

# **No Space for Community**

## **The Value of Faith Buildings and the Effect of Their Loss in Ontario**



**Study conducted in partnership with**  
Faith & the Common Good, Ontario Nonprofit Network, the Ontario Trillium Foundation,  
Cardus, the City of Toronto, The National Trust for Canada

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## Executive Summary

Estimates suggest that 1/3 of Canada's faith buildings could be in danger of closing. The United Church of Canada reports one building closing a week while the Anglican denomination forecasts a trendline toward a complete loss of members around 2040 (Folkins, 2020). The No Space for Community two-year study gathered new data through surveys of existing nonprofit organizations and groups that make use of faith building space. This data enabled us to examine a series of core questions about how faith building closures may impact community user groups including: Where will twelve step groups, social services, services for equity-seeking communities, foodbanks, blood donor clinics, arts groups or community meetings go in the absence of faith buildings?

With the funding support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the City of Toronto, a collaborative team of institutional members designed and executed a survey project to learn more about the impact of faith building closures on nonprofit and community groups at a local level. The survey asked the user groups in the faith buildings a series of questions to determine the nature of the use arrangement, financial commitments, and what their alternative locations might be if the building they were using closed. The study was not a survey of the faith communities themselves or a study of religion.

The online and paper surveys focused on four core geographic areas in Ontario: City of Toronto, Peterborough, Huron County (Goderich), and Sudbury. Surveys were accepted from other areas of Ontario as long as they met the above noted criteria. The most significant number of respondents came from Toronto while a low number of responses were collected from Sudbury. Local researchers were hired for each area to recruit participants and coordinate project work.

The results from the survey are reflected in four key findings:

1. Culture and Arts, Recreation and Sports, Social Club and Education and Research were the top four types of users;
2. When asked why they used a faith building, the top three answers were: Convenient location; Good price; Accessibility;
3. Central to the study focus, participants were asked if they thought they could find another space if the building they used closed – more than 50% said they could not, 18% said they could but that it would be another faith building, and 16% said they were unsure;
4. Payment for the space varied considerably with 32% saying they used it for free, 27% said some other arrangement (not specified in the survey) was used, 21% said they paid monthly and 16% said they paid hourly.

Online surveys were filled out between April 2019 – October 2019 by groups that use faith buildings for their programs and activities. The faith communities themselves were not part of the study. More than 1950 surveys were filled out, 948 sufficiently complete to be validated for inclusion in the study.

The impact of faith building closures across these Ontario sites strongly suggests that faith buildings function as hosts for many other community organizations in significant ways and that the current faith building closure pattern will have clear negative impacts on quality of life for Ontario communities.

The pioneering nature of the Community Spaces in Faith Places survey has deepened our understanding of the complex, beneficial way that faith community buildings support the life of their local communities and neighbourhoods. It has also revealed that there is a lot more work to be done to extend that understanding. Regional variance in Ontario means that social and religious changes will have unique faith building dynamics that need to be negotiated.

If we fail to adequately understand these changes – representing both challenges and opportunities – we may well lose vital community capacity that will not be easy or even possible to replicate. Acting quickly and effectively will save time and money since preserving and sustaining our current capacity will be much less costly than rebuilding from scratch if that capacity is lost. Many community leaders and networks of nonprofits, charities and faith communities have raised these concerns in various ways. There is an opportunity in our current moment to make critical decisions that will see access to community space increase, rather than contract, in coming months and years.

Visit: [www.communityspacefaithplace.org](http://www.communityspacefaithplace.org)

## Mobilizing the Project

With the funding support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the City of Toronto, a collaborative team of institutional members designed and executed a survey project to learn more about the impact of faith building closures on nonprofits and community groups at a local level in Ontario.





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## Context and Rationale

Estimates suggest that 1/3 of Canada's faith buildings could be in danger of closing. The United Church of Canada reports one building closing a week while the Anglican denomination forecasts a trendline toward a complete loss of members around 2040 (Folkins, 2020). Many nonprofit and local community groups are dependent on access to these spaces to carry out their work. Recognition of the importance of faith buildings for neighbourhood development has a long history here and in the United States (Building the Organizations That Build Communities: Strengthening the Capacity of Faith- and Community-Based Development Organizations, 2004).

While a wide range of research has been done on changing religious patterns in Canada (Reimer et al., 2016; Selja, 2013), there is considerably less clarity about the physical facilities that belong to religious communities and what their near-future possibilities may be (Holroyd, 1991). The United Church of Canada buildings noted above are located across Ontario and in many rural areas they are the last standing local community spaces. In urban areas, skyrocketing real estate costs and increasing population density have dramatically increased program space demand for many nonprofit and other community groups (Artscape 5.0 Strategic Plan 2018-2022, 2018). In both rural and urban communities many of these buildings operate as de-facto community centres, providing space for addiction recovery groups, suicide prevention programs, children's and seniors activities, sports activities, art groups, the homeless and other vulnerable communities. Faith buildings have a long history of being affordable spaces for the not for profit sector to deliver local community programs that are not accommodated by libraries, schools, or other public venues.

### Loss of Physical Space for Neighbourhoods

A simple question has motivated this study: What will happen when these faith buildings are closed? How many nonprofits and neighbourhood groups will be left without a place to gather?

Closure rates and dynamics vary considerably across faith traditions, denominations and geographic areas (Frolick, 2016; Seljak, 2008). The effect on local community groups varies but without new research and awareness, we will only learn about those effects after the fact. These changes require closer attention from citizen groups, government agencies, policy advisors and other decision makers.

Access to affordable space is challenging for nonprofits in Ontario's urban centres. Some of the most affordable spaces are to be found in Ontario's faith buildings which we are seeing closing at a rapid rate. Rural areas face other challenges and churches are sometimes the only spaces for gathering outside of work and home. Closure of faith buildings increases distance and mobility challenges which are already prevalent in rural society. We can expect greater vulnerability to isolation and loneliness as a consequence of decreased availability of affordable, usable spaces for neighbourhood organizations. Moreover turning churches into community hubs that allow for transitions in ownership from faith groups to neighbourhood organizations are less likely to be possible in rural settings because of lower population densities. There is currently no precise data on faith building usage by the nonprofit sector in Ontario, let alone Canada.

### **Modifying Existing Use Patterns**

The City of Toronto's Economic Development and Culture Division (a partner on this project) is looking at how to use existing neighbourhood spaces within the city to better support the need for affordable space in the culture sector in response to the dire need of artists and arts organizations looking for more affordable space to work in. From high density urban settings to lower density rural settings, more effective policy responses are needed to make full use of current space, to preserve that function over time, and to prepare to consider how more space could be made available where neighbourhood demand warrants it.

The historical growth of Ontario communities brought with it the establishment and building of religious buildings that were common elements in villages, towns and cities. Standing on a main street corner in these places, many places of worship would have been within easy viewing distance. As Ontarians moved to the suburbs, congregations moved with them. Ontario Places of Worship developed a singular database of religious buildings that is "...the only comprehensive listing of religious properties in the province to undertake a provincial inventory of religious buildings...to address the ongoing stewardship and adaptive reuse of Ontario's religious properties" (Places Of Worship Database, 2017). This database notes that many of these properties are in danger (or have succumbed to) being lost:

*"Ontario's religious properties are increasingly at risk as a result of demolition, neglect and deterioration. Some of the challenges facing religious properties include shifting demographics that have led to closures, the amalgamation of congregations in some faith communities and a trend toward constructing new places of worship rather than reusing existing religious buildings. In order to better understand the nature and gravity of this issue, it was first necessary to survey the province to determine its scope. The Ontario's Places of Worship project is the culmination of that work. Over 80 per cent of culturally significant religious buildings in the province are not identified in existing local heritage inventories." (Ibid)*

### Changing Religious Practice in Canada

From Angus Reid to Statistics Canada, it is clear that religious belief and practice in Canada is significant. It has changed over the past few decades (and will likely continue to change) but it will continue to form an important facet of community capacity and social care across a range of services.

More than 67% of Canadians identify as Christian, 24% identify as having no religious affiliation, 7% identify as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist, and 1% identify as Jewish (Government of Canada & Government of Canada, 2014).

This identification does not mean active participation, which is important for the changing demand for buildings. In Canada, attendance at religious services fell from 43% in 1986 to 27% in 2012 ((NW et al., 2013). Other research supports this trend of declining participation. The decline, however, does not equal disappearance (“A Spectrum of Spirituality,” 2017) but has introduced a secondary effect which is the focus of this study, that the many local groups who benefit as secondary users of religious spaces, are affected when the religious communities that built, owned and maintained the spaces they use decline or disappear. Research on the economic value of common good contributions by local congregations and places of worship has revealed (in both Canada and the United States) a significant multiplying effect (Cnaan et al., 2013; Wood Daly, 2016) when the many different dimensions of contribution are considered. At larger scales, the contribution of the activities of religious organizations to national GDP in the US is notable (Grim & Grim, 2016) and Canadian research is forthcoming (<https://www.cardus.ca/>).

Adding to the complexity of changing religious patterns, building use and neighbourhood support are the highly varied ways in which different communities of faith interact with their local neighbourhoods. Some function as community centres, some serve their neighbourhoods directly while hosting few community groups, and some attend primarily to their own members and adherents in terms of building use.

Physical proximity of a faith building to a neighbourhood alone does not generate neighbourhood cohesion. The role of institutional places, such as synagogues and community centres, has played an important role in religious community cohesion but engagement with the wider community depends on informal and formal group and organizational interactions with the neighbourhood. In addition to architectural and symbolic meaning, use of a space embeds a faith building more fully in the neighbourhood fabric (Harold & Fong, 2018). These buildings have a long history in Ontario, including a history of change (Frolick, 2016).

In some communities, mosques and gurdwaras are operating at full capacity and serve their communities as centers for cultural and religious groups. There are evangelical Christian congregations who make full use of their facilities running their own programs and events. Faith communities like these may not host significant numbers of nonprofit and other community groups owing to being fully utilized already. This may account for the lack of response from these groups or we may have failed to achieve sufficient distribution within the confines of our small scale study.

The contrast between a declining congregation with few members and a large, old building and a growing, space-stressed faith group reflects the complexity of faith building usage. Within these dynamics, this study seeks to clarify how projected faith building closures will affect the significant number of nonprofit and other community groups that depend on them to carry out their work.



## Methodology

The survey devised by the steering committee was distributed via the networks of all the partners (social media, newsletters, in person, at conferences). Each of the four areas (Toronto, Sudbury, Huron County and Peterborough) had designated research leads who distributed survey links or paper copies of surveys to the user groups in a wide range of faith buildings. Surveys were completed from across Ontario. The faith communities themselves were not included in the survey [1].

The research leads followed up on regional diocesan structures, municipalities, faith communities and nonprofits to ensure as many groups were included as possible. The faith communities were relied on only for contact information regarding groups working out of their spaces. They did not fill out the surveys and, where they did, these were excluded in the results. Research leads also sought independent information regarding local groups working out of faith buildings (local informational listings, social media, community boards) to complement the faith community networks by accessing user groups directly through these other network pathways. French surveys were also provided.

The voluntary nature of the research meant that we could only collect data from those for whom time, interest and awareness were sufficient to fill out the survey. Each of the four areas identified -City of Toronto, Peterborough, Huron County (Goderich), and Sudbury had a research lead who distributed surveys, communicated with key leaders, and raised awareness about the importance of understanding the issue better through the study. Media coverage (interviews and articles) supported the intent to get the survey to as many nonprofit and other community groups as possible in a given location. No groups were excluded by design or intent provided they met the criteria.

The core partners for the study also distributed the survey links ( Ontario Nonprofit Network, Ontario Trillium Foundation, City of Toronto, the National Trust for Canada, Faith & the Common good and Cardus) as did supporting partners Rural Ontario Institute, SPARC, Artspond and Artsbuild Ontario. Newsletters featured the survey and promoted early results, social media alerts were sent to extend awareness to online communities, and a podcast was widely distributed to encourage further participation.

Regional workshops to talk about faith building use and the research project were held in Kingston, London, Stratford, Sudbury and Toronto. Local connections and awareness led to Girl Guides Canada encouraging participation from their groups and Artsbuild actively reaching out to their members.

[1] If a religious group was renting space as secondary users, they were included given that they, too, would be impacted by a faith building closure.

Most of the 948 survey responses were completed online using Survey Monkey to answer the core 21 questions. Paper surveys were used where requested or if surveys were completed by phone. The data was compiled into a single document and cleaned before calculations. The data cleaning included removal of duplicates, incomplete survey responses, and removal of responses from groups that did not qualify but filled out surveys (e.g. faith groups who owned the building). Preliminary results were released in October and the final data set was completed for incorporation in this report.

A range of case studies captured details and dynamics that could not be reflected in a survey style instrument. These studies were developed by local community group leaders with significant experience in their neighbourhoods.

## Survey Results

The first section of the survey results cover all the respondents from the survey. The picture that those results paint strongly suggests that the closure of faith buildings will have a negative impact on local communities by making it much more difficult for a wide range of arts, culture and civic groups to carry out their programs and activities. After the complete results, a section is devoted to each of the four geographic areas: Toronto, Huron County, Peterborough and Sudbury.

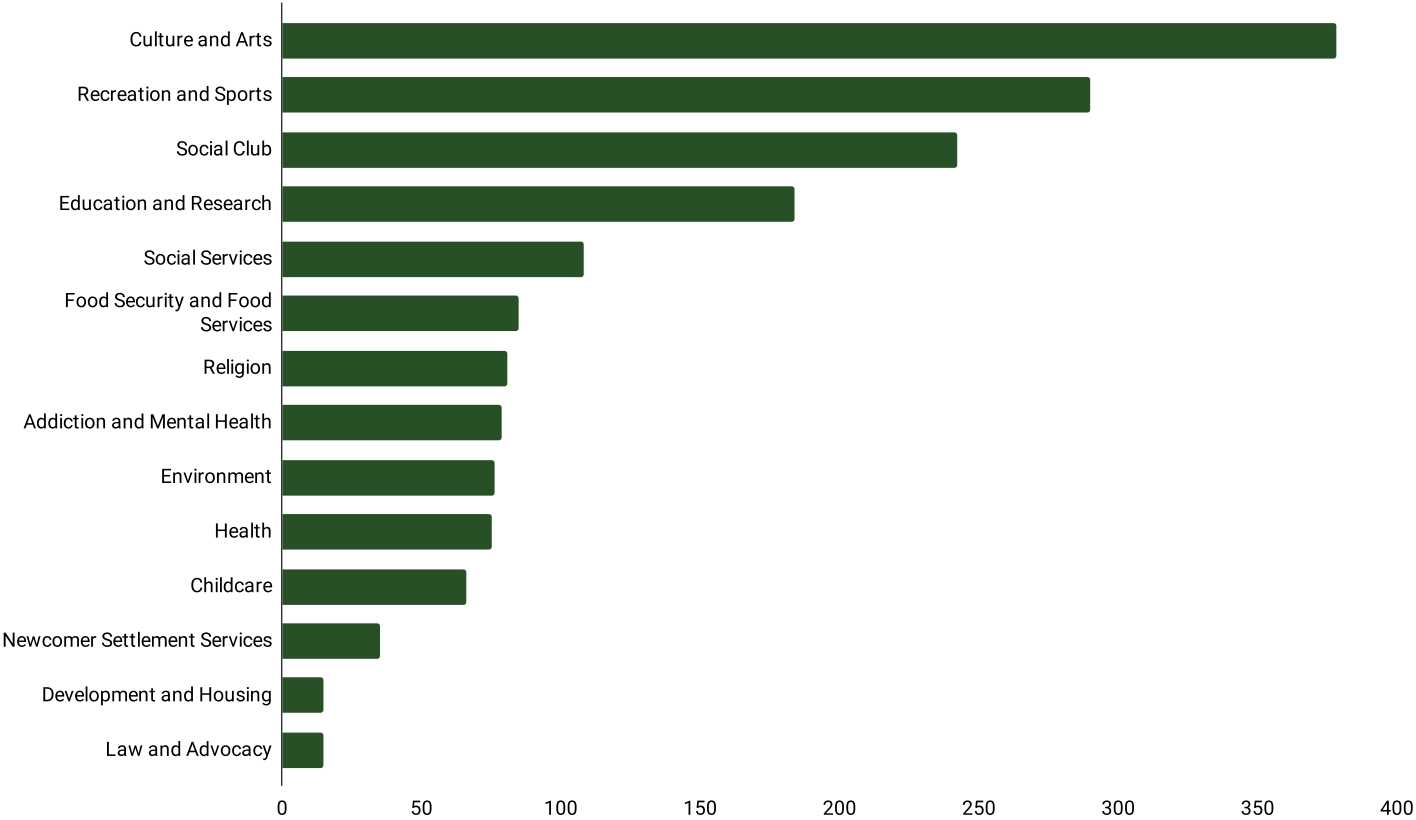
A key insight of this research project is that there is local variation in neighbourhood group use of faith buildings. These features are only partially represented in the data. In addition to the survey, the research leads for each of these areas provides a brief summary of the state of their local groups and the faith buildings that support them. Many common themes are identified but unique aspects, such as the difference between high demand space in urban areas and de-population in rural areas, are also outlined.

Finally, specific cases studies support and enhance the data by drawing on working level dynamics and features that are essential for understanding the particular impact that faith building closures will have across a variety of different community types, sizes and locations. The data alone is not sufficient to provide a community-by-community comparison but area information for Toronto, Huron County, Peterborough and Sudbury enrich our understanding of the unique benefits of faith buildings and the potential impact that their closure can have. These insights can enable us to understand the local drivers of faith building closures or responses such as adaptive re-use.

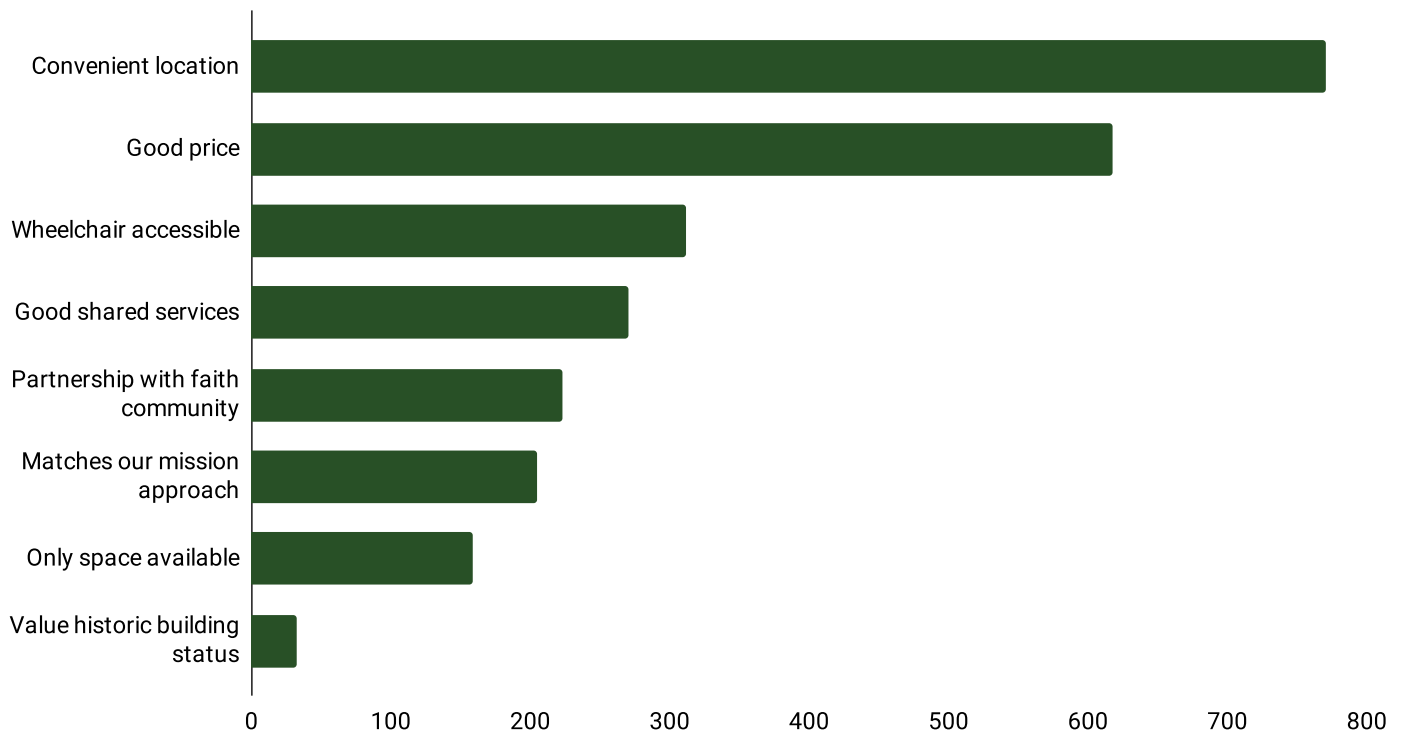
# Complete Survey Results

In this section, graphs of the data collected are presented, first in total, and then by each of the four geographic regions.

**Graph: What Does Your Group Do?**



### Graph: Why Do You Use a Faith Building?



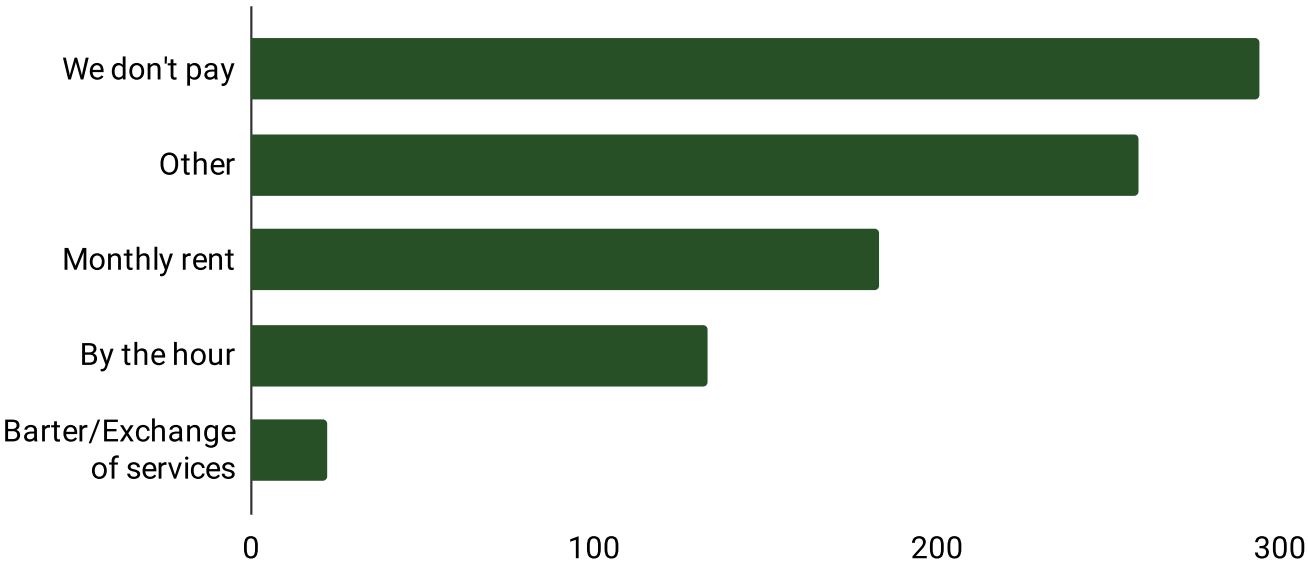
## Why Do You Use a Faith Building?

There were 189 additional comments/other responses. The word cloud is below showing frequency of terms by size:

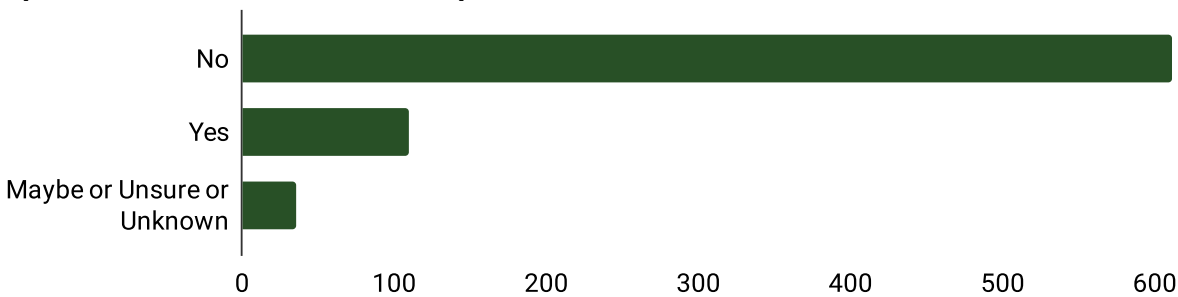




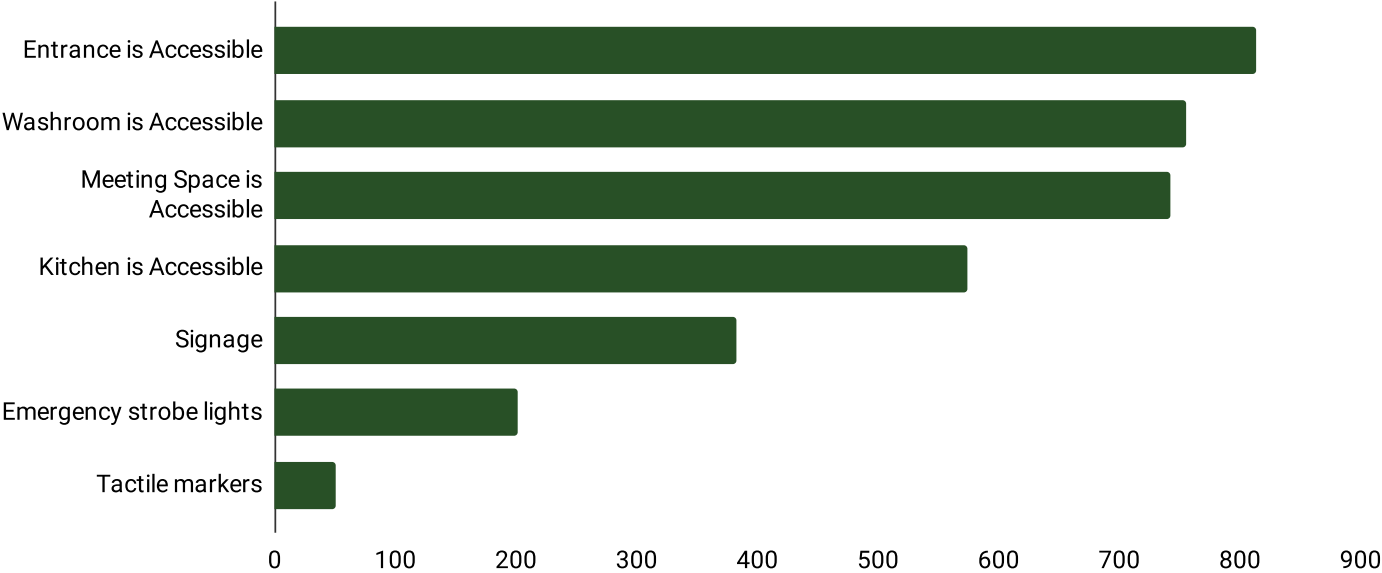
**Graph: How Do You Pay For the Space?**



**Graph: Could You Find Another Space?**



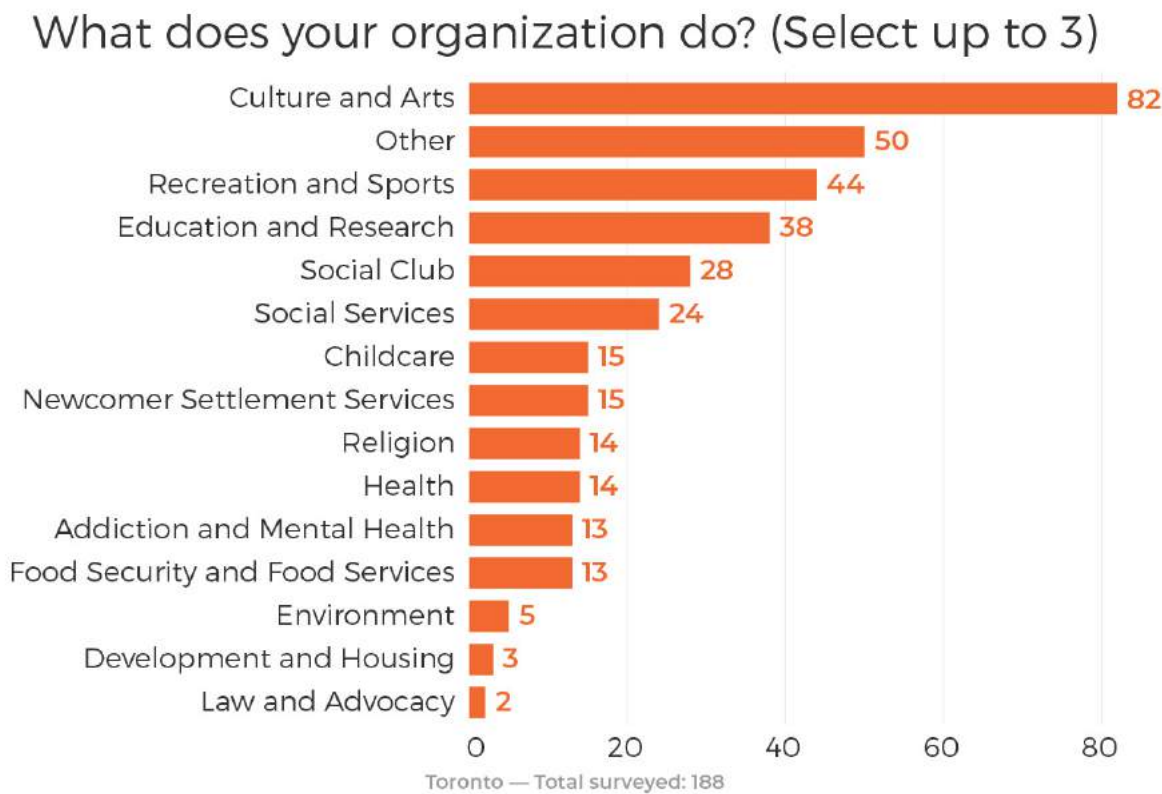
**Graph: Ways that the Faith Building You Use Is Accessible**



## Toronto Context

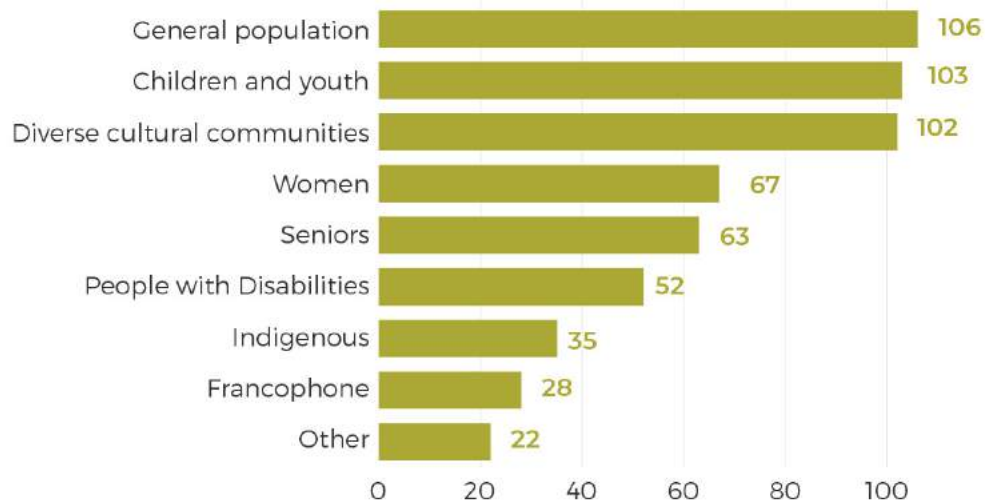
Toronto’s churches provide a significant amount of centrally located space to user groups. In Toronto it was more common to pay something for the space; perhaps reflecting the more expensive real estate reality of the city. The conversion of these spaces to condos has exacerbated an already difficult situation in regards to public space, as evidenced by the number of respondents indicating that they could not find another space if their current faith building closed.

## Toronto Results



**Toronto Results Continued**

What population(s) do you serve?  
(Check all that apply.)



Toronto — Total surveyed: 190

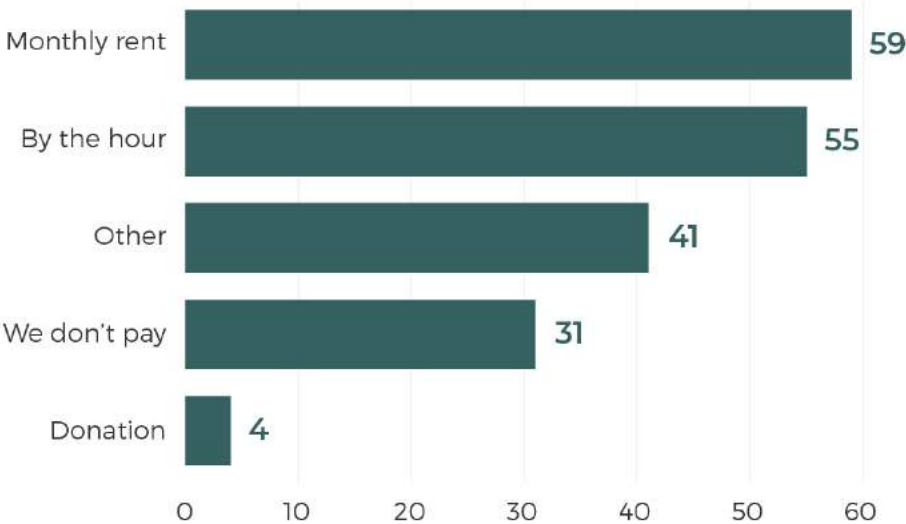
Why does your organization operate out of  
the faith building? (check all that apply)



Toronto — Total surveyed: 190

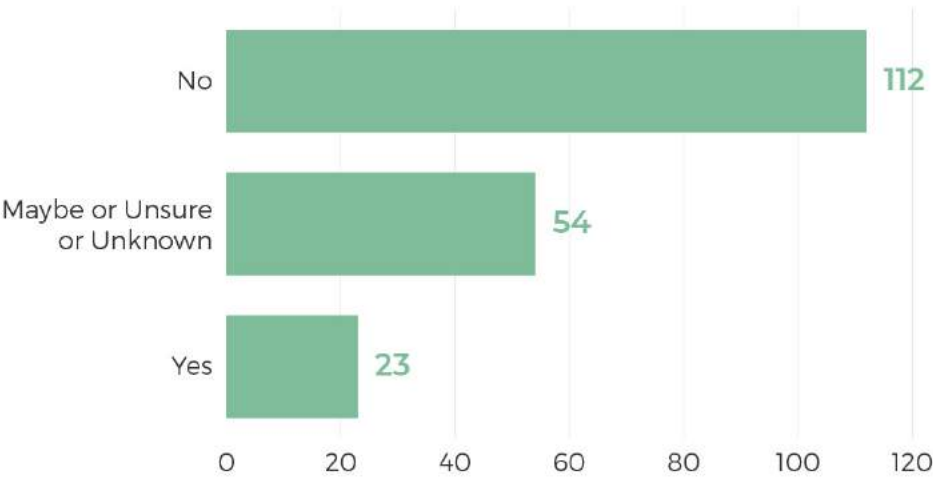
Toronto Results Continued

How do you pay for your space in the faith building?  
(choose one)



Toronto — Total surveyed: 190

If you could no longer operate out of this  
faith building, would you have an affordable  
alternate space available to you?

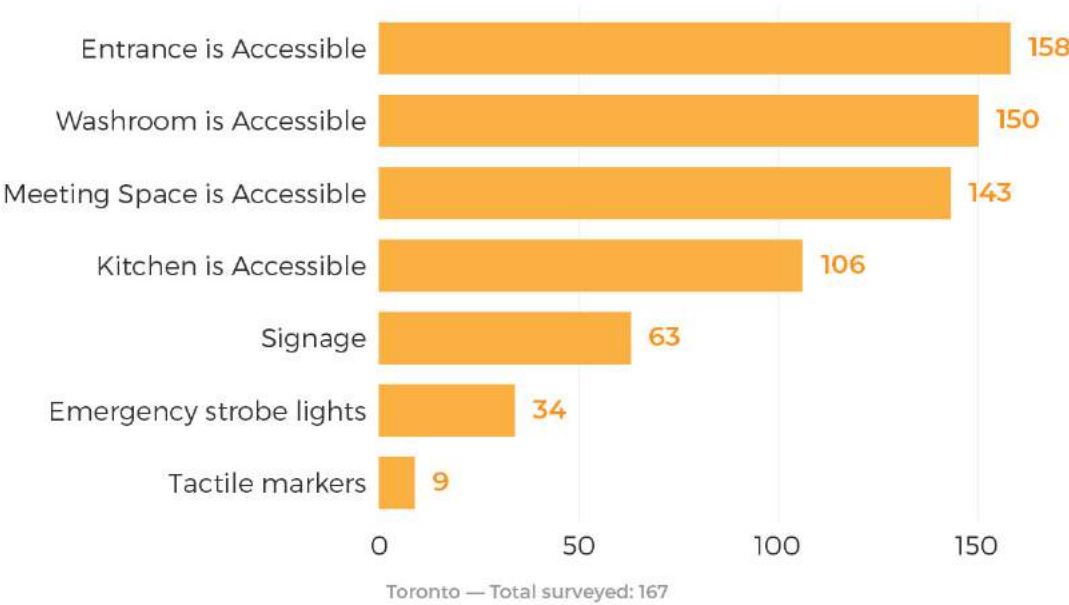


Toronto — Total surveyed: 189



Toronto Results Continued

In what ways is your faith building accessible  
(check all that apply)



## Case Study: St Matthew's Church Sparks Community Building and Neighbourhood Development

### The Church Building as Service and Host

St Mathew's United Church has a building from 1924, with 21,000 square feet located in Toronto's Wychwood neighbourhood. Shaped by the moral energy and social activism of its Methodist roots, the congregation understands its mission to be a community of faith that serves their surrounding neighbourhood. They host two other worshipping congregations. Four volunteer-based programs deliver services to the marginalized or socially isolated members of the community. The space offers so many more opportunities. St. Matthew's has long been a place that has served outside groups of various types. Situated in a central location within a highly populated neighbourhood, the demand for extra space has always been there.

### The Journey to its Current Role

In 2008, the congregation's board realized that they were running an ongoing deficit as operations and capital costs for the building were far exceeding the income. However, they had a vision: to create a gathering centre for the community. The building should be there for whatever changes the neighbourhood is going through. They hired a community outreach coordinator who assessed the market rate for rents and developed communication material that targeted the neighbouring community's needs. This brought in a set of anchor tenants and a number of individual users. With this arrangement, the congregation still has enough space for its own committees and other activities. Presently, the external users predominantly come from the arts sector, which reflects the arts-focused culture in this neighborhood. On any given day, toddlers attend music classes; young people are enrolled in a drawing course to prepare for higher education programs; violin and cello instructors are holding their lessons; yoga sessions are underway; and alternative health sessions can be attended. Artists and independent non-profit organisations use four of the church's rooms exclusively.

To initiate such close links to the neighbourhood, they established a potluck dinner for all external users. Among the various outcomes was an open day for the community to present the different activities that were going on in the church. Also, different groups pulled together their resources to carry out renovation projects with church board's approval. The initial offer of hospitality by the congregation has enabled cooperative initiatives among the external groups who use the building to serve the neighbourhood in new and innovative ways. In this way, the congregation has provided a spark that results in new partnerships that impact on the local community. As they do so, that same congregation is itself changed and renewed through participating in this new social hub.

### Keys to Success

A key to this success, besides the general ethos of the congregation, is its openness to change and development. As the surrounding community changes, so do the groups hosted in the church building. Today, during the opening times, 31% of the available space is used throughout the week. Whenever a group leaves the church, through word-of-mouth someone new appears. As much as the neighbourhood is changing (through gentrification, urban density increasing, and the number of marginalized and poor people living in the area increasing), St. Matthew's actively participates in responding to such change by accommodating different groups that wish to share the space with socially conscious groups.

Illustrating St. Matthew's long-term and holistic approach to social outreach is another significant factor. About 40 years ago, the congregation made part of their land available to develop St. Matthew's Bracondale House, a privately-owned, non-profit apartment building with 130 one-bedroom and bachelor apartments that house individuals aged 65 and older. The congregation is currently looking into options to develop another affordable housing project on their land.

### Learn More

You can learn more about the St. Matthew's United Church through their [website](#) and the art scene in the community of Wynchwood [here](#).

*Photo: "Wynchwood Open Door" St. Matthew's United Church*

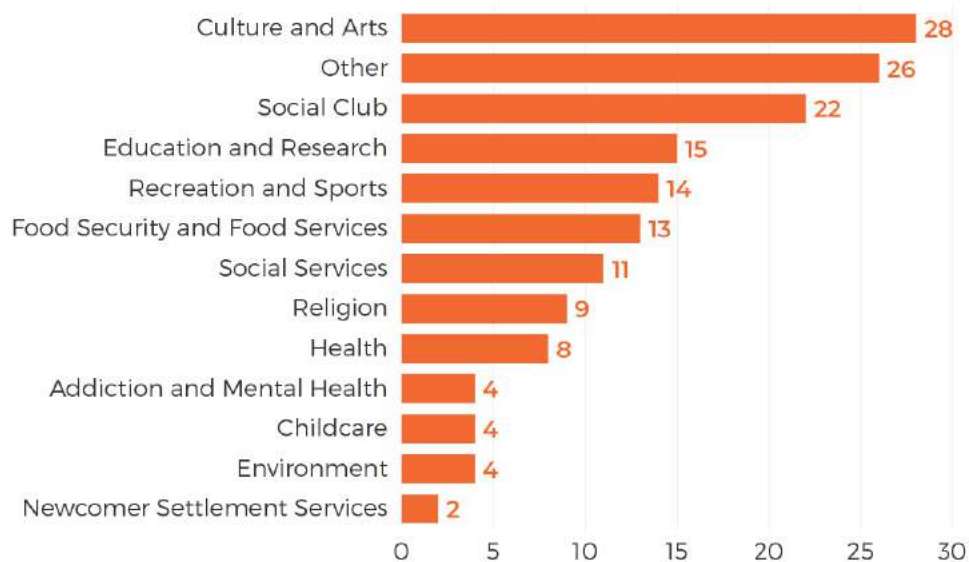


## Huron County Context

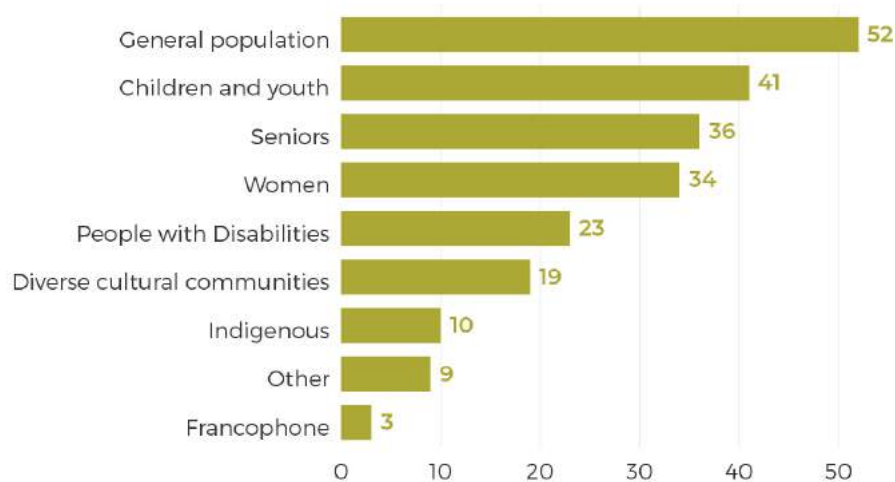
In Huron County churches are often the last standing “third space” as many rural schools have closed and the closure of legions are speeding up as well. The comparatively large number who pay nothing to use these spaces highlights the dangers to the general public should they close.

## Huron County Results

What does your organization do? (Select up to 3)

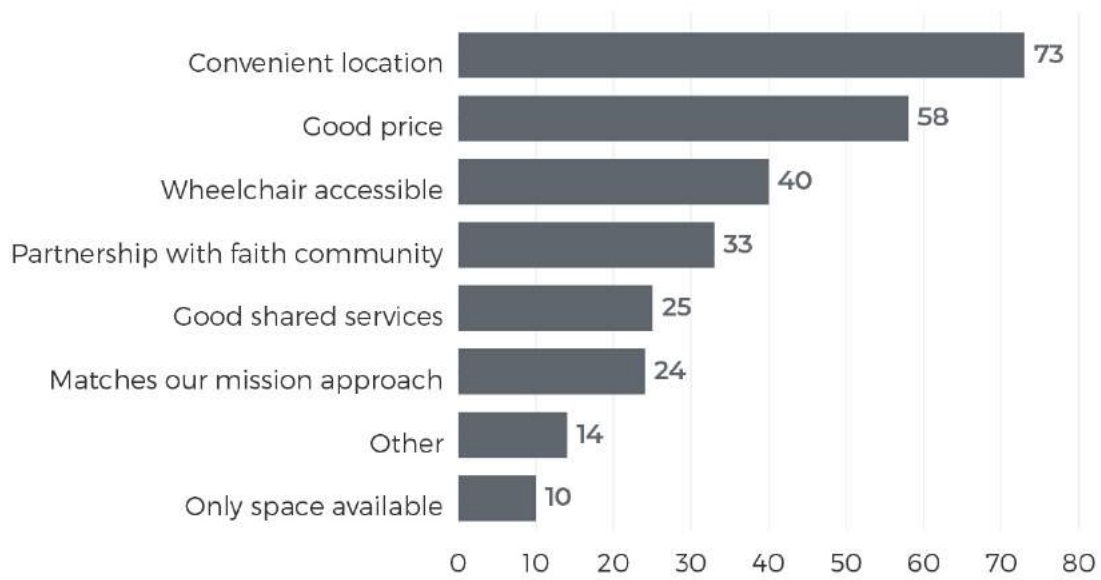


What population(s) do you serve?  
(Check all that apply.)

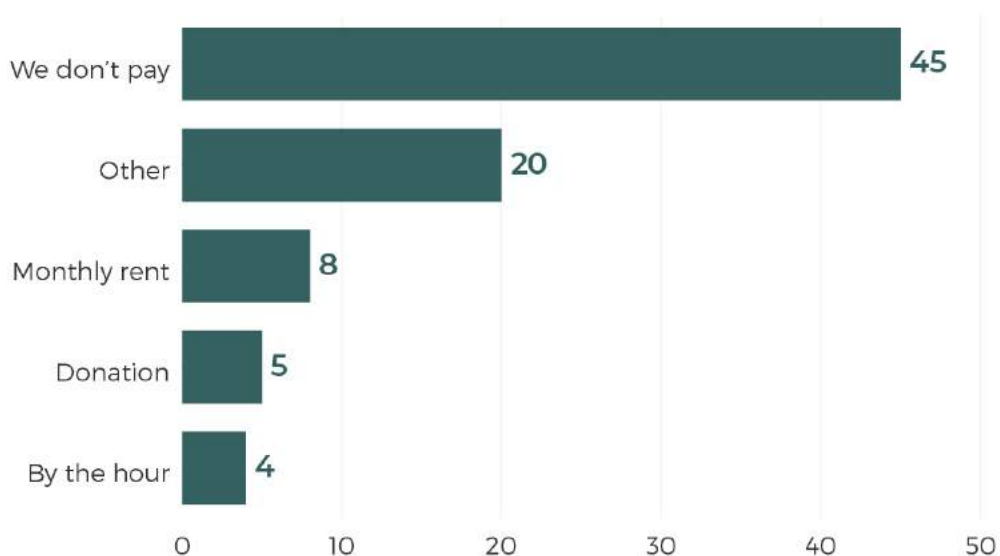


**Huron County Results Continued**

Why does your organization operate out of the faith building? (check all that apply)



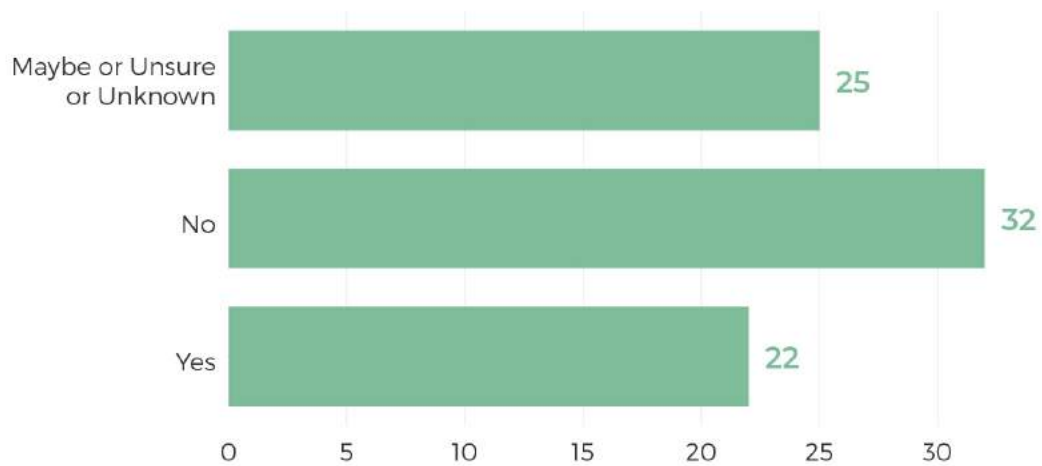
How do you pay for your space in the faith building? (choose one)



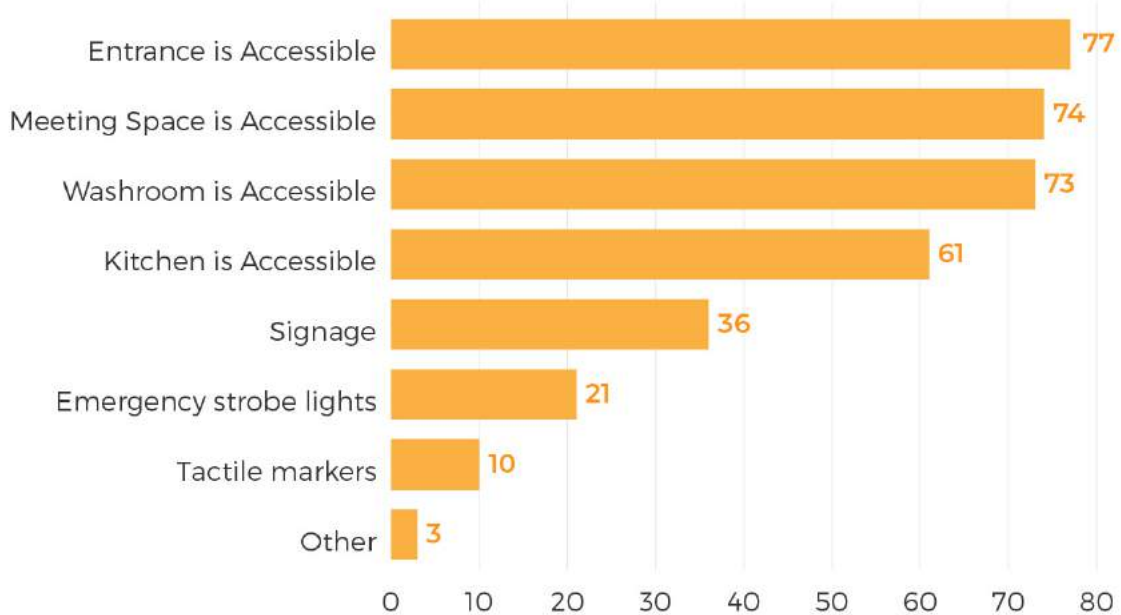


**Huron County Results Continued**

If you could no longer operate out of this faith building, would you have an affordable alternate space available to you?



In what ways is your faith building accessible (check all that apply)



## Case study: How Huron Shores United Church opened its doors to Grand Bend

### Recognizing the Opportunity to Improve

Grand Bend is a small resort community on the shores of Lake Huron, about an hour northwest of London. Its beautiful beaches have attracted tourists and cottagers for decades, and more recently retirees have discovered its charms. A red brick church building with a distinctive six-sided tower has been a part of the town's main street for almost 100 years.

In the earliest years, the campers in our resort community united with our church and during July and August Sunday outdoor services are conducted in our "Green Cathedral" welcoming our tourists and community, a tradition that continues today. past three years, the church has reinvented itself as a much-needed community hub and concert hall, an integral and valued part of the community.

The leaders of Grand Bend United Church (as it then was known) knew the building needed updating and had been discussing options since the early 2000s. At one point a life lease housing community was considered. Later, land was purchased outside the main village for a new building. During a visioning session held in 2011, the church recognized that with an aging congregation, its future lay in connecting with the community around it. Activities such as Free Stores, beach clean-ups, and donations to support local people in need began the process of reaching out. In 2012, deeming the cost of the new church prohibitive, the congregation decided to stay where it was on the "main drag" and update the existing building. Accessibility, sustainability and flexibility were the main design criteria.

*Photo: "Green Cathedral Activities ", Huron Shores United Church, 2019*



### Collaborating with the Community to Bridge the Gap

Major work was completed to restore and protect the historic exterior. An addition was required to house a full-size elevator and accessible washrooms, to exceed government requirements and make the building only the second fully accessible community space in Grand Bend. As plans developed, the congregation merged with that of Greenway United Church, a few kilometers away, and the name was changed to Huron Shores United Church. To honor that development, the Greenway Chapel was incorporated into the plans. The sanctuary was to be remodeled to act as a multi-use facility with state-of-the-art audio-visual and theatrical lighting capabilities, and a modern commercial kitchen was added in the lower level.

And of course, there was the question of funding. The congregation was relatively small and couldn't provide all the estimated \$2 million needed to complete the project. To many, it seemed risky to start construction without knowing where the money would come from. But in 2016, inspired by a lively new minister and led by a committed Building Team, the church took the plunge. Members of the congregation supported the building project strongly. More remarkable, donations were received by community members outside the congregation. Federal and municipal grants, donations from the Grand Bend Community Foundation and the Rotary Club, debentures, and a mortgage from the United Church helped bridge the gap.

*Photo: "Ukeleh Group", Huron Shores United Church, 2019*





### **Building for the Religious and Secular Community**

As construction was underway, the congregation was preparing to welcome the community. In 2017, it became the first church in the former Huron Perth Presbytery to become an Affirming Congregation, explicitly opening the doors to people of all sexual orientations. Another team began working on reconciliation, connecting with the nearby Indigenous community.

By 2018, the church was ready to launch most of its renewed building and to encourage its use by the community. It didn't take long for groups like the Grand Bend Community Foundation and the Grand Bend Rotary Club to start booking the space. The building became the main location for popular beachfront concerts on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. The church was even included on the local holiday home tour. A gala concert was planned in the fall of 2018, and soon there were concerts planned monthly.

*"The community of Grand Bend gets this shift of a traditional church now willing to be integrated into the community. Organizations that don't normally give to religious institutions supported this project, because they were giving to an institution that is as much a part of the secular community as it is a church."*  
*Peter Challen, congregation member*

Everyone is proud to see the building used seven days a week, often with several meetings happening simultaneously. Recently the congregation hired a Community Wellness Coordinator to develop programs to combat social isolation – a role that has become especially important in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic. Another exciting development was the creation of "Grand Bend Place—Centre for the Living Arts," a group of individuals from the church and community tasked with creating and programming a secular concert space.

### **Keys to Success**

#### **Strong Spiritual Leadership**

The previous minister Harry Disher and current minister Kate Crawford provided guidance and inspiration, keeping spirits high in challenging times and maintaining the focus on spiritual growth and community outreach.

**Exceptional Volunteer Leadership**

Through the church management team, the Building Team, and now Grand Bend Place, remarkable individuals stepped forward to push this project forward. They faced tough decisions and challenging situations without losing heart. They were (and are) tireless in their gift of time, passion and spirit.

**Open, Flexible Congregation**

It hasn't always been a smooth transition from traditional church mode to life as a community hub. The healthy debate developed around issues such as what to do with the cross when a rock concert was underway! Getting over the bumps required mutual understanding and respect and heartfelt accommodation. Regular communication has been critical in this process.

*"As we reflect on our pathway, it's clear that change is always with us.  
It has become our friend and mentor."  
Bob Illman, Chair of Trustees*

*Photo: "Volunteers from the Community", Huron Shores United Church*



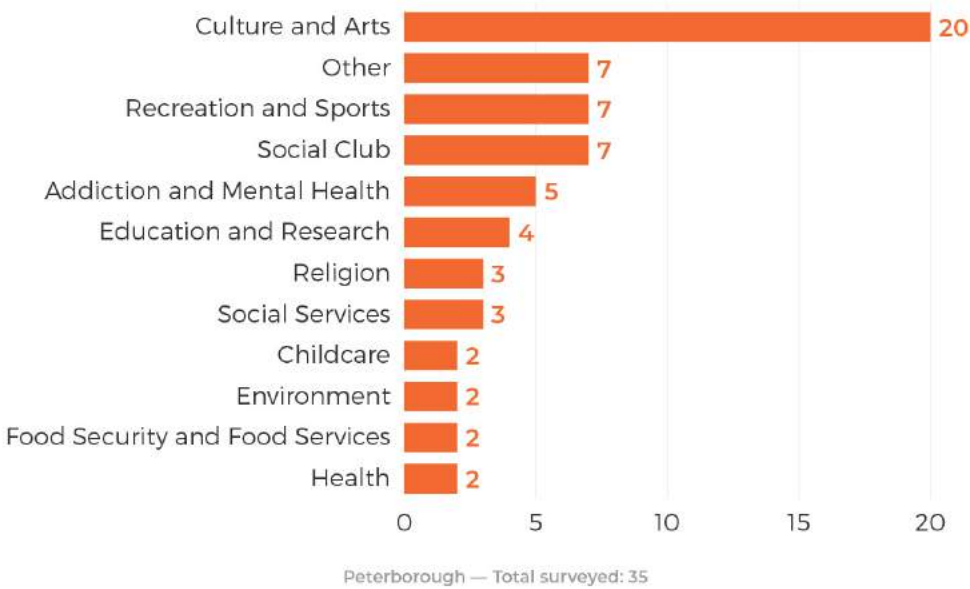


## Peterborough Context

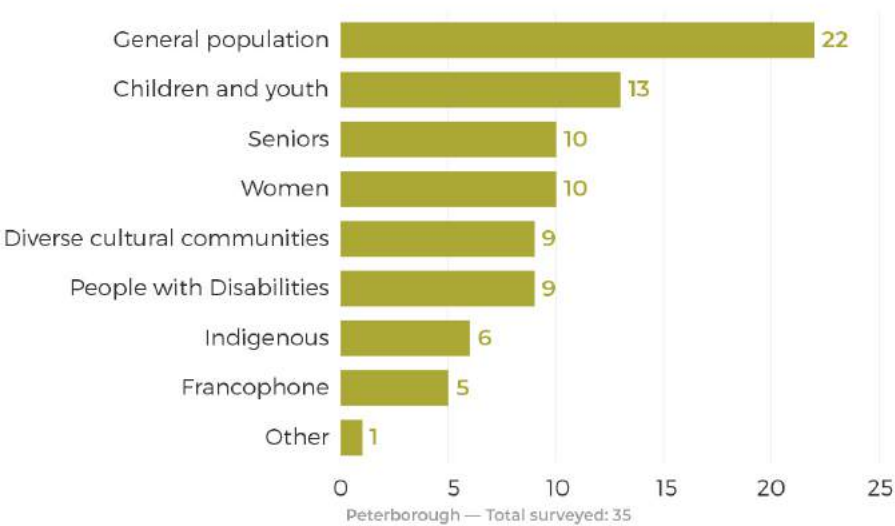
Peterborough has seen some dramatic demolitions of historic faith buildings in the past two years that has drawn attention to the issue. The case study featured here indicates what a vital role the faith buildings can play as partners in community support initiatives.

### Peterborough Results

What does your organization do? (Select up to 3)

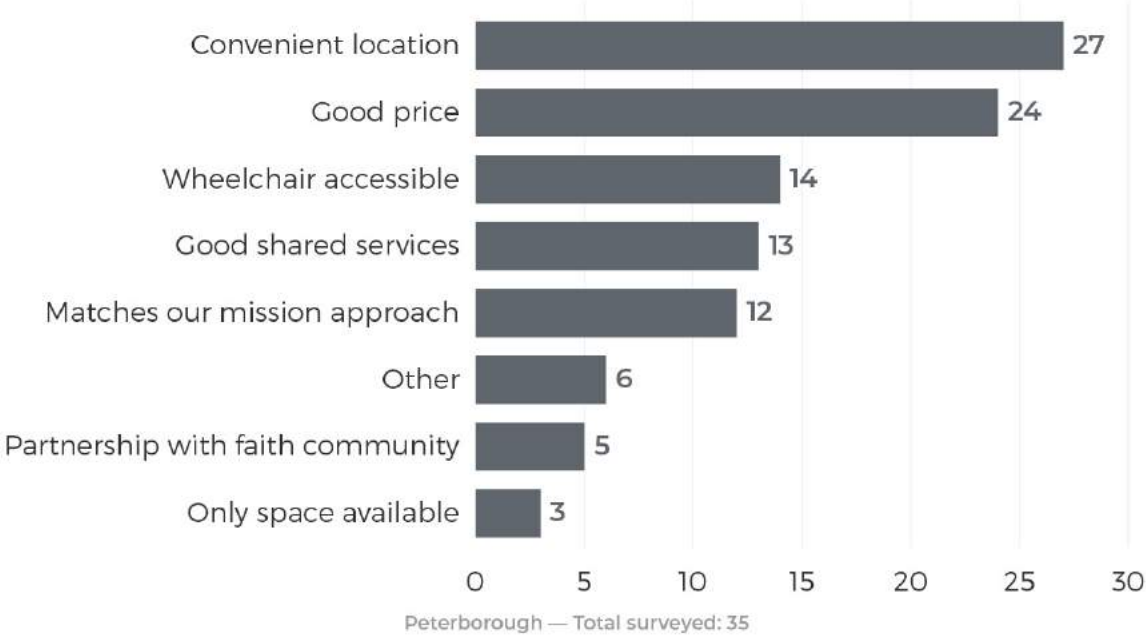


What population(s) do you serve?  
(Check all that apply.)

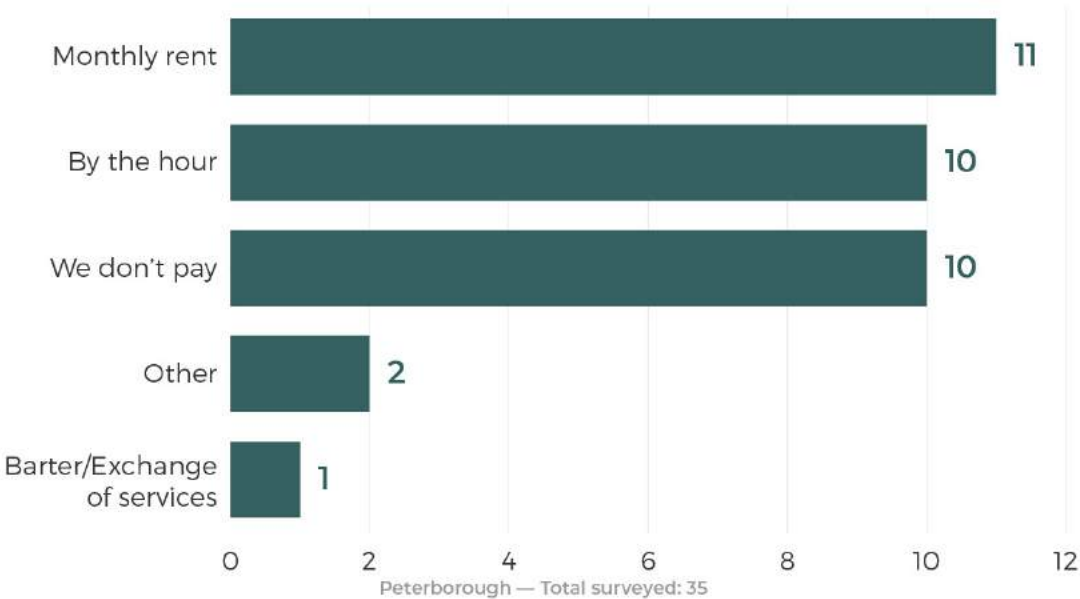


Peterborough Results Continued

Why does your organization operate out of the faith building? (check all that apply)

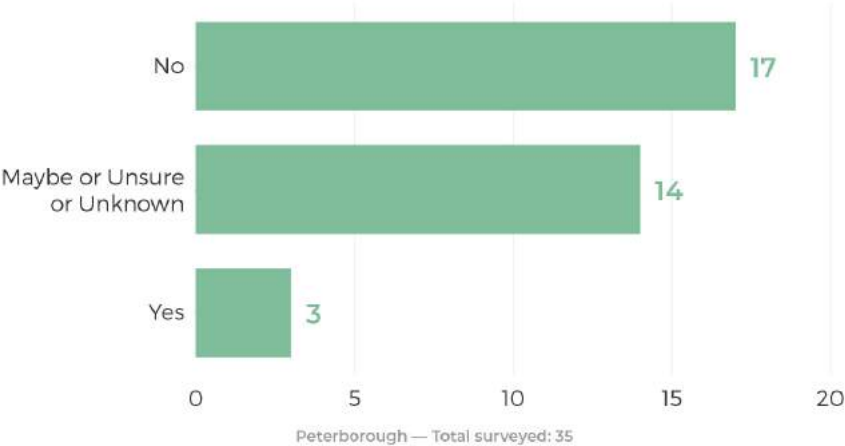


How do you pay for your space in the faith building? (choose one)

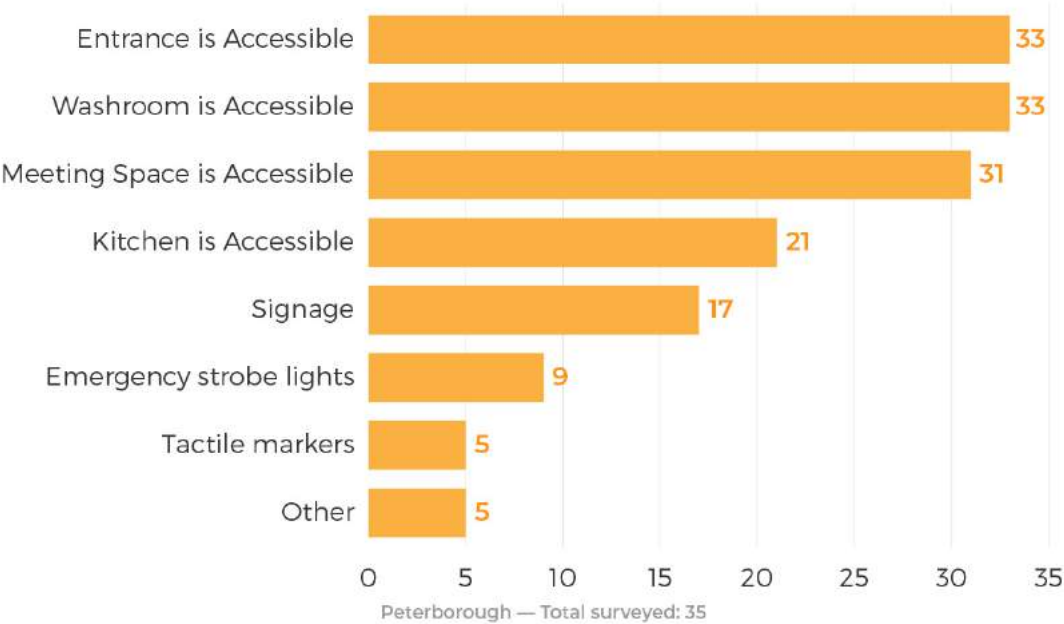


Peterborough Results Continued

If you could no longer operate out of this faith building, would you have an affordable alternate space available to you?



In what ways is your faith building accessible (check all that apply)



## Case study: Church of St John the Evangelist Anglican Peterborough: A ministry for the whole city

### The Spark

The church is a classic “Church on the Hill” serving generations and generations in the community. As the neighbourhood changed, the Deacon at the time felt the Church needed to start looking beyond its walls for a mission and meaning of being a church and felt the location dictated that mission. The first missional event was a soup and sandwich lunch 20 years ago for anyone who needed it in the neighbourhood.

### Their Journey to Here

The single meal grew into a meal a week, and in a similar fashion, other congregations tried to do similar efforts. The difference was the location, as the building was located where the need was the strongest. In 2009 St Johns underwent a massive renovation of the basement to serve the need of food insecurity, with a large open space, washrooms and a huge commercial kitchen. By 2012 Canadian Mental Health Association was running the Lighthouse Program 11-2 every day with services for people who were homeless, as well as lunch. This was the first partnership with a non-profit organization to help them deliver their missional work.

In 2015 the Warming Room was operating in the building, from November to April with 2 full-time staff, some part-time staff, and \$80,000 budget. There was now a safe place for people who were homeless to stay in the colder weather safely. This was a partnership model of funding and leveraging donations and again more volunteers.

*Photo: "Volunteers and Staff of St. John's ", St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, Peterborough*



An RFP came out in 2016 from the City asking for an organization to be open 4 hours a day and serve one meal all year, with funding to accomplish that. St John the Evangelist felt that wasn't enough and wanted to be open 8 hours a day and serve 2 meals. It was at this point that they dug deep inside and felt that they wanted to be the delivery agent themselves, instead of just the space renter and supporter.

When 2018 arrived St Johns had One Roof operating from the City's original RFP, One City Peterborough, a new venture to help support shelter insecure people, the HOME program that rented a home for high support needs people that still operates today, and the Warming Room became all year programming, instead of just 6 months. At this point, they had 2 full-time staff, 40 part-time staff and a budget of \$1.7 million. It took 2 decades from that original idea to this point.

Today, One City Peterborough is its own entity. This made sense from an operations and management perspective for both St John the Evangelist and the activities of One City Peterborough. The two are close, in fact, the Executive Director is one of the Deacons for St Johns.

*"St. John the Evangelist was an important incubator for Warming Room Community Ministries and now One City Peterborough. By starting out under their structure it allowed us to focus on the work of supporting the most vulnerable in our community and then develop a structure of our own. Without the support of St. John's, and the many other faith groups that have partnered closely with us over the years, we would not have been able to do the work we do. Faith communities have supported us financially, with space and with volunteers."*

*ED One City Peterborough – Christian Harvey*

*"St Johns owns the program, staff, budget, building, but people of Peterborough really own the ministry. This allows others to maximize where they can participate and not have to deal with logistics; they can just show up and do the work. People are invested on so many different levels here, some volunteers help staff, companies donating food and spices and such. All walks of life participate in this ministry and it enriches everyone's lives."*

*Rector, Rev - Canon Brad Smith*





Inspired by our lectionary readings, let us embark on a

## PARISH-WIDE LENTEN OUTREACH PROJECT

to support the work of Warming Room Ministries

- Please consider adding one or more of the items to your weekly shopping list and bringing them to church. There will be a basket for each week on the welcome table in the Narthex.
- Feel free to participate each week, one week, or however many weeks you would like!
- For the second Sunday in Lent, look through your linen cupboards to see if you have something “nearly new” that you can donate. Or feel free to look for something new.

### First Sunday in Lent: March 10th

The word is very near to you, on your lips and in your heart. *Romans 10: 9*

- Chapstick
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste

### Second Sunday in Lent: March 17th

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram. *Genesis 15:12*

- Bottom sheets
- Top sheets
- Pillowcases

### Keys to Success

#### Strong Leadership

A strong leadership with a crystal clear vision and ability to lead in new directions.

#### Elastic and Resilient Congregation

An elastic, resilient congregation willing to see beyond their walls to the needs of their community.

#### Willing to Broaden the Perception of Church

A willingness to look at “church” as more than just Sunday.

#### Effective Partnerships and Building Connections

Drawing in volunteers and money from other congregations and community groups is due to walking the walk and talking the talk.

### Learn More

You can learn more about the Church of St. John the Evangelist Anglican Peterborough on [their website](#) and through the City of Peterborough [One City webpage](#).



## Sudbury Context

Despite significant efforts to recruit survey participants through site visits and support of the research lead, only a small number of results were obtained. Lists of all the faith communities in Sudbury were compiled and direct communication with them was undertaken to encourage distribution of the survey to groups who used their facilities. This produced few results. In addition, an on-site visit with the research lead, including meetings with key local leaders, was undertaken to better understand the dynamics of low survey completion rates. Additional follow-up with those who did respond was also pursued. Despite these efforts, the rate of response from faith building user groups in Sudbury remained low.

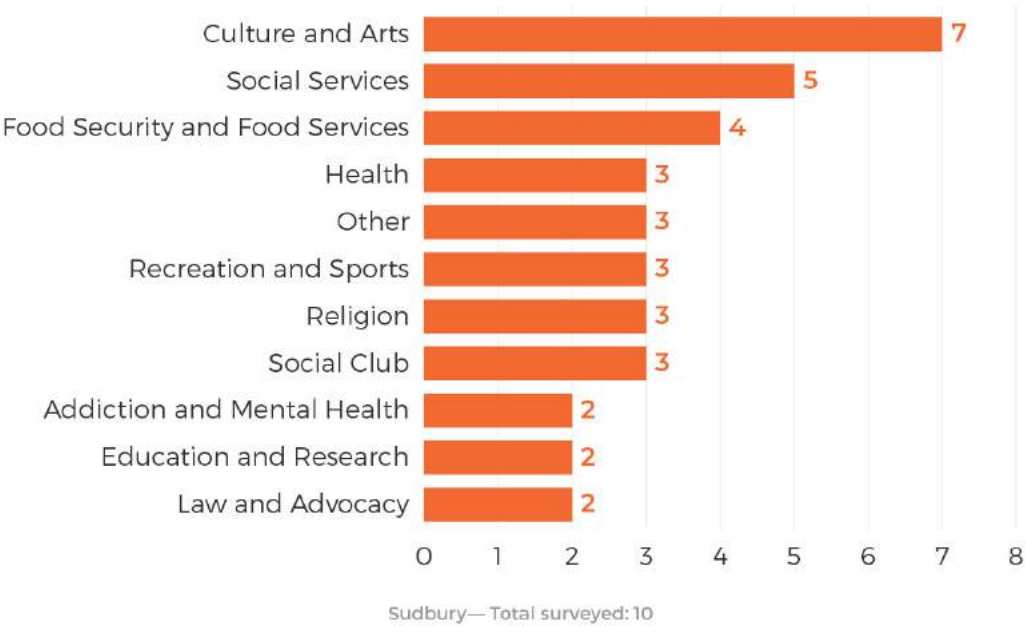
It is unclear why the response rate was so low. Sudbury has a very active community and neighbourhood associational life with a wide range of services offered through charities and nonprofits across the city. Utilization of a local research lead was intended to off-set the perception that this was a Toronto-oriented study and communication included notice of the Peterborough and Huron County aspects of the study. It may be that both the timing of the survey collection period did not fit well with local interests and that awareness about the impact of faith building closures was lower than in other locations such as Huron County where rural dynamics have heightened concern.

After discussion about the best way to proceed with the data that was collected, it was decided that the results should be included in the report. The numbers suggest that there is a more complete picture of arts and other user groups who make use of faith buildings in Sudbury and it is hoped that these initial results will be a stimulus for ongoing, more extensive research on how faith building closures could affect Sudbury in coming months and years.

Overall, the results did reflect similar patterns seen in the wider research as the following graphs reveal.

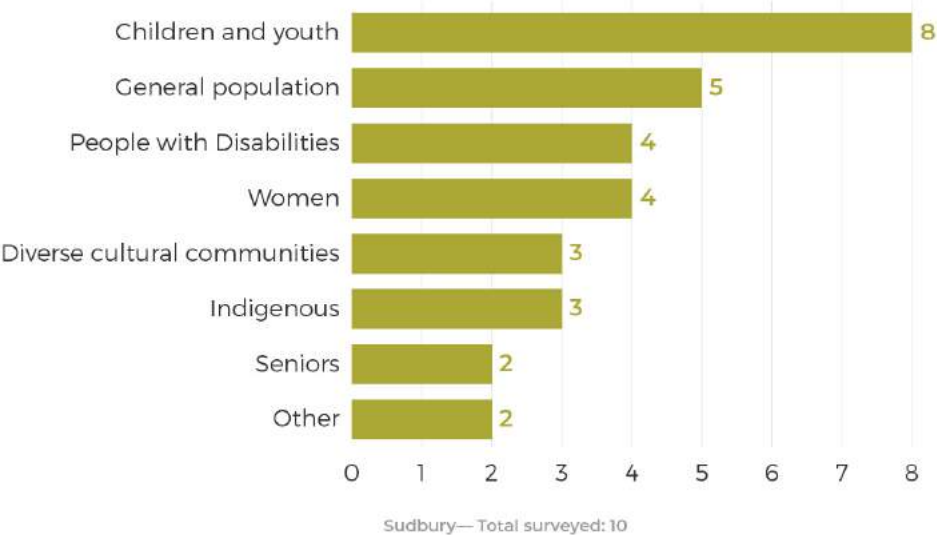
Sudbury Results

What does your organization do? (Select up to 3)

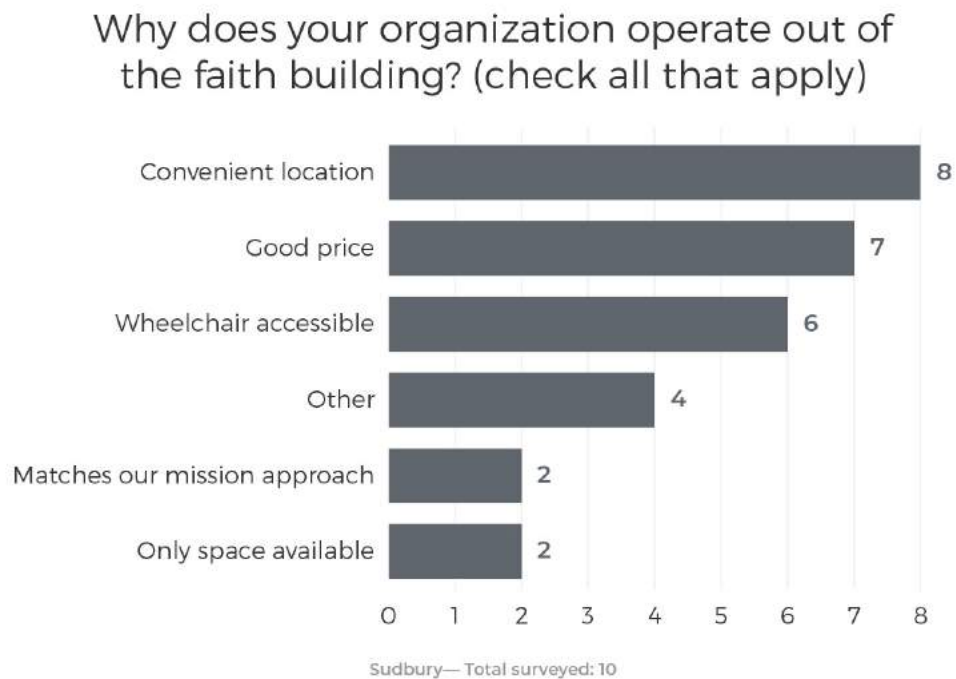


Culture and Arts organizations along with Social Services organizations ranked as the highest categories. Food Security and Food Services was the third most common organizational activity which was a higher ranking than what was found in both the Toronto and total survey group results.

What population(s) do you serve?  
(Check all that apply.)



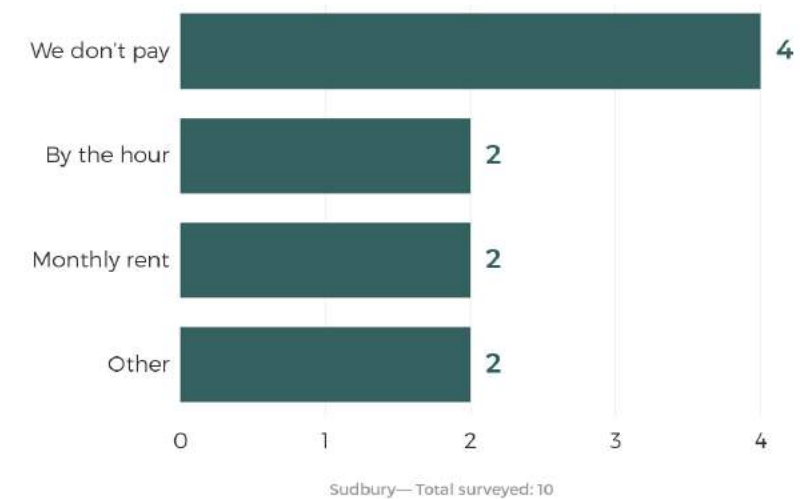
### Sudbury Results Continued



People with disabilities was a common population served which explains why accessibility was a common reason to operate out of a faith building. g. The combination of location convenience and good price is also consistent with other findings.

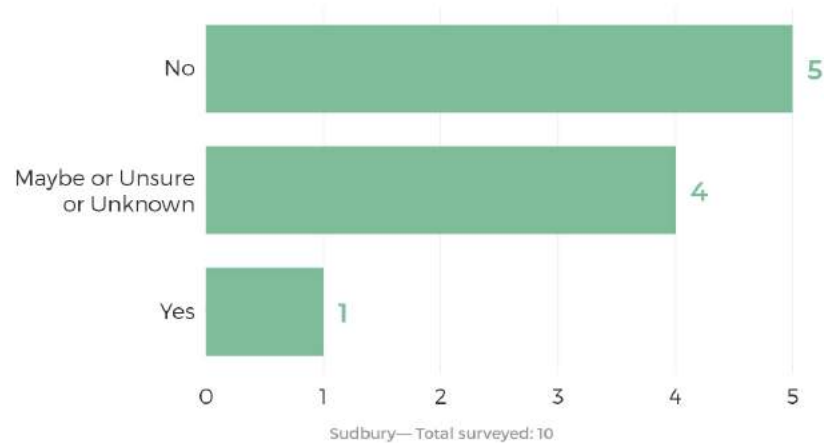
Sudbury Results Continued

How do you pay for your space in the faith building?  
(choose one)



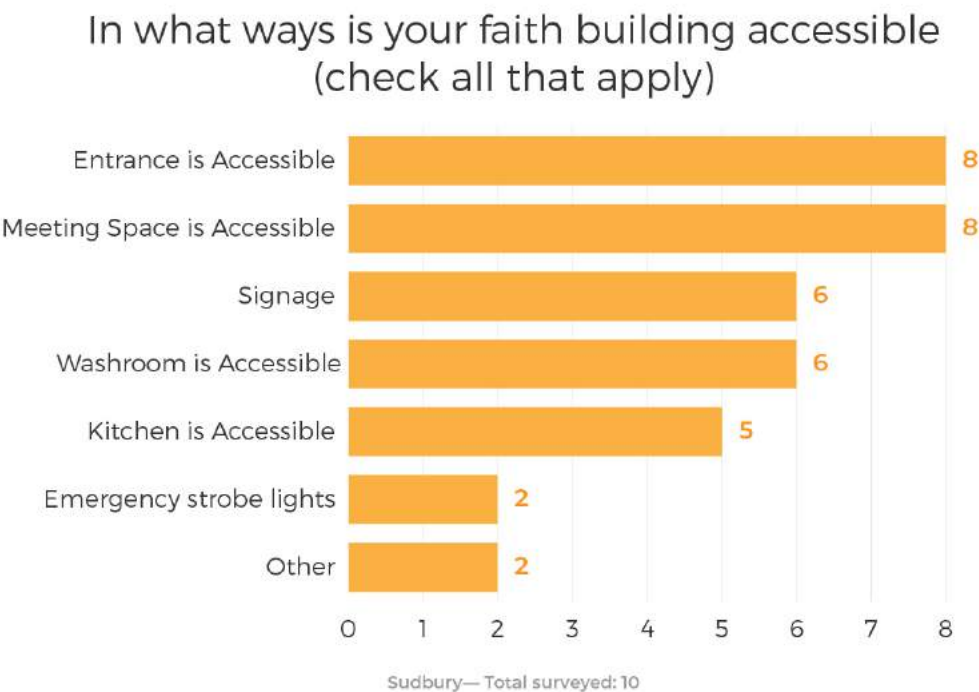
Sudbury payment arrangements for users of faith buildings fit the pattern of being largely free and the groups served also mirror a focus on youth and children alongside the general population.

If you could no longer operate out of this  
faith building, would you have an affordable  
alternate space available to you?



The central question of options subject to their current location being unavailable aligns with the findings in other locations with only one of the ten responses indicating they would have an option. With only ten groups responding, 90% still identify their vulnerability to the loss of their present location.

Sudbury Results Continued



## Policy Responses to Protect Local Community Spaces

Changes in building use that are as significant as those affecting faith communities in Ontario have wide impacts for the community groups that have been the central focus of this study. Effects on the faith buildings will impact those groups and require careful consideration from a policy perspective. Charitable organizations such as faith communities are governed by Federal and Provincial legislation that affects their formal legal status, finances, tax benefits and activities. A recent Special Committee of the Senate was given the task of reviewing the state of Canada's charities in response to the recognition that established patterns of governance and policy strategies were in need of revision. That committee produced a report with 42 recommendations (Mercer & Omidvar, 2019).

It is not the place of this current study to review those recommendations but they clearly signal that there is a strong governmental role being played in the charitable sector, of which both the faith communities and some of the user groups examined in this study are a part. Charitable organizations arise from citizens serving to meet the needs of neighbours and those in need of support. Local, provincial and federal governments provide guidelines, tax benefits and enabling means for this charitable impulse to be expressed through organizational forms. As noted earlier in this report, if the significant range of support services provided by user groups in faith buildings were to decline, the cost to all orders of government would be significant.

Preservation of the capacity we currently have is vital in addition to finding strategies that support neighbourhood level growth in social good capacity such as arts and culture events, support service for addictions, children and youth programs, and opportunities for neighbours to meet and share common experiences.

It is with this in mind that the following recommendations are being made.

Specifically, land use demands, cultural and social change, large scale demographics, economic patterns and governmental decisions for a complex range of dynamics are playing out in practical ways at municipal levels. There are a series of questions that serve to orient our initial range of policy recommendations:

1. What needs to change at a municipal level to support community use of existing faith buildings?
2. Who is in a position to make those changes?
3. What policies need to be enhanced that are already supporting and helping maintain these buildings for community group use?
4. What are the provincial and federal responsibilities that affect faith building closures? How will these policy dynamics need to change?



The Community Spaces in Faith Places survey and report suggest that the support for faith building preservation, not only as physical spaces but as integral parts of the social infrastructure of communities, does not represent a peculiar or sectarian interest but is a matter of concern for all Ontarians. Although specific faith communities and traditions have their own specific expressions and practices, those activities over time have led to very important common good spaces and social goods. With that in mind, we have identified specific policy dynamics to support municipal and civil society organizations efforts to ensure that benefit continues as much as possible.

The following policy recommendations affirm that faith communities, as part of our civil society, should be neither privileged nor excluded (this may be the case where funding specifically excludes faith communities even where their work is clearly oriented to neighbourhood or local benefit) but should be engaged in and supported as institutional citizens who positively impact the wider neighbourhood. Six key areas for policy change, if acted on, would be significant in sustaining the faith community buildings we have as well as preparing for closures as they happen in both urban and rural settings.

1. That governments recognize the role of faith buildings—both historical and contemporary— in providing physical spaces and building social capital making them a critical part of a complex ecosystem of local community resources.

- Faith buildings are **neighbourhood hubs** that are not easily duplicated or replaced.
- They **represent assets in communities** which often have deep connections and links in communities beyond the faith community itself.
- A significant number are of historical heritage and should be preserved.

2. That, as faith practices and communities change, government and public involvement increase in terms of preserving and developing faith buildings' historic role as affordable, accessible and inclusive community meeting places.

- **One third of faith spaces are at risk**
- **84% of groups** supported in faith based spaces have **no realistic alternatives**.

3. That efforts are made to increase public awareness of the role of faith communities and their buildings in the fabric of communities.

- **Local community groups often rely on faith communities** as a source of physical space for activities that enhance local quality of life.
- Communities look to faith communities to provide them **free or affordable space** for local group activities.
- There is **little to no recognition** in communities of how vulnerable and important this "taken for granted" resource is.

4. That municipal governments include faith buildings in their planning and consider them as important infrastructure for strengthening neighbourhoods.

- Work actively with faith groups to **support their leadership development and institutional capacity** so that future structural engagement with the city/neighbourhood is enhanced. These capacities are often critical in times of crisis, challenge, or disruption.
- Work with faith communities to improve involvement in **strategic, long-term planning deliberations** for the municipality.
- Consider faith buildings as **community assets in zoning policies**.
- **Community Improvement Plan** enrichment through more direct faith building considerations as significant local assets.
- Ensuring that these resources are designed to support both urban and rural communities.
- Municipal and Provincial governments need to learn how to work more directly with faith communities, including in funding considerations. Default exclusion of faith communities from various forms of government support and consideration may end up undermining the social and common good capacity generated by faith communities. Canadians and their governments will need to get more comfortable with the role that faith communities play in supporting their local geographic communities.

5. That provincial governments recognize the cultural and historic value of faith spaces and their role in supporting resilient communities providing the policy and funding support necessary to preserve these local assets.

- This should include **examining property tax assessment** criteria for former faith buildings converted to user group space so that faith buildings could serve a wider range of services without jeopardizing their tax exempt status.
- **Provincial volunteer support** initiatives to recognize and support the value of accessible free meeting space as a catalyst for social resilience.
- Provincial and federal policy supporting social enterprise and social finance could play critical roles in cases where building ownership transitions are being planned.
- Community bonds or structures similar to Nova Scotia's Community Economic Development Funds could be supported provincially as a means of finding capital for repurposing [2].
- Increased awareness of how faith communities may be vulnerable to market opportunities in selling their buildings for commercial development. Just as the sale of schools in many municipalities are subject to preference being given to other potential educational or community uses, it may be that municipal support could help local faith communities to develop alternatives to selling and loss of public access during seasons of duress.

[2] For more information: <https://nssc.novascotia.ca/corporate-finance/community-economic-development-Investment-funds>

6. That the federal government recognize the critical role of faith buildings as neighbourhood assets -- and often historical assets -- and provide conversion support through local infrastructure funding programs and innovation initiatives.

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation should provide long term mortgage support options.
- Inclusion of faith buildings in both physical and local community infrastructure evaluation and planning.
- Federal Community Futures Development Corporation loan programs could support both maintenance and growth of needed physical spaces by extending those approaches to faith buildings [3].

[3] For more information: <https://www.cfontario.ca/index.php/public-information>

## For Further Research

The Community Spaces in Faith Places survey development, collection and summary process produced significant insight into the positive role that faith buildings play in hosting local groups and organizations. It also became clear that much more research and policy development is needed to address the challenges faced by the potential closure of nearly 1/3 of those facilities. In particular, there are a range of directions that further research could take to support the current work:

1. Add **more communities** to survey: There are a significant number of groups and communities across Ontario that should be reviewed for clarification about their needs and challenges.
2. New **strategies to engage groups** that did not respond: Groups that did not engage in the survey undoubtedly contribute to local social capacity even where that value was not captured by the survey. We need to understand the full range of benefits more clearly.
3. Grow a **wider research partnership network**: The extent and complexity of social infrastructure at local levels warrants not only more research and active policy change but better integration across existing work. Academic, community and policy dialogue can generate improved insight and alignment.
4. **Extend to other parts of Canada**: Four regions of Ontario with varied responses in each does not constitute a fulsome picture of the whole of Canada's neighbourhood dynamics. Every part of the country has been and will be impacted by faith building closures.
5. **Explore proxy measures** for groups that are difficult to measure: There are facets of faith building effects that may be able to be seen by looking at other measures such as geographically mapped locations of arts, culture and community groups over time to see changes in those patterns. We know from early research on charity deserts that faith communities, like other charities, are not evenly distributed.
6. **Faith facilities are being built**: This study did not consider where, how and at what rate new faith building capacity is being added. As noted, religion in Canada continues to change alongside other social dynamics. This is not only a negative phenomena. Some faith communities are growing, building, and adding social capacity. This needs to be compared with the closure rates that are occurring.

**7. Social infrastructure mapping** to visualize impact of building closures on social fabric of communities: As noted in proxy measures, the ability to more clearly see the social infrastructure of communities will be critical for assessing if it is growing, thinning or changing in unexpected ways. If we cannot see those changes, it will be difficult to know, except after the fact, if our policy decisions are having a positive or negative impact.

The pioneering nature of the Community Spaces in Faith Places survey has deepened our understanding of the complex, beneficial way that faith community buildings support the life of their local communities and neighbourhoods. It has also revealed that there is a lot more work to be done to extend that understanding. The specific dynamics of each village, town or city in Ontario and across the country will have their own stories to tell about how changing demographics, religious patterns, and social needs are reflected in the physical buildings that faith communities have built historically and continue to build and develop today.

If we fail to adequately understand these changes – representing both challenges and opportunities – we may well lose vital community capacity that will not be easy or even possible to replicate. Acting quickly and effectively will save time and money since preserving and sustaining our current capacity will be much less costly than re-building from scratch if that capacity is lost.

Many community leaders and networks of nonprofits, charities and faith communities have raised these concerns in various ways. There is an opportunity in our current moment to make critical decisions that will see community increase, rather than contract, in coming months and years.

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## Appendix: Survey Questions

### Community Spaces in Faith Places

#### Counting the Community Usage of Faith Buildings in Ontario

Survey Monkey Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/72MH65C>

Have you ever attended a community meeting? How about an exercise group? Have you ever given blood or taken your child to a Scouts or Guides meeting? Have you ever voted? How many times have these activities taken place in a faith building (defined as Church, Synagogue, Mosque, Temple, Gurdwara)? What if this faith building was gone?

What if we told you that approximately 1/3 of Canada's faith buildings will likely close in the next ten years?

This survey is part of a project researching the extent to which faith buildings support other community and nonprofit groups across Ontario. We need to understand how many community groups and nonprofit groups are conducting activities out of faith buildings so we can measure the impact more clearly. Our aim is to help nonprofits to maintain affordable space by drawing attention to the potential impact of the loss of faith buildings.

Please respond to this survey if you are the manager or head of a community organization or group that uses space in a faith building in Ontario. Organizations with volunteer staff and with paid staff are both encouraged to participate. Please complete only one response per organization. Please forward the link to this survey to other heads of organizations that use space in faith buildings.

If you use more than one faith building, you will be asked to fill out the survey for each faith building you use. The survey will continue with a 6 question follow-up for each faith building, so you may complete the survey for each faith buildings in one sitting.

Our partners in this survey are Ontario Trillium Foundation, National Trust for Canada, Faith & the Common Good, Ontario Nonprofit Network, Cardus, and the City of Toronto. Your data will only be provided to these partners in aggregate format for the purposes of calculating the risk to communities of faith building closures. You will only be contacted regarding this survey if you requested notification of the results.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kendra Fry, [kfry@faithcommongood.org](mailto:kfry@faithcommongood.org).

This survey has 21 questions and will take about 10 minutes to complete.

1. Legal name of the group or organization you are filling in the form on behalf of:

2. Do you operate programming or have offices in a faith building? Yes / No

**Information About Your Community Group or Nonprofit**

3. What is the legal status of your group or organization:

- Registered Charity
- Not For Profit Organization
- Informal Community Group
- For-profit corporation
- Social enterprise
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. How is your work carried out?

- Paid staff only
- Paid staff and Volunteers
- Volunteers only
- Don't know

5. What is the size of your organization's annual revenue (income)?

- 0 - \$50,000
- \$50,001 - \$100,000
- \$100,001 - \$500,000
- \$500,001 - \$1,000,000
- \$1,000,001 - \$5,000,000
- Over \$5,000,000
- Don't know

6. What does your organization do? (check up to three if they apply)

- Culture and Arts
- Recreation and Sports
- Social Club
- Education and Research
- Childcare
- Health Addiction and Mental Health
- Social Services
- Newcomer Settlement Services
- Food Security and Food Services
- Environment
- Development and Housing
- Law and Advocacy
- Religion
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. What population(s) do you serve? (check all that apply)

- Diverse cultural communities
- Francophone
- Indigenous
- People with disabilities
- Women
- Children and youth
- Seniors
- General population
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Information about the Faith Building that You Use**

8. What is the name of the faith building that you use? [ box ]

9. What is the address of the faith building that you use? [ Fill in four boxes ]

10. Does the faith building have a formal historical designation?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

11. How big is your space in the faith building ? (estimate)

- Up to 200 square feet (e.g. single office/desk)
- 200-1000 square feet (gathering space for 40 or so people)
- 1001-5000 square feet (a small gym)
- More than 5000 square feet

12. How do you pay for your space in the building? (choose one)

- By the hour
- Monthly rent
- We don't pay for the space
- Barter/Exchange of services
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- If yes to 'by hour' or 'monthly rent', please specify amount [ box ]

13. How often do you use the space in the faith building (choose one)

- Less than 5 hours per month (~up to 1 hour per week)
- 5-8 hours per month (~less than 1 day per week)
- 9-35 hours per month (~up to 1 week per month)
- 35 hours-70 hours per month (1-2 weeks per month)
- 71-140 hours per month (~full time days)
- Over 140 hours per month

14. What type of facilities do you utilize in the faith building? (choose best description of each space)

- Office space
- Meeting Space
- Playground Space
- Multi-Purpose Room
- Kitchen
- Gymnasium
- Social Housing
- Shelter
- Pool
- Rehearsal/Performance Space
- Sanctuary / Worship space
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

15. In what ways is your faith building accessible (check all that apply)

- Entrance is accessible
- Washroom is accessible
- Meeting space is accessible
- Kitchen is accessible
- Signage
- Emergency strobe lights
- Tactile markers

16. Why does your organization operate out of a faith building? (check all that apply)

- Convenient location
- Good price
- Facilities are wheelchair-accessible
- Matches our mission approach
- Good shared services
- Only space available
- Partnership with faith community
- Value its historic building status
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



17.If you plan to move from this faith building within the next two years, please explain why. [ check the most important reason(s) ]

- Not planning to move
- Lease ending or not renewed
- Costs too high
- Need different geographical location to serve clients
- Need bigger space to serve clients
- Need smaller space to serve clients
- Opportunity to share space with another organization
- Need more office space
- Need more meeting space
- Need more playground space
- Need more multi-purpose space
- Need more kitchen space
- Need more gymnasium space
- Need more social housing space
- Need more shelter space
- Need more rehearsal/performance space
- Need more sanctuary/worship space
- Need more wheelchair accessible space
- Building is closingOther (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

18.If you could no longer operate out of this faith building, would you have an affordable alternate space available to you? [ box ]

19.Do you have any other comments to share?

20.Do you want to be notified of the survey results?

21.Do you use another faith building that you can report on? [ If yes, this will take you to a 6 question survey about the other faith building you may use ]

*\*\* Thank you for taking time to complete the Community Spaces in Faith Places survey.*