

Q2 2025

THE UNSTUCK CHURCH REPORT

SPECIAL EDITION: CHURCH STAFFING TRENDS

Sponsored by:



VANDEBLOEMEN

THE UNSTUCK GROUP®

— WE HELP PASTORS LEAD UNSTUCK CHURCHES. —

Introduction

May 2025

Every quarter, The Unstuck Group compiles the data we've collected to monitor trends in churches in the United States and around the world. 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 1 and April 29, 2025, providing a very current snapshot of ministries of all shapes and sizes.

We received survey responses from 251 churches, ranging in size from under 100 to over 9,900 in physical attendance for worship gatherings. The average in-person attendance of churches that participated was 978 people.

Thanks to the 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. Based on your size, you'll be able to see how you compare with other like-sized churches in areas like attendance-to-staff ratios, FTE distribution across ministries and the use of a multisite strategy.

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	65:1
Staffing as a Percentage of Total Budget	53%
Churches Actively Planning for Pastoral Succession	10%
Generation Most Represented on Staff Teams	Millennials

Let's talk about current staffing challenges...

I spent a lot of time over the last 12 months working with churches on their staffing and structure. So when we surveyed you about the biggest challenges your churches are experiencing in this area right now, I wasn't at all surprised by the answers. Your responses were consistent with what I have seen on the ground.

I hope this report will help you realize that you're not the only church experiencing significant staffing difficulties in this season. You're in good company: Many amazing churches are commiserating about the same issues.

I found that most of your challenges fell into five key areas:

- **Financial Constraints**

Budget constraints, funding for staffing, paying livable wages and financial resources are concerns in this year's survey. Financial constraints were the most cited issue this year, which indicates a trend continuing from last year. Many churches expressed that they were struggling to pay competitive wages and were concerned about having limited funds to hire or retain staff. Because of this, it's getting harder and harder to keep spending on staff between 45 to 55% of the overall budget.

Another complicating factor: Giving lags behind growth and that's making it difficult to balance staffing expenses with continued ministry growth.

- **Structure & Organizational Challenges**

This past year, we helped many churches navigate *major* restructures. Five years ago, I recall suggesting smaller changes—you know, some tweaks here and there. But in the past few years, more churches have been making bigger changes and that came through in the data.

Many churches noted difficulties around rightsizing their teams. Paradoxically, while they felt overstaffed, they also felt some teams were under-resourced. As they dug deeper into their structure, they recognized they didn't have some of the right people or the right roles on the team. They expressed an imbalance in how the workload is delegated, commonly saying that leaders are overloaded because there aren't enough leaders on the team. Some called out the challenge of managing transition or legacy staff issues.

Many discovered that job responsibilities are fuzzy, and because of that, there isn't much accountability in the organization. Often these challenges were exposed as churches experienced growth and refreshed their vision. And that makes sense: With a new vision, you need to restructure your team around that vision.

- **Volunteer Development and Leadership Pipeline**

Volunteering has been the slowest metric to rebound coming out of the pandemic. And that, of course, has created problems on the staffing side of churches. Churches have offset the lack of volunteers and volunteer leaders by hiring more paid staff.

Unfortunately, a lot of these paid staff members are focused on *doing* ministry instead of *leading* others. Developing volunteer leaders, delegating responsibilities and recruiting/retaining volunteers continue to be a headline issue for churches.

- **Finding Qualified Staff**

Difficulties in hiring, finding qualified candidates, staff turnover, overstaffing vs. volunteers, lack of full-time staff, too many part-time staff, allocation of staff and staff burnout are ongoing concerns. Churches are struggling to find the right people to hire. It's especially tough when it comes to filling roles in worship, kids ministry and students—it seems there just aren't enough qualified candidates out there.

On top of that, related to the financial constraints mentioned above, churches have to compete with the broader job market, which makes it even harder to attract talent. Even when you find a qualified candidate, getting the right fit both *culturally* and *spiritually* is the next challenge many churches mentioned.

- **Growth and Scaling Issues**

For the past three years in a row, The Unstuck Church Report has reported that the average church responding to our surveys has experienced double-digit growth year-over-year. It's incredible. We know that's not every church's story, but in our tribe, it does reflect *a lot* of the stories we're hearing.

Growing churches are having trouble scaling staff to match church growth and/or multisite expansion. It's creating tension in keeping up with increasing operational and ministry demands. These churches reflected that they need a proactive staffing plan for future growth vs. continually chasing and reacting to staff disruptions.

Okay, okay—I hope I didn't discourage you with all the challenges. I'm just sharing what you shared with us.

Let's face it, there will always be "people" problems when leading a ministry. But the people are the joy in all of it as well. They are your most important asset. A lot of staffing dilemmas are what I would call *perpetual*. They'll always be there, and we find ways to keep making them better and less frustrating.

But, more importantly, many are also solvable. We shouldn't lose hope; we can find more strategic ways to staff and structure our ministries. It's more than a job, and your team is more than a staff.

The Unstuck Group's founder, Tony Morgan, shared these encouraging words last year, and they are still true today. They filled me with hope as I reread them, and I wanted to share them again:

- *It's possible to create financial margin and prioritize resources where they will have the greatest Kingdom impact—that includes people resources.*
- *It's possible to raise up people who love Jesus, love your mission and want to help you engage your mission. It takes time and hard work, but it's possible.*
- *It's possible to bring organizational clarity and streamline decision-making so that the right leaders are in the right roles, helping you move your ministry priorities forward.*
- *It's possible to navigate the uncertainty of growth and change. And it's amazing how much anxiety subsides when there's clarity about where the church is going and how it's going to get there.*
- *It's possible to love your team and love your mission. But it does begin with building a healthy culture. The good news is that YOU can help shape that healthy culture.*

It's possible. Let that fill you up. 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 and structure is not working, like the challenges we uncovered in this quarter's survey, I hope you will trust our wisdom and experience to help you and your team.

People problems are uniquely challenging on a ministry staff team. Leading your people through them is hard. Learn how we can support you at theunstuckgroup.com/structure.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy K. Anderson".

Amy Anderson
Managing Director

Staffing & Ministry Overview

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Category				
Attendance Increase From Last Year	15%	11%	10%	13%
Multisite Churches	0%	5%	15%	51%
Attendees to Full-Time Equivalent Staff	51:1	54:1	61:1	83:1
Attendees to Volunteer Leader	10:1	17:1	16:1	14:1
Giving Increase From Last Year	7%	6%	6%	9%
Staff Budget Percentage	54%	54%	53%	53%

The average in-person attendance increase over the previous 12 months softened to 12%, compared to 17% last year.

However, the trend of double-digit growth continues for the 12th quarter in a row.



“That is obviously not the story of all churches in North America, but it is the story of churches connected to the Unstuck tribe! The average weekly attendance for the last 12 months increased from 899 people to 978. This is the total of all people, including children.”

Amy Anderson

One in five churches surveyed is a multisite church.

On average, those churches have three locations, including the original location. But if you look at the data by church size, you see the opportunity to go multisite grows as the church grows. The data indicate that 51% of churches with an average of 1,000 or more people in attendance are now multisite.

Staffing levels compared to attendance continues to move toward health.

Up from 62 last year, the average church employs one full-time equivalent (FTE) staff person for every 65 attendees. This number includes all ministry and support staff.

This is one area where there is a significant distinction between small and large churches. Churches with fewer than 200 people in attendance employ one FTE for every 51 attendees. Large churches with more than 1,000 in attendance have one FTE for every 83 attendees.

For comparison, The Unstuck Group recommends a benchmark of one FTE for every 75 people in attendance.

Churches have a span of care of one volunteer leader for every 16 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 (e.g., volunteer team leaders or group leaders).

This is an area where smaller churches continue to be healthier than larger churches right now. Smaller churches are more effectively empowering lay leaders over ministry teams and groups.

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

The average staff budget is 53% 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. And while the average is 53%, only 34% of the churches surveyed are operating in that range. In fact, 22% of the respondents reported spending less than 45% on staffing, and a whopping 45% reported spending more than 56%.



Insights From William Vanderbloemen, CEO and Founder of Vanderbloemen

The smartest churches are spending more on fewer people. They're not hiring for age groups or ministry silos; they're hiring people who can recruit, train and retain volunteers. That's the real multiplier.

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: Senior Pastors, Executive Pastors, etc.	22%	15%	11%	12%
Next-Gen Ministries (newborn - 18): Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, etc.	16%	23%	21%	20%
Adult Ministries: Groups, Connections, Care, Counseling, Missions, etc.	20%	21%	25%	24%
Worship Arts: Music, Tech Arts, Creative, etc.	14%	15%	13%	15%
Digital & Communications: Web, Social Media, Communications, Video, etc.	7%	7%	8%	7%
Operations: Finance, Facilities, HR, IT, Database, etc.	18%	16%	17%	18%
Other:	2%	3%	4%	4%

Looking at the Attendees to Full-Time Equivalent Staff data, a typical church of 2,000 people will have 24 full-time equivalent employees (=2000/83), with the allocation for each ministry as follows:

- Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor + One Additional Senior Leader - 3
- Next-Gen Ministries - 4.75
- Adult Ministries - 5.75
- Worship Arts - 3.6
- Digital & Communications - 1.6
- Operations - 4.3
- Other - 1

It's important to remember that these are just averages. There is no correlation in the data (yet) as to how healthy, growing churches are allocating their staff positions. However, the average church in our survey is growing by 12%, so there are some indicators that point to health.

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

However, they have more staff in Adult Ministries, including 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.

Staffing allocation in Adult Ministries increased significantly compared to the 2024 survey data.

In 2024, the average percentage of staffing allocation to Adult Ministries was 17%. As you can see in the table above, churches of all sizes are allocating more than 20% and some are allocating as much as 25%.



"This could be the result of lagging volunteer and volunteer leader numbers. Without multiplying and equipping leaders on staff teams, churches tend to hire "doing roles," which should be volunteer roles. Administrative roles also may add to these numbers. The data reflects that 13% of staff are filling admin roles. My gut, and my experience, tells me Adult Ministries may account for several of those allocations."

-- Amy

Of those surveyed, 67% of churches use contract services.

Here's some insight into how churches leverage contract services to run their ministries:

- **Facilities and Grounds:** This was the top category overall with more than 60% of respondents citing it's where they contract services. Churches contract with providers to cover lawn care, landscaping, snow removal, janitorial services, etc.
- **Finance and HR:** Nearly 50% of churches leverage other organizations to handle bookkeeping/accounting, payroll and HR support.
- **Creative and Tech:** 20% of churches outsource graphic design, social media and web design.

Staffing by Generation

The survey also asked respondents how many staff positions they have in each generation. The table below reflects the responses received with the data broken down by church size.

	<200	200-499	500-999	1000+
Category				
Boomers (61 or older)	15%	14%	15%	10%
Gen X (45-60)	32%	29%	30%	28%
Millennials (29-44)	35%	42%	40%	42%
Gen Z (28 or younger)	18%	16%	15%	20%
Average Age of Senior Pastor	46	49	51	51

Millennials are now the majority.

People between the ages of 28 and 43 now fill the majority of staff positions at churches of every size.

Gen Z representation increased across all church sizes.

More churches are hiring and engaging this upcoming generation. And it makes sense—they're getting older!



"Seeing the representation of these Gen Z and Millennial leaders increase is great news for the Church. Barna Research Group highlights the benefits they bring to the table: '77% of Gen Z say they want their work to make a positive impact on the world....Millennials want to work for organizations that have a purpose beyond profit—and for churches, that mission alignment can be a powerful motivator.' To me, that would indicate these younger generations have the capacity for strong alignment with purpose-driven ministries.

I'm encouraged by what I've been seeing at the churches I served over the past 12 months. So many were very intentional about opening up seats at the table for these two generations and pursuing their perspectives and opinions. I was 33 when I was given a seat around the leadership table at my church. I'm grateful I was given a shot."

-- Amy

Staffing for the Future

The average age of pastors increased slightly, but active succession plans have decreased.

On average, Senior Pastors are 51 years old (on the younger end of Gen X), up slightly from 50 last year. However, only 10% of churches report actively planning for pastoral succession—a significant decrease from 23% last year. This decline suggests churches may be deprioritizing this leadership transition since it is likely 10+ years away.



Succession Insights From Vanderbloemen

Succession is still a massive issue. The Baby Boomers are retiring, but there aren't enough Gen Xers to fill their seats. Churches may not be actively planning yet, but the need isn't going away. In ten years, we'll look back and see that this report saw the wave coming before most people did.

-- William

Of the churches surveyed, 70% have key leadership roles to fill next year.

Here are the roles that top the list:

- **Next Gen Leaders:** Leader, pastor, director—however you title it, Student Ministry is a top staffing priority. The Kids Pastor role isn't far behind. Almost a quarter of the churches surveyed said finding a leader over Next Gen Ministry is a priority over the next 12 months.
- **Discipleship Leaders:** Almost a third of the churches surveyed need to find multiplying, equipping leaders to lead campuses, oversee spiritual formation and help people get connected at their church.
- **Worship Leaders:** A fifth of churches indicated they will need to add team members to this role in the next 12 months.
- **Executive Pastors:** 10% of churches identified that they need to hire an Executive Pastor.



Staffing Insights From Vanderbloemen

Student ministry is the hardest position to fill right now. The pandemic disrupted participation rhythms, and many students found connection outside the church. At the same time, the traditional “on-ramp” to senior leadership—starting in student ministry—is no longer the only path. With church planting networks and multisite opportunities, there are simply fewer people pursuing these roles.

-- William

How Churches Plan on Filling Key Leadership Roles

The survey also asked the question, “What is your strategy for identifying and recruiting top talent for open leadership positions?” Many churches listed multiple ways they intend to identify their future leaders. In other words, they don’t have one approach; they have several strategies they are using at the same time. Here’s a summary of the responses:

- **Internal Development and Promotion (68%)**

A significant majority of churches prioritize internal development and promotion for leadership roles, focusing on cultivating talent from within through coaching, mentorship and leadership pipelines. They identify and raise up volunteers who show leadership potential, leveraging discipleship groups and leader development programs. By promoting faithful members or volunteers who demonstrate leadership skills, these churches ensure continuity and alignment with their values.

- **Networking and Relationships (48%)**

Nearly half of churches lean heavily on networking and relationships to recruit leadership talent, tapping into personal connections within their congregations and broader denominational networks. They rely on word-of-mouth referrals from trusted ministry partners and local pastors, and they cultivate relationships with nearby colleges, universities and seminaries to identify promising candidates.

- **Formal Recruiting Methods (32%)**

About a third of churches employ formal recruitment methods, posting open positions on job sites like ChurchStaffing.com, LinkedIn and Indeed. They also partner with recruiting firms and headhunters to fill senior or specialized leadership roles and advertise opportunities in denominational newsletters and nonprofit publications to reach a broader pool of qualified candidates.

- **Specialized Development Programs (24%)**

Approximately a quarter of churches utilize specialized development programs—such as residency and internship tracks, mentorship cohorts and targeted training for younger leaders (ages 20 to 30)—to build strong leadership pipelines.

- **Ad-Hoc and Undefined Approaches (12%)**

Of the churches surveyed, 12% said they have no clear plan for leadership recruitment or development.



"Here's the good news I share with churches all the time. You're looking for individuals who are people-magnets. People who know how to live out Ephesians 4 and give ministry away. They need to love Jesus and His Church. So look for leaders."

You can engage organizations like Vanderbloemen to help you recruit leaders from outside your church, but you also need to be working to develop leaders from within. It's both/and. Don't say "no" for people; give them a chance to answer first. God is already going before you to prepare people for ministry. You can teach them theology. There are probably dozens of leaders in your auditorium each weekend who are waiting for you to ask them to step into ministry."

-- Amy

Summary by Church Size

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Church Demographics				
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For more information related to this survey and the summary of the learnings, contact The Unstuck Group:

theunstuckgroup.com

help@theunstuckgroup.com



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 VANDERBLOEMEN

Vanderbloemen is the premier executive search and consulting firm helping Christian organizations build exceptional teams. Over 4,100 mission-driven organizations trust us to power their purpose through executive search, succession planning, and organizational health solutions. Let's lead the future of ministry together. Learn more by visiting vanderbloemen.com.