

Tracking the Overall Impact Lockdowns Had on Churches

New research detailing the impact of COVID on churches yielded mixed findings, with both positives and negatives emerging in the wake of the pandemic.

The report, titled, “Back to Normal? The Mixed Messages of Congregational Recovery Coming Out of the Pandemic,” was conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, and is part of a larger project assessing the pandemic’s impact.

On the positive front, attendance is on the rise among Christian denominations, though it is still generally “below pre-pandemic levels,” according to the report. Before COVID, worship attendance had a median of 65 people, now down to 60.

But when one takes into account people watching virtually, total worship attendance jumps to a median of 75, which is above the 65 observed before the pandemic.

Another positive finding surrounds income and money coming into churches. The average median income for a church in 2020 was \$120,000, but that number has grown to \$170,000—a 42% increase—over the past three years.

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“Even adjusting for inflation,” the report noted, “This still represents a remarkable increase of over 25% since 2020.”

This positive finding is reportedly in line with other national giving trends.

Perhaps one of the most surprising positive elements in the

study surrounds tensions and debate within churches. While America is a powder keg of emotions, particularly around politics and contentious social issues, churches are experiencing a decrease in “serious conflict.”

According to the report, “All three categories of serious conflict decreased between 5% and 25%,” with increases in churches experiencing no conflict or less serious levels of conflict.

The report speculates one possible reason for this is churches became more homogeneous before or early on in the pandemic.
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