

Summary of Responses to the FACT 2020 survey Question: “What are your top 2 concerns about the future of your congregation's ministry? (max 50 characters)”

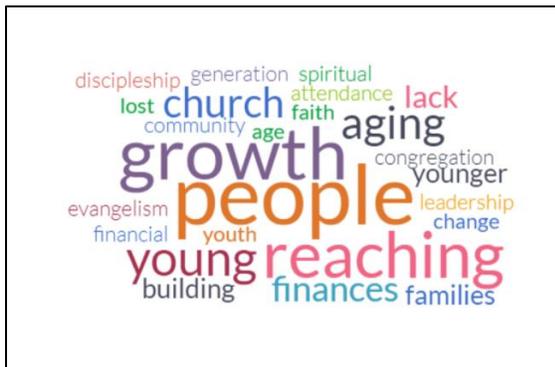
Introduction

On February 24th, 2020, the Church of the Nazarene participated in the national interfaith FACT 2020 (Faith Communities Today) survey by sending out email invites to 2,005 Nazarene churches. A total of 326 churches began the survey, 257 completed the survey. The following is a brief summary of the responses to an open-ended question asking the leader’s top two concerns for the future of their congregation.

Before getting to the summary, it seems prudent to point out the negative format of this question, it asks for “2 top concerns.” The responses to the question, while important, should not be interpreted as “doom and gloom,” nor taken as a generalized view in which church leaders view the church. For in fact, the following question on the survey asks a positive question for which there were many positive responses given: **What are the top 2 aspects of your congregation's ministry that you are most proud of?** In other words, the responses to the question for this summary should be understood as just half of the negative/positive views church leaders have of their church and community.

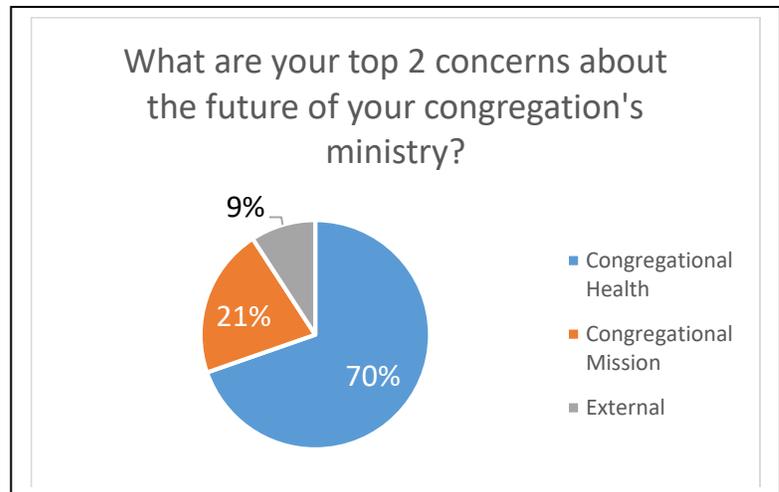
Summary

The open-ended question: **What are your top 2 concerns about the future of your congregation's ministry? (max 50 characters)** received a total of 468 unique responses (78% of respondents gave the requested two responses, 5% only one, and 23% did not answer the question). The Word Clouds below show pictures of the most used words to the two responses. Central to both responses is “People,” which was a theme that ran through almost all of the categories and subcategories. The respondents expressed concern for “People” in both positive way and negative ways. Positively, “People” are a focus of concern because they are those who need to be reached, saved, disciplined, and brought into leadership in the church. Negatively, “People” are a focus of concern because they are getting older, are attending church less, giving less, participating less in the life of the church.



Also central to the respondent's concerns, as can be seen in the Word Clouds, are the twin items of "Growth" and "Finances." Taken together these two items account for 44% of all the responses to this question.

Because this was an open-ended question, there was not only a wide range of responses, but also differing terminology used for similar concepts. In order to make the responses more conducive for comparison I have grouped them into three broad categories: Congregational Health Concerns, Congregational Mission Concerns, and External Concerns. Congregational Health Concerns accounted for 326 responses, or 70% of the responses.



Congregational Mission Concerns accounted for 99 responses, or 21% of the responses. External Concerns accounted for 43 responses, or 9% of the responses.

Within these three broad categories, I further categorized the responses into fourteen subcategories as follows (number of responses):

- 1. Congregational Health (326)**
 - a. Church attendance/church growth (134)
 - b. Finances (72)
 - c. Lack of young people (50)
 - d. Aging of the congregation (25)
 - e. Church building (23)
 - f. Pastoral leadership (14)
 - g. Church closure (8)
- 2. Congregational Mission (99)**
 - a. Evangelism (32)
 - b. Living Out Mission (32)
 - c. Discipleship (26)
 - d. Spiritual Growth (9)
- 3. External (42)**
 - a. Outreach to the community (25)
 - b. Cultural change (11)
 - c. Denominational (7)

I. Congregational Health

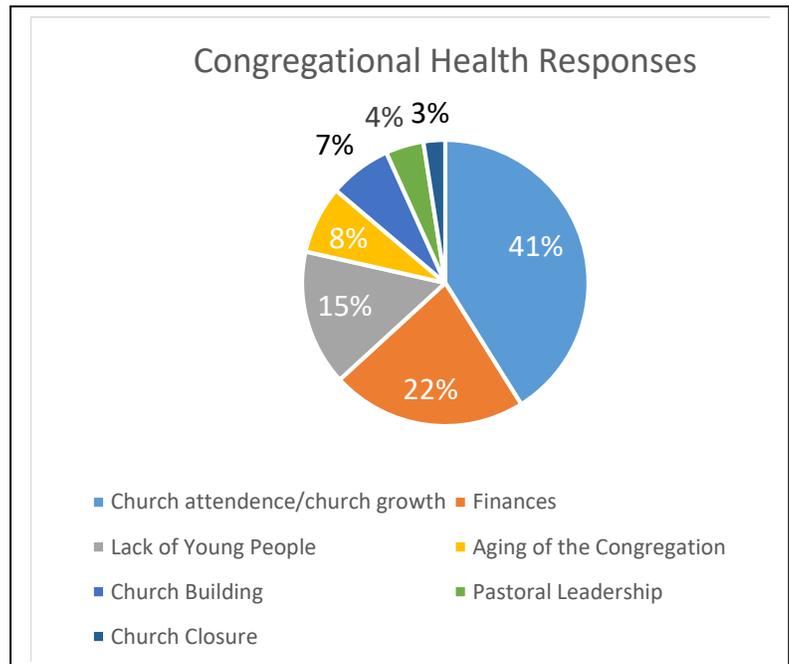
Congregational Health concerns accounted for the greatest number of responses (326). The category also included the two most common responses for the question in general: Church attendance/church growth (134) and Finances (72). When combined, these two responses accounted for not just 63% of the Congregational Health responses, but of 44% of all responses across all three broad categories.

Concerning the “**Growth**” responses, these were not in reference to spiritual growth, “spiritual growth” responses are categorized under the “Congregational Mission” category. These “growth” responses focus numbers.

The “**Finances**” responses most often were general, such as “finances,” “financial,” and “financial stability.” Other responses though specifically targeted certain financial concerns such as “Not enough finances to do local ministry well,” “Not being able to pay a full time pastor,” and “The next generation embracing a financial commitment to God and the Church.”

The next two highest responses both center around age but in opposite ways: **Aging of the Congregation** and **Lack of Young People**. Together, these two responses account for 23% of the responses in this category. Interestingly, the concern for the lack of young people is not simply a lack of them in the church, but also, even if they are in the church, are not taking active rolls in leadership and giving. One response touched on both these aspects of aging at the same time: “Younger people replacing those who have moved on to heaven.”

The final three sub-categories, though fewer in number than the previous ones, often were tied to the previous responses. In the “**Church Building**” sub-category, many responses centered on deferred-maintenance and repair, which is often the result of financial strain. The “**Pastoral Leadership**” sub-category also had several responses centered on challenges with keeping good staff or financially affording a pastor. Several also expressed concern about the next pastoral transition concerning whether or not the church would be viable after the current pastor retired. The final sub-category, “**Church Closure**,” speaks for itself, but was also tied with not just financial and attendance issues, but also leadership issues, as one person wrote: “People not becoming involved so that the church closes.”



II. Congregational Mission

Congregational Mission responses accounted for the second most responses, 21%. The two largest categories are **Evangelism** and **Living Out Mission**. **Evangelism** responses focused on both the need to bring more new “souls” into the church as well as the need for “soul winners” in the church. As one respondent said, their concern is “Wanting them to grasp their responsibility to share Christ.” **Living Out Mission** included positive responses such as “Integrity, character, and completing Mathew 28, the Great Commission,” but also negative responses such as: “Great Sunday morning attendance & att. Rest of week, blah.”

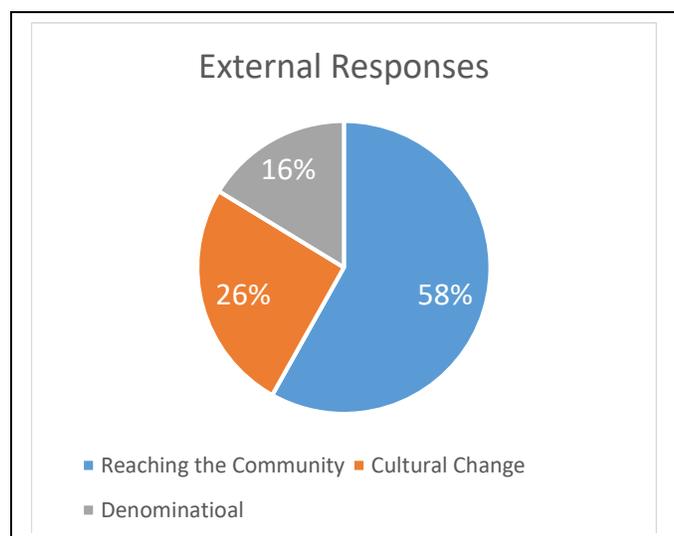


The concern for “**Discipleship**” again was twofold, the need for discipleship in general, but also a more personal aspect of the need for the laity to take an active role in “one-on-one discipleship.” The “**Spiritual Growth**” responses included concerns for “spiritual growth,” “spiritual maturity,” and “spiritual depth.”

III. External

The concerns our respondents have are not just about the activities within their churches or their church people’s lives, but are also external, such as political, social, and denominational forces.

On a positive note, “**Reaching Our Community**” respondents expressed a strong desire to be able to engage with their larger community. Some challenges with this are a shrinking population base around their church, as one respondent wrote, “Young people have no economic reason to remain in the area.” For others it is finding ways to engage with other cultures who are becoming part of their community, such as “Reaching out the Hispanic population that surrounds us.”



“**Cultural Change**” were negative responses focused on concerns related to sexual morality issues, political “idolatry,” and the “influence political correctness.”

In addition, several had “**Denominational**” concerns. Some concerns here echoed the larger “**Cultural Change**” concerns around perceived relaxing of standards toward sexual morality. Others expressed concerns about denominational leadership.

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