

# Options for Sunday workers an opportunity for churches

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla.—The Church of Eleven22 didn't plan to have a worship service on a different day, but the congregation met in another church's building and outgrew all of its Sunday morning options.

"Because of other things happening at the church at the time, Thursday night was the only option available," said Joby Martin, lead pastor of the church in the Jacksonville, Fla., area. "It was an accident, but God breathed on it like crazy."

Having worship services at other times may provide opportunities for growth for other congregations, as 1 in 4 U.S. Protestant churchgoers with a job say they have to work on Sunday mornings at least once a month, according to Lifeway Research.

"When a local body of believers cannot all meet together, it is missing out on its purpose," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "While a traditional Sunday morning meeting time works for most, it isn't possible for all to attend."

The [study](#) from the evangelical research firm found most churchgoers aren't faced with a job preventing them from gathering with their church on Sunday mornings. Two in 5 (41 percent) say their job never requires them to work on Sunday. Another 36 percent say they do not have a job.

Still, 23 percent of Protestant churchgoers at least occasionally are forced to miss Sunday morning services because of their job, including 5 percent who have to work that time each week, 6 percent twice a month or more, 4 percent once a month, 5 percent a few times a year, and 2 percent once a

year or less.

Among churchgoers who have a job, 64 percent never have to work on Sunday mornings, yet more than a third (36 percent) are required to at least occasionally clock in during those hours. For 8 percent, their job requires them to work every Sunday morning. Another 10 percent work at that time twice a month or more, 7 percent say once a month, 7 percent a few times a year, and 4 percent once a year or less.

## **Demographic differences noted**

Particular demographic groups are more likely to be working during the traditional time for a church worship service, including many that churches are struggling to reach.

Among 18- to 35-year-old employed churchgoers, 42 percent say their job requires them to work at least one Sunday morning a month. Those who are high school graduates or less (28 percent) or those with some college (29 percent) are more likely to work at least once a month on Sunday mornings than those with a bachelor's (17 percent) or graduate degree (16 percent).

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African American (32 percent) and Hispanic (31 percent) employed churchgoers are more likely to say they have to work at least once a month on Sunday morning than white churchgoers with a job (20 percent).

While larger churches may be more likely to offer non-traditional times for worship services, those who attend smaller churches are more likely to work occasionally on Sunday mornings. Those who attend a church of less than 50 people (28 percent), a church of 50 to 99 people (33 percent), and

a church of 100 to 249 people (25 percent) are more likely than those who attend a church of 500 people or more (12 percent) to say they work at least once a month on Sunday morning.

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A 2018 Lifeway Research study found 56 percent of U.S. Protestant churchgoers believe the biblical command to take a day of Sabbath rest each week still applies today. In a typical week, 70 percent say they take that rest day on Sunday, with 23 percent saying they don't take such a day and few pointing to any other day.

## **Challenging schedules offer opportunity**

The mix among Sunday morning workers of highly religious demographic groups with some of those who are the most unchurched provides congregations with a compelling opportunity to offer something beyond the traditional service times, as Martin and the Church of Eleven22 discovered.

Forced to start a service on a different day, Martin settled on Thursday as the only possible day. "We did not want to do Saturday, because at that point, I had a young family, and they would end up despising a Saturday service because we would never get a day with family."

In addition to their non-traditional worship service times, Martin said the church offers services live online and on-demand. They also have discipleship groups that take place throughout the week, all with an eye to those who may not have open Sunday mornings. He said other churches could do the same.

The congregation didn't offer any resistance to the idea of offering worship

services at different times. “Our people are very excited to open more opportunities for more people to hear the gospel,” he said.

As a pastor who is obviously working on Sunday, Martin said, he still tries to take a day of rest. “I don’t do it very well, but I try to rest and refuel on Fridays,” he said. In a 2015 Lifeway Research study, 85 percent of pastors at evangelical and historically Black Protestant churches say they unplug from their ministerial duties at least one day a week.

For those non-pastors who work on Sunday and aren’t at a church that offers different service times, Martin said, they could use technology to listen to worship music and a sermon to have an extended time with God as an alternative, but “it doesn’t take the place of corporate worship.”

Some may be able to take a day of rest on a day they meet with their small group Bible study, he said. They could also “visit a church that does meet when it’s conducive for you to meet.” For those with other employment options, Martin said, looking for a job that doesn’t require regular Sunday morning working hours could be a simple solution.

The online survey of 1,002 American Protestant churchgoers was conducted Sept. 20-27, 2019, using a national pre-recruited panel. The completed sample is 1,002 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.