

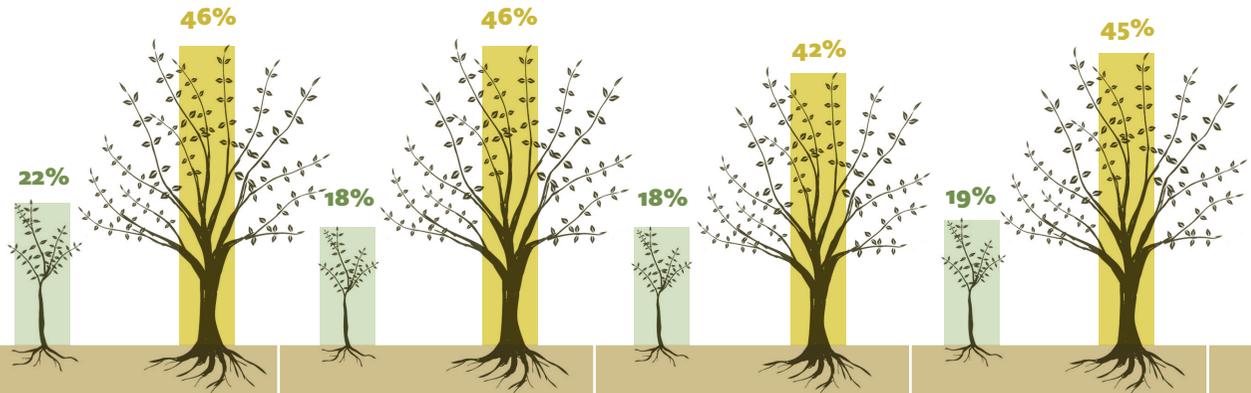
SPOTLIGHT: Mainline Conservatives' Dilemma

➡ Conventional wisdom says that conservative churches grow and liberal churches don't. But as a recent study from the Hartford Institute for Religion Research found, this isn't quite accurate. It's the *denomination's* theology that tends to matter, not the congregation's. Churches in evangelical denominations are more than twice as likely to grow as churches in mainline denominations, but within those denominations theological orientation doesn't have much effect. In other words, orthodoxy doesn't draw crowds on its own.

WHY DENOMINATION MATTERS MORE THAN CONGREGATION

■ MAINLINE
■ EVANGELICAL

% OF CONGREGATIONS GROWING



LIBERAL (SOMEWHAT AND PREDOMINANTLY)

MODERATE

SOMEWHAT CONSERVATIVE

PREDOMINANTLY CONSERVATIVE

CONGREGATION'S THEOLOGY



“The quality of congregational life, the involvement of members and technology in evangelism and recruitment, and even being located in the South appear to be much more important to growth than your denominational family, theology, or strictness (which has long been thought to be a secret to growth).”

David Roozen, director, Hartford Institute for Religion Research



“One of the stronger correlates of growth was the extent to which the congregation ‘has a clear mission and purpose.’ Not surprisingly, churches in conservative and evangelical denominations are considerably more likely to [say they have one] than mainline congregations. . . . At least part of the explanation for mainline decline is lack of a clear motivating purpose.”

Kirk Hadaway, author of the “Facts on Growth: 2010” Hartford study



“I confess I am not surprised. I find mainline evangelical churches less politically active and more open to ecumenism, which fails to draw the constituency that the more conservative counterparts can draw. The behavior is very different, even if the doctrine is similar. Numerical growth may not be an indicator of renewal or discipleship.”

John Armstrong, ACT 3, leadership trainers involved in mainline renewal