

Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville

Returning to In-Person Activities (RIPA) Advisory Group

Analysis of Congregational Return to In-Person Worship Survey

The survey was conducted between July 10 and 24, 2020. Ninety-six individuals responded online and eight via paper copies, for a total “n” of 104.

The survey was conducted online using Google Forms. Google provides, as a standard service, a tabulation of online responses to each item displayed in (bar or pie) chart format. This is attached as Appendix 1 and summarized below. For those completing the paper version, responses to critical survey items and open-ended comments were added manually.

Executive summary

- Most survey respondents are very comfortable with livestreaming worship services as an alternative during the current pandemic - but a significant minority have not been accessing them.
- Respondents generally expressed significant caution about returning to in-person gatherings too soon.
- When the option for in-person worship is reopened, about half of the respondents would prefer gathering in person, but the other half would prefer livestreaming. This presents a fundamental challenge for the staff and leaders of PCOL going forward: how to sustain, simultaneously, quality worship experiences both in-person and livestreamed, and continue to keep the congregation “together while (at least partially) apart.”

The open-ended responses to the final open-ended survey item are compiled on pages 6-9 of this analysis. They are grouped according to broad theme identified by the reviewers. Several comments expressed appreciation for the survey and the work of the Advisory Group.

It should also be noted that the available data and scientific insight about COVID-19 are not static. We must remember that these responses were collected during a particular window of time (July 10-24). As we learn more about how COVID-19 is and is not spread, our planning will need to adjust accordingly.

Critical survey items

We identified three “critical survey items” as being worthy of the extra effort required to merge online and paper responses:

- Item 5 asked respondents “What do you most look forward to about the resumption of in-person worship?”
- Item 8 asked “Since the beginning of the pandemic, how often have you attended PCOL Sunday morning worship via live stream video?”
- Item 20 asked “When we do return to the option of in-person worship, how likely are you to continue watching a live-streamed worship service?”

In the analysis that follows, these critical items are highlighted within boxes.

Demographics (*See Appendix 1, pages 1-2*)

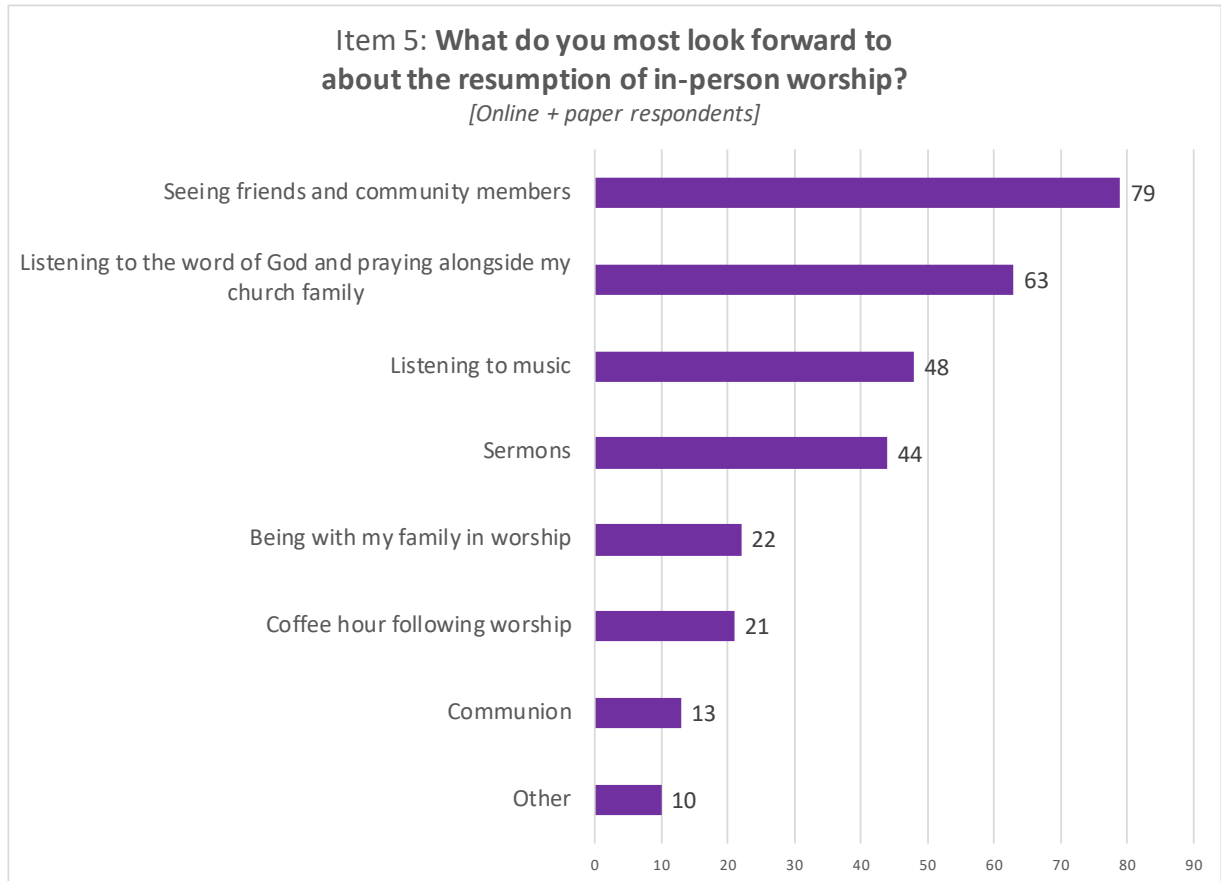
Most survey respondents were longtime active members, but not all:

- Over 60% of respondents reported that their household includes one or more people over 65.
- Nearly three-quarters of all respondents have been PCOL members for more than ten years.
- About two-thirds of all respondents reported that they have served as a Deacon. Also, two-thirds have served as an usher or greeter. Half have served as an Elder, more than 40% as a Trustee, about 35% as a Sunday School teacher, and about one-fifth as a choir member.

What respondents would most look forward to (*Appendix 1, page 2*)

Critical survey Item 5

This item asked respondents to check up to three things they would most “look forward to about the resumption of in-person worship.” Up to three responses were allowed. Adding the paper responses to those submitted online shows:



In addition to the prompts provided, several respondents indicated singing as an aspect of congregational worship that they are eager to see resumed.

Past patterns of church attendance (*Appendix 1, page 4*)

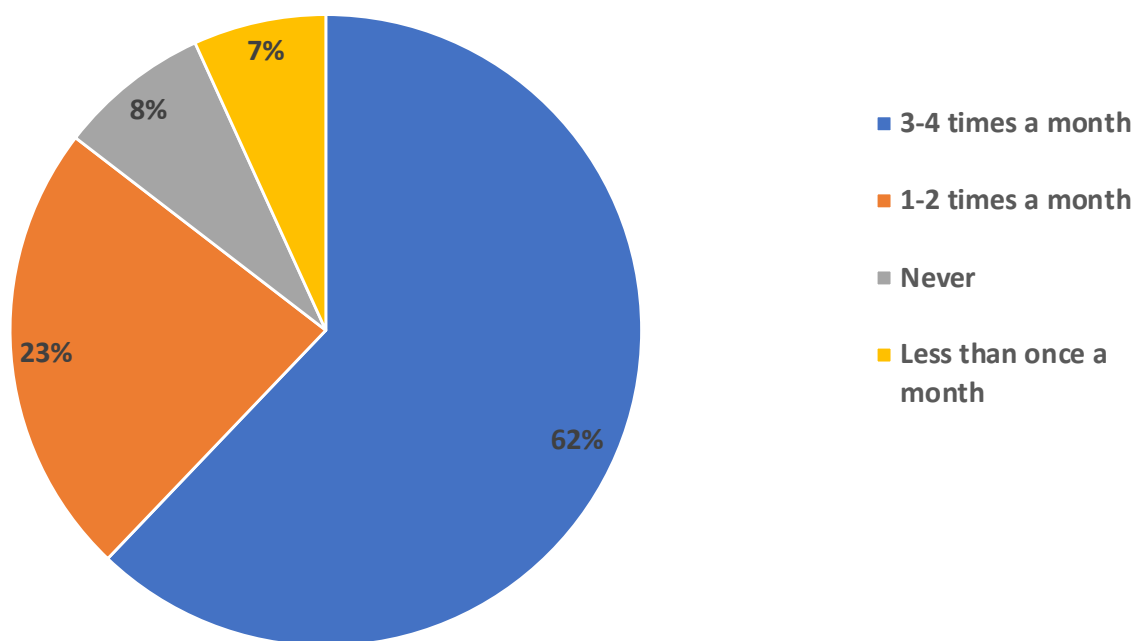
The next series of items asked respondents about their past patterns of church attendance:

- About two-thirds of respondents reported attending regular Sunday morning services 3-4 times per month.
- Over 90% reported attending Sunday evening WINK services less than once a month or never.

Critical survey item 8

The next item asked “Since the beginning of the pandemic, how often have you attended PCoL Sunday morning worship via live stream video?” Only 3% of online respondents reported never having attended livestream worship, versus five of the eight paper respondents. Overall, 15% of all respondents have attended livestream worship “never” or “less than once per month,” while 85% reported attending between one and four times per month.

Item 8: Since the beginning of the pandemic,
how often have you attended PCoL Sunday morning worship
via live stream video?
[Online + paper respondents]



Observation: This chart illustrates that most survey respondents – but by no means all – are quite comfortable with the live-streamed worship format.

Likelihood of attending in-person if ... (Appendix 1, pages 3,5-6)

The next four survey items asked respondents whether they would be more likely or less likely to attend in-person worship if certain circumstances were present.

- The overwhelming majority of respondents said they would be more likely to attend if masks were required “during entry and exit as well as throughout the service.”
- A similar majority would be more likely to attend if “physical distancing is strictly maintained during entry and dismissal as well as throughout services, allowing only those living in the same household to sit together.”
- Respondents split roughly in half as to whether they would be more likely or less likely to attend in-person services that were “shortened significantly to minimize prolonged exposure to others.”
- About one-quarter of respondents said they would be less likely to attend worship “if congregational singing is not permitted.”

Sanitation (*Appendix 1, page 6*)

The next series of items asked to what extent respondents agree or disagree with four statements about church-provided resources for in-person worship. Percentages who responded Strongly Agree or Agree to each item were as follows:

- Hand sanitizer should be conveniently available to attendees. 86%
- The church should arrange for cleaning and disinfecting between all group gatherings. 76%
- The church should provide masks for attendees who do not bring their own..... 72%
- The church should provide sanitizing wipes for attendees to clean their own spaces before and after gatherings. 56%

Reasons for reluctance to attend (*Appendix 1, page 7*)

In the next series of questions, respondents were asked about several factors that might present inhibitions to attendance in person.

- Only ten online respondents indicated that they would not use a reservation system, if one were required to limit attendance. (One suspects that this may be less about the reservation system than about individual reluctance to attend for other reasons.)
- Nearly two-thirds of online respondents said yes to whether “in-person attendance would put you at risk physically and would this impact your attendance.”
- Thirty-two online respondents provided information about special needs that “might impact your in-person participation.” Eleven reported concern about a compromised immune system. Others referred to a general concern related to age, difficulty with hearing or vision, or other illnesses or family circumstances.

Likelihood of participation (*Appendix 1, pages 8-9*)

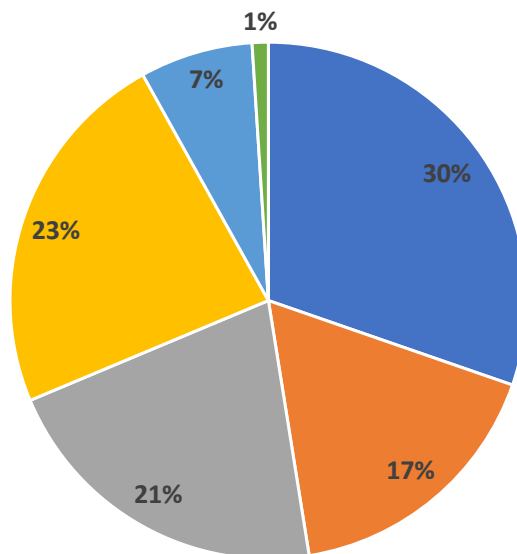
- Roughly half of the online respondents said they were not likely to participate “in a social hour/conversation following worship in the next six months, assuming proper safety measures.”
- Nearly two-thirds of the online respondents said they were not likely to participate “in adult education in the next six months, assuming proper safety measures.”
- Only seven respondents indicated that they were likely or somewhat likely “to allow your child to participate in in-person youth group in the next six months, assuming proper safety measures.” (As this question was not applicable to most respondents, a separate survey of parents may be needed.)

Likelihood of participation (continued)

Critical survey item 20

A total of 99 respondents (91 online plus 8 via paper) provided important insight into the wide variety of perspectives about in-person vs. live-streamed worship services, at least for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly one-half of all respondents indicated a preference for live streaming, even if in-person worship were an option, while the other half would either “never watch the live stream,” “prefer to always worship in-person,” or would watch the live stream “if I were ill or out of town.”

Item 20: **When we do return to the option of in-person worship, how likely are you to continue watching a live-streamed worship service?**



- If live-streamed worship were always an option, I would do that and only attend in-person very occasionally.
- I would watch the live stream every week.
- If I were ill or out of town I would watch the live stream.
- I will prefer to always worship in-person.
- I would never watch the live stream.
- Other

Observation: This chart illuminates a fundamental challenge for the leadership of PCOL going forward: how to sustain, simultaneously, quality worship experiences both in-person and live-streamed, and keep the congregation “together while (at least partially) apart.”

Open-ended item: *Is there anything else you think we should know or consider?*

The final item on the survey generated thirty-eight total responses from online and paper respondents. In the table below, they are organized into general themes. Following the table, each comment is listed within each of these themes.

n	Theme	Description
7	Not comfortable attending until further notice	Indicated that the member was unlikely to attend until things get better, sometimes explicitly mentioning the availability of a vaccine the milestone for feeling safe to return
6	Supportive comment	Expressed support or gratitude to the committee or to PCOL, sometimes specifically for conducting the survey
6	Comments about live stream	Commented on the value of live stream, or suggested a way to improve live stream
5	Choir safety	Expressed a specific concern about the safety of participating in the choir or the inclusion of vocal music in general
4	Urging caution	Urged PCOL to move forward slowly and carefully with restarting live services.
3	Emphasizing masks	Expressed the importance of wearing masks or of PCOL encouraging mask-wearing
1	Unlikely to attend for other reasons	Stated an inability to attend for reasons other than the pandemic
1	Visitors	Mentioned the importance of continuing to welcome visitors and guests
1	Childcare	Asked about the PCOL's plans for childcare upon return
1	Outdoor service	Suggested conducting outdoor service if possible
1	Outreach / inclusiveness concerns	Expressed a concern about how PCOL would reach out to those who cannot attend in-person
1	Meeting space	Included a comment about use of meeting space
1	Sanitizing	Included a specific comment about sanitizing practices

Individual comments

Not comfortable attending until further notice

- As in person worship is considered very high risk, I would not be likely to attend in the next several months. With numbers going up across the US, we are being pretty conservative in our interactions with others and limiting our activities, despite missing our “ normal “ activities
- Until a safe and effective vaccine is readily available, I would not be likely to attend in person services. Singing in the choir is very important to my worship experience.
- Can't return until vaccine
- If I don't feel safe to return to the office for work, I certainly don't feel safe in the church where we will all be closer. I miss seeing everyone but don't want to resume in person until it is safe. The only thing I feel comfortable with right now is seeing people outside in small groups
- My family will not attend in-person services until either the number of COVID cases in NJ is close to 0, there is a vaccine and my family has been inoculated, or there is a cure discovered. We do not want to risk ourselves or others.
- If weather permits, keeping the sanctuary windows open would also make me feel safer; but, frankly, given my health condition and my husband's, I would not attend in-person services until this pandemic is over.
- We've been taking quarantine very seriously. I personally won't be comfortable attending church until there's a vaccine. Virtual services have been very convenient for us since the baby's nap time usually interferes with worship.

Supportive comments

- Thank you
- A lot of work - you are doing a good job!
- Thanks for all your hard work
- Thank you for this thorough survey.
- I appreciate very much your time and wisdom as you discern how best to open up as a church. I have great confidence in this team's leadership and eventual recommendations. Thank you. Prayers and energy for the journey.
- "I am deeply appreciative of all the time --- and energy, intelligence, imagination and love! --- invested in (a) the live-stream services, (b) the community-sustaining programming of PCOL, and (c) this inquiry to reassess things. I love my church and am proud to participate in all that they're doing in the service of Christ and of God's creation. PS - a little thing, but it took me a while to realize it wasn't a typo, but just an awkwardly constructed sentence (which I likely recognize only b/c it's a frequent issue my own ramblings!). In that last survey question, I suggest an edit to the fourth option: "I will always prefer to worship in-person" reads a bit better. :)"

Choir safety

- I would really like to return to in-person services but as a choir member I am very concerned about safety and can't see how choir participation can resume any time soon.
- In addition to congregational singing, choral singing should also not take place. I will err on the side of caution in deciding when to attend worship.
- How the choir would work (or not) moving forward

Comments about livestream services

- There is admittedly some risk involved in any venture out of the house - especially when interacting with others. As long as prudent guidelines are in place, I'm eager to have the congregation "congregate" again. Those who are strongly risk-averse can stay home and participate via the livestream option.
- I would watch the live stream when I can't make in person.
- Ways to minimize the distraction of "the cameras" for livestream - e. g. broadcasting recorded segments in the meetinghouse for F2F (face-to-face) attendees (I hate to say "live" attendees - hopefully we are all a-live :))
- I love the online stream. It gives me the option to always attend! Thank you for your beautiful services each week! Love the music and all of your creative ideas for worship! Your efforts are very appreciated! ❤️
- Live stream works for us since we live 100 miles away
- We've been taking quarantine very seriously. I personally won't be comfortable attending church until there's a vaccine. Virtual services have been very convenient for us since the baby's nap time usually interferes with worship.

Urging caution

- I have a concern about the "second wave" and the collision with flu season. I caution the church to move slowly. Best scenario is opening after a vaccine.
- Although we miss in-person worship, we will have to weigh everything on how exposed we are during our jobs/school and if we are putting others at risk.
- I don't think it will be safe to open this fall for in-person worship. Not worth the risk.
- I just do not feel comfortable attending an indoors service even if I know everyone is being careful and the church is doing their part.

Emphasizing Masks

- I feel that masks should be required but also that people need to wear them properly (covering their nose and mouth) and ensure they are a proper material (I have seen people online wearing very thin material in protest). If someone insists they cannot wear a mask for whatever reason, they should not be permitted in the church for their safety and the congregation's
- Masks mandatory Please !
- Letting groups within the church go back to in person meetings with masks and social distancing.

Unlikely to attend for other reasons

- I am often out of town on Sunday until our beach house is closed for the year (late Nov)

Visitors

- We think music is very important in the service even if we can't sing. We want continue to be welcoming to visitors and guests.

Childcare

- Wondering about childcare options -- will childcare still be offered? What about church school for the younger kids?

Outdoor service

- While the weather permits, can we look to have the service outside as this will limit the amount of cleaning required for the meeting house

Outreach / inclusiveness concerns

- Will we be making a special effort to reach out to those who cannot attend in-person services?

Meeting space

- Letting groups within the church go back to in person meetings with masks and social distancing.

Sanitizing

- My answer to the question pertaining to sanitizing wipes was answered considering the fact that the church would be sanitizing before and after gatherings, I would not feel that I would need to sanitize again.

Two observations about the survey process (from Jeff Johnson)

- I am truly appreciative of the committee that took the time and energy to think about all of these concerns. The approach taken with this survey was particularly thoughtful and analytical. It evidences a deep concern and compassion about people. Similarly, the responses from many of the members show how deeply they care about PCOL. It's clear how some of them are missing the community.
- Putting on my hat as someone who works in a measurement organization, I worried a little bit about how representative this survey is. I'm not that concerned about whether it's representative of PCOL membership in general; it's more important that it be representative of people who attend regularly under normal circumstances. Are you concerned at all that it might not be? Of the 96 responses, 69 identified themselves as having been members for 10 years or more. Does that sound about right? If so, then maybe nothing to worry about. If it seems off, I might be concerned about whether there is a particular category of regular attendees who are underrepresented and whether their lack of response might be associated with some trait that makes them feel at greater risk of the pandemic or of its social consequences (i.e., older members who aren't computer-survey savvy? Parents of children who have little time? People with illness or disability that make taking surveys hard?)

Analysis respectfully submitted

July 27, 2020

Tom Wilfrid and Jeff Johnson

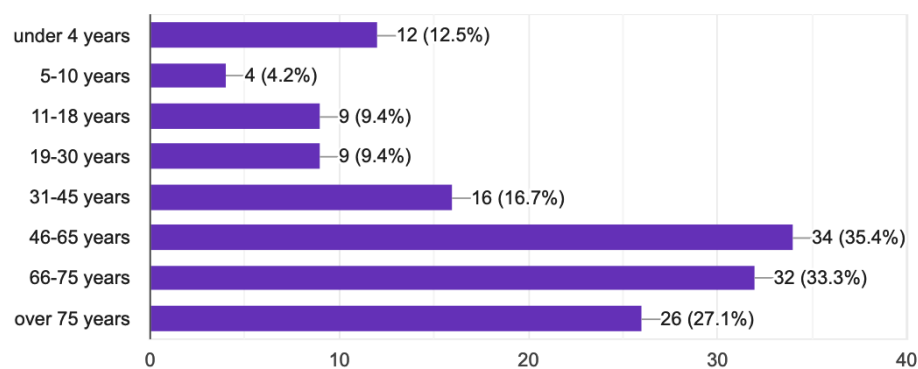
[Edited for the website, August 9, 2020]

Appendix 1 – Statistical results from online respondents (from Google Forms)

N=96

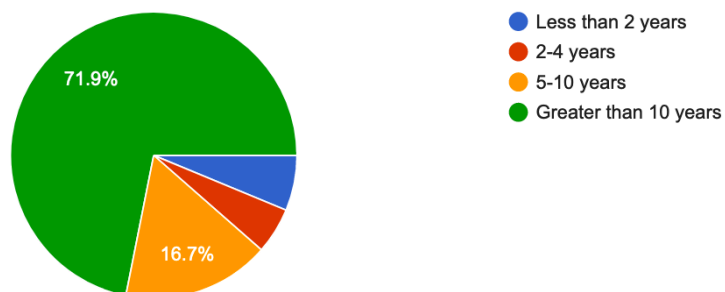
Please check all age groups that apply to members of your household.

96 responses



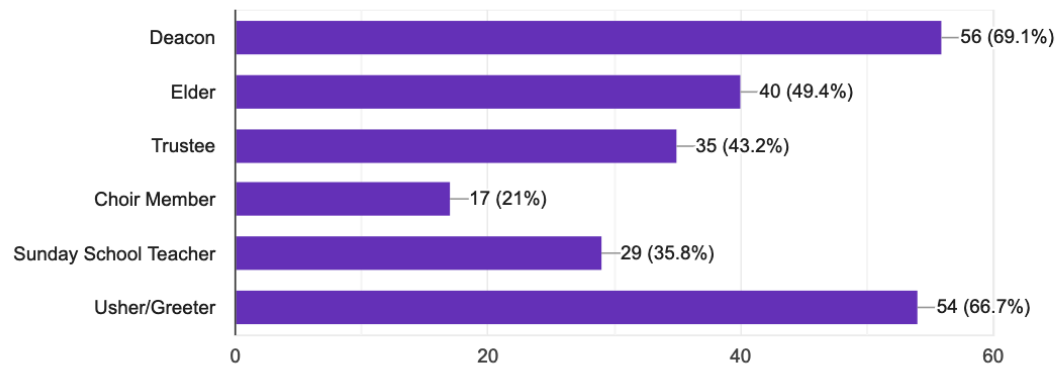
How long have you been a member of PCol?

96 responses



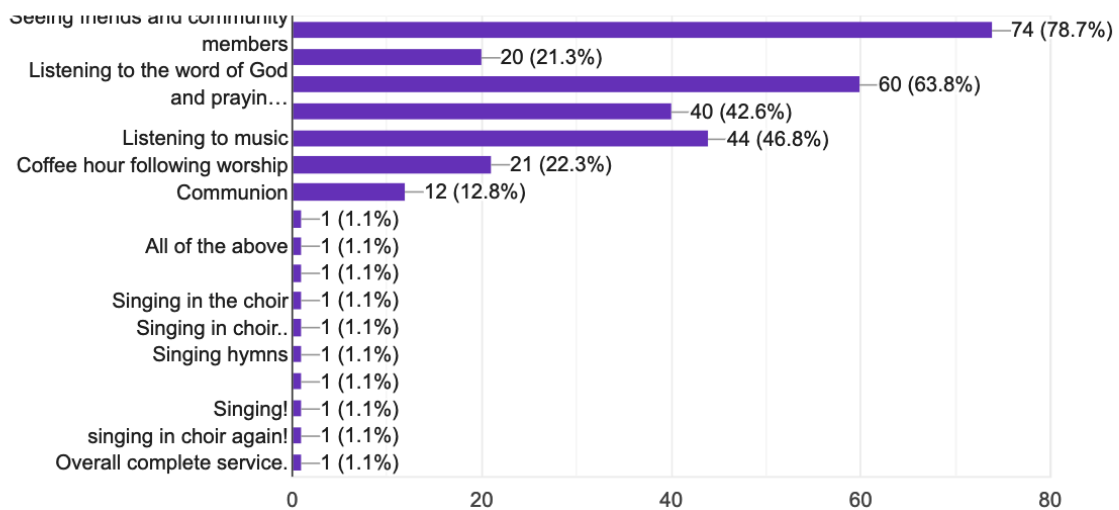
Have you served in any of the following capacities? Please check all that apply.

81 responses



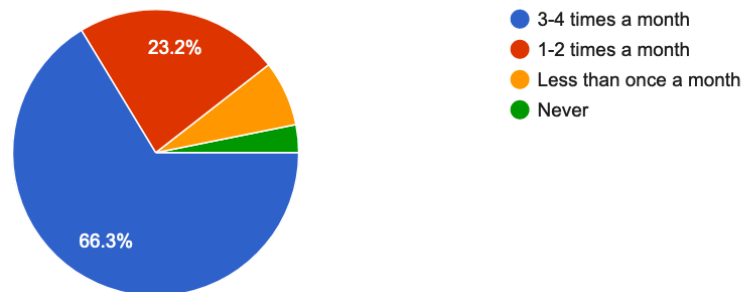
What do you most look forward to about the resumption of in-person worship? (Please choose 3)

94 responses



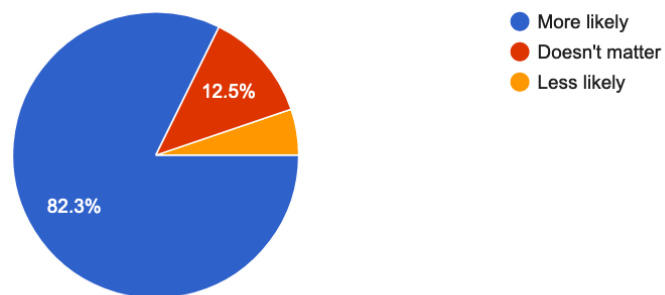
Since the beginning of the pandemic, how often have you attended PCoL Sunday morning worship via live stream video?

95 responses



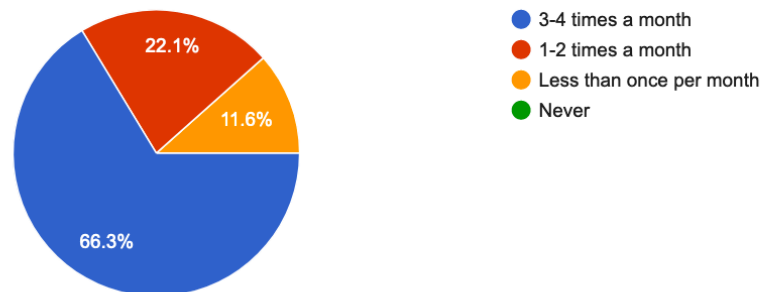
Would you be more or less likely to attend in-person worship if masks are required during entry and exit as well as throughout the service?

96 responses



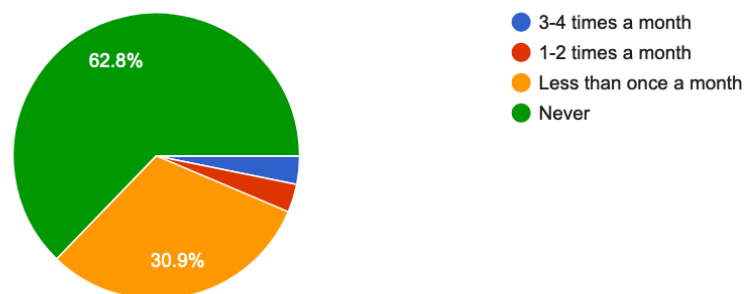
How often did you normally attend PCoL's in-person traditional, Sunday morning worship services?

95 responses



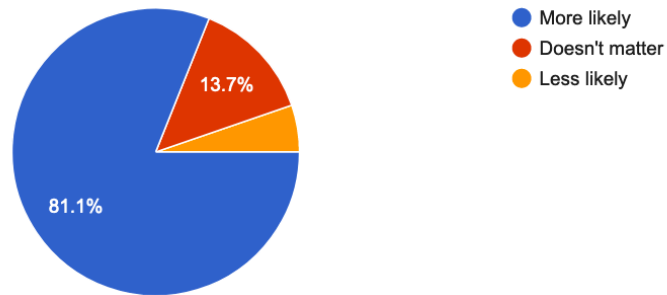
How often did you normally attend PCoL's in-person Sunday evening WINK services?

94 responses



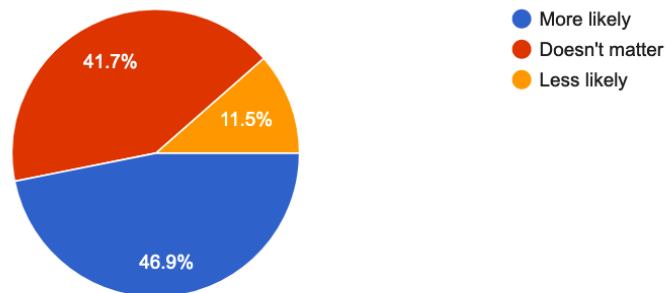
Would you be more or less likely to attend in-person worship if physical distancing is strictly maintained during entry and dismissal as well as throughout services, allowing only those living in the same household to sit together?

95 responses



Would you be more or less likely to attend in-person worship if services are shortened significantly to minimize prolonged exposure to others?

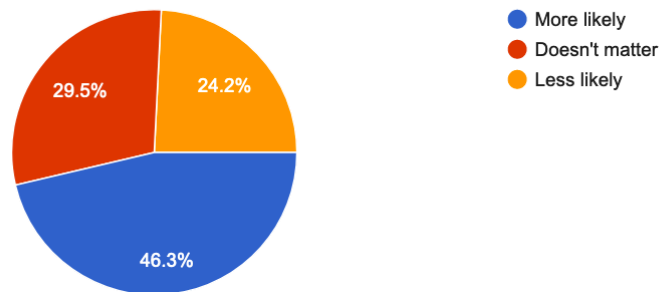
96 responses



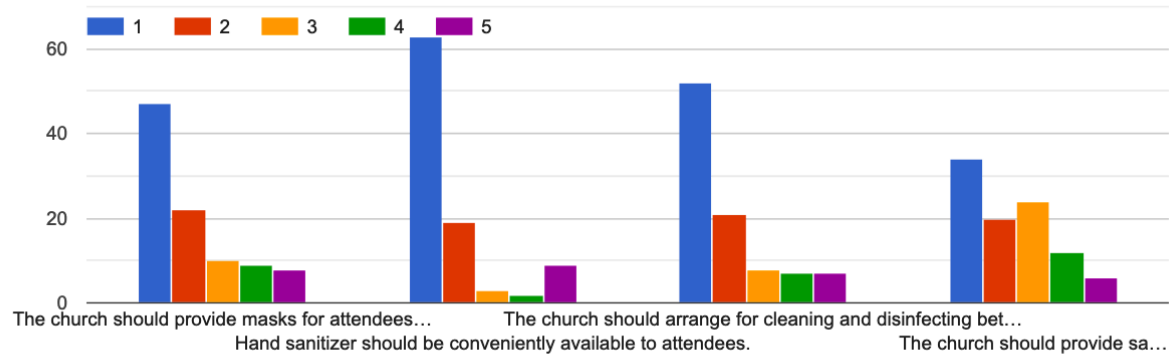
Would you be more or less likely to attend in-person worship if congregational singing is not permitted?



95 responses

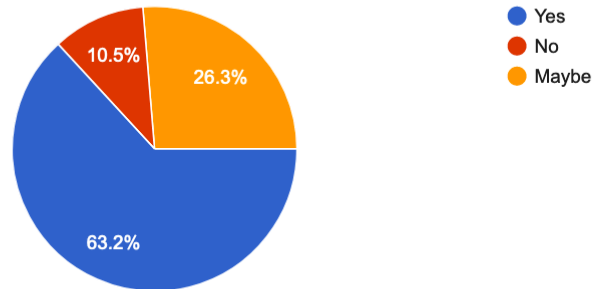


For each of the following four statements, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree, using the following scale: 1-Strongly Agree; 2-Agree; 3-No opinion; 4-Disagree; 5 Strongly Disagree



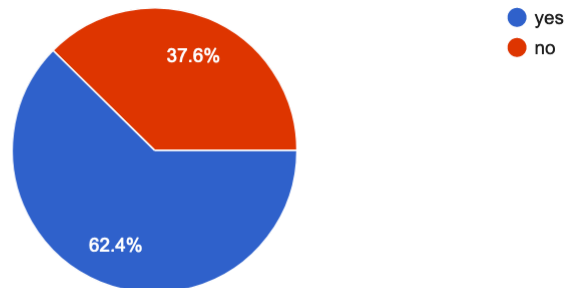
If church reopened and required a reservation for Sunday services to comply with safety guidelines (mandated reduction in maximum capacity) would you use the reservation system to attend?

95 responses



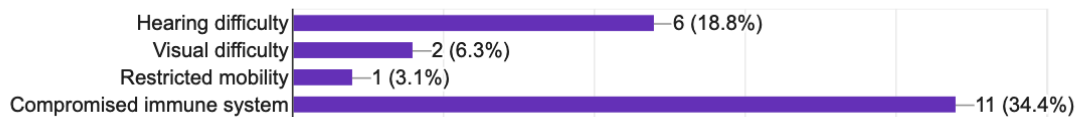
Do you feel that in-person attendance would put you at risk physically and would this impact your attendance?

93 responses



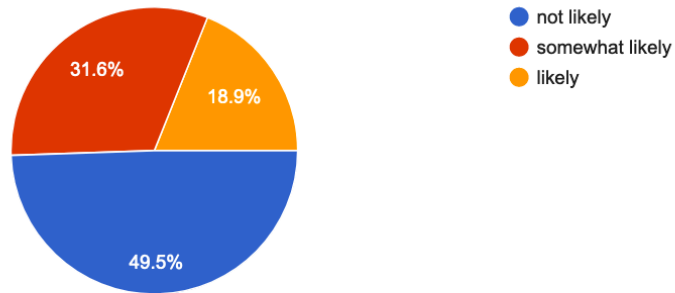
What special needs do you have that might impact your in-person participation?

32 responses



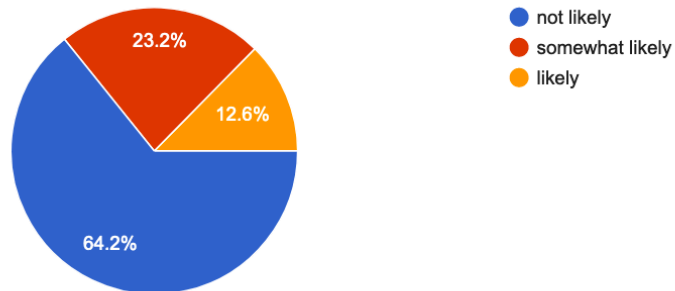
Once in-person worship resumes, how likely are you to participate in a social hour/conversation following worship in the next six months, assuming proper safety measures? (Food will likely not be served.)

95 responses



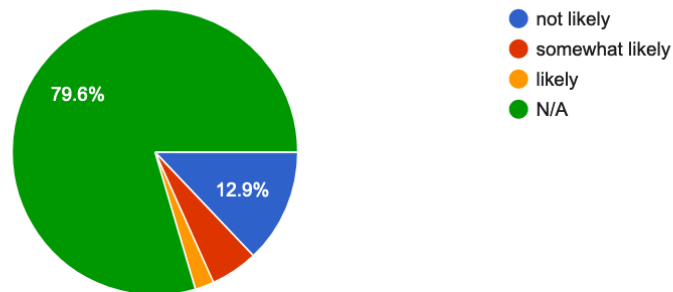
Once in-person worship resumes, how likely are you to participate in adult education in the next six months, assuming proper safety measures?

95 responses



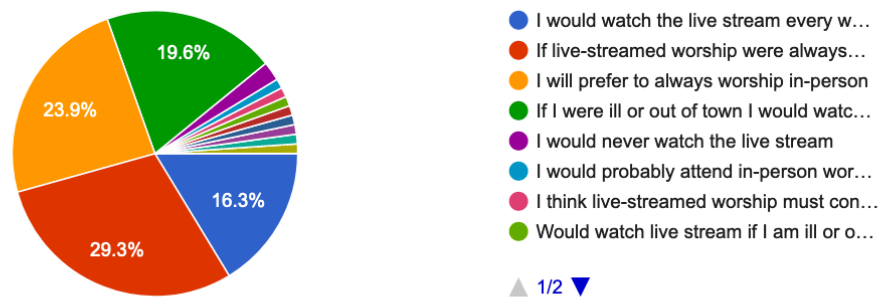
Once in-person worship resumes, how likely are you to allow your child to participate in in-person youth group in the next six months, assuming proper safety measures?

93 responses



When we do return to the option of in-person worship, how likely are you to continue watching a live-streamed worship service?

92 responses



Is there anything else you think we should know or consider?

37 responses