

WESTLAKE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



5/28/20

Congregational COVID-19 Survey

This paper reports the results of a congregation-wide survey executed May 15-19 regarding the impact, concerns, and plans for Westlake UMC to re-open as the COVID-19 crisis continues. 166 responses were received from 1,053 contacted for the survey.

Westlake United Methodist Church

CONGREGATIONAL COVID-19 SURVEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Westlake United Methodist Church (“WUMC”) closed its buildings for all activities, e.g., pre-school, small group, Sunday school, worship services, in mid-March in compliance with state and local guidance to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. As the crisis has unfolded, church leadership began to seek a path for re-opening and restarting the normal activities of the church.

In a meeting of church council, it was decided that a survey of the congregation would be a useful tool in gauging the hopes, fears and concerns with re-opening. The purposes of the survey include:

- Identify and quantify the concerns of the congregation regarding re-opening WUMC;
- Identify and quantify expectations for resuming worship on campus;
- Identify and quantify expectations for how that might be executed;
- Gauge congregational feedback on existing online services;
- Provide the congregation with a mechanism to voice their concerns; and
- Provide the congregation with a mechanism to share what they see/feel WUMC is doing right.

A committee including Rev. Tracey Beadle, Senior Pastor; Jim Burke, current Church Council Chair; Ellen Balthazar, incoming Church Council Chair; and John Walters, Trustee Committee Co-chair, began work on a survey instrument to develop, execute and tabulate the survey and its results. The WUMC staff members reviewed and provided input on questions and survey design.

The team wishes to thank the WUMC congregation for participating in the survey and providing honest feedback regarding their expectations and concerns related to the COVID crisis and the path forward to re-opening the church for activities. We honor those who completed the survey as we have learned much from your candid responses. A special thanks to the WUMC staff for their review, comments, and edits, which made the survey instrument a better work product.

Survey Response

WUMC received 166 responses to the survey, a 15.7% response rate for the population of 1,053. Statistically, these results represent an overall confidence level of 95% with a confidence interval of 7%. These terms are defined as:

The **confidence level** tells you how sure you can be. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the confidence interval. The 95% confidence level means you can be 95% certain; the 99% confidence level means you can be 99% certain. Most researchers use the 95% confidence level.

The **confidence interval** (also called margin of error) is the plus-or-minus figure usually reported in newspaper or television opinion poll results. For example, if you use a confidence interval of 4 and 47% percent of your sample picks an answer you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question of the entire relevant population between 43% (47-4) and 51% (47+4) would have picked that answer.¹

In order to reach 5% and 4% confidence intervals, 275 and 380 responses respectively would be required. The team believes the effort required to achieve these results outweighs the benefits.

¹ (Creative Research Systems, 2012)

SURVEY RESULTS

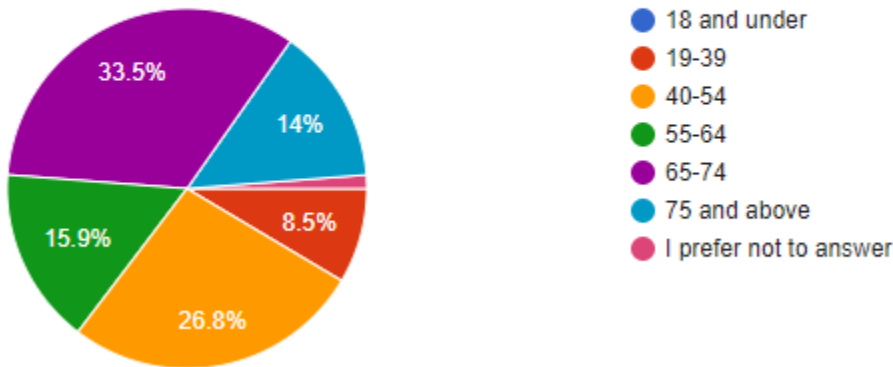
The charts and lists below detail the survey results by question, grouped by the categories defined above, rather than the order presented in the survey. For questions that provided an option for “Other,” the user defined responses were grouped into one “Other” response, as none were statistically significant and in some cases were a restatement of an option defined as part of the base question.

Demographic Questions

Question responses:

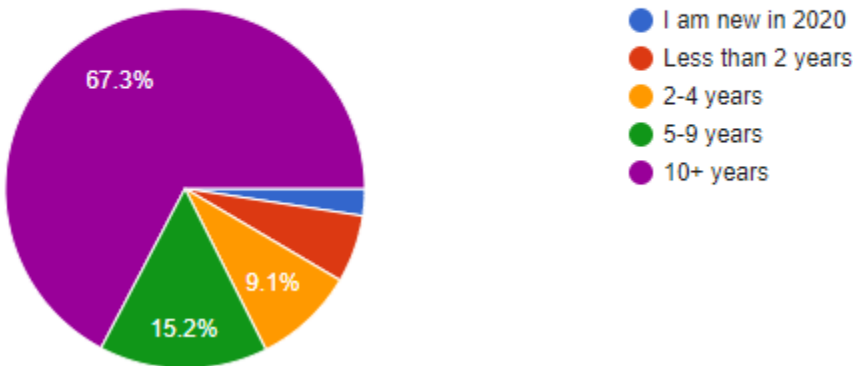
What is your age:

164 responses



How long have you been attending?

165 responses



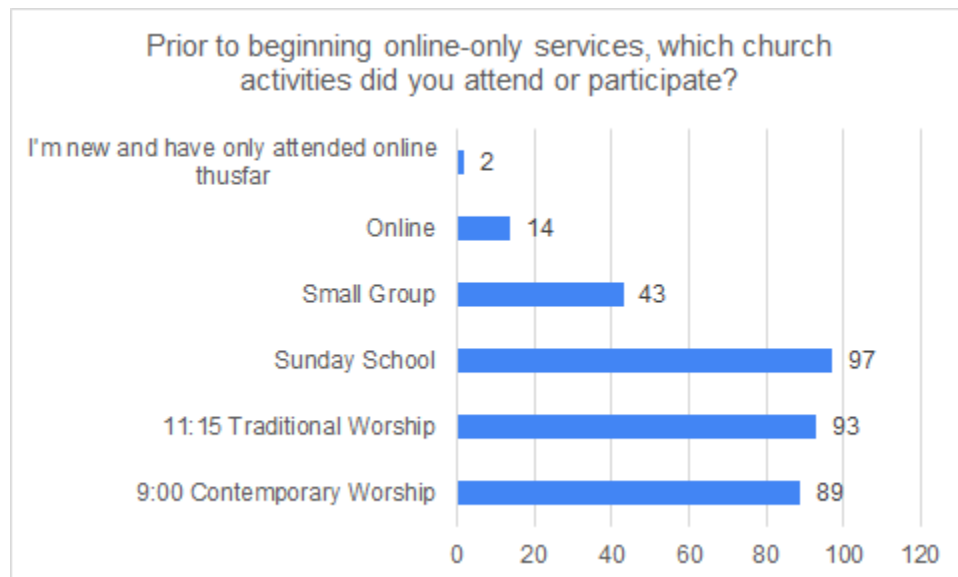
The survey results show that WUMC is like many other Methodist churches in America. Adults from all generations participated in the survey. However, almost half, 47.5%, of the respondents were 65 or above, the most “at-risk” age group as identified by the CDC. This is in comparison to 32% in this age range for the American United Methodist average. Adding the at/near retirement age range (55-64), and the percentage increases to 63.4%, versus 62% for the Methodist average.²

Length of attendance shows that long-time attendees make up a large majority of the respondents, with those attending longer than 10 years comprising two thirds of the respondents.

² (Pew Research Center, 2014)

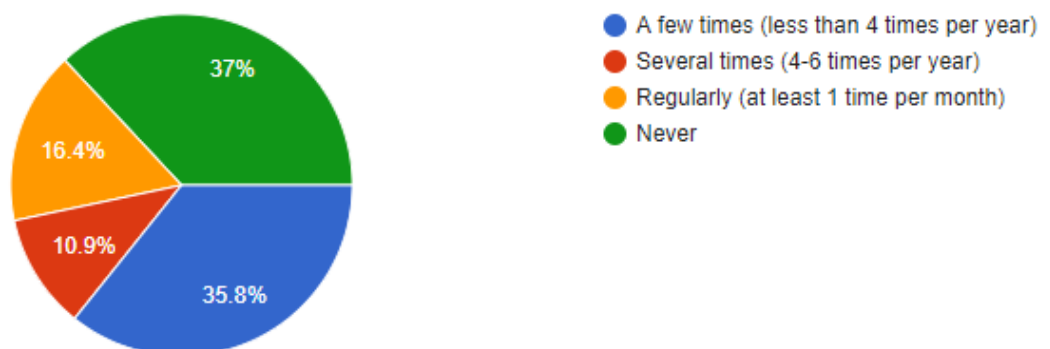
Current Participation

Question responses:



Prior to online-only worship beginning, how often did you participate in worship online?

165 responses



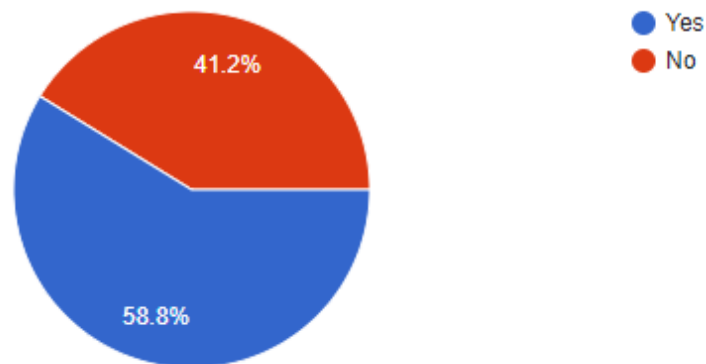
Survey respondents were about equally split between those who attended the 9:00 service, pre-COVID, and those who regularly attended the 11:15 service. Consistent with previous surveys, over half of worshippers also regularly attended a Sunday fellowship group (Sunday School). Prior to “Shelter at Home”, over a quarter of respondents indicated familiarity with on-line worship, with 16.4% participating in on-line worship regularly and 10.9% tuning in 4-6 times per year.

Perceived Risks

Question response:

Do you consider yourself or someone in your home to be in one of the "high risk" categories for COVID-19?

165 responses



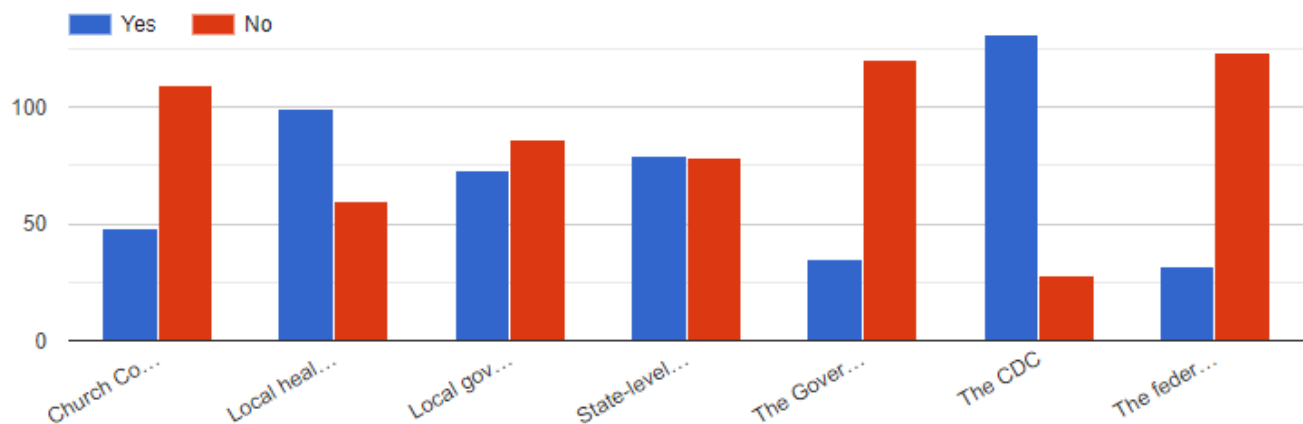
Perceived COVID Risk by Age Group		Perceived Risk	
Age Group	No	Yes	Grand Total
19-39	13	1	14
40-54	33	11	44
55-64	13	13	26
65-74	7	48	55
75 and above	1	22	23
I prefer not to answer (blank)	1	1	2
Grand Total	68	97	165

As the population of the WUMC congregation is older, the level of perceived risk for COVID-19 is reflected in the overall percentage that feels at risk. This is also reflected in the perceived risk by age group, with older congregants feeling most at risk. Reflecting the large number of 65+ respondents, 70% of respondents 65+ felt they or someone in their home was in a "high risk" category for COVID.

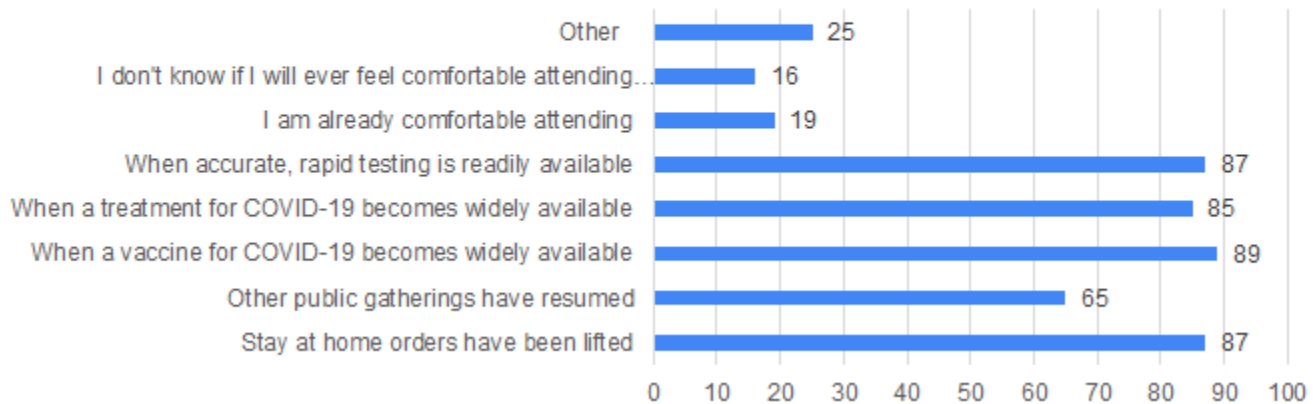
Re-opening Attitudes and Prerequisites

Question responses:

If the following officials said it was okay to attend events with large gatherings, would it make you more likely to attend these types of events? (e.g., worship, Sunday school, small groups, fellowship events)? Please respond Yes or No to each.

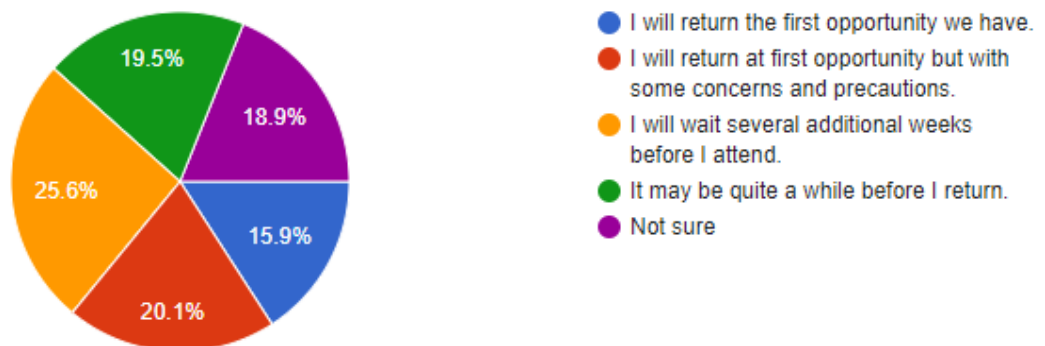


Given your current understanding of the spread of coronavirus, which of the following is necessary for you to attend an in-person worship service? (check all that apply)



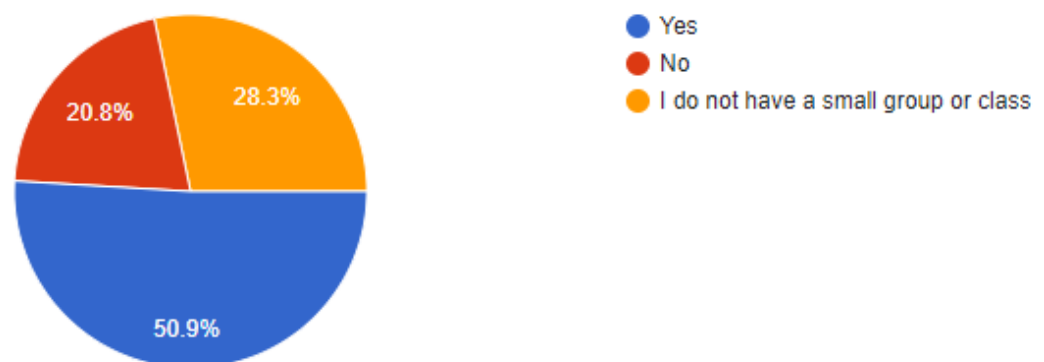
When bans are lifted and social distancing measures are implemented by WUMC, which best describes your attitude toward returning to a worship service at church? Select one:

164 responses



When allowed, would you be willing to attend your small group or class in the space it typically meets?

159 responses



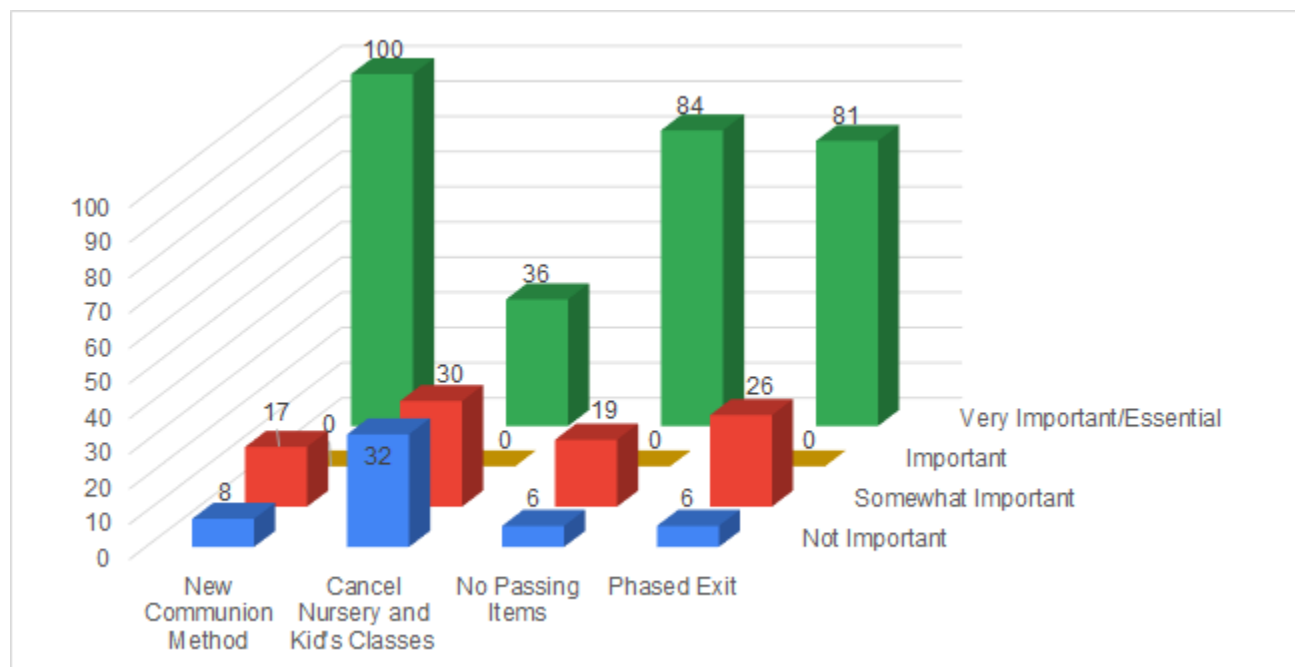
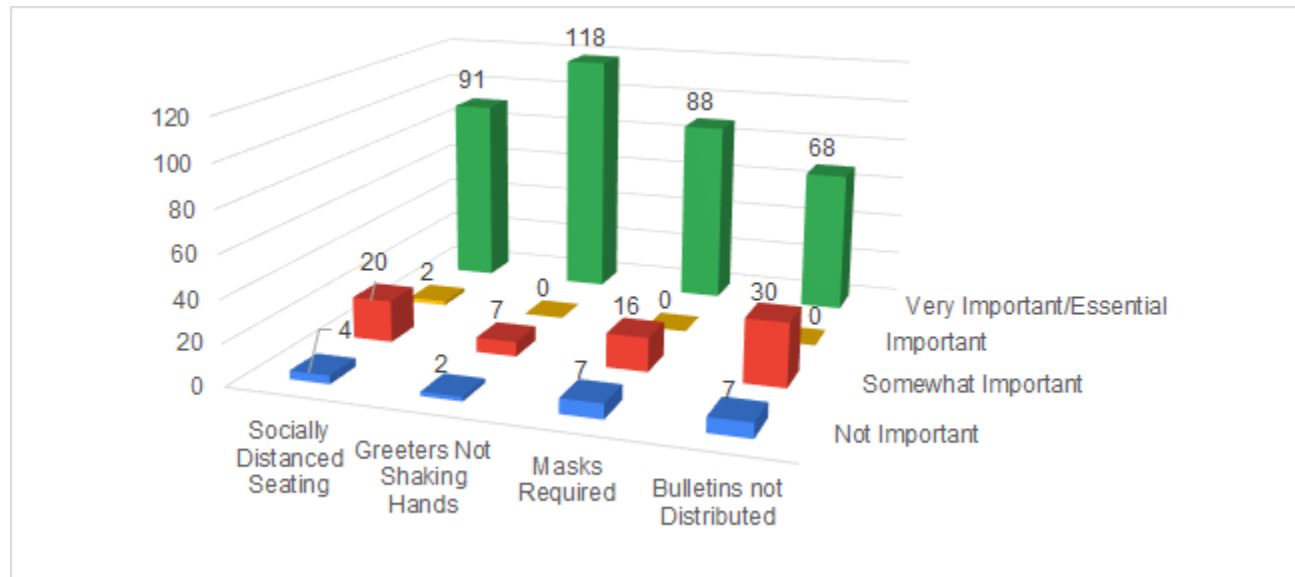
Overall, the congregation has a conservative attitude toward re-opening which is subsequently reflected in the prerequisites for restarting in person worship, classes and small groups. As a majority of the participants consider themselves “at risk,” they place more trust in local, state and federal health agencies versus appointed/elected officials for guidance. Comfort in attending gatherings is primarily guided by the availability of testing, treatments, and vaccination for the virus, and by the lifting of stay at home orders (87%, 85%, 89%, and 87%, respectively).

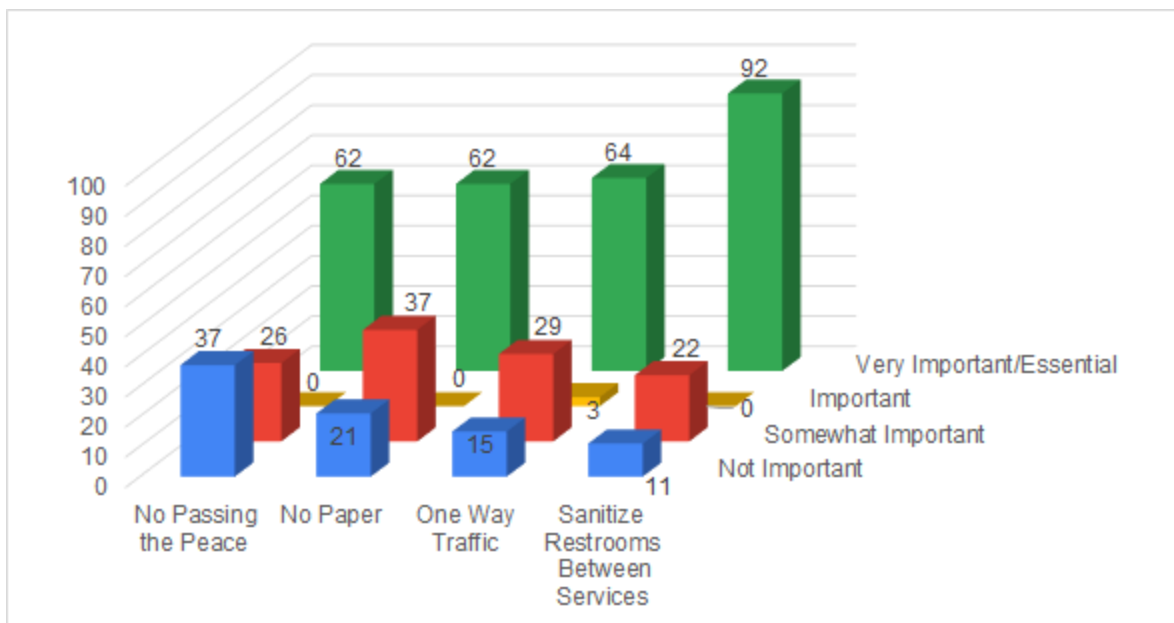
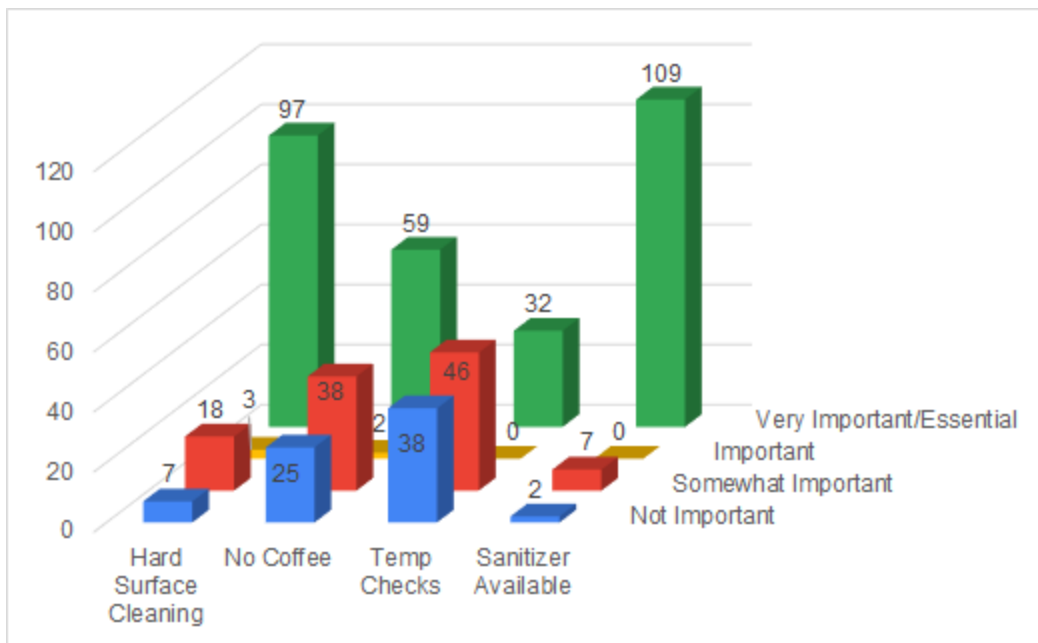
Likewise, the congregation is in no rush to begin attending, 45.1% of respondents said they would wait several weeks before returning or that it would be quite a while before they would return. Adding the “not sure” group brings the total to 64%.

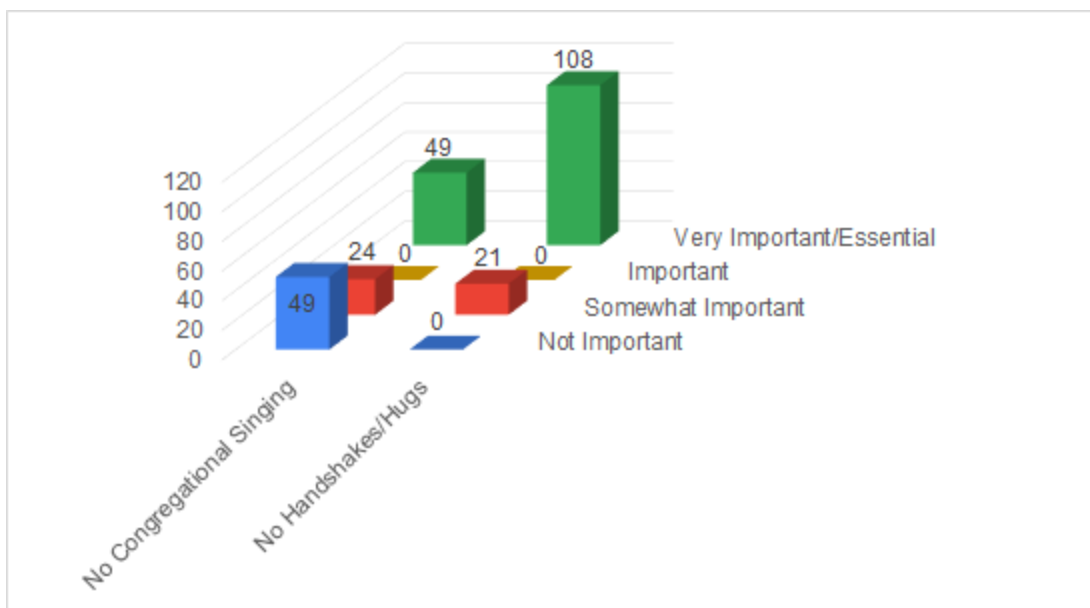
Re-opening Requirements

Question responses:

What precautions, if any, do you expect our church to take for worship gatherings? Select all that apply:







The survey asked the participants to rank a set of common COVID re-opening requirements from “Not Important” to “Very Important/Essential.” Respondents expressed strong agreement that when in-person worship resumes, physical contact should be limited, a new method must developed for Communion, sanitizer should be made available, and surfaces/facilities will need to be aggressively cleaned.

Socially distanced seating, wearing masks, no passing of items and a phased exit were more important than not distributing bulletins/paper, eliminating coffee service, not passing the peace or delineating one-way traffic.

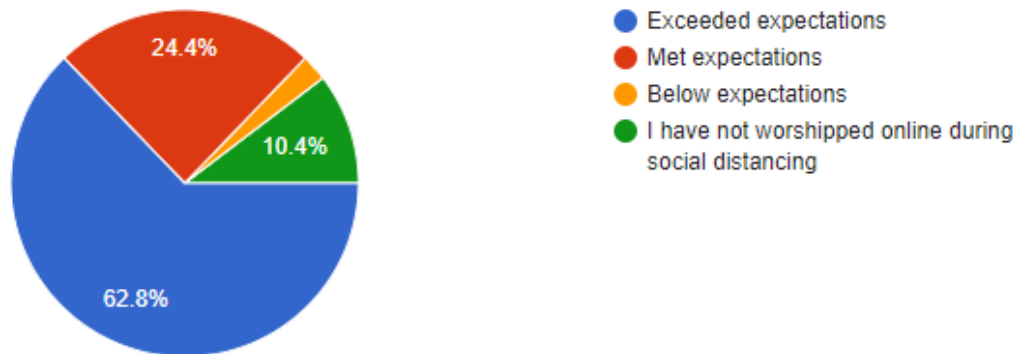
Opinions were diverse on cancelling nursery/children’s programming, conducting temperature checks and congregational singing.

(Note) The Committee wonders if these results might be different had respondents had access to additional information that has become available that indicates congregational singing to be one of the riskiest behaviors as it relates to the spread of COVID-19.

Online Participation and Satisfaction

Since WUMC has moved to online-only worship, what has been your experience?

164 responses



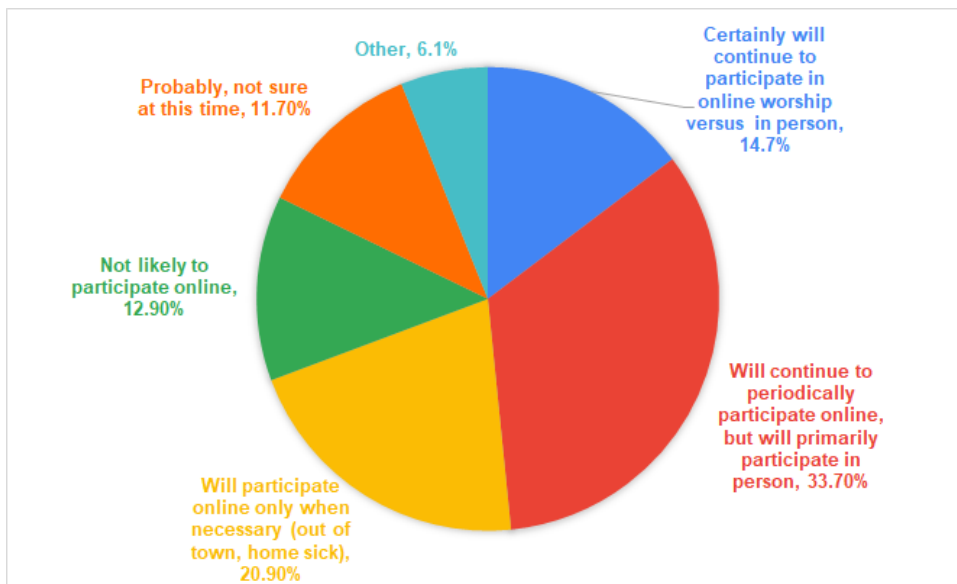
What has been the BEST thing about our online worship service? Word Cloud of the words most commonly used:



What, if anything, has been the MOST UNSATISFACTORY or CHALLENGING thing about our online worship services? Word Cloud of the words most commonly used:



After we resume in-person worship, how likely are you to participate in online worship as an alternative to in-person worship?



Shifting to an online-only format for worship required a re-thinking of the format to deliver a more personal, connected webcast versus the single camera view of the sanctuary from prior to the COVID crisis. The increased production quality and revised content and format is reflected in the overall satisfaction with the online worship experience, with 87.2% of survey participants saying that the online worship either met or exceeded their expectations. This was reflected in the comments regarding the best things about the service from the participant's viewpoint. The word cloud of the 50 most used words in the comments reflects the overall satisfaction with the effort.

The word cloud for challenges or difficulties with the online service reflect three themes: technical difficulties accessing/viewing the webcast; webcast timing; and the loss of in-person connectedness.

Going forward, the online service will play a key role for the congregation. While 37% said they had never participated in the online services prior to the COVID crisis, only 12.9% said they would not participate going forward. A small majority want to have the community of an in-person service, and many will also use the online services when in-person attendance is not reasonable.

General Feedback

Any comments or suggestions? Word Cloud of the words most commonly used:



The last question provided the congregation with an avenue to express their thoughts, comments, suggestions, and concerns. The word cloud of the 50 most used words reflect the overall positive outlook of the congregation and their desire to meet again when the situation allows.

CONCLUSION

Summary conclusions based on the purposes of the survey include:

- Identify and quantify the concerns of the congregation regarding re-opening WUMC;

Many in the congregation feel at risk for COVID-19, which directly impacts the prerequisites and expectations for re-opening.
- Identify and quantify expectations for resuming worship on campus;

Respondents trust local, state and federal health officials to determine when groups can safely meet again. However, most expressed caution with returning to church activities and were comfortable waiting for a safe plan to be developed.
- Identify and quantify expectations for how that might be executed;

There was a positive consensus regarding the implementation of standard distancing protocols used in other public spaces, with lesser strong consensus on some traditional worship practices.
- Gauge congregational feedback on existing online services;

Overall feedback for the online services was very positive, a strong majority feeling the online service met or exceeded expectations. Furthermore, online participation will continue at a rate higher than prior to the COVID crisis.
- Provide the congregation with a mechanism to voice their concerns;

Concerns ranged from moving too quickly, adequately providing for safety, loss of community/fellowship, to technical difficulties and timing issues for the online services.
- Provide the congregation with a mechanism to share what they see/feel WUMC is doing right.

The WUMC staff received praise for rising to the challenge of producing a high-quality online service weekly and finding new ways to keep the congregation engaged during the crisis. The congregation is optimistic about the return of church activities at the proper time, with the proper safety precautions.

This survey will be distributed to the staff, church committees, and congregation. Staff and committee members will meet with classes and small groups to discuss the survey results and solicit feedback to be shared with the re-opening committee. Additional discussions with committees will be executed to share more detailed data analysis as needed. Data from this survey will impact how we proceed in opening in-person gatherings at our Church facility and ideas for individual Church committees to consider. This data will be presented to Church Council in the near future and some changes may occur before the Church Council meets.

Last, the survey results will be shared with the District offices to help their efforts in providing guidance to other congregations.

The team again wishes to thank the WUMC congregation for participating in the survey and providing honest feedback regarding their expectations and concerns related to the COVID crisis and the path forward to re-opening the church for activities. We honor those who completed the survey as we have learned much from your candid responses. A special thanks to the WUMC staff for their review, comments, and edits, which made the survey instrument a better work product.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Development and Publication

The survey instrument was crafted from a sample COVID-19 church survey from Lifeway Church, with additional questions coming from other sample church surveys identified by committee members and WUMC staff. A mass email from the church was sent to 1,053 addresses on file which included members and non-members alike. A follow-up was posted to the WUMC Facebook page on 5/15 and the survey was featured during the online service on 5/17. A preliminary deadline for responses was set for 5/19.

Question Formats

Questions for the survey used a variety of formats, including yes/no, multiple choice, scaled response and short/long text responses. The formats used were selected to generate both quantitative and qualitative answers, as well as provide a basis for cross tabulation, e.g., tabulating the results of a question based on the results of another question. For example, tabulating the perceived risk in relation to the age range of the respondent.

Tabulation and Report

After the closing date, the team met to review the survey results and create cross-tabulations as needed to identify relationships between the questions in an effort to better “read between the lines,” and provide WUMC leadership with as much information as possible beyond the raw data in order to plan and make decisions regarding the re-opening effort.

Survey Questions

The survey questions selected offered the opportunity to capture the following information and provide a basis for cross-tabulation. The question main segments included:

- Demographics
- Current Participation
- Perceived Risks
- Re-opening Attitudes and Prerequisites
- Re-opening Requirements
- Online Participation and Satisfaction
- General Feedback

Questions related to children’s Sunday school and youth programs were not included in this survey. Additional targeted surveys will be used to engage and collect responses from those congregants later.

Demographic Questions

Demographic questions were included to capture information related to the congregants. The questions were distributed throughout the survey. Questions included:

Email address *

Valid email address

What is your age:

ending?

- ☐ 18 and under
- ☐ 19-39
- ☐ 40-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75 and above
- ☐ I prefer not to answer

Current Participation

Current participation questions were included to gauge the relative level the respondents were actively engaged in activities at WUMC. Questions included:

Prior to beginning online-only services, which church activities did you attend or participate? Select as many as apply:

- ☐ 9:00 Contemporary Worship
- ☐ 11:15 Traditional Worship
- ☐ Sunday school
- ☐ Small group
- ☐ Online
- ☐ I'm new and have only attended online thus far

Prior to online-only worship beginning, how often did you participate in worship online?

- ☐ A few times (less than 4 times per year)
- ☐ Several times (4-6 times per year)
- ☐ Regularly (at least 1 time per month)
- ☐ Never

Perceived Risks

A single perceived risk question allowed the respondents to self-identify their level of risk in relation to the COVID-19 crisis.

Do you consider yourself or someone in your home to be in one of the "high risk" categories for COVID-19?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Re-opening Attitudes and Prerequisites

Re-opening attitudes and prerequisites were selected to gauge the respondent's willingness to return to activities on the WUMC campus and what official/unofficial benchmarks would be required prior to initiating WUMC in-person activities. Questions included:

If the following officials said it was okay to attend events with large gatherings, would it make you more likely to attend these types of events? (e.g., worship, Sunday school, small groups, fellowship events)? Please respond Yes or No to each.

	Yes	No
Church Council	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local health department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local government (mayor, city cou...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State-level health department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Governor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The CDC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The federal government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Given your current understanding of the spread of coronavirus, which of the following is necessary for you to attend an in-person worship service? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Stay at home orders have been lifted
- ☐ Other public gatherings have resumed (concerts, theaters, sporting events, etc)
- ☐ When a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes widely available
- ☐ When a treatment for COVID-19 becomes widely available
- ☐ When accurate, rapid testing is readily available
- ☐ I am already comfortable attending
- ☐ I don't know if I will ever feel comfortable attending public gatherings
- ☐ Other...

When bans are lifted and social distancing measures are implemented by WUMC, which best describes your attitude toward returning to a worship service at church? Select one:

- ☐ I will return the first opportunity we have.
- ☐ I will return at first opportunity but with some concerns and precautions.
- ☐ I will wait several additional weeks before I attend.
- ☐ It may be quite a while before I return.
- ☐ Not sure

When allowed, would you be willing to attend your small group or class in the space it typically meets?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I do not have a small group or class

Re-opening Requirements

Re-opening requirements included a single question to gauge both the inventory of desired WUMC actions as part of re-opening and the relative importance of these actions in the view of the respondent.

What precautions, if any, do you expect our church to take for worship gatherings? Select all that apply:

Question	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important/ Essential
Socially-distanced seating				
Greeters not shaking hands				
Masks required for attendees				
Bulletins not distributed by hand/new method				
Communion not offered by traditional method				
Nursery and children's classes not offered				
No passing of items (offering plate/registration pad)				
Phased exit (leaving gradually w/o crowding)				
Hard surfaces wiped down between services				
Coffee service discontinued				
Temperature checks on entry				
Sanitizer available at entrance/exits				
No "passing the peace" during service, even without touching				
No paper distributed by any method				
Set up one-way foot traffic for entering and exiting the worship center				
Sanitize restrooms between services				
No congregational singing				
No handshakes/hugs				

Online Participation and Satisfaction

Online participation and satisfaction questions were included to gauge the overall success of the revised online worship services offered by WUMC after closure in March. Questions sought to measure overall satisfaction, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and quantify the respondent's attitude toward participating online in the future. Questions included:

Since WUMC has moved to online-only worship, what has been your experience?

- ☐ Exceeded expectations
- ☐ Met expectations
- ☐ Below expectations
- ☐ I have not worshipped online during social distancing

What has been the BEST thing about our online worship services?

Short answer text

What, if anything, has been the MOST UNSATISFACTORY or CHALLENGING thing about our online worship services?

Short answer text

After we resume in-person worship, how likely are you to participate in online worship as an alternative to in-person worship?

- ☐ Certainly will continue to participate in online worship versus in person
- ☐ Will continue to periodically participate online, but will primarily participate in person
- ☐ Will participate online only when necessary (out of town, home sick)
- ☐ Not likely to participate online
- ☐ Probably, not sure at this time
- ☐ Other...

General Feedback

Last, a general feedback question was included to allow the respondent to provide feedback not covered in the survey questions. This question will provide an additional avenue to identify risks, concerns, and expectations from the congregation.

Any comments or suggestions?

Long answer text

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Creative Research Systems. (2012). *Sample Size Calculator*. Retrieved from <https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

Pew Research Center. (2014, May 30). *Members of the United Methodist Church*. Retrieved from Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life: <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/united-methodist-church/>