




**PANDEMIC:**  
Did the Pandemic  
Change the Trajectory  
of Church Plants or  
Multisite Campuses?

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By Warren Bird, Ph.D.



## Historic Research North America's largest-ever survey of its kind.

### 2,702 Participants:

- 2,315 church planters/founding pastors
- 387 multisite directors or campus pastors

### Survey Offered in 3 Languages

### 50+ Denominations/Networks:

- Most responses: Southern Baptists
- Second most responses: ARC (Association of Related Churches)
- U.S. (92%) and Canada (8%)

In 2022, ECFA (Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability) launched a survey titled “The New Faces of Church Planting and Multisiting” under the leadership of Warren Bird, Ph.D., ECFA's Senior Vice President of Research and Equipping. The survey was over a year in development. Its preparation involved focus groups, numerous reviewers from a diverse community of church leaders, input from many denominations and networks, and comparison against major surveys conducted in recent years.\*

ECFA sponsored the survey in an effort to serve hundreds of ECFA members that are involved in church planting or multisite campuses. ECFA is also eager to help a larger number of new churches and campuses lay the right foundation for leadership, board, and financial integrity.

We welcome your feedback and comments at [research@ECFA.org](mailto:research@ECFA.org).

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## 6 Reports Total (ECFA.org/surveys)



**Executive Summary:** The New Faces of Church Planting and Multisiting



**Funding:** What Does It Cost to Launch a New Church or Campus?



**Ethnicity/Race:** What Trends Are We Seeing with New Churches that Are Multiracial?



**Pandemic:** Did the Pandemic Change the Trajectory of Church Plants or Multisite Campuses?



**Multiplication/Replication:** What Are the Best Predictors of a Church's Ability to Multiply Itself?



**Church Plant vs Multisite:** Church Planting vs. Multisite Campus Launching: How Do They Differ?

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\* The survey launched February 22, 2022 via targeted emails and widespread social media. It closed May 30, 2022, with a total 3,286 participants, a number that was narrowed to 2,702 after data cleanup that included removal of duplicate entries from the same church, of survey takers outside of North America, of non-Protestant participants, and of survey responses with too few questions answered. The survey design used extensive skip logic such that each participant received 15 minutes of relevant questions, tailored to their circumstances. Thus, no survey taker responded to every question in the survey.

This report focuses on PANDEMIC issues for new churches. It tries to answer several questions including:

- How was the mental health of leaders impacted by the pandemic?
- What outreach strategies were different during the pandemic?
- What new models emerged during the pandemic?
- How was launch size impacted by the pandemic?
- How much of a pandemic attendance dip hit new churches and multisite campuses?
- Did the pandemic shift the balance of evangelism and discipling?

The following graphics each follow the format of a headline to show the main idea, a visualization of the research data, and at bottom the actual survey question(s). The N statements (usually bottom right) show the number of survey participants for the questions behind that particular graphic. When possible, medians are featured rather than averages, because medians are less susceptible to distortion by outliers.

## Launch Day Attendance Has Inched Downward for Years, with a Dip in 2020 but Bounceback in 2021

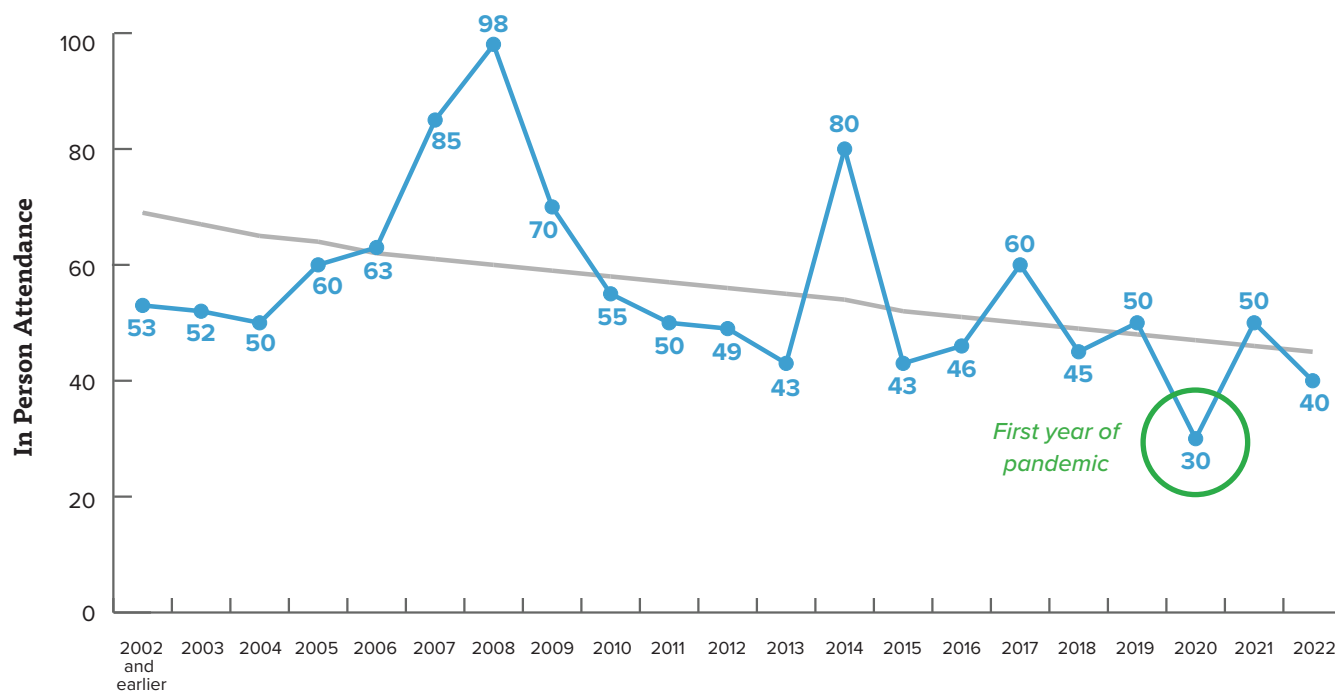


Table 1

N=1604

Question: What year did you publicly launch? (i.e., your new church began worship services that invited the public)  
 Question: When your church first publicly launched, what was the actual attendance that first week?

## Church Planters Today Launch at Age 42, A 6-Year Increase Over 15 Years

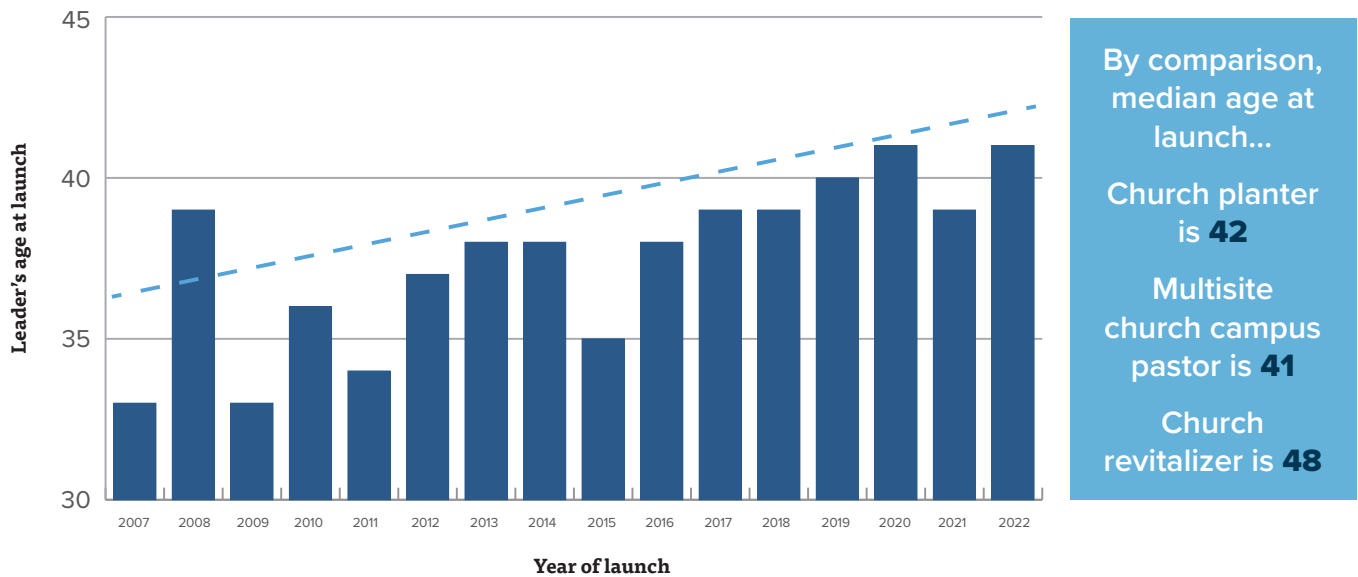


Table 2

N=1789

## The Pandemic Caused Only a Temporary Dip in the Ability for New Churches to Launch Large

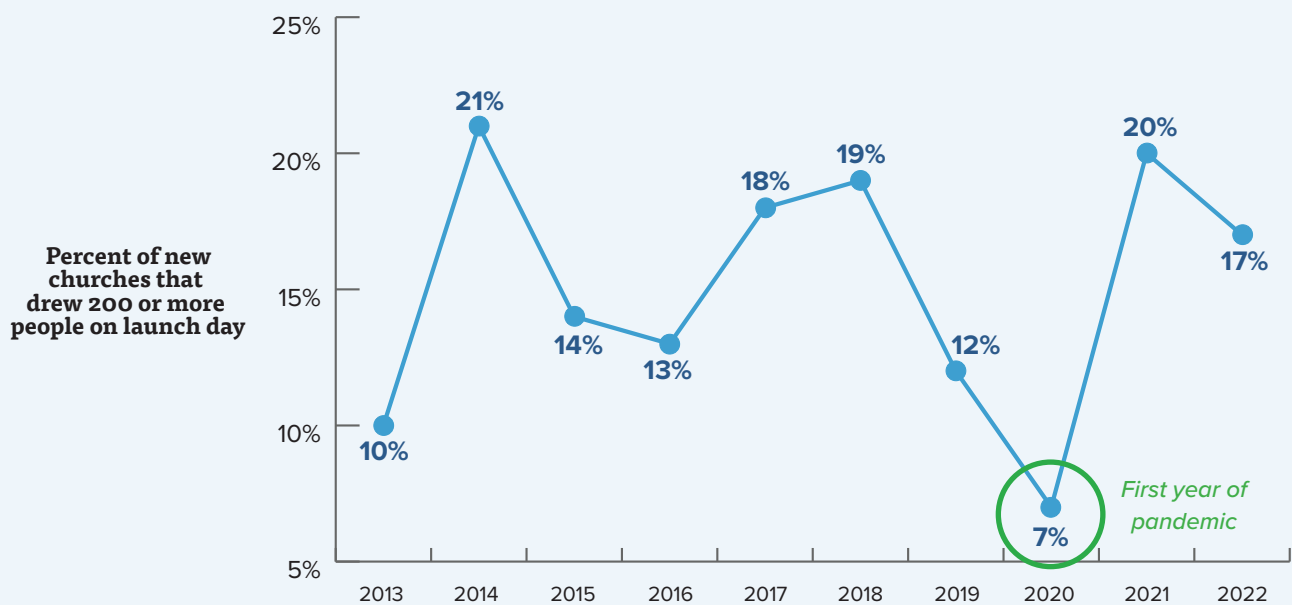


Table 3

N=1710

# Church Planters Said the Pandemic Did Not Change Their Level of Mental Health

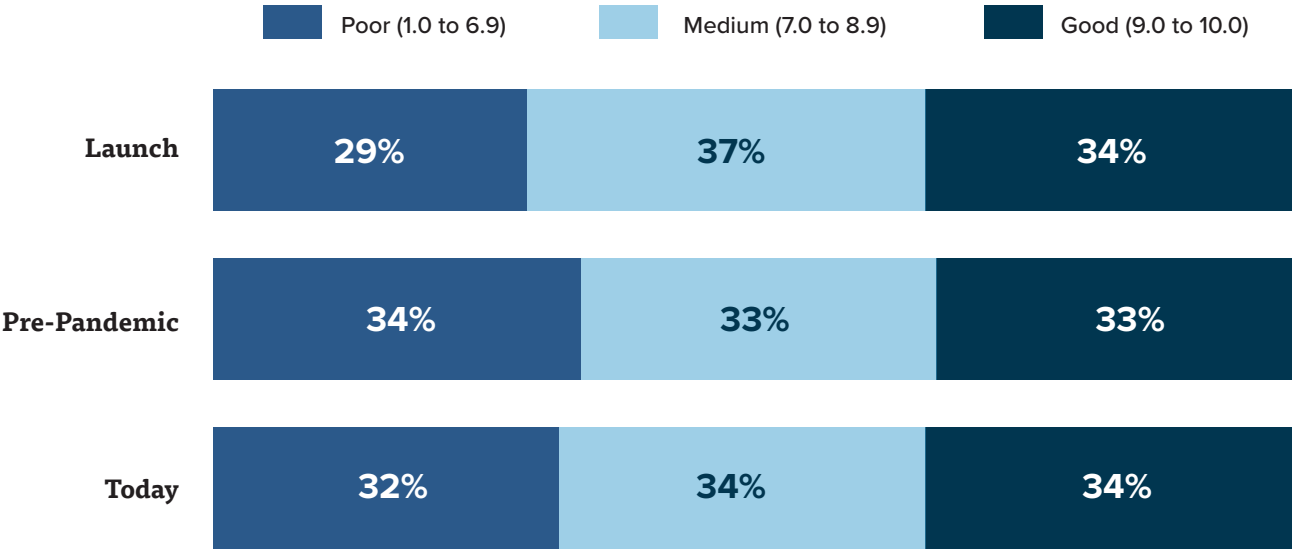


Table 4

N=204

Note: The median for all three questions was right at 8.0, which helped define what should be low, medium, and high in the scale above.

Question: On a scale of 1.0 (low) to 10.0 (high) how would you rate your mental health at the time of launch? Just before the pandemic (early 2020)? Today?

# First-Year Attendance Was Bigger Pre-Pandemic, Both for New Churches and Especially for Multisite Campuses

	New churches		Multisite Campuses	
	Attendance Launch Day	Attendance End of Year One	Attendance Launch Day	Attendance End of Year One
Pandemic launches (2020-2022)	40	45	60	48
Pre-Pandemic launches (2019 and earlier)	50	50	100	120

Table 5

N=1720

Question: What year did you publicly launch? (i.e., your new church or multisite campus began worship services that invited the public)

Question: When your church first publicly launched, what was the actual attendance that first week? At the end of the first year?

## Church Planters Showed Similar Approaches for Launches During and Before the Pandemic

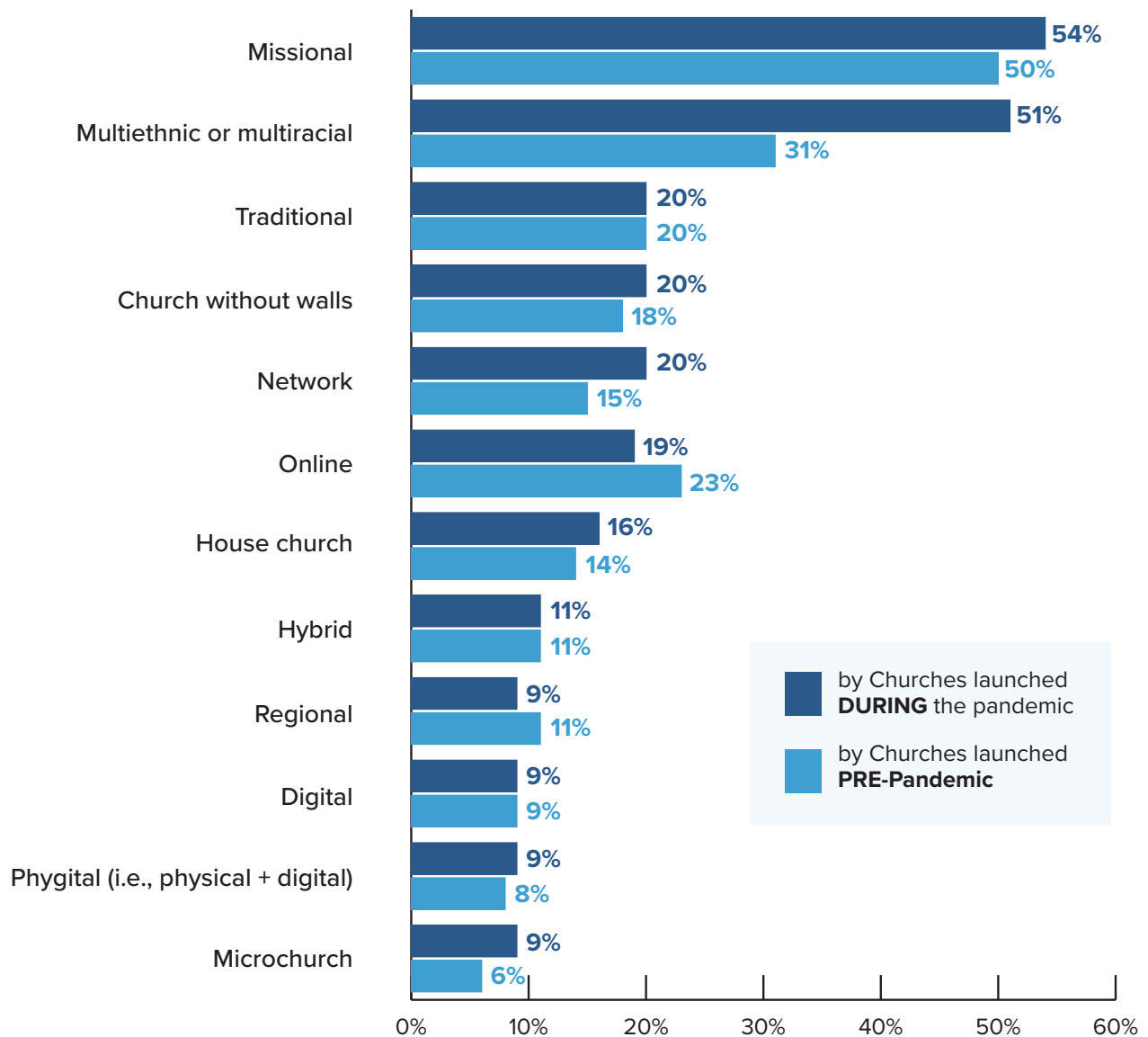


Table 6

N=1766

Question: Which words/names, if any, represent terms you regularly use to describe your current approach to “doing” church?  
Select ALL that apply. (22 choices offered)

## Online Connections, Meals, and Outdoor Events Topped the List of Pandemic Outreach

<b>23%</b>	<b>Mix of digital and in-person:</b> Churches experimented with a multitude of ways to involve online and in-person simultaneously (worship, Bible study, devotionals, prayer, more)
<b>19%</b>	<b>Food:</b> Dinner church or neighborhood meals designed for outreach
<b>16%</b>	<b>Events:</b> Community outreach events, including concerts and service projects, especially to disadvantaged people
<b>14%</b>	<b>Offsite worship:</b> Church services (most often called “pop-up church”) in community locations such as park, restaurant, coffee shop, or beach
<b>12%</b>	<b>Third places:</b> Discussion groups in non-church settings, such as pubs, coffee shops, restaurants, or homes
<b>7%</b>	<b>Mixed rhythm:</b> Alternating all-church meetings with smaller meetings for the rest of the month (whether in-person, online, or a hybrid mix)
<b>5%</b>	<b>More mixed rhythm:</b> Replacing a church service with all-church outreach
<b>4%</b>	<b>Niche:</b> Launching themed gatherings, such as men’s groups, mom’s groups, or other special interest group

Table 7

N=184

Question: New models: If you regularly gather in other ways than asked above, whether in-person or online, please explain.

## New Churches Put Heavier Emphasis on Evangelism Than Discipleship, But Discipleship Increased During the Pandemic

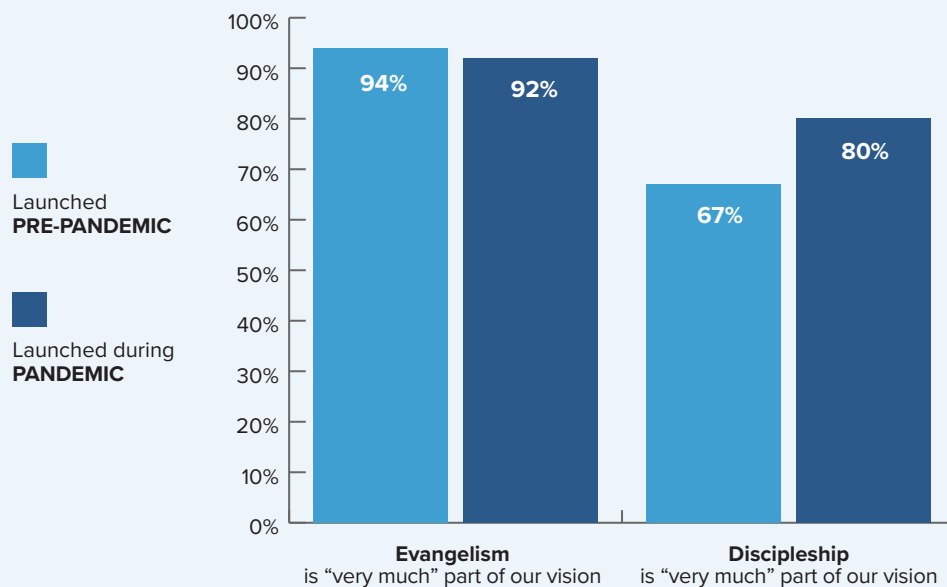


Table 8

N=131

Note: The headers above correspond with these definitions in the survey question:

Evangelism = To reach new people with Jesus' gospel

Discipleship = To help existing believers grow as disciples of Jesus

Question: When your church first launched, which of the following were part of your vision for ministry?

[Scale with three choices: Not at all, Somewhat, and Very much]

## For Churches Launched During the Pandemic, a Majority (63%) Came Through Transfer Growth, With 32% More from Conversion and Renewal Growth

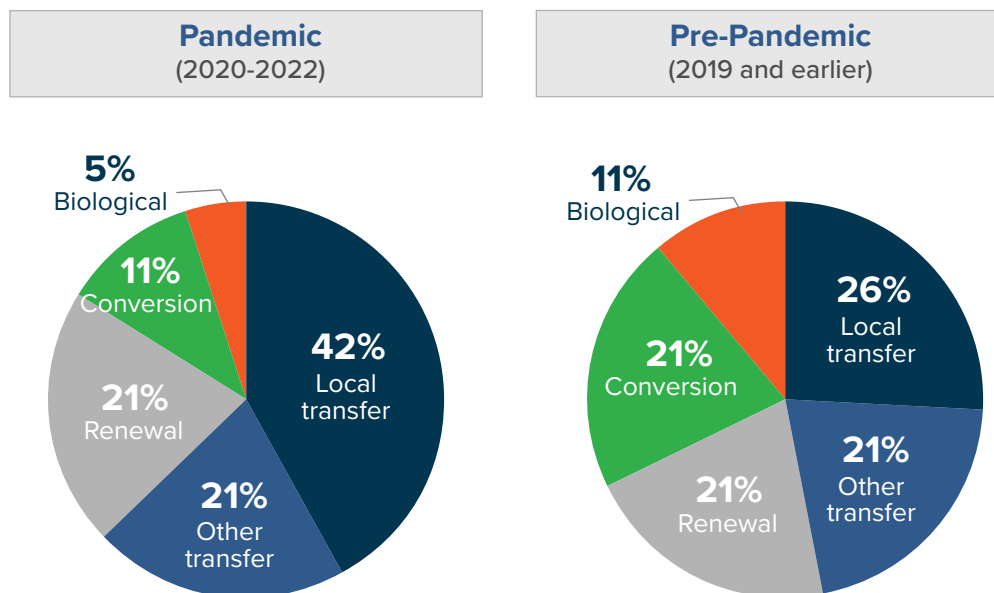


Table 9

N=220

NOTE: The exact wording on the five categories is:

Local transfer: Transfer growth (from LOCAL churchgoing Christians)

Other transfer: Transfer growth (from NEW-TO-YOUR-AREA churchgoing Christians)

Renewal: Renewal growth (from de-churched Christians)

Conversion: Conversion growth (from new Christians)

Biological: Biological growth (from church families having/adopting children)

Question: Estimate the percentage of your congregation today that's represented by the following. [5 categories offered, adding up to 100%]



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