

# DISCOVERING THE “ONLINE CHURCH” IN CANADA: WORSHIP EXPERIENCES

An Online survey by:



April 29, 2020 (Results as of May 5 2020)

## THE QUESTION

In the middle of March 2020, responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Canadian churches were required to stop holding public gatherings. In the weeks to follow, Canadian churches have been exploring new ways of gathering as the body of Christ. Some have tried “drive-in” solutions, some have temporarily shut down, and some have turned to the internet to provide online options for gathering and continuing their ministry as an “online church.”

On April 29, Outreach Canada circulated a short survey to learn about Canada’s new online worship experiences. We want to learn:

- How attendance has been affected
- What services are being provided
- What tools are being used
- What challenges are being encountered,
- What churches are thinking about their future participation in “online church.”

Future surveys over the next three weeks will look specifically at online giving, online pastoral care, and online evangelism, and discipleship.

This online survey is still open to more participants. You may complete the survey at:

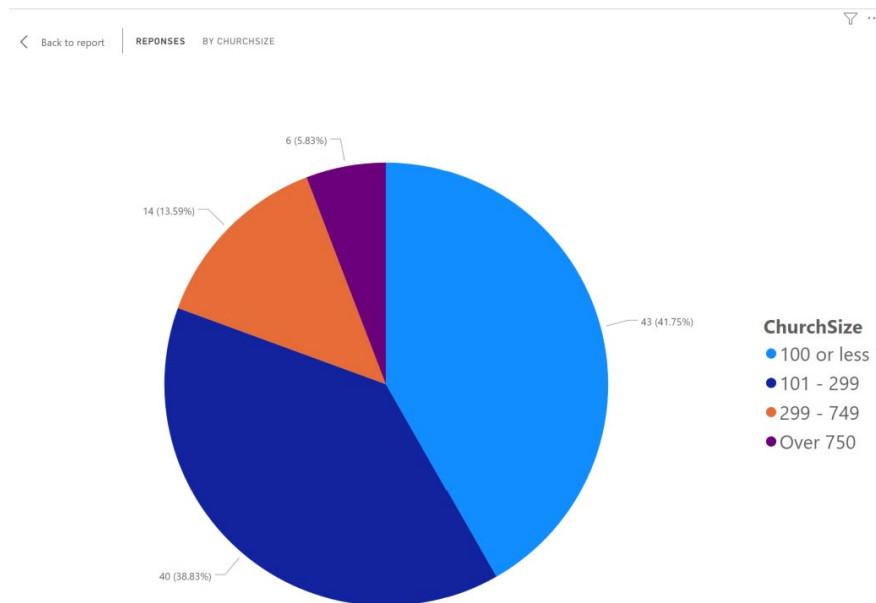
[www.outreach.ca/discover-survey](http://www.outreach.ca/discover-survey)

Reports on this survey and future Discovering The “Online Church” surveys are located at:

[www.outreach.ca/discoveringtheonlinechurch](http://www.outreach.ca/discoveringtheonlinechurch)

## OUR SAMPLE

We circulated a short survey to approximately three thousand churches across Canada. As of May 5, one-hundred-three churches had responded to the survey. The smallest churches had an average attendance of less than 30 people, and the largest averaged 5,500 worshippers per week. These 103 churches had a total average of 34,830 worshippers per week, and the average attendance in the sample was 341, and the mean was 123, spanning across multiple denominations, provinces, and territories.



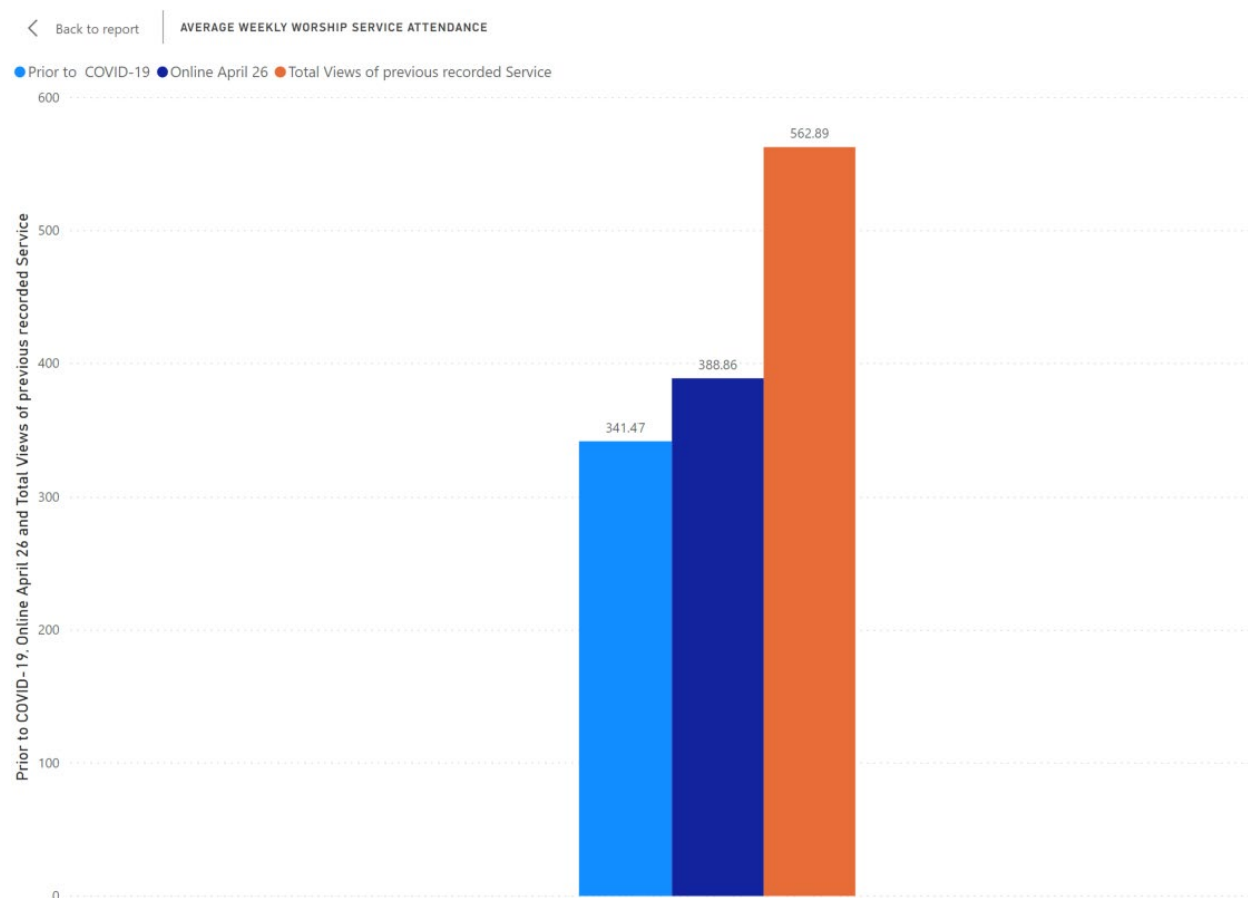
The map below shows the location of the churches in this sample based on their postal codes.



## WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

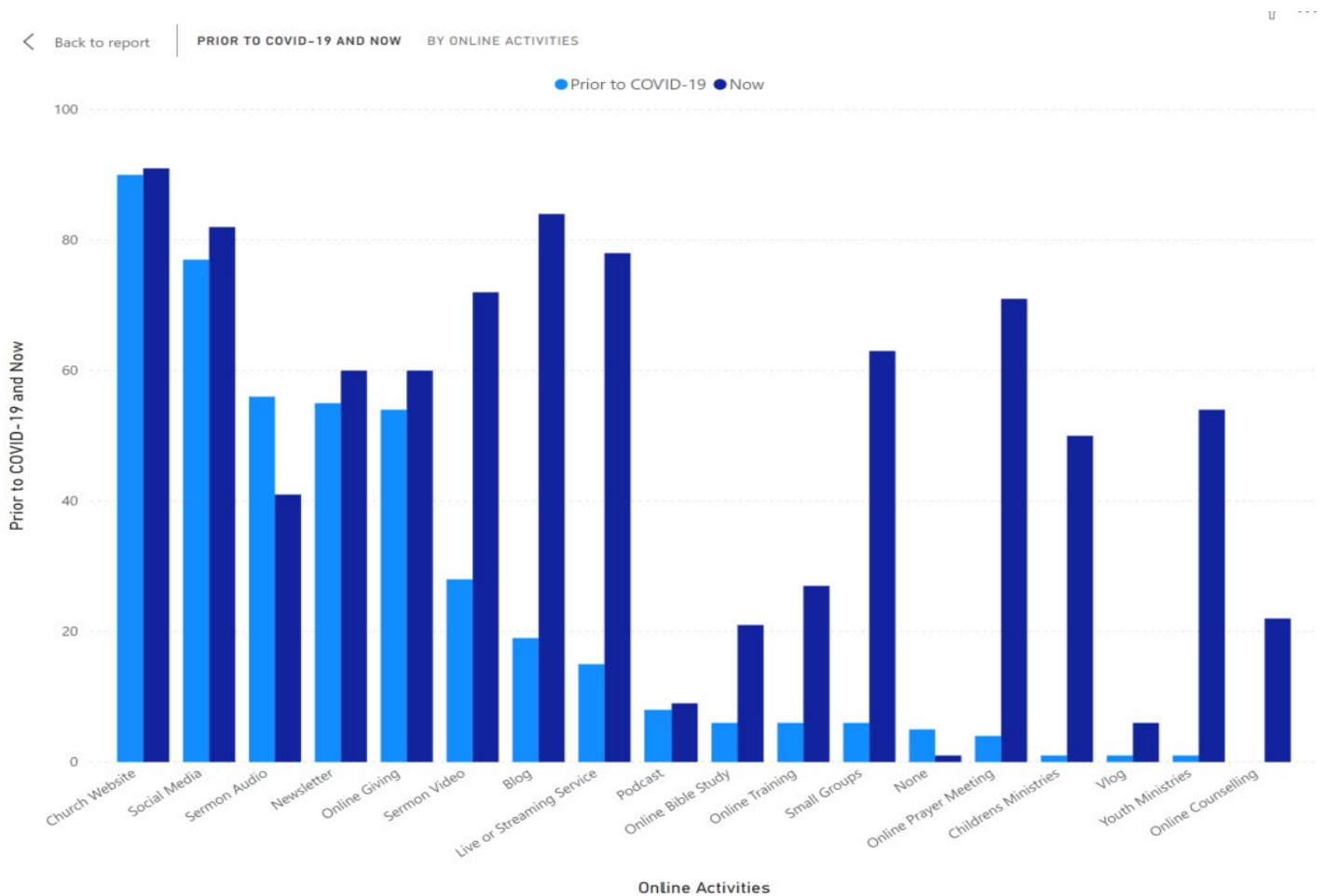
We asked churches to report their average worship service attendance before COVID-19 and then to indicate their online participation on April 26 and their online views from the previous week from April 19-25. We recognize that there are some challenges in the way we asked the questions. We asked about April 26 to identify a specific number of connections to an online worship service on Sunday. Many of these services are streamed live or pre-recorded and streamed at their regular Sunday worship time. It is not possible to accurately determine how many people are in “attendance” online because we don’t know how many individuals are viewing the service together (i.e., my family of 4 watches our church together on Sunday morning – 4 individuals but one connection). The Orange bar in the figure below identifies the total number of views for the previous week’s service/sermon. In most cases, this is a higher number than regular service attendance. Some churches have indicated that the views of their online services are not just local but include viewers from other areas.

One denominational leader shared that two of their non-English churches were experiencing viewers from other countries, and they were intentionally using this as a way to plant new churches.



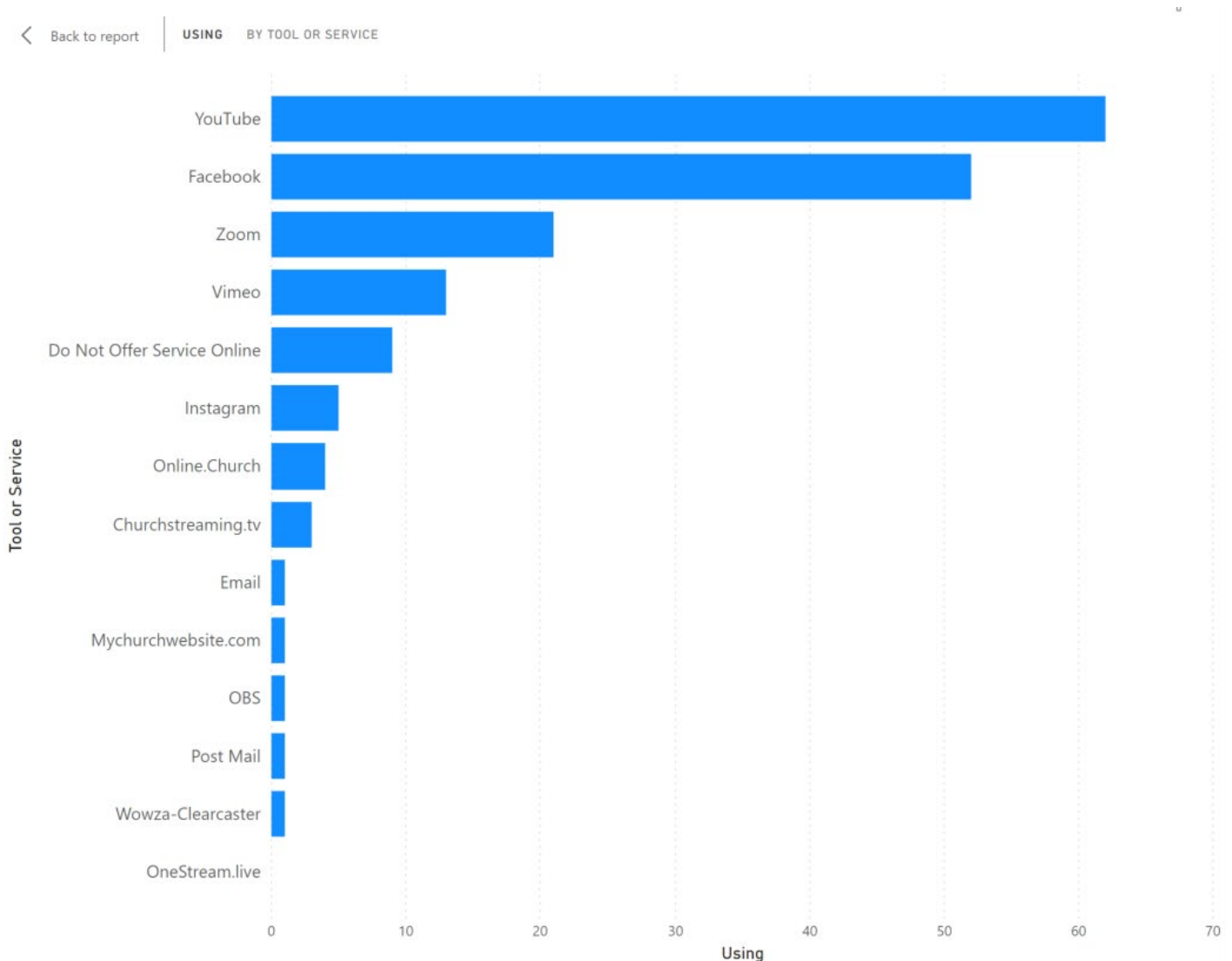
## SERVICES PROVIDED

We asked churches about their participation in seventeen possible online activities. Before COVID, most churches had websites and social media presence. Many were providing audio versions of their sermons, online giving, and weekly newsletters or bulletins. In the weeks following the restrictions on public worship, we have seen tremendous growth in other online offerings like live services and sermon videos. We have also seen growth and innovation as churches provide youth, children, prayer, and Bible study meetings online.



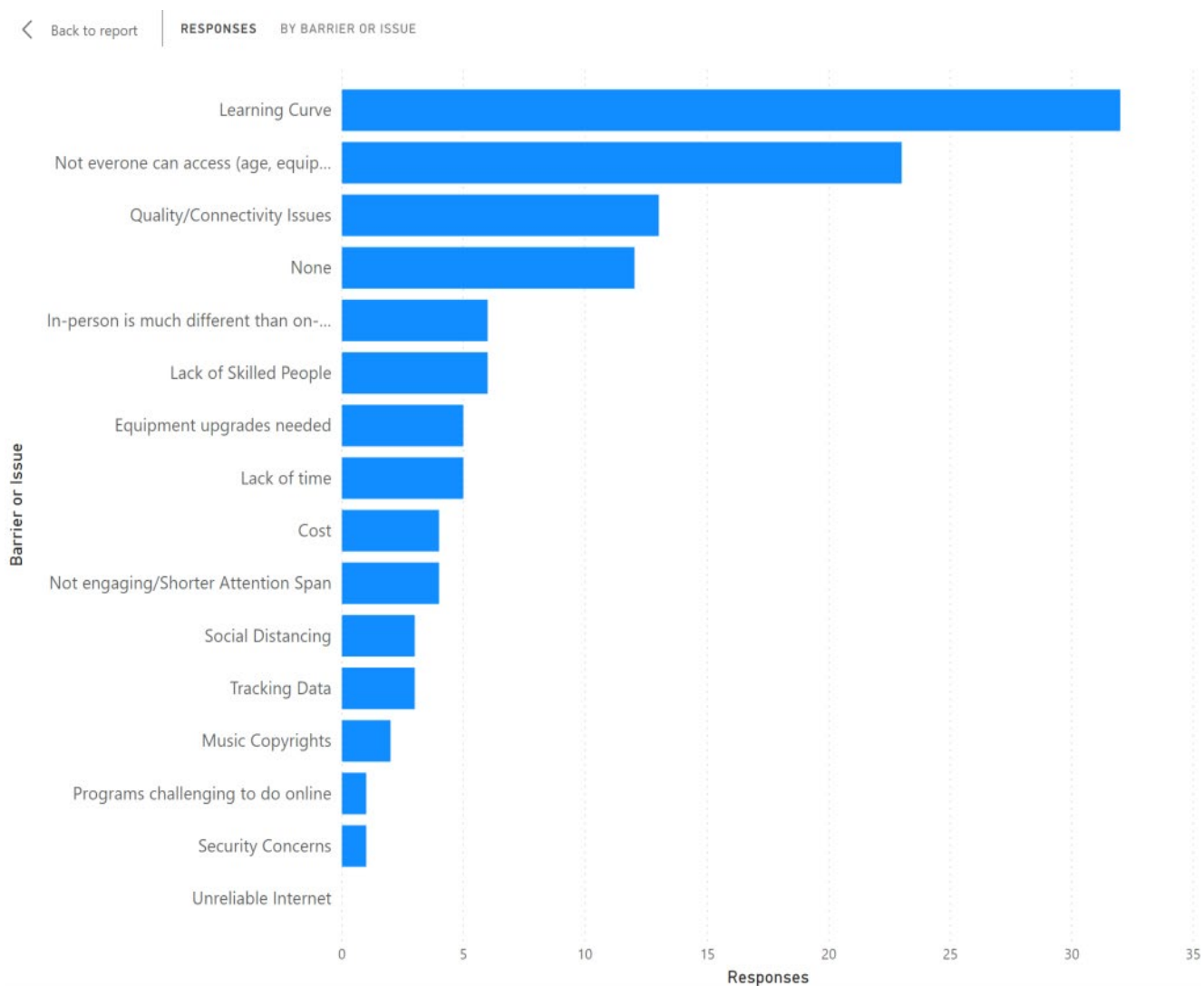
## TOOLS USED

There are many tools available for churches to provide online experiences and interactions with their members. In our sample, we found that most of the churches are using free services like YouTube and Facebook. Other services that made our list include Zoom, Vimeo, Instagram, Online.Church (Church Online Platform), Churchstreaming.tv, and others. One church indicated “Post mail.” We have heard that not all church participants have computers, and some churches have been recording their online services on DVDs for physical distribution to those who are not able to participate in church online.



## CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

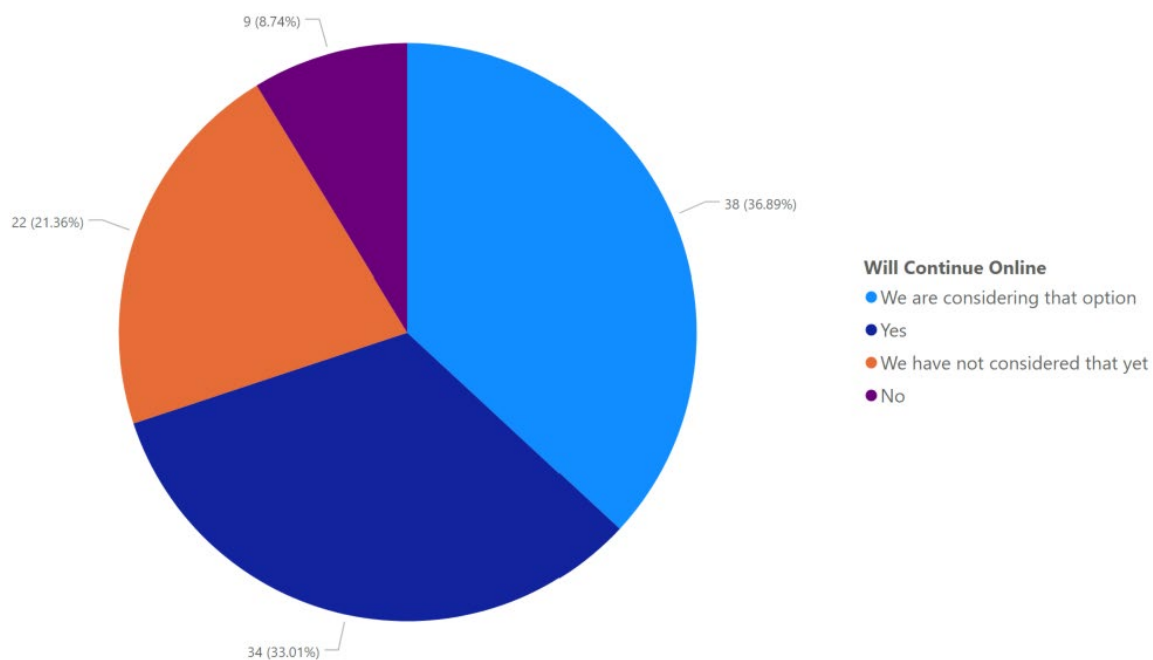
We asked what challenges churches had experienced in taking their worship service online. Churches who have been providing online services before COVID-19 were well prepared for this change; however, for most of the churches in our sample, the move to “online church” was a challenge. Many identified the steep learning curve and lack of skilled people. Another significant challenge was related to connectivity. Churches indicated internet access, inadequate equipment, and members without internet access as substantial barriers to providing an “online church” experience. As mentioned above, some have been finding creative solutions like recording and distributing DVDs for members. Others have taken a straightforward approach by using their cellphone and social media accounts to provide a live worship experience. Many of these worship services, Bible studies, and prayer times are found on Facebook.



## WILL WE CONTINUE?

In our final question, we asked churches if they thought they would continue to provide online worship service options after the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. It is notable that while most churches had a minimal virtual footprint before the Pandemic, over 72.9% of the churches in our sample (72 churches) indicate that they are at least considering the continuation of their online worship options beyond the recommended time of safe social distancing. Almost 33% of the churches indicate that they are already planning to continue with “online church” options.

< Back to report | CHURCHES BY WILL CONTINUE ONLINE



## THANK YOU

We would like to thank the 103 churches that took the time to complete this short survey. This provides an interesting look at how Canadian churches are responding to the new needs and realities of our present world. T.V., video, and online church productions used to be associated with Televangelists and megachurches, but with the availability of simple tools, ease of internet access, pandemic urgency, and lots of creativity, even a small church can have an online presence. If you need help developing an online expression of your church, we would like to help you. Please feel free to contact us, and we will help connect you with the assistance and coaching you need. [info@outreach.ca](mailto:info@outreach.ca)