



Q4 2021

# THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

BENCHMARKS + TRENDS IN U.S. CHURCHES

**THE UNSTUCK GROUP**<sup>®</sup>

— WE HELP CHURCHES GET UNSTUCK. —

# Introduction

## NOVEMBER 2021

Every quarter, The Unstuck Group compiles all the data collected using our [Vital Signs Assessment tool](#) to monitor trends in churches in the United States and around the world. Churches that engage the [Unstuck consulting process](#) and subscribers to the [Unstuck Learning Hub](#) get free access to the assessment tool.

Over the last 12 months, 194 churches completed the assessment to help us get a picture of where there is health and where churches appear to be getting stuck. The average in-person attendance of churches that participated was 506 people, and those same churches also saw over 2,000 views every week through their online services or messages. These churches ranged in size from under 100 to over 7,500 people.

The churches that participated on average started their ministry in 1963. The oldest church that participated dates back to the early 1700s. Most of the churches are connected to a denomination, but about a third of the churches that participated indicated they were nondenominational churches.

Read on for some of the key takeaways from the most recent assessment results in the categories of **reach, connection, staffing and leadership, finances** and overall **health**.

## KEY FINDINGS

CATEGORY	METRIC
In-Person Average Weekly Attendance	-34%
Online Service Views	+205%
Number of People Baptized - Previous 12 Months	-49%
New People Added to the Church Database	-18%
Adults & Students Volunteering	-3%
Total General Fund Giving	-1.5%
Current Total Cash Reserves	24 weeks



# Ministry Reach

## Churches connected with fewer new people in the last 12 months.

Specifically, there was an 18% decline in the number of new people that churches started tracking in their database over the last year compared to the year before.

On average, the number of new people added in the last year was equal to 10% of the total number of people in the church's database.

## The average in-person attendance over the previous 12 months dropped by 34%.

The average weekly attendance for the previous 12 months declined from 851 to 564. This includes the total of all people, including children.

## The number of baptisms over the last 12 months declined by 49% across all churches.

This year, the number of people baptized equaled 3% of this year's average in-person attendance. That's down from 5% the year before. The decline in baptisms is far higher than the decline in in-person attendance. This metric indicates churches are seeing fewer people say "yes" to Jesus in the last year, even factoring in the attendance decline.

## The decline in attendance continues to be offset by the increase in online service views.

The average number of online service views (one minute or more) per week has more than tripled from the year before. Churches reported an average of 2,173 service views per week compared to 712 service views per week the year before.

## Most churches offer multiple service times to reach more people.

Of the churches surveyed, 74% offered multiple weekend services across all their locations. We asked churches to include weeknight services if attendance is meant as a "weekend service" option.

## One in four churches surveyed is now multisite.

On average, those churches have 2.8 locations, including the original location. This is the highest percentage of multisite churches we've seen in our results since we started collecting this data.

“

For the churches who completed the Vital Signs Assessment at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, these year-to-year attendance comparisons were still reflecting the drop since pre-pandemic attendance.

Next quarter will be our first chance to see a full year's worth of data that will show how churches are fairing since the pandemic started in early 2020.

-- Tony Morgan

”

# Ministry Reach, cont.

**Of the churches that have one worship style, about two out of three (68%) offer “contemporary” styles of worship services.**

Just 6% of churches surveyed still offer only traditional services. And 17% of churches offer multiple types of worship services. We know from previous research that declining churches are more likely to offer multiple styles of worship.

**Children’s ministry in-person attendance is down to 14% of overall attendance.**

This includes all children from newborn through fifth grade. The year-over-year decline in children’s ministry attendance was 38%. Because this percentage drop is more than the overall attendance decrease, this suggests that churches are reaching fewer young families with kids.

**Student attendance has also declined over the last year.**

Student ministry attendance for in-person gatherings dropped by 23%. Currently, the average student ministry is 7% of overall attendance. This includes all students in sixth through twelfth grades. Here, the attendance drop is less than overall attendance. That indicates that students have been more inclined to return to in-person gatherings than adults, churches are doing better at reaching new students than adults, or a combination of both.

# Ministry Connection

**About one in five churches have discontinued a membership- or partnership-type commitment.**

Currently, 19% of churches do not offer membership as a connection point to the church.

**Home groups are the primary option churches offer to connect people into smaller gatherings beyond the weekend services.**

Of the churches surveyed, 87% offer home groups as an option to connect with other people. Just 7% only offer Sunday school as an option.

**Small group participation has increased through the last year.**

Churches are seeing 65% of their adults and students participate in a group. Participation in groups has increased by 2% in the last 12 months.

**Volunteer engagement, on the other hand, continues to be a struggle for churches.**

In this reporting period, only 40% of all adults and students served at least monthly on a volunteer team. That's the lowest volunteer engagement percentage we've recorded since collecting this data. The number of volunteers decreased by 3% from the previous year.

**Churches are increasing their use of email to stay connected with their congregations.**

The number of people currently opted in to receive email communications (i.e., newsletters, content email lists, etc.) increased by 26% from the previous year.

“

As more churches continue to emphasize connecting people into relationships over connecting people in church membership, I anticipate the percentages of churches offering membership or partnership programs to drop over time.

This will particularly be the case for churches focused on reaching Millennials and GenZ, who seem to value relationships with other people far more than membership in established institutions.

-- Tony Morgan

”

# Ministry Staffing & Leadership

## **Staffing levels remain high compared to attendance declines.**

The average church employs one full-time equivalent staff person for every 42 people in attendance. This number includes all ministry and support staff. We know from previous research that growing churches have 35% fewer staff positions than declining churches.

## **Churches lean on part-time staff more than other sectors of the economy.**

The average church has 47% of their staff working part-time. By comparison, the current national average remains at 17% part-time workers according to the Department of Labor.

## **Churches have a span of care of one volunteer leader for every 11 people in attendance.**

Leaders include adults and students who are serving in roles where they are responsible for leading a team or a group of other people (i.e. team leaders or groups leaders).

## **The average church board or elder team has nine members.**

The largest board identified in the current reporting cycle had 106 members.

## **Churches generally have only a few additional boards or committees.**

Churches, on average, have three additional boards or committees beyond the primary board. However, one church had 20 additional committees.

# Ministry Finances

## Giving has decreased slightly during the last year.

Churches reported on average that their total general fund giving was down 1.5% from the previous year. At the same time, the total number of giving units declined by 8% year-over-year.

## Churches are at the top end of the financial investment we recommend for staff.

The average staff budget is 55% of the overall ministry budget. This includes the cost of all salaries and benefits. We recommend that churches try to keep staffing budgets between 45% and 55% of the overall budget. The Unstuck Group does not collect salary information for individual employees.

## Churches average having the equivalent of 24 weeks in cash reserves.

That's well beyond the six to eight weeks that The Unstuck Group recommends. The amount of cash reserves continues to increase and is up significantly from pre-COVID when churches indicated they had 15 weeks in cash reserves.

## Churches have very little debt.

On average, the current debt load is 0.7 times the church's total annual giving. The Unstuck Group encourages churches to keep total debt below 2.0 times annual giving.

“

Churches have experienced a decline in reaching new people for several years. With that, it's certainly not surprising that we're also starting to see a drop in total giving units.

However, this is the first reporting period where the giving seems to be catching up with the drop in reaching new people.

-- Tony Morgan

”

## ABOUT THE UNSTUCK GROUP

The Unstuck Group helps pastors grow healthy churches by guiding them through experiences to align vision, strategy, team and action. Our core services include ministry health assessments, strategic planning, staffing and structure reviews and multisite and merger planning. Learn more by visiting [theunstuckgroup.com](https://theunstuckgroup.com).

Over the last 11 years, we've worked alongside and built relationships with the leadership teams at 500+ churches. Our goal is to help you lead a thriving church that continually reaches new people and helps them take next steps towards Christ.

>>> Interested in learning more? [Let's talk.](#)

For more information related to this survey and the summary of the learnings, contact our team:

🌐 [theunstuckgroup.com](https://theunstuckgroup.com)

📞 844-486-7882

✉ [help@theunstuckgroup.com](mailto:help@theunstuckgroup.com)