

Survey Report: COVID-19 and Our Congregations

December 2020

COVID-19 and Our Congregations

This report shares preliminary findings of CARDD's COVID-19 impact research, including:



Impact on Worship

In-person Worship
Worship Precautions
Online Worship



Impact on Gathering and Giving

Christian Education
Ministry Gatherings
Congregational Giving



Impact on Clergy

Assistance Needed
Support Given
Pastoral Care

Introduction

- ◆ The COVID-19 pandemic has brought changing and challenging circumstances to our UCC congregations and clergy
- ◆ This report aims to share relevant and easily-accessible information with our clergy, congregations, Conferences, and all those who engage in ministry across our church settings
- ◆ These survey findings represent the first in an ongoing exploration of how our churches and pastors are adapting to the new realities of COVID-19 and eventually the long-term impact of these changes and innovations

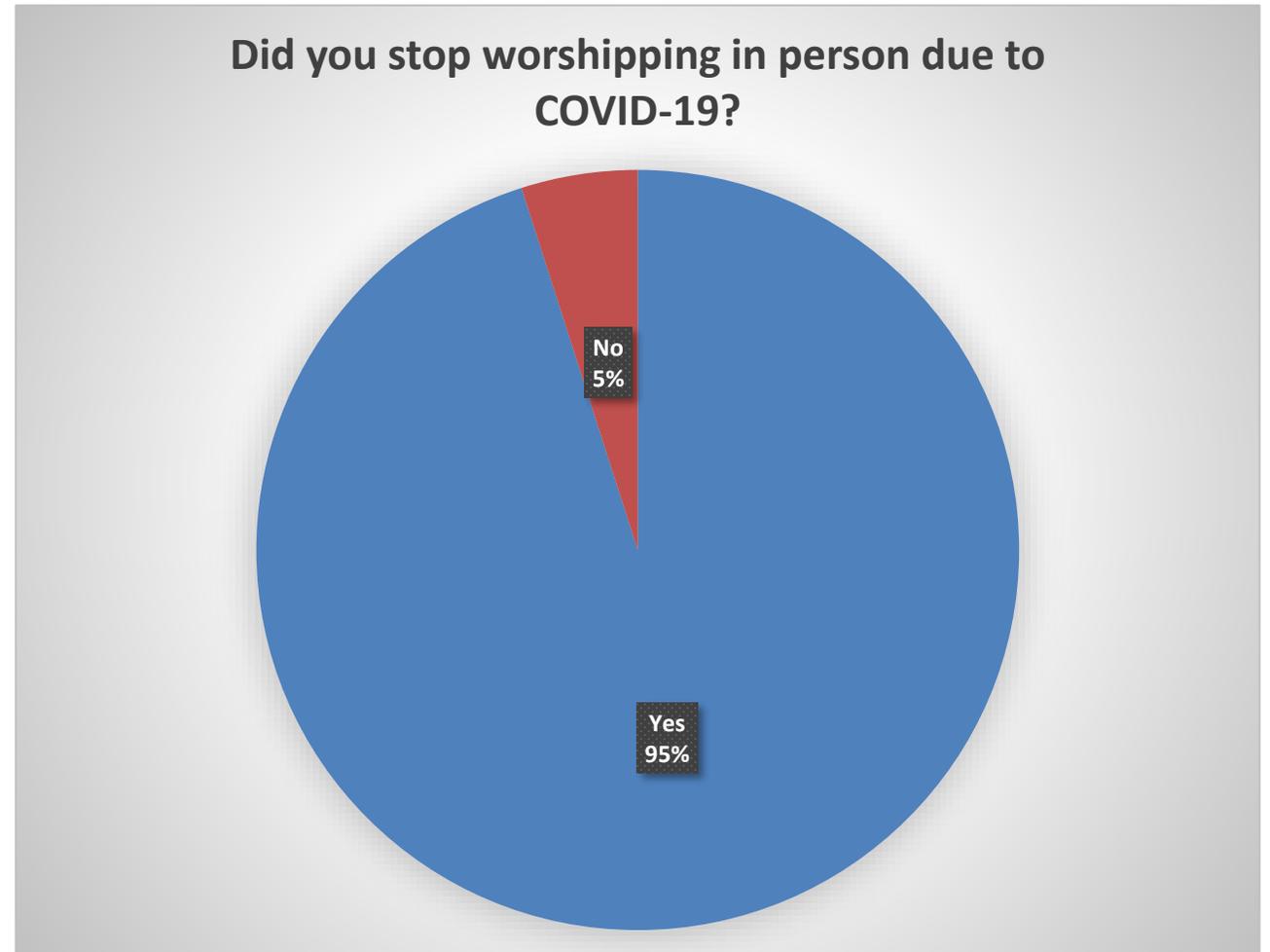
Survey Methodology

- ◆ This survey was emailed to a random sample of senior pastors, solo pastors, co-pastors, designated term pastors, and interim pastors in the UCC
- ◆ A total of 345 clergy responded out of the 823 clergy who were sent the survey, resulting in a 41.9% response rate
 - ◆ Surveys were physically mailed to clergy who did not have email addresses listed in the Data Hub
- ◆ Respondents completed the survey from mid-August through mid-September 2020

Impact on Churches: Changes to In-Person Worship

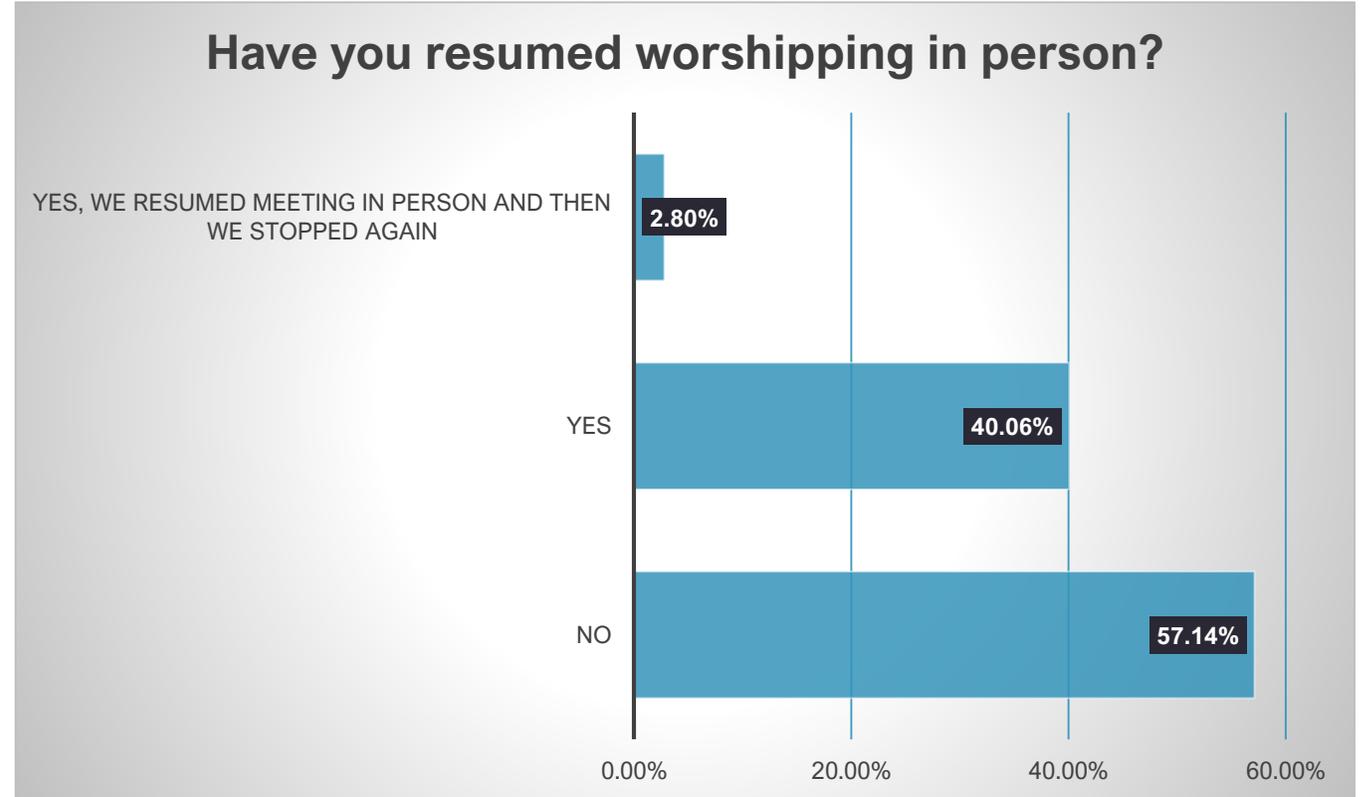


Stopping Worship



- Nearly all UCC churches who responded to the survey (95%) reported stopping worship at some point due to COVID-19

Resuming Worship



- ◇ At the time of this survey, 57% of churches had not yet resumed in-person worship
- ◇ It is possible that as pandemic conditions change, some churches have since started to worship in person or those who had resumed worshipping in person may have stopped again

New Precautions for In-Person Worship

What measures are you planning to implement when you resume in-person worship or are currently practicing for in-person worship? Choose all that apply.

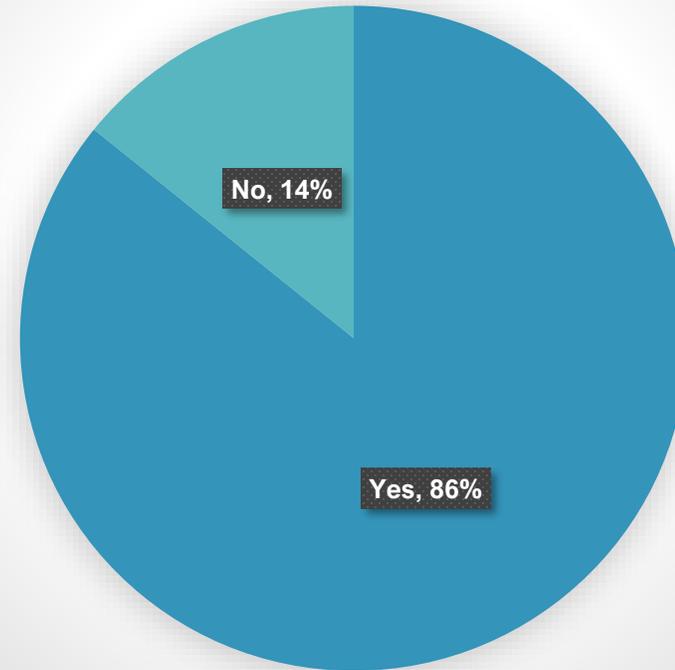
| | |
|---|--------|
| Spacing between people in the worship area | 90.88% |
| No passing of offering plates | 89.36% |
| No physical passing of the peace | 89.06% |
| Hand sanitizer stations | 85.11% |
| Requiring everyone to wear masks | 83.59% |
| No offering of food and beverages before or after church | 82.07% |
| Extra cleaning | 79.03% |
| No choir | 76.90% |
| Modified communion | 75.38% |
| No social time before or after church | 69.00% |
| No in-person gatherings outside of worship (e.g. Bible study) | 41.03% |
| Limiting the number of participants | 40.43% |
| No youth programming | 38.30% |
| No corporate prayers | 27.36% |
| Requiring registration to attend worship | 22.19% |
| No communion | 15.81% |
| Offering extra services | 11.85% |
| Extra time between multiple services | 8.81% |
| Other | 13.37% |
| None | 1.52% |

Impact on Churches: Online Worship



How Widespread Is Online Worship During the Pandemic?

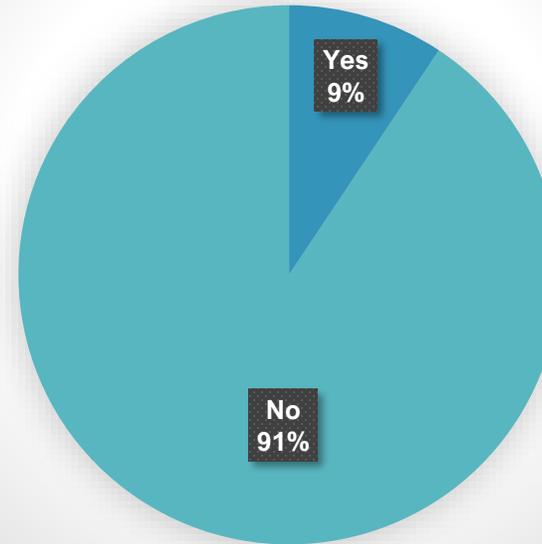
Is your church holding online worship during the
COVID-19 pandemic?



- ◇ 60.5% of churches worshipping online reported sharing live worship, while 39.5% reported sharing pre-recorded worship

Online Worship: Before and since COVID-19

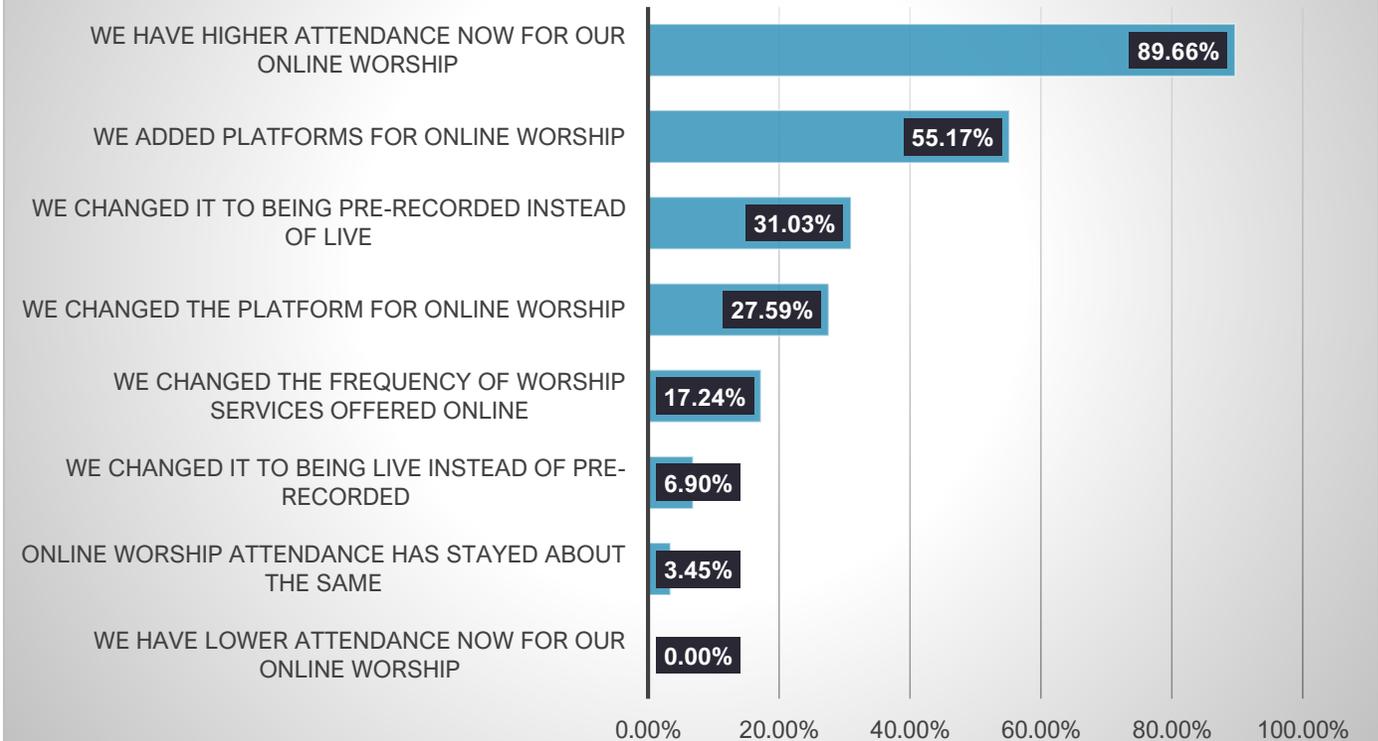
Did your church worship online before the
COVID-19 crisis?



- ◇ Only 9% of churches reported worshipping online before the COVID-19 crisis, compared to 86% reporting holding worship online as a result of the pandemic
- ◇ This represents an 855.6% increase in online worship

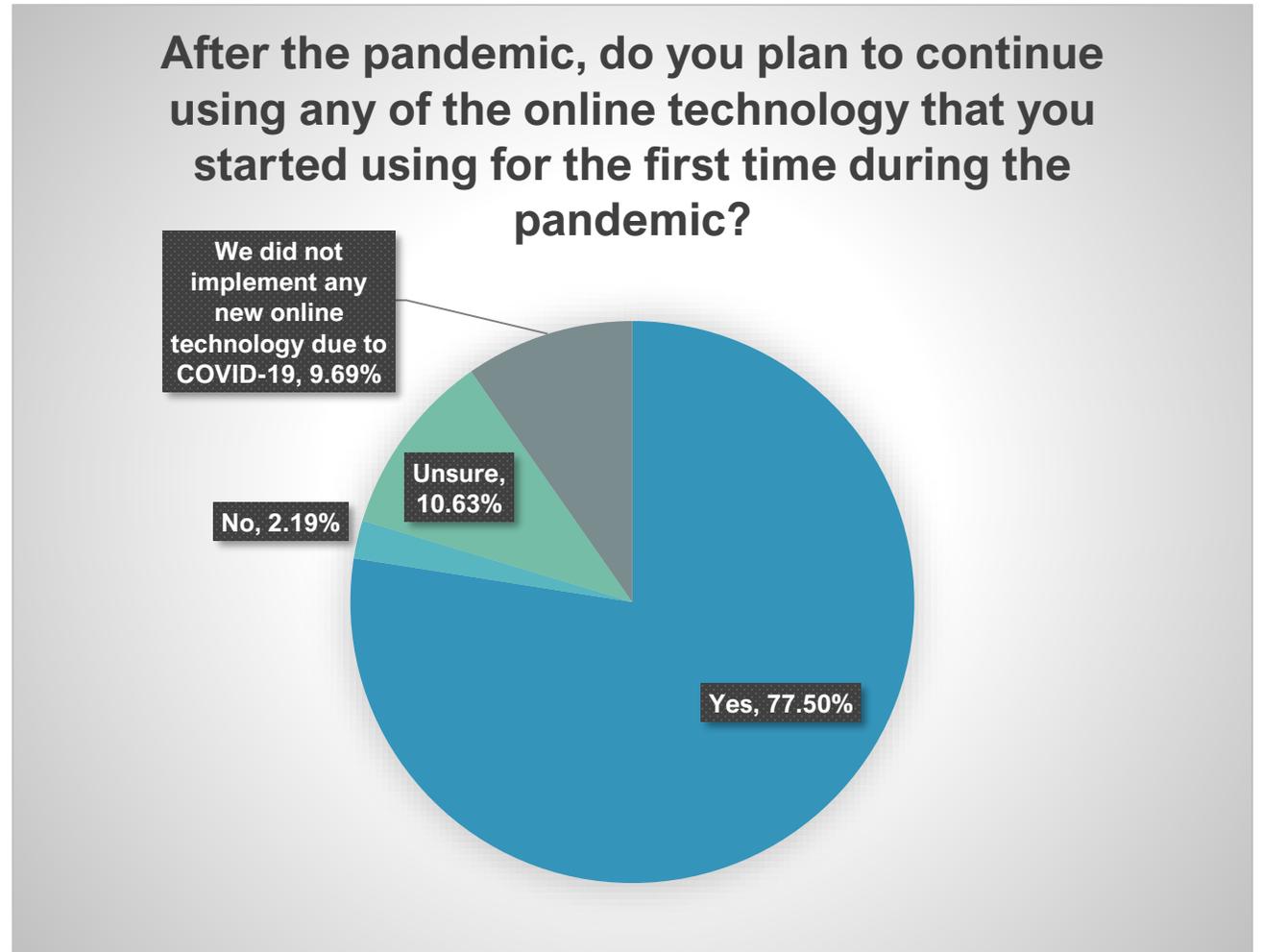
Online Worship: Churches Worshipping Online Pre- Pandemic

For churches already worshipping online before the pandemic, how has their online worship changed since the COVID-19 crisis?



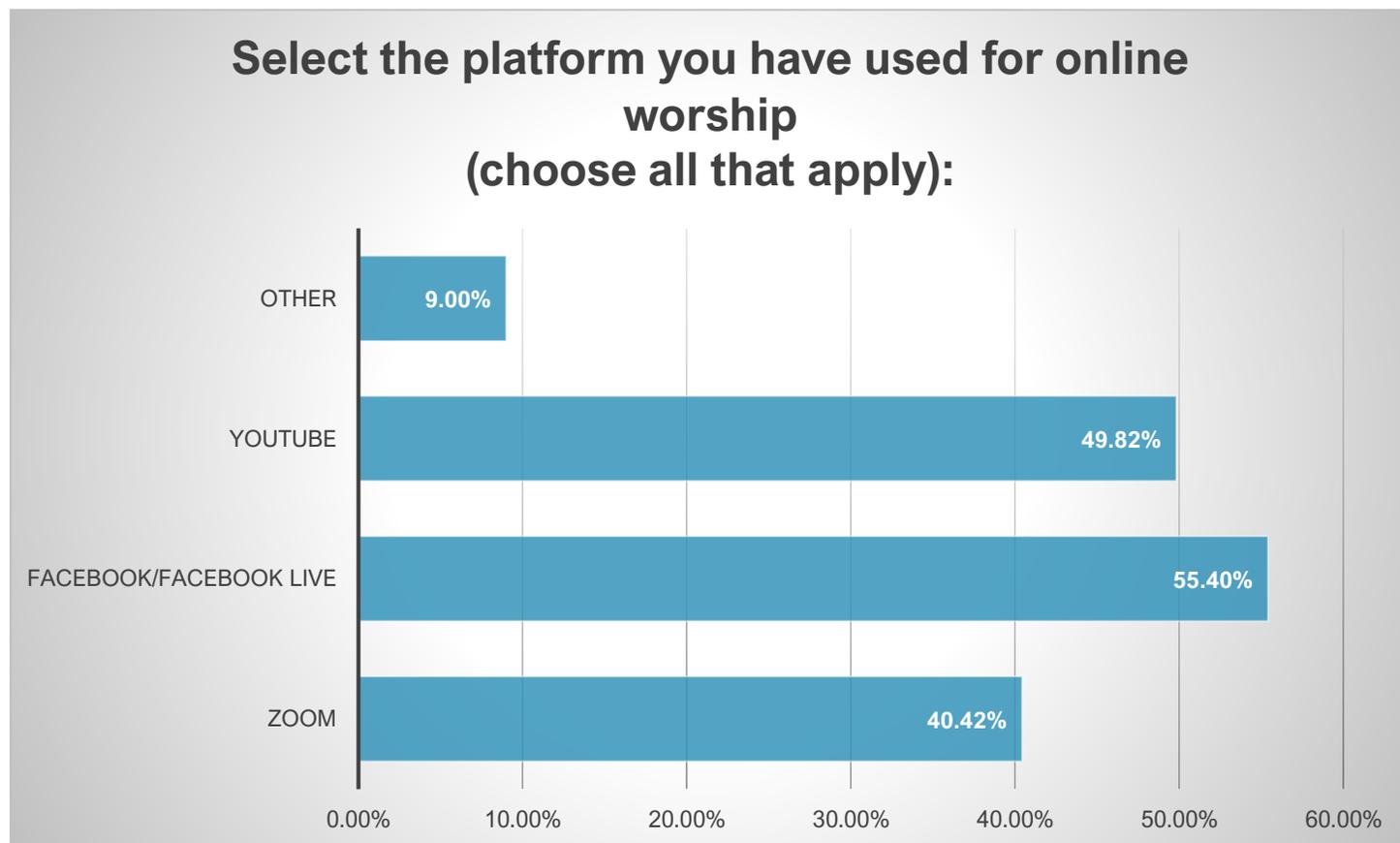
- ◇ More than half the churches who were already worshipping online before the pandemic reported having higher worship attendance and using additional platforms for online worship compared to before the pandemic

Technology Adoption



- ◇ 77.5% of churches reported they were planning to continue using technology they adopted during the pandemic, which suggests that some of the new ways of gathering and interacting as a congregation will become a regular feature of church life beyond the pandemic

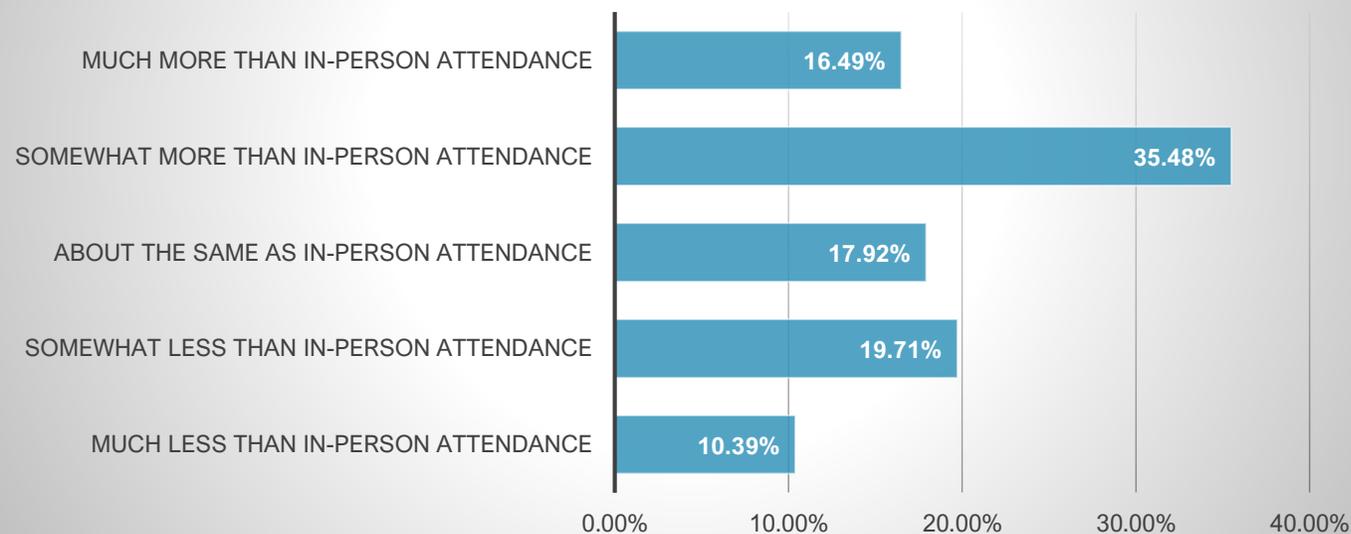
Online Worship Platforms



- ◇ 39% of churches worshipping online reported using at least two of the platforms named above
- ◇ 8.7% reported using all three

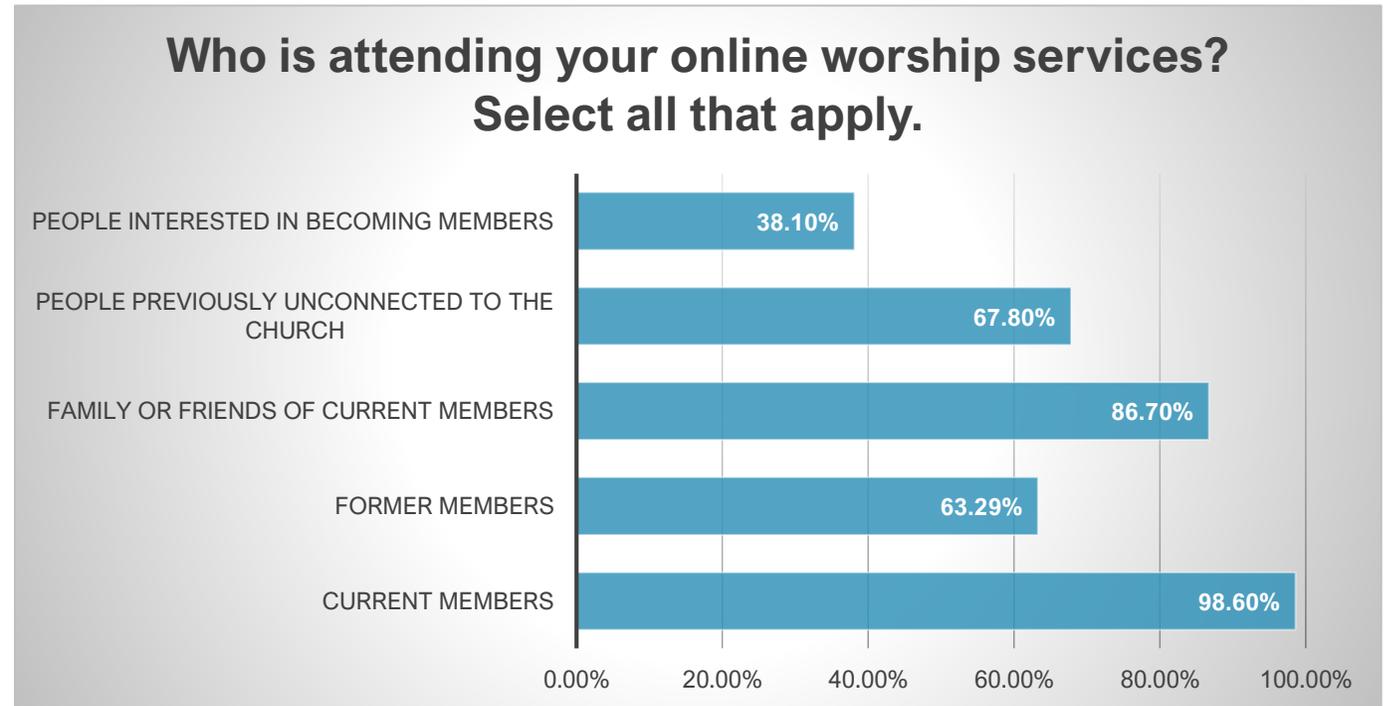
Online Worship Attendance

Compared to your in-person worship attendance before the COVID-19 crisis, how would you describe your online worship attendance?



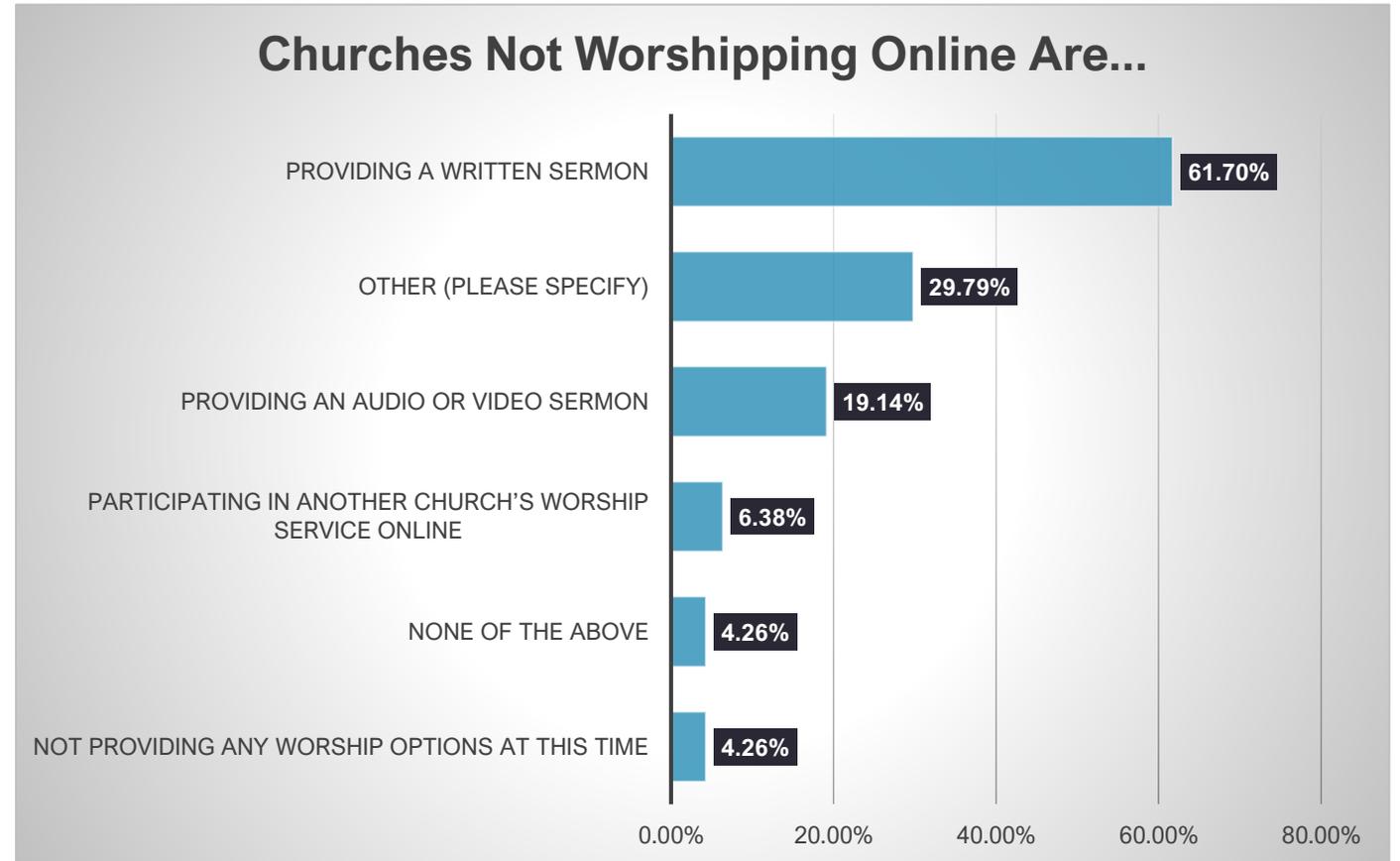
- ◇ Some of the differences between in-person and online worship attendance stem from the different ways people engage with online worship compared to in-person worship as well as the different ways online worship attendance is counted. For example, a service on YouTube can be accessed indefinitely, multiple people can watch a service on one screen, the way views are counted varies among platforms, etc.
- ◇ Due to these differences, online and in-person worship numbers should always be measured separately

Who Attends Online Worship?



- ◇ 69.1% of congregations are measuring their online worship attendance
- ◇ CARDD will be offering guidelines as part of 2021 Yearbook reporting on how to measure online worship attendance across the most commonly used platforms
- ◇ While the Data Hub is not equipped to collect online worship attendance, this data will be collected in the Yearbook Supplemental Survey

Alternatives to Online Worship



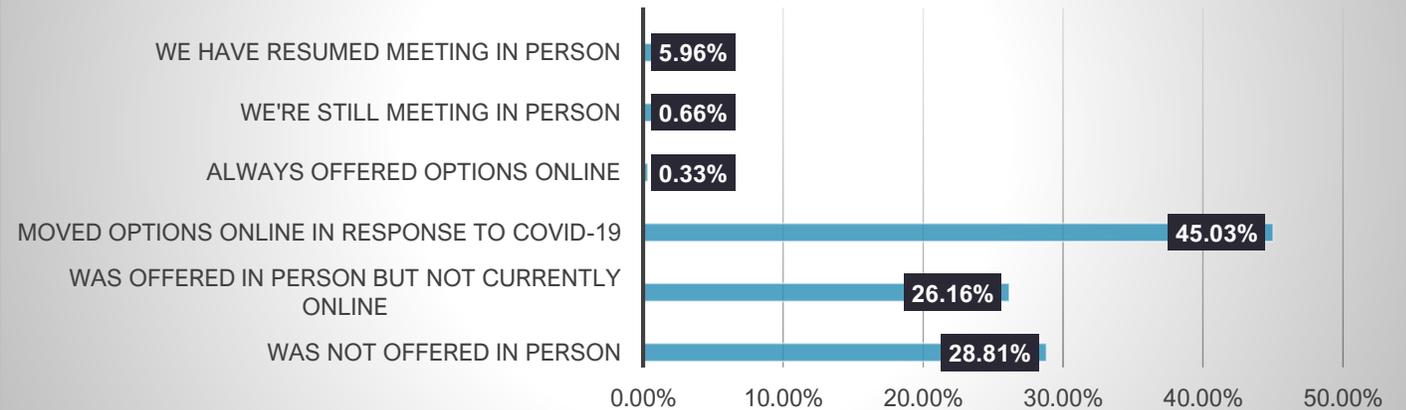
- ◇ Churches not currently worshipping in-person or online are finding creative ways to stay engaged with the congregation
- ◇ Fewer than 5% of churches not worshipping in-person or online reported that they are not currently providing any worship options

Impact on
Churches:
Gathering
and Giving

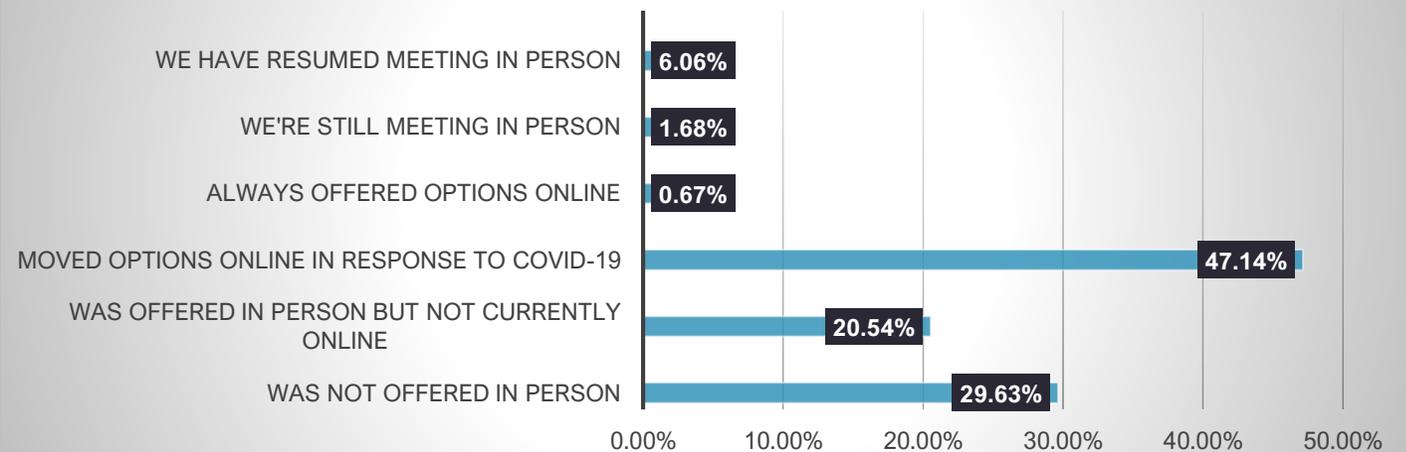


Changes in Ministry Gatherings: Christian Education

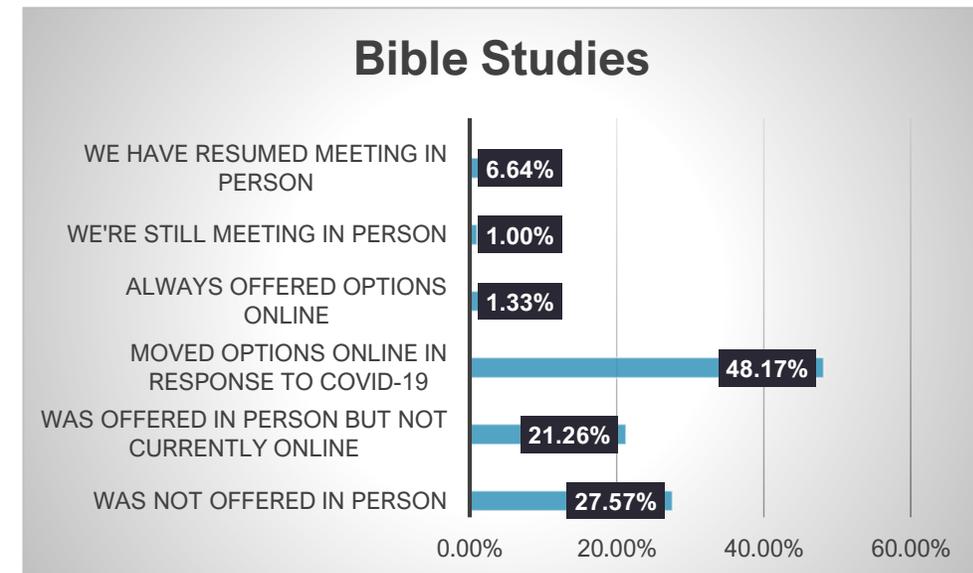
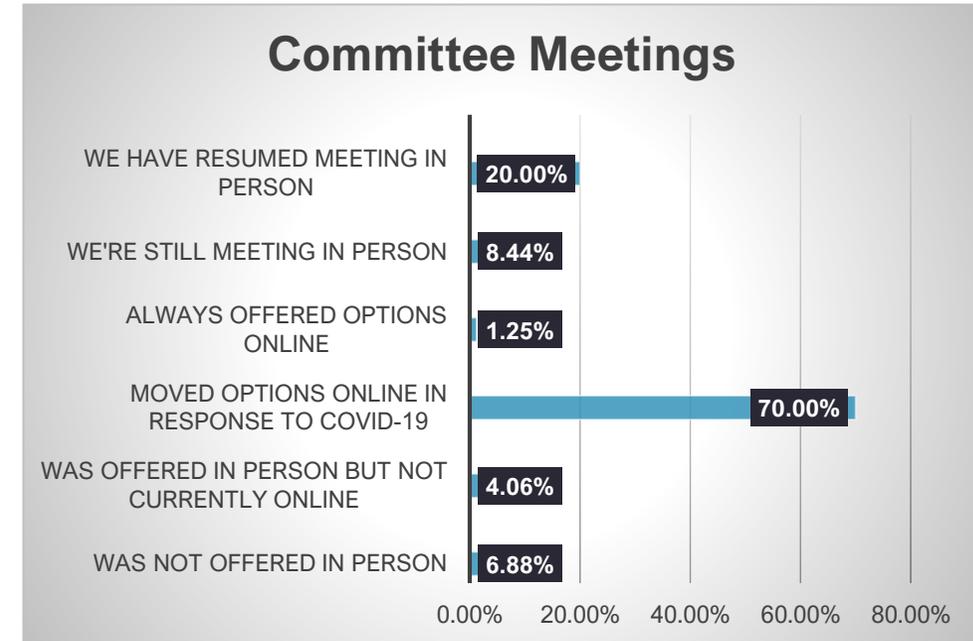
Christian Education – Youth (17 and younger)



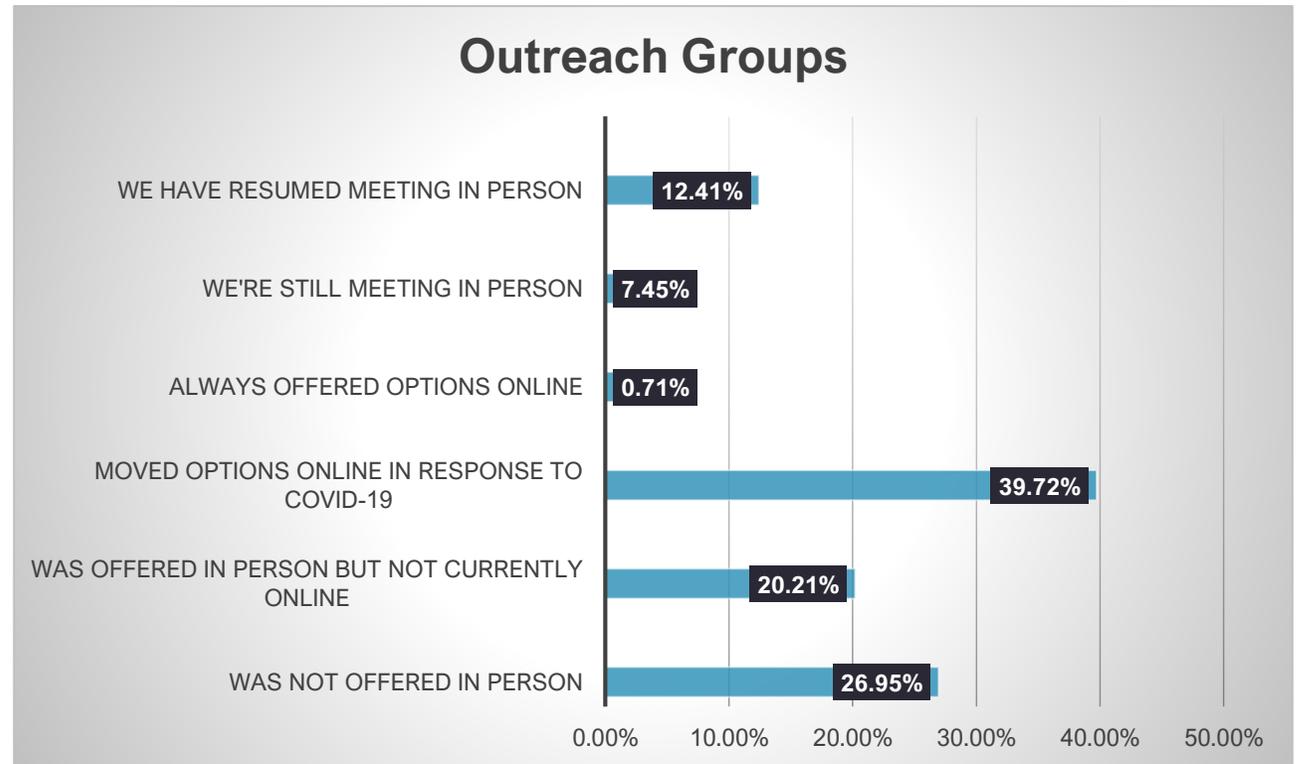
Christian Education – Adult (18 and older)



Changes in Ministry Gatherings: Committee Meetings and Bible Studies



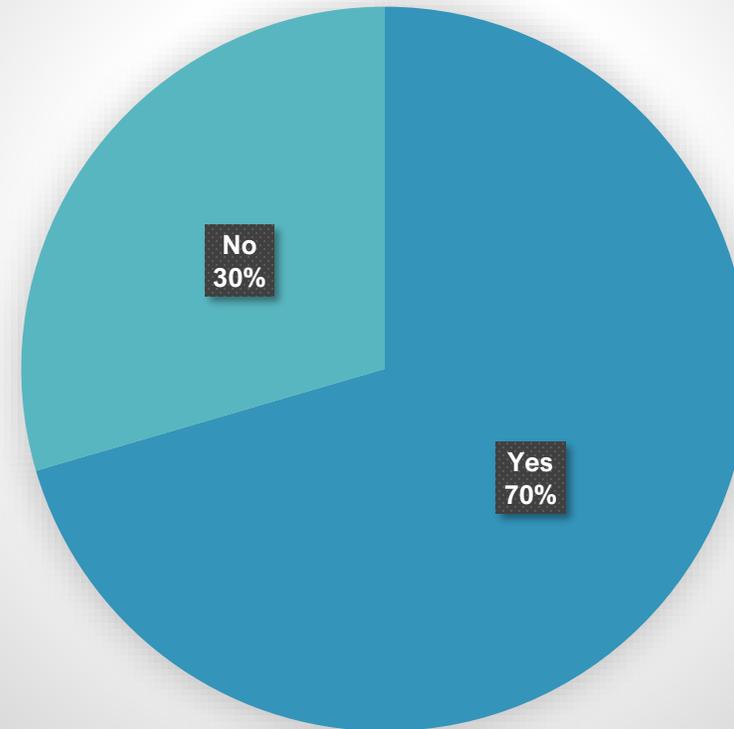
Changes in Ministry Gatherings: Outreach Groups



- ◆ The most frequently reported change to how various groups/ministries have gathered since the pandemic has been that they have moved online

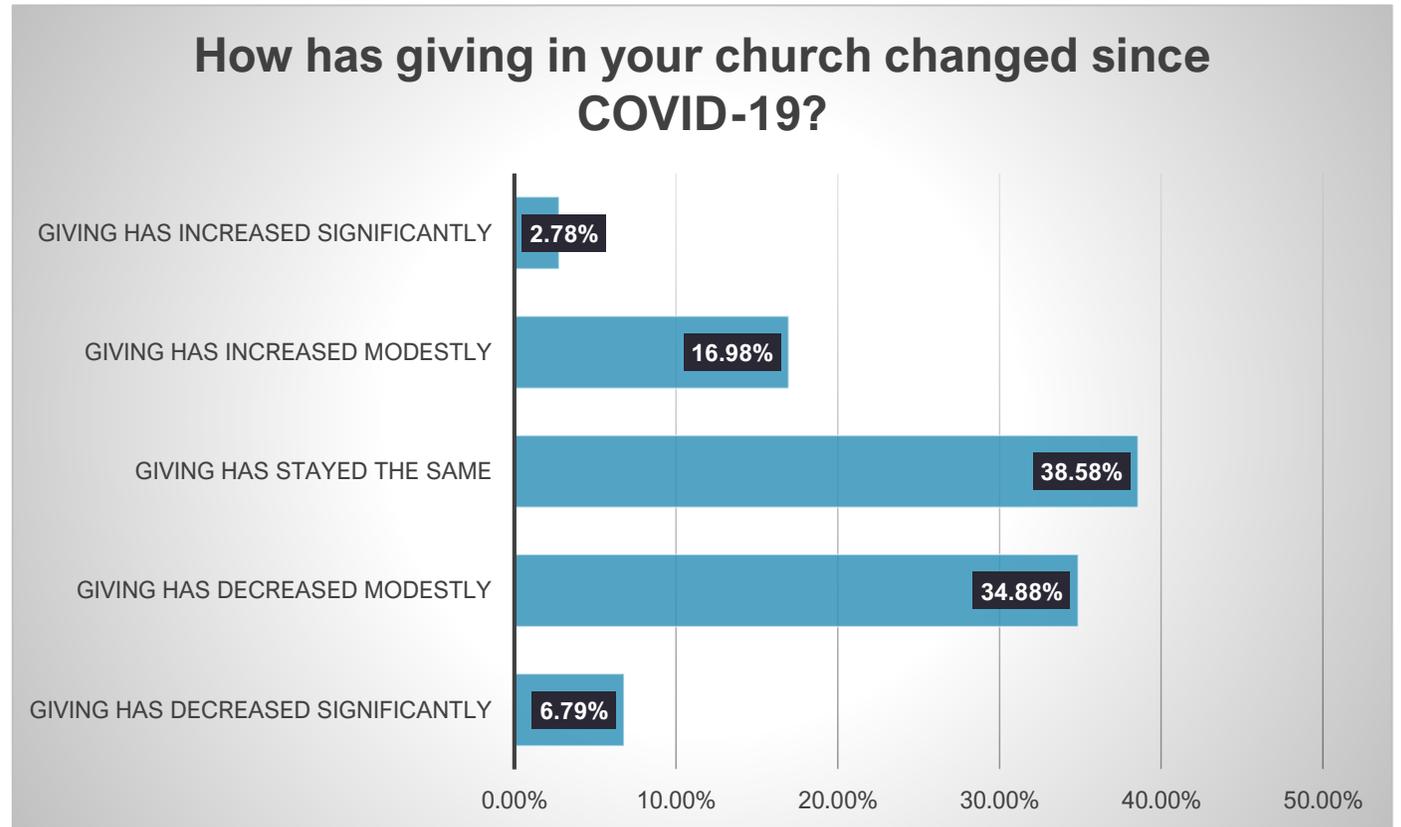
Changes in Outreach

Has your congregation continued or expanded your outreach, community service, or social justice work?



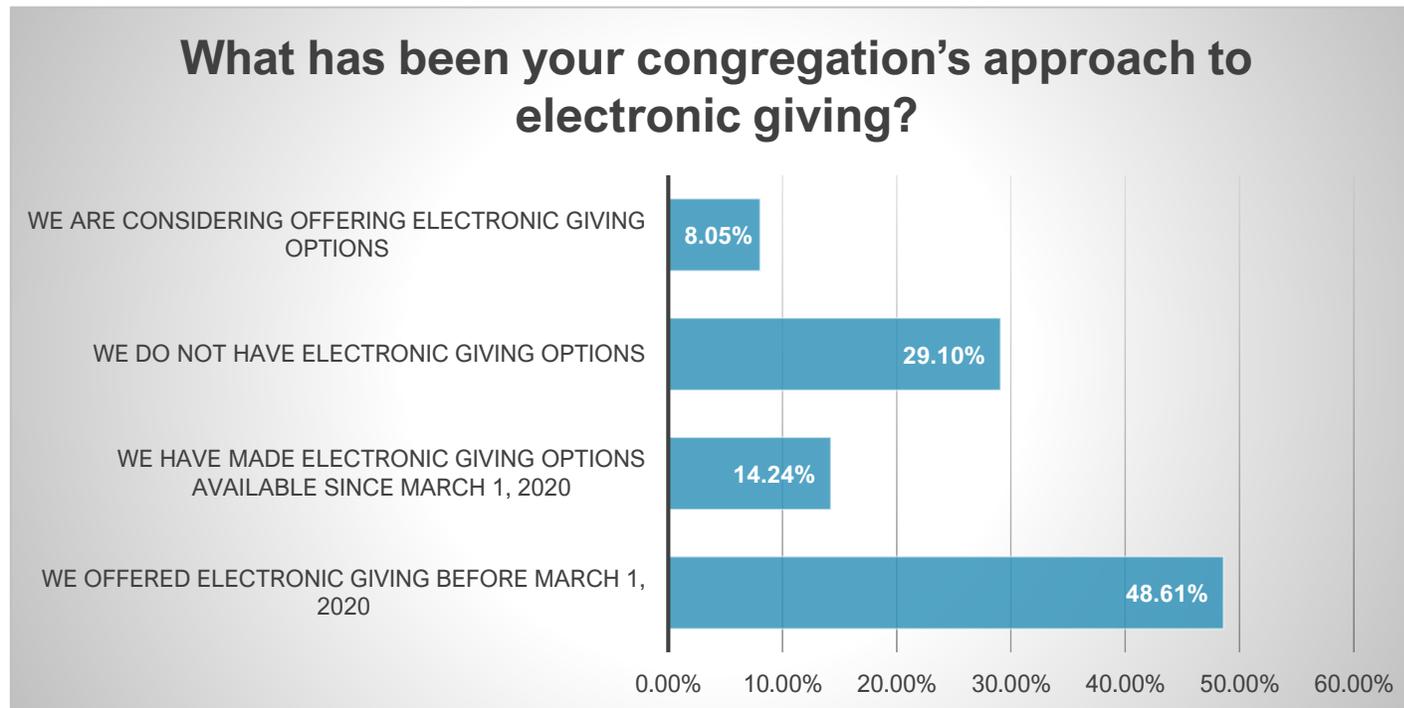
- ◆ Our churches are still active and engaged with their communities in the midst of the pandemic, with 70% of respondents reporting that their congregation has continued or expanded their outreach, community service, or social justice work

Changes to Giving



- ◇ 41.7% of churches have reported a decline in giving
- ◇ 19.8% of churches have reported an increase in giving
- ◇ 38.6% of churches have reported that giving has stayed the same

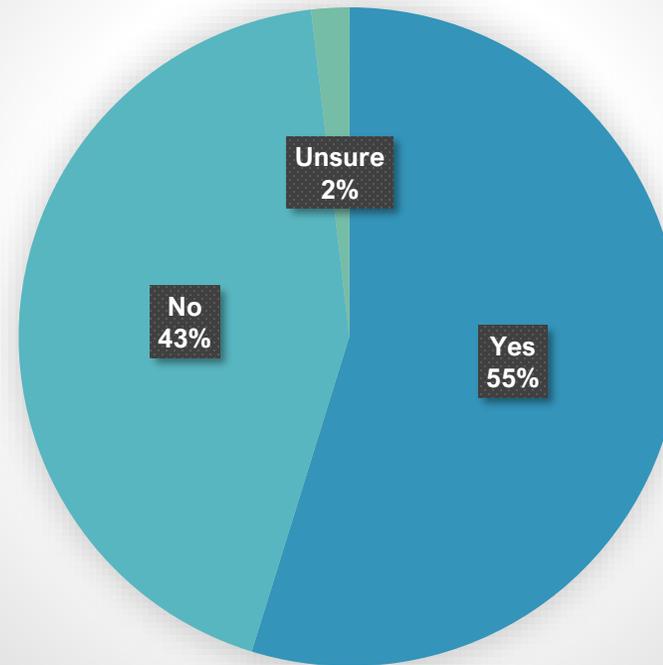
Electronic Giving Approaches



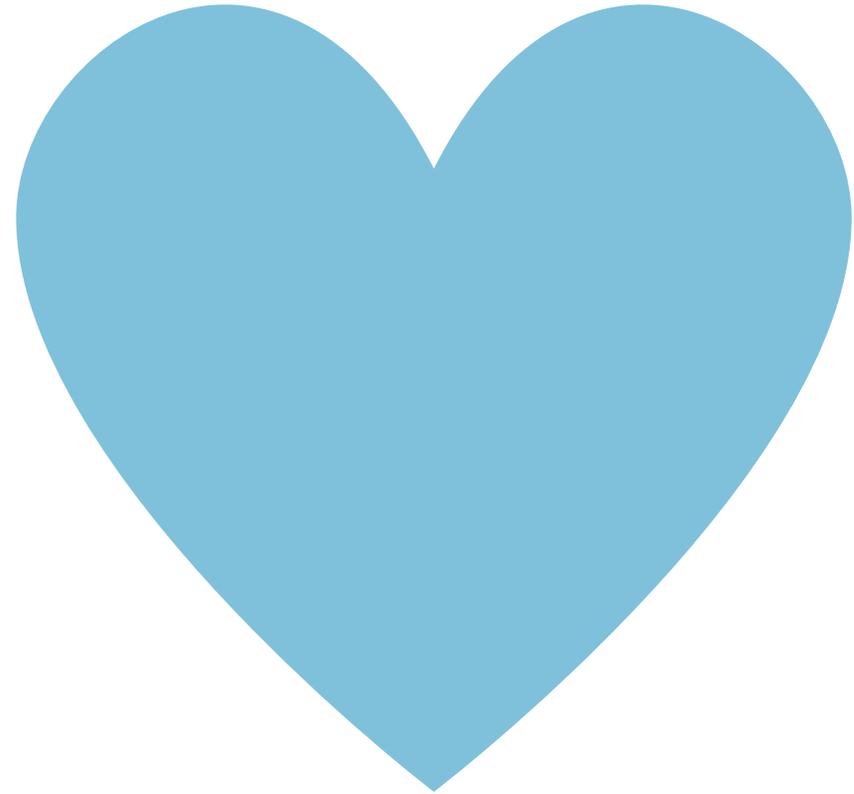
- ◆ Either before or since the pandemic, 62.9% of congregations offer electronic giving options

Payroll Protection

Did your congregation apply for the Payroll Protection Plan from the SBA?



Impact on
Clergy:
Decision-
Making



Information to Guide Decision- Making

What resources are you using to guide your decision-making process around gathering in-person for worship? (Choose all that apply)

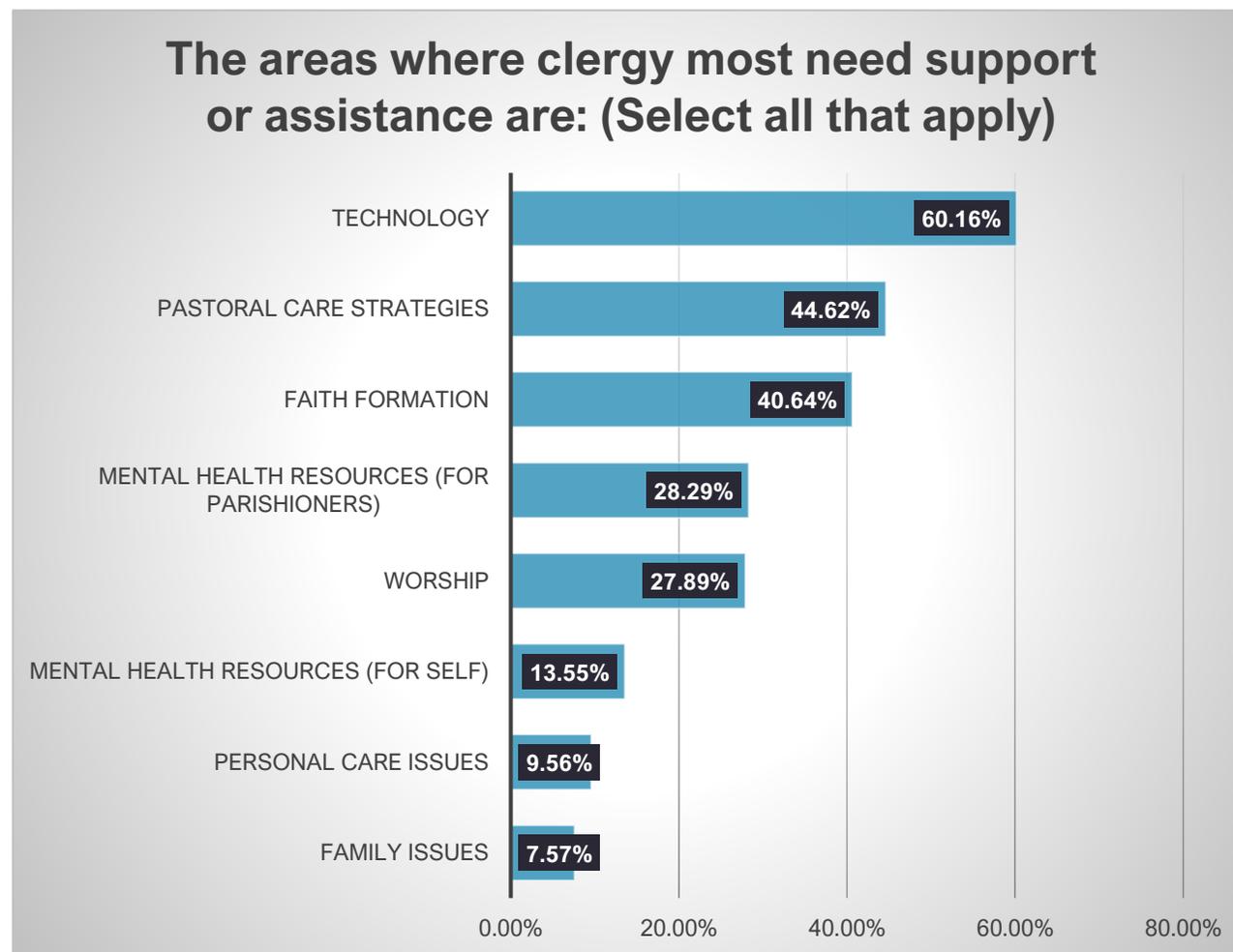
| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| The Conference | 77.37% |
| The CDC | 73.09% |
| State health departments | 69.72% |
| Local health departments | 66.06% |
| State officials | 63.30% |
| Local officials | 46.48% |
| The National Setting | 33.33% |
| The World Health Organization (WHO) | 26.30% |
| Other (please specify) | 21.41% |
| Federal officials | 12.84% |
| None | 0.61% |

- ◆ Clergy most commonly reported relying on their Conference, the CDC, and state and local health departments to guide their decision-making around in-person worship

Impact on
Clergy:
Clergy
Support

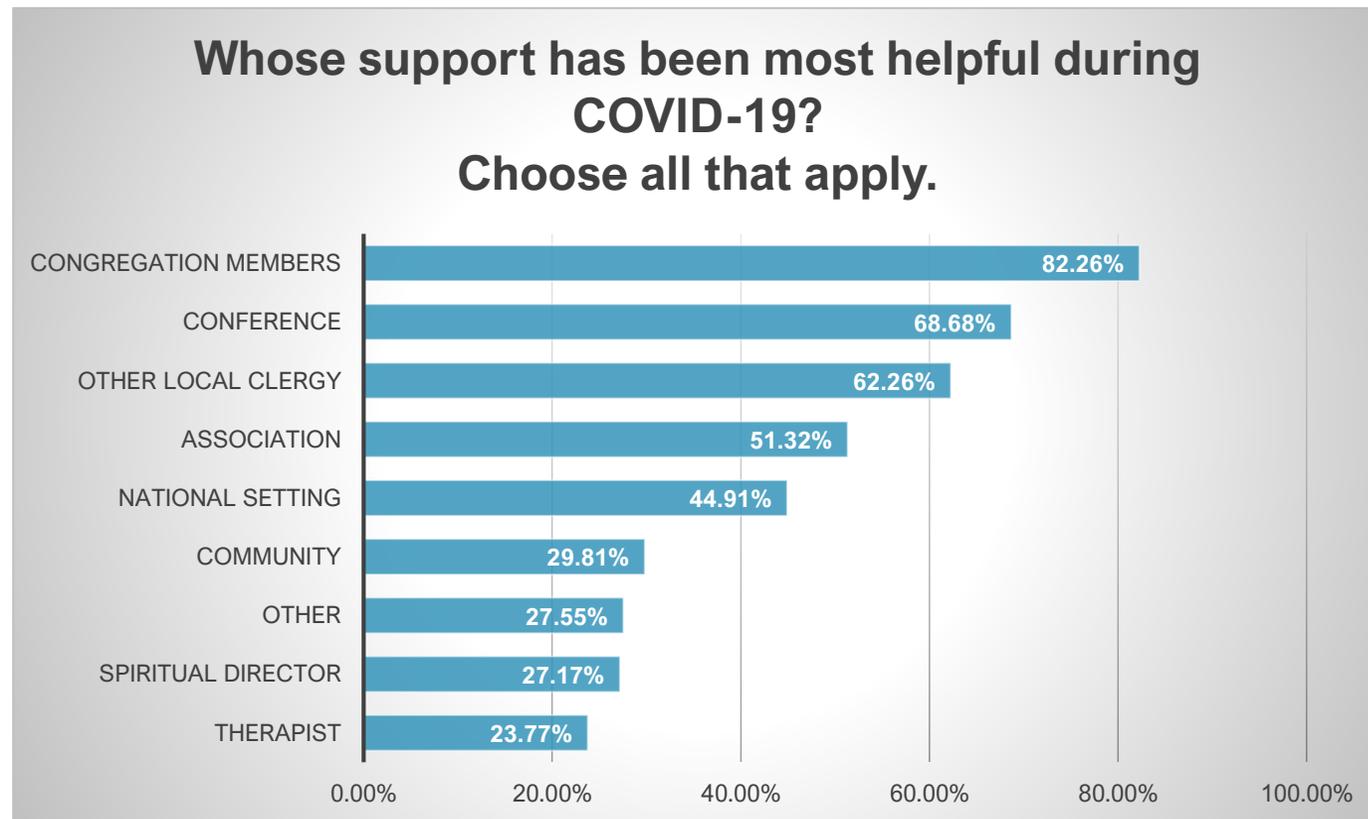


Where Clergy Need Assistance



- ◆ Clergy identified technology as the area where they need the most support or assistance during the pandemic

Most Helpful Support for Clergy

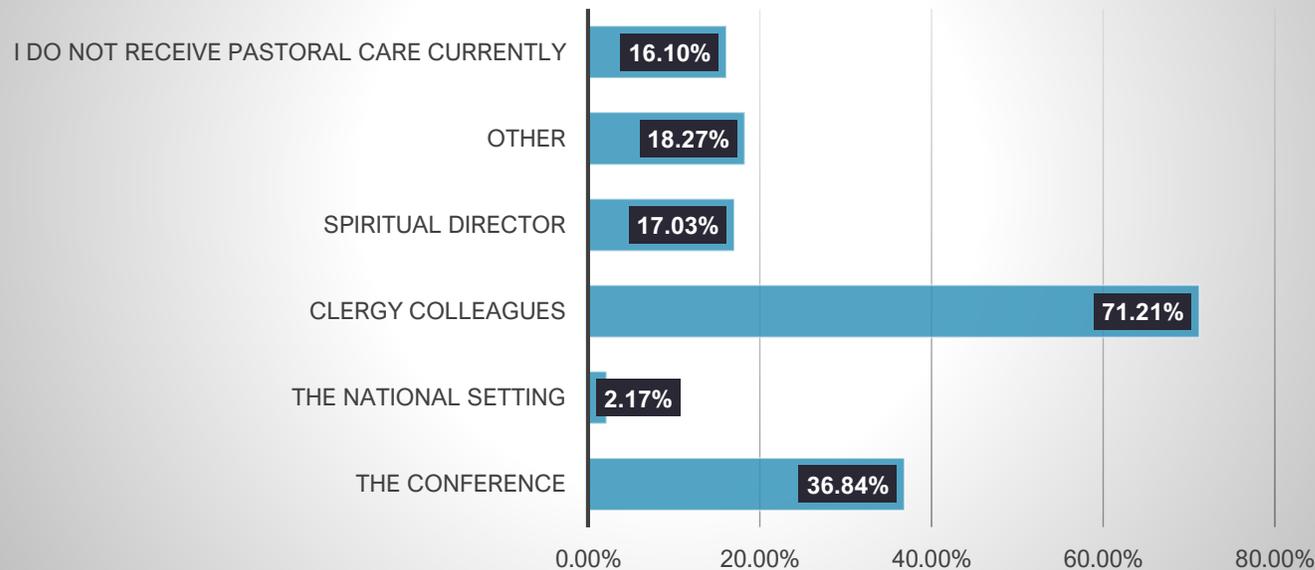


- ◆ Clergy reported receiving the most helpful support during the pandemic from their congregation members, followed by their Conference and other local clergy.

Pastoral Care for Clergy

Where do you, as clergy, receive pastoral care currently?

Choose all that apply.



- ◇ By far, the most common source of pastoral care during the pandemic for clergy responding to this survey was clergy colleagues, whether UCC or in another faith community

Concluding Thoughts

- ◆ Our churches have had to adapt to ongoing change while also continuing to be the church in new and vibrant ways
- ◆ The rapid shift toward online worship and ministry gatherings has been one of the most pronounced impacts of COVID-19
- ◆ Given the central role that technology has served across many churches during the pandemic, this is not surprisingly the area where clergy identify as needing the most assistance

Forthcoming Reporting

Future reporting will include:

- ◇ Analyses of trends by
 - ◇ Conference/Geography
 - ◇ Church Size
 - ◇ Church setting (from rural to urban)
- ◇ Follow-up surveys to understand how churches continue to adapt to the pandemic over time

Thank you to our clergy who have taken the time to share their experiences, allowing us to produce this and future reports for the United Church of Christ.

We are grateful for all that you do!

The Center for Analytics,
Research & Development, and Data
(CARD D)

www.ucc.org/research