

## APPENDIX 1



**Making  
Disciples  
for Life** 



# CONGREGATIONS AND COVID-19

JULY 2020 – SURVEY OF LCMS CONGREGATIONS

LCMS RESEARCH SERVICES

# BACKGROUND

The unprecedented global pandemic of COVID-19 has created new challenges for congregations, ministries, and clergy throughout the Synod. Not only has there been a toll on human lives, but there have been economic and emotional waves that have affected everyone.

One word that has often been used to characterize the COVID-19 pandemic is "uncertain". Scientists and medical experts have been uncertain about exactly how the disease is transmitted. Government and local officials are uncertain about how and when to enforce restrictions on gatherings. Employees are uncertain about when (or even if) they will be able to return to work.

Congregations have faced uncertainty as well. When will we be able to gather for worship? How can we minister to people while "social distancing"? What is going to happen to our budget? How many people are going to drift away? What about our Lutheran schools?

The goal of this study is to find answers within the lingering uncertainty this crisis has brought to the Synod.

- How have LCMS Lutherans been affected by the disease itself and the economic fallout?
- How did LCMS congregations respond to the threat of the virus and the restrictions on gatherings?
- What kinds of resources do our workers and ministries need as we move forward from this pandemic?
- How effective have the Synod and its entities been at supporting our churches during this crisis?
- How are our ministers coping personally and professionally?
- How are congregations and schools adapting to new behaviors, patterns and practices in their ministry?
- What will be the long-term impact on our ministries and our people?

To find these answers, Research Services is conducting a series of surveys. This report presents the results of the first survey, that of LCMS congregations. In June, this survey went out to every congregation with a valid email address (4,787). Over 1,200 responded, with 1,054 completing the survey (mostly by a pastor or other staff member).

In August of 2020, we plan to conduct a survey of church workers (Ordained and Commissioned) to address the personal and professional impact of COVID-19 on our rostered clergy.

In the fall, we will conduct a survey of LCMS Schools to learn how the situation impacted Lutheran education over two different school years.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





# SUMMARY OF RESULTS AS OF JUNE 2020

## Impact to Individuals:

- A quarter of congregations reported *at least one* confirmed case of COVID-19 among their parishioners
- Around 5% of congregations reported at least one death – *estimated around 500 LCMS Lutherans passed away*
- Urban communities were especially hit hard, most notably New York City as well as Detroit, and Chicago
- Estimated 65,000 LCMS households lost income due to the pandemic/shutdown situation
  - All community types (urban, rural, small town, etc.) were equally as likely to be affected financially

## Impact to Congregation Life:

- Congregations in every LCMS district faced restrictions prohibiting them from gathering for worship
  - On Easter, only 15% of congregations gathered for worship (and most of these had to limit their capacity)
  - 80% of congregations used the internet to livestream or post recordings of worship services or sermons
    - Prior to the virus, 56% posted nothing online and another 25% only posted recorded sermons
    - Now, 70% of congregations plan to continue posting online, and nearly half (of all) will be livestreaming
- The impact was larger than worship as regular classes, Bible Studies and other normal gatherings were even more likely to be canceled than worship services



# SUMMARY OF RESULTS AS OF JUNE 2020

## Impact to Finances:

- For most congregations giving is not down due to the pandemic (25% even say giving has gone up!)
- However, around 12% say giving has gone down significantly
  - In comments, several congregations explained that even though giving is down, their expenses have also decreased (since the building is not being used as often, programs and events have been cancelled) to the point that their overall financial situation is holding steady (or improving)
    - *Since this was shared voluntarily in open-ended answers, it is not possible to measure how common this was from this data*
- The congregations in the most financial trouble were all small congregations (*less than 150 weekly worshipers*)
  - Yet, those who say they are in serious trouble are just a small portion of all small congregations (<4%)
- 90% of congregations do not plan to reduce personnel/payroll this year
- Around 30% of congregations say they will likely have to reduce work-at-large disbursements
  - Less than 1% say they will **eliminate** their work-at-large funding
  - Congregations that are not planning to reduce their work-at-large gifts make up approximately 75% of total reported disbursements to their district (and Synod)
    - *Unfortunately, the response volume from individual districts is too small to estimate a per district impact*



# SUMMARY OF RESULTS AS OF JUNE 2020

## Moving Forward:

- Most congregations feel optimistic and most have already begun gathering for worship again
- Only 13% have concerns about viability – and 70% of these already had concerns *prior* to the pandemic.
- Over 40% of congregations say they have no major needs at this time, and nearly another 30% say they only have a few (specifically, needs from their District or Synod)
- Most of the needs brought by congregations are relational rather than programmatic or logistical
- They are most likely to look to their district or other local LCMS presence for support and/or resources
  - However, the data suggests that the support and resources that are most needed are common across the Synod, and therefore do not need to be location-specific
- The majority have a highly favorable view of the support received from their district as well as Synod
- While not measured by the survey, the comments suggest that there is some degree of tension or division among certain groups with strong (but opposing) opinions about the response to the virus

## Next Steps (Research):

- Survey of LCMS Church Workers – launching mid-August
- Survey of LCMS Schools – launching mid-September
- Follow up surveys – *forthcoming as necessary*



# SURVEY OVERVIEW





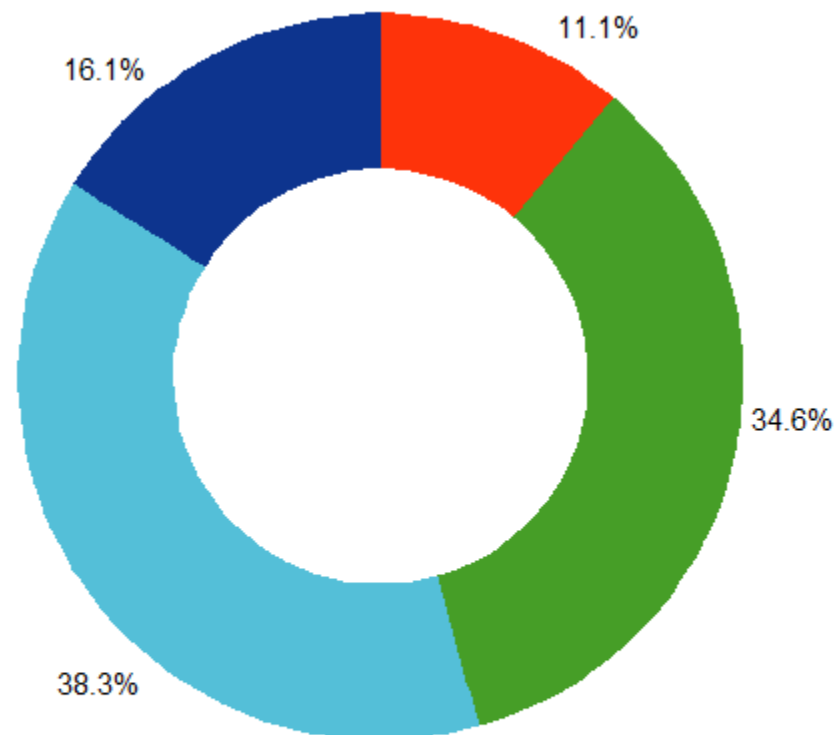
## A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF LCMS CONGREGATIONS

Overall, the sample is very well representative of the diversity of congregations within the LCMS. With over 1,200 congregations in the sample, the margin of error is +/-2.5% (margin of error is higher in sub-groups).

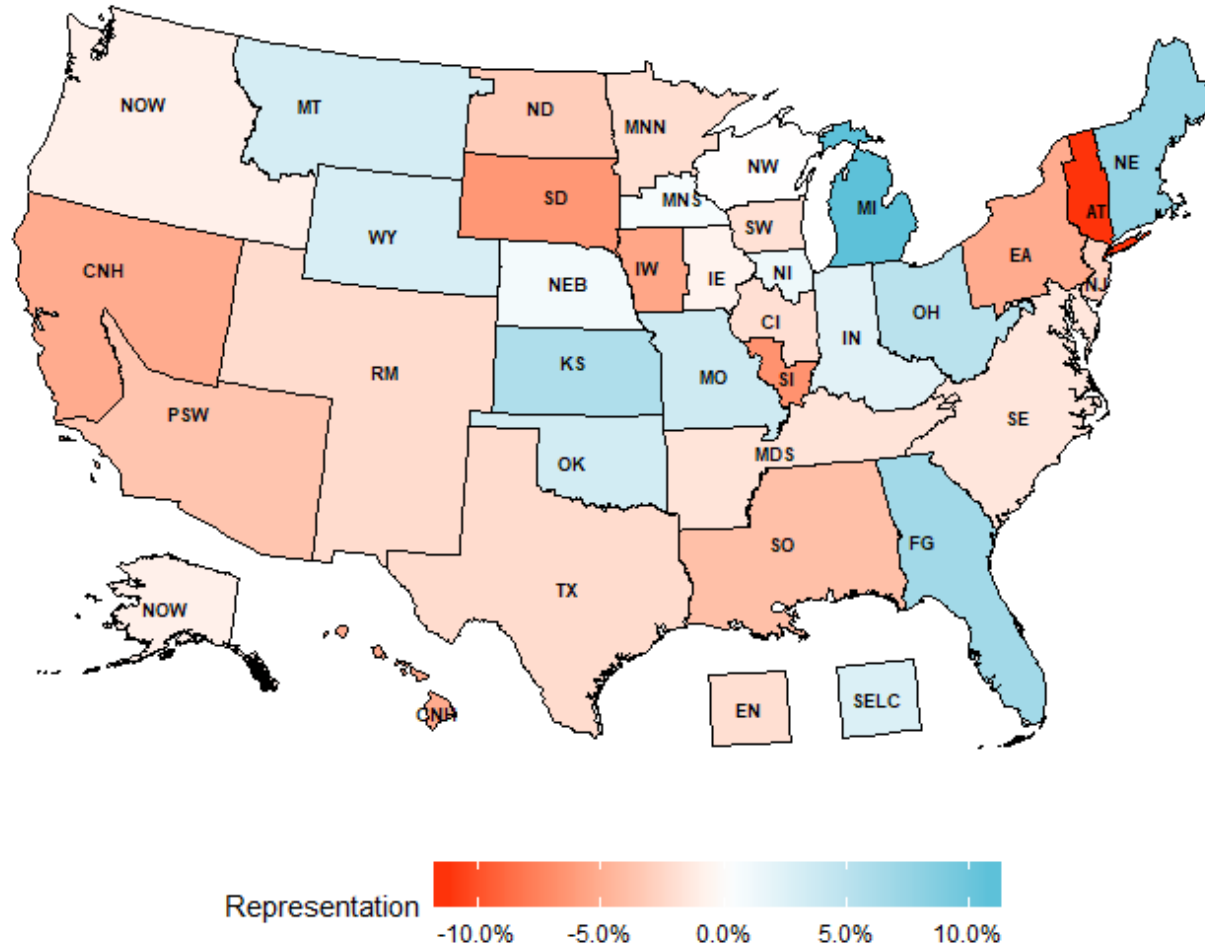
There is a proportionate spread across districts, as well as community types (i.e. urban, small town). The sample also fits the expected range of congregation sizes. As is the case with most congregation surveys, the smallest congregations are slightly under-represented, but they are not absent from the sample.

Very few congregations were in other special circumstances, with less than 5% either having recently called a new church worker, considering merging, or planning on closing

Pastors were the most likely to fill out the survey, (60%) with an informed staff member being the next most likely. Just under 13% of the congregations in the sample were vacant congregations.

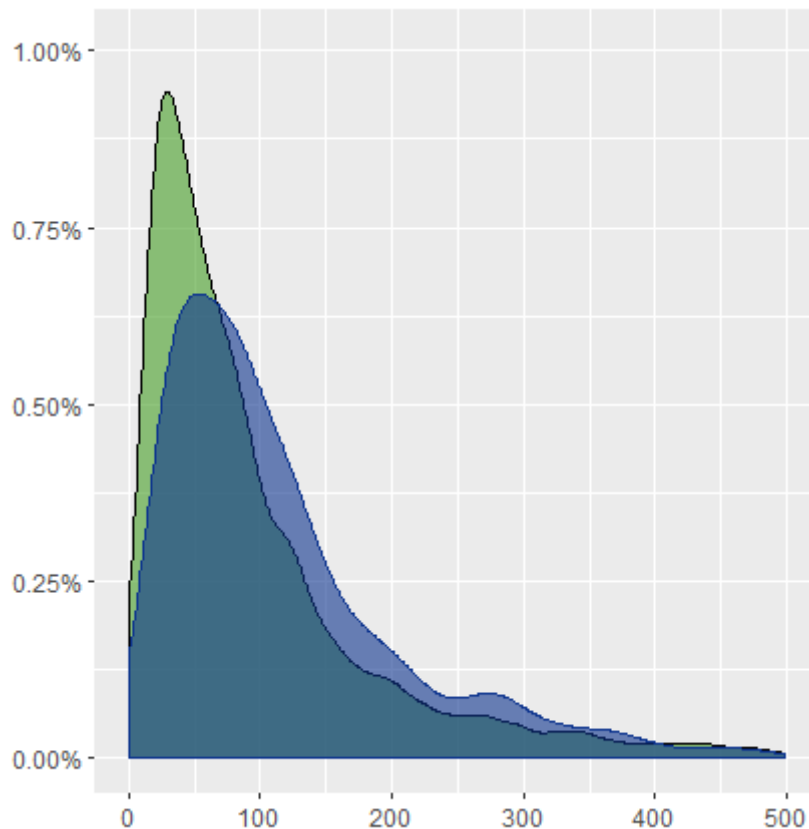


## GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE (SAMPLE REPRESENTATION COMPARED TO EXPECTED PROPORTION)

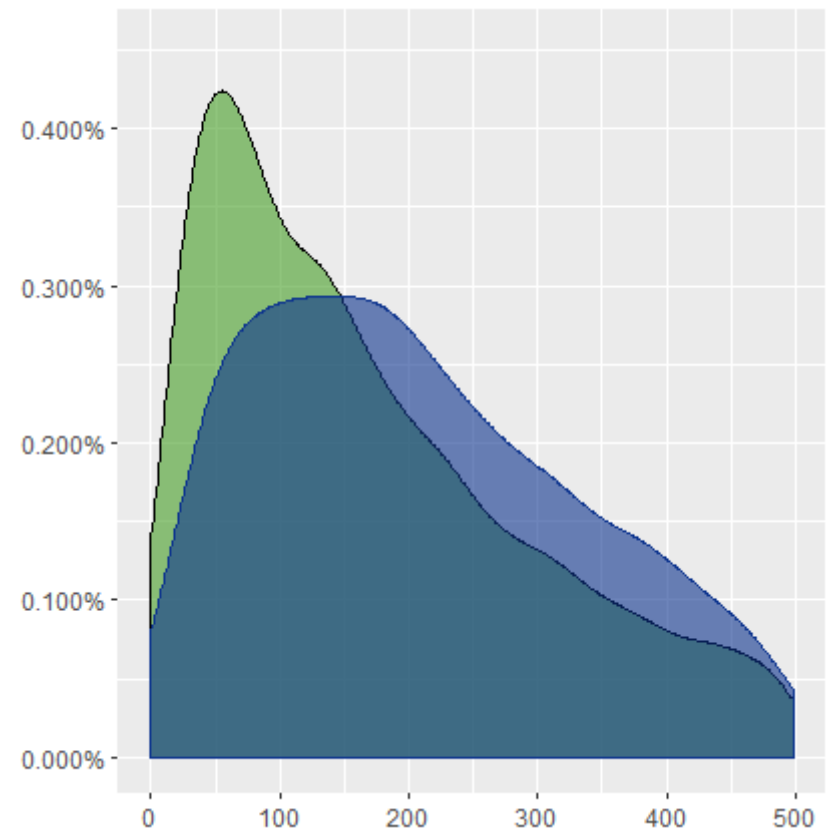


# COMPARISON OF SAMPLE (BLUE) WITH LCMS OVERALL (GREEN) *ONLY THE SMALLEST CONGREGATIONS ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED*

## Worship Attendance



## Baptized Membership



*Note: there are larger congregations in both Synod and the sample, but for legibility of the charts the tails were trimmed.*



# IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

CONGREGATIONS AND COVID-19





## IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS (AS OF JUNE 2020)

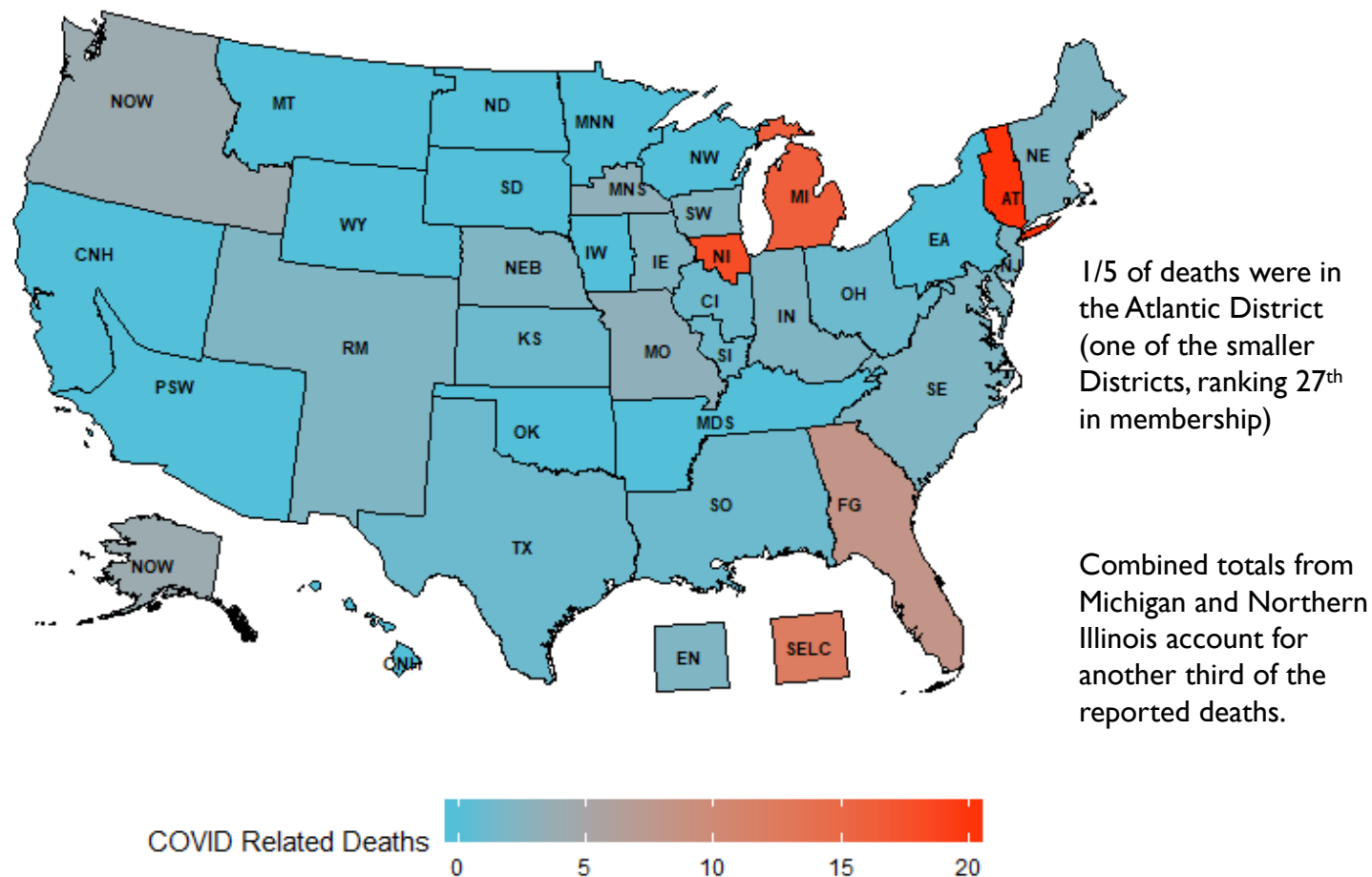
Applying the numbers from the survey, we can estimate that, Synodwide, approximately:

- **4,500** baptized members were diagnosed with COVID-19
- **1,250** were hospitalized
- **500** passed away
- Nearly **65,000** LCMS households lost income related to the virus and its economic impact

*These numbers are estimates, proportionately applying the numbers reported on the survey from the sample to the total population of Synod, and they are subject to the +/-2.5% margin of error.*

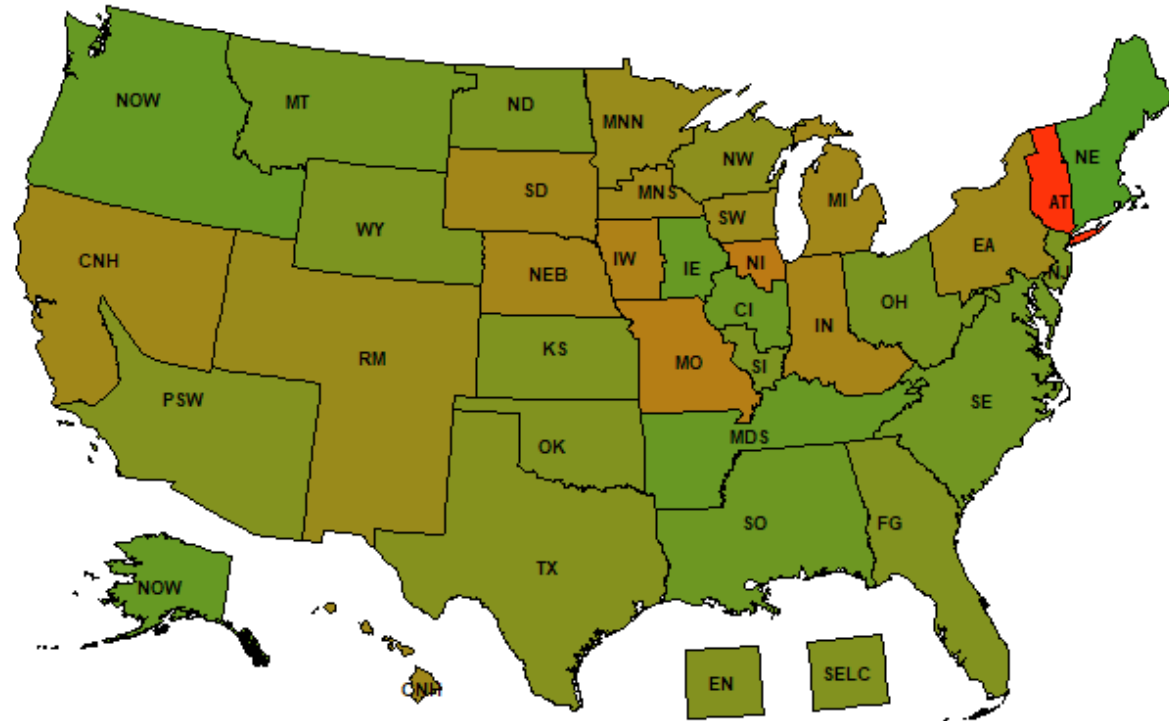
# COVID RELATED DEATHS OF LUTHERANS

(NUMBERS AS REPORTED IN THE SURVEY)

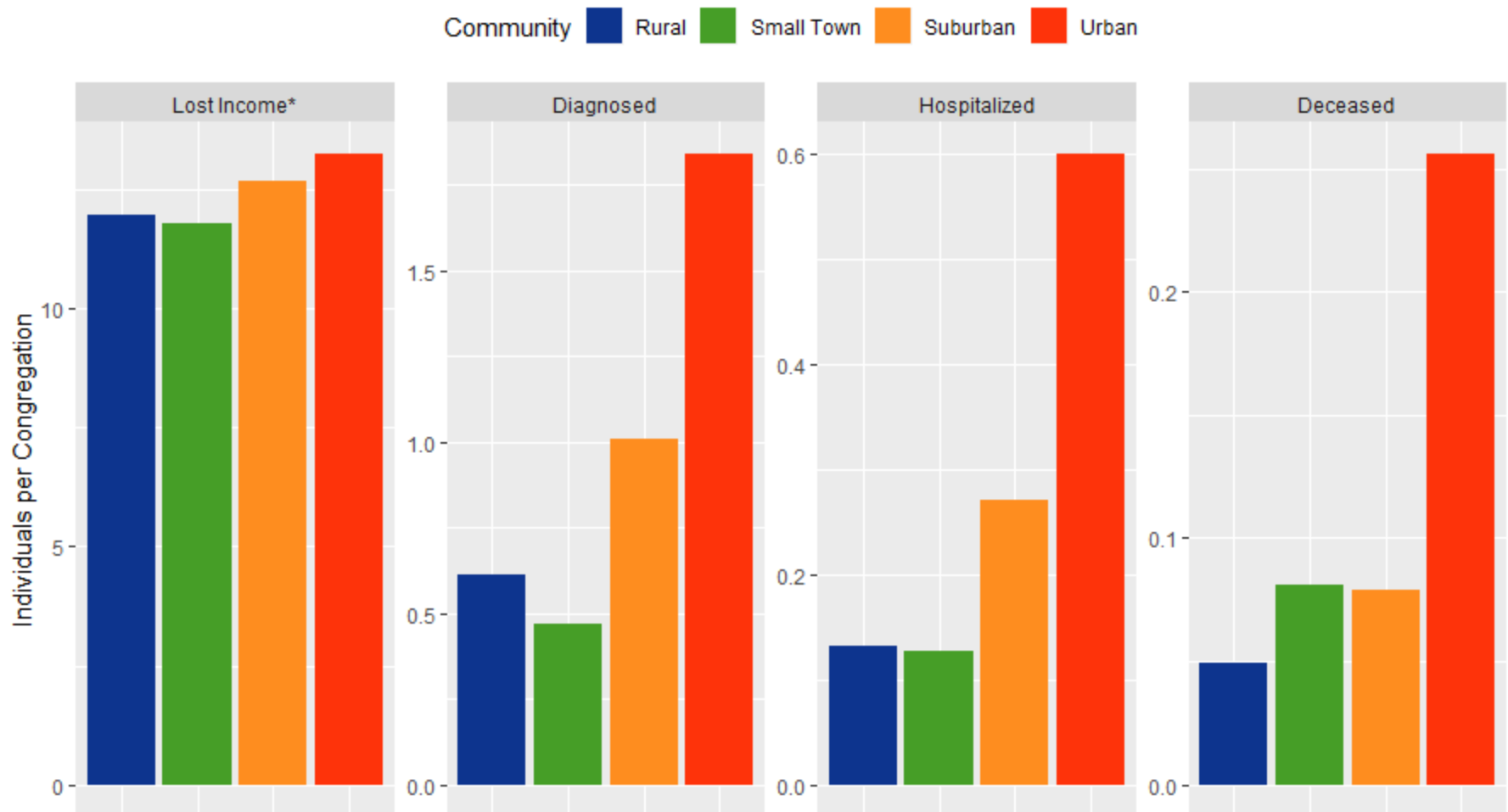


# LUTHERAN HOUSEHOLDS WITH COVID-RELATED LOST INCOME

(NUMBERS AS REPORTED IN THE SURVEY)



## WHILE URBANITES WERE MORE SEVERELY AFFECTED BY THE VIRUS, ALL COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCED THE ECONOMIC IMPACT



\* Lost income was counted in terms of households while the other items counted individuals.



# DESPITE THE BAD NEWS, INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES DISPLAY OPTIMISM AND RESILIENCE

- **3-in-4 congregations** say their members more clearly see the importance of their Lutheran identity
- **Over 85% of congregations...**
  - Found opportunities for ministry and outreach during the pandemic
  - Say their church community is strong, despite being physically distanced
  - Have a plan for moving forward
  - *Disagree that they felt like they faced this crisis alone*
- **Over 95%** of respondents agree that they have been able to find joy during the pandemic (with over a quarter strongly agreeing)

However...

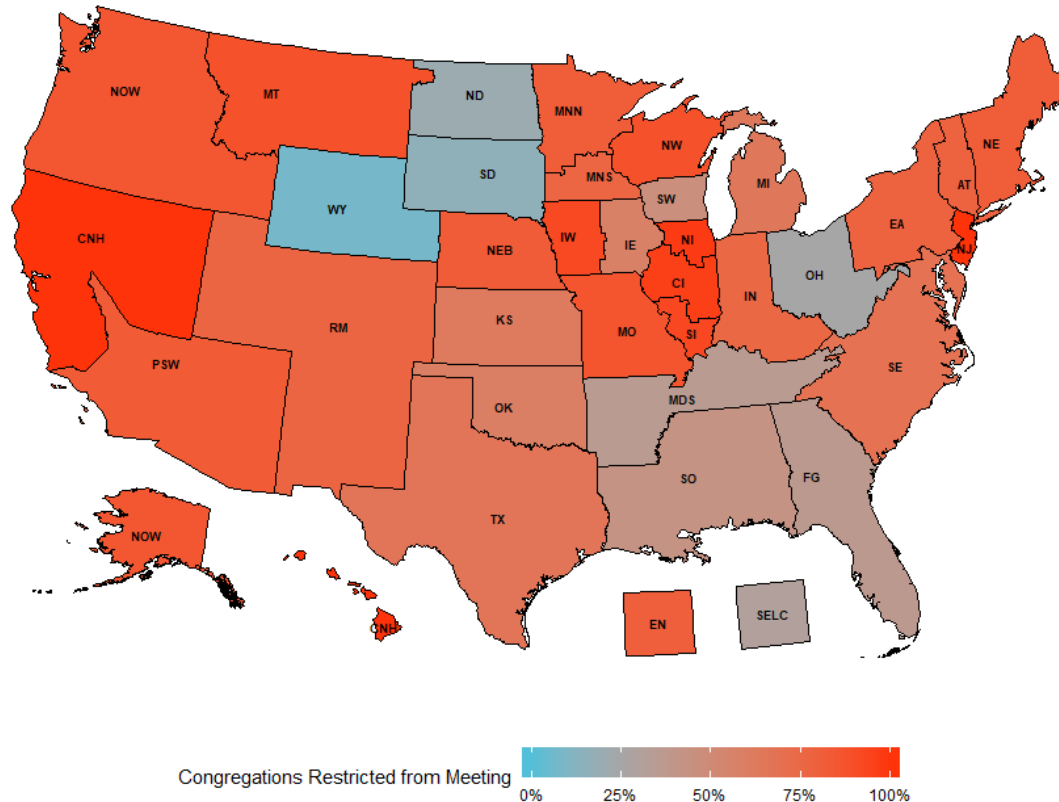
- **80% of senior/sole pastors** say they have been even busier than normal during the pandemic
  - *This only drops to 74% among other types of survey respondents*
- **65% of rostered workers** say they are personally worn down by the added stress
  - *49% of lay respondents also say they are worn down*
- **13% of respondents** worry that their congregation may not be viable after the pandemic
  - *70% of these were already struggling, and a fifth of them were already worried about their future*
  - *Only 3% of all congregations have new worries about their viability because of the pandemic*



# IMPACT ON CONGREGATION LIFE

CONGREGATIONS AND COVID-19

# RESTRICTIONS ON GATHERING FOR WORSHIP IN EVERY DISTRICT



- **Over two-thirds of congregations** were in communities that restricted churches from gathering in-person for worship
  - There were congregations in every district that were not permitted to gather in-person for worship
  - Congregations in rural areas were just as likely as urban and suburban areas to be forced to suspend gatherings for a time
- Just over **twenty percent** of congregations were allowed to continue gathering for worship, as long they limited capacity and practiced social distancing.
  - Only **five percent** of congregations say they were always free to meet as usual

# SUDDEN SYNODWIDE HALT OF IN-PERSON WORSHIP IN MARCH

## OVER 80% WERE ONLY ONLINE, AND LESS THAN 15% MET IN-PERSON FOR EASTER

	No restrictions	Reduced Capacity	Online Only	No Service
Mar 1 -	91%	2%	6%	1%
Mar 7 -	88%	4%	6%	1%
Mar 15 -	65%	10%	21%	4%
Mar 21 -	14%	10%	65%	11%
Mar 29 -	6%	9%	77%	9%
Apr 5 -	3%	9%	80%	8%
HolyWeek -	2%	8%	80%	9%
Apr 12 -	3%	11%	81%	6%
Apr 19 -	3%	10%	82%	6%
Apr 26 -	3%	10%	81%	6%

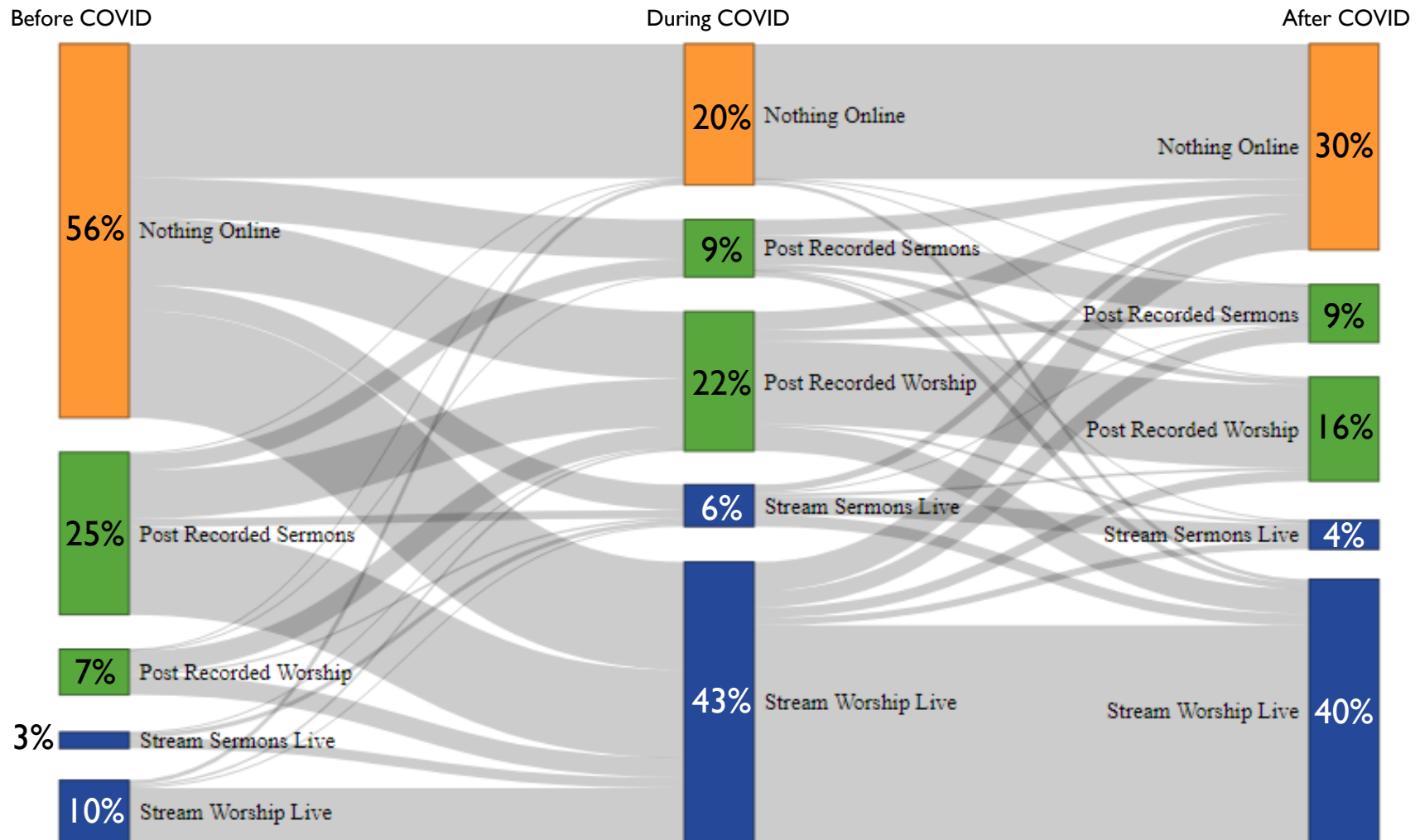
## THE RETURN TO IN-PERSON SERVICES HAS BEEN MORE GRADUAL, MOST CHURCHES ARE NOW MEETING, THOUGH OFTEN WITH REDUCED CAPACITY

	No restrictions	Reduced Capacity	Online Only	No Service
May 3 -	5%	13%	76%	5%
May 10 -	7%	21%	68%	4%
May 17 -	9%	26%	61%	4%
May 24 -	12%	31%	53%	3%
May 31 -	17%	42%	39%	3%
Jun 6 -	23%	49%	26%	2%
Jun 14 -	26%	55%	18%	1%
Jun 21 -	29%	58%	12%	1%
Jun 28 -	31%	59%	9%	1%
Jul 5 -	36%	56%	7%	1%

# SCRIPTURE & PRAYER HAD THE MOST INFLUENCE ON DECISIONS ABOUT GATHERING FOR WORSHIP, AFTER THE GOVERNMENT

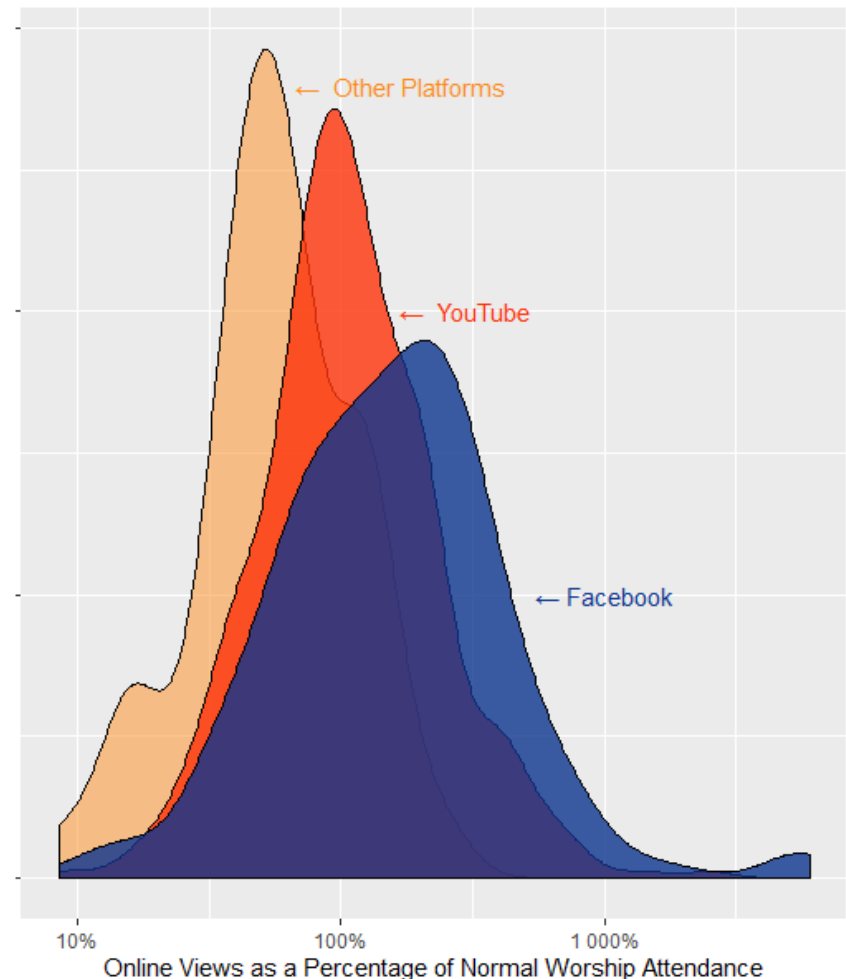
	Major	Significant	Minor	Not at all
Government -	64.5%	28.7%	5.4%	1.4%
Bible -	63.2%	26.7%	6.9%	3.1%
Prayer -	61.8%	27.1%	7.9%	3.2%
Medical Experts -	53.2%	37.5%	8.1%	1.1%
Congregation Leaders -	47.5%	39.1%	10.2%	3.3%
District -	26.8%	36.8%	26.6%	9.7%
Synod -	19.9%	32.0%	33.7%	14.3%
Other Churches -	10.6%	30.7%	41.9%	16.8%
Secular Media -	2.6%	16.6%	47.6%	33.1%
Christian Media -	2.5%	15.6%	49.9%	32.1%

# MOST WILL CONTINUE OFFERING ONLINE SERMONS OR WORSHIP LONG-TERM, EVEN AFTER THE PANDEMIC SITUATION IS OVER



# CONGREGATIONS QUICKLY ADAPTED TO ONLINE SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT PREPARED TO TRACK ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

- Nearly **70%** of congregations that posted worship or sermons online, posted them to more than one location.
- Facebook was by far the most popular platform for sharing worship services or sermons, with over **70% of the congregations** who posted online using it
- YouTube came in second (**59%**), just ahead of churches using their own website to host videos (**55%**)
- All other options (Zoom, Google Meet, Vimeo, etc.) were used far less frequently (**less than 12% each**)
- Among those that posted online content, **75%** made an effort to track their views
- **However**, the counting methods of different platforms made it difficult to accurately assess engagement.
  - Facebook, for instance, counts videos that auto-play for three seconds as a “view”, including multiple “views” from the same individual (this has highly inflated the view counts from Facebook).
  - YouTube counts a view only if the person watches for at least 30 seconds, and it also counts multiple views.
- The survey asked congregations to report their views from a typical worship service, and the numbers are dramatically inflated and vary greatly by hosting platforms.







# ALL OF CONGREGATION LIFE WAS AFFECTED, NOT JUST WORSHIP

- **64% of congregations** had to cancel or postpone regular business meetings
- **59%** convened staff or leadership meetings online
- **49%** had to postpone confirmations
  - 21% postponed baptisms
  - 28% postponed weddings or funerals
- **47%** canceled summer VBS
- **28%** required worshipers to wear masks
- **Less than 3% of congregations** continued in-person Sunday School, Bible Studies, or other classes
  - 40% completely canceled all classes and small groups
  - 33% continued with classes meeting online
  - 20% replaced existing classes with online content for wider audiences
- **67% of congregations** provided midweek Bible Studies or devotionals online
- **59%** offered the Lord's Supper on an individual or family basis
- **56%** intentionally contacted all households at least once every two weeks
  - 31% tried to make contact every week
- **41%** report they found new ways to meet needs of people in their community during the pandemic



# IMPACT ON FINANCES

CONGREGATIONS AND COVID-19



## BY JUNE, LESS THAN 12% OF LCMS CONGREGATIONS SAY GIVING IS DOWN SIGNIFICANTLY

One of the biggest questions on most people's minds about the COVID-19 pandemic was the economy. When many congregations had to halt in-person gatherings in March and many church members were furloughed from their jobs, there were serious questions about the impact on giving.

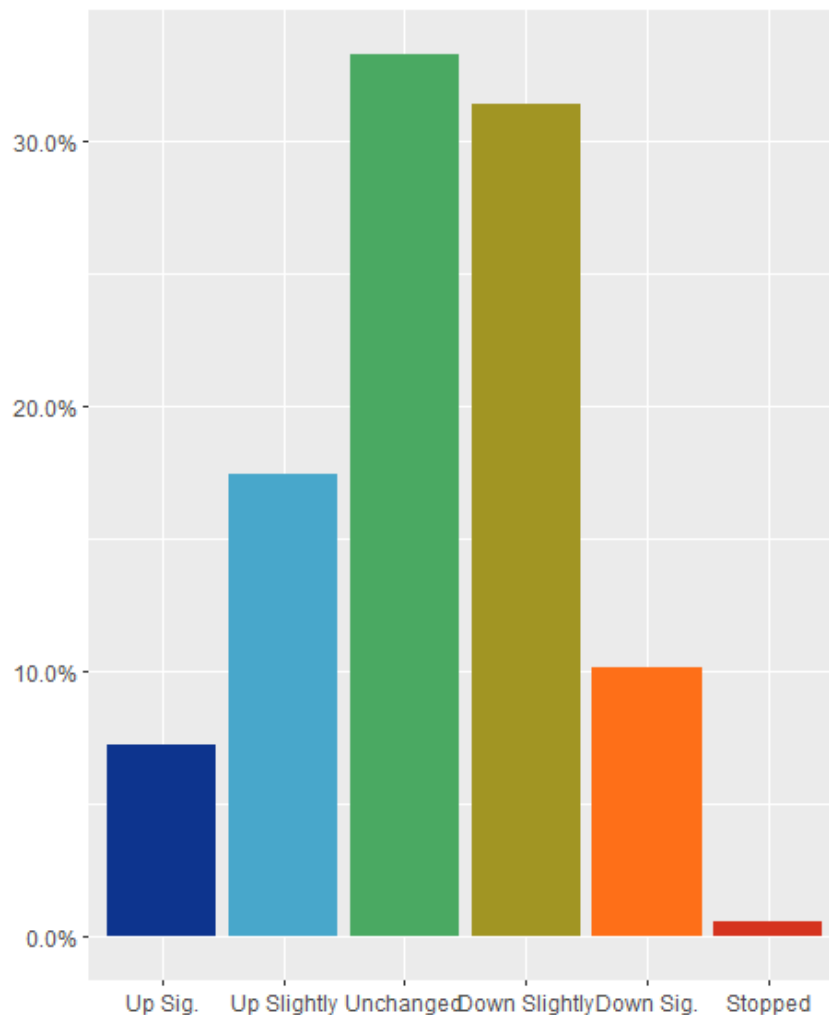
Early signs suggest that the situation seems to be far less severe than at first feared:

- **Over a quarter of congregations** report their giving is actually up from the previous year.
- **Less than half** of congregations say giving is down, and most of those report it is only down slightly.
- **Nearly 90%** of congregations believe they will get through this with no or only minor budget changes

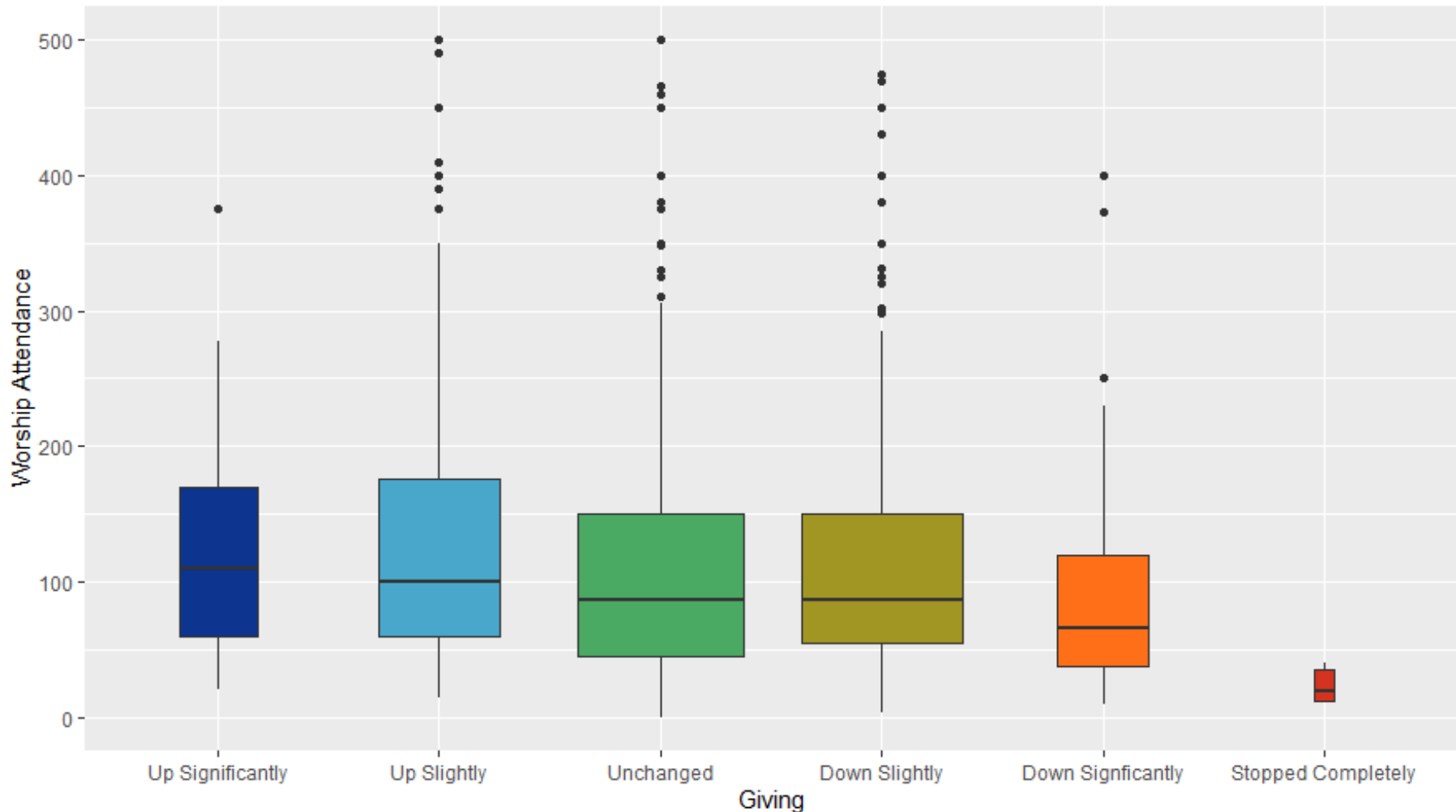
Several congregations point out their decline in giving was offset by spending decreases in ministry areas and lower utility bills as buildings went unused.

*Other research into congregation finances is also finding optimistic news, including this recent report from the ECFA:*

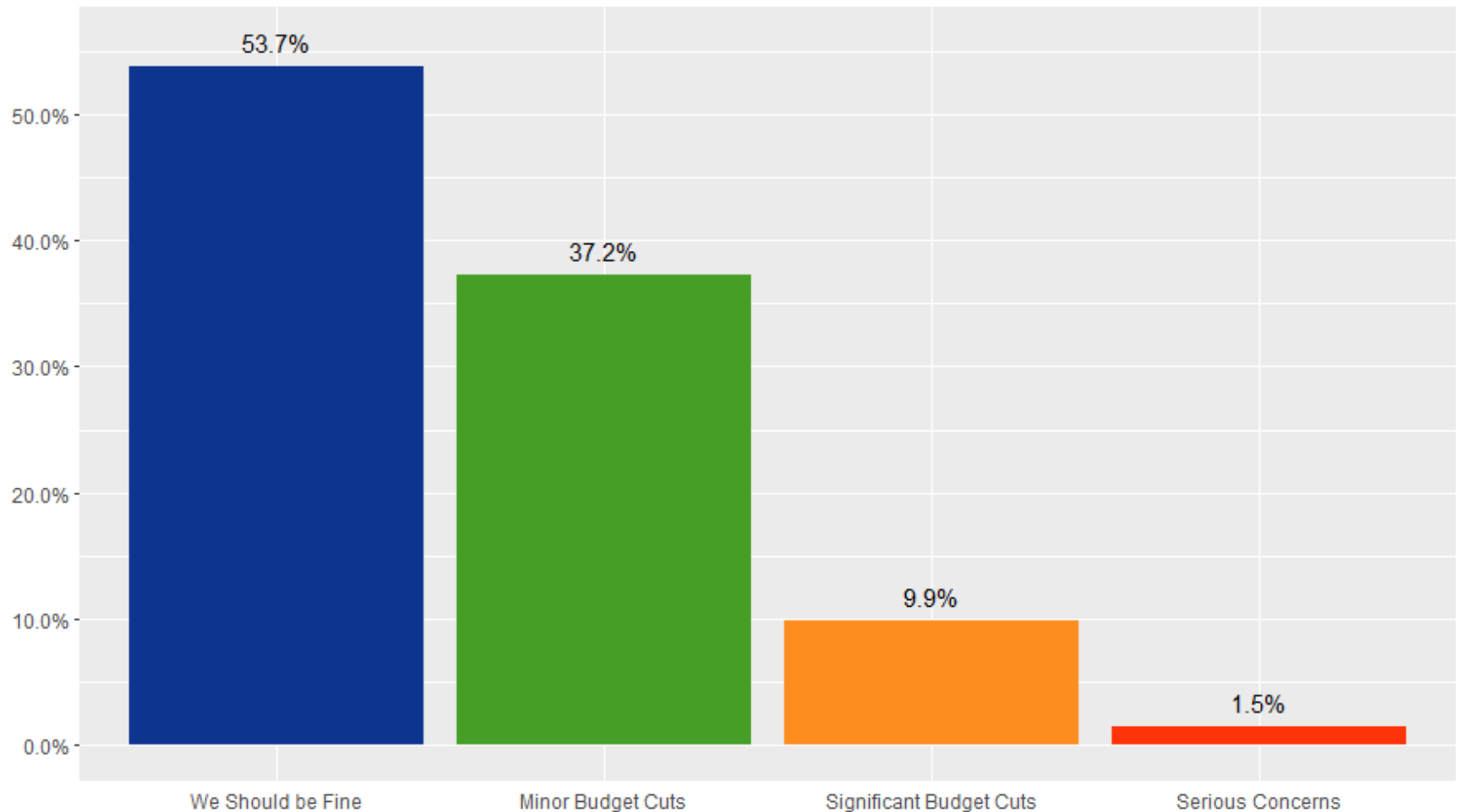
<https://www.ecfa.org/FileAccess.aspx?file=Covid19FinRep&source=Church>



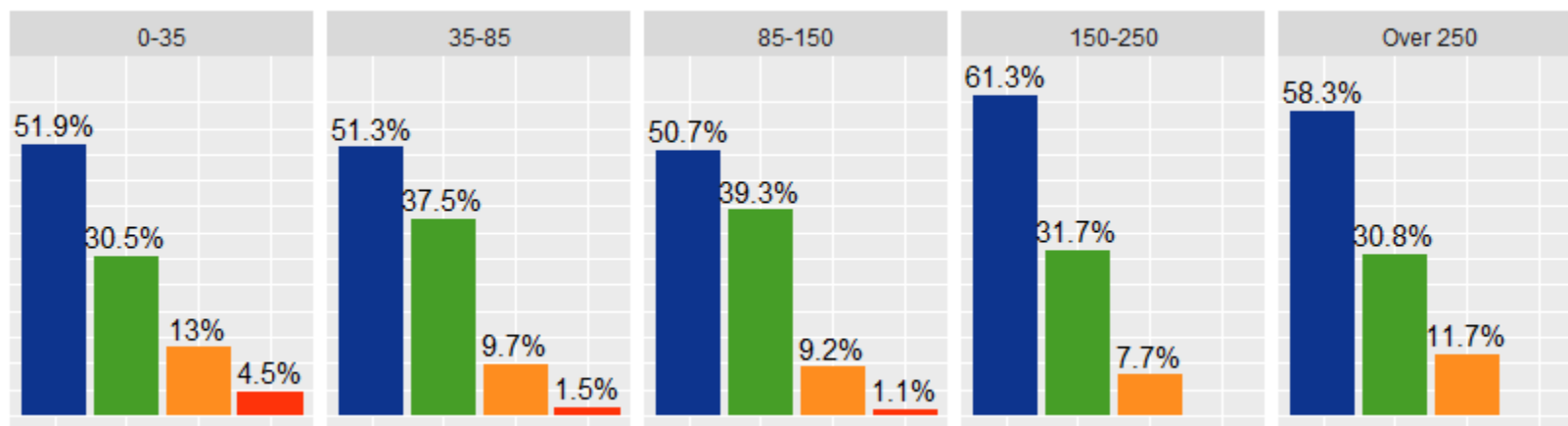
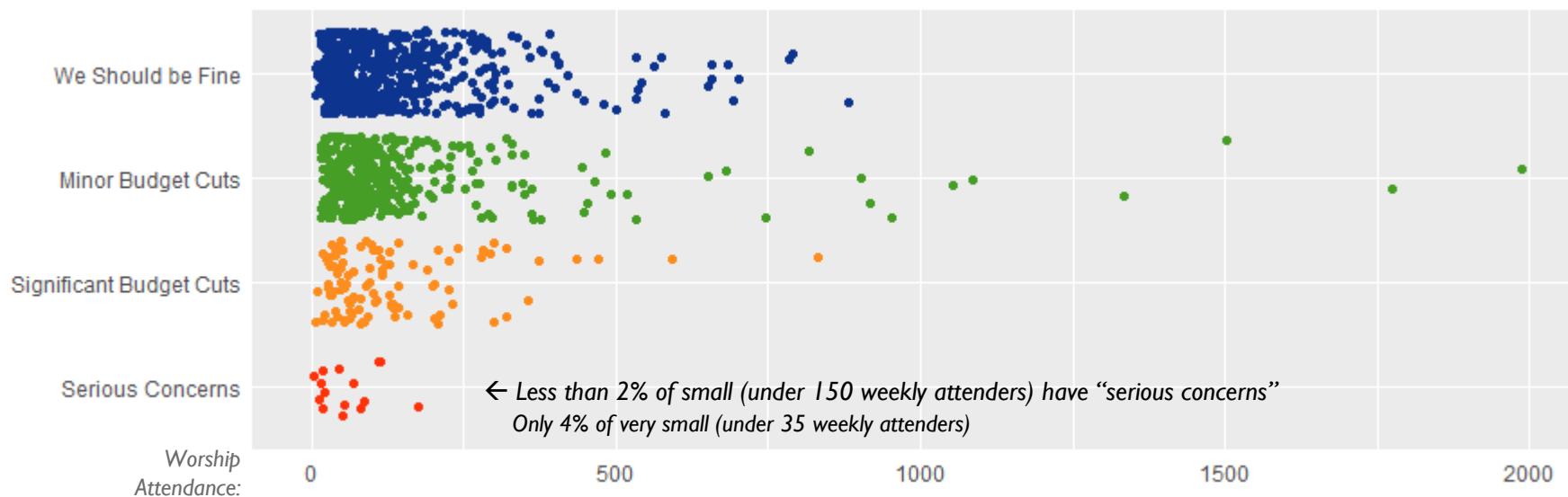
ONLY A FEW VERY SMALL CONGREGATIONS HAD GIVING STOP  
OTHERWISE, GIVING WAS NOT AFFECTED BY SIZE, NOR BY COMMUNITY TYPE



## THE VAST MAJORITY OF CONGREGATIONS SAY THEY CAN GET THROUGH THIS WITH NO OR ONLY MINOR BUDGET CUTS

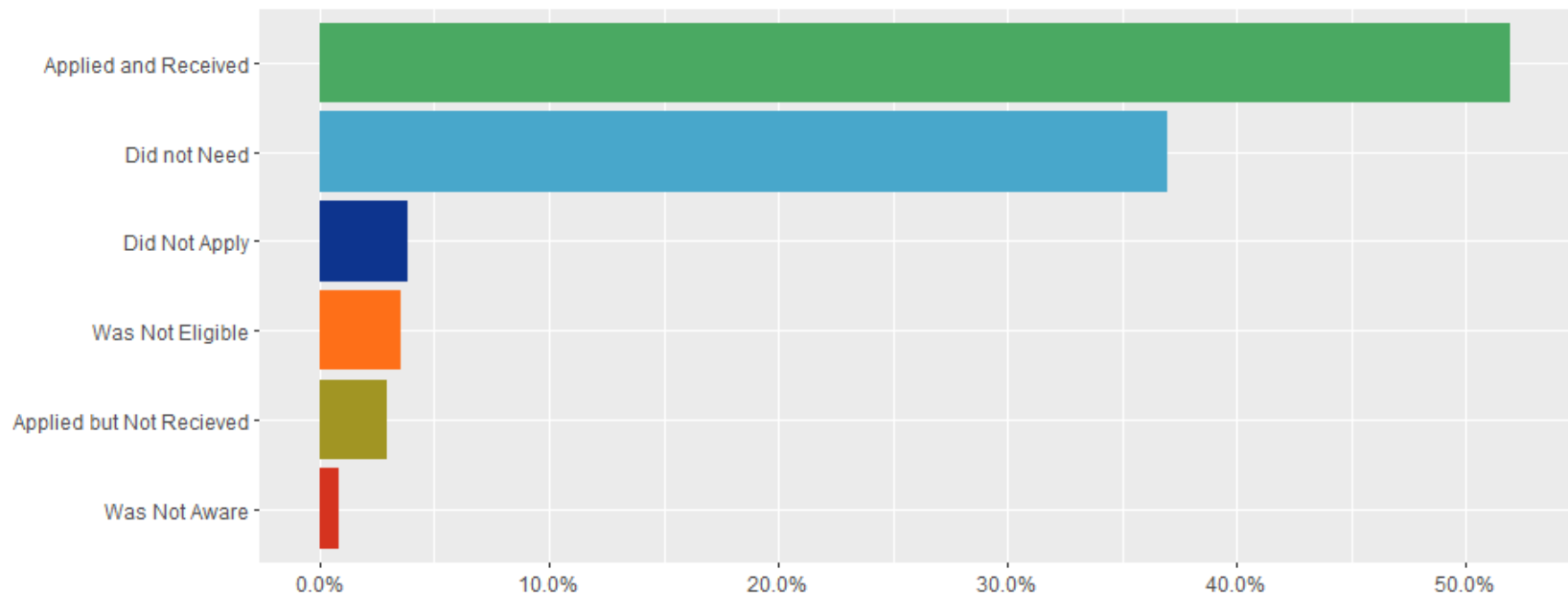


# ONLY SMALL CONGREGATIONS IN “SERIOUS” FINANCIAL TROUBLE BUT VERY LARGE CONGREGATIONS ARE LIKELY TO MAKE MINOR BUDGET CUTS

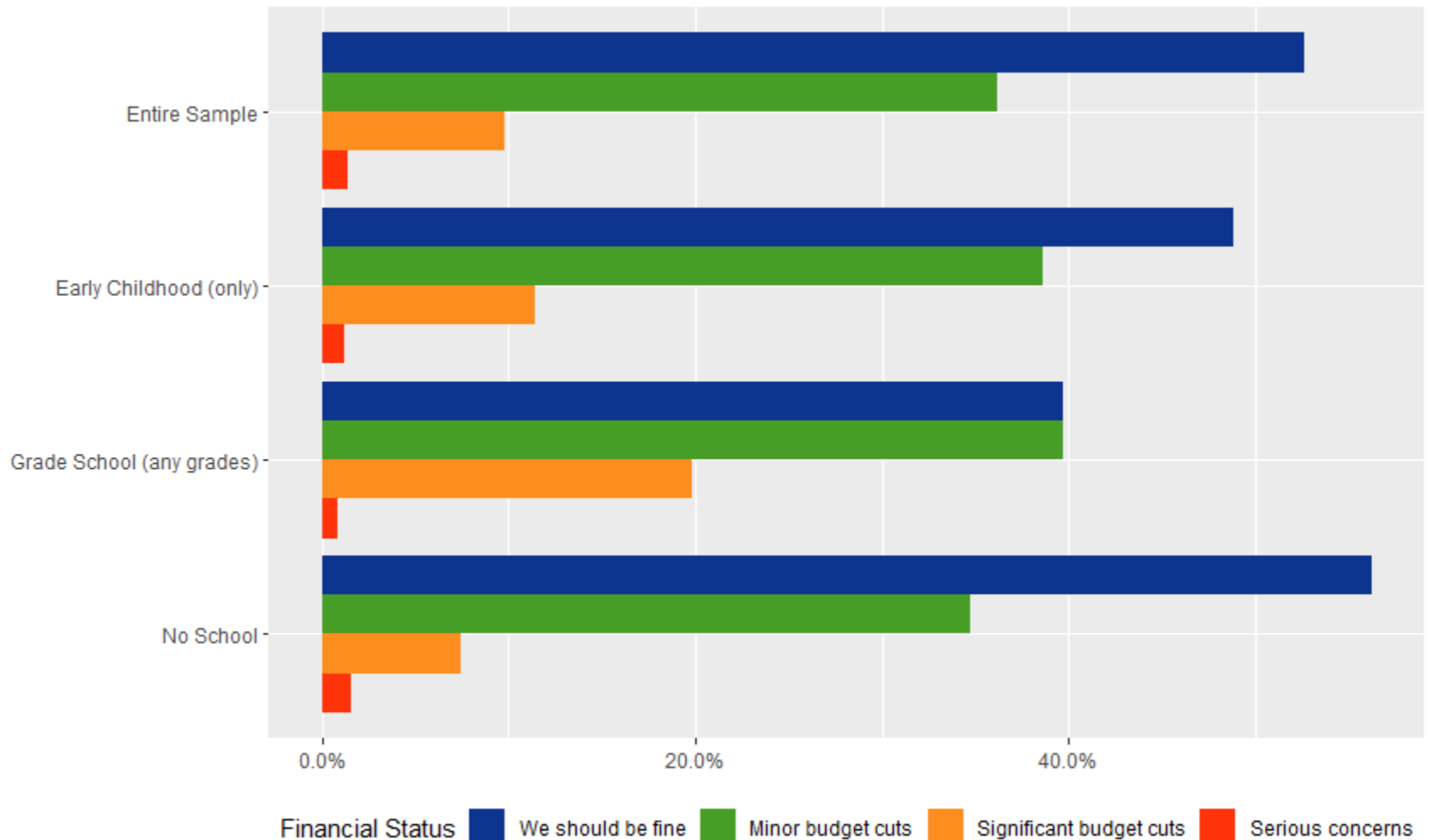


# MORE THAN HALF OF LCMS CONGREGATIONS RECEIVED LOANS FROM THE PAYCHECK PROTECTION PROGRAM

- **Over a third of congregations** report they did not apply for the loans because they did not need the money
  - *Their answers to other financial questions corroborate that they experienced little financial impact*
- **The remaining 12%** of congregations are among the congregations in the most dire financial situations
  - *The most common reason given by these congregations for choosing not to apply for loans was that congregations did not feel comfortable accepting government money*

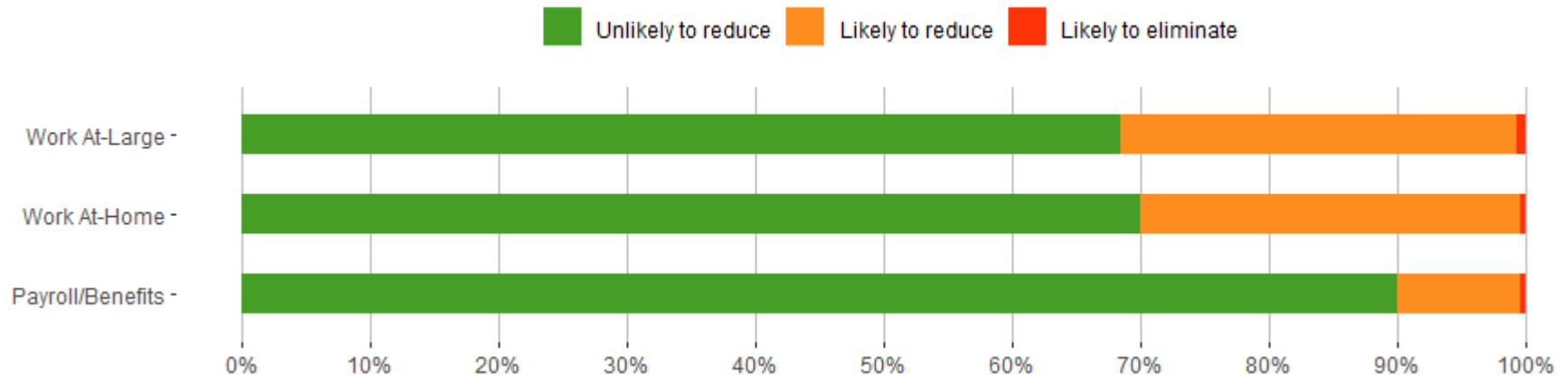


## CONGREGATIONS THAT OWN AND OPERATE A SCHOOL WERE MORE LIKELY TO SAY THEY WILL MAKE SIGNIFICANT BUDGET CUTS



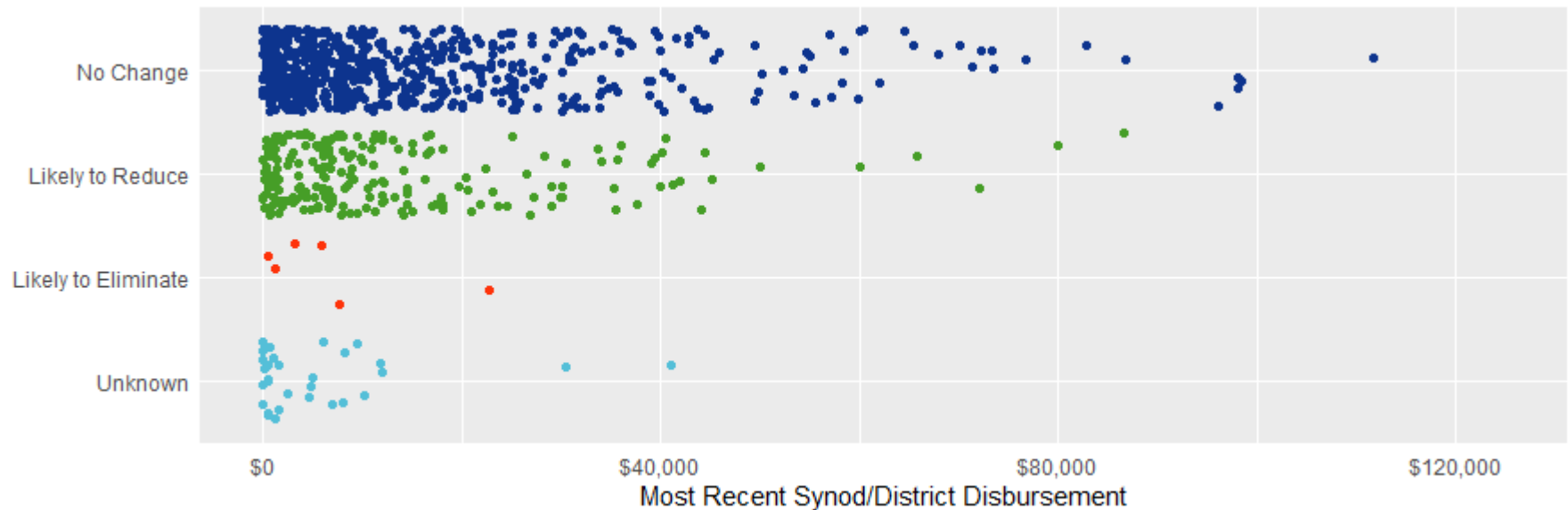


## MOST SAY THEIR BUDGETS, *ESPECIALLY PAYROLL*, WILL NOT BE REDUCED



- *Not shown:* **10% of congregations did not provide an answer**
- Among those that did, **over two-thirds** do not plan to make any reductions to their At-Home or At-Large budgets
- **Nearly 90% of congregations** do not expect to make any reductions to payroll budgets
  - *In a separate question 20% say they have furloughed staff or reduced working hours*
- **Nearly 40% of congregations** provided a means and/or encouraged electronic giving during the pandemic
  - *Up from only 25% prior to the pandemic*
- **27% of congregations** took advantage of loan repayment relief (such as mortgage deferrals)
- **Twenty percent** drew from financial reserves to pay church expenses

# CONGREGATIONS REDUCING OR ELIMINATING WORK-AT-LARGE TEND TO BE THOSE THAT ALREADY GIVE LESS



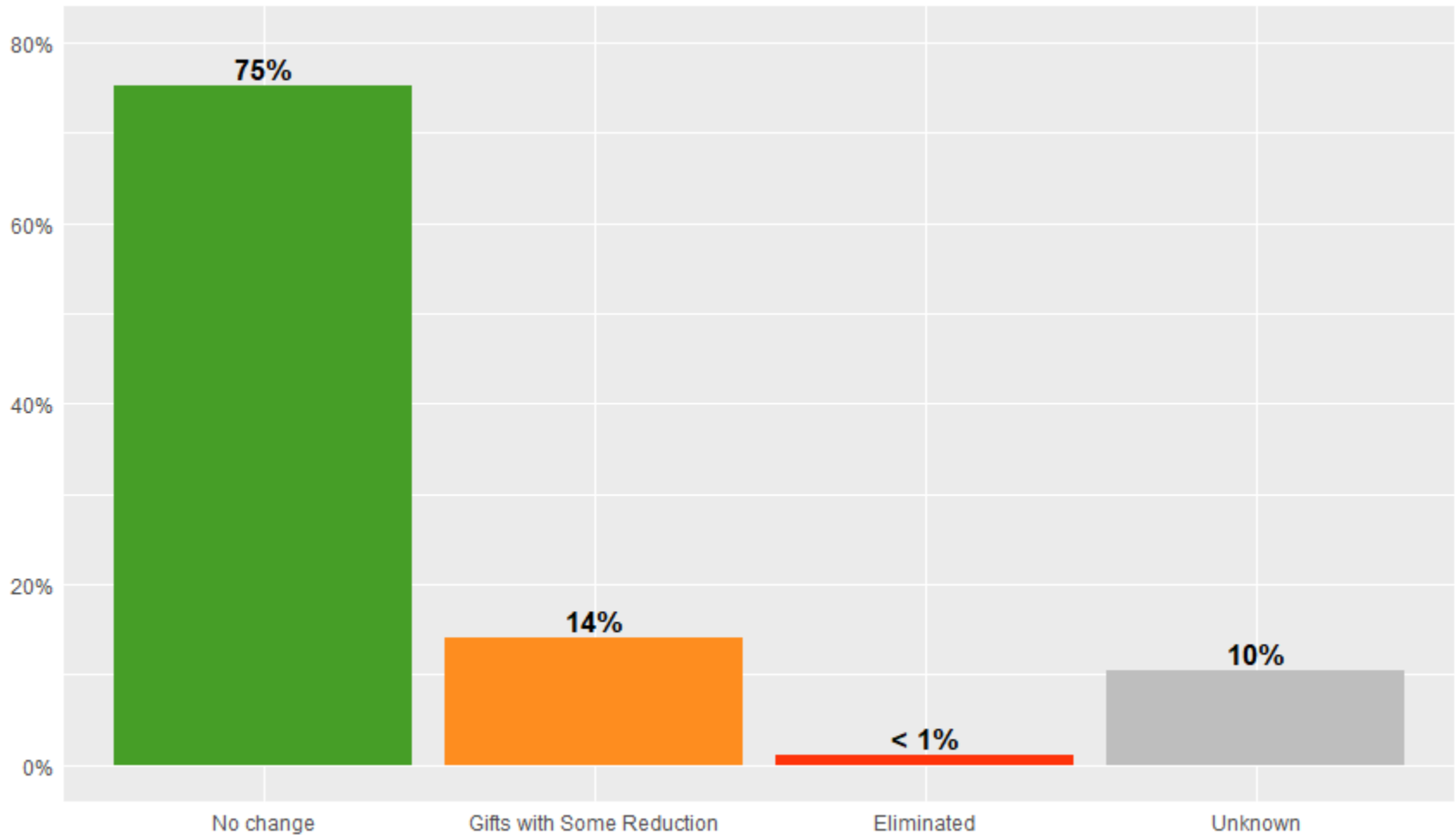
- The few congregations who are likely to eliminate their work-at-large budgets are among those already giving very low amounts to District and Synod.
- Likewise, those who did not give a definite answer have also given much lower amounts to District/Synod
- Those who are planning to reduce (but not eliminate) their work-at-large were already giving to District/Synod at a slightly lower rate than congregations who plan to make no change to work-at-large

## 30% OF CONGREGATIONS ARE LIKELY TO REDUCE BUT NOT ELIMINATE THEIR WORK-AT-LARGE CONTRIBUTIONS

- They are equally likely to be in any district/region or any community type (urban, rural, etc.)
- Likewise, congregation size (membership or attendance) was not a determining factor
- These congregations already **contribute a reduced amount** to work-at-large (*based on giving history*)
  - Combined, they have reported district and Synod disbursement amounts 20-30% lower than congregations of the same size that are not planning to reduce their work-at-large contributions
  - Congregations that say they will eliminate (not just reduce) their work-at-large budgets this year, report even lower district/Synod amounts (over half have never reported an amount on their annual statistics)
- They were **more likely to receive PPP loans** (60% compared to 50% of the entire sample)
- **Most (69%) say any budget cuts they make will likely only be minor** (*this was asked separately*)
- All together, these congregations have experienced an estimated **13% decrease in giving**

## ESTIMATED IMPACT TO DISTRICT AND SYNOD DISBURSEMENTS

*PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS – BASED ON MOST RECENT REPORT*



# KEY FACTORS STILL REMAIN UNKNOWN

- **How long will this situation last, and how will that continue to impact the U.S. economy?**

- This analysis of congregation finances is based on the first half of 2020. We do not know what is in store for the economy for the rest of the year. If we have already been through the worst, then it is very likely this estimate will improve, but the estimate may worsen if there is another economic downturn.

- **To what extent will work-at-large disbursements follow giving patterns?**

- Contributions may be down 20%, but the impact on work-at-large will not necessarily follow that. Some congregations rely on other sources of income that have not been factored in. Some congregations may have to reduce work-at-large disproportionately because other costs are fixed. For others, their reduction to work-at-large might be minimal as utilities have been lower, mortgages were deferred, and payroll was covered by the PPP.
- Also, over 25% of congregations say their giving is up. Will these congregations *increase* their contributions?

- **What else is impacted by work-at-large reductions?**

- Synod and district contributions are only part of Work-At-Large disbursements. Missionaries, RSOs, schools, local charities can be included in this line-item. All of these may be affected proportionately, or congregations that reduce their work-at-large may choose to keep the same level of support for some while eliminating support for others.

- **To what extent will districts have to reduce Synod's share?**

- This analysis only considers the decisions of congregations. Congregations contribute to their districts, and each district contributes to Synod nationally. Districts will be the first to assess the impact on work-at-large. They will then have to adjust their budgets, including what they send to Synod. The amount they send also could be affected disproportionately.

- **What about sampling error?**

- While there is accurate representation from all districts in our sample, we do not have enough responses to make conclusions from a district-level analysis of the financial impact. With over 1,000 congregations, our margin of error for all of Synod is only +/-2.5%. This means we can explore large groups of congregations such as rural congregations or large congregations with confidence. However, spread across 35 districts, the response volume from any individual district is not sufficient for making broad generalizations on the district-level summary data.



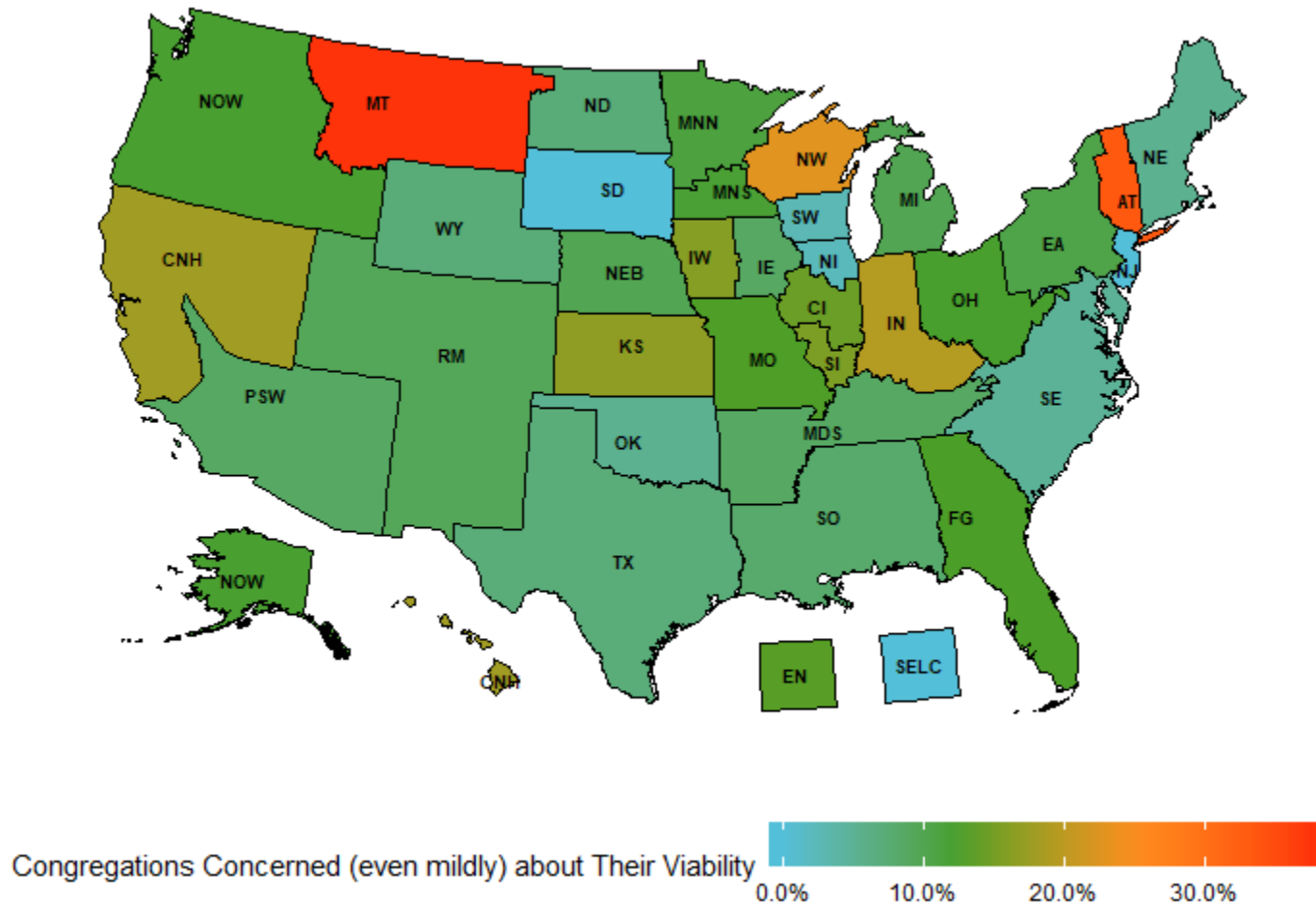
# SUPPORT AND RESOURCES MOVING FORWARD

CONGREGATIONS AND COVID-19



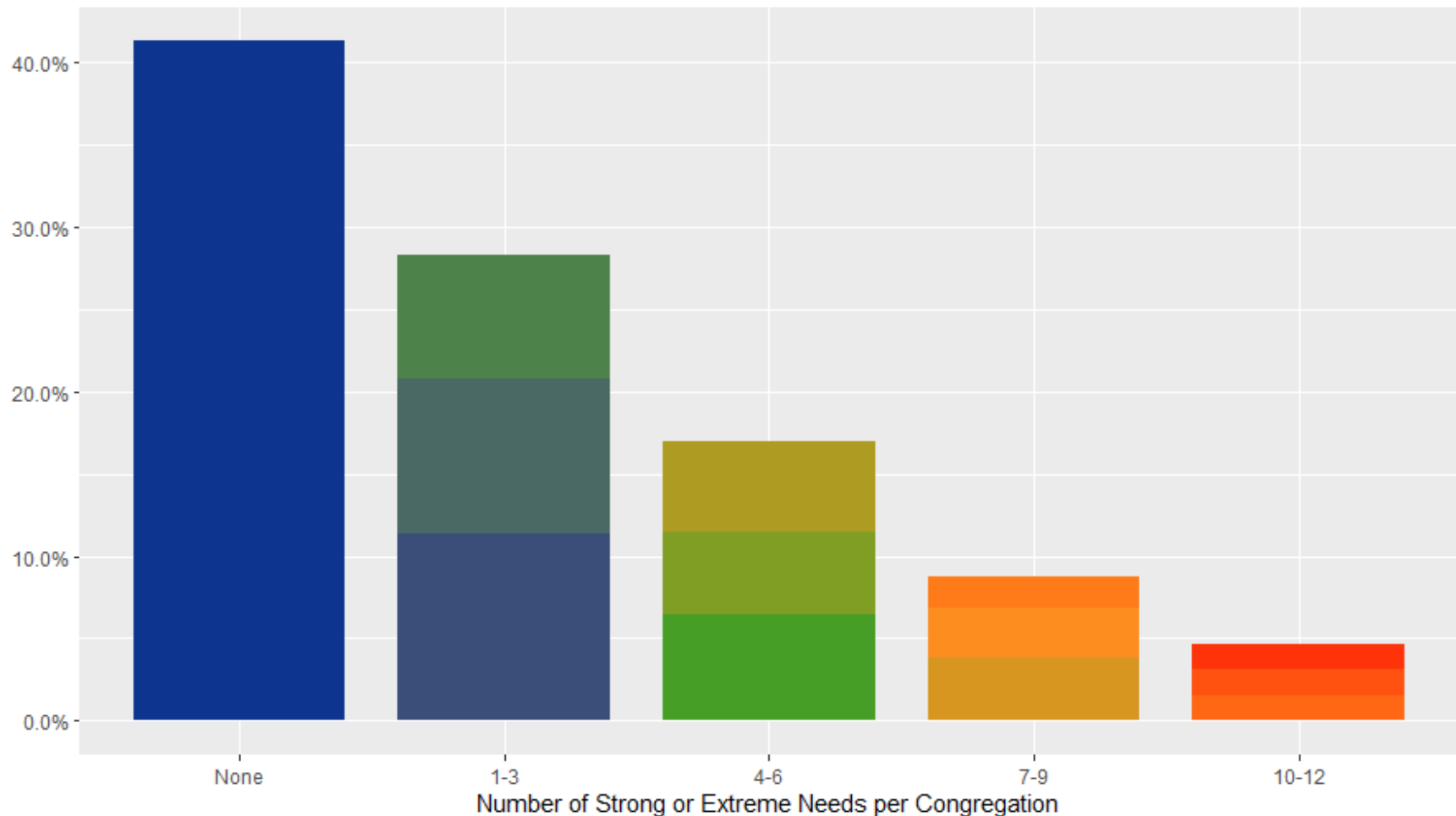
# 13% OF CONGREGATIONS HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT VIABILITY

*MOST OF THESE (70%) ALREADY HAD CONCERNS PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC*



*Based on responses to four separate items about financial and/or long-term viability.*

40% REPORT HAVING NO MAJOR NEEDS AT THE TIME OF SURVEY  
ANOTHER 28% INDICATE ONLY 3 OR FEWER MAJOR NEEDS





# THE MOST COMMON NEEDS CONGREGATIONS SHARE FOCUS ON RELATIONAL MINISTRY RATHER THAN OPERATIONAL LOGISTICS

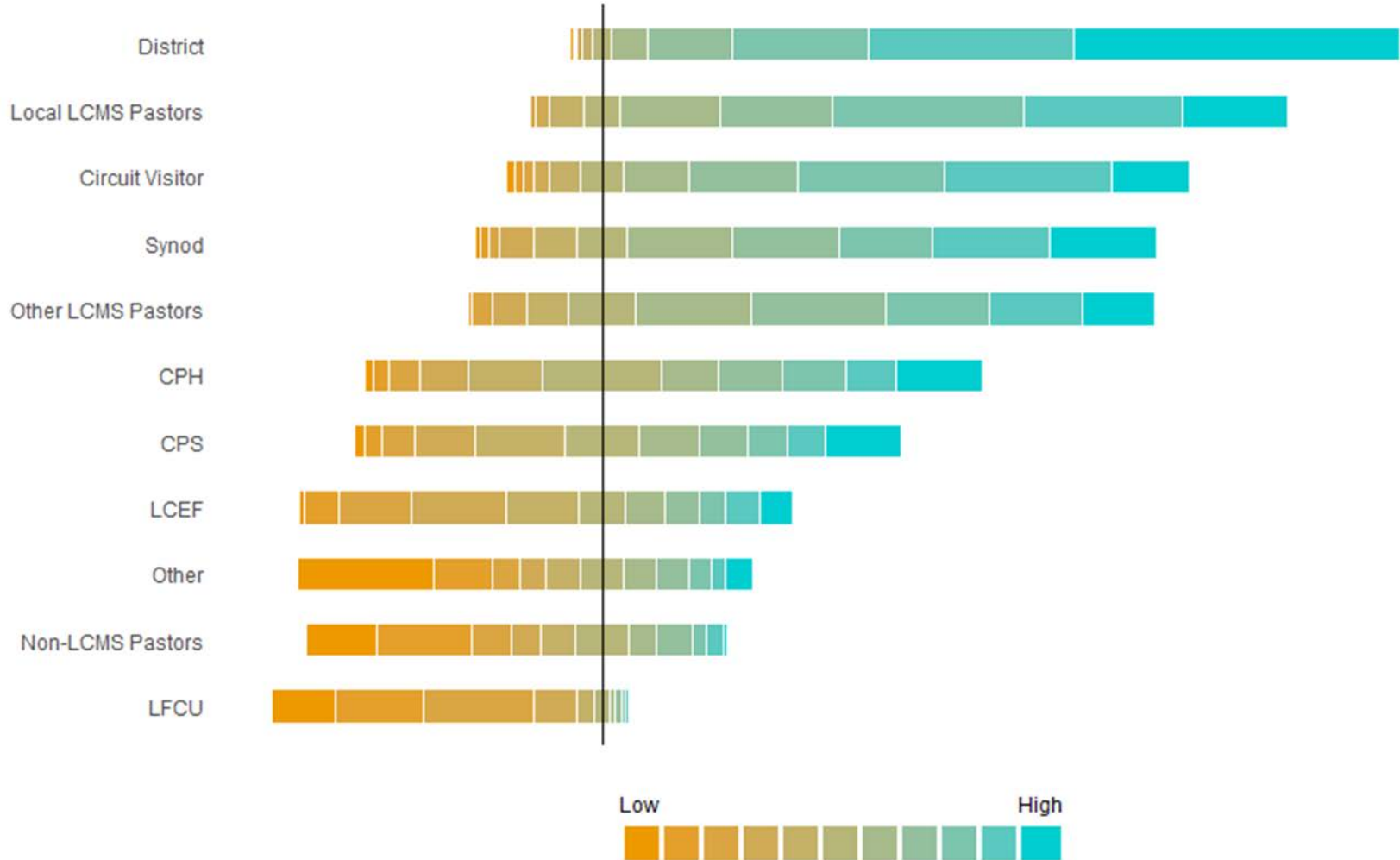
	Strong Need	Moderate Need	Would be nice	Not at all
Strategies to minister remotely -	34%	22%	26%	18%
Resources to provide related Bible Study content -	30%	23%	25%	22%
Practices for keeping people safe in a pandemic -	28%	25%	26%	20%
Strategies for outreach when social distancing -	26%	25%	29%	20%
Support cultivating an online community -	24%	21%	26%	29%
How to be compliant with local regulations -	21%	25%	28%	26%
Support with Streaming/Posting Online -	22%	21%	24%	34%
Training on how to communicate in a crisis -	18%	23%	30%	29%
Training on how to lead in a crisis -	15%	23%	32%	30%
Support setting up or promoting online giving -	17%	18%	21%	45%
Strategies to survive the financial crunch -	14%	20%	33%	33%
Information about the virus itself -	14%	20%	27%	40%

## LIKEWISE, THE MOST COMMON OBSTACLES AND FRUSTRATIONS RELATED TO MINISTERING DIRECTLY TO PEOPLE

- **Nearly half of congregations** identified administering the sacraments was an obstacle they could not get past
  - Most of these congregations (**27%** of the total) identified this as a **major obstacle**
  - Only **a quarter** of all congregations said this was never an obstacle
- Likewise, **half of congregations** reported that reaching people without internet access was an obstacle they could not get past
  - Though most who found it an obstacle said this was only a **minor one** (**38%** of the total)
- Other common obstacles included: *(percentages of those saying each was an obstacle they never overcame)*
  - **36%** Creating a meaningful experience apart from the ministry of presence
  - **29%** Getting people interested in participating online
  - **28%** Conducting business in accordance with by-laws (holding meetings, paying bills, etc.)
  - **27%** Members preferring online content from another church
  - **24%** Sound or video quality of online worship
- Items that were generally not obstacles:
  - Paying for the needed technology: **77%** never an obstacle and **13%** an obstacle they overcame
  - Licenses for sharing copywritten material: **73%** never an obstacle and **16%** an obstacle they overcame
  - Lack of expertise with technology: **59%** never an obstacle and **24%** an obstacle they overcame

# MOST CONGREGATIONS WILL LOOK FOR HELP LOCALLY

*“RANK WHERE YOU ARE MOST LIKELY TO LOOK FOR SUPPORT MOVING FORWARD”*



# FROM WHERE ELSE DOES MY HELP COME?

*“HOW MUCH DID EACH IMPACT THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF YOUR CONGREGATION?”*

District -	23%	25%	28%	3%	15%	6%
Local Congregations -	18%	26%	30%	3%	18%	5%
Synod -	17%	21%	31%	4%	24%	3%
Non-Local Pastors -	11%	25%	33%	3%	20%	8%
Circuit Visitor -	18%	21%	25%	4%	22%	10%
CPS -	7%	15%	26%	5%	32%	15%
LCEF -	6%	12%	19%	5%	38%	21%
LFCU -	2%	3%	5%	6%	46%	37%
	Significant	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Negative	No Impact	Not applicable

- District offices were the most impactful source of help for congregations during the pandemic
  - In all but 4 of the 35 districts, combined ratings from congregations cited the district office in the top three the most influential sources of help during the pandemic
    - Indiana, North Wisconsin, Rocky Mountain and Southern Illinois were the other four
    - District ratings were especially high in Atlantic, New Jersey, and Northern Illinois districts where the virus was strong early on
- In 28 districts, neighboring LCMS congregations were also among the top three most positive influences (usually second to the district office)
- Synod Nationally ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, and circuit visitors tied with non-neighboring LCMS pastors as 4<sup>th</sup>



# CONCLUSIONS

CONGREGATIONS AND COVID-19



## FOR CONGREGATION LEADERS:

- **Good job!** This year has dealt a difficult hand, and your hard work made a difference. Continue to be “with” your people however you can – even if that means staying at a distance for a little while longer. We will get through this, and when we do, people will need the ministry of presence.
- Do what you can to **foster community** however possible right now. We are blessed to face this crisis with so many readily available technologies to keep us connected. If you need help with these technologies or any creative ideas, reach out, there are many who will provide help.
- **Check in with each other.** The majority of our congregations have done well in this crisis, but there still are many with concerns. Congregations are especially interested in local help and support that is relational in nature. Look after your sisters.
- **Continue your Work-At-Large support** as much as possible. Missionaries, food pantries, Lutheran schools, your district office and Synod, are all facing a financial crunch. As giving levels begin to recover in your congregation, please consider supporting the larger Church body as we all work together in Gospel ministry.
- **If you need something, speak up.** Your Synod is eager to help – whether that be your circuit, your district, the Office of National Mission, or any of the corporate entities that exist to serve the church. All of these are your Synod, but in order to help you, they need to hear from you.
- **Don't overlook the emotional toll** this may have taken on you personally or on other clergy and congregation leaders. Each of us have faced new levels of burnout, stress and anxiety because of this crisis. Talk about your experiences and feelings. For the sake of your ministry, your family, and yourself, talk about what you are going through. You will find that you are not alone.

## FOR DISTRICTS

- **Congregations are most likely going to look to you** for help and support moving forward. On the one hand, this shows that they find value in your office, but it also means there will be lots of work ahead.
- **The concern shared by most congregations is that attendance will remain low even after things return to normal.** There is great concern that many have gotten too “comfortable” with the convenience of watching from home, and that it may be difficult to draw them back to church, even after the threat of the pandemic is gone.
  - *But they also recognize that many will come back, eager for fellowship and more committed than before!*
- **Their neighboring congregations and their circuit visitors** are the next most likely places they will look for help. One essential way to support and edify your congregations in this recovery time is to ensure that congregations are networked and interacting with one another. Make sure no one goes through this alone.
- **The help and resources they are looking for are relational.** While it may be easy to prepare a one-size-fits-all program or set of strategies, what many need most is a listening ear. There will still be times to give advice and connect to resources, but be prepared that what many need is just encouragement, emotional support, and prayer.
- **We are all in this together as one Synod.** When they are looking for resources, congregations may turn to you first, but you are not alone in being able to help them. We do not need to develop thirty-five separate paths to recovery, when congregations across the country are in the same situation. Work together with ONM and Synod’s corporate partners in supporting our congregations and ministries.

## FOR SYNOD NATIONALLY

- **Thankfully, the situation is not as dire as at first feared.** Very few congregations see this pandemic as a serious threat to their future. The vast majority have not seen their giving decrease significantly, and do not expect to make serious budget cuts.
  - However, that does not mean there won't be fall out. We very likely may see a higher number of closures in 2020, and the Synodical budget will likely experience a sizeable (but likely not severe, nor permanent) downturn.
- **Through spread across the nation, congregations face similar challenges.** Despite a few localized differences (notably in the communities hit hardest by the disease), the situations congregations face now have more in common than not.
  - They are looking for ways to minister individuals who are hesitant to come to a large gathering. They are learning how to use new technological tools. They are trying to re-engage those who prefer the convenience of virtual church. They have to shepherd a flock that has been polarized over how they chose to respond. They are now advocating to their local authorities for the church's ability to gather for worship.
  - Mostly, they need encouragement, support and prayer.
- **Allow Districts to serve their congregations.** They understand the unique context, and the congregations are more likely to turn to them first. Remember, Districts are the Synod in their place. We are working together.
- **Continue to provide top notch resources.** While congregations did not list Synod as the most influential or even most likely source of help, Synod nationally was still viewed favorably by most. Some congregations will turn to you directly, but even if they don't, their Districts likely will.





## THINGS TO KEEP AN EYE ON

- **Digital is becoming the new normal.** Congregations discovered that today's technology makes posting online worship incredibly simple. For better or worse, many are going to continue putting their worship services online even after the pandemic. This has the potential to be a profound sociological change, and needs to be monitored. Congregations do not need training on how to generate digital content. Rather they need guidance about the surrounding implications:
  - How will this change congregation statistics?
  - How will it affect the way people view "going" to church?
  - What are the theological implications about what it means to gather as Christ's church?
- **There are strong opinions about how the virus was handled.** Narrative comments provided through the survey suggest that there may be some degree of division in the Synod regarding the ways people responded to the pandemic. Because this was based on comments, it is not possible to measure the degree to which these opinions differ or are potentially divisive. However, it is clear from sentiment that there exists some degree of displeasure at the way congregations chose to handle the crisis, as well as how Synod as a whole responded.



## NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCHING THE IMPACT

- In August of 2020, Research Services is conducting a survey of rostered church workers (ordained and commissioned), to assess the impact of COVID-19 on them personally as well as professionally.
- In September of 2020, Research Services will conduct a survey of LCMS Schools (high schools, elementary schools, and early childhood centers) not only to learn how they handled the pandemic for both the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, but also to assess the impact this has had on staff, enrollment and education.
- In early 2021, Rosters and Statistics will begin collecting the 2020 year-end statistics, which will provide opportunity to assess the impact of the pandemic with direct measures of trends.
- Consideration will be given to subsequent surveys of congregations, church workers, or schools in order to track their recovery, even over years to come.

For questions about this research, contact LCMS Research Services: [research@lcms.org](mailto:research@lcms.org) | 314-996-1439

- Scott Kostencki, Director of Rosters, Statistics and Research Services
- Ryan Curnutt, Senior Research Analyst
- Hanna Pan, Data Analyst



# CHURCH WORKERS AND COVID-19

SEPT. 2020 – SURVEY OF LCMS ROSTERED CHURCH WORKERS





# SURVEY OVERVIEW

CHURCHWORKERS AND COVID-19



# BACKGROUND

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has created new challenges for congregations, ministries, and clergy throughout the Synod. Not only has there been a toll on human lives, but there have been economic and emotional waves that have affected everyone.

One word that has often been used to characterize the COVID-19 pandemic is "uncertain". Scientists and medical experts have been uncertain about exactly how the disease is transmitted. Government and local officials are uncertain about how and when to enforce restrictions on gatherings. Employees are uncertain about when (or even if) they will be able to return to work.

In June of 2020, LCMS Research Services conducted a survey of congregations to gauge how Lutheran churches across the country were coping with the pandemic. The results of that survey are available in a separate report.

The LCMS also has great concern about its clergy. Rostered church workers, both commissioned and ordained ministers have been affected by this pandemic in many of the same ways as the average American, but also in many unique ways.

To learn more about how LCMS church workers are dealing with the pandemic, this survey was launched in late summer of 2020.

This survey was an attempt to gauge the wellbeing of our church workers. It explores various aspects of wellbeing, including emotional health, relational wellbeing, vocation, finance, spirituality, and physical health.

This survey also sought to explore how our church workers have responded to the complicated pandemic situation. What are their opinions on how the Church has responded? How concerned are they about the virus itself? What do they need from their District and the national church body moving forward?

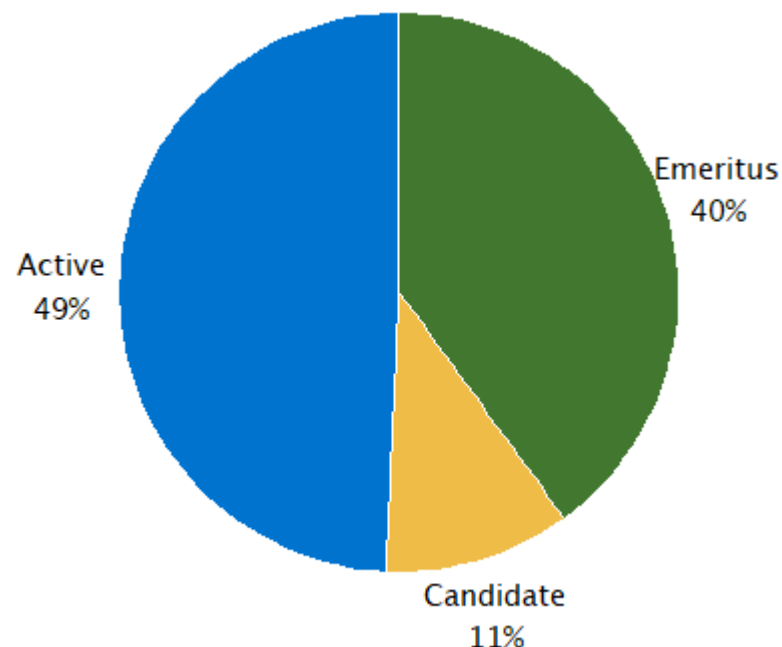
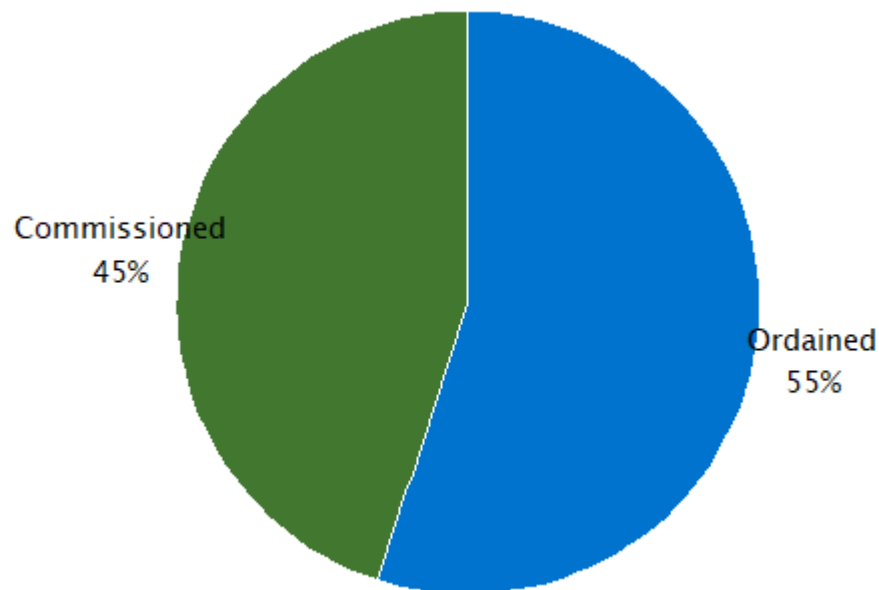
Finally, the survey also attempts to measure some basic practicalities of this situation, such as, how has it effected the call process, has it caused many calls to come to an early end, how are workers seeing their day-to-day responsibilities changing, to mention a few.

This survey is the second phase of the greater study of the COVID-19 pandemic on the LCMS. In addition to the completed congregation survey, another component is a study of LCMS schools, which was launched in early fall of 2020.

Given that the virus is still affecting the world, and the economic and social aspects of the pandemic are constantly changing, there will likely be follow up efforts to some of these studies, in the months (and possibly years) to come.

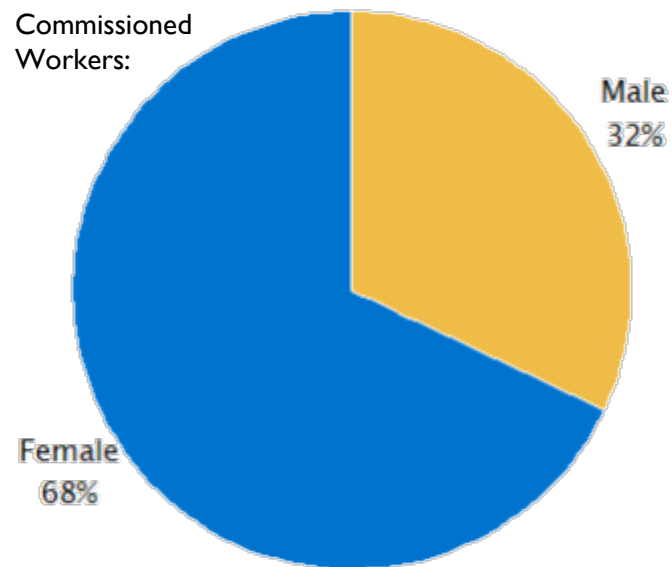
## THE SAMPLE AS A REFLECTION OF THE ROSTER

- The survey of church workers went out in September to a sample of 7,000 out of nearly 20,000 rostered workers, including active, candidate and emeritus commissioned and ordained ministers.
- Just over 400 church workers responded, so the margin of error for survey results is less than +/- 5%
- Though there are slightly more commissioned workers overall, more responses came from ordained ministers.

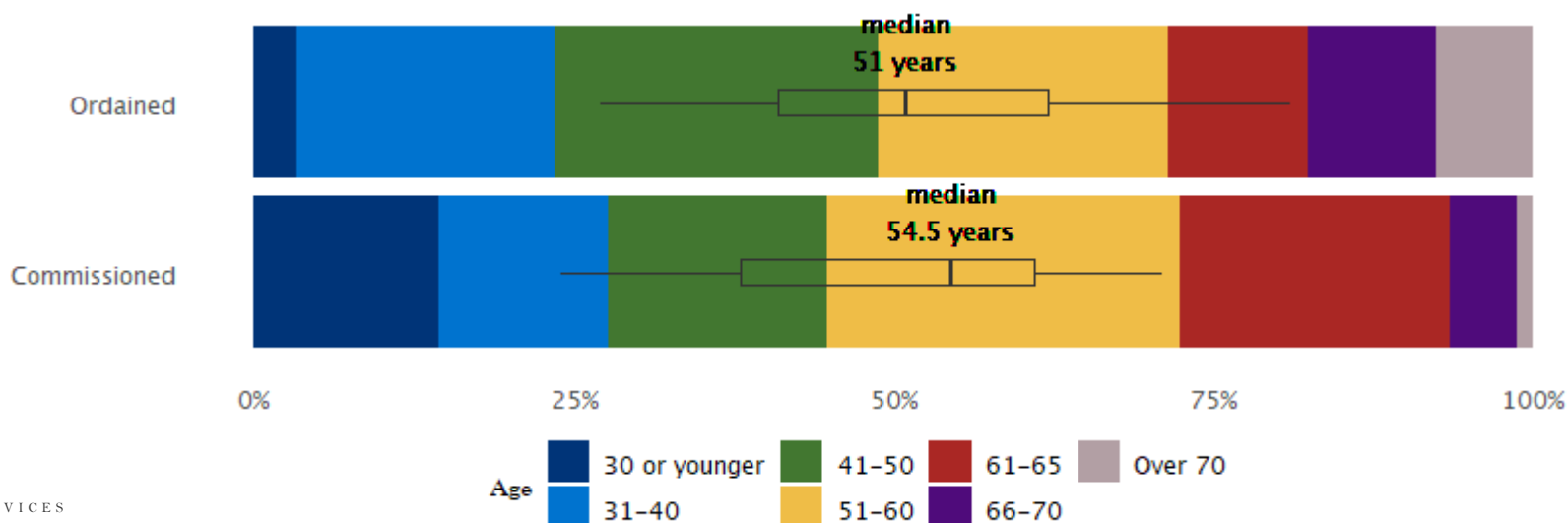


- Likewise, there were slightly more responses from Emeritus and Candidate workers than would be expected. This is actually a good thing, because it provides a stronger sample of these unique voices.
  - The distribution of active, candidate and emeritus status was no different for roster class
- Because of this imbalance, combined results are weighted to give accurate summaries.

# DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE CHURCH WORKER SAMPLE



- All LCMS ordained ministers are male, but among commissioned workers, over two thirds of survey responses came from females.
- Ordained ministers are more likely to be middle-aged than commissioned workers. However, with large segments of both younger and older commissioned workers, the median and average ages for the two roster classes are not far apart.





# IMPACT ON CALLS

CHURCHWORKERS AND COVID-19





## VERY FEW CALLS ENDED BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC (AS OF SEPT)

- **Very few calls ended because of the pandemic.** Of the 397 responses from church workers, 211 were active in a call in 2020. Of these, only 17 workers are now retired (13) or on candidate status (4). Only three of these workers (two commissioned and one ordained) cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a contributing factor to their call ending in 2020.
  - Of these three, only one said COVID-19 was the primary reason, the other two both said the pandemic contributed along with other reasons.

*Note: it is possible that a number of workers who lost their call to the pandemic may have chosen not to fill out this survey. However, since a large pool of candidate workers responded overall, there is a low likelihood of this sampling bias.*

- **Rosters has processed fewer call closures during the pandemic.** It is too early to know the degree to which this lower number indicates a real trend in call changes for 2020, or that there have been delays in submitting paperwork. But when combined with results from these surveys, there is strong evidence to conclude that the pandemic has not caused church workers to lose their calls. In fact, it may have led to more workers remaining in their calls.
- **Substantial utilization of payroll protection loans** likely helped sustain calls. Similar to the congregation survey, over half (59%) of active church workers reported that their organizations received PPP loans.
- On the other hand, this is the situation as of September 2020. There are still signs that the full economic impact has yet to be realized, and further changes may yet be in store.

# WORKERS' OUTLOOK ON THEIR CALLS LARGELY UNCHANGED

- The survey asked active workers to what degree they were considering a change in their call prior to the pandemic, and to what degree the pandemic changed that.
  - Fewer than 15% of active workers say that the pandemic changed their outlook on their call.
  - Among those who say the pandemic changed their outlook, two-thirds are now less likely to consider a call change

- Among workers now considering new calls, the following reasons (all in the context of the pandemic) were cited:

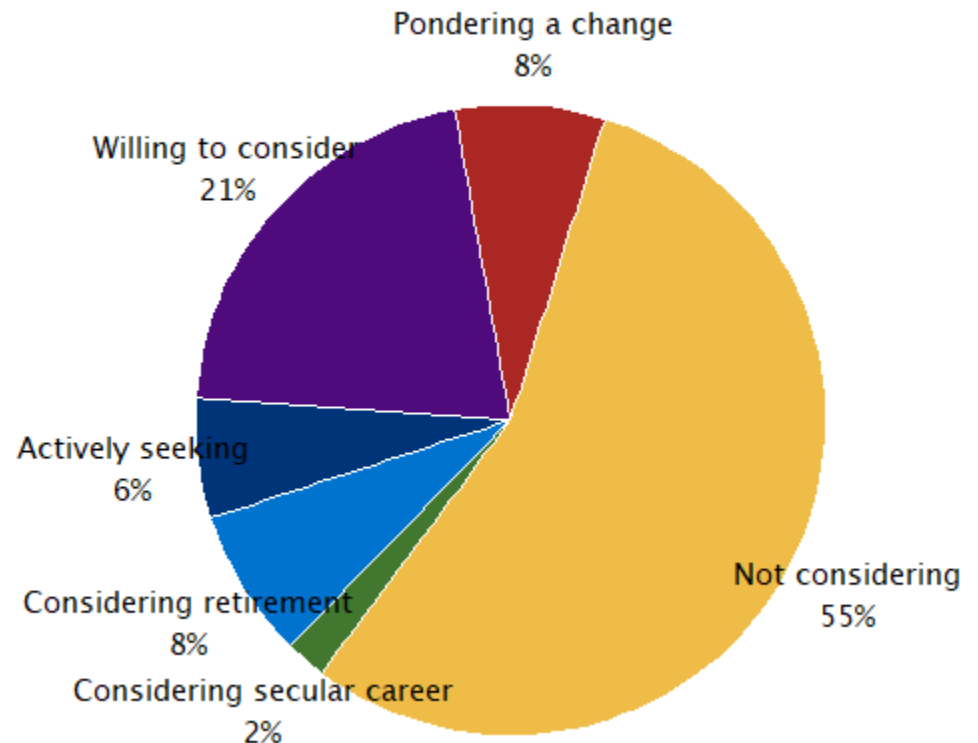
- Increased workload or stress
- Inability to minister under new restrictions
- Conflict or tension regarding the response to the pandemic

- Reasons that were rarely or never cited:

- Reduced pay / Reduced hours
- Health and safety concerns

*(Due to the small sample of workers now considering new calls, individual percentages for each of the above reasons lack the necessary precision to be shown.)*

## Active Workers Considering a Call Change Prior to COVID-19



# MOST ACTIVE WORKERS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THEIR MINISTRY

- Ninety-three percent of active workers say they **fully (49%) or mostly (44%) agree with the way their ministry organization has responded to the pandemic.**
- Likewise, active workers have felt well-cared for in their call during the pandemic, with **nearly 80% saying their ministry organization has taken good care of them**
  - Differences among organization types were not significant for this item, but **commissioned workers in congregations were noticeably less likely to feel well cared-for** than pastors at congregations (81% vs 74%).
- **A third of active church workers have some degree of concern** of their ministry organization's viability
  - Most of these (20% of all active workers) feel only "somewhat" concerned (<4% "strongly" concerned).
  - Notably, there are no major differences in responses from workers in schools versus those in congregations. However, **42% of workers in other organizations** (colleges, RSOs, chaplains, etc.) have concerns, and at higher levels (14% "strongly").
- Likewise, workers are confident they will not lose their calls, with **88% of active workers saying they are not worried**
  - However, there are significant differences in this confidence between various groups of workers
  - Ordained ministers serving congregations are least worried (less than 9% of pastors say they are worried about their call)
  - But **commissioned workers in congregations are a bit more concerned**, 21% are worried about their call
  - While only **15% of rostered workers called to schools** (mostly commissioned) worry about losing their calls, as many as **30% of workers in other organizations** (ordained or commissioned) say they have concerns about losing their jobs.

# IMPACT ON CALL PROCESS

- **30 workers** in the sample (active or inactive) were actively looking for calls prior to the virus situation.
- Most of them provided ways **the pandemic situation has negatively affected the call process**. While this pool is too small to quantify these factors, it seems fitting to list the reasons that received multiple mentions.
  - Candidates have experienced significant delays in correspondence with district offices and congregations
  - Travel restrictions have made it difficult for candidates and calling bodies to meet
  - Some potential calling bodies have suspended their calls due to financial uncertainty
  - There are simply fewer call opportunities available as normal operations are on hiatus
- A few church workers who are currently active but had been looking for a new call, **gave reasons why they stopped their search for a different call**
  - Greater appreciation for their current ministry
  - Greater appreciation for their district and local support
  - Finding new opportunities to serve in their call, meeting new needs
  - But a couple others became disillusioned with ministry, due to the extra demands and increasing financial uncertainties
- **No worker** in the survey indicated they had received a new call during the pandemic
  - But the call process is not stopped, Rosters has processed over 500 new calls since April 2020 – but this is about half of the number of calls processed over the same period of time in recent years
    - A large portion of these calls were new church workers (recent graduates)
    - A large portion of these were teachers starting the 2020-2021 school year
    - Still nearly half of the new calls processed by rosters during the pandemic were pastoral calls



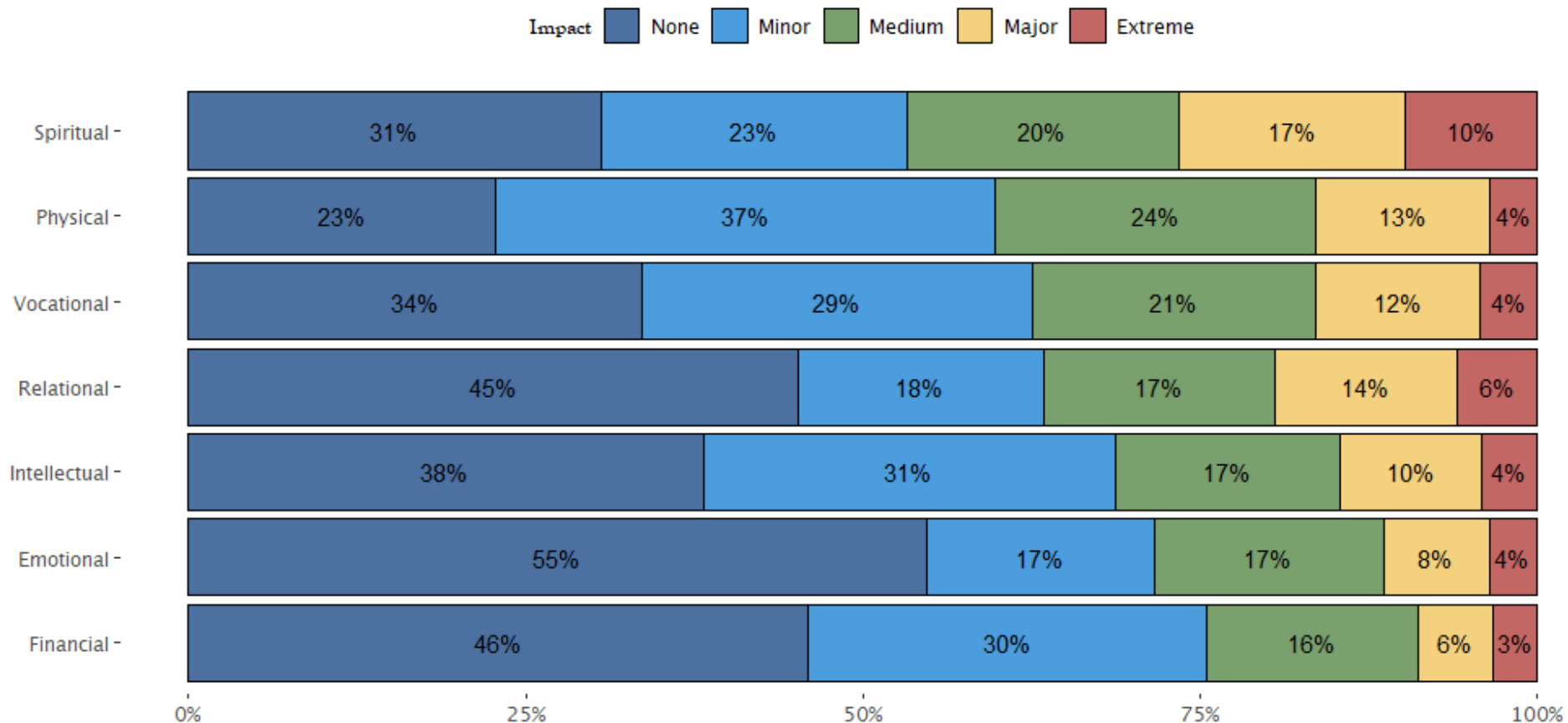
# IMPACT ON WELLBEING

CHURCHWORKERS AND COVID-19

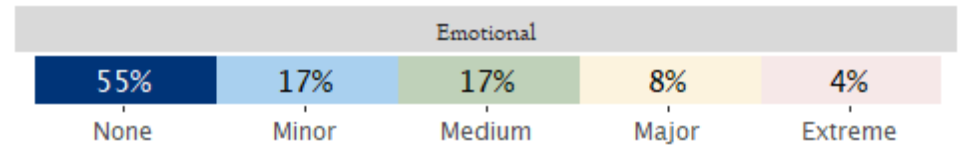


# MEASURING SEVEN COMPONENTS OF WELLBEING

*Previous research into worker wellness has utilized seven components of wellbeing. Questions related to each of these factors of wellbeing were included in this survey on COVID-19, so the impact of the pandemic on each could be measured.*



# EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

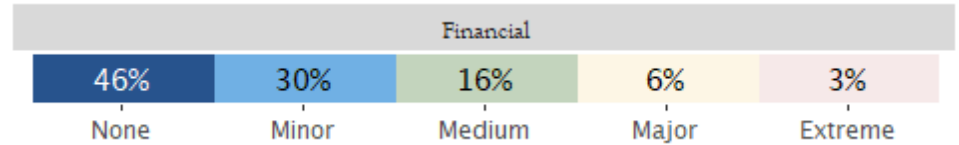


- Not only have the emotional aspects of the pandemic hit workers in different ways, but workers are also aware of the impact in different ways. The survey used a series of items to create an emotional wellbeing scale:
  - There were many nights when I had a hard time sleeping because of the virus
  - Thinking about the virus has made it hard for me to stay focused on important tasks
  - I have been too busy dealing with emergencies to plan for the future
  - I have found very little joy during the pandemic
  - My own mental health has had a negative impact on my life and vocation in the past six months
- Female commissioned ministers were nearly twice as likely as males to indicate the pandemic has had a strong effect on items related to their emotional wellbeing (16% vs 8%)
  - Among men, 60% indicate little to no emotional impact, but only 45% of women did the same
- Younger workers also feel the emotional impact more strongly than older workers.
  - The effect by age exists regardless of gender, or by roster status (active / candidate).

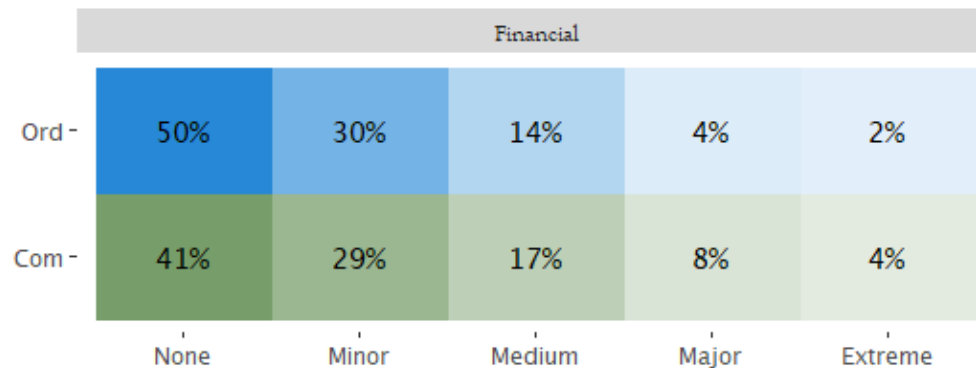
- Overall, emotional wellbeing alone does not seem to have been greatly impacted by the pandemic. However, the other measures of wellbeing affect emotional wellbeing, often without the worker being aware.**

	Emotional				
	None	Minor	Medium	Major	Extreme
Over 70 -	69%	14%	13%	3%	1%
66-70 -	70%	14%	10%	4%	2%
61-65 -	54%	19%	15%	7%	5%
56-60 -	38%	23%	23%	11%	5%
46-55 -	43%	15%	26%	12%	5%
36-45 -	50%	17%	19%	10%	4%
35 or younger -	28%	19%	22%	20%	11%

# FINANCIAL WELLBEING

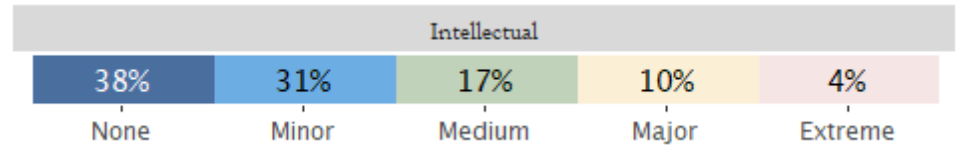


- Given the great economic uncertainties regarding the pandemic and the resulting recession, it would follow that financial wellbeing would likely be a great concern. However, of all the measured aspect of wellbeing, this factor has fewest workers in the “major” or “extreme” impact groups.
  - Unlike other factors of wellbeing that were measured with a multiple-item scale, financial wellbeing was directly measured.
- As with emotional wellbeing, younger workers were much more likely than older workers to have concerns about their finances (18% of workers under 45 have major or extreme concerns, compared with 9% overall).
- While gender did not make a significant difference in financial wellbeing, roster class made a significant difference. Commissioned workers are twice as likely to be worried about their finances than ordained.

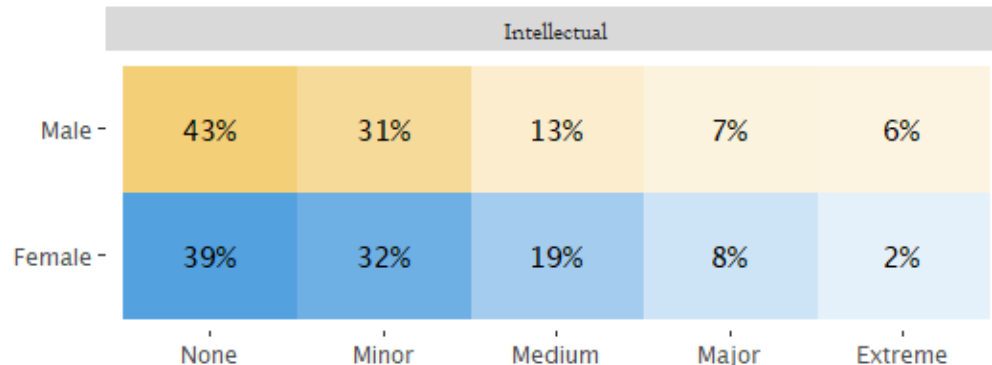




# INTELLECTUAL WELLBEING

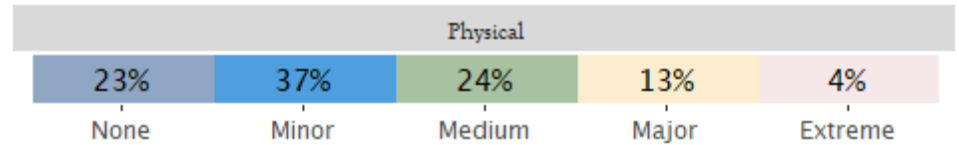


- Previous studies have shown that intellectual wellbeing tends to be one an area where rostered workers tend not to identify major needs\*. Likewise, the pandemic does not seem to have had a significant impact on how they feel about their intellectual wellbeing.
- Two areas of intellectual wellbeing that the pandemic may have affected were:
  - *Not attending continuing education opportunities or professional conferences in person*
  - *Your ability to study effectively being disrupted by the pandemic (such as altered schedules or study environments)*
- Male workers are slightly more likely than females to say the pandemic has affected their intellectual wellbeing. This holds true even when just comparing commissioned workers (as all ordained workers are male).

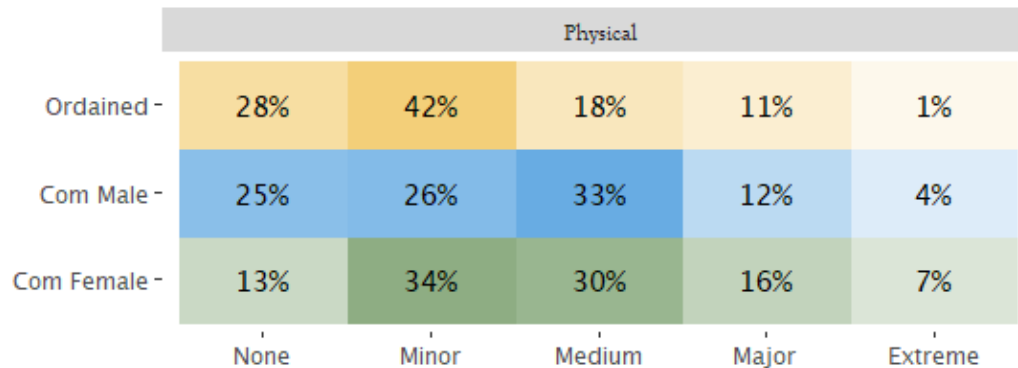


\* Worker Wellness Survey and Focus Groups, LCMS Research Services, 2018

# PHYSICAL WELLBEING

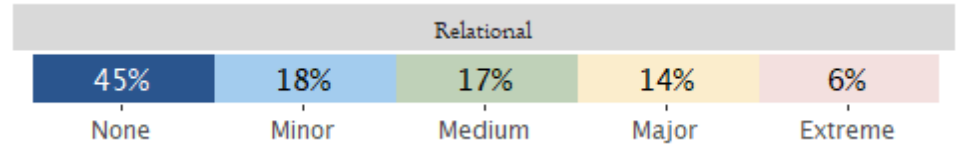


- Given that the pandemic was particularly an issue of public health, it is not surprising to see that physical wellbeing was the area where the fewest number of workers had no markers of concern. Though they were not unconcerned, their concern was mostly moderate, with the highest numbers of minor and medium concerns (rather than major or extreme).
- Interestingly, especially considering how the virus is known to be higher risk to older adults, there was only a very slight increase in the level of concern based on a worker's age.
- There were, however, sharp differences in the level of concern between gender and roster class, with ordained (men) being less concerned than commissioned, and females commissioned more concerned than males (though no significant differences by roster status).



- Of all the workers in the sample, only two tested positive for the virus, but they were never hospitalized.
  - An additional 38 say they might have had it, as they had symptoms but were never tested
  - Six worker spouses tested positive (sadly, one passed away), as well as sixteen workers' children (no deaths reported)
  - Over a dozen workers lost a parent, other family member, or close friend because of the disease

# RELATIONAL WELLBEING

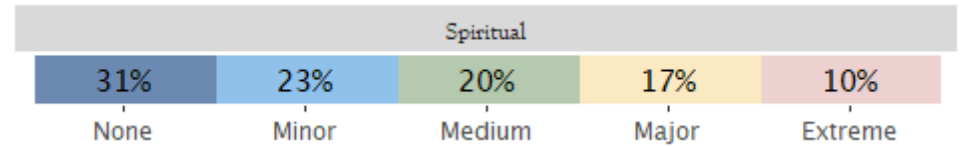


- Given that the primary strategy in responding to the virus was “social distancing”, it is not surprising to see that relational wellbeing was an area with greater impact from the pandemic.
- Several relational markers were included in this factor including:
  - Not being able to see close friends / family
  - Feeling as though they had to face the pandemic alone
  - Not having anyone to talk to about what they are going through
- Unlike other factors of wellbeing, there are no significant differences based on age, gender, or roster class.
- There are also no differences within relational demographics, such as marital status, young children in the home, or the type of organization served.
- The only significant difference was among candidate workers. Those who are not regularly serving in ministry were twice (12%) as likely to be in the “extreme” category.

Active -	43%	19%	19%	14%	6%
Candidate (not serving) -	42%	16%	11%	18%	12%
Candidate (serving) -	41%	22%	17%	14%	7%
Emeritus (not serving) -	52%	16%	15%	12%	5%
Emeritus (serving) -	47%	19%	16%	13%	6%
	None	Minor	Medium	Major	Extreme

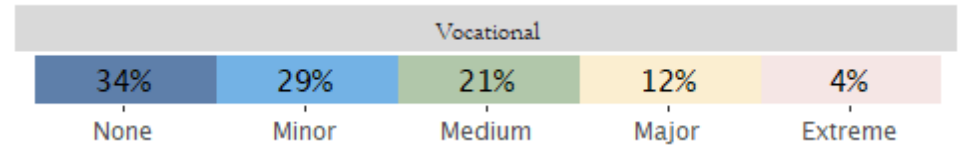
- Notably, this difference was offset by smaller “Minor” and “Medium” segments. “None” is not significantly different.

# SPIRITUAL WELLBEING



- The area of wellbeing most significantly hit by the pandemic seems to have been spiritual wellbeing.
- For this factor, there were three particular items asked regarding the impact of the pandemic:
  - *Not being able to receive communion during the pandemic*
  - *Not being able to meet with a spiritual partner / Father Confessor during the pandemic*
  - *Not being able to attend worship services during the pandemic*
- Of the three items asked, the most influential was not being able to attend worship.
  - The impact was not different among those who are called to congregations from those not called to congregations, so it is unlikely that this was cross-correlation with vocational wellbeing.
  - Also, this correlated strongly with receiving communion
- As with relational wellbeing, the impact on spiritual wellbeing was felt across all groups. Ordained or commissioned, young or old, male or female, active or inactive, made no difference in how their spiritual wellbeing was impacted.

# VOCATIONAL WELLBEING



- It terms of survey items, vocational wellbeing was the largest of wellness scales. It included several items from their ability to cope with how the pandemic changed their responsibilities to their concerns about job security.

Concerned people will drift away from church	11%	29%	30%	24%	7%
Ministering to people without internet access	12%	31%	27%	22%	8%
Ministering to people from a safe distance	15%	31%	32%	17%	5%
Difficulty meeting people's needs	22%	31%	24%	17%	5%
Concerned about their ministry's viability	24%	32%	23%	14%	6%
Tension with people ministering to	24%	37%	25%	9%	5%
Frustrations dealing with technology	31%	36%	21%	9%	3%
Tension with other ministry leaders	35%	30%	25%	6%	4%
Having too much work to do	45%	21%	17%	12%	5%
Concerned people will go to another church	48%	31%	15%	5%	1%
Not having enough to do	58%	24%	11%	6%	2%
Concerned about losing their call	66%	18%	10%	3%	3%
	None	Minor	Medium	Major	Extreme

- The top factors weighing on their vocation are all related to unique challenges of ministering to people during the pandemic
- Interestingly, conflict and tension with others in ministry (specifically regarding the pandemic response) clustered around frustrations with technology
- Other concerns, such as being overworked, underworked, or losing their call were low concerns for most church workers

# INDICATORS OF ANXIETY AND STRESS

- Overall, there were several items on the survey that specifically measure the level of stress and anxiety of our workers. While the majority of workers do not attribute an increased level of stress to the pandemic, there are still many workers who are having trouble sleeping, focusing, or experiencing joy.
- Loneliness, isolation and worries about their ministry are less common, but not insignificant.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Trouble sleeping	7%	8%	14%	12%	30%	28%
Not experiencing joy	4%	8%	16%	18%	37%	17%
Difficulty focusing	1%	13%	22%	16%	31%	17%
Not one to talk to	5%	8%	9%	11%	36%	31%
Worried about ministry	4%	8%	21%	9%	33%	25%
Feeling all alone	5%	6%	13%	12%	37%	27%
Survival mode	3%	6%	21%	11%	40%	18%
Worried about losing call	3%	2%	8%	7%	28%	52%

*\*data has been weighted for roster class and status*



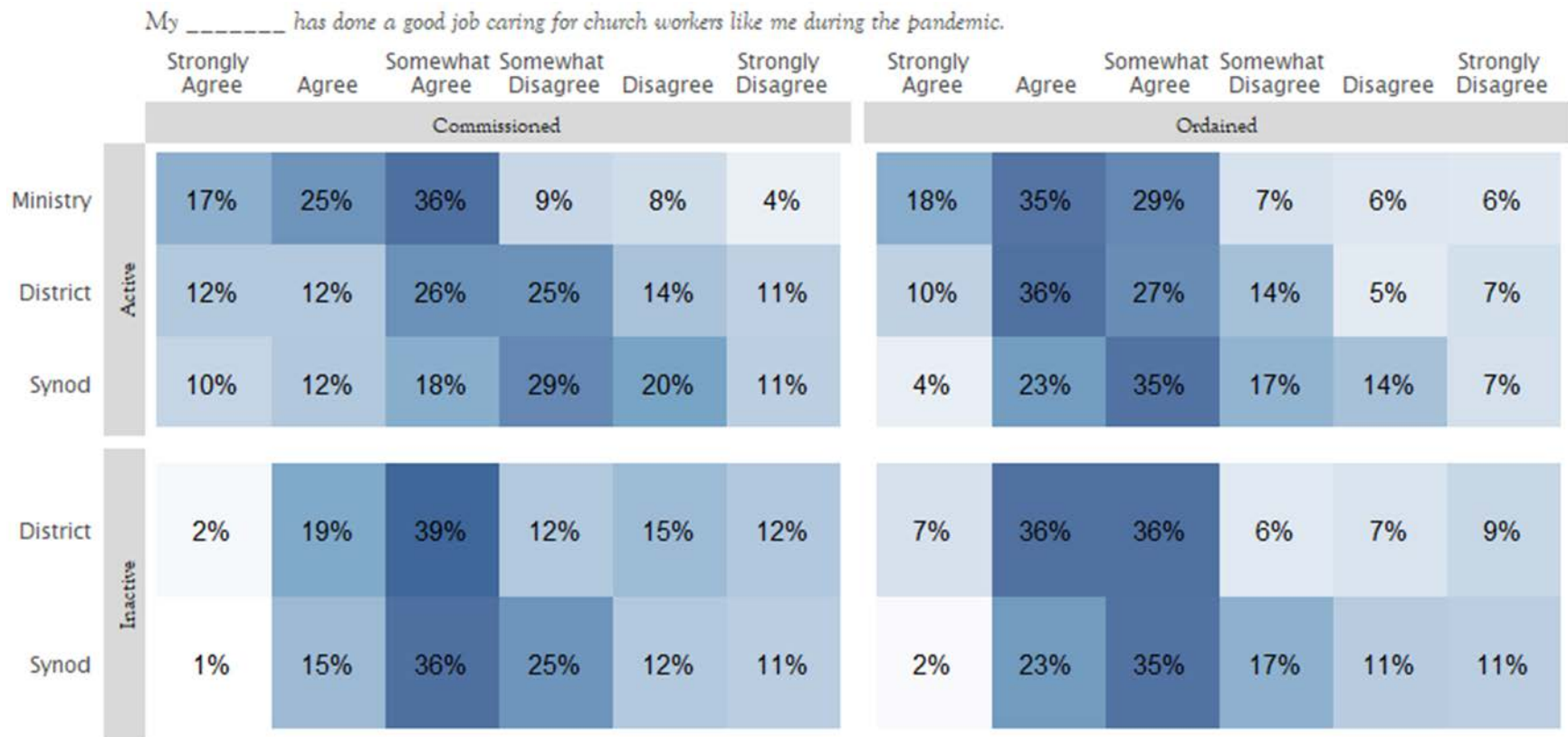
# OUTLOOK AND ATTITUDE

CHURCHWORKERS AND COVID-19



# MANY, BUT NOT ALL, WORKERS FEEL FAIRLY WELL CARED FOR

- Active workers, especially ordained ministers, are the most likely to feel well cared for. Among inactive workers, candidates felt the least cared for.
- Still there were many active workers who felt their Synod and Districts could have done better in providing care



\*data has been weighted for roster class and status



# ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PANDEMIC AND OVERALL RESPONSE

The pandemic has been polarizing in America, with far-ranging perspectives from whether or not businesses should stay open, to whether or not masks are effective in curbing the spread.

Responses to the Congregation Survey indicated, there were divisive attitudes toward the pandemic among church workers. However, as that survey was not intended to survey the workers' opinions, it was not able to measure this division. The survey of church workers was better suited to explore the nuances within their perspectives.

Below is a table of responses from all church workers to five questions about their view of the pandemic and response.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Better to err on the side of caution	22%	33%	28%	7%	6%	5%
Masks are helpful against the virus	29%	27%	22%	9%	9%	5%
The response to the virus has been more harmful than virus itself	21%	19%	21%	11%	16%	12%
People aren't taking the virus seriously enough	10%	15%	26%	17%	22%	10%
Churches never should have suspended in-person worship	12%	10%	15%	15%	25%	23%

*\*data has been weighted for roster class and status*

# MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ORDAINED AND COMMISSIONED

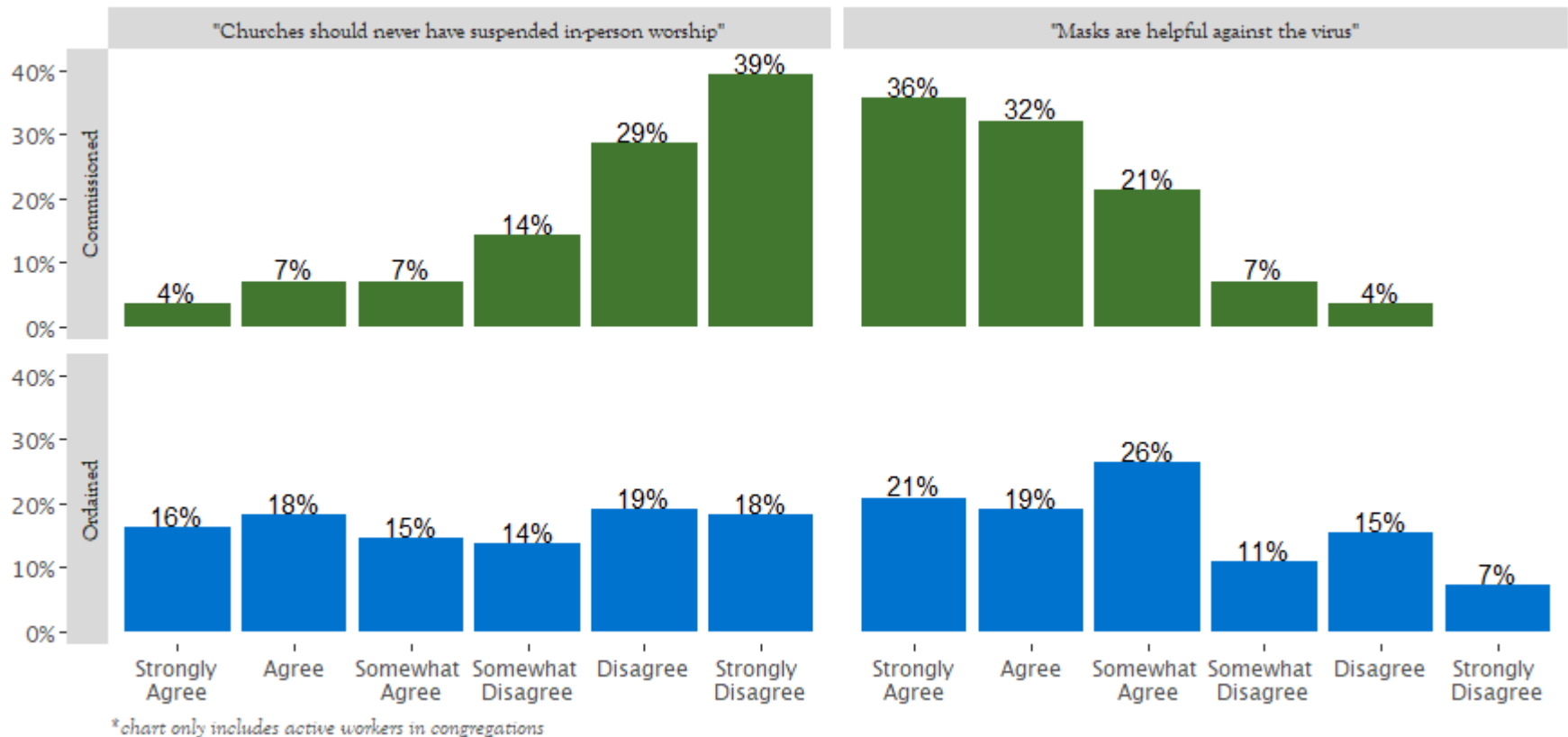
- The overall view of church workers may not appear polarized, but looking deeper reveals several differences.
  - Commissioned workers are significantly more likely than ordained to strongly agree that it is better to err on the side of caution regarding the virus (ordained were much more likely to strongly disagree)
  - Ordained workers are significantly more likely than commissioned to agree that the response to the virus has been more harmful than the virus itself

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Commissioned						
Better to err on the side of caution	29%	32%	29%	4%	5%	1%
Masks are helpful against the virus	32%	32%	18%	8%	5%	5%
The response to the virus has been more harmful than virus itself	17%	20%	21%	12%	14%	16%
People aren't taking the virus seriously enough	11%	14%	32%	16%	21%	7%
Churches never should have suspended in-person worship	8%	5%	13%	14%	30%	29%
Ordained						
Better to err on the side of caution	16%	31%	27%	11%	7%	9%
Masks are helpful against the virus	21%	19%	28%	10%	15%	7%
The response to the virus has been more harmful than virus itself	28%	20%	18%	8%	16%	9%
People aren't taking the virus seriously enough	10%	10%	19%	18%	27%	17%
Churches never should have suspended in-person worship	16%	18%	16%	15%	18%	18%

\*Active workers only

# POLARIZATION IS STRONGEST AMONG ACTIVE PASTORS

- The responses from commissioned workers (in congregations), indicates strong consensus that churches should have suspended in-person worship and that masks are effective at stopping the spread of the disease.
- By contrast, the distribution of responses from parish pastors signals a very high degree of polarization (large numbers of people hold opinions at all levels, with large numbers at the extremes).





## POSITIVE COMMENTS *(KEY SUMMARY OF OPEN-RESPONSE ITEMS)*

- The most common sentiment from church workers, was that they were blessed by getting to spend more time with their families, specifically spouses and children
- Another popular sentiment was that many workers feel this experience has made them more intentional with their personal relationships, and they now feel closer with friends and family
- With more congregations offering online services, church workers have been able to connect with other churches and be fed from hearing multiple sermons
- Church workers also say this experience has taught them to trust in God and reassured them that He is faithful
- Many also say that this has made them more comfortable with technology. They better understand how to use it effectively in their ministry, and will continue to use it beyond the time of the pandemic
- There were many sentiments similar to the congregation survey, that community within congregations has grown stronger, and there is a greater appreciation of worship, sacrament and Lutheran identity
- Ministries and church workers have been able to find new opportunities to serve people, and connect with new people because of the virus



## FEEDBACK FOR SYNOD *(KEY SUMMARY OF OPEN-RESPONSE ITEMS)*

- A range of contradictory criticisms reflects the division observed among attitudes toward the virus
  - “Synod needed to be bolder in leadership and giving clear directives for all of Synod”
  - “Synod needs to understand that situations are different in each context, and should let church workers determine what was best for their ministry instead of issuing generic mandates”
  - “Why did Synod stay so quiet during the pandemic?”
- For all the voices calling on the Synod to “take a bold stance” and give clear instructions for “uniform practice”, there are just as many counter-voices arguing that Synod’s responses did not take into consideration situational differences and that there is no “one-size fits all solution”
- Still, many church workers also commended Synod and their districts, saying that they did well and would not suggest they do anything different
- Another common theme was that there is so much division in our country now, (politics, race, the pandemic), and the Church should have made a stronger effort to promote (and demonstrate) unity and compassion
- Some workers (notably, candidates and unmarried workers) were very likely to express feeling that their district (or Synod) never reached out to them or checked in on them
- Multiple non-congregation workers said that the congregations they attend are not doing as well with checking in on members as they think they are (neither communicating often nor well enough)
- Still many more workers complimented the care they have received from their congregations and their calling organization



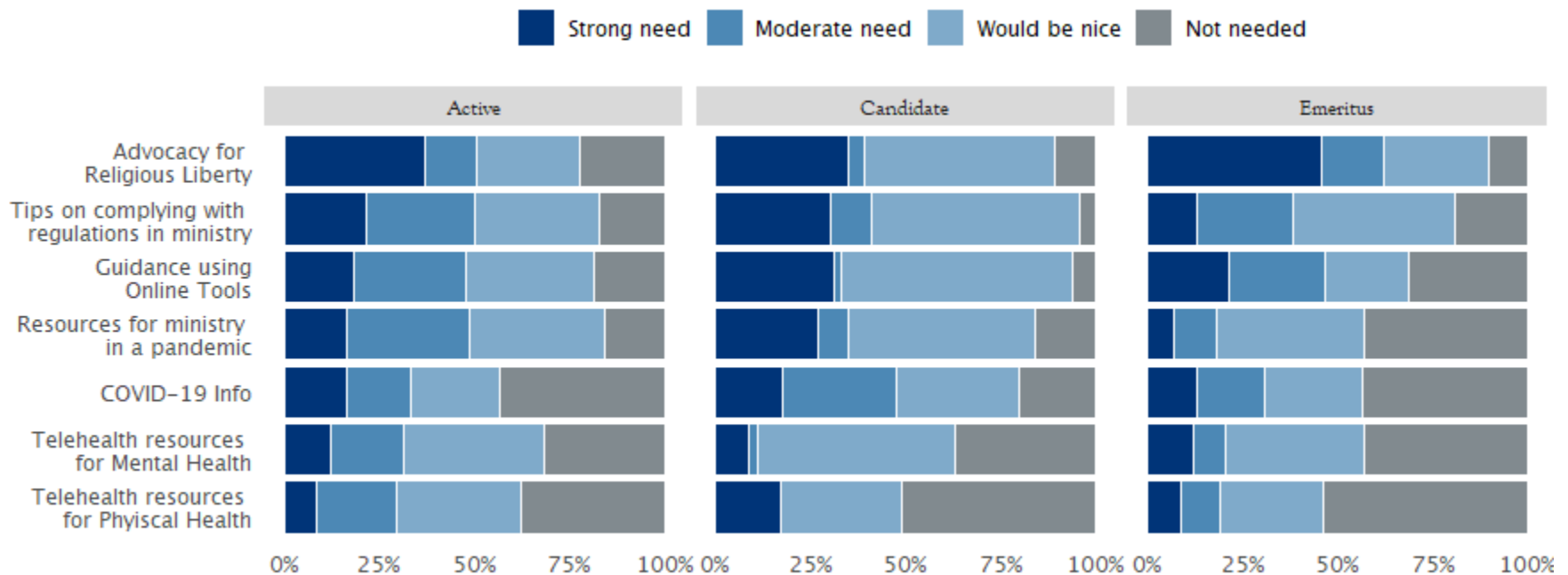
# SUPPORT AND RESOURCES MOVING FORWARD

CHURCHWORKERS AND COVID-19



# WORKERS WANT SYNOD TO TAKE THE ROLE OF AN ADVOCATE

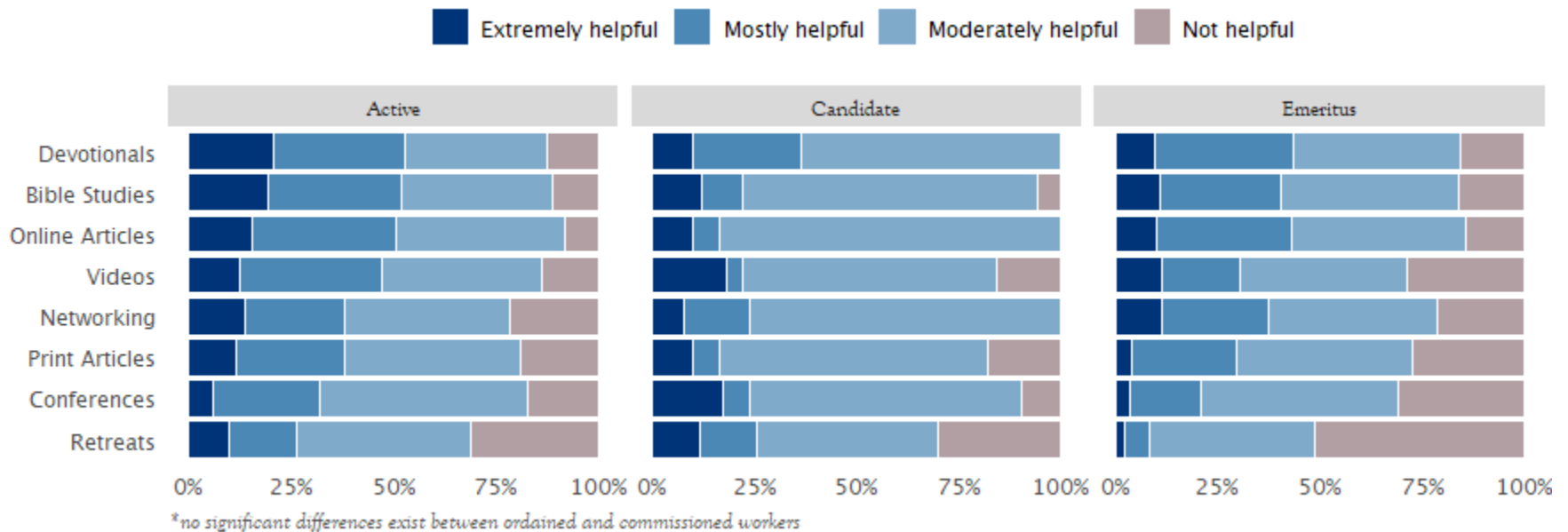
- Consistent with what was learned in the congregation survey, what many church workers say they need most from their Synod is advocacy defending religious liberty
- The other highly rated needs are all related to aspects of ministry in the pandemic (complying with regulations, using online tools, and resources specific to the pandemic situation)
- Medical resources, such as information about the virus, or telehealth access were not very highly rated, but most workers still think “they would be nice to have”



\*no significant differences exist between ordained and commissioned workers

# WORKERS ARE GENERALLY OPEN TO RESOURCES FROM THE LCMS

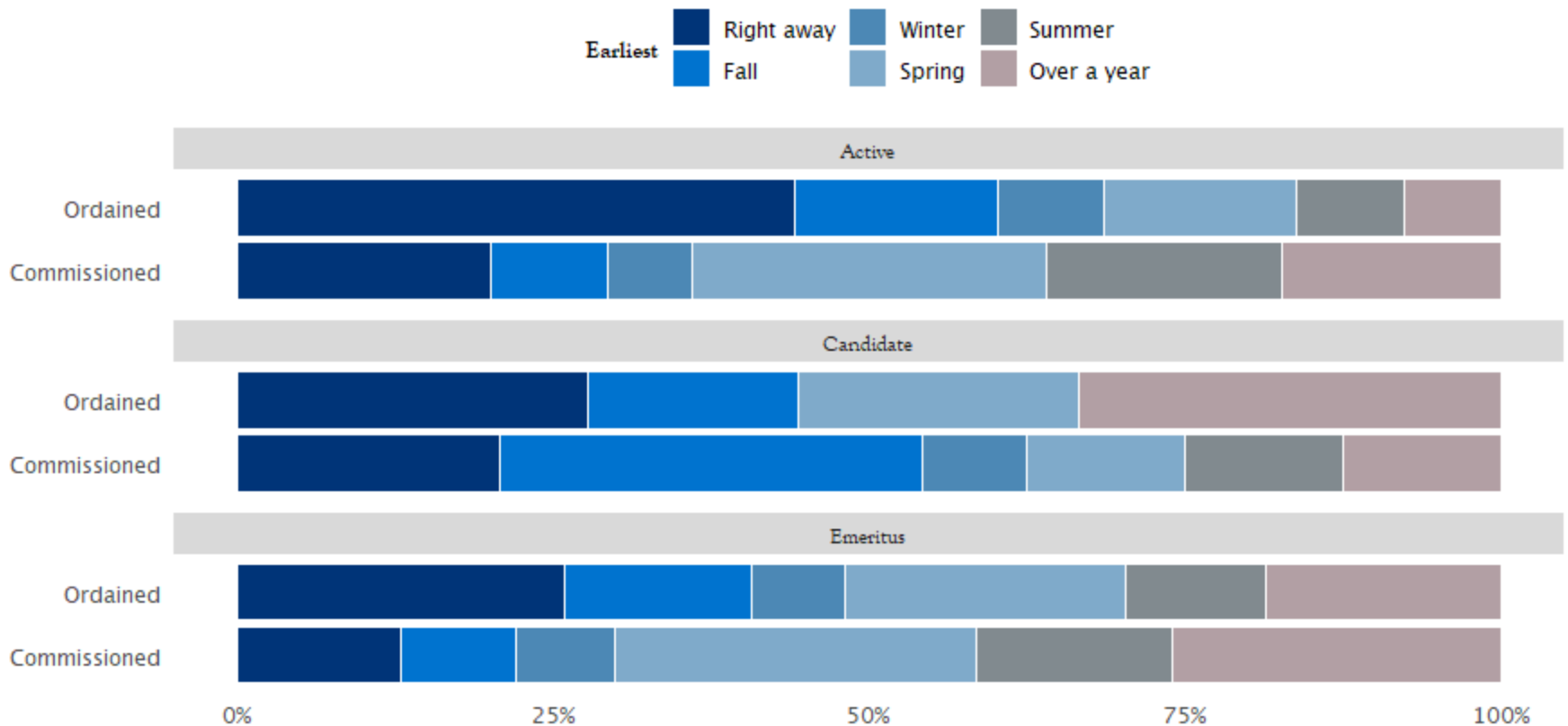
- When asking about specific types of resources provided by the LCMS, most workers are open to various media.
- Devotionals and Bible Studies were particularly strong, with online articles and videos also rated strongly
- Print Articles still show some popularity, but were far from as popular as online articles
  - Notice that emeritus workers were less favorable toward print than active workers
- Retreats were still mostly popular, however, these received the largest number of “not helpful” votes.
  - Based on other responses, these mostly came from people with concerns about social distancing





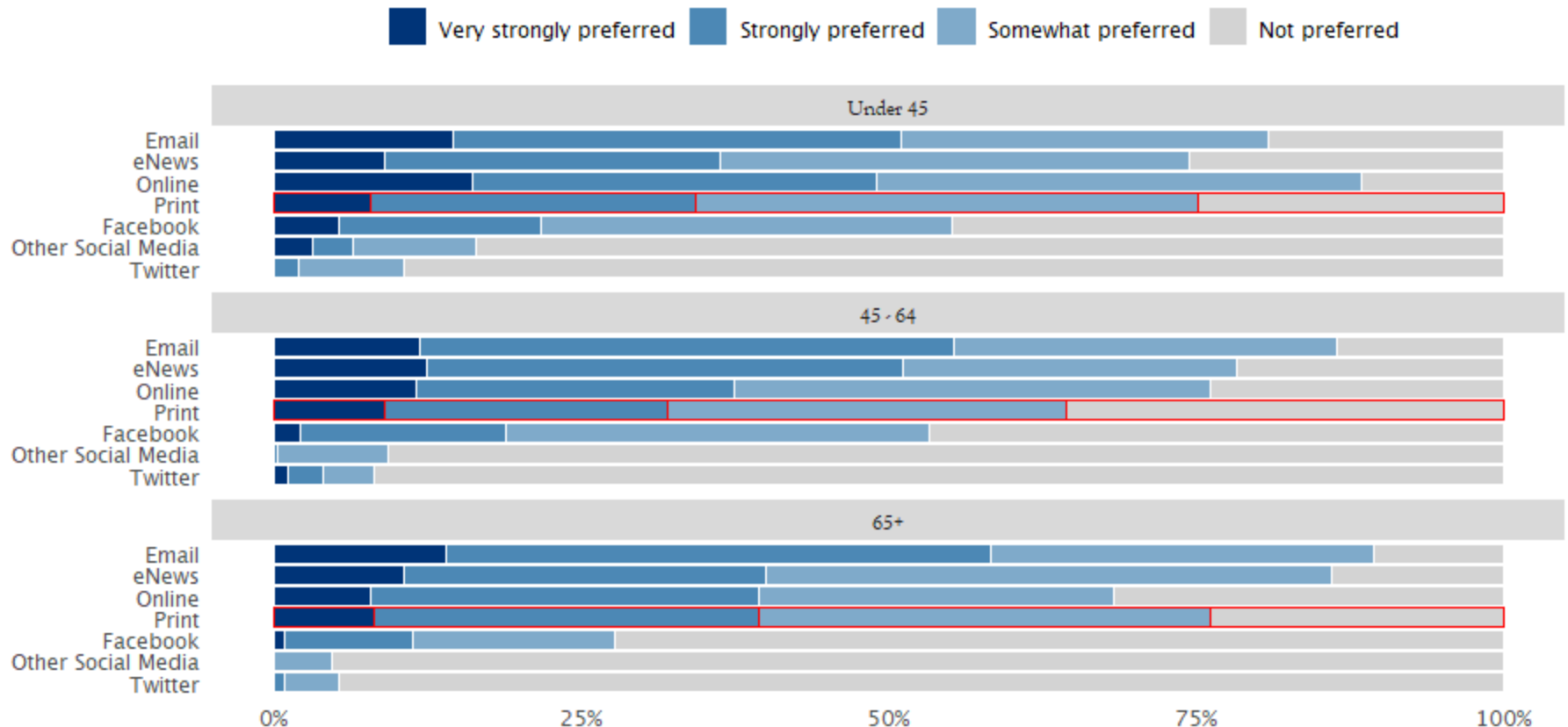
## SIMILAR TO THE WAY THEY WERE DIVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE VIRUS, WORKERS VARY IN THEIR DESIRE TO ATTEND EVENTS

- Just as many more commissioned workers were cautious and guarded in their response to the pandemic than ordained ministers, they also want to wait longer before attending a large in-person event.
- Concerns over social distancing and staying safe were by far the highest reasons workers cited for delaying
  - Other possible factors like time, finances, and travel restrictions were specifically indicated as not being reasons



# DIGITAL SOURCES OF LCMS NEWS ARE PREFERRED

- Regardless of age, more church workers say they prefer digital sources for LCMS news over printed material
  - Of note, this was based on an internet survey, so there may be a sampling bias toward digital media
- Despite preferring digital, social media was not viewed highly as a source for LCMS news, even among younger church workers




\*Data has been weighted for roster class and status.  
Only seven respondents indicated no preferred source



# CONCLUSIONS

CHURCHWORKERS AND COVID-19






# SUMMARY OF SEPTEMBER 2020 CHURCH WORKER SURVEY

## ■ Overall, workers seem to be doing okay but not thriving

- Keep in mind, this survey was conducted in September, nationally, attitudes regarding the virus were much more optimistic in September than they had been in months prior
- Also, it is possible that there is some self-selection bias, in that some more burdened workers did not respond
- Still, even despite the positive attitudes in the survey sample, the pandemic has impacted aspects of workers' wellness, most especially spiritual and vocational wellbeing
  - Workers have suffered from not being able to attend worship or participate in communion
  - Workers are facing new challenges in carrying out ministry, and finding many new responsibilities thrust upon them
  - Additionally, workers have experienced the same emotional weights we have all faced, such as concerns to physical health, isolation from others, and a general uncertainty about the future

## ■ Most workers say they have felt cared-for

- They are especially grateful to the care from their calling entity, and their District, and in many cases Synod nationally
- However, commissioned workers were somewhat less likely than ordained to say so (from any organization)
- When it comes to Synod nationally, what workers most want is an advocate for religious liberties
- Secondarily, workers see Synod as providing spiritual resources, such as devotionals and Bible study materials, and guidance on doing ministry



# SUMMARY OF SEPTEMBER 2020 CHURCH WORKER SURVEY

- **A third of active workers are at least “somewhat concerned” about their calling entity’s viability**
  - Workers at RSOs are most concerned, more so than workers at congregations or schools
  - Generally, ordained ministers are less concerned than commissioned
- **The call process has slowed, but it has not come to a halt**
  - There have been fewer call changes during the pandemic than normally for this time of year
  - Very few calls have ended because of the pandemic
  - The majority of workers are less likely to be considering a new call now than prior to the pandemic
  - However, there are workers who have been pushed by this situation to look for new calls, or even new careers
  - Inactive workers report that communication regarding the call process has been substantially delayed
  - The pandemic is not yet over, and some of the impact on calls may still be to come
- **Especially among ordained ministers, attitudes are highly polarized**
  - Ordained ministers called to congregations are nearly evenly split on whether or not churches should have canceled in-person services, with substantial numbers at extreme opposite ends
  - Pastors were similarly polarized on the issue of whether mask-wearing is effective
  - By contrast, commissioned ministers (even those in congregations) were much more of one mind
  - Despite the presence of extreme views, most workers report that there has not been a high degree of tension or conflict related to the pandemic



## NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCHING THE IMPACT

- LCMS Research Services is planning a second wave survey of congregations in early 2021, to get a second measurement of the impact of the pandemic. Consideration will also be given to additional surveys of church workers and schools.
- In addition, careful analysis will be given to any trends and major changes as Rosters collects 2020 statistical data on congregations in the spring of 2021.

For questions about this research, contact LCMS Research Services: [research@lcms.org](mailto:research@lcms.org) | 314-996-1439

- Scott Kostencki, Director of Rosters, Statistics and Research Services
- Ryan Curnutt, Senior Research Analyst



# LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19

SEPT. 2020 – SURVEY OF LCMS SCHOOLS





# SURVEY OVERVIEW

LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19





# BACKGROUND

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has created new challenges for congregations, ministries, and clergy throughout the Synod. Not only has there been a toll on human lives, but there have been economic and emotional waves that have affected everyone.

One word that has often been used to characterize the COVID-19 pandemic is "uncertain". Scientists and medical experts have been uncertain about exactly how the disease is transmitted. Government and local officials are uncertain about how and when to enforce restrictions on gatherings. Employees are uncertain about when (or even if) they will be able to return to work.

In the summer of 2020, LCMS Research Services conducted a survey of LCMS congregations as well as a survey of church workers, to gauge how Lutherans across the country were coping with the pandemic. The results of those surveys are available in separate reports.

But a study of this pandemic would be woefully incomplete without hearing from the nearly 2000 high schools, elementary schools, and early childhood centers across Synod. All schools have faced great struggles in seeking to educate our young people during a pandemic that has forced so many to stay at home.

At the end of September 2020, after nearly all schools had started their fall terms, Research Services sent out a survey to all LCMS schools.

The primary purpose of this survey was to gauge how our schools were coping with the pandemic. Do they have concerns about their viability? Is their enrollment suffering? Is the quality of education suffering? How many have had to teach “virtually” – and for how long? What kinds of resources are they most in need of moving forward?

Additionally, there are concerns about our teachers. While the church worker survey included many teachers in its sample, that survey was limited only to rostered workers. This survey was an opportunity to gain some insight into how other teachers were faring.

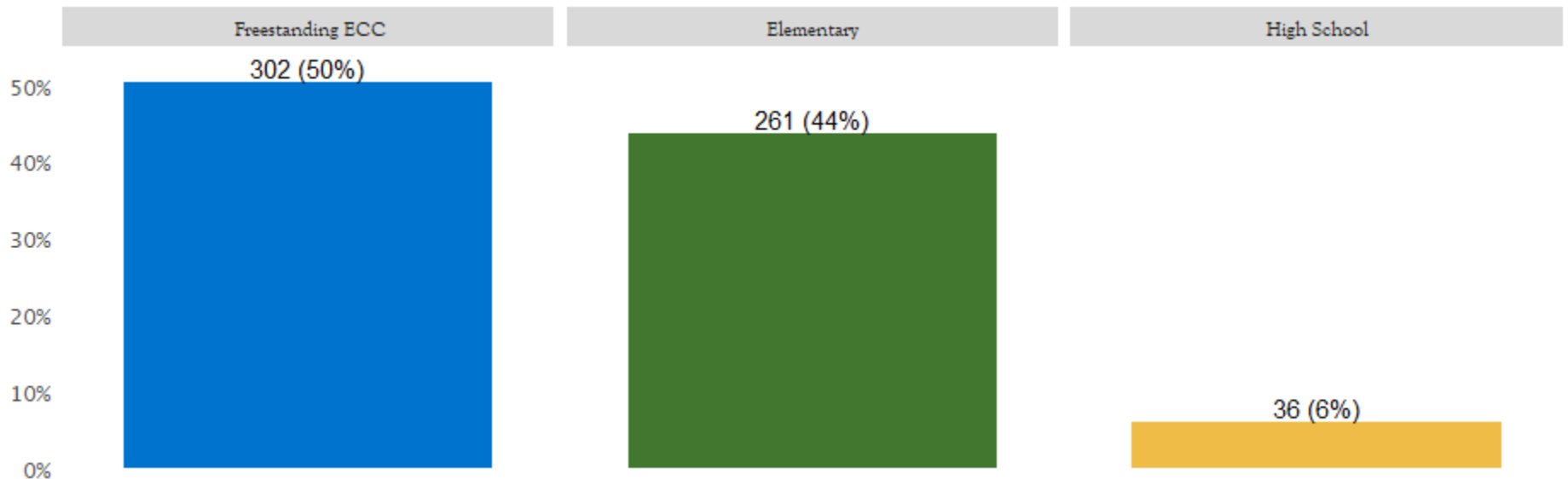
Given that the virus is still affecting the world, and the economic and social aspects of the pandemic are constantly changing, there will likely be follow up efforts to some of these studies, in the months (and possibly years) to come.

# TYPES OF SCHOOLS

- 523 Early Childhood Centers (ECCs): Preschools vs. Child Care Centers | Freestanding vs. Associated
  - Of these 452 include **preschools**, while the remainder are **child care centers**
  - Many are **associated** with an elementary, but most (302) are **freestanding** (i.e. not connected to a grade school)
  - There are several additional classifications of ECCs (school year, full-day, set schedules, etc.) that the survey addressed, but generally these were found as not making a significant difference in results (also, there is a great deal of overlap with most ECCs fitting in multiple categories)
- 276 Elementary Schools (having any grade levels between 1-8)
  - Some ECCs include Kindergartens but not any numbered grade levels, these are not considered elementary schools
  - While grades 6,7,8 may be considered middle school, for this survey, these grades are included with elementary schools
  - Except where noted, in the rest of this report, any school that includes grades 9-12 will count as high schools (this is because their answers to the survey had more in common with answers given by high schools than elementary schools).
  - There are 261 elementary schools that are not part of full K-12 school (the other 15 include high school grades)
- 36 High Schools (having any grade levels between 9-12)
  - Fifteen of these high schools have grades K-12
  - Five (of the fifteen) also have preschool classes
- *Note: there is overlap within several of the tallies shown above*

## CLASSIFICATION WITHOUT OVERLAP

- The classifications and counts on the previous page contained overlap. When it is necessary for analysis to avoid overlap, schools will be classified in the following manner:
  - **Early childhood centers** will only be freestanding ECCs (whether a preschool, child care center, or both)
  - **Elementary schools** are any schools with any grades 1-8 but no higher grades (includes some with an ECC)
  - **High schools** are any schools with grades 9-12 (includes some with lower grades from 1-8 or even an ECC)





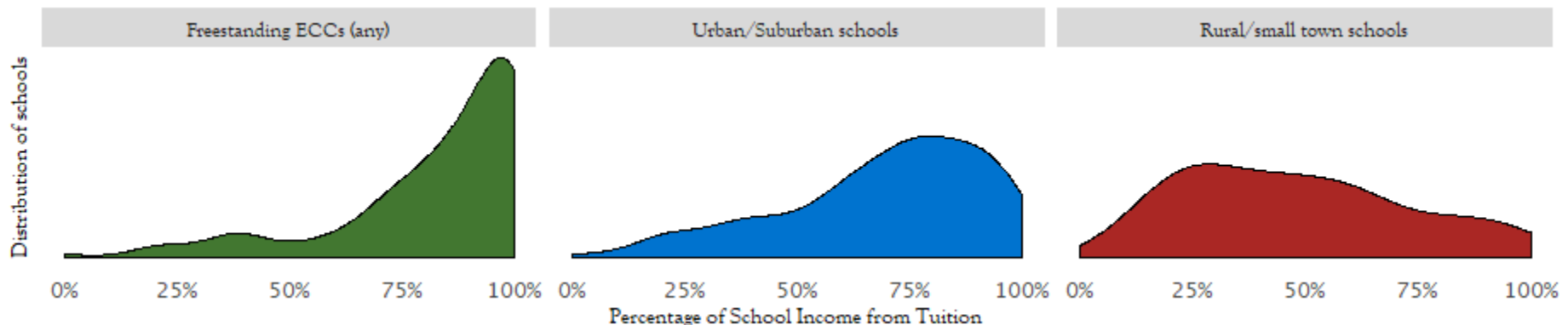
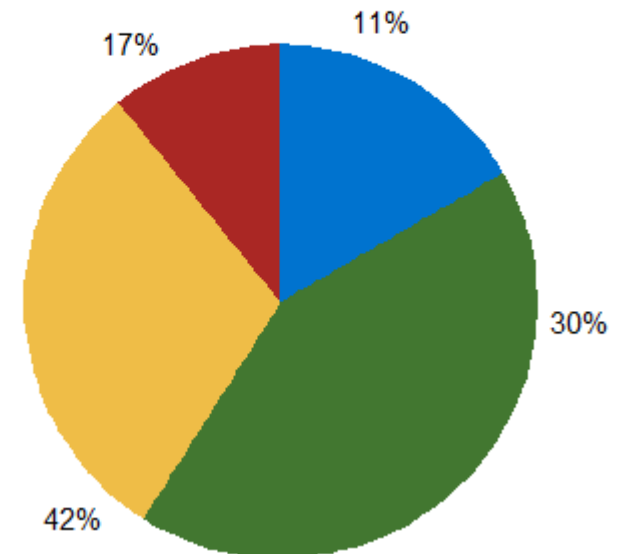
# SAMPLE AS A REFLECTION OF THE ROSTER

- Nearly a third (609) of all LCMS schools responded to the survey.
- Results came from every district of the Synod, representing nearly every state
  - No results from Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, Rhode Island, Vermont or West Virginia.
  - California, Illinois, Florida, Indiana, Wisconsin and Michigan had the most responses by state.
- For most, at least 60% of enrolled students live within 5 miles of the school
  - This is much higher among early childhood centers, and lowest for high schools
  - This also varies greatly among community types (urban/rural/small town)
- Half of the surveys were filled out by a non-rostered administrator, while most of the rest (44%) were filled out by commissioned workers
  - Nearly all of the non-rostered responses to the survey represented freestanding ECCs
  - 85% of the surveys were filled out by the Principal or Director of the school
    - All were filled out by a staff member at the school/congregation or by a member of the school board

# MOST SCHOOLS ARE SUBURBAN OR IN SMALL TOWNS

- Over 70% of LCMS schools are in small town communities or suburban areas of large cities
- By school type, the one major difference is that there many fewer rural high schools (only 3% of LCMS high schools are in rural areas), with most of the difference made up in suburban communities (half of LCMS high schools are suburban)
- Nearly all freestanding ECCs (regardless of community type) rely heavily on tuition and fees – representing 75-100% of their income
- Schools in urban and suburban communities tend to rely heavily on tuition, while a greater number in rural and small town settings rely more on other sources (true for elementary and high schools).
- Schools in rural and small town areas seem to rely less on tuition and more on other sources of income, such as money from their congregations (there are too few high schools in this group to test if there are significant differences by school type)

■ Rural 
 ■ Small town 
 ■ Suburban 
 ■ Urban

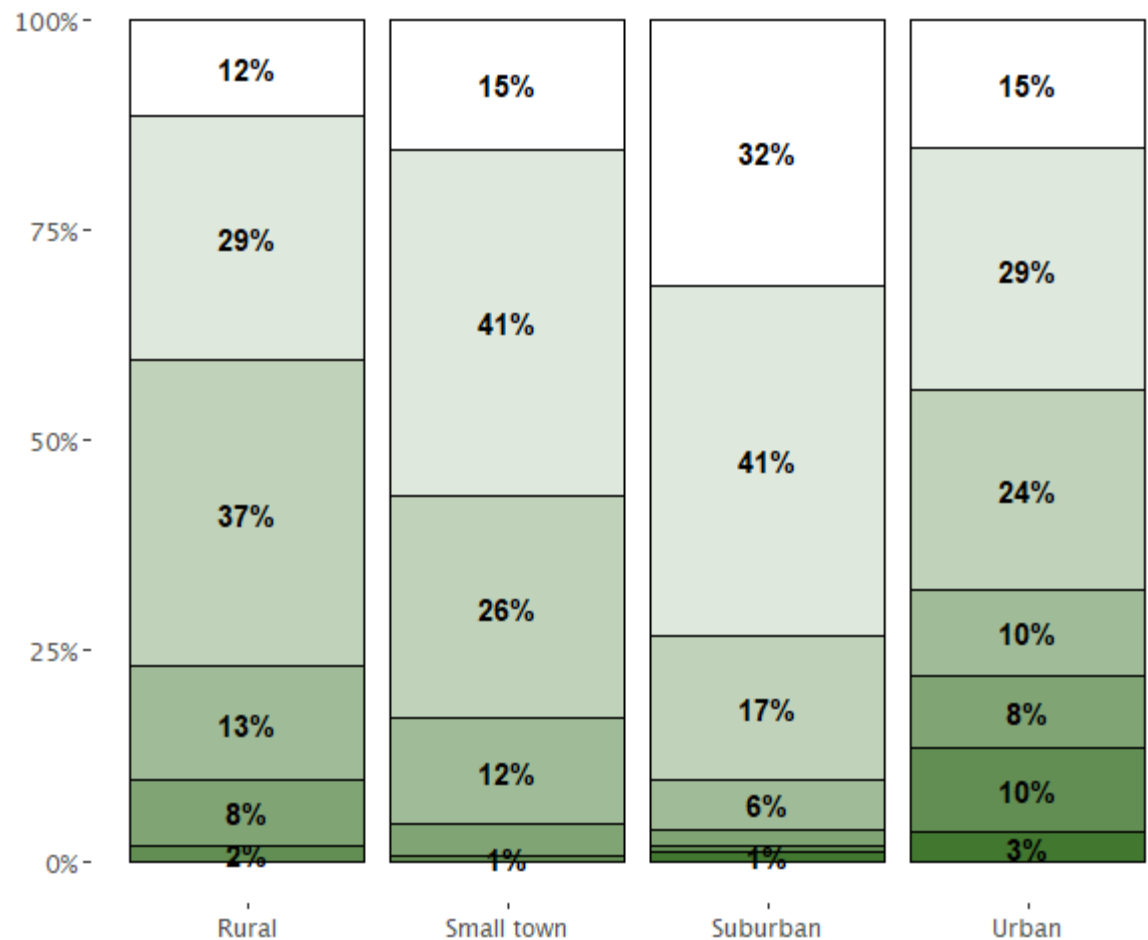


# DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF STUDENT POVERTY

Percent of enrolled students who live below the poverty level

Over 80%	40-60%	5-20%	None
60-80%	20-40%	Less than 5%	

- Synodwide, roughly 1-in-5 schools has 40% or more students who live below the poverty level. This is more common in rural and urban areas.
- According to survey responses, schools with higher levels of student poverty tend to rely less on tuition and more on other sources for income (regardless of school type or community type).
- The proportion of students below the poverty level does not appear to predict significant differences in reported impacted of the pandemic.





# IMPACT ON ECCS

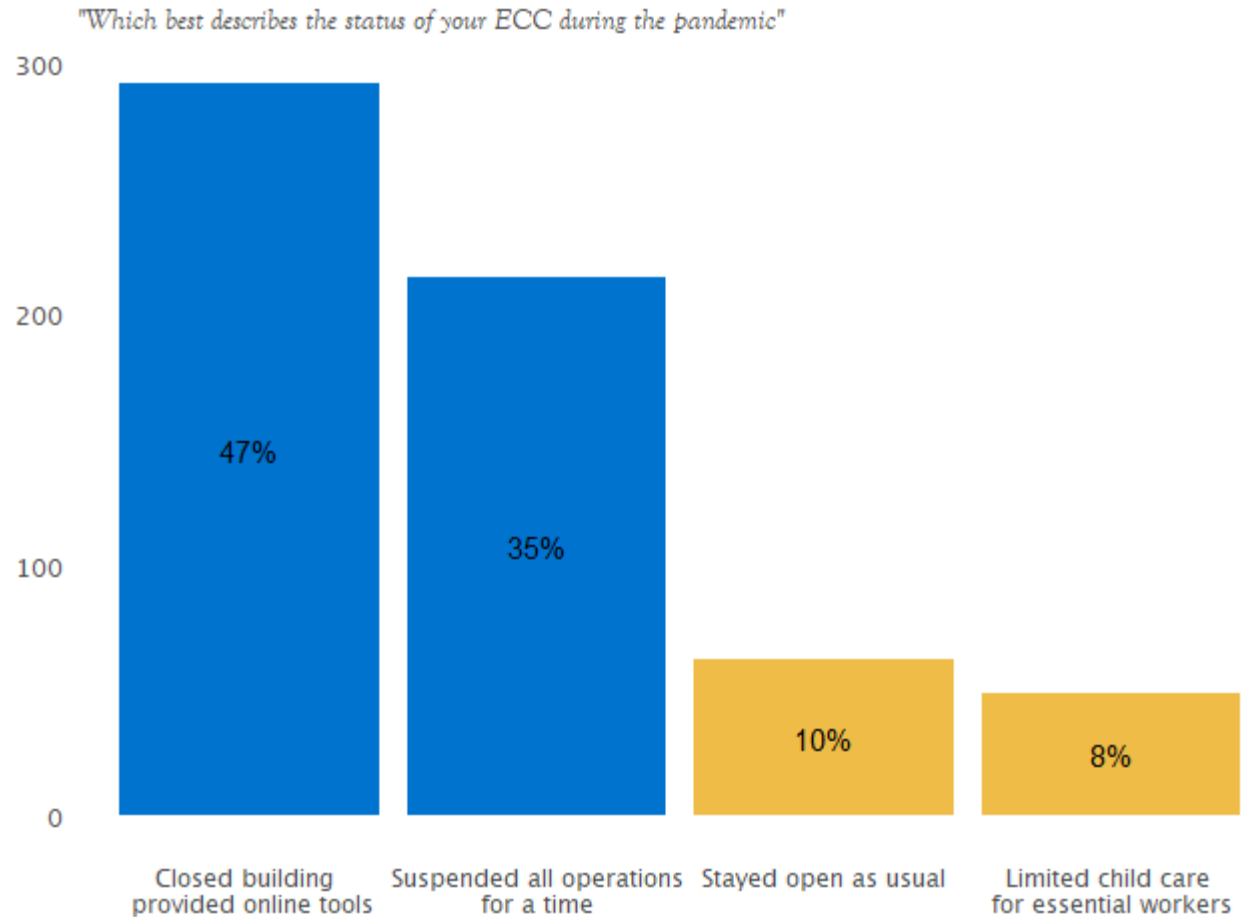
LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19



# OVER 80% OF ECCS CLOSED THEIR BUILDINGS AT SOME POINT

(True for freestanding ECCs as well as those associated with schools)

- Nearly half of all ECCs provided online learning at some point, while another third completely suspended operations for a while.
- It might be surprising to note that there were no differences in status (including online learning) if the ECC was freestanding or not, or whether it is a preschool.
- Community type (urban vs. rural) also had no effect on whether or not they closed.
- Low enrollment was the most commonly cited reason for closing, followed by having to comply with new pandemic regulations.

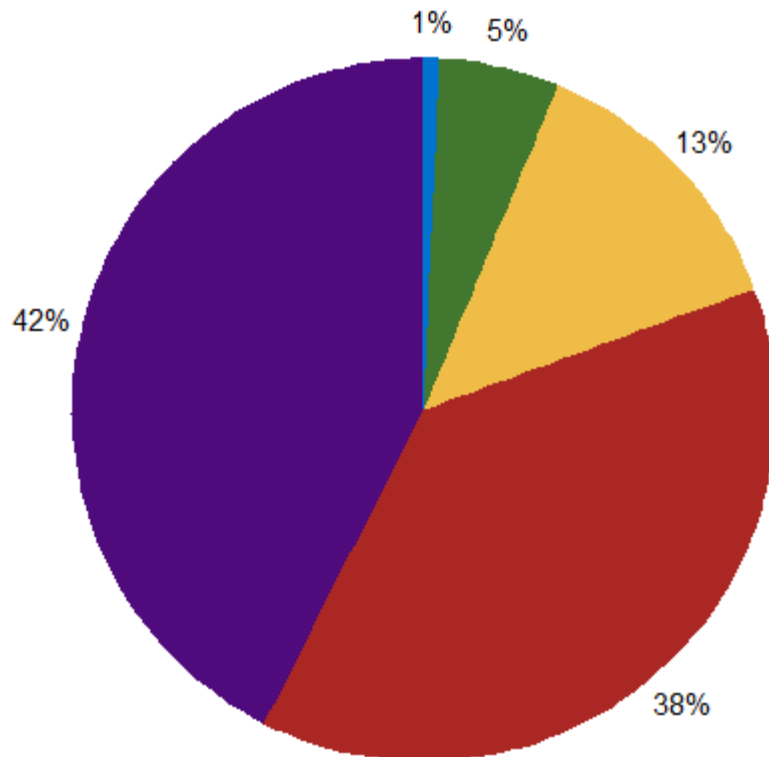
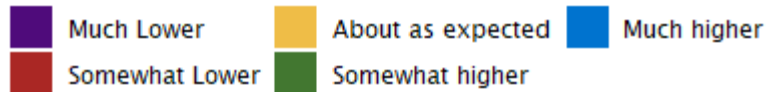


\*No significant differences between pre-schools and child care centers.



# ENROLLMENT IS SIGNIFICANTLY DOWN AT FREESTANDING ECCS

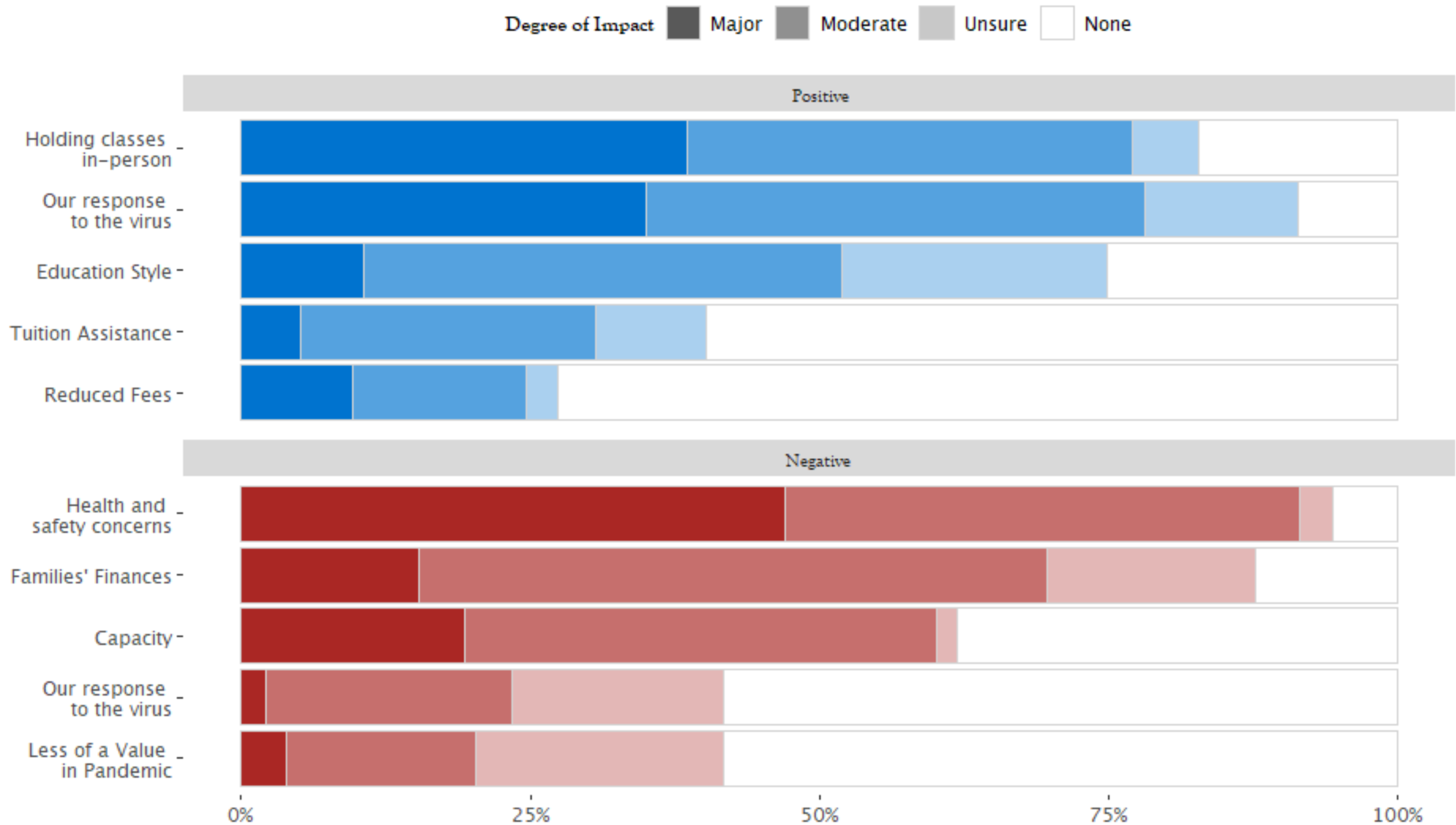
*How does this year's enrollment compare with what would have been expected without the virus?*



- Much more so than grade schools, ECCs say their enrollment numbers have dipped significantly during the pandemic
- Health concerns were cited as the biggest factor for lower enrollment
- This was followed closely by economic concerns (or lost income) from students' families
- Another common reason for lower enrollment numbers was new capacity restrictions
- While enrollment was lower overall, many ECCs did point to ways that their enrollment may also have seen a boost because of the pandemic:
  - Some experienced a boost because they provided in-person options when others did not
  - Others say many families in the area were attracted to them because of the way in which they responded to the pandemic

# FACTORS IMPACTING ENROLLMENT AT FREESTANDING ECCS

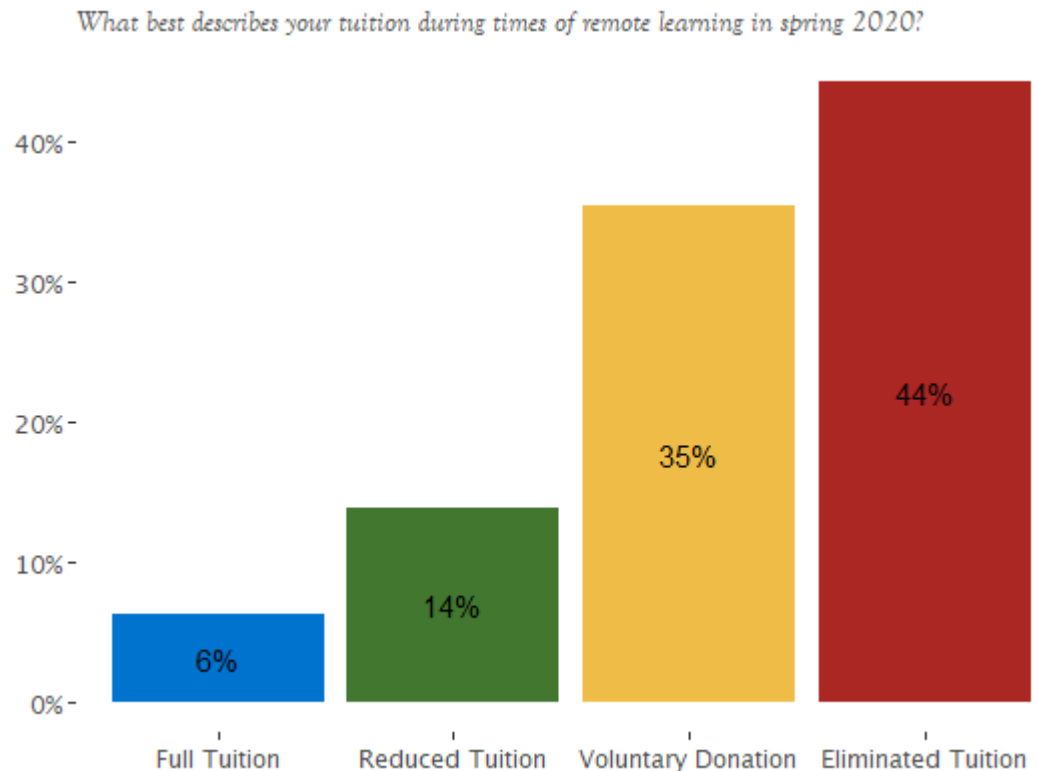
*What factors related to the pandemic positively/negatively impacted this year's enrollment?*



# UNLIKE SCHOOLS, MOST ECCS REDUCED TUITION WHILE REMOTE

- Only 6% of freestanding ECCs continued charging full tuition during times of remote learning
- While this was true for the Spring term of 2020, it was not continued during Fall of 2020, as most (over 80%) returned to full tuition
- This was only true for freestanding ECCs. For ECCs that are connected with an elementary school, 95% reported remaining at full tuition (similar to numbers for all elementary schools)
- The trend was true for preschools as well as ECCs that only provide child care

*Keep in mind, almost all freestanding ECCs rely on tuition as their primary source of income (between 75-100%)*

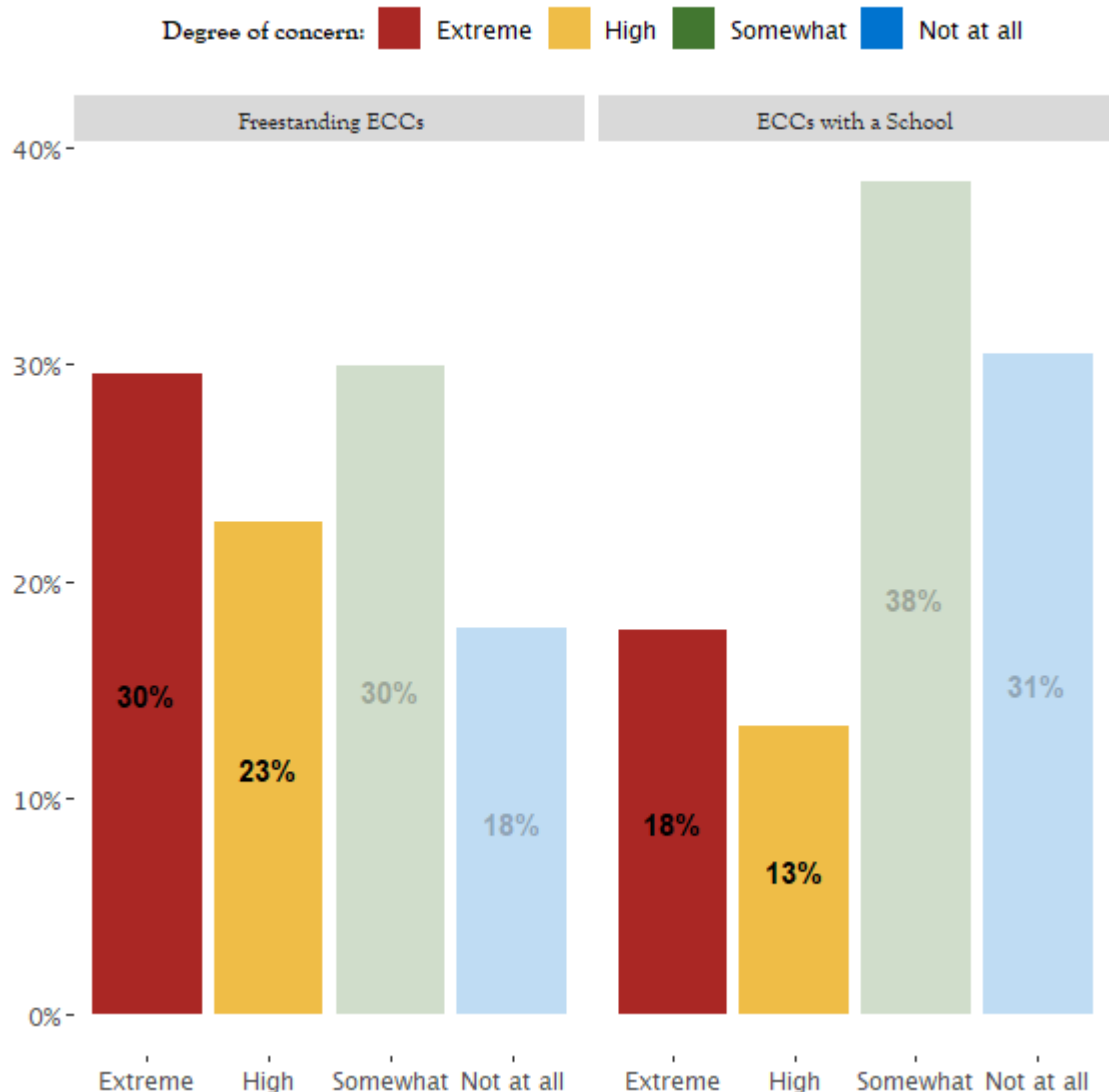


*Data only includes responses from freestanding ECCs that offered remote learning opportunities.*

# MANY FREESTANDING ECCS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT VIABILITY

*"To what degree are you concerned about the ability of your school to survive the pandemic?"*

- Half of freestanding ECCs expressed an elevated (high or extreme) level of concern about their ability to survive the pandemic
- While this is significantly lower among ECCs connected with a school, the overall number remains high (nearly 1-in-3)
- Community type (urban/rural), region of the country, and size of school (enrollment) do not have any correlative effect on concerns about viability
- Of note, the survey only measures the perceptions of those filling out the survey; this is not the same as measuring how likely the school is to close
- There is also no baseline data on this topic prior to COVID-19 to provide comparison or measure the degree of change





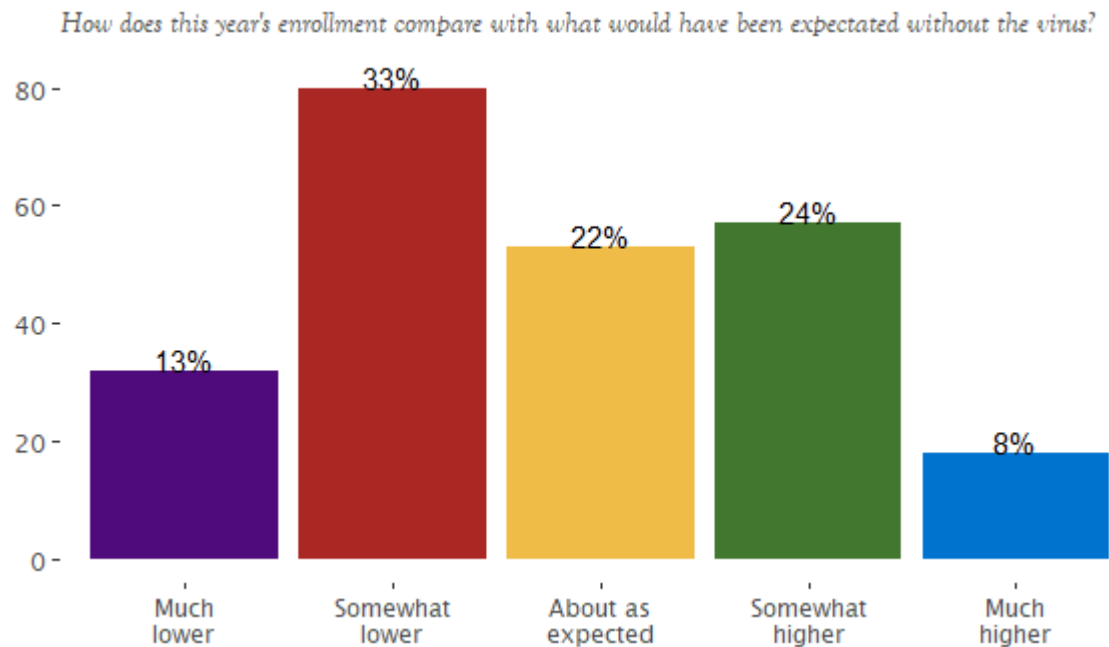
# IMPACT ON ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS

LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19



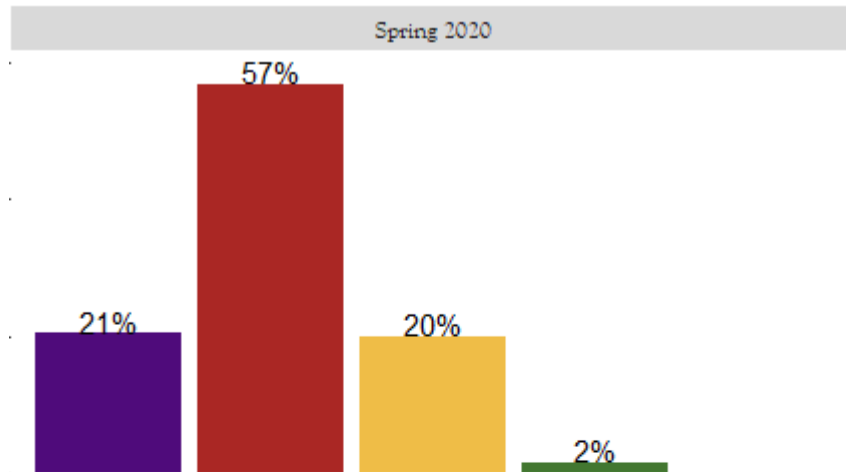
# THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON SPRING AND FALL SEMESTERS

- Over 93% of Lutheran schools halted in-person classes in Spring of 2020
  - Fewer than 4% of schools had students return to classrooms before the spring semester ended
- By contrast, 82% started the fall semester fully in-person
  - The remaining were evenly split between full remote learning or a hybrid
- According to the survey, the pandemic has lowered enrollment for the 2020-2021 school year for nearly half of LCMS schools, but for nearly a third of schools, enrollment is actually up
  - Those starting the year remotely or with a hybrid model were more likely to say this year's enrollment is down
- As with early childhood centers, the main reasons cited for enrollment going down were students' health and safety and families' financial situations
- Schools that have seen enrollment increase from the pandemic cite families agreeing with the way their school responded to the pandemic, especially that they are holding in person classes when other schools are not
- Only one school suspended operations (only temporarily)

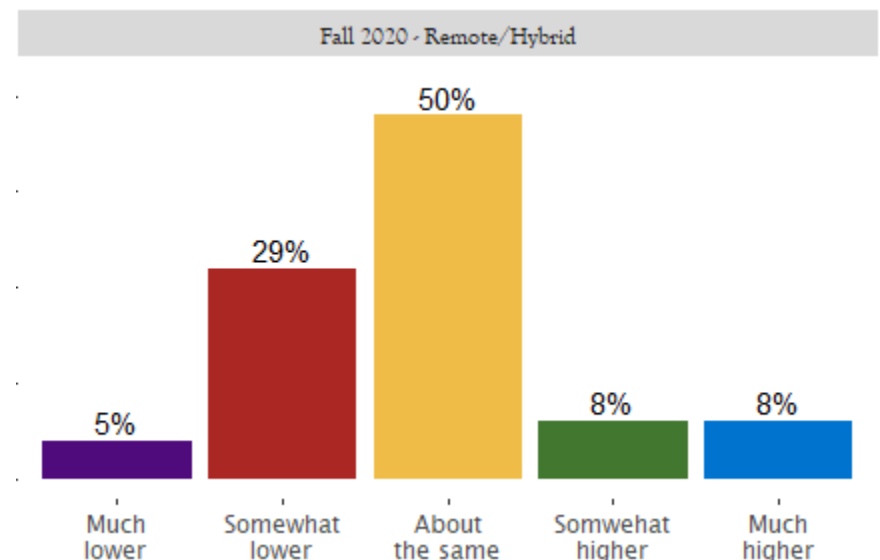
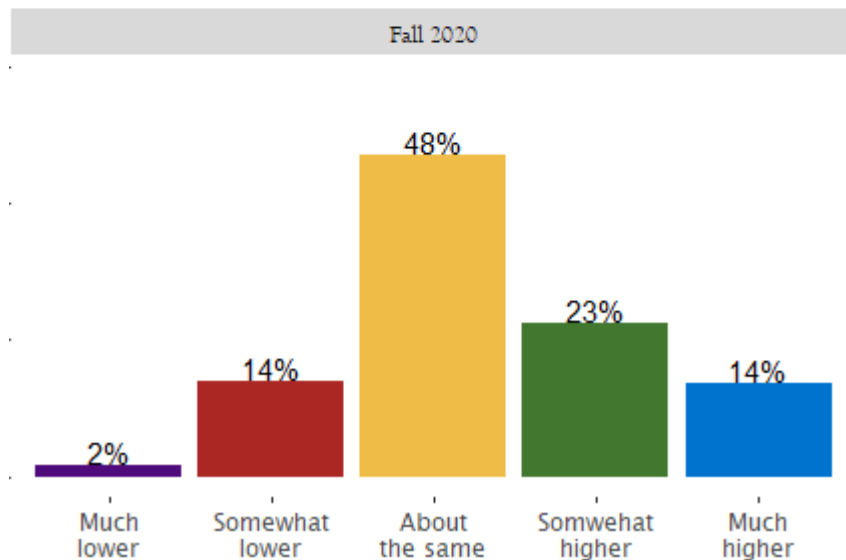


# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REBOUNDED FROM A DIFFICULT SPRING

*How has student engagement compared with previous years at the same time?*

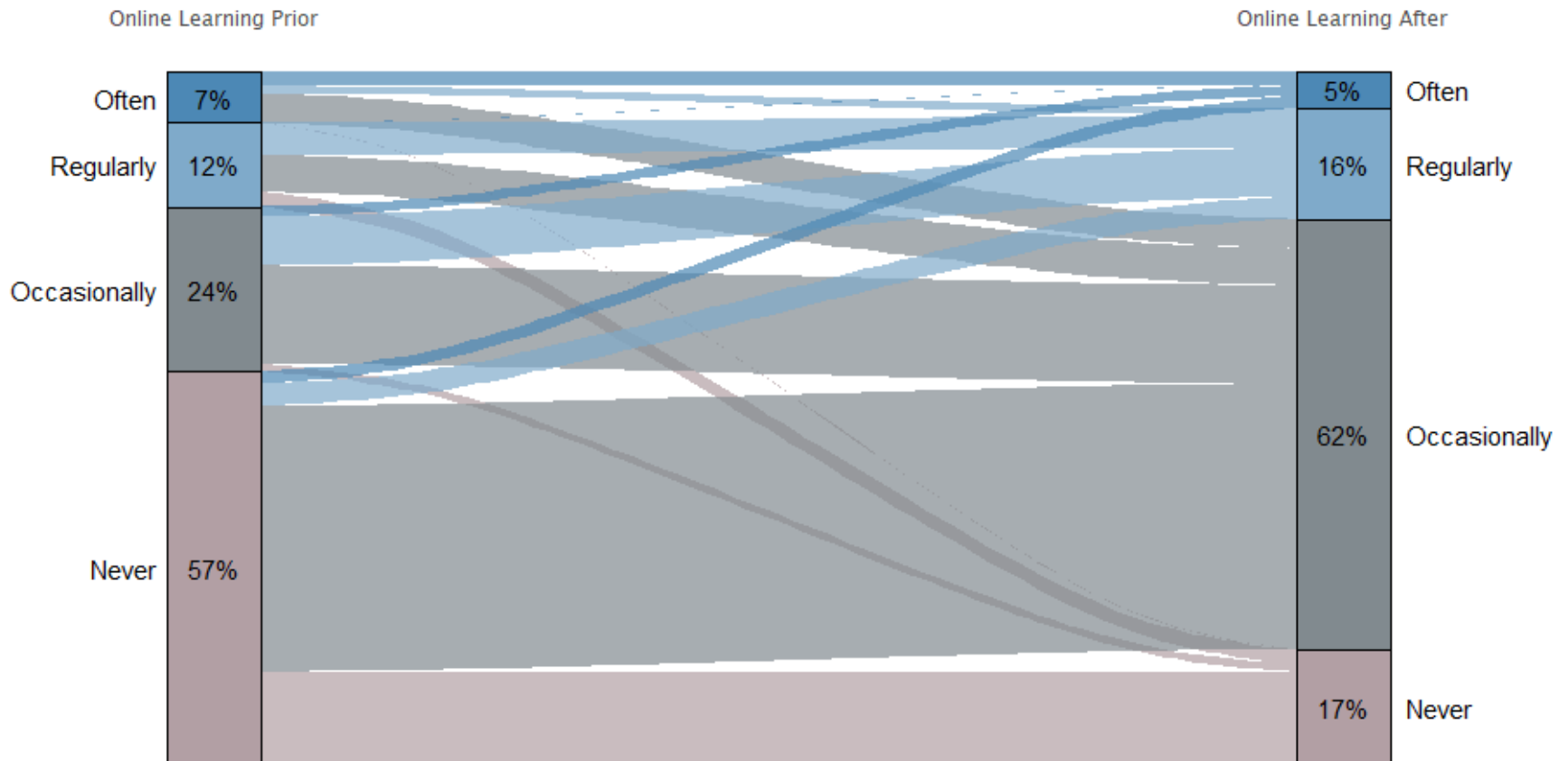


- Remote learning was thrust upon students and faculty in the spring semester, and student engagement suffered greatly
- In the fall, student engagement rebounded, with around half of schools saying engagement was about the same, but a significant portion saying engagement had improved
- Of note, student engagement also improved even among schools that started the fall remotely



# MORE SCHOOLS TO INCLUDE ONLINE TOOLS MOVING FORWARD

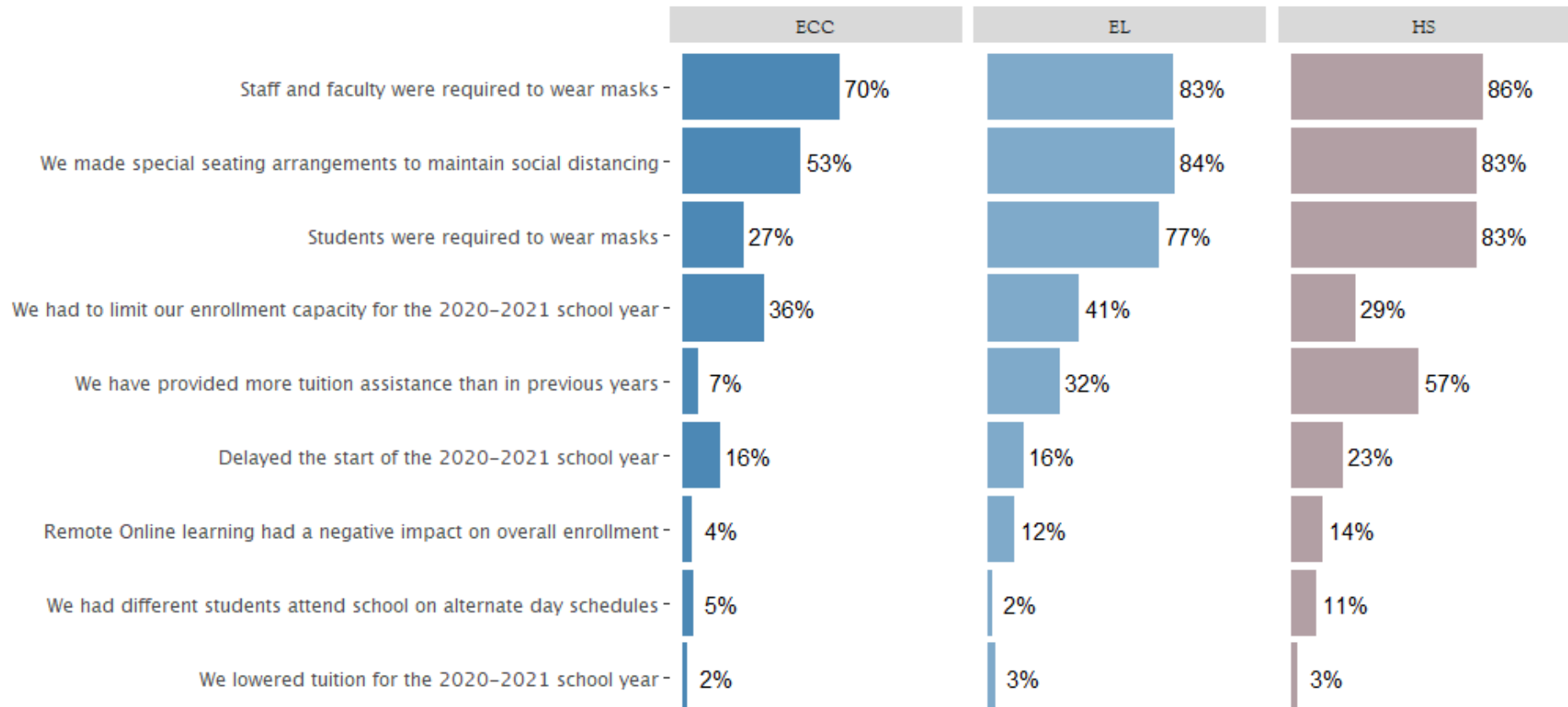
- Prior to the pandemic, fewer than half of all elementary and high schools incorporated online learning
- Moving forward, most say they will continue using online learning occasionally with their regular teaching
- Only very few who used online learning before the virus will be getting rid of it in the future





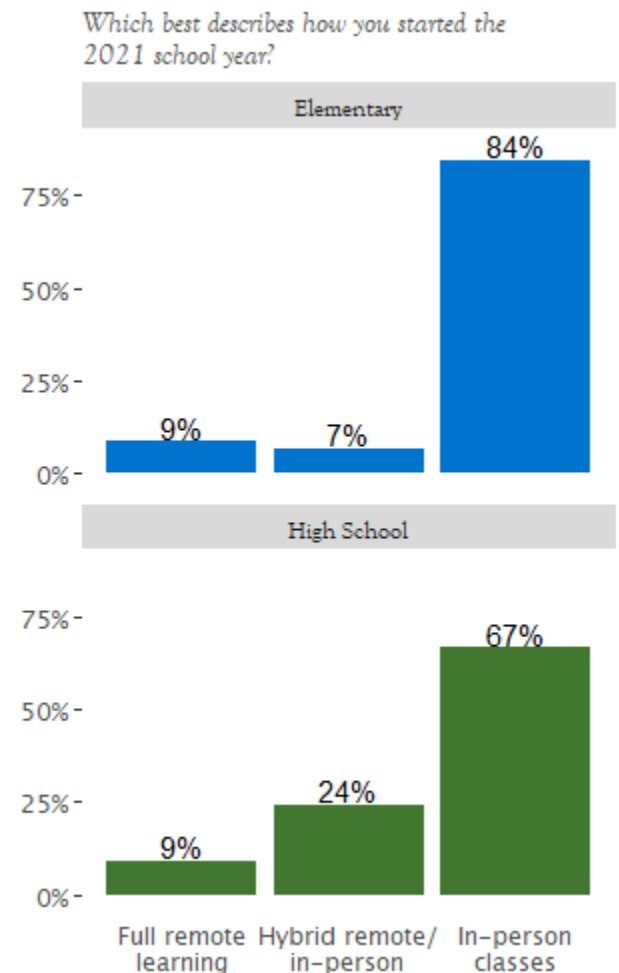
# MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING FOUND ALMOST EVERYWHERE

*Percentage of schools (by type) that have done any of the following:*



# FEW DIFFERENCES IN ELEMENTARY VS. HIGH SCHOOL RESPONSES

- Many major factors were not significantly different between elementary and high schools:
  - Ability of the school to survive the pandemic
  - Impact on enrollment
  - Effect on student engagement in the fall and spring
  - Likelihood of using online learning tools in the future
  - Requiring masks and changing seating to ensure social distancing
- Though in some factors, high schools responded differently:
  - While most LCMS high schools started 2021 in-person, overall high schools were more likely than elementary schools to have started with a hybrid model (*see right*)
  - Lutheran high schools were less likely than elementary schools to have limited their enrollment due to capacity restrictions (29% vs 41%)
  - High schools were also more likely than elementary schools to increase tuition assistance for this year (57% vs 32%)
  - While high schools were slightly less likely to provide laptops or tablets because of the pandemic, they were nearly twice as likely to say they already provide such devices, regardless of the pandemic (30% vs 16%)



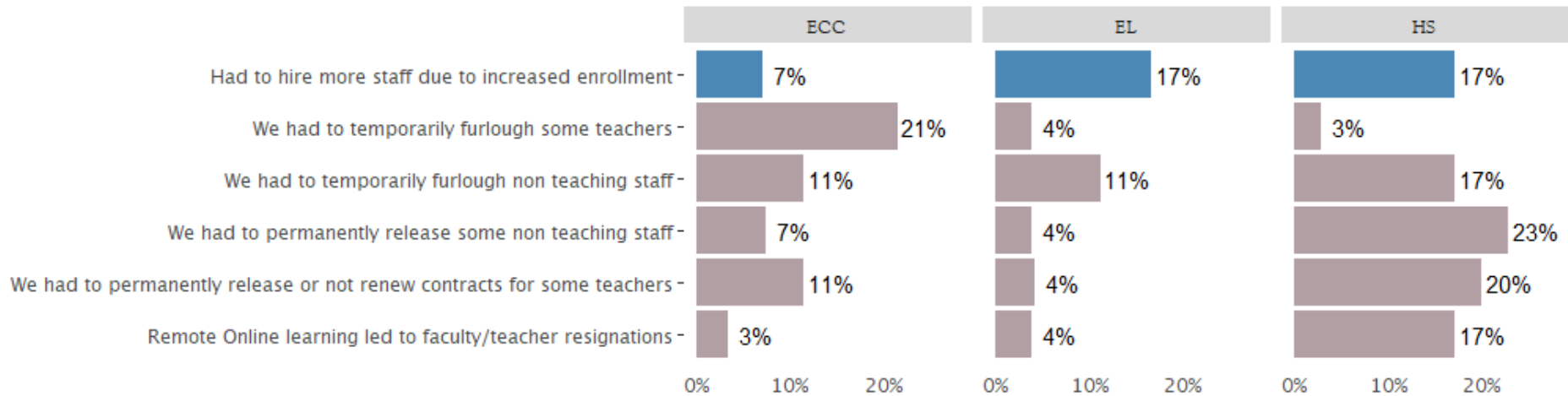


# IMPACT ON FACULTY AND STAFF

LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19



# SCHOOL TYPE GREATLY AFFECTED THE IMPACT ON FACULTY/STAFF



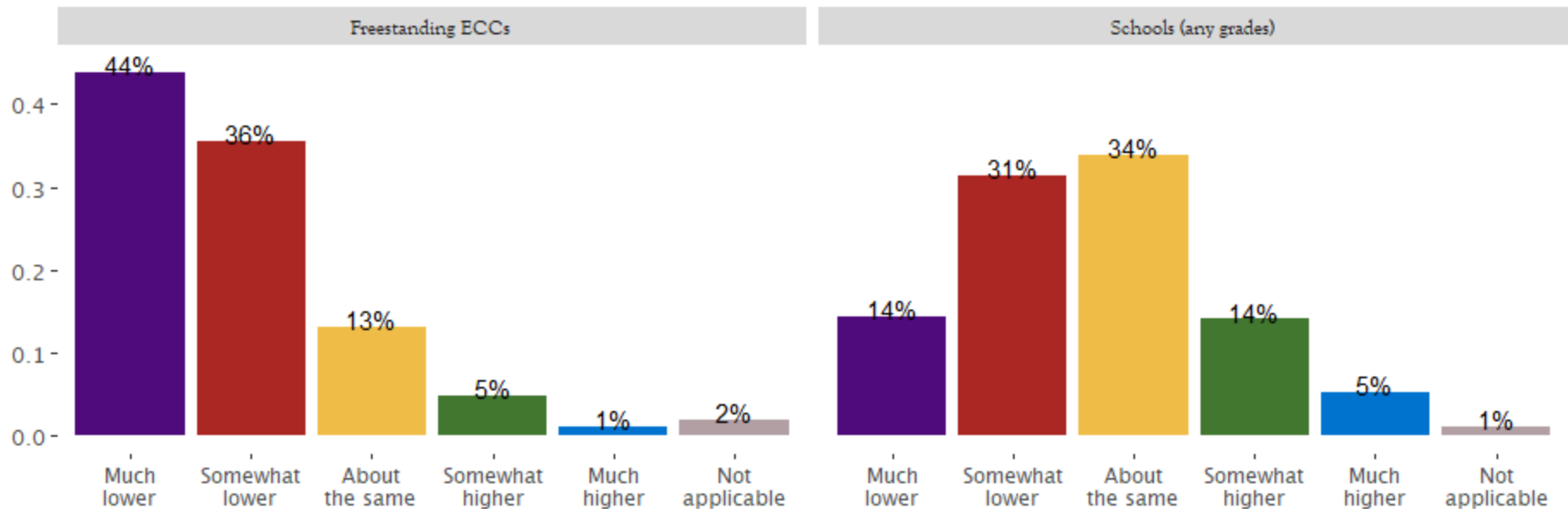
- One area with especially significant differences by type of school was the impact on staff
  - Very few elementary schools lost staff, and many needed to hire new staff
  - High schools were the most likely to have lost teachers (either by release or resignation)
    - While these percentages are higher, the small number of high schools means this is a very low percentage of teachers overall
  - Early childhood centers were more likely to have furloughed teachers temporarily
  - *Not shown:* ECCs were far less likely than elementary or high schools to receive PPP loans (63% vs 81%)

*Note: the survey did not ask about specific numbers on faculty/staff furloughs or releases. But given relatively low numbers of schools that had to release or not renew contracts with staff, it seems as if the overall impact on staffing was minimal. This is in line with findings from the “Church Workers and COVID-19 Survey”, which found that very few rostered workers (which included many teachers) lost their call because of the pandemic.*

## INCOME FROM TUITION IS LOWER, ESPECIALLY IN ECCS

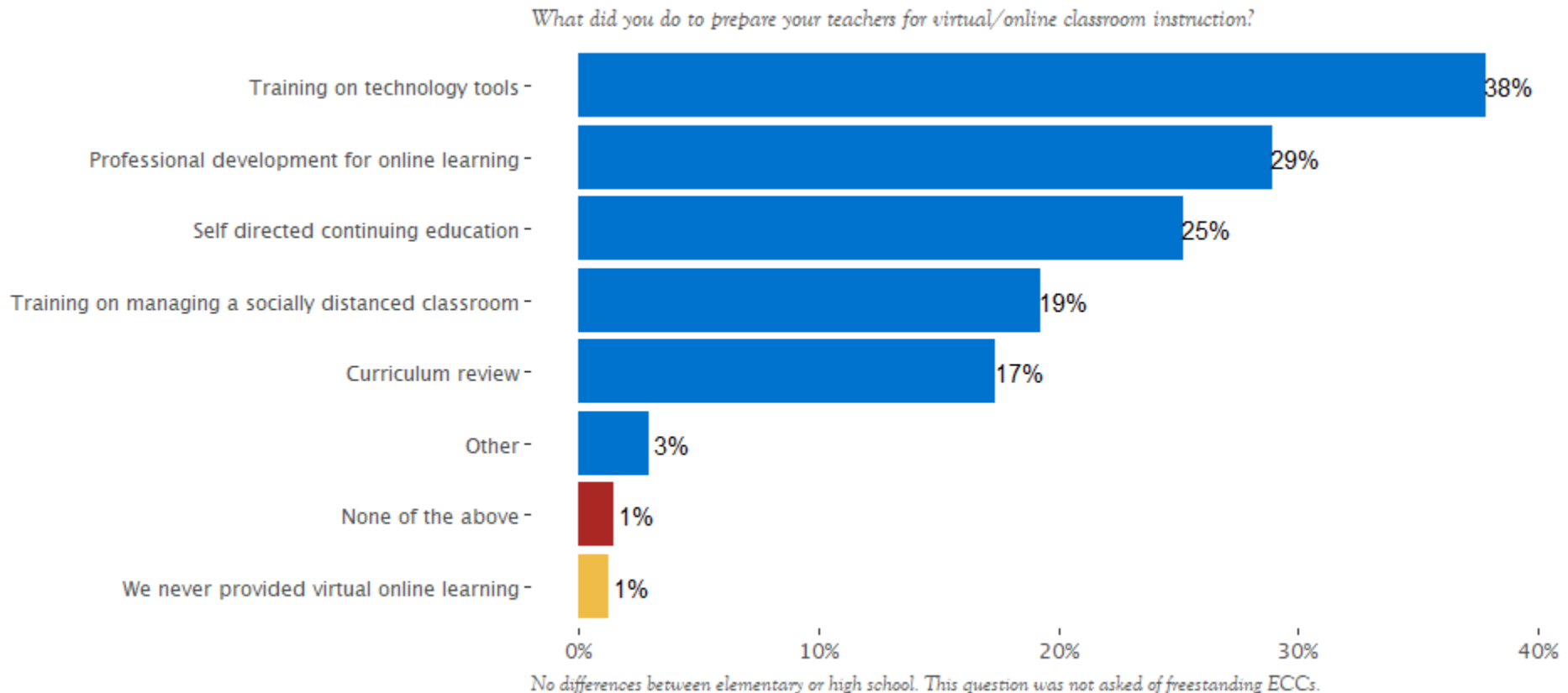
- For nearly all ECCs, tuition and fees are almost exclusively the only source of income, whereas many elementary and high schools are more likely to receive supplemental funding from congregation(s)
- With that, the pandemic has been especially difficult for ECCs as they are much more likely than schools to have seen their enrollment decrease (and along with that their income from tuition)
- In both cases, the impact on tuition closely follows the impact on enrollment

*To what degree has your school's income from tuition changed this year because of the pandemic?*



# SCHOOLS PREPARED TEACHERS FOR USING TECHNOLOGY

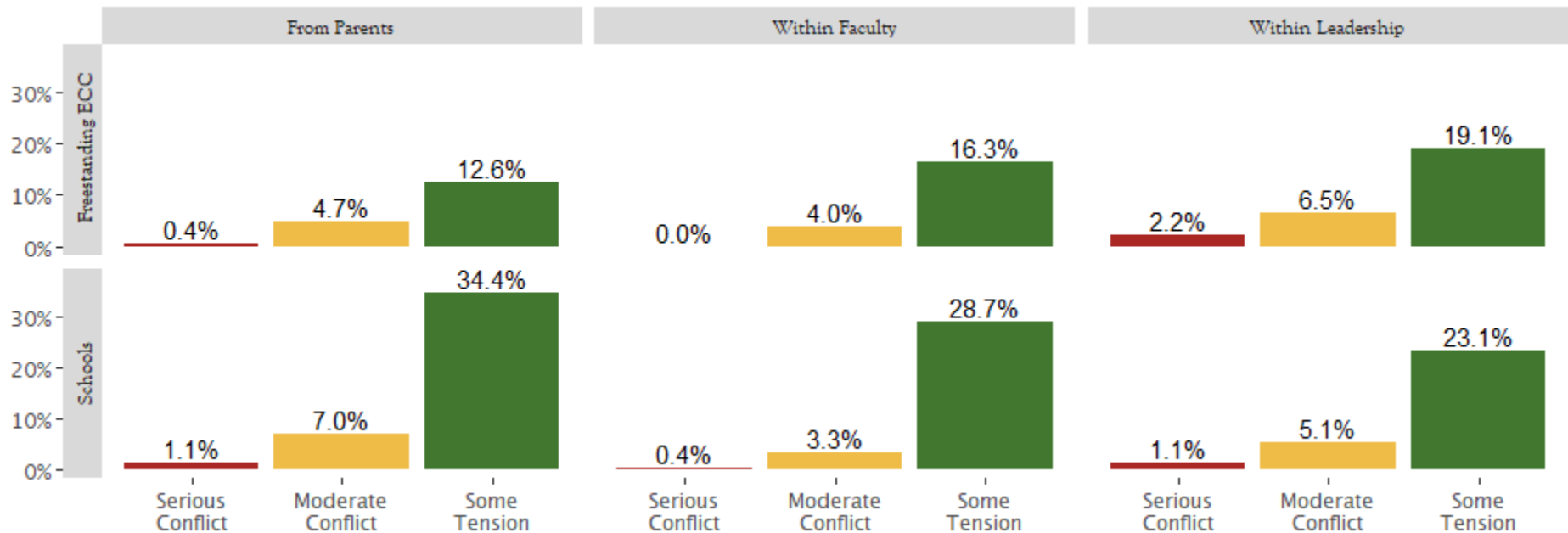
- Nearly every school prepared their teachers for online instruction
- Well over a third of schools (38%) specifically provided training related to using the technology
- Only 29% provided opportunities for the teachers' professional development related to online instruction



# SCHOOLS REPORT MINIMAL CONFLICT WITH COVID RESPONSE

- Over 40% of schools experienced some sort of tension or conflict from parents
- About a third of schools dealt with tension or conflict between faculty members
- Though freestanding ECCs also had to manage conflict and tension, when compared with schools, they faced it at a significantly lower degree, especially from parents or between faculty
- Also, unlike the experience with schools, ECCs dealt with the more conflict or tension within the school's leadership than any other source

*To what degree has there been conflict regarding your school's handling of the pandemic situation?*



*No significant difference between elementary and high school responses.*



# MOVING FORWARD

LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19





# EMOTIONAL WELLBEING TOPS LISTS OF SCHOOL CONCERNS

"To what extent do you have concerns about any of the following due to COVID-19"

		An extreme concern	Very much a concern	Somewhat a concern	Not a concern
Faculty Emotions	Faculty	25%	32%	32%	11%
Faculty Health		20%	26%	39%	14%
Faculty Finances		15%	20%	40%	25%
Faculty Spirituality		17%	22%	32%	29%
Faculty Retention		13%	16%	26%	46%
Student Emotions	Student	22%	34%	32%	12%
Student Spirituality		18%	28%	34%	21%
Student Health		15%	28%	36%	21%
Student Finances		8%	20%	49%	23%
Student Education		14%	23%	33%	29%
Viability of ECC	School	30%	23%	30%	18%
Viability of School		16%	15%	36%	33%

Other than items not applicable to many ECCs (such as student education), there are no significant differences in responses by school type except for school viability (shown).

# GUIDANCE FROM OTHER LCMS SCHOOLS AND THEIR DISTRICTS

- A majority of schools only “somewhat” look to any outside sources for help
- When they do, most look to their state and local governments for guidance during the pandemic
  - This is likely because most regulations and restrictions are being issued locally
- Other LCMS schools are the next highest source of guidance
  - Notably, this is considerably lower among freestanding ECCs (*this is the only major difference by school type*)
- District help is much more likely to be sought than Synodical help (a much stronger difference than observed from congregations)
- News and social media were ranked lowest (consistent with the findings from congregations)

*"To what extent are you looking to the following for resources or guidance"*

	Great deal	Good amount	Somewhat	Not at all
State Local Govt	23%	27%	40%	10%
LCMS Schools	13%	29%	43%	15%
District	15%	32%	37%	15%
Federal Govt	9%	23%	49%	20%
Public Schools	3%	19%	54%	23%
Private Schools	3%	19%	49%	29%
Congregations	4%	13%	49%	34%
Synod	4%	10%	47%	38%
Social Media	1%	9%	39%	51%
News Media	2%	5%	30%	63%

*\* Chart only includes responses from elementary and high schools. Freestanding ECCs are not significantly different except for a lower ranking of looking to other LCMS schools.*

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ARE THE HIGHEST RATED NEEDS

- When asked to rate their needs, most schools only expressed moderate to low need for specific help
  - This is likely because most schools have already started the new school year and returned to in-person instruction
  - Approximately 1-in-6 schools indicated at least one “strong need”
  - However, the same amount expressed having no needs (only indicated “not at all” or “would be nice”)
  - The remainder of schools issued one or more areas of “some need”
- The most common needs cited were resources and recommendations related to online instruction
  - However, these were not needs expressed by many freestanding ECCs (the only significant difference by school type)

*"To what extent do you need the following resources"*

	Strong Need	Some Need	Would be Nice	Not at all
Resources for teachers teaching remotely	14%	26%	38%	22%
Recommendations of online learning tools	9%	25%	38%	27%
Financial guidance	7%	20%	33%	40%
Advice for complying with government regulations	9%	19%	31%	42%
Expectations for schools during a pandemic	10%	17%	31%	42%

\* Chart only includes responses from elementary and high schools. Freestanding ECCs are not significantly different except that they do not share as much need of the top two items (related to education).



# CONCLUSIONS

LCMS SCHOOLS AND COVID-19



# IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND INDIVIDUALS

## ■ Educational Impact

- Almost every LCMS school had to suspend in-person classes in the spring of 2020
- Most were able to start the fall term in-person
- Student engagement suffered in the spring but mostly rebounded in the fall (even among those that were not back in classrooms)
- Masks and socially-distanced classrooms are now the norm for most schools
- Overall, schools are not worried that the quality of education is suffering because of virtual learning, and many plan to continue incorporating online learning moving forward

## ■ Human Impact

- Schools are especially concerned about the emotional wellbeing of faculty and students during the pandemic
- When it comes to their students, schools are concerned about spiritual development more than health or even the quality of the education they received while remote learning (*not to imply they do not care about these topics*)
- As for faculty, after emotional wellbeing schools' second highest concern is about their teachers' health and safety
- Many school faculty and administrators have had to deal with conflict regarding the response to the pandemic, especially with parents (this was significantly less of an issue with freestanding ECCs)

# ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

- There are significant concerns about the viability of many schools
  - Half of freestanding ECCs are “very much” concerned about their school surviving if the pandemic continues
  - Just under a third of schools are “very much” concerned

*Reminder: a high degree of concern over viability does not mean closure is imminent.  
It is also not known how many of these already had concerns about viability, prior to the pandemic.*

- For most schools, enrollment is down because of health and safety concerns, but also because of the economic factors affecting families
  - Freestanding ECC enrollment is significantly down
- Fortunately, most schools have not had to release staff
  - Nearly a third of ECCs had to furlough or release teachers
  - 1-in-5 high schools have had to release teachers
  - Some high schools also had teachers resign out of frustration with online learning
  - Elementary schools were more likely to have hired new teachers than release any (though this was a small group)
- Moving Forward
  - Schools are most likely to look to their District office and other LCMS schools for resources and guidance
  - Schools are not necessarily looking directly to Synod for help, but with a high number of schools (especially ECCs) concerned about viability, there may be need for large-scale financial support programs
  - Though most schools did not indicate any “strong needs” in terms of specific resources, most would be receptive to any help, especially resources for teachers and online learning



## NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCHING THE IMPACT

- LCMS Research Services is planning a second wave survey of congregations in early 2021, to get a second measurement of the impact of the pandemic. Consideration will also be given to additional surveys of church workers and schools.
- In addition, careful analysis will be given to any trends and major changes as Rosters finalizes the 2020 statistical data on schools (collecting in fall of 2020).

For questions about this research, contact LCMS Research Services: [research@lcms.org](mailto:research@lcms.org) | 314-996-1439

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