

ABC Survey Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 June 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 was a point person survey in which the person most knowledgeable was asked to complete the survey on behalf of the congregation. In May of 2020, a survey regarding the impact of the global pandemic was sent to all of the ABC regions via the executive minister.

A total of 414 congregations responded to the survey. A summary of the quantitative results is shown below.

Question 1: Compared to the rest of the country, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in our local community:		
	Actual #	Percentage
Has been far less than the rest of the country	187	46%
Has been slightly less than the rest of the country	71	17%
Has been about the same as the rest of the country	63	15%
Has been slightly more than the rest of the country	64	16%
Has been far more than the rest of the country	24	6%

Question 2: Overall, COVID-19 has had:		
	Actual #	Percentage
Almost no impact on our congregation	54	13%
A slight impact on our congregation	54	13%
A moderate impact on our congregation	105	26%
A strong impact on our congregation	129	31%
A tremendous impact on our congregation	68	17%

Question 3: COVID-19 has negatively affected (Please check all that apply)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Our worship	297	73%
Our sense of community	250	62%
Our outreach	204	50%
Our discipleship	183	45%
Our mission	120	30%
Other (comment)	82	20%

Question 4: COVID-19 has provided new opportunities for (Please check all that apply)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Our worship	310	77%
Our outreach	245	61%
Our sense of community	226	56%
Our discipleship	171	43%
Our mission	150	37%
Other (comment)	48	12%

Question 5: What online activities has your congregation been able to offer since the onset of COVID-19? (Please check all that apply)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Online worship	362	88%
Online conversations with individual members	292	71%
Online committee and board meetings	261	64%
Online small groups	227	55%
Other (comment)	45	11%
We have not been able to offer any online activities	26	6%

Question 6: If you have been able to offer online worship, has your online worship attendance		
	Actual #	Percentage
Increased since before the pandemic	215	57%
Stayed about the same	107	29%
Decreased since the pandemic	53	14%

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)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Online worship	293	79%
Online small groups	156	42%
Online committee and board meetings	130	35%
Online conversations with individual members	129	35%
Other (comment)	65	17%

Question 8: What do you think that your congregants miss most about not being able to gather?		
	Actual #	Percentage
Feeling a sense of community from being together	221	54%
Greeting one another	121	29%
Singing and praying together	43	11%
Hearing a sermon in person rather than online or not all	19	5%
Engaging in mission activities face to face	5	1%

Question 9: Has your congregation engaged in any of the following activities during COVID-19? (Please check all that apply)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Delivering supplies to persons who cannot leave their home	283	73%
Distributing food to those in need	233	60%
Making masks	195	50%
Providing encouragement to first responders	114	29%
Delivering supplies to the homeless	70	18%
Other (comment)	63	16%
Engaging in political advocacy regarding COVID-19	39	10%

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)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Very slight	174	49%
Somewhat severe	91	26%
Moderately severe	69	19%
Very severe	14	4%
Extremely severe	8	2%

Question 11: The approximate percentage of persons associated with our congregation who are now unemployed as a result of COVID-19 is:		
	Actual #	Percentage
0 to 10 percent	213	66%
10 to 20 percent	62	19%
20 to 30 percent	25	8%
30 to 40 percent	10	3%
40 to 50 percent	4	1%
More than 50 percent	7	2%

Question 12: During this health crisis, have your weekly financial offerings		
	Actual #	Percentage
Increased significantly	13	3%
Increased slightly	51	13%
Stayed the same	97	24%
Decreased slightly	164	40%
Decreased significantly	80	20%

Question 13: Do you anticipate any financial difficulty in paying your pastor and staff in the next 3 months?		
	Actual #	Percentage
The church is not concerned about paying our pastor and staff	254	62%
The church is somewhat concerned about paying our pastor and staff	123	30%
The church is very concerned about paying our pastor and staff	30	7%

Question 14: In terms of our ability to balance our budget this year		
	Actual #	Percentage
We are not concerned	139	34%
We are somewhat concerned	140	35%
We are moderately concerned	87	21%
We are very concerned	34	8%
We wonder if we will be able to remain open this year	6	2%

Question 15: How would you describe your personal state of mind? (Please check all that apply)		
	Actual #	Percentage
Hopeful	277	68%
Resilient	213	52%
Concerned	171	42%
Calm	161	39%
Encouraged	144	35%
Stressed	107	26%
Frustrated	91	22%
Anxious	68	17%
Other (comment)	43	10%

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?

	Actual #	Percentage
Extremely innovative	51	12%
Very innovative	123	30%
Moderately innovative	131	32%
Somewhat innovative	87	21%
Not innovative at all	18	4%

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

	Actual #	Percentage
Healthier than it was before	153	38%
Just as healthy as it was before	175	43%
Less healthy than it was before	49	12%
Other (comment)	29	7%

Question 21: Given the present circumstances, how do you feel about attending large regional and national gatherings?

	Actual #	Percentage
I would attend with no concerns	10	9%
I would attend if all of the proper health safeguards were put into place	41	39%
I would not attend until there was a dramatic change in the current conditions created by COVID-19 such as the widespread availability and effectiveness of a vaccine	51	49%
The global pandemic has permanently influenced my desire to attend large gatherings	2	2%

Summary of Tables

Some of the key findings from the survey are included below.

Overall Impact of COVID-19

While the survey indicated that a slight majority of the congregations surveyed are experiencing only a slight or moderate impact from COVID-19, a small percentage of ABC congregations have been hit very hard by the pandemic.

- The majority (63%) of respondents believe that they are in an area with fewer cases than the rest of the country.
- About one-half (52%) of the congregations surveyed indicated that COVID-19 has had a moderate or less impact on their congregation.
- Some congregations (14%) report being hit very hard financially by COVID-19 stating that at least 20% of their members are unemployed.

Impact of COVID-19 on Worship and Ministry

The survey shows signs that many congregations have delivered a hardy response to the adverse effects of COVID-19. While the pandemic has elicited both positive and negative influences upon the congregations surveyed, sometimes the dual influences have occurred in same areas such as worship and outreach.

- 88% of the respondents indicate that their congregations have been able to offer online worship during the pandemic. Only 6% indicate that their congregation has not been able to offer any online activities during the pandemic.
- 73% of the respondents believe that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their worship, but a slightly higher number (77%) believe that COVID-19 has also created new opportunities for worship. Similarly, 50% of the respondents believe that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their outreach, while (61%) believe that COVID-19 has created new opportunities in this same area of ministry.
- Over one-half (57%) of the respondents say that their worship attendance has increased during the pandemic compared to only 14% who indicate that worship attendance has declined.
- In most cases, however, increased worship attendance online has not translated into increased giving. Sixty-percent report that giving has decreased compared to only 16% who report that giving has increased during the pandemic.
- Nearly 4 out of 5 respondents indicate that they plan to continue to offer online worship following the stay at home orders.

- Respondents indicate that their congregants miss “feeling a sense of community” the most when compared to missing other elements of worship and ministry.
- Nearly three-fourths of the responding congregations revealed that they have engaged in “delivering supplies to persons who cannot leave their home” during the pandemic and at least one-half have engaged in “distributing food to those in need” and “making masks.”

Future Outlook

While COVID-19 has taken a severe toll on some congregations, others have shown strong signs of resiliency and hope.

- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the respondents say that their congregations are not worried about paying their pastor and staff in the near future.
- In terms of balancing the budget, the responses are divided into thirds, with one-third expressing no concern, another third expressing some concern, and a third expressing moderate to heavy concern. Two-percent are wondering if they will be able to remain open after this global pandemic.
- Responding to a list of possible state of mind descriptors, the majority of persons (68%) indicated that they are “hopeful” and another 52% indicated that they feel “resilient” about the future.
- 42% of respondents said that they feel that their congregation is an extremely innovative or very innovative congregation, signaling more creative responses to COVID-19.
- 38% of respondents said that their congregation would be “healthier than it was before” following the pandemic, compared to only 12% who said that they believe that it would be “less healthy than it was before.”

Additional Responses to Question 3 Regarding Areas Impacted by COVID-19

- Our well-being
- Our leadership team, committee, and board meetings
- My workload
- Our unity
- Ability to grieve with those who died
- Support of the homeless
- Ability to integrate our new pastor
- Pastoral calling
- Actual presence
- Need to gather as the Body of Christ
- Has just made each of these look different
- Sense of security

Additional Responses to Questions 4 & 5 Regarding New Opportunities Created by COVID-19

- Being missional
- Prayer
- Welcoming visitors
- Checking in with one another
- Waiting and planning for new emergence
- Our openness to be led by the Lord
- Creative use of technology
- Competitive communications
- To be patient
- We are like technology refugees
- The opportunity to reassess values
- Our ability to show our willingness to lay down our lives for one another
- Our dependence upon one another as human beings and society
- Dialogue about the use of our building
- Greater utilization of gifts
- Creativity
- Social media
- Our faith
- Considering restructuring staff
- Online recovering and support groups
- Online opportunities to volunteer for missionary service
- Online game nights
- Common Thursday discussions
- Drive-in worship
- Children's programming
- Podcasts, testimonies, and daily devotions
- Communion
- Meditations of Facebook
- New website

Additional Responses to Questions 7 Regarding Online Activities to be Continued Following COVID-19

- Daily devotions
- Bible study
- Sermons
- Prayer meetings
- Party blocks
- Partial online worship
- Children's programming
- Fun activities like trivia night
- Podcast, testimonies, daily devotions
- Email devotionals
- Zoom account
- Weekly talk
- Facebook
- It is too soon to think about this
- We plan to slowly phase out online activities
- Food pantry requests

Additional Responses to Question 9 Regarding New Ministries Created by COVID-19

- Encouragement to members
- Giving away masks
- Financial and prayer support to members
- Searching for additional sources of income
- Checking on high risk members
- Opening the building for overflow emergency shelter
- Neighborhood clean-up
- Delivering lessons and gift bags to children
- Drive-through prayer
- Diaper giveaways
- Increased checking on each other
- Encouragement to business owners
- PPE to hospital, pet food to SPCA, girl scout cookies to police department
- Caravan funerals
- 24 hour vigils
- Responding as EMT's to the homes of patients
- Supporting communities agencies that do these things
- Intercession for family affected by the virus
- Our members do these things individually
- Landscaping
- Raised \$66,000 for those laid off in our community

Additional Responses to Question 15 Regarding State of Mind Descriptors

- Mine changes daily
- All the feelings in mass quantity
- Fatigued
- Deprived
- Tired
- Exhausted with children under 5
- Positive
- Sad
- Discouraged
- Peaceful
- Exhilarated
- Overwhelmed
- Depressed
- Awed
- Meditative and reflective
- Challenged
- Grateful
- Busy
- Expectant
- Optimistic

Note: Responses to Question 18-20 as listed below are quite extensive and available in a separate file upon request.

Question 18: What I would like to tell others about how COVID-19 has affected our congregation is...
{Comment box}

Question 19: The new learning(s) that we have acquired as a result of COVID-19 are... {Comment box}

Question 20: A new ministry that we plan to launch as a result of the pandemic is... {Comment box}