

About This Report: Reading the Numbers

Introduction: The Connectional Table contracted with The Martec Group, an international research company, to measure thoughts, feelings, perceptions and attitudes of United Methodists around the world. Researchers collected thousands of individual perspectives through in-depth telephone interviews, short telephone queries and an on-line survey. About two-thirds of those interviewed were United Methodist lay persons; the remainder included clergy or other church professionals.

This study is designed to provide an overview—a snapshot—of the thinking of church leaders. The information describes current views. It does not offer prescriptions for change. It provides a shared starting point for Christian conversation about our present and future.

Because measuring each individual's strength of feeling is a key element, many questions are rated on a scale. That provides response options for those who believe strongly about a topic and those who do not.

In many instances, the researchers choose to display only the “agree strongly” or “extremely important” numbers. They do not include numbers for respondents who take a “somewhat” position on the questions. This helps to distinguish between those who feel strongly on a question and those who do not.

One example of this can be found on pages 55-56 of the “Survey of United Methodist Laity and Clergy.” This section focuses on evangelism to attract young adults to the church. The report reflects respondents who “agree strongly.” That enables those reviewing the research to compare what people say about wanting to give a high priority to reaching young people, with what they say is their willingness to actually change worship styles or allocate resources in order to attract and retain younger participants. For example, 59 percent of the clergy “agree strongly” that the church needs to give more attention/priority to evangelism to attract young people. Asked if their church is willing to change/add worship options to attract young people, however, only 21 percent “agree strongly.”

In instances where sharp differences—high levels of agreement and disagreement—are evident, numbers all along the scale are shown.

On pages 60-61, for instance, the report shows wide ranges of agreement/disagreement of clergy/laity in the U.S. jurisdictions on church statements regarding homosexuality. The responses reflect contrasts between regional jurisdictions.

This report is designed to serve as a resource for discussion now and as a baseline for future research on the state of The United Methodist Church. Future studies may be compared with the results of this report to measure how views may change over time.