

## **Churches Feel the Competition**

Summarized and posted by Bob Young

According to a new survey released by American Congregations 2008, nearly two-thirds of U.S. congregations say they feel at least some competition from nearby churches. The report, titled FACT (Faith Communities Today), was written by David A. Roozen, director of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership and professor of Religion and Society at Hartford Seminary.

Old-line Protestant churches indicate feeling significant competition (42%) than the evangelical Protestant groups (19%) and the Catholic/Orthodox churches (13%). Of non-Christian groups—including Jewish, Muslim and Baha'i—37% say they feel at least some competition in drawing newcomers. The old-line Protestant groups see the competition as an obstacle to attracting new people. The report suggests that the sense of competition is due in part to the “sameness” that churches perceive in comparison with other churches. That is, the more a congregation feels that it is similar to surrounding congregations, the greater the sense of competition and the more difficult it is to understand why certain “similar groups” are succeeding in attracting people. The survey shows that the greater a congregation's sense of being different and the greater a congregation's clarity about its purpose, the less competition it feels from other groups.

While competition from nearby congregations is a challenge for many, surveyed congregations were most likely to identify the general lack of interest in religion as an obstacle to attracting new people. Of the congregations surveyed, 76% say lack of interest is at least some of the challenge. The survey notes that an increasingly mobile population presents another significant challenge.