

# Church Engagement Report 2019





What will it mean  
to be an engaging church  
in the next decade?  
How will we measure it?

# Contents

---

Introduction	4
Differences Between Growing & Declining Churches	6
Survey Data	11
Next Steps	24
About Blackbaud	27

# INTRODUCTION

---

Engagement is a buzzword—among church leaders, as in the marketplace—loosely defined and easily manipulated to mean different things to different people. Clearly, what we mean by “engagement” as church leaders has its own uniqueness. But how exactly?

What will it mean to be an engaging church in the next decade? How will we measure it?

At the root of these questions is an assumption that engagement matters—that something critical is at stake if we don’t reach it. All church leaders know that measuring weekend service attendance alone falls short of giving us a true measure of church health. After all, what does the number of bodies in a building on a Sunday tell us about how well we’re reaching people outside our walls? Or how well we’re encouraging people to grow as disciples? Or how well we’re connecting with the next generation?

With this project, we aimed to learn a little more about how churches are defining and measuring engagement today. In December 2018, we began asking church leaders to share their current practices and the trends from the last year in the metrics they are tracking. We had 176 churches respond. We’re grateful for their time and effort to participate and shed some light on where things stand today!

We spent some significant time analyzing the data, looking for themes and insights to set the baseline in our understanding of how we look at engagement. This report contains our most significant findings. In particular, the data showed compelling things about the differences in engagement between growing and declining churches. For instance,

- ✓ *Growing churches are seeing increasing engagement in small groups.*  
.....
- ✓ *The average person actually attends services more frequently in declining churches.*  
.....
- ✓ *Both growing and declining churches are seeing similar increases in engagement with the content they share on Facebook®.*  
.....



You'll find the report presented in three sections: 1) A snapshot of the raw data, including facts about who participated, their average attendance, regions and denominations, 2) Observations on the differences in engagement metrics between growing and declining churches, and 3) Next Steps.

We hope you are able to take some insights from this report, apply them to your ministry context and find some practical next steps. We look forward to tracking these trends over time, as churches continue to refine their definition of engagement and their methods for increasing it.

Sincerely,



**Tony Morgan**  
The Unstuck Group



**Kevin Knight**  
Blackbaud





CHAPTER

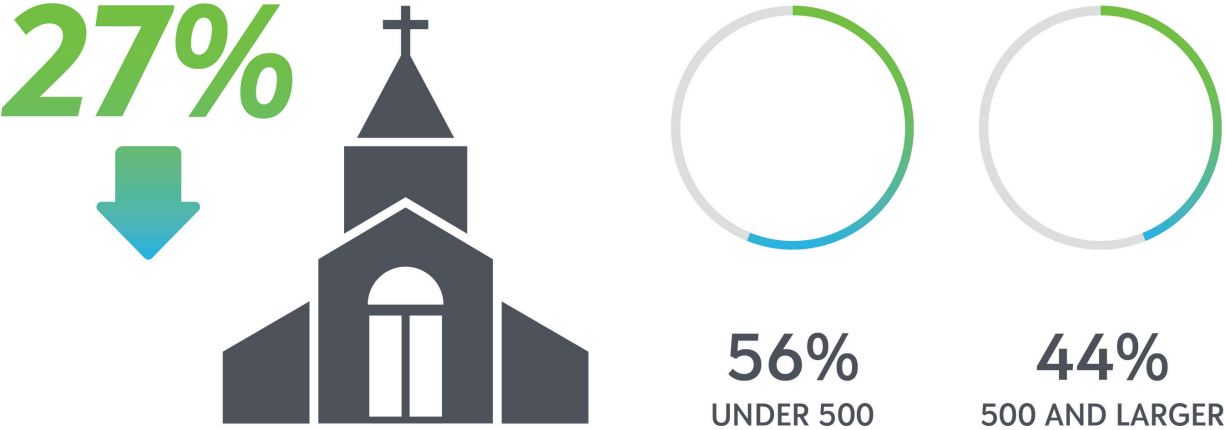
01

Differences  
Between Growing &  
Declining Churches

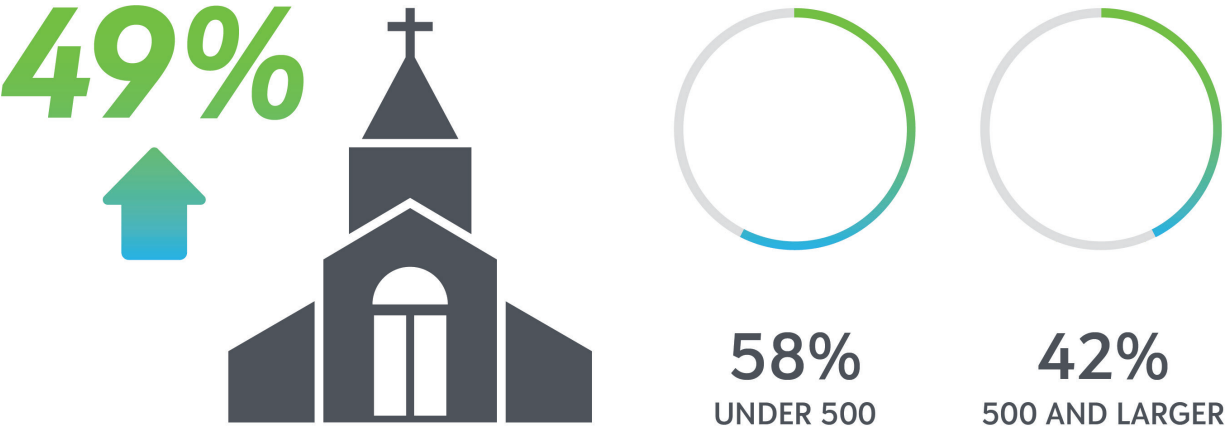
---

# Comparing the Data from Growing & Declining Churches

## Declining Churches



## Growing Churches



“This is key. It would be easy to make assumptions that these results are because some churches are larger than others. In fact, there are a slightly higher percentage of smaller churches included in the mix of growing churches.” – Tony Morgan, The Unstuck Group

## Observations and Insights

**1. The average person attends services more frequently in declining churches.**

People attend 2.5 weeks each month in declining churches compared to 2.3 weeks per month in growing churches. This implies growing churches are reaching more first-time guests.

---

**2. Growing churches have increasing engagement in small groups.**

Small group participation increased in 74% of growing churches and only 33% of declining churches.

---

**3. Declining churches are more likely to offer Sunday School.**

65% of declining churches offer Sunday School and only 43% of growing churches offer Sunday School.

---

**4. Growing churches are seeing more increases in children's ministry attendance.**

Only 22% of declining churches had increases in children's ministry while 77% of growing churches saw increases in their children's ministry.

---

**5. Greater than three times more growing churches experienced increases in first-time guests compared to declining churches.**

“74% of growing churches had increases in first-time guests compared to only 23% of declining churches. This data point along with the frequency data point listed above suggests that growing churches are more outward focused than declining churches.” — Tony Morgan

---

**6. Of the churches who are tracking first-time givers, growing churches are seeing more increases.**

86% of growing churches experienced increases in first-time giving. Only 20% of declining churches saw increases in new givers. Seven in 10 churches had no idea how many first-time givers they had in the last year.

---

**7. Moderate volunteer engagement is a sign of growth.**

47% of growing churches indicated that 25 to 50% of their average attendees volunteer once per month. Only 24% of declining churches indicated the same. On the other hand, more declining churches have even higher volunteer engagement.

34% of declining churches indicated more than half of their attendees volunteer once per month. Only 19% of growing churches had that same level of engagement.

---

**8. Growing churches have increasing engagement on their church app.**

Of all the growing churches, 41% indicated an increase in church app usage compared to only 19% of declining churches.

---

**9. Of the churches measuring website metrics, growing churches had more new visitors on their website in the last 12 months. 85% of growing churches had an increase in new visitors to their website compared to only 60% of declining churches.**

“There’s a much greater disparity between growing and declining churches when it comes to returning visitors to their websites. Of those churches monitoring return visitors, 79% of growing churches saw an increase while only 33% of declining churches had increases in return visitors to their websites.” — Tony Morgan

---

**10. Increases in Facebook engagement were similar in both growing and declining churches.**

74% of declining churches had increases in Facebook engagement, and that number was 81% for growing churches.

---

**11. 61% of growing churches had increased engagement on Instagram compared to 41% of declining churches.**

“Besides the bigger disparity in engagement growth with Instagram, more telling is that only 44% of declining churches are using Instagram while 72% of growing churches are using that platform.” — Tony Morgan

---

**12. Neither growing or declining churches are seeing as much increase on Twitter, but increased engagement was still higher with growing churches.**

13% of declining churches experienced increasing engagement on Twitter compared to 24% of growing churches.

---

**13. Growing churches are more likely to be on Twitter.**

44% of growing churches use that social media platform compared to only 21% of declining churches.

---

**14. When it comes to engagement with video content online, 71% of growing churches experienced an increased compared to 51% of declining churches.**

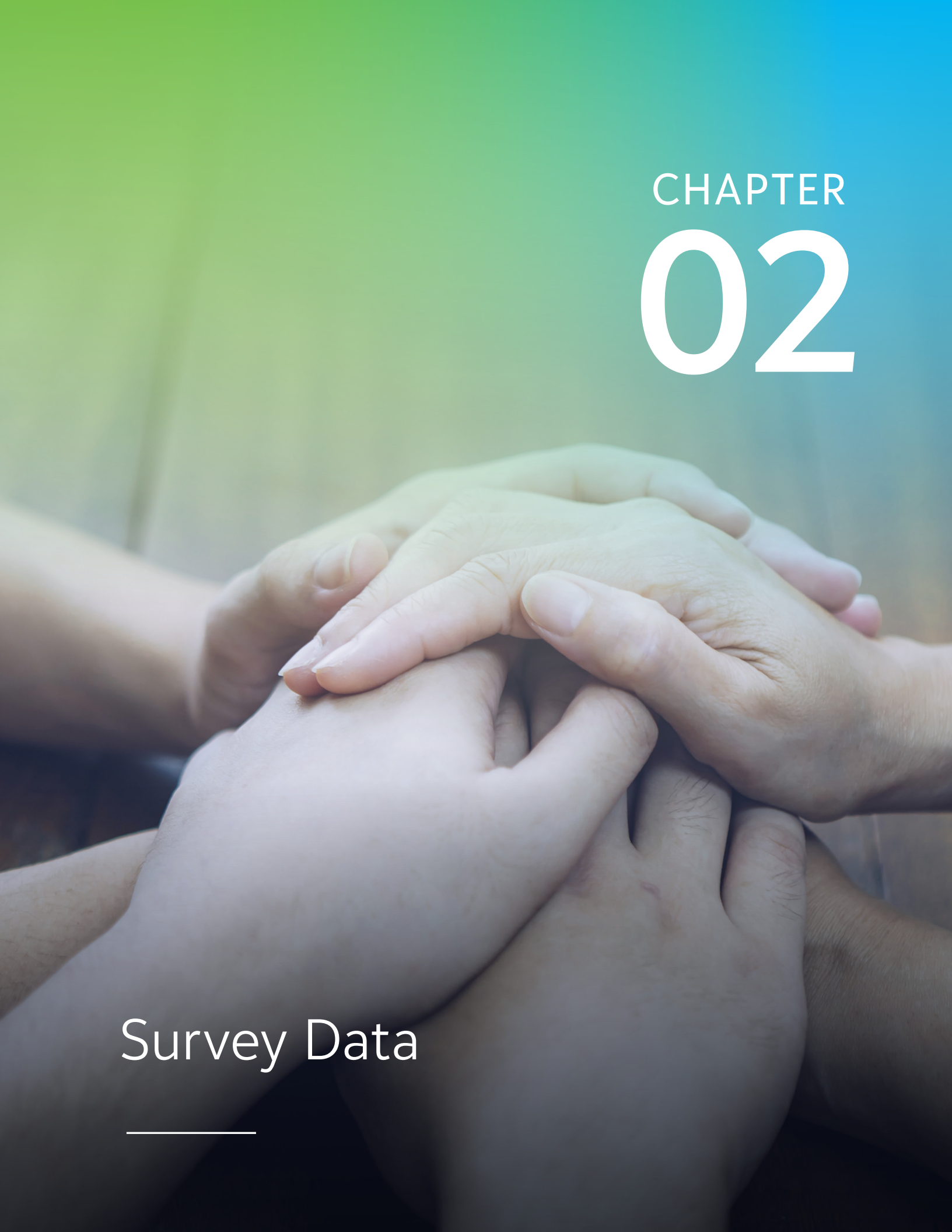
---

**15. Also, growing churches are much more likely to share video content through live-streaming, on-demand, YouTube, Vimeo, etc.**

“85% of growing churches are sharing video content online compared to only 49% of declining churches. This suggests that sharing video online may slightly reduce the frequency that people attend, but it likely increases the total number of people who attend the church.” — Tony Morgan

---





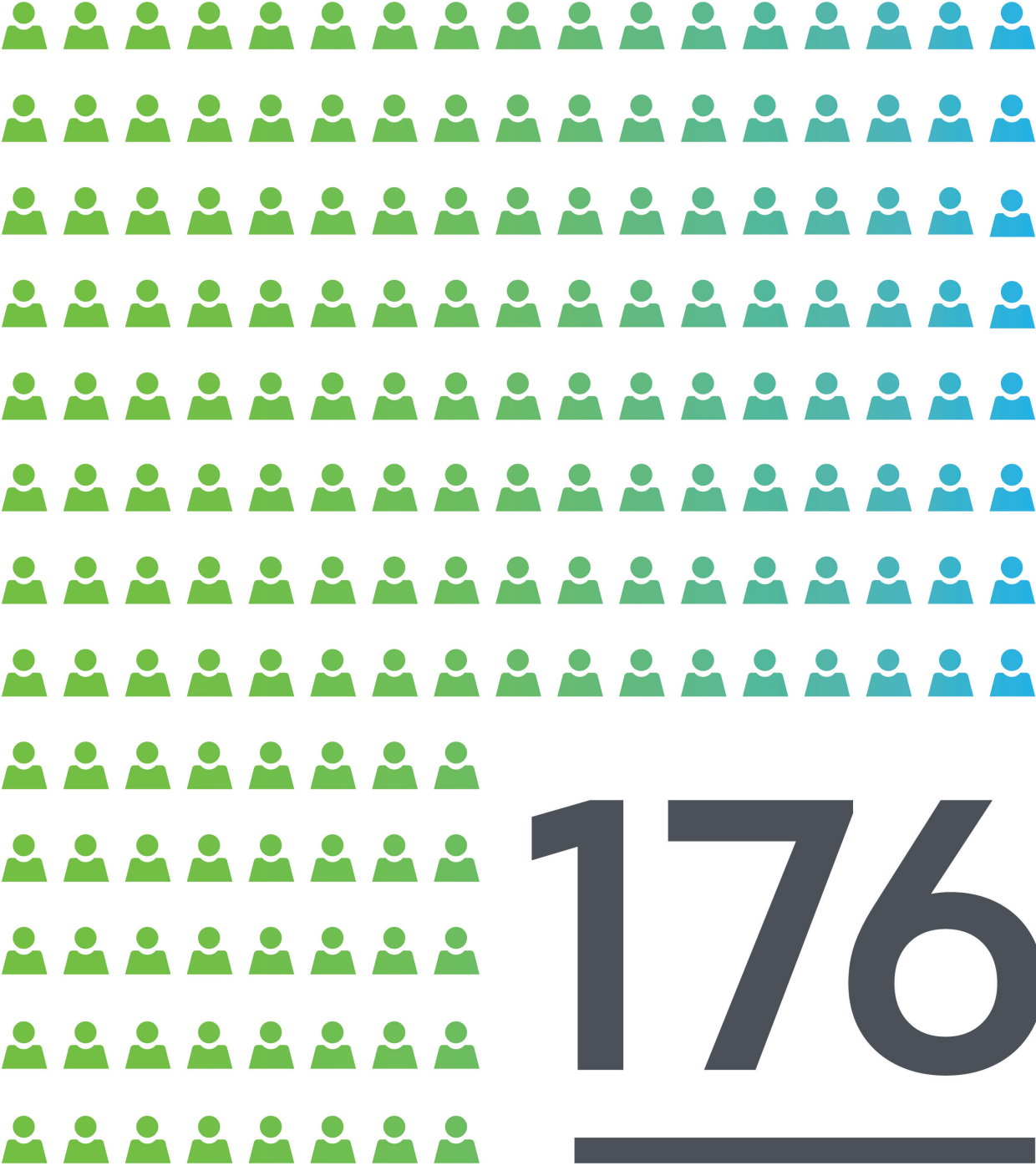
CHAPTER  
02

Survey Data

---

# Who Participated in This Survey?

## Total Participants





## Regions



**32%**  
WEST



**23%**  
MIDWEST



**15%**  
SOUTHEAST



**15%**  
SOUTH



**14%**  
NORTHEAST



## Denominations



**32%**  
NON-  
DENOMINATIONAL



**24%**  
BAPTIST



**13%**  
METHODIST/  
WESLEYAN



**11%**  
ASSEMBLIES  
OF GOD



**11%**  
OTHER



**4%**  
PRESBYTERIAN



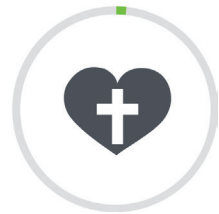
**3%**  
LUTHERAN



**1%**  
PENTECOSTAL



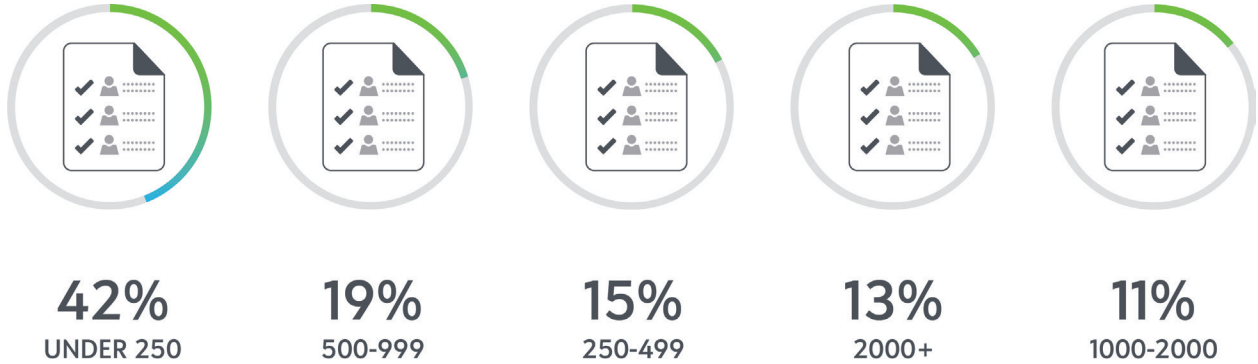
**1%**  
CHURCH OF CHRIST



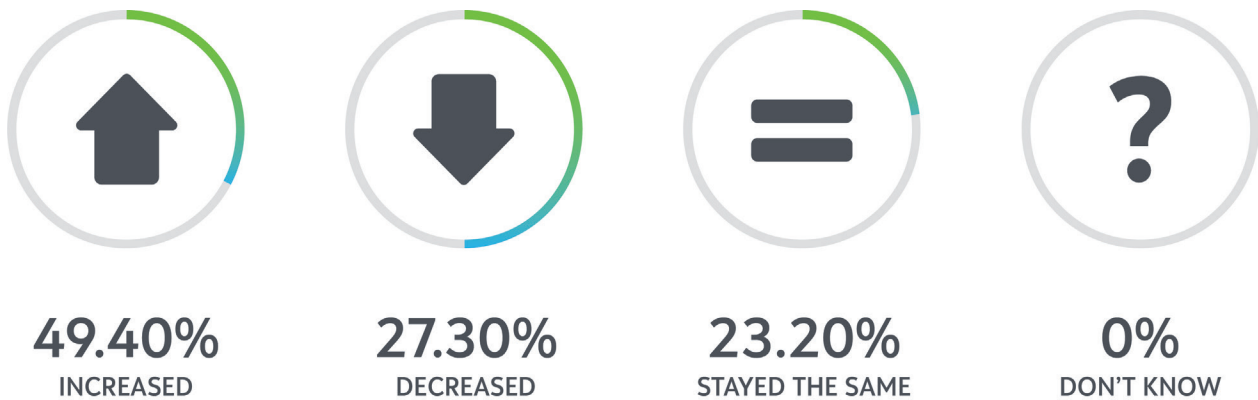
**1%**  
EPISCOPALIAN/  
ANGLICAN

## Survey Data Snapshots

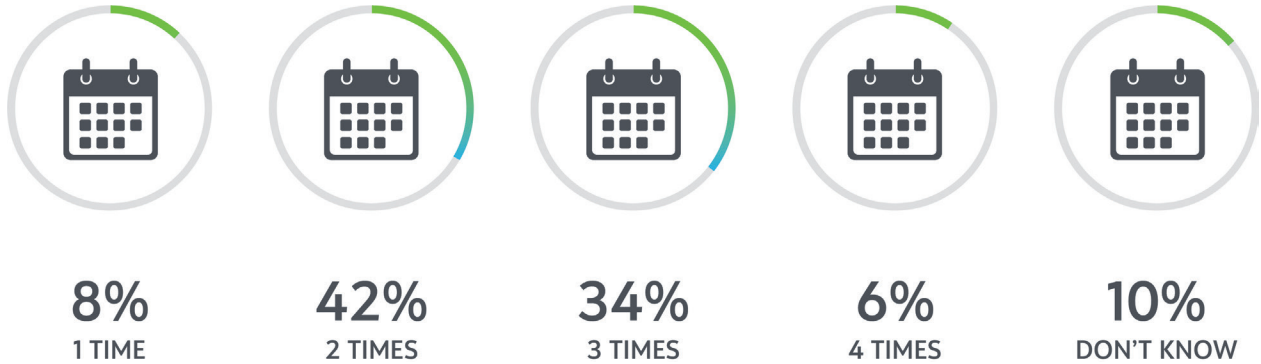
What is your average weekly attendance?



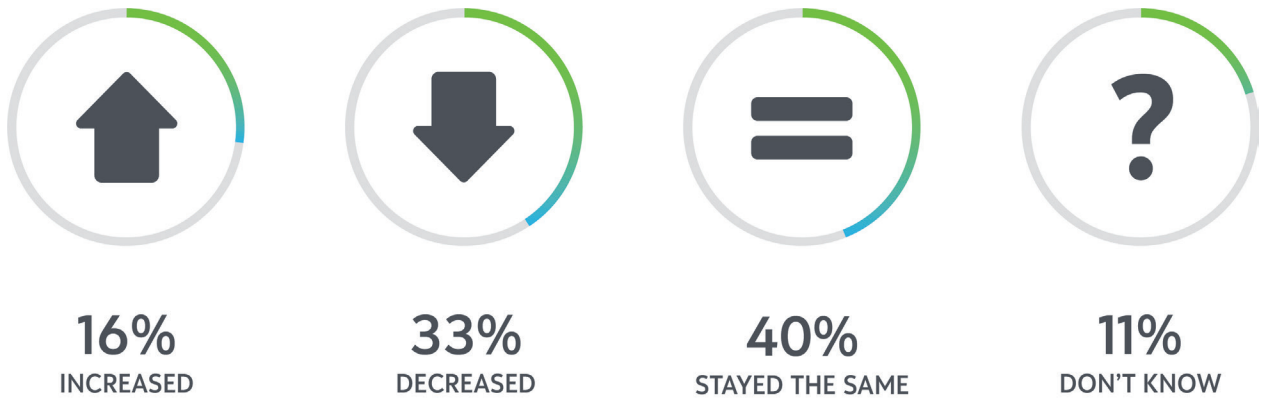
How has your average weekly attendance changed in the last 12 months?



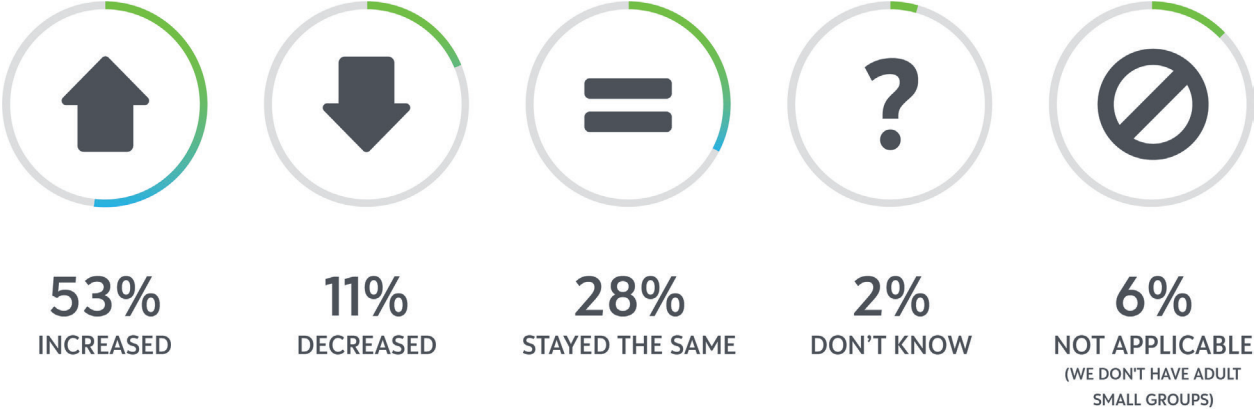
How many times per month does the average person attend your weekend service?



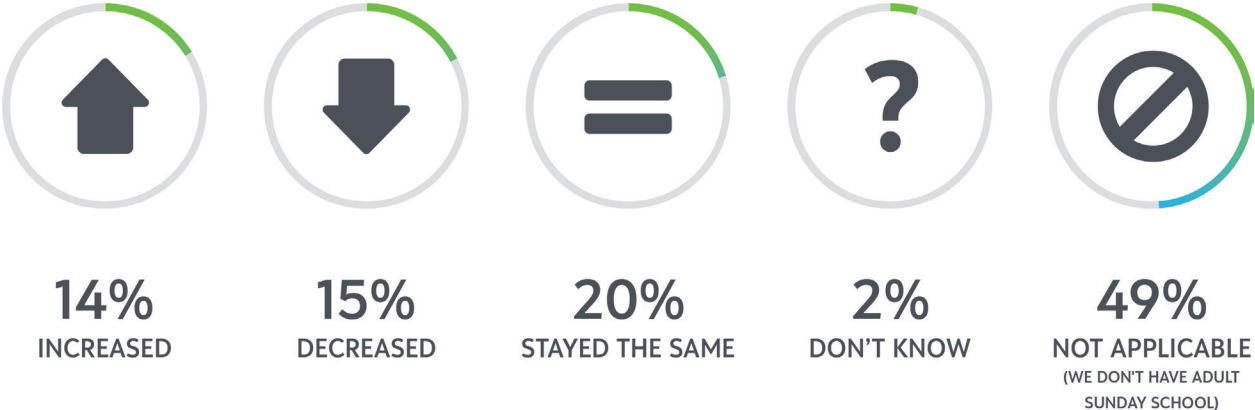
How has that average frequency of attendance changed in the last 12 months?



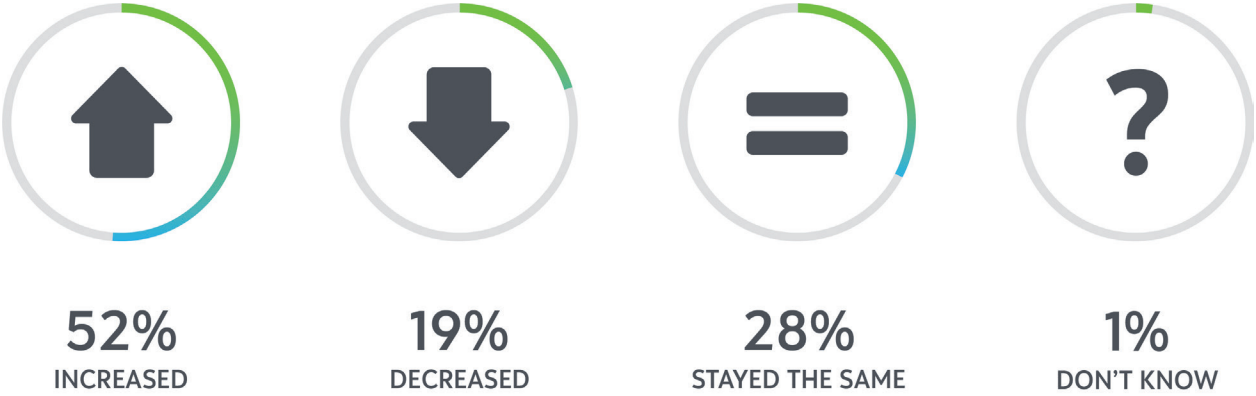
How has the total number of people participating in adult small groups changed in the last 12 months?



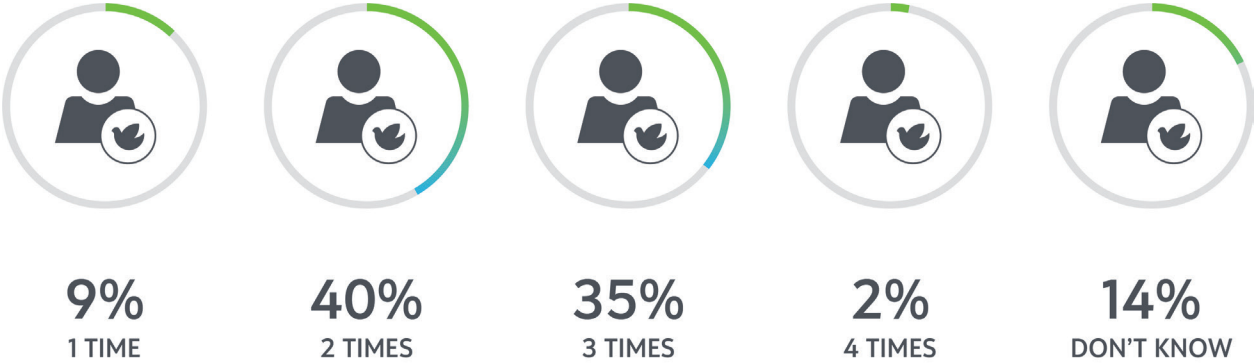
How has the total number of people participating in adult Sunday School changed in the last 12 months?



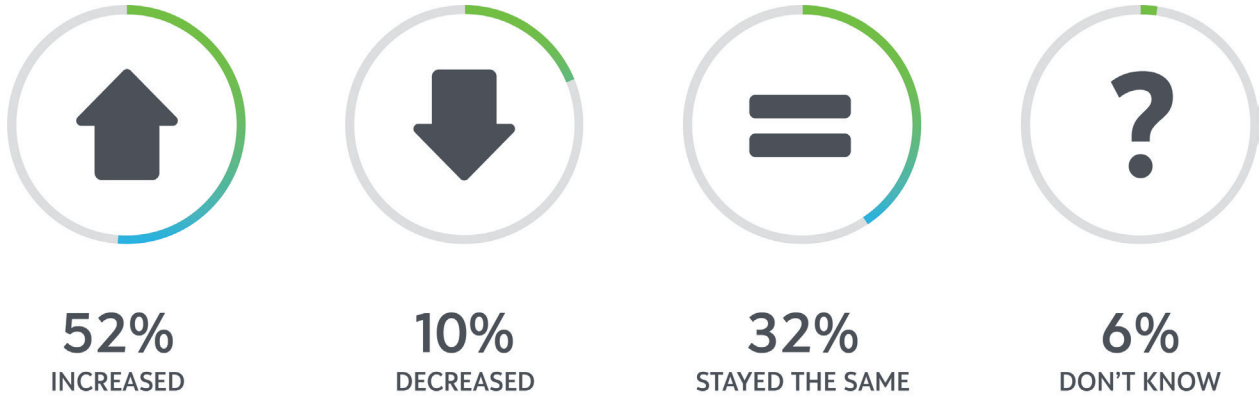
How has the average weekly number of children checked-in to weekend services changed in the last 12 months?



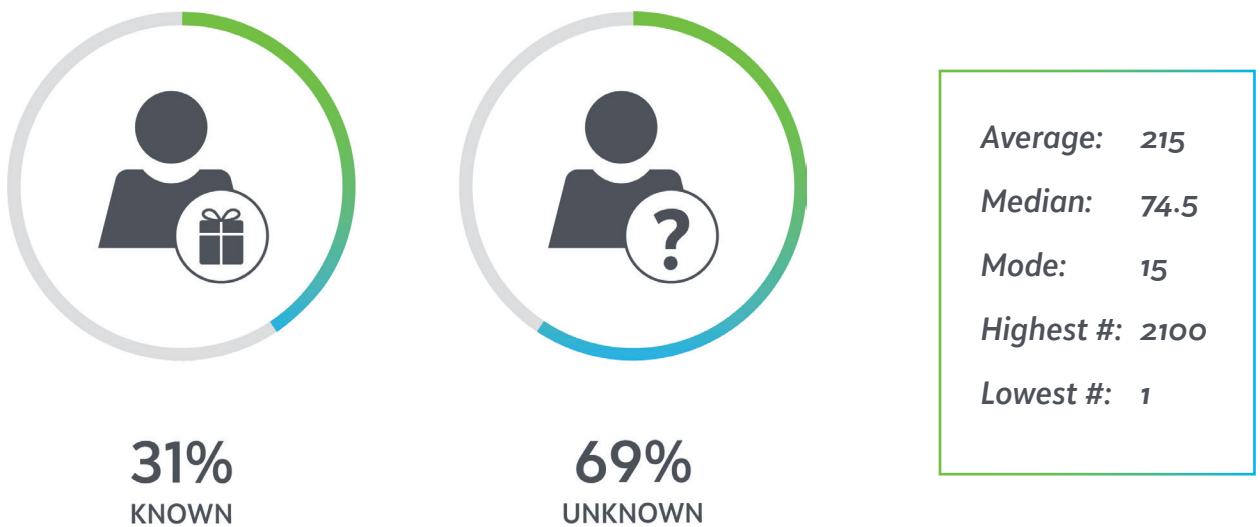
How many times per month does the average child attend weekend services?



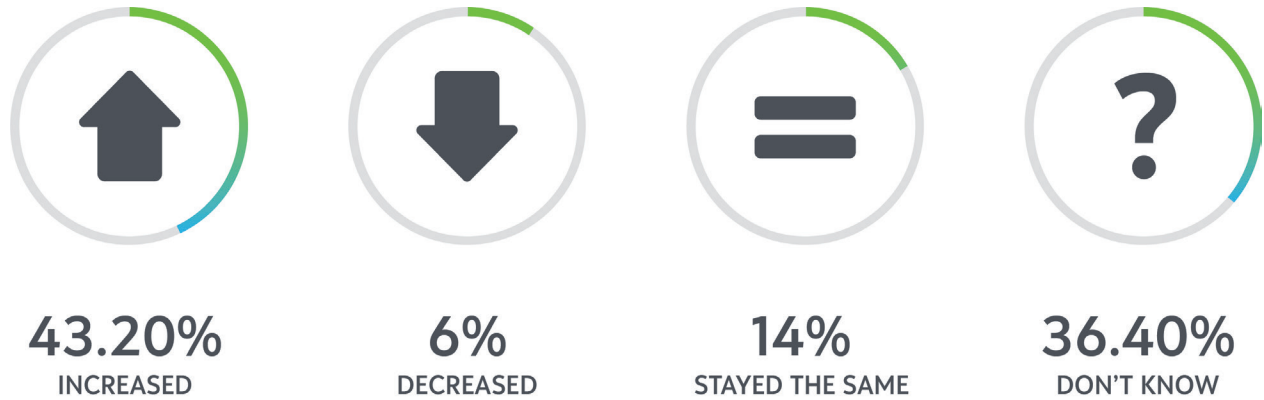
How has the number of new first-time guests to your weekend services changed in the last 12 months?



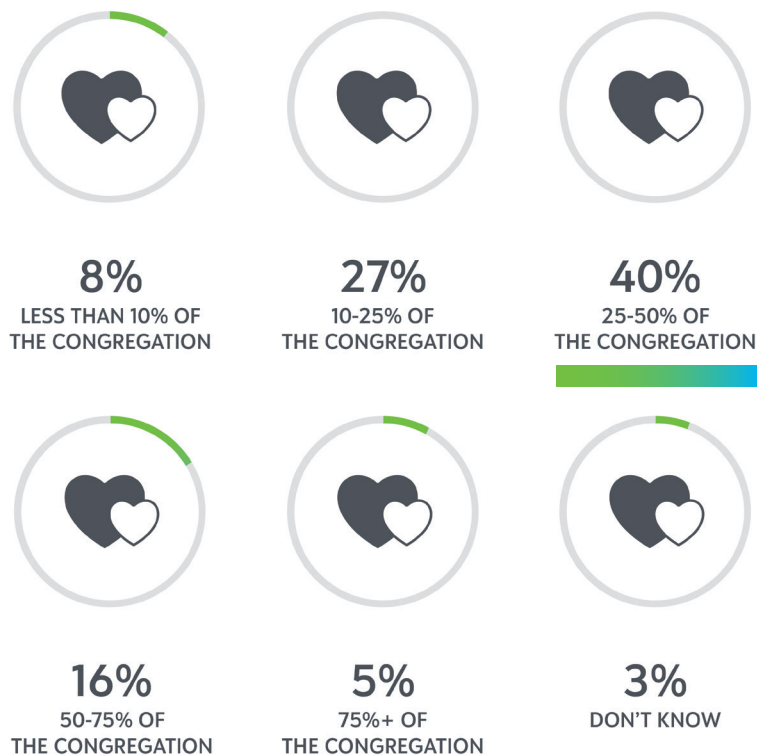
How many new first-time givers did you have in the last 12 months?



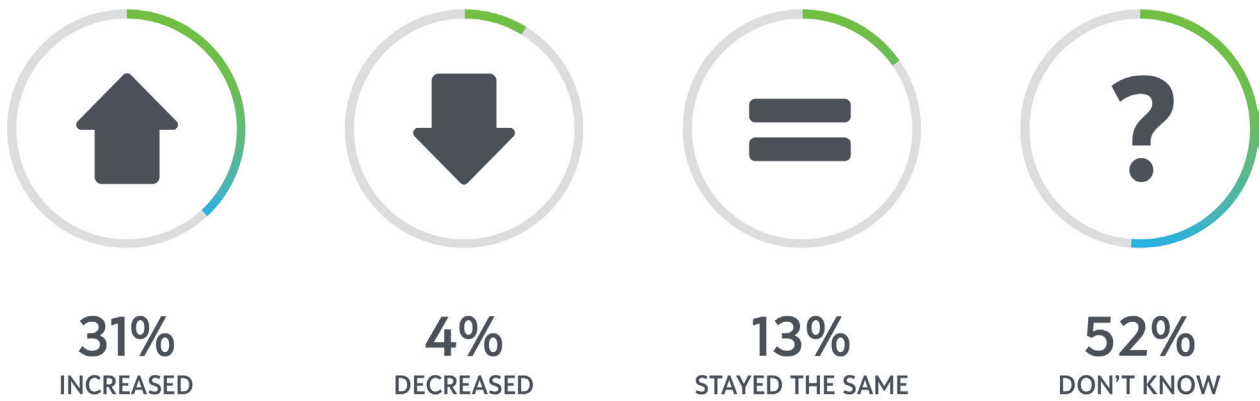
How has the number of new first-time givers changed in the last 12 months from the previous 12 months?



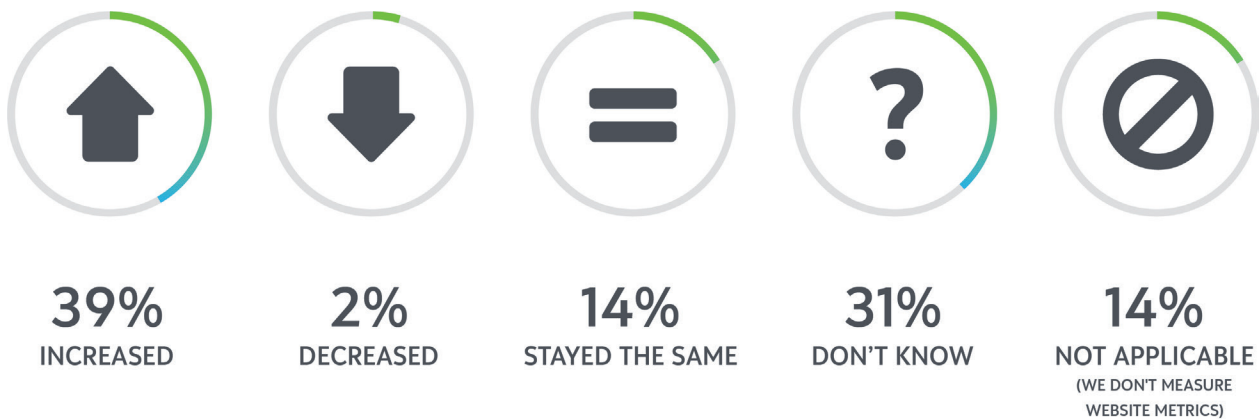
What percentage of your average attendees volunteer at least once per month?



How has frequency of usage for your church app changed in the last 12 months?

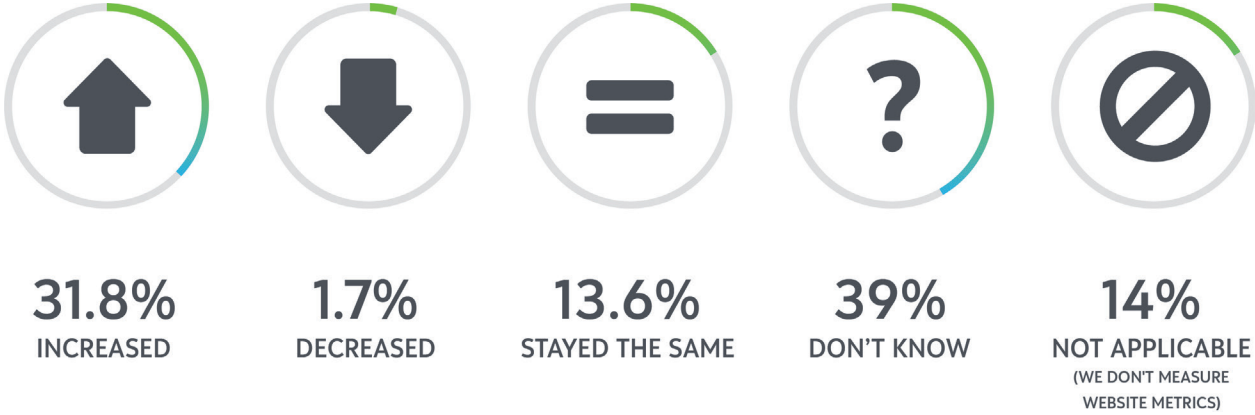


How has the number of new visitors to your website changed in the last 12 months?

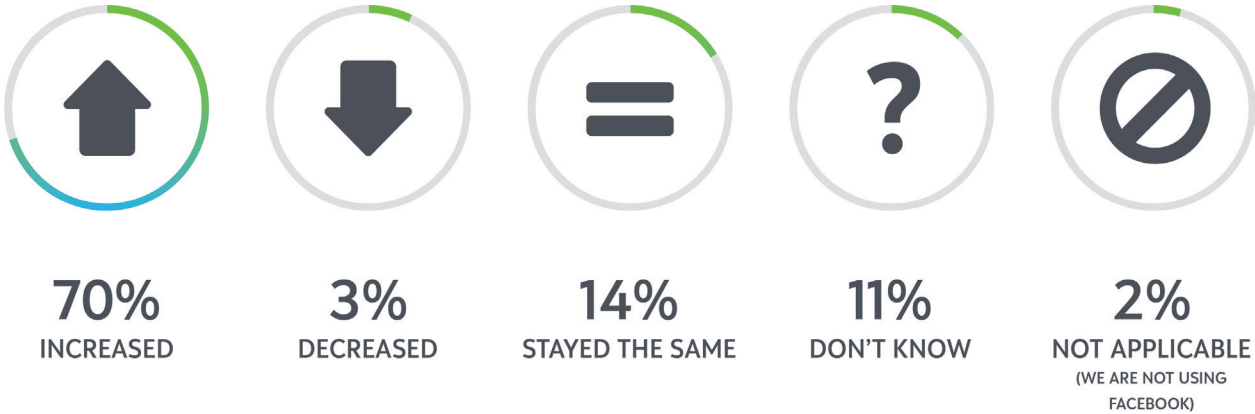




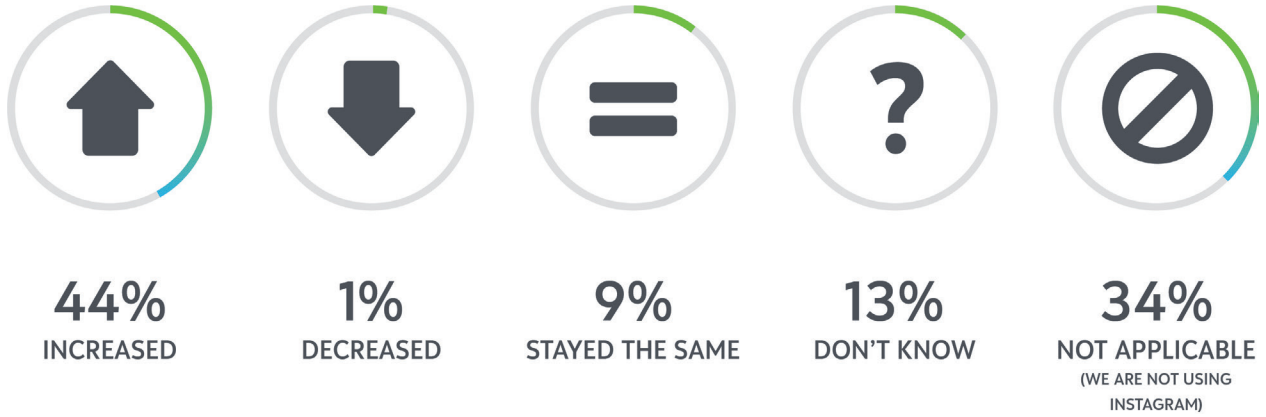
How has the number of returning visitors to your website changed in the last 12 months?



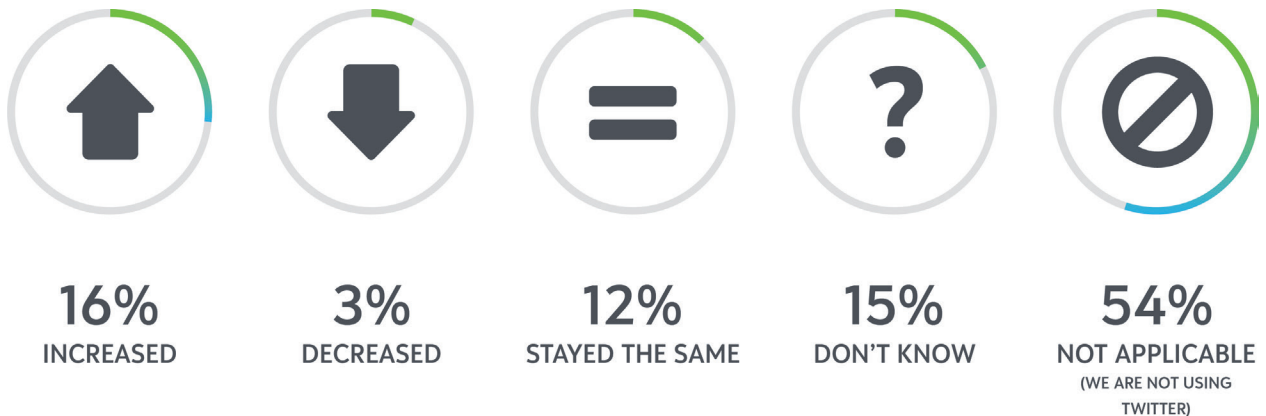
How has engagement with your Facebook posts changed in the last 12 months?



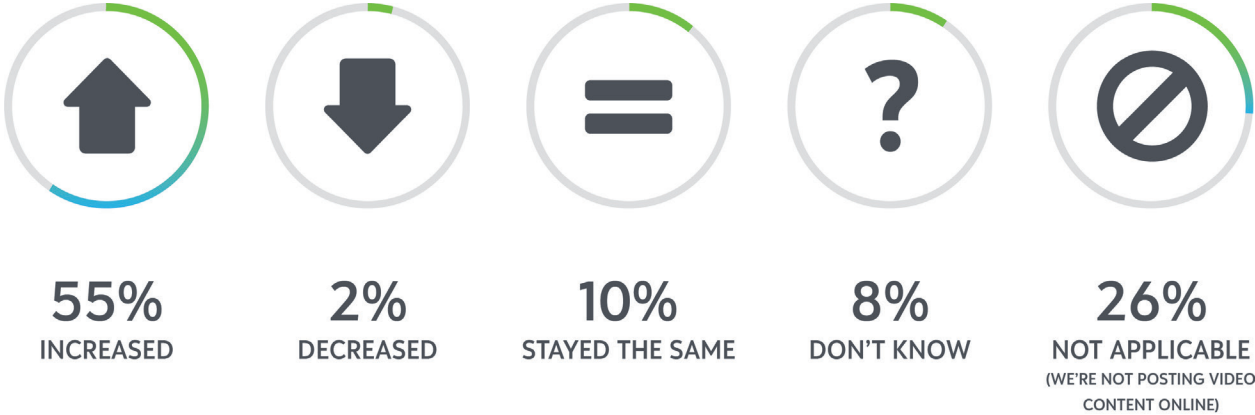
How has engagement with your Instagram® posts changed in the last 12 months?



How has engagement with your Twitter® posts changed in the last 12 months?



How has engagement with your video content (live-streaming, on-demand, YouTube®, Vimeo, etc.) changed in the last 12 months?







CHAPTER  
03

Next Steps

---



We believe engagement is crucial to ministry health, but in our time leading in and working with hundreds of churches, we've found engagement metrics only shed light on the health of a church if they include metrics that show how well the church is **reaching out**.

---

## Healthy, growing churches are engaging new people **and** the people that have already connected with the church.

---

The data in this report further confirms our stance on this. The two things must be linked in any church's definition of what it means to be engaging.

In this section you'll find a couple of practical tools to help you take next steps after reading this report. We hope you will explore them.

### Conversation Guide

Take this report to your next Senior Leadership Team meeting. Here are some questions you may want to process together:

1. *How have we been defining engagement at our church? What needs more clarity? What needs to change?*
2. *Are we in a season of plateau/decline or a season of growth? What do we share in common with the growing/declining churches who responded to the survey that fueled this report? Are we experiencing anything different?*
3. *The data showed growing churches are more likely to have a web strategy that encourages ongoing engagement with first-time **and** returning visitors. Growing churches were also more likely to leverage social media platforms and, as a group, those churches are also seeing increasing engagement on social media platforms. How well is our web and social media strategy performing for us? Who owns the strategy? What steps do we need to take to better resource that person or team this year? Do we need some outside help?*
4. *The data showed growing churches are seeing an increase in small group participation. How healthy are our groups? How will we measure it this year? How can small groups help us both reach out and engage the people we already have?*  
*>> Recommended Resource: [Small Groups for the Rest of Us](#) by Chris Surratt*

5. Tony shared that 74% of growing churches had increases in first-time guests compared to only 23% of declining churches. How healthy is our “front door?” What steps do we need to take to engage more first-time guests?

>> Recommended Resource: [4 Worst Practices for Connecting with New Guests - Episode 78 - The Unstuck Church Podcast](#)

---

6. The data showed the vast majority (77%) of growing churches saw increases engaging children in their ministry over the last 12 months. How healthy is our children’s ministry? How do we need to invest in this area this year?

---

7. Responding to the survey questions required a church be able to track and pull data on significant engagement metrics. How difficult would it be for us to answer the questions put forth in this survey? Do we have an effective system for monitoring these metrics? What are the gaps in the information we track? Which are the most critical to monitoring the health of our church? What steps do we need to take to get better data?

---



## Blackbaud Church Management

Technological advancements are leaving the church tech space behind, but your congregation expects a modern online experience, from giving to child check-in. Blackbaud Church Management™ is the only church software backed by the world's leading cloud software company powering social good.

It goes beyond just church management: It seamlessly connects your church to your ministry—all in one platform.

[Request a Demo](#)

## The Unstuck Process

Numbers never tell the whole story. But if you're experiencing plateau or decline, an outside perspective combined with some objective metrics are invaluable allies in getting a clear picture. The Unstuck Group's consulting process helps you assess your ministry's health today, clarify the vision God's given you for the future, and create the structure and action plans to see it through.

In the Ministry Health Assessment phase of the Unstuck Process, your team gets a fresh perspective on where your church may be stuck, including a report from a first-time guest experience "secret shopper" that gives you insight into what it's really like for a new guest at your church. That perspective sets you up to initiate and lead the right changes to position your church for healthy growth.

[Learn How It Works](#)

## About Blackbaud

Blackbaud is the world's leading cloud software company powering social good. Serving the entire social good community—nonprofits, foundations, corporations, education institutions, healthcare institutions and individual change agents—Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through software, services, expertise, and data intelligence.

The Blackbaud portfolio is tailored to the unique needs of vertical markets, with solutions for fundraising and CRM, marketing, advocacy, peer-to-peer fundraising, corporate social responsibility, school management, ticketing, grantmaking, financial management, payment processing, and analytics. Serving the industry for more than three decades, Blackbaud is headquartered in Charleston, South Carolina and has operations in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

©March 2019, Blackbaud, Inc.



THE  
UNSTUCK  
GROUP®

blackbaud®