



Navigate going back to church confidently

American Church Group of Colorado partnered with Springtide Research Institute and The Parable Group to conduct this study in an effort to determine how people are feeling regarding COVID-19 stay-at-home measures and disinfection practices, and how they are approaching returning to church in person. The survey, conducted by Springtide Research Institute, found that there are essentially three main groups of people for church leaders to plan for and respond to.

The study revealed three groups of people:

We had over 1,800 people share their thoughts with us about their goals, thoughts, needs, feelings, pain points, and actions during this uncertain time. Specifically, we asked them to answer questions related to their health and welfare, how they prefer the experience and format of services to be, their general attitude and temperament regarding COVID-19 regulations, and how they are engaging with their relationships.

Of this sample, 69% were active church members, 19% were unpaid lay leaders, and only 8% were paid staff or pastors. A majority of this population indicated that they were uncertain and cautious about returning to in-person services. The descriptions outlined in this report highlight the characteristics and actions of the three main groups that emerged from this study and the actions that church leaders could take to respond to each group.

SUMMARY:

- Over 1,800 people completed the survey between May 21, 2020 and May 27, 2020.
- 57% say their faith has GROWN during this time.
- 60% say that they are open to attending services at a different time than currently offered.
- 41% have health circumstances to consider when making decisions.
- 59% have people in their life that are within a sensitive population.
- Only 32% have children to think about during this time.
- 42% feel strongly that practices should be followed.
 - 25% don't feel strongly.
 - 34% feel somewhat strongly.





GROUP 1

Abiding Attenders: 25% of all churchgoers

These are the people who are not concerned at all about adhering to social distancing practices and just want to get back to “normal.”

Health and Welfare: They don’t need clear and consistent disinfection practices at their church to feel safe, and they don’t necessarily believe that the church needs to take precautions. They are not uncomfortable or concerned when people don’t practice social distancing or wear Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), and they do not feel uncertainty about what the “right” procedures are.

Experience and Format: The church experience and format are important to them, and they don’t want things to change. The format does affect their commitment to the church, and they are not huge fans of online services.

Attitude and Temperament: They don’t think it’s important to follow social distancing practices overall and don’t necessarily think the requirements are necessary or fair. They want to be with people, so they don’t feel the need to follow regulations and would be comfortable returning to church as it was. They are not impacted financially and would volunteer at the level that they did prior to COVID-19.

Other factors: They are more likely to be connected to others already and are encouraging social connections. They’re typically not part of a sensitive (at-risk) population to contract COVID-19.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Of the three profiles, this group is the one most likely to take exception to social distancing or PPE measures, such as being required to wear a mask. It’s important that volunteers are trained so that they can appropriately respond to any concerns or frustrations related to PPE compliance.
- Try to keep some options the same as they were before COVID, as much as possible. Offer in-person services for a limited number of people—for these folks—while still following regulations.
- Design watch party style, in-person services for people who have been social distancing in safe “pods” to attend together.





GROUP 2

Hesitant Debaters: 54% of all churchgoers

These are the folks who are in the middle and may be uncertain overall about the right things to do.

Health and Welfare: They are moderately concerned about disinfection practices in order to feel safe and think it's a good idea to follow precautions. They are not overly concerned about how the staff of the church complies with regulations. They are at low risk for contracting COVID-19.

Experience and Format: This group is largely neutral about what happens with the church experience and format and seems to be relatively noncommittal. They are open to online church and are moderately flexible about how and when they attend services.

Attitude and Temperament: They are cautious about regulations and have been impacted by COVID-19 but are relatively neutral about the regulations. They want to engage both financially and in person but may have been impacted and so are in the middle about following mandated practices.

Other factors: They are likely connected to people and are encouraging social activity, though cautiously.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Messaging to this group should be largely centered around serving the greater good. They are uncertain, so having something defined is better.
- Stand firm about disinfection and distancing practices to help quell uncertainty. Don't change these decisions too often, or people will get confused and do nothing.
- This is the largest group, so actions should largely take this cautious but curious group into consideration. Offer both in-person and online options for people to choose and be innovative about how to hold services in a new or different way. For example, offer an "al fresco" service with outdoor tables spread apart, but also have it streaming online.





GROUP 3

Adaptable Adherents: 21% of all churchgoers

These folks are concerned about following regulations and are less likely to engage socially.

Health and Welfare: These folks need clear and consistent disinfection practices in their church before they will attend and want the church to abide by every precaution, even if it seems like a lot. They are uncertain about the right things to do, and so they want to follow every practice. It's important to them that church staff and those around them adhere to PPE and disinfection practices.

Experience and Format: These folks are willing to adapt to different structures and formats to make sure that safety regulations are followed. They need their community, but not enough to violate safety protocols. They are largely flexible about the format, time, and location of church services and will continue to watch services online if they're offered.

Attitude and Temperament: This group is highly regulated and wants all practices adhered to. They believe the recommended social distancing regulations are necessary and fair. They are willing to forego connection with others in an effort to follow regulations. They do not feel comfortable in church right now, and COVID-19 may have affected their financial situation and ability to volunteer.

Other factors: This group is much less likely to encourage or pursue connections with others. Thirty-seven percent of this group doesn't want to see any in-person connection at this point.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Offer clear and regular online options for services and social engagement.
- Create ways that communities can engage virtually or with social distancing measures firmly in place and enforced.
- Reiterate that even though services MAY be offered in person, they will still have the option of attending virtually so that they don't feel excluded.





Data Highlights: Health & Welfare

When we asked participants about their goals for returning to church, **68% say it's important to them that their church's disinfection practices are clear and consistent in order for them to feel safe.** And 69% think that their church should take precautions, even if it feels like a lot.

It is important to me that my church's disinfection practices are clear and consistent in order for me to feel safe.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	121	6.7
Disagree	108	6.0
Neither Disagree nor Agree	343	19.0
Agree	599	33.2
Strongly Agree	635	35.2
Total	1806	100*

I believe that my church should take every precaution to keep us safe, even if it seems like a lot.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	88	4.9
Disagree	151	8.4
Neither Disagree nor Agree	321	17.8
Agree	588	32.6
Strongly Agree	657	36.4
Total	1805	100*

*Tables may not add up to 100% because of rounding.



Data Highlights: Experience & Format

Not surprisingly, **37%** want their church experience to stay the same as it was before the pandemic. However, in general, **83%** say that they need to be part of a church community, regardless of the format.

It is important to me that my church experience is just like what it was prior to the pandemic.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	163	9.0
Disagree	486	26.8
Neither Disagree nor Agree	495	27.3
Agree	401	22.1
Strongly Agree	267	14.7
Total	1812	100*

I need to be part of a church community, regardless of the format.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	48	2.6
Disagree	76	4.2
Neither Disagree nor Agree	188	10.4
Agree	668	36.9
Strongly Agree	832	45.9
Total	1812	100*

*Tables may not add up to 100% because of rounding.



Data Highlights: Attitude & Temperament

Over half of participants (54%) say that it's important to follow recommended social distancing regulations, and 50% believe that the stay-at-home and social distancing mandates are necessary and fair.

It is important to me that we follow the recommended social distancing regulations, even if it is not mandatory.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	211	11.6
Disagree	282	15.6
Neither Disagree nor Agree	335	18.5
Agree	507	28
Strongly Agree	477	26.3
Total	1812	100*

I believe that the stay-at-home and social distancing mandates that churches are required to comply with are necessary and fair.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	322	17.8
Disagree	333	18.4
Neither Disagree nor Agree	255	14.1
Agree	420	23.2
Strongly Agree	482	26.6
Total	1812	100*

*Tables may not add up to 100% because of rounding.



Data Highlights: Relationships & Connections

Regardless of the decisions that are made, **96%** say that the church should be communicating updates about requirements and next steps to people.

Communication should be clear and regularly distributed.

I believe that it is important that my church does a good job of communicating updates to people.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	9	0.5
Disagree	6	0.3
Neither Disagree nor Agree	57	3.1
Agree	815	45.0
Strongly Agree	925	51.0
Total	1812	100*

*Tables may not add up to 100% because of rounding.



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Our agents are dedicated to serving Christian ministries. They have made serving the Church a focus of our agency. Because of their background and experience, our agents understand many of the challenges faced by Christian churches and ministries.

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Springtide Research Institute

is a sociological research institute listening to the inner and outer lives of young people ages 13 to 25. Amplifying young people's lived experience through unbiased research and the generation of evidence-based actionable insights, we seek to help those who care about young people, care better.

Springtide Research Institute is available for custom research. Reach out to Megan Bissell (megan@springtideresearch.org) about details and for our full scope of capabilities.

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