

# Tipping Point

**"Is there a tipping point whereby the average age of those attending a church when reached means the church will inevitably close?" asked a correspondent, meaning "Are there ways of assessing a declining congregation to give an indication of when its slide downwards will mean inevitable closure?" Can a church get to a certain point in terms of the age of the congregation or other factors, when closure becomes almost a foregone conclusion? If such could be ascertained, could something then be done before it is too late?**

In terms of statistical probability the answer may well be negative, but it's a question worth consideration. "All things are possible with God," said the (arch)angel Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:37). God can and does over-rule our human predictions. However, there is a difference between a "tipping point" which is a process that can go on for some time, seeing a decline over 5 years say, and a "trigger point," when something suddenly happens, for example, a key person in the ministry or congregation dies. The two are not the same.

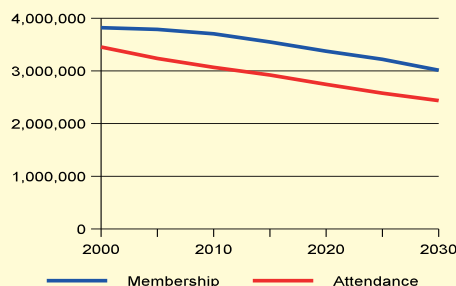
Tipping points are usually foreseeable ("if we continue at this rate the church will close in 10 years' time") whereas as trigger points are not. Trigger points cause unexpected changes and may be positive as well as negative, such as a new churchgoing family with small children suddenly arriving in a village or a dynamic incumbent taking office.

Is there are relationship between tipping and trigger points? A true illustration comes from a church in a Kent coastal town. The church was just about holding its own with an ageing, faithful but rather unenterprising vicar with his eyes set on retirement. When this occurred, the diocese decided it could not afford a replacement, and the church congregation subsequently declined even though quite a number of young families attended and it was on the edge of a council estate. The tipping point was probably foreseeable (the vicar's retirement) but the actual trigger in this case was probably the diocese's decision not to replace the vicar.

Tipping points usually assume a straight line continuation of the trend. It is true that most line projections are straight lines, but it shouldn't be assumed that will always be the case, as the

graph of current numbers of churchgoers and church members across all English congregations indicates. The blue membership line is clearly not a straight line, and actually the red church attendance line is slightly curved, in both cases initiating a slightly different trajectory.

*Trends in English church attendance and membership, 2000-2030*



The obvious tipping problem is the ageing of the people in the church. However, to have a church only of younger people does not always mean a successful or thriving church. Springboard research in 2000 showed that a growing congregation needs a mix of people of all ages, including some older people (over 10% of total).

The Church of England's attendance line may well be a downward slope at present but that apparently straight line has a slight "kink" due to the increase in Immigrant and Messy Churches which have brought a considerable influx of both new people coming to church and people coming back to church (average time away 10 years according to Eddie Gibbs' research in 1993, although later research would put it at 14 years). That has caused the rate of decline to lessen. The same is true in Scotland.

A tipping point assumes a church cannot continue. But that depends on (a) people, (b) finance, (c) location and (d) intangible things like vision. The United Reformed Church is one denomination where numbers are declining, for instance, but its financial reserves will almost certainly ensure that not all its churches will close. Also some of its churches are growing and each church is constitutionally independent, such being unlikely to close. The denomination might actually close but if some of its churches continue (perhaps as independent churches), has the URC reached a tipping point?

People of course are essential, but in Scotland, for example, there are an incredible number of

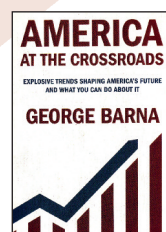
small, sometimes very small (single figure) congregations, but being in wildly rural areas people continue to come together for worship. There's a therapeutic value in so doing (the intangible factor), and they refuse to close! Does closure mean loss of a building? Not in Scotland! Congregation A merges with congregation B to become Congregation C. Congregation C worships in alternate weeks in Church A and Church B. People matter more than buildings.

What if the money runs out? Some Anglican Dioceses are spending more money than they receive and are running out of reserves. Some may merge, as did the three Dioceses which merged in April 2014 to become what is now the Diocese of Leeds, but mergers of loss-making Dioceses can only be a short-term solution, unless there is a radical change brought about by the merger. More mergers could well take place, and there are a number of relatively small Dioceses. What is the minimum number of churches for a Diocese? In Kenya it's about 30! In the UK, the Church Commissioners' money could be used to keep Dioceses afloat for a long time should that be decided as the best use of their many investments.

It is the intangibles which precipitate a tipping point. Not lack of people, nor lack of finance, but lack of a will to continue, that is, a loss of a sense of purpose, a loss of vision, a loss of hope, overwhelmed by the circumstances. Such are probably more likely in churches of some churchmanships, but this is not the deciding factor as churches of all types are growing as well as declining.

So can tipping points be predicted? If it depends purely on finance, no, although estimates can be made when reserves and income will diminish to create insolvency. If it depends on people, when they all die off a church has to close! Many Christian Brethren churches are in this position. But buildings can be sold, assets used for other purposes, so the tipping point becomes a translation exercise into another ministry. The Needed Truth Brethren have done just that and are thriving now several years after their difficult decision to close all their meeting places. So tipping points leading to demise would seem to depend more on attitudes, humanly speaking, than anything else, and how can these be predicted with any degree of accuracy, if at all?

**SOURCES:** *Church Growth in the 1990s*, Christian Research analysis for Springboard, 2000; *Winning Them Back*, Eddie Gibbs, MARC, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 1995.



## Book Review

### America at the Crossroads

Explosive Trends shaping America's Future and what you can do about it.

George Barna. ISBN 978-0-8010-0831-3; 208 pages; \$19.99 hardback; Published by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2016.

This very timely book is the result of many hours of careful, detailed work poring through much data. Although written before the results of the recent American presidential election were known, the campaign was under way.

It reflects on 20 separate issues under three broad headings – Faith and Spirituality, Government and Politics, Lifestyles and Perspectives. While it naturally uses American examples, it helps guide 21st century thinking and relevance to a scene far wider than just one country. Many of its issues are true elsewhere, and not least in the United Kingdom.

Most chapters are in three sections – a Summary of the Issue, Key Facts

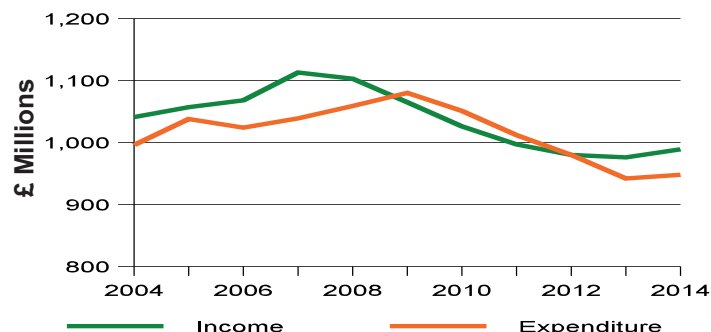
relevant to it, and Outlook and Interpretation. For instance, in the chapter on Life Transformation Barna points out that the "Christian Church is faced with a major paradox." On the one hand he cites the many instances where leaders contend they are doing a good job of discipling people, while on the other the Church is rapidly losing influence in society. Most American Christians, he argues, have few goals other than to be a better person, which is undertaken by reading the Bible, praying and going to church. In terms of becoming more Christlike, most stop at the point of being immersed in religious activity. Few experience brokenness because of sin, or are willing to submit to God's ways, surrendering all and loving the Lord with all their being. Much the same could be said of Christians elsewhere.

While two-fifths of Americans go to church, half go only once a month, and only a third have asked Christ into their life. What then do labels like "Christian" really mean? With mega-churches dominating America's religious landscape, and billions of dollars raised for church-based ministry, are people really being changed? Will religious persecution and hardship be a trigger for change? Can there be a spiritual turnaround in America? That question can readily be asked elsewhere also, not least in the UK. This is a useful but disturbing book, relevant for teaching, training and thinking in today's world.

# Church Income and Expenditure

The Church of England publishes detailed figures of its income and expenditure, which in total are shown in the graph from 2004 to 2014. The figures are expressed in real terms of the actual value of money in 2014, that is, taking the rate of inflation into account. If the trend in these figures continues in subsequent years, yet to be published, income may slightly exceed expenditure in further years.

Income and Expenditure in the Church of England, 2004-2014



Income in 2014 was made up of planned giving (33%), direct giving (14%), trading (11%), Gift Aid (9%), grants (8%), fundraising (6%), collections at services (6%), legacies (5%), investments (4%) and fees (4%). Some 560,000 people planned their giving to their church, some two-thirds (68%) of usual Sunday attendance, giving on average £11 per week.

While the number of people giving has gone down (it was 630,000 in 2007), the percentage of the Sunday congregation planning their giving has slightly increased (65% in 2007), and the amount given per week has also increased (£8.50 in 2007).

The crossing over of the two lines on the graph between the years 2009 and 2012 is mainly due to reduced income rather than increased expenditure. The income reduction was largely caused by a smaller return on investments in these years, almost certainly because of the financial depression which hit the world in that period.

Expenditure in 2014 consisted of parish share (34%), capital expenditure (18%), church running expenses (14%), salaries and support costs (11%), charitable giving (5%), trading costs (5%), utility bills (5%), staff expenses (4%), mission (2%), fundraising costs (1%), and other expenses (1%).

SOURCE: *Parish Finance Statistics 2014*, Research and Statistics Dept., Archbishops' Council, Church of England, 2016.

## Multiplying Churches

In the 1970s, Rev David Wasdell undertook some fascinating statistical work looking at the constraints of congregational growth and, in particular, the penetration of those churches into the life of their local community (or parish). He found that an individual church could sensibly hope to reverberate meaningfully in a community of 2,000 people, but if it was much larger (say a parish of 5,000 or 10,000 souls) it tended only to impact its immediate locality, and if it grew in numbers it was simply attracting those outside its immediate sphere of influence.

Wasdell suggested that the remedy was not in having more clergy (though they would help sustain a larger congregation) or in combining parishes since this simply linked two foci in separate locations without any impact on the community in between them, but rather in having more lay-led gatherings or churches. His research has largely been overlooked and now mostly forgotten.

Canon George Lings, who is responsible for the Church Army Research Unit in Sheffield, has revisited David Wasdell's work in a very relevant article in *Rural Theology* (reference below). He finds that the arguments used against David Wasdell are very similar to those currently being used against Fresh Expressions and Messy Churches. Lings argues that in order to "think outside the box" it is necessary to make the sides of the box porous.

What are the sides of the traditional "box"? Lings cites four: (a) an ordained minister, (b) a Sunday worship service, (c) the church building, and (d) the limitation of locality. To think outside the box, he says, we need to consider using church leaders who may not have been trained in the traditional way, and indeed may not even be ordained. Pioneer ministers are being appointed in some Anglican Dioceses whose remit is to gather congregations apart from a church building, maybe in a factory, or an empty shop, but somewhere where ecclesial overtones are not a constraint.

Wasdell showed that on average an ordained

minister can grow a congregation to about 175 people. A few do better and reach 200 people, but without another staff member it is most unlikely to get much beyond this limit. One more staff member would allow the church to grow to 350, but then a further staff member would be needed. In the present decade for "staff member" read "administrator" or "youth minister" or sometimes "music director" and these may well not be full-time but part-time paid appointments.

Most churches have a Sunday morning worship service. Some new Pentecostal churches starting out have their meetings on Sunday evenings instead and find they grow! Many Messy Churches do not meet on a Sunday at all but during the week, and midweek services generally are growing (see article on Anglican Midweek Ministry). Thinking outside the box means seeking to overcome the constraints of "Sunday" as a day to meet, "morning" as a time to meet, and "worship" as the type of meeting for which people will come.

There are some 52,000 church congregations in the UK, but perhaps only 42,000 of these meet in an actual church building (according to the National Churches' Trust). When the Ichthus Fellowship was growing in the 1990s it would often have an area fraternal gathering in which all the various local congregations came together for a joint evening of worship, often held in a school because of the space needed to accommodate several hundred people. Much work was required to get a school hall ready for such an evening. Wouldn't it have been easier in the long-run to build a large enough church to hold these? "No," replied Faith Forster, one of the key leaders, "as we get great fellowship and bonding from having so many people working together as a team to get it all ready." They were thinking outside the building box.

One reason why the Redeemed Christian Church of God has been so successful in the UK (it has planted over 700 churches in the last 20 years) is that it seeks to have a place of worship "within 10 minutes walking distance of where people live," a phrase straight from their country of origin, Nigeria, where most rural people never catch a car, bus or train to go to church! They are planting churches in the midst of people who will

most likely attend if locally invited. The focus is on arranging a meeting to which people will come and unfettered by constraints of artificial boundaries like parishes, or Dioceses. One reason why so many rural churches survive on small numbers is that they still attract people primarily because of the fellowship and friendship they offer rather than the worship service *per se*. They don't think about being outside the box; in many cases they already are! Three-fifths, 57%, of Church of England churches are rural, serving just under one fifth, 17%, of the population, so sometimes the buildings have to go, but the human sense of "place" isn't necessarily thereby lost as friendship can flourish in other settings.

Not all rural churches are successful. Where tradition, denominational structures, or people unwilling to be outgoing pertain, rural churches focus inwards not outwards and ultimately will need to close.

Lings points out that Bob Jackson, a church growth expert and former Archdeacon, has frequently argued that for large churches to be effective they need small sub units. Trinity Church in Cheltenham grew tenfold by multiplying many house groups in its vicinity in the 1990s. Fresh Expressions gatherings, whose average size is 44 people, are large enough to be missional, modelling "being a community that turns newcomers into friends and followers of Jesus." It is the "we come to you" principle of the Incarnation, gathering where relevant such as by the river like the women of Philippi (Acts 16:13).

The word "multiplying" is statistical, and church growth needs to have goals other than numbers. Lings argues that the word to use should be "reproduce" and explains "the Church must dare to have church children, who are related to us but not the same as the parent body, just as in all human non-identical reproduction." He posits the question, "Can churches wanting to grow shift from pursuing instincts to add to expressions of church they already have, to include diverse non-identical reproductions of ones they do not have?"

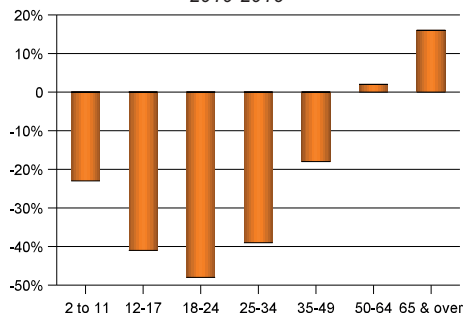
SOURCES: Article "A Case for Multiplying the Type and Number of Churches" by Canon Dr George Lings, *Rural Theology*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2016, Page 112f; *Let my people grow*, David Wasdell, Urban Church Project, 1974; *Divide and Conquer*, David Wasdell, Urban Church Project, 1975; *Hope for the Church*, Bob Jackson, Church House Publishing, 2002.



# SNOWFLAKES

**Watching television.** A survey has found that Americans are watching traditional television much less than formerly (overall -16%), as smart phones (47%) and tablets (5%) have taken over; these two are now domestic viewing habits. The decline is broken down by age, as shown in the chart, with growth for those over 50.

Change in hours of traditional television watched per month in America, by age, 2010-2016



SOURCE: Article in *The Economist*, 29th October 2016, Page 65.

**Sovereign Matters.** The UK may have the interesting sequence of Elizabeth II, Charles III, William V and George VII – the first four prime numbers!

SOURCE: From a person with initials K B-C in Maidstone, in *Am I Missing Something ...?*, Unpublished letters to the *Daily Telegraph*, Edited by Iain Hollinshead, Aum, 2013, Page 108.

**Children in need.** Just over 3% of children under 18 years of age in England were defined as “in need” by the Dept of Education in 2016, a percentage which has remained unchanged since 2010. Half, 51%, of those in need in 2016 were because of abuse or neglect (due to domestic violence or parental mental health problems). Just over half, 53%, are boys, and almost two-thirds, 64%, remain “in need” for less than 6 months. Children’s social care departments in Local Authorities assess referrals from police (28%), schools (17%), and others and take appropriate action. A third, 35%, in 2016 were deemed to require no action.

SOURCE: Paper “Characteristics of Children in Need”, Dept for Education, SFR 52/2016, 3rd November 2016, National Statistics.

**Top 2016 Books.** *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* was the top selling book in 2016, with just under 1.5 million copies sold with a value of £16 million. Second was *The Girl on the Train*, with 1.1 million copies earning £5.4 million, and third was *Lean in 15*, selling a fraction over a million copies for £8.2 mn. The *Harry Potter* title was also top selling book in America with 4.4 million copies sold.

SOURCE: *The Bookseller*, 6th January 2017, Pages 7 and 15.

**School Leadership Challenge.** Three organisations studied leadership in schools and estimated 19,000 more head teachers would be required in 2022 than are likely to be available. They suggest steps are taken (a) to encourage head teachers to remain in their positions, (b) consider allowing those in other professions outside teaching to become head teachers, (c) changing school culture to allow more career progression, and (d) show more how much good head teachers impact the quality of schools. Have such recommendations any relevance to church leadership?

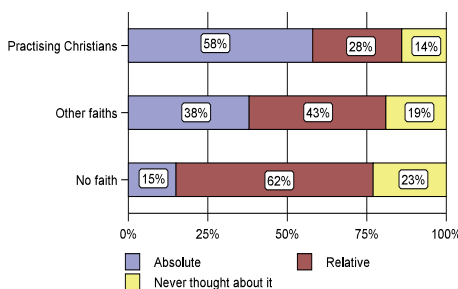
SOURCE: *School Leadership Challenge 2022* report by The Future Leaders Trust, Teaching Leaders and Teach First, by Bregg Wigdortz OBE and James Toop, November 2016.

**Impact of retirement.** The number of stipendiary Anglican clergy is declining, from 8,300 in 2012 to 7,990 in 2015, made up of a reduction of 450 men but an increase of 140 women. In the 3 years 2013 to 2015, the number of clergy increased by 1,327 (828 male, 499 female), but decreased by 1,730 (1,334 male and 396 female). Half of the men, 48%,

retired, but only a third, 34%, of the women. 2% died. If the age of retirement was increased by 1 year, what difference would that make to numbers of clergy? It would add 298 to numbers in 2020, and an estimated 390 more clergy in 2035 (6,690 instead of 6,300).

SOURCE: Ministry Statistics in Focus, Stipendiary clergy projections 2015-2035, Research and Statistics Dept., Archbishops’ Council, 2016.

**Moral Truth.** A sample of Americans were asked if Moral Truth was Absolute or Relative. Their answers are shown in the bar-chart, showing that while a majority of practising Christians believe in Absolute truth, two-fifths, 42%, do not. Similar findings would probably be true of the UK:



SOURCE: *The End of Absolutes*, Barna Update, 25th May, 2016, www.barna.org.

**The United Methodist Church** was formed in 1968 in Texas merging two large denominations to form what is now the largest Methodist Church in the world. It had 7.2 million members in America in 2014, rather less than half of whom regularly attended worship. However, it is now losing attenders very quickly. Between 1974 and 2002 the loss was an average of 4,700 per year, but between 2002 and 2012 it was more than 10 times that at 52,000 per annum. In the three years since 2012 it has lost over 220,000 of those attending worship, to a new level of 2.7 million in 2015. Economist Dr Don House says, “This is not sustainable,” and predicts that by 2030 the denomination could be in permanent decline with collapse by 2050.

SOURCE: Press Release, giving News Analysis on United Methodists, 8th December, 2016.

**Information Aggregation.** Mammoth search engines like Google gather data on users’ habits and then use that to target specific offers or advertisements, so that when you search for something in which you are interested ads for similar products suddenly start appearing on your favourite news website or Facebook time line.

SOURCE: *FirstClass*, Issue 3, 2016, published by iapa, Page 6.

**Connecting data.** Collecting and analysing vast amounts of often disparate data from a growing number of digital sources helps in the targeting of consumers with what they want to buy, even sometimes before they know it! Items like age, gender, food shop most frequented, car, time spent online, bank, sport, magazines, politics, newspaper, pets for example can all be bundled together to identify profiles. Many dog owners shop at Sainsbury’s. Londoners lead not just in dominating where so many online consumers live, but the cars (BMW and Volkswagen) and the banks (First Direct, Lloyds and Barclays) for example which they use. The list, and analysis, is endless!

One example comes from an advert for a fruit pie showing a slice of this being eaten with a fork. For left-handed viewers the fork was on the left of the slice, for right-hand viewers on the right. Having the fork on the correct side makes it easier because the brain imagines reaching for the fork. We may think our choices are a result of our free-will but in many areas our choices may well have been cleverly manipulated!

SOURCE: One of many articles in *Raconteur*, “The Insight Economy”, 1st September, 2016, Page 8f.

A third, 33%, of the children had no visits from relatives, including half, 51%, of those who were under 13. Those in rural homes were much more likely to have a visit than those in urban homes (94% to 55%), perhaps because community and family ties may be stronger in rural homes, and because transport to Homes into the town or city was too great an expense. Usually it was the mother (26%) who visited, something more likely for younger children, and for girls in urban homes.

Most of the Homes said they were Christian, with religious values actively taught, especially love, obedience and respect. Most of the children said they tried to follow these values in their lives. Two-thirds, 66%, of the Homes had religious services within the Home; three-fifths, 62%, had other religious activities such as being part of a choir, learning Bible verses, or dancing. The large majority said their spiritual leadership was either good or very good, 87%, and 97% of the children felt being in a Home was helpful to them, mostly for religious reasons.

What this shows is that relatively large Children’s Homes can be successfully run, if there is adequate financial support, providing children with positive benefits from being there, and giving them an opportunity to realise their potential which they might not otherwise have had. The gratitude shown when they were much older (and had left the Home to get work) was very moving.

It is noteworthy that most of the Children’s Homes in the Southern World are run by Christians, doubtless because of their inner calling of loving others. The number being cared for is probably less relevant than the quality and depth of love and care being shown by those running the Homes. Can children be actively loved in a Home of 50 or 60? Yes, they can. Can children in a Home of just 10 young people not be given loving care? Unfortunately, yes they can. Part of our Christian calling is loving and helping others, whether these be children overseas in institutional homes or the needy youngsters in our own back streets.

Rhena Taylor, founder of Outlook, a Christian organisation focussing on older people, when overwhelmed by the scale of poverty she saw, once said to a couple who went on to work in Manila, “When you are surrounded by an ocean of need, the Lord does not expect you to drain the ocean single-handedly but to take out your bucketful.” The Lord smiles over every child loved and cared for – a very precious bucketful.

SOURCE: *Children’s Homes in Kisumu*, Kenya, Report of Research, Silas Mauji, Cherry Brierley Children’s Home, 2016; email from Rose Dowsett.

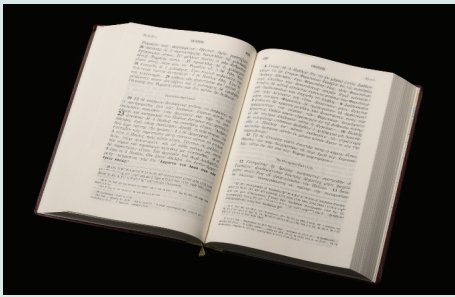
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## REFLECTIONS

God asks three people in the Old Testament (OT) the same question, and He asks each of them that question twice, "What do you see?" They were all prophets – Jeremiah, Amos and Zechariah. Jeremiah replied that he saw "a branch of an almond tree" and "a boiling pot" (Jer 1:11, 13). Amos replied, "a plumb-line" and "a basket of summer fruit" (Amos 7:8, 8:2). Zechariah replied, "a lampstand all of gold" and "a flying scroll" (Zech 4:2, 5:2).

Each of these items are physical objects which, had the prophets wished, could have been described in terms of given measurements of height, width or depth and, presumably, colour. They were all common items with which their hearers would be familiar.

They were all symbolic objects, however, each linked with future punishment, except Zechariah's golden lampstand (linked to the building of the new Temple). God told Jeremiah, "You have seen well."

As we look into 2017 and beyond, we don't see objects like these but use words such as "fearful", "threatening", "uncertain". Or our future expectations may be related to people rather than events such as what sort of leader a person may turn out to be. Our foresight is often descriptive of feelings or attitudes or evaluations based on previous experience, unwarranted prejudices or inadequate information.

Abraham "looked forward to the city" with foundations (Heb 11:10), Moses persevered "seeing Him who is invisible" (11:27), and Paul says God plans to "gather up all things" in the cosmic Christ (Eph 1:10), where "things" mean "the whole creation, spiritual and material" (Foulkes, Tyndale). Jesus' unveiling of the future involves not just seeing, but also hearing. "You will hear of wars and rumours of wars," said Jesus (Matt 24:6), but He also spoke of seeing material signs such as "the desolating sacrilege" (24:15) which would act as a signal to those then living in Judea to flee. The emphasis is on the concrete, not the abstract.

What are the equivalents in the 21st century to the future-linked signs seen by the OT prophets? Legislation enabling forced repatriation? A rocketing retail price index? A nuclear explosion? Yet more air attacks in Syria? Trade barriers? Explicit discrimination? Unilateral treaty cancellation? The same-sex laws? What the OT prophets saw was not just for their own personal enlightenment but part of their ministerial call from God – messages of warning and opportunity to share with their hearers.

The servant of God must be both near-sighted and far-sighted but not short-sighted. He must not be intimidated by the immediate nor discouraged by the distant. If s/he can prayerfully and Biblically relate the signs of the present to the promises of the future and translate such into action in his ministry, s/he will be walking securely in the visionary steps of Jeremiah, Amos and Zechariah.

## Childhood Church Influence

An Australian study early in 2016 looked at the impact of religion as it influenced the behaviour and actions of Australian individuals. It also looked at the number of nominal Australian Christians. It found that two-thirds, 67%, of the Australian population said they had attended a Christian church as a child, around the age of 11. Of that number:

- 38% now attended a Christian church as an adult
- 2% were involved in another religion, and
- 27% no longer identified with any religion.

The vast majority of these 27%, 92%, said they never attended church, but the other 8% said they went occasionally, with 1% of these latter claiming to go once a month.

Asked the other way round, of those currently attending a Christian church:

- 92% said they had grown up attending a church
- 3% said they had grown up in a different religion, and
- 5% said they had grown up with no religious involvement.

A few in this last group of 5% had attended Buddhist or Hindu services. Of those currently attending church, just

over a third (36%) went once or twice a month or more frequently (committed Christians), while 64% said they only attended once or twice a quarter (nominal Christians).

Committed Christians were more likely to have a university degree (38%) than nominal Christians (27%) or non-Christians (28%). Committed Christians were also more likely to have been born overseas (17%), compared with 9% of nominal Christians and 6% of those with no religion.

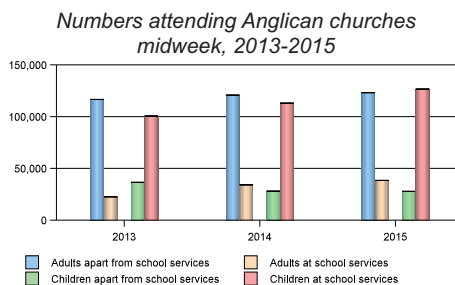
Many of the nominal Christians had high levels of voluntary involvement in society and said they chose their paid occupations so that they could contribute to the lives of others. Many described themselves as spiritual rather than religious. The same survey asked respondents to indicate the value they gave to voluntary work on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 was high; committed Christians scored it higher (7.4) than nominal Christians (6.8) or those of no religion (6.1).

"There was evidence of the influence of Christian values on those who had attended a church when growing up, but who had ceased to attend," wrote the researcher analysing the results of the study, Stephen Reid. "There is a continuing influence of the Christian faith particularly in values and principles."

**SOURCE:** Article by Stephen Reid "Commitment, Nominalism and 'No Religion'", in Pointers, Australian Christian Research Association, Vol 26, No 2, June 2016.

## Anglican Midweek Ministry

**Numbers attending church midweek in the Church of England are increasing, and maybe in other denominations as well where they are not normally measured. In 2013 the decision was taken to ask Anglican churches to identify separately those attending church for school services such as carol services or other special services, and these have now been measured for three years, 2013 to 2015. These are services held in a church, not a member of the ministry team going into a school to hold, lead or speak at a service. The children have to come out of school to attend these midweek services. About a fifth of those attending these midweek "school services" are adults (presumably teachers), and these are counted also and, as with the children, show an increase in numbers, as the graph indicates:**



This bar-chart shows a number of things:

- Both the number of adults attending midweek not as part of school services as well as those coming as part of school services are increasing, those outside of school services shown in blue in the graph and those at school services shown in gold. The number of adults attending these two types of services has increased from a total of 139,000 in 2013 to 162,000 in 2015, a +16% increase in two years.
- The number of children attending church not as part of a school service, labelled "apart from school services" in the chart, has declined (shown in green), from 36,000 in 2013 to 28,000 in 2015, a decrease of -24% in two years.
- The number of children attending school services, however, has increased from 101,000 in 2013 to 127,000 in 2015, an increase of +26% in two years (the pink columns). This increase is sufficient to

eliminate the decrease of children attending outside or apart from school services, so that the total number of children attending church services has increased from 137,000 in 2013 to 155,000 in 2015, an increase of +13%.

So church attendance midweek by children not as part of a school service has dropped but attendance at school services has increased. This increase in attendance at school services in churches midweek may be due to a slightly reducing percentage of members of church teams leading acts of worship in schools themselves, that is, going into schools to take services. In 2014, 29% did this at least once a week and 50% once a month, but in 2015 these percentages were both lower being, respectively, 28% and 48%. From the school's point of view, it may be that taking children to a service in church replaces having a visitor from the church to speak at the school. This would presumably result in more children coming to a service in a church midweek which would then be led by a team ministry member.

The above figures also vary by size of church as might be expected as larger churches tend to have more children at services, especially when part of school services. In 2013, the size of congregations in the Church of England as measured by total Sunday attendance (adults and children) was:

- 3% Over 200
- 11% 101 to 200
- 9% 76 to 100
- 13% 51 to 75
- 23% 26 to 50
- 41% 25 or under

An analysis by the Church of England of attendance by size of church suggests that the increase recorded in children attending church is coming less from the largest churches but rather more from the second tier of churches by size (those under 200 in total attendance rather than above 200).

Weekday attendance in Cathedrals has stopped increasing (from 16,000 in 2010 to 19,000 in 2013) and has fluctuated since then (down to 17,000 in 2014 but up again to 19,000 in 2015). This change has been reflected entirely among adults, as the children have been virtually constant between 2013 and 2015 (just over 4,000).

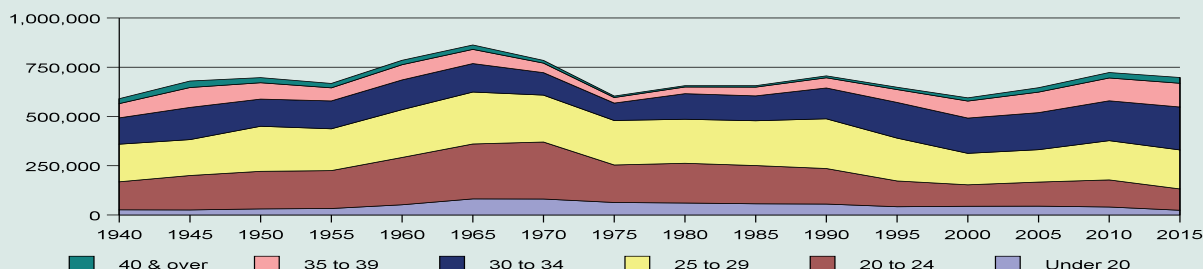
**SOURCES:** Statistics of Mission, 2013 (Figure 16), 2014 (Table 15) and 2015 (Tables 1 and 6), and Cathedral Statistics 2015, Research and Statistics Dept., Archbishops' Council, Church of England.



## OLDER PREGNANCIES

The graph shows the number of births in England and Wales in quinquennial years from 1940 to 2015. The average number is 690,000 a year, but it is obvious that this varies both by age of mother and over time. These changes are relevant to church leaders as they give some indication of flow of young children into their church, assuming that the fertility of churchgoing mothers is similar to those who do not attend church.

Live births by age of mother, England and Wales, 1940-2015



The number of births in 1940 at 590,000 (at 86% of average) was obviously lower as WWII broke out with all its uncertainties for the future. They added just 1.4% to the population. The peak year in the graph is 1965 at 860,000 births (the actual peak was the year before with 880,000), 25% above the average, and 1.8% of the population.

This birth "bulge" was experienced in other countries, especially in America although some ten years earlier, but not in every country in Europe. The early 1960s were the years when "you never had it so good" as Prime Minister MacMillan famously said, but it reflected the general sense of well-being and confidence for the future at that time.

That changed in the later "swinging sixties" with a raft of new legislation on divorce and abortion, changing sexual attitudes, the rise of "flower power" in the 1970s, with a consequence that numbers drastically dropped in the decade to 1975 when births totalled 600,000, 1.2% of the population and 88% of the average.

Total numbers increased slightly between 1975 and 1990 when they were 710,000, 3% above the average and 1.4% of the population, and then dropped again to the millennium year of 2000, when numbers were also 600,000, 88% of average and 1.2% of the then population. Numbers have again increased since then, partly reflecting the earlier bulge 30 years later and the extra numbers of babies being born as greater numbers of immigrants arrived in Britain. In 2015 there were 700,000 births, 1% above average, but still 1.2% of an increasing population, 28% of which were to mothers not born in the UK.

Births also vary by age of mother. Teenage births peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, 10% of all births 1965 to 1975, dropped a little lower in subsequent years up to about 2000 when Britain still had the highest rate of teenage pregnancies in Europe. Since then it has dropped drastically and was only 3% of all births in 2015. This does not actually reflect the number of pregnancies but rather the number of abortions, since more than half of conceptions to teenagers are aborted. While the drop of 46% in numbers since 2000 are welcome, the percentage of conceptions is still higher than in other western European countries.

Births to women in their early 20s increased from 24% of the total in 1940 to 32% by 1965, but abruptly fell in numbers from 280,000 in 1965 to 190,000 in 1975, though still 32% of the total. Since then their proportion has steadily decreased and by 2015 was only 15% of the total. Births to mothers in their late 20s have broadly kept the same throughout this period, from being 32% of the total in 1940 to 28% in 2015.

The percentage of births to mothers in their early 30s has increased through these 75 years, from 23% of the total in 1940 to 31% by 2015. Later marriages (because so often preceded by cohabitation) and the starting of families has become the norm, with women often preferring becoming established in a career before starting a family. Likewise women in their later 30s are having more children. Their numbers have increased from 72,000 of the total in 1940 (12% of all births) to 121,000 in 2015 (17% of all births), as later pregnancies have become less unusual.

Similarly, pregnancies are not uncommon to women aged 40 or more. In 1940 there were just 25,000 such births (4.2% of the total), but this number steadily dropped to 1975 (6,500) and 1980 (6,700 or 1.0% of all births), but with improving medical facilities has steadily increased since then. In 2015 there were 29,000 births to women over 40, again 4.2% of all births, but these numbers are now overtaking the number of births to teenagers (24,000 in 2015). The number of older pregnancies is increasing partly because "it takes time to achieve financial stability and establish a career," as Laura Donnelly, the Health Editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, suggests.

What therefore is the relevance of these trends for church leaders and youth ministers? Older mothers probably means older volunteers to help with the children's work in churches and, perhaps with an eye on their careers, fewer volunteers. More than half of larger Anglican churches in a 2008 survey had insufficient volunteers for their youth work, and more were resorting to "contracts" whereby volunteers agreed to do so many hours in a given period of time, but no more.

Parents of a child born when the mother is 35 will be in their mid-fifties by the time that child is 20.

Many then are more heavily involved in their work, and more likely to be in a position of greater responsibility, finding it more difficult to help with youth teams, perhaps also losing some of their energy and creativity. With successful career parents often choosing to take early retirement, volunteers should become more available, though perhaps as grandparents rather than parents. More churches are, however, employing children's workers rather than relying solely on volunteers. The figures cited above suggest these trends will continue at least for the next decade or so.

**SOURCES:** Live births by age of mother, Office for National Statistics, 2015; The Significance of Larger Churches, Brierley Consultancy report, 2009; article in *The Daily Telegraph*, 25th February, 2015, Page 8.

Before you congratulate anyone else on their forthcoming happy event, you need to distinguish between older pregnancies and middle-age spread!



## These may be helpful

### Books and reports received

*Rooted in the Church*, Summary Report, Church of England, Education Office, Nov 2016. What has helped seeds of faith root and flourish in young people.

*Charting the Faith of Australians*, 30 years in the Christian Research Association, Philip Hughes, contributing editor, (Australian) Christian Research Association, 2016, ISBN 978-1-87522-384-8.

*The Day of Small Things*, George Lings, Church Army Research Dept. An analysis of Fresh Expressions in 21 Dioceses in the Church of England.

*An Encounter with Sagebrush* (Community Church, Albuquerque, New Mexico), A report to the Anglican Church, Colin Bailey, 2016.

*What's wrong with Islamic Finance*, Christian Concern, Christian Legal Centre, 2016.

*Statistics for Mission 2015* and *Cathedral Statistics, 2015*, both Research and Statistics Dept., Archbishops' Council, Church of England, 2016.

*Above and Beyond in Trusteeship*, What good governance looks like, Iona Joy and Oliver Carrington, New Philanthropy Capital, The Clothworkers' Company, December 2016, www.thinkNPC.org.

*Implementing the Family Test*, A review of progress one year on, Relationships Foundation, 2016.

*Ministry Statistics in Focus*, Stipendiary clergy projections, 2015-2035, Research and Statistics Dept., Archbishops' Council, Church of England, 2016.

## Humour

### More poor translations...

(Korean hotel in Seoul) Measles not included in room charge  
(Qatar hotel welcome notes) Please do not use the lift when it is not working  
(French hotel in Paris) Please leave your values at the front desk  
(Indonesian hotel menu in Bali) Toes with butter and jam  
(Street sign in Japan) Waiting will be prosecuted  
(Private school in Nairobi, Kenya) No trespassing without permission  
(Road sign in Malaysia) Caution: Water on road during rain

**SOURCE:** Lost in Translating, Charlie Croker, Michael O'Mara, 2006.



## Providing Facts for Forward Planning

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### SNIPPETS

1) 84% of respondents to a small Traidcraft survey indicated they preferred receiving their Christmas greetings by card, 3% by text and 2% by social media. Presumably the other 11% were by email.

2) The cost of family failure in the UK was estimated at £48 million in 2016, up from £37 million in 2009, according to the Relationship Foundation.

3) Between 4% and 9% of the general UK population have had a Near-Death-Experience, as estimated by Rev Roger Harper, an Anglican prison chaplain and psychiatrist.

4) Christian parents are reluctant to share their faith with their children in case their child is alienated at school or asks a question they can't answer.

5) American research in 2016 found that the average youth ministry in a church requires 1 adult volunteer for every 5 teenagers.

6) The 2016 annual British Social Attitudes' survey found that the percentage of people who said they had NO Religion fell for the second year running from 49% in 2015 to 48%.

7) Cheetahs can go from 0 to 60 miles an hour in just 3 seconds; its spine is flexible, curving in and out with each stride, pushing the cat farther and faster.

**SOURCES:** 1) Article in the *Church Times*, 18th November 2016, Page 5; 2) *Counting the Cost of Family Failure 2016*, Relationships Foundation, November 2016; 3) *Christianity* magazine, December 2016, Page 46; 4) *Church Times*, 11th November 2016; 5) *The State of Youth Ministry*, Barna Group, November 2016; 6) *British Social Attitudes* survey, Nat Cen, *The Tablet*, 13th August 2016, Page 24; 7) *Answersmagazine.com*, October-December, 2016, Page 20.

## CHILDREN WITH LITTLE HOPE

**There is an ongoing debate as to whether impoverished and orphaned children in under-developed countries are best helped in their development by (a) staying with their grandparents or other relatives (all usually equally impoverished), (b) staying in purpose built Children's Homes looking after perhaps 40 to 60 children, or (c) being in smaller family-size units of say 10 or more children where there are at least two adult supervisors, perhaps a married couple, who can act as proxy-parents. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) would say the ideal is (c).**

The first of these, (a), is frequently of no advantage to the child because s/he becomes yet an extra mouth to be fed in a home often without adequate nourishment already, and where education is almost always a further expense which cannot be met. The loss of a parent to any child is always heart-breaking, but to lose both can be totally devastating in Third World or Southern World countries where 85% of the world's 7.4 billion people live.

The problem with (c) is finding couples willing to look after so many children and who also have adequate space for them to sleep and live. If there are say up to 20 children in such a home, this is a considerable expense in terms of food, clothing and accommodation which many are unable to find readily. Giving children in such homes an education is an extra expense. Many countries find they are unable to provide sufficient proxy-parents able and willing to take on this role, largely because of inadequate financial support structures.

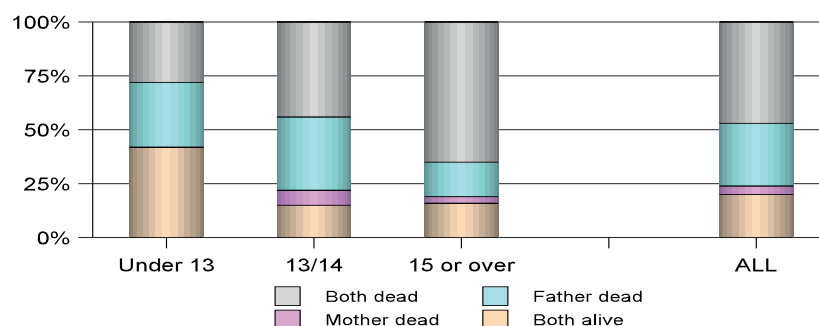
In such circumstances (b) becomes an opportunity, although the funding issue is equally relevant. It is sometimes easier because the staff:child ratio is lower, and hence less expensive per child. However, while children in such Homes may not get as much individual adult attention as in (a) or (c), they usually do get the opportunity to make friends who have gone through similar experiences of losing their parents, often through HIV/Aids or traffic accidents. While it is impossible to replace the deep love of a mother and a father for their child, children can find sharing intimate experiences with other children profoundly helpful. Where else would one hear such conversations as in a Home for orphaned children in one of the Southern World countries:

"How old were you when your mother died?"  
 "Did she take long to die?"  
 "Was she in much pain?"

They then realise they are not the only ones to have experienced such traumatic events. Research was undertaken in 2015 in the third largest city in Kenya, Kisumu, where it is estimated there are about 40,000 orphaned children out of a population of half a million. The city had a number of Children's Homes, mostly charities, often run and financed by churches or Christian organisations. Some 163 children in 17 of these Homes were interviewed; their average age was 13 and on average they had been in their Home for 5 years. A third were in the top 5 in their class at school.

On average they had 5 siblings, which meant they came from slightly larger families than usual in Kenya (6 children where the average fertility rate has recently dropped to 4.9 per woman), one reason probably why their relatives were eager to put them in a Home. As the chart shows children rapidly become orphans in Kenya. The rapidity of being orphaned increased as children moved from being 10 or 11 years old to 15 or over – 28% of the former age were full orphans, but 65% of the later age. Parental death when the children are young and when parents are in their 30s is a common factor of life in East Africa.

Percentage of children in Children's Homes with two, one or no parents alive by age, Kenya, 2015



Children from rural areas who had lost one or both parents were more likely to be in Homes for orphans. The Homes were not problem free. The biggest problem that children faced was their education, largely a lack of money for fees, text books, uniform or school bags. Problems with food and water were highlighted by a fifth, 21%, of the mostly older children.

Nine out of 10 of the children interviewed felt that the Home services they received were good (50%) or excellent (40%). Every Home had its rules and regulations. Three-quarters of the children (76%) strongly agreed that such regulations helped in the general running of the Home, and a further 22% agreed. Why were they useful? Essentially because they helped children "choose to do the right" thing, that is, the children saw the moral values by which the Home was run. All Homes offered some kind of leisure activities, on average two types each, of which football was by far the most popular (60%).

*Continued on page 4*