



**Universität  
Zürich** <sup>UZH</sup>

**Theologische Fakultät**

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**Churches Online in Times of Corona –  
Blind spots, impacts and perspectives for Religious Education  
in the light of  
„caring education“ and „educational care“**

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European Protestant & Anglican Network for lifelong Learning EAEE and plusbildung:  
What do we gain, what do we lose?

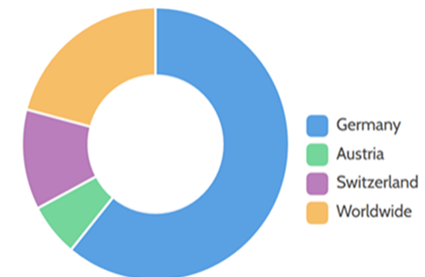
June 11th 2021 per ZOOM



## 1. Background of the CONTOC-Study

### Brief description of the study:

- **First empirical study** – also ecumenical and international for the first time
- **Cooperation partners**  
(Zürich, Würzburg, St. Gallen (SPI) Hannover (SI), Frankfurt/St. Georgen).
- **Target groups:** pastors and chaplains
- **Time horizon of the survey:** end of May until mid July 2020  
first wave of the pandemic
- **50 quantitative**, several **qualitative questions**
- **Responses:** 6500 responses  
around 5000 from german-speaking countries.
- **Background information and findings:**
- [www.contoc.org](http://www.contoc.org) : larger research context: [www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch](http://www.digitalreligions.uzh.ch)
- **Publications (German and English):** Spring / Summer 2022





## 1. Background of the CONTOC-Study

### Objectives:

- **Media use** of pastors: How did they deal with the constraint of restrictions?
- **Background:** Pastors as **essential key persons** with a **good overview of the parish situation** and **specific strategic responsibility** within and for the church as institution.
- No investigation about “click numbers” (no “outreach”-study), nor volunteers’ perspectives, but from the **point of view** of these pastoral key persons.
- **Practical-theological approach:** we ask about “what has been done” to ask about what “is to be considered” for the future.
- First CONTOC study also suggests a **next comparative study – possibly in spring 2022** (and also shows the need for a systematic survey of **user perspectives**).



## 2. Processes of digital media communication for the different church fields of action

- **The practice during the first wave of the pandemic allows to discover the (present and future) pastoral self-understanding and the church logic of action and practice:**
- **Significant increase in digital worship services**
- **Expansion of worship formats**, including e.g. devotions, spiritual impulses.
- These are **not understood as a substitute** for the analogue formats!
- During the crisis, **non-digital practice continued** as far as possible, especially in the area of **pastoral care** and **diaconia**.
- **Christian Education**, on the other hand, has clearly receded.



## Does the field of "education" show a blind spot in the crisis?

Did pastoral staff see education as particularly negligible in the crisis?

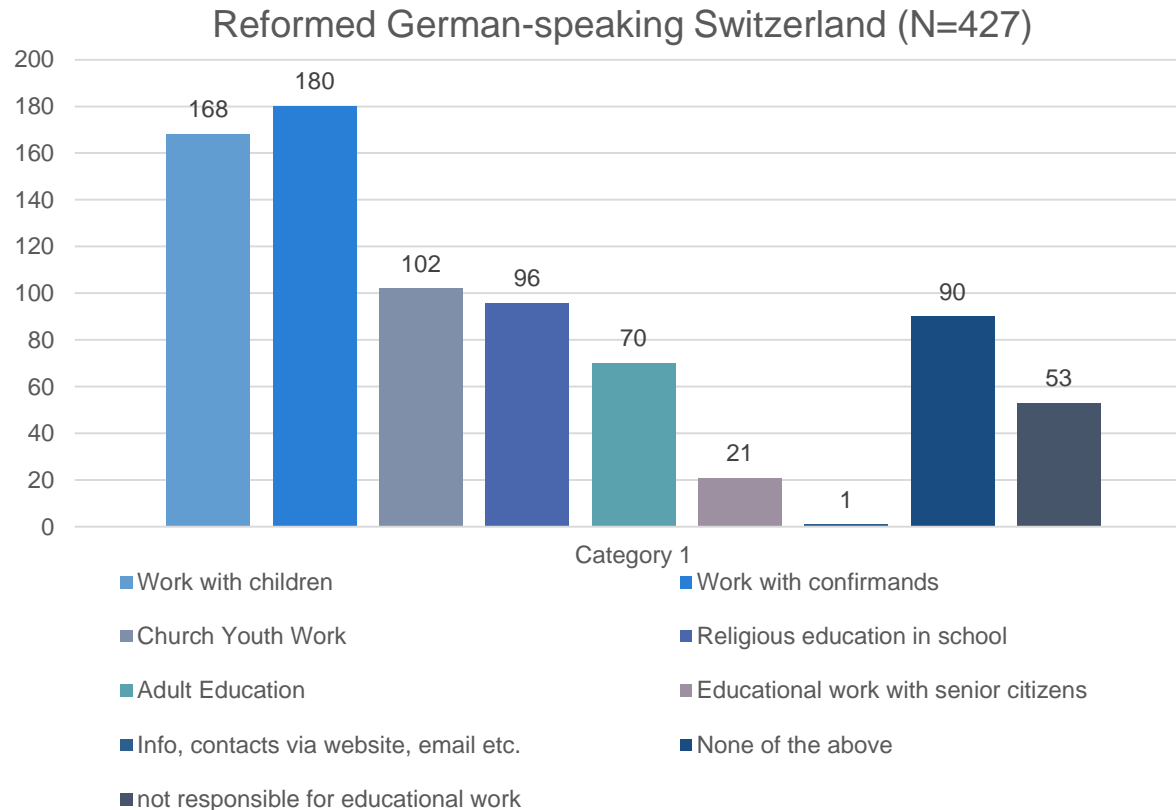
Have the education sector and also religious education fallen by the wayside ? - which would be particularly dramatic in view of the crisis and the need for „**caring education**“, „**educational care**“ and theological reflection.

Education topics in CONTOC: Comparatively few items

- and yet with recognisable significance...



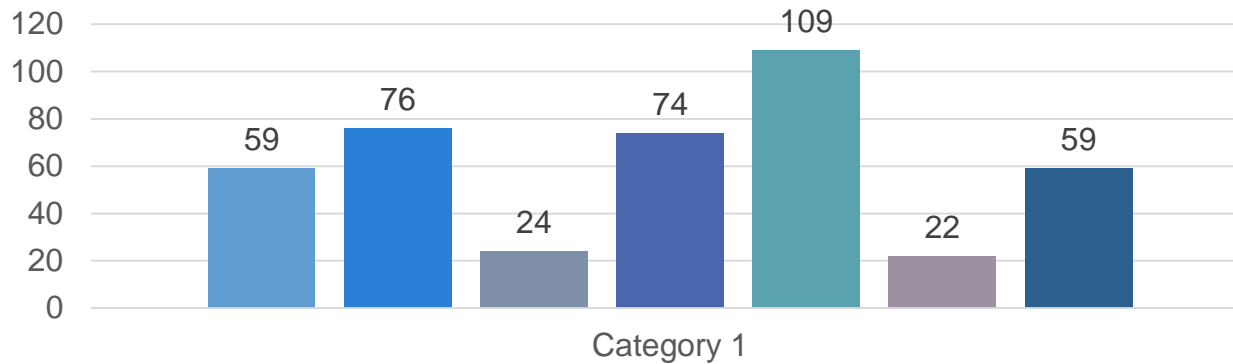
## The higher the age group, the lower the offer: online education in times of Corona





### 3. Results from the CONTOC-Study

#### Contacts with the confirmands (N=181): Maintained - but not in every respect...

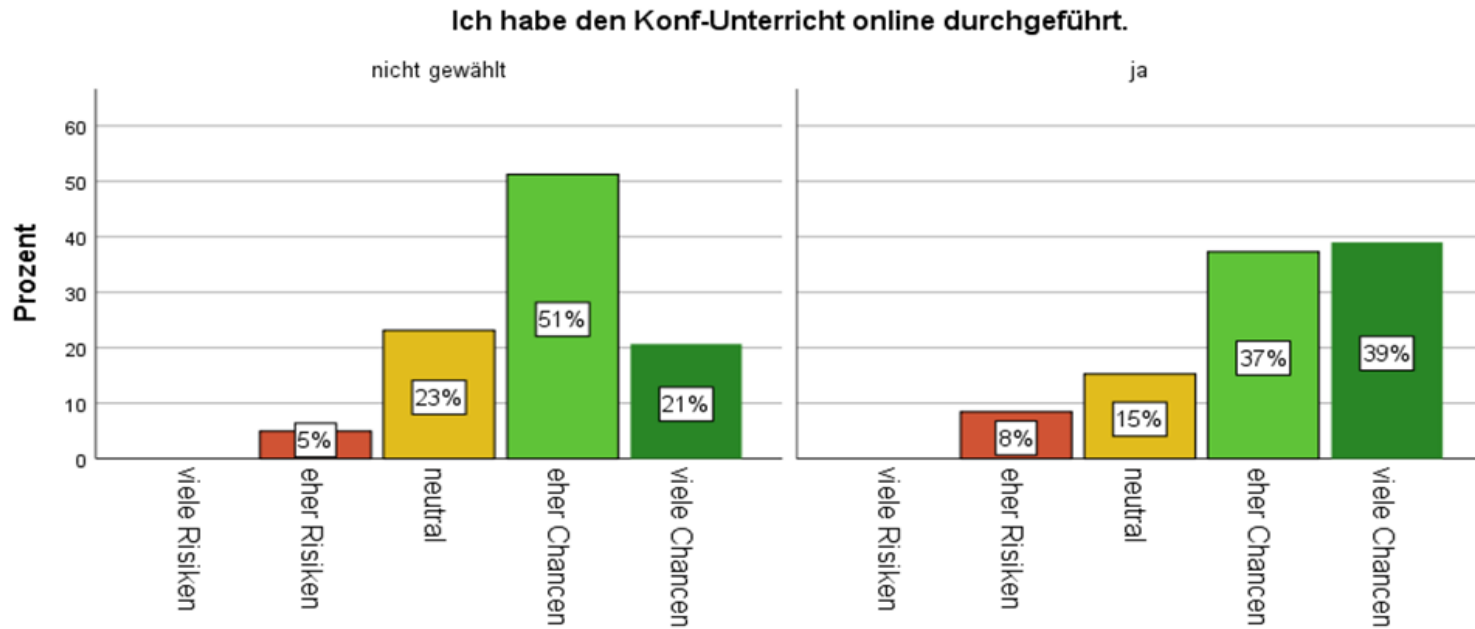


- I conducted confirmation classes online.
- I was in discussion with them about the cancelled confirmation ceremony.
- On the planned confirmation day there were actions (presentation of gift etc.)
- I was in conversation with them online about the current crisis.

### 3. Results from the CONTOC-Study

**In the field of confirmation work, online offers have future potential:  
Clear correlation of "I have conducted confirmation classes online." with "Do  
you see more opportunities or more risks in online-based communication?":**

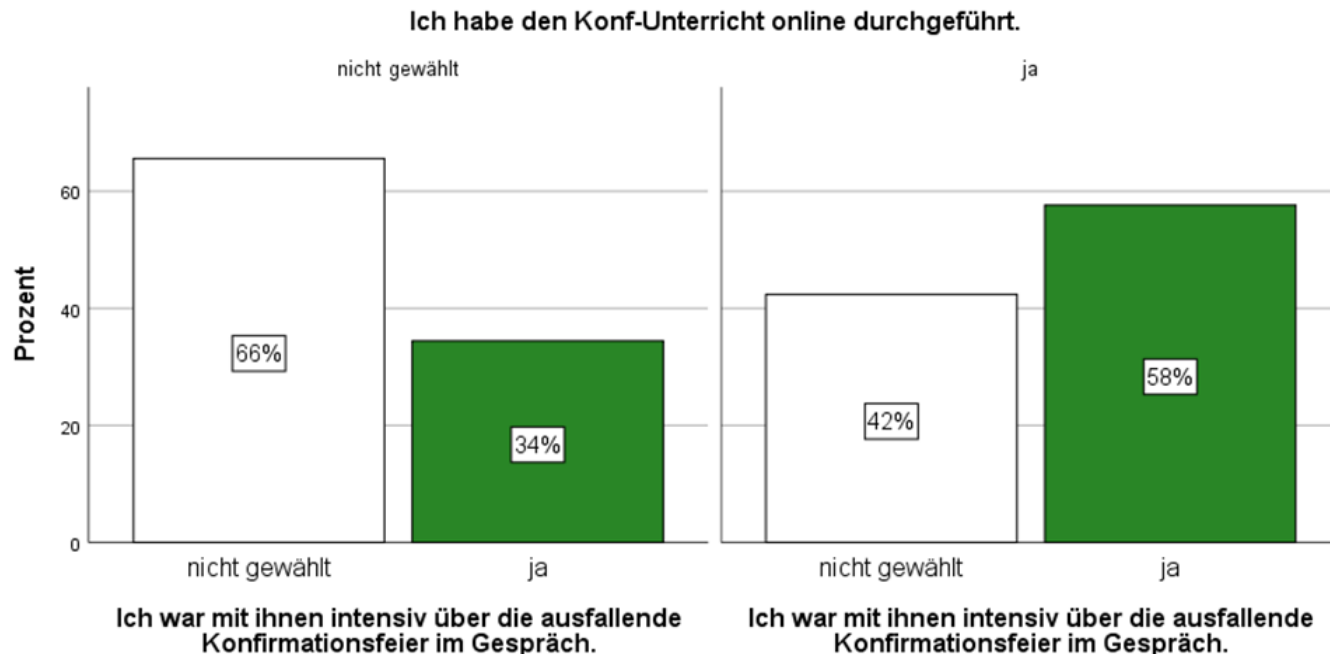
Sehen Sie in online-basierter Kommunikation eher Chancen oder eher Risiken?





## Theologische Fakultät 3. Results from the CONTOC-Study

**Those who were "online" communicated more frequently about the confirmation ceremony:  
Clear correlation of "I conducted the confession lessons online." and "I was in intensive conversation with them about the cancelled confirmation ceremony."**





## 4. Conclusions on education

- It is recognisable that with the Corona crisis, many **church educational offers have been significantly reduced. The higher the age target group, the fewer offers were maintained.**
- For confirmation work, a **clear reduction of programs can be noted.**
- This is even more true for the area of **religious education** at school.
- In both education sectors, it appears that a not insignificant proportion of those responsible have maintained **rather little contact.**
- The field of education was confronted with **changed patterns of perception, attention and articulation.**
- Corona accelerates both **light and shadow sides** of pedagogical as well as practical-theological developments.



## 4. Conclusions on education:

- The teachers' "stages of adoption" of digital media: "**Will, skill, tool**"-Model (D. Petko, 2012)
- Stage 1: "I am aware that technology exists but have not used it - perhaps I'm even avoiding it. I am anxious about the prospect of using Computers"
- Stage 2: "Learning the process" ("I **will**")
- Stage 3: "Understanding and application of the process"
- Stage 4: "Familiarity and confidence" (I have the **skills**")
- Stage 5: "Adaption to other contexts"
- Stage 6: "Creative application to new contexts": Transformational process: "I can apply what I know about technology in the classroom. I am able to use it as an **instructional tool** and integrate it into the curriculum."



## 4. Conclusions on education

In the first lockdown, education **with digital media** took place above all:

- attitudes toward digital media changed (**“Will”**)
- the digital competencies of the respondents have been developed (**“Skill”**)
- the digital equipment of the parishes have been evaluated or improved (**“Tool”**)

Education **in digital media** has been relevant or possible for the respondents only to a limited extent. At least as providers they have gained initial experience and can concretize their needs.

Education **about digital media** has led to the fact that

- its goal was seen in increasing participation in programs ('reaching new contacts')
- its social dimension has become very prominent
- theological and social reflections on digital media are needed.



## 4. Conclusions on education

### Corona catalyses the digitalisation of religious education in a theological sense:

- *Corona catalyses an enabling didactics*: hope as „strength“ of Christian religious education. "No doubling of hopelessness through religion, but utopia of lived hope" (J.B. Metz).
- *Corona catalyses the diaconal side of Christianity*: religion as a resource for resilience and to live in solidarity
- *Corona catalyses 'vulnerable sovereignty'* (H. Keul) as an attitude in dealing with fragility, powerlessness and insecurities.
- *Corona catalyses opportunities and needs for „caring education“ and „educational care“ in the sense of meaningful and life-serving relational encounters.*

### Guiding question for further discussion

- *Which experiences in the field of online education were so positive that they are worth maintaining and expanding "after the crisis"?*
- *How can we deal with and interpret the existential and societal crisis in theological terms?*



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**Thank you for your attention !**