

COVID-19 ABC REGIONAL SURVEY RESULTS JUNE 2020

ABC Survey Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Regions July 2020

Members of the Regional Executive Ministers Council were invited to respond to a survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the ABC regions during the spring of 2020. In order to better respond to the survey, an assessment of ABC congregations was conducted previously and the results were shared with the REMC. A total of 21 regions responded to the survey. A summary of the quantitative results is shown below.

Question 1: Compared to the rest of the country, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in our region:

	Actual #	Percentage
Has been far less than the rest of the country	5	24%
Has been slightly less than the rest of the country	2	10%
Has been about the same as the rest of the country	5	24%
Has been slightly more than the rest of the country	3	14%
Has been far more than the rest of the country	6	29%

Question 2: Overall, COVID-19 has had:

	Actual #	Percentage
Almost no impact on our region	0	0%
A slight impact on our region	1	5%
A moderate impact on our region	9	43%
A strong impact on our region	8	38%
A tremendous impact on our region	3	14%

Question 3: COVID-19 has negatively affected (Please check all that apply)

	Actual #	Percentage
Our search committee work	14	74%
Our ability to support congregations	10	53%
Our ability to care for pastors	6	32%
Our overall mission work	6	32%
Other	6	32%
Our region staff	5	26%
Our overall communication	1	5%

Question 4: COVID-19 has provided new opportunities for (Please check all that apply)

	Actual #	Percentage
Our overall communication	20	95%
Our ability to care for pastors	18	86%
Our ability to support congregations	15	71%
Our region staff	11	52%
Our search committee work	7	33%
Our overall mission work	4	19%
Other	1	5%

Question 5: The negative financial impact of COVID-19 upon our congregations has been

	Actual #	Percentage
Very slight	3	14%
Somewhat severe	11	52%
Moderately severe	7	33%
Very severe	0	0%
Extremely severe	0	0%

Question 6: During this health crisis, the giving to our region has

	Actual #	Percentage
Increased significantly	0	0%
Increased slightly	2	10%
Stayed the same	1	5%
Decreased slightly	11	52%
Decreased significantly	7	33%

Question 7: In terms of our ability to balance our budget this year

	Actual #	Percentage
We are not concerned	6	29%
We are somewhat concerned	6	29%
We are moderately concerned	7	33%
We are very concerned	2	10%
We wonder if we will be able to remain open this year	0	0%

Question 8: How would you describe your personal state of mind?

	Actual #	Percentage
Resilient	5	24%
Other (comment)	4	21%
Hopeful	4	19%
Concerned	4	19%
Calm	2	10%
Encouraged	2	10%
Stressed	0	0%
Frustrated	0	0%
Anxious	0	0%

Question 9: As you reflect upon your region's responses to previous crises and opportunities, how would you rate region's current capacity and willingness to innovate as a result of COVID-19?

	Actual #	Percentage
Extremely innovative	1	5%
Very innovative	14	70%
Moderately innovative	5	25%
Somewhat innovative	0	0%
Not innovative at all	0	0%

Question 10: After this global health crisis, in terms of region vitality, our region will be

	Actual #	Percentage
Healthier than it was before	7	35%
Just as healthy as it was before	10	50%
Less healthy than it was before	3	15%

Question 14: Given the present circumstances, how do you feel about attending large regional and national gatherings?

	Actual #	Percentage
I would attend with no concerns	4	19%
I would attend if all of the proper health safeguards were put into place	10	47%
I would not attend until there was a dramatic change in the current conditions created by COVID-19 such as the widespread availability and effectiveness of a vaccine	6	29%
The global pandemic has permanently influenced my desire to attend large gatherings	1	5%

Summary of Tables

Some of the key findings from the survey are included below.

Overall Impact of COVID-19

Some of the regions in this survey expressed fewer COVID-19 cases than the rest of the country and some regions expressed more cases, suggesting a fair representation of regions in the survey. The overall results suggest that the majority of the regions have been able to absorb the impact of COVID-19 quite well so far; while about one-third have been strongly impacted.

- 34% of the reporting regions have had fewer COVID-19 cases than the rest of the country while 43% have had more cases than the rest of the country.
- The regions are fairly evenly divided between those said that COVID-19 has had a slight or moderate impact (48%) on their region compared to 52% who indicated that COVID-19 has had a strong or tremendous impact on their region.
- While giving has actually increased in a couple of regions, it has decreased only slightly in one-half (52%) of the regions, and decreased significantly in one-third (33%) of them.
- In terms of balancing regional budgets, the responses fell into thirds, with one-third expressing no concern, another third expressing some concern, and a third expressing moderate to heavy concern.

Impact of COVID-19 on Regional Ministry

The survey shows signs that the strongest negative impact of COVID-19 upon regional ministry has been in the area of working with local church search committees. From additional anecdotal evidence during weekly calls with the executive ministers, the majority of pastoral transitions have been put on hold. Other areas of regional ministry, however, contain signs of hope. In many ways, the creative responses to COVID-19 from the regions has overshadowed the negative impact as the majority of regions have signaled new opportunities for regional ministry in several areas.

- Nearly three-fourths (74%) of the regions expressed that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their ministry with local church search committees and a little over one-half (53%) indicated that the coronavirus has negatively impacted their ability to support congregations.
- Less than one-third (32%) reported a negative impact from COVID-19 on their ability to support pastors or their mission work.

- An overwhelming majority of regions reported new opportunities from COVID-19 in three areas, namely communication (95%), ability to care for pastors (86%), and ability to support congregations (71%). Over one-half (52%) also reported new opportunities for their region staff.

Future Outlook

The attitude toward the future among the executive ministers is positive overall. While many regions expressed concerns over the impact of COVID-19, the majority are prepared to weather the storm, take advantage of new regional ministry opportunities, and emerge just as healthy, if not more so, than before the pandemic. Many of the narrative responses also support these positive expressions.

- Responding to a list of possible state of mind descriptors, the most common response from the executive ministers was that they feel “resilient” (24%), followed by “hopeful” (21%), and “concerned” (19%).
- Three-fourths (75%) of the executive ministers said that they feel that their region is an extremely innovative or very innovative region, and the other quarter believe that their region is a moderately innovative region. There were zero responses to the possibility of regions being labelled as only somewhat innovative or not innovative at all.
- One-half of the executive ministers believe that their region will be “just as healthy as it was before” the pandemic and an additional one-third believe that their region will be even “healthier than it was before” following the pandemic, compared to only 15% who said that they believe that it would be “less healthy than it was before.”

Additional Responses to Question 3 Regarding Areas Impacted by COVID-19

- Regional Events (in-person gatherings); Ordination services
- Our ability to gather in community and ministry.
- The "business as usual" i.e. administrative
- Camping program
- Camping ministries
- Annual Gathering, other educational/training events

Additional Responses to Questions 4 Regarding New Opportunities Created by COVID-19

- Collaboration within the ABC and ecumenically

Additional Responses to Question 11 Regarding What Regions Would Like Others to Know about COVID-19

- Overall, my Region has responded well, showing flexibility and innovation in responding to this challenge. This has happened even in our small and struggling churches to a surprising degree.
- It has been a blessing to see the resiliency of the churches and leaders in the region.
- It has made us closer to pastors and more responsive
- The crisis has called forth more collaborative action between pastors and the region
- It has brought a common enemy to rally us together.
- We have connected with pastors and churches that had not been in regular contact with the region.
- The impact has increased our ability to communicate effectively and stretched our imaginations for current and future mission.
- We have found new ways to do old things, some of which we will continue long after this has passed.
- There's still so much we don't yet know
- It has been a horrible disruption. How do we get "back on track" when we can't see the track?
- Created huge opportunities for generosity
- It has moved us to embrace and express our faith with more sincerity

Additional Responses to Question 12 Regarding New learning(s) acquired as a result of COVID-19

- That the future belongs to the flexible, and those who can keep their mission at the center.
- Lots of online stuff, and other ways of working. Learned a lot about how much the connections that I can no longer make mattered.
- There is an openness now to more remote forms of engagement with churches and leaders...that is encouraging.
- Supporters, committed, faithful churches, who are resilient
- Congregations are reaching more people through virtual worship than traditional attendance at in person worship services. Congregations have gained new skills in the digital world.
- My region needs help with technology
- It has led us back to center and define more closely our mission
- People are more resilient than they think.
- Together we are strong, resilient and gifted.
- Implementation of technology and new ways of experiencing community.
- Our congregations and pastors are more resilient and adaptable than we thought.
- Our relationships with our pastors is still key to our ministry
- Expedited and mainstreamed technology which is critical for work in a geographically expansive region.
- Improving and increasing our communication through online and social media methods.

Additional Responses to Question 13 Regarding New Ministries Launched as a result of COVID-19

- We have done a bunch of pandemic related webinars and roundtables. I expect our use of virtual platforms to continue to be robust even when this pandemic is over.
- Training in new ways of online worship. What does the new "hybrid" with some in person and some online look like?
- Not new, but enhanced...we will be doing more remote engagements with congregations and leaders to help offset the cost of travel.
- Web-based learning opportunities and support groups
- Family Talks- 5-7 minute brief video interviews of different leaders on a variety of topics to share on Social media with our region family
- Nothing specific - but a way to help churches with technology seems to be something to discuss with our board.
- Pastors Encourage calls, regional conference on facing cultural issues.
- Tech training, expanded camping ministries pastor care
- Online discussion groups
- None. We are looking forward to rebooting those put on hold
- Creating an ongoing task force on social justice, continued collegial groups of clergy via tech
- Day camps for kids at our camps