

ALREADY GONE

An American survey exploring in some depth why young people leave the church was published in the UK in June 2009 under the title *Already Gone* with a special introduction for this country. They questioned 1,000 young people now in their 20s, 95% of whom had regularly attended church when younger, about why they had largely stopped (some still attend at Christmas or Easter).

Some of the findings replicate research already undertaken on the UK scene, as might be expected. It re-inforces the problem that many Christian young people have with the church by the time they reach College age, with only a quarter of churched teens still being in church when they are 29. The importance of this study is that they asked those who had stopped going to church their reasons.

- 40% of ex-churchgoers now in their 20s stopped when transitioning between what we would call Junior and Secondary School;
- 44% stopped when transitioning from Secondary School to University/College;
- 11% stopped after they left College.

The key finding in this study is that many of those who eventually stop attending do so because their belief in the Scriptures is undermined. Two-fifths, 40%, said the Bible contained errors, and 30% didn't know whether it did or not. What kind of errors did the Bible contain? The top four reasons were: contradictions (22%), the writers made mistakes (18%), the unsaved go to hell (16%) and it is wrong about the earth's age (10%).

Attending and not attending Sunday School (SS) differences

Issue	Attended SS	Not attended SS
NO, the church is not relevant to my needs today	46%	40%
YES, good people don't need to go to church	39%	29%
YES, I've become anti-church as I've got older	39%	27%
YES, God used evolution to create human beings	25%	19%

Just over a further two-fifths, 44%, said they did not believe the Bible was true. Why was this? The top four answers were: it was written by men (24%), it has not been translated correctly (18%), it contradicts itself (15%) and that science shows that the earth is old (14%), answers which overlap those just given. Altogether the issue about the age of the



earth and whether science had caused them thus to doubt the Bible was applicable for almost half, 46%, of these American young people. Most of them accepted the various stories in Genesis, but when asked if they had one problem more than another, 30% said it was with the earth being young, not old, and 13% could not accept that the days of creation were 24-hour days (the top two problems).

Those who no longer attend church, if they ever think of church at all, think of it as being hypocritical, political and irrelevant. However, a fifth, 21%, said they missed worshipping God, and another fifth, 19%, missed special events and the minister's teaching (19% also). Two-thirds, 65%, of the sample were married and of these 70% had married in church, so "church" clearly still meant something to them. Two-fifths, 38%, expected to attend church regularly when they had children. This raises the issue of what might be done to bring these young people back to church (other than them having children!), and the more important question, in some ways, of how to stop them leaving in the first place. Are there elements of the Bible's teaching, especially with regard to creation and evolution, which need to be focussed on more clearly?

That there is confusion may be seen in the answers to the questions shown in the Table, which suggests that some of the problems may be in what is taught in Sunday School. UK research has shown that churched young people spend on average 4 years in Sunday School – what are the key things that are vital to teach during that time?

The conclusion of this particular study is the importance of teaching the Bible and living it out not just in church, including Sunday School, but also in our homes as well.

SOURCE: *Already Gone, Why your kids will quit church and what you can do about it*, by Ken Ham with Todd Hillard and Britt Beemer, Master Books, Arizona, June 2009, 978-0-89051-529-7.

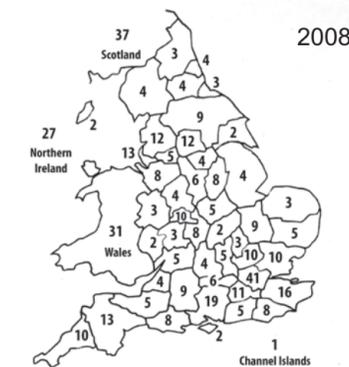
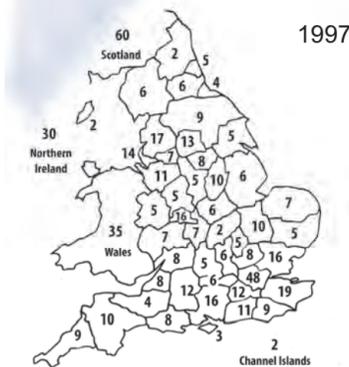
CHRISTIAN BOOKSHOPS

It is a tough time for the Christian book trade. Some Christian bookshops are struggling to pay their bills to the publishers. There are not so many Christian bookshops as there used to be – the number listed in *UK Christian Handbook* was 545 in 1997 and 447 in 2008, a drop of 18%, or a net 9 closures per year.

County changes

That drop is seen across the country and is quickly evident from a comparison of the two maps showing the number of Christian bookshops per country and county. In only 8 counties of England's 47 has the number increased, and only in three by more than one – Devon, Hampshire and Hertfordshire. South Yorkshire and West Sussex have seen the highest percentage of losses – at least half. Of the four countries in the UK, Scotland has seen the most closures proportionately, almost two in every 5.

Christian Bookshops 1997 and 2008



Foreign births in the UK

The population of the UK is currently increasing relatively rapidly. In 1976 we totalled 56.2 million people; in 1986 we totalled 56.7 million, a net increase of 500,000 in those 10 years. In 1996 we totalled 58.2 million, an increase of 1.5 million. In 2006 we totalled 60.6 million, an increase of 2.4 million. What drives that increase?

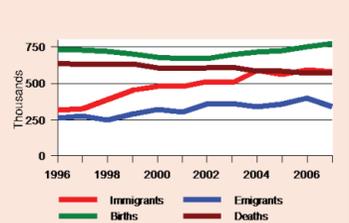
There are essentially only two causes – the number of immigrants less the number of emigrants, and the number of births less the number of deaths. In the 10 years 1996 to 2006, there were 7.0 million births, 6.1 million deaths, 4.6 million immigrants and 3.1 million emigrants, giving the total increase of 2.4 million. All these big numbers are carefully measured since knowing the total population is important.

The graph shows that the number of births which was declining in the last half of the 1990s has started to increase, the number of deaths is decreasing, and that while the

number of immigrants and the number of emigrants have both increased the number of immigrants is increasing faster.

These various trends are not independent of each other. Some of the immigrants will have children while they live in the UK, and some will die (although actually relatively few because the immigrants generally are younger than the native UK population).

Changes to UK population, 1996-2007



born to foreign women aged 25 to 34, whereas the biggest increase for native women was those aged 35 to 39, an increase of 57%.

The consequence of these extra births is that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) as it is called, a useful number calculated on the number of births divided by the number of women aged 15 to 45 (roughly their child-bearing period), has increased from 1.7 in the 1990s to 1.9 in 2007. However, that 1.9 figure is made up of 1.8 for UK-born women and 2.5 for foreign born women. The norm TFR for replacing the existing population is 2.1, so foreign women are not just replacing themselves as it were but substantially increasing their numbers.

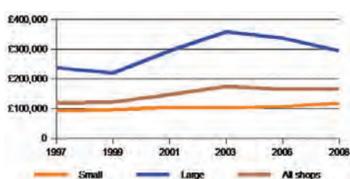
What does all this mean for the church? An increasingly different culture in the age of having children which is bound to impact church life if more women in their 30s, especially late 30s, have children, as it these women who find it hardest to remain regular churchgoers. And for churches with substantial numbers of foreign-born women in their congregations, the need to cope with quite different cultures in their youth work.

SOURCE: *Population Trends* No 136, Summer 2009, Office for National Statistics, Palgrave macmillan.

Turnover

In addition to that, the average turnover per shop has remained roughly the same over the last 5 years, although this average is made up of a very slight increase in smaller shops (with an area of under 1,000 sq ft) offset by a decrease in larger shops. Total turnover of these shops was £75 million in 2008, against £65 million in 1997. Had the 1997 turnover kept pace with inflation the 2008 turnover would have been £87 million.

Average turnover of UK Christian Bookshops, 1997 to 2008



Other elements

In these years the proportion of Christian bookshops which are registered charities has remained much the same – three-fifths, 60%, in 2008, but the percentage which are denominational other than Anglican or Roman Catholic has increased from 9% to 25%. Christian bookshops may account for only 1.1% of total national non-fiction sales, but they are an important part of the Christian landscape in the UK and play a vital role in the Church's ministry.

More than half of book buyers, 55%, say they would like to see more money taken off books. How do they hear of new titles and authors? The most common way is by displays in a bookshop (18%), followed by a newspaper or magazine review (17%), or a recommendation from a friend (17%). Asked about the future, the top item that book readers said they would like was a machine which printed an out-of-print book while they waited (38%). The demand for print simply isn't going to go away in this electronic age!

SOURCE: *Religious Trends* Nos 1, 3 and 5 1998/99, 2002/03 and 2005/06 editions, Christian Research, London, and *UK Christian Resources Handbook* 2009/2010, Christian Research, Swindon; articles in *The Bookseller* 12th and 19th June and 31st July 2009.

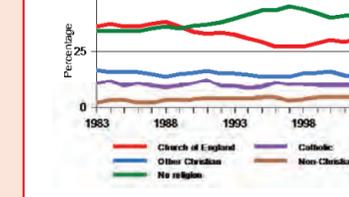
Staff

In 1997 10% of Christian bookshops ran with volunteer staff only, and those with paid employees averaged 3.6 per shop. In 2008, 14% of shops had volunteers only, but paid employees averaged 4.1 per shop. In 1997, sales per employee averaged £30,300, and in 2008 the average was £36,200, a figure which has not kept pace with the rate of inflation (if it had, it would have been £41,000).

SNOWFLAKES

Anglicans lose their faith. An article celebrating 25 years of the British Social Attitudes' Survey, showed that religious identity as measured by this survey has seen very little change in denominations or religion other than the Church of England, but that a decrease for Anglicans almost exactly mirrors a rise in the proportion of the population saying they now have no religion.

Religious belonging, UK, 1983-2007



SOURCE: *SRA News*, May 2009, Page 11.

Women under high stress. Sharon Platt-McDonald, Seventh-day Adventist Health Ministries' Director, says one of the key stresses for women is their poor work/life balance. "Many working women carry the lion's share of childcare, housework and caring for older relatives". No wonder so many find regular churchgoing difficult! Most of the 6.8 million people caring for disabled or frail elderly relatives are women, undertaking repetitive and time-consuming chores. How can churches best help such?

PARANORMAL BELIEF

G K Chesterton said, "When people stop believing in God they don't believe in nothing – they believe in anything." That remains true today. While 63% of adult women and 49% of men say they believe in God, and 61% and 41% respectively in Heaven, at the same time 70% of women and 53% of men believe in fate!

Belief in ghosts appears stronger in young people – 49% of students aged 14 to 16 said they believed in them, but only 38% of adults. British young people seem more sceptical of horoscopes than American teenagers – 35% of our youngsters read them against 80% of those across the pond.

Are churchgoers different? Not necessarily – 29% say it is lucky to find a four-leaf clover, 26% lucky to hang up a horseshoe, 24% that it is lucky to have a black and white cat walk across your path, and 23% to stir the Christmas pudding, while a quarter, 27%, admit that they cross their fingers for luck.

Should churches not just stress the positive elements of the Christian faith but actually teach against the negative beliefs that some churchgoers admit they have?

SOURCE: Articles by Leslie Francis, Emy Williams and Mandy Robbins "The Unconventional Beliefs of Conventional Churchgoers: The Matter of Luck" in *Implicit Religion*, Volume 9, Number 3, 2006 and "Alternative spiritualities", paper presented to the 2008 Denton Conference; Ipsos MORI poll for *Schott's Almanac*, October 2007.

Vital statistics. Comparative data from National Sizing Surveys for women show the following increases over the last 50 years:

Item	1950s	2000s
Height	5' 2"	5' 4"
Bust/Chest	37"	38"
Waist	27½"	34"
Hips	39"	40½"
Weight	136 lbs	144 lbs

SOURCE: *Research magazine*, June 2005, Page 45.

Faith boosts economy. A number of surveys by inter-faith and other groups have assessed the value to the economy from the community work that they undertake. The latest of these, commissioned by the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths' Forum, published in July 2009, showed that faith communities in the region employed the equivalent of 540 full-time staff and gave a million hours of voluntary time between them. The economic value of this, plus the equivalent in rental use, and the value of tourists to historic sites, totalled about £300 million. The report, *Grace and Generosity*, is the result of replies from 11% of some 3,000 faith groups contacted.

SOURCE: Article in *Church of England Newspaper*, 4th July 2009.

Cost of being a Christian. A *Sunday Telegraph* survey asked 512 Christians about reactions to their faith. They reported:

44%	Mocked for their faith
10%	Rejected by their family
6%	Rebuked for sharing their faith
5%	Missed out on promotion
47%	Had experienced no such thing.

Pentecostals felt their faith had cost them promotion five times more than Anglicans or Catholics. Three-quarters, 72%, of respondents said there was less religious freedom now than 20 years ago.

SOURCE: Quoted in *Third Way*, Summer 2009, Vol 32 No 5; survey at www.comres.co.uk

Age of workforce. Across UK industry, the age of workers splits almost equally into four groups: Under 30 24% (of which those in their 20s are 19%), those in their 30s 25%, those in their 40s 25%, and those 50 and older 26%. In the publishing industry, a third, 32%, of those working for journals and periodicals are under 30. The age profile of ministers is very different: Under 40 8%, those in their 40s 24%, and those 50 or over 68%. We need more younger ministers!

SOURCE: Article "Cutting edge versus old-fashioned" by Catherine Neilan in *The Bookseller*, 21st August 2009.

Continued from page 1

Leadership

The majority of all clergy working in rural Australia, as in England, have more than one congregation in different locations. Other patterns, however, are being trialed in Australia as in England, such as merging congregations, co-operation between churches in witness and ministry and small congregations using one property.

The Church of England is also developing ministry leadership of groups of lay people, ordained and locally ordained people, who work together to lead services, home groups and provide pastoral care; 23 Dioceses have such teams. Ordained Local Ministers are licensed to serve in the community where they live.

In Australia, similar Anglican patterns have been developed, one of which is "Enabler Supported Ministry", where up to 12 small churches have lay leaders ordained for local ministry, who are mentored and supported by an ordained "Enabler".

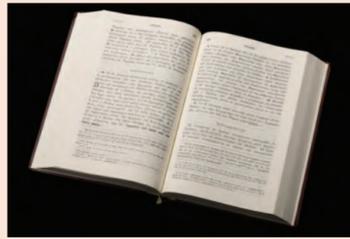
There are also schemes in both England and Australia to train "Pastoral Assistants" and "Pastoral Workers", equipping people over 3 years on pastoral work and baptismal and marriage preparation.

In both British and Australian communities, most lay leaders are retired people who may be able to continue for the next ten years, but there appears to be no one to take over after that, making the longer term future very bleak. Some parts of Australia and the UK are looking at "Pioneer Ministry", developing people who will be pioneers, starting fresh expressions of the church. But fresh expressions should not replace all traditional forms of church life. Sometimes new life can be breathed into traditional structures and forms. At other times, people must let go of the old in order for the new to be born.

A longer version of this article, with references, is available; email peter@brierleyres.com



Heather Wright



REFLECTIONS

The wisest man on earth. He understood human nature. He could see through the chaos of the moment. He knew the highs and lows of emotions. He was a keen observer of life. He watched nature carefully. He had God-given insights. He appreciated the pull of sexual desire. He had a way with words. He loved peaceful actions. He thought long-term. He had a wonderful memory. He was very popular. He did a lot of good. He could see the big picture. He was God's chosen man for the job. And he was *wise – very, very wise.*

But his life ended in folly. He was unable to pass on his real values to his children. He could not resist temptation. He didn't keep to the ways of truth. He embraced foolishness. He didn't deliver on God's explicit instructions. He allowed himself to become lax. He caved in to sexual desire. The only man ever to have 700 wives was King Solomon (and 300 concubines!). Initially, he had everything – wealth, wisdom and winsomeness – but in the end he had nothing.

How can someone go from the top to the bottom? Very easily, but usually not all at once. It began for Solomon with an initial desire to please his first wife – built for her a temple to her god. He married Pharaoh's daughter in disobedience to God's instructions to His people but doubtless because of the strength that strategic alliance would bring to his Kingdom. The end, however, does not always justify the means. He knew God was with him, but neglected to trust Him for the intimate details; obedience in the macro but not in the micro.

God is patient, but by the time Solomon had reached his 700th wife and umpteen temples to placate their wishes, His patience had run out. Had Solomon repented of his original folly, he would have been forgiven – even up to seventy times seven follies. Solomon never seemed to apply his gift of perceptiveness to his own marital circumstances. He didn't look to the end of the matter. He didn't think through the implications of what he was doing. He didn't care about the gross image he was creating. He was indifferent to the example he was setting. Many men have fallen through unbridled lust, and Solomon was neither the first nor the last.

We can choose to sin but we cannot choose the consequences.

World Population

Every two years the Population Division of the UN issues a statement on the World Population. That for 2008 indicated that by 2050 the world population is expected to reach 9.1 billion, against 6.8 billion in 2009 and 7 billion in 2012.

Most of this increase is among the developing countries, increasing, as the Table shows, from 5.6 billion to 7.8 billion. The increase in the developed countries is just 50 million, and this only because of the huge number of immigrants into these countries (over 87 million) expected over the next 4 decades.

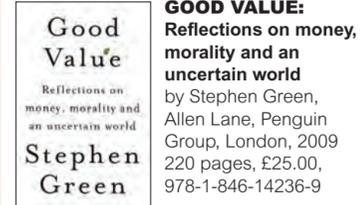
Changes in the world population

Item	Developing countries	Developed countries	World: All countries
Population 2009	5.6 billion	1.23 billion	6.8 billion
Population 2050	7.8 billion	1.28 billion	9.1 billion
% Over 60 2009	9%	21%	11%
% Over 60 2050	20%	33%	22%
Avg fertility 2009	2.73	1.64	2.56
Avg fertility 2050	2.05	1.80	2.02
Avg life 2009	66 years	77 years	68 years
Avg life 2050	74 years	83 years	76 years

There are 3 key criteria which the UN bears in mind when forecasting the population:

1) The average fertility per woman. UN experts believe that fertility will continue to fall in most countries in the developing world. Should their figure be wrong, and the average fertility is 2.50 not 2.05 in 2050, the world population would be 10.5 billion! It is assumed average fertility will rise in the developed countries, despite some 45 having a projected population decline of more than 10% in the period.

BOOK REVIEW



This is an interesting book for two reasons – firstly it is contemporary. I was reading it in August 2009 and it has commentary in it on events occurring in April the same year. Publishers rarely produce a book that quickly without good reason. Secondly, while the author is Chairman of HSBC, the second largest bank in the world (the largest is the Bank of America) and has been with them for 27 years, he has also been a Non-Stipendiary Minister in the Church of England for over 20 years, so his views are tempered with Christian insights.

2) That the number of people with AIDS getting anti-retroviral treatment will keep increasing, with 40% to 50% of all sufferers having treatment (and much more in some countries), thereby increasing the average length of life for a person getting the disease from 12 years to 28 years.

3) The continuing number of immigrants from one country to another. The three countries with the largest average annual intake between 2009 and 2050 are the US with 1.1 million per year, Canada with 214,000 and the UK with 174,000. For the UK this is a HUGE number if the forecast is true – some extra 7.1 million people coming to the UK over the next 40 years.

For the church, this means an influx of new people from different cultures will be an ongoing opportunity. It also means a continuing proliferation of new migrant churches – how best encourage and work with them? Hence the proportion of white attenders in our churches is likely to decrease much more quickly than from 88% in 1998 to 83% in 2005 would suggest. Can our inter-church structures cope with that?

One further consequence of the UN work is also seen – the increasing proportion of older people. This has serious consequences for the church which tends to have a greater proportion of older people than the population. If 33% of the population in developed countries will be over 60 by 2050, it maybe that predictions of UK church attendance being twice that will also become true!

SOURCE: UN Population Division Press Release, March 2009.

Essentially the book tells the story of the enormous current global economic crisis, from its beginnings in 2007 to date. The author is extraordinarily well-read and quotes from a huge range of sources. He has the ability to explain the complex with simple concepts and easily understood words. Although the focus is the contemporary world, he charts changes across the millennia – the rise of globalisation, the importance of London, how this recession compares with the 1930s, the impact of it on the marginalised and our social responsibility, the need to commit to change in the future, the crucial importance of the market economy, the value of money, the morality of giving not getting.

This is an up-to-date book well worth reading to re-adjust one's insights and to realise that we can't live without the business world today where Christian principles and ethos are needed more than ever.

CORRESPONDENCE

The article on *Mid-week Ministry* sent out with the previous issue of *FutureFirst* produced some interesting correspondence. One person wrote:

"I liked this article [on Mid-week Ministry]. It made me ponder two further questions:

"1) How do churches which do not have a building tackle this area [of mid-week ministry]? Is it the same or different from what churches with good building facilities can do? In my own congregation, we meet on Sundays in a secondary school, hire a church hall mid-week for a Parent and Toddler group, and apart from that have to do everything in homes. There's plenty going on, and a steady stream of people coming to faith, but it does mean that most meetings by necessity are in quite small groups. There is probably a growing number of Christian groups, like ours, which do not have their own premises. Does that make us more resourceful or is it a real handicap?

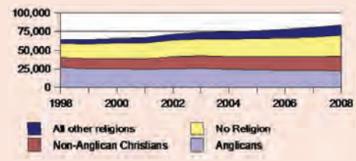
"2) The implication of what you write is that our goal is to get people to church, and to get them there on Sundays. How does this tie-in with post-modern, Fresh Expression, et al assumptions? How do we better equip believers to disciple effectively those who do not come on Sundays, and maybe never will, but who are moving towards faith or indeed have come to faith? I think more and more churches need to address this alongside whatever happens on Sundays.

"Probably quite unanswerable, but the questions are genuine!"

In a subsequent email, she added: "I don't wish to abandon all larger and more familiarly structured churches – I just don't think they are the exclusive last word. Some larger churches and denominations are quite as capable of departing from Scripture and apostolic faith as some small groups. I guess whatever the size or structure, we are all engaged in a spiritual battle where the enemy delights to deceive or neutralise. As for resources, I would be the first to urge some co-operation and merging and so on. My concern is that in the UK there are growing numbers of people who are so disaffected from the 'ordinary' churches that they won't go near them. Sadly that includes many children raised in committed Christian homes as well as those who have never had any personal contact with the gospel. For some of these – but of course not all – small discipling groups may be the best route through which they can encounter Christ for themselves, and where temporarily or permanently they find the most meaningful place of belonging. Not least, for the growing numbers of people who come from broken families, or who have

Religion of Prisoners

Over the last 10 years the prison population in England and Wales has increased from 64,000 in 1998 to 83,000 in 2008 (the latest year for figures). The number who claim to be Christian among these has remained roughly at 41,000, but the proportion who are Christian has decreased from 63% to 50%. Those with no religion have increased from 28% to 33%, which means those with non-Christian beliefs have increased from 9% to 17% – a doubling of their proportion. These changes are illustrated in the chart, where "Christian" is broken down between Anglican and non-Anglican.



Two increases especially have occurred since about 2003. The first is the number of "other Christians" who are not Anglican, Free Church or Roman Catholic – presumably Pentecostals or other charismatics or Orthodox – who have gone from 6% of the total of non-Anglican Christians in 1998, to 14% in 2003, and to 18% in 2008, a tripling of their proportion.

The other increase is in the proportion of Buddhists among the "other religions" who have gone from 6% of the total in 1998, to 11% in 2003, and to 13% in 2008, a doubling of their proportion. However, the majority of those in the other religion category are Muslims, 72% of the other-religion total in 2008.

The Table gives some of the characteristics of

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

Statistician's friend: "How is your wife?"
Statistician: "Compared with whom?"

Letter to the *Daily Telegraph*: "On Tuesday, I very reluctantly complied with an idiotic legal requirement to put up a "No Smoking" sign in the porch of our beautiful old church. To balance things up, I put another sign underneath: 'Warning. If you smoke on these premises, God, who knows all, will forgive you. But the Government, who know nothing, will prosecute you.' (Book of Common Sense 3:1-4)." Dr Bryan MacDonald, Devon.

79% of Muslims say British laws should be guided by Christian values. 74% of Hindus agree, compared with just 70% of Christians.

SOURCES: Quotes, Damned Quotes, and, John Bibby, 1986; *The Week*, 18th July 2009; Grove Books.

never known family life at all, the small group becomes a very meaningful family to them. I guess I'm arguing for a plurality of forms."

Would any other reader like to comment?

SOURCE: Emails from reader.

prisoners, broken down by their religion. It shows that Muslim prisoners and those of no religion are the youngest while Jews and those in the Free Church (Baptists, Church of Scotland, Methodists and Pentecostals form 78% of the total) are the oldest. The Table also shows that Jews and those in other religions are likely to be serving the longest, while Hindus and those of no religion the shortest.

Women serve slightly shorter sentences than men (3.0 years to 3.5), but are slightly older (33.1 years to 32.8 years).

Characteristics of prisoners, England and Wales, 2008

Religion	Avg age in yrs	Avg sentence	Total number	% male
Muslim	29.9	3.9	9,800	97%
No religion	30.0	3.0	27,700	94%
Other Christian	32.6	3.4	3,300	92%
Roman Catholic	33.0	3.6	14,300	94%
Hindu	33.8	3.2	450	96%
Sikh	33.9	3.5	650	96%
Anglican	36.2	3.6	23,050	94%
Buddhist	37.5	4.3	1,750	96%
Other religions	37.5	4.3	800	94%
Free church	41.7	3.9	1,200	86%
Jewish	42.8	4.3	200	97%
TOTAL	32.8	3.5	83,200	95%

No-one wishes to see people of any religion in prison, but given that two-thirds, 67%, of prisoners professed some religion in 2008, what steps should churches be taking to help them in terms of teaching, visiting and after-care to augment the sterling work already being done by Prison chaplains, Alpha in Prison (in which some 600 churches are involved), etc?

SOURCE: Population in Prison Establishments, Ministry of Justice, June 2009.

THESE MAY BE HELPFUL

Books and reports received

Telling it slant: The Need for EC-centric Mission, John Pritchard, and *Christianity in Europe: The way we are now* by Parush Parushev, Crowther Centre Monographs Nos 8 and 9, CMS, Oxford, May 2009.

Driven to disaffection: Religious Independents in N Ireland, Ian McAllister, Research Update, Number 41, November 2005, www.ark.ac.uk.

The Seven Faith Tribes, Who they are, what they believe and why they matter, George Barna, Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 2009.

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Providing Facts for Forward Planning

SNIPPETS

1) Ipsos Mori predicts that in 2009 the % of mobile-only households will exceed the % of landline-only telephone households for the first time.

2) 70% of 3 year-olds in Britain recognise the MacDonald's symbol but only half of them know their own surname.

3) 19,000 Africans serve as missionaries on other continents.

4) 1.6 million people in Britain drive without car insurance, 4% of drivers.

5) Archbishop of York John Sentamu was voted the "most respected living Christian" in a Premier Christian Radio poll in the UK by 18% of respondents.

6) A week's worth of information in the *New York Times* exceeds the information an 18th century person would come across in his entire lifetime.

7) 33% of working mothers would like to quit their jobs to care for their children; 66% cannot afford to do so.

SOURCES: 1) Research, July 2009, Page 12; 2) Good Value, Stephen Green, Penguin, 2009, Page 135; 3) Overseas Ministry Study Centre, Connecticut, 2009 leaflet; 4) *The Week*, 8th August 2009, Page 19; 5) *Church of England Newspaper* article 5th June 2009; 6) Sony video "Do you know?", June 2008, www.releaseplatform.com; 7) National Centre for Social Research 2009 study, published in the *Daily Mail*, quoted in *The Week*, 8th August 2009.

Rural Church Life in England and Australia

Rev Dr Philip Hughes - Director, Christian Research Association, Australia

In some respects, the English rural scene is very different from that in Australia. Many rural Australian towns (Australians rarely use the word 'village') are isolated in ways alien to the much smaller and more densely populated UK. Many rural Australian towns exist 50 or 100 miles from each other. In some areas pastors use small planes for visiting. Distances between churches make it virtually impossible to visit more than one or two congregations in one day.

Secondly, in most parts of Australia, rainfall is unreliable. Many farmers have seen their crops fail year after year. Some have sold up, others are trapped by debt. Some do not have alternative skills. Most are loathe to leave the farming life, so undertake off-farm work to make ends meet. Australian farmers have not had the disrupting UK foot and mouth disease.

Thirdly, Australian rural churches are not ancient buildings; few are more than 150 years old.

There are, however, many similarities too: the decline in rural populations, the lack of church interest among younger people, and the struggle to find leadership, members and financial resources.

Social Capital

Declining rural church life in both England and Australia threatens both community and social capital – and its networks and norms. Networks are the interactions between individuals. Norms are those "cultural factors relating to established rules of behaviour ... and the shared understandings or values held by any group of people" (Langrish). However, the high level of mobility, and increasing individualistic culture and worldview are undermining this.

Michael Langrish, Bishop of Exeter, argues that religious faith has been an important foundation for social capital: bringing people together has made a major contribution to local communities. As people move from religion as obligation to consumption, its role diminishes.

Churches have great resources contributing to social capital: places of worship, halls, and sometimes

schools, can be used for community purposes. They are a major source of local leadership: thousands hold positions in church structures and have been trained through their church involvement.

A British Attitudes Survey found faith affiliation one of the strongest predictors contributing to the relationships and bonds of trust that constitute social capital, alongside age and social class. Christian affiliation is a significant predictor of people's engagement in residents' associations, school boards, PTAs and even town councils and neighbourhood watch schemes.

Churches are in a good place to speak up for the needs of the vulnerable, and are more likely to have links with the sick and elderly.

Australian research has also confirmed that rural churches play a significant role in social capital. Most rural churchgoers are volunteers in local community activities, welfare organizations and sporting clubs.



Many Australian rural churches have lost connection with large sectors of their communities, especially the younger people. Churches can no longer simply serve pre-existing communities and assume that they will have a place.

In England, there is an assumption that churches are "public utilities", expected to be available for baptisms, weddings and funerals, with rare attendance at other times. In Australia, there are remnants of that assumption, but fewer people are coming for such.