

# *What Research Has Revealed About the New Sunday Morning*

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Articles [State of the Church 2020](#) in [Faith & Christianity](#) in [State of the Church 2020](#) • June 3, 2020

**S**ince March of this year, Barna has been researching digital church trends that have surfaced (or simply been emphasized) as a result of COVID-19. As part of our [State of the Church 2020 project](#), we'd already uncovered new data on what we called "[worship shifting](#)" and considered some of the [uncertain digital and physical realities facing churches](#).

Now, three months into America's fight against COVID-19, with some churches continuing to social distance and others now beginning to welcome members back into their physical buildings for worship services, we're curious how engagement with services—both online and in-person—continues to evolve. Here are some key things we've learned during this unique period in our nation's history and our worship gatherings.

**Half of Churched Adults Have *Not* Streamed a Church Service in the Past Four Weeks**

The majority of pastors (96%) reports their churches have been streaming their worship services online during the pandemic. But that may not matter for nearly half of churched adults—that is, those who say they have attended church in the past six months; 48 percent of this group report they have *not* streamed an online service in the last month. Even looking at a more consistent segment—practicing Christians, who are typically characterized by at least monthly attendance—one in three (32%) admits they have not streamed an online service during this time.

Researchers were surprised to see this seeming dip among regular attenders, particularly considering that a plurality of Protestant pastors (40%) has reported **an increase in virtual attendance** since the pandemic pushed services online. Additionally, weekend schedules during the crisis have likely looked more open, and many churches now offer on-demand streaming after an initial service or upload; 29 percent of practicing Christians and 20 percent of non-practicing Christians say they take advantage of this option on a day other than Sunday. These are all reasons virtual attendance could have been boosted, but it's possible that enthusiasm for *only* online service options has dwindled as the weeks have passed.

Churched adults logging in for services usually opt for their regular church home (40%), though 23 percent have streamed services from a different church, essentially “church-hopping” online. One-third of practicing Christians (34% vs. 16% non-practicing Christians) has also virtually attended a church other than their own in the past month; indeed, we see one-quarter of practicing Christians (26% vs. 12% non-practicing Christians) notes that, during the pandemic, this has become typical of their online attendance. This might not be such a departure from pre-COVID-19 attendance habits, as 35 percent of churched adults and 26 percent of practicing Christians **told us in December 2019** that they usually divide their attendance among two or more churches.

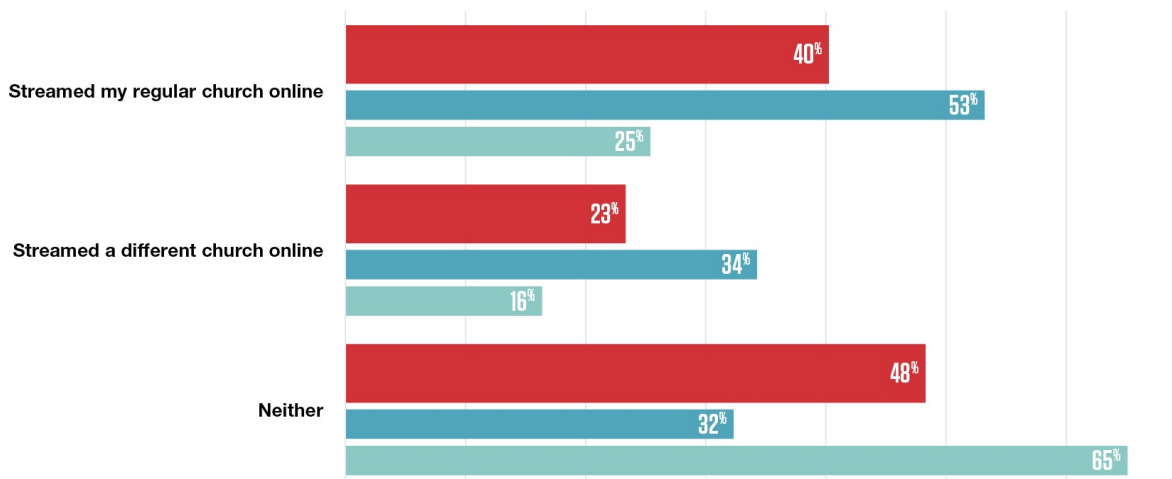
Not only do some churched adults see online worship as an opportunity to try other services themselves, some also see it as a chance to invite friends—whether Christian (22%) or non-Christian (14%)—to “visit” their churches online.

# ARE CHURCHED ADULTS ATTENDING ONLINE SERVICES?

Barna

IN THE PAST FOUR WEEKS, I HAVE...

● Churched adults ● Practicing Christians ● All other churched adults



n = 501 churched U.S. adults | April 28-May 11, 2020

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## Fifteen Percent of Practicing Christians Multitask While Streaming Worship Services

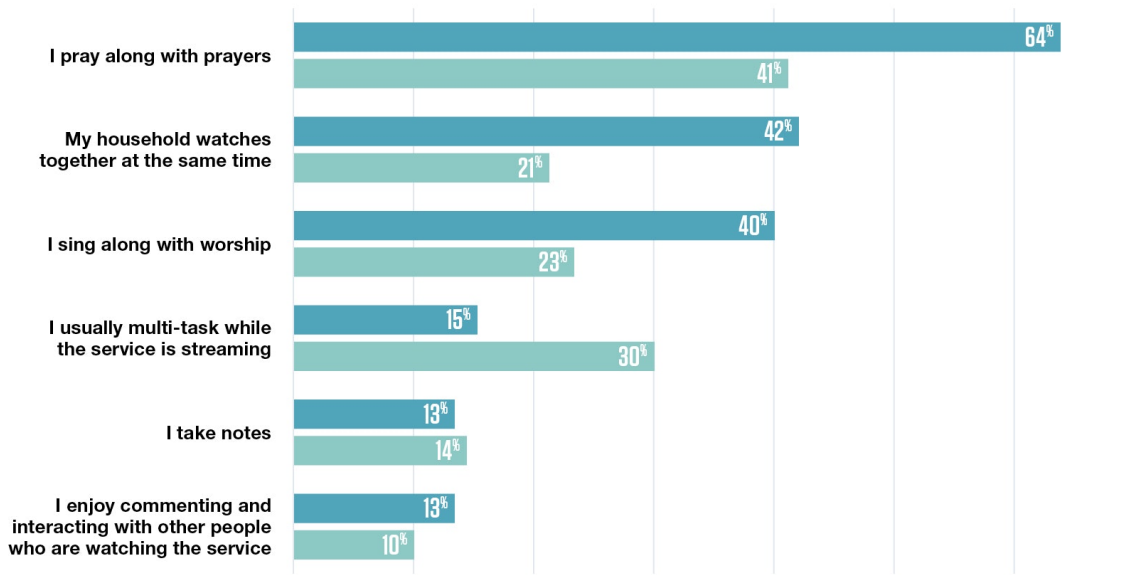
What does the new Sunday morning look like for Christian households who continue to tune in to virtual worship services? Does the level of attentiveness change when a household is streaming the message in a living room or bedroom, as opposed to following the motions of a group of people gathered in a physical building?

Practicing and non-practicing Christians have different routines during online services. For example, while three in five practicing Christians (64%) say they still pray along with prayers, only two in five non-practicing Christians (41%) say the same. This trend is similar for other practices, such as households watching services together at the same time (42% practicing Christians vs. 21% non-practicing Christians) or singing along with worship (40% vs. 23%).

A number of churchgoers also admit that attending online services offers opportunity for them to multitask while the service is streaming (15% practicing Christians vs. 30% non-practicing Christians). Although, as Barna has [previously noted](#), distraction is reportedly a common part of in-person attendance too, regardless of age and device usage.

## BASE: HAS STREAMED CHURCH

● Practicing Christians ● Non-practicing Christians



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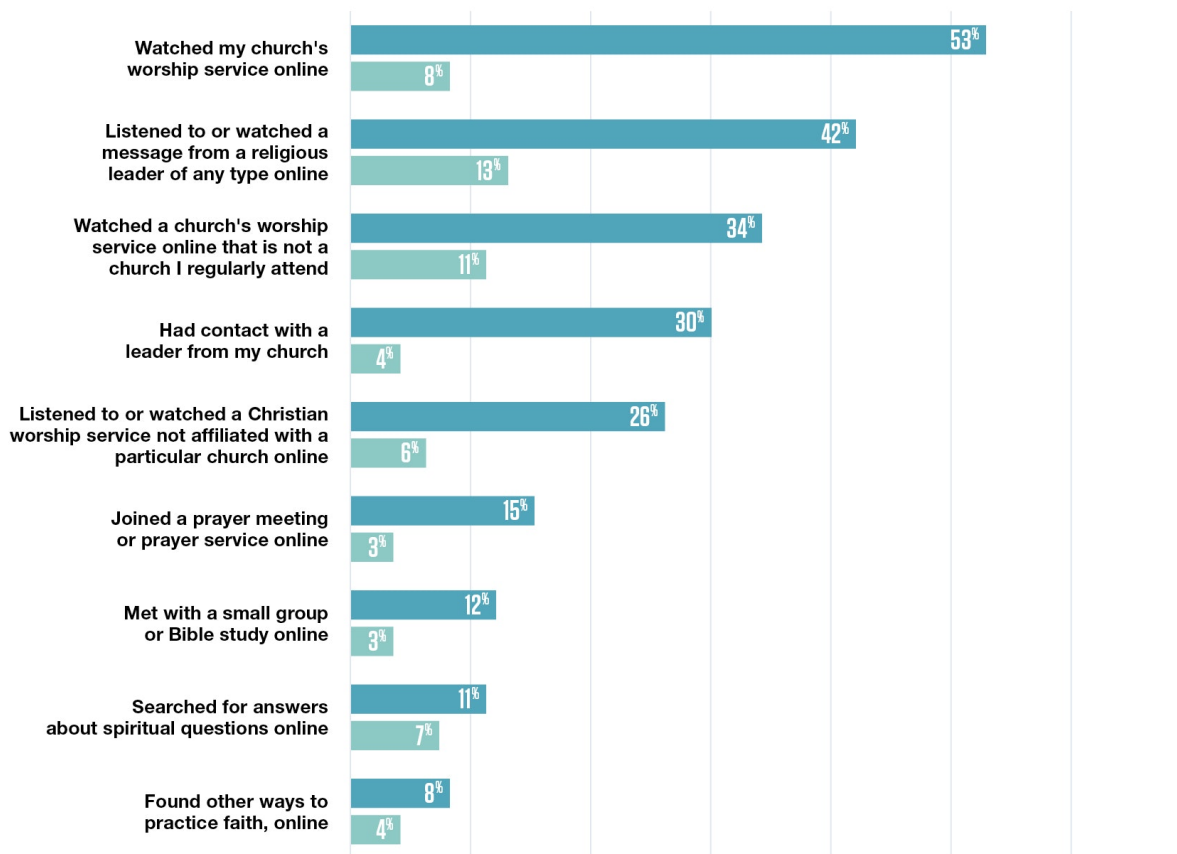
## Just Three in 10 Churchgoers Have Had Contact with a Church Leader in the Last Month

In a time of social distancing and isolation—something that is **impacting the relational, emotional and mental health of both pastors and their people**—the level of connection among churched adults might be suffering. Relational measures of participation, at least, are low. For example, while it may be the norm to have a quick chat with your pastor on a Sunday morning, only 30 percent of practicing Christians and 4 percent of non-practicing Christians say they’ve had contact with their church leader within the last month. Additionally, only 15 percent of practicing Christians (and just 3% of non-practicing Christians) have joined a prayer meeting online in the past four weeks, and even lower numbers met with a small group or Bible study (12% practicing vs. 3% non-practicing).

Currently, two in five practicing Christians (42%) and one in 10 non-practicing Christians (8%) say they have listened to or watched a message from a religious leader of *any* type online in the past four weeks. Others say they have searched for spiritual answers online (11% vs. 7%) or found some other way of practicing faith online (8% vs. 4%).

## IN THE PAST FOUR WEEKS, I HAVE...

● Practicing Christians ● Non-practicing Christians



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America's period of social distancing may have had significant impact on how churchgoers attend worship services, in terms of frequency and engagement. We'll continue to share more about what we've learned from different groups of attendees during this period of distancing and how it should impact approaches to digital Church for the long term.

*In a recent webcast, [Caring for Souls in a New Reality](#), Barna president David Kinnaman offered a more in-depth presentation of these findings. If you missed the webcast or want to watch certain segments, visit [Barna Access](#)—our new digital subscription service—to [view the replay](#) for free for a limited time. [Barna Access](#) is also home to our [ChurchPulse tools](#), which can be utilized with a free membership to measure the well-being of your congregation.*

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## About the Research

The statistics and data-based analyses in this study are derived from a national public opinion survey conducted by Barna among 1,000 U.S. adults. Responses were collected online between April 28-May 5, 2020, using a nationally representative panel. The rate of error for this data is +/- 2.2% at the 95% confidence level.

**Additional COVID-19 Pastor Data:** Barna Group conducted these online surveys among 1,759 Protestant Senior Pastors from March 20–May 18, 2020. Participants are all members of Barna Group’s Church Panel. Minimal weighting has been used to ensure the sample is representative based on denomination, region and church size.

## Data Collection Dates

Week 1, n=222, March 20-23, 2020

Week 2, n=212, March 24-30, 2020

Week 3, n=195, March 31-April 6, 2020

Week 4, n=246, April 7-13, 2020

Week 5, n=204, April 14-20, 2020

Week 6, n=164, April 21-27, 2020

Week 7, n=167, April 28-May 4, 2020

Week 8, n=165, May 5-11, 2020

Week 9, n=184, May 12-18, 2020

Weeks 10 and 11, n=191, May 19-June 1, 2020

**Churched** adults have been to church in the last six months.

**Christians** are self-identified Christians, including those who identify as Catholic, excluding those who identify as Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness.

**Practicing Christians** identify as Christian, agree strongly that faith is very important in their lives and have attended church within the past month.

**Non-Christians** identify with a faith other than Christianity (“religious non-Christians”) or with no faith at all (“atheists / agnostics / nones”).

Photo by [Wang John](#) on [Unsplash](#).

## About Barna

Barna research is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984.

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