

Faith Digest

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Church health trends not looking good. American congregations have grown less healthy in the last decade, with fewer people in the pews and aging memberships, according to a new Hartford Seminary study. Median worship attendance at a typical congregation decreased from 130 to 108, according to the [Faith Communities Today](#) survey, based on responses from more than 11,000 Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations in 2010 and more than 14,000 congregations in 2000. The percentage of congregations with average weekend worship attendance of 100 or fewer inched up from 42 percent to 49 percent over the decade. More than a quarter of congregations had 50 or fewer people attending in 2010. Across the board—among white evangelical, white mainline and racial/ethnic congregations—there was a decrease in attendance. In many cases, congregations not only are seeing fewer people but older ones in their pews. At least one-third of members in more than half of mainline Protestant congregations are 65 or older.

Most Americans don't know candidate's religion. Six out of 10 Americans don't know Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney is a Mormon, a new survey shows. Just 42 percent identified the former Massachusetts governor as a Mormon, according to the Washington-based [Public Religion Research Institute](#). That figure remains unchanged from July 2011, despite a flurry of media attention after a prominent supporter of Texas Gov. Rick Perry—Robert Jeffress, pastor of [First Baptist Church in Dallas](#)—called Romney's religion a "cult." The only group that showed an increased knowledge about Romney's religion was white evangelicals, whose knowledge of Romney's faith rose from 44 percent in July to 53 percent in mid-October. Researchers found Perry trails both Romney and rival Herman Cain among white evangelicals on measures of political

affinity but is relatively even with Cain on measures of religious affinity. Just 8 percent of evangelical voters said Romney's beliefs are closest to their own. The poll is based on a random sample of 1,019 adults, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Supreme Court steers clear of roadside crosses. The Supreme Court announced it will not reopen a case in which a lower court ruled highway crosses memorializing Utah state troopers are unconstitutional. The Utah Highway Patrol Association had erected 12-foot white crosses to honor fallen officers since 1998. The American Atheists filed suit in 2005. The group lost its first legal challenge, but the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last year that the memorials "have the impermissible effect of conveying to the reasonable observer the message that the state prefers or otherwise endorses a certain religion." The conservative [Alliance Defense Fund](#), which asked the Supreme Court to consider the case, was disappointed. "Justice is not well served when unhappy atheists can use the law to mow down memorial crosses and renew the suffering for the survivors," Alliance Defense Fund Senior Counsel Byron Babione said.

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