

THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

*Benchmarks & Trends
in U.S. Churches*

Q4 2018



THE UNSTUCK GROUP[®]

— WE HELP CHURCHES GET UNSTUCK. —

KEY INSIGHTS ● ● ●



MINISTRY REACH ● ● ●

What strategies are churches using to reach their community? Are those strategies having an impact?

The average attendance of churches increased over the last year. There was a 1.3% increase in average total attendance, both worship and kids, when comparing the current year to the same period last year. Though attendance is still increasing, the growth has slowed when compared to attendance increases from a year ago.

Churches are adding more services to reach more people. Of the churches surveyed, only 25% have a single service during the week. For those churches offering multiple services, 40% have two service times, and 35% offer three or more identical service options. Twelve months ago, only 64% of churches had multiple services. That has increased to 75%.

One person will be invited to church each year for every two people in attendance. Specifically, a church of 100 people will average 57 first-time guests over a one-year period.

Almost 74% of churches offer “contemporary” styles of worship services. Less than one in four churches still offer traditional services, and only 28% are attempting some blend of contemporary and traditional. Just 14% of churches offer multiple styles of worship services.

Fewer churches have gone multisite. Of the churches surveyed, 85% are in one location, and 15% have committed to a multisite strategy and are meeting in multiple locations.

One child attends each week for every four adults. Children newborn through fifth grade make up exactly 19% of the average weekly attendance. There's no change in children's ministry attendance from this time last year.

Student ministry attendance is increasing. Currently the average student ministry is 10% of overall attendance. This includes all students in sixth through twelfth grades. This is up from 8% of overall attendance 12 months ago.

The number of baptisms over the last 12 months increased to 6% of the church's total attendance. In other words, a church averaging 1,000 people in attendance baptized 60 people. Of the churches surveyed, one church baptized 763 people in the last year.

I'm always encouraged by the number of people who are going public with their profession of faith through baptism. Several churches have baptized hundreds of people in the last year. What's discouraging, though, is that more than 7% of the churches surveyed did not baptize a single person in the last 12 months. Among all the churches our team serves, these are the ones we really want to help get unstuck.. -- Tony Morgan

MINISTRY CONNECTION ● ● ●

How are churches getting people connected? Is it working?

About one in six churches has discontinued a membership- or partnership-type commitment. Currently 16% 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, 50% offer only home groups, 30% provide an option of home groups or Sunday school and 20% only offer Sunday school.

Exactly 3 of every 5 adults and students participate in one of these smaller groups. Churches are seeing 60% of their adults and students participate in a group. This is up from 55% engagement in smaller groups one year ago.

Volunteer engagement has increased. In this reporting period, 46% of all adults and students served at least monthly on a volunteer team. That's up from 41% engagement 12 months ago.

The increases in volunteer engagement and smaller group participation are encouraging. They reflect a level of increase in spiritual maturity in the churches surveyed. However, churches need to be cautious here, because it may also reflect a lack of connection to people outside the faith and outside the church. In other words, higher percentages here may mean the "front door" isn't as wide as it could be. -- Tony Morgan

MINISTRY FINANCES ● ● ●

Are churches in a healthy financial position? How much are people giving?

Giving is flat for churches over the past year. The per capita giving was \$52 per week. That's down slightly from \$54 twelve months ago. To calculate this number, children's attendance is removed so that per capita giving is measured against adult and student attendance.

Churches spend about half of their financial resources on ministry staff. The average staff budget is 48% of the overall ministry budget. This includes the cost of all salaries and benefits. The Unstuck Group does not collect salary information for individual employees.

Churches average having the equivalent of 12 weeks in cash reserves. That's well beyond the six to eight weeks that The Unstuck Group recommends. This suggests churches are generally in a healthy financial position to invest in expanded Kingdom initiatives.

Churches are reducing their level of debt. On average, the current debt load is 1.0 times the church's total annual giving. This is down from previous quarters. The Unstuck Group encourages churches to keep total debt below 2.0 times annual giving.

MINISTRY STAFFING & LEADERSHIP ● ● ●

What are the current trends in church staffing? Are these trends healthy?

Churches increasingly lean on part-time staff. The average church has 56% of their staff working part-time. This is up from 50% a year ago. By comparison, the current national average is 17% part-time workers according to the Department of Labor.

Staffing continues to climb. The average church employs one full-time equivalent staff person for every 55 people in attendance. Twelve months ago, churches employed one staff person for every 64 people in attendance.

From my perspective, this is an alarming stat. My fear is that churches have been through several years of strong financial growth, and they've continued to increase the size of their staff teams. In the long run, we know this will negatively impact the health of the church. The biblical model is for those of us who lead in churches to equip God's people to do the work of God. When churches hire too many staff to do the work God intended for the body of Christ, we know that eventually impacts ministry health and leads to plateau and then decline. -- Tony Morgan

Churches have a span of care of one leader for every 23 people in attendance. Leaders include adults and students who are serving in leadership roles that are responsible for multiple volunteer team or small group members. The span of care has increased significantly from a year ago.

The average church board or elder team has nine members. The largest board identified in the current reporting cycle had 115 members.

Churches generally have reduced the number of additional boards or committees. Churches on average have three additional boards or committees beyond the primary board. One church had 40 additional committees.

Unless otherwise noted, this report reflects data collected by The Unstuck Group through the third quarter of 2018 over a 12-month collection cycle. The 169 churches surveyed ranged in total attendance from under 100 people to over 7,000. The average size of the churches surveyed is 652 people.

MINISTRY HEALTH ● ● ●

What are the current trends in church health? Are churches growing or declining?

Eighty percent of churches are currently sitting on the downward slope of the typical church life cycle.* In particular, the majority (60%) of churches are in Maintenance phase. For a detailed description of each phase of the life cycle, check out [The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health](#) by Tony Morgan.



*This observation reflects the results of 1,280 churches who completed the leadership team version of the Unstuck Church Assessment in the last 12 months, which incorporates objective metrics of church health, along with the subjective perspectives of the church's leadership team members. You can take the assessment for free at [assess.theunstuckchurch.com](https://www.theunstuckchurch.com/assess).

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