STATISTICAL TRENDS IN USA AND CANADA FOR THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE: 2008-2023

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Introduction

Research and analysis represent some of the hard work any denomination needs to undertake for the sake of understanding its present and considering possible adjustments as it considers its future. At least in this study, statistical analysis is not intended to replace or supersede the work of the Church in prayer as it discerns the leadership of the Spirit, but rather as a resource that can be used as an additional tool for assessment and strategic planning.

The particular purpose of this paper is to examine key statistical data points for the Church of the Nazarene in the US/Canada especially over the past fifteen (in some cases, twenty) years. Rather than a random sample, this is a comprehensive study with data being drawn from annual pastors' reports. Key findings are presented for particular church domains, along with special notes, projections, analyses, and possible considerations for the future. Data for the Southwest field is included as a comparator to the US/Canada total to offer an example of regional variation. Special thanks to Rich Houseal and Laura Lance in the denominational research office for their assistance in the compilation and organization of the data.

Findings: Age of Senior Pastors in US/Canada (Percentage)

	2000	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023
Under 30	2.6	2.1	1.8	2.5	2.3	1.6	1.1
30-39	17.7	12.7	11.8	11.9	12.0	12.3	9.0
40-49	36.2	27.0	22.9	21.4	20.7	20.8	21.0
50-59	29.0	34.2	36.1	34.1	31.0	29.3	25.6
60-69	13.1	19.6	22.0	23.8	25.7	26.4	28.3
70+	1.4	4.3	5.4	6.4	8.4	9.6	11.8

Notes:

1) The pastoral cohort under the age of 40 dropped by more than 25% from 2000 (20.3%) to 2008 (14.8%). In the ensuing years, the percent of pastors under 40 remained fairly stable (14.8%, 13.6%, 14.4%, 14.3%, 13.9%) until 2023 (10.1%). So, the decreases in the under 40 cohort occurred primarily in the years between 2000-2008, and 2019-2023.
2) As a percent of the total cohort, there were half as many pastors under the age of 40 in 2023 (10.1%) as there were in 2000 (20.3%).
3) In 2023, there were more lead pastors in the US and Canada:
    a. over the age of 80 (1.8%) than under the age of 30 (1.1%)
    b. over the age of 70 (11.8%) than under the age of 40 (10.1%)
    c. over the age of 60 (40.1%) than under the age of 50 (31.1%).
4) In 2023, two thirds of pastors (65.7%) were over the age of 50.
5) The aging of the pastorate likely corresponds to an aging among congregants in general. (See data on youth and children below).

Projections: Given that the rate of the aging of the clergy does not appear to be slowing down, if current trends continue, the percent makeup of the clergy over the age of 60 will continue to increase by a little more than one percent per year. (There was an increase of 10 percentage points over the age of 60 in the past nine years. An increase of 16 percentage points over the past 15 years). Even if that moderates to some degree with the retirement of baby boomers, half of the pastoral cohort could be over the age of 60 by 2033. It remains to be seen whether or not the sudden rapid decline of pastors under the age of 40 over the past four years continues or if that was an aberration.

Analysis: Clearly, the pastoral cohort in the US/Canada is aging. Older pastors have some distinct strengths, including the wisdom that comes with years of pastoral experience. But younger pastors may also have some advantages. For example, younger pastors may resonate better with the current cultural context (e.g. tech savvy) and may be better able to attract and minister to young families. Regardless, if the pastoral cohort continues to get older, it will likely have an impact (e.g. reflecting and contributing to the overall aging of congregations). There are a number of variables that may be contributing to the aging of the pastoral cohort and to the decline in young adults entering the ministry, including:

1) Older pastors are mostly boomers, a generational cohort that constitutes an unusually high percentage of the total population. It would be expected that the larger percentage of people in this age group would increase the percentage of pastors at every stage through their life span, including those now in their sixties and seventies.
2) As boomers near retirement, it appears that there is not a corresponding increase in the pastoral cohort in the equally large population cohort of millennials (now in their late 20's, 30's and early 40's). This could lead to a shortage of (or increased demand for) pastors which could contribute to an increase in church mergers, an increase in the percentage of pastors going into ministry later in life, and possibly an increase in the number of pastors serving in multiple posts ("circuit riders").
3) There is a dramatic increase in the percentage of young adults in the dominant culture who have "no religious preference."[1] While the increase of "nones" is not primarily among committed evangelicals,[2] this still represents a change in the culture that may indirectly impact the number of young adults going into pastoral ministry, including in the Church of the Nazarene.
4) Denominational identity for many may be moderated as some young adults consider themselves to be more broadly Christian than more particularly Nazarene. This "post-denominational" factor may be correlated with the rise of young adult participation in non-denominational churches.
5) The psychological makeup of young adults has changed over the years with research indicating that major life decisions (like marriage and vocation) are being somewhat

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/
[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/

delayed.[3] This may have an impact on the number of young adults considering (or sensing a call into) a life of pastoral ministry.

6) The cost of ministerial preparation, especially undergraduate, has increased with a corresponding potential increase in educational debt. This may serve as a deterrent to pursuing pastoral ministry as a life-long vocation, especially given the relatively low salaries of pastors and the potential difficulty for repaying student loans. This may contribute to more young adults preparing for other service vocations.
7) With congregational size smaller than in the past and, as we shall see, local church finances lower than in the past (when controlling for inflation), fewer churches may be able to afford staff (e.g. youth pastors) which has traditionally served as a first step for many into lead pastor roles.

Looking to the Future: Some educational regions have developed gatherings and retreats to provide discernment opportunities for high school and/or college students who may have the gifts and graces for pastoral ministry. Those leading these retreats could serve as denominational resource persons as they may have insights into the experiences of those being called as well as suggestions about how to address some of the challenges of preparing for ministry. Given that educational debt is likely a factor, increasing scholarships for those going into ministry could also be helpful. In addition, Christian education may need to include greater emphasis on the particular history, theology and mission of the Church of the Nazarene in ways that would better help young adults understand and be drawn to service in the Church.

Findings: Average Morning Worship Attendance (In Thousands)

US/Canada

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
IN PERSON	519	507	481	456	436	330	*(-36%)
ONLINE						127	
TOTAL						457	(-12%)
ADJUSTED TOTAL						393	(-24%)

Southwest

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
IN PERSON	70	72	68	60	56	38	*(-46%)
ONLINE						17	
TOTAL						55	(-21%)
ADJUSTED TOTAL						47	(-33%)

*Percentage differences are 2023 data in comparison to 2008 data.

Notes:

1) ONLINE attendance counts are hard to measure and difficult to compare to IN PERSON attendance. In some cases reported ONLINE attendance may be a rough estimate. Online viewing also provides viewers the opportunity to multi-task (e.g. watching a

[3] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/23/young-adults-in-the-u-s-are-reaching-key-life-milestones-later-than-in-the-past/

football game). Given these, and other, contingencies and given that most "current metric platforms" count anyone who is online for one minute, we are suggesting the additional measure of ADJUSTED TOTAL attendance which would count the IN PERSON total plus half of the ONLINE total. (See Appendix A)

2) The decline in average worship attendance is precipitous and continuous. There is no indication that the trend is "bottoming out".
   - Compared to 2008, the 2011 IN PERSON (Total) decreased by 12,000.
   - The 2014 attendance dropped an additional 26,000.
   - In 2017, the additional drop was 25,000.
   - In 2019 (two years later), it was an additional 20,000.
3) The ADJUSTED TOTAL dropped about 40,000 in the past four years, which is consistent with the 20,000 person decline in the previous 2 years. So, currently, the ADJUSTED TOTAL average morning worship attendance (IN PERSON plus half the ONLINE) is declining by about 10,000 per year. That's the equivalent of a net annual loss of 200 congregations averaging 50 in morning worship.

Projections: On the one hand, we might expect the slope of the decline in morning worship attendance to even out. On the other hand, as the preponderance of older congregants move into their retirement years and begin to numerically decline in church attendance, we might expect further declines in total worship attendance. At the current rate, in seven years (2030), the average IN PERSON attendance will be half of the IN PERSON total attendance reported in 2008. (260,000 compared to 519,000 in 2008)

Analysis: Most denominations have been reporting declines in membership and attendance leading some to label the current context as post-denominational.[4] Mainline denominations began their decline in the 1960's and have continued to decline.[5] Evangelicals peaked as a percentage of the total population in 1993 (30%) and have steadily declined over the past 30 years (22% in 2018).[6] The peak year for worship attendance in the Church of the Nazarene was 2005. Some of the thoughts on numerical decline of denominations include:

1) Congregants attending, but not as often, which decreases the sense of community or "life together" of congregations.[7] [8]
2) Increase of the "Nones" and Non-denominational churches drawing congregants away from established denominations. About 13% of the American population self-identify as non-denominational, more than those in all Mainline denominations.[9]

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[4] https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx
[5] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/chapter-1-the-changing-religious-composition-of-the-u-s/
[6] https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/mainline-protestant-evangelical-decline-survey-us-nones.html
[7] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/
[8] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/
[9] https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/the-future-of-american-christianity

3) Denominations becoming identified with particular social issues and political parties.[10] For example, in a 2023 study, 60% of unaffiliated adults under the age of 30 cited negative religious teachings about LGBTQ as a reason for leaving the religious tradition they grew up in.[11]
4) Influence of technology (e.g. the Internet) on community life in America.[12]
5) Out of touch with cultural shifts in society (seen as anachronistic).
6) Inadequate discipling of children and youth.

Looking to the Future: Local congregations and districts may need to consider new and creative ways to engage their communities in mission. This could include logistical changes like multiple use of facilities, development of house churches, and reallocation of time, money and energy for new and potentially different models of church development. It may also be a time to include more theoretical and conceptual analysis, both theologically and sociologically, about the nature and mission of the Church in contemporary American society.

Findings: Median Congregational Worship Attendance

US/Canada

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
IN PERSON	60	59	56	52	50	38	*(-37%)
ONLINE						5	
TOTAL						48	(-20%)
**ADJUSTED TOTAL						43	(-32%)

Southwest

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
IN PERSON	67	69	64	57	56	34.5	(-49%)
ONLINE						5	
TOTAL						45	(-33%)
**ADJUSTED TOTAL						39.5	(-41%)

*Percentage differences are 2023 data in comparison to 2008 data.
**The sum of IN PERSON and ONLINE.

Notes:
1) Here again, there is precipitous decline, especially for IN PERSON attendance. And the rate of decline is increasing.

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[10] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/22/us-churches-closing-religion-covid-christianity#:~:text=those%20at%20church.%E2%80%9D-,About%20a%20quarter%20of%20the%20young%20adults%20who%20dropped%20out,and%20social%20issues%2C%20McConnell%20said.
[11] https://ministrywatch.com/study-unaffiliated-americans-are-the-only-growing-religious-group/
[12] https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/10/community-in-the-digital-age/408961/

2) The percentage decline in average worship attendance is greater than the percentage decline in total churches. As a result, the median worship attendance is declining more rapidly than the total worship attendance.
3) The median worship attendance varies by region. IN PERSON median is highest for the NNU region (45) followed by Canada (42) and Mount Vernon (41). The TNU, SNU and ENC regions were near the national median at 37 followed by ONU (35), SNU (35) and PLNU (34.5).

Projections: The median worship attendance was declining by about one per year prior to 2019. Using 2023 as the new base (post-COVID), if the rate of decline continues, the median IN PERSON would be just above 30 by 2030 and the ADJUSTED TOTAL (IN PERSON plus ONLINE) median would be between 35 and 40. On the other hand, given the major decline for the In Person median attendance during the COVID years, there may be a post-COVID rebound for many congregations.

Analysis: Given that the median size of Nazarene congregations for IN PERSON worship is 38, and could decline even more, in many cases people are gathering for worship in what seems like empty sanctuaries. In some cases, it may also question the value of maintaining properties for such limited use. An increasing number of congregations may be reaching the point where they are no longer viable. This may especially be the case in congregations that are aging.

Findings: Children's Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
US/Canada	102	102	98	94	86	70	*(-31%)
Southwest	13.9	14.5	13.9	13.3	11.0	8.3	(-40%)

US/Canada Youth Discipleship Ministries (In Thousands)

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
US/Canada	58	65	60	55	51	41	*(-29%)
Southwest	8.7	10.9	9.2	7.9	7.0	5.0	(-43%)

Notes

1) The decline in children and youth attendance mirrors the decline in morning worship attendance.
2) When the 2023 youth totals are compared to the peak year (2011) the decline is even greater (-37%) than comparing the data to 2008 (-29%).
3) The median number of children per congregation is six. The median number of youth is three.

Projections: Children's discipleship Ministries has been declining at an average of four thousand per year over the past six years. If that trend continues, in five years (2028) there will be 50,000 children reported in discipleship ministries, less than half the number reported in 2008.

Likewise, if the current trend continues, the average number of youth will decline in five years (2028) to less than half the number of youth reported in 2011 or 2014.

Analysis: The declines in children and youth ministries of -31% and -29% are less than the decline of IN PERSON worship (-37%), but greater than the ADJUSTED TOTAL average worship attendance (-24%). While this is subject to interpretation, comparison of the children and youth data with the ADJUSTED worship attendance may indicate that there is a proportionately greater loss of families with children in the total attendance decline, which, in turn, may contribute to the aging of congregations. There is also the possibility that with the addition of counting online attendance, there are proportionately fewer children and youth attending online.

Looking to the Future: Focusing on ministry to families has always been a strength for the Church of the Nazarene. Re-focusing on children, youth and families may be helpful as congregations build for the future. For those who have not already done so, congregations offering online worship may want to consider developing online ministries for youth and children.

Findings: US/Canada -- Primary Language English Congregations

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
US/Canada	4351	4295	4251	4217	4190	3946	*(-9%)
Southwest	421	414	409	406	398	373	(-11%)

US/Canada – Primary Language Spanish Congregations

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
US/Canada	444	468	534	623	638	615	*(+38%)
Southwest	121	134	169	183	178	161	(+33%)

US/Canada – Other (Primary Language) Congregations

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023	
US/Canada	235	239	251	280	285	316	*(+34%)
Southwest	62	67	75	78	81	82	(+32%)

*Percentage differences are 2023 data in comparison to 2008 data.

Notes:

1) While English speaking congregations have declined in number and attendance, the number of SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations sharply increased over the past 15 years both numerically and as a percentage of the total.
2) In 2008, SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations combined accounted for 13.5% of all active churches. In 2023, the percentage had grown to 18.5%.

3) The growth in the number of SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations has leveled off over the past four years with 923 in 2019 and 931 in 2023.
4) The number of SPANISH congregations in the Southwest declined over the past six years from 183 to 161. This decline accounts for most of the decline of SPANISH-SPEAKING congregations in the US/Canada.

Projections: In the past, the number of new congregations may have been associated with the numbers of new immigrants coming to the US and Canada. The recent decline in SPANISH-SPEAKING congregations may be reflective of a period with lower immigration. As immigration has picked up over the past couple years, the number of SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations may begin to increase again. But in the meantime, with SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations flattening out, the increase in their share of the total number of congregations is primarily a result of the declining number of ENGLISH-SPEAKING churches. It is reasonable to assume that SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations will account for nearly 20% of all active congregations in the next five years.

Analysis: The decline in overall attendance for US and Canada is somewhat mitigated by the increase in SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations. These congregations increasingly contribute to the total number in attendance, which means that the decline in ENGLISH-SPEAKING congregations, as a whole, remains even greater than the aggregate numbers indicate. On the other hand, SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations tend to be newer and on average, smaller, which brings down the median worship numbers for the whole. (SPANISH worship attendance median is 28. OTHER LANGUAGE median attendance is 17.5).

Looking to the Future: In some communities, more consideration may need to be given to the development of multi-congregational churches and/or the process of transferring facilities from ENGLISH-SPEAKING congregations to SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations. This could be enhanced through educating pastors and leaders on how to navigate these changes both missionally and organizationally.

Findings: Financial Trends in Local Congregations (In Millions)

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023
US/Canada	838	737	737	733	739	798
*CPI adj.		.914	.895	.853	.818	.685
**Adj. Total		673	660	625	605	547
**** %Change		-20%	-21%	-25%	-28%	-35%

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023
Southwest	112	93	93	94	98	107
** CPI Adj. Total		85	83	80	80	73
***Percent Change		-19%	-20%	-27%	-26%	-35%

CPI Adjusted Median Per Capita Giving

	2008	2011	2014	2017	2019	2023
US/Canada	1,616	1,408	1,468	1,398	1,424.	****1,391 (-14%)
Southwest	1,614	1,264	1,313	1,367	1,471	1,564 (-3%)

*The US Bureau of Labor calculator was used to establish the CPI adjustment multiplier.
**The baseline for the CPI adjustment was set at 2008 to indicate the subsequent strength of giving relative to that which was reported prior to the last recession.
***The "Percent Change" is CPI percent adjusted total income relative to 2008.
**** Per Capita based on the total adjusted average worship attendance.

Notes

1) The congregational median giving for all purposes (GFP) is $75,305. The median for tithes and offerings was $70,390. To say it another way, in 2023, half of the churches in the US and Canada had less than $70,390 from tithes and offerings to cover all operating expenses. The median GFP varied by region with the NNU region being the highest at $118,009 and the TNU region being the lowest at $64,171.
2) Giving held steady after the recession of 2008, and then increased sharply over the past four years. While per capita giving is lower than 2008, controlling for inflation, it held steady since then. And in the Southwest, per capita giving has steadily increased, even controlling for inflation. This probably means that as churches in the Southwest were experiencing higher numerical losses, those who stayed tended to be strong financial supporters.
3) While financial giving increased during the COVID years, it actually decreased when controlling for inflation.
4) Controlling for inflation, congregations today have 65% of the annual financial resources (giving for all purposes) that they had in 2008.

Analysis: Giving patterns for generational cohorts are higher for Builders and Boomers and lower for Gen X and Millennials. Looking to the future, this may affect per capita giving as more Builders and Boomers retire and live on limited incomes, and/or decrease as a cohort in overall numbers. Some of the ways churches often navigate decreasing finances include increases in deferred maintenance, salary cuts, releasing staff, pastors going from full time to bi-vocational, and discontinuation of health insurance. Given the current assumptions of what a church needs to operate even at the most basic level, these necessary cutbacks generally have an impact on the congregation's ability to fulfill its mission of reaching and serving the community.

Looking to the future: Church facilities in some communities may be under-utilized assets. Sharing facilities with organizations that are consistent with the mission of the Church may provide ministry partnerships that better serve the community as well as increased financial support. These may include schools, non-profits, and immigrant congregations that may or may not be Nazarene.

Conclusion

Summary
The pastoral cohort for the Church of the Nazarene in the US/Canada has been growing older and congregations have experienced numerical and financial decline over the past 15 years.

1. In 2023, forty percent of pastors were over the age of 60.
2. Between 2008 and 2023, total average IN PERSON morning worship declined by 36% and the TOTAL ADJUSTED morning worship declined by 24%.
3. In that same period, the median IN PERSON average declined from 60 to 38 and the ADJUSTED median declined from 60 to 43 (combined medians of IN PERSON and ONLINE attendance).
4. Children's ministries declined by 31% and youth ministries declined by 29%. In 2023, the median children's reported attendance in US/Canada congregations was six. The median number of youth was three.
5. Between 2008 and 2023, the number of ENGLISH-SPEAKING congregations declined by 9% while the number of SPANISH-SPEAKING congregations increased by 38% and the number of OTHER LANGUAGE congregations increased by 34%.
6. Between 2008 and 2023, controlling for inflation, Giving for All Purposes declined by 35%. In 2023, the median giving for all purposes was $75,305.

Projections
If current trends continue, the Church in the US and Canada would approximate the following in 2030. It should be noted here that these are not predictions but projections. That is, this is simply taking the trajectory of the data in the past and extending it into the future.

1. Nearly half (47%) of the pastoral cohort would be over the age of 60.
2. IN PERSON worship attendance for the US and Canada would be half of what it was in 2008 with a median worship attendance just over 30. The decline would be somewhat higher for children, youth and young adults.
3. There would be a net of 300 fewer ENGLISH-SPEAKING congregations, which could be partially offset by an increase of 100 SPANISH and OTHER LANGUAGE congregations. (Several factors make this harder to estimate.)
4. Controlling for inflation, giving for all purposes would be about 55% of what it was in 2008.

Looking to the Future
Many churches across the country are flourishing. But these are mostly anomalous and don't reflect the state of the Church as a whole. Like most other denominations in the US and Canada, the Church of the Nazarene is experiencing major decline. This, of course, should be a matter of prayer as church leaders discern how to navigate the challenges in the current environment. In addition, church leaders may want to include an analysis of statistical trends as they consider strategic priorities for the future. With declining numbers of congregants gathering in person for worship, and decreasing financial resources, many churches may be looking at a future of mostly-empty sanctuaries, skeletal pastoral staff, and older facilities with significant deferred

maintenance. This may require thinking about new models of ministry. Churches, like other organizations, tend to resist change until those making the decisions sense that the organization is in crisis. For many local churches, a sense of crisis may create an opportunity both out of missional vision and financial necessity to move from "survival" mode to new and creative ways to engage their communities in mission.

Appendix

ADJUSTED TOTAL WORSHIP ATTENDANCE
as a Measure for Comparison

Given the addition of online attendance to the total, there is probably no way to adequately compare the average worship attendance data of 2023 to previous years. The denominational guideline issued by the General Secretary in May of 2023, is as follows:

> "In fulfilling our call to "make Christ-like disciples in the nations," we encourage every local church to maintain an online presence. This is a great strategy of outreach and engagement with our communities. A local church's online presence is a great front porch for our churches. Most people do not walk through the doors of a church without first engaging online. It is difficult to measure online attendance.
>
> The knowledge of attaining 50% viewership is not attainable using current metric platforms. We want every church to measure their worship attendance in the following ways. Tracking attendance with in-person and online attendance. We define online attendance as being engaged for 1-minute with a video stream or posted video on the internet either live or during the following week. The platforms that allow streaming only give 3-second views, 15-second views, and 1-minute views. We suggest using the 1-minute view because that is the longest unit of time measured.
>
> We encourage engagement with online viewers through a response to a question, making a comment, or asking for a prayer request. We do not recommend using a multiplier. A 1:1 ratio will offset any inflation of counting 1-minute views. We also hope that viewing will engage a viewer in a discipling process that ultimately leads them to in person attendance in worship or small group."

New technologies have created great opportunities for churches to expand their ministries through online capabilities. This not only allows churches to minister to some of their own members who cannot attend, but it may also be a ministry to others in their community and around the world. It may also create an opportunity for people in their community to "check them out" before showing up in person. Many of our churches developed some of these tools out of necessity during the COVID years when In Person attendance was often limited.

But when it comes to recording worship attendance for a local congregation, there are several questions that arise. In some cases, ONLINE attendance may be an estimate. An examination of the data from pastors' reports, an unusual number of churches reported online worship totals that were in round numbers of 50, 100, 150, etc. A rough count shows about 65 churches reporting such rounded off numbers.

And then there is the question about whether ONLINE participation is equivalent to IN PERSON. Certainly, there is relational and communal value to being present with the congregation in worship. Participating in singing and sharing at the Lord's Table are examples that are difficult to replicate online. In some cases there may also be the temptation to multi-task. (For example, doing housework, talking on the phone, or watching a football game with the worship service on in the background).

Another concern is the number of churches reporting large ONLINE worship attendance figures in comparison to the IN PERSON attendance (a figure which should represent to some degree the leadership base of the congregation). Again, examining the data indicates that about 428 congregations reported a larger ONLINE worship attendance than IN PERSON attendance. This, of course, may be an indication of the outreach of the church into the community through online ministries. Looking further at the churches that reported at least as many ONLINE as IN PERSON breaks out as follows:

16	churches only offered ONLINE worship
237	the same IN PERSON and ONLINE up to double the number ONLINE
79	between twice and triple the number ONLINE compared to IN PERSON
26	between three and four times the number ONLINE compared to IN PERSON
19	between four and five times the number ONLINE compared to IN PERSON
36	between five and ten times the number ONLINE compared to IN PERSON
13	between 10 and 100 times the number ONLINE compared to IN PERSON
2	over 100 times the number ONLINE compared to IN PERSON

Some of the reported ONLINE numbers are quite large compared to the reported IN PERSON attendance. While these may be great examples of outreach into the community, it may be problematic to report them as equivalent to IN PERSON worship. Here are some examples:

IN PERSON	ONLINE
46	1305
58	399
79	640
69	500
87	697
27	685
125	1000
46	700
52	500
2	10,200

Part of the question is what can be considered online participation in worship? Does it imply that there is actually a worship service that online viewers are logging into? Would hits on an online blog count? Given that most online technologies count anyone who is logged on for one minute, how do we account for those who are church surfing rather than attending a worship service? And, of course, there is no way to tell if these are accurate counts, estimates or perhaps exaggerations. But counting ONLINE worship does have an impact on the total average worship numbers for the denomination, especially if you include it as equivalent to IN PERSON in the total count.

With all of that taken into consideration, I am suggesting an ADJUSTED TOTAL attendance that counts IN PERSON attendance plus half of ONLINE attendance. Admittedly, this is somewhat arbitrary, but using this formula gives us a more reasonable way of comparing worship attendance in 2023 with previous years and the TOTAL ADJUSTED Attendance numbers are more consistent with the trajectory of attendance in previous years than the category of TOTAL ATTENDANCE.