



State of the churches

The impact of COVID-19

May 2020

For people who love church buildings

National Churches Trust

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Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

Introduction

The National Churches Trust conducted an online survey into the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on churches in May 2020. 566 churches responded to the survey.

1. Key Findings

- **Churches have been able to respond to the needs of local people during the lockdown.** Around 34% of churches say they have been able to fully continue their existing support, and around 55% say they have continued partially. This means that a vast majority, around 89%, of churches are continuing to provide some form of support.
- **Churches have set up a wide range of new community support services and forms of worship during the COVID-19 lockdown.** The top five new activities are: making contact with isolated or vulnerable people, online worship, telephone befriending, shopping and/or delivery of shopping or essential supplies and online support groups.
- **The closure of church buildings has had a negative impact.** Around 75% of churches taking part in the survey say that closing their church during the lockdown has had a negative effect on the community and around 16% say they don't know if it has.
- **Churches will be important to the local community in the future.** 64% of respondents think churches will become more important in the future as a result of COVID-19.
- **Once they are open again, churches say that people are most looking forward to togetherness/companionship, closely followed by religious service and being able to gather together in the building again.** Using a weighted average on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest, companionship/togetherness came out with a score of 4.89, religious services 4.41 and being in the building again 4.14.

2. Methodology

Parameters

The survey of the impact of COVID-19 on churches was undertaken by the National Churches Trust from 01/05/2020 - 26/05/2020. 566 churches took part from all four countries of the U.K. The majority of response were from churches in England and the most predominant denomination that took part was Church of England. There was also responses from Methodist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Baptist and Scottish Episcopal churches and also from churches belonging to the Church in Wales and the Church of Scotland.

Design and Response

This survey was conducted online using SurveyMonkey software.

The data in this report has been analysed as it was submitted so a margin of error should be considered of duplicate and incomplete responses.

3. Summary of findings

Catherine Townsend, Head of Church Support for the National Churches Trust comments:

Churches and their volunteers have adapted to meet the needs of their congregation and wider community during the COVID-19 lockdown, a time when the type of support they provide is needed most.

Before the lockdown, many churches were distribution hubs for food banks. Our survey indicates that many churches continued this support and 45 respondents said they have started a food bank during the lockdown that did not previously exist.

Our Lady Help of Christian, Kentish Town, London usually offer lunch, showers and clothes to about 80 people on a Sunday. They have been unable to carry out this service during the COVID-19 lockdown in the usual way. Instead they have been giving out hot takeaways and food parcels to vulnerable people.

Churches taking part in our survey have been able to meet the needs of local people in very imaginative ways. These include a seedling swap; loans of books and jigsaws; social media posting of worship and uplifting quotes; delivery of craft boxes; online Sing for Fun and many more.

St. Mary the Virgin, Grafton Regis, Northamptonshire organised donations of snacks for the staff at the local brain injury nursing home.

Some churches have partnered with other local services to further their community outreach. St. Andrew's, Bangor, Co. Down are working with North Down Community Network to publicise the support that churches can offer.

The activity of St Faith's, Lee-on-the-Solent in Hampshire highlights how adaptable churches have been in the circumstances: "Our weekly Cuppa and Company group for older people has stopped, but team members are contacting those who would usually come by phone. Our weekly Toddlers group has stopped, but we are putting a song time and story on Facebook each week."

St Winifred, Mountain Ash in Wales have also found new ways to provide existing services. They usually run 'Fit and Fed' which provides meals for school children during the holidays. They say they've "worked with schools to deliver food packages of basic necessities to vulnerable families instead."

Churches are at the forefront of combatting loneliness especially in rural communities and during lockdown they have continued to support people through telephone calls, social media and sending letters to those who are not online.

All Saints', Barrowby, Lincolnshire, one of the churches which took part in the survey, told us they are "ensuring all members of [their] church family can access services, including printouts delivered weekly to non-computer users, to ensure no-one is left out." They now run a virtual coffee morning and have set up a YouTube channel.

Many churches have been able to provide some form of online worship and this has been seen as positive. But this is not seen as a substitute for gathering together in a church building. A common theme in the survey responses is summed up by Methodist Chapel, Scotter, Lincolnshire: "Our congregation miss sharing together the personal interaction in fellowship and sharing in Worship." These are things that can happen outside of a church building but

many feel these are enhanced by the face to face interaction and sense of place that a church provides. This sentiment is captured by St John the Evangelist, Stranraer who say that "the internet has enabled worship to continue and attracted more watchers than normally attend services, but this cannot replace the live worship and contact with others."

Going forward churches are optimistic that they can continue to be a place of support for the community. St Alban the Martyr, Northampton "hope that the help the church has provided to the community in the crisis will continue to increase its profile in the community after." St James Church, Darwen is in an area of high deprivation in England. They are at the beginning of a project "to make [the church] relevant again to local residents and see great social and spiritual needs after this passes" which they believe they can address.

The closure of churches has had a serious impact on the finances of many churches. St Mary's, Keysoe, Bedfordshire said: "The lock down will prove to lead to a very difficult financial year for us. Apart from the loss of about a third of our income derived from church collections, we have been unable to organise two summer events which both raise funds and put us in touch with the parish in general. Some fundraising has continued thanks to imaginative ideas. For example, St Peter ad Vincula, Roydon, Essex have been raising money for the local foodbank through a beard competition.

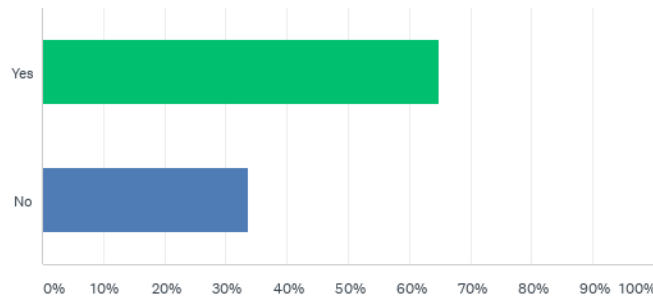
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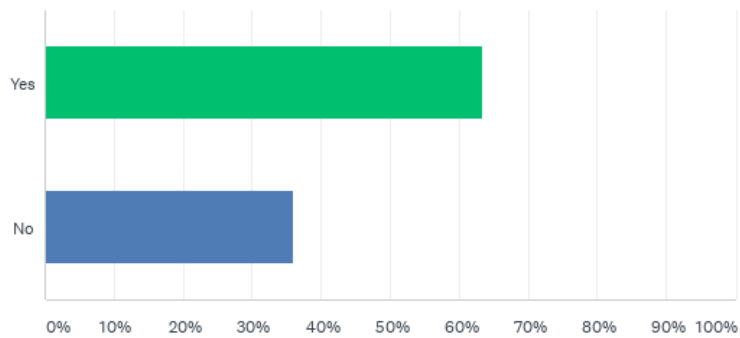
Overall, our 'State of the churches' survey paints a picture of churches doing good work in the community at times of crisis. We are hopeful that churches will continue to fulfil this important role during the UK's recovery from the pandemic and into the future.

4. Tables

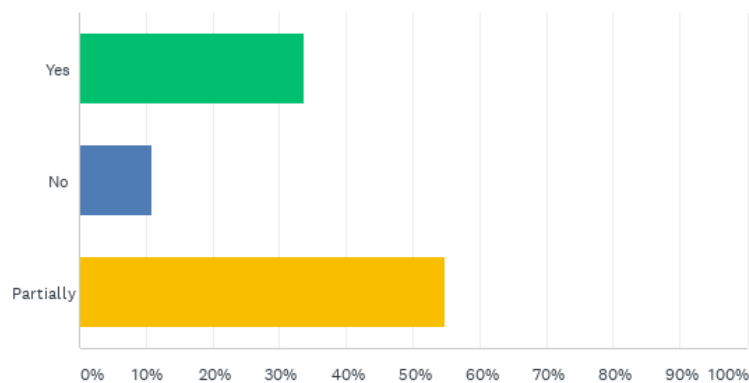
Do you think your church and the help it provides to the local community will become more important in the future as a result of COVID-19?



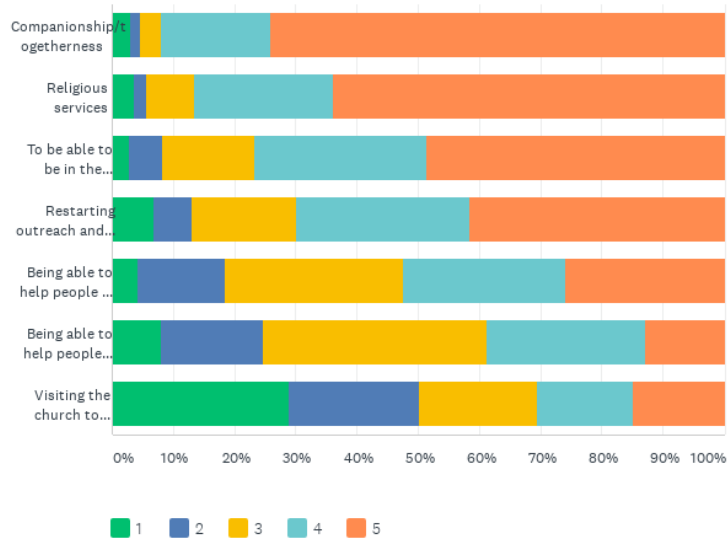
Do you think your church and the help it provides to the local community has become more important during the COVID-19 lockdown?



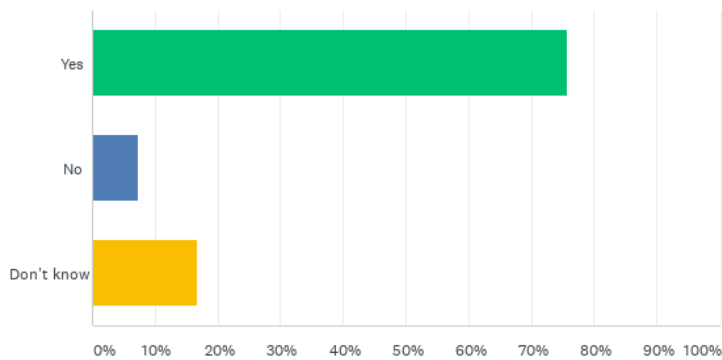
Has your existing help and support for local people been able to continue during the COVID-19 lockdown?



What do you think people are most looking forward to when your church reopens? Please look at each statement and assess it in order of how important you think it is. With 1 being not very important and 5 being very important.



To the best of your knowledge, have local people been negatively affected by the closure of your church as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown?



Have you set up any of the following new outreach or support services for local people as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown? Please tick all that apply.

