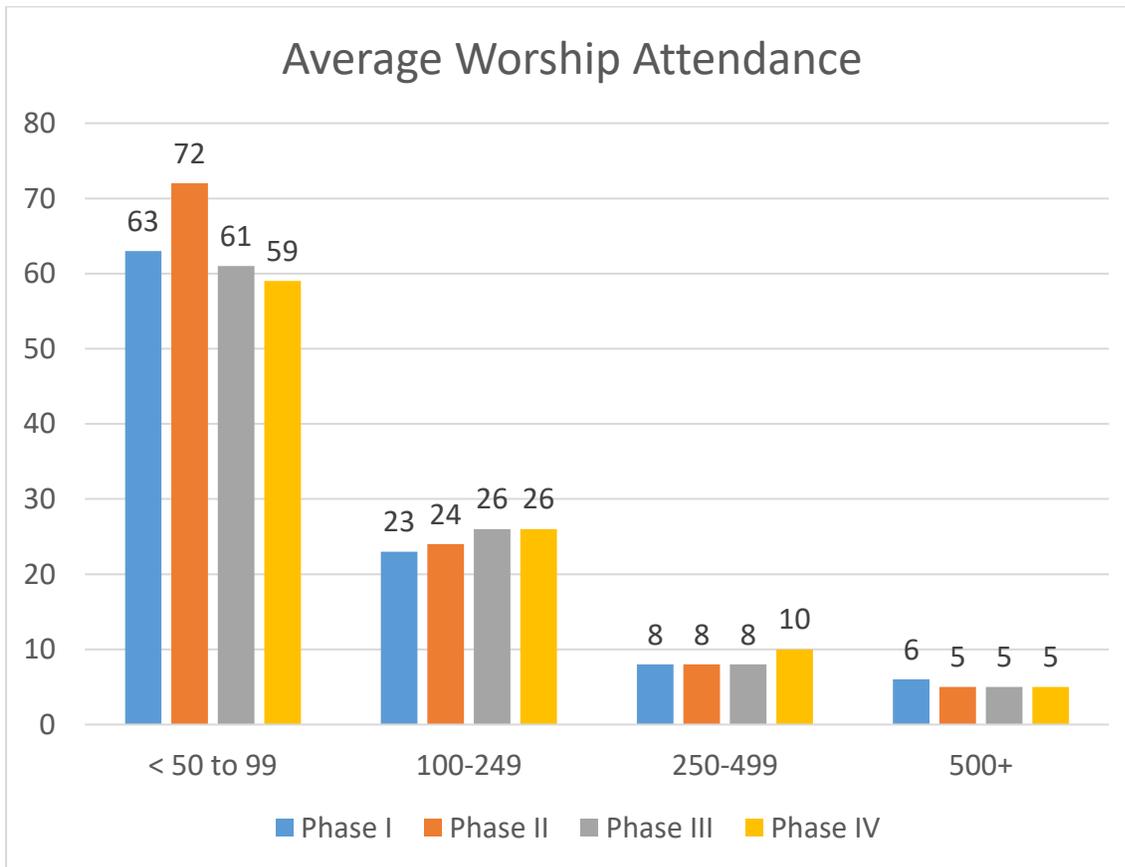


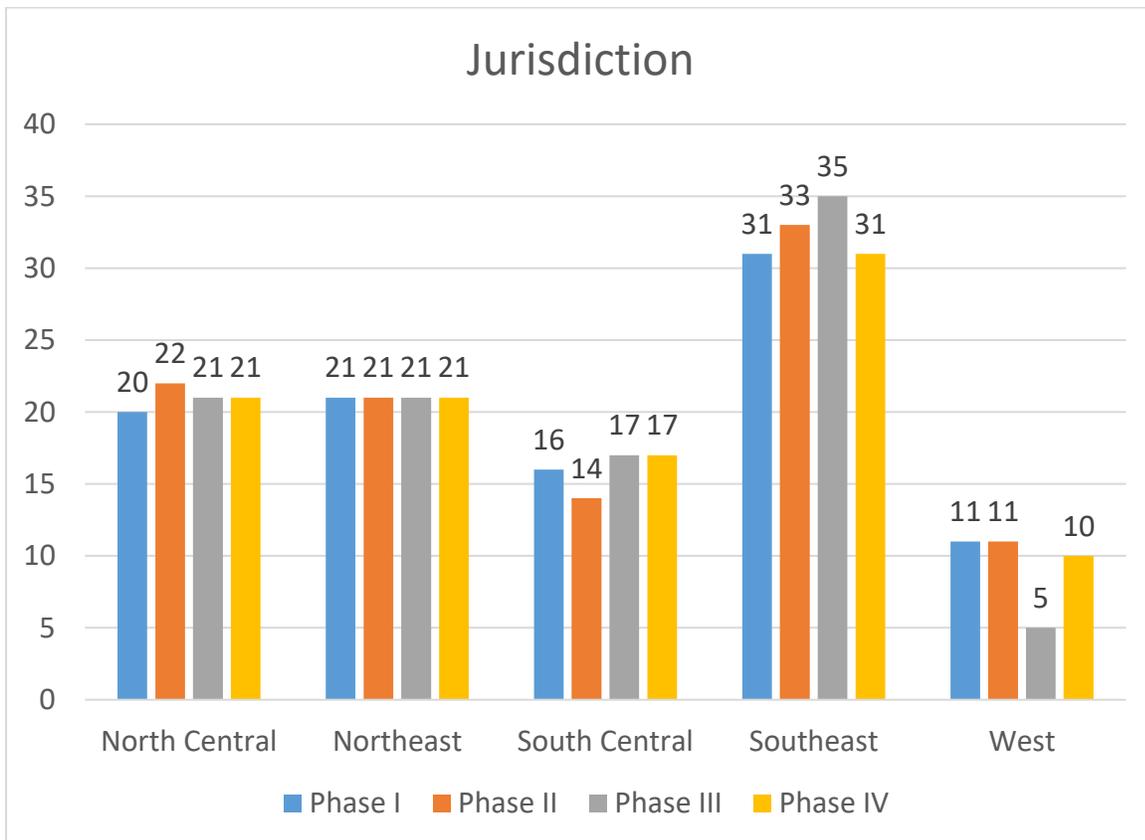
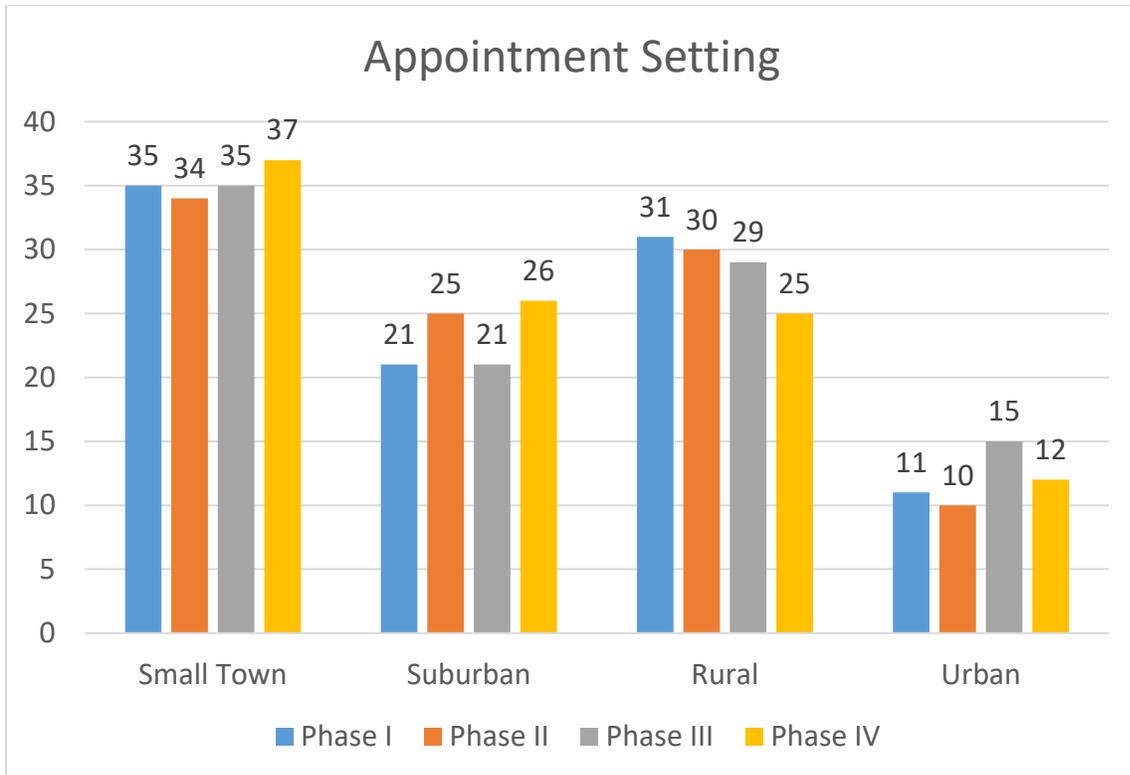
**Impact of COVID-19 Study
Phase IV**

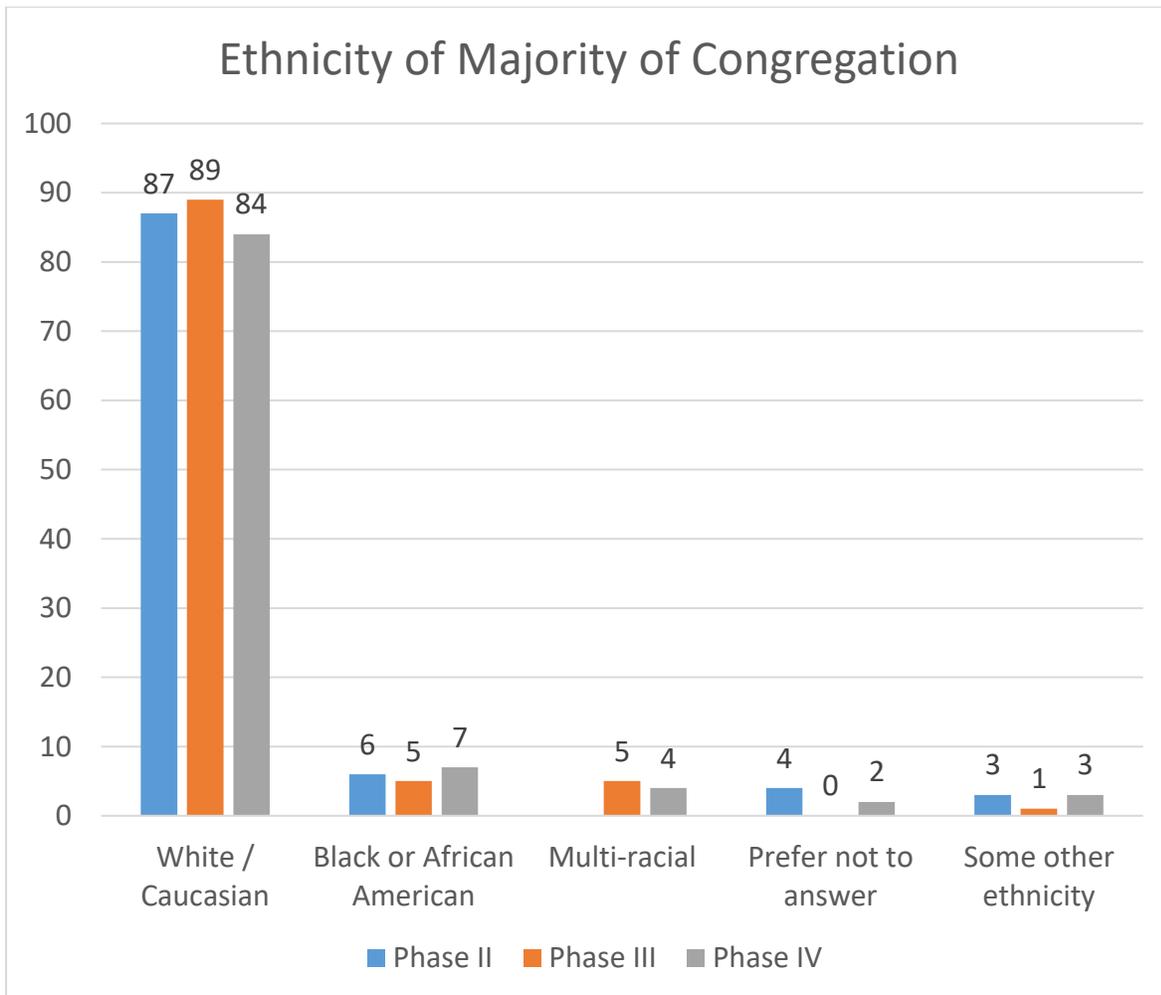
In May, United Methodist Communications fielded the fourth phase of this study, which continued to assess the impact of COVID-19 on local church activity levels; how they have continued and/or adapted services and ministries, financial impact, clergy wellbeing, and demographic differences.

This study fielded May 19-June 6, 2021 using the Survey Monkey online platform. Invitations were sent to 11,000 randomly selected churches and 745 completed the questionnaire. Please note this is a “convenience” sample with limitations on how well it represents The United Methodist Church as a whole.

A quick look at the respondent profile helps frame the results.







Study Highlights – Total Sample (N=745)

- Most churches are worshipping with a hybrid approach: online and in-person.
- Overall worship attendance is a bit lower compared to one year ago, when the first study was completed.
- The biggest concerns are potential permanent decline in attendance/membership and stress in leadership role.
- The top two things that need to change before churches open for in-person worship are 1) member vaccination and 2) directives from Bishops or AC leaders.
- Onsite services for children and youth, as well as small group and Sunday school for adults, are coming back.
- Traditional church ministries top the list of ways churches are using their buildings, including food distribution, nonprofit organizations and support groups.
- As the pandemic continues, positive attitudes reflect little change. Respondents are hopeful, blessed and encouraged. Levels of exhaustion and loneliness are on the rise.
- Giving continues to strengthen. Church financials continue to improve. Over half received support under the CARES Act.

Study Highlights – Jurisdictional Differences

- The Western jurisdiction is trending more online ONLY. The West is reporting the lowest in-person children's/youth activities and small group/adult studies. In fact, 89% say they will not have or are unsure about VBS this summer.
- The West cites higher levels of state and local government support required in order to open for in-person worship.
- More churches in the North Central and Northeastern jurisdictions received CARES Act support.
- The Southeast reports the highest level of using their church as a vaccination location.
- Agreement that "In-person church worship is an essential service that should be exempt from mandatory closing" varies by jurisdiction. Agreement is highest in the Southeast (31%), North Central (30%) and South Central (27%) and lowest in the West (6%).

Study Highlights by Average Worship Attendance (AWA)

- Smaller churches (<100 AWA) are trending more in-person ONLY compared to larger churches, that are using a hybrid approach.
- Larger churches cite higher levels of services provided "as usual". In contrast, almost 70% of churches with <100 AWA indicate they will not have VBS this summer.
- Phone is the primary method to reach those that are NOT digitally connected. Larger churches hosted more outdoor worship than smaller churches.
- Smaller churches (<100 AWA) say member opinions need to change before they re-open. Larger churches more often say state and local government mandates need to change before re-opening.
- Financially, larger churches are not struggling as much as smaller churches.
- Regardless of AWA, top concerns are finances and attendance. 65% of churches with <50 AWA did not apply for the CARES Act, compared to 8% of churches with 500+ AWA that did not apply.
- Alternative use of the church building varies a bit by church size. Larger churches use the building for childcare, school and vaccine distribution. Smaller churches use the building for support groups, nonprofit organizations, civic purposes, and internet connection for the community.
- In terms of mental wellbeing, feelings of exhaustion, anxiety and frustration are higher among larger churches.

Study Highlights among Black Churches

The largest ethnic sample is Black or African American (n=45). This data provides a glimpse into the Black church experience.

- 70% are <100 AWA and most are in the Southeastern jurisdiction, representing a mix of community types (urban, rural, etc.).
- 51% are worshipping online ONLY and 27% are worshipping both online and in-person.
- Phone is the primary method of reaching those NOT digitally connected.
- The top two things that need to change before Black churches open for in-person worship are member vaccination and member opinion.
- The top concerns are finances and attendance. 40% received CARES Act support and 56% did not apply.
- Black churches are reporting limited children's/youth activities, with 89% saying no or unsure about VBS this summer.
- The top five adjectives describing their mental state of Black church leaders are all positive (blessed, hopeful, grateful, encouraged, inspired), with only 33% saying they are exhausted.