

In April 2022, the COSM group (The Committee on Shared Ministry)* constructed the following survey which was shared with the congregation as a link to a Google Form in the weekly congregation-wide e-mail and also mailed to members who prefer written communication to inquire about the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens' response to the pandemic. By April 16, a total of 33 responses were returned. Of the thirty-three that were mailed, 13 were returned (39%). Of the remaining 220 members who had access to the survey via email, 20 responses were received (9%). The total percent returned for both mailed and emailed surveys was 13%:

**Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens
Managing in Times of a Pandemic: A Survey
April, 2022**

The Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM) serves as the investigative “eyes and ears” of the congregation by recognizing poignant issues that call for focused attention and inquiry. As members and friends have been adjusting to the demands of the pandemic for several months, the committee determined that it would be useful to design a survey to get a better grasp of practices and decisions that have worked effectively as well as learn more about concerns.

We would like everyone in your household who is 15 or older and associated with the Fellowship to respond individually to the survey (and younger ages welcome to respond). Your responses are **confidential**, so you do not need to put your name on the survey. Please complete one survey per person. You may write on the back or enclose extra paper if needed. Enclosed is a stamped, addressed envelope in which to return your survey.

*You have received this hard copy of the survey because you have expressed a preference for non-electronic communications, so please ignore any email asking you to complete the survey.

We sincerely thank you for providing information about your experience with the Fellowship through this difficult time. We will carefully analyze all responses and prepare a thorough report. The deadline for returning the survey is **April 16th, 2022**.

CoChairs: Deborah Hardegree and Jamie Mendenhall-Turner

1. Is there anything you found useful that has been done during the Pandemic that you feel was beneficial and should be continued in post-Pandemic times?
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2. Do you have immediate concerns about the Fellowship's practices regarding the Pandemic? If so, what are your concerns?
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3. Do you have any specific recommendations for practices regarding the Pandemic for the Fellowship?
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4. Has the Pandemic altered your commitment to the Fellowship? No___ Somewhat___ Moderately___ Very much___ If so, how?
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5. How would you assess the communications you have received about the practices at the Fellowship regarding the Pandemic?
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6. **If you have child(ren)/grandchild(ren) at UUFA** How old are they? _____

- a. How have the Fellowship's practices during the Pandemic affected your (grand)child(ren) and their connection to UUFA?
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- b. What are current barriers for your family re-engaging with the Fellowship? Do you feel there are any current UUFA pandemic practices that support or are barrier(s) to re-engagement? Do you have suggestions going forward about programming that would help your child(ren) re-engage?
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7. Have you been in contact with or plan to contact anyone on the Board or committee regarding any concerns? If already in contact, did you find the communication satisfactory?
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8. Do you have additional concerns or considerations related to our Fellowship's response to the pandemic? If so, please share them here:
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9. How many years have you been involved with the Fellowship?: _____ Years

10. What is the best description of your involvement **prior to** the pandemic?

____ not very involved ____ moderately involved ____ very involved

11. What is the best description of your involvement **throughout** the pandemic?

____ not very involved ____ moderately involved ____ very involved

12. What is your age category: ____ <18 ____ 18-29, ____ 30-49, ____ 50-69, ____ 70+

Committee Members:

Deborah Hardegree*

Margaret Holt

Jamie Mendenhall-Turner*

Lisa Brown

Adrien Helm

Deborah Keys

*Co-Chairs

The following is a summary of the responses:

1. Is there anything you found useful that has been done during the Pandemic that you feel was beneficial and should be continued in post-Pandemic times? The responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive and largely related to the effective use of technologies. **Total Responses: 28**

- a. Two responded “No”
- b. **Technology** -Live streaming/video recording/zooming

Attractive to new people

Useful for committees/care rings to do their work

Attendance-taking (to help connect to those who may have drifted away)

On-line visitor cards, getting to know UUFA

Electronic access for some older people, people with health/disabilities issues, seasonal attendees, was a relief

Virtual meetings

Opportunity to connect with people in far away places

- c. The response of the board to “keep us going”; nimble leadership responsive to safety and “staffing up”
- d. Rev. Lisa – she was a gift to the Fellowship during this time
- e. Weekly newsletter from Shaye
- f. Updated website
- g. Zoom Coffee Hour (maybe people at church could go into a room and Zoom with those at home)
- h. Weekly messages from the President were supportive (when they went away I felt less connected and informed). Could have included others like the choir director and lay ministers.

Illustrative comments from two respondents

While presenting the service and other meetings via Zoom, Facebook, Vimeo, etc. takes a lot of planning and technical skill, labor, and preparation, doing so has allowed and included many more people in UUFA's activities. We have viewers/participants from around the globe! I hope that we can continue with the hybrid services and meetings so that our outreach continues to stretch further than just Northeast Georgia.

Having Sunday services, committee mtgs, & special events Zoom -accessible is the best silver lining to come out of Covid sheltering. I STRONGLY endorse keeping these options- not only shuts-ins in Athens, but even out-of-state folks join us!

2. Do you have immediate concerns about the Fellowship’s practices regarding the Pandemic? If so, what are your concerns? Total Responses 26

Eight respondents said they had no concerns. Concerns largely fell into the following categories: rules and policies during the pandemic, leadership effectiveness, volunteerism, technology savvy, and children and youth effects.)

Others presented a spectrum of concerns about rules/policies during the pandemic with some feeling the rules were necessary and protected the safety of individuals; others felt the rules were far too conservative and dismissed the wisdom of members. The following comments express the range of thought and the poles of the spectrum:

"If anything, I think we have been overly cautious. However, I also think that we have kept our folks as safe as we could under the circumstances. I do fear that a few may have gotten impatient with the strict precautions and may have sought out other congregations."

"I hope that mental health and people's need for in-person connection can be given equal weight with physical covid safety. I feel the fellowship has given too much weight to covid safety."

"I think UUFA did a stellar job of shepherding our congregation through the pandemic. I applaud the informed & concerned way we have taken in keeping all ages as safe as possible in chaotic times."

One felt the Fellowship was too conservative following UU policy rather than local guidelines. They felt other churches had returned to in person services. "We are educated, so using more common sense of individual responsibility will have allowed the community to be more of a community on-site."

"It's a chicken/egg problem, a timing issue between increasing knowledge about Covid & its spread versus our behaviors & restrictions. In retrospect, UUA & UUFA should have been less restrictive & parental & trusted the congregation to do the right thing(s). The building is still more restricted than it needs to be."

"The Medical Advisory Panel and Regathering Task Force need to develop an endemic plan to replace the pandemic plan. The current plan made sense when it was believed COVID would be an issue for weeks or months, but it is not reasonable to assume COVID will go away in the foreseeable future."

"While continuing to require masks inside the building, there is a Covid-weariness of having to remain masked. As temperatures get hot over the summer, gathering for post-service conversation and snacks could get less bearable. Also, rainy weather will (pardon the pun) put a damper on that."

"I feel UUFA has been very careful to follow guidelines to promote safety during the pandemic."

Concerns were expressed for those who had to make the rules (masks, requirements for checking in, etc.), dealing with frustrations and those who objected to the rules.

Volunteers for services and committees may have been "burned out". Another said, we did overtax a few volunteers before we decided to hire technical help.

Other concerns were about participation of those not savvy or not committed to technology

One felt it would have been nice if the minister could have made more direct contacts via phone or email, especially with those not savvy with technology.

One spoke out about reaching out to another member to be able to see a service.

"How will the Fellowship recapture outliers who do not like zoom or simply did not view the online services?"

"I am concerned to see what a livestream/online option means for the new normal. Might the easy access of online prompt a decline in gathering in person? This concern is less a Fellowship thing than a concern for all organizations that have shifted to zoom/online meetings."

Others expressed concerns about children and youth, feeling they may have been neglected. Also, they added younger adults may not have been left out as well.

"Would love to have the potluck reinstated inside with use of the kitchen."

One expressed a desire for "a face-to-face visit" with this report.

3. Do you have any specific recommendations regarding the Pandemic for the Fellowship?

Total Responses: 22

Five responded no, or not applicable – Several who replied no to this inquiry also commented how everyone had done a fantastic job under great duress.

Recommendations focused on ongoing assessment of practices, need for frequent updates regarding the pandemic and the Fellowship, ongoing commitment to on-site return, ongoing safety practices, development of a new plan, considerations for continued use of technology.

"In the future we might want to hold a session for people who had to make the hard decisions to give them a chance to share their struggles, and for us to ask them what we in the congregation could do to be helpful to them."

Two replied "frequent updates"- with one specifying via phone contacts.

"Have a section on website- Covid update. Medicare people can get up to 8 free tests monthly- do all know that fact?"

"Communicate local changes & our continued attendance to trace & also to keep track of members, visitors. Share information on community on Sunday- coffee, my classes, help with treats- communicate both thanks & needs."

"Continue to embrace a return to activity on-site. *I'm grateful that we're back in-person and I hope that will continue.*"

"Continue with caution and keep safety as a priority. Remind people to be honest if they have been exposed. Maybe stay home if you have allergies or a cold just so that people feel more confident. I hope everyone will continue to wear masks and keep social distancing. Continue vigilance with hand sanitizer and distancing when numbers of infections are down in the area, revert to masks and outdoor services (weather permitting) when infection numbers rise, and provide hybrid services through it all. We should also trust our members to know what is best for themselves with some guidelines. Trust the congregation to do the right thing, especially when we can inform them better about risks & measures to be taken. Maximize the flow of information, minimize restrictions where risks are known. Promote good behaviors."

One expressed a desire for a new plan. "The current plan is not sustainable. UUFA cannot repeatedly close and reopen through the expected future spikes in COVID cases. Vaccination rates are high at UUFA. Treatments are becoming available." Another said, it felt like the phases moved slowly and were very conservative and didn't allow for info like vaccine rates

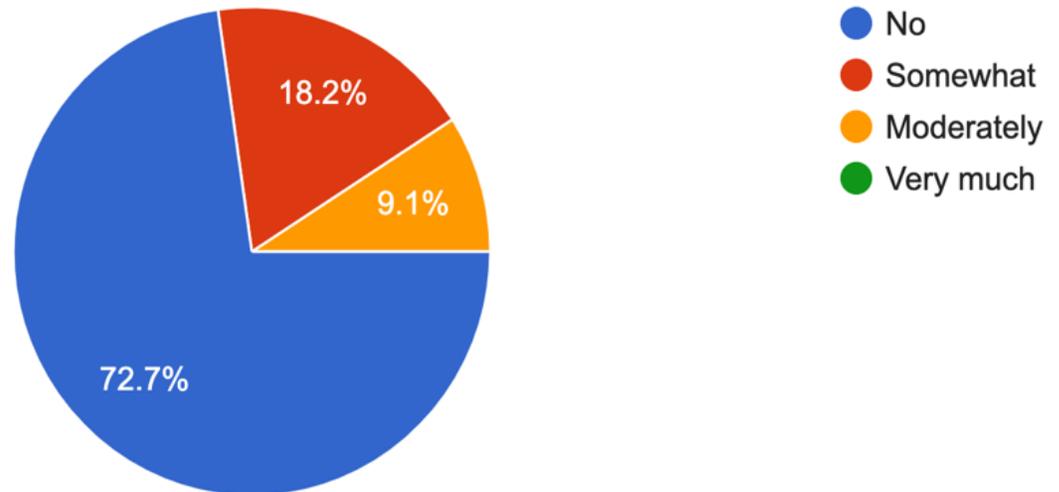
Others' recommendations related to technology: "Keep finding ways for electronic access to as much UUFA activity as possible. Maintain "hybrid" opportunities. Make it easy for folks who only have cell phones."

"Consider reevaluations like this one periodically."

4. Has the Pandemic altered your commitment to the Fellowship?

Has the Pandemic altered your commitment to the Fellowship?

33 responses



Nearly 73% said the pandemic had not altered their commitment to the Fellowship.

If so, how?

The majority of responses were expressions of lessened or ended engagement. However, one said their involvement had increased and another “realized the importance” of their involvement and said UUFA “facilitates my social action involvement and growth.” Comments describing less or no engagement and frustrations are included below:

The fact that we have not been able to participate in most activities has reduced our involvement.

Not sure when I will return to live services

Not as connected

I am still committed but have to choose activities which don't require being part of a group in person.

I have not been back.

Although we could watch it, we didn't really participate like we should. We couldn't remember to do emails, but we would participate in actual events like drivebys.

I have not liked the parental restrictions and think we needed (and need) more trust in each other to do the right things.

It's difficult to feel involved without in person meeting.

During the pandemic, the few were asked to continue the work of the many. I feel burned out and under-appreciated. In addition, outreach to individuals who are not tech-savvy was minimal, and pastoral care/outreach almost nonexistent.

5. How would you assess the communications you have received about the practices at the Fellowship regarding the pandemic? Total Responses 30

The responses to this inquiry fell into four categories: inconsistent, so-so, good, and excellent.

Inconsistent

Not consistent enough- through e-news, not embracing care rings/communicators- Changing procedures but not communicated timely, not using leadership enough regularly online. Certain sections might be standard on E-news besides weekly updates i.e, grounds, security, safety, RE, Choir, Board, etc. What each is doing- rotate all the groups' monthly report.

Confusing.

Always had to do it through someone else-my communicator.

So-So

I could use more frequent updates

I would like to hear from the Green Team

I make an effort to follow UUFA news fairly closely through the website and email, so I have not had a problem. UUFA should not, however, assume and insist on online communication. Not everyone uses or wants to use online resources. How do we reach people who do not actively seek out information?

Generally, it's been pretty good. But I notice that the website has not been updated with the latest information in a month.

A fair effort but not great. In matters like this, redundancy is needed. Just doing it once is not enough. Over-communicate.

If you're up on emails it's great, but sometimes it would have been better if someone could call me one-on-one.

Good/OK

The group that has continued communication of various kinds has maintained enough interest.

Fine

All has continued as before, with the addition of podcasts and other ways of communicating.

Overall communication has been good. There have been times when it was confusing, but we are living in confusing times.

adequate

clear, frequent enough

they've been clear

Excellent

They are to be saluted

I have been impressed with the use of weekly emails, special video announcements, Facebook posts, etc. I felt well-informed.

Communications have been clear, and concise and timely.

They have been great, across all media.

Communications about pandemic practices have been most helpful.

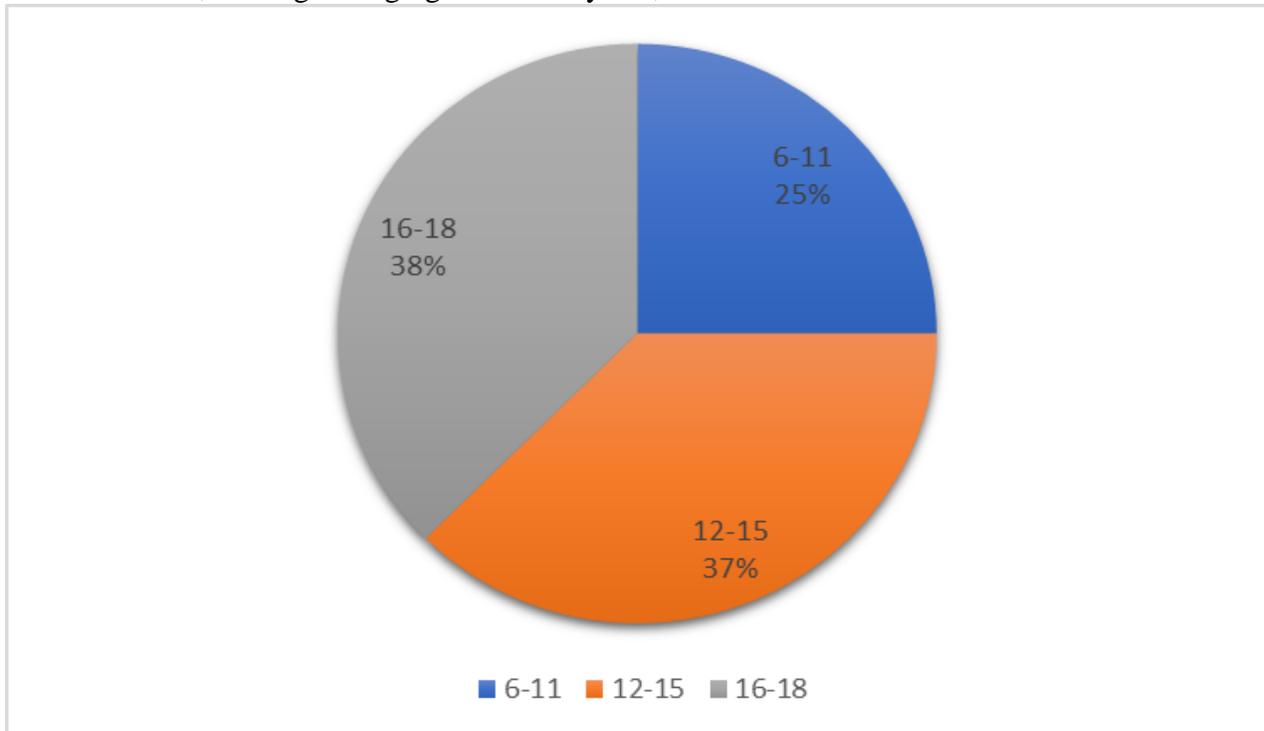
Well done

Excellent- even the duplication of messages & reminders has not been burdensome.

Clear, well-considered presentation on paper, live-stream & Zoom

6. If you have child(ren) at the UUFA, how old are they?

Of the 17 responses, 13 of the respondents responded n/a or none. There were 4 households with 2 children each, with ages ranging from 8-18 years,



How have the Fellowship’s practices during the Pandemic affected your (grand)children and their connection to UUFA? Total Responses: 11

The responses to this question indicated a considerable concern by parents/grandparents about the engagement of their children in the Fellowship as a result of the pandemic. Some made an attempt to ZOOM at first, but soon their children lost interest and became detached. Although the Fellowship wished to connect there was a lack of programming. Some felt the Fellowship “inhibited unnecessarily the opportunities for gathering the youth together.” They felt there should have been a way to allow the vaccinated youth and their parents to come together. Several expressed their belief that many of the older youth would never come back. One parent remarked that their children’s relationship to the Fellowship has “pretty much been completely severed and there was doubt they would ever come back. One who stated they did not have children said “we needed to loosen up a bit.”

“They have really negatively been impacted. They were used to going and the routine of it was helpful. Having it off their radar for so long was painful and made it difficult to come back. This was compounded by no programming happening in the absence of Kelli. I know this was a complicated and heartbreaking situation but I feel like the UUFA forgot about the families during the pandemic and let the lack of a DRE guide their choices rather than engage w/families during the pandemic when it was possible (open the playground when rates were low). I have serious doubts that if something happened and Amber had to take a leave of absence for over a year that we would just not have any music in our services or have no musical programs in the meantime. They would have found a way to prioritize those services and made sure it happened. Instead, families were left out in the cold. The only programming that has happened in the last year before Kahla was hired was initiated by the families themselves and pushed through the administration to help us fund them/ offer space.”

What are the current barriers for your family re-engaging with the Fellowship? Do you feel there are any current UUF pandemic practices that support or are barrier(s) to re-

engagement? Do you have suggestions going forward about programming that would help your child(ren) re-engage? Total Responses: 14

Here are some of the comments:

Youth leaders and a structure

Things that help: Continuing to do the family dinners, fun time on the playground, field games, etc to remind the kids that UUFA exists, is a fun place, and has people there who are invested in them. Spell out what the plan is for kids under 3 who can't go to RE classes. We have no nursery services and I don't know if anyone is trying to hire anyone.

Continue to open up the services to in person activity.

my health

I tire of patio ministry. Let's get back into the building with appropriate precautions.

I don't know if anything could help get my kids back, but I do hope to see the fellowship be serious about fostering a lively and fully functional youth group.

7. Have you been in contact with or plan to contact anyone on the Board or committee regarding any concerns? If already in contact, did you find the communication satisfactory? Total Responses 23

Seven said they had made no contacts about concerns.

Most responses were stated as satisfactory communication with the Board and committees with a few expressions of some concerns.

Satisfactory Communication

Over the years, it's been satisfactory.

I have always had very satisfactory help when contacting members of the board.

I have been and communication has generally been satisfactory.

A few parents wrote a long letter about our concerns and sent it through the lay ministers who I believe contacted the Board. After this, they amped up efforts to hire a DRE and started programming again which has been very helpful.

Not quite sure what you're asking with "or committee," but I did have a lunch conversation with someone whom I suspect is on several committees. I found the communication satisfactory spoke to Barb Schell- satisfactory.

I think our leadership has worked hard during the past two years. They have done the best they could.

yes

I have been in conversation with several Board members throughout the pandemic and have found the communication satisfactory.

Since I agreed to swerve a 3- year term on Board, I'd say Board communication was effective & satisfactory :-)

Not Well Understood

I feel everyone is open but contact with Lay Ministers not well understood. They are communicating recently on their changing roles.

UUA's direction could have been better.

I have voiced my concerns throughout. The concerns were heard but continue.

8. Do you have additional concerns or considerations related to our Fellowship's response to the pandemic? If so, please share them here.

Additional concerns expressed were about our culture, goals, communications, volunteering, use of technology, current official health status, past over-reach **Total Responses 16**

Folks have forgotten how much we need a village

Highlight goals of 2021-22 to July. How accomplishing them? Do strategic communications on on-going tasks & projects to fully open up the bldg. & future expand community activities on Sunday or other times i.e., Coffeehouse.

Share where needs of volunteering may be needed-hospitality, guides, greeters, RE teachers.

When watching the service via Zoom I have noted that Amber is too close to the mic causing some distortion t her lovely voice. Zoom has been very helpful. I think maintaining Zoom mtgs. & service would be an excellent idea.

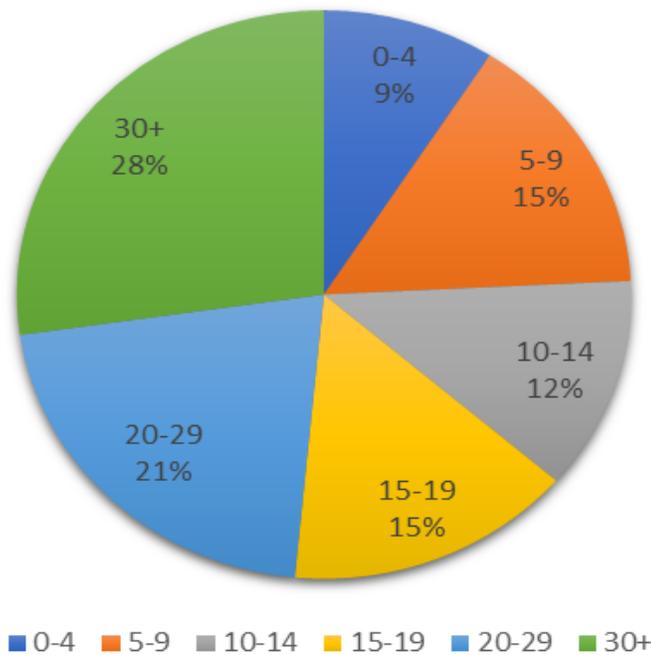
Is the Fellowship in an endemic now?

The Medical Advisory Committee was comforting at first but too cautious as time & information moved on.

Five "no" responses: no/No/None Thanks/No just Kudos!/None other than it was frustrating

9. How many years have you been involved with the Fellowship?

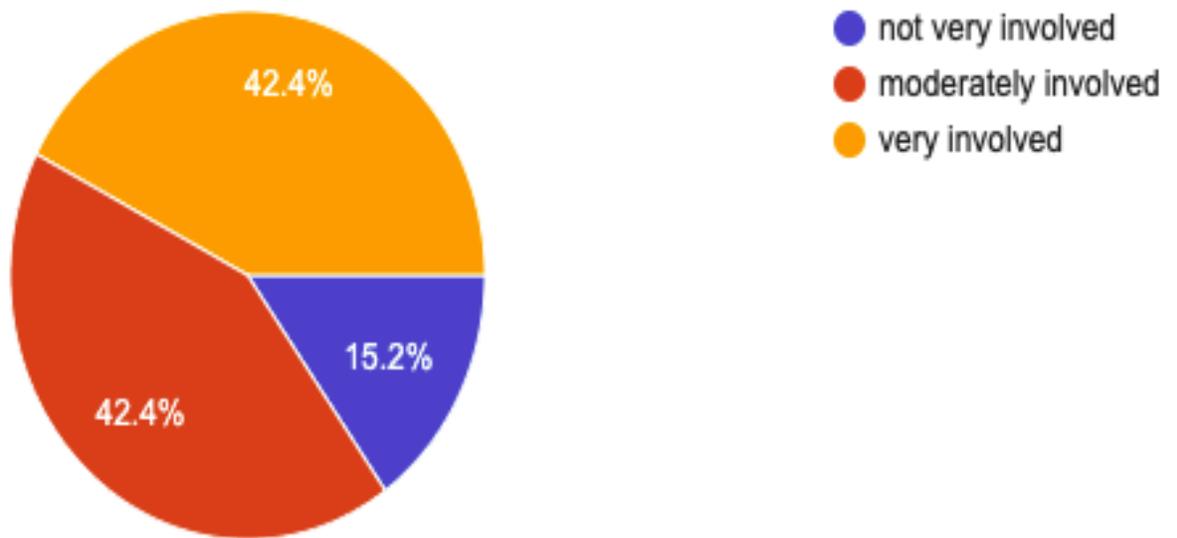
Answers ranged from one to 50 years.



10. What is the best description of your involvement prior to the Pandemic?

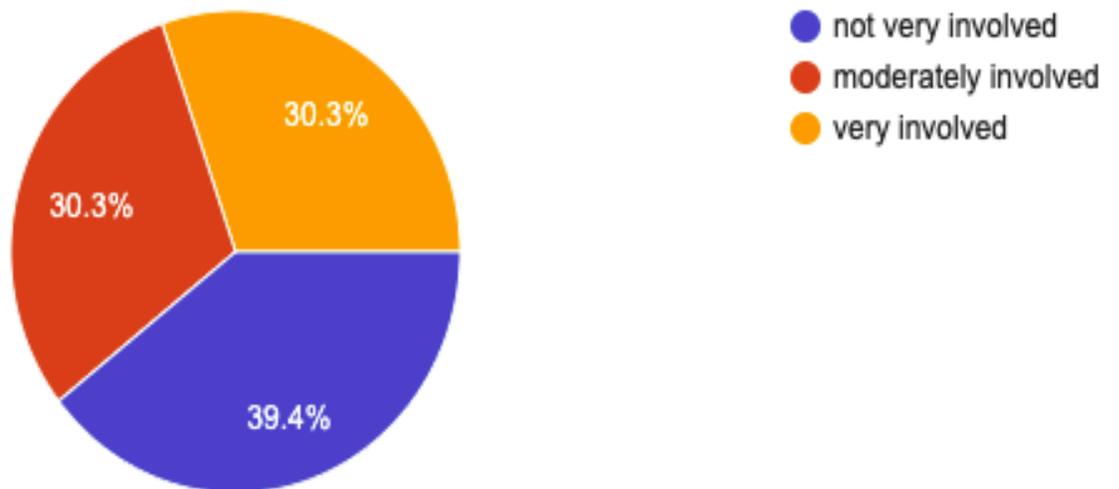
Total Responses 33

Slightly more than 15% said they were not very involved prior to the Pandemic. Almost 85% indicated they were moderately or very involved prior to the pandemic.



11. What is the best description of your involvement throughout the pandemic?

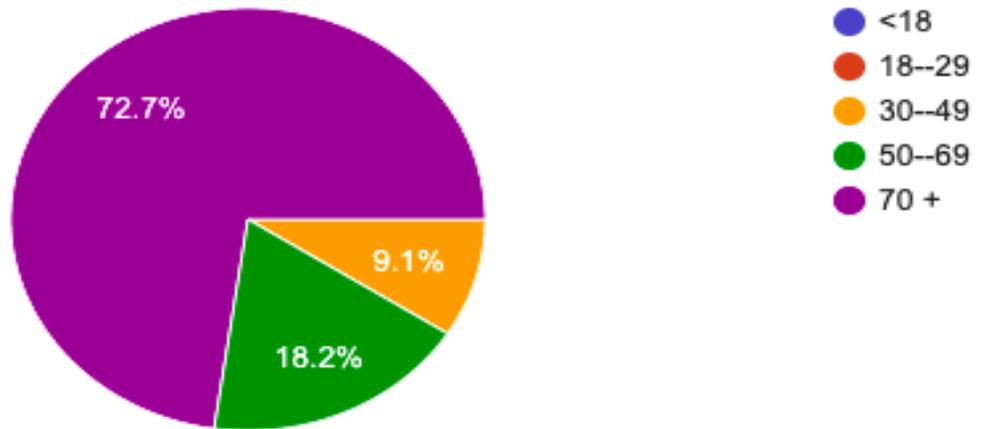
Nearly 40% of the respondents indicated they were not very involved in the Fellowship throughout the pandemic. Slightly more than 60% were either moderately or very involved.



The changes in involvement for respondents prior to and throughout the survey are notable with those reporting “not very involved” increasing by 24%

What is your age category?

33 responses



12. What is your age category?

Nearly 73% of the 33 respondents were 70+ years of age. None of the responders was younger than 30.