

Protestant churches adopt new technology: Congregations have growing Web presence

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Although churches are frequently viewed as behind the times, a new study shows that Protestant congregations are quickly embracing new technologies.

According to the Barna Group survey, since 2000 many congregations in various regional, denominational and sociological categories have embraced the Internet, videography and other high-tech methods of carrying out their ministries.

For example, the study showed that 57 percent of all Protestant churches now have a Web site—up from 34 percent in 2000. The greatest increases in that category came among mainline Protestant churches, 70 percent of which now have a presence on the World Wide Web.

The study also found that churches located in the western states, churches with large congregations and churches with mostly white parishioners are most likely to have Web sites.

In addition, the survey determined that a large majority—62 percent—of all Protestant churches use large-screen projection technology. In 2000, only 39 percent of them used large screens. Once again, large congregations and predominantly white churches were most likely to use projection screens.

One technological area in which the study found little growth among Protestant churches was use of electronic funds transfer, or EFT, technology for contributions. Twelve percent of congregations use that service, up from 7 percent in 2000. Churches in the Northeast have been much more open to the technology, with 28 percent embracing EFT.

George Barna, who directed the study, expects churches to embrace further technological trends in the next five years. “During the next half of this decade we

expect increased broadband access, podcasting, and ubiquitous adoption of handheld mobile computing devices by consumers to further alter the way churches conduct ministry," he said.

The data for the study were gathered from telephone interviews with 845 senior pastors of Protestant churches around the country, conducted in June. The sampling has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 percentage points. -*Associated Baptist Press*