

Shawna, L. Anderson, Jessica Hamar Martinez, Catherine Hoegeman, Gary Adler and Mark Chaves. 2008. Dearly Departed: How Often Do Congregations Close? *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 47, Issue 2, 321-328.

- The study estimates the rate of congregational mortality in the United States.
- The authors determine the 2005 status of 1,234 congregations in the National Congregations Study (NCS) (therefore, they consider a 6.5-year interval – between 1998 and January 2005).
- The study verifies the activity of congregations for any date between January and February 2005. To be considered active, a congregation must be holding regular worship services (evidence of activity: bulletins and calendars, reports of rallies, passion plays, or other public events held at congregations, and being listed in official denominational directories).
- A three step confirmation procedure guided the investigation: (1) finding evidence of life via the internet (confirmed congregational activity for 78 percent of all congregations); (2) denominational yearbooks (confirmed congregational activity for additional 3 percent of congregations); and (3) contacting congregations directly (additional 17 percent of congregations were confirmed active).
- The study finds a religious congregations' average annual mortality rate of 1 percent, which is among the lowest annual mortality rates ever observed for any type of organization. According to the existent literature, this low mortality rate probably indicates that weak congregations live in a weakened state rather than die definitively.
- Additional interesting finding. The web-search for congregations showed that, if in 1998 approximately 29 percent of congregations reported having a website, in 2005 websites were found for approximately 65 percent of congregations (this represents a 123 percent increase since 1998 – Roman Catholic congregation experienced the largest increase with 253 percent).