

THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

NEW CHURCH STAFFING TRENDS

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THE UNSTUCK GROUP[®]
— WE HELP CHURCHES GET UNSTUCK. —

Q2 2023

Introduction

MAY 2023

Every quarter, The Unstuck Group compiles all the data we've collected to monitor trends in churches, primarily in North America. For this quarter's report, we are focusing on staffing trends in churches of various sizes. These trends reflect data collected during the four weeks between April 10 and May 5, 2023, providing a very current snapshot of ministries of all shapes and sizes.

We received survey responses from 337 churches that ranged in size from less than 100 to more than 10,000 in physical attendance for worship gatherings. The average in-person attendance of churches that participated was 820 people.

Thanks to a growing number of church leaders responding to the survey, we were able to include a summary of the data by church size again in this quarter's report. As you'll see in that table, the data point to several areas where there is little to no difference between small and large churches. Examples include the percentage of women and men on staff, the percentage of the staff team allocated to digital and communications and the percentage of Millennials on the staff team. On the other hand, there are some areas where there seems to be a disparity between small and large churches, including the use of multisite strategy, attendance to staffing ratios and the staffing practices churches are leveraging to improve team health.

Read on for some key staffing and structure takeaways from the most recent assessment results.

KEY FINDINGS

CATEGORY	RESULTS
Average Attendance Increase Over Last 12 Months	23%
Attendance to Full-Time Equivalent Staff	59:1
Staffing as a Percentage of Total Budget	52%
Average Staff Turnover Rate Each Year	12%
Churches Actively Planning for Pastoral Succession	27%
Generation Most Represented on Staff Teams	Millennials

First, let's talk about staffing changes...

For whatever reason, churches seem more reticent to make staffing changes than other organizations I've served in the past. The data seem to confirm it as well. McKinsey & Company, a consulting firm that serves businesses around the world, [previously found that 70% of companies have experienced an organizational redesign or restructuring in the last two years](#). Scott Keller, a senior partner at McKinsey, suggested, "Companies apparently revamp their organizations more often than they overhaul their websites (on average, every three years) or upgrade their computer systems (every three to five years)."

I'm not suggesting that it's necessarily a good thing that businesses make structure changes that frequently, but it does highlight the fact that restructuring is normal. While it's less common in churches, it does happen. As an example, our data indicates that 54% of churches have engaged in a staffing structure change involving multiple positions in the last two years.

Similarly, employee turnover happens at churches but not nearly as frequently as in businesses. Our recent survey results show that the average staff turnover rate in churches is 12% within the last 12 months. For businesses, on the other hand, their turnover rate is 50% higher at [18% each year](#). Many churches have expressed concern about voluntary staff departures, but in most cases, their turnover rate is still well below what businesses in their same communities are experiencing. Change happens in people's lives, and it will certainly happen on our church staff teams as well.

Helping churches with staff restructuring has been part of the Unstuck Process from our beginning nearly 15 years ago. We've helped more than 500 churches implement structure changes, ensuring they have the right people in the right roles. From redesigning the senior leadership team to bringing clarity to roles and responsibilities to right-sizing the staff team, our Unstuck team has years of experience helping pastors adjust their structure so they can focus more time on helping people meet and follow Jesus.

Why is restructuring a part of the Unstuck Process, and why is our team interested in staffing trends? It's because we know new vision and new ministry strategy will never get traction if it's layered on top of an existing structure—a structure that was designed for different purposes and, many times, different strategies that worked in the past but aren't getting the same results today. **You can't embrace a new direction without making appropriate structure changes. Strategy and structure changes must go hand in hand.**

We also know that pastors don't typically have the same level of experience that business leaders have when making staffing and structure changes, which is why it's really a critical component of how we serve churches of all different shapes and sizes. If your ministry strategy doesn't seem to be firing on all cylinders, it may not be the strategy that's broken—it could be your structure instead.

I hope you find the church staffing trends in this report insightful and helpful as you consider how to move your church's mission forward! And if you sense something about your staffing structure is not working, I hope you will trust our wisdom and experience to help you. Visit our website to learn more about [how we help churches with staffing and structure](#).



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Morgan', written in a cursive style.

Tony Morgan
Founder & Lead Strategist of The Unstuck Group

Staffing & Ministry Overview

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1,000+
Attendance Increase From Last Year	17%	20%	25%	21%
Multisite Churches	13%	8%	26%	55%
Attendees Per Full-Time Equivalent Staff Person	45:1	51:1	64:1	77:1
Attendees Per Volunteer Leader	15:1	12:1	18:1	24:1
Staff Budget Percentage	57%	54%	54%	50%
Staffing Turnover Rate	14%	14%	12%	11%
Percentage of Women on Staff	54%	50%	51%	53%
Percentage of Men on Staff	46%	50%	49%	47%

The average in-person attendance over the previous 12 months increased by 23%.

The average weekly attendance for the last 12 months increased from 669 people to 820. This is the total of all people, including children. Larger churches, especially those between 500 and 1,000 in attendance, are growing at a faster rate than smaller churches.

One in four churches surveyed is now multisite.

On average, those churches have three locations, including the original location. This, of course, is one area where there is a disparity between large and small churches, as should be expected. The data indicate that 55% of churches that average 1,000 or more people in attendance are now multisite.

Staffing levels compared to attendance seem to be normalizing.

The average church employs one full-time equivalent (FTE) staff person for every 59 attendees. This number includes all ministry and support staff. This is another area where there's a significant distinction between small and large churches. Churches with fewer than 200 people in attendance employ one FTE for every 45 attendees. Large churches with more than 1,000 in attendance have one FTE for every 77 attendees. By comparison, The Unstuck Group recommends one FTE for every 75 people in attendance.

Churches have a span of care of one volunteer leader for every 21 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 group leaders). This is an area where smaller churches are healthier than larger churches right now. Smaller churches are more effectively empowering lay leaders over ministry teams and groups.

Staffing & Ministry, cont.

Churches are investing more than half of their giving into ministry staff.

The average staff budget is 52% of the overall ministry budget. This includes the cost of all salaries and benefits. Consistent with the number of employees, larger churches are also investing a smaller proportion of their ministry budgets on staff. 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 are experiencing less staff turnover when compared to other organizations.

The current reported staff turnover rate for all churches is 12%. Prior to the pandemic, the Society for Human Resource Management indicated that companies will experience an [18% turnover](#) in their workforce every year. That percentage increased during the pandemic but seems to be normalizing again.

There are more women than men on church staff teams.

Of the surveyed churches, the staff was split 52% women and 48% men. Men are slightly under-represented on church staff teams when compared to U.S. averages.

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“Though the overall numbers indicate men are slightly under-represented on church staff teams, my sense is that women are largely under-represented in staff leadership roles. In future research, I’d like to look more specifically at the number of women in staff leadership. Based on my experience of working with hundreds of churches through the years, my sense is that healthy, thriving churches also tend to empower women leaders more effectively.”

-- Tony

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Staffing Insights from Darren Key (CFP®), CEO of [Christian Financial Resources](#):



Christian Financial Resources strongly recommends keeping your staff expense below 50% of your actual income (not your budget). One way to do this is using the conservative number below and having a pool of at-risk/performance-based money.

- 35% - 50% Staffing
- 10% - 20% Missions
- 10% - 20% Programming
- 20% - 45% Administration (debt, facilities, insurance, office, etc.)

Staffing for growth may put your ministry slightly higher than the 50% mark, which should even out as the church grows. However, beware of the cost if the growth isn’t actualized, it could force staff reductions. So, plan accordingly and consider the impact additional employees will make in the first year and for years to come.

Being conservative with your staffing also creates opportunities for your members to become involved in ministry, encouraging spiritual growth and maturity.

Staffing by Ministry

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1,000+
Senior Leadership (Senior Pastors, Executive Pastors, etc.)	28%	22%	19%	11%
Next Gen Ministries (Children's Ministry, Students, College, etc.)	18%	21%	22%	21%
Worship Arts (Music, Tech Arts, Media, etc.)	17%	13%	15%	19%
Adult Ministries (Groups, Connections, Care & Counseling, Missions, etc.)	4%	11%	12%	14%
Digital & Communications (Web, Social Media, Communications, Database, etc.)	7%	7%	6%	7%
Operations (Finance, Facilities, HR, IT, etc.)	13%	17%	14%	16%
Other	14%	9%	11%	12%

In the survey, we asked respondents to tell us how many staff positions they currently allocate to different ministries and roles. The table above reflects the responses we received by size of church.

Using the data collected, we can determine that a typical church of 2,000 people will have 26 full-time equivalent employees. The allocation for each ministry is:

- Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor + 1 Additional Senior Leader: 3
- Next Gen Ministries: 5.5
- Worship Arts: 5
- Adult Ministries: 3.5
- Digital & Communications: 2
- Operations: 4
- Other: 3

Larger churches tend to have a smaller percentage of people in senior leadership roles.

However, larger churches, in turn, have more staff in adult ministries. That includes staff for roles like small groups, connections, care ministries and missions. It's likely that senior leaders oversee most, if not all, of the adult ministries in smaller churches.

Larger churches tend to invest more staffing resources in next-generation ministries.

That's consistent with previous research using the Unstuck health assessment data that also indicated there's a strong correlation between the strength of a church's children's ministry and its ability to reach more new people.

The investment of staffing resources in digital and communications roles is just about the same for churches of every size.

It will be interesting to see if this investment shifts over time as churches discover that online engagement is part of the "front door" strategy that helps churches connect with new people.

Staffing by Ministry, cont.

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“Some may look at this data and grow concerned by the fact that churches tend to hire more people in operations staff roles than adult ministries positions. I actually see that as a sign of health in a church’s staffing model. The primary reason is that adult ministries should be the easiest and most compelling reason for engaging volunteer leaders. Although not impossible, it’s a lot harder to leverage volunteers in operations ministries. Many times, operations functions require people with specialized skills and experience, making those functions more challenging for volunteer engagement.”

-- Tony

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Staffing Insight from [Christian Financial Resources](#):

Understanding the fluctuations in your church’s income and expenses throughout the year can help your leadership plan for seasons of decreased giving, ensuring that your employees get paid on time. CFR encourages churches to keep a minimum of 13 weeks cash on hand. We explain more in our whitepaper:

[“The One Financial Number Every Church Leader Needs to Know.”](#)

Moral failings and church splits tend to attract attention, but in fact, churches rarely close due to those kinds of problems. Instead, many closures are caused by churches running out of cash. Ideally, CFR recommends keeping four weeks of expenses in your checking account and the remainder in savings.

Staffing by Generation

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1,000+
Boomers (59 or older)	21%	22%	19%	14%
GenX (43-58)	36%	34%	31%	30%
Millennials (27-42)	38%	35%	38%	39%
GenZ (26 or younger)	5%	8%	12%	17%
Average Age of Senior Pastor	51	51	52	49

In the survey, we also asked respondents how many staff positions they have in each generation. The table above reflects the responses we received by size of church.

It's interesting to compare these percentages to the US population as a whole. This is roughly the US population by generation:

- Boomers of working age (59-67) - 9%
- GenX (43-58) - 33%
- Millennials (27-42) - 38%
- GenZ adults (18-26) - 20%

The Boomers are the generation that is most overrepresented on church staff teams.

This is more true for smaller churches with fewer than 200 people in attendance. Small churches have 50% more Boomers on its staff team than large churches with more than 1,000 people.

GenZ adults are the generation that is most underrepresented on church staff teams.

Again, this is most pronounced with small churches, which tend to only have one-fourth of the number of GenZ staff that we would expect to see based on the makeup of the U.S. population. Large churches with more than 1,000 people, on the other hand, employ three times as many young adults.

The average age of Senior Pastors across all churches is 51.

Squarely in the middle of GenX, Lead Pastors of larger churches tend to be slightly younger than pastors at smaller churches.

“The fact that larger churches have younger staff teams is something all churches should probably pay attention to. There’s a vitality in churches with younger staff that appears to be attractive to people of all generations. Again, I don’t have data to confirm this, but it seems that churches with older staff teams are still able to reach and minister to older adults but have challenges reaching younger adults. Churches with a healthy representation of all the generations on their team seem to be multi-generational churches. **You reach who you are.**”

-- Tony

Leveraging Contractors

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1,000+
Weekend Services	6%	17%	26%	36%
Operations (Finance, Facilities, HR, IT, etc.)	30%	48%	57%	61%
Communications (Web, Social Media, Communications, Database, etc.)	15%	24%	40%	45%
Other	6%	14%	6%	14%
Average Monthly Amount Spent on Contractors	\$946	\$3,073	\$2,450	\$5,495

We asked survey respondents to indicate whether or not they are hiring contractors to complement their staffing in various ministry areas.

Churches most commonly outsource operations functions.

Half of the churches surveyed use contracted services to help with finances, facilities, HR, IT, admin support, etc. Larger churches with more than 1,000 attendees are twice as likely to contract for some operations functions.

About one-third of churches outsource functions associated with communications.

This includes help with web, social media, communications, database and other related functions. Large churches are three times more likely to outsource some communications functions.

The average amount spent on contractors by each church was about \$34,000 per year.

Again, larger churches are likely to spend about twice that amount. However, compared to wages, taxes and employee benefits, this is a relatively small investment for large churches.

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“Leveraging contracted services may be a good opportunity for churches of all sizes to accomplish more ministry while investing less money. If you take advantage of this, consider using a company that outsources specifically to churches. And make sure you are following state laws for how you compensate contractors versus employees.”

-- Tony

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Staffing Insight from [Christian Financial Resources](#):

To keep your church on mission and drive volunteer engagement, consider using independent contractors for non-core competencies like human resources or accounting. Contractors' time can typically be adjusted up or down each month based on your ministry's needs, helping keep your staffing costs low.

Staffing Practices

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1,000+
Actively Planning for Pastoral Succession	32%	21%	32%	27%
Staff Restructuring Involving Multiple Positions Within the Last Two Years	42%	57%	52%	61%
Written Values or Behaviors To Shape Team Culture	58%	73%	82%	88%
Defined Onboarding Process for New Staff	51%	57%	83%	84%
Defined Staff/Leadership Development Strategy for Staff	28%	40%	55%	42%
Evaluation Process To Encourage Improvement, Clarify Wins, etc.	57%	64%	77%	83%
Senior Pastor Empowered To Hire and Fire All Staff Without Board Approval	30%	47%	57%	58%

When the Unstuck team helps churches with staffing and structure, we also provide coaching and additional resources on staffing best practices, including succession planning, team culture and empowering the pastors and staff leaders to lead strong. The categories in the table above reflect the themes we commonly engage with the churches we serve.

More than one in four churches is actively planning for pastoral succession.

That suggests there will likely be more opportunities for GenX and Millennials leaders to step into pastoral leadership in the coming months.

More than half of churches have been through a staff restructuring within the last two years.

These were organizational redesigns that involved multiple staff positions. Interestingly, about one in seven churches indicated they've never been through a staff restructuring.

More than three quarters of churches have developed written values or behaviors to shape team culture.

That includes nearly 9 of 10 large churches with more than 1,000 in attendance. Clarifying culture in writing helps to lay the foundation for modeling, coaching, hiring around culture and, where necessary, removing people from the team.

Most churches have a defined onboarding process for new staff.

Nearly 70% of churches indicated they have an intentional strategy to help new employees join the team.

Less than half of churches have a defined staff and/or leadership development strategy for staff.

Larger churches in the 500 to 1,000 range were more likely to have a strategy in place for the ongoing development of staff.

Staffing Practices, cont.

Nearly three quarters of churches have an evaluation process in place for staff.

That evaluation process is used to encourage improvement, clarify wins and provide coaching for underperformance when needed.

About half of senior pastors are empowered to hire and fire all staff without board approval.

This practice helps to position senior pastors and their other staff leaders to have full accountability for the health and performance of the team. Senior pastors of large churches with 500 or more in attendance are almost twice as likely to have that authority as pastors of small churches with fewer than 200 attendees.

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“Churches should be the best employers in the world, and yet, many times, they lack some of the best practices we see in other healthy organizations. Seeing the gap that can exist in these areas makes me grateful that our Unstuck team has the opportunity to step in and provide coaching and resourcing to pastors who don't typically have the wisdom and experience related to staffing best practices that can lead to team health and performance.”

-- Tony

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Staffing Insight from [Christian Financial Resources](#):

Knowing that staffing is one of your church's largest expenses, your leadership needs to be proactive in thinking about long-term financial health. A three-year projection (Pro-forma) will show you the full cost of staffing. Churches often hire people mid-year without considering the significant increase in their budget for the following year when that employee will be paid for 12 months. Three-year projections will also help your church establish the necessary giving to support the additional expenses new hires create.

Summary by Church Size

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Church Demographics				
Attendance Increase from Last Year	17%	20%	25%	21%
Multisite Churches	13%	8%	26%	55%
Attendees Per Full-Time Equivalent Staff	45:1	51:1	64:1	77:1
Person Attendees Per Volunteer Leader	15:1	12:1	18:1	24:1
Staff Budget Percentage	57%	54%	54%	50%
Staffing Turnover Rate	14%	14%	12%	11%
Percentage of Women on Staff	54%	50%	51%	53%
Percentage of Men on Staff	46%	50%	49%	47%

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Staffing by Ministry				
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Operations (Finance, Facilities, HR, IT, etc.)	13%	17%	14%	16%
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Staffing by Generation				
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GenZ (26 or younger)	5%	8%	12%	17%
Average Age of Senior Pastor	51	51	52	49

CATEGORY	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Churches Using Contractors by Ministry				
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Evaluation Process to Encourage Improvement, Clarify Wins, etc.	57%	64%	77%	83%
Senior Pastor Empowered to Hire and Fire All Staff Without Board Approval	30%	47%	57%	58%

ABOUT CHRISTIAN FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Since 1980, Christian Financial Resources (CFR) has financed more than 950 ministry projects for independent churches in the United States. As your church grows, CFR is equipped to support your vision and your ministry with financial services tailored to meet the needs of independent churches—including capital campaigns, stewardship services, and loans for construction, building purchase, or real estate acquisition.

As your ministry continues to grow, consider how CFR can help your church cultivate a generosity mentality and raise more capital for your next project.

>>> Interested in learning more? [Click here.](#)

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 14 years, we've worked alongside and built relationships with the leadership teams at 600+ 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:

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