

## THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON THE 2021 ANNUAL CHURCH STATISTICAL REPORT

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The following report analyzes the statistics as reported in the 2021 Annual Church Statistical Report (ACSR) in order to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ACSR includes statistical activity for 31,781 churches as reported by pastors on their Annual Pastor's Reports (APR).<sup>1</sup> The Board of General Superintendents (BGS) issued two rulings concerning the APR for 2021 (July 2020<sup>2</sup> and December 2020<sup>3</sup>). These rulings allowed the local church to take one of three actions regarding the reporting of attendance figures: 1) Not to report attendance figures, which the database records as a zero, 2) use the previous year's attendance figures, or 3) report the average attendance the church experienced throughout the year.

In addition to the pandemic's impact on attendance, there are other statistics where the pandemic's impact may be measured. These include:

- the number of new Nazarenes
- the number of new and active churches
- members lost by death
- church income

As each of the above areas is considered, regional differences will also be examined.

### *Worship Attendance Reporting*

There were 28,822 churches reported as active for the 2021 statistical year. Table 1 shows the various ways churches reported worship attendance, and breaks the counts down by region. Overall, 20.6% of churches did not report a worship attendance figure. It is possible that some of these churches were Parent Affiliated Churches (PAC), and that their worship attendance was reported with their parent church.

The Africa Region had the highest percentage of churches not reporting worship attendance (36.9%), and was the only region where the percentage not reporting worship attendance was above the global average of 20.6%. Africa was also the only region where not reporting worship attendance was the most common method used (slightly higher than the combined "Reported Different" columns total of 35.4%). The USA/Canada Region used this method the least (10.1%).

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<sup>1</sup> The Annual Statistical Report shows 23,508 organized churches at the start of the year. It also shows 733 newly organized churches, 438 disorganized or merged churches, and 6,807 churches that are not yet organized, for a total of 31,781 churches.

<sup>2</sup> TEMP07-2020-08: Annual Reporting -- At this time, there is no requirement to record attendance, but we do recommend that district superintendents and pastors work together on accountability. Additionally, we ask all pastors to utilize the Annual Pastor's Report (APR), specifically to record membership and giving for the current period. However, for purposes of the APR 2019 attendance statistics may be utilized for the comparable months of 2020.

<sup>3</sup> TEMP12-2020-01: APR For The COVID Year -- Given the limitations of attendance during the pandemic, Annual Pastor's Reports will be exempted from reporting morning worship and discipleship attendance. The remainder of the report should be completed as required.

Using the same worship attendance figure as the previous year was the most common method for reporting worship attendance in the USA/Canada Region (53.2%). It should be noted that the previous year's worship attendance was pre-populated into the APR reporting system shortly before districts in the USA/Canada Region started entering their APR reports. In addition, it is impossible to know when a church used their 2020 worship attendance for 2021, and when a church reported their actual 2021 figure and it just happened to be the same as 2020. Overall, this method of reporting was used by 34.6% of all churches. The Eurasia Region had the second highest percentage of churches use the same worship attendance figure as the previous year (36.3%). The Asia-Pacific Region had the lowest percentage of churches report the same worship attendance as the previous year (23.1%).

		<b>Table 1: Worship Attendance Reporting (# of Churches)</b>					<b>Total</b>
		<b>Did Not Report Worship Attend.</b>	<b>Reported Same Attend. as Previous Year</b>	<b>Reported Different, Lower Attend.</b>	<b>Reported Different, Higher Attend.</b>	<b>New Churches</b>	
<b>Africa</b>	Count	2,999	2,203	992	1,886	50	8,130
	% within Africa	36.9%	27.1%	12.2%	23.2%	0.6%	100.0%
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>	Count	313	465	532	615	90	2,015
	% within Asia-Pacific	15.5%	23.1%	26.4%	30.5%	4.5%	100.0%
<b>Eurasia</b>	Count	1,181	2,801	1,816	1,632	292	7,722
	% within Eurasia	15.3%	36.3%	23.5%	21.1%	3.8%	100.0%
<b>Mesoamerica</b>	Count	485	1,025	962	780	120	3,372
	% within Mesoamerica	14.4%	30.4%	28.5%	23.1%	3.6%	100.0%
<b>South America</b>	Count	438	781	677	627	16	2,539
	% within South America	17.3%	30.8%	26.7%	24.7%	0.6%	100.0%
<b>USA/Canada</b>	Count	508	2,684	1,226	539	87	5,044
	% within USA/Canada	10.1%	53.2%	24.3%	10.7%	1.7%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	5,924	9,959	6,205	6,079	655	28,822
	% within all regions	20.6%	34.6%	21.5%	21.1%	2.3%	100.0%

A plurality of churches (42.6%) reported a worship attendance figure that was different from the previous year (combined "Reported Different" columns total). This percentage was almost evenly divided between those that reported a lower worship attendance (21.5%), and those that reported a higher worship attendance (21.1%). On the Asia-Pacific Region, the percentage of churches that reported a worship attendance higher than the previous year was 30.5%. This was the Asia-Pacific Region's largest category of churches, and the only region where this occurred (see Table 1).

New churches were placed in their own column on Table 1 since they could not be compared to the previous year. Of these churches, 27.3% did not report a worship attendance figure. For those that did report a worship attendance figure, the mean was 22, and the standard deviation was 30.

The total worship attendance figure for 2021 was 1,460,348, which was 93,272 (-6%) less than the 2020 worship total of 1,553,620. Churches that did not report a worship attendance figure in 2021 (5,924) reported 68,961 worshippers in 2020. This was equivalent to 4.4% of the total in 2020. In order to compare the mean average worship reported by the 12,284 churches in which 2021 worship

attendance was different from 2020 worship attendance, a paired samples T-Test was performed. The T-Test was statistically significant,  $t(12,283) = -2.628$ ,  $p < .009$ , and showed the average worship attendance in these churches declined by 2.4 (2020 mean worship = 61.4; 2021 mean worship = 59.0). The change in the standard deviation between 2020 and 2021 showed a decrease of 52.3 (2020 SD = 197.2; 2021 SD = 144.9), indicating the range of attendance figures reported had contracted.

### *Discipleship Attendance Reporting*

Patterns for reporting discipleship attendance were similar to those for worship attendance. Table 2 shows the various ways churches reported discipleship attendance, and breaks the counts down by region. Overall, 23.1% of churches did not report discipleship attendance. As noted in the section on worship attendance, it is possible that some of these churches were Parent Affiliated Churches (PAC), and that their discipleship attendance was reported with their Parent Church.

		<b>Table 2: Discipleship Attendance Reporting (# of Churches)</b>					Total
		Did Not Report Discipleship Attend.	Reported Same Attend. as Previous Year	Reported Different, Lower Attend.	Reported Different, Higher Attend.	New Churches	
<b>Africa</b>	Count	2,944	2,209	1,063	1,864	50	8,130
	% within Africa	36.2%	27.2%	13.1%	22.9%	0.6%	100.0%
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>	Count	438	378	564	545	90	2,015
	% within Asia-Pacific	21.7%	18.8%	28.0%	27.0%	4.5%	100.0%
<b>Eurasia</b>	Count	1,479	2,850	1,683	1,418	292	7,722
	% within Eurasia	19.2%	36.9%	21.8%	18.4%	3.8%	100.0%
<b>Mesoamerica</b>	Count	609	950	912	781	120	3,372
	% within Mesoamerica	18.1%	28.2%	27.0%	23.2%	3.6%	100.0%
<b>South America</b>	Count	594	693	646	590	16	2,539
	% within South America	23.4%	27.3%	25.4%	23.2%	0.6%	100.0%
<b>USA/Canada</b>	Count	603	2,545	1,094	715	87	5,044
	% within USA/Canada	12.0%	50.5%	21.7%	14.2%	1.7%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	6,667	9,625	5,962	5,913	655	28,822
	% within all regions	23.1%	33.4%	20.7%	20.5%	2.3%	100.0%

As with worship attendance, the Africa Region had the highest percentage of churches not reporting discipleship attendance (36.2%), and was the only region where the percentage not reporting discipleship attendance was above the global average of 23.1%. Africa was also the only region where not reporting discipleship attendance was the most common method used (just slightly higher than the combined “Reported Different” columns total of 36.0%). The USA/Canada Region used this method the least (12.0%).

Reporting the same discipleship attendance figure as the previous year was the most common method for reporting worship attendance in the USA/Canada Region (50.5%). Again, it should be noted that the previous year's discipleship attendance was pre-populated into the APR reporting system shortly before districts in the USA/Canada Region started entering their APR reports. In addition, it is impossible to know when a church used their 2020 discipleship attendance for 2021, and when a church reported their actual 2021 figure and it just happened to be the same as 2020. Overall, this method of reporting was used by 33.4% of all churches. The Eurasia Region had the second highest percentage of churches use the same discipleship attendance figure as the previous year (36.9%). The Asia-Pacific Region had the lowest percentage of churches report the same discipleship attendance as the previous year (18.8%).

A plurality of churches (41.2%) reported a discipleship attendance figure that was different from the previous year (combined "Reported Different" columns total). This percentage was almost evenly divided between those that reported a lower discipleship attendance (20.7%), and those that reported a higher discipleship attendance (20.5%). The Africa Region was the only region where a larger percentage of churches reported a higher discipleship attendance than the previous year (22.9%) vs. those reporting a lower attendance (13.1%).

New churches were placed in their own column on Table 2 since they could not be compared to the previous year. Of these churches, 34.4% did not report a discipleship attendance figure. For those that did report a discipleship attendance figure, the mean was 24.5, and the standard deviation was 25.4.

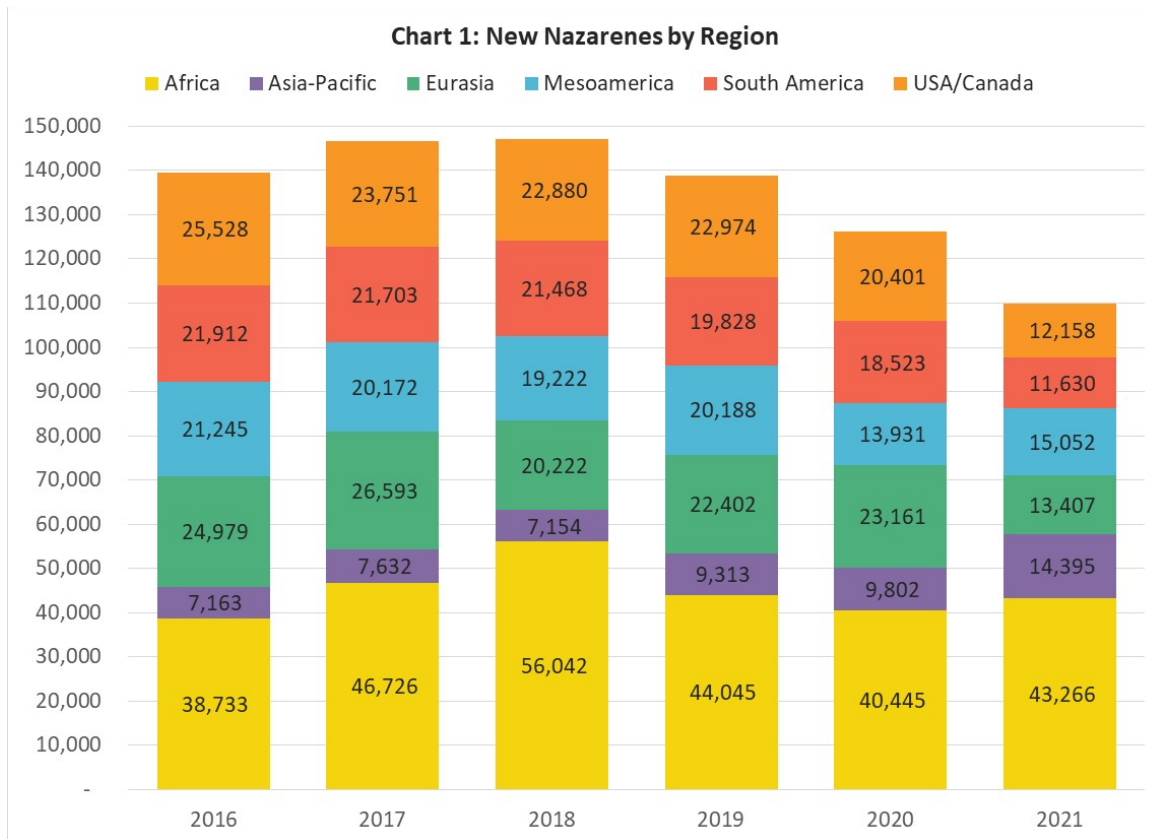
The total discipleship attendance figure for 2021 was 1,223,204, which was 118,320 (-8.8%) less than the 2020 discipleship total of 1,341,524. Churches that did not report a discipleship attendance figure in 2021 (6,892) reported 79,194 in discipleship attendance in 2020. This was equivalent to 5.9% of the total discipleship attendance in 2020. In order to compare the mean average discipleship attendance reported by the 11,875 churches in which 2021 discipleship attendance was different from 2020 discipleship attendance; a paired samples T-Test was performed. The T-Test was statistically significant,  $t(11,874) = -2.873$ ,  $p < .004$ , and showed the average discipleship attendance in these churches declined by 3.5 (2020 mean discipleship = 55.0; 2021 mean discipleship = 51.5). The change in the standard deviation for discipleship attendance between 2020 and 2021 showed a decrease of 80.0 (2020 SD = 189.8; 2021 SD = 109.8), indicating the range of attendance figures reported had contracted.

### *New Nazarenes*

The number of new Nazarenes<sup>4</sup> tends to fluctuate from year to year, especially at the local church and district levels. Chart 1 shows the total number of new Nazarenes received at the regional level between 2016 and 2021. When looking at the total number of new Nazarenes received each year, it is difficult to know whether the 2021 assembly year declined because of the pandemic, or whether the decline was simply part of the trend seen in the previous two years.

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<sup>4</sup> New Nazarenes are new members received by profession of faith or transfer from another denomination.



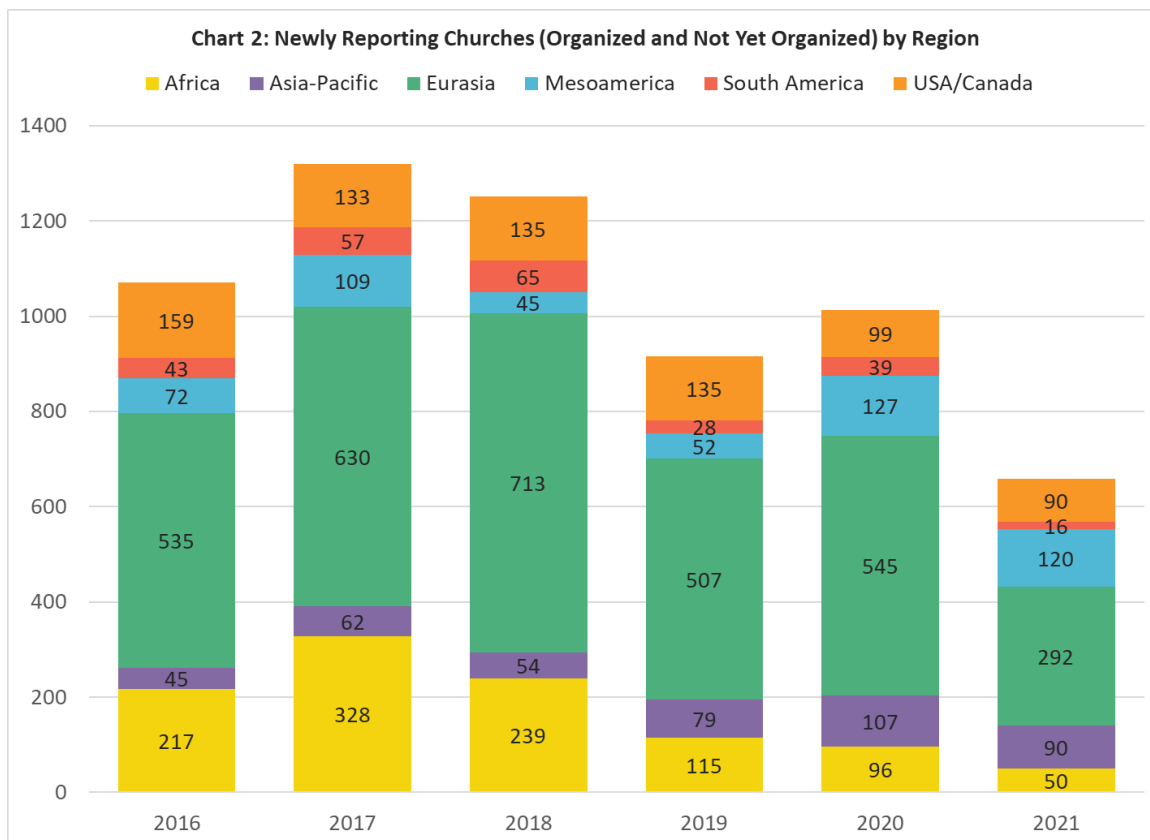
However, when region totals are looked at individually and compared to the 2020 assembly year, the pandemic appears to have had a significant negative impact on the percentage change in the number of new Nazarenes received into membership during the 2021 assembly year on the Eurasia (-42.1%), South America (-37.2%), and USA/Canada (-40.4%) Regions (see Table 3). On the other hand, the number of new Nazarenes showed increases over the previous year on the Africa (7.0%), Asia-Pacific (46.9%), and Mesoamerica (8.0%) Regions. The increase on the Asia-Pacific Region is large enough to make one wonder if the data is correct. When looked at more closely, the country of Papua New Guinea accounts for all of the net gain on the Asia-Pacific Region, and more. Of the 14 districts in Papua New Guinea, 10 reported an increase in the number of new Nazarenes, while four showed a loss. Overall, between the 2020 and 2021 assembly years, the 14 districts in Papua New Guinea reported a net increase of 5,743 (166%) new Nazarenes, while the Asia-Pacific Region's net increase was 4,593 (46.9%). The districts in Papua New Guinea with the largest gains included Papua New Guinea Jiwaka South (1,918 new Nazarenes reported; representing a 237.7% increase over the previous year), Papua New Guinea Simbu (1,179; 140.0%), Papua New Guinea North Coast (898; 255.1%), Papua New Guinea Hagen (704, 482.2%), Papua New Guinea South Coastal (549; 1,830.0%), and Papua New Guinea Bromley Memorial (532; 295.6%). Is it possible that the districts in Papua New Guinea used the pandemic as an outreach opportunity? Whatever the case, the gains in new Nazarenes in Papua New Guinea should be explored further.

**Table 3: % Change in New Nazarenes**

Region	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Africa	20.6%	19.9%	-21.4%	-8.2%	7.0%
Asia-Pacific	6.5%	-6.3%	30.2%	5.3%	46.9%
Eurasia	6.5%	-24.0%	10.8%	3.4%	-42.1%
Mesoamerica	-5.1%	-4.7%	5.0%	-31.0%	8.0%
South America	-1.0%	-1.1%	-7.6%	-6.6%	-37.2%
USA/Canada	-7.0%	-3.7%	0.4%	-11.2%	-40.4%
Total	5.0%	0.3%	-5.6%	-9.0%	-13.0%

### New and Active Churches

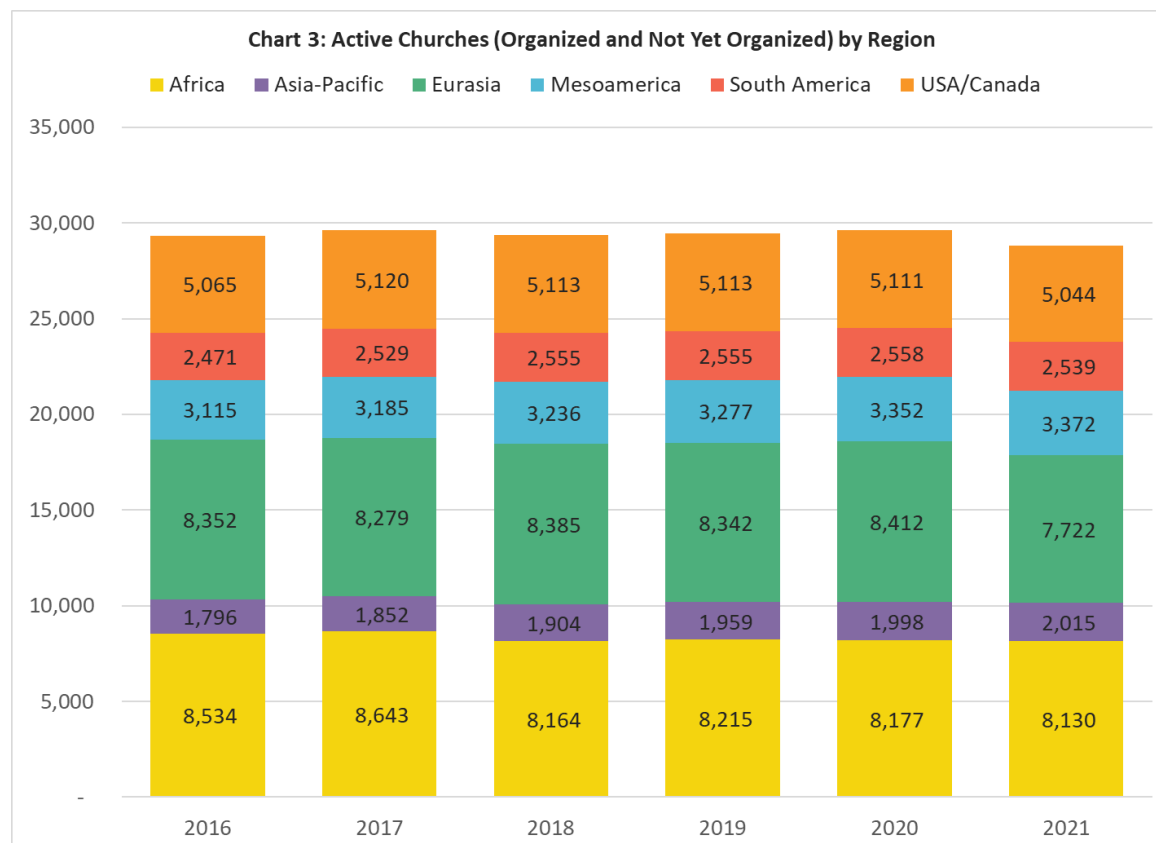
Chart 2 shows the number of new churches started each year between 2016 and 2021, by region. These churches can be organized or not yet organized. A total of 658 churches reported for the first time during the 2021 assembly year, which is 35% lower than the previous assembly year.



When compared to the previous year, every region showed a decline in the number of new churches in 2021. Three regions experienced declines of more than 45% (South America, -59.0%; Africa, -47.9%;

and Eurasia, -46.4%). The remaining regions reported declines between 5% and 16% (Mesoamerica, -5.5%; USA/Canada, -9.1%; and Asia-Pacific, -15.9%).

Chart 3 shows the number of active churches for the 2016 to 2021 assembly years, by region. Active churches can be either organized or not yet organized. The total number of active churches in 2021 was 28,822. This was the lowest number of active churches since 2016, and the change between the 2020 and 2021 assembly years represented the largest decline during this time span (-786 churches; -2.7%). The only other decline since 2016 occurred between the 2017 and 2018 assembly years, when the number of active churches fell by 251 (-0.8%).



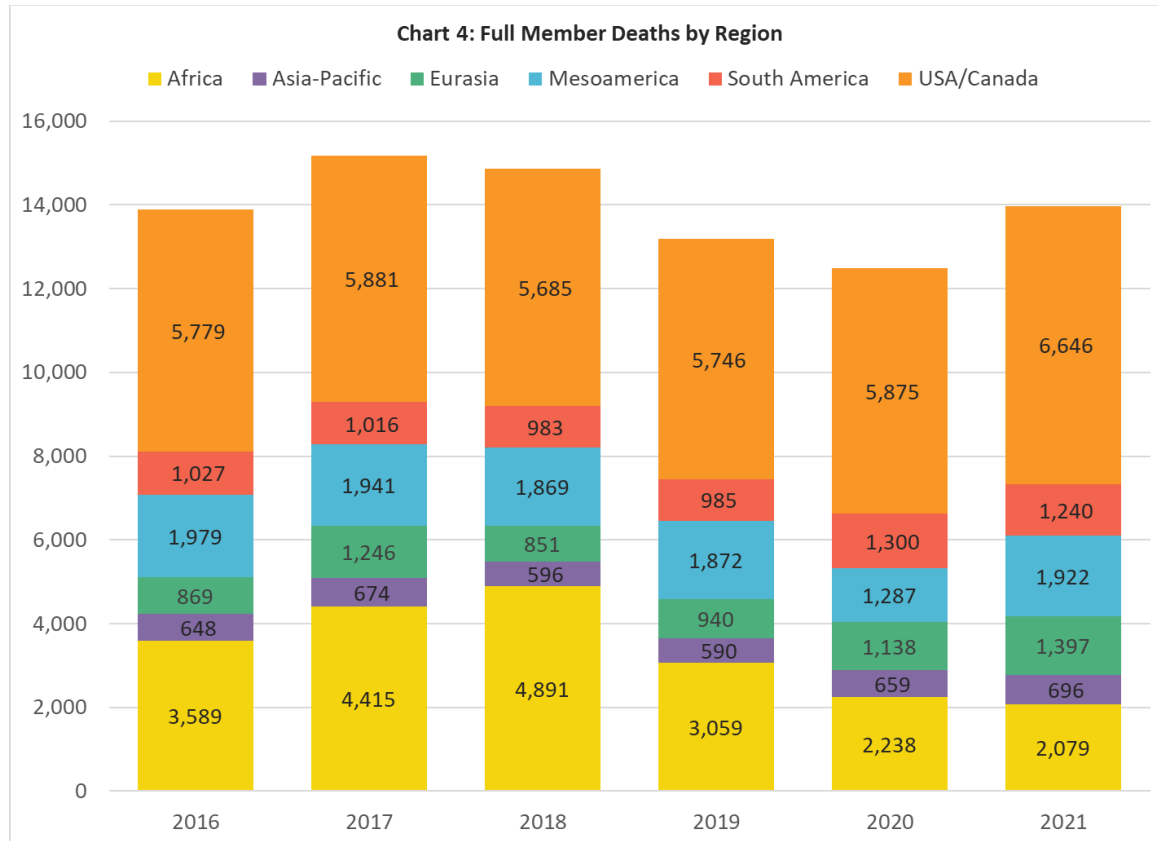
### *Members Lost by Death*

As one would expect, the number of full members lost by death during the 2021 assembly year (13,980) increased by 11.9% from the previous year. However, as Chart 4 shows, there were more full members lost by death in the non-pandemic assembly years of 2017 (15,173) and 2018 (14,875).

When looking at each region separately, the Mesoamerica Region had the largest increase in full member deaths between the 2020 and 2021 assembly years (49.3%); however, in the 2020 assembly year full member deaths on the Mesoamerica Region declined by 31.3% from the previous assembly year. In fact, looking at the number of full member deaths on the Mesoamerica Region each year (see

Chart 4), it seems as if the 2020 assembly year was the outlier because the number was significantly lower than in other years since 2016.

The Eurasia Region reported a 22.8% increase in full member deaths during the 2021 assembly year. The region also reported a 21.1% increase in full member deaths during the 2020 assembly year. The USA/Canada Region showed a 13.1% increase in full member deaths during the 2021 assembly year. On the other hand, the Africa Region has had two of their lowest number of full member deaths during the 2020 and 2021 assembly years. In fact, the Africa Region's 2021 figure is less than half of the totals reported in 2017 and 2018.



## Finances

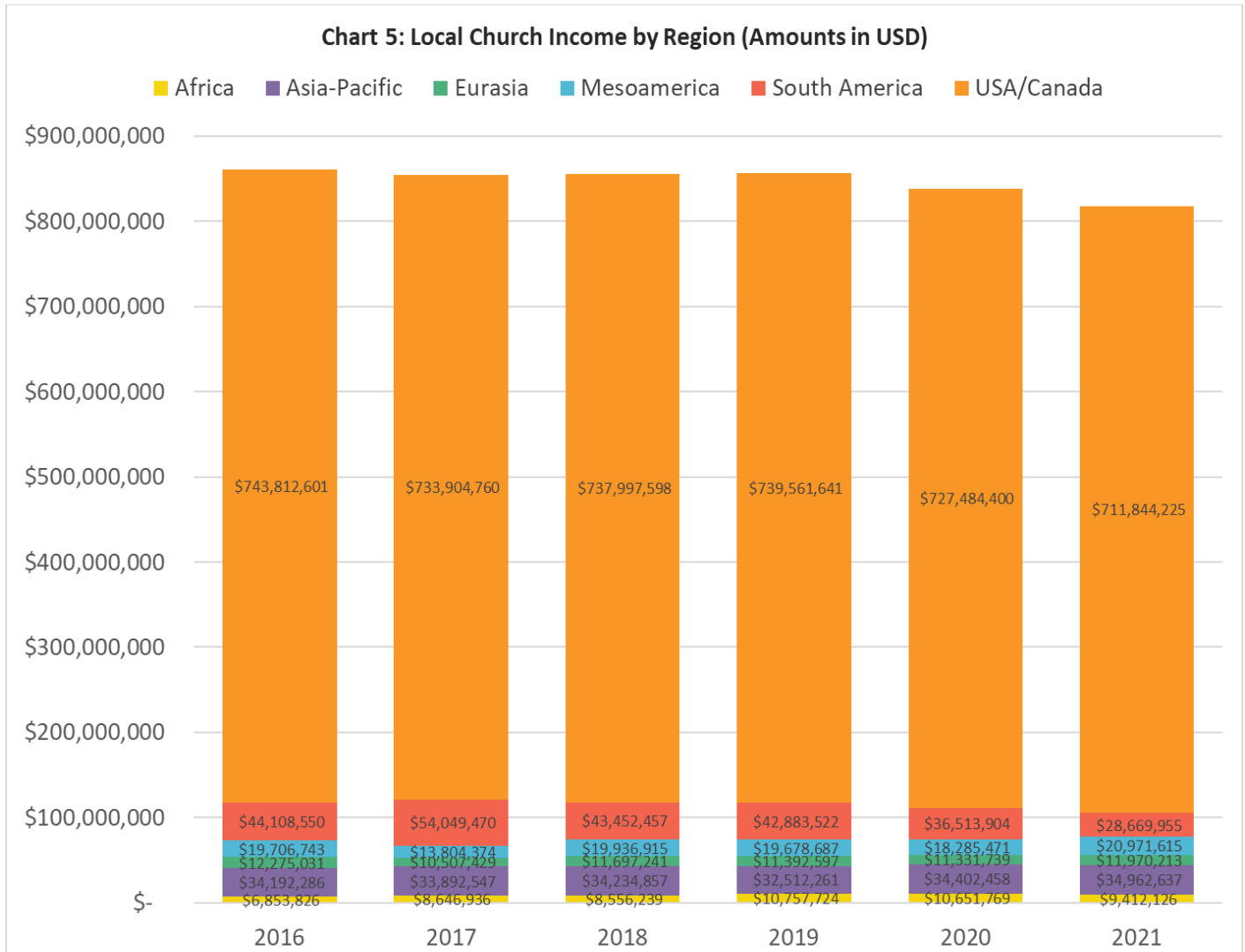
With many local governments, state governments, and countries placing restrictions on gatherings due to the pandemic, one might expect significant declines in local church incomes. Overall, there was a decline in local church income during the 2021 assembly year of -2.5%. This percentage is not much different from the -2.1% loss reported during the 2020 assembly. As illustrated in Chart 5, total income at the local church level between 2016 and 2019 was flat. The change in income during those years ranged from -0.7% (2017) to 0.1% (2018 and 2019). Between 2019 and 2021, local church income declined globally by -4.5%.



The South America Region suffered the largest percentage decline in local church income during the 2021 assembly year; down -21.5% from the previous year, and down -33.1% since the 2019 assembly year. The next largest percentage decline was on the Africa Region (-11.6%). The only other region to show a percentage decline for the 2021 assembly year was the USA/Canada (-2.1%); however, the loss in local church income on the USA/Canada Region accounted for 75.1% of the total decline of \$20,838,970.

Three regions reported increases in local church income during the 2021 assembly year: Mesoamerica (14.7%), Eurasia (5.6%), and Asia-Pacific (1.6%). For the Asia-Pacific Region, local church income reached an all-time high in 2021. For the Mesoamerica Region, local church income was its highest since 2015.

It should be noted that this report is using US dollar amounts in order to make income comparisons easier, and that every region uses two or more different currencies. Conversion rates vary from country to country, as well as year-to-year within a country, and therefore affect the amounts in different ways. For example, it is possible that in a local currency, local church income increased from one year to the next, but when converted to US dollars, the local church income ends up being a decline. Additionally, no attempt has been made to adjust for inflation.



### Conclusion

While it may seem obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic is having an impact on Nazarene churches around the world, that impact is not evenly distributed and can be difficult to distinguish from ongoing trends. Since churches used three different methods to report worship and discipleship attendance (either did not report, or used the previous year's figures, or reported averages for the current year) it is difficult to assess the real impact of the pandemic on attendance. In addition, with the rise in availability and use of virtual technology, the definition of attendance seems to have changed. What is known is that 20.6% of all churches did not report worship attendance, and 23.1% did not report discipleship attendance. Furthermore, 34.6% of all churches reported the same worship attendance figure as the previous year, as did 33.4% for discipleship attendance. For those churches that reported different attendance figures than the previous year (42.6% for worship attendance, and 41.2% for discipleship attendance), the average change in worship attendance was -2.4, and the average change in discipleship attendance it was -3.5. These average loss figures may not sound like a lot, but multiplied over approximately 12,000 churches, the total adds up.

New members are typically received during worship services or other church gatherings. If a government entity places restrictions on gatherings, one would assume there would be a negative impact on receiving new Nazarene members. This seemed to be the case in the 2021 assembly year for the Eurasia (-42.1%), South America (-37.2%), and USA/Canada (-40.4%) Regions; however, the following regions reported receiving more new Nazarene members than they did the previous year: Africa (7.0%), Asia-Pacific (46.9%), and Mesoamerica (8.0%). Additionally, significant gains in the number of new Nazarenes on 10 of the 14 districts in Papua New Guinea should be further examined for potential evangelism lessons.

The pandemic clearly had an impact on the number of new churches. Every region reported fewer new churches during the 2021 assembly year when compared to the previous year. On the other hand, it was remarkable that God was able to use Nazarenes to start 658 new churches during a global pandemic. These new churches helped offset the closure of 1,067 churches (364 were disorganized, 74 were merged, and 629 not yet organized churches were dropped).

At first glance, it seemed that the pandemic was related to an increase in the number of full members lost by death during the 2021 assembly year, which were up 11.9% when compared to the previous year. However, when the last five years are taken into consideration, the total number of deaths reported for 2021 are in the middle of the pack.

Finally, when one considers that there were fewer people in attendance, fewer new Nazarene members received into fellowship, fewer new churches, and fewer active churches, it comes as no surprise that local church income during the 2021 assembly year declined by -2.5%. The South America Region suffered the largest percentage declines, but the region has reported significant losses in local church income since 2017 (-47.0% from 2017 to 2021), so it is difficult to know how much should be attributed to the pandemic and how much should be attributed to other factors. It appears that the pandemic is exacerbating some already occurring negative trends, while also creating some new negative realities. As the church considers how to overcome the negative impacts caused or exacerbated by the pandemic, we would be wise to remember the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 19:26; “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”