

# **Pastors' Views on How COVID-19 is Affecting Their Church February 2021**

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN PROTESTANT PASTORS

**Lifeway** research

# Methodology

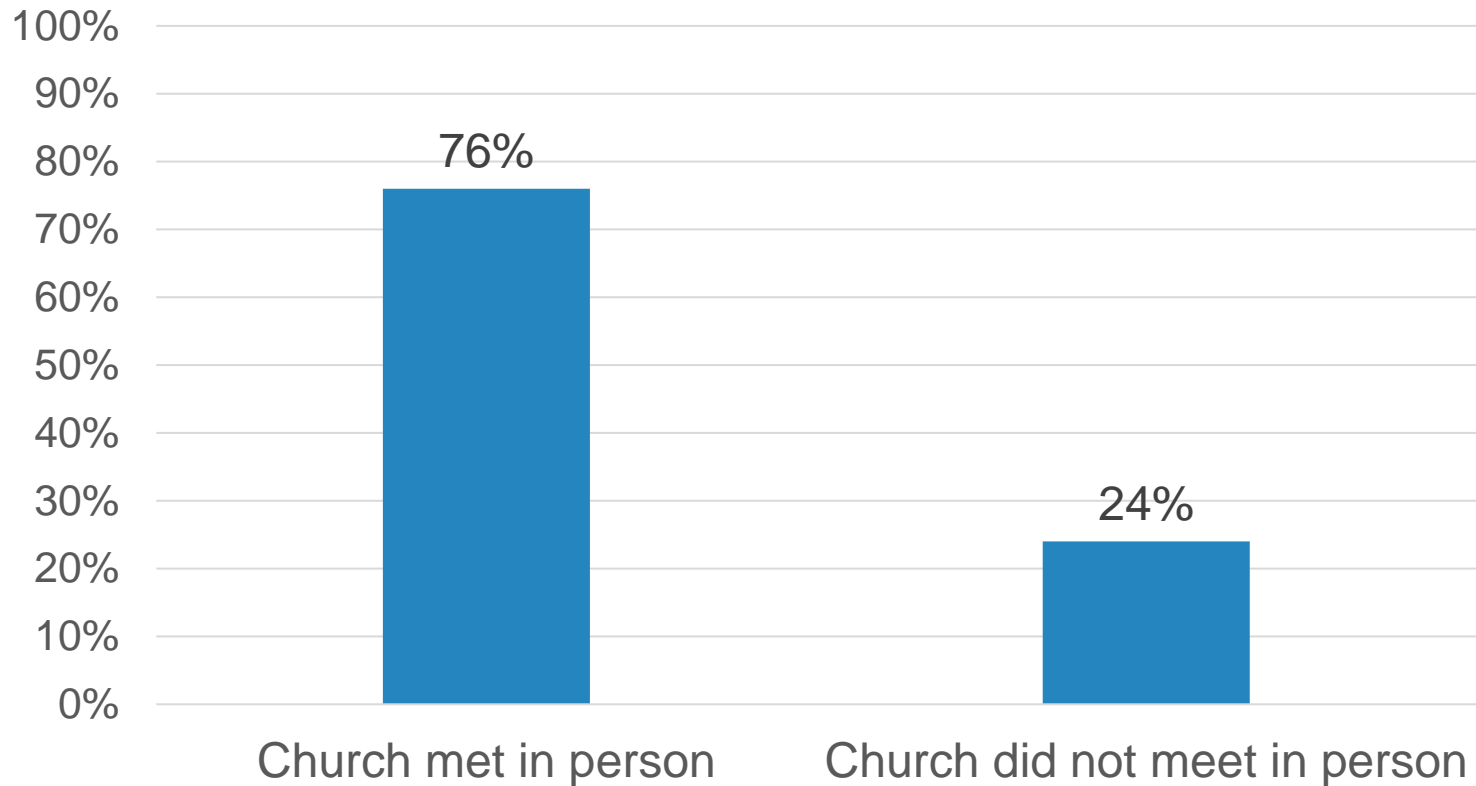
- The online survey of 430 Protestant pastors was conducted February 1-11, 2021
- Invitations were emailed to the LifeWay Research Pastor Panel followed by two reminders.
- The probability sample of Protestant churches was created by phone recruiting by LifeWay Research using random samples selected from all Protestant churches. Pastors who agree to be contacted by email for future surveys make up this LifeWay Research Pastor Panel.
- Each survey was completed by the senior or sole pastor or a minister at the church
- Responses were weighted by church average attendance, region, ethnicity of pastor, and whether the pastor self-identified as evangelical or mainline to more accurately reflect the population

# Methodology

- The final sample is 430 useable surveys
- The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed  $\pm 6.2\%$  This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting
- Margins of error are higher in sub-groups
- Comparisons are made to a survey using the same methodology conducted July 20-22, 2020 with 443 completes
- Comparisons are made to a survey conducted September 2-October 1, 2020 using both online sample using the same methodology and phone using random sampling with 1,007 completes (502 by phone, 505 online)

# 76% of pastors say their church met in person in January 2021

Among Protestant Pastors

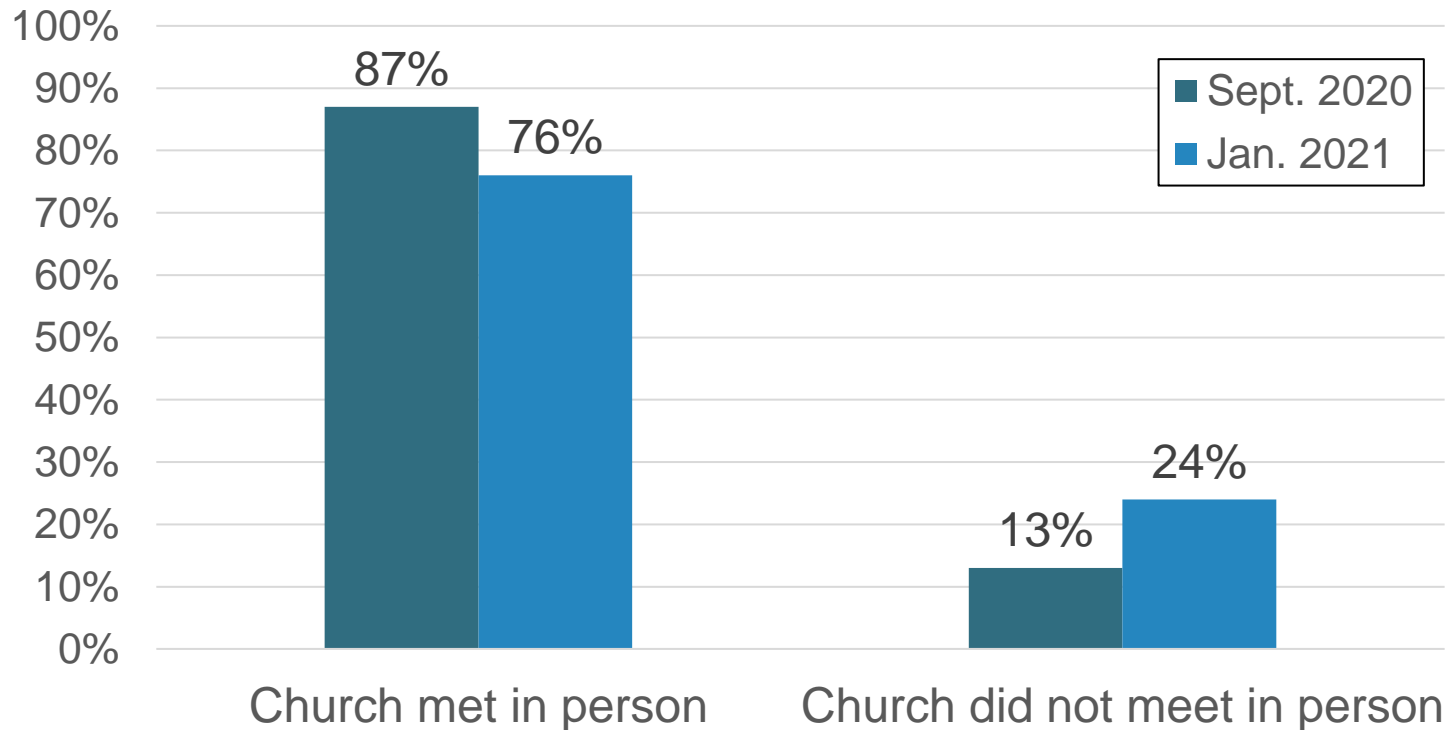


**Lifeway**research

Q2: "Last month (January 2021), what was your church's average worship attendance in person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?" n=430

# 11% fewer churches met in person in January 2021 than September 2020

Among Protestant Pastors

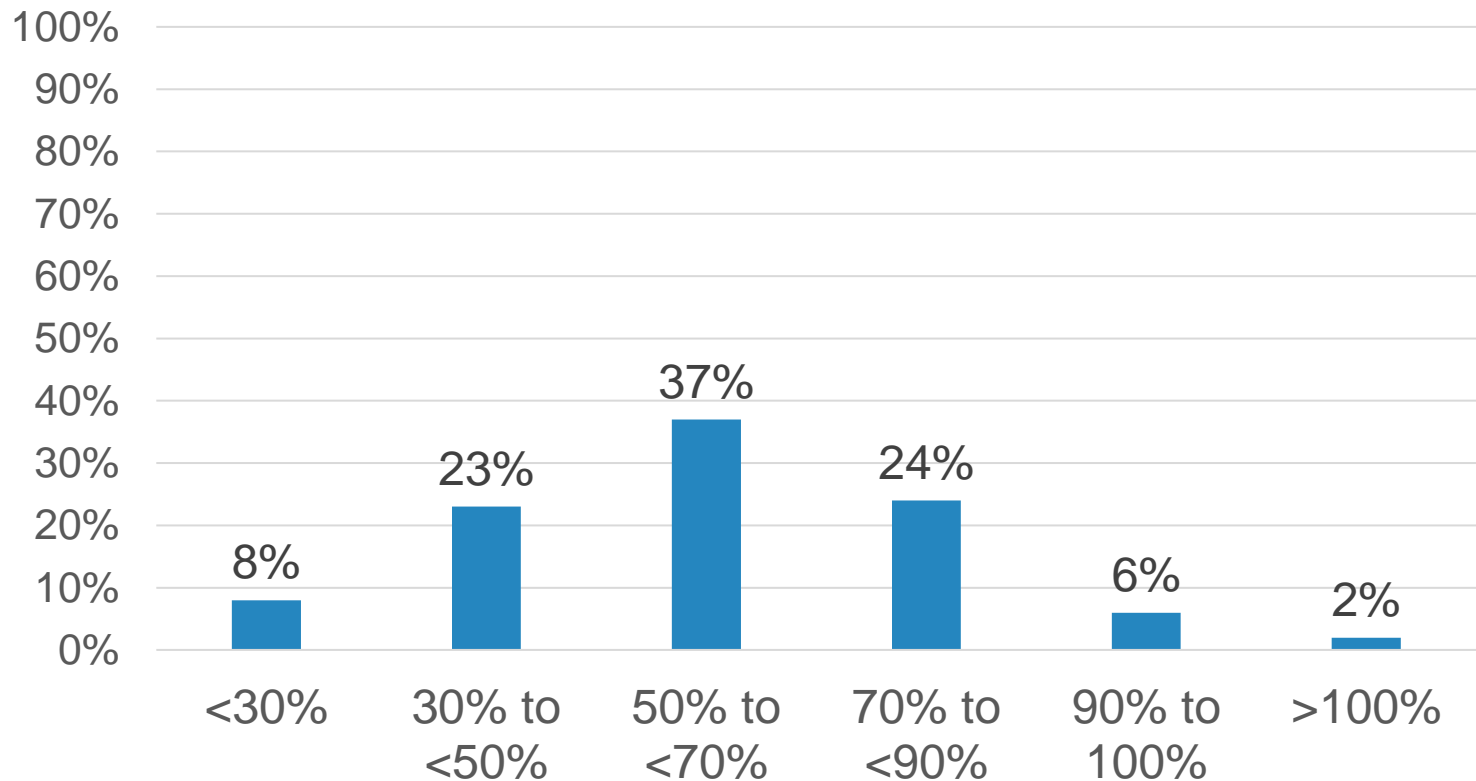


Lifeway research

Q2: "Last month (January 2021), what was your church's average worship attendance in person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?"

# January 2021 Attendance as a percentage of January 2020 Attendance

Among Protestant churches that met in person in January 2021

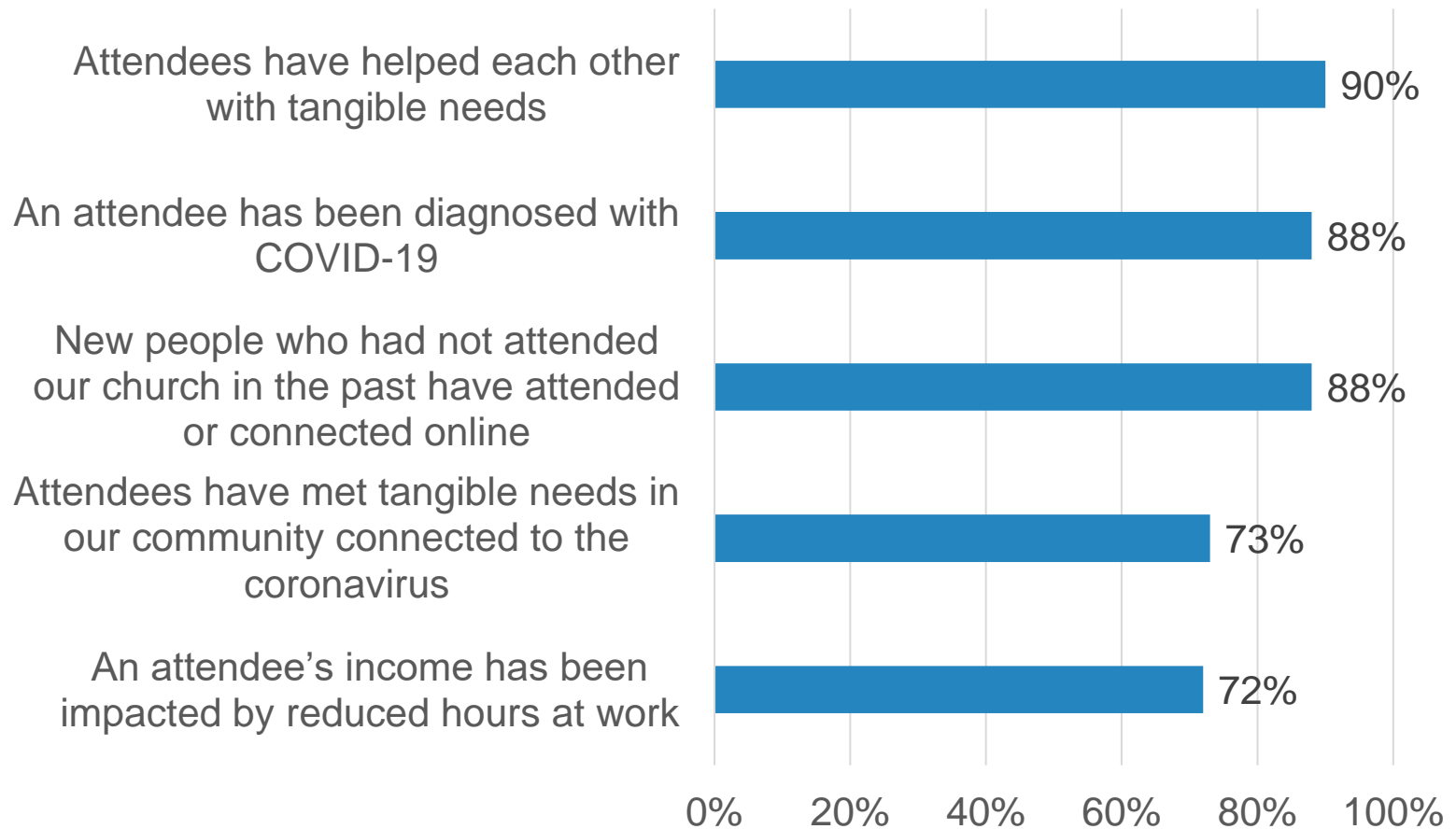


**Lifeway**research

Q3: "Last month (January 2021), what was your church's average worship attendance in person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?" n=350

# “Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”

Among Protestant Pastors

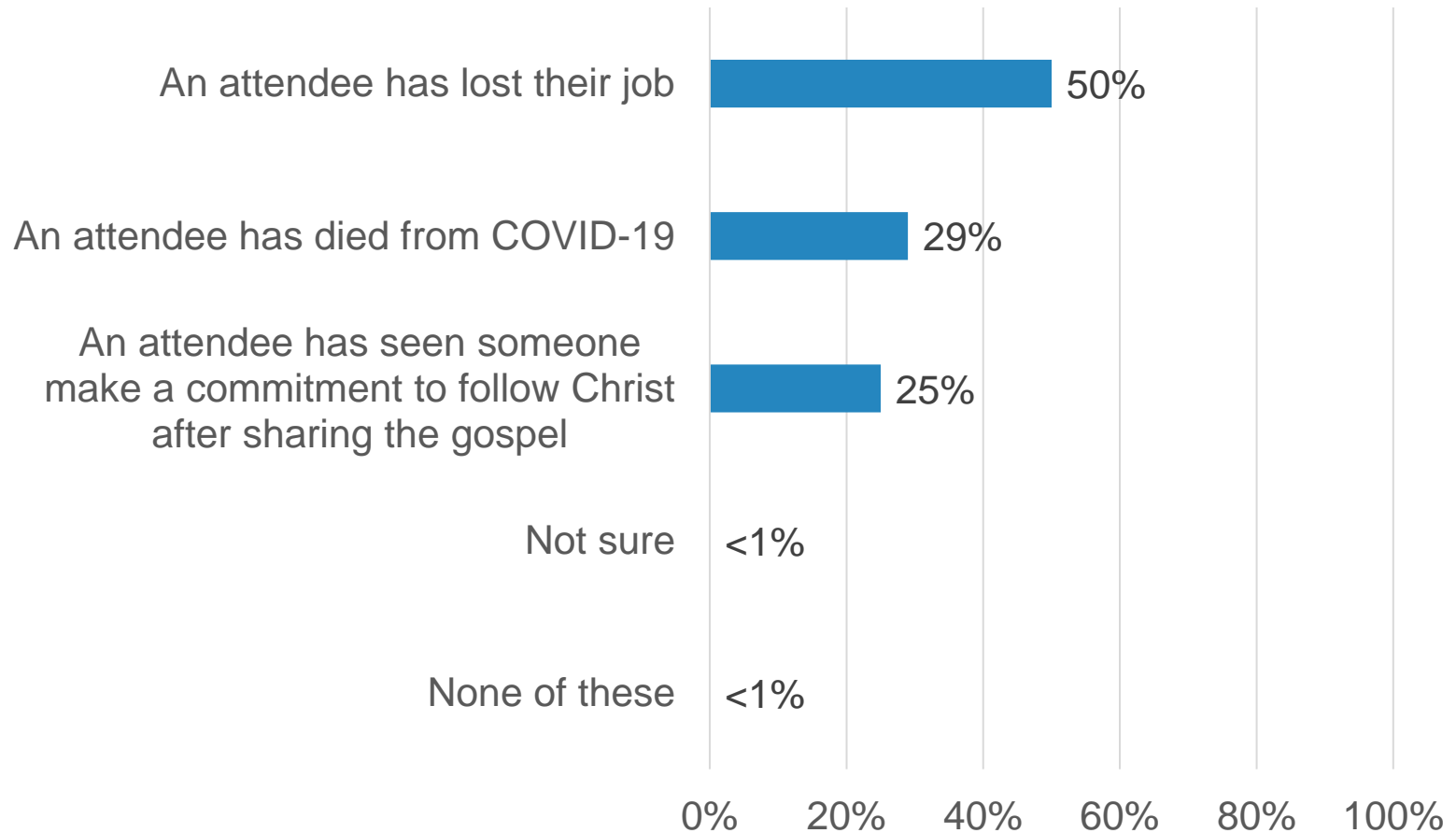


**Lifeway**research

Q4: “Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?  
(Select all that apply)” n=430

# “Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”

Among Protestant Pastors



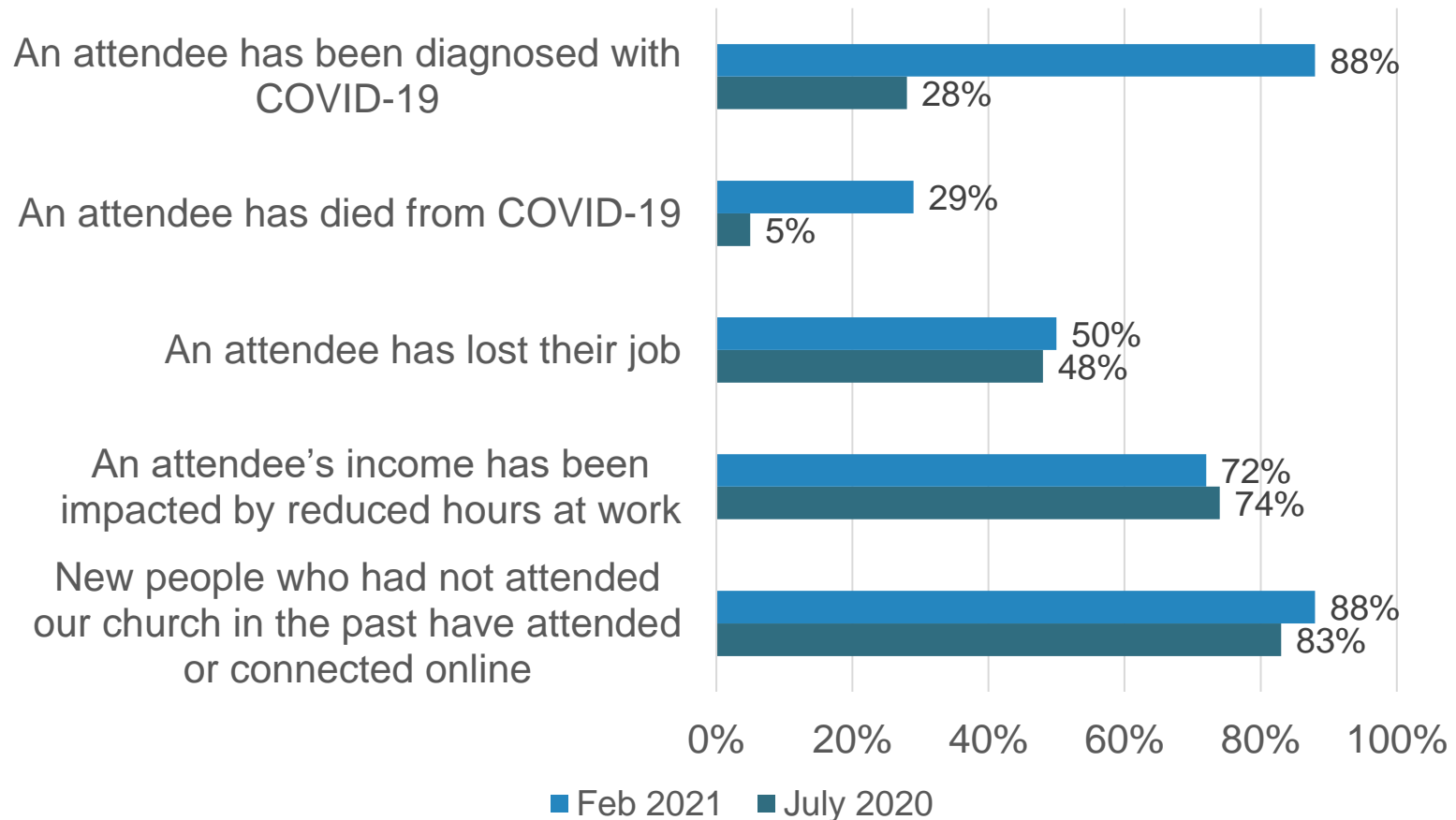
**Lifeway**research

Q4: “Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?  
(Select all that apply)” n=430



# “Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”

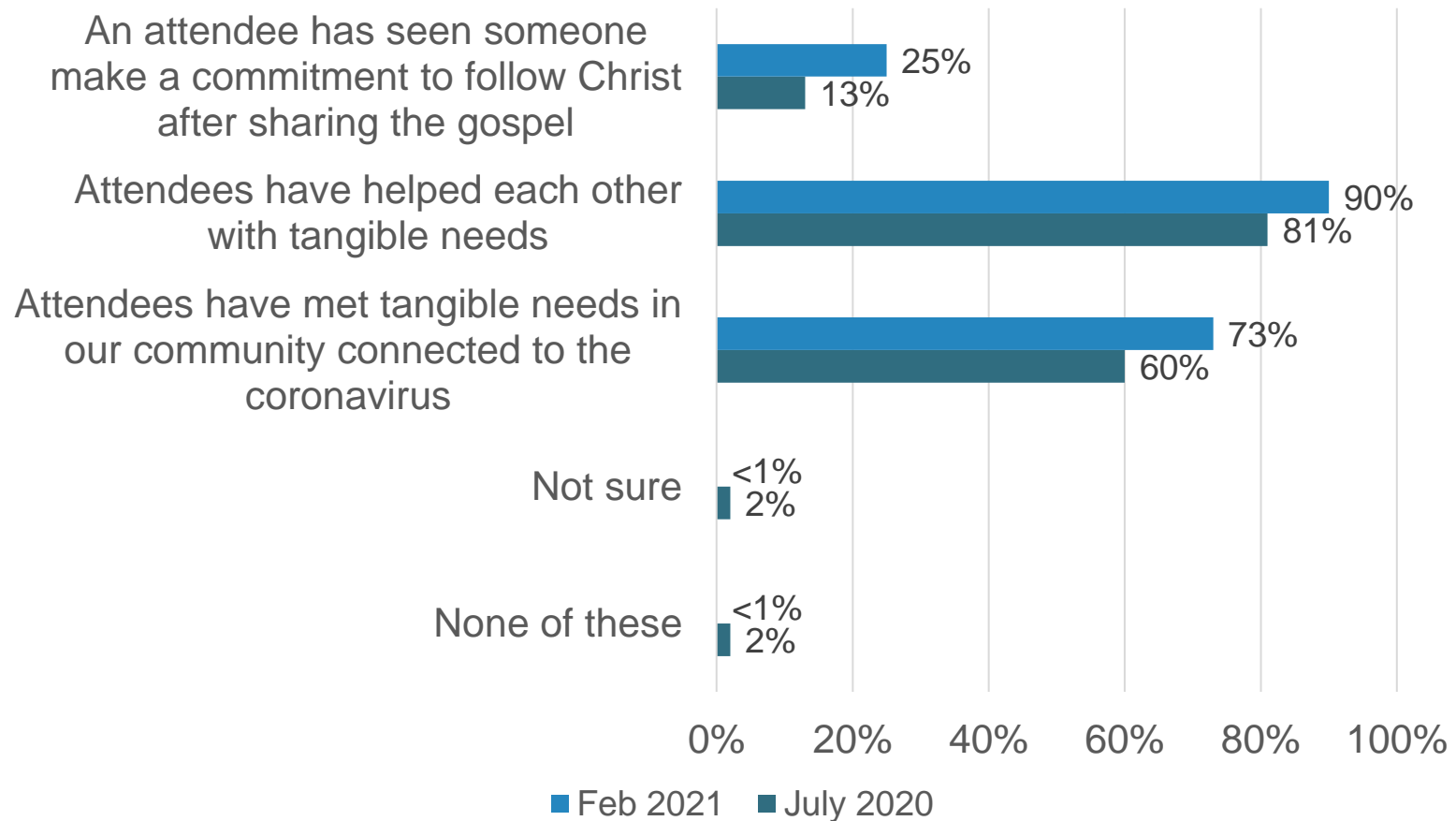
Among Protestant Pastors



Lifeway research

# “Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”

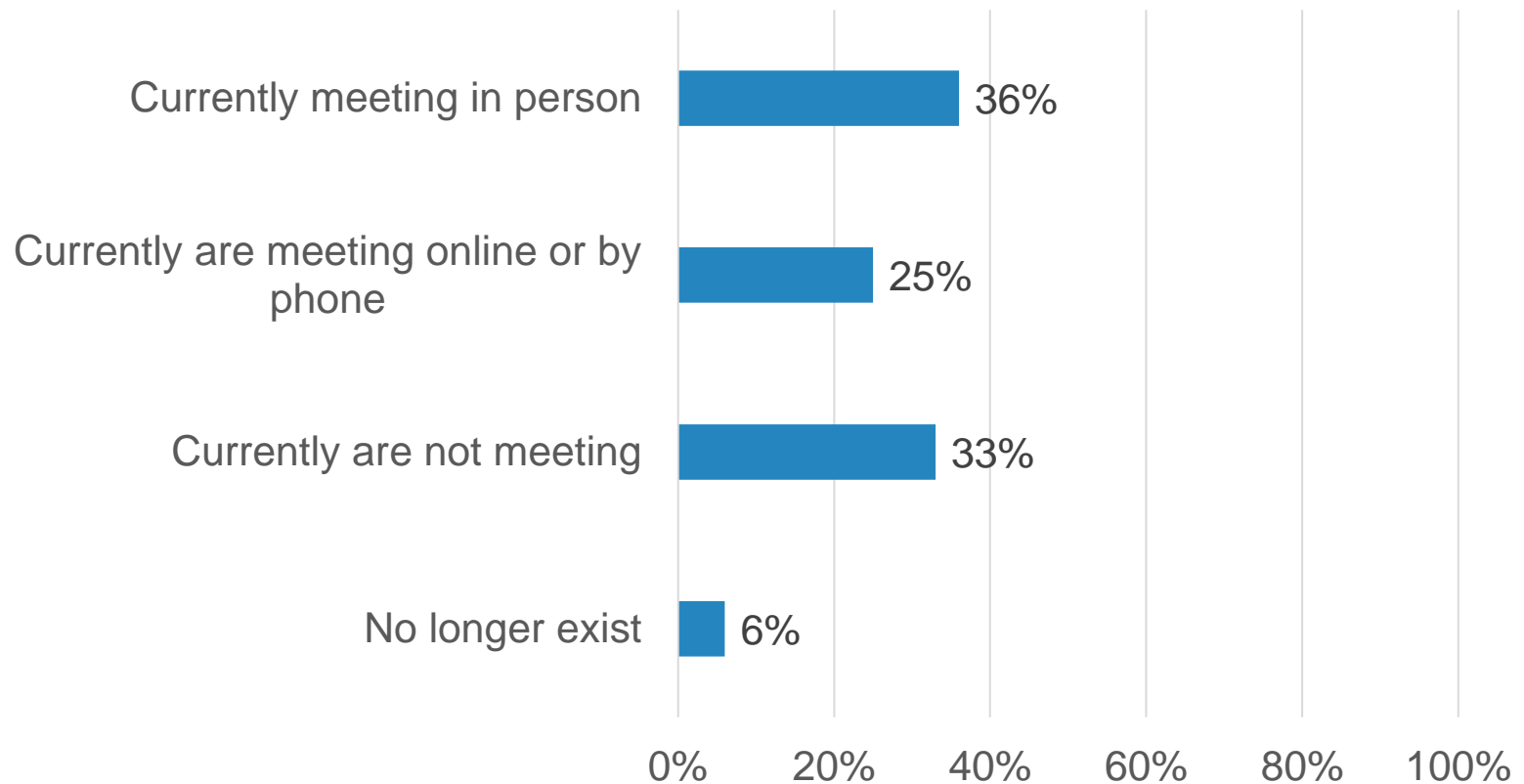
Among Protestant Pastors



Lifeway research

# On average pastors report 62% of their adult small groups/ Sunday school classes are currently meeting

Average Percentage Groups fitting each description

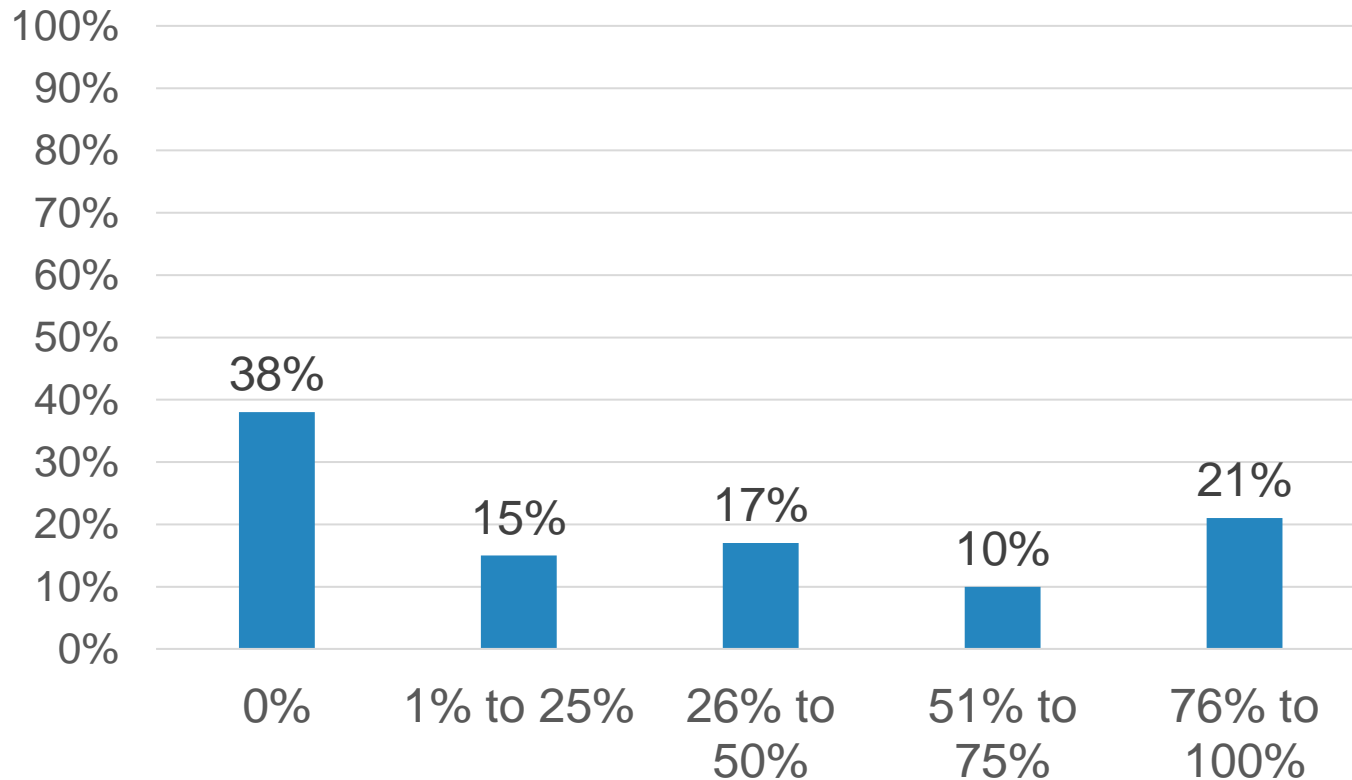


**Lifeway**research

Q5: "Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?" n=430

# Percentage of adult small groups currently meeting in person

Among Protestant Pastors

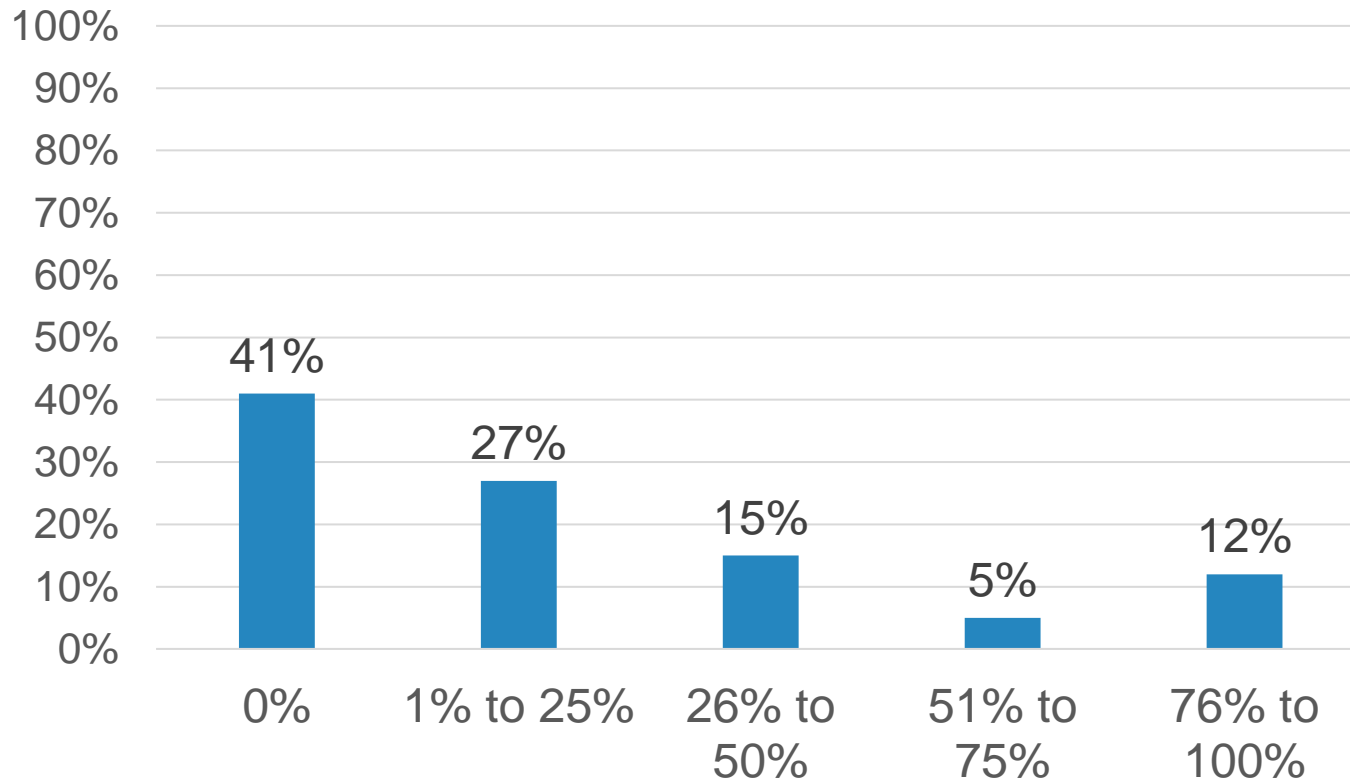


Lifeway research

Q5: "Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?" n=430

# Percentage of adult groups currently meeting online or by phone

Among Protestant Pastors

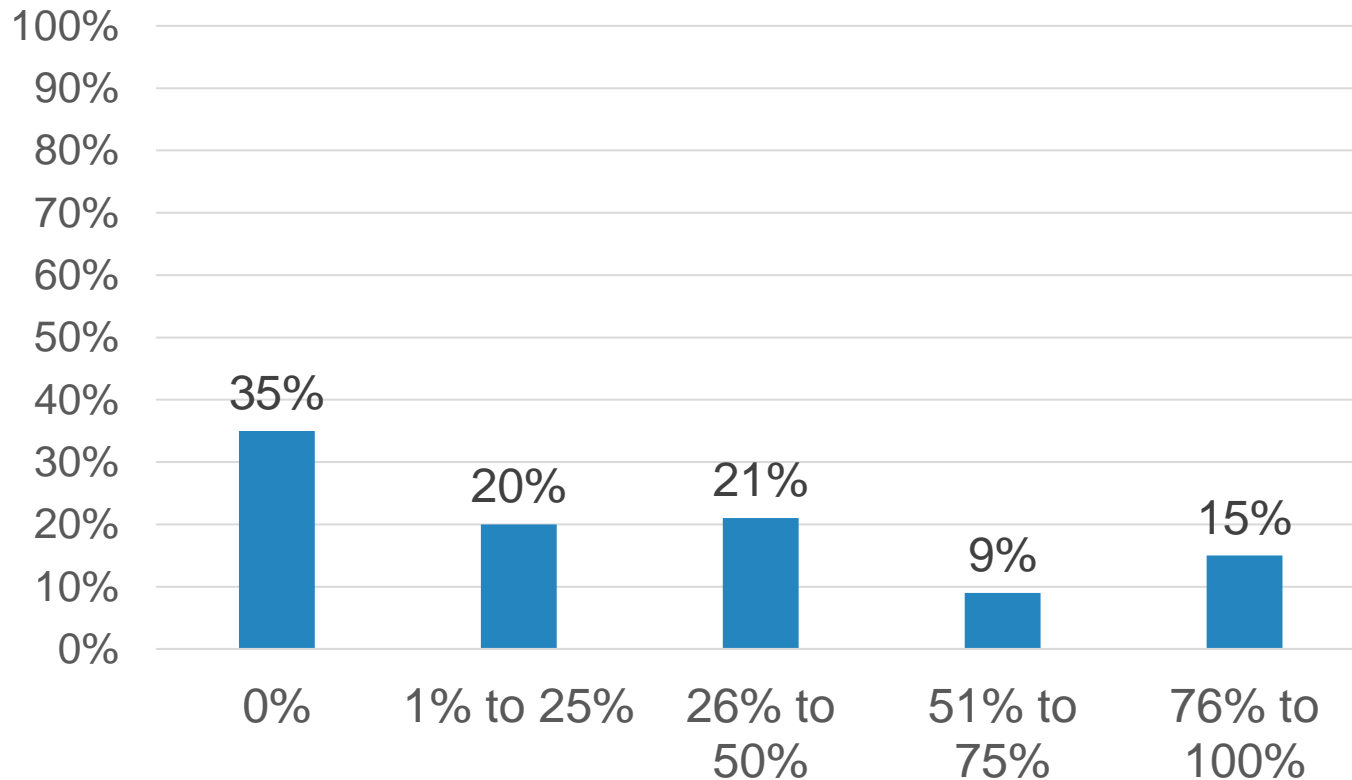


Lifeway research

Q5: "Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?" n=430

# Percentage of adult groups currently not meeting

Among Protestant Pastors

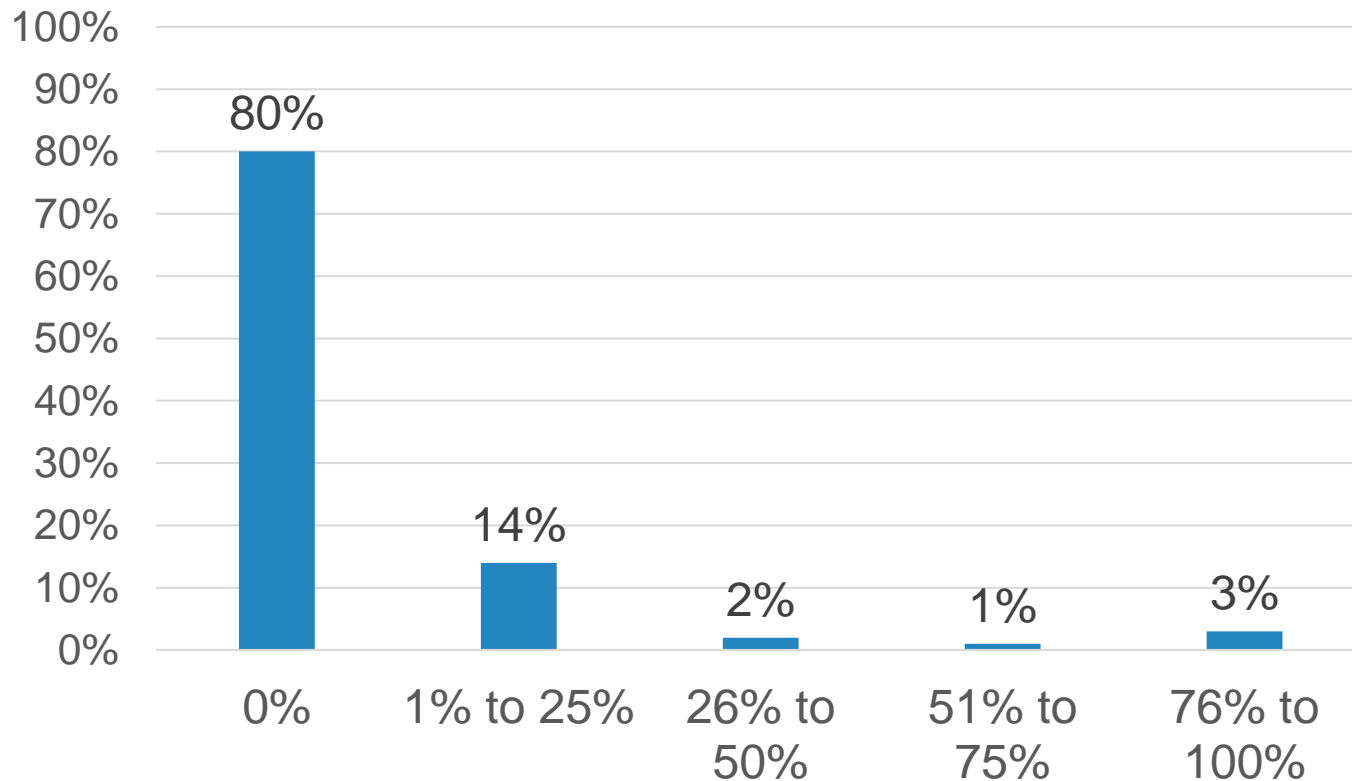


**Lifeway**research

Q5: "Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?" n=430

# Percentage of adult groups that no longer exist

Among Protestant Pastors

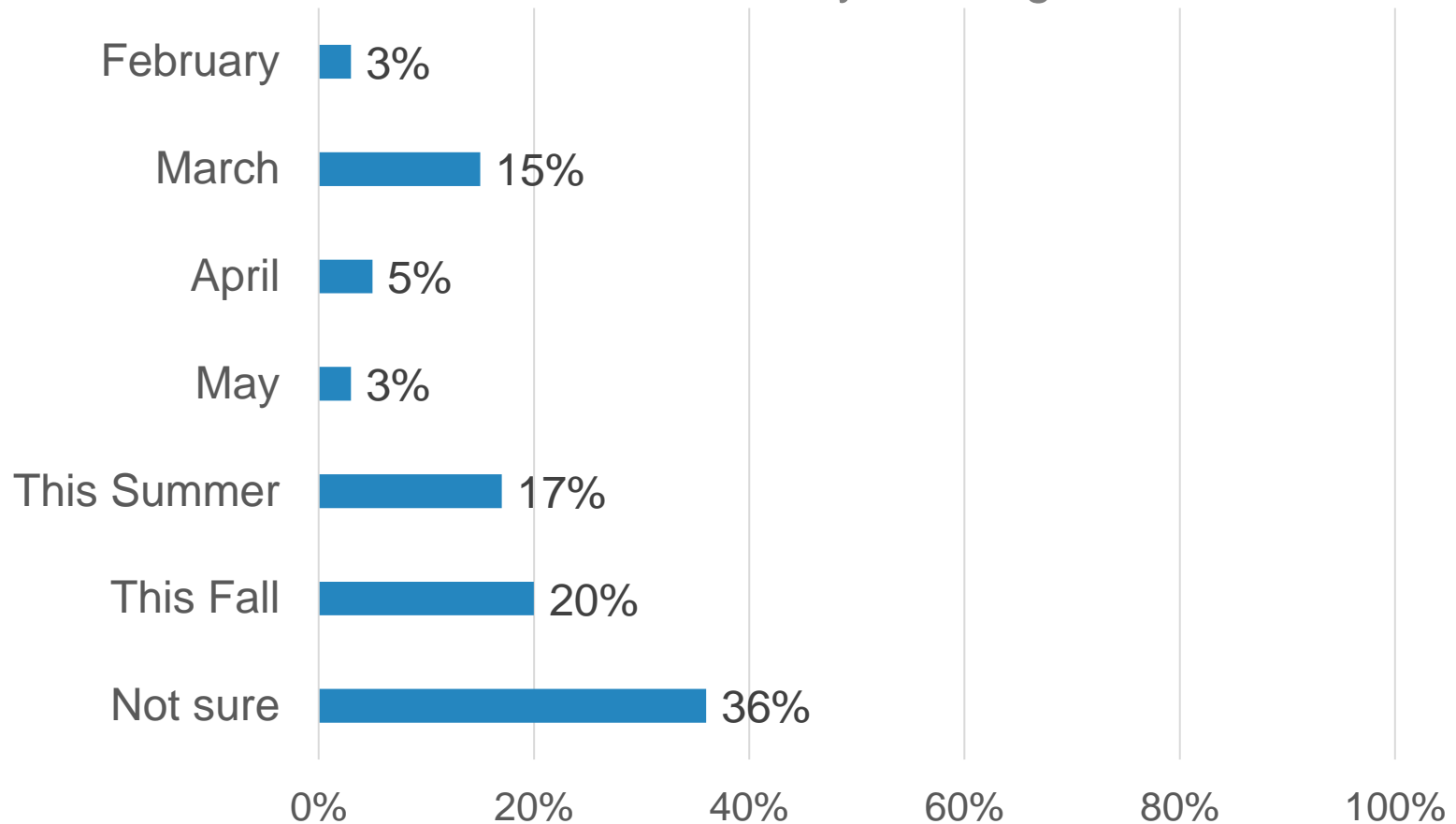


Lifeway research

Q5: "Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?" n=430

# 43% expect their adult groups to be meeting by the end of summer

Among churches where the majority of adult small groups are not currently meeting

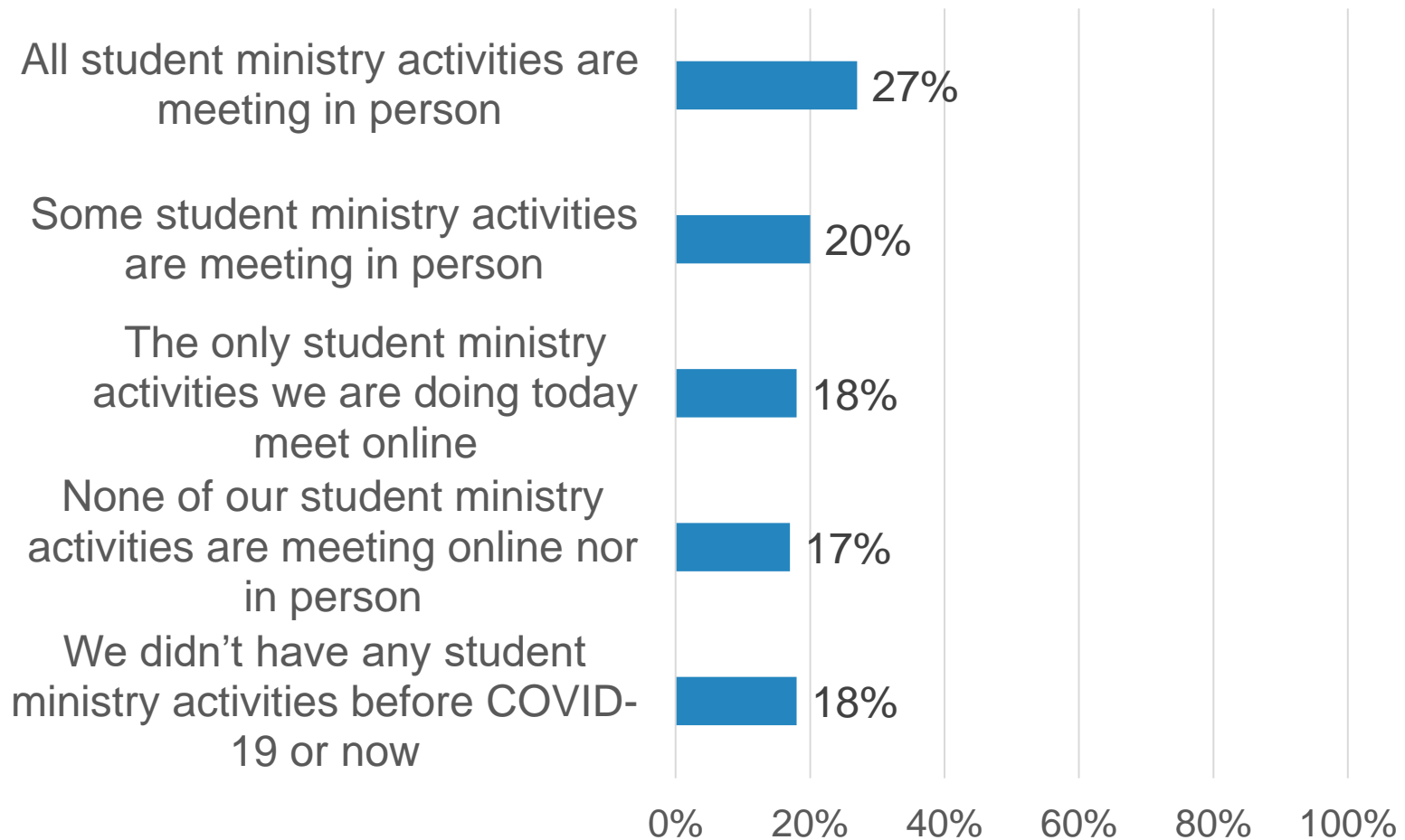


Lifeway research



# Almost 1 in 5 churches did not have student ministry activities before COVID-19

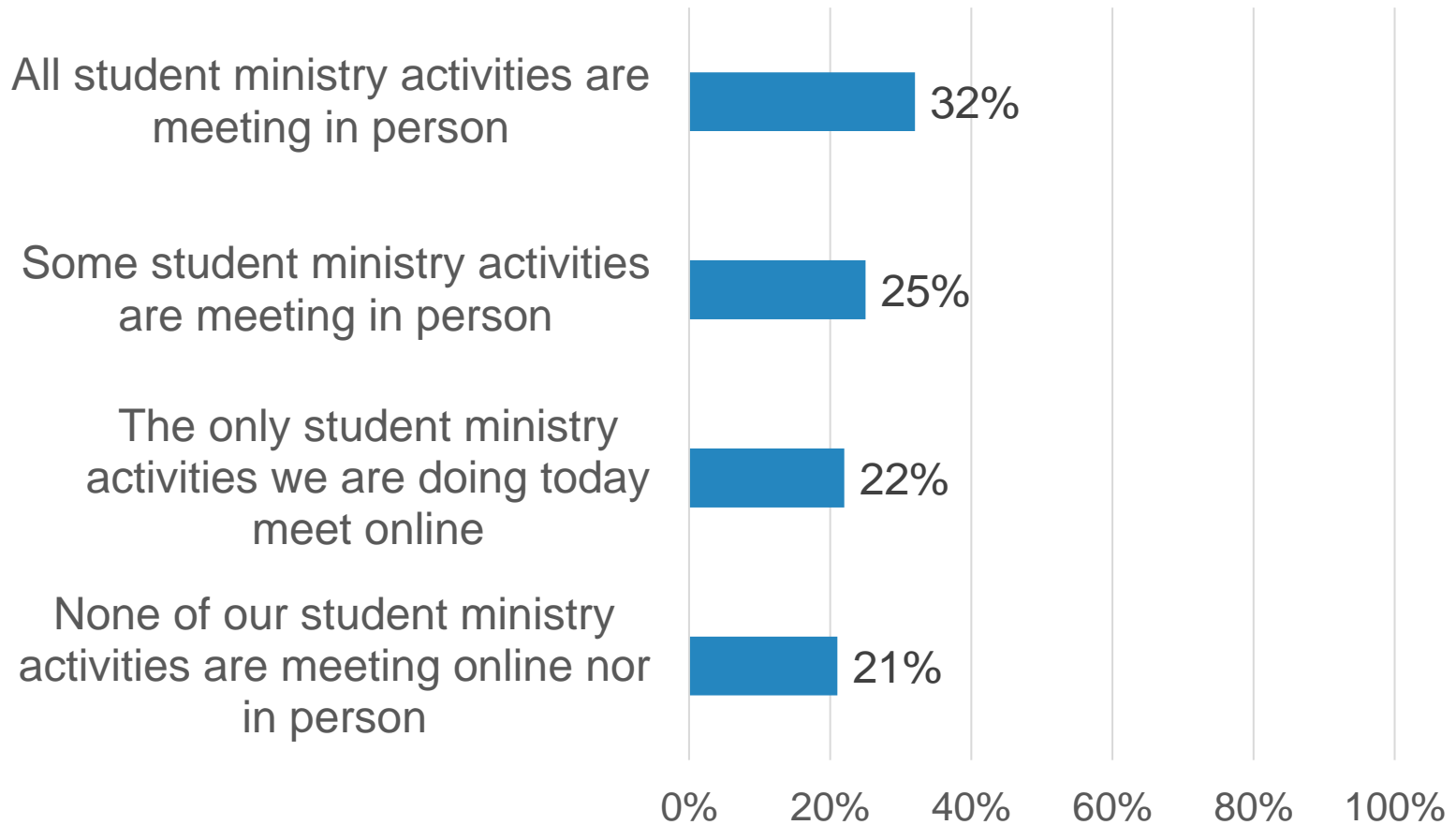
Among Protestant Pastors



**Lifeway**research

# 57% of churches with pre-COVID student activities have resumed all or some of these activities in person

Among those that had Student Ministry Activities before COVID-19



**Lifeway**research

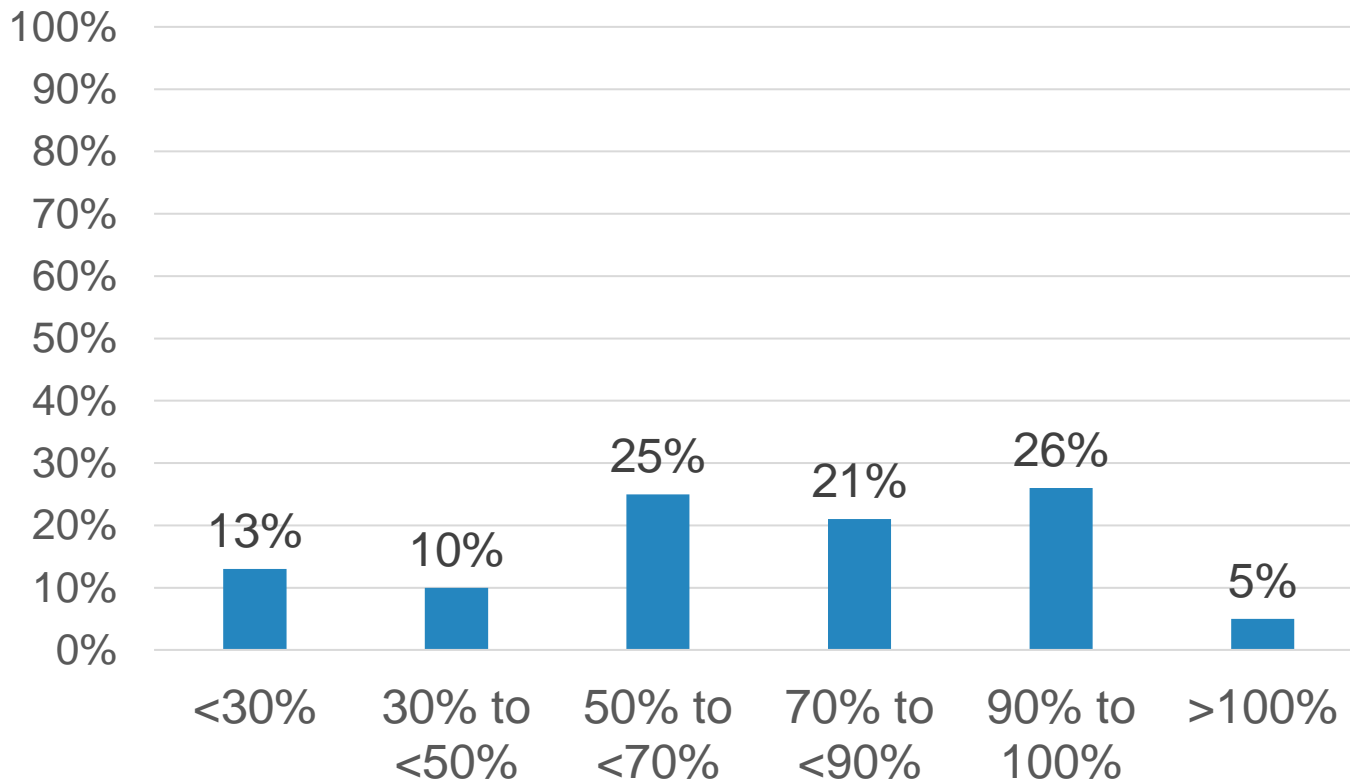
# Student ministry activities meeting in person when not all have resumed

Among those with some Student Ministry Activities meeting in person

- Sunday School/Sunday Morning Meeting 21%
- Wednesday Night Youth Meeting/Wednesday Night Worship 20%
- Youth Activities 19%
- Small Groups/Bible Studies 12%
- Fellowships/Game Nights 7%
- Outdoor Activities 6%
- Sunday Night Meeting 5%
- Worship 5%
- Confirmation Classes 4%
- Awana 2%
- Volunteer With Children's Ministry 1%

# 48% say that current in-person student ministry attendance is less than 70% of pre-COVID attendance

Among student ministries meeting in person for some or all activities

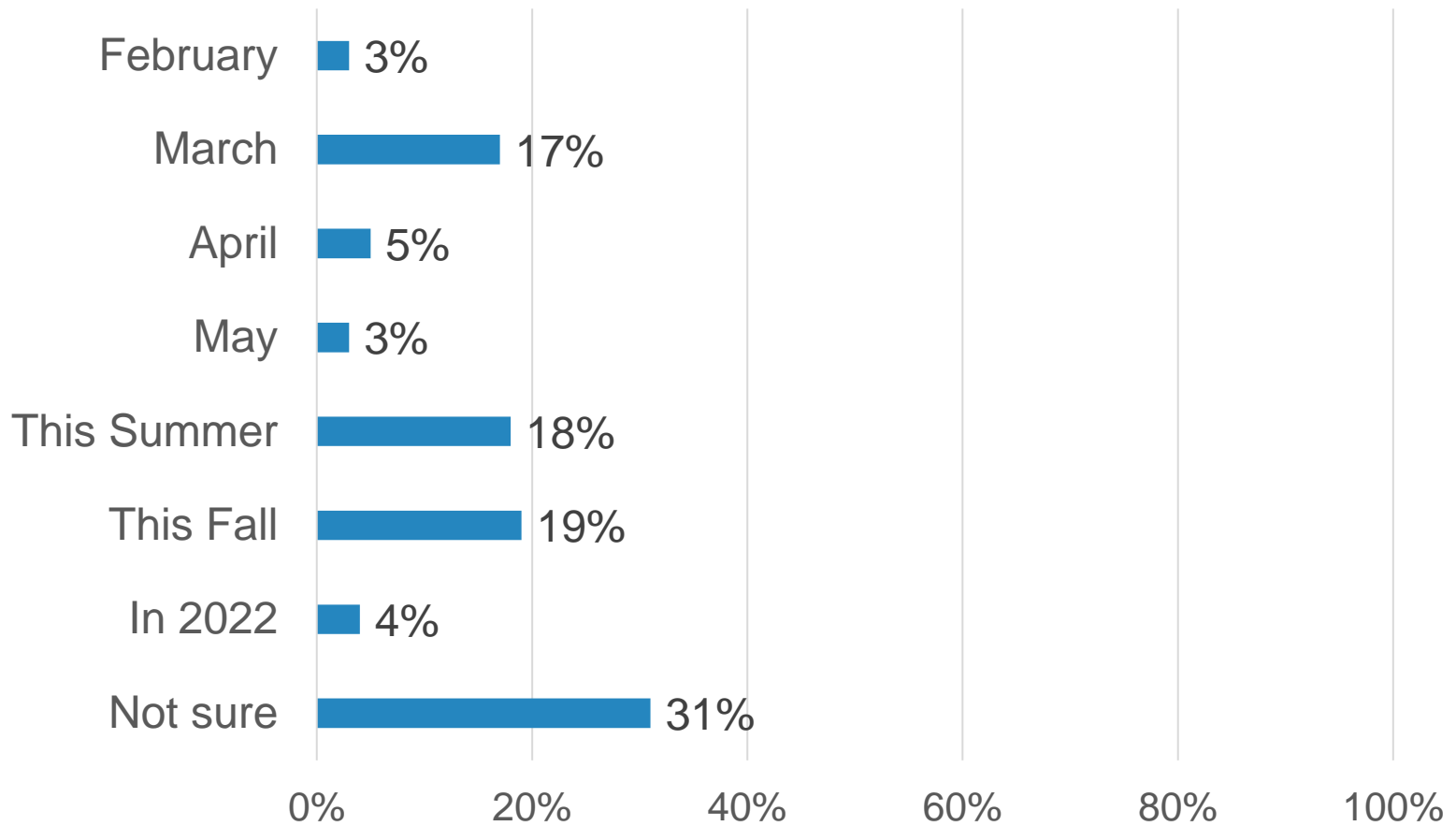


Mean: 68%

Lifeway research

# 46% expect their student ministry activities to resume in-person by the end of summer

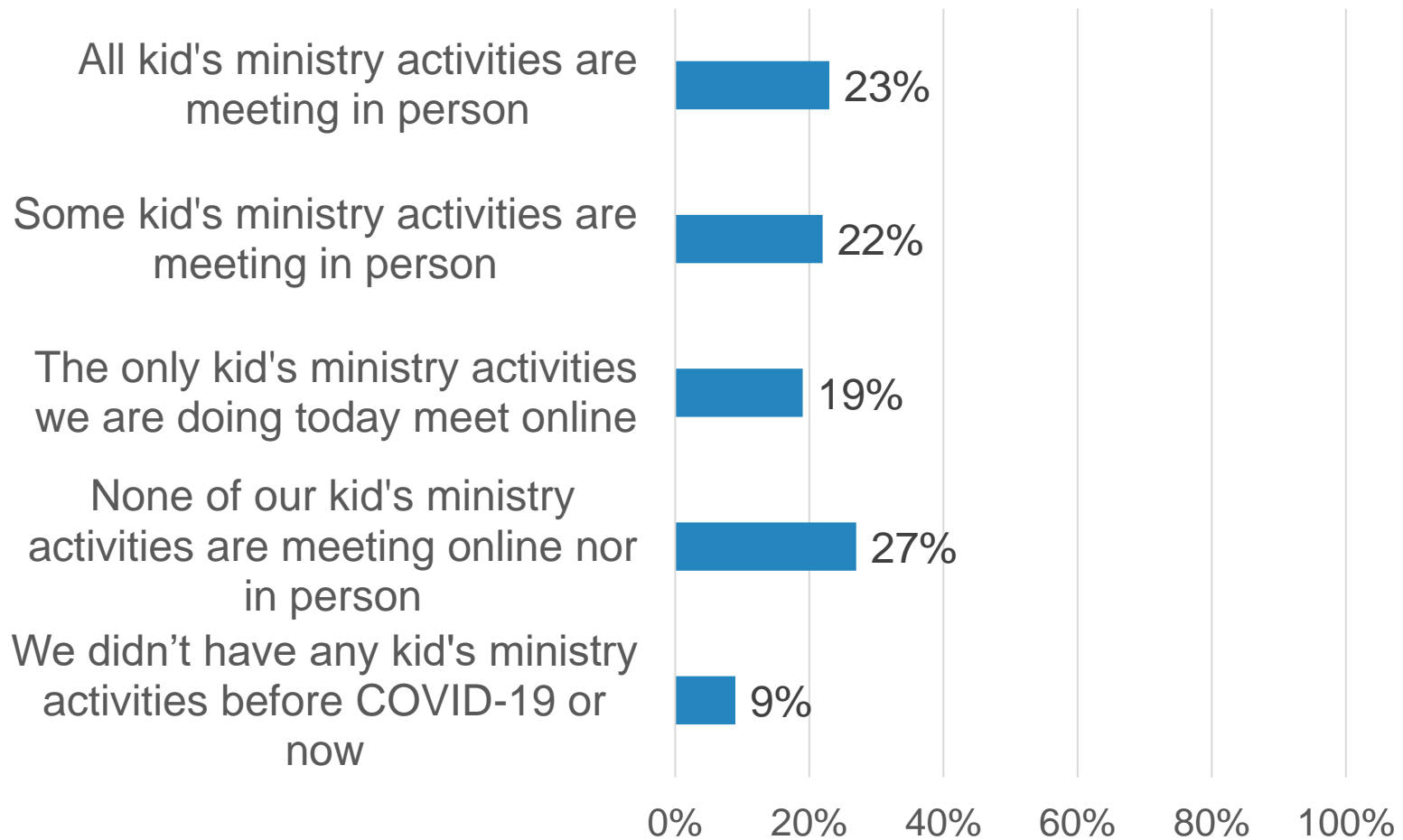
Among student ministries meeting only online or not meeting at all



**Lifeway**research

# Almost 1 in 10 churches did not have kid's ministry activities before COVID-19

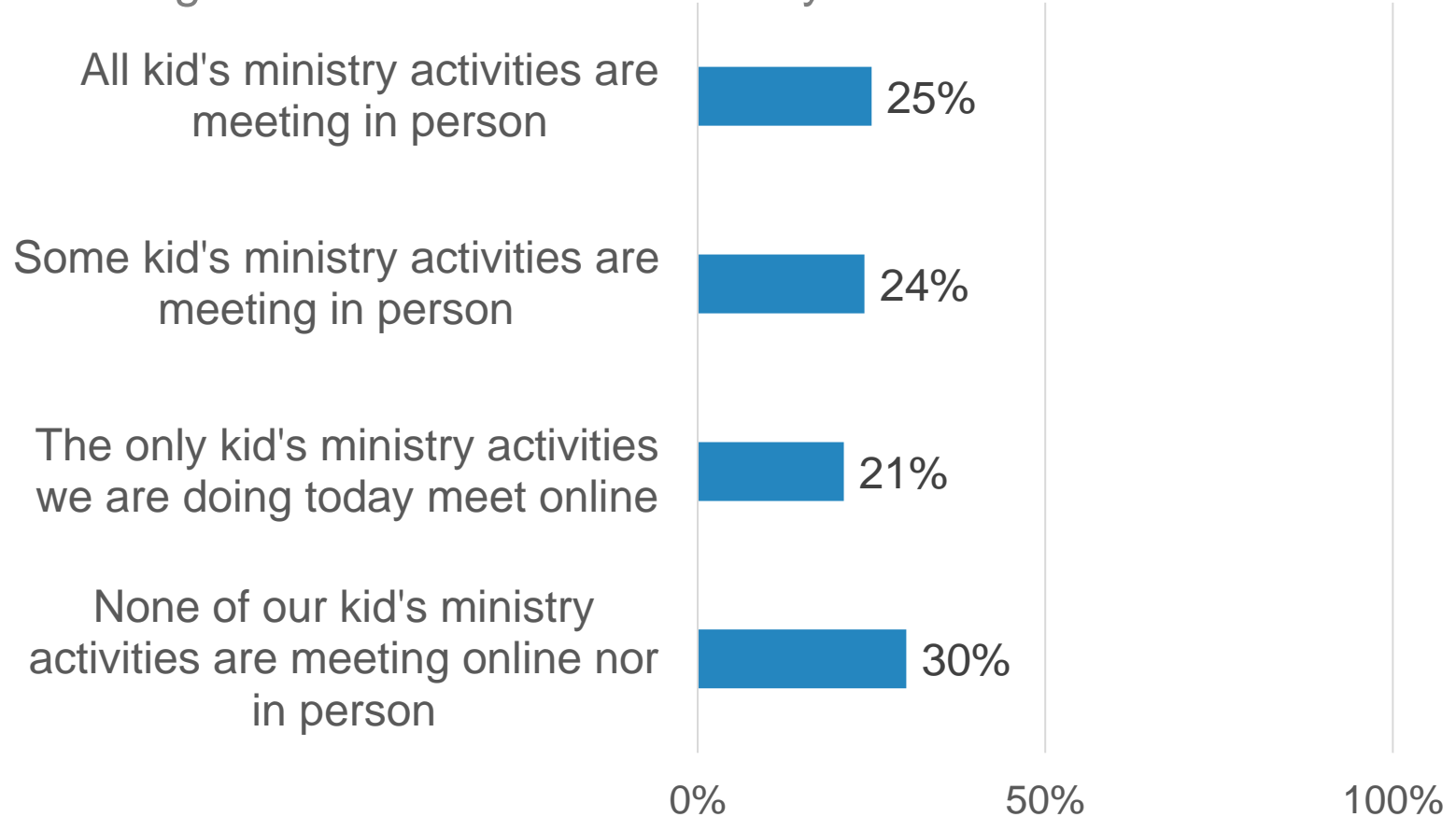
Among Protestant Pastors



Lifeway research

# 49% of churches with pre-COVID kid's ministry activities have resumed all or some of those activities in person

Among those that had Kids Ministry Activities before COVID-19



**Lifeway** research

# Kid's ministry activities meeting in person when not all have resumed

Among those with some Kid's Ministry Activities meeting in person

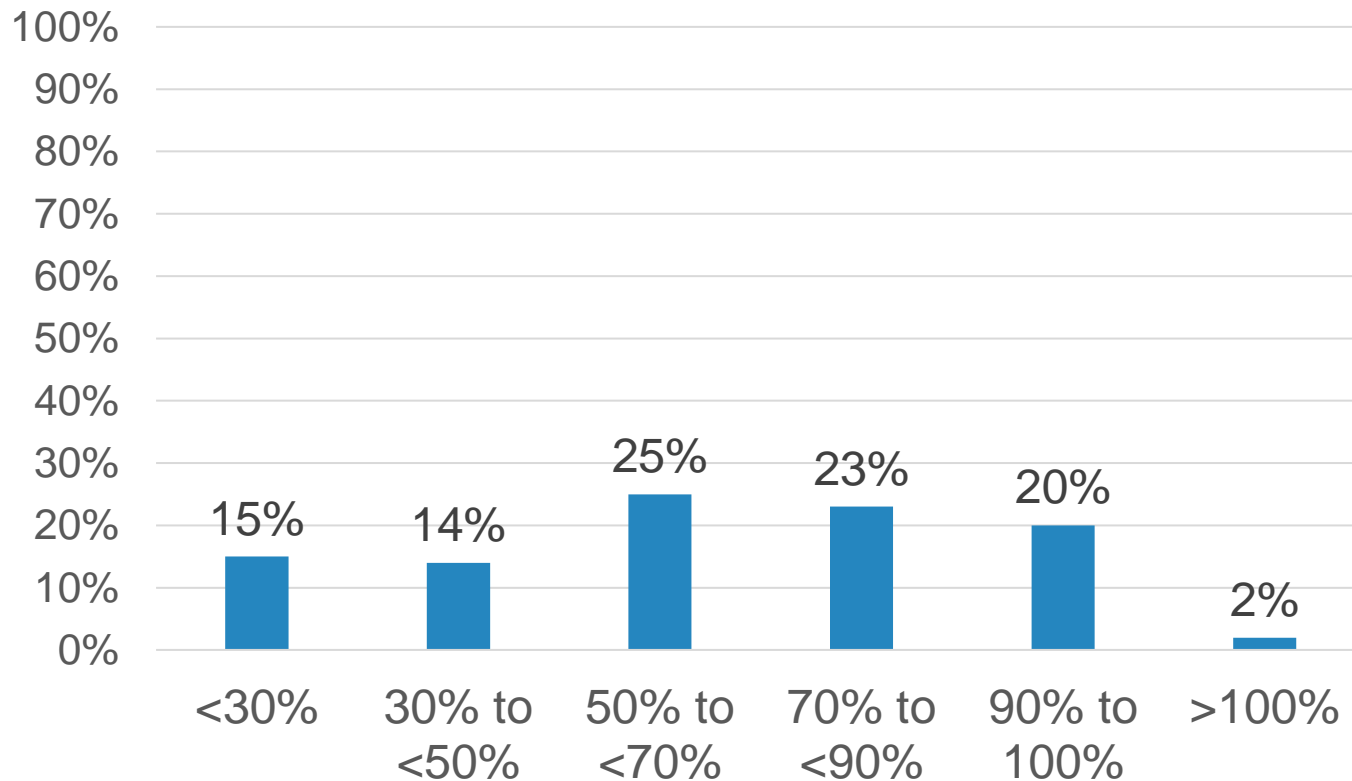
- Sunday School 34%
- Children's Church 25%
- Midweek/Wednesday Activities 11%
- Sunday Morning Activities 11%
- Nursery 10%
- Awana 6%
- Children's Fellowship/Activities 6%
- Bible Classes 4%
- Weekday Preschool 4%
- Outdoor Kids Activities 2%
- Upwards 1%
- MOPS 1%
- Snack Time 1%

**Lifeway**research



# 53% say that current in-person kid's ministry attendance is less than 70% of pre-COVID attendance

Among kid's ministries meeting in person for some or all activities

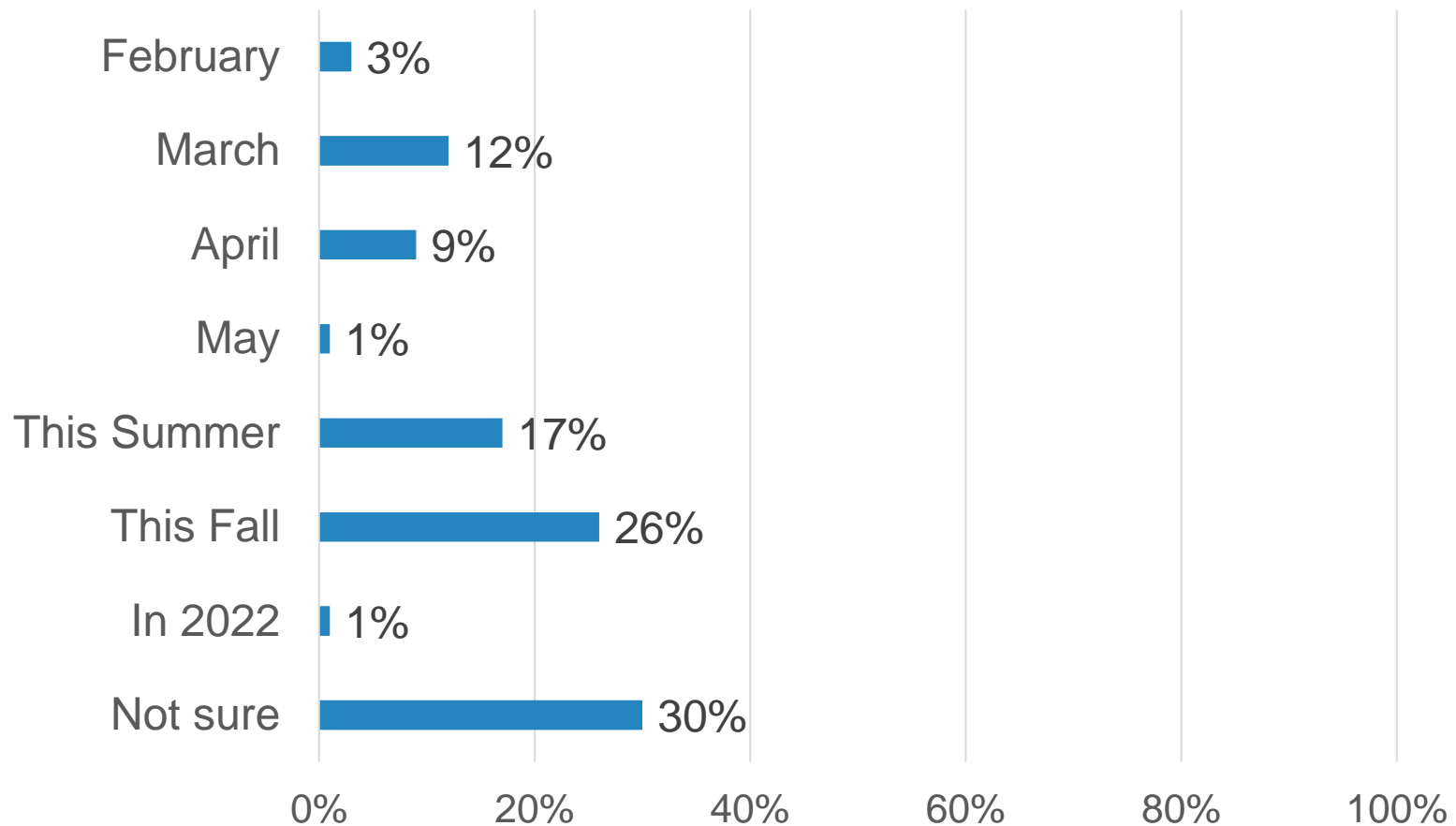


Mean: 62%

Lifeway research

# 43% expect their kid's ministry activities to resume in-person by the end of summer

Among kid's ministries meeting only online or not meeting at all



Lifeway research

# Significant Differences

Pastor

Age

Self-identified Evangelical/Mainline

Church

Region

Average Attendance

# Significant Statistical Differences

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

AGE	SELF-IDENTIFIED	REGION	PRE-COVID ATTENDANCE
18-44	Evangelical	Northeast	0-49
45-54	Mainline	South	50-99
55-64		Midwest	100-199
65+		West	200+

Note: Region is defined by the US Census locations

**“Last month (January 2021), what was your church’s average worship attendance in person on a typical weekend (including all ages from babies to adults but not counting anyone twice)?”**

- Mainline pastors are more likely to select “Did not meet in person” than Evangelical pastors (39% v. 12%)

## January 2021 Attendance as a percentage of January 2020 Attendance

- Pastors age 45-54 (31%) and 55-64 (28%) are more likely to report January 2021 attendance between **30- $<$ 50%** of January 2020 than those pastors age 65+ (10%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to report January 2021 attendance  **$<$ 30%** of January 2020 than Evangelical pastors (18% v. 3%)
- Pastors in the West (12%) are more likely to report January 2021 attendance between **90-100%** of January 2020 than those in the Midwest (4%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (42%) and 200+ (40%) are more likely to report January 2021 attendance  **$<$ 50%** of January 2020 than those with attendance of less than 50 (12%) and 50-99 (28%)

**“Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”**

**An attendee has been diagnosed with COVID-19**

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to select (74%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (92%) and South (95%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (73%) and West (72%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the least likely to select (72%)

**“Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”**

**An attendee has died from COVID-19**

- Pastors age 18-44 (41%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (23%) and 65+ (19%)
- Pastors in the South are the most likely to select (38%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ are the most likely to select (51%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are least likely to select (15%)



## **“Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”**

### **An attendee has lost their job**

- Pastors age 18-44 (57%) and 45-54 (53%) are more likely to select than pastors age 65+ (36%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (57%) and 200+ (79%) are more likely to select than those with attendance of less than 50 (33%) and 50-99 (41%)

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

- Pastors age 65+ are the least likely to select (47%)
- Pastors in the South (74%) and West (83%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (62%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (89%) and 200+ (86%) are more likely to select than those with attendance of less than 50 (58%) and 50-99 (59%)

**“Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”**

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

- Pastors age 45-54 (96%) are more likely to select than pastors age 55-64 (84%) and 65+ (82%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (90%) and South (90%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (75%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (95%) and 200+ (98%) are more likely to select than those with attendance of less than 50 (75%) and 50-99 (84%)

**“Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”**

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

- Evangelical pastors are more likely to select than Mainline pastors (31% v. 12%)
- Pastors in the South (29%) are more likely to select than those in the Midwest (17%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ are the most likely to select (46%)

## **“Have any of the following occurred within your congregation (including to yourself) at any time during the coronavirus pandemic?”**

### **Attendees have helped each other with tangible needs**

- Pastors age 45-54 (94%) and 55-64 (94%) are more likely to select than pastors age 65+ (81%)
- Pastors in the West (96%) are more likely to select than those in the Northeast (82%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (96%) and 200+ (99%) are more likely to select than those with attendance of less than 50 (78%) and 50-99 (89%)

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

- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (85%) and 200+ (86%) are more likely to select than those with attendance of less than 50 (56%) and 50-99 (69%)

**“Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?”**

**% Currently are meeting in person**

- Pastors age 55-64 (48%) are more likely to answer “0%” than pastors age 45-54 (26%) and 65+ (30%)
- Mainline pastors are more likely to answer “0%” than Evangelical pastors (56% v. 26%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (52%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those in the Midwest (31%) and West (32%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ are the least likely to answer “0%” (22%)

**“Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?”**

**% Currently are meeting online or by phone**

- Pastors age 18-44 (50%) and 65+ (52%) are more likely to answer “0%” than pastors age 45-54 (35%) and 55-64 (34%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to answer “0%” than Mainline pastors (49% v. 30%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (57%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those in the South (34%) and West (38%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 (51%) and 50-99 (45%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those with attendance of 200+ (26%)

**“Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?”**

**% Currently are not meeting**

- Pastors age 55-64 (21%) are more likely to answer “76% to 100%” than pastors age 45-54 (9%)
- Pastors in the West (46%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those in the Northeast (27%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 (44%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those with attendance of 100-199 (27%)

**“Of the adult small groups/Sunday School classes/Bible studies that existed in your church before COVID-19 (January 2020), estimate what percentage of groups fit each description below?”**

**% No longer exist**

- Pastors age 55-64 (86%) are more likely to answer “0%” than pastors age 18-44 (73%)
- Pastors in the West (91%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those in the Northeast (76%) and South (76%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 50-99 (88%) are more likely to answer “0%” than those with attendance of 100-199 (76%) and 200+ (69%)



**“When do you expect to have the majority of your adult small groups meeting again?”**

- *No significant differences*

## **“Which of the following best describes your student ministry activities today (middle and high school ages)?”**

- Pastors age 18-44 (21%) are more likely to select “None of our student ministry activities are meeting online nor in person” than pastors age 55-64 (12%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to select “All student ministry activities are meeting in person” than Mainline pastors (36% v. 7%)
- Pastors in the Midwest (22%) are more likely to select “None of our student ministry activities are meeting online nor in person” than those in the West (9%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (35%) and 200+ (41%) are more likely to select “All student ministry activities are meeting in person” than those with attendance of less than 50 (16%) and 50-99 (19%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the most likely to select “We didn’t have any student ministry activities before COVID-19 or now” (57%)

## **“As a percentage, how does your church’s in-person student ministry attendance today compare to your pre-COVID attendance?”**

- Mainline pastors are more likely to answer “<30%” than Evangelical pastors (24% v. 10%)
- Pastors in the South (15%) are more likely to answer “30% to <50%” than those in the Midwest (4%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 200+ are the most likely to answer “50% to <70%” (45%) and least likely to answer “90% to 100%” (10%)

## **“When do you expect to resume in-person student ministry activities again?”**

- Mainline pastors are more likely to select “This Fall” than Evangelical pastors (25% v. 10%)

## **“Which of the following best describes your kid’s ministry activities today (birth-elementary ages)?”**

- Pastors age 55-64 (26%) are more likely to select “The only kid’s ministry activities we are doing today meet online” than pastors age 18-54 (15%) and 65+ (14%)
- Evangelical pastors are more likely to select “All kid’s ministry activities are meeting in person” than Mainline pastors (32% v. 8%)
- Pastors in the Northeast (24%) are more likely to select “We didn’t have any kid’s ministry activities before COVID-19 or now” than those in the Midwest (8%) and South (5%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of 100-199 (28%) and 200+ (32%) are more likely to select “The only kid’s ministry activities we are doing today meet online” than those with attendance of less than 50 (6%) and 50-99 (15%)
- Pastors of churches with attendance of less than 50 are the most likely to select “We didn’t have any kid’s ministry activities before COVID-19 or now” (33%)

**“As a percentage, how does your church’s in-person kid’s ministry attendance today compare with your pre-COVID attendance?”**

- Pastors age 55-64 (34%) are more likely to answer “70% to <90%” than pastors age 18-44 (18%)

## **“When do you expect to resume in-person kid’s ministry activities again?”**

- *No significant differences*

# **Pastors' Views on How COVID-19 is Affecting Their Church February 2021**

A SURVEY OF AMERICAN PROTESTANT PASTORS

**Lifeway** research