

Barna Study Reveals 2 in 5 Churchgoers Are Open to Inviting Others to Digital Services

As COVID-19 cases continue to rise across the U.S., local and state governments continue to implement new mandates and restrictions that affect how Americans gather for the holidays—both inside and outside the home. Many church leaders are now contemplating how a socially distant Advent and Christmas season will impact invitations, attendance and outreach for holiday services.

Today's article features data from our brand-new journal, *Five Changing Contexts for Digital Evangelism*, taking a closer look at the current climate for extending or accepting invitations to digital church services.

Churchgoers extend digital church invitations but still favor invitations to in-person services. Six in 10 churched Christians (62%) hope that, even post-COVID-19, churches will keep using digital means of gathering people together. As such, they're keen to play a role in inviting friends, family or acquaintances to participate in online services—but in-person gatherings are still the more appealing invitational environment. Nearly two-thirds of churched Christians (64%) say they're open to inviting someone to attend an in-person service. In contrast, 4 in 10 (40%) say they're open to inviting someone to join them for an online church service.

Those who attend a church that successfully blended digital and in-person ministry even before the COVID-19 crisis are almost twice as likely to say they actually prefer inviting someone to online church rather than to in-person services

(48% vs. 29% of those who did not attend a church that engaged congregants well both digitally and physically pre-pandemic). More familiarity with digital and hybrid environments seems to accompany more confidence in bringing others into that space.

Beyond services, churchgoers are much less open to extending invitations to other activities like classes and conversation groups, no matter the context.

Half of unchurched adults say they aren't interested in any invitation to a church activity. Six in 10 church adults (61%) report that during the COVID-19 response they have been extending the same number of church invitations (digital or otherwise) as they did before the pandemic. One in 6 (14%) reports they are offering more invitations during this time, while one-quarter (25%) says they are offering fewer. Naturally, church adults who express being more comfortable with extending invitations to online services are also quite likely to be offering more church invitations during the pandemic, though even among this group, just over one-quarter (27%) reports an increase.

What kind of reception can a Christian expect on the other side of an invitation to church?

It might be pretty chilly: Overall, about half of all unchurched adults (52%)—including three-quarters of those who are non-Christians (73%)—wouldn't be interested in any invitation, to any church or faith environment. For these non-Christians, an online church service, viewed alone, is the only activity for which the percentage who would consider participation reaches double digits (12%). This suggests that formal communal participation, unlike solo spiritual exploration or relational discussion, isn't a starting point for many outside the church.

About the Research

The research presented for Barna's 2020 Digital Church study

was conducted online from Sept. 1 -15, 2020. In total, Barna surveyed 1,302 U.S. adults. The sample error for this study is ± 2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

*For the original article, visit [this link](#). This article is an excerpt from *Five Changing Contexts for Digital Evangelism*, a new Barna study.*