

COVID-19

A REVIEW SIX MONTHS INTO THE PANDEMIC

OCTOBER 2020



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A note to church leaders

The survey's questions focused on health and safety guidelines that were known at the time that the survey was being developed. These guidelines continue to change as the CDC and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) increase in their knowledge and understanding of COVID-19.

You were asked what needs to happen before you can open the church property for worship. One question focused on cleaning the facility, plans to sanitize areas including the restrooms, and identifying those who prepare and maintain the facility (staff, members, or commercial cleaning company) in order to reduce the spread of the virus from surface contamination. This question was based on what was known at the time that the survey was written and would not be included if the survey was being written today. The CDC and NIH now focus on the airborne transmission of the virus rather than surface contamination.

In preparing to bring members and visitors in doors for worship, the CDC offers these guidelines:

1. Check the building's mechanical and life safety equipment
2. Check that the ventilation systems are working properly
3. Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible
4. Inspect water fountains, ice machines, and sink facets

For more detail on these and other CDC guidelines, visit the CDC's Information for Office Buildings page as there is not a church specific page:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/office-buildings.html>

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Six months into the pandemic, what is happening in PC(USA) congregations?

This is the question that is on the mind of many Presbyterian leaders today. Leaders want to know how the local church is faring. Have members become ill; have any died? What is happening with worship? Is the church continuing to meet?

In April, this year a survey was sent to congregations asking about their immediate response to the pandemic. Now as fall and winter are approaching, a new survey containing some of those same questions was sent in September. New questions ask about worship, finances, and the precautions that are being or will be taken as congregations meet for worship.

The survey was sent to 6380 congregations with email addresses on file with Research Services. A share link was posted on the website. A total of 1796 responses were received but not every respondent answered all questions. Mid-councils were not included in this survey.

- 47 Continued to hold in-person worship throughout the pandemic
- 892 Stopped in-person worship **BUT** have resumed in-person worship
- 695 Stopped in-person worship **AND** have not resumed in-person worship

Here is what they told us. 40% (662) report that someone in their congregation has or had COVID-19 with 148 congregations reporting losing members to COVID-19.

Many are limiting attendance for funerals, weddings, baptisms, if they are allowing them at all.

Most congregations are doing well to very well but 10% of the congregations are not doing very well at all. Some have seen the financial situation improve from the sudden decline in the spring. Even so, many have applied for Payroll Protection Plan grants or other loans. For those in greater financial stress, they are reducing staff, reducing mission funding, or considering one of these actions. About 50 are thinking about closing or merger.

Suddenly, churches are moving services online via Zoom, Facebook, and other platforms. This allows them to remain in contact with members, connect with those who are homebound, and to expand their reach.



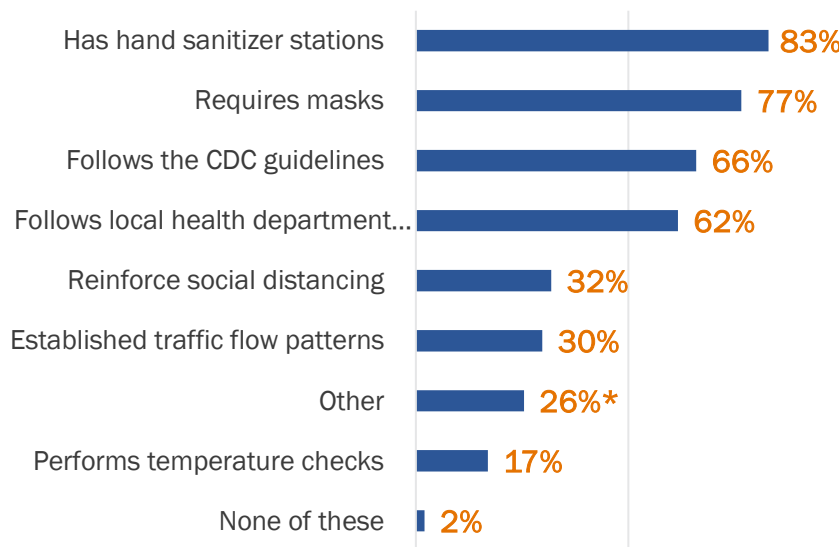
CHURCHES THAT **CONTINUED** IN-PERSON WORSHIP



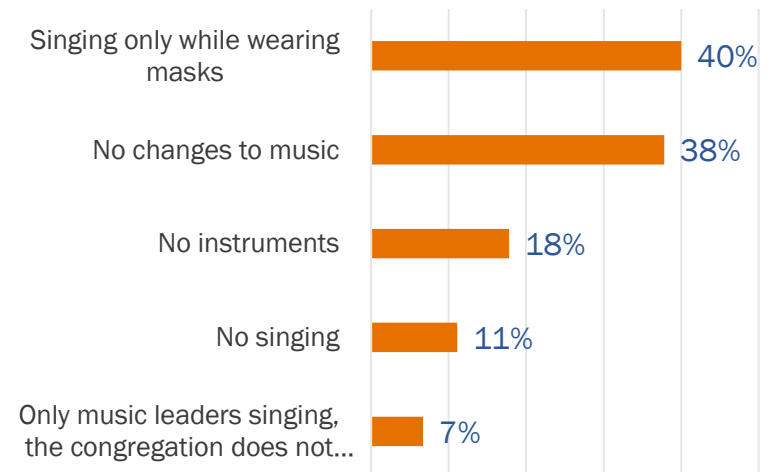
47 congregations have continued to hold in-person worship during this time of pandemic. However, many of these congregations made changes to promote the health and safety of their members and visitors.

Questions were asked about the specific changes that were implemented. This includes changes to music.

Health & Safety Promotion



Music



* While “Other” was chosen, the respondents did not list what other action they have taken.



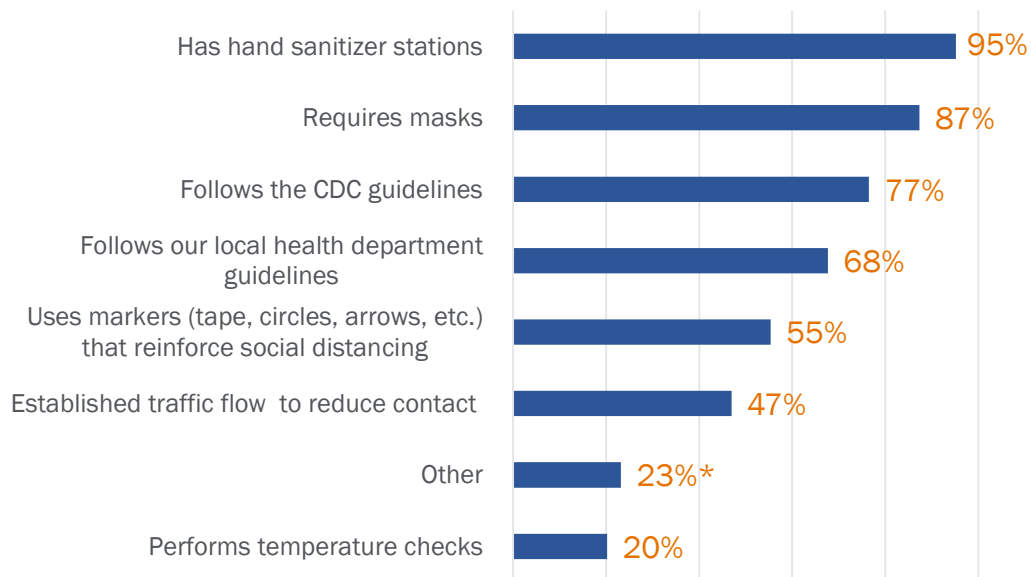
CHURCHES THAT **RESUMED** IN-PERSON WORSHIP



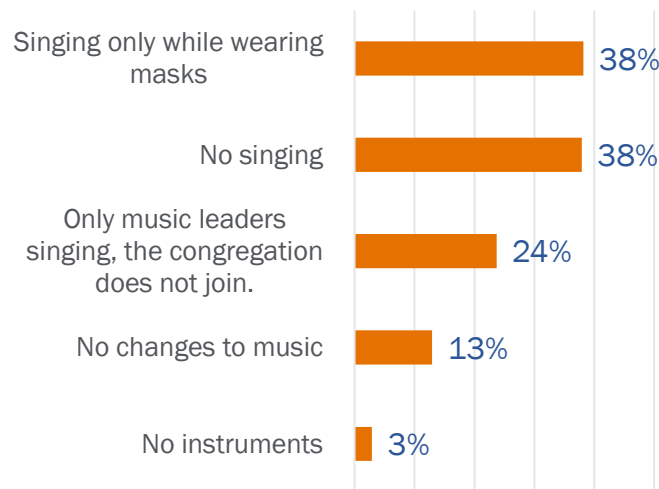
892 congregations have resumed in-person worship during this time of pandemic. It would have been good to ask these congregations how long in-person worship had been stopped but it was not.

They were asked what specific changes they have made to promote the health and safety of their members and visitors and about the changes in finances after resuming in-person worship.

Health & Safety Promotion



Music



* Air purifiers have been purchased, new filters for all HVAC systems, and no use of pew Bibles or hymnals. Current custodial staff and volunteers are addressing the cleaning of facilities.

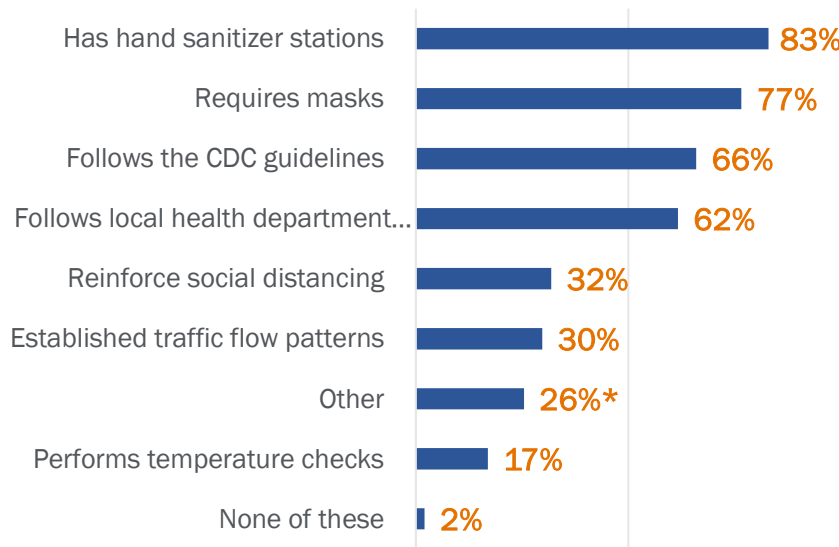


CHURCHES THAT **STOPPED** IN-PERSON WORSHIP

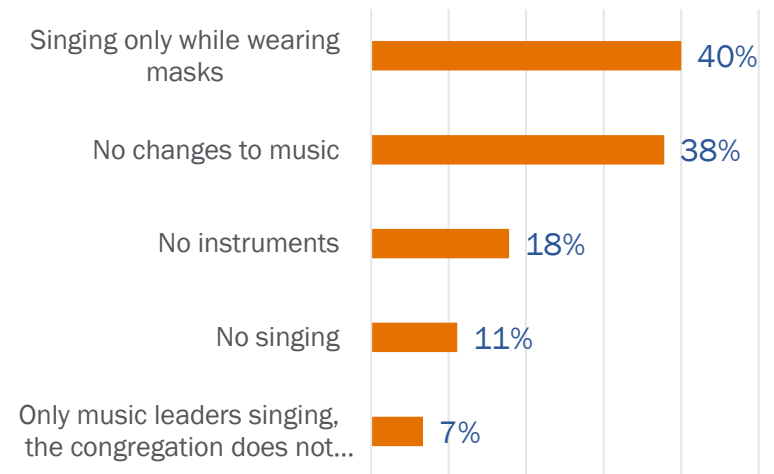


695 congregations have stopped and have not resumed in-person worship. Questions to these congregations ask what changes will be made to promote the health and safety of their members and visitors.

Health & Safety Promotion



Music



* While "Other" was chosen, the respondents did not list what other action they have taken.



WORSHIP



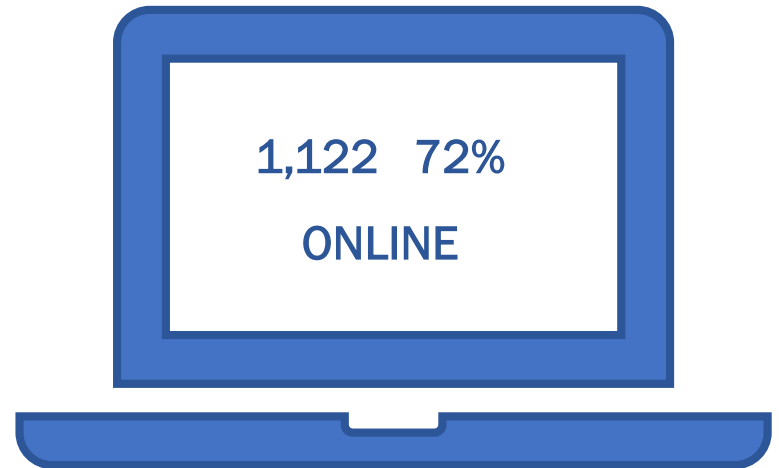
So, how and where are congregations gathering for worship?

Congregations were asked to tell us about their early months of worship during the pandemic. What are the biggest changes that have occurred with worship. For the first time, many congregations ventured into an online worship presence. Several discovered home-bound members who cheered once “*their church service*” was available to them via Facebook or other social media outlet. This

Where did you gather for worship?

34	2%	In-person at place away from the church property, i.e., city park, other outdoor space
91	6%	No service at all, not in-person or online.
287	19%	In-person inside the church building
291	19%	In-person worship on the parking lot, lawn, somewhere outside of the building
369	24%	Blend of online and in-person

N=1553



What online platforms are used for sharing worship?

Congregations seem to be using multiple platforms to engage their members and community in worship. Several use more than one platform. In addition to the list, churches are using radio, Microsoft TEAMS, recordings on their website, WebEx, email, and YouTube.

For congregations without an online platform, they are encouraging their members to join online worship with other Presbyterian churches.



616	47%	Facebook Live and related platforms
603	46%	You Tube
492	38%	Zoom
331	25%	Live-streaming
283	22%	Other
13	1%	Television
5	.4%	Go To Meeting

An important part of worship is worship planning. There are many available resources, but which ones are being used during this time of pandemic by Presbyterian leaders? Several reported using more than one.

More than 50 resources were named. **Here are the top three:**

- 695 51% Book of Common Worship (2018 or 1993)
- 596 44% Call to Worship, Glory to God (2103)
- 602 44% Presbyterian Hymnal (1990)



What about lectionaries?

- 938 68% Revised Common Lectionary
- 318 23% I do not use a lectionary
- 188 13% Other (themes, Feasting on the Word, Book of Confessions)
- 125 9% Narrative Lectionary

“When weary, I preached on some of my favorite verses.”

What worship services are offered, when, and for how long?

Congregations offer services both online and in-person. Services are held in parking lots, drive-in movie theaters, and public outdoor spaces. These services include daily prayer groups, daily devotions, and small group Bible studies.



Online services

1030 offer 1 worship service per week
113 offer 2 per week

999 (78%) are 31-60 minutes in length
157 (15%) are less than 30 minutes
131 (13%) are more than 60 minutes

In-person worship

978 offer in-person worship
Of these, 898 are once a week

870 (85%) are 31-60 minutes in length
64 (6%) are less than 30 minutes
90 (9%) are more than 60 minutes

Daily prayer

384 offer daily prayer
Of these, 215 have one service per week

491 congregations offer small groups

Tell us more about online worship.

How many services per week?

- 1030 offer 1 worship service per week
- 113 offer 2 per week

How long are the services?

- 999 (78%) are 31-60 minutes in length
- 157 (15%) are less than 30 minutes
- 131 (13%) are more than 60 minutes

Are the services the same as in-person worship?

- 730 (54%) identical to in-person service
- 507 (37%) different format
- 339 (25% more casual)

When are there new services each week?

- 1,159 (79%) Sunday morning
- 98 (7%) Wednesday evening
- 69 (5%) Sunday evening
- 35 (2%) Saturday evenings

Are the services live or pre-recorded?

- 778 (52%) are live worship services
- 363 (25%) are pre-recorded
- 351 (24%) offer **both** live and pre-recorded services



How do you know that I have been there?*

By counting the clicks:

- 325 check clicks at the end of the service
- 214 check clicks at the beginning of service
- 182 check clicks at the mid-point of service

Is there a dedicated time for stewardship?

- 518 (37%) always
- 197 (14%) usually
- 281 (20%) sometimes
- 409 (20%) no

* Responders could select multiple options

Tell us more about in-person worship.



How do you know that I have been there?

892 a person counts the number that are attending service

In-person worship

978 offer in-person worship
Of these, 898 are once a week

How long are the services?

870 (85%) are 31-60 minutes in length
64 (6%) are less than 30 minutes
90 (9%) are more than 60 minutes

Are the services the same as online worship?

730 (54%) identical to in-person service

When are there new services each week?

898 Sunday morning service

Who leads worship?

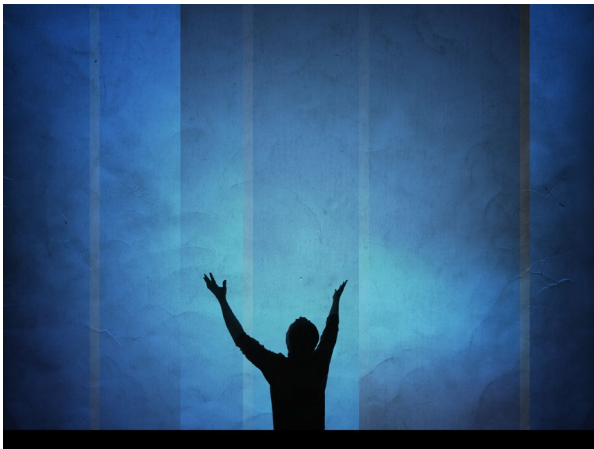
Another concern during that is highlighted during the pandemic is the number of congregations that do not have staff, paid or volunteer, to lead worship.

Of 1547 responses,

263 (17%) do not have staff or volunteers to lead worship.

1,285 (83%) have paid staff

Most congregations are led by the senior pastor. Many congregations have additional staff to assist in worship leadership.



Worship Leaders

1,159	91%	Senior Pastor
705	56%	Music Minister/Leader
458	36%	Ruling Elders
391	31%	Worship team
119	9%	Deacons
109	9%	Choir
41	3%	All of the above

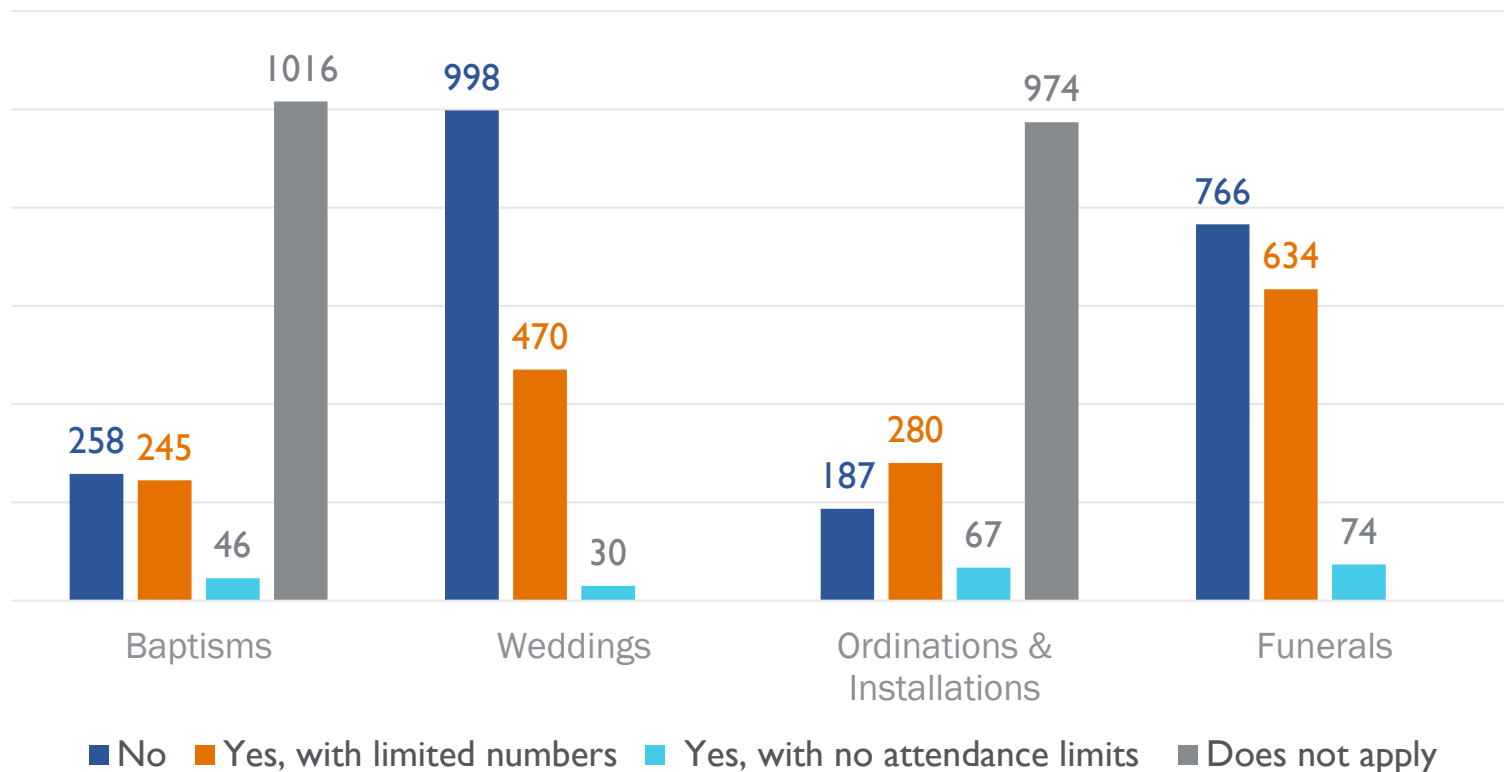


SACRAMENTS

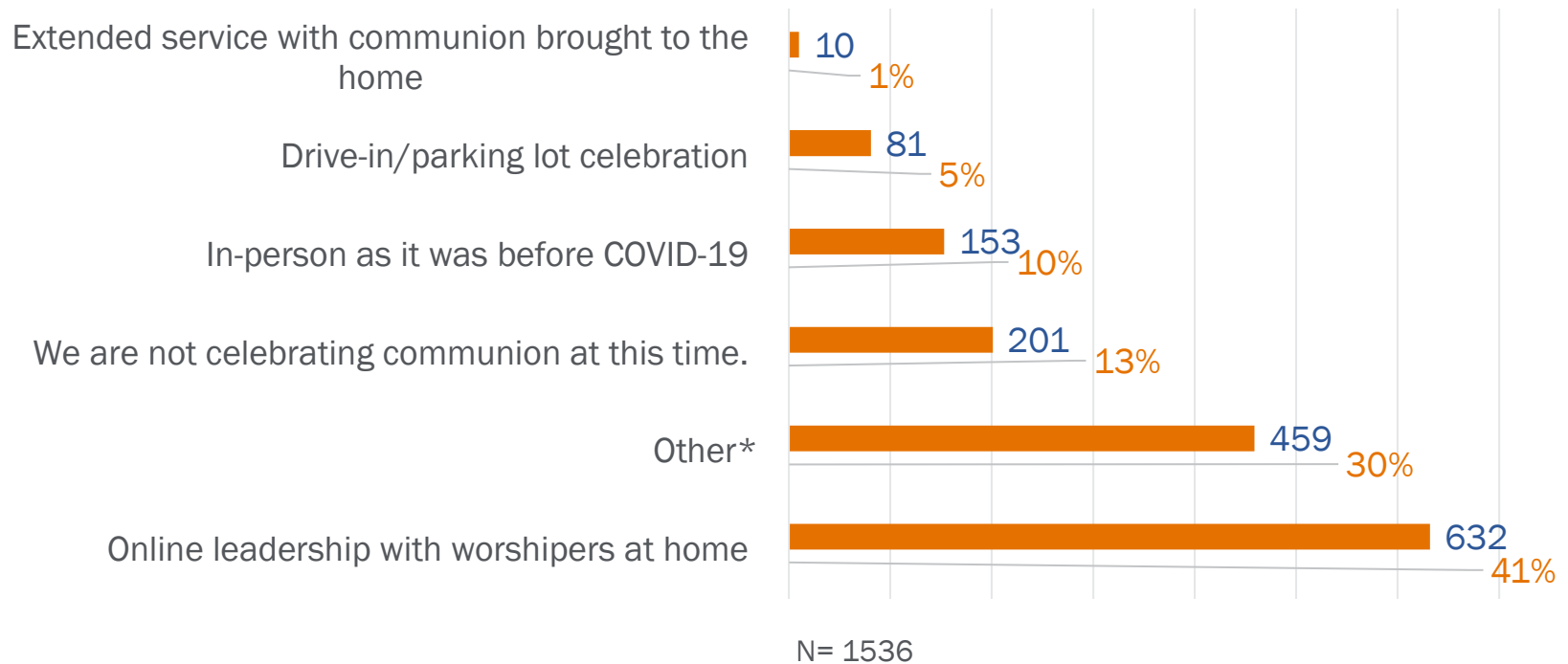


With the advice and guidance of the CDC, NIH, and local health department, social distancing and small group gatherings have been the rules for the day. Within these limitations, how does or can the church fully participate in the sacraments?

Being unable to serve the membership during this time is a stressor that many pastors stated.



How you are currently celebrating the Lord's Supper – Eucharist – Communion?



*Some of the other ways that the sacrament is being celebrated is at home with commercially purchased elements, congregations provide their own elements, each family serves itself, and porch visits,



FINANCES



So, how are finances since the pandemic's onset?

Congregations (n=1638) ...

- 661 (40%) report their finances are about the same
- 769 (48%) report decrease in their finances - 38% somewhat, 10% dramatic decreased
- Of these reporting loss...
 - 498 (66%) are showing some recovery
 - 214 (28%) are not showing any recovery

They are taking these actions

	Taken		Considering	
Reduce non-personnel administrative costs	262	37%	39	5%
Reduce mission expense	155	22%	54	8%
Reduce shared mission to the national church	135	19%	52	7%
Reduce personnel through furloughs & layoffs	108	15%	32	4%
Reduce per capita payments to presbytery	80	11%	51	7%
Start sharing pastoral leadership with another congregation	47	7%	37	5%
Reduce staff benefits	45	6%	28	4%
Hold conversations about merging	40	5%	29	4%
Hold conversations about closing the church	30	5%	17	2%

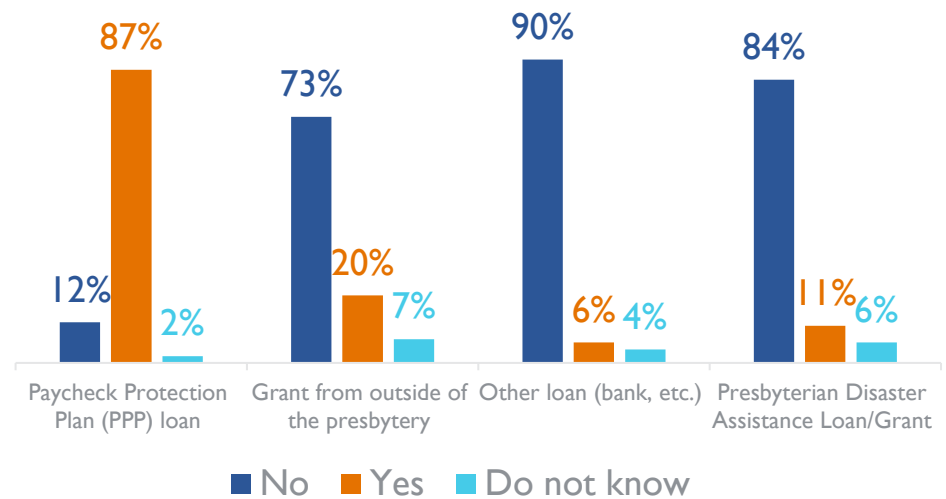
So, what actions have congregations taken to augment their budgets?

In addition to budget restrictions, 1175 congregations reported that they have...

- **716 (61%)** applied for or received a Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) loan.
- **539 (46%)** started online giving.
- **373 (32%)** withdrawing from saving accounts.
- **141 (12%)** applied for a grant outside of the presbytery.
- **63 (5%)** withdrawing from church's private foundation.
- **62 (5%)** applied for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance grant or loan
- **19 (2%)** applied for a loan from another source (bank, etc.)

Of those who applied for a loan or grants, here are the determinations that were known at the time of the survey.

Some applications have yet to be determined.





PRESBYTERIAN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

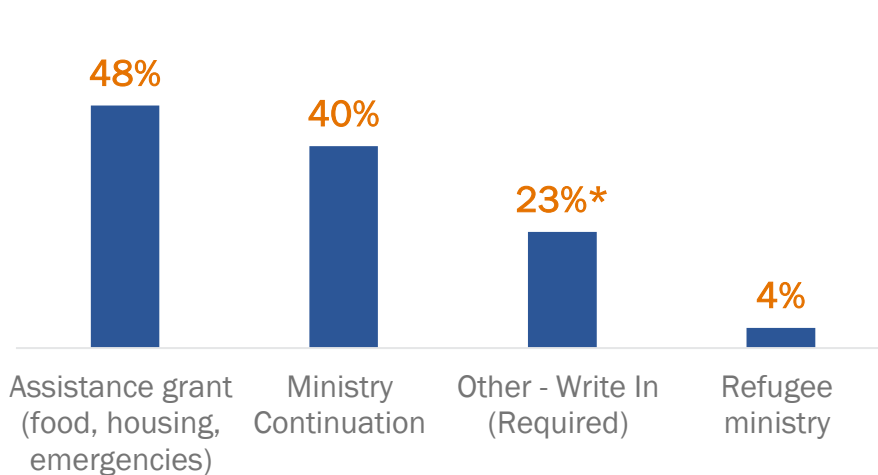


Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA)

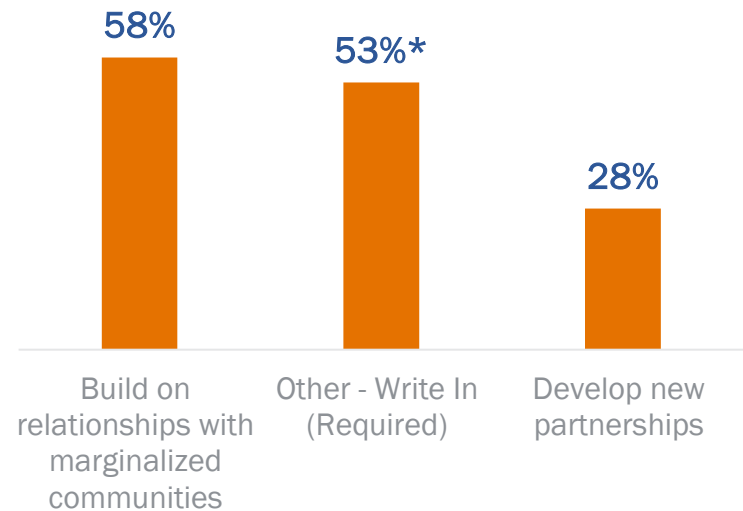
grants were made available to congregations at the beginning of the pandemic. Congregations responding to this survey were asked about the purpose of the grant and the grant's impact on their ministry.

The grants assisted congregations in making forming new ministries and partnerships, expanding community outreach, and to address unbudgeted expenses for the items to begin live streaming services.

Purpose of PDA Grant



Results of PDA Grant



* Most other responses included paying ongoing expenses, technology assistance, hurricane relief, and new ministry

Research Services helps the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) make data-informed decisions using surveys, focus groups and interviews, demographic analysis, and program evaluations.

We are social scientists with backgrounds in sociology, public policy, and economics. We serve congregations, congregations and synods, PC(USA) national agencies, and other PC(USA)-related organizations. Research Services is a ministry of the A Corporation Administrative Services Group.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of this report, contact us at 502-569-5077 or research@pcusa.org.

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