

UNITED METHODIST  
**Global Church Planting**  
2021 REPORT



# Introduction

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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 know what strategies seem to be the most effective. The information also helps us understand the effects of situations and events taking place that can seem like barriers to planting new churches. Situations like denominational disaffiliation create barriers that may mean less funding for planting or may shift the focus away from a strategy to plant new churches toward other priorities, such as preserving, stabilizing, or revitalizing the churches that are staying. The effects of the pandemic and the return to in-person gatherings may strain the local church. Denominational leaders also feel stress, as they strategize about how to support and care for long-established congregations to create stability and move toward revitalization. However, this shifts the focus away from planting new faith communities. The church also faces such challenges as demographic shifts and new generations being further removed from the church.

The challenges may seem overwhelming, but each challenge also offers an invitation to innovate, adapt, learn, and experiment. We might ask ourselves, “What are the new skills we’re learning because of this challenge? How are we using what we have learned to create a better future?” Challenges are a doorway toward growth and life, as we observe, strategize, and take action steps. We learn from those experiences and then innovate to continue strategizing and recalibrating action steps as the needs arise.

Challenges are an invitation from God to trust more deeply and grow in faithfulness to God’s mission, which offers hope, life, and love to all creation. While challenges seem daunting, the opportunities to partner with God and help create something new are exciting and give hope to the whole church as we see that God is still working in and through the people of The United Methodist Church to offer new faith communities that go where the people are, that meet in new ways, that reach those who might normally not be reached, and that transform lives through God’s grace.

The information collected is being used to inform the work of Path1 and 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 the data 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.

The future holds tremendous opportunities for Path 1 at Discipleship Ministries to strengthen the equipping of world-changing disciples of Jesus Christ and the church planting movement within the

United Methodist connection in the United States and globally.

We invite you to study and share this report with your annual conference and local church leadership team. We encourage you to send us your insights and suggestions about how we can better improve our efforts of making disciples of Jesus Christ by planting new, vital, and fresh Christian communities in a dynamic and diverse mission context. If you have any questions, suggestions, or interest in discussing this report with your team, please contact Bryan Tener and/or Bener Agtarap at [btener@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:btener@umcdiscipleship.org) and [bagtarap@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:bagtarap@umcdiscipleship.org) respectively.

## Methodology

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With the help of our research and data team, Naomi Annandale and Mark Dorminy, we provided a survey that was sent to each annual conference developer's office with an invitation to respond. Interpretation and analysis of the survey is done through our research and development office, the Path1 team, and our strategic board. We received thirty-five completed surveys from US annual conferences out of fifty-four invitations sent out. Based on this percentage of returned surveys, we believe we get a sense of the trends within church planting and the general state of planting in regard to the denominational schism, post-Covid challenges, and cultural shifts within the United States. This information helps shape Path1's role as an equipper for planting, a broker of knowledge, and a convener of conversations with important partners.

## Noteworthy Trends

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

The Covid-19 pandemic had a great impact on the church. Some people are not returning to in-person gatherings. The increased financial concerns for the church has led to a slowing down or stopping of planting projects, which has led to a further increase in digital engagement and an ever-growing need for resources and tools to implement and develop hybrid churches and digital churches for worship and other aspects of discipleship.

### Funding

Anywhere from fifty percent to one hundred percent of project funding is through annual conferences, but how funding is distributed and for how long depends on the kind of new start and other variables. For example, one conference funds for five years, with decreased funding every year with the hope that the new church will be fully self-sustaining after five years. A majority of survey responses pointed toward funding on some level for three to five years.

## Future Anticipated Growth

Survey responses noted that the lower number of people returning to in-person worship, the denominational split, and financial challenges create hesitancy toward starting new churches. Survey respondents indicated a need for resources and training on entrepreneurship, innovation, leadership, community engagement, and alternative revenue sources. They also cited the need for lay training for bivocational- and covocational-led faith communities. Survey responses included concerns about disaffiliation and starting new churches where the local church has disaffiliated.

## Lay-Led Movement

Survey responses indicated that empowered laypeople are vital to present and future growth. Contextually, these factors laid out in the 2021 report continue to affect church planting:

- the closing of existing churches
- disaffiliation and discernment leading toward staying or disaffiliation and the unknowns within those conversations
- 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, were more significant during the pandemic
- decentralization on the larger level
- distrust of institutions
- push toward more emphasis on the local and on individual rights. in the worst cases, there has been radical individualism at the expense of neighbors both near and far.

Every challenge is an opportunity. Empowering and equipping laypeople and emphasizing the journey toward maturing discipleship highlight the communal aspects of our faith. Movements like the good neighbor experiment, fresh expressions, and lay-led church planting allow for experimentation with covocational and bivocational ministry. These movements also offer opportunities for laypeople to lead, form new faith communities where are, 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. Thirteen responded, yes; fifteen, no.

We see the following as opportunities for Path1 to fulfill its role as a facilitator of strategic conversations and broker of knowledge for the way forward as a denomination:

- Partnering with annual conference leaders and our traditional partners in discerning and developing strategies on the conference level
- Working to ensure training is readily accessible for laypeople (go at their own pace, digital, cost-efficient formats)



- Investing in relationships with new partners who are innovative and diverse to better inform our own training and experience and to create a larger network

## Intentionality in Planting Multiethnic Faith Communities

Fifteen annual conferences have a strategy for planting multiethnic faith communities. As demographics continue to shift and to create faith communities that look more like the surrounding communities, conferences will need to make significant inroads to reach younger and more diverse generations. The need for strategizing for multiethnic planting will continue to grow, both for the creation of resources and for discerning and implementing those strategies.

### POSSIBLE FOCAL POINTS MOVING FORWARD:

- listening, supporting, and partnering with the national plans to help broaden the pool of leaders for a more diverse church.
- Connecting with, training, and equipping laypeople who desire to stay in The United Methodist Church to lead faith communities in areas where disaffiliation occurs. Strategizing with developers, laypeople, and other strategic partners on best practices for this.
- Offering diversity training and the use of IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory); teaching about 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 offered.)
- Emphasizing context as it relates to diverse cultures, colonization through the church as history, and equipping and empowering leaders to envision and build decolonized faith communities that help to reclaim culture, order the world toward justice, and work for the beloved community.

Fresh Expressions, the Good Neighbor movement, and resources that work through laypeople and offer ways of knowing the community can help make inroads in areas related to future growth.

For resources related to planting to new churches, faith communities, and fresh expressions, see the links below:

- [Path 1/Church Planting Website](#)
- [Equipping Laypeople in Engaging People in the Community with Jesus' Love](#) by Bener Agtarap
- [Multicultural Congregations in the Blended Ecology](#) by Michael Beck
- [Church Planting and Hybridity: Challenges to Planting New Churches Within Ethnic Communities](#) by Marcelo Gomes
- [Rare Opportunity to Learn from a Groundbreaking Multicultural Church](#) by Paul Nixon
- [Unidos: Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month](#) by Patricia Peña

# Statistics

## 2021 US Annual Conferences

**TOTAL SURVEY'S COMPLETED: 35**

**Total of New Church Plants, New Faith Communities, and Fresh Expressions Combined: 524**

**Total New Church Plants: 136**

*Of the new church plants that began, 41 of the planters were designated by the following:*

- 13 Bi-vocational
- 10 Part-Time Planters Appointed in Local Church Settings
- 10 Lay-Planted
- 8 Co-vocational

**Conferences with Lay Planting Strategies:**

- 13 Yes
- 15 No
- 7 No Response

**Total New Faith Communities: 126**

- 14 Part-Time Planter
- 10 Lay-Led

**Total Fresh Expressions: 211**

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

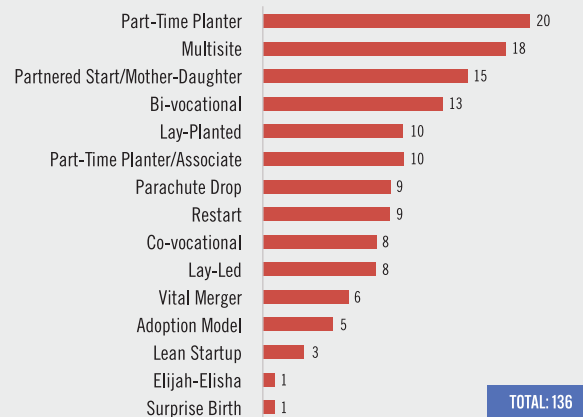
- 15 Yes
- 11 No
- 24 No Response

**Central Conference New Church Plants and Faith Communities**

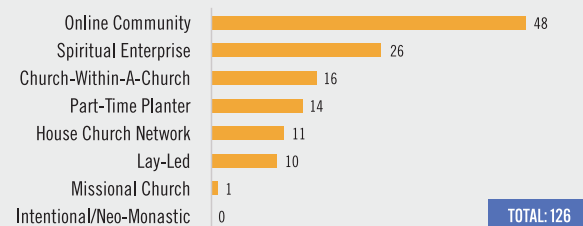
**Total Responses: 7**

- 2 New Mission Churches
- 1 New Church Plant
- 1 New Fresh Expression

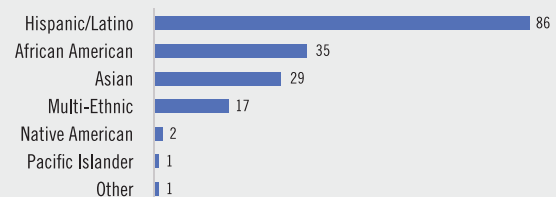
## NUMBER & TYPE OF NEW CHURCH PLANTS



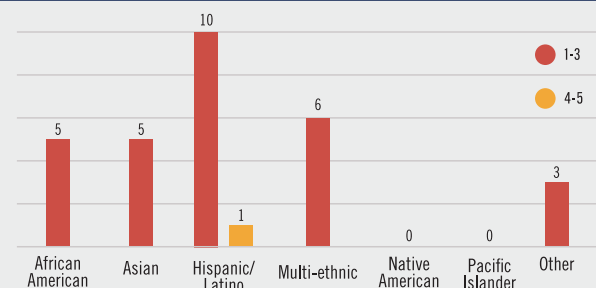
## NUMBER & TYPE OF NEW FAITH COMMUNITY



## PLANTER DEMOGRAPHICS



## NUMBER & TYPE OF ETHNIC CHUCH PLANTS



# Written Responses

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## Comments on Open-Ended Questions

### ***How is the present uncertainty within the UMC and the restrictions imposed by the global Covid-19 pandemic impacting 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 UMC 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; positively, in that it challenges 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 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 them.
- We did not plant any new church in 2021 for the first time in five years, mainly due to Covid restrictions. The uncertainty has not seemed to hamper the desire to plant; just unsure of the resources and structures to support new plants.

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

- Ongoing leadership development/church planting training. Highlighting and promoting successes of church planting and FX.
- LAUNCHPAD: We offer two online cohorts of Launchpad each year—fall and spring. These are held in the evenings over a period of eight to ten weeks. This pacing gives teams time to meet between training on each "Season of Planting" so that they can process what they are learning in light of their context. These are taught by a team of experienced planters.

GREENHOUSE GROUPS: These are coaching groups for people who have completed Launchpad and are beginning to work the six- to twelve-month plan they developed in Launchpad. We are using the L3 process for each group meeting, which includes each participants setting clear action steps for the three or four weeks before the next group gathering. We are finding these VERY helpful

Regional NFC TEAMS: Our Director of NFC, David Masland, officially retired during 2020, but continues to work part-time supporting the planting movement. This shift required a strengthening of the Conference NFC Team. We now have small teams of two to three people in each of three Upper New York regions, serving as support to anyone seeking to plant a new church or missional faith community. These persons are meeting regularly for conversation with people all along the process of planting (from discernment to launch and beyond).

- Listening to our local church leaders, then implementing trainings to support their concerns. Last year we offered Multiply Minis and Emerge, along with Bishop Palmer's Leadership Clinics. Our Greenhouse and Greenhouse Expressions (GHX) are for planters/FX.
- Discipling systems resulting in multiplication looks promising; Fresh Expressions training well received and 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 and boot camp.
- 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.
- We can't plant reproducing churches until we learn how to make disciples. Disciples Made and Phil Maynard's Shift 2.0 have been helpful. Fresh Expressions training through FX US and the latest sessions from Path 1 have been very helpful.

## Survey's Open-Ended Comments

- Community planting is not easy to do in this time of pandemic because of limited movement, not enough funds, people in the community striving to survive for their family's needs like food and funds to finance the schooling of their children. But by the help of our bishop and some laypeople in our area (MinPAC), we planted three mission churches.
- Our prospect is the area where people have mixed cultural practices and status of life. Since the pandemic last, in the past two years, financial assistance is needed.



# 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 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. They usually average between fifty to one hundred people at most. They are unlikely to charter or continue to grow beyond a certain point. The majority of our "nontraditional" churches (which include coffeehouses, house churches, intentional communities, etc.) may fall within this category.

## Strategies for New Places for New Peoples in 2021-2024

### NEW CHURCHES

Parachute Drop

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) serve as an anchoring, sponsoring, or parenting force in launching a new church. Unlike multisite, 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** – When 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. Church planting from scratch.

**MULTISITE** – Among the most popular planting strategies today, with 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 will act as a campus ministry of the original church. Unlike 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 senior pastor and 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 both 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 to form a completely new community with a new name under the leadership of a trained planter, rather than one of the church's' former pastors. This is not merger for survival, but a merger for the sake of reaching new people—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 their 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 there is no worship or sacraments. Sometimes, a fresh expression project may develop into a church start. A fresh expression may overlap with other forms of nontraditional church planting.

**LAY-LED** – The name says it all. Lay-led plants are any 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 good strategy if the 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 the 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 outlet. 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. And because 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 the 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 only 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 in 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. 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 it is that *early funding will be limited*.