

Report on 2013 Mennonite Church Canada Congregational Survey

Introduction

In 2012, we conducted a long overdue comprehensive survey of Mennonite Church Canada congregations. 60% of congregations responded to that survey.

The responses to the 2013 congregational survey represent over 60% of our congregations and almost 75% of our members, indicating a higher response rate among larger congregations this year (twice as many of our largest congregations responded in 2013, which impacts some of the comparative data). In total, the responses represent 23,125 members and 19,750 attendees. Outside of MC Sask, just over 60% of the congregations in each Area Church responded to the survey. In MC Sask, 75% of the congregations responded to the survey. While we did receive the same number of survey responses in 2013 as in 2012, our hope is that we can significantly increase participation in the years to come.

As indicated in 2012, many of the survey results are designed to be used as comparative figures. We can begin to make those comparisons this year, but it is too soon to identify any trends with confidence. In the meantime, we have collected some valuable data on age demographics, ethnic diversity and students preparing for ministry.

Once again, the conclusions following represent a mix of actual figures and extrapolated data. Please note that the 2013 survey (unlike the 2012 survey) did not include questions on baptisms, language or the use of Mennonite Church Canada worship resources, as this data is available elsewhere in a more comprehensive and accurate form. Also note that last year's report included extrapolations based on an inaccurate figure for Mennonite Church Canada membership. This year's comparisons therefore include revised extrapolations from 2012.

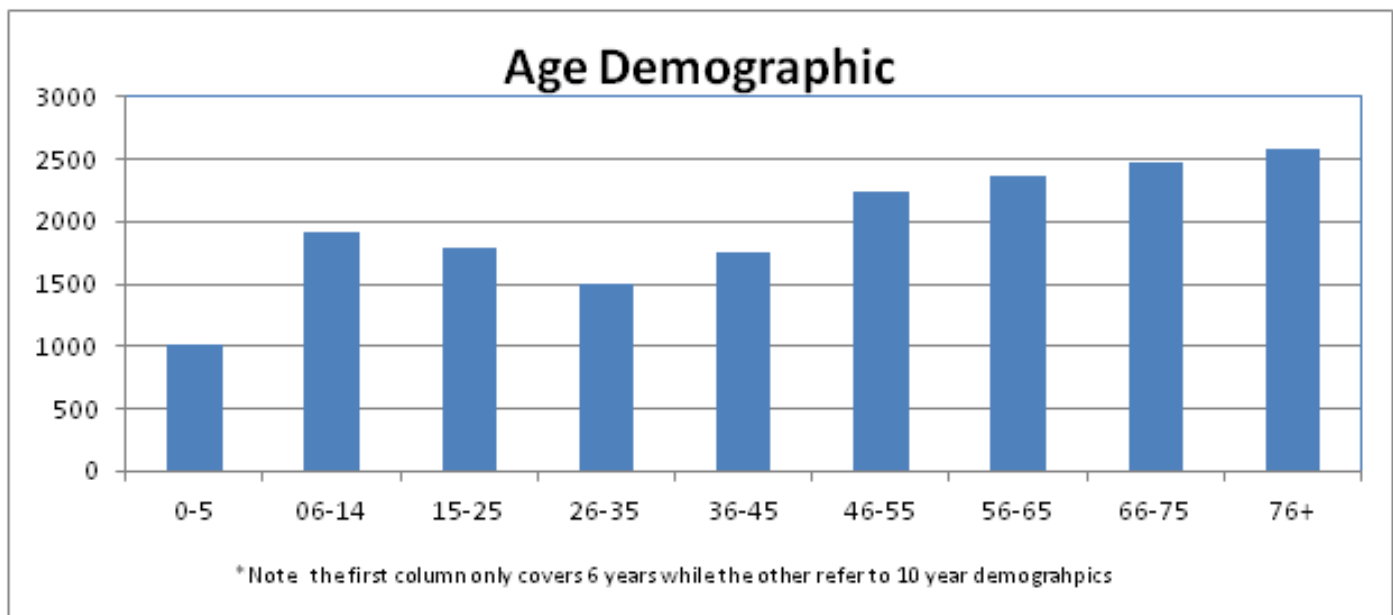
Births and Deaths

This year, congregations reported virtually the same number of births and deaths. Extrapolating from the collected data, there were approximately 450 births and 450 deaths in Mennonite Church Canada congregations in 2013, an average again of two of each per congregation.

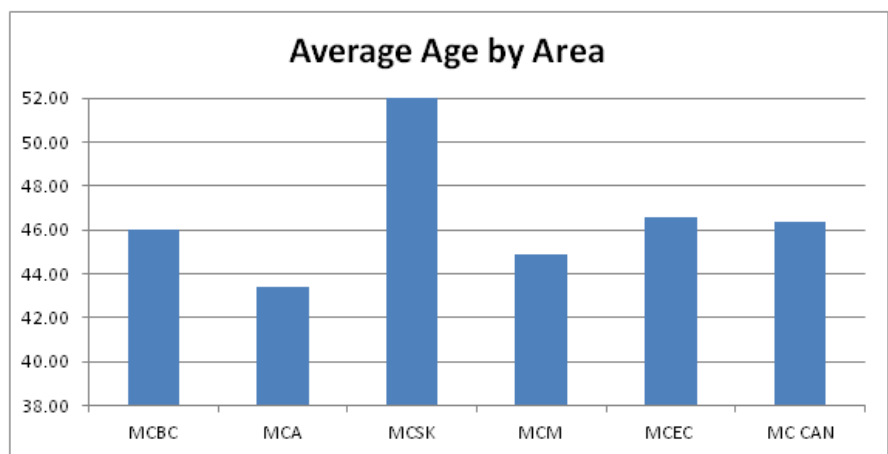
Attendance

The estimated weekly total attendance across Mennonite Church Canada congregations in 2013 was 26,500. The revised estimate of attendance in 2012 is 25,500, so the 2013 figure suggests 1,000 more attendees per week than last year, a 4% increase. It is too early to identify a trend here, but it is surely an encouraging sign given the general decline in church attendance in Canada. Because of the increased response from larger congregations in 2013, the average attendance in each Area Church cannot be fairly compared to 2012.

The average age of Mennonite Church Canada attendees in 2013 was 46.4, up .8 from last year's 45.6. This rise in average age is not surprising. We remain on the low end of denominational age demographic statistics. 31% of our attendees are under the age of 30, a figure which remains unchanged from last year. 42% of our attendees are over 55, which is a slight increase over last year, accounting for the increase in the average age (that increase can be partly accounted for by the increase in the number of larger congregations which responded to the survey, as larger congregations are more likely to show an aging demographic). Over 65% of responding congregations show a balanced age demographic, with an overall average age of 40 (down from 70% last year), while 35% show an aging demographic (i.e. at least two-thirds of attendees are over 50 and the average age is well over 60). The graph below again reflects both the aging demographic and the relative balance in age groups, as well as the ongoing lower numbers in the 26-35 age demographic. Comparing the graph to last year, of note are the steadily rising figures for the higher ages. This may, again, reflect the responses from larger congregations.



Looking at the age demographic data broken down by Area Churches, we find that roughly 30% of the congregations in MCBC and MCA are aging, compared to 50% in MC Sask, 28% in MCM and 35% in MCEC. The differences from 2012 could again be accounted for by the representation from larger congregations, since (as seen in the graph on the right) the average ages in Area Churches remain remarkably consistent in the 2012 and 2013 surveys, suggesting confidence in these figures.



Ethnic Diversity

This year, the question on ethnic representation in congregations was formulated differently and the data and conclusions are therefore more reliable. 65% of the congregations reported at least a few attendees of non-European ethnicity (down from 75% last year). In total, 9% of Mennonite Church Canada attendees were of non-European ethnicity (the same as last year), with 80% of those having a South-East Asian ethnicity and most of the others an African ethnicity.

Students Preparing for Ministry

This year we asked congregations only to report on students who are preparing for ministry. These figures can therefore not be compared to last year's figures, which included all students taking ministry-related courses. In the future, we will be working with actual figures provided by Mennonite Church Canada schools (CMU, Columbia, Conrad Grebel, AMBS) and including all students taking courses in those schools, as this will provide more comprehensive data.

Extrapolating from our 2013 survey results, we can estimate that 160 students in Mennonite Church Canada congregations are preparing for ministry and that roughly 64 of those students

(40%) are attending Mennonite Church Canada schools. Reports from the schools would suggest that, if we are working with a narrow definition of 'preparing for ministry', the second figure is a little high (i.e. there are approximately 50 students from Mennonite Church Canada congregations preparing for ministry in Mennonite Church Canada schools).

Conclusion

The results of this second annual survey continue to provide a positive and hopeful reflection of Mennonite Church Canada congregational life. Challenges remain, but we are well-positioned to respond to those challenges in a thoughtful and creative manner. With the support of congregations and Area Churches, I hope this survey can continue to aid in that process.



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