

Pastors' Views on How COVID-19 is Affecting Their Church July 2020

Survey of American Protestant Pastors

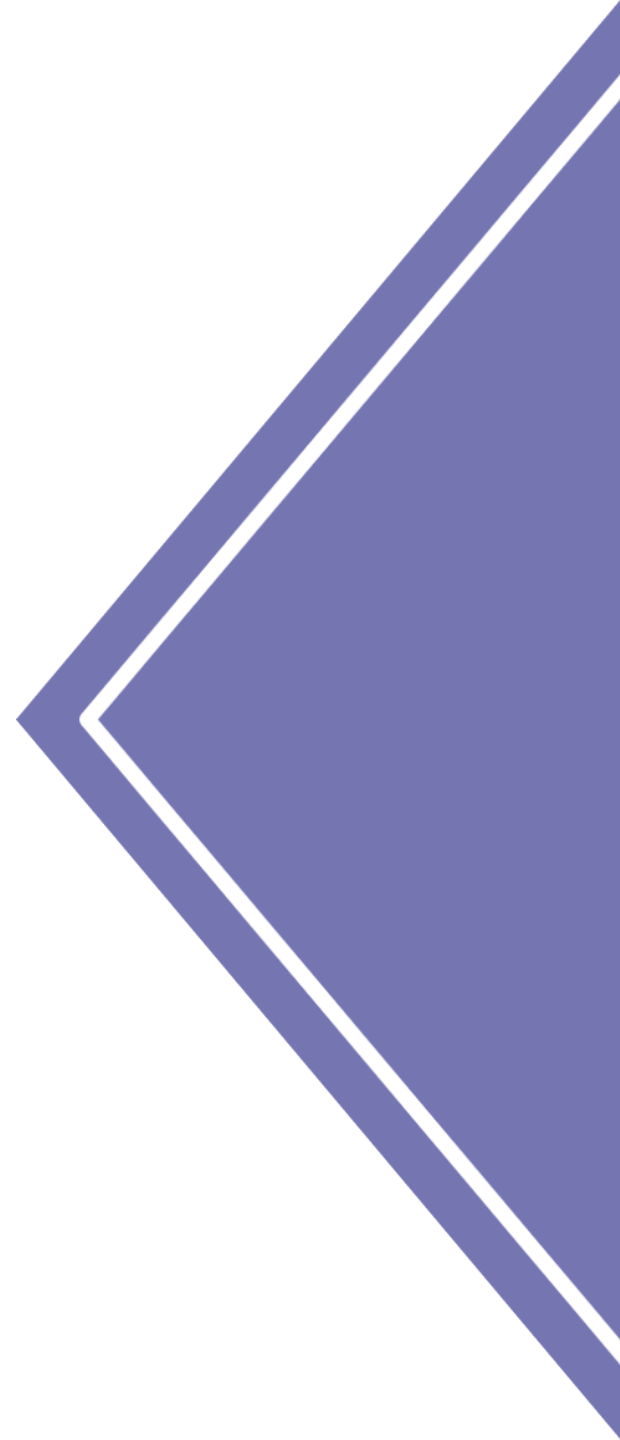
Methodology

- The online survey of 443 Protestant pastors was conducted July 20-22, 2020
- Invitations were emailed to the LifeWay Research Pastor Panel followed by two reminders.
- The probability sample of Protestant churches was created by phone recruiting by LifeWay Research using random samples selected from all Protestant churches. Pastors who agree to be contacted by email for future surveys make up this LifeWay Research Pastor Panel.
- Each survey was completed by the senior or sole pastor or a minister at the church
- Responses were weighted by church average attendance, region, ethnicity of pastor, and whether the pastor self-identified as evangelical or mainline to more accurately reflect the population

Methodology

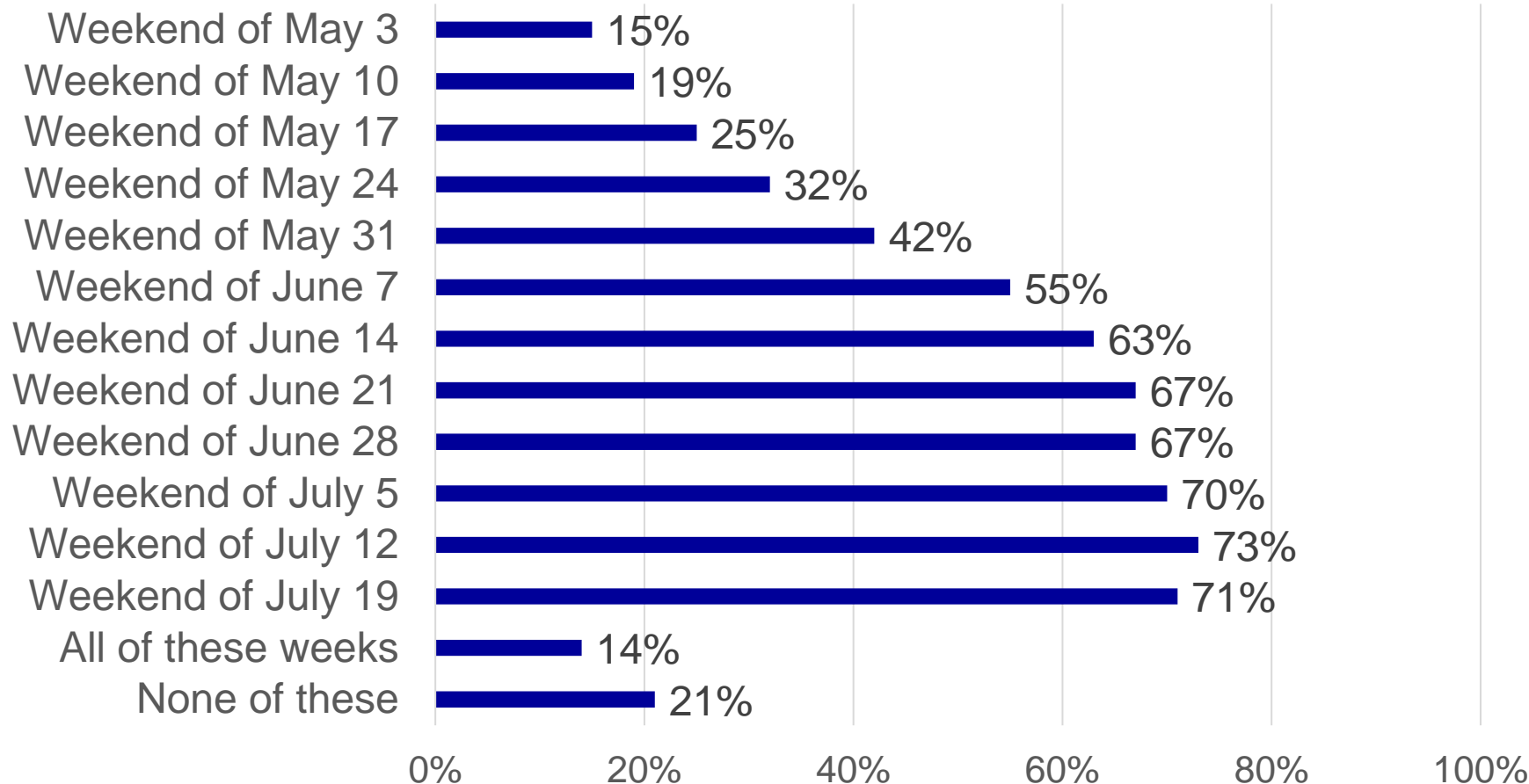
- The final sample is 443 useable surveys
- The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed $\pm 5.0\%$
- Margins of error are higher in sub-groups
- Comparisons are made to surveys using the same methodology conducted March 30-31, 2020 with 400 completes and April 27-29, 2020 with 470 completes

Survey Responses



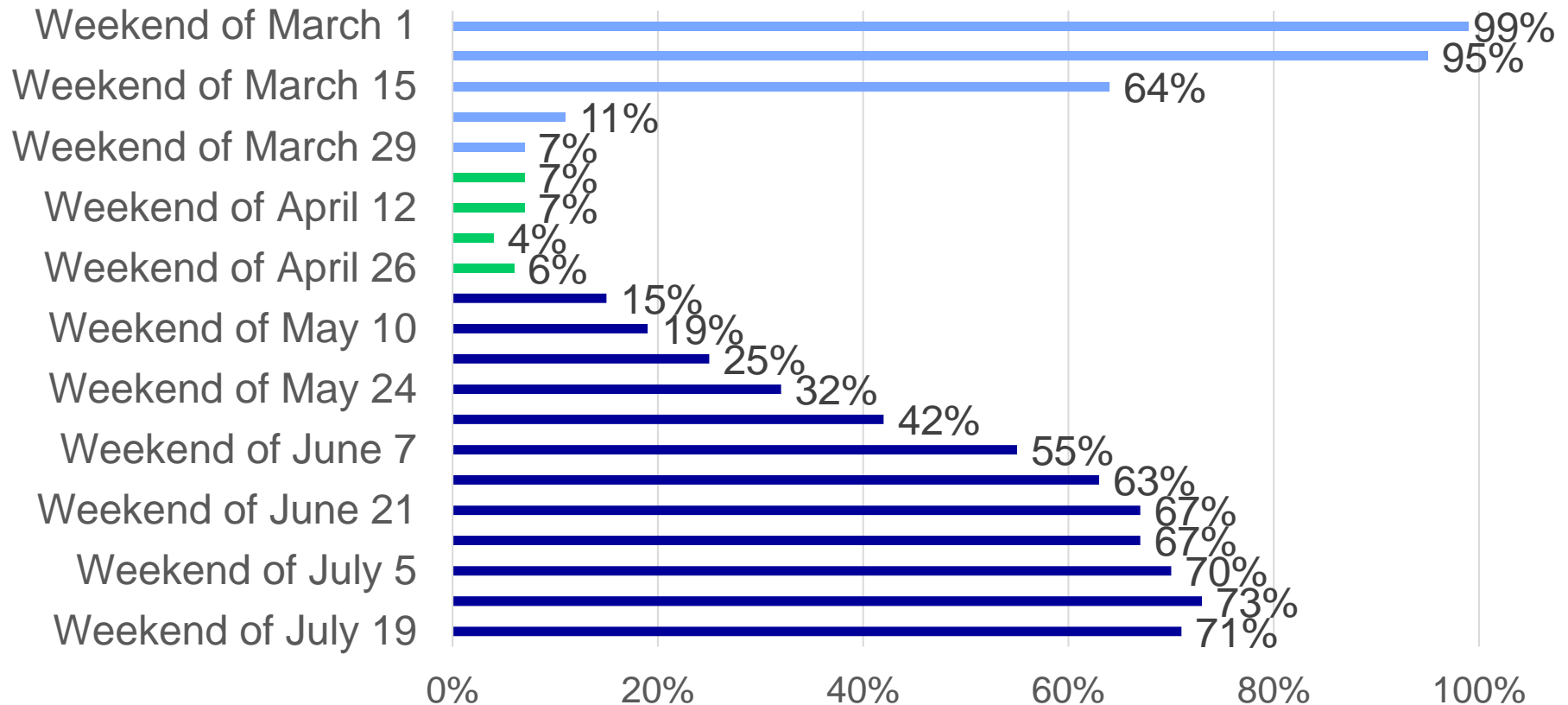
“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Among Protestant Pastors



Churches meeting for in-person worship have returned to mid-March levels

Among Protestant Pastors



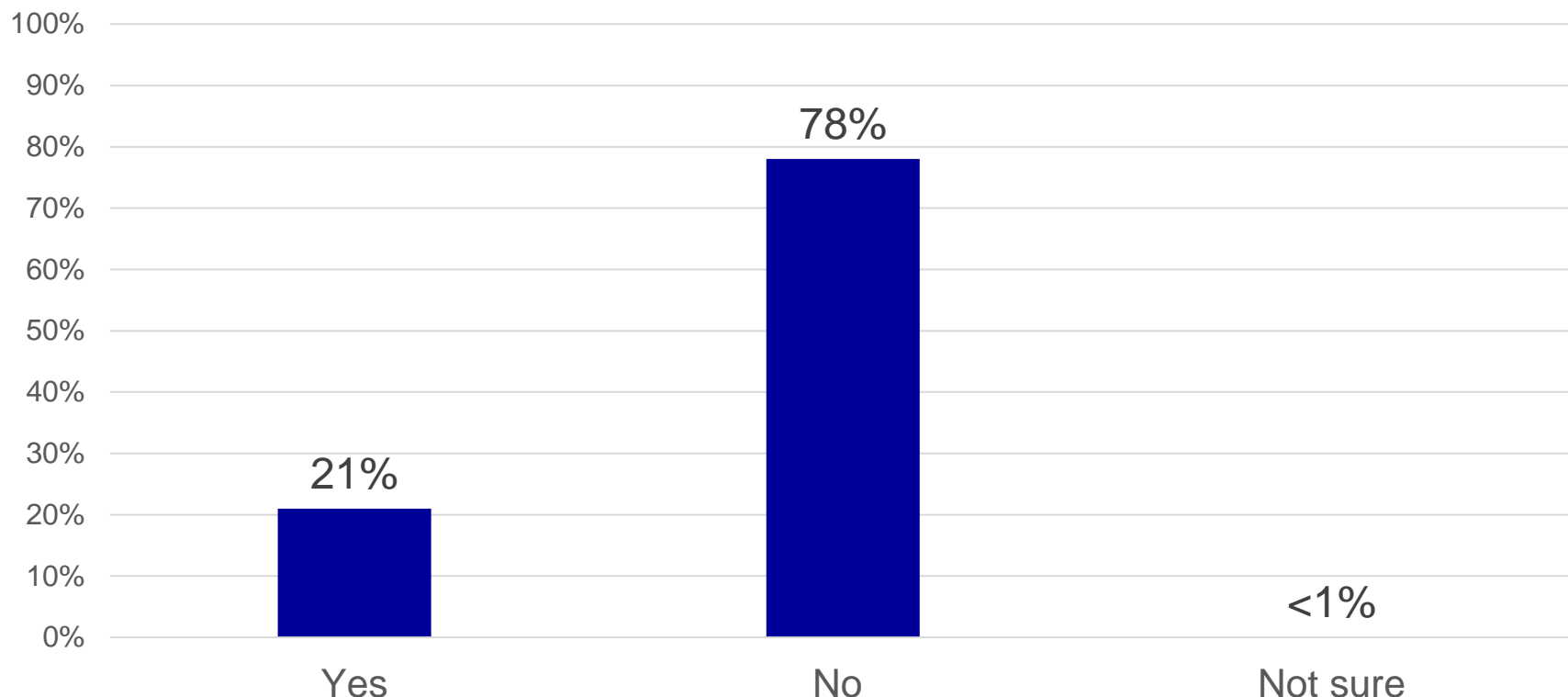
Combined with April 27-29 and March 30-31 surveys

Q2: "Which weekends in March did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)? Select all that apply" n=400

Q2: "Which weekends in April did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)? Select all that apply" n=470

1 in 5 churches offered drive-in worship services at least once when they couldn't meet in person

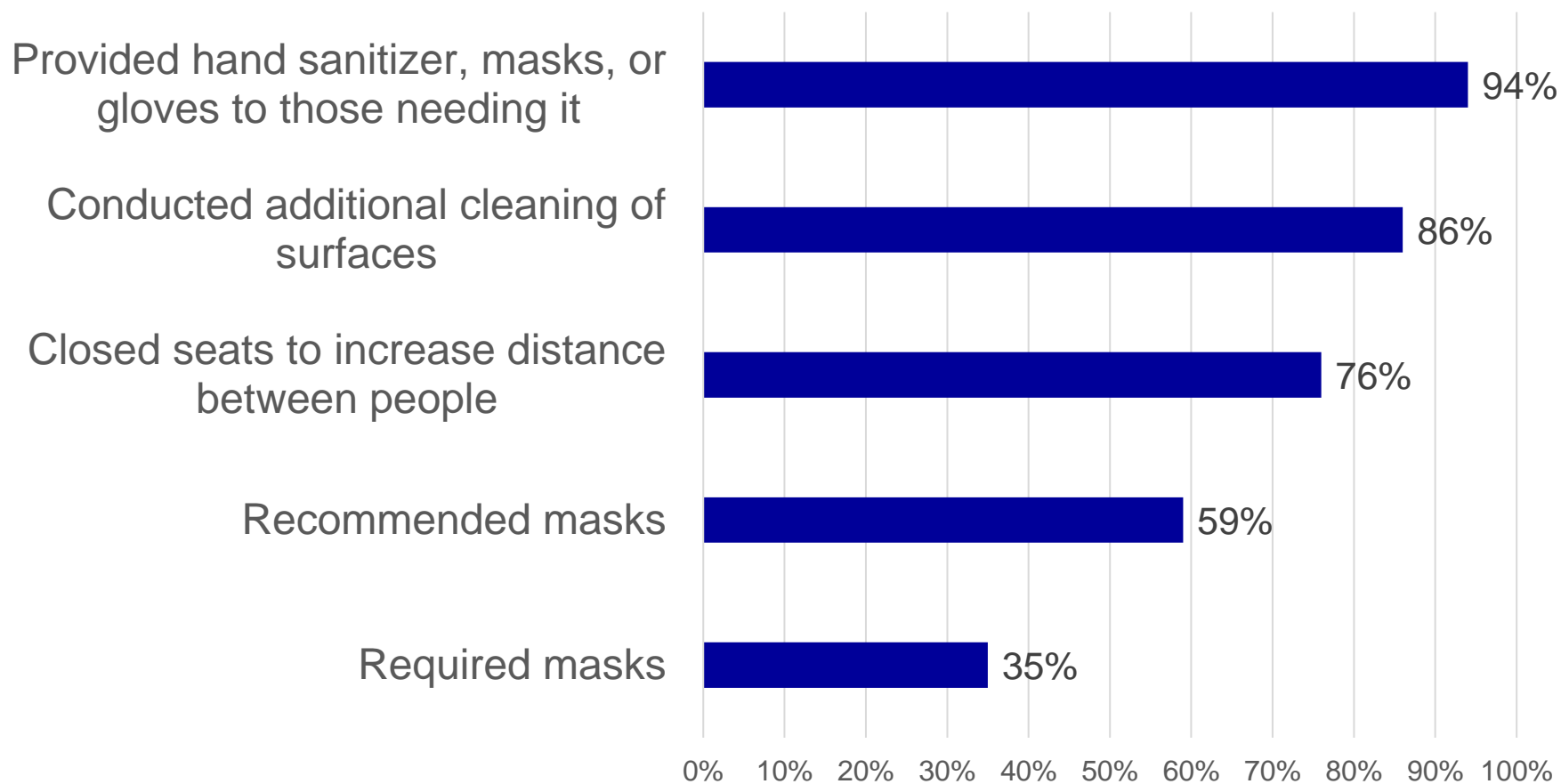
Among Protestant Pastors



Q3: "Did your church offer drive-in services in which attendees worshiped from their vehicles any of the weeks you did not meet in person?" n= 443

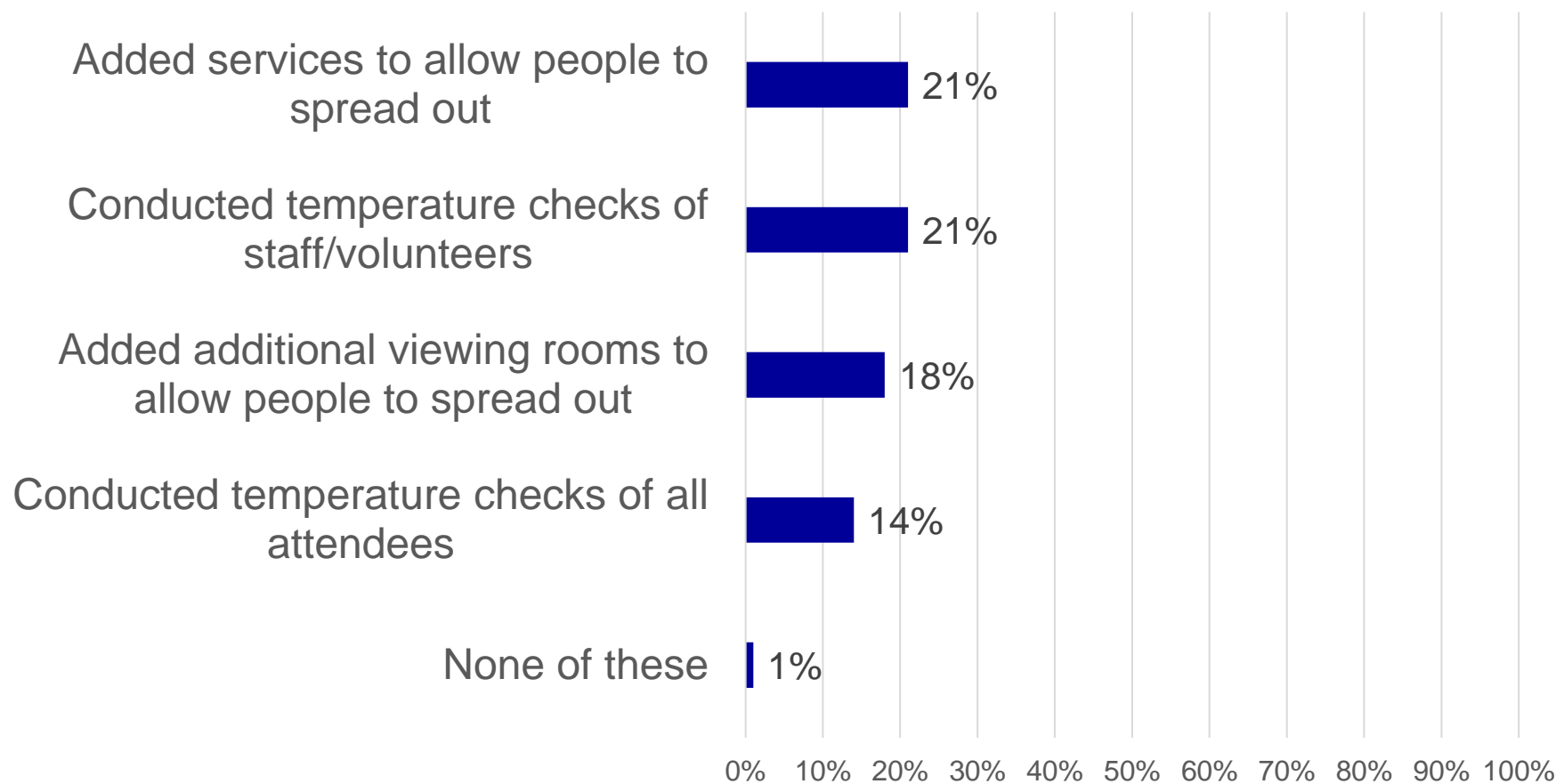
“Which, if any, of the following precautions has your church taken for those attending in-person worship services indoors?”

Among Protestant Pastors



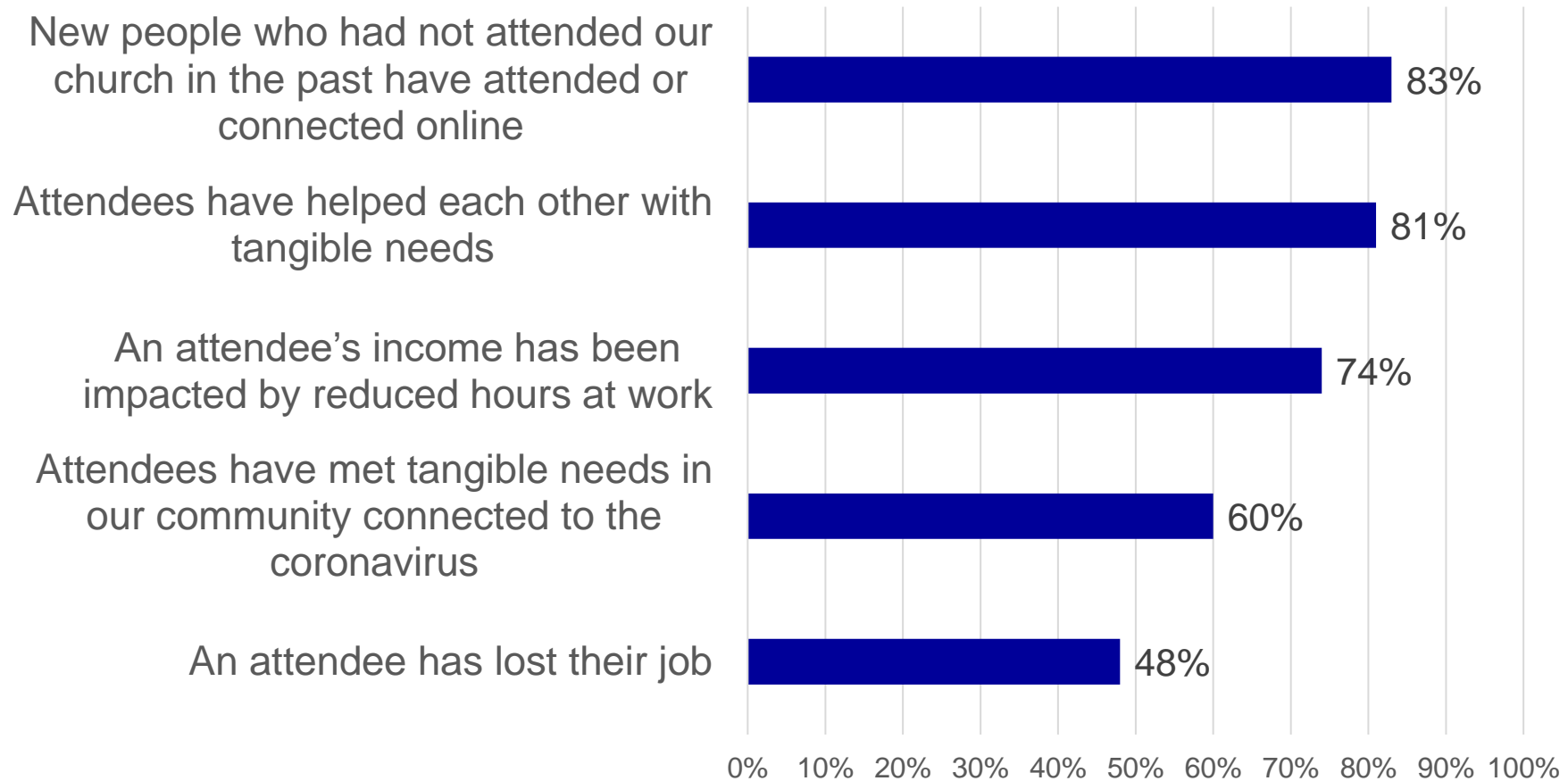
“Which, if any, of the following precautions has your church taken for those attending in-person worship services indoors?” continued

Among Protestant Pastors



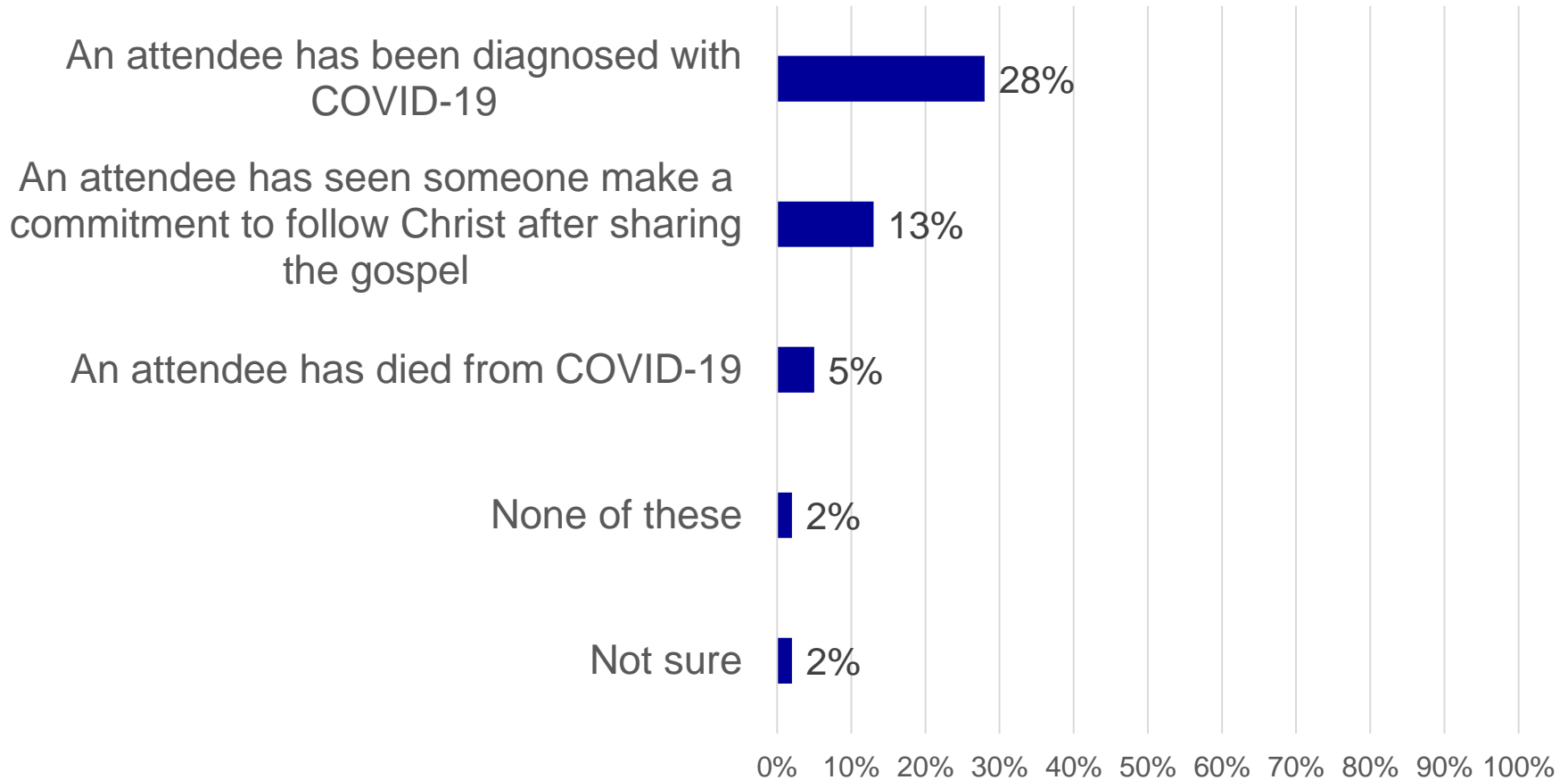
“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

Among Protestant Pastors



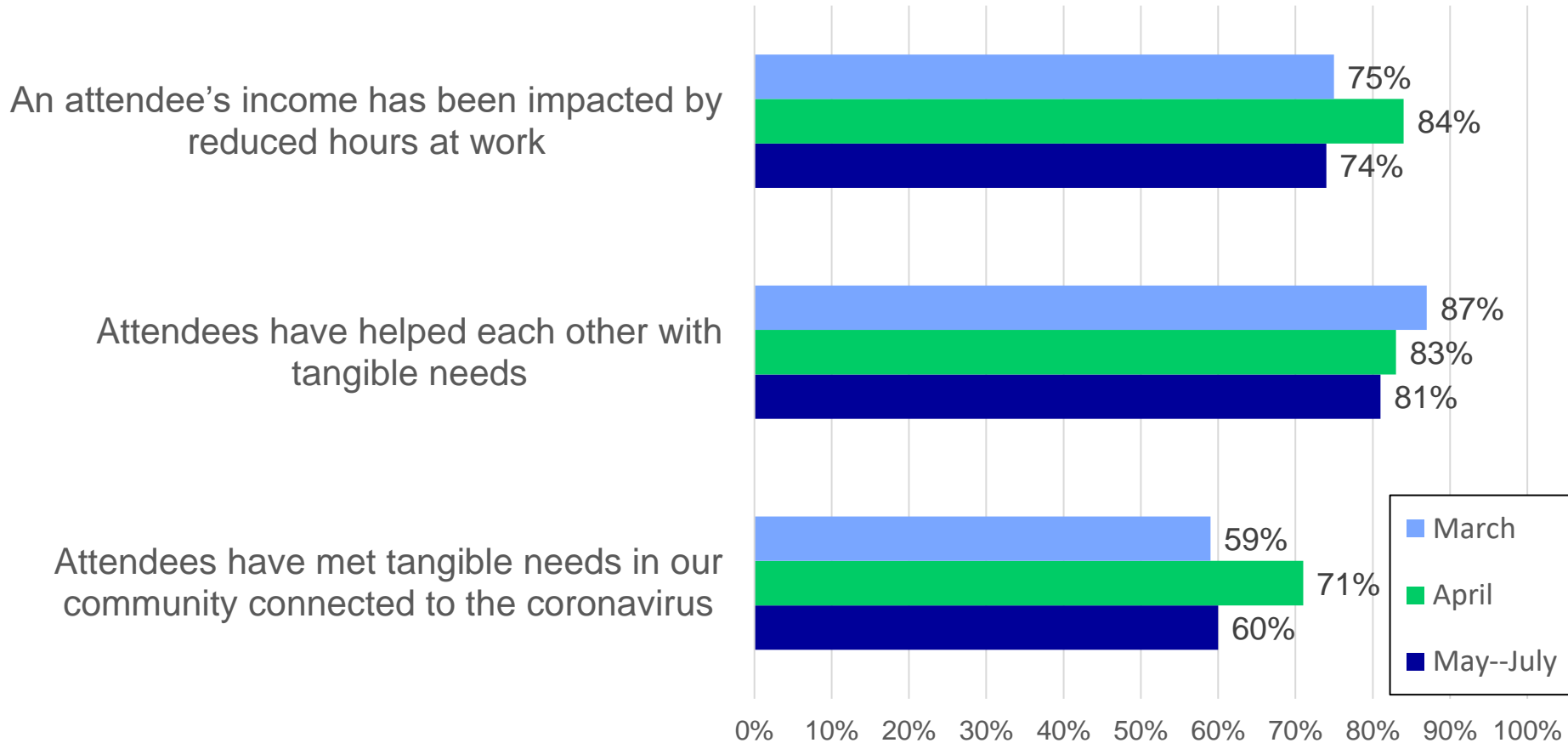
“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?” continued

Among Protestant Pastors



“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

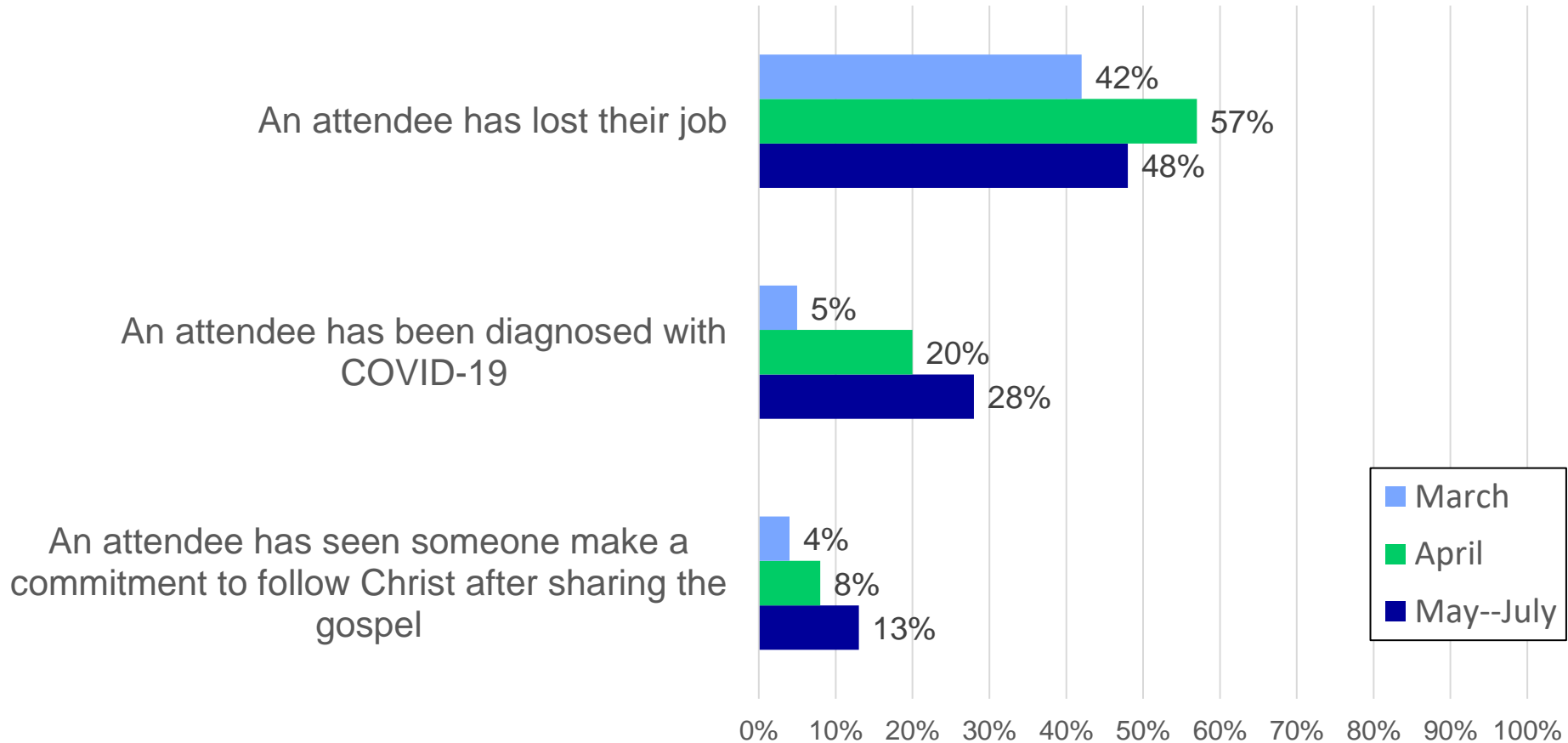
Among Protestant Pastors



Comparison to April 27-29 survey March 30-31 survey.

“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

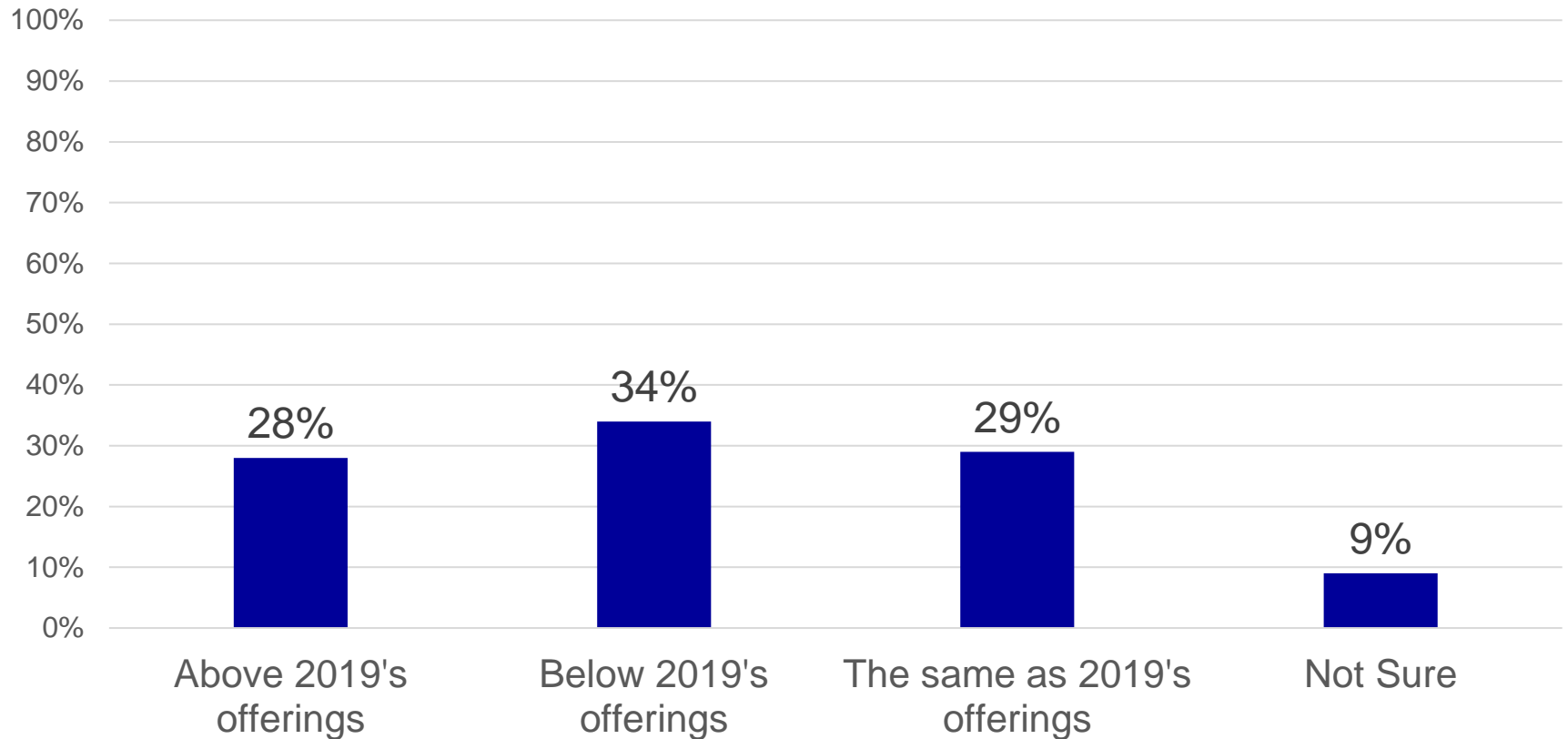
Among Protestant Pastors



Comparison to April 27-29 survey March 30-31 survey.

34% say 2020's offerings are below calendar year 2019; 28% say they are above

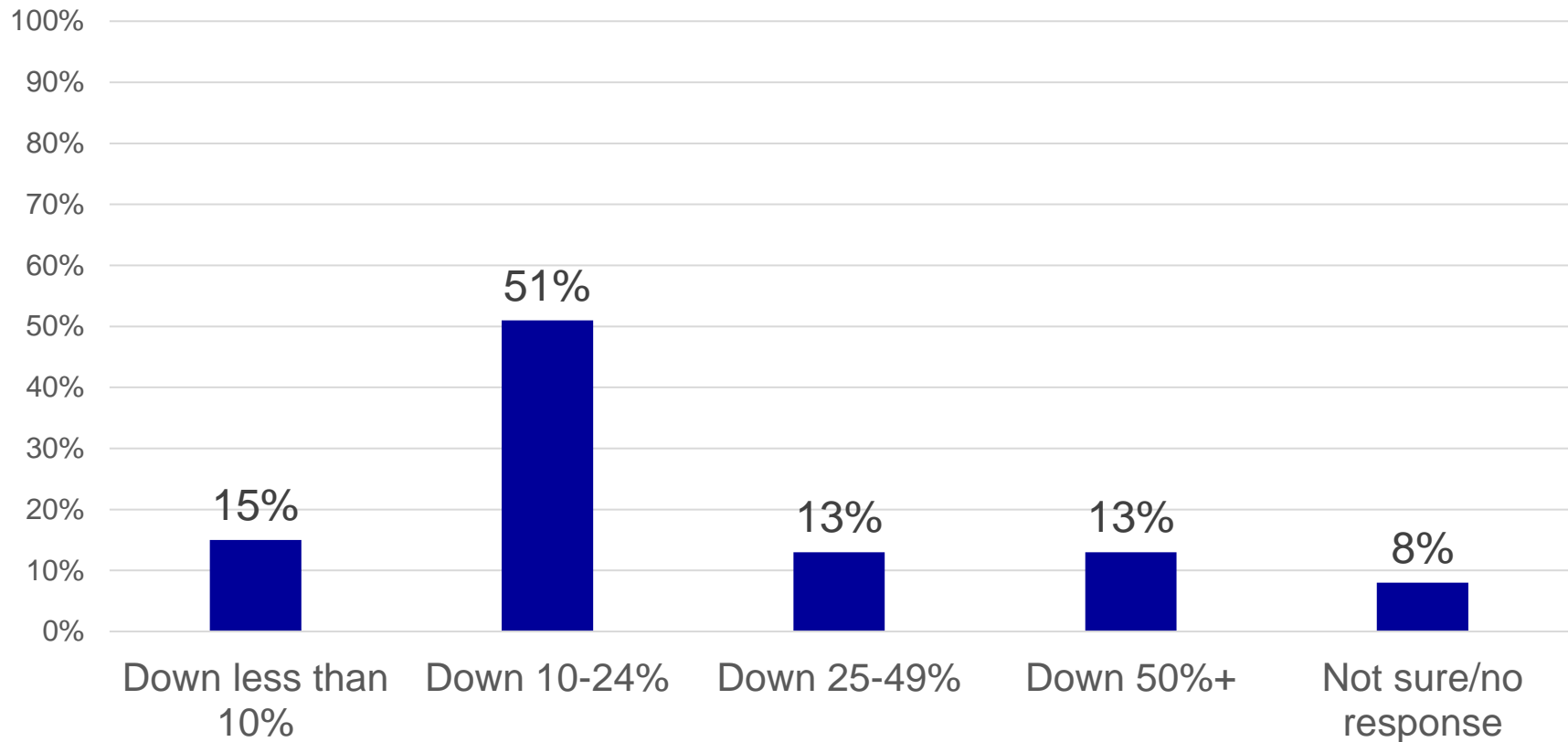
Among Protestant Pastors



Q6: "Compared to your calendar year 2019 offerings, have your total offerings so far for 2020 been ..." n=443

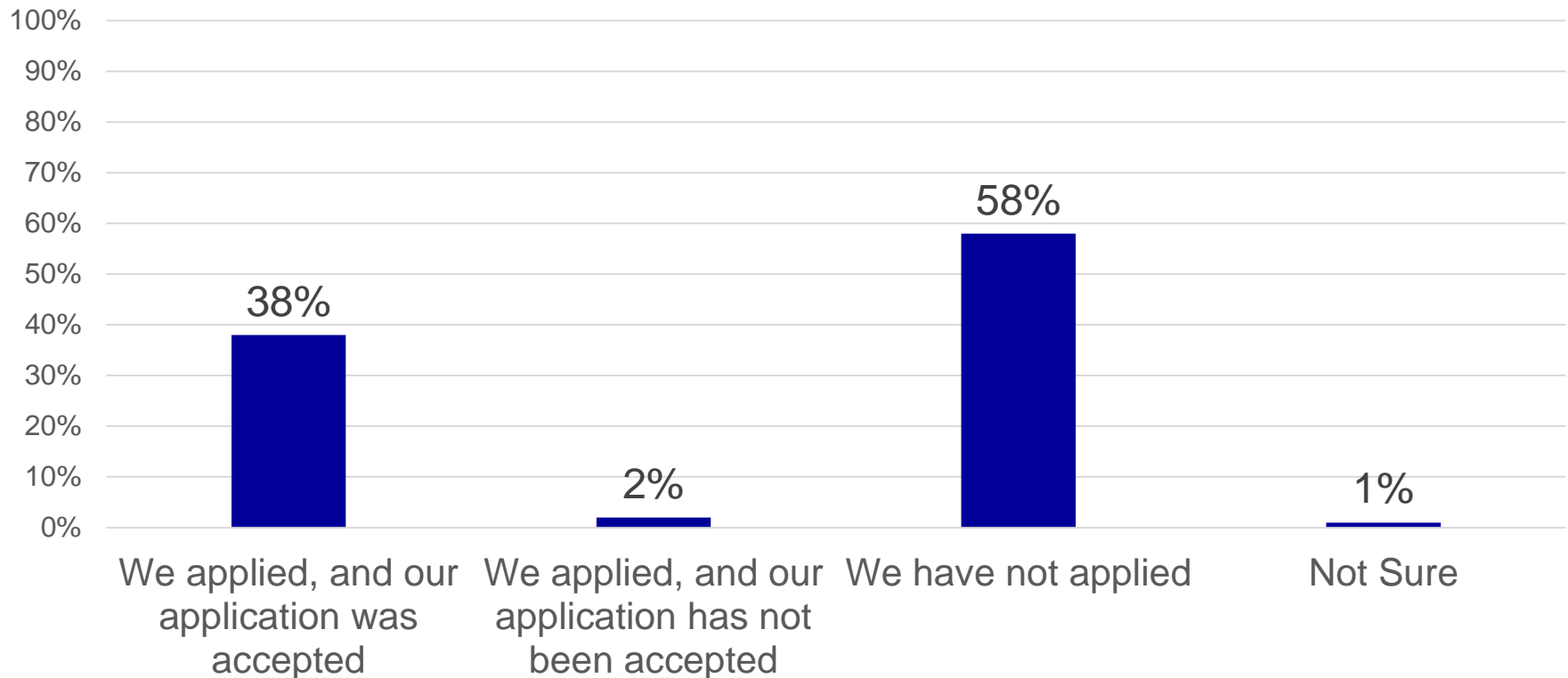
Where giving is down, 13% say it has decreased by at least 50%

Among Pastors Saying Giving is Below 2019



38% applied for government assistance and were approved

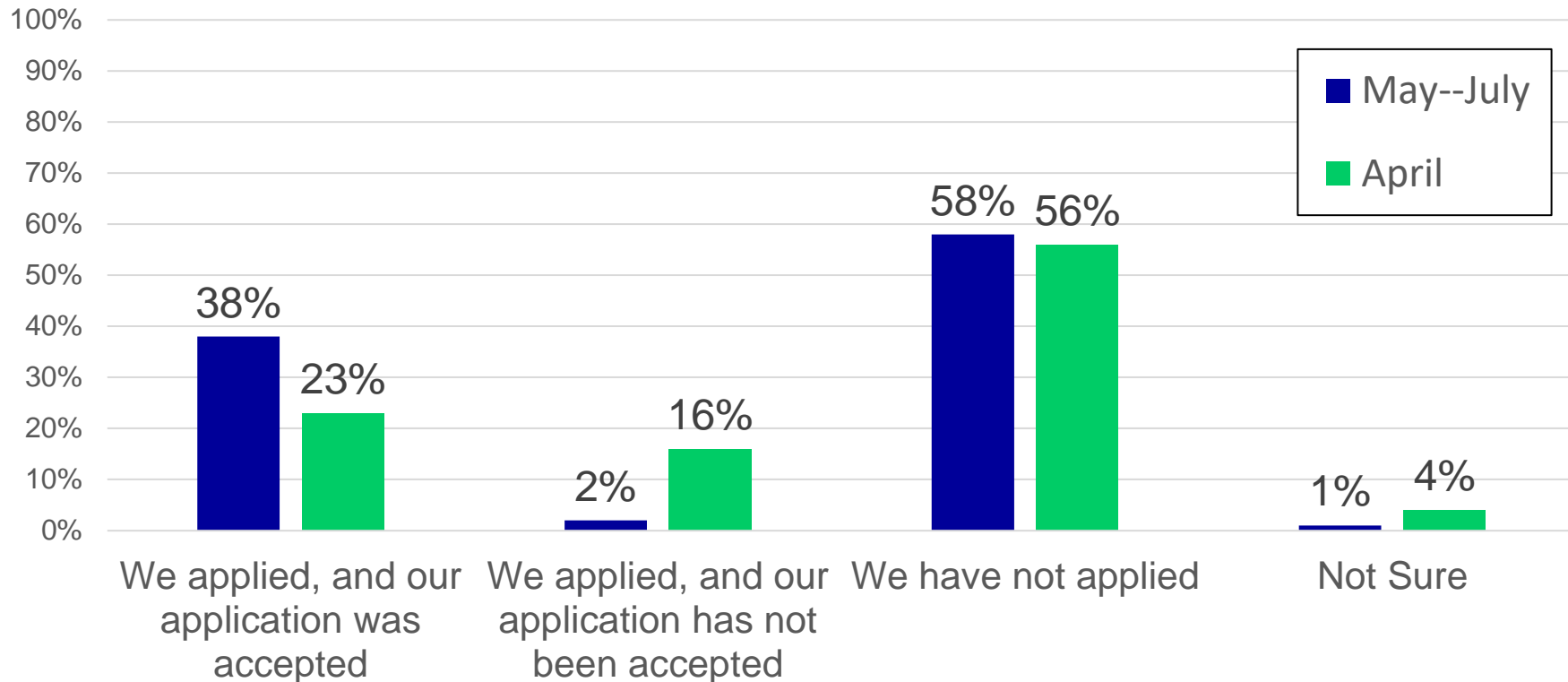
Among Protestant Pastors



Q7: "Did your church apply for any government assistance offered through the CARES Act or Small Business Administration?" n= 443

Approval for government assistance increased 15% compared to April

Among Protestant Pastors

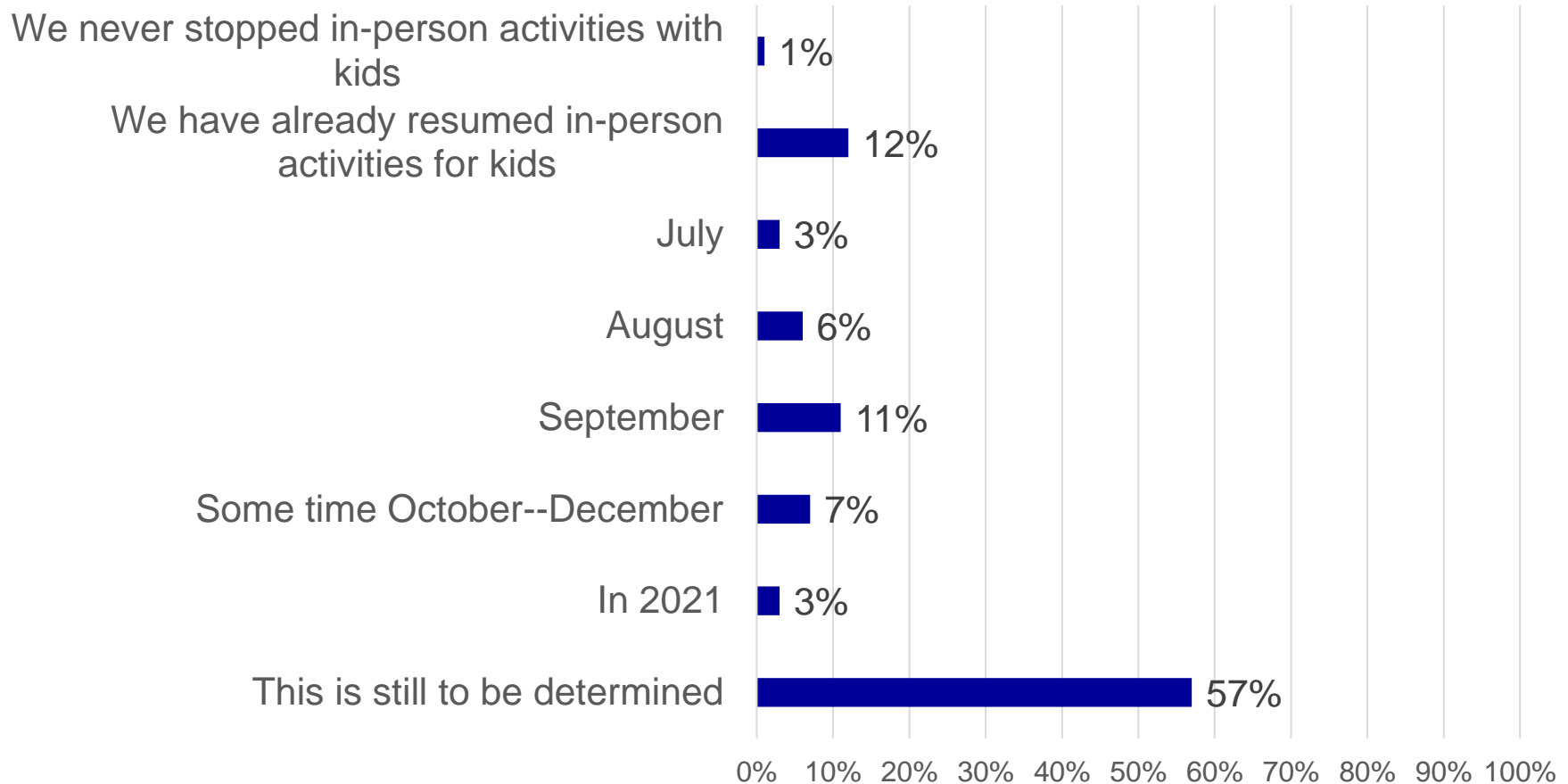


Comparison to April 27-29 survey.

Q7: "Did your church apply for any government assistance offered through the CARES Act or Small Business Administration?" n= 443 July, n=470 April

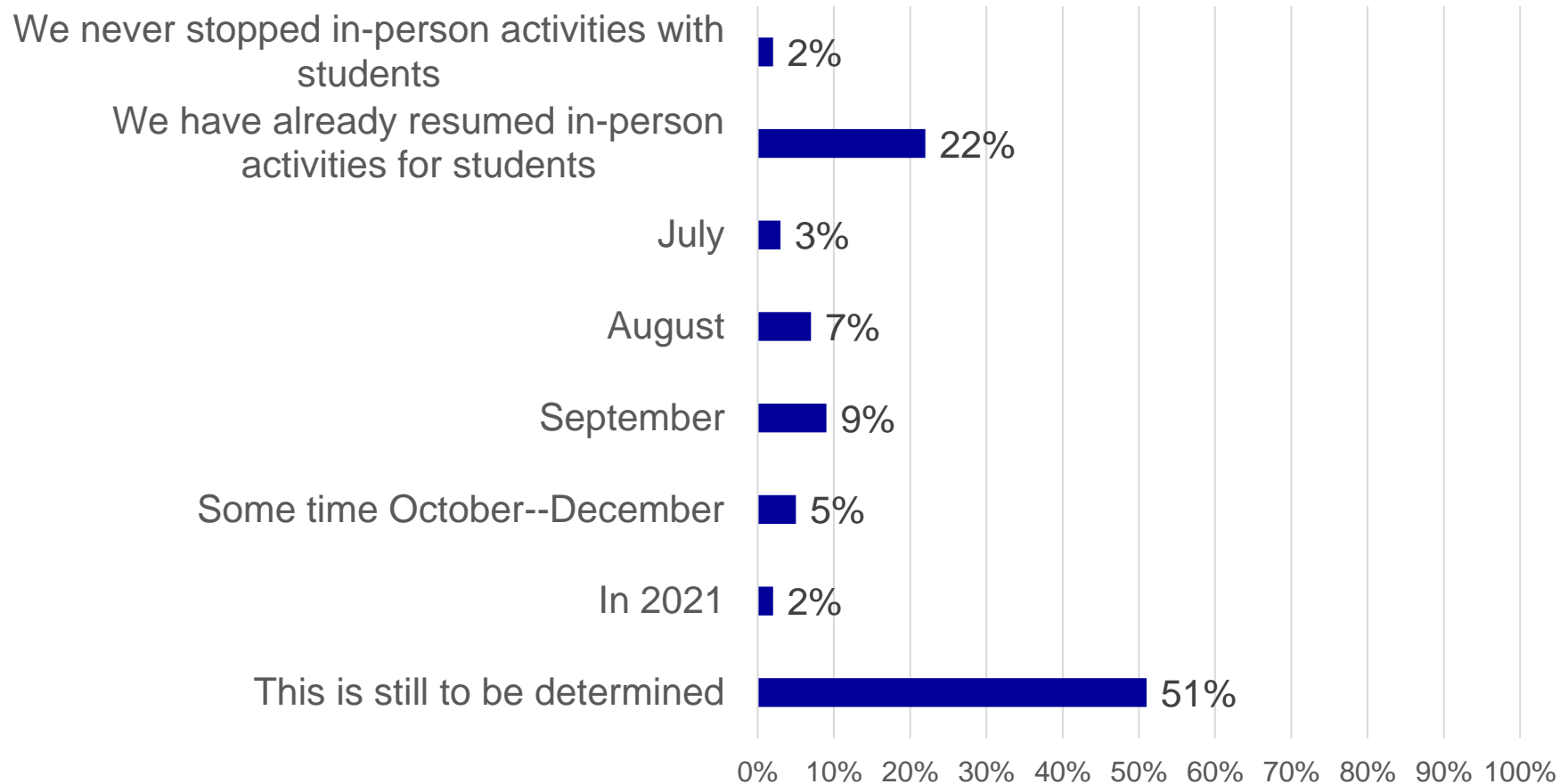
57% have not determined when in person kid's ministry activities will resume; 13% are meeting now

Among Protestant Pastors



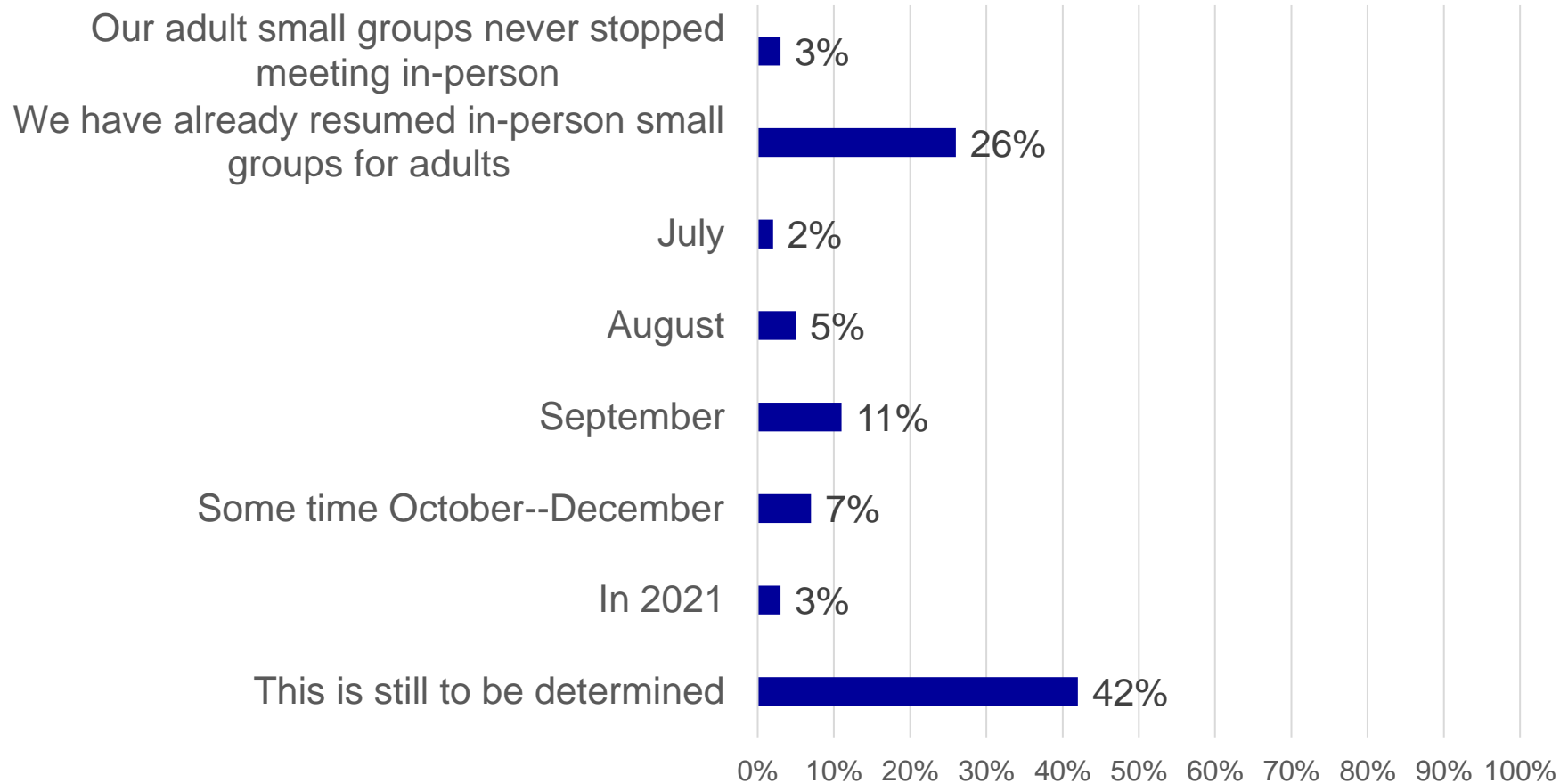
51% have not determined when in person student ministry activities will resume; 23% are meeting now

Among Protestant Pastors



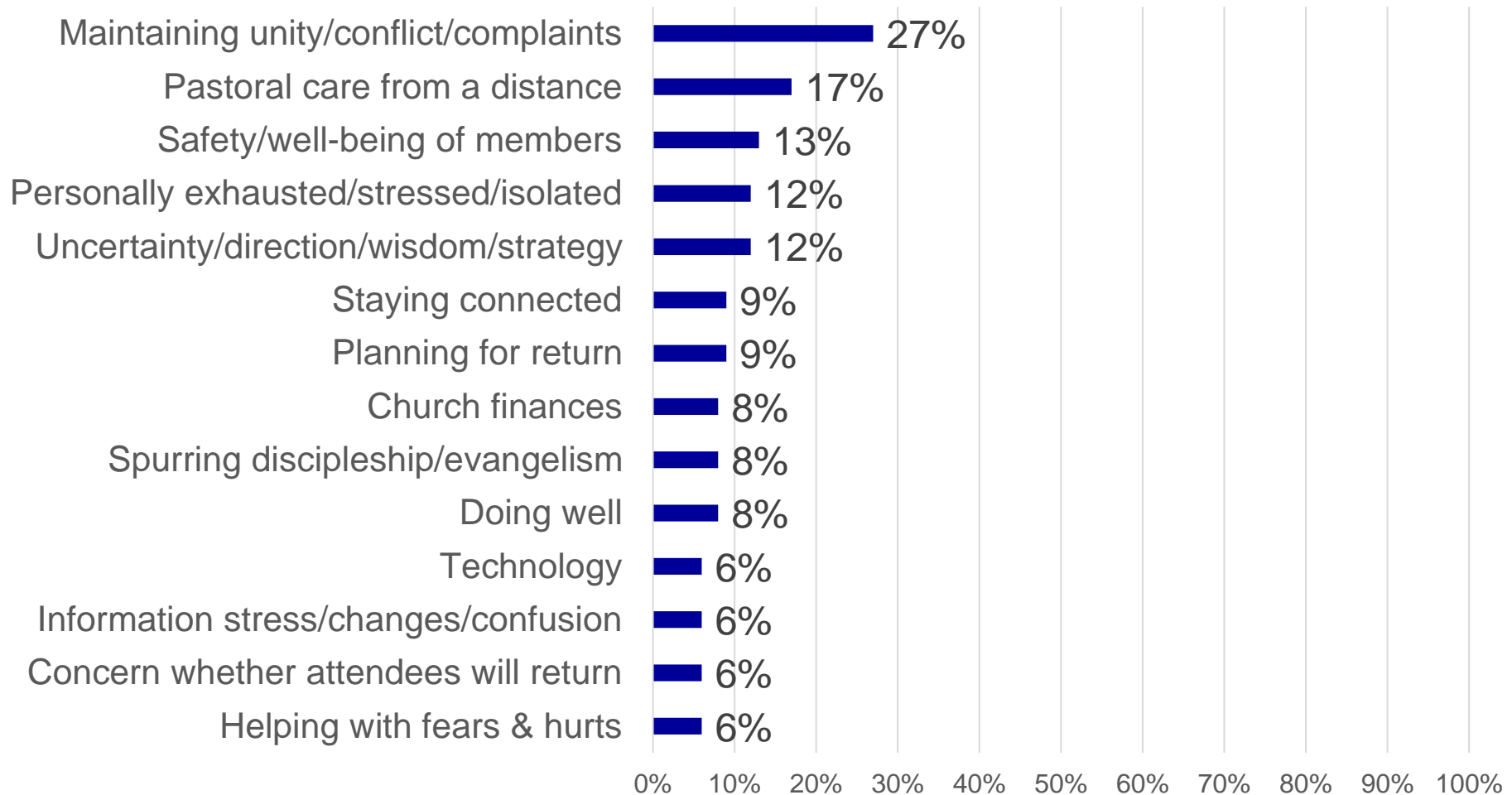
42% have not determined when in person adult Bible study activities will resume; 29% are meeting now

Among Protestant Pastors



Top pressure points mentioned by pastors

Among Protestant Pastors



Examples of responses related to: Maintaining unity

- “People are very upset about our states mandatory mask requirements. At least two key families will not come to church because they refuse to wear a mask.”
- “Different political opinions on both sides elevated to the point of doctrine.”
- “I'm feeling the pressure of helping the congregation to have love and grace for one another with the varying viewpoints of how to respond to this virus; mask/no mask, sources of truly reliable information as to numbers and true impact of the virus, politics entering that whole discussion.”
- “My people are in very different places regarding the virus. Some are losing patience and want to get on with normal life with little regard for the potential consequences. Others are still practicing extreme social distancing and are having a tough time understanding others who are not taking this as seriously as they are.”

Examples of responses related to: Maintaining unity

- “People's attitudes have split very much on partisan lines. Half the church is opposed to any reopening. Half the church is frustrated that we haven't long since reopened.”
- “I am aware that people are growing weary of the entire pandemic. Some are scared to death, while others are convinced it is a hoax. Trying to minister to both ends of the spectrum is exhausting.”
- “Pressure to violate public health orders. Pressure to pretend the virus isn't real.”
- “Many of our congregants are still scared and unwilling to come out of their houses. No matter what we choose to do for safety, or choose not to do, we are told by some group that it is too much/not enough.”

Examples of responses related to: Pastoring over a distance

- “Frustration at not being able to minister to the sick, dying and have funeral/memorial services..”
- “Dealing with losses when few people can gather to celebrate/mourn the loss.”
- “The special services (funerals and weddings) are exhausting as we try to help people comply with healthy department restrictions.”
- “Connecting with people is still a struggle. It's tough to reach out to folks at the time they want - especially with hospitals still limiting visitors. Phone and Zoom ministry is soul-sucking in a way that in-person ministry is not.”
- “Finding a better way to reach out to those in hospitals and nursing homes.”
- “We have had several older members die (not of COVID), and we couldn't visit them or hold funerals.”

Examples of responses related to: Safety of members

- “Added precautions taken to make sure everyone is safe being added to an already full schedule.”
- “I pray that no one gets this horrible virus.”
- “Trying to protect people and our testimony while still meeting.”
- “Managing the political elements of the pandemic which hinder the safety and well-being of community and congregation.”
- “Trying to watch out for the wellbeing of attendees and guard our testimony in the community is paramount!”
- “Our freedom to worship has not been violated because we have decided to not gather for worship in person for health and safety concerns for our congregation and staff.”
- “Making correct decisions that effect the physical health, AND spiritual well being of the church membership in ways that honor God's will, and Romans 13!”

Examples of responses related to: Personally exhausted

- “Feeling disconnected from the people and their needs. Need encouragement, Aaron and Hur to hold up my hands, people to come alongside me. But I am tired of virtual everything!!! PS MAYBE I JUST NEED A HUG?!!!”
- “Figuring out how to take a vacation that will truly be restorative.”
- “I desperately need time off, but with having to organize live-streams, worship services, and Sunday School I have no time to get away. I’m a one person staff and its difficult to find someone willing to fill in for me. I’ve had two days off since Christmas.”
- “I am also not able to rest like I should...”
- “The biggest pressure point has been bearing the stress of the church as well as that of family (my third child was born March 30th amid restrictions). Beyond that, I have generally felt alone in decision-making, which wasn't the case before COVID19. The stress upon everyone has caused a deferring of responsibility in some cases.”

Examples of responses related to: Uncertainty/wisdom

- “Lack of things to look forward to given constantly shifting local numbers and no way to plan more than a couple weeks at a time.”
- “The general uncertainty of the times and fear of making someone ill.”
- “Our issue last week was whether or not we should tell people that a greeter tested positive for COVID. Thanks to clear communication and permission of the person in question, everything is okay so far.”
- “Deciding which ministries/programs to bring back and which to allow to stay on the shelf. This seems to be an ideal time to let some ministry things go that needed to a long time ago and so wisdom in how to communicate why we might not bring back a certain ministry.”
- “We are waiting for the next shoe to drop. We've had five different plans to continue Word and Sacrament ministry.”

Examples of responses related to: Staying connected

- “Nurturing a sense of community, common identify, and shared purpose digitally, particularly when folks are burning out on ‘digital togetherness.’”
- “Keeping connected with church members is very difficult without weekly services and activities.”
- “Staying connected with our church family through personal phone calls / visits and creating short videos for social media to keep our church family encouraged and connected. Making time consistently for those important connections is a challenge.”
- “Many have stopped attending altogether and it is difficult trying to keep everyone together and "connected" especially in an area with very poor internet service.”
- “I am concerned that we are losing community and connectedness as a congregation as a result of the separation orders.”

Examples of responses related to: Planning for return

- “The greatest pressure is not knowing when to start our Small Groups and kids.”
- “How to do children's and teen ministry effectively.”
- “I’m 68 and pastor a small rather rural church. Learning to rethink and reinvent systems is much more than I had in mind for an exit strategy. Plan to relaunch kids & student ministries. Do online better.”
- “Children's ministry. Without children's church, many congregants are reluctant to return to in-person worship.”
- “The struggle right now is trying to determine when to bring back children's ministry and trying to find volunteers to help with it. With an older congregation, I believe many are still wary of helping with children due to proximities involved.”
- “Help with returning to our sanctuary. Our current services are outside and online.”

Examples of responses related to: Church finances

- “Lack of money and enthusiasm.”
- “Attendance down, giving down, mixed messages coming from politicians. Uncertain future.”
- “Finances are a pressure point.”
- “Plate offerings. Our Pledges are up by about 5%, but because we cannot take up offerings when we are closed, the un-pledged offerings are significantly down.”
- “Giving is way down, and facility upkeep needs are way up.”
- “The church finances remain unpredictable and unstable. There is great financial uncertainty.”
- “We are holding out financially, but there is no guessing how long this can last .”

Examples of responses related to: Spurring discipleship/evangelism

- “Balancing keeping people safe, with the church’s mandate to gather for worship and disciple-making.”
- “Not able to build leadership.”
- “I am feeling frustration in not being able to offer in-person connections for both fellowship and outreach.”
- “We need more effective outreach, or we won't survive as a church.”
- “Keeping people connected to Jesus.”
- “Leading church people to purposefully disciple others through conversations, not group events.”
- “My major concern is how to reach the unchurched. Social media can only go so far without face to face contact.”

Examples of responses related to: Information stress

- “It is impossible to make good decisions without information, and each piece of information is accepted by one side and rejected by the other.”
- “The ability to sift through the tremendous amount of COVID info.”
- “The information is so varied & controversial.”
- “Clear guidance from the government would be a help.”
- “The information provided by the media is suspect.”
- “Trying to be an expert in medical research and an expert in the use of God's Word to comfort people with the gospel is difficult.”

Examples of responses related to: Concern whether attendees will return

- “Others who are going and doing everything else within the community are choosing not to come to church because of broken habits.”
- “Also, due to the lack of children ministries (Kids church, Sunday School, Awana), a number of young families have disengaged from the church.”
- “Are attendees going to come back?”
- “Many families and individuals getting out of the habit of coming to church on Sunday's or listening to our live feed on Sunday.”
- “Concerned that people will habituate to staying at home and forsake the fellowship of other believers in worship.”
- “Concern about once faithful people who have backed away from faithful attendance and ministry.”

Significant Differences

Pastor

Age

Self-identified Evangelical/Mainline

Church

Region

Average Attendance

Significant Statistical Differences

Comparisons were made to determine if there are any significant statistical differences among the pastor's age and self-identified Evangelical or Mainline, as well as the church's region and average attendance

Age	Self-Identified	Region	Attendance
18-44	Evangelical	Northeast	0-49
45-54	Mainline	South	50-99
55-64		Midwest	100-199
65+		West	200+

“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Weekend of May 3

- Pastors age 45-54 (23%) are more likely to select than pastors age 18-44 (7%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (2%)

Weekend of May 10

- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (23% v. 13%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (3%)

Weekend of May 17

- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (29% v. 15%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (7%)

“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Weekend of May 24

- Pastors age 45-54 (42%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (28%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (40% v. 17%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (35%) and South (37%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (18%)

Weekend of May 31

- Pastors age 45-54 (54%) and 65+ (46%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (33%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (53% v. 24%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (12%)

“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Weekend of June 7

- Pastors age 18-44 (61%) and 45-54 (61%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (47%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (68% v. 35%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (28%)

Weekend of June 14

- Pastors age 45-54 (71%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (56%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (75% v. 41%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (40%)

“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Weekend of June 21

- Pastors age 45-54 (80%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (58%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (79% v. 44%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (69%) and South (74%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (45%)

Weekend of June 28

- Pastors age 45-54 (82%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (58%) and 65+ (66%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (80% v. 46%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (45%)

“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Weekend of July 5

- Pastors age 45-54 are the most likely to select (85%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (81% v. 51%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (72%) and South (74%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (57%)

Weekend of July 12

- Pastors age 45-54 are the most likely to select (86%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (83% v. 57%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (77%) and South (76%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (55%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (80%) are more likely to select those with attendance of 200+ (67%)

“Which weekends the last couple months did your church gather in person for worship (even if attendance was light)?”

Weekend of July 19

- Pastors age 45-54 (81%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (66%)
- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (82% v. 57%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (78%) and South (75%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (55%) and West (61%)

All of these weeks

- Pastors age 45-54 (19%) and 65+ (16%) are more likely to select than pastors age 18-44 (6%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select (2%)

“Did your church offer drive-in services in which attendees worshiped from their vehicles any of the weeks you did not meet in person?”

- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select “Yes” than self-identified Mainline pastors (27% v. 15%)
- Pastors in the South (27%) are more likely to select “Yes” than those in the West (14%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the most likely to select “No” (94%)

“Which, if any, of the following precautions has your church taken for those attending in-person worship services indoors?”

Conducted additional cleaning of surfaces

- Pastors age 45-54 (92%) are more likely to select than pastors age 18-44 (79%)
- Pastors in the South (90%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (78%) and Midwest (81%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the least likely to select (72%)

Closed seats to increase distance between people

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to select (60%)
- Pastors in the West are the least likely to select (58%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the least likely to select (58%)

“Which, if any, of the following precautions has your church taken for those attending in-person worship services indoors?”

Recommended masks

- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (65% v. 43%)
- Pastors in the South are the most likely to select (70%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (66%) are more likely to select those with attendance of 50-99 (51%)

Required masks

- Pastors age 55-64 (41%) are more likely to select than pastors age 45-54 (25%)
- Self-identified Mainline pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Evangelical pastors (53% v. 29%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (62%) and West (48%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (29%) and South (29%)

“Which, if any, of the following precautions has your church taken for those attending in-person worship services indoors?”

Provided hand sanitizer, masks, or gloves to those needing it

- No significant differences

Added services to allow people to spread out

- Pastors age 18-44 are the most likely to select (34%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (31%) and 200+ (40%) are more likely to select those with attendance of less than 50 (6%) and 50-99 (11%)

“Which, if any, of the following precautions has your church taken for those attending in-person worship services indoors?”

Added additional viewing rooms to allow people to spread out

- Pastors age 18-44 (22%) and 55-64 (23%) are more likely to select than pastors age 65+ (8%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (22%) and 200+ (38%) are more likely to select those with attendance of less than 50 (5%) and 50-99 (12%)

Conducted temperature checks of staff/volunteers

- Pastors in the West (32%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (16%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ (32%) are more likely to select those with attendance of less than 50 (15%)

Conducted temperature checks of all attendees

- Pastors in the West are the most likely to select (28%)

“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

An attendee has been diagnosed with COVID-19

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to select (15%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (41%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (21%) and West (20%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the least likely to select (13%)

An attendee has lost their job

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to select (30%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (61%) and South (52%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (38%) and West (35%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ are the most likely to select (80%)

“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

An attendee’s income has been impacted by reduced hours at work

- Pastors age 18-44 are the most likely to select (93%) and those age 65+ are the least likely to select (52%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (84%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (67%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less 200+ are the most likely to select (95%)

New people who had not attended our church in the past have attended or connected online

- Pastors age 18-44 (90%) are more likely to select than pastors age 65+ (80%)
- Pastors in the West are the most likely to select (94%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (87%) and 200+ (94%) are more likely to select those with attendance of less than 50 (73%)

“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

An attendee has seen someone make a commitment to follow Christ after sharing the gospel

- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than self-identified Mainline pastors (17% v. 5%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ (26%) are more likely to select those with attendance of less than 50 (4%) and 50-99 (9%)

Attendees have helped each other with tangible needs

- Pastors age 45-54 (88%) are more likely to select than pastors age 65+ (72%)
- Pastors in the West (91%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (75%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the least likely to select (61%)

“As of today, have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) as a result of the coronavirus spreading?”

Attendees have met tangible needs in our community connected to the coronavirus

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to select (45%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ are the most likely to select (86%) and those with attendance of less than 50 are the least likely to select (30%)

An attendee has died from COVID-19

- Pastors age 18-44 are the most likely to select (11%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (10%) are more likely to select than those in the South (3%)

“Compared to your calendar year 2019 offerings, have your total offerings so far for 2020 been...”

- Pastors in the Midwest (35%) and South (30%) are more likely to select “Above 2019’s offerings” than those in the Northeast (13%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 are the most likely to select “Above 2019’s offerings” (39%)

“Did your church apply for any government assistance offered through the CARES Act or Small Business Administration?”

- Self-identified Evangelical pastors are more likely to select “We have not applied” than self-identified Mainline pastors (67% v. 47%)
- Pastors in the South (64%) are more likely to select “We have not applied” than those in the Northeast (46%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 (70%) are more likely to select “We have not applied” than those with attendance of 55-99 (56%) and 200+ (44%)

“Based on what you know today, which of the following best describes when your church plans to allow your kid’s ministry to gather for activities in person in your normal facility/church building?”

- Self-identified Mainline pastors are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than self-identified Evangelical pastors (73% v. 53%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 (65%) and 50-99 (66%) are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” those with attendance of 100-199 (49%) and 200+ (46%)

“Based on what you know today, which of the following best describes when your church plans to allow your student ministry (middle school and high school) to gather for activities in person in your normal facility/church building?”

- Pastors age 65+ (61%) are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than pastors age 45-54 (40%)
- Self-identified Mainline pastors are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than self-identified Evangelical pastors (72% v. 41%)
- Pastors in the West (66%) are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than those in the South (46%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 (63%) and 50-99 (60%) are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than those with attendance of 100-199 (41%) and 200+ (32%)

“Based on what you know today, which of the following best describes when your church plans to allow your adult small groups/Sunday School classes to gather for normal Bible study activities in person?”

- Pastors age 45-54 (37%) are more likely to select “We have already resumed in-person small groups for adults” than pastors age 55-64 (24%) and 65+ (21%)
- Self-identified Mainline pastors are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than self-identified Evangelical pastors (53% v. 36%)
- Pastors in the Northeast are the least likely to select “We have already resumed in-person small groups for adults” (13%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 (45%) and 50-99 (48%) are more likely to select “This is still to be determined” than those with attendance of 200+ (30%)

Pastors' Views on How COVID-19 is Affecting Their Church July 2020

Survey of American Protestant Pastors