



Report 3 Executive Summary of
'We're Still Here': Reflections of the Post-Pandemic Digital Church
How the Pandemic Altered Long-Term Technological Attitudes and Ideas in the Church Congregation

“We’re Still Here’: Reflections of the Post-Pandemic Digital Church” is a 27-page report released in October of 2023 that explores the experiences of churches post the COVID-19 pandemic. The report analyzes survey data of approximately 250 individuals who were granted the “Connect Through Tech” grant in 2020, funded by the Center for Congregations in Indianapolis, Indiana. This report is part of a larger “Connect Through Tech” grant program of the Center for Congregations in Indianapolis. It supported more than 2,700 congregations across Indiana in 2020 and 2021 by providing them with funds. The survey has approximately 40 questions focusing on technological decisions that were made pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and post-pandemic. The main purpose of the survey was to better understand how the forcible exploration of digital technology in 2020 had altered congregational views of community, ministry, and the digital relationship. Of note, we were specifically interested in the changes churches made in their overall perspectives and activities pre- and post-COVID.

Our survey included some relevant demographic questions as well as approximately 40 questions related to their attitudes and experiences pre- and post-COVID with technology. The vast majority of respondents identified themselves as paid full-time staff (60%) and the rest as either regular volunteers (18%) or part-time staff (14%). The individual responding varied from the age of 24 to 78, with an average age of 52. The majority of the respondents were in small towns, the largest makeup being in Indianapolis (35 churches) or Fort Wayne (14 churches). The majority of the respondents identified themselves as White (82%), followed by Black (14%), Hispanic (2%), or Asian (.4%).

This third report was interested in exploring these questions:

- 1) Are there differences in technology use before and after the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- 2) Were there attitude changes pre- and post-pandemic towards technology?**
- 3) Were there differences in responses based on the sizes and churches and based on the age of those implementing these technological changes?**

The results of this survey’s study include a few key themes:

Churches made major transitions to technology during the pandemic, from social media to camera purchases.

- Amid digital restrictions and social distancing guidelines, our data indicates that Indiana churches also encountered many technological questions and decisions. We can see that churches reported that their engagement with digital technology changed quite a bit since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Churches in Indiana did experience attitudinal shifts amid their utilization of technology.

- Our data, made from the responses of Indiana churches, indicate that while they were actively shifting their use of technology as a necessity, many of them report that their attitudes toward technology and their perspective of the relationship between church and technology have changed as well. There was a shift towards more neutral and positive responses by the end of the pandemic. Specifically, the results indicate that those who started with more negative attitudes toward technology changed to more neutral attitudes, whereas those who started out with more neutral attitudes toward technology changed to more positive attitudes.

COVID-19 also forced churches to consider social media as a tool of digital technology to be utilized.

- Churches not only began live streaming or utilizing online giving during the pandemic, many churches report beginning to utilize social media sites far more during the pandemic in an effort to stay connected to their church congregants. Most notably, Facebook was a popular social media site to utilize for connection and communication with congregants.

Attitudes toward the relationship between digital technology and the church varied based on the size of the church at hand.

- When the churches in our data were separated by size, our results indicated that before the pandemic, larger churches tended to have more neutral perspectives on the relationship between church and technology. In contrast, smaller churches tended to have more negative responses to the relationship. Our data shows there is a correlation between church size and attitudes towards technology. This suggests the need to further explore the potential connection between church size and access to technology and how this shapes church views of technology.

The time *when* churches made their first digital purchase or use differed based on their congregational size.

- Our data shows that many larger churches had already begun implementing digital resources pre-pandemic, whereas smaller churches had to make a more drastic transition online in March 2020. This indicates that larger churches were more likely to have already been using some level of technology in their services before the pandemic forced them to.
- This seems to suggest that technology development and usage might depend on resources. Almost all churches that had resources that allowed the usage of technology

before the pandemic had already established an online presence. The smaller churches that didn't have the resources were hesitant to start employing technology even after the pandemic, likely because their resources were already spread thin. This is an important theme for further study.

The age of the church leader making digital decisions impacted the *type* of social media chosen.

- While some uses, such as Livestream, remain similar among the age groups of churches, other uses vary. We found that older church leaders (especially pastors over 60) tended to use Facebook more than younger leaders. Younger Leaders (those under 40) utilized Twitter or Instagram much more often. This suggests that church choices about technology are directly tied to generational social media preference.

Overall, this third and final report from the Tech in Churches project explores the attitudinal and technological differences for Indiana congregations pre- and post-pandemic. Our findings indicate that factors such as age and size made a difference in the utilization and timing of digital resources. Our research also echoes our previous reports' research that pastors and leaders encountered a variety of technological decisions to be made. This report is part of a larger research project that analyzed the church's and tech's decision-making processes during the pandemic. *Tech In Churches During COVID-19* is a research project funded by the Lilly Endowment that explores the evolving relationship between technology and religious congregations.

The project is led by **Heidi A Campbell**, who is a professor of Communication and Presidential Impact Fellow at Texas A&M University and director of the Network for New Media, Religion, and Digital Culture Studies.

For more information about the research project, please see: <https://www.techinchurches.org/>

The full copy of Report Three can be found at:
<https://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/200172>

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