

Most churches still have Wednesday evening activities

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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—What began as midweek prayer meetings in the 18th century has become an accepted part of congregational life in the vast majority of Protestant churches in America.

Nine in 10 Protestant pastors say they have some type of activity on Wednesday night, according to a new study from LifeWay Research. Only 10 percent say they have no regular events on Wednesday evening.

“Church leaders frequently discuss the difficulty of getting people to participate in church activities multiple days each week,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “Yet the vast majority of churches are still open and active on Wednesday nights.”

While the historic roots of Wednesday night church gatherings centered on prayer, the study found the modern usage of a midweek service stretch beyond that.

Almost six in 10 churches have small-group adult Bible study classes. Most (53 percent) also have some type of student ministry or youth group gathering.

Around half of pastors (48 percent) say they have children’s activities. Slightly less (45 percent) use the night for a prayer meeting.

About two in five pastors say their churches have choir or worship team rehearsals on Wednesday.

A third (33 percent) say their church has a worship service that night, while

8 percent say they do something else.

Small churches least likely to meet midweek

Churches drawing smaller groups on Sunday morning are the most likely to say they do not hold Wednesday night activities.

Around a third (31 percent) of pastors of churches with Sunday morning attendance of less than 50 say they don't have any midweek events.

"It is not surprising when we see smaller churches doing fewer types of activities," McConnell said. "Church activities require leaders and preparation. Small churches only have so many people to whom they can turn. Yet two-thirds of these churches choose to gather on Wednesday nights."

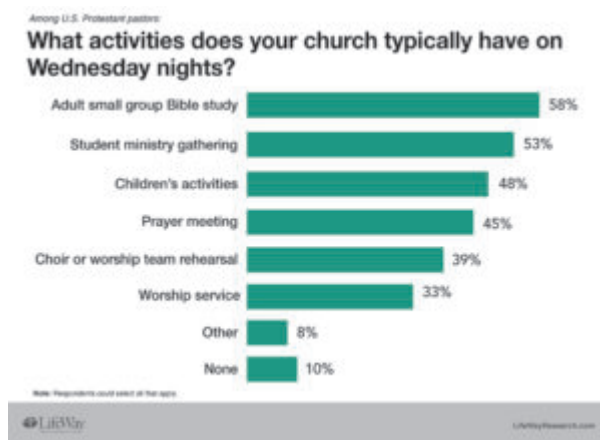
Among churches with Sunday attendance of 250 or more, 75 percent say they have small-group adult Bible study classes.

Eight in 10 pastors of this size church (80 percent) say their church has a student ministry or youth group gathering.

Pastors of churches with 250 or more in attendance are also the most likely to say they have choir or worship team rehearsal on Wednesday evening (58 percent).

Larger churches more likely to schedule Wednesday activities

The larger the church, the more likely they are to have a worship service on Wednesday night—those with a Sunday worship service of less than 50 (23 percent), those with an attendance of 50 to 99 (30 percent), attendance of 100 to 249 (38 percent), and attendance of 250 or more (41 percent).



Pentecostal pastors (62 percent) are the most likely to say they have a Wednesday evening worship service.

Pastors in the South are the most likely to say they maintain the traditional Wednesday night prayer meeting (54 percent).

Evangelical pastors (54 percent) are more likely than mainline pastors (36 percent) to hold midweek prayer meetings. Baptists are the most likely denominational group (74 percent) to reserve Wednesday night for prayer.

“The church exists 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of whether the doors to the building are open or not,” McConnell said. “But research demonstrates that church buildings are welcoming people much more frequently than one hour on Sunday morning. In fact, it is rare to find a church closed on a Wednesday night.”

Researchers conducted the phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors August 29 to Sept. 11, 2018. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches, and analysts used quotas for church size. Callers conducted each interview with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called.

Analysts weighted responses by region to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys, providing 95 percent

confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent.
Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.