THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

BENCHMARKS + TRENDS IN U.S. CHURCHES

Q1 2022

THE UNSTUCK GROUP®

— WE HELP CHURCHES GET UNSTUCK. —

Introduction

FEBRUARY 2022

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.

For this quarter's report, we limited the analysis to churches that completed the assessment between mid-March 2021 and early-February 2022. We purposely chose this time period so that the year-to-year data comparisons would reflect what churches have been experiencing since the Covid pandemic started in March 2020. In other words, this is the first quarterly report that does not include any pre-pandemic data.

With those requirements, 102 churches completed the full assessment for this report. The average in-person attendance of churches that participated was 513 people, and those same churches also saw over 2,760 views every week through their online services or messages. These churches ranged in size from under 100 to over 4,500 people.

The churches that participated on average started their ministry in 1959. The oldest church that participated dates back to the early 1700s. Most of the churches are connected to a denomination, but more than 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. This quarter, we are also including a bonus section highlighting what the data is telling us about the differences between churches that are growing and declining on this side of the pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS

CATEGORY	THIS YEAR	LAST YEAR	DIFFERENCE
In-Person Average Weekly Attendance	513	737	-30%
Online Service Views	2760	1093	+152%
Baptisms per 100 Attendees	5.4	3.1	+74%
New People Added to the Church Database	681	581	+17%
Adults & Students Volunteering	47%	34%	+38%
Total General Fund Giving	$1,886K	$1,916K	-1.6%
Current Total Cash Reserves	25 weeks	22 weeks	+14%

Ministry Reach

Churches started to connect with more new people in the last 12 months.

Specifically, there was a 17% increase 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. As an example, churches that are tracking 1,000 total people in their database added the names and contact information of 100 new people in the last year.

> This may be the most encouraging trend in this entire report. It confirms the anecdotal stories I'm hearing from pastors and other church leaders. More new people are connecting with churches in this season.
>
> It highlights the priority of making sure we are prepared to welcome new people and encourage them to take their next steps toward Jesus while also connecting them with other people in our churches.
>
> **-- Tony Morgan**

The average in-person attendance over the previous 12 months dropped by 30%.

The average weekly attendance for the previous 12 months declined from 737 to 513. This includes the total of all people, including children.

The number of baptisms over the last 12 months increased by almost 75% relative to attendance.

The number of people baptized equaled 5.4% of this year's average in-person attendance. That's up from close to 3% the year before. This suggests that more people are not only connecting to churches, but more people are also saying "yes" to Jesus.

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 gone up more than 150% from the year before. Churches reported an average of 2,760 service views/week compared to 1,093 service views/week the year before.

Most churches offer multiple service times to reach more people.

Of the churches surveyed, 71% offered multiple weekend services across all their locations. We asked churches to include weeknight services if attendance is meant as a "weekend service" option.

Nearly one in four churches surveyed is now multisite.

On average, those churches have 3.1 locations, including the original location.

Ministry Reach, cont.

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

Just 12% of churches surveyed still offer only traditional services. 17% of churches offer multiple types of worship services.

Children's ministry in-person attendance is down to 16% of overall attendance.

This includes all children from newborn through fifth grade. The year-over-year decline in children's ministry attendance was 27%. This suggests that more parents with kids have returned to in-person worship compared to adults without kids. We know that because the drop in overall attendance was slightly higher at 30%.

Student attendance has not declined as much as adult attendance.

Student ministry attendance for in-person gatherings dropped by 6%. Currently, the average student ministry is 8% of overall attendance. This includes all students in sixth through twelfth grades. Again, it appears 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 it's a combination of the two.

Ministry Connection

More churches appear to be discontinuing a membership- or partnership-type commitment.

Currently, 23% of churches do not offer membership as a connection point to the church. This is a trend we've continued to see through the years, especially as the next generation of adults continues to prioritize relational connections rather than membership in various contexts.

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

Of the churches surveyed, 85% offer home groups as an option to connect with other people. Just 7% of churches only offer Sunday school as an option.

Small group participation has increased through the last year.

Churches are seeing 84% of their adults and students participate in a group. Participation in groups has increased by 7% in the last 12 months. This is by far the highest percentage of group participation we've seen through the years when compared to attendance at physical worship gatherings.

Volunteer engagement seems to be stabilizing on this side of the pandemic.

In this reporting period, 47% of all adults and students served at least monthly on a volunteer team. That's consistent with the percentage we expected to see prior to the pandemic.

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 34% from the previous year.

> Again, I see this as positive news. I've heard from many churches that volunteer engagement significantly dropped during the pandemic. That was confirmed by our data collection the last couple of years. The fact that volunteer engagement seems to have stabilized is very encouraging.
>
> At the same time, I know many churches feel as if they don't have nearly the number of volunteers they need to sustain their ministry model. That suggests churches need to continue to be intentional about building volunteer teams. However, it may also mean the ministry model needs to be simplified to maximize the impact of volunteer teams.
>
> **-- 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 34 people in attendance. This number includes all ministry and support staff. As you will see later in this report, there is quite a distinction in staffing between growing and declining churches.

Churches have a span of care of one volunteer leader for every nine 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 median church board or elder team has eight members.

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

Churches generally have only a couple additional boards or committees.

The median number of additional boards or committees beyond the primary board is only two. However, one church had 63 additional committees.

Ministry Finances

Giving to churches has declined during the last year.

Churches reported on average that their total general fund giving was down 1.6% from the previous year. At the same time, the total number of giving units declined by 10% year-over-year.

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

The average staff budget is 54% 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 25 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 0.8 times the church's total annual giving. The Unstuck Group encourages churches to keep total debt below 2.0 times annual giving.

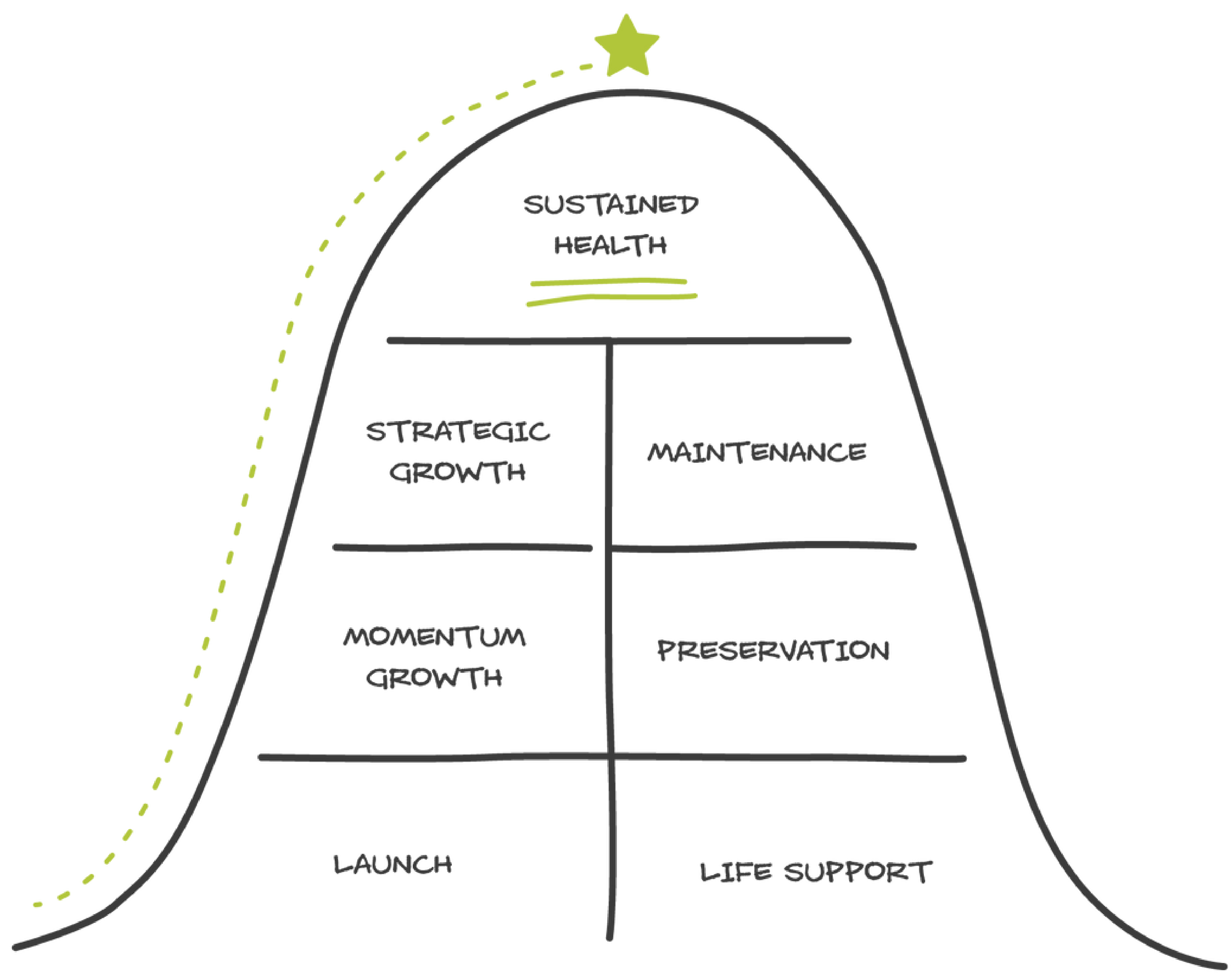
Distinctions Between Growing and Declining Churches

Even though overall attendance at physical gatherings is down 30% year-over-year in the churches that were assessed, there are several churches that are starting to grow again on this side of the pandemic. Of the 102 churches that were surveyed, 35 churches have experienced attendance growth when compared to the previous year.

What's telling, though, are some of the distinctions between the churches that are growing and those that are still experiencing attendance decline. Here are some of the key differences we identified from the data:

- **The majority of growing churches were non-denominational.** Declining churches are 40% more likely to be connected to a denomination than growing churches.
- **Growing churches have smaller boards and fewer committees than declining churches.** Churches that streamline governance also streamline decision-making. That makes it easier for these churches to make changes in ministry strategy when it's necessary because of the changes happening in the world around us.
- **Growing churches have less debt than declining churches.** It appears that growing churches are more efficient in how they're investing Kingdom resources to reach new people.
- **Growing churches are baptizing a higher percentage of people than declining churches.** In other words, the growth isn't happening because churches are only swapping Christians. A portion of the growth is coming from more new faith conversions.
- **Growing churches are reaching more younger families than declining churches.** We know that because kids and students attendance is 28% of total attendance in growing churches and only 22% of total attendance in declining churches.
- **Declining churches are more likely to offer multiple styles of worship services.** Think combinations of traditional, contemporary, blended, modern and so on. In other words, the more worship styles a church offers, the more likely the church is experiencing a decline in attendance.
- **Declining churches have significantly bigger staff teams than growing churches.** Declining churches employ 56% more full-time equivalent employees than growing churches.

> Here's one final thought regarding these differences between growing churches and declining churches:
>
> We saw every one of these trends that distinguish growing and declining churches *before* the pandemic as well. In other words, the fundamentals of what differentiates churches that are healthy, thriving and growing haven't changed because of the pandemic. In fact, several of these differences have only become more pronounced over the last couple of years.
>
> Because of that, it might just be time for many churches to get back to the fundamentals.
>
> **-- Tony Morgan**



ABOUT THE UNSTUCK GROUP

Most organizations start, grow, thrive, lose momentum, decline, and eventually end. **That doesn't have to be your church's story.**

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.

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:

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