

Megachurches a draw for those under 45: Members often invite others to church

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Megachurches are most attractive to younger adults, and almost all who arrive at their sanctuaries have attended church elsewhere before, a new survey shows.

The study by Leadership Network and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research found that almost two-thirds (62 percent) of adults who attend Protestant megachurches are younger than 45, compared to 35 percent in U.S. Protestant congregations overall.

Researchers found that just 6 percent of those attending a megachurch—defined as a congregation attended by 2,000 or more each week—had never attended a worship service before arriving at their current church.

Almost half (44 percent) had come from another local church, 28 percent had transplanted from a distant congregation and 18 percent had not attended church for a while, according to the study, released on June 9.

“It appears that megachurches draw persons who want a new experience of worship—contemporary, large-scale, professional, high-tech,” said Scott Thumma, coauthor of *Not Who You Think They Are: The Real Story of People Who Attend America’s Megachurches*.

“The nearly 30 percent coming from a distant church previously . . . want a place to plug in immediately to a community, missions and small groups.”

Thumma said he was surprised at the extent to which megachurch attendees invite others to worship with them; just 13 percent said they had not invited anyone in the past year.

In comparison, a different survey by the Hartford Institute found that 45 percent of attendees of mostly mainline Protestant churches had not invited anyone in that time frame.

“That is radically different from anything I have experienced in other churches,” said Thumma, a sociologist of religion at Hartford Seminary, “and goes a long way to explain why these congregations are growing at such rapid rates.”

The new study was based on responses to questionnaires by 24,900 attenders of 12 megachurches. The member survey, which had a 58 percent response rate, was supplemented by researcher visits, interviews and staff surveys. *-Religion News Service*