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# FUTURE FIRST



## FACTS FOR FORWARD PLANNING

## SNIPPETS

1) Only 0.4% of books sold in the UK in 2022 had a print run of at least 5,000 copies, the number to break even on costs.

2) 41% of Americans said religion was very important in their lives compared with 37% in Greece, 36% in Israel, and 21% in each of the UK, Germany and Spain. It was 62% in the US in 1998!

3) Nearly 5,000,000 single-use vapes are thrown away each week across the world. Between them, these contain enough copper and lithium to make batteries for 5,000 electric cars annually.

4) A reader points out that there are now more Presbyterians in Taiwan than in Scotland, where the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland is seen as the "mother church."

5) There were 110 centenarians in the UK in 1921, and, 100 years later, 13,920 in 2021, 0.0002% and 0.02% of the respective populations.

6) A Girlguiding survey found 52% of young girls said their top priority when they were 30 was "own my own house", while 48% said, "to have a partner or be married."

7) LICC claim that 380,000 Christians are engaged with its vision "to see a world transformed for the glory of God through the impact of whole-life disciples of Jesus." It aims for a million by 2027.

**SOURCES:** 1) Article in *The Economist*, 2nd September, 2023, Page 71, according to Nielsen Book data; 2) Pew survey reported by Rebecca Paveley in the *Church Times*, 11th August, 2023, Page 4, *Answers*, July-Sept 2023, Page 30; 3) Statement in the *Daily Mail*, reproduced in *The Week*, 16th September, 2023, Page 21; 4) Personal email; 5) Office for National Statistics released 12th September, 2023; 6) Survey of 2,614 young girls, reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, 13th September, 2023, Page 3; 7) London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) *Impact Report 2022-2023*.

## Keeping the Gospel Flame Alight: Recent Brethren Experience in Britain and Ireland

By Dr Neil Summerton CB

**Christianity of all shades is characterized by renewal movements. They go back at least to the Montanist movement of the late second century. They have been particularly prominent in evangelicalism since that emerged from the Pietist and Moravian renewal movements in Germany after 1650.**

Evangelical renewal movements are concerned to keep the flame of dynamic New Testament evangelism and spirituality alight. The Brethren was one such movement which emerged (with others) from the early 19th century evangelical revivals in Britain and Ireland. The Christian or Open Brethren in particular were essentially a revivalist movement, growing dynamically as a result of the global evangelical revival of 1859–63 and the revivalist campaigns which followed. They have remained so and, today, the Open wing of the movement is present in 160 or more countries of the world through 40,500 or more self-governing congregations. This article looks at one particular effort to maintain spiritual life among the Open Brethren since 1945.

By 1945, the Open Brethren were somewhat covertly divided between a large and still vibrant conservative group which was wary of trends on the more open side, and that year established a magazine (*Precious Seed*) specifically to counter the tendencies reflected in *The Harvester* and *The Witness*.

Among the recognized leaders of the open side were scholars (Bruce, Wiseman, W J Martin), academic doctors (Rendle Short, Bill Capper), prominent businessmen (Sir John Laing, J J Stordy), and lawyers (George Goodman, Montague Goodman, Derek Warren). They were aware that some adaptation of the Open Brethren to changed cultural conditions was needed, even though 1960 was a new high-water mark for the Brethren in the UK (when the list of churches enumerated c 1,760).

One result of these concerns was the formation in 1963 of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship by a group of men mainly located in southern England and mainly in their thirties.<sup>1</sup> Its inspiration was a body with a similar name and purpose which was formed in 1960 in New Zealand. A similar body was soon formed in Australia, with separate branches in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The CBRF UK acquired nearly 1,000 subscribers in its first year.

In the first 25 years of its existence, it was a relatively low-key activity, the work entirely of volunteers. Apart from yearly seminars in the south-east, its main activity was publication, starting with a cyclo-styled, stapled bi-monthly *Journal*. But this tempo could not be maintained by

voluntary resources, and, by the 1980s, the flow was reduced to a yearly review.

These publications tended to focus on topics which leaders in Open Brethren churches were wrestling with. Some must have appeared quaint to outsiders, like those on the role of women in the church. There was a good deal of focus on encouraging church leadership, and on how paid leadership could be introduced without destroying the "lay" leadership on which Open Brethren churches had largely depended for five generations without disaster ensuing.<sup>2</sup> There were notable occasional papers, including Stephen Short's *The Ministry of the Word* (1965), Roy Coad's *Prophetic Developments* (1966), Timothy Stunt's *Early Brethren and the Society of Friends* (1970), and F F Bruce's *Women in the Church – a Biblical Survey* (1982).<sup>3</sup>

Also noteworthy for readers of *Future First* is that CBRF initiated in 1966 a statistical survey of Brethren churches which was repeated at ten-year intervals up to 1999. This was an objective effort to study how these churches were evolving, and certainly spotted early the decline in Brethren numbers since 1960.<sup>4</sup>

From the mid-1980s, CBRF morphed into Partnership,<sup>5</sup> with a clearer mission to strengthen and encourage independent local churches. As the 1990s wore on, it was able to do more because it had at least three unpaid volunteers, working virtually full-time. Consultations of key people were organized in 1981 and 1991 to make recommendations for encouraging the Brethren. The 1991 consultation recommended that Partnership open its membership to churches, not just individuals, and begin to encourage local networking between churches. It held a series of conferences in the 2000s to encourage churches generally and conferences for full-time workers and other key leaders. It proposed to sister bodies joint organization of what are now the *Living the Passion* conferences. It began to offer pastoral support and consultancy to individual churches, and to help churches find full-time workers. When *The Harvester/Aware*<sup>6</sup> magazine failed in the mid-1990s, Partnership stepped in to produce a periodical, *Partnership Perspectives*, to fill the gap with good-quality journalism based in serious thought. Books were also published, such as *Church Leaders' Handbook* (2002) and *Serving God's People: Re-thinking Christian Ministry Today* (2007), together a compendium for leaders of independent evangelical churches.

Partnership also took close interest in the Brethren movement internationally. In the 1980s, it helped organize conferences of key Brethren leaders in Europe, and it was involved in the development of the International Brethren Conferences on Mission from 1990 onwards.<sup>7</sup> To fill the

knowledge gap between countries in the Brethren, Harold Rowdon began the process of inviting standardised country information in the 1990s, and this work morphed into a publication, *Brethren Movement Worldwide: Key Information* from 2007 onwards. The latest edition<sup>8</sup> includes entries for 120 countries and a statistical overview for which Peter Brierley contributed the numerical analysis and summary tables. The handbook also includes historical information country by country, and contact information for key activities. The whole underlines the character and contribution of a still living movement for the kingdom of God.

The underlying purpose of CBRF/Partnership was to help the Brethren movement to remain vibrantly contributing to that kingdom. The question therefore arises, "Why was it thought necessary to bring the ministry to a close at the end of 2022?"

First, the decline of the movement in the UK is part of the story: the 1,760 congregations of 1959 are now only 770.<sup>9</sup> There was a dearth of successors to those who had carried the burden of Partnership for many years. Secondly, however, others did not consider that Partnership itself was making the generational shifts in renewal that were needed. It remained committed to the rigorous, thoughtful approach implicit in the foundation of the CBRF. It was easy to characterize this as merely academic. It was also easy to interpret CBRF as the educated instructing the uneducated. Many in the movement continue to be suspicious of intellectuals and think that training and study are dangerous to faith. Even some non-conservatives thought CBRF was arrogant, even if CBRF's first journal had recognized that those associating in CBRF needed to do their work with due "humility . . . conscious of their inadequacy."<sup>10</sup>

Of course, rigorous analysis can be "edgy" in its conclusions and they can be unexpected and challenge comfortable conventional thinking. But that is not a reason for giving up careful thought. And there are topics in every generation which it is right to reconsider, sometimes radically, in the light of Scripture with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Activism is vitally necessary if the gospel is to be spread and good works are to be accomplished. But it does need to be accompanied by rigorous reflection rooted in what God is trying to say through Scripture. What is certain is that the movement gave CBRF a bad name at the very beginning, and neither it nor Partnership could shake it off. There were many congregations which longed for growth, for renewal, from the Lord and which seemed to be seeking to adapt in sensible ways, but which somehow could not get to the waters when they were stirred. Perhaps that was true too of Partnership.

**NOTES:** 1) For more information on the formation of the CBRF in the UK, and the members of its first committee, see N W Summerton, *Charisma and Organization: Unresolved Tensions in the Brethren* (Glasgow: BAHN, 2021), 57–66.

2) These included the first edition of the writer's *A Noble Task: Eldership and Ministry in the Local Church* (1987).

3) Many CBRF articles have been digitized by Rob Bradshaw—see [biblicalstudies.org](http://biblicalstudies.org) and [theologicalstudies.org](http://theologicalstudies.org). The extensive output of the three Australian branches of CBRF has also been digitized.

4) See Graham D Brown, "How can we improve our evangelism? Deductions from a survey of Assemblies" in *Journal of the CBRF* No 21, Pages 44–57 (reporting on the 1966 survey); Graham Brown and Brian Mills, *"The Brethren" Today: A factual survey* (Exeter/Paternoster/CBRF, 1980); Peter Brierley, Graham, Brown et al., *The Christian Brethren as the Nineties began* (Carlisle: Paternoster/MARC Europe/Partnership, 1993); and Graham Brown, *Whatever Happened to the Brethren?: a survey of local churches in 1998–1999*, 2003.

5) CBRF remained the legal charitable vehicle for Partnership until 1994, when it adopted and changed the name of a then dormant company, Harvester (UK) Ltd, which had been set up to try to revive the fortunes of *The Harvester/Aware* magazine.

6) *Aware* was a title first used by CBRF in the mid-1980s for an information letter to churches.

7) The IBCM8 conference in June 2023 brought together 1,300 participants from 120 countries.

8) N W Summerton (ed.), *The Brethren Movement Worldwide: Key information*, (6th edition, Darvel, Scotland: OPA & IBCM Network, 2023) pages viii–xxviii. See <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ycin/skq/>

9) This is not the Brethren experience in many other countries — take India where getting on for 400,000 adults and children gather in 4,250 congregations, and where there are 6,500 potential such congregations, or the several African countries where in each there are more than 1,000 assemblies and in one case more than 2,000.

10) *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal*, 1 (May 1963), [3].

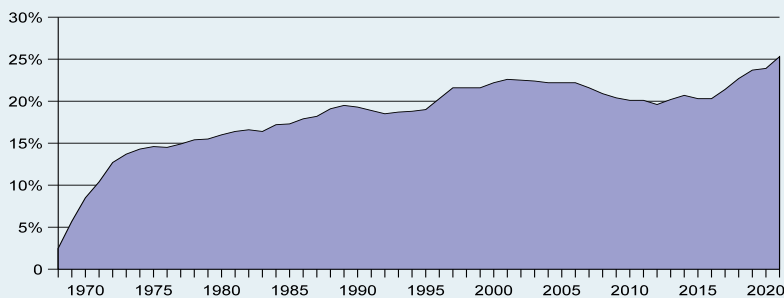
## Losing our Children

**Most churches are finding it difficult to retain their numbers of attending children, and to attract new ones. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are of concern but help to explain the smaller numbers.**

The ONS defines the number of "conceptions" by women as the total of the number of births (babies born) [B] and abortions (babies lost) [A]. There are of course those who sadly have a still birth which are also counted separately but are not included in the calculation of the abortion rate, which is defined as [A] divided by [A + B] expressed as a percentage.

The chart shows the UK figures. After abortions were legalised in 1968 the rate rose sharply in the first seven years to 15% (one conception in seven), then a much slower increase to almost 20% in 1990, then it dropped for several years but rose again to 22–23% before falling again in the last decade but again rising sharply since 2016 to an estimated 25% in 2021, the latest year for which data is available.

Percentage of children aborted in UK, 1968 to 2021



That means we are now losing one baby in every four conceived to an abortion. So our Primary Schools have only three-quarters of the children they might have had, and, of course, the drop works itself all the way up into adulthood, and eventually will impact the number of pensioners. So it is not just churches that have fewer potential members, but the whole of society.

It is the English and Welsh (E & W) figures which are driving the increase. In the year 2000, the E & W rate was 22.5% against Scotland's 18.8%. By 2020 these percentages were respectively 25.5% and 15.4% with N Ireland (legally told it must freely allow abortions in 2022) just 0.3%.

Since 1968, there have been a total of very nearly 9 million abortions in the UK, against very nearly 40 million births, an abortion rate of 18.4%. Of these 9 million, 8.4 million are from England and Wales so instead of our 2021 Population Census recording very nearly 60 million people in the country, it would have been 68 million! Of these 8.4 million 2.3 million would now be under 12 years of age – Primary age or pre-Primary (doubling our class sizes). No wonder our churches have fewer children!

But though there may be fewer children in the general population, there is still a generation of children and teenagers who are largely growing up outside the church and, more importantly, ignorant of our Lord Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

**SOURCES:** Office for National Statistics, Legal abortions, residents and non-residents, Scotland, 1991 to 2021; Public Health, Scotland, Termination of Pregnancy Submissions Scotland, 2013 to 2022; Stormont's Dept of Health 2022.

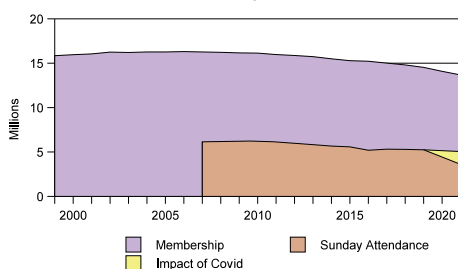
## Southern Baptists

The American Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is the largest denomination in the United States with 16 million members. But ever since conservatives took the leadership in 1979, women have not been accepted as ministers. The church grew steadily in the last half of the 20th century, but has now begun to decline. In 2012 it gained 3 people for every one it lost; by 2022 it was losing 5 people for every two it gained.

It is a substantial monolith, however. Since the turn of the century it has averaged some 45,000 congregations, about the total number of churches in the UK, with an average membership of 350, which would put them in the "larger church" category in the UK, but not in the US (where it needs to be over 2,000).

As a Baptist church they have gained through some 340,000 baptisms every year with another 310,000 joining them for other reasons. Sunday morning worship sees an average of 5.2 million people attending, about 1.7% of the American population (and about the same percentage as Anglicans in England). Their Sunday School numbers, however, are very different from the UK – an average of 70 young people in every church, about three-fifths, 62%, of adult numbers, or two-fifths, 39%, of all those attending, double the percentage of young people attending in the UK (18%).

SBC Membership 1999-2021



The membership decline is matched by an attendance decline also; the graph shows both are going down. Attendance has declined at an average annual rate between 2007 and 2019 at -1.2% per annum; membership has declined at -0.9%. Over the last two years on the graph, 2020 and 2021 (the latest year for data) the steep drop is probably because of Covid restrictions and the yellow fragment illustrates what it might actually have been had there been no Covid – but numbers still reducing nonetheless. Figures of Sunday attendance are not available before 2007. In 2007, attendance was two-fifths, 38%, of membership; in 2019 (so discounting the Covid years) it was 36%.

The number joining SBC churches apart from baptism were greater than the baptisms in 2002 – 460,000 joining to 410,000 baptisms. As everywhere, people join other churches for many reasons – moving house, employment, wanting to change church as well as conversions. But by 2019 (omitting the Covid years) for 150,000 baptisms, only 120,000 joined for other reasons. Conversions and change in the US are just as hard as in the UK – and, as in the UK, numbers of both conversions and baptisms are declining.

How far the SBC decline is due to their stand on male-only ministerial leadership is not obvious from the figures they regularly collect each year. However, some of the largest SBC churches, like Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, which attracts a Sunday congregation of 30,000, have disagreed with the SBC on this issue and ordained women as ministers (in 2021) when there was an overwhelming vote in favour (89%) among the 11,000 of their members who voted.

**SOURCE:** Article in the *Economist*, 10th June, 2023, Page 36; Southern Baptist Convention email; website: <http://sbhla.org/digital-resources/sbc-annuals> [then go for annual report in year required.; search "statistics" until you get the relevant page].

## Changing Culture

The National Centre for Social Research issued its 40th British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey on 21st September 2023 essentially trying to ascertain how British culture has changed since 1983, if at all. The survey reports the public as saying it has moved towards the left, becoming more liberal in the process. While religion has also followed a similar trend the term "liberal" here is social, not theological.

Some attitudes are in the majority, but are not universal. One spokesperson for the study said this was seen in three broad areas: (a) education and religiosity; (b) the way in which wider society deals with specific moral lapses; and (c) changes in individual behaviour, that is, the direct experience of adverse social behaviour.

The researchers looked at the answers to various questions on social and moral issues to support this conclusion: area (b). Taking agreement with sex before marriage as an example, in 1983 41% of respondents agreed with the statement, "Pre-marital sex is not wrong at all," where as in 2023 twice as many, 79% did. Similarly, "same-sex is not wrong at all" has changed from 19% agreeing in 1983 to 67% in 2023, more than three times as many.

The sex issue was continued in other questions. "It's OK to live together even though you are not married" was agreed by 64% in 1994 (not every survey question goes back to 1983) and by 81% in 2022. A fifth, 19%, disagreed in 1994, but only 8% in 2022. "Are people prejudiced against those who are transgender?" was another question. "Yes, very prejudiced," said 3% in 2016 and "a little prejudiced," said 15% (with 82% not prejudiced). In 2022 the very prejudiced were 9%, little prejudiced 27%, and the unprejudiced 64%.

Having children was another issue. "People wanting children should marry first." In the 1920s (judging by people's current age), 95% agreed with this, in the 1930s 90%, but in the 1970s 45% and the 1980s 48%, with the growth of disagreement largely expanding between 1995 and 2015 to just 20% in 2023 saying, "Marry first." These findings therefore span different generations, but it is not certain such reactions will continue into the future.

Other questions related more to area (c) given above. Class identity was investigated, and found the concept had waned, but not its presence. The change had been driven by women working full-time, fewer restrictions on those who were coloured, and by women needing child care when their family was young.

In 1983, 32% said they were working class and 20% middle class, but in 2023 these percentages were 46% and 29% respectively, both increasing by roughly 50%. Does your class affect your opportunity in life? In 2021, 28% said "greatly," 49% "a lot" and 23% "not much." And in 2022, 52% said it was fairly difficult to change class and half, 49%, said they were aware of social class differences.

How was "working class" defined? Three-fifths, 62%, by the year you finished your education, 62% if your job was semi-routine, and 56% if you lived in the North (and only 40% if you were in London). Where you were born was critical, especially if you were an immigrant. Nevertheless respondents felt that the percentage of people actually serving in a working class job now was "fairly small."

The BSA researchers concluded that: "Attitudes towards many social and moral issues have undergone a profound, long-term, secular change, such that Britain now looks and feels like a different country from 40 years ago. In contrast, however, attitudes towards the economic role of the state have swung to and fro, creating a cyclical pattern that has left the shape of public opinion (in this regard) looking much the same now as in the 1980s." Church leaders have to adjust to these changes themselves, see their implications for the proclamation work they undertake, and help sensitively those of their colleagues caught up in them.

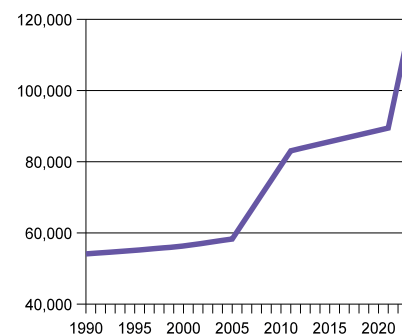
**SOURCE:** British Social Attitudes Survey released 21st September 2023, and public zoomed event supporting its release.

## CHINESE CHURCHGOING

An October report from the Bible Society gives exciting news about Chinese churchgoing in the UK. It has increased very rapidly over the last two years, it said, mostly because of the 100,000 Hong Kong immigrant arrivals through the British National Overseas (BNO) programme. This scheme is expected to allow up to 150,000 or 200,000 Hong Kong-ers into the UK in total, so the number of Chinese churchgoers could grow further. A quarter, 23%, of the Chinese in the UK affirm they are Christian.

From an estimated total of 83,000 Chinese churchgoers in 2011, their total attendance grew to 89,475 by 2021 (+0.7% average annual growth) and then jumped to 115,290 by 2023 (+13.5%), with at least 27 new congregations started in that period, mostly speaking Cantonese. Much of the growth has come from British-born Chinese. According to *The Times* newspaper, the Manchester Chinese Church, for example, has grown from 200 people to 2,000 in this latter period because of immigrants and three new buildings have been opened to accommodate the members. The graph charts this growth, the large increase between 2005 and 2010 suggesting that the English Church Census of 2005 missed a number of Chinese congregations and should be higher.

Chinese Church attendance in England, 1990 to 2023



The report says that three-quarters, 75%, of Chinese Christians worship in Chinese churches, although Hong Kong BNO arrivals are less likely to do so. Most Chinese Christians hold a high view of the Bible, though the half (50%) who use paper Bibles are more confident about talking about it; those under the age of 30 have weaker Bible engagement. Digital formats have tended to replace paper Bibles.

Chinese church leaders work extremely hard, long hours (86% over 40 hours a week) and are under pressure; four-fifths, 78%, have faced health problems, and two-fifths, 39%, financial problems. A quarter, 26%, said they had been "burnt out" at some stage.

Chinese Christians value good, grounded, down-to-earth Bible teaching and close church relationships in which many are enthusiastically involved. Their spiritual life is inherently linked to their church involvement, often through weekly fellowship or Bible study meetings (71%). Half, 52%, have a daily quiet time.

Non-Christian Chinese people are often open to an invitation to attend church. Half, 46%, said they were interested in exploring Christian perspectives on secular matters.

**SOURCES:** *Chinese Christianity in Britain*, a booklet of 10 vignettes, by Dr Yinxuan Huang, Bible Society, 2023; Religion Media Centre item, 23rd October 2023; *UK Church Statistics* No 4, 2021 Edition, Table 13.22.1 for pre-2005 figures.

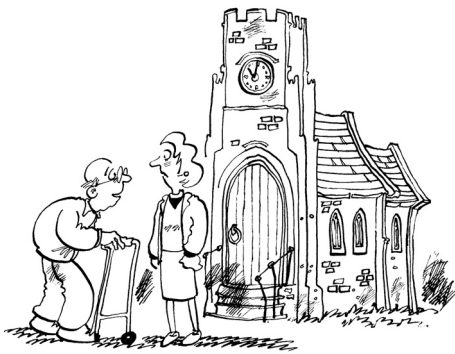
# Readers Right/Write

"Note about megachurches in America: technically, there ARE Catholic parishes that would meet the definition of a megachurch (e.g. more than 2,000 in an average Sunday Mass)--3,000 of them, as Wikipedia notes--but they are not called megachurches because that's a specifically Protestant term. So it's not that no Catholic church/parish rises to that level. In fact, if the stat is true, there are nearly twice as many Catholic "megaparishes" as Protestant "megachurches."

**SOURCE:** Personal email; Justin Long with permission; <http://www.justinlong.org/musings>

## This may be helpful Books/papers received

*Messiah in the Mishkan*, the latest book from Dr Chris Woodall, describing "how the Old Testament Tabernacle furnishings provide not only a shadow of the substance that is to be found in Christ, but also the unsearchable riches beyond." Price £15, available from [doctorwoodall@gmail.com](mailto:doctorwoodall@gmail.com).



...I'm so old I remember coming to this church before it was built!

### Correction

The October 2023 edition of FutureFirst included an item on Page 4 which gave the US membership of the Church of Jesus Christ (Mormons) as 4.1 million in 2022. That figure was unintentionally incorrect – it should have been 6.8 million, a significant growth from the 5.4 million in 2007, and thus contributing to the Church's global growth.

### A Christmas Blessing

May the trust of Mary and Joseph,  
The joy of the angels,  
The wonder of the shepherds,  
The worship of the wisemen  
And the peace of Christ  
be yours, this Christmas and always.

**SOURCE:** Anon.

# SNOWFLAKES

**British Universities.** The Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) report that there are a total of 149 Christian Unions among the universities and colleges in Great Britain in 2023: 30 in London, 23 in the Midlands, 18 in the North East, 17 in Scotland, 15 in the South East, 13 in the North West, another 13 in East Anglia/Central, and 10 each in the South West and Wales. There are 166 officially recognised universities and colleges in the UK, of which 3 universities and six colleges are in N Ireland, which leaves 157 in Britain, of which 95% have a Christian Union.

**SOURCE:** UCCF Annual Report 2022/23 for CUs, and the web for total numbers, accessed Sept 2023.

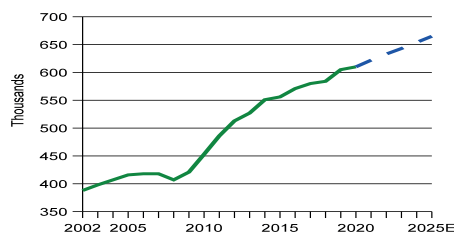
**Bishops in House of Lords.** A survey of 1,185 Church of England priests which included a question on the number of Bishops in the House of Lords found:

- 45% wanted to keep all 26 seats but "opened up to other denominations and faiths"
- 37% would like them kept for Church of England Bishops
- 9% thought there should be fewer than 26, and 9% didn't reply.

**SOURCE:** Times survey using YouGov random selection of 5,000 names from Crockford's, reported in the *Church Times* 8th September, 2023, Page 5.

**Oldest people.** The number of older people in the UK who are 90 or over has increased by over 50% since 2002, as the graph shows, mostly over the last 10 years, but especially between 2010 and 2015. They were 0.65% of the population in 2002, but were 0.90% in 2020. This is likely to be true of church people also. The number of centenarians has doubled from 7,620 in 2002 to 15,120 in 2020.

UK population 90 or over, thousands



**SOURCE:** Population estimates of the very old, UK, Office for National Statistics, September 18th, 2023; projection editor.

**Fewer heterosexuals.** The results of the 2022 sexual identity show that the proportion of heterosexual people in the UK continues to fall. In 2022 93% of men were heterosexual in the UK down from 95% in 2014, when it was first measured. For women the percentages are respectively 94% and 96%. For both sexes, it is those who are bisexual who are increasing.

**SOURCE:** Sexual Identity in the UK, Office for National Statistics, 27th September 2023.

**Roma population.** In 2021 the Population Census found there were 101,135 Roma people in England and 1,885 in Wales. Roma are an Indo-Aryan ethnic group who traditionally live with a nomadic, itinerant lifestyle. Originating in the Indian subcontinent, they are widely dispersed across Europe and the Americas, speaking a language (Romani) that is related to Hindi. They are 0.2% of the population of England and 0.06%

of the Welsh population. Half, 51%, are in their 20s and 30s, and just over half, 55%, are men. Almost three-quarters, 72%, of them are Christian, against the 46% of the general population, 17% have no religion (against 37%) and 2% Muslim (against 7%).

**SOURCES:** Roma population in England and Wales, Office for National Statistics, 30th October 2023; personal email; web on Roma, accessed 1st November 2023.

**Chinese decline.** A Chinese academic, Chifeng Zong, indicated that 2013 Chinese religion, both Christian and Buddhist, has seen a sudden and significant decline. This is seen in far fewer leaders, a loss of revenue of 50% and members up to 30% with very little inflow to counter balance it. The decline is seen in both rural and urban churches, those approved by the government and independent churches, the Buddhists seeing the greatest decline.

**SOURCE:** The China General Social Survey, summarised in an article in *Pointers*, Christian Research Association Vol 33 No 3 September 2023, Page 3.

**New Age ideas.** In what ways has Christian thought shifted towards New Age culture over the last 20 years? Daren Kemp, a key academic researcher on the New Age, with a book published by the Edinburgh University Press on it, suggests three broad ways: (A) Green theology is now generally accepted, where 20 years ago it was on the fringe. For example, the 2030 net zero target of the Church of England. (B) Yoga, pilates and meditation groups are much more common in church halls where 20 years ago "there would have been some raised eyebrows." (C) Openness to LGBT, where 20 years ago it was on the fringe of the Church of England. Now it is going mainstream.

**SOURCE:** Personal email from Prof Kemp September 2023.

**Impact of Covid-19.** Figures from the Roman Catholics in England and Wales in 2018 and 2021 show the impact that the pandemic had on their Mass attendance. It dropped by 45% from 715,000 in 2018 to 390,000 in 2021. These figures exclude any live streaming. Since the Covid restrictions were eased in 2021 it may well be that their 2022 figures, collected usually in October, may show an increase, and thus a smaller drop. The size of the decline is much greater than apparent elsewhere.

**SOURCES:** Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales taken from personal email.

**Destitute people** are those without sufficient means to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed. In the UK there were some 1.55 million destitute people in 2017, rising to 2.4 million in 2019 and 3.8 million in 2022. These included 350,000 children in 2017, then 530,000 and 1 million children subsequently. A huge amount of basic need which church-run food banks help a little towards meeting. In 2023, three-fifths, 60% or 2.3 million, were UK nationals, the remaining two-fifths, 40% or 1.5 million, were migrants.

**SOURCE:** Destitution in the UK, fourth report by Heriot-Watt University, with Kantar Public, financed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, released 24th October 2023.

## UK Religion

It's not often one can write about UK religion as a whole for most information is not collected simultaneously for all four countries, but the decadal Population Census is different and makes that possible. Now that Scotland, which delayed their Census until 2022, has published its set of results, one can look at **UK** religion, treating Scotland's 2022 numbers as if they were for 2021 and so are included with the other 3 countries without amendment.

Censuses in all four UK countries asked similar questions, although Scotland and N Ireland broke down the Christian component of their Religion question to ask about denominations also. The following Table takes the numbers for each religion (counting all the denominations in Scotland and N Ireland together) and breaks them down in two ways. The "Vertical percentages" give the percentage of people in each religion for each country. The "Horizontal percentages" give the percentage of people in each country for each religion. The coloured column and row give the totals for the UK.

*Religious Communities within the UK, 2021*

Religion	Vertical percentages					Horizontal percentages				
	England %	Wales %	Scotland %	N Ireland %	UK %	England %	Wales %	Scotland %	N Ireland %	UK BASE (=100%)
Christian	46.3	43.6	52.4	79.7	47.6	82.1	4.3	8.9	4.7	31.9m
Muslim	6.7	2.2	1.4	0.6	5.9	96.1	1.7	1.9	0.3	4.0m
Hindu	1.8	0.4	0.3	0.2	1.6	96.9	1.2	1.5	0.4	1.0m
Sikh	0.9	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.8	96.8	0.8	1.7	0.7	0.5m
Jew	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.4	96.4	0.7	2.2	0.7	0.3m
Buddhist	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.4	91.3	3.5	4.5	0.7	0.3m
Other Religions	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.6	90.7	4.4	4.2	0.7	0.4m
No Religion	36.7	46.6	35.7	17.4	36.5	84.8	5.9	7.9	1.4	24.4m
Not Stted	6.0	6.3	9.4	1.6	6.2	82.2	4.7	12.3	0.8	4.1m
BASE (=100%)	56.5m	3.1m	5.4m	1.9m	66.9m	84.4	4.6	8.1	2.9	66.9m

The vertical percentages show that N Ireland has almost double the

percentages of Christian adherents than each of the other three countries. For all the other religions, England has the largest percentage, particularly for Muslims and Hindus. Other Religions are more spread across the four countries. No Religion is highest in Wales as a percentage of its population, much higher than in England and Scotland where the percentage is almost the same, and in all three countries more than double the percentage in N Ireland.

All the non-Christian religions have at least 90% of their adherents in England, so obviously few in the other three countries. Buddhists and Other Religions are, however, relatively strong in Wales and Scotland. No Religion is about the same as average for the English population, more than would be expected in Wales, slightly less in Scotland and only half the population proportion in N Ireland.

More people than might have been expected did not answer the religion question in Scotland, but this was part of the poor overall response in Scotland to the Census, mostly because of its questions on sexuality. Far fewer didn't answer the question in N Ireland, much unlike what happened in earlier Censuses there.

What does all this show? That England has the largest proportions of non-Christian religions, partly because the bulk of new immigrants settle in England, and that Wales is very anti-religion of any kind. Scotland has relatively high numbers of Christian adherents, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews and Buddhists. N Ireland is strong in its Christianity – boosted by the number of Roman Catholics (over half the total number of Christians and two-fifths, 42%, of the population).

Overall, though, the inclusion of figures for Wales, Scotland and N Ireland makes little difference to the much publicised and commented upon English figures from this Census – that Christian adherents are now less than 50% of the population while those of No Religion are now over a third of the population (37%).

**SOURCES:** National statistical offices of all four countries in their 2021 Census results; Scotland's released 15th September 2023.

## Friends in Care Homes

**Care Homes are one type of communal establishments measured by the Office for National Statistics in the 2021 Census. The official definition of these dwellings is, "A managed communal establishment is a place that provides managed full-time or part-time supervision of residential accommodation." These included living in educational hostels (480,000 or 46% of the total, nearly all aged between 16 and 24), in Care Homes (344,000, 33%), in prisons (67,200, 7%), in defence establishments (42,100, 4%), in hotels or bed and breakfasts (35,400, 3%), in staff or worker accommodation (23,800, 2%), in temporary accommodation because travelling (17,800, 2%), in homeless shelters (14,100, 1%), and smaller numbers in medical facilities (6,500), in religious institutions (3,700), in children's homes (3,600) and 3,500 others, totalling 1,041,700 people or 1.7% of the total population in England and Wales.**

The second largest type of communal establishment is Care Homes, accounting for about 0.6% of the population, or about 1 person in every 170, slightly fewer than the 1 in 150 in 2011. Most churches these days have some of their community living in Care Homes, because of advancing age, chronic illness, financial insecurity or other reasons. Some have regular visits from family or friends, while others lead a very lonely life. Some pass on relatively quickly, while others may live in the same room for several years. Some are collected for church, some are able to join services in their Home, while others have to resort to radio or television for spiritual encouragement. Only a relative few will have the technical competence and equipment to live-stream.

Of those in Care Homes, just under half, 47%, have nursing help alongside, an increasing percentage, while 53% have no nursing support. As the Table shows half, 50%, of Care Home residents are 85 years of age or older, equivalent to 11% of that population or 1 person in 9. The percentage who had been to Sunday School was almost half, 46%, for those 85 or older, but less for younger people, and only 15% for those aged 40 to 64 in 2020.

*Characteristics of those in Care Homes, England and Wales, 2021*

Group Age	Younger people Under 65	The Third Age 65 to 74	The Active Frail 75 to 84	The Inactive Frail 85 & over
% of all those in a Care Home	18%	8%	24%	50%
% of population in a Care Home	0.1%	0.5%	2.1%	11.1%
% who went to Sunday School	[40-64] 15%	32%	36%	46%

A survey of Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA) twenty years ago in 2003 found that while 34% still felt linked to their church when between 65 and 74, only half that proportion, 19%, felt that link by the time they were 85 or older.

Some 11% of those 85 or over are in Care Homes, higher than the percentage attending church, 8.7%! In numerical terms, there were 170,000 people 85+ in Care Homes in 2021 and 169,000 85+ year old, who were churchgoers. There is bound to be some overlap in these two numbers, perhaps of the order of 18 to 20,000 if the above proportions hold! This suggests perhaps more attention should be given to the very old.

There are more women than men who are in Care Homes, as might be expected because women live longer than men – 70% in 2021, but 74% in 2011, as more men are now living longer, some of whom require Care Home treatment. Those in Care Homes generally reported they were in good

or fair health in the Census. The majority of those in Care Homes are White. There was a greater majority of the population in Care Homes in the North East and North West than anywhere else in England and Wales.

### Church leadership

What does all this mean for church leaders? It is likely they will have some church members or ex-members now living in Care Homes. Having a list of their situation and in which Home is a useful essential – and where these Homes are actually located. While for some, live-streaming of services will be a huge blessing, they do not replace regular visiting, if possible. Giving elderly people the opportunity to go outside (in their wheelchair) will normally be enthusiastically welcomed, and, for some, especially the opportunity to attend Sunday service in their wheelchair. Pastoral work, gifts of flowers from the church, and personal prayer are hugely important, in the context of end-of-life spiritual care.

If permitted by the Home, a visiting team from the Church to take a regular Sunday (or weekday) service is not only an encouragement to believers but can also be a gentle reminder to those without faith, particularly if accompanied by a regular opportunity for Communion (for believers) and hymn singing (favourites) for those with Sunday School and Church memories.

It is also important to remember past years for those now 85 years old. It means they were born in 1938, the same year as George Verwer if they were churchgoers, and were 14 when Queen Elizabeth became Queen. The WWII years and subsequent milestones are still vivid memories, especially when involving the loss of family members. Those who are 90 now were born when George V was King! The whole world has changed dramatically since then, but to the unchanging God of the Ages, a frail or dementia-stricken Care Home resident is equally as precious as when they were young and full of life, energy and vitality.

**SOURCES:** Office for National Statistics, Living in Communal establishments, 2021 Population Census; survey for MHA, Christian Research, 2003. *UK Church Statistics*, No 4, 2021 Edition, Table 13.6.1.

## Christians in N Ireland

**In the 2021 Population Census, Northern Ireland recorded a total of 1,903,176 people in its population. This is 2.9% of the UK total of 66.94 million, of which Scotland is 5.44 million, Wales is 3.11 million and England 56.49 million, respectively 8.1%, 4.6% and 84.4%. The percentage of Christian adherents is, respectively, 80% for N Ireland, way above the 52% for Scotland, 44% for Wales and 46% for England, making 48% for the whole of the UK.**

The N Ireland Census breaks down the voluntary Religion question by asking people if they are Catholic, Church of Ireland (Anglican), Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland or other Christian, a most useful and helpful breakdown much appreciated by denominational leaders and others in N Ireland. Despite a request to do something similar in England and Wales, the Office for National Statistics has thus far refused to do so.

The 2021 Census gave a +0.5% increase over 2011 in the N Ireland population, but a +1.7% increase in Christian adherents. This was entirely due to (a) the Roman Catholics who increased by +0.9%, and are 53% of N Ireland Christians, and (b) those in Other denominations, who increased by +2.2% but are only 9% of all the Christians. The three main Protestant denominations, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists, all declined, respectively by -1.2%, -0.9% and -1.9%. The Protestant institutional denominations are all declining, while the Catholics and newer non-institutional groups are growing (like the Black and charismatic churches), the latter a picture which is true across the whole of Britain.

In addition the Census showed there had been a considerable increase in those with No Religion, having a +6.1% increase since 2011. They now represent a sixth, 17%, of N Ireland's population, small in N Ireland, compared with 36% in Scotland, 47% in Wales and 37% in England, averaging to 37% for the whole of the UK. In summary, therefore, the UK is 48% Christian, 37% No Religion, 9% Other Religions, and 6% not answering. If those non-answering are taken out, then these percentages are, respectively, 51%, 39% and 10%.

The graph shows the changes in the population of N Ireland since 1861, although their Censuses have not always been at 10-year intervals. The huge dip in 1981 was because, in the middle of the Troubles, thousands of people refused to answer a question which might, they thought, allow for discrimination or violent attack.

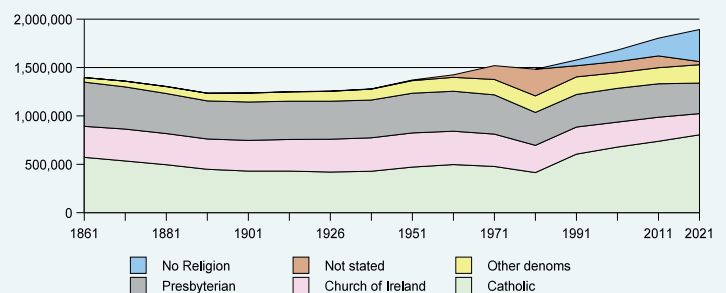
The weakness of the three Protestant institutional churches in N Ireland shows itself also in the age of those who remain as adherents. The

Church of Ireland has 20% of its adherents under 20 and 26% 65 or over. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has 20% and 25% respectively, and the Methodist Church in Ireland 18% and 29%. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church has 28% and 14% respectively, a very great difference, and the combined non-institutional denominations are 25% and 17%, somewhere between the Catholics and the Institutionals in both percentages.

Other Religions, however, have 28% who are under 20 but only 8% 65 and over, this latter indicating they have far fewer older people, some of which are likely to be immigrants or other newcomers, though they are only a small part of the population (1%).

The age structure is actually more significant than the figures suggest. Across the population of N Ireland, those 75 and over increased from 6.5% of the population in 2011 to 7.9% in 2021, a +1.4% increase. In contrast the 75 and overs among the Catholics increased by +1.2%, and the non-institutionals by just +0.2%, while the Anglicans increased +3.4% and the Presbyterians by +3.1%. The Methodists in 2011 were included with "other religions" for age analyses, but that group has increased by +6.9% since then!

*Population of Northern Ireland by religion and denomination, 1861 to 2011*  
*Other denominations includes Methodists and, since 2001, Other religions.*



In other words it is not just that the combined institutional churches are significantly older than the population as a whole, but very much older. In 2021, 7.9% of N Ireland's population were 75 or over, 12.7% of the institutional churches. Life tables for N Ireland suggest that by 2031 9.6% of the population will be 75 or over, which could mean 15.5% for the institutional churches.

While many elderly people are still active and can play a positive part in church life, and therefore should not be bewailed or assumed to be a "negative" in statistical interpretations, replacement inevitably involves younger people coming to faith, though not necessarily into institutional, traditional church structures.

**SOURCES:** Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency – 2021 Population Census and Expectation of Life tables.