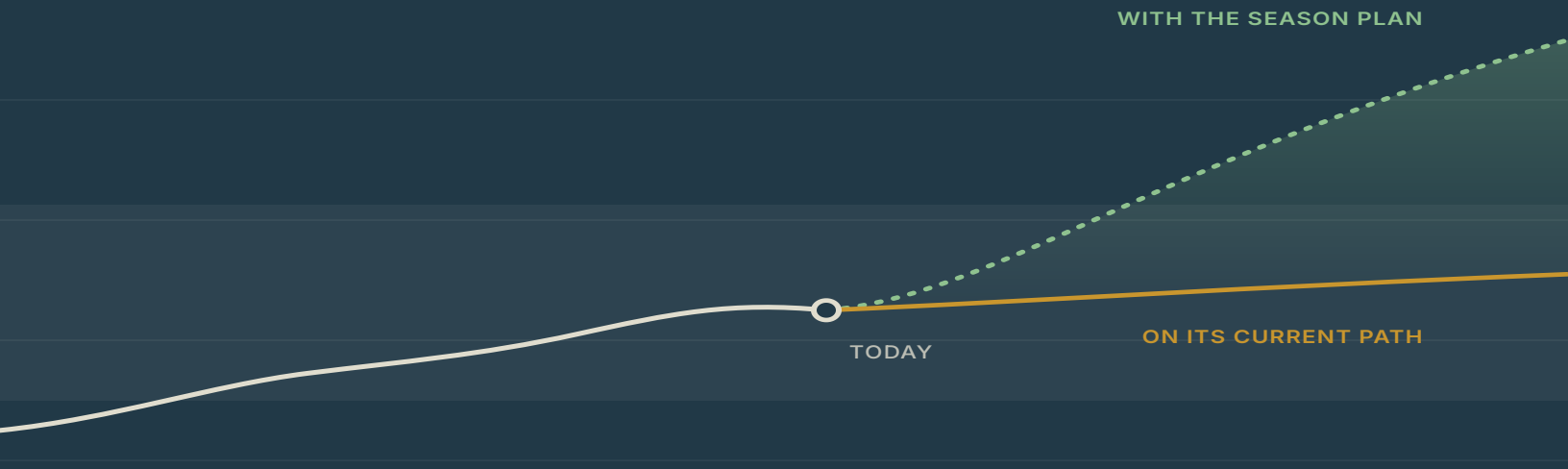
NEXT SAGE
CHURCH CATALYSTS

Leading more people toward devotion to Jesus

Church Catalysts and Vitals

How, when, and if your church should activate its catalysts

The 13 Church Catalysts that explain participation and pace in your church, the 10 Church Vitals that keep it healthy and nine Season Plans that show them at work.



Bruce Smith · Next Sage Church Catalysts

November 2026

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The church's part

All churches have their strengths, weaknesses, healthy habits and unhealthy ones.

I started working in a church at 19 years old in Overland Park, Kansas, 41 years ago. It was a wonderful church of about 600 people. Since then I have served in and alongside churches across denominations, in urban, suburban and rural settings, from 250 people to more than 20,000.

I tend to stay for years, not weeks. I have worked alongside at least seven churches for five years or more, and two of them for 15. Each is unique in its own way. But when you walk with that many churches through that many seasons, you start to see patterns.

Next Sage Church Catalysts is something I built from the patterns I have seen. Some churches have more and more people moving toward devotion to Jesus, and some have fewer. Some churches have healthy habits, and some have unhealthy ones. It is a lens to look at your church through and see which of these patterns might be true about your church.

But first let's get on the same page about something. The mission of the church is clear.

It is to help people become followers of Jesus and to help them become more like him. Becoming like him is an internal change that shows up in how a person lives. Faith and deed. The internal change is nearly impossible to measure, but easy to see in a life.

For a follower of Jesus, as the internal change takes over, the way they live begins to change. Prayer becomes regular and without ceasing. They learn to hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit and to obey them. Personal Bible study and memorization transform the mind. Unconditional generosity teaches us that we are stewards, not owners. And they live out the Gospel story in front of family and friends.

Because the believer wants to become more like Jesus, they learn to do these things because Jesus did them. Jesus studied the Scriptures. He prayed. He was led by his Father in his daily life. He was generous. And he lived out a life of the gospel.

There are also things Jesus did that show a believer how to live in a church. Jesus went to the synagogue and the temple for worship, corporate prayer and teaching, and so should we. Jesus lived in a community of believers, a small tribe of 12, and so should we. Jesus was a servant, even washing feet. And Jesus gave, and taught his followers to give.

Today, a follower of Jesus can live out these same actions in a local church.

These last ones can be counted and examined. We can see how many people are living life in a community of believers, like a small group. But the internal change cannot be counted, and neither can a person's prayer life. And therein lies the rub. The mission is internal change that results in external actions, living like Jesus did, but we can only look at the part that happens in the church. There is no church database that tells us if a person is praying without ceasing.

So to understand if the mission of the church is being accomplished, we have to be able to correlate external actions to likely internal change. Correlation is not perfect. It is just likely. It is never proof, and no person gets a score.

It is likely that a person who lives out regular church attendance, being in a small group, volunteering and giving to the local church is experiencing internal change. They are living in the environments where teaching about Jesus, modeling what following Jesus looks like and observing people who follow Jesus can happen best.

Because of these environments, the person can learn more and more about the internal change and try to follow Jesus's example of turning it into action. To begin to live differently. To grow into someone who more resembles Jesus, internally and externally.

When we talk about a church growing, we can mean that same kind of change: people becoming more like Jesus. But often we just mean more people attending. We say, "That church is really growing," and what we mean is that there are more people there on Sunday.

Next Sage Church Catalysts is not only about making a church bigger.

> It is about more of the people in your church becoming devoted to Jesus.

I once heard it put this way: God is always doing his part to draw people to him and help them become more like Jesus, and they definitely have a part to play, but there is also our part. The church's part. Next Sage Church Catalysts is about the church's part. It helps you know whether you are doing it, what could hinder it or help it, and which catalysts to activate so more people move toward devotion to Jesus.

Bruce Smith Co-founder, Next Sage Church Catalysts

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is for pastors, executive pastors and the leaders who serve beside them.

> It explains a way to read the data a church already has, name the few things worth changing this season and watch whether the change is working.

How to read it

It shows participation, not faith

Nothing here measures what is happening inside a person. No one gets a score.

It names catalysts, not methods

We show the Church Catalysts and Church Vitals and help a church pick the right ones for its season. How a church welcomes guests, forms groups or recruits volunteers is its own decision.

One fictional church, run nine ways

Sage Ridge Community Church starts as a thriving church. We then gave it eight common conditions, one at a time, so you can see what each looks like in the data and what a Season Plan does about it. A real church may be facing more than one.

Every number is illustrative

The sample data was built from patterns in real churches. The forecasts show direction and size. A forecast is not a promise.

01 **Church Catalysts: what, if, when and how.** What data can show, how participation is counted and what a Church Catalyst is.

02 **The 13 Church Catalysts.** Each one is a question, a rate and an owner.

03 **The 10 Church Vitals.** Each has a healthy range, and both ends are a problem.

04 **One church, run nine ways.** The Thriving Church and eight churches that each face one condition.

05 **Making it real.** What your leaders see, what we need from you and where to start.

You can explore everything in this guide in the interactive demo. Choose a church, switch catalysts on and off and watch the next 12 months change.

PART 01

Church Catalysts: what, if, when and how

What your data can show, and what it can't

The author's note sets out the mission. This guide starts where a database starts, with participation.

WHAT DATA CAN SHOW

Who is in the places where following Jesus is taught, modeled, encouraged and hopefully caught: Sunday services, a small group, a serve team and regular giving.

More participation is a reason for hope and a clue to the next step a church could offer. It is never proof of what is happening in someone's heart. Attendance and giving are the result of ministry, not the driver of it. The numbers in this guide follow the work. They don't replace it.

Four rules that hold everywhere in this guide

1	**Participation, not faith**	No measure, chart or sentence claims to measure spiritual growth. No person gets a score.
2	**Giving is yes or no**	Giving counts as yes or no for each person, based on whether their household gives. Amounts appear only as church-wide totals.
3	**Leaders see counts**	Lists of names are for the staff a church authorizes. A child's check-in is used only to link a household.
4	**Church language**	Attenders, members, volunteers, groups and giving.

Who this guide is for

It is written for churches that hold that mission and expect a follower of Jesus to take part in the life of the church: Sunday services, a small group, serving and giving, and often mission trips, studies and events. Throughout the guide we call a thriving church of this kind The Thriving Church. Its catalyst levels are what a thriving church sees: a high bar we encourage every church to aim for.

- A person who attends only on Sundays, and infrequently, has probably not been in the places where that change is taught and caught. They may still be a deep follower whose life is limiting them for a season.
- A person in a small group, serving and giving is likely a deep follower, even when their Sunday attendance is infrequent. This guide counts them in full participation.
- A partial pattern is a clue. Someone on Sundays and in a group, and not yet serving, shows the church what next step to offer.

Every count has exceptions. The data shows where a next step could be offered. A person decides whether to take it.

The path

How a church leads people from visitor toward devotion

1
Sunday earns trust
You meet people where they are and give them a reason to come back.
THE CHURCH LEADS

2
A group or a team puts them near a leader
Not only to run a meeting or finish a task, but to notice people.
THE CHURCH LEADS

3
A leader invests in a few
One to three people, over time, in conversation. No one can schedule it.
THE LEADER LEADS

4
Those few do the same
This is where your next leaders come from.
THE PERSON LEADS

The data can see the first two steps and where new leaders come from. It cannot see step 3, and it does not try. The Church Catalysts organize the room, not the relationship.

Most churches see Sunday. Few see the whole church

Ask a pastor what share of the church is in a small group, and the answer usually describes the people in the room on a typical Sunday. That is natural. Sunday is what a leader sees.

61%
of the known adults in the room on a typical Sunday are in a group

41%
of every active adult are in a group

2,015
on an average Sunday, adults and everyone under 18

4,891
people active in the last 13 weeks

Both percentages are true. The gap between them is where the next steps are.

3,060
active adults

1,256
adults in a small group

1,111
adults serving

576
adults in full participation

Illustrative. The Thriving Church, 25 October 2026. Involvement shown two ways: the adults in the room on a typical Sunday, beside everyone active.

That is why a Season Plan opens with the big picture, then shows involvement two ways.

Four areas and three levels

Each adult gets a level in each of four areas, based on the last 13 weeks.

AREA	WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE	CONSISTENT MEANS
Sundays	A child checked in to Kids Ministry (credited to every adult in the household), a serve check-in on a Sunday team, or adult check-in where a church takes it	5 or more of the last 13 Sundays
Small group	On a small group roster, or group attendance	About half or more of the times the group met
Serving	On a serve team roster, or a serve check-in	About half or more of the times scheduled, and at least twice
Giving	A giving record, by household	Giving on the household's own pattern: weekly, monthly, quarterly or annual

Three levels. Consistent, Occasional and Infrequent. A person is counted as involved in an area when the level is Consistent.

Likely. Most churches don't take adult attendance, so the data mostly sees parents of checked-in kids and Sunday volunteers. An adult the data can't observe on Sundays, and who is Consistent in a group, serving or giving, is counted as Likely on Sundays, and always shown apart from observed attendance.

New. A flag in each area. It means a first activity in that area in the last 13 weeks, not new to the church.

By household. Giving is measured by household. A gift from one spouse counts for both.

Next steps toward full participation

The four areas make 16 combinations. The Season Plan groups them by the next step in front of each adult.

NEXT STEP	WHO IS IN IT	ADULTS	SHARE
Not yet involved	Not Consistent in any area	**1,007**	**33%**
Sunday rhythm	Involved somewhere and seen on fewer than 5 of 13 Sundays	**443**	**14%**
Small group	On Sundays, not in a group	**575**	**19%**
Serving	On Sundays and in a group, not serving	**258**	**8%**
Giving	On Sundays, in a group and serving, not giving	**201**	**7%**
Full participation	In a small group, serving and giving	**576**	**19%**

Illustrative. The Thriving Church, 25 October 2026, with the path Sundays, group, serving, giving.

Some churches put serving before a group. The Season Plan switches between the two paths. The switch changes only which next step a person is counted under. In the sample church, serving first moves the "Serving" count from 258 to 689 and the "Small group" count from 575 to 144.

The next step names what is missing. How the church offers it is the church's choice.

What a Church Catalyst is

Weekend attendance is not a catalyst. It reports the result, but it can't tell you what to do. Should we start more groups? The headcount can't answer it. You need who came, who is in a group, who serves and who gives: data kept in different systems. Joined together, they answer the question.

DEFINITION

A Church Catalyst is a measure, built by joining two or more sets of your data, that shows one place your church can act and that one leader can own.

A catalyst makes a reaction more likely without being the reaction. The church sets the conditions. What happens in a person belongs to that person and to God.

The five tests

1. **It's a rate or a ratio, not a total.** Weekend attendance is a result. The share of guests who reach a fourth visit is a catalyst.
2. **It joins data that normally lives apart,** such as your church management system and your giving platform.
3. **You can explain what it changes:** if this moves, more people take a next step.
4. **One leader can own it,** and your church picks the method.
5. **It has a trend and two forecasts:** where it lands on its current path, and where it lands if you activate it. The gap is the case for activating it.

Catalysts are recalculated every week after Sunday. Movement between levels is measured monthly and shown beside the same month last year, because churches are seasonal.

Why you activate only a few

No church should activate all 13. Every catalyst takes leaders' time, and activating one spends something real. A catalyst is worth activating only when the gain clearly outweighs that cost.

Time

Leadership hours, and volunteer attention taken from other work.

Money

A hire, a tool, an outreach or an event you give up.

Relational equity

Trust spent with staff, volunteers or the congregation, such as a changed role or a new ask.

2–3 catalysts at a time is usually right. Sometimes four. **Never five.** A Season Plan is the short list a church activates this season. Each catalyst in it has one owner, one goal and one date.

Every other catalyst still shows its trend and forecast, and what activating it could do.

If, when and how

If

Start with the Church Vitals

Participation Trend comes first: is participation moving at the pace you want? A Church Vital out of range, like Available Space or Leader Span, is a constraint. Address it before activating a catalyst that would push it further out. A catalyst can help one church and hurt another. Outreach is the clearest case.

THE SEASON A CHURCH IS IN	WHAT MORE OUTREACH DOES
Few new people finding the church, with room for more	Helps
Involved people drifting out	Hides the problem. New guests replace the people leaving.
Available Space too high	Hurts. Guests arrive at a room with no seat for them.
Serving Load too high	Hurts. Each outreach adds Sundays to the same volunteers.
Group Room or Leader Span too high	Hurts. New people can't find a group or team with room.
A calendar already full of events	A risk. Outreach becomes one more event.

That is the job of the Church Vitals in Part 3. A Church Vital out of range is a reason to pick a catalyst, or to leave one alone.

When

Measure weekly

Church data moves by the week and the season. Most catalysts are read over a 13-week window, so a real change shows within a quarter. The Season Plan refreshes daily. Most church data arrives weekly, so the full picture lands on Sunday night.

How

One owner, one goal, two forecasts

Name one owner, set a goal and a date, track it every week and review it every month. This guide names measures and next steps. It doesn't prescribe programs or practices. A church chooses how it welcomes guests, forms groups, recruits volunteers and teaches generosity. The Season Plan then shows whether the method the church chose is working. A good idea only half carried out tells you nothing.

PART 02

The 13 Church Catalysts

Each catalyst answers one question about how people move in your church. Each is a rate, has one owner and gets a trend and two forecasts. The church chooses the method it uses to activate one.

NEXT STEPS			
01	SR	Sunday Rhythm	Of the people we see on Sundays, how many come consistently?
02	GC	Group Connection	How many of our Sunday people are in a small group?
03	SC	Serving Connection	How many of our Sunday people serve?
04	GV	Giving Connection	How many of our Sunday people are in a household that gives consistently?
MOVEMENT			
05	SF	Steps Forward	Each month, what share of our people move to deeper participation?
06	SG	Second Gift	Do first-time givers give again?
REACH			
07	OR	Outreach	When we rally to invite, how many first-time guests come?
08	PV	Plan a Visit	Of local people who look us up, how many take a step toward coming?
09	FF	First to Fourth	Do first-time guests reach a fourth visit?
10	FD	First 90 Days	Do new people find a place here in their first three months?
11	WB	Welcome Back	When people drift, do they return?
LEADERS			
12	BL	Bench to Leader	Are the people who are ready to lead becoming leaders?
EVENTS			
13	EB	Event Bridge	Are events followed by a next step?

How to read the charts in this part

— Actual, weekly - - - On its current path, with its range — If activated — The Thriving Church

Each catalyst has its own page. The chart on it comes from one of the nine churches in Part 4 that has the catalyst in its Season Plan. The values are not benchmarks. Each church's own history sets what is normal for it.

Next steps

Whether the people in the room on Sunday have taken the next step in front of them.

NEXT STEPS

01 Sunday Rhythm

SR

Of the people we see on Sundays, how many come consistently?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Adults seen on 5 or more of 13 Sundays, out of adults with any Sunday evidence

FOR EXAMPLE

Of 2,000 adults with any Sunday evidence in the last 13 weeks, 1,000 were seen on 5 or more Sundays. Sunday Rhythm is 50%.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sunday is where most people start. Occasional attenders are in the room too rarely for much else to take hold.

TYPICAL OWNER

Weekend services pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

50%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

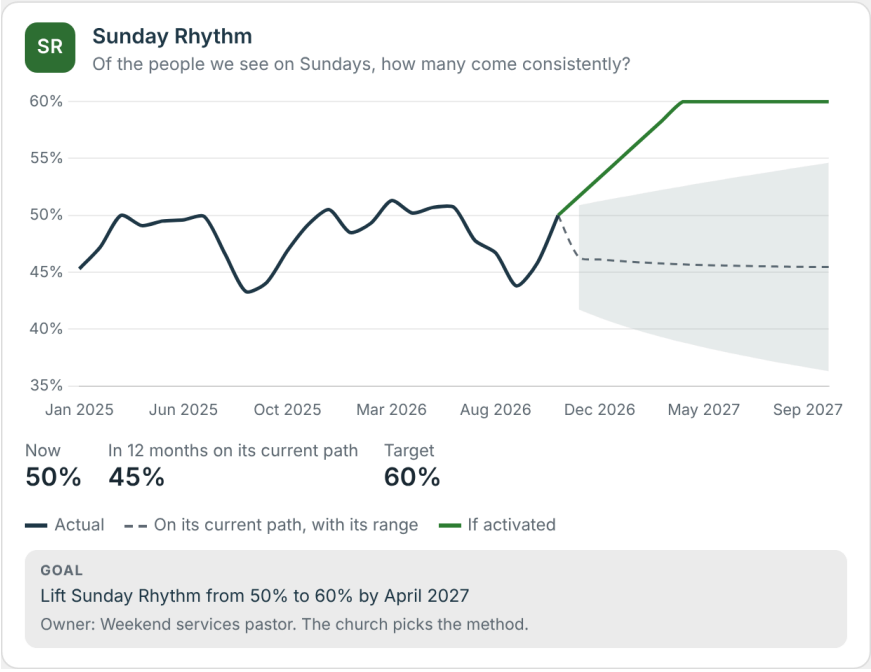
The weekend average is flat while the count of active adults keeps rising.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Available Space, because people attending more often fill seats without one new person arriving. Data Coverage, because this catalyst only sees adults the data can observe.

WATCH OUT FOR

A change in check-in habits can move this number when nobody is attending more. Read it beside the weekend headcount.



Illustrative. The Thriving Church. Lift Sunday Rhythm from 50% to 60% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +360 on the weekend by October 2027.

NEXT STEPS

02 Group Connection

GC

How many of our Sunday people are in a small group?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Adults on Sundays and in a group, out of adults on Sundays

FOR EXAMPLE

1,300 adults are involved on Sundays and 790 of them are in a small group. Group Connection is 61%.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sunday-only attenders are the largest group in most churches. This catalyst is that count as a rate.

TYPICAL OWNER

Groups pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

61%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

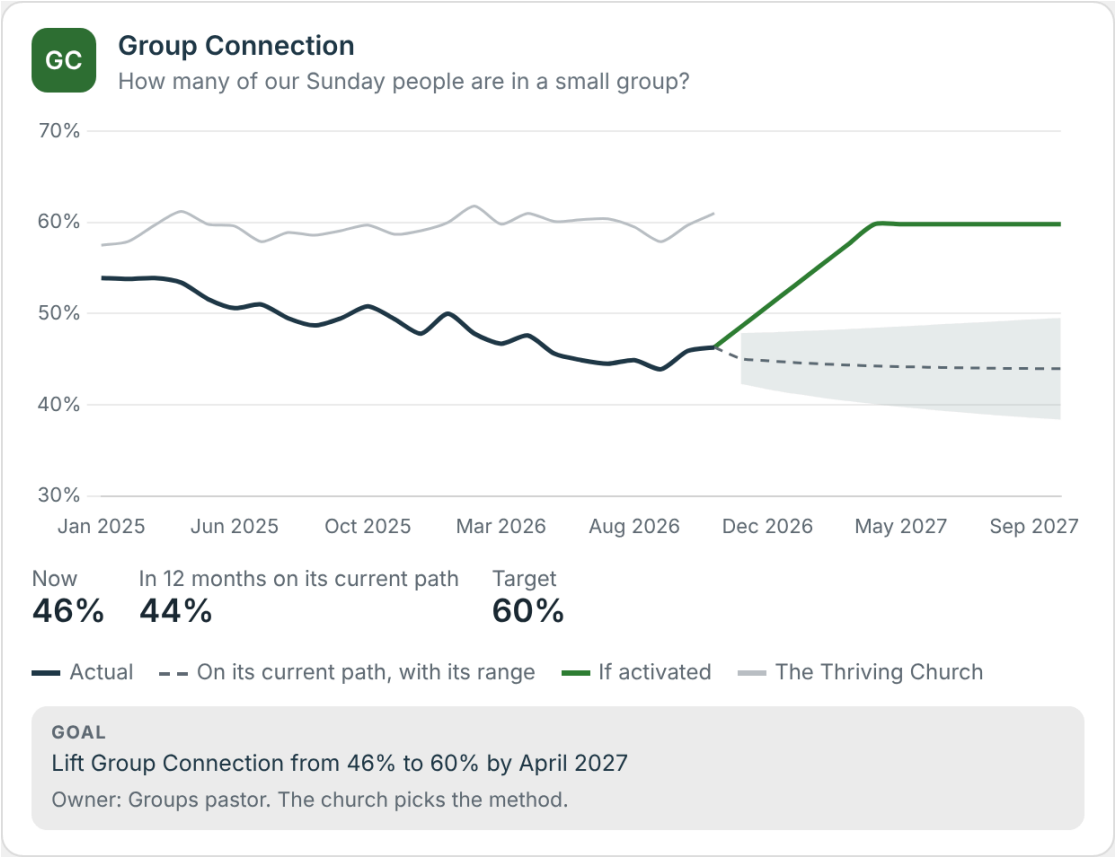
A small group is the next step for the largest number of adults, and Group Room is low. There is room in groups and people are not moving into it.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Group Room and Leader Span. If groups are already full, Bench to Leader belongs in the plan with it.

WATCH OUT FOR

The whole-church share is lower than the Sunday share. Decide which one the goal is set on and stay with it.



Illustrative. The Sunday Crowd. Lift Group Connection from 46% to 60% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +137 on the weekend by October 2027.

NEXT STEPS

03 Serving Connection

SC

How many of our Sunday people serve?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Adults on Sundays and serving, out of adults on Sundays

FOR EXAMPLE

1,300 adults are involved on Sundays and 690 of them serve consistently. Serving Connection is 53%.

WHY IT MATTERS

Serving moves a person from receiving to contributing, and it fills the teams that make room for more people.

TYPICAL OWNER

Volunteer or connections director

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

53%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

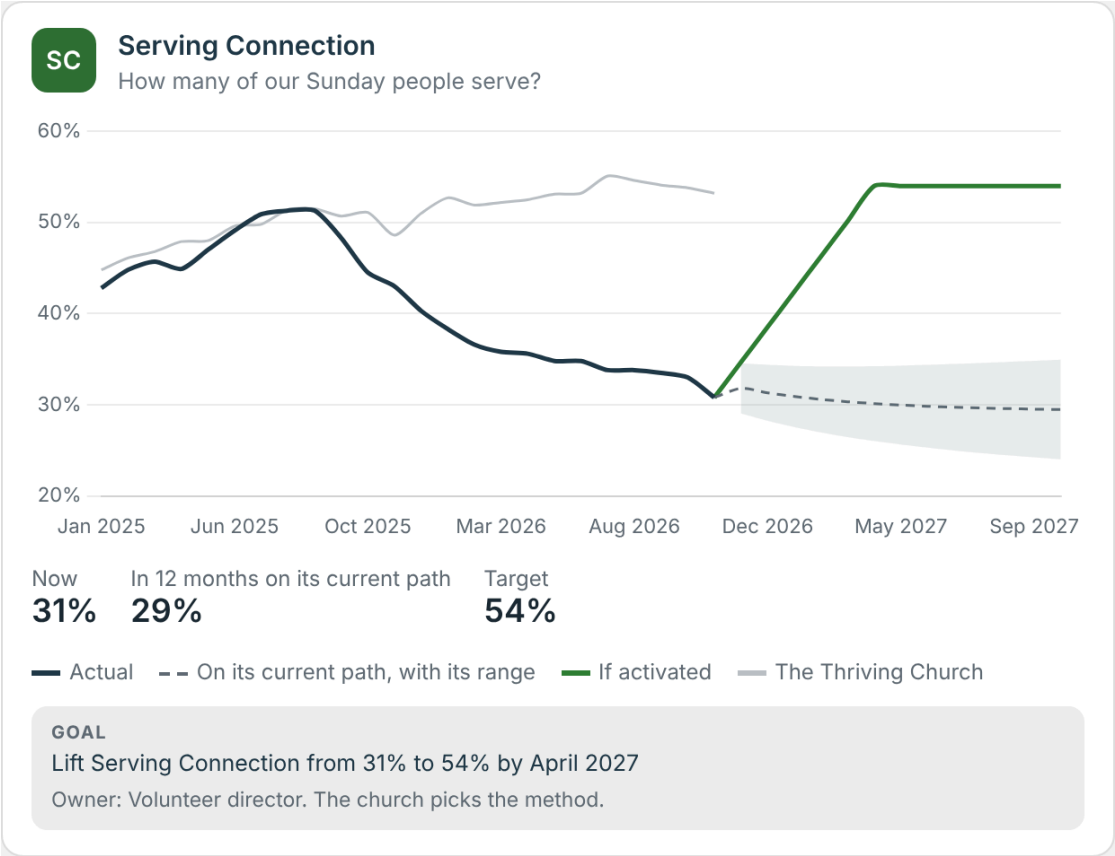
There are more than about 2.0 people on the weekend for each adult serving, Serving Load is climbing and first-time guests are returning less often.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Serving Load and Leader Span on teams. A new volunteer needs a team leader with room for one more.

WATCH OUT FOR

A name on a roster is not serving. The catalyst counts adults who served about half the times they were scheduled, and at least twice.



Illustrative. The Tired Few. Lift Serving Connection from 31% to 54% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +304 on the weekend by October 2027.

NEXT STEPS

04 Giving Connection

GV

How many of our Sunday people are in a household that gives consistently?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Adults on Sundays in a consistently giving household, out of adults on Sundays

FOR EXAMPLE

1,300 adults are involved on Sundays and 806 of them live in a household that gives on its own pattern. Giving Connection is 62%.

WHY IT MATTERS

Consistent giving is one of the four areas and funds the ministry. It is counted, never ranked.

TYPICAL OWNER

Executive pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

62%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

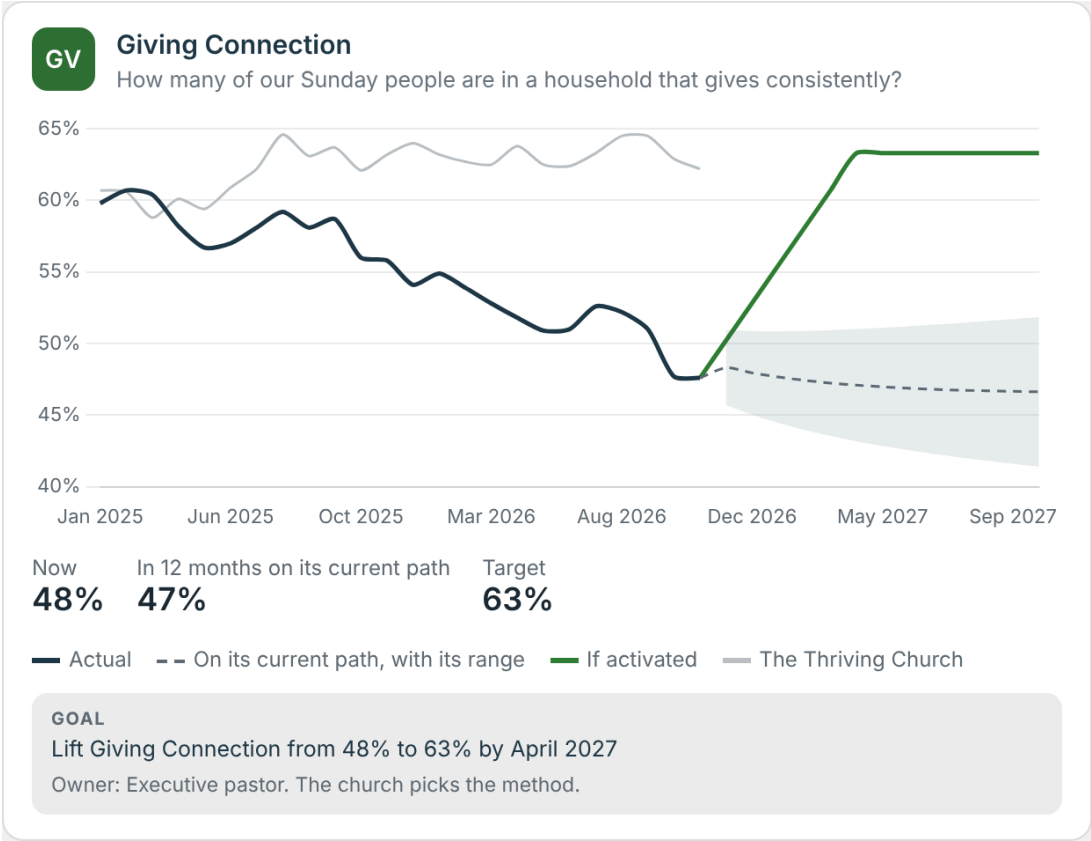
Giving is flat or falling while attendance holds, and funding is behind the number of people the church serves.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Giving Dependence. A church that leans on a few households needs a wider base.

WATCH OUT FOR

It is yes or no for each person, based on whether their household gives. It never shows an amount for a person, and a gift from one spouse counts for both.



Illustrative. The Giving Lag. Lift Giving Connection from 48% to 63% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +242 on the weekend by October 2027.

Movement
Whether people are moving to deeper participation, month to month.

MOVEMENT

05 Steps Forward

SF

Each month, what share of our people move to deeper participation?

HOW IT IS COUNTED
Adults involved in more areas than last month, out of active adults

FOR EXAMPLE
Of 3,000 active adults, 450 are involved in more areas this month than last. Steps Forward is 15%.

WHY IT MATTERS
A church can hold the same picture for years while people stand still. This shows movement.

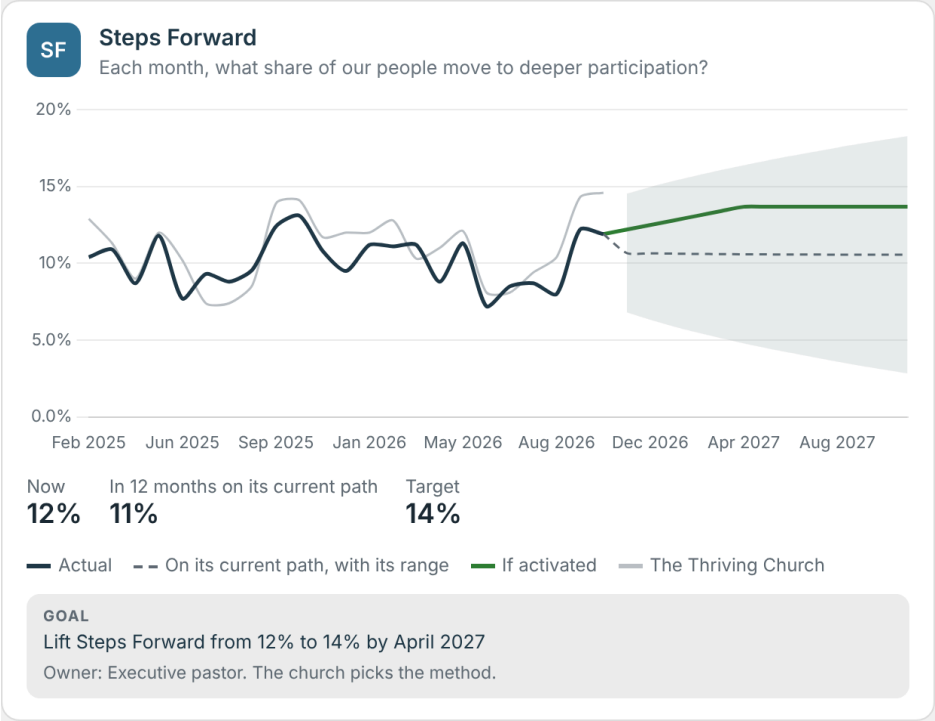
TYPICAL OWNER
Executive pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES
15%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT
The next-step counts look the same quarter after quarter, and lapsed attenders are rising.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST
Front Door and Back Door, and Group Room. People who take a step need somewhere to take it.

WATCH OUT FOR
It is seasonal. Compare each month with the same month last year, not with the month before.



Illustrative. The Quiet Back Door. Lift Steps Forward from 12% to 14% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +194 on the weekend by October 2027.

MOVEMENT

06 Second Gift

SG

Do first-time givers give again?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

First-time giving households with a second gift within 13 weeks, out of first-time giving households

FOR EXAMPLE

50 households gave for the first time 13 weeks ago and 30 of them have given again. Second Gift is 60%.

WHY IT MATTERS

One gift can be a response to a moment. A second starts a pattern.

TYPICAL OWNER

Executive pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

60%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

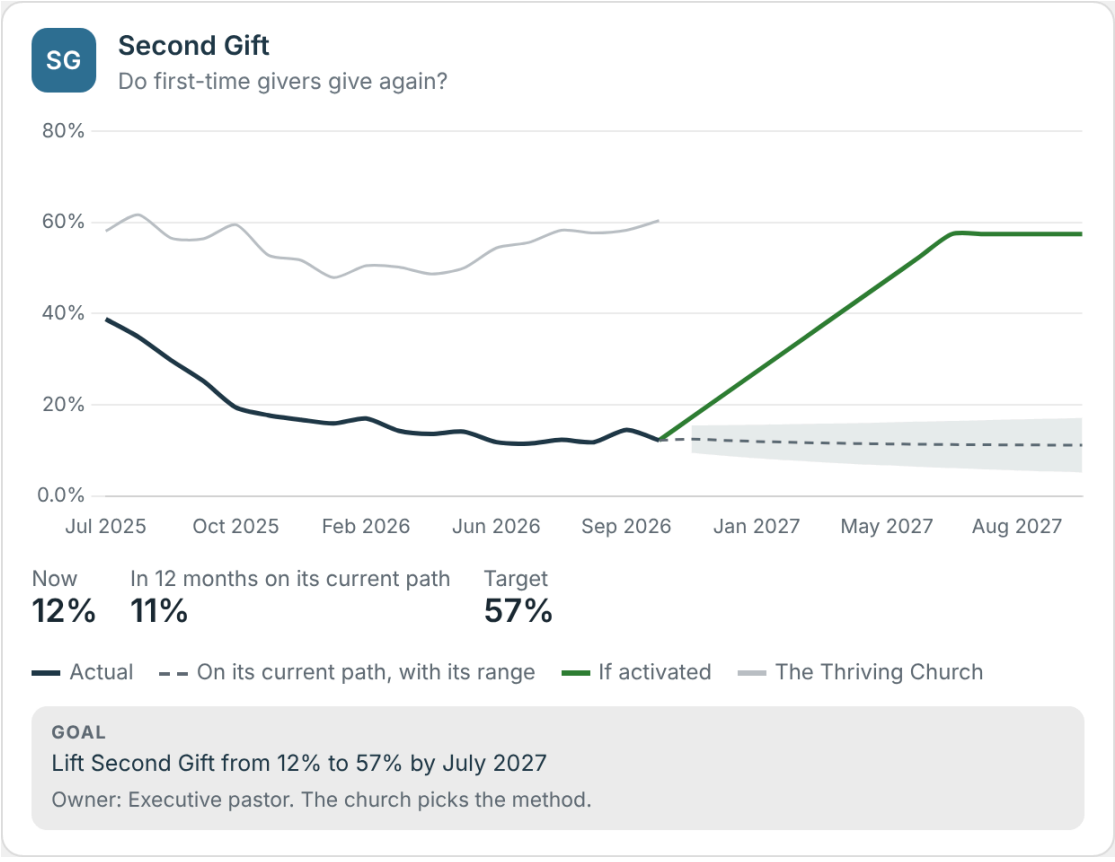
New giving households appear every month, and the count of consistently giving households is not rising.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Giving Dependence, and funding against the number of people the church serves.

WATCH OUT FOR

Small numbers. In a month with few first-time givers the rate jumps. Read the trend, not one month.



Illustrative. The Giving Lag. Lift Second Gift from 12% to 57% by July 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +28 on the weekend by October 2027.

Reach
Whether new people find the church, come back and find a place in it, and whether those who drift return.

REACH

07 Outreach

OR

When we rally to invite, how many first-time guests come?

HOW IT IS COUNTED
New adult profiles in the two Sundays of an outreach, against a normal two weeks

FOR EXAMPLE
A normal two weeks brings 20 new adult profiles. The two Sundays of an outreach bring 44. Outreach is 2.2.

WHY IT MATTERS
A church that never rallies to invite depends on people finding it on their own.

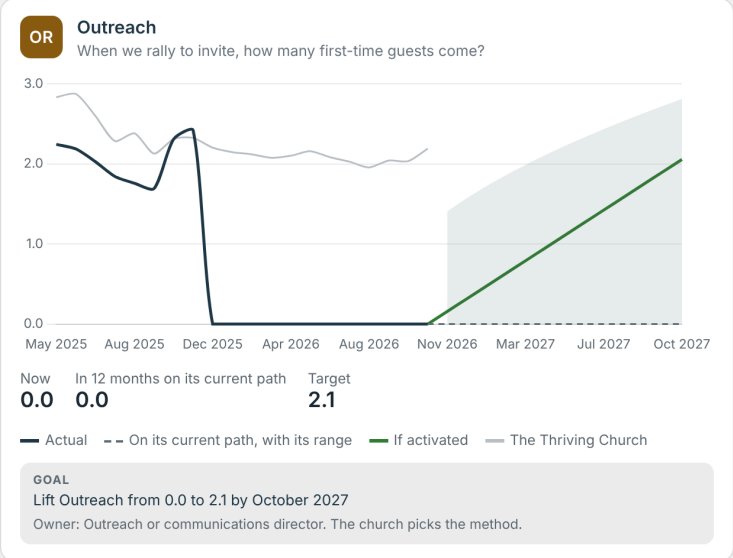
TYPICAL OWNER
Outreach or communications director

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES
2.2 times a normal two weeks

SIGNS YOU NEED IT
Few first-time families, with Available Space, Group Room and Serving Load all in range.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST
Available Space, Serving Load, Group Room and Leader Span. If any one is too high, more outreach makes it worse.

WATCH OUT FOR
Outreach can hide a back door. New guests replace the people leaving and the weekend number holds. Check Front Door and Back Door first.



Illustrative. The Closed Front Door. Lift Outreach from 0.0 to 2.1 by October 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +95 on the weekend by October 2027.

REACH

08 Plan a Visit

PV

Of local people who look us up, how many take a step toward coming?

HOW IT IS COUNTED
Plan a visit actions, out of new local website visitors

FOR EXAMPLE
4,000 new local visitors come to the website in 13 weeks and 200 take a plan-a-visit action. Plan a Visit is 5%.

WHY IT MATTERS
It is the step in reach closest to the church's control.

TYPICAL OWNER
Communications director

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES
5%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT
Website visits are steady and first-time families are falling.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST
Available Space, for the main room and for Kids Ministry.

WATCH OUT FOR
It needs website data limited to local visitors. Without that limit the rate reads far too low.



Illustrative. The Closed Front Door. Lift Plan a Visit from 2% to 4% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +148 on the weekend by October 2027.

REACH

09 First to Fourth

FF

Do first-time guests reach a fourth visit?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

First-time households that reach a fourth Sunday within 26 weeks, out of first-time households

FOR EXAMPLE

100 households visited for the first time 26 weeks ago and 45 of them reached a fourth Sunday. First to Fourth is 45%.

WHY IT MATTERS

A first visit is curiosity. A fourth is the start of a pattern.

TYPICAL OWNER

Connections director or kids pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

45%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

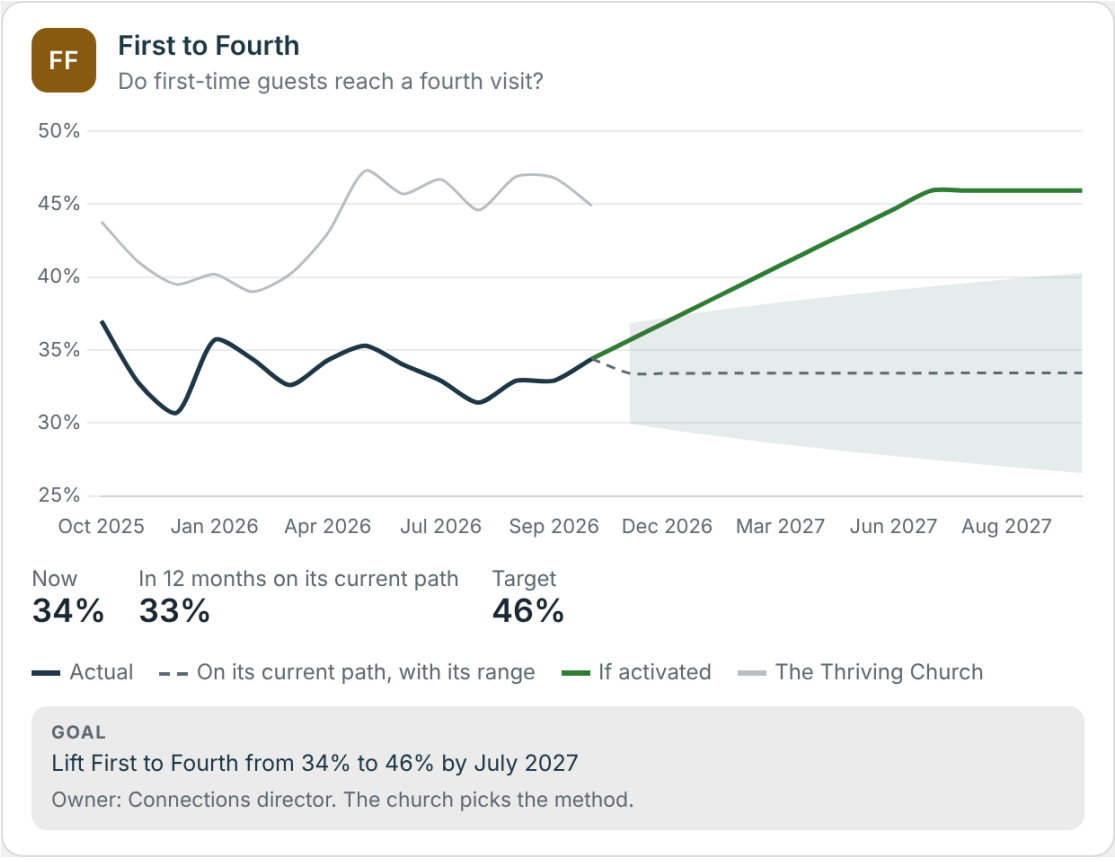
First-time families keep coming at a steady rate, but the number of active adults isn't rising.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Available Space, including Kids Ministry space, and Serving Load, the number of people for each volunteer. A push to keep more guests can fill a room past its range.

WATCH OUT FOR

It is seen mostly through kids' check-in. Households with no children are harder to see unless a church takes adult check-in.



Illustrative. The Full Room. Lift First to Fourth from 34% to 46% by July 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +116 on the weekend by October 2027.

REACH

10 First 90 Days

FD

Do new people find a place here in their first three months?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

New people from 13 weeks ago who are involved in one or more areas today, out of all new people from 13 weeks ago

FOR EXAMPLE

100 new people arrived 13 weeks ago and 19 of them are involved in one or more areas today. First 90 Days is 19%.

WHY IT MATTERS

New people decide early whether they belong.

TYPICAL OWNER

Connections director

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

19%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

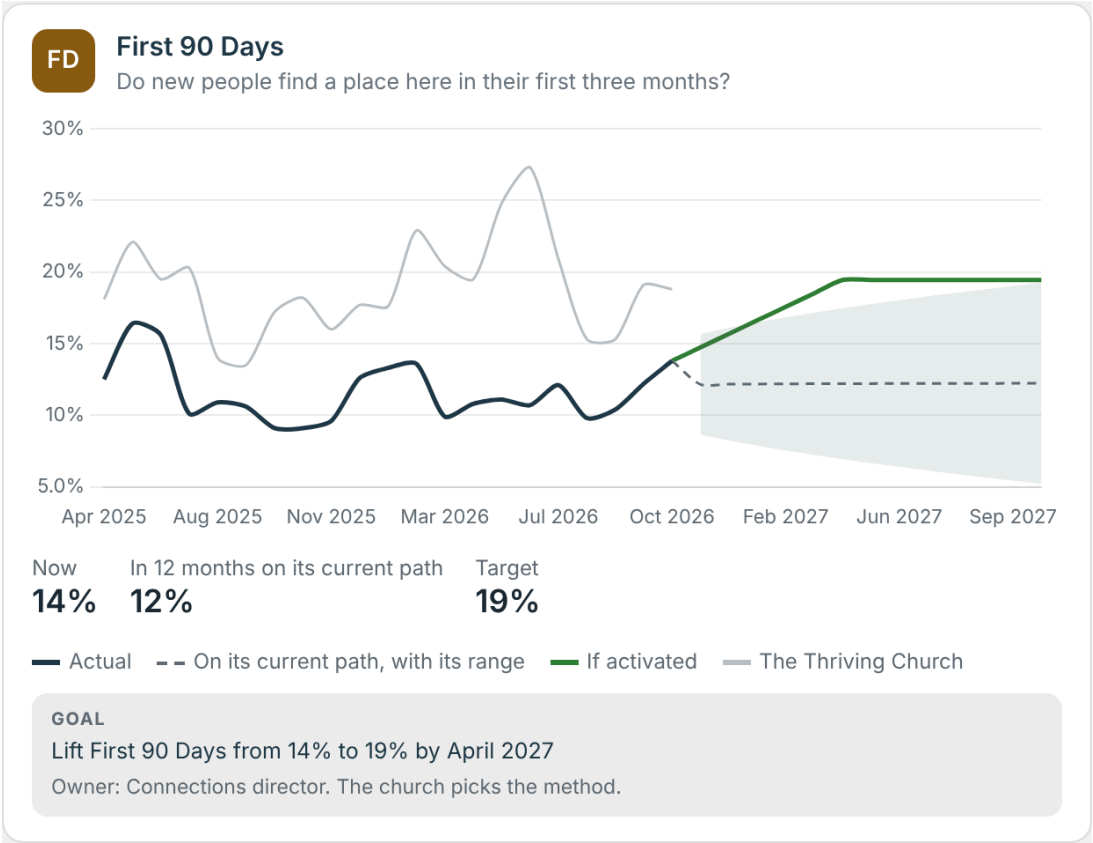
New people keep arriving and Full Participation is not rising.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Group Room and Leader Span. A new person needs a group or team with room.

WATCH OUT FOR

It looks back 13 weeks. A change made today shows in the number next quarter.



Illustrative. The Event Treadmill. Lift First 90 Days from 14% to 19% by April 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +115 on the weekend by October 2027.

REACH

11 Welcome Back

WB

When people drift, do they return?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Lapsed attenders and lapsed givers who returned within 13 weeks, out of all who lapsed

FOR EXAMPLE

200 adults lapsed in a quarter and 94 of them were back within 13 weeks. Welcome Back is 47%.

WHY IT MATTERS

It shows whether people who drift come back, whatever the church does to reach them. The lost sheep was already in the shepherd's care (Luke 15:4–6).

TYPICAL OWNER

Care pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES

47%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT

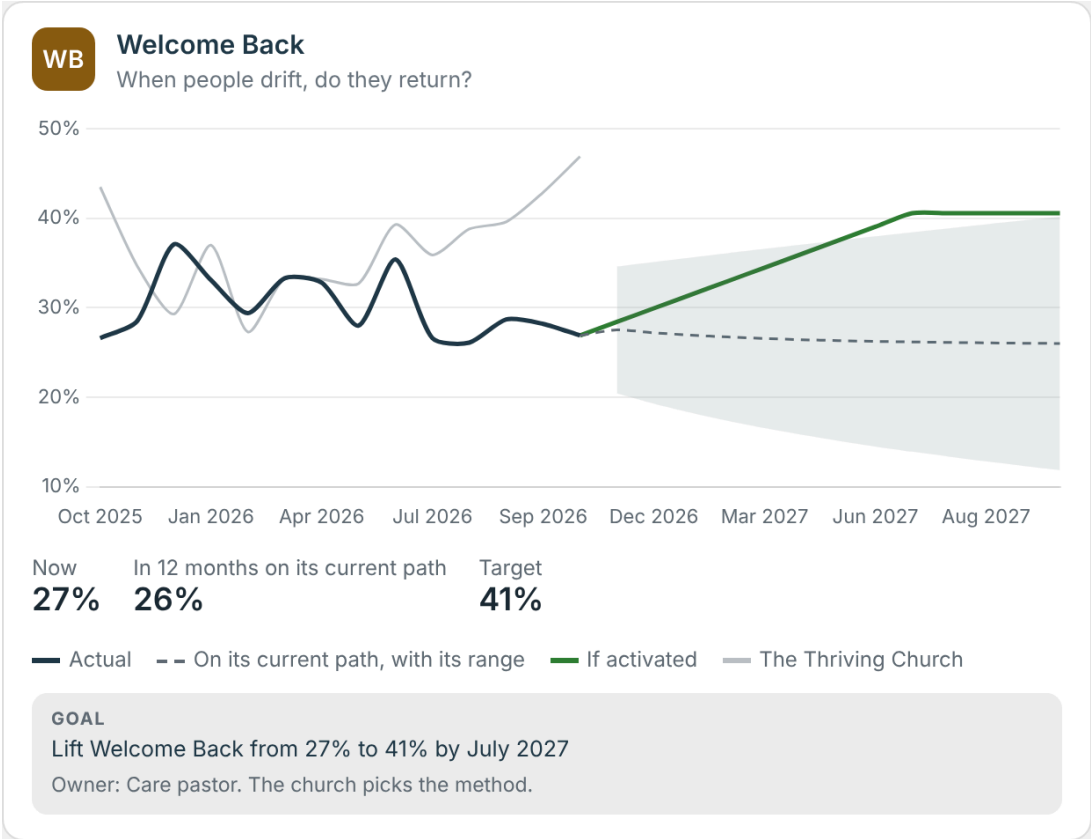
Front Door and Back Door is below its range while first-time families hold steady.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST

Front Door and Back Door, and Participation Trend.

WATCH OUT FOR

It measures return, not loss. Read it beside the count of lapsed attenders.



Illustrative. The Quiet Back Door. Lift Welcome Back from 27% to 41% by July 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +24 on the weekend by October 2027.

Leaders
Whether the people ready to lead are becoming leaders.

LEADERS

12 Bench to Leader

BL

Are the people who are ready to lead becoming leaders?

HOW IT IS COUNTED
Adults who became leaders in the last 12 months, out of adults on the bench a year ago. The bench is adults in a group, serving and giving who hold no leader role.

FOR EXAMPLE
252 adults were on the bench a year ago and 76 of them became leaders. Bench to Leader is 30%.

WHY IT MATTERS
New groups and teams need leaders before they need members. A full bench with no new leaders means the people are there and nobody has stepped up.

TYPICAL OWNER
Executive pastor

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES
30%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT
Group Room or Leader Span is too high, and people who say yes to a group or team wait for a place.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST
Leader Span, Group Room and Leader Participation.

WATCH OUT FOR
It needs a year of history and it moves slowly. It rarely moves attendance alone. Its value shows when another catalyst fills the room it makes.



Illustrative. The Leader Ceiling. Lift Bench to Leader from 0% to 30% by October 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +100 on the weekend by October 2027.

Events
Whether the effort a church puts into events leads anywhere.

EVENTS

13 Event Bridge

EB

Are events followed by a next step?

HOW IT IS COUNTED
Event participants who weren't in a group or on a team and joined one within 13 weeks, out of event participants who weren't in one

FOR EXAMPLE
437 event participants were not in a group or on a team, and 93 of them joined one within 13 weeks. Event Bridge is 21%.

WHY IT MATTERS
Events take real effort. This shows which ones are followed by more participation.

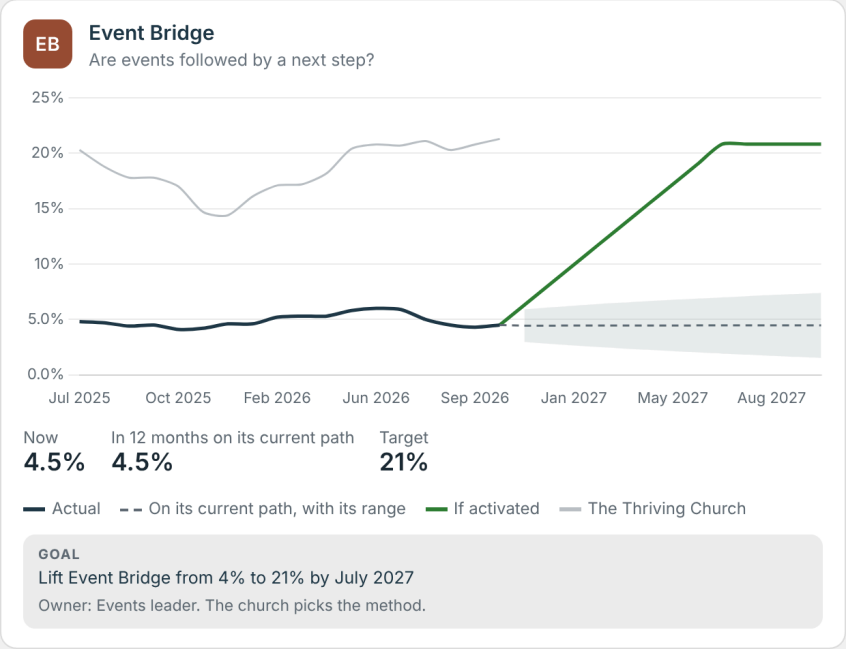
TYPICAL OWNER
Event or ministry leader

WHAT A THRIVING CHURCH SEES
21%

SIGNS YOU NEED IT
A full calendar, the same people at every event, and Group Connection and Serving Connection both low.

CHURCH VITALS TO CHECK FIRST
Serving Load. Events draw on the same volunteers as Sundays.

WATCH OUT FOR
It counts only participants who are not already in a group or on a team. A well-attended event can still read low.



Illustrative. The Event Treadmill. Lift Event Bridge from 4% to 21% by July 2027. Activated alone, the model suggests about +58 on the weekend by October 2027.

PART 03

The 10 Church Vitals

Church Vitals are not catalysts. You don't activate one. It moves because the catalysts do. Each has a healthy range, and both ends are a problem.

Participation

Is participation moving, and are people settling in and going deeper?

		STARTING RANGE	TOO LOW	TOO HIGH
Participation Trend	Is participation moving at the pace we want?	10% to 35%	Shrinking or stalled	Moving faster than groups, teams and leaders can absorb
Front Door and Back Door	Are more people settling in than slipping away?	4 to 10	The back door is gaining on the front door	New people arriving faster than they can be connected
Full Participation	How many of our people are in a group, serving and giving?	15% to 30%	Few people reach what the church hopes for	Rare. It may mean few new people are arriving.

Room

Is there room for the next person, on Sunday and in a group?

		STARTING RANGE	TOO LOW	TOO HIGH
Available Space	Do we have room for the next guest?	50% to 80%	The room feels empty	No seat or kids' space for the next guest
Group Room	Is there room in a group for the next person?	65% to 90%	Groups too small to last	No room for the next person who says yes

Leaders and volunteers

Are leaders and volunteers carrying a load they can sustain?

		STARTING RANGE	TOO LOW	TOO HIGH
Leader Span	How many people does each leader carry?	6 to 10	More leaders than groups and teams need	Leaders stretched too thin to know their people
Leader Participation	Do our leaders show the participation we hope for in everyone?	70% to 95%	Even the church's own leaders aren't doing what it hopes everyone will	Rarely a problem
Serving Load	How often are our volunteers serving?	3 to 7 times in 13 weeks	Volunteers not used enough to feel needed	Burnout, and the next volunteer to step back

Foundations

Can the church rely on its giving and on its data?

		STARTING RANGE	TOO LOW	TOO HIGH
Giving Dependence	How much of our giving comes from our largest giving households?	50% to 75%	Rarely a problem	Losing a few households would threaten the budget
Data Coverage	How much of the room can our data see?	35% to 70%	The picture misses most of the room	Evidence credited too widely, or headcounts too low

The ranges are starting points from the sample church. Each church's own history sets the real ones.

Reading the Church Vitals

> **Participation Trend is the master Church Vital.** It is active adults today against a year ago.

> **Full Participation and Leader Participation are Church Vitals, not catalysts.** Full participation is where the other catalysts lead. If Leader Participation drops, a church should pay attention.

> **Giving Dependence is one church-wide percentage.** It names no household.

Two limits on pace

Two things set how fast a church can add people, whatever catalysts it activates.

Giving

Giving pays for outreach, for a steady flow of new guests, for the staff who lead groups and serving and invest in leaders, and for added room. When giving falls behind the number of people a church serves, all four slow down. Giving also follows involvement. Households in a group or serving give more, so a church that doesn't move people into groups and serving doesn't see that giving.

Volunteers

A church without enough people serving can't serve a larger weekend well, and guests stop coming back. The Thriving Church has about 1.8 people on the weekend for each adult serving. Past about 2.0, the model has guests returning less often.

The problems compound. A church short on volunteers loses guests, then giving, then the means to fix either.

Available Space: when to add room, and how much

Available Space is measured against the seats a church has today. So it shows when room has to be added and how much. Room is needed once the fullest service passes 80% of seats. How a church adds it is the church's choice: another service, another venue or a bigger room.

CHURCH VITAL · PARTICIPATION

01 Participation Trend

PT

Is participation moving at the pace we want?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Active adults today divided by active adults a year ago, minus 1.

FOR EXAMPLE

3,060 active adults today against about 2,390 a year ago. Participation Trend is 28%.

HEALTHY RANGE

10% to 35% to start. The master Church Vital. A church's leaders set the pace they want.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

Shrinking or stalled

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

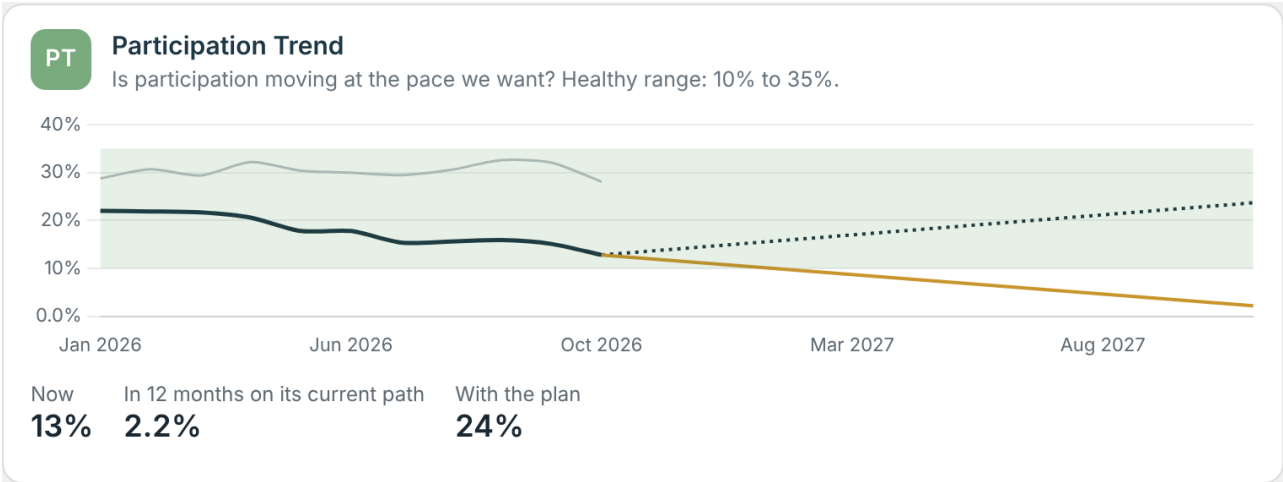
Moving faster than groups, teams and leaders can absorb

WHAT MOVES IT

Every catalyst, in time. The Reach catalysts add people. The Next steps and Movement catalysts keep them.

WATCH OUT FOR

The count of active adults rises faster than attendance when the data sees more of the room. Read it beside the weekend headcount.



Illustrative. The Tired Few. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · PARTICIPATION

02 Front Door and Back Door

FB

Are more people settling in than slipping away?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Adults who became Consistent on Sundays, divided by lapsed attenders, over the last 12 months.

FOR EXAMPLE

560 adults became Consistent on Sundays and 100 lapsed. Front Door and Back Door is 5.6.

HEALTHY RANGE

4 to 10 to start. Measured over 12 months, because one quarter swings with the seasons.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

The back door is gaining on the front door

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

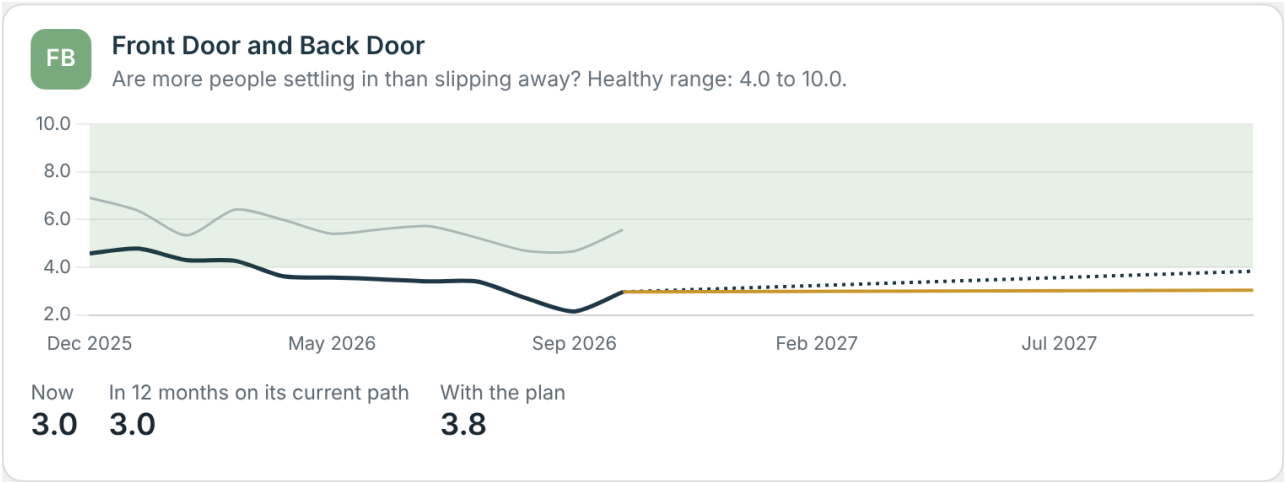
New people arriving faster than they can be connected

WHAT MOVES IT

First to Fourth and First 90 Days widen the front door. Welcome Back, Steps Forward and Group Connection narrow the back door.

WATCH OUT FOR

No catalyst acts directly on involved people leaving. This Church Vital can take longer than a year to return to its range.



Illustrative. The Quiet Back Door. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · PARTICIPATION

03 Full Participation

FP

How many of our people are in a group, serving and giving?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Adults in a small group, serving and giving, out of active adults.

FOR EXAMPLE

576 of 3,060 active adults are in a group, serving and giving. Full Participation is 19%.

HEALTHY RANGE

15% to 30% to start. Where the other catalysts lead.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

Few people reach what the church hopes for

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

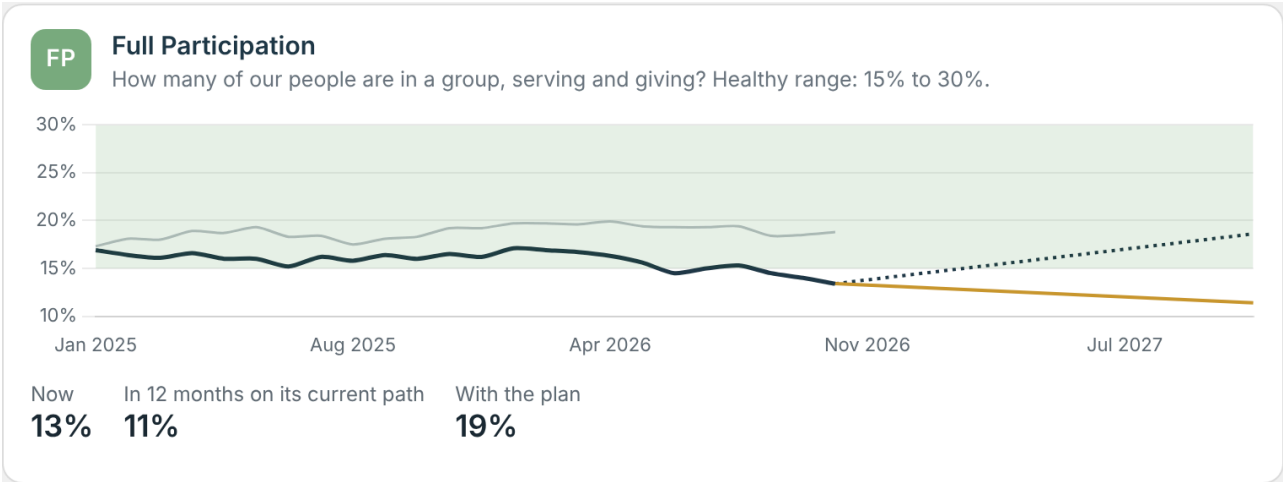
Rare. It may mean few new people are arriving.

WHAT MOVES IT

Group Connection, Serving Connection and Giving Connection lead here. First 90 Days starts new people toward it.

WATCH OUT FOR

In the 12-month model it is an estimate built from the overlap of the three areas. The history on the chart is the real count.



Illustrative. The Sunday Crowd. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · ROOM

04 Available Space

AS

Do we have room for the next guest?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Weekend headcount at the fullest service divided by seats, and kids checked in divided by Kids Ministry capacity.

FOR EXAMPLE

730 people at the fullest service in a room with 1,030 seats. Available Space is 71%.

HEALTHY RANGE

50% to 80% to start. Room is needed once the fullest service passes 80% of seats.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

The room feels empty

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

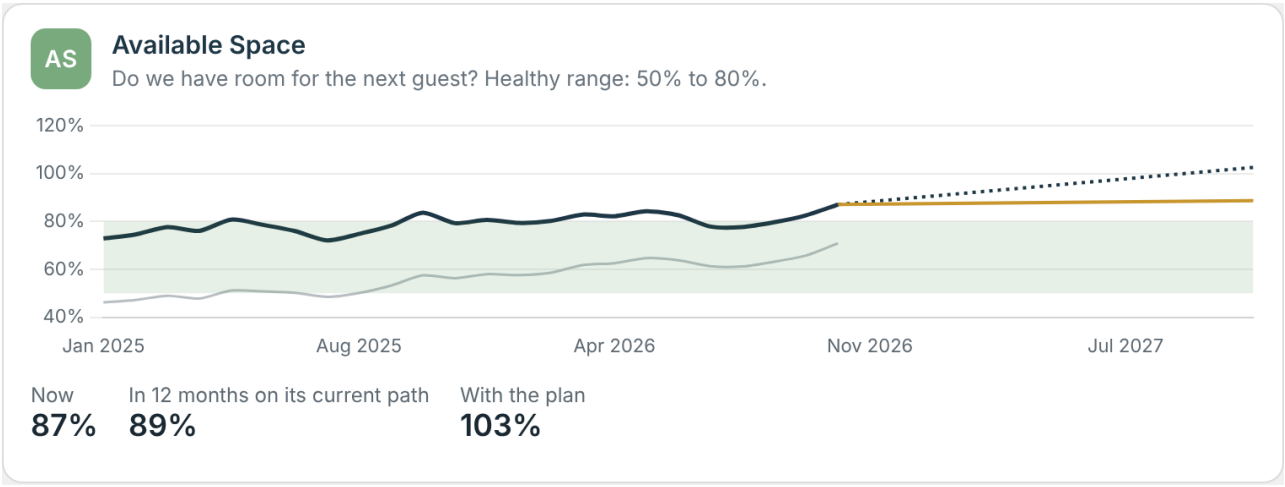
No seat or kids' space for the next guest

WHAT MOVES IT

Every catalyst that adds people or raises how often they attend. Sunday Rhythm fills seats without one new person arriving.

WATCH OUT FOR

It is measured against today's seats, so a forecast can pass 100%. That number shows how much room the plan needs.



Illustrative. The Full Room. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · ROOM

05 Group Room

GR

Is there room in a group for the next person?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Members on small group rosters divided by the total stated capacity of the groups.

FOR EXAMPLE

1,256 adults on rosters in groups with room for about 1,650. Group Room is 76%.

HEALTHY RANGE

65% to 90% to start. Both ends matter: groups too small to last, or no room for the next person.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

Groups too small to last

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

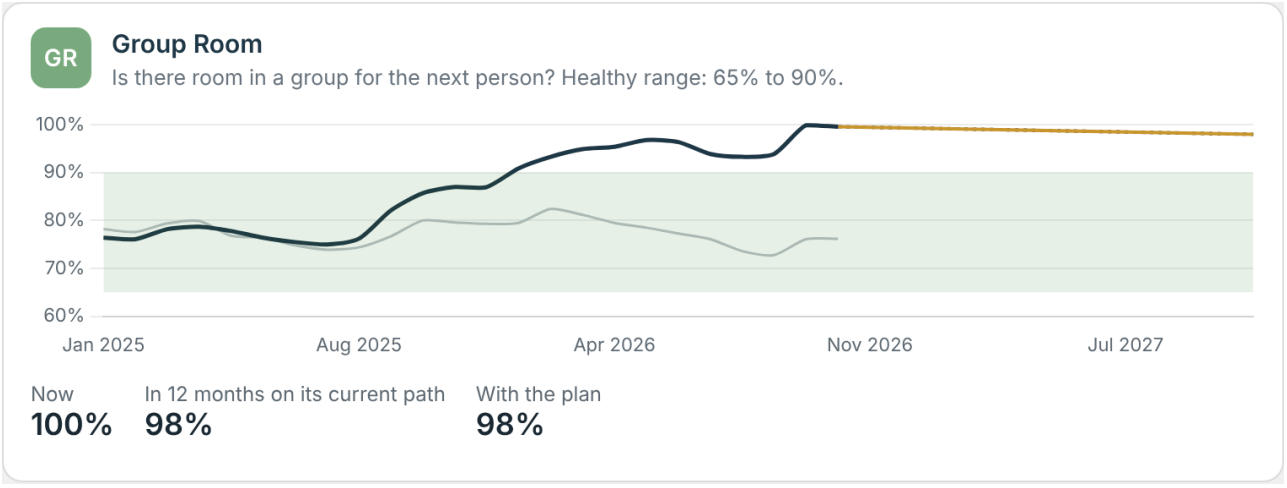
No room for the next person who says yes

WHAT MOVES IT

Group Connection fills groups. Bench to Leader adds groups.

WATCH OUT FOR

Stated capacity is each leader's own number. Check that it is current before trusting the rate.



Illustrative. The Leader Ceiling. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · LEADERS AND VOLUNTEERS

06 Leader Span

LS

How many people does each leader carry?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Group members divided by group leaders, and team volunteers divided by team leaders.

FOR EXAMPLE

In The Thriving Church each group leader carries 7.4 people and each team leader 9.8.

HEALTHY RANGE

6 to 10 to start. Shown for groups and for teams.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

More leaders than groups and teams need

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

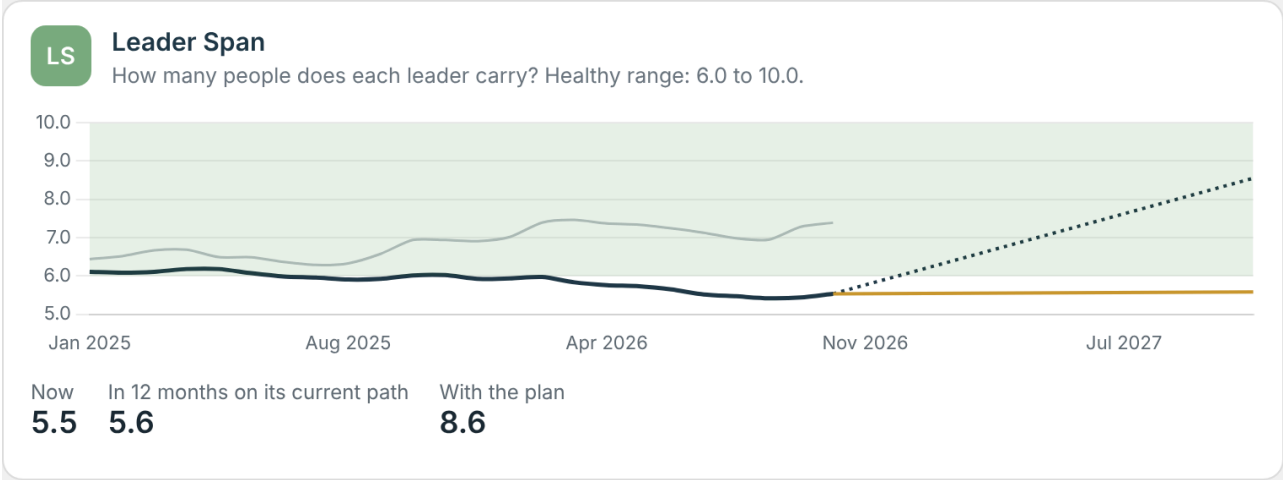
Leaders stretched too thin to know their people

WHAT MOVES IT

Bench to Leader lowers it. Group Connection and Serving Connection raise it.

WATCH OUT FOR

An average hides one leader carrying 20 people. Read it group by group and team by team.



Illustrative. The Sunday Crowd. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · LEADERS AND VOLUNTEERS

07 Leader Participation

LP

Do our leaders show the participation we hope for in everyone?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Group and team leaders who are in a small group, serving and giving, out of all leaders. Their Sunday attendance is shown beside it.

FOR EXAMPLE

Of 100 leaders, 80 are in a group, serving and giving consistently. Leader Participation is 80%.

HEALTHY RANGE

70% to 95% to start. If it drops, a church should pay attention.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

Even the church's own leaders aren't doing what it hopes everyone will

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

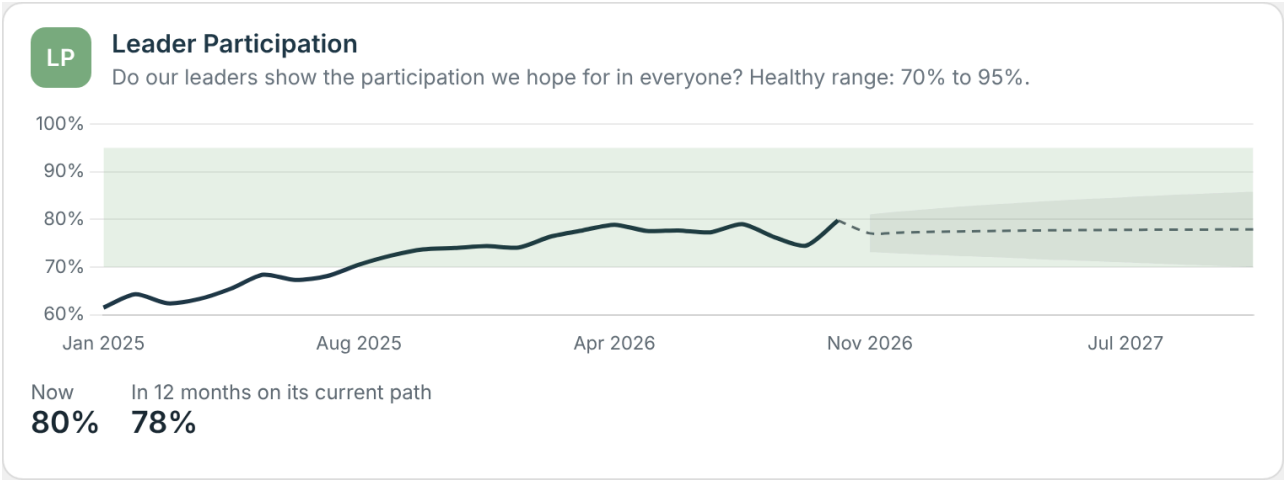
Rarely a problem

WHAT MOVES IT

No catalyst moves it directly. In the sample church giving is the area most leaders are missing, so Giving Connection is the nearest.

WATCH OUT FOR

Consistent giving is a higher bar than "gave recently." This Church Vital reads lower than a church's own lists of leaders would suggest.



Illustrative. The Thriving Church. The green band is the healthy range.

CHURCH VITAL · LEADERS AND VOLUNTEERS

08 Serving Load

SL

How often are our volunteers serving?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Average times served in 13 weeks, for each Consistent volunteer.

FOR EXAMPLE

1,111 volunteers served about 6,440 times in 13 weeks. Serving Load is 5.8.

HEALTHY RANGE

3 to 7 times in 13 weeks to start. An early warning for the teams.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

Volunteers not used enough to feel needed

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

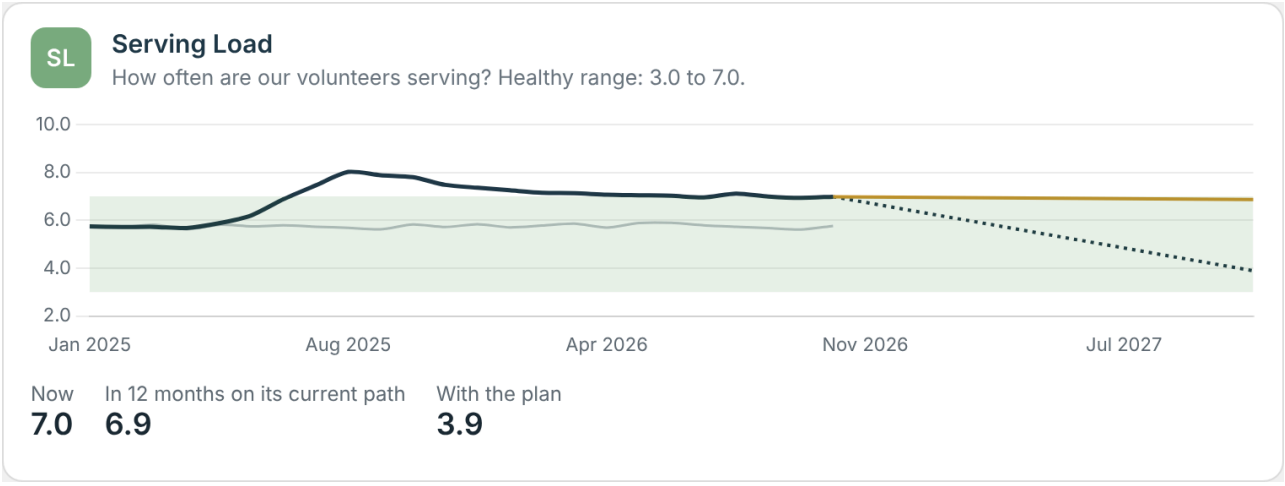
Burnout, and the next volunteer to step back

WHAT MOVES IT

Serving Connection lowers it by sharing the same Sundays among more people. Outreach and events can raise it.

WATCH OUT FOR

It rises before volunteers step back. In The Tired Few it rose first and the loss of volunteers followed.



Illustrative. The Tired Few. The green band is the healthy range. The gray line is The Thriving Church.

CHURCH VITAL · FOUNDATIONS

09 Giving Dependence

GD

How much of our giving comes from our largest giving households?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Giving from the largest 10% of giving households, divided by total giving, over the last 12 months. The 10% line can be moved for each church.

FOR EXAMPLE

The largest 124 of 1,240 giving households gave 68% of $3.48 million.

HEALTHY RANGE

50% to 75% to start. A church-wide figure only.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

Rarely a problem

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

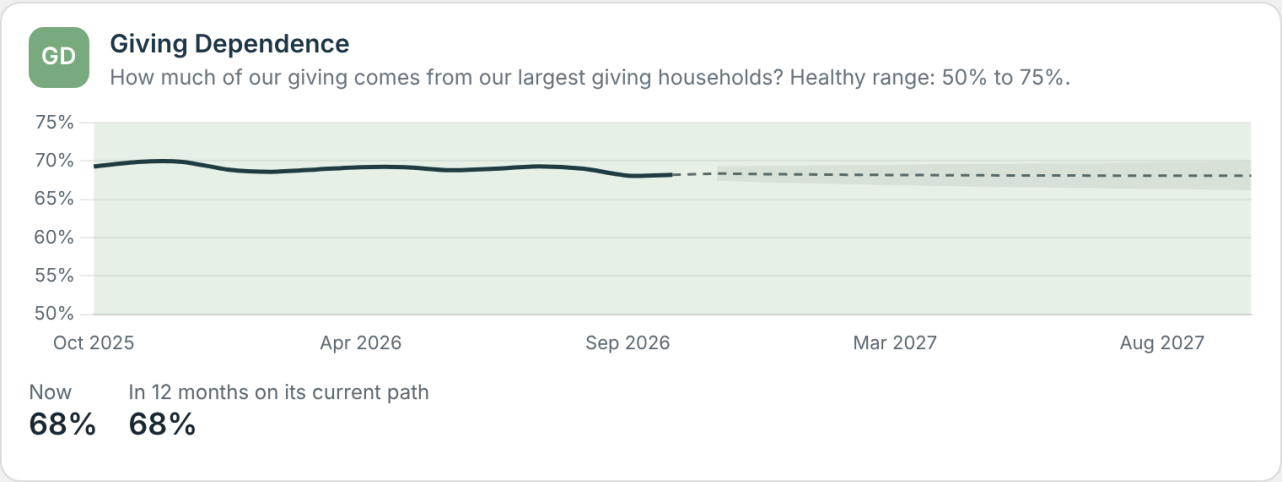
Losing a few households would threaten the budget

WHAT MOVES IT

Giving Connection and Second Gift widen the base of giving households.

WATCH OUT FOR

It is one church-wide percentage. It names no household and shows no amount for one.



Illustrative. The Thriving Church. The green band is the healthy range.

CHURCH VITAL · FOUNDATIONS

10 Data Coverage

DC

How much of the room can our data see?

HOW IT IS COUNTED

Average adults with Sunday evidence each week, divided by the average adult headcount.

FOR EXAMPLE

About 610 adults with Sunday evidence against an adult headcount of 1,329. Data Coverage is 46%.

HEALTHY RANGE

35% to 70% to start. It says how far to trust every Sunday number in the Season Plan.

IF IT IS TOO LOW

The picture misses most of the room

IF IT IS TOO HIGH

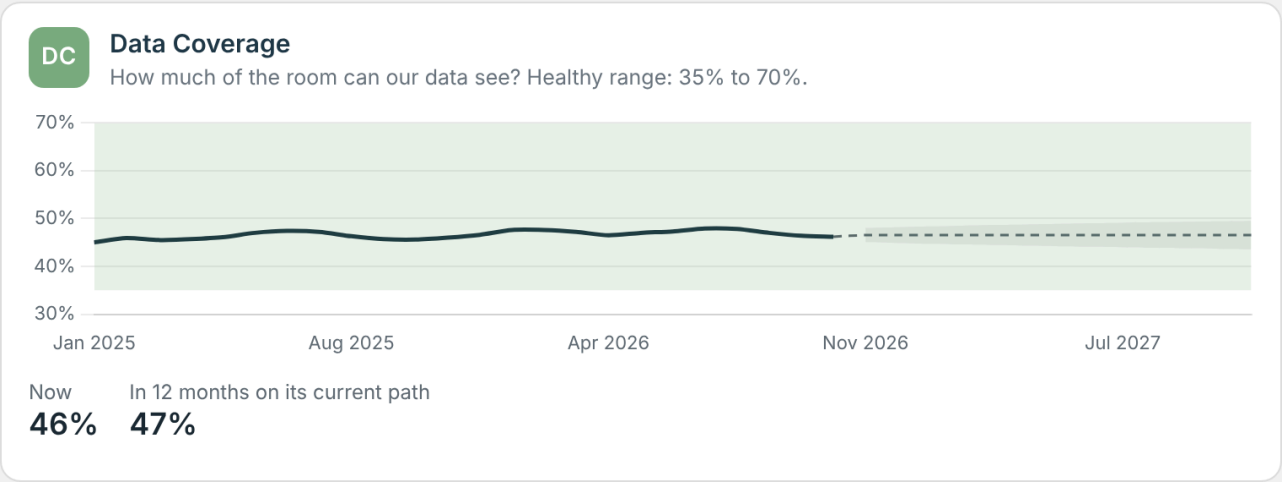
Evidence credited too widely, or headcounts too low

WHAT MOVES IT

No catalyst moves it. It rises where a church takes adult check-in.

WATCH OUT FOR

About a third of Sunday involvement in the sample church is Likely, not observed. Likely is a weak guess.



Illustrative. The Thriving Church. The green band is the healthy range.

PART 04

One church, run nine ways

Sage Ridge Community Church is fictional. We built two years of data for it, from October 2024 to October 2026: households, check-ins, group and team rosters, giving, events and website visits. About 1.7 million records across the nine versions, shaped by patterns from real churches.

Then we ran it nine ways. The first is The Thriving Church. Each of the other eight starts as the same church and faces one condition. We kept each condition narrow so it is easy to see. A real church may be facing more than one. Nothing forces the weekend number. In each version it moves because of the one change made and what follows from it.

RECORDS	COUNT
Households	27,574
People	43,574
Groups	1,231
Group memberships	15,829
Group meetings	77,356
Group attendance	322,010
Teams	126
Team memberships	12,137
Serve schedule	391,250
Serve check-ins	339,785

RECORDS	COUNT
Kids' check-ins	170,944
Giving dates	211,876
Weekly giving totals	972
Events	272
Event registrations	48,547
Weekend headcounts	972
Website weeks	972
Online service views	2,916
Outreach events	106
All records	**1,668,449**

Illustrative. Record counts across all nine versions of the sample church. A further 7,200 rows hold the weekly value of each catalyst and Church Vital.

Three rules that make conditions compound

1	Giving follows involvement	A household in a group or serving gives several times what a household in neither gives, and a household in both gives more again.
2	Giving limits the flow of guests	Giving pays for outreach and for a steady flow of new guests. When it falls behind, fewer guests come.
3	Volunteers limit a Sunday	When each volunteer carries more people than in The Thriving Church, fewer guests come back.

The first rule was checked against one real church's giving. The other two are sized to match what we have seen in churches. They are not measured.

The nine churches at a glance

CHURCH	WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027	OCTOBER 2027	SEASON PLAN
The Thriving Church	2,015 +21% in a year	2,431 on its current path	2,904 with the plan	Bench to Leader · First 90 Days · Sunday Rhythm
The Full Room	1,577 +2% in a year	1,607 on its current path	1,857 with the plan	First to Fourth · First 90 Days · Second Gift
The Sunday Crowd	1,461 +3% in a year	1,482 on its current path	1,911 with the plan	Group Connection · Serving Connection · Bench to Leader · First 90 Days
The Leader Ceiling	1,781 +11% in a year	1,887 on its current path	2,228 with the plan	Bench to Leader · Serving Connection · First 90 Days
The Tired Few	1,479 −9% in a year	1,361 on its current path	1,778 with the plan	Serving Connection · Bench to Leader · First 90 Days
The Giving Lag	1,603 +4% in a year	1,659 on its current path	1,902 with the plan	Second Gift · Giving Connection
The Quiet Back Door	1,561 −1% in a year	1,569 on its current path	1,865 with the plan	Welcome Back · Steps Forward · Group Connection · Bench to Leader
The Closed Front Door	1,415 −1% in a year	1,405 on its current path	1,695 with the plan	Outreach · Plan a Visit · First to Fourth
The Event Treadmill	1,405 +3% in a year	1,427 on its current path	1,788 with the plan	Event Bridge · Group Connection · Serving Connection · First 90 Days

Illustrative. Weekend is the 13-week average of adults and everyone under 18 in the building on Sunday morning. Most teens attend a student service and aren't in it.

On its current path, only The Thriving Church keeps its pace. No other church rises more than 6%, and The Tired Few shrinks.

How to read each church

Each church takes two pages. The first shows the condition in the data and where the church lands on its current path. The second shows its Season Plan, each catalyst with its goal, and what the model suggests the plan adds by October 2027.

In the large chart, blue is weekend attendance and green is full participation. Dashed lines show the current path. The shaded area is what the plan adds.

1 OF 9 The Thriving Church

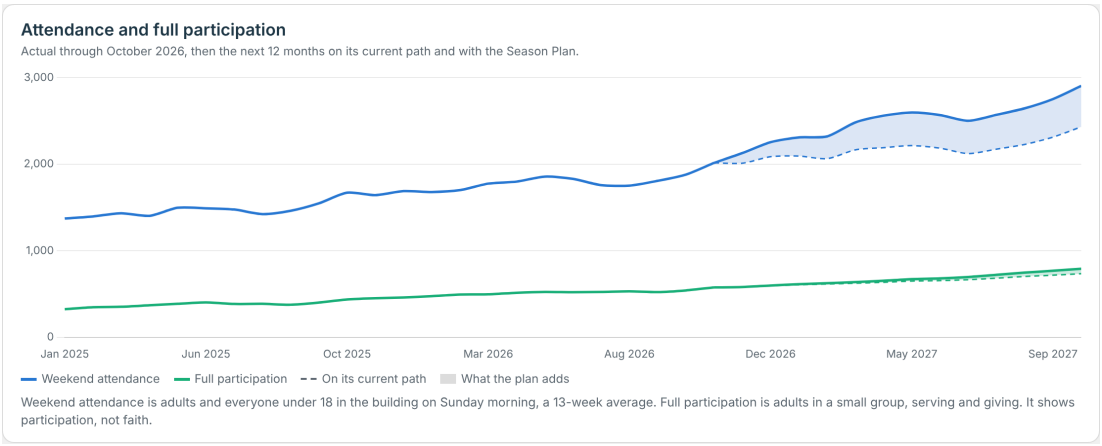
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
2,015	2,431	2,904	+$307K
1,670 a year ago	+416 from today	+473 against its current path	church-wide total

A thriving church with attendance up a little over 20% a year.

It is the church the other eight are measured against, and it has a Season Plan too. A thriving church still picks catalysts for its season.

Sage Ridge averaged 1,670 on a weekend a year ago and 2,015 today. It holds six outreaches a year. About 40% of its new people first came through one.

THE BIG PICTURE	THE THRIVING CHURCH
Active adults	3,060
Adults in a small group	1,256
Adults serving	1,111
Giving, last 12 months	$3.48 million
Adults in full participation	576



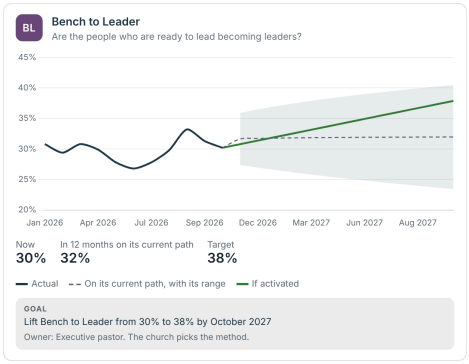
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 2,015 to about 2,431 by October 2027, and full participation from 576 to about 734 adults.

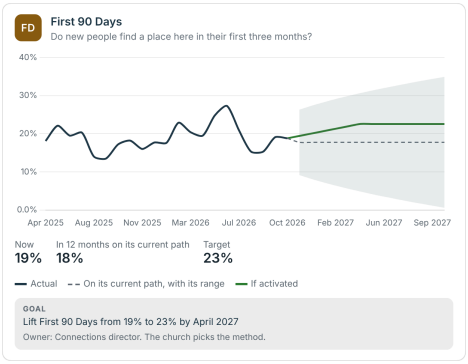
Why these catalysts

Most of what this plan adds comes from Sunday Rhythm: the same people attending more often. Bench to Leader adds little attendance this year. It makes room for groups before the room is needed, and at this pace a church that ignores it pays in the second year.

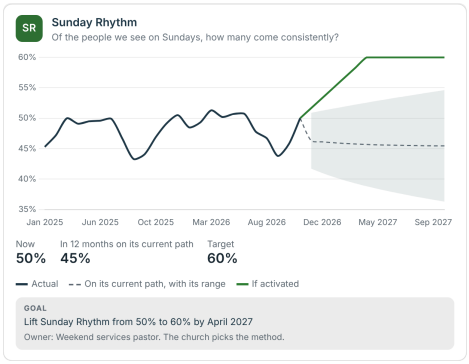
1 OF 9 The Thriving Church: the Season Plan



Added to the weekend if activated alone **Little on its own**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+91**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+360**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 2,904 on the weekend by October 2027 against 2,431 on its current path, and 792 adults in full participation against 734. Of the added attendance, about 405 comes from people attending more often and 67 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	100%	100%
People for each volunteer	1.6	1.9
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+81
Adults serving, added by the plan		+87
New leaders, added by the plan		+14

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Available Space	71%	86%, too high	102%, too high

ROOM

This church adds room as attendance rises, so seats never hold it back. With the plan it needs more room from January 2027 and about 1,320 seats at the fullest service by October 2027, against 1,030 today.

2 OF 9 The Full Room

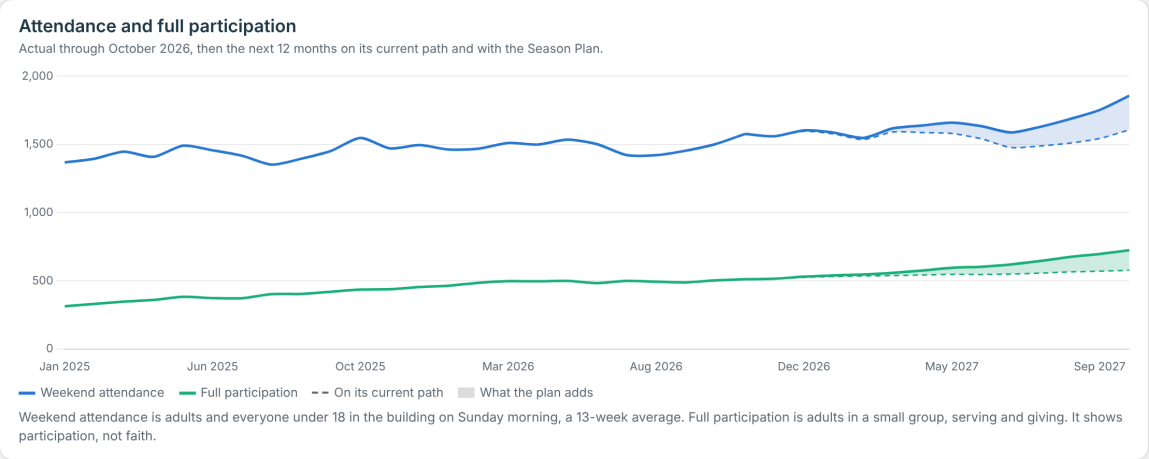
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,577	1,607	1,857	+$213K
1,548 a year ago	+30 from today	+250 against its current path	church-wide total

Ran out of seats and kids' space on Sundays, so guests stopped coming back.

The church has 650 seats and Kids Ministry space for 300. The Thriving Church has 1,030 and 405.

Guests keep arriving, and outreach still works. Once the room passed 80% in spring 2025, fewer guests came back. The weekend rose 2% in a year while The Thriving Church rose 21%.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE FULL ROOM
Available Space, seats at the fullest service	71%	87%
Available Space, Kids Ministry	76%	83%
First to Fourth	45%	34%
First 90 Days	19%	13%
First-time families, 26 weeks	351	349
Participation Trend	28%	14%



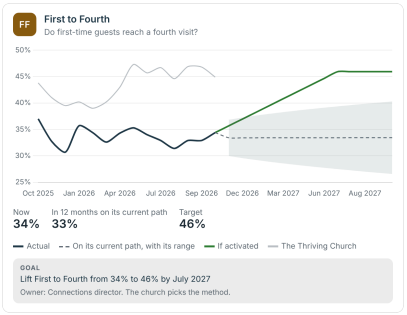
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,577 to about 1,607 by October 2027, and full participation from 511 to about 577 adults.

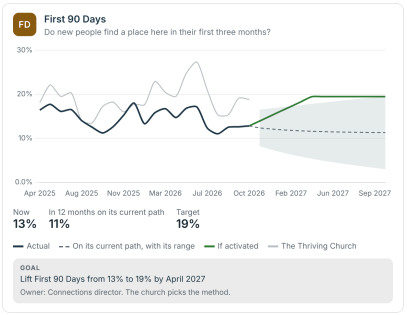
Why these catalysts

First to Fourth and First 90 Days measure whether guests stay. Second Gift is there so giving can pay for the added seats. Outreach is not in the plan. It would bring more guests to a room with no seat for them.

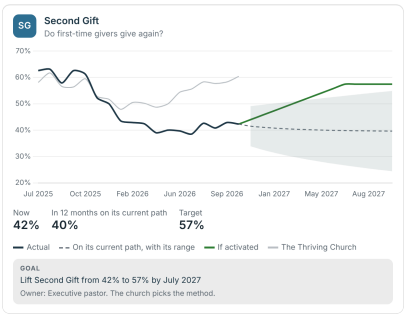
2 OF 9 The Full Room: the Season Plan



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+116**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+117**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+8**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,857 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,607 on its current path, and 724 adults in full participation against 577. Of the added attendance, about 20 comes from people attending more often and 230 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	100%	100%
People for each volunteer	1.5	1.4
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+215
Adults serving, added by the plan		+222
New leaders, added by the plan		+5

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Participation Trend	14%	8.5%, too low	24%
Available Space	87%, too high	89%, too high	103%, too high

ROOM

The plan only works with more room. With the plan and no added room, the model suggests about 1,683 on the weekend. With room for it, about 1,857. That takes about 830 seats at the fullest service by October 2027. The church has 650.

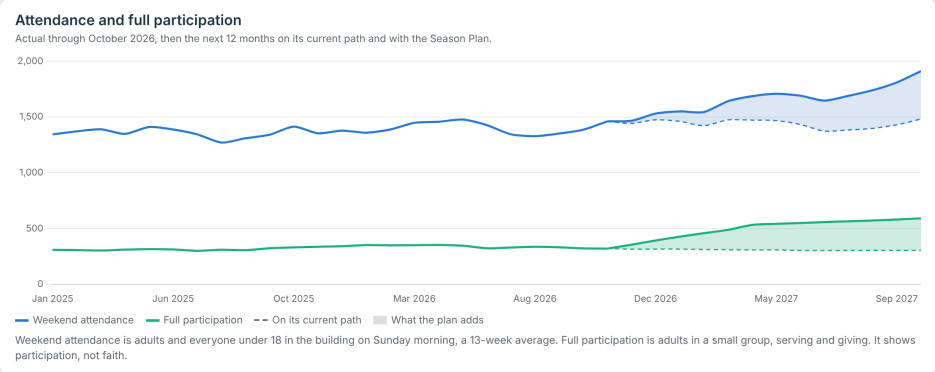
3 OF 9 The Sunday Crowd

WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,461	1,482	1,911	+$536K
1,414 a year ago	+21 from today	+429 against its current path	church-wide total

Little emphasis on groups or serving. Most people stop at Sunday, and the church has hit a ceiling.

The weekend hit a ceiling. It rose 3% in a year. Full participation went from 331 to 320 while The Thriving Church added 139. There aren't enough volunteers for the crowd, so guests come back less often. Giving was flat while The Thriving Church's rose 16%. Groups are half empty.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE SUNDAY CROWD
Group Connection	61%	46%
Serving Connection	53%	42%
People for each volunteer	1.8	2.3
First 90 Days	19%	13%
Group Room	76%	61%
Giving, last 12 months	$3.48 million	$2.71 million
Adults in full participation	576	320



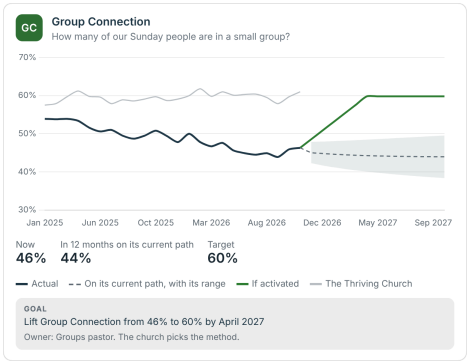
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,461 to about 1,482 by October 2027, and full participation from 320 to about 303 adults.

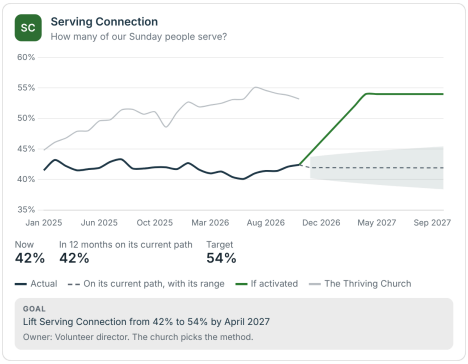
Why these catalysts

A church that starts moving people into groups and serving needs leaders recruited alongside, and a way for new people to find a place. Serving Connection does the most, because it lifts the volunteer limit.

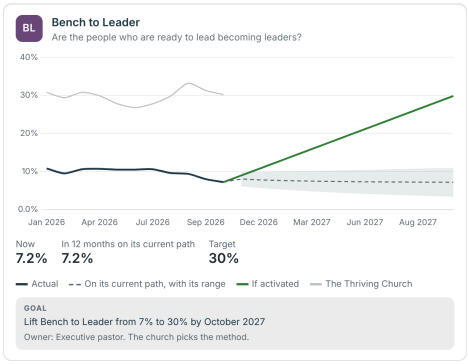
3 OF 9 The Sunday Crowd: the Season Plan



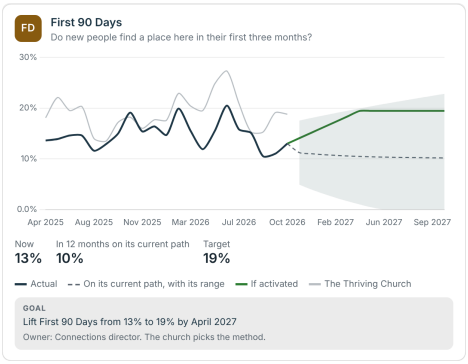
Added to the weekend if activated alone **+137**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+178**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **Little on its own**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+164**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,911 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,482 on its current path, and 591 adults in full participation against 303. Of the added attendance, about 121 comes from people attending more often and 308 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	99%	100%
People for each volunteer	2.3	1.6
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+582
Adults serving, added by the plan		+507
New leaders, added by the plan		+39

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Group Room	61%, too low	61%, too low	94%, too high
Leader Span	5.5, too low	5.6, too low	8.6
Full Participation	13%, too low	11%, too low	19%
Front Door and Back Door	4.1	3.9, too low	6.2

4 OF 9 The Leader Ceiling

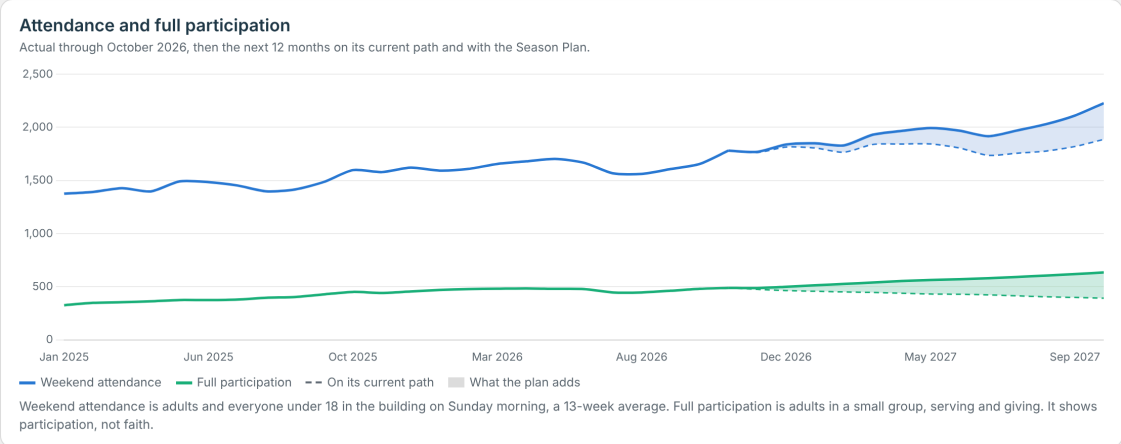
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,781	1,887	2,228	+$272K
1,598 a year ago	+106 from today	+341 against its current path	church-wide total

People are ready to lead and almost none become leaders, so groups and teams are full.

From September 2025 almost no new leaders step up. Groups fill to capacity, and people who want a group can't find one. Teams stop adding people too.

The people are there. The church has 320 adults in a small group, serving and giving who aren't leading. None became leaders in a year. In The Thriving Church, 76 did.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE LEADER CEILING
Bench to Leader	30%	0%
New leaders, 12 months	76	0
Ready to lead	351	320
Groups	159	115
Group Room	76%	100%
Leader Span, groups	7.4	9.1



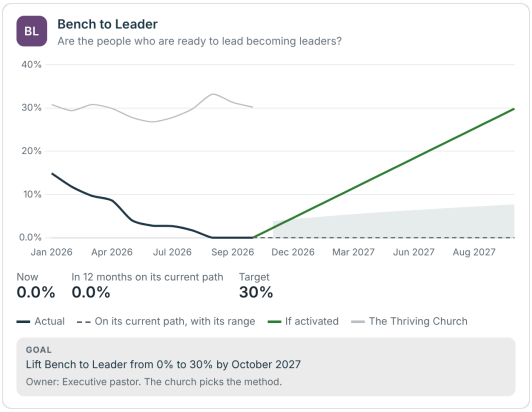
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,781 to about 1,887 by October 2027, and full participation from 489 to about 392 adults.

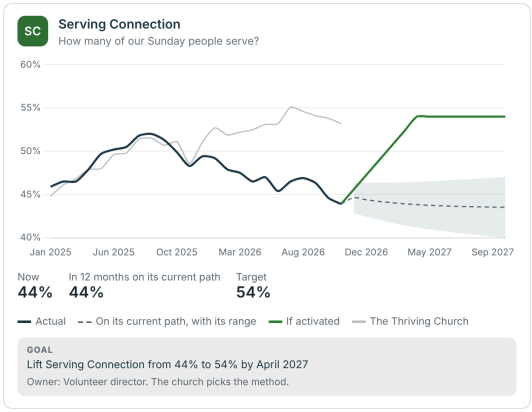
Why these catalysts

New leaders open groups, and the people waiting fill them. Group Room stays near full for more than a year, because the waiting list is long.

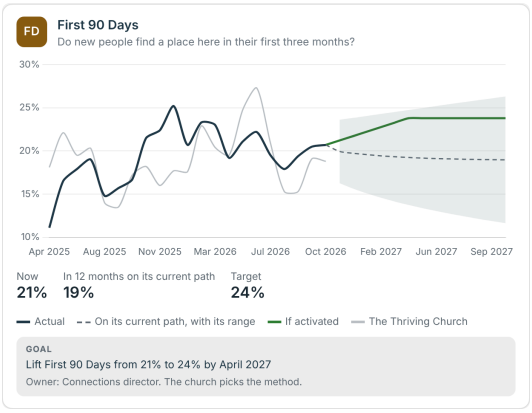
4 OF 9 The Leader Ceiling: the Season Plan



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+100**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+152**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+49**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 2,228 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,887 on its current path, and 634 adults in full participation against 392. Of the added attendance, about 101 comes from people attending more often and 241 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	91%	96%
People for each volunteer	2.2	1.7
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+308
Adults serving, added by the plan		+440
New leaders, added by the plan		+63

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Group Room	100%, too high	98%, too high	98%, too high
Full Participation	17%	12%, too low	17%

5 OF 9 The Tired Few

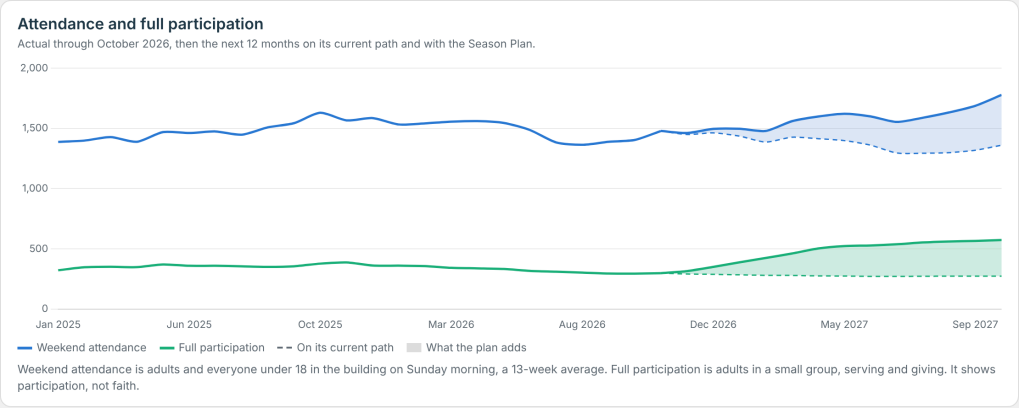
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,479	1,361	1,778	+$389K
1,630 a year ago	−118 from today	+417 against its current path	church-wide total

The same volunteers carry every Sunday. They are stepping off teams and the church is shrinking.

From June 2025 few new volunteers join and the existing ones are scheduled more often. Serving Load rose first. Then volunteers began stepping off teams.

The church is shrinking. The weekend is down 9% in a year. With 3.2 people for each volunteer, Sundays can't be served well and guests don't come back. Every outreach adds to the load on the same volunteers.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE TIRED FEW
Serving Connection	53%	31%
Adults serving consistently	1,111	460
People for each volunteer	1.8	3.2
Serving Load, times in 13 weeks	5.8	7.0
First 90 Days	19%	10%
Adults in full participation	576	298



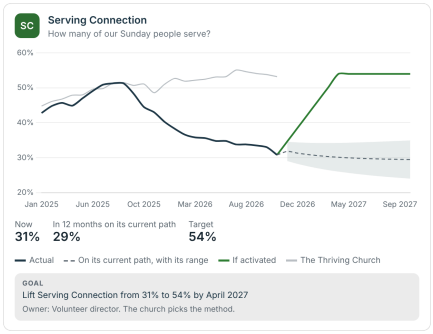
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,479 to about 1,361 by October 2027, and full participation from 298 to about 273 adults.

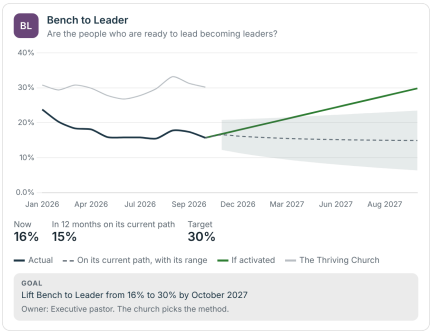
Why these catalysts

Serving Connection is the way out. Alone it adds about 300 to the weekend. Without it, no other combination of catalysts turns this church around.

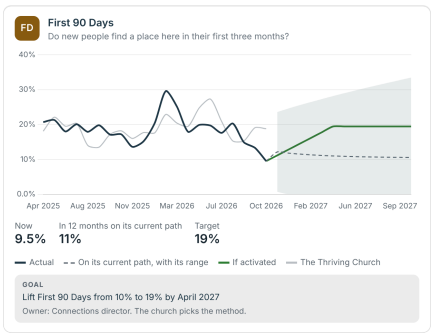
5 OF 9 The Tired Few: the Season Plan



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+304**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **Little on its own**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+74**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,778 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,361 on its current path, and 573 adults in full participation against 273. Of the added attendance, about 107 comes from people attending more often and 310 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	100%	100%
People for each volunteer	3.3	1.9
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+383
Adults serving, added by the plan		+525
New leaders, added by the plan		+25

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Participation Trend	13%	2.2%, too low	24%
Available Space	51%	47%, too low	62%
Group Room	74%	77%	94%, too high
Full Participation	12%, too low	11%, too low	18%
Front Door and Back Door	2.9, too low	3.0, too low	5.5

6 OF 9 The Giving Lag

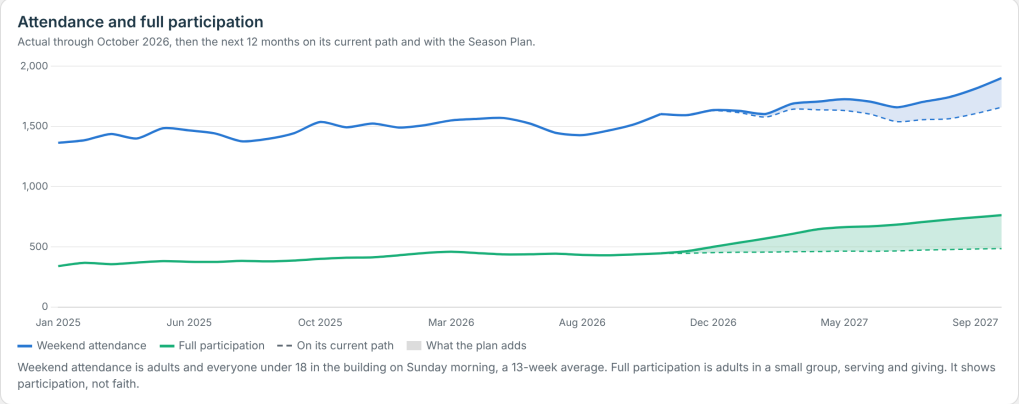
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,603	1,659	1,902	+$836K
1,537 a year ago	+56 from today	+243 against its current path	church-wide total

First-time givers rarely give again. Giving fell, and the church can no longer fund outreach or a steady flow of guests.

From January 2025 first-time givers rarely give again and few new households start. Giving fell 13% in a year while The Thriving Church's rose 16%.

The giving problem became an attendance problem. With funding at 83%, outreach brings fewer guests and about 39% fewer new families arrive.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE GIVING LAG
Second Gift	60%	12%
Giving Connection	62%	48%
Households giving, 12 months	1,240	798
Giving, last 12 months	$3.48 million	$2.27 million
Funding	100%	83%
First-time families, 26 weeks	351	215



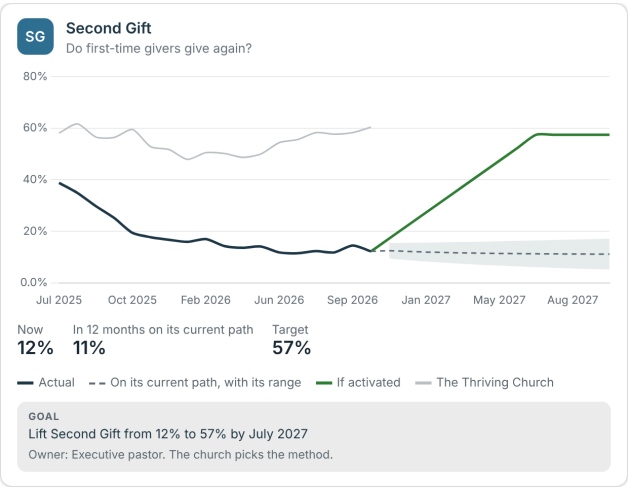
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,603 to about 1,659 by October 2027, and full participation from 446 to about 485 adults.

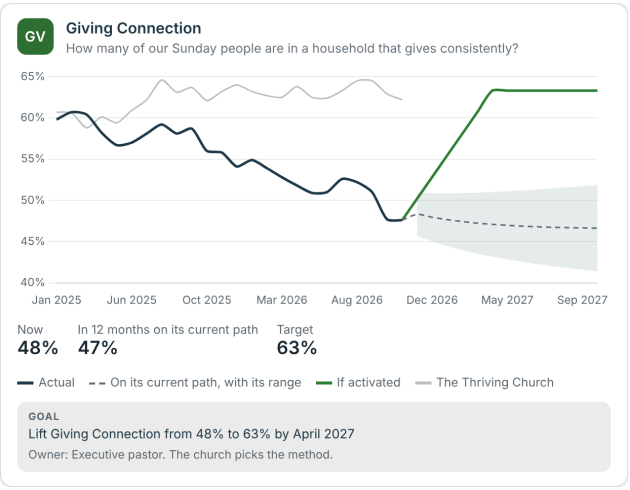
Why these catalysts

When giving recovers, the flow of guests recovers with it. This is the plan with only two catalysts. They are enough.

6 OF 9 The Giving Lag: the Season Plan



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+28**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+242**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,902 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,659 on its current path, and 763 adults in full participation against 485. All of the added attendance comes from more people. This plan doesn't change how often people attend.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	82%	100%
People for each volunteer	1.4	1.4
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+191
Adults serving, added by the plan		+168
New leaders, added by the plan		+26

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Participation Trend	11%	9.7%, too low	26%

7 OF 9 The Quiet Back Door

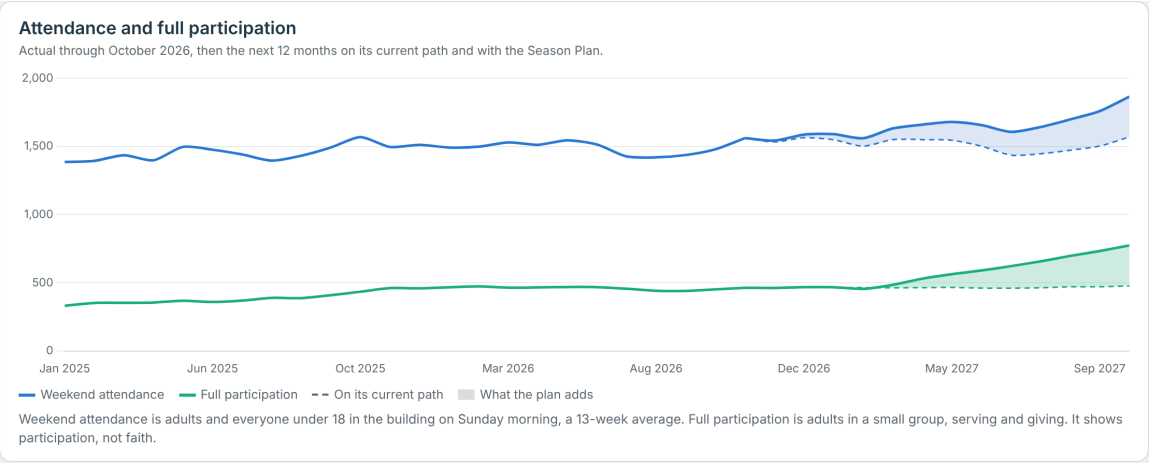
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,561	1,569	1,865	+$391K
1,569 a year ago	+8 from today	+296 against its current path	church-wide total

Involved people are drifting out while new guests keep the weekend number steady.

From September 2025 involved adults leave at three times the normal rate. New families keep arriving and outreach keeps working, so the front door looks fine. That is how outreach can hide this problem.

The weekend hasn't moved in a year. The people leaving are the involved ones, who give the most.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE QUIET BACK DOOR
Lapsed attenders, 13 weeks	35	66
Front Door and Back Door	5.6	3.0
Participation Trend	28%	20%
First-time families, 26 weeks	351	359
Outreach lift	2.2	2.4
Funding	100%	95%



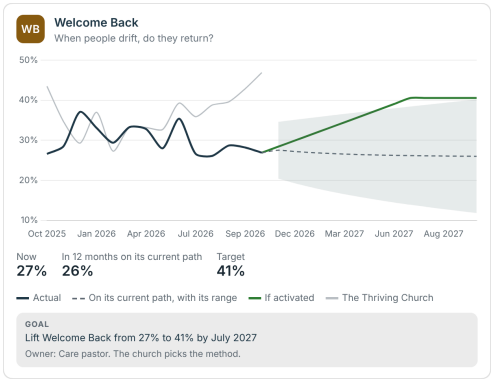
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,561 to about 1,569 by October 2027, and full participation from 463 to about 476 adults.

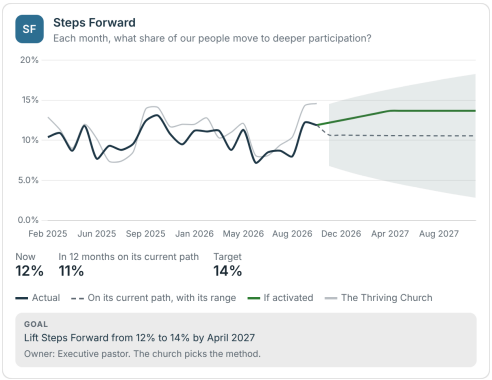
Why these catalysts

The way to keep involved people is to move them on to full participation. Bench to Leader makes room for them. Front Door and Back Door still reads low after 12 months. This one takes longer than a year to fix.

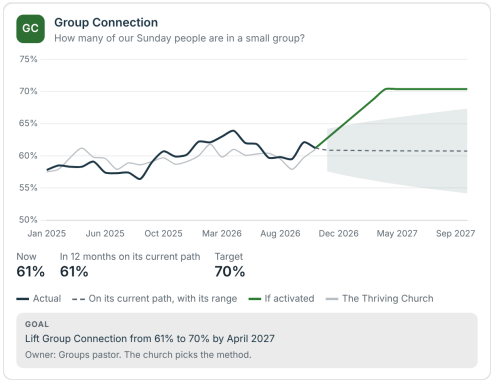
7 OF 9 The Quiet Back Door: the Season Plan



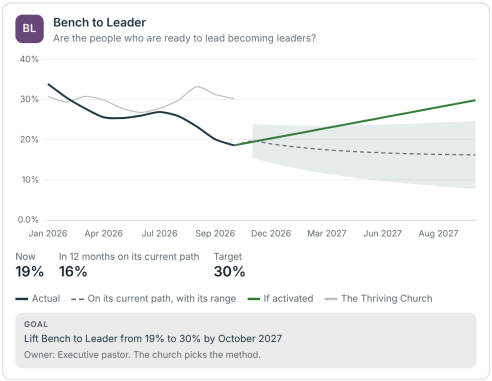
Added to the weekend if activated alone **+24**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+194**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+96**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **Little on its own**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,865 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,569 on its current path, and 774 adults in full participation against 476. Of the added attendance, about 148 comes from people attending more often and 148 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	97%	100%
People for each volunteer	1.8	1.3
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+599
Adults serving, added by the plan		+528
New leaders, added by the plan		+52

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Participation Trend	20%	9.7%, too low	19%
Group Room	70%	69%	93%, too high
Front Door and Back Door	3.0, too low	3.0, too low	3.8, too low

8 OF 9 The Closed Front Door

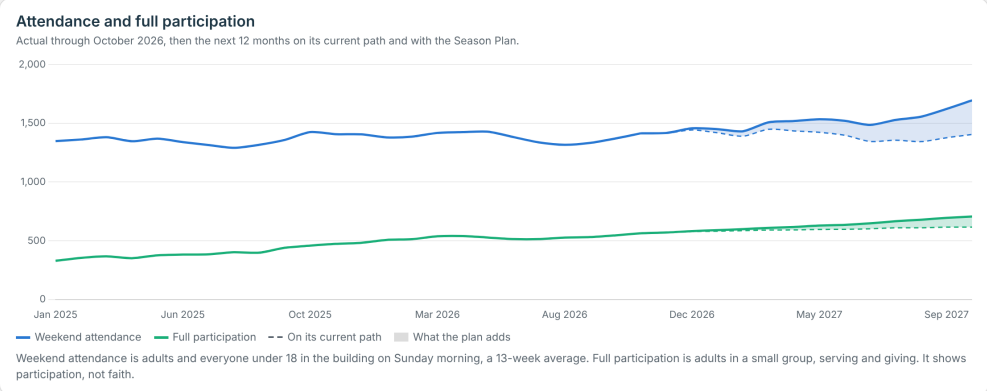
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,415	1,405	1,695	+$202K
1,425 a year ago	−10 from today	+290 against its current path	church-wide total

Healthy inside, with no outreach and few new people finding the church.

From January 2025 the church stops holding outreaches. Fewer people find it, and fewer of those take a step toward visiting.

Inside, the church looks as healthy as The Thriving Church or better. Only reach and the weekend number show the problem.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE CLOSED FRONT DOOR
Outreaches, last 12 months	6	0
Plan a Visit	5.1%	1.5%
First-time families, 26 weeks	351	96
Participation Trend	28%	12%
Group Connection	61%	66%
Full Participation	19%	25%
Available Space, seats	71%	51%



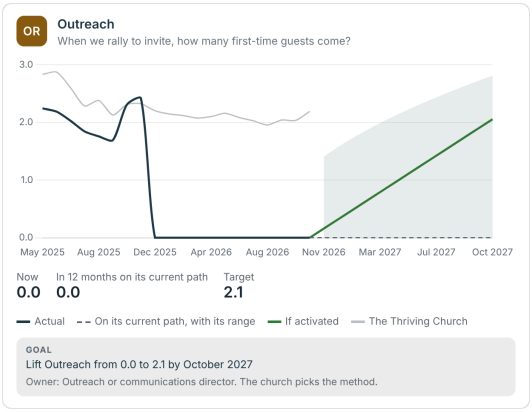
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,415 to about 1,405 by October 2027, and full participation from 564 to about 616 adults.

Why these catalysts

This is the church Outreach helps most. It has room, volunteers and a healthy inside. It has too few guests.

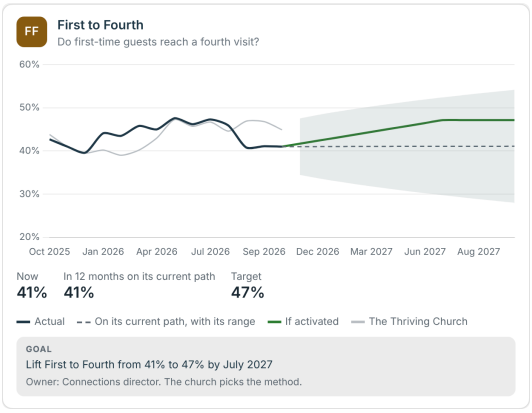
8 OF 9 The Closed Front Door: the Season Plan



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+95**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+148**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+19**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,695 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,405 on its current path, and 706 adults in full participation against 616. All of the added attendance comes from more people. This plan doesn't change how often people attend.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	100%	100%
People for each volunteer	1.3	1.3
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+251
Adults serving, added by the plan		+226
New leaders, added by the plan		+6

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Participation Trend	12%	3.5%, too low	25%
Group Room	70%	62%, too low	73%

9 OF 9 The Event Treadmill

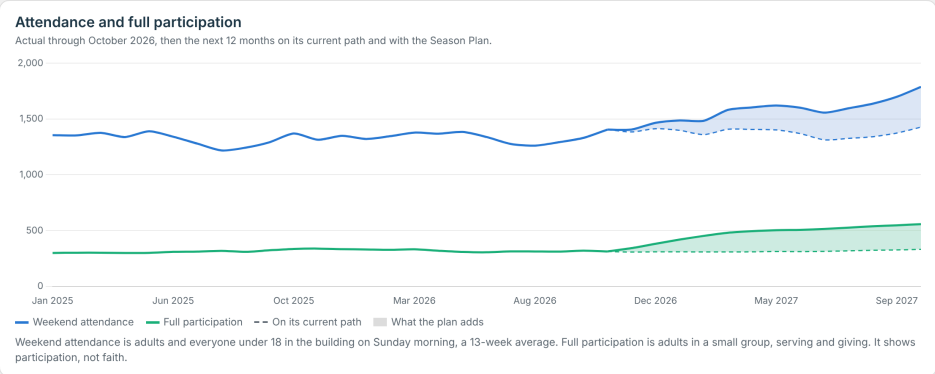
WEEKEND NOW	OCTOBER 2027 ON ITS CURRENT PATH	OCTOBER 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED IN 12 MONTHS
1,405	1,427	1,788	+$539K
1,370 a year ago	+22 from today	+361 against its current path	church-wide total

A full calendar of events that don't lead to a group or a team.

The calendar holds many more events, and they draw mostly people who are already involved. In The Thriving Church about one event participant in five who wasn't in a group or on a team joins one within 13 weeks. Here it is about one in 22.

Like The Sunday Crowd, it has too few volunteers for its weekend and has nearly stopped adding people.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS	THE THRIVING CHURCH	THE EVENT TREADMILL
Event registrations, 12 months	2,840	4,148
Event Bridge	21%	4%
Group Connection	61%	47%
Serving Connection	53%	39%
People for each volunteer	1.8	2.5
First 90 Days	19%	14%
Adults in full participation	576	312



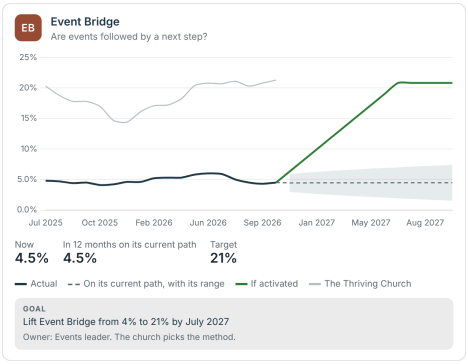
ON ITS CURRENT PATH

The model suggests the average weekend moves from 1,405 to about 1,427 by October 2027, and full participation from 312 to about 331 adults.

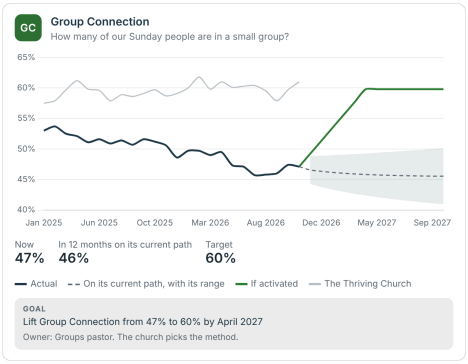
Why these catalysts

A church focused on its next event forgets to follow up with the people who came to the last one. First 90 Days is that follow-up. Event Bridge connects events to groups and serving.

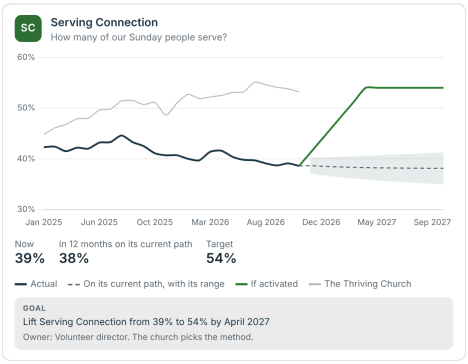
9 OF 9 The Event Treadmill: the Season Plan



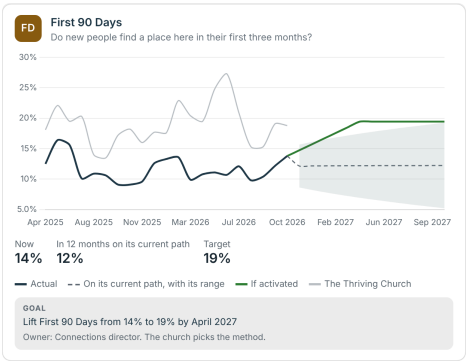
Added to the weekend if activated alone **+58**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+111**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+208**



Added to the weekend if activated alone **+115**

WITH THE SEASON PLAN

The model suggests about 1,788 on the weekend by October 2027 against 1,427 on its current path, and 557 adults in full participation against 331. Of the added attendance, about 91 comes from people attending more often and 269 from more people.

BY OCTOBER 2027	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Funding, against The Thriving Church	100%	100%
People for each volunteer	2.3	1.8
Adults in a small group, added by the plan		+576
Adults serving, added by the plan		+354
New leaders, added by the plan		+10

CHURCH VITALS TO WATCH	NOW	ON ITS CURRENT PATH	WITH THE PLAN
Available Space	50%, too low	50%	63%
Group Room	55%, too low	57%, too low	96%, too high
Leader Span	5.1, too low	5.3, too low	9.0
Full Participation	13%, too low	13%, too low	18%

What the nine churches show

1	**Conditions compound**	A church that doesn't move people into groups and serving runs short of volunteers, then of guests who stay, then hits a ceiling.
2	**Two stories**	Attendance and full participation tell different stories. The Sunday Crowd, The Tired Few and The Event Treadmill are more than 40% behind The Thriving Church on full participation. The Closed Front Door is 30% behind on attendance and nearly level on full participation.
3	**Serving Connection**	It is the strongest catalyst in four churches. It lifts the volunteer limit, raises how often people attend and raises giving.
4	**Bench to Leader**	It rarely moves attendance alone. It makes room. Its value shows when another catalyst fills that room, or when groups are already full.
5	**Two ways the weekend rises**	More people come, or the same people come more often. Adults who join a group or start serving are in the room more often.
6	**The same catalyst, two results**	Outreach restores The Closed Front Door and would hurt The Full Room.
7	**Longer than a year**	Some conditions take longer than a year. The Quiet Back Door's plan slows the loss. It doesn't stop it in 12 months.

ADULTS IN FULL PARTICIPATION	NOW	OCT 2027, CURRENT PATH	OCT 2027 WITH THE PLAN	GIVING ADDED
The Thriving Church	576	734	792	+$307K
The Full Room	511	577	724	+$213K
The Sunday Crowd	320	303	591	+$536K
The Leader Ceiling	489	392	634	+$272K
The Tired Few	298	273	573	+$389K
The Giving Lag	446	485	763	+$836K
The Quiet Back Door	463	476	774	+$391K
The Closed Front Door	564	616	706	+$202K
The Event Treadmill	312	331	557	+$539K

Illustrative. Giving added is the church-wide total over the 12 months of the plan.

PART 05

Making it real

What your leaders see, and what they don't

RULE	WHAT IT MEANS
Counts in the Season Plan	Elders, board members and ministry leaders see counts, rates, trends and forecasts. No names.
Name lists for staff	Staff the church authorizes can open the list behind a count.
Giving as yes or no	Giving counts as yes or no for each person, based on whether their household gives. A list shows it only to staff authorized to see giving, and a church can hide giving from name lists for everyone.
No amounts on people	Amounts appear only as church-wide totals.
Kids	No child appears in any list or chart of people. A check-in links a household and nothing more.
No scores	No person-level score, rank or grade exists anywhere.
Small counts	Any count under 5 that involves giving or leaders shows as "fewer than 5."
Your data stays yours	It is stored only in your church's own private Quickbase app, encrypted at rest and in transit. Analysis tools help clean and analyze it but never store it, and export files are deleted once loaded. We never show or share it with another church or any other organization.

We never import notes, prayer requests, counseling or care records, medical fields or background checks.

What we need from you

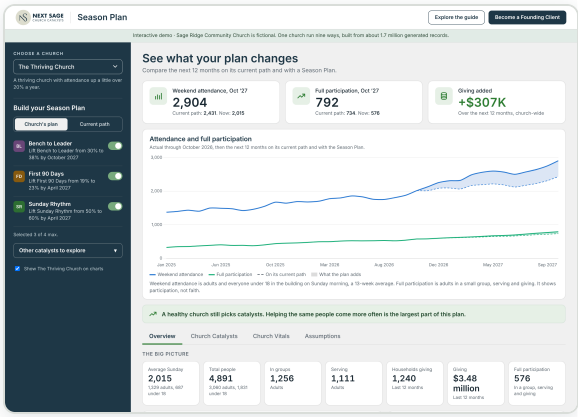
Most of it is already in your church management system and your giving platform:

- Profiles and households, with the date each was created
- Kids' check-ins, and adult check-ins where you take them
- Small group rosters, attendance and meeting dates
- Serve teams, schedules and serve check-ins
- Giving records and recurring gifts
- Event and trip registrations
- Group and team leader roles
- Your weekend headcount, seats and Kids Ministry capacity
- Your outreach dates, website visits and online service views

About two years of history is best, so giving patterns and same-month-last-year comparisons work from the first day, and one year will work. We connect to your systems where we can, and take file uploads where we can't. The Season Plan refreshes daily, and the full picture for a week lands on Sunday night.

How we work with a church

1. **A Discovery Meeting**
   In 45 minutes we learn your church and agree what data to use. A mutual NDA is signed before any data is shared.
2. **We do the work first**
   We connect your data and build your Season Plan at no cost.
3. **A Reveal Meeting**
   In one hour we show you your church in its own data: the big picture, the next steps, the catalysts with the most potential and what a plan could do.
4. **Then you decide**
   If you go ahead, we finalize your Season Plan with your leadership team and launch it live, on a 12-month agreement. If you don't, we delete your data.
5. **A steady rhythm**
   We read what moved with you every month, and choose the catalysts again each season.



Illustrative. The live Season Plan for The Thriving Church.

Church Insights

Your live Season Plan, with one meeting a month: the Monthly Results Meeting.

Church Advisory

Everything in Church Insights, plus a Season Plan Review: two meetings a month with your leadership team, and counsel between meetings.

Church Leadership

Everything in Church Advisory. Bruce joins your leadership team: four meetings a month, one of them on site, and counsel between meetings.

Things to know

Everything about Sage Ridge is fictional. It was built from patterns in real churches. Some names in the sample data may resemble real people by coincidence.

Every strength in the 12-month model is an assumption set for the example. The giving pattern was checked against one real church. How often people attend by involvement was matched to a real church's check-in rates. The rest are not measured.

Plan results are only as good as the targets. Most targets in this guide are The Thriving Church's level, reached in six to twelve months. A real church would often set smaller steps.

Likely is a weak guess. In the sample data only about a third of adults counted as Likely on Sundays really attend 5 or more of 13. A church that wants a firmer Sunday number needs adult check-in.

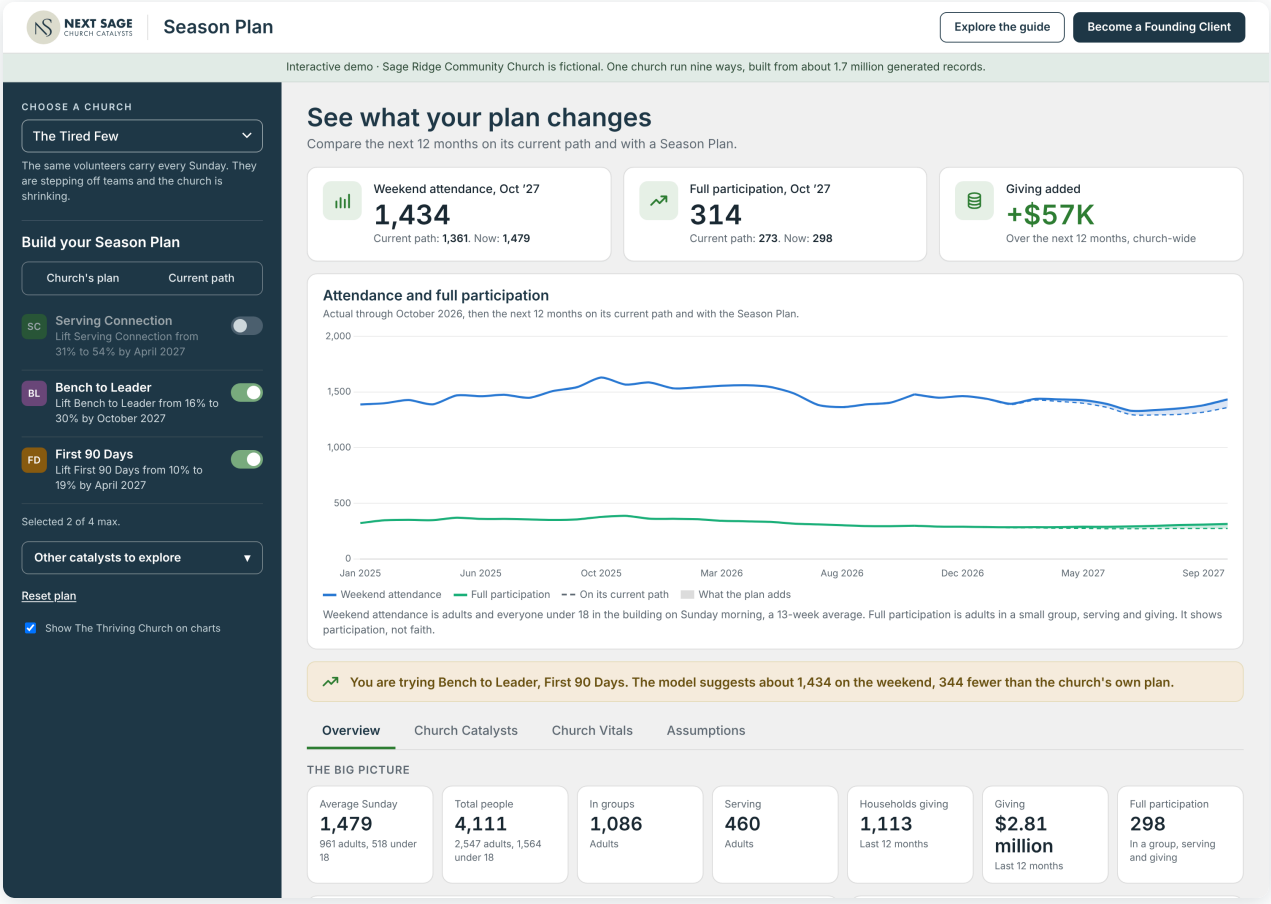
Students aren't handled yet. Teens who serve on Sunday and the student service are not in the sample data.

Ranges are starting points. Each church's own history sets the real ones.

IN THE SEASON PLAN

Try a plan

Switch any catalyst on or off, up to four, and the next 12 months redraw: weekend attendance, full participation, giving and every Church Vital. It is how a leadership team sees why one catalyst belongs in this season's plan and another can wait.



Illustrative. The Tired Few with Bench to Leader and First 90 Days switched on and Serving Connection left out. Without Serving Connection, the plan adds far less.

Counts only. No names, no amounts on people and no scores, on every screen.

WHERE TO START

See your church in its own data.

We do the work first. You see your Church Catalysts, your Church Vitals and a 12-month forecast before you decide anything.

01

Become a Founding Client

Up to 10 churches get the $900 setup waived and three months of service at no cost, a $1,950 value: their Season Plan and two meetings a month. After three months, continue on a 12-month agreement with no setup fee, or stop and owe nothing. Your written Season Plan is yours to keep.

next-sage-group-335b69b0060eeeafd14d8e4.webflow.io/founding-client

02

Try a Season Plan

Choose one of the nine churches, switch catalysts on and off and see what the next 12 months could hold.

demo.nextsagecatalysts.com

03

Request a Discovery Meeting

Talk with Bruce Smith, Co-founder, Next Sage Church Catalysts. 224-770-0751.

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Data shows participation, not faith. No person gets a score.

NEXT SAGE
CHURCH CATALYSTS

© 2026 Next Sage Group, LLC. Next Sage Church Catalysts is a line of Next Sage Group.
Illustrative example. Sage Ridge Community Church is fictional.
Forecasts are projections, not promises.