

TO: Don Thomas  
Mary Elise Thomas

DATE: 26 March 2012

FROM: Eileen Brown

COPIES: MCC Council

SUBJECT: Monroe Community Church Survey Results

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Don and Mary Elise, here are the final results of the survey completed for the church at the beginning of this year. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you and give back just a tiny bit of what you both give to our community. As always, please let me know if there are questions about anything in this report.

### **Background**

The Monroe Community Church (MCC) is the only active church operating within the town of Monroe, NH. As such, you are uniquely positioned to provide both religious and secular (community) services. Over the past few years, the church has responded to growing needs in the town of Monroe by adding several new programs. These have been implemented despite an almost continual shortage of volunteers, creating 'volunteer fatigue' for those that have been helping.

Despite your proactive response to community needs, regular attendance at MCC has not grown proportionately with the increase in church programs and outreach. This raised the question of how MCC can become more relevant to the people of Monroe, and that was the impetus for this survey.

### **Methodology**

A survey of all Monroe households was undertaken to better understand the views of both current MCC members as well as non-members. In the November town newsletter, people were alerted that a survey would be coming, and it was enclosed with the next newsletter edition (January). The town website and Facebook page were also used to alert people that the survey was coming, and then used again to remind them to return it. Surveys were postage-paid to encourage returns. Note that although this mail survey was a "universal sample" of all Monroe households, the fact that it was mailed as part of the town newsletters may have had an impact on return rates (only those people who open the newsletter would have seen the survey.)

The survey returned 14%, an average return rate for an 'untargeted' mail survey. (In this case, we say the survey was "untargeted" because we surveyed 100% of households.) A copy of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 1.

### Key Learning

**Overall, MCC does a great deal for the town of Monroe, but may not always get credit for it.** Although many of the church's programs have been ongoing for years, there is still not universal awareness of either the program or your role in it. This is true of traditions like chicken BBQ's, the annual calendar, and even the Memory Tree. In almost all cases, **approximately 20% of the town is either unaware of the programs or that the church is involved.**

There is interest in a number of potential new programs, and the good news is that 41% of the respondents provided their contact information and offered to help volunteer. Obviously, careful matching of volunteers to any new program will have to happen before you add even more to your workload.

**One reason for this may be how you choose to communicate.** By communicating in-person on Sunday, and through your "Order of Service", you essentially talk only to those that are in church. That may seem obvious, but it does limit awareness of MCC's programs to people who already know about them! **All age groups** in the survey were open to getting news via a church website or Facebook page. (There is also interest in reading highlights of Pastor Don's sermons in the Bridge Weekly.) Using new tools that **do not require people to have been at Sunday services** will help get the word out about all that you do.

**No single means of communication is enough in today's world.** Yes, you sponsor a bi-monthly newsletter where news of all activities and programs is provided. However, the average American now receives 30,000 advertising messages every day. Against this backdrop, you cannot rely on the newsletter or any other *single* method to communicate with people. Anecdotal evidence suggests the newsletter is often overlooked in the crush of junk mail, or glanced at, put aside, and then misplaced. We hear this all the time vis-à-vis news about recycling, school events, or even the town's Harvest Festival. The church is not alone in this challenge; any message needs to be delivered multiple times, via multiple channels, to maximize your reach.

**Growing your membership appears to be critical.** Comparing the age of those attending MCC to the town as a whole (based on the 2010 U.S. Census), your membership is heavily skewed 65+. Simply put, if you do not begin to supplement your

65+ group with younger members, in a few short years, the church will struggle to remain viable. (Let's face it, we are all striving for immortality in Heaven, but that won't happen until AFTER we are dead!)

**Close to 40% of the respondents do not currently attend any church.** The chief reason given is that they "are spiritual on their own." These may be your most likely candidates for new members, because they are unaffiliated with any church, and did not indicate that they have any negative feelings toward church. (Few people said they "avoid organized religions" or that "church is boring".)

**In going after new members, you are starting from a position of strength.** The majority of current members feel the church is "strong and vibrant." Even people who do not attend MCC have an almost 50% positive view of MCC, and everyone feels the programs you are running are still relevant for today's Monroe. If you are going to try to grow by attracting new members, it helps to have such a positive starting point. After all, who would want to join a church that *wasn't* vibrant?

**The case for change has not yet been made, but it may not be as difficult as you might expect.** Perhaps because current members as well as people in town think the church is vibrant, they do not understand why MCC would need to change to attract new members. However, they are not necessarily opposed to change, either. A majority of MCC members and non-members are open to change as long as it doesn't destroy core traditions or beliefs. As an example, the majority are open to new music. This is a simple change that could be implemented on an occasional basis, while still preserving the bulk of your traditional music ministry.

### **Recommendations**

Don and Mary Elise, I fully acknowledge that I am NOT a member of the MCC, nor will I become one in the future (I have a different religious affiliation, as you know!).

Therefore, please accept these recommendations as coming from an outside, unbiased, and totally "uninformed" point of view. They are given from the point of view of a marketing researcher, which is my background.

Overall, my 3 core recommendations for you are:

1. **Grow or Die**
2. **Make New Friends but Keep the Old**
3. **Talk is Cheap . . . But Really Important**

**Grow or Die** simply means that the core of your active church membership is aging. It is a painful but simple reality that if you do not attract younger members, the church will eventually cease to be viable. I was astonished to compare the demographics of MCC members to the 2010 Census for Monroe. Although the entire population of the USA is aging, the composition of MCC is far more skewed to 65+ than the town as a whole.

**Make New Friends but Keep the Old** refers to the need to make some changes to attract new members, but do so in a way that does not alienate your current membership. In this survey, your current members are giving you permission to make some changes: 60% say MCC should change to get new members, and almost 90% are open to new music. I'm not advocating you suddenly become a Fundamentalist church, or a Baptist church, or in any way stray from your religious beliefs and traditions. However, if you are going to grow, then you need to give new people a reason to try you.

**Talk is Cheap . . . But Really Important** means that you need to find new ways of talking to people. Limiting yourselves to Sunday announcements is not enough. They only reaches people who were in church THAT Sunday. Occasional church-goers as well as people who never attend are left out . . . and those are the people you need to get into the church in order to stay viable. The newsletter already exists . . . and there are still people unaware of your programs.

To this end, I strongly encourage you to start a church Facebook page, perhaps with a volunteer page administrator. This is free, easy, and takes very little time for what could be a strong payback. The church already has a website, which is a page within the Monroe Town website. We can make more use of that as well, with timely news and announcements. Driving people to the church webpage from Facebook is a simple way to connect with people.

There were also several suggestions from respondents about other means of communication, such as radio advertising. You may wish to keep this in mind and budget some advertising for key times of the year, such as Easter and Christmas. These are times when people who are unaffiliated with any church might be more inclined to attend a service . . . so why not tell them about yours?

## Detailed Findings

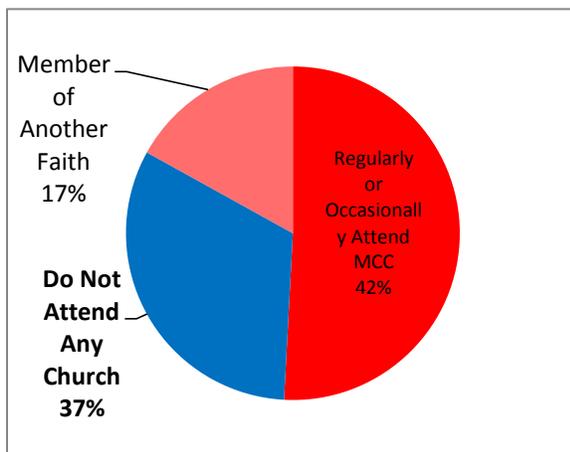
A full set of data tabs is attached in Appendix 2.

## Sample Composition

Composition refers to age of the respondents and their self-declared church attendance. (Note that we had also asked about the age and presence of children; however, the sample was too fragmented to be able to analyze at this level.)

Most questions from the survey were analyzed based on whether someone “regularly or occasionally” attended MCC, or “rarely or never” attended MCC. This gave us our two main groups, “Attend MCC” and “Do Not Attend MCC”.

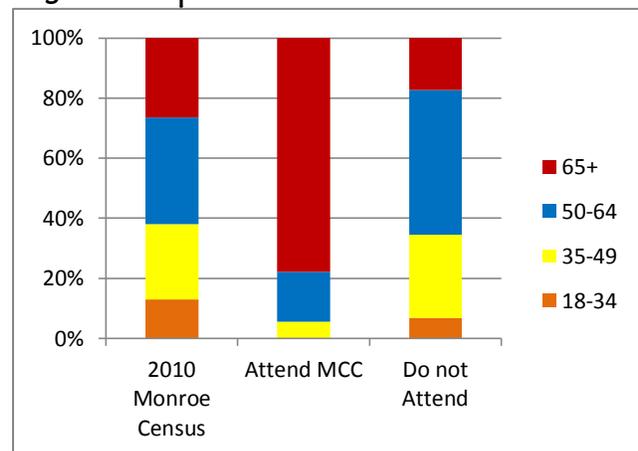
## Church Attendance



Slightly more than half of the sample are not members of MCC. Some are members of another faith, and in most cases, it is their choice of faith that determines their choice of church. Among those saying they do not attend any church, the primary reason given was “Am spiritual on my own.”

Demographically, the group that does NOT attend MCC more closely mirrors Monroe’s overall age profile, as shown from the 2010 Census. The “Attend MCC” group is heavily skewed to 65+.

## Age of Respondents

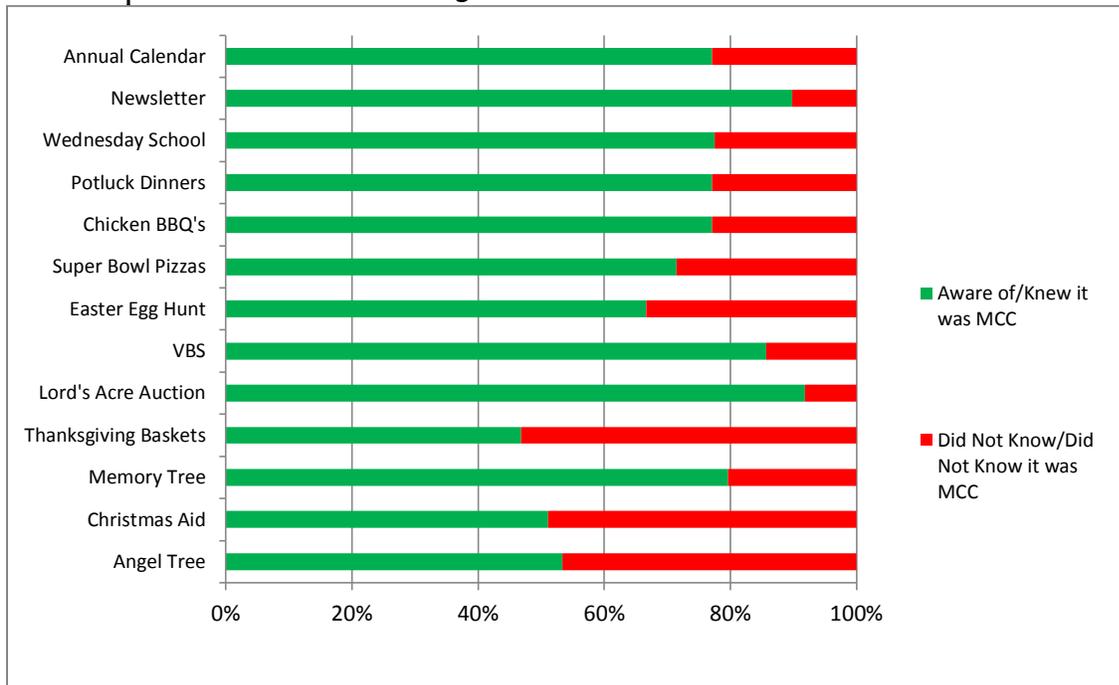


**Awareness of Programs** was asked both to learn about how aware Monroe residents are of church programs, and whether they even know the church is involved with those programs. Originally, the survey was designed to evaluate responses based on whether someone was “aware” or “unaware” of church programs. However, the sample size

proved too small for this to be reliable, and so here, we present the data as learning for how effectively we communicate!

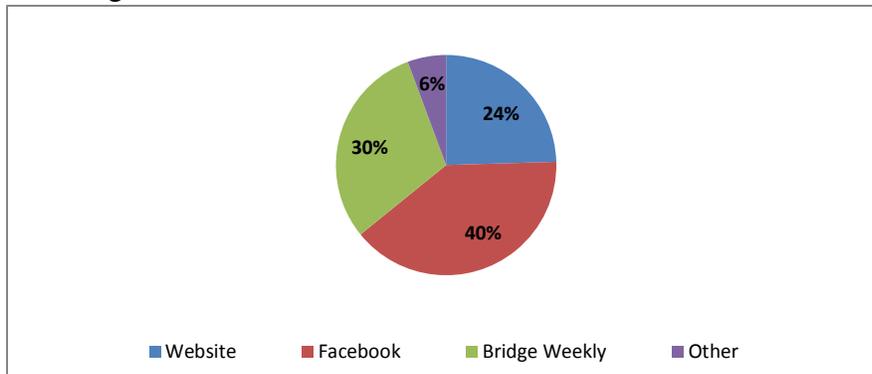
Surprisingly, over 20% of Monroe residents are unaware of the church's role in some long-standing programs such as Chicken BBQ's or the "Memory Tree." Newer programs, such as Christmas Aid and Thanksgiving Baskets, have a large awareness gap to close.

### % of Respondents Aware of Programs/Church Involvement



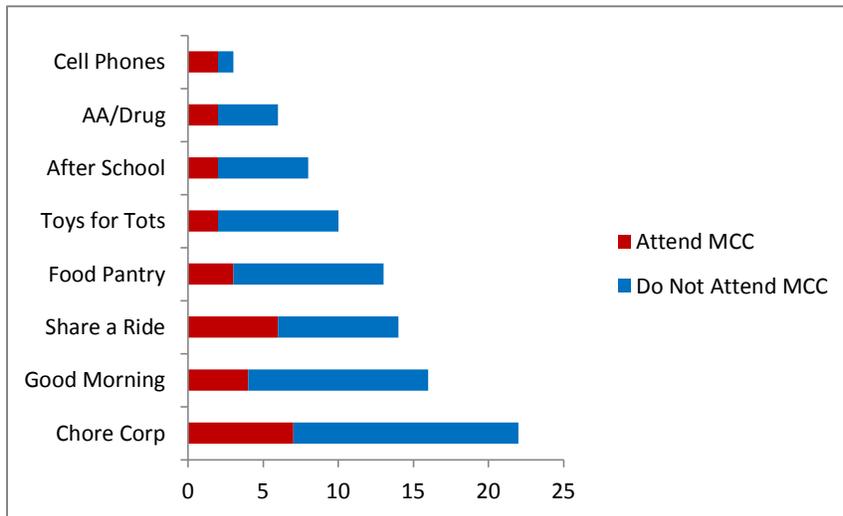
PR, advertising, and the use of Facebook, can all help close awareness gaps and increase the public's understanding of just how much the church does for the town. Facebook and a website, in particular, are appealing to people:

### How Might We Best Communicate?



The "Other" group represents a handful of specific suggestions about advertising vehicles, such as WTVN, mailing the church bulletins, or hanging them at the Library.

Thinking about current programs and wondering about others that would be relevant, we asked about specific new options. The more desirable new programs were a Chore Corps, Good Morning Phone Calls, and a Food Pantry or Share-a-Ride program:



The good news for MCC is that a large number of survey respondents provided their contact information about becoming a volunteer. (This information has been provided to Don and Mary Elise and is not included in this report, in order to protect privacy.)

As mentioned in the Key Learning section, you may wish to work on strengthening your volunteer pool for existing programs before adding new activities. Many of the volunteers were open to current options in addition to the new ideas listed.

### Attribute Statements

A range of statements were asked on an Agree-Disagree scale, and we asked people to respond to these statements whether or not they attended MCC. Obviously, for those who attend MCC, their agreement/disagreement is based on personal experience. For those who do not attend, their responses are based on their impressions, whether from friends, family, or simply living in town.

The wording of the statements, and the TOTAL results, were as follows. Please keep in mind the TOTAL results are a combination of those who ATTEND MCC and those who do NOT attend. The two groups occasionally vote in opposite directions, and we must also look carefully at the differences in their responses.

### **% of TOTAL Sample Agreeing or Disagreeing:**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>% Disagree Strongly or Somewhat</b>	<b>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</b>	<b>% Agree Strongly or Somewhat</b>
MCC is a strong and vibrant church	9%	31%	60%
MCC should adjust traditional practices to attract new members.	12%	38%	40%
MCC should preserve its traditional beliefs and practices.	7%	31%	62%

<b>Statement</b>	<b>% Disagree Strongly or Somewhat</b>	<b>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</b>	<b>% Agree Strongly or Somewhat</b>
The Village Church building could be remodeled to make it more welcoming.	49%	35%	16%
If MCC makes no changes to its current practices, the church will cease to be viable.	35%	39%	26%
The programs MCC runs may not be the most useful for life in Monroe today.	39%	50%	11%
Changing the way MCC operates, whether in music, service times, or more, would be extremely hard for me to accept.	42%	49%	9%
I do not understand why MCC would need to change just to attract more members.	38%	34%	28%

To get a better sense of how MCC members and non-members respond, please see the following breakdown of the “Agree Strongly or Somewhat” group, based on whether or not they attend MCC:

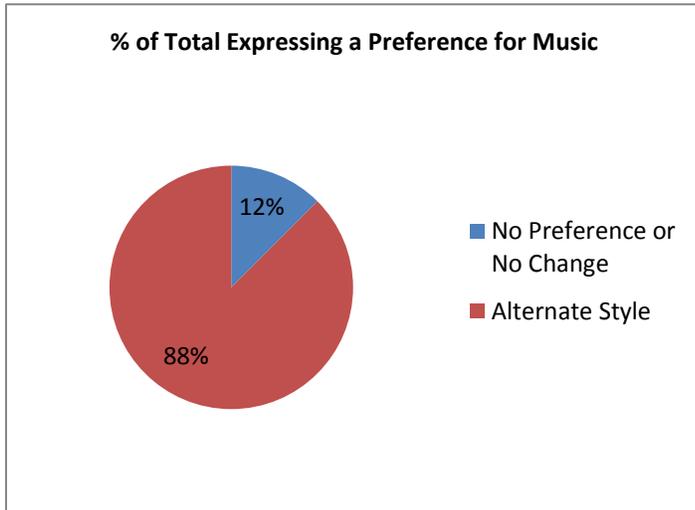
#### **% Agreeing Strongly or Somewhat**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Attend MCC</b>	<b>Do Not Attend MCC</b>
MCC is a strong and vibrant church	79%	46%
MCC should adjust traditional practices to attract new members.	59%	27%
MCC should preserve its traditional beliefs and practices.	83%	48%
The Village Church building could be remodeled to make it more welcoming.	28%	8%
If MCC makes no changes to its current practices, the church will cease to be viable.	33%	20%
The programs MCC runs may not be the most useful for life in Monroe today.	6%	15%
Changing the way MCC operates, whether in music, service times, or more, would be extremely hard for me to accept.	17%	4%
I do not understand why MCC would need to change just to attract more members.	41%	17%

Perhaps the most interesting difference between those attending and those not attending is seen in the statement “MCC should adjust traditional practices to attract new members.” Here, 59% of church members agree that they should make changes. Only 27% of non church-goers agree, perhaps because they simply do not know what MCC’s traditional practices are!

Likewise, there is a large difference in the views of MCC members and non-members when it comes to remodeling the Village Church. 28% of MCC members agree the church could

be remodeled to “make it more welcoming.” Just 8% of non-members agree. Again, they may simply not be familiar with the inside of the church, or they may be reacting as townspeople who like the look of a familiar landmark, whether or not they ever go inside!

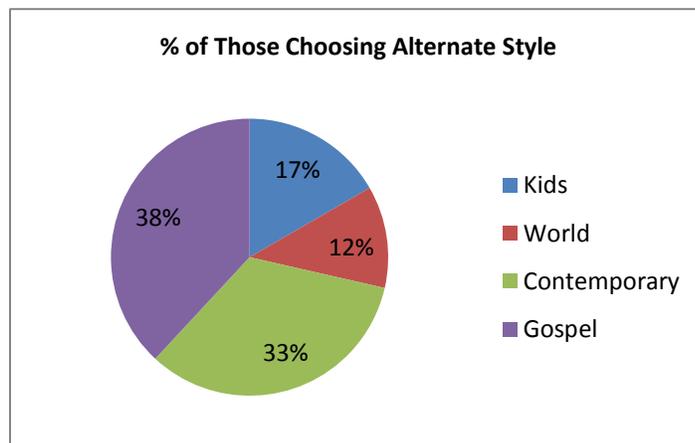


Returning to the need to make changes, one of the most common things churches change as they seek to reinvigorate their membership is music. Monroe is no exception, with people being quite open to new types of music.

Almost 90% of the total sample chose an alternate style of music. This obviously does not mean they do not like traditional hymns;

however, it is perhaps recognition of the fact that anyone born after 1950 has grown up with rock & roll!

And what style of music appeals? Among the 88% who were open to an alternate style, gospel is the most appealing, followed closely by “contemporary.” (We had categorized



“contemporary” in the survey as “guitars, drums.”) World music was explained as music from other cultures.

Adding in an occasional service with either gospel or contemporary music is a perfect example of having news the church could communicate to newcomers, to encourage them to attend and try something new.

