

ANXIETY AND VITALITY IN THE CHURCH

CURRENT STATISTICAL TRENDS IN THE UCC

PRESENTED BY ERICA DOLLHOPF, PH.D.

DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ANALYTICS, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, AND DATA

APRIL 2, 2022




OVERVIEW

- Sources of Anxiety in the Church
- Congregational Vitality
- What can my church do?



ANXIETY IN THE CHURCH

TRENDS IN OUR SOURCES OF WORRY



WHAT DOES
YOUR CHURCH
FEEL ANXIOUS
ABOUT RIGHT
NOW?

SHARE YOUR
ANSWER IN THE
ZOOM CHAT

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP 2 CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF YOUR CONGREGATION?

Attendance

Aging members

Not open to doing anything different than we did 50 years ago

Finances

No children attending

Growth

Available volunteers

Not enough leadership in members


Finding a new pastor

Safety

Building maintenance expenses

Survival

COMMON SOURCES OF ANXIETY

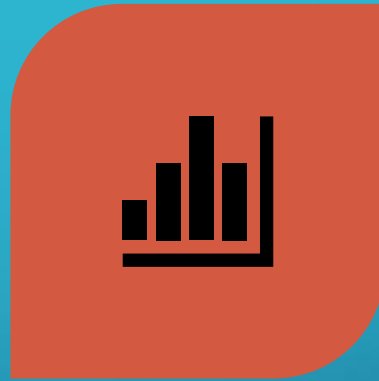


Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Membership and Worship• Christian Education• Demographic Trends
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Income• Distribution of Spending• Giving
Church Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age• Usage• Safety
Clergy Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retirements• Demographics• Burnout

HOW WE WILL MOVE THROUGH THIS SECTION



AFFIRM & ADDRESS, EXAMINE
THE DATA, FIND REASONS
FOR HOPE



PANDEMIC IMPACT



DATA SOURCES



CHURCH PARTICIPATION

MEMBERSHIP, WORSHIP, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION,
DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS



CHURCH PARTICIPATION

WHAT ARE YOUR
BIGGEST WORRIES?

SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS IN
ZOOM CHAT



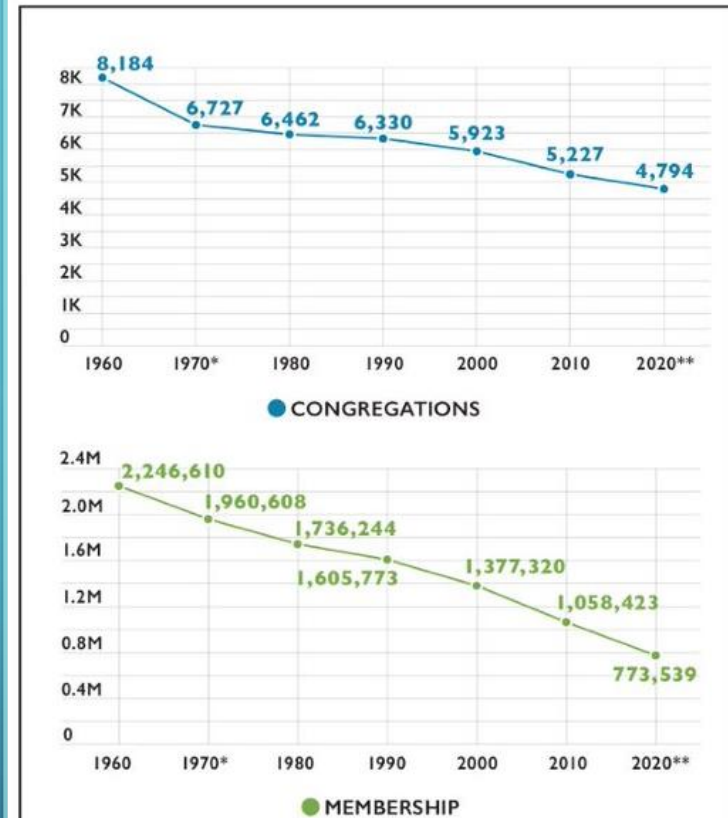
MEMBERSHIP AND WORSHIP TRENDS

GROWTH AND DECLINE IN THE UCC

- Similar to other Protestant denominations, the UCC has experienced a decline in the numbers of congregations and members in recent decades.
- Some of this decline, however, began prior to the formation of the denomination in 1957 as the number of congregations steadily decreased despite membership increases in the UCC's early years.

Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

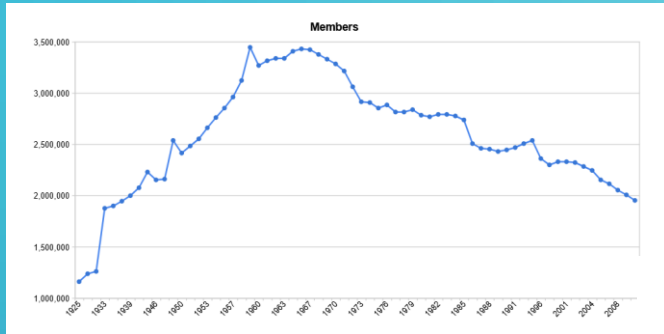
UCC CONGREGATION AND MEMBERSHIP
CHANGES BY DECADE (1960–2020)*



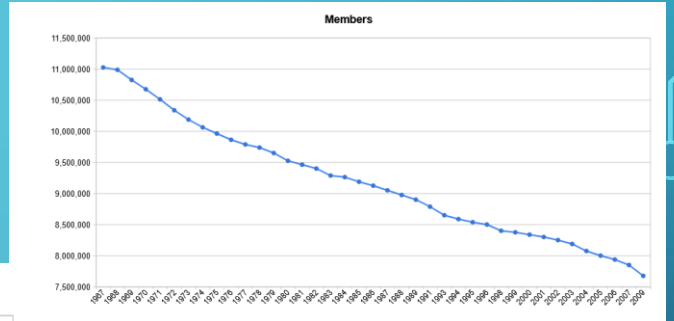
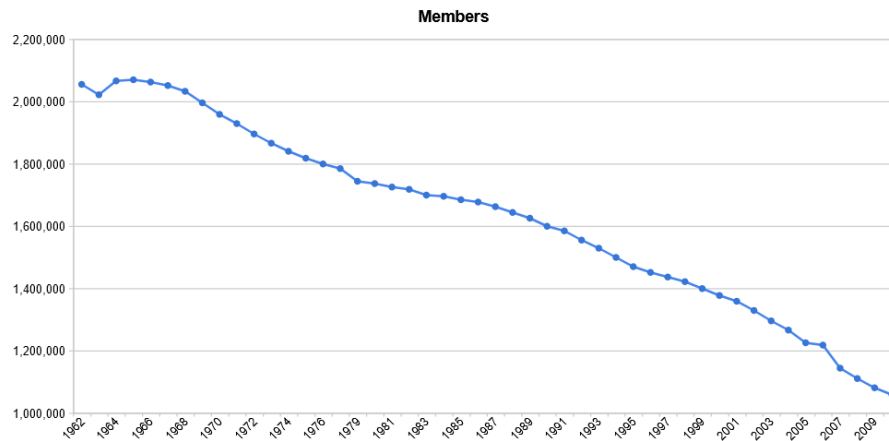
* There was a significant decrease in congregations between 1955 and 1965 that was due largely to the decisions of 1,000 Congregational Christian Churches not to unite with the United Church of Christ. During this same period, however, UCC congregations experienced an increase in membership which is not reflected in this table. A detailed statistical summary by year can be found in the 2020 UCC Yearbook & Directory, pp. 10-11.

**Data for 2020 was likely impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. See the COVID-19 section starting on page 31 for more details about how the pandemic impacted congregational life over the past year.

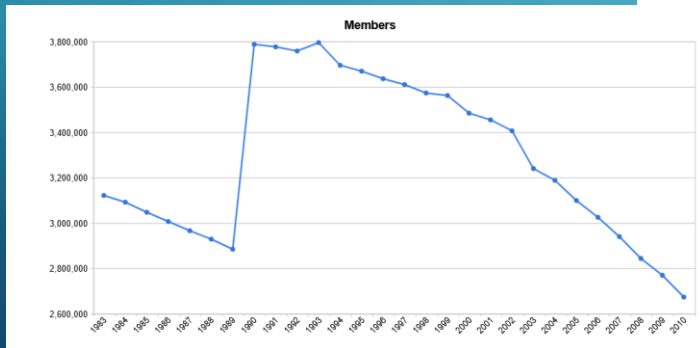
Membership Trends Across Mainline Protestant Denominations



The Episcopal Church

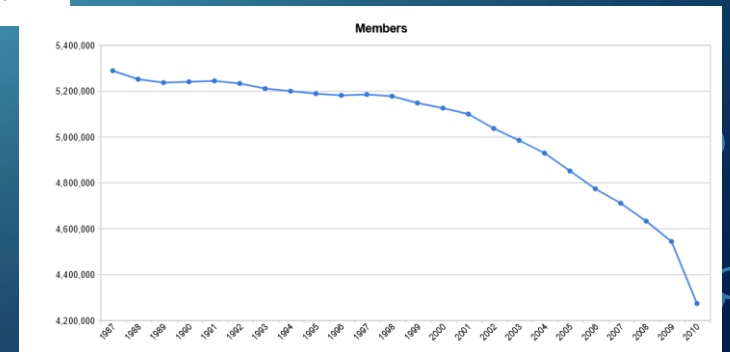


United Methodist Church



Presbyterian Church (USA)

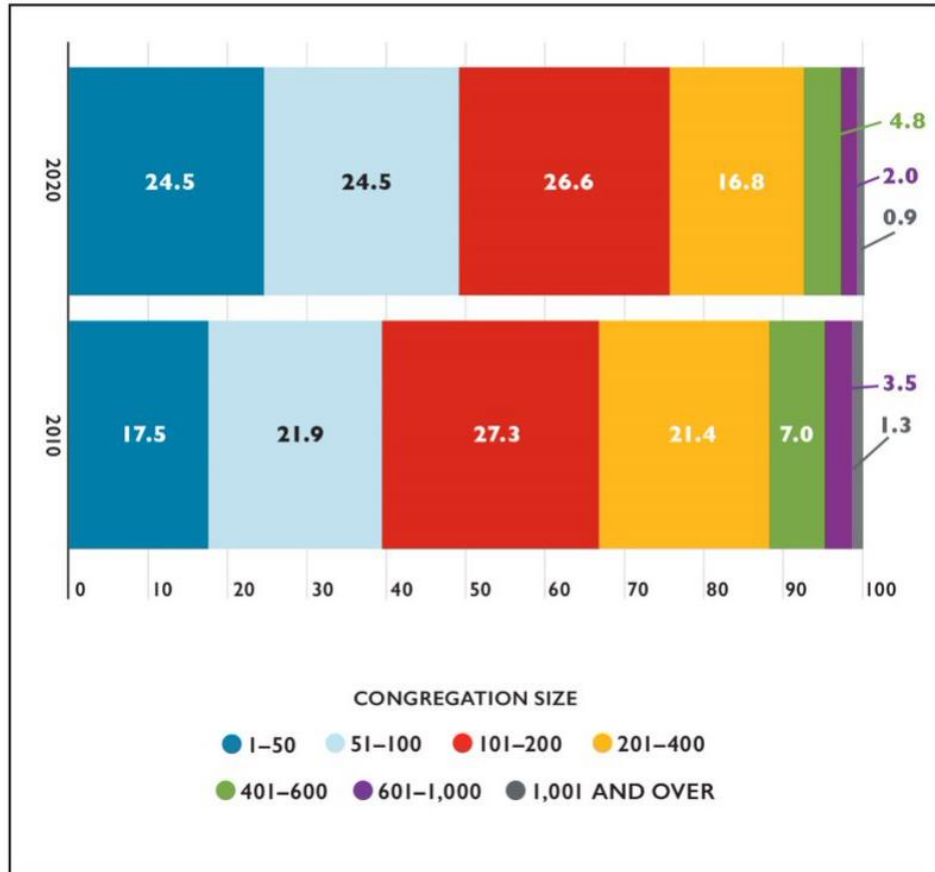
United Church of Christ



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

CHURCHES BY CONGREGATION SIZE

PERCENTAGE OF CHURCHES BY CONGREGATION SIZE

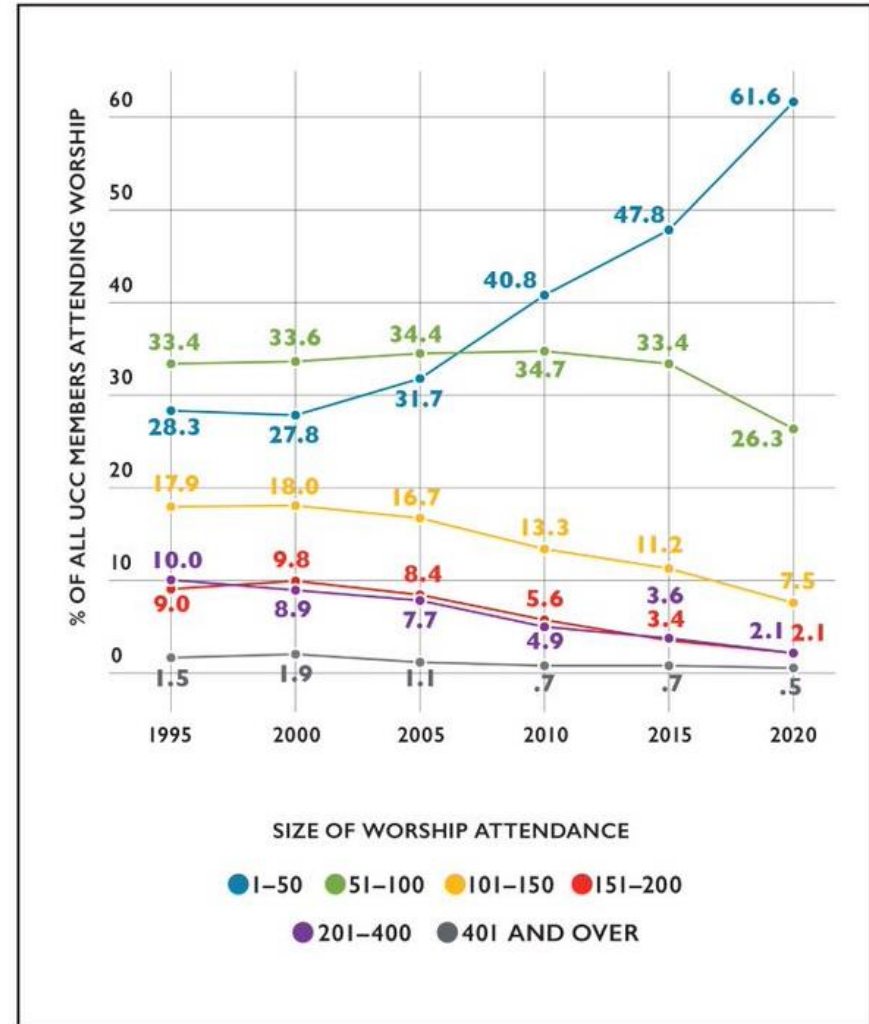


- The majority (92.4%) of UCC congregations have fewer than 400 members
- Almost half of congregations (49.0%) have 100 members or fewer.
- The UCC is increasingly becoming a denomination of small churches:
 - In 2010, 88.1% of UCC churches had 400 members or fewer and 39.4% of churches had 100 members or fewer.

CONGREGATIONS BY WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

- Even more churches are categorized as smaller churches when considering worship attendance figures
- In 2020, nearly 90% of churches in the UCC had a weekly worship attendance of fewer than 100
 - This is 12.4% higher than in 2010 and 26.5% higher than in 2000.
- The most dramatic decreases since 1995 have been occurring in congregations of 101-400 worship attenders.
- As a result, over three out of every five (61.6%) UCC congregations now have a weekly worship attendance of 1-50 individuals.
- The restrictions on gathering sizes many churches faced for in-person worship during the COVID-19 pandemic may be partly responsible for the increases in the 1-50 category in 2020.

PERCENTAGE OF UCC CONGREGATIONS BY WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

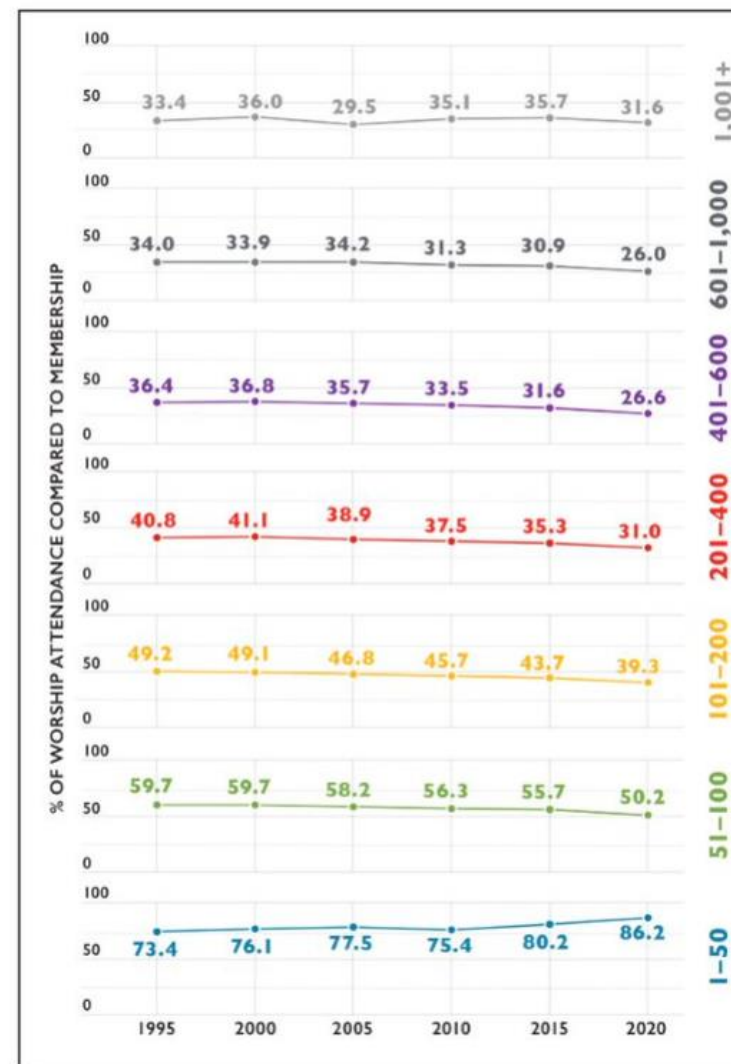


Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

WORSHIP ATTENDANCE COMPARED TO MEMBERSHIP

- From 1995 to 2020, fewer people generally attended in-person worship as an overall proportion of the number of church members, with two exceptions:
 - The largest churches have effectively remained stable
 - The smallest churches, which have seen an increase.
- The smallest churches have the highest worship attendance to member ratios: on average, in 1995 there were 73.4% of people attending in-person worship compared to the overall membership of a 1-50 member congregation; this percentage has risen to 86.2% in 2020.
- Caveat to trends: those who attend in-person worship may not all be members.
- In addition, given the restrictions many churches faced for in-person worship during the COVID-19 pandemic, the attendance for in-person worship in 2020 may have been limited for health and safety reasons.

AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF WORSHIP ATTENDANCE TO MEMBERSHIP BY SIZE



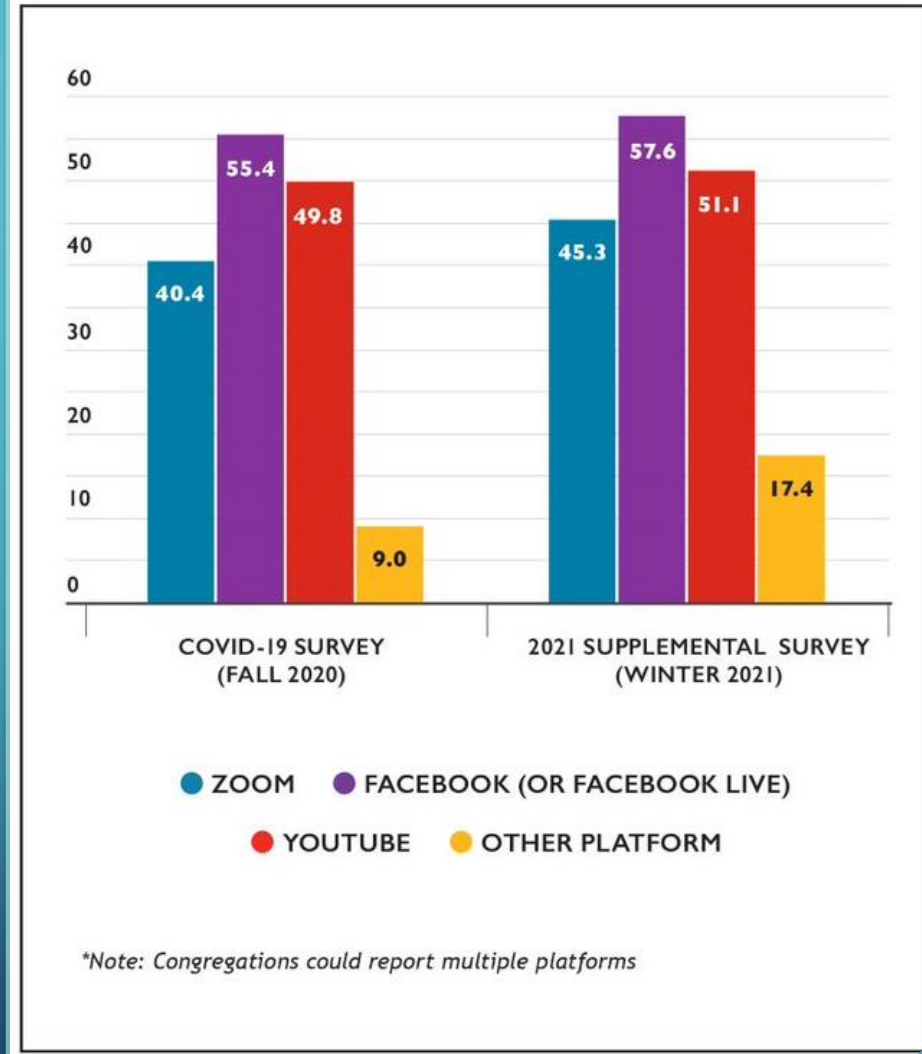
Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

VIRTUAL WORSHIP TRENDS

- 96.5% of UCC congregations reported suspending in-person worship at some point due to the pandemic.
- Congregations vastly expanded virtual worship offerings to a level never before seen.
 - 9% of congregations reported offering virtual worship prior to the pandemic
 - 91.3% of congregations have reported offering virtual worship at some point during the pandemic (Winter 2021)
- These virtual worship opportunities were both live (62.9%) and recorded (53.0%) (note: congregations could report both options).
- Congregations most commonly used Zoom, Facebook/Facebook Live, and YouTube as platforms for sharing their virtual worship services
- Congregations are increasingly using multiple platforms for their services.
- Nearly three quarters (72.5%) of congregations reported that they are planning to continue to offer virtual worship beyond the pandemic.

Sources: 2021 Statistical Profile, 2020 COVID-19 Survey

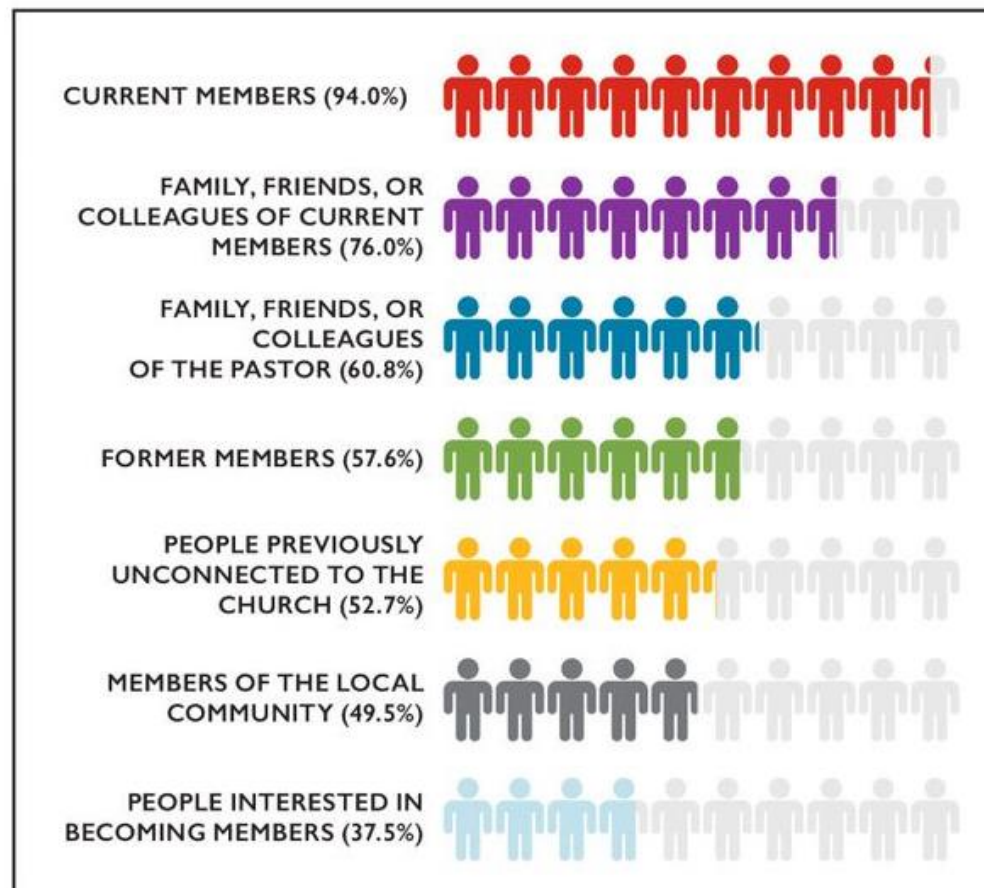
CONGREGATIONS' VIRTUAL WORSHIP PLATFORM USAGE



WHO IS ATTENDING VIRTUAL WORSHIP?

- Virtual worship has enabled congregations to welcome new people to their church as well as reconnect with people whom they haven't seen in awhile. Among churches holding virtual worship, nearly all congregations (94.0%) reported that current members attended their services.
- Family, friends, and colleagues of current members (76.0%) as well as family, friends, and colleagues of the pastor (60.8%) also commonly attended congregations' online worship services.
- Over half of congregations (52.7%) reported that people previously unconnected to their church were attending their online worship services, suggesting that virtual worship may be a way many congregations can and are engaging in outreach.

VIRTUAL WORSHIP ATTENDEES

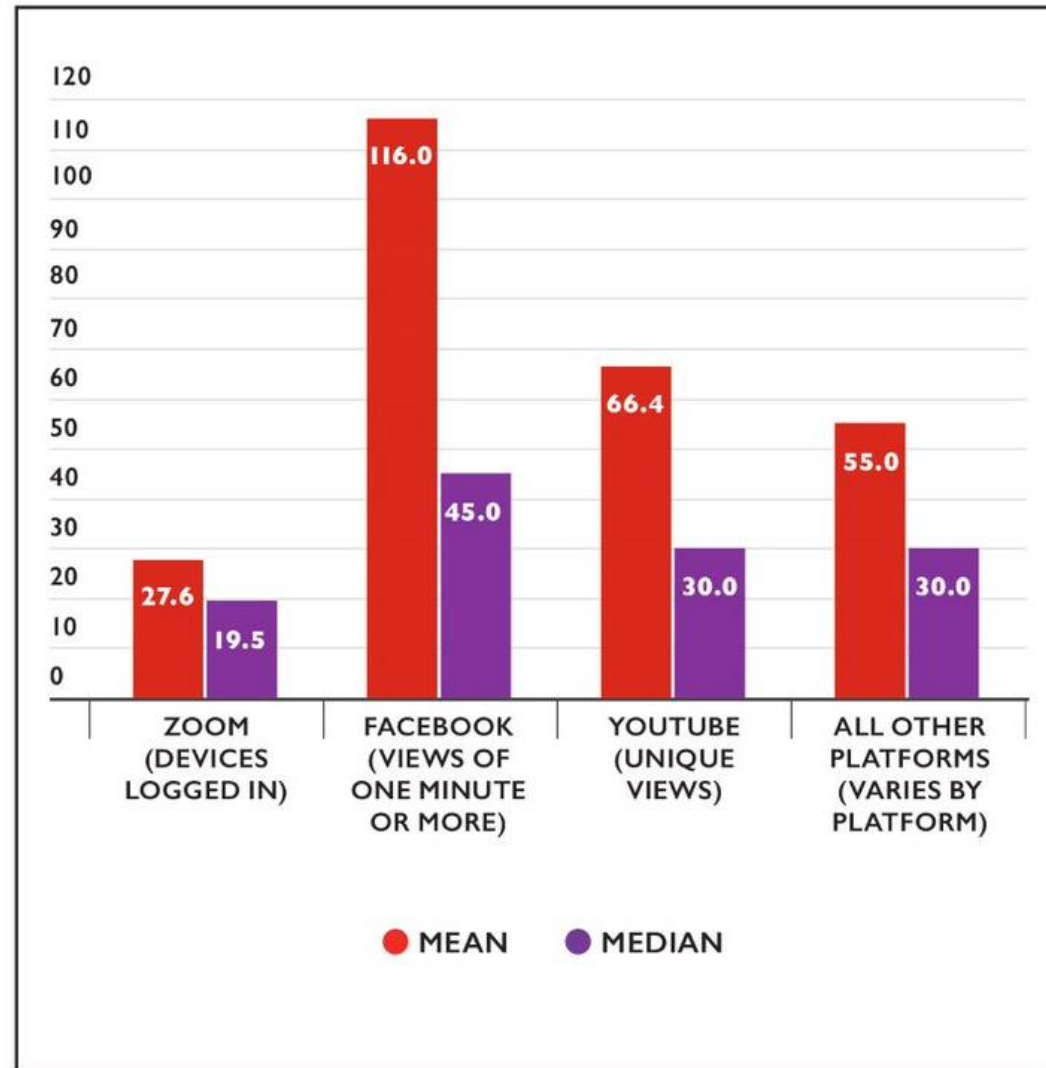


VIRTUAL WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

- Why is virtual worship measured separately from in-person worship?
 - These numbers essentially measure different things.
 - While in-person worship attendance figures represent the number of people present, online worship attendance generally represents the number of devices that have connected
 - Multiple people may be viewing worship on a single device or a single device may connect multiple times.
 - Different platforms have different ways of measuring viewership, which is why attendance is measured separately for different platforms.

Sources: 2021 Statistical Profile, 2020 COVID-19 Survey

VIRTUAL WORSHIP ATTENDANCE BY PLATFORM





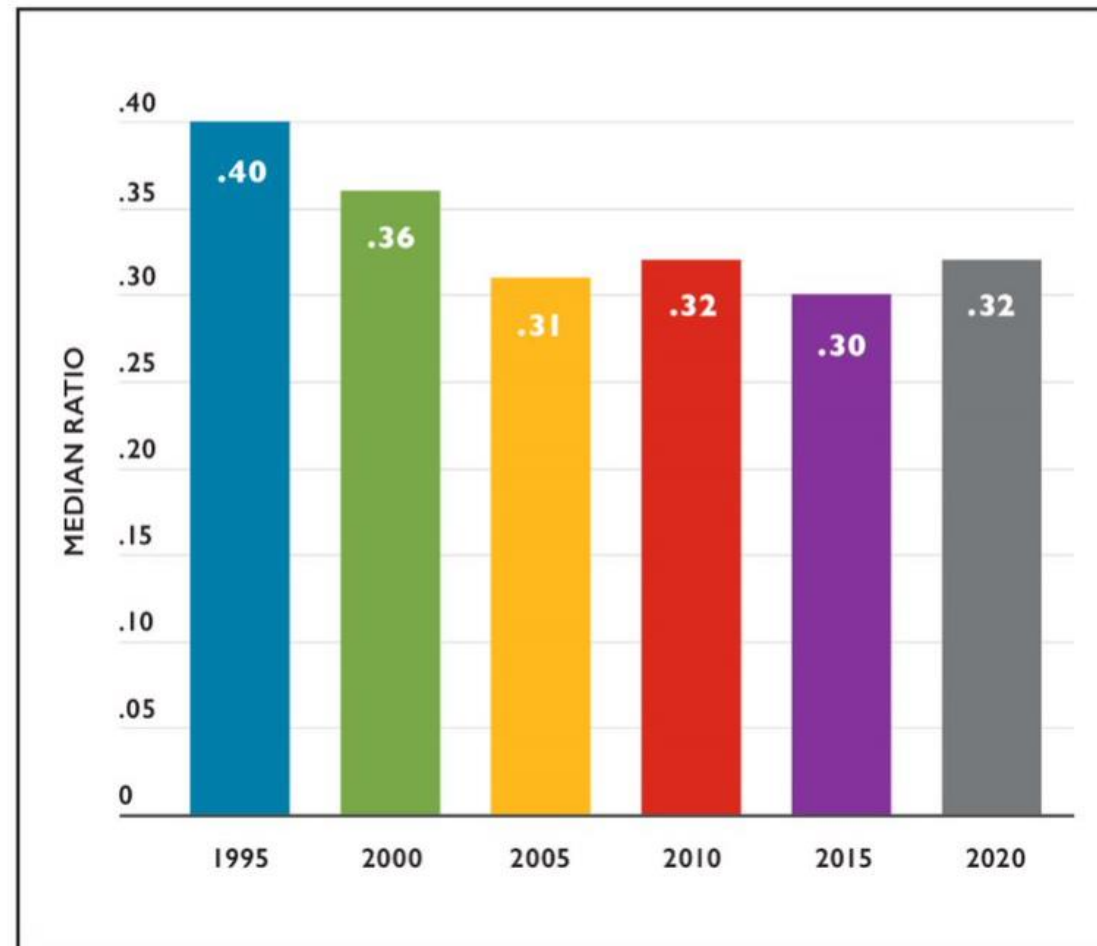
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

TRENDS IN THE UCC

- Since the 1950s, enrollment and attendance numbers for Christian Education/Faith Formation programming (also known as Church School or Sunday School enrollment in previous years) has been declining along with membership numbers.
- The median percentage of Christian Education/Faith Formation attendance compared to worship attendance has been quite stable since 2005.
- This suggests that just under one third of people who attend worship services also attend Christian Education/Faith Formation programming
 - These categories may not perfectly overlap in practice.
- While there has been an unusually large decrease in Christian Education/Faith Formation enrollment in 2020, this was most likely a result of the pandemic—the median percentage of attendance remained similar to previous years.

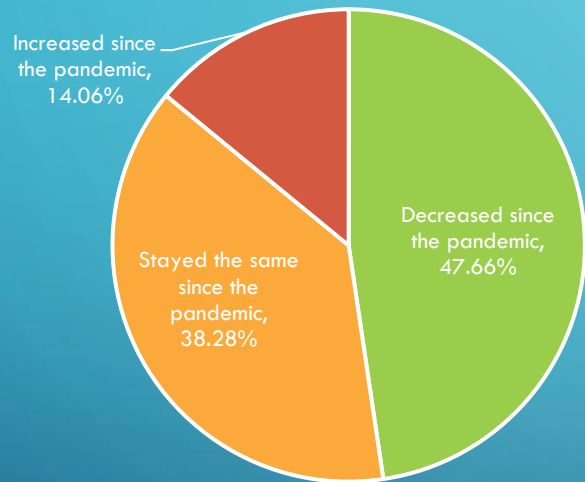
Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

MEDIAN RATIO OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION/ FAITH FORMATION ATTENDANCE TO WORSHIP ATTENDANCE OVER TIME (1955–2020)

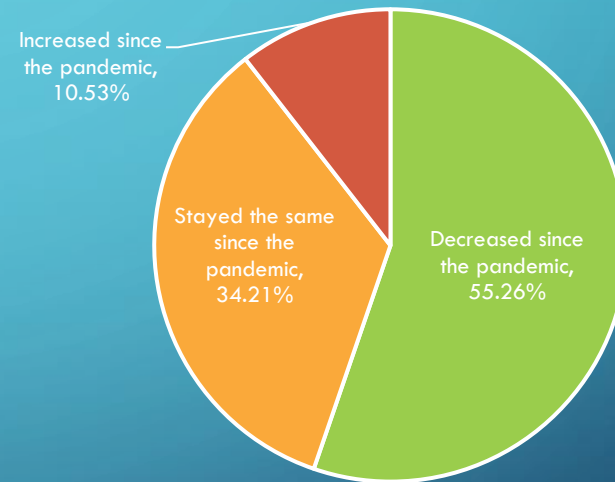


PANDEMIC IMPACT ON ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

July 2021: The number of adults (>17) participating in religious education



November 2021: The number of adults (>17) participating in religious education

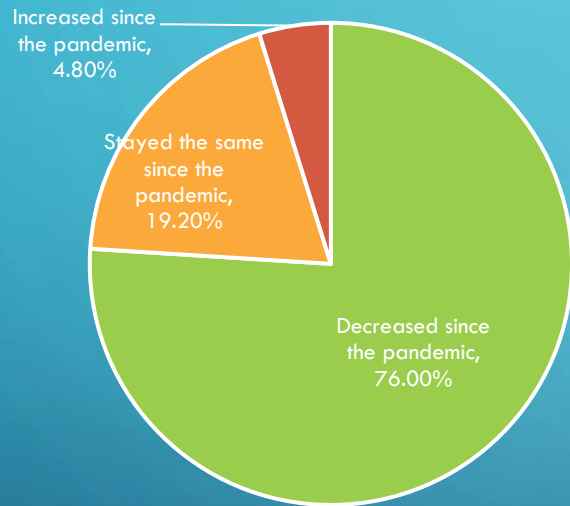


- Between July and November 2021, smaller proportions of churches reported both that adult participation in religious education had increased or stayed the same since the pandemic, while a larger proportion of congregations reported a decrease in participation

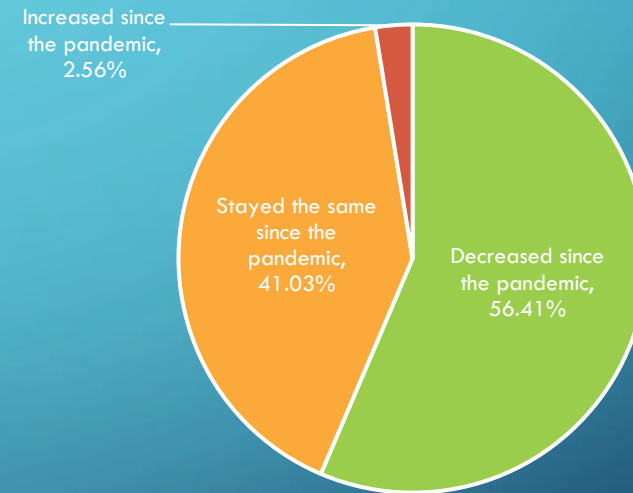
Sources: EPIC FACT Surveys 1 and 2

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

July 2021: The number of children (<18) participating in religious education



November 2021: The number of children (<18) participating in religious education



- Between July and November 2021, smaller proportions of churches reported both that adult participation in religious education had decreased or increased since the pandemic
- While a higher proportion of churches initially reported declines in children's participation compared to adult participation (76% compared to 48%), by November 2021, the proportions were nearly identical (56% compared to 55%)

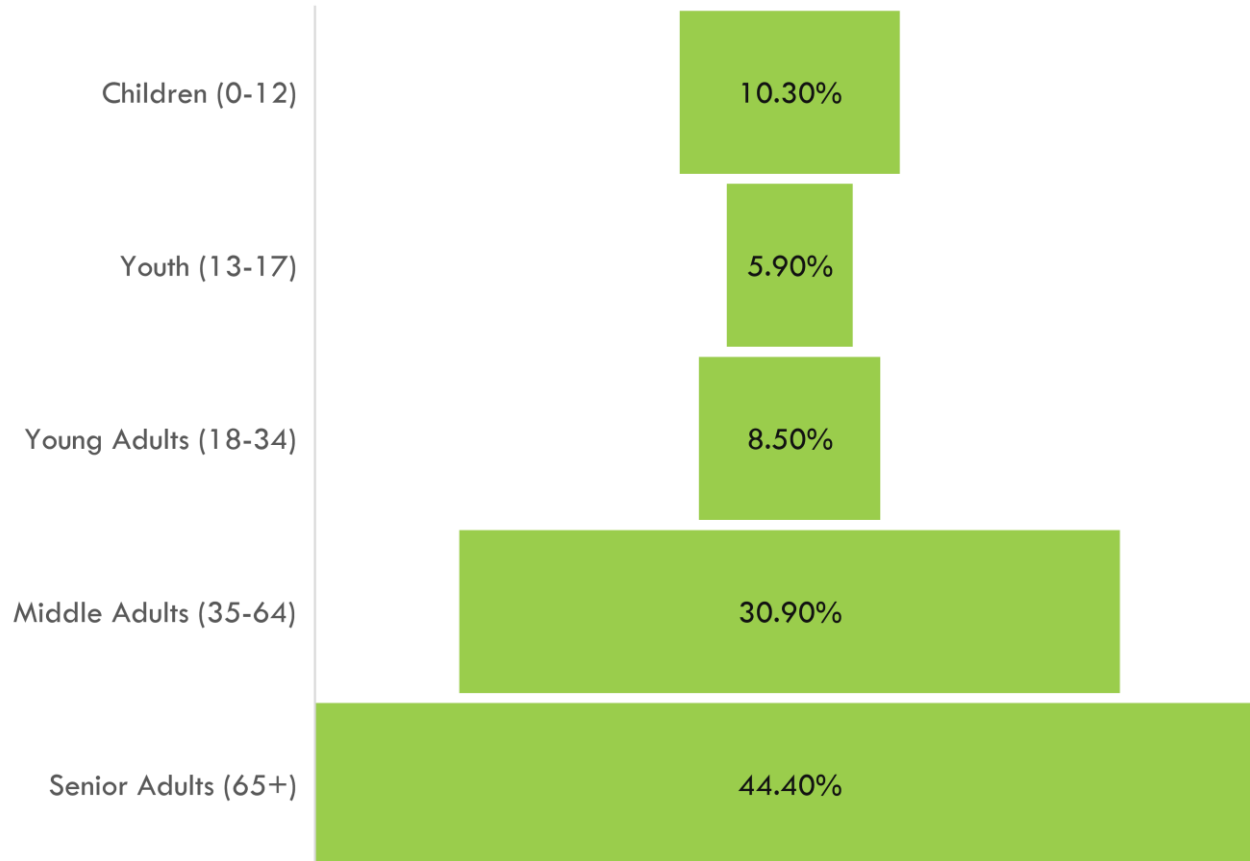
Sources: EPIC FACT Surveys 1 and 2

The background is a dark teal gradient. In the corners, there are white line-art graphics resembling circuit boards or neural networks, with lines connecting to small circles.

PARTICIPANT AGE DEMOGRAPHICS

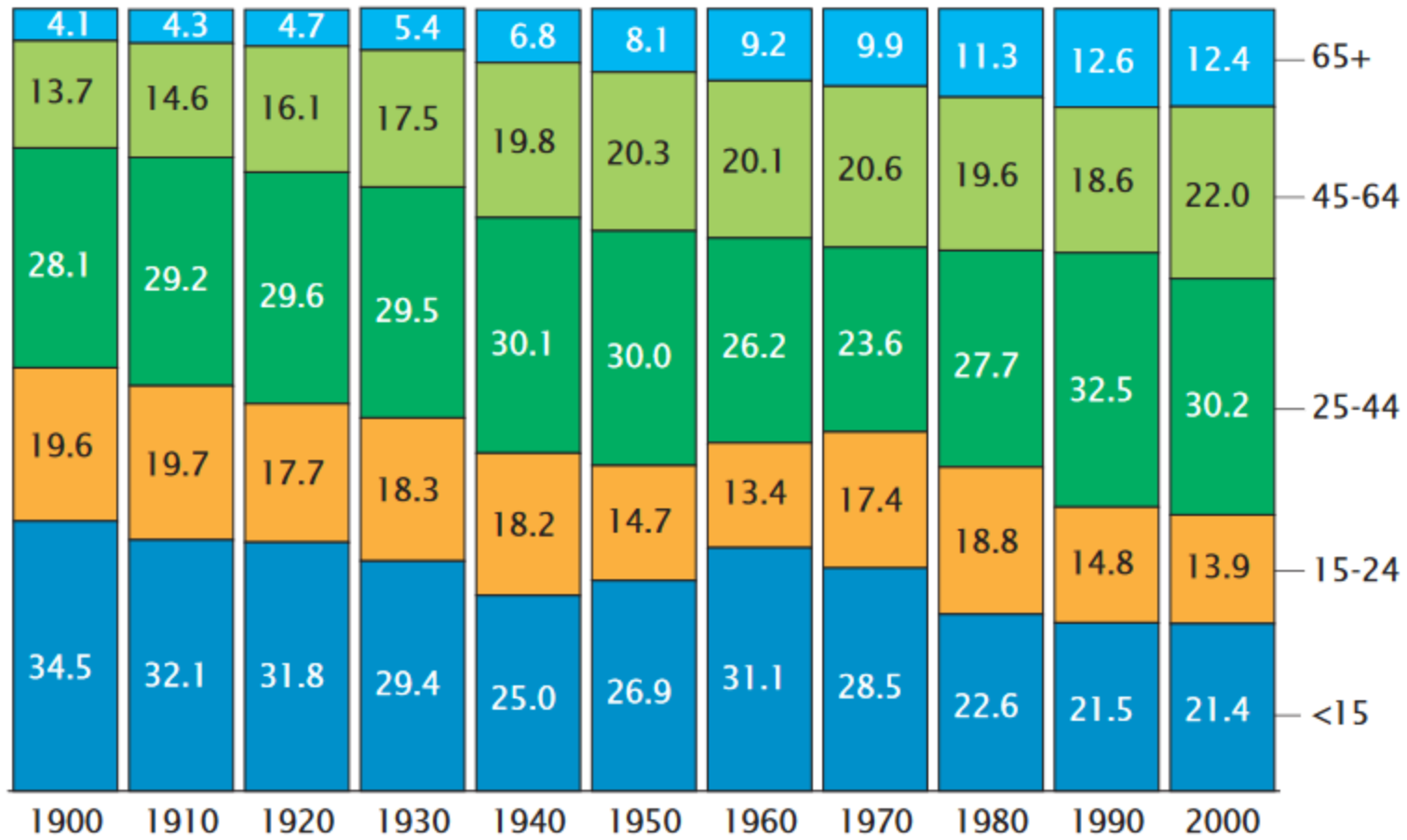
PARTICIPANT AGE DEMOGRAPHICS

Mean % of Congregation Participants



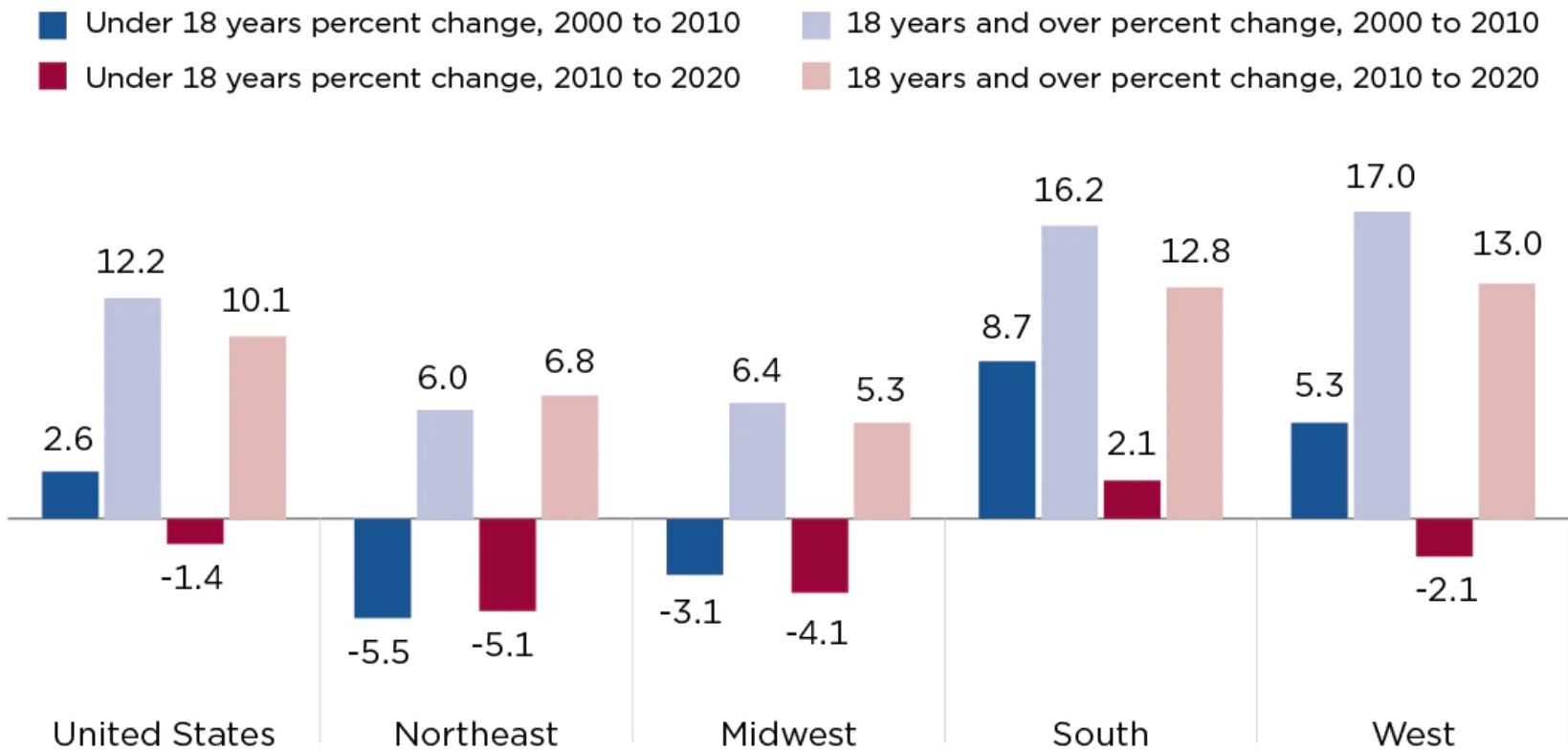
- Three quarters of congregational participants (75.3%), on average, are middle adults or senior adults
- Senior adults comprise the largest category of participants on average (44.4%)
- Youth (5.9%) and young adults (8.5%) on average comprise the fewest participants

Figure 2-4.
**Percent Distribution of the Total Population
 by Age: 1900 to 2000**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census of population, 1900 to 2000.

Percent Change in Population by Age Groups and Regions: 2000 to 2010 and 2010 to 2020



Note: The Northeast Region includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Midwest includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The South includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The West includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

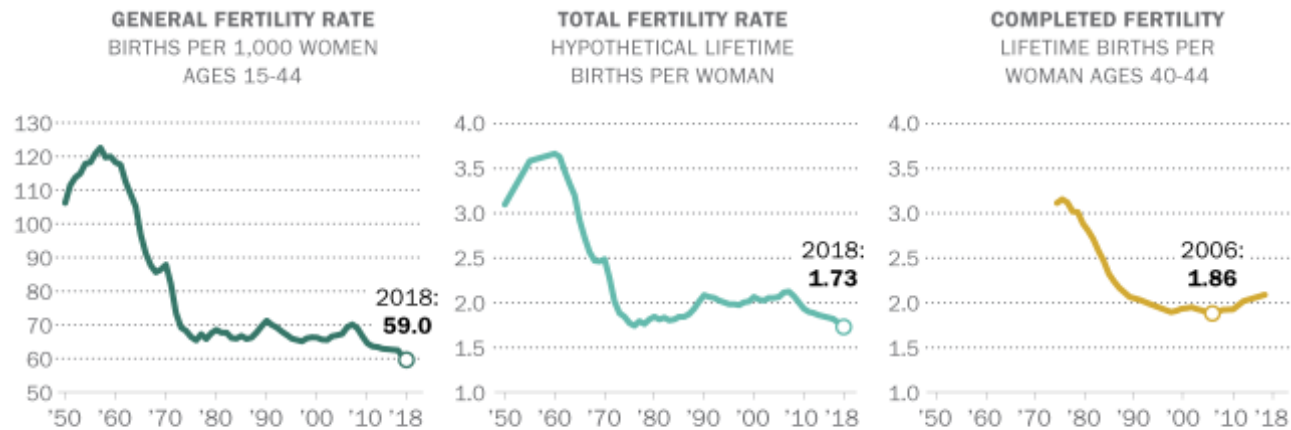
Information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions is available at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/technical-documentation/complete-tech-docs/summary-file/>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File; 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File; 2020 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File.

Source:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/stories/2021/08/united-states-adult-population-grew-faster-than-nations-total-population-from-2010-to-2020-figure-1.jpg>

U.S. fertility hit all-time low in 2018 ... and 2006

Fertility indicators



Note: 2018 data are preliminary. Where necessary, TFR and completed fertility values are interpolated. Completed fertility data available from 1976 to 2016 only. All values based upon live births.

Source: Data for GFR obtained from National Center for Health Statistics and Heuser (1976); for completed fertility, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey; for TFR, National Center for Health Statistics.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

FERTILITY RATES

- Fertility rates in the US, across various measures, have overall declined since the founding of the UCC
- One of the likely consequences is of this are fewer children being present in church life, aside from other factors that may limit the participation of children

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a network of light blue lines and small circles, resembling a circuit board or a tree structure. The lines are vertical and horizontal, with some branching out to small circles at the ends.

CHURCH FINANCES

INCOME, DISTRIBUTION OF SPENDING, GIVING



FINANCES

WHAT ARE YOUR
BIGGEST WORRIES?

SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS IN
ZOOM CHAT

LOCAL CHURCH EXPENDITURES

- Operating expenses for an average local congregation in 2020 was \$172,934—a \$10,918 (-5.9%) average decrease from 2019.
- Average total income for a local church in 2020 was \$220,505—a \$14,740 (-6.3%) average decrease from 2019.
- Both the average operating expenses and income for local congregations **increased** from average amounts reported over the past decade—from \$161,759 in expenses (a 6.9% increase) and \$206,743 in income (a 6.7% increase) in 2010.
- This is a considerably smaller increase than in previous years (15.0% and 16.3% increase in 2019, respectively).

TOTAL LOCAL CHURCH EXPENDITURES (2016–2020)

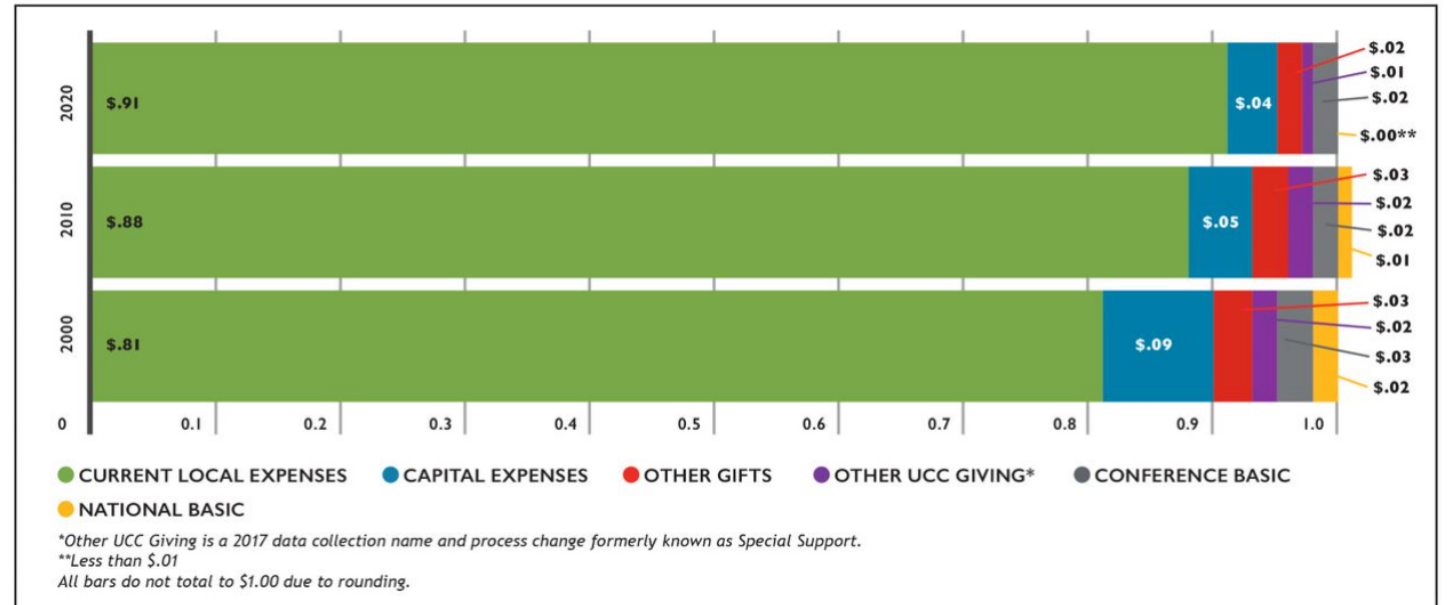
EXPENDITURE	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Current Local Expenses	\$819,948,400	\$850,592,022	\$856,790,219	\$865,208,873	\$802,588,216
Total Mission Support	\$60,992,331	\$58,151,694	\$54,910,992	\$51,535,392	\$46,095,281
Capital Expenses	\$39,072,196	\$55,196,673	\$55,852,902	\$50,254,926	\$34,893,962
TOTAL	\$920,012,927	\$963,940,389	\$967,554,113	\$966,999,191	\$883,577,459

Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

THE CHURCH DOLLAR

- In the last two decades, the distribution of the church dollar has experienced some noticeable shifts. **Current local expenses** have increased by **\$.10** while all others have decreased or remained steady.
- All types of UCC Giving (Conference Basic, National Basic, and Other UCC Giving) have decreased in the past 20 years.

CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH DOLLAR



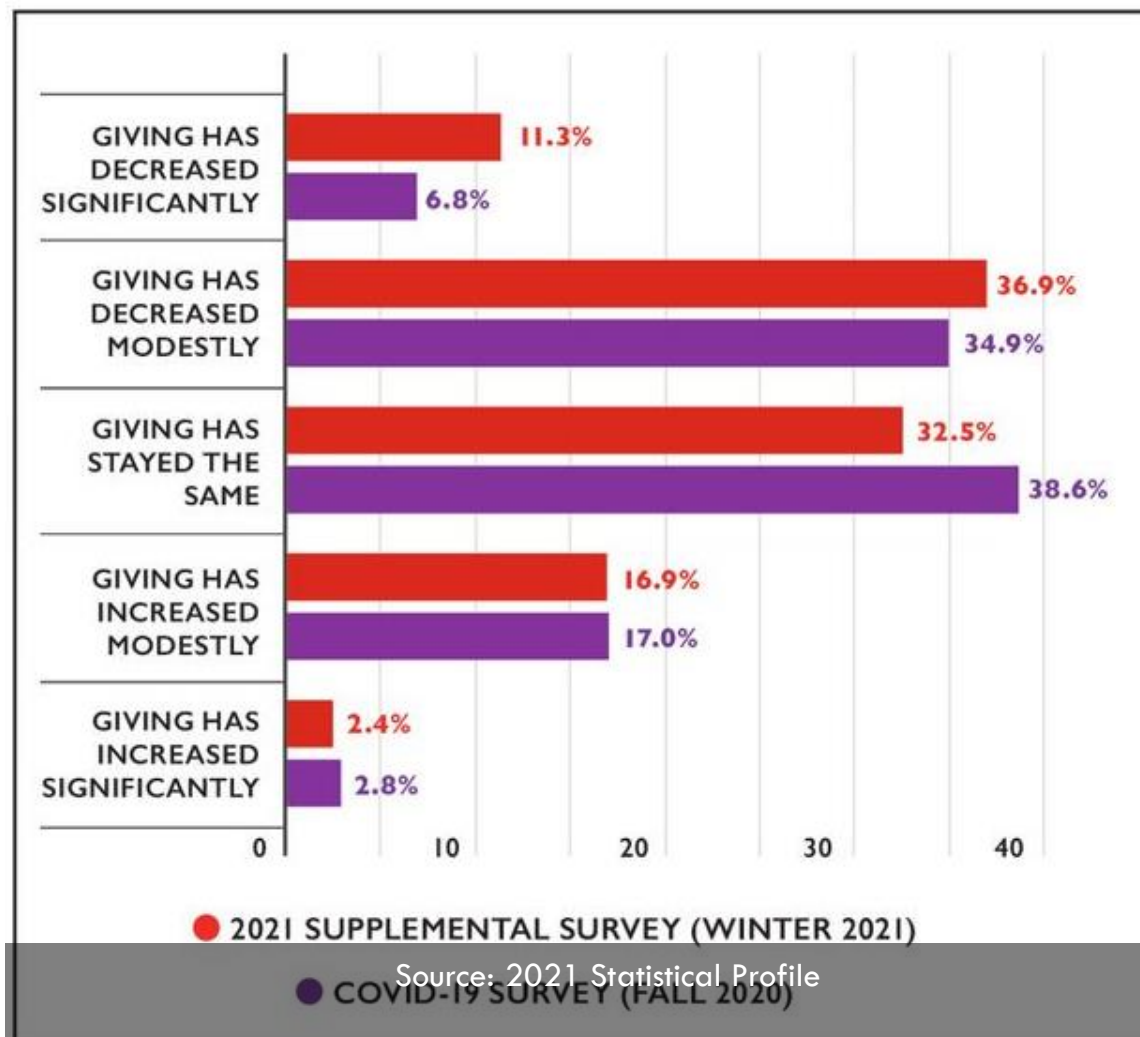
Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

FINANCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- In the 2021 supplemental survey, nearly half (48.2%) of congregations reported that their giving has decreased modestly or significantly, which is an increase over the first COVID-19 survey where 41.7% of congregations reported the same.
- Nearly 1 in 5 congregations (19.3%) have reported that giving has increased modestly or significantly since the beginning of the pandemic, however, suggesting that the pandemic has had very different financial impacts for different congregations.

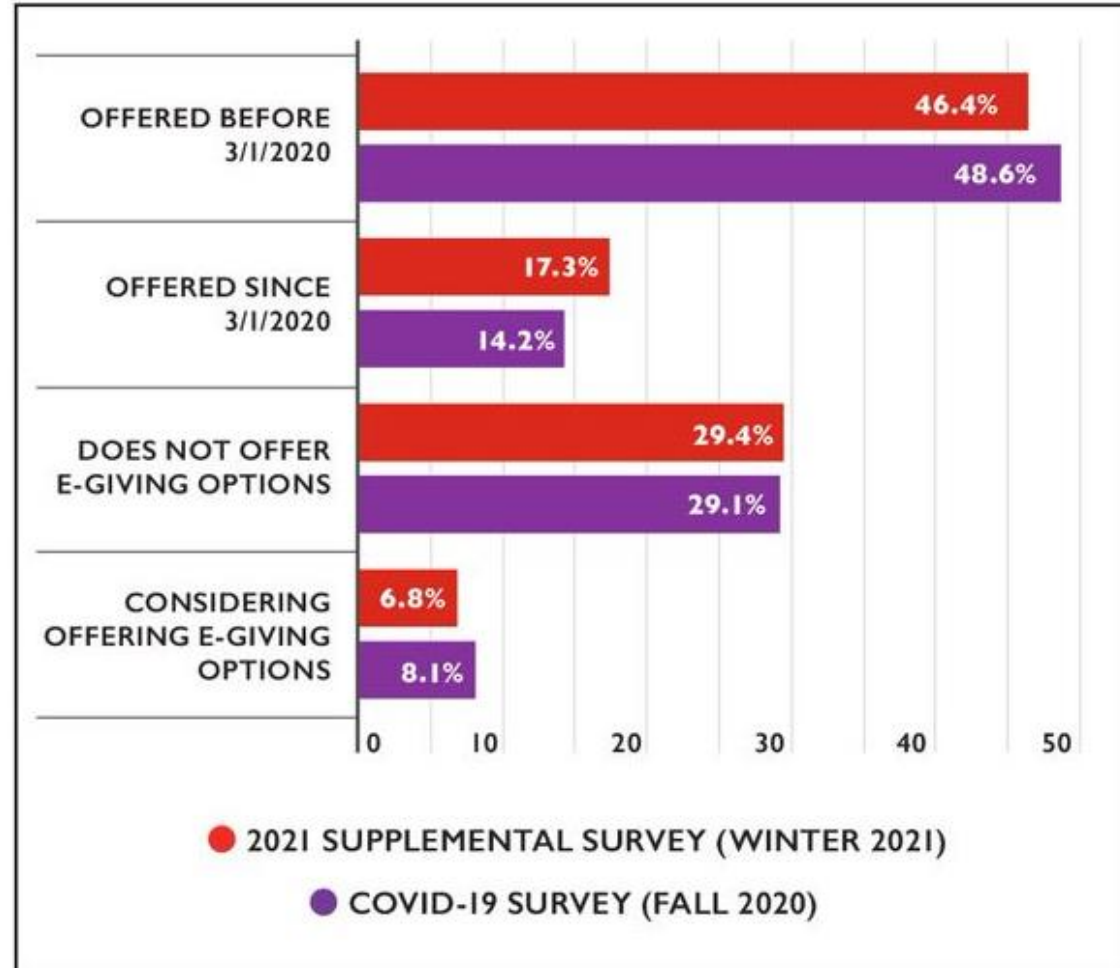
OVERALL GIVING

How has giving in your church changed since COVID-19?



ELECTRONIC GIVING TRENDS

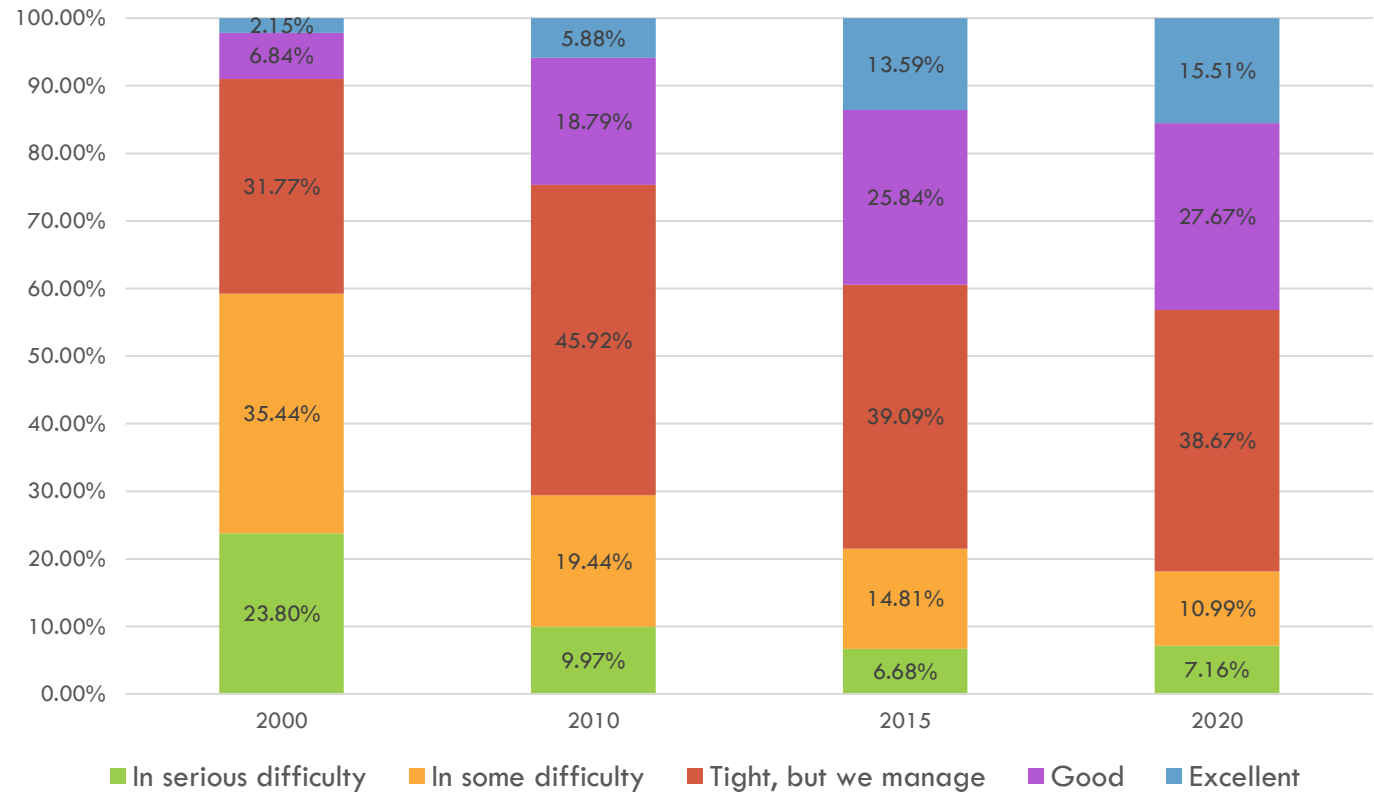
- Nearly half of congregations offered electronic giving options before the pandemic, and now nearly two thirds of congregations (63.7%) offer electronic giving.
- Interestingly, these numbers have not changed much between the two surveys asking COVID-19-related questions, suggesting that churches that adopted online giving as a result of the pandemic did so early on.
- Congregations most commonly reported using Vanco (including Realm), Tithe.ly, PayPal, Venmo, and the church or conference website.



SELF-RATED FINANCIAL HEALTH

Sources: 2000, 2010, 2015, and 2020 FACT Surveys (question not asked in 2005)

Self-Rated Financial Health of UCC Congregation



- Since 2000, UCC congregations have generally reported higher rates financial health, with 9% reporting “Good” or “Excellent” financial health in 2000 and 43% reporting the same in 2020.



THE CHURCH BUILDING

AGE, USAGE, SAFETY



CHURCH BUILDINGS

WHAT ARE YOUR
BIGGEST WORRIES?

SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS IN
ZOOM CHAT



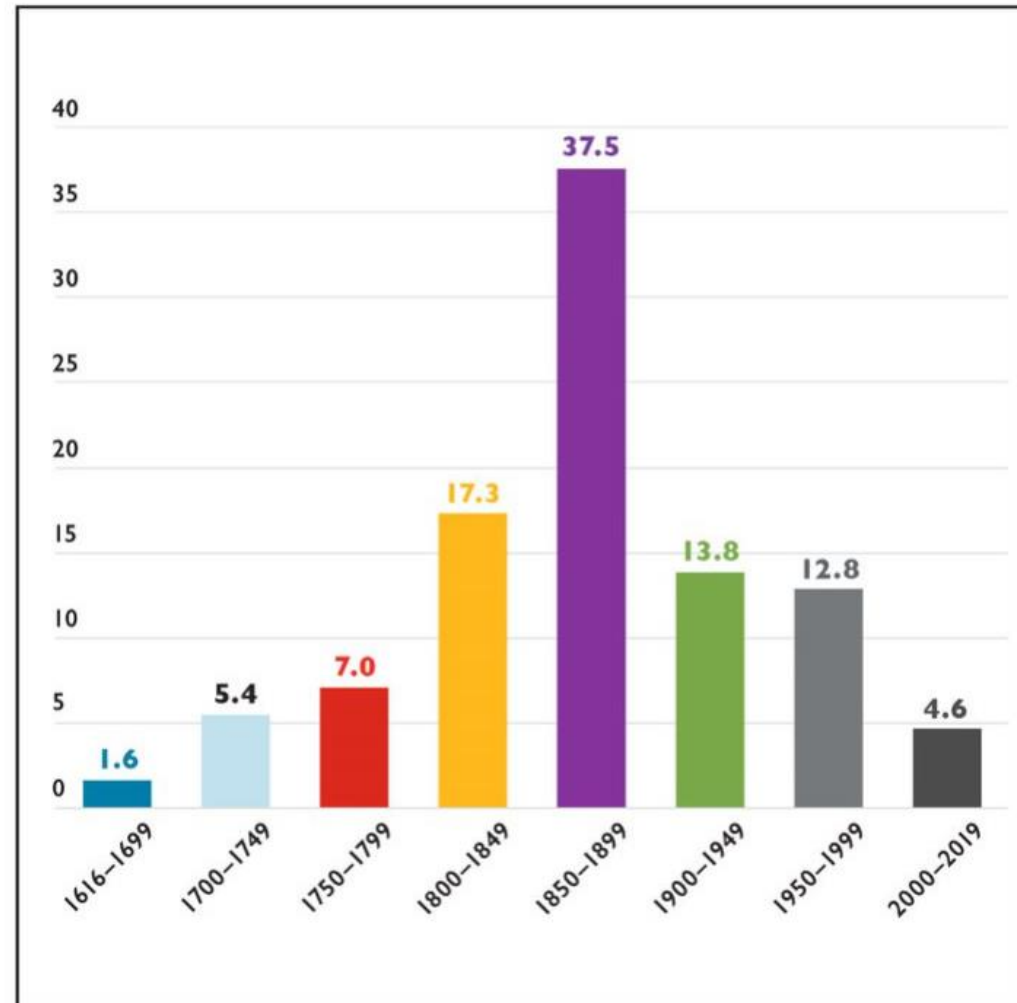
CHURCH BUILDING AGE AND USAGE

DATE OF ORGANIZATION

- While the UCC has only been in existence since 1957, many of its congregations were founded by predecessor denominations.
- The vast majority of churches (84.9%) were organized before the UCC's founding year.
- The latter nineteenth century (1850-1899) was the most common founding era for UCC churches
- Just under 1 in 20 UCC churches (4.6%) has been founded in 2000 or later, a percentage that has been increasing steadily.
- The average founding date of congregations is 1873 while the median founding date is 1875.

Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

UCC CONGREGATIONS BY DATE OF ORGANIZATION (PERCENTAGE)

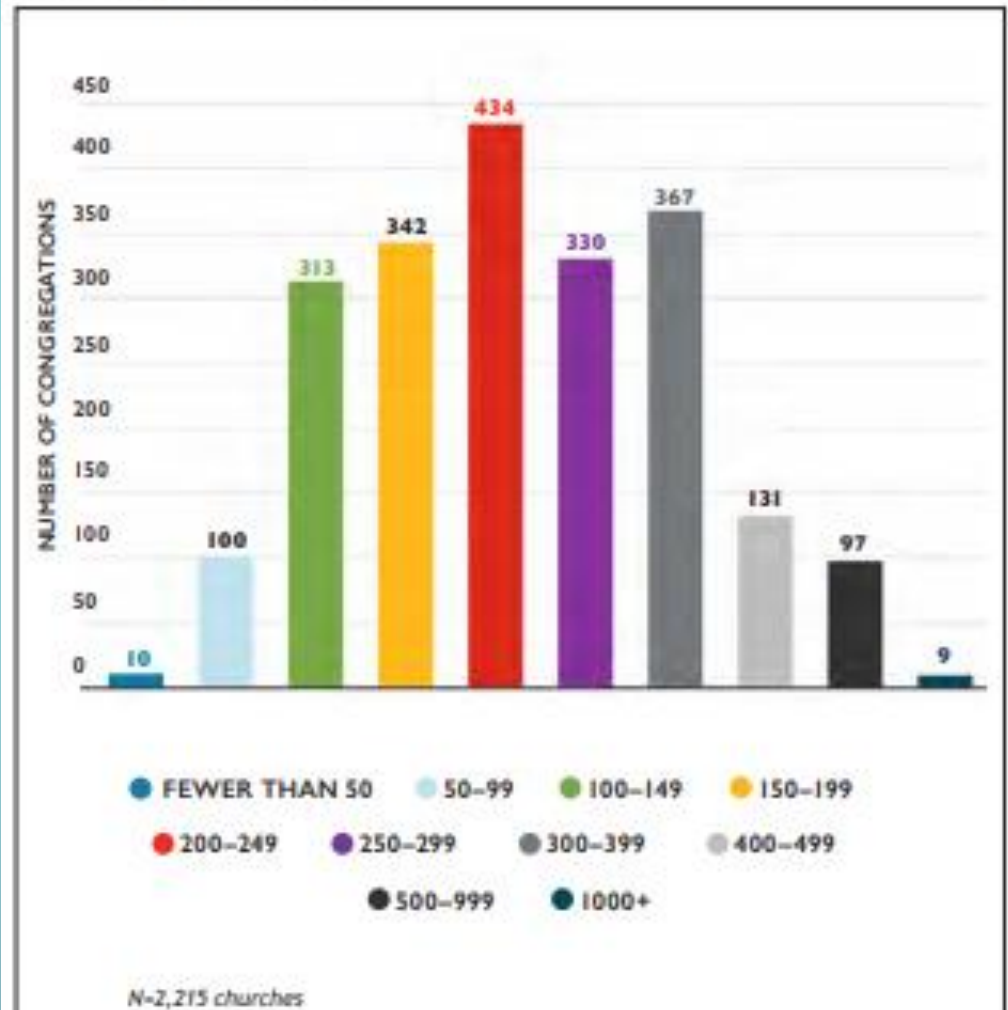


BUILDING AGE AND WORSHIP CAPACITY

- 2019 supplemental survey questions on building usage
- Among survey respondents, the median date that congregations moved into their current building is 1959, suggesting that UCC congregational buildings are generally much newer than the congregations themselves (1875 was the median founding date for congregations in the year this data was collected).
- Nearly three-quarters of congregations (73.9%) indicated their congregation was still in the same location where it was founded (though not necessarily in the same building)
- 94.6% of congregations reported that they owned their building, with the remainder reporting renting, moving their primary worship location regularly, using a facility for free, or some other arrangement.
- The average reported worship capacity was 240 and the median value was 200.
- 8 in 10 congregations in the UCC (84.2%) in 2019 reported that their average worship attendance was 100 or fewer
- 16.5% of congregations report sharing their building with another congregation

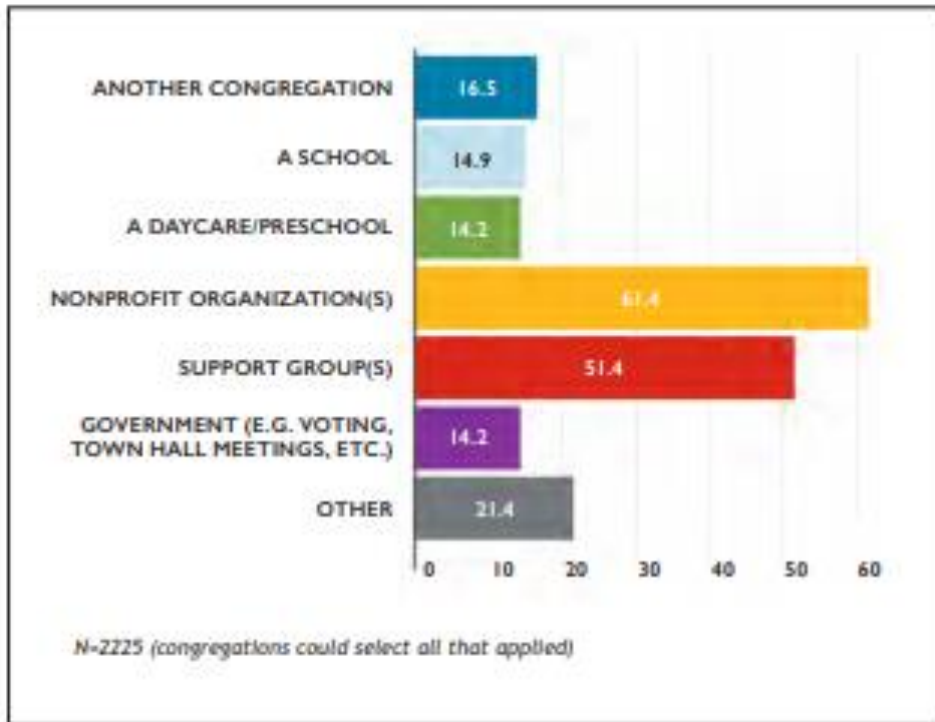
Source: 2020 Statistical Profile, Special Report Section
(Erica Dollhopf, author)

WORSHIP CAPACITY



USAGE OF CHURCH BUILDING

USE OF SPACE BY OTHER ORGANIZATIONS – % OF CHURCHES



- Most UCC churches open their doors to others in the community in a variety of ways.
- The most commonly reported building use by another organization was use by a nonprofit organization, such as the Girl Scouts or a food pantry (61.4%).
- Slightly over half of the respondents (51.4%) also reported that support groups used their building.
- Other uses include by another congregation, by the government (e.g. for voting or town hall meetings), a school, or a daycare/preschool.

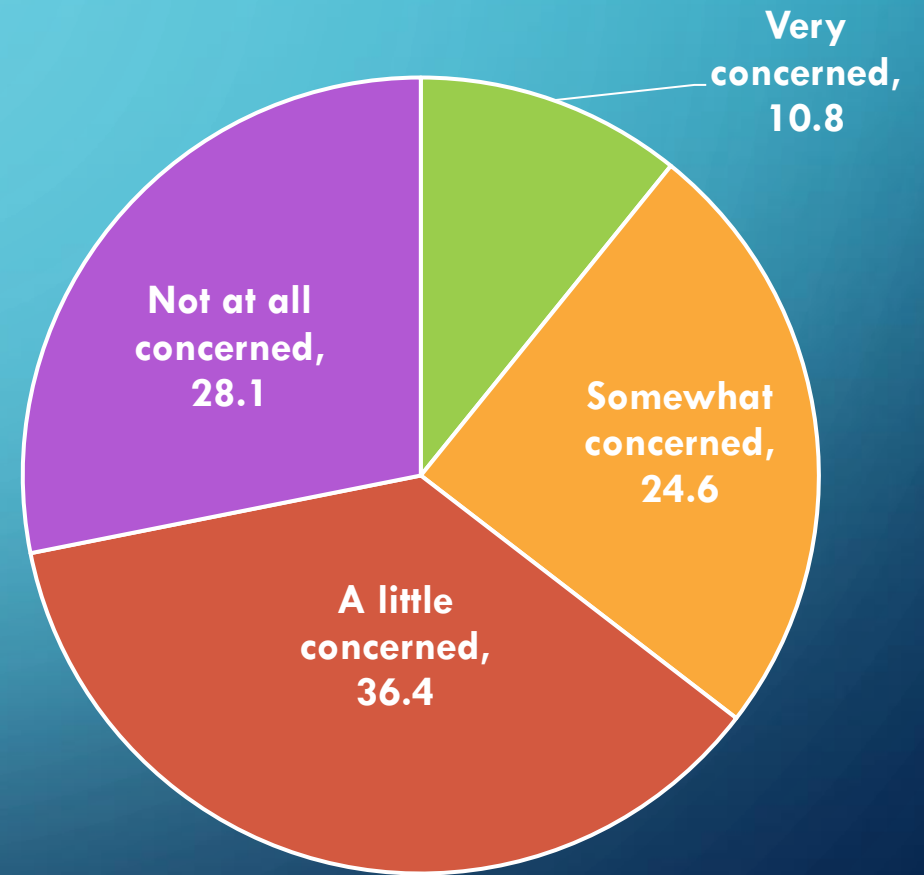
The background is a dark blue gradient with a subtle circular pattern. White circuit-like lines with circular nodes are positioned in the corners: top-left, top-right, bottom-left, and bottom-right. The text "SAFETY AND SECURITY" is centered in the middle of the page.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

CONCERNS ABOUT SECURITY

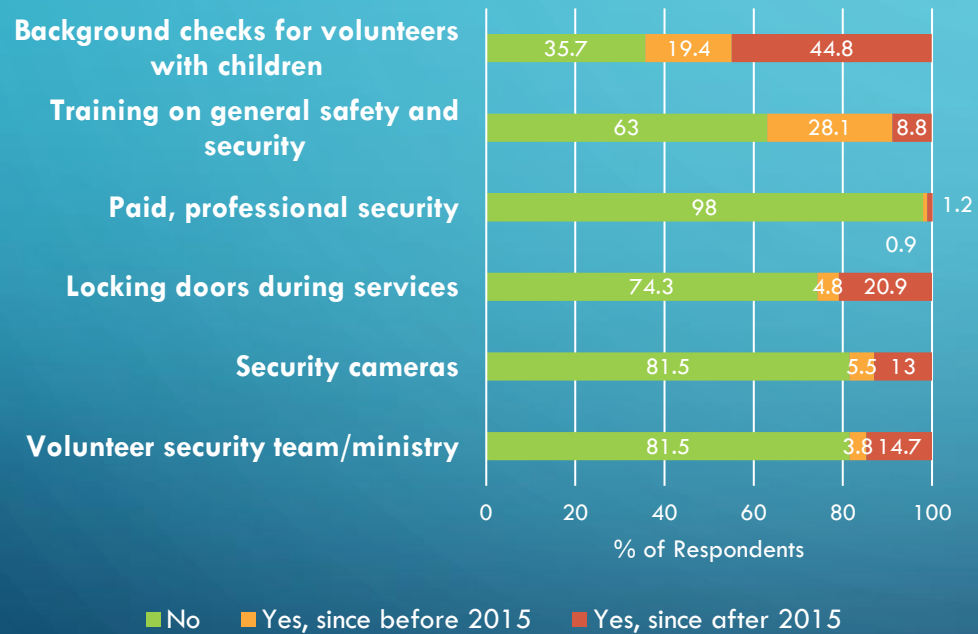
- Most congregations (64.5%) report being “Not at all concerned” or “A little concerned” about personal safety and security when they gather
- 1 in 10 churches (10.8%) reported being “Very concerned” about personal safety and security when they gather

To what extent is your congregation concerned about personal safety and security when you gather?



SAFETY MEASURES IN CONGREGATIONS

Safety Measures in Congregations



- The most common safety measure in congregations is background checks for volunteers with children, with 64.2% reporting having this measure in place
- The least common safety measures in congregations were paid, professional security, security cameras, and having a volunteer security team/ministry



CLERGY TRENDS

RETIREMENTS, DEMOGRAPHICS, BURNOUT



CLERGY TRENDS

WHAT ARE YOUR
BIGGEST WORRIES?

SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS IN
ZOOM CHAT

The background is a gradient of blue, transitioning from a lighter shade at the top to a darker shade at the bottom. In the four corners, there are decorative white line-art elements resembling circuit traces or data paths, with small circles at the end of the lines.

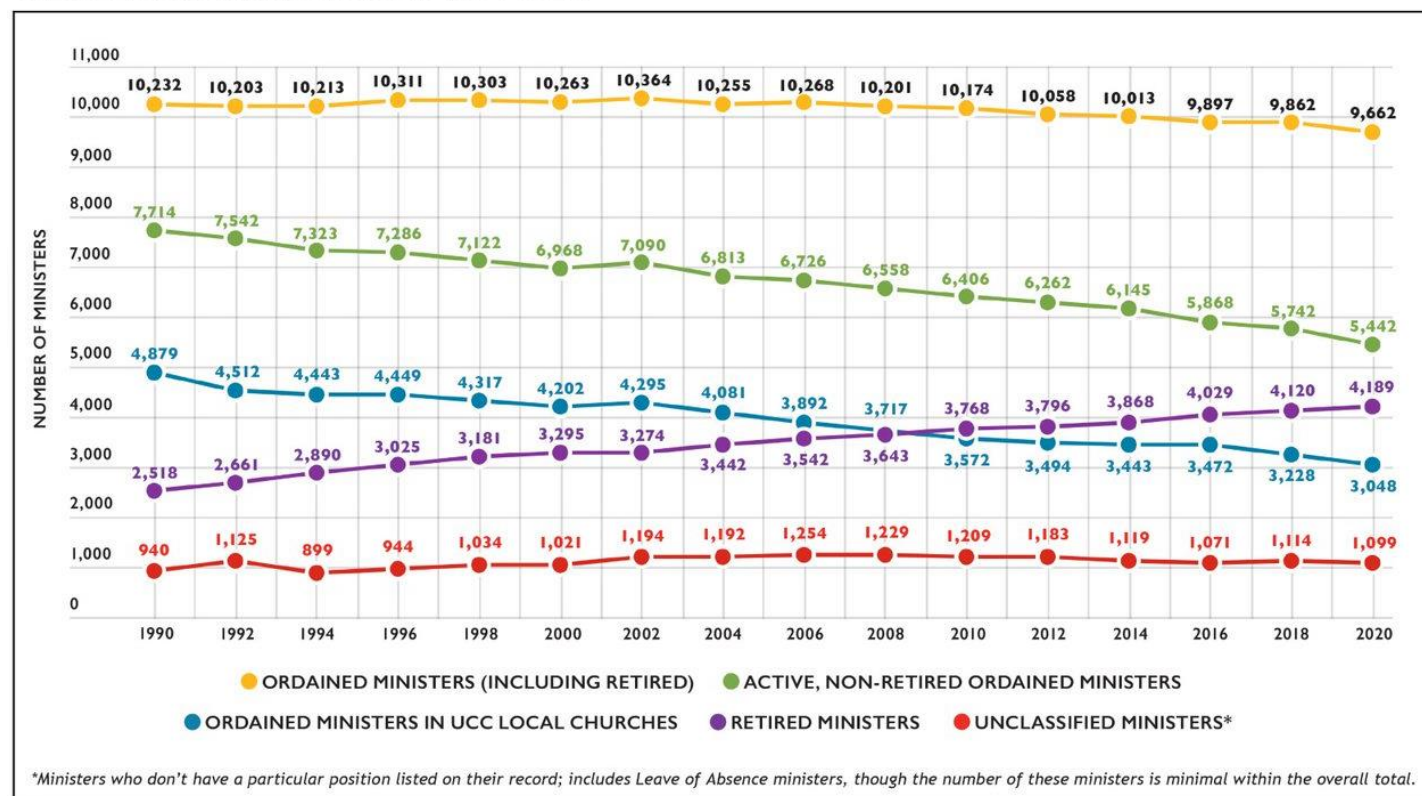
RETIREMENTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

TRENDS IN ORDAINED MINISTRY THE UCC

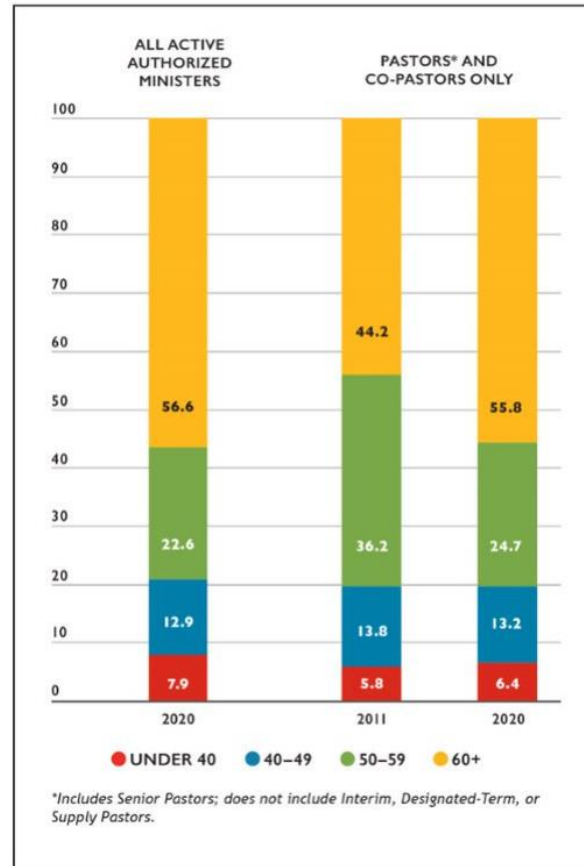
- Since 1990, the number of Ordained Ministers has remained relatively stable, though there are slight incremental decreases in more recent years.
- The number of Retired Ministers and Pastor Emeriti has increased steadily in this time frame.
- Notably, since 1990 the decline in ordained ministers (-5.5%) has been much smaller than the declines in congregations (-24.3%) or membership (-51.8%) during the same time frame.

Source: 2021 Statistical Profile

TRENDS IN ORDAINED MINISTRY (1990–2020)



ACTIVE, NON-RETIRED AUTHORIZED
MINISTERS BY AGE (PERCENTAGE)



ACTIVE, NON-RETIRED AUTHORIZED MINISTERS BY AGE

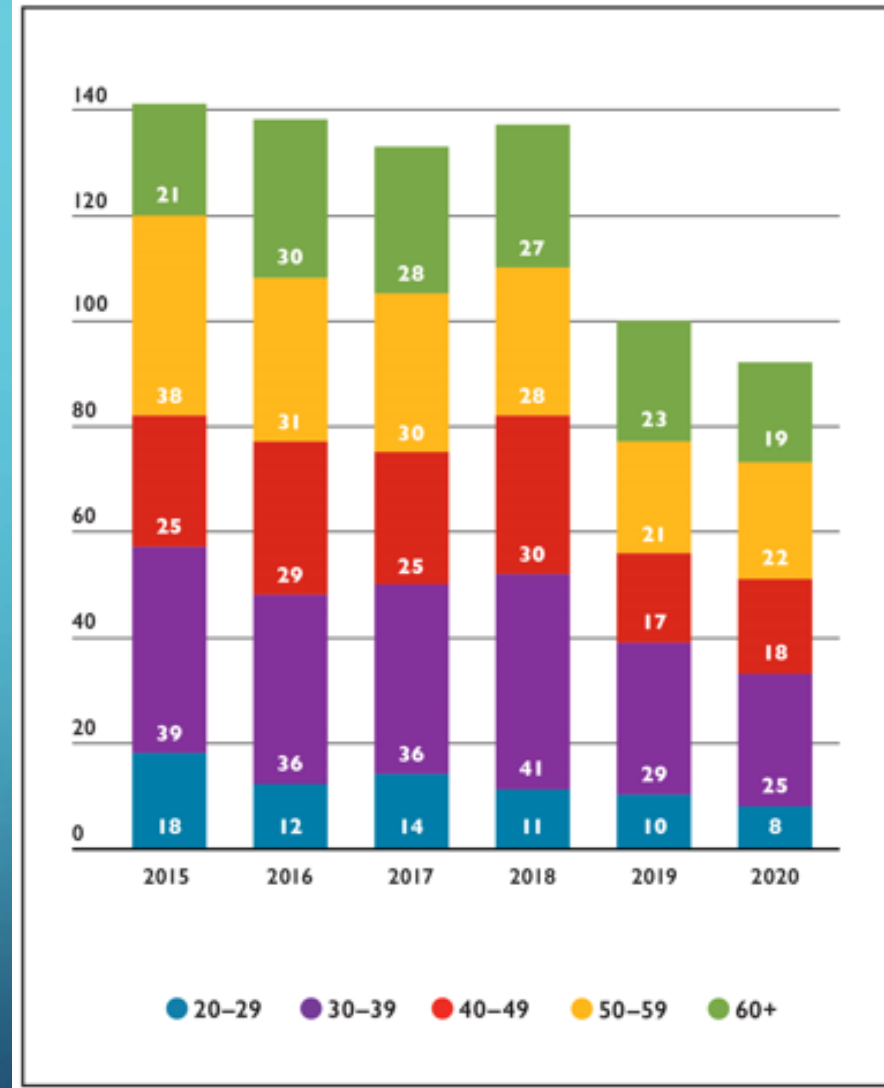
- Data regarding Authorized Ministers in the UCC reflects a population of predominantly older clergy.
- Over one half of active, non-retired authorized ministers were age 60 and above (56.6%) and over three-quarters (79.2%) were 50 and older.
- Local church pastors and co-pastors are increasingly comprised of the oldest clergy in the UCC, with over half (55.8%) of all congregations being served by authorized ministers age 60 and above.
- The number of congregations being served by clergy under 50 has remained relatively stable.

ON AUTHORIZED MINISTER AGE DISTRIBUTION

- Report from Elizabeth Dilley, Minister and Team Leader of MESA
 - 2021 Statistical Profile
- Biggest age group of people being ordained – 30-39
- Ministry pipeline includes people of all ages
- Note: ordinations for a particular year are often reported beyond that year, so the 2019 and 2020 numbers may still increase

Source: 2021 Statistical Profile, Special Report Section (Elizabeth Dilley, author)

AGE AT TIME OF ORDINATION (2015–2020)



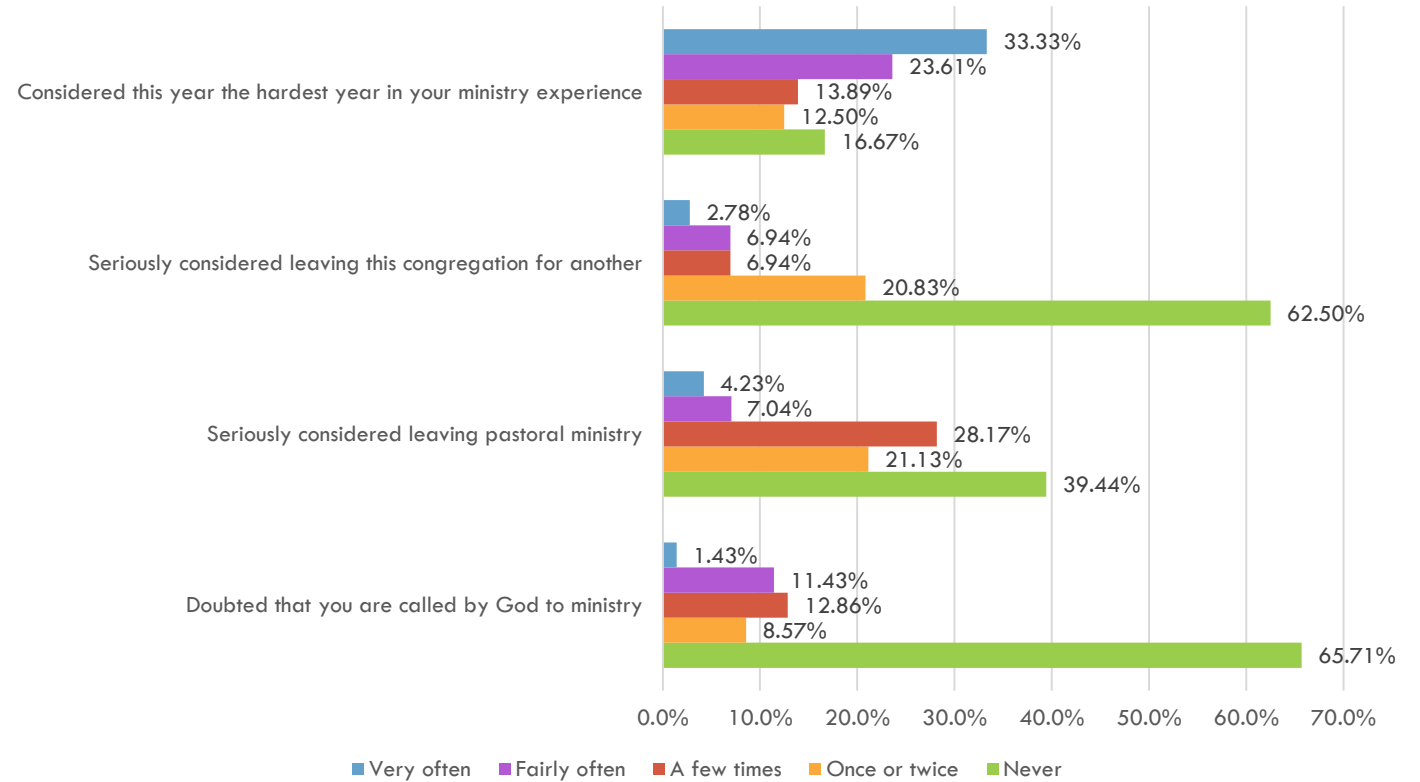


CLERGY BURNOUT

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON CLERGY

Source: EPIC FACT Survey 1 (July 2021) –
UCC Sample

Impact of the Pandemic on Clergy



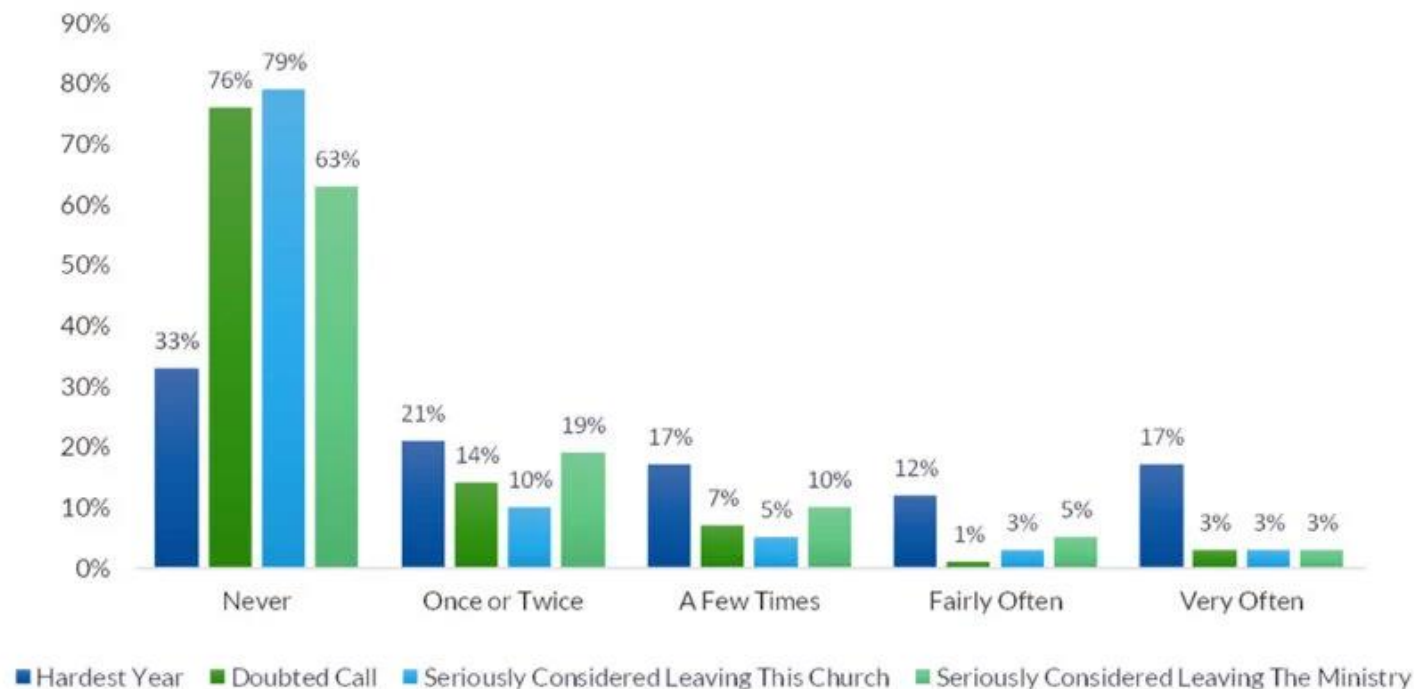
- Clergy most commonly reported that they “very often” considered the first year of the pandemic to be the hardest year in their ministry experience (33.33%)
- However, “Never” was the most common responses to whether pastors seriously considered leaving their congregation for another, seriously considered leaving pastoral ministry, or doubted their call by God to ministry

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON CLERGY: BROADER NATIONAL TRENDS

- Looking at respondents across denominational traditions, trends are similar
- Clergy commonly felt the first year of the pandemic was their hardest year of ministry, but didn't necessarily consider leaving their position or their ministry
- Dr. Scott Thumma, Hartford Institute for Religion Research
- <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/18/is-a-great-resignation-brewing-for-pastors/>

Source: EPIC FACT Survey 1 (July 2021) –
All respondents

The Hardest Ministry Year Ever

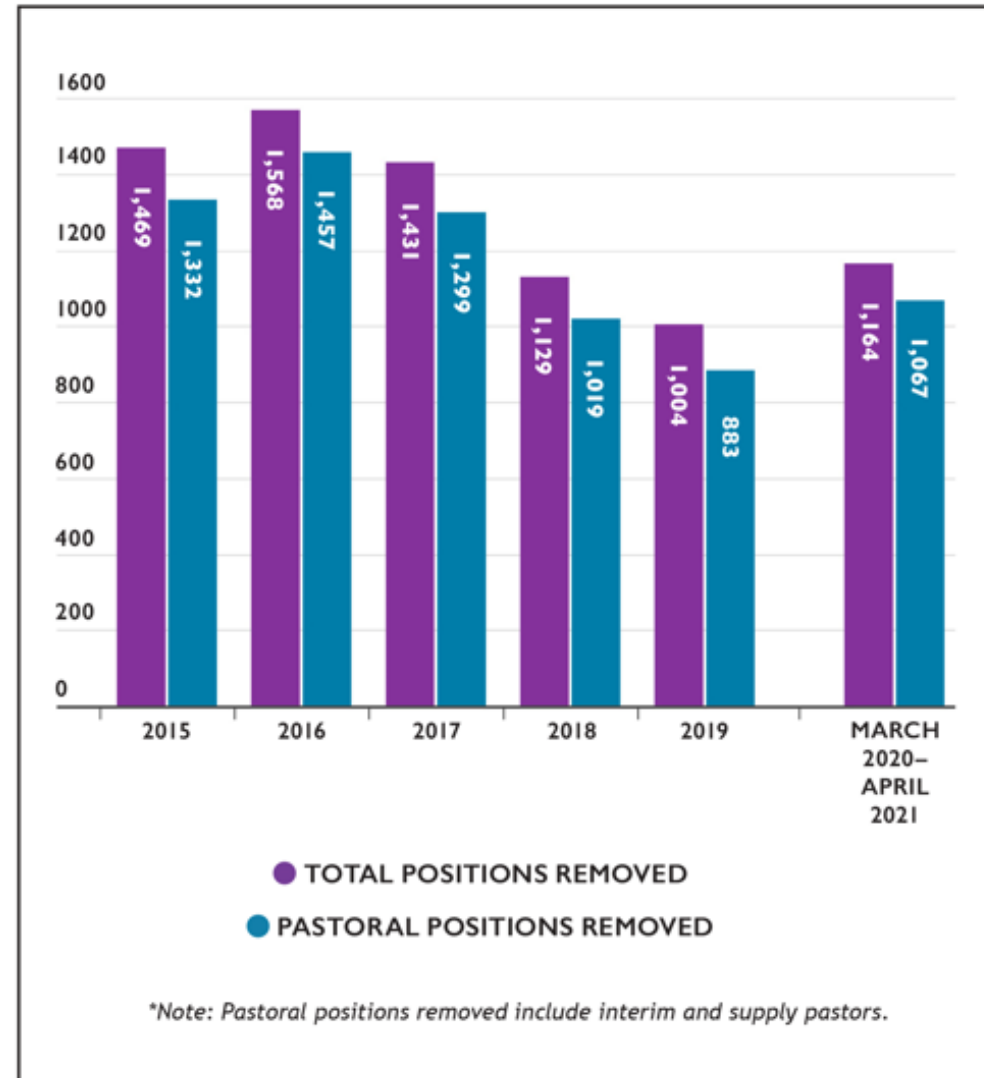


Source: Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations study, Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

MINISTRY POSITIONS REMOVED

- Rev. Jeff Nelson, MESA
 - 2021 Statistical Profile
- Records of concluded pastoral positions were pulled from the UCC Data Hub from March 2020 through April 2021. For the purpose of comparison, the same variables were pulled from 2015 to 2019.
- Several caveats apply for this analysis:
 - First, the month in which a ministry position was recorded as ending in the Data Hub reflects when this information was logged by Conference staff and not necessarily when the position concluded.
 - Second, the results could not be parsed out to account for retirements, position eliminations, deaths, and other factors.
- This table shows the total ministry positions removed, as well as how many of those positions were specifically pastoral in nature (this second number includes interims and supply pastors).
- The graph breaks down how many positions were recorded each month from March 2020 through April 2021.

MINISTRY POSITIONS REMOVED (2015–2021)

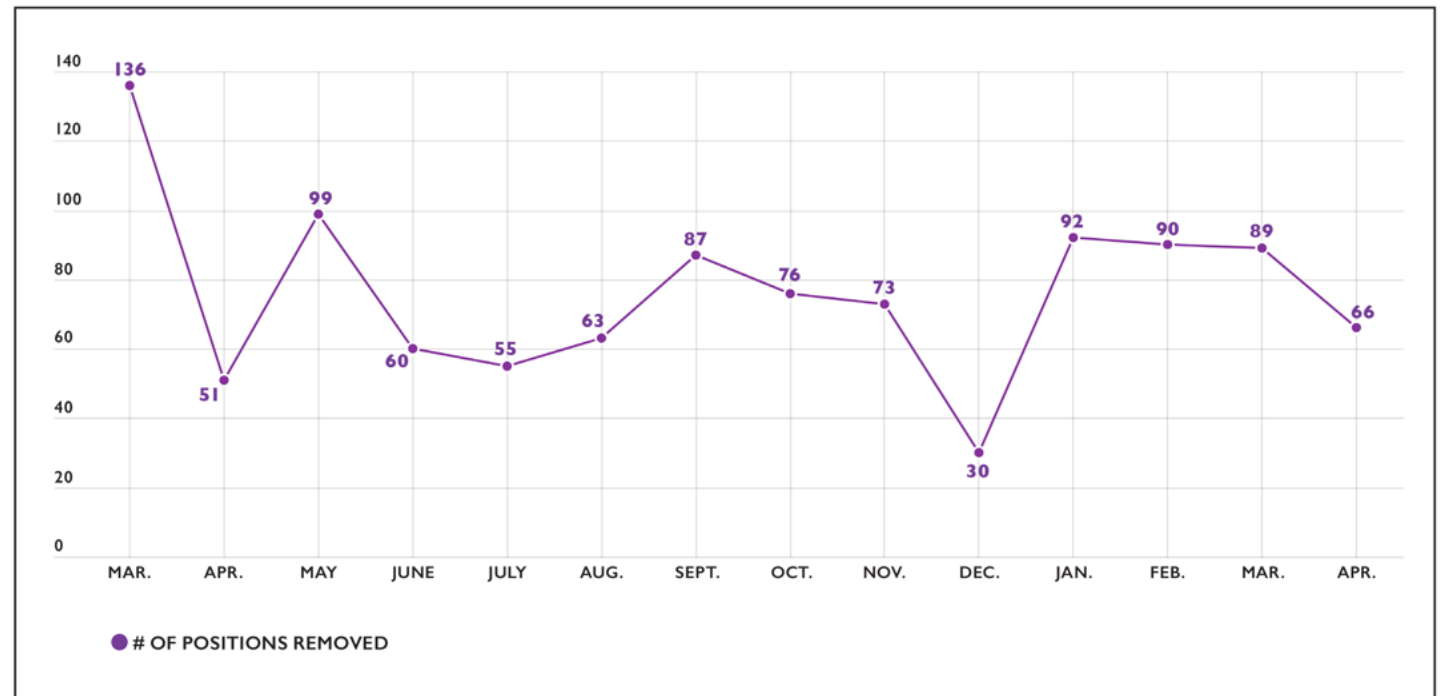


Source: 2021 Statistical Profile, Special Report Section
(Jeff Nelson, author)

PASTORAL POSITIONS REMOVED

- On average, 1,198 pastoral positions were removed each year between 2015 and 2019. As of this report's writing, the number of positions that have been removed during the pandemic has been lower.
- So far, there has been no consistent trend since March 2020 to indicate that a greater number of ministers have left their ministry settings during this season.
- 2021 data will provide an interesting point of comparison when available

PASTORAL POSITIONS REMOVED FROM MARCH 2020–APRIL 2021



Source: 2021 Statistical Profile, Special Report Section
(Jeff Nelson, author)

THAT WAS A LOT OF DATA!



RECAP OF WHAT
WE'VE COVERED



WHAT ARE SOME OF
THE TAKEAWAYS?

TAKEAWAYS

- Your church is not alone
- Many of the trends we see have been present for decades and go beyond the UCC
- There are signs of hope in the midst of challenging trends



CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY

WHAT IS CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY?



- When you think of congregational vitality, what are some of the ideas and themes that come to mind?

STUDIES OF VITALITY

- Linda Bobbitt
 - Spiritual vitality, 2015 FACT data
 - “Spiritually vital congregations are those that **come together for a divine common purpose** in ways that are **transformative to the people within them and to their communities**”
 - Common across faith traditions: Connections with God, with each other, and with the world
- Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi
 - Relationship between congregational vitality and ministerial excellence
 - No relationship between vitality and congregational growth
- Other studies
 - Different types of congregational vitality
 - Congregational characteristics

Sources:

- Linda Bobbitt, *Vital Congregations* (2015), http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/Congregational_Vitality_Report.pdf.
- Bobbitt, “Measuring Congregational Vitality: Phase 2 Development of an Outcome Measurement Tool,” 2014.
- Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, *Congregational Vitality and Ministerial Excellence: Intersections and Possibilities for Ministry*, (2015), <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC-Congregational-Vitality-and-Ministerial-Excellence-Report.pdf>

CENTER FOR ANALYTICS,
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT,
AND DATA



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST



**Faith
Communities
Today**

2020 FACT SURVEY, UCC RESPONSES

- Sent to all UCC congregations (4,852 at year-end 2019)
- Offered in English and Spanish
- Primarily offered online; copies mailed to congregations identified as having limited or no internet access
- Survey open February-April 2020
- 29.8% response rate

UCC CONGREGATIONS: VITALITY ANALYSIS

- Mission and identity questions from survey
 - Community vitality
 - Internal relational vitality
 - Organizational vitality
 - Spiritual vitality
- Factor analysis – questions heavily loaded onto single item
 - Overall congregational vitality
- Developed into scale
 - Chronbach's alpha = 0.917
 - High internal reliability
- Dependent variable in regression analysis



PREDICTORS

ASPECTS OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE THAT MAY PREDICT OVERALL VITALITY IN THE UCC

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

- % of young adults (18-34)
- Contemporary worship
- Innovation in worship
- Fit between congregation and clergy
- Congregational age
- % change in worship attendance over the past 5 years

CONTROL VARIABLES

- Total participants
- Current self-rated financial health
- Whether 10% or more of regular participants are people of color
- Proportion of women in the congregation

FINDINGS

PREDICTED OVERALL VITALITY

- **Level of innovative worship**
- **Fit between pastor and congregation**
- Number of participants
- 10% or more participants are people of color

DID NOT PREDICT OVERALL VITALITY

- % of young adults
- Level of contemporary worship
- Congregational age
- 5 year percentage change in worship attendance
- Current financial health
- % of female participants

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS?

- Congregations do not necessarily need to be growing or in perfect financial health to be vital
- Innovation in worship is important
 - Authentic to church
 - Not always contemporary worship
- Focusing on young adults isn't inherently a pathway to vitality
- What vitality looks like is contextual for every church
- How are you connecting with each other? With our community? With God?



WHAT CAN MY CHURCH DO?

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

LEARNINGS

- What information has been helpful here today?
- What advice would you give to a congregation based on what you've learned?
- What is something you'd like to explore further?



THANK YOU!

ERICA DOLLHOPF, PH.D.
DOLLHOPFE@UCC.ORG

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a network of light blue lines and small circles, resembling a circuit board or a neural network structure. The lines are vertical and horizontal, with some branching out to small circles at various points.

QUESTIONS?