

Age of C of E Clergy

In 2018 there were some 7,700 full-time Church of England paid clergy serving in parishes plus a further 2,920 who serve in a self-supporting capacity. A fifth of these, 22%, serve as curates or assistant ministers while the rest are incumbents or of incumbent status. That works out as 1 minister for every 66 who attend on a usual Sunday.

The age of these ministers is shown in the graph, along with the ages of adults in the church.

It may be seen that there's a greater proportion of ministers between 55 and 70 than churchgoers, but many more churchgoers than ministers past 75. More churches are appointing "Ministers for the Elderly" or some similar title.

Some larger Churches Struggling

In the odd-numbered years the National Larger Anglican Churches' Consultations take place. They began in 2005 and the eighth was held in 2019. It was attended by nearly 100 leaders from some of the largest Anglican churches, "large" in this context being defined as churches with normal Sunday attendance, adults and children, in excess of 350 people. This is not to decry the sterling work of churches with less than this attendance size, whether in single, double or triple digits, but because each group of churches, small, middle and large, has its own specific attendance problems and needs and opportunities.

There are some 163 such larger churches in England (1% of all churches) with a collective attendance of some 88,000 people, almost an eighth (12%) of total Church of England attendance in 2019. Representatives from about a third of these churches attended the 2019 event.

Those attending these Conferences are asked to complete an evaluation form, the results from which are used in the thinking and strategising for the following Consultation (in this case ready for 2021). Many of those who attend have come to previous Consultations and have also completed evaluation forms for these as well.

One of the questions on the form is the approximate size of Sunday congregations. Not everyone answers this question, and not every larger church attends each Consultation, and the number of churches who answered this question in both 2017 and 2019 was just 20, a small but significant sample of the total. In 2017 these same 20 churches collectively had 14,500 people attending them, but in 2019 that had reduced to 11,750.

Of those 20 churches only three had seen their attendance increase in the period 2017 to 2019 and that by an average of +5% per year. The remaining 17 churches all experienced a decline in attendance, seeing their attendances drop from an average of 600 per church to 530, or a drop of -6%.

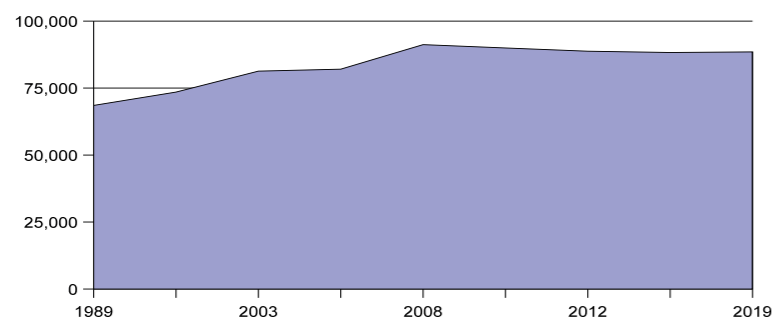
There is no reason to think these churches are anything other than typical of all the larger churches, meaning that while a few are growing, the majority are finding it very hard to maintain the numbers they once had. The graph shows how attendance at larger churches grew in the 1990s and 2000s, but has struggled to grow during the last decade since 2008, overall numbers remaining largely static.

This does not necessarily mean though that the membership or attendance of any particular church is declining, but probably rather that those attending are doing so less often. This is something borne out by the experience of numerous smaller churches, and this is just one small piece of possible statistical evidence to support that.

In the latest edition of Statistics for Mission 2018, the Research and Statistics Department of the

Church of England report that "the Worshipping Community of regular worshippers at Church of England churches has been almost unchanged from 2014 to 2018, falling by 2% over this period," a very small annual rate. In other words, while Sunday attendance overall is definitely declining, overall congregational allegiance is not.

Numbers attending the largest Anglican churches



So while the work of the church is reaching out to those who do not yet attend, part of that work is retaining those who do come and another part is encouraging those who attend to do so more regularly. "Regularly" used to be considered as at least "once a month", but perhaps frequency needs to be measured more rigorously now.

SOURCES: Evaluation forms from the National Larger Anglican Churches Consultations, 2017 and 2019; Statistics for Mission, 2018 edition, published 2019, Pages 3 and 23.

Favourite Hymns

Viewers of the BBC 1 programme Songs of Praise were asked to select their favourite hymns from those which have been on the programme over the last 5 years. They were as follows:

- 1) Jerusalem
2) How Great Thou Art
3) In Christ Alone
4) Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
5) Abide With Me
6) I Vow to Thee My Country
7) Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah (Redeemer)
8) Amazing Grace
9) Be Still for the Presence of the Lord
10) I, the Lord of Sea and Sky

The competition was last held in 2013, and "Jerusalem" did not feature in the top 10 at all.

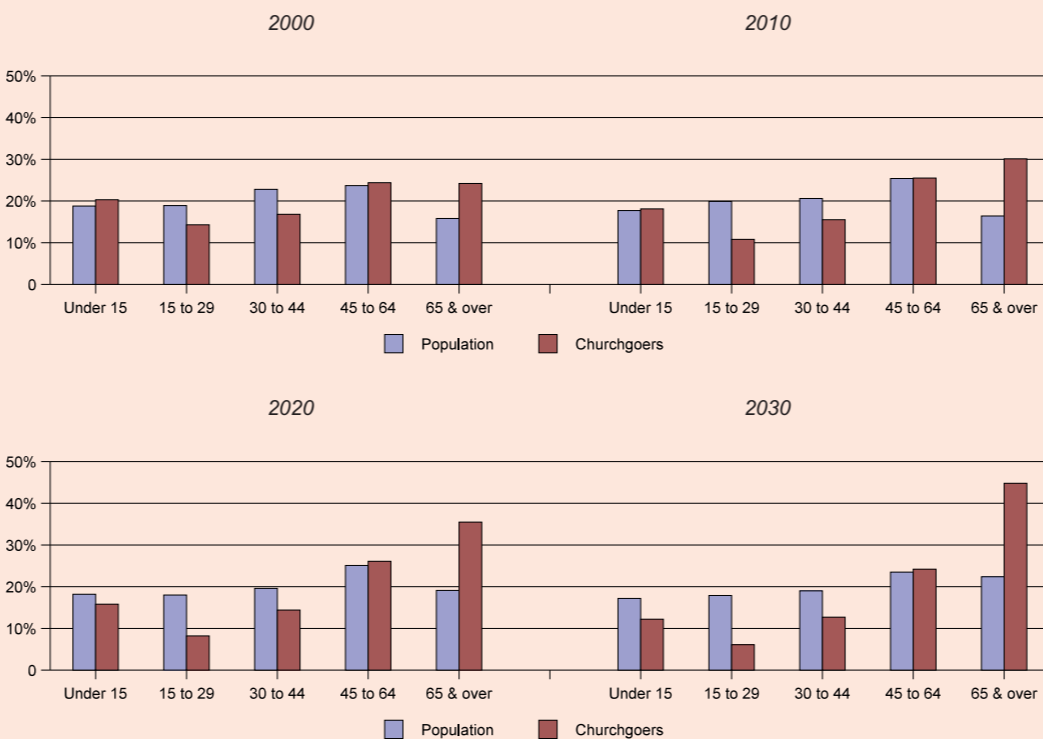
SOURCE: BBC, but given in the Church of England Newspaper, 4th October 2019, Page 1.

Age of English Churchgoers

The numbers of churchgoers in England who are under 45 shrinks from 51% in the year 2000 to 44% by 2010 to 38% by 2020 and to 31% by 2030, if present trends continue. In England in 2005, 39% of churches had no-one attending under 11 years of age, 49% no-one attending between the ages of 11 and 14, and 59% no-one attending between the ages of 15 to 19. "Half the Church of England parishes had no work among young people in 2005," said an official Anglican publication. These figures are for Sunday attendance, so mid-week numbers are excluded.

The key issue is whether present trends will continue. How far is the fall in total attendance due to the absence of young people on Sundays? Many teenagers left the church in the 1980s and many children under 15 in the 1990s. Twenty and thirty years later there is a dire absence of those in their 30s and 40s, and little sign of younger replacements. Unless this circle can be broken the church will survive only as a group of increasingly elderly people, both living longer and, because of their generational habit, continuing to go to church regularly, usually every week, whereas their younger counterparts only attend perhaps once a fortnight or once a month. The graph compares these age proportions with those of the population:

Age-groups in the British population and in the church, 2000 to 2030



While the proportions of those under 30 in the general population drop between 2010 and 2020, that is far, far smaller than the decline seen in this age-group in the churches. The need to reach out to young people is obvious and something that the church is increasingly taking on board in such initiatives as the young family orientated "Messy Church," the employment of Youth and Children's Workers, etc.

Notice also that the percentage fall in those aged 30-44 in 2020 and 2030 is very slight; some numbers are coming back here, partly because of the growth of immigrant, black and new churches being started.

SOURCES: Pulling out of the Nosedive, Peter Brierley, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 2006, Page 118; Resourcing Mission within the Church of England, GS 1580B, 2005; UK Church Statistics, Brierley Consultancy, Table 13.2.2.

The new Archbishop of York

The Rt Rev Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford, has his final day as that Bishop on Easter Day, 2020, and thence moves to York, taking up his new responsibilities in time for the Lambeth Conference in July.

In 2016 he went on the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage writing a poem/sonnet each day. These have since been published by Canterbury Press under the title Striking Out. Here is one of them:

Pearl of Great Price

His eye is on the pearl whose price is more than all the wealth you're storing for tomorrow. His alchemy brings joy from hurt and sorrow. He can mend damaged hearts, open locked doors.

His work is restoration and relieve: each person valued, every splinter sought. His aim is beauty. He doesn't squander thought on cost or blame. He works, and grieves

for the possibilities rejected, the wonder that was broken and blemished. He knows his labour cannot be finished until all the pieces are connected.

His work is revelation and release. His way is hope and his end is peace.

Humour

In his early days in politics, Conservative Michael Portillo was sometimes a bit too enthusiastic. On one occasion, he hurried up a garden path without noticing that it was covered in wet concrete; only when he'd knocked on the front door did he realise that he'd left a trail of deep footprints. Luckily, he recovered his presence of mind before the door opened. "Good morning, sir," he said brightly. "I am your Labour Party candidate."

SOURCE: The Week, 9th November, 2019, Page 24.

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SNIPPETS

1) A Pew Research Centre survey found that of American adults aged 18 to 44, 59% had lived with an unmarried partner, whereas only 50% of 18-44 year olds had ever been married.

2) Migrants who move from lower to higher income countries typically earn 3 to 6 times more than they did at home.

3) The Anglican Church of Canada will have run out of churchgoers by 2040 if the present rate of decline continues, according to a report in their Anglican Journal by Rev Neil Elliot.

4) In just one recent month, October 2019, the Google website had 80 billion visits - 10 for every person on the planet! That was about 3 times more than Youtube with 29 bn and Facebook with 25 bn.

5) The top three selling books in the UK in the 2010s (2010 to 2019) were all by the same author - E L James (Fifty Shades of Grey, Fifty Shades Darker and Fifty Shades Freed), a total of 11.2 million books!

6) 70% of current (post-December) election Conservative Members of Parliament were elected after 2010.

7) After a huge decline in the number of pubs in Britain (25% fewer since 2008), the number increased by 320 in 2019, mostly by making them food establishments as well as drinking venues.

SOURCES: 1) Report in Time, 18th November, 2019, Page 9; 2) World Bank, quoted in The Economist, 16th November, 2019, Page 3 of Migration report; 3) Report in the Church Times, 15th November 2019; 4) Felix Richter, statista.com, 2nd December 2019; 5) Report in The Bookseller, 6th December 2019, Page 6; 6) Daily Telegraph, 14th December 2019, Page 8; 7) Report in The Week, 28th December 2019, Page 62.

HAPPY WIFE, HAPPY LIFE

Harry Benson, Research Director, Marriage Foundation

A few years ago, I was about to write a new book on marriage. As her Christmas present to me, my wife Kate sent me away for a few days on a silent retreat to hear what Jesus thought about it!

Well, the retreat was all very nice. I was encouraged to spend my days as if Jesus was actually right there next to me. I opened doors for him. I made sure there was a seat for him next to me at meals. I maintained my composure even when somebody inadvertently sat on Jesus. But after two days of niceness, I needed to hear something more meaty and specific.

As we walked together down a path outside on my final day, I turned in mild frustration to the space next to me and said out loud, "OK Jesus, what's the deal about marriage?"

As clear as day came the reply, "Well Harry, it's like you and me. Put your arm in mine and let's walk. In that moment I knew. He was showing me the picture of marriage that I have carried around in my head ever since.

To paraphrase Paul, husband love your wife as Jesus loves me. With kindness, humility, love, intent, sacrifice and forgiveness. When I do that, I get loved in return. As husband, it's my job to take responsibility for my marriage. And it's Kate's job to let me take that responsibility.

This is how I now think of the words head and submit. They have nothing to do with power or control or decisions or roles. Quite the opposite. They describe how we should treat one another and who should have ultimate responsibility for making sure our relationship stays on track. Just like with Jesus and me.

I think this is an incredibly attractive picture of a deeply secure, committed and contented relationship that works well for both of us.

If God made us, it shouldn't matter whether we believe in God or not. The principles within this picture of marriage should apply to all loving relationships, believer and non-believer alike.

This insight inspired our book What Mums Want and Dads Need to Know, written for a secular audience hungry for ideas on how to make a marriage work and how to bring it back when it goes wrong.

Christians - indeed all of us - can remain confident that these principles help us understand the key social trends of our time.

1) We all want a relationship of reliable love

Lifelong singleness as a deliberate choice is rare. Just 6% of women and 9% of men have reached their 60s without ever cohabiting or getting married. Some of these may never have found the right person. Most of today's teenagers still aspire to marriage. Several recent surveys find that fewer

than 5% of teenagers reject marriage outright. Eight out of 10 say they want to get married. However, for many, marriage has been replaced by cohabitation.

Having fallen two thirds from their 1970 UK peak, marriage rates have levelled off. Nonetheless we project that 55% of today's teens and 20-somethings will get married at some stage, compared to 90% of women and 80% of men in their 60s who have ever married.

So we pursue the dream of "happily ever after." But we are increasingly conflating cohabiting with "living together as if married."

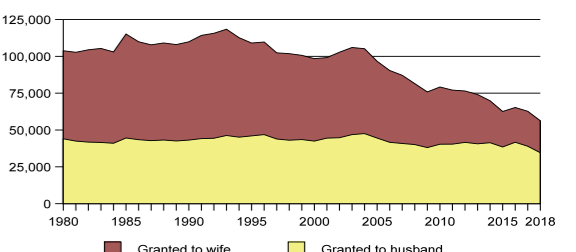
2) Cohabiting is not marriage

Reliable love means having somebody on your side, loving you through thick and thin, putting up with your inevitable human failings, being there for the long haul.

The biggest barriers to "happily ever after" are in cohabiting ambiguity - either of you assuming but not knowing where the other stands - and asymmetry - each of you having different plans and levels of commitment.

In order to shift the odds in your favour, you need clarity from both of you about your plans for the future, you need a decision to commit to the plan from both of you, and you both need to see evidence or signals from each other that show you are serious.

Number of opposite-sex couples divorcing by party to whom granted, England and Wales



You can do that without getting married. But only a minority manage it. Even among parents who cohabit but don't marry, just 30% are still together as a couple when their child sits GCSEs.

But whereas stability is the exception for unmarried parents, it is the norm for married parents of whom 75% remain together.

Think about the ingredients of marriage:

Marriage starts with the question "Will you spend the rest of your life with me?" The answer "yes" signals that both have made a decision and signed up for the same plan for the future. The plan is then publicly declared and affirmed in front of family and friends.

