

## CONTENTS

Suppose ...	P1
Leaving church	P2
Founder-led Churches	P2
Trustworthy Trustees	P3
Polygamy	P4
Snowflakes	P4
Average Age of Churchgoers	P5
The Methodist Church of Great Britain	P6
English Evangelicals	P6

# FUTURE FIRST



## FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

ISSN 2040-0268 | Number 73, February 2021

## SNIPPETS

1) Of the 2.9 million Catholics in Switzerland in 2019, 32,000 or 1.1% left the church that year (that is, stopped paying the church tax), up from 25,000 in 2018, mostly aged between 25 and 35.

2) Three-fifths, 62%, of British customers tried new shopping behaviours because of Covid-19, and 85% intend to continue their new way of doing things.

3) Three people were admitted to hospital in England and Wales in the year ending 31st March 2020 having been "struck by lightning" and 10 people from being "attacked or struck by a crocodile"!

4) In 2019, people made an average of 953 private or public trips by car (61%), walking (26%), bus (5%), train (3%), bicycle (2%), taxi (1%) or other ways (2%) per person, an average of 2.6 per day.

5) That is 4.5 billion bus journeys, down from 7.1 billion in 1960 and 3.1 billion rail journeys up from 1.7 billion in 1960. 2020 figures will be very different!

6) An average of marriages in England and Wales between 2013 and 2017 (latest available) was 7 boys and 55 girls aged 16 each year, and 34 boys and 110 girls aged 17.

7) In 1960 there were 53,200 churches in England with an average membership of 185 people each. In 2020 there were 45,500 churches with an average membership of 105 people each.

**SOURCES:** 1) *Religion Watch*, Vol 36 No 1, November 2020, published by the Baylor Institute; 2) *The World in 2021*, The Economist, Nov 13th 2020, Page 24; 3) *Daily Telegraph* report Dec 24th 2020, Page 13; 4) and 5) *Passenger Transport*, Transport Statistics Great Britain 2020 Page 2; 6) *Marriages in England and Wales*, Office for National Statistics, April 2020; 7) *UK Church Statistics* No 4, 2021 Edition, Tables 12.10 and 12.19.

## Suppose ...

**Both inside and outside the church, the question is being asked, "What will the church look like when the Covid-19 lockdown has finally finished? Will the churches be empty given the popularity of YouTube services?" This is a (probably futile) attempt to answer the question, especially as almost all the needed information is unknown at the time of writing, the turn of the year! What are some of the issues?**

- 1) It is true that YouTube, Zoom, Skype, etc. services have been popular. How much will churchgoing people prefer to continue to watch these or attend live-streamed services after churches open again unrestricted for public worship without risk of catching Covid?
- 2) What difference does age of churchgoer make to these assumptions?
- 3) How many former churchgoers who had drifted away through busy-ness, family commitments, etc will have felt the need, under the spectre of Covid, to return to church and faith?
- 4) It is said that many new non-churchgoing people have tuned in to one or more of these services. (A) How many have been converted and therefore are likely to attend church in future? (B) How many might continue to watch electronically without making any commitment?
- 5) How will the number of Covid-19 deaths affect number of churchgoers?

Comments on these questions:

1) A survey advertisement in *The Economist* asked how much people would wish to continue using their newly found electronic communication expertise in general when things went "back to normal." It found very little difference by age except that older people were slightly more inclined to use Zoom (or whatever) than those aged 16 to 24 (88% to 76%). How far might such be true of churchgoers who certainly value the opportunity to meet friends and chat to others after a church service? Probably hardly at all! Assume most under 65s, say 95%, will continue to go to church, and say 50% of 65-and-overs continue to go to church, while the others find the comfort, ease and no necessity to travel strong reasons for staying at home to participate electronically.

2) The largest numbers of English churchgoers in pre-Covid 2020 were Roman Catholics (710,000 of whom 38% were 65 or over), Anglicans (680,000 of whom 45% were 65 or over), followed by Pentecostals (450,000, 15% 65 or over), Independents (330,000, 23% 65 or over), and all the others totalling 620,000 (44% 65 or over). So out of a total of 2,790,000 churchgoers, 990,000 were 65 or over (36%).

The 65 and overs divide into two broad groups: those who do not have the facilities, technological skills or motivation for digital expertise, and those who do. Of the 990,000 who are 65 or over, 520,000 are aged 65 to 74, 330,000 are between 75 and 84, and 140,000 are 85 and over. Suppose 95% of the first group, the younger ones, are "tech-savvy", 75% of the second group and 25% of the third group. That would mean that 780,000 of those 65 and over are tech-savvy and 210,000 are not. Say 80% of the tech-savvy 65 and overs

return to church, so 620,000 return and 160,000 do not. One presumes most of the non-tech-savvy folk will be only too eager to return to actual physical worship and fellowship of church life, say 90%, the others having got into the habit of non-churchgoing, so 190,000 return and 20,000 do not.

Of the under 65s, assume all are "tech-savvy," but some will prefer to stay at home in future and watch YouTube etc instead as it is more comfortable, convenient, easier to cope with child-care or whatever, while the remainder will return to "normal" church. Suppose 5% are in the first group, and 95% are in the second, so 90,000 in the first group and 1,710,000 in the second.

3) There is no information at all on this, except that there are a number of people who have joined "Outside In" (run by C & M Ministries Trust) and participate in some devotional activity. Say a tenth of the answers in (4).

4) Some reports said that numbers watching their services increased by 20%, 50% or even 100% of normal numbers, but what is not known is for how long these people actually watched the service, with its presumably unfamiliar rituals and prayers. Suppose the actual increase was 25%, and that a quarter of these, another 25%, watched the whole service (or sufficient of it to count as a participant). So out of 1,800,000 under 65 churchgoers, perhaps 450,000 others turned their service on, and 110,000 of these watched most of it. That's a gain. The 990,000 over 65s might have been joined by 250,000 others of whom 60,000 stayed watching but only half of these actually joined a congregation subsequently – a 30,000 gain. The other 30,000 continued to watch at home.

5) The number of Covid-19 deaths for the whole of 2020 has been put by the Office for National Statistics at perhaps 75,000, but the number has gone through some counting uncertainties. Presumably the likelihood of a Covid death would apply equally to churchgoers as well as non-churchgoers. In 2020, churchgoers were 4.9% of the population, so perhaps 4,000 of the total deaths were of churchgoers.

How do these all add up for English churchgoers in 2020? See the following Table, with the percentages in the final column being for those Under 65, 65 & over, Total population, respectively:

It will be appreciated that this Table is totally speculative, but if the assumptions in it turn out to be plausible the net effect of Covid will be to reduce the physical number of Sunday churchgoers actually in a church building considerably in future, perhaps by about one-seventh (-14%). The principal reason is the number of older people preferring to watch services on YouTube or whatever at home, or who are still fearful to join a crowd in church. If likely to be true, then the challenge is how do churches get the older people back into a church service, especially those non-tech-savvy? For all churchgoers, the habit of regular physical attendance may well take some effort (and time) to restore.

## English churchgoing numbers for different groups affected by Covid

Item	Under 65s	65 & over	Total	% of population		
Pre-Covid in 2020	1,800,000	990,000	2,790,000	3.9%	9.3%	4.9%
Post-Covid tech-savvy returners	+1,710,000	+620,000	+2,330,000	+3.7%	+5.8%	+4.1%
Non tech-savvy returners	0	+190,000	+190,000	0%	+1.8%	+0.3%
Those not going back	-90,000	-180,000	-270,000	-0.2%	-1.7%	-0.5%
Returning people	+ 11,000	+ 3,000	+ 14,000	<i>All less than 0.1%</i>		
New people (converts)	+ 110,000	+ 30,000	+ 140,000	+0.2%	+0.3%	+0.3%
Deaths from Covid	- 1,000	- 3,000	- 4,000	<i>All less than 0.1%</i>		
<b>Total in 2021?</b>	<b>1,740,000</b>	<b>660,000</b>	<b>2,400,000</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>4.2</b>

Some might see the problem as not dissimilar to that faced by the cinemas with the challenge of Netflix and the streaming of films. Why pay for a seat in the cinema, plus the cost and inconvenience of travel, when one can sit in comfort with a beer and popcorn or whatever in one's home? Is it a case of Christians heeding Paul's warning: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom 12:2)?

SOURCES: Article in *The Economist*, 19th Dec 2020, Page 31, UK Church Statistics No 4, 2021 Edition, Table 13.7.1, email from Keith Wood.

## Leaving Church

**When surveys ask why people have left their congregation or church, the answers are usually grouped as, "Moved away (from present house)," "Left to go to another church" or "Died." An American survey sought more detailed answers to the first and second alternative, by distinguishing between those who moved only a short distance away or a fair distance away, the latter being defined as moving to another county. (That one can move only a few miles and yet cross a county border was ignored). The results are summarised in the Table:**

Percentage of congregation moving and/or changing their church

	Moved short distance %	Moved longer distance %	Did not move %	Total %
Changed congregation	11	6	20	37
Did not change congregation	8	1	54	63
Total	19	7	74	100

What this shows is that over a six-year period (2006 to 2012) just over a third of the church, 37%, changed to another church or congregation. Of these, just over half, 54% [20 out of 37], simply moved church and did not move house. Of those which did move house, the other half, 46%, two-thirds, 65% [11 out of 11 + 6 = 17], only moved a short distance, whereas the other third moved some way away, and so leaving the congregation was more understandable.

Of the almost two-thirds, 63%, who stayed with the congregation all that time, a seventh, 14% [8 + 1 = 9 out of 63], moved house, most of whom, 12%, moved just a short distance (perhaps nearer to their church), while the other 2% moved further away but liked their church so much that they still came back to it.

Some British surveys have explored similar questions, though not usually asking if a move was near or far away – this is a fresh factor. In the Diocese of Rochester, for example, movements away were

measured in 1992/3 and 2002/2003. The 37% of Americans who changed congregations were measured over 6 years, so could be averaged as say 6% per year. In Rochester between 2002 and 2003, 3% left their Electoral Roll (approximately equals membership), or changed their congregation, only half the proportion of that in the American study. But only 10% of the Rochester people changed their church without moving, a much smaller percentage than the American 54%.

The comparison is between two different countries, two different time periods, and two different denominations, and both are small samples, so the comparison is hardly valid. It simply suggests Americans may be more prone to changing their congregation if they feel like it than those in English churches, and will do so without the "excuse" of moving house.

What is important to note from this study, and from other like studies, is that people leaving their congregation do so for reasons other than that they are leaving the faith. In the Rochester study for every four people leaving their congregation, only one person left because of loss of faith. That finding is true from other studies also. Younger people tend to move as they complete their education and initial employments; middle-aged people move often for family reasons; older people leave because they die. The broad generalisation "once a churchgoer, always a churchgoer" has a lot of truth in it.

Research shows that people leave because relationships change, or satisfaction with leadership changes, some leave to get married, or because they've changed their job; few leave because their theological position has changed. Congregations which are culturally and institutionally strong are more resilient to change than others. The "continuity of experience," as one paper expressed it, or worshipping with familiar faces is "as meaningful, if not more so, than the personality of the pastor or the diversity of the church's programmes. ... The experience of worship is profoundly shaped by the continuity of who is there." Churches are often described by their members as families, but families are continuing structures, and it is that continuity that is important, even if others join or leave.

SOURCES: *Electoral Roll Survey*, Diocese of Rochester, Church of England, 2003, Christian Research, December 2003; Articles "Congregational Switching" by David Sikkink and Michael Emerson, and "Continuity and Community" by Sally Gallagher, both in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 62, No 2, June 2020, Pages 233 and 346-8.

## Founder-led Churches

**What are the differences between a church which is led by the person who started the congregation and a pastor who didn't? Three waves of the American National Congregations Study in 1998, 2006 and 2012 of 1,300 churches which were started after 1929 were used (the initial pastor of churches founded earlier would have passed on by the time of the surveys), and a variety of questions asked, some of which are shown in the Table on Page 3.**

These differences are interesting. Those starting churches in America (and perhaps therefore in the UK also), are less likely to have a degree (though half of them did), and more likely to have a higher proportion of younger people and fewer older

people. Unlike in the UK where founder-led pastors were at least 10 years younger than the average non-founder-led pastor, in this sample there was only a small difference (40 to 44 for non-founder-led pastors).

They are also less likely to have just a White congregation, which perhaps suggests that starting a congregation among non-White people maybe an ethnic response to lack of easy acceptance in White congregations. In this sample only 25% of founder-led church pastors were white, against 75% in non-founder-led churches. The actual average size of the congregations in founder-led or non-founder-led churches was about the same (95 to 102). Founder-led churches were much more

likely to be non-denominational (49% to 21%), or Pentecostal. Fewer would have a written budget, even though two-thirds (65%) did, but they would be much less likely to own the building they worshipped in (56% to 90%) – something supported in the London Church Census of 2012 when many newly started churches rented space in existing churches for Sunday worship.

Only two-thirds (65%) of those starting churches had paid pastors, and these were more likely to be part-time (53% to 38%), again something found by the London Church Census, where many Black pastors did their church work in their spare time.

All this supports the findings from studies of church planting. What is the experience of those called to start a church? "Very hard work." Is it worth it? "YES" is the very affirmative reply by 93% of those in one such survey.

**SOURCES:** Article in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 62, No 1, March 2020, Page 72, *Capital Growth*, ADBC Publishers, Tonbridge, 2013.

## Humour

Little boy turning over the dusty pages of the Family Bible: "Mummy, isn't this God's book?"  
"Yes, dear."  
"Hadn't we best return it to God? We don't use it."

"What were you doing in 2020?"  
"I was washing my hands."

The nervous curate attracted sympathy when, as he was about to christen Kate and Sidney, he inadvertently read out "Steak and Kidney."

**SOURCE:** New Zealand's *Evangelical Presbyterian*, Sept 1966, Page 316, courtesy email Belisha Price; *Humour*, John Barnes.

"There is a gap in your resumé," commented a manager.

## Differences of a Founder-led Church

Question	Non-Founder-led Church %	founder-led Church %
Pastor female?	10	8
Pastor with BA degree or higher?	47	66
Mostly White congregation (>80%)	22	78
Mostly Black congregation (>80%)	45	55
% congregation over 60	14	32
% congregation under 35	39	27
Non-denominational church	49	21
Mainline denomination	2	22
Pentecostal denomination	31	21
Church has formal written budget	65	75
Congregation owns church building	56	90
Pastor is paid	65	86
Part-time pastor	53	38

## Trustworthy Trustees

by Heather Wraight, former Deputy Director Christian Research

**Charities hit the headlines during lockdown for one of two reasons: either for the way local charities and churches stepped up to address the needs of their community, or because their normal activity became impossible and with fund-raising at almost a complete stop the financial implications were serious.**

There were dire predictions about thousands of charities and some independent churches being forced to close, though it will be some time before the long-term outcome is clear, whether closure or continuing to respond to new opportunities.

Grappling with the impact of such situations is the responsibility of decision makers: the Trustees on a Charity's Board and those in a Trustee role in a church – Deacons, Elders, PCC etc. Before Covid-19 hit, Heather Wraight researched by interview the role and responsibilities of Christian charities and unearthed some significant differences often found between charity and church Trustees.

Item	Charity Trustees	Church Trustees
Awareness of role	Know they are Trustees	May not know they are Trustees
New Trustees	Appointed by Trustees or AGM = existing Trustees can choose	Elected by congregations or chosen by leader = existing Trustees don't choose
Aims and Objects	Usually well known	Often unknown or remote
Charity Commission (CC)	Know have to report to CC	May be unaware of CC
Accountability	Clear: supporters, clients, CC etc	Difficult if theology or strong leaders drive decisions
Chair	Chosen by Trustees = succession planning possible	Minister often expected to chair = succession planning rare

The detail behind the first two of these shows how these differences occur, or the effect they have.

### Awareness of role

New Trustees of charities have to sign documents declaring that they are a fit person to become a Trustee. Signing these brings home the responsibility of the role. Those joining the board of a charitable organisation were found to be aware right from the start that they were taking on legal obligations, including accountability to the Charity Commission (CC).

Churches are only required to register as a separate charity apart from their denomination if their income reaches a certain threshold, currently £100,000 but expected to be less than that before long. In churches where their denomination is the registered charity, people on their leadership boards are often not aware they are Trustees until their income reaches that threshold and they have to register separately.

Several of the interviewees had found it more difficult to recruit new board members, with people apprehensive of the responsibilities, especially of the "offices" of chair, treasurer or secretary. One example of the extra demands that was quoted by several was the way accounts have to be presented (SORP compliant) and the need to include them in an annual report which meets the CC's requirements.

### Appointment of new Trustees

Part of the reason for this is the way Trustees are appointed. In a charity the existing Trustees are responsible for finding new people to join the board and, depending on what is set out in their governing document, they and/or their AGM appoint them. So there is a clear process.

In a church, it is much less clear that new PCC, Diaconate etc. members are also becoming Trustees, especially in denominations where the congregation elects them. Members of the church may agree to stand for election for a variety of reasons, including because someone they respect asks them to or because they are already responsible for activities which are overseen by the PCC.

It was common to hear about cases where new members were elected to the PCC or Diaconate and soon found out what the church or denomination expected of them, but had not been told what the CC or charity law expected of them.

Another weakness in the appointment process revealed by the research was a lack of attention to skills gaps on a board. The main thing a charity board usually looked for in potential new Trustees was interest in and support of the ministry. What was rarely considered by a church board was whether a new person would bring a fresh perspective or skills that the board lacked. One danger of this is that poor decisions can be made and repeated because there is no one with the experience or understanding to challenge them.

The research revealed a range of issues which require careful balancing by Trustees, including:

- The opportunity for different activity or emphasis vs whether it is in line with their Vision, Aims and Objects (if such have been officially formulated)
- Assuming that God will protect them and provide for them so they have no strategies or plans in place to manage risk vs dealing with risk at a human level without consciously praying for God's guidance and direction
- Finding new Trustees with the skills the board needs vs approaching friends or supporters who may be willing but will not bring a fresh perspective or needed skill
- Appointing a chair with the right mix of vision, leadership and relational skills vs asking the Trustee who has been on the board the longest or works the hardest but is not really gifted for the role
- A clear vision but with poor strategy to fulfil it vs a big programme of activities but no overarching vision to shape what they do
- Allowing finance to control the vision and activities vs having a clear vision of what God is asking them to do and then praying, teaching and fund-raising to enable it to happen.

In the book *Tracks of Trustworthiness*, Heather addresses these and other matters. There are extensive quotes from the research interviews as well as sharing wide personal experience as a Trustee to bring the issues to life. A Biblical perspective is also looked at especially by considering the lives and ministries of Daniel and Nehemiah, both great administrators, to help people think about how Christian Trustees can bring their beliefs and values to bear on their role.

**SOURCE:** *Tracks of Trustworthiness*, Biblical and contemporary insights for Church or Charity Trustees, Instant Apostle, 2020. Paperback, available from the author: heather.wraight@gmail.com at £10.99. ISBN 978-1-912726-29-5.

## Polygamy

Polygamy is not something often written about, but a recent survey by the Pew Research Centre reveals the surprising fact that one-tenth of the world's population lives in a polygamous society! While there are only a very few polygamists in the Americas, Europe or Asia (including China and India), there are many in especially Central Africa.

In Burkina Faso, for example, more than a third, 36%, of the population live in polygamous households. This is the country with the highest percentage, but the country with the actual greatest number is Nigeria, which has over half the polygamists in the entire world because it has a high percentage and a very large population.

Polygamy (where a man has more than one wife) and polyandry (where a woman has more than one husband) go together, but it is the former which is the dominant feature. Pew Research identified 19 countries where the percentage of people living in polygamous households was over 0.5%. Four of these countries in fact accounted for three-quarters, 74%, of the global polygamous households, shown in the Table where "% of pop" represents the percentage of the population living in a polygamous household:

*Percentage of polygamous households by country*

Country	% of pop	Millions of people	% of total
Nigeria	28	57,722,840	54
Burkina Faso	36	7,525,080	7
Niger	29	6,981,750	6½
Mali	34	6,896,560	6½
All others (15)	5	27,761,780	26
TOTAL	13	106,888,010	100

Take out these four top countries from the world total, then Pew identified 28 million polygamists in the rest of the world, out of a population of 7.5 billion, or 0.4%. So, apart from Central Africa, they really are few and far between.

What part does religion play in the polygamist saga? A book by Dr Gaskiyane, a Christian worker with 35 years of African ministry, highlights the belief of the Mormons that "polygamy is blessed by God as a way of having very large families," who will therefore be around to support you in heaven (which is NOT a Biblical teaching!).

Usually, however, polygamy is associated with Islamic culture, partly because Mohammed himself had several wives in later life. "It is not encouraged or recommended as the norm for society," Gaskiyane writes, but goes on to point out that looking after several women who are in desperate poverty, who can help with household chores, running a farm, helping with children is one way of alleviating the hardship they would otherwise have to endure. Some Christians in desperate conditions in parts of Africa have taken similar views, although most missions working in Africa have taught one wife per husband.

In all 19 countries identified by Pew as specially polygamous bar one, Muslims dominated in terms of population religion, and the polygamy in those countries can doubtless be linked to the Islamic culture. The one exception to this was Chad, 15% of whose population is living bigamously, and which is 21% Christian but only 10% Islam. However, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* published last year indicates that Chad is in fact 58% Muslim, so perhaps this is an element of the Pew findings which is erroneous.

Polygamy is not unknown in the UK, and occasionally there are reports of the police coming across either Christian or Muslim men with more than one wife, and taking them to court for resolution. The main finding of the Pew Research is that outside Central Africa, polygamy is rare, including in Islamic households. Some migrants coming to Europe and the UK might be so minded, however! Although several in the Old Testament had more than one wife, this practice is disavowed today, except by some Mormons and the occasional aberrant secret group. The Pew Research also asked Americans if they thought polygamy was morally acceptable, finding that 34% of self-described liberals thought it was but only 9% of conservatives.

**SOURCE:** *Polygamy is rare around the world*, Stephanie Kramer, Pew Research Centre Report, 9th December 2020; *Polygamy* by Dr I Gaskiyane, Piquant, 2000, ISBN 0-9535757-9-9.

## SNOWFLAKES

**What is the value of the church?** A National Churches' Trust study found that 40,300 churches across the UK generate at least £12.4 bn in economic and social value each year. The benefits of market value and replacement cost were £2.4 bn and there was £10 bn value in non-market areas, such as in social and well-being value. The latter splits mostly between £8.3 bn of well-being value derived from individuals benefitting from community goods and £1.4 bn well-being value from actual weekly church attendance.

**SOURCE:** Survey conducted by State of Life for the National Churches Trust, given in *Religion Watch*, Vol 36 No 1, November 2020, published by the Baylor Institute quoting from the newsletter *Counting Religion in Britain*, October 2020.

**Megachurch growth.** The very largest churches in America continue to grow significantly by moving to extra locations and totalling all the resulting congregations. In 2000 a quarter, 23%, of churches were on more than one site, but twenty years later in 2020 three times as many, 70%, are multi-site. Only 18% of these churches started new congregations between 2010 and 2015, but half, 48%, did so between 2015 and 2020. Many of our UK larger churches plant new churches also, but do not usually count all their congregations together – the new churches are allowed to be largely independent of the "mother" church.

**SOURCE:** *Religion Watch*, Vol 36 No 1, November 2020, published by the Baylor Institute, [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/2020\\_Megachurch\\_Report.pdf](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/2020_Megachurch_Report.pdf).

**Worldview factors are important.** What influences people's worldviews? An American survey of college students showed that 60% of religious people said religion was a key influence against 10% of non-religious people. However, family background and traditions were felt to be bigger influences (72% and 57% respectively), and a person's cultural background was also a major factor (41% and 28%).

**SOURCE:** Article "Examining the worldview influences of nonreligious college students" by Christopher Scheitle et al in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 62 No 2 June 2020, Page 262.

**Online Worship.** During the coronavirus lockdowns many churchgoers have used online worship platforms to receive ministry. An Anglican survey partly through the *Church Times* but joined by others, looked at the sources of that online worship. The survey concluded in July 2020, thus before the second and third lockdowns, but the first third of responses showed that the prime source of such services were a person's own church (82%), another Church of England church (45%), the Diocesan service (22%), the Church of England nationally (18%) or a church from another denomination (18%).

**SOURCE:** Article "Faith in Lockdown" by Andrew Village and Leslie Francis in *Rural Theology*, Vol 18, No 2, 2020, Page 81.

**Youth Worker Burnout.** A survey among Christian youth workers in both the UK and US who had experienced burnout asked what were the contributing factors leading to burnout. There were three factors primarily:

- 47% Feeling isolated or lonely
- 43% Spiritual dryness, an un nourished soul
- 42% Supervisor relationship

The issue of burnout is serious as two-fifths, 41%, of those participating in the study had not recovered from burnout and had no intention of returning to ministry or leading in volunteer roles, which is very sad. On the other hand, the other

three-fifths had recovered from burnout, usually through a significant break or sabbatical or taking a holiday, but sometimes (a fifth, 19%) with professional counselling, and sometimes through delegating or restructuring the workload.

**SOURCE:** Article "Burnout among Christian youth workers" by Dr Len Kageler on Yack College, New York in *The Story*, produced by Youthscape, Vol 16, Winter 2020, Pages 6 and 7.

**Bookshop crunch.** Are bookshops essential or non-essential in a Covid lockdown situation? The Government deems them non-essential, so they have to close, but in a survey among trade customers of bookshops amidst the second lockdown in November 2020, only half agreed – the other half feeling they were selling essential goods. Not surprisingly, half felt their sales would decrease and a third thought their profitability would lessen because of lockdown No 2.

**SOURCE:** *The Bookseller*, 13th November 2020, Page 7.

**The Rich and Religion.** Gallup asked the question "Is religion an important part of your daily life?" and tabled the median responses among countries as follows, all answering YES to the question, by their per-capita income (put into £ at \$1 = £0.80):

Income of £0-£1,600	95%
£1,601 to £4,000	92%
£4,001 to £10,000	82%
£10,001 to £20,000	70%
Above £20,000	47%

It is easy to deduce from this simple Table that the richer a person the less they are interested in religion. That might be true in general terms, but such weighty conclusions (and their implications) should never be made from a simplistic finding such as the Table above. Sometimes statistics can mislead!

**SOURCE:** Article in *Ministry*, November 2020, Page 14.

**Cities.** Half of the world's population live in cities, yet cities occupy only 3% of the world's surface area.

**SOURCE:** *The Week*, 16th January 2020, Page 23.

**Babies wanted.** The global fertility rate is 2.5 babies per woman, but in South Korea the rate is only a third of this, 0.84 babies per woman. The government is offering £1,350 for every birth.

**SOURCE:** *The Week*, 16th January 2020, Page 21.

**Change of the Tide.** A new book with this title and subtitle "Revivals in the UK" gives a history of revivals in this country, and is also one of the first to make comments in a published book on the coronavirus pandemic. The author describes the difference between actions taken when churches were closed by those who think of church as a building and those who think of it as primarily a people, a body as it were of volunteers.

**SOURCE:** *Change of the Tide*, Dr Nigel Paterson, Regeneration Publications, Southampton, 2020, ISBN 978-1-8382660-0-4.

**FutureFirst** is a bimonthly bulletin for those concerned with the future of the church. Editorial board: Rosemary Dowsett, Anne Coomes and Peter Brierley. The acceptance and publication of copy does not indicate editorial endorsement. Readers are welcome to quote items provided they give the source.

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**ISSN 2040-0268**

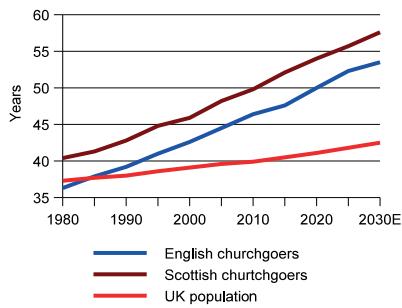
## Average Age of Churchgoers

The average age of a pre-Covid churchgoer in 2020 was 50, whereas the average of a person living in England as a whole was 41. So churchgoers are almost 10 years above the average in age. It doesn't vary hugely by gender – in 2020 male churchgoers were 48 on average and female 51.

In Scotland in 2020 folk were slightly older – the average male churchgoer was 53 and women were 55. These are against a population average of 42, so Scottish churchgoers have a larger gap. We don't have the same information about Welsh churchgoers or those in N Ireland, though their average population ages in 2020 were, respectively, 42 and 40 (making the overall UK rate 41).

While the present gender difference in average ages is marginal, that is not true when one looks at average ages over time. The graph compares the English, Scottish and UK Population average ages, actual up to 2020 and the forecast for the decade ahead.

*Fig 1: Average age of churchgoers and population 1980 to 2030E*



The graph is interesting. It shows that Scottish churchgoers have consistently been older than English churchgoers over the last 40 years. Almost certainly this is partly because England has seen huge numbers of immigrants, asylum seekers, workers, students coming to the country since the 1980s, a number of whom come from Christian countries and presumably would join a local church. The number of diaspora or immigrant churches has especially increased substantially in this period.

However, the graph also shows that in 1980 the average age of churchgoers was lower than the average population age. This is partly because the church catered for large numbers of children 40 years ago. Over a quarter of those attending in 1980 were under 15 (26%) whereas only 21% of the population then was under 15.

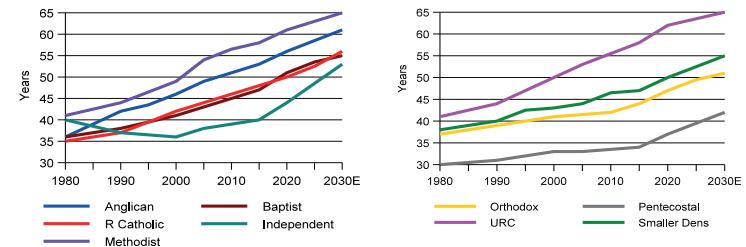
But as the decades passed two things happened. With the decline of Sunday Schools the numbers of children attending church dropped drastically. By the year 2000 only 20% were under 15 and by 2020 only 16%. By comparison the numbers of children in the population had dropped to 19% by the year 2000 and to 18% by 2020, thus decreasing also but at a slower rate than in the church.

The second factor was the growing proportion of churchgoers 65 and over – 22% in 1980, 25% in 2000 and 36% in 2020. The general population was ageing also – it had 15% who were 65 and over in 1980, 16% in the year

2000 and 19% in 2020. The rate of church ageing is much more rapid than the population. Why? It was losing many children, but also many teenagers and many of those in their 20s. The older people, often converted in their teenage years, had been going to church all their life and didn't give up in old age!

A very simple graph but it shows a widening distance in ages between the general population and the churchgoing group. Is this true denominationally? The following graphs show the average age over the years in different denominational groups.

*Figs 2,3: Average age of churchgoers by denomination 1980 to 2030E*



The curious path of the Independent graph is because it includes the New Churches which burst on to the scene in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing in considerable numbers of younger families with obviously younger parents and younger children. These brought the average age down, but in the 21st century the families which stayed in these churches were becoming older and a similar influx of youth was not repeated.

Those in every denominational group are getting older. The Table gives the average age of churchgoers for each denominational group for the three years shown in order of their average ages in 2020. There are three groups: (a) Those whose average age is under the overall average age of 50; (b) Those whose average age is about 50 – the Roman Catholics, Baptist and Smaller Denominations, and (c) The oldest groups well above the average – the United Reformed Church (URC), the Methodists and the Anglicans.

Group	1980	2000	2020	Group	1980	2000	2020
Pentecostal	30	33	37	Baptist	36	41	51
Independent	40	36	44	Anglican	36	46	56
Orthodox	37	41	47	Methodist	41	49	61
R Catholic	35	42	50	URC	41	50	62
Smaller	38	43	50	<b>Overall</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>50</b>

So what does all this tell us? The Independent graph in Figure 2 shows that it is possible for the average age to go down as well as up, and the Pentecostal graph is increasing at only half the overall rate (up 7 years in 40 against 13 overall). Both these groups have started new fellowships which have attracted young families, children as well as adults. Outreach is vital, not only because "the love of Christ constrains us" but also for survival and regeneration.

SOURCE: UK Church Statistics No 4, 2021 Edition, Tables 13.4.1, 13.4.2, 13.7.1.



...asking her how old she was is one thing... but then saying 'you thought she was much older' is something else!

## These may be helpful

### Books/papers received

**Z-A of Faith Spirituality**, Laura Hancock, Director of National Ministries, Youth for Christ, March 2020, www.yfc.co.uk. Report of research among 1,001 young people aged 11-18, asking about spirituality, prayer, Christianity and church, 48 pages A4.

**Pews, Benches and Chairs**, Church seating in English parish churches from the 14th century to the present, edited by Trevor Cooper and Sarah Brown, The Ecclesiological Society, 2011.

**Their Master's Voice**, The fifth book by Dr Chris Woodall, this time on the Old Testament prophets, WIPF and Stock publishers, December 2020, £15, ISBN 978-1-7520-4218-1.

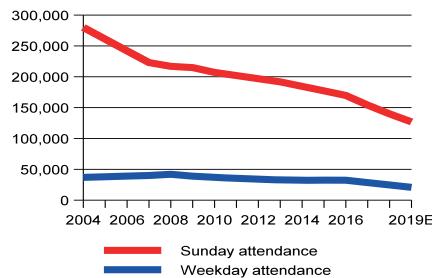
## The Methodist Church of Great Britain 2019

**The Methodist Church of Great Britain (MCGB) was formed in 1932 from a merger of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Primitive Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church (itself a merger of three groups in 1907), then with a total membership of 840,000 and 7,800 churches. In 2019 the MCGB had some 4,200 churches across England, Wales and Scotland, with membership of 170,000.**

In terms of church buildings it is the second largest denomination in England, second only to the Church of England (with 15,500 churches). There are 30 Districts currently (equivalent to Dioceses) which are subdivided into Circuits, on average 12 Circuits in each District, but some have just 1 like the Welsh-speaking churches, those on the Isle of Man and Shetlands. The largest is London with 35. Each Circuit has on average 12 churches, or 140 per District (the Church of England has 380 churches per Diocese).

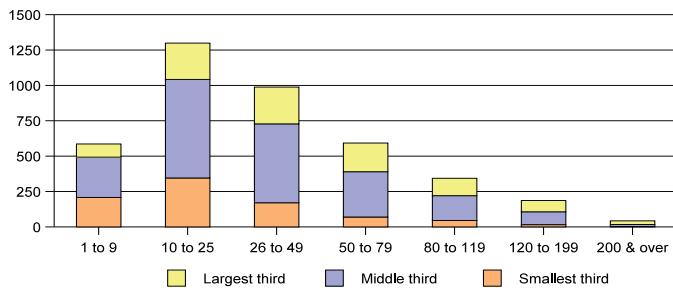
Numerically, Methodist attendance is not very dissimilar to its membership, showing the loyalty of members to attend if they can (in pre-Covid days). In 2019 attendance was about 164,000, all but 20,000 attending on a Sunday and the rest during the week. As with Anglican churches, they find Sunday attendance declining faster than weekday attendance (as shown in the graph), and children and young people attendance declining roughly twice as fast as adult attendance (again, as with the Church of England).

Sunday and Weekday attendance in the Methodist Church



Individual churches naturally vary in size. A list of all 4,200 churches gave an interesting overview of their size distribution, as can be seen in the second graph, which falls into three groups – the largest third of churches, the middle third and the smallest third, taken by the average number of members per church by District. In the largest Circuit in the largest third was the London Circuit with their churches averaging 69 members, and the smallest Circuit in the smallest third was the Synod Cymru averaging 15 members.

Number of Methodist churches by 2019 membership



It is obvious that a huge proportion of Methodist churches are very small. Two-fifths, 38%, have under 20 members per church, which equates to roughly the same number coming Sunday or midweek, if churches that small have a midweek meeting. The same proportion, 39%, have between 20 and 59 members, leaving just under a quarter, 23%, with 60 members or over. The overall average number is 41 people, but this is biased because of a small number of larger churches. The median size is 28, meaning that half the churches have 28 or fewer members while the other half have more.

One church in 7, 14%, has a congregation in single figures, which must put that fellowship very close to viability. That a few churches are so small is not unique, however. The Church of England Diocese of London, the 11th largest Diocese, had 25% of its churches with under 50 members in 2015 (a third of the Methodists' 71%), and 3% of its congregations were with under 20 people, again a much smaller proportion than the Methodists, but still showing that even a "successful" Diocese has a mixed collection of church sizes.

There are 20 Methodist churches, 0.5%, with 250 or more members. Twelve of these have between 250 and 349 members, and 8 have 350 or more (the usual definition of a "larger church"), or 0.2% of all the churches (the percentage of Church of England churches this big is five times as many, 1%). The two largest churches, with 465 and 464 members respectively are Swan Bank, Stoke-on-Trent and Wesley's Chapel, in City Road. Two others are over 400: Bournemouth Methodist Church (429 members) and Methodist Central Hall in Westminster (422 members).

It is obvious this is a serious situation of which the MCGB is well aware. Solutions are not simple, but probably include a wide assessment of structure and emphasis.

SOURCE: List of MCGB churches provided helpfully for the data in *UK Church Statistics No 4, 2021 Edition*, Tables 6.1.2.role

## English Evangelicals

**The number of pre-Covid churchgoers on a usual Sunday in England in 2020 was about 2.8 million people. The number, as is well known, is decreasing – it was 3.5 million in the year 2000 and if forecast trends prove accurate, could be 2.4 million by 2030, a rate of decline of -1.2% per annum.**

Evangelicals were 37% of the total in 2000 but could be 52% by the year 2030, even though their numbers are also slightly decreasing, from 1.31 million in 2000 to perhaps 1.26 million by 2030, a rate of decline of -0.1% per annum. In 2020 they were 46% of the total, 1.28 million.

The chart shows the decline of both, although the number of Evangelicals looks almost static. It is, however, easy to see that the proportion of Evangelicals is increasing over this 30-year period.

Fig 1: Pre-Covid English churchgoers and future trends 2000 to 2030E

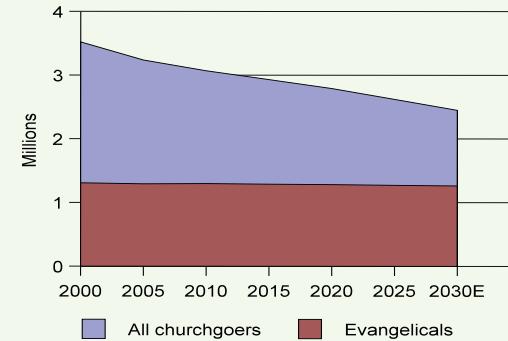
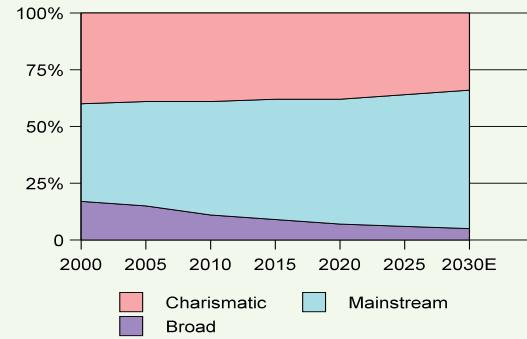


Fig 2: Proportions of different groups of English Evangelicals 2000-2030E



Evangelicals were identified by the minister of their church ticking they were an "Evangelical" church when the Census was undertaken. Broad Evangelical church numbers come from their minister also ticking "Broad" on the form, and Charismatic Evangelicals by the minister ticking "Charismatic". That leaves those whose minister just ticked the single word "Evangelical" and no others, but to distinguish this group from the other two the word "Mainstream" was added to it.

The second diagram shows how the proportions of these three groups has changed over this period. Broad Evangelicals (whom some equate with "liberal") have declined very greatly over this period, while Mainstream Evangelicals (which some equate with "Conservative") are growing. The Charismatic appear to be declining, but this is partly because types of worship and singing considered "charismatic" at the beginning of the century have become so much part of customary worship now that they are not considered charismatic as such at all.

SOURCE: *UK Church Statistics No 4 2021 Edition*, ADBC Publishers, 2020; Table 13.17.