

Survey finds more megachurches (1,200+) than expected: Texas and California have the most

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Protestant megachurches—those with weekly attendance exceeding 2,000—may be far more prevalent than originally thought.

Researchers at the Connecticut-based Hartford Institute for Religion Research and the Dallas-based Leadership Network say they have discovered that the number of Protestant megachurches may be at least 1,200 rather than about 850, the figure they have cited before.

“It’s hard to believe we missed so many,” said Scott Thumma, a professor at Hartford Seminary, where the institute is housed.

“At one point, there were small [enough] numbers of megachurches that one person could kind of know them all. Now there’s become so many that it really takes some kind of team effort or sharing of information in order to keep up.”

Thumma is collaborating with experts at Leadership Network, an organization that works with pastors of large churches, to further ascertain the numbers of churches that claim more than 2,000 in weekly attendance.

“Our preliminary research for the major survey effort indicates there could very well be another 200 to 400 megachurches in addition to these,” said Warren Bird of Leadership Network in a statement. “We’ll have to see what information the questionnaires return to know for sure.”

Thumma said critics who thought the large congregations were a baby-boom phenomenon that would wane quickly seem to be incorrect: “In fact, they’re increasing almost exponentially over the last 20 years. We’ve found megachurches now in just about every state.”

Although researchers must await results of surveys they were to send to more than 1,700 large congregations in mid-May, they already have a sense of where the largest of some 1,200 megachurches are. Texas has the most with 174, followed by California with 169, Florida with 83 and Georgia with 64. *-Religion News Service*