Megachurch Attenders: Why they come and Why Some Stay

The data cited in this session can be found at: www.hartfordinstitute.org/innovation3
For additional resources from Innovation[3] visit learnings.leadnet.org

Warren Bird, Leadership Network, Dallas, TX, (www.leadnet.org)
Scott Thumma, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford, CT, (www.hartfordinstitute,org)

A megachurch is any church with a sustained weekly attendance of 2000 people per week.

We asked attendees of 12 megachurches why they came, how they got connected, how they grew spiritually, and why they stayed. We had over 25,000 responses.

Some of our findings:
- Inivitation: 82% were invited by a friends, co-workers or family.
- Age: average age of mega attenders is 40 years old, compared to 50 in all US churches.
- Education: 52% were college grads vs. 38% in all churches.
- Singles: 31 % were singles vs. 16% in other churches.
- Frequency of attendance: 70% said they attend every week vs. 80% for all congregations.
- Giving: 33% say they give 10%.

Points of interest:
- 39% have attended for two years or less--so don't assume anything you did 3 years ago will be effective or remembered.
- Contemporary musical instruments are strongly correlated to congregational growth.

Why they come:
- Most come in the front door, through the worship service.
- Most come at the invitation of friends or family
- Worship is the strongest pull, then the pastor, then the church's reputation.
- The newer they are, the more likely they are to check out the Web site before visiting.
- Size, style of worship, and multiple paths all led to feeling their needs were being met.

Why some stay:
- Not all do; the revolving door is a constant challenge.
- The pastor becomes more important, as do social/community programs and adult programs.
- Friends and family got them in, keep them connected and involved.
- They gain a sense of belonging.
- They are encouraged to find and use their gifts, grow in faith, needs are met.

Why do people leave?
- They move away.
- They don't get involved and don't form relationships.
- You have to work hard to get involved at a megachurch.

How do people move from spectator to participant?

There are many different paths to participation.
- 75% say they got involved in small groups.
- 40% say they have a sense of belonging.
- 42% say they were strongly encouraged to get involved.

How to increase retention: (True for all attenders—not only newcomers)
- Use family and friends to bridge them into participation and involvement.
- Treat them as active participants in the church.
- Develop their gifts and callings.
- Offer multiple avenues and options for involvement.
- Partner with other organizations to increase diversity of ways to be involved.
- Make Christianity costly: demand more by raising the bar.