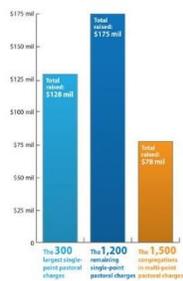


United But Not Uniform

We may be a United Church, but we are definitely not a uniform church. In 2011, there were about 3,000 congregations: 1,500 were single-point pastoral charges, and 1,500 were part of 659 multiple-point pastoral charges.

If the United Church were uniform, one would expect to find that the people and financial resources of single-point pastoral charges would equal multiple-point pastoral charges.

In the chart, the two blue bars are the single-point pastoral charges. The light blue bar shows the 300 congregations with the highest average worship attendance, while the dark blue bar represents the remaining 1,200 single-point charges. The orange bar represents all 1,500 multiple-point congregations.



The total money raised by the light blue group is 65 percent higher than the total for all multiple-point pastoral charges combined. In fact, in almost every Year Book measurement, the top 300 congregations exceed the total of the multiple-point pastoral charges.

Make no mistake: a congregation in the top 300 is not better than a multiple-point congregation. Each will have its own strengths and challenges — but very different strengths and very different challenges.

Given the magnitude of the differences, I wonder if we don't need to imagine ourselves, not as a United Church, but as a Trinitarian Church — one in three and three in one: (1) large single-point pastoral charges; (2) medium and small single-point pastoral charges; and (3) multiple-point pastoral charges.

I wonder if we have the capacity to imagine different ways of being church for each grouping? And to provide different resources and supports for each of them?

Whatever else can be made of this data, it is certainly clear that there is no such thing as a "typical" United Church congregation. Whenever we talk about congregations, we need to be very clear just what sort of congregation we are imagining.

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