Introduction

The Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey was first conducted in 2000 and has been followed ever since by surveys every five years (with an additional report in 2008). Since its first run over two decades ago, the religious landscape of the United States has changed considerably. Naturally, the UCC has changed with it. The following report highlights several of the most notable trends, drawing on successive FACT surveys to trace changes in attendance, participation, congregational conflict, and part-time clergy.

Attendance and Participation have Declined

On average, mean weekend worship attendance declined by 17% every five years between 2000 and 2020 (Figure 1); the decline in median attendance over the same period was 16% every five years. In 2000, an average of roughly 143 people attended weekend worship at UCC churches; median worship attendance was 100 for the year. In 2020, the average and the median number of attendees were roughly 67 and 50, respectively—approximately 53% and 50% of what they were in 2000. Akin to other American mainline Protestant denominations, worship attendance and membership among UCC congregations have both steadily declined since the mid-20th century.¹⁻⁵
Congregational engagement is not represented by worship attendance alone. Rather, the social and community programs offered by churches are integral aspects of their mission, often involving persons who are not regular worship attendees. Since 2000, median participation among the UCC congregations has been greater than median worship attendance even as both have declined (Table 1). In 2000, median participation and worship attendance were 130 and 100, respectively. Analysis of the UCC’s FACT 2020 sample found median participation (65 people) and attendance (50 people) to be roughly 50% of what they were 20 years ago.6

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Median Participants</th>
<th>Median Worship Attendees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Congregational Conflict has Declined

Between 2000 and 2020, conflict within UCC FACT congregations became less frequent (Figure 2). In 2000, 85% of UCC congregations reported experiencing conflict in the preceding 5 years; in 2020, that figure was 65%. The percentage of UCC FACT congregational respondents reporting serious conflict in the previous 5 years declined.
between 2000 and 2020 from roughly 59% to 36%. Intra-congregational conflict is common across faiths: 64% of the overall FACT 2020 population\textsuperscript{ii} reported that at least some level of conflict had occurred in the previous 5 years. Lastly, over 1 in 10 (11%) UCC congregations experienced some level of specifically political conflict in 2020; most (64%) did not.

\textbf{Part-time Clergy are on the Rise}

More UCC clergy are ministering in part-time roles than ever before. Part-time clergy comprised 34\% of the 2020 UCC FACT sample’s clergy; just 17\% of the 2000 sample’s clergy were part-time ministers (Table 2). Among part-time clergy in 2020, the mean hours worked per week was 20. The proportion of part-time clergy who are also employed in a secular setting has trended downward since FACT 2000. Fewer than 1 in 3 (32\%) part-time clergy members had outside secular employment in addition to their ministerial employment in 2020, landing close to the 35\% figure for the 2000 UCC FACT sample.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Part-time Ministry & Secular Employment, 2000–2020}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Congregations Reporting Part-time Clergy & Congregations Reporting Part-Time Clergy with Secular Employment\textsuperscript{iii} \\
\hline
2020 & 488 (43\%) & 155 (32\%) \\
2015 & 309 (36\%) & 126 (41\%) \\
2010 & 208 (35\%) & Unknown (data not collected in 2010) \\
2000 & 121 (17\%) & 52 (35\%) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textbf{Citations:}

Although the questions about congregations’ experiences with conflict have varied, they all queried (1) whether respondents’ congregations had experienced some level of internal conflict (i.e., between congregants, clergy, or clergy & congregants) about finances, leadership, theology, etc., in the preceding 5 years, and (2) the outcomes or severity of said conflict(s). For example, FACT 2000 queried whether congregations had experienced theological conflict in the preceding 5 years. Response options included no, as well as yes, and it was very serious, moderately serious, or not very serious. FACTs 2015 and 2020 queried for any conflict; response options—which were non-exclusive—were no, yes, but it/they were not serious, as well as yes, and it at least one instance some people left, some people withheld donations, and a clergy leader or staff member left.

Traditions represented in 2020 included Protestant (both Evangelical and Mainline), Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and other Christian groups, as well as Unitarian Universalism, the Baha’i Faith, Islam, and Judaism.

Of those reporting part-time ministry.