

Pastors' Views on Reaching Non-Christians and Young Adults

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN PROTESTANT PASTORS

Sponsored by

Wheaton College Billy Graham Center

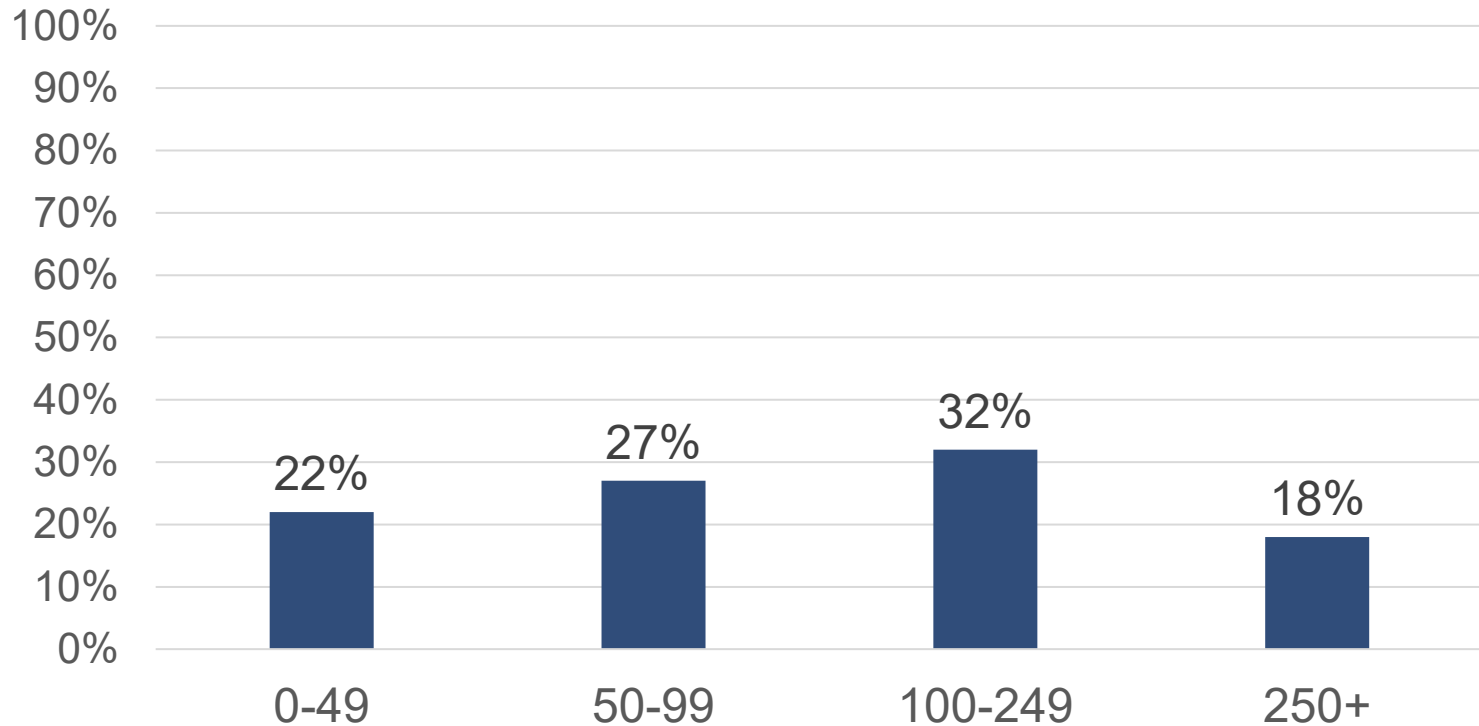
Lifeway[®] Research

Methodology

- The study was sponsored by the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center
- The phone survey of 1,003 Protestant pastors was conducted September 2-24, 2025
- 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 1,003 surveys
- The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed $\pm 3.3\%$ This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting
- Margins of error are higher in sub-groups
- Comparisons are made to a January 2016 survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors conducted by Lifeway Research for the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center

Average worship attendance Fall 2025

Among Protestant Pastors



Mean: 183

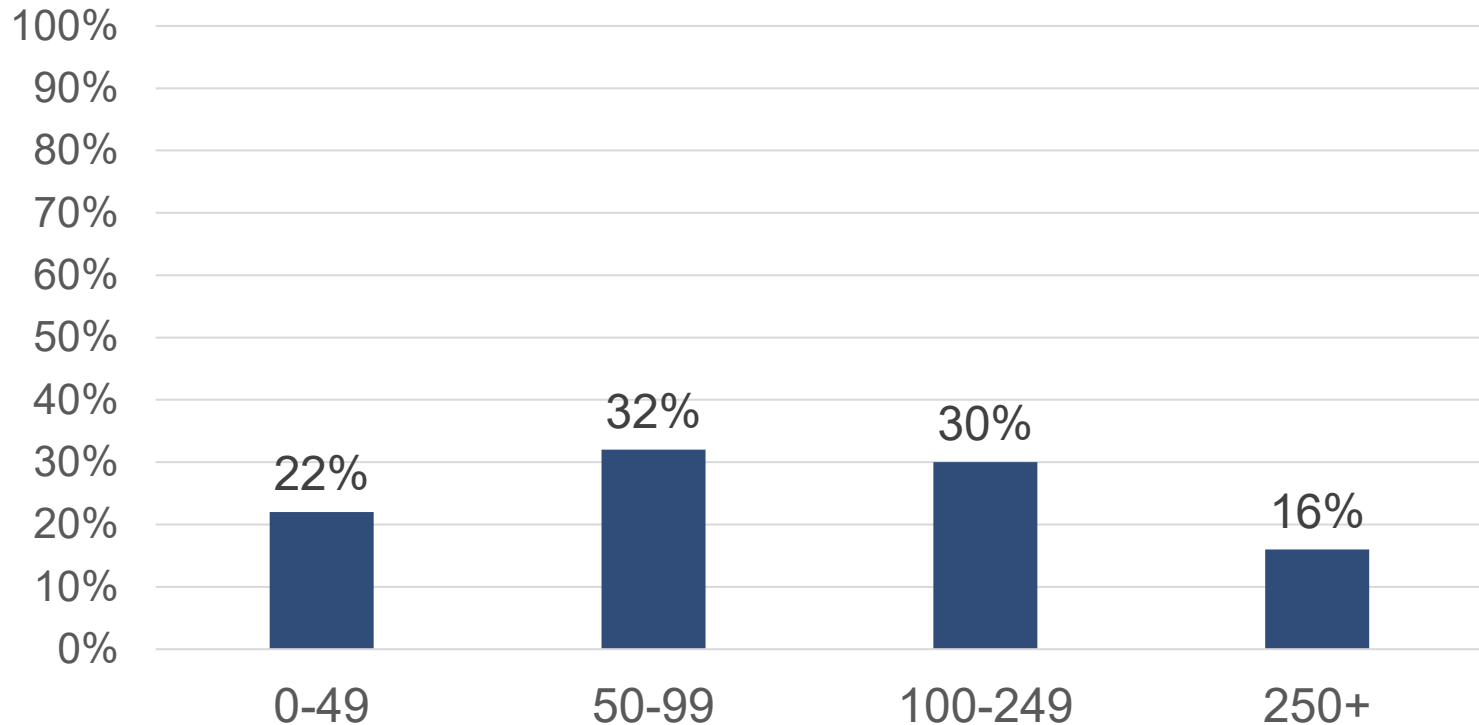
Median: 100

Lifeway Research

Q: "What was your church's average worship attendance in person 2 years ago in the Fall 2023 (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?" n=1,002

Average worship attendance Fall 2023

Among Protestant Pastors



Mean: 176

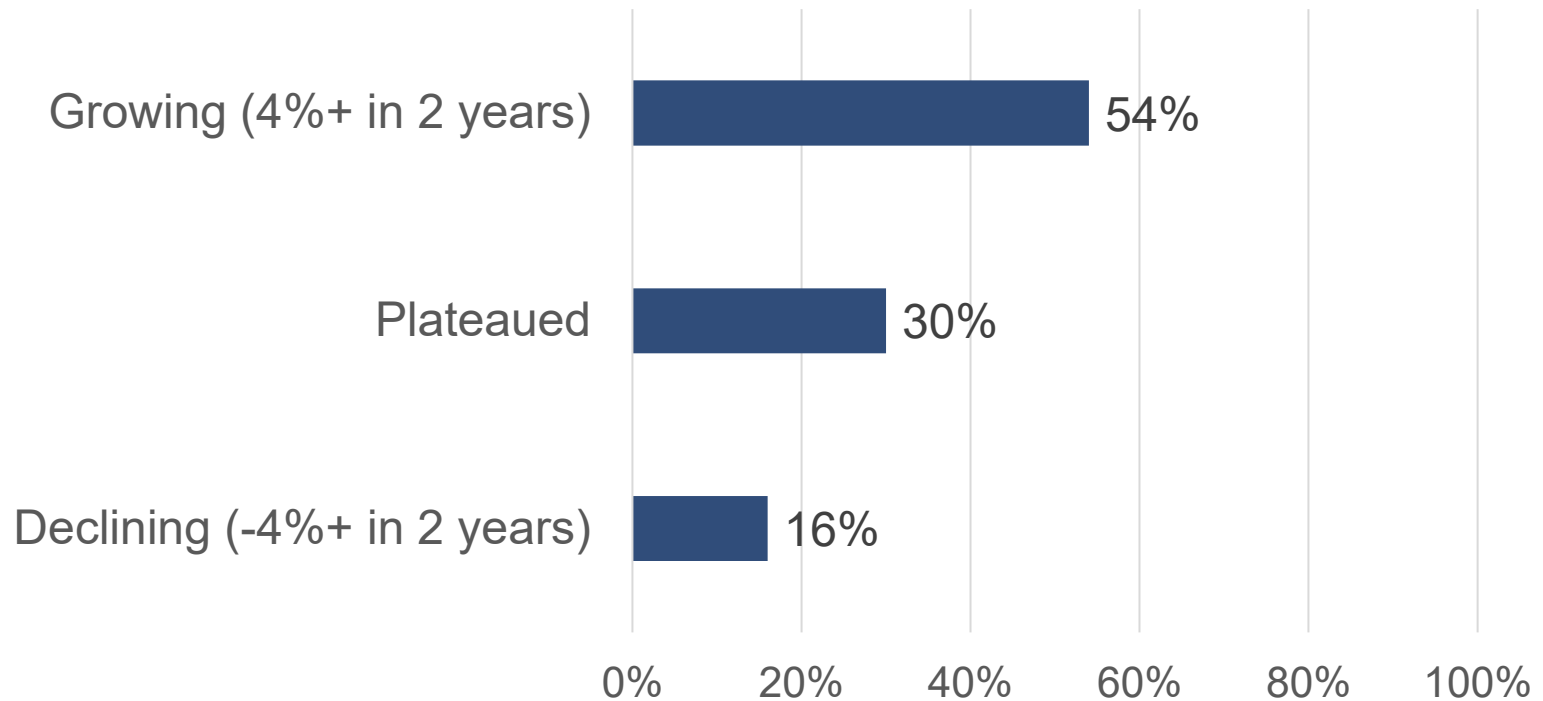
Median: 90

Lifeway Research

Q: "What was your church's average worship attendance in person 2 years ago in the Fall 2023 (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?" n=937

Percentage change in worship attendance Fall 2025 compared to Fall 2023

Among Protestant Pastors



Mean Pct Change: 16%

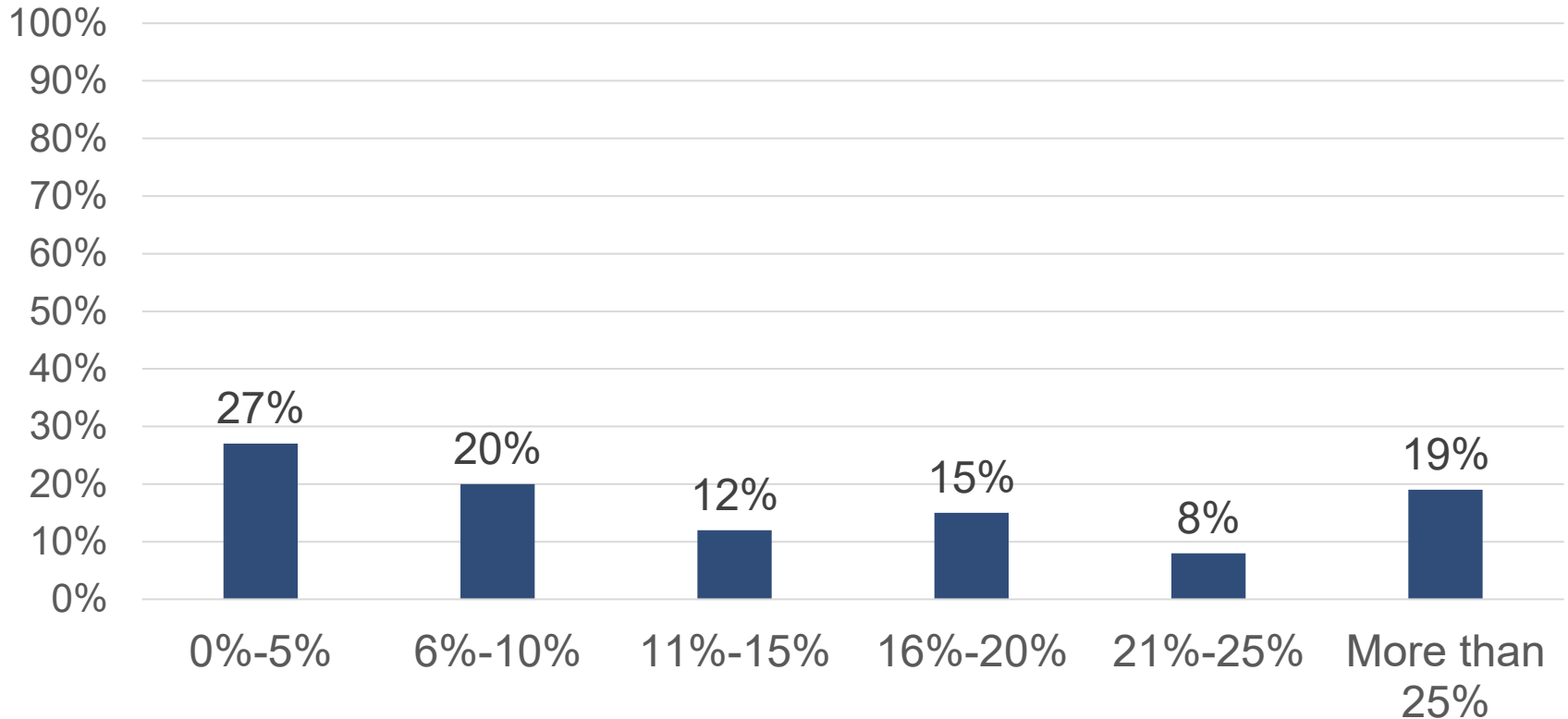
Median Pct Change: 10%

Lifeway Research

Q: "What was your church's average worship attendance in person 2 years ago in the Fall 2023 (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?" n=937

On average 17% of worship attendees are young adults 18-30

Among Protestant Pastors



Mean: 17

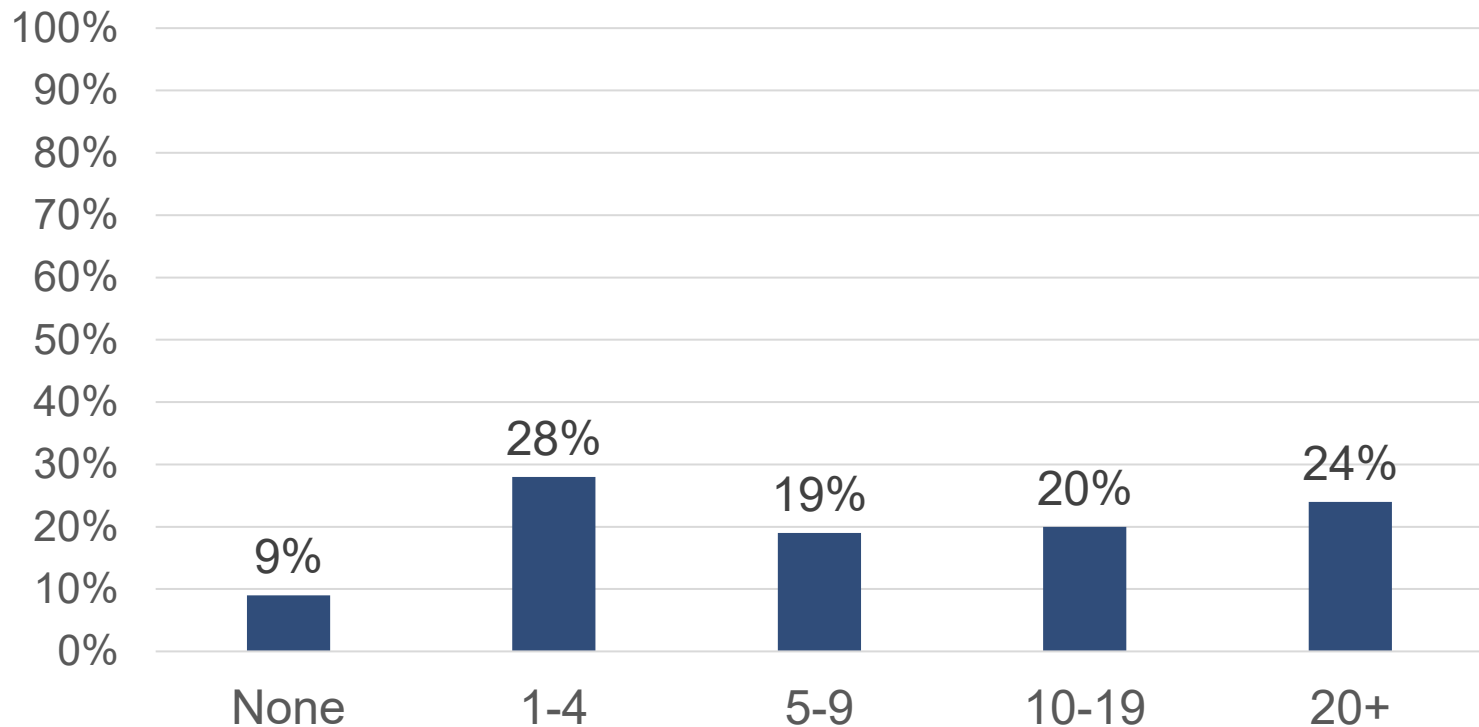
Median: 15

Lifeway Research

Q: "What percentage of your average worship service attendance are young adults between the ages of 18 and 30?" n=983

Number of new commitments to Jesus Christ in the past 12 months

Among Protestant Pastors



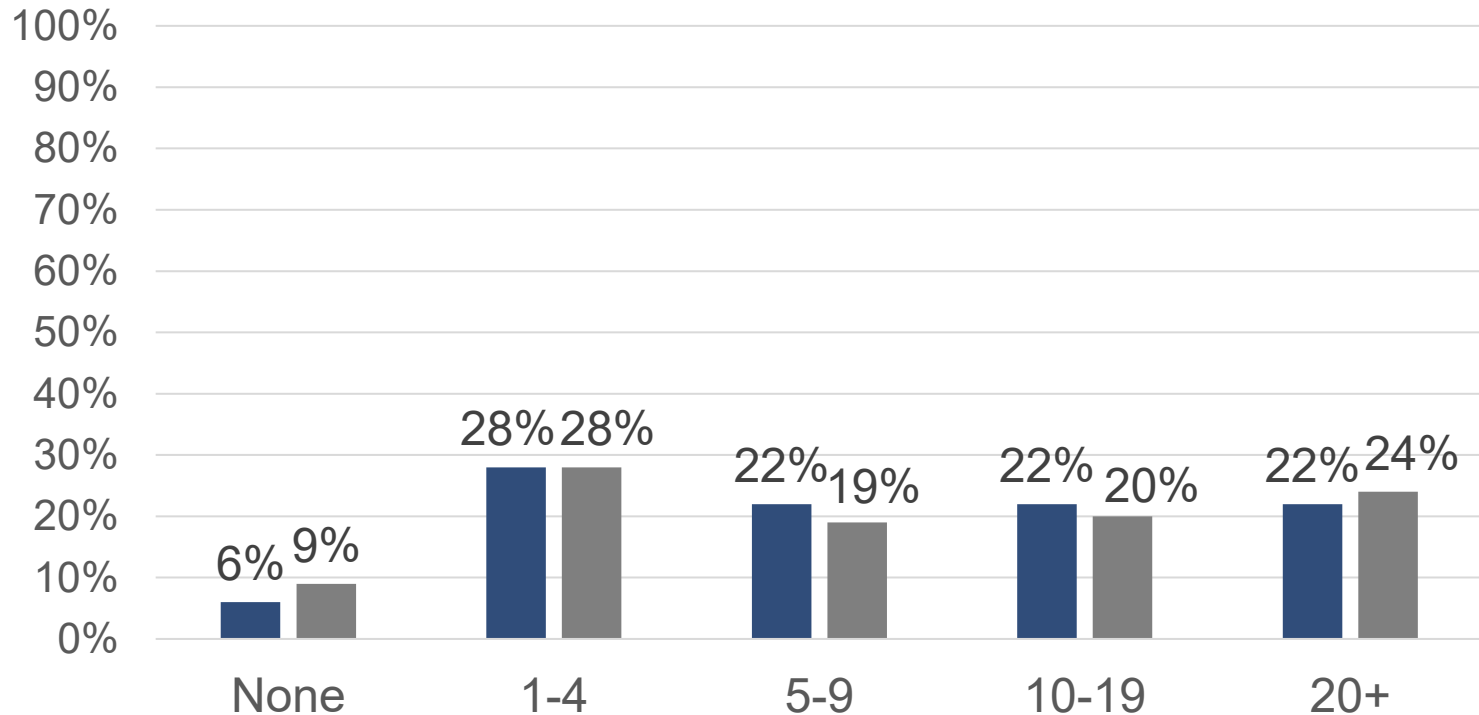
Mean: 18

Median: 6

Lifeway Research

Slightly more churches had no new commitments to Jesus Christ in 2025 v. 2016

Among Protestant Pastors



	<u>2016</u>	<u>2025</u>
Mean	17	18
Median	7	6

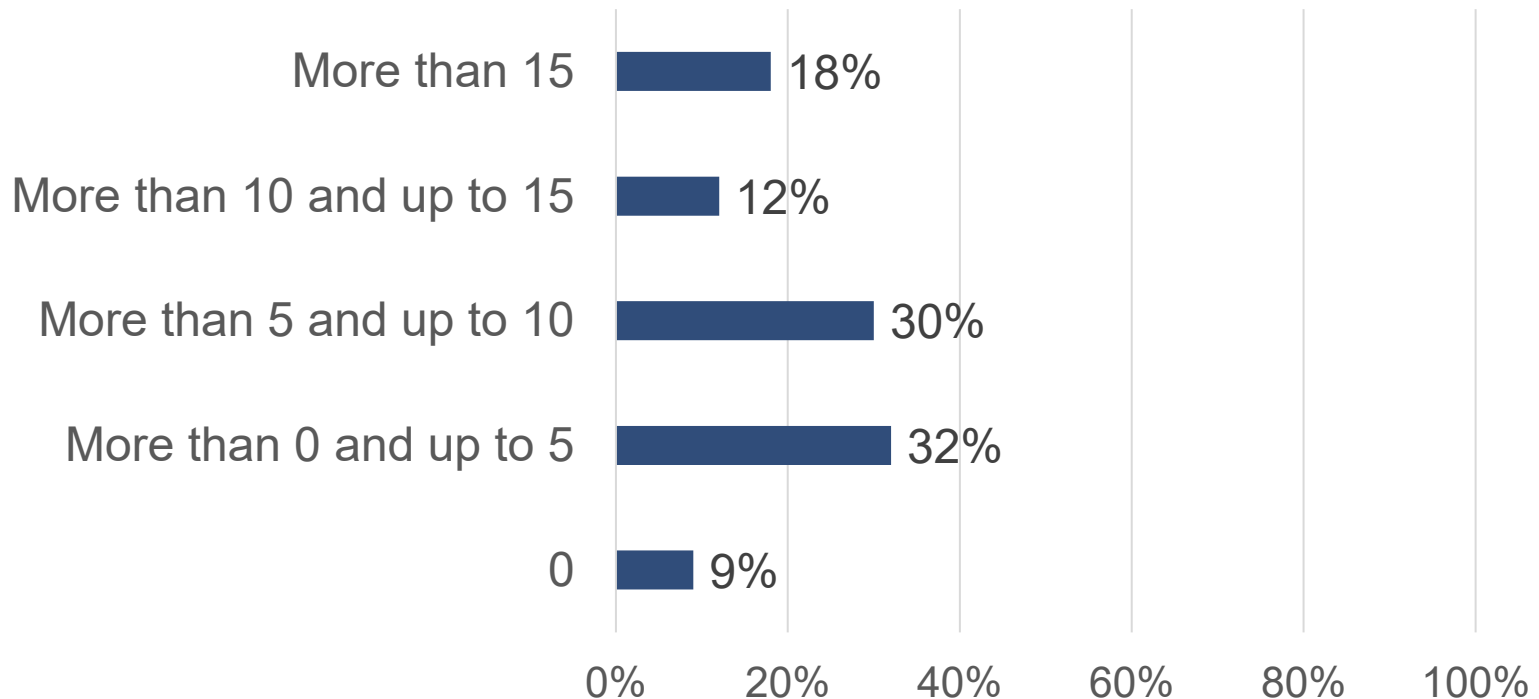
■ 2016 ■ 2025

Lifeway Research

Q: "In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?"

30% had more than 10 new commitments to Christ *per 100 attendees* in the past 12 months

New Commitments Per 100 Attendees in Protestant Churches



Mean: 11

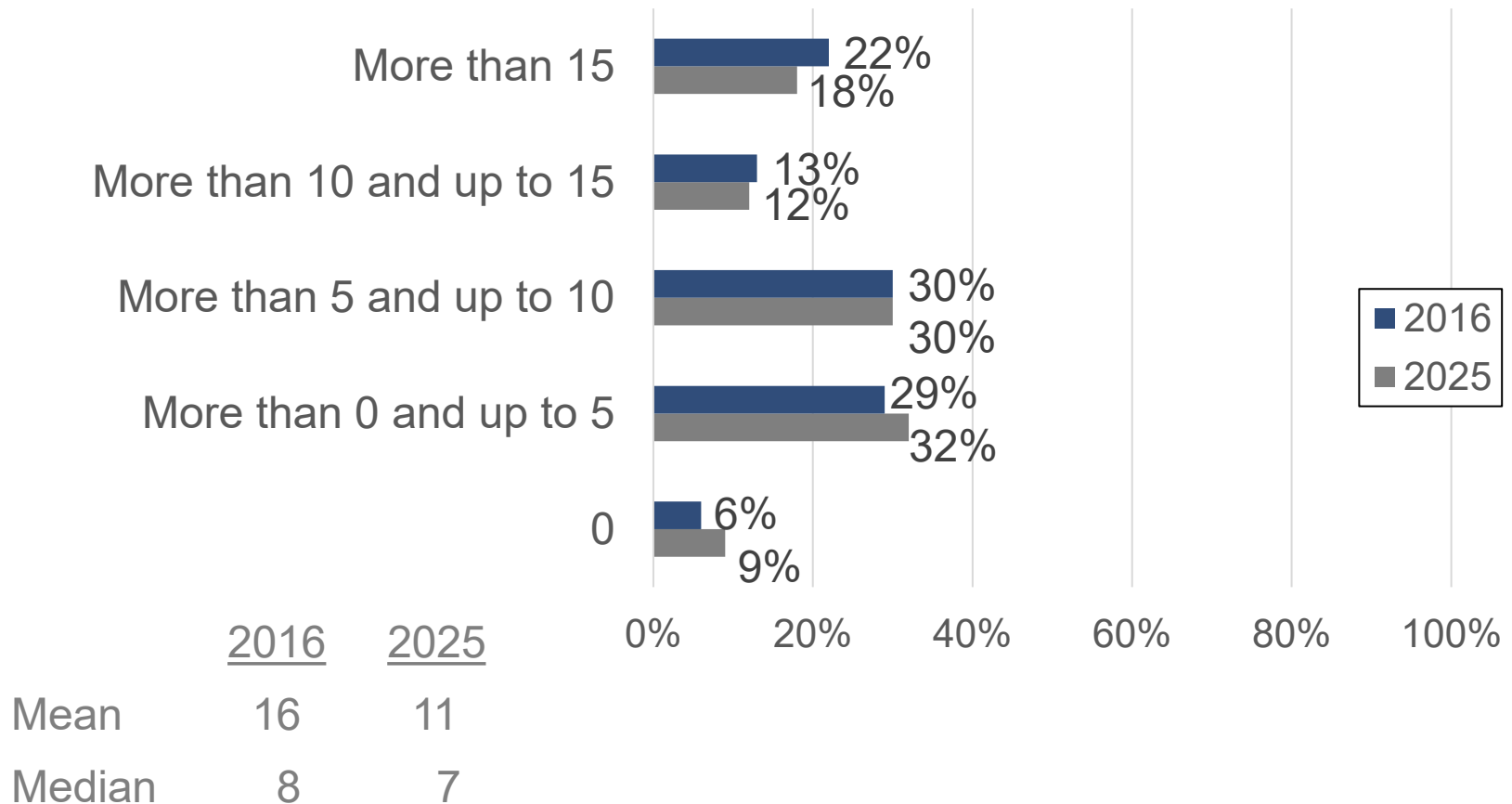
Median: 7

Lifeway Research

Q: "In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?" n=911

Fewer churches had more than 15 baptisms *per 100 attendees* than in 2016

New Commitments Per 100 Attendees in Protestant Churches

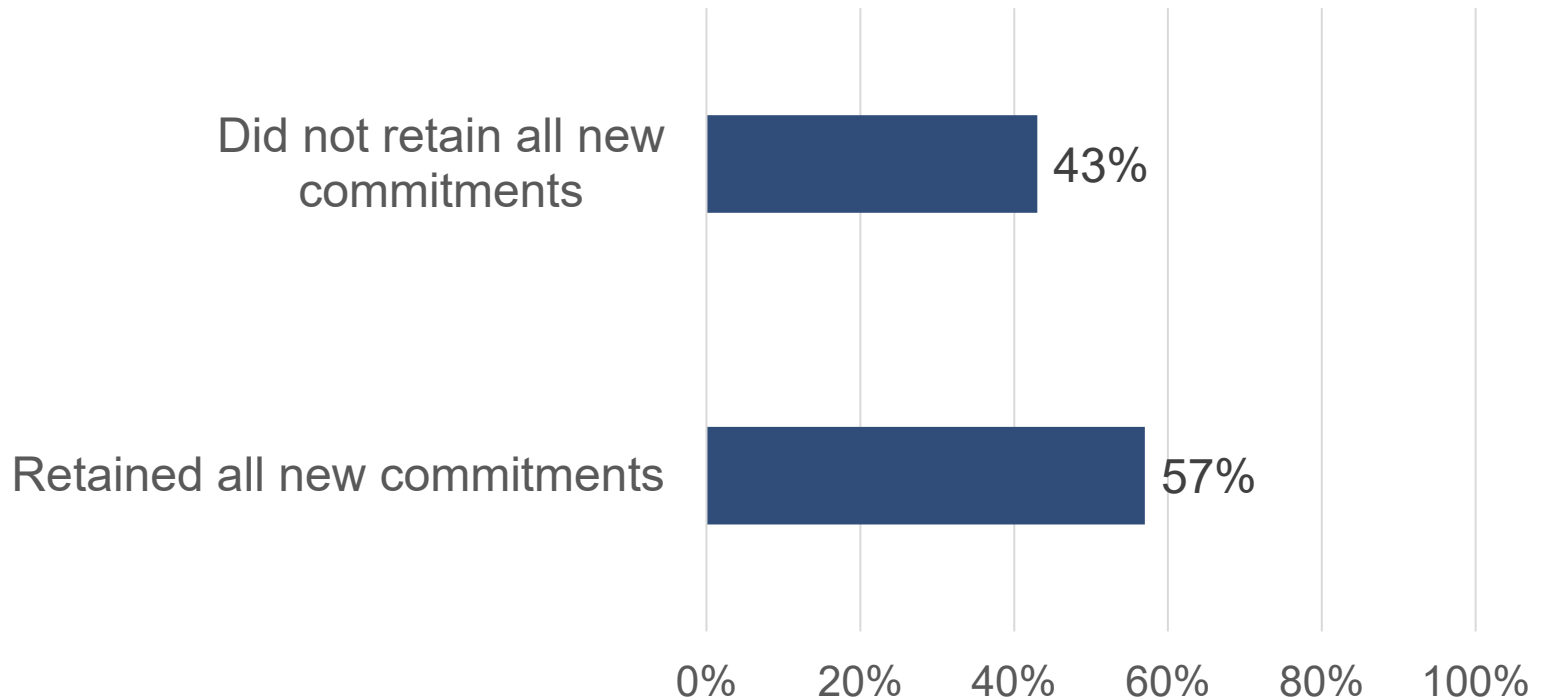


Lifeway Research

Q: "In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?"

On average, 81% of new commitments were retained

Among Protestant Pastors

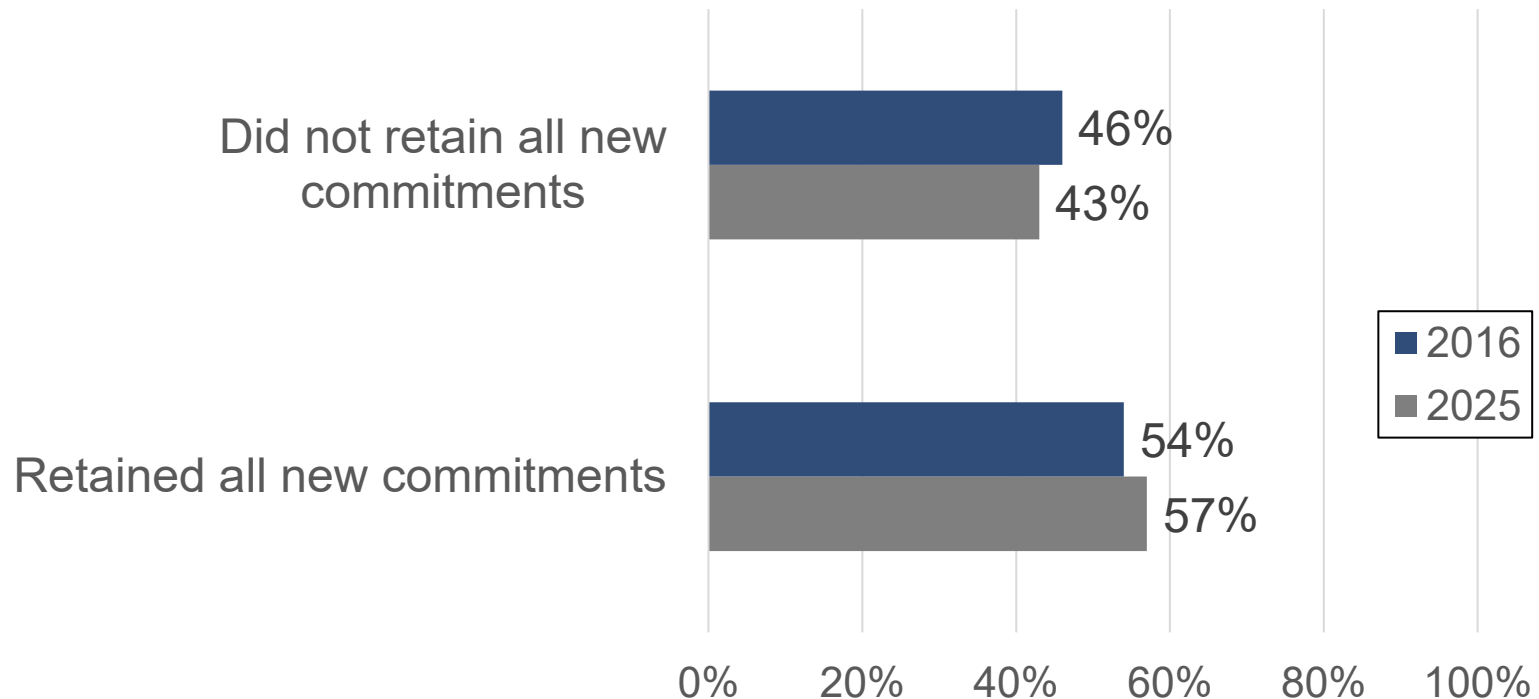


Lifeway Research

Q: "Among these commitments in the past 12 months, how many have ALSO become active in the life of your church?" n=839

The average of 81% of new commitments being retained is similar to the 80% in 2016

Among Protestant Pastors

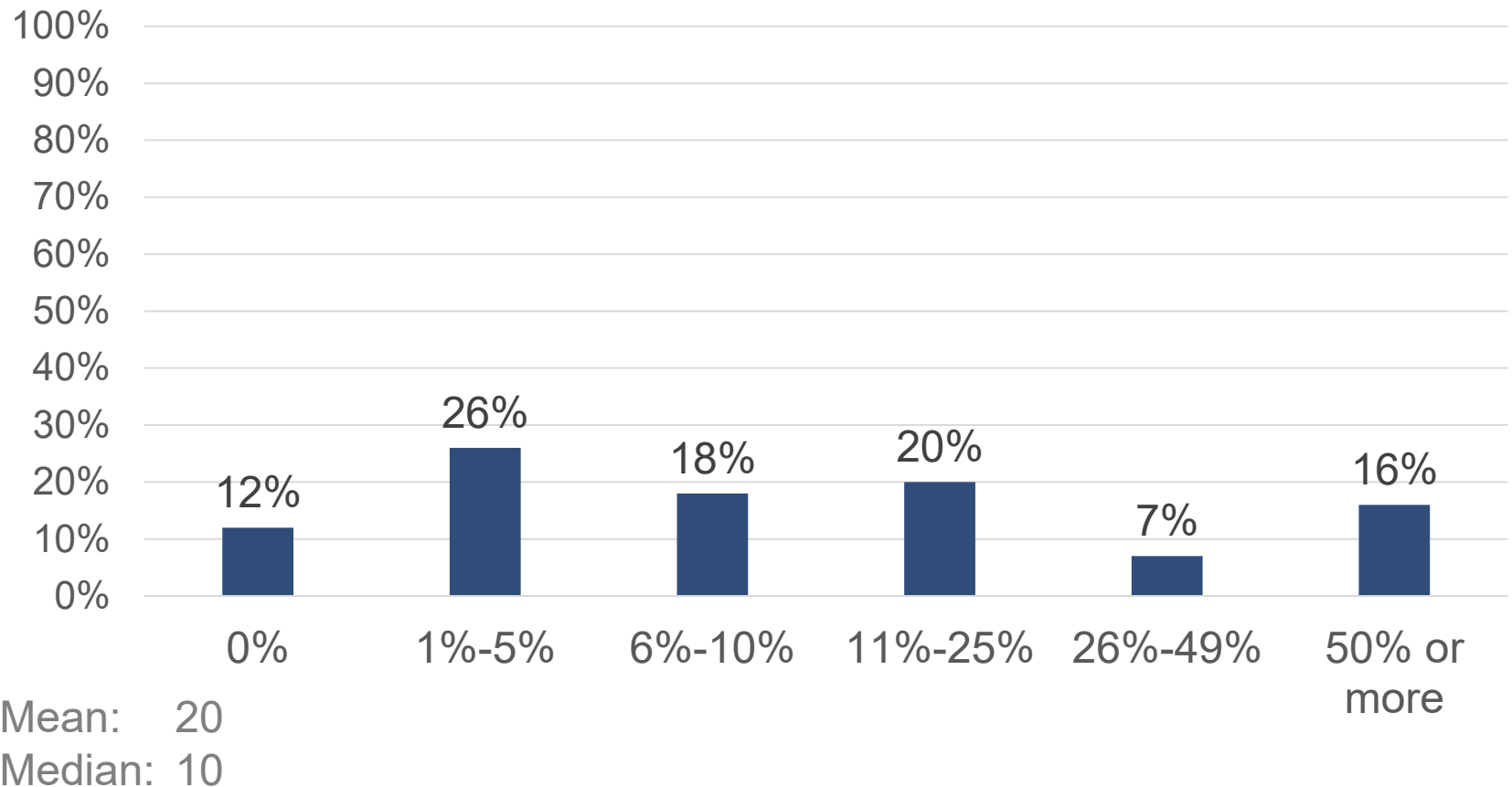


Lifeway Research

Q: "Among these commitments in the past 12 months, how many have ALSO become active in the life of your church?)"

On average, 20% of new church attendees are people who previously did not go to church

Among Protestant Pastors

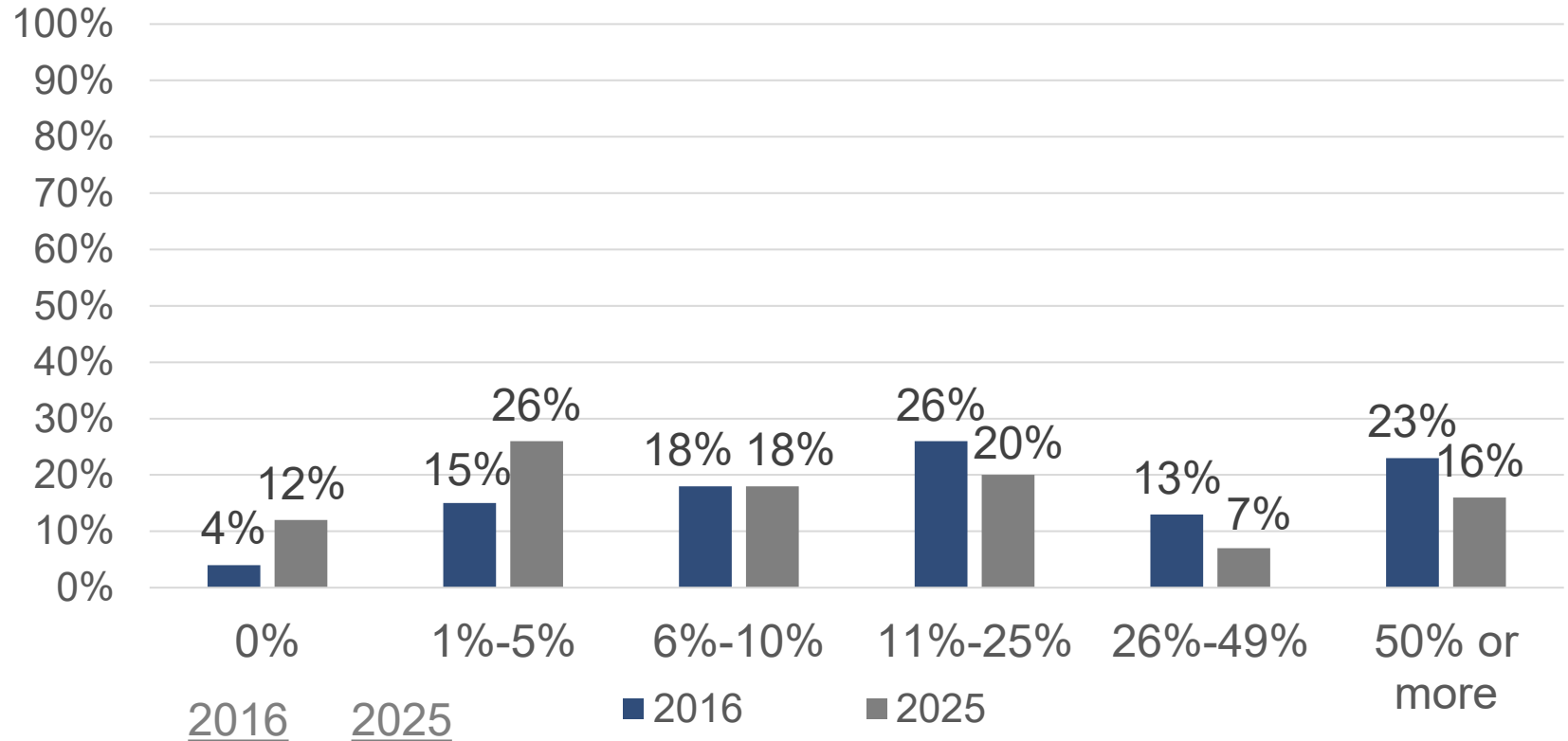


Lifeway Research

Q: "New people that begin to attend your church can be children born to adults who attend your church, they can be people who transfer from another church, or they can be people who did not go to church. Among the new people who have begun to attend your church over the last 2 years, please estimate the percentage of newcomers who were people **who did not go to church?**" n=926

New church attendees are less likely to include more than 10% people who previously did not go to church than in 2016 (44% v. 63%)

Among Protestant Pastors



Mean 27 20

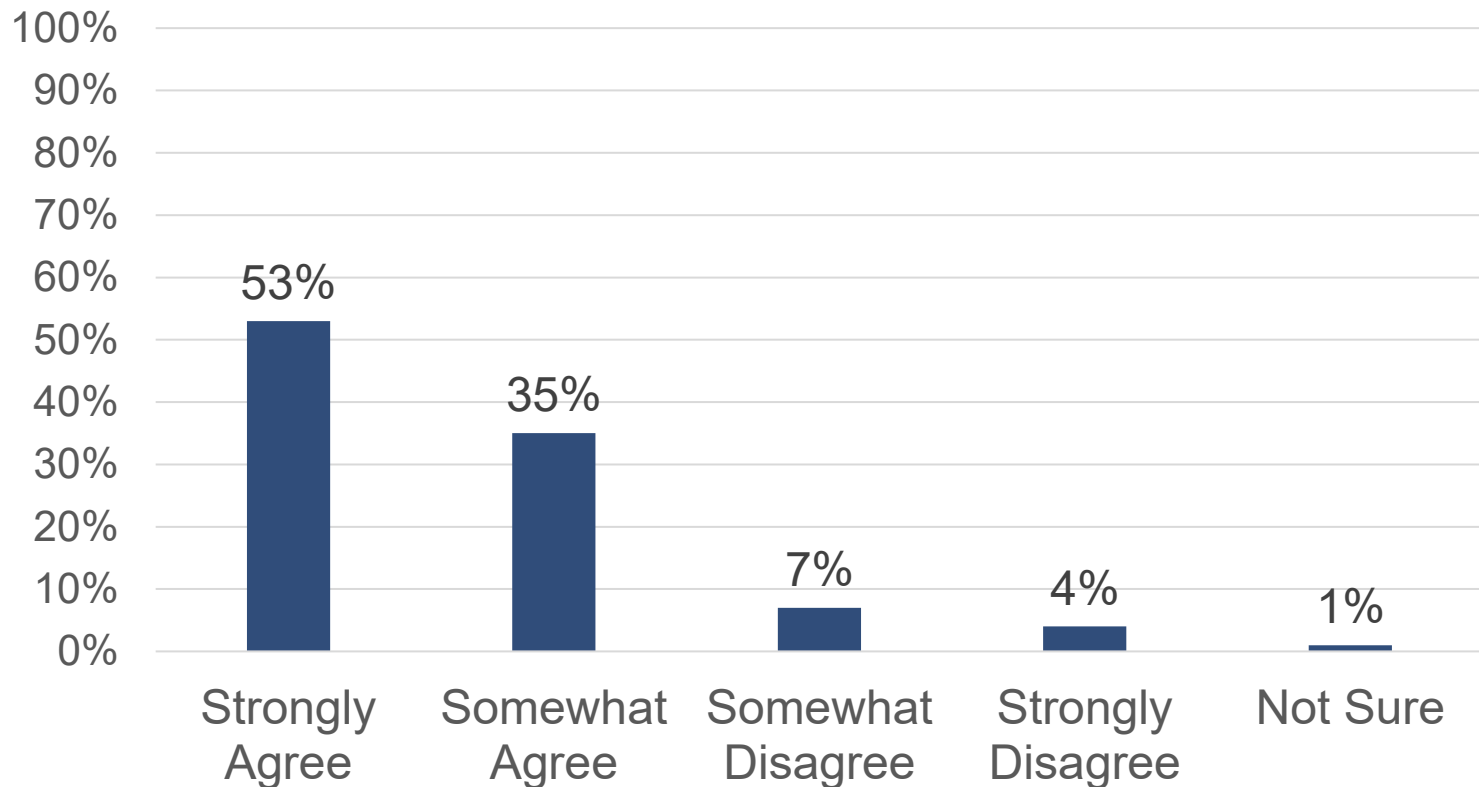
Median 20 10

Lifeway Research

Q: "New people that begin to attend your church can be children born to adults who attend your church, they can be people who transfer from another church, or they can be people who did not go to church. Among the new people who have begun to attend your church over the last 2 years [2016: 5 years], please estimate the percentage of newcomers who were people **who did not go to church?**"

88% of pastors intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians to share Christ with them

Among Protestant Pastors

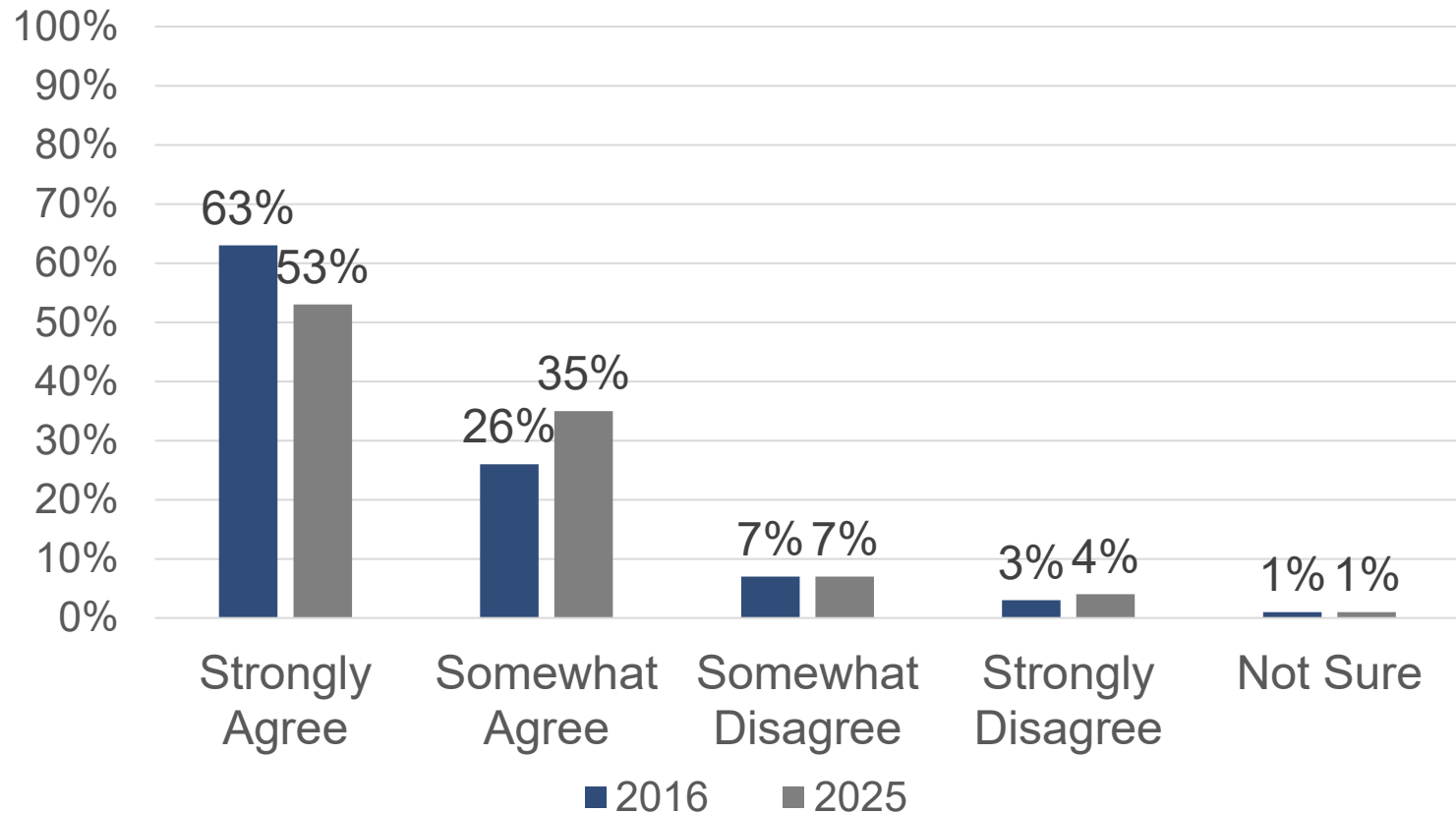


Lifeway Research

Q: "I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them." n=1,003

Total agreement is similar, but fewer pastors than 2016 strongly agree they intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians to share Christ with them

Among Protestant Pastors

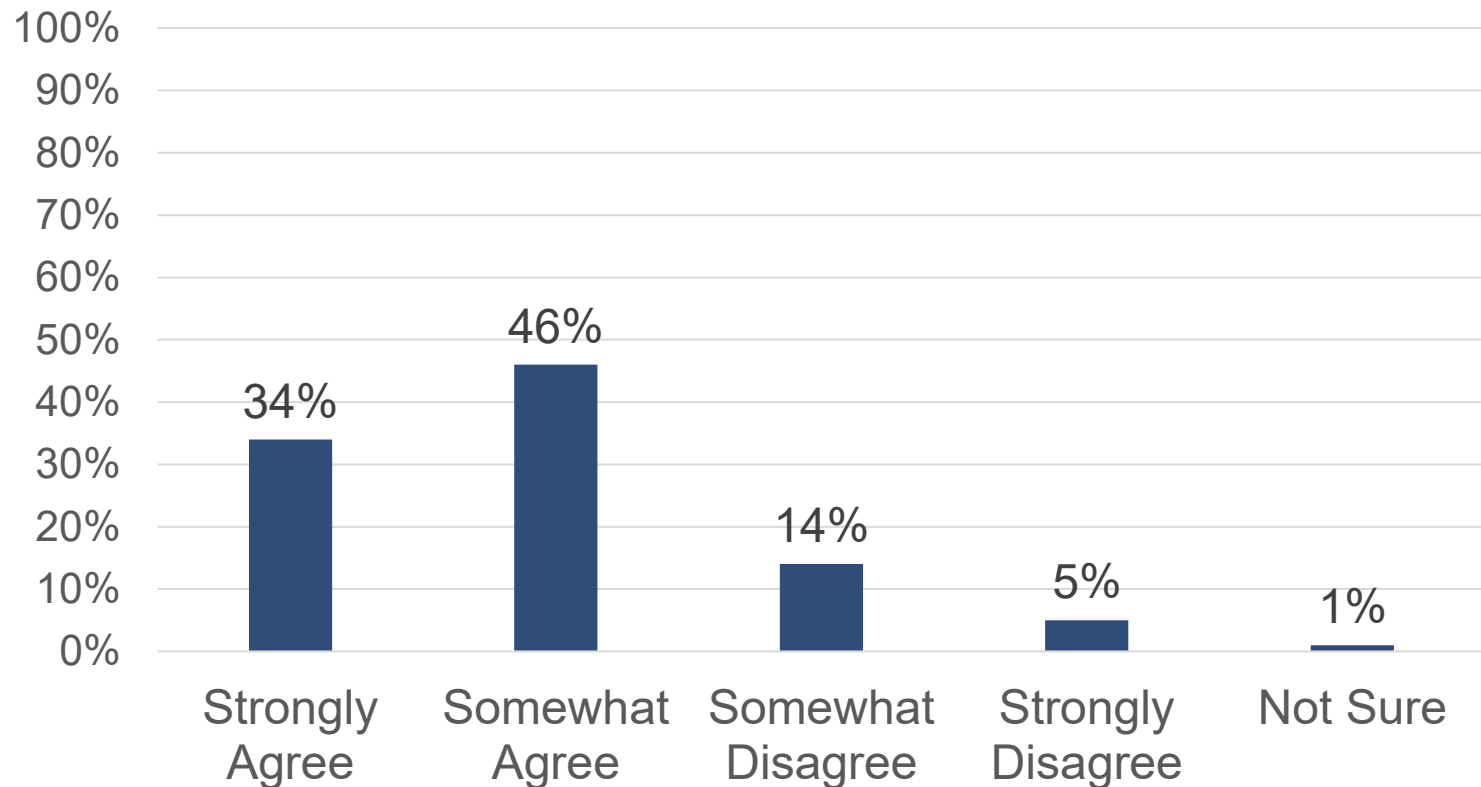


Lifeway Research

Q: "I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them."

80% of pastors say they are consistently hearing that members of their congregation are engaging in evangelistic conversations

Among Protestant Pastors

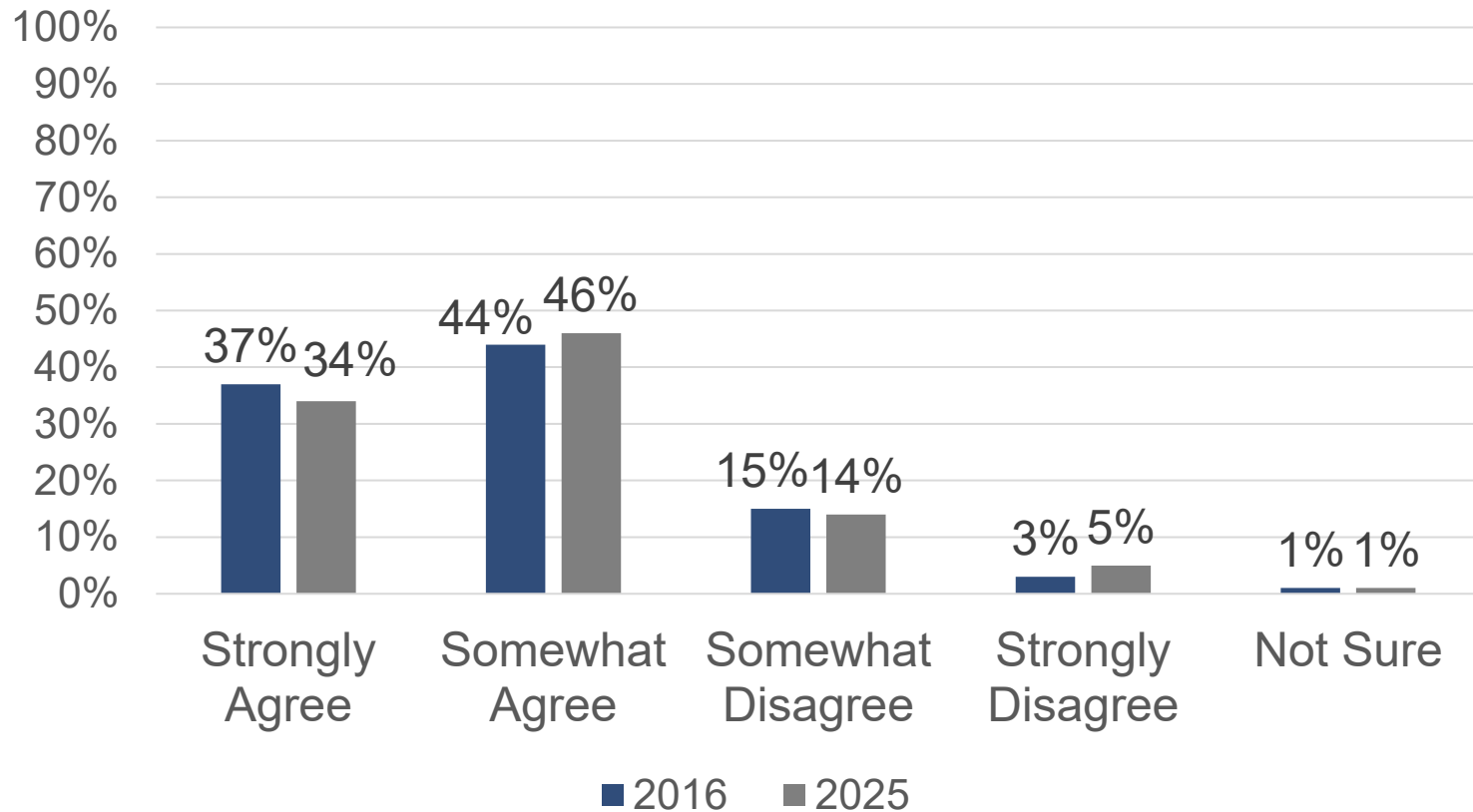


Lifeway Research

Q: "We are consistently hearing reports of members of our congregation engaging in evangelistic conversations, where people share their faith with people who are not Christians." n=1,003

A similar number of pastors agree they are consistently hearing that members of their congregation are engaging in evangelistic conversations compared to 2016

Among Protestant Pastors



Lifeway Research

Q: "We are consistently hearing reports of members of our congregation engaging in evangelistic conversations, where people share their faith with people who are not Christians."

Significant Differences

Pastor

Ethnicity

Age

Gender

Education Level

Self-identified Evangelical/Mainline

Church

Region

Denomination

Average Attendance

Location

Lifeway Research

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.

AGE	GENDER	ETHNICITY	EDUCATION	Self-Identified
18-44	Male	White	No College Degree	Evangelical
45-54	Female	African American	Bachelor's Degree	Mainline
55-64		Other Ethnicities	Master's Degree	
65+			Doctoral Degree	

Significant Statistical Differences

Comparisons were made to determine if there are any significant statistical differences among the church's region, denomination, attendance, and location.

REGION	DENOMINATION GROUP	ATTENDANCE	LOCATION
Northeast	Baptist	0-49	Urban
South	Lutheran	50-99	Suburban
Midwest	Methodist	100-249	Rural
West	Pentecostal	250+	
	Presbyterian/Reformed		
	Holiness		
	Non-Denominational		

Note: Region is defined by the US Census locations

Percentage change in worship attendance Fall 2025 compared to Fall 2023

- Pastors age 18-44 (61%) are more likely to be in Growing churches than pastors age 55-64 (45%) and 65+ (51%)
- Pastors age 65+ (21%) are more likely to be in Declining churches than pastors age 18-44 (13%) or 45-54 (11%)
- African American pastors (25%) and pastors of Other Ethnicities (24%) are more likely to be in Declining churches than white pastors (15%)
- Pastors with a Master's Degree (33%) are more likely to be in Plateaued churches than those with a Bachelor's Degree (25%)
- Churches in the South (58%) are more likely to be Growing than those in the Northeast (46%)
- Churches in the Northeast (20%) are more likely to be Declining than those in the West (11%)

Percentage change in worship attendance Fall 2025 compared to Fall 2023 *Continued*

- Baptists (57%), Pentecostals (63%), and Non-denominational (57%) are more likely to be Growing than and Methodists (42%)
- Lutherans (37%) are more likely to be Plateaued than Baptists (26%)
- Methodists (26%) are more likely to be Declining than Lutherans (14%), Pentecostals (11%), and Non-denominational (12%)
- Churches with attendance of 100-249 (64%) or 250+ (70%) are more likely to be Growing than churches with attendance of 0-49 (32%) and 50-99 (48%)
- Churches with attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to be Plateaued (43%)
- Churches with attendance of 0-49 (25%) and 50-99 (22%) are more likely to be Declining than churches with attendance of 100-249 (11%) or 250+ (7%)

“What percentage of your average worship service attendance are young adults between the ages of 18 and 30?”

- Pastors age 65+ are the most likely to select “0%-5%” (35%)
- Female pastors are more likely to select “0%-5%” than males (32% v. 24%)
- White pastors (29%) are more likely to select “0%-5%” than African American pastors (14%)
- African American pastors (28%) and pastors of other ethnicities (27%) are more likely to select “More than 25%” than white pastors (17%)
- Pastors with a Master’s Degree (29%) or a Doctoral Degree (29%) are more likely to select “0%-5%” than those with a Bachelor’s Degree (20%)
- Pastors with no college degree (26%) or a Bachelor’s Degree (27%) are more likely to select “More than 25%” than those with a Master’s Degree (13%) or a Doctoral Degree (13%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to select “0%-5%” than Evangelical pastors (35% v. 21%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to select “More than 25%” than Mainline pastors (23% v. 15%)

“What percentage of your average worship service attendance are young adults between the ages of 18 and 30?” *Continued*

- Pastors in the Midwest (26%) are more likely to select “6%-10%” than those in the South (16%) and West (17%)
- Pastors in the South (24%) and West (24%) are more likely to select “More than 25%” than those in the Northeast (10%) and Midwest (12%)
- Methodists are the most likely to select “0%-5%” (47%)
- Baptists (26%), Pentecostals (27%) Holiness (30%), and Non-denominational (34%) are more likely to select “More than 25%” than Lutherans (8%), Methodists (12%) and Presbyterian/Reformed (7%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance 0-49 are the most likely to select “0%-5%” (51%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance 250+ are the most likely to select “More than 25%” (38%)

“In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?”

- Male pastors are more likely to select “1-4 new commitments” than females (31% v. 23%)
- White pastors (29%) are more likely to select “1-4 new commitments” than African American pastors (17%)
- African American pastors (34%) are more likely to select “20+ new commitments” than White pastors (23%)
- Pastors with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to select “1-4 new commitments” (40%)
- Pastors with no college degree (31%) or a Bachelor’s Degree (36%) are more likely to select “20+ new commitments” than those with a Master’s Degree (17%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to select “No new commitments” than Evangelical pastors (12% v. 6%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (31%) and Midwest (34%) are more likely to select “1-4 new commitments” than those in the West (19%)
- Pastors in the South (28%) and West (27%) are more likely to select “20+ commitments” than those in the Midwest (17%)

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“In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?”

Continued

- Methodists (45%) and Presbyterian/Reformed (41%) are more likely to select “1-4 new commitments” than Baptists (26%), Lutherans (22%), Pentecostals (14%), Holiness (24%), and Non-denominational (23%)
- Baptists (30%), Pentecostals (43%), Holiness (34%), and Non-denominational (33%) are more likely to select “20+ new commitments” than Lutherans (17%), Methodists (9%), and Presbyterian/Reformed (10%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to select “1-4 new commitments” (55%) followed by those with attendance of 50-99 (37%), 100-249 (17%), and 250+ (8%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to select “20+ new commitments” (67%) followed by those with attendance of 100-249 (25%), 50-99 (11%), and 0-49 (3%)
- Pastors at churches in a rural area (35%) are more likely to select “1-4 new commitments” than those at churches in an urban area (27%)
- Pastors at churches in an urban area (25%) are more likely to select “20+ new commitments” than those at churches in a rural area (16%)

“In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?”

New Commitments Per 100 Attendees

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to have “More than 0 and up to 5” (22%)
- White pastors are the most likely to have “More than 0 and up to 5” (34%)
- African American pastors (37%) and pastors of other ethnicities (27%) are more likely to have “More than 15” than white pastors (14%)
- Pastors with a Master’s Degree (36%) or a Doctoral Degree (35%) are more likely to have “More than 0 and up to 5” than those with no college degree (21%)
- Pastors with no college degree (28%) are the most likely to have “More than 15”
- Mainline pastors are more likely to have “0” than Evangelical pastors (12% v. 6%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (36%) are more likely to have “More than 0 and up to 5” than those in the West (24%)

“In the past 12 months, how many people have indicated a new commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior through your church?”

New Commitments Per 100 Attendees

Continued

- Presbyterian/Reformed (44%) are more likely to have “More than 0 and up to 5” than Baptists (31%), Lutherans (25%), Pentecostals (15%), and Holiness (24%)
- Pentecostals (41%) and Holiness (30%) are more likely to have “More than 15” than Baptists (17%), Lutherans (15%), Methodists (8%), Presbyterian/Reformed (10%), and Non-denominational (16%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance 0-49 are the most likely to have “0” (23%)
- Pastors at church in a suburban area (35%) are more likely to have “More than 5 and up to 10” than those at churches in a rural area (23%)

“Among these commitments in the past 12 months, how many have ALSO become active in the life of your church?”

- African American pastors are the most likely to select “Did not retain all new commitments” (56%)
- Pastors with a Master’s Degree (61%) or a Doctoral Degree (64%) are more likely to select “Retained all new commitments” than those with no college degree (50%) or Bachelor’s Degree (49%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to select “Retained all new commitments” than Evangelical pastors (64% v. 53%)
- Methodists (80%) and Presbyterian/Reformed (78%) are more likely to select “Retained all new commitments” than Baptists (49%), Lutherans (59%), Pentecostals (33%), Holiness (49%), and Non-denominational (42%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance 250+ are the most likely to select “Did not retain all new commitments” (60%)
- Pastors at church in a rural area are the most likely to select “Did not retain all new commitments” (54%)

“Among the new people who have begun to attend your church over the last 2 years, please estimate the percentage of newcomers who were people who did not go to church?”

- Pastors age 65+ are the most likely to answer “0” (20%) and the least likely to answer “11%-25%” (13%)
- Female pastors are more likely to answer “1%-5%” than males (33% v. 23%)
- African American pastors (38%) are more likely to answer “1%-5%” than white pastors (24%)
- White pastors (18%) are more likely to answer “50% or more” than African American pastors (4%)
- Pastors with a Doctoral Degree are the most likely to answer “6%-10%” (32%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to answer “0” than Evangelical pastors (16% v. 10%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (15%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those in the West (7%)

“Among the new people who have begun to attend your church over the last 2 years, please estimate the percentage of newcomers who were people who did not go to church?”

Continued

- Lutheran (18%), Methodists (26%), and Presbyterian/Reformed (21%) are more likely to answer “0%” than Baptists (4%), Pentecostals (3%), Holiness (6%), and Non-denominational (7%)
- Lutheran (30%) and Methodists (32%) are more likely to answer “1%-5%” than Non-denominational (18%)
- Pentecostals (28%) and Holiness (28%) are more likely to answer “50% or more” than Baptists (15%), Lutherans (15%) and Methodists (11%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance of 0-49 are the most likely to answer “0%” (29%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance of 100-249 (23%) or 250+ (31%) are more likely to answer “11%-25%” than those at churches with attendance of 0-49 (12%) and 50-99 (16%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance of 250+ are the most likely to answer “26%-49%” (17%)

“I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.”

- Pastors age 55-64 (90%) and 65+ (91%) are more likely to Agree than pastors age 18-44 (84%)
- Male pastors are more likely to Agree than females (91% v. 80%)
- White pastors (12%) are more likely to Disagree than African American pastors (4%)
- Pastors with no college degree (93%) or a Bachelor's Degree (92%) are more likely to Agree than those with a Master's Degree (84%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to Agree than Mainline pastors (94% v. 85%)
- Baptists (94%), Pentecostals (95%) and Holiness (98%) are more likely to Agree than Lutherans (81%), Methodists (85%), and Presbyterian/Reformed (81%)
- Pastors at church in an urban area are the most likely to Disagree (14%)

“We are consistently hearing reports of members of our congregation engaging in evangelistic conversations, where people share their faith with people who are not Christians.”

- Pastors with no college degree (90%) or a Bachelor's Degree (86%) are more likely to Agree than those with a Master's Degree (72%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to Agree than Mainline pastors (86% v. 73%)
- Pastors in the South (84%) are more likely to Agree than those in the Midwest (74%)
- Baptists (91%), Pentecostals (95%), Holiness (92%), and Non-denominational (92%) are more likely to Agree than Lutherans (67%), Methodists (66%), and Presbyterian/Reformed (67%)
- Pastors at churches with attendance 100-249 (86%) and 250+ (90%) are more likely to Agree than those at churches with attendance of 0-49 (72%) and 50-99 (72%)

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