

Influence of Church Leadership on Congregant Wellbeing

Purpose: To evaluate church members' ratings of their church and its leadership associated with their personal ratings of wellbeing.

Method: The survey was conducted in 6 evangelical churches in the United States by announcement during Sunday services and advertisement in church bulletin/website/email over 4 weeks. Subjects were asked about their background, personal wellbeing, and perceptions of the church and its leadership.

Results: There were 115 participants. Participants mostly were evangelical (97%) and agreed, or strongly agreed, they had good wellbeing (88%). Similar findings were shown in surrogate markers of wellbeing including: contentment, peace, joy and purpose. Ratings for church leaders were generally positive with the best ratings for the pastoral staff and then progressively lower for elders and then small group leaders. Associations of wellbeing to church and leadership ratings with significance levels were found in approximately half of responses. Of these, about 1/3 were still significant following a modified Bonferroni correction. In each question with a significant difference, respondents with the best wellbeing gave higher ratings to the leadership and the church than those with lesser wellbeing. The greatest differences between those with the best and with less wellbeing were most evident among the small group ratings with effective communication (10% vs. 34%, $P=0.0001$) and support the member's needs (20% vs. 42%, $P=0.019$) demonstrating the greatest distinctions.

Conclusion: This study suggests that congregants in evangelical churches generally have high self-perceived wellbeing. Those with the highest wellbeing are more likely to rate their church and leadership more positively than those of lesser wellbeing.

RESULTS

Participants

There were 115 participants. See Table 1 for full demographic information. Demography was unremarkable for the central United States except there was an over-representation of Asian Americans because of their high prevalence in one of the six participating churches. Participants were overwhelmingly evangelical (97%). They also expressed confidence in their acceptance by God based on grace (97%) and in the security of their salvation (88%). The highest ratings for adherence to their faith was for prayer and praise (95% and 92%, respectively).

Rating of wellbeing

When asked if participants had good wellbeing they overwhelmingly indicated they agreed or strongly agreed (88%). Similar findings were shown in surrogate markers of wellbeing including: contentment, peace, joy, purpose and God's acceptance. Please see Table 2. Ratings of leadership and church - Ratings for the pastoral staff, elders and small group leaders were generally positive. For pastors, ratings were highest for knowledge of the Bible (98%), ability to lead and teaching (95%), and strong bible-based vision for the church (87%). Lowest scores were noted with more personal criteria such as: acting on congregant's suggestions (28%), pastoral care (65%) and supporting parishioner's needs (51%). Ratings were generally best for the pastoral staff and then progressively lower to elders and small group leaders. Please see Table 3. Participants noted that they attended their church mostly for teaching (88%) and for the opportunity for spiritual improvement (86%). In contrast, members attended a small group to grow spiritually (65%) and for fellowship (67%). Please see Table 4.

Associations between wellbeing and church and leadership ratings

Associations of wellbeing to church and leadership ratings showed significance to the $P<0.05\%$ level were found in approximately half of the question choices. Of these, about one-third were still significant following the modified Bonferroni correction ($\alpha/2$). In response to every question with a significance level of $P<0.05$, participants with the best wellbeing gave higher ratings to the leadership and the church than those with lesser wellbeing. Please see Table 5. The greatest differences between those with the best and with less wellbeing were most evident among the small group ratings with effective communication (10% vs. 34%, $P=0.0001$) and support the member's needs (20% vs. 42%, $P=0.019$) demonstrating the greatest distinctions.

Table 1: Demography
(>10% responses)

Question	Level	N	%
Race	Caucasian	86	75%
	Asian	22	19%
Gender	Female	54	48%
	Male	59	52%
Age		46 +/- 16	N/A
Religion	Evangelical Christian	111	97%
Education	Some college	19	17%
	College graduate	42	37%
	Some post graduate	12	11%
	Post graduate degree	34	30%
Employment	Full-time employed or self-employed	66	58%
	Retired	18	16%

Table 2: Ratings of wellbeing (N=115)

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Indifferent	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
I have good wellbeing	3	2	2	2	5	54	47	6.08
I am content	4	2	2	4	15	52	36	5.82
I have peace	3	2	2	0	16	49	42	5.97
I have joy	3	1	1	3	13	45	49	6.07
I have purpose	3	1	0	3	12	38	58	6.18
God accepts me	3	0	0	0	4	21	87	6.59

Table 3: Ratings of church leadership

Answer Options	Pastor		Elder		Small group leader	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Knowledge of the Bible.	113	98%	97	86%	71	65%
Ability to teach/lead.	109	95%	84	74%	72	66%
Strong Biblical vision for the church.	100	87%	81	72%	58	53%
Effective communication.	87	76%	62	55%	64	59%
Supporting my needs.	59	51%	42	37%	44	40%
Implementing my suggestions.	32	28%	28	25%	33	30%
Pastoral care.	75	65%	53	47%	33	30%

Table 4: Ratings of church

	Church		Small group	
	N	%	N	%
Quality of Bible preaching and teaching.	101	88%	56	52%
Desire for spiritual growth.	99	86%	70	65%
Wonderful praise and worship.	64	56%	24	22%
I feel emotionally supported by other church members.	61	53%	57	53%
Abundant prayer.	39	34%	35	32%
Bible-based fellowship.	84	73%	73	68%
Opportunities for service.	74	64%	33	31%
Quality children's programs to teach and care for my children.	24	21%	8	7%

**Table 5: Associations between wellbeing and church and leadership ratings
(showing responses <0.025)**

Questions	Responses		Good wellbeing (n=47)		Other wellbeing (n=68)		P-value
			N	%	N	%	
I assess our pastoral staff to be mature in the following areas	Effective communication.	Y	41	36%	47	41%	0.024
		N	6	5%	21	18%	
	Pastoral care.	Y	37	32%	38	33%	0.011
		N	10	9%	30	26%	
If I regularly attend a small group, I assess the leader to be mature in the following areas	Effective communication.	Y	35	30%	29	25%	0.001
		N	12	10%	39	34%	
	Supporting my needs.	Y	24	21%	20	17%	0.019
		N	23	20%	48	42%	
If I am a member of a small group, I attend because of the following	Quality of Bible teaching.	Y	32	28%	24	21%	0.001
		N	15	13%	44	38%	
	Abundant prayer.	Y	20	17%	15	13%	0.019
		N	27	23%	53	46%	
	Bible-based fellowship.	Y	37	32%	36	31%	0.005
		N	10	9%	32	28%	
	Wonderful social interaction that makes me feel accepted and affirmed.	Y	27	23%	22	19%	0.007
		N	20	17%	46	40%	

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