

Methodist and Wesleyan Denomination Report

National COVID Church Attendance Project

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1 Key Takeaways

1.1 Methodist and Wesleyan Churches' Synopsis

- There was a significant decline to in-person attendance during the pandemic.
- Attendance is beginning to return to its pre-pandemic state.
- Virtual attendance increased significantly.
- Small churches maintained a larger percent of their in person attendance during the pandemic.
- Giving continued as projected, despite the decline in attendance, even improving in many cases.
- Staffing continued largely as it stood in January 2020.

1.2 Comparison to All Churches

- In-person attendance decreased more in Methodist and Wesleyan churches when compared to all survey respondents.
- Methodist and Wesleyan churches were about twenty percent more likely to accept CARES Act loans.
- Methodist and Wesleyan church-goers attend church virtually more often than other survey respondents, behaving similarly to Baptist churches.
- Methodist and Wesleyan giving behavior is slightly higher than the full survey.
- Methodist and Wesleyan staffing behavior saw a slight decline which is noteworthy in the context of the steady results from the full survey.

For more information on the general survey, full survey results **can be viewed here**.

2 Attendance

Among surveyed Methodist and Wesleyan churches, attendance¹ saw a decline of around sixty percent during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are beginning to see a recovery. Since January of 2021, Methodist and Wesleyan churches have recovered slightly over a third of the lost attendance.

Total Methodist/Wesleyan Attendance Throughout the Pandemic

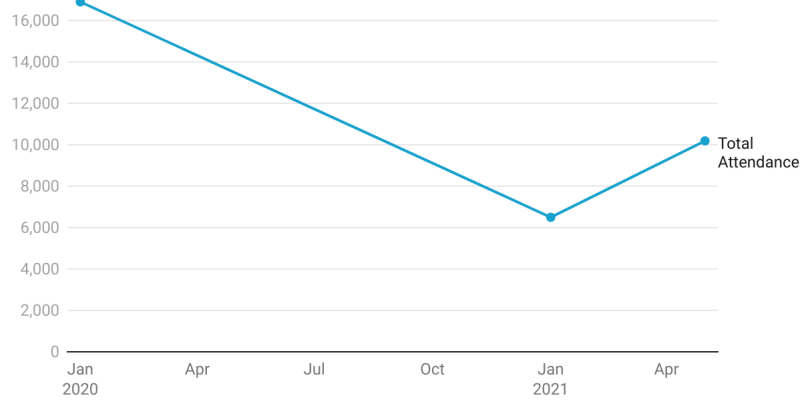


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

¹Attendance is calculated by combining in-person and virtual attendance. This comparison is not perfect, as churches use different means of reporting virtual attendance, some using a multiplier, some using peak viewership, others using average viewership.

2.1 In-Person Attendance

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, most churches have seen a significant decline to in-person attendance. In our data-set, this is mostly upheld. Over the first few months of 2020, patterns have begun to return to pre-pandemic norms. ²

Change in January 2020 In-Person Attendance by Church Size (Methodist/Wesleyan)

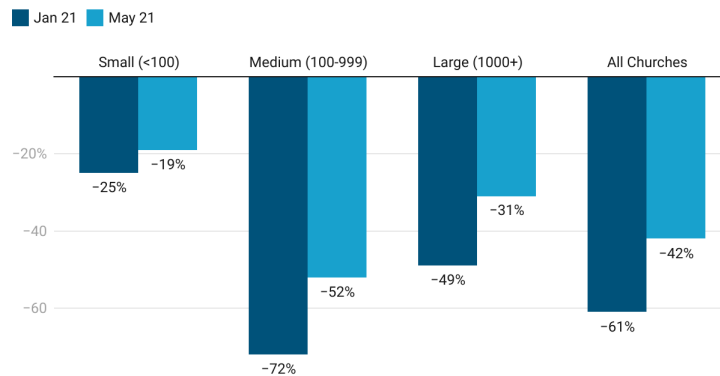
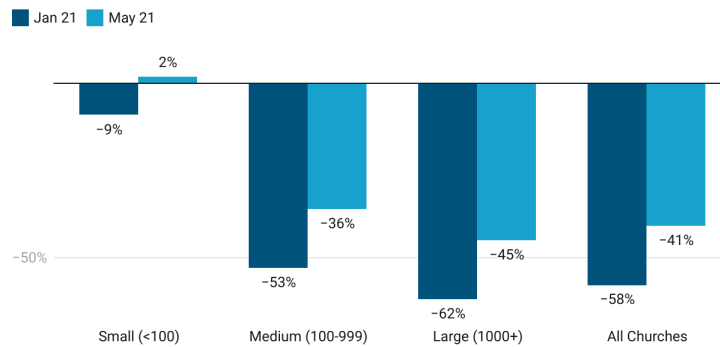


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

Change in January 2020 In-Person Attendance by Church Size (All Churches)



N=812; Size of church is based on in-person church attendance as of January 2020

Chart: National Covid Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

²This drops one church which experienced immense growth during the pandemic, as it was an extreme outlier that was skewing the data

In comparison with the full survey, churches generally followed similar trends with some notable exceptions. First, Methodist and Wesleyan churches with under a thousand attendees saw similar effects to the general survey, but with amplified effects. Once churches began to exceed that thousand attendee mark, the effects seem to have been dampened³ Next, the small Methodist and Wesleyan church behaviour was unique. Although small churches as a whole are now exceeding their pre-pandemic attendance, the dramatic increase is a clear divergence from the norm, and it does not match up with any existing denominational analysis.

³This is from a sample size of 15.

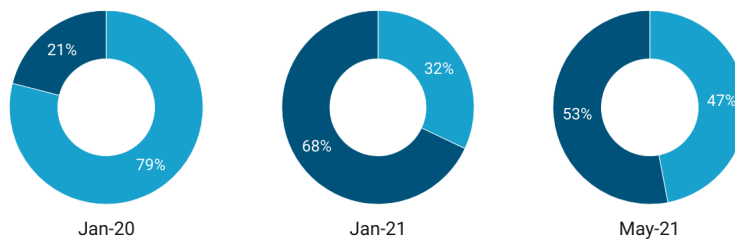
2.2 Virtual Attendance

Across churches, virtual attendance has increased. In the case of Methodist and Wesleyan churches specifically, there was originally a large fraction of virtual church-goers. Before the pandemic, about 1 in 5 Methodist and Wesleyan congregants were attending online as compared to 1 in 7 generally. During 2020, there was an increase threefold in virtual attendance as a ratio to in-person, and the return to in-person has been slow. Methodist and Wesleyan churches have a significantly higher portion of viewers online than other denominations.

Attendance Composition by Date (Methodist/Wesleyan)

Based on Survey Responses Received as of 06/01/2021

■ In-Person ■ Online



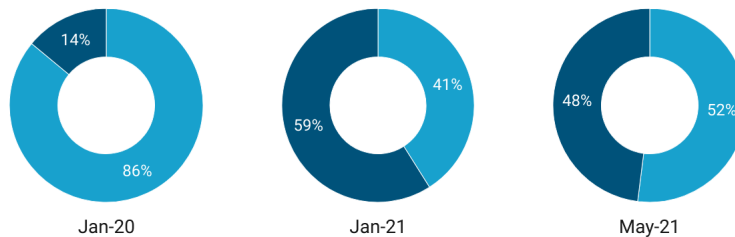
N=75; Online attendance has increased substantially during COVID. Prior to the pandemic, roughly 1 in 5 attendees was remote. As of May 2021, roughly 1 in 2 attended remotely

Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

Attendance Composition by Date (All Churches)

Based on Survey Responses received as of 06/01/2021

■ In-Person ■ Online



N=669; Online attendance has increased substantially during COVID. Prior to the pandemic, roughly 1 in 7 attendees was remote. As of May 2021, roughly 1 in 2 attended remotely

Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

3 Budget

Giving held steady in 2020, with about half of churches receiving more tithes than they budgeted prior to their knowledge of the pandemic. Even when looking at the worst declines, actual church giving was not as heavily impacted as expected, especially in Methodist and Wesleyan churches. They received significantly more giving compared to their budget than the survey average. This is noteworthy in the context of the substantial attendance decline and economic uncertainty. There are several possible explanations. It could be a consequence of churchgoers attempting to compensate for their inability to attend. It could also be a result of the stimulus checks.

Calendar Year 2020 Actual Giving Relative to Budget

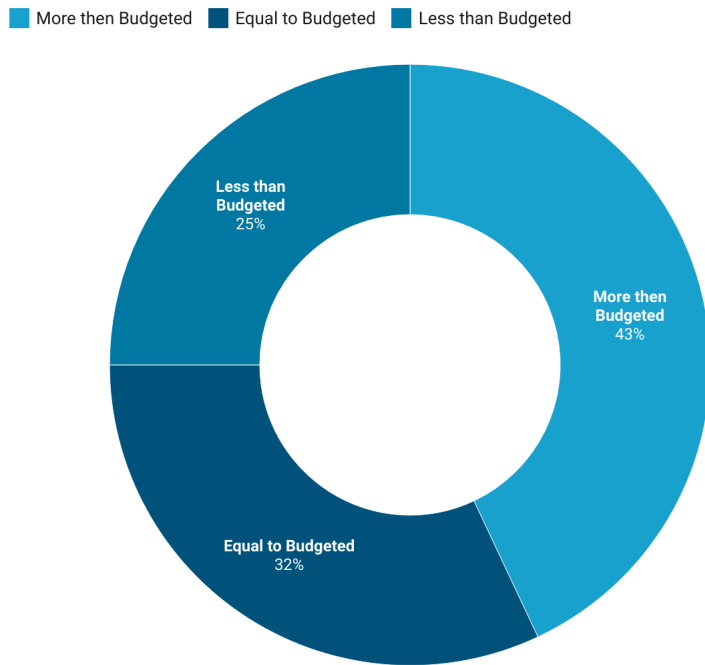


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

4 Staffing

Similar to budget, staffing remained fairly stable. Approximately the same number of churches increased and decreased staffing. The majority of Methodist and Wesleyan churches maintained the same amount of staff, although it is worth noting that they did see more of a decline in staffing than the survey average. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of the higher ratio of giving to budget that Methodist and Wesleyan churches had.

Staffing Change from January 2020 (Methodist/Wesleyan)

■ Remained the Same ■ Decreased ■ Increased

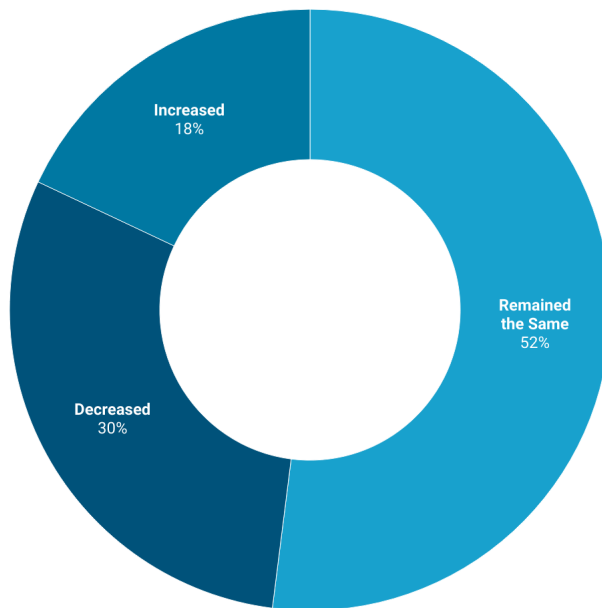


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

4.1 CARES

The CARES act is often credited with staffing survival. In the case of Methodist and Wesleyan churches, this is very plausible. In fact, more churches accepted the CARES Act than increased staffing and maintained staffing combined. This is very surprising, especially given that most CARES Act acceptance was based on the loan forgiveness contingent on maintaining staffing.

Share of Churches that Received a CARES Act Loan (Methodist/Wesleyan)

■ No ■ Yes

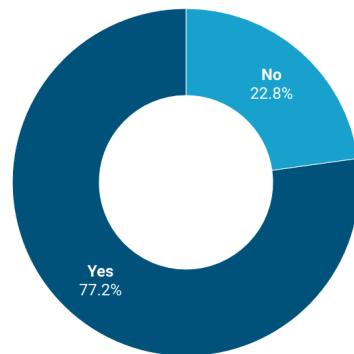


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

Share of Churches that Received a CARES Act Loan (All Churches)

■ No ■ Yes

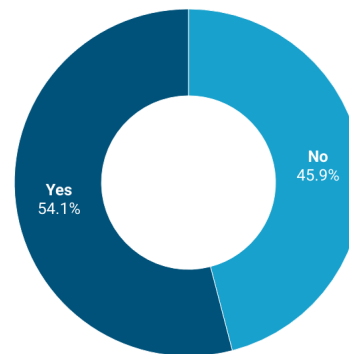


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5 Partners

- CDF Capital
- Exponential
- Humanitarian Disaster Institute
- Leadership Network
- Outreach Magazine
- PCA Retirement and Benefits
- Wheaton College
- Wheaton College Billy Graham Center