

The background features an abstract graphic design. On the left, there are several vertical columns of dots in teal and yellow, connected by thin, wavy lines. On the right, there are more scattered dots and lines, some forming faint outlines of buildings or structures. The overall color palette is dark with teal and yellow accents.

Buildings and Gatherings:

**The Shifting Landscapes of
American Religious
Communities**

Nancy Ammerman

Activating Hidden Assets: Making the
Most of Sacred Places for the Wider
Community

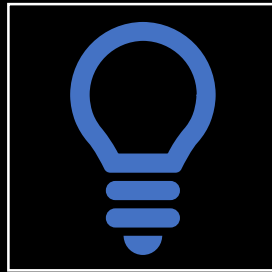
Partners for Sacred Places

April 5, 2024

The Backdrop



The rise of the 'nones' and the decline that signals



The history of American religious innovation



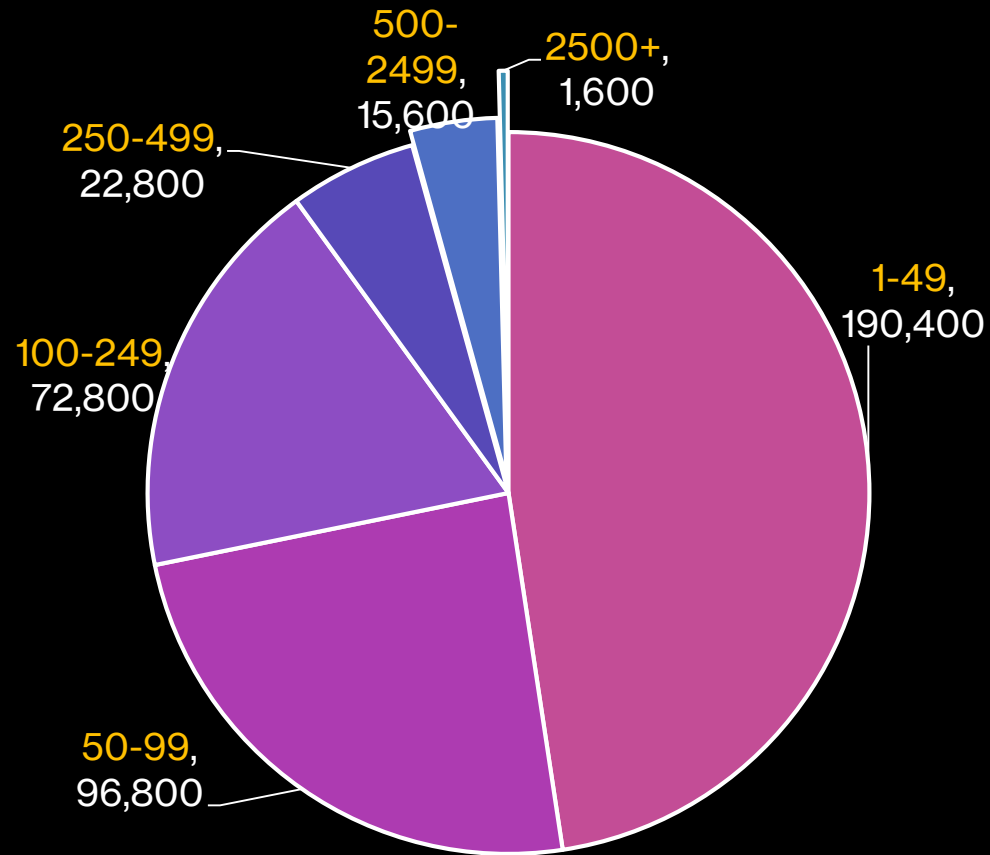
Our task: Keep **both** those things in balance

How Many Congregations Are There?

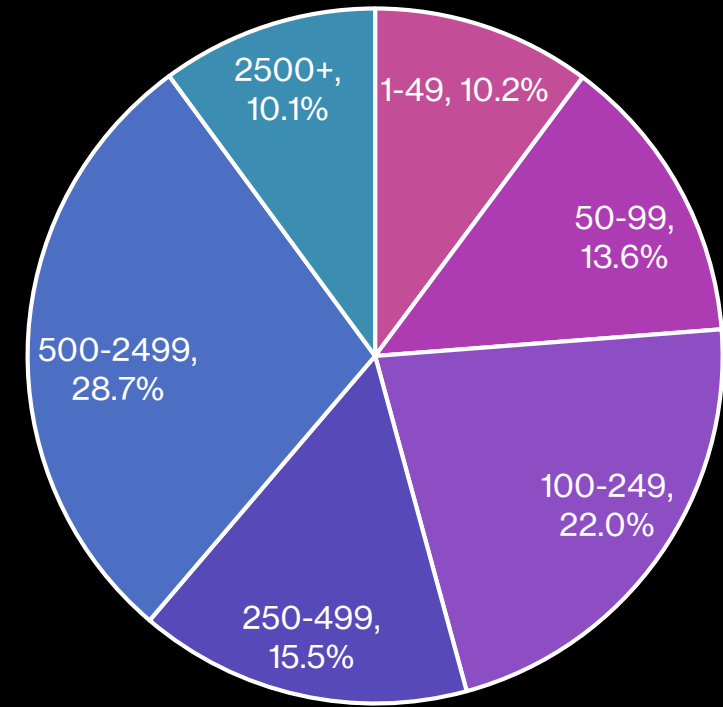
- 2020 Religion Census says 356,642
- Compare to schools (pre-k – 12)
~ 129k
- Likely undercounted by 20% or more, including
 - + African American bodies
 - + Nondenominational Churches, including networks
 - + Immigrant congregations

How Big Are They?

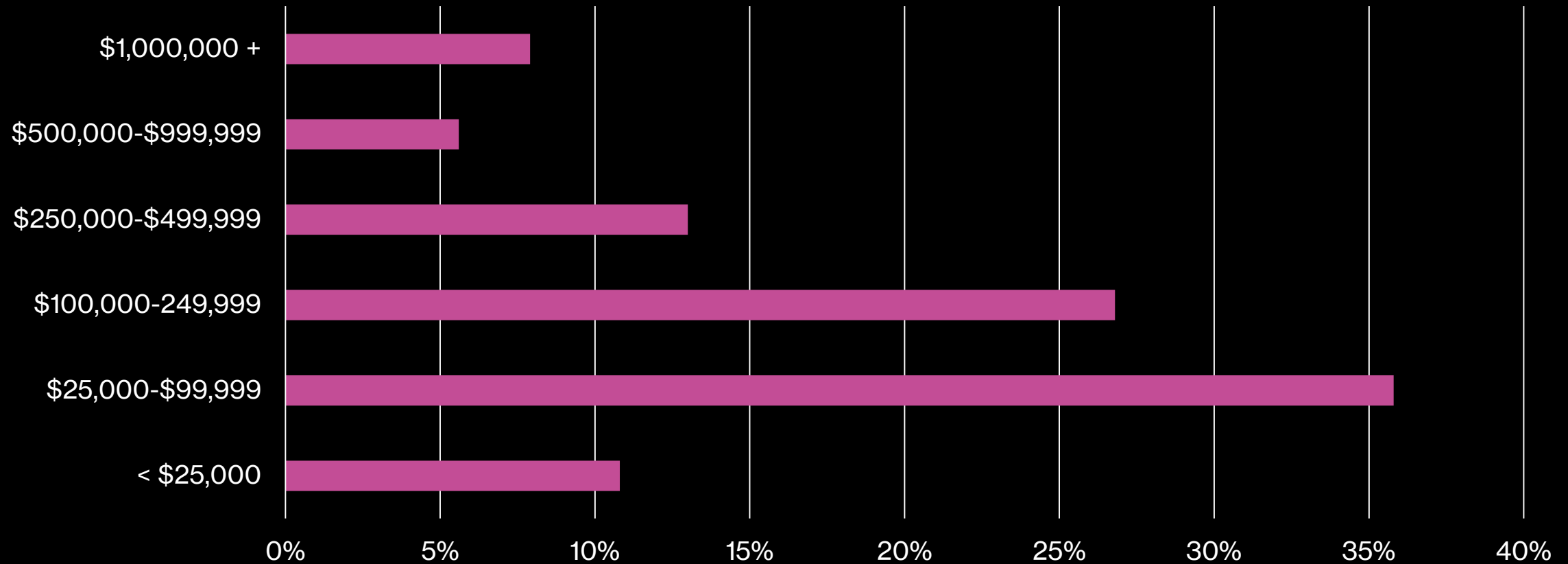
Estimated Number of **Congregations** by Average Number Regularly-Attending Adults



% of Adult Regular **Attendees** by Size of Congregation

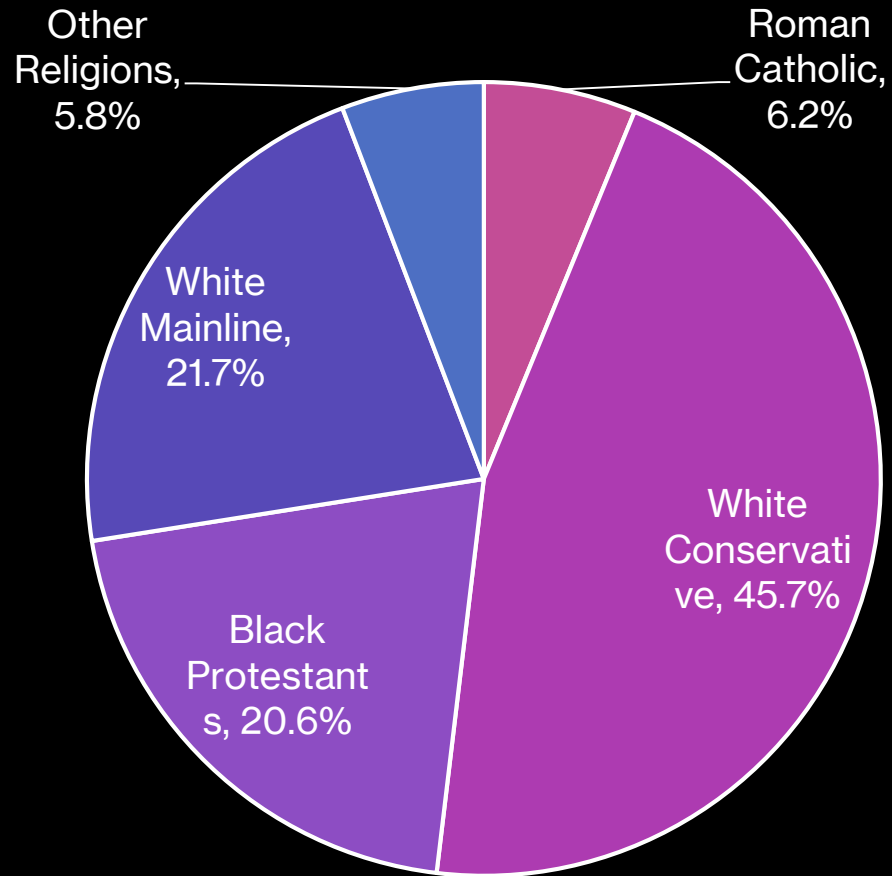


Income From All Sources

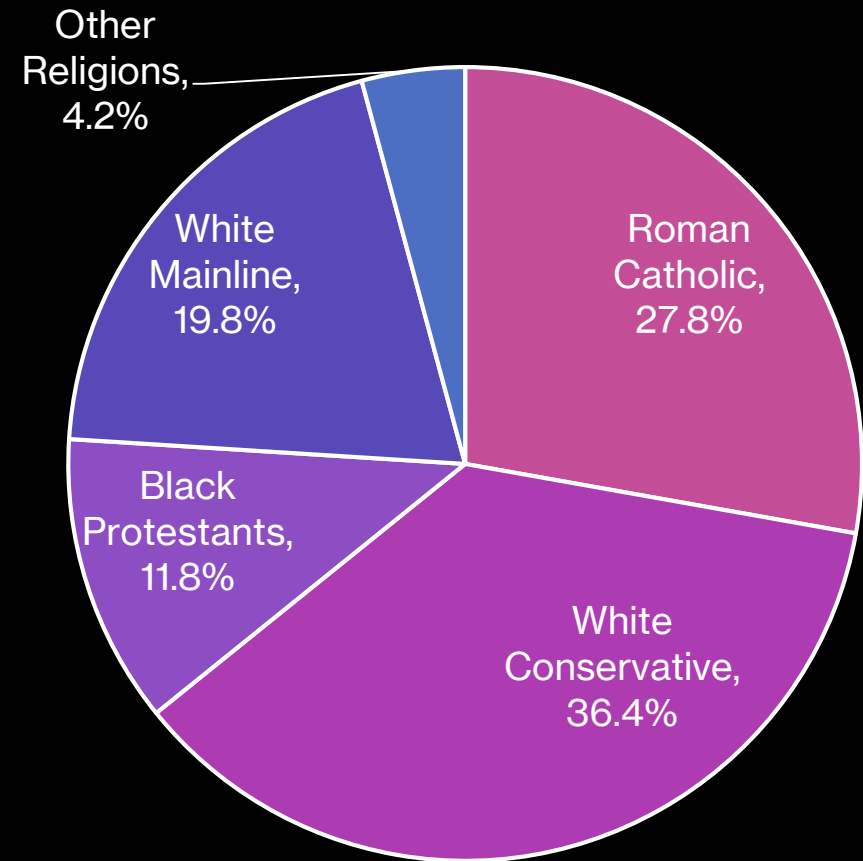


Which Religious Traditions Do They Represent?

% of **Congregations** by Tradition



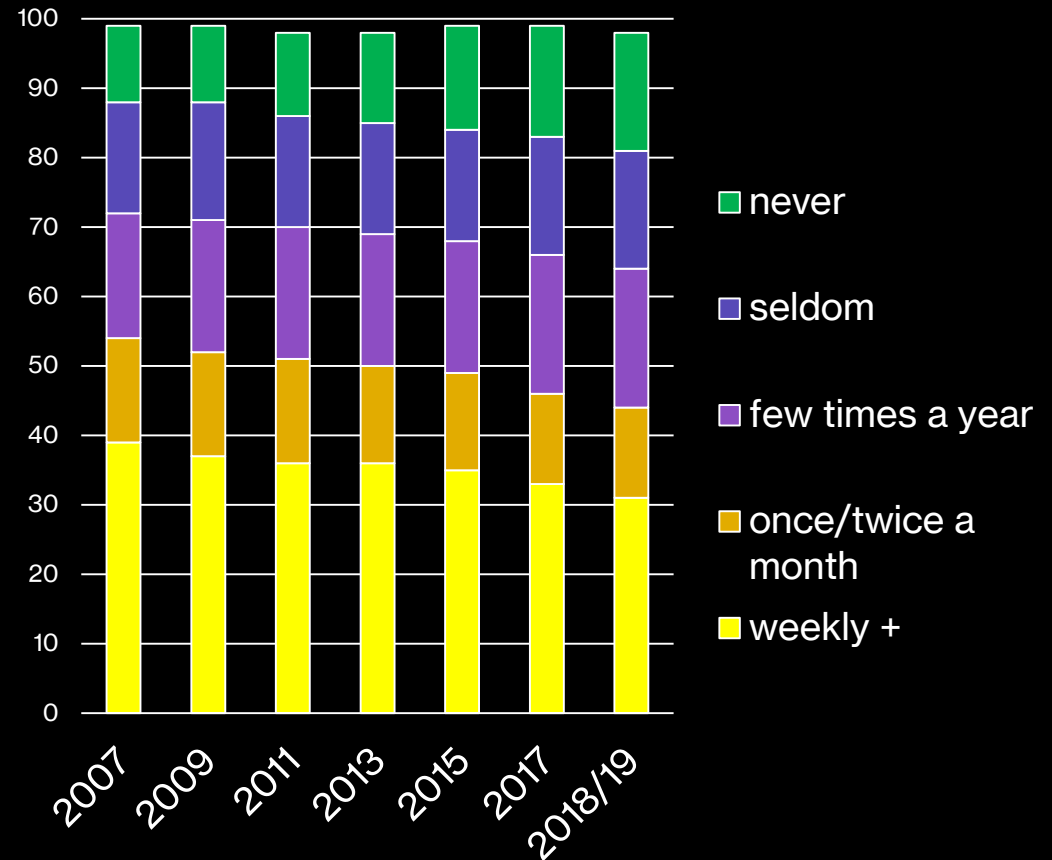
% **Attendees** by Tradition



How Many People Are Connected?

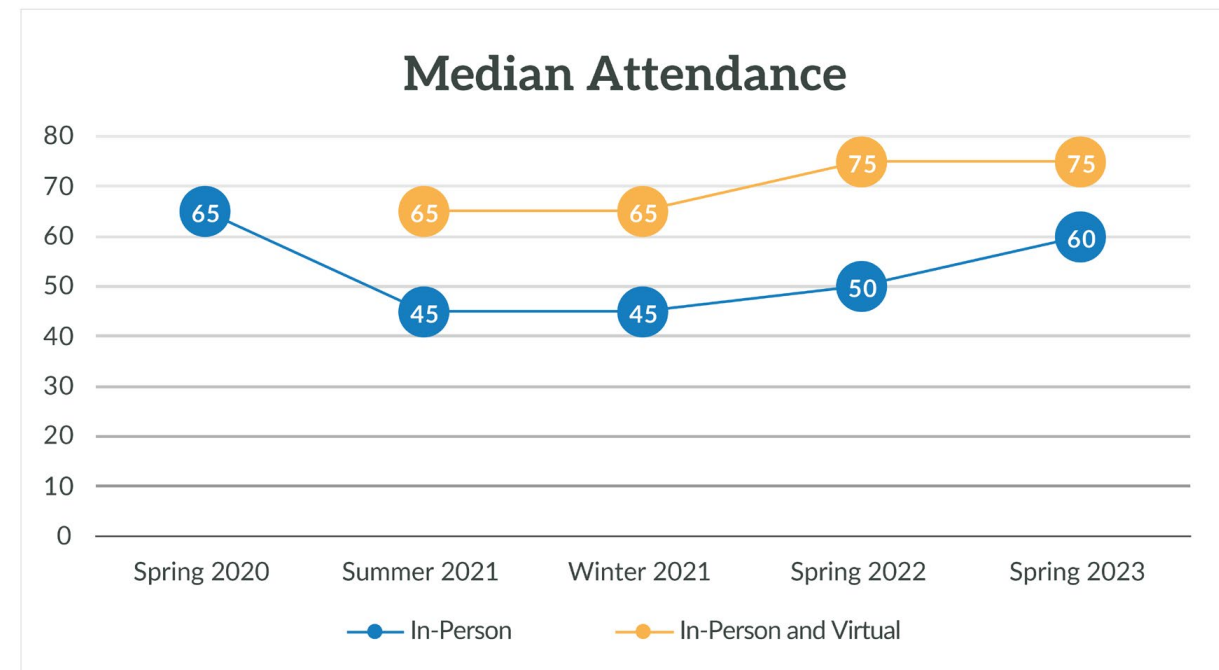
- 30-45% of the adult population with some regularity
- Perhaps 65% at least tangentially
- 28% (and growing) are unaffiliated, and most of those don't attend

Trends in Service Attendance



Effects of the Pandemic

- Hybrid worship continues
- Fellowship, youth & kids' activities are largely in-person.
- Adult activities include virtual
- Service work is in person



Source: Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations study, Hartford Institute for Religion Research

What about the buildings?

86.6% own the building (including denominational ownership)

51.0% - outside group used or rented space in building in last 12 months

BUT

Building upkeep is 2nd biggest part of the budget

Building issues are among leaders' biggest concerns

Are Sacred Spaces Disappearing?

- Yes – perhaps 1% per year
- No – lots of ‘churn’ as buildings change hands



- Most likely to disappear
 - + Smallest
 - + Storefronts & house churches
 - + Already dilapidated

Are replacements on the horizon?

- Roughly 10% of congregations are less than 10 years old.
- New modes of gathering with uncertain futures





What is at risk?

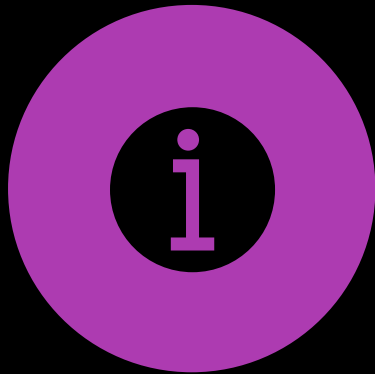
The Good of the Members

Congregational Gatherings Provide

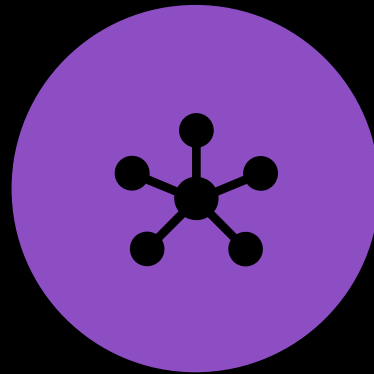
- A Community of Belonging and Caring -> positive health and wellbeing
- A Community of Tradition -> Identity and inclusion, especially for minority & immigrant groups
- A Moral Community -> neighborliness
- A Public Community -> civic skills



Congregational Gatherings Connect



TO INFORMATION



TO NETWORKS



TO LEADERS

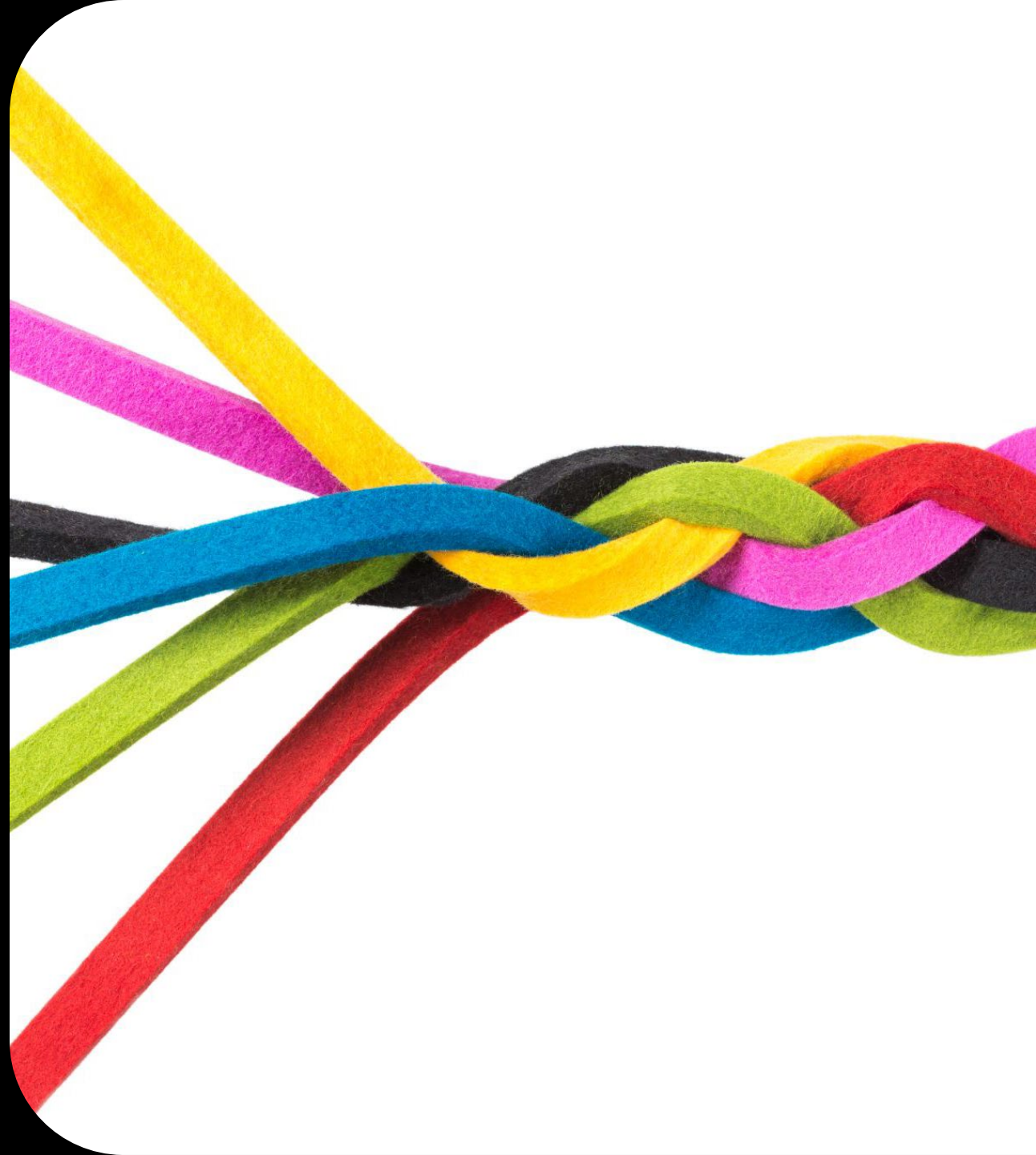
What is at risk?

Community Spaces

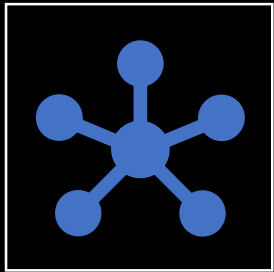


Spaces for

- Meeting, organizing, deciding
- Performing
- Providing community services
- Beauty



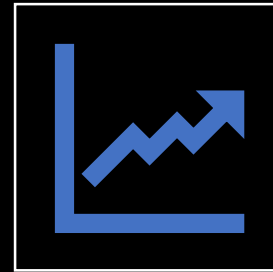
Congregational Spaces



Are critical social
infrastructure



Are constantly changing
and potentially at risk



Demand strategic
investments

To learn more...

- www.StudyingCongregations.org