

Q2 2026

THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

BENCHMARKS + TRENDS
IN NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES

Sponsored by:



THE UNSTUCK GROUP®
WE HELP PASTORS LEAD UNSTUCK CHURCHES

Introduction

JUNE 2026

Every quarter, The Unstuck Group compiles the data we've collected from churches to monitor trends across the United States and around the world. The survey respondents are primarily churches connected to our work. Because of this, our data may more accurately reflect an "Unstuck" church rather than the broader trends in the big "C" church.

For this quarter's report, we are focusing on staffing trends in churches of various sizes. These trends reflect data collected during the eight weeks between April 13, 2026 and June 5, 2026, providing a very current snapshot of ministries of all shapes and sizes.

We received survey responses from 239 churches, ranging in size from 100 to over 10,000 in physical attendance for worship gatherings. The average in-person attendance among participating churches was 917 people.

As in past reports, you'll be able to see how your church compares to other like-sized churches in areas like attendance to staff ratios and staffing allocation across ministries, and you'll notice how multisite strategy impacts a church. We have taken the staffing data a step further this year, comparing the data of growing and declining churches, multisite and single-site churches and churches that meet our staffing health benchmarks vs. those that don't.

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



Key Findings

Category	Results
Average Attendance Increase Over Last 12 Months	12%
Attendance to Full-Time Equivalent Staff	64:1
Average Budget Increase Over Last 12 months	9%
Staffing as a Percentage of Total Budget	52%
Churches Spending More Than 55% of Budget on Staffing	37%
Generation Most Represented on Senior Leadership Teams	Gen X
Hardest Staff Role to Fill	Worship Arts



This year's biggest staffing challenges...

For three years in a row, this report has told a similar story. Staffing for a healthy ministry is hard right now. Budgets are stretched thin. Roles and reporting lines have become less clear. Finding qualified candidates is difficult.

But here's what's different in this year's data. Churches are beginning to make corrections. Last year, 45% of churches were spending more than 55% of their budget on staffing, which is beyond our recommended range. This year, that number dropped to 37%. The number of churches operating with a healthy financial margin grew. After several years of embracing less healthy models, it's possible some churches are beginning to shift their approach to staffing.

That doesn't mean the hurdles are gone. In this year's survey, we asked pastors and church leaders to tell us about the biggest staffing and structure challenges their church is facing. And it's clear that there are some big hurdles churches are working to navigate:

- **Financial Constraints.** For the third year in a row, money was the most common challenge for churches. About one in four named budget, funding or compensation as their biggest staffing challenge. Limited funds to add staff, increase pay or absorb the rising expenses of health insurance and cost-of-living were the most cited pain points. Added to that, the biggest barrier to hiring (51%) was budget and funding.
- **Role Clarity, Structure and Reporting Lines.** About one in five churches said that unclear reporting and decision-making, silos and getting the right people in the right roles were their primary challenges. These challenges are typically felt more significantly when a church is growing or embracing a new vision. When there's a new sense of direction, there also needs to be a refreshed structure to support it.
- **Growth and Scaling.** For 17% of churches, their structure is feeling strained due to rapid growth. They cited scaling staff to match attendance increases, adding campuses and keeping up with rising operational demands as their headline issues. These churches need to create proactive staffing plans to get in front of future growth rather than being reactive to what's happening today.
- **Finding Qualified Staff.** Finding qualified, competent staff is still an uphill battle for 17% of churches with 35% of all churches saying this is their biggest barrier to hiring. Worship Arts roles were the hardest to fill this year (more on that later in the report).
- **Leadership Development, Succession and Moving from Doers to Leaders.** Churches also cited working to grow the next layer of leadership internally, navigating pastoral succession and shifting from paid staff doing ministry to equipping volunteers for ministry as key structural challenges. Volunteer leadership pipelines are still one of the clearest dividing lines in our data.

Rather than just collecting the challenges, we also compared the churches that are navigating them well against the churches that seem to be getting stuck. Churches staffed at healthy levels almost never declined in attendance. But churches that spent more than 55% of their budget on personnel grew at half the rate. Churches with younger leadership teams and deeper volunteer benches excelled in other areas of health.

These hurdles are real, but as many churches have shown, there's also a clear path through them. And this year, it's visible in the data. As you read this report, if something here describes your church and reveals why you may be feeling stuck, we'd love to help you and your team. You can learn more about how we support churches' staffing and structure decisions at theunstuckgroup.com/structure.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean Bublitz".

Sean Bublitz

Managing Director of The Unstuck Group

Staffing & Ministry Overview

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Category				
Attendance Increase From Last Year	16%	11%	11%	13%
Multisite Churches	0%	8%	17%	57%
Attendees to Full-Time Equivalent Staff	45:1	56:1	67:1	81:1
Attendees to Volunteer Leader	14:1	17:1	17:1	17:1
Giving Increase From Last Year	11%	10%	10%	10%
Staff Budget Percentage	50%	56%	50%	52%

The average in-person attendance increase over the previous 12 months held at 12%.

That makes 16 consecutive quarters of double-digit attendance growth for churches connected to the Unstuck tribe.



"One of the surprising data points from this quarter's survey was that churches under 200 were growing at a faster pace than any other attendance band. As I looked more closely at the data, I noticed a number of recently planted churches responded to the survey. Not only were they growing faster, but they were also engaging more volunteer leaders. It's encouraging to see so many churches in the "Launch" phase of the lifecycle reaching people and engaging them in ministry."

Sean Bublitz

One in four churches surveyed is now a multisite church.

On average, those churches have three locations, including the original location. The likelihood that a church will become multisite grows as the church grows. In fact, 57% of churches with 1,000 or more in attendance are now multisite, and the number of churches that are already multisite increased in every size band this year, outside of churches under 200 in attendance.

Staffing levels stayed essentially flat at one FTE for every 64 attendees.

Last year, the reported ratio was 65:1. This number includes all ministry and support staff. The difference between small and large churches is still significant. Churches under 200 have one FTE for every 45 attendees, and churches over 1,000 in average attendance have one FTE for every 81 attendees.

For comparison, The Unstuck Group recommends a benchmark of one FTE for every 75 people in attendance. Only about one in four churches (26%) are staffed at or above the benchmark. The chart below digs a bit deeper into this one metric. No church in the 75-89:1 benchmark zone declined in this year's survey. This pattern crossed all attendance bands.

Attendees per FTE	Churches	Median Attendance Growth	Churches Declining
Fewer than 50:1	78	6.5%	15%
50-64:1	61	9.8%	8%
65-74:1	35	10.5%	3%
75-89:1 (benchmark zone)	22	10.3%	0%
90:1 or more	40	14.9%	5%



"The principle we continue to see in the data, as well as in our on-site consulting with churches, is that churches that are overstaffed are more likely to experience decline. Of course, when a church declines, the staffing ratio automatically worsens, but declining attendance and overstaffing seem to feed off each other. On the other hand, churches that stay lean on staffing seem to stay out of that spiral."

Sean Bublitz

Churches have a span of care of one volunteer leader for every 17 people in attendance.

We define “volunteer leaders” as adults and students who serve in roles responsible for leading teams or groups of people (e.g., volunteer team leaders or group leaders).

This is an area that slipped slightly over the last year. Interestingly, churches that hit The Unstuck Group’s benchmark of 10:1 in this year’s survey did not grow faster than other churches. Where the difference did show up, though, was in generosity. Churches at or exceeding the benchmark saw their overall giving grow faster (12.7% vs. 9.6%), and they had a higher per-capita giving.

This is consistent with other research: People who serve and lead tend to give more to the church.

Churches are investing just over 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.

The Unstuck Group recommends that churches try to keep staffing budgets between 45% and 55% of the overall budget. This year, 33% of churches fell within that range, while 27% had staffing budgets even lower than that range. Although the other 37% of churches are spending more than 55%, this is still an improvement from last year’s results when 45% of churches were over the benchmark.



Insights from Todd Rhoades, Co-founder of Chemistry Staffing

As Sean mentioned earlier in the report, the shift in budget allocation to staffing may mean many churches are adjusting their approach to filling roles. In Chemistry’s 2025 Church Staff Health Assessment of nearly 1,200 church staff, 51% of paid staff told us they had seriously considered leaving their current role in the past year.

Read those two findings together, and the current staffing market comes into focus. Churches say they cannot find people, but half the people already on church payrolls are quietly open to a move. The talent is not absent. It is employed, passive and will never see your job posting. Churches are smart to define the role first, go find strong people on purpose and move quickly when they meet one.

Staffing by Ministry

The survey asked respondents how many staff positions they currently allocate to different ministries and roles. The table below reflects the responses received with the data broken down by church size.

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Category				
Senior Leadership: <i>Senior Pastors, Executive Pastors, etc.</i>	23%	15%	12%	10%
Next Gen Ministries (newborn - 18): <i>Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, etc.</i>	21%	22%	21%	21%
Adult Ministries: <i>Groups, Connections, Care, Counseling, Missions, etc.</i>	18%	25%	26%	25%
Worship Arts: <i>Music, Tech Arts, Creative, etc.</i>	12%	16%	13%	14%
Digital & Communications: <i>Web, Social Media, Communications, Video, etc.</i>	7%	7%	7%	7%
Operations: <i>Finance, Facilities, HR, IT, Database, etc.</i>	16%	12%	17%	19%
Other:	3%	4%	3%	4%

Looking at the Attendees to Full-Time Equivalent Staff data, a typical church of 2,000 people will have 25 full-time equivalent employees ($=2000/81$) with the allocation for each ministry as follows:

- Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor + Senior Leadership - 2.5
- Next-Gen Ministries - 5
- Adult Ministries - 6.5
- Worship Arts - 3.5
- Digital & Communications - 2
- Operations - 4.5
- Other - 1

The shift in Adult Ministry staffing has held.

Last year, our survey showed a significant jump in staffing allocated to Adult Ministries (from 17% in 2024 to nearly 25%). For churches with more than 200 in attendance, this trend continued, as these churches allocated 25% to 26% of their staff positions to groups, connection, care and missions. In smaller congregations, it's likely that senior leaders are overseeing most of the adult ministries themselves.

Next Gen investment has become more uniform.

Churches of every size now allocate about 21% of their staff to ministries serving kids and students. In fact, churches with fewer than 200 jumped from 16% last year to 21% this year.

Administrative roles are growing.

Roughly 17% of staff FTEs are dedicated to assistant and administrative support roles, which is up from 13% last year.



"When volunteer engagement lags, churches tend to hire people to accomplish tasks, including admin support, rather than to build and lead teams. It's possible we're seeing that reflected in the data this year. With more churches experiencing growth, they're also more likely to lag in the percentage of volunteers serving and volunteer leadership. As we see throughout this report, though, over-hiring could end up being a key lid to their growth over time."

Sean Bublitz

Staffing by Generation

Instead of generational data on the entire staff, this set is specifically targeted at those on the **Senior Leadership Team** (i.e., the group of leaders setting ministry strategy in the church).

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Category				
Boomers (62 or older)	10%	16%	17%	14%
Gen X (46-61)	54%	43%	41%	46%
Millennials (30-45)	31%	43%	41%	40%
Gen Z (14-29)	5%	4%	1%	0.5%

Gen X has the most representation at the leadership table.

Across all senior leadership seats, Gen X holds 43%, Millennials 39%, Boomers 16% and Gen Z just 2%.

Gen Z seats are primarily at smaller churches.

One of the more surprising findings in this year's report is that churches under 200 give Gen Z leaders about 5% of the senior leadership seats, while churches over 1,000 only give around half a percent of those same seats. This could be a reflection of the fact that smaller churches in this survey are also newer churches.



"The generational shift in church leadership is underway. Millennials hold an equal number of Senior Leadership Seats in many churches as do Gen Xers. At the same time, Gen Z is still underrepresented on many church leadership teams. With the oldest of Gen Z approaching 30, we will be watching to see when Gen Z begins to hold more leadership responsibility with ministry."

Sean Bublitz

The average age of Senior Pastors remained at 51.

In last year's survey, we asked about pastoral succession, and only 10% of churches reported they were actively planning compared to 23% the year before. It seems many churches have recently completed a transition in this pastoral role.

Staffing for the Future

Budget is the biggest barrier to hiring.

We asked churches the single biggest barrier to making their next staff hire, and just over half (51%) said budget and funding.

Thirty-five percent pointed to finding qualified candidates as their biggest barrier.

The rest were split among unclear role definition (6%), culture fit concerns (6%) and board or elder approval processes (3%) as their primary barriers.



Hiring Insights from Chemistry Staffing

In most searches we walk into, the candidates exist. What is missing is a clearly defined role and a process fast enough to land a strong person before another church does. The market has split. Excellent candidates move through it in a matter of weeks, while churches that take months to decide keep wondering why the “unicorn” got away. The unicorn did not vanish. They took another call.

Of the churches surveyed, 63% use contract services.

That’s down slightly from 67% last year. Here’s how these churches leverage contract services to run their ministries:

- **Facilities and Grounds:** Cleaning, janitorial and custodial services lead the way at 34%, followed by building maintenance, HVAC, electrical and plumbing (26%) and landscaping and grounds (17%).
- **Finance and HR:** About a third of churches (32%) outsource bookkeeping, accounting, payroll or HR support.
- **Creative, Tech and Worship:** One in five churches (20%) contract audio, video, streaming or production support. Another 14% outsource graphic design, 12% outsource web design and digital marketing and 11% pay contract musicians, which is consistent with the difficulty of hiring in the Worship Arts leadership role.



"In this year's survey, contractor use tracks with health: 65% of growing churches use outsourced services compared to just 45% of declining churches. Healthy churches seem to buy shorter-term specialized capacity rather than adding it to the permanent payroll."

Sean Bublitz

Worship Arts is the hardest role to fill.

The challenge to fill Worship Arts roles outpaced filling other roles by a wide margin: 28% of churches said they were struggling to fill roles in Worship Arts, ahead of Next Gen (18%), Executive and Operations (12%), Communications and Digital (8%) and Campus Pastors (6%). In last year's survey, Student Ministry was the headline challenge.

Growing vs. Declining

Below is a comparison of the staffing data between growing churches (85% of churches in this year's survey) and churches that are flat or declining (15%). One note on the sample size: only 20 churches in the survey reported declining attendance. While that sounds like a win, it also indicates we should report these comparisons as directional. The pattern, though, is consistent with what The Unstuck Group has learned from its work with churches.

Category	Growing Churches	Declining Churches
Giving Increase From Last Year (median)	8%	1.1%
Attendees to FTE (median)	61:1	42:1
At or Above the 75:1 Staffing Benchmark	29%	10%
Staffing Budget % of Overall Giving (median)	51.5%	58.8%
Spending More Than 55% of Giving on Staffing	36%	60%
Multisite	25%	5%
Use Contractors or Outsourced Services	65%	45%
Senior Leadership Seats Held by Millennials	43%	26%

Declining churches have the most committed givers.

Per-capita giving is the highest in flat or declining churches. This means they have fewer—but likely highly committed—attendees supporting a staff structure that was designed for a larger congregation.

Declining churches are in a difficult position of being overstaffed and under-resourced.

Declining churches are giving just 1% more over the last year (well below inflation), while at the same time have one staff member for every 42 attendees. In addition, they're spending 59% of their budget on staffing, and 60% of these declining churches are over the 55% budget benchmark for staffing.



Staffing Budget Insights from Chemistry Staffing

Fewer churches are overspending on staff, and the ones staying lean are staying healthy. We would add one caution from the field: Lean is a strategy, not just a number. The goal is not a better ratio. It is the right people in the right, clearly defined seats, hired through a process built to compete for talent that has more options than ever.

Staffing allocation is a key difference between growing and declining churches.

Declining churches tend to invest more in Worship Arts (19% vs. 14% in growing churches) and Operations (20% vs. 15%). At the same time, they are investing less than growing churches in Next Gen ministries (17% vs. 22%).

Role clarity and structure are bigger challenges for growing churches.

About one in five churches is working to overcome unclear reporting and decision-making, silos and mismatched roles. But this can actually be a positive sign, as these challenges generally surface when a church is growing or embracing a new vision.



Hiring Insights from Chemistry Staffing

While these churches facing an unclear structure may not see this as a hiring problem yet, it is about to become one. You cannot hire your way out of a structure you have not defined. We see it constantly: A church drops a talented leader into a seat no one has actually drawn, and a year later, everyone concludes it was a bad hire. It usually was not. It was a bad seat. Sixteen straight quarters of double-digit growth means a lot of churches are running on an org chart built for a version of themselves that no longer exists.

The Senior Leadership Team leans older in declining churches.

Growing churches' Senior Leadership Teams are younger with 43% of the seats filled by Millennials vs. 26% in declining churches. Declining churches have the greatest representation of Gen X in leadership seats and the oldest average Senior Pastor age.

This data doesn't answer the key question of which came first, attendance decline or over-staffing, but it does provide an indication of the profile for a declining church: over-staffing, personnel budgets beyond the benchmark, aging leadership and fewer people giving more. If this describes your church, the time to act on it is now.

Summary by Church Size

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Church Demographics				
Attendance Increase From Last Year	16%	11%	11%	13%
Multisite Churches	0%	8%	17%	57%
Attendees to Full-Time Equivalent Staff	45:1	56:1	67:1	81:1
Attendees to Volunteer Leader	14:1	17:1	17:1	17:1
Giving Increase From Last Year	11%	10%	10%	10%
Stuff Budget Percentage	50%	56%	50%	52%
Churches Using Contractors or Outsourced Services	50%	59%	64%	74%
Staffing by Ministry				
Senior Leadership	23%	15%	12%	10%
Next Gen Ministries	21%	22%	21%	21%
Adult Ministries	18%	25%	26%	25%
Worship Arts	12%	16%	13%	14%
Digital & Communications	7%	7%	7%	7%
Operations	16%	12%	17%	19%
Senior Leadership Team by Generation				
Boomers	10%	16%	17%	14%
Gen X	54%	43%	41%	46%
Millennials	31%	43%	41%	40%
Gen Z	5%	4%	1%	0.5%
Average Age of Senior Pastor	49	51	51	51



ABOUT THE UNSTUCK GROUP

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 consulting.

Learn more by visiting theunstuckgroup.com.



ABOUT CHEMISTRY STAFFING

Chemistry Staffing is a church search firm helping churches across the country hire healthy pastors and ministry staff who stay. Led by experienced pastors and church leaders, we match every role across the five areas that predict long-term fit: theology, culture, personality, skills and chemistry. From senior pastors to worship and operations roles, plus coaching, compensation and succession support, we make your next hire easier.

Learn more at chemistrystaffing.com.

