

On publication of the annual Statistics for Mission, Bishop Steven reflects that there remains a huge appetite to learn and explore the Christian faith. The sheer number of courses run by churches is a sign of how much people want to explore the big questions about the meaning and purpose of life.

According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, 52% of people in Britain now declare they are of no religion. That proportion is growing. With every decade that goes by, people understand less and less about the Christian faith.

The hunger for purpose and meaning and love remains. Questions about life and faith are as deep as ever. Many people still pray, especially at great crises in their lives. But most people need more help to explore Christian faith in a way which welcomes you in and makes no assumptions about what you already know.

How are churches responding in love to a population which understands less and less about the Christian faith? It's important to meet people where they are, without judgement. It's important to offer loving service and friendship without qualification.

Churches are also learning (slowly) that it's important to offer simple, accessible ways to explore what it means to be a Christian from the very beginning. More than a third of churches now offer some way of doing this every year. For me, it's right at the top of the list of what you should be able to find in every local church.

Pilgrim was developed by bishops and teachers of the Church of England to support every local church in learning and teaching the faith year by year as a normal part of parish life. There are eight short courses of six weeks each: four for absolute beginners and four which build on this foundation. The courses explore the four simple texts which have always been wonderful ways into the Christian faith: the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the Commandments and the Apostles' Creed.



Every session begins with listening to God in the Scriptures. The whole Pilgrim course is also a guide to reading the Bible: the Old Testament and the New. The original booklets were launched in 2013 and more than a quarter of a million books have been sold. In 2017 the authors published *The Pilgrim Way*, a simple question and answer summary of Christian faith which is now at the centre of the faith section of the Church of England website.

For many people, it's good to learn in a group. Others prefer one to one conversations with some daily readings in between. Earlier this year, we published the first two booklets to support this: *Pilgrim Journeys* on the Lord's Prayer and the Beatitudes. The booklets were linked to the Church of England's digital campaigns for Lent and Easter. More than 40,000 booklets were sold and the same number of people again engaged through smart speakers, the app and daily emails.

There is a huge appetite to learn and explore. We may not be called to be a bigger church in this generation. But we are called to be a deeper church: helping beginners come to know Christ and be formed as Christian disciples for a life of faith and adventure.

At the very heart of *Pilgrim* is a desire to see the character of Christ formed and shaped in the life of every Christian so that we in turn can help reshape the world.

Steven Croft

Steven Croft is the Bishop of Oxford and one of the four lead authors of Pilgrim (with Robert Atwell, Stephen Cottrell and Paula Gooder).

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