

Sunday mornings still segregated; that's OK with worshippers

January 15, 2015

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in American life, with more than eight in 10 congregations made up of one predominant racial group.

And most worshippers like it that way.

CHURCH SEGREGATION

VIEWS AMONG CHURCHGOERS:

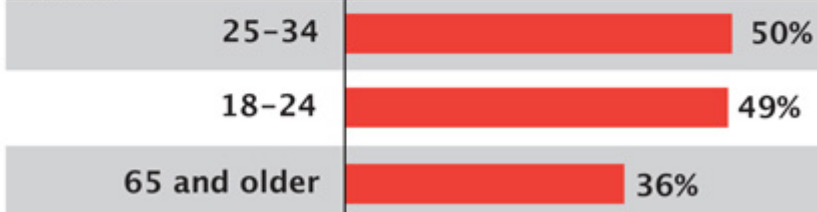
Percent who agree with statement:

“My church needs to become more ethnically diverse.”

BY RACE:



BY AGE:



Two-thirds of American churchgoers (67 percent) say their church has done enough to become racially diverse.

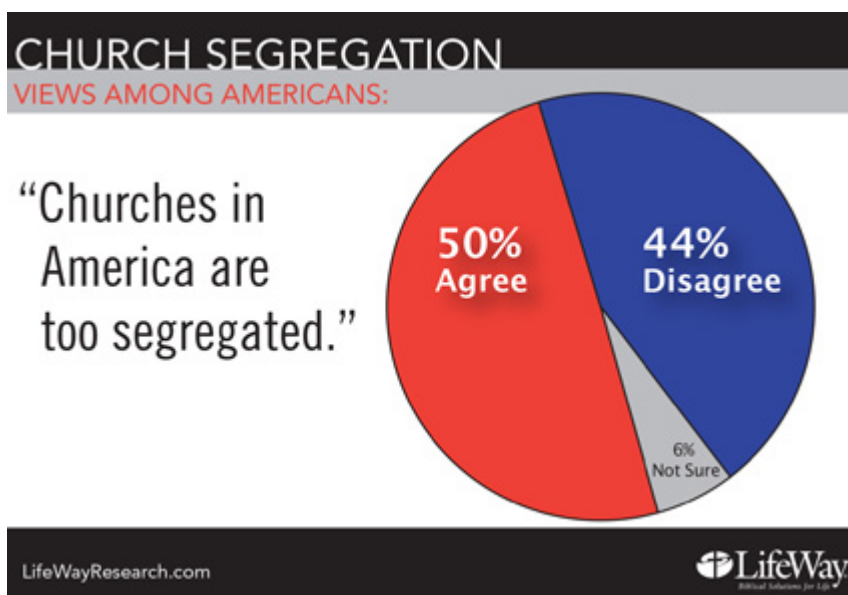
And less than half think their church should become more diverse.

Those are among the findings of a study of church segregation by Nashville-based [LifeWay Research](#). Researchers surveyed 994 churchgoers—who attend worship at least at holidays or more often—about race and the church. They also surveyed 1,000 Americans as well as 1,000 Protestant senior pastors.

Churchgoers, researchers found, are lukewarm about diversity. More than half (53 percent) disagree with the statement, “My church needs to become more ethnically diverse.” Four in 10 agree.

Researchers also found churchgoers who oppose more diversity do so with gusto. A third (33 percent) strongly disagree their church needs to be more diverse. More than four in 10 (42 percent) felt strongly their church was doing enough.

Evangelicals (71 percent) are most likely to say their church is diverse enough, while whites (37 percent) are least likely to say their church should become more diverse.



African-Americans (51 percent) and Hispanic-Americans (47 percent) were more likely to say their church needs to be more diverse.

“Surprisingly, most churchgoers are content with the ethnic status quo in

their churches,” said Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research. “In a world where our culture is increasingly diverse, and many pastors are talking about diversity, it appears most people are happy where they are—and with whom they are.

“Yet, it’s hard for Christians to say they are united in Christ when they are congregating separately.”

Most segregated hour

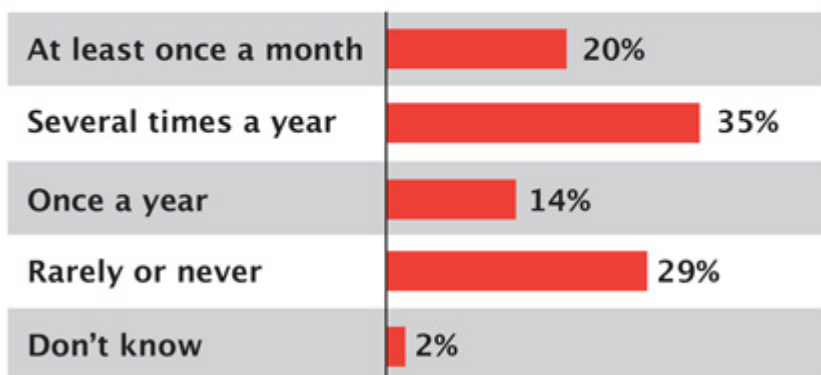
Not long after giving his famed “I Have A Dream” speech during the March on Washington in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was invited to lecture on race at Western Michigan University.

In a question-and-answer session after the lecture, King said Christians in the United States fail to live out the tenets of their faith.

CHURCH SEGREGATION

VIEWS AMONG PROTESTANT PASTORS:

Number of times pastors speak to their churches about racial reconciliation



LifeWayResearch.com



“We must face the fact that in America the church is still the most segregated major institution in America,” he said. “At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic.”

A previous study of Protestant pastors by LifeWay Research found more

than eight in 10 (86 percent) have congregations with one predominant racial group. The National Congregations Study found a similar lack of diversity in houses of worship.

As part of the study on segregation, LifeWay Research also surveyed 1,000 Americans about race. They found only about a third (34 percent) of Americans have regularly attended a house of worship where they were a minority.

Among those who had attended a church as a minority, one in five said their ethnicity hindered their involvement. Of those who have not been a minority in church, nearly a quarter (22 percent) say being a minority in a congregation would make them feel uncomfortable.

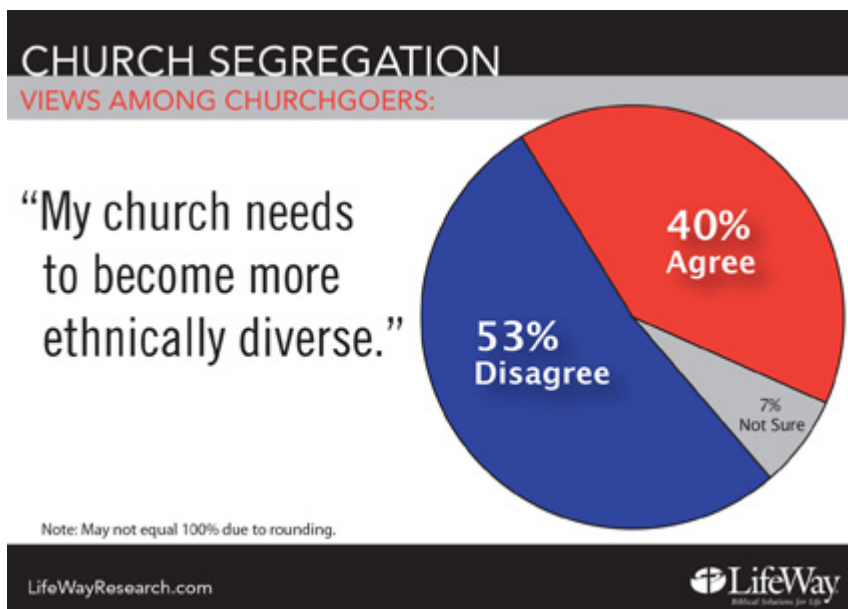
Still, many Americans believe churches should be more diverse. Half (50 percent) agree with the statement, “Churches in America are too segregated.” Four in 10 (44 percent) disagree.

“It’s fair to say churchgoers in communities with little ethnic diversity perhaps cannot relate to a multi-ethnic expectation,” Stetzer said. “But in urban settings, other ethnic groups are not far away.”

Pastors value diversity more than churchgoers do

In a survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors, LifeWay Research found many have some diversity in their professional and social circles.

Most (84 percent) say they have spoken with a friend from a different ethnic group within the last week. Two-thirds (63 percent) say they've met with ministers from another ethnic group in the past month.



Still, for many pastors, the issue of racial reconciliation seldom comes up in sermons. Four in 10 (43 percent) say they speak on the issue once a year or less. Twenty-nine percent of pastors rarely or never do.

About a third (35 percent) speak several times a year. In addition, one in five speak about race at least once a month.

"The Bible talks a lot about men and women from every tongue, tribe and nation being in heaven, so it might be good to get accustomed to that heavenly expression here and now," Stetzer said.

Previous LifeWay Research studies have found nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of Protestant senior pastors say their church is involved personally in racial reconciliation. Almost all (90 percent) say racial reconciliation is mandated by the gospel.

Researchers also found most Americans (82 percent) believe diversity is good for the country. Three-quarters of Americans (74 percent) say the country has made progress on race relations. But eight in 10 (81 percent) say there still is a long way to go.

All survey samples provide 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.5 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.