

**By Steve Jones – President, Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists, Canada**

Recently, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's head researcher, Rick Hiemstra, shared some survey research with our National and Regional directors, particularly statistics and insights related to church trends coming out of the pandemic. The surveys were conducted in September 2021 in partnership with Maru (a polling company) and EFC, involving 3,025 Canadians 18 or older and representing every region, age, and gender in Canada.

Here are some of the findings:

- 4 in 5 Canadians had almost no connection with church worship services during the pandemic
- Those who never attend a worship service jumped from 55% pre-COVID-19 to 71% during COVID-19
- Among self-identified evangelicals, those who never attend a worship service jumped from 22% pre-COVID to 37% during COVID-19
- About one third of evangelicals admitted their attendance (virtual) dropped during the pandemic – only 1 in 10 said it increased.
- Looking across various generations (Silent, Boomer, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z), worship service attendance dropped during COVID-19. However, Gen Z (18-26) are the most frequent worship service attenders during COVID-19 among all generations with 27% indicating attendance 2-3 times or more per month. Because we expect young people to be the ones who transition out of faith, Maru polled another 3,000 Canadians and discovered the same result, and this is true in U.S. surveys as well.

Maybe online media is a more natural place for 18-26-years-olds to “do church”, or possibly God is doing a new thing with this new generation?

We had two years of getting out of the habit of physical church attendance – when were people planning on returning?

- Among those who attended a worship service 2-3 times or more per month – they indicated they plan to continue virtual attendance (7%) or that they will never physically return (9%).
- On vaccine requirements, evangelicals had slightly different opinions among themselves as well as with all Canadians:

- “Lockdowns mandated by health authorities have been reasonable and necessary to protect Canadians.” All Canadians: 52% strongly agree, 10% strongly disagree; Evangelicals: 50% strongly agree, 19% strongly disagree.
- “Vaccine passports are a reasonable way to function during the pandemic.” All Canadians: 55% strongly agree, 13% strongly disagree; Evangelicals: 47% strongly agree, 19% strongly disagree.
- “The danger posed by COVID-19 does not justify the limitations on personal freedoms during the pandemic.” All Canadians: 18% strongly agree, 47% strongly disagree; Evangelicals: 30% strongly agree, 41% strongly disagree. \*Add in the figures for moderate agreement and disagreement and you discover a near 50/50 split among Evangelicals.
- “Governments and employers should accommodate those who do not want a COVID-19 vaccine.” All Canadians: 19% strongly agree, 39% strongly disagree; Evangelicals: 30% strongly agree, 31% strongly disagree. \*Two thirds of Evangelicals think vaccine passports were a good idea compared to nearly four fifths of all Canadians.
- “No one should be required to get a COVID-19 vaccine in order to keep their job.” All Canadians: 20% strongly agree, 41% strongly disagree; Evangelicals: 31% strongly agree, 34% strongly disagree. \*Add in the moderately agree and disagree and you discover a near 50/50 split among Evangelicals.

What have we learned?

The pandemic was an instrument to help indicate the health and resilience of our local churches. We discovered how exhausting it is to navigate in the midst of uncertainty and a lack of unity due to outside forces. How do we remain united on mission during the tough times? We learned there is need for greater maturity when dealing with differences of opinion and conviction on non-primary and even secondary issues. We discovered that evangelical Canadians are generally more concerned about the limitations of personal rights than the average Canadian, possibly due to concerns for religious liberty rights. We discovered that about 15-20% of our people disappeared post-COVID-19, some still attending virtually but many walking away entirely. We discovered that Gen Z (18-26) were our most resilient worship attenders between pre- and post-COVID-19. How do we address the new “virtual reality” and accommodate this in our future ministries?

A big THANK YOU to Rick and EFC for doing the “heavy lifting” in conducting these recent surveys and helping us to better understand the current landscape.