

A. Brazal

Prof. A. Brazal, De la Salle
University, Manila, Philippines.
E-mail: agnesmbrazal@
gmail.com,
ORCID: [https://orcid.
org/0000-0002-0431-9380](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0431-9380)

T. Camarines

Dr T. Camarines, De la Salle
University Integrated School
- Senior High School, Manila,
Philippines.
ORCID: [https://orcid.
org/0000-0003-0385-221X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0385-221X)

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Women's reception of cyber churches during the pandemic and indications for the future

ABSTRACT

This article aims to respond to the question: How have women received the shift of religious activities online and what are its implications or challenges, if any, for the future of the church? The study reveals no significant difference in the level of engagement in religious activities prior to and during the pandemic among women respondents in the NCR, Philippines. Women have played crucial roles in maintaining the religious well-being of their household, suggesting exercise of agency and leadership. A correlation/regression analysis of the data also projects a significant increase in level of engagement in 10 online religious activities post-pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

The crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on religion and religious practices in various ways. The most dramatic result, according to a Gallup news report (Newport 2020), was the sudden shift from face-to-face to online worship.

Baker *et al.* (2020) point to how social distancing and the turn to digitally mediated worship has accelerated the privatisation of religiosity. This can go hand-in hand with trends toward secularisation. They posit that the post-pandemic era may not see a return



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to pre-pandemic level of participation, but it may lead to the exit of some from religious participation. For future studies, they propose that researchers come up with sufficient measures to distinguish the extent of privatisation from secularisation or decline of levels of religiosity (Baker *et al.* 2020). Based on his empirical studies in the Philippine context, Baring departs from the Western discourse, particularly on the youth's religious dis-affiliation and privatisation of their faith. Instead, Baring (2018:5) notes that Philippine students view religiosity as a combination of personal, institutional, and ethical commitments.

Bare (2020:38) foresees that religious traditions that stress embodied aspects of the Christian faith such as the incarnation and transubstantiation "will quickly retreat from e-church" after the pandemic. Other traditions such as Protestant churches that view the eucharist solely as a memorial are better poised to adopt online worship, even in the post-pandemic era.

Baker *et al.* also note challenges posed by the lack of face-to-face interaction on charitable giving. Some individuals or religious congregations may have less knowledge or access to electronic forms of capital transfer. This will result in less donations to the church and its ministries.

Studies have been made regarding the digitalisation of churches in response to the corona virus pandemic. Gauxachs *et al.* (2021) analysed churches' response in Spain from the perspective of the leaders and institutions of the Spanish Catholic hierarchy. They note an increase in participation in digital platforms (Institutional webpage, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Skype, and other videoconferencing activities) in 86.8 per cent of the 70 dioceses studied; 73.5 per cent of these dioceses experienced an increase in audience in Youtube, 64.7 per cent in institutional webpage, and 60.3 per cent in Facebook. The new users came particularly from other towns or countries, or spiritual seekers who wish to be anonymous. Some dioceses had a surge of both young and older people. The digital divide, however, has led to the falling out of members who have no access or capability to participate (Gauxachs *et al.* 2021:9).

In the United States of America, the Pew Research released in August 2020 reveals that over 50 per cent of US adults, who normally participated in religious services at least once a month in 2019, have replaced in-person attendance with virtual participation. Less than a quarter (23 per cent) of the regular participants in religious services have attended both in-person and virtual services in the last month (Pew Research Center 2020a).

Generally, 90 per cent of those who have recently participated in religious services online are satisfied with the experience. However, the

US Pew Survey result also shows that 80 per cent of adults will revert back to their in-person pre-pandemic religious practice. This implies that the pandemic will not change participation in in-person religious services. This study, however, focuses only on religious services or institutional religious practice online and did not include other forms of private practices.

In terms of self-perception, 28 per cent of US Americans share that their personal faith became stronger because of the pandemic. Among advanced economies, US Americans are also most likely to say that their faith has become stronger during the pandemic (Pew Research Center 2020b).

In the Philippines, Pulse Asia's *Ulat ng Bayan* survey that involved 1,200 respondents, the vast majority (51.8 per cent) of them expressed that they became more religious during the pandemic, compared to only 1.5 per cent who said that they became less religious (Cornelio 2020). When the data is disaggregated by gender, the results revealed that women (55.5 per cent) are more significantly inclined ($p < .05$) to say that they became more religious compared with men (48 per cent) (Cornelio 2020).

As with the Pew study, this was based on the respondents' self-perception. This also agrees with the results of the nationwide *Veritas Truth Survey* conducted among 1,200 respondents from 20 June to 10 July 2020, showing that 89 per cent of the respondents are convinced that faith is "very important" in battling the pandemic (Patinio 2020).

Meza's (2020) exploratory study of Catholics in the Department of Nariño, Colombia, yielded a different result relating to participation in religious services. He saw evidence of a decrease in institutionalised religious practice, at a time when normally people resort to religion as a source of coping. Literature posits the causal link between fear and religious faith: fear stimulates religious faith and religious faith alleviates fear (Daaleman & Dobbs 2010; Harding *et al.* 2005). This would, therefore, predict an increase in religious practice during the pandemic. This was not validated in Meza's study. Meza posits the possible existence of new forms of coping (for example, new types of connection, devices, and so on) that would explain the decrease in participation in religious practice. A crisis such as the pandemic and the shift to worship online can also create a space for reconsidering beliefs and practices (Osteen & Campbell 2020).

Meza's study shows that gender, the type of religious practice, and the frequency of religious participation prior to the pandemic are among the significant predictors of an increase in religiosity during the pandemic. An increase in religious practices was more apparent in women, and in private or personal religious practices than in institutionalised practices.

Those women and men who were not practising before the quarantine tend to abandon religious practices during the quarantine. Meza further points out that more women than men carry out their religious activities online, whereas the men prefer traditional media such as the TV or in family gatherings.

The initial studies above show a divergence in participation in religious services prior to and during the pandemic, such as in the increase in participation in the USA and Spain and a decrease in Colombia. In terms of religiosity based on self-perception, there has been an increase of religiosity in the USA and the Philippines during the pandemic. A significant increase in religiosity during the pandemic was also found to be more apparent in women than in men (Philippines and Colombia).

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

Our study focuses more particularly on the religious activities of women during the quarantine and their participation in cyber-churches and its challenges, if any, for the future. Cyber-church is defined, from a ministry perspective, as enabling “worship and Christian education, evangelization and community on the World Wide Web”. In the context of the Philippines that has one of the, if not the longest and strictest period of quarantine so far in the world, and as churches have thereby been pushed to morph into a cyber-church, this study aims to examine its impact on women's participation in church. This research addresses the main question: How have women received the shift of church activities (masses, devotion, charity work, and so on) online? What are its implications for the future?

A survey of Catholic women in the National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines was conducted using Google form shared on various Facebook pages or sent by email through a convenience sampling strategy (snowballing).¹

The NCR, as the economic and political hub of the country, was chosen as the cities/municipalities in the area experienced the same length and severity of quarantines during the pandemic. The NCR comprises 16 cities and one municipality.

¹ The research is committed to protecting the confidentiality of participants' personal information and complies with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 110173) of the Philippines.

Table 1 shows the level of restrictions on religious gatherings in the NCR from the start of the pandemic until the date when the survey began to be conducted (12-31 October 2021).

Table 1: Quarantine levels of NCR and restrictions on religious gatherings

Date	Quarantine level	Restrictions on religious gatherings
15 March- 15 May 2020	Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) (IATFa 2020)	No religious gatherings were allowed, except for funeral rites.
15-31 May 2020	MECQ (IATFb 2020)	Maximum of 5 persons per religious gathering
1 June- 2 August 2020	GCQ (Chua)	10% seating capacity or 10 persons
3-18 August 2020	MECQ (Chua)	Maximum of 5 persons per religious gathering
19 August- 21 October 2020	GCQ (Chua)	10% seating capacity or 10 persons
22 October 2020-14 February 2021	GCQ (Malolos <i>et al.</i> 2021)	30% seating capacity
15 February- 21 March 2021	GCQ (Malolos <i>et al.</i> 2021)	50% seating capacity
29 March- 11 April 2021	ECQ (Gita-Carlos 2021; Rappler 2021)	No religious gatherings; weddings, baptisms, funerals are limited to 10 persons
12 April- 14 May 2021	MECQ (Punzalan 2021)	Maximum of 5 persons per religious gathering
15 May- 15 July 2021	GCQ with heightened restrictions (PCOO 2021; CNN 2021)	No religious gatherings; gatherings for necrological services, wakes, inurnment, and funerals for those who died of causes other than COVID-19 are limited to immediate family members

Date	Quarantine level	Restrictions on religious gatherings
16-29 July 2021	GCQ (Perez-Rubio 2021)	Religious gatherings shall be allowed up to 30% of the venue capacity, provided that there is no objection from the local government unit (LGU). This may be increased to 50% depending on the LGU. Gatherings for necrological services, wakes, inurnment, and funerals for those who died of causes other than COVID-19 shall be allowed from to 30%-50% of the venue capacity, with the permission of the LGU
30 July-5 August 2021	GCQ with heightened restrictions	No religious gatherings; gatherings for necrological services, wakes, inurnment, and funerals for those who died of causes other than COVID-19 are limited to immediate family members
6-20 August 2021	ECQ (Ranada 2021)	No religious gatherings, except for funeral rites.
21 August-15 September 2021	MECQ with laxer restrictions (IATF 2021)	Religious gatherings are allowed up to 10% of the venue capacity, provided that there is no objection from the local government unit. This may be increased to 30% depending on the LGU. Gatherings for necrological services, wakes, inurnment, funerals for those who died of causes other than COVID-19 are limited to immediate family members
16 September-15 October 2021	Alert level 4 (Nepomuceno 2021)	10% seating capacity; only for fully vaccinated individuals; Gatherings for necrological services, wakes, inurnment, funerals for those who died of causes other than coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) are limited to immediate family members.

Based on the data in Table 1, within a span of 1 year and 7 months (15 March 2020-15 October 15 2021), there were 314 days (roughly 10 months) when religious gatherings were either not allowed or restricted to a maximum of 5 persons or 10 per cent capacity (30 persons in a 300-seat

capacity church). In slightly more than 1 month, churches were allowed to operate at 50 per cent capacity. This shows how restricted in-person religious activities had been prior to this study.

This study is descriptive and predictive, using both qualitative and quantitative data. It adapts some of the questions from Meza's (2020) study on "In a pandemic are we more religious? Traditional practices of Catholics and the COVID-19 in South-western Colombia".² The researchers constructed the questions related to online religious practices.

The questionnaire consists of nine questions, in both English and Filipino. The participants were asked about how they view the COVID-19 pandemic; their priority during the pandemic; the response of the cyber church to the pandemic; their religious activities prior to and during the pandemic; their online religious activities during the pandemic; their role in online religious activities in relation to others; their experience and perception of the online church, and the online activities that they foresee pursuing in the post-pandemic scenario. The survey was subjected to a pilot test to evaluate the comprehensibility of the questions.

The quantitative data gathered (religious activities prior to and during the pandemic) was subjected to t-tests to determine whether there is a significant difference in their participation in each of the religious activity prior to and during the pandemic.³ The t-test also determines the correctness of the results and its applicability to the entire population. Regression and standard normal distribution analysis were employed to predict religious participation online after the pandemic.

The sample (n=117) can be classified into the following structural categories: a) Age: 18-29 years (23); 30-49 years (33); 50-64 years (52); over 65 years (9). Educational level: primary education (0); high school (9); technical/vocational education (4); college (51); graduate/postgraduate (53). Marital status: married (40); separated (1); free union (6); single (55); widow (9). Employment status: unemployed (6); student (14); housewife/house manager (3); private employee (56); government employee (12); businesswoman (10).

2 See Tables 1, 4, 6, 7-9, 11 (Meza 2020). Meza's study was among the first researches on religious practices during the pandemic to be published.

3 The date of the beginning of the pandemic was not identified in the questionnaire but was dependent on the respondents' experience, which, as residents of NCR, would be the lockdown implemented throughout Luzon (where NCR is located) starting on 17 May 2019 (Office of the President of the Philippines 2020).

3. SCOPE AND LIMITATION/SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The focus of the study is NCR, a megacity and not a rural area where more people may find it difficult to access the internet because of the lack of infrastructure. The vast majority of the respondents are highly educated: 43.6 per cent hold a college degree and 45.3 per cent possess graduate/postgraduate degrees, a population that is more knowledgeable or adept in the use of the internet. The composition of the respondents generated by the snowball sampling seems to be mostly middle class, since they are highly educated. The data is derived from a population (88.9 per cent with undergraduate/postgraduate degrees) that is slightly over the middle-class population of NCR (74.1 per cent) (Albert *et al.* 2020:24).

Despite the specificity of its respondents, the exploratory study on this under-researched topic hopes to contribute toward an evaluation of the reception of cyber churches on the religious activities of women in urban areas during the pandemic. On a more pastoral level, it is hoped that the results of the research can guide churches in envisioning the face of the post-pandemic church.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research presupposes that online and offline activities form a continuum; the virtual is not the opposite of the real. Activities online are supplemented by activities offline and vice-versa. In the 1990s, studies contrasted the virtual from the real. Religion is regarded as having changed drastically online. Nowadays, scholars view the online and offline contexts as complementary rather than opposite or dichotomous. Campbell (2012:65), a scholar of digital religion, argues that

online technology use and choices cannot be easily disembedded from offline contexts and so requires looking at how offline practices guide online beliefs and behaviors.

Cyber communities supplement rather than replace physical communities. Relationships that are formed in virtual communities can be strengthened in offline encounters and vice-versa. Online activities complement and enhance offline activities and vice-versa.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A relative majority of the women respondents (63 per cent) recognise the virus' effect on people's health. Less than half (48 per cent) view it as a result of nature's reaction to human abuses. They attribute its origin to non-natural causes: a virus created in a laboratory (39 per cent); an invention of politicians (3.4 per cent); part of a global conspiracy (20.5 per cent), and a pharmaceutical strategy to earn money (16.2 per cent).

5.1 Religious activities prior to and during the pandemic

The *t-test* indicates that there is no significant difference in women's performance of twelve religious activities (Mass, personal prayer, group meditation, bible reading, bible sharing, praying the rosary, lighting a candle, listening to music, novena, anointing of the sick, funeral/memorial rites, charity, human rights advocacy, rituals) *prior to and during* the pandemic. In all of these activities, the *p* values are more than .05.

Table 2: Religious activities prior to and during the pandemic⁴

Activities	Prior to (\bar{x})	During (\bar{x})	p value	Interpretation
Mass	4.25	4.11	0.066	Not Sig.
Personal prayer	4.80	4.80	1.000	Not Sig.
Novena	3.03	3.09	0.569	Not Sig.
Rosary	3.81	3.90	0.309	Not Sig.
Lighting candles	3.11	3.11	1.000	Not Sig.
Group meditation	2.97	2.83	0.204	Not Sig.
Personal Bible reflection	3.51	3.56	0.510	Not Sig.
Bible sharing	3.05	3.08	0.791	Not Sig.
Listening to religious music	3.98	4.02	0.608	Not Sig.
Anointing of the sick	2.58	2.49	0.335	Not Sig.
Charity work	3.88	3.74	0.077	Not Sig.
Human rights advocacy	3.31	3.30	0.0927	Not Sig.

The result contrasts with the Ulat ng Bayan survey that reveals an increase in religiosity in general during the pandemic (Cornelio 2020). The latter, however, was based on self-perception. That there is no

⁴ The following scale was used for frequency of engagement: 5-all/several days a week; 4-once a week; 3-once a month; 2-very rarely; 1-do not practise.

significant difference in religious activities of women prior to and during the pandemic, in particular that this did not decrease, suggests that online religious activities have helped them sustain their religious practices. This is supported by their generally positive appraisal of online religious activities and their desire to continue these even post-pandemic.

A vast majority of the women have a positive experience or perception of the online church: 92 per cent expressed a deepening of their faith as a result of their participation in online religious activities; 88 per cent experienced support and care from others; 81 per cent noted that their presence and contributions were valued, and 67 per cent felt more intimate connection with others. Only 17 per cent of them articulated that they do not experience a genuine sense of community online. Fifty per cent also registered their concern that the poor cannot or may find it difficult to participate in these online activities because of lack of resources to buy data.

5.2 Younger women’s religious activities

A different picture emerges when Mass attendance by women aged between 30 and 49 years is segregated from the Mass participation of the remainder of the congregation prior to and during the pandemic. The *post hoc tests* reveal that, among the three other age groups (18-29 years, 30-49 years, and 50-64 years), there was no significant increase/decrease in their participation in Mass activity. With women aged between 30 and 49 years, there was a significant *decrease* in Mass participation during the pandemic.

Table 3: Paired sample T-tests for Mass attendance per age group

Age group prior to	Age group during		statistic	df	p
18-29 years	18-29 years	Student’s t	1.55	22.00	0.135
30-49 years	30-49 years	Student’s t	3.03	32.00	0.005
50-64 years	50-64 years	Student’s t	-1.15	51.00	0.255
over 65 years	over 65 years	Student’s t	-1.51	8.00	0.169

Table 4: Mean value for Mass attendance per age group

	18-29 years prior to	18-29 years during	30-49 years prior to	30-49 years during	50-64 years prior to	50-64 years during	over 65 years prior to	over 65 years during
N	23	23	33	33	52	52	9	9
Missing	29	29	19	19	0	0	43	43
Mean	3.48	3.26	4.45	3.91	4.38	4.48	4.67	4.89

The vast majority of the millennials belong in the 30-49 years age group.⁵ According to the Barna (2020) group, a leading research organisation on faith and culture, 50 per cent of practising millennials in the USA were not watching online worship. In the USA, millennials have been leading the exit from the church even prior to the pandemic. In the Philippines, there has been a general decline in Mass attendance, although the surveys did not disaggregate by age. The 1991-2003 Social Weather station survey revealed a slight decrease in Mass attendance of Catholics (Dizon 2013). A more recent survey in February 2013 showed a decline in Mass participation from 64 per cent in July 1991 to 37 per cent in February 2013 (Mangahas & Labucay 2013). Researchers still need to establish whether this decline was propelled by millennials and/or Gen Z. Another possible explanation for the decrease in Mass attendance of women aged between 30 and 49 years is that young mothers who are raising children also belong to this age group. Young mothers find it more difficult to create a sacred space and engage in streamed worship services while taking care of their children.

The young women respondents, aged between 18 and 29 years, do not differ significantly in their level of religious engagement prior to and during the pandemic. However, compared to other age groups during the pandemic, their engagement in Mass, personal prayer, novena, rosary, personal Bible reflection, listening to religious music, and charity work was significantly lower than all the rest. Prior to the pandemic, the frequency of their engagement in Mass, personal prayer, rosary, group meditation,

⁵ Millennials were born in/between 1981 to 1996 and would be aged 25 to 40 years in 2021, when the survey was conducted. Gen Zs were born in 1997 and beyond.

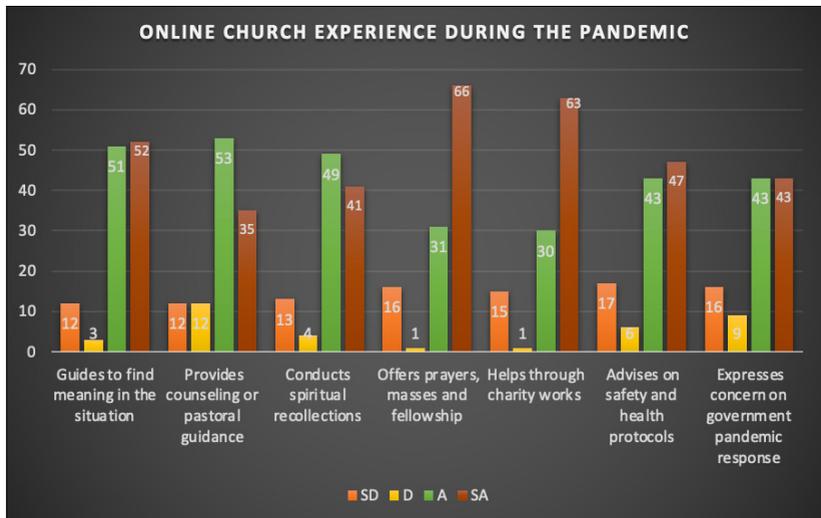
personal Bible reflection, and listening to religious music were likewise significantly less compared to the other age groups. When it comes to human rights advocacy, there is no significant difference among the age groups prior to and during the pandemic.

5.3 Women's priorities and cyber church's response to the pandemic

The women respondents identified the following as their priorities during the pandemic: Relationship with God, 54 per cent; emotional and mental health, 50 per cent; physical health, 41 per cent; help those in need, 41 per cent; family unity and tranquillity, 35 per cent, and employment and income, 32 per cent.

Their top priorities – relationship with God and health – are roughly similar to the results in Meza's study. Concern for employment and income likewise comes last, which, in Meza's study, was the first among the men's priorities, reflecting the traditional gender division of labour and characteristics, where men are usually the primary breadwinners, as well as the greater tendency for women to be more religious. Some studies have shown that the greater religiosity of women compared to men is due to not working outside the home and/or having more time available to engage in religious activities (Azzi & Ehrenberg 1975; Iannaccone 1990). However, these studies have been countered by Miller and Stark's (2002) research that reveals that men's irreligion is more due to their greater propensity toward risk-taking behaviour, such as courting divine punishment.

In terms of the respondents' description of church response to the pandemic, the respondents strongly agree with the following as their church's response to the pandemic: offers prayers, masses, and fellowship (66/117; 56.4 per cent); helps through charity works (63/117; 53.8 per cent), and guides to find meaning in the situations (52/117; 44.4 per cent).



In the *Ulat ng Bayan Report*, on the other hand, the respondents identified the following as their expectations in terms of the church's role during the pandemic: "continue to hold religious services" (73.2 per cent); "provide material relief" (48.7 per cent), and "express concern about the government's response to the pandemic" (43.6 per cent) (Cornelio 2020)

When compared with the women's perception of their actual church's response, there is congruence in the expectation and response with regard to holding religious services (mass, prayers, fellowship) and providing material relief (helps through charity). What was missing in the women respondents' top 3 answers is the online church's articulation of concern about how the government is addressing the pandemic. The churches could have done something more in this regard.

5.4 Women's role in group online religious activities

The respondents' participation in online religious activities in relation to others can be described as follows: 73 per cent share what they learn online with family and friends; 58 per cent invite family/others to join them in these activities; 50 per cent set up the devices at home so that their family can participate in these activities; 17 per cent are involved in organising these activities in the parish/church, and 9.4 per cent answered none of the above, which we can presume to mean that they simply participate as individuals in these religious activities.

After subjection to *t-tests*, we found a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the involvement of married or women with family versus single women. Married or women with family engage more in setting up the devices for the family, inviting and/or sharing with the family/others what they learned online. This aligns with the social expectation that mothers take the initiative in religious activities in the family. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference in the level of involvement of the two groups in organising these online activities in the parish/church.

Our analysis showed that women's priority on employment and income significantly correlates *negatively* ($p = 0.042$) with their role in inviting family or others in online religious activities. In other words, the more women prioritise employment and income, the less their involvement in inviting family or others in online religious activities during the pandemic.

5.5 Charity work/Donations

The results of our study also revealed no significant difference in the performance of charity work prior to and during the pandemic. In the Pew research, the gap between those who have donated more and less is most apparent among Catholics, where 28 per cent gave less donations during the pandemic than they would have otherwise, compared with 5 per cent who donated more. The Pew study, however, specifically pertains to donation to the church and its ministries. This research did not distinguish between donation to the church and other non-religious groups, nor did it differentiate between financial donation and the rendering of service for charitable causes.

5.6 Online religious activities during and after the pandemic

The scores for the online religious activities during the pandemic and the expected online religious activities after the pandemic were compared as shown in the table below. These were subjected to regression and standard normal distribution analysis. The results indicate a significant cause-and-effect relationship between the religious activities during the pandemic and the projected online religious activities after the pandemic for the following activities: rosary ($p = .003$); novena ($p = .008$); lighting candle to God or a saint ($p = .003$); group meditation ($p < .001$); personal Bible reading ($p = .023$); Bible sharing ($p < .001$); listening to religious music ($p < .001$); anointing of the sick and other rituals ($p < .001$); charity work ($p = .05$), and human rights advocacy ($p = .002$). In other words, an increase in their participation in some religious activities during the pandemic predicts a significant increase in this activity online after the pandemic.

The proposed cause is the score for the current activities (independent variable), and the proposed effect (dependent variable) is the score for future activities. We can surmise that the experience of engaging in religious activities online during the pandemic has exposed the respondents to the possibilities and advantages of doing religious activities virtually and thus the desire to continue these in the future.

Activities	R	Interpretation ¹	R ²	Interpretation	P	Interpretation
Mass	0.136	Weak correlation	.0185	1.85% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.142	Not Sig.
Personal prayer	0.136	Weak correlation	.0185	1.85% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.143	Not Sig.
Novena	0.245	Weak correlation	0.0600	6% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.008	Sig.
Rosary	0.277	Weak correlation	0.0765	7.65% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.003	Sig.
Light candles	0.277	Weak correlation	0.0765	7.65% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.003	Sig.
Group meditation	0.401	Moderate correlation	0.161	16.1% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.001	Sig.
Personal Bible reflection	0.210	Weak correlation	0.0442	4.42% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.023	Sig.

1 The following serves as guide for evaluating the relationship: -.00-0.10, No or negligible correlation; 0.10-0.39, Weak correlation; 0.40-0.69 Moderate correlation; 0.70-0.89 Strong correlation; .90 -1.00 Very strong correlation (Schober et al. 2018).

Activities	R	Interpretation ¹	R ²	Interpretation	P	Interpretation
Bible sharing	0.466	Moderate correlation	0.217	21.7% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.001	Sig.
Listening to religious music	0.395	Weak correlation	0.156	15.6% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.001	Sig.
Anointing of the sick/ Funeral/ emorial Rites	0.322	Weak correlation	0.104	10.4% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.001	Sig.
Charity work	0.182	Weak correlation	0.0330	3.3% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.050	Sig.
Human rights advocacy	0.286	Weak correlation	0.0820	8.2% of the change in the outcome (post) variable is due to the predictor (during)	0.002	Sig.

As the data indicates, an increase in the level of engagement in online religious activities such as praying the rosary and novena, lighting candles to God or a saint, group meditation, personal Bible reading, Bible sharing, listening to religious music, anointing of the sick and other rituals, charity work, and human rights advocacy, it may do well for parishes/religious communities in the NCR to start or continue providing access to these activities online. In case resources are limited, special focus can be placed on those with moderate correlation (group meditation, Bible sharing) or nearly moderate correlation (anointing of the sick/funeral/memorial rites, and listening to religious music).

With regard to anointing the sick, officially there are no sacraments online in the Catholic Church. Friends, family, and healthcare workers can, however, pray over the patient and lay hands on them using oil. Some priests do this through a video call with the assistance of a nurse clad in full-body personal protective equipment (PPE) to do the anointing, or by allowing the patient to anoint himself/herself. Fr J. Michael Sparough, SJ, refers to the story of Jesus' healing of the centurion servant, and points out how Jesus did not need to be physically present to heal; his words suffice (Matt. 8:5-13). For the dying, the family, and friends, it may not matter whether the church considers the ritual a sacrament or not. It is an occasion for them to feel the gracious presence of God and the care of the Christian community, as well as find meaning in their suffering, which is a first step toward healing (Brazal 2021). Participation in the anointing of the sick online will continue to be practised, especially for close relatives who cannot be with their dying relatives in their final moments.

6. THE POST-PANDEMIC CHURCH: A HYBRID CHURCH?

While the data from this research was culled only from women's religious activities in NCR, and still has to be validated by further research on men and in other places, it supports the theory – considering women are the most active parishioners – that the church (at least in NCR) cannot go back to exactly how it was prior to the pandemic. It appears that the post-pandemic church should be a hybrid church, operating both in-person and virtually in a continuum. On the one hand, there is the desire among the respondents to continue engaging in religious activities online. On the other hand, the decrease in Mass attendance of women aged between 30 and 49 years suggests the importance, among others, of in-person gatherings; it provides a sacred space for worship. This is true not only for

young mothers/parents, but also for those who do not have access to the internet or those whose houses are not conducive to worship. Others also feel a greater sense of community in in-person worship.

7. CONCLUSION

The study reveals no significant difference in the level of engagement in religious activities of women in NCR prior to and during the pandemic, indicating that the shift to religious activities online may have helped sustain women's religious practice. This is supported by their generally positive appraisal of online religious activities and their desire to continue these even post-pandemic.

Women also exercised crucial roles in maintaining the religious well-being of their household and community. Although this can be read as reflecting the patriarchal division of labour in the family that relegates the care for the religious well-being of the family especially to mothers, it can also be interpreted as a manifestation of women's exercise of agency and leadership during the pandemic.

The shift from in-person to online religious activities has the potential to continue far beyond the quarantine brought about by the pandemic. The research predicts an increase in the level of engagement in 10 online religious activities post-pandemic. Churches in NCR may do well to continue, if not, to start providing access to these religious activities online. The church is challenged to discern how it can combine the best of both online and offline worship after the pandemic.

Whether the face of the post-pandemic church must be hybrid can be validated in future studies by expanding the research to include men and/or other places. Further research on this topic can focus on whether online religious activities lead to greater empowerment for women, in terms of increased leadership roles in the church/religious organisation. A comparative study with the men and getting more participants from lower socio-economic classes is highly recommended.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey form states side-by-side the questions in both English and Filipino. Only the English questions are listed below.

For the questions marked with an asterisk, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the participants' agreement to a statement (5-Strongly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2-Disagree and 1-Strongly Disagree), or the frequency of their religious practice (all/several days a week, once a week, once a month, very rarely, do not practise)

A. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Your current location

Caloocan, Las Pinas, Makati, Malabon, Mandaluyong, Manila, Marikina, Muntinlupa, Navotas, Paranaque, Pasay, Pasig, Pateros, Quezon City, San Juan, Taguig, Valenzuela.

Name (Optional)

Age

18-29 years old, 30-49 years old, 50-64 years old, over 65.

Educational level

College/University graduate, Elementary/Primary level, High school level, Graduate studies/Postgraduate studies, Vocational/Technical.

Civil status

Free union; Married, Separated, Single mom, Single, Widow.

Employment status

Government employee, Businesswoman, Housewife, Private employee, Retiree, Student, Unemployed.

B. Perception about COVID-19

Check the statements that best describe your view or opinion.

1. A virus created in a laboratory;
2. It is an invention of politicians;
3. A virus that produces various infections in the body;
4. It is part of a global conspiracy;
5. A pharmaceutical strategy to earn money;
6. Nature's reaction due to human abuses;
7. Part of prophecies on the end of the world.

***C. Response of online church/religious communities (parish, The Feast, El Shaddai, and so on) in this time of pandemic.**

Check each statement that describes your level of agreement as members/parishioners.

1. Guides to find meaning in the situation; 2. Provides counselling or pastoral guidance; 3. Conducts spiritual recollections; 4. Offers prayers, Mass and fellowship; 5. Helps through charity works; 6. Advises on safety and health protocols; 7. Expresses concern on government pandemic response.

D. Your priority right now

Check one.

1. Emotional balance/mental health; 2. Employment and income; 3. Relationship with God; 4. Physical health; 5. Family unity and tranquillity; 6. Help those most in need. Others: Please specify.

***E. Your religious activities PRIOR TO the pandemic**

In the next 3 items, you will be asked about your religious activities PRIOR TO the pandemic, DURING the pandemic, and which of these you do ONLINE. Check for each item the frequency of your performance of the religious activity.

1. Mass; 2. Personal prayer; 3. Novena; 4. Rosary; 5. Light candle to God or a Saint; 6. Group meditation 7. Personal Bible reading; 8. Bible sharing; 9. Listening to religious music; 10. Anointing of the sick, funeral, and memorial rites; 11. Charity work; 12. Human rights advocacy. Others: Please specify.

***F. Your religious activities DURING the pandemic.**

Check for each item the frequency of your performance of the religious activity.

Note: Devotion also includes Novena and prayer

1. Mass; 2. Personal prayer; 3. Novena; 4. Rosary; 5. Light candle to God or a Saint; 6. Group meditation 7. Personal Bible reading; 8. Bible sharing; 9. Listening to religious music; 10. Anointing of the sick, funeral, and memorial rites; 11. Charity work; 12. Human rights advocacy. Others: Please specify.

G. Your ONLINE religious activities during the pandemic.

Check the items that best describe your ONLINE religious activities.

Note: Devotion also includes Novena and prayer

1. Mass; 2. Personal prayer; 3. Novena; 4. Rosary; 5. Light candle to God or a Saint; 6. Group meditation 7. Personal Bible reading; 8. Bible sharing; 9. Listening to religious music; 10. Anointing of the sick, funeral, and memorial rites; 11. Charity work; 12. Human rights advocacy. Others: Please specify.

H. Your experience of online church during the pandemic.

Check the statement(s) that best describe(s) your experience of online church.

1. Experienced support and care from others; 2. Cannot experience a genuine sense of community; 3. Valued presence and contributions; 4. Deepening of our shared faith; 5. Felt more intimate connections; 6. The poor cannot participate. Others: Please specify.

I. Women's role in online religious activities.

Check the statement(s) that describe(s) your role in online religious activities.

1. I organise these activities in our parish/church; 2. I set up the devices so my family can participate in the activities at home; 3. I invite family/ others to join me in these activities; 4. I share what I learn online with my family and friends; 5. None of the above. Others: Please specify.

J. Post-pandemic scenario

Check the religious activities below, that you wish to be continued online even after the pandemic.

1. Mass; 2. Personal prayer; 3. Novena; 4. Rosary; 5. Light candle to God or a Saint; 6. Group meditation 7. Personal Bible reading; 8. Bible sharing; 9. Listening to religious music; 10. Anointing of the sick, funeral, and memorial rites; 11. Charity work; 12. Human rights advocacy. Others: Please specify.

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Post-pandemie