

# **State of the Church COVID-19 Report**

—  
and What  
Churches Can  
Do about It  
—

April 20, 2020

# About Faithlife

Since 1992, Faithlife Corporation has grown from a couple of programmers in a basement into the largest developer of Bible study software and a worldwide leader in multilingual electronic publishing. We partner with more than 500 publishers to make more than 120,000 Bible study resources available to customers around the world.

Today, Faithlife is proud to have built the world's first integrated ministry platform, which houses everything church leaders need to engage and disciple their communities online. Whether you're a small group leader looking to host a video chat discussion with your small group, a communications director looking to ship your latest newsletter, or a bookkeeper keeping track of your church's giving, Faithlife's integrated ministry platform is the robust tech stack you need to do the critical work of the church.

Best of all, as the makers of Logos Bible Software, we built the entire platform around Scripture, so you can always keep the main thing the main thing.

One platform. One login. Infinite possibilities.

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# COVID-19 and what we're learning

There's no question COVID-19 has turned the way churches operate completely upside down. From getting services and giving online fast to figuring out how to care for members you can't see in person, churches are scrambling to find creative ways to do ministry.

To understand the impact COVID-19 is having on churches across the country better and identify trends that will help churches plan for their new normal, we gathered data from two sources:

- Surveys to people with a leadership role in their church.
- Internal research based on aggregated church customer insights.

Response rates came from churches of varying sizes:

- 23% from churches with 1–49 people
- 45% come from churches with 50–149 people
- 18% from churches with 150–349 people
- 12% from churches with 350 or more people

## Topics this report will address

- How COVID-19 has caused churches' online giving to shift
- The use of online giving solutions before and after COVID-19
- The impact of COVID-19 on weekly and monthly giving
- How givers have adopted online giving in response to COVID-19
- How churches are adopting live streaming in response to COVID-19
- Insights from Easter Sunday
- Church technology trends on Easter Sunday
- How prepared churches feel about what's ahead

## Synopsis

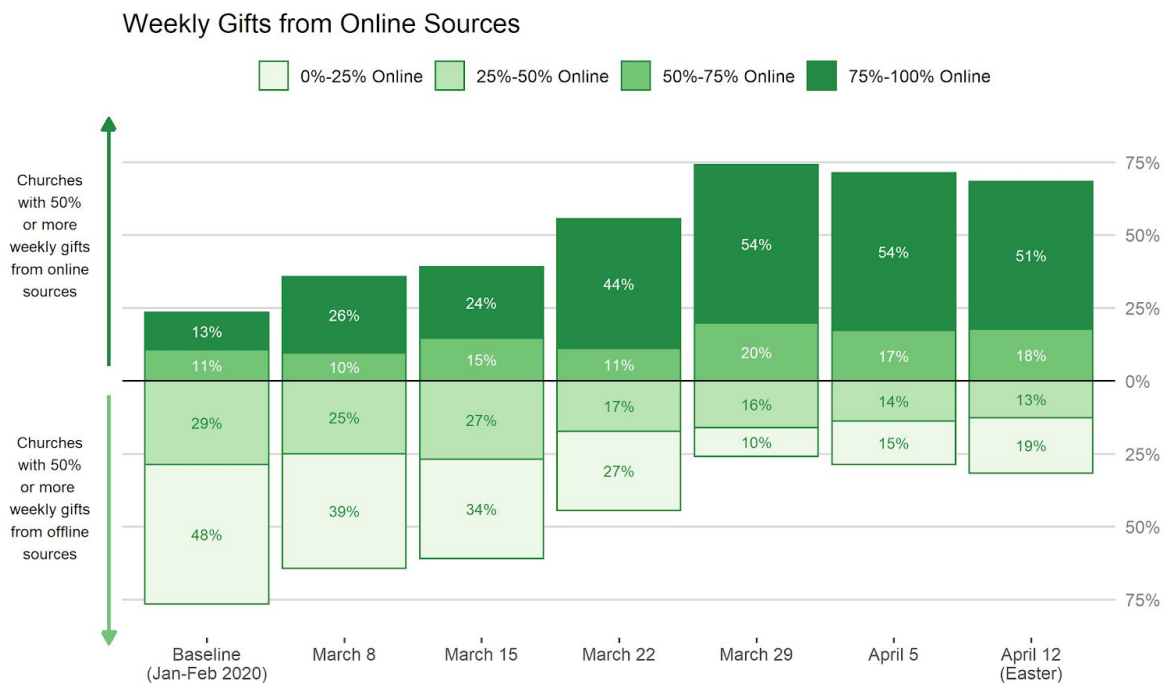
- Finding solutions to engage congregations online has been critical to maintaining attendance and giving revenue.
- Churches that have implemented online giving solutions are seeing less dramatic decreases in giving.
- Streaming live or prerecorded services has proven most effective at drawing attendees to services.
- Online services have allowed churches to reach people that hadn't been attending services in person.
- Churches that have implemented technology solutions are seeing stronger continued engagement with their congregations.

## How COVID-19 has caused churches' online giving to shift

We sampled approximately 300 churches that log both cash and online transactions. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, 78% of these churches received less than half (50%) of their gifts from online sources. Half of churches saw less than 25% of their gifts come in online.

March saw a dramatic shift in the number of churches that reported 50% or more of their gifts coming from online giving sources.

The first two weeks of April show a stabilizing trend, with online giving sources remaining critical for the majority of churches.



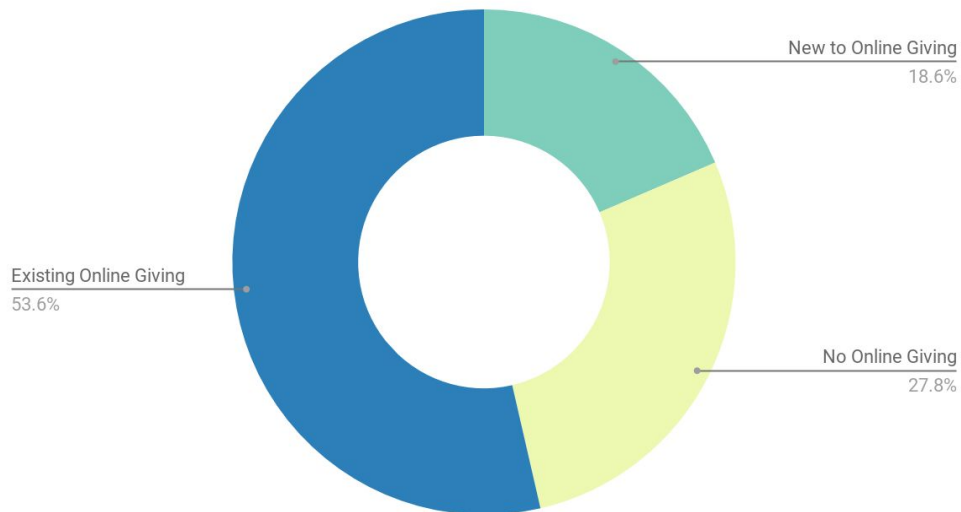
*\*Churches were categorized by the percent of weekly gifts received from online giving platforms for the weeks of March 8–29. The darker colors on top show the percentage of churches with 50% or more of their total weekly budget collected from online sources. The percentage of churches in each category (online or offline sources) is listed on the far left and is based on giving over the weeks of January and February, 2020. This serves as a recent baseline comparison for the levels of online giving before the spread of COVID-19 in the United States.*

## Use of online giving solutions before and after COVID-19

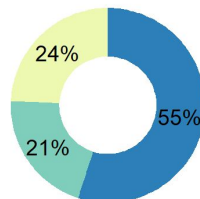
According to the survey, 54% of churches reported that they had an online giving solution in place prior to the pandemic. Another 19% said they implemented online giving because of the pandemic.

**Churches in the South were—and continue to be—least likely to have an online giving solution.**

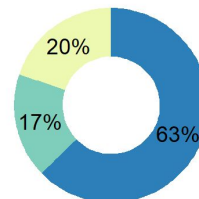
Churches and Online Giving



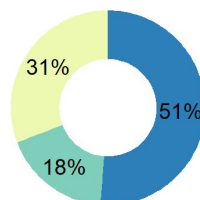
Midwest



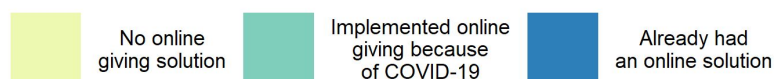
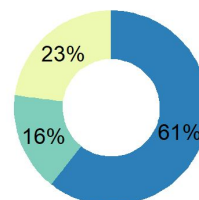
Northeast



South

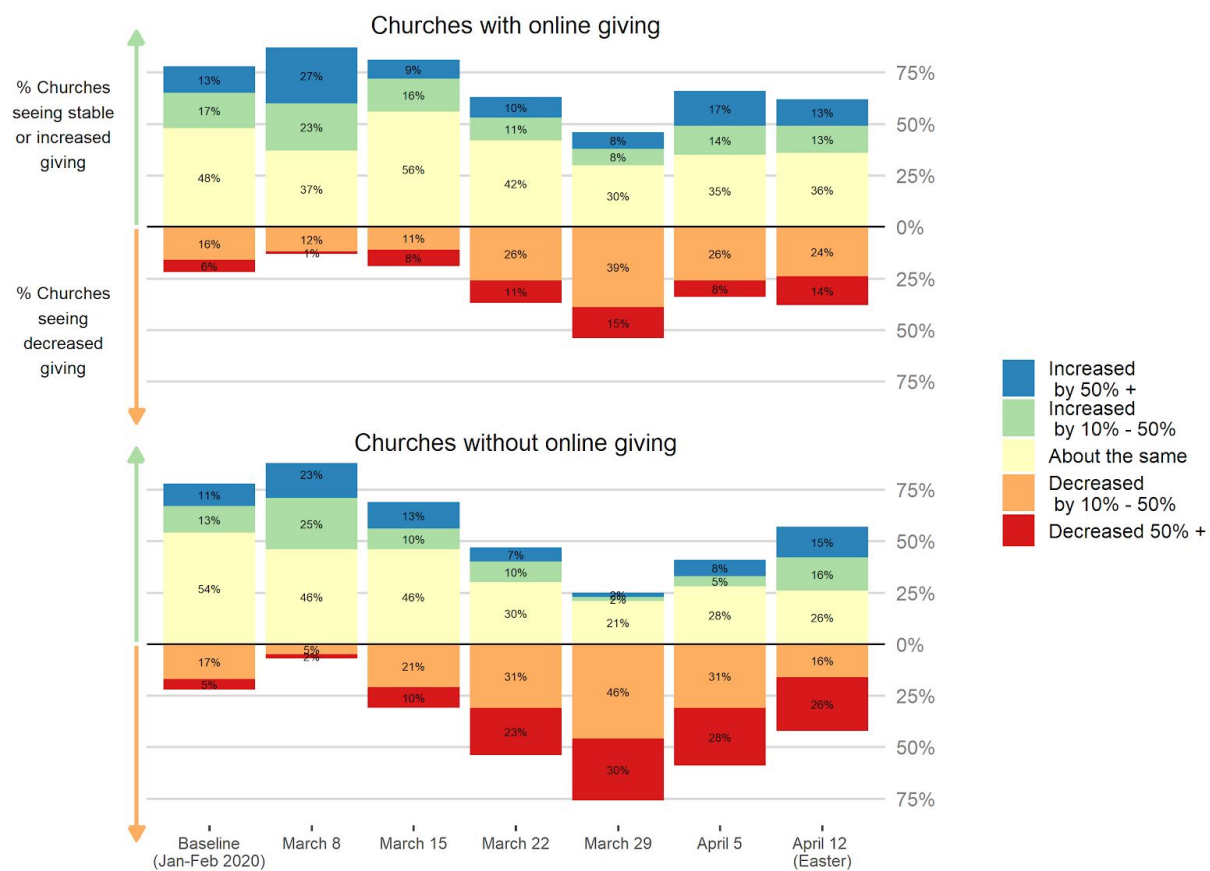


West



## The impact of COVID-19 on weekly giving

For each church, we calculated average weekly giving prior to March 2020 and compared those numbers with the total gifts received during Sundays in March and April. This allows us to categorize every church each week by their percent difference from average (indicated by color). Changes in the total weekly giving volume for churches with an online giving solution are shown on the left panel compared to churches that do not offer online giving on the right. Because weekly giving naturally varies week to week throughout the month, the left of each panel shows the distribution of churches averaged over January and February of 2020.



**Churches without a giving solution**

Many churches without a giving solution saw decreases in giving in late March. Starting the week of March 15, 21% of these churches experienced a 10–50% decrease in giving and 25% experienced a decrease of 50% or more. During the last week of March, only 27% of churches without an online giving solution had about the same or increased giving. Holy Week and Easter brought some recovery with over half of churches reporting the same or increased giving, though we’re still below pre-pandemic levels.

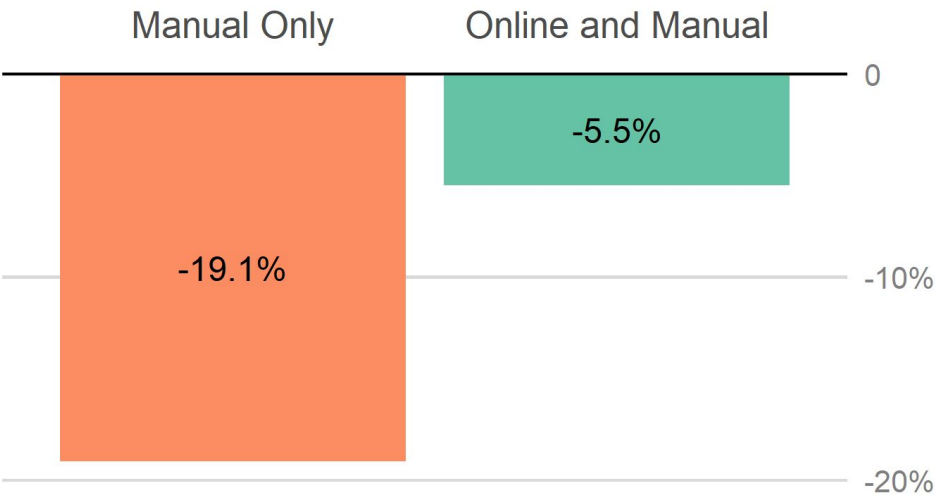
**Churches with a giving solution**

Churches with online giving also saw an alarming impact on weekly giving, with 20% of churches reporting a decrease in giving by more than 10% the week of March 15 , which rose to 58% during the last week of March. However, 42% of churches with an online giving solution did have about the same (or an increase) in giving during this time. Holy Week and Easter also brought increased giving to this group, though still also below pre-pandemic levels.

This pattern was similar across all church sizes (results not shown).

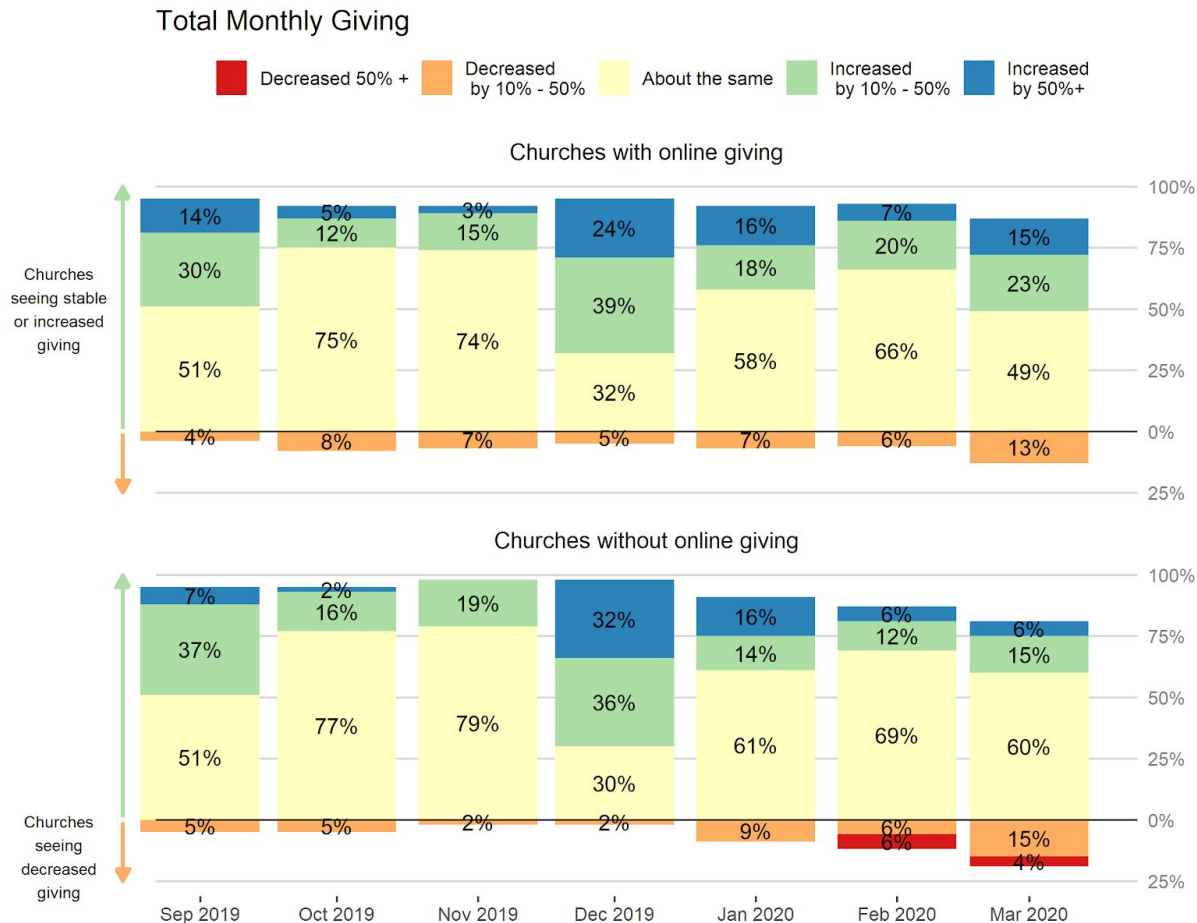
**Compared to 2019, churches without online giving saw an average giving decrease of 19% during Holy Week. Churches with an online giving solution saw much less of a reduction, decreasing 5.5% on average.**

Easter Giving  
in 2020 compared to Easter 2019



## The impact of COVID-19 on monthly giving

Weekly gifts vary for churches even when there is not a pandemic, so it helps to look at monthly totals, which are more stable over time (except for December, when giving increases for many churches and summer months, when giving can decrease). We looked at how monthly giving (relative to the average for each church) has shifted in recent months.



Churches with an online giving platform were more protected from severe drops in giving (>50% drop) than churches with no online giving platform, while 4% of churches without an online giving platform saw a 50% decrease or greater in total monthly gifts in March.

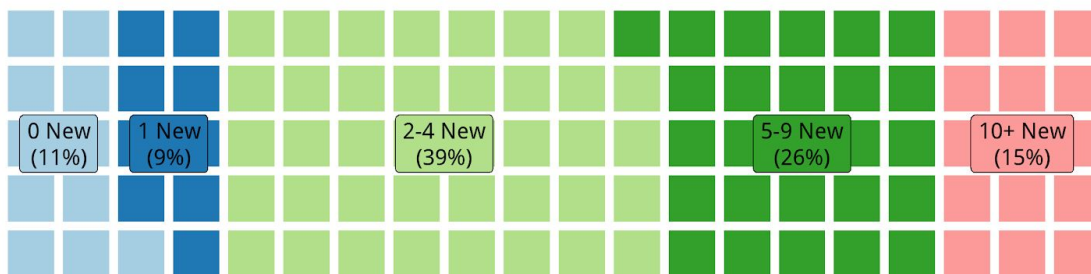
However, because the shutdowns began in the middle of March, we won't know the full extent of the effect on monthly budgets until the end of April.



## How givers are adopting online giving in response to COVID-19

We wanted to understand how well givers adapt to using an online giving solution. The chart below shows the number of new online givers in March for a hypothetical sample of 100 churches that had previously established online giving. Each square represents one church out of 100, and the color shows how many new online givers contributed in March. Many churches (89%) had at least one new giver, and 39% saw between 2 and 4 new online givers.

The below image shows new giver acquisition during March across a sample of 100 churches that had established online giving prior to the pandemic:



The next image shows the same figure for churches that have recently adopted an online giving solution (with their first online gift either in February or March and at least \$100 in gifts). It shows that 54% of churches had 2–4 new givers in March, and 28% had 5–9 new online givers. Less than 1% of churches had no new givers in March.

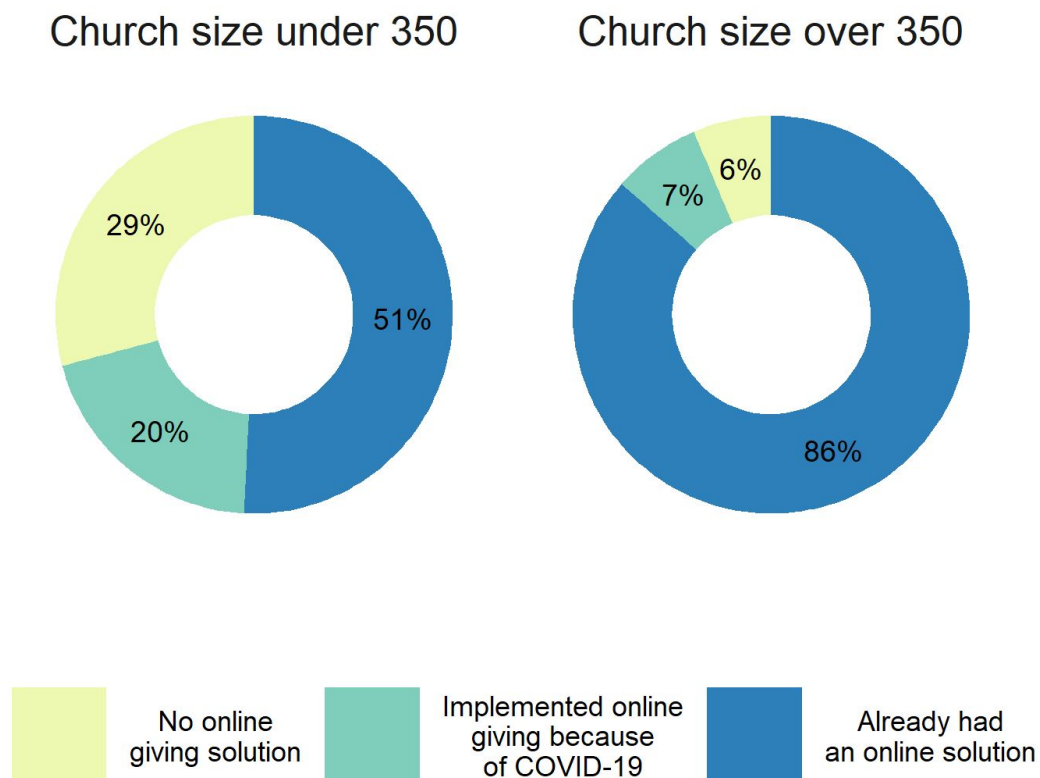
This image shows new giver acquisition during March across a sampling of 100 churches that established online giving in response to the pandemic:



## Conclusions around giving

1. Many churches are seeing a reduction in gifts during this time of social distancing.

This trend affects churches without online giving more drastically than those who have adopted an online giving platform. Smaller churches are less likely to have implemented online giving (figure below) or to have a large portion of gifts come from online donations prior to COVID-19 and may be impacted at a higher rate.



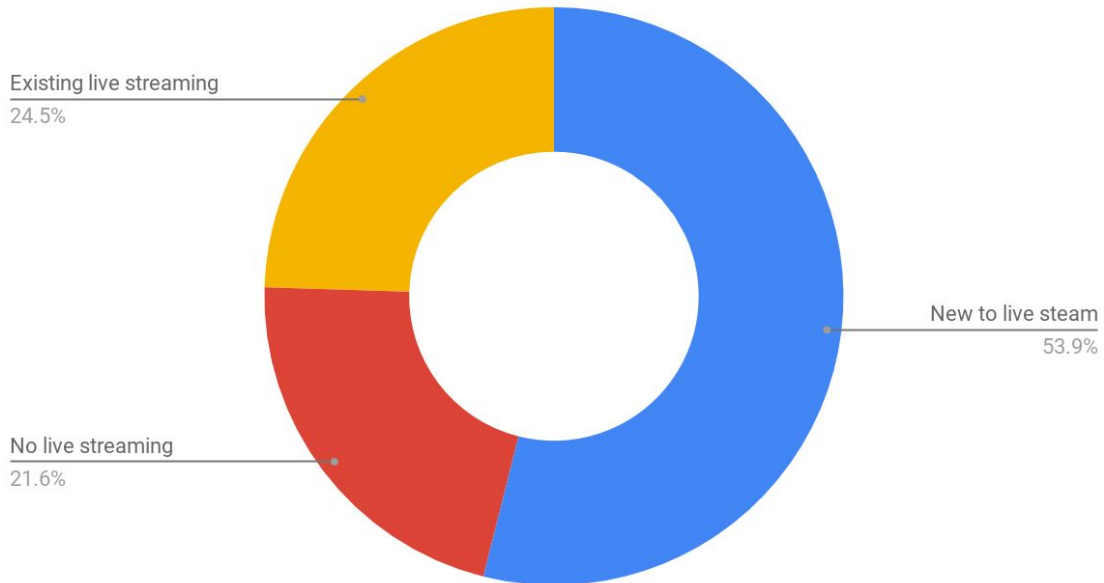
2. When online giving is implemented for a church, new and existing givers will adopt it as a viable method of donating to their church.

Online giving has become the primary way to accept gifts for many churches during this time. Existing online givers have shifted their behaviors to use online giving, and people new to online giving have created accounts to give for the first time online. When a church adopts online giving for the first time, we observe that it is often the case that several givers join and set up gifts within the first month of adoption.

## How churches are adopting live streaming in response to COVID-19

Less than 25% of churches reported that they had a live streaming solution in place prior to the pandemic, while a whopping 54% said they implemented live streaming because of the pandemic. Finally, 22% said they still do not have a live streaming solution in place.

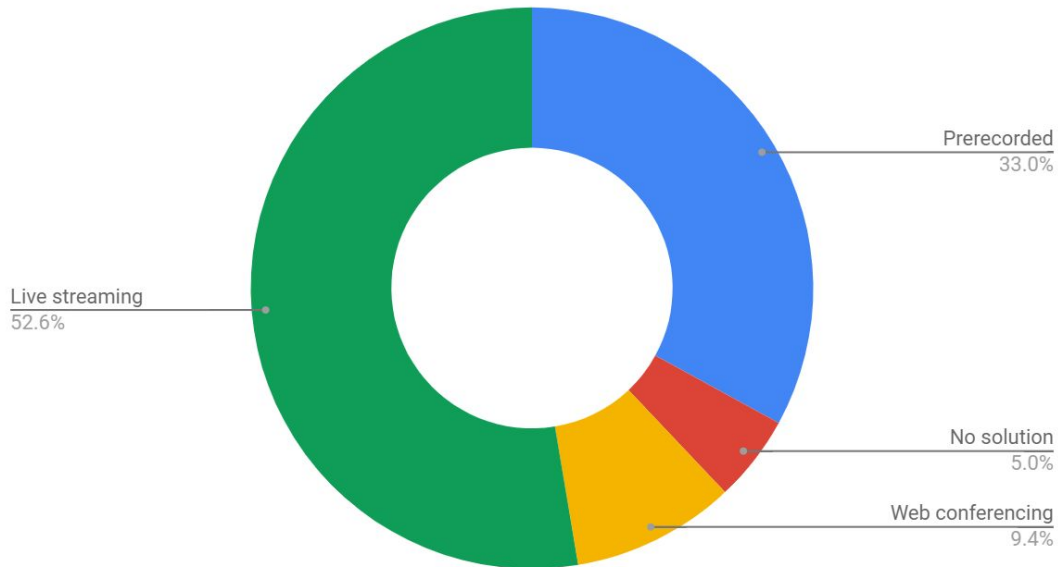
Churches and Live Streaming



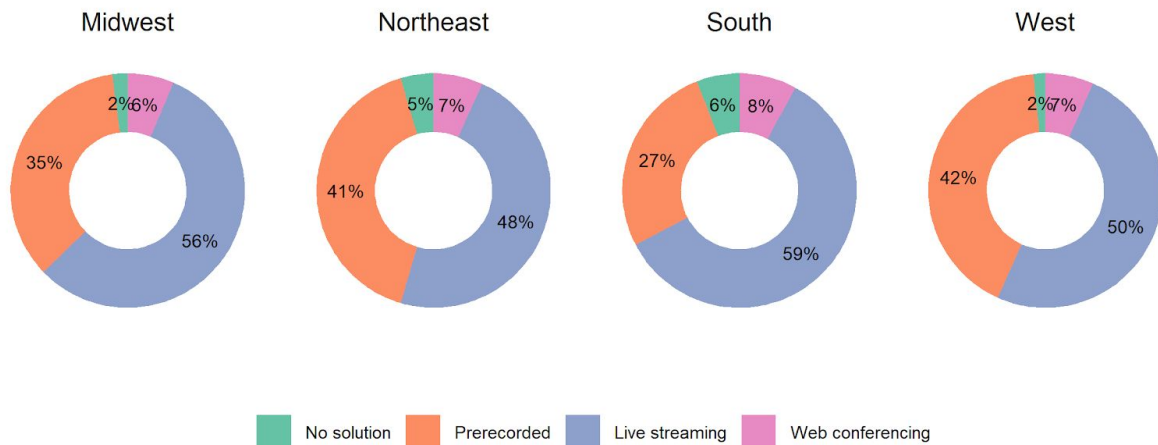
## Insights from Easter Sunday

Churches used various technology solutions to reach their congregations on Easter. The two most popular were live streaming and prerecorded services posted online. **A higher percentage of churches in the South and the Northeast were unable to provide an online service on Easter Sunday.**

### Technology Solutions

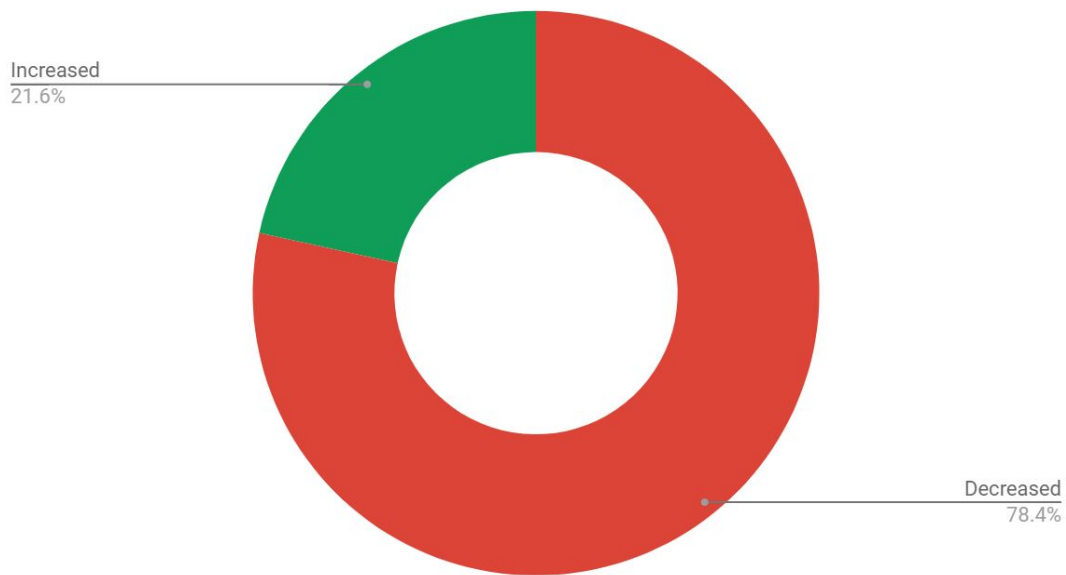


### Did you host an online Easter service?

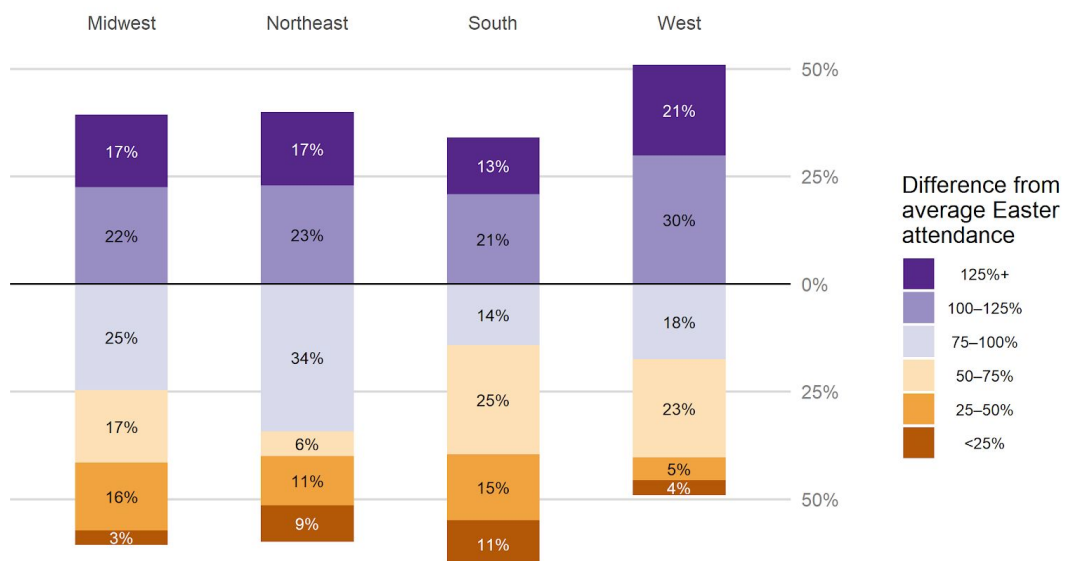


**Easter Sunday attendance was down for most churches compared to 2019. However, a regional view shows a slight majority of churches in the West saw an increase in attendance compared to 2019.**

Easter Service Attendance 2020 vs 2019

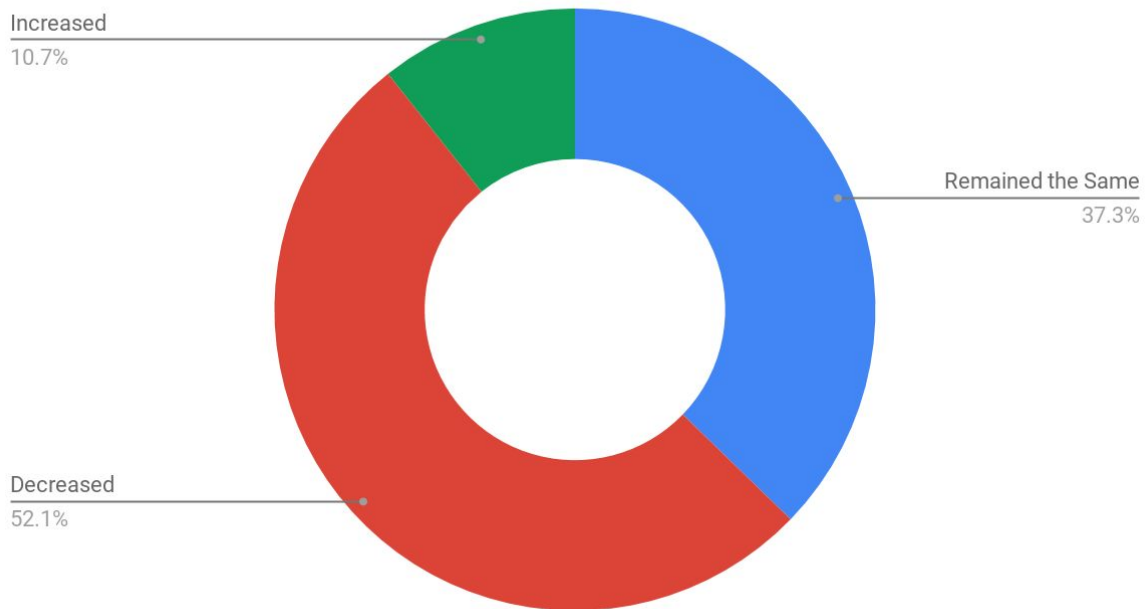


How was the attendance of your online Easter service?

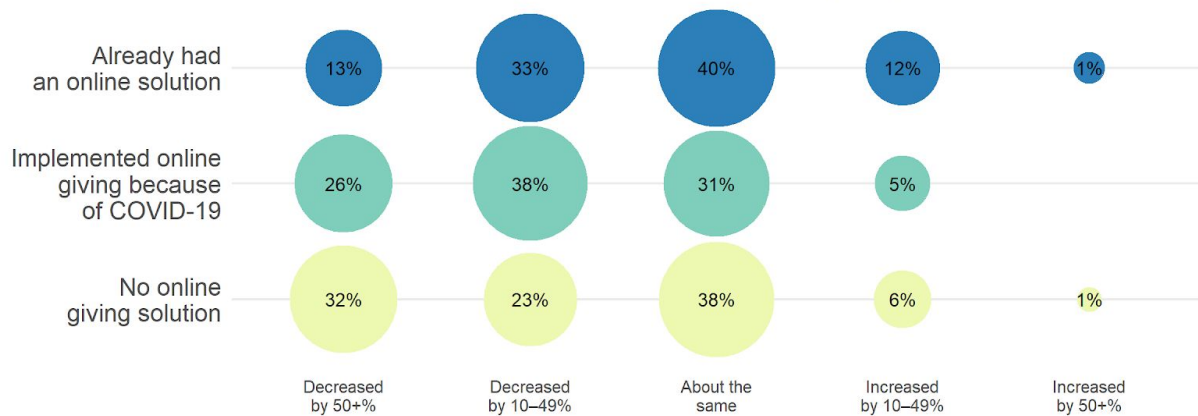


## Easter Sunday giving decreased for more than half of churches this year compared to 2019.

### Easter Sunday Giving 2020 vs 2019

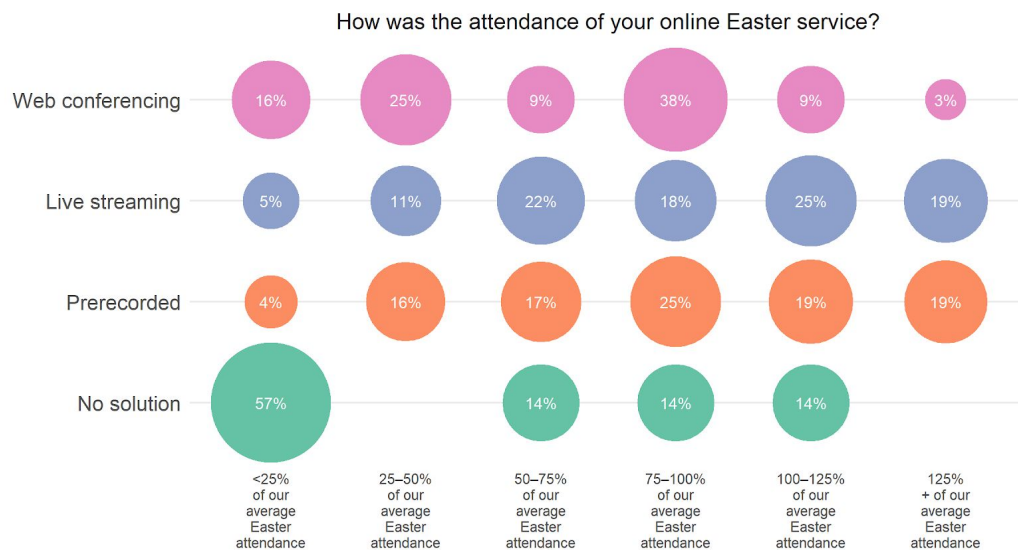


### How did this year's giving during Holy Week and Easter Sunday compare to Holy Week and Easter Sunday last year?

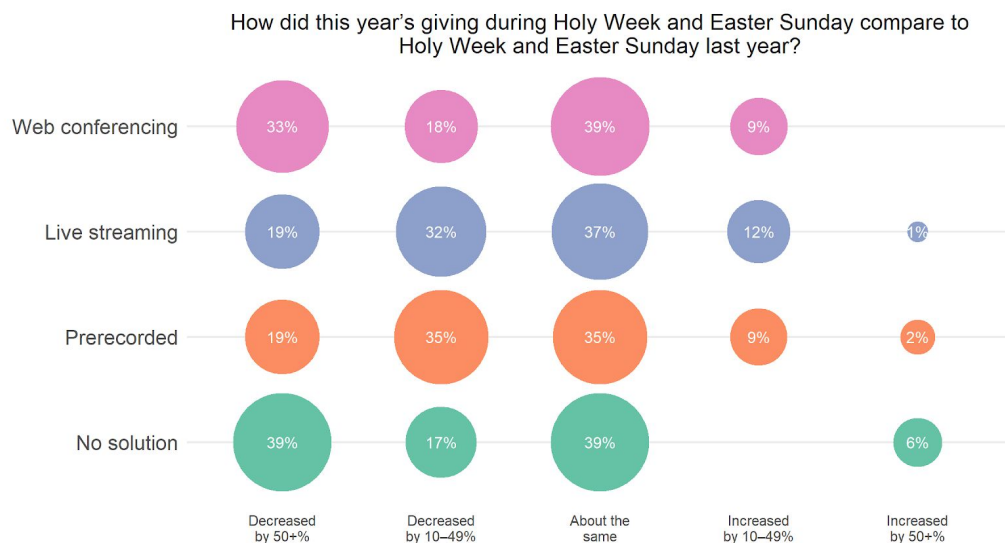


## Church technology trends on Easter Sunday

While attendance overall was down for churches on Easter Sunday, **those that streamed live or prerecorded services tended to see less of a drop in attendance than those that used a web conferencing solution.**

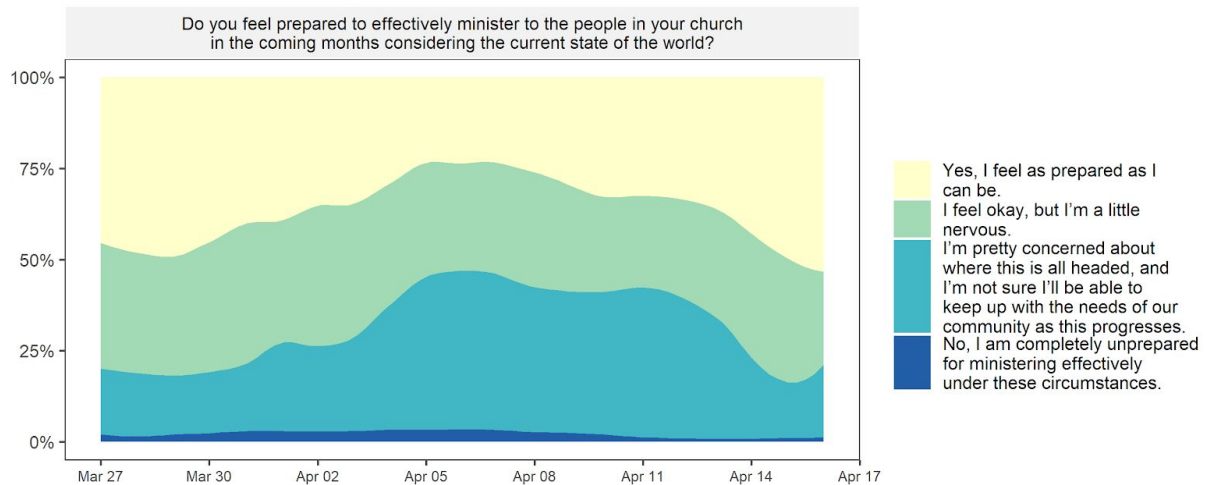


**Churches that streamed live or prerecorded services saw less of a reduction in giving** than those that used web conferencing or didn't offer their service online.



## How prepared churches feel about what's ahead

We are seeing an encouraging trend in church leaders overcoming uncertainty and becoming more confident in their ability to effectively minister to the people in their church in the coming months.



Churches responded to open-ended questions about what worried them, what they needed help with, and what had been surprisingly effective or rewarding about holding services online.

### Worries:

- The wellbeing of congregants (~32%)
- Not being able to disciple well enough and seeing people fall through the cracks (~25%)

### Need help with:

- Staying connected with the congregation, especially those who don't have internet access or are not online (~36%)
- Technical needs and set up; the ability to sustain the weekly output of filming/editing and live streaming (~25%)

### Found surprisingly effective or rewarding:

- Reaching a broader audience (~40%)
- Higher attendance in midweek services/more engagement midweek for small groups (~15%)



## Churches Must Take Action Now

Churches cannot wait any longer. They must adapt to this new norm and implement necessary technology like online giving and live streaming. With such significant drops in week-to-week giving, some churches may not have the financial means to reopen once the pandemic ends. This is particularly true in churches with average attendance under 350, where churches with small staff or leadership teams haven't had time to explore solutions.

The time to act is now. Implementing [online giving](#) and live streaming frees up staff to do the truly difficult ministry work ahead and focus on what's most important: people.

Faithlife offers free and low-cost resources to help churches, families, and schools thrive during the COVID-19 outbreak, from online giving to live streaming to content solutions. Our church support center is open 365 days a year to help you get [mobile giving](#), [live streaming](#), and an online church community up and running. We've helped thousands of churches of all sizes, and we want to help you be a light in your community during these hard times.

[Get started now](#)