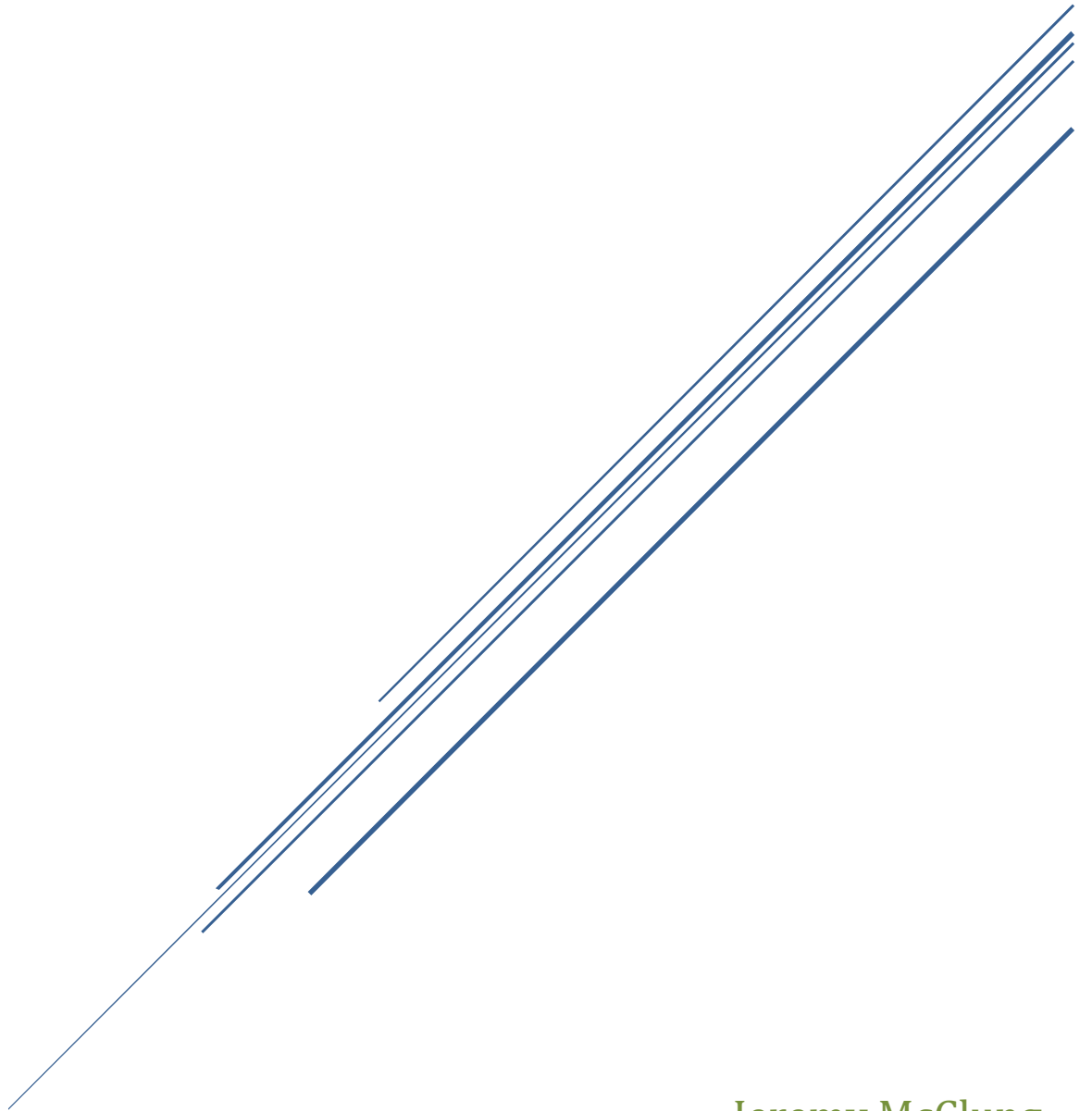


FINDING FAITH IN CANADA TODAY

A Study on How Canadians Become Christians



Jeremy McClung
and John Bowen

Introduction

The gospel is good news that is meant to be shared with all people. Because of this, Christians from many different denominational backgrounds desire to “evangelize” (good-news-ify) those around them. Methods of evangelization vary widely, and many resources have been written on approaches and techniques for effectively inviting others to become Christians.

However, we have very few empirical studies of how people (particularly adults) become Christians. One of the most extensive and intriguing is John Finney’s study of adult converts in England, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?*, published in 1992. Bryan Stone conducted similar research in the United States, borrowing Finney’s title for his 2018 book *Finding Faith Today*. This study follows in their footsteps, but focuses on Canadians, gathering and analyzing the self-reported experiences of those who became Christians as adults.

Our primary goal in conducting this research was to uncover patterns and insights that could be useful to churches and individuals who wish to become more effective at sharing the good news.

The Researchers and Our Supporters

Dr John Bowen is a retired professor and former director of the Institute of Evangelism at Wycliffe College with considerable experience in hands-on evangelistic ministry. He initiated the project in 2019. Dr Jeremy McClung is the current director of the Institute of Evangelism, spent many years in church planting, and wrote his MA thesis on evangelism and conversion. He joined as a research partner during the planning phase.

John was particularly interested in exploring differences between those who had some church background and those who had none; identifying patterns within various demographic segments; detailing what kinds of changes happened as a result of becoming Christian; and tracking the role churches played before, during, and after conversion. Jeremy focused more on the individual’s experience of conversion: whether it was an event or process; if there was an identifiable order in which specific elements were experienced; and the extent to which people emphasized the volitional, emotional, cognitive, or other aspects of the experience.

We gave our time to the project, but financial costs were primarily covered by the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, with additional support from Muskoka Community Church and the Institute of Evangelism. We are grateful to Bishop Susan Bell for seeing the value of this research and for her support throughout the process. The project would have been impossible without the expertise of Elvira Prusaczyk, data analyst extraordinaire. We are also thankful to James Penner and Edward Ng for sharing their knowledge, as well as Andrew Grenville, Chris Andya, Viengtha Vongphachan, and Rashmi Mukherjee from Maru/Blue.

Methodology and Dataset

At the center of our project was an online questionnaire that sought a better understanding of respondents' experiences of becoming Christian, and their lives before and after. This questionnaire was developed with input from peers who had more experience in sociological research of this nature. An early draft was administered to a small sample of test respondents whose responses helped us tweak our questions.

Besides its focus on Canadians, our research was unique in the way these respondents were found. While Finney and Stone had relied on members of the clergy to identify recent converts to study, we utilized a premium data services firm, Maru/Blue, to provide a pool of respondents from the Canadian population at large.

First, an "omnibus" survey was administered to a large sample of people who had been previously identified as Christian. This survey included the following statement, with the option to agree or disagree to varying degrees: "I am a Christian who came to the faith as an adult, and I didn't grow up as a believer." Out of 7717 respondents, 687 (9%) agreed with the statement either strongly or moderately.¹ Of those respondents, 335 then completed our extensive questionnaire, with an additional 165 completions obtained from Maru/Blue's larger general population sample. These responses were collected from June 21 to July 20, 2021.

This approach has many advantages. First, it prevents any prejudice introduced by researchers regarding denomination or tradition. Second, it allows converts to self-identify, which means that those who became Christians without the involvement of a member of the clergy—or even a church—can be included.² However, we also encountered challenges. We had hoped to study only those who had no previous church background and whose conversions had occurred when they were 17 or older. However, as we began to analyze our data, it became clear that we had many respondents who did not neatly fit these categories.

When we filtered out those who had become Christians below the age of 17, we ended up with a total of 318 respondents, including 183 who had some church influence prior to becoming Christian, and 115 who were more clearly "unchurched." The background of the remaining 20 was ambiguous.³ Respondents came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and were nearly equally divided between male (51%) and female (49%). Compared to the general population, these converts were more likely to be white (85% vs 70% of the population) and

¹ This is in keeping with a similar exploratory question Maru/Blue included in an omnibus in January 2019, "Are you a Christian who came to the Christian faith as an adult, without having grown up as a Christian?" Of 1515 respondents, 150 (10%) answered "Yes."

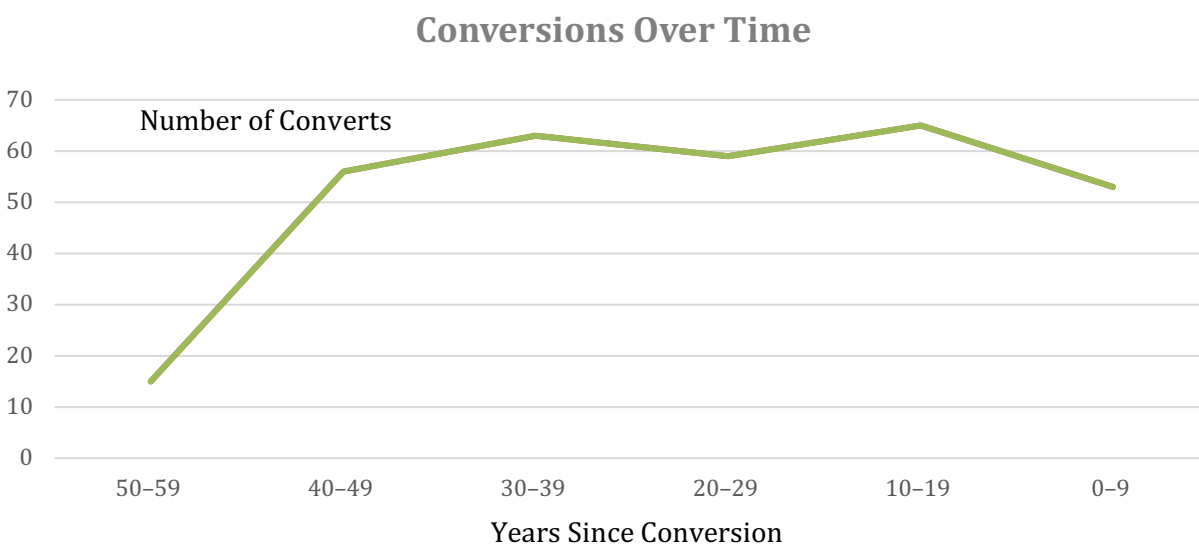
² 26% of our respondents indicated that their experience of conversion was entirely private, not marked by any public ceremony or even by telling another person.

³ While we classified 58% of respondents as having a churched background, only 37% said they saw their experience as "returning to Christianity." Our criteria for classifying someone as previously churched included other markers, such as being active in church before conversion, or citing parental influence on their beliefs. Some who grew up in church but only really understood Christianity later in life may have experienced their conversion as becoming Christian for the first time, even if it was a return by objective standards.

married (70% vs 40% of the general population). Although the age of respondents at the time of the survey (*not* at the time of conversion) was heavily weighted from the mid-40's onward (the average was 63) and 45% were retired, this may be reflective of the kind of people who take online surveys rather than any significant trend in conversion.⁴ Their distribution among provinces was roughly in keeping with that of the general population, with the exception of Quebec. This deviation is easily explained by the fact that our survey was administered in English, limiting responses to English speakers and missing much of the Quebec population.⁵

The main body of this report offers our preliminary analysis of this sample of those 318 Canadians who identified themselves as having become Christians as adults. This is organized according to five questions: *Who are they? What was it like? What influenced them? What happened afterward? Did becoming a Christian make a difference?*

We will conclude with our preliminary thoughts about the implications of our study for individual evangelists, churches, and researchers. Along the way we will share a few key insights for individuals and churches, the first of which is this: Canadians are still becoming Christians. In fact, despite a slight decline in the last decade, there is no significant upward or downward trend in conversion by decade in the last 50 years.⁶ This may indicate that the evangelistic situation in the 21st century is not as dire as it sometimes seems.



Key Insight: *Canadians are still becoming Christians at a steady rate.*

⁴ Unfortunately, statistics about the age distribution of the initial sample of 7717 were not available.

⁵ This is a particularly important area for further research. Of the 150 who identified as becoming Christian in the January 2019 omnibus survey mentioned in footnote 1, 50 were French speakers and 56 were from the province of Quebec. In fact, Quebec had the highest percentage of “Yes” responses, at 15%. We regret that our resources did not permit the administration of a parallel questionnaire for francophones.

⁶ Although there seems to be a drop in conversions in the last 10 years, this does not yet indicate a trend and could have many explanations. The considerable drop in those who became Christians 50–60 years ago is likely related to matters of age, including life expectancy and the online nature of the survey.

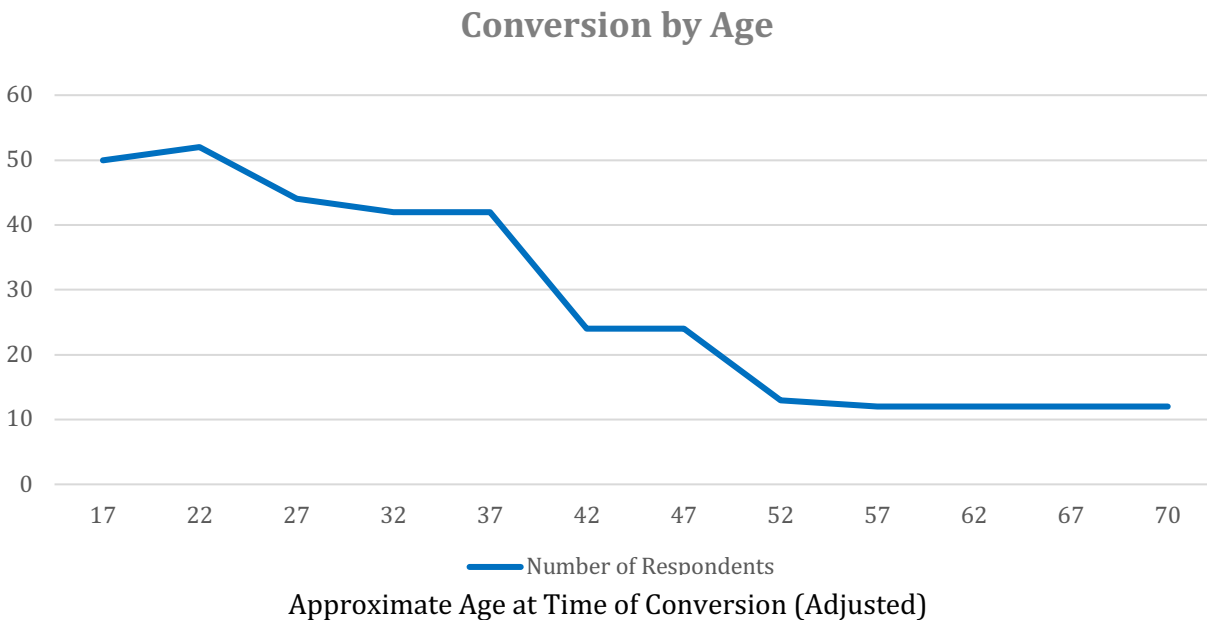
Analysis and Observations

Who are they?

While anyone, from any background, at any age, can become a Christian, it can be helpful to understand who is most likely to be receptive to the gospel, when, and why. In this section we look for patterns in demographics and consider how respondents answered questions about what led them to become Christian.

Age at Time of Conversion

The average age of conversion for our 318 respondents was 35 (median 33), with respondents ranging from 17 to 70 years old.⁷ While about two thirds had converted by the age of 40, it is important to note that a significant number of respondents reported becoming Christian from the ages of 41–70. In fact, in the past 20 years, a solid majority of converts were over 40, while very few were under 25.⁸ The line graph below is a rough visualization of the gradual decline in conversions as age increases.⁹



⁷ Ages of conversion were roughly calculated by subtracting how long ago respondents said they had become Christians from their age at the time of response. Because we did not explicitly define the age of an “adult”, the lower ages are less reliable, since some who became Christians in their late teens may have excluded themselves from the survey if they did not view this as becoming Christian as an adult.

⁸ Zero respondents who indicated they had become Christians in the last 10 years were in the 17–20 age bracket at the time of their conversion. This may be a reflection of the age of the typical respondent, rather than the dire situation it seems to indicate. However, the seeming decrease in younger conversions over time does line up with increasing hostility to Christianity and deserves further study.

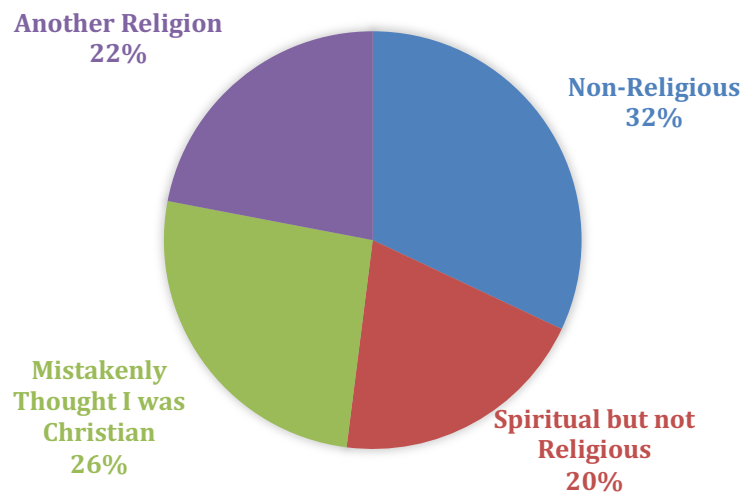
⁹ The original divisions were: ages 17–20, 38 converts; 21–25, 52; 26–30, 44; 31–40, 84; 41–50, 48; 51–70, 49; Missing, 3. For visualization purposes, because these were uneven groupings, the numbers in the chart have been adjusted to represent “conversions-per-five-years.” E.g., the 38 conversions in the four years of ages 17–20 were adjusted to the five-year rate of 48, while the 84 in the ten years from 31–40 were divided into two.

Key Insight: People become Christian at all ages—don't focus exclusively on one stage of life.

Religious Background

When asked about their background before becoming Christian, nearly one third said they were non-religious/non-spiritual (7% Atheist, 7% Agnostic, 18% No religion). Only 20% placed themselves in the supposedly popular “spiritual but not religious” category. 26% said they thought they were Christian, but now would say they really weren't, and 22% identified themselves as either a committed or nominal adherent of another religion. Of these, eight came from traditions with some relationship to orthodox Christianity (four Jehovah's Witnesses, two Mormons, two Unitarian Universalists, plus one from Judaism); eight came from Eastern religions (six Buddhists, one Taoist, and one a mixture between the two); five had been practitioners of Indigenous Spirituality; and one each came from the occult and New Age spirituality. It is notable that *none* came from Hindu or Muslim backgrounds.

Background Before Conversion



When asked what sources of religious or broadly spiritual influence of a positive kind existed in their lives before conversion, 42% pointed to parents, 20% to their spouse, and 18% indicated they already attended church when they became Christian. Respondents were much less likely to choose impersonal sources of influence such as books (13%), internet searches (2%), or online church services or sermons (3%). Many became Christian before the internet was widely used, yet these last two numbers are still surprisingly low.

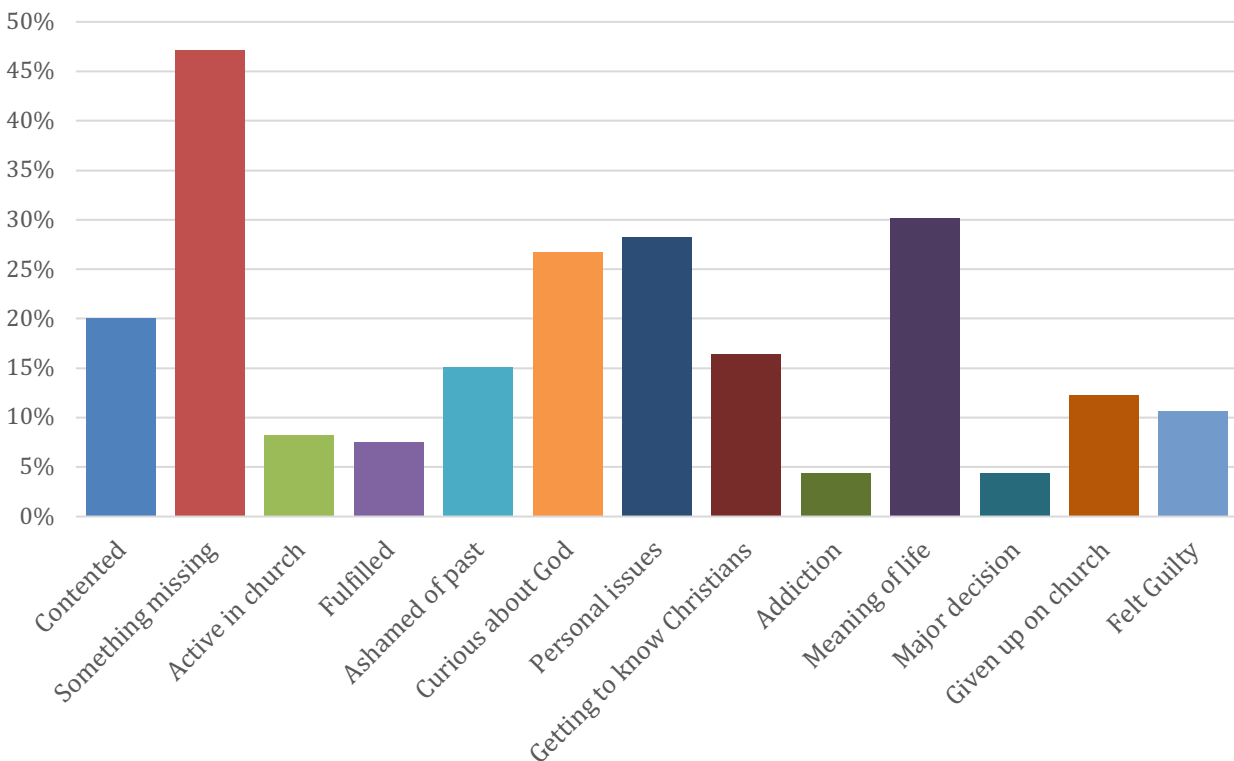
Key Insight: A significant portion of people who became Christian thought they already were. Evangelistic strategies should include those inside or with ties to the church.

Life Before Conversion

Before they were Christians, 47% had a sense that something was missing, 30% said they were wondering about the meaning of life, and 28% said they were struggling with personal issues. Only 27% said they were curious about God and Christianity, and even fewer said they had a sense of shame about their past (15%) or were suffering with a sense of guilt (11%). In fact, 20% (1 out of 5) described their lives before becoming Christians as contented, and 8% called their previous lives fulfilled.¹⁰ While in some ways these numbers affirm evangelistic approaches that address curiosity and the search for meaning, they are also a reminder that *more than half* of respondents *did not* feel the kinds of things Christians often assume they do.

As far as what held them back from becoming Christian, 15% said they had intellectual problems with faith, and 13% said that either specific Christian beliefs or the historical involvement of the church in racism, colonialism, etc. had been obstacles. However, it is significant that more than half of these indicated they were yet to come to the point where the issues no longer troubled them. Clearly not all obstacles need to be eliminated for someone to become Christian.

Life Before Becoming Christian



Key Insight: *People are not necessarily on a quest to find God, forgiveness, or meaning before they become Christians.*

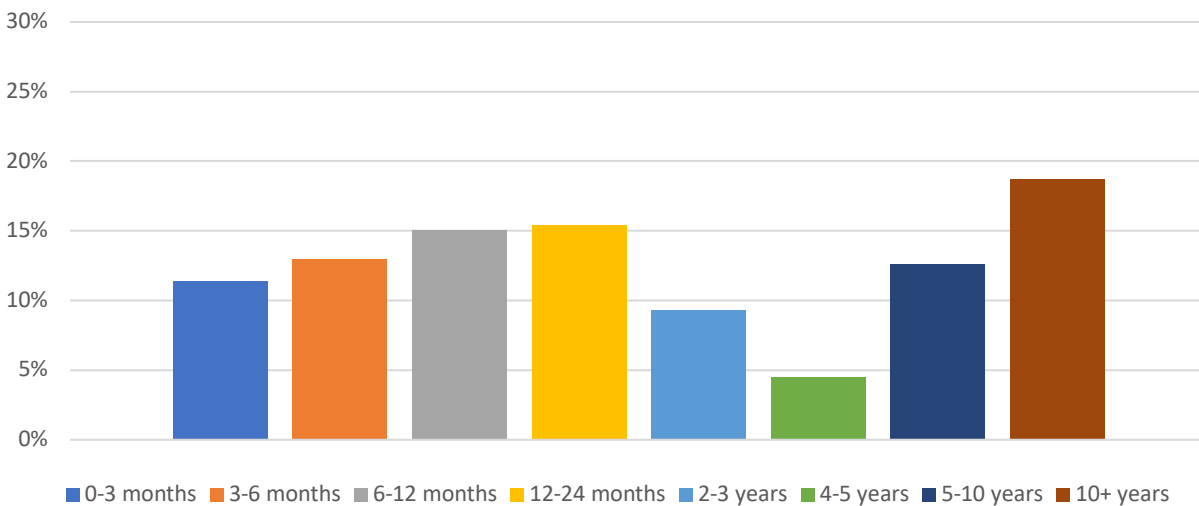
¹⁰ Note that respondents could choose more than one descriptor.

What was it like?

Event vs Process

While the apostle Paul’s instantaneous and dramatic experience on the road to Damascus has often been taken as a paradigm for Christian conversion, many scholars today argue that becoming Christian should be seen as a process, rather than an event. Of our respondents, 39% said it was a process with no single discernable moment of conversion or turning point, 38% said it was a combination of a process and a specific moment of becoming a Christian, and only 16% said it happened in a single, life-changing event. When those who saw it as a process were asked how long it took, 39% said less than a year, 25% said 1–3 years, 17% said 4–10 years, and 19% said *more than 10 years*. Respondents whose experience included some kind of turning point identified that moment as praying a prayer of commitment or openness (26%), responding to a speaker’s invitation (13%), having something in the Bible speak to them (11%), receiving a vision or other supernatural experience (11%), and witnessing an answer to prayer (8%).

Length of Process of Conversion



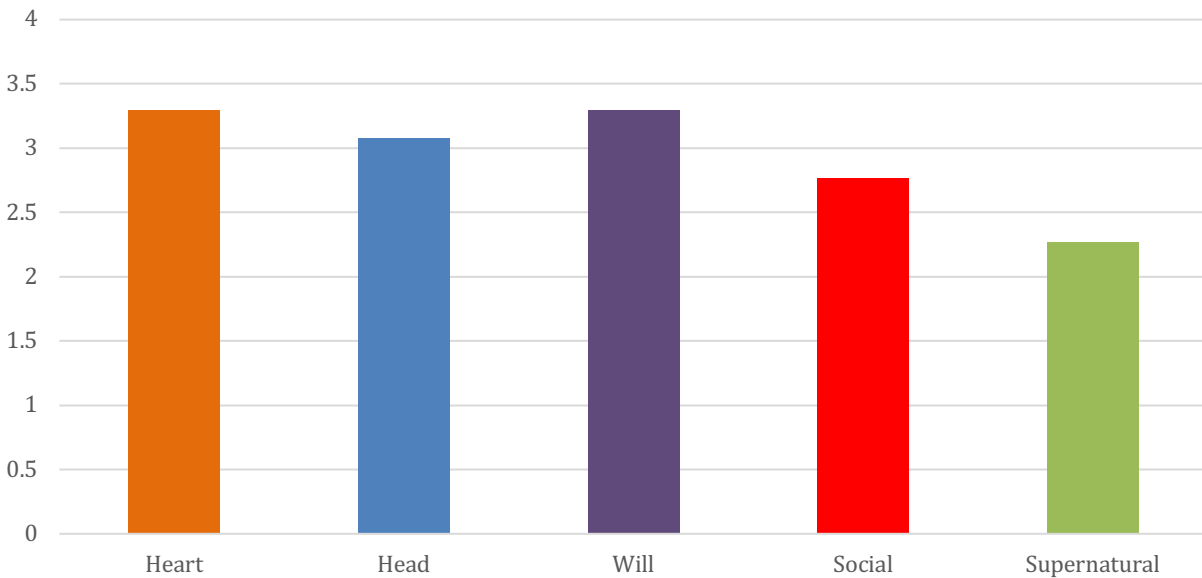
Key Insight: *Becoming Christian is often a lengthy process—be patient and persistent.*

What Kind of Journey?

In previous research, Jeremy delineated five aspects of conversion: intellectual, emotional, volitional, spiritual, and social. Different traditions and approaches to evangelism tend to emphasize changes in one of these areas of life. For example, Billy Graham focused on the volitional aspect as he invited his listeners to make a “decision” for Christ, while Roman Catholics are more likely to highlight the social component of joining the church. We were curious about which of these aspects stood out to our respondents, so we asked them to

describe their journey to faith in Christ by rating statements related to the five areas. While all five received overall positive ratings, “a matter of the heart” and “a matter of the will” were tied for the highest with average ratings of 3.29 (out of 4), while “a supernatural experience” was the lowest with an average rating of 2.27. Interestingly, those with no previous church experience rated this last component higher than those with a church background, 2.37 vs 2.14—a small but statistically significant difference.¹¹

Characterizing the Experience



Key Insight: *Becoming Christian is a wholistic experience—don’t focus on just one aspect.*

Was There a Discernable Order of Events?

We also wanted to identify any patterns in the order in which people experienced certain elements or markers that commonly occur in the journey to becoming Christian. To do so, we asked them to rank seven events in chronological order from first to last. These are listed here according to their *overall* ranking by respondents, meaning that, on average, attending church

¹¹ Those who had previous church influence were more likely to see their conversion as a matter of the will (3.29 vs 3.17 for unchurched). This is in line with the idea that they would have been likely to have experienced some of the other four areas already (intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social), leaving mainly the *decision* to fully engage. Those who had converted 40–60 years ago also rated “will” somewhat higher; however, there were no other obvious trends over time. Demographically, there were only a couple of statistically significant variations: women rated the heart and supernatural experiences more highly than men; those with university education were less likely to see becoming Christian as a matter of the will.

or other Christian events was most commonly identified as happening earliest in the process, while answers to questions generally came later in the process.¹²

Conversion-related events according to overall ranking:

- Attending church or other Christian events
- Your first experience sensing God’s presence
- Understanding the “gospel” (the core Christian message)
- Making an intentional commitment to Jesus
- The first time you prayed in your own words
- Accepting and experiencing God’s forgiveness
- Having intellectual doubts/questions answered

This is a relatively simplistic way to analyze the raw data, which is included in the table below (the numbers indicate how many respondents ranked an item as first, second, etc.):

	First Prayer	Sensed God’s Presence	Committed to Jesus	Understood Gospel	Questions Answered	Received Forgiveness	Attended Church
First	36	55	34	26	34	17	97
Second	66	40	36	49	46	36	31
Third	24	56	52	55	33	52	18
Fourth	41	41	49	40	29	50	21
Fifth	39	32	49	43	31	38	24
Sixth	33	20	29	39	36	47	33
Seventh	23	20	20	22	56	29	55

Some observations on each element include:

- *Attending church or other Christian events* was the item identified as the first step in the process by the most people by far (97 vs 55 for the next most). In fact, more people identified this as the first step in the process than any other ranking of any element. However, as important as church attendance seems to be, the fact that 55 people rank it as last in the process indicates that it is by no means foundational to every conversion.
- When it came to their *first experience sensing God’s presence*, most placed this in the beginning half of the journey, with 192 ranking it 1–4, and only 72 ranking it 5–7.
- While only 26 chose *understanding the “gospel”* as the first step in their journey, most identified it as happening in the early to middle part of the process.
- *Making an intentional commitment to Jesus* could happen at any point in the process, but is more heavily weighted in the middle (3–5).
- Likewise, *the first time you prayed in your own words* is well represented at all points in the process but is significantly more often chosen as the second step. In fact, at 66, this is the second highest single ranking in any category.

¹² The overall ranking was accomplished by assigning each number one ranking the highest score of 8, each number two ranking a score of 7, and so on (the survey also included an “other” category that is not considered in this analysis). This gave overall scores of 1511, 1489, 1414, 1404, 1400, 1301, and 1281 corresponding in order to the list above.

- Conversely, only 17 people identified *accepting and experiencing God’s forgiveness* as first in the process, making it the lowest of all single ratings. This element is fairly evenly distributed throughout the middle of the process.
- While *having intellectual doubts/questions answered* receives the lowest average ranking (meaning that it is latest in the process on average), and 56 people ranked it as last in the process, it is by no means heavily weighted toward the end. In fact, it appears to be the most evenly distributed of the elements, with 2 being its second-highest ranking.

The clearest implication of all of this is that the journey to faith, while it contains some common waypoints, is unique to each individual.

Key Insight: The order in which individuals experience various aspects of becoming Christian varies—don’t assume a pattern.

What influenced them?

We wanted to better understand what helped our respondents to become Christians, recognizing that this was likely to involve circumstances, people, churches, ministries, and other influences. When asked about life events that might have triggered their journey toward becoming Christian, one third said there were none that they could identify. However, the other two thirds could point to specific catalysts, with equal distribution between positive events (getting married, the birth of a child, or something else) and negative (the death of a loved one, personal health issues, the loss of a job, mental health issues, addiction, or something else). Respondents were offered a list of possible factors or influences and asked to rate their significance. The chart on the next page illustrates the percentage of respondents who chose “very important” or “somewhat important” for each item.¹³

Relationships of all kinds are important, however it is “friendship with a Christian” (40%) that is the clear winner over parents (13%), children (11%), other family (12%), a pastor or minister (20%), and even one’s own spouse (32%).

Key Insight: Friendship is the most effective environment for evangelism.

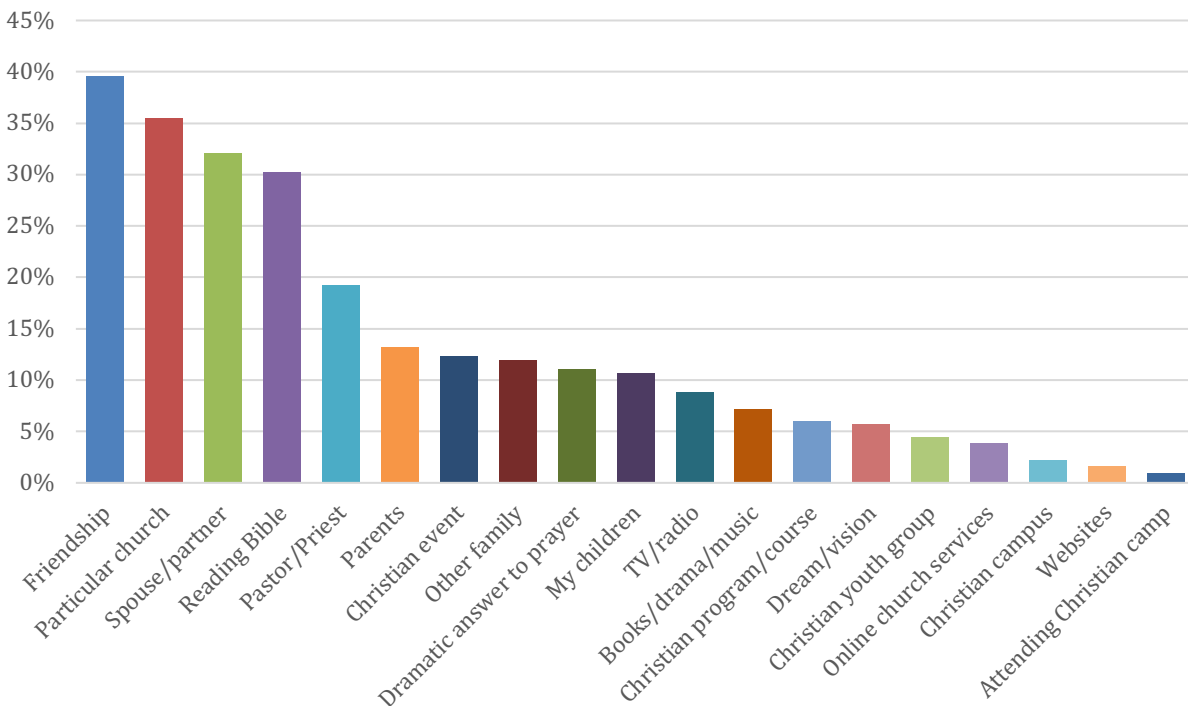
When it came to other influences, “a particular church” came out on top, with 36% of respondents indicating this was important in their journey. It is interesting to note that in an earlier question, only 12% indicated they had “given up on church.” Other Christian ministries appear to have been much less influential: 12% said a Christian event, conference, or retreat

¹³ Respondents were asked to rate the items as very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all. However, because they were (unintentionally) allowed to skip items, it makes more sense to analyze the data by the number of people who chose a factor, rather than its average rating (since an item may be ranked highly by only a few people). However, for those who are curious, the top five factors by average ranking were: spouse, parents, reading the Bible, children, and a dramatic answer to prayer.

was important, while 4% pointed to youth group, 2% to campus ministry, and only 1% to Christian camp. This does not necessarily mean that these latter three have not helped people become Christians, since they focus on youth rather than adults, and thus most of their target audience would have been excluded from our study.

Reading the Bible was important to 30% of our respondents, while Christian TV, radio, websites, books, drama, music, programs, and courses all came in below 10%. We were curious about how many people would mention the Alpha Course, since it is often upheld as a particularly effective evangelistic tool in Canada today. From our sample, 8 people (2.5%) indicated that Alpha had been an important factor in their journey. While at first glance this number may seem disappointingly low, further reflection tells a different story. First of all, it was not a viable option for many of our respondents, since they became Christians before it was released. The first videos for wider usage were filmed in 1995 and Alpha Canada was established in 1998, but it took time for its popularity to grow. If we take just those who became Christians in the twenty years before our survey (2001 to 2021), we have a sample of 118, 7% of whom indicate Alpha was an important factor in their conversion—a number that seems to affirm its effectiveness.¹⁴

Most Significant Factors in Becoming Christian

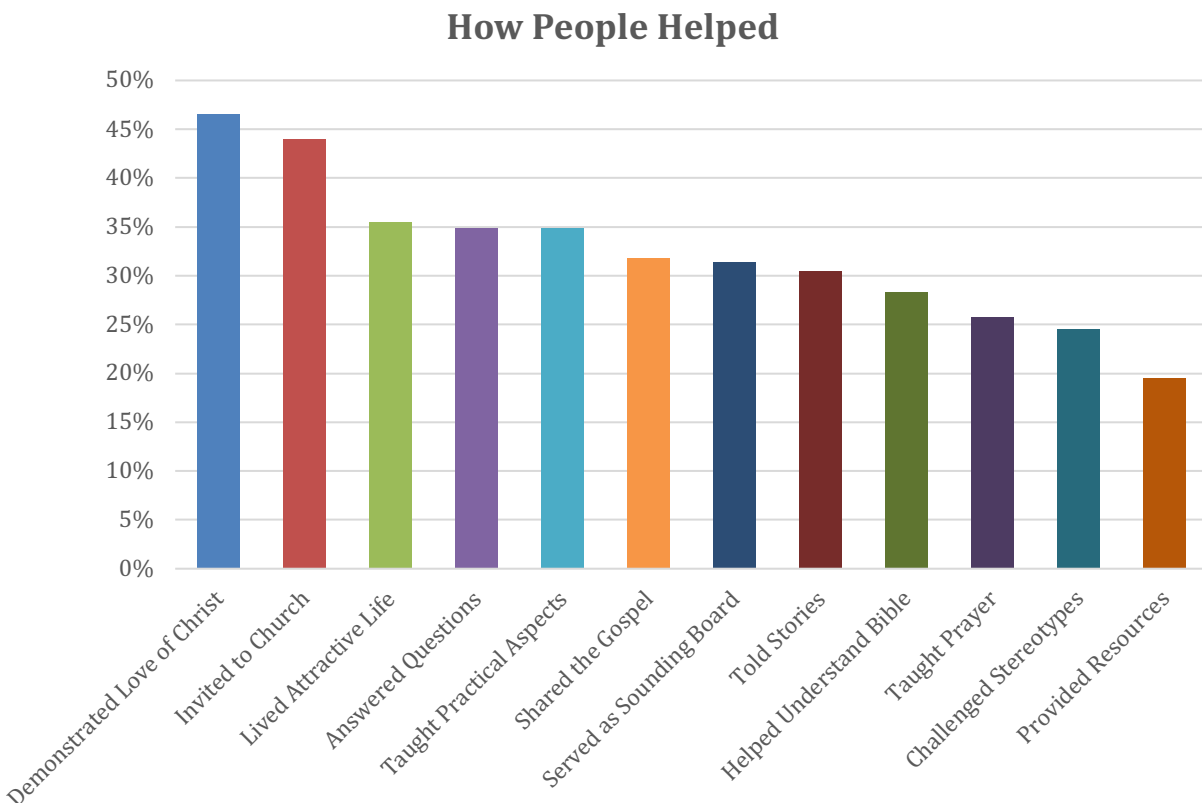


Key Insight: Relationships, church, and Bible-reading were by far the most effective evangelistic strategies. Evangelism doesn't need to be complicated.

¹⁴ A closer look at the eight respondents who identified Alpha as a factor reveals that three of them became Christians before 1995 ('85, '91, and '94). This may indicate that, even though it was not linked to their conversion per se, Alpha was an important part of their subsequent growth or learning.

How People Helped

Whether family members, friends, or pastors, people clearly played the most important role in our respondents' journeys toward becoming Christian. But what was it that these people did that was helpful? We asked our respondents to think of those who had been most influential and indicate *what they had done* that had been important to them. Their top three choices are good news for people who are afraid they do not have the necessary training or knowledge to evangelize, since no special skills are needed to: 1) demonstrate the love of Christ in practical ways (47%), 2) invite people to church services or events (44%), or 3) live a life that is attractive enough that others want to live that way too (36%). However, it is important to note that actually talking about one's faith is still quite important, with 35% indicating the value of providing answers to intellectual questions and doubts or (also 35%) explaining practical aspects of the Christian faith. Respondents had also been helped by someone sharing the gospel message directly (32%) or someone telling stories and sharing ways that God had impacted them (31%). Many indicated the importance of having a sounding board or listening ear (31%), as well as help with learning to pray, reading the Bible, and providing resources. Perhaps it is significant that one in four said that influential people had challenged their stereotypes of what it meant to be a Christian.

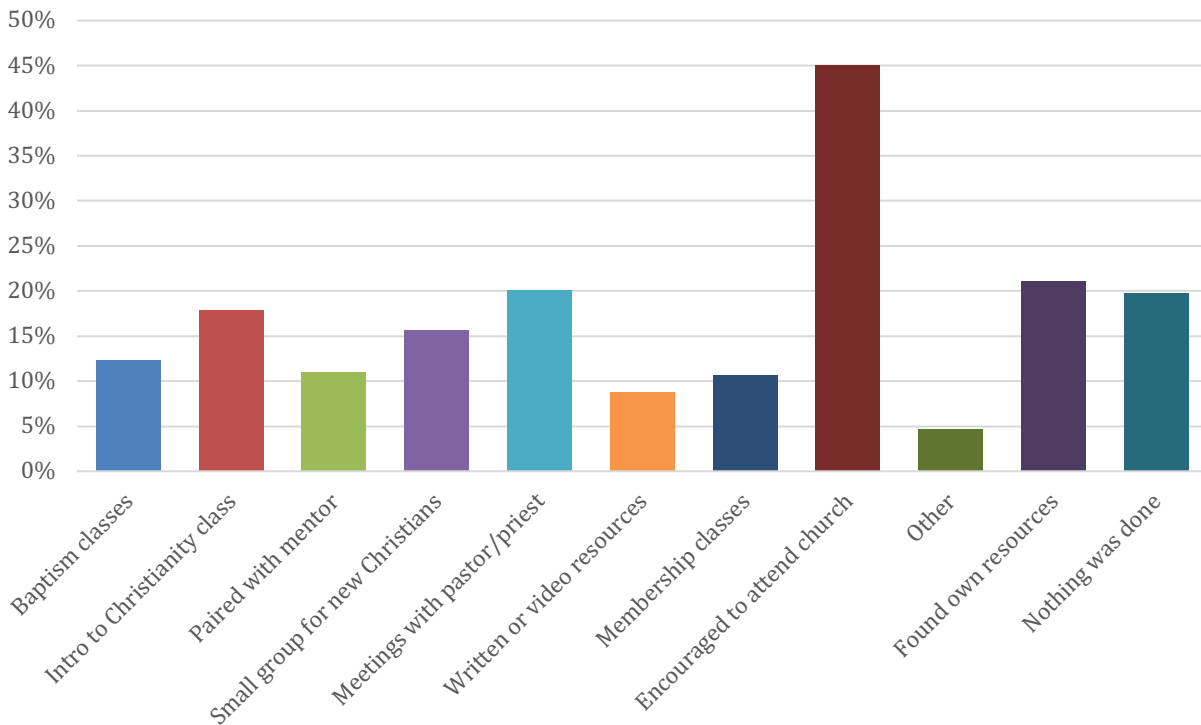


Key Insight: *The most important evangelistic methods are loving, inviting, and modelling. Don't be intimidated or think you need to have all the answers.*

What happened afterward?

Respondents tended to mark their conversion publicly in two ways: by baptism or a baptism-related ritual,¹⁵ and/or by some sort of verbal acknowledgement. People told a friend (36%), their spouse (26%), a pastor (26%), or a small or large group (23% for each). As mentioned above, it is worth noting that 26% said it was an entirely private experience. But besides hearing their stories and celebrating through baptism, what else was done to help get these new Christians started on the right trajectory?

Support Offered After Becoming Christian



The most common thing churches did to disciple new Christians was to encourage them to attend worship services (45%). While there is no doubt that church attendance is an important part of growth as a Christian, it is questionable whether this alone will meet the needs of recent converts. Only 20% indicated that something other than church attendance was offered to intentionally get them started on the path of discipleship (another 20% said nothing at all was done).¹⁶ While 63% were satisfied with the support their church gave them, 32% said it could have been better—whether or not they realized it at the time.

Key Insight: *Greater attention should be given to how we can intentionally disciple those who have recently become Christians.*

¹⁵ 50% underwent baptism, 10% participated in confirmation, and 7% renewed their baptismal vows.

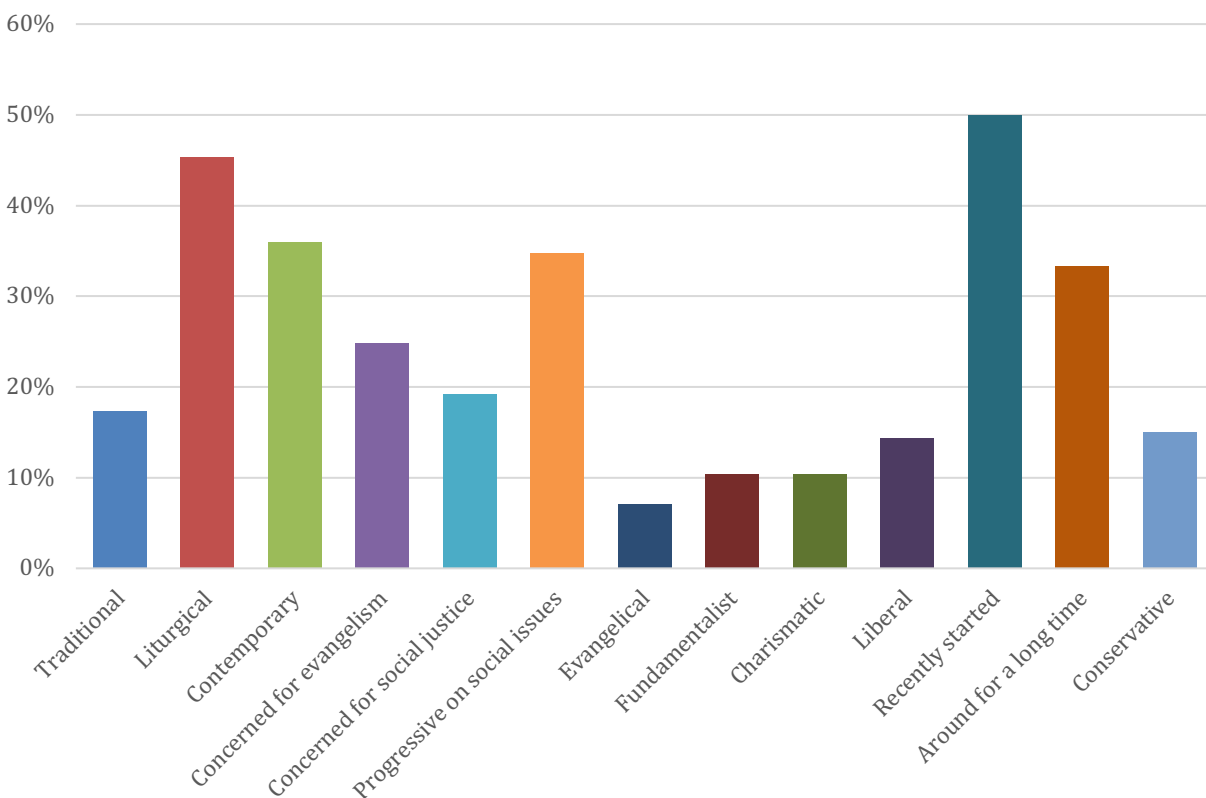
¹⁶ 65 people out of 318, or 20.44%, chose at least one option other than “attend church”, “I found my own”, or “nothing was done.”

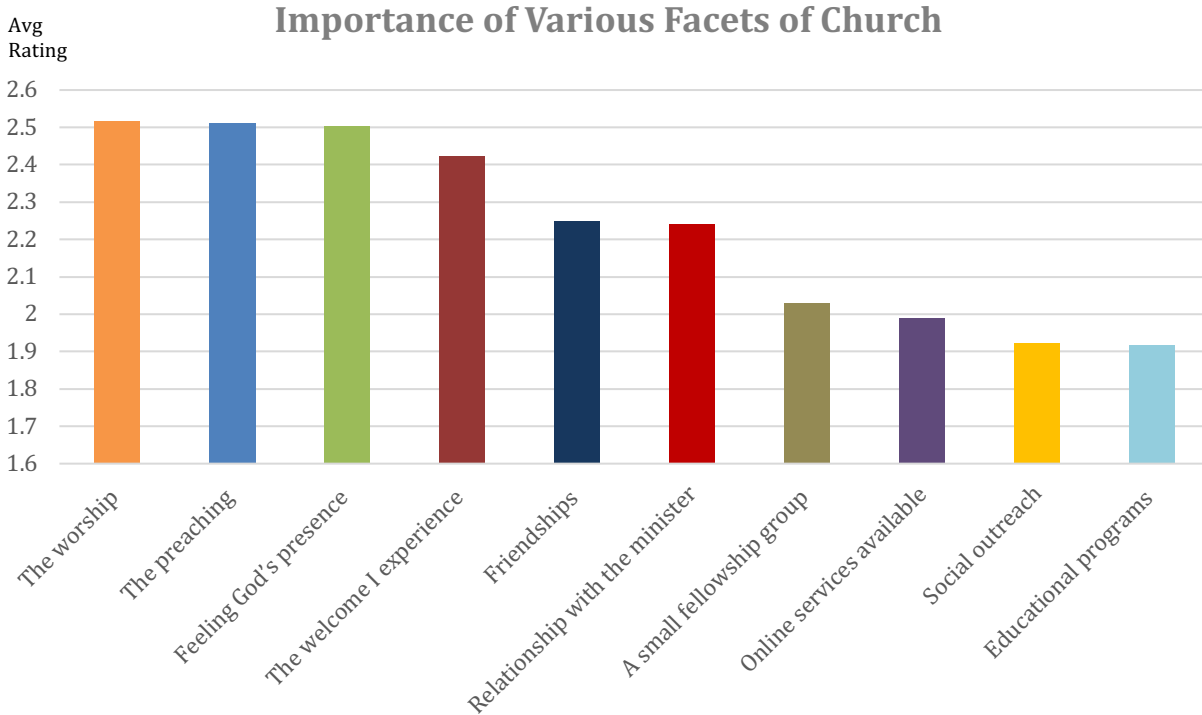
Attending Church

When it came to church, most found it at least “fairly easy” to start attending. For many, this was because they were already familiar with church (55%) or because they went with someone (27%). However, the church itself also made a difference, with 30% pointing to the fact that the people were welcoming, and 24% saying that it helped that they could follow what was going on. Only 3% of respondents found it difficult to start going to church, and they linked this most often to not knowing what to do in the service, not wanting to be noticed or singled out, and unexplained fear or emotional resistance.

We asked them to indicate the background/style of the church they attend, along with rating the features that were most important to them. However, shortcomings in our questionnaire meant they were not necessarily describing the church in which they came to faith. Since many had become Christian decades earlier, these results are not necessarily relevant to the process of becoming Christian. Nonetheless, they are worth reviewing:

Church Currently Attending





Did becoming Christian make a difference?

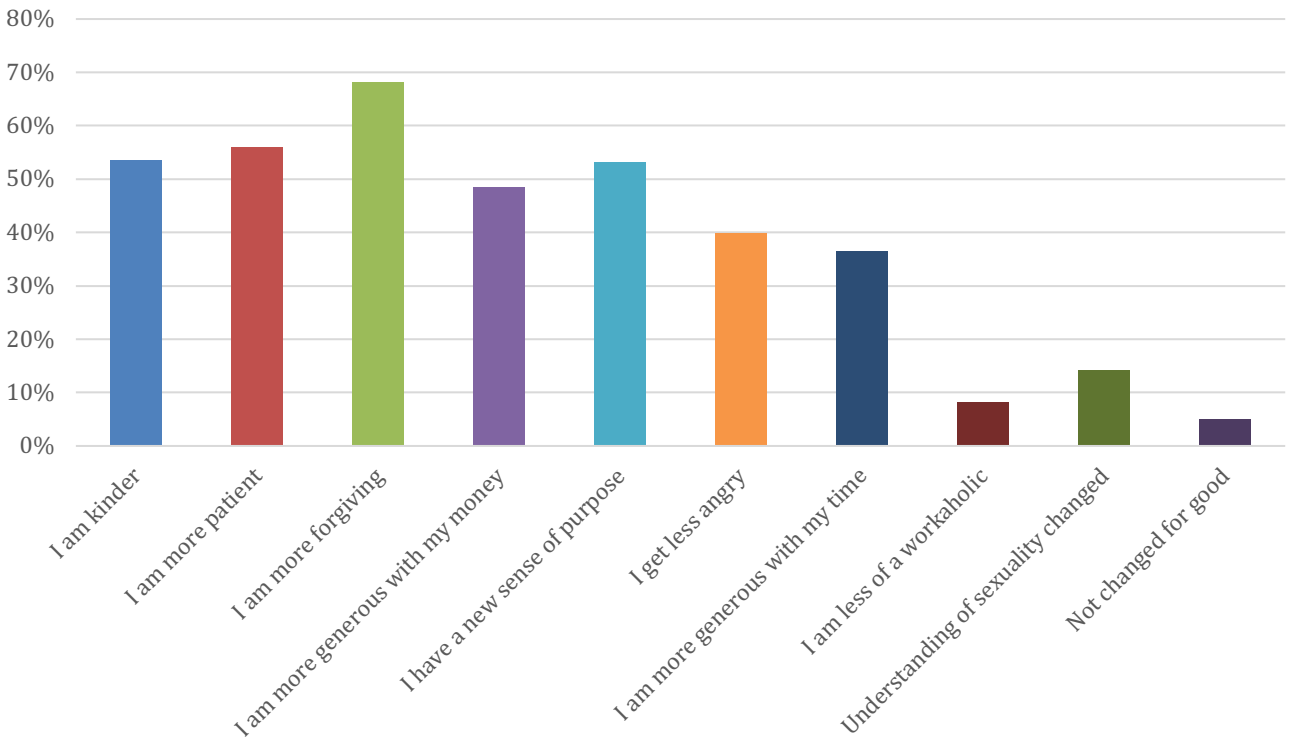
We wanted to get a sense of how becoming a Christian might have made a difference in the lives of our respondents, so we asked questions about their self-perception, their religious observances, and their views on a few social issues.

Changed Lives

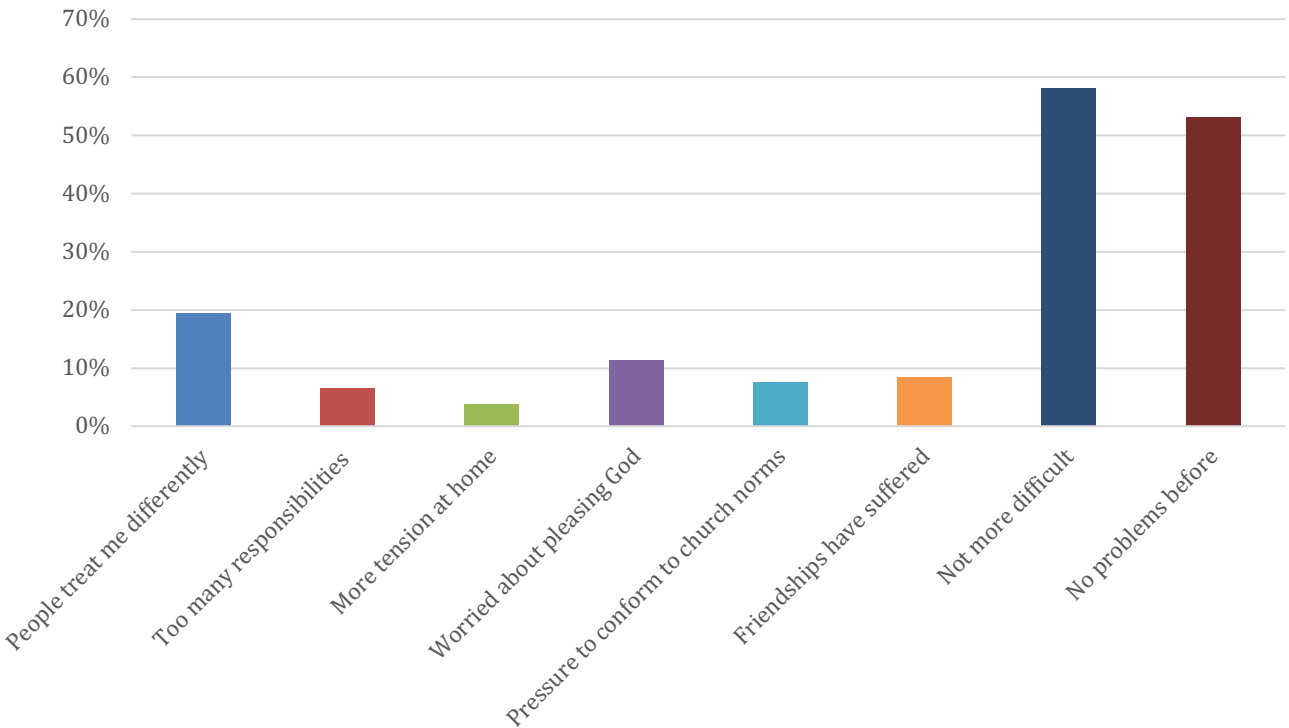
To help us understand how they perceived changes in their own life, we asked them to respond to statements describing both positive and negative changes by selecting Yes, No, or N/A. The most frequently chosen was “I am more forgiving,” with 68% indicating they believed this to be true. More than half perceived themselves to be kinder, more patient, and having a new sense of purpose since becoming Christian. Significant numbers saw themselves as more generous with their money and time, as well as less angry—all very good things.

However, the disconcerting implication is that a sizeable portion (nearly half) of respondents did not see themselves as changing in one or more of these areas (although only 5% indicated outright that their lives had not changed for the good). When it came to negative changes, the top answers had to do with changes in relationships (“people treat me differently because of my faith,” 19.5%; “friendships have suffered,” 8.5%) or pressure surrounding new norms of behaviour (“I find I am worried about pleasing God,” 11.3%; or “I feel pressure to conform to the norms of the church,” 7.5%).

In what ways has your life improved?



In what ways has your life become more difficult?



Changes in Practice

We also asked them how often they attended church, went to small group, and prayed/read their Bibles: every week, once or twice a month, occasionally, or not at all. While each of these three practices saw an increase in frequency, none of the changes were particularly dramatic. However, even more disconcerting is how seldom respondents said they engaged in these practices after becoming Christian. Our scale was every week (3), once or twice a month (2), occasionally (1), or not at all (0). Reading the Bible and praying had the highest rating of 2.12, indicating that, on average, respondents engaged in this kind of devotional practice on less than a weekly basis. Church attendance was only slightly lower at 1.92, while participating in a small group was decidedly “occasional” at 1.17.¹⁷

Changes in Viewpoints

We asked about seven social issues that are sometimes associated with particular “Christian” viewpoints. For most of the questions, respondents’ views were unchanged. The fact that these unchanged views fall on both sides of every issue is indicative of a wide variety of denominations and backgrounds.¹⁸ Areas that saw the greatest change include the 27% who said that they consider care for the environment *more* important than they did before they were Christians. This is a welcome contrast to societal prejudices that often associate Christianity with ambivalence or hostility toward environmentalism (perhaps represented by the 3% who said it is now less important). 26% of respondents had seen sex before marriage as permissible before they were Christians, but no longer did. Smaller but significant changes were seen in the 11% who had become more complementarian and the 9% who had become opposed to abortion. Intriguingly, while 4% said they had taken a more conservative stance on same-sex marriage, more (7%) said they had become supportive of same-sex marriage since becoming Christian.¹⁹

For ease of presentation only, responses are categorized in the following chart according to their stereotypical association with more socially conservative or progressive viewpoints. Each question in the survey had its own set of responses and did not use the words “conservative” or “progressive”. These terms are less than ideal and are not meant to reflect a theological or political perspective.²⁰

¹⁷ Before respondents became Christian these were 1.25, 1.49, and 0.93 respectively.

¹⁸ Intriguingly, while 13.5% said that “Christians who associate strongly with more right-wing views than your own” had been an obstacle to their becoming a Christian, 7.9% said it was the left-wing views of other Christians that had held them back.

¹⁹ It is possible that some of these changes may have more to do with the passage of time and changes in societal viewpoints than with Christian values (i.e., this may be a case of correlation, not causation).

²⁰ For the purpose of this table, the conservative is (admittedly unfairly) taken to be: less concerned about the environment, against sex before marriage, against same-sex marriage, in favour of a more traditional view of gender roles, against tighter gun control, against abortion rights, and against a guaranteed basic income.

Changes in Viewpoints on Social Issues

Issue	Unchanged	Unchanged conservative vs progressive	Became more conservative	Became more progressive	Uncertain
Care for the environment	60%	60%, -	3%	27%	11%
Sex before marriage	64%	29%, 35%	26%	-	10%
Same-sex marriage	74%	48%, 25%	4%	7%	15%
Women's equality	84%	4%, 80%	11% ²¹	1%	4%
Tighter gun control	82%	27%, 55%	4%	1%	13%
Abortion rights	76%	43%, 33%	9%	1%	14%
Guaranteed basic income	65%	23%, 42%	1%	4%	31%

***Key Insight:** The relative lack of transformation in many who became Christian is cause for concern and may be linked to a lack of intentional discipleship.*

Concluding Thoughts

In many ways, most surprising to us as we conducted this research was the relative lack of surprises. We had hoped for new insights, clear patterns, and important trends. Instead, what we found was that people were continuing to become Christians in Canada at roughly the same rate, and through tried-and-true avenues like friendships, church involvement, and Bible reading.

For Individuals

This study has a few implications for Christians who want to share their faith with others. Perhaps the most important is the reminder that becoming Christian is a long process, often lasting many years. The best thing you can do is have long-term friendships with those who are not Christians and allow the life and love of Christ to overflow through your own. Of course, there may be times when you need to address questions, explain more about your faith, and share the gospel. However, because each person's journey is unique, it is better to remain responsive and flexible rather than trying to steer the process according to a preconceived pattern. Your friend does not need be having an emotional or existential crisis in order to become Christian. For those who are afraid they do not have the skills or knowledge needed to

²¹ The conservative viewpoint was worded as: "Was in favour beforehand, but now prefer to speak of 'complementary roles' for men and women."

evangelize effectively, this is encouraging: the life you live is more important than the answers you give.

Perhaps a reminder is in order that this does not mean pretending to be especially righteous or super-Christian, but simply means keeping in step with the Holy Spirit's work in your life. Of course, the second most important thing you can do for a friend is to ask them to attend church. Evangelism is most effective when it doesn't rely on just one person, so belonging to a community of other believers into which you feel comfortable inviting non-Christian friends is also important.

For Churches

What are the implications of this study for priests, pastors, and leaders who want to become more effective in their corporate evangelistic efforts? First, in keeping with the conclusions above, the people in the church need to be encouraged to have genuine friendships with those who are not Christians. This means resisting the overprogramming that keeps church attendees from having time to develop relationships with people outside their church community, and avoiding the kind of us-against-them mentality that makes them afraid to do so. Leaders need to model this by having their own non-Christian friends—not as projects or mere “examples,” but as genuine, long-term, mutually loving relationships.

Since attending church was high on the list of what helped people become Christians, not only should parishioners be regularly encouraged to invite their friends, but services should also be designed with non-Christians in mind. This does not mean adopting a “seeker” model but ensuring that everything is done in a way that is accessible and understandable to those who are new to church. It is important to remember that one of the most fruitful fields to harvest seems to be *inside* (or closely related to) the church: those who grew up attending a church, whether orthodox or an offshoot such as Jehovah's Witness or Mormon, or who are currently attending, but don't really “get it” yet. Evangelistic efforts should not just be targeted at those outside the church, but should be built into the regular life of the church.

As far as programs and resources, these seem to be less important than is sometimes assumed. While the Alpha course seems to be quite effective, reading the Bible came out as the clear winner over all kinds of other resources. Perhaps a “beginner's guide to reading the Bible” class might be in order, or even some simple written instructions on how to get started. Whatever these programmatic efforts may be, it is important that they include relationships, and not just information. Furthermore, the church ought to pay attention to all five aspects of becoming Christian: head, heart, will, supernatural, and social. Ideally it would provide opportunities for developing, or at least acknowledge the need to engage with, all of these factors.

Perhaps even more important than offering programs aimed at pre-Christians is providing new followers of Jesus with the resources they need to get started. It seems that churches are doing very little to help those who become Christian know just what that means and how it should shape their lives—resulting in the relative lack of post-conversion transformation seen in many

of our respondents. The early church's strategy for incorporating new believers (the catechumenate) is an example of the kind of wholistic, intentional approach that is needed to help launch new Christians on the right trajectory.

For Researchers

We offer the insights and conclusions in this report with a sense of humility and openness, knowing (better than we did when we started!) that we are not sociologists and that our methodology was imperfect. However, our hope is that what we have done will not only serve the church in practical ways, but also prompt further research, for example:

- Can the apparent trend of conversion happening later in life be verified?
- Why did we find zero Muslim or Hindu converts?
- What kinds of churches are most effective at helping people become Christians?
- What is happening in Quebec and/or among francophones as it relates to evangelism and conversion?

Those who have questions or would like access to our questionnaire or dataset can contact John at john.bowen@wycliffe.utoronto.ca or Jeremy at jeremy.mcclung@wycliffe.utoronto.ca.