

## **Chapter 17**

### **Megachurches and Public Life: How Megachurch Congregants See Life as a Whole and Live Out Their Faith in Public Life (Joel Tejedro)**

#### **Abbreviations**

CCF	Christ's Commission Fellowship
CHC	City Harvest Church
GCQ	New General Community Quarantine
GS	Global South
HIRR	Hartford Institute for Religion Research
JIL	Jesus Is Lord Church
JTF	John Templeton Foundation
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning
QOS	Qualtrics Online Survey
RT	Ritual Theory
SC	Spiritual Capital
SR	Sociology of Religion
TMCP	Templeton Mega-Church Project
VCF	Victory Christian Fellowship

#### **Introduction**

Megachurches are undergoing a massive transition and transformation influenced by the recent global health crisis, wars, and geo-political conflicts on various continents. While it is still in its infancy, the study of megachurches in the Global South will continue to evolve and be forged by global challenges as the twenty-first century unfolds. How megachurch congregants approach lived religion and play their role in public life are questions worth noting in our times. Drawing our attention from perspectives of megachurch congregants, fresh from the results of the empirical research conducted by the research team of Templeton Megachurch Project of John Templeton Foundation, this chapter unpacks the collective voices of church congregants as to how they live out and translate that faith in public life. Using the Qualtrics Online Surveys, we

surveyed megachurch congregants from all walks of life about faith and life, politics, socio-economic issues, cultural values, social media, and the COVID-19 pandemic to make important and meaningful discoveries that can shape the global study of religion and the forging of public policy toward religion.

### **Conceptual Mapping of the Role of Megachurches in the Urban Life of Metro Manila**

Even before megachurches developed in Metro Manila, Christian churches had been recognised as prominent markers with an important role in shaping the city's public life. Despite the increasing influence of secularisation and modernisation, Christian churches in the Philippines remain change agents for social and political transformation. Alan Delotavo's analysis of the church's role in the Philippines points out that the church "remains at the forefront of moral empowerment, an agent of political change, a political refuge, and the most influential opposition against corruption".<sup>1</sup> In addition, Delotavo notes that "the church with its interrelated relationship with the state was instrumental for nurturing life and as a therapeutic institution that has a repository of transcendent values that heal an ill nation."<sup>2</sup> Megachurches as an urban face of Christianity resonate well to the flourishing of life providing a strong deposit of belief, spirituality, and moral life of urban centres in Metro Manila, Philippines. In the studies of Jayeel S. Cornelio and Manuel Victor Sapitula on the sociology of religion in the Philippines, three essential observations emerged as to why Christian religiosity in the Philippines is steadily vibrant, regardless of the decline of attendance at Catholic churches. First, the "missionising zeal

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Delotavo, "Ethical Considerations of Ecclesio-Political Involvement: A People Power Case", *The Asia Journal of Theology* 20(2), (October 2006): 225.

<sup>2</sup> Delotavo, "Ethical Considerations", 226. See also O. Elisha, "Moral Ambitions of Grace: The Paradox of Compassion and Accountability in Evangelical Faith-Based Activism", *Cultural Anthropology* 23(1), (2008): 154.

of Evangelical churches”<sup>3</sup> promotes a “communal and highly experiential mode of spirituality available to other Christian churches.”<sup>4</sup> This attracts the Catholic youth to transfer their religious affiliation. Second, religious vibrancy is fuelled by charismatic renewal movements in Catholic and Evangelical churches as they open up religious spaces for Filipinos to find personal meaning that affects spiritual discipline and the betterment of life.<sup>5</sup> Third, Cornelio and Sapitula observe that megachurches have begun to showcase their successes and religious sites as a “grand global appeal” to demonstrate the gravitational shift of Christian mission from the West to the Global South. A case in point is the establishment of El Shaddai’s International House of Prayer in Parañaque.<sup>6</sup>

Cornelio’s study of the Jesus Is Lord Church (JIL) headed by Eddie Villanueva shows that megachurches like JIL are prime players at the forefront of indigenising Christianity and have “political leverage” in Philippine society. Although they experienced political harassment and an assassination attempt initially, JIL stood as a megachurch with a strong political voice in the Philippines.<sup>7</sup> Cornelio admits this is not always the case for megachurches in the Philippines. His recent study reveals that some megachurches are branded as “apolitical” for failing to take a stand on what is morally right. According to this study, megachurches acknowledge that, although they have an important voice in the social space, they have failed to take a position on crucial political and moral issues. A case in point is President Duterte’s “war on drugs,” where

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<sup>3</sup> Jayeel S. Cornelio and Manuel Victor Sapitula, “Are We Losing Faith? An Invitation to the Sociology of Religion in the Philippines”, *Philippine Sociological Society*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014, [Available at: <https://socialstudiescorner.wordpress.com/tag/philippine-Catholicism/>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

<sup>4</sup> Cornelio and Sapitula, “Are We Losing Faith?” 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cornelio and Sapitula, “Are We Losing Faith?” 2-3. .

<sup>6</sup> Cornelio and Sapitula, “Are We Losing Faith?” 2-3; see also Jayeel S. Cornelio, “Jesus Is Lord: The Indigenization of Megachurch Christianity in the Philippines”, in T. Chong (ed), *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption, and the Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2018): 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelio, “Jesus Is Lord”, 130-38.

they failed “to recognise the structural causes and consequences of substance abuse in the country”.<sup>8</sup> Cornelio criticises these megachurches because of their ambivalent position when it comes to religious position about protecting the dignity of human life.

Megachurches in the Philippines have significantly changed the congregational life of their members. These megachurches own campuses and multi-site fellowship meetings. They have shifted from using TV media to web pages, Facebook, YouTube videos, and live streams at a fraction of the previous cost. Although they still adhere to mother organisations, they are becoming autonomous in branding, tailoring their programmes, and avoiding bureaucratic delays. On-the-job training is more valued than seminary training.<sup>9</sup> Worship services are contemporary with creative worship styles. Some megachurches are designed like shopping malls to attract and accommodate large crowds. A critique of megachurches indicates that this rationale is anthropologically rather than theologically based.<sup>10</sup>

Another striking observation about megachurches is that they are like therapeutic, spiritual pharmacies for individuals. James K. Wellman Jr., Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk’s 2014 study of twelve megachurches in the US from the perspective of ritual theory shows that megachurches produce positive emotional energy. Membership symbols are charged with emotional significance, feelings of morality, and a heightened sense of spirituality. Contrary to the criticism that megachurches are “superficial sources of entertainment that do not produce the significant feeling of belonging, moral responsibility, or spirituality,” megachurches are

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<sup>8</sup> Jayeel S. Cornelio and Ian Marañon, “A ‘Righteous Intervention’: Megachurch Christianity and Duterte’s War on Drugs in the Philippines”, *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 2(2), (2019): 224, 227, [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/25424246-00202005>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

<sup>9</sup> John Dart, “Trends of Bigger Churches: Going Mega”, *Christian Century*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010: 21-23.

<sup>10</sup> Lacey Warner, “Mega Churches: A New Ecclesiology or Ecclesial Evangelism?” *Review and Expositor* 107(1), (2010): 26.

perceived as good drugs that provide spiritual prescriptions for the betterment of life.<sup>11</sup>

Ethnographic observations and interviews among members of megachurches in the US by David Snow et al. show that megachurches attract and appeal to the masses for two reasons: at the personal level, megachurches provide a fine-tuning of a wide array of emotional problems and issues. At the organisational level, megachurches are significant players in a self-help market economy.<sup>12</sup>

The critiques of social scientists and marketing theoreticians also confirm that the megachurch phenomenon successfully markets its witness, power, and influence in the business centres. Joy Chin writes that megachurches like City Harvest Church (CHC) in Singapore “display a striking similarity in their rationalisation of production and consumption to those mass-production corporations of which McDonald’s is the epitome”.<sup>13</sup> Drawing from George Ritzer and Elizabeth Cook, Chin further argues that through this McDonaldisation of megachurches, they “grow in size in a short period and acquire their unique identities and influences in the society”.<sup>14</sup> Joseph Daniels and Marc von der Ruhr, who critique megachurches from an economic perspective, argue that they are attractive and successful because they “assert their ability as consumers of religious products to engage in religious switching.”<sup>15</sup> That is to say

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<sup>11</sup> James K. Wellman Jr., Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk, “God Is Like a Drug...: Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches”, *Sociological Forum*, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014, pp. 650-651. [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12108>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

<sup>12</sup> David A. Snow et al., “A Team Field Study of the Appeal of Megachurches: Identifying, Framing, and Solving Personal Issues”, *Ethnography* 11(1), (2010): 165, [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138109347006>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

<sup>13</sup> Joy Tong Kooi Chin, “McDonaldization and Megachurches: A Case Study of City Harvest Church, Singapore”, in Pattana Kitiarsa (ed), *Religious Commodifications in Asia: Marketing Gods* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 1.

<sup>14</sup> Chin, “McDonaldization”, 2. See Elizabeth Cook, “Would You Like Your Jesus Upsized? McDonaldization and the Mega Church,” Senior Thesis Projects, 1993-2002, Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2002, [Available at: [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_interstp2/85](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_interstp2/85)], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024]; and George Ritzer, *The McDonaldisation of Society* (Newbury Park, CA: Pine Forge, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Joseph P. Daniels and Marc von der Ruhr, “Examining Megachurch Growth: Free Riding, Fit, and Faith”, *International Journal of Social Economics* 39(5), (March 2012): 357, 253, 372. [Available at: [https://epublications.marquette.edu/econ\\_fac/139](https://epublications.marquette.edu/econ_fac/139)], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

that megachurches attract religious refugees because they “provide low cost and low commitment at the start, but the moment the attendees perceive a good fit in the church, they increase expectations and commitments”.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, megachurches can create bonding and bridging capital that connects to their influence in the public sphere and transnational networks. Terence Chong, an astute sociologist in Singapore, observes that the rise of megachurches in Asia was due to the influx of Protestant churches that detached themselves from the control of mother organizations for greater freedom of innovating and branding their worship.<sup>17</sup> He observes that the theology of the prosperity gospel and openness to charismata are associated with megachurches because of the upward mobility lifestyle of the middle classes. In addition, megachurches teach the integration of “sacred” and “secular” as a social space of Christian witness to encourage members to become change agents in society.<sup>18</sup> Chong also points out that the development of megachurches in Asia is a by-product of a growing “transnational” relationship with their Western counterparts. Although he acknowledges that some megachurches have an indigenous origin, the influence of international co-operation and globalisation has opened an immense network between these megachurches. They share information, knowledge, resources, and leadership models to maintain their religious status as megachurches.<sup>19</sup>

A study by Cartledge *et al.* on megachurches in London in 2017 shows a variety of activities of social engagement. These include work with children and youth, older people,

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<sup>16</sup> Daniels and von der Ruhr, “Examining Megachurch Growth”, 372.

<sup>17</sup> Terrence Chong, “Introduction”, in Terrence Chong (ed), *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2018): 407.

<sup>18</sup> Terrence Chong, “Introduction”, 408.

<sup>19</sup> Terrence Chong, “Introduction”, 411; see also Rene E. Mendoza, “Religion and Secularization in the Philippines and Other Asian Countries”, *Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics*, Kokugakuin University, 1999 [Available at: <https://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/cimac/mendoza.html>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

people experiencing homelessness, families, couples, people with physical and health needs, the widowed and bereaved, and community development such as educational projects and social campaigning against human trafficking.<sup>20</sup> According to this study, megachurches are galvanising civic engagement that positively impacts the lives of the city and its citizens and are working for real change in the communities they seek to serve.<sup>21</sup> Some essential findings from this study resonate with policymakers and social innovators to encourage collaboration between religious groups and civil society. While megachurch pastors, leaders, and congregants value beliefs, rituals, and values, the principal reason for their social engagement is their inherent personal and vibrant relationship with God. Megachurch members engage in social concerns because a relationship with God is the heart of their motivation.<sup>22</sup> The social engagement of megachurches is not primarily motivated by an agenda of proselytisation and evangelism. Still, it is a product of a solid interpersonal relationship within the faith community and with other partners.<sup>23</sup> As a result, Church social engagement provides a substantial deposit of spiritual and social capital to their members and the broader networks of the community.<sup>24</sup> According to this study, the diversity of forms of social engagement in these megachurches is based on each church's distinctive calling and conviction. There is no uniformity of social engagement but rather a diversity of expressions of Christian faith in the public sphere.<sup>25</sup>

### **Methodology**

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<sup>20</sup> Mark J. Cartledge et al., *Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 1.

<sup>21</sup> Cartledge et al., *Megachurches and Social Engagement*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Cartledge et al., *Megachurches and Social Engagement*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Cartledge et al., *Megachurches and Social Engagement*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Cartledge et al., *Megachurches and Social Engagement*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Cartledge et al., *Megachurches and Social Engagement*, 5-6.

The research team who conducted this study made a series of field visits and communications to our pilot projects, secured a research agreement with megachurches' leadership, and observed research protocols by communicating clearly what the research project intended to do.<sup>26</sup> While doing this process, we examined and watched hundreds of online sermon videos, TV interviews of megachurch leaderships, and testimonials of members of CCF and VCF. In addition, we joined the various social media platforms of CCF and VCF to receive and continually update each church's published videos. Finally, while the COVID-19 pandemic restricted us in so many ways from attending the physical services, we participated in the online services of both churches almost every Saturday and Sunday.

The survey instruments used for this study was from the 2015 Survey of North American Megachurches of Hartford Institute for Religion Research designed by Scott Thumma and Warren Bird<sup>27</sup> revised by Timothy Wadkins and the International team of researchers for the study of megachurches in the Global South.<sup>28</sup> The research team of the Global South spent one year of online Zoom meetings to revise, enhance, and add essential variables of the

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<sup>26</sup> This research project is funded by the generosity of John Templeton Foundation under the "Templeton Megachurch Project in the Global South" of Canisius College in New York, USA. I am pleased to acknowledge the contributions of many people who immensely contributed for the making of this project in the Philippines. To Prudencio Coz, Joseph Antolin, Karlo Timenia, Marichu Soliven Dulay, Ethel Giesbrecht, Lawrence Panaguiton, my research staff who helped me in so many ways to translate, implement, gather data and interview leaders of CCF and VCF. Larry Uy (Executive Secretary of VCF) has tremendously assisted us in promoting and distributing the survey flyer to the pastors and congregations of VCF; Pauline Abegail Matute (Executive Secretary of Peter Tan-chi) has helped us tremendously to communicate the project to the pastors, from securing the research agreement to reviewing our survey questionnaires to the leadership of CCF. Pauline Matute served as a "point person" and communication staff to us so that we could communicate with the church's leadership. J.P. Masakayan (Administrative Pastor of CCF, Georgetown University, USA) has helped us to endorse our research project to Pastor Peter Tan-chi. Pastor Masakayan linked us to the leadership during the formation of the research project in 2020. Ricky Sarthou (Executive pastor of CCF) has equally assisted us in promoting the surveys to CC members.

<sup>27</sup> Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, "Megafaith for the Megacity: The Global Megachurch Phenomenon", in Stanley D. Brunn (ed), *The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Place, Identities, Practices and Politics* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2015); first online 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014, [Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9376-6\\_123](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9376-6_123)], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Wadkins, "Modernization, Megachurches and the Urban Face of Christianity in the Global South", *An Approved Project Proposal for the John Templeton Foundation*, 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020.



Congregational Survey Instrument to appropriate the instrument in the GS context. Important variables added were engagement with the world, theological questions, and COVID-19 questions. In addition, we used the Qualtrics Online Survey and Google Form Online Survey to collect samples from CCF and VCF. The survey was conducted by the Philippine Regional Team with the partnership of the leadership of CCF and VCF. We crafted three long, short, and abridged survey versions and made the study available in Qualtrics and Google Forms. We also published and printed hard copies of the instruments to make them available on all fronts. Since the data collection's success lies in the endorsement and recommendation of megachurch leadership, we sent the draft to CCF and VCF for review after pretesting the survey instruments. We requested implementation of the survey for the pastors and congregants. We sent emails to the leadership of both churches and charted the plan to implement the surveys. Methodological predicaments encountered during the research process involved meeting the expectations of megachurch leaders. There is reluctance and scepticism from VCF regarding whether data collection can be successful due to the New General Community Quarantine (GCQ) imposed by the national government in Metro Manila, Philippines. The pandemic gravely affected church attendance and the implementation and collection of data on time.

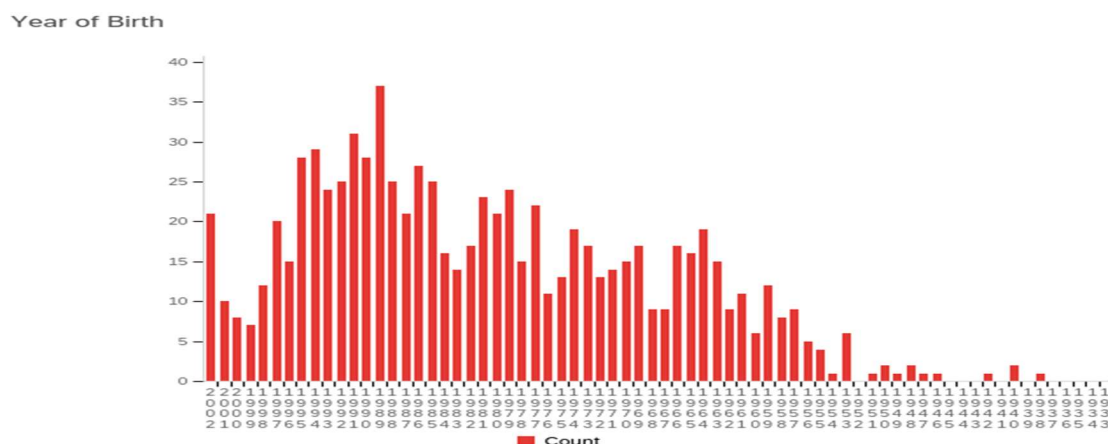
There were at least three phases to collecting data from our target projects. First, we formally requested the leaderships of CCF and VCF to roll out the surveys to their members to ensure we would meet the target number of data we intended to collect. As a result, the online surveys were sent to their pastors in the main churches and then to different satellite churches in the Philippines and overseas. Second, we formed a team of surveyors to promote, send, and distribute the surveys to the congregants attending the CCF and VCF, recruiting and inviting their adherents from various social media platforms to participate. Third, to attract the

congregants to join the survey, we created the “Join and Grab” flyer as a research strategy to provide a grab meal to encourage participants to join the survey. While this strategy has proven effective for participants living in Metro Manila, it was only sometimes the case in other provinces of the Philippines and overseas.

### **Summary of the Demographic Portraits**

Respondents to our surveys were taken from the two prominent evangelical churches yet consider themselves non-denominational with Pentecostal branding concerning their worship styles and ways of worship. Although there were 1,029 total respondents from CCF and VCF, only 880 completed the survey. Four hundred-eight individuals (46.36%) attend Victory Christian Fellowship, and 472 (53.64%) come from Christ Commission Fellowship. Qualtrics extracted 149 participants due to the significant items that these survey respondents did not answer. This section describes the following demography of the respondents.

### Q5.1: In what year were you born?



1933-1945	4	Silent Generation
1945-1964	114	Baby Boomer
1965-1980	252	Generation X
1981-2000	432	Millennial
2001-	31	Generation Z
Unknown	47*	No given year

Most congregant survey participants, 432 individuals (49.09%), came from millennials born between 1981 and 2000, followed by Generation X with 252 individuals (26.63% born between 1954 and 1980). Third in rank is the baby boomers, with 114 individuals (12.95%) and 31 individuals (3.52%) coming from Generation Z. Data also show that only four individuals (0.45%) are from the silent generation. Forty-four individuals (5%) did not consent or give the year when they were born. Regarding gender, 340 individuals (38.68%) are male and 537 (61.09%) are female. Two individuals (0.23%) identified as non-binary or third gender. While there were a proportionate number of male participants, the majority of participants were female congregants. Regarding marital status of participants, 464 individuals (52.73%) indicated married, 345 (39.20%) indicated single, 15 individuals (1.70%) said they live with a partner, 26 individuals (2.95%) indicated divorced or separated, and 30 individuals (3.41%) indicated widowed.

With regard to whether the participant's spouse or partner join them in the church, 421 individuals (88.08%) said they attend the same church, 26 (5.44%) attend a different church, 22 (4.60%) individuals said they adhere to a different religious faith, and 9 (1.88%) said they do not adhere to any faith at all. Four hundred and two individuals (45.68%) neither said they have a partner or have a status of single.

Table 1. Work Status of Participants

<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
450	51.25	Employees with salary
123	14.01	Business owner with employees or owners of small businesses
84	9.57	Housewife
49	5.58	Pensioners, retirees, or living with savings
47	5.35	Students
44	5.01	Unemployed
4	.46	Living at the Pyramid of Poverty
8	.91	Daily Wage Labourer
4	.46	Small Farm Owner
3	.34	Living on Welfare and Charity
1	.11	Wage earner in the Agricultural Sector
65	7.40	Missionaries, self-employed/Freelancers, or Own Home Businesses

When it comes to the work status of participants, 450 individuals (51.25%) work as employees with a salary, 123 individuals (14.01%) said they are a business owner with employees or owners of small businesses, and 84 individuals (9.57%) said that they work as a housewife. Data shows that three groups of participants consider themselves to have no work status. Forty-nine individuals (5.58%) said they are pensioners, retirees, or living with savings. In contrast, 47 individuals (5.35%) are still students, and 44 (5.01%) are unemployed. The data also shows that four participants (.46%) consider themselves living at the pyramid of poverty in the Philippines. Eight individuals (0.91%) consider themselves daily wage labourers, four individuals (0.46%) said they are small farm owners, and three individuals (0.34%) said they are living on welfare and charity. Only one individual (0.11%) said they are a wage earner in the agricultural sector. The data shows, however, that 65 individuals (7.40%) were not included in

the bracket. These people serve as missionaries, self-employed/freelancers, or own home businesses.

When it comes to how participants describe their class position in society, 445 individuals (50.63%) say they are middle class, 339 individuals (38.57%) say they belong to the working class, and 73 individuals (8.30%) say they consider themselves lower class. Data shows that 22 individuals (2.50%) say they belong to the upper class. Regarding educational background and achievement, most participants, 468 individuals (53.36%), said they hold graduate and post-graduate degrees, and 216 individuals (24.63%) hold postsecondary and undergraduate degrees. One hundred twenty-one individuals (13.80%) completed diploma, certificate, and vocation courses, while 61 (6.96%) completed their secondary studies. Almost equally, five individuals (0.57%) and six individuals (0.68%) said they completed their elementary education or have some schooling but did not complete their elementary education. Most megachurch congregants are highly educated people with graduate and post-graduate degrees.

### **Christian Life**

Megachurches are believed to be the spiritual capital centres that teach doctrines and beliefs so they know how to behave and act in society. This section of the survey examined the opinions of megachurch congregants relative to different Christian beliefs taught by their pastors. When it comes to the Bible, whether congregants believe that the Bible gives a clear answer about good and evil, 863 individuals (98.97%) said they agree. Asked whether they think that God punishes those who engage in fornication and adultery, the survey revealed that about 819 individuals (94.25%) agreed. When asked about whether God will punish homosexual activity, about 798 individuals (92.25%) agreed. Regarding Christian evangelistic responsibility to share

the good news with other religions, 863 individuals (98.97%) said they agreed Christians should do this. Regarding the responsibility of Christians to work for justice for the poor, 755 individuals (86.58%) agreed Christians should do this work, With regard to whether Christians have to help the disadvantaged in society with no expectation that they will convert or join the church, 800 individuals (93.13%) agreed. Regarding giving support and donations to the church, 806 (94.16%) of the congregants agreed that Christians should support the church financially. With regard to paying tithes, 765 (88.63%) agreed Christians should tithe, 69 (7.94%) disagreed this statement.

Regarding spiritual warfare, most megachurch members believe Christians are at war with Satan and his forces in our sin-warped, broken world. 823 individuals (95.03%) highly subscribe to the belief that Christians are involved with satanic forces. Megachurch congregants believe in healing but they do not like associating themselves with faith healers or televangelists who use a medium of instrument for economic exchange and aggrandisement. When it comes to speaking in tongues as the only evidence of Spirit baptism, 155 individuals (17.94%) agreed, 630 individuals (72.92%) disagreed, and 79 individuals (9.14%) felt doubtful about the statement. The survey showed that while minimal agreement exists among members regarding speaking in tongues as the only physical evidence of Spirit baptism, the overall tone of the megachurch congregants was to reject this idea as they are still determining whether tongues serve as the only evidence of Spirit baptism. Regarding the continuity of miracles today, 784 individuals (90.95%) agree and believe in the occurrence and continuity of miracles today, as in biblical times.

Regarding the doctrine of eschatology and last events, 848 individuals (97.47%) say that Jesus is Saviour and Lord and the only way to be saved from eternal damnation and 831

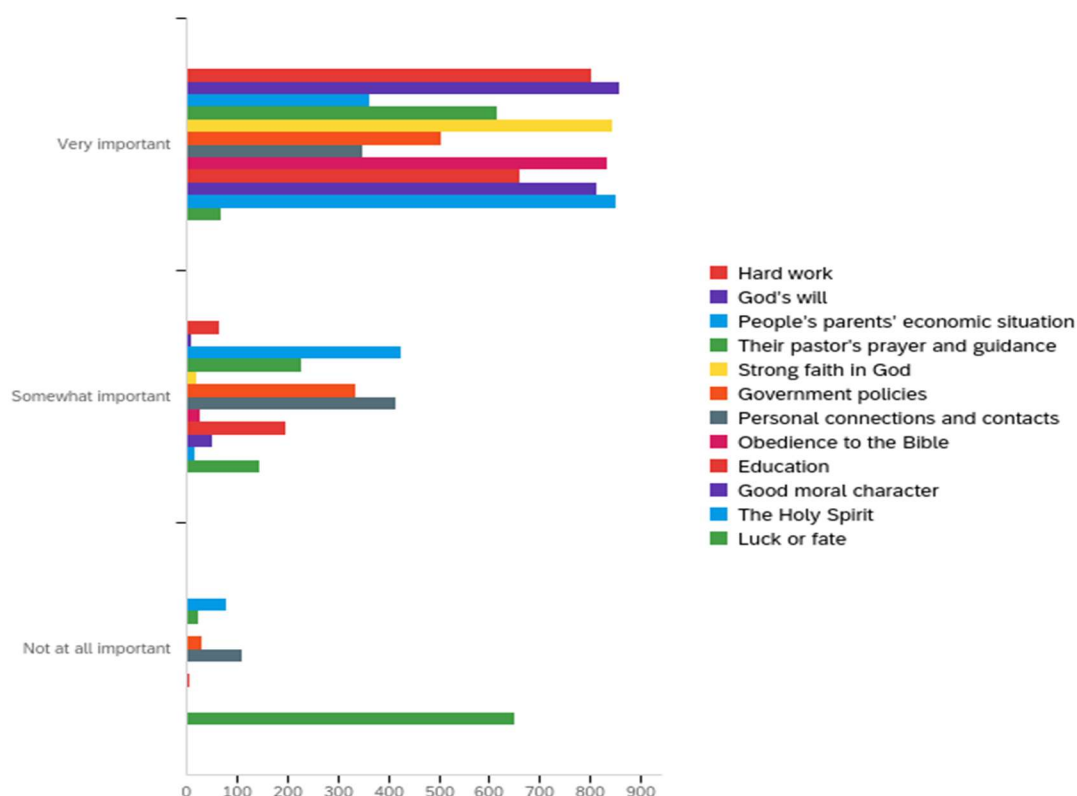
individuals (95.85%) said Jesus will return soon. Regarding the timing of the last days and the Church's rapture, megachurch congregants agree that the religious faithful will be saved and taken up to heaven in what is called the rapture of the Church: 698 individuals (81.45%), and 78 individuals (9.10%) disagreed. Another 81 individuals (9.45%) were doubtful relative to this statement.

A public perception exists of megachurches as the habitat of the prosperity gospel, known as "health and wealth" theology. The "redemption and lift" and upward mobility mentality of the members sometimes fuel congregant attraction to the prosperity gospel. The survey examined whether this holds true within megachurches in the Philippines.

The survey revealed that 452 individuals (52.13%) agreed that God will grant wealth and success to all believers who have true faith, 349 individuals (40.25%) disagreed, and 66 individuals (7.61%) felt doubtful of the statement. When it comes to health, 445 individuals (51.39%) agreed that God will grant good health and relief from sickness to believers who have true faith, 359 individuals (41.45%) disagreed, and 62 individuals (7.16%) felt doubtful about that statement. The data reveals intriguing observations about the belief in health and wealth among megachurch congregants. While a slight majority (52.13% and 51.39%) of both questions show that megachurch congregants believe that God grants wealth and health, these theological stances are faced with a high degree of disagreement (40.25% and 41.45%) among members of megachurches. More than 7% of participants felt doubtful and unsure about the questions. In other words, a theological "tension" of belief is emerging within megachurch congregants about the doctrinal issues of health and wealth theology.

## The Economic Life

### Christian and Economic Well-Being



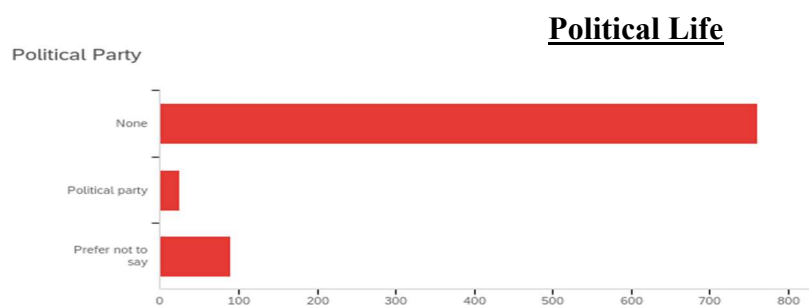
Megachurches are homes of a few oligarchs but are populated by middle-class and working people in the country who are driven by upward mobility and economic success. Although diverse in their opinions about wealth and prosperity, megachurch congregants in the survey clarified what important factors affect personal economic success. This study has enumerated economic indicators for economic success. Regarding hard work, this study found that 804 individuals (92.52%) agreed that hard work is very important, 858 individuals (98.73%) indicated that they see God's will as very important, people's parents' economic situation, 362 individuals (41.85%) regard it as very important, while 424 individuals (49.02%) said they see it as somewhat important. Furthermore, 615 individuals (71.18%) see pastor's prayer and guidance as very important. When it comes to the importance of faith in God, 845 individuals (97.58%) said they see it as very important. When it comes to their perspective on government policies on



economics, 503 (58.02%) said that it is very important and 336 individuals (38.75%) said it is somewhat important. Regarding the importance of social capital, 413 individuals (47.58%) think it is crucial, 347 individuals (39.98%) said they regarded it as very important, and another 108 individuals (12.44%) said they see it as unimportant. Regarding obedience to the Bible, 835 individuals (96.53%) said they regard it as an important indicator of economic success.

Regarding education, 662 individuals (76.62%) said they believe financial literacy is important while moral character, like integrity and honesty, 815 individuals (94.11%) said is imperative.

Regarding the role of the Holy Spirit, 851 individuals (98.04%) said the Holy Spirit is very important while 652 individuals (75.55%) regard fate and luck as not important at all. When it comes to the perceptions of megachurch congregants about the Philippine economy, when asked whether this country is being left behind in terms of economic development, 483 individuals (55.58%) agreed, 459 individuals (52.82%) say that they agreed the economy is improving, 339 individuals (38.97%) said that it is in the right direction, and 327 individuals (37.54%) said they felt neutral and unsure whether this country is respected in the world.



John Choo, Evelyn Tan, and P.S. Goh write that megachurches in the Philippines have begun expanding their political influence by “endorsing political candidates” to their adherents through their church-based political movement, “influencing their middle-class members to be a ‘salt and light’ in the bureaucracy through fielding political offices,” and “galvanising the

grassroots by sending their members out of the streets for political causes”<sup>29</sup> These qualitative observations, however, have never been tested empirically and quantitatively. We asked members a series of questions on political issues to see the faces of political engagement of megachurches, 761 individuals (86.97%) said they do not have any political affiliations whatsoever. However, when asked the name of their political affiliations, although restrictive with their responses, the Liberal Party, represented by Leni and Kiko Pangilinan during the past election, is the representative voice of megachurch members. Although some identify as the political party of Uniteam, Manny Pacquiao, and the Christian Values movement of CCF – or some identify themselves as Independent, Republican, or Conservative, the most identified political party of megachurch congregants is the Liberal Party.

Our survey indicated that megachurch congregants remain apolitical and do not want to identify with any political party in the Philippines. Although emerging political movements now exist that voice out the beliefs, values, and choices of megachurches, it appears that information about these political movements owned by megachurches has not been communicated well to the congregants, or perhaps these political choices endorsed by megachurch leadership are politically coerced by their members for personal political choices. The survey shared four noticeable and dominating choices of megachurch congregants about electing a leader of the country: a person who is a Christian (84.00%), a candidate who supports democracy (80.83%), an authoritative leader (72.70%), and a member of the church (69.21%). Our survey also shows that a female candidate (26.74%) and a member of another religious faith (10.53%) are the secondary choice candidates that megachurch congregants will vote for. Candidates who are members or advocates

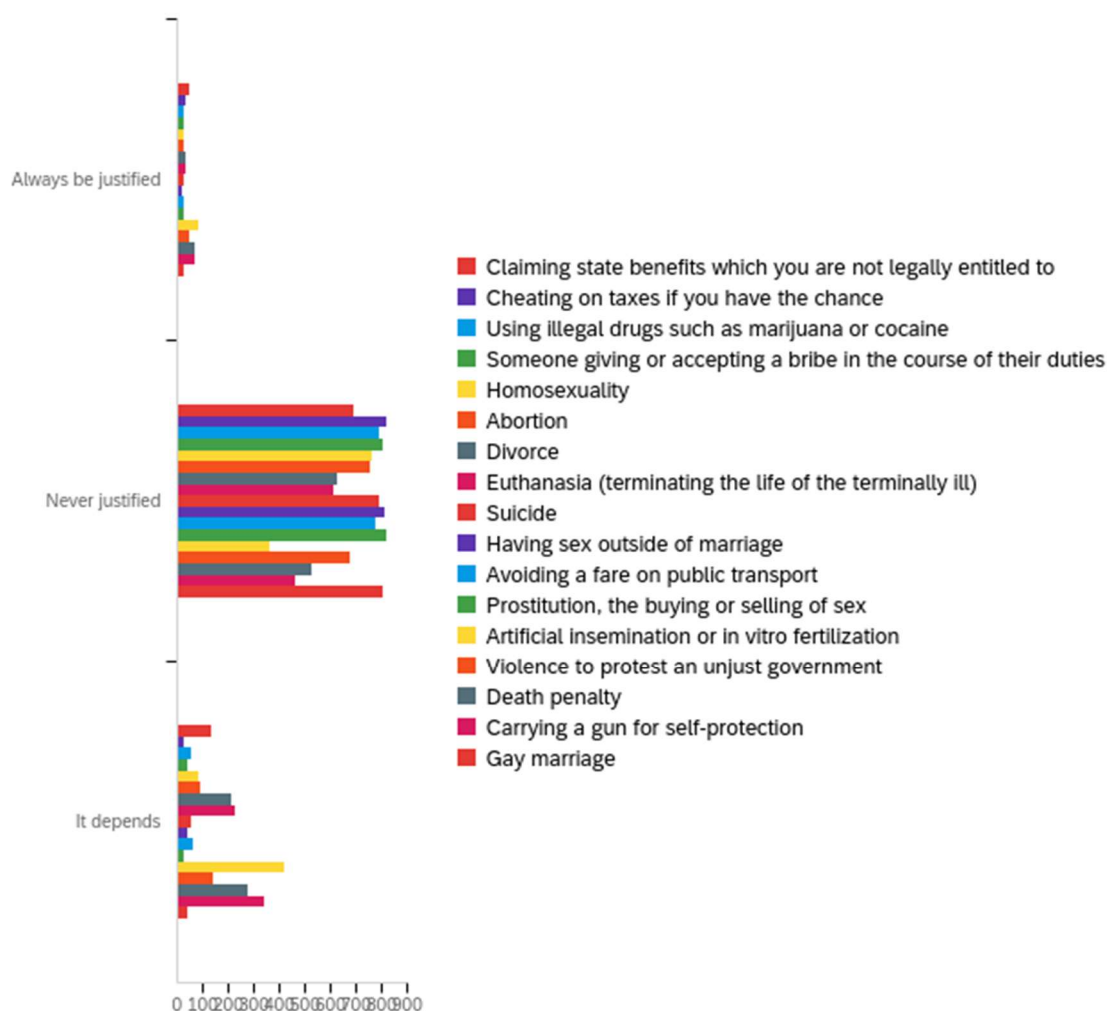
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<sup>29</sup> John Choo, Evelyn Tan, and P.S. Goh, “Christian Megachurches and Politics in the Philippines”, *Perspective ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute* 62 (2020): 1-4.

of the LGBTQ community (3.35%) and those with an atheistic belief (1.74%) are the less likely choice candidates of megachurch members. Most of the members always participate in local and national elections. Although the percentage varies, megachurch congregants participate slightly more at the national level (74.02%) than at the local level (68.69%).

### Social Issues

Perceptions about Social Issues



Regarding the perception of the most controversial social issues in society today, megachurch congregants are staunch in their positions on these social issues. Mainly, when it comes to claiming state benefits to which you are not legally entitled, 694 individuals (79.68%) said they are never justified in receiving them. With regard to cheating on taxes, 819 individuals

(93.81%) said it is never justified. When it comes to using illegal drugs such as marijuana or cocaine, 795 individuals (91.07%) said it is never justified. With regard to whether someone is giving or accepting a bribe in the course of their duties, 810 individuals (92.78%) said doing so was never justified.

With regard to homosexuality, 765 individuals (87.93%) said it is never justified, With regard to abortion, 757 individuals (86.91%) said it is never justified. Regarding divorce, the legal separation of a couple, 630 individuals (72.33%) said it is never justified. Our survey also suggested that the biblical prohibition and illegality of the matter in the Philippines likely influenced this perception. Concerning euthanasia or terminating the life of a terminally ill person, 613 individuals (70.62%) said it is never justified. However, when it comes to suicide, 790 individuals (90.29%) said it is never justified. When it comes to pre-marital sex, 815 individuals (93.57%) said it is never justified. With regard to avoiding a fare on public transport, 782 individuals (89.68%) said it is never justified. Regarding prostitution and the buying and selling of sex, 822 individuals (94.37%) said it is never justified. Our survey shows that most megachurch congregants reject and resist any form of sexual promiscuity contrary to the Holy Scriptures.

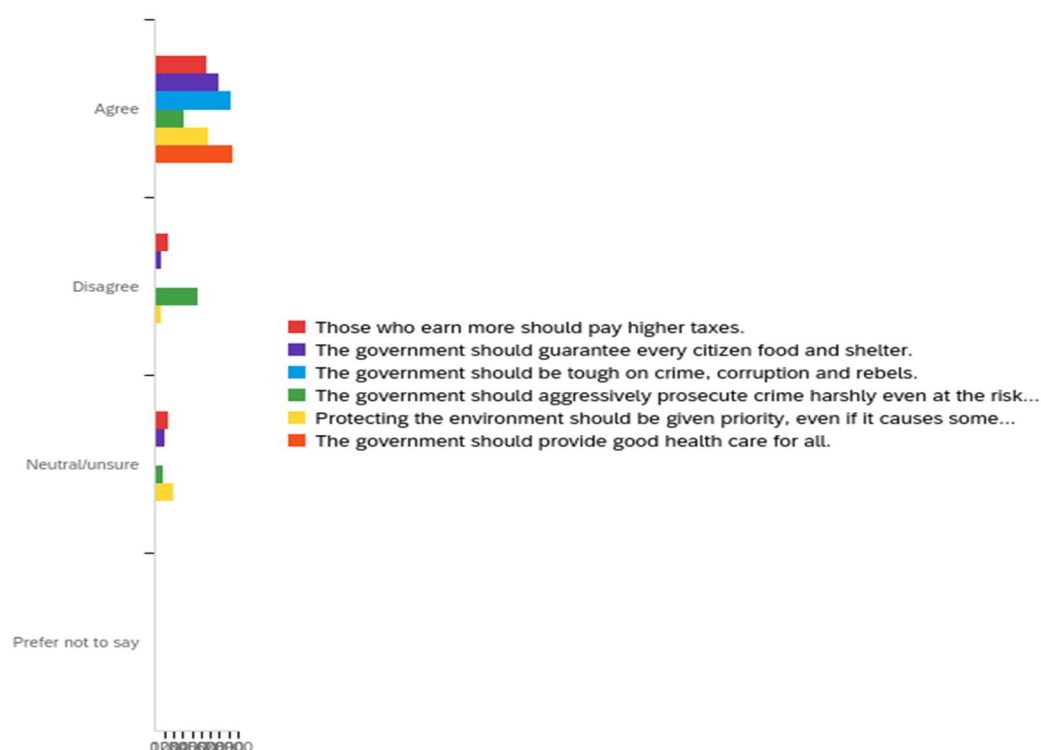
Concerning artificial insemination or in vitro fertilisation, 364 individuals (41.79%) said it is never justified, and another 421 (48.34%) said it depends upon the situation. While less than half of the participants (41.79%) reject the justification of in vitro fertilisation, an increasing acceptance and justification of artificial insemination or in vitro fertilisation exists among members of megachurches in the Philippines.

When it comes to protesting an unjust government, 679 individuals (77.96%) said it is never justified, 526 individuals (60.60%) said death penalty is never justified. When it comes to

carrying a gun for self-protection, 67 individuals (7.68%) said it is justified, but 464 individuals (53.12%) said it is never justified, while 341 individuals (39.11%) said it depends upon the situation. With regard to gay marriage, only 25 individuals (2.86%) said it is always justified, but 808 individuals (92.45%) said it is never justified, while 41 individuals (4.69%) said that it depends. At the same time, a small percentage of acceptance and ambiguousness of the issue exists.

**Q9.14: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about government actions and policies.**

Level of Acceptance about Government Responses to Social Issues



When it comes to the attitudes of megachurch congregants on government policies and actions, 558 individuals (64.06%) agreed with policies, 148 individuals (16.99%) disagreed with them, and 147 (16.88%) felt neutral. Only 18 individuals (2.07%) preferred not to say that those who earn more should pay higher taxes. Concerning shelter and food, 697 individuals (80.21%) of church congregants agreed that the government should guarantee every citizen food and

shelter. Only 63 individuals (7.25%) disagreed, 103 individuals (11.85%) felt neutral, and six individuals (0.69%) preferred not to say their responses.

With regard to whether the government should be tough on crime, corruption, and rebels, 828 individuals (95.28%) agreed, 18 individuals (2.07%) disagreed, 103 individuals (11.85%) felt neutral, and only six individuals (0.69%) preferred not to say their response. Most megachurch congregants highly support the government's tough decisions and actions on crime, corruption, and rebels.

However, regarding the government's aggressiveness to prosecute crime harshly, even at the risk of violating human rights, 305 individuals (35.18%) agreed with that aggressiveness, but 467 individuals (53.86%) disagreed. In comparison, 82 individuals (9.46%) felt neutral, and only 13 individuals (1.50%) preferred not to share their responses. Most megachurch congregants reject the government's actions to prosecute crimes if they violate human rights.

Regarding protecting the environment as a priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs, 585 individuals (67.71%) agreed with that policy. However, only 67 individuals (7.75%) disagreed, while 200 individuals (23.15%) felt neutral, and 12 individuals (1.39%) preferred not to respond. Most church congregants support the government priority of protecting the environment even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs.

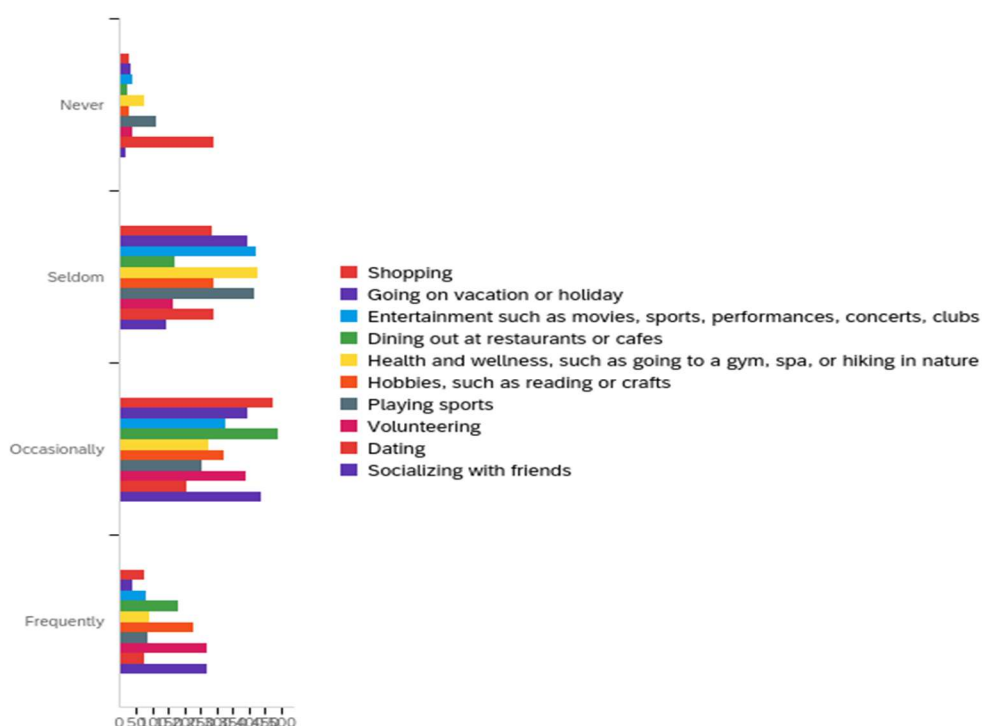
When it comes to the provision of good health care for all, 839 individuals (97.44%) agreed with providing good health care for all, and only six individuals (0.70%) disagreed, while 14 individuals (1.63%) felt neutral. Two individuals (0.23%) preferred not to say. The survey indicated that among the social issues asked, megachurch congregants highly support the statement that the government should provide good health care for all its citizens. The high

responses of the megachurch congregants about healthcare are fuelled by the urgency of this government's actions to the negative impact of COVID-19 on Filipino citizens.

### Cultural Issues

#### **Q10.1: How often do you engage in the following activities?**

Lifestyles Engagement



This section of the survey sought to discover the faces and forms of cultural values of megachurch congregants and how modernisation and urbanisation has affected or influenced them. We measured the cultural values of megachurch congregants and how often they go shopping, on vacation, what proportion of their time they spend on entertainment, etc. When it comes to shopping, only 29 individuals (3.34%) never go shopping, but 288 individuals (33.14%) seldomly shop, and 476 individuals (54.78%) occasionally shop. In comparison, 76 individuals (8.75%) said they frequently go shopping. While 33.13% of megachurch congregants seldom go shopping, data show that most occasionally go shopping.

When it comes to going on vacation during holidays, 34 individuals (3.9%) never go on vacation during holidays, 397 individuals (45.68%) seldomly have a vacation, while 399 individuals (45.9%) occasionally go for vacation during holidays. Only 39 individuals (4.49%) say they frequently go on vacations during holidays. The majority of responses from megachurch congregants indicate they seldom or occasionally go for vacation during holidays.

With regard to attitudes toward entertainment, such as movies, sports, performances, and concert clubs, only 41 individuals (4.71%) never go to those activities, 422 individuals (48.45%) seldomly attend these activities, and 329 individuals (37.77%) occasionally hang out at these entertainment activities. Only 79 individuals (9.07%) frequently go for these activities. The majority of megachurch members seldom attend locations associated with the entertainment industry.

When it comes to dining out at restaurants or cafes, only 21 individuals (2.41%) said they never go out to restaurants and cafes, 173 individuals (19.89%) seldom go to these places, 493 individuals (56.67%) occasionally dine out, and 183 individuals (21.03%) frequently go to these places. Megachurch congregants are more occasional than frequent in their dining out at restaurants and cafes.

Concerning health and wellness, such as going to the gym, spa, or hiking in nature, only 76 individuals (8.75%) said they do not go to these places, yet 427 individuals (49.14%) seldomly go. In comparison, 275 individuals (31.65%) occasionally attend these fitness areas. Ninety-one individuals (10.47%) said they frequently visit these wholesome places.

When it comes to hobbies such as reading or crafts, only 28 individuals (3.23%) never have hobbies like reading or crafts. However, 291 individuals (33.56%) seldomly read and do crafts, and 321 individuals (37.02%) occasionally read a book and do crafts, while 227



individuals (26.18%) frequently do reading and crafts. The majority of church congregants occasionally have hobbies like reading and doing crafts.

With regard to playing sports, 113 individuals (13.02%) said they never play sports; however, 416 individuals (47.93%) said they seldomly play sports, and 254 individuals (29.26%) occasionally play sports, while 85 individuals (9.79%) frequently play sports. The majority of the megachurch congregants seldom play sports.

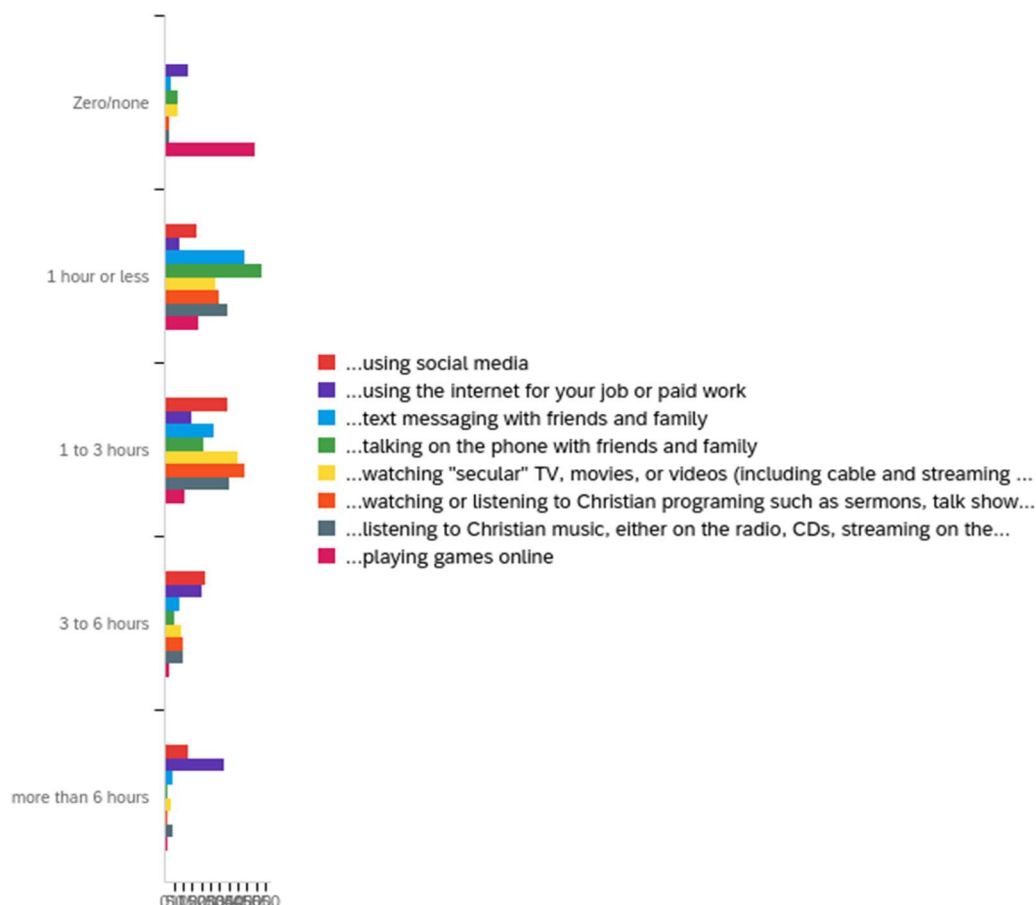
When it comes to volunteering, only 39 individuals (4.49%) said they never volunteer, 167 individuals (19.22%) seldomly volunteer, 393 individuals (45.22%) occasionally volunteer, while 270 individuals (31.07%) frequently volunteer. The majority of megachurch congregants occasionally volunteer.

With regard to dating, 292 individuals (33.68%) said they do not date others, yet 290 individuals (33.45%) said they seldom date others, while 209 individuals (24.11%) acknowledged they date others. Seventy-six individuals (8.77%) said they frequently do date other people.

Regarding socialising with friends, 17 individuals (1.95%) said they never socialise with friends, while 143 individuals (16.40%) said they seldomly socialise with their friends. However, 439 individuals (50.34%) acknowledged that they occasionally socialise with friends, and another 273 individuals (31.31%) said they frequently socialise with friends. Megachurch congregants occasionally and frequently socialise with their friends.

**Q10.13: On average, how many hours per day do you spend doing the following?**

Hours Spent in Social Media



When it comes to time spent using social media, only eight individuals (0.92%) said they spent zero or no time using social media, 177 individuals (20.25%) said they spend one hour or less, but 342 individuals (39.13%) said they spent 1-3 hours, while another 222 individuals (25.40%) believe they spend 3-6 hours, and 125 individuals (14.30%) say it is more than six hours. The time spent on social media among megachurch congregants varies. However, the most obvious observation is that most church congregants spend between 1-3 hours and 3-6 hours on social media.

However, when it comes to using the Internet for their jobs or paid work, 127 individuals (14.65%) said they use it zero or no hours, 80 individuals (9.23%) said one hour or less, 143

individuals (16.49%) said between 1-3 hours, 198 individuals (22.84%) said between 3-6 hours, and 319 individuals (36.79%) said they use it more than six hours. The data clearly shows megachurch congregants are regular users of the Internet for their jobs and paid work.

With regard to text messaging with friends and family, only 34 individuals (3.91%) said they spend zero or no hours text messaging with friends and family, but 439 individuals (50.46%) said they text one hour or less per day, 269 individuals (30.92%) said between 1-3 hours per day, 83 individuals (9.54%) said between 3-6 hours per day, and 45 individuals (5.17%) said they text more than six hours per day. Megachurch congregants are regular users of cell phones and smart phones for communication with 81.38% using these devices between 0-3 hours daily.

In the same way, when it comes to talking on the phone with friends and family, only 68 individuals (7.83%) said they talk on the phone zero to no hours, but 530 individuals (60.99%) said one hour or less, 212 individuals (24.40%) said between 1-3 hours, and 48 individuals (5.52%) said between 3-6 hours. In comparison, 11 individuals (1.27%) said they talk on the phone more than six hours per day. Most church congregants talk on the phone with friends for an hour or less.

When it comes to watching “secular” TV, movies, or videos (including cable and streaming services), only 68 individuals (7.82%) said they watch for zero or no hours, 279 individuals (32.07%) said one hour or less, 401 individuals (46.09%) said between 1-3 hours, and 91 individuals (10.46%) said between 3-6 hours. In comparison, 31 individuals (3.56%) said they watch it for more than six hours. Most megachurch congregants spend time watching secular TV, movies, or videos for 1-3 hours per day.

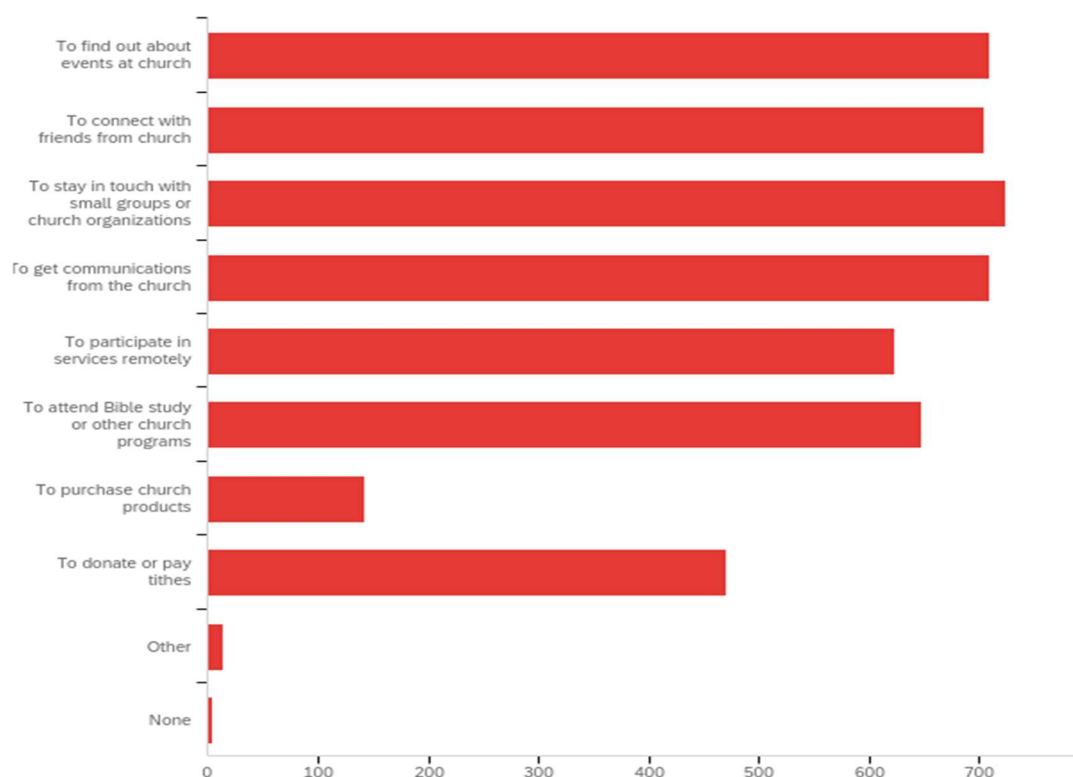
When it comes to watching or listening to Christian programming such as sermons, talk shows, podcasts, or drama, only 25 individuals (2.87%) said they watch it for zero or no hours, 299 individuals (34.29%) said an hour or less, but 432 individuals (49.54%) said between 1-3 hours, and 99 individuals (11.35%) said between 3-6 hours, and only 17 individuals (1.95%) said they watch Christian programming for more than six hours. Most megachurch congregants spend 1-3 hours per day listening to Christian programming.

Regarding listening to Christian music, either via the radio, CDs, streaming on the Internet, or downloading, only 3.21% said they listen for zero hours per day, but 344 individuals (39.49%) said they listen for an hour or less. In comparison, another 350 individuals (40.18%) said they listen 1-3 hours per day. One hundred and three individuals (11.83%) said they listen between 3-6 hours, while 46 individuals (5.28%) said they listen more than six hours per day. Most megachurch congregants listen to Christian music on radio, CDs, or online sources for under 3 hours per day.

When it comes to playing games online, 495 individuals (60.89%) said they play for zero hours, 181 individuals (22.26%) said for an hour or less, while 10 individuals (12.79%) said between 1-3 hours. Only 23 individuals (2.83%) said they play online games for 3-6 hours per day, while ten individuals (1.23%) said they play for more than six hours per day. While some congregants play online games, the majority do not.

**Q10.14: For what church-related purposes do you use social media? (Select all that apply.)**

Purpose of Social Media in Church



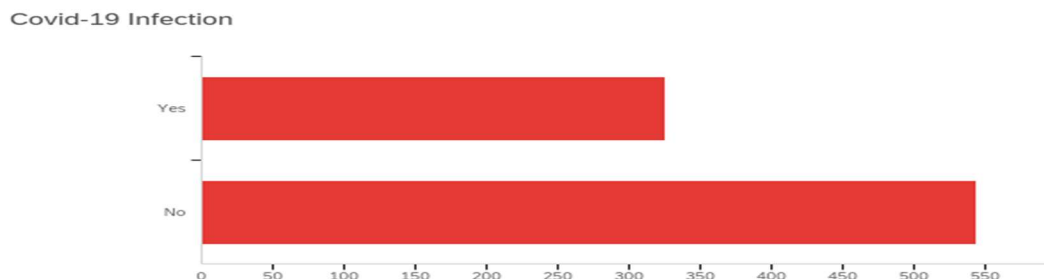
Regarding the use of social media in the context of church affairs, church congregants gave various responses for various reasons: 14.93% want to find out about the events of the church, 14.82% want to be connected with friends from the church, 15.24% want to be in touch with small groups or church organisations, 14.93% want to get communications from the church, 13.14% want to participate in services remotely, and 13.64% want to attend Bible study or other church programmes.

Regarding buying church products, only 3.01% say that they want to purchase church products, and another 9.92% said they want to donate or pay their tithes. Aside from other reasons, 14 individuals (0.29%) said they want to minister virtually, send Bible passages and prayer, attend Zoom meetings, find inspirational and doctrinal sermons for difficulties in life,

watch and share sermons, facilitate small groups and Dgroups (discipleship groups), and attend book studies.

### **Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### **Q11.1: Have you had COVID-19?**



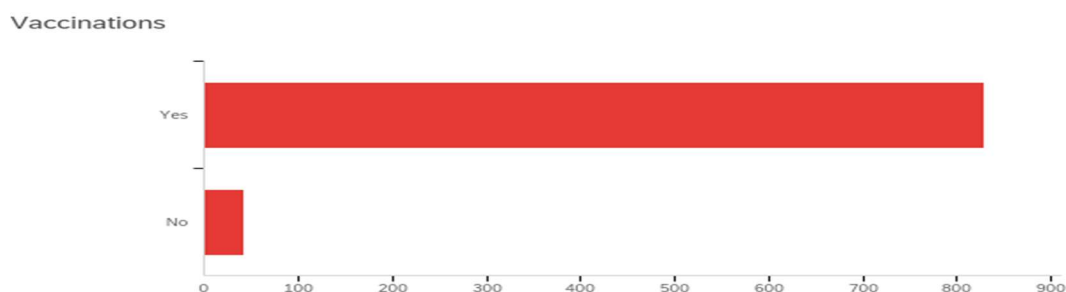
While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage and disrupt millions of individuals and families, creating economic and social turmoil globally, Oliwia Kowalczyk, Krzysztof Roszkowski, and Anna Bajek’s study on the role of religion during the global pandemic perceived that “Religion has always played the role of balm for the soul and that churches are like hospitals of the soul.”<sup>30</sup> Recent studies by the Pew Research Center in the US show that the COVID-19 pandemic has boosted the faith of believers and bolstered the bonding of family relationships.<sup>31</sup> Religious activities became less expensive and increasingly democratised due to social media platforms and online activities.

Regarding whether the COVID-19 pandemic has infected participants, 544 individuals (62.60%) said no, and 325 individuals (37.40%) said yes. Most had not gotten it themselves although it affected many.

#### **Q11.4: Have you received the COVID-19 vaccine?**

<sup>30</sup> Oliwia Kowalczyk, Krzysztof Roszkowski, Xavier Montane, Wojciech Pawliszak, Bartosz Tylkowski, and Anna Bajek, “Religion and Faith Perception in a Pandemic of COVID-19”, *Journal of Religious Health* 59(6), (2020): 2671, [Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7549332/>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].

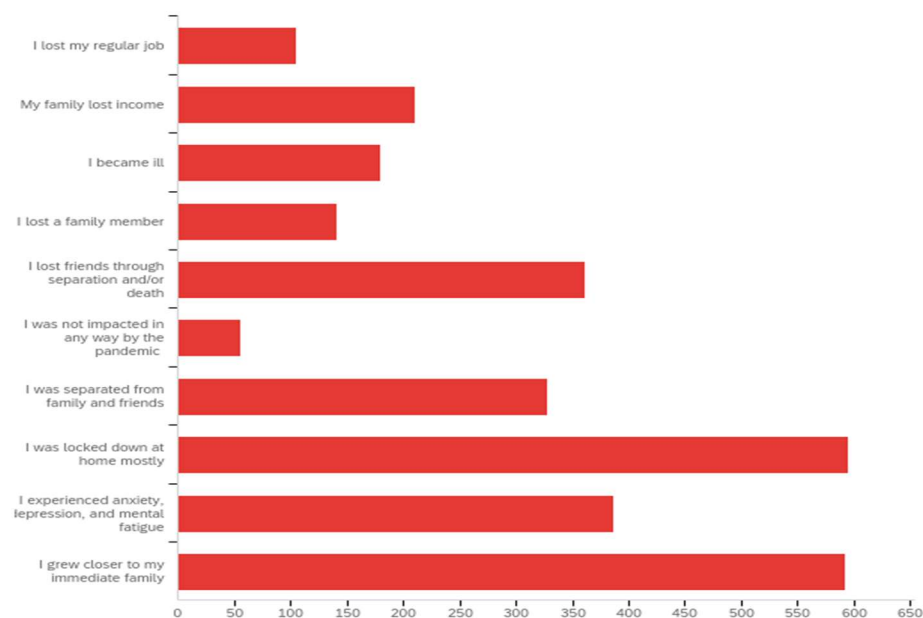
<sup>31</sup> Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life, “More Americans Than People in Other Advanced Economies Say COVID-19 Has Strengthened Religious Faith”, *Pew Research Center*, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021, [Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/01/27/more-americans-than-people-in-other-advanced-economies-say-covid-19-has-strengthened-religious-faith/>], [Last accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024].



Regarding receiving the COVID-19 vaccines, 829 individuals (95.18%) received vaccinations while only 42 individuals (4.82%) said no. There is an overwhelming indication that megachurch people believe in the interplay of faith and fact in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey responses indicated that megachurch congregants, while believing in God, also believe in the modern discoveries of medical sciences.

**Q11.8: How were you impacted personally by the global COVID-19 pandemic? (Select all that apply.)**

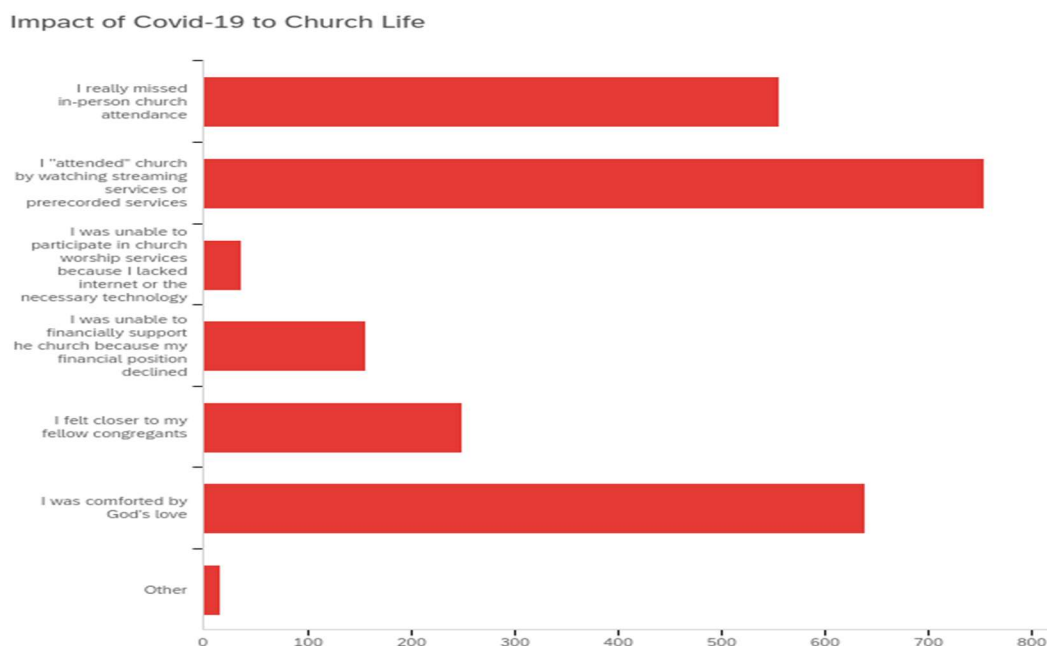
Impact of Covid-19 to Personal Life and Family



Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on personal life, 20.07% said they grew closer to their immediate family, and 20.14% said they were locked down at home mostly. In addition, 13.10% experienced anxiety, depression, and mental fatigue; 12.22% lost a friend through separation or death; and 11.10% were separated from family and friends. Also, 7.11% lost their

family income, about 6.06% became ill, about 4.77% lost a family member, and 3.55% lost their regular job. Only 1.90% were not impacted in any way by the global pandemic.

**Q11.9: Which of the following occurred in your church life due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (Select all that apply.)**



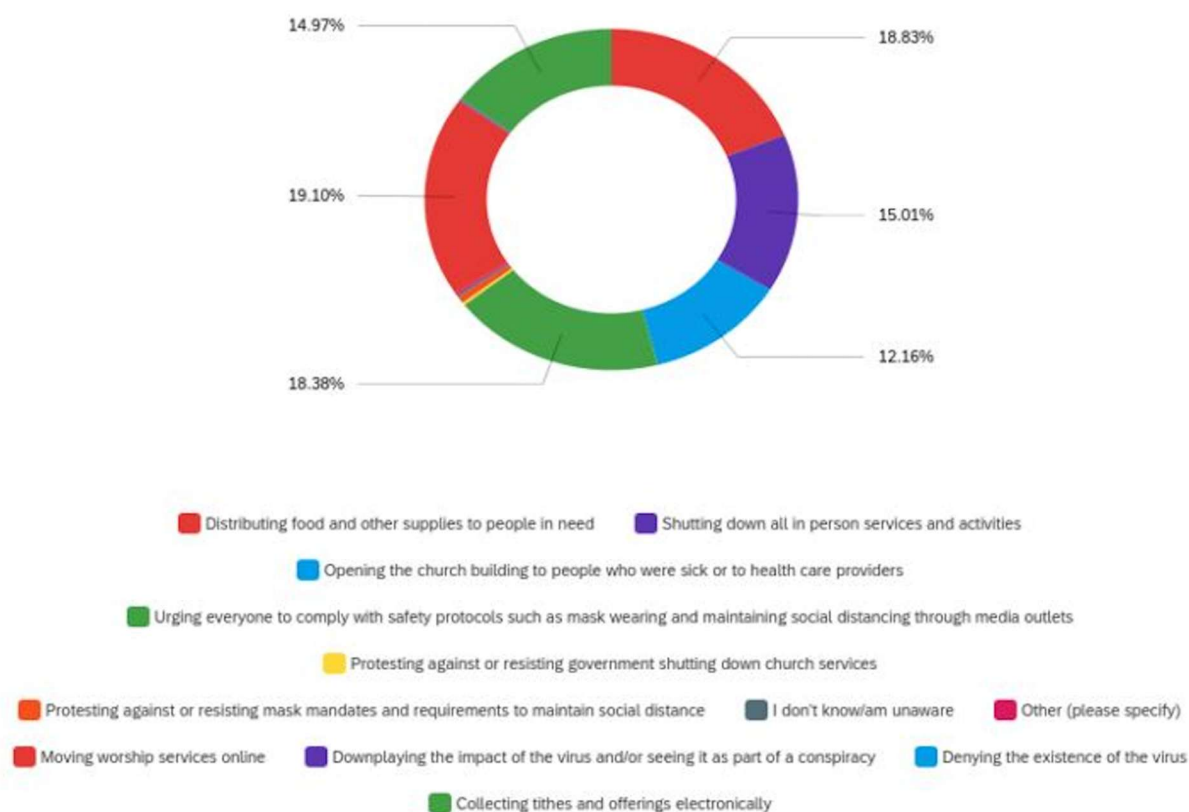
Regarding the result of COVID-19 on church life after the pandemic, 31.34% attended church by watching streaming or pre-recorded services, 26.57% were comforted by God's love, 23.08% missed in-person church attendance, and 10.38% felt closer to their fellow members. However, 6.48% could not financially support the church because of the decline of their financial position, and 1.49% could not participate in church worship services because they lacked the Internet or the necessary technology. With other reasons, 0.66% said that discipleship became more challenging, so they became inactive as a cell group leader. One respondent said, "My fiancée disengaged in her commitment vows and abandoned our relationship due to [our] long distance relationship and her lack of faith. She chose the system and the needs of this world rather than God's purpose for us in Christ's ministry." Although some felt disappointed that the church remained closed, they grew in their relationship with God through worship and served in



different capacities than before COVID-19. Some became more active and followed God's calling after they recovered and healed from COVID-19. Thus, they continued to attend their online Zoom meetings. These members realised many important lessons they had learned from the pandemic.

**Q11.10: How has your church responded, currently or in the past, to the COVID-19 pandemic? (Select all that apply.)**

Church Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic



Regarding how megachurches responded to the effect of COVID-19 on the lives of their people and communities, 19.06% said they shifted from physical services to online worship services, 18.82% immediately distributed food and other supplies to needy people, 18.35% urged everyone to comply with the safety protocols such as wearing masks and maintaining social distancing through media outlets, 15.08% shut down all in-person services and activities, and

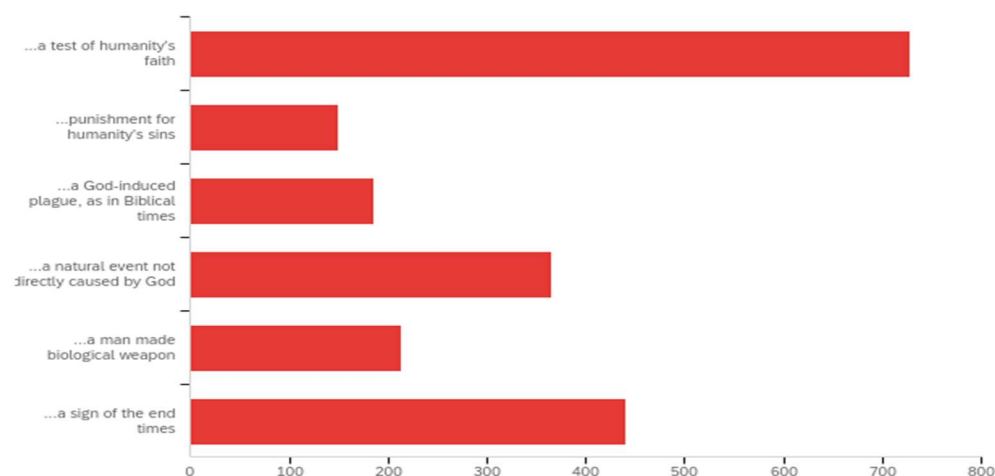
another 15.00% said that collecting tithes and offerings was done electronically. Other 12.15% opened the church building to people who were sick or health care providers.

As to some other activities undertaken by megachurches, some participants said they have topics in their online classes that deal with the effects of COVID-19, such as anxiety, trusting God, and the like. These churches are more committed to online evangelism and discipleship training, organising daily devotions through Zoom meetings, and supporting people through online efforts and counselling who have difficulty coping emotionally and mentally. The church also distributed COVID-19 aid kits and spiritual support to people during the pandemic.

As to the adverse reactions of congregants, 0.29% said they protested against or resisted the government shutting down church services and the mask mandate and requirement for social distancing, 0.15% just downplayed the impact of the virus and saw it as part of a conspiracy theory, and another 0.05% denied the virus's existence.

#### **Q11.11: In your opinion, the COVID-19 pandemic is... (Select all that apply.)**

Perceptions about Covid-19 Pandemic



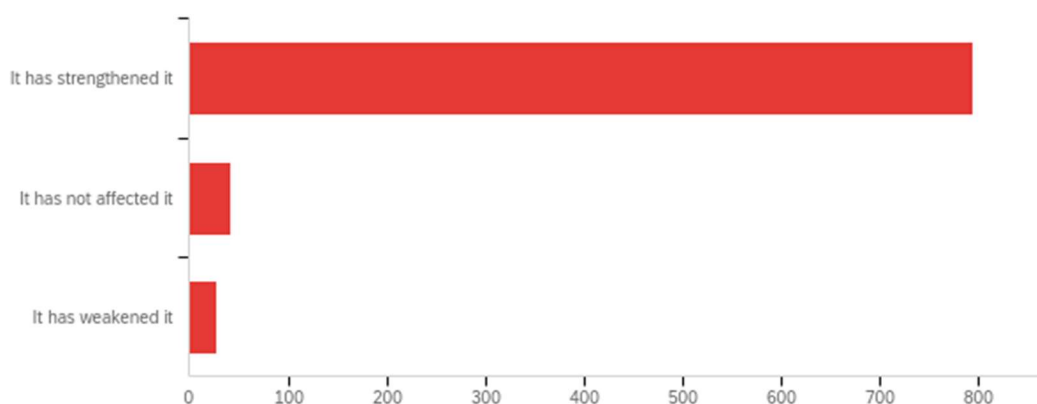
When asked their opinions about COVID-19, 34.97% of the megachurch congregants surveyed said it was a test of humanity, while 21.18% said it was a sign of the end times.

Additionally, 17.53% said it was a natural event not directly caused by God. However, 10.28% said it was a human-made biological weapon.

Regarding the question of whether the virus is a God-induced plague, as in biblical times, 8.89% said it is not, and another 7.16% saw it as a punishment for humanity's sin.

**Q11.12: What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your faith?**

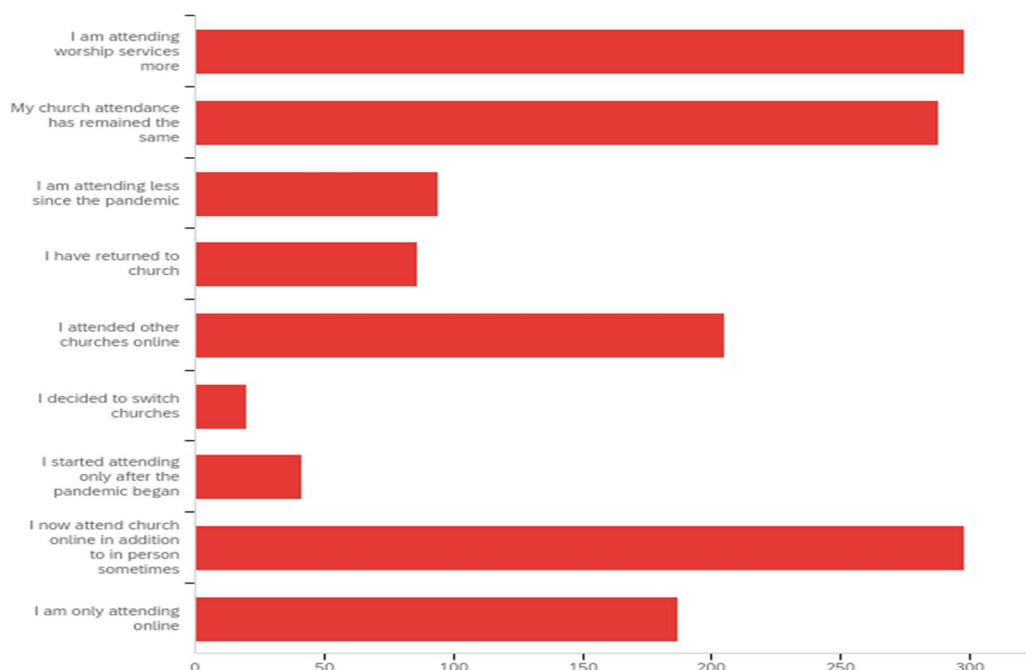
Impact of Covid-19 on Faith



With regard to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their faith, 795 individuals (92.01%) said it has strengthened their faith, 42 individuals (4.86%) said it has not affected it, while 27 individuals (3.13%) said it weakened their faith. Most megachurch congregants claimed that the global pandemic strengthened their faith.

**Q11.13: What has been the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on your church attendance, whether in person or virtual? (Select all that apply.)**

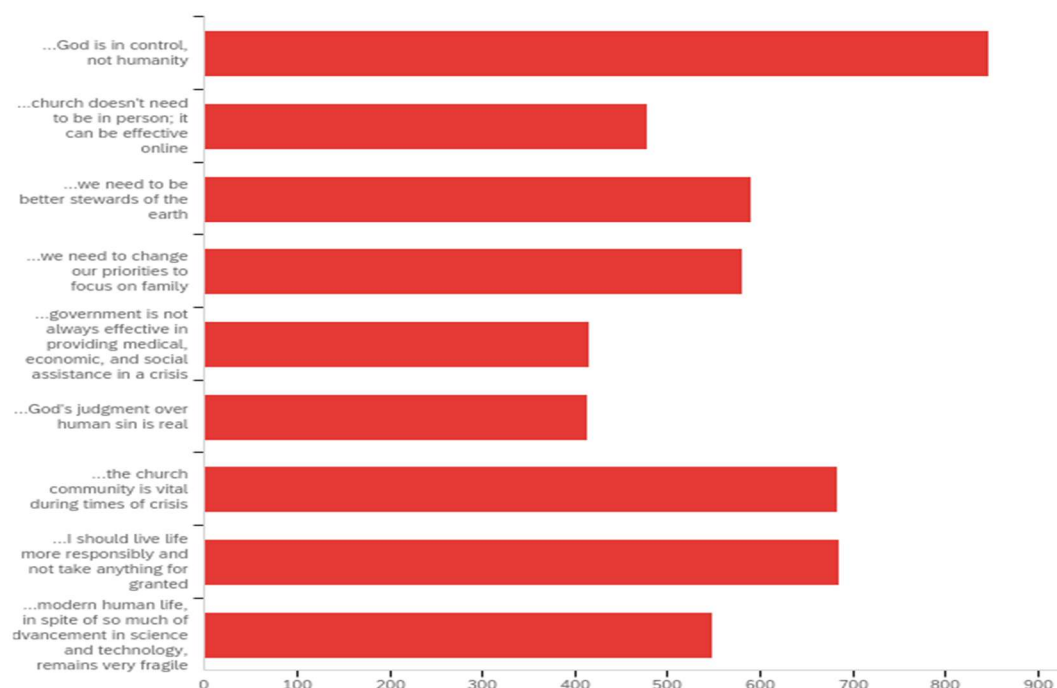
Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Church Attendance



Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on church attendance, whether in person or virtual, 19.64% attend worship services more, the same percentage of 19.64% now attend online and in-person sometimes, 18.98% said their church attendance has remained the same, while 13.51% said they have attended other churches online. Additionally, 12.23% now only attend online. Moreover, 6.20% have attended less since the pandemic, and 5.67% have just returned to the church. Furthermore, 2.70% say they started attending only after the pandemic began, while 1.32% say they just decided to switch churches.

### Q11.14: The COVID-19 pandemic has taught me that... (Select all that apply.)

Lessons Learned on Covid-19 Pandemic



Regarding the lessons COVID-19 taught congregants, 16.16% say they believe that God is still in control of the situation and not humanity, and 13.07% say the pandemic has encouraged them to live life more responsibly and not take anything for granted. In comparison, another 13.03% recognised the church community as vital during times of crisis. Regarding stewardship, 11.28% see the importance of being better stewards of the earth, and another 11.09% say we also need to change our priorities to focus on family. About 10.46% also believe that in modern human life, despite so much advancement in science and technology, our lives remain fragile. Regarding government responses, 7.92% believe the government is ineffective in providing medical, economic, and social assistance in a crisis. Last but not least, 7.88% said God's judgement over human sin is real.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The face of megachurches in the Global South, particularly in the Philippines, has changed the face of urban Christianity in the metropolitan cities of Metro Manila. Evidence from the survey indicates that the demographic of these megachurches is mainly multi-generational, primarily millennials and Gen Z – the new generations shaped and driven by upward mobility. While most congregants are female, married with their spouses and children, an almost equal percentage of single congregants participate in megachurch life operations. Our finding reveals that most church congregants come from middle-class families and are socially elite people with businesses and employees who do not depend much on foreign remittances of their loved ones but sustain themselves by hard work, industry, and innovative business acumen. These people, with their parents, are highly educated and motivated people with college, graduate, and post-graduate degrees from private and public universities. While megachurches are becoming a melting pot of all cultures with multi-ethnic people, megachurches like CCF and VCF are still dominated by Filipino or Filipino Chinese Christians with single citizenship, who are bilingual and trilingual people who can speak their ethnic, national, and international languages, and who are born and are living in the urban cities of Metro Manila.

Second, megachurch congregants appear to have a genuine conversion to Christianity that occurred within the ministry of these megachurches due to intentional discipleship and Bible studies. As a result, megachurch congregants display a tremendous loyalty to what they believe at present by not subscribing to other religious beliefs. The result of the study shows that although most of them come from the three major Christian traditions – Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical Christianity. Because they felt dissatisfied with their former churches, they have changed their church affiliations multiple times and find megachurches more satisfying to their

religious taste and branding.<sup>32</sup> The study also indicated that when it comes to Christian faith and practices, megachurch congregants identify as Christians who adhere to the beliefs and practices of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity. This conversion experience to Christianity within megachurches occurred when they were in their teens or early career periods. Most of the megachurch congregants read the Bible daily or every week. While most people in megachurches have never seen physical displays of the Spirit such as laughing, dancing, shaking, and being “slain in the Spirit,” many sometimes and frequently see manifestations of charisms within the megachurch services.

Third, when it comes to what they believe, megachurch congregants strongly believe that the Bible stands as an absolute truth that prescribes moral ethics that shape their values and behaviour in society. Congregants take seriously the moral teaching of the Bible as a source of their ethical behaviour. This is evidenced by the fact that although there is a slight degree of resistance and rejection about fornication, adultery, and homosexuality, most megachurch congregants show their high regard for teaching what the Bible says against sexual promiscuity. The survey indicated that megachurch congregants are highly motivated people to evangelize, they work for justice, they provide financial support and tithe for the cause of the church. While a certain degree of resistance to support the church exists, the overarching mindset of megachurch congregants is that they willingly invest their money and resources for religious purposes and missions endeavours.

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<sup>32</sup> Jayeel Cornelio, *Being Catholic in Contemporary Philippines: Young People Reinterpreting Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 184-85. See also Cornelio and Sapitula, “Are We Losing Faith?”; J.A. Bautista and P.J. Braunlein, “Ethnography as an Act of Witnessing: Doing Fieldwork on Passion Rituals in the Philippines”, *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 62 (2014): 501-528.; David S. Lim, “Consolidating Democracy: Role of Evangelicals in Deepening Democracy in the Philippines from 1986-1998”, in David H. Lumsdaine (ed), *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 235-284.

Fourth, although most megachurch congregants do not belong to political parties, most participate in the national and local elections and believe that the political sphere can be an excellent platform to make a difference. Therefore, when we ask who to vote for, the overwhelming response is a Christian (preferably male) political leader who supports democracy but is solid and authoritative, especially if he is a member of their church. While our data show that our country is left behind regarding economic development, half of our respondents believe we are now improving and going in the right direction, but the other half are neutral and unsure about it.

As the data shows, we also do know that, like other Filipinos living in urban centres of Metro Manila, the cultural lifestyle of megachurch congregants are manifested by occasionally dining out with families and friends at restaurant and cafes, shopping, socialising with friends, and volunteerism, etc. Our data shows that the scope of friends of these members extends to other members of other Christian churches or other religions, no religion at all, and even extend to members of the LGBTQ community. These interpersonal relations can extend even to acknowledging having relatives and friends in over five countries. However, when asked about trusting other people, our data shows that megachurch congregants trust their fellow members in the church more than outside of their church. Therefore, when they asked whether they are happy people, our data shows most as more than happy and pretty happy attending their current church.

Our data also reveals that people of faith in megachurches are highly technological and digitalised people with the Internet and personal gadgets like smartphones, computers, laptops, or tablets. These gadgets are used for an average of three to six hours per day but more than six hours at work. Regarding church activities, we now know that megachurch congregants use these gadgets to stay in touch with small groups and church-related events and programmes, to connect



with friends in the church, and/or to participate in an online Bible study or services. Our data also shows that megachurches have Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and TikTok accounts.

Finally, our data shows that, while COVID-19 did not infect most megachurch congregants, most took the vaccines and see them as a modern discovery of medical science to fight the virus. Our data also shows that almost all were in lockdown at home and experienced anxiety, depression, and mental fatigue due to the virus aggravated by the loss of income and livelihood; loss of loved ones, relatives, and friends; and prolonged separation from the people they loved. However, most congregants acknowledged becoming closer to their immediate family members. Our data reveals that while our respondents missed the physical worship services by watching streaming or pre-recorded services, most believed that God comforted them. We now also know that, although megachurches stopped their physical services and moved to online services, the megachurch congregants contributed to the rule of law by observing public measures like wearing masks and observing social distances. These churches were instrumental in distributing food supplies and medical kits to people in need. As to how they collected financial support from their congregants during the pandemic, our data also shows they collected tithes and offerings from their members through electronic banking and other online outlets.

Regarding their opinion about COVID-19, the overwhelming response of megachurch congregants from our data reveals that COVID-19 was a test of humanity's faith, an indicator of the end times, and a natural event not directly caused by God. Some saw it as a biochemical weapon. While the impact of COVID-19 on individuals has strengthened their faith, megachurch congregants have democratised their participation in megachurch life by attending both physical

and online worship services. Overall, our data also reveals that megachurch congregants learned vital lessons that God – not humanity – is still in control, that the church remains essential in times of global crisis, and that we should live a responsible life and not take everything for granted.

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### **Abstract**

Megachurches at large are undergoing a massive transition and transformation influenced by the recent global health crisis, wars, and political conflicts in various continents. While the study of megachurches in the Global South is still in its infancy period, they will continue to evolve and be forged by the global challenges of the 21st century. How megachurch congregants approach lived religion and how they play their role in public life are questions that are worth noting in our times. Drawing our attention from perspectives and perceptions of megachurch congregants, fresh from the results of the empirical research conducted by the research team of Templeton Megachurch Project of John Templeton Foundation, this study unpacks the collective voices of church congregants as to how they see life from the eyes of faith and how they translate that faith in public life. Using the survey templates of Qualtrics, we surveyed and interrogated megachurch people from all walks of life about faith and life, politics, socio-economic issues, cultural values, social media, and the Covid-19 pandemic and find out important and meaningful discoveries that perhaps shape the public policy toward the study of religion.