

New churches draw people who previously didn't attend

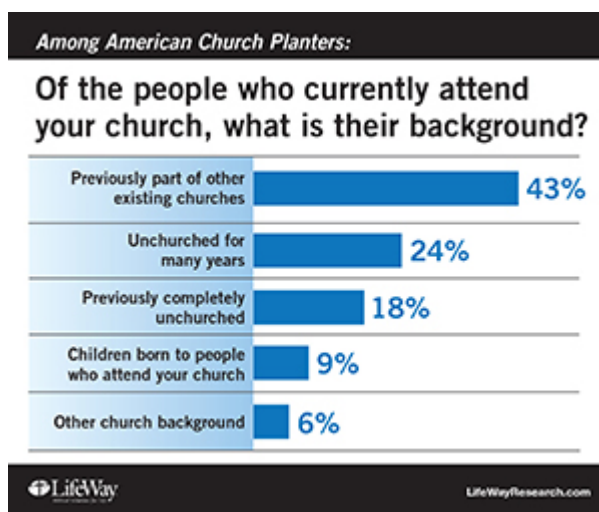
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NASHVILLE, Tenn.—America is launching new Protestant churches faster than it loses old ones, attracting many people who previously didn't attend anywhere, new [LifeWay Research](#) studies show.

More than 4,000 churches opened their doors in 2014, outpacing the 3,700 that closed, according to estimates from the research organization, based on input from 34 denominational statisticians.

And on average, 42 percent of the people worshipping at churches launched since 2008 previously never attended church or hadn't attended in many years, LifeWay Research finds in an analysis of 843 such churches from 17 denominations and church planting networks.

The church planting [study](#) indicates newly planted churches are more effective than existing ones at drawing people who aren't connected with a church, said Ed Stetzer, LifeWay Research executive director.



“In winning new converts to Christ, church plants are light years ahead of the average church because of their focus on reaching the unchurched,” Stetzer said.

Factors common to successful church launches

Successful church launches have several factors in common, the 2015 National Church Planting Study shows:

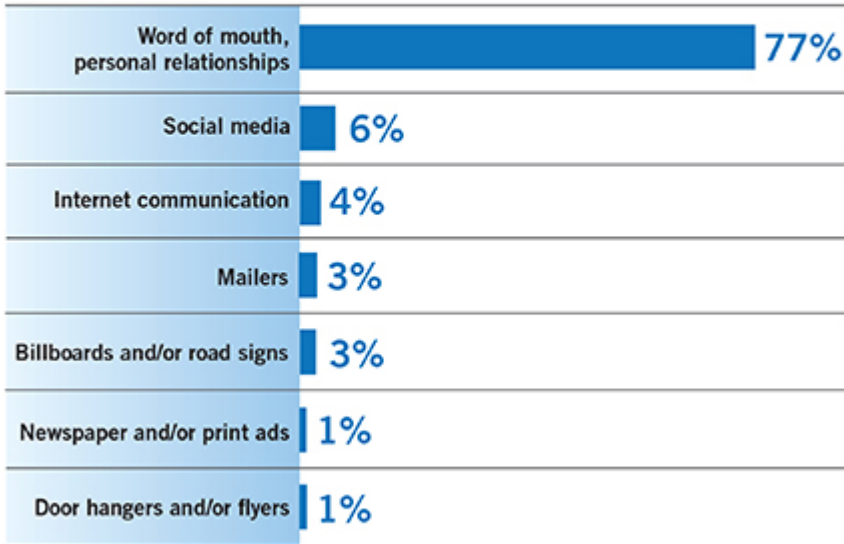
- **Meeting in a public space.** New churches meeting in schools have significantly higher worship attendance than other new churches, report more first-time commitments to Christ and are more likely to become financially self-sufficient.
- **Focusing on outreach.** New churches that offer sports leagues, social gatherings and children's special events are significantly more likely than other startups to be congregations with a majority of people who previously did not attend church.
- **Supporting their leaders.** Adequate compensation and health insurance for the church planter are linked to higher worship attendance and a greater likelihood of financial independence for the new church.
- **Starting more churches.** New churches that invest in church planting and launch at least one additional new church in the first five years report higher worship attendance and more commitments to Christ.

"Healthy new churches have an outward focus from day one, communicating every month that the goal is to be a multiplying church," Stetzer said.

Although some pastors bristle at new churches coming into their community, they have more to learn—and less to fear—from the startup down the street, Stetzer said.

Among American Church Planters:

What form of publicity is the most successful at attracting new members?



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One lesson is the value of time-tested methods. While most church plants use the Internet for outreach, 77 percent say word of mouth and personal relationships are the most effective forms of publicity. Only 6 percent say social media is most effective.

Nearly two-thirds of new churches (63 percent) say Bible study is their primary small group activity.

“It’s not the most innovative things that matter most. It’s the nuts and bolts,” Stetzer said.

“An existing church can take notice and ask: ‘Hey, are we doing those things? Are we making sure people in the community know we exist? Are we inviting people to come and making them feel welcome and all those things a church plant does?’”

In addition, new churches can attract demographic groups that largely may be unreached by existing ones, Stetzer said. Sixty percent of church plants aim to reach a cross-cultural or multiethnic group of people from the outset.

“It takes multiple methods to reach a diverse population,” Stetzer said.

“The United States from its founding has been a very diverse population. A one-size-fits-all church has never been part of the American equation.

“As much as ever, we need different approaches to reach different types of people.”

The 2015 National Church Planting Study report analyzes 843 churches started in 2008 or later that continue to exist today. The study was sponsored by 17 denominations and church planting networks that participate in the Church Planting Leadership Fellowship.

From May to August 2015, planters were invited individually to complete the online survey by email, phone and postcard. Factors associated with church planting success were determined after controlling for church demographics, denomination/church planting network, U.S. state, church planter characteristics and other characteristics.

Estimates of the number of 2014 Protestant church starts and closures are based on unofficial reports LifeWay Research gathered from 34 denominations that represent 55 percent of U.S. Protestant churches. The pattern in this large sample was applied to the nonreporting and nondenominational groups to provide the overall estimate.