

Impact of COVID-19 on Canadian Christian Charities

Fall Report

November 17, 2020

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Note: This report, including specific slides, statistics, and visuals, may be freely shared. If possible, please include a link to the full report.

Constant adaptation is the new norm.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed virtually every part of our lives. From masks to restrictions on gatherings to Zoom fatigue, nothing works quite like it used to. This is true for Christian churches and ministries all across Canada.

On October 6, 2020, a coalition of Christian research organizations conducted a second national survey to see how Christian churches and ministries were adapting and faring as the second wave of COVID-19 struck many cities. WayBase took the lead to facilitate a national survey where 1,269 churches and ministries responded from every province and territory representing 108 Christian faith traditions.

This report provides an overview of what the survey uncovered. You will see:

- 1) The negative financial impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt strongly across all provinces in Canada;
- 2) About 75% of Churches now offer in-person gatherings, although many still choose to participate online;
- 3) Higher levels of in-person re-engagement is correlated with better revenue;
- 4) There was a significant increase in the use of technology with 80% of churches now offering online services;
- 5) As churches and ministries continue to adapt, many are turning their attention to the needs in their community.

Christian churches and ministries are constantly adapting as they continue to serve communities and cities across Canada in Jesus' name. Moving forward, the churches and ministries have the opportunity to collaborate in new ways to support each other and serve the growing needs in our local communities and our world.

Research Partners:

Organizations

WayBase

Canadian Centre for Christian Charities

Flourishing Congregations Institute at Ambrose
University

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Cardus

Researchers

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Overview of the Christian Movement

Based on WayBase Data

32,000+

Christian organizations in Canada

77%

are churches

\$6+ billion

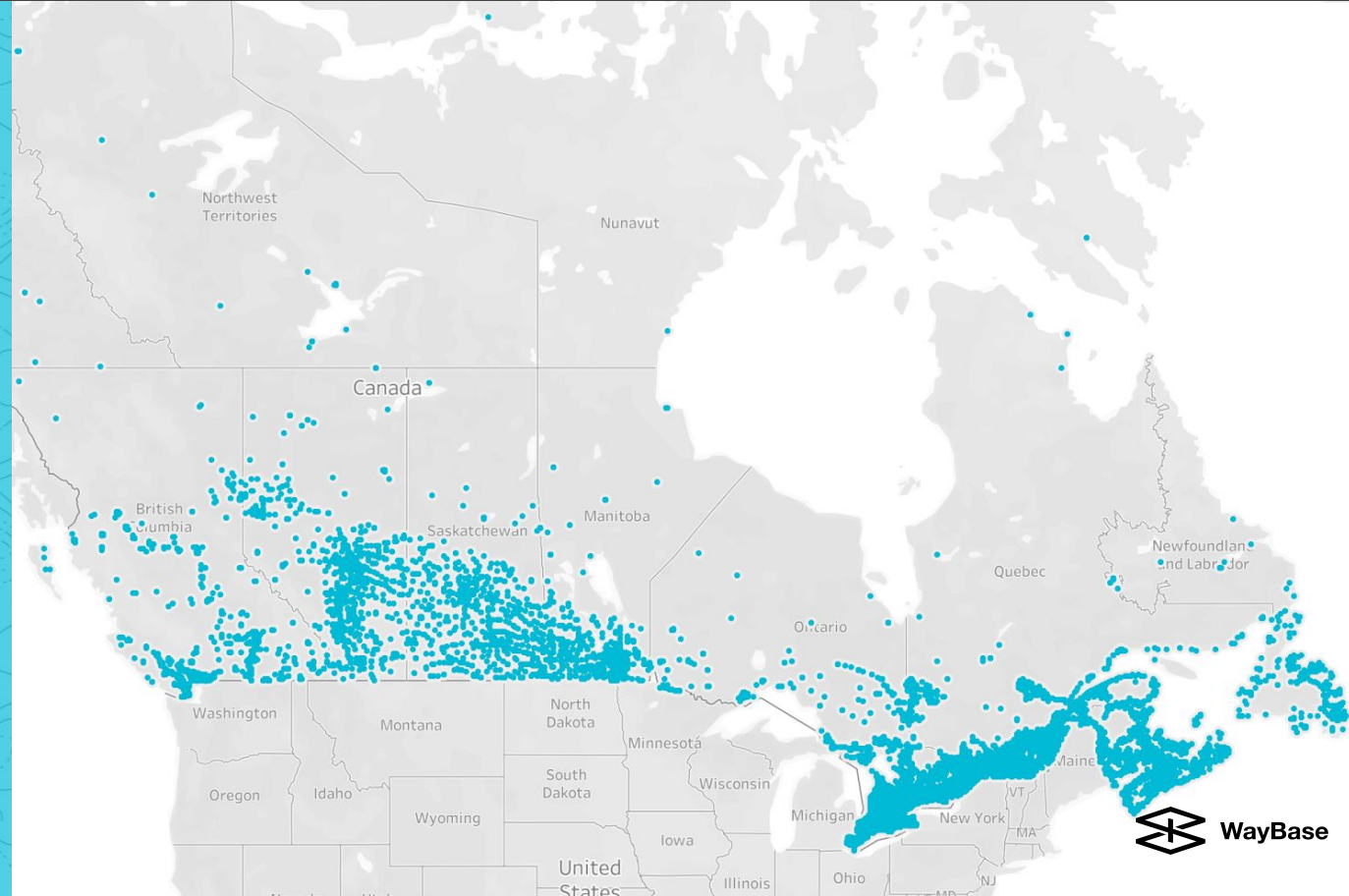
Church Revenue

\$8+ billion

Welfare, health, others

Christian ministries gather in community and invest in their communities.

While 32,000 organizations and \$15 Billion in revenue seem like large numbers, both of these are magnified by the power of volunteers.

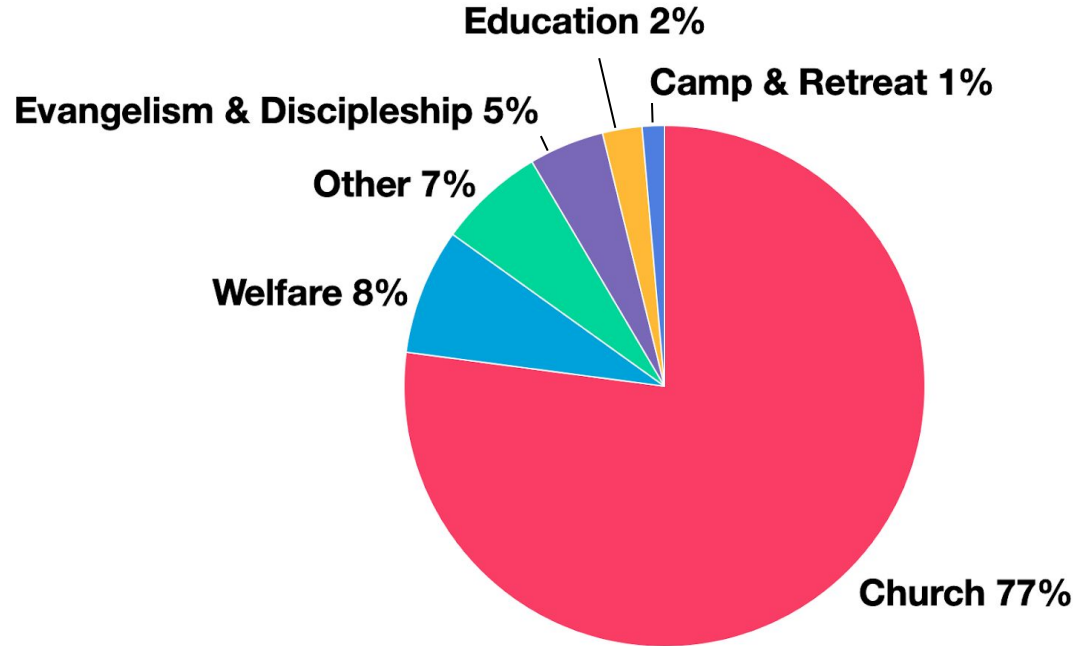


What kinds of Christian ministries are there in Canada?

Churches are the primary way Christians gather.

Their members experience community together in a network of care support. They also get organized to serve and invest beyond themselves.

In this way, Churches become the support base for many important community-serving organizations as well.



Note: for a better understanding of all categories, refer to the appendix

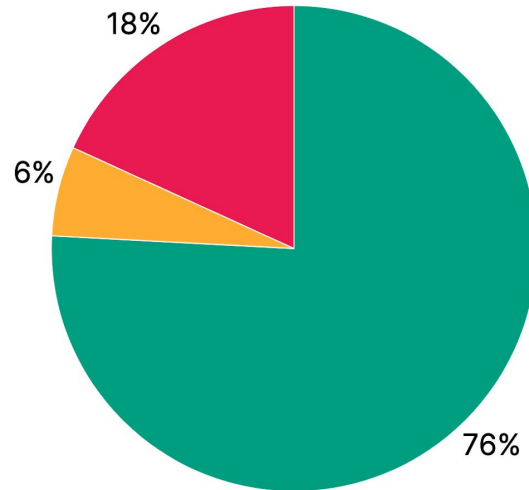
In-Person Services

What is the status of in-person services for churches and other ministries?

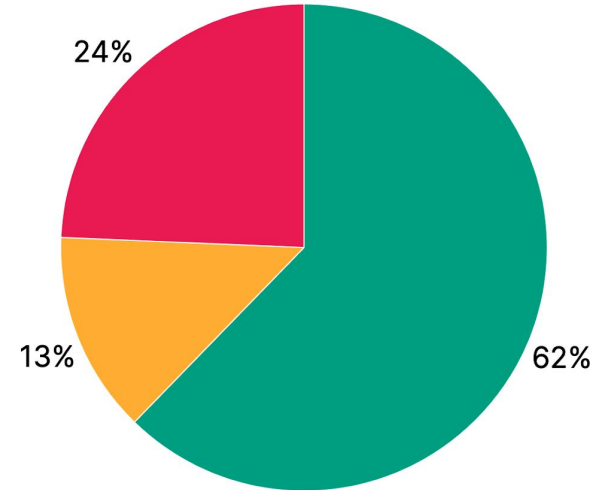
In Spring 2020, the majority of churches and ministries had either closed in-person services or closed all services. This fall, 76% of churches and 62% of other ministries have some form of in-person services.

This indicates that reopening in-person services was a high priority even as this required significant changes to adhere to health requirements.

Churches



Other Christian Ministries



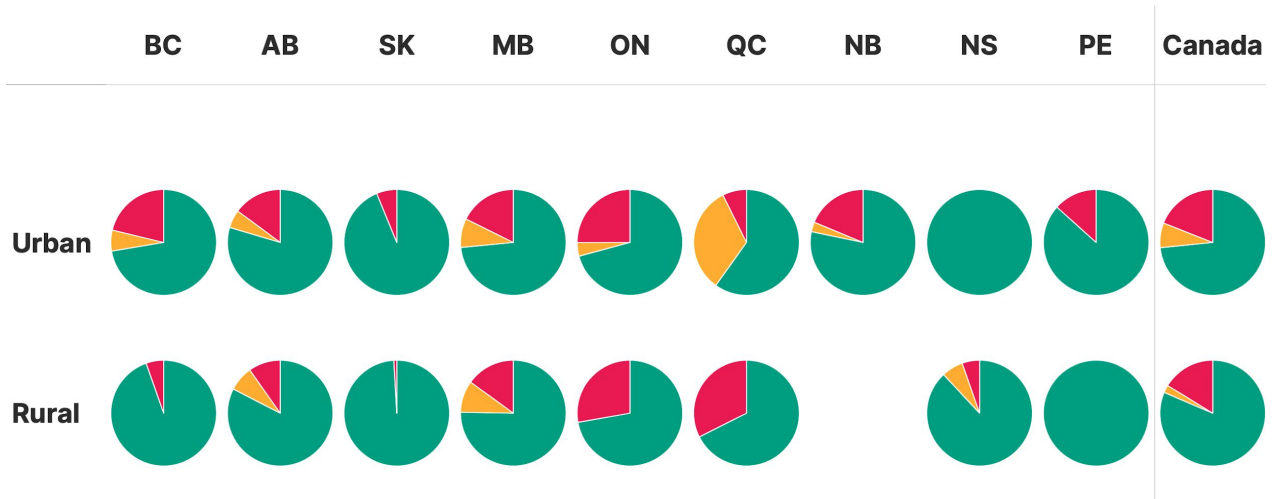
■ Closed ■ Open ■ Reopened, but reclosed

How does the status of in-person services differ between provinces?

There is significant diversity between provinces in the extent to which churches are open for in-person services.

Rural churches tend to be somewhat more open to in-person services than urban centres that have higher numbers of COVID-19 cases.

This suggests that the number of COVID-19 cases in an area significantly impacts a church's comfort in re-engaging its people for in-person gatherings.



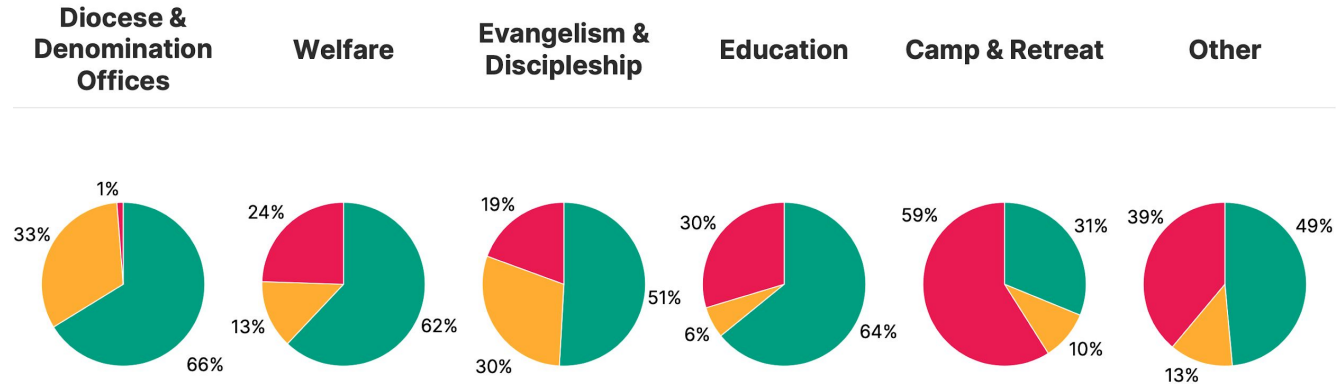
Note: Some locations have been omitted from this chart due to small sample sizes

■ Closed ■ Open ■ Reopened, but reclosed

Among ministries, how does the status of services and programs differ?

There is great diversity across the various types of ministries and their ability to reopen for in-person services or programs.

If the pandemic continues for an extended time and these trends continue, these ministries may need additional support.

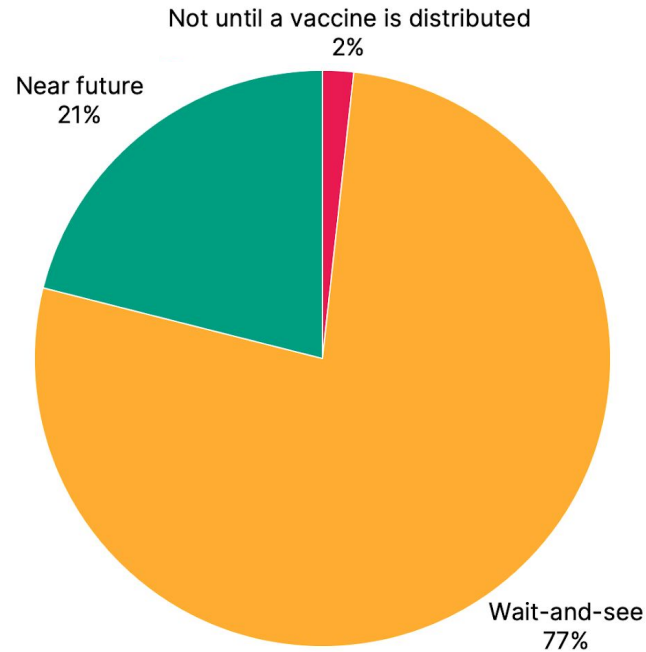


■ Closed ■ Open ■ Reopened, but reclosed

For closed churches, what are the plans for reopening in-person services?

The majority of churches that are not currently offering in-person services are tentative about reopening, but not to the extent that they would require a vaccine to be distributed first.

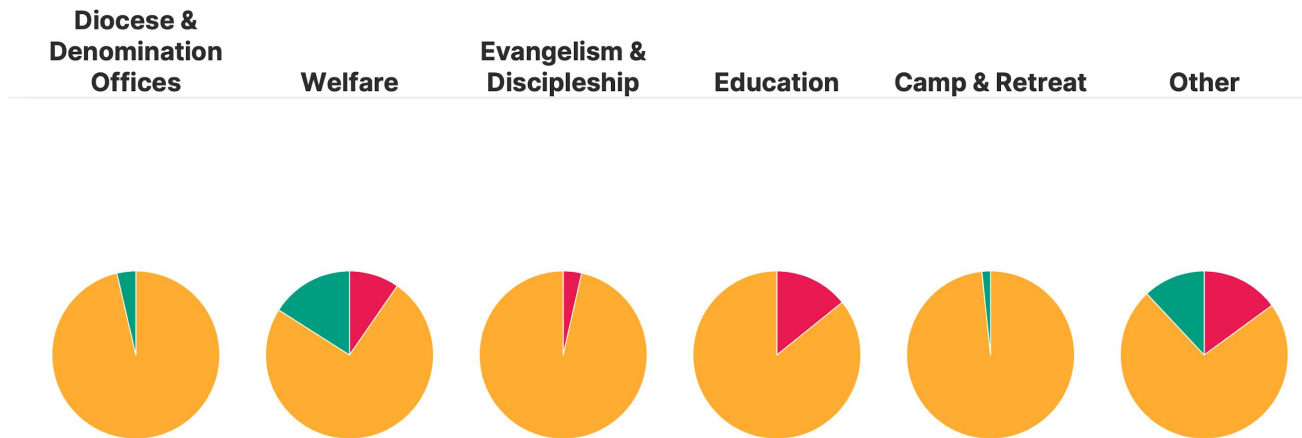
Many leaders feel that a “wait and see” approach is the best way to navigate the uncertainties that come with this pandemic.



For closed ministries, what are the plans for reopening in-person services?

When compared to churches, a higher number of ministries that are not currently offering in-person services are tentative about reopening.

This greater level of caution is likely due to the nature of their in-person services and requiring people to stay in closed spaces for extended periods of time.



Online Services

How many churches are offering online services?

The primary way Christian churches adapted to COVID-19 is shifting their services online. This is true of all churches across of Canada.

Although a low percentage of churches discontinued their online services this fall, the majority continue.

This suggests that one of the most lasting impacts of COVID-19 will be a greater number of churches engaging people online.



■ Never online ■ Stopped offering online services during COVID-19
■ Continue to offer online services

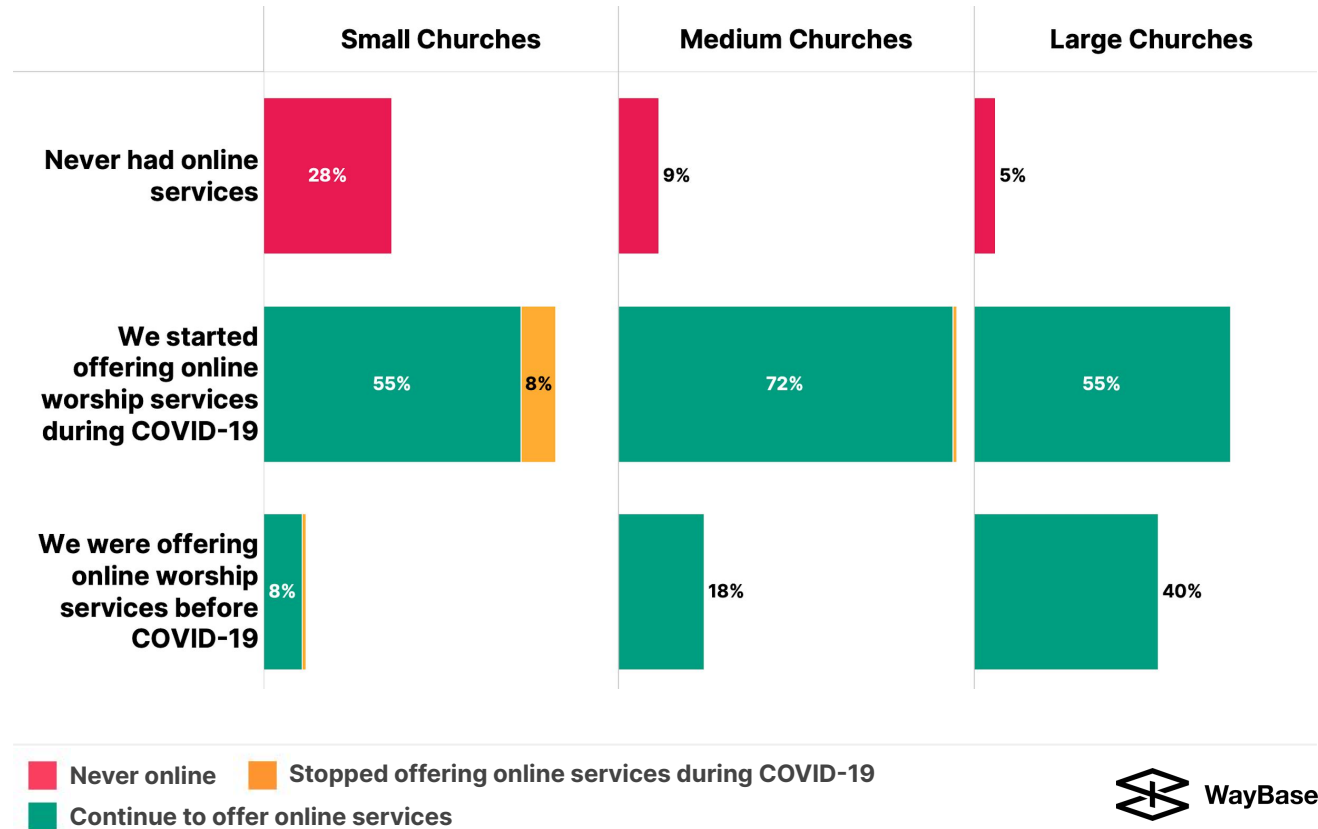
How does size of church impact the decision to offer online worship services?

While a lower percentage of small (<\$250K) churches added online services, the relative percentage increase was higher than larger services.

This further underscores how churches of all sizes are making it a high priority to engage their people online.

Size Refers to Revenue

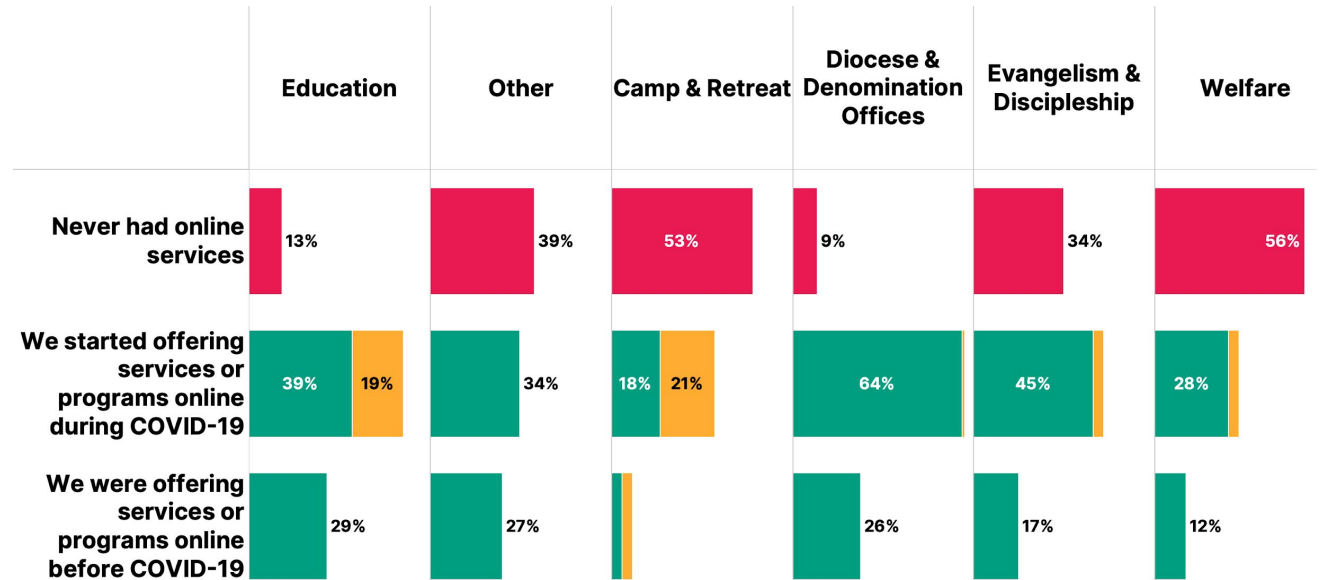
Small - Under \$250k
Medium - \$250k-750K
Large - Over \$750K



How many ministries previously offered or now offer online services?

Similar to churches, ministries across Canada have adapted by offering online services and programs but to a much lower extent.

Many of these ministries are based fully on in-person programs that do not translate to online services. This will no doubt be an ongoing challenge for these ministries to find meaningful ways to care for and engage the people they serve.

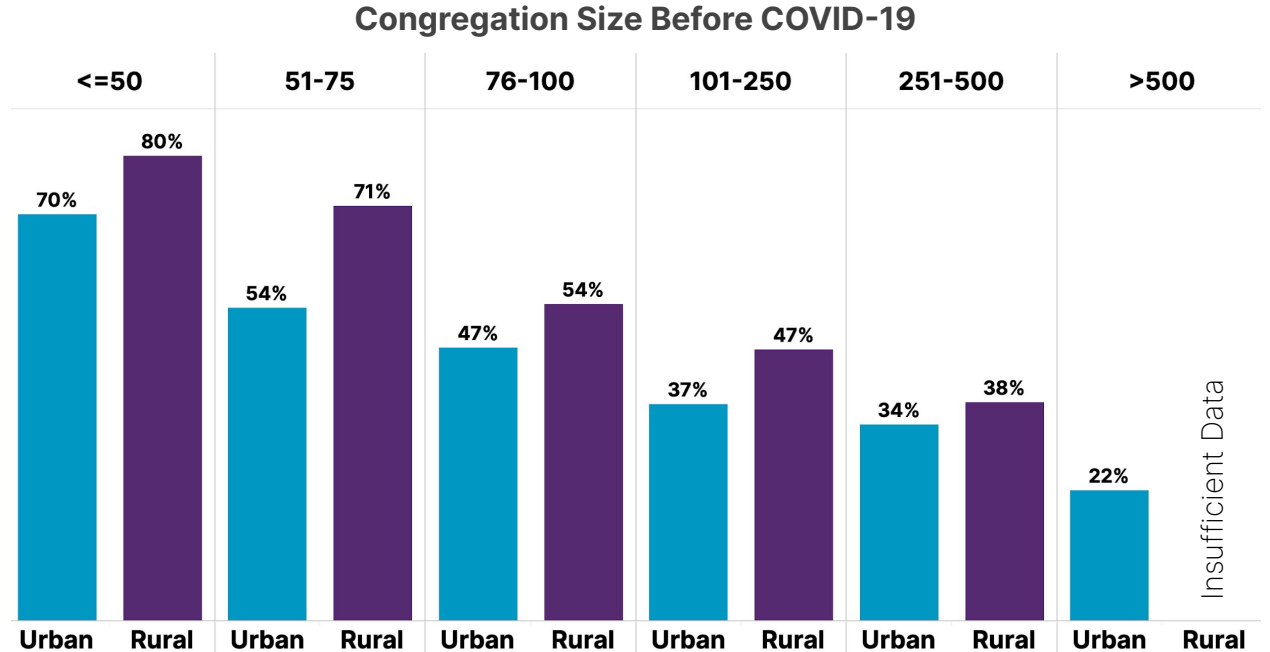


Engagement

What is the level of re-engagement at in-person services for churches?

Overall, small churches have a much higher level of engagement at in-person services this fall when compared to larger churches. Similarly, rural churches are re-engaging in-person to a greater degree than their urban counterparts. Collectively, the majority of attendees are still choosing not to attend in-person worship services.

This means most churches must maintain both in-person and online worship services in order to maximize engagement.

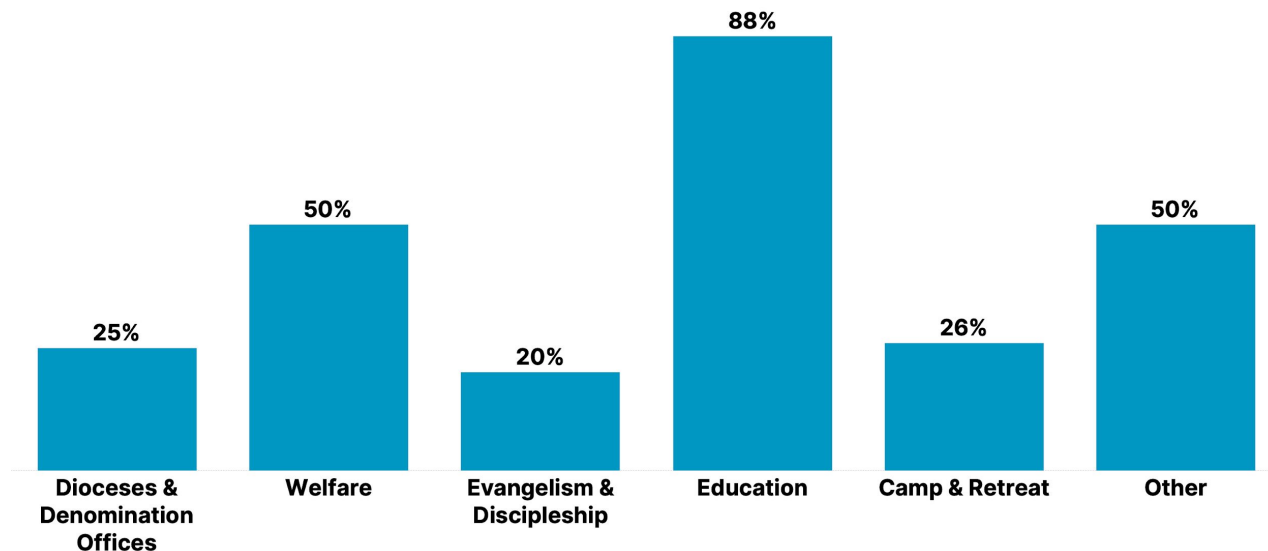


This bar chart represents the percentage of people at the most highly attended service since reopening as compared to Pre-COVID-19 average attendance.

For ministries, what is the level of re-engagement at in-person services and programs?

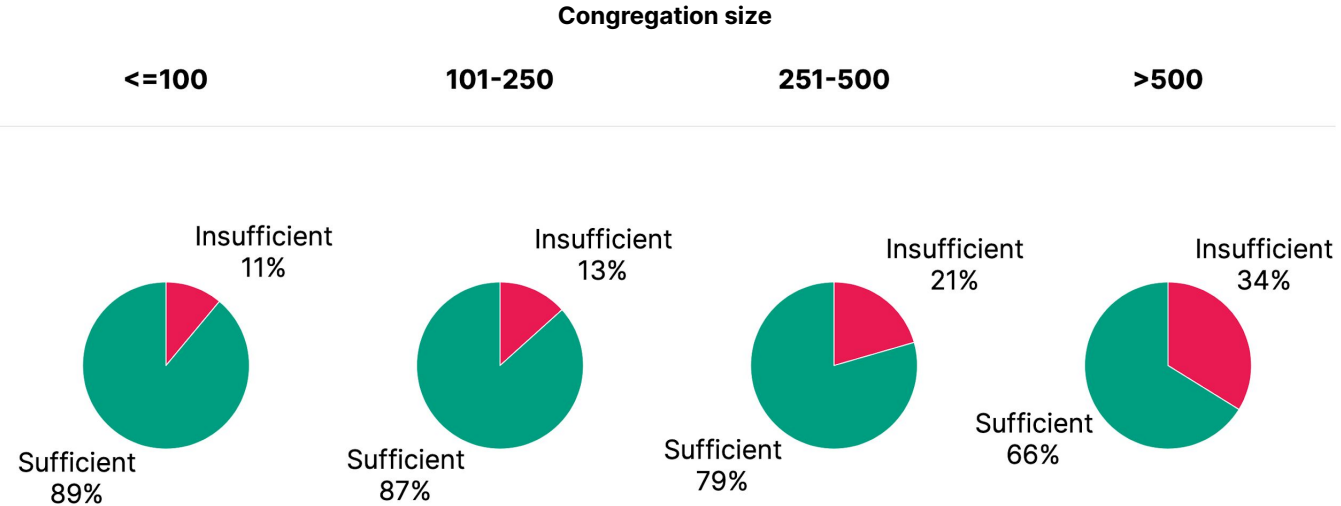
Re-engagement for in-person services and programs for ministries is significantly lower than churches, with the exception of education.

This suggests that new strategies and approaches may be needed as ministries continue to navigate the impact of the pandemic.



Is there sufficient seating capacity for those who want to attend a church in person?

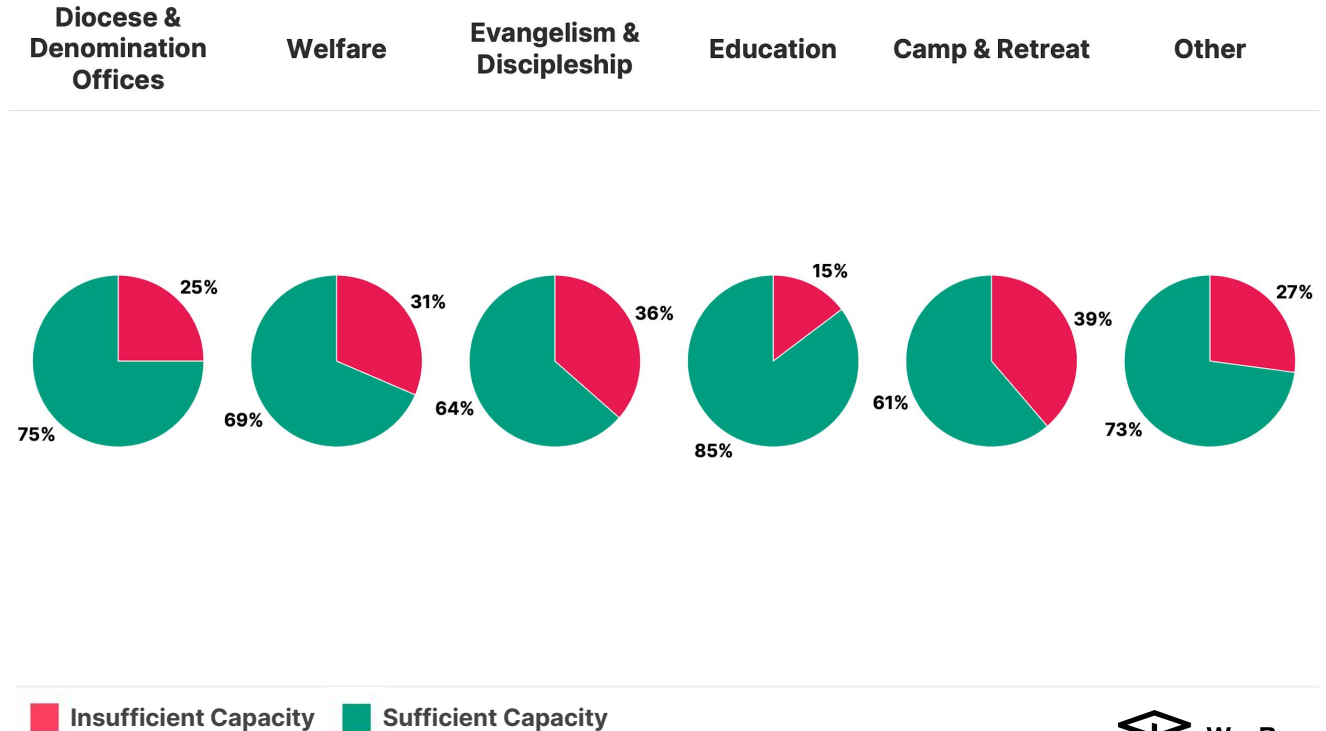
New health requirements significantly impact seating capacities for churches. Smaller churches can more easily adjust to limitations to sizes of gatherings and may find it easier to stay personally connected to their community during the pandemic.



Is there sufficient capacity for those who wish to access in-person programs offered by a ministry?

The capacity issues related to reopening for in-person services and programs has a higher impact on camp and retreat ministries as well as welfare and community benefit ministries.

When we combine the capacity issue for camps and retreat ministries that are open, along with the very high percentage of camps that are closed, these ministries are significantly constrained.

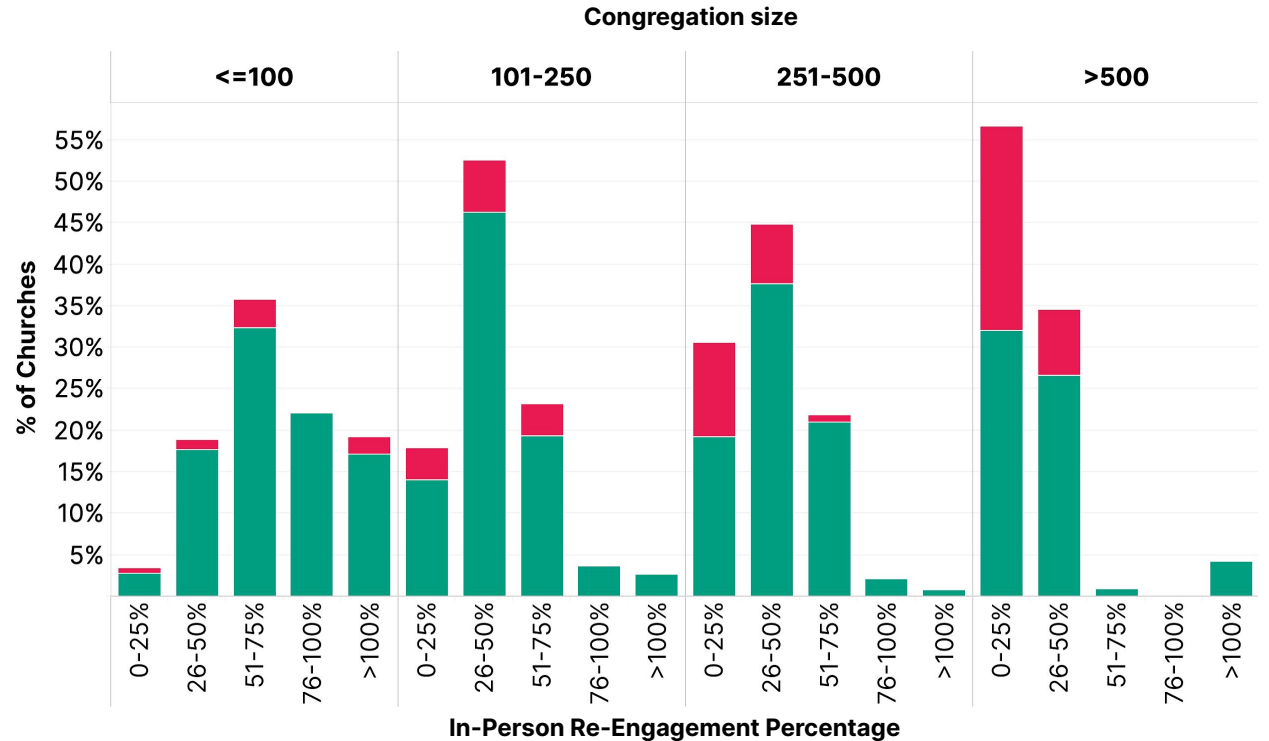


How is in-person re-engagement impacted by size of church and capacity?

Larger churches are more impacted by capacity issues created by health restrictions for gathering in-person services.

When their overall attendance is down from pre-Covid numbers, this inability to accommodate those who want to attend creates an added downward pressure on engagement.

Many churches are experimenting with or increasing their focus on small groups to overcome this challenge.



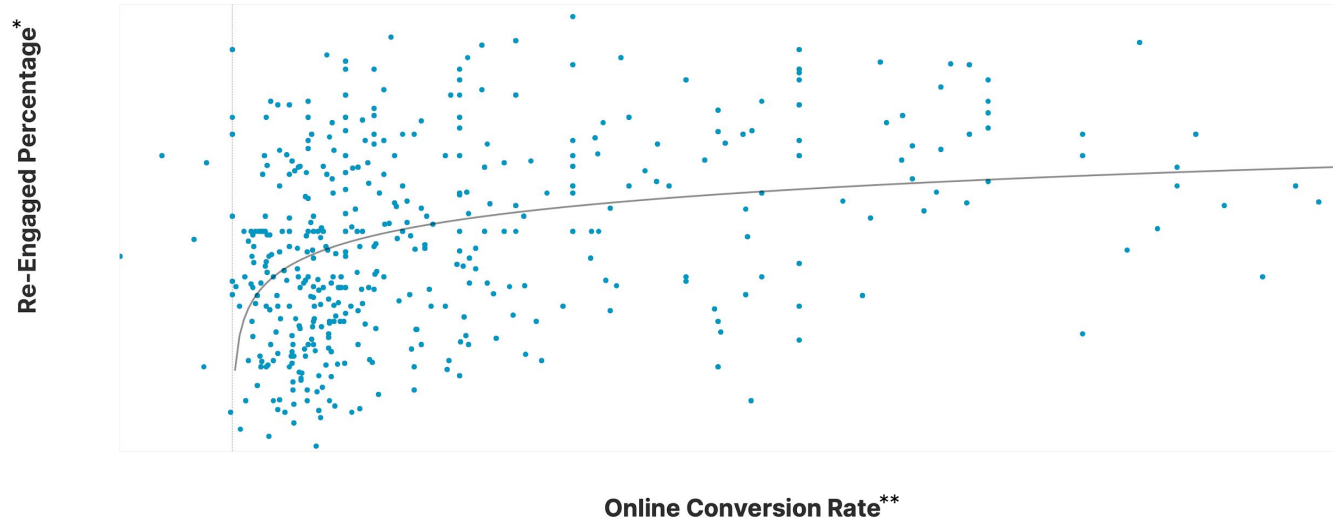
■ Insufficient Capacity ■ Sufficient Capacity

Do more online views encourage better in-person re-engagement?

This survey revealed that higher online conversion rate had a positive impact on in-person re-engagement, but with diminishing returns.

This suggests that online services do have value in helping people stay engaged.

But, driving high viewership is not the key (nor is it essential) to driving in-person re-engagement.



*The percentage of people at the most highly attended service since reopening compared to pre-COVID-19 averages.

**The increase in online attendance for every person no longer attending in-person.

Financials

How did church Fall revenue compare with Spring expectations?

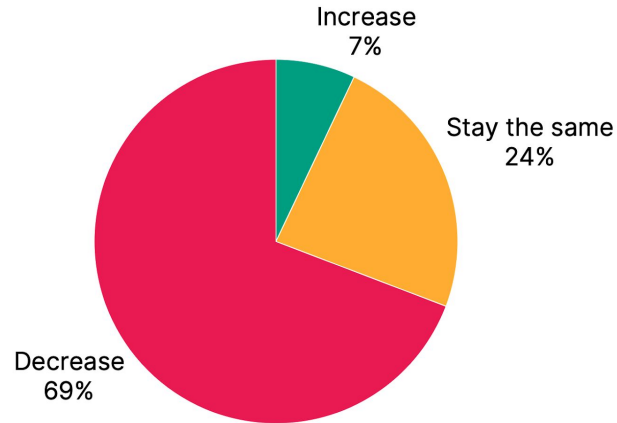
In our May survey, we asked church leaders what they believed their fall revenue would be and then we compared those projections with their actual reported revenue.

Leaders were relatively accurate in their projections.

This suggests that leaders have a good sense of the dynamics impacting their revenue.

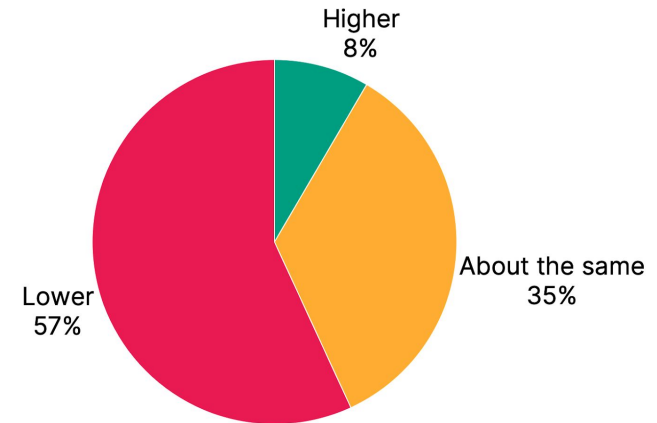
Anticipated Impact on Fall Budget

(From May Survey)



Actual Revenue

(Relative to May Expectations)



How did ministry Fall revenue compare with Spring expectations?

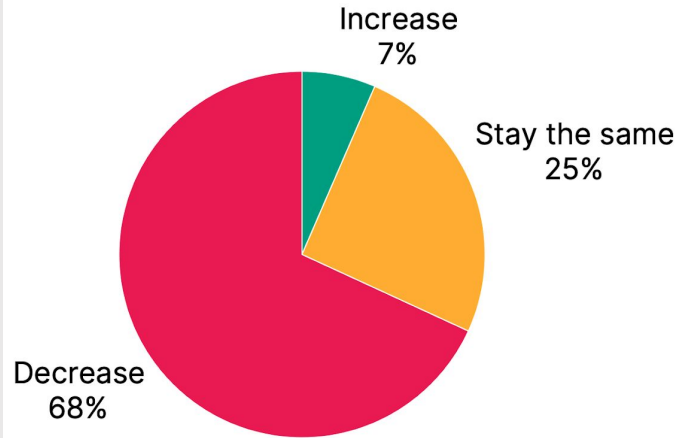
We surveyed ministry leaders about what they believed their fall revenue would be and then we compared those projections with their actual reported revenue.

Overall, ministry leaders were accurate in their projections.

This suggests that ministry leaders have a good sense of the dynamics impacting their revenue.

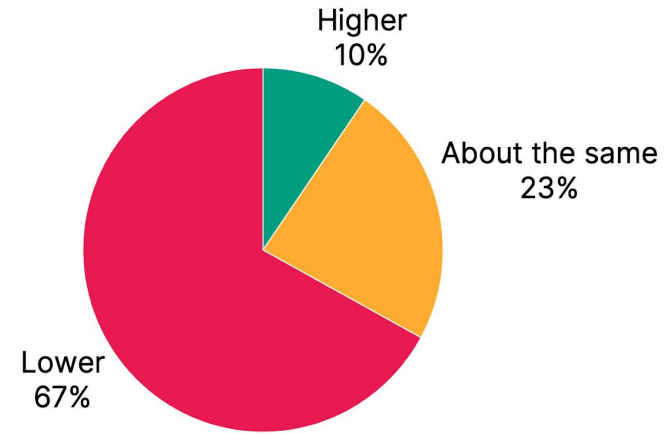
Anticipated Impact on Fall Budget

(From May Survey)



Actual Revenue

(Relative to May Expectations)



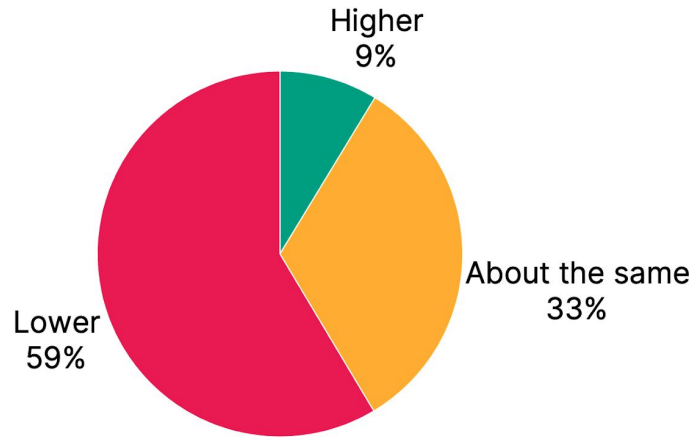
What is church revenue when compared to pre-COVID-19 budgets?

Some may wonder if churches in the hardest hit provinces would experience a greater drop in revenue.

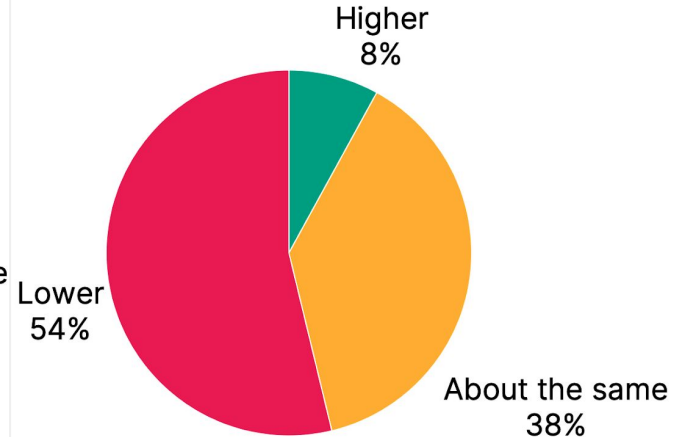
Although there is some difference, it is negligible.

This suggests that the economic impact of the pandemic is widely felt.

BC, ON, QC



Other Provinces/Territories

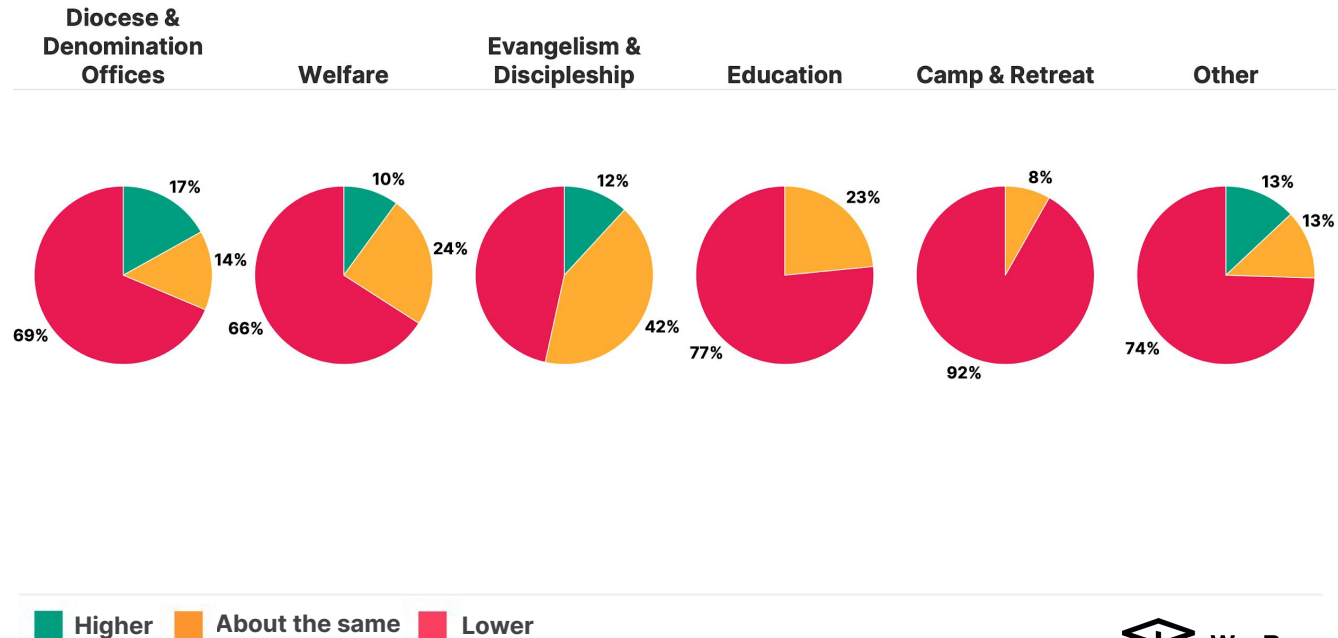


What is ministry revenue when compared to pre-COVID-19 budgets?

Similar to many churches, the revenue of ministries is significantly impacted across all types of ministries.

No group is faring particularly well with camp/retreats and education suffering the greatest losses in revenue.

Reduction in expenses and fundraising will both be vital to navigate the realities of this pandemic and to continue to deliver much needed services.

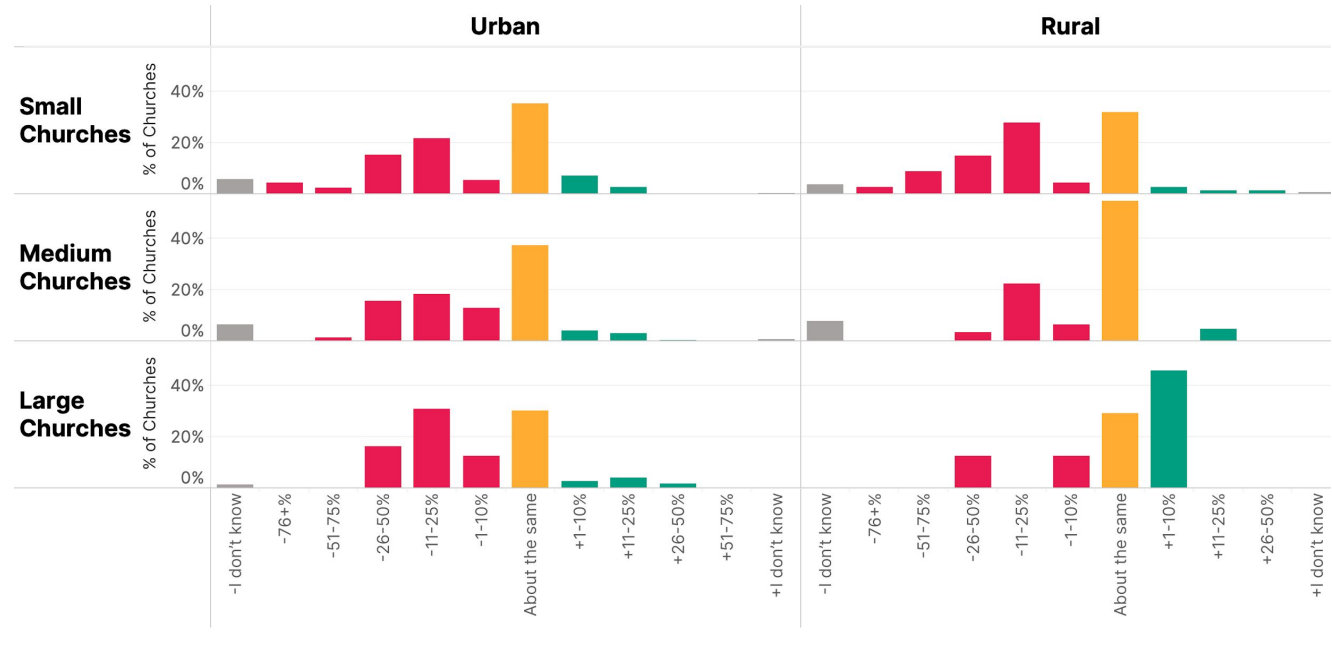


How many churches are seeing significant decreases in revenue?

Smaller churches were more likely to experience significant drops in revenue, both in urban and rural settings.

Overall though, it appears that rural churches were not as impacted as urban churches.

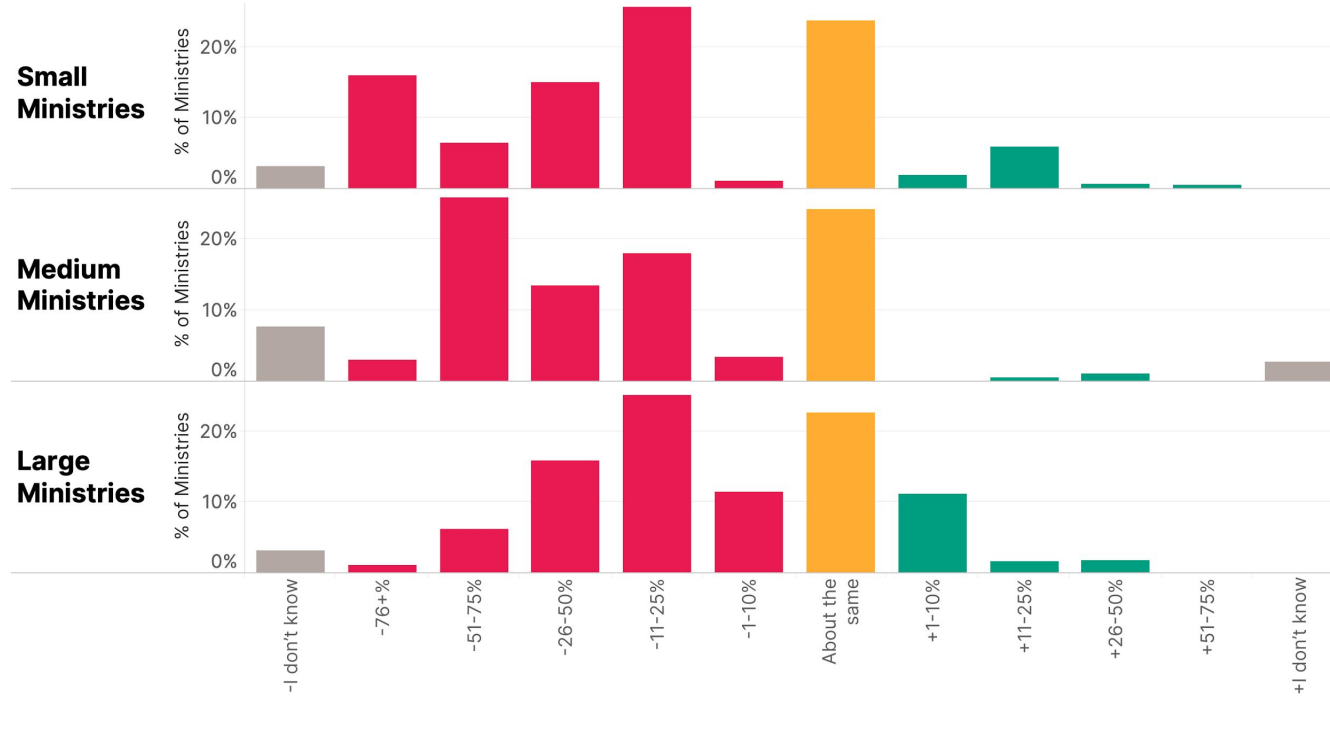
This may be due to a higher percentage of their people re-engaging through in-person services.



How many ministries are seeing significant decreases in revenue?

All sizes of ministries report significant declines in revenue with the smaller and medium being more likely to report major drops in revenue (over 50%).

Overall, this impact means ministries will be hard pressed to address the needs of our communities without a significant influx of financial support, new forms of partnership and collaboration, or radically innovative approaches.



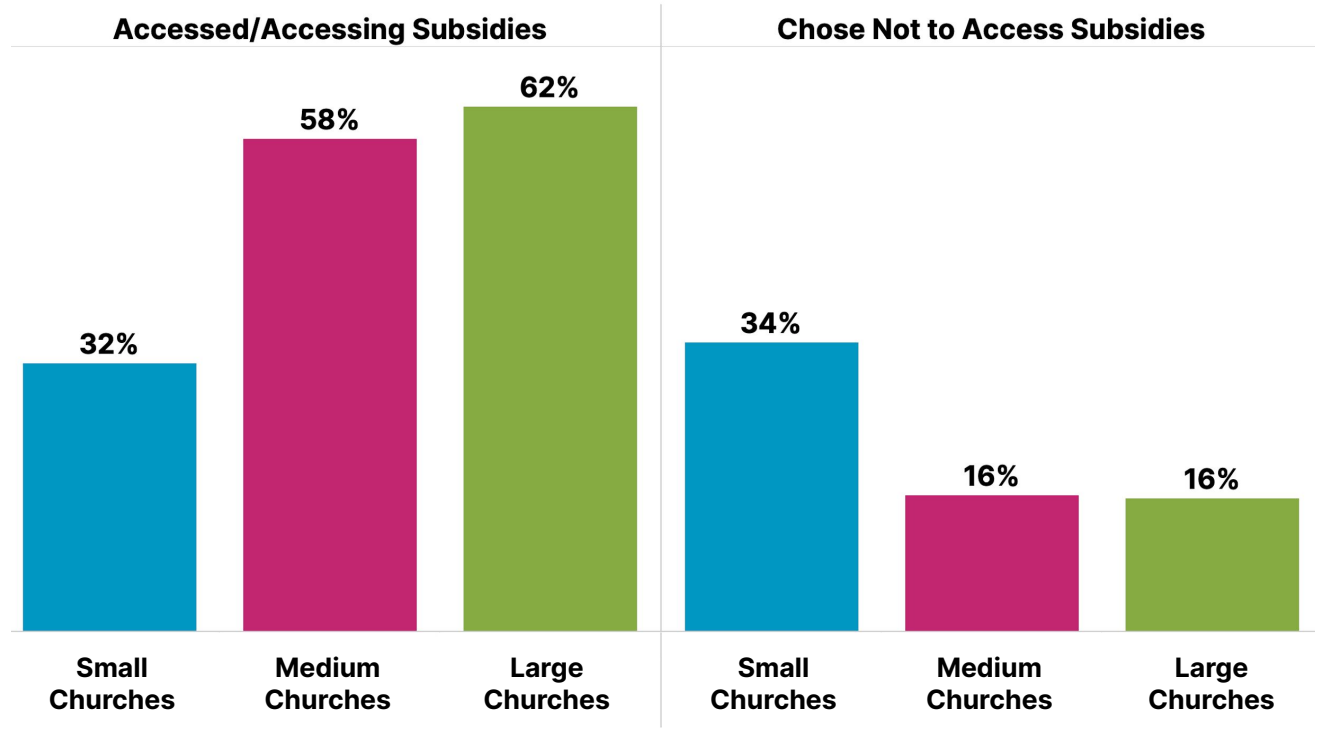
Government Subsidies

How many churches accessed government subsidies?

A majority of medium and large churches accessed government subsidies to help bridge financial shortfalls.

Smaller churches were less likely to decide to apply for subsidies.

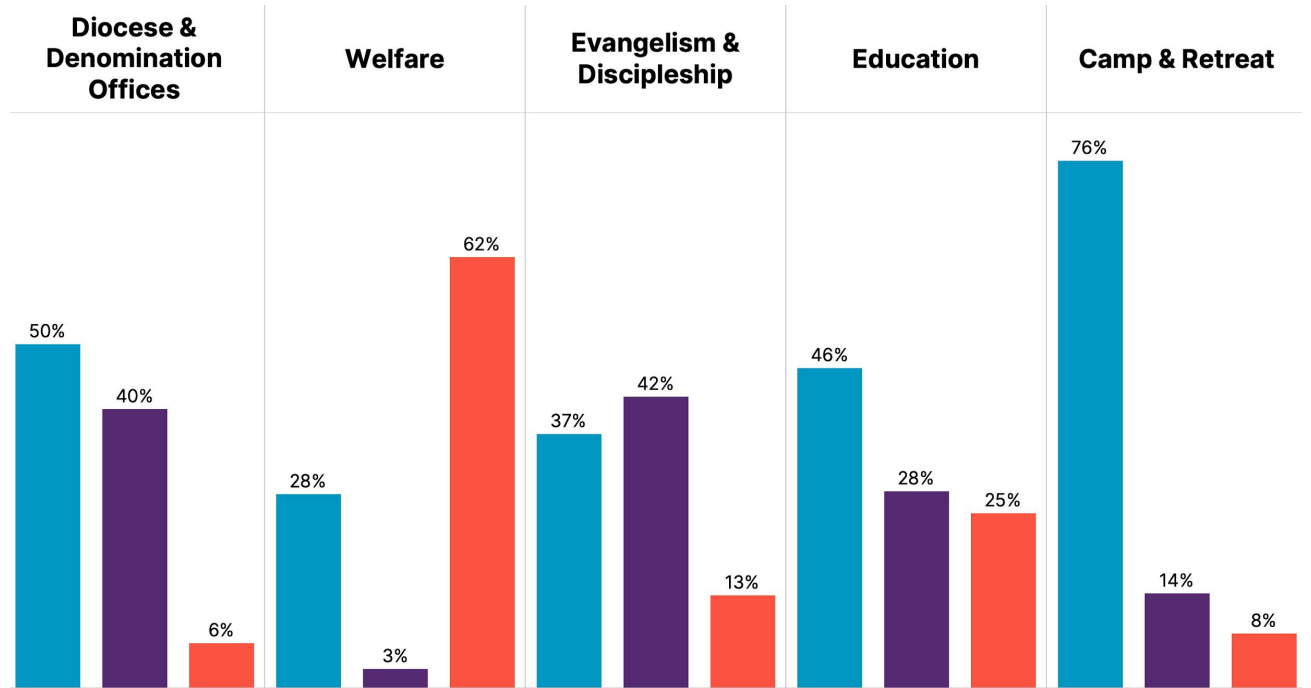
The financial need of small churches was significant and so the decision not to apply may be a matter of conviction or administrative capacity.



How many ministries accessed government subsidies?

Many ministries accessed government subsidies, with camps leading the way.

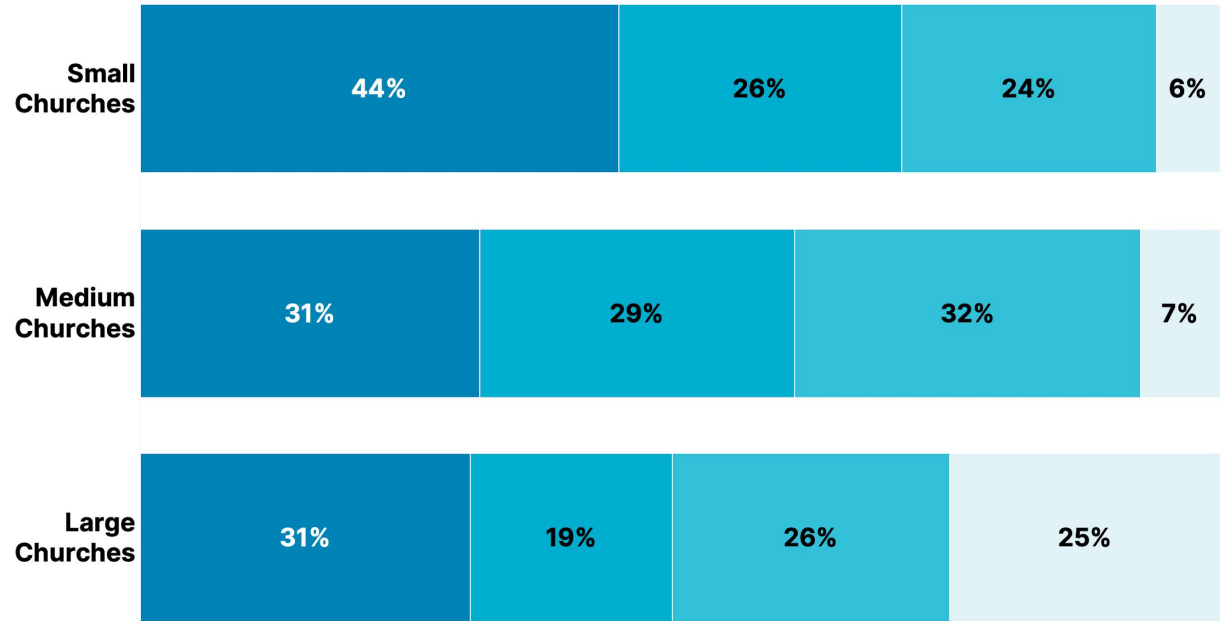
Welfare and Community Benefit ministries were the most likely to not qualify for government subsidies. Many were small organizations who may not have had employees and therefore would not have qualified for subsidies.



■ Accessed / Accessing subsidies ■ Chose not to access subsidies
■ Did not qualify for government subsidies

How important are government subsidies to churches that accessed them?

While nine out of ten churches receiving subsidies felt those funds were important at some level, what is striking is the high percentage who viewed subsidies as vitally important to their ability to continue.

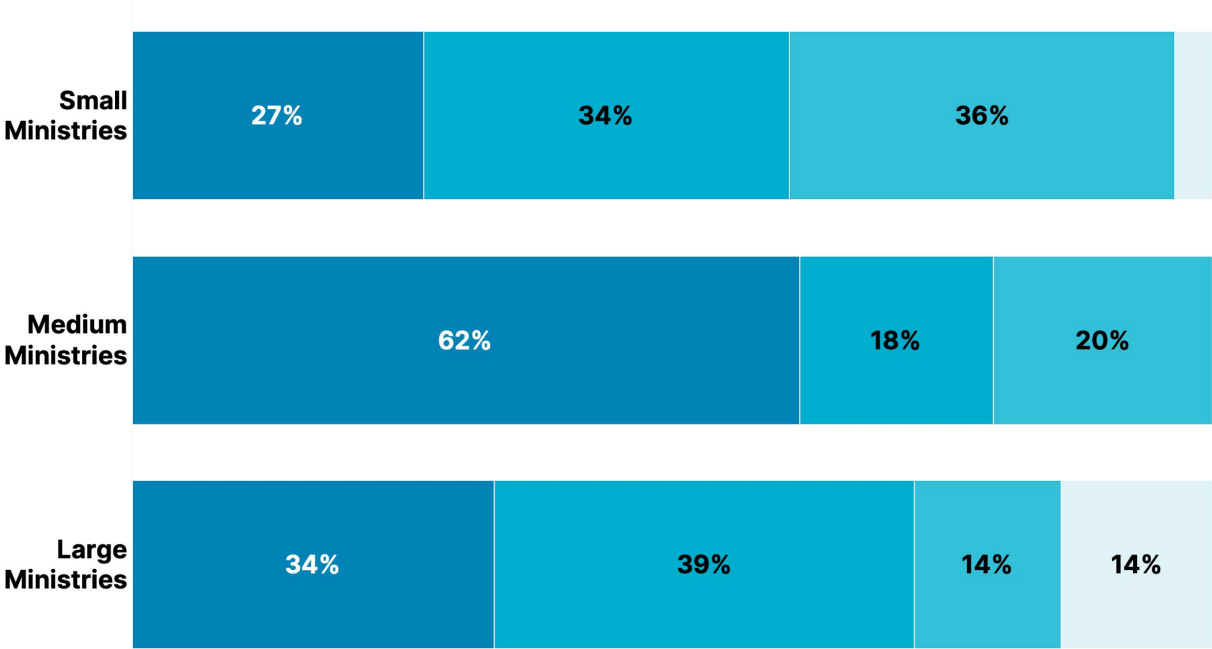


Vitally important **Moderately important** **Somewhat important**
Not important

How important are government subsidies to ministries that accessed them?

Virtually all ministries that accessed government subsidies indicated that these were important.

Even more ministries than churches indicated that subsidies were vital to their existence during this time which indicates how vulnerable our communities are.



■ Vitally important ■ Moderately important ■ Somewhat important ■ Not important

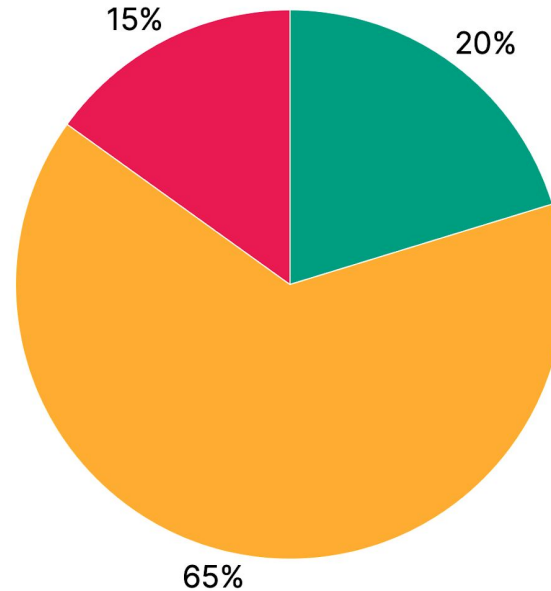
Future Financial Outlook

What are the expectations for church revenue in the next 6-12 months?

Most churches believe their revenue has now stabilized, albeit at a lower level than pre-Covid and in some cases, significantly lower.

This view was consistently held across different sizes of churches.

There are some churches that expect a continuing decline and may need additional support to navigate the financial impact of the pandemic.

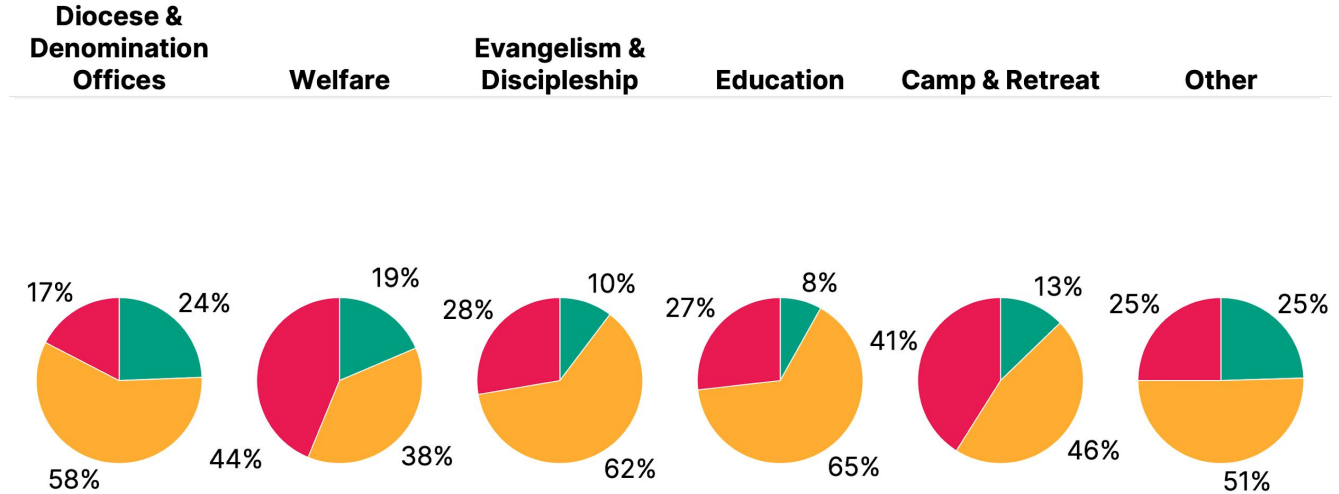


■ Increase ■ Stay the same ■ Decrease

What are the expectations for ministries' revenue in the next 6-12 months?

Welfare, camps and retreat ministries, more so than churches or other ministries, anticipate that they will experience a further decline in revenue in the coming 6 to 12 months.

The importance of our camps to our youth and welfare ministries to our communities means that concerted action will be needed to ensure these ministries continue.



■ Increase ■ Stay the same ■ Decrease

Adaptation

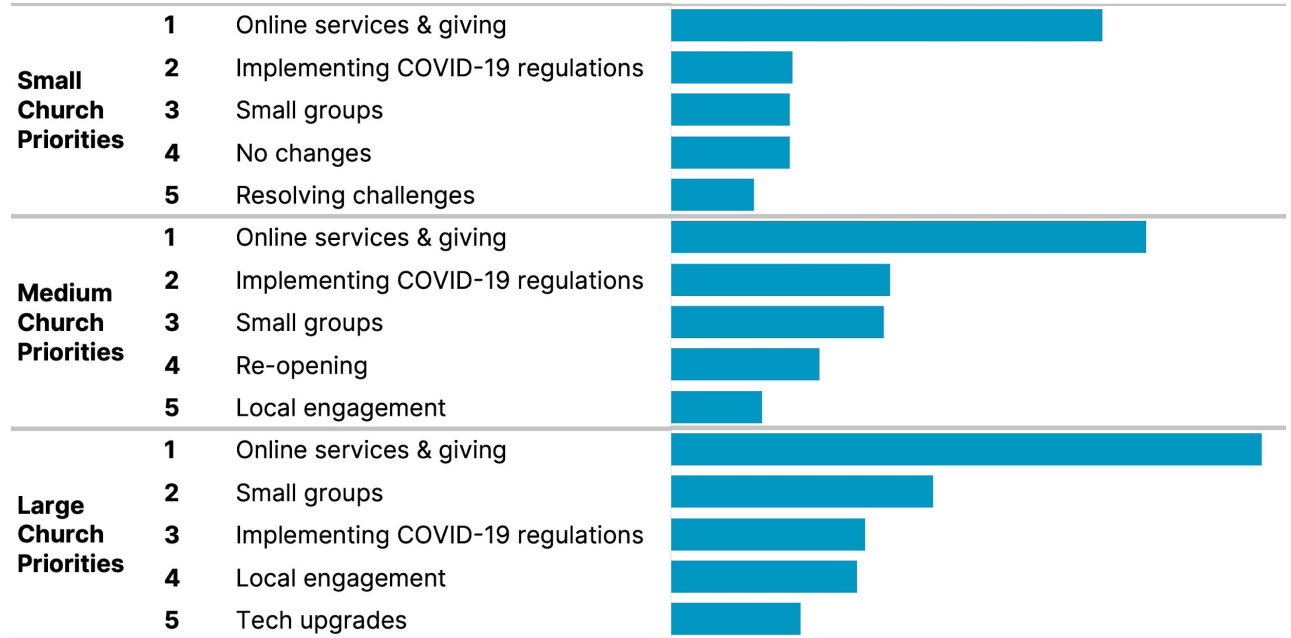
What important changes are being implemented by churches this fall?

Changes by churches fell into three themes.

After shifting services online, churches are engaging their people in small groups and looking for creative ways to serve their children and youth.

They are investing significant energy to implement new safety protocols for in-person activities.

They are exploring how to better meet local needs and express the love of God to their neighbours.

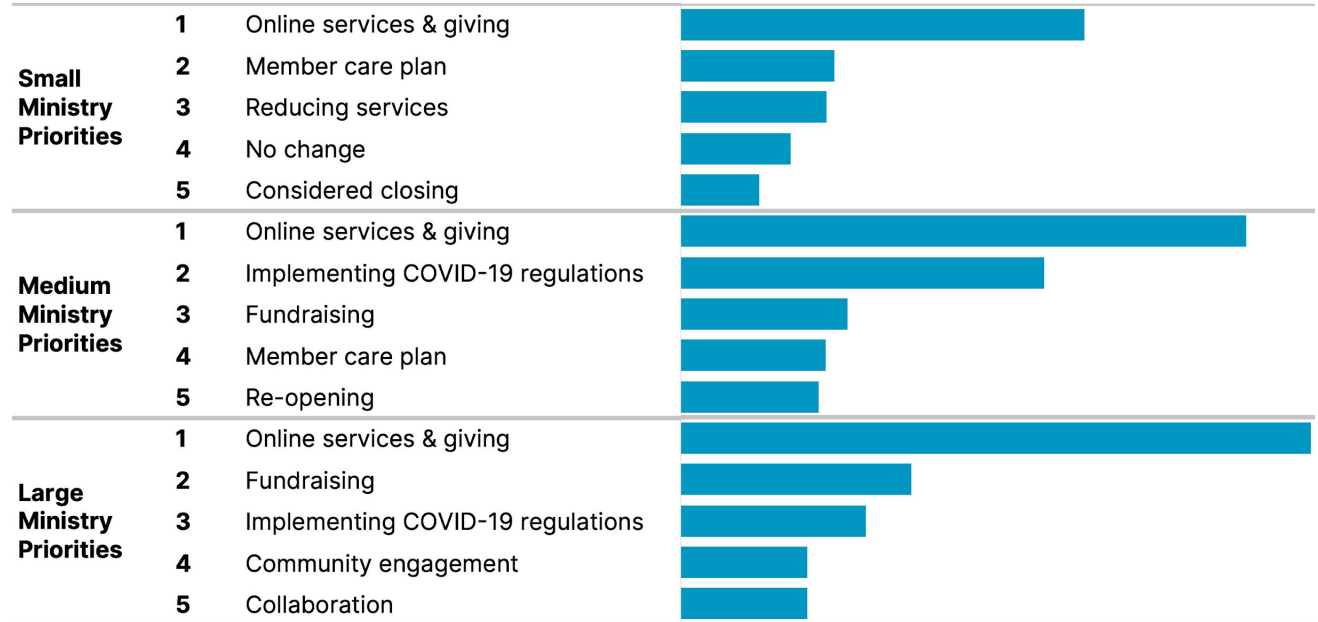


What important changes are being implemented by ministries this fall?

Ministries, like churches, are actively adapting to the realities of COVID-19.

They made changes related to online services, online giving, member care, and fundraising as a part of bolstering their support base.

There is an opportunity for churches and ministries to partner in new ways and actively collaborate on serving their local communities and beyond so every ministry remains strong during these challenging times.



Thanks for your interest in this report.

In early 2021, we will be conducting a more comprehensive survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on Christian churches and ministries.

[To participate in or be notified about future surveys, click here.](#)

Appendix

Comments on Methodology and Limitations

General Methodology

WayBase provides empowering online tools for organizations and individuals to take action with others to improve their lives, the lives of others, their communities, and the world. As a part of this vision, WayBase maintains a database that endeavours to contain data on every Christian ministry in Canada.

The qualification for being listed in WayBase.com is dependent on that ministry:

- Identifying as Christian (by subscription to a statement of faith by either: The Canadian Council of Churches, The Canadian Centre for Christian Charities, or The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada);
- Having charitable status or being confirmed as a ministry by another ministry already listed on WayBase.

From October 6-19, 2020 we invited leaders from these Christian organizations to respond to our online survey on the impact of COVID-19 on their ministry.

Linking Results with Ministries

Emails inviting responses were connected with the organization name and a unique identifier, ensuring all responses were associated with the correct organization.

Where the responder modified the organization name or location, a verification was done to assign the response to the new organization.

Where multiple responses were received on behalf of a single organization, these were manually reviewed to assess the individual in the best position to give a representative answer on behalf of the organization.

May Survey Report

To view the the previous Impact of COVID-19 on Canadian Christian Charities May survey results, [click here](#). We intend to conduct another national survey in the new year.

Comments on Methodology and Limitations

Representativeness

In order to ensure the representativeness of the results, we reviewed the distribution of results by organizational category, revenue size, province, and area type (urban vs rural. Revenue size was determined by the following revenue buckets (determined by their 2017 charitable return): <\$25K, \$25K-\$100K, \$100K-\$249K, \$250K-\$499K, \$500K-\$759K, \$750K-\$999K, \$1M+. These were then grouped into small, medium, large (<\$250K, \$250K-\$750K, >\$750K, respectively). This was done after observing minimal differences between the more granular sized buckets.

For the most part, responses were well in line with the distributions of organizations identified in WayBase, however we have not fully validated by Christian faith stream or faith tradition.

Data was re-sampled according to revenue group, province, and areatype (urban vs. rural) in order to produce results representative of the localized nature of COVID-19 effects.

Other notes:

If multiple organizations are using the same charitable number, their sizes are treated the same. This is because we have no principled criteria to assign a size, and at the same time, the responses of sub-organizations is to a certain extent a representation of the larger organization. This was a relatively minor factor affecting <1% of responses.

References to small, medium, and large refer to size of revenue, not people served. Estimating functional size based on revenue size is a common practice. Revenue data was only available in the case of charities. Non-charity responses were used when division by revenue size was not a factor. WayBase recognizes that organizations can have small revenue but serve a large number of people. Size of congregation is described explicitly by congregation size in some cases.

Ministries by Category

Church includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Congregation	Multisite Congregation (Campus)	Church Office - Multisite	
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Diocese & Denomination Offices includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Church Office - Church Network Church Office - Church Planting	Church Office - Denomination District/Diocese/Conference	Church Office - Denomination Head Office	Church Office - Parish/Pastoral Charge
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Welfare / Community Benefits includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Abuse Services Agricultural Programs Disaster/War Relief Food Bank/Food Security Homelessness/Homeless Shelter Indigenous Peoples Social Services Infrastructure Development	Low Income Housing Orphanage Peace Work Prison & Reorientation Services Refugee/Immigration Services Relief and Development Social Justice Advocacy	Thrift Stores After School Program Community Benefits - Child Care Disability Services Drop-In Centre Employment and Career Services Government Engagement	Group Home Legal Services Marriage, Family, and Sexuality Community Benefits - Pregnancy Care/Family Planning Community Benefits - Other Welfare - Other
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Ministries by Category

Education includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Early Childhood Elementary/High School Higher Education Adult Education	Alternative Education Library Literacy/Language Studies Research	Scholarships & Educational Awards Education - Other School District/Board/Division (note: The Catholic District School Board	was excluded from this survey due to its significant size and unique funding model that would skew results)
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Camp & Retreat includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Day Camp Overnight Camp	Other Recreation	Retreat Centre	Retreat - Other
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Evangelism & Discipleship includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Student Ministry Conferences & Events	Discipleship General Evangelism General	Missionary Sending/Support	Evangelism/Discipleship - Other
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Ministries by Category

Other includes ministries engaged in the following work:

Association - Faith and Work Association - Financial Services/Financial Benefit Programs Association - Ministerial/City Networking Association Association - General Culture & Media - Bookstores Culture & Media - Museum/Heritage Culture & Media - Music Culture & Media - Online Media Culture & Media - Publishing/Curriculum Culture & Media - Radio Broadcasting Culture & Media - Technology Culture & Media - TV Broadcasting Culture & Media - Other	Environment/Animals - Animal Care & Preservation Environment/Animals - Environmental Care & Preservation Foundation - Christian Ministry Foundation - Education Foundation - Health Foundation - Other Health - Addiction Recovery Health - Children's Hospital/Care Health - Hospice/Palliative Care Health - Hospital Health - Mental Health Services Health - Seniors Homes/Elder Care Health - Other Leadership Development - Conferences & Events Leadership Development - Resources	Leadership Development - Training Programs Leadership Development - Other Property/Trusts - Cemetery Property/Trusts - Facilities, Buildings, and Maintenance Property/Trusts - Trust Property/Trusts - Other Religious Order - Augustinians Religious Order - Benedictines Religious Order - Carmelites Religious Order - Carthusians Religious Order - Cistercian Religious Order - Convent Religious Order - Dominicans Religious Order - Franciscans Religious Order - Jesuits Religious Order - Missionaries of Charity	Religious Order - Monastery Religious Order - Salesians Religious Order - Vincentian Religious Order - Other Resource Individuals - Author/Blogger Resource Individuals - Chaplain Resource Individuals - Choir Resource Individuals - Counselor Resource Individuals - Entertainer Resource Individuals - Musician/Band Resource Individuals - Speaker/Communicator Resource Individuals - Spiritual Director Resource Individuals - Visual Artist Resource Individuals - Wedding Officiant Resource Individuals - Other
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| **WayBase.com**