

## Religious Canadians praying for return to in-person worship, but won't forsake online services in future

*Half of Canadians who regularly attended religious services pre-pandemic "very keen" to go back*

**April 1, 2021** – Easter may be a time of rebirth and renewal, but the new surge of COVID-19 infections across the country means 2021 will not bring a much-awaited resurrection of pre-pandemic in-person prayer, gathering, and Communion.

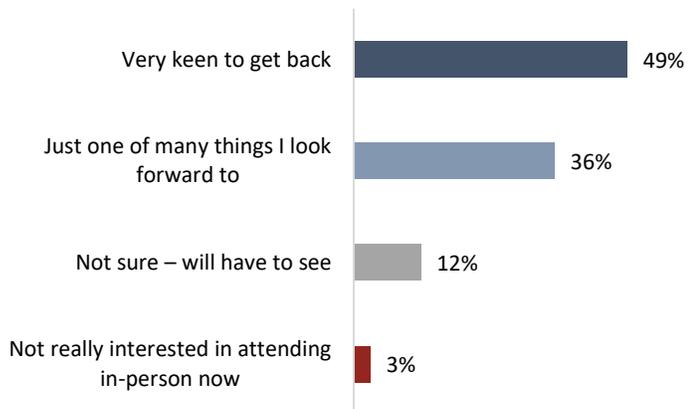
As many Canadians of faith mark a second year of Holy Week at home, a new public opinion survey from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with [Cardus](#), finds this demographic reflecting on what they have gained and lost after more than 12 months of separation from their congregations.

The study, which canvassed the views of 1,059 Canadian adults who attended religious services at least once per month pre-pandemic, finds more personal prayer (32%), but less connection to a sense of religious community (50%). Many long for a return to in-person worship (49%), but among those who've had an opportunity to do so under pandemic restrictions, a plurality (42%) describe the experience as less satisfying. The pandemic has also had equal parts positive and negative impacts on their own spirituality.

As with almost every aspect of pandemic life, online services have been a lifeline for those craving contact with their churches, temples, and synagogues. The vast majority (77%) of Canadians who regularly attended religious services pre-pandemic say they've streamed or "attended" a religious service online, most of them on a regular basis, and most praising it in absence of no other alternative. Indeed, more than three times as many say they would maintain the availability of online services rather than discontinue them post pandemic (56% versus 17% respectively).

### How would you describe your own personal feeling about being able to attend in-person worship again?

(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)



#### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with [Cardus](#), conducted an online survey from March 23 – 26, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 1,059 Canadian adults who attended religious services at least once per month pre-pandemic and are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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### **More Key Findings:**

- Asked how the gathering restrictions on places of worship in their province compare with those imposed on other public venues, two-in-five (39%) Canadians who normally attend religious services say they have been unfairly harsh. BC hosts the highest proportion of those who hold this view (50%).
- Holy Communion is one such practice that has been severely limited under the pandemic. More than half (55%) of Roman Catholics miss it greatly, while just 5 per cent do not miss it at all.
- One-in-four (26%) Canadians who normally attend religious services say their financial contribution to religious organizations has declined over the past year.

### **About ARI**

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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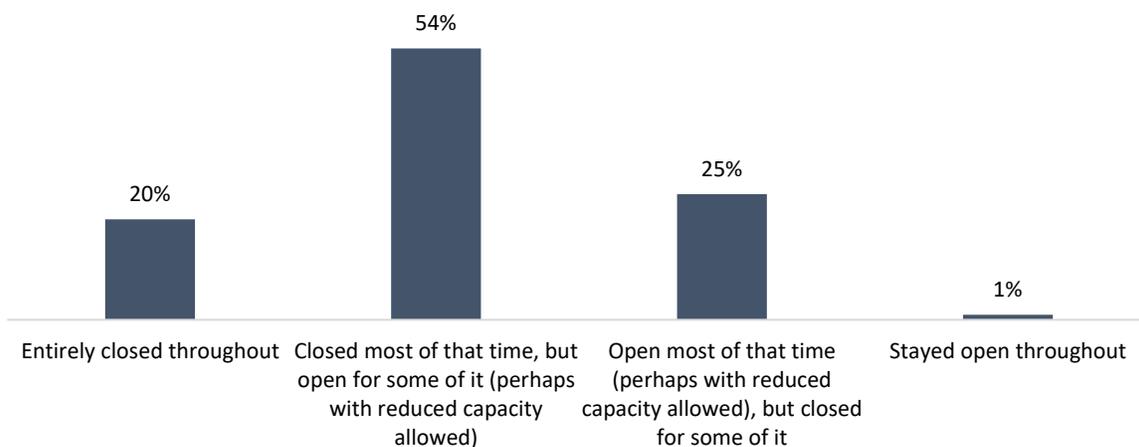
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## Part One: The Pandemic – A Year of Tested Faith

To better understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious groups and in-person worship, the Angus Reid Institute surveyed Canadians who have a religious faith, and who attended religious services at least once per month prior to the pandemic. The proportions of those included in the study are weighted to account for patterns in regular worship attendance.

Asked how their own place of worship endured the pandemic, Canadians of faith had mixed experiences. For one-in-five (20%), services have been closed entirely. A majority (54%) say that services have been closed most of the time, while one-quarter (25%) say the opposite, that their place of worship has been mostly open, though with reduced capacity:

**Over the last year, tell us about the situation at your usual place of worship in terms of Covid restrictions and in-person group worship?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



### More prayer, fewer donations

The effect closures and limited services have had on faithful Canadians is profound. In a personal sense, many have increased or at least sustained the amount of prayer that they normally do at home or with their families. But in a broader sense, the faithful community appears to have suffered significantly. Half (51%) say they've reduced the amount of community outreach and volunteer work they normally would have participated in, while one-quarter (26%) have given less in financial support to their place of worship or congregation. The challenging fiscal circumstances of many Canadians have been well-documented by the Angus Reid Institute [here](#).

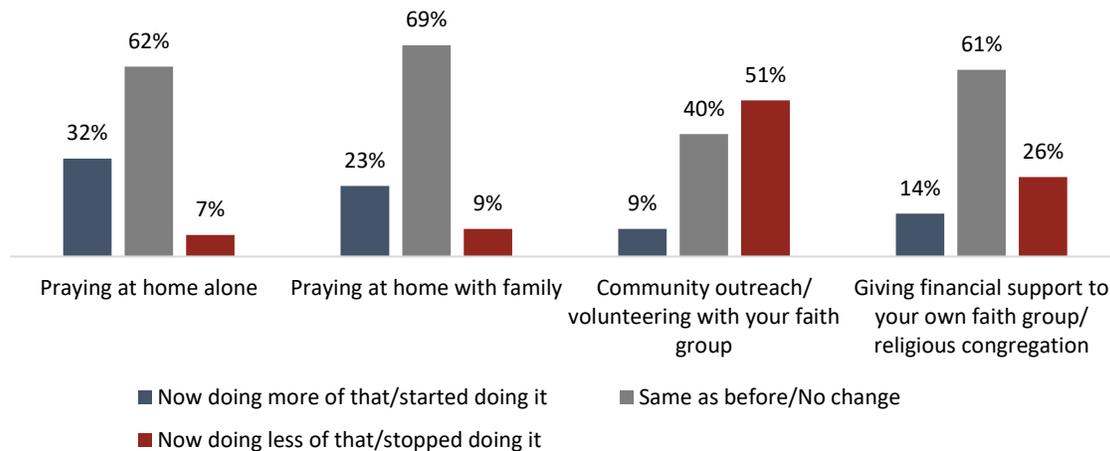
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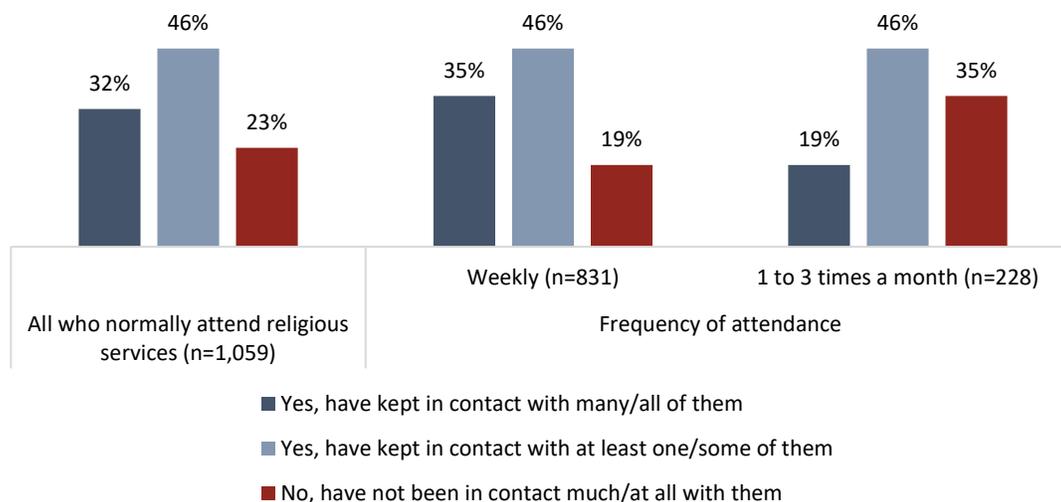
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**Has your own participation in any of the following activities changed over this past year of Covid?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



Relationships with fellow worshippers been similarly difficult to maintain. Asked if they have kept up contact with members of their faith groups, just one-in-three (32%) say contact has been sustained throughout the pandemic. This is notably higher among those who are more committed to regular attendance at their place of worship, as seen in the following graph:

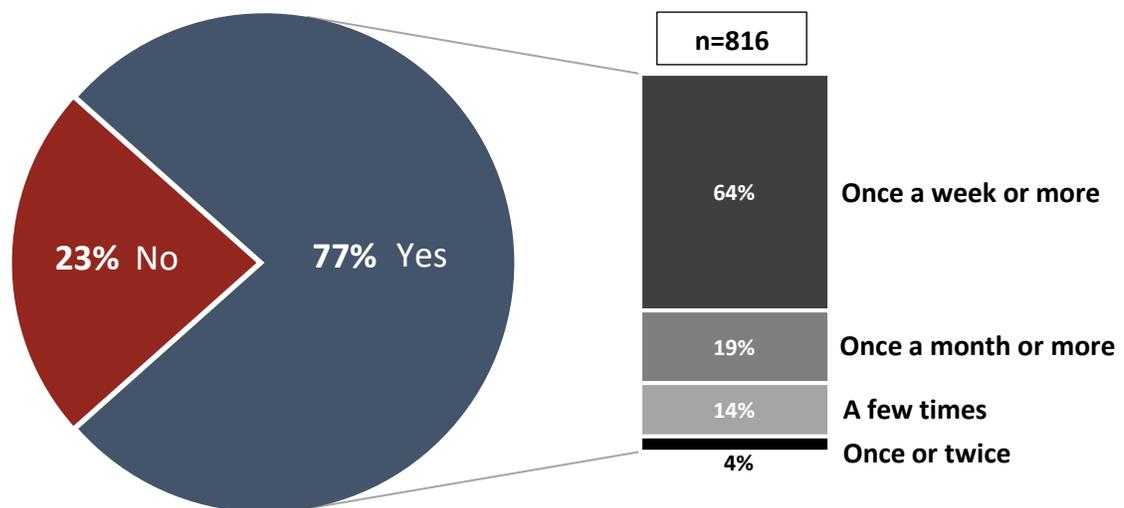
**During the pandemic, have you been keeping in contact with people that you know through your faith group and place of worship?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



**Switching to streaming from in-person worship**

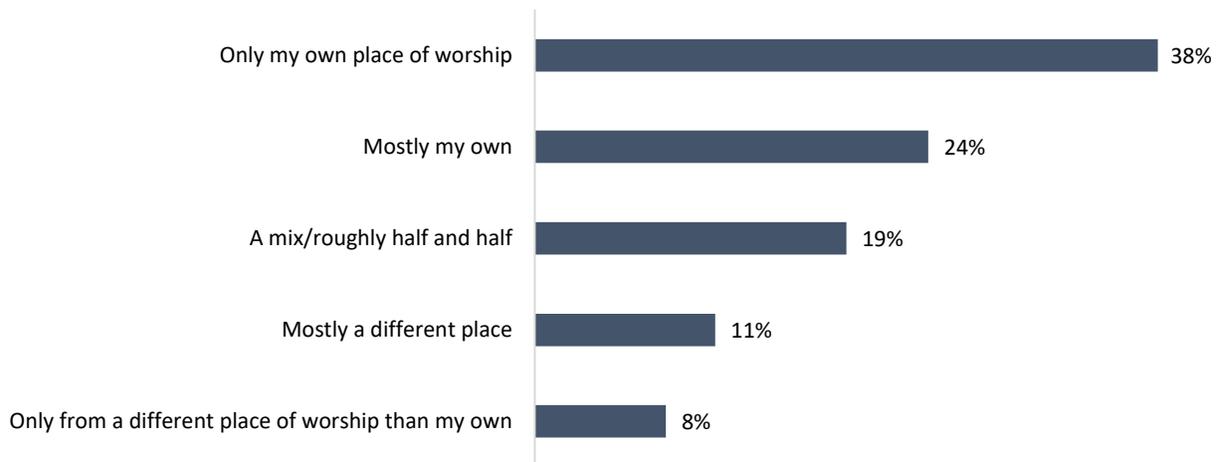
Technology and religion are rarely discussed in the same paragraph, but streaming technology has been an unlikely saviour of Canadians of faith. Churches, mosques, and temples across the country have resorted to offering services online, in lieu of physical attendance, and the level of uptake is immense. Fully three-quarters of faithful Canadians say that they have streamed a service or prayer session throughout the pandemic. Among that group, two-thirds are doing so once a week or more. There is notable consistency across generations on this question, as [older Canadians adjust](#) to new ways of communication ([see detailed tables](#)):

**Have you yourself been streaming/attending any online religious worship/prayer during Covid? And if so, how often?**  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)



While they may normally rely on their own community for in-person worship and activities, many appear to be branching out and enjoying worship services outside their congregant communities as well. Asked with whom they are streaming, two-in-five (38%) have been participating in services with groups outside of their own at least half the time:

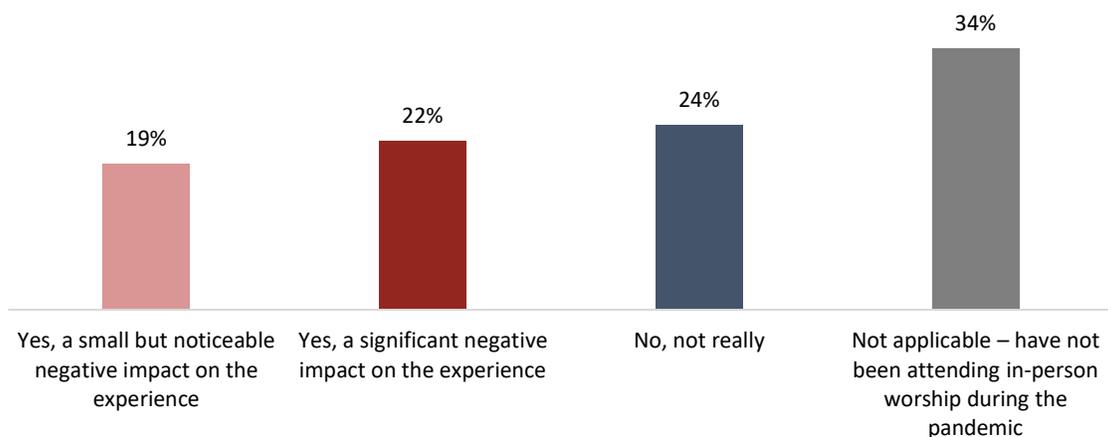
**Are you streaming worship from your own regular (pre-Covid) place of worship, or those offered from somewhere else?  
(Those streaming/attending online religious services, n=816)**



**After a year, are religious Canadians spiritually better or worse off?**

A year of non-traditional observances, Zoom calls, and streaming has been difficult for many faithful Canadians to endure. When services have been available, masks and social distancing have been a necessary but cumbersome part of the spiritual experience. Overall, two-in-five (42%) say that they had a more negative experience when they were able to attend a service:

**If you have been able to attend in-person worship during the pandemic, have the health precautions had a negative impact on your experience?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



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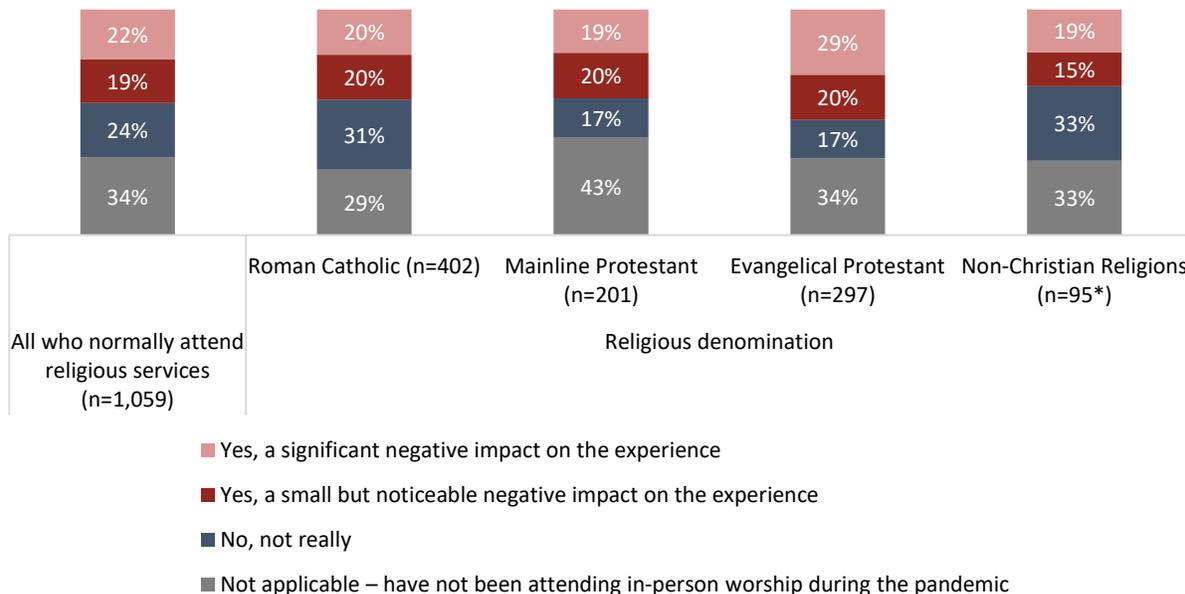
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Evangelical Protestants feel these impacts most strongly, with half (49%) saying that health precautions have negatively impacted their experience at in-person worship, a higher level than those who identify as Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, or Non-Christian:

**If you have been able to attend in-person worship during the pandemic, have the Covid health precautions had a negative impact on your experience?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



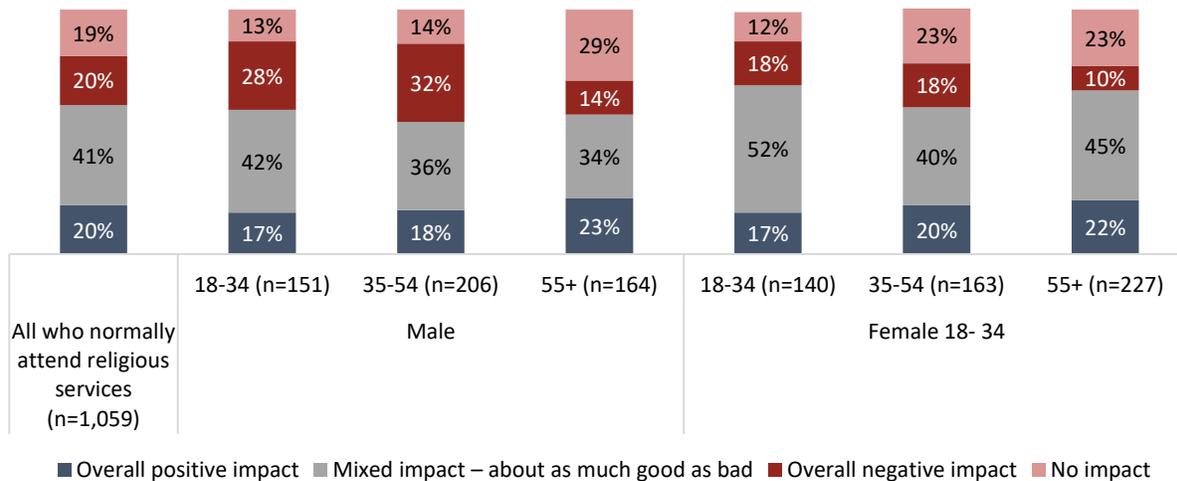
**\*small sample size, interpret with caution**

The overall effect of the pandemic on the spirituality of religious Canadians is, much like faith in Canada, diverse. There are some, in particular men under the age of 55, who say that they have been hindered more profoundly than others. For many, however, connecting with faith in a different way has engendered positive changes; those over the age of 54 are most likely to say this:

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**What kind of impact, if any, has Covid-19 had on your own personal spiritual state?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**

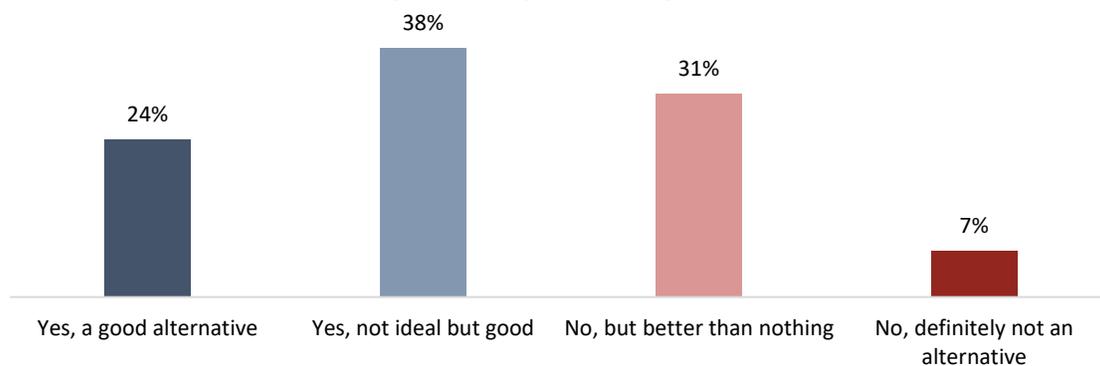


**Part Two: The Good, the Bad, the Isolation**

**Online was fine**

With so much of life concentrated online over the past year, terms like [Zoom fatigue](#) have become more common. Practicing faith online comes with the loss of in-person intimacy it often entails. For those who have turned to online services, one-quarter who have used it (24%) describe it as a nice alternative. The rest, however, are less enthusiastic. Two-in-five (38%) say that it is okay but less than ideal, while the same number are more negative:

**Overall, have you found online, streamed worship a good alternative for in-person worship?  
(Those streaming/attending online religious services, n=816)**



**In-person worship heavily missed**

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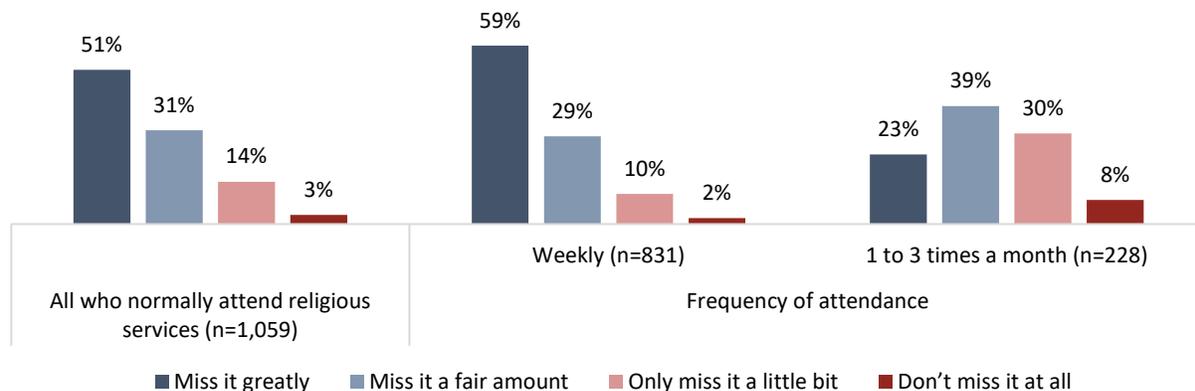
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The aforementioned discussion of online services inevitably leads to discussions of physical services and how much they are missed. For those who normally attend (weekly), the absence has been profound. For worshippers who attend less regularly, the absence has been noticed, but not as significant:

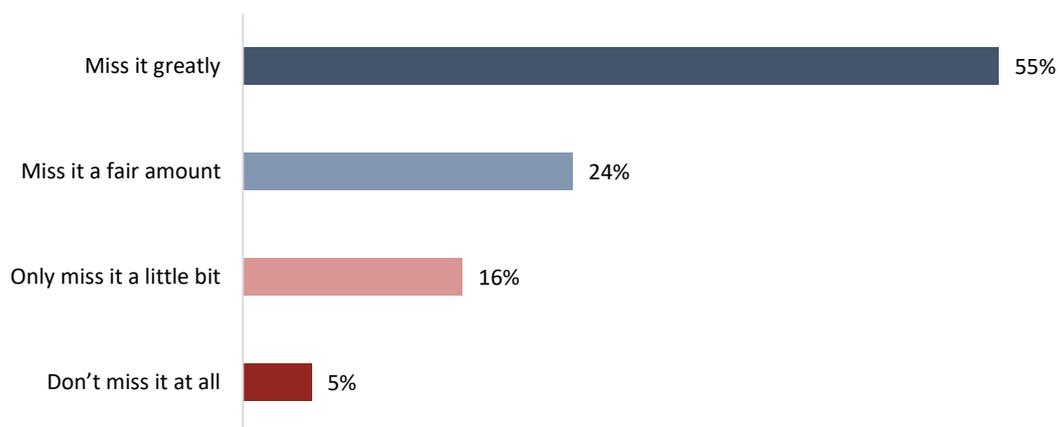
**How much, if at all, do you miss attending religious worship in person the way you did before Covid-19?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



**Roman Catholics anxious to resume Communion**

Respondents who identify as Roman Catholic were further prompted on this question about the physical aspects of Communion. The future of the consecration and consumption of bread and wine has been a point of uncertainty going forward in the realities of a post-COVID world, but for those who practice, this is a significant tradition that is longed for. More than half (55%) of Roman Catholics say they miss it greatly, eleven times the number who do not miss it at all:

**Do you miss having the opportunity to receive Holy Communion?  
(Total Roman Catholics, n=396)**



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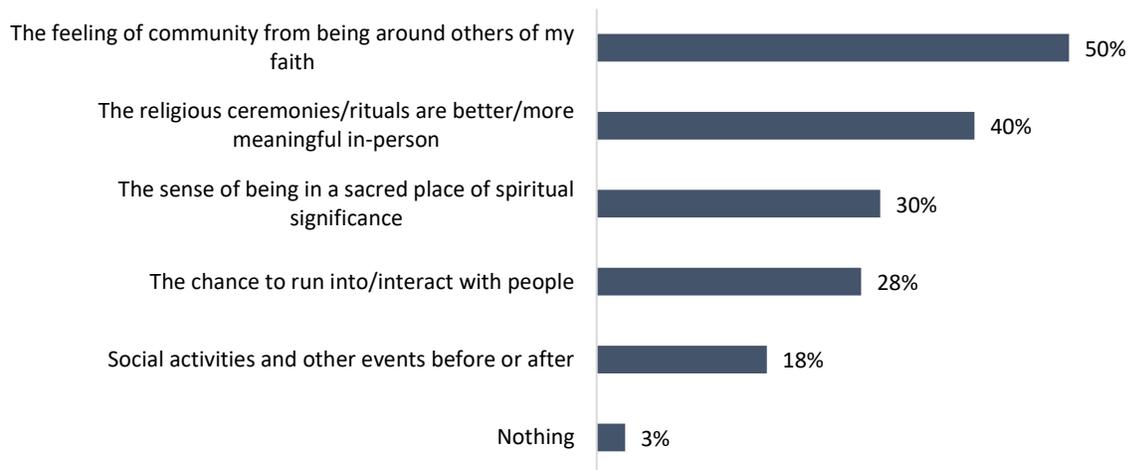
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**Half miss sense of community the most**

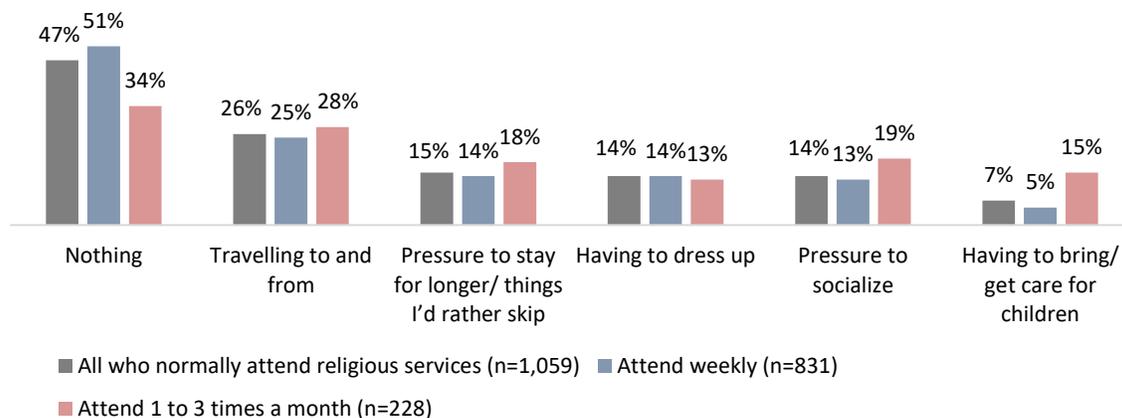
Whatever religious tradition they follow, Canadian worshippers are yearning for community. Asked what aspect of physical services they miss most, half say the sense of kinship and unity that comes of being around others is most coveted. For two-in-five (40%), being present for a physical service or given ritual creates more of a powerful experience that cannot be fully replicated online:

**What, if anything, do (or did) you miss most about attending worship in-person? (All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



There are some positive aspects of *not* attending services in person, which religious observers appreciate. The biggest benefit is not having to get there, chosen by one-quarter of faithful Canadians (26%). Notably, for those who attend services more rarely, bundling up their children or finding alternative care is also something they're cheerfully living without:

**What, if anything, do (or did) you not miss about in-person attendance at your place of worship? (By attendance frequency)**



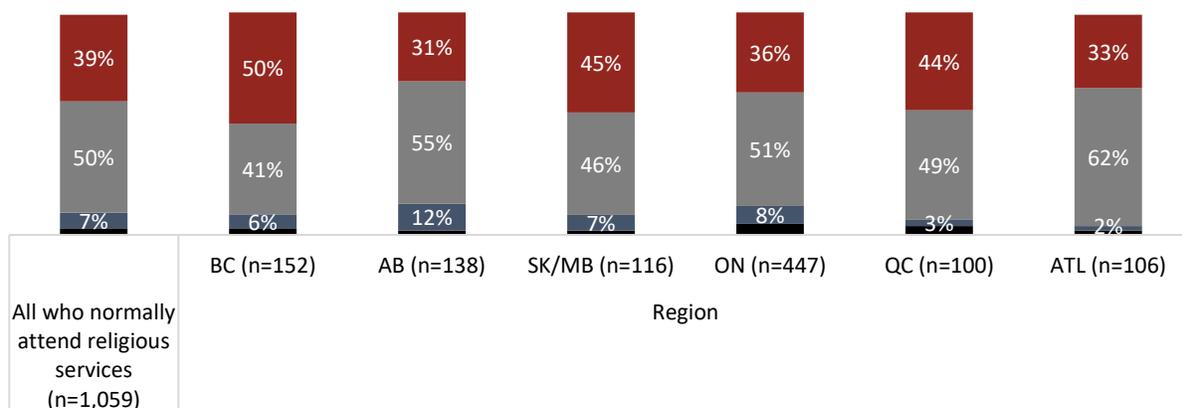
### Part Three: Are restrictions treating religious communities fairly?

Businesses, worship communities, and individuals across the country have been, depending on the period of the pandemic, supportive or critical of their government’s restrictions on gatherings. Places of worship, by definition gathering places for larger groups of people, have been hit hard and as noted throughout this release, forced to adjust. Some have argued that these [services are essential](#), while opponents have countered that they are [a considerable risk](#) to public safety.

#### **Half say restrictions have been fair, two-in-five say they have been too strict**

Those who attend religious services are largely in two camps. Half (50%) say that they feel the balance their provincial government has maintained is fair. Others, however, are more critical. Two-in-five (39%), rising to 50 per cent in British Columbia, say that restrictions have been harsh:

**How would you describe your province’s public health restrictions on places of worship compared to other public venues where people gather?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



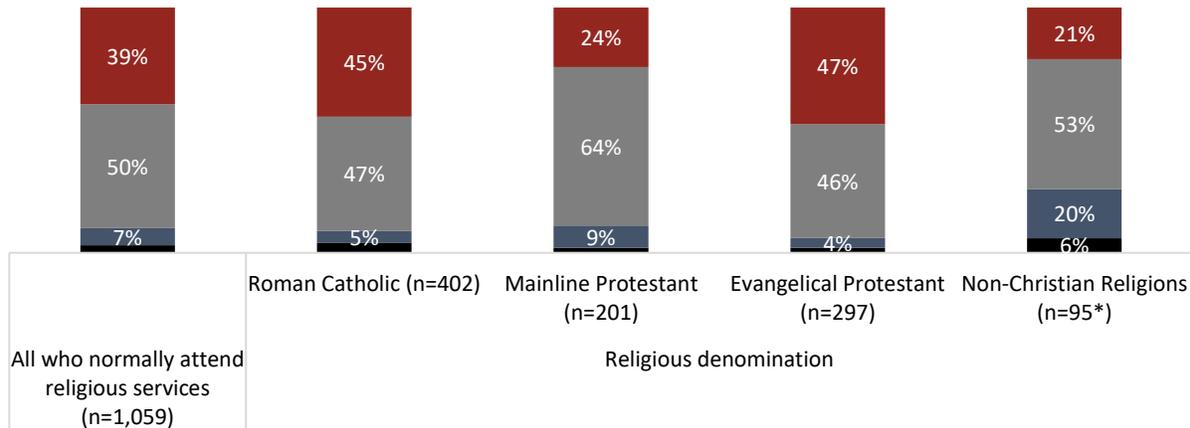
- Restrictions have been unfairly harsh on places of worship compared to other public venues
- Restrictions have been fairly balanced between places of worship and other public venues
- Restrictions have been too relaxed for places of worship compared to other public venues
- Don't know/Can't say

Evangelicals and Catholics are the most likely to take this critical view, with nearly half saying that restrictions are unfairly harsh on places of worship. This is roughly double the proportion of mainline Protestants and those of a non-Christian faith who say the same.

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**How would you describe your province's public health restrictions on places of worship compared to other public venues where people gather?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



- Restrictions have been unfairly harsh on places of worship compared to other public venues
- Restrictions have been fairly balanced between places of worship and other public venues
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- Don't know/Can't say

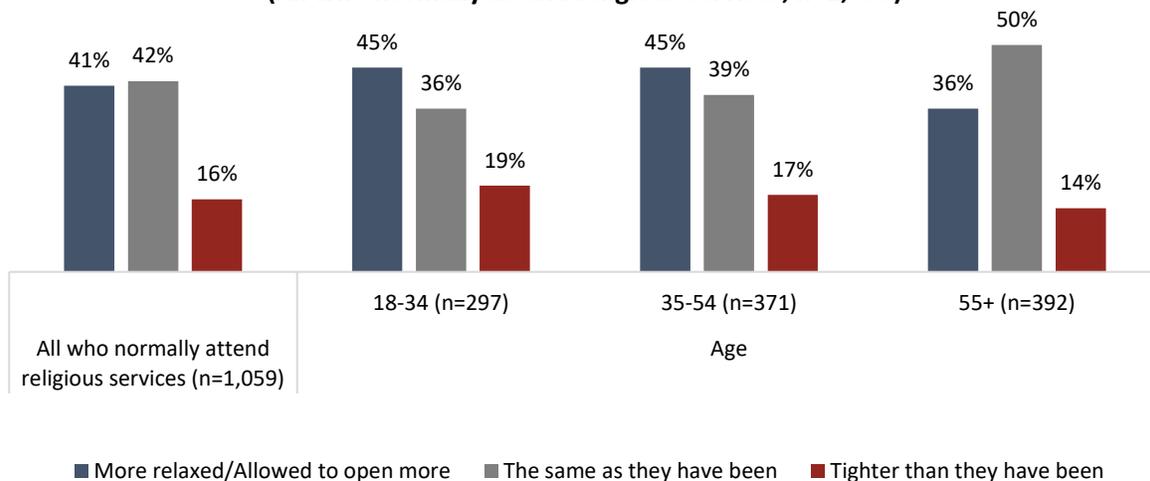
**\*small sample size, interpret with caution**

At the community level, considering their own place of worship, faithful Canadians are again divided. An equal number say that if were up to them they would have opened up in-person attendance (41%) or kept it about the same (42%).

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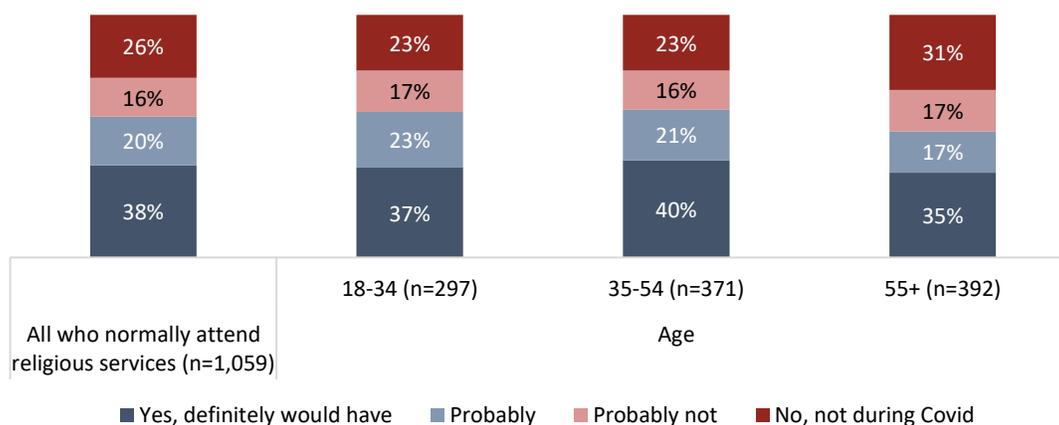
**If it were entirely up to you, would Covid restrictions on in-person attendance at your own place of worship have been:**  
**(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



**Majority would have attended more if place of worship were open**

Had they been open, two-in-five (38%) canvassed for this survey say they absolutely would have attended, while one-in-five (20%) say this probably would have been the case. Older Canadians are more likely to say they absolutely would not have taken this risk during COVID-19:

**Had more opportunities for traditional in-person worship been offered during this past year of the Covid pandemic would you have attended?**  
**(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



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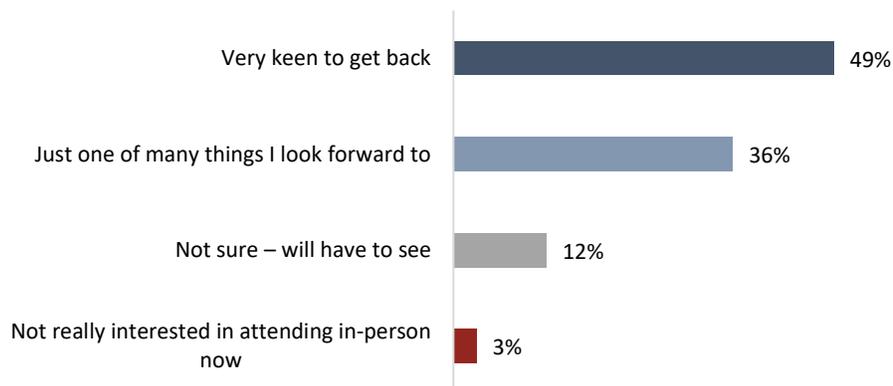
## Part Four: Post-COVID hopes

As with nearly every part of society, planning for a post-COVID world creates anxiety and unanswerable questions. What will the world look like? Will habits and preferences change? The faithful community has its own share of questions, but the place of in-person worship appears unaltered.

### **High level of enthusiasm for return of in-person service**

When the pandemic is over, half (49%) of faithful Canadians are fervent in their desire to get back to in-person worship. For one-in-three (36%) this is high on list of activities they look forward to resuming, but among other aspects of life as well. These data will likely assuage concerns about the future of in-person services, as just three per cent of respondents say they are not interested in going back:

**How would you describe your own personal feeling about  
being able to attend in-person worship again?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



The frequency at which most will return to services appears likely to return to pre-pandemic levels. Three-quarters (77%) say that nothing will change, though Canadians of faith are twice as likely to say they will attend more rather than less. One-in-seven (15%) of those who were attending less regularly say that they will increase their attendance in the future:

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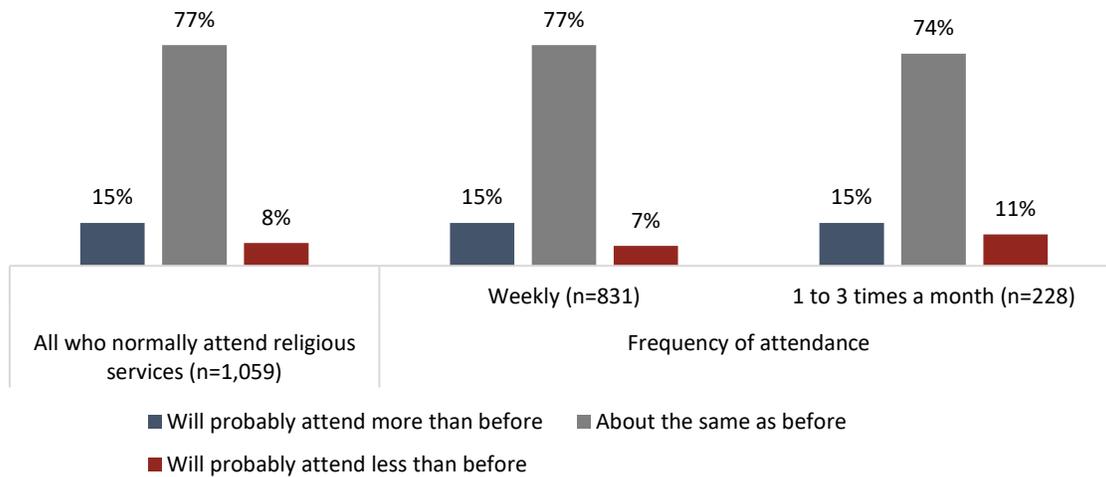
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**How would you guess your future post-pandemic attendance at your place of worship will compare to how often you were attending in recent years pre-pandemic?**

**(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



**Most want to keep online options available**

While they're anxious to enjoy the benefits of in-person services, more than half of worshippers, and three-in-five over the age of 54, say that online worship has an important role to play in the future of faith. A majority across each age group say that they hope their church will commit to providing online services:

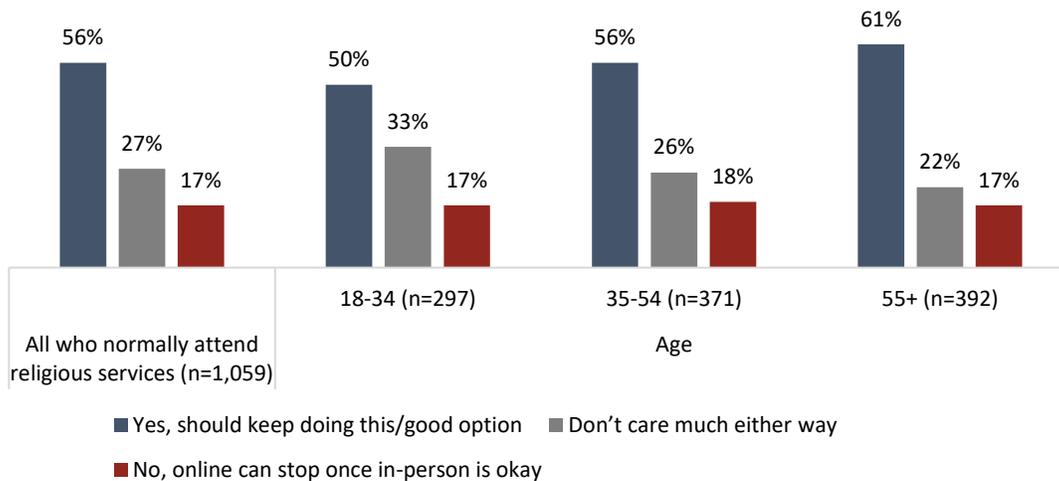
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**Would you hope your place of worship, or ones like it, will continue to offer online religious worship even after COVID-19?  
(All who normally attend religious services, n=1,059)**



**Note on methodology**

The Angus Reid Institute began by examining the percentage of Canadians that follow each faith group. Additional research was then incorporated based on likelihood to regularly attend worship between each group. Thus, the overall sample of Evangelical Protestants in this sample is higher than the proportion in the national population.

*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*

*For detailed results by religious affiliation and attendance frequency, [click here](#).*

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