

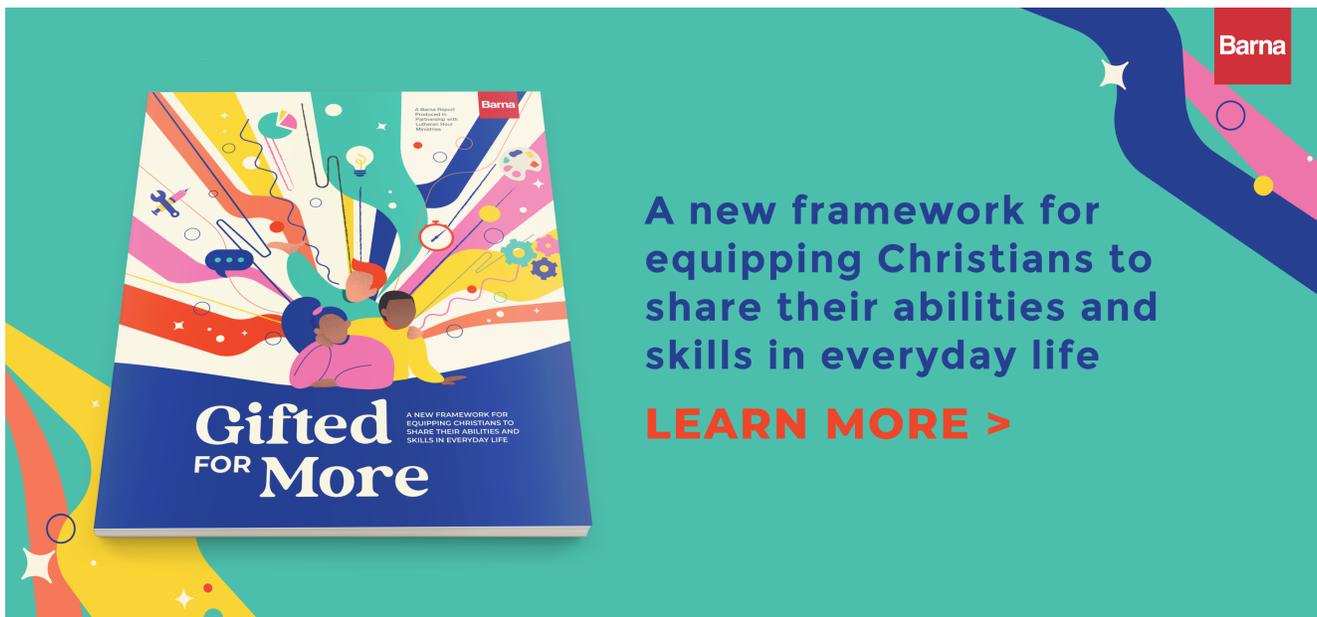
New Research Points to Gaps in How Churches Support Congregants' Gifts

Articles in Faith & Christianity in Leaders & Pastors • October 20, 2021

***P*astors and churchgoers alike believe an individual's unique gifts and talents point to God and draw people to him. So are churches adequately helping to identify, support and celebrate congregants' gifts?**

For a recent report titled *Gifted for More*, Barna explored how U.S. adults and practicing Christians identify, develop and use their unique skills and abilities, both inside and outside church walls. The study, conducted in partnership with *Lutheran Hour Ministries*, also examined how pastors view giftedness in their church—and suggests the U.S. Church is due for a fresh framework for gifts.

Below, new data from *Gifted for More* present some of church leaders' varying views on giftedness, as well as how U.S. adults and practicing Christians believe the Church could assist in their giftedness journey.



Pastors Believe Gifts Reflect God—But Have a Moderate Sense of Gifts in Their Congregation

Church leaders overwhelmingly believe people’s giftings reflect the God who created them (98% agree overall, 79% “strongly” so). Of many possible perspectives about giftedness that Barna presented to pastors, this statement generated the most enthusiastic response.

Overall, four out of five pastors also agree to some extent that helping people discover and develop their giftings is an important priority in their church. Nearly nine in 10 agree at least somewhat that helping people deploy, explore or practice generosity with their gifts is a priority of their church community. Looking only at the percentages of pastors who “strongly” agree with these statements, however, tempers the picture of pastoral support of gift development.

HOW PASTORS VIEW GIFTEDNESS WITHIN THEIR CHURCH

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	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
People's giftings reflect the God that created them		79%			19%
I know most people's occupations in our congregation		50%		38%	
Helping people discover their giftings is an important priority in our church		38%		42%	12%
In our church, people's giftings are often celebrated for how they make a difference in our church	24%		58%		13%
In our church, people's giftings are often celebrated for how they make a difference outside our church	17%	44%		22%	14%
As a pastor, I feel I have a good sense of the giftings in our congregation	16%	64%			12% 8%
People's giftings shouldn't define how they serve in our church	10%	20%	16%	40%	14%

n=491 U.S. Protestant pastors; June 23–July 28, 2020. | Source: Barna Group | [Download image](#) © 2021 | Barna.com

Overall, pastors have a moderate sense of the giftings present within their congregation (16% agree “strongly,” 64% “somewhat”)—at the least, they know most people’s occupations within their church (50% “strongly,” 38% “somewhat”).

When it comes to how individuals’ skills are put into action within a local church context, a slight majority of pastors—just over half (54%)—believes that congregants’ giftings should define how they show up in church ministry. In general, churches seem slow to celebrate the impact of individuals’ skills and gifts, especially when they are used outside of the church building (17% “strongly” agree, 44% “somewhat”).

Gifted for More delves deeper into some of the ways that church leaders currently have a narrow vision or a lack of structure to support congregants in gift development.

50% of Practicing Christians Who Know Their Gifts Say These Skills Are Noticed at Church

Do Christians see developing their giftings and strengths as a way to grow closer to God? When Barna asked, a majority of self-identified Christians (82%) and nearly all practicing Christians (97%)—those U.S. adults who identify as Christian and also say religious faith is very important in their lives and have attended church within the past month—agreed at least somewhat.

GROWING IN GIFTINGS & CLOSENESS TO GOD

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Do you agree or disagree with this statement: “As I grow in my gifts, I find that I also grow in my closeness to God”?

	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Disagree somewhat	Disagree strongly
Self-identified Christians		38%	44%	13%
Practicing Christians		62%		35%

n=980 U.S. adults who self-identify as Christian; June 16–July 6, 2020.

n=1,374 practicing Christian adults; June 16–July 6, 2020. | Source: Barna Group | [Download image](#)

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In this regard, the local church has the potential to play a large role in the development of congregants’ giftings. Half of practicing Christians who know and understand their gifts well (50%) say their skills are most commonly noticed at church, while one-quarter of all self-identified Christian adults (25%) affirms this. Among all U.S. adults who attend church at least once a year, only 18 percent say the same.

WHERE GIFTINGS ARE MOST COMMONLY NOTICED BY OTHERS

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Where are (or were) your giftings most commonly noticed by others?

Select all that apply.

Base: those who know and understand their gifts well

	All U.S. adults	Practicing Christians
Family or friends	67%	70%
People who share a similar hobby or interests	35%	31%
Work or school	33%	35%
Church (asked among those who attend at least once a year)	18%	50%

While all self-identified Christians also occasionally attribute the development of their gifts to either a leader at church (23%) or another church member (13%), practicing Christians are more likely to select these people as investors in their particular giftings (36% leader at church, 27% another church member).

Even so, with only one in three practicing Christians saying their leaders invest in them and even fewer noting other church members doing the same, local congregations have a gap to fill when it comes to identifying and developing the gifts of others. In fact, among those who are interested in developing their giftings, data show that half of practicing Christians (55%), 29 percent of self-identified Christians and one in five of all U.S. adults who have been to church within the past year (20%) say they would be open to growing and investing in their gifts at church.

Additional reading and resources:

- For more insights on giftedness in the Church, read *Gifted for More*, available on **Barna Access Plus** or for purchase in the Barna shop.
- Check out other Barna reports created in partnership with **Lutheran Hour Ministries**—*Better Together*, *Households of Faith* and *Spiritual Conversation in the Digital Age*— available both on **Barna Access Plus** and through the Barna shop.
- In addition to partnering with Barna on the *Gifted for More* study, **Lutheran Hour Ministries** has created a giftings assessment called **EveryGift** to help pastors and their people identify their unique skills and abilities. Check out the assessment and accompanying resources [here](#).

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About the Research

This quantitative study consisted of three online surveys. The first was a survey of 1,504 U.S. adults with an oversample of 1,000 additional practicing Christians (meaning they self-identify as Christian, say their faith is very important in their life and, over the past year, on average, they attended church at least one time per month). In total, responses from 1,374 practicing

Christians were analyzed in this report. This survey was conducted from June 16–July 6, 2020. The margin of error for the sample is +/- 2.3 percent for all U.S. adults and +/- 2.5 percent for practicing Christians at the 95 percent confidence level.

The second quantitative survey focused on the 12 giftings explored within this publication and mastery measurements within giftedness. This online survey was conducted among 1,019 U.S. adults from September 3–12, 2020. The margin of error for this sample is +/- 2.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

For these two general population survey efforts, researchers set quotas to obtain a minimum readable sample by a variety of demographic factors and weighted the samples by region, ethnicity, education, age and gender to reflect their natural presence in the American population (using U.S. Census Bureau data and historical Barna data for comparison). Partly by nature of using an online panel, these respondents are slightly more educated than the average American, but Barna researchers adjusted the representation of college-educated individuals in the weighting scheme accordingly.

The third quantitative online survey was conducted among 491 U.S. Protestant senior pastors from June 23–July 28, 2020. These pastors were recruited from Barna's pastor panel (a database of pastors recruited via probability sampling on annual phone and email surveys) and are representative of U.S. Protestant churches by region, denomination and church size. The margin of error for this sample is +/- 4.4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

U.S. adults are U.S. adults ages 18 or older.

Practicing Christians are self-identified Christians who have attended a worship service within the past month and strongly agree their faith is very important to their life.

Photo by [Madalyn Cox](#) from [Unsplash](#).

About Barna

Barna is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of

the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984.

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