

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Are People Coming Back to Weekend Services? - Episode 263

Answering your frequently asked questions

Are people coming back to weekend services? **The answer is yes and no.** In 2019, Pew Research reported that “rates of religious attendance” were declining, and we all know the pandemic accelerated that decline. They also reported that 54% of Americans now say they attend religious services a few times a year or less, and only 45% say they attend at least monthly. In other words, **more people don’t attend church now than those that do.**

However, the data is also saying “yes.” In [the Q3 Unstuck Church Report](#), we found that **average in-person attendance over the previous 12 months has increased by 30%.** So, though most churches haven’t returned to attendance patterns before the pandemic, churches are seeing growing attendance again.

The 3 priorities every church needs to embrace in this next season

The people coming to your weekend services can be divided into two groups: People who were a part of the church before the pandemic and have come back, and new people. The great news is, **both groups are at your church because they want to be there.** So, how can we leverage this knowledge to encourage weekend service attendance?

PRIORITY #1: Adopt a fresh mindset.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!” (Isaiah 43:18-19). In order to adopt a fresh mindset, we need to:

- **Embrace a new starting line.** It’s time we all start looking forward, not back. We all have a new starting line: It’s today. It’s a fresh start.
- **Re-envision your mission.** Remind people of why you exist. Cast a fresh vision of where God is calling your church. People love being part of something new!
- **Move from a harvesting mindset to a planting mindset.** “*For everything there is a season, a time to plant and a time to harvest.*” Farmers do very different things when they are planting versus when they are harvesting. Different seasons require different priorities.

Let's not focus on where we've been—instead, let's embrace a new starting line, a fresh vision for our mission, and rally our team around this planting season, asking what strategies need to be developed so that we are good sowers.

PRIORITY #2: Ensure you are creating an experience people want to come to.

When people try a new thing, they ask, “Will this make a difference in my life?” If it does, you've got them. If it doesn't, they move on. Healthy churches grow because their people find the experience transformative—and they tell their friends about it. In fact, 90% of people say they started attending their church because a friend or family member invited them.

Here are a few things to consider to ensure what we're doing on the weekend is remarkable:

1. **Don't design an experience for EVERYBODY**—instead, design an experience for the people in your mission field that you are trying to reach. In other words, narrow your focus a bit. Many churches feel like they're missing the next generation and young families. If that's the case, then we need to figure out what their needs are and use our weekend experience to help them with those needs.
2. **Take some risks.** Try a new thing. Three songs, announcements, and a 35-minute sermon has become the tradition. Instead, gather a diverse team and brainstorm the question, “What would be remarkable in THIS season, in our context? What could we try?”

What was remarkable in 2015 might not be remarkable in 2022. In our current context, being safe might actually be the risky move.

PRIORITY #3: Prioritize kids ministry.

Barna recently reported that Millennials make up the largest group of people who are returning to church. In fact, the percentage of Millennials reporting weekly church attendance has increased from 21% to 39% since 2019. Among Gen X, attendance has increased 8 points (24% to 32%), while Boomers show a decrease in attendance (31% in 2020 down to 25% in 2022).

Our research has consistently found a link between [healthy kids ministry and churches that are reaching more new people](#) and experiencing growth. Millennials are now in that age group where they have young kids, and these are the largest group of people returning to church. Churches need the older generation to serve and help reach the up and coming generations—and connecting their servanthood to being a part of reaching and discipling their children and grandchildren is often a catalyst.

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