



Michigan Conference United Church of Christ

# 2025 Worship Engagement Survey

Final Report

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE



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To: The Michigan Conference United Church of Christ  
From: Mitten Project Program Director Jennifer Ringgold  
Re: 2025 Worship Engagement Survey Report  
Date: January 16, 2026

As we embark on the first year of programming for the Michigan Conference Mitten Project, I am extremely grateful to the local churches and survey participants who have shared their thoughts, ideas, and voices through the 2025 Worship Engagement Survey. We are absolutely thrilled with the participation from across the Conference and excited to share insights as we begin this work together. Our consultants at APPRECOTS have collated and distilled data, both qualitative and quantitative, from over 500 individual responses and more than half of our Michigan churches, to begin to paint a picture of how we can support participation across all-ages in worship and prayer.

In the survey report, it is so important to heed what is said across each key population. It is such a tremendous gift to hear from and learn with our pastors, children youth and family ministry leaders, parents, worship attendees, and our children and youth. Please handle their responses with care.

Some of the key themes that are emerging include:

- Churches are creating a welcoming environment for children.
- Children need more support to feel a connection between church and their daily lives.
- Children and youth want to help more at church.
- Parents are worried that it will be more work for them to include children.
- People of all ages could use help to pray together.
- Children Youth and Family ministry leaders have ideas for including children and they are tired.
- Clergy are excited to learn more about engaging children in church.
- Relationships are key to helping children feel connected in church.

This first set of data begins to paint a picture of a deep desire to engage children in church with a gap in understanding for how we might successfully accomplish their inclusion. We are learning so much and anticipate the incredible potential for expanded study over the five years of the Mitten Project. It is clear that we will need to devote time and energy to creating sustainable forms of ministry across ages that are more transformational and less transactional. This will be hard and important work and we will need to do it together.

I am excited to share this report with you, and I look forward to continued opportunities to learn together in the year(s) ahead. Please mark your calendars with [2026 Mitten Project events](#), look into the [2026 Resource Kit](#), and subscribe to [Conference communications](#). I welcome your continued thoughts and ideas via email, text, and phone.



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*The Michigan Conference has received a grant of \$1,250,000.00 from Lilly Endowment Inc. for the [Michigan Conference Mitten Project](#). This 5-year program invites congregations to engage children and families in ways that deeply connect faith practices and community so that all of us, in each generation, can leave church more spiritually connected and ready to find the sacred in our everyday lives.*

# Executive Summary

The 2025 Michigan Conference Children’s Worship Engagement Survey was designed to support the *Michigan Conference Mitten Project*, an effort to “knit together” children and adults in worship and prayer. With support from a Lilly Endowment grant aimed at strengthening multigenerational worship and prayer, the Michigan Conference Mitten Project focuses on two main objectives:

- Strengthen worship and prayer practices that respect how children experience God and express their faith.
- Enhance worship and prayer practices that connect more directly with the daily lives of children and families in Michigan UCC churches.

This survey specifically looked at the role children and adults play in church life. It was sent to more than 125 Michigan United Church of Christ congregations in Fall 2025, collecting insights to help churches build stronger connections across generations.

Questions were designed for different groups based on a person’s role in the church, how they interact with children, and their age. The primary focus was on children ages 3–12, but feedback was also collected from church staff, parishioners, parents, and older youth. This helped give a clear picture of how children are involved in church and how connections between generations can be strengthened in worship, learning, and prayer.

This survey will be repeated every year through 2030 so churches can see how things change over time, celebrate progress, and find new ways to support children, families, and communities in their faith journeys.



# Children's Responses

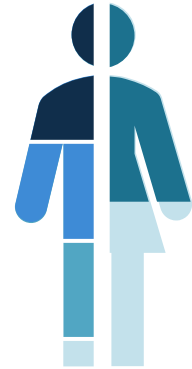
*Ages 0-12*

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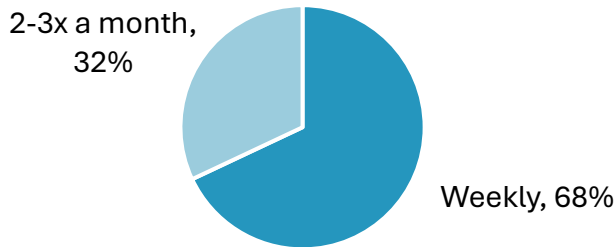
# Children's Responses

## Demographics at a glance

- 25 Total Children
- Ages: 4-12
- Gender: 28% female, 32% Male, 40% unknown
- Community: 60% described being from a small town
- Race: 96% white
- Total Churches Represented: 8



How often do you attend worship services?

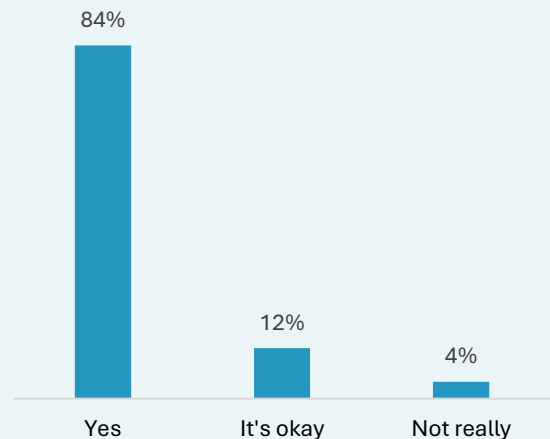


100% of children reported feeling adults at church are **welcoming.**

What do children **love most** about going to church?

For many, it's all about community. Fifteen out of twenty children said spending time with friends, their "church family," and other people is what makes church fun. But it's not just about people; kids also enjoy snacks, Bible lessons, arts and crafts, and simply being with God. Together, these responses show that church is a place where learning, relationships, creativity, and faith all come together to make the experience enjoyable for children.

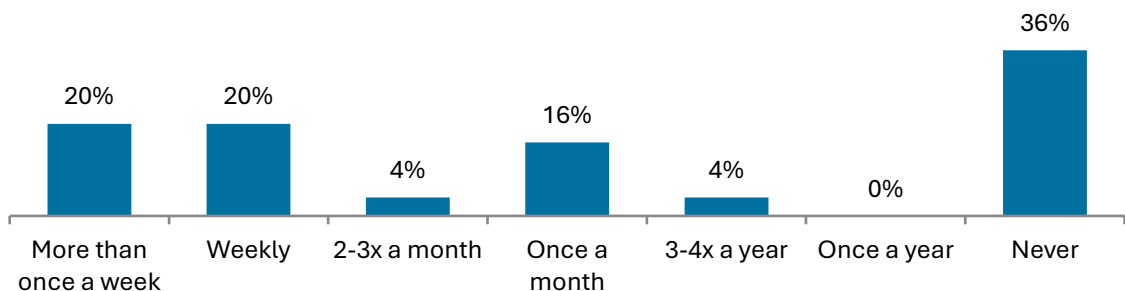
Do you like going to church?



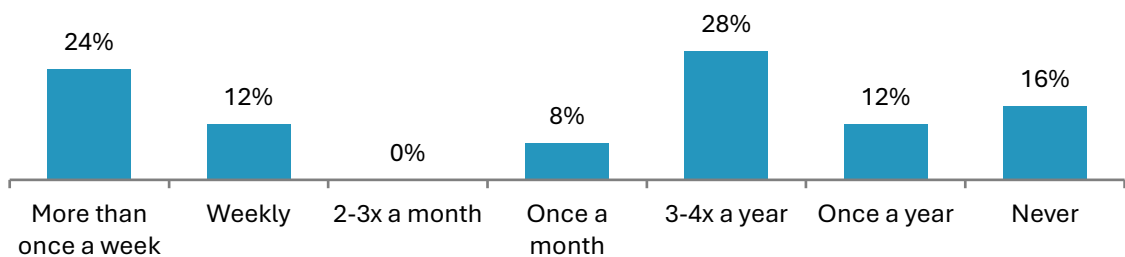
# Children's Responses

Children's responses show that connecting with God looks different for each child and prayer is just one part of that experience. There is no single way children connect; some pray on their own, some with family or [at] church, and some are still figuring it out. **Over half of children (68%) agreed or strongly agreed that their church understands that they connect with God in their own special way**, while 16% were unsure, 4% were neutral, and 12% disagreed. This percentage is higher than clergy (63%) but lower than parents (74%), pointing to an opportunity to strengthen alignment between adult perspectives and children's church experiences.

## How often do you pray or engage in prayer **personally**?



## How often do you pray or talk to God **with your family**?



Children feel close to God in many ways. About **40% said prayer at church or at home is their main way of staying connected**. While some reported not knowing what helps them feel close to God outside of church, others identified the following experiences and objects as reminders and ways to stay connected to God:

- By spending time with family
- Having conversations with other or themselves
- Using reminders like the Bible or bracelets
- Singing
- Being alongside their church community

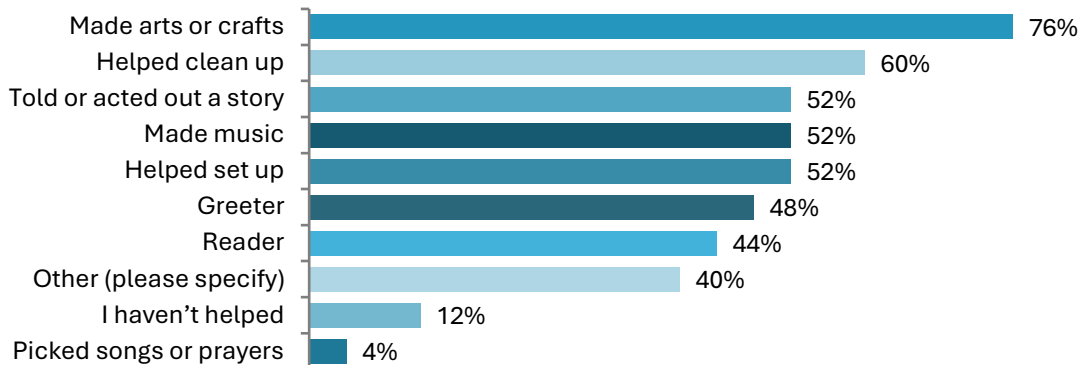


# Children's Responses

In the past year, do you feel like you have been **more or less involved in church** than last year?

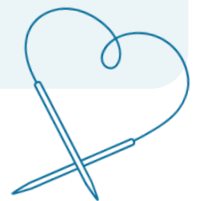


How have you **helped** at church?



# 96%

of children stated they may be or are interested in helping more at church.



## How do children want to help?

While 20% of children are interested in continuing with the creative parts of worship like singing, reading, or making art, **over 50% of responses responded they desired to help with more practical tasks** such as cleaning, setting up, helping in the kitchen, or assisting younger kids. These activities are important for supporting the church and being part of the community but do not involve planning or creating the worship experience itself. This shows that while children want to contribute, they may not yet see how they can take part in the creative side of worship.



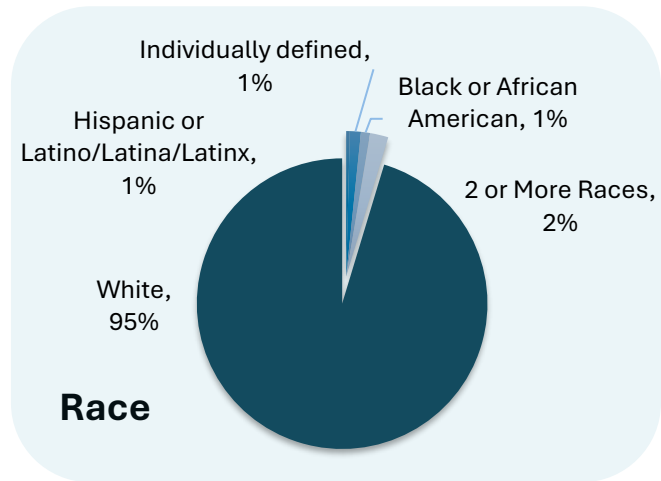
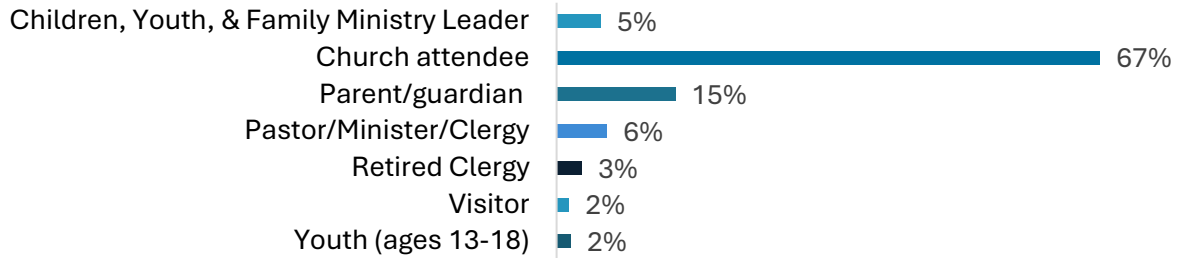
# Youth & Adult Responses

*Ages 13+*

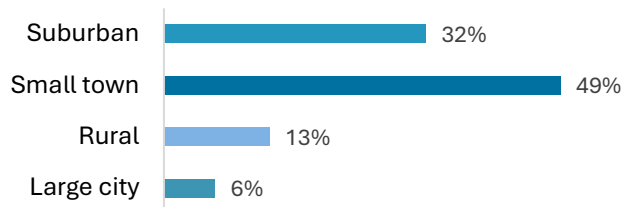
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# Demographics of Respondents ages 13+

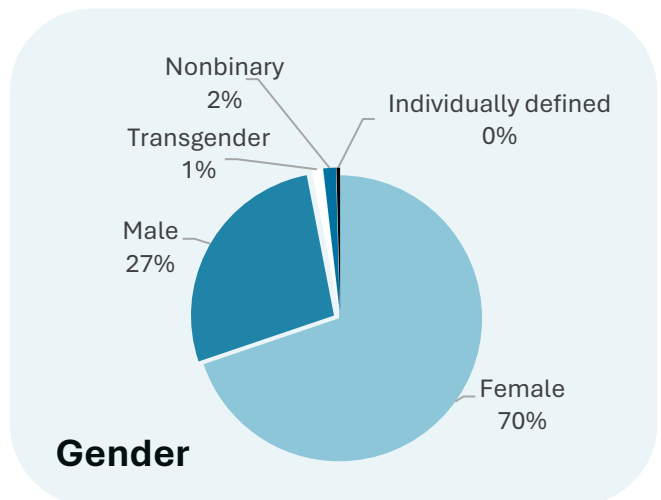
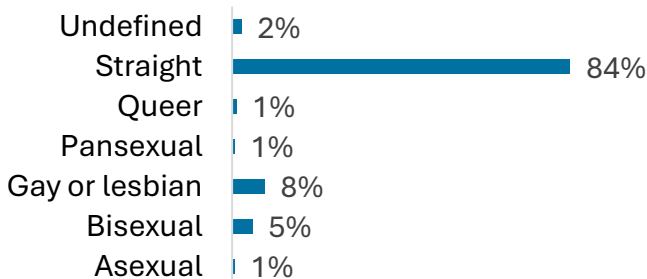
## Which role best describes you?



## Which best describes where you live?



## Which best represents how you think of yourself?



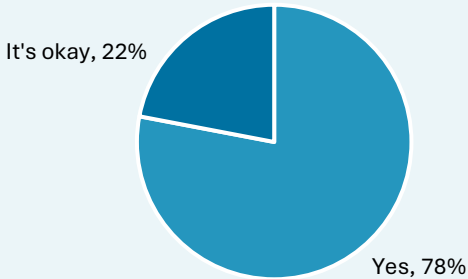
The **“Individually defined”** category groups together open-ended responses that were unable to be attributable to one or more of the provided categories, single responses that would otherwise risk identifying individual survey respondents, and responses that were beyond the scope of the question.

# 13-96

Age range of survey respondents. The **average age is 61.5** across 411 individuals who provided their age.

# Youth Responses

Do you like going to church?



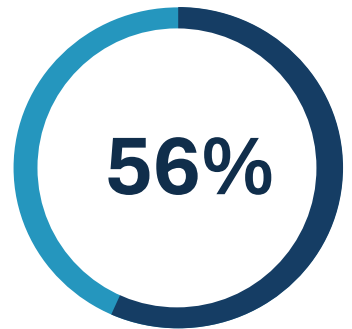
Similarly to children, youth also chose **community** and **a sense of belonging** as their top reason for liking church (67%). Youth also felt closest to God at church through sermons, community and relationships, and prayer.

**Top three** reasons going to church is hard:

- 1) Scheduling conflicts (67%)
- 2) Sitting still & boredom (11%)
- 3) Few kids the same age (11%)

## Youth want to contribute meaningfully to church life.

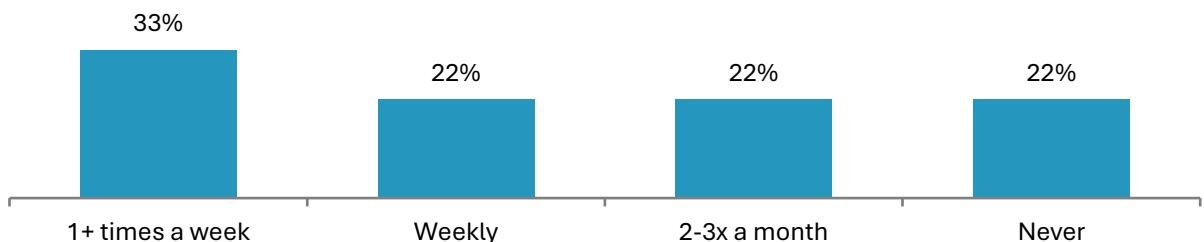
In line with developmental differences, 56% of youth shared desires to experience and contribute to church in ways that give them increased agency and responsibility (e.g., helping younger children, supporting technology, and providing general support), while younger children expressed more interest in helping with more simple and concrete tasks.



# 66%

of youth reported engaging in personal prayer at least once a week. This means youth pray alone **26% more** than children ages 4-12.

How often do you pray or talk to God with your family?



**19% more youth pray weekly with family than their younger peers.**

# Parent Responses

# 74%

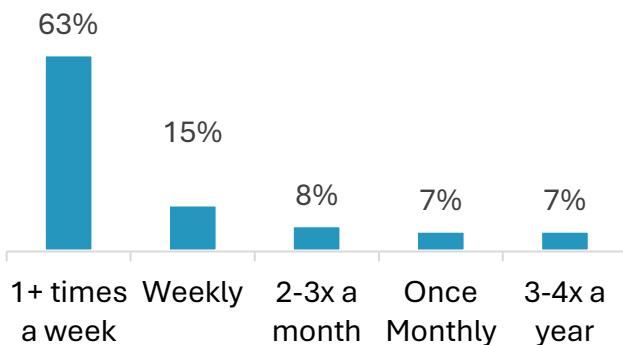
of parents with younger children agreed that their church acknowledges and supports the unique spiritual needs of children.

## Strong Support & Opportunities for Involvement

This is in contrast with the 38% of the same parents who feel their church provides no support or limited involvement of children in the creation of worship.

# 38%

### How often do you personally pray?

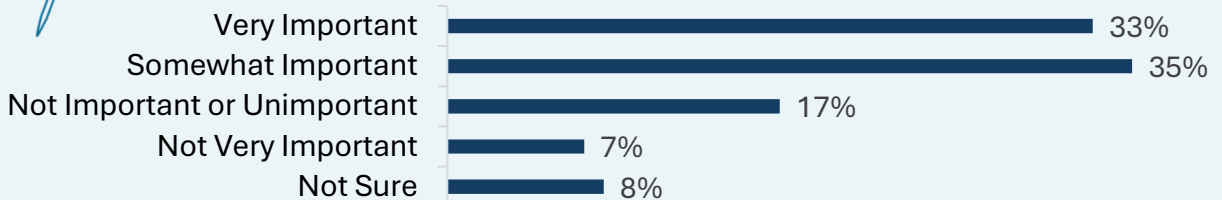


### Worship Outlast Attention Spans

Parents of children ages 3–12 frequently noted that traditional worship services are designed with adult attention spans in mind. Long sermons, complex readings, and adult-focused messages often make it difficult for children to stay engaged or understand what is happening. As a result, attention span challenges and focusing for extended periods, emerged as the most noted barrier to participation (21%).



### How important is it that children help with creating worship services?



Notably, only parents of younger children reported that involvement in worship creation was not very important. While several factors may contribute to this perspective, one parent explained: *“As a parent, it is really nice to be able to participate in a traditional service away from my children while also knowing they’re safe and have good influences...I don’t think people realize that it means more work for [parents]. Worship services are a reprieve and replenishment. Sometimes they are a sliver of relief in really hard weeks.”*

# Church Attendee Responses

# 64%

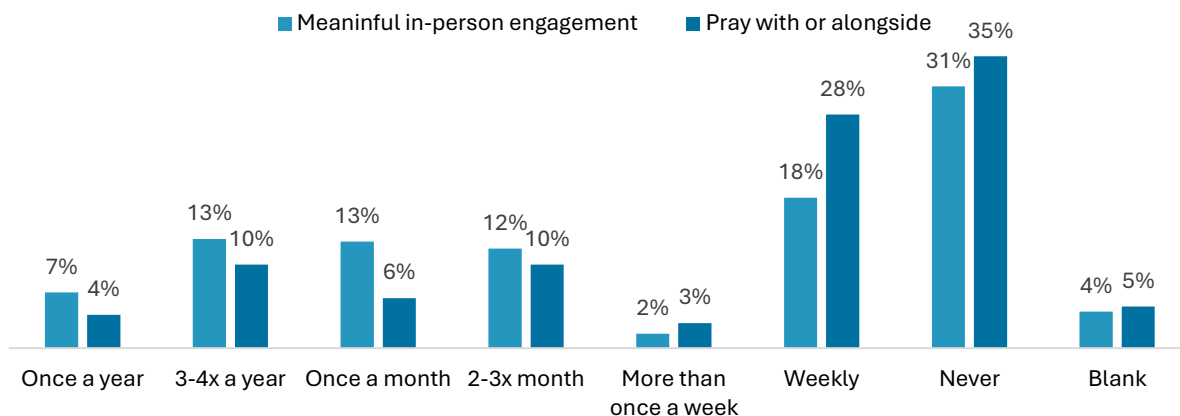
of church attendees responded it is **somewhat** or **very important** for children to participate in creating worship services.

## Connecting Beyond Church

Church attendees overwhelmingly identified **nature** and **outdoor settings** as their strongest connection to God beyond church walls. Only 7% of clergy felt nature connected them to God. Additionally, 25% of church attendees listed prayer, scripture and devotional study, and music as meaningful ways to maintain spiritual connection.

Like many others, church attendees most often point to a **sense of community** and **fellowship** as the primary reason they attend church. Other common motivators include engaging music and singing, opportunities to learn God’s message through high-quality sermons, and the comforting feeling that church is “like coming home.”

## How often do church attendees interact with children?



Almost half of all church attendees believe that younger children regularly participate in church services, with about 27% reporting seeing **more engagement** in the past year. The top five ways church attendees see children involved are:

1. Children’s Message
2. Singing or Music
3. Service Projects
4. Communion or Rituals
5. Reading Scripture or Prayers



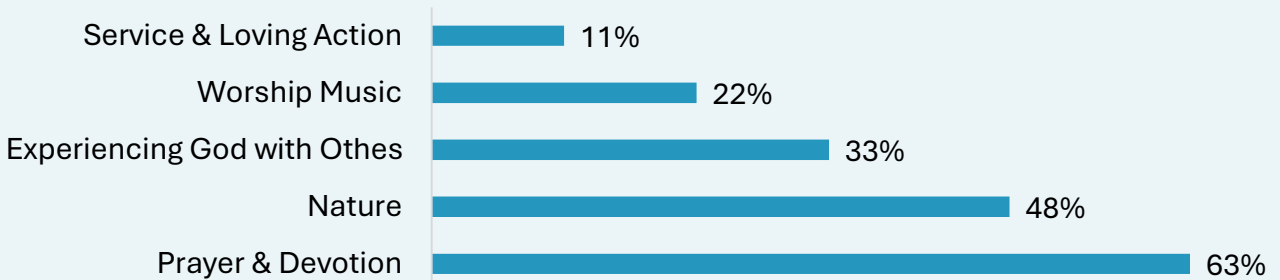
# Children, Youth, & Family Ministry Leader Responses

Children, Youth, & Family (CYF) Ministry Leaders overwhelmingly value the **community, spiritual growth, and worship experience** at church. Nearly nine in ten respondents mentioned community as a key positive, and many noted music, teaching, and opportunities for connection with God.

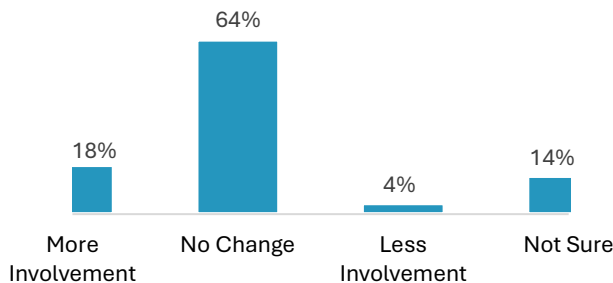
The **top four** reasons going to church can be challenging for CYF Ministry Leaders are:

- Lack of Motivation & Energy
- Declining Church Attendance
- Financial & Resource Constraints
- Cultural & Congregational Conflicts

## What helps CYF Ministry Leaders feel close to God at church?



Are children **more or less involved** in the creation of worship than last year?



# 38%

of CYA Ministry Leaders believe traditional, adult-focused worship services are the largest barrier to children participating at church.

**Intentional Engagement Matters.** CYF Ministry leaders reported children engage most deeply when they are active participants. Examples of active participation include carrying candles, ringing bells, helping in worship, being asked questions, and having real responsibilities. CYF Ministry Leaders also believe **children thrive when adults include them warmly and when teaching is creative, visual, and age-appropriate.**

# 56%

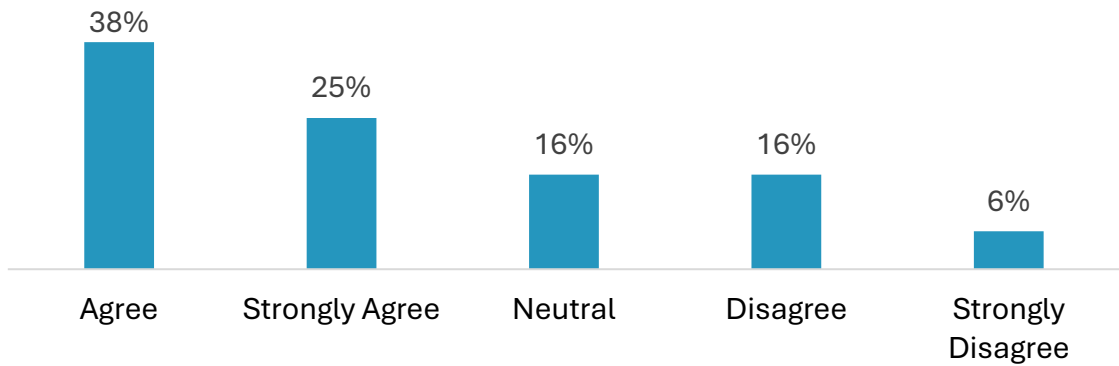
Percentage of CYF Ministry Leaders reported personally engaging in prayer with children one or times a week.

# Clergy Responses

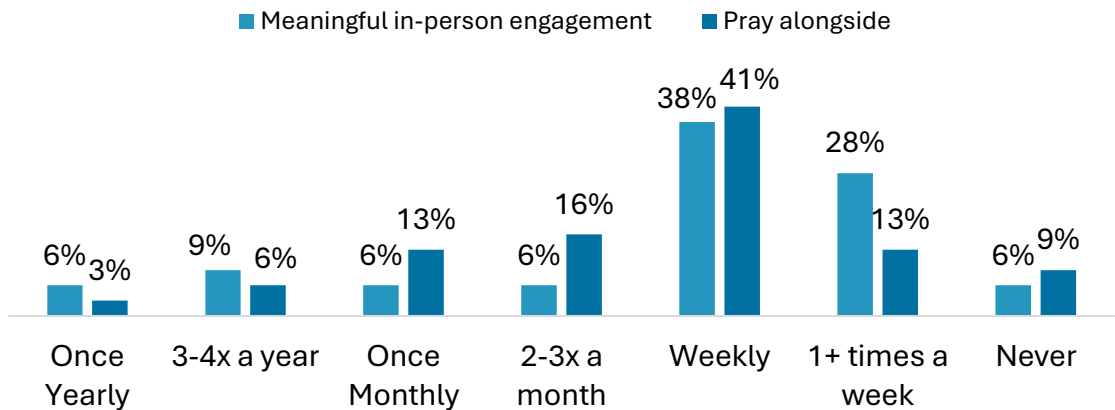
# 82%

Percentage of active clergy believe it is **somewhat** or **very important** for children to help in the creation of worship services.

Does your church acknowledge and support the **unique spiritual needs** of children separately from those of adults?

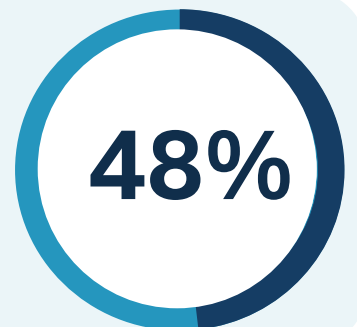


How often do clergy **interact** with children?



## Messaging Matters.

Like parents and CYF Ministry Leaders, 48% of clergy also recognize the importance of child-friendly communication and teaching is an important part of what helps children feel connected during church.



# Thank you!

Special thanks to all the congregations that had representation among the survey respondents. Your participation reflects a deep commitment to listening, learning, and strengthening our shared ministry. We are truly grateful for the time and care you invested, and we look forward to seeing this list grow each year as even more communities add their voices to the conversation.

