<sup>140</sup> de la Huerta, p. 7.

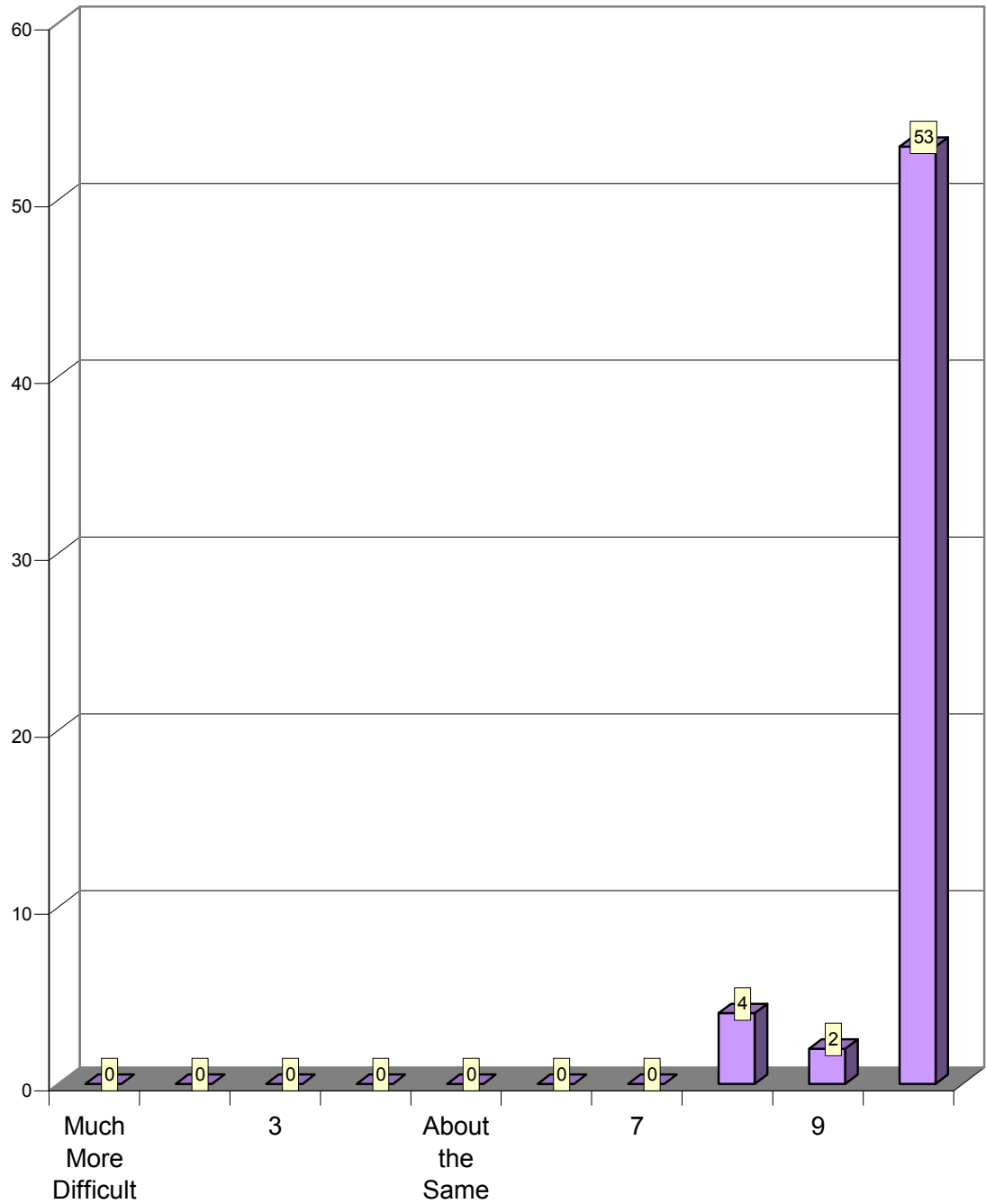
<sup>141</sup> Question 61; Chart 9.1

<sup>142</sup> David Newhouse, “On Being Gay (And Not Straight),” *ReCreations: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Queer People*, ed. Catherine Lake (Toronto: Queer Press, 1999), p 162-163.

when embraced, not that he would recommend it for someone who is not gay. But, Newhouse concludes, since the Creator made LGBT people, “[God] must have had some purpose in mind.” Discovering what it is is exciting.

Personally, I have great gratitude that God believed in me so much as to bless me with the gift of my sexuality. I cannot imagine ministry, nor would I want to, in any other way.

**9.1: Based Only On Your Experience, Do You Believe It Is "Better" To Be Open About Your Sexual Orientation?**



## Chapter 10: Advice

The last questions I asked on the survey involved guidance from the participants to potential candidates, search committees and placement staff in the associations or conferences.<sup>143</sup> I encourage you to read the verbatim responses to questions 69-71 in the appendix. Each one has an Id number that can be traced to many other questions and to the charts related to attendance and membership figures in the appendix. To fully appreciate their wisdom, I used verbatim answers for several other questions on the compilation of the surveys: whether growth or decline can be attributed to having a gay pastor, how pastors handled and overcame their pressures and concerns, whether they think it would be easier to or would prefer to serve an LGBT congregation, what unique joys there are for out pastors, and finally three questions concerning advice.

### **Words of Advice for Those Considering a Call**

What would the pastors in this study like to say to others interested in ministry in a predominantly straight congregation? Six respondents simply wrote: “Do it” or “Go for it!” Honesty, clarity, maturity and patience were frequent responses.

As regard honesty, several said that they believe it best to be out on the profile, but if nothing else, to provide clarity, be the one who makes sure the issue of sexual orientation is addressed; “If they don’t bring it up in interviews, do it yourself.” And, another advised, “If they express reluctance, respect their views and do not try to ‘talk them into it.’ Do not hide or minimize” the issue. You may also have to help them understand appropriate boundaries, including “declining to respond to a question that seems intrusive.”

Maturity is also a means to success. Among items mentioned in this regard: know yourself first, have strong integrity, trust in your calling, work at integration (personal wholeness) and “don’t apologize for being you.” In that regard, we must also remember our responsibility for our own issues, “Try to do as much work as possible on your own internalized homophobia, before you start serving churches. They’ll have plenty of work they’ll need help with.” This further reminds us of boundaries about which clergy must understand for themselves and continually articulate for the congregation. I believe it is more important for us to know who we are than to convince them to like us. We should not expect the congregation to take care of us but rather create a support network outside the church, as is true for straight pastors as well. However, since many LGBT people have been hurt by churches in the past, I believe there are temptations to seek, or need, for undue affirmation and even adulation which we may not recognize. But, they do not need to compensate for the grief another congregation has caused. We must be aware of any lingering effects from our “woundedness and victimization” by doing our own homework, as de la Huerta suggests, and developing “some method of self-awareness and self-observation for confronting our own inner (or outer) demons.”<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>143</sup> Question 69-71

<sup>144</sup> De la Huerta, p. 127.



One respondent said, “Never flinch from being exactly who you are. If you act like you are hiding some awful secret (like it’s something to be ashamed of) then it creates a tension for them.” But another added, while being open and honest with them, “Don’t be discouraged about rejection. It will take time.” Time, patience, integrity and support are necessary to keep us faithful to our calling.

### **Words of Advice for Search Committees**

First of all, the UCC Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team has produced a stellar DVD for search committees to begin considering “non-traditional” pastors – those with disabilities, of a different race, female or who are gay and lesbian.<sup>145</sup> “Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent” profiles an actual search committee who, much to their surprise, found that a pastor who is lesbian was their best match. It also shows how this “traditional” congregation has thrived in the short time she has been present.

Several respondents in the survey spoke of advising committees to concentrate on the match of gifts and needs. There is also a tremendous amount of honesty necessary. The committee must be honest with the candidate about whether the church is truly ready or if they just hope they will be. One respondent advised candidates to ask specifically what search committee members will do should any conflict arise. There is nothing wrong with having faith that God will provide a way, but they must also do the foot work of preparing the church. One mentioned providing extra opportunities for the congregation and candidate to meet one another. Other suggestions were listed earlier in chapter 8.

Another form of honesty is the committee’s responsibility to the congregation. One said, “Do not underestimate the resistance or anxiety this will create among the congregation. Deal with it openly and honestly and patiently” but also, once again, in such a way that emphasizes the match of gifts and needs.

Once you have found the best candidate, be very careful not to present him or her in a way that sounds like: “She’s the best candidate, except she is gay. But she’s still the best.” This will communicate that the committee is ashamed that they did not do a better job or that this is the best they could do, reinforcing the heterosexist notion that a church should prefer a straight pastor. Focus on the match. Another said, “Be led by your vision” for the church, not what you think they cannot handle. Some said having done the ONA process first is advisable or perhaps other congregations who have previously called openly gay pastors could be consulted.

Another area of honesty for the committee to consider is within itself. They should “never cater to a few individuals” who are determined to take the church in a new direction regardless of the others. Everyone must put their own fears and anxieties on the table at the beginning. Try to be gentle to one another and listen without judgment. Then, see where the Spirit is leading. Simply put, “Call the person whom God is telling you is your next pastor and don’t worry about anything else.”

---

<sup>145</sup> “Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent” Parish Life and Leadership Ministry, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio, 2004, DVD.

## **Words of Advice for Associations and Conferences**

Some have advised that placement staff should submit profiles only to those congregations where he or she thinks there is a chance to be hired. Essentially, be honest and candid to spare conflict; “Don’t set either up for unnecessary failure if at all possible.” Yet, added to this opinion is that they must be advocating for change, opening doors, encouraging churches to go through the ONA process, giving a special nod of “worth checking out.”

Some said that conference ministers have a moral responsibility to connect pastors and churches regardless of sexual orientation and this cannot be done without providing opportunities in unexpected places. However, as one noted, “In a couple of cases, I have found placement staff more excited about the possibility of having an openly gay pastor in the conference/association than candid openness about a particular congregation.” In that case, as well as where there is resistance, conference ministers should examine their own biases. But, even more so, congregations need help on this issue. “Be involved” and help them move forward; if not this time, then plant a seed for the future. The real focus of education for committees should be about “competence and fit;” “This is not a tolerance issue but a faithful commitment to send folks where they are called.”

Others believe the conference should have no role in helping to sort out who is ready and who is not. Essentially “do not censor.” “They should not be in the process of selecting candidates for churches,” they argued. “It is the church’s responsibility to do the work of discernment and figuring out.” To emphasize, in fact, one said, “Make it clear to the churches that they WILL receive such profiles.” In the same vein, one said “don’t limit LGBT candidates to ONA or ‘liberal’ congregations in an effort to ‘spare them the pain of rejection.’”

All make good points, even if some positions are mutually exclusive. The truth is, as one noted, “Our committees on ministry are so uneven throughout the UCC system...Some [LGBT pastors] are treated with respect and openness, others are overtly told there is no chance for them and will not support them in doing so [being out].”

In all cases, when offering help, “Be sure the congregation has done their homework on these issues.” Then, once the pastor has started, check in. These are still difficult times.

## **Conclusion**

How have these congregations fared? What has it been like for the pastors? What were the fears and apprehensions felt by both congregations and pastors when they began their ministry together? How have these been addressed and, if they have been, overcome? These were some of my original questions.

First, the majority of congregations are faring better than their counterparts in the UCC. They have not been without conflict, but they have shown a disproportionate rate of growth on all indicators of health. Secondly, pastors have had to face varying levels of homophobia, some quite severe, others less than anticipated. Most appear to recognize some limitations but have not been restricted to the point of preferring to leave ministry in a predominantly straight congregation nor the ministry itself. In few cases was the difficulty too much for either pastor or

congregation. Thirdly, each congregation appears to have a different way of addressing its issues, but most have demonstrated that openness and proactive conversations, done in an honest manner, can transcend their differences, while acknowledging that not everyone will remain. Finally, through their own patience and the integrity of their call from God, openly gay men and lesbians have and will continue to faithfully serve Christ's Church, opening the doors for others like them that might have questioned, "Will it ever happen?" By God's grace, the answer is yes; but not everywhere, yet.

## Bibliography

- Beam, Joseph, ed. *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*. Boston: Allyson, 1986.
- Bechtel, Carol M. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Esther*. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2002.
- Bridgewater, Dee. "Effective Coming Out: Self-Disclosure Strategies to Reduce Sexual Identity Bias." *Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia: Strategies That Work*. James T. Sears and Walter L. Williams, eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Comstock, Gary David and Susan E. Henking, eds. *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Continuum, 1997.
- Dais, Stephan Lee. "Don't Turn Your Back On Me." *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*. Joseph Beam, ed. Boston: Allyson, 1986.
- Day, Ann B., ed. *And So We Speak: Experiences and Reflections of Openly Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clergy and Seminarians in the United Church of Christ*. Holden, MA: United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns, 1998.
- Open and Affirming: Yes, It Matters!* Holden, MA: United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns, 2005.
- De la Huerta, Christian. *Coming Out Spiritually: The Next Step*. New York: Tarcher/ Putnam, 1999.
- DiNovo, Cheri. *Qu(e)rying Evangelism: Growing a Community from the Outside In*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, 1845*. Quoted in Keith Boykin, *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America*, New York: Anchor, 1996.
- DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903; reprint: New York: Dover, 1994.
- Fone, Byrne. *Homophobia: A History*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000.
- Graham, Elaine L. *Transforming Practice: Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997.

- Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- "Hard Pill." 93 min. John Baumgartner, director, 2005. Film.
- Heckles, Jane Elizabeth. "Stewardship Trends in Open and Affirming Churches of the United Church of Christ." D.Min. thesis, Andover Newton Theological School, 1997.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, eds. New York: Warner, 1998.
- Lake, Catherine. *ReCreations: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Queer People*. Toronto: Queer Press, 1999.
- Law, Eric H. F. "A Spirituality of Creative Marginality." *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*. Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking, eds. New York: Continuum, 1997.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1984.
- Mosala, Itemeleng J. "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa." *Semeia* 59 (1992): 129-137.
- Nehring, Arlene K. Pastor Eden United Church of Christ, Hayward, CA. Interview by author. January 20, 2006.
- Newhouse, David. "On Being Gay (and Not Straight)." *ReCreations: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Queer People*. Catherine Lake, ed. Toronto: Queer Press, 1999.
- Office of General Ministries, Research Services. *The UCC Statistical Handbook: 2003*. Cleveland: United Church of Christ.
- Powell, Lois M. Minister and Team Leader, Human Rights, Justice for Women, and Transformation Ministry, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ. Interview by author. January 24, 2006.
- Richardson, H. Neil. "The Book of Esther." *The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971.
- Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. *Just Wives? Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003.

- “Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent.” Cleveland: Parish Life and Leadership Ministry, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, 2004. DVD.
- Sears, James T. and Walter L. Williams. *Overcoming Heterosexism and Homophobia: Strategies That Work*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Shepherd, Reginald. “On Not Being White.” *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*. Boston: Allyson, 1986.
- Stewart, Chuck. *Sexually Stigmatized Communities: Reducing Heterosexism and Homophobia: An Awareness Training Manual*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999.
- Swayne, Steven. “Remembering DuBois.” [www.thedartmouth.com](http://www.thedartmouth.com). November 20, 2003.
- Tigert, Leanne McCall. *Coming Out Through Fire: Surviving the Trauma of Homophobia*. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999.
- Coming Out While Staying In: Struggles and Celebrations of Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals in the Church*. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996.
- That We May All Be One: 30 Years of United Church of Christ Social Justice Policy Statements on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns*. Cleveland: United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Division of the American Missionary Association and UCC Office for Church in Society, 1999. (Superseded by Wider Church Ministries and Justice and Witness Ministries on July 1, 2000.)
- White, Sidnie Ann. “Esther.” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. Louisville: KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992.
- Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

# APPENDIX

For Summary Responses to All Survey Questions please refer to pdf file “Survey Response” on CD.

Appendix 1.1

id	Fear Loss?	Anyone leave?	Come Back?	Peak	Year	Difference from peak	Decline	Arrival of pastor	Year	Today	New members	More Less	Growth	Fear True?	Other Factors
1		Y	Y-2					150	2002	170	40	20	13%		
2	Y	Y	Y-3	250	1985	60	24%	190	2004	215	20	25	13%	N	
3	Y	Y	N					300	2003	300	12	0	0%	N	
4		Y	Y-2					80	2004	85	5	5	6%		
5															
6		Y	Y-2	175	1955	95	54%	80	2000	87	40	7	9%		
7	Y	Y	N	700	1955	540	77%	160	2003	160	14	0	0%	N	
8	Y	Y	N	725	1965	431	59%	294	1999	263	33	-31	-11%	Y	deaths
9	Y	Y	N	1000	1962	525	53%	475	2004	450	5	-25	-5%	Y	conflicts
10	Y	Y	N	600	1960	450	75%	150	2003	135	9	-15	-10%	Y	deaths
11	Y	Y	N	700	1970	381	54%	319	2003	200	27	-119	-37%	Y	rolls
12	Y	N	N	450	1957	399	89%	51	1999	72	25	21	41%	N	
13	Y	Y	N	800	1975	595	74%	205	2004	240	35	35	17%	N	
14	Y	Y	N		1950			100	1999	93	8	-7	-7%	Y	deaths
15	Y	Y	N					83	2003	99	18	16	19%		
16	Y	Y	N												
17	Y	Y	N	900	1957	874	97%	26	2005	54	29	28	108%		
18	Y	Y	Y-20	1003	1961	455	45%	548	2004	608	45	60	11%	N	
19		Y	N	800	1968	400	50%	400	1998	400	80	0	0%		
20		Y	Y-2	1000	1980	550	55%	450	2002	500	50	50	11%		
21		N		750	1940	250	33%	500	1995	450		-50	-10%		
22		N		130	1977	80	62%	50	1999	82	62	32	64%		
23	Y	N		375	1995	255	68%	120	2004	121	3	1	1%	N	
24	Y	Y	Y-2	1800	2005	400	22%	1400	2001	1840	440	440	31%	N	
25		Y	N						2004		5	0		N	
26		N		125	1996	93	74%	32	2003	38	8	6	19%		
27		N		300	1982	210	70%	90	2002	105	25	15	17%		
28	Y	Y	Y-2	800	1962	547	68%	253	2001	247	85	-6	-2%	Y	
29		Y	Y-1	750	1950	738	98%	12	2002	15	9	3	25%		closed
30															
31	Y	Y	N	40	2004	0	0%	40	2004	40	5	0	0%	N	
32	Y	Y	N					71	2003	108	30	37	52%		rolls
33	Y	Y	Y												



id	Fear Loss?	Anyone leave?	Come Back?	Peak	Year	Difference from peak	Decline	Arrival of pastor	Year	Today	New members	More Less	Growth	Fear True?	Other Factors
35	Y	Y	Y -4	200	1950	100	50%	100	2002	65	10	-35	-35%	Y	rolls
63												0			
37		N		480	1967	390	81%	90	2000	125	35	35	39%		
38		Y	Y -1									0			
39		N						60	2001	60	20	0	0%		
40	Y	N		125	1970	75	60%	50	2004	60	10	10	20%	N	
41	Y	Y	N	150	1970	90	60%	60	2004	68	9	8	13%	N	
42	Y	Y	N	160	1980	0	0%	160	1998	130	30	-30	-19%	Y	
43	Y	Y	N	200	2005	125	63%	75	1989	200	40	125	167%	N	
44		N		1500	1970	1419	95%	81	2004	90	10	9	11%		
45		N						99	2003	122	17	23	23%		
46		N		500	1995	150	30%	350	2004	390	40	40	11%		
47	Y	Y	N	200	2005	188	94%	12	1995	200	188	188	1567%	N	
48		Y	Y -2	250		205	82%	45	2001	250	45	205	456%		
49	Y	N		300	1970	215	72%	85	2002	95	15	10	12%	N	
50															
51				1441	1958	917	64%	524	1997	421	182	-103	-20%		
52															
53	Y	Y	N	250	1970	141	56%	109	1999	98	39	-11	-10%	Y	
54	Y	Y	N	350	1964	244	70%	106	2004	109	9	3	3%	N	
55	Y	Y	N	380	1960	180	47%	200	1996	200	40	0	0%	N	
56								70	2004	75	5	5	7%		
57		Y	N	85	1995	5	6%	80	1998	61	23	-19	-24%		rolls,deaths
58	Y	Y	N	100	1970	59	59%	41	2005	18	15	-23	-56%	Y	
59				400	1965	350	88%	50	2003	50	0	0	0%		
60	Y	Y	Y	2300	1973	1200	52%	1100	1994	1000		-100	-9%	Y	
61	Y	Y	Y					40	2003	116	100	76	190%	N	
62				260	2005	48	18%	212	2001	260	48	48	23%		
63				1000	1960	600	60%	400	2003	600	40	200	50%		
64								212	2004	217	5	5	2%		
65	Y	Y	N	160	2003	30	19%	130	1997	160	16	30	23%		
33		41	Y -14	24,964		15,059	60%	11,170		12,417	2,158	1,247	11%		

# Appendix 1.2

## Membership Figures For Churches That Reported Peak

id	Member		Actual		Pastor		Members			
	Peak		Loss	Decline	Arrived		Today	New	Difference	Growth
2	250	1985	60	24%	190	2004	215	20	25	13%
6	175	1955	95	54%	80	2000	87	40	7	9%
7	700	1955	540	77%	160	2003	160	14	0	0%
8	725	1965	431	59%	294	1999	263	33	-31	-11%
9	1000	1962	525	53%	475	2004	450	5	-25	-5%
10	600	1960	450	75%	150	2003	135	9	-15	-10%
11	700	1970	381	54%	319	2003	200	27	-119	-37%
12	450	1957	399	89%	51	1999	72	25	21	41%
13	800	1975	595	74%	205	2004	240	35	35	17%
17	900	1957	874	97%	26	2005	54	29	28	108%
18	1003	1961	455	45%	548	2004	608	45	60	11%
19	800	1968	400	50%	400	1998	400	80	0	0%
20	1000	1980	550	55%	450	2002	500	50	50	11%
21	750	1940	250	33%	500	1995	450		-50	-10%
22	130	1977	80	62%	50	1999	82	62	32	64%
23	375	1995	255	68%	120	2004	121	3	1	1%
24	1800	2005	400	22%	1400	2001	1840	440	440	31%
26	125	1996	93	74%	32	2003	38	8	6	19%
27	300	1982	210	70%	90	2002	105	25	15	17%
28	800	1962	547	68%	253	2001	247	85	-6	-2%
29	750	1950	738	98%	12	2002	15	9	3	25%
31	40	2004	0	0%	40	2004	40	5	0	0%
35	200	1950	100	50%	100	2002	65	10	-35	-35%
37	480	1967	390	81%	90	2000	125	35	35	39%
40	125	1970	75	60%	50	2004	60	10	10	20%
41	150	1970	90	60%	60	2004	68	9	8	13%
42	160	1980	0	0%	160	1998	130	30	-30	-19%
43	200	2005	125	63%	75	1989	200	40	125	167%
44	1500	1970	1419	95%	81	2004	90	10	9	11%
46	500	1995	150	30%	350	2004	390	40	40	11%
47	200	2005	188	94%	12	1995	200	188	188	1567%
48	250		205	82%	45	2001	250	45	205	456%
49	300	1970	215	72%	85	2002	95	15	10	12%
51	1441	1958	917	64%	524	1997	421	182	-103	-20%
53	250	1970	141	56%	109	1999	98	39	-11	-10%
54	350	1964	244	70%	106	2004	109	9	3	3%
55	380	1960	180	47%	200	1996	200	40	0	0%
57	85	1995	5	6%	80	1998	61	23	-19	-24%
58	100	1970	59	59%	41	2005	18	15	-23	-56%
59	400	1965	350	88%	50	2003	50		0	0%
60	2300	1973	1200	52%	1100	1994	1000		-100	-9%
62	260	2005	48	18%	212	2001	260	48	48	23%
63	1000	1960	600	60%	400	2003	600	40	200	50%
65	160	2003	30	19%	130	1997	160	16	30	23%
	<b>24,964</b>		<b>15,059</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>9,905</b>		<b>10,972</b>	<b>1,893</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>11%</b>

# Appendix 1.3

## Membership For Churches That Did Not Include Peak

id	Pastor Arrived		Members Today	New	Difference	Growth
1	150	2002	170	40	20	13%
3	300	2003	300	12	0	0%
4	80	2004	85	5	5	6%
14	100	1999	93	8	-7	-7%
15	83	2003	99	18	16	19%
32	71	2003	108	30	37	52%
39	60	2001	60	20	0	0%
45	99	2003	122	17	23	23%
56	70	2004	75	5	5	7%
61	40	2003	116	100	76	190%
64	212	2004	217	5	5	2%
	<b>1,265</b>		<b>1,445</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>14%</b>

# Appendix 2.1

## Worship Attendance at the Peak, Arrival of Pastor and Today

ID	Peak Year	Peak Attend.	Decline Since Peak	% Decline	Arrival of Pastor	Year	Today in Worship	More/ Less	% Growth
1	1940	800	717	90%	83	2002	108	25	30%
2	1985	140	50	36%	90	2004	160	70	78%
3					150	2003	150	0	0%
4					40	2004	40	0	0%
5									
6	1982	170	135	79%	35	2000	50	15	43%
7					50	2002	75	25	50%
8	1967	200	104	52%	96	1999	85	-11	-11%
9	1962	800	675	84%	125	2004	175	50	40%
10	1970	200	125	63%	75	2003	90	15	20%
11	1985	230	155	67%	75	2003	98	23	31%
12					30	1999	60	30	100%
13	1975	350	290	83%	60	2004	102	42	70%
14	1950				40	1999	30	-10	-25%
15					60	2003	65	5	8%
16									
17	1957	600	588	98%	12	2005	54	42	350%
18									
19	1968	400	270	68%	130	1998	110	-20	-15%
20	1982	500	350	70%	150	2002	220	70	47%
21					300	1995	250	-50	-17%
22	2005	60	45	75%	15	1999	60	45	300%
23	1992	162	100	62%	62	2004	62	0	
24									
25									
26	1996	75	50	67%	25	2003	30	5	20%
27	1982	75	55	73%	20	2002	50	30	150%
28	1962	700	607	87%	93	2001	112	19	20%
29	1950	400	385	96%	15	2002	17	2	13%
30									
31					34	2003	30	-4	-12%
32					40	2003	80	40	100%
33									
34					140	2005	140	0	0%
35	1950	150	125	83%	25	2002	40	15	60%
36									
37	1958	400	355	89%	45	2000	75	30	67%
38									
39	1965	1000	955	96%	45	2001	40	-5	-11%
40	1970	75	60	80%	15	2004	35	20	133%
41	1965	200	165	83%	35	2004	45	10	29%

42	1985	<b>100</b>	20	20%	<b>80</b>	1988	<b>75</b>	-5	-6%
43	1993	<b>100</b>	60	60%	<b>40</b>	1989	<b>100</b>	60	150%
44	1970	<b>1000</b>	960	96%	<b>40</b>	2004	<b>50</b>	10	25%
45			0			2003	<b>60</b>		
46	2005	<b>450</b>	0	0%	<b>450</b>	2005	<b>450</b>	0	0%
47	2005	<b>175</b>	163	93%	<b>12</b>	1997	<b>175</b>	163	1358%
48		<b>70</b>	10	14%	<b>60</b>	2001	<b>90</b>	30	50%
49	1970	<b>150</b>	115	77%	<b>35</b>	2002	<b>50</b>	15	43%
50									
51	1958	<b>720</b>	566	79%	<b>154</b>	1997	<b>177</b>	23	15%
52									
53					<b>50</b>	1999	<b>75</b>	25	50%
54	1964	<b>253</b>	201	79%	<b>52</b>	2004	<b>65</b>	13	25%
55					<b>125</b>	1996	<b>140</b>	15	12%
56					<b>30</b>	2004	<b>40</b>	10	33%
57	1995	<b>40</b>	20	50%	<b>20</b>	1998	<b>35</b>	15	75%
58	1970	<b>100</b>	74	74%	<b>26</b>	2005	<b>40</b>	14	54%
59	1965	<b>250</b>	220	88%	<b>30</b>	2003	<b>30</b>	0	0%
60	1975	<b>1000</b>	525	53%	<b>475</b>	1994	<b>375</b>	-100	-21%
61					<b>40</b>	2003	<b>100</b>	60	150%
62	2004	<b>180</b>	30	17%	<b>150</b>	2001	<b>180</b>	30	20%
63	2003				<b>250</b>	2003	<b>250</b>	0	0%
64					<b>45</b>	2004	<b>65</b>	20	44%
65	2002	<b>75</b>	55	73%	<b>20</b>	1997	<b>75</b>	55	275%
		<b>12,350</b>	<b>9,380</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>4,394</b>		<b>5,435</b>	<b>981</b>	<b>22%</b>

## Appendix 2.2

### Worship Attendance (only those that include information about peak attendance)

id		Peak	Difference	Decline	Pastor Arrived		Today's Worship	Difference	Growth
1	1940	800	717	90%	83	2002	108	25	30%
2	1985	140	50	36%	90	2004	160	70	78%
6	1982	170	135	79%	35	2000	50	15	43%
8	1967	200	104	52%	96	1999	85	-11	-11%
9	1962	800	675	84%	125	2004	175	50	40%
10	1970	200	125	63%	75	2003	90	15	20%
11	1985	230	155	67%	75	2003	98	23	31%
13	1975	350	290	83%	60	2004	102	42	70%
17	1957	600	588	98%	12	2005	54	42	350%
19	1968	400	270	68%	130	1998	110	-20	-15%
20	1982	500	350	70%	150	2002	220	70	47%
22	2005	60	45	75%	15	1999	60	45	300%
23	1992	162	100	62%	62	2004	62	0	0%
26	1996	75	50	67%	25	2003	30	5	20%
27	1982	75	55	73%	20	2002	50	30	150%
28	1962	700	607	87%	93	2001	112	19	20%
29	1950	400	385	96%	15	2002	17	2	13%
35	1950	150	125	83%	25	2002	40	15	60%
37	1958	400	355	89%	45	2000	75	30	67%
39	1965	1000	955	96%	45	2001	40	-5	-11%
40	1970	75	60	80%	15	2004	35	20	133%
41	1965	200	165	83%	35	2004	45	10	29%
42	1985	100	20	20%	80	1988	75	-5	-6%
43	1993	100	60	60%	40	1989	100	60	150%
44	1970	1000	960	96%	40	2004	50	10	25%
46	2005	450	0	0%	450	2005	450	0	0%
47	2005	175	163	93%	12	1997	175	163	1358%
48		70	10	14%	60	2001	90	30	50%
49	1970	150	115	77%	35	2002	50	15	43%
51	1958	720	566	79%	154	1997	177	23	15%
54	1964	253	201	79%	52	2004	65	13	25%
57	1995	40	20	50%	20	1998	35	15	75%
58	1970	100	74	74%	26	2005	40	14	54%
59	1965	250	220	88%	30	2003	30	0	0%
60	1975	1000	525	53%	475	1994	375	-100	-21%
62	2004	180	30	17%	150	2001	180	30	20%
65	2002	75	55	73%	20	1997	75	55	275%
		<b>12,350</b>	<b>9,380</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>2,970</b>		<b>3,785</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>27%</b>

## Appendix 2.3

### Worship Attendance (without peak information)

id	Pastor		Today's	More	%
	Arrived		Attendance	Less	Growth
3	<b>150</b>	2003	<b>150</b>	0	0%
4	<b>40</b>	2004	<b>40</b>	0	0%
7	<b>50</b>	2002	<b>75</b>	25	50%
12	<b>30</b>	1999	<b>60</b>	30	100%
14	<b>40</b>	1999	<b>30</b>	-10	-25%
15	<b>60</b>	2003	<b>65</b>	5	8%
21	<b>300</b>	1995	<b>250</b>	-50	-17%
31	<b>34</b>	2003	<b>30</b>	-4	-12%
32	<b>40</b>	2003	<b>80</b>	40	100%
34	<b>140</b>	2005	<b>140</b>	0	0%
53	<b>50</b>	1999	<b>75</b>	25	50%
55	<b>125</b>	1996	<b>140</b>	15	12%
56	<b>30</b>	2004	<b>40</b>	10	33%
	<b>1,089</b>		<b>1,175</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>8%</b>

Appendix 3.1

**Sunday School Attendance**

id	Fear Losing Children?	Peak Year	Peak Sunday School	Arrival of Pastor	Difference	% Decline	Today's Attendance	More/Less	% Growth	Fear True?
1		1950	400	35	365	91%	47	12	34%	
2		1985	60	15	45	75%	20	5	33%	
3				30			35	5	17%	
4				10			10	0	0%	
5										
6	Y	1940	200	5	195	98%	10	5	100%	N
7		1950	50	25	25	50%	25	0	0%	
8	Y	1965	100	15	85	85%	15	0	0%	N
9	Y	1965	300	80	220	73%	80	0	0%	N
10				35			30	-5	-14%	
11		1960	200	10	190	95%	15	5	50%	
12				8			8	0	0%	
13	Y	1975	115	15	100	87%	20	5	33%	N
14	Y	1950		4			4	0	0%	N
15				19			28	9	47%	
16										
17		1957	200	4	196	98%	12	8	200%	
18		1961	968	200	768	79%	230	30	15%	
19		1968	1000	60	940	94%	60	0	0%	
20		1982	450	150	300	67%	220	70	47%	
21				25			75	50	200%	
22				1			10	9	900%	
23		1991	47	11	36	77%	17	6	55%	
24	Y	2004	200	125	75	38%	175	50	40%	N
25	Y							0		N
26		1996	53	9	44	83%	12	3	33%	
27	Y	1982	75	3	72	96%	12	9	300%	N
28		1870	250	11	239	96%	15	4	36%	
29				0			2	2		
30										
31				0			7	7		
32										
33	Y			0			NEW			N



34	Y	1955	100	30	5	95	95%	30	7	0	0%	N
35										2	40%	
36												
37				50				60	10	10	20%	
38								90	90			
39				0				0	0			
40		1970	25	15	10	40%		50	35	35	233%	
41		1970	70	2	68	97%		16	14	14	700%	
42	Y	1985	20	10	10	50%		20	10	10	100%	
43	Y			12				50	38	38	317%	N
44				9				12	3	3	33%	
45				6				10	4	4	67%	
46				150				150	0	0	0%	
47	Y	2005	50	4	46	92%		50	46	46	1150%	N
48			25	15	10	40%		70	55	55	367%	
49		1970	50	4	46	92%		10	6	6	150%	
50					0				0			
51	Y	1958	294	55	239	81%		30	-25	-25	-45%	Y
52	Y			33				127	94	94	285%	N
53	Y			15				27	12	12	80%	N
54		1966	55	11	44	80%		8	-3	-3	-27%	
55	Y		100	125	-25	-25%		140	15	15	12%	N
56				0	0			3	3			
57		1970	30	4	26	87%		15	11	11	275%	
58	Y	1970	30	3	27	90%		10	7	7	233%	N
59				1				2	1	1	100%	
60	Y								0	0		N
61	Y			2				7	5	5	250%	N
62		1970	60	25	35	58%		35	10	10	40%	
63				130				130	0	0	0%	
64				35				37	2	2	6%	
65	Y	2002	9	2	7	78%		2	0	0	0%	N
	<b>21</b>		<b>5,586</b>	<b>1,658</b>	<b>4,533</b>	<b>81%</b>		<b>2,392</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>1</b>	

## Appendix 3.2

### Sunday School Attendance at the Peak, Arrival of Pastor and Today

		Peak	Pastor	Difference	Decline	Today	Difference	Growth
1	1950	400	35	365	91%	47	12	34%
2	1985	60	15	45	75%	20	5	33%
6	1940	200	5	195	98%	10	5	100%
7	1950	50	25	25	50%	25	0	0%
8	1965	100	15	85	85%	15	0	0%
9	1965	300	80	220	73%	80	0	0%
11	1960	200	10	190	95%	15	5	50%
13	1975	115	15	100	87%	20	5	33%
17	1957	200	4	196	98%	12	8	200%
18	1961	968	200	768	79%	230	30	15%
19	1968	1000	60	940	94%	60	0	0%
20	1982	450	150	300	67%	220	70	47%
23	1991	47	11	36	77%	17	6	55%
24	2004	200	125	75	38%	175	50	40%
26	1996	53	9	44	83%	12	3	33%
27	1982	75	3	72	96%	12	9	300%
28	1870	250	11	239	96%	15	4	36%
35	1955	100	5	95	95%	7	2	40%
40	1970	25	15	10	40%	50	35	233%
41	1970	70	2	68	97%	16	14	700%
42	1985	20	10	10	50%	20	10	100%
47	2005	50	4	46	92%	50	46	1150%
48		25	15	10	40%	70	55	367%
49	1970	50	4	46	92%	10	6	150%
51	1958	294	55	239	81%	30	-25	-45%
54	1966	55	11	44	80%	8	-3	-27%
55		100	125	-25	-25%	140	15	12%
57	1970	30	4	26	87%	15	11	275%
58	1970	30	3	27	90%	10	7	233%
62	1970	60	25	35	58%	35	10	40%
65	2002	9	2	7	78%	2	0	0%
		<b>5,586</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>4,533</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>1,448</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>38%</b>

# Appendix 3.3

## Sunday School Attendance without Peak Information

id	Arrival of Pastor	Today	More/ Less	% Growth
3	30	35	5	17%
4	10	10	0	0%
10	35	30	-5	-14%
12	8	8	0	0%
14	4	4	0	0%
15	19	28	9	47%
21	25	75	50	200%
22	1	10	9	900%
29	0	2	2	
31	0	7	7	
34	30	30	0	0
37	50	60	10	20%
43	12	50	38	317%
44	9	12	3	33%
45	6	10	4	67%
46	150	150	0	0%
52	33	127	94	285%
53	15	27	12	80%
56	0	3	3	
59	1	2	1	100%
61	2	7	5	250%
63	130	130	0	0%
64	35	37	2	6%
	<b>605</b>	<b>854</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>41%</b>

# Appendix 4

id	Fear Too Many?	LGBT Percentage of Membership		
		% LGBT When Pastor Arrived	% LGBT of New Members	% LGBT Today
1		9	15	6
2	Y	1	1	1
3	Y	1	0	1
4		1	1	1
5				25
6	Y	5	5	10
7	Y	3	20	4
8		0	3	1
9	Y	0	0	0
10	Y	0	0	0
11		0	20	3
12	Y	0	75	40
13	Y	10	20	12
14	Y	0	12	3
15		4	27	8
16		0	0	0
17	Y	0	31	16
18		0	5	5
19	Y	25	50	25
20		1	1	1
21		40	50	40
22		0	50	40
23		3	0	3
24		1	1	1
25		1	0	1
26	Y	1	0	1
27	Y	0	33	7
28	Y	5	25	10
29		0	10	8
31	Y	0	0	0
32		0	26	7
33	Y	1	0	1
34	Y	1	0	1
35	Y	5	2	5
37		2	10	4
39	Y	50	30	45
40		4	0	4

41	Y	0	1	1
42	Y	3	5	3
43	Y	10	40	30
44		5	50	10
45		2	22	5
46	Y	8	19	
47	Y	20	50	40
48	Y	1	24	9
49		0	20	
51		2	26	10
52	Y	1	5	6
53	Y	1	15	6
54	Y	0	44	4
55	Y	2	25	15
56		1	20	2
57		0	3	3
58	Y	0	60	20
59		10	1	18
60	Y	1	15	10
61	Y	2	6	10
62	Y	1	15	3
65	Y	0	15	0