

# Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Pacific Churches



**Impact, Response and Recovery**





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# Acknowledgments

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

– 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

This report was prepared by the Research and Evaluation team: Kathleen Seataoai Forrest, Dr ‘Ana Hau’alofa’ia Koloto, Anita van der Veer, Dr Manuila Tausi, Greg Keeble and Dr Sydney Kingstone.

We gratefully acknowledge all the Church leaders who took the time to respond to our request for information to support this study. We are truly grateful to you all for your time and generosity.

We also offer our sincere thanks to the four case study churches and their families, Congregational Christian Church of Samoa Porirua, The Dream Centre, Samoan Assembly of God church in Invercargill and Siasi Uesiliana Tau’ataina ‘o Tonga (SUTT) Te Rapa, for allowing us to talanoa with you and to hear your experiences.

We are truly thankful for the support our leaders have given during this research. It is with gratitude that we acknowledge our Tautua leaders, Aiono Matthew Aileone, Aiolutepoa Sina Aiolutepoa-Aiono and Terina Cowan, for allowing us the space to capture these insights.

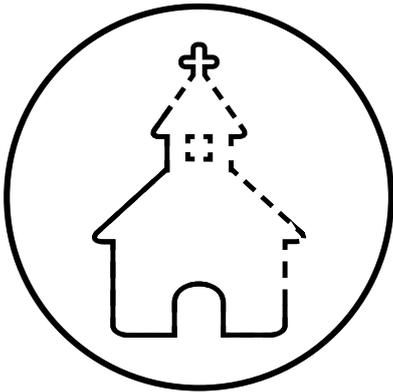
We acknowledge the support from the senior members of Regional Partnerships in the collection of information from church leaders. We would like to make special mention of Fa’alogo Va’ai, Lisa Tou, Yara Richmond and Ariki Maureen Tukaroa-Betham for their support in connecting with Pacific leaders. Thank you, team.

We are grateful to our external peer reviewers, Dr Halahingano Rohorua and Dr Jenny Cave, for taking the time to provide feedback and strengthen the report. We also want to thank Kevin Wilson and Te Vaerangi Minster for providing a policy lens over our work.

**Fa’afetai tele lava, Mālō ‘aupito, Fakafetai lasi, Fakafetai lahi lele, Faiakse’ea, Meitaki ma’ata, Fakaauae lahi, Kam rabwa, Vinaka vaka levu.**



# Main messages



## Purpose

- Gather information on the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on Pacific churches.
- Inform the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (the Ministry) on the role of Pacific churches in supporting Pacific communities during the lockdown.
- Provide evidence to inform policy, practice, and future research.

## Methods

- Underpinned by the Kakala research process.
- Mixed-methods approach including an online survey and case studies.
- Online survey approached 300 of the 470 known individual Pacific church leaders across Aotearoa from May to August 2020. 145 church leaders took part, respondents included a diverse array of church leaders and churches.
- Case study used purposive sampling of four churches. Employed talanoa with church leaders and families using face-to-face, telephone, and Zoom.

## Key findings

### Impact

- The role of Pacific churches is pivotal in enhancing Pacific family wellbeing.
- Pacific church services going online was the most positive impact of the lockdown according to church leaders.
- Lockdown reconfirmed the importance of family vā (relationships) – the relationship with each other and the relationship to and faith in God.
- The impact of the lockdown on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, widows, single women, single parents, children, and youth was evident.

### Response

- Pacific churches were key to supporting families, and often used their own resources to do so.
- Active church leaders and committees were more effective in responding to needs.
- Young people provided key technological resources and support to the church.
- Pacific churches play an important role in accessing government support for Pacific communities.

### Recovery

- Lockdown provided for some churches the opportunity to transform how they did things to further support families.
- Churches with a long-term vision and preparedness responded better to the lockdown.
- Some Pacific churches adopted new cultural practices.
- Key components to the recovery process for Pacific church leaders involved supporting families and building faith.
- The adaptation of digital platforms for the delivery of services kept communities connected.

## Implications

### Pacific churches

- Pacific churches play a critical role in crisis management for Pacific communities.
- Pacific churches need to prioritise preparation for crisis situations.
- Young Pacific people have crucial roles for the Pacific church and community development.

### Ministry for Pacific Peoples

- Pacific churches play an important role in realising the Lalanga Fou goals.
- Faith and spirituality are key components of Pacific wellbeing.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen the role of the Ministry and other agencies to partnership with Pacific churches to recover and thrive.

### Future research

- Careful consideration needs to be made on the combination of tools and methods used to inform the research in particular, using a Pacific world-view lens. These findings will serve as the baseline for future research with Pacific churches.

# Executive summary

Given COVID19 as an unprecedented time in our history, Pacific churches were actively supporting their church communities and ensuring key messages reached the Pacific community. Churches across Aotearoa experienced both positive and negative impacts of the lockdown, from March to June 2020, on church programmes. Despite the disruptions and constraints to church programmes, some churches demonstrated resilience, resourcefulness, and transformation. This study explores the role of churches and focuses on understanding the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on church programmes and family needs, and the response of churches to family needs and recovery efforts during this pandemic.

This report presents findings from research using a mixed methods design, and underpinned by the Kakala research framework. It analyses and discusses responses from a survey of 145 churches, and talanoa with four case study churches and their families. The findings are captured under three key theme areas: impact, response, and recovery. A key implications section completes the report.

It is intended that this study will provide evidence to the Ministry of Pacific Peoples to inform policy, practice and future research.

## The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on Pacific churches and families

### The role of churches is pivotal in enhancing family resilience and wellbeing

Pacific churches were shown to be a pillar of hope and support for many Pacific families in Aotearoa during the nation-wide lockdown from 25 March to 8 June 2020. As people faced a time of uncertainty and fear, church leaders were voluntarily doing all they were able, to navigate a new territory to support members spiritually, and where possible, in tangible ways as well.

The church leaders' significant contribution was spiritual support and reassurance of God's love and grace to their members. This was important to help people transcend the stressful situation by seeing opportunities to grow closer to God or to improve their lives. The findings indicate that during the crisis, people's faith was strengthened

as they fostered a sense of connectedness with God and with their families. Families drew closer together as they fellowshiped in their homes and as a result felt the blessings of family bonding, financial gains, and overall positive wellbeing.

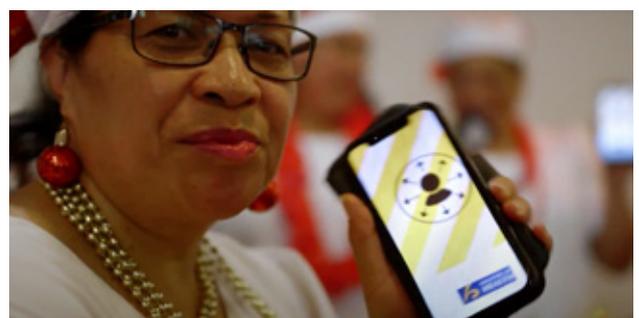
Church leaders also played a key role in connecting families to social service providers and to government agency supports. They also supported efforts to relay key COVID-19 messages out to the community.

### Church services going online was the most positive impact of lockdown according to church leaders

Church leaders witnessed both a growth in attendance and more connected families due to the church moving away from the pulpit into family homes and living rooms. Embracing digital platforms such as Facebook is not as daunting now for some people as the lockdown had encouraged them to use it if they wanted to communicate, be informed, and stay connected.

The lockdown did highlight, however, that there was a digital divide with some families not having access to devices and connection. Support from government agencies such as the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP), Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Ministry of Education (MoE) to equip Pacific communities helped not only to minimise the technology gap, but also supported both online learning for Pacific children and the upskilling of the elderly who normally have not engaged via this channel.

Embracing technology for participating in church programmes also had a positive effect on sustaining family relationships. As a result of not physically going to church, families engaged with church activities at home and fellowshiped as a family; they connected spiritually and practiced reciprocal love due to being under the same roof.



### **Lockdown reconfirmed the importance of family vā (relationships) – the relationship with each other and the relationship to and faith in God**

Parents, children, and other family members stayed together under the same roof at the same time during lockdown. The relationships between married couples were strengthened. Parents were engaging with their children and becoming more aware of their education by spending time with them in their learning. However, not all parents and children were engaging in the education space at home as there was a void of devices or internet access in some households. Spiritual growth was felt in family homes as individual members drew closer to God and parents were imparting spiritual and life lessons to their children.

### **The impact of the lockdown on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, widows, single women, single parents, children, and youth was evident**

The biggest advantage for the elderly group was their ability to stay connected with families and church members online. Those who lived with their children were supported as young people were able to connect them online. Others, however, required further assistance to connect online. Widows and single women missed out on important spiritual rituals such as the partaking of the sacrament because of church conventions, however, churches were able to stay connected and support them through appropriate church support groups. Young people were also affected, as youth programmes and those aimed at children were largely stopped. Some family households were also without devices and that limited connectivity, affecting the learning of young people.

## **The response to the COVID-19 lockdown by Pacific churches and families**

### **Churches were key to supporting families**

Churches provided spiritual support and additional resources for families. The survey revealed that 52% of churches were able to use their own church resources to support families, 41% utilised government funding, 23% used funding from support agencies and 13% used business sponsorship or other funding. Those churches that utilised their own church funds were able to financially support families and provide food packages. Other churches referred families onto social service providers.

Church leaders who accessed outside support were more likely to go to Pacific social providers, MPP or MSD. This lends support to the importance of having Pacific by Pacific approaches that encourage Pacific engagement and/or ensuring that services and government agencies employ culturally safe practices and strategies.

The findings also highlighted the effectiveness of active church committees that have different purposes such as a COVID-19 committee that supported gathering intelligence about key messages and access to support. Other churches had active women's and men's organisations such as the 'Relief Society' and 'Elder's Quorum' that kept in contact with vulnerable members such as widows and single women. Other churches had a range of committees that had a social and education arm. All these committees played a critical and effective role in supporting different family groups and individuals during the lockdown.

### **Young people provided key technological resources and support to the church**

The skills of young people in the church contributed to positive outcomes. Churches who were able to access these skills reported being well informed, well supported and well connected. Young people were able to support their families with their digital skills – to connect families online with other family members and the church. Young professionals were able to connect churches with social providers and government agencies through their individual skills and talents to navigate systems and processes to ensure better outcomes for church families. The lockdown highlights the benefit of recognising and utilising the skills and talents of young people to help churches transform and to bridge the intergenerational gap.

### **Churches were vital in accessing government support for Pacific communities**

The findings show that some families were helped through the church applications made to available funding from MSD. Other families were helped directly by Pacific service providers after being referred by churches. These families felt cared for, supported and strengthened as a result of being connected to these services. For other families, the role of churches in connecting families with the education sector was transformational and encouraged them to reconsider the value of their children's education. It is an important role for churches to be the connectors between their families and government support systems.

## The recovery from the COVID-19 lockdown on Pacific churches and families

### Lockdown provided for some churches the opportunity to change or transform how they deliver programmes to better support families

This study highlighted the importance of being prepared. Planning and being prepared are hallmarks of a church that has a long-term sustainable vision. Good governance is also essential for any organisation to achieve its objectives, drive improvement, and maintain good standing in the eyes of the community it serves. The study highlights those churches with visionary leadership, active leadership teams and committees, that were transformational in their thinking, supported the growth of resources by identifying resource opportunities. These churches collaborated with their communities and had plans in place to realise strategic goals and objectives and were far more likely to achieve a positive and effective response to the lockdown.

### Churches with a long-term vision and preparedness responded better to the lockdown

The case studies followed four churches that demonstrated long-term vision and preparedness. For one church the plan involved ensuring that they had a good cash flow of funds, for another church it was strengthening the families to make good consistent decisions, for another church it was moving away from steadfast traditions and adopting the new digital era. One church also took the opportunity to transform how they responded to cultural practices such as fa'alavelave (cultural commitment) as the lockdown showed them that some of these practices were more challenging to families. As such, the church made a decision to stop the practice of buying bulk goods and giving of fine mats during funerals or other significant events, as a sign of respect and reciprocity, but instead to allow the families to demonstrate the values in their own way.

### Key components to the recovery process for churches involved supporting families and building faith

The study identified churches who were seeking to put together a preparedness pack and emergency plan because of the lockdown situation. With no clear end to the pandemic in sight, the role of the church in Pacific communities is vital in the continual response and recovery of Pacific families to offer spiritual support and transforming traditional practices into the new digital era of communication and connection.



## Implications for Pacific churches

### The critical role of churches in crisis management

The study confirms how critical Pacific churches are in the response and recovery of Pacific families. Our findings support the way Pacific churches have always cared for their families and communities through the values of love, generosity and tautua (service).

### The importance of preparedness

This study points to the importance for churches to be strategic and prepared at all times. The results of this study suggest that churches that were positioned to respond positively and support their church families already had a plan in place well before the COVID-19 lockdown. As a result, these churches were prepared and coordinated in their response to family needs. The study indicates that the key components of preparedness are having: a plan with a long-term vision, emergency funds, a focus on family wellbeing, a visionary leader, and the ability to adopt/adapt to change.

### The important role of the young people for church and community development

Findings suggest the need for churches to recognise the skills and expertise of young people to contribute to church and community development. The study highlighted instances where young professionals who traditionally were not visible before the pandemic but became leading individuals during the lockdown. There is benefit in nurturing and strengthening these skills to support succession planning and contribute to the development of confident, thriving, resilient and prosperous young Pacific peoples.

## Implications for the Ministry for Pacific Peoples

### The role of churches in realising the Lalanga Fou goals

The findings of this study demonstrate Pacific Church's ability to contribute to the Lalanga Fou goals, particularly goals 1-3, and indicate there is more potential to support the fourth goal.

#### Goal 1:

##### Thriving Pacific languages, cultures and identities

Pacific churches supported Pacific languages, cultures, and identities during lockdown through switching to social media platforms to deliver programmes, which in turn encouraged in-home fellow-shiping at a greater level than practiced prior to this event.

#### Goal 2:

##### Prosperous Pacific communities

The Ministry realised Pacific churches are the link to prosperous Pacific communities in their response to family's needs.

#### Goal 3:

##### Resilient and healthy Pacific peoples

The Ministry also contributed to sustain resilient and healthy Pacific peoples by promoting a family-focused approach to worship.

#### Goal 4:

##### Confident, thriving and resilient Pacific young people

The experience of those churches that utilised the skills of young people in their congregations were positive and appreciated.



### Faith and spirituality as key components of Pacific wellbeing

Often, wellbeing models measure quality of life through health, economic, social, and cultural factors. This study points towards faith and spirituality as significant key components for Pacific wellbeing. These components permeated the way churches and families responded to the impacts of the lockdown and influences on the recovery efforts of churches. This has implications for strategic frameworks that prioritise Pacific wellbeing.

The Ministry's key programmes rely on the partnerships and connections they have with Pacific communities, and this study supports the importance of continually strengthening partnership with Pacific churches. These relationships can be strengthened by providing better access to key information and funding that will aid the efforts of both groups to serve Pacific communities. Other agencies can also leverage off these partnerships, and in doing so, strengthen a cross-agency integrated approach to improve service to Pacific communities and to their overall wellbeing.

### Implications for Future research

#### Careful consideration needs to be made on the combination of tools and methods to inform the research

This study implies that when using a mixed methods approach for researching Pacific communities, careful consideration needs to be made on the combination of tools and methods chosen. A better response rate from Pacific communities may be achieved with the use of qualitative face to face methods such as talanoa or focus groups as a way of informing subsequent quantitative steps such as a survey.

#### Utilising the study's findings as baseline for future research with Pacific churches and communities

This research may be considered a baseline study of the role of churches in responding to the needs of Pacific families. The findings point to important areas for future research to refine and further elaborate.

# Introduction: Pacific churches are the heart of the Pacific community

A high proportion of the total Pacific population have at least one church affiliation (70.8% or 270,390 people) (Stats NZ, 2018). During the national lockdown period from March to June 2020, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (the Ministry) had captured insights<sup>1</sup> on how the lockdown was affecting Pacific communities across Aotearoa. While the long-term outlook of the COVID-19 pandemic is still highly uncertain, Pacific churches have been adapting to new challenges and opportunities that have arisen from this pandemic.

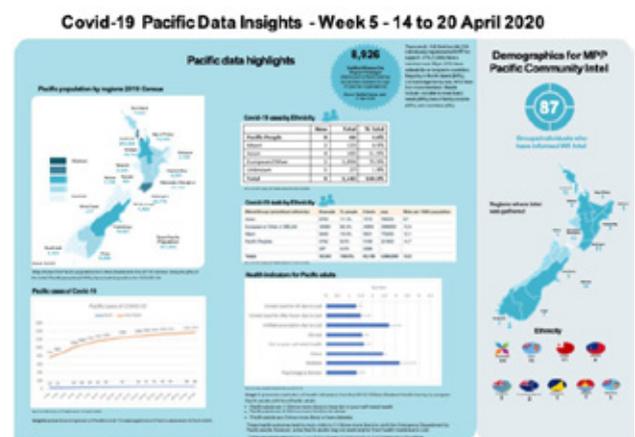
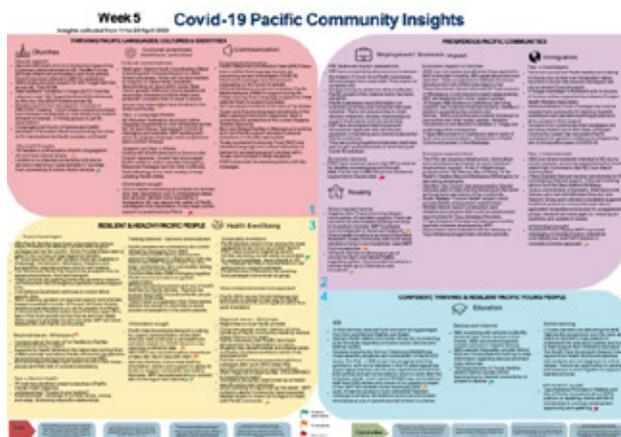
It became evident that many churches were actively contributing to support the needs of their church communities and ensuring key messages were delivered out to the wider Pacific community. Many adopted new ways of communicating and engaging with their members via digital platforms, holding online services and providing digital daily encouragements. All these were demonstrations of the significant role that churches play in Pacific communities and the resilience of Pacific communities to navigate and adapt to change during times of crisis.

This study explores the role of churches and focuses on understanding the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on Pacific church programmes and their families, the response of Pacific churches to the needs of families, and the recovery processes that some churches have identified.

This study is pioneering as there is no equivalent government-led study to date that explores the role of Pacific churches during and after the lockdown. As such, it offers critical insights that will support COVID-19 recovery efforts across government.



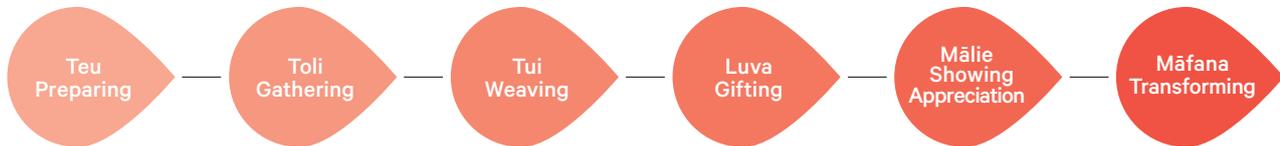
PICTURE 1: NZ GOVERNMENT POSTER DURING LOCKDOWN.



PICTURE 2: EXAMPLE OF THE MPP WEEKLY INSIGHTS SENT TO INFORM MINISTERS AND OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

<sup>1</sup>During the March to June 2020 lockdown, members of the Ministry’s Regional Partnerships team undertook the task of collecting data from Pacific communities on their activities, queries, and needs. The Research and Evaluation and Policy teams analysed and captured these insights to inform the Minister for Pacific Peoples and other government officials.

# Kakala research methodology



Underpinning this research project was the Kakala research process<sup>2</sup>, which draws on the six steps used in the making kakala (garland). The first step is the planning stage (Teu), the second step is the data gathering stage (Toli), the third step is the analysis and write up stage (Tui), and the fourth step is the gifting of the final report and publication (Luva). This will then be followed by the fifth and sixth steps of 'Mālie' and 'Māfana', which describe the feeling and sense of achievement and warmth one gets from completing a quality kakala and gifting it.

The project adopted a mixed methods approach involving a survey and a case study of four Pacific churches and their families. This research was designed to gather responses from Pacific church leaders across Aotearoa on how the COVID-19 lockdown affected their churches and families.

For the survey, the target population was based on the Ministry's register of 470 individual Pacific church leaders from across Aotearoa. As the survey was designed to be disseminated online, the survey population was based on the 300 Pacific church leaders with email addresses.

The survey questionnaire was developed by the Ministry's Research and Evaluation team using Qualtrics

software and included a combination of structured and open-ended questions. The structured questions used Likert and matrix rating scales. There was a total of 20 questions, 11 were demographic and nine asked about impact and response to the COVID-19 lockdown.

A pilot study was conducted to test the survey questions, language, measurement, design and length. The pilot was conducted during April 2020 for three weeks with eight groups. The survey questionnaire was subsequently revised based on the pilot study results.

The case study element first entailed the selection of churches based on a combination of variables including the activities they undertook during the lockdown, ethnicity, region and denomination. We initially identified 10 churches that were of interest from the Ministry's 'MPP Weekly insights', and these were then reduced to four representative examples. Invitations were sent out to the four originally selected churches, but not every invitation was accepted so additional church leaders were approached to participate during the time of the study. These churches were found through the Ministry's networks. A participant information sheet and a set of key questions were developed to guide the talanoa with church leaders and families.



PICTURE 3: KALONI KAKALA FLOWERS.  
PHOTO TAKEN FROM THE KOLOTO FAMILY HOME IN TONGA.

<sup>2</sup> Johansson Fua, Seu'ula. (2014). Kakala Research Framework: A Garland in Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education. *Of Waves, Winds and Wonderful Things: A Decade of Rethinking Education*, 50–60

## Toli

A link to the online survey questionnaire and a participant information sheet were emailed to 300 church leaders who were asked to respond on behalf of their church.

Initial survey uptake was slow during the months of May and June, and so the completion time was extended to increase the response rate. During July and August, the Research and Evaluation team at the Ministry worked closely with selected members of Ministry of Pacific Peoples' Regional Partnerships team to actively engage with churches to encourage increased survey uptake, using other methods such as phone calls and face to face contact in addition to the email reminders. A hard copy of the survey questionnaire was designed for completion off line which was disseminated and handed out with telephone back up support in completing the survey.

For the case studies, data gathering was undertaken from July to September and involved several talanoa with church leaders and families. The talanoa involved a combination of face to face, telephone and Zoom conversations in English, Samoan, and Tongan languages as appropriate.

Data collection method	Component	Participants	Timeframes
Survey	Pilot	8	April 2020
	Survey	145	May – August 2020
Case study	Talanoa	6 Pacific leaders and 6 families (15 individuals)	July – Sept 2020

TABLE 1: MIXED METHOD APPROACH

## Tui

The total number of survey responses received from churches by the closing date was 145, while the total number of case study talanoa involved six Pacific church leaders and nine family members across six families, as shown in Table 1.

Survey responses were analysed using Qualtrics software, as well as Excel pivot tables and charts. The analysis involved cross tabulations between variables to look at the relationship between church demographics and responses to the impact and response questions. Textual data from the open-ended questions was grouped into two themes: opportunities and barriers. Case study analysis involved transcribing the talanoa and then carrying out thematic analysis of common themes.

The table and chart outputs and analysed texts were combined with case study thematic information to arrive at the key findings.

## Luva

Gifting of the final report and publication will involve dissemination of the report to the Ministry, the Minister's office, and the wider Pacific communities.

## Mālie and Māfana

In the broader context, the findings of this study will inform policies and COVID-19 recovery efforts to support Pacific families and their church communities; this is what the Research and Evaluation team aspires to achieve from this report.

### Strengths and limitations of this study



#### Strengths include:

- A first government-led study into the perspectives and efforts of Pacific churches to inform COVID-19 recovery efforts and the development of key initiatives to support Pacific families and communities.
- Applying a mixed methods approach to give both quantitative and qualitative information about Pacific churches and their communities during the lockdown.



#### Limitations include:

- A moderate number of respondents - 145 churches out of the 300 Pacific churches with email addresses that the Ministry had a working relationship and had the ability to access and complete the online survey.
- Time constraints and limited resources contributed to the moderate number of respondents.



# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Church profiles

### Surveyed church leaders

There were eight different denominations represented in this study as shown in Figure 1. The majority of church leaders belonged to Methodist (30%) and Congregational (25%) churches, making up just over half of the total responses. Other church leaders belonged to Assembly of God (10%), non-denominational Christian (9%), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (7%), Presbyterian (6%), Seventh Day Adventist (5%), and other denominations (8%).

In terms of ethnic communities, there were eight different Pacific ethnicities represented in the survey as shown in Figure 2. Two thirds (67%) of survey participants came from Samoan and Tongan communities, with a further 11% being Tuvaluan.

A total of 61 churches (42%) use two languages in their church, made up primarily of one Pacific language and English. There were 41 churches (28%) that primarily use one main Pacific language.

The survey was regionally distributed across Aotearoa, however the majority of churches were from the Auckland region (47%) as shown in Figure 3.

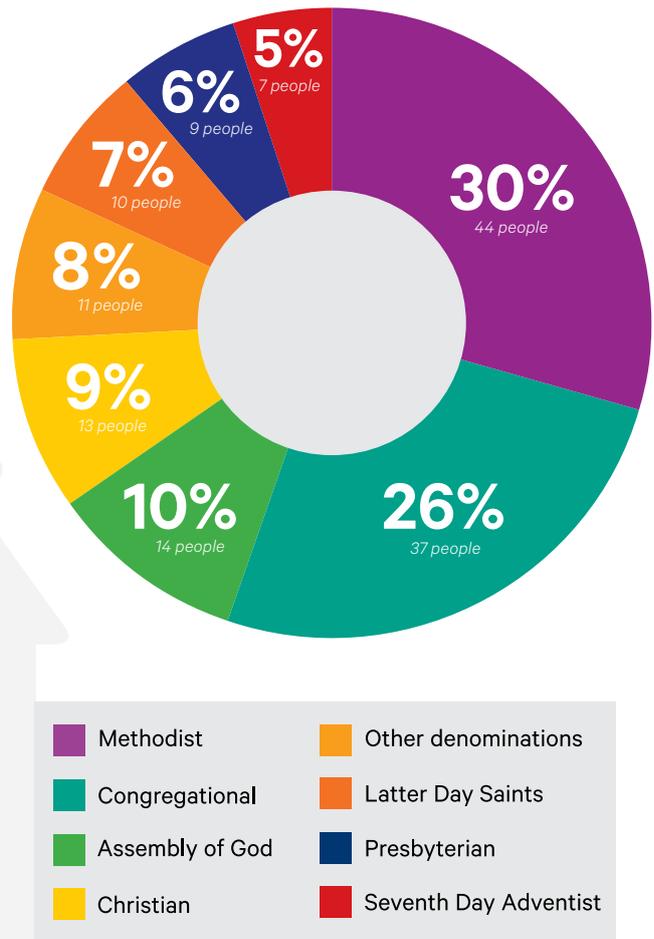
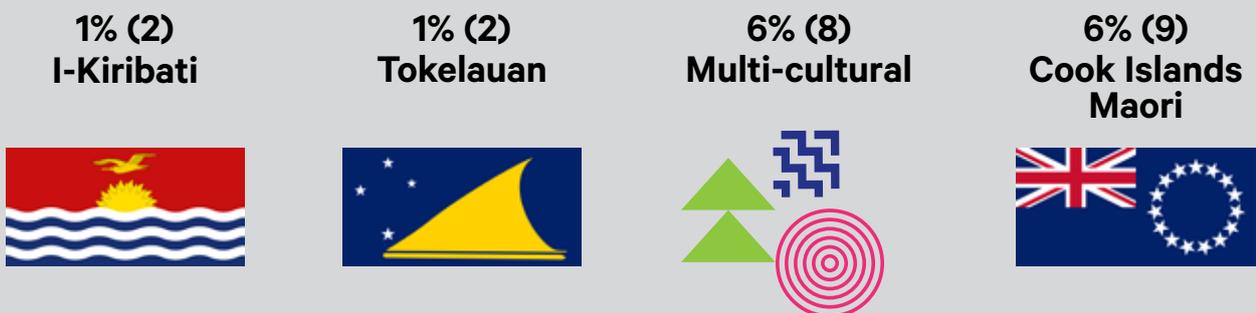


FIGURE 1: DENOMINATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED PACIFIC CHURCH LEADERS

FIGURE 2: ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED PACIFIC CHURCH LEADERS



Most participating churches (61%) had fewer than 40 families making up their congregation, while 19% had 40-99 families, and 20% had 100+ families.

In looking at the distribution of the ages of church goers, church leaders reported that 39% of churches had fewer than 10 elderly people<sup>3</sup>, 37% reported 20 or more elderly people in attendance while 24% reported 10-19 elderly people.

Twenty-eight per cent of churches had 20 to 39 young people<sup>4</sup> in their church, 20% had 100 or more young people, 19% had 40 to 59 young people, 17% had fewer than 20 young people, and 15% had between 60-99 young people. (Undefined 1%)

Most churches were registered as a charitable trust in New Zealand (90%).

**145**  
Survey responses received

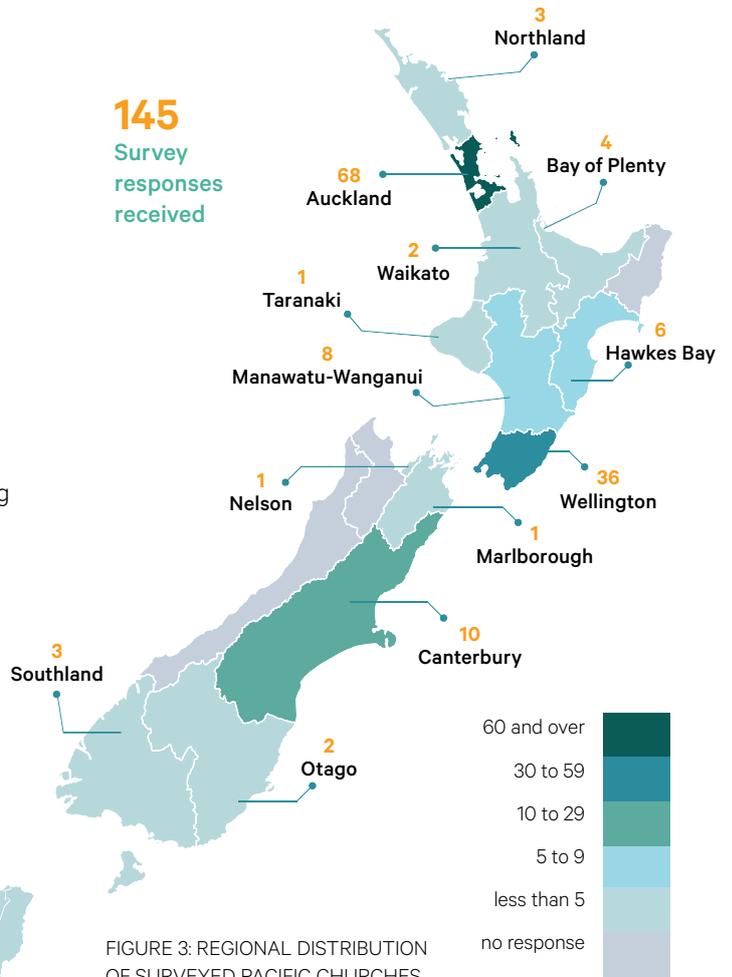


FIGURE 3: REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED PACIFIC CHURCHES

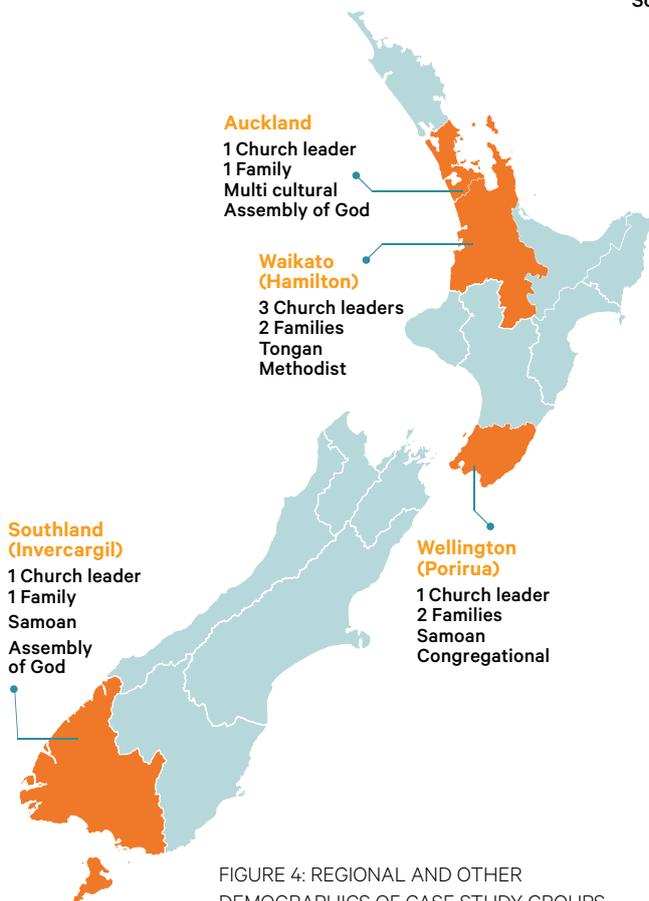


FIGURE 4: REGIONAL AND OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS OF CASE STUDY GROUPS

### Case studies

People from four churches participated in the case study element of the research, representing four different regions (Auckland, Waikato, Wellington and Southland), and three church denominations (two from Assembly of God, one Methodist, and one Congregational) as shown in Figure 4.

The ethnic makeup of these churches were: two Samoan churches, one Tongan church and one multi-cultural church. A total of 15 individuals took part, including six church leaders and nine family members from six families.

<sup>3</sup> Aged 65 years and over  
<sup>4</sup> Aged between 0 to 24 years

**8% (11)**  
**Fijian**



**11% (16)**  
**Tuvaluan**



**27% (39)**  
**Tongan**



**40% (58)**  
**Samoan**



# Prior to COVID-19 Lockdown

Prior to lockdown, Pacific churches were engaged in many regular programmes and services. Church leaders reported that their churches were involved in leading church services (97%), children's programmes (94%), youth programmes (91%), women's (87%) and men's (74%) fellowships, and family and/or parent's programmes (68%), as shown in Figure 5. A smaller number of churches were engaged in other programmes, such as counselling (55%), health (43%), languages (41%), or others (26%).

Before the COVID-19 lockdown, what services and programmes were offered by your church?

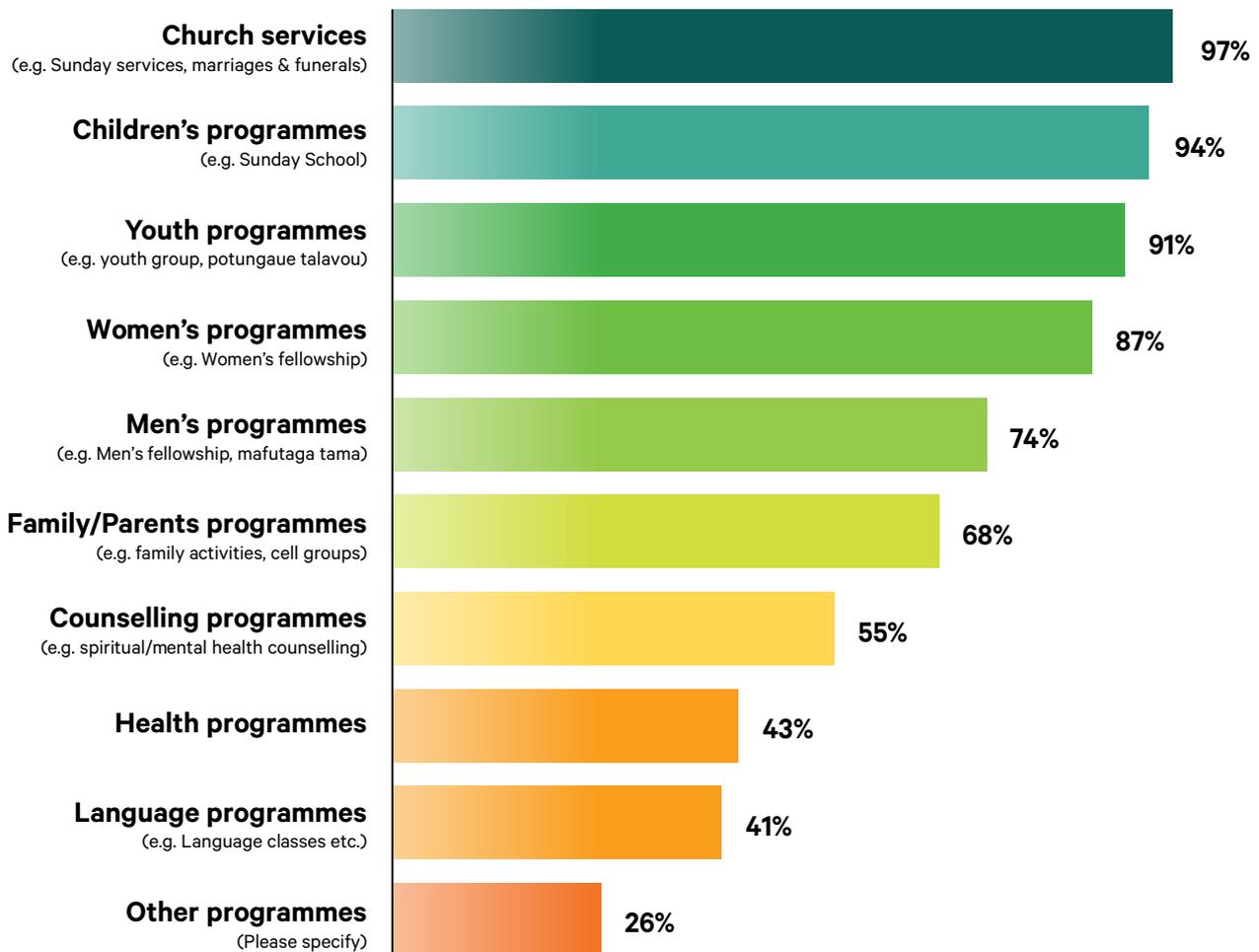


FIGURE 5: CHURCH PROGRAMMES PRIOR TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

The next sections will focus on three key themes uncovered in the research: **Impact, Response and Recovery** during the March to June lockdown.



# 1. Impact

The impact of COVID-19 lockdown is still widely experienced across Aotearoa. Pacific church leaders reported that lockdown had significant impacts on their churches and the families attending their churches, as shown in Figure 6.

When asked to describe how the lockdown impacted their congregations (Figure 7), nearly all the leaders mentioned that church services were disrupted (92%) and the majority also mentioned that church programmes were also disrupted (62%). Additionally, 37% of church leaders were aware that their congregations were suffering from social disruption, while 17% noted spiritual disruption among their congregants. Almost one quarter of church leaders mentioned that their churches moved services online (23%), and almost one in five did the same for programmes (18%), and this is even while 11% were cognisant of the reality that their church families were impacted by the digital divide. Church leaders also expressed concern about their vulnerable populations, with 10% worried for the wellbeing of their elderly congregants. Another 11% of church leaders reported having financial concerns for their church and congregation. There were 11% reporting positive aspects of lockdown.

## The impact of lockdown on churches

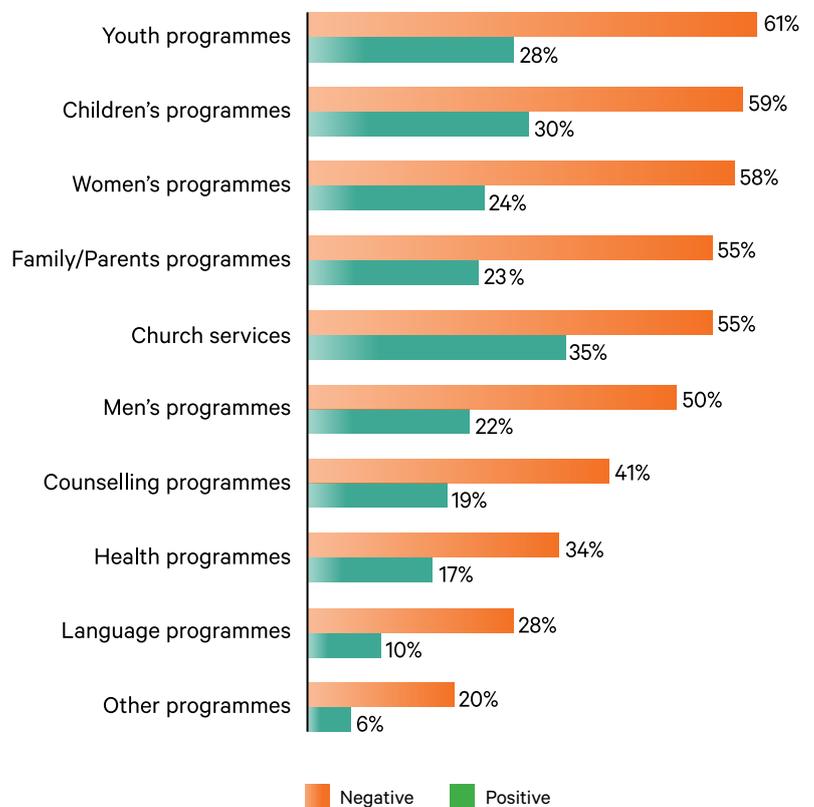


FIGURE 6: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

The impact of the lockdown on Pacific churches was felt both positively and negatively. Lockdown occurred during a period when churches normally held significant annual events such as Easter (involving Easter camps) and Mother’s Day. May is a particularly significant month for Tongan churches because the first Sunday is White Sunday (Fakamē), followed by Mother’s Day on the second Sunday, and Father’s Day on the third Sunday. When the lockdown occurred, all these programmes were impacted due to church members’ inability to meet physically.

## Positive experiences for churches during lockdown

### Conducting services and delivering programmes in innovative ways

The lockdown created the opportunity for Pacific churches to deliver church services and church programmes differently. It also changed the way churches communicated and connected with their church families. Many churches went online, and social media platforms like Zoom, Facebook and YouTube became synonymous

with Sunday church services, for example, Sunday School and Youth Bible studies. Additionally, some churches even posted weekly photos and videos of their family services online to share with other church member.

Some churches utilised radio stations and TV programmes, like Talofa Radio, Hope Channel Fiji, Shine TV and other local Christian radio stations, to broadcast their services.

*“The churches services went online. Sunday School and Women’s Ministry cancelled. Youth programme went online. Men’s faikava (kava groups) went online.”*

*“Churches went online. Used their own FB page for services and youth gatherings. All other groups gathering stopped.”*

*“We started a running our programmes differently like Sunday School classes over Zoom, meetings via Zoom and Sunday Services live on our church private Facebook page.”*

*“I prepared the guide for Sunday & Wednesday services and Friday Prayer meeting weekly. Distributed them to mailboxes. Each family conducted their own service. After each service, the youth posted photos and videos of their family’s service. I felt it was more realistic to actually have them hold a service than just sitting watching a live. Very positive feedback.”*

## Please tell us in detail how your church services and programmes were affected

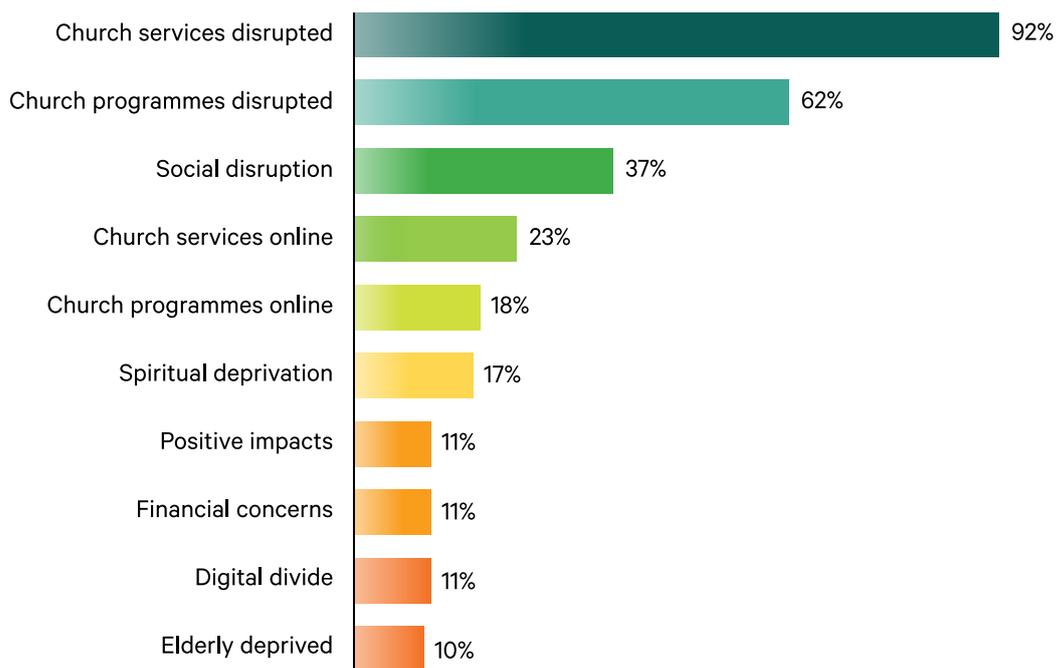


FIGURE 7: HOW CHURCHES WERE AFFECTED DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

**Creating new programmes and adapting others**

Some churches thrived under lockdown, transitioning their programmes with ease into the digital space because it was something that they were already doing. Others took the opportunity to set up new programmes created by the void of regular programmes that were stopped. For example, one church swapped its regular music programme for prayer night for the elderly and the sick to get together. Another church began posting daily encouragements on their Facebook pages. Additional churches committed time to pray for leaders, medical staff and essential workers during the lockdown.

*“...Our Choir and brass band stopped, we used their regular time (Tuesday night) to run new programs (Prayer night for our Elderly and members who are sick).”*

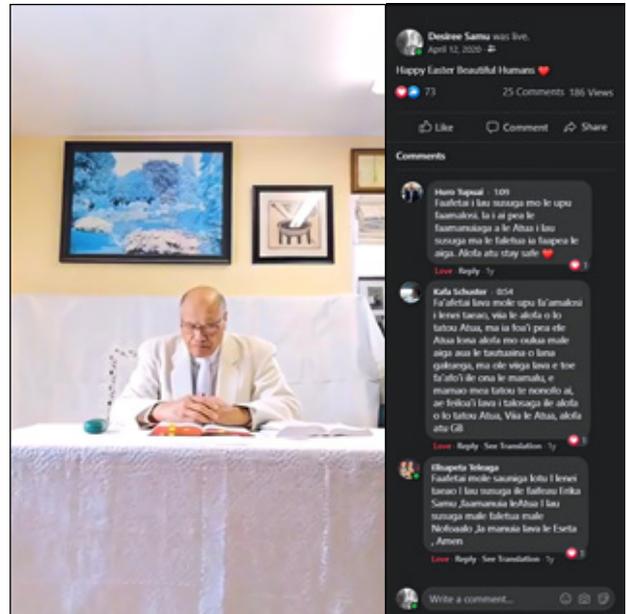
*“At every level of Lockdown (For example from 4 down to 3) a special prayer service lead by the Minister for every families of the church at 11.00pm; Prayer of Dedication for the Prime Minister, Ministers of Government, Government Officials, Front Line workers, Doctors and Nurses, Essential Staff workers and those who are sick and affected by COVID-19.”*

Some church leaders decided to adapt the format of special church events to fit within the lockdown framework. For example, the Tongan Methodist churches have an annual special Children’s Day event in May (Fakamē) that usually requires hours of practice and commitment of the Sunday school pupils and youth to put together the programme and items for the Sunday service. On the day, they play a significant role in leading the service and delivering their programme. However, due to the lockdown, individual families led and conducted this special service through Facebook and took turns putting together family items to share with everyone. Another church held a special service for Mother’s Day which was appreciated by all the members.

*“For Mother’s Day we set up a Zoom link and the church could do something special for the ladies. It was quite emotional, and everyone was excited to be able to see each other after a long time.”*



PICTURE 4: REVEREND ERIKA SAMU LAFOA’I CONDUCTING AN ONLINE CHURCH SERVICE DURING LOCKDOWN.



Methodist and Latter-Day Saint churches adapted and offered innovative ways of conducting Holy Communion.

*“Holy Communion was conducted through Vahefonua Facebook page every 1st Sunday of the Month. Families themselves were creative selecting their own steward at home to schedule and lead their afternoon prayer. They also use their home steward to serve Holy Communion while lead by the Minister from Facebook.”*

*“Partaking of the sacrament (which is done weekly in our church) proved difficult for widows and single women in our congregations because the sacrament needs to be prepared by men holding the priesthood, but widows and single women were assured of promised blessings even if they weren’t able to partake of the sacrament (bread and water) during the initial weeks of lockdown. The bishops and the sisters in the Relief Society organization kept in contact with them throughout...When social distancing restrictions were slowly lifted, the sacrament was delivered to the homes of widows and single women.”*

**Expanding church service attendance**

Church leaders whose churches went digital noted that online platforms opened up their churches to a wider community beyond their usual Sunday congregation. In some cases, these was an international reach such as people living overseas who joined in on Sunday Services via the social media platforms, creating larger than usual gatherings. The online services allowed people who were not in regular contact physically to now see each other on a more regular basis.

*“Our church had a Facebook page which we used to connect everyone to listen and take part in the service. Our Sunday School program also continued on using the Facebook page. It was a good turnout on Facebook, and it was shared with other churches around NZ and Australia.”*

*“We continue on with our services and our people joined us from home. It’s a positive turn for our people but at the same time we reached a much larger community that is around 5,000 – 10,000 viewers on average every Sunday.”*

*“We run church services on Zoom for those who have access to computers. Some join in on their mobile phone. Some families run their own Zoom for their family members here in Auckland, Australia, Hastings, Napier, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea. Some tune in to Hope channel Fiji and listen to the programmes for the children, youth, and preaching services for the adults.”*

### Enhancing family fellowship

Family time became the cornerstone of the lockdown for many Pacific church families according to church leaders. Churches encouraged families to fellowship together in spirit and in unity. For many families it was to become the new norm during the duration of the lockdown to do things together. Families were becoming ‘creative’ in their communication, and for many, what was initially a novelty soon became the norm.

*“We were not affected that bad, because that time we spend with our family.”*

*“Although that there were negative impact but the positive outweigh some of the negative as families were creative of new ways of conducting family service at home and Church Ministers using of Social Media.”*

*“The Church was well prepared in all aspects way before COVID-19 occurs. There’s no impact on church programmes and everything was under control. The main focus of church programmes is to strengthen home and families and Covid-19 was the best time to see and hear from church families how they achieved that focus.”*

*“Our Church leader from the Church Headquarters instruct[ed] us during the lockdown to perform our Sunday Service in our own homes and families. So, every Sunday till the end of the lockdown our service in our families was great.”*

### Growing spiritually and financially

One church leader in Auckland highlighted that church finances increased during the lockdown. This was contrary to what the church was expecting, and what the majority of churches experienced.

*“The church’s income increased during lockdown. So, that was a surprise as we expected it to drop. In fact, we prepared for it to drop but it increased, and it increased quite substantially... we still get people through the TV Ministry to donate from outside the church... But the church’s weekly giving increased. I think it said*

*that where the people are at. Usually your money tells you where the people are at...It was not because any of them got pay rises, it was more a spiritual thing. People pressing closer to the Lord perhaps. That has continued now and has not stopped.”*

### Resting and recuperating

According to two case study church leaders, one of the best opportunities that the lockdown presented was the time to relax and recover. One church leader described church as sometimes stressful and demanding and that the lockdown removed some of those stressors. Lockdown also helped church congregants save money on petrol and time on the roads and gave people some breathing space.

*“I think this was the best time for resting. Even for myself, for that 6 weeks, I was recharging. I stayed home for 6 weeks. The car never moved for 6 weeks. There was a lot of positive things that came out of COVID-19.”*

*“I think a lot of people, up until we came out of lockdown did not really miss church... They had all this free time and because church is stressful, and you have to put your hand to the plough. There is a high demand and usually it is high maintenance. It uses up your time and there was a time when they had to get to work but now could stay home and save petrol. Our petrol bill, that was huge savings. Probably the lockdown helped for us reducing some of the normal stressors. I mean it introduced new stressors but removed a lot of the usual stressors of the daily rat race like traffic and all that stuff.”*



PICTURE 5: FROM MOTHER'S DAY, MELEPOPUA VAKA AND HER GRANDCHILDREN DURING FAKAMÉ.

## Negative experiences for churches during lockdown

### Experiencing a sense of loss

Church leaders described experiencing loss during the lockdown: a loss of freedom, a loss of autonomy to conduct programmes, a loss of finances, a loss of connection both physically and spiritually, and a loss of pastoral care. Church leaders expressed frustration about not being able to meet up physically as a communal body to run their regular programmes and the negative impact on the churches finances as many churches rely on members donations to support church maintenance and to support the Minister.

*“The COVID 19 has greatly impacted our church family, just as the whole country. More or less we were locked in the houses, likened to prisons. It limited our freedom. As a result, we can’t conduct our church services as well as meeting up now and then, to engage and share as a family. How our church operates financially depends largely upon the church members’ donation. Again, that was another burden.”*

*“The most impact of the Covid-19 on our church is the congregation not able to gather together on Sunday as a community to share the gospel and worship together especially in the Level 4. The major impact was the finance where we stop all collection and projects in order for the individual families to survive daily.”*

*“No physical gathering. No tithes coming in to pay for lease. No community gathering. Programmes were affected.”*

### Experiencing great spiritual impacts due to programme cancellations

For some churches, the disruption was abrupt, leaving members adrift as regular programmes which they were attending enthusiastically was no longer happening. Church leaders felt that the cancellation of these programmes had a great spiritual impact on their members. Sunday services, Sunday school, elderly connection, outreach programmes to the homeless, health and fitness groups, pastoral care, cultural activities, and choir practices were programmes reported as significantly disrupted during the lockdown. Other church leaders mentioned the difficulty or inability to carry out pastoral duties such as funerals, home visits and special spiritual services such as holy communion, and partaking of the sacrament.

*“Sunday services are the highlight of the week as Church is to bring people together. For instance, children have their Sunday schools prior to the combined language church service where the combined choir sing. To the elderly people, on the other hand, Sundays are once a week of social contact. These were*

*all affected and interrupted by COVID-19. In addition, the weekly bible studies and choir practices were cancelled. The spiritual impact of these program cancellations was immense.”*

*“Outreach programme to the homeless stopped. Health activity/fitness group stopped because of restrictions. Families who needed support (pastoral) care - no face to face meetings, no cultural activities - use of language reduced.”*

*“We did not have time to meet and fellowship together as members... To share and assist one another because of the restriction.”*

### Highlighting the digital divide within Pacific communities

The lockdown highlighted the digital divide issue facing our Pacific communities with many not having devices, internet connectivity, or the capability to connect online. This led to some churches stopping programmes entirely, including Sunday services, and encouraging families to conduct their own family services at home. Even when churches did have online Sunday services, some families in their congregations were not able to connect because they did not have the means to do so, and this could be a particular hardship for elderly members.

*“Communication unreached to our elderly, also to our vulnerable who are facing financial crisis. Visitation totally shut down, many church activities were on halt and church finance crippled because of people staying away from church for 2 month[s].”*

*“Our services and programmes affected. Worship together interrupted. Some families found no connections with our online services.”*

*“Some of the church members do not have access to the internet, so it’s very hard to spread the message to them especially the elderly.”*

### Creating uncertainty around church fellowship and finances

For some church leaders, the lockdown heightened the feeling of uncertainty and apprehension of the unknown. Given this situation being an unprecedented crisis, church leaders were not aware of how long the lockdown would last or how long they were to be without fellowship or finances. Some felt unprepared to face a long period of not fellowshipping together or running regular church programmes.

*“Sustainability of services and fellowship, also our activities, we just could not run all programs except church services.”*

*“The Sunday services were affected in a negative way as people could not fellowship, people were missing the fellowship, the camaraderie and the connection. People were unprepared for the length of the lockdown as well as the adjusting to the new norm.”*

## What were the needs of the Pacific families in your church during the COVID-19 lockdown?

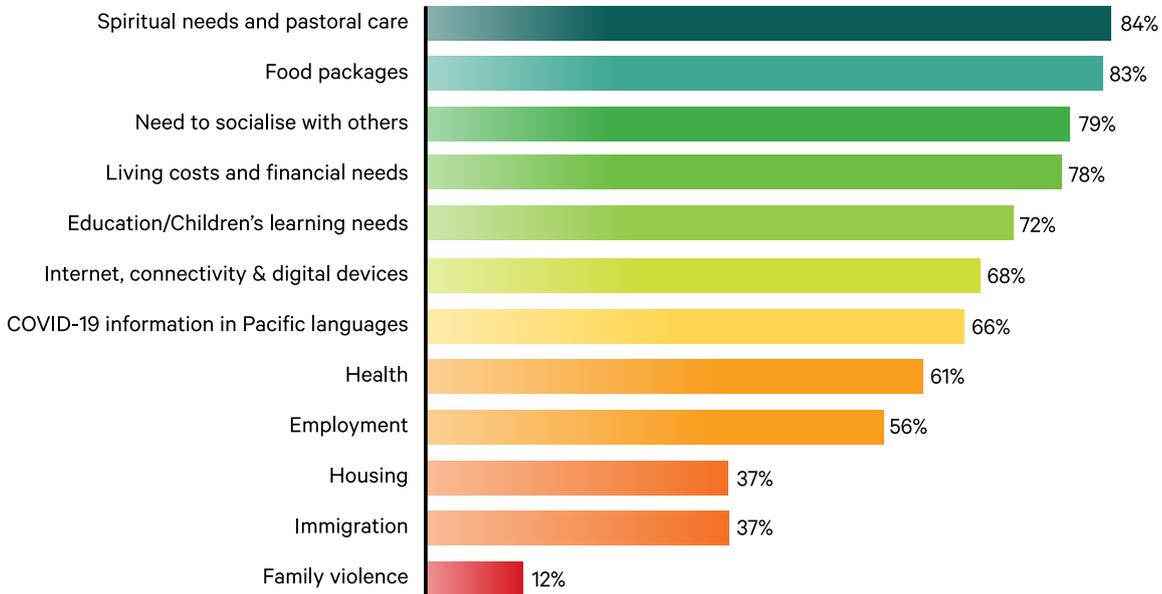


FIGURE 8: NEEDS OF PACIFIC CHURCH FAMILIES DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

### The impact of lockdown on families

The lockdown created a surge in the needs of Pacific families. When shown a list of needs families faced during the lockdown, 84% of church leaders noted that spiritual and pastoral needs were significant for their communities, followed by food packages (83%), social needs (79%), financial needs (78%), and educational needs (72%). Over one half of church leaders also reported that digital needs (68%), Pacific language COVID-19 information (66%), health (61%) and employment (61%) were also significant for their families. Other needs, such as housing (37%), immigration (37%), and family violence (12%) were recognised by less than half of the church leaders (Figure 8).

### How churches responded to family needs during lockdown

Church leaders were also asked to describe the ways in which their churches helped their families during the lockdown, as shown in Figure 9. Church leaders reported providing pastoral care support (41%) and food support (39%) more than any other type of support. Additionally, 35% of church leaders reported providing online or telephone-based support to families. Just over one quarter of church leaders reported seeking government support to support their families (26%), while around one fifth provided information and communication support (22%), or financial support (20%). Twelve per cent of church leaders sought support from non-government organisations (NGOs), while 10% reported being unable to offer any support or being unsure of how to access support for their families.

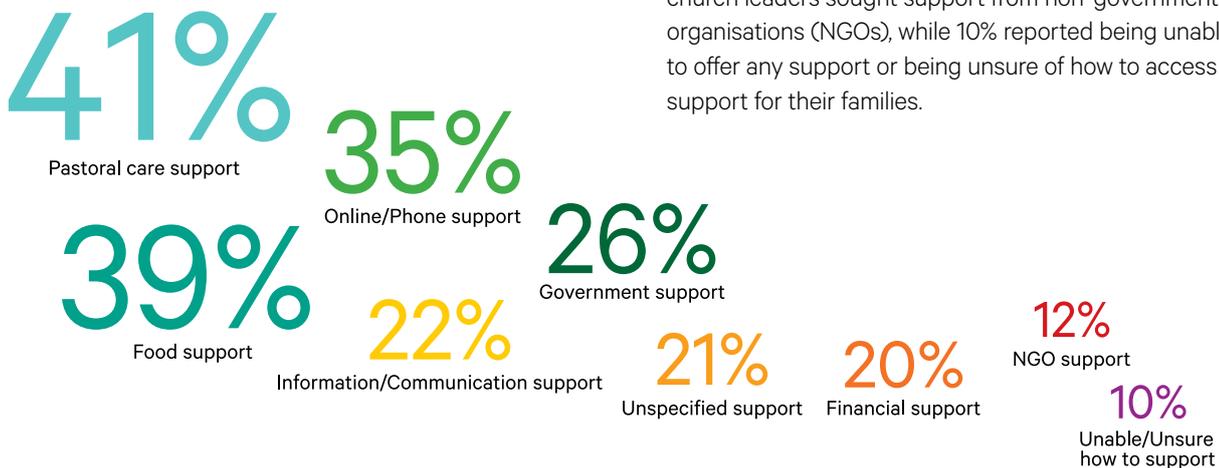


FIGURE 9: HOW CHURCHES RESPONDED TO PACIFIC FAMILIES' NEEDS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

## Barriers to addressing families' needs

### Struggling to ask for help

Some families did not initially reach out for support because of a mentality that someone else is worse off than them. For one family this had been embedded in them through traditional cultural practices. It is premised on the biblical principle of being content with what you have lest you fall into the trap of greed and gluttony.

*"In our culture, in the way we are brought up, we don't ask for help. We fear that others are worse off than us...We get food and food vouchers. Church has a food bank which was available. Even though it was our church we didn't feel we should just help ourselves in case there were others that needed it more than us. Big families like ours are just a handful in our church. We knew. And although we knew it was available, we just felt that someone else might need it more... The church offered but we just did not access it."*

### Lacking devices to connect with church and educators

Some families did not have the means to connect online to their church or other communities. One case study participant thought that churches should be more aware of the technology gap so they could offer support to connect people into the digital space.

*"[The church needs] ...to work on updating our data of which families don't have online access. Facebook had become a tool for a lot of churches to use. But certain people don't have access especially the older ones. And this made it a little bit harder to keep them in the loop. When you see each other online you can make sure they are ok and not left out. Is it a [support for a] device or is a connection at home and also do they know how to operate the device? What if online was taken away too? How do we then still be a church?"*

## Positive experiences for families during lockdown

### Connecting and strengthening relationships

Family relationships were strengthened during the lockdown. Parents and children had positive experiences as the lockdown gave them the opportunity to bond and reconnect. Parents had time to teach their children life skills and take an active interest in their education. Married couples were also having positive experiences as partners were valuing and appreciating each other's company and contribution around the household. Families with members overseas had come together amidst the crisis as they had more time to communicate and connect with each other.



*"We are family orientated and we love our kids, and we support them and communicate with them. Help them with homework etc. We build relationships with our kids during lockdown and encourage them to stay positive and not worry."*

*"So many good things that came out like a family coming together during lockdown. I have two sons overseas and we came together in that time. So, we could come together because everyone had more time. The church also gave to the people and it was not just getting money but handing it out. We came together as a family and we had good relationships with our children."*

*"Me, my husband, my daughter and her husband and her two children [were in one bubble]. When we all stayed together it was a very warm gathering of our family and we all obeyed what the Minister told us to do. It strengthened our relationships with our children and also my husband."*

Love, 'ofa, alofa or aroha was deepened during the lockdown. But not just any love, a reciprocal love between family members. The love between family members was given and received daily and enhanced as members spent quality time together because every member was present under the same roof at the same time. The time invested into bonding, spiritual worship and fellowship was very positive for families.

*"There is a saying of this Covid-19, that of the reciprocal love of family, a saying of the closer bonding of family, the father and the mother, children and grandchildren. And there is also another saying that of a time for grandchildren with grandparents or their uncle or with their parents, as well as time for family worship. We became closer through family worship and fellowship. For our work, I would come in from work and my wife would leave for her work, and we would do this from January to December, and thank goodness there is a Sunday. But there is a saying, that the grandchildren can see their grandparents, children can see that there is a father and a mother at home every evening for the*

*family worship, so there was deepening of love within the family, and deepening love of God.”*

*“A lot of time I don’t have much time with my family, to sit down and have a conversation and provide some guidance to the children, however, Covid-19 lockdown brought my family together to get to know God and his goodness. It provided opportunities to spend time together, to strengthen our relationships. Although we were poor but through God’s love and the kindness that my family received from various sources, we were very happy and contented, and we know that we have a living God who answers all prayers.”*



### **Strengthening spiritual family bonds**

Family devotions became more frequent in family households. As they connected in prayer and devotion their connection to God was being strengthened. There was also a better connection with the church community as church unity and spiritual growth was happening in family households. Families considered the lockdown a time of privilege to draw closer to God, to build their spiritual relationships which would in turn bless their families so that they could be a blessing to others.

*“We are building them [our children] in the Word of the Lord. Our relationship with our kids and God will flow to other families. It is natural... COVID-19 makes me seek more of the Lord and love my wife more, and my wife loves me more! That love flows to our church.”*

*“...They [the families] had a day of the week to do lotu (devotion) online and then share it with the rest of the church. Inviting the church into our homes was a bit of a glimpse of how other families are doing it...We prayed more, we had more time. The church encouraged families to be families and that was positive. That brought families closer... It felt like the contact in lockdown, there was more regularity than when it is not lockdown.”*

### **Feeling blessed and helping others in need**

During the lockdown, some families had more money in their pockets and more petrol in the car, and because of this they were able to help other families in need. Some families went back to the basics of life, enjoying the simple things like fellowship and having enough to eat. Some families who needed support were helped by the church directly or referred to social services to support them with their needs.

*“We received some food and money to help our families... Mentally and physically to me was really good. We had enough rest and we also did not spend that much money and also we could communicate with the children.”*

*“We saved a lot of money. During that time, we did not go out spending...It brings a lot of good things. Lockdown made us think about a lot of things, like to work out your budget.”*

*“We also involved the kids when we wanted to bless a family. We took some groceries to a big family last week and we did this as a family...We are hoping that in 10 years, 20 years from now, we hope that the kids have learned and that they will continue and look out for others in their time.”*

*“I had my sister, her husband and their daughter who came [from Tonga] to visit my family for three months. During the lockdown I was experiencing some financial hardship because I was on a sickness benefit. I paid my bills and there was not enough left to pay for food because there were too many of us, my two teenagers, my sister, her husband and daughter. Fortunately, the Lord helped through K’aute. We were surprised when there was a knock on the door and four people came to bring support packages for my family because our Church Secretary had contacted and communicated my family’s needs to K’aute. We counted our blessings and God’s love who put it in this organisation’s heart to come in and support my family with so much. We were happy that our family was being cared for and supported, and this strengthen our faith in God, that we are not forgotten. The help came from different places, but God was in charge.”*

In other churches the skills and talents of young professional people were used to support church operations during lockdown. One church supported the setup of a COVID-19 committee made up young professionals, which was empowering for both the young people and the church. Another church had a young member who was good at sourcing available support services and directing families to these. More details of these examples are captured below.



## Community differences

### Impact on churches

Comparisons were made across church denominations, ethnicity, family size and region. While the number of families in a congregation did not make a significant difference to lockdown impacts, the other factors did, particularly in terms of negative impacts. See Appendix 2 for further details.

### Denominational differences

Church leaders across all denominations indicated a positive impact on their Church services. The Assembly of God and other Christian churches noted an equally positive impact on their children's programmes, while Congregational churches noted an equally positive impact on their youth programme. Conversely, the Methodist churches felt a negative impact on their children's programme. Congregational and Assembly of God churches felt a more negative impact on their women's and men's fellowships, while other denominations felt a more negative impact on their youth programmes.

### Ethnic differences

Samoan churches were more likely to indicate a negative impact on their youth and women's programmes. Tongan churches were more likely to say that their children's and youth programmes were more negatively affected. Other ethnic groups noted a higher negative impact on their children's, youth, and family/parent's programmes.

### Regional differences

Auckland-based churches were more likely to indicate youth programme and women's fellowship as the most negatively affected programmes. Wellington-based churches were more likely to note church services as most negatively affected. Churches in the South Island mostly indicated family/parent's programmes as the most negatively affected programme.

### Impact on families

Comparisons made across the four areas (church denominations, ethnicity, family size and region) showed some differences in the needs of families. See Appendix 3 for further details.

### Denominational differences

Based on church denomination, Congregational churches were more likely to note 'spiritual needs and pastoral care' as their families' highest need, Methodist churches were more likely to indicate 'food packages', Assembly of God churches had three needs that were highly noted 'spiritual needs and pastoral care,' 'food packages,' and 'need to socialise with other family and church members'. Latter-Day Saints churches noted 'need to socialise with other family and church members' as their highest family need. For all other churches, 'food packages' was indicated as the highest family need.

### Differences by number of families in the church

Churches composed of fewer than 40 families in their congregation were more likely to indicate 'food packages' as their highest need. Churches with 40 to 99 families were more likely to specify 'need to socialise with other family and church members' as their families highest need, while churches with 100 or more families were more likely to say that 'spiritual needs and pastoral care' was their highest need.

### Regional differences

Regionally, a high proportion of churches in the Auckland region selected 'spiritual needs and pastoral care' as the highest family need, whilst a high proportion of churches in the Wellington region noted 'food packages' as the highest family need. A high proportion of churches in other regions of the North Island and from the South Island indicated 'living costs and financial needs' as their highest family need.



## 2. Response

This section looks at how church leaders described their church's responses to family and community needs during the lockdown. We discuss which funding sources they utilised, where they sought support and information from, and how they received communication during the lockdown.

### Funding sources used by churches

Churches used whatever means that were available to them to support families. Some churches were unresponsive to this question (22%), which may suggest that they did not know what sources were available or how to access them. Over half of churches, however, were able to utilise their own church donations or church Trust funds (52%). Many churches also accessed government funding (41%), while almost one quarter of churches accessed support agencies (23%). Community fundraising was used by a smaller group of churches (12%). Business sponsorship was the least common funding source at 4% (Figure 10).

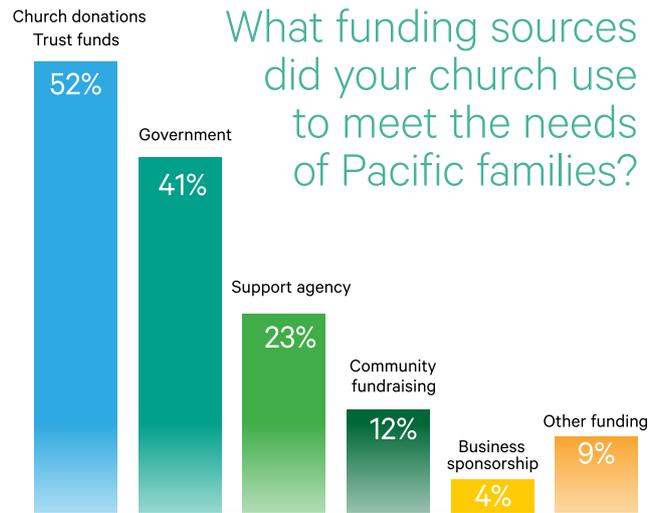


FIGURE 10: FUNDING SOURCES USED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF PACIFIC FAMILIES

### Support groups and agencies accessed by churches

Churches that were aware and able to access support relied mainly on three support groups: Pacific social service providers, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, and the Ministry of Social Development. Other support groups were accessed but to a lesser extent (Figure 11). Interestingly, a quarter of church leader participants were unresponsive to this question, which may suggest that they were unaware or unable to access support.

What support groups/agencies did your church work with to meet the needs of Pacific families?

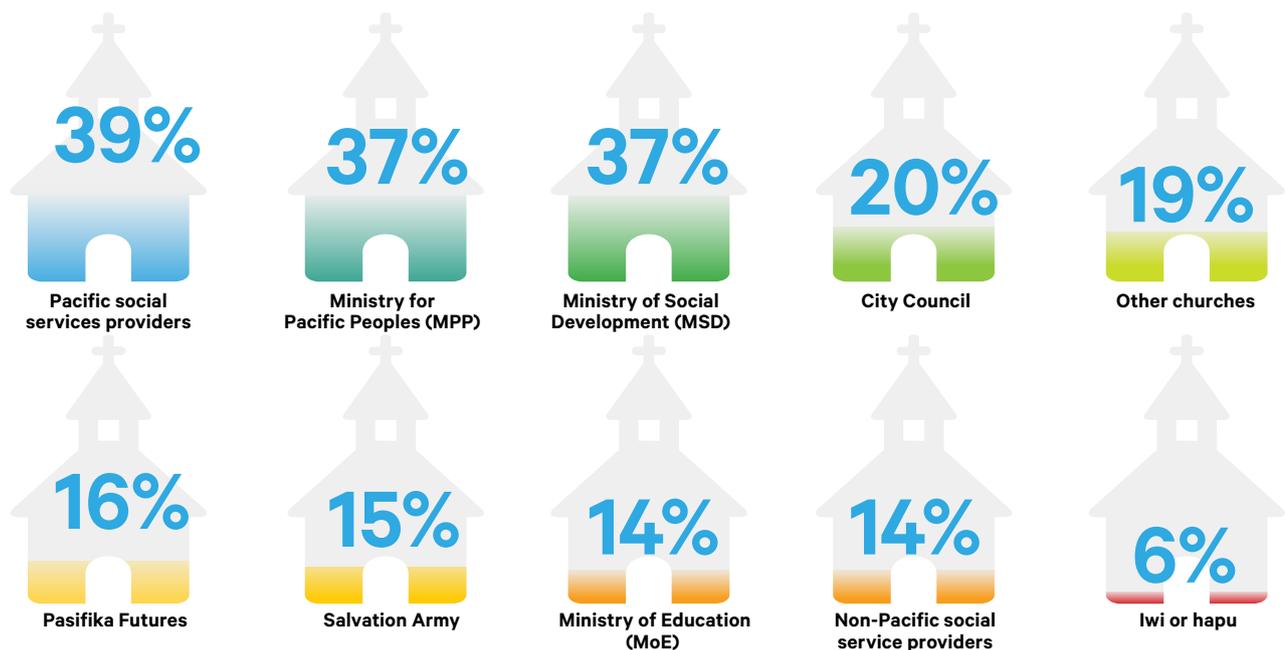


FIGURE 11: CHURCHES WORKING WITH SUPPORT GROUPS/AGENCIES

Once they became aware of what was available, many church leaders were grateful for the support from government agencies. Churches actively referred families to social support services available during the lockdown, and encouraged them to make full use of the assistance. Some churches were particularly grateful to the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Ministry of Education, Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment, and Ministry of Social Development.

*"[We] worked with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (MPP) and the Fono to reach families in need. Weekly meetings with other Fijian Church Leaders and MPP updates. Translated resources for All of Government response. Filmed Fijian message for COVID-19."*

*"The information received via email from MBIE and MPP kept me informed of what services and help was available. We were able to reach out to our families and give assistance to those who needed urgent attention."*

*"The Minister/pastor provided pastoral care to the families who were suffering and there were vouchers and money provided for all families in the church from the funding that we received from Ministry of Social Development."*

*"We received funding from the Ministry of Education - and we were able to help our families in need - also a special fund of \$5,000 which helped with groceries for all families."*

## Community differences

Comparisons made between ethnicity and region yielded no differences in the sources of funding or support groups accessed by churches. There were, however, some differences in types of support groups accessed by churches by denomination and family size. See Appendix 4 for further information.

## Denominational differences

Congregational and Assembly of God churches were more likely to seek support from the Ministry for Pacific peoples, whilst Methodist and other Christian churches sought more support from Pacific social service providers. Other churches were equally likely to use Pacific social service providers and Ministry of Social Development.

## Differences by the number of families in the church

Those churches with the lowest and highest numbers of families (<20 and 100+) were most likely to use Pacific social service providers, whilst those with families in between (20 to 99) were more likely to access the Ministry for Pacific Peoples.



## How churches supported their families

### Providing food parcels and financial support

Those churches that were able to use their own church funds to support families were mainly helping families who were struggling to meet basic needs such as food and utility bills. These churches were able to send families food parcels and provide financial assistance, as well as giving internet and education support.

*“The church elders were designated specific families of the parish and wider Samoan community, they maintained communication with them and reported back to the church committee about who required help with bills and food parcels. This was then distributed to them as required.”*

*“A Pacific Trust within the church received two lots of funding to support Pacific families in our spheres of influence, community - food packages, support with utilities bills, internet, advocating with schools and education support. The support was 53 Pacific families initially and then 60 other Pacific families with the second lot of funding.”*

*“We supported our families with food parcels. We make contact via Facebook and calling. We provided some financial assistance.”*

*“[We provided] Pastoral care and 70 dollars voucher.”*

*“We as church leaders contacted families, we know they are in need because parents lost their jobs and direct them to the places where they can get food parcels and financial assistance to help pay for their rent. Some of us shop online and send shopping to families in need for food. Some of us have to break our Bubbles to take food from our garden at home and food from our fridge, and to go to the ATM machine to withdraw some money and take it to families that are really struggling.”*

*“The church has a structured Welfare & Self Reliance Emergency Response plan and approach for identifying those that are needy and linking them to those that can help them either within the church or from within the community.”*

### Offering spiritual support and regular communication

A lot of churches were only able to be a pillar of hope for families, offering spiritual support and prayers rather than offer tangible support. They also communicated to their families where support could be accessed by sending key information, and at times sought help on behalf of the families.

*“Our main responses to our families were daily and/or regular phone communication to each household to ensure that they are not alone or left to their own devices to try and work through the lockdown, regular pastoral care and the weekly preparation/delivery of food parcels.”*

*“We do lots and lots of checking up with the families to make sure no family is left behind. We received The Preparing and Awareness fund via the Work and Income where we were able to provide food parcels for the families. Church Minister conducted few online services via the Radio Samoa from Nelson. We also set up a Facebook Chat group via messenger where Church Minister sent out update on covid-19 daily and few messages to encourage not so much spiritually but also physically. We did really well as a church community not so much for the church members but all the Samoan Community especially the RSE workers.”*

*“A Church’s Facebook page was setup and families were notified about how to look after themselves during the covid-19 pandemic. Besides, any helpful information from the MPP was distributed on the page, such as families needing help with food and who were facing financial difficulties. Families were also encouraged to apply for funding offered by the government and other supporting agencies. Besides providing families with their spiritual needs, the Church on the other hand, offered to help those who were really struggling with the basic necessities.”*

*“Spiritual needs were met through virtual platforms. Information about Covid19 were posted on all ward and stake social media pages. If they were not translated in Samoan or Tongan (our biggest wards/congregations) then we utilized our skilled and qualified linguists/language teachers in our membership to translate the information before we posted it. Most of the time, the bishops for both our Samoan and Tongan congregations made personal phone calls to each of their members, checking up on their welfare and safety as well as relaying key information about Covid19 restrictions and plans to them in the Samoan and Tongan languages.”*

*“Ringling our families. Posting up relevant COVID information via emails and Turou group page. Online meetings via Zoom to check those that were to become unemployed had signed for job seeker and those in employment had applied via their employer for the wage subsidy. Turou checked for members to take the test, if unwell - isolate and stay home to save lives.”*

## How families supported their churches

### Empowering and engaging young Pacific people

It is important to note the important role young Pacific people played during lockdown to support churches and their families. The digital skills of the youth were most useful in helping families set up online so that they could attend online services and meetings, and post videos and photos.

*“The young ones helped their families and made things easier. The young people were the ones who were very active online and connected the church and community during the lockdown.”*

## 3. Recovery

This section describes different approaches taken by four specific churches through the journey of COVID-19 lockdown as explored during talanoa with church leaders and family members. Each case study presents a range of responses actioned by the church during lockdown as well as specific recovery measures put in place.

The approaches are varied and yet equally important and successful for their congregations. Going into the future, it will be important for Pacific churches to recognise their own unique approach to managing crises in their communities such as the COVID-19 lockdown.

### CASE STUDY 1.

A well-prepared approach:  
Congregational Christian Church  
of Samoa Porirua – Ekalesia  
Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano I Samoa  
Porirua

### Response during lockdown

Well in advance of COVID-19, this Samoan congregational church in Porirua had been planning support mechanisms for times of crisis; when lockdown happened, they were already prepared. They were quickly able to utilise the churches 'cash flow', which had been accumulating over a period of 10 years, and develop a new COVID-19 committee to support the flow of information about the COVID-19 situation. The Minister also ensured that he prepared his congregation spiritually with church services and daily devotions. He was a key factor in the church's preparedness, which he states had been part of an overall transformational plan he set out 25 years earlier when he first came to lead the congregation. His main philosophy has been to develop the congregation to become transformative thinkers, positive thinkers, with the ability to make good sustainable decisions to create the positive change.

He emphasised that the church makes collective decisions, and this is fundamentally how they operate. So, when COVID-19 happened they came together and confirmed the decisions to use the church funds and to set up the new COVID-19 committee group.

*"This was not a response to COVID-19 it was building a community that would be ready for anything that comes their way. So COVID-19 was just something that came at its own time, but the community was ready for it. The work has been done a long time ago. Rather than reacting to an issue, we were ready."*

*"The congregation, all of its stuff, welfare, decision making, it has to be done by the congregation... Everything is decided by the congregation."*

### Using church funds wisely

The church used its fund to support family households, whether they were existing or previous members. Previous members were often young people who left to join other churches, but as long as their parents were part of the congregation, they were counted towards the support grants.

*"We did not wait for the Government to do something for us, we have a very good cash flow in this church and we have been working on it for over 10 years now...We collected 161 account numbers of families but only 141 accepted to receive those funds. The others decided they are ok, and they don't need it. We used automatic bank transfer...We could have handled it for more than 3 months if needed. We planned everything well ahead of time...Even our operational costs, which we fund with free offering, we stopped it for three weeks. We did not ask for any funding. We locked it down! But we had a good reserve, and we could operate... So, we have a good cash flow from the use of our properties. For the sustainability of churches, you need cash flow."*

### Empowering young professionals to lead the COVID-19 work for the church

A meeting had been called prior to the lockdown to prepare the church. The formation of a new COVID-19 committee was made and supported by the church. This committee was unique from the rest of the existing church committees because it was led by professional 'young people' who worked across the government sector. These were children of older members of the church. This was different because committee positions in the church were mainly held by elders or senior members of the church. The church Minister stated that this was the right time to "entrust power to our young generation."

*"We had a small committee in our church, the young one, the COVID-19 Committee...[the] Minister told us that the church had to have a meeting...That is when they formed the special committee, one [person] from Health, one from MSD and the other one from MBIE...they were very talented. It was a very special committee. They worked together with [the Minister] and the secretary of the church. That made things easier for our church... All information was released to Facebook for the members of the church by this committee...this committee searched for resources made available by the Government and then got them for our church."*

## Recovery measures

### Playing an important role in culture, language, and housing

The Minister talked about the important role churches have in the revitalisation of Pacific languages in New Zealand. He described a recently established NZ-based collective church trust that is a ‘starting point of a journey’ to support the development of a church-based language curriculum for young people that “*enhances the cultural and language conversation by young people and lets [them] feel proud about their language and culture and use it to converse with each other.*”

*“We can do things like language that can be church based. Because that is where the expression of language and culture is always happening. You can develop your curriculum, utilise your own people to do [it]. So, we can do that...any language. You have classrooms in all these places already there. You know. You don’t have to wait until you go to a secondary school that teaches Samoan language or Tongan language. It is already in the community... We have to build that confidence that if you are Tongan speak Tongan to your Tongan colleagues. Because if we don’t practise it, who will practise it for us? We will have to own it. So, there are a lot of things that this kind of structure can develop for our own people.”*

He also believed that churches need to play a role in community housing given that they often have land and cash flow which could support housing developments, which might in turn generate income.

*“There are a lot of churches with excess land that can build a cash flow by using that piece of land by putting up a family 2-unit that can be rented out. Rather than just building it or preserving it for the church that has not got a sustainability scheme. You have to think outside the box. But many of the Ministers they always think inside the box.”*

### Opportunities for change and transformation

The Minister described COVID-19 as creating the best opportunity for transformation for Pacific communities; an opportunity to change old customs that do not benefit the community and to adopt new ones that bring about wealth and sustainability. The two transformational decisions made by the church were: first, their cultural way of responding to fa’alavelave (cultural obligations); and second, changing how they donated to the corporate body while ensuring they had cash flow.

*“I found COVID-19 as the best opportunity for transformation. I look at it as a very positive way. Transforming our Pacific churches and how we do our things here. We need to build the basic community in such a manner that whatever happens you need to be prepared. We need to be prepared for rainy days.*

*The driving force was to see it in a positive way. To see what God has given to us. God has given us the positive thinking during these times. We have changed a lot in this community in the past 3 months. The transformation was very quick. It is the right time for transformative thinking.”*

### Cultural transformation

Lockdown forced Pacific communities to make some changes, particularly during funerals, however, the Minister considered this a positive development that allowed for future changes. The church decided that moving forward they would as a congregation not support the purchase of bulk goods to express the principle of reciprocity. This practice was normal before the lockdown where families would put a lot of effort and money into purchasing bulk food to demonstrate the value of reciprocity, love and respect of the deceased person. The Minister believed that it only benefited businesses and not the community, and so instead he encouraged the congregation to express the principle in love and kindness and in whatever way families deemed appropriate.

*“One was how we respond to fa’alavelave’s [cultural obligations] and this was huge. We are not going to do the fine mats and buys stuff and then we did it on Sunday. And the Monday after someone passed away and we implemented it straight away. People accepted it as a good decision.”*

### Building up cashflow

To ensure that there was always going to be cash flow in the church a decision was made that instead of 100 percent of annual donations going to the corporate as was always the practice, the church would give 70 percent and keep 30 percent. This decision was transformational in the sense that it went against tradition which has sustained the corporate church for many years. However, the church was comfortable with their decision because they experienced the benefits of having cash flow during times of crisis.

*“The other decision we did was [about who we] take our donations to the bigger church. This time we need to think that something like this might happen again this year [so] we need to decide on the percentage to take over and leave the other. We will hold 30 percent to build our fund for if anything happens again. That is a big decision for us... We spent about \$75,000 to go out to our community, for our own church.”*



## Case Study 2.

### A grassroots approach: The Dream Centre

#### Response during lockdown

A Pastor of the multi-cultural Dream Centre church in Auckland described their response during the COVID-19 lockdown as “grassroots.” The church took things back to basics and asked families to focus on the Homefront. Members were asked to focus on their own families. The church leaders had been encouraged to focus on their own families, but they also extended the support for other families in the church.

*“You know what had lockdown done? It took the church from its corporate focus to now down to a real grassroots which really is the foundation of our church which are the families...what we told our church [was]...we don't want you to worry about any of the Ministries, anything to do with the church, just focus on the families, Mom and Dad, the children you know fellowship together but also things that we have lost like just having a meal together, table fellowship, connecting with Mom and dad. Like family time with children and that was our primary focus...So the lockdown was very good in that sense because it really just reaffirmed what we have been trying to do before lockdown...and the real need for, cause, that is what our focus is all around that family unit. Strong church, corporate church.”*

#### An actively engaged leadership team

The church also had an active leadership team that worked together doing different roles to support its members during the lockdown. They were meeting and talking regularly and taking on different tasks such as communicating key COVID-19 messages to members, conducting welfare checks with members, and leading online programmes for spiritual connection.

*“I think with our leaders... they were very independent in terms of being able to lead the church obviously. They were decisive, you know. Calm, there was no panic and we were talking. The Pastors, I think we were meeting initially each week by Zoom. So, there was that ongoing communication. We still had that where we were going in terms of, not just seeing how everyone was doing but also how we disseminated the information that needed to go. We had people that were going onto the National COVID-19 website. So, stage 3, we had all the information of that. We sent it out. There were certain people that did those roles and others were just finding out how everyone was doing. You know, those roles did not exist before lockdown. They just came. The church really just naturally evolved into it. And it was not hard.”*

The Pastor of the church played a vital spiritual role to support everyone in prayer and encouragement. He stated that his role was to give spiritual uplifting. He did feel that during this pandemic, amidst the uncertainty he needed to have it all together to give people reassurances and to build confidence of his members. He was also ever watchful of the events unfolding both locally and internationally to ensure he was up to date, and this knowledge supported the decisions he would make for the church.

*“I felt that I had to have it all together...I had to reassure them, the Lord is here with us, from that angle. We had a food bank, we can help. Even though there was no food in the food bank, don't worry, the church is here. We will always help. My role really was to give some confidence and to allow that to flow down to the other leaders. Also, to try and discern what was actually happening... paying attention to not just the national news but the international news in trying to see how this thing was moving. You try and understand, is this serious or is this just going to blow over within a short period of time. So a lot of the information was stuff that I was picking up on the news...from the websites...all the announcements on the TV... my job was what I have always been doing as a Pastor. It just went to a different level, into a different direction.”*

#### Recovery measures

##### Harvest 2025 family focussed plan

The Dream Centre was building on a family focussed plan they have named Harvest 2025. The COVID-19 situation helped the church to bring together the final pieces, and to bring it together

*“We were already on the plan. Our plan was focussed on families. In fact, it was an initiative hoping to consolidate on family plans... It hadn't really taken off but the focus for us is getting our families on plans where they can be become spiritually and socially, economically sustainable. For example, finance... let's connect that. What every family would have...I would call them 3 dreams: (1) My children would go to University, (2) We would own a house and (3) to be debt free. So here is the plan. We will work with the income and this is how you are going to work through those kinds of channels. And how you get support and working through those channels. It was always and initiative whether we knew it would take 2 to 3 years before we got it right. So, we would appoint a mentor to every family and there would be buddy families where you would work with other families and that be part of the whole life group thing. We would also focus on marriages strengthening especially among the men... getting men around health.”*

### Case Study 3.

#### A family-based approach: Invercargill Samoan Assembly of God church & Latter-Day Saints churches

#### Response during lockdown

A Samoan Assembly of God church in Invercargill was simple in their approach. Due to having a small congregation that did not all have proper devices, the Minister encouraged followers to spend time with their families to pray and praise together. He explained that his role was to encourage and pray for his church even though he could not see them or engage with them. He did provide online Sunday services for his members, which were attended by those who could connect.

The Latter-Day Saints churches nationwide used a home centred – church supported model during lockdown. It was based on a worldwide church reset in 2018, which aimed to involve the whole family in the learning and engagement with scripture. The lockdown gave them the opportunity to test this model which ended up being a great success. The benefits were that youth began to regularly engage, and meetings and bible studies were being conducted effectively online.

*“Two weeks prior to New Zealand’s COVID-19 lockdown, the (overall) Church leaders suspended face to face Sunday church services across the world and asked each Household to begin holding one-hour sacrament meetings in their homes. In 2018, the Church leaders reset the way Church should be run or viewed, focusing on a Home Centred - Church Supported model. This meant that Sunday School programs were no longer a ‘come to church and be taught’ but rather a ‘learn at home as individuals and families - and then come to Church and share.’ With this model, when the Covid19 lockdown came, the membership of the [name omitted] were already used to doing ‘spiritual learning’ at home. Organization meetings (for both Women’s organizations called ‘Relief Society’ and the Men’s group called ‘Elders Quorum’ transitioned well in to holding virtual meetings beginning first on Messenger and then moving to Zoom meetings). Ward (congregation) Youth Leaders began meeting weekly via Zoom with their youth, who also had begun using the Zoom platform for their 1-hour Seminary (Bible Studies) classes each weekday morning during the lockdown period. This was quite a positive impact for us. Prior to lockdown, some of our wards had only 4 or 5 youth regularly attending (in person) each morning. When lockdown moved Seminary to a virtual classroom - everyone attended (no one missed). A couple of weeks into lockdown, our Self Reliance classes including BYU Pathway Connect classes joined the virtual platforms. [We]... stayed in contact with each other through phone calls, text messages, emails and social media.”*

### Recovery measures

#### Learning from the experience

Many churches had been unprepared for the lockdown period, and the disruption was significant.

*“Interruption meant that things could not continue. It has taken quite a bit of effort to get things going again.”*

Church leaders recognised the benefits of connecting digitally if physical contact was not possible, but they need support for resources and systems to be able to do so in the future.

*“We need to get online resources like cameras, streaming, editing etc so that next time something like this happens, we will definitely be doing online church services.”*

#### Applying for funding opportunities to support church recovery

Since the lockdown, some churches, such as the Samoan church in Invercargill, have sought opportunities to grow and develop by applying for available funds like the Ministry for Pacific People’s COVID-19 Community fund to fill a need for digital devices for families who were without connection during the lockdown. If successful, this would allow their church families to connect and communicate more easily when situations like this arise again.

### Case Study 4.

#### A technology-based approach: Hamilton SUTT Te Rapa<sup>5</sup>

#### Response during lockdown

##### The development of Facebook communication pages

In response to the lockdown, the Steward of the Tongan SUTT Te Rapa church in Hamilton set up three separate Facebook pages that served different purposes to assist in the communication and provision of support to church members during the lockdown. The first Facebook page was called Ma’u’anga Kelesi (meaning source of grace), the second was Fakamatala Fakatonga (meaning Information) and the third was Ma’u’anga Tokoni (meaning source of help and support).

<sup>5</sup> The Tongan SUTT Te Rapa church in Hamilton serves 30 families and is led by a Steward with the support of a newly established Trust made up of 12 Trustees.

### Ma'u'anga Kelesi SUTT Te Rapa

The Ma'u'anga Kelesi Facebook page was designed for the congregation's spiritual connection. Through this page the church livestreamed their regular Sunday and Thursday services, which were led by lay preachers who took turns streaming live from their lotofale (living rooms).

The church also utilised its Facebook page to engage families in fun activities like the singing challenge, family-led skits for Fakamē, and Mother's Day greetings. The singing challenge was an initiative led by the leader of the Youth and Christian Education Department whereby one family would share a song online and then nominate another family to take up the challenge. For the Fakamē (Children's Day or White Sunday) the Steward invited families to come up with their own skits to share on the Facebook page during the week leading up to the Fakamē. Each family also shared their Mother's Day Greetings via this Facebook page. These were popular activities which kept families engaged as they worked together towards a common purpose of spiritual devotion to God and to one another. Families keenly awaited these activities during the lockdown and were actively commenting on the Facebook page to praise and provide positive encouragement to other families when their activities were on. Members who missed out on the live stream could also watch the activities later.

*"When we initiated the singing activity, we decided to practice a song and upload it on Facebook, and we nominated the Steward's family, and then they nominated the Tautaiolepo family. When they came on, they were all dressed up nicely. What I value from this activity was to see each of the families being happy to participate in the activity. They looked well and beautiful. Their children were happy to appear on camera. Personally, it did not matter whether we gathered in the church, it was very satisfying to set up a little dedicated space in my living from which we could share with other families and worship as a family. It was important that our church leader was aware that families were happy to follow through with church activities at home."*

*"The singing challenge set up by the leader of the Youth and Christian Education gave families something to do, and they looked forward to it. It was also helpful that food and family support packages were provided, and Tongan Language information about Covid-19 was fed directly to families. They looked forward to the next family's song, their Fakamē skit. That kept them busy. I know that everybody looked forward to these activities. Every family created their drama and they acted it out, very enriching. I think that was the most successful programme during lockdown. Every family took part. [laughs] And most of the live stream were done from their telephones. The result, we can see the island heart. If you need to do something, you will find a way to do it, regardless of the obstacles."*

The positive impact on the church was that it promoted teamwork, working together as a family unit. The father became the camera person whilst the mother led the service from their living room, and the children were all there. The family altar became alive and it created a new way for families to work together, using a family-centred approach to delivering church services.

### Fakamatala Fakatonga Covid-19

The Fakamatala Fakatonga page was set up to share information in the Tongan language about COVID-19. The Chairperson of the Trust was responsible for posting Tongan language information on COVID-19 from the Government website, Pacific health sector, and Tongan health professionals across New Zealand and abroad. This page was initially set up specifically for elderly church members and mothers, however, to reach the wider Tongan community, it was decided the page would be made available to the public.

*"The Government's response was good for mainstream through the Covid-19.govt.nz, but to me there should have been a separate page for Pacific languages. The elderly was the most vulnerable, and we shared the [Tongan] translation to the Fakamatala Fakatonga page, short videos from the Police, information from MPP, even a Tongan doctor from Sydney who shared daily information. The Ministry for Pacific peoples should have a team of translators. The Tongan media should also play their part in disseminating information."*

### Ma'u'anga Tokoni SUTT Te Rapa

The Ma'u'anga Tokoni page was set up specifically for church families to access information about support services and updates from the work carried out by the Sub-committees.

#### Sub-committees actively engaging families with support

The Trust's three sub-committees: Education Committee, Vetekina 'o e Hopoate (Social and Economic Services) Committee and the Tonga Culture and Traditions Committee, were activated during the lockdown to identify families' needs and seek out the relevant support services and entitlements that were available to them.

Some families experienced hardship during the lockdown.

*"Three were made redundant. We followed up a Tongan Social Worker and she advised us on what about the way you talk with WINZ. When you talk with WINZ you use a softer voice, because the WINZ workers are also human too. One father was so happy that WINZ paid four weeks rent. We called a Tongan Economist for advice and she gave two principles, first, Mo'ui Fakapotopoto (live wisely or sustainably) and Mo'ui Topono (to be contended)."*

Twenty-two families received support from K'aute, the Whānau Ora Service Provider in Hamilton. Other support for the church's families was provided by the Salvation Army, Hamilton City Council, Tongan Council, and Ministry of Social Development. The team extended their work to include Tongan families in Hamilton and Auckland who reached out for help. The Secretary was very successful in identifying and referring Tongan families to the Whānau Ora service providers that she was offered a job towards the end of the lockdown.

### A focus on education needs

The Education Committee undertook a baseline survey to assess the Tongan language, education and IT needs of the families. The Survey revealed that only one out of the 10 secondary school students had access to learning devices during lockdown. Whilst all 30 families had access to the internet, this access was mainly through their mobile phones. The Trust Chairperson and the Education Committee members contacted the relevant high schools via phones, Zoom meetings and emails to seek devices for the students. All schools were responsive and organised teachers and/or deputy Principal to deliver these devices to students' homes. Parents too became teachers to help their children at home. In describing how they supported their seven children, one mother explained:

*"With my children, there are seven of them in different Year and different levels, but we tried to complete everything by 3.00 pm. We worked really hard because there are many of them, Year 1, Year 2, Year 4, Year 5, Year 7, Year 8 and Year 12.. It was very enriching because you get to find out about the various topics they learn at schools. It was enjoyable. I get some insights into the amount of work that my children do in their classrooms on a daily basis, a better appreciation of what they do."*

The father also related his experiences of helping their children at home:

*"Because they attend a Christian school, they each had a devotion in the morning, and different activities during the day. I learnt a lot through helping the children. I had to research the topics so that I can help them...The parents became the teachers."*



### Fakatautehina Mentoring Programme

The Education Committee met with parents and secondary school students via Zoom. A decision was made to set up an informal mentoring programme using the Tongan concept of Fakatautehina. The term tautehina refers to a big brother and little brother or big sister and little sister relationship. Fakatautehina is to make two people become a big brother/little brother or big sister/little sister. During lockdown, these Fakatautehina was set up whereby each of the 10 secondary students was paired with a big brother/sister who became an informal mentor and support person. All 10 big brother/sisters had gained a University qualification in various fields such as law, education, economics, finance, social work, mental health, finance and community development.

*"This programme was very useful and beneficial for the students, there was focused attention on their support. The baseline survey that we undertook revealed their needs, for instance, that they did not have the devices, and so the Education Committee's support was appropriate and relevant. Only a few students felt shy to share with their mentors. But the programme had the full support of the parents."*

*"One of the greatest outcomes that happened was the realisation that each member had a talent and skill to offer, which were the results of the investments made by families in the areas of education and career pathways. These harvests provided opportunities for the church to benefit from these. A little research committee was set up. There was a baseline survey, the Fakatautehina Mentoring – Big brother/sister relationships. The Zoom meeting with parents and high school students. Zoom meetings with teachers and school leaders. This was the first time ever it has happened in the church for 30 years. Online learning became a reality. The [Government] \$88 million announcement. You see great thinking up there but when you bring it down to the grassroots it greatly impacted on Pacific and Tongan families. At the same time, it encouraged families to reconsider the value of children's education."*

*"The Trustees learnt about the different types of devices required for different levels of children's learning. We contacted the schools about the MoE devices but those arrived late. The Trust helped the families to shoulder the pressures on mothers and fathers, and these are fathers and mothers who came from Tonga with a high school education, but their hearts are there to do the best for their children. The Trustees helped to communicate on their behalf, with school principals and schools to access resources that their children were entitled to. Although the devices from MoE were delayed the schools were asked 'so what are you doing about it?'. The Deputy Principal delivered the device to the students' home a few days later. Wow, that it was possible for a deputy principal to hand deliver a device for a student! This strengthen the communications between the Tongan families and the schools."*



PICTURE 6: WORKSHOP FOLOFOLA E FALA KAE TALANOAI E KALIA PROJECT – FUNDED BY MPP LIF (LANGUAGE INNOVATION FUND) – PART OF THE SUTT TE RAPA RECOVERY IN JULY.

to change required a shift in the mindset of members, but that the benefits were threefold in terms of saving time, money and creating comfort for the congregation to engage in church activities in a new way.

*“The church must allow itself to change and adapt to the new medium used to deliver its services. We have this opportunity, and it has proven to work. For instance, we can consider doing our Thursday service online and leave the Sunday for the face to face gathering. The challenge would be for church members to make time to commit to attending the service online. Even the Women’s Fellowship programme can be done online. This will save time on having to get ready and travel to the service on Thursday evenings, save petrol, and it will be warmer at home. The Trust meeting took place regularly online during the lockdown.”*

### Utilising the skills and talents of young people in the church

The church leaders acknowledged that on reflection, the activities during the lockdown highlighted to them the skills and talents within the church. Young members who had gained a good education were able to navigate the system whilst at the same time taking the families, both young and old, with them. In 1989, when the church was established there was one member with a postgraduate university qualification, 30 years later, there are now 12 members with university qualifications and several with trades qualifications. The response to COVID-19 had challenged the Church to become more intentional and purposeful about the education of its 10 secondary school students, 6 intermediate students, 19 primary students, and 24 early childhood children, as well as the holistic wellbeing of their families.

### Recovery measures

#### Embracing technology into how they conduct their church

The SUTT Te Rapa church recognised that they needed to adopt a new way of operating and that they could usefully incorporate strategies that worked during the lockdown. The church leader acknowledged that adapting

### Being prepared and moving forward

Moving forward, SUTT Te Rapa also recognised the need to put in place a preparedness package that involves an emergency plan and emergency fund. It will help translate what is done out of love into a systematic and functional process that will be more sustainable.

*“The Trust needs a Recovery Plan and Recovery Fund. We learn from the Palagi church that there is an Emergency Plan and Emergency Fund. There are many things for the Trust to attend to moving forward. I appreciate the opportunity to meet the CE of MPP and Senior Officials in response to our concerns about the learning devices for our students. It helped to prepare the Trustees for the future because all of this work is done from the heart and learning as we go. We can work smarter if we can have someone come in and train us how to perform at governance level. We have not been in operation for a year yet. In fact, we have had a baptism of fire by this Covid-19 lockdown and we have come out stronger in the end”*

In their recovery efforts the church has also utilised innovation funds from the Ministry for Pacific Peoples to revamp the church’s Kalia framework to ensure that the youth understand its principles and key components. The church is also working with the Ministry of Health to repurpose the focus of the Talanoa Mo’ui project for its innovation fund. The church is beginning to build on lessons learnt during the lockdown period.





This section considers the implications of the research findings for Pacific churches, Ministry for Pacific Peoples and other government agencies, and for future research.

# Implications

## Pacific churches and families

### The critical role of churches in crisis management

The study confirms how critical Pacific churches are in the response and recovery of Pacific families. Our findings support the way Pacific churches have always cared for their families and communities through the values of love, generosity and tautua (service). At the time of this study, New Zealand was faced with another lockdown which had an even greater impact on Pacific churches because the virus had spread more widely in the Pacific community through mass gatherings such as church services. The lessons learned in this first lockdown will help to inform policymakers, leaders and programme designers to understand what works, and also draw out what more is needed to strengthen churches' efforts in their responses towards a supported and thriving Pacific community.

### The importance of preparedness

This study points to the importance of churches being strategic and prepared at all times. Results suggest that churches that were positioned to respond positively and support their church families already had a plan in place well before the COVID-19 lockdown, and were prepared and coordinated in their response to family needs. The study indicates that the key components of preparedness are having: a plan with a long-term vision; emergency funds; a focus on family wellbeing; a visionary leader; and the ability and willingness to adapt to change. It is suggested that churches can improve how they respond in the future if these five components are adopted.

### The important role of the young people for church and community development

The findings implicate the need for churches to recognise the skills and expertise held by young people in churches because it can benefit both church and community development. The study highlighted

instances where young professionals, who traditionally were not visible before the pandemic, became the leading individuals during the lockdown. Nurturing and strengthening their skills will support succession planning and contribute to the development of confident, thriving, resilient and prosperous young Pacific peoples.

## Ministry for Pacific Peoples

### The role of churches in realising the Lalanga Fou goals

The findings of this study help to inform the Lalanga Fou goals. The Pacific churches were able to demonstrate their contribution to the Lalanga Fou goals during the lockdown.

They demonstrated their ability to realise thriving Pacific languages, cultures, and identities (Goal 1) on social media platforms as churches were still able to conduct their services and programmes in their heritage languages and for some bilingually.

They realised prosperous Pacific communities (Goal 2) in their response to family's needs by connecting the community with service providers

They also contributed to resilient and healthy Pacific peoples (Goal 3) by promoting a family-focused approach to worship and by following health protocols in a pandemic.

Pacific churches also empowered the youth by empowering their digital skills which were utilised and appreciated. (Goal 4)

There is potential for Pacific churches to take a lead role on language and cultural revitalisation, perhaps in partnership with the Ministry's Pacific Language Weeks or other Language programmes. Pacific churches have often been a place where the expression of language and culture is always happening. The study suggests that Pacific churches already have a target audience and a platform (both online and face to face) to deliver language programmes.

### **Faith and spirituality as key components of Pacific wellbeing**

Often, wellbeing models measure quality of life through economic, social, and cultural factors. This study points towards faith and spirituality as additional key components for Pacific wellbeing, not least because they permeated the way churches and families responded to the impacts of the lockdown, and influenced recovery efforts. This has implications for future development of strategic wellbeing frameworks.

### **To strengthen the role of the Ministry and other agencies to partner with Pacific churches to recover and thrive**

The Ministry's key programmes rely on the partnerships and connections they have with Pacific communities and these relationships have been nurtured and supported as a mechanism for influencing government policy and decision-making. This study supports the importance of continually strengthening partnerships with Pacific churches. These relationships can be strengthened by providing better access to key information and funding that will aid the efforts of both groups to serve Pacific communities. Other agencies can also leverage off these partnerships, and in doing so, strengthen a cross-agency integrated approach to improve service to Pacific communities and to their overall wellbeing.

### **Future research**

#### **Utilising the study's findings as baseline for future research with Pacific churches and communities**

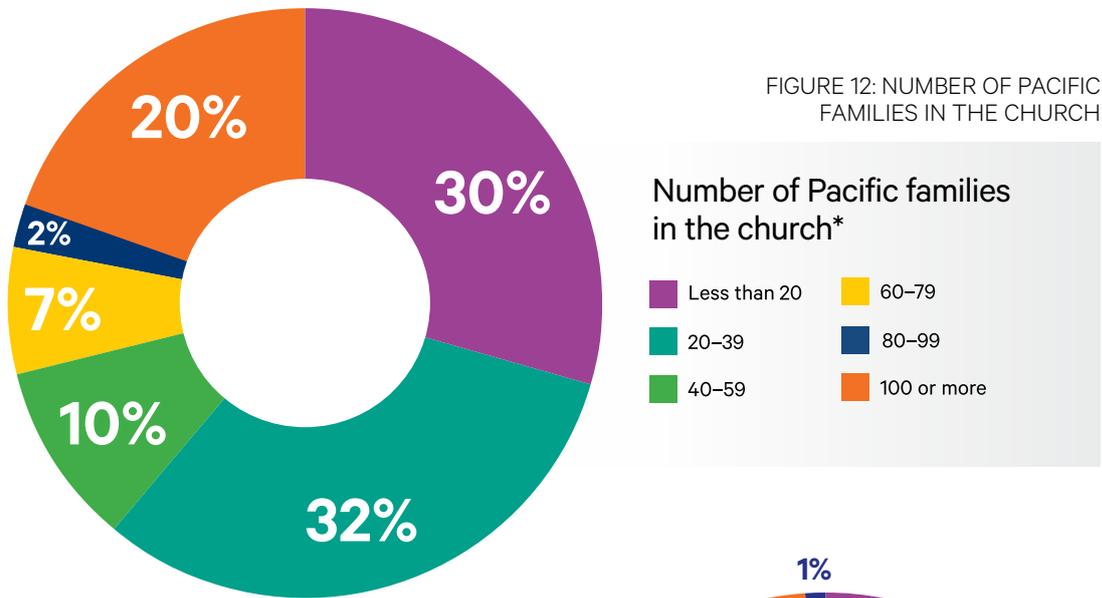
This research may be considered a baseline study of the role of churches in responding to the needs of Pacific families. The findings point to important areas for future research to refine and further elaborate. Future research could usefully explore: Pacific people's informal economy, in particular, the role of volunteering and unpaid productive work; the role of spiritual and relational wellbeing as a key component of Pacific wellbeing; and key areas for governance support of Pacific churches.

#### **Careful consideration needs to be made on the combination of tools and methods to inform Pacific research**

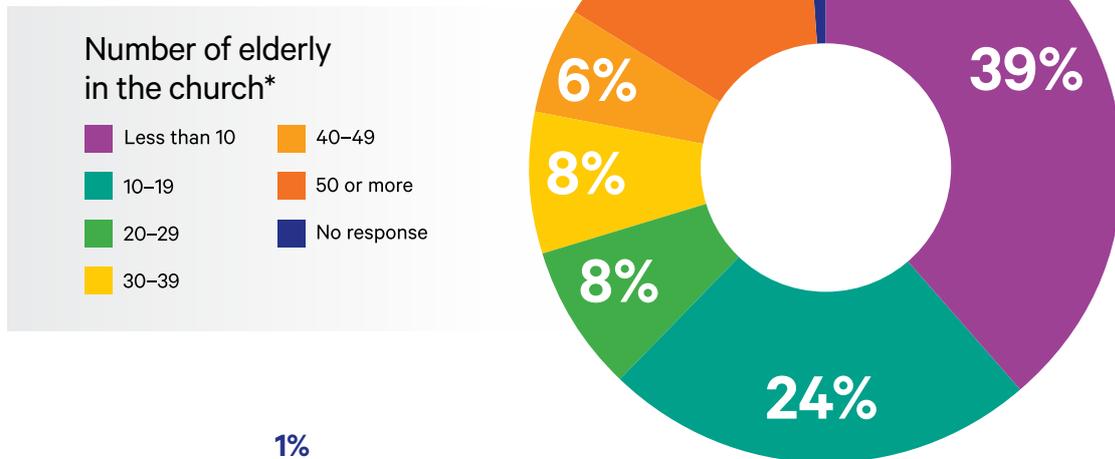
This study implies that using mixed methods amplifies the inclusivity nature of Pacific research frameworks. When engaging Pacific communities, careful consideration needs to be made on the combination of tools and methods chosen. A better response rate from Pacific communities may be achieved with the use of qualitative face to face methods such as talanoa or focus groups as a way of informing subsequent quantitative steps such as a survey.



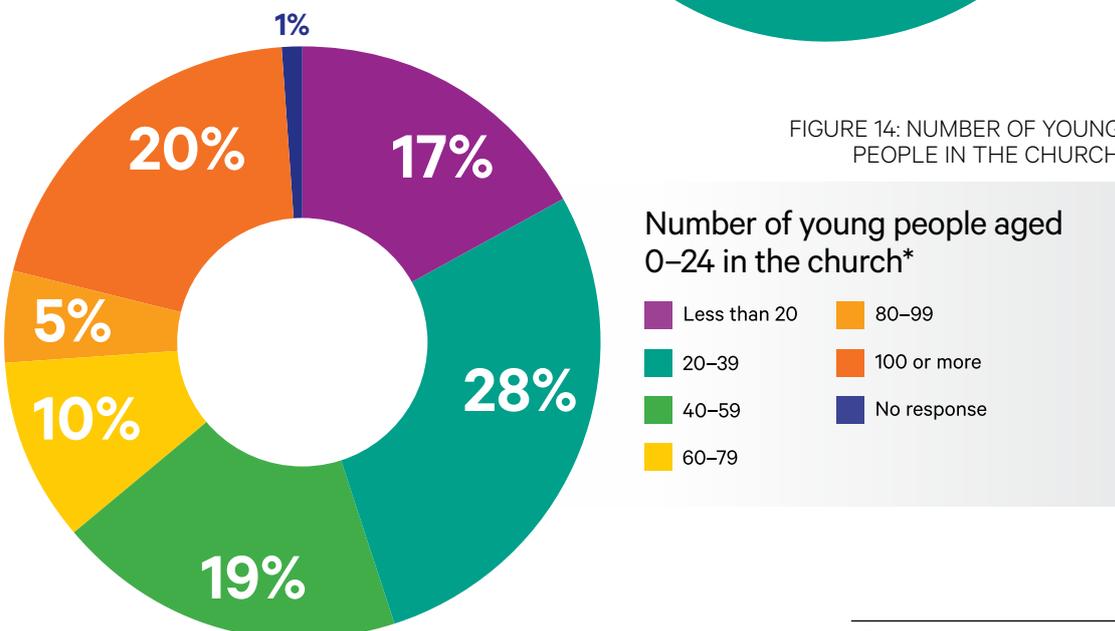
## Appendix 1 – Graphs showing church profiles



**FIGURE 13: NUMBER OF ELDERLY IN THE CHURCH**



**FIGURE 14: NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH**



\* Churches that responded to the survey

## Appendix 2 – Graphs on the **positive** and **negative** impact on Church programmes

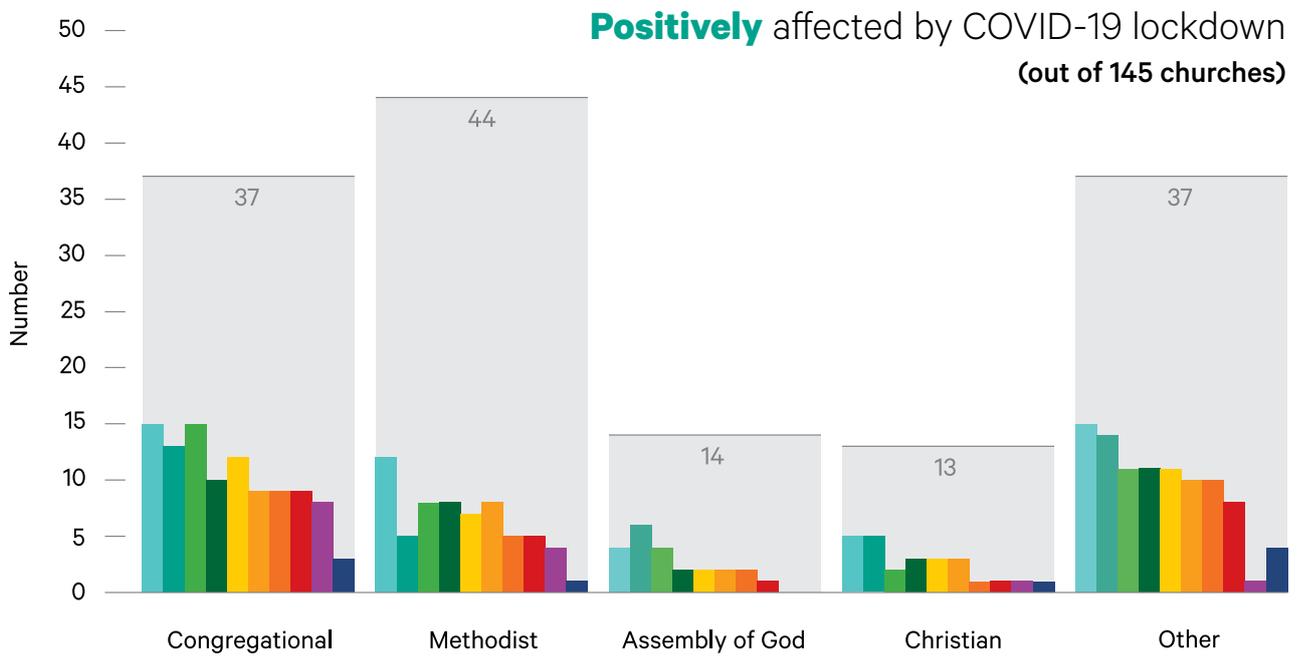


FIGURE 15: POSITIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES BASED ON CHURCH DENOMINATION

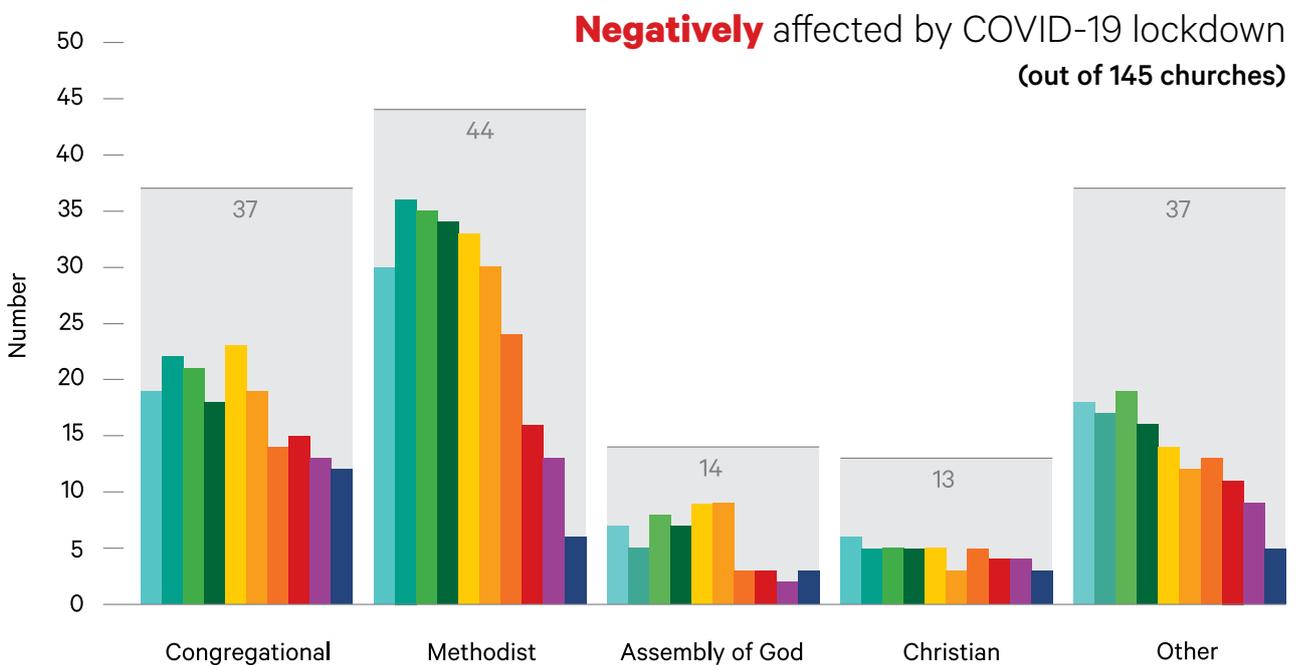
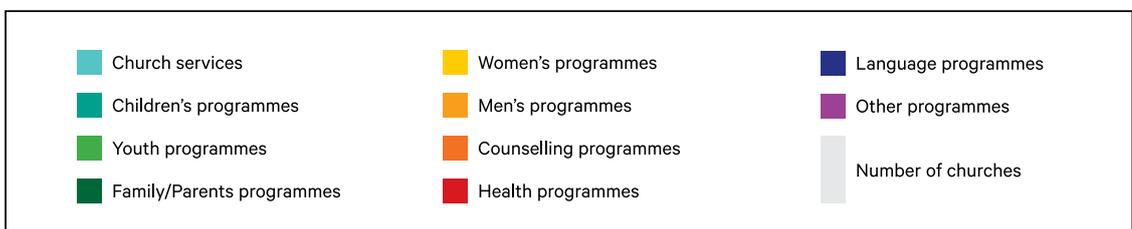


FIGURE 16: NEGATIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES BASED ON CHURCH DENOMINATIONS



## Appendix 2 – Graphs on the **positive** and **negative** impact on Church programmes (continued)

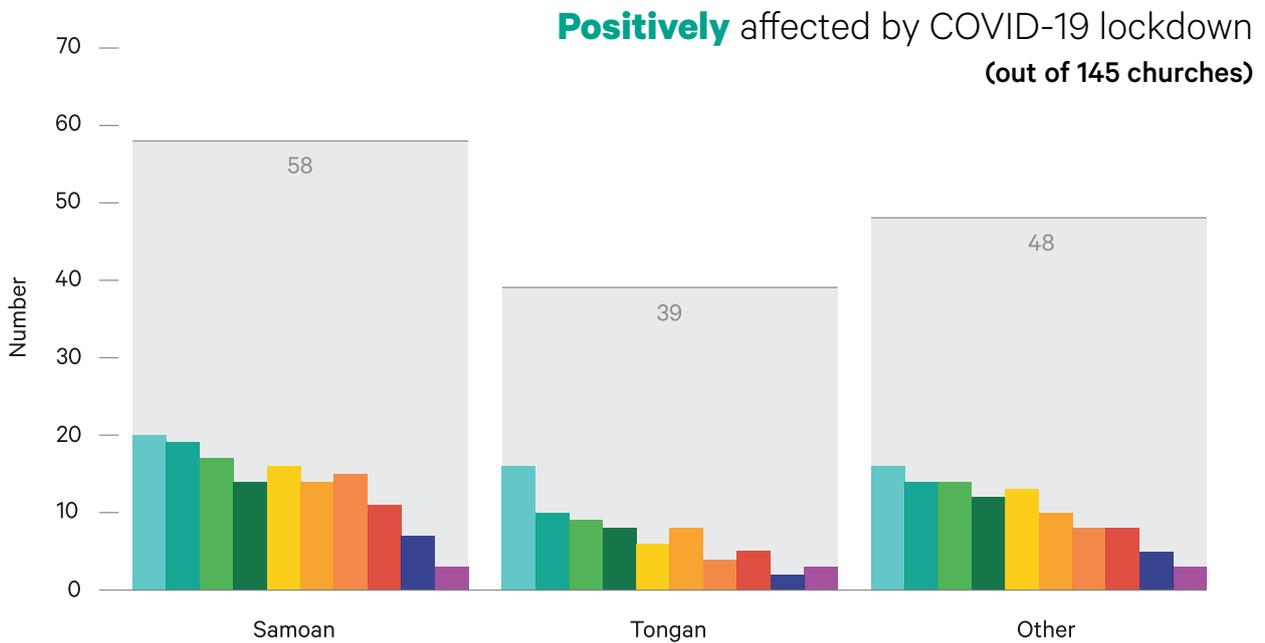


FIGURE 17: POSITIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES BASED ON CHURCH ETHNICITY

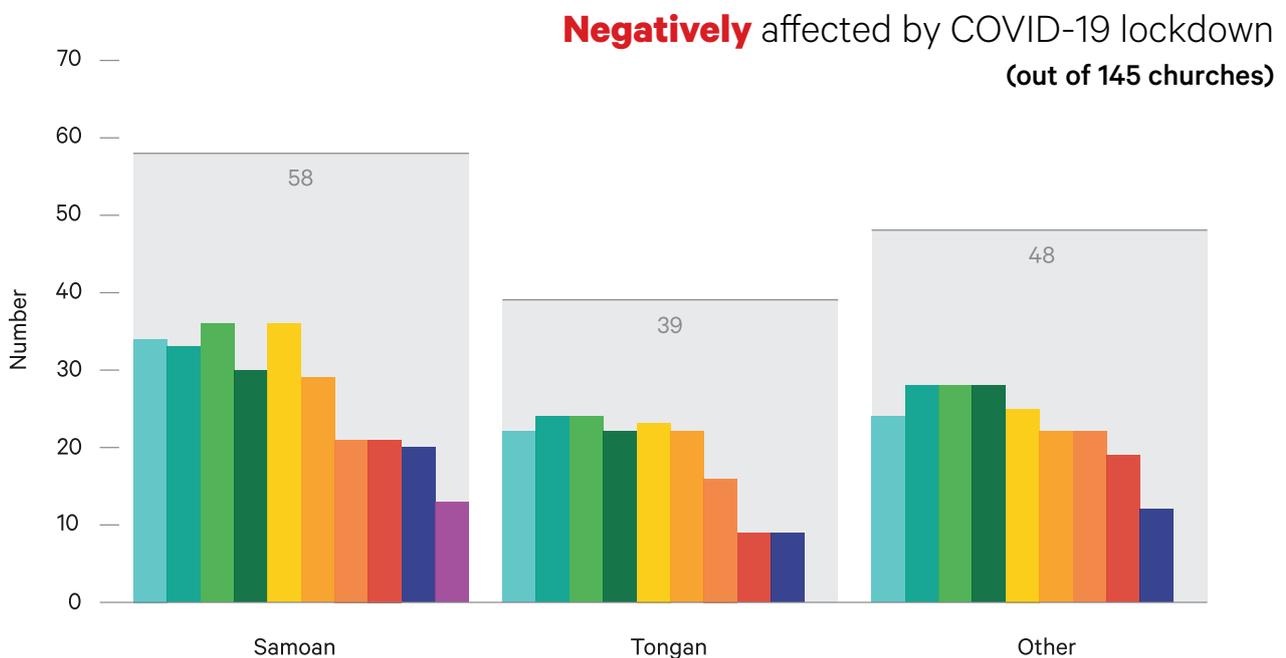
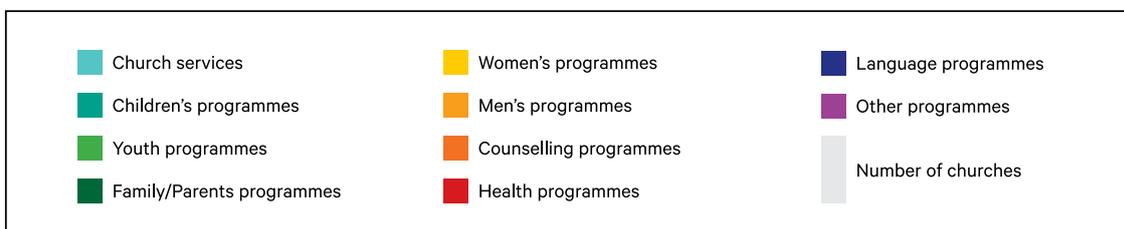


FIGURE 18: NEGATIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES BASED ON CHURCH ETHNICITY



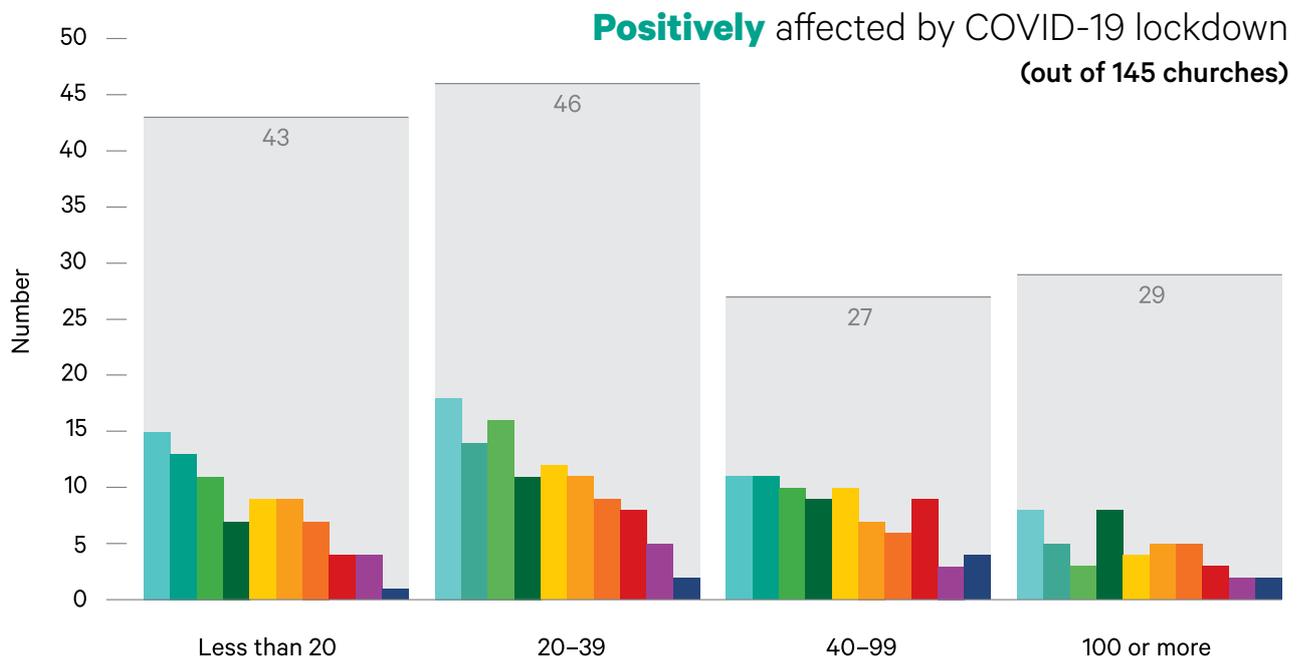


FIGURE 19: POSITIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES BASED ON NUMBER OF FAMILIES IN THE CHURCH

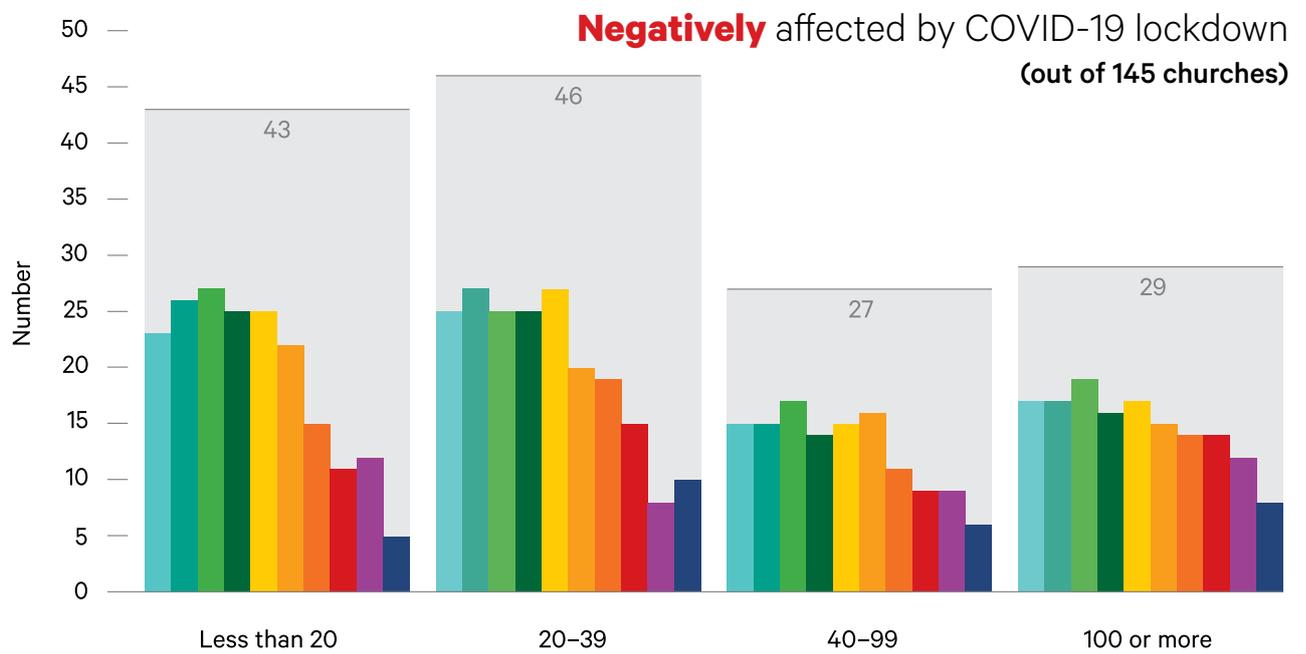
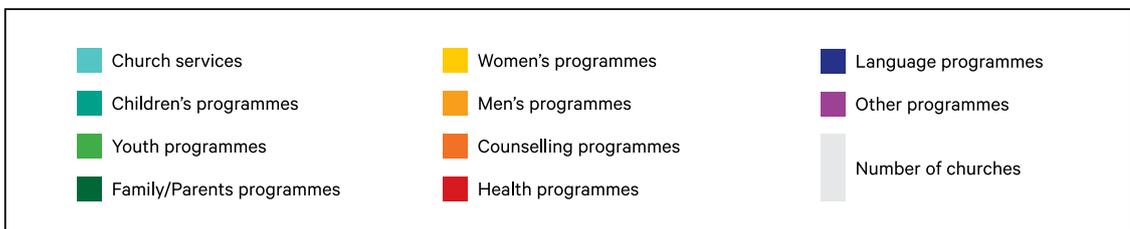


FIGURE 20: NEGATIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES BASED ON THE NUMBER OF FAMILIES IN THE CHURCH



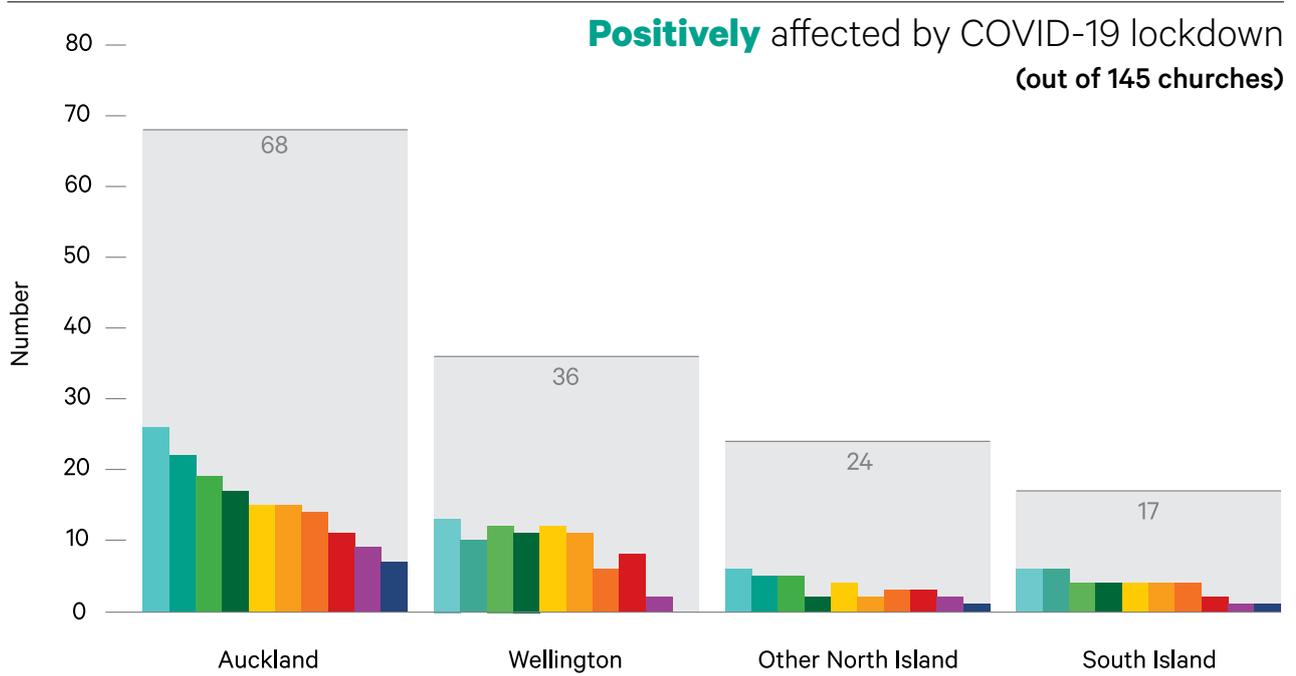


FIGURE 21: REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF POSITIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES

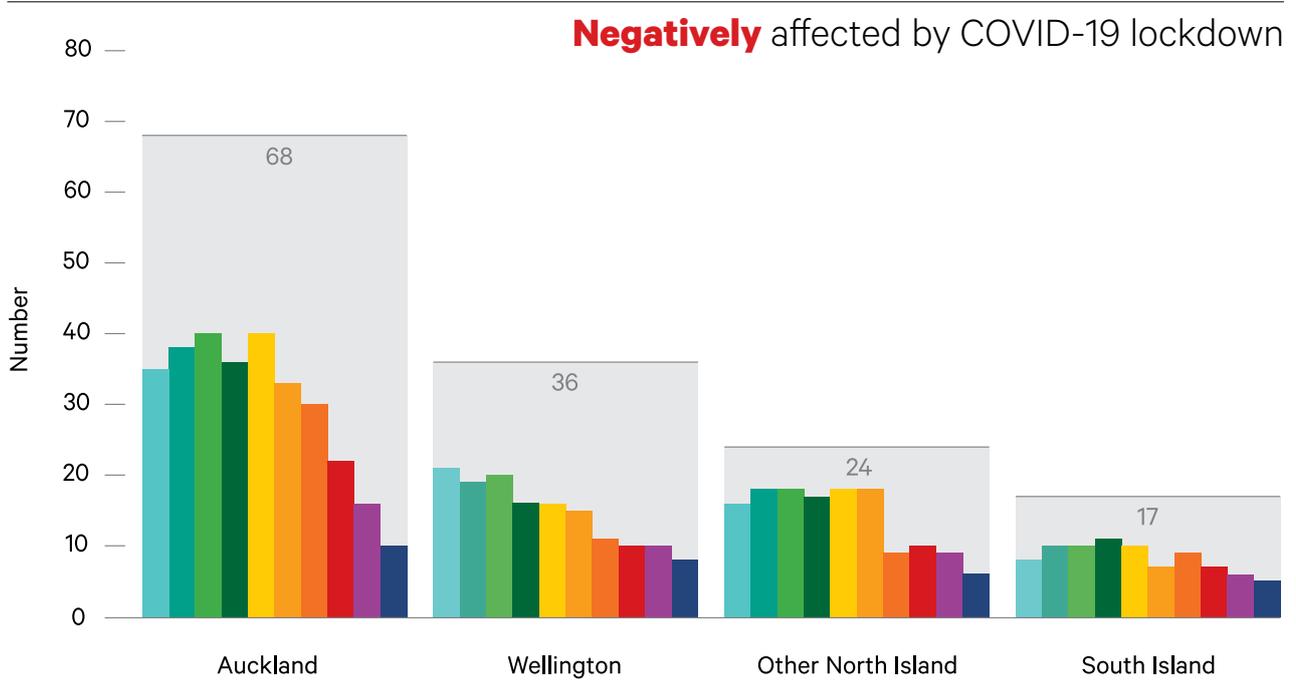
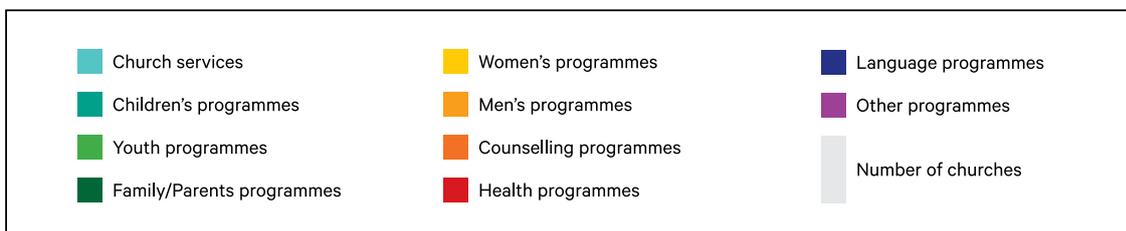


FIGURE 22: REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF NEGATIVE IMPACT ON CHURCH PROGRAMMES



### Appendix 3 - Graphs showing family needs (out of 145 churches)

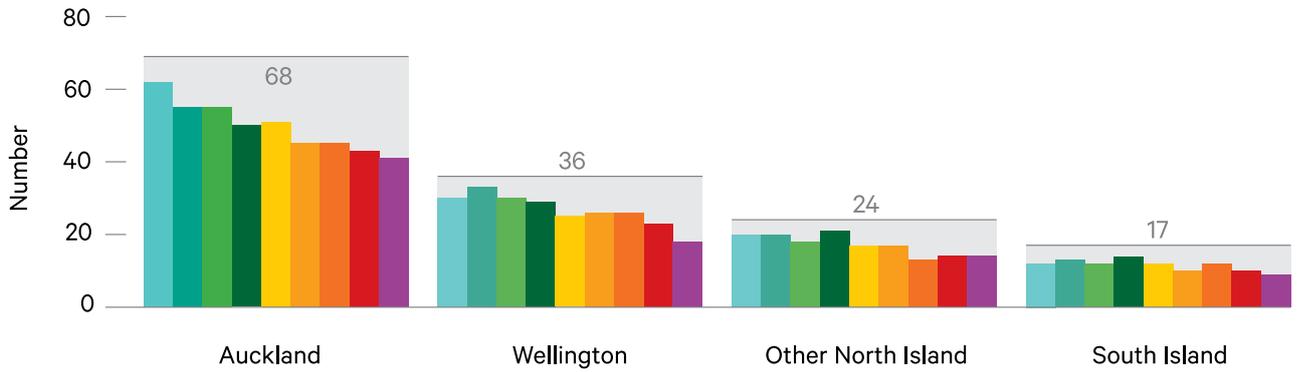


FIGURE 23: REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF PACIFIC CHURCH FAMILY NEEDS

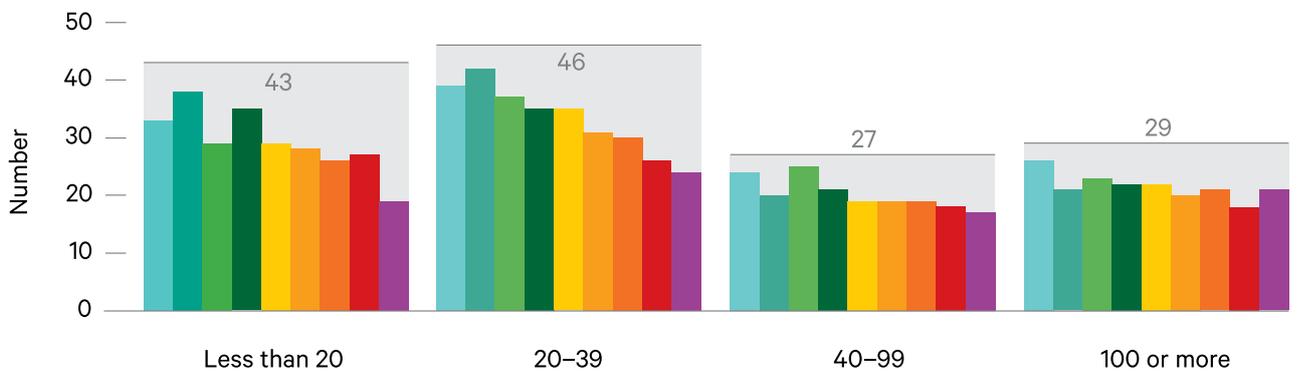


FIGURE 24: FAMILY NEEDS BASED ON THE NUMBER OF FAMILIES IN THE CHURCH

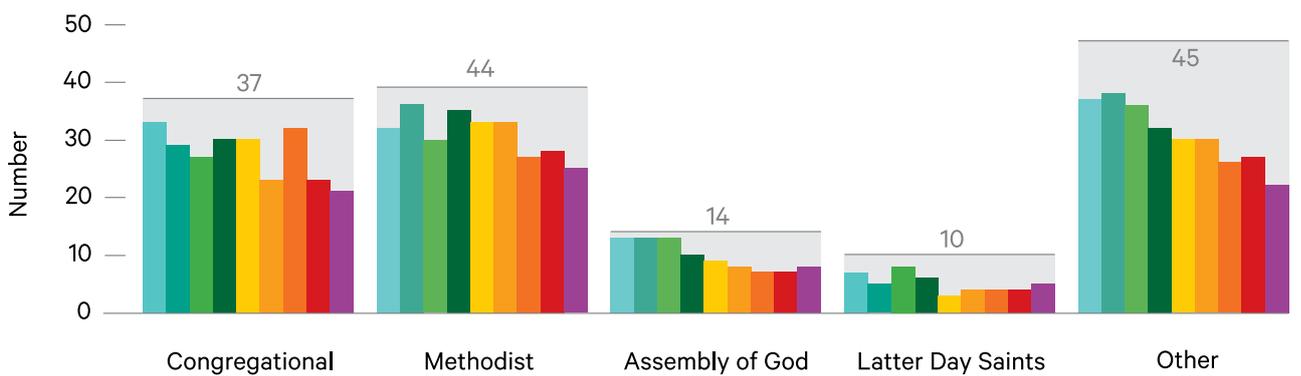
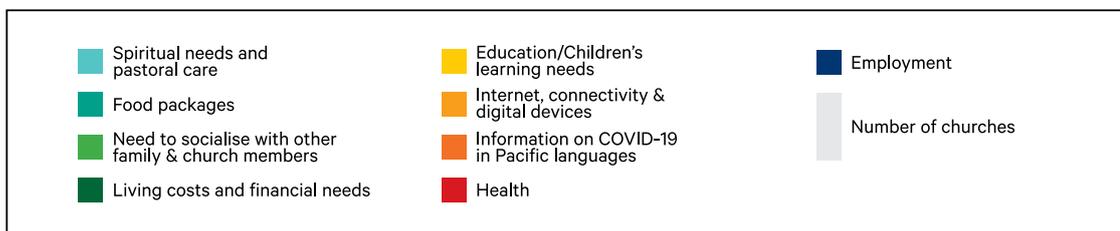
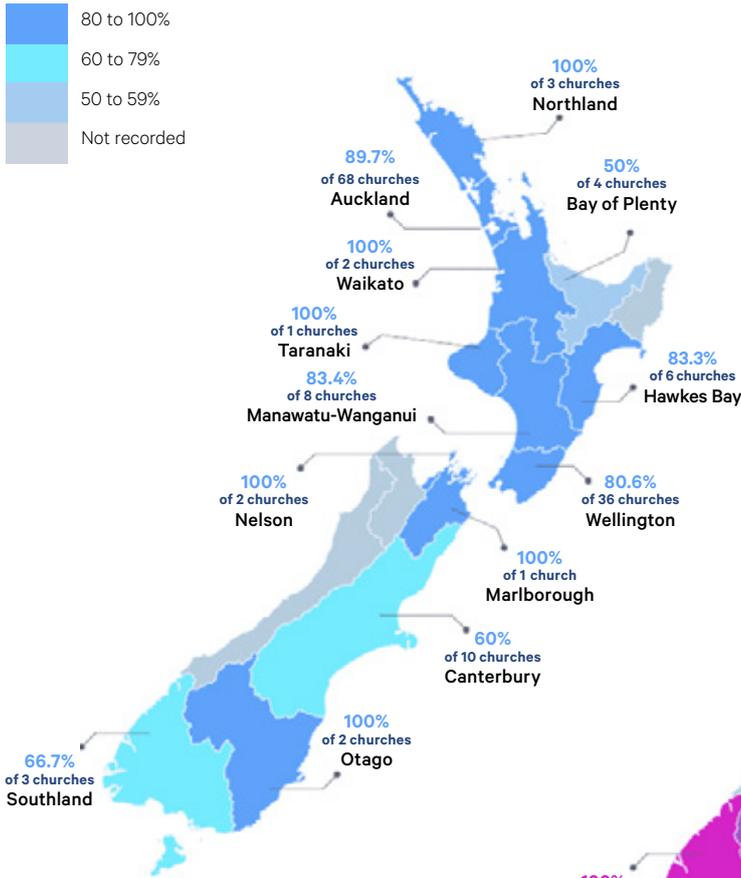


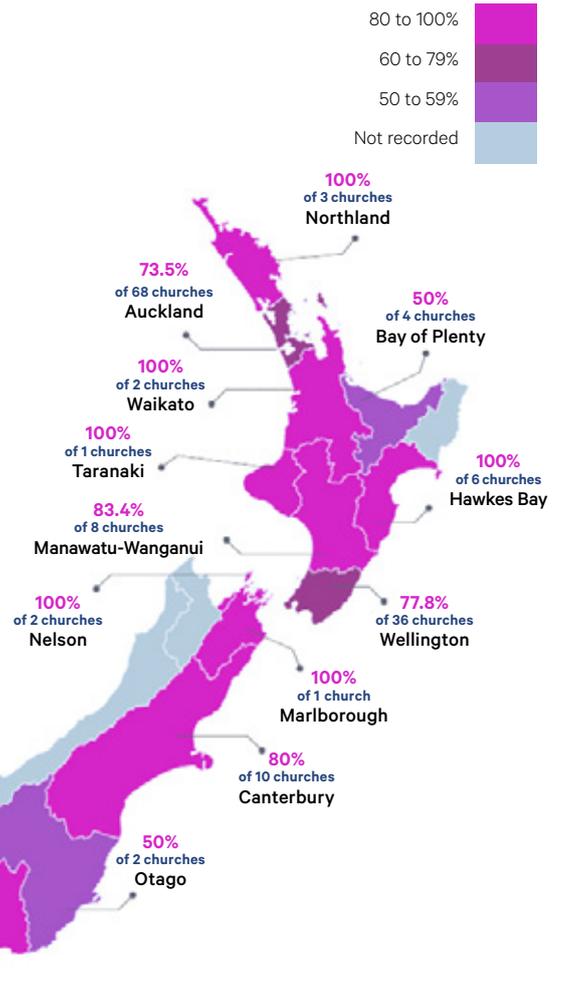
FIGURE 25: FAMILY NEEDS BASED ON CHURCH DENOMINATION



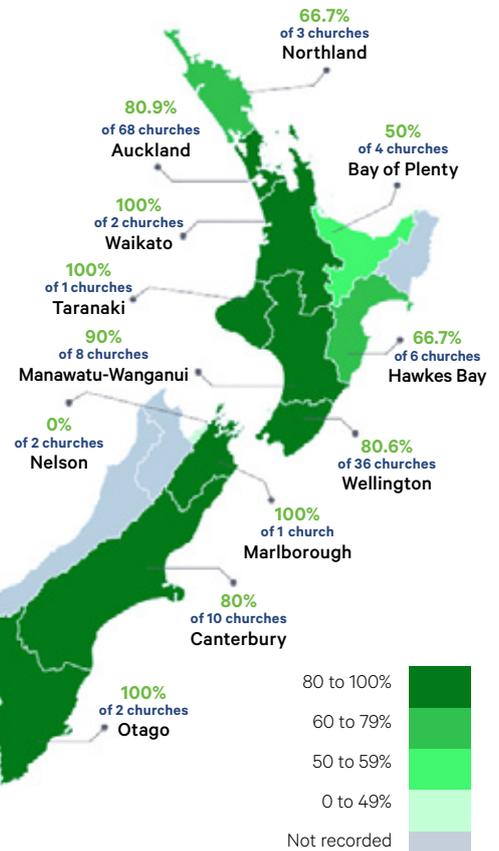
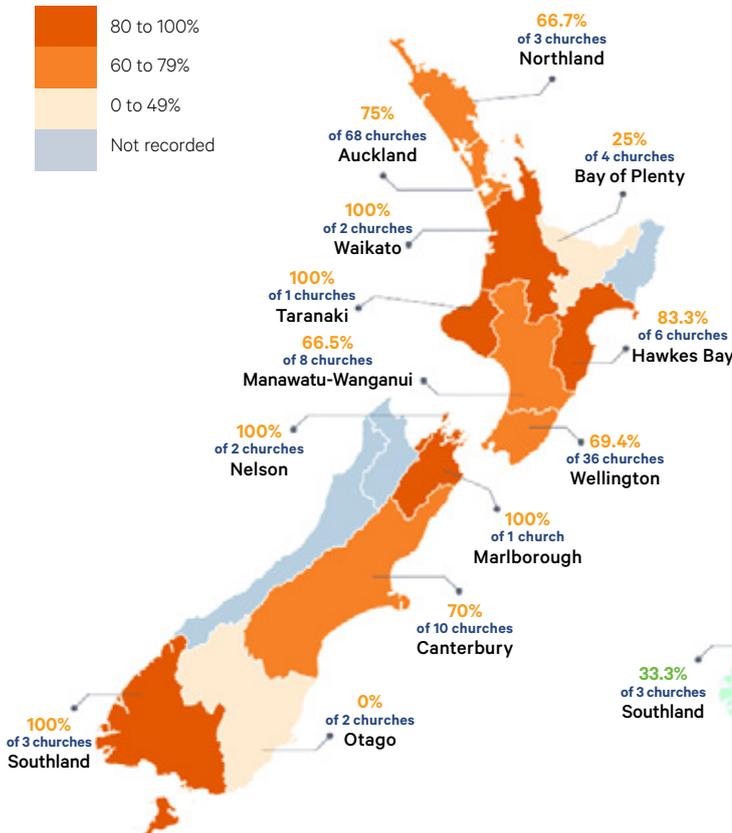
### Spiritual needs and pastoral care



### Living costs and financial needs



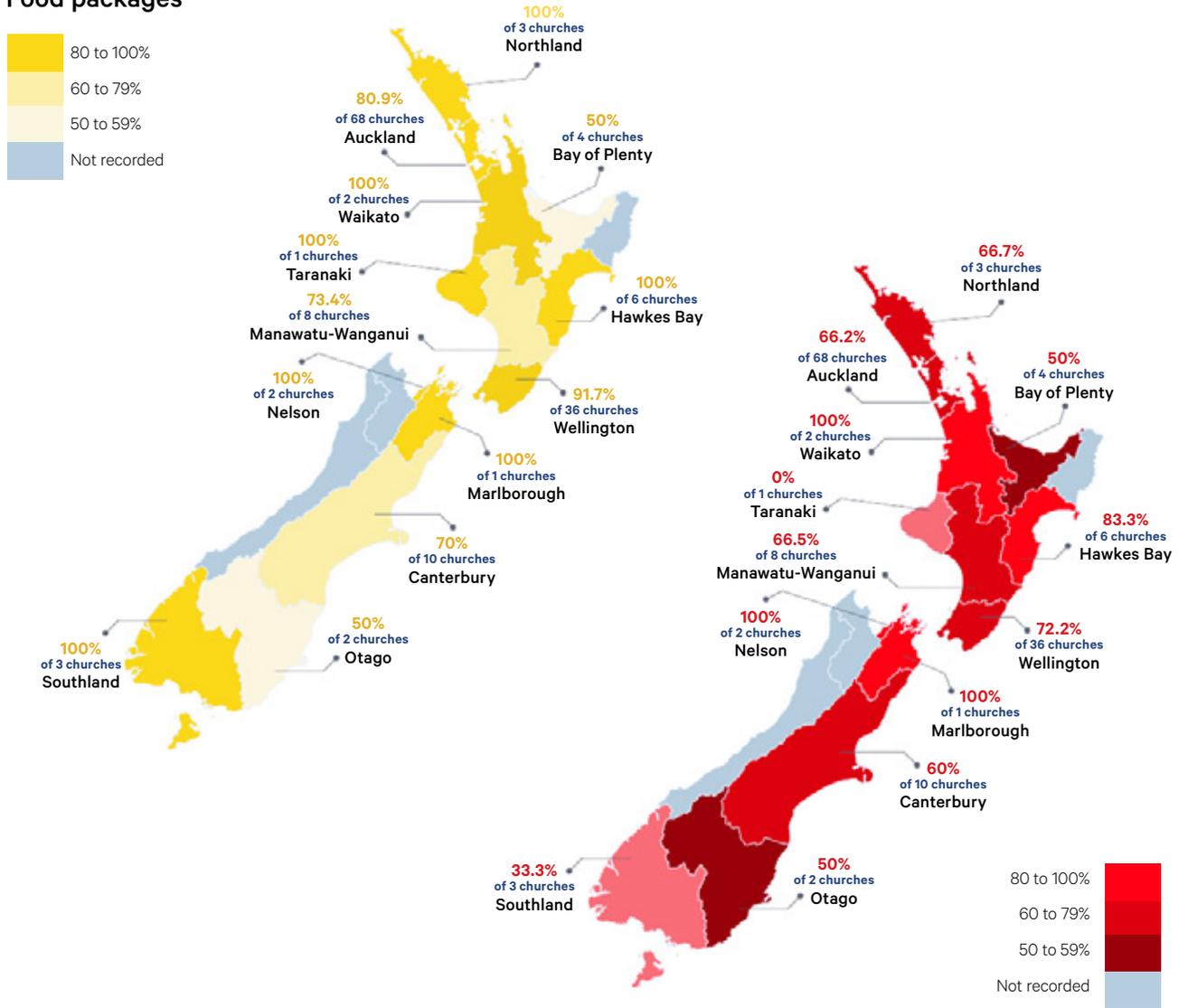
### Education/Children's learning needs



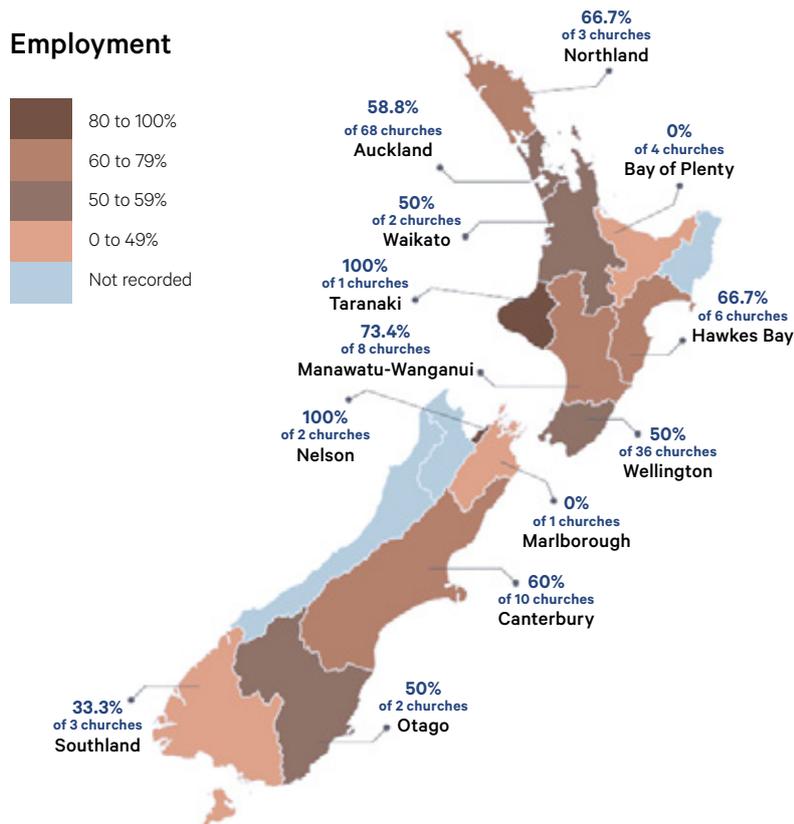
### Needs to socialise with other

FIGURE 26: TOP 7 NEEDS OF FAMILIES BY REGION

### Food packages



### Employment



### Internet, connectivity and digital access

FIGURE 26: TOP 7 NEEDS OF FAMILIES BY REGION (continued)

## Appendix 4 - Graphs showing resources and support groups

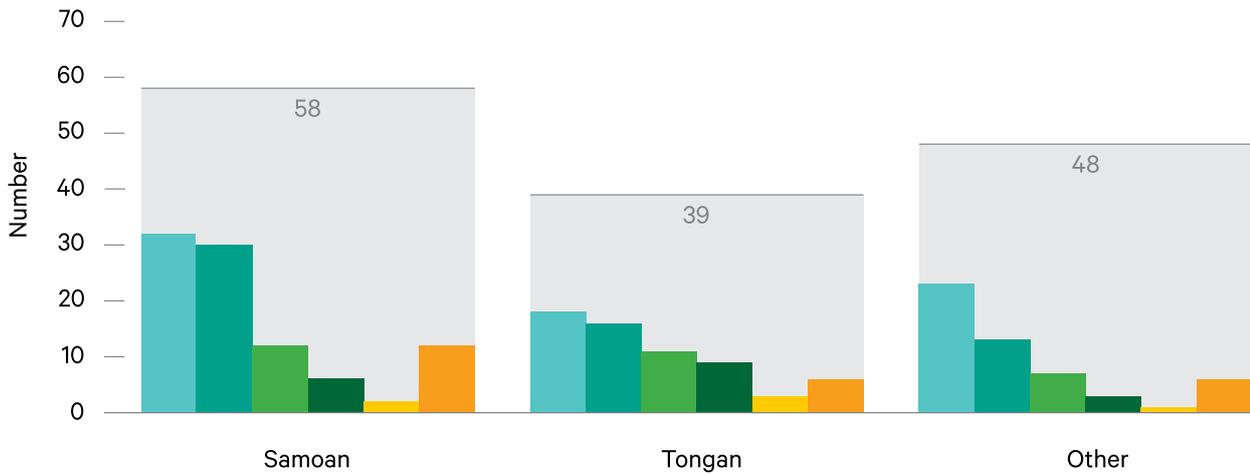


FIGURE 27: SOURCES OF FUNDING BASED ON CHURCH ETHNICITY

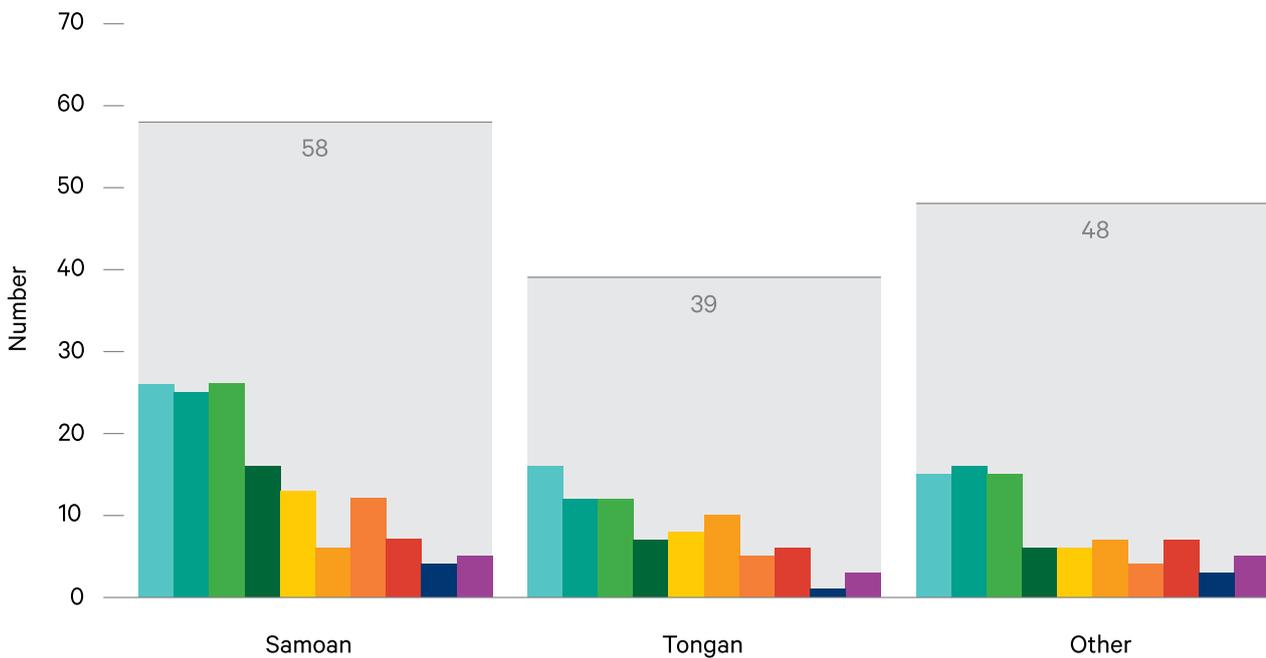
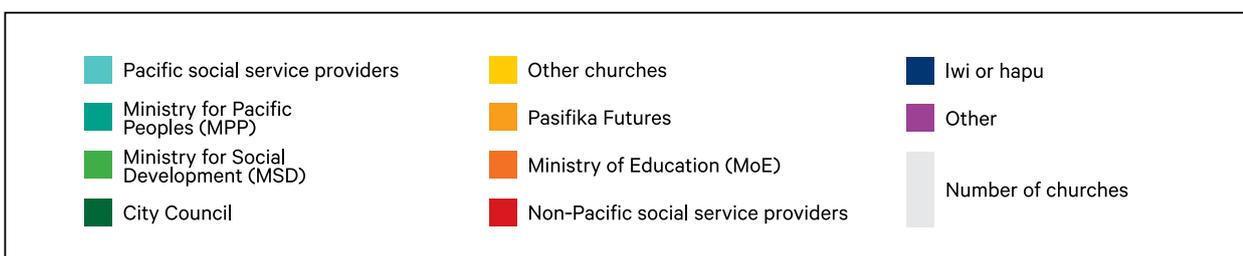


FIGURE 28: SUPPORT GROUPS ACCESSED BY CHURCH ETHNICITY



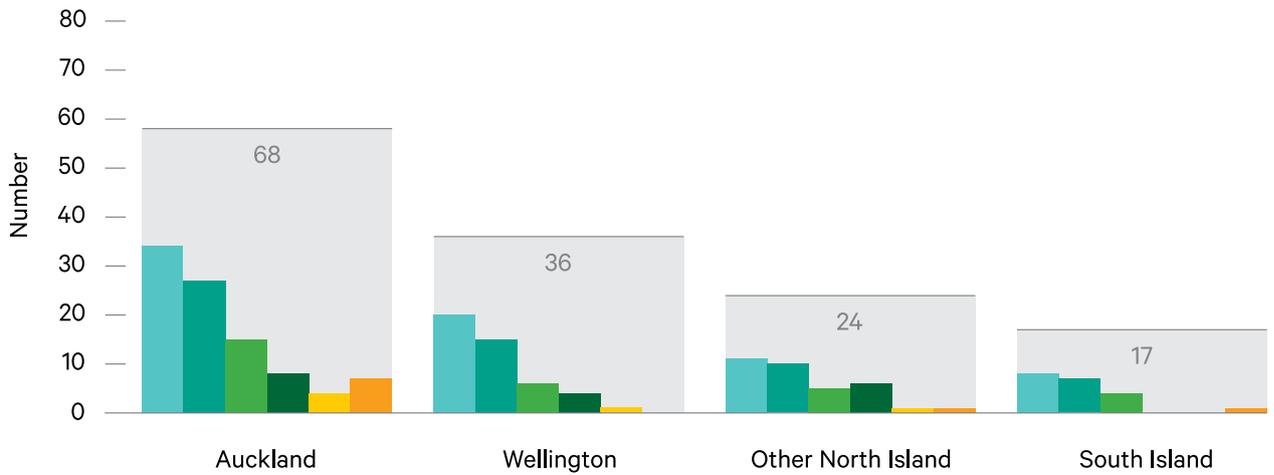
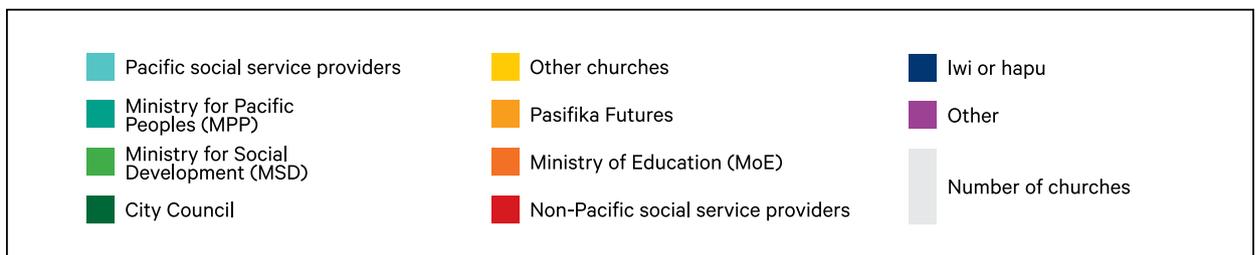


FIGURE 29: SOURCES OF FUNDING BASED ON REGION



FIGURE 30: SUPPORT GROUPS ACCESSED BASED ON REGION



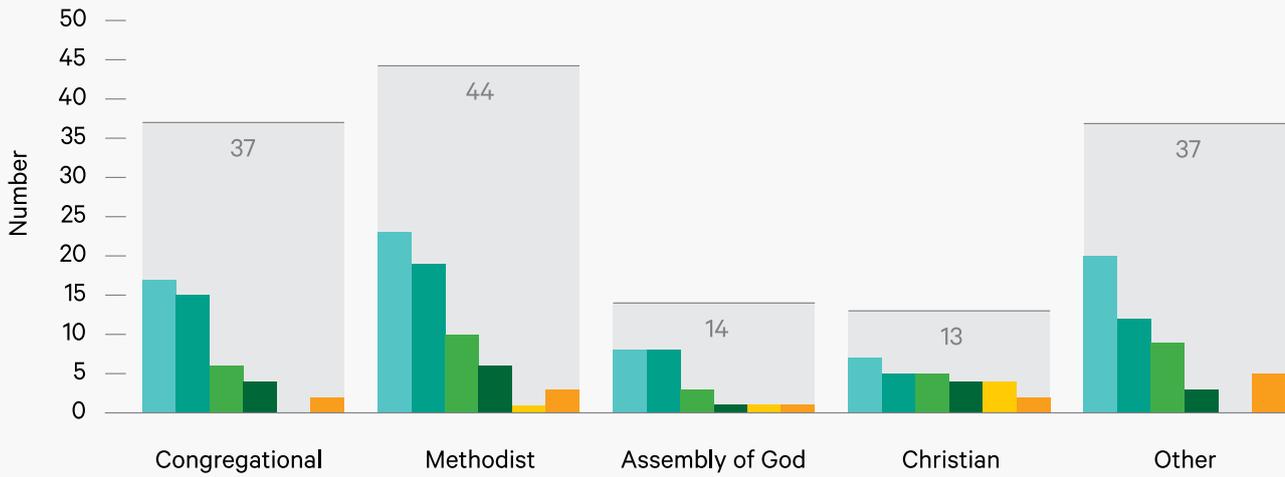


FIGURE 31: SOURCES OF FUNDING BASED ON CHURCH DENOMINATION

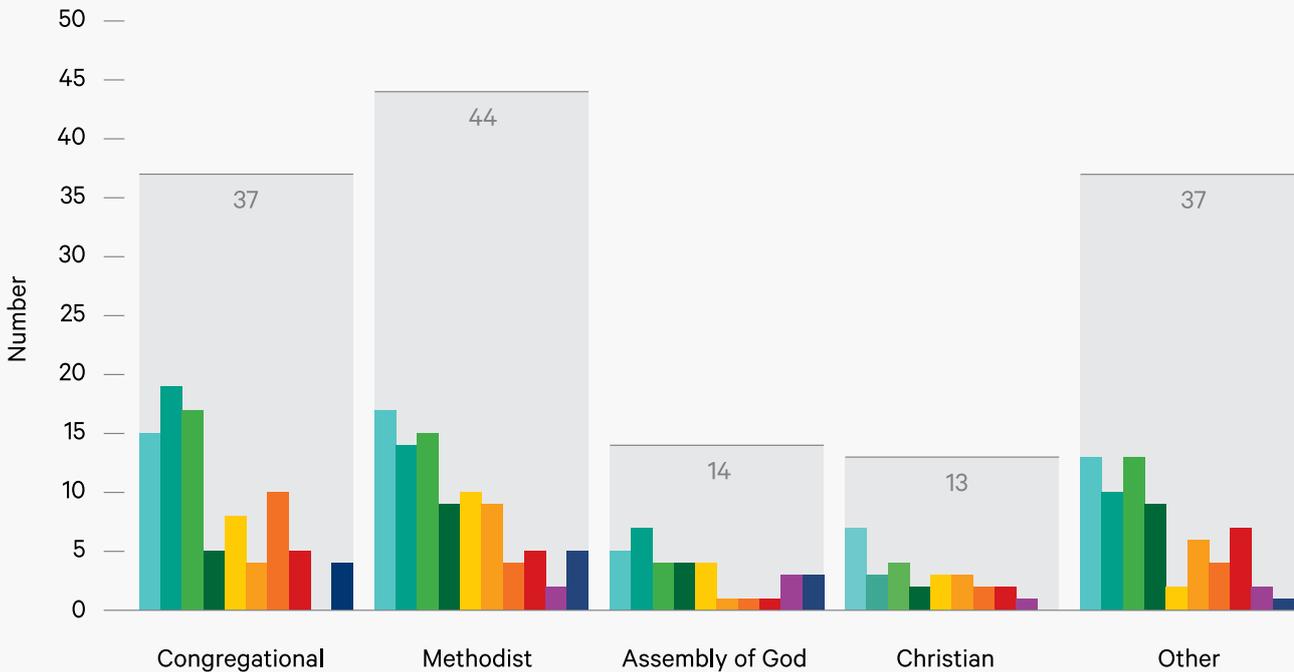
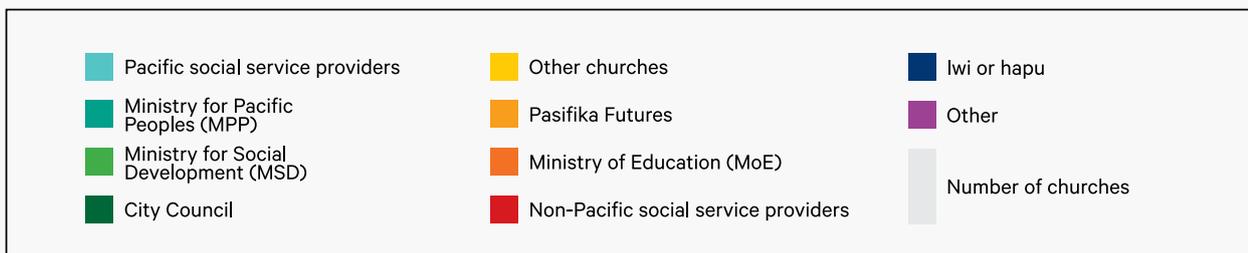


FIGURE 32: SUPPORT GROUPS ACCESSED BASED ON CHURCH DENOMINATION



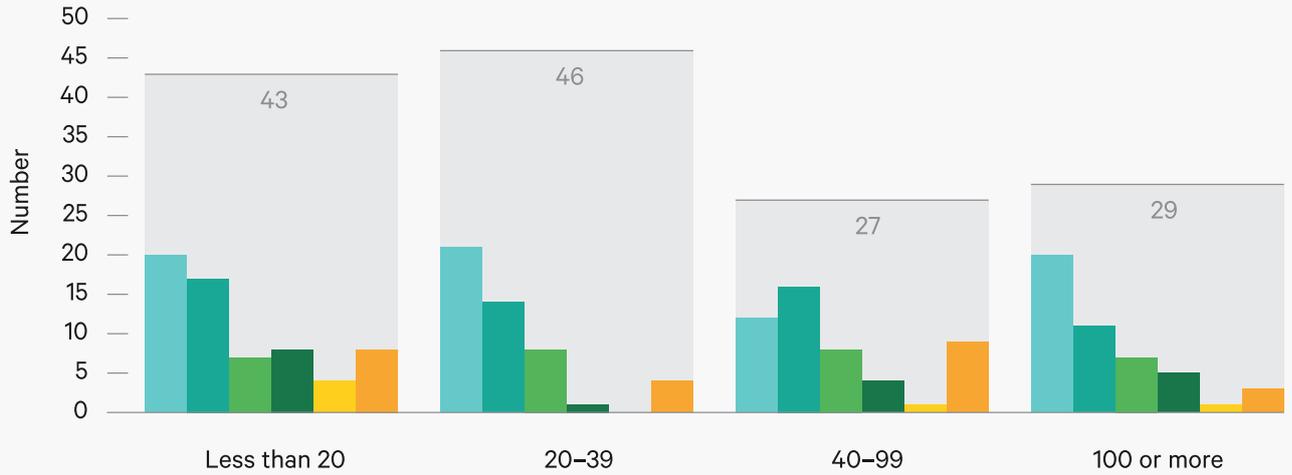


FIGURE 33: SOURCES OF FUNDING BASED ON NUMBER OF FAMILIES IN THE CHURCH

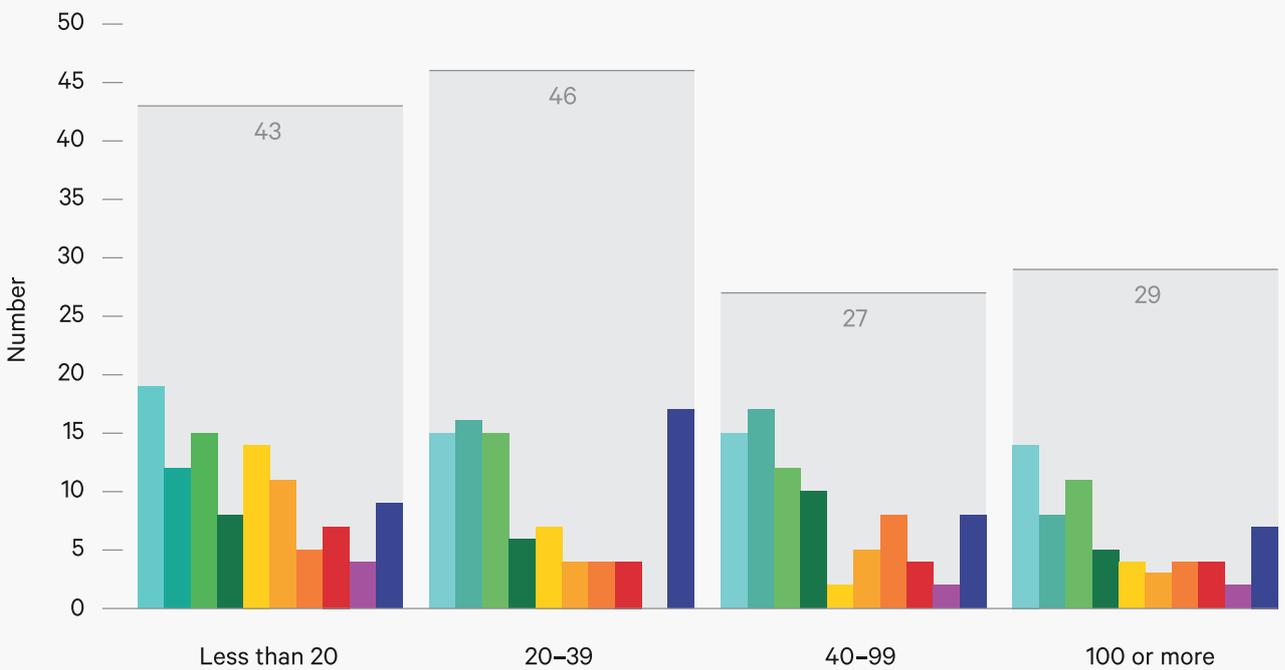
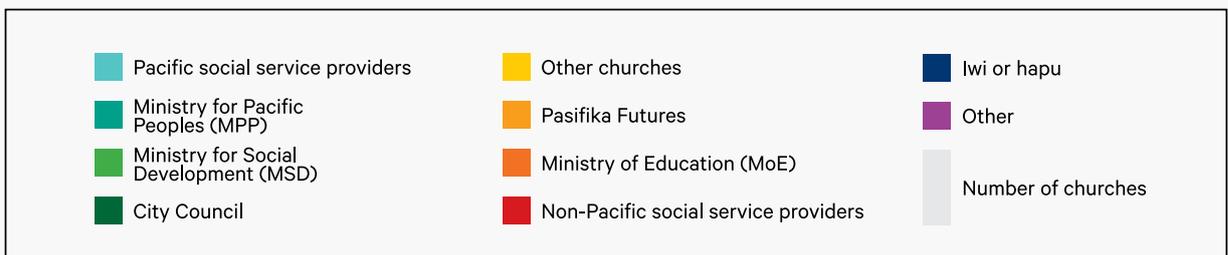
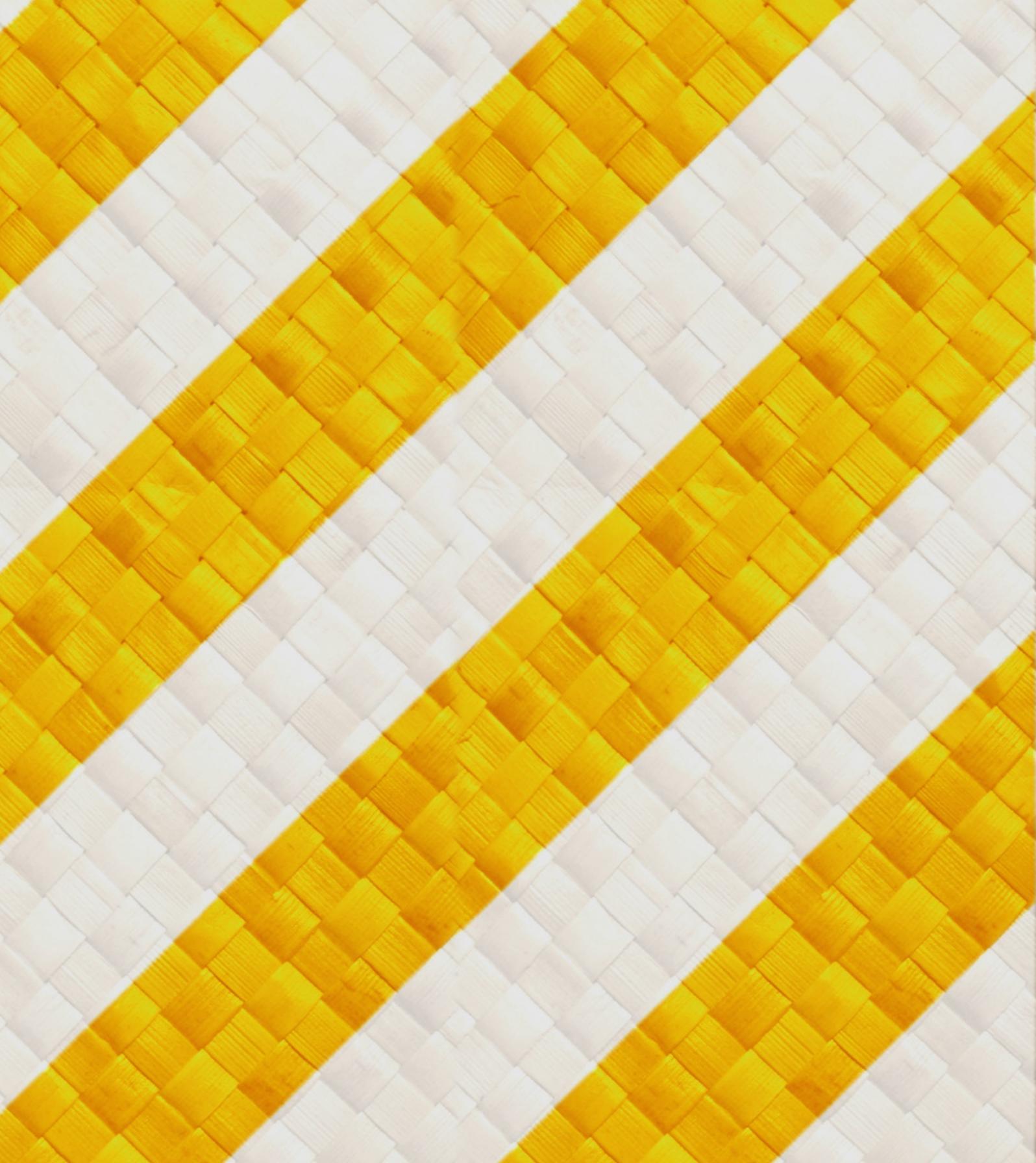


FIGURE 34: SUPPORT GROUPS ACCESSED BASED ON NUMBER OF FAMILIES IN THE CHURCH





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