

A study of ACMR data (2008-2020) and the five church health metrics proposed by the Acts 2 Journey Team

What is the healthiest church size?

Clearly there would be many factors to consider in such a question, but when considering the new metrics proposed by the Church Transformation Initiative, possible answers begin to emerge. These metrics, based on reported worship attendance, conversion, and both water and Spirit baptisms, are some of the many metrics worth considering when defining a healthy church. While in no way a conclusive or an exhaustive list of measures, these metrics do begin to address missional effectiveness, assimilation, kingdom growth, discipleship, mobilization, and reproduction of Spirit-baptized disciples.

As with physical health, church health is built on potentially dozens of factors, so any final determination of health would require consideration of many additional measures. Historically, when using the five metrics of this study, churches 200-399 and 400-699 have generally proven to demonstrate the best overall health. Recent years' studies, however, reveal significant struggles among these groupings as well.

Churches under 200 are most unhealthy in the area of missional effectiveness. The ratio of attendance to conversions is typically insufficient to support growth. These churches do, however, demonstrate effectiveness in both water and Spirit baptism ratios, and achieved healthy levels in these two categories in virtually every year of the study.

Churches over 400 are the strongest in missional effectiveness. For the largest of these churches, the conversion numbers are extraordinarily high, but their water baptism and Spirit baptism ratios continue to be well below healthy levels. Though their water baptism ratios had been improving in recent years, they have slipped back and remain well beyond a healthy threshold. Spirit baptism ratios in larger churches are showing slight improvement, but remain well beyond the healthy standard, at times even rising more than twice the targeted threshold.

IMPORTANT: Given the impact on overall data and ministry emphasis increasingly given to mega-churches (2000+) additional categories of 2,000+ and 5,000+ in worship attendance have been added in recent years. In 2020, 80 churches reported an average of 2000+ in worship attendance compared to 53 such churches in 2005. Nearly 1/5 (19.7%) of the total worship attendance was reported by these churches compared to 9.98% in 2005. Similarly, in 2020, 15 churches reported an average of 5000+ in worship attendance compared to 5 such churches in 2005. 9.2% of the 2019 total worship attendance was reported by these churches compared to 1.77% in 2005. It is also significant that the attendance reported by both extra large categories have dropped from the record levels recorded in 2018 (45.5% decrease for 2000+ churches; 41.1% decrease for 5000+ churches) The number of 5000+ churches decreased by eight (from 23 to 15 or 53.3% of total), decline driven largely by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it should be noted that 2019 showed decline as well.

Of course there are many other available observations from the data collected in this study. After a brief explanation of the research, the remainder of this report explains the metrics and provides both the data and paragraph summaries of key observations.

COVID Statement

Some may question the value of such data reporting given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the normal activities of the local church. Indeed, 2020 has been a year of unusual nature. Attendance and adherent measures have been greatly affected. Still, assessment provides an encounter with reality, in this case a reality that must be recovered from as the subsequent year does not provide a return to previous levels. 2020 ends where 2021 starts and must be treated as such. 2020 data reveals both the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current reality of the local church—a reality that confronts the local pastor in all ministry efforts.

The Research

The metrics of this study were derived from worship attendance, conversion, water baptism, and Spirit baptism data taken from the previous 13 years of data (2008-2020), though data is available for every year

since 1980. All data has been obtained from the relevant year's submissions of the Annual Church Ministries Report (ACMR).

Terminology

When speaking of small and large churches, the following terminology has been used consistently in this report:

- Smallest churches – those reporting 1-49 in worship attendance
- Smaller churches – those reporting 1-199 in worship attendance
- Larger churches – those reporting 200+ in worship attendance
- Largest churches – those reporting 1000+ in worship attendance
- Mega-churches 2 – those reporting 2000+ in worship attendance
- Mega-churches 5 – those reporting 5000+ in worship attendance

The Metrics (with observations)

Five metrics have been used for the purpose of measuring church health. They are as follows:

1. Missional Effectiveness and the AC Ratio

The AC measures our worship attendance against the number of conversions or salvation decisions our efforts produce. This ratio demonstrates the local church's **missional effectiveness**. Rather than measuring attendance alone, the AC reveals the degree to which our efforts to connect with people and lead them to faith in Christ are being effective by calculating how many of us it takes to produce a new believer each year.

Healthy Church¹: Attendance / Conversions < 5.0

¹*It is estimated that in a healthy church, the AC of a local congregation will likely be 5.0 or lower.*

AC < 5.0	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
1-49	8.15	6.29	6.92	6.70	6.36	6.20	6.28	6.09	6.17	6.08	6.36	6.05	5.89
50-99	7.25	6.63	6.60	6.71	6.65	6.00	5.67	5.74	6.32	6.35	6.26	5.99	6.20
100-199	7.15	5.93	6.29	6.57	6.09	5.51	6.01	5.96	5.75	6.21	6.18	5.86	6.08
200-399	6.06	5.41	5.39	5.43	5.66	4.95	4.90	5.55	5.32	4.62	5.01	4.36	4.22
400-699	4.72	3.75	3.86	3.66	3.56	3.73	4.34	4.18	3.94	4.27	3.69	3.87	3.94
700-999	5.32	3.91	4.05	3.95	4.09	2.94	2.53	4.60	4.45	3.25	3.76	4.09	4.65
1000+	3.21	2.88	2.96	2.76	2.60	3.08	3.12	2.68	2.59	2.46	2.78	2.71	2.50
2000+	2.71	2.53	2.70	2.46	2.35	2.88					2.60		
5000+	1.90	1.95	2.14	1.90	1.98	2.95					2.96		

Our larger churches demonstrate greater missional effectiveness than our smaller congregations.

Our largest churches (1000+) report an attendance to conversion ratio (AC) approximately three times as effective as our smaller churches (0-199). In these largest congregations the number of conversions reported in 2020 demonstrated a 33% decrease over 2019. While there is obvious impact from the pandemic, the conversions reported by these churches have been declining since 2017's all-time high. The number of conversions reported in our largest churches represents nearly more than 30% of their reported attendance, meaning these churches report a conversion for every 3.1 people attending their worship settings. In smaller churches (under 200) conversions reported annually comprise just under 14% of reported worship attendance, with a conversion reported for every 7.4 people attending their worship settings.

The missional effectiveness ratio (AC) has shown some decline among all church size groupings.

In the last past decade of the study, nearly every size group showed an increasing AC ratio. This means that this measure of missional effectiveness is declining for each of these groups. The current trend shows that it is taking more worship attenders to produce a conversion.

Churches above 400 show the healthiest conversion ratios (AC).

Since we have established the healthy threshold for the AC at 5.0, it is noteworthy that all groups above 400 had an AC inside this threshold for 2020 (except 700-999). All groups under 400 in worship attendance

had an AC significantly beyond this threshold, underscoring the apparent need for greater evangelism effectiveness in our smaller churches.

For every 100 people in a smaller church, 13.7 conversions were reported in 2020.

At first glance, this might seem like an acceptable number, given that 13 converts provide a potential for growth. But a healthy threshold would require at least 20 conversions. Since other research has shown that our smaller churches are not growing, we can conclude that the current level of conversions is, indeed, failing to produce congregational growth.

For every 100 people in a large church, nearly 24.7 conversions were reported in 2020.

This strong rate of conversions points to a high level of missional effectiveness in our larger churches, though this number showed decline over previous years. Clearly conversion growth is a significant element of the growth in these churches (gross increase of 132,104 people from 2000-2020). However, the wide gap between these conversion numbers and those reported in smaller churches may also underscore a need for clarifying how conversions are counted.

The largest churches report nearly 50% of all conversions, while mega-churches report 38% of total conversions.

The 202 churches (1.56% of all churches) reporting more than 1000 in average worship attendance also reported 46.56% of the total conversions. The 80 churches (0.6% of all churches) reporting more than 2000 in worship attendance also reported 37.4% of the total conversions. The 15 churches (0.15% of all churches) reporting more than 5000 in worship attendance reported 24.7% of the total conversions.

This research underscores the likely need to provide standards for reporting conversions.

The process for ACMR reporting of conversions continues to be in need of review leadership. Given that the ACMR instructions offer no guidance for counting conversions, there can be ample room for a wide variety of approaches. The numbers reported seem to indicate the presence of this diversity, as some churches report levels of conversions that might either be inflated or poorly managed. For example, in our largest churches (1000+), the annual conversion number has been reported as high as 40% of the worship attendance.

Since those who report the highest conversions also report the lowest percentage of water baptisms (CW), we must either conclude that these churches are either struggling more than others to maintain contact with and lead converts to water baptism or they may be counting converts in a manner different from others.

One recommendation might be that *a convert should only be counted when the church has sufficient information to reconnect personally with that individual.* Such a requirement would demand either a name or the ability to identify the individual in other ways (i.e., Sandra’s mom, the Wilson’s neighbor, etc.). Without the ability to initiate future connection, the process of discipleship will be difficult to continue.

2. Assimilation and the CW Ratio

The CW identifies the salvation decisions solidified by the act of water baptism by taking the total number of conversions for the year and comparing that number with the water baptisms reported that same year. A CW of 1.0 would mean that we baptized the same number of people as made conversion decisions. The CW can be used to help us measure the health of our **assimilation** efforts. A low CW indicates that the church is maintaining connection to its converts long enough to guide them toward the choice to be baptized. A high CW indicates that we aren’t baptizing a good percentage of our converts.

Healthy Church²: Conversions / Water Baptisms < 3.0

²*It is estimated that in a healthy church, the CW of a local congregation will likely be 3.0 or lower.*

CW < 3.0	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
1-49	2.70	2.95	2.58	2.55	2.68	2.63	2.61	2.69	2.72	2.57	2.53	2.54	2.70
50-99	2.28	2.22	2.13	2.12	1.98	2.17	2.32	2.31	2.08	2.11	2.15	2.24	2.23
100-199	2.49	2.39	2.15	2.10	2.23	2.37	2.18	2.15	2.31	2.16	2.19	2.33	2.31
200-399	2.61	2.66	2.62	2.53	2.52	2.81	2.76	2.52	2.70	3.13	2.88	3.17	3.39

400-699	3.78	3.81	4.00	4.35	4.23	3.72	3.43	3.14	3.65	3.30	3.79	3.79	4.12
700-999	3.67	4.11	4.05	4.01	3.87	5.13	6.42	3.23	3.31	4.20	4.13	3.99	3.78
1000+	5.62	5.30	5.14	5.17	5.44	5.19	4.79	5.38	5.65	7.02	6.42	6.73	7.82
2000+	6.42	5.76	5.35	5.56	5.79	5.56					6.94		
5000+	7.34	6.56	6.33	6.83	6.60	5.70					6.70		

Smaller churches demonstrate stronger water baptism ratios (CW).

Our smaller churches baptize more than 40% of their reported conversions. Since the healthy threshold for the Conversion/Water Baptism ratio (CW) is 3.0 (or baptizing 1 of 3 conversions), our smaller churches are well within healthy boundaries.

Larger churches have poor water baptism (CW) ratios.

Whether due to high numbers of reported conversions or difficulty maintaining sufficient contact with those converted so as to lead them to water baptism, it is generally accurate to say that the larger the church, the lower percentage of their converts are being baptized. Among churches 1000+, more than five converts are reported for each water baptism. Churches of 5000+ report nearly seven converts for each water baptism. One recommendation might be a national emphasis on water baptism, including a *Nationwide Baptism Day*, similar to the effort made by the Assemblies of God in Brazil and perhaps others.

The water baptism ratio (CW) is generally improving among all size groupings over the past decade.

Overall, the CW ratio has shown either consistency or some improvement in nearly every size grouping, though all but two groupings showed decline in this area in 2020. While the CW ratio of all three size groups 400 and larger (400-699, 700-999, 1000+) are beyond the healthy threshold, these ratios have been showing some improvement over the study period, though the most recent years demonstrate a regression.

Water baptism rates in our largest churches had shown slight improvement in the past two years, but ground has been lost in 2019 and 2020. These churches continue to have the poorest rates among all size grouping.

Less than 1 in 6 of reported conversions are baptized in mega-churches. While this is well below the healthy threshold, it is improved from 1 in 7 in 2010 and 1 in 8 in 2005.

3. Kingdom Growth and the AW Ratio

The AW measures the number of water baptisms against our average worship attendance. Since most of our churches require new members to be converted and baptized, this ratio can help us see our potential for membership growth. Yes, transfer growth can give us new members and not positively affect this ratio, but the AW demonstrates a local church's actual contribution to **kingdom growth**. If a church's AC should be below 5.0 and the CW should be less than 3.0, the AW should be less than 15.0.

Healthy Church³: Attendance / Water Baptisms < 15.0

³*It is estimated that in a healthy church, the AW of a local congregation will likely be 15.0 or lower.*

AW < 15.0	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
1-49	21.99	18.57	17.84	17.08	17.07	16.34	16.37	16.35	16.79	15.65	16.05	15.40	15.91
50-99	16.49	14.71	14.05	14.19	13.16	13.00	13.16	13.28	13.13	13.38	13.44	13.42	13.81
100-199	17.82	14.18	13.50	13.83	13.58	13.04	13.08	12.84	13.28	13.38	13.53	13.64	14.06
200-399	15.84	14.37	14.11	13.73	14.26	13.91	13.55	13.98	14.36	14.47	14.41	13.83	14.31
400-699	17.85	14.26	15.43	15.92	15.09	13.89	14.86	13.15	14.37	14.09	13.98	14.67	16.21
700-999	19.52	16.10	15.75	15.85	15.85	15.07	16.26	14.89	14.75	13.67	15.54	16.29	17.55
1000+	18.04	15.30	15.22	14.29	14.15	15.97	14.96	14.43	14.62	17.27	17.81	18.24	19.57
2000+	17.38	14.59	14.44	13.70	13.64	15.99					18.05		
5000+	13.93	12.78	13.54	12.98	13.09	16.84					18.26		

Is membership growth potential keeping pace with church turnover and mortality rates?

The AW ratio (attendance/water baptism) helps us measure kingdom growth in that it identifies the ratio of converted and baptized individuals to attendance in a congregation. If an AC of 5.0 and a CW of 3.0 provide the healthy boundaries, then an AW of 15.0 or 6.67 baptized for every 100 in attendance would be the healthy threshold. That would mean seven (rounded) individuals now able to become members of a church (since most list water baptism as a prerequisite for membership).

The question these numbers force is whether or not the healthy AW threshold will translate into church growth or increased health. It seems the current AW isn't overcoming decline in the smaller church, but is sufficient to support growth in the larger church.

The attendance to water baptism ratio (AW) is not significantly affected by church size.

In 2020, all most size groupings exceeded the AW threshold of 15.0. The AW of churches 0-49 exceeded the target significantly 21.99 as did the AW of churches 700-999 at 19.52. The AW of our largest churches (1000+) also exceeded (18.04) the target. Of course, smaller churches had unhealthy conversion rates and healthy baptism rates, while the larger churches excelled in conversion but struggled with baptism ratios. Combining the two ratios brought both groups to comparable nearly healthy levels in this ratio, but the lack of growth in smaller churches underscores that their current ratio is just beyond the outer threshold for health and likely needs to be significantly lower to achieve growth.

While we must believe that baptism rates impact church growth, it's clear that other factors are required to account for the fuller picture. For greater health, the larger church must increase baptism efforts while not diminishing its conversion focus if health is to be achieved. Smaller churches must escalate their efforts in evangelism while not slowing their effectiveness in water baptism if health will be achieved.

4. Discipleship and Mobilization and the CS Ratio

A CS ratio compares conversions with Spirit baptisms and can help us measure both **discipleship** effectiveness and our efforts to **mobilize** our Spirit-filled saints. It would seem that our CS should be 4.0 or less since that would mean ¼ of our converts are being baptized in the Holy Spirit. At the same time, a CS below 3.0 would indicate that we are struggling to mobilize the Spirit-filled people in our church. It seems unlikely that Spirit baptism numbers would approach conversion numbers in a healthy church since Spirit baptized people should now be more effectively engaged in evangelism effort.

$$\text{Healthy Church}^4: \quad 3.0 < \text{Conversions} / \text{Spirit Baptisms} < 4.0$$

⁴A healthy CS would likely fall between 3.0 and 4.0. So, if our numbers are outside those parameters, we can identify whether we have a mobilization problem (<3.0) or a discipleship problem (>4.0).

3.0 < CS < 4.0	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
1-49	3.34	3.77	3.56	3.94	4.23	3.97	4.24	3.93	4.01	3.84	3.73	4.07	3.57
50-99	3.45	3.55	3.47	3.50	3.35	3.64	3.69	3.84	3.51	3.57	3.37	3.46	3.47
100-199	3.88	4.03	3.63	3.80	3.97	4.12	3.69	3.67	4.00	3.59	3.49	3.66	3.60
200-399	4.48	4.25	4.28	4.29	4.39	4.57	4.68	4.26	4.46	4.65	4.49	4.93	4.90
400-699	7.00	6.96	7.03	7.38	7.23	6.79	5.66	5.67	5.79	5.27	5.41	4.90	5.24
700-999	7.78	6.23	5.99	6.73	6.28	8.91	10.78	5.76	5.19	6.42	6.17	5.90	4.28
1000+	7.26	7.29	6.88	7.43	6.60	8.92	7.95	8.08	8.75	9.12	7.36	7.78	8.25
2000+	7.42	7.00	6.69	7.42	7.98	9.89					6.95		
5000+	8.22	6.49	6.67	7.60	7.99	15.16					6.16		

Smaller churches demonstrate stronger Spirit baptism ratios (CS).

When it comes to Spirit baptism, the smaller church posts a healthier ratio of conversions to spirit baptisms (CS). Some might argue that this score is affected by the fewer number of conversions, but it still indicates that the priority of Spirit baptism is being managed reasonably well in the smaller church.

A healthy CS has been determined to be between 3.0 and 4.0. Smaller churches 1-199 have been nearer these boundaries in each of the 12 years in the study. None of the size groupings above 200 have met the healthy standard in any year of the study.

An additional question arises when considering whether or not the smaller congregation is effectively mobilizing its Spirit-filled saints in evangelism effort. It seems theologically contradictory that our smaller churches would be doing better than others at leading people to Spirit baptism, but simultaneously struggling to generate healthy conversion numbers.

Our largest churches (1000+) reported a 42% decrease in Spirit baptisms in 2020 when compared to 2016.

The volatility of reported totals among these churches suggests the need to evaluate this reporting in a manner that has yet to be accomplished. While the COVID-19 pandemic played a large role, it should be remembered that 2019 showed a 13% decline when compared to 2016. This, alongside the near 30% increase in conversions reported by these same churches since 2015 suggests either a great spiritual renewal or a shift in approaches to reporting. Subsequent, church-by-church review should be considered to determine the nature of this increase.

Largest churches still report poorest Spirit baptism ratios (CS).

In our larger churches (200+), the ratio of conversions to Spirit baptisms has rarely dipped below 5.0 during the entire period of the study and have remained well above 6.0 in the past six years. In fact, the larger the church, the higher the ratio climbed, with Churches 1000+ posting a CS of 7.26 for 2020, which shows a loss of recent improvement in the past decade; however, this ratio is greatly affected by large number of Spirit baptisms reported by one or two congregations. It is a great concern that these largest churches report only one Spirit baptism for every seven conversions. To interpret the impact of this data, *consider that only 1 of 7 reported conversions in churches will ever become a Spirit-baptized believer.*

What does this mean? It seems evident that the larger congregation struggles to guide many of its new converts to spirit baptism. While the cause can be emphasis, it might also be affected by limited settings for such intensive pursuit or issues related to gathering such information.

While our largest churches are also our fastest growing, the low rate of Spirit baptisms compared to conversion rates is alarming. Indeed, how can such churches expect to maintain a Spirit-filled focus if so few of those they reach ever make it to their own Upper Room?

Spirit baptism ratios pose long-term challenge for larger churches.

The importance of the CS for the larger church is revealed when thinking of the long-term implications of such high ratios. If, only 1 out of 7 or 8 converts ultimately experience Spirit baptism, as has been the case for our largest churches throughout the years of the study, what hope will that church have of maintaining a Spirit-filled environment or finding Spirit-filled individuals for ministry and church leadership into the future.

We should also consider the level of influence many of these churches and their leaders have gained throughout our fellowship. *If there is a diminished focus, priority, and practice of Spirit-baptism in these settings, to what degree would widening their influence among other churches further diminish the Pentecostal pursuit of the Fellowship?* It's worth noting that twice in the book of Acts (Samaria Acts 8; Ephesus Acts 19), the apostles aggressively sought to engage a lack of Spirit-baptism focus amidst great revival.

Poor Spirit baptism ratio (CS) for large churches affected by high conversions reported.

If a standard for reporting conversions were implemented, the high number of conversions reported, especially among larger churches, would likely be affected. Since the number of conversions is a core element of the CS, any inflation of conversion numbers would adversely affect this important ratio. A conversions reporting standard would very likely improve the poor CS numbers and reveal that we may be actually doing a better job of leading new converts to Spirit baptism among those with whom we can maintain contact.

5. Reproduction and the AS Ratio

As we did with water baptism, we can combine attendance and Spirit baptism numbers in an AS ratio. By measuring Spirit baptism against average worship attendance, we can measure the

reproduction of Spirit-filled disciples taking place in the congregation. Our collective efforts to continue pursuing Christ's worldwide harvest in the future hinge on the continued **reproduction** of Spirit-filled believers. The healthy range for the AS can be found by multiplying the church's AC by

$$\text{Healthy Church}^5: \quad 3.0 * AC < \text{Attendance} / \text{Spirit Baptisms} < 4.0 * AC$$

⁵The healthy range for the AS can be found by multiplying the church's AC by 3.0 and 4.0. In so doing, if the AS is outside these parameters, we can determine whether we have a mobilization problem (<3.0) or a discipleship problem (>4.0).

3*AC < AS < 4*AC	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
0-49	27.25	23.69	24.61	26.36	26.94	24.61	26.60	23.94	24.75	23.34	23.71	24.63	21.05
50-99	24.97	23.54	22.92	23.49	22.27	21.85	20.91	22.02	22.18	22.65	21.07	20.70	21.51
100-199	27.70	23.88	22.85	24.98	24.16	22.70	22.14	21.91	22.99	22.26	21.57	21.44	21.89
200-399	27.19	23.00	23.04	23.28	24.87	22.62	22.94	23.68	23.75	21.49	22.49	21.51	20.66
400-699	33.06	26.07	27.14	27.00	25.77	25.36	24.54	23.71	22.82	22.51	19.95	18.95	20.64
700-999	41.38	24.40	24.23	26.61	25.70	26.19	27.28	26.52	23.10	20.86	23.20	24.11	19.87
1000+	23.32	21.01	20.39	20.53	17.17	27.46	24.83	21.67	22.66	22.44	20.43	21.09	20.63
2000+	20.08	17.73	18.06					18.29	18.79	28.43	18.08		
5000+	15.61	12.64	14.28					14.44	15.84	44.78	18.26		

While the larger church shows excellent conversion ratios (AC) and the smaller church shows nearly healthy Spirit baptism ratios (CS), neither group was able to achieve a healthy attendance to Spirit baptism ratio (AS). A healthy AS is calculated as follows:

$$\text{A healthy AS ratio:} \quad \text{where } 3 * AC < AS < 4 * AC$$

For example, for the largest churches, the AC in 2020 was 2.88, so:

$$(3 * 3.21) < AS < (4 * 3.21) \quad \text{or} \quad 9.63 < AS < 12.84$$

Since the actual AS for 2020 in this group was 23.32, you can see that this is well beyond the healthy parameters.

Calculating the AS for the smallest churches reveals a somewhat better result (actual AS for 2020 was 27.25):

$$(3 * 8.15) < AS < (4 * 8.15) \quad \text{or} \quad 24.5 < AS < 32.6$$

The larger churches AS is made unhealthy by poor Spirit baptism results while the smaller churches AS is negatively affected by poor conversion numbers. If both were healthy, the numbers would look something like this:

$$(3 * 5.0) < AS < (4 * 5.0) \quad \text{or} \quad 15.0 < AS < 20.0$$

One should note that 5.0 is the upper threshold for a healthy AC. Even healthier conversion ratios would yield a lower and healthier AS.

Higher reporting of Spirit baptisms among our largest churches (1000+) requires more research.

The aforementioned increase in reported Spirit Baptisms among our largest churches prior to 2020 suggests the need to evaluate this reporting in a manner that has yet to be accomplished. This, alongside the near 55% increase in conversions reported by these same churches (since 2015) suggests either a great spiritual renewal or a shift in approaches to reporting. Subsequent, church-by-church review should be considered to determine the nature of this increase. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought these numbers back to 2015 levels, the recent reporting should reflect concern.

One in 25 attenders baptized in Spirit each year in our smaller churches.

Since our smaller churches are not growing, one Spirit baptism for every 27 (27.3) attenders would produce an increasingly Spirit-filled congregation, provided that those lost to the congregation were not among its Spirit-filled members. Since this is unlikely to be the case, one can hardly imagine that the current AS ratios for smaller churches can sustain a long-term priority for Spirit baptism.

Consider a small church of 100 people:

At the current AC (7.15), CW (2.49), and the current AS (27.25), 14 conversions would be reported, 5 or 6 water baptisms will occur, and 3-4 will be baptized in the Spirit each year. While we don't know the church's turnover rate (the number who died or left the church and the number of new people added in a year), we do know that this church is experiencing no better than 0% growth or a net change of zero, so we can only at best project an attendance of 100 at the end of that year. If congregational turnover was exceptionally low, it is possible that a higher percentage of Spirit-baptized believers are in the congregation at the end of the year.

Certainly there are variables that cannot be fully collected in these calculations, but these smaller churches are recording four conversions for every Spirit baptism. It is possible that in some cases, the congregational percentage of Spirit-baptized individuals is increasing.

Consider a large church of 1,000 people:

At the current AC (3.21), CW (5.62), and the current AS (23.32), 312 conversions would be reported, 55 water baptisms would occur, and 43 will be baptized in the Spirit each year. Again, we don't know the church's turnover rate, but we do know that our largest churches averaged more than 50% growth over the past decade, or an annual net change of nearly 5%, so if we can project an attendance of 1,050 at the end of that year. While not knowing the turnover number and how many of those who died or left or were added were Spirit-filled, we do know that at these rates, the church is reporting a minimum of 269 non-Spirit-baptized and 257 non-water-baptized conversions each year or more than seven non-Spirit baptized for every one Spirit-baptized and more than five non-water baptized for every one water baptized convert.

Certainly there are variables that cannot be fully collected in these calculations, but these largest churches are recording seven or more conversions for every Spirit baptism so it's difficult to project that the congregational percentage of Spirit-baptized individuals is increasing.

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Sherry Doty and her team provided research data for this study.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Mike Clarensau
Research Coordinator, Acts 2 Journey Team