

RenewalWorks Facts

- It is based on 15 years of Episcopal research from over 350 churches and 29,000 Episcopalians.
- RenewalWorks began as a ministry of Forward Movement in July 2013 with this vision: to build cultures of discipleship in Episcopal congregations by encouraging a singular focus on spiritual growth – becoming disciples of Jesus.

Respondents describe themselves as mainline or traditional. They are older (75 percent over age 50), white (91 percent white non-Hispanic), wealthy (60 percent report income of \$75,000 or above) and long tenured in their churches (54 percent have attended for more than ten years).

- Responses to the inventory indicate a distinct Episcopal culture, often characterized by a passive and complacent approach to life in the church.
- Many people attend Sunday services but do not feel personally responsible for practicing faith outside of that weekly service.
- ❖ **Other Episcopalians report interest in learning more about a deeper spiritual journey and in being challenged. But they are not sure how to take the next steps.**
- Seventy-three percent of Episcopal respondents identified themselves in the first two stages of spiritual growth; in other words, they consider themselves to be at an early, less mature stage of spiritual development.
- According to their demographic information, these respondents are older in age and have attended their church for longer than ten years, which raises the question: Why haven't more people developed a deeper relationship with Jesus?
- ❖ Data shows that a commitment to daily spiritual practices is a strong driver for movement from the second to the third stage of spiritual growth. Most respondents report that their church does not provide resources that teach, model, or encourage these kinds of spiritual practices.

For instance, while the Episcopal Church stresses the importance of prayer, many congregations fail to offer teaching on prayer as part of church programming or Christian formation. Not surprisingly, respondents indicate a lack of competence or confidence in leading group prayer or praying the Daily Office.

Data also indicate that Episcopal congregations embrace a strong serving culture. However, there is often a lack of clarity about why that service is an expression or outgrowth of Christian identity, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish church mission and outreach from the excellent work of other nonprofit organizations.

- Parishioners in the first two stages (exploring and growing) of the continuum are highly dependent on the church—and specifically the clergy—to help teach, guide, and mentor them.
- With 73 percent placing themselves in the first two stages, the role of clergy in spiritual development is significant.
- This can represent a challenge: Clergy report that the many demands of their jobs pull them away from teaching about personal spiritual practice as well as from being fed themselves in their own spiritual journey.

At the same time, clergy also indicate that they are hesitant to issue a challenge to their parishioners, to elevate expectations amid diminishing attendance and an overall decline in interest in religion.

- ❖ **Parishioners, however, say they want leadership that encourages and teaches them to grow in their faith.**
- ❖ **Sixty percent want the church to help them develop a relationship with Jesus.**
- ❖ **Fifty-seven percent want to be challenged to grow and take next steps spiritually.**

When asked how their current church was doing in those criteria, only 42 percent said they were extremely satisfied or very satisfied with the way their church helps them develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.

- Many people report that the greatest obstacle to their own spiritual development comes from their busy schedules.
- Many clergy report that they are pulled in so many directions that they cannot focus as they would like on their own spiritual growth or the spiritual growth of members of their congregation.
- ❖ **Research indicates identifiable catalysts that can bring transformation and spiritual growth in the lives of parishioners. The four catalysts in particular seem to have influence:**
 - **Engagement with scripture:** At every stage along the continuum, engagement with scripture is transformative.
 - **The transforming power of the eucharist:** For Episcopalians, especially for those beginning an intentional spiritual journey with Jesus, participation in the eucharist is key. The more that churches can help people grow in understanding this mysterious sacrament, the further people move along the spiritual continuum.
 - **A deeper prayer life:** Research indicates a lack of confidence and satisfaction with prayer life. A discernible deepening of relationship with God happens in the same way any relationship grows—through time spent in conversation.
 - **The heart of the leader:** None of this transformation will be possible without the commitment of the leader to his or her own discipleship, including clarity of belief, dedication to spiritual practice, and service in the world.