



Congregations with Multiple Clergy

By Amy Kubichek, Ph.D. and Lovett H. Weems Jr.

Religious Workforce Project

Lewis Center for Church Leadership

Wesley Theological Seminary



**Religious
Workforce
Project**



www.religiousworkforce.com



About the Religious Workforce Project

Building on previous research, the Religious Workforce Project is an effort to understand the nation's religious workforce in a comprehensive way. The Project includes a national meta-analysis and a qualitative study in the Washington, DC, metro area. Funding for the project is generously provided by The Lilly Endowment, Inc. This project seeks to answer the following questions: Given today's changing religious landscape, how are leaders of U.S. congregations adapting? How do these changes shape the staffing, financial models, priorities, and the work of U.S. congregations? And what is the state of the religious workforce today?



Congregations with Multiple Clergy

By Amy Kubichek, Ph.D. and Dr. Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Introduction

Congregations vary considerably in the number of pastoral leaders that serve them. Those who worship in churches with multiple clergy may be surprised to learn that just over half (54%) of U. S. congregations have only one pastor and no other paid ministry staff, according to the latest wave of the National Congregations Study.¹ Indeed, for many of them their one pastor may be part-time or in some cases an unpaid volunteer pastor.

The research focuses on the almost half of congregations that do have multiple pastors and/or paid ministerial staff. This report explores the characteristics of those congregations that have multiple clergy leading them. We begin with an overview of all congregations in the United States by drawing on National Congregations Study data. We then move on to look at the characteristics of multiple-clergy churches across several Protestant denominations.

Congregations with Multiple Ministerial Staff across Religious Traditions

The National Congregations Study² gives a snapshot of some trends among congregations with more than one ministerial staff person. The NCS uses the terminology of “ministerial staff” to designate those who are paid full-time to do ministry work such as youth ministry, music ministry, religious education, among other roles.³ This does not necessarily mean these staff are ordained or serve as pastors, although pastors are certainly included. This is especially true among Roman Catholic parishes where all types of staffing have increased but the number of additional priests has not necessarily increased. Across traditions, increasing numbers of people appear

1 Mark Chaves, Joseph Roso, Anna Holleman, and Mary Hawkins. *Congregations in 21st Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2021), 28.

2 Mark Chaves, *National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset* (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019).

3 Mark Chaves, Joseph Roso, Anna Holleman, and Mary Hawkins. *Congregations in 21st Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2021), 29.



to have responsibilities and often specific training for various ministerial roles that might previously have been done by clergy. We use the NCS data because it gives consistent information over a span of time. However, later in the report, we focus more specifically on churches with multiple clergy.

We begin by looking at the percentage of churches with two or more full-time ministerial staff in four Christian traditions: Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic. The percentage of churches with two or more full-time ministerial staff stayed about the same across the three NCS surveys between 2006-2007 and 2018-2019 (table 1).⁴ Roman Catholic parishes are the most likely to have multiple ministerial staff. By 2018, almost half (47 percent) had more than one ministerial staff. This is more than twice the percentage of evangelical Protestant congregations with more than one ministry staff (22 percent). In contrast, less than 10 percent of Black Protestant congregations had multiple full-time staff in ministry positions in 2018.

Table 1. The Roman Catholic tradition has the largest share of congregations with two or more full-time ministerial staff

Religious Tradition	2006-07	2012	2018-19
Black Protestant	14.7%	7.7%	7.8%
Evangelical Protestant	18.7%	17.9%	21.8%
Mainline Protestant	14.9%	14.0%	13.7%
Roman Catholic	44.7%	41.1%	47.1%
All congregations	19.5%	16.2%	18.4%

Source: Chaves, M. (2021) National Congregations Study Cumulative Dataset (1998, 2006-2007, 2012, 2018-2019)

⁴ Mark Chaves, Joseph Roso, Anna Holleman, and Mary Hawkins. *Congregations in 21st Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2021), 74.



A different trend emerges regarding part-time ministerial staff, which the NCS also covers in the survey during wave 2 (2012) and wave 3 (2018-19). There is a statistically significant increase in the percentage of churches with two or more part-time ministerial staff persons, going from 14.8 percent in 2012 to 20.9 percent in 2018-19.⁵

We also look at the median number of full-time ministerial staff by congregational size as measured by number of regular participants. As one probably would expect, larger congregations tend to have more full-time ministry staff than smaller congregations. An analysis of NCS data combined for all four years shows that congregations with 50 or fewer regular participants have a median of zero full-time ministry staff, while congregations with 1,000 or more participants have a median of 5 full-time ministerial staff (table 2).

Table 2. Median number of full-time ministerial staff by congregations' regular participant range

Regular Participant Range	Number of Full-time Ministerial Staff
1,000 or more	5
501-999	3
251-500	2
51-250	1
50 or fewer	0

⁵ Mark Chaves, Joseph Roso, Anna Holleman, and Mary Hawkins. *Congregations in 21st Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2021), 75.



Congregations with Multiple Clergy across Denominations

There are different patterns among denominations within faith traditions. We have data that show the relative presence of churches with multiple clergy across some evangelical and mainline Protestant denominations between 2000 and 2019.

Evangelical Protestant

Church of the Nazarene

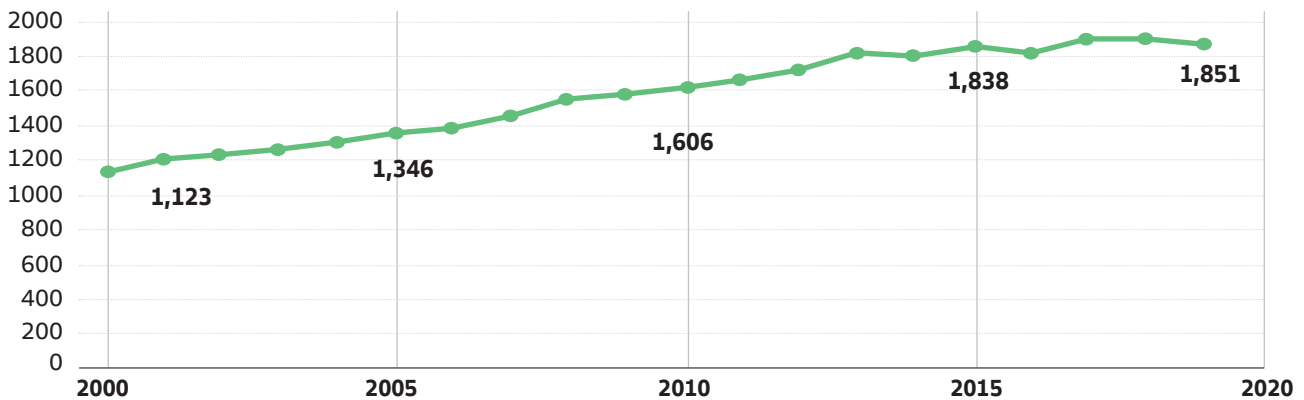
In Church of the Nazarene data, congregations report the number of clergy serving the congregation. The clergy may be full-time, part-time, paid, unpaid, active, or retired. There has been steady growth in churches reporting more than one clergy between 2000 and 2019, from 23 percent of churches (or 1,123) in 2000

to 37 percent (or 1,851) in 2019 (table 3 and figure 1). This is a relatively high percentage compared to other denominations that are covered later in this report.

Table 3. The share of Nazarene congregations with multiple clergy increased from 2000 to 2019.⁶

Year	Total Churches	Churches with 2+ Clergy (Number)	Churches with 2+ Clergy (Percent)
2000	4,646	1,123	24%
2005	4,611	1,346	29%
2010	4,618	1,606	35%
2015	4,535	1,838	41%
2019	4,414	1,851	42%

The number of Nazarene churches with multiple clergy increased from 2000 to 2019.



Source: Research Services, Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center

Figure 1: Number of Nazarene Churches with Multiple Clergy, 2000-2019

⁶ Total number of churches excludes the churches with missing data on number of clergy serving them.



Multiple clergy churches are most common among larger churches. Over 90 percent of congregations with 501 or more attenders have multiple clergy (figure 2). This is also true for just over 70 percent of churches with 101 to 250 attenders. However, multiple clergy are found in churches of all sizes to some extent. For instance, just over 40 percent of congregations with 51 to 100 worshipers have multiple clergy. The presence of multiple clergy in smaller congregations may be due to the fact that both full-time and part-time clergy are included in this number, as well as paid and unpaid. For example, 38 percent of multiple-clergy congregations in the 51 to 100 attendance range have a lead pastor who is bivocational.

Larger Nazarene congregations are more likely to have multiple pastors than smaller congregations.

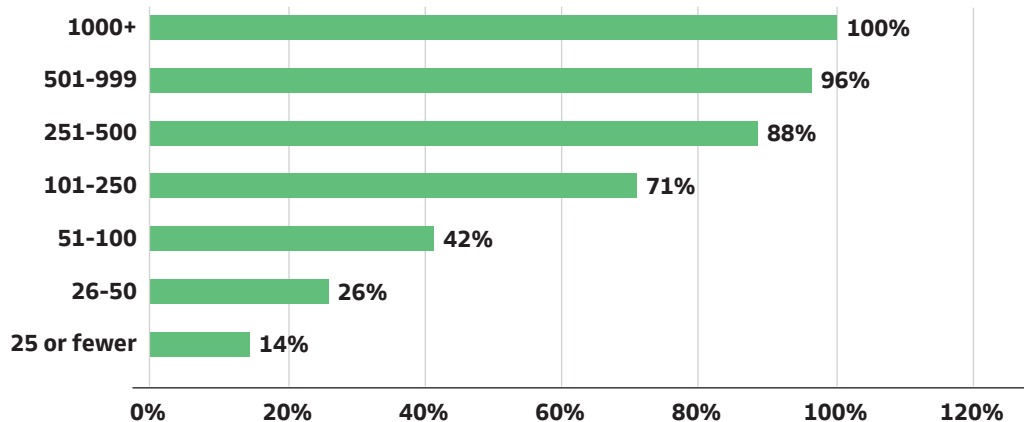


Figure 2. Percentage of Nazarene Churches with multiple clergy by average worship attendance tiers (2000-2019 pooled data)



Mainline Protestant

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The numbers reported for the ELCA include all rostered Ministers of Word and Sacrament, non-retired including both full time and part time. Clergy other than senior or solo pastors include assistant/

associate pastors, co-pastors, interim pastors, and pastor developers.⁷ Both the number and percentage of churches with multiple clergy declined between 2000 and 2018 (table 4). The percentage of churches with multiple clergy declined from 15 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2018. The number of multiple-clergy churches declined

by 52 percent during this period, going from 1,551 in 2000 to 747 in 2018. In the years for which we have data, these declines were generally steady and consistent from 2002 forward.⁸

Larger ELCA congregations are more likely to have multiple pastors (figure 3). In both 2000 and 2018, over 80 percent of congregations with 501 or more attenders had multiple pastors. Just

Table 4. The number of ELCA churches with multiple clergy has decreased.

Year	Churches with Multiple Clergy (Number)	Churches with Multiple Clergy (Percent)
2000	1,551	15%
2010	1,302	13%
2018	747	8%

Source: Research and Evaluation, ELCA

Larger ELCA congregations are more likely to have multiple pastors than smaller congregations.

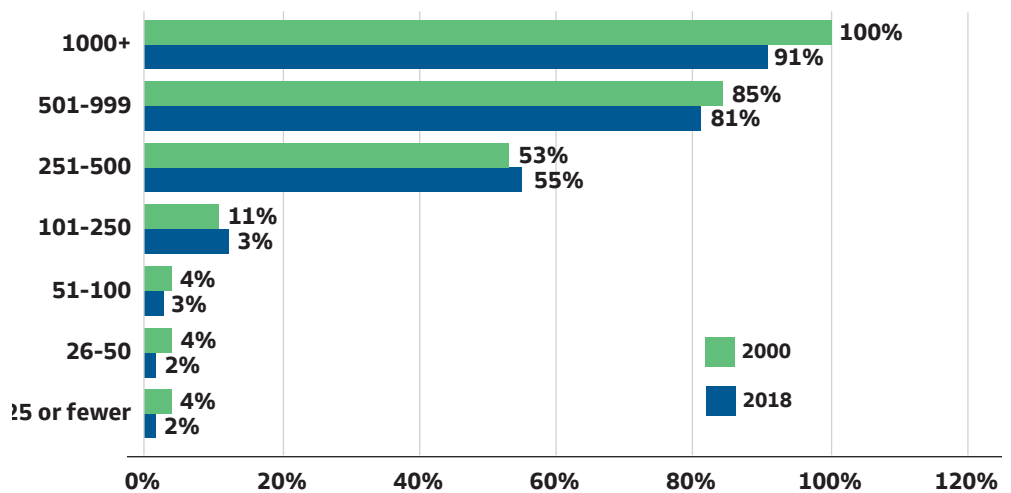


Figure 3. Percentage of ELCA Churches with multiple clergy by average worship attendance tiers, 2000 and 2018

⁷ Ministers of Word and Sacrament may serve congregations in roles other than as pastor, such as Children, Youth, and Family, music ministry, Christian formation and discipleship, campus ministers, and camp directors. Deacons (known as Ministers of Word and Service) are also clergy, although they do not usually serve as pastors. For the purposes of these analyses, only Ministers of Word and Sacrament serving in a pastor role are included.

⁸ Research and Evaluation, ELCA.



over half (53 to 55 percent) of congregations with 251 to 500 attenders had more than one pastor. Among ELCA congregations, 251 attenders seem to be the cut-off dividing those congregations that are likely to have multiple pastors from those that are not. The percentage of ELCA congregations with multiple clergy drops dramatically in congregations with 250 or fewer worshippers.

Episcopal Church

For the Episcopal Church, data on clergy are available beginning in 2010, and include full-time clergy who have not retired. Figures for 2010 through 2019 for the Episcopal Church show more multiple clergy churches in the early and late years of this time frame (table 5). Although the numbers do not vary dramatically, there is a noticeable increase in 2018 and 2019 in the number and percentage of churches with multiple clergy, as well as the number of clergy beyond the lead pastor (priests and deacons combined) (figure 4).

Table 5. Episcopal Churches with Multiple clergy, 2010-2019

Year	Total Churches	Churches with 2+ FT Clergy (Number)	Churches with 2+ FT Clergy (Percent)	Number of Clergy	Priests	Deacons
2010	6,794	820	12%	1,131	763	368
2011	6,736	853	13%	1,178	789	389
2012	6,667	836	13%	1,185	790	395
2013	6,622	783	12%	1,110	765	345
2014	6,553	763	12%	1,096	753	343
2015	6,510	802	12%	1,149	777	372
2016	6,473	801	12%	1,143	801	342
2017	6,447	794	12%	1,123	767	356
2018	6,423	841	13%	1,176	969	207
2019	6,393	884	14%	1,531	1,102	429

The number of Episcopal churches with multiple full-time clergy fluctuated between 2010 and 2019.

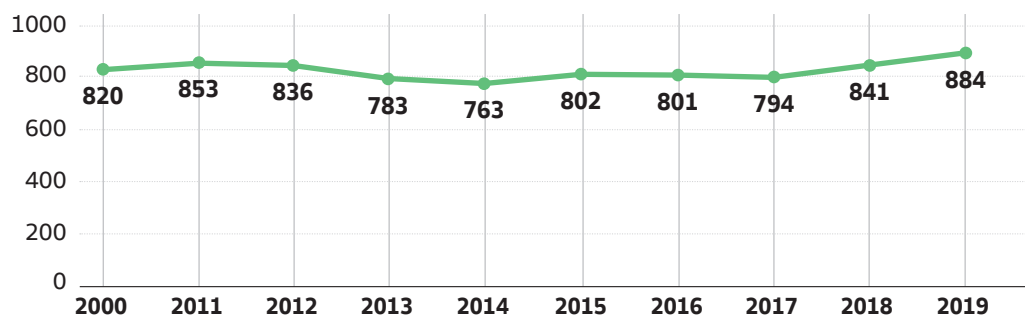


Figure 4. Episcopal Churches with Multiple clergy, 2000-2019



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

There are fewer Presbyterian Churches (USA) with two or more installed teaching elders (ordained clergy serving as pastors) in 2014 than in 2004, the period for which we have figures.⁹ The number of churches with multiple installed teaching elders declined steadily from 10 percent in 2004 to 7 percent in 2014 (table 6 and figure 5). The decline in terms of number of churches went from 1,133 in 2004 to 669 in 2014, or 41 percent fewer.

Table 6. The share of PCUSA Churches with Multiple clergy decreased between 2004 and 2014.

Year	Total Churches	Churches with 2+ FT Clergy (Number)	Churches with 2+ FT Clergy (Percent)
2004	11,019	1,133	10%
2005	10,960	1,009	9%
2006	10,905	1,011	9%
2007	10,820	989	9%
2008	10,753	974	9%
2009	10,658	973	9%
2010	10,562	911	9%
2011	10,466	876	8%
2012	10,267	812	8%
2013	10,038	736	7%
2014	9,829	669	7%

The number of PC(USA) churches with multiple full-time clergy decreased from 2004-2014.

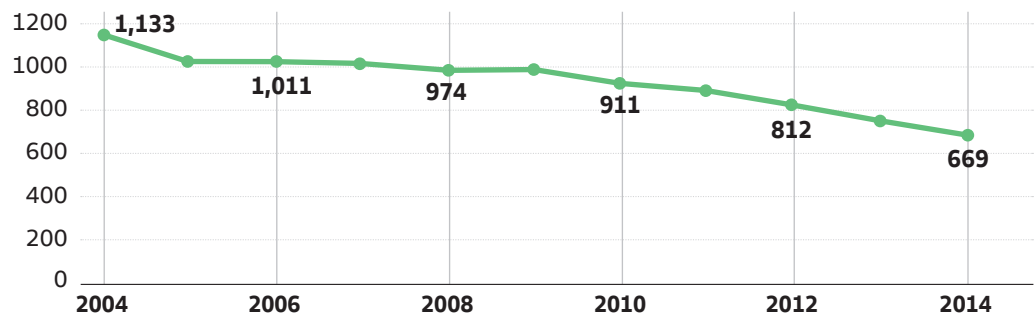


Figure 5. PCUSA Churches with Multiple clergy, 2004-2014

⁹ Comparative Statistics of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville, KY: Research Services, 2004-2014). Data for "congregations with more than one installed pastor."



United Church of Christ

Figures available from the United Church of Christ (2015-2019) indicate a small (2 percent) of churches reporting multiple clergy or other ministerial staff but with consistent and steady numbers for these five years (table 7).¹⁰

Table 7. UCC Churches with Multiple clergy, 2015-2019

Year	Total Churches	Co-Pastor	Associate Pastor	Christian Educ.	Music Minister	Youth Minister	Other Local Church Worker	Total Secondary Ministry Staff	Multiple-Clergy Churches (Number)
2015	5,055	78	39	7	2	2	7	135	96
2016	5,081	79	32	4	3	4	15	137	98
2017	5,030	82	25	11	4	5	16	143	102
2018	4,952	74	30	7	3	2	12	128	91
2019	4,918	79	28	6	4	2	14	133	94

¹⁰ CARDD, United Church of Christ



United Methodist Church

Some of our most detailed data comes from the United Methodist Church. Between 2000 and 2019 there are changes in the number of United Methodist churches with multiple full-time clergy and, perhaps more significantly, in the makeup of the associate staff clergy serving in these churches. The data come from those enrolled in the United Methodist pension program.¹¹

The share of UMC congregations with multiple pastors was under 5 percent throughout this period (table 8). This is a smaller percentage than in the ELCA, the Episcopal Church, or the PC(USA). Between 2000 and 2019, there was a net increase of 96 churches that had multiple full-time clergy, which was an increase of 11 percent. The high point was 2016 with 1,349 churches, with declines in the three subsequent years (figure 7).

Table 8. Less than 5 percent of UMC churches had multiple clergy from 2000 to 2019.

Year	Total Churches	Churches with 2+ FT Clergy (Number)	Churches with 2+ FT Clergy (Percent)	Number of Clergy
2000	35,778	843	2%	2,088
2005	34,776	867	2%	2,168
2010	33,346	943	3%	2,479
2015	32,140	1,166	4%	2,998
2019	30,545	939	3%	2,455

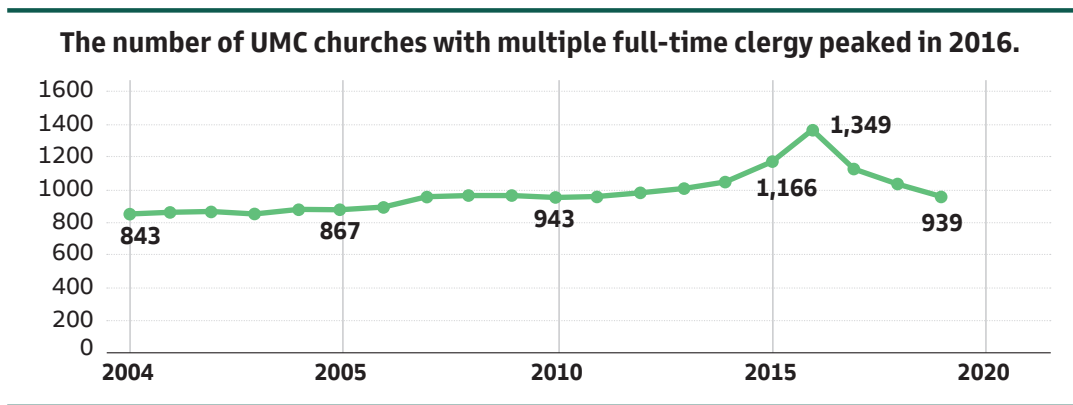


Figure 7. UMC churches with multiple clergy, 2000-2019

¹¹ Data provided by Wespeth Benefits and Investments.



In terms of the number of clergy other than lead pastors in these churches, there was an increase of 271 full-time associate staff clergy or 22 percent from 2000 to 2019 (table 9). There are different categories of full-time clergy utilized by United Methodist churches: deacons, elders, associate members of the annual conference, full-time local pastors, and clergy from other denominations. Deacons and elders typically hold seminary degrees. Associate members and full-time local pastors usually complete a multi-year academic program administered by United Methodist theological schools. Clergy from other denominations will generally have seminary degrees but not always depending on the requirements of their denominations.

- Full-time local pastors and associate members together grew from 155 to 389, a 151 percent gain.
- Deacons increased from 143 to 327, a gain of 129 percent.
- Fewer elders serve as associate staff clergy, decreasing from 932 to 772, a decline of 17 percent.
- Clergy from other denominations, a small part of this clergy pool, increased from 15 to 28.

Table 9. Among UMC churches with associate clergy, the number of deacons and local pastors increased and the number of elders decreased between 2000 and 2019.

Clergy Type	2000	2019	Numeric Change (2000-2019)	Percent Change (2000-2019)
Deacons	143	327	184	129%
Elders	932	772	-160	-17%
FT Local Pastors and Associate Members	155	389	234	151%
Clergy from Other Denominations	15	28	13	87%
Total Associate Clergy	1,245	1,516	271	22%



We have looked at the numerical changes by clergy categories engaged as full-time associate staff clergy between 2000 and 2019. The following points and the figures below show the proportionate changes in the composition of full-time associate staff clergy in 2019 compared to 2000 (figure 8).

- Full-time local pastors and associate members together increased from 12 percent of associate staff clergy in 2000 to 26 percent in 2019.
- Similarly, deacons increased from 11 percent in 2000 to 22 percent in 2019.
- The proportion of elders serving as associate staff clergy decreased most of the clergy categories, from 75 percent in 2000 to 51 percent in 2019.
- Clergy from other denominations grew from 1 to 2 percent of the associate staff clergy.

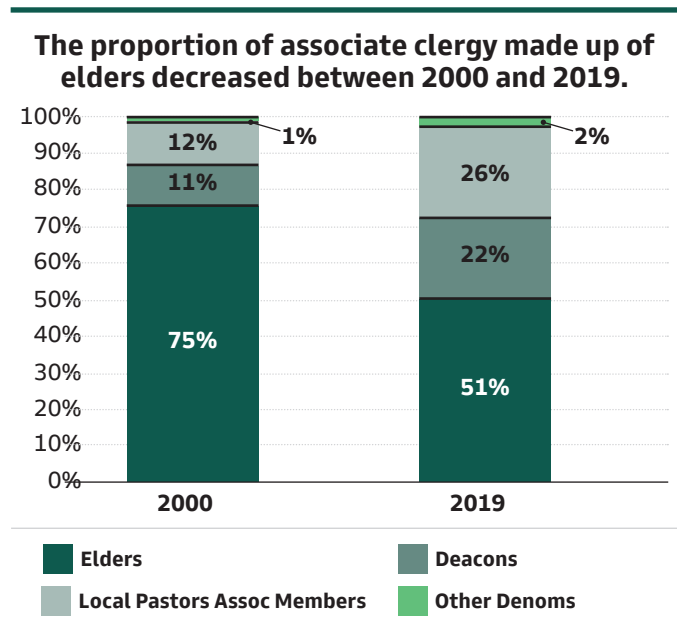


Figure 8. UMC makeup of associate clergy in 2000 and 2019



Findings

Churches have more personnel but not always clergy or full-time.

Full-time clergy

- The number of full-time clergy beyond the lead pastor is relatively stable overall but varies within traditions.
- Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholics have more, and Black Protestant and Mainline Protestant have fewer in recent years.

Part-time clergy

- All churches are more likely to have more part-time clergy beyond the lead pastor.
- While all traditions show gains, Evangelical Protestant added more part-time clergy staff than churches from other traditions.

Lay staff

Paid full-time and part-time lay staff has increased consistently since 1998 for all traditions.

The types of associate staff clergy may be changing.


United Methodist Case

- The United Methodist Church gives an example of where the types of clergy serving on church staffs beyond the lead pastor may be shifting among some mainline denominations.
- In 2000, 75 percent of all full-time associate clergy were elders meaning they were ordained and typically had a Master of Divinity degree. By 2019, only 51 percent of all full-time associate clergy were elders. The remainder were deacons (also ordained and usually with a theological degree) and “local pastors,” a United Methodist category of clergy who typically follow an alternate Course of Study educational path delivered by denominational seminaries but not the equivalent of a degree.
- Similar practices have long been common among Black Protestant and Evangelical Protestant traditions.



Multiple clergy churches tend to be larger but not exclusively.

Nazarene Case

- It is logical to expect that larger churches are more likely to have additional clergy beyond the lead pastor.
- The Nazarene example shows that most churches with multiple clergy have more than 100 worshipers on average.
- We also know from tracking what percentage of budgets go for personnel, that such proportionate spending increases with the size of congregations of all traditions.
- However, the Nazarene example also shows that the presence of additional clergy beyond the lead pastor is found in congregations of all sizes. 



Lewis Center for Church Leadership | Wesley Theological Seminary

4500 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20016

www.wesleyseminary.edu

