

Presbyterian Denomination Report

National COVID Church Attendance Project

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1 Key Takeaways

1.1 PCA 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 did comparatively very well during the pandemic.
- Giving continued as projected, despite the decline in attendance
- Staffing continued largely as it stood in January 2020.

1.2 Comparison to All Churches

- In-person attendance decreased less in PCA churches when compared to all survey respondents.
- Small churches in the PCA saw a unique increase in attendance rather than the decrease most churches experienced.
- PCA churches were half as likely to accept loans via the CARES act as compared to other respondents.
- PCA church-goers attend church virtually less often than other survey respondents.
- PCA giving behavior is largely consistent the full survey.
- PCA staffing behavior is largely consistent with the full survey.

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

2 Attendance

Among surveyed Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) churches, attendance¹ saw a decline of around twenty percent during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are beginning to see a recovery. Since January of 2021, PCA churches have recovered slightly over half of the lost attendance.

Total Presbyterian Church Attendance Throughout the Pandemic

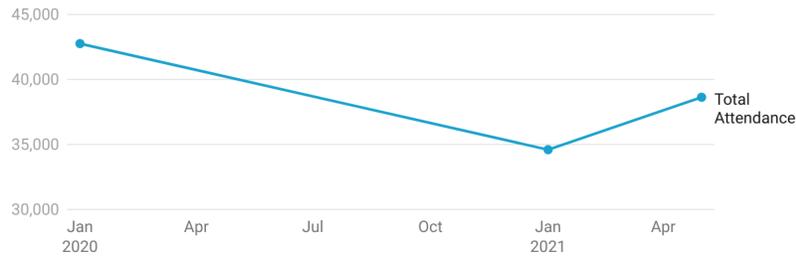


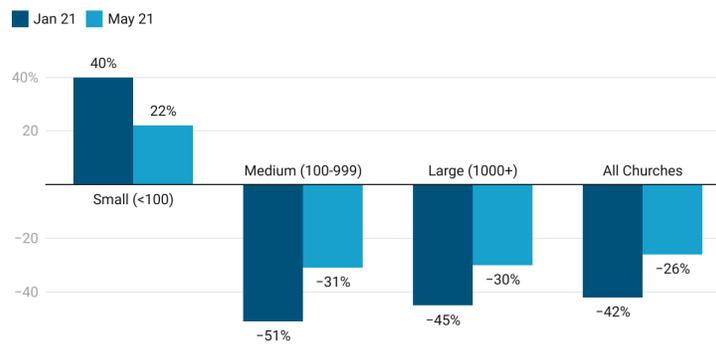
Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

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

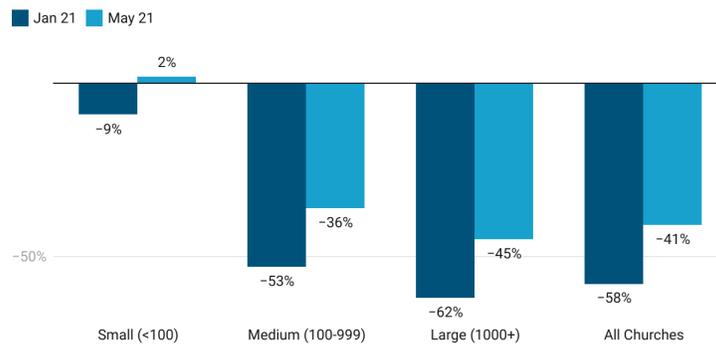
Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, most churches have seen a significant decline to in-person attendance. In our data-set, this is mostly upheld. However, when churches are further divided, different attendance patterns by church size are uncovered. In contrast to the overall pattern, small churches saw growth by the end of 2020. Larger churches—churches with attendance over one hundred—saw the substantive decline that was consistent across churches. Over the first few months of 2020, patterns have begun to return to pre-pandemic norms. One hypothesis is that those who were previously attending a larger church switched to smaller churches during the pandemic. Now that vaccinations are widely available in the US, those people may be returning to their original church homes.

Share of January 2020 In-Person Attendance by Church Size (Presbyterian)



N=202; 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

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

In comparison with the full survey, churches generally followed similar trends with some notable exceptions. First, PCA churches maintained a higher proportion of their in-person church-goers. Next, the small PCA church behaviour was unique. Although small churches as a whole are now exceeding their pre-pandemic attendance, this is a new development for non-PCA churches.

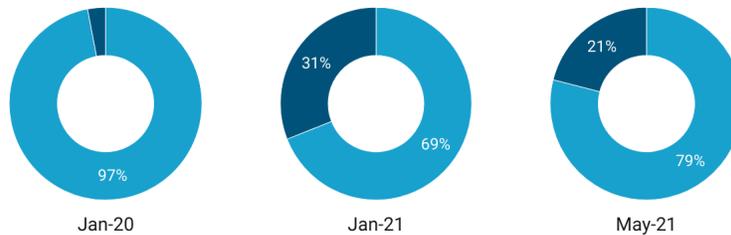
2.2 Virtual Attendance

Across churches, virtual attendance has increased. In the case of PCA churches specifically, there was originally a negligible fraction of virtual church-goers. Before the pandemic, about 1 in 33 PCA congregants were attending online as compared to 1 in 7 generally. After 2020, there was a substantive increase, but it has already begun to drop off. PCA churches have a significantly lower portion of viewers online than other denominations.

Attendance Composition by Date (Presbyterian)

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

■ In-Person ■ Online



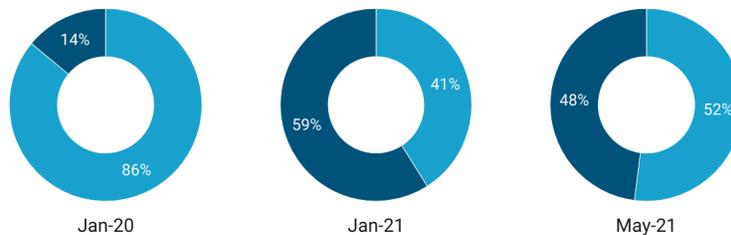
N=202; Online attendance has increased substantially during COVID. Prior to the pandemic, roughly 1 in 33 attendees was remote. As of May 2021, roughly 1 in 5 attended remotely.

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



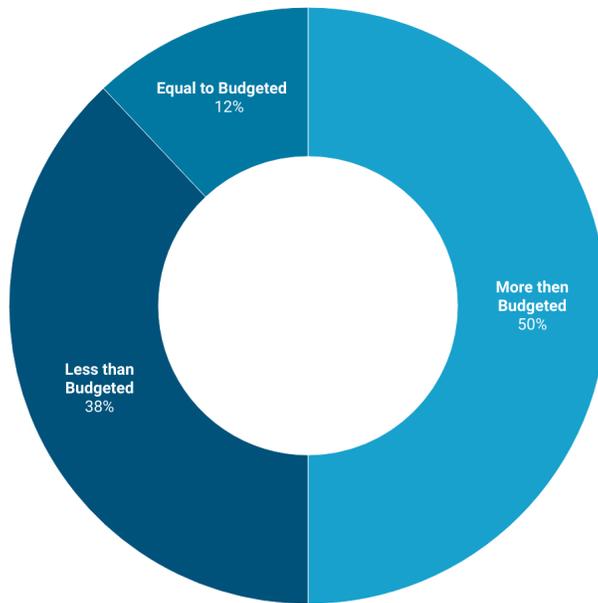
N=669; Online attendance has increased substantially during COVID. Prior to the pandemic, roughly 1 in 7 attendees was remote. As of May 2021, roughly 1 in 2 attended remotely.

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 tithe 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. 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 church-goers 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



Source: National COVID Church Attendance Project - 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 PCA churches maintained the same amount of staff.

Staffing Change from January 2020 (Presbyterian)

■ Remained the Same ■ Increased ■ Decreased

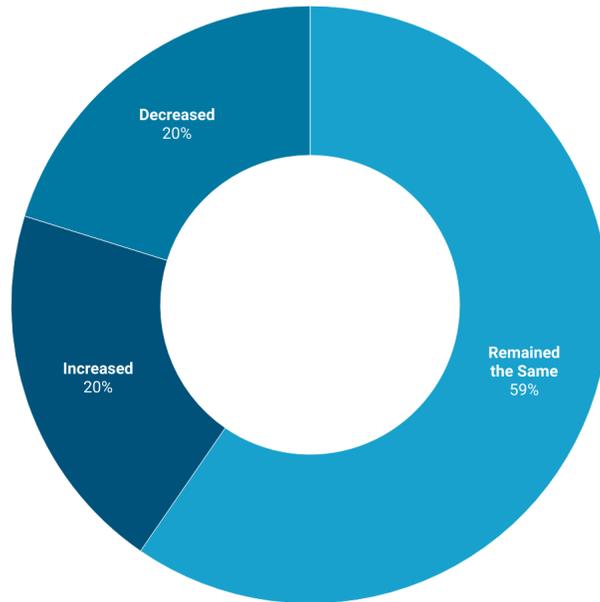


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

4.1 CARES

The CARES act is often credited with staffing survival. However, while over half of churches surveyed received a CARES loan, only slightly over 1 in 4 PCA churches did. Churches attributed this to a number of factors, including political reasons, public affiliation, lack of need, or theological opposition to government helping to fund the church.

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

■ No ■ Yes

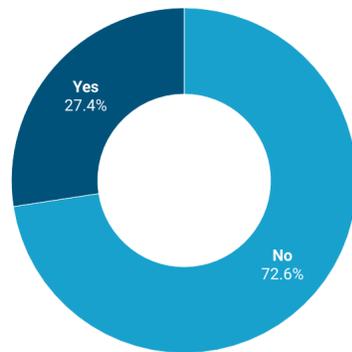


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

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

■ No ■ Yes

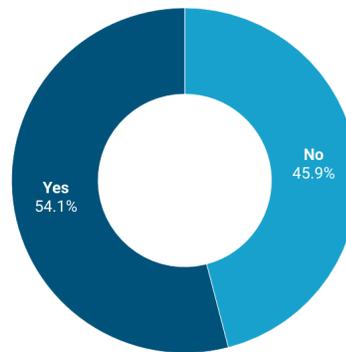


Chart: National COVID Church Attendance Project • Source: NCCAP • Created with Datawrapper

5 Partners

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