

NEWS RELEASE from ELLISON RESEARCH

**** For Immediate Release: July 14, 2008 ****

SUMMARY:

A new study finds that “churched” and “unchurched” often are not clear definitions of how Americans behave when it comes to attending religious services. Many “churched” people attend services irregularly, while many of the “unchurched” do not avoid religious services altogether. The study estimates up to 43 million adults will visit a house of worship they don’t regularly attend during the coming year.

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Additional data from the study can be found at

<http://www.ellisonresearch.com/releases/20080714.htm>

RADIO NEWS DIRECTORS: quotes/comments on the study can be downloaded in MP3 format for news use at <http://www.ellisonresearch.com/releases/20080714.htm>

FULL RELEASE:

Study results released today from Ellison Research (Phoenix, Arizona) show the traditional definitions of “churched” and “unchurched” often don’t tell a complete story about how Americans attend religious worship services.

The findings are from a study independently designed, funded, and conducted by Ellison Research among a representative sample of over 1,000 American adults. Ellison Research is a full-service marketing research firm.

The study asked Americans to report on their attendance at worship services. Many studies on this topic have traditionally labeled worship attendance as a yes/no equation – people either attend on some type of regular basis (usually monthly or more) and are often called “churched,” or they typically don’t attend frequently enough to be considered “churched” and are often considered simply “unchurched.”

The Ellison Research study showed these labels often don’t tell the whole story. For one thing, only 63% of “churched” Americans actually report attending religious worship services once a week or more. The remaining 37% attend on a regular basis, but don’t make it to worship services every week. They typically attend three times a month (12%), twice a month (16%), or once a month (9%).

For another thing, the “unchurched” often do not entirely stay away from worship services. Among those who don’t attend once a month or more, 18% say they do visit

worship services occasionally, just not on a regular basis. Another 22% are what many Christian pastors term the “C & E’s” – people who attend on special occasions such as Christmas and Easter, Ramadan, Hanukkah, or other religious holidays. Only 60% of the “unchurched” do not attend worship services at all.

Rather than defining “churched” and “unchurched” as a yes/no equation, if American adults are placed on a more realistic continuum based on their normal behavior, attendance at religious services actually looks like this:

- Attend more than once a week: 11%
- Attend once a week: 22%
- Attend two to three times a month: 14%
- Attend once a month: 5%
- Attend occasionally, but not on a regular basis: 9%
- Attend only on religious holidays: 10%
- Do not attend at all: 29%

The Ellison Research study also evaluated current worship attendance based on a family history of attendance. If an adult attended worship services regularly at some point before the age of 18, there is a 55% chance that person is currently attending once a month or more. If the person never attended prior to age 18, there is only a 21% chance that individual is currently attending worship services on a regular basis.

Current worship attendance is also linked to parental religious involvement. When someone grows up with both a mother and a father attending religious services at least occasionally, there is a 62% chance that individual is now regularly attending services as an adult. When someone grows up with only one parent attending services at least occasionally, there is a 50% chance he or she is now attending worship regularly. But when an individual grows up with neither parent regularly attending religious worship services, there is only a 33% chance that person is now regularly attending religious services.

Ron Sellers, president of Ellison Research, noted that the study raises questions about typical definitions of the “unchurched.” “There’s a whole industry seeking to help clergy reach the unchurched, with seminars, books, videos, training centers, and consultants,” Sellers observed. “However, many people don’t really have a basic notion even of just what it means to be ‘unchurched.’ There’s often an assumption that people either do attend worship services, or they don’t. But what we find in this study is that up to one out of every five Americans is attending worship services at least occasionally during the year, even though they are not regularly involved. That has huge implications for local congregations who are trying to attract new people.”

Sellers pointed out that congregational growth is not just a factor of attracting new people, but of keeping those who visit. “Houses of worship spend tremendous resources trying to attract new people, but are they paying enough attention to what happens when that new person walks through the doors for the first time? We estimate that up to 43

million adults who do not regularly attend worship services will visit a church or place of worship at some point during the year, to say nothing of children and teens who visit with their family or on their own. Are those congregations and clergy members ready for them?"

STUDY DETAILS:

The study was conducted by Ellison Research, a marketing research company located in Phoenix, Arizona. The sample of 1,007 adults is accurate to within ±3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level with a 50 percent response distribution.

The study was conducted in all 50 states. Respondents’ age, household income, geography, racial or ethnic background, and gender were carefully tracked to ensure appropriate representation and accuracy.

More complete data from these questions, along with audio commentary files, is available at <http://www.ellisonresearch.com/releases/20080714.htm>.

If you would prefer to receive future news releases at a different e-mail address or wish not to receive them at all, please contact Kathi Denton at Ellison Research (phone 602-493-3500 x8143), or at kathidenton@ellisonresearch.com.

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Actual attendance of religious worship services, by demographics...

| <u>Frequency of Attendance</u> | <u>All</u> | <u>Men</u> | <u>Women</u> | <u>Age</u> <u><35</u> | <u>Age</u> <u>35 – 54</u> | <u>Age</u> <u>55+</u> | <u>White</u> | <u>Black</u> | <u>Hispanic</u> |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| More than four times a month | 11% | 13% | 10% | 11% | 10% | 12% | 9% | 21% | 11% |
| Four times a month | 22 | 18 | 24 | 18 | 18 | 28 | 21 | 20 | 27 |
| 2 – 3 times a month | 14 | 15 | 13 | 14 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 25 | 12 |
| Once a month | 5 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 6 |
| Occasionally, not on regular basis | 9 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 12 |
| Holidays only | 10 | 11 | 10 | 14 | 11 | 7 | 10 | 15 | 6 |
| Not at all | 29 | 31 | 27 | 27 | 32 | 28 | 33 | 8 | 26 |

Actual attendance of religious worship services, by religious background...

| <u>Frequency of Attendance</u> | <u>Born Again</u> | <u>Not Born Again</u> | <u>Evan-gelical</u> | <u>Not Evan-gelical</u> | <u>Father Attended</u> | <u>Father Didn't Attend</u> | <u>Mother Attended</u> | <u>Mother Didn't Attend</u> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| More than four times a month | 20% | 5% | 37% | 7% | 15% | 8% | 12% | 8% |
| Four times a month | 33 | 15 | 38 | 20 | 28 | 18 | 26 | 16 |
| 2 – 3 times a month | 17 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 16 | 13 | 16 | 12 |
| Once a month | 4 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Occasionally, not on regular basis | 8 | 9 | 4 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 10 |
| Holidays only | 7 | 13 | 2 | 12 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 10 |
| Not at all | 11 | 40 | 4 | 32 | 18 | 35 | 23 | 38 |

Actual attendance of religious worship services, by political background...

| <u>Frequency of Attendance</u> | <u>Conservative</u> | <u>Moderate</u> | <u>Liberal</u> | <u>Republican</u> | <u>Independent</u> | <u>Democrat</u> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| More than four times a month | 16% | 9% | 6% | 15% | 7% | 9% |
| Four times a month | 28 | 20 | 15 | 27 | 15 | 23 |
| 2 – 3 times a month | 14 | 16 | 13 | 15 | 14 | 16 |
| Once a month | 4 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| Occasionally, not on regular basis | 8 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| Holidays only | 9 | 12 | 10 | 9 | 11 | 12 |
| Never | 21 | 29 | 40 | 23 | 37 | 26 |

*Numbers may not add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

