



NEWCHURCHES

2015 EXCLUSIVE REPORT

THE STATE OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE U.S.

by ED STETZER, MICAH FRIES, AND DANIEL IM



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THE STATE OF CHURCH PLANTING IN THE U.S.

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CHURCH PLANTING MATTERS

In fact, it matters greatly. First of all, the Church matters because it's Christ's bride. Beyond that though, church planting specifically matters because the Church is God's intended vehicle to advance the gospel and grow believers into the image of Jesus.

Because church planting matters, it's important that we know the current state of church planting. What's happening? Are we succeeding? What trends and movements are shaping church planting? The survey results you see in this report represent the largest, most thorough survey done yet on church planting in the U.S. since 2007 (The Canadian and Australian versions of this report are forthcoming and will be available at www.newchurches.com).

The survey asked well over 12,000 church planters to share their experience in a 20 to 30 minute online survey across 17 different denominational and church planting network organizations. About

1,200¹ church planters completed this survey, of which a reduced number of 843 fit the criteria of being planted since 2007 and still operating today.

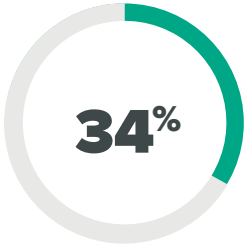
So what did we learn through all of our research? Well, you'll have to read through this report to find out, but most importantly, we learned that many church plants are effectively reaching the lost. More attention and resources are getting funneled towards church planting. Church planting is also no longer located on the fringe of church life, but is now an anticipated and even preferred destination for leaders. It is a priority for denominations, networks, and local churches.

As a result, some of the best and brightest leaders across the country are committing themselves to church planting. This ought to be celebrated.

When planting a church, you often get a mix of both churchd (individuals who have a church background) and unchurched people (individuals without a church background). In the survey, the results revealed that 1/3 of all new church plants are made up of primarily previously unchurched people. That means the majority of people attending the remaining 2/3 of church plants already have a church background and are coming from another church, or are looking for a church because they've recently moved.

Worship Attendance of Church Plants started since 2007 by year of existence.

YR.	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
1	51	30
2	74	45
3	95	60
4	124	72

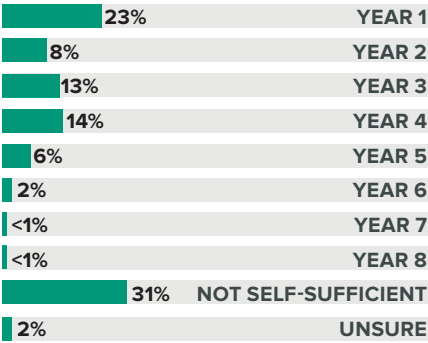


What percentage of church plants surveyed have a majority unchurched background? 34%

New Commitments to Jesus Christ in Church Plants started since 2007 by year of existence.

YR.	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
1	11	4
2	14	5
3	18	6
4	17	6

1. Denominations and networks which participated in the survey include: Assemblies of God, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of the Nazarene, Converge, Evangelical Free Church of America, Free Methodists, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Missionary Church, New Thing Network, Presbyterian Church of America, Project Jerusalem, Southern Baptists, United Methodist Church, Vineyard Church of America and The Wesleyan Church.



During which year (if at all) did the new church become financially self-sufficient (no financial support received from outside sources)?

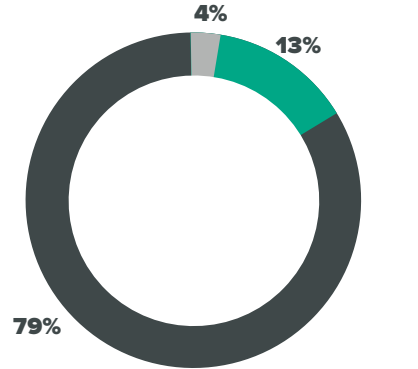
Note: percentages represent churches started between 2008 and 2012.

We found that financial self-sufficiency happens in varying ways, but from a statistical perspective, if your new church plant isn't financially self-sufficient by its fourth year of existence, it is increasingly unlikely that it will become self-sufficient. Nearly half (44%) of all churches started in 2012 or earlier became financially self-sufficient within three years. That percentage dwindles past that critical three-year threshold. What's more, some 31% of the churches started in 2012 or earlier we surveyed never even reached financial self-sufficiency. Of this group of recent church plants that remain financially dependent on other organizations or churches, nearly half began in 2010 or earlier (five or more years ago). Obviously that is not a sustainable percentage over the long-run. Many of those churches contained in the 31% may not succeed, and may eventually close.

When looking at how new churches are divided around the country (see figure on right), we find some unsurprising and typical responses. As has been true for

a while now, the areas getting the most attention are the areas that already have the most churches. At the top of that list is the South. Already the most church saturated region in the United States, in our survey, Southern new churches accounted for 43% of all new churches surveyed. Texas, in particular, accounted for almost 9% of all new churches surveyed.

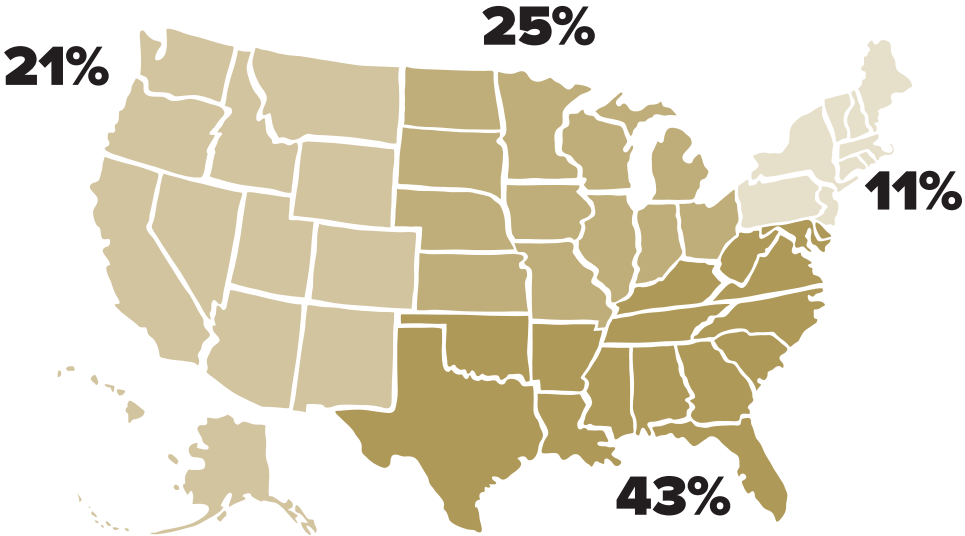
While the South accounted for the most significant amount of new churches, the Northeast, home to a significant bulk of the US population, and the most unchurched region in the U.S., received only 11% of new churches. The research is revealing that we need a significantly larger commitment to not just planting churches, but to strategically planting churches.



What percentage of US church plants are majority foreign born, second-generation immigrant or without immigrant background?

13% Foreign Born
4% 2nd Generation
79% No migrant background

Note: These percentages do not total to 100% since several churches do not have a majority immigrant status group in their congregation.



Breakdown of church plants by region



U.S. States with the highest numbers of new churches

One of the more interesting aspects of the study relates to the church's ability to reach the growing foreign-born population across the United States. The foreign-born population of the U.S. is around 13% of the total U.S. population and about that share of U.S. church plants are estimated to be primarily reaching that demographic—about 13% of church plants surveyed are majority foreign-born. However, only 4% of church plants are majority

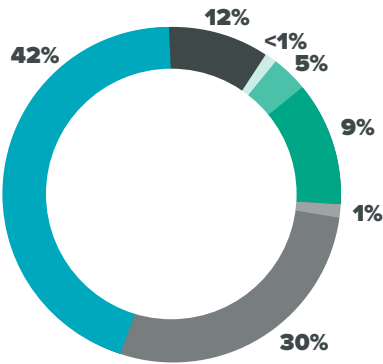
second-generation immigrants, which is a much lower share of the U.S. population, at 13%, that are second-generation immigrants. Although not all those living in the U.S. with an immigrant background worship in church plants that contain a majority belonging to an immigrant group, it does seem that there could be a lack of church plants reaching out to second generation immigrants in the United States.

What is the ethnicity of the new church pastor?

An area where new churches must improve is on raising up ethnic minority leadership. The two ethnicities that aren't represented at a rate consistent with their percentage to the entire U.S. population are African-American pastors and Hispanic pastors, both of which reflect around half the percentage that their ethnicity actually occupies within the United States.

Although the study was offered in Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and French, there may have been a lack of willingness for some church planters to respond to this survey request, particularly pastors who may be planting churches without citizenship. Yet, these realities do not address all the issues here, and church planting needs to be more diverse, and involve more ethnolinguistic groups.

Anglo pastors of new churches, on the other hand, outsize their percentage of the American population by 10-15%. It would appear that a stronger commitment to the development of minority leaders of new churches must be a priority for the church moving forward.



How much education do pastors of new churches have?

Some high school	1%
High School graduate	5%
Some College/University	12%
College/University graduate	30%
Some graduate studies	9%
Graduate Degree	42%
Not sure	<1%

Finally, what about education? The church planters in this sample were generally well-educated, though there were diverse educational levels represented. However, we do recognize that surveys like this may not always engage a portion of the church planting population that is “off the radar,” in cities, ethnic enclaves, and the like.

Church planting is essential to advance the Great Commission. It is not, however, without trouble spots, and we want to be aware of these areas and address them head-on.

In the next pages of this report, we will attempt to dive deeper into the state of church planting. We will consider what leads churches to higher attendance, what churches are doing to see more people make commitments for Christ, what churches are doing to successfully reach the unchurched, how new churches are becoming financially self-sufficient, how they are training up the next generation of leaders and finally, what it takes to create a culture of multiplication.

As a general reminder: most of the numbers contained in this report represent the mean (or the average). We intentionally chose this, as opposed to the median, because the general trends are consistent whether you look at mean or median, and also because we are accustomed to talking about mean (or average). Additionally, the findings presented in this report represent statistically significant findings, a statistical procedure that is based on means, not medians.

Remember, however, that the mean can be easily influenced by extremes, whereas the median is less influenced by very high or low numbers. A good example of this is the first graphic in this chapter. While the average church size for a four year old church plant in America is 124, the median size is 72. While the growth trend is similar between the mean and median, it's important to note that if you start a new church, you are more likely to average

an attendance of 72 after 4 years, than you are 124. So pay more attention to the trends and don't compare yourself and your church to the mean.²

2. It should be noted how the factors were determined. A statistical technique called multivariate regression analysis was used to determine what factors were significantly related to higher attendance, higher number of new commitments to Christ, a congregation consisting of half or more unchurched, being financially self-sufficient within three years of being planted and having planted a daughter church within five years. All regression analyses controlled for church denomination or network, U.S. state, basic church composition (education, race and ethnicity composition, age breakdown, urban/rural location, immigrant composition), and pastor characteristics (education, race and ethnicity, age, marital status). Significant factors listed in each section of this report are considered important and consistently true across all church plants no matter their location, church composition, or planter characteristics.

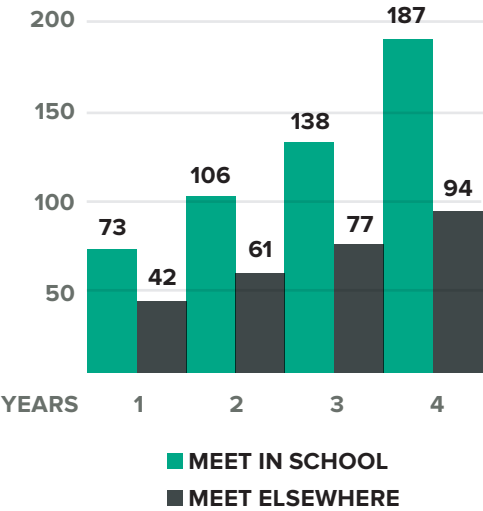
THE CROWD

What is it that leads to higher levels of attendance in the first several years of a church plant? This is obviously a significant question and according to our research there are a host of issues that relate to the answer. There are certainly more factors than this survey can reveal, but here are four major trends that have a direct affect on higher attendance: a highly public presence, a commitment to multiplication, a generous attitude towards the planter/pastor, and a focus on new members. Of course, all of these factors are influenced by the goal of the planter and the organization behind the church planting. Thus, we are aware that this is not a survey of, for example, house churches that want to multiply, rather than expand. It is a survey of mainstream church planters and the metrics that such planters (and their supporting organizations) use.

A HIGHLY PUBLIC PRESENCE

New churches that are committed to a highly public presence experience higher attendance. Whether it be their location or their commitment to publicity, churches who work diligently to maintain a public presence are churches who see higher attendance, year over year.

Average worship attendance for new churches that meet in school facilities vs. new churches that meet elsewhere.



Average worship attendance for new churches that meet in industrial or warehouse spaces vs. new churches that meet elsewhere.

	INDUSTRIAL/ YR. WAREHOUSE	OTHER
1	90	48
2	130	69
3	170	87
4	238	111

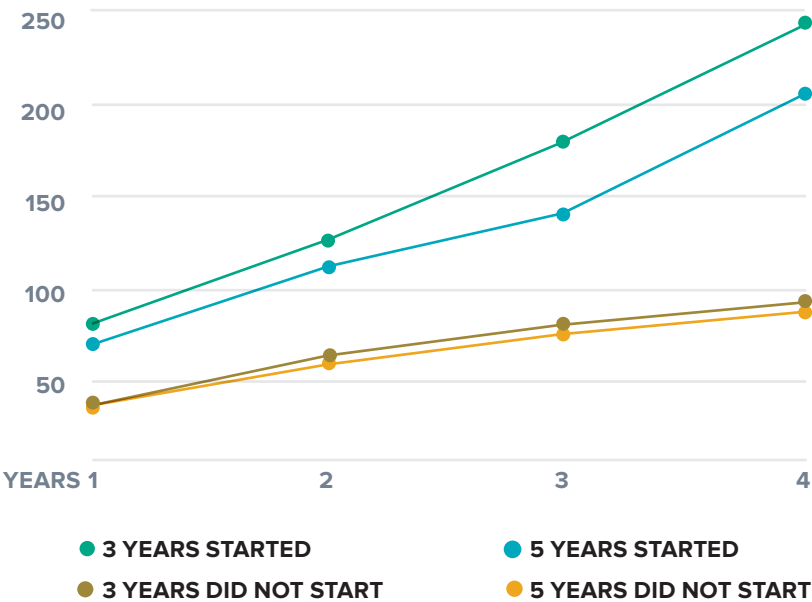
Average worship attendance for churches who use mailers as one of their top 3 forms of publicity vs. churches who do not use mailers as one of their top 3 forms of publicity.

YR.	MAILERS	NONE
1	69	46
2	97	68
3	129	86
4	173	110

Average worship attendance for churches who use radio or television ads as one of their top 3 forms of publicity vs. churches who do not use radio or television ads as one of their top 3 forms of publicity.

YR.	RADIO/TV	NONE
1	82	49
2	126	72
3	167	92
4	208	120

Average worship attendance for churches who start at least one daughter church within their first 3 and 5 years vs. churches who do not start at least one daughter church within their first 3 and 5 years.



A COMMITMENT TO MULTIPLICATION

Churches who are committed to multiplication seem to experience a consistent increase in attendance. This commitment to multiplication is an externally focused one where churches are committed to planting other churches. In other words, the commitment to be a church planting church seems to result in higher attendance year over year.

Average worship attendance for churches who financially contribute to other church plants vs. churches who do not financially contribute to other church plants.

YR.	CONTRIBUTE	NONE
1	59	40
2	87	55
3	117	62
4	150	80

Average worship attendance for churches whose leaders invest in or mentor other leaders of new churches at least quarterly vs. churches whose leaders did not invest in or mentor other leaders of new churches.

YR.	MENTOR	NONE
1	60	43
2	92	59
3	121	73
4	167	85

Average worship attendance for churches whose leaders receive financial compensation for their work in the church vs. churches whose leaders do not receive financial compensation.

YR.	PAID	NONE
1	56	35
2	82	48
3	108	50
4	142	59

A GENEROUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PLANTER/PASTOR

Churches who make it a priority to provide training and compensation for their planter/pastor experience greater attendance. The lesson, of course, is that leadership development for the planter/pastor matters for the overall health of a new church. In addition, the presence or absence of an adequate financial compensation package affects the growth trajectory of a new church.

A FOCUS ON NEW MEMBERS

Finally, it is worth noting that we found that churches who make a new members' class a priority see a direct correlation in their ability to have larger attendance, year over year, as opposed to churches who do not require the same sort of class.

Average worship attendance for churches whose leaders receive a minimum of a month-long training course provided by their denomination or network vs. churches whose leaders do not receive the training.

YR.	TRAINING	NONE
1	70	50
2	104	73
3	154	93
4	247	120

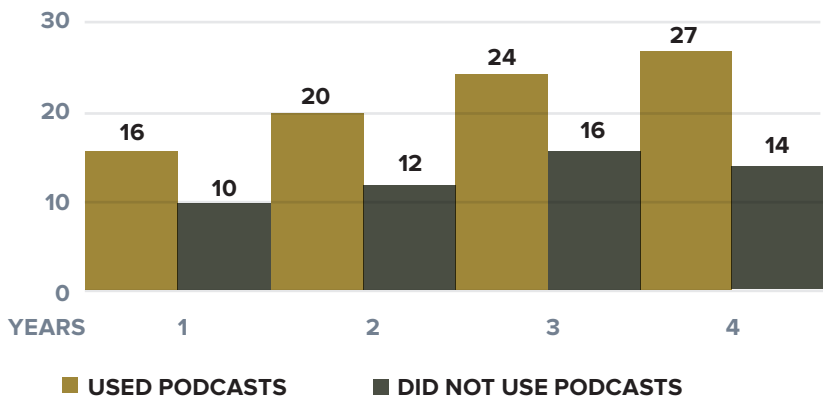
Average worship attendance for churches who hold new member classes vs. churches who do not hold new member classes.

YR.	CLASSES	NONE
1	61	38
2	89	53
3	113	67
4	139	98

NEW DISCIPLES

While it is a good thing to see higher levels of attendance in a church plant, it is even more important that we see an increasing number of committed disciples. So what are churches doing that leads to a higher number of conversions/commitments? Essentially, we found that churches who are prioritizing a public and digital presence, have intentional outreach activities and programs, and are investing in developing lay leaders are all much more likely to be churches who see higher numbers of people make commitments for Christ.

Average number of commitments made in church plants who use podcasts as a form of communication vs. church plants who do not use podcasts as a form of communication.



A PRIORITY ON PUBLIC AND DIGITAL PRESENCE

The underlying principle here is that churches who make an effort to be where the people are, and make an effort to communicate in a manner consistent with the public at large (i.e. digital presence), are churches who see a higher number of people making a decision for Christ.

AN INTENTIONAL OUTREACH STRATEGY

Churches who offer programs and activities for the unchurched are the same ones who see larger numbers of people making decisions for Christ. While this may seem self-evident, it is important to note that in an era when outreach activities at many churches are going by the wayside, there still seems to be tremendous evangelistic power in them.

Average number of commitments made in new churches who use mailers as one of their top three forms of publicity vs. new churches who do not use mailers.

YR.	MAILERS	NONE
1	21	8
2	22	11
3	25	16
4	28	14

Average number of commitments made in churches who use a sports league as a continuing form of outreach vs. churches who do not use a sports league as a continuing form of outreach.

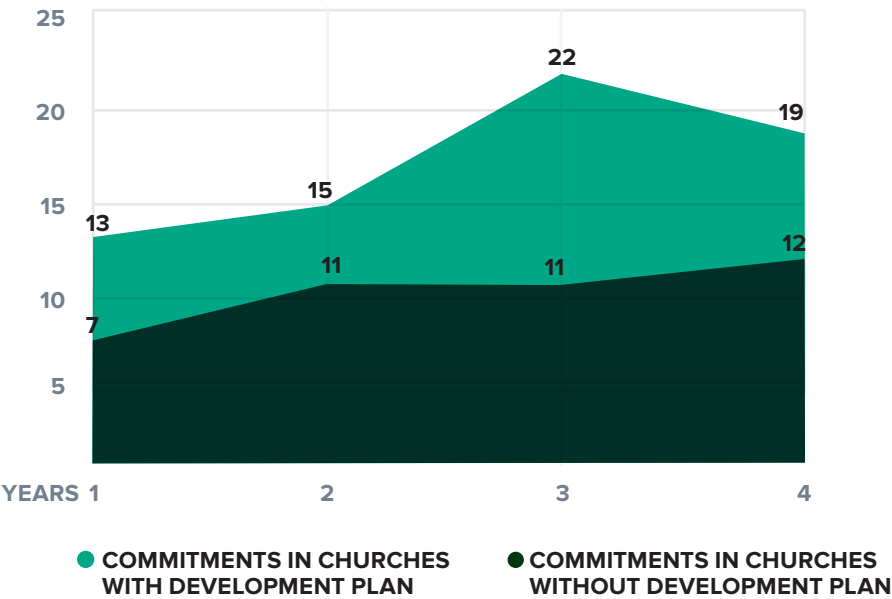
YR.	SPORTS	NONE
1	15	10
2	18	13
3	20	18
4	23	15

A FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

In one of the more interesting elements of the research, we found that churches who have an intentional leadership development plan for their members are churches who have a greater likelihood of seeing more people make decisions for Christ. Essentially, these churches recognize that in order to see the lost get saved, they need to focus on training and developing their members.

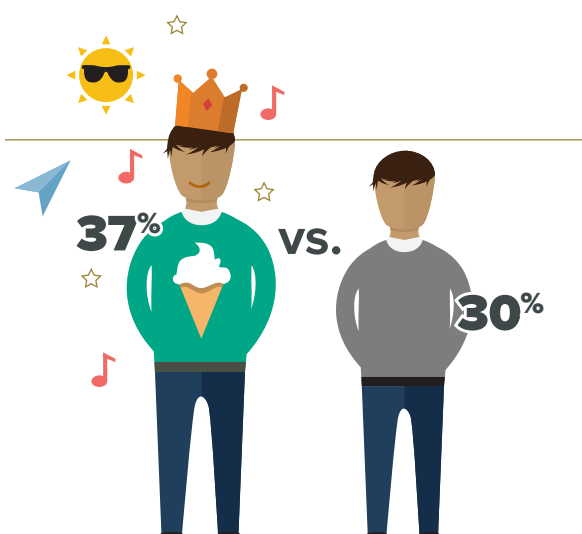
As we are looking across this data, it is clear that the churches that are seeing larger numbers of people make commitments to Christ are the churches that are making their community a priority, who are publicly known in their community, who are intentionally connecting with their community, and who are speaking the language of their community while unleashing their members for ministry. This is probably not surprising, but remarkably, this is forgotten in many new churches. This must be a priority.

Average number of commitments made in churches who offer a leadership development plan for their membership vs. churches who do not offer a leadership development plan for their membership.



REACHING THE UNCHURCHED

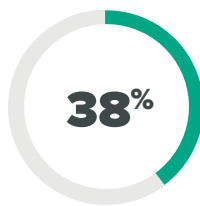
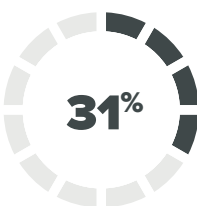
We have found that new churches who have success seeing unchurched people engage with their church are the churches who have a public presence, an intentional strategy to reach those who are unchurched, and who create opportunities for the message of Christ to be shared with unchurched people. What is fascinating, however, is that a few methods that might seem to be dated are actually quite effective at reaching the unchurched. Things like door hangers and door-to-door strategies were identified as successful measures that a new church can take to help reach their unchurched communities.



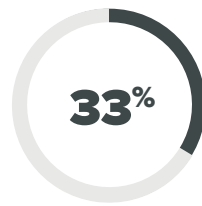
Among new churches that use special events for kids as a primary form of outreach, **37%** are majority unchurched. Among new churches that do not use special kids events as a primary form of outreach, **30%** are majority unchurched.

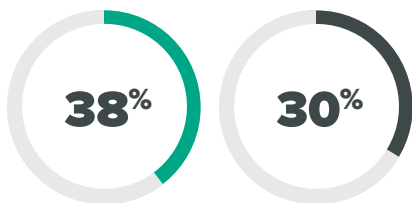


Among new churches that use door hangers or flyers as a form of outreach, **45%** are majority unchurched. Among new churches that do not use door hangers or flyers as a form of outreach, **31%** are majority unchurched.

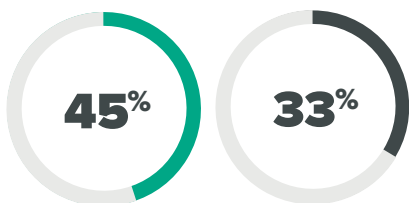


Among new churches that use prayer walking in preparation for their launch, **38%** are majority unchurched. Among new churches that do not use prayer walking in preparation for their launch, **33%** are majority unchurched.

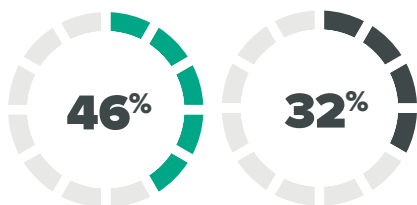




Among new churches that use ongoing outreach Bible studies as a form of outreach, 38% are majority unchurched. Among new churches that do not use ongoing outreach Bible studies as a form of outreach, 30% are majority unchurched.



Among new churches that use door-to-door outreach as a primary strategy for their launch, 45% are majority unchurched. Among new churches that do not use door-to-door outreach as a primary strategy for their launch, 33% are majority unchurched.



Among new churches that use ongoing sports leagues as a primary form of outreach, 46% are majority unchurched. Among new churches that do not use ongoing sports leagues as a primary form of outreach, 32% are majority unchurched.

The data is clear. Evangelism is not easy, but it may not be as difficult as we might think. The data informs us that simply doing something might be more effective than crafting an elaborate strategy. Churches who do something, in respect to evangelism, are churches who are much more effective than churches who don't. Unfortunately though, there are a significant number of churches that simply aren't engaging in any evangelistic activity. It's reminiscent of the quote that is often attributed to D.L. Moody.

“I like the way I do evangelism better than the way you don't do evangelism.”

D.L. Moody

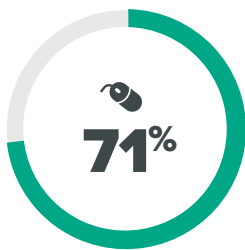
We need a generation of churches that utilize as many evangelism techniques as possible. The research is clear: using techniques leads to increased numbers of unchurched people engaging with your church. Whether it's sports leagues, door-to-door, or door hangers, the important thing is to do something. No longer should it be okay for us to just sit on the sidelines critiquing other forms of evangelism while essentially not engaging in any ourselves.

ON THEIR OWN

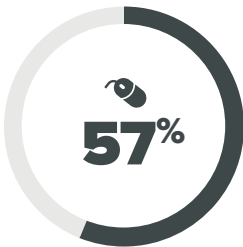
One of the big questions on the mind of most—if not all—church planters is achieving sustainability: how is it that a church can achieve financial self-sufficiency? As we said in the beginning of this report, 3-4 years is the sweet spot for financial sustainability. If a new church is unable to become financially self-sufficient by that mark, it is unlikely that they will ever be financially sustainable. So, how can a church make it there within 3-4 years? Our data shows that churches who prioritize a public presence, focus on new membership assimilation, and develop leaders well are churches who tend to become financially self-sufficient.

A PUBLIC PRESENCE

Churches that can be seen and known are more likely to be successful. This is a simple strategy and one that makes a lot of sense. Visibility matters greatly in the long-term viability of the church. If you are not seen and/or known, you will struggle to recruit new people to attend, which will inevitably result in the closing of your church because of a lack of finances and sustainability.

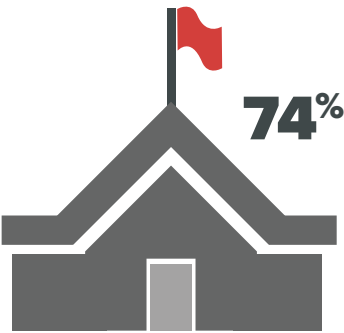


Among new churches who put their sermons online as a communication tool, **71%** are self-sufficient within the first three years.

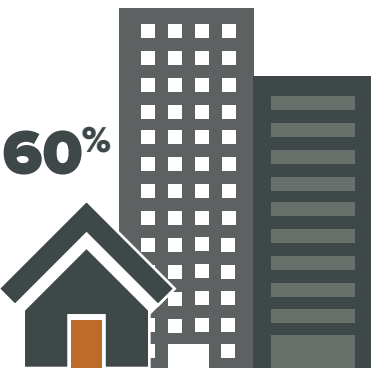


Among churches who do not put their sermons online as a communication tool, **57%** are self-sufficient within their first three years.

Among new churches who use a school as a meeting space, **74%** are self-sufficient within three years. Among new churches who do not use a school as a meeting space, **60%** are self-sufficient within three years.

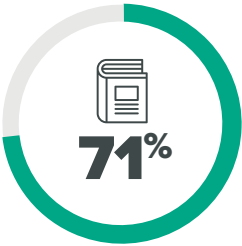


VS.



A NEW MEMBER ASSIMILATION PROCESS

Churches who have a clear and consistent pathway to move people into membership and the life of the church are remarkably more apt to become financially independent than churches who do not. Churches must make it a priority to move people along a discipleship pathway, and one of the ways in which they do that is to assimilate new people into the life of the body, often through a new member's class.



Among new churches who hold a new member's class, **71%** are self-sufficient within three years.



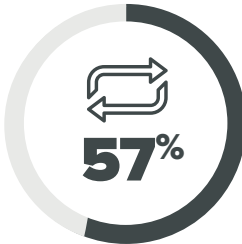
Among the churches who do not hold a new member's class, **53%** are self-sufficient within three years.

A FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Churches who help disciple their people—often through leadership development—are churches that have a higher likelihood of seeing financial success. This should not be surprising. Maturity generally leads to more sacrificial hearts, and more sacrificial hearts leads to greater patterns of financial success.



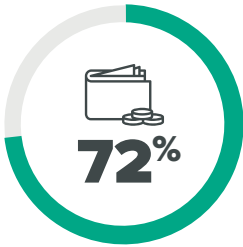
Among new churches who develop a leadership training plan for their membership, **68%** are self-sufficient within three years.



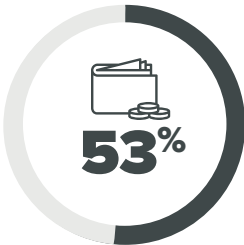
Among new churches who do not develop a leadership training plan for their membership, **57%** are self-sufficient within three years.

**FINANCIAL WISDOM,
INTEGRITY, AND
MULTIPLICATION**

Churches who handle money well, with an eye to the future, and who provide for their planter/pastor tend to be churches who do better financially than churches who do not. Unfortunately, because many planters/pastors are not great long-term planners, these can be details that are occasionally lost. While it would seem that the church often can't afford to invest in these patterns, this detail seems to indicate the reverse is true. The new church can't afford not to invest in these patterns.



Among new churches who develop a proactive church stewardship plan to move the church to self-sufficiency, 72% are self-sufficient within three years.



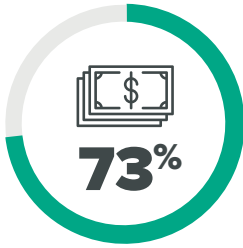
Among new churches who do not develop a proactive church stewardship plan to move the church to self-sufficiency, 53% are self-sufficient within three years.



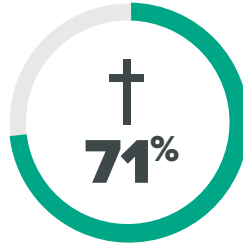
Among new churches who do financially contribute to other church plants, 71% are self-sufficient within three years.



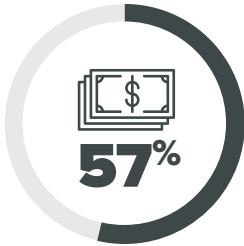
Among new churches who do not financially contribute to other church plants, 54% are self-sufficient within three years.



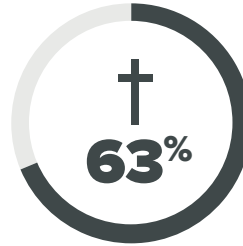
Among new churches whose pastor receives what they believe to be adequate financial compensation from the church, **73% are self-sufficient within three years.**



Among new churches who plant at least 1 daughter church within the first 3 years, **71% are also self-sufficient within three years**



Among new churches whose pastor does not receive what they believe to be adequate financial compensation from the church, **57% are self-sufficient within three years.**



Among new churches who do not plant at least 1 daughter church within the first 3 years, **63% are self-sufficient within three years.**

A FOCUS ON MULTIPLICATION

Churches who have a vision bigger than themselves have a tendency to become self-sufficient at a higher level than churches who don't. People give to vision. When planters/pastors lead their church to have a big vision for expansion and multiplication, and the church commits to that vision, churches are more likely to give sacrificially, increasing the likelihood that the church will make it to financial self-sufficiency.

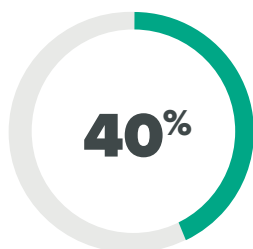
MULTIPLICATION

Finally, while we are excited about new churches, we need more than just individual churches being planted if we want to keep up with the population growth in the United States. In that case, we not only need individual new churches, we also need movements of new churches. So what is it that leads churches to not only succeed, but to multiply consistently?

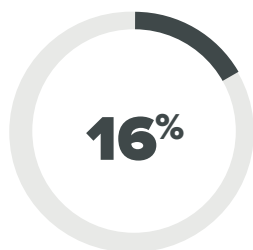
Looking across the data of churches surveyed, we noticed a number of things that are present in multiplying churches started between 2008 and 2012. They are very visible, both publicly and digitally. They are intentional in their programs and activities that are focused on outreach. They are devoted to membership assimilation and leadership development. The planters/pastors of these new churches are well trained and prepared. The planters/pastors of these new churches also have adequate provision to take care of them. They are intentional about multiplication and create specific pathways to make it happen. In other words, churches that are engaged in multiplication are relentlessly intentional about it. They prepare, plan, and execute their strategy to not only see a new church begin, but to multiply into other new churches; effectively working toward movement multiplication.

A PUBLIC AND DIGITAL PRESENCE

Churches that multiply are churches with an external focus. These multiplying churches are clear and intentional about being highly visible in their community. They excel at finding various pathways to make their presence known in their communities.



Among new churches that utilize a podcast as a means of communication, 40% start another new church within their first 5 years of existence.



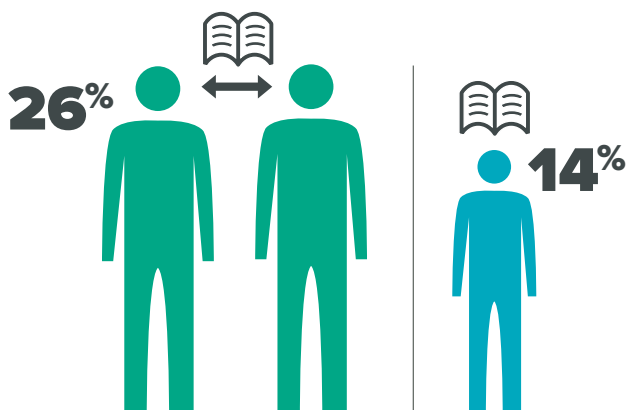
Among new churches that do not utilize a podcast as a means of communication, 16% start another new church within 5 years of existence.

A SERIOUS COMMITMENT TO DISCIPLESHIP AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Churches that multiply place a high priority on discipleship within their church community, and they treat church membership seriously. They have set the bar high on church membership, and while they will invite anyone to attend their church, they have strong expectations for those who would call themselves members of their church. Not only that, though, they have a commitment to discipleship that is evidenced, not just in discipleship programs, but also in a culture of one-on-one discipleship throughout the church.

AN INTENTIONAL MATURITY AND MULTIPLICATION

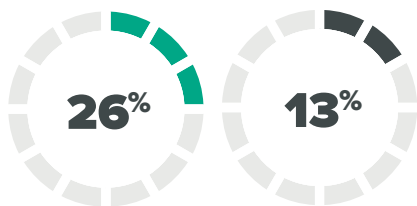
Among new churches that multiply, there is an intentional plan to place the church on a solid financial footing—to help it mature as an organization—and an equally strong commitment to making multiplication a part of the DNA of the church. Multiplying churches evidence this commitment by developing partnerships with other organizations to help start new churches, budgeting funds to assist in the starting of new churches, and by regularly communicating, with their congregation, the importance of multiplication. Churches that multiply take on a variety of forms and environments. While their circumstances may change, they have in common a commitment to purpose, intentionality, and an investment in the development of the people that make up their own church.



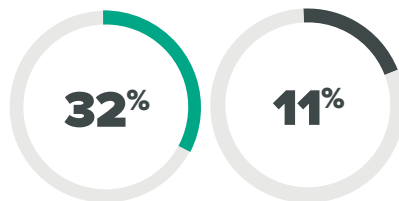
Among new churches that practice one-on-one discipleship, **26%** start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not practice one-on-one discipleship, **14%** start another new church within 5 years of existence.



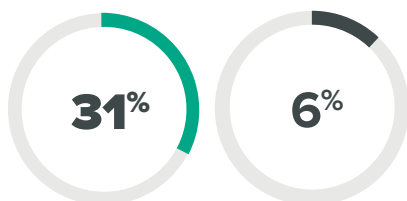
Among new churches that require a membership covenant for anyone joining their church, **26%** start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not require a membership covenant for anyone joining their church, **16%** start another new church within 5 years of existence.



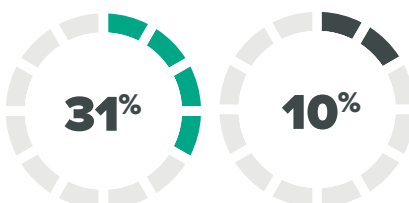
Among new churches that have an intentional stewardship plan developed to move their church to financial self-sufficiency, **26%** start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not have an intentional stewardship plan developed to move their church to financial self-sufficiency, **13%** start another new church within 5 years of existence.



Among new churches that regularly communicate a commitment to multiplication, **32%** start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not regularly communicate a commitment to multiplication, **11%** start another new church within 5 years of existence.



Among new churches that contribute financially to other church plants, **31%** start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not contribute financially to other church plants, **6%** start another new church within 5 years of existence.



Among new churches that receive outside funding from a sponsor church or churches, **31%** start another new church within their first 5 years of existence. Among new churches that do not receive outside funding from a sponsor church or churches, **10%** start another new church within 5 years of existence.

CONCLUSION

Over the coming months, we will be unpacking this information at NewChurches.com through a series of member-exclusive blog posts and webinars. To stay up to date on the latest research and insight on church multiplication, we invite you to sign up to be a Plus Member at NewChurches.com.

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