

ABC Survey Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 October 2020

This is a follow-up survey of American Baptist congregations assessing the impact of the global pandemic. In the spring of 2020, the members of the National Executive Council and Regional Executive Ministers Council requested a survey of American Baptist congregations to assess the impact of COVID-19. This survey, distributed in September of 2020, requested completions by October 15, 2020. The tables below show a comparison of the May and October results. This is a point person survey in which the person most knowledgeable is asked to complete the survey on behalf of the congregation. A total of 154 congregations responded to the survey.

Question 1: Compared to the rest of the country, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in our local community:		
	May	October
Have been far less than the rest of the country.	46%	41%
Have been slightly less than the rest of the country.	17%	19%
Have been about the same as the rest of the country.	15%	24%
Have been slightly more than the rest of the country.	16%	12%
Have been far more than the rest of the country.	6%	4%

Question 2: Overall, COVID-19 has had:		
	May	October
Almost no impact on our congregation	13%	6%
A slight impact on our congregation	13%	17%
A moderate impact on our congregation	26%	28%
A strong impact on our congregation	31%	40%
A tremendous impact on our congregation	17%	9%

Question 3: COVID-19 has negatively affected (Please check all that apply)		
	May	October
Our worship	73%	70%
Our outreach	50%	66%
Our sense of community	62%	64%
Our discipleship	45%	51%
Our mission	30%	32%
Other (comment)	20%	17%

Question 4: COVID-19 has provided new opportunities for (Please check all that apply)		
	May	October
Our worship	77%	79%
Our outreach	61%	58%
Our sense of community	56%	47%
Our discipleship	43%	44%
Our mission	37%	37%
Other (comment)	12%	11%

Question 5: What online activities has your congregation been able to offer since the onset of COVID-19? (Please check all that apply)		
	May	October
Online worship	88%	85%
Online conversations with individual members	71%	63%
Online committee and board meetings	64%	57%
Online small groups	55%	53%
We have not been able to offer any online activities	6%	8%
Other (comment)	11%	15%

Question 6: If you have been able to offer online worship, has your online worship attendance		
	May	October
Increased since before the pandemic	57%	50%
Stayed about the same	29%	37%
Decreased since the pandemic	14%	13%

Question 7: Which, if any of your online activities do you plan to continue once you are able to resume activities in your church building following COVID-19? (Please check all that apply)		
	May	October
Online worship	79%	83%
Online small groups	42%	42%
Online conversations with individual members	35%	37%
Online committee and board meetings	35%	35%
Other (comment)	17%	13%

Question 8: What do you think that your congregants miss most about not being able to gather?		
	May	October
Feeling a sense of community from being together	54%	45%
Greeting one another	29%	36%
Singing and praying together	11%	11%
Engaging in mission activities face to face	1%	4%
Hearing a sermon in person rather than online or not all	5%	2%

Question 9: Has your congregation engaged in any of the following activities during COVID-19? (Please check all that apply)		
	May	October
Delivering supplies to persons who cannot leave their home	73%	71%
Distributing food to those in need	60%	66%
Making masks	50%	45%
Delivering supplies to the homeless	18%	33%
Providing encouragement to first responders	29%	25%
Engaging in political advocacy regarding COVID-19	10%	11%
Other (comment)	16%	17%

Question 10: The negative financial impact of COVID-19 upon our individual members and congregants has been (If you are unsure, please skip this question)		
	May	October
Very slight	49%	46%
Somewhat severe	26%	24%
Moderately severe	19%	24%
Very severe	4%	5%
Extremely severe	2%	2%

Question 11: The approximate percentage of persons associated with our congregation who are now unemployed as a result of COVID-19 is:		
	May	October
0 to 10 percent	66%	75%
10 to 20 percent	19%	18%
20 to 30 percent	8%	5%
30 to 40 percent	3%	0%
40 to 50 percent	1%	1%
More than 50 percent	2%	1%

Question 12: During this health crisis, have your weekly offerings		
	May	October
Increased significantly	3%	5%
Increased slightly	13%	16%
Stayed the same	24%	29%
Decreased slightly	40%	38%
Decreased significantly	20%	12%

Question 13: Do you anticipate any financial difficulty in paying your pastor and staff in the next 3 months?		
	May	October
The church is not concerned about paying our pastor and staff	62%	70%
The church is somewhat concerned about paying our pastor and staff	30%	23%
The church is very concerned about paying our pastor and staff	7%	7%

Question 14: In terms of our ability to balance our budget this year		
	May	October
We are not concerned	34%	48%
We are somewhat concerned	35%	26%
We are moderately concerned	21%	12%
We are very concerned	8%	13%
We wonder if we will be able to remain open this year	2%	1%

Question 15: How would you describe your personal state of mind? (Please check all that apply)		
	May	October
Hopeful	68%	62%
Concerned	42%	45%
Resilient	52%	39%
Encouraged	35%	31%
Calm	39%	29%
Stressed	26%	28%
Frustrated	22%	28%
Anxious	17%	22%
Other (comment)	10%	9%

Question 16: As you reflect upon your congregation’s responses to previous crises and opportunities, how would you rate congregation’s current capacity and willingness to innovate as a result of COVID-19?

	May	October
Extremely innovative	12%	8%
Very innovative	30%	17%
Moderately innovative	32%	42%
Somewhat innovative	21%	25%
Not innovative at all	4%	7%

Question 17: After this global health crisis, in terms of church vitality, our congregation will be

	May	October
Healthier than it was before	38%	25%
Just as healthy as it was before	43%	45%
Less healthy than it was before	12%	21%
Other (comment)	7%	9%

Summary

A narrative summary of the results is included below. Overall, congregations report a similar number of community cases and similar financial effects as in the spring. They appear to be less hopeful and less opportunistic, however, as the emotional impact of the pandemic appears to be taking a toll on pastors and leaders.

Impact

- Sixty percent (60%) indicated that the number of COVID-19 cases in their communities appears to be less than the rest of the country. This number is similar to the 63% figure reported in May.
- Forty-nine percent (49%) indicated that COVID-19 has had a strong or tremendous impact on their congregation. This number is similar to the 48% figure reported in May.

Online Activities

- Seventy percent (70%) conveyed that the pandemic has negatively affected their worship, but an even higher number (79%) conveyed that the pandemic has provided new opportunities for worship.
- More congregations have seen an increase in worship attendance (50%) than a decrease in worship attendance (13%) during the pandemic.

- A slightly higher percentage of respondents (83%) than in the spring (79%) plan to continue to offer online worship following the pandemic.
- Most congregations have been able to offer online worship and other activities during the pandemic. Less than ten percent have not been able to offer any online activities.
- More persons now (66%) than in the spring (50%) expressed that the pandemic has negatively influenced their outreach and fewer persons are seeing new opportunities in this area.

Other Activities

- The activities that persons miss the most are feeling a sense of community (45%) greeting one another (36%).
- Over 50% of the responding congregations have been involved in delivering supplies to the homebound and those in need, and the number congregations involved in delivering supplies to the homeless nearly doubled since the spring survey.

Financial Impact

- Nearly one-half of the responding congregations indicate that the financial impact of COVID-19 has been very slight. Less than 10% denoted that the impact has been very or extremely severe.
- Three-fourths of the responding congregations are experiencing less than 10% unemployment among their members.
- Even though more congregations experienced a decrease rather than an increase in giving, 83% have seen only slight changes in their weekly offerings.
- A higher percentage (70%) of responding congregations are not concerned about the ability to pay their pastor and staff over the next three months compared to a 62% figure in the spring.
- A higher percentage (48%) of responding congregations are not concerned about their ability to balance their 2020 budget compared to a 34% figure in the spring. The percentage of very concerned congregations, however, has risen from 8% to 13%.
- It is interesting to note that the number of congregations who express being very concerned about their budget is equal to the number of congregations who have not been able to offer any online activities.

Outlook

- Respondents report being less calm, resilient, and hopeful now than in the spring and report being more concerned, anxious, and frustrated.

- The number of congregations feeling very or extremely innovative decreased to 25% from 42% in the spring.
- Similarly, the number of congregations suggesting that they would be healthier after the pandemic decreased to 25% compared to 38% in the spring.

Recommendations

- *Connect with the online worship community.* Because so many persons are lacking a sense of community and engagement, encourage congregations to extend their online presence beyond worship, by connecting with the online worshipping community by sharing success stories of those who have been able to do this.
- *Share stories of neighborhood ministry.* Search for and share stories about how congregations have been involved in delivering supplies to the homebound, persons in need, and the homeless. Develop resources for creative outreach during the global pandemic.
- *Provide encouragement.* Lift up ways to care for pastors and other congregational leaders as a result of increased feelings of concern, anxiousness, and frustration.
- *Emphasize opportunities over challenges.* Remind congregations that opportunities can still outweigh challenges. We serve a God who knows how to use disruption to expand the kingdom.
- *Leave no congregation behind.* Look for ways in which the small percentage of congregations that have been severely impacted by the pandemic can express their concerns and seek assistance.