

Leaving the Church

Two surveys published in the mid-1990s measured the percentage of people who returned to church after they had left “for at least a year”. They found that some 40% returned after a period of some 8 to 10 years, with Eddie Gibbs finding they were “less spiritual” on their return. It would be interesting to research the reasons in returning to church through the successful “Back to Church Sunday” apart from a friendly invitation, if there are other reasons involved.

Leslie Francis and Philip Richter have extensively researched the reasons for leaving with the key reason being poor relationships, followed by a loss of faith or moving into a new area where church didn’t fit into their changed lifestyle or work pattern. Others felt they had “grown out” of church and yet others that they didn’t get out of it what they put into it.

A totally different perspective on why there is disengagement comes from Indian research, which gives these reasons, though not stating their order of importance:

- 1) Lack of pre-baptismal care (that is, they lack understanding of the faith)
- 2) Lack of post baptismal care, in follow-up, pastoral care or counselling (lack of spiritual nourishment)
- 3) Realisation of the sufferings they have to endure for the sake of their faith
- 4) Social pressure from their society (relatives and family members)
- 5) Difficulty in finding Christian life partners (girls unmarried by 30 is considered a stigma)
- 6) Difficulty in overcoming the bad habits in which they were bound (especially drinking)
- 7) Dependency on missionaries for anything due to the indispensability attitude of the missionaries
- 8) Persecution from affluent people (higher castes stop hiring believers in lower castes)
- 9) Unanswered prayers in times of sickness
- 10) Inadequate knowledge of the scriptures owing to non-literacy
- 11) Missionaries’ minimal understanding on the differences between Biblical principles and practice (for example, some missionaries insist dead people must be buried not cremated as is often the Indian custom, or that women should not wear bangles to show they are married as do others in their society)
- 12) Lack of exemplary life of Christians who are living in church growth areas.

In today’s increasingly non-Biblical UK society, some of these reasons are relevant to us, even if we would wish to put them in alternative language. Our churches, too, need to use the opportunity of baptism, prepare people for suffering and persecution, encourage prayer for unbelieving families, instruct young people about sexual attitudes and Christian marriage, help believers cope with sickness and thorny issues such as unanswered prayer, teach Christians how to face and overcome temptation, warn about the dangers of over relying on leadership, all based on deep understanding of Scripture and powerful application of its teaching.

SOURCES: W inning Them Back, Eddie Gibbs, MARC Publications, 1993; Gone for Good, Leslie Francis and Philip Richter, Epworth Press, 2008; article by Christopher Thomas “Attrition of Believers” in Indian Church Growth Quarterly, July-September 2010, Vol 17, No 2, Page 6.

World Focus in October

The October 2010 Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town was a wonderfully successful gathering of over 4,000 delegates from 196 countries around the world, two-thirds of whom came from the Third (or Developing) World. Two-fifths were under the age of 50, and almost a third were women in ministry leadership. 700 tables of 6 people meeting together each day created fellowship and prayerful support.

There were always sufficient numbers of staff to ensure smooth facilitation, and there were 300+ special observers. The purpose of the Congress was to equip and encourage the church worldwide to continue reaching out to all the lost especially over the next decade.

It might be thought that such a vast exercise would be preceded by an evaluation of where the world was in evangelistic terms, but this was left in effect to the next edition of Operation World [OW] which was published during the Congress week. While OW is principally a prayer guide for the nations, behind that is a vast and complex database covering the world.



There are only two such databases in existence – this one and the World Religion Database [WRD] run by Gordon-Conwell University under Dr Todd Johnson. Naturally the two have much in common but they are different. The WRD is behind the recently published Atlas of Global Christianity.

OW and WRD use the same UN regional breakdowns of which countries belong where. They also use the same broad denominational classification. However, OW ensures that all its sub-totals add up to the grand total (which WRD doesn’t do), and more importantly some of their definitions, especially for evangelicals, differ. OW follows more conventional, denominational and normally understood definitions of charismatic, Pentecostals and evangelicals. Personally, this author finds the OW basis more understandable and its consequent numbers more convincing!

The first part of OW gives an overview of World Christianity which formed a natural backdrop to the discussions at the Congress. A third of the world are nominally Christian and over a fifth (22%) nominally Muslim. About half (16%) of the world’s population of Christians are Catholic, in turn about double the proportion of Protestants. Independents and Orthodox (at 4% each) are the only other two major blocs.

Evangelicals are said to be 8% of the world’s population. Pentecostals are 3% and Charismatics 6% (not all charismatics are evangelical). These figures are broken down by continent: 27% of North America’s population are evangelical, 18% of Africa’s, 18% of the Pacific [old Oceania], 17% of Latin America, 14% of the Caribbean, 4% of Asia

DEPENDENT CHILDREN

There are over 13 million dependent children in the UK, that is, those under the age of 16, or unmarried young people aged 16 to 18 in full-time education. That number in 2009 was a fifth (21%) of the population, but under two-thirds of them (just 63%) live with two married adults (their parents). In a small number of these cases (about 1%) the two married adults are the child(ren)’s grandparents. The average number of children in families with two married adults is 1.8.

One in every eight (13%) dependent children live with two unmarried (cohabiting) adults, one or both of whom may be their parent(s). Three-quarters (73%) of cohabiting partners have never been married, 2% have been widowed, and the remaining quarter (25%) are divorced or separated. The average number of children in these families is 1.7.

A 2005 survey showed that these percentages are broadly true of churched children also. One youth leader taking a weekly Bible Class for 10 youngsters was shocked to find that four of them were not living with both their parents, though she had known that just one of them had divorced parents. It means that when the minister or leader says, “Invite your parents to come for the special Christmas Carol service,” two in every five children will be wondering, “Does he really mean my father, or the man who lives in our house?” or will feel the request irrelevant as they think, “I only have one parent.”

Lone parents

The remaining quarter (24%) of children are being brought up by a single adult, invariably one of their parents. Only a tenth (10%) of these lone parents are male. The average number of children in a lone parent family is 1.6, which means that many lone parents are looking after two or even three children. Half of the lone mothers were married, but relationship breakdown means they are now either separated or divorced from their former husband. The other half are single, and the father of their child(ren) has left them to bring them up alone. Less than one in a thousand lone mothers are widows, some of these from the wars in Iran and Afghanistan.

Single parents are most numerous among black ethnic groups: 41% of families of Black Caribbean families have one parent, compared with 22% of Whites, 15% of Chinese and 10% of Indians. The think tank, Civitas, says that “children who grow up without their biological fathers are more likely to be unemployed, commit crime and leave education early. They are also twice as likely to be homeless, and three times more likely to live in rented accommodation than children from two-parent families.”

Step-families

Divorce and re-marriage are quite common – some 17% of those aged 35 to 44 who are not single, and who will often have a family, are divorced and now re-married or cohabiting. In the subsequent step-family, 86% will have children from the mother’s previous marriage or cohabitation, 10% from the father’s, and 4% from both. So step-brothers and step-sisters are relatively common as children grow up, and for those children who come to church it would always be helpful to have the opportunity to discuss family relationships in this context.

“make-do” people, as well as rich people. In Tim Keller’s view, churches in the city have to:

- **Get used to different cultures**
- **Show people their work/life balance**
- **Be constantly open to change**
- **Be famous in its geographical area**
- **Be the centre of the arts, in collaboration with others.**

Tim ended by quoting Ray Bakke, the former Senior Lausanne Associate for Urban Ministry, who said, “History began in a garden, but it will end in a city.” He challenged the audience to be “priests in our cities,” citing how Abraham prayed for the unbelieving cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (though mostly out of concern for his nephew Lot and family), acting as their representative. He also spoke of Jonah, angry when the tree covering him died, saying that in effect God said to him, “Jonah, you love space, but I love people.” So should we.

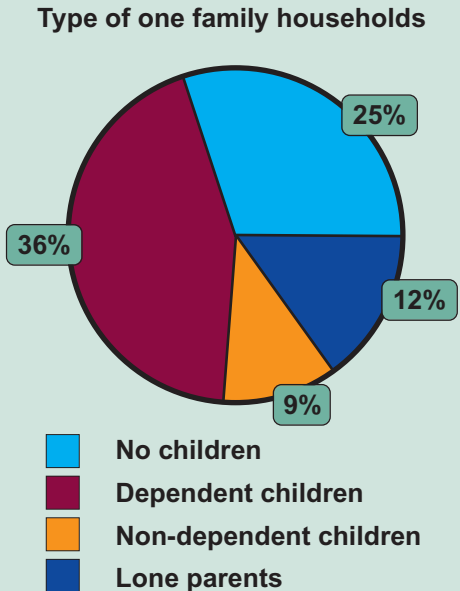
SOURCES: Tim Keller on Global Issues, Megacities, Priary 3, 20th October, Third Lausanne Congress, www.asiaandthetext.com; International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol 34, No 1, January 2010, OMS.

A city has all kinds of people – young adults, poor and broken people (mostly unreached in shanty towns),

Sometimes these families are fractious, and the likelihood of physical abuse within them, between step-siblings, can be high. Figures are not available for the number of half-brothers or sisters (from the new relationship), as these will obviously complicate family relationships even further, perhaps leading to the sidelining of step-brothers and sisters.

Households

There were 59 million households in Great Britain in 2009. Five-sixths of the people in these households (82%) were in one family households, 12% in one person households (half with those over state pension age and half under), and the remaining 6% were in multi-family or two-unrelated- adults-without-children households. The pie-chart shows the make-up of the 82% family households.



SNOWFLAKES

Poverty. What does it mean to be poor? At the Living Hope Trust just 20 miles south of Cape Town, South Africa, a group of people work to help/enable some of the people who live nearby escape from the crippling economic conditions in which they find themselves. The leader of that work described the poverty mind-set they seek to tackle as comprising the following issues:

- **No plan for the future**
- **Dependency on alcohol or drugs**
- **Unable to speak up for themselves**
- **Inability to see creative opportunities**
- **A distorted view of themselves**
- **No dreams of a different world**
- **Not qualified, and no skills**
- **Often with sickness and ill health**
- **Feel they are stuck in a box and can’t get out.**

Living Hope believes poverty starts in the mind, so give information and training to help people obtain some kind of employment, however trivial. Some of the issues they seek to redress, however, relate to poverty in quite different contexts, such as in leadership, education or family circumstance in countries such as the UK. If part of the solution is in training, how can we help people think outside their box?

SOURCE: Living Hope, Chair Rev John Tomas, www.livinghope.co.za.

Mission is ...?

The Edinburgh 2010 Conference held in June commemorated the famous 1910 Edinburgh Conference with its ringing challenge of “evangelising the world in this generation.” Partly in preparation for the 2010 Conference a study was spearheaded by Canon Janice Price, Secretary of the Global Mission Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland [CBTI], to ascertain how the word “mission” was perceived by church leaders and others.

They scrutinised the websites of various denominations and agencies to see the connotations attached to the word and formulated a questionnaire which was made available on online, sent out on paper to nearly 300 churches in the Midlands and circulated to delegates at a mission conference. In total there were nearly 200 respondents. Each was asked how far they agreed or disagreed with given statements.

Mission is often summarised as: proclaiming the Good News; teaching new believers;

Statement	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %
Proclaiming the Gospel is about using both word and deed	98	1	1
Hospitality and openness to all are key aspects of mission	93	6	1
In a world of conflict mission must address reconciliation	93	5	2
Mission is primarily about the church taking the Gospel into the world	84	11	5
Mission requires a call to repentance and new life in Christ	81	10	9
Mission is relational and best expressed through partnerships	78	17	5
Mission is primarily about following God into the world	73	20	7
Mission without social action is not mission	69	16	15
The yardstick of mission is concern for the poorest	53	28	19
Mission without proclamation is not mission	53	26	21
Mission is primarily about bringing justice to the world	36	25	39
Mission is best carried out in a particular place by Christians	20	38	42

SOURCES: Foundations for Mission, Anne Richards et al, CBTI, 2010; article by William Burrows in International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Vol 34, No 3, July 2010, Page 135; The Cape Town Commission, draft advance copy, The Lausanne Movement, October 2010, Page 22.

“Hotbeds” of terrorism ? It is sometimes alleged that certain parts of England are especially likely to breed Muslims undertaking terrorist activity. The authors of a book challenging myths about race and immigration have looked at this carefully and concluded that the allegation is not true. Using 2001 Census data, they looked at the number charged with terrorism and where they lived; details are in the Table:

Proportion of Muslims charged with terrorism by concentration of Muslims				
Concentration of Muslims	Number of Local Authority Districts	Total Muslim population	Concentration of Muslims (% of local population)	Number of Muslims charged with terrorism
Lowest	325	391,344	1%	16
Low	30	381,933	6%	26
High	14	356,025	11%	16
Highest	7	432,418	18%	17

They concluded that concentration of Muslims is not associated with terrorism. “Neither segregation nor neighbourly sympathy ... produces or characterises someone committed to acts of terrorism.”

SOURCE: Sleepwalking to segregation?, by Nissa Finney and Ludi Simpson, Policy Press, Bristol, 2009, Page 109.

Mission trips through American “mega” churches are increasing, but are mainly short-term trips for high school youth. Some 94% of the 405 churches surveyed organise such trips, spending up to a third (32%) of total expenditure on them. Such support

responding to human need; seeking to transform society, and safeguarding creation. Others would say that mission is now “less about attracting converts to Christ” than about promoting “human liberation and to alleviate suffering”. The forthcoming Cape Town Commitment says “mission must reflect the integration of evangelism and committed engagement in the world,” showing a different response by evangelicals to the above statements.

Answers to 12 of the 44 questions in the CBTI survey are given in the following Table where “Agree” includes “Strongly agree” as well as “Agree”, and “Disagree” similarly. They show that the word “mission” is diversely understood, some giving primacy to proclamation and others to social action, and yet others to both.

competes with expenditure on full-time mission workers, and may be one reason why the number of the latter is declining. The trips are frequently (82%) based on countries which are “centres of global Christianity” rather than places where there are few Christians, and are thus in effect meeting the needs of the mega-church and extending its ministry and influence.

SOURCE: Article in Religion Watch, May/June 2010, Page 2.

The 4-14 Window. (That is children between 4 and 14 years of age). Some Latin American workers have highlighted “the 4-14 window” as being the age of key people to reach. Their concern for young people, expressed at the Lausanne Congress, might well be taken up in the UK also. In a detailed survey of 28,000 children across the continent, they found that:

- 19% had thought of committing suicide
- 32% had had enough alcohol to get drunk on at least one occasion
- 39% had had sexual intercourse
- 64% had broken the law, including 15% who had stolen something, and 55% who had cheated in an exam
- 77% spent less than an hour a week talking with their parents
- 82% spent at least 8 hours a week watching TV or using the web.

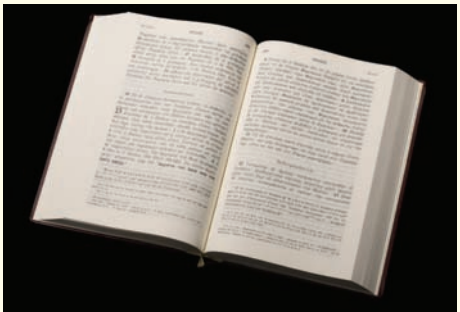
Denomination	Conservative %	Labour %	Lib Dems %	Other parties %
Anglicans	45	25	20	10
R Catholics	30	40	23	7
Other Christian	33	30	26	11
Other religions	31	28	31	10
Not religious	29	28	33	10
Actual result	36	29	23	12

Doesn’t have to be South America, really, does it? Similar concerns could easily be chalked up for those under 15 in this country. We tend to blame the children, but part of the cause is poor parenting. One infant school head said the other day at a Governors’ meeting, “We take children as young as 3, but some have acute speaking problems because they’ve been used to sucking dummies continually.” The meeting went on to discuss how their linked Secondary School could help provide better parenting skills both in their sixth form lessons and to the wider community.

- 1) Give Me Joy in My Heart
2) Amazing Grace
3) We Pledge to One Another
4) Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
5) Jerusalem.

As might be expected, these are very different from those chosen in a Royal School of Church Music survey to mark the publication of Sing Praise: How shall I sing that Majesty?, Love Divine, all loves excelling, All my hope on God is founded, In Christ alone and When in our music God is glorified.

SOURCES: The Way, October 2010, Page 9; article in Church Times 24th September 2010.



REFLECTIONS

Are You Focussed Outward?

In a sailboat, we are looking at the water, listening to the wind and, most importantly, attending to the subtle ways the boat responds. An experienced sailor sails as much by feeling and hearing as by seeing. In listening to the sails, the ropes, the water against the keel, and the creaks of the boat, a good sailor can almost see the wind and know how it is blowing. On the other hand, in a powerboat, you can't hear the wind, you can't hear the sea, and you can't hear the boat – all you hear is the motor. Or as one old sailor contrasted it, “A sailing vessel is alive in a way that no ship with mechanical power could ever be.”

As leaders, we naturally look to our intellect, insights, experience and ideas to guide these boats of ours. But our motor of ministry activity can sometimes get so loud that we can't begin to hear the wind, much less feel how our boat is responding to the wind.

Our ministry motors – the engines of aggressive programmes, activities and initiatives – can drown out our ability to hear the wind and know how the wind and boat are interacting. If our motor is cranked up to full speed, we get going so fast that the most vital and strategic ministry opportunities become a blur as we speed by them.

But if we focus on the sail and sky instead of the motor and power, we will be looking up and out, rather than staring down and in. The contrast couldn't be starker – and this is a critical benchmark to examine if we are catching the wind of God instead of powering our own motorboat. If we focus on our motor, we not only miss the wind of God, but we even forget that God gave us the gifts that allowed us to build that motor in the first place. So we doubly miss the blessing of God.

The Polish novelist and sailor Joseph Conrad wrote, “The true peace of God begins at any point 1,000 miles from the nearest land.”

As leader, have you ever been so far from land that you had to focus on the vastness of the sky because your motor wouldn't do you any good that far from your secure harbour? To catch the wind of God, our focus must be on the limitless power of the Holy Spirit instead of on the power of a motor that never allows us to stray far from shore.

Adapted from The Longview, Lasting Strategies for Rising Leaders, by Dr Roger Parrott, David Cook, Colorado Springs, 2009, Pages 242-244.

UK Religions

The new 2010 Integrated Household Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics included a question on a person's religion. The Table shows the changes between this sample of 440,000 adults with the 2001 Population Census:

Religion	2001 %	2010 %
Christian	71.6	71.1
Muslim	2.7	4.2
Hindu	0.9	1.5
Sikh	0.6	0.7
Jew	0.4	0.6
Buddhist	0.3	0.4
Other religions	0.3	1.1
No religion/not given	23.2	20.4
Base (= 100%)	58.8mn	440,000

Despite many claims that secularism is increasing, this study does not support that change, rather that those with no religion are decreasing (although not quite the same thing). The number who are Christian has reduced only marginally, while all non-Christian religions have increased (from 5.2% of the total to 8.5%), Muslims, Hindus and Other religions the most proportionately. It will be interesting to see how far these 2010 results prefigure the 2011 Census findings.

SOURCES: ONS/The Daily Mail in The Week, 2nd October 2010; article in ChurchTimes, 1st October 2010.

What some people say

The butcher backed into the meat grinder and got a little behind in his work.

Edna Healey once remarked to her husband at a dinner, “I think we can go now, Denis,” she said, “I don't think there's anyone you haven't insulted.”

SOURCE: IndexNo 11, July 2010, Page 7; The Week, 31st July 2010, Page 38.

BOOK REVIEW

Dry Bones can Live: How to be part of a healthy church by John James, O Books, John Hunt Ltd, Hampshire, 2010 210 pages, £11.99



This book has been carved out of the pastoral experience of a fruitful ministry in Penarth Tabernacle, a large Baptist church in North Wales. John James understands that the church is God's instrument for the Kingdom, and looks at its current life soberly and frankly, but with a determined belief that things can be different. He writes with an eye on what research is saying, with a focus on the future and with a certainty that prayer can be answered if growth is the aim.

It is practical, easy to read, and covers a huge number of topics. It thus gives a wide perspective in an accessible way. It's a great pity that the sub-headings are not printed in bold for ready identification, but don't let that put you off a book to encourage and help those who are currently finding ministerial life tough. Written from a clear evangelical perspective, it touches on church life whatever one's persuasion. It is the testimony of a lifetime's endeavours for God.

These may be helpful

Books and reports received

The European Atlas of the Seas, European Commission, www.ec.europa.eu/maritimeatlas, looks especially at the environment, fishing, society and transport.

Welfare and Religion in 21st Century (Volume 1), edited by Anders Backstrom and Grace Davie, is a comparative study of how religious institutions and beliefs interact in 8 Western European countries, Ashgate 2009.

Cycles of Poverty, Unemployment and Low Pay, by Chris Goulden, looks at recurrent poverty, current policy, and ways to create routes out of poverty, from the Policy and Research Unit, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, February 2010.

Building Better Neighbourhoods, The Contribution of Faith Communities to Oxfordshire Life, Dr David Jarvis, et al, SURGE, Coventry University, 2010.

“Home tonight? What? Where?”, the Meanings of House, Home and Family among the Vietnamese Refugees in a Canadian City, unpublished manuscript, 2010.

Are Our Children Learning?, Annual Learning Assessment Report, Uwezo, 2010. A study of Kenya's Primary Schools, showing that while primary attendance has now reached 96% of children, acceptable levels of reading and numeracy have yet to be achieved.

No 14: Crusade Sermons, Francis of Assisi and Martin Luther: What does it mean to ‘take up the cross’ in the context of Islam? by Ida Glaser
No 15: Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees, by Daniel G Groody, CSC

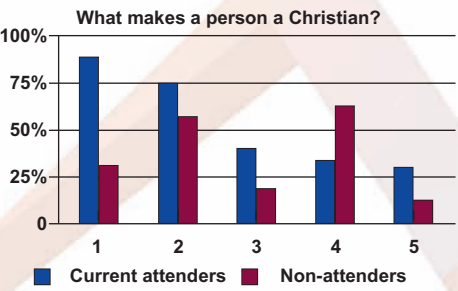
No 16: Religious Conversion: Rethinking Religious Encounter in Modern India, by Atola Longkumer
All Crowther Centre Monographs, March 2010, Church Mission Society, Oxford

Training up the Child: Youth Participation, Cultural Identity and the Black Majority Church in Britain, unpublished paper for a professional journal.

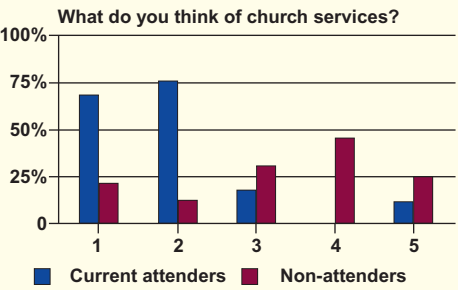
What is Scottish Nominalism?

As in other countries of the UK, the number attending church in Scotland is decreasing, even though the percentage in church each week (10%) is higher than in England and Wales (both 6%). Allan Vint, the Mission Development Officer in Dunfermline Presbytery in Fife, undertook a survey earlier this year which obtained responses both from those who regularly attended church and those who didn't.

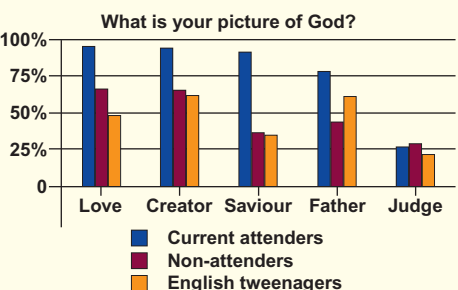
At least two-thirds of the latter had been to Sunday School as children, and they retained some of what they had been taught then. Answers to some of the questions broken into these two groups shows a number of the key differences between current churchgoers and those who have stopped going.



Top five answers
1 = Knowing Jesus as personal Saviour
2 = Believing in God
3 = Believing the Bible is true
4 = Leading a good life
5 = Going to church



Collective top five answers
1 = Friendly
2 = Enjoyable
3 = Old-fashioned
4 = Irrelevant
5 = Boring



These comparisons show something of what may happen when people stop going to church. They perhaps entertained views which made them feel hypocritical when attending church, and lost any relationship they may have had with God. Living a good life and believing in God is equated to being a Christian rather than trusting in Christ as Saviour. The perception of church services is that they are irrelevant, old-fashioned

and boring and God is Love, the Creator and Father rather than Saviour. The essence of Christianity is lost and church is something to be avoided. On the other hand, that more than a quarter of churchgoers believe that knowing the Bible, living a good life and going to church makes a person a Christian suggests that teaching the essence of the faith to current churchgoers might be a good thing – presumably these results showing that not every churchgoer is (yet) a Christian.

The third graph compares the results of the Scottish survey with those from an English survey of young people aged 11 to 14 in 2001. These young people had a similar picture of God to adults in Scotland some years after attending Sunday School and this suggests that they are equally far from understanding the true nature of Christianity.

Such studies are always helpful in enabling those teaching the faith to understand better their audiences both inside and outside the church, and cater for the needs of each appropriately.

SOURCES: Dunfermline Presbytery Community Survey, Rev Allan S Vint, July 2010; Reaching and Keeping Teenagers, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 2002.

Australian Religion

The Australian part of the International Social Science Survey shows “significant rates of religious decline and disaffiliation in the past two decades.” Religious attendance fell from 23% in 1993 to 16% in 2009 according to this study, and belief in God from 61% to 46%. Whereas 70% of the population identified with a particular denomination in 1993, only 50% did so in 2009, with a corresponding increase in those claiming to have “no religion”, up from 27% to 43% in the same period.

The regular censuses undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics tell a similar story, and although their percentages are lower in the fall of denominationalism and the rise of “no religion”, they go in the same direction.

Such findings are not new in Western nations, although Australia seems to have more analyses of their religious condition from many sources. Their Department of Immigration [DI] commissioned a study called “Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia”, and the Australian Christian Research Association [CRA] recently published “Shaping Australia's Spirituality.”

What do these various pieces of Australian research tell us that is important to hear and which might help other countries having similar trends? They show that, as elsewhere, the attendance drop is increasingly among younger people: 61% of those now in their 50s went to church as children at least monthly, against 47% of those in their 30s, and 28% of those now in their 20s. Young people find “the meaning of life” other than in religion.

Measuring the proportions transferring from one denomination to another or from Christianity to

another religious system has always been a strength of Australian religious research. 11% of those who grew up with no religion have become Christian, 1% have converted to another religion, but 25% brought up as Christians now have no religion. So keeping people becomes as important as reaching people.

Other issues include what pupils are taught in religious schools (of “serious concern” to 13% of Australia's public), but while such have enormous potential to influence young people it would seem they are not very effective. Rowland Croucher suggests the key problem is “consumerism” and lack of change in church services. He also suggests that lack of satisfaction is a key “hurt” for young people, while noting that most reject the traditional “no sex before marriage” idea. Would these two findings be linked?

The CRA report noted that “the most passionate advocates of atheism are older people, mostly male”, which begs the question, “Who are the most passionate advocates of Christianity?” Is a succession policy in place? While the DI report noted that the mainstream churches have been “forced to withdraw their personnel from areas such as inner suburbia or to spread their resources more thinly in poorer, outer-suburban areas”, it is still true that the churches are responsible for most of the 8,000 Australian charities, with over a million volunteers. A sixth (18%) of Australia's hospitals are run by churches.

Part of the change is undoubtedly age-related as in the UK and the USA. Church community involvement is widespread, doing work which would often not otherwise be done, so the message of Christian compassion has not been lost. Education remains an opportunity not always being taken.

Tackling the issues of the meaning of life, satisfaction with life, or how to live life, are much deeper and more complex. What the Australian research has done so valuably is to highlight these key items, even if the answers are not yet apparent – there or elsewhere!

SOURCES: Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia, Dept of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Desmond Cahill et al, 2010; Shaping Australia's Spirituality, Rev Dr Philip Hughes et al, CRA, 2010; Pointers, June 2010, CRA newsletter; Religion Watch, July/August 2010, New York, Vol 25, No 5, Page 3.

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Providing Facts for Forward Planning

SNIPPETS

1) “If you take Christ out of Christmas, all you're left with is M & S”.

2) 12,800 people in England and Wales are expected to celebrate their 100th birthday in 2011. There were 550 centenarians in 1961.

3) Herbert and Zelmira Fisher, aged 105 and 103 respectively, celebrated their 86th wedding anniversary in 2010 in North Carolina, USA – a world record.

4) 30,000 children starve to death every day.

5) More than two-thirds of first dates are now arranged via a social networking site or an online dating service.

6) There are 18 million orphans in the world.

7) One in four UK lap dancers in 2010 had a degree.

SOURCES: 1) Aled Jones, quoted in The Daily Telegraph, courtesy The Week, 19th December 2009, Page 21; 2) Population Trends, National Statistics, Number 96, Summer 1999; 3) Guinness Book of Records, 2011 edition, via The Bookseller, 10th September 2010, Page 14; 4) and 6) Simon Hood, Australian Multiplex speaker at the Third Lausanne Congress, Cape Town, October 2010; 5) The Bookseller, 8th October 2010, Page 28; 7) Report in The Week, 18th September 2010, Page 20.

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Faith and Footfall

by Rev David Richards, Vicar of St John's, Stratford, East London

“Footfall” is not a word used much in the context of mission and evangelism, but it is an important word for us at St John's, right in the centre of Stratford, a busy, multi-cultural, retail and transport centre in East London. “Footfall” is a word borrowed from the retail world – a measure of the number of people who walk past a shop. Thousands of people pass our church every day, hundreds walk through the churchyard every hour, so reaching out to them is a mission priority.

churchyard path, or decide that they want to join in; there are always some empty chairs near the path that they can use. We aim to turn towards the footfall, not away from it.

• We make sure the music is good and that there is a good balance of traditional and modern hymns (something for everyone).

• We aim to make the message inclusive and present it with drama and visuals; the odd bit of slapstick is not unknown.

• We offer Prayer Ministry (part of every service anyway), and invite passers-by to come for prayer; often, they come in such numbers that every Prayer Minister on site is busy.

• We plan a whole series of open air services, not just one, partly because it's disappointing if the only one planned is rained off, partly because they build momentum as the series goes on.

These events are hard work. The biggest stress factor is the weather; I get all the local forecasts and then try to guess what the weather will be like during the service. Once we have decided to go out, our committed team of helpers bring out all the band equipment, 350 stacking chairs, a table for Holy Communion, signs inviting people to join us, hymn sheets, music folders ... the list goes on.

The amazing thing is that our congregation really enjoys these services, members get excited about the opportunity to share worship with those who pass by and they demonstrate that by enthusiastic participation. Even our shy, introverted organist comments, “That was a lovely service”, and doesn't complain that his post-service voluntary will not work on a Roland keyboard.

St John's has some obvious advantages. We have a nice, flat churchyard; we have a good thoroughfare running through (on one Sunday in August 2010 our newcomers counted 581 people walking through or immediately past the churchyard during the service, not counting the 350 who attended the service or the many hundreds more who passed close by). We have tried to maximise the advantages: we have bought band equipment which works outside as well as inside; we invested in an outdoor power supply; to improve the health and safety of the services, we

ensured that our new chairs were stackable and easy to transport. ... None of this was too difficult, and the investment was useful for other events.

We normally plan 6 Open Air Services from the end of July to the end of August; this works for us because our multi-ethnic congregation doesn't tend to go away at this time of the year, and I prefer a holiday when camp-sites are not so crowded. This timing is not essential, however; at a Stratford Churches' Festival week in June, we held 3 Open Air services. Two were Sunday morning and 1 was a midweek evening ecumenical service (a very different dynamic because the 2 pubs opposite were open in the evening – people brought their drinks out to see what was going on). The principle is: choose your time and your service format with one eye on what will work for you, and the other on the footfall.

We have seen increased numbers at the morning service and new people joining our Confirmation class every September following these services. But numbers are not the whole story. Engaging with the footfall has made the church more outward-looking. Our indoor worship has been enriched also, because there is nothing like worship in the midst of the footfall to make us acutely aware of the “cringe factor” in our services.

In 2010, seven (that's 13.5%), of our morning services were held outside. We enjoyed them all and many passers-by watched, joined in, or experienced something of Christians worshipping the Lord. Thank God for footfall.

