Pastors’ Descriptions of In-person Worship Attendance 2023

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN PROTESTANT PASTORS
Methodology

- The phone survey of 1,004 Protestant pastors was conducted August 29, 2023 - September 20, 2023
- The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were used for church size
- Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest at the church
- Responses were weighted by region and church size to more accurately reflect the population
- The completed sample is 1,004 surveys
- The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed ±3.2%. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting
- Margins of error are higher in sub-groups
- Comparisons are made to the following LifeWay Research studies: a phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors September 6-30, 2022, a phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors September 1-29, 2021, a mixed mode survey of 1,007 Protestant pastors September 2-October 1, 2020, and an online survey of 430 Protestant pastors February 1-11, 2021.
Less than 1% of pastors say their church did not meet in person in August 2023

Among Protestant Pastors

Church met in person 100%

Church did not meet in person <1%

Q: “For August 2023, what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?” n=993
There is no change in the number churches that met in person in August 2023 v. August 2022.

Among Protestant Pastors

Church met in person

- August 2023: 100%
- August 2022: 100%
- August 2021: 98%
- 2020: <1%

Church did not meet in person

- August 2023: <1%
- August 2022: <1%
- August 2021: 2%
- 2020: 13%

August 2023  August 2022  August 2021  January 2021  September 2020

Q: “For [Month], what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)’”
For August 2023, what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?  

Q: “For August 2023, what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?”  

n=991
August 2023 attendance as a percentage of January 2020 attendance

Among Protestant Pastors

Q: “For August 2023, what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?” n=895
Attendance compared to Jan./Feb. 2020: In the last year, the percentage of churches has increased that exceed their pre-COVID attendance (23% v. 17%)

Among Protestant Pastors

Q: “For [Month], what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?”
Mean and median of attendance as a percentage of Jan./Feb. 2020

Among Protestant Pastors

Mean
• 63% - September 2020
• 60% - January 2021
• 73% - August 2021
• 85% - August 2022
• 89% - August 2023

Median
• 62% - September 2020
• 60% - January 2021
• 71% - August 2021
• 78% - August 2022
• 82% - August 2023
Significant Differences

Pastor
Ethnicity
Age
Gender
Education Level
Self-identified Evangelical/Mainline

Church
Region
Denomination
Average Attendance
Significant Differences

Comparisons were made to determine if there are any significant statistical differences among the pastor’s ethnicity, age, gender, education, self-identified Evangelical or Mainline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>Self-Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-44</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No College Degree</td>
<td>Evangelical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Mainline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Significant Statistical Differences**

Comparisons were made to determine if there are any significant statistical differences among the church’s region, denomination, and pre-COVID attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>DENOMINATION GROUP</th>
<th>Pre-COVID ATTENDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>0-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>50-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>100-249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>250+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presbyterian/Reformed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian/Church of Christ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Region is defined by the US Census locations
“For August 2023, what was your church’s average worship attendance in-person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?”

- Pastors age 65+ are the most likely to select “0-49” (47%)
- Male pastors are more likely to select “100-249” than females (27% v. 20%)
- White pastors (28%) are more likely to select “100-249” than African American pastors (12%)
- Pastors with a Master’s Degree (41%) are more likely to select “50-99” than those with no college degree (31%) or a Bachelor’s Degree (31%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to select “100-249” than Mainline pastors (30% v. 17%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (36%) are more likely to select “0-49” than those in the South (27%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (40%) are more likely to select “50-99" than those in the West (30%)
- Methodists (41%) and Presbyterian/Reformed (35%) are more likely to select “0-49” than Baptists (23%)
August 2023 Attendance as a percentage of January 2020 Attendance

• Pastors age 65+ (10%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 30 to <50% of January 2020 than pastors age 45-54 (3%)
• Pastors age 18-44 (28%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance >100% of January 2020 than pastors age 65+ (18%)
• Female pastors are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 50 to <70% of January 2020 than males (33% v. 21%)
• Male pastors are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between >100% of January 2020 than females (25% v. 15%)
• White pastors (18%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 90 to 100% of January 2020 than African American pastors (7%)
• African American pastors (17%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 30 to <50% of January 2020 than White pastors (6%)
August 2023 Attendance as a percentage of January 2020 Attendance continued

- Pastors with a Doctoral degree (37%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 70 to <90% of January 2020 than pastors with no college degree (24%)
- Pastors with a Bachelor’s degree (23%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 90 to 100% of January 2020 than pastors with no college degree (14%) or a Doctoral degree (12%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 50 to <70% of January 2020 than Evangelical pastors (29% v. 20%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to report August 2023 attendance >100% of January 2020 than Mainline pastors (26% v. 18%)
August 2023 Attendance as a percentage of January 2020 Attendance continued

- Methodists (10%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between **30 to <50%** of January 2020 than Lutherans (2%)
- Methodists (34%) are more likely to report August 2022 attendance between **50 to <70%** of January 2020 than Baptists (21%), Pentecostals (16%), Presbyterian/Reformed (21%), Christian/Church of Christ (16%), and Non-denominational (18%)
- Baptists (18%), Lutherans (21%), and Non-denominational (27%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between **90% to 100%** of January 2020 than Methodists (11%)
- Baptists (23%), Pentecostals (27%), and Presbyterian/Reformed (27%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance **>100%** of January 2020 than Methodists (14%)
August 2023 Attendance as a percentage of January 2020 Attendance continued

• Pastors of churches with pre-COVID attendance of 50-99 (25%) and 100-249 (25%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 50 to <70% of January 2020 than those with attendance of 0-49 (17%)
• Pastors of churches with pre-COVID attendance of 0-49 (23%) are more likely to report August 2023 attendance between 90 to 100% than those with attendance of 50-99 (16%)
• Pastors of churches with pre-COVID attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to report August 2023 attendance >100% (35%)
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