

Q1 2026

THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

BENCHMARKS + TRENDS
IN NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES

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WE HELP PASTORS LEAD UNSTUCK CHURCHES

Introduction

MARCH 2026

Every quarter, our team at The Unstuck Group surveys churches across North America to get a clear read on congregational health, momentum and overall trajectory. For the Q1 2026 report, we heard from more than 300 churches, representing weekly in-person attendance from anywhere under 100 to more than 12,000. On average, participating churches reported 944 people attending weekly, up from 778 when we started this research in 2017. And the churches in this survey reflect a wide range of traditions: 40% nondenominational, 21% Baptist, 7% Methodist and the rest spread across Assemblies of God, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Pentecostal and other denominations.

One of the unique findings in this quarter's report is how the health of the churches connected with The Unstuck Group has shifted over the years. For example, in 2017, 44% of the churches that participated in our survey were declining or flat in their growth. Today, only 8% of the churches fall into that category. Likewise, in 2017, only 56% of the churches were growing, but today that number is 86%. So, in some ways, this quarter's report begins to reveal the trends of growing churches.

We want to thank all the churches that took the time to participate in this quarter's survey. We couldn't do it without you. The learnings that come out of these reports are meant to provide churches with information and trends that help them make decisions to lead a healthy, growing church. So, read on for key takeaways from the most recent survey results in reach, connection, finances and overall health to gain some best-practice wisdom from other church leaders.



Key Findings

	This Year	Last Year	Difference
Attendance Increase From Last Year	14%	15%	-1%
Decisions to Follow Jesus as a Percentage of Attendance	10%	20%	-10%
Online Views Change From Last Year	25%	26%	-1%
Percentage of Adults and Students in Groups	51%	43%	+8%
Percentage of Adults and Students Serving	41%	35%	+6%
Giving Increase Over Last Year	9%	8%	+1%
Per Capita Giving (no Kids)	\$57	\$51	+9%



What 300+ Churches Are Telling Us About the Next Season of Ministry

Church leaders across North America are navigating a moment that feels both encouraging and uncertain. Attendance is rising in many places. New people are exploring faith. Year-over-year growth across churches remains in the double digits, and the churches represented in this survey have grown an average of **81% since their post-COVID attendance levels in 2021**. That's amazing!

In many ways, this is a hopeful moment for the Church.

But as we analyzed responses from more than 300 churches in the 2026 Q1 Unstuck Church Survey, another reality emerged beneath the encouraging numbers. **Momentum is real, but it is also slowing.**

While most churches are growing, the **rate of growth is beginning to decelerate**. In 2022, churches experienced an average year-over-year growth rate of 19%. By the time of this survey in February 2026, that number had declined to 14%.

The change does not signal decline. Rather, it suggests that the **post-pandemic rebound many churches experienced has normalized**. Churches that experienced rapid growth in recent years are now entering a new phase, one where growth will need to be cultivated intentionally again. The systems that help people take next steps—connecting, serving, leading and inviting others—are becoming increasingly important.

In other words, churches that assume momentum will continue may soon find themselves plateauing. But churches that treat this moment as an opportunity to strengthen engagement systems and ensure a healthy invite culture are well positioned for the next chapter.

We organized this report around four core ministry areas: Reach, Connection, Staffing and Finances. In each section, we'll highlight what separates thriving churches from those that are plateaued or in decline, and we'll close with practical implications.

The great news is that so many churches are experiencing significant growth right now. If that's you, celebrate it! I hope these findings encourage you and help you identify your right next steps to steward the moment well. And if your church is not among those seeing double-digit growth, I hope you, too, find some helpful ideas about ways you could lead your church toward healthy growth.



Amy K. Anderson

Amy Anderson

Managing Director of The Unstuck Group

Ministry Reach

Churches are seeing broad growth in attendance, but the pace is easing.

The average church in the survey reported a 14% year-over-year increase in weekly in-person attendance. This increase is genuinely encouraging, but it is also a step down from the 19% growth we saw back in 2022. When you look at the trend line from 2022 to 2025 (19% → 15% → 17% → 14%), it looks like the post-COVID rebound is beginning to level out.

Growth is fairly consistent by size.

Churches of 1,000+ reported 16% growth while churches of 200-499 and 500-999 both came in at 14% and churches under 200 reported 12%. This small four-point spread suggests attendance growth is not primarily about size.

Across all churches, decisions to follow Jesus equal about 10% of average attendance.

Churches running 1,000+ report 11%, while churches under 1,000 average 9%. But when you break it down by growth rate, the contrast is even clearer: Declining churches report just 4% of their attendance making decisions to follow Jesus, whereas churches growing by more than 20% see 12%—a threefold difference.

This is one of the clearest signals we have that outward-focused churches are also the ones most likely to experience sustained growth. In other words, attendance growth and spiritual fruit are not competing priorities. They move together.

Online engagement is a leading indicator of growth.

Online service views are up 25% year-over-year across all churches, and 97% of surveyed congregations now offer online services. The churches that perform best online consistently see the strongest gains in in-person attendance, as well. Online engagement continues to be one of the clearest leading indicators of future growth.

Kids' ministry attendance lags behind benchmark.

Kids' ministry (newborn through 5th grade) continues to average 16% of total attendance across nearly every church size, although the Unstuck benchmark for kids is 20%. We encourage churches to do demographic research to see what percentage of the population around their church is represented by this age group. The win is that your church reflects your community.

Most churches have simplified worship to a single modern or contemporary style.

In fact, 76% of all churches are contemporary-only. That number climbs to 93% for churches of 1,000+ but is only at 58% for churches of less than 200. Churches trying to offer multiple worship styles under one roof are more likely to be plateaued or declining. While this is correlation (not causation), simplifying to a single contemporary expression seems to align with healthier growth trends.

Multisite continues to be, overwhelmingly, a large-church strategy.

Half of churches of 1,000+ are multisite. The average multisite church reported 2.5 locations. Zooming out, multisite growth has been steady. It increased from 16% of the survey population in 2017 to 19% in 2025. We expect this trend to continue for large churches.

Churches are growing their pipeline with contact tracking.

This year churches are tracking more contacts in their databases than they were a year ago, with total contacts up 12% year-over-year. Smaller churches are leading the way, with a 13% increase for churches of less than 500 compared to an 11% increase for churches of 1,000+.



“It seems the muscle to track new contacts is building. The question now is, ‘What are we doing with that information so that we can better reach and disciple the people we are connecting with?’”

Amy Anderson

Ministry Connection

Group participation is on the rise.

In the Q1 2026 data, group participation climbed to 51% of attendance across churches, up from 43% in Q1 2025, which is an encouraging sign that more churches are helping people take a real step beyond Sunday and into community. It also reinforces something we have seen before: When attendance health improves, group health tends to improve right along with it.

Volunteer numbers are finally rebounding post-COVID: 41% of attendees are serving as volunteers, up from 35% in Q1 2025.

That's progress! This has been the hardest engagement area to strengthen since the pandemic. By church size, the picture is fairly steady: Churches with 500-999 in average attendance lead the pack with 47% serving in volunteer roles. Churches of less than 200 and churches of more than 1,000 reported 41%-42%, and churches of 200-499 reported 38%.

Across churches of all sizes, the average attendee-to-volunteer-leader ratio is 17 to one.

This is not simply a recruiting problem. It points to a leadership development and empowerment gap. Churches need systems that help people move from serving on a team to leading a team to coaching other leaders.

When churches rank engagement areas from strongest to weakest, the results are almost unanimous. "Engaging volunteer leaders in ministry" shows up as the number one challenge (the lowest score) for churches at every growth level except one. The exception is churches that are growing 5%-10%, where "first steps of engagement" just barely edges out volunteer leaders.



"The volunteer leader ratio is where the story gets even more telling. In churches over 1,000, that stretches to 21:1, which is the weakest ratio in the survey. In other words, most churches still have a meaningful opportunity to develop more volunteer leaders, and larger churches are feeling that gap the most."

Amy Anderson

Growth barriers: The “why” depends on whether you are declining or growing (fast).

In this quarter’s data, how church leaders identified the biggest barrier to future growth correlated interestingly with the status of their church’s attendance: growing or declining.

Declining churches tend to name internal culture issues first: lack of vision (23%), a weakened invite culture (23%) and lack of alignment (19%). In comparison, 48% of churches growing by 10% or more indicated space issues as their primary barrier to growth, which was followed by a cooling invite culture (16%).



*“If you’re getting dizzy from the numbers, just focus on this: Nearly half of the surveyed churches reported that **a lack of space** is their biggest roadblock to growth. Demand is outpacing capacity. This data supports what we have been seeing on the ground with churches throughout the past 18 months.”*

Amy Anderson

Declining churches are the most resistant to change.

Resistance to change as a barrier to growth was reported as 15% in declining churches, 7% in moderate-growth churches and just 3% among the fastest growing churches.



“The signal here is strong. Churches that cannot adapt will not grow, no matter how strong their finances or programs may be. One more encouraging insight: 15%-24% of churches growing at 5% or more reported “none” as their primary barrier. In other words, they feel positioned to keep reaching people without a major obstacle slowing them down. Only 4% of declining churches could say the same.”

Amy Anderson

Ministry Staffing & Structure

Staff budget allocation is consistent across church sizes.

On average, churches allocate 51% of their budget to staff salaries and benefits. While still the biggest line item in church budgets, this is within the benchmark range for healthy churches (45%-55%).



“What stood out to me is how steady that percentage stays as churches get larger. It ranges from 49% for churches averaging 200-499 to 52% for churches averaging 500-1,000+.”

Amy Anderson



Insights from David Middlebrook, Founder of The Church Lawyers

Understanding what a fair and comparable salary is for your pastors for a church of your size and in your specific location is important to pastor retention and part of best practices and good stewardship.

As churches struggle to determine reasonable compensation for employees, The Church Lawyers assist churches by undertaking independent third-party evaluations of executive compensation, utilizing comparability data to ensure that pastoral compensation is reasonable in accordance with federal tax law and industry standards.

The average church board or elder team has eight members.

Most churches also report two to three standing committees. However, like many of our past surveys, this survey had some extreme outliers, skewing the average numbers higher. But 58% of churches have boards containing eight or fewer members, which is in line with The Unstuck Group's recommendations. When governance and committee structures get too large, it inevitably slows down decision-making and diffuses accountability.

There are significant gaps in compensation and risk management.

Only 51% of churches use a professional salary analysis for senior and executive pastor pay. The difference by church size is telling with 74% of churches running 1,000+ using a professional analysis and only 31% of churches under 200 using one.

Fifty-seven percent of churches have not completed a legal or risk management audit in the last three years, and this number stays consistent across church sizes (54%-60%). As churches add staff, go multisite and expand their digital footprint, complexity goes up and risk goes up with it.



Risk Management Insights from [The Church Lawyers](#)

Churches are mission-driven organizations, but they operate within a complex web of federal and state laws that govern everything from corporate structure and board governance to employment practices, tax-exempt status, intellectual property and real property. Over time, many churches unknowingly accumulate legal vulnerabilities: outdated bylaws that no longer reflect their leadership structure, employment policies that fall short of current labor laws, unprotected creative works like sermon series and music or compensation arrangements that raise IRS compliance concerns.

Having a specialized firm like The Church Lawyers conduct a comprehensive legal snapshot gives church leadership a clear, objective picture of where the organization stands legally by identifying gaps, risks and areas of exposure before they become costly crises. Just as a physician performs a health checkup to catch problems early, a legal review equips church leaders with the knowledge and tools to protect the organization, their staff and ultimately their mission.

For any church—whether a new plant or a large multisite organization—investing in a periodic legal review is not a sign of distrust in leadership; it is a demonstration of responsible oversight that honors the congregation, protects the staff and ensures the church can continue doing what it was called to do for decades to come.

Ministry Finances

Across all churches, average giving rose 9% year-over-year.

The increase shows up across every size category, with churches of 1,000+ leading at 10% growth and smaller churches close behind at 8% growth.

The per capita giving (excluding kids) average is \$57 per person each week across churches.

Smaller churches (fewer than 200) reported higher per capita giving at \$65, while churches 1,000+ averaged \$49.

MortarStone's 2024 research adds important context: Only 1 in 20 attendees tithe (5%) with the top 1% of givers accounting for 21% of total giving. And to replace the giving of one Boomer, it takes about 3.5 Millennials or 10 Gen Z givers. Even when giving dollars go up, churches may not actually be gaining purchasing power because of the 28% increase in inflation since 2019.



"This gap makes sense when you think about growth. As you reach more new people, they often need time before they begin giving consistently. It also means higher per capita giving in smaller churches can reflect a more established donor base."

Amy Anderson

Most churches are sitting on a healthy cash cushion.

On average, it's 6.6 months of reserves, which is well above the typical two to three months we recommend. Churches of less than 500 average 7.4 months, while churches of 1,000+ average 5.5 months.

The average debt-to-annual-giving ratio is 0.6x, comfortably under the 2x ceiling.

Churches of less than 200 carry the least debt at 0.4x, and churches 1,000+ carry the most at 0.7x. One interesting note: Plateaued and declining churches are more likely to be debt-free, which could mean debt has been avoided for good reasons. However, this can also suggest that strategic debt often shows up when a church is still investing and moving forward.

The majority of churches are financially stable or thriving.

Thirty-seven percent of declining churches say their finances are “thriving,” as do 38% of churches growing by more than 20%. Nearly half of all churches (49%) reported feeling financially “stable,” and only 2% reported being under severe strain.



“Here’s what surprised me: Finances are not the deciding factor in whether a church is growing. So if money is not the difference-maker, what is? When we compare churches that are growing to those that are not, the gaps show up in vision clarity, an active invite culture, strong volunteer leadership and a real willingness to change.”

Amy Anderson

Final Thoughts

I hope this report raised some helpful questions for you and your church, and those questions deserve answers.

At The Unstuck Group, we exist for one reason: to help pastors lead unstuck churches. Whether you're hitting a growth ceiling or fighting an internal culture battle, we've been there with churches like yours.

Here's the kind of work we do together:

- **Multisite launches:** built for health, not just speed
- **Growth barriers:** identified, named and strategically overcome
- **Staffing and structure:** aligned to where you're going, not just where you've been
- **Invite culture:** reignited with a real plan behind it

If this report stirred something—a question you can't shake, a gap you can't ignore or a next step you're not sure how to take—that's worth a conversation. Our team at The Unstuck Group would love to be part of what comes next for your church.



Summary by Church Size

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+	All Churches
Church Demographics					
Year Started	1948	1955	1955	1977	1960
Board Members	8	8	9	8	8
Committees	3	3	2	2	3
Offering Only Contemporary/Modern Worship	58%	71%	69%	93%	76%
Offering Online Services	94%	95%	99%	99%	97%
Multisite Churches	0%	9%	11%	50%	19%
Reach					
Attendance Increase From Last Year	12%	14%	14%	16%	14%
Decisions to Follow Jesus as a Percentage of Attendance	9%	9%	9%	11%	10%
Kids as a Percentage of Attendance	17%	16%	18%	16%	16%
Students as a Percentage of Attendance	12%	10%	10%	8%	10%
Online Views Change From Last Year	28%	27%	27%	18%	25%
Change in Total Contacts Compared to Last Year	13%	13%	12%	11%	12%
Staffing & Finances					
Staff Budget Percentage	51%	49%	52%	52%	51%
Weekly Per Capita Giving (Not Including Kids)	\$65	\$57	\$59	\$49	\$57
Giving Increase From Last Year	8%	9%	8%	10%	9%
Debt-to-Annual-Giving Ratio	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6
Months of Cash Reserves	7.3	7.4	6.3	5.5	6.6



	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+	All Churches
Next Steps					
Volunteers as a Percentage of Attendance	42%	38%	47%	41%	41%
Attendees Per Volunteer Leader	16:1	16:1	15:1	21:1	17:1
Group Participants as a Percentage of Attendance	52%	51%	51%	49%	51%



Summary by Church Growth

Biggest Barrier to Growth	Resistance to Change	Space Issues	Lack of Vision / Clear Direction	Lack of Alignment	Invite Culture	None
Declining Churches	15%	12%	23%	19%	23%	4%
<5% Growth	11%	17%	23%	11%	26%	11%
5 - 10% Growth	7%	28%	7%	13%	21%	24%
10 - 20% Growth	13%	47%	8%	5%	15%	12%
>20% Growth	3%	49%	5%	8%	16%	18%
All Churches	9%	35%	11%	10%	20%	15%

Financial Position	Thriving: Finances are strong and thriving, allowing us to plan and invest for the future.	Stable: Finances are stable but are constrained when it comes to funding future dreams.	Somewhat Constraining: Finances are tight, and we are having to be very cautious with spending.	Very Constraining: We are under significant financial strain and struggling to cover basic expenses.
Declining Churches	37%	48%	15%	0%
<5% Growth	27%	46%	24%	3%
5 - 10% Growth	29%	59%	13%	0%
10 - 20% Growth	36%	47%	11%	6%
>20% Growth	38%	44%	18%	0%
All Churches	34%	49%	15%	2%





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. Want to **join the 700+ churches** that have engaged our Unstuck Process to make a greater Kingdom impact?

Learn more by visiting theunstuckgroup.com.



ABOUT THE CHURCH LAWYERS

When ministry meets legal complexity, The Church Lawyers are in your corner. Exclusively dedicated to serving churches, ministries and nonprofit organizations, the firm brings specialized legal expertise that general practice firms simply can't match. From church formation and governance to employment law, property matters, IRS compliance, crisis management and more, our comprehensive counsel covers every dimension of ministry life. No legal concern is too big or too small. With affordable services and a membership program offering discounted legal rates, quality legal protection is accessible to ministries of every size.

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