

United Church of Canada Public Research Findings | Summary

In the spring of 2022, The United Church of Canada commissioned a research study as it worked towards a new Strategic Plan for 2023-2025. This research was done to gain a better understanding of worshippers and non-worshippers to inform communications going forward. An online survey was completed by members of the congregation and then among members of the Canadian population who are neither particularly pro nor particularly against churches.

Primarily, we sought to understand Canadian's:

- perceptions of Churches in general and the UCCan specifically,
- reasons for attending church or not
- what about the UCCAN might resonate with them.

“The congregation” = filled in a survey designed for members of the UCCAN

“Canadians” = filled in a survey designed for non-members/non-participants

Speaking with Humility

Canadians are different from the *congregation* in important ways when thinking about increasing engagement and inviting participation with the Church. Life experience, needs, opportunities and challenges, perspectives and priorities will often be very different from those of the congregation. Outreach must be empathetic and receptive.

- Among the Canadians surveyed, 45% consider themselves spiritual, and 21% religious.
- Half believe in God (convinced or think there is a God) compared to 86% of the congregation.
- One in five Canadians (19%) feel that religion is a very important part of their life, compared to a strong majority of the congregation (85%).
- Three quarters of the congregation are going to worship at least once a week whereas most Canadians are not active in attending worship services
- 23% of Canadians had attended once in the past year, 15% in past 3 months.
- Almost equal proportions attend non-worship activities at churches, with 11% attending volunteering initiatives, and 10% lectures or presentations.

Churches Could be a Beacon of Belonging

Canadians-crave a sense of belonging and interaction. There's a role for the church to continue to meet a broad range of human needs– comfort, support, social connection & community, When asked about the challenges they face, Canadians report their number one challenge is physical health followed by...

- 32% Mental Health
- 28% Stress
- 24% Lack of purpose
- 20% Not meeting their own potential

Canadians are experiencing acute loneliness

- 27% Lack of Friends
- 15% Lack of Community
- 13% unfulfilling social relationships

Canadians most frequently ranked the following as the top 5 reasons for being involved in church:

1. Social interaction 37%
2. Sense of belonging 36%
3. Moral/spiritual guidance 33%
4. Being with higher power 32%
5. Comfort in life's trials and tribulations 30%

65% of Canadians have named experiencing at least one of the challenges that they also believe church involvement can address.

Perceptions of church

Respondents were nearly as likely to use positive words to describe churches as they were to use negative ones, suggesting that many respondents have mixed perceptions.

- Spiritual
- Welcoming
- Beneficial
- Helpful
- Uplifting
- Hypocritical
- Damaging
- Boring
- Awkward

Biggest barriers to attending church

- Not open-minded enough 32%
- My belief not strong enough 29%
- Feel out of place when attending 28%
- Issues discussed not relevant to me 24%
- Get benefits in other ways 23%

“It’s not Anger, It’s Indifference” (Carey Niewhof)

