

UNITED METHODIST  
**Global Church Planting**  
2020 REPORT



Each year, we at Path1 and Discipleship Ministries collect data on the number of new churches, faith communities, and fresh expressions that have been planted in The United Methodist Church in each annual and central conference.

The data collected provides insight into regional and national trends as well as information that can help us to know what strategies seem to be most effective. This information is used to help inform not only the work of Path1 but also those who serve in roles as annual conference developers and church revitalization strategists. Starting new churches, faith communities, and fresh expressions of the Christian faith is vitally important as we seek to share the good news of Jesus. Behind these data points are the stories of people who have found relationships with God and neighbors. It is through these relationships that our mission to transform the world into what God intends occurs.

## Methodology

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In 2020, for collecting data from 2019, we moved to Survey Monkey, using our research and data team, Naomi Annandale and Mark Dorminy. Prior to the use of Survey Monkey, the data was collected via spreadsheet, which sought out many of the same metrics included in the methodology we now use, but it was much more difficult to track the information as it came in. Additionally, we were not able to dig deeper into what was behind the numbers. To keep records of data more effectively, interpret data, and include important questions (and their answers), we moved to Survey Monkey, which has allowed us to go further in learning and discovering what is taking place within the denomination regarding planting new faith communities.

## Noteworthy Trends

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### Funding

Anywhere from 60%–100% of project funding by conferences. How funds are distributed and for how long funding lasts depends upon the kind of new start and other contextual variables.

### The Pandemic of Covid-19 and Its Effects

Covid-19 disruptions had a great impact overall. The pandemic slowed or stopped planting projects; one respondent mentioned that planters have focused on digital engagement; but for the most part, planting has slowed greatly—even counting fresh expressions.

## Future Anticipated Growth

Given the current and unknown future related to both the denominational situation and Covid-19, many respondents found it difficult to project the number of new church plants anticipated over the next five years. They used 2020 as a season of putting a hold on new church plants and shifted their focus to strengthening digital ministry for new churches and established congregations. Those who did anticipate future growth there recognized that a majority of what is going to be new will be fresh expressions, laying the groundwork through identifying leaders, both clergy and lay, and training for leadership. One respondent highlighted that in the annual conference, ten new faith communities began, and all ten were digital and lay-led.

## Lay-Led Movement

Our denomination has its roots in a lay-led, lay-empowered movement that we often highlight, acknowledging that decline began as the role of the clergy became more professionalized and as itinerancy evolved. Contextually, these factors have bearing now:

- the closing of existing churches
- the financial implications of having a full-time elder
- the financial burden that comes with seminary within the world of “church”
- societal and political shifts (*pre-pandemic, and brought even more so to the front during the pandemic*)
- decentralization on the larger level
- distrust of institutions
- push toward more emphasis on the local, on individual rights, and—in its worst cases—radical individualism at the expense of neighbors near and far.

In every challenge, there is an opportunity. The empowering and equipping of laypeople, emphasizing a journey toward maturing discipleship so that people take responsibility for their life of faith and seek out relationships with others, speaks both to empowering the individual and to communal aspects of our faith. Movements like the good neighbor experiment, fresh expressions, and lay-led church planting, allow experimentation with co-vocational and bi-vocational ministry. They also offer opportunities for laypeople to lead in their contexts, form new faith communities where they find themselves, and live out discipleship aimed toward serving and equipping others for the life of faith.

We asked if the annual conference has a strategy in place for lay planting. Sixteen responded with yes; eighteen said no, and nine did not respond.

*“In most cases, money is not our problem. Our most urgent needs are missional imagination, missional leaders (both lay and clergy) and missional accountability.”*

**ROGER ROSS**

Director of Congregational Excellence, Missouri Annual Conference

We see these opportunities for Path1 to fulfill its role as the facilitator of strategic conversations and broker of knowledge for the way forward as a denomination and other expressions of Methodism in the local, regional, and global contexts:

- Partnering with annual conference leadership and our traditional partners in discerning and developing strategies on the conference level
- Working to ensure training is readily accessible for laypeople (go at your own pace, digital, cost-efficient formats)
- Investing in relationships with new partners who are innovative and more diverse to better inform our own training and experience but also to create a larger network

## Intentionality in Planting Multiethnic Faith Communities

Respondents were asked how many different racial/multiethnic faith communities were planted, the racial demographic of planters, and if their annual conferences had a strategy for starting new multiethnic faith communities. The majority of new church plants were Hispanic/Latinx, with seventeen choosing the 1–3 category; African-American was chosen by ten in the 1–3 category; five Asian; one Pacific Islander; and eleven marked multiethnic (1–3) and two at (4–5). Twenty annual conferences have a conference strategy for multiethnic planting, while eleven do not; eleven gave no responses to this question.

Comments ranged from focusing primarily on Hispanic/Latinx planting and using training for this, to committing funds (50%) from closed churches for multiethnic starts, to working with the national plans to identify potential planters, to creating a team that meets regularly for training, to creating a conference position focused on justice and equity. As demographics continue to shift, conferences that want to create faith communities that look more like their communities will need to make significant inroads to reach younger and more diverse generations.

### **POSSIBLE FOCAL POINTS MOVING FORWARD:**

1. One focus for our work could be listening, supporting, and partnering with the national plans to help broaden the pool of leadership for a more diverse church.
2. Other beneficial foci include diversity training, use of IDI, teaching on white privilege, and cultural competency to enhance and inform antiracist discipleship (*this is an area of focus in both Discipleship Ministries and Path1 through the training and programs we offer*).
3. Third, continued and growing emphasis on context as it relates to diverse cultures, colonization through the church as its history, and equipping and empowering leaders to vision and build decolonized faith communities that help to reclaim culture, ordering of the world toward justice, and work for the beloved community.

# Statistics

## 2020 US Annual Conferences

TOTAL SURVEY'S COMPLETED: 45

**Total New Church Plants: 178**

*Of the new church plants that began, 42 of the planters were designated by the following:*

- 10 Part-Time Planter
- 12 Bi-Vocational
- 8 Co-Vocational
- 12 Lay Planted

**Total New Faith Communities: 220**

- 29 Lay-Led
- 13 Part-Time Planter

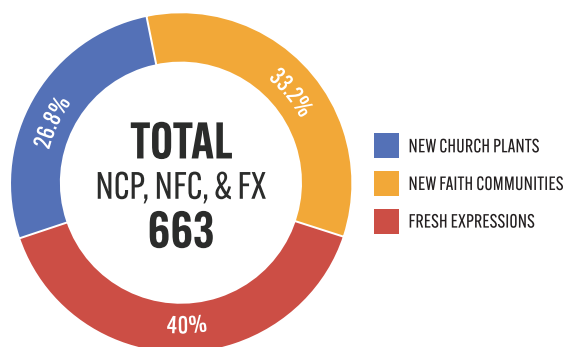
**Total Fresh Expressions: 265**

**Conferences with Lay Planting Strategies:**

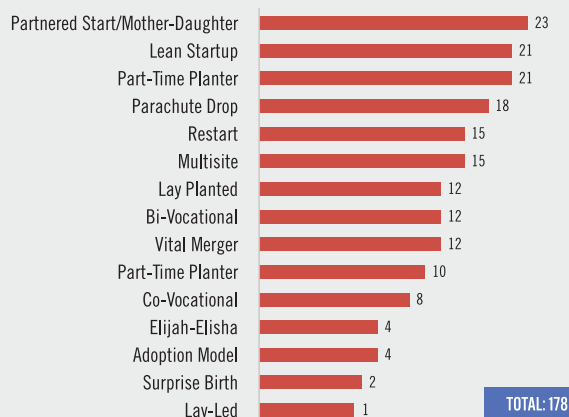
- 16 Yes
- 18 No
- 11 No Response

**Conferences with Strategies for Planting Multiethnic Faith Communities:**

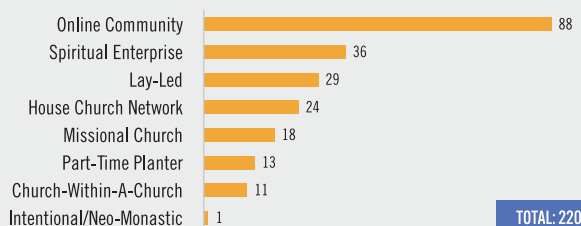
- 20 Yes
- 12 No
- 13 No Response



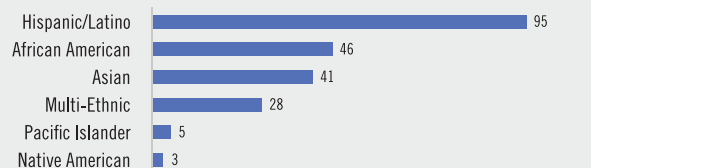
### NUMBER & TYPE OF NEW CHURCH PLANTS



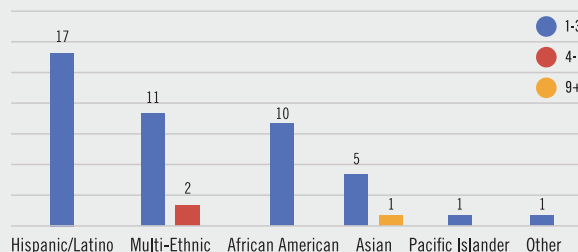
### NUMBER & TYPE OF NEW FAITH COMMUNITY



### PLANTER ETHNICITIES IN THE UMC



### NUMBER & TYPE OF ETHNIC CHURCH PLANTS



## Central Conference New Church Plants & New Faith Communities

CENTRAL CONFERENCE	EPISCOPAL AREA	NEW CHURCH PLANTS	NEW FAITH COMMUNITIES
<b>Africa</b>	East Africa	NR	NR
	East Angola	NR	NR
	Mozambique	NR	NR
	Western Angola	NR	NR
	<b>East Zimbabwe</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>
	<b>West Zimbabwe</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Congo</b>	Central Congo	NR	NR
	Eastern Congo	NR	NR
	North Katanga	NR	NR
	South Congo	NR	NR
<b>West Africa</b>	Liberia	NR	NR
	Nigeria	NR	NR
	Sierra Leone	NR	NR
	Cote d'Ivoire	NR	NR
<b>Central and Southern Europe</b>	Central and Southern Europe	0	0
<b>Germany</b>	Germany	NR	NR
<b>Northern Europe</b>	<b>Eurasia</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Nordic &amp; Baltic</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	Baguio	NR	NR
	Davao	NR	NR
	<b>Manila</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Totals</b>		<b>26</b>	<b>147</b>



# Responses to Open-Ended Questions

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***How are the present uncertainty within the United Methodist Church and the restrictions imposed by the global Covid-19 pandemic affecting planting and plans for planting in your context?***

- Pretty much halted all anticipated church plants, though they are now beginning to dream again.
- The pandemic has caused churches to delay developing new fresh expressions. The uncertainty within the United Methodist Church hasn't been a significant factor.
- Without a doubt, our biggest challenge. We are looking at what we can do NOW (or soon) and, without trying to force too much, focusing on the do-able and working to do that well.
- It has actually allowed innovation to thrive in many ways.
- It impacted negatively because some people stopped attending church, but positively in that it challenged the planters to create online campuses.
- Planters are hesitant to commit. Parent churches are hesitant to adopt, merge, or form satellites. We are having more openness to mergers.
- It is very challenging; however, with our church leaders' resiliency, some churches are able to thrive using the technology. A lot of our local churches continue doing online worship to reach more people. Some may not go to church in-person due to COVID19
- It has impacted both our funding and our outreach. Several fresh expressions did not get off the ground due to pandemic restrictions and the anxiety related to those.

***What resources, training, and strategies seem to be working well in your conference?***

- Training from Planter Organizations.
- Discipling systems resulting in multiplication looks promising; fresh expressions training was well-received, and it stimulated activity.
- Quarterly training for planters, coaching consulting, and advising networks.
- Leadership development with ICD & IDC is the Institute of Congregational Development to equip church planters.
- We have a yearlong church planting/leadership training. We enroll churches in "Churches Planting Churches." Continually offer fresh expressions training. Boot camp.
- We are in the process of re-evaluating our models. We are currently using Launch Party for one of the new plants. We have a group intentionally looking at these questions.

- Path 1's multisite training with Paul Nixon has been very helpful. We use coaches: Ken Nash and Paul Nickerson. Jim Griffith has been helpful. But what seems best is finding laity or clergy who "have it" and then staying close to them and their leaders.
- Leadership development for young clergy. Community development and engagement training. Evangelism 101.

*"The large number of new online faith communities is likely a result, at least in part, of the pandemic and is an acknowledgement by at least some of our churches as to the importance of reaching people digitally. I would expect the number to continue to increase. Although somewhat difficult to count, Fresh Expressions of church appear to be by far the most common approach churches and Conferences are using. For being a predominately white denomination within the U.S., it is encouraging to see a significant number of non-white and Hispanics leading efforts."*

**ED FENSTERMACHER**

Associate Director of Church Development

### ***Is the coronavirus pandemic likely to affect the types of new faith communities you plant in the next twelve months?***

- Yes, particularly those communities with issues related to internet connections and provisions of gadgets. An example of this is how to sustain the development of congregations in tribal communities.
- Due to some restrictions on health protocols, the movement for in-person religious gatherings was too limited. However, the maximization of social media platforms can help to continue developing new faith communities.
- Our people have accepted the new normal. The pandemic has brought communities together as an opportunity for witnessing to neighbors.
- The economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic had been and still is an issue in church funding since the advent of this pandemic. Loss of income and temporary unemployment are reasons for lesser receipts in the majority of our local churches. Priorities for the meantime are financial support for clergy and deaconesses, including medical and financial aid for those clergy and deaconesses who have been infected by the coronavirus. As of this writing, we have registered 12 deaths, 99 quarantined Covid-19 infected, 43 hospitalizations due to the Covid-19 virus, and 124 were totally recovered. With these scenarios, funding for new faith communities is negatively affected.



# APPENDIX: Strategies for Planting New Churches & Faith Communities in the US

## Definitions of Terms

**NEW CHURCH** – Still meets the characteristics of a new church start established some time ago; has the potential to charter or otherwise live in the traditional connectional system; has potential for self-sustainability in terms of growth and finances. Multisite campuses should still fall within this category, even though they may never charter if they fit the definition of a self-sustaining church. This category accounts for the vast majority of new places we've planted over the last eight years.

**NEW CHURCH COMMUNITY** – Refers to smaller, less traditional communities that are engaged in worship and discipleship practices that may or may not have multiple smaller groups within them. These usually average around fifty to one hundred people at most. These are unlikely to charter or continue to grow beyond a certain point. The majority of our "non-traditional" churches (which include coffeehouses, house churches, intentional communities, etc.) may fall within this category.

## Strategies for New Places for New Peoples in 2016-2020

### NEW CHURCHES

Parachute Drop / Classical Missionary

Partnered Start / Mother-Daughter

Multisite

Restart

Vital Merger

Elijah-Elisha

Fresh Expressions

Lay-Led

Part-Time Planter

Surprise Birth

### NEW FAITH COMMUNITIES

Church-Within-A-Church

Spiritual Enterprise (Coffee House, Diner Church, etc.)

House Church Network

Intentional & Neo-Monastic Community

Online Community

Fresh Expressions

Lay-Led

Part-Time Planter

Missional Churches

Lean Start Up

## Planting Strategy Definitions

**PARTNERED START/MOTHER-DAUGHTER** – An existing congregation (or perhaps several churches) serves as an anchoring, sponsoring, or parenting force in launching a new church. Unlike the multisite church, the daughter church is intended to develop into a full-fledged chartered church of its own, independent of the mother congregation.

**PARACHUTE DROP/CLASSICAL MISSIONARY** – A planter is sent into a territory to start a new faith community in which the planter is not from that territory and there are no active partnerships in place with other churches or Christian institutions in the area. This is church planting from scratch.

**MULTISITE** – Among the most popular planting strategies today, the multisite strategy has a higher rate of success if the mother campus is healthy enough to pursue it. An existing church starts a new faith community offsite, which acts as a campus ministry of the original church. Unlike the mother-daughter model, the new community will remain under a common umbrella with the original church that may be maintained through various means of oversight or shared accountability. The church (on multiple sites) will function as one church. It is critical that BOTH the senior pastor and the planting pastor be trained and ready for this. Many United Methodist multisites are working poorly due to the lack of attentiveness to best practices. (*See Path 1's "Churches Planting Churches" program.*)

**RESTART** – Either a pre-existing church or an attempted plant failed, but the conference or partners still believe a new faith community can flourish in the area and decide to try again, usually with new leadership. Existing property or assets from the old community are used by the restart, but old buildings may be liquidated.

**VITAL MERGER** – Unlike other types of mergers where one church folds into another existing congregation, vital mergers occur when two or more existing churches agree to form a completely new faith community. The idea is to start completely fresh with both congregations selling their property and pooling money and resources together to form a completely new community with a new name under the leadership of a trained planter, rather than one of the churches' former pastors. This is not a merger for survival, but a merger for the sake of reaching new people—it is totally different from a normal merger. More than one location may be retained in the merger.

**ELIJAH-ELISHA** – This strategy requires a proactive discernment process with the district superintendent or conference staff. Congregations may either discover a new vision and recommit to fruit-bearing ministry or respond to God's call to become an "Elijah" new church start (2 Kings 2:1-14 tells how Elijah passed on the legacy of his ministry to Elisha). Elijah churches intentionally choose either to (a) join another church and give the physical assets to the conference to reach a new group of people or (b) open their doors to a planter and launch team that takes over complete management of the facility to start a new congregation. Sometimes the facilities are liquidated with funds reinvested in new space and ministry start-up costs.

**FRESH EXPRESSIONS** – Designed by planters in Britain specifically to reach the unchurched, a fresh expression is a catch-all for contemporary communities of varying size and shape that focus on fellowship, mission, and/or group discipleship as their first priority and experiment with what a church can look like in the twenty-first century. Often fresh expressions have no worship or sacraments. Sometimes, a fresh expression project may develop into a church start. A fresh expression may overlap with other forms of non-traditional church planting.

**LAY-LED** – The name says it all. Lay-led plants are faith communities of any size where a layperson is assigned as the planter and primary shepherd to the community. Some lay planters may be people still in the process toward ordination, while others may be certified lay ministers with no intention of becoming elders.

**PART-TIME** – Sometimes a conference may opt to appoint a planter to serve a new ministry on a part-time basis while holding another appointment or job outside of ministry. This can be a good strategy if your funding to support a new plant is tight, or if there's a shortage of available full-time pastors in the area. However, make sure the time commitments for the part-time planter match your conference's expectations.

**SURPRISE BIRTH** – A church is started with no initiative from the conference or existing church partners. The people may or may not have United Methodist Church history. It is important that such churches that wish to be part of The United Methodist Church commit themselves to the same theology, polity, and measures of accountability.

**CHURCH-WITHIN-A-CHURCH** – Sometimes a new church or faith community may start meeting in a property belonging to an existing church, but still function as a separate community with its own members, ministries, and leadership. In other cases, the new faith community functions with membership in the existing church, but simply forms around a new worship community designed for a distinctive population. These arrangements might be temporary or permanent. Existing congregations choosing to share property may find that new churches may better serve their immediate neighbors.

**SPIRITUAL ENTERPRISE** – Maybe you've seen faith communities that operate out of a coffee shop or a diner or other business outlets. These aren't simply churches meeting in places of business, but rather churches running the business. This can be a great model for reaching the unchurched and millennials. Since sales help offset the costs of ministry, many spiritual enterprises are able to reach sustainability and devote more time and resources to outreach. The business model needs to be carefully developed and vetted.

**HOUSE CHURCHES** – Christianity began with Jesus and disciples meeting in people's homes, and this practice continued for some time before the first separate church buildings appeared. Many early Methodist groups under Wesley also met in private homes weekly. Many new churches may begin

meeting in homes and coffee shops as a part of a First 12 group or planting team. These are perfect venues for small-group discipleship. Sometimes a house church community may decide not to extend into a traditional large congregation or may instead opt to form a house church network with other groups in the area that may meet together at a large venue infrequently. In other cases, the house churches form a network and function together as a campus of sorts with relationship to and oversight from the elder who is pastor of an anchor church.

**INTENTIONAL/NEO-MONASTIC COMMUNITY** – Other times, a group of people may choose to form their living situation around Christian fellowship by creating an intentional community. Sometimes members might share a residence or simply commit to living near one another and engaging in daily rituals of fellowship and piety together. The community is bound by a shared covenant that requires regular acts of piety, worship, mercy, and justice. Naturally, these groups will remain small in size, but the deep level of commitment from the members to outreach and social justice can have a great impact on the surrounding area.

**ONLINE COMMUNITY** – In the digital age, we are now able to connect and build relationships with people all over the world without having to meet in person. Churches too are finding ways to reach people with common interests and ideals who are miles apart. Not only are churches streaming their weekly services to reach a larger audience, but some are, in fact, building interactive faith communities whose entire parish exists online. This works best with people who are comfortable with online engagement. It is also a way to offer church to people who are living remotely (in a non-Christian country, for example, or in rural Nevada).

**MISSIONAL CHURCH** – Missional churches see themselves primarily as servant disciples engaged in outward evangelism and service to a community. Instead of focusing primarily on internal programs, missional churches are always looking out to the community they serve and will seek to be the hands and feet of Christ to that community. Because of their focus primarily on mission as well as their presence in less-affluent communities, missional churches may not develop into traditional large-member congregations and may continue to rely on financial support from their conference or planting partners to continue their services.

**LEAN START UP** – A Lean Start-up Plant might use almost any planting strategy, but with the understanding that conference funding will be minimal (micro-grant) or nonexistent. A Lean Start-Up may use volunteer leaders in lieu of paid ones. It may be led by laity rather than clergy, at least until it grows to a certain point. It may borrow meeting space rather than pay for it. It may remain small by design and multiply. Or it may grow into a large and complex congregation. But what distinguishes the learn start-up is that *early funding will be limited*.