



Impact of Pandemic on Nazarene Churches and Pastors

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The following report examines the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on local Nazarene churches and pastors across the globe. The pandemic has led to numerous cancellations, postponements, or changes in venues (i.e. from in-person to online) of denominational events and meetings, including the 2021 General Assembly, 2020 and 2021 General Board, district assemblies, and local church worship services. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some churches and pastors are adapting well to ministry opportunities during the pandemic, while others are struggling to survive. In order to achieve some clarity as to what is happening globally among Nazarene churches, General Superintendent Dr. Fili Chambo asked Research Services to conduct a global survey of Nazarene pastors.

Methodology

Research Services developed a short, online survey consisting of six questions about the local church and two questions concerning the pastor. These eight questions all used the following scale: *Strongly agree*, *Agree*, *Slightly agree*, *Slightly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Strongly disagree*. Additionally, there were two demographic questions concerning region and worship attendance. There was also an optional, open-ended question, which asked, "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your ministry, or your church's ministry, in response to the pandemic?"

In addition to providing the survey in English, the survey was translated into 10 other languages: Bengali, French, Haitian, Hindi, Korean, Marathi, Portuguese, Spanish, Tok Pisin, and Xitsonga. Together, these 11 languages accounted for the primary language used in 21,716 churches, or 74% of all 29,461 Nazarene churches. It should be noted that there were still 181 other primary languages used in worship by Nazarene churches. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the number of churches, by region, and by the languages in which the survey was available. The table also shows the percentage of churches that the 11 languages covered, by region.

An email inviting pastors to participate in the survey included a link to the online instrument. Research Services had the email translated into each of the 11 languages. Each regional director provided a contact person to whom Research Services sent the appropriate emails. The regional office then handled the distribution of the emails. In many parts of the world, asking pastors to complete an online survey is still problematic, as illustrated by the following note received from the Eurasia Regional Office:

“Just so you know, many of our pastors in southern Asia do not have computers or smart phones; wifi is not always readily available; and often mobile data rates are often not unlimited, but paid per use. In these same areas, online surveys and even emails are not regular or preferred modes of communication. All of these factors will contribute to a lower participation percentage.”

	Africa	Asia-Pacific	Eurasia	Mesoamerica	South America	USA/Canada	Language Total
English	928	56	89	201		4,190	5,464
Spanish	5		9	2,207	1,733	638	4,592
Bengali			4,141				4,141
French	1,546		8	16		25	1,595
Portuguese	591		19		625	9	1,244
Marathi			1,017				1,017
Hindi		2	946			1	949
Tsonga	909						909
Haitian				721	4	78	803
Tok Pisin		608					608
Korean		328	2			64	394
Region Total	3,979	994	6,231	3,145	2,362	5,005	21,716
Total Churches on Region	8,215	1,959	8,342	3,277	2,555	5,113	29,461
% of Churches with Survey Available in Language	48.4%	50.7%	74.7%	96.0%	92.4%	97.9%	73.7%

Between October 2 and November 20, 2020, we received 2,191 usable surveys. Computing a response rate is difficult given the following factors: 1) distribution of the survey invitation occurred in six separate regions, 2) the number of pastors with or without email is unknown, and 3) the number of churches that did not have a pastor at the time the time of the survey is unknown. However, since we know that 21,716 churches use one of the 11 languages in which the survey was available, and since we received 2,191 responses, the minimum response rate would be 10.1%. Of course, the response rate varies by region and the above listed circumstances. Table 2 shows the responses to the question, “On which region is your church?” The table also shows the minimum response rate based on the number of responses received and the potential number of responses based on the number of churches using one of the 11 languages.

	# of Responses	% of Responses	Potential Responses	Minimum Response Rate
Africa	41	1.9%	3,979	1.0%
Asia-Pacific	123	5.6%	994	12.4%
Eurasia	142	6.5%	6,231	2.3%
Mesoamerica	372	17.0%	3,145	11.8%
South America	455	20.8%	2,362	19.3%
USA/Canada	1,031	47.1%	5,005	20.6%
Region not indicated	27	1.2%		
Total	2,191	100.0%	21,716	10.1%

Although the survey was available in 11 languages, only six languages were used to complete the survey: English (1,337 responses), Spanish (718), Portuguese (121), French (9), Korean (5), and Haitian (1). Languages not used included Bengali, Marathi, Hindi, Tsonga, and Tok Pisin.

Given which languages were used and which were not, the results of this survey may be understood as results for English, Spanish, and Portuguese speaking churches and pastors. The implication is that translation is not enough to ensure participation when using online technology. Future surveys will need to take into consideration various ways to distribute and collect survey data, especially from the Africa and Eurasia regions.

Survey Results

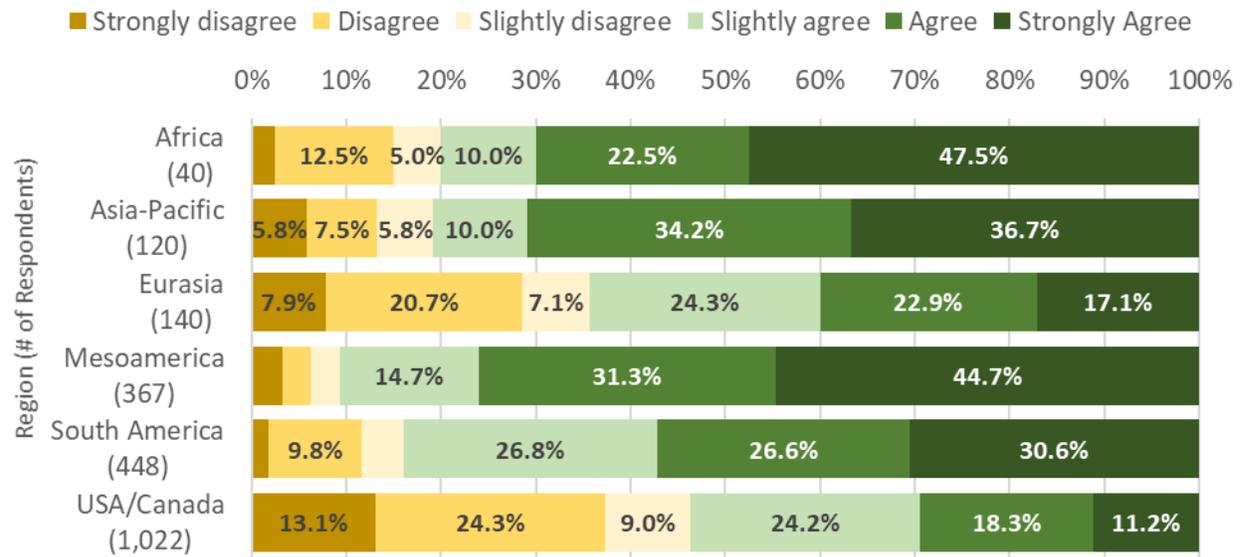
The following tables and charts examine the overall response to each survey statement, and differences in region and attendance size. Because of low response rates from the Africa and Eurasia Regions, comments concerning regional differences will not include those regions; however, their data will remain in the charts. Throughout the report, the term *agreed* will be used to indicate the total of those who responded *strongly agree*, *agree*, or *slightly agree*, and will be marked with an asterisk. Likewise, the term *disagreed* is used to indicate the total of those who responded *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, or *slightly disagree*, and will be marked with an asterisk.

1) The financial viability of this church has been put at risk by the pandemic.

<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	
175	8.1%	Strongly disagree
346	16.0%	Disagree
142	6.6%	Slightly disagree
475	22.0%	Slightly agree
513	23.7%	Agree
<u>513</u>	<u>23.7%</u>	Strongly agree
2,164	100.1%	Total
27	missing	

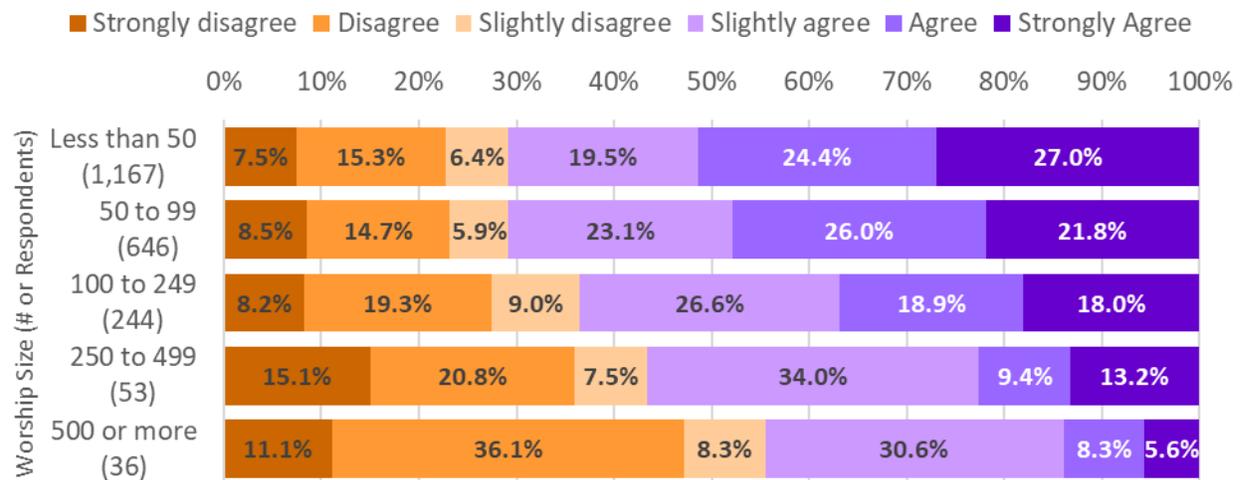
A majority of pastors *agreed** (69.4%) that the pandemic has put the financial viability of their church at risk. Differences by region and worship size were statistically significant. Chart 1 shows that The Mesoamerica Region was the most likely to *agree** (90.7%), while the USA/Canada Region was the most likely to *disagree** (46.5%). Chart 2 illustrates that as church size decreases, the level of agreement with the statement increases.

Chart 1: The financial viability of this church has been put at risk by the pandemic.



$X^2(25, N = 2,137) = 408.128, p = .000$

Chart 2: The financial viability of this church has been put at risk by the pandemic.

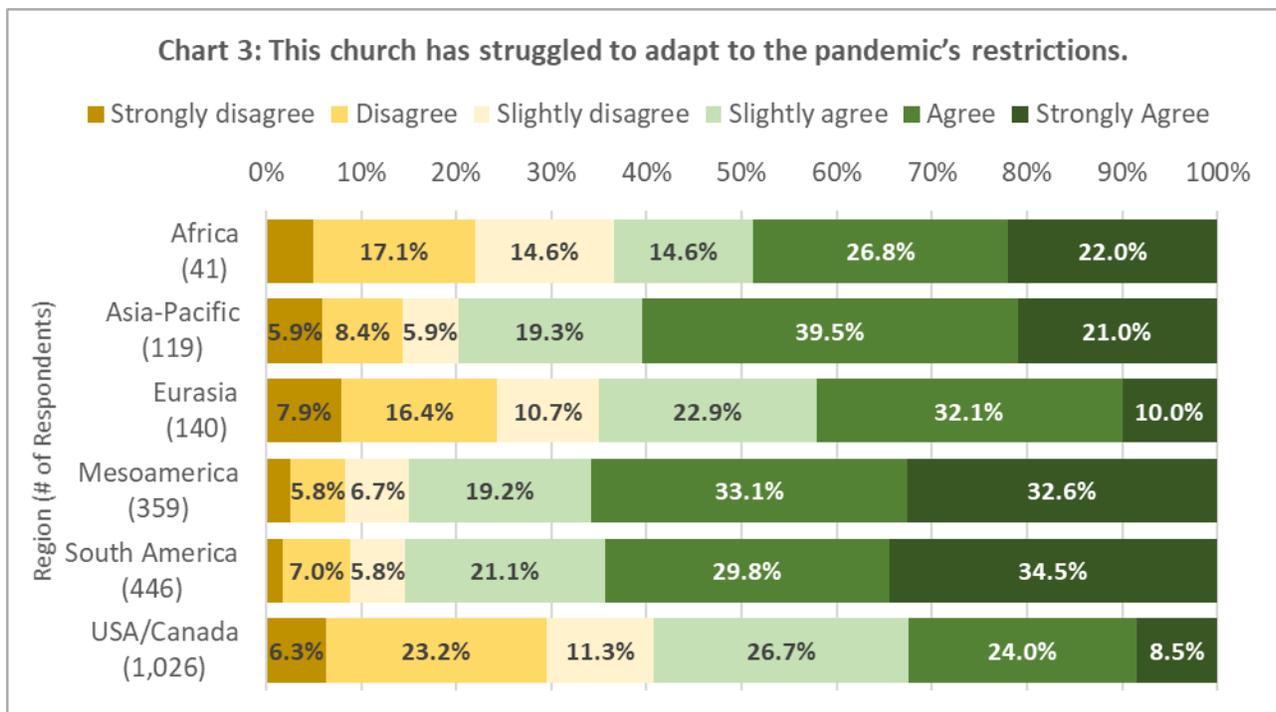


$X^2(20, N = 2,146) = 60.009, p = .000$

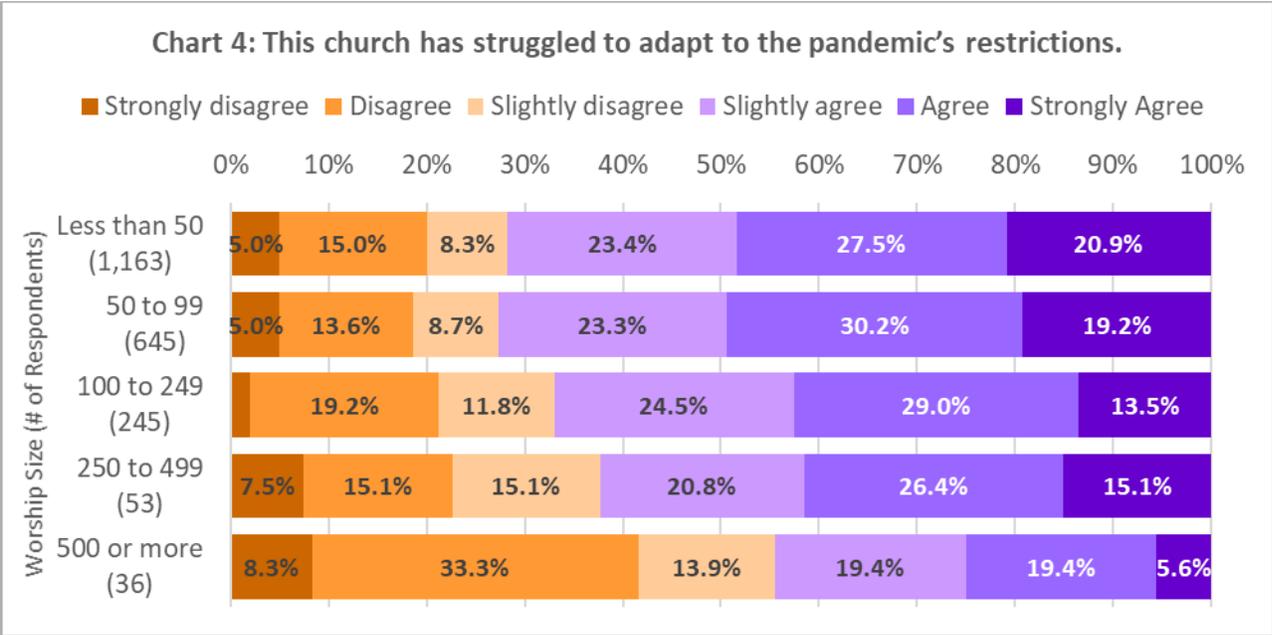
2) This church has struggled to adapt to the pandemic’s restrictions.

#	%	
102	4.7%	Strongly disagree
334	15.5%	Disagree
194	9.0%	Slightly disagree
502	23.3%	Slightly agree
610	28.3%	Agree
415	19.2%	Strongly agree
2,157	100.0%	Total
34	missing	

A majority of pastors *agreed** (70.8%) that their churches have struggled to adapt to the pandemic’s restrictions. Differences by region and worship size were statistically significant. Chart 3 shows that around 85% of pastors on the Mesoamerica and South America Regions *agreed** with the statement, while less than 60% of pastors on the USA/Canada Region *agreed**. Chart 4 shows that more than 70% of pastors in churches with less than 100 in attendance *agreed** with the statement, while less than 45% of pastors in churches with 500 or more in attendance *agreed**.



$\chi^2 (25, N = 2,131) = 306.678, p = .000$

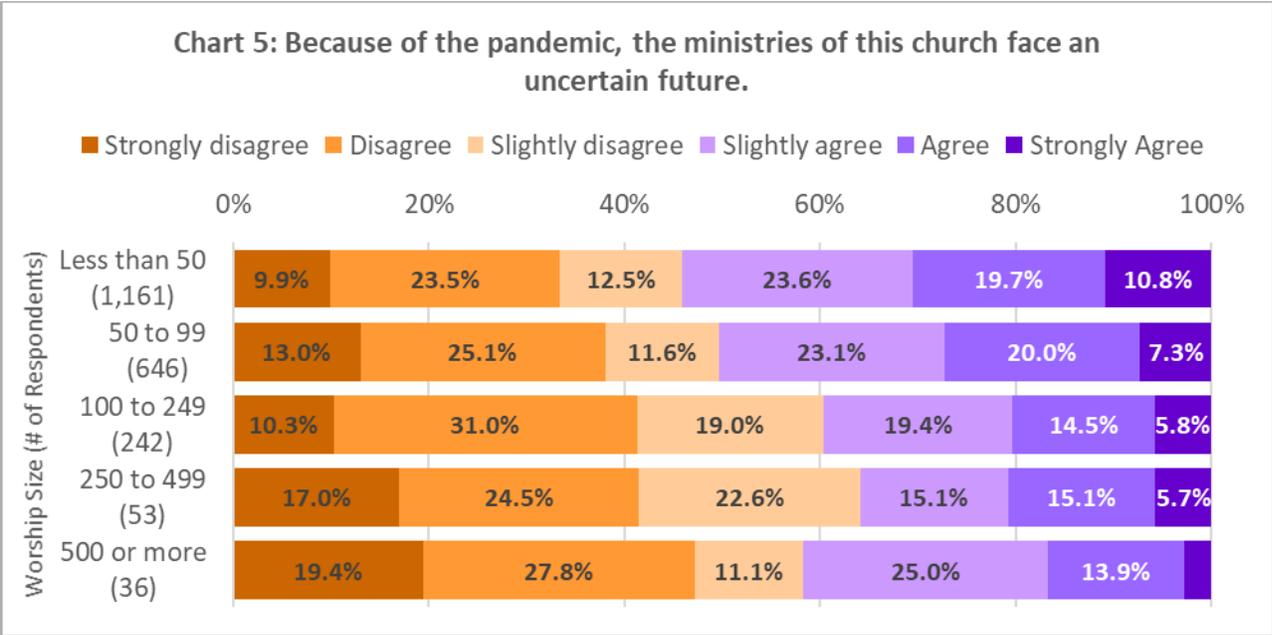


$X^2(20, N = 2,142) = 35.801, p = .016$

3) Because of the pandemic, the ministries of this church face an uncertain future.

#	%	
241	11.2%	Strongly disagree
537	25.0%	Disagree
284	13.2%	Slightly disagree
489	22.7%	Slightly agree
409	19.0%	Agree
192	8.9%	Strongly agree
2,152	100.0%	Total
39	missing	

Responses to the above statement were evenly divided between those who *agreed** (50.6%) and those who *disagreed** (49.4%). Differences by region were not statistically significant; however, differences by attendance size were statistically significant. Chart 5 shows that as attendance size increases the percentage of those in agreement decreases, with the exception of a slight increase in agreement once the category of 500 or more in attendance is reached; however, it should be noted that the percentages that *strongly agree* (2.8%) and *agree* (13.9%) are smaller than all other attendance categories.

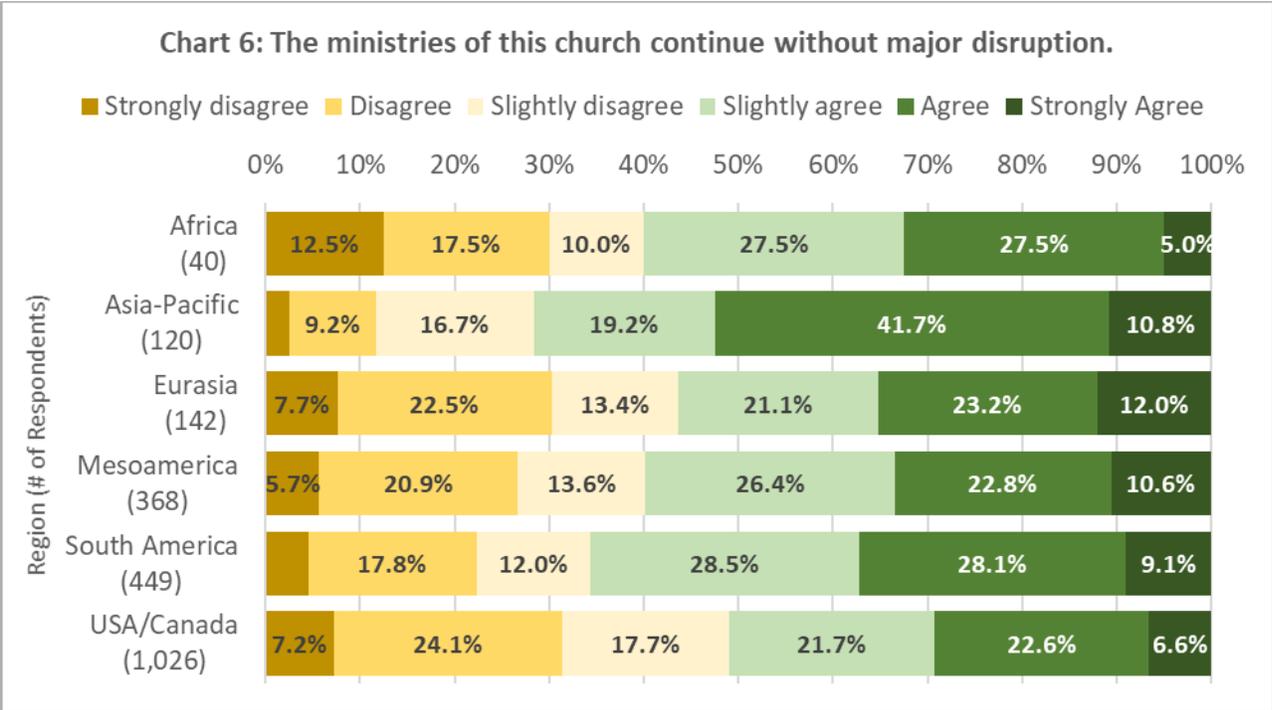


$X^2(20, N = 2,138) = 42.182, p = .003$

4) The ministries of this church continue without major disruption.

#	%	
135	6.2%	Strongly disagree
457	21.1%	Disagree
333	15.4%	Slightly disagree
517	23.8%	Slightly agree
544	25.1%	Agree
183	8.4%	Strongly agree
2,169	100.0%	Total
22	missing	

A majority of pastors *agreed** (57.3%) with the statement, “The ministries of this church continue without major disruption; however, less than 10% *strongly agreed*. Differences by attendance size were not statistically significant. Differences by region were statistically significant as illustrated by Chart 6. More than 70% of pastors on the Asia-Pacific Region *agreed** (71.7), while slightly more than 50% of pastors on the USA/Canada Region *agreed** (50.9%).



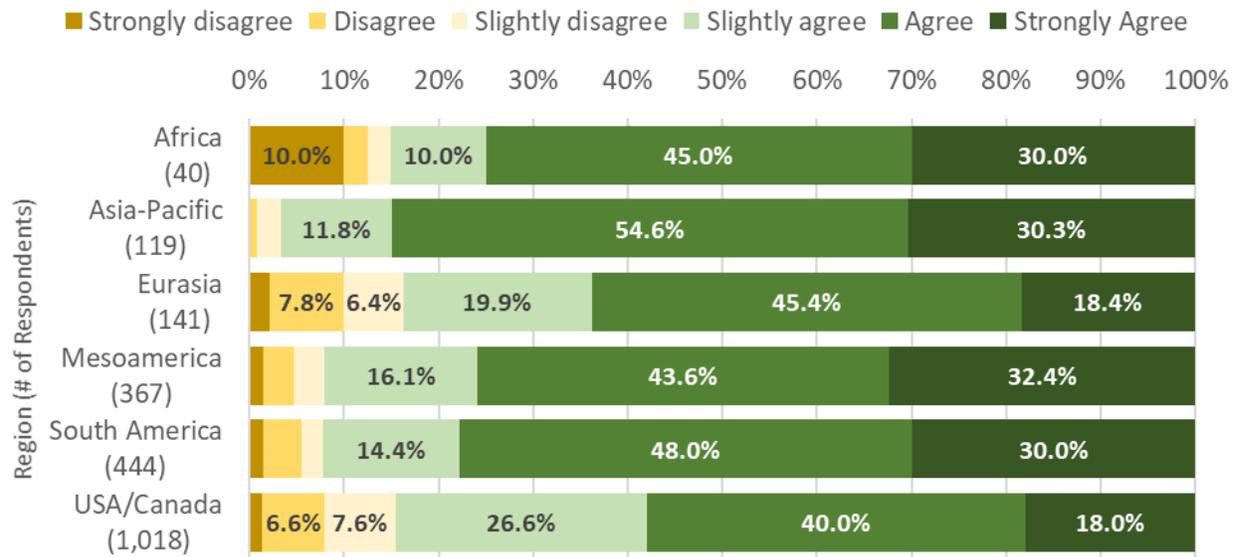
$X^2 (25, N = 2,145) = 70.673, p = .000$

5) This church has identified and embraced new opportunities for ministry since the pandemic.

#	%	
32	1.5%	Strongly disagree
111	5.2%	Disagree
112	5.2%	Slightly disagree
442	20.6%	Slightly agree
938	43.6%	Agree
514	23.9%	Strongly agree
2,149	100.0%	Total
42	missing	

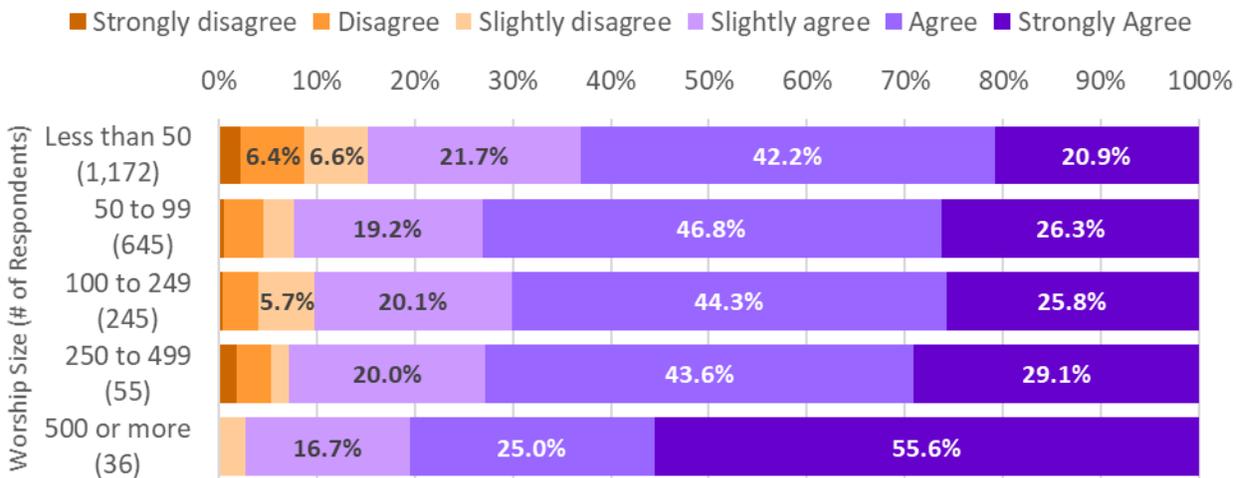
A large majority of pastors *agreed** (88.1%) with the statement, “This church has identified and embraced new opportunities for ministry since the pandemic.” Differences by region and attendance size were statistically significant. As seen in Chart 7, 96.7% of pastors on the Asia-Pacific Region *agreed** with the statement, compared to 84.6% of pastors on the USA/Canada Region. Chart 8 illustrates that as attendance size increased, so did the percentage of pastors in agreement with the statement. In fact, more than 55% of pastors in churches with an attendance of 500 or more *strongly agreed* with the statement.

Chart 7: This church has identified and embraced new opportunities for ministry since the pandemic.



$X^2(25, N = 2,129) = 142.267, p = .000$

Chart 8: This church has identified and embraced new opportunities for ministry since the pandemic.

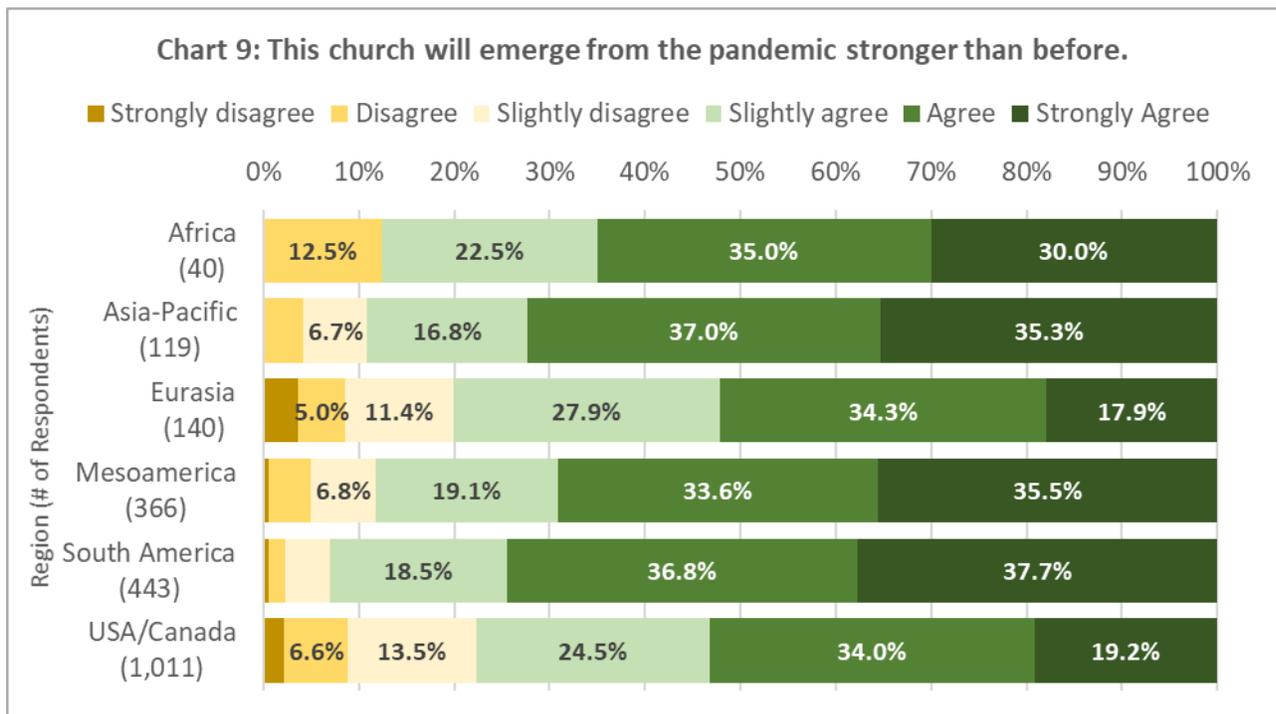


$X^2(20, N = 2,153) = 58.577, p = .000$

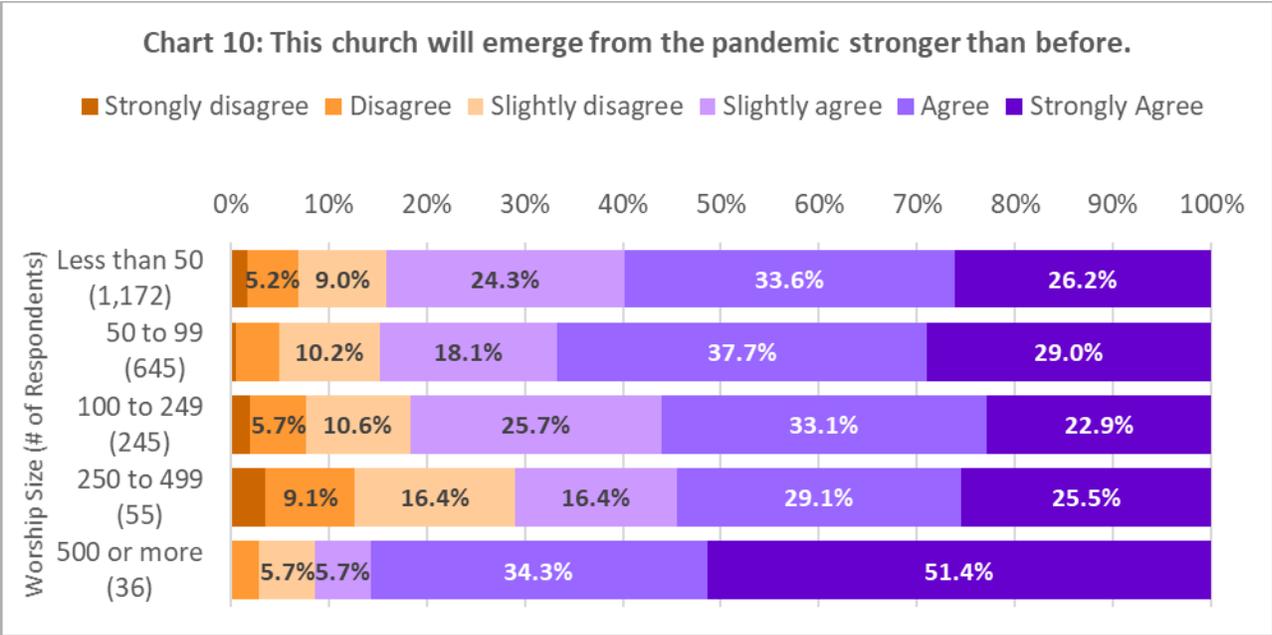
6) This church will emerge from the pandemic stronger than before.

#	%	
31	1.4%	Strongly disagree
109	5.1%	Disagree
207	9.7%	Slightly disagree
470	22.0%	Slightly agree
742	34.7%	Agree
581	27.1%	Strongly agree
2,140	100.0%	Total
51		missing

A large majority of pastors *agreed** (83.8%) that their church will emerge stronger from the pandemic. Differences by region and attendance size were statistically significant. Chart 9 shows that more than 35% of pastors from the Asia-Pacific, Mesoamerica, and South America Regions *strongly agreed* with the statement, while less than 20% of pastors on the USA/Canada Region *strongly agreed*. Chart 10 shows that pastors in churches with an attendance of 500 or more were much more likely to *strongly agree* (51.4%) with the statement than pastors in other churches.



$\chi^2(25, N = 2,119) = 139.098, p = .000$

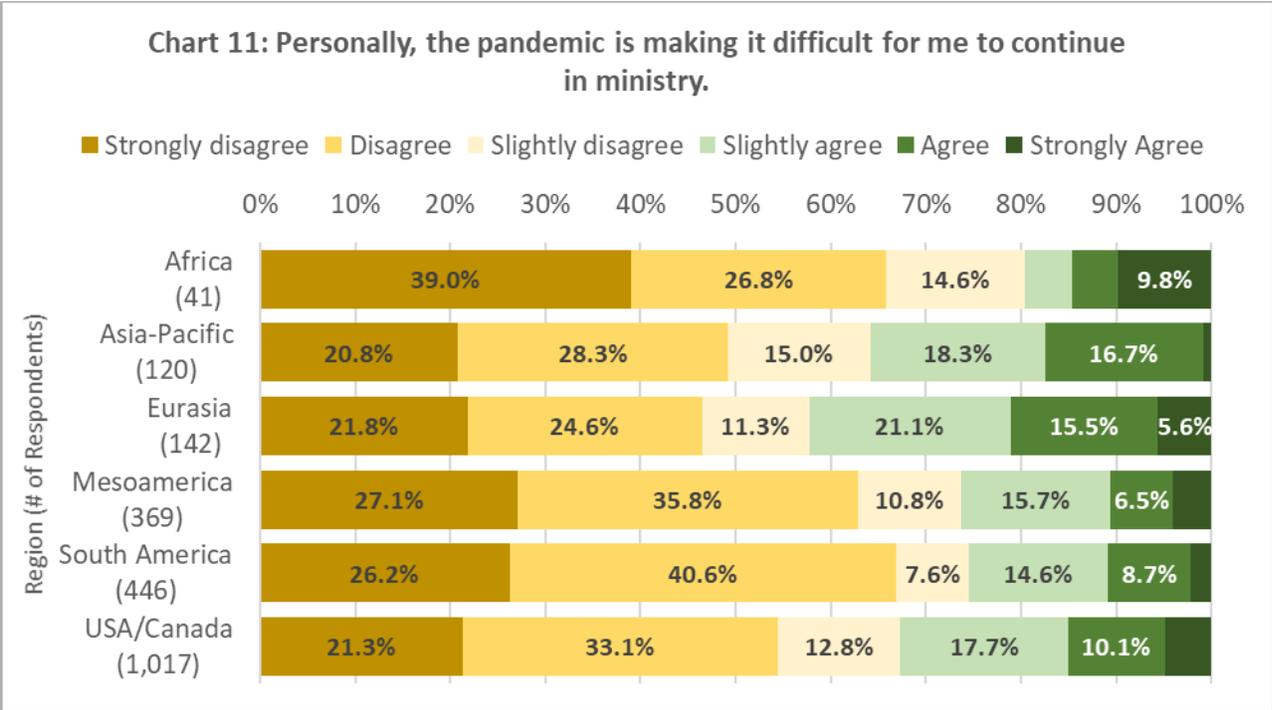


$\chi^2(20, N = 2,153) = 40.422, p = .004$

7) Personally, the pandemic is making it difficult for me to continue in ministry.

#	%	
510	23.7%	Strongly disagree
739	34.3%	Disagree
247	11.5%	Slightly disagree
357	16.6%	Slightly agree
212	9.8%	Agree
89	4.1%	Strongly agree
2,154	100.0%	Total
37		missing

A majority of pastors *disagreed** (69.5%) with the statement, “Personally, the pandemic is making it difficult for me to continue in ministry.” Only 4.1% *strongly agreed* with the statement. Differences by region were statistically significant. Chart 11 shows that about 74% of pastors on the Mesoamerica and South America Regions *disagreed** with the statement, while 64% of pastors on the Asia-Pacific Region *disagreed** with the statement. Differences by attendance size were not statistically significant.

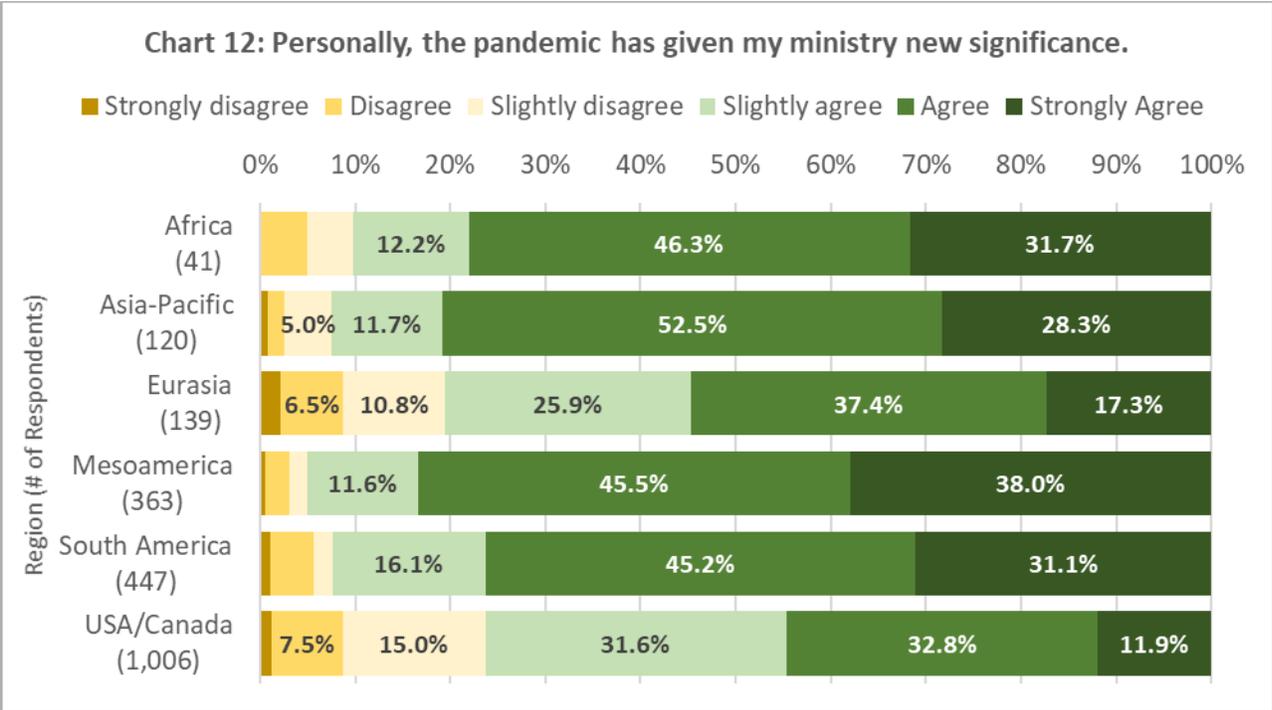


$\chi^2 (25, N = 2,135) = 66.678, p = .000$

8) Personally, the pandemic has given my ministry new significance.

#	%	
23	1.1%	Strongly disagree
118	5.5%	Disagree
190	8.9%	Slightly disagree
488	22.8%	Slightly agree
841	39.4%	Agree
477	22.3%	Strongly agree
2,137	100.0%	Total
54	missing	

A large majority of pastors agreed* (84.5%) with the statement, “Personally, the pandemic has given my ministry new significance. Differences by region were statistically significant. More than 90% of pastors in the Asia-Pacific, Mesoamerica, and South America Regions *agreed** with the statement, compared to 76% of pastors in the USA/Canada Region. Differences by attendance size were not statistically significant.



$\chi^2 (25, N = 2,116) = 314.728, p = .000$

Demographic Items

9) On which region is your church?

#	%	
41	1.9%	Africa
123	5.7%	Asia-Pacific
142	6.6%	Eurasia
372	17.2%	Mesoamerica
455	21.0%	South America
1,031	47.6%	USA/Canada
2,164	100.0%	Total
27	missing	

10) Which best represents you church’s average worship attendance (including children and adults)?

#	%	
1,182	54.4%	Less than 50
653	30.1%	50 to 99
246	11.3%	100 to 249
55	2.5%	250 to 499
36	1.7%	500 or more
2,172	100.0%	Total
19	missing	

Open-ended Responses

An optional, open-ended question gave respondents the opportunity to express things about the pandemic and their ministry that the survey questions did not cover. The question asked, “Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your ministry, or your church's ministry, in response to the pandemic?” Eight hundred seventy-three (39.8%) respondents chose to make a comment. Of these, 439 were in English, 374 were in Spanish, 48 were in Portuguese, seven were in French, two were in Korean, two were in Russian, and one was in Haitian.

Conclusion

Responses to the survey show a mixture of struggle, adaptation, and optimism for the future. While there are statistically significant differences by region and attendance size, the patterns of responses are often similar. Concerning the struggles faced, a majority of pastors said that the financial viability of their church was at risk. This item had a high correlation with the statement, “This church has struggled to adapt to the pandemic’s restrictions” ($r = .505, p < .000$), indicating that the more a church struggled to adapt, the more the church’s financial viability was at risk. Furthermore, even though the percentage of pastors that *strongly agreed* (4.1%) or *agreed* (9.8%) with the statement, “Personally, the pandemic is making it difficult for me to continue in ministry” seems low, the thought that one in ten pastors is having difficulty continuing in ministry is alarming. In fact, this statement had a high correlation with the statement, “Because of the pandemic, the ministries of this church face an uncertain future” ($r = .406, p < .000$), to which 50.6% of pastors *agreed**

Although there are struggles, many pastors reported that their churches were adjusting to the conditions presented by the pandemic. In fact, a large majority of pastors *agreed** (88.1%) with the statement, “This church has identified and embraced new opportunities for ministry since the pandemic.” This statement had a high correlation with the statement, “Personally, the pandemic has given my ministry new significance” ($r = .443, p < .000$). In addition, a majority of pastors *agreed** (57.3%) with the statement, “The ministries of this church continue without major disruption.”

Finally, many pastors expressed an optimism for the future in that a large majority *agreed** (83.8%) that their church will emerge stronger from the pandemic. This item had a high correlation with the statement, “This church has identified and embraced new opportunities for ministry since the pandemic” ($r = .456, p < .000$). The relationship between these two statements gives hope in that churches that identify and embrace new opportunities during the pandemic may indeed emerge from the pandemic in a stronger position.