







## REFLECTIONS

It was an enormous challenge. In fact, her life depended upon it. Was she willing, as we would say, “to put all her eggs in one basket”? Would she risk what Rudyard Kipling called “one turn of pitch and toss”?

Sometimes we have to make a major decision. We don't yet have all the finance or personnel, but should we not start the new building, or the new programme? One major piece of information is missing, and it isn't going to be available immediately. Do we risk all, and go ahead? "Don't be a fool, are you really sure this is necessary?" our inner self whispers. "How can you do this? Isn't it just arrogance on your part, trying to be more than you really are?"

We are given an opportunity to do something. A 79-year old American ex-CEO was asked to become the CEO of a new agency – “I'll do it,” he said. John Laing was offered the contracts for building the M1 and the new Coventry Cathedral. Could his firm cope with such a twin challenge? He signed for both on the same day (30th October 1956); the answer was affirmative.

The lady in our opening paragraph was an orphan, without siblings. She was alone, but brought up by a very caring uncle. She was also very beautiful, and was chosen from among all the potential young women to become the wife of the Emperor. She had a secret, however, which she kept from her husband.

In those days, 2,500 years ago, societal rules were very strict. The King was absolute monarch. No-one entered his presence without permission, and to attempt to do so was death – unless at the moment of encounter he deemed otherwise. Esther, the secret Jew, was told by her uncle of a plot to eliminate all the Jews in the Persian Empire. Would she approach the Emperor with a plan to get that thwarted? Only after every Jew in the capital city of Susa spent 3 days in fasting and prayer, she said.

Her uncle, Mordecai, agreed, and said she was probably the King's favourite wife “for such a time as this”. We now know she risked all (“If I perish, I perish”), her meeting with King Xerxes was granted, her plan of special feasts was successful, the enemy was defeated, and the Jews were saved from holocaust.

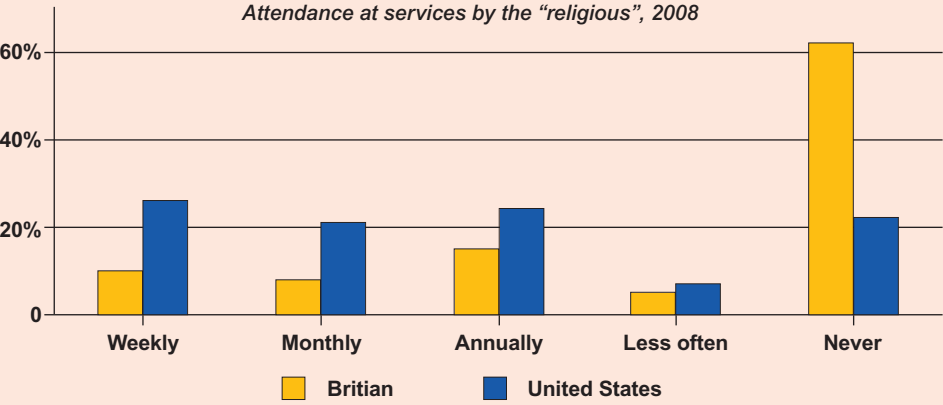
But her challenge remains. Are your plans under God, for such a time as this, worth taking a risk like that which Esther took? Each moment of history brings with it its time of decision. When faced with appalling news from the battlefield, Churchill simply said, “Let us go forward”. Exactly so.

### Affiliation and Involvement

In 1990 80% of French people would call themselves Catholic, but that was true of only 51% in 2007, a huge decline in a short period. Is that related to the fact that only 58% of French homes have a Bible, and only 26% of French people have read it?

In the United States, a 2009 survey of 12 megachurches (those with at least 2,000 on a Sunday) found that attenders' average age was 40 (younger than most churches), that almost a third were single, that many had seen spiritual growth in their lives in the last year (62%), were committed to Christ (92%), but were not active in the church (45% never volunteered to help), nor gave generously (32% gave only a little or nothing at all). This shows that affiliation, even attendance and spiritual commitment, do not necessarily correlate with church involvement.

In the UK some 3% of the population are evangelical churchgoers, but some 9% would call themselves evangelical while not attending. In France, less than 1% of the population is evangelical, though whether this 1% is of churchgoers or those calling themselves evangelical is not clear.



A gap between affiliation and involvement has long been known, with those identified with a certain position but inactive often being called “nominal Christian/Catholic/Evangelical” or whatever. A different typology has now been introduced by Professor David Voas – those who are religious (who may or may not attend regularly), those who are “fuzzy” and those who are unreligious.

In his article in the December 2009 issue of *FutureFirst*, the percentages for these 3 groups were given as, respectively, 25%, 35% and 40%. In the United States they are 71%, 25% and 4%.

### What some people say

My young grandson called the other day to wish me Happy Birthday. He asked me how old I was, and I told him, 62. My grandson was quiet for a moment, and then he asked, "Did you start at 1?"

The children were lined up in the cafeteria of a Catholic elementary school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The nun posted a note on the apply tray, “Take only ONE. God is watching.” At the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cakes, next to which, in a child's handwriting, was a sign, “Take all you want. God is watching the apples.”

SOURCE: Emails from Alison Hills, Tonbridge, and Kim Tainio, Borough Green.

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How involved are the “religious”, judging involvement by church attendance? This is illustrated in the chart, showing that Britain and the United States are quite different, using *British Social Attitudes* Survey data.

The British religious mostly specialise in never attending, whereas the American religious attend reasonably frequently – on average once every 3 weeks. The British religious attend once every 2 months, varying significantly by denomination – Anglicans once every 10 weeks, others once a month.

Does this variation in affiliation make any difference to people's lives? YES, 92% of the religious say that religion helps people gain comfort, whereas that is true only of 80% of the fuzzy and 68% of the unreligious. Should any religious group be able to have their own schools? YES say 56% of the religious, 39% of the fuzzy and 36% of the unreligious.

It affects opinions also. Is abortion wrong only sometimes or not at all if there is a strong chance of a birth defect? YES say 67% of the religious, 81% of the fuzzy and 86% of the unreligious. Is pre-marital sex always or almost always wrong? YES say 29% of the religious, 10% of the fuzzy and

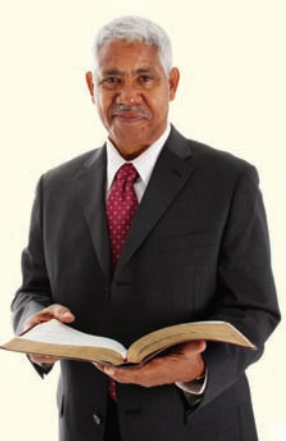
## Sermons

The College of Preachers undertook a survey in 2009 to which 193 people responded from 16 different churches. One sixth (17%) said sermons frequently changed the way they lived, and three-fifths (62%) said they provided a “sense of God's love”. Just over half (55%) felt their knowledge of Jesus had improved. How would your hearers evaluate your sermons?

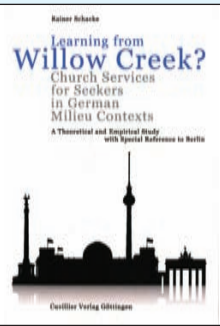
Cambray Baptist Church in Cheltenham had 423 responses to the question, “If you could ask God one question, and knew He'd answer it, what would it be?” The top three were: Why does God allow suffering? Why am I here? What happens when I die?

These were then made into widely announced sermon topics, which drew 25 visitors the first Sunday. Could your church do something similar?

SOURCES: Articles in the Church Times, 22nd January, 2010 and in the Baptist Times, 19th March, 2010.



## GERMAN CHURCH GROWTH



standing of different “clusters” and how they can reflect different life-styles. Rainer Schacke decided to use this method to investigate church growth in Germany for his doctoral thesis with the London School of Theology.

By interviewing church members in several Berlin churches, Rainer identified which of these groups were among its members. In one church, for example, there were four – New Middle Class, Postmaterialists, Modern Performers and Experimentalists, though not necessarily in the proportions shown in the diagram which relate to the entire city of Berlin. Measuring the same 5 years later,

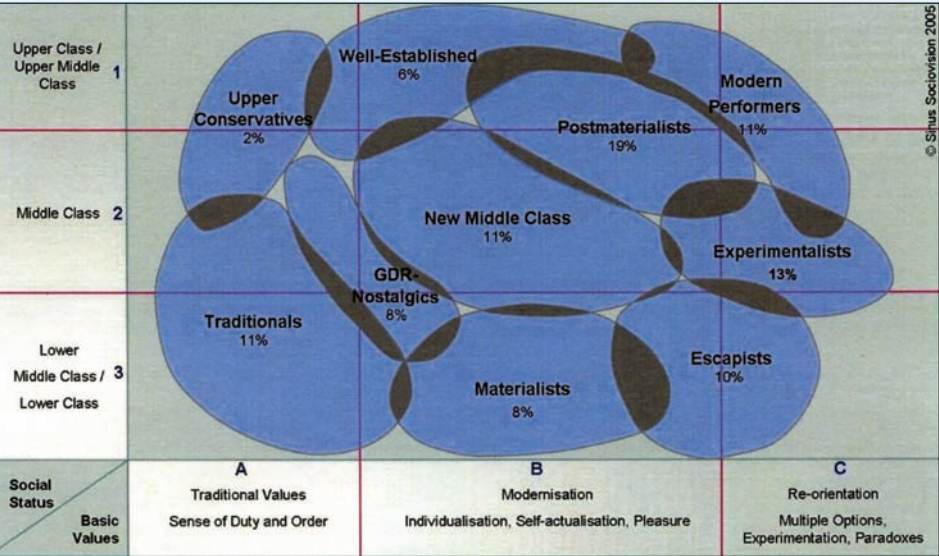
he found that some now attending the same church were in a different group, the Materialists group – an extra group was being reached, with a different class background and values.

Some of the churches had planted an extra congregation in the period under measurement, which often reached different groups from those in the original church. How best span the culture differences thus revealed? He also found that the different churches were reaching different groups in different locations. Church leaders thus could compare how they were reaching people in a common group, say the New Middle Class, but some groups, like the Traditionalists, were only being reached by one church.

The value of this approach is that the domains show the neighbourhood values which help in understanding how to reach people where they currently stand. The author can be reached via the publisher of the book, info@cuvillier.de.

SOURCE: Learning from Willow Creek? Church Services for seekers in German Milieu Contexts, Rainer Schacke, Cuvillier Göttingen, 2009, ISBN 978-3-86955-104-3.

One such milieu for the city of Berlin is shown. Each of the 10 groups can be analysed by age, employment, leisure interests, and so on.



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Is the future one of gloom? No. I recognise that being on the edge means that frequently you are in front of the curve. In Suffolk over the past 40 years we have developed a range of solutions to ministry which have later been recognised by the wider church as innovative. I don't know what we will do but I do believe that we will rise to the challenge.

SOURCES: Mid-year estimates 1971-2008 and 2008 based projections 2008-2026; Office for National Statistics; Projected changes in population, Suffolk County Council citing Dwelling Led Projections, Royal Statistical Society, December 2006

## Being Fair

An Ofsted survey asked a group of 130 young people aged 11 to 14 if they were treated fairly, recognising that what “fairness” means will vary from child to child.

Most (96%) felt that adults running activities they attended generally treated them fairly, as did 94% of doctors, 88% of teachers and 83% of social workers. Friends followed closely at 82%, and other children or young people at 80%. However, just under three-quarters (72%) of the general public treated them fairly.

What made young people treat other young people unfairly? They said if they “look different” (14%), or misbehave (13%), or come from a different culture or race (13%), or act differently (12%) or themselves treat others unfairly (11%).

What made adults treat young people unfairly? That question was easier to answer. A third (34%) said if they misbehaved or got into trouble, followed by their attitude (11%) or were rude or unkind to others (10%).

Were things improving? Is the way young people are being treated getting more fair? Three-fifths (60%) said YES, and a sixth (18%) said NO, it was getting more unfair. A fifth (22%) thought it hadn't changed.

What answers would your young people give?

SOURCE: Fairness and unfairness. A report of children's views, Children's Rights Director for England, Ofsted, 2010, www.rights4me.org.

## These may be helpful

Books and reports received

*Living Dolls*, The Return of Sexism, Natasha Walter [a journalist], Virago Press, 2010, already reprinted. A passionate and important book looking afresh at women and girls, at sexism and femininity today. Well researched, frankly stated, debunks common myths and stereotypes about women, though some might find the cover offensive.

*87th Annual Report of the Irish Council of Churches*, for the year ending 2009, with many activity details and lists of committees, available from the Inter-Church Centre, 48, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ.

*Faith in the Countryside*, by Declan Flanagan, Rural Ministries, Wellingborough 2010. Six key findings from churches across all denominations, focussing on leadership and planning for those wanting to plant and grow churches in rural areas.

*Building Better Neighbourhoods*, the Contribution of Faith Communities to Oxfordshire Life, by Dr David Jarvis et al, Coventry University Applied Research Centre in Sustainable Regeneration, 2010, ISBN 978-1-84600-034-8.



## Providing Facts for Forward Planning

### SNIPPETS

1) Methodist men live for an average of 84 years instead of the normal 77, and Methodist women to 91 instead of 82, due to “our emphasis on physical health and avoiding excess,” said Dr Richard Vautrey.

2) The top 500 billionaires in the world collectively are worth twice as much as the poorest two billion people on the earth.

3) 7% of teenagers aged 15-17 in Lewisham, south London, conceived in 2006-8, the highest rate in the country.

4) In the year 1972, 7% of the population got married; in 2008 it was 2%. Just 40% of the UK population is married today.

5) The number of exhibitors and visitors to the 2010 London Book Fair in April was 32% down on the 2009 Fair.

6) 40% of Americans believe the Second Coming will have occurred by 2050, and 46% don't.

7) The weight of China's “Three Gorges” Reservoir will tilt the earth's axis by nearly an inch.

SOURCES: 1) Report in the Church Times, 2nd July 2010; 2) In It Is In Age, Andy Matheson, Authentic, 2010; 3) and 4) Fact File UK, Population, The Guardian, 24th April, 2010; 5) The Bookseller, 2nd July 2010; 6) Pew Research Centre study quoted in the Church Times, 25th June 2010 Page 11; 7) National Geographic magazine, Special issue on “Water”, April 2010, Page 128.

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## The Challenge of an Ageing Population

Revd Canon Graham Hedger,  
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Table 1: UK population aged 65 and over, and percentage of total, by gender

Year	Men		Women		Total	
	Millions	% of total	Millions	% of total	Millions	% of total
1971	2.84	11%	2.78	10%	5.62	10%
2001	3.93	14%	5.45	18%	9.38	16%
2021	5.69	18%	7.01	21%	12.90	19%

Table 2: Number of people in Suffolk and 2 Districts, by age-group

		Under 15		15 to 64		Over 65	
		Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
2000	All Suffolk	124,400	19%	422,600	63%	123,300	18%
	Suffolk Coastal	20,800	18%	70,500	61%	24,100	21%
	Waveney	20,200	18%	68,000	60%	24,300	22%
2021	All Suffolk	116,200	16%	433,400	59%	184,000	25%
	Suffolk Coastal	17,200	14%	68,000	55%	38,600	31%
	Waveney	15,900	14%	62,500	56%	34,000	30%

It is no secret that the population of Britain is both growing and ageing. The combination of a falling birth rate (though this may be changing) and the increasing longevity of life is producing both a larger population and a significant increase in the over 65s.

In the 50 years from 1971 to 2021 the proportion of the UK population aged over 65 is expected to increase from 10% to 19%, as Table 1 indicates. The increase in population is not uniform across Britain, or even the regions and counties. In Suffolk, the changes, while not dramatic, are significant especially in the coastal strip covered by two district councils (Suffolk Coastal and Waveney). In the period between 2001 and 2021 the population over the age of 65 in Suffolk Coastal is expected to increase by 50%, as shown in Table 2.

The two districts, although different, share several common elements. Both have one significant centre of population: Lowestoft in Waveney, and Felixstowe in Suffolk Coastal. However, Lowestoft has significant deprivation and economic problems. Felixstowe is smaller and is growing; it has the largest UK container port, though it, too, has some pockets of deprivation. Both districts share a common problem of an ageing population. The coastal strip and small market towns attract recently retired people into the area and a combination of relative affluence and healthy lifestyles may well be significant contributing factors to longevity of life.

Such a growth brings with it challenges and opportunities for the local authorities, primary care trusts, the voluntary sector and the churches. One of the advantages of this growing population is that many of the ‘young old’ are willing and able volunteers in the numerous charities and community groups in the area. This has breathed new life into organisations and helped many communities tackle local need. In the current climate where local authorities will be seeking to move from providing some services to commissioning from the third sector this is welcome news. Good health, relative wealth and ability mask many other

issues, and, in particular, longer term issues for an elderly population. It is known that in many of the villages and towns of the area there are many people over the retirement age who do not have generous (if any) private pensions, and do not have good health. Long term action by the local authorities and the third sector has sought to address this through advice on benefits and the development of outreach services. The churches, working in partnership with many agencies, are frequently the vehicle for bringing people and agencies together so that people can continue to live in their homes for longer periods.

It has always been difficult in small churches to provide a balance of activities and services that attract younger people. If the population in the area is growing older then there will be fewer young people to start with. Add to that the problem of attracting them to church events and it could be a recipe for accelerated decline. The options might include accepting the situation and urging families to travel to larger town churches, or perhaps arranging specialised events on an occasional basis to complement what happens on a regular basis. My experience of four small rural churches is that some of the oldest church members are game for anything and welcome changes to church life. They recognise that not everything on offer is their cup of tea but see it as the way forward.

I believe that as we get to grips with some of the challenges presented by the ageing population we will discover new and innovative ways of meeting the needs. We might start employing church community workers who specialise in care of the older members of a community. We will certainly need to look beyond the local church and think across areas for both this sort of ministry and other specialist roles. We might find that some churches specialise in ministering to specific groups of people (a revision of Donald McGavran's “homogeneous principle” of church growth).

There are other issues to be taken into account. Nationally the Church of England is experiencing a decline in stipendiary clergy, and over the next few years there will be significant reductions. This will impact on the whole church but could be felt most keenly in rural churches where often clergy are expected to be responsible for several churches. Providing the fall in stipendiary numbers is matched by an increase in self supporting clergy and other forms of ministry then the problem will not be too severe. But, will this pool of willing and

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