

A Lewis Center Report on
**Clergy Age Trends in the
United Methodist Church**
2021 Report

Elders • Deacons • Local Pastors

2021 Report
Lewis Center for Church Leadership
Wesley Theological Seminary



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

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Highlights

Highlights of the 2021 Report

Young Elders Decline to Record Low Number

The recent decline in the number of young elders (under 35) began in 2017 and followed modest gains after the low point of 2005. That decline continues; however, the scale of the decline in 2021 is larger than seen before. The number of young elders in 2021 is 742, far below the previous low of 852 reported in 2005. The losses in 2021 were comparable for men and women based on the proportion of each among young elders. The larger declines began in 2019. Since then, the decline in young elders has been 207, or a 24% decline.

While the overall number of active elders in the United Methodist Church continued to decline in 2021, the annual rate of decline was 7% compared to 15% for young elders. Young elders constitute 6% of active elders in 2021 compared to 7% in 2020.

Some Shifting from Older to Middle Age Elders

Since 2000, we have been watching a trend of having fewer elders in the middle age (35-54) group and more elders in the older (55-72) group. Since those in the older group face a mandatory retirement age of 72, with most retiring before that age, it seemed that this expanding pool of older elders could not continue to grow indefinitely. After 20 years of growth, one began to wonder whether such a decline might ever happen. Last year there was a modest turn in this trend, with a 1% shift from the older group to the middle age group.

In 2021, there is another 1% decline in older elders as a percentage of the whole. Older elders now comprise 54% of all elders. (They comprised 30% as recently as 2000.) Middle age elders went from 38% of all elders to 40%. (They comprised 65% in 2000.) The proportional gain for the middle age group came from the 1% decline in older elders and 1% from the young elders' decline. Keep in mind that all age groups of elders declined in raw numbers, but some declined more than others, thus the change in proportional representation.

Deacons Show Trends Similar to Elders

The numbers and ages of deacons follow similar directions as elders. There is a decline in the number of young deacons since 2019 of 23%. Young deacons comprise 10% of all active deacons in 2021, higher than the percentage for young elders, though this percentage has declined from 12% in 2019. One caution in the deacon statistics to remember is that the total number of deacons is lower in this report than their presence in the denomination. This difference is because a number of deacons serve in work settings other than congregations and have pension plans through those agencies rather than Wespath Benefits, from which our numbers come.

Local Pastors Continue to Grow in Proportion to Elders

Elders and local pastors are appointed as pastors of congregations. In 1990, there were over five elders for each local pastor; today there are 1.6 elders for each local pastor. In 2021, there are 11,771 elders and 7,243 local pastors. The decline in the total number of local pastors in 2021 was 3% compared to 6% for elders. There is a higher proportion of young local pastors (9%) compared to elders (6%). Young deacons at 10% of all deacons have the highest proportion of young clergy among the three categories.

Purpose and Description

The purpose of this ongoing research effort is to identify clergy age trends in the United Methodist Church so that denominational leaders have the data for planning and a baseline for monitoring future changes. This report builds on previous reports on clergy age trends issued by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership. The first report, *Clergy Age Trends in the United Methodist Church: 1985-2005*, documented the dramatic decline in United Methodist young clergy in both numbers and percentages over 20 years. This report presents a snapshot of where clergy age trends stand in May 2020.

This report is made possible through partnership with the denominational pension agency, Wespeth Benefits (WB). The Lewis Center for Church Leadership works with WB each year to determine age trends for United Methodist clergy.

The project covers elders, deacons, and local pastors in the five jurisdictional conferences of the United Methodist Church in the United States. While not all clergy are in the denominational pension system, most are, and the percentage not in the system tends to stay the same across the years, thus making trend comparisons possible. Readers should keep in mind that the total number of deacons is significantly lower in this report than their presence in the denomination because more deacons than other clergy work in employment settings with pension plans other than through WB. For local pastors, both full-time and part-time local pastors are included. Since WB does not keep records of clergy by race, we are not able to make comparisons by racial groups.

To help the church address the dramatic loss of young clergy first reported in 2005, the Lewis Center for Church Leadership has provided resources beginning with [*The Crisis of Younger Clergy*](#) by Lovett H. Weems Jr. and Ann A. Michel (Abingdon, 2008) and the formation of cohorts of young clergy to provide advanced leader development.

More recently, the Lewis Center developed a series of free one-page downloadable documents to assist those seeking to support younger clergy.

- [Why Young Clergy Matter](#)
- [Ways Established Church Leaders Can Work with Young Clergy](#)
- [Suggestions for Churches with a Young Pastor](#)
- [Suggestions for Churches with a Single Pastor](#)
- [Suggestions for Churches with a Clergywoman](#)

Contributors

Lovett H. Weems Jr., senior consultant of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, was project director. Matthew Lyons, marketing manager, and Holly Metcalf, student worker, contributed to the project. Barbara Boigegrain, general secretary of Wespeth Benefits and Investments, and the staff, particularly Amit Dharna, David Sirkin, and Tanya Lerner, provided essential cooperation and data.

Summary of Findings

Young Clergy Trends

Young Elders

- The number of under-35 elders decreased by 110 to 742, continuing a five-year decline.
- The percentage of young elders declined slightly (6.3% compared to 6.8% in 2020).
- The North Texas Conference reported the highest percentage of young elders at 11.3%.

- The Top Ten Conferences by percentage
 - North Texas (first time #1)
 - Texas (#1 in 2020, 2019, 2016, 2015, 2014, and 2012)
 - Susquehanna
 - Tennessee
 - Kentucky
 - Louisiana (new since last report)
 - Michigan (first time in the top ten)
 - Virginia
 - Dakotas
 - North Carolina

- The top ten list is more regionally diverse in recent years. For many years two jurisdictions, Southeastern and South Central, provided almost all the conferences in the top ten. In the past two years, four or five jurisdictions have been represented each year.

- The largest total number of young elders (42) is in the Virginia Conference, followed by Texas (39) and Western North Carolina (36).

Young Deacons

- The number of under-35 deacons declined by 13 in 2021 to 95.
- The percentage of young deacons among all active deacons declined by 1%, to 11% in 2021.
- Despite the percentage decline, the percentage of young deacons remains above that of elders and local pastors.

Young Local Pastors

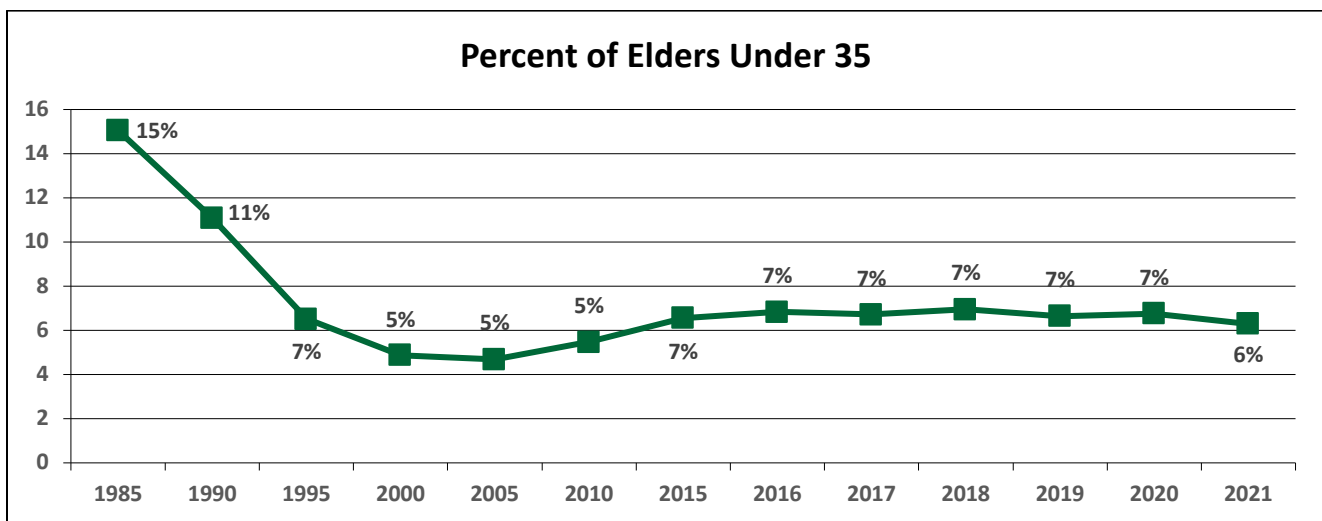
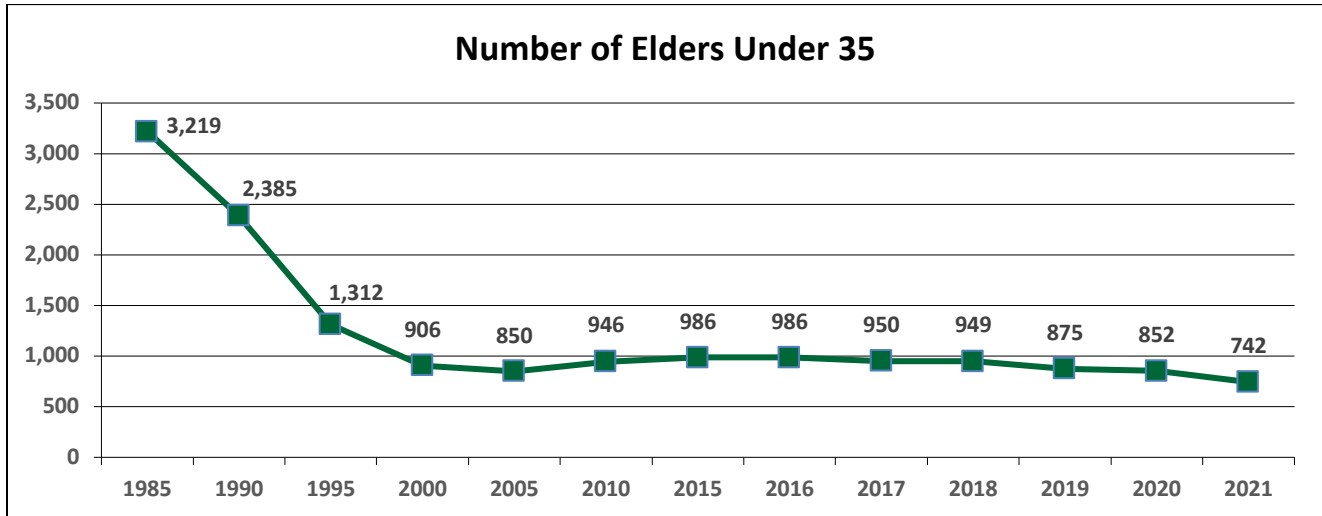
- The number of under-35 local pastors declined to 621 in 2021 from 654 in 2020.
- The percentage of young local pastors among all active local pastors remained at 9%.

What's Behind the Accelerated Decline in Young Clergy?

The 2020 *Clergy Age Trends in the United Methodist Church* report detailing the declining young clergy numbers in recent years led to a significant response from readers. As a result, Dr. Ann A. Michel, associate director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, used several survey questions to ask those who have reservations about pursuing ordination in the denomination more about the nature of their concerns. Her subsequent article, [*What's Keeping Younger People from Ordained Ministry in the United Methodist Church*](#), is one of the most read and shared *Leading Ideas* articles this year.

Elders

To have comparable figures across the years for elders, the figures include *not only those ordained elder but also those commissioned on the elder track but not yet ordained.*



Trends of Elders 1985-2021

Year	No. of Elders	No. of Elders Under 35	% Under 35	No. of Elders 35-54	% 35-54	No. of Elders 55-72	% 55-72
1985	21,378	3,219	15%	12,305	58%	5,854	27%
1990	21,507	2,385	11%	12,678	59%	6,444	30%
1995	20,117	1,312	7%	12,843	64%	5,962	30%
2000	18,576	906	5%	12,005	65%	5,665	30%
2005	18,141	850	5%	9,872	54%	7,419	41%
2010	17,293	946	5%	7,698	45%	8,649	50%
2015	15,019	986	7%	5,746	38%	8,287	55%
2020	12,610	852	7%	4,830	38%	6,928	55%
2021	11,771	742	6%	4,652	40%	6,377	54%

**Gender Breakdown within
Age Cohorts – Elders**

Year	Gender	Under 35	35-54	55-72
2018	Men	63%	68%	70%
	Women	37%	32%	30%
2019	Men	63%	67%	71%
	Women	37%	33%	29%
2020	Men	62%	67%	69%
	Women	38%	33%	31%
2021	Men	62%	67%	68%
	Women	38%	33%	32%

Median and Average Ages – Elders

Year	Median* Age	Average Age
1985	48	46.8
1990	47	47.5
1995	48	48.4
2000	50	49.5
2005	52	51.5
2010	55	52.8
2015	56	53.4
2016	56	53.4
2017	56	53.5
2018	56	53.5
2019	56	53.6
2020	56	53.4
2021	56	53.5

*Median – half older, half younger

Average and Median Ages by Conference

Median - half older, half younger

CONFERENCE	2021 Average	2021 Median
ALABAMA-WEST FLORIDA	52.9	56
ALASKA MISSIONARY	0.0	0
ARKANSAS	51.6	53
BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON	54.6	57
CALIFORNIA-NEVADA	55.7	58
CALIFORNIA-PACIFIC	56.1	58
CENTRAL TEXAS	51.6	54
DAKOTAS	51.6	53
DESERT SOUTHWEST	54.7	57
EAST OHIO	53.7	57
EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA	56.6	59
FLORIDA	52.9	55
GREAT PLAINS	52.4	54
GREATER NEW JERSEY	54.3	57
HOLSTON	52.2	53
ILLINOIS GREAT RIVERS	54.0	58
INDIANA	53.5	57
IOWA	53.5	57
KENTUCKY	52.4	54
LOUISIANA	52.7	55
MEMPHIS	54.6	56
MICHIGAN	53.8	57
MINNESOTA	54.4	57
MISSISSIPPI	53.0	55
MISSOURI	52.9	55
MOUNTAIN SKY	52.6	56
NEW ENGLAND	53.0	55
NEW MEXICO	54.4	57

CONFERENCE	2021 Average	2021 Median
NEW YORK	56.5	59
NORTH ALABAMA	52.6	55
NORTH CAROLINA	52.7	56
NORTH GEORGIA	53.2	55
NORTH TEXAS	51.3	53
NORTHERN ILLINOIS	52.9	55
NORTHWEST TEXAS	55.2	56
OKLAHOMA	53.8	56
OK INDIAN MISSIONARY	57.9	58
OREGON IDAHO	53.7	57
PACIFIC NORTHWEST	52.1	54
PENINSULA-DELAWARE	56.4	58
RED BIRD MISSIONARY	0.0	0
RIO TEXAS	53.4	55
SOUTH CAROLINA	54.6	57
SOUTH GEORGIA	53.3	56
SUSQUEHANNA	53.6	58
TENNESSEE	50.8	51
TEXAS	51.1	53
UPPER NEW YORK	55.4	58
VIRGINIA	51.5	53
WEST OHIO	54.4	57
WEST VIRGINIA	54.5	57
WESTERN N. CAROLINA	53.4	56
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA	54.4	57
WISCONSIN	54.8	57
All Elders	53.5	56

Elders

Presence of Elders under 35 by Annual Conference 2019-2021

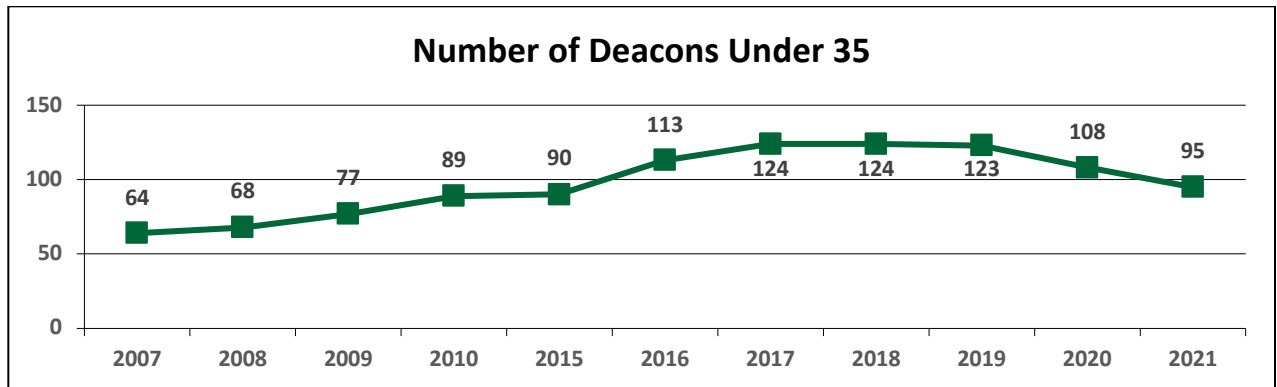
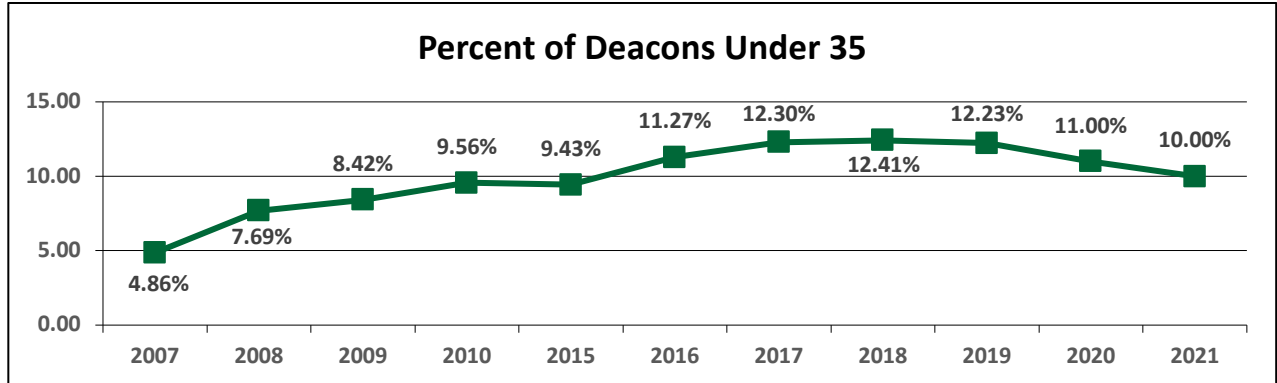
CONFERENCE	2021 Elders under 35	2021 Elders under 35	2021 Elders	2020 Elders under 35	2020 Elders under 35	2020 Elders	2019 Elders under 35	2019 Elders under 35	2019 Elders
Alabama-West Florida	15	8.1%	186	16	8.3%	193	14	7.0%	200
Alaska Missionary	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Arkansas	13	7.2%	180	16	8.0%	199	18	8.5%	212
Baltimore-Washington	14	4.3%	326	16	4.7%	341	21	6.0%	352
California-Nevada	8	3.9%	206	11	5.2%	212	12	5.8%	207
California-Pacific	7	2.4%	294	10	3.3%	306	11	3.5%	318
Central Texas	15	7.9%	189	16	8.3%	192	15	7.4%	203
Dakotas	8	8.6%	93	12	11.8%	102	11	10.7%	103
Desert Southwest	1	1.2%	85	2	2.1%	94	3	3.1%	98
East Ohio	16	7.1%	226	16	6.8%	236	13	5.2%	248
Eastern Pennsylvania	7	3.8%	183	6	3.0%	200	6	2.8%	218
Florida	22	6.3%	349	25	6.9%	361	27	7.3%	369
Great Plains	22	7.0%	313	23	7.0%	327	26	7.3%	357
Greater New Jersey	14	5.5%	253	16	6.1%	264	17	6.2%	273
Holston	15	5.7%	262	19	6.9%	275	21	7.4%	284
Illinois Great Rivers	13	5.9%	220	16	6.7%	240	16	6.1%	262
Indiana	26	7.5%	346	24	6.4%	377	26	6.6%	395
Iowa	15	6.4%	235	16	6.3%	255	17	6.4%	265
Kentucky	18	9.1%	197	21	8.5%	248	24	9.5%	252
Louisiana	13	8.9%	146	13	8.0%	163	16	9.4%	171
Memphis	6	6.1%	98	5	4.5%	112	8	6.3%	126
Michigan	26	8.9%	293	25	7.8%	320	21	6.5%	322
Minnesota	6	4.2%	143	6	4.0%	149	6	3.7%	162
Mississippi	18	6.6%	271	20	7.1%	282	17	5.7%	297
Missouri	9	3.9%	229	12	4.9%	246	15	5.6%	270
Mountain Sky	Rocky Mountain						5.2%	172	
	Yellowstone	13	6.5%	201	13	6.1%	212	8.1%	37
New England	10	5.6%	178	12	6.1%	197	9	4.6%	195
New Mexico	0	0.0%	65	0	0.0%	73	1	1.4%	72
New York	4	1.6%	243	5	1.9%	261	8	2.9%	274

Presence of Elders under 35
by Annual Conference
2019-2021, continued

CONFERENCE	2021 Elders under 35	2021 Elders under 35	2021 Elders	2020 Elders under 35	2020 Elders under 35	2020 Elders	2019 Elders under 35	2019 Elders under 35	2019 Elders
North Alabama	14	6.3%	221	22	8.8%	250	19	7.5%	255
North Carolina	29	8.5%	340	38	10.3%	368	37	9.7%	380
North Georgia	26	6.2%	417	30	6.8%	443	32	7.0%	460
North Texas	25	11.3%	222	23	9.8%	234	24	10.0%	239
Northern Illinois	15	6.0%	250	20	7.8%	258	19	7.2%	264
Northwest Texas	2	2.9%	70	3	4.0%	75	2	2.6%	76
Oklahoma	15	6.4%	235	16	6.2%	259	22	7.9%	280
OK Indian Missionary	0	0.0%	12	0	0.0%	13	0	0.0%	11
Oregon-Idaho	4	4.9%	82	3	3.8%	79	3	3.9%	77
Pacific Northwest	9	6.3%	143	13	9.0%	145	12	7.6%	158
Peninsula-Delaware	3	2.9%	105	4	3.5%	113	4	3.3%	122
Red Bird Missionary	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Rio Texas	7	3.6%	195	9	4.5%	201	10	4.6%	217
South Carolina	20	5.9%	341	21	5.7%	370	25	6.6%	377
South Georgia	6	3.4%	179	8	4.2%	192	5	2.5%	198
Susquehanna	18	9.9%	181	21	10.1%	208	18	8.0%	226
Tennessee	15	9.8%	153	17	10.4%	163	17	9.9%	172
Texas	39	10.6%	367	47	12.1%	389	45	11.0%	410
Upper New York	8	4.0%	202	11	4.9%	226	9	3.8%	237
Virginia	42	8.9%	474	49	9.6%	513	49	9.0%	546
West Ohio	22	5.2%	425	26	5.7%	455	27	5.7%	476
West Virginia	8	4.9%	162	9	5.3%	170	11	6.3%	174
Western North Carolina	36	6.5%	553	46	7.9%	584	50	8.3%	603
Western Pennsylvania	17	6.7%	252	16	5.9%	273	18	6.3%	284
Wisconsin	8	4.4%	180	8	4.2%	192	6	3.1%	196
Total	742	6.3%	11,771	852	6.75%	12,610	875	6.65%	13,155

Deacons

Deacon numbers include *not only those who have been ordained deacon but also those who have been commissioned* on the deacon track but not yet ordained. Readers should keep in mind that the total number of deacons is significantly lower in this report than their presence in the denomination because more deacons than other clergy work in employment settings with pension plans other than through the Wespeth Benefits.



Trends for Deacons 2005-2021

Year	No. of Deacons	No. of Deacons Under 35	% Under 35	No. of Deacons 35-54	% 35-54	No. of Deacons 55-72	% 55-72
2005	850	46	5%				
2006	844	52	6%	438	52%	354	42%
2007	902	64	7%	457	51%	381	42%
2008	897	69	8%	441	49%	387	43%
2009	915	77	8%	438	48%	400	44%
2010	930	89	10%	419	45%	422	45%
2014	954	86	9%	382	40%	486	51%
2015	954	90	9%	398	42%	466	49%
2016	1,003	113	11%	415	41%	475	48%
2017	1,008	124	12%	404	40%	480	48%
2018	999	124	12%	399	40%	476	48%
2019	1,006	123	12%	415	41%	468	47%
2020	983	108	11%	429	44%	446	45%
2021	945	95	10%	431	46%	419	44%

Median and Average Ages - Deacons

Year	Median* Age	Average Age
2006	53	51.7
2007	52	51.4
2008	53	51.3
2009	53	51.4
2010	54	51.6
2015	54	51.7
2016	54	51.4
2017	54	51.4
2018	53	51.2
2019	53	53.6
2020	53	50.9
2021	52	51

*Median - half older, half younger.

**Gender Breakdown within Age Cohorts
Deacons**

Year	Gender	Under 35	35-54	55-72
2018	Men	20%	32%	24%
	Women	80%	68%	76%
2019	Men	20%	33%	24%
	Women	80%	67%	76%
2020	Men	26%	32%	23%
	Women	74%	68%	77%
2021	Men	28%	31%	22%
	Women	72%	69%	78%

Deacons

Presence of Deacons under 35 by Annual Conference 2019-2021

CONFERENCE	2021 Deacons under 35	2021 Deacons under 35	2021 Deacons	2020 Deacons under 35	2020 Deacons under 35	2020 Deacons	2019 Deacons under 35	2019 Deacons under 35	2019 Deacons
Alabama-West Florida	3	8.8%	34	3	8.6%	35	3	8.8%	34
Alaska Missionary	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Arkansas	2	20.0%	10	2	20.0%	10	2	16.7%	12
Baltimore-Washington	0	0.0%	21	0	0.0%	20	1	4.8%	21
California-Nevada	0	0.0%	5	0	0.0%	7	1	12.5%	8
California-Pacific	2	15.4%	13	2	12.5%	16	1	5.3%	19
Central Texas	1	3.8%	26	2	7.4%	27	3	10.7%	28
Dakotas	0	0.0%	7	0	0.0%	7	1	14.3%	7
Desert Southwest	0	0.0%	4	0	0.0%	6	0	0.0%	7
East Ohio	1	7.7%	13	1	6.7%	15	3	17.6%	17
Eastern Pennsylvania	0	0.0%	18	0	0.0%	19	1	5.0%	20
Florida	2	7.7%	26	1	3.7%	27	3	11.1%	27
Great Plains	4	22.2%	18	2	12.5%	16	2	10.5%	19
Greater New Jersey	0	0.0%	12	0	0.0%	12	0	0.0%	12
Holston	1	8.3%	12	1	7.7%	13	1	7.1%	14
Illinois Great Rivers	2	13.3%	15	3	21.4%	14	1	7.7%	13
Indiana	2	10.0%	20	0	0.0%	20	2	10.5%	19
Iowa	0	0.0%	7	0	0.0%	8	0	0.0%	8
Kentucky	0	0.0%	16	0	0.0%	22	2	9.1%	22
Louisiana	2	9.5%	21	2	10.0%	20	2	10.5%	19
Memphis	0	0.0%	6	0	0.0%	7	0	0.0%	9
Michigan	1	4.0%	25	1	3.8%	26	3	12.0%	25
Minnesota	1	8.3%	12	1	8.3%	12	2	13.3%	15
Mississippi	4	23.5%	17	6	30.0%	20	6	26.1%	23
Missouri	2	8.3%	24	3	13.0%	23	3	14.3%	21
Mountain Sky	Rocky Mountain						0	0.0%	24
	Yellowstone	0	0.0%	16	0	0.0%	20	0	0.0%
New England	1	9.1%	11	2	18.2%	11	2	20.0%	10
New Mexico	0	0.0%	6	0	0.0%	7	0	0.0%	7
New York	2	25.0%	8	1	12.5%	8	1	11.1%	9

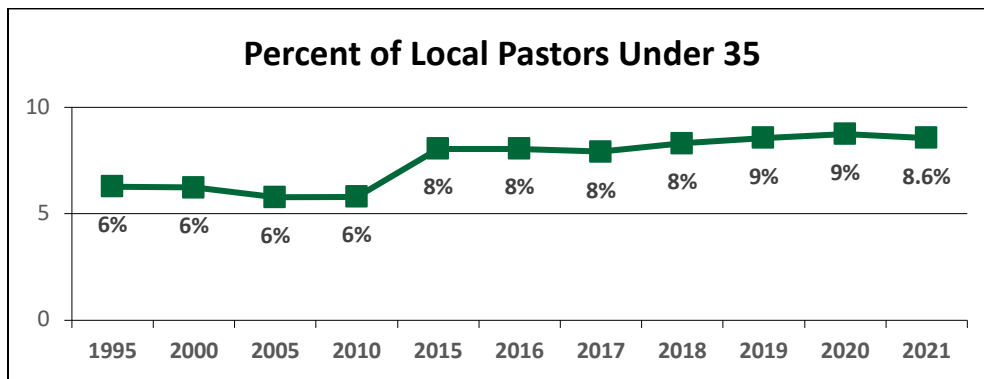
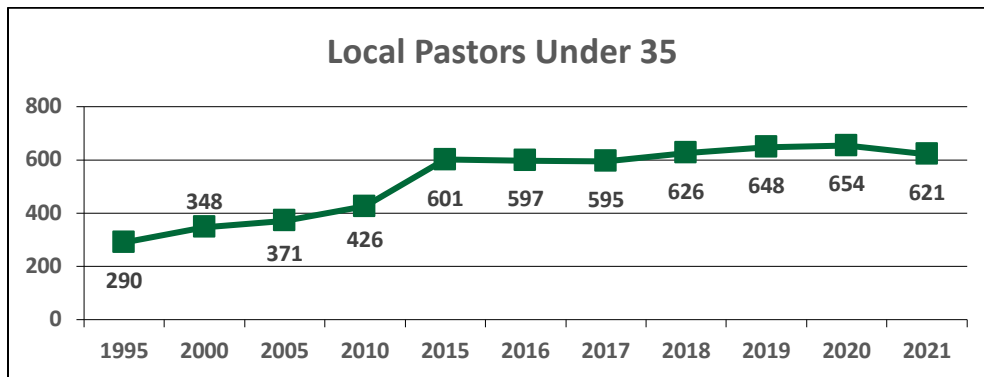
Deacons

Presence of Deacons under 35 by Annual Conference 2019-2021, continued

CONFERENCE	2021 Deacons under 35	2021 Deacons under 35	2021 Deacons	2020 Deacons under 35	2020 Deacons under 35	2020 Deacons	2019 Deacons under 35	2019 Deacons under 35	2019 Deacons
North Alabama	1	8.8%	34	0	0.0%	15	1	7.1%	14
North Carolina	4	0.0%	0	6	25.0%	24	8	28.6%	28
North Georgia	5	20.0%	10	8	11.8%	68	8	11.9%	67
North Texas	8	0.0%	21	9	18.0%	50	7	14.6%	48
Northern Illinois	3	0.0%	5	4	16.0%	25	3	10.0%	30
Northwest Texas	0	15.4%	13	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Oklahoma	0	3.8%	26	0	0.0%	23	1	4.2%	24
OK Indian Missionary	0	0.0%	7	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Oregon-Idaho	0	0.0%	4	0	0.0%	7	1	12.5%	8
Pacific Northwest	1	7.7%	13	1	12.5%	8	1	12.5%	8
Peninsula-Delaware	0	0.0%	18	0	0.0%	4	0	0.0%	4
Red Bird Missionary	0	7.7%	26	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0
Rio Texas	1	22.2%	18	2	11.8%	17	2	10.5%	19
South Carolina	4	0.0%	12	6	28.6%	21	6	30.0%	20
South Georgia	3	8.3%	12	4	26.7%	15	6	40.0%	15
Susquehanna	0	13.3%	15	0	0.0%	3	0	0.0%	4
Tennessee	6	10.0%	20	9	20.5%	44	9	22.0%	41
Texas	4	0.0%	7	5	15.6%	32	4	12.1%	33
Upper New York	2	0.0%	16	0	0.0%	16	0	0.0%	17
Virginia	5	9.5%	21	7	22.6%	31	5	17.9%	28
West Ohio	3	0.0%	6	4	10.0%	40	3	7.3%	41
West Virginia	0	4.0%	25	0	0.0%	10	0	0.0%	10
Western North Carolina	6	8.3%	12	5	7.7%	65	8	12.5%	64
Western Pennsylvania	5	23.5%	17	4	50.0%	8	3	50.0%	6
Wisconsin	1	8.3%	24	1	11.1%	9	1	12.5%	8
Total	95	10.1%	945	108	11.0%	983	123	12.23%	1,006

Local Pastors

Local pastor numbers include both full-time and part-time local pastors. Full-time local pastors represent just under 40% of local pastors.



Trends for Local Pastors 1985-2021

Year	No. of Local Pastors	Local Pastors Under 35	% Under 35	Local Pastors 35-54	% 35-54	Local Pastors 55-72	% 55-72
1985	3,804	130	3%	2,212	58%	1,462	38%
1990	3,936	163	4%	2,244	57%	1,529	39%
1995	4,622	290	6%	2,641	57%	1,691	37%
2000	5,571	348	6%	3,109	56%	2,114	38%
2005	6,517	371	6%	3,213	49%	2,933	45%
2010	7,341	426	6%	2,932	40%	3,983	54%
2011	7,353	455	6%	2,790	37%	4,108	57%
2012	7,532	472	6%	2,753	37%	4,307	57%
2013	7,671	522	7%	2,716	35%	4,433	58%
2014	7,395	568	8%	2,597	35%	4,230	57%
2015	7,464	601	8%	2,579	35%	4,284	57%
2016	7,408	597	8%	2,531	34%	4,280	58%
2017	7,512	595	8%	2,544	34%	4,373	58%
2018	7,538	626	8%	2,519	34%	4,393	58%
2019	7,563	648	9%	2,535	33%	4,380	58%
2020	7,478	654	9%	2,546	34%	4,278	57%
2021	7,246	621	8.6%	2,440	33.7%	4,185	57.8%

Median and Average Ages – Local Pastors

Year	Median Age	Average Age
1985	51	49.6
1990	51	50.4
1995	51	50.3
2000	52	50.8
2005	53	52.2
2006	54	52.5
2007	54	52.8
2008	55	53.3
2009	55	53.5
2010	55	53.9
2015	57	54
2016	57	54.1
2017	57	54.1
2018	57	54.3
2019	57	54.3
2020	57	54.2
2021	57	54.4

* Median – half older, half younger

**Gender Breakdown within Age Cohorts
Local Pastors**

Year	Gender	Under 35	35-54	55-72
2018	Men	76%	71%	65%
	Women	24%	29%	35%
2019	Men	76%	70%	64%
	Women	24%	30%	36%
2020	Men	76%	70%	64%
	Women	24%	30%	36%
2021	Men	73%	70%	63%
	Women	27%	30%	37%

Local Pastors

Presence of Local Pastors under 35 by Annual Conference 2019-2021

CONFERENCE NAME	2021 Local Pastors under 35	2021 Local Pastors under 35	2021 Local Pastors	2020 Local Pastors under 35	2020 Local Pastors under 35	2020 Local Pastors	2019 Local Pastors under 35	2019 Local Pastors under 35	2019 Local Pastors
Alabama-West Florida	19	12.9%	147	21	12.5%	168	17	10.2%	166
Alaska Missionary	1	16.7%	6	1	10.0%	10	1	12.5%	8
Arkansas	3	3.4%	87	5	5.5%	91	4	4.0%	101
Baltimore-Washington	11	9.3%	118	10	8.8%	114	9	7.8%	115
California-Nevada	2	3.4%	59	0	0.0%	52	3	5.4%	56
California-Pacific	7	8.8%	80	6	7.3%	82	4	5.3%	76
Central Texas	8	12.1%	66	8	12.7%	63	8	12.7%	63
Dakotas	11	14.1%	78	10	13.3%	75	12	16.0%	75
Desert Southwest	3	10.0%	30	5	15.2%	33	6	20.7%	29
East Ohio	11	5.9%	186	21	9.7%	217	25	10.5%	237
Eastern Pennsylvania	11	9.4%	117	10	9.2%	109	0	0.0%	82
Florida	19	10.2%	186	11	5.9%	187	14	7.3%	192
Great Plains	19	8.4%	226	21	8.6%	244	13	5.4%	239
Greater New Jersey	19	12.6%	151	19	12.2%	156	18	11.3%	159
Holston	9	7.4%	121	6	4.8%	126	7	6.3%	112
Illinois Great Rivers	11	5.8%	189	14	7.3%	192	13	7.1%	183
Indiana	13	6.8%	191	18	8.9%	202	20	9.4%	212
Iowa	5	3.5%	144	6	3.9%	154	5	3.1%	160
Kentucky	24	10.5%	228	23	9.8%	234	27	10.8%	250
Louisiana	5	4.4%	113	6	5.0%	121	5	4.1%	123
Memphis	2	2.5%	81	2	2.5%	80	2	2.2%	89
Michigan	12	7.2%	167	11	6.1%	179	9	4.8%	186
Minnesota	9	11.0%	82	10	11.9%	84	12	14.5%	83
Mississippi	15	6.3%	239	15	6.1%	246	14	5.4%	260
Missouri	21	9.3%	225	19	8.1%	235	16	7.1%	226
Mountain Sky	Rocky Mountain						4	7.4%	54
	Yellowstone	2	3.2%	62	3	4.5%	66	1	5.9%
New England	11	8.8%	125	13	10.0%	130	13	9.7%	134
New Mexico	2	9.5%	21	0	0.0%	16	0	0.0%	15
New York	8	12.5%	64	9	13.8%	65	9	15.0%	60

Local Pastors

Presence of Local Pastors under 35 by Annual Conference 2019-2021, continued

CONFERENCE NAME	2021 Local Pastors under 35	2021 Local Pastors under 35	2021 Local Pastors	2020 Local Pastors under 35	2020 Local Pastors under 35	2020 Local Pastors	2019 Local Pastors under 35	2019 Local Pastors under 35	2019 Local Pastors
North Alabama	16	7.8%	125	21	9.8%	215	25	11.1%	226
North Carolina	43	17.3%	21	36	14.2%	253	34	13.0%	261
North Georgia	23	8.4%	64	26	9.7%	268	23	8.2%	282
North Texas	10	11.0%	125	9	9.5%	95	10	9.6%	104
Northern Illinois	6	10.3%	21	7	11.1%	63	7	10.8%	65
Northwest Texas	8	12.3%	64	8	10.7%	75	7	9.2%	76
Oklahoma	13	11.1%	125	13	10.9%	119	11	9.4%	117
OK Indian Missionary	0	0.0%	21	0	0.0%	7	0	0.0%	6
Oregon-Idaho	3	15.0%	64	3	10.7%	28	4	14.8%	27
Pacific Northwest	4	13.8%	125	5	16.1%	31	5	15.2%	33
Peninsula-Delaware	11	9.7%	21	12	10.6%	113	9	8.0%	113
Red Bird Missionary	1	16.7%	64	2	28.6%	7	2	28.6%	7
Rio Texas	9	6.3%	125	12	8.6%	139	10	7.1%	141
South Carolina	13	5.1%	21	14	5.6%	249	15	6.0%	248
South Georgia	6	4.8%	64	9	7.0%	129	9	7.1%	126
Susquehanna	26	13.2%	125	32	16.0%	200	35	17.6%	199
Tennessee	8	5.1%	21	8	4.4%	182	13	7.0%	186
Texas	24	15.3%	64	23	14.6%	158	29	18.6%	156
Upper New York	7	3.6%	125	9	4.4%	203	18	8.1%	222
Virginia	23	7.9%	21	26	8.6%	304	28	8.7%	321
West Ohio	27	10.0%	64	29	11.0%	263	22	9.7%	226
West Virginia	8	5.1%	125	10	6.0%	168	11	6.2%	177
Western North Carolina	23	11.0%	21	22	10.3%	213	14	7.0%	200
Western Pennsylvania	7	4.2%	64	8	4.8%	166	11	6.1%	180
Wisconsin	9	8.9%	125	7	7.1%	99	5	4.9%	102
Total	621	8.6%	7,246	654	8.70%	7,478	648	8.57%	7,563

Annual Conference Clergy by Age Group – Numeric – 2021

CONFERENCE	Deacons				Elders				Local Pastors			
	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Total	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Total	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Total
Alabama-West Florida	3	14	17	34	15	73	98	186	19	55	73	147
Alaska Missionary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	2	6
Arkansas	2	1	7	10	13	88	79	180	3	29	55	87
Baltimore-Washington	0	12	9	21	14	120	192	326	11	28	79	118
California-Nevada	0	2	3	5	8	72	126	206	2	27	30	59
California-Pacific	2	4	7	13	7	108	179	294	7	26	47	80
Central Texas	1	14	11	26	15	84	90	189	8	26	32	66
Dakotas	0	3	4	7	8	43	42	93	11	39	28	78
Desert Southwest	0	1	3	4	1	39	45	85	3	7	20	30
East Ohio	1	7	5	13	16	79	131	226	11	54	121	186
Eastern Pennsylvania	0	9	9	18	7	52	124	183	11	34	72	117
Florida	2	12	12	26	22	150	177	349	19	73	94	186
Great Plains	4	4	10	18	22	135	156	313	19	81	126	226
Greater New Jersey	0	4	8	12	14	91	148	253	19	60	72	151
Holston	1	4	7	12	15	126	121	262	9	34	78	121
Illinois Great Rivers	2	8	5	15	13	77	130	220	11	59	119	189
Indiana	2	13	5	20	26	117	203	346	13	68	110	191
Iowa	0	3	4	7	15	85	135	235	5	44	95	144
Kentucky	0	7	9	16	18	85	94	197	24	94	110	228
Louisiana	2	9	10	21	13	59	74	146	5	32	76	113
Memphis	0	1	5	6	6	35	57	98	2	24	55	81
Michigan	1	13	11	25	26	103	164	293	12	53	102	167
Minnesota	1	5	6	12	6	50	87	143	9	28	45	82
Mississippi	4	7	6	17	18	117	136	271	15	82	142	239
Missouri	2	13	9	24	9	104	116	229	21	83	121	225
Mountain Sky	0	4	12	16	13	83	105	201	2	19	41	62
New England	1	5	5	11	10	74	94	178	11	34	80	125
New Mexico	0	3	3	6	0	27	38	65	2	8	11	21
New York	2	2	4	8	4	87	152	243	8	19	37	64

Annual Conference Clergy by Age Group – Numeric – 2021 (continued)

CONFERENCE	Deacons				Elders				Local Pastors			
	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Total	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Total	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Total
North Alabama	1	9	3	13	14	93	114	221	16	58	131	147
North Carolina	4	11	8	23	29	130	181	340	43	84	121	6
North Georgia	5	33	25	63	26	177	214	417	23	94	156	87
North Texas	8	23	20	51	25	93	104	222	10	38	43	118
Northern Illinois	3	10	10	23	15	107	128	250	6	15	37	59
Northwest Texas	0	0	0	0	2	29	39	70	8	24	33	80
Oklahoma	0	9	10	19	15	92	128	235	13	43	61	66
OK Indian Mission	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	12	0	4	4	78
Oregon-Idaho	0	4	3	7	4	31	47	82	3	10	7	30
Pacific Northwest	1	4	4	9	9	66	68	143	4	12	13	186
Peninsula-Delaware	0	3	0	3	3	32	70	105	11	22	80	117
Red Bird Mission	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	186
Rio Texas	1	10	7	18	7	84	104	195	9	58	75	226
South Carolina	4	8	11	23	20	126	195	341	13	75	167	151
South Georgia	3	7	4	14	6	78	95	179	6	49	70	121
Susquehanna	0	1	2	3	18	56	107	181	26	73	98	189
Tennessee	6	19	14	39	15	76	62	153	8	59	89	191
Texas	4	18	11	33	39	157	171	367	24	53	80	144
Upper New York	2	2	15	19	8	69	125	202	7	50	139	228
Virginia	5	13	14	32	42	207	225	474	23	100	169	113
West Ohio	3	19	16	38	22	163	240	425	27	99	145	81
West Virginia	0	3	7	10	8	53	101	162	8	44	105	167
West. North Carolina	6	34	24	64	36	212	305	553	23	60	126	82
West. Pennsylvania	5	2	2	9	17	90	145	252	7	49	110	239
Wisconsin	1	5	3	9	8	65	107	180	9	43	49	225
Total	95	431	419	945	742	4,652	6,377	11,771	621	2,440	4,185	7,246

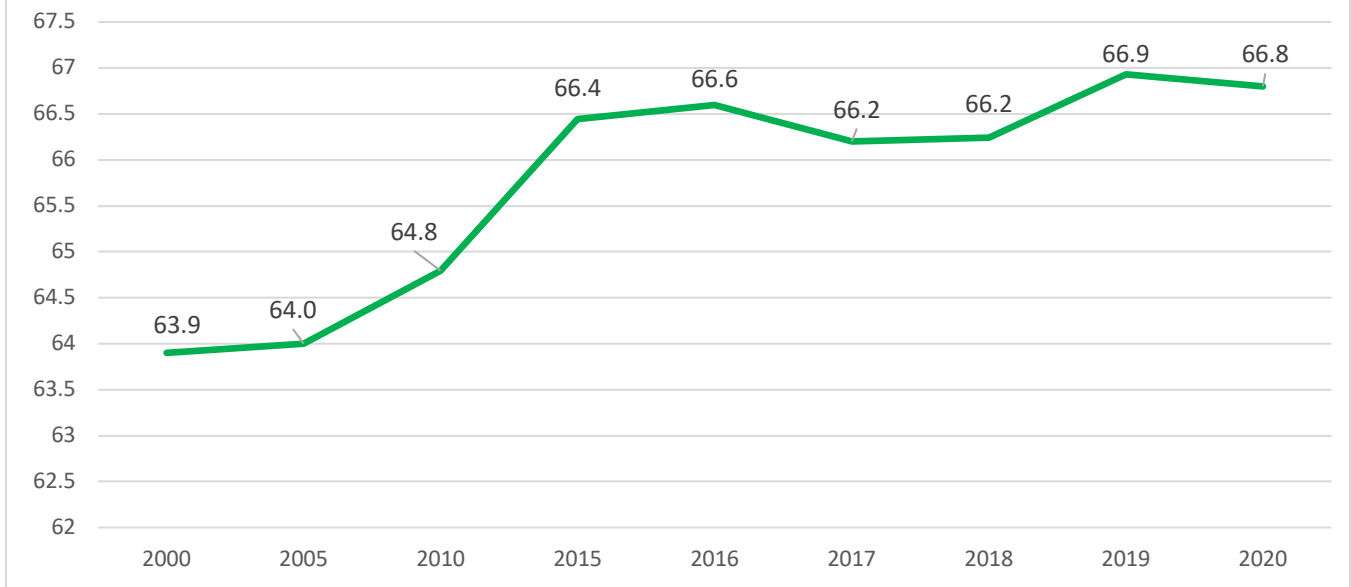
Annual Conference Clergy by Age Group – Percentage – 2021

CONFERENCE	Deacons			Elders			Local Pastors		
	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72
Alabama-West Florida	8.8%	41.2%	50.0%	8.1%	39.2%	52.7%	12.9%	37.4%	49.7%
Alaska Missionary	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%
Arkansas	20.0%	10.0%	70.0%	7.2%	48.9%	43.9%	3.4%	33.3%	63.2%
Baltimore-Washington	0.0%	57.1%	42.9%	4.3%	36.8%	58.9%	9.3%	23.7%	66.9%
California-Nevada	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%	3.9%	35.0%	61.2%	3.4%	45.8%	50.8%
California-Pacific	15.4%	30.8%	53.8%	2.4%	36.7%	60.9%	8.8%	32.5%	58.8%
Central Texas	3.8%	53.8%	42.3%	7.9%	44.4%	47.6%	12.1%	39.4%	48.5%
Dakotas	0.0%	42.9%	57.1%	8.6%	46.2%	45.2%	14.1%	50.0%	35.9%
Desert Southwest	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	1.2%	45.9%	52.9%	10.0%	23.3%	66.7%
East Ohio	7.7%	53.8%	38.5%	7.1%	35.0%	58.0%	5.9%	29.0%	65.1%
Eastern Pennsylvania	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	3.8%	28.4%	67.8%	9.4%	29.1%	61.5%
Florida	7.7%	46.2%	46.2%	6.3%	43.0%	50.7%	10.2%	39.2%	50.5%
Great Plains	22.2%	22.2%	55.6%	7.0%	43.1%	49.8%	8.4%	35.8%	55.8%
Greater New Jersey	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	5.5%	36.0%	58.5%	12.6%	39.7%	47.7%
Holston	8.3%	33.3%	58.3%	5.7%	48.1%	46.2%	7.4%	28.1%	64.5%
Illinois Great Rivers	13.3%	53.3%	33.3%	5.9%	35.0%	59.1%	5.8%	31.2%	63.0%
Indiana	10.0%	65.0%	25.0%	7.5%	33.8%	58.7%	6.8%	35.6%	57.6%
Iowa	0.0%	42.9%	57.1%	6.4%	36.2%	57.4%	3.5%	30.6%	66.0%
Kentucky	0.0%	43.8%	56.3%	9.1%	43.1%	47.7%	10.5%	41.2%	48.2%
Louisiana	9.5%	42.9%	47.6%	8.9%	40.4%	50.7%	4.4%	28.3%	67.3%
Memphis	0.0%	16.7%	83.3%	6.1%	35.7%	58.2%	2.5%	29.6%	67.9%
Michigan	4.0%	52.0%	44.0%	8.9%	35.2%	56.0%	7.2%	31.7%	61.1%
Minnesota	8.3%	41.7%	50.0%	4.2%	35.0%	60.8%	11.0%	34.1%	54.9%
Mississippi	23.5%	41.2%	35.3%	6.6%	43.2%	50.2%	6.3%	34.3%	59.4%
Missouri	8.3%	54.2%	37.5%	3.9%	45.4%	50.7%	9.3%	36.9%	53.8%
Mountain Sky	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	6.5%	41.3%	52.2%	3.2%	30.6%	66.1%
New England	9.1%	45.5%	45.5%	5.6%	41.6%	52.8%	8.8%	27.2%	64.0%
New Mexico	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	41.5%	58.5%	9.5%	38.1%	52.4%
New York	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	1.6%	35.8%	62.6%	12.5%	29.7%	57.8%

Annual Conference Clergy by Age Group – Percentage – 2021 (continued)

CONFERENCE	Deacons			Elders			Local Pastors		
	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72	Under 35	35 to 54	55 to 72
North Alabama	7.7%	69.2%	23.1%	6.3%	42.1%	51.6%	7.8%	28.3%	63.9%
North Carolina	17.4%	47.8%	34.8%	8.5%	38.2%	53.2%	17.3%	33.9%	48.8%
North Georgia	7.9%	52.4%	39.7%	6.2%	42.4%	51.3%	8.4%	34.4%	57.1%
North Texas	15.7%	45.1%	39.2%	11.3%	41.9%	46.8%	11.0%	41.8%	47.3%
Northern Illinois	13.0%	43.5%	43.5%	6.0%	42.8%	51.2%	10.3%	25.9%	63.8%
Northwest Texas	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	41.4%	55.7%	12.3%	36.9%	50.8%
Oklahoma	0.0%	47.4%	52.6%	6.4%	39.1%	54.5%	11.1%	36.8%	52.1%
OK Indian Missionary	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%
Oregon-Idaho	0.0%	57.1%	42.9%	4.9%	37.8%	57.3%	15.0%	50.0%	35.0%
Pacific Northwest	11.1%	44.4%	44.4%	6.3%	46.2%	47.6%	13.8%	41.4%	44.8%
Peninsula-Delaware	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	2.9%	30.5%	66.7%	9.7%	19.5%	70.8%
Red Bird Mission	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	66.7%
Rio Texas	5.6%	55.6%	38.9%	3.6%	43.1%	53.3%	6.3%	40.8%	52.8%
South Carolina	17.4%	34.8%	47.8%	5.9%	37.0%	57.2%	5.1%	29.4%	65.5%
South Georgia	21.4%	50.0%	28.6%	3.4%	43.6%	53.1%	4.8%	39.2%	56.0%
Susquehanna	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	9.9%	30.9%	59.1%	13.2%	37.1%	49.7%
Tennessee	15.4%	48.7%	35.9%	9.8%	49.7%	40.5%	5.1%	37.8%	57.1%
Texas	12.1%	54.5%	33.3%	10.6%	42.8%	46.6%	15.3%	33.8%	51.0%
Upper New York	10.5%	10.5%	78.9%	4.0%	34.2%	61.9%	3.6%	25.5%	70.9%
Virginia	15.6%	40.6%	43.8%	8.9%	43.7%	47.5%	7.9%	34.2%	57.9%
West Ohio	7.9%	50.0%	42.1%	5.2%	38.4%	56.5%	10.0%	36.5%	53.5%
West Virginia	0.0%	30.0%	70.0%	4.9%	32.7%	62.3%	5.1%	28.0%	66.9%
West. North Carolina	9.4%	53.1%	37.5%	6.5%	38.3%	55.2%	11.0%	28.7%	60.3%
West. Pennsylvania	55.6%	22.2%	22.2%	6.7%	35.7%	57.5%	4.2%	29.5%	66.3%
Wisconsin	11.1%	55.6%	33.3%	4.4%	36.1%	59.4%	8.9%	42.6%	48.5%

Average Annual Retirement Age for All United Methodist Clergy



Average Retirement Ages

	2005	2020
Elders	64	66
Deacons	64	67
Full-Time Local Pastors	65	67
Part-Time Local Pastors	67	66

Lewis Center for Church Leadership

About the Lewis Center for Church Leadership

Established by Wesley Theological Seminary in 2003, the [Lewis Center for Church Leadership](#) helps the United Methodist Church address its current challenges. The Center is building a vision for church leadership grounded in faith, informed by knowledge, and exercised in effective action. It seeks a holistic understanding of Christian leadership that brings together theology and management, scholarship and practice, research, and application.

Committed to the broad goal of helping the church reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people, the Center focuses on improving leadership effectiveness and providing actionable insights and best practices to promote effective ministry. The Center seeks to be a trusted resource for church leaders so that congregations increase in service, vitality, and growth. The Center staff of 11, along with other researchers and consultants who assist with special projects, also draws on the expertise of the entire Wesley Seminary faculty and a wide array of gifted practitioners. With funding from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the Lewis Center is currently undertaking a study of the U.S. religious workforce. Learn more about this work at <https://religiousworkforce.com>.

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