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### A Tale of Three Congregations: Building Resilience in Congregations in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

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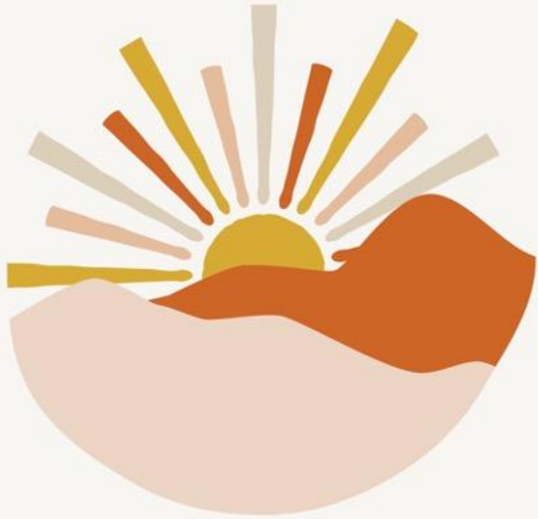
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# Behold, I Will Do A New Thing

*"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*

*-Isaiah 43:19*



# Behold, I Will Do A New Thing

**SCORR 2022**

# A Tale of Three Congregations:

Building Resilience in  
Congregations in  
Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

Makaela Brass, Zara Escamilla and  
Dr. Isaac Voss

# Goals

- Consider three case studies on the **impact** of the Covid-19 pandemic on Congregations
- Introduce a **framework** for Community (Congregational) Resilience.
- Illustrate the framework with **findings** from the Sacred Roots Research Project.
- Consider **implications** for Racial/Ethnic Reconciliation



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## Case Study A: A Non-Resilient Response in OC Church

- 100 person, mostly Anglo, upper middle class.
- Met in a non-standard facility, closed for Covid.
- “Overwhelmed”, the pastor (tech., mental health) and board decided to not even meet online, basically disbanded.
- Near the end of COVID the pastor resigned.
- Associate pastor took over and began small groups in homes. Numbers and giving have substantially declined.



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# Case Study B:

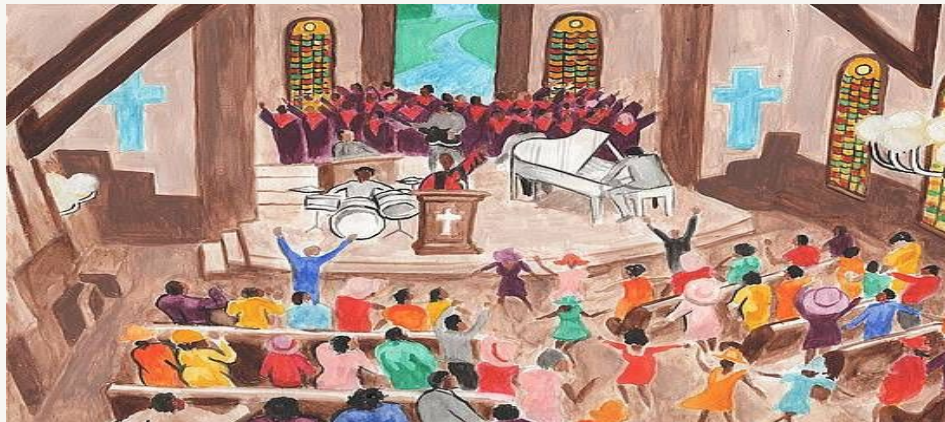
## A Resilient Church in Watts, Los Angeles County

### Demographics:

- Located in a low-income neighborhood
- Approximately 100-150 members
- Predominantly Black and Female
- Older Generation
- Family church
- Remained Open during the COVID pandemic.

### Adversities:

- Diminished youth involvement
- Decrease in tithes and offering giving among congregation
- Pastor at risk of burnout
- Social Unrest/Heightened police presence in the area



### Resilience:

- Remained open in the pandemic
- Growth in congregation
- Growth in leadership and other auxiliaries
- Adapted to online services and online ways of giving
- Support from government assistance through relief systems
- Strengthened community
- Encouraged racial dialogues



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# Case Study C: Church in Bellflower, Los Angeles County

## Demographic:

- Size of church: 200-300 congregants
- Predominantly Hispanic adults
  - Holds English services for youth and other ethnicities, but outreach is low
- Remained open during pandemic 2020-2021

## Adversities

- Health concerns
- Poverty
- Deportations
- Social unrest
  - Broke through culture of silence

## Resilience:

- Online streaming and tithe link available
- Spread message of courage during fearful times
- Food drives for congregants and community members
- Vaccination Center and Blood Drive Center
- Faithfulness to giving, but also trust that blessings will be received through church or personal life
- Close-knit community built through programs established prior to COVID-19 pandemic like Life Groups, Rooted Groups



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# Sacred Roots Research: Our Sample

- Size – 48 congregant leaders
- Age – average 50 yrs.
- Gender – 87% M, 13% F
- Ethnicity – Asian, Black, White, Hispanic, African.
- Multicultural, multiethnic population.
- 75% from churches of 250 or less.
- Mostly Urban (70%)



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# What is Resilience?



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**Community/Congregational Resilience** is a *process of linking community resources to adaptation after (or during) adversity* (Norris et al, 2008).

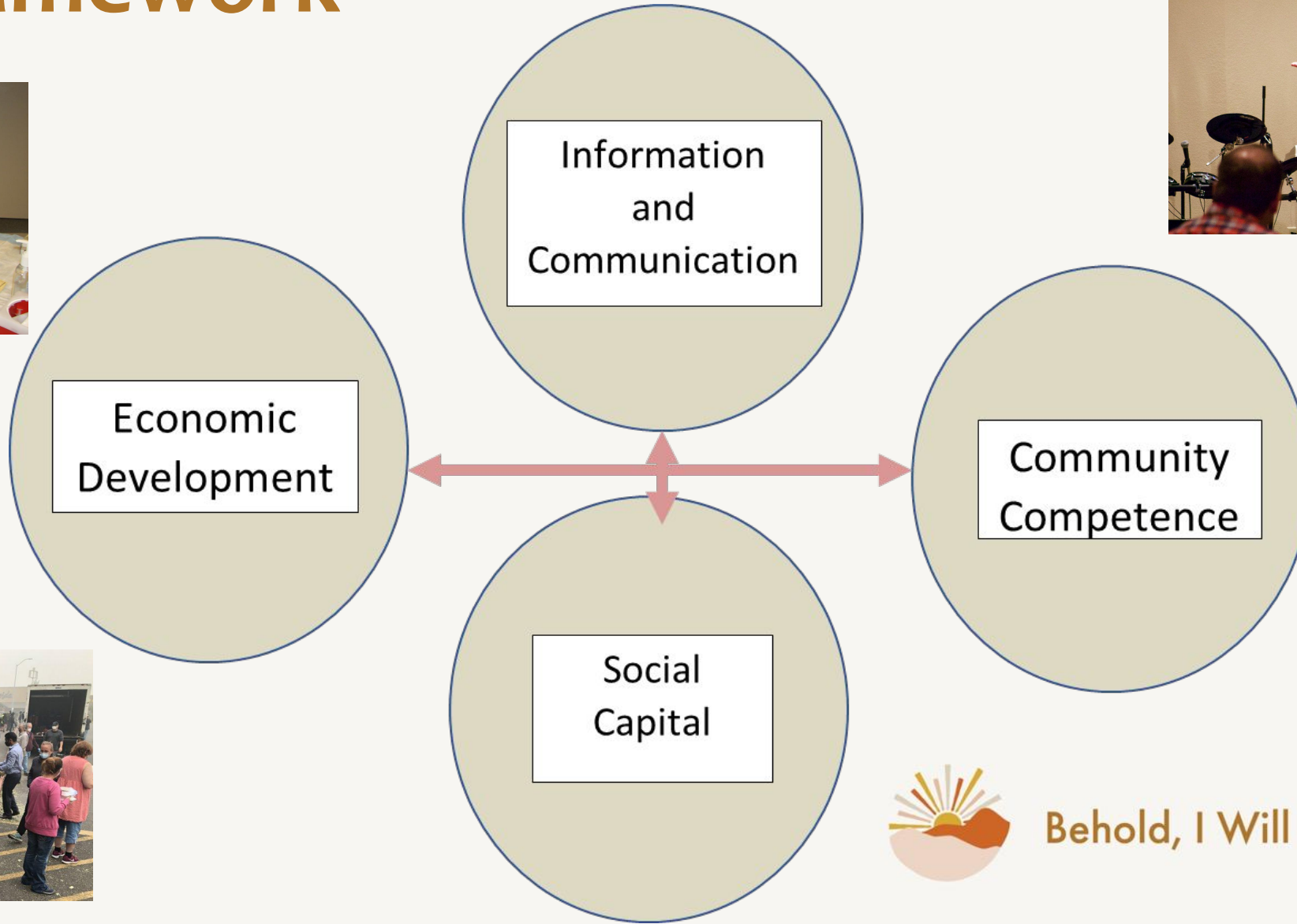
Was your congregation resilient? What helped?



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# A Framework



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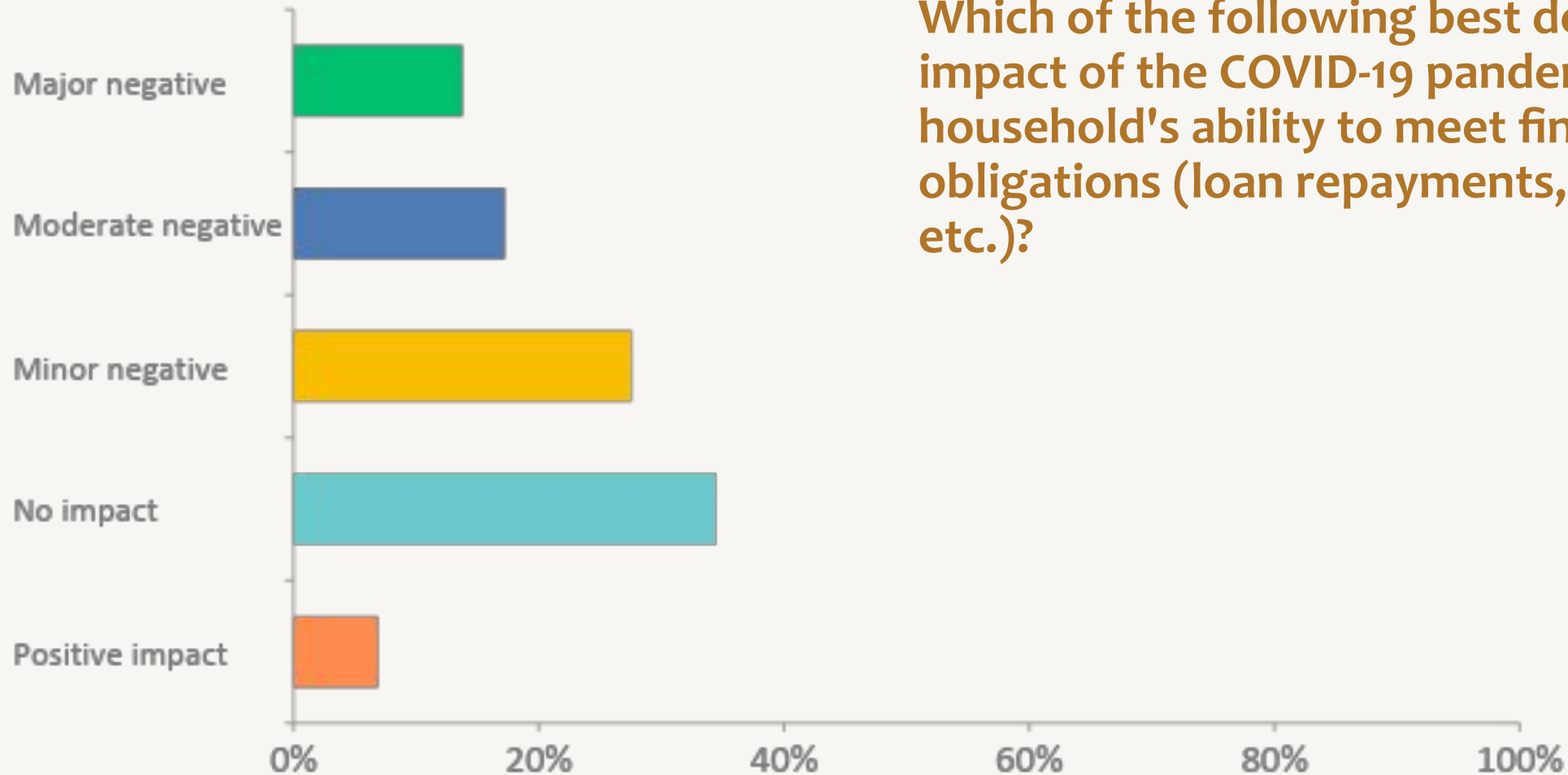
# Resource #1 - Economic Development

- Congregants contributing financially, online giving.
- Economic stability (low job loss, or pay cuts) (Pew, 2020)
- Active in the local community



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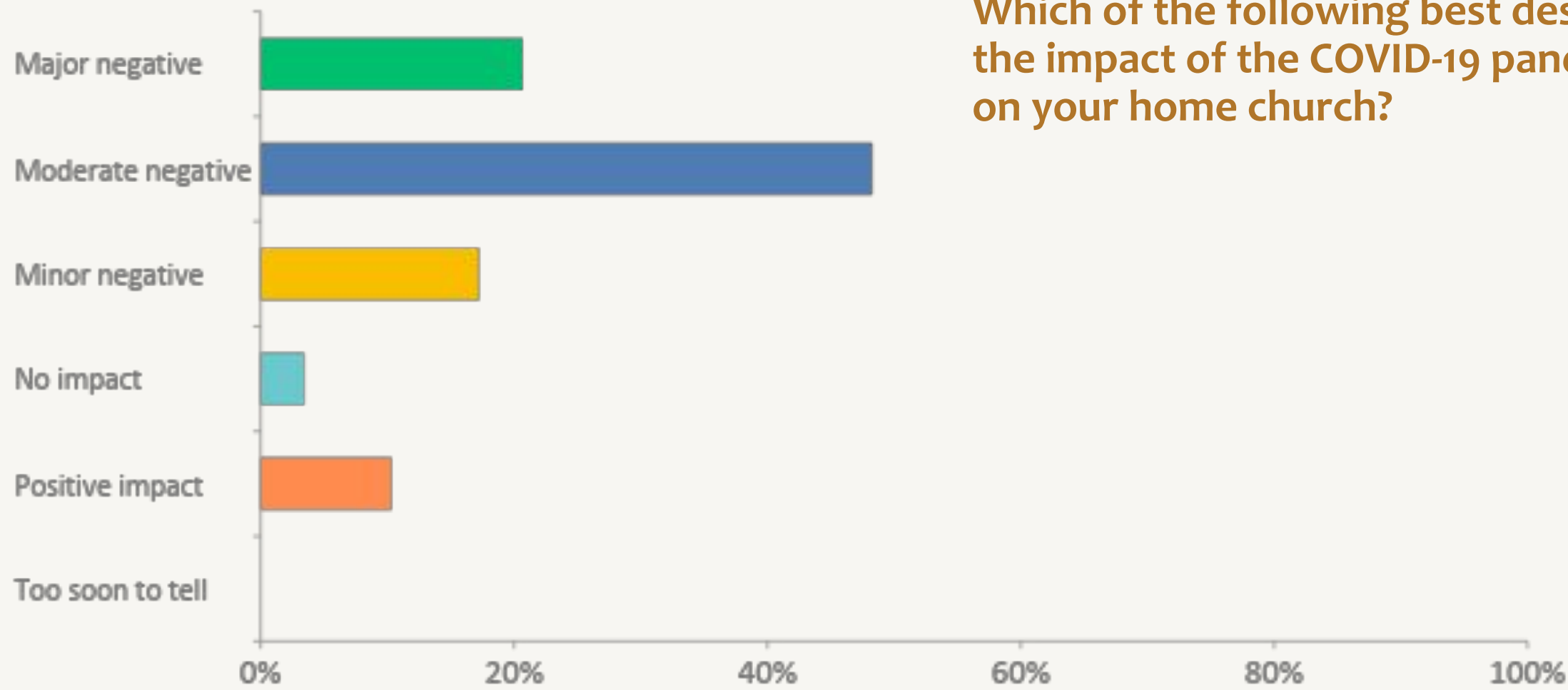
Which of the following best describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your household's ability to meet financial obligations (loan repayments, household bills, etc.)?



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Which of the following best describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your home church?



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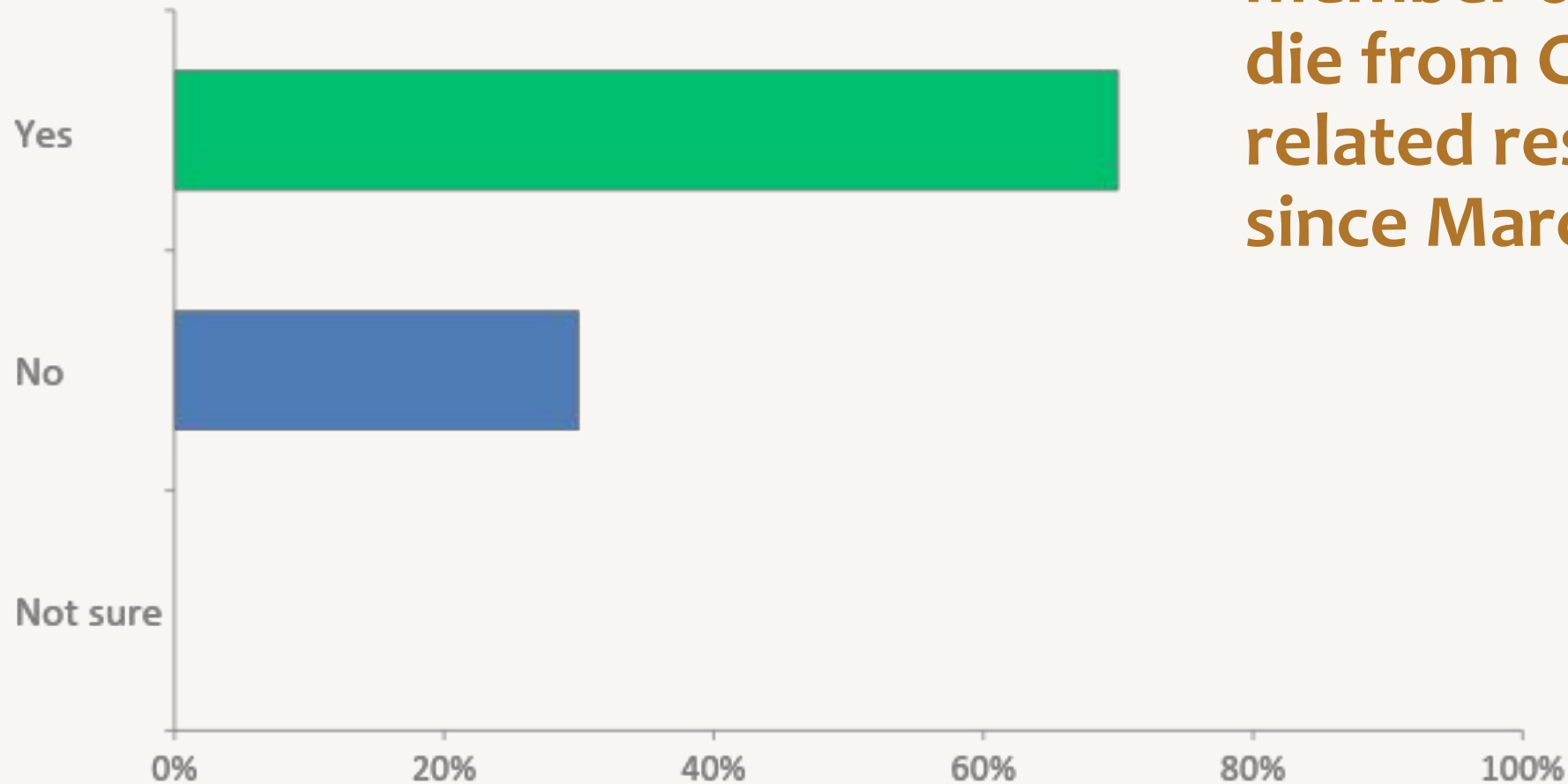
## Resource #2 – Social Capital

- Significant lay involvement, volunteering
- Good at incorporating new people
- Cross Class Friendships (Chetty et al, 2022)

“The biggest challenge is that people don’t give me the time... they are busy with many things.” Bengali pastor



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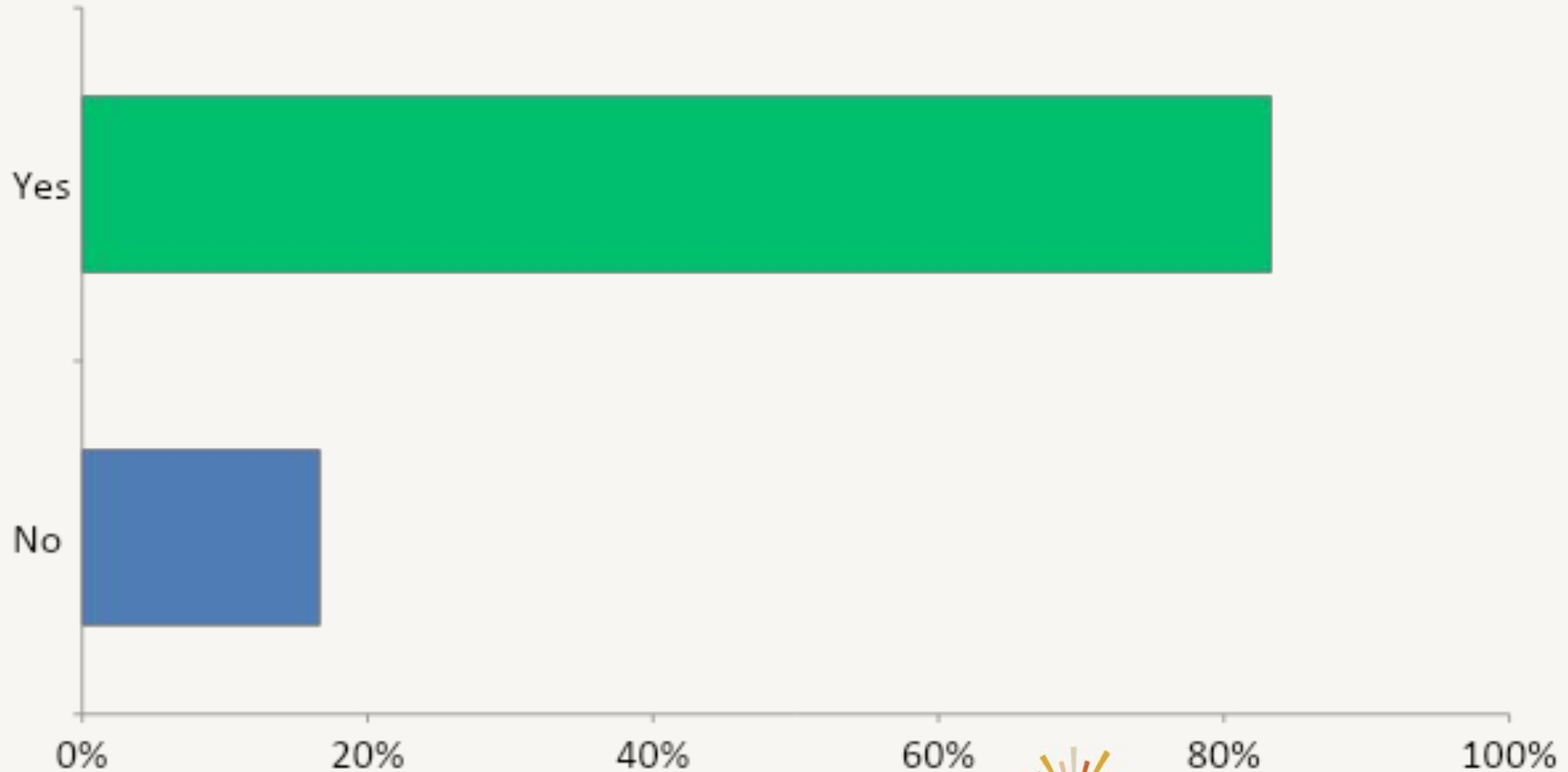


**Have you had a family member or close friend die from COVID-19 or related respiratory illness since March 1, 2020?**



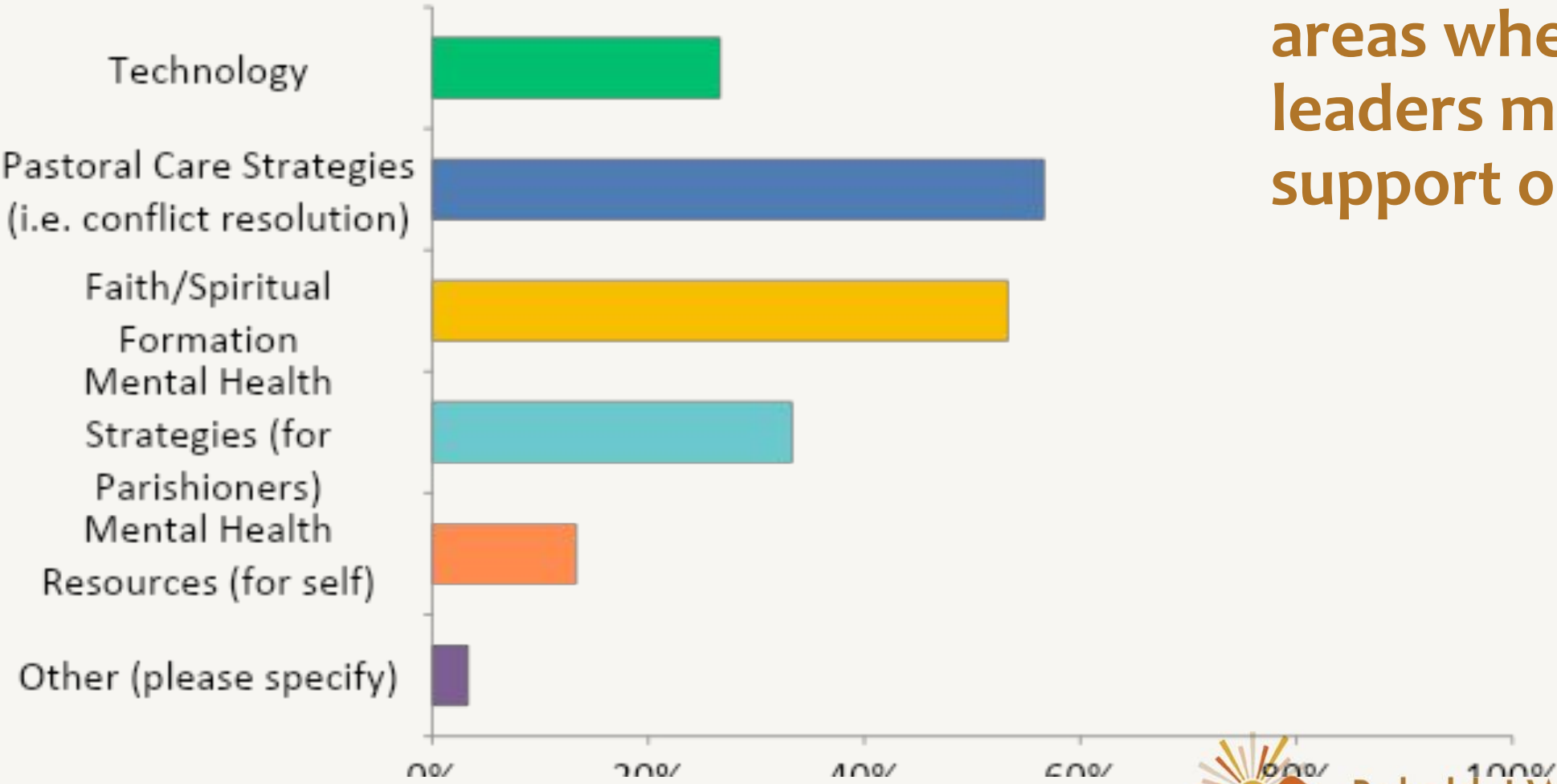
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## Did your church hold regular, online worship during the COVID-19 pandemic?



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What are the primary areas where church leaders most need support or assistance?



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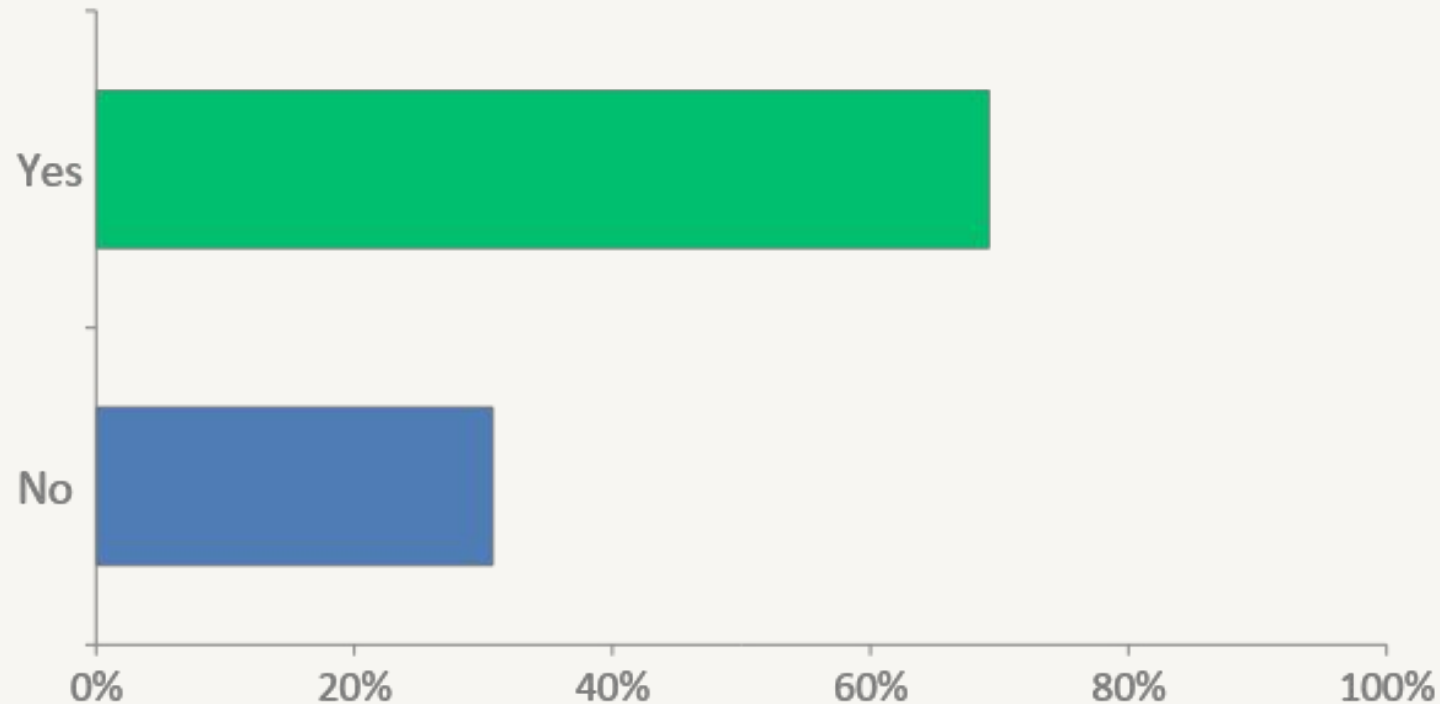
# Resource #3 - Community Competence

- Innovative and open to change
- Vibrant, contextual worship
- Strong, adaptive leadership that fits with participant values.



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# Would someone close to you say that you recognize the signs of stress and burnout within yourself?



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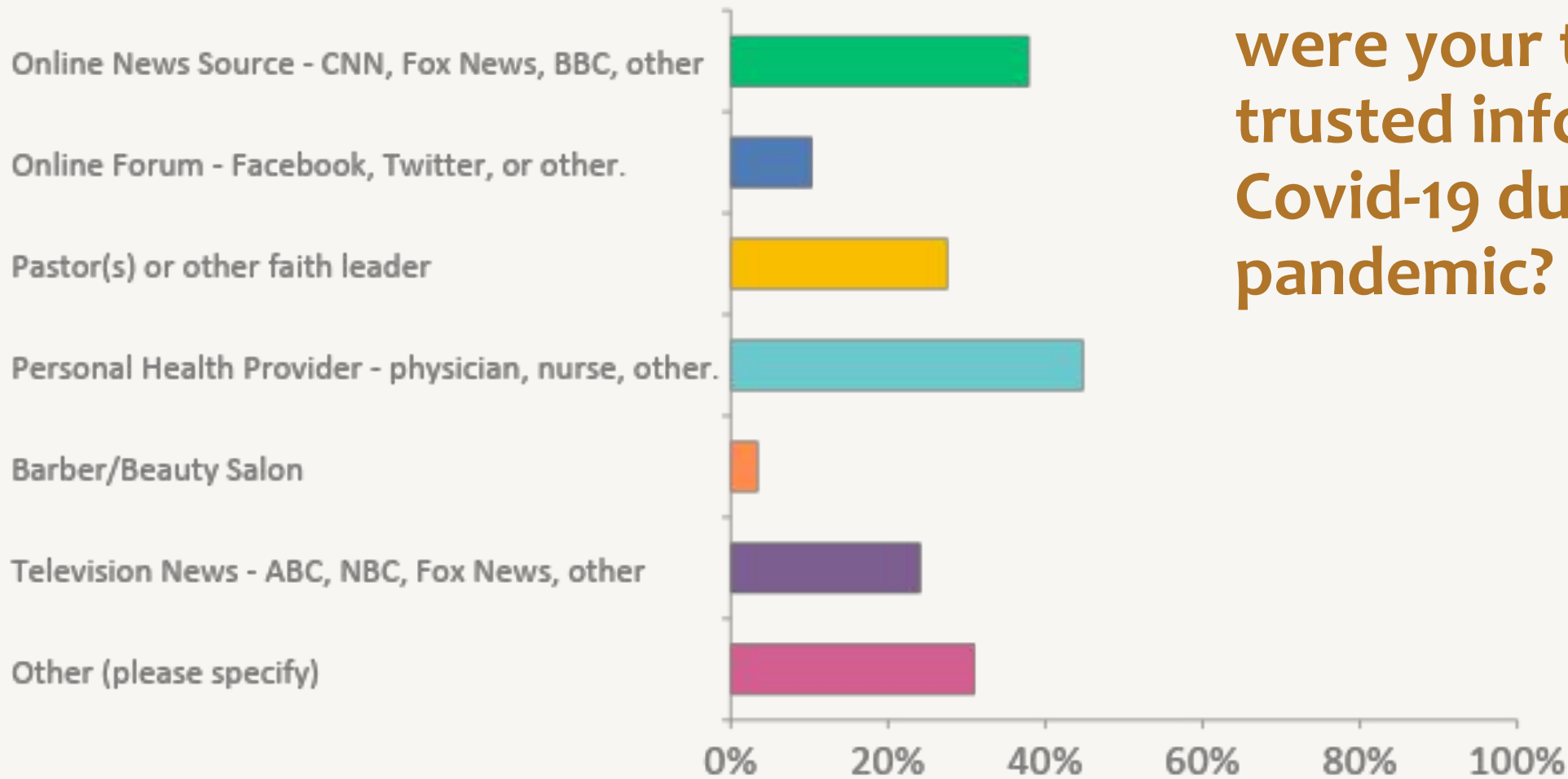
## Resource #4 - Information and Communication

- A clear and compelling vision/narrative.
- A trusted source of information – “Clergy have the authority and trust of their members” (Pew, Oct, 2021).
- Effective use of technology



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Which of the following were your top sources for trusted information on Covid-19 during the pandemic?



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# Implications for Racial/Ethnic Reconciliation

- Openness to other ways of ministry, preaching and worship
- Prayer, singing, literature in different languages
- “Genuine, diverse leadership”
- Shared purpose/narrative



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# Q & A

Unmute yourself or leave your questions in the chat!



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# SCORR Workshop Survey