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# NWC SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

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# ABOUT 1001 NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

*Igniting a movement in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to begin 1001 New Worshiping Communities (NWCs), using new and varied forms of church for our diverse and changing culture, and forming new disciples of Jesus, transforming our denomination, and impacting our world.*  
*-the 1001 NWC office*

1001 NWC (new worshiping communities) is a movement happening in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Across the PC(USA), God is raising up leaders in churches and presbyteries who are creating new worshiping communities.

They are taking on new and varied forms of church for our changing culture. Primarily they are seeking to make and form new disciples of Jesus Christ, to change and transform the world.

In June 2012, the 220th General Assembly declared a commitment to a churchwide movement that results in the creation of 1,001 worshiping communities over the next 10 years.

Since the beginning of the 1001 NWC initiative, 586 new worshiping communities have either launched or joined the 1001 fold. Of those communities, 469 (80%) are still active.

The 1001 NWC initiative includes new worshiping communities, new church developments, immigrant fellowships, and other expressions of church all under the umbrella of NWCs.

New worshiping communities, immigrant fellowships, and other expressions of church are initiated by a leader and may or may not have a goal of organizing as a congregation. New church developments, on the other hand, are initiated by the presbytery with the goal of becoming organized as a congregation.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 7 YEARS OF NWCs

- 509 NWCs have launched since the initiative began in 2012.\*
- 77 pre-existing communities have joined the 1001 NWC initiative
- 20% (117) of NWCs have closed
- 6% (32) are no longer affiliated with the 1001 initiative
- Half of all NWCs make it to the 4-year mark, and 21% of the NWCs currently associated with 1001 are 7 years or older.
- The average age of currently active NWCs is 5.2 years

## PREDICTORS OF SUSTAINABILITY

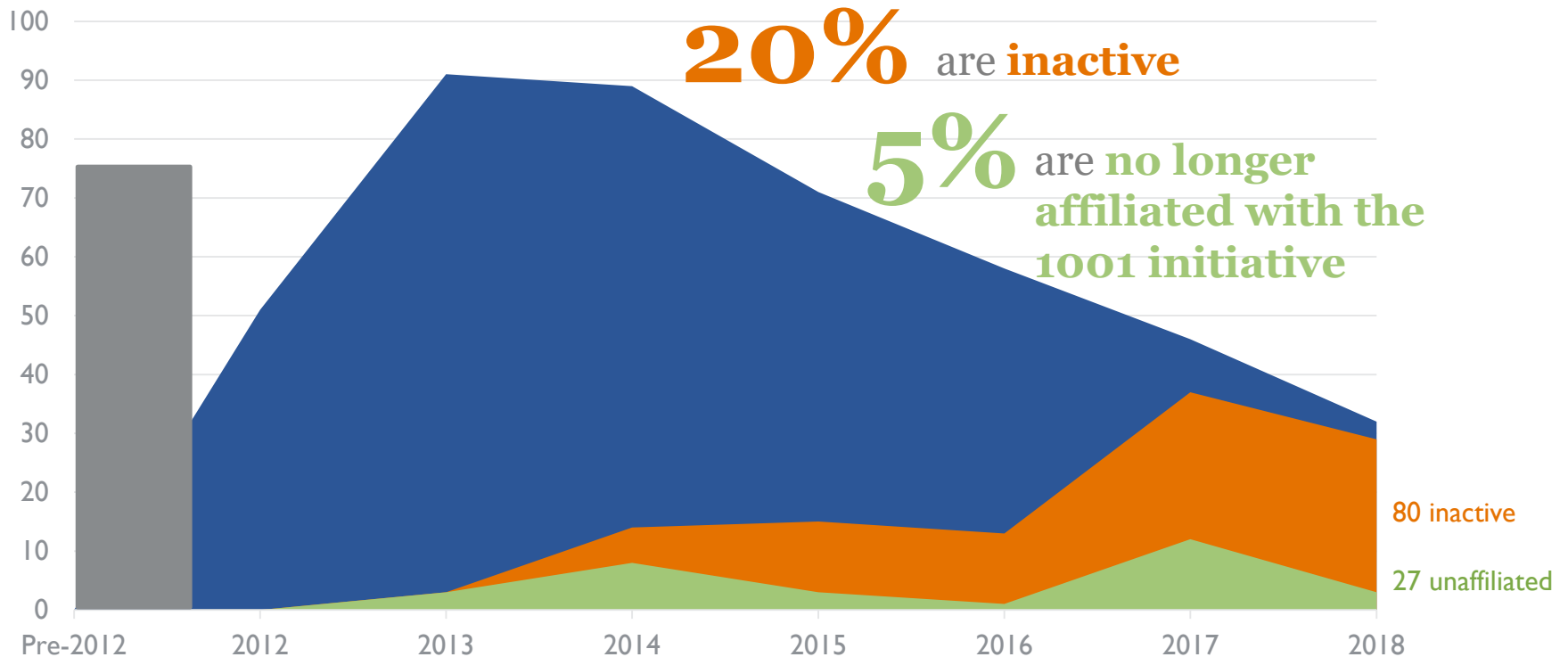
- The most common reason a community closes is failure to thrive
- The second most common reason a community closes is that the leader moves on or away
- Within 1001, self-identified churches are less likely than other kinds of NWCs to close
- Although geographic location seems to have a small impact on whether a NWC lasts, what matters more is that the NWC has a regular gathering space
- Worshiping communities that are still open were 59% larger in 2015 than those that have since closed
- Immigrant fellowships have more sustaining power than other kinds of NWCs within 1001
- Communities of color are less likely to close than white and multi-ethnic or multicultural communities
- Support from partner congregations, presbyteries, and from the Presbyterian Mission Agency's 1001 office all improve a NWC's chance of staying active
- The most impactful source of support (financial or otherwise) is from individuals in partner congregations, which increases a NWC's chance of sustaining by 19%

*\*This number includes 65 NWCs for which we have no recorded start date. We are treating them as if they launched since 2012, but we could be wrong. We are working to track down start dates for these communities.*

# SEVEN YEARS OF 1001

*In June 2012, the 220th General Assembly made a commitment to a churchwide movement that results in the creation of 1,001 worshipping communities over the next 10 years. Since then, 509 new worshipping communities have launched, and 77 existing communities have been taken into the fold*

Of these **586 NWCs**

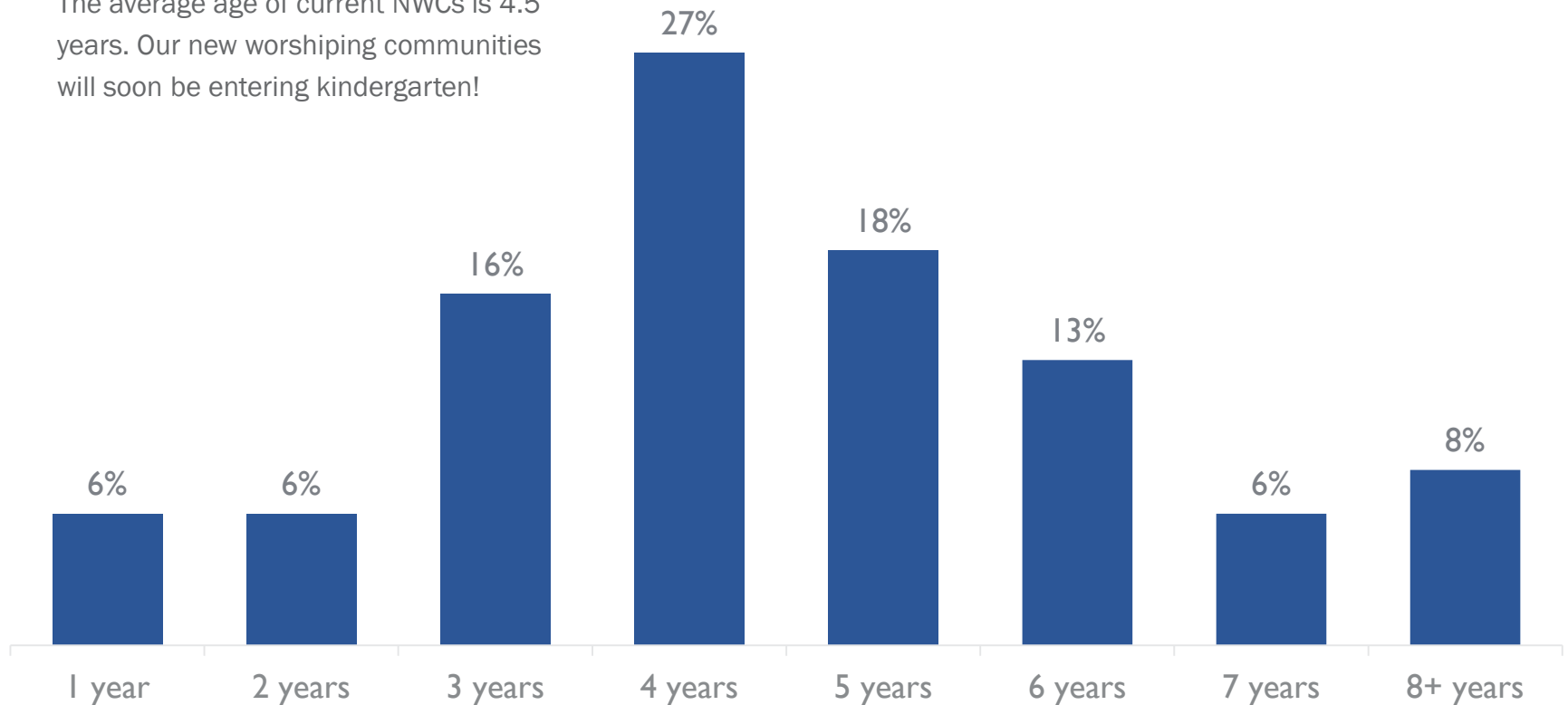


NOTE: Total launched NWCs in graph do not add up to 586 because we do not have a record of the start year for 65 NWCs.

# THE LIFE SPAN OF A NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

*The average lifespan of a NWC that has closed is 3.5 years. And half of all NWCs make it to the 4-year mark. In fact, 21% have made it to the 7-year mark!*

The average age of current NWCs is 4.5 years. Our new worshipping communities will soon be entering kindergarten!



NOTE: Percentages are calculated based on the 490 NWCs for which we have data on what year they started.

## REASONS NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES CLOSE

*So far, 91 NWCs have closed their doors. Their leaders report various reasons for the closing.*

Reason for closing	
Failure to thrive	18%
Leader moved on or away	13%
Failure to launch	7%
Inadequate funding	5%
Dissolved into area church	4%
Lack of support	4%
Inadequate leadership	3%
Loss of meeting space	1%
Bought a building	1%
Ministry was complete	1%

*“Not only did I want to build a new congregation, but I wanted my Presbytery to learn with me about church in the 21st Century. As it turned out, very [few] people in the Presbytery were interested.”*



# COMPARING ACTIVE VERSUS CLOSED COMMUNITIES

*Key differences between the communities that have closed and those that have not*



# PREDICTORS OF SUSTAINABILITY

*By comparing inactive communities to those that are still active today, we can discern how these two groups differ. Differences were found in the following areas:*

<b>TYPE OF COMMUNITY:</b>	Within 1001, new church developments are more likely than other NWCs to close
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Although geographic location seems to have a small impact on whether a NWC lasts, what seems to matter more is that the NWC has a regular gathering space
<b>SIZE :</b>	Worshiping communities that are still open are 59% larger than those that have since closed
<b>RACE AND ETHNICITY:</b>	Communities of color are less likely to close than white and multi-ethnic or multicultural communities
<b>SUPPORT :</b>	Support from partner congregations, presbyteries, and the Presbyterian Mission Agency's 1001 office all improve a NWCs chance of staying open

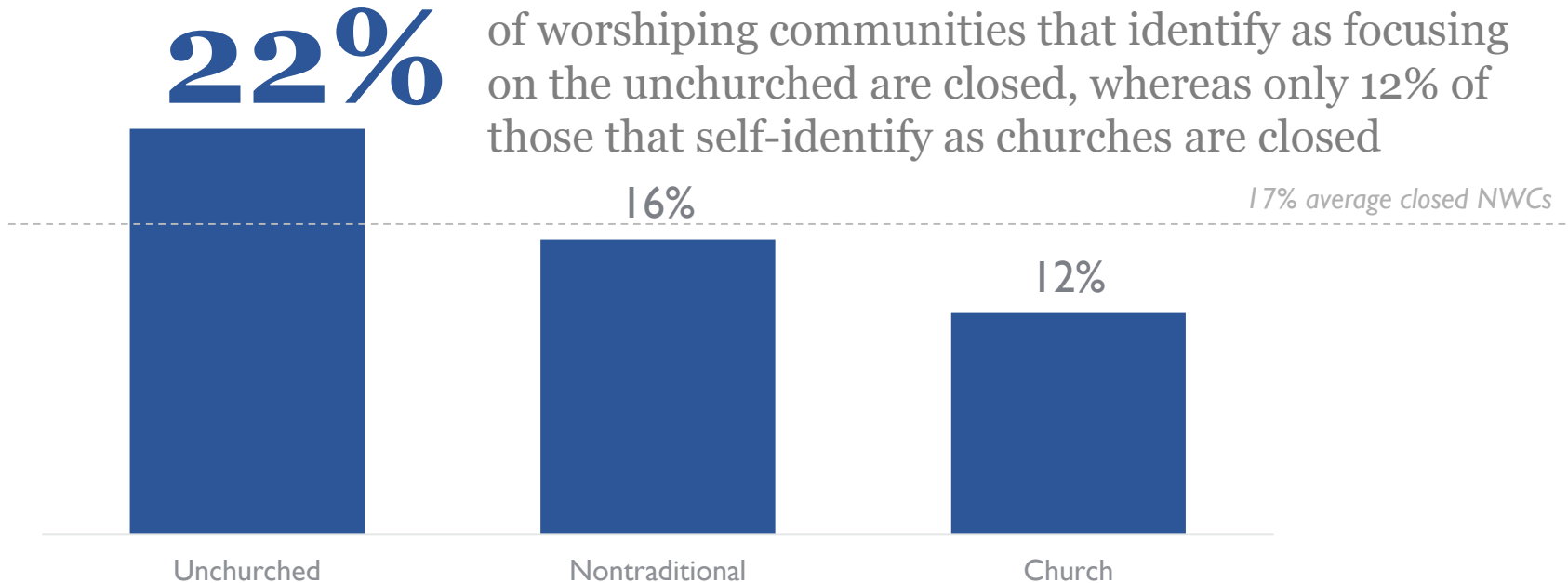
## *A note about things that do not seem to matter*

It is too small a group to tell for sure, but operating a business does not seem to protect the sustainability of a NWC. Of the 12 NWCs that reported owning a business in 2015, 4 are now closed (33%). This is twice as high as the 17% average NWC closing rate. Also, meeting frequency does not seem to impact sustainability. Regarding the leaders, it does not seem to matter whether they are ordained as a minister, or whether they are paid for their job leading the worshiping community.



## IDENTITY OF COMMUNITY MATTERS

*Within 1001, communities that identify as churches are less likely to close.*

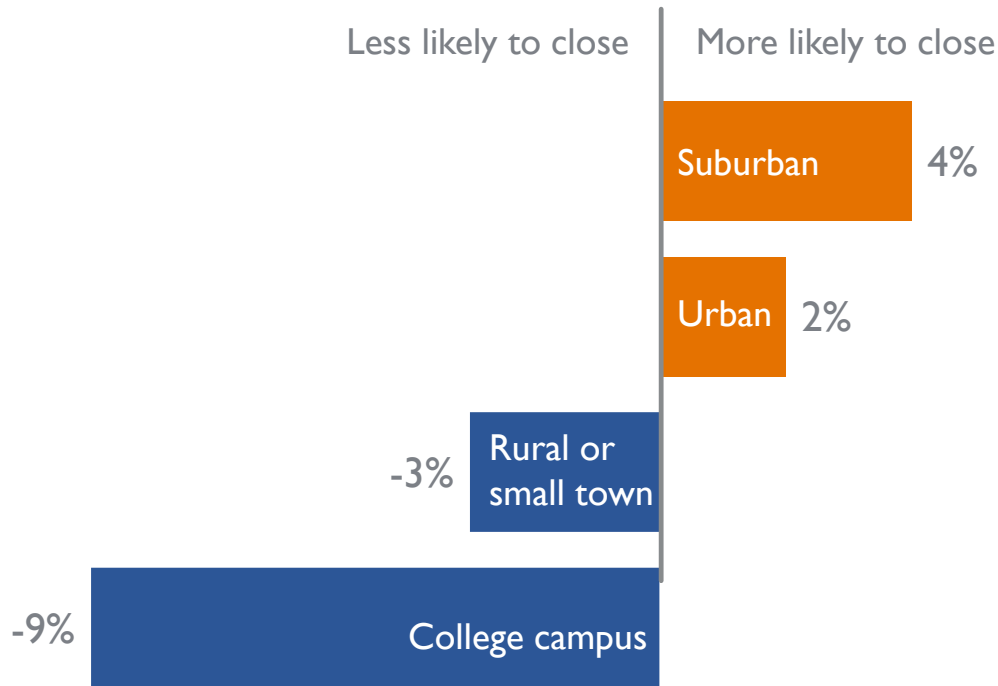


New worshipping communities that do not identify as “church” are more likely than those that do to have closed since the launch of the 1001 initiative. This could be explained by intent—perhaps those which identify as “church” are more interested in building something that lasts, whereas “unchurched” communities might be shorter-lived by design. There is likely also a special challenge to a community’s sustainability when focusing on the unchurched population (those who have no faith affiliation).

# THE ROLE OF LOCATION

*Communities in suburban locations are more likely to close than those in rural locations or small towns.*

## LIKELIHOOD OF CLOSING COMPARED TO THE AVERAGE NWC



Geographic location seems to only have a small impact on whether a NWC lasts; what seems to matter more is that the NWC has a **regular gathering space**. This probably helps explain the low closure rate of campus ministries.

Having a regular gathering space protects the longevity of a NWC. Currently, 89% of NWCs have a regular gathering space. Most frequently, this space is provided by the PC(USA).

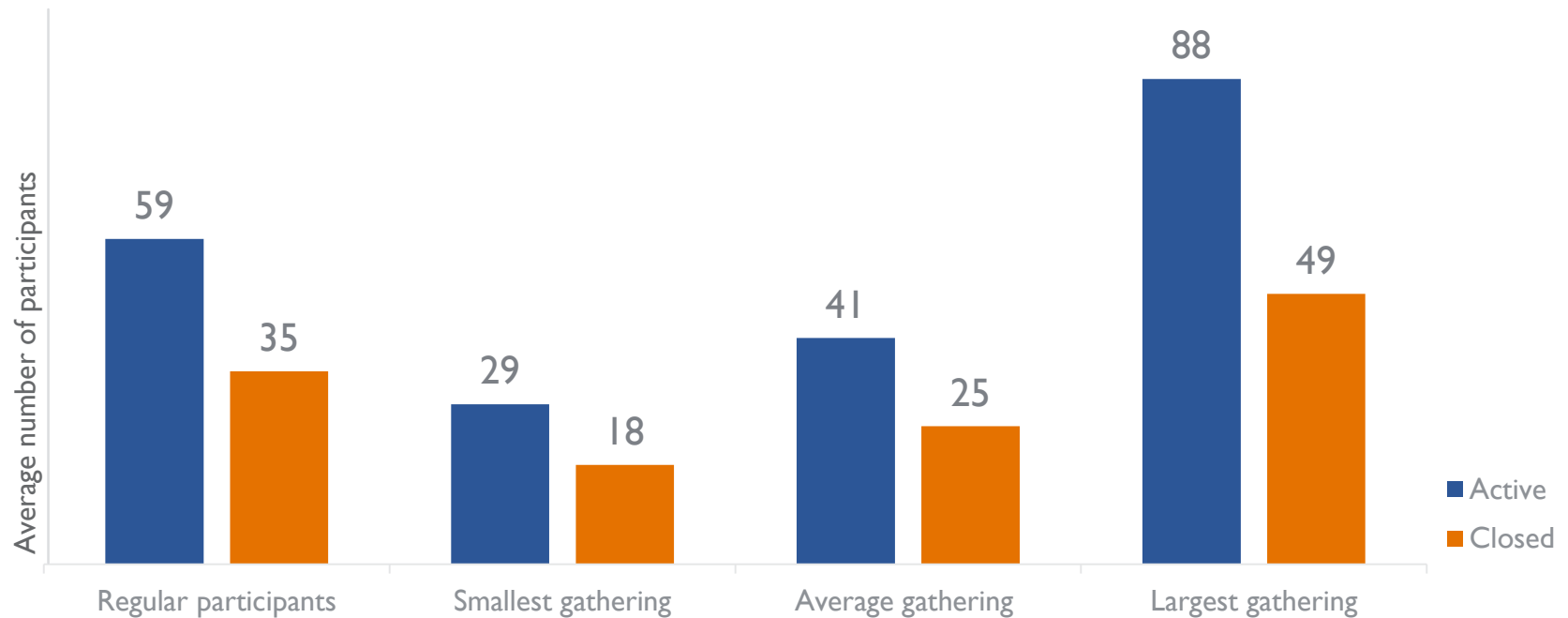
NWCs without a regular gathering space are

**9%**

more likely than those with a space to close

## SIZE MATTERS

Worshiping communities that are still open are *larger* than those that have closed.



### *The size of New Worshiping Communities today*

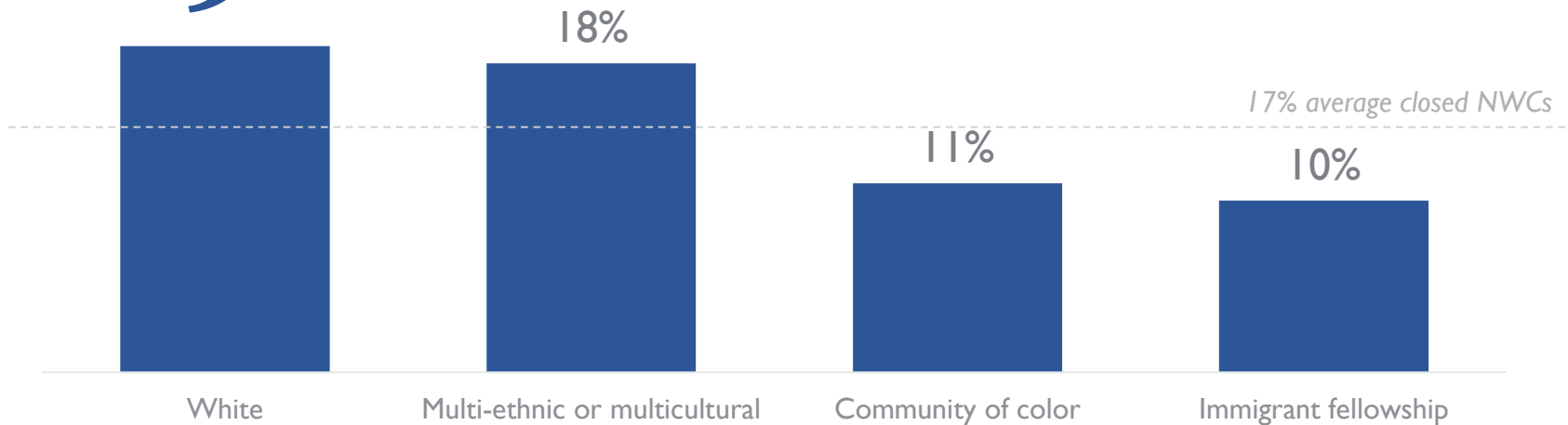
NWCs range from 1-300 regular participants with an average of 40. However, this average is a bit skewed due to a few very large NWCs. Half of all NWCs have 30 or fewer regular participants. New worshiping community gatherings tend to range in size from about 6 to 135 participants, but they can have as many as 600 participants.

# RACE AND ETHNICITY OF COMMUNITY MATTERS

*Communities of color and immigrant fellowships are less likely to close than white and multi-ethnic or multicultural communities.*

**19%**

of NWCs that are majority White have closed, compared to only 13% of communities of color

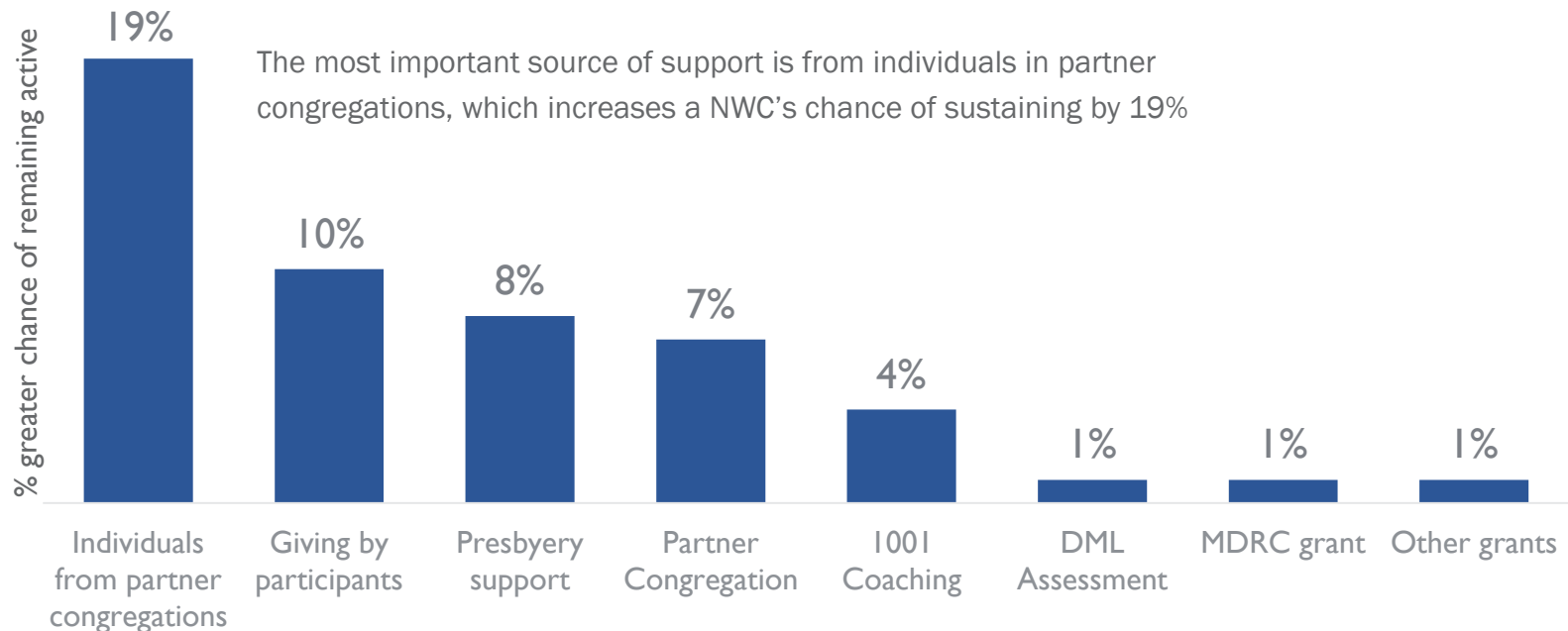


Part of the reason for this difference by race is that White communities are more likely than others to identify as “non-churched,” which has a 22% close rate. In addition, immigrant fellowships and communities of color are more likely to identify as churches. We cannot tell the causal relationship from these data—is it the fact that they are communities of color, that they are structured as churches, both, or something else entirely, that contributes to the greater stability of these NWCs?

*NOTE: Worshipping communities can fall into more than one category*

# HAVING SUPPORT MATTERS

*Support from partner congregations, presbyteries, and from the 1001 office all improve a NWC's chance of staying open.*



The top five most impactful forms of support have one important thing in common—community. Even though having a partner congregation matters, it matters even more if the *individuals* in that congregation are supporting the NWC in some way (monetary or otherwise). In addition, giving by participants will help not just financially, but it can also increase the participants' sense of commitment to the group. Presbytery support can help the NWC feel like a part of something greater than itself, and coaching gives the leader someone to lean on.



## ABOUT THIS REPORT

*This research was conducted in partnership with the 1001 NWC office of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.*

This study includes an analysis of data from two sources: (1) the Highrise database maintained by the 1001 NWC office, and (2) the 2015 1001 Leader Surveys.

The 2015 leader survey was sent in January 2015 to 457 leaders for whom we had email addresses. Of these, 143 responded for a response rate of 31%.

Since taking the survey in 2015, 18% (n=26) have since closed their worshipping community.

The goal of this study was to identify markers or benchmarks that lead to continuing viability and sustainability of new worshipping communities, both within and outside the scope of the 1001 NWC program.

This report was written by Dr. Angie Andriot of Research Services, a part of the A. Corporation Administrative Services Group, for the 1001 NWC office off the Presbyterian Mission Agency in August of 2019.

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions through the use of surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, presbyteries and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a part of the A. Corporation Administrative Services Group of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or [research@pcusa.org](mailto:research@pcusa.org).



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