

changing church

AUTUMN SURVEY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Our second survey of the UK evangelical church during the coronavirus pandemic shows that churches are continuing to innovate to meet the needs of those who attend as well as those in their community. Between the 1 and the 12 October we received responses from more than 1,000 individuals and in excess of 450 church leaders, giving us a fuller picture of how churches are navigating the continually changing landscape, evolving laws and guidance, and the challenge of local and regional lockdowns.

We are releasing the survey results in batches. This report looks at some of the high-level headlines from across the survey. The next report will take a deep dive into church function and finance. That will be followed by a report on mission, evangelism, discipleship, and community engagement. Finally, we will look at the future of the church and release all the remaining data.

Church buildings have generally been able to reopen, but there are significant challenges to running blended services – combining in-person and digital content. Encouragingly, we have found that attendance at church services and small group gatherings over the past month is slightly higher than before COVID-19, with this increase most obvious among 18-24 year olds. The majority of churches (60%) are meeting together in person every week for primary services, and almost all individual respondents (99.8%) have been to either an online or in-person church service in the last month.

Christians remain committed to sharing their faith, with individuals having spoken to an average of six non-Christians about their faith in the last three months. The main barrier to everyday evangelism has been people not having significant relationships with people who are not Christians. Overall, church leaders haven't seen any decrease in the number of people responding to Jesus since before COVID-19, but there have been changes in different regions and depending on whether churches are gathering online or in person.

The guidelines and restrictions continue to create challenges for churches. Children's ministry is one of the most challenging areas, especially for smaller

churches. However, churches continue to engage in community transformation with large increases in churches helping to deliver food or medicine, a moderate increase in mental health work, and small decreases in most other areas of serving, but particularly schools support, debt counselling and homelessness.

When it comes to church finances, there is a mixed picture, with church leaders indicating that the amount they receive in donations has decreased, whilst the church attendee results showing a slight increase. There will be more on this in our next report released on Wednesday, 11 November.

We received:

- **451 valid responses** from church leaders
- **1,061 valid responses** from individuals

Approximately 60% of the church leaders represent churches that are members of the Evangelical Alliance. These churches represent a good spread in terms of denomination, location and size.

Just under half (46%) of individual respondents were members of the Evangelical Alliance and most (89%) met one of the following four criteria: they identify as evangelical, they are a member of the Evangelical Alliance, they attend an Evangelical Alliance member church, or they answer some theological questions in an evangelical way.

The research was conducted by the Evangelical Alliance in collaboration with Stewardship and in partnership with Eido Research.

As always, we hope these reports tell a story of what is currently happening, but more importantly, that they help our members and others to plan for the future. The church has changed how it operates, but not what it does.

We at the Evangelical Alliance will use the results to continue to resource you and raise your voice to the government and media.

Be blessed,

Peter Lynas, UK director

10 key points

1. Six in 10 churches are meeting for weekly in-person services

The majority of church leaders (60%) said they are meeting together as a church in person every week for primary services. A further 7% are meeting in person at least monthly.

84% of church leaders said they are still providing some form of online service at least monthly (43% live streaming services and 37% using Zoom or other video call software).

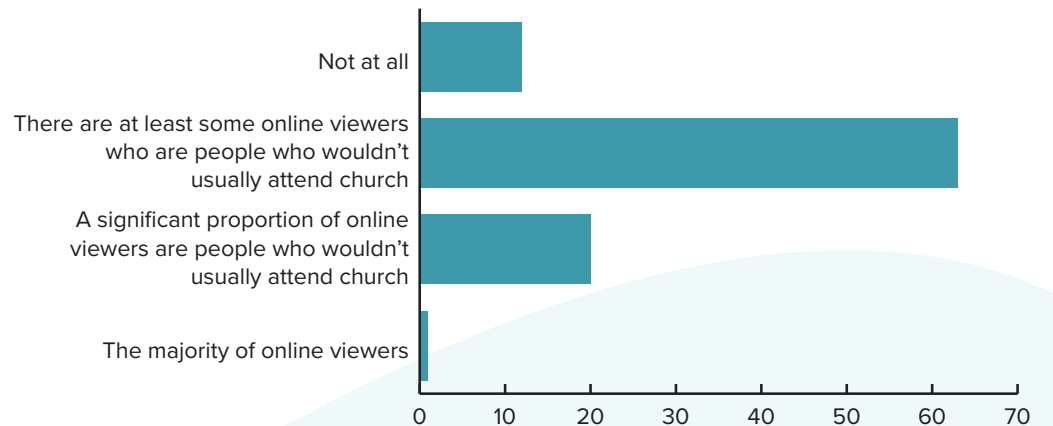
2. More respondents are attending church now than before COVID-19, especially amongst 18–24 year olds

99.8% of respondents have been to an online or in-person church service in the past month. Attendance at any church meeting is now higher than before COVID-19; on average respondents had been to eight meetings in the past month compared to 7.5 in an average month before the pandemic. The increase in attendance is most notable in the youngest age bracket, where 96% of those aged 18-24 had attended their home church online in the past month – higher than attendance at in-person gatherings before the crisis.

3. Nearly nine in 10 church leaders hosting online meetings were reaching new people

The vast majority (88%) of those who were hosting online meetings have found that they have attracted viewers who would not normally attend church services. One in five church leaders say that a significant proportion of those watching wouldn't usually attend.

To what extent are your online services being watched by people who wouldn't usually attend church?

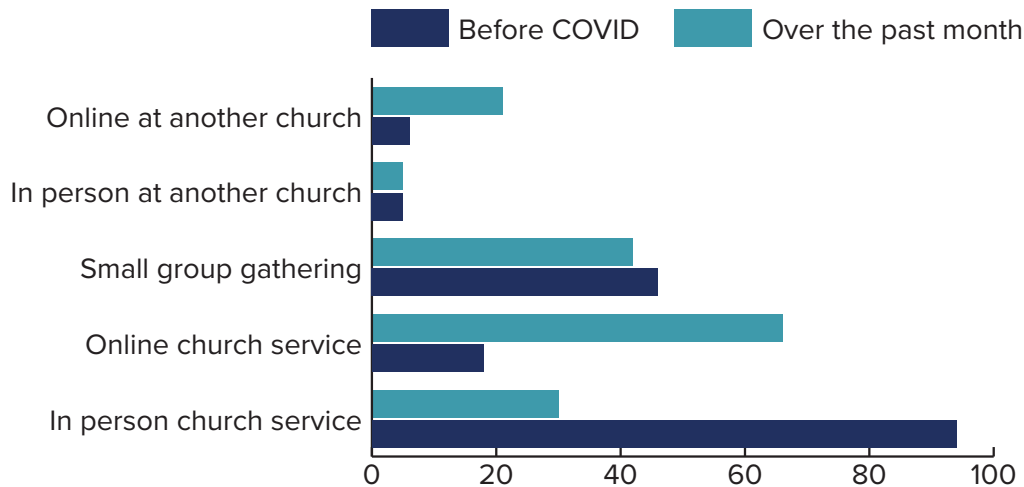


4. Most small groups are still taking place online

79% of church leaders said that they are gathering in small groups online. When the survey was taken 31% said they were meeting in church buildings and 14% in people's homes however, changing restrictions and guidelines will likely have impacted this more recently.

42% of individuals said that they had, in the past month, attended small group meetings weekly. This is slightly lower than before COVID-19 (46%).

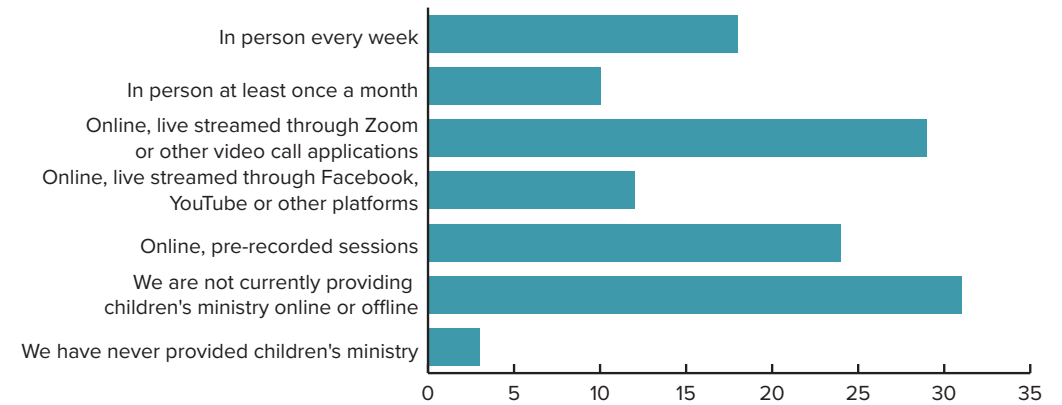
Percentage of individuals attending different services at least weekly (Comparison between before COVID-19 and over the past month)



5. Less than one in five churches running in-person children's work weekly

Only 18% of church leaders said that they are running children's ministry in person on a weekly basis – a further 10% said they were doing so monthly. This remains one of the most significant areas of hesitancy for churches, with three in 10 churches not currently providing any activity for children.

How churches are gathering for children's ministry (according to leaders)

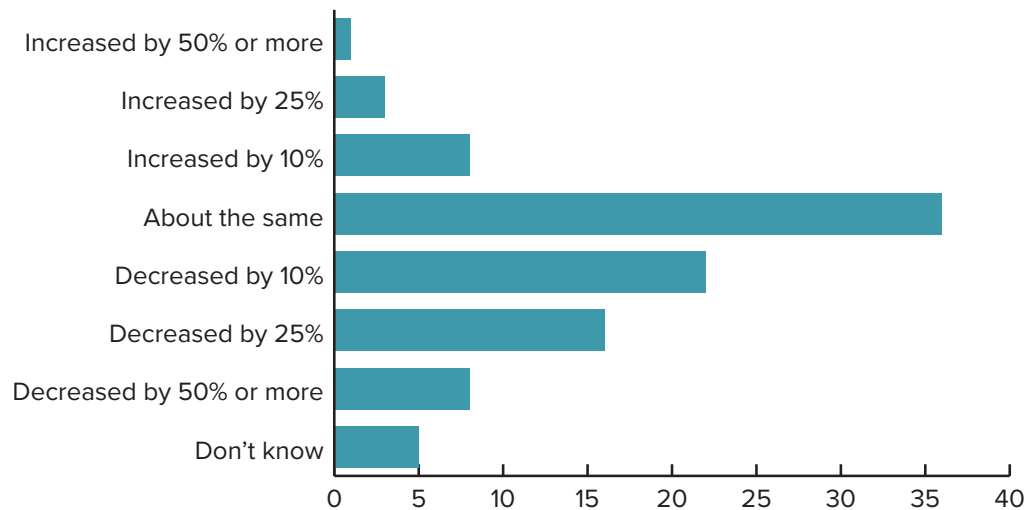


6. Nearly half of churches are seeing reduced donations

46% of churches reported to us that donations were down over the past three months compared to what was typical before COVID-19, and 36% said they had remained the same.

Church leaders in Northern Ireland and Scotland have been hit the hardest, with the average church experiencing a 25% decrease in donations.

Change in donations (past three months compared to typical pre-COVID-19)



7. Most people attending church have maintained or increased their giving

The majority of individuals (72%) indicated that their giving has remained the same since the start of COVID-19, and 18% have increased their giving.

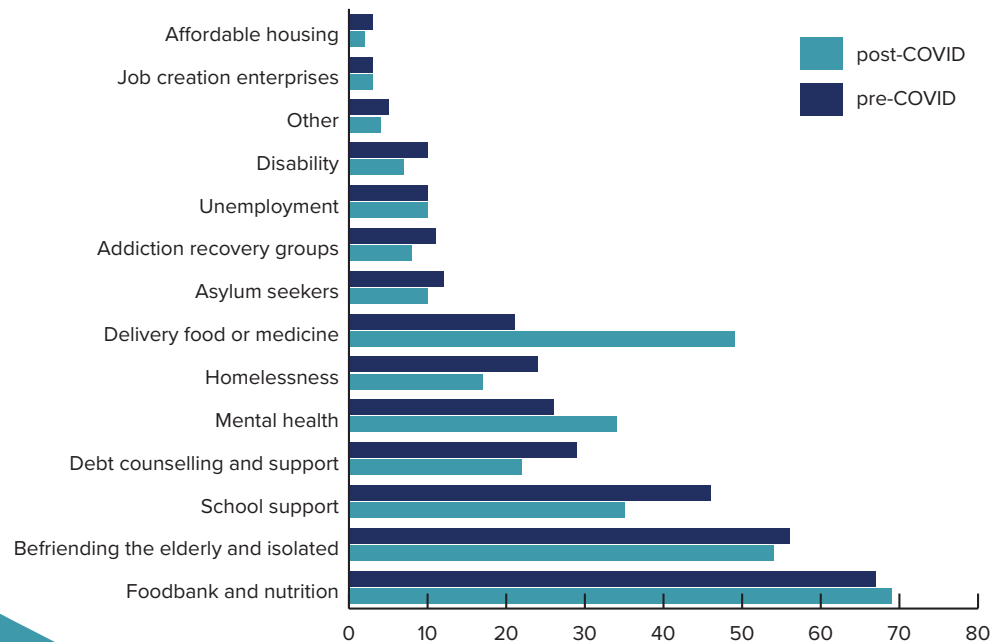
On average, church leaders receive 82% of their congregational giving via online giving or direct debit. Church leaders said 7% of their donations are coming via cheques and 12% of giving is through cash in a Sunday collection. There is a relatively strong correlation between churches who receive more of their donations in person and those who have experienced the largest decreases.

8. Churches are committed to supporting their communities

Church leaders indicated that as a congregation they are continuing to respond to the needs they are seeing in their local communities; 49% of churches are involved in food and medicine delivery and 54% are befriending the elderly and isolated.

Almost a third of individuals had volunteered time to help their local community, and a similar proportion (32%) had donated money specifically to this. Likewise, 33% had provided support for the vulnerable and elderly, and only one in seven said they were not in a position to help.

Activities churches were involved with pre- and post-COVID



9. In the last three months each Christian talked to six non-Christians about their faith

On average, individuals suggested that they have spoken to six non-Christians about their Christian faith in the last three months. However, 57% of individual respondents had not invited a non-Christian to a church-related activity or meeting (including social events). Those who had invited someone to an activity or event had, on average, spoken to 2.4 more people about their faith.

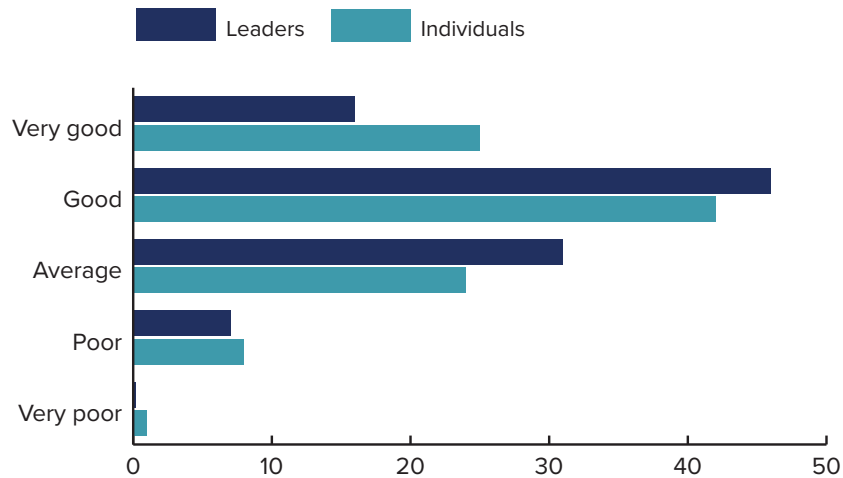
The biggest barrier to sharing faith was the lack of relationships: 44% felt that they didn't have enough significant relationships with people who are not Christians.



10. Almost two thirds of respondents say their wellbeing is good or very good

Most church leaders (62%) and individuals (67%) completing the survey felt they had average or above average wellbeing despite the current pandemic. However, amongst leaders, those who described their emotional wellbeing as good or very good had dropped by about 10% from our survey of church and organisation leaders conducted in May.

Emotional wellbeing of leaders and individuals



Questions for reflection

1. Children's ministry is a challenging area for churches, in what ways could you help your church meet this need at the current time?
2. The data suggests that attendance at church services and small group gatherings over the past month is slightly higher than before COVID-19, how does this fit with your own experience?
3. On average, individuals have spoken to six non-Christians about their Christian faith in the last three months. Who are the six non-Christians you could be praying for over the next three months, that they would become disciples of Jesus?



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