

## Introduction to QB Church Survey Results

This survey was sent to all registered ministers, asking mostly for information about their church. The response was excellent with 80 responses (out of our 220 churches) within 10 days of the first circulation of the survey. Responses continue to trickle in and the results and comments below may need to be updated at a later time.

Although there was a wide variety of responses, it is likely that the churches/pastors that are doing well are more willing to respond to such a survey. So this survey may paint a slightly more positive picture than reality. But 80 responses is a strong sample, so the information is fairly representative.

Many pastors were at pains to point out that their responses were not just a result of the COVID disruption. Some churches have grown or have been depleted by numerous other factors like changing communities or new buildings or church conflict or a new pastor.

“Post-COVID” is used extensively in this survey and comments. This is only true to a degree. Restrictions have eased considerably in Queensland for a significant length of time so we have some idea of what the new normal may look like. But it must be acknowledged that we have not emerged from the threat of COVID and the pandemic is by no means a thing of the past. Any outbreak could force us back into lockdown. We may not really be completely post-COVID for many years.

These survey results may be useful in the following ways:

1. They may give pastors and churches a snapshot of how the QB Movement has fared through the COVID disruptions.
2. They may help pastors and churches to discern which of their experiences have been typical of other churches and which have been atypical (positively or negatively).
3. They may assist the QB Support Team to target resources for the real needs of pastors and churches.

Your brother,

John Sweetman

### Q1-3. Pre-COVID and Post-COVID Sunday Attendance

Pre-COVID Attendance	11690
Post-COVID Attendance	10563
Post-COVID Online	1975
Total Post-COVID Attendance	12538

#### **Comment**

These figures could be good or bad news for the QB Movement depending on how we interpret them.

Our Sunday church attendance has dropped by 9%. This is a significant drop that has affected most churches, but not all. With some COVID restrictions still in place, it is probably too early to tell whether this will be the final result or whether there are still some people who will return to Sunday services when everything is back to normal (whatever and whenever that may be).

On the other hand, if we total physical attendance and online attendance, the weekly attendance of the churches surveyed has actually grown by 7%. The quality of this growth depends on the nature of the online attenders. Are they committed to regular attendance? Are they being supported and disciplined? If this is the case, then overall our churches have grown considerably through COVID.

My guess is that we have grown in Sunday attendance, perhaps not by 7% but by a considerable amount. Churches have counted their online attendance differently in the survey, so not all the online attenders may be committed to the church. But a growth of say 5% across QB would be an incredible result for the last 12 months.

Further analysis of the results will be needed to discern whether this growth has been across the board or has been mainly contained to certain sizes or styles of churches.

4. How has the total number of people who would identify with your church (pre-COVID vs now) changed?

More	48%
Same	39%
Less	13%

6. Do you offer streaming of your Sunday service?

Low quality	35%
High quality	33%
No	32%

**Comment**

Overall, it appears that our church families have grown through COVID with 48% of pastors reporting an increase in numbers and only 13% reporting a decrease.

Factors identified for growth include:

- New people showing interest in the Christianity and the church
- Transfers from other churches who have struggled through COVID
- Greater connection with “fringe-dwellers”
- Some online remotes who have linked in
- More people on the move (especially in regional Qld)

Factors identified for decline include:

- Those on the fringe or unhappy or not well-connected left
- COVID gave freedom to easily opt out
- Nominal attendees have dropped off
- People getting involved in COVID-conspiracies

Most churches are reporting an upsurge in visitors and new attenders. This is encouraging. But many churches reported a trend for people to physically attend services less often. Some churches have bucked this trend, but it was mentioned frequently.

Streaming appears to be a mixed blessing. It increases access to church services for both new people and those unable or unwilling to attend services. This can improve commitment to the church as people will be involved that previously would not or could not have been physically at church on a regular basis. But it also can allow the development of a consumeristic involvement in church that may inhibit long-term commitment.

Further research needs to be done to determine how streaming church services is contributing to the health and growth of churches and whether the quality of streaming and online resourcing has an impact on this.

5. How have your offerings changed?

Same	43%
More	40%
Less	17%

**Comment**

While the most frequent response was that offerings were about the same (43%), the churches that found offerings had increased (40%) far exceeded those who reported a decline in offerings (17%). This is a surprising but encouraging development.

Many pastors pointed to the consistency of electronic giving as a significant factor behind maintaining and increasing giving. Also, many churches found Job Keeper a great help.

Decreased giving was mainly linked with either internal problems or the loss of attenders due to COVID. But some pastors pointed out that those who left were not normally strong givers.

Some churches found that giving increased during the lockdown, but then decreased somewhat over 2021.

12. What has been the impact on your church vision and ministry strategy?

Clearer	45%
Same	43%
Less clear	12%

**Comment**

This result was a surprise to me. I thought that the complications and difficulties of the COVID restrictions would have made the future less clear for most churches. While some churches (12%) have found it so, a huge 88% either have a clearer vision and strategy (45%) or at least have the same level of clarity they had pre-COVID (43%).

Some pastors pointed out that the disruptions of COVID actually allowed new vision and strategy to emerge. Others, without the need to maintain lots of ministries, developed a new focus on the Great Commission. Some have seen a new season of simplicity and focus in their church. A few expressed appreciation for the work of the QB Support Team in helping them through the process. That was nice.

Others pointed out the difficulty of planning when there is still a lack of certainty. Connecting with people online is a major challenge that still requires some work. Is it mainly a tool for church people or for non-Christians?

9. What have you observed about finding volunteers in your church?

Same	55%
Harder	31%
Easier	14%

**Comment**

The feedback we were getting from pastors was that volunteers were much harder to find in a post-COVID world. While almost a third of our churches (a significant number) are experiencing this, the survey shows that it is not as widespread as we were expecting with almost 70% finding it either the same or easier to find volunteers.

Some pastors indicated that it was easier to find volunteers on Sunday than during the week. Others said that people (especially new people) were keener to help now and there was a new energy.

Identified reasons for the lack of volunteers include people being wary of overcommitment, people enjoying a more relaxed lifestyle, people tired from the season, the loss of some key volunteers, the irregularity of young families (and others), people enjoying flexibility, and people busy doing other things.

Some have found that as we have emerged from the COVID restrictions, more volunteers are coming forward.

8. What have you observed about your small group attendance?

Same	56%
More	28%
Less	16%

**Comment**

It appears that overall COVID has had a limited influence on small group attendance. This is surprising given the importance of small groups during the COVID restrictions.

Some who have experienced growth in small groups point to the critical nature of small groups during COVID and the continuing momentum that has resulted. Other factors include a greater desire for people to be together, the increased flexibility of ways of meeting, and the growth in some churches.

Reasons for the decline of small groups include less involvement of people post-COVID, the collapse of groups that were not strongly connected together during COVID, and an overall decline in attenders.

But our small groups are still growing overall according to these figures.

10. What have you observed in your youth ministries?

Same	32%
More	32%
Less	26%
None	10%

**Comment**

It appears that youth ministries have emerged from COVID at much the same size overall as they entered with just slightly more experiencing growth (32%) than experiencing decline (26%). However, the results indicate that there has been considerable volatility in youth ministry with only 32% remaining the same.

A number of pastors indicated that their youth ministries were already in decline and that COVID had little effect or just exacerbated the trend. Some youth ministries died over COVID and have not been able to be resurrected. Others cited the difficulty of finding leaders post-COVID.

Those who have seen an increase put it down to families looking for more support for their young people, more youth programs like Youth Alpha, the success of online youth programs during COVID, and young people wanting to be connected.

11. What have you observed about your children's ministries?

Same	47%
Less	28%
More	25%

**Comment**

While almost half our churches (47%) have seen little change in the size of their children's ministries, slightly more have seen a decrease (28%) than have seen an increase (25%). This is still an encouraging result seeing numbers in church services have decreased and families in particular have become less regular.

Factors identified for the decrease in the number of children involved include the absence of children's programs during COVID, parents sensitive about the health of their children (staying away if one child is not well), families taking longer to return to church due to other priorities, and sporadic attendance.

Those who have experienced an increase mainly saw it as reflective of a stronger attendance all round.

### 13. For Pastors - What is your general emotional state at the moment?

Mostly positive	62%
Positive and negative	34%
Mostly negative	4%

#### Comment

It looks like QB has a strongly positive group of pastors. While a few of us (4%) are really struggling and a third of us (34%) experiencing both positives and negatives in similar measure at the moment, by far the majority (62%) have a positive perspective on their life and ministry. In the light of the pressures of the last 12 months, this is a surprising and encouraging result.

This is not to ignore those who are finding things difficult. Some of the comments included:

- Tired from solo-pastoring a needy community without a building, without any proper breaks since 2019.
- I carry the bulk of the load of ministry and financially we are declining which presents future challenges for me to consider and manage.
- Personally, I'm exhausted. I keep pushing, but feel like there's only so much longer I can do so. Tiredness is leading to decreased general joy and insecurity.
- Personally feeling tired. Partly because of no decent holiday since COVID and partly extended family needs have increased.
- I am exhausted, without a healthy leadership structure to lean on.

Those who feel both positive and negative added comments like:

- Positive in the sense of seeing what God is doing, growth of the church etc., but negative with the impact of increased workload, issues around ongoing uncertainty, decision fatigue and the challenges faced by increased growth.
- Have my days of throwing it in. There have been a lot of conspiracy theorists who make things difficult at times.
- I'm optimistic about the future, but pastoral ministry/church leadership is definitely harder and more taxing now than pre-COVID.

But the majority of pastors were feeling positive. Here are some of their comments:

- Feeling pretty good at the moment!
- I'm really encouraged by what I see in the church and hopeful about what God will do in the coming weeks and months.
- I'm feeling positive, but this is only a recent outcome after having a good break away.
- Our church is in a good place.
- In terms of ministry, very positive! We are in a great spot as a church right now.
- Positive about greater prayer support and volunteering from our members.

14. What are other impacts of Covid-19 that you have observed in your church may be worth noting?

1. The level of self preservation, protection and fear amongst fringe and faithful was surprising. We have also noted the increase in consumerism and a general increase in taking time out. Going to church is less frequent and belonging is optional. Some people have become more committed to online teaching from gifted teachers from around the world and are disappointed by the quality, quantity or lack of emphasis in certain doctrinal emphasis that we provide
2. General commitment has lessened as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns and the associated financial challenges. Volunteerism is down and attendance commitment is seen more as optional especially amongst aged and Africans migrants. Covid-19 has simply highlighted the challenges facing an aging church, with few young people, and a dispersed congregation.
3. Community moments have been attacked - morning teas were not possible for many months. We are finally returning to the possibilities again - but it's meant home-made biscuits and cakes are out. While this is seemingly insignificant in the scheme of things, for some communities this has been severely destructive. There is a sense where the functions of preaching, praying and worship have been painted as a 'necessary' thing but the wider fellowship areas and general service/community involvement has been crippled. This is also reflected in the modern move to outsource everything to 'trade qualified' people - meaning working bees and volunteers are less valued and harder to secure.
4. Those on the outer who we saw occasionally in person have become more committed in "attendance" through online options resulting in greater connection with the church.
5. The importance of being intentional and connected to the people.
6. Pandemic fatigue means those on the edges have tended to drift away while we have also seen new people start coming to the church on a regular basis.
7. Increase in generosity toward people in the church and also helping those outside of the church particularly elderly and house bound. A real sacrifice of time and energy to be there for one another.
8. Seeing the value of meeting in person.
9. I am reluctant to say this because COVID has been difficult for so many, but in our case, it provided a circuit breaker to refocus our ministries and we are stronger as a result so far.
10. The value - opportunity to try new things, embrace technological opportunities and start new services.
11. The comfort and stability of the normal (pre-COVID way) of doing things helped during the uncertainty of Covid but we recognise that we need to break out of that and keep moving forward. The restrictions on morning teas and social functions have impacted a community a little - don't feel quite as connected.
12. People tend to be more self-focused and there is a greater sense of fear in some.
13. A risk of pulling up the drawbridge and not focusing on going out the community. 21 Days of Prayer for Revival has come at a good time in that regard. Calling us to put our attention back on the wider community.
14. Even though we generally don't have an after-church morning tea (due to COVID restrictions and lack of volunteers to make it work), people stay around after the service just as long or even longer now. Interesting!
15. Church now outdoors in undercover sport centre. Hence church in cage nickname. Got Cong used to change ready for new build. Allowed us to address issues e.g. staff, personal, old practices. Harder to visit esp. nursing home. While not true for most, for us very positive experience. Pivot tables easy for us because of techs. At first lots of meetings. Not now. Morning tea continues to be a challenge.
16. Some leaders have become the COVID police rather than servants of the Lord.
17. It has helped accelerate the rate of change that was already planned for the church.
18. Biggest change is that people attend Sunday Services less often. This makes pastoral care more difficult.
19. We have not moved back into our main worship facility as we can't social distance appropriately on pews and fit all our people in. This has helped us to brush off some cultural and religious

practices that weren't building our people closer to each other or God. But this has hindered our use of supporting aids such as power point and sound system. But this has also allowed to consider alternative ways to do our Sunday Services and brought our church congregation more open to change.

20. There is a general weariness.
21. More administration required.
22. We have a number of elderly folk (and some who do not have good health) who do not yet feel comfortable to attend services because of COVID. The main impact of COVID-19 is probably that it has caused us to think "outside the box", how we can work with the other 3 congregations, how best to reach the people of Logan, etc. A very challenging time!
23. Normal patterns and routines have been shaken; those with strong faith will adapt to changing forms, and those whose faith was relatively weak are less committed. Our church is also in the process of transitioning pastors which will likely have an impact on how people are responding at this time.
24. Due to seating/space restrictions, a lot of people have generally opted to attend church every other week or less. With the arrival of individual chairs soon it will be interesting to see if things change. There is a general sense of transition for a lot of people. Coming in, going out- which makes it challenging as leaders looking for ministry volunteers.
25. Significant opportunities emerged for us to serve our community which the church has responded to very generously- this has become an ongoing ministry.
26. While we are committed to offer an online option, I've noticed that for a handful in our congregation, it has become a substitute for in person church rather than an alternative for those who can't be there. I think the blessing of online services is people can still 'attend' and remain engaged even though they're unable to be there because they're not well, or their kids or they are out of town because of work etc. But for people who can be there but prefer the convenience of attending online, it's an area of concern for me that I need the Holy Spirit's wisdom and help in addressing.
27. We now meet in a local park once a month.
28. It has identified those who are not putting all their hope in Jesus but on some other foundation.
29. People changed churches. Many people have gone to different churches. I hear this from a lot of pastors. COVID stopped the regular pattern of people going to one church. Some...especially younger Millennials, simply haven't gone back.
30. GP's full up with mental health problems. People happy with a more internal-focused life.
31. We have noticed a general aversion to using things like Zoom.
32. COVID-19 has increased our engagement with the community through a maternity hub and it's wrap around services of playgroup, family training, and food relief.
33. Our English Connection Program has decreased significantly.
34. There has been less ongoing impact than we had first been thinking/hearing. Things are continuing to return to a sense of normality which isn't really all that dissimilar to pre-COVID overall.
35. A couple of attenders getting taken up with conspiracy theories, and subtly indicating they'd like more said about COVID (e.g. exposing media/governmental 'lies') from the pulpit. But we haven't succumbed to this.
36. Overall engagement is down - people are much less likely to engage. I think they got a taste of balance in life and are hesitant to give it up again. Which is fine - it just means we need to change how we 'do' church. Probably need to leverage where people are at (work, school, uni, home) rather than expecting them to add something else to the schedule. For us, I think this will mean making disciples who make disciples in those contexts, moving right away from events-based ministry style.
37. Two impacts: a) Most learned the high value of congregating/fellowship while in lockdown last year. b) The differing COVID standards for services vs creche vs hosting morning tea etc made 'doing church' quite complicated and a turn off for some.
38. We are regional and unaffected in many ways.
39. We have lost some serial critics! Able to make some good modernisation changes during COVID

40. 1.COVID has allowed us to reset some of the things that needed resetting. 2. We have entered the online church space and intend to capitalise on this. 3. There is an increase in the amount of time people give to end-times and conspiracy theories which creates sideways energy.
41. Changes in how morning tea was conducted left people not staying after church. However, over time people began to stay again and now are staying longer prior to COVID. We have also moved to online leadership meetings every second month, something that would not have been considered prior to covid. Area meetings went to a weekly online meeting, helping to develop relationships that have moved to the churches working together more.
42. Increased flexibility, adaptation to change, accepting things that people may not have changed in the past. More social media interaction. Need to develop multiple methods of communication.
43. Up skilling is vital as new platforms have proved effective.
44. The value of the community of believers. Those with strong connections to each other fared well during COVID. Those without seemed to struggle.
45. People building relationships with their neighbours.
46. The impact seemed less significant in the north.
47. Few people at morning tea because of the restrictions on food.

## Some Conclusions

QB churches have so far come through COVID well. Many churches have effectively moved online, our attendance (if online is included) has increased, as have our offerings. This is due to God's grace and we should be thanking him. It is also due to pastors and leaders who have innovated, served faithfully, loved and disciplined their people, and pursued new vision.

The COVID disruptions have taken their toll. Some pastors are tired from changes and decision-making, some congregations have diminished, some churches are struggling to meet budget, some youth ministries and children's ministries have decreased, and some churches are finding it more difficult to find volunteers.

On the other hand, most pastors are positive about the future and many churches have clarified their post-COVID vision. The COVID challenges have enabled many churches to reassess their ministries and to focus on what is most important. Many churches are experiencing an influx of new people.

Two-thirds of our churches are streaming services. This is an incredible change. But there is still some work to be done on how to best target and utilise online ministry because of the way it can contribute to outreach, commitment and discipleship, but also consumerism and selfishness. We will continue to work on this individually as churches and together as a Movement.

This is an exciting time to be linked with QB churches. Through a period of heavy testing of the church throughout the world, QB churches are emerging with growth, vision and renewed dependence on God.

We praise God for what he has done over the last 12 months but recognise that there are many challenges that lie ahead and that we will need his direction and power more than ever.