

Study: Congregants happier with good friends in pews

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [January 11, 2011](#) issue

Close friendships among churchgoers, rather than theology, seem to be the key to happiness among religious people, according to a new study.

One-third of Americans who attend religious services weekly and have three to five close friends in the congregation said they are "extremely satisfied" with their lives. In comparison, only one in five Americans who attend services weekly but have no close friends in the congregation say they are extremely satisfied.

"In short, 'sitting alone in the pew' does not enhance one's life satisfaction," conclude authors Chaeyoon Lim of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Robert D. Putnam of Harvard University in a December article in *American Sociological Review*.

"Only when one forms social networks in a congregation does religious service attendance lead to a higher level of life satisfaction."

Researchers found that 23 percent of people who attend religious services several times a year and have three to five close friends in the congregation are extremely satisfied. About a fifth of people who never attend services also say they are extremely satisfied with their lives.

The findings are based on the Faith Matters Survey of U.S. adults. —RNS