

CONTENTS

Vietnamese Conversion Survey	P1
Partnerships	P2
American Voting	P2
After Covid	P2
Global Overview	P3
The 24:14 Movement	P4
Why Pray?	P4
Co-habiting Couples	P5
Sexual Attitudes in Australia	P5
Social Justice	P5
Biblical Baby Names	P6
English Conversion Surveys	P6



FUTURE FIRST

FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

ISSN 2040-0268 | Number 74, April 2021

SNIPPETS

1) As this is the April 2021 issue of *FutureFirst*, it seems right to honour and congratulate our Christian Queen, Elizabeth II, whose 95th birthday is on 21st April 2021. "Long may she reign." A very Happy Birthday, Ma'am!

2) Brazil, China, Philippines and South Korea have been the key Global South countries in sending out mission workers to other countries so far this century.

3) Between February and July 2021 69 different publishers aim to publish 255 different books on religion (not necessarily Christian).

4) Over the same period some 64 publishers aim to publish 193 books on "Mind, Body and Spirit."

5) There are about 1.1 million words in the Bible. There are 93 women who speak, 49 of whom are named. Together they speak about 14,000 words.

6) A property surveyor reckons more churches will be sold because of Covid – half to be redeveloped as housing, and half as places of worship under new management.

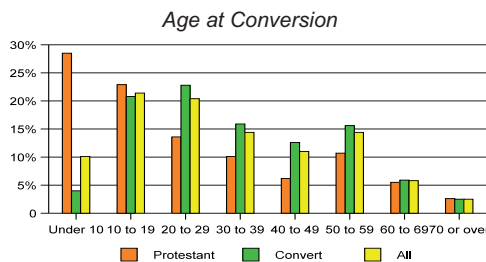
7) A survey of almost 20,000 adults in England and Wales found only 6% read the Bible outside church services. A third, 36%, said it was "outdated," rising to half, 47%, of 18-34 year-olds.

SOURCES: 1) –; 2) *International Bulletin of Mission Research* article, Vol 45, No 1, Page 15, Jan 2021; 3) and 4) Counts in the *Buyer's Guide to Non-Fiction*, The Bookseller, February 2021; 5) Count by Rev Lindsay Freeman, an American Episcopal minister, news release by the *Star Tribune*, 2nd February, 2015; 6) Graham Smith of Rapleys, quoted in *Christianity*, February 2021, Page 13; 7) A Bible Society survey with YouGov in Autumn 2018, article in *Transmission*, Spring 2021, Pages 3 and 4.

Vietnamese Conversion Survey

A Vietnamese survey of October 2018 of 2,150 people in Vietnamese-speaking churches in North Vietnam, with its report written in Vietnamese but fortunately translated into English, has become available. A quarter, 24%, had been born in a Protestant family, but 71% had been converted from another religion, nearly always Buddhism (though 5% didn't answer the question). Half had been converted within the previous 10 years. Of these converts, two-thirds, 66%, were women. While two-fifths, 42%, had become Christians very quickly after hearing the gospel (under a month), the average time for the remainder was 1½ years.

Half, 51%, of those born in Protestant families in North Vietnam had become Christians by the age of 20, and 25% of those converted from another religion, with a further 23% converted in their 30s and 16% in their 40s (a total of 64%). This compares with 58% of the Vietnamese population being under 40 in 2016. It was found those over 60 were more likely to convert. The average age of conversion for a Protestant was 25 years and 34 years for those converted later in life. The overall ages of conversion are shown in the chart where "Protestant" means "Born in a Protestant family," and where half of those saying they became a Christian when under 10 indicating they became a Christian at birth.



How had they become Christians? A third through their family, 33%, and half as many through a friend, 17%, and a quarter, 27%, by a Christian worker. Three-fifths, 59%, of those helping someone find faith were aged between 30 and 59, and 13% by those 70 and over. What was the means of conversion? Reading the Bible, two-fifths, 39%, said, followed by a tract or other book, 28%.

What was the key influence on becoming a Christian? "The love I saw in the lives of Christians," said a quarter (25%) of the converts, someone sharing the gospel (23%), seeing a healing or other miracle (19%), a church service/sermon (11%), studying the Bible (7%). Why become a Christian? The top answers were (in order):

- "To know the truth"
- "To go to heaven"
- "To get forgiveness of sins" and
- "To get God's help in my life."

One of the questions the Vietnamese survey asked, "Were you part of a group who all became Christian at the same time?" has not been asked as far as is known in any previous English survey on conversion. Four-fifths, 82%, had done so, with an average group size of 12 people. Another new

question was about marriage. Three-fifths, 62%, of the Christian men had married a Christian woman, but only two-fifths, 42%, of the Christian women had married a Christian man. Almost three-quarters, 71%, of the men who married a non-Christian wife had seen her become a Christian, but only 44% of the women marrying a non-Christian husband saw them becoming a Christian. Clearly there is a high rate of intermarriage with non-Christians. Female converts find it very difficult to find a Christian husband – something true in many countries other than Vietnam! They saw relatively few Christians leave church because they had married a non-Christian. (As stated above, two-thirds, 66%, of the converts were women).

Of your five closest friends, how many are Christians? Two-fifths, 39%, of the converts said "None." On average, however, the number was two. How often did converts attend church? Nine in every ten, 89%, went every week, and half, 51%, attended another Christian meeting every week. Half, 47%, were members of a house/cell/care group. How many people had they told about Jesus in the past month? A third, 32%, said "None," but others had, on average, spoken to 3 people.

The survey also asked about the theology of the converts. Two-thirds, 68%, affirmed that "Jesus died for me to save me", with half (47%) correctly saying that we don't get saved by keeping God's law, three-quarters (77%) saying Jesus never sinned, if you don't believe in Christ you are eternally lost (79%), everything in the Bible is true (81%), with two-thirds (66%), however, also thinking that if you had enough faith God would heal you.

The questionnaire also asked about the church attended by the convert. The oldest church in Vietnam was founded in 1915, and only five before 1934, with some 78 churches attended by the converts started since 1988, 43 of which had begun since 2007 (this was a 2018 survey)! On average each church had 94 members with attendance of 52 each week. The largest was 920, and the smallest had just 6 people each week. Half of these churches (50%) were started by the person who is now the pastor, and a further 38% by a group of believers. A fifth, 22%, had leaders but no pastor, and two-thirds, 64%, a Board submitting to a pastor.

Just over a quarter (29%) had no full-time staff, a quarter (25%) just one person, and almost half (46%) more than one full time. On average it was 2 per church. Two-thirds (70%) of churches were engaged in evangelism, and over half in social work (57%) and church planting (53%). Three-fifths of churches met in a house or apartment (62%), a fifth (19%) in an owned facility, and a fifth (19%) rented somewhere.

What, in summary, does this Vietnamese survey reveal about the church in that country?

The importance of evangelism is clear in the work of churches, and is seen in people coming to faith. While many in Britain come to faith before they are 20, in Vietnam substantial numbers have come when in their 20s, 30s or 40s.

Continued on page 2

- Family life is critically important in helping people come to faith. Some come to faith through the Christian faith of husband/wife.
- Reading or sharing the Bible is also hugely important. Being part of a Bible Study group is also critical.
- Showing the love of Christ in action, in social work or other ways. Friendship and sharing with others is part of this.
- Theology is key, and Christians need to be able to explain the hope that is in them.
- Homes are a good place in which to start churches.

May this survey account of God's kingdom in a hostile environment be a challenge to us in the UK, so often "at ease in Zion."

SOURCE: Conversion growth of Vietnamese-speaking Protestant churches in Northern Vietnam, Evangelical Community of Hanoi, October 2018.

Partnerships

Prior to 2005 the only partnerships legally permitted was by (what is now called) opposite-sex marriage. In 2005 Civil Partnerships were allowed, and from 2014 same-sex marriages have been allowed. The latest Office for National Statistics figures is on numbers going up to 2018, the 2019 figures not being released till later this year, 2021.

In these 14 years of Civil Partnerships there have been a total of 66,200, the number which are religious not being recorded. In the same period there were 3.4 million opposite-sex marriages, 1.0 million of which were religious, almost a third, 30.2%.

In the years 2014 to 2018 there were 25,300 same-sex marriages, of which just 171 were religious, 0.7%. Of the total same-sex marriages 11,100 were male or 44%.

Over these 14 years of Civil Partnerships (CPs) in England and Wales there have been 36,300 male CPs and 29,900 female CPs, 55% to 45%. In the same period there have been 18,400 dissolutions (equivalent to a marriage divorce), of which 41% were male and 59% female. This is interesting as it shows men more likely to form a Civil Partnership, and women more likely to exit one!

Of the male CPs started in this period, four-fifths, 79%, were surviving at the end of 2018, but of the female CPs started only two-thirds, 64%, were still intact. The rate of dissolution is much greater than the rate of divorce in an opposite-sex marriage. These numbers are more easily shown in a Table.

Civil Partnerships in England and Wales 2005-2018

	Male	Female	Total	% Male	% Female
Formed	36,300	29,900	66,200	55	45
Dissolved	7,600	10,800	18,400	41	59
Remaining	28,700	19,100	47,800	60	40
Remaining out of total	79%	64%	72%		

Prior to the introduction of same-sex marriages, just over half of new CPs were male, 55%, as shown in the Table. In the years 2015 to 2018, however, when same-sex marriage was permissible, the number of CPs dropped by half (1,700 in 2014 and 900 in 2015, with 6,500 same-sex marriages in 2015), and the proportion of male CPs went up to two-thirds, 67%, while the male percentage of same-sex marriages was only 44%. Men are keener on Civil Partnerships, but women on marriage.

Presumably the same will be true of religious CPs and same-sex marriages.

SOURCE: Office for National Statistics website Marriages and Divorces Registry for appropriate years.

American Voting

What part did faith play in the American presidential voting last November (the success of Joe Biden and the downfall of Donald Trump)? It is reported that 79% of those calling themselves Evangelicals voted for Donald Trump. Dr George Barna undertook a survey of Americans to ascertain how far voters for each candidate differed on faith and certain social issues, the Biden voters on the whole being more liberal and the Trump more Biblical.

Matters of faith among American Presidential voters

Item	Trump	Biden	All Americans%
Self-identified Christian	80	65	70
Attend a Protestant church	42	27	~
Attend a Catholic church	21	21	~
Active in local Christian church	42	31	~
Self-identification: theologically conservative	42	25	~
Absolute moral truths defined in the Bible	43	25	~
Only those who have accepted Christ as Saviour go to heaven	34	15	24
Don't believe in God or care about God	18	29	~
Marriage is between one man and one woman	69	42	54
God is all-powerful, all knowing, Creator of the universe and still rules it today	60	37	47
The Bible is ambiguous on abortion	41	60	51
All religious faiths are of equal value	56	68	62

Not all the questions given to respondents were given answers in the press release. There are some issues where the Biden supporters are stricter than the general American public – abortion and all faiths being of value, but equally there are some issues where the general public gave more conservative answers! From this particular survey, Biden's own faith as a Roman Catholic does not appear to have been of great significance to the American voters.

SOURCE: Press Release by the Cultural Research Centre, Arizona Christian University, February 2021.

After Covid

Will the church survive? YES is the unambiguous answer since it's God's church and God is in control. Will the church survive in the form we have known it? Probably not. With the Church of England considering closing or reducing direct ministerial oversight in perhaps a fifth of its loss-making 15,000+ churches (according to an internal document published by the Sunday Times), its presence and leadership will clearly be very different.

Bishops are looking at organising local teams, led by self-supporting ministers, with retired clergy still officiating or lay ministers looking after local churches. Unquestionably this would be a significant change, and other denominations may equally well have to face radical alterations to what has hitherto been their norm.

Will the "people in the pew" be the same as before? Very likely to be fewer in number especially among those over 65 years of age. A useful analysis by the Office for National Statistics splits the population into three groups: A those 15 or younger, B those aged 16 to 64 and C those 65 years of age and older.

Of those in Group C, two-thirds (66%) live by themselves, and it is likely that at least some of these will have grown used to the convenience of participating in services via the comfort of their own home though the older section in this group may well not have online facilities or skills. The other third live with those in Group B whose energy, love and care may well keep the family together and the large majority return to church. This third of Group B, 34%, splits into two smaller groups, of 5% and 29%, the first when they are joined by children in Group A, and the 29% who have no children now under 15 (four-fifths of whom have just one parent living with them).

There is a very small percentage of older people, 0.2%, who are effectively living with just their grandchildren, perhaps because the parents have died or separated or unable to bring up their children. It is a small number of households, 11,800 throughout the UK, and almost three-fifths (57%) of these, 6,800, are just a single grandparent with one or more grandchildren living with them. If they have the energy and are churchgoing (perhaps 350 of them) they are likely to return to church post-Covid if they possibly can, especially for the sake of the grandchildren living with them.

The large majority of families, just over three-quarters (78%), have no-one 65 or over living with them, although many of these will have parents or grandparents living elsewhere. Of these families, some 2.6

million can be expected to return to church (5.1%, the population average of 2020 churchgoers in England and Scotland).

In terms of pre-Covid churchgoing, the church had 15% in Group A (aged 15 or under), 48% in Group B (aged 16 to 64) and 37% in Group C but their family living pattern is unknown. The percentages show that the church has a larger proportion of elderly people than in the general population, something already known, and which perhaps might mean that the proportion actually returning to churchgoing might be higher because of habit commitment and Scriptural injunction. A small proportion might be lost because they are not happy with the new, less traditional "way of doing things," that is, they feel church is no longer church.

SOURCES: *Money, People and Buildings*, Church of England Bishops Report described in the *Sunday Times*, 31st January 2021, and Labour Force Survey, Demographic Analysis Unit, Office for National Statistics, April 2020.

Global Overview

Every January the *International Bulletin of Mission Research* presents a snapshot of global Christianity. 2021 was no exception, and the following is a summary of its findings, where "%pa" is the annual average percentage increase or decrease and "%Σ" is the percentage of the global total.

Table 1: Global Christianity in millions, 2000 to 2025

Group	2000	%pa	%Σ	2020	%pa	%Σ	2021	%pa	%Σ	2025E	%Σ
R Catholics ¹	919	+1.1	46	1,137	+1.0	45	1,148	+1.1	45	1,200	45
Protestants	429	+1.6	22	586	+1.4	23	594	+1.2	23	624	24
Independents	284	+1.6	14	391	+1.5	16	397	+1.6	16	423	16
Orthodox	258	+0.6	13	292	+0.7	12	294	+0.3	12	297	11
Unaffiliated	99	+0.7	5	113	0	4	113	+0.9	4	117	4
TOTAL	1,989	+1.2	100	2,519	+1.1	100	2,546	+1.1	100	2,661	100
Evangelicals	271	+1.8	14	387	+1.8	15	394	+1.7	15	421	16
Pentecostals ²	443	+1.9	22	644	+1.9	26	656	+1.8	26	704	26

¹ Less those double-counted ² Including Charismatics

It may be seen that the Roman Catholics are likely to be almost half of Total Christians (45%), in 2025 followed by the Protestants which include Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, etc (24%), and then the Independents (16%) and Orthodox (11%). Protestants have gained pro rata in the first quarter of the present century, while the Orthodox have declined. Evangelicals are growing but Pentecostals, which include many Evangelicals, are growing faster, so the global church is becoming more Evangelical and Charismatic.

Table 2: World population and major religions, in millions, 2000 to 2025

Group	2000	%pa	%Σ	2020	%pa	%Σ	2021	%pa	%Σ	2025E	%Σ
Christians	1,989	+1.2	32.4	2,519	+1.1	32.3	2,546	+1.1	32.3	2,661	32.5
Muslims	1,291	+1.9	21.0	1,893	+1.7	24.3	1,926	+1.7	24.5	2,061	25.2
Hindus	822	+1.3	13.4	1,063	+1.0	13.6	1,074	+0.6	13.6	1,101	13.4
Buddhists	452	+0.9	7.3	546	+0.7	7.0	550	+0.9	7.0	569	7.0
Jews	13	+0.7	0.2	15	+0.4	0.2	15	+0.5	0.2	15	0.2
All others	781	+0.6	12.7	881	+0.5	11.3	885	+0.8	11.2	912	11.1
Atheists/Agnostics	797	+0.5	13.0	879	0	11.3	879	-0.3	11.2	867	10.6
World Population	6,145	+1.2	100	7,796	+1.0	100	7,875	+1.0	100	8,186	100

The world is slowly becoming more religious as the percentage of atheists and agnostics declines, while the Muslims increase at a relatively fast rate of +1.7% per year (2021 to 2025). Muslims are likely to increase by 0.7% of the global population between 2021 and 2025, while Christians only increase by 0.2%. The Christian expansion is mainly led by the Independents (+1.6% per annum in Table 1).

It is the Global South which is the spearhead of growing Christianity, with Africa leading (+2.8% annual growth), followed by Asia (+1.5%), and Latin America (+1.1%). In the Global North there is almost no growth, with Europe static (0.0%) and North America only +0.3%. In Oceania (mainly Australia and New Zealand), growth is also below average (+0.6%). In 2021, two-thirds, 67%, of Christians were people of colour, as were 78% of Evangelicals, and both percentages are growing.

Cities are the growing mission field. The world's urban population grew 10% between 2000 and 2021; in 2000 there were 371 cities with a population of over a million inhabitants; by 2021 this has become 593 cities, with a doubling of the urban poor and slum dwellers.

The Christian missions force is increasing annually, from 11.3 million workers in 2000 to 13.6 million by 2021, but the major part of this increase is in national workers who were 96% of the total in 2000 and 97% of the total in 2021, a clear trend towards more indigenous mission. The percentage of unevangelised people was reckoned at 30% in 2000, down to 28% by 2021, perhaps reflecting the rise in the number of mission agencies from 4,000 in 2000 to 5,600 in 2021, which might also indicate some fragmentations.

National leadership is increasingly being seen in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, while the questions of denominational schism (700 new ones have been started every year since 2000), the role of women and other issues tend to dominate the headlines (2,400 new Christian periodicals have been started around the world every year since 2000). Resources will always need to be prioritised carefully – the report estimated only 1.7% of the income earned by Christians is given to Christian causes each year.

SOURCES: Article "World Christianity and Mission 2021" in *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, by Gina Zurlo, Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing, Vol 45, No 1, Page 15, January 2021 and Marc van der Woude in <http://www.christiantrendwatcher.com>, February 2021.

The 24:14 Movement

The 24:14 Movement (based on Matthew 24:14 "this good news ... will be proclaimed ... as a testimony to all the nations [every people group] ... and then the end will come.") has published an interesting Data Dashboard in which it shows that in 1985 there were 3.2 billion "lost souls" [or unreached people] in the world, which had risen to 5.5 billion by 2019, an increase averaging 68 million people per year.

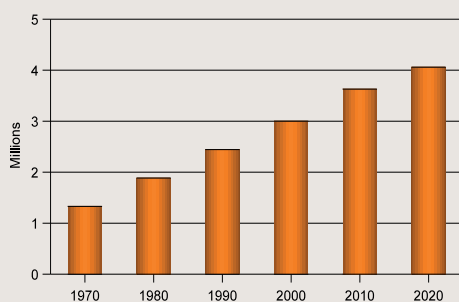
The global population in 1985 was 4.8 billion and in 2019 it was 7.7 billion, an increase of 85 million per year. *The World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE) gives data on the number of Christians worldwide, which was 1.6 billion in 1985 and 2.5 billion in 2019, an increase of 26 million every year on average.

The WCE measures adherents while 24:14 seeks to count congregants (that is, people in actual congregations), and the two are not the same. Putting the above figures together we have in an average year of 85 million people born, 17 million joining a Christian congregation, 9 million more Christian in name (adherents) but not in a church, and 59 million not Christian in any sense.

24:14 points out that Church Planting Movements are one way of reaching more people. New churches reach out to a group of people new to the gospel, but usually within 3 or 5 years they are reaching maybe four generations with the gospel through those who join their congregation. 24:14 therefore strongly advocates the starting of new churches.

WCE also gives the number of global congregations, but this is clearly a difficult number to count as its estimates keep reducing for previous years every time it publishes its estimate for the latest year! 24:14 also gives the number of congregations globally but admits it also has very limited data. The latest revisions from the WCE show the following increase in global churches, and if these figures are approximately correct, they show a more even rate of increase than given by 24:14:

Estimate of the number of congregations worldwide according to WCE



Forecasts of these numbers is equally uncertain. The annual article based on WCE figures gives an estimate of over 6 million congregations by 2025, but since the number rose by only a million in the 20 years 2000 to 2020, it seems unlikely there will be an extra 2 million in the five years 2020 to 2025 which it predicts. In short, estimating congregational growth is very insecure and uncertain.

The 24:14 Movement focusses on Church Planting Movements, that is, groups of churches starting new congregations together, such as a specific denomination or a number of, say, evangelical churches working together to reach out to the lost.

SOURCES: Wikipedia; *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, edited by Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, Edinburgh University Press, 2020, annual updates given in *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, OMSC, 24:14 Goal paper published by missionfrontiers.org, 2019.

SNOWFLAKES

Pandemic Impact. A reader writes: "You may be interested in our anecdotal observation from Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, that those churches which tend to be physically characterised by "auditorium performance" made the transition to online quite straightforwardly, but their congregation/audience is perhaps more susceptible to channel hopping. Conversely, those who traditionally gather for a 20 minute Bible exposition have tended to stick to the weekly Bible teacher they know, perhaps also dropping in on one or two other churches on YouTube during the week for encouragement. It's perhaps also true that the Charismatic Evangelicals, for whom singing is key to their Sunday services, are missing physical church much more than their Conservative Evangelical cousins, who are more happy to sit at home, take in a good weekly sermon, and ride out the pandemic."

SOURCE: Paul Houghton, CEO, Kingdom Bank, personal email after receiving last issue of *FutureFirst*, January 2021.

Workers going home. An evaluation of the impact of Brexit and Covid by Russell Lynch, Economics Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, suggests that the UK population may shrink by as much as 1.3 million as foreign-born residents return home, a reduction of some 2%. This could especially impact Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Diaspora (or immigrant) congregations. This exclusion also takes into consideration the economic fallout of the virus on couples which will cause delay in starting families, suggesting only 569,000 babies were born (in England) in 2020, a drop of 7% on 2019, the official count to come.

Sources: Article in *Daily Telegraph*, 15th January 2021, Page 2.

Strengthening their Faith. An international survey across 14 countries by the Pew Research Centre in the summer of 2020 found that in each country people felt Covid-19 had strengthened the religious faith of their country, on average 15% agreeing, but with 85% saying it had made no difference. A tenth, 10%, said it had strengthened their personal faith. US percentages were much higher, UK were the same as the average (14% & 10%), Japan was the lowest (5% and 5%).

Source: Report by the Pew Research Centre, released 27th January, 2021.

Mission work is changing. A Barna research report produced in partnership with the American International Mission Board found that:

- The definition of success for a missionary has changed, from evangelism (44%) and discipleship (40%) to "saving lives" (47%)
- Donations are losing their appeal: 27% of young adults (under 35) feel mission workers should not use donations as their source of income (against 14% for those 35 or older)
- Mission workers should blend business and social good, with Millennials seeing mission workers as entrepreneurs, artists and business leaders.

How far this is actually happening was not researched, and British mission supporters may be quite different in their opinions, though a 2009 British survey did support the first of these bullet points.

SOURCE: *The Future of Missions*, Barna Book, 2020.

Gen Z are 36% more likely than the average to watch a vlog (a personal website or social media account where a person regularly posts short videos) and 26% more likely to use streaming services on mobile. As privacy issues have become a growing concern among generations, three-fifths, 60%, of Gen Z users have previously used a private browsing window. Half, 52%, are also using an ad blocker and 50% have deleted cookies.

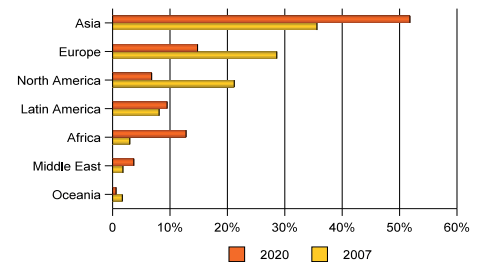
SOURCES: www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm; web on Gen Z.

American suicide data shows that in 2017 there were 10 suicides per 100,000 married people, a rate of just 0.001%. For widows and single people the rate was twice that, but for divorced people the rate was 40 suicides per 100,000, vividly showing the stress and difficulty of divorce. Equivalent UK figures are not published. This finding was, however, confirmed in an international study in 2005 especially of young people finding "increases in divorce rates have a particularly pronounced effect on suicide rates."

SOURCE: *Evangelicals Now*, February 2021, taken from an article by Charles Fain Lehman, article in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, by Steven Messner et al, Vol 68, Nov 2006, Page 1105.

Internet usage has increased enormously in the last 13 years. In January 2007 there were 1.1 billion users worldwide; in September 2020 there were 4.9 bn, more than four times as many. The graph shows where this change has occurred – in Asia and Africa predominantly, with Europe and North America not keeping up because of the alternatives used by Gen Z.

Internet Usage by World Region, 2007 and 2020



Child marriages. Save the Children estimate that there will be 2½ million more child marriages because of the pandemic, and because the pandemic had prevented contraception access for an estimated 47 million women worldwide there will be 7 million unintended pregnancies, especially in Africa.

SOURCE: Summary of paper by Dr Ted Lankester, Lausanne Catalyst for Faith, Health and Collaborative Love issued by Global Connections, January 2021.

Why Pray?

Sometimes an article gives very useful points which aren't statistical in the slightest! The following is a summary of the points made in an article by Mr James Martin, the Jesuit editor-at-large of *America* magazine and one of the Vatican's consultants. He is answering the question as to why we as Christians should pray:

- 1) God wants to be in a relationship with us.
- 2) We want to be in a relationship with God.
- 3) We have to! It's as natural as breathing.
- 4) We need to! Life is not problem-free.
- 5) Prayer helps us to keep our spiritual balance.
- 6) It is a way to unburden ourselves and to feel less alone.
- 7) Prayer helps us praise God.
- 8) Solidarity, connecting to our brothers and sisters who also pray.
- 9) To be transformed by God's grace.

SOURCE: Article "Nine reasons to pray" in *The Tablet*, 6th February 2021, Pages 4 and 5

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.

Established 2009. Subscriptions free via website www.brierleyconsultancy.com. Published by Brierley Consultancy, The Old Post Office, 1, Thorpe Avenue, Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 4PW, United Kingdom. Email: peter@brierleyres.com.

CO-HABITING COUPLES

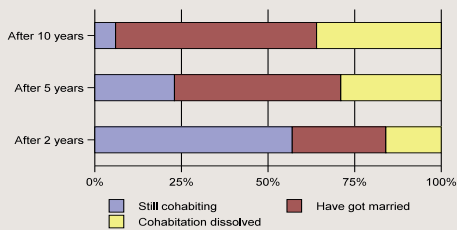
The number of cohabiting couples has been and is increasing. At the turn of the century almost a tenth of the UK population, 10%, were living in an opposite-sex cohabiting household, some 5.7 million people, including children. By 2010 that had increased by 2 million to 7.7 million, 12% of the population, and in 2019 it was almost 10 million people, 17% of the population. The actual number of households in 2019 was about 4 million, so an average of 2.5 people in each.

After marriage, cohabiting is the most popular household type, respectively 53% and 15% in 2019. Over the last five years these numbers have been augmented by civil partnerships, same-sex marriages and cohabiting couples, but the combined total number of people in these situations in 2019 was just over 300,000 people and too few to be included in this article.

In 2020 and 2021, Covid restrictions have caused marriages to be postponed and cohabitation may possibly have consequently increased. Official figures from the Office for National Statistics for the present Covid situation are not yet available. However, church couples will have been subject to the same pressures and restrictions as others. The percentage of church couples cohabiting was estimated in 2016 as 2%, based in part on a large church survey in 2012. That percentage will have increased since then, and is perhaps 3% now. Will it have increased more because of lockdown?

A 2015 Barna survey of Americans found a large majority, 84%, approving of cohabitation because it was good to see if "there was compatibility," although only half that percentage, 41%, of Christians agreed. As far as is known no equivalent study has been undertaken in the UK among churchgoers, but the out-turn of what happens to British people cohabiting has been surveyed, and is shown in the graph. By the time the couple have been together for five years, almost half have got married, and almost a third have gone separate ways. Very few survive cohabiting for ten years.

Outcomes of cohabitation in the UK over the first 10 years



The turning point seems to be with the birth of a child. 70% of married people in 1992 had a child of 16 (the age when the Office for National Statistics measured it), and 75% in 2007, while for cohabiting couples these percentages were 36% and 7% respectively. It would seem that the joys and pressures of family life are best handled within the security of a married relationship – the Biblical pattern! Perhaps when the difficulties of lockdown have eased, there will be a flurry of marriages in church as well as other venues.

SOURCES: ONS website; article "Cohabitation in the 21st Century" in Engage, Jubilee Centre, Issue 28, Spring 2010, Page 2; UK Church Statistics No 4, 2021 Edition, Table 14.20.

These may be helpful - Books/papers received

Finding the Evangelical Way in Scotland: 1560-2020, Rev Ian Bunting, February 2021, available from ianbunting@waitrose.com.

Disciple Scotland! A manifesto for investigating discipling Scotland through disciple-making movements, 24:14 movement, <http://2414now.net>.

Sexual Attitudes in Australia

Researchers in Australia are fortunate in that as well as having a Population Census every 5 years they also have a regular Survey of Social Attitudes (SSA) which, like our British Social Attitudes Survey, asks similar questions every few years. The Australian surveys also ask about a person's religion and allows them to indicate in much greater depth than in the UK which denominations they belong to. This helps develop a greater understanding of social mores and values.

Australian respondents' answers to questions on social attitudes, 2018

Denomination	Sex outside marriage always wrong %	Same sex relations always wrong %	Abortion if on low income always wrong %
Column 1	2	3	4
R Catholic	75	36	25
Anglican	84	44	8
Protestant	81	75	55
Uniting Church	76	28	7
Pentecostal	100	86	59
Orthodox	96	33	22
Other Christian	98	70	71
Other religions	61	28	20
No Religion	54	12	6
Overall 2018	65	26	15
Overall 2009	68	37	23

The Australian SSA data has been analysed by Stephen Reid, one of the researchers of the Australian Christian Research Association, who looked at attitudes to sexual relations in the SSA series. The Table gives in Column 2 the percentage

of respondents who said that "sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse" was always wrong. Column 3 shows the percentage saying it is always wrong for two adults of the same sex to have sexual relations; Column 4 that it is always wrong for a family to have an abortion even if on a very low income and unable to afford more children.

Where does "growth" come into all this? The cells coloured in green highlight the 3 largest percentages in each column. As in the British Church, in Australia (from their Census records) it is the Pentecostal and Other Christian churches which have grown (over period 2006 to 2016), although the Orthodox have not (grew 2006 to 2011 but not 2011 to 2016), over a period when the church as a whole has declined. This would suggest that a "higher" view of the authority of Scripture, in this case on sexual issues, may have some relation to growing churches.

SOURCES: Article in *Pointers*, magazine of Christian Research Association, Vol 30 No 4, December 2020, Page 1; UK Church Statistics No 4 2021 Edition, Table 15.11.

Humour

Signs by the road seen by drivers:

"Homemade sausages – 80 yards left." [Bruce, West Sussex]

"Heavy plant crossing" – I imagine a Trifid ambling across the road [Barry, Hampshire]

"Slow work in progress" [Rodney in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa]

Two adjacent notices: "Public toilets" and "24 hours maximum stay" [Lawrence outside Ely Cathedral]

"Potatoes turn left," in south Guildford [Dolly, Berkshire]

SOURCE: *Daily Telegraph* letters 3rd and 5th June, 2015.

Social Justice

Young people today are often very concerned about social and political justice. The "Gen Z" generation (= those born in the 21st century) are especially worried about climate justice as they would term it, and the fact that politicians and older people are not taking the problems seriously enough. They are conscious that over the next 50 to 80 years of their lives, the problems arising from not taking action now will rebound on them in years to come, and may then be unsolvable.

A recent survey in the summer of 2020, by Youthscape for Tearfund, of 630 young British Christians online and a further 23 participating in focus groups highlighted key issues they were concerned with – and the top 3 were all over 90%:

- 96% about discrimination, such as racism, sexism and being homophobic
- 94% about poverty, in the UK or abroad
- 92% about climate change.

They see justice as an important part of their faith, and 84% regard action on climate change as part of basic justice. Two-thirds, 66%, said they had not heard a sermon on climate change, and half, 51%, said no church leader had spoken to them about it. Only 9% felt their church was doing enough on this topic.

So what should be done? Young people would like action – now! What type of action? "Looking after our planet" sounds platitudinous, but they would link that with looking after our neighbours (wherever they happen to live), and living, and praying, to make a practical difference. School strikes were/are one way of highlighting the importance of the issue, but few specific examples of what to do emerged from the survey apart from divesting from fossil fuels, reducing global emissions, but also helping to eliminate poverty. "Help the rich to realise

they can live with less," they said.

They would argue that racial justice is part of the concern to help the impoverished, because climate change impacts coloured people more than white, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the impact is not just racial but gender-linked and economic as well.

On a personal basis, young people felt we should recycle more things (97%), use less plastic (89%), pray about change (85%), eat less meat (73%) and sign petitions or go on a march (46%) for instance. Two-fifths, 40%, said most of their friends would agree with them. They recognise that influencing their family is important (56%) as well as changing the way they travel. In general they didn't see the church encouraging them in this direction, but rather dragging its feet. It was the injustice element that concerned them most (86%).

Many felt their faith supported them in their concerns, because they felt people should care for God's creation. Three-fifths, 58%, considered the church was not doing enough, and recommended people should read more books or watch documentaries about it. Their church should become an Eco Church!

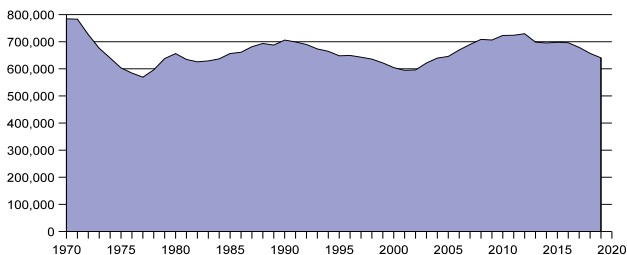
Another survey by the American Barna organisation, which interviewed 1,500 teenagers, looked at how young people were prepared to criticise themselves as well as society in general – the amount of time Gen Z folk spend personally on the screen. Three-fifths, 60%, feel it is far too much, and when they do so, half, 53%, feel bad about it. They also feel that technology makes them waste their time (54%), liable to procrastinate (53%), and more distracted (50%) so that they are less productive (36%) and actually shorten their attention space (30%). However, screens are here to stay, so "the emerging generation needs screen-literate leaders to offer wisdom for their digital lives."

SOURCES: *Burning Down the House*, Youthscape Centre for Research and Tearfund, published 2021; *The Tech-Wise Challenge*, Barna, 10th February, 2021.

BIBLICAL BABY NAMES

The number of births in England and Wales has been going up and down over the last 50 years as the graph makes clear. In this period, the high point was in 1970 with 780,000 births, against the lowest point just 7 years later in 1977 with 570,000, a drop of -27%. The average of these two points is 680,000 which perhaps can be taken as the average number of births per year in these years.

Births in England and Wales, 1970 to 2019



The average person, however, probably finds the names new parents give their babies each year more interesting than the number born each year! The top names of boys and girls have been published for many years, although not every year until 1996. They can be readily seen in the web lists compiled by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), who list all the first names given to babies. If in a typical year 680,000 babies are born, then about 350,000 will be boys and 330,000 girls, as more boys are always born than girls. (Men's mortality is greater than women's, and they become about equal in number nationally when they reach ages 30 or 35).

The ONS lists up to 5,000 different names each, for both boys and girls, with the top name given perhaps to about 5,000 or 6,000 children, boys or girls, each year. The tenth name in the list may, however, only be given to perhaps, say, 3,000 or even fewer. In 2007, for example, the top 10 names were spread across 58,000 boys and 43,000 girls, or 15% of the babies born that year. In 2019, the top ten names were spread across 39,000 boys and 28,000 girls, or 10% of the babies born, simply showing that many more different names are now being given to newly born children.

In general the names in the top ten for both sexes change from year to year quite slowly. Every so often a new one comes in, stays for a year or two, and then drops out. So Callum suddenly came into 8th position in the boys' list in 1998 (not being in the top 10 in 1997), moved to 9th in 1999, to 10th in 2000, and hasn't been in the top 10 since.

How many of these names are Biblical? In the 10 year period 1996 to 2005, of the 100 boys' names in the top 10 each year, 76 were Biblical, though non-Biblical Jack was the very top name in each year. The favourites occurring every single year in that decade were Daniel, Thomas, James, Joshua and Joseph. Others appearing in some years were Samuel (7), Matthew (6) and Benjamin (3).

In the following 10 years, 2006 to 2015, of the 100 top boys' names in the top 10 each year, only 34 were Biblical, Oliver replacing Jack as the top favourite, though not every year. In these years only Thomas was mentioned each year, with James in 9, Joshua 6, Daniel 4, Jacob 3 and Samuel and Noah once each. In 2019 the only Biblical boys' name in the top 10 was Noah.

How many of the girls' name were Biblical? Far fewer. Between 1996 and 2005, just 22 of the 100, and between 2006 and 2015 only 5 – Chloe each time. In the first period Chloe was top in 6 years, and was in the other 4 years also. Hannah came 8 times and Rebecca 4 times. Grace has been in the top 10 several times, but while a Biblical word, it is not a Biblical name. Likewise Ruby. Why are there so few Biblical girls' names in use? Probably because there are fewer women mentioned (or at least named) in the Bible!

The top 5 names in the latest publication of boys' and girls' names in England and Wales are shown in the Table, with Biblical names highlighted in green:

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Boys 1st	Oliver	Oliver	Oliver	Oliver	Oliver
2nd	Jack	Harry	Harry	George	George
3rd	Harry	George	George	Harry	Noah
4th	George	Jack	Noah	Noah	Arthur
5th	Jacob	Jacob	Jack	Jack	Harry
Girls 1st	Amelia	Olivia	Olivia	Olivia	Olivia
2nd	Olivia	Amelia	Amelia	Amelia	Amelia
3rd	Emily	Emily	Isla	Ava	Isla
4th	Isla	Isla	Ava	Isla	Ava
5th	Ava	Ava	Emily	Emily	Mia

Ten of these names are used by royalty (shown in pink), compared with 5 Biblical, twice as many boys' names with royal associations rather than Biblical. Could the lessening number of Biblical names follow the dropping numbers attending church?

SOURCE: Office for National Statistics website on Boys' and Girls' Names, 2019 and earlier years accessed February 2021.

English Conversion Surveys

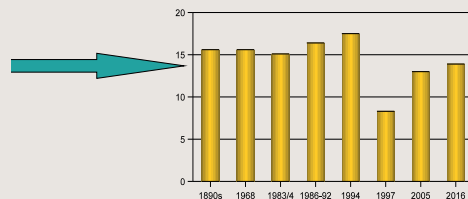
A very early study by a Harvard Quaker teacher Edwin Starbuck in the late 1800s found the average age of conversion 15.6 years. One of the earliest surveys into the age at which people in England were converted was in 1966 in the aftermath of the Billy Graham Crusades that year when the Evangelical Alliance asked over 4,000 people when they became Christians. Three-quarters, 76%, said they were converted under the age of 20, which included 17% under the age of 12. This varied between 73% for men and 78% for women.

Similar surveys were undertaken in the subsequent years. In two surveys of the Luis Palau Missions to London in 1983 and 1984, they found 48% of those accepting Christ under the age of 19, had done so under the age of 14. Surveys of English people attending mission conferences in the 1980s and early 1990s found that 91% had been converted between 6 and 25, with 50% by the age of 15.

A large survey by Churches Together in England in 1994 found 26% saying they first knew they were Christians before the age of 10, and a further 25% between the ages of 11 and 15. A survey by Agapé in 1997 of 700 churching young people found that 43% had made a personal commitment before they were 11, and a further 43% between the ages of 11 and 14. A survey by Josh McDowell in 2005 of 1,400 English young people found that of the 28% of Christians who had made a commitment, four-fifths, 82%, had done so before the age of 14.

Almost the same percentage as the earliest survey in England in 1966, 73%, of 2,200 responding evangelical leaders attending the Lausanne III Congress in Cape Town, 2010, were also converted under the age of 20. A survey by Prof David Voas published in 2012 found a quarter, 23%, of English churchgoers started attending church although their parents did not. The chart shows the approximate age of conversion from these various studies; the average, shown by the arrow, is 14.4 years.

Average Age of Conversion from Sundry Surveys



Some surveys in the last 10 years include:

- 1) A Barna survey of English Christians in 2015 found two-fifths, 42%, of Christians had grown up in a Christian home, but three-quarters, 73%, of non-Christians said the same!
- 2) An American survey in 2016 found 1% knew they were Christians before they were 4, 63% between 4 and 14, 34% between 15 and 29 and 2% when 30 or over.
- 3) A ComRes survey in England of 2017 found 92% had become Christians before the age of 11, mostly because brought up in a Christian family.

Is it time for another large survey?

SOURCES: Edwin Starbuck in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902; *Background to the Task*, Evangelical Alliance, 1968; *Mission to London* 1983 and 1984, MARC Europe; *Finding Faith in 1994*, Lent '94 Research Project Technical Summary; *Right from Wrong*, Agapé, 1997; *Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders*, Pew Research Centre, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, June 2011; article by D Voas and I Storm in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 53, No 4, Jan 2012; *Perceptions of Jesus in England*, Executive Report, Barna, 2015; National Association of Evangelicals, USA, 2016.