

Survey of Free Will Baptist Churches

NAFWB Committee on Denominational Research

July 2020

Executive Summary

Introduction

Designed to target the churches of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, the survey collected a variety of information with the goal of helping denominational leaders better serve pastors and churches. The survey responses were gathered anonymously. The survey will also serve as a baseline for future research.

Demographics and Descriptors

Nearly all (93.15%) of the respondents to the survey identified as “pastor” of the church. [See Q1] The geographic distribution of the responding churches is somewhat diverse; four in ten (42.35%) say they are in urban settings (town or city), one-third (33.33%) are rural (countryside) and one-quarter (24.32%) describe their location as suburban. [See Q2] Responses were received from 29 US states and Canada. The top ten states represented are: North Carolina (11.85%); Tennessee (10.47%); Arkansas (9.92%); Missouri (6.34%); Florida (5.79%); Ohio (5.79%); Oklahoma (5.79%); Georgia (5.23%); Kentucky (4.13%); Alabama (3.86%). [See Q3]

Almost two-thirds (63.94%) of the churches responding have a full-time pastor. More than one third (34.65%) say they pay a bi-vocational pastor. The other most common paid positions in churches are as follows: Administrative assistant/secretary (15.21%); Full-time youth pastor (12.11%); Part-time/bi-vocational worship (8.45%); Part-time/bi-vocational youth pastor (7.89%). [See Q4]

Three-fourths (74.52%) of churches say their congregation includes 25% or fewer divorced/remarried persons. [See Q6]

Pastoral Ministry

Virtually all (97.25%) of the churches surveyed identify their pastor is the person who does hospital visitation and bereavement ministry at the church. Clearly this is sometimes a shared area of ministry ministries since almost four in ten (37.91%) churches report that deacons help, almost one-quarter (23.08%) say other church leaders are involved and almost one in five (18.41%) identify their associate pastor as engaged in this as well. [See Q7]

Congregational Makeup

Churches are primarily comprised of people who are high school graduates – more than two-thirds (69.23%). Fewer than one-third (29.40%) of FWB church people have attended or graduated from college. [See Q8]

Most FWB churches have little racial diversity, more than seven in ten (71.94%) are comprised of only one race (mono-ethnic) while 16.67% say they are bi-ethnic (primarily two races) and slightly more than one in ten (11.39%) say they are multi-ethnic. [See Q9]

Almost six in ten (58.40%) reporting churches are either plateaued (“neither growing or declining” – 36.64%) or in decline (21.76%). [See Q18] The vast majority (80.22%) of people who are members of these churches grew up in their church as children. [See Q10]

These churches report lower levels of growth by conversion as more than two-thirds (64.09%) say only 25% or fewer members are converts who did not grow up in the church. [See Q11] Understandably, there are very low percentages of members who came in by conversion [see Q11] and by transfer from other churches (either inside or outside their immediate area). [See Q12 and Q13]

Church Membership

Most of those who attend these churches are members. The great majority (84.21%) of survey respondents report that 50% or more attendees at their church are members. [See Q14]

Salvation and baptism are by far the primary membership requirements in the reporting churches. Almost all (98.07%) say they new members are required to validate in some way their “confession of salvation.” Most (84.81%) of these churches see they require “baptism.” [See Q15]

Doctrinal requirements are also important in the new members process for these churches. Two-thirds (67.96%) of the churches surveyed say they require new members to “agree to the FWB church covenant” and just over one-

half (51.66%) require new members to “agree to the FWB treatise.” Only four in ten (40.61%) churches require a new members class and one-half (49.58%) say they provide a class for new/potential members. [See Q15 and Q16]

When people do transfer into FWB churches, they are most likely to come from other FWB churches (68.04%) or Southern Baptist churches (61.43%). [See Q17]

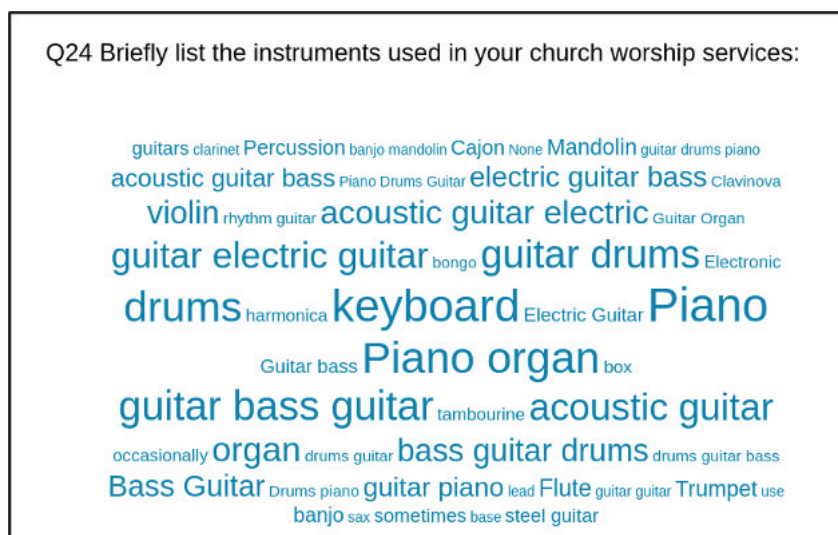
Music, Worship and Bible Versions

Just over one-half (53.97%) of the churches surveyed describe their worship style as “traditional.” Four in ten (40.00%) say their style is “blended,” and very few (6.03%) choose “contemporary” as the best way to describe their services. [See Q19]

The music selection in these church’s Sunday morning worship reflects somewhat their styles, more than one-half (53.15%) say they sing a combination of hymns and choruses – which means some choruses are clearly included in even the traditional services. Four in ten (41.37%) sing only hymns and very few (4.66%) sing only choruses (songs not found in a hymnal). [See Q20]

The use of video projection (50.55%) and the hymnal (48.90%) for songs and lyrics are nearly equal preferences, almost perfectly 50/50. [See Q21]

Keyboard instruments are still the primary ones used in worship, three-fourths (75.70%) of these churches say they use them. More than one-half also use other instruments, those they mentioned are seen in the word cloud (larger type size indicates more mentions): [See Q24]



Many churches also include other elements in their services; more than three-fourths (78.24%) feature Scripture reading [See Q25]. Nearly one-half (48.60%) incorporate recorded music. A choir is part of the services of more than four in ten (42.46%), and nearly as many (37.43%) have a praise team as part of their worship. [See Q23]

By far, the most commonly used Bible version for preaching is the King James Version (KJV), used by seven in ten (70.49%) churches. Nearly one-third (30.87%) use the English Standard Version (ESV) and one-fourth (25.41%) preach from the New King James Version (NKJV). [See Q26]

Association Meetings

Occasionally, discussions arise concerning the necessity of attendance at local, state, and national association meetings. Questions were asked to find out what our pastors thought about these meetings.

First of all, we wanted to know whether our pastors made an attempt to attend these meetings. About 66% of our pastors say they try to at least occasionally attend the National Association (39% yearly and 27% occasionally). When asked to rate the importance of the National Association from 1 to 10, 40% gave a ranking of 10, and the weighted average was 7.8.

Regarding the state association meeting, 82% of pastors say they try to attend at least occasionally, with 68% attempting to do so yearly. When asked to rate the importance of the state association from 1 to 10, 37% gave a ranking of 10, and the weighted average was 7.7.

Concerning the local association meeting, 92% of our pastors say they try to attend at least occasionally with 82% attempting to do so yearly. When asked to rate the importance of the local association from 1 to 10, 30% gave a ranking of 10, and the weighted average was 6.6.

We also asked one more question about the local associations: “How many times should a local association meet

yearly?” Of those answering, 37% said 2 times per year, and 31% said 4 times per year. The remaining responses were as follows: once yearly (16%), three times yearly (11%), and more than four times yearly (2%).

Services, Small Groups and Attendance

Nearly two-thirds (64.66%) of the churches in the study offer 2 weekend services and another nearly one-third (30.41%) offer only one. [See Q27] The majority (57.38%) of Sunday morning services are offered at 11:00. One-quarter (25.96%) of churches worship at 10:30 am, and one in five (19.13%) begin their services at 10:00 on Sunday mornings. [See Q28]

Almost all (97.27%) of the churches in the research offer a Sunday morning worship and nearly as many (93.17%) offer Sunday school/life groups (95.07% weekly – See Q31). Almost nine in ten (89.34%) offer a mid-week study/prayer meeting. Two-thirds (66.12%) still offer a Sunday evening service. [See Q29] Of those with a Sunday evening service, nearly all of them (97.93%) offer it weekly. [See Q30]

Compared with worship attendance, Sunday school attendance is excellent (75-100%) for one in five churches (20.44%) and strong (50-75%) in more than one-third (36.74%) of churches. The remaining 42.82% of churches say fewer than 50% of those who attend worship also participate in Sunday school. [See Q33]

Curriculum and Training

More than three-fourths (76.75%) of the FWB churches surveyed use Randall House curriculum for their Sunday school groups. RHP is by far their publisher of choice. [See Q34]

The majority (58.01%) of these churches do not offer any training for their teachers and volunteers. One-third (32.60%) say they offer an annual training and only 7.73% offer training quarterly. [See Q35] Very few churches (19.61%) offer any training for parents and grandparents to help them disciple their children outside church. [See Q36]

Corporate Spiritual Practices

As reported the majority of these churches offer a mid-week program – mostly for Bible study (80.56%) and/or for prayer time (56.11%). [See Q38]

The most common frequency for celebrating the Lord’s Supper is quarterly, by four in ten (40.27%) churches, followed by twice a year (28.22%) and once a year (20.00%). [See Q39]

Feet washing is practiced once a year by four in ten (41.37%) churches, and equally twice a year or quarterly, both by 20.00% of churches. Some (16.71%) of these churches say they never practice feet washing. [See Q40]

Church Organizational Practices and Policies

Nearly all (94.12) of the churches in the research say they have a set of by-laws for their church. This is true also of a church constitution which the vast majority (88.80%) of these churches also have in place.

Almost two thirds (64.71%) of these churches also have a church usage policy developed. More than one-half (58.82%) have a wedding policy.

Fewer have developed policies to keep people safe from mistreatment. Fewer than one-half (45.38%) say they have a child-safe policy and only 38.94% have a sexual harassment /abuse policy in place. [See Q41]

The great majority (80.89%) never offer any training and resources regarding sexual harassment [See Q42] and two-thirds (64.82%) never train regarding child safety. [See Q42 and Q43]

In line with current trends and practice, more than one-half (56.70%) of the churches surveyed have a security team in place. Other safety and security measures include and the percentage of churches using them follow: security system (40.78%); video monitoring (36.59%); door monitors (33.52%); Self-locking doors (22.07%). [See Q44]

Three-fourths (76.65%) of these churches do not provide any safety and security training (CPR, basic lifesaving, etc.) nor do they have AED devices installed for cardiac emergencies (79.28% do not). [See Q45 and Q46]

One-half (49.03%) of these church leaders report that their church has enacted church discipline 1-3 times in the past five years. Nearly one-half (47.08%) say they have never enacted discipline. [See Q47]

Ministry and Community Outreach

Most of these churches host some kinds of outreach activities in the community. Nearly one in four (38.76%) host 3 to 5 of these and one in five (21.35%) host 5 or more. [See Q48] A listing of the activities in which their church is engaged is summarized in the following word cloud: [See Q49]

Almost all (96.02%) of the churches surveyed use Facebook to reach out. Almost two-thirds (64.53%) reach out using a church website. Only 18.35% use Instagram as a church and another 12.84% have a church Twitter. [See Q50]

Churches offer many ways for their people to be engaged in ministry. The most commonly offered roles are teaching (89.52%) and leadership (deacon, trustee, board, etc.) (85.27%) which are likely offered to a limited number of people.

Q49 Please briefly list the outreach activities in which your church is engaged:

nursing home several caroling VBS Harvest Festival dinners Car Show host
 Operation Christmas Child youth Church Park annual men s Hunt Fall Festival fish fry
 Back School Bash Sunday School community events Church Picnic
 Egg Hunt Fall Back Church Sunday meals invitations Block Party service projects
 children support activities Trunk-or Treat Movie Night summer
 Vacation Bible School Halloween church feeding food
 Christmas Parade Easter special visitation Egg Hunt Trunk
 services Canvassing events cookout Christmas
 Special days VBS Carnival Fall Festival water
 Community door door Easter Egg Hunt
 Park Trunk Treat Harvest Festival day Help outreach
 Hunt Trunk Treat ministry Treat Easter Egg Picnic local school
 Family door knocking monthly Sports school mission festival Booth
 neighborhood food drives Sunday free etc also revival Park outreaches
 Back school parades Weekly food bank food pantry giving away Friend Day
 None Camp fellowship Thanksgiving Singing Homeless Fourth July
 Trunk Treat Easter Various City class VBS Fall Festival Good News Clubs

Other ministry opportunities available (by percentage of churches offering them) are: sound (77.05%); nursery (71.39%); greeters (66.01%); security team (52.41%); AV (51.27%) [See Q51]

When asked what specific ministries they would like to see added to their church, respondents to the survey mentioned these which graphically depicted in the following word cloud: [See Q 52]

There is an opportunity in all of the surveyed churches for their people to become more engaged in the work. When asked what percentage of their church members are regularly involved in the work, only about one-quarter (27.55%) estimate engagement at 40% or more of their people. Almost three-fourths (72.73%) report that 30% or fewer of their people are regularly engaged in the ministry and work of the church. [See Q53]

Q52 Is there a particular ministry you would like to see added to your church?

added Yes Worship choir Greeters Praise Team team need Group Small Groups
 Security team N Children class Youth care outreach
 Sunday school ministry service Discipleship Family
 College music young adult Personal church Men Addiction lot
 time Men s Pastor Nursery evangelism

SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)

The leaders (mostly pastors) surveyed were asked to describe the strengths and weaknesses they perceive in their own churches as well as the opportunities and threats they believe their churches are facing. All of their responses were open-ended - the following word clouds provide some limited insight, especially noting those most mentioned words and phrases (once again, larger type size indicate more mentions): [See Q54, Q55, Q56 and Q57]

Q54 What would you describe as the strengths of your local church?

Faithfulness doctrine friendly welcoming Compassion great Loving congregation willingness
grow Teaching Fellowship caring Bible Solid focus Bible teaching preaching Outreach
knowledge youth Bible teaching music visitors friendliness
Bible preaching teaching giving programs family Location good Commitment
Fellowship school church sound community
desire Friendly Closeness love help people feel
Unity Prayer welcoming others ministry spiritual
Strong atmosphere Discipleship spirit Worship believers
members Family atmosphere caring Support service volunteers Biblical
Biblical preaching missions Bible Study Friendly loving Active Preaching generosity
Preaching Teaching Longevity faithful involvement Community involvement

Q55 What would you describe as the weaknesses of your local church?

children struggle better intentional Outreach evangelism lack young people people involved
care area apathy Faithfulness vision commitment location people size Music
classes many reach community involvement Complacency enough moving
members willingness Need limited community Strong
discipleship one outreach training Lack
participation church finances ministry Sunday School attendance Age
minded Evangelism will youth s workers services time dedication
reach try new things small help young adults due attendance work
young people leadership development adults Personal Evangelism volunteers structure
visitation interest Older follow

Q56 What would you describe as the opportunities your local church has?

building God growing community around church College within help school system children
lost people Community Involvement center serve others neighborhood Engaging
grow limited school involved growth place area different families
teaching opportunities potential church many people
reach gospel community great ministry activities
Outreach love many working people share local
unchurched need located location discipleship good Music ministry new
diverse community youth continue Involvement Evangelism Jesus diversity several young
Lots preaching city Hispanic ministry small

Q57 What do you believe to be the major threats to your local church?

aging membership Financial attendance times workers youth younger younger generation
 lack commitment lack evangelism older lack concern community many age
 die Complacency loss Apathy involvement
 church feel Lack larger people Comfortable members
 Mega congregation culture change sin area going none families commitment
 future lost enough

More than one-half (55.37%) of the churches surveyed receive offerings only once per-week and more than four in ten (42.98%) take up a collection in every service.

Slightly more than one-fourth (27.00%) of these churches are set up to receive online offerings, 12.40% receive bank drafts and a few (7.44%) offer text-to-give. [See Q58]

Nearly seven in ten (69.15%) of the FWB churches studied say they have a church budget. And the vast majority (84.30%) say they have multiple individuals handling the money for accountability. [See Q59 and Q60]

Connection and Giving to The FWB Denomination

When asked how much they value their congregation's remaining in the FWB denomination, on a 100-point scale (where 1 is not at all valuable, and 100 is very valuable) the mean rating is 82 for all churches. [See Q61]

About one-half (48.61%) of churches send a representative to the annual FWB national convention. [See Q62]

Most all of the churches surveyed participate in denominational giving in some way. Almost four in ten (38.95%) designate money to specific ministries. While only 17.96% participate in cooperative giving (to all the ministries), 37.85% say they give in both of these ways. [See Q63]

International Missions is included in more (80.81%) of these church budgets than any other national agencies. Other agencies (with the corresponding percentage of churches) are: North American Ministries/Master's Men (56.09%); Welch College (37.27%); The Together Way (31.37%); NAFWB Executive Office (16.24%); WNAC (15.50%) and Randall House/Vertical Three (12.55%). [See Q64]

The following word cloud graphically displays the other FWB ministries to which these churches give: [See Q65]

Q65 Please list other Free Will Baptist ministries included in your church's budgeted giving:

Harvest Ministries special offerings individual missionaries
 Southeastern College Plan giving plan national Alabama Children's N Youth Camp
 Child Care Office State Association Local
 Will Baptist Family VA Co-op Ohio Harvest designated
 FWB Family Ministries Southeastern Free Will
 Children Home Camp missionaries state offices
 Free Will Baptist support None State Missions
 ministries Promotional Office State NC
 Family Ministries Cumberland Camp missions
 Cooperative giving FWB Alabama Children Home church Will Baptist College
 Children's Home Trinity Camp Association Arkansas Acts
 Baptist Family Ministries College Home Missions
 FWB Children's home coop California Acts Florida Mission Shares
 Randall University Children's Home gives local state TN
 Southeastern FWB College

These leaders receive communications from the denomination in multiple ways. Three-fourths (76.88%) of the

church leaders surveyed prefer to receive email communication from the denomination. Two-thirds (67.69%) say they prefer ONE Magazine, more than one-half (54.60%) prefer mail and four in ten (40.11%) prefer social media. [See Q66]

Few congregates receive ONE Magazine – six in ten (60.22%) churches report that 25% or less of their people receive the denominational publication. [See Q67]

Missionaries are the denominational representatives leaders want most to visit and speak at their churches. Eight in ten (82.00%) say they would want a missionary to come. Nearly equally, interest in missionaries is followed by state personnel (52.29%), national department directors (49.43%) and national department personnel (44.86%). [See Q68]

Credentialed Ministers in FWB Churches

Many ordained ministers attend FWB churches as members. Almost two-thirds (64.36%) of churches have at least one ordained minister as a church member who is not their lead pastor. [See Q69]

Many fewer churches, less than one-quarter (24.79%), include at least one licensed minister who is not the lead pastor. [See Q70]

Only one-quarter (25.35%) of churches say they have men/boys in their churches who have answered the call to preach and are not the lead pastor. [See Q71]

Implications and Opportunities

While pastors take the lion's share, there is some sharing of pastoral care ministries in our churches. **Is there an opportunity to provide resources here as deacons and other leaders help in caring for their people?** [See Q7]

Obviously most FWB churches are not vigorously growing. **There is an opportunity to help with church growth strategies.** [See Q18] We are in need of much more conversion growth – most of our people have grown up in our churches. [See Q9 & 10]

The new members requirements and processes are not as consistent with these churches – only 40% require a class – there may be an opportunity to create more consistency and to help churches with this area. Only about one-half (49.58%) offer some kind of class for potential/new members [See Q16]. There is a relatively strong concern for new members to agree with doctrine and practice, **perhaps new convert and new member materials and strategies can help make this more practical (easily implemented) for churches.** [See Q15]

Worship styles and musical choices seem more diverse than they were in the past (when most churches depended on a hymnal). Most churches are including music not found in a hymnal. **Is there an opportunity to better understand how these choices are made and to provide guidance with regard to worship planning and musical choices?** [See Q19 and Q20]

Most of these churches report that they are not offering regular training for their teachers and leaders [See Q35] nor are they offering any help/training for parents and grandparents to disciple their children at home (outside the church) [See Q36]. **This may be an opportunity to come alongside church leadership to offer help and resources for training teachers and leaders.**

The limited practice of the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and especially feet washing indicate there is a possibility that these churches may not see their importance for the church body. **Is there an opportunity to emphasize the importance of the practices of these sacraments in some way?** [See Q39 and Q40]

Relatively fewer churches have developed and put in place policies for protecting children and for sexual harassment; nor do they offer training. In spite of the fact that most of these churches have constitutions and by-laws, this may be an area of legal exposure and is a needed protection. **This may be an opportunity to help churches with advice/counsel, training and resources to make churches safer and to protect members.** [See Q41, Q42 and Q43]

Some churches have taken measures to secure their people, services and buildings. Since this is a very critical issue in current day, those who have not taken such precautions and actions might need help and advice to determine what they need and how to get started. **There is an opportunity to offer support and help in the area of safety and security.** [See Q44]

Like the need to protect their people from abuse, many churches have not put measures in place for medical safety – such as training in CPR, and available AED devices, etc. **To the extent that there is a need and any liability, medical safety is also an area where churches may need direction, help and resources.** [See Q45 and Q46]

FWB churches are clearly beginning to use social media to reach out – nearly all have Facebook and others are using Instagram and Twitter. **There is probably a good opportunity to help them develop the right social media and content strategies.** Leveraging the expertise of some who have these skills could be very helpful to churches. [See Q50]

Relatively few of the churches surveyed are set up to receive giving digitally (online, text, etc.) even though their

people are undoubtedly engaging more and more in the digital economy (Amazon, etc.). **Perhaps there is an opportunity to provide guidance, advice and even tools for these churches to help them with digital giving strategies.** [See Q58]

Parting Thoughts

The committee would like to give a special word of thanks for the support and cooperation of our NAFWB Moderator Tim York as well as Executive Secretary Dr. Eddie Moody and his staff. Our future plans include an ongoing survey regarding the practices of Ordaining Committees in our local associations. Visit our website at www.nafwb.org/research for the results of this and future surveys and information regarding future research of the Committee on Denominational Research.

The Committee on Denominational Research was appointed by Moderator Tim York at the National Association of Free Will Baptists in Little Rock, Arkansas, in July 2018. The committee consisted of Dr. Danny Baer (Chair), Dr. Eddie Moody, Dr. Ron Hunter, Dr. Tim Eaton, and Mr. Mark McPeak. In 2019 Dr. Sarah Bracey and Mr. Eric Thompson was added to the committee. The committee was initially funded by a \$5,000 grant supplied by the Free Will Baptist Foundation in 2018 and continues to operate on those funds..