Report 2
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Mission to Serve Tech:
Churches "Lock Down" Technology During The Global Pandemic

How The Pandemic Influenced Pastors' And Churches' Views Of Using Technology To Serve Members And Mission

Authored By:
The Network For New Media, Religion & Digital Culture Studies

TECH
IN CHURCHES
DURING COVID-19

Mission to Serve Tech: Churches "Lock Down" Technology During The Global Pandemic

Report 2 From *Tech In Churches During Covid-19 Research Project*

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Project Summary

*The Analyzing Churches Engagement with Technology During the COVID-19 Pandemi*c research project investigates the role technology has played in churches during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it studies how digital media use shaped the worship, outreach, and the outlook of congregations during this time. The study draws on data collected by the Center for Congregations in Indianapolis during 2020-2021 through its Connect Through Tech grant program. The Center provided funding to approximately 2700 congregations in the state of Indiana to purchase technology resources to help facilitate their move from traditional to online forms of worship during the pandemic. The full study involves the analysis of grant program materials and case studies of different congregations' technological innovation and negotiation strategies. The overall goal is to investigate the theological and social implications of these technological choices and consider the long-term impact they might have on congregational vitality and mission.

In this second report we analyze demographic data, reports, and narratives provided by grant awardees in order to map how and why churches employed various digital media technologies and strategies to serve their communities during social distancing. The central research question that guided research in Report 2 was:

> **How do churches view the COVID-19 pandemic-induced shift towards technology-dependent, online worship?**

Our primary interest was in the overall effects of an involuntary, forced shift towards a digital world for the Church. Did this shift alter the understandings, conceptualizations, and willingness to approach technology for churches? How did churches previously understand and view technology and how do they view it now? What types of changes were made in this time to allow for a technologically conducive environment for church? And ultimately, the researchers are interested in how churches viewed this shift. Did they view it with hesitancy? With a sense of begrudging tolerance? Did pastors and leaders move excitedly towards the camera or microphone, or did they work under a temporary assumption?

For this report, the research team analyzed information provided by approximately 2700 churches in Indiana who received funding through the Connecting Through Technology Grant program sponsored by Center for Congregations in 2020. First, the team looked at data included on the grant applications from churches that had applied for funding. The applications included information about the demographic nature of the church as well as narratives of the specific needs of the church such as technological requirements, concerns of moving online, and pastoral struggles with the digital shift. Next, the team analyzed responses from grant recipients appearing in their final report narratives explaining what technology they eventually purchased with the grant, how it was used, and other key factors in making the shirt after the fact. A content analysis approach was used to identify key themes related to the church's perceptions about the relationship between the church and technology in the spring of 2020, when the call for grant applications was made by the Center.

Following that, the final reports submitted by these churches in Spring and Summer of 2021 were analyzed. These reports summarized what technology churches purchased, how it was used, and what impact it had on churches during this time period. By utilizing a series of set questions and categories as well as a coding sheet, the team performed a systematic content analysis of these two sets of data to discover patterns and themes within the documents.

Here, the team examined how pastors and church leadership navigated this shift and what resources they utilized to do so. Ultimately, the researchers were interested in comparing the perceptions, difficulties, and unexpected surprises that churches found themselves in when they were forced online during the global pandemic. Specifically, this report aims to explore a few key questions regarding how different churches interacted with and conceptualized technology during the pandemic. The core questions that guided the research team's analysis in Report 2 included:

> **(1) How do churches view technology and the internet? And how has this changed between the initial applications from 2020 to final reports submitted in 2021?**

This question was aimed at an understanding of the ways that pastors and church leaders understood technology and what the digital world had to offer. Many of the perspectives that people and churches held before the pandemic changed rapidly when they were forced to become digital institutions, turning their services into livestreams and their Bible Studies into Zoom calls. This involuntary digitalization means that new conceptualizations of technology were formed from 2020 to 2021. Here, researchers were hoping to learn about this gradual progression of digital perspectives.

(2) How do churches conceive of and describe the church and its mission? And how has this changed between the initial applications from 2020 to final reports submitted in 2021?

Here, researchers were interested in how grant applicants and recipients conceptualize the purpose and mission of their church. Did they view their church as mainly focused on evangelizing? Did they view their church's purpose to be the creation and implementation of service to the community? Or was the purpose of "church" to hold worship experiences? Researchers were particularly interested in the ways that the conceptions of "church" and the mission of church changed pre-pandemic and post-pandemic.

(3) What do churches see their relationship to digital media in light of their technological engagement, during the pandemic?

By asking this question, researchers hoped to discover how connected and dependent on technology that churches, church staff, and pastoral leadership saw themselves and their community during the pandemic. As the pandemic plagued on, did pastors view their relationship with technology as different because of their use of digital resources? These were the main factors that researchers were interested in.

(4) What kind of community do churches see themselves being? And has increased technology use shaped their understanding of community in any ways?

This question is focused on how community has been shaped throughout the last few years. Researchers are interested in the ways that churches define and maintain community, and the particular ways technology might have altered these perspectives. Is a community still a community through a digitally-mediated resource? If so, was this perspective altered during the pandemic?

(5) What are the most notable challenges and opportunities did technology use and integration into church work create for congregations?

This question is interested in how digital resources and technology use might have created additional challenges or allowed for notable opportunities during the pandemic. How did digital resources aid the Church? How might having the resources impede efforts or cause worry or confusion? These are the major questions that researchers were interested in.
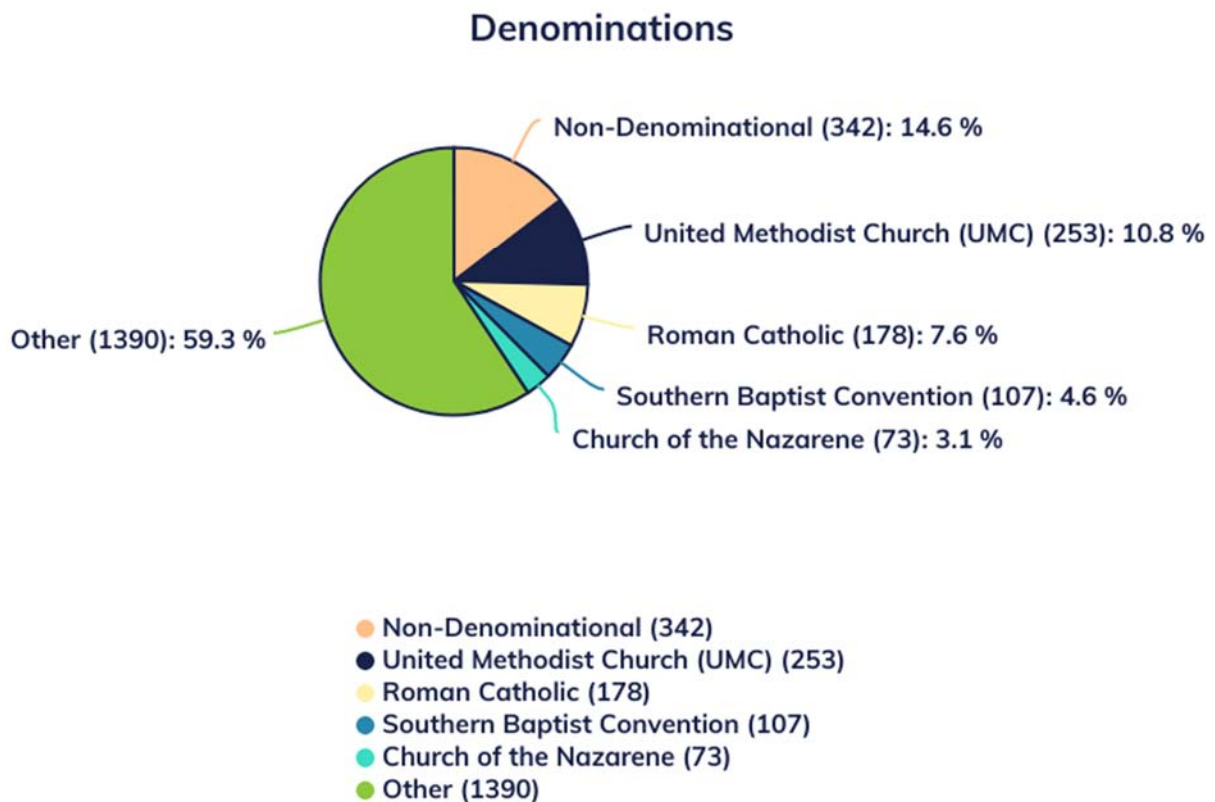
Demographics

The churches that received grants from the Center for Congregations and that are ultimately included in the second report derive from a variety of denominational backgrounds, ethnicities, and localities. Below, the research team offers a detailed description and account of the demographics of the data included in this study. The demographics listed below are those found in the application and final report analysis portion of the results. Part two of the report has a short description of the report data results.

The demographic data displayed in the graphs below was gathered during the analysis of the final report, which included a more extensive data set than the first section. There was not much of a difference in percentages approximately (1%) between the demographic data from the application and the final analysis.

Denominations

Church denominations that grant recipients derived from indicate that more than half of them (59.3%) identified as "other" from the specified categories. There are five other primary responses that included denominations that represented over 3% of the grant recipients: non-denominational (14.6%), United Methodist (10.8%), Roman Catholic (7.6%), Southern Baptist Convention (4.6%), and Church of the Nazarene (3.1%).

Denominations

Non-Denominational (342): 14.6 %

United Methodist Church (UMC) (253): 10.8 %

Roman Catholic (178): 7.6 %

Southern Baptist Convention (107): 4.6 %

Church of the Nazarene (73): 3.1 %

Other (1390): 59.3 %

- Non-Denominational (342)
- United Methodist Church (UMC) (253)
- Roman Catholic (178)
- Southern Baptist Convention (107)
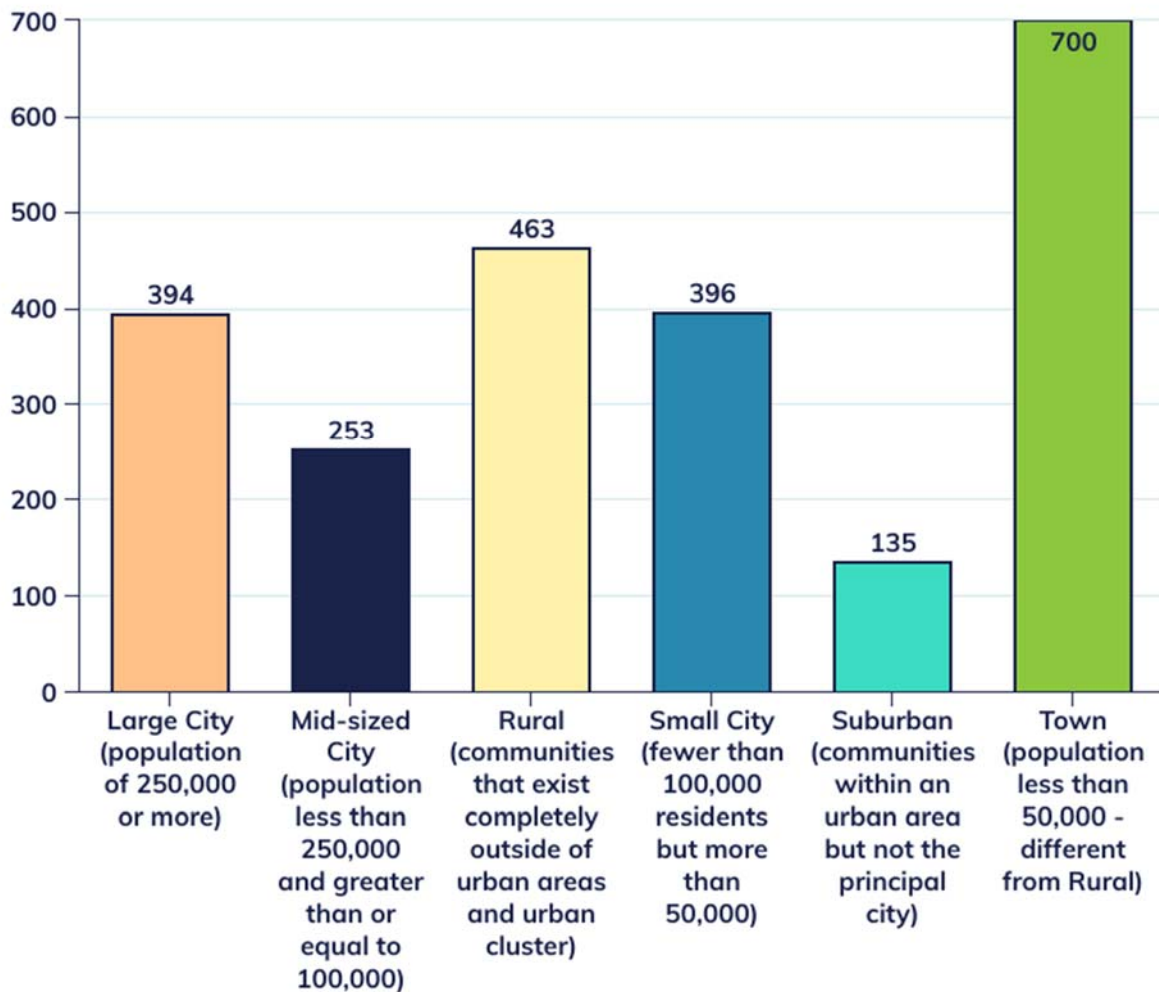- Church of the Nazarene (73)
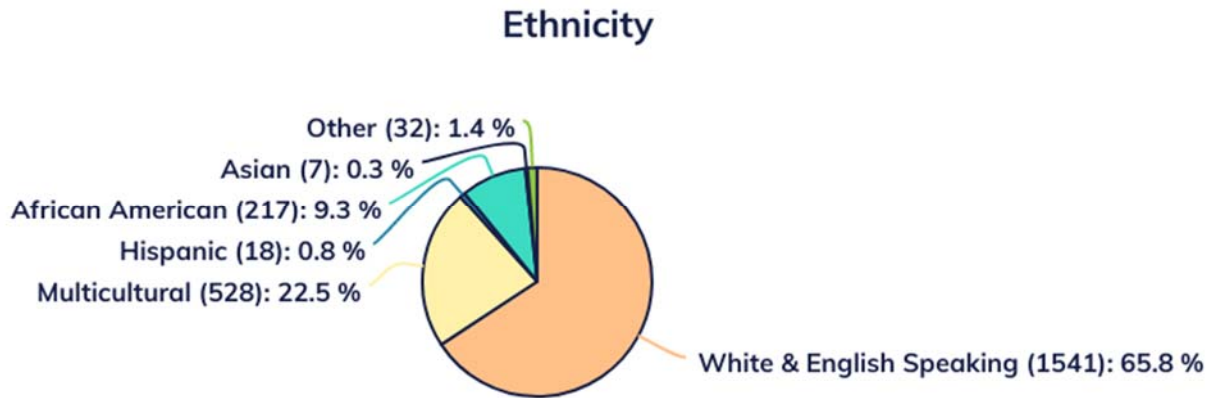- Other (1390)

Geographical Setting Of Congregations

The demographic information showed that the majority of churches (46.1%) were located in Central Indiana. A smaller percentage were located in Northeast Indiana (19.2%) and Northwest Indiana (18.1%). The remainder were located in the Southwest (9.7%) or Southeast (6.6%).

According to the information gathered from the respondents, 700 (29.9%) churches come from towns with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, which is a large proportion of the churches. A total of 463 (19.8%) applicants identified themselves as being from a rural area, while 396 (16.9%) from a small city, 394 (16.8%) from a large city, 253 (10.8%) from a mid-sized city, and 135 (5.8%) from a suburban area. This shows that the majority of respondents who received grants come from small towns with a population of under 50,000, not from "megachurches."
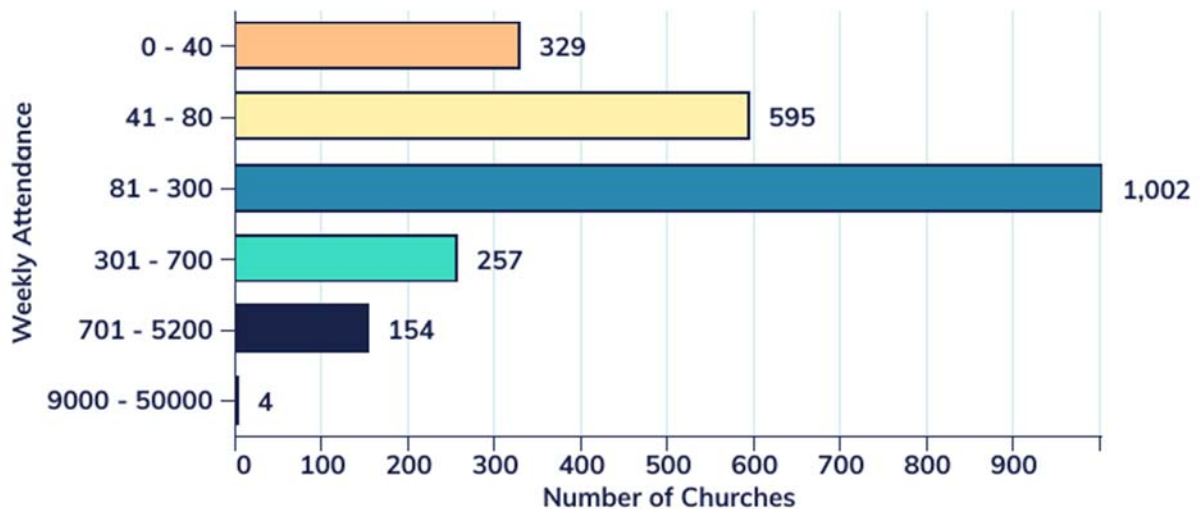
Geographical Setting of Congregations

Category	Value
Large City (population of 250,000 or more)	394
Mid-sized City (population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000)	253
Rural (communities that exist completely outside of urban areas and urban cluster)	463
Small City (fewer than 100,000 residents but more than 50,000)	396
Suburban (communities within an urban area but not the principal city)	135
Town (population less than 50,000 - different from Rural)	700

Ethnicity & Attendance

Ethnicity

Other (32): 1.4 %
Asian (7): 0.3 %
African American (217): 9.3 %
Hispanic (18): 0.8 %
Multicultural (528): 22.5 %

White & English Speaking (1541): 65.8 %

The data explored church congregations that were predominantly White and English speaking (65.8%). Church congregations were also Multicultural (22.5%), African American (9.3%) Hispanic (0.8%), Asian (0.3%), and not specified (1.4%).

Weekly Attendance (average weekly attendance Pre-COVID, roughly from 2015-2019)

Weekly Attendance	Number of Churches
0 - 40	329
41 - 80	595
81 - 300	1,002
301 - 700	257
701 - 5200	154
9000 - 50000	4

Researchers also explored the applicants' weekly average attendance prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results indicated that 329 (14.1%) churches had attendance of 0-40 members, 595 (25.4%) churches had 41-80 members, 1,002 (42.8%) churches had 81-300 members, 257 (11%) churches had 301-700 members, 154 (6.6%) churches had 701-5200 members, and lastly, 4 churches had 9000+ (0.2%) members attend.

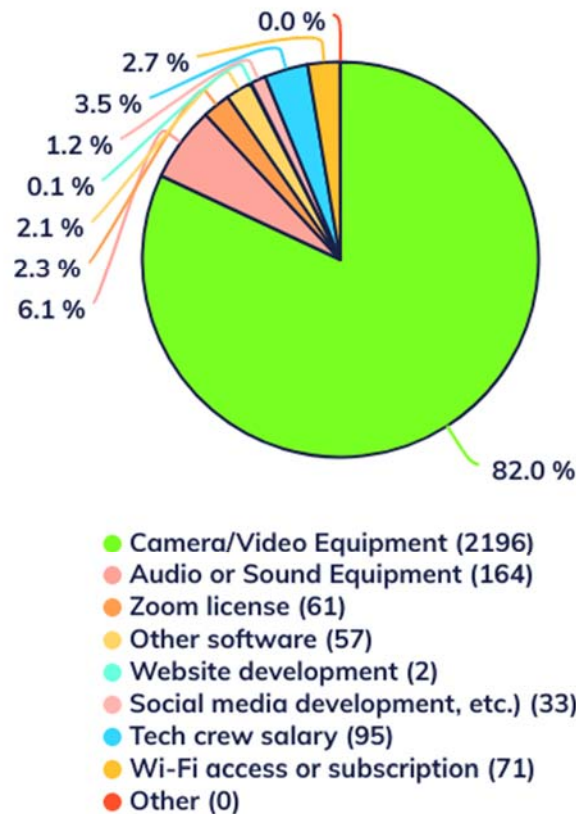# Part 1: Analysis Of Churches CTT Grant Applications

In part one, we provided an overview of information gleaned from the Connect Through Tech grant applications, where churches identified the specific technologies they saw as needed in order to "lock down" or secure their move to online services. Specific questions were asked in the application such as church demographics (i.e., denomination, size, type of population, ethnic majority, language spoken, city, etc.), what major issues occurred during the implementation of digital resources, prior experience with technology, as well as a detailed list of what they would purchase with the prices included. Of specific interest to the team was how applicants and leaders defined and understood the mission and identity of their church, how they viewed technology, what they saw at that time as the relationship between their church and digital media and how they felt investing in technology would benefit them. We also paid attention to what initial challenges churches encountered in 2020, due to their lack of technological resources, and how they felt investing technology would help solve problems or address related issues. In part one, we outline the specific questions that the content analysis and coding performed set out to answer and what was learned from this investigation.

Main Technologies Purchased By Churches

This question is centered around the specific type of technology that churches chose to purchase during the COVID-19 pandemic. The technology purchased is an indicator of the needs of the congregations specifically in their move online from primarily in-person services. Some individuals chose to spend money on technology for streaming services such as camera or video equipment or audio or sound equipment to allow members to better grasp what is being said in the livestream. Other churches utilized the grant money to purchase software such as Zoom licenses or software to edit and merge videos. Some pastors or church staff used grant money for website development to either update existing or from scratch, create a church website as a hub for resources during the pandemic. Others used the money to purchase ads for social media in an effort to develop their platform in a digital space. Lastly, some chose to spend the grant finances on paying a group of people to run the technology or to purchase higher speed internet to more efficiently stream services.

01 What technology was purchased?

Top Response: Camera/Video Equipment (82%)

- Camera/Video Equipment (2196)
- Audio or Sound Equipment (164)
- Zoom license (61)
- Other software (57)
- Website development (2)
- Social media development, etc.) (33)
- Tech crew salary (95)
- Wi-Fi access or subscription (71)
- Other (0)

We start our discovery by identifying what CTT grant recipients utilized their requested funds. Applications asked churches to be specific as possible about the type of technology they needed, up to $5000, why and how it would help them move their services online. The research findings showed that the vast majority of purchases made by grant recipients were overwhelmingly camera/video equipment (82%), followed by a small number of congregations highlighting their need for audio or sound equipment (6.1%). It is interesting to note that over half of these requests for digital video cameras came from church who previously did not own this equipment. For example, a Baptist church, who described themselves as a predominantly small white congregation, stated that the ability to purchase a camera and video equipment was the most important part of the grant for them. Without the funds to purchase video equipment they felt that they would not be able to reach key sectors of their congregations, especially elderly congregants and those that moved or had to relocate due to the pandemic. The church explained they did not have any staff with experience running camera and audio equipment, but if they received the grant, they optimistically felt they would be able to figure it out and run the church service online.

Main Purchases Made By Churches

The purpose of the second question of "What was the money used to facilitate?" was to discover what the purchase was for. This is distinctly to understand what the function of the grant was utilized for pastors and church leaders. For some, the money was used to facilitate a livestream whether that be to aid the direct livestream ability or to aid the Wi-Fi or internet access to more successfully connect to the internet. For others, the money was utilized to create a website or to develop a more intact social media presence. Overall, this question is exploring what technology purchased during the COVID-19 pandemic was primarily used for. Results indicate that 84.7% of the purchases by churches was for the purpose of live streaming services.

02 Money used to facilitate.

Top Response: For Livestreaming Service (84.7%)
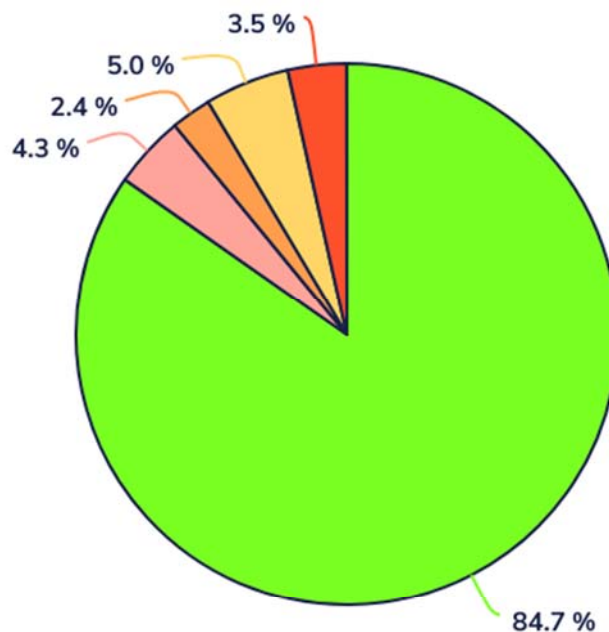
- For livestreaming service (2290)
- To support/develop website, create new website (117)
- Develop social media platforms for church (65)
- Network/internet access (136)
- Other (95)

The results from analysis of this research question showed that the majority of the technology purchases made by churches were done with a single goal in mind, to get equipment that would facilitate the live streaming of worship services (84.7%). One church, which describes itself as an African American, non-denominational gospel church, expressed the importance of this purchase. They saw it as offering them the ability to not only live stream services, but offered the potential to create a new format for discipleship and make meeting times more productive. During the pandemic recording and broadcast services were framed as essential and necessary, but efforts aimed at live streaming service had been put on hold, since church services return to the physical building. They later reported that also using funds to help develop a website during the pandemic has been more beneficial in the long run. The website investment has allowed them to connect their congregation with their community in a new way, through sharing more about events, news stories, and facilitating "constant conversations" that were once limited to their one-hour meeting time on Sundays.
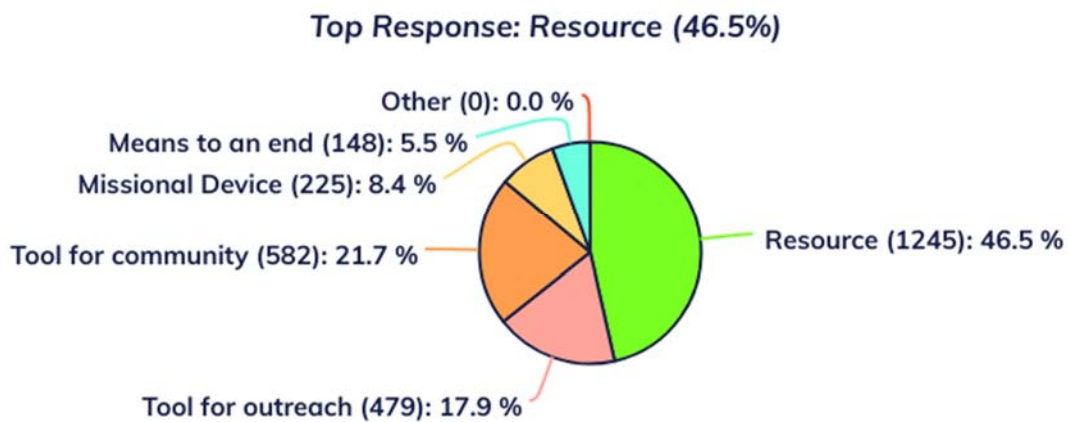
A few churches, typically those who already had cameras or recording equipment, said they would use the funds to support and develop websites (4.3%) or to develop social media platforms for the church (2.4%). Also a few church applicants (3.5%) noted they wanted to use the money to upgrade equipment, video switcher, and/or pre-recorded services, as noted by the category "other" purchases.

One church, United in Christ Church, which describes itself as an African American, non-denominational gospel church, expressed that the ability to live stream has created a new area for discipleship and productive meeting times. During the pandemic, it was seen as necessary, but the sole live streaming service has taken a step back from their church since the return to the physical building. Developing a website allowed them to connect with their community and beyond regarding events, news stories, and constant conversations that are usually withheld to a one-hour meeting time on Sundays.

How Churches View Technology at Beginning of the Pandemic

This question's purpose is to understand how each individual church or pastoral team views the function, impact, and purpose of technology. Some pastor's view technology as a resource to enable the continuation of church during the COVID-19 pandemic. Others view technology as a tool for either outreach (to reach people), community (to maintain connection with members and as a body of believers), or evangelization. Others view technology less favorably, and more as something that is required right now to fulfill current needs, but not necessarily as something positive. Altogether this question aims to understand the broader purposes behind the technology use.

03 TECH AS A... (Main way applicants communicate how they view technology)

Top Response: Resource (46.5%)

- Other (0): 0.0 %
- Means to an end (148): 5.5 %
- Missional Device (225): 8.4 %
- Tool for community (582): 21.7 %
- Resource (1245): 46.5 %
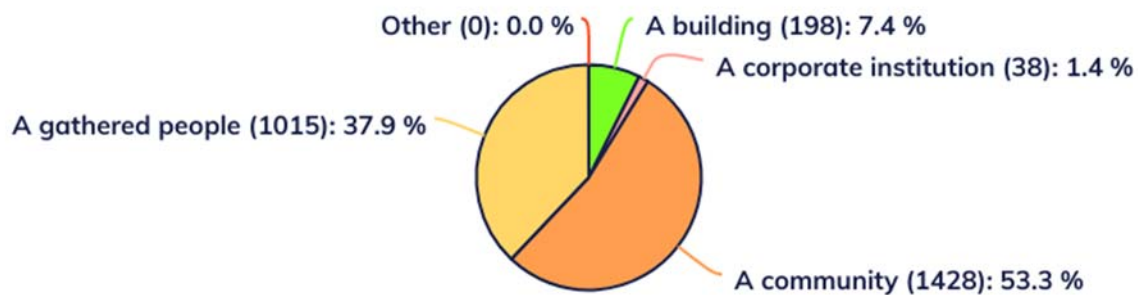- Tool for outreach (479): 17.9 %

This question centered around discovering how congregants and churches view technology. The results indicate that the majority of churches (46.5%) viewed technology as a resource. For example one church, which described itself as a multicultural Christian church, shared that they viewed technology as a resource able to expand their possibilities for ministry when used strategically by the church. After the pandemic, this church reported that having technology on hand to live stream services has seen an impact on the consistency in their congregations attendance, when combining online and offline attendance. They credited this to the high quality technology resources the grant provided that opened up new opportunities for congregational meeting. Other churches reported they initially saw the technology as a tool for community (21.7%), tool for outreach (17.9%), missional device (8.4%), or as a means to an end (5.5%).

How Churches Define the Role of the Church at the Offset of the Pandemic

This question is focused on exploring how church leaders view the role of the church. Some individuals view church as a building that is occupied by people. Other congregations in this study described their church as a "capital C" Church, or as a corporate institution defined by the larger global body of believers, though most of these were Catholic or Orthodox churches. Some view church as a group of people who share life together, as a community of people with similar beliefs. Lastly, some pastors/church leaders view church as a people gathered together in a space. This question is aimed at understanding what the pastors view church as and how that impacts their understanding of technology.

04 **CHURCH AS... (Main way applicants communicate how they view what the church is)**

Top Response: A Community (53.3%)

Other (0): 0.0 %
A building (198): 7.4 %
A corporate institution (38): 1.4 %
A gathered people (1015): 37.9 %
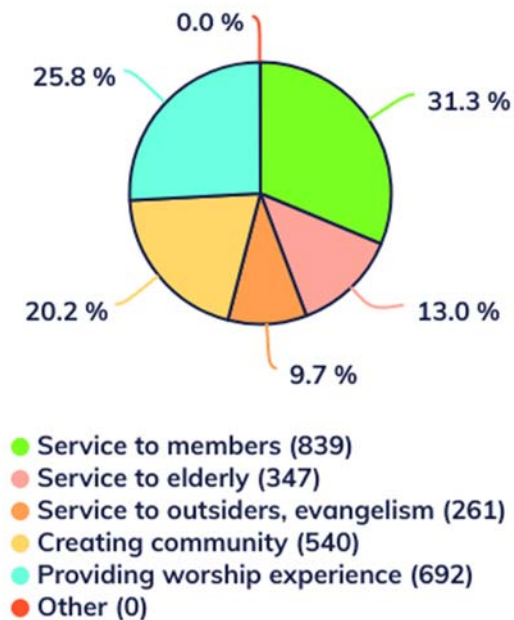A community (1428): 53.3 %

This question centered around discovering how congregants view the purpose and function of the church. The results indicate that the majority of churches (53.3%) see their function as providing "a community." For example, an Evangelical Presbyterian church, that describes itself as White and English speaking, recounted finding their connection through utilizing technology as it has allowed them to stabilize the community. Each obstacle presented a new opportunity to test the church and their community, and has created a stronger bond of battling through something together. Another large group of churches (37.9%) see the function of the church as serving as a "gathered people". To a much lesser degree churches identified as primarily being about offering a "building" (7.4%) or as a "corporate institution" (1.4%).

Leaders Perception of Mission of the Church

This question explores the mission of the church and how grant recipients understood and communicated through technology their purpose as a church body. Some pastors understood their mission as a church to serve their members, others felt more of the COVID-19 mission was to serve those who were elderly. We noted in our findings that the largest group of pastors indicated that they saw the primary mission of the church as being there to serve outsiders with an emphasis on the church being called to "proclaim the Gospel". Other leaders saw their primary purpose as serving their members by allowing them to foster friendships, fellowship, and connections with others. Finally, many viewed their mission during the pandemic as providing a meaningful worship experience to people.

05 MISSION AS... (Main way applicants communicate what they view the mission of the church as)

Top Response: Service to Members (31.3%)

0.0 %

25.8 %

31.3 %

20.2 %

13.0 %

9.7 %

- Service to members (839)
- Service to elderly (347)
- Service to outsiders, evangelism (261)
- Creating community (540)
- Providing worship experience (692)
- Other (0)

The question highlights how leaders saw the core mission of the church at the beginning of the pandemic. Results here indicate a split between churches describing their mission as being about offering services to members (31.3%), providing worship experiences (25.8%) or being about the goal of creating community (20.2%).

This lead priority of many churches around primarily focusing on service to their members, as their priority during the pandemic, was communicated clearly by one Missionary Baptist Church. They stated that"...due to this national pandemic, having quality technology to enable streaming services has become of most urgency" in order to keep providing their members with the preach "word of God" and to "connect to our members as well as the community at large." Similarly, this focus of church leaders on serving people that were part of the congregation at the pandemic was notable. During a time when almost all people were impacted by lockdowns and many became "shut-ins" for the first time, a Community Church shared that it saw its central mission and desire to "provide weekly services for its members." This echoes the centralized focus of many churches' in our study, they describe their primary reason for wanting technology was to be able to continue creating worship service opportunities for members who had access to technology.

To a much lesser extent churches saw themselves as primarily being about serving a specific population of thief congregations , such as the elderly (13%), or evangelizing to outsiders (9.7%).
This is illustrated by a United Methodist Church, who stated that while the state of their worship service was a primary concern during the pandemic, they also framed it as, "worship provides the foundation in carrying out our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and our vision of loving God, loving others and serving others."

Also churches in these categories, instead of just focusing on keeping services going for congregants, stated they felt it was technology that should be viewed as opening up their services to new and non-members alike. The Catholic Parish, highlighted this when they found themselves altering their prior internal focus soon after the start of the pandemic. When social distancing forced the temporary closure of their church and halted Sunday Mass, after a decision by the diocese of roman catholic churches, they saw their only options as to transitioning to an online platform, even though this challenged some of the traditional practices of the Roman Catholic church. While they wrote about previously turning their heads against incorporating technology and social media in their churches, the necessity that came up during the pandemic allowed them to see church in a new way, and how it can be used to serve their members and visitors alike. They described this as forcing them to put trust in God and in this new though confusing journey of technology in the Catholic church.
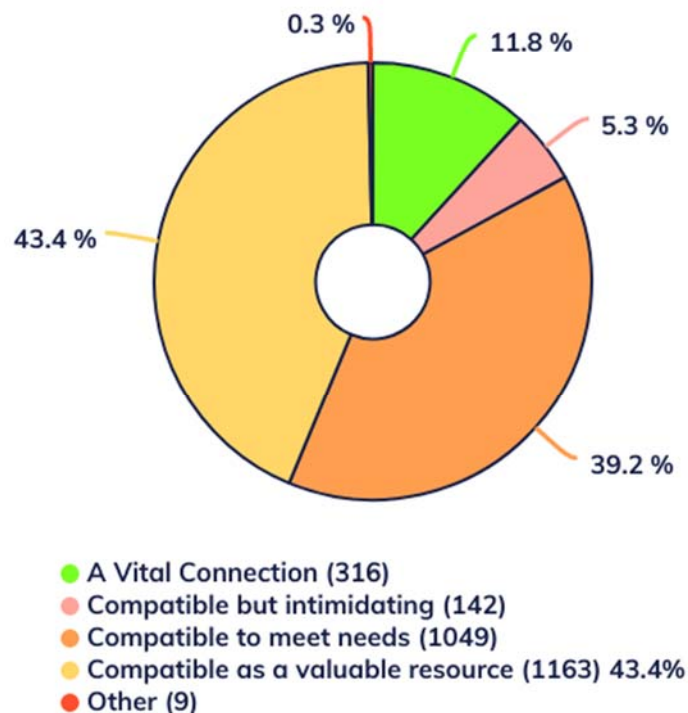
As mentioned above, about 13% of church leaders emphasized serving the elderly in their congregation as a primary focus of the church during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a Nazarene Church shared, they "...have a high percentage of older people who cannot attend regularly. This [technology] will enable them to feel more connected with the services and pastoral teaching." Other churches responded that the high percentage of over 60s in their congregation, coupled with the fact older congregation members often voiced concerns about online services due to their lack of technology access or knowledge led to this emphasis.

How Churches See their Relationship with Technology

This question aims to explore how churches and pastors view and conceptualize the relationship between religion and technology. Some pastors viewed the relationship between church and technology with enthusiasm, identifying it as an important and exciting relationship. Others however view the relationship as being compatible, but either as scary to approach or something that can just meet the needs, but with a lack of excitement. Lastly, some view the relationship with realism, viewing technology as something that will enable the church to survive and thrive during the pandemic.

06 CHURCH & TECH ARE... (How they describe the relationship between religion/faith and technology)

Top Response: Compatible as a Valuable Resource (43.4%)

0.3 %
11.8 %
5.3 %
43.4 %
39.2 %

- A Vital Connection (316)
- Compatible but intimidating (142)
- Compatible to meet needs (1049)
- Compatible as a valuable resource (1163) 43.4%
- Other (9)

This question focused on discovering how pastors view the relationship between church and technology. The results indicate that many view church and technology as compatible to be a valuable resource (43.4%). Many other churches saw the relationship as compatible to meet needs (39.2%). Other churches saw it as a vital connection (11.8%), compatible but intimidating (5.3%), or in some other, unspecified way (0.3%).

One "Community Church" stated that they have "...seen that the livestream has become a valuable resource for our church to continue to Pastor and connect with people." They, along with many other congregations, see the church's relationship with technology as an invaluable tool, especially during times of hardship.

Contrary to this belief, some churches view the relationship with technology with less excitement and more practically, as just meeting basic needs during the pandemic. For example, a Hispanic Church shared that "The items to be funded will help meet the needs of our congregation, as great challenges require great changes; this pandemic brought us a few months into the future, why do we say this? Because we thought about being able to broadcast live in the future." It is clear that not all congregations view technology with such enthusiasm, but with a sense of realism that it is what is required during a period of lockdown.

For example, one congregation identified church and technology as compatible to meet needs during the pandemic. They shared, "Recorded worship is better than no worship, but it's not the same as a live experience." They clearly identified a difference between the legitimacy of recorded worship and live worship, however, they saw the mediated form as necessary during COVID-19.

This was also echoed by a multicultural, nondenominational church, who shared their views of technology in more overtly positive terms. The view on technology was quick to end in this congregation as it was viewed in order to meet the current needs of the church. If they had not taken part in this shift in technology, as a church and congregation, they would have "fallen behind." Now, as they introduce some technology, they strive to keep it as a minimum in efforts of a more traditional community.

What "Community" Means to Churches

This question is focused on how the pastors or church leaders view digital technology in relation to a sense of community or the practical creation of community. For some pastors, digital technology meets the needs of online and offline communities and both benefit. In other perspectives, offline community (in other words, not digitally mediated) is viewed as the "norm" or the expectation. Some view online communities as clearly affecting the community, either by encouraging it or others view it as inhibiting it. Other pastors see online communities, or digitally mediated forms of community, as being the only practical option, and with a sense of urgency to return to "normal" types. Some view online community as a type of community, but as something distinct from offline communities, and requiring different resources. Lastly, some churches view online community as requiring a specific set of "tech" resources that those that traditionally disciple or foster community in-person do not have.

07 COMMUNITY IS... (Main way applicants seem to define community what they see as its relationship to church in online and offline contexts)

Top Response: Meeting One Another's Needs (40.4%)

- 0.0 %
- 3.1 %
- 9.8 %
- 5.4 %
- 40.4 %
- 19.0 %
- 22.2 %
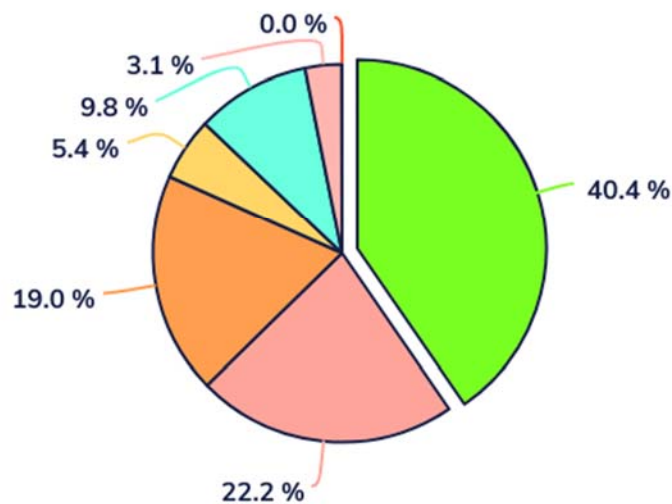
- Meeting one another's needs (1083) 40.4%
- Offline as the norm (596)
- Online community as either inhibiting or encouraging community (510)
- Online community as the only option (144)
- Online & Offline are separate (262)
- Online as requiring a skill set (84)
- Other (0)

The research demonstrated that the majority of churches in this study view online services options as meeting the needs of the community to connect during the pandemic (40.4%). However, a large percentage of churches view online communities as temporary, and offline as the true normative representation of community (22.2%). Some churches report viewing the online context as either inhibiting or encouraging community (19%), online community as completely separate from offline community (9.8%), online community as being the only option during the pandemic (5.4%), or online community as requiring certain skills (3.1%).

For example, a church in central Indiana said they realize tech can meet the needs of their congregation for the future. As they reflected, "...if we can enhance our quality of presentations, we can be more effective in growing our potential of meeting the ministry needs of our congregation and the community at large." Similarly a predominately White, English speaking United Methodist congregation, said they have strived to move away from technology since it was introduced. This illustrates that due to COVID-19 global pandemic fact-to-face restrictions, the church deemed it necessary to halt in person physical meetings. However, it also resists the idea of a church functioning and communicating online as ideal, as many churches in this study stressed that the church community should happen in person.

Key Challenges Lack of/or Inexperience with Technology Posed to Churches

This question is aimed at exploring the challenges that technology has created for them as they navigated the shift online. The answers varied. Some indicated that the quality of production was their greatest challenge (creating a high quality and limited error service). Some pastors indicated that specific challenges related to execution of livestream was the greatest challenge that they encountered. Differently, some indicated that just learning new tech was hard, trying to teach themselves digital media was their greatest challenge. Among pastors, (15.6%) found it difficult to build a community online and (15.4%) found technological issues and upgrading their existing technology, as well as finding volunteers to run the media. Lastly, many pastors encountered challenges when it came to equipping the elderly with technology and helping them navigate the shift online.

08 THE GREATEST CHALLENGE IS... (What do applicants communicate that is the biggest challenge they are facing at related to technology)

Top Response: Upgrading Technology (38.6%)
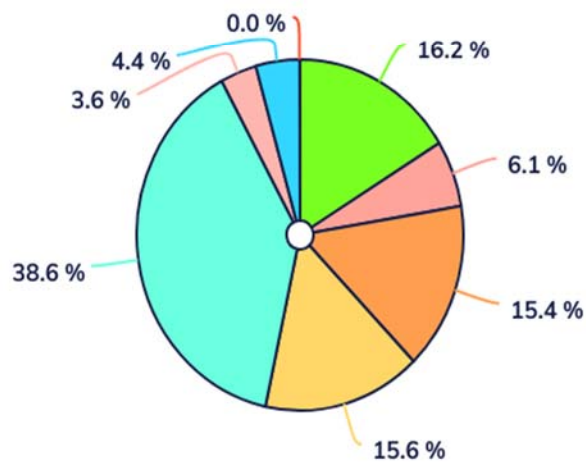
- ● Quality of production (435)
- ● Learning new technology (164)
- ● Technology execution issues (413)
- ● Creating connections online (419)
- ● Upgrading technology (1035) 38.6%
- ● Finding technologically willing volunteers (96)
- ● Helping the elderly with technology (117)
- ● Other (0)

Findings related to this question showed that the majority of churches in our study viewed the greatest challenge during the shift to online services was the decision making around upgrading existing technology (38.6%). One Catholic church who described themselves as White, English speaking and having minimal technology in the church before the pandemic, said they needed to run Sunday services and they had no video equipment. With the purchase and upgrading their technology and the quality of production they saw as a minimal standard for webcasting, the parish saw an increase in young congregants *during* the pandemic and after, compared to other Catholic churches that leaders reported who have been struggling to keep young people engaged during the pandemic. Others, such as a pastor from a Baptist Church, reported being surprised by the costs of many technological items their church had to upgrade to get services online. Early on in the pandemic they reported church leaders' had to use personal phones, because their video camera was not of good enough quality to film the services. They shared that "creating these online connections and support through online opportunities means we will need to record, edit, and stream services with more than just our phones."
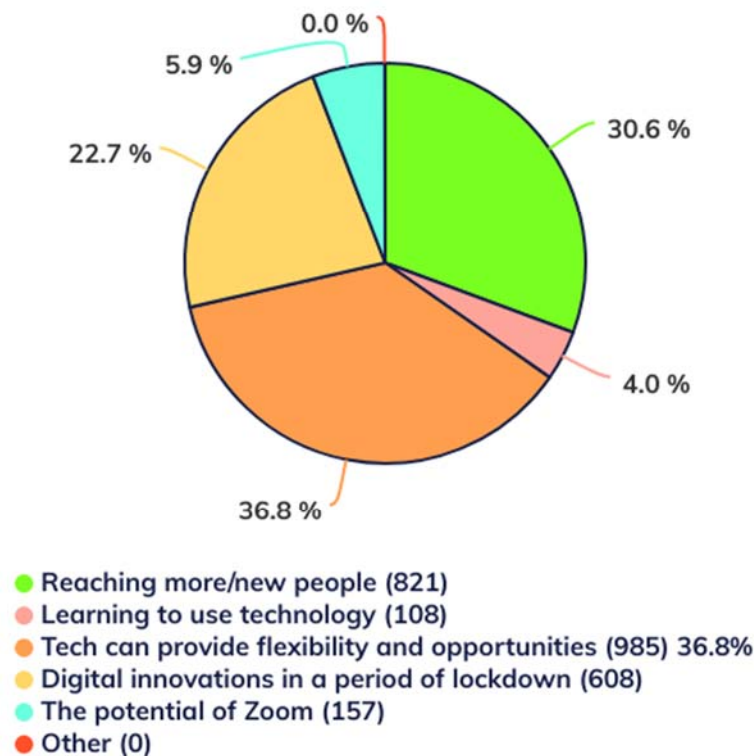
Other primary concerns included facing issues with the quality of production and services (16.2%), creating connections online (15.6%), and technology execution issues (15.4%). A smaller number of churches identified the greatest challenges for churches as learning new technologies (6.1%), helping the elderly with technology (4.4%), and finding volunteers to help with technology (3.6%). These results indicate that churches experienced a variety of challenges in the shift online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many found the task of upgrading technology to be the most significant uphill battle.

Perceived Opportunities Technology Offers Churches

This question is aimed at exploring some of the greatest opportunities that the shift online created for churches. Some pastors reflected that the greatest benefit of the shift was their extended reach to new people in new places. Pastors indicated that learning to use technology was an opportunity that if not necessitated by force, might never have happened, and pastors were grateful. Similarly, pastors found that this shift online enabled them to work more flexibly and were grateful of the opportunities that it provided. Others reflected on the creativity that digital innovations brought and allowed them to think through. Lastly, some found the innovations of Zoom to be particularly impactful and helpful, from the use of breakout rooms to the use of chat functions to resemble real life conversations. Ultimately, this question aims to explore the opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic offered.

09 THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY IS... (What do applicants communicate that is the biggest opportunity they see technology offers them/their church at that moment)

Top Response: Tech Can Provide Flexibility and Opportunities (36.8%)

0.0 %

5.9 %

30.6 %

22.7 %

4.0 %

36.8 %

- Reaching more/new people (821)
- Learning to use technology (108)
- Tech can provide flexibility and opportunities (985) 36.8%
- Digital innovations in a period of lockdown (608)
- The potential of Zoom (157)
- Other (0)

The findings related to this question indicate that the majority of churches identify the greatest opportunity during this time is that technology can provide flexibility and opportunities (36.8%). For example, one Pentecostal, African American church found that tech can provide flexibility and opportunities. As the participants noted that the flexibility provided by technology and live streaming meetings (no travel, time management, comfort of your own home,) has allowed for a constant participation from congregants that could not constantly participate, as well as reaching people that they have missed out on.

The transition to integrating technology into church was seen as an opportunity to reach more and new people for a little over 30% of the churches. These churches identified the greatest opportunity as having the ability to reach more/new people (30.6%). As a nondenominational church stated, "we can have a better chance of not only reaching our current congregation more effectively but also in reaching the unchurched or those who are looking for a new church home." Other churches reported utilizing digital Innovations in a period of lockdown (22.7%), realizing the potential of Zoom (5.9%), and simply being forced to learn to use technology (4%) were the greatest opportunities the pandemic provided them.

Summary:

How Churches Saw Technology At The Beginning Of The Pandemic

This first part of the report is aimed at gaining a closer and more thorough understanding of the thinking and reasoning of churches from Indiana transition to online worship services in 2020. Particularly, the research team was interested in how church leadership previously viewed their relationship with technology, and how the pandemic might have altered this perspective. From this interest and data analysis a number of specific themes were discovered.

First, it is evident that a majority of churches in our study planned to utilize grant funds to purchase digital recording cameras or video equipment. Churches viewed these technologies as essential for their live streaming purposes. Churches mostly indicated that they viewed technology with some hesitancy, or communicated with enthusiasm that they saw it as a resource to enable their successful transition online and continue to function as a church during the pandemic. Next, it was clear from our analysis that most churches in this report viewed the Church as a community of people who care for, value, and love one another. The churches view technology as a vital connection and key factor for the functioning and success of churches during the pandemic. Lastly, churches saw the primary mission of the church to serve its members, and/or providing people with a worship experience. Both of these claims suggest that the purpose of the church is focused on its congregations, either through providing specific or offering or a set experience. In terms of a church's perceived relationship between community and technology, we found most church leaders saw the usefulness of technology centered around its ability to meet immediate service related needs. In other words, as technology was utilized, it created an online space where the community could meet and encounter each other.

Furthermore, the research team learned that churches in 2020 face the greatest challenge in caring for or ministering to the elderly through the use of technology, particularly when so many in this age group lack access, training, or familiarity with technology required to participate in these online services. They also saw engaging with new digital technologies created the greatest opportunity for them. Translating and reconfiguring services into a digital environment allowed pastors and leaders to be creative and try new elements of the service and church gathering. Ultimately, the research showed in 2020 churches definitely saw technology as something that was intimidating, but as something that might be worthwhile.

Part 2: Analysis Of Church's CTT Final Reports

In stage two, the team analyzed data gathered from the final reports of approximately 2400 Indiana churches submitted to the Center for Congregations detailing how Connect Through Technology grant funds were used and the impact it had on those churches. For example, researchers wondered how churches view technology and the internet after a grant fund has been awarded, as well as the integration of tech supplies in the church. As part of the Center's final survey, churches were asked to reflect on a few specific questions:

> **(1) Which one thing did you accomplish because of the Connect Through Tech grant that would not have been possible without it?**

This question considers how churches applied the grant funds to any new church accomplishments during the global pandemic. This question is distinct from the earlier information as they are interested in what might have not been possible to achieve in the church without the application of grant funds.

> **(2) Tell a story about how Connect Through Tech has affected congregational life and the congregation's work.**

This question examines how churches found a meaningful experience or impact with the connect through tech grant. We are interested in capturing the story of the church with technology during the pandemic and how this may have changed in just a short period.

> **(3) In the long term, how will your congregational life remain virtual beyond the time of social isolation?**

This question asks if churches see their relationship with technology expanding or dwindling beyond the global pandemic. Will their relationship with technology change, as they have been forced to work exclusively with it in a church setting due to social distancing regulations? Or has the church adopted technology as a new component of their service in the future?

From these guiding questions an analysis of the congregational responses on the final reports for the CTT grant program were conducted, which, in brief, addressed the following themes.

First, the final report's main themes included the perceptions of church applicants toward technology, the church, and its purpose. The use of technology as a tool for mission, service, and worship during the pandemic was the first theme to emerge in the data collection. Technology was suggested as a tool to keep services and members connected during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a survey of respondents.

Next the evolution of the church's relationship with technology was explored, looking at the question of whether experiencing church online was the most significant experience, whether it was a hybrid experience, or whether experiencing church offline was the standard for the church following the pandemic. The feedback on using technology in the church and establishing a long-term connection was overwhelmingly positive.

Finally, the use of technology and the greatest impact and success of the creation of new online programs was the third theme and final area of focus. This theme is focused on the issue of how technology is encouraging churches to go beyond the pandemic to engage congregation members or engage in online activities for members. According to the applicant results, about 50% of the leaders were inspired to continue leading worship and devise new technology initiatives for their congregations despite the pandemic.

The intention of this stage of analysis was to gather final data from church's final grant reports to gain a deeper understanding of how churches transition online. A special focus was placed on how church leadership previously viewed this relationship and how the pandemic might have altered it. In the years after the start of COVID-19, technology altered the normal lives of church members in a significant way, and this report captures the unique perspective of that early transition to technology in the churches.

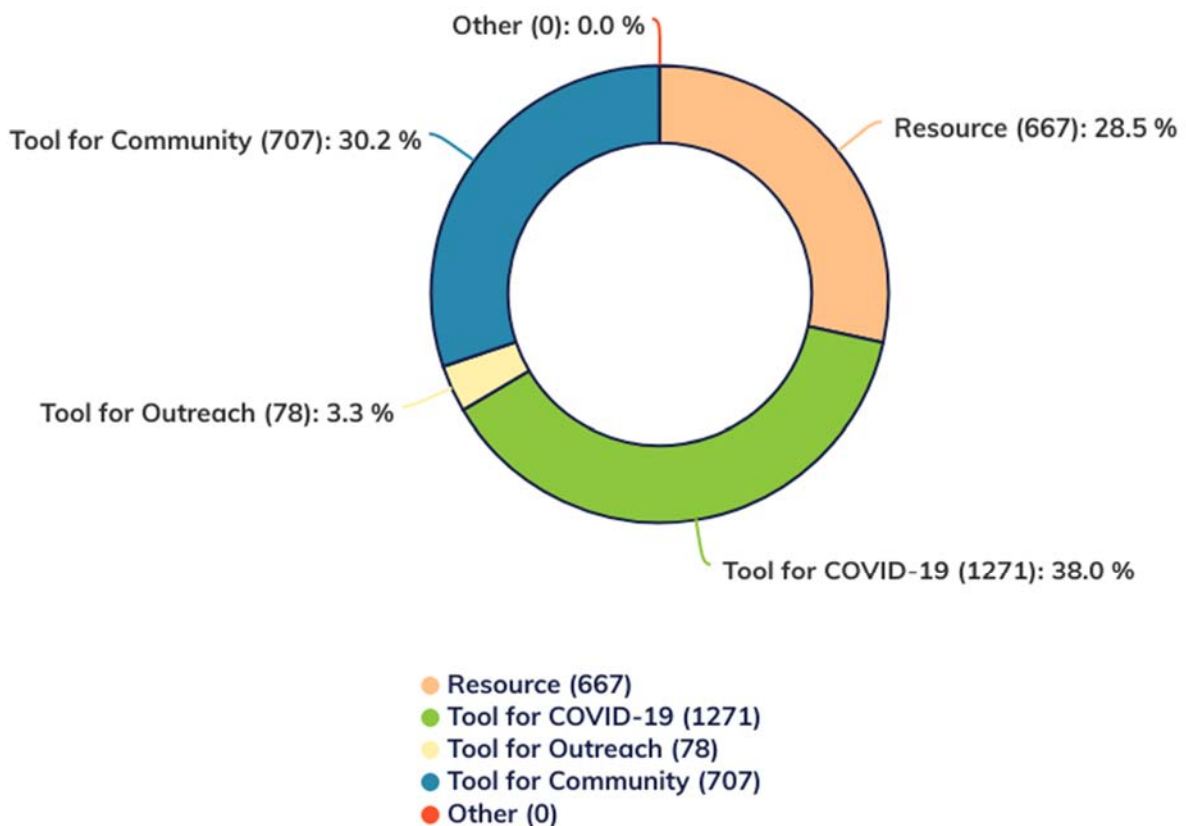**Note on Demographics for Part 2**

In the report's first section, beginning on page 4, you can find demographic data from the final report analysis. Part two focuses on findings from 2343 churches who submitted a report about their experience and use of CTT funds. This is in contrast to 2700 churches in part one who received funding from the CTT program. This difference in the population between report two and one represents a very small difference in demographic data, a variation of about 1%.

How Church Views Technology One Year into the Pandemic

This question is focused on the ways that churches and pastors conceptualized technology. As the data showed throughout the work that the research team completed, pastors and churches widely vary based on their perspectives and understandings of the relationship between church and technology.

01 TECH AS A... (Main way applicants communicate how they view technology)

Top Response: Tool for COVID-19 (38%)

Other (0): 0.0 %

Tool for Community (707): 30.2 %

Resource (667): 28.5 %

Tool for Outreach (78): 3.3 %

Tool for COVID-19 (1271): 38.0 %

- Resource (667)
- Tool for COVID-19 (1271)
- Tool for Outreach (78)
- Tool for Community (707)
- Other (0)

The majority of the churches (38%) view technology as a tool: either to continue services during COVID-19, to reach new people outside of the purview of their church walls, or to facilitate community among members. The other churches and pastors view technology as largely a tool for community (30.2%) or as a resource (28.5%). This difference can be seen in churches from the Northeast and Central regions, who shared personal narratives in their final reports that
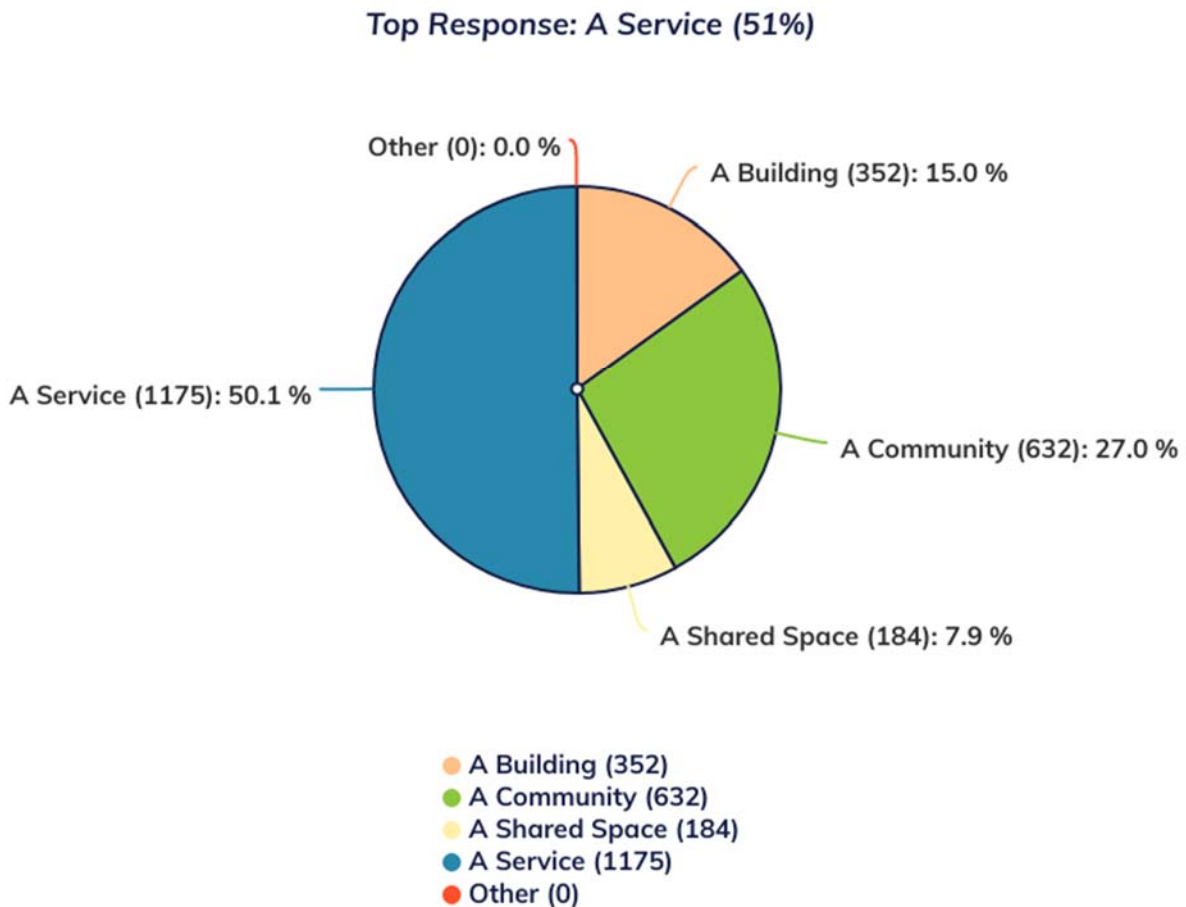
illustrate how churches used these different frameworks for understanding technology. One church noted that technology for them, as a resource to fix the problem of not being able to gather in person. They stated "[We] have been able to put the Sunday Sermons live on a weekly basis. With COVID-19 and many other happenings this would not have been possible." Another shared this sentiment of seeing technology as a tool allowing them to meet the immediate need of running services, "The grant allowed us to get the technology we needed to do it right."

Interestingly a smaller number of churches viewed technology primarily as a tool primarily for outreach (3.3%). A Community Church shared that while they viewed technology as a tool, for them it was a tool enabling them to reach new individuals or faraway communities. "Church and technology is here to stay in our culture now. We look to continue to build this tool for outreach and remote church going forward. We are looking to set up small satellite churches all over our city." This perspective focuses on the way that technology has enabled an outreach ministry, rather than simply serve the home congregation. It was noticeable both in part one and part two there was a strong emphasis on churches describing technology as useful or important because it served internal needs of the congregation, rather than being conceptualized as a tool for building external relationships.

How Role of Church Viewed During the Pandemic

This question is focused on the ways churches and pastors view church broadly. For example, some people define and understand church as a building, exclusively as a space to be utilized. Others view church as a group of people living life together in community. Distinct from this, others view church as a group of people in the same space, whether online or offline. Finally, some view church as event focused, meaning they see it as people taking part in a service or worship experience together.

02 CHURCH AS... (Main way applicants communicate how they view what the church is)

Top Response: A Service (51%)

Other (0): 0.0 %

A Building (352): 15.0 %

A Service (1175): 50.1 %

A Community (632): 27.0 %

A Shared Space (184): 7.9 %

- A Building (352)
- A Community (632)
- A Shared Space (184)
- A Service (1175)
- Other (0)

Results from the second stage of research indicate that similar to part one, the overwhelming majority of grant recipients viewed the aim of the church as serving members, or offering them

a worship experience that they can take part in together (50.1%). To a much lesser extent churches in part two viewed the church primarily as a community or a body of people living in unity (27%).

A United Methodist Church from the southeast region, shared that "As our Children Ministry Director, the addition of a dedicated computer for our ministry has been wonderful. This has allowed me to organize the ministry all in one place, to have a workspace that I can use at church and home for staying in touch with our families, and to overall have a better balance with my work and personal time. Thank you for providing our church with the grant resources to improve our technology within the different ministry groups." What is communicated here is that the church is seen as an entity which offers important service to the community.

Similarly, a Reformed Presbyterian Church, expressed that the pandemic experience helped foster the idea that the role of the church is to provide a sense of belonging for each member and to connect them as a community. Trying to get everyone connected to the online services and having to provide some with individualized technology help enable them to remember that each member should be seen and is special. They saw this view as important to creating a solid community of people willing to assist each other when needed. Online and live stream services enabled them to communicate with members remotely from their homes, helped foster a sense of rebuilding the community through the digital connection in ways they saw as enriching their distanced congregation.

Finally, a smaller number of leaders described their church as a building or a place (15%) or a shared space together, online or offline (7.9%). This was articulated by one non-denominational church's experience of the pandemic, which led them to identify their church as a building, especially when they were physically separated from it. They stated, "even though we are beginning to enter back into the physical church building we will continue to stream live. We understand that everyone still does not feel safe incoming and congregating together. So this will allow us to remain in contact with our congregation that are still leery about coming into the physical building." Here, we see that even when churches put primary focus on the physical space of the church, technology is viewed as valuable when it assists them in reconnecting to this preferred place.

Mission of the Church During the Pandemic

This question is geared toward understanding the way that churches, leaders, and applicants understand the mission of their church. Some churches understand the mission of church as a service, whether to already members of the church, the vulnerable (elderly or immunocompromised), or to outsiders, those not in the church community already. A church's mission is often described as bringing people together or providing a worship experience. The question refers to the specific mission of the church in the face of the pandemic.

03 · · · · · · · · · MISSION AS... (Main way applicants communicate what they view the mission of the church as) more theological here.

Top Response: Providing Worship Experience (47.7%)
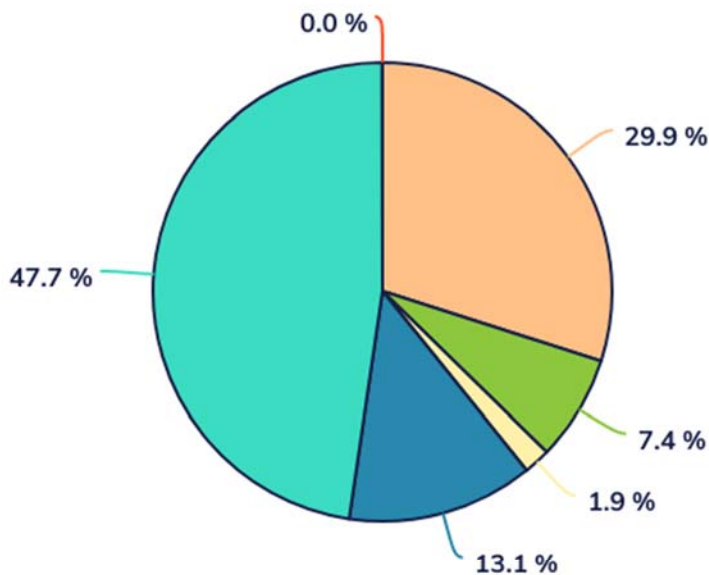
- ● Service to Members (702)
- ● Service to Vulnerable (173)
- ● Service to Outsiders (44)
- ● Creating Community (308)
- ● Providing Worship Experience (1118)
- ● Other (0)

In stage two we discovered that the majority of churches view the mission of the church as providing a worship experience to people (47.7%). One church that shared this view found that by adapting to technology and embracing online services, they were able to best serve their members. In turn, they found new types of community being formed and maintained through online worship.

Other churches viewed their mission as a service to their members (29.9%) or to create community (13.1%). For example, one couple from North Carolina made the move to Indiana in the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and was looking for a new church home. They researched and connected with one Indiana church through the online presence that the church offered and eventually started attending when the church began small in-person gatherings. The church personally shared that "This was meaningful to us because we were able to have an online presence and carry out our mission of connecting people." Here, it is clear that the church views its primary mission as creating a community for attendees and members.

Finally, a smaller number of individuals viewed their mission as serving either the vulnerable (7.4%) or outsiders (1.9%). This is illustrated by the report from one African Methodist Episcopal church, who described getting access to the vulnerable or elderly was also one of the challenges of the church when being faced with the change to tech. "We were having a service, via Zoom and one of our elderly members began praising God because she really missed her church. Once she got connected she said, I never thought that I could have church while being home in bed. She was so excited!"

Perceived Relationship of Church to Technology During the Pandemic

This question is aimed at understanding how churches and pastors understand and conceptualize the relationship between church and technology. Some view the relationship between faith and technology as essential, meaning in overly positive terms. Others view the two as connected, in either positive or negative ways. Some churches view the relationship between church and technology as compatible: either as something overtly intimidating or as a tool. Lastly, some view the relationship between the two as conflicted, meaning they see the purpose but still remain feeling that it is problematic.

04 CHURCH & TECH ARE... (How they describe the relationship between religion/faith and technology)

Top Response: Connected, Positively (48.7%)

0.0 %
3.0 %
12.9 %
6.0 %
1.1 %
28.3 %
48.7 %
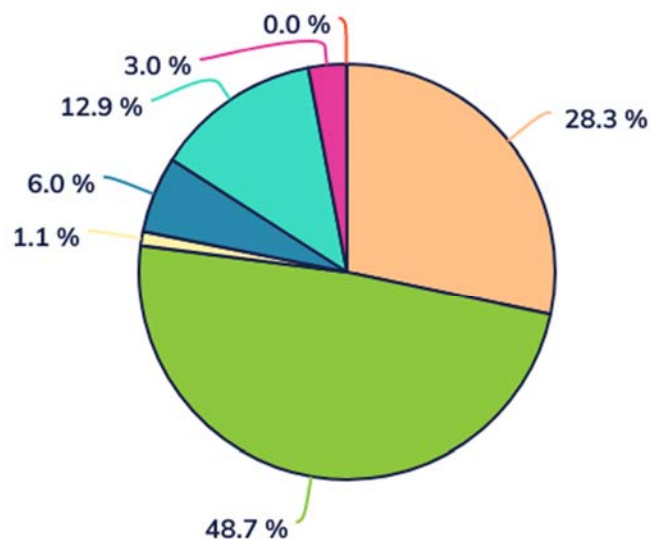
- Essential; Overly Positive View (664)
- Connected, Positively (1141)
- Connected, Negatively (26)
- Compatible, but Intimidating (140)
- Compatible, as a Tool (302)
- Conflicted, Necessary but Problematic (70)
- Other (0)

We found that the majority of churches in this study view the relationship created by church with technology a year into the pandemic as connected in positive ways (48.7%). Other grant recipients viewed the relationship between the two as essential, but saw this dependency during the pandemic in overly positive ways (28.3%). For example, one church in the Northeast region shared that they had "...several former members attend our Zoom church from New York, Ireland, and Wisconsin, and we anticipate trying to find ways to keep them connected even when we begin meeting in person. We also have a geographically dispersed congregation and have found that remote meetings can be quite efficient and save driving time and resources for many of us." Many churches in this study reported being happily surprised at how using technology to facilitate online services broadened their outreach in unexpected ways.

This ability of technology to provide a reliable live stream service to their congregation, was often described as going far beyond the leaders expectations. One Catholic Church reported that the ability to have online services in tandem with in-person services unexpectedly solved a problem they regularly encountered. They stated that in past years, their Easter service had set limits to the number of congregation members who could attend, requiring them to have an "overflow room," where people watched a less than desirable video feed. But in 2021 with the use of live streaming services being in place, it allowed them to double the number of individuals participating in the service both at the church and those at home.

There was a much lower proportion that described their churches relationship with technology as simply compatible or neutral (12.9%). There were around (6%) of churches that still viewed technology as something distinctly intimidating, while the remaining viewed it as problematic, but necessary (3%) or negatively related (1.1%).

Views of Online and Offline Church

This question is aimed at understanding how churches view their focus. In other words, where they invest their time, energy, and resources. Churches may view their primary focus as offline, hybrid (both online and offline) in either positive or negative ways, or for online worship (either positive, neutral, negative, or undervalued). Altogether, this question is interested in how churches decide what and how to allot their passion, volunteers, and money towards.

05 CHURCH FOCUS IS... (Main way they describe where the church is focusing their attention and work) [online, offline & both/hybrid]

Top Response: Hybrid Focus, Positive (37%)

- 0.0 %
- 8.4 %
- 4.8 %
- 3.8 %
- 12.5 %
- 37.0 %
- 24.1 %
- 9.3 %
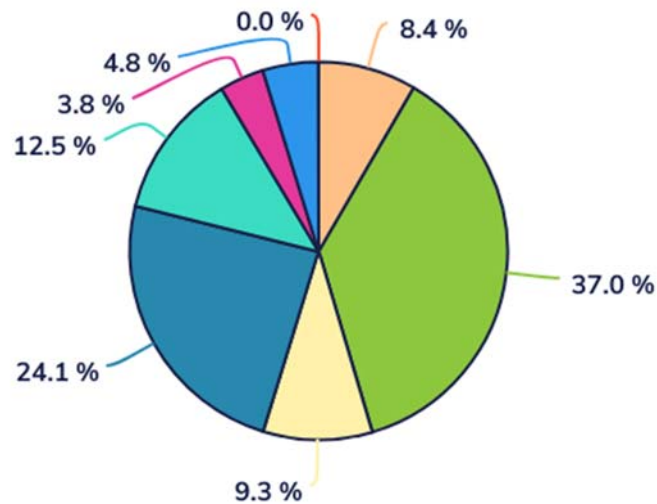
- ● Offline, as Preferred (197)
- ● Hybrid Focus, Positive (867)
- ● Hybrid, Negative (219)
- ● Online, Positive: (565)
- ● Online, Neutral (294)
- ● Online, Negative (89)
- ● Online, Undervalued (112)
- ● Other (0)

Based on final reports over ⅓ of churches reported that in 2021 they focused on using technology to sustain hybrid worship. Hybrid worship describes the live streaming or running of online worship services alongside traditional face-to-face worship. While this can take different forms, live streaming the in-person worship service or creating an online space where people watching the in-person service while interacting with others on the platform, these saw this development in very positive ways (37%). Another ¼ of churches also viewed their chosen focus as maintaining some form of online worship, in positive ways as well (24.1%). One Eastern Orthodox Church described their focus as livestreaming to members of their church. They shared that the Divine Liturgy, an integral part of their church beliefs, as being impossible without the use of online livestreams. They represent the viewpoint of many people who responded, as either seeing online as the most important, or as part of the hybrid experience that the church should focus on during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A smaller percentage of respondents indicate that while they were still offering online services (12.5%) or hybrid worship (9.3%) they viewed this as a negative. Other churches indicated that they focused on offline being preferred (8.4%), online as something undervalued (4.8%), or online as negative (3.8%). As one Catholic Church explained that they view the value of offline community as more integral than online worship. They were grateful for the impact of online worship however, they view the ultimate purpose of the church as the offline community that it provides. This does not represent the majority of churches' perspectives; however, some churches did think of church in this way.

Positive Impact of Technology on Churches

This question is aimed at understanding what churches experienced the greatest success of impact that they found with the transition online during the pandemic. The experiences of churches in the shift online varied greatly depending on the resources that they already had, their location, and their size. This question is attempting to see a broader perspective of themes of successes that churches found during the pandemic.

06 SUCCESSES/ GREATEST IMPACT... (Primary positive impact technology and online worship made on applicants to church)

Top Response: Help Engage Members, Convenience of Online (21.6%)

12.5 %
21.6 %
12.0 %
6.4 %
8.7 %
8.9 %
21.6 %
8.3 %
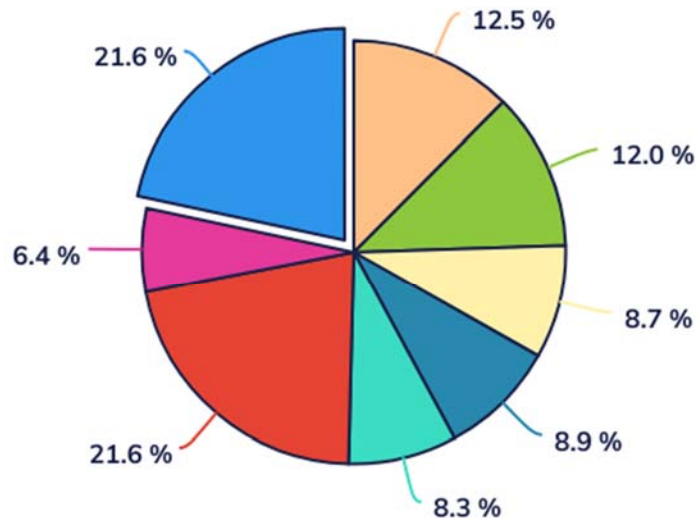
- Enabled continuation of Sunday Church services (292)
- Enabled Church Growth (in numbers) (282)
- Helped address covid-19 social problems (i.e., isolation) (204)
- Helped diversify congregation (209)
- Enabled creation of new programs, that are temporary (194)
- Enabled creation of new programs, that will continue long term (505)
- Created new service opportunities, rise in volunteers (150)
- Help engage members, convenience of online (elderly, busy members) (507)

Results indicate that the majority of churches in this study indicate that they view the greatest opportunity offered to them by technology use during the pandemic is either the ability provided to engage members in new ways (21.6%) or the ability and opportunity technology provides to create new church programs (21.6%). For example, a Hispanic Baptist church shared

that embracing technology for them meant being able to provide families' new experiences, which they viewed as one of their key successes during the online shift. While many families in their congregation and members contract COVID-19 they were still able to stay connected to the church during periods of quarantine. Through the internet they also were able to reach out to other churches in their denomination in faraway places such as England, Puerto Rico, and Honduras who were in struggling situations, because they no longer received the necessary donations from their community. This church set-up a donation page to help these congregations and distribute funds and provide encouragement throughout the pandemic.

Other churches indicate that the greatest success that they found was the ability to continue services despite lockdown (12.5%) or the ability to grow in church attendance and reach (12%). Still other churches identified the greatest success was that they were able to diversify their congregation (8.9%), address social problems during the pandemic (8.7%), create new programs (8.3%), or create new service opportunities for volunteers (6.4%). Ultimately, what was seen is that there were great successes and opportunities during the pandemic that were wide ranging. A United Methodist Church found their greatest success was that they were able to engage members through online worship, especially the elderly population. They reported:

> We are an aging congregation. The risks associated with COVID-19 made it uncomfortable for some of our members. Equipment purchased with the Connect Through Tech grant made it possible for those members to join in our Sunday services. Additionally, post COVID-19, we will be able to reach unchurched members as well as continue to serve our shut ins."

This church reported in mid-2021 that they expects to continue with online service beyond the pandemic " we expect to expand beyond our service to engage members of the congregation that are unable to participate in activities, hold virtual Bible Study, provide children's messages, youth engagement, various workshops, and other events that benefit our community." Enthusiastic reports of the experience potential of online worship were common amongst the churches studied. While for many their focus is on using technology to support and maintain a community of committed members, we saw an increase in the final reports of churches speculating about how the potential to use church online reach out and grow new members was noted.

Summary:

How Churches Approached Technology One Year After The Pandemic

The research found that technology had a major impact on the church and the way that they were run, even after one entire year of the pandemic. Themes were offered that aid an understanding of the relationship between the church and technology as well as how after a year of this implementation, perspectives changed. Data being gathered a year after the pandemic offers a special window into the early church's views on technology. According to the final report, about 80% of applicants had a favorable opinion of how technology and religion interact. Even so, there was a lack of consistency in the greatest effects or successes of technology and worship, suggesting that church leaders may have needed more time to assess the change.

The majority of churches saw technology as a tool during the COVID-19 pandemic to have a church service. However, others viewed technology's primary purpose as either creating community or a resource to utilize. Most church leaders viewed a "church" as a worship service while others saw the "church" as a community of those who loved and cared for each other. Researchers found that most individuals at this time saw the mission of the church as to provide worship experiences, while others saw the mission to serve members. The research team found that the majority of pastors saw the relationship between church and technology as connected, not necessarily with great enthusiasm, but definitely positively. A smaller amount saw church and technology as an essential connection, with some enthusiasm and in a positive light. Most churches saw their focus as creating a hybrid worship experience, which felt the most relevant to a one-year post-pandemic world.

Lastly, churches offered up their perspectives of what their successes have been over the past year. Most notably, churches saw the greatest impact of technology as either creating new programs or engaging members, near or far, young or old. What the research team found was that churches were resilient over the last year, often altering their priorities, perspectives, and conceptualizations as they learned, struggled, and grew.

Comparison Of Findings:

How Churches Views Of Technology And Online Church Shifted Over The Pandemic

Results of both stage one and two shed new light on and provide a deeper understanding of how churches responded to the shift online during COVID-19. Based on the results, churches navigated the pandemic differently throughout the process of shifting online, depending on their sizes, locations, and prior experiences. Some commonalities in the data indicate essential themes that enable us to comprehend this shift to the digital sphere. Most notably, similarities and differences can be seen when comparing the application data and the final report data.

Tech as a resource before the grant but as the focus after the grant.
The data shows that the majority of applicants viewed technology as a "resource," fulfilling a certain need that the pandemic created. However, after the grant money was given out, many of the recipients viewed technology in overtly positive ways, indicating that at one point, technology was seen as more of a solution to a problem but by the end of the grant money, technology was viewed in more necessary terms.

An example of how the grant application process far surpassed expectations was provided by a church in the Central region that belongs to the Friends (Quaker) denomination. The church leader joined a resource group that discussed digital church expressions and explained that they are still learning how big of a mission field the online community is. After the experience over the last 18 months, given how real the connections, relationships, and opportunities for discipleship have become, they would be hesitant to use the word "virtual." Through Facebook live videos, Zoom, and now even Discord (for discussions and resources), they will continue to provide opportunities for people to connect to our service.

Also a Presbyterian church from the central region said that this pandemic has changed their world. They are all eager to safely return to the worship and work of ministry within our church building. But they have also learned that they can stay connected and include a greater number of individuals with the power of technology. They will continue to nurture that power as they move forward as a congregation.

"Tech as a…" resource?
Differences between the first and second wave of data indicate that there was a shift in the understanding of the purpose of technology during the pandemic. In round one, (46.5%) of individuals viewed technology as a resource. In round two, (28.5%) of individuals viewed technology as a resource, with more indicating that it was a "tool for COVID-19."

An Episcopal Church, in the Central region, does not believe that they can go back to being a non-digital congregation. Between COVID-19 apprehension, routine health concerns, and the ease of attending when out of town, technology is seen as a valuable tool to keep people engaged. Technology was rapidly introduced to churches as a "tool for COVID-19" however, now seems to be an integral part of programmatic needs.

A Lutheran Church, in the Central region, expressed that the pandemic caused them to hurry up an lock-in tech to establish a church communications platform. This specific congregation chose Flocknote, and it has been a great communication tool compared to our old purely email system. They plan on continuing a broadcast (either live or recorded) of our services indefinitely and will also likely keep some meetings streamed through Zoom, even post-pandemic.

Church as a worship experience.
Churches indicated in the application stage of data that they viewed "church" as overwhelmingly a community (53.3%) followed by a gathered people (37.9%). However, after the grant money was received, churches reported seeing the church as a worship experience (50.1%) and less so as a community (27%).

A Catholic church in the Northwest Region was very constrained in their ability to update its structural environment to meet the needs of the technology-based worship experiences this Pandemic took the world to because they are an older Cathedral style building from about 1890. With the help of this grant, they were able to hire individuals to help them envision and map out the necessary steps to prepare them to bring the worship service into the homes of their neighborhood.

Mission as changing.
In the application stage of data, there was a more even toss-up as to how church leaders conceptualized the "mission" of the church as. Many reported that the mission of the church is a service to members (31.3%), to provide worship experiences (25%), or to create community (20.2%). However, after the grants were received and technology was implemented, more churches indicated that the mission of the church was to provide worship experiences (47.7%). Less individuals reported that the mission was to serve members (29%) or create a community (13.1%).

A United Methodist church in the Northwest region expressed that tech in the church created a small change in the mission. Their church is connecting with a greater number of worshippers than would normally attend their services in person. They see live-streaming (and recorded) services as a long-term component of their worship and mission in their community. They are reaching non-attenders, shut-ins, nursing home residents, and more through this technology.

The relationship between church and technology as less intimidating.
Before the pandemic, many church applications indicated that they found the relationship between technology and the church as compatible. Some viewed this with an intimidating lens (39.2%) others viewed it with more excitement, as a valuable resource (43.4%). In the second

round of data, after the implementation of technology, more individuals found the relationship to be positive, as the two are connected (48.7%). Fewer churches indicated that they found technology essential (28.3%). Most shockingly, the contrast between those who found it intimidating (6%) was far less than before.

One church from the Southeast region expressed that they found learning about the benefits of technology in the church as helpful and a positive experience. They shared that they believe they will always have a streaming platform. They had long-term goals prior to the pandemic, and it forced their hand to launch their online presence. The journey by which they came to where they are today was a great learning opportunity, but they feel that they have been able to firmly establish their presence in the "online" world through the use and initiation of technology.

Greatest opportunity as engaging members and creating new programs for long-term purposes.
Churches, staff, and pastoral leadership viewed the greatest opportunities that technology offered as both engaging members as well as the new ability to create programs with the intention of long-term implementation. Interestingly, the data showed that this finding was exactly tied at 21.6% for both responses.

The biggest opportunity for one Assemblies of God church in the Central region was accepting change and developing new initiatives using the grant-purchased technology. The pandemic forced Life Church out of its comfort zone quite a bit. Fundamentally, they believed in live preaching and did not have, an online presence, but this opened up new possibilities for growing the church and more importantly the kingdom of God. Although they are currently meeting in person, they are planning on taking the foundation that was laid during the pandemic to the next level and beginning an online campus at the end of 2022.

The greatest challenge was mixed with "upgrading technology" as the most significant.
Unlike some of the other responses where there is a clear majority, the greatest challenge seemed to differ among respondents. The greatest challenge was identified, especially in rural or small towns as upgrading pre-existing technology (38.6%) however, many other challenges were noted such as poor quality of live streams (16.2%), creating a sense of community through a digitally mediated format (15.6%), or issues with technology execution (15.4%), among others.

A United Methodist Church expressed that the challenge of upgrading technology became clear by being positioned in a smaller town. They said that the challenge is that there is a gross misunderstanding of how technology impacts low-income rural communities that struggle to acquire technology. The grant made it possible to reach not only the congregation that they serve during the pandemic but also reach individuals from across the country.

Overall, the report shows us the ways that churches and leaders responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to digitally mediated forms of religion. This was unprecedented for many rural churches that had nothing more than a microphone or their cellphone to reach the

online community members. This report demonstrates the ways that churches were resilient, creative, and steadfast in their response to the pandemic. Churches fought through intimidation to become technologically experienced. Pastors altered their conceptualizations and definitions of church, technology, and their mission. Pastors, leaders, and volunteers proved once again that despite natural disasters, diseases, and wars, the church will continue as long as there are people.

Questions Raised By Research

The report and data analysis offers a more nuanced understanding of the transition online for churches. However, even with two stages of data and an extensive data analysis, questions remain and should warrant further investigation. Further research would provide an even greater conceptualization of what the relationship between technology and religion is and what the future of this relationship will be. COVID-19 was unprecedented and undoubtedly changed the future of the American Christian Church. It is necessary to conduct more research on the topic of church technology integration. There are still some specific questions.

What equipment did churches find most useful or vital in making the move online?
In responding to the question focused on what the grant money was utilized for, 82% of churches reported purchasing camera/video equipment. However, it is not clear the specific type of camera/video equipment was purchased. This question would enable a greater understanding of what type of equipment is most useful in a digital environment so that future churches with no prior experience with technology might avoid useless purchases and instead be thoughtful with their digital choices.

What changes are permanent? What changes are temporary?
Some questions focused on the "hybrid" experience but many churches indicated that they were making long-term adjustments as a result of the grant money. Other churches indicated that they were attempting to "get through" this period and meet back in person regularly as soon as the government would allow it. Longitudinal studies could investigate what technology is still being used and what technology is discontinued after the pandemic. This question being answered would enable a greater understanding of the impact of digital technology on the church, and to what extent must we alter our understanding of "church in America" if most churches offer online resources.

How did they facilitate livestreams?
Many churches focused on live streams during the pandemic given the guidelines and lockdowns. The research at hand did not require churches to specify the service they were using for livestream. Given the instant notoriety of Zoom during the pandemic, research should investigate what the primary tools were used for live streams such as Zoom, YouTube TV, Facebook Live, and others. This question being answered would benefit both churches with the goal of providing livestreams as well as change the way we begin to conceptualize livestream. It is possible that there might be resources created and made just for churches to facilitate this in an easier way if we have a greater understanding of why the churches chose the resource that they did.

What changed their mind about technology?
Seeing the shift of intimidation of technology to positive, even excitement when working with technology, research should investigate this shift in more depth. Questions remain as to what enabled the shift to seeing technology as more positive. Was it experience with the technology,

working with volunteers who understood, or finally feeling capable to work with it? This question would deepen our understanding of what about technology is conducive to a church setting as well as provide churches with continued hesitancy a more thorough explanation as to why technology might be a vital resource for churches across the country and globe.