

# **The Collection of 2002 Statistics of Ethnic Origin**

## **National Census of Electoral Roll members and Parochial Church Council members.**

### **1. Introduction**

#### *1.1 Background*

In November 1999, General Synod requested that the major revision of the Church Electoral Roll be used as an opportunity to collect information on the ethnic background of parish Electoral Roll members and of Parochial Church Council members. The intention was to identify the level of participation of people with minority ethnic backgrounds in Synodical government at Parish level. Synod specified that dioceses should utilise the question on ethnic origin used in the 2001 government census in order to facilitate appropriate reflection and comparison with local population statistics.

Accordingly, the Archbishops' Council, through the Research and Statistics Department, designed anonymous forms for parish Electoral Roll and Parochial Church Council members which accompanied the usual legal Electoral Roll form. These were made available to dioceses for appropriate distribution along with guidance regarding the collation of the information at deanery and diocesan levels.

\* *the term utilised in the report "How We Stand".*

## 1.2 *Previous Enquiries*

In 1993 a major census of ethnicity, “*How We Stand*”, was distributed alongside the annual parochial returns. An overall response rate of approximately 60% was achieved across the parishes although in the case of six dioceses the response was considerably lower. The survey also relied on visual identification of ethnicity by a parish representative which was inevitably subject to error. Nevertheless between 20% and 30% of parishes were found to have ‘black Anglican participation’\*. The percentage of ‘black Anglican participation’ on the parish Electoral Rolls was between 0.9% and 1.4% while the black Anglican presence in Sunday church attendance was between 1.5% and 2.4%. The dioceses of London, Southwark and Birmingham revealed the highest levels of ‘black Anglican participation’ of up to approximately 10%.

In 2000 a smaller scale survey “*Called To Lead*” was undertaken in nine dioceses. A wide range of response levels were achieved in the participating dioceses and again the exercise depended on the visual identification of ethnicity by a parish representative. Slightly higher levels of minority ethnic representation were found than in the 1993 survey and when comparisons were made with the local (background) population minority ethnic children and young people were well represented in churches. The report concluded that there are many parishes where adults with minority ethnic backgrounds were adequately represented on the parish Electoral Rolls, in Sunday church attendance and among churchwardens. The lack of representation of minority ethnic people among Readers, Parochial Church Council and Deanery Synod representatives was a concern and even more particularly among clergy.

## 2. **CONCLUSIONS**

2.1 Parish Electoral Roll officers and diocesan administrators are to be thanked for the significant resources given to this project at a time of increased financial and resource constraints. That the exercise attracted a good level of response (54%) across parishes in participating dioceses together with a very high response (84%) among individuals in participating parishes is a tribute to their hard work and commitment to the issue under study.

2.2 The investigation into the composition of the newly elected Parochial Church Councils involved members in completing a fresh enquiry form with a consequent drop in participation levels. Nevertheless, a third (33%) of parishes in participating dioceses undertook this aspect of the enquiry producing a very high (87%) response among those Parochial Church Council members involved.

2.3 This study identifies that only 3.17% of current Electoral Roll members are of minority ethnic backgrounds. This compares with a percentage of 9.08% reported across England by the 2001 government census. Only three participating dioceses, London, Southwark and Birmingham reveal significant levels of minority ethnic presence among either Electoral Roll members or Parochial Church Council members. The higher levels in these three dioceses partially reflect the increased presence of people with minority ethnic backgrounds in the surrounding population. There is some evidence from this research that people with certain minority ethnic backgrounds, for example, 'Black or Black British' are participating more fully in local church life than others.

2.4 The level of participation of people with minority ethnic backgrounds as members of local Parochial Church Councils is less than their presence on the parish Electoral Rolls. Although all the numbers involved are small, it can be observed from this research that broadly speaking participation

levels of people with minority ethnic backgrounds decrease as the level of ‘decision making’ is perceived to increase.

2.5 The presence of people from minority ethnic backgrounds is significantly lacking among stipendiary clergy across the dioceses. It remains low among other forms of (voluntary) licensed ministries but improved levels of participation are evident among other local church office holders, most noticeably among people with ‘Black or Black British’ backgrounds.

2.6 It is potentially misleading to compare the results of this national enquiry with the results from “*How We Stand*” (1993) and “*Called To Lead*” (2000). However, it would appear that the levels of participation of people with minority ethnic backgrounds in local church ‘decision making’ have not significantly improved over the last decade although anecdotal evidence indicates that they are increasingly involved in general local church life. A more meaningful monitoring process should be instituted utilising a research methodology which properly reflects the broader local church experience.

2.7 Participation levels among people of different backgrounds in local church decision making processes are not entirely reflected in their presence on the Electoral Roll and on the Parochial Church Council. Previous research in this field indicated a reluctance of people with minority ethnic backgrounds to become involved in these more formal aspects of church life. It also revealed a variable relationship between levels of church attendance and Electoral Roll membership. The results of this national exercise under-estimate minority ethnic participation in the life of the Church and no doubt also the levels of their participation in local church decision making processes.

2.8 The recent release of population statistics resulting from the 2001 government census reveals significant variations

in minority ethnic populations across England. Most noticeably, the London region population contains 29% of minority ethnic people and it supports 45% of the UK minority ethnic population. At the other end of the spectrum, the south west and north east regional populations contain just 2.3% and 2.4% respectively of people from minority ethnic backgrounds and support only 2.4% and 1.3% respectively of the UK minority ethnic population. The minority ethnic population is clustered in the major conurbations and its geographical distribution varies widely between different ethnic minority groups.

2.9 National census results for ethnicity also permit analyses by demographic indicators. Ethnic groups are known to differ from each other in terms of, for example, age and educational attainment. People of 'Mixed' ethnicity have the youngest age profile while 'Chinese' people, 'Indians', 'Black Africans' and 'Other Asians' are more likely than White people to hold a degree or equivalent. Issues around ethnicity therefore need to be set in the wider context of other demographic variables and should not be examined in isolation.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Project Design*

General Synod specified that the enquiry should focus entirely on the issue of ethnicity and that it should take the form of a census i.e. all Electoral Roll members and Parochial Church Council members should be asked to indicate their ethnic origin. The exercise, while being tested in the Battersea deanery of Southwark diocese, had not been tested in other locations with different demographic or environmental profiles.

Several predominantly rural dioceses consequently decided not to participate, as the exercise was not considered appropriate to their situation.

Another complication of the research was that the question asked of Electoral Roll members could not be made a compulsory aspect to their application. Whilst assuring members of the voluntary nature of the question, the legal standing of the Electoral Roll form did not easily lend itself to the promotion of the exercise. This no doubt reduced the level of responses achieved although with strong local encouragement good response levels were achieved in some dioceses.

Electoral Roll and Parochial Church Council members were judged to represent ‘decision makers’ in Church of England parishes and other ‘decision makers’ in the Church were not explicitly included in this exercise. However, the profile of the General Synod is known from the Appointments Survey which members voluntarily complete and is regularly updated. The results from the question regarding ethnicity are included in the report in section 4.3 for comparison purposes only.

A number of fundamental issues concerning the design of this research exercise were not able to be addressed by the Research and Statistics department due to the prescriptive nature of the General Synod motion. It is to be regretted that a more flexible and rigorous enquiry could not be designed to deliver the information required by General Synod in a more meaningful context. In this regard, Professor Bernard Silverman, Bristol University and Dr Carole Cull, University of Oxford both members of General Synod have written a statistical position paper included in Appendix 2. A properly constructed statistical survey would enable a more meaningful examination of the sensitive subject under study and a consequently more consistent categorisation of ethnicity together with a better understanding of the issues.

The age profile of different ethnic groups has recently been reported from the 2001 government census and is included in Table G (Appendix 1). The graph, in particular, indicates the variations here which also need to be taken into account when investigating the involvement of minority ethnic groups in the life of the Church. For example, although the Chinese group contains around the same low proportion of children as the White group (fewer than 20% are under 16 years old); minority ethnic populations are all younger overall. With 55% under 16, the Mixed group has by far the youngest population. The Office of National Statistics has observed that:

*“In key areas of race equality strategy, such as health, education, and economic activity, ethnic minority groups differ widely.”*

Educational attainment is another relevant example. Black Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are less likely than the White group to hold a degree or equivalent whereas Chinese people, Indians, Black Africans and Other Asians are all more likely. Any research into minority ethnic participation must therefore include reference to key demographic variables.

Previous enquiries into ethnicity in the Church relied on visual identification by a local church leader. The present exercise correctly left respondents to disclose their own ethnic background in as confidential and anonymous manner as such a parish collection system allows but it is worth noting the warnings recently expressed by the Head of the Ethnicity and Identity Branch at the Office for National Statistics:

*“In demographic, social and economic research, information on ethnicity is relatively difficult to collect and analyse..... Accepted classification, and the demands for them, change over time, but are always subjective.”*

### 3.2 *Response Rates*

Nine dioceses declined to participate in this investigation. For the dioceses of Sodor and Man and Europe the form of the question of interest was not seen as appropriate. The diocese of Oxford was already undertaking a more detailed internal investigation. Results from this investigation are not yet available for collation at a national level. Other dioceses cited a significant lack of suitable resources to implement the task or inappropriate design for predominantly rural situations:

*“The position has not helped by the fact that the spring of 2002 has seen a great deal of paper flying about .....the whole exercise has undoubtedly caused much confusion and extra work in parishes just as in this office”* (assistant diocesan secretary)

Among the thirty-five participating dioceses, just over half (54%) of parishes agreed to distribute the specially designed Electoral Roll forms (ref Appendix 3). Many parishes design their own Electoral Roll forms based on the Church Representation Rules and many others utilise old stock. Parishes were still less inclined to survey their new Parochial Church Councils with the suggested questionnaire (ref Appendix 3). Only a third (33%) participated in this aspect of the investigation and the quality of information received by the Research and Statistics department was poor.

The level of participation in the exercise varied significantly across the country. Tables A and B (Appendix 1) reveal widespread variations in the parish response rates achieved by dioceses with a consequent loss of accuracy. A number of dioceses did not have the resources to encourage and facilitate more widespread participation. Indeed the necessary use of parish Electoral Roll officers to distribute and collect the information reduced response rates significantly. Many of



these volunteers were not willing to use the Electoral Roll revision exercise in this way and many respondents suspected a lack of anonymity, particularly in small congregations.

Other issues raised during the research project are best articulated by some of those who implemented the exercise at a local level:

*“It is fair to say that this exercise has produced a significant level of unhappiness and even anger in our parishes and the general impression is that it is an unwarranted intrusion and a waste of money which would have been better spent on pastoral matters.”*

*(assistant diocesan secretary)*

*“I am listing some of the comments received ..... The inclusion of the ERI form may be counter productive in encouraging new members onto the Electoral Roll..... In small communities it is possible to make highly informed guesses about the authorship of responses..... This has no bearing on parish life and could sow the seeds of division.”*

*(assistant diocesan secretary)*

*“The congregations at our two churches come from diverse ethnic backgrounds..... ethnicity was seen as not being relevant to Christian identity.”*

*(London PCC secretary)*

*“Almost half of our Electoral Roll members refused to complete the tear off section of Form SG1 ..... making comments such as ‘we are all Christians’ ..... surely we are all the same.”*

*(West Midlands treasurer)*

*“The PCC consider this exercise to be unnecessarily divisive and declined to participate. This church does not recognise ethnic distinction.”*

*(Birmingham churchwarden)*

Within participating parishes, however, the level of completed returns was very high. In these parishes, overall, 84% of Electoral Roll members and 87% of newly elected Parochial Church Council members provided information on their ethnic background. This reflects a willingness among individual participating parishes to respond to this exercise and examine the issue under study. We can conclude that across the Church there is widespread interest and concern regarding the representation and involvement of minority ethnic Anglicans in the Church. The response rate among participating parishes in every diocese was in excess of 70% among Electoral Roll members (ref Table A) and among Parochial Church Council members was in excess of 66% (ref Table B).

## **4. Results**

### *4.1 Electoral Roll Membership*

The results of the enquiry into the ethnic background of Electoral Roll members are provided in Table A (Appendix 1). The total minority ethnic participation reported in this exercise is 3.17% although the significant diocesan variations are readily apparent. London and Southwark reveal the highest levels of minority ethnic involvement with Birmingham, Chelmsford, Manchester and Bristol also registering significant levels. In each case this involvement is predominantly black or black British. Whilst the minority ethnic representation is low among predominantly rural dioceses, the diocese of Truro, in particular, presents an interesting challenge to the form of question utilised for this exercise. Many here wanted to express their Cornish origins and thus inflated the Other White category. Whilst this desire was present among other groupings in other areas of the country, it did not produce such statistically noticeable results but the following comments from two dioceses should be borne in mind:

*“A number of parishes noted that some people wished to be described as English and therefore ticked ‘Any other white background’ rather than ‘British’ but we have tried to pick those out and put them all under the ‘British’ category.”*

*“There should be categories for ‘English’, ‘Welsh’, ‘Scottish’ (and yes we did get ‘Yorkshire’), rather than ‘British’.*

Regional results from the 2001 government census have recently been released and those regarding ethnicity are provided in Table E. England has the highest level of people with minority ethnic backgrounds (9.08%) of all the United Kingdom countries. The significant variations across the regions are also very apparent with 29% of the London population and 11% of the population of West Midlands indicating a minority ethnic background. The lowest levels of just 2% appear in the north east and south west regions. Table F emphasises the dominance of London in that 45% of the UK minority ethnic population resides in the London region. The minority ethnic population of the UK is, in fact, clustered in the major conurbations of England to a far greater extent than the general population. The new census figures also show that geographical distribution continues to vary widely between different ethnic minority groups. For instance, while four out of five black Africans live in London, only one in five Pakistanis do.

In order to make valid initial comparisons of diocesan results against their local population, Table D presents each government region in turn alongside the dioceses with significant areas falling within its boundaries. The London and West Midland trends are clearly reflected to varying extents in the dioceses covered by these regions. The reader is

encouraged to examine the map of England's dioceses and government regions provided in Appendix 1 before making detailed comparisons. Further analysis is possible for individual dioceses using district based census results which are now available. Information about these can be found on the Office for National Statistics website [www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk) by accessing "Find detailed statistics by area name" and selecting the appropriate region then district.

#### 4.2 *Parochial Church Council Members*

Alongside the main enquiry into the ethnic origins of Electoral Roll members was a questionnaire for newly elected Parochial Church Council members. The results provided in Table B (Appendix 1) show similar diocesan variations as discussed above. However, it is also clear that minority ethnic representation among Parochial Church Council members is lower than among Electoral Roll members.

Table C presents the results for members with different roles in the life of the local church. It is evident that minority ethnic representation is lower among stipendiary clergy than any other licensed ministry or parish office holders. The higher levels of response from Southwark, Portsmouth, Coventry and Birmingham dioceses permits a closer examination of this issue for these particular dioceses. The relevant tables for Southwark and Birmingham, in particular, (which can be found alongside Table C) reveal most evidently an increased proportion of 'Black or Black British' among each of the licensed ministries and parish office holders examined here. The representation of minority ethnic people among stipendiary clergy remains very low although their presence among parish office holders is closer to their presence among the background regional populations. Most noticeably, it is the presence of 'Asian or Asian British', 'Chinese' and 'Mixed'

ethnicities which remain low across all the licensed ministry and parish office holder categories.

#### 4.3 *General Synod Members*

General Synod members are asked on election to complete an appointment survey which includes the 2001 government census question on ethnicity. 92% of members have responded to this particular question and from these replies we know that the ethnic composition of Synod is currently in the region of:

92.3% White British	1.4% Asian
4.8% Other white	1.1% Black
	0.4% Mixed

There is, therefore, a stronger minority ethnic presence on the General Synod than among the other local church ‘decision making’ forums examined in this investigation.

#### 4.4 *Comparison with Previous Surveys*

It is potentially misleading to compare the results of this national enquiry with the results from “*How We Stand*” (1993) and “*Called To Lead*” (2000). Both these exercises depended on the visual identification of ethnic background by a nominated church representative. The current church census reports the results from a self-disclosure exercise. Response rates for the previous surveys were generally higher than those from the 2002 exercise although all three investigations experienced a wide range of response levels across the country. The significant quantities of non-response in each exercise may represent specific constituencies which are not therefore represented in the overall results. Without further investigation it is not possible to define the significant contributions which missing respondents would provide.

It would appear, however, that the levels of participation of people with minority ethnic backgrounds in local church 'decision making' have not significantly improved over the last decade although anecdotal evidence indicates that they are increasingly involved in general local church life. This exercise serves to reinforce the need for the national Church and local churches to properly monitor and address the issue of minority ethnic participation at every level of church life.

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