

**The Church Growth Research Programme
Report on Strands 1 and 2**

**Numerical change in church attendance:
National, local and individual factors**

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February 2014

Executive summary

The national challenge

1) The reason for decline in affiliation and attendance is the failure to replace older generations of churchgoers. The problem is not adults leaving the Church: it is that half of the children of churchgoing parents do not attend when they reach adulthood.

2) This key finding has important implications. Retaining children/youth is critical; it is easier to raise people as churchgoers than to turn the unchurched into attenders. There is no harm in pursuing programmes aimed at former or non-churchgoers (Back to Church Sunday, Alpha, etc.), but expectations need to be realistic. Recent history suggests that gains and losses during adulthood are roughly in balance; the challenge is to retain the new generation.

The local context

3) Numerical growth must be distinguished from the level of participation, and the socio-demographic context is important to both. Often attendance is highest as a proportion of the population in rural areas where growth is hard to achieve; growing churches are often found in cities where relatively few people are active Anglicans. Middle class suburbs with church schools, or inner city parishes with Christians arriving from overseas, offer great opportunities; rural districts and areas of industrial decline can be far more challenging. One of the difficulties for the Church of England is that its traditional rural strongholds and its new centres of urban growth are so different. The Church is faced with a strategic challenge: the question is whether the focus should be on supporting areas of existing strength or on developing churches that are growing but not yet as significant in absolute terms.

4) There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another. There are no strong connections between growth and worship style, theological tradition, and so on. What seems crucial is that congregations are constantly engaged in reflection: churches cannot soar on autopilot. Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment.

The human factor

5) For there to be growth, the existing congregation must be willing to experience change. At a minimum growth involves new people disrupting what might be a cosy club. In all probability there will need to be larger changes, in the timing and type of worship, in how and when the building is used, and crucially in shifting lay leadership towards younger and more recent arrivals. Such changes are uncomfortable. It is also necessary for a significant subset of lay members to be active in assuming responsibilities, rather than passively leaving things to the ordained minister.

6) The personal characteristics of the ordained minister are important. He or she needs to have a vision for the church and must be able to motivate people. Unfortunately it is likely that to a large extent people with the necessary qualities are born, not made. There are reasonably strong associations between growth and personality type, but none between growth and attendance on leadership courses. Interviews provide additional (albeit somewhat anecdotal) evidence that motivating, inspirational ministry is a key to growth.

Resources for growth

7) Resources make a difference, and the most important returns come from human resources. With some 12,500 parishes, it is unfortunately not financially feasible to have a full-time ordained minister exclusively dedicated to each one. Active and able lay involvement is crucial. Just as there is a vicious circle of declining numbers leading to declining resources, there can be a virtuous spiral of increased resource producing growth.

Gains at parish level may not promote the strategic mission of the wider Church. It would be pointless (from the perspective of the Church as a whole) to put enormous efforts into activities that simply shift people from one parish to another, unless the aim is to invest in some churches and to close others.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for advice from Kirk Hadaway, Officer for Congregational Research at the Episcopal Church in the United States, and Ruth Powell, director of NCLS Research in Australia. The support and guidance of the Research and Statistics Unit – Bev Botting, Louise McFerran, Hannah Kirk – was invaluable. Members of the Advisory Panel offered helpful suggestions. Above all, Kevin Norris played a crucial role in coordinating the Church Growth Research Programme and in obtaining consensus on the questionnaire content.

Preface

Strands 1 and 2 of the Church Growth Research Programme cover:

- 1) The analysis of data gathered over the past decade from the annual returns made by parishes and collated by the Research and Statistics Unit, in conjunction with descriptive statistics for parishes derived from population census data;
- 2) The collection and analysis of new data from a purpose-built survey of growing, stable and declining churches across all dioceses. A more detailed description of the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

In the report that follows, we try to look at the big picture of church growth and decline. We focus on seven broad themes: generational replacement, youth participation, demography, the church profile, laity, clergy, and resources. Although we consider and discuss scores of factors that have been linked to numerical change, we believe that it is most fruitful to adopt a broad perspective. Each section attempts to identify the essential features that lead to success or failure.

One key problem is how best to measure numerical growth. A variety of indicators for attendance and occasional offices are available, but all are affected to some degree by measurement error and random fluctuations. Such variability poses particular problems with small churches, where the addition or subtraction of just a few people produces large proportional changes in the totals.

Following discussions with our colleagues in the Research and Statistics Unit, we have suggested that the standard deviation in attendance counts can serve as a consistent threshold of numerical change across the full range of attendance levels. In Appendix 2, we describe how predicted values of the standard deviation can be produced for different measures of attendance. It is then possible to express a percentage change between one year and another in terms of those values. The growth rate would thus be 'standardised', making it comparable across parishes of different sizes and also across different measures of attendance.

When there are a number of correlated variables that all reflect some underlying process, for example church growth, it is helpful to create a scale derived from several of them rather than relying on a single measure. Our 'objective' measure of growth is an average of the standardised rates of change between 2001-3 and 2009-11 in four indicators:

- usual adult Sunday attendance
- all age average weekly attendance
- child average Sunday attendance
- Easter attendance

The method is described in Appendix 2.

There is an alternative measure of growth, however, that does not involve calculations using parish statistics. One of the questions on the survey was:

During the past five years, has the number of people who attend for worship at least monthly...

- Declined a little
- Declined substantially
- Grown a little
- Grown substantially
- Stayed about the same

In what follows we refer to this measure as ‘self-reported growth’ or ‘the subjective measure of growth’. Although in principle the ‘objective’ measure should be more reliable than self-reported growth, we know that the data are imperfect. Moreover there may sometimes be a mismatch between the parish-level figures and the individual parish churches being described on the survey forms. If the parish includes additional churches that have experienced different rates of change, the overall figures may not characterise the church the respondent had in mind.

The levels of self-reported growth are probably exaggerated. The table below shows the distribution of churches by each indicator; there appears to be a tendency to report some growth rather than none, and to avoid reporting substantial decline.

Numerical change among churches in the sample (%)

	Self-reported	Objectively measured
Declined substantially	6	16
Declined a little	20	20
Stayed about the same	19	37
Grown a little	39	10
Grown substantially	17	16

There may be a substantial amount of measurement error in the objective growth rates, or a substantial amount of inaccuracy in the subjective assessment of numerical change, or both. For present purposes, however, the true extent of growth or decline is not important. We are concerned with relative performance, and consistent inflation does not pose a problem. As long as we can correctly identify some churches as more or less successful than others, the degree of success is immaterial. What is worrying is the possibility of bias. If churches or clergy with particular characteristics are more likely than others to over-estimate growth, the analysis may incorrectly attribute causal power to those factors.

Somewhat alarmingly, the correspondence between the objective and subjective measures is rather low. If it was simply a matter of across-the-board over-estimation, there would be little problem: we are mostly interested in comparing churches and for that purpose only need to know their relative standing. Unfortunately the situation is not so straightforward. The correlation between the two measures is only 0.29, which means that some churches with poor statistical returns claim to be doing well and vice versa. (It makes no difference whether the objective rates come from a ten-year or a five-year period.)

In any event we carried out the analyses using both measures of growth and report both sets of findings where the differences are worth noting. In general the results were similar whichever measure of growth was used as the variable to be explained, though typically self-reported growth had the stronger associations with other factors. The objective indicator is helpful as a cross-check.

The sample

Our initial intention was to draw a stratified random sample of churches with roughly equal numbers classified as growing, declining or numerically stable. In the event we were heavily constrained by practicalities. E-mail addresses are not available for all churches, and many possible candidates were ruled out because they had already been approached to participate in other surveys conducted by the Church. The eventual sample was to some degree a census of contactable churches that had not been excluded for one reason or another. As suggested in Appendix I, it appears to provide a reasonable cross-section of all churches. Nevertheless it was not our aim to produce a sample that is fully representative of the whole Church, and we would be reluctant to estimate national figures using descriptive statistics (frequencies or cross-tabulations) from the survey. Those statistics should be

indicative of the true values, but it would be difficult to reweight the cases or to calculate confidence intervals.

We are much more confident about studying the *relationship* between possible explanatory factors and levels of growth. For these purposes it is less important to have a perfect sample; we are not interested in the exact proportion of churches that have adopted contemporary music in worship, for example, but rather in the connection between that style and numerical change. The size, breadth and quasi-random character of the sample, in conjunction with its apparent representativeness, give us reason to believe that our findings on the associations between growth and the factors of interest are well founded.

Statistical methods and analytical strategy

A first step in any analysis is to inspect the descriptive statistics, in particular the frequency distributions of each explanatory variable. It is interesting to see how much variation is found and at what levels. In some instances it may be necessary to exclude outlying values.

We then proceed step by step in testing the relationship between growth and the potential explanatory factors. In the first stage, we look at bivariate correlations: is X positively or negatively related to growth? Appendix 5 provides the full set of correlations. Although these results are interesting, one immediately wants to control for possibly confounding variables. If early-hours ministry to clubbers is associated with growth, for example, perhaps it is the age profile of the congregation rather than the activity itself that is significant. Multivariate analysis is essential.

The main tool was linear (or ordinary least-squares) regression. Growth was the dependent variable, i.e. the value to be explained. A variety of explanatory variables were considered simultaneously in order to identify which had significant effects, all else being equal. The primary objective was to find which variables on a particular topic had the clearest connection to growth or decline. The results are discussed in the report.

A longer sketch of some of the challenges around measuring growth and causal analysis can be found in Appendix 3. Results from multivariate analysis encompassing all of the potential factors are provided in Appendix 4.

I The background: Religious change in modern Britain

Times have been hard for the Church of England, as for most major churches in the developed world. The future need not be the same as the past, but it is important to understand what is happening. Planning based on false assumptions or wishful thinking would be like building a house upon the sand. Consider, for example, three common ideas about churchgoing:

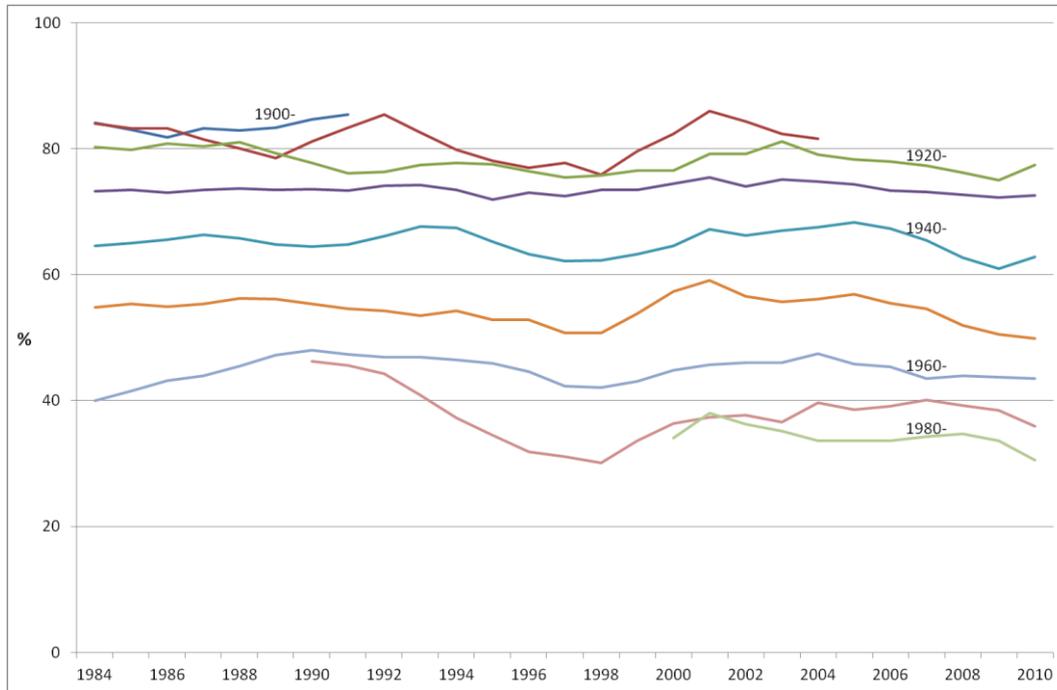
- 1) attendance decline occurs as busy adults drift away from regular practice.
- 2) the young may find worship dull, but when people marry, start families, see their children leave home, or reach retirement, an interest in religion returns.
- 3) there is a reservoir of faith waiting to be tapped; the Church just needs to reawaken its dormant constituency of people who are 'believing without belonging'.

We can test these ideas using major national surveys, in particular the British Social Attitudes survey from 1983 onwards. What emerges is that the large decline in attendance has not happened because many adults have stopped going to church. The decline has happened because more and more adults never start attending in the first place. The change that leaders have to worry about, in other words, goes on not within any particular generation, but from one generation to the next.

We tend to suppose that people become more religious with age, perhaps when they start families or become widowed. If so, today's partygoer might be tomorrow's churchgoer. A significant number of adults do become more observant, but they are balanced by others who move away from religion. Most of these changes seem to occur for personal reasons that are not systematically related to having children or reaching old age. On average such life events have only slight effects.

Social forces are not making each of us gradually less religious. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that on average people experience little change in their religious beliefs and practices once they reach their early 20s. What secularisation does is to change the environment in which children are raised and the likelihood of effective religious upbringing. Each generation comes to be less religious than the one before.

Figure 1.1: Religious affiliation by decade of birth, 1983-2011;
change is between, not within, generations ...



Source: British Social Attitudes survey 1983-2011

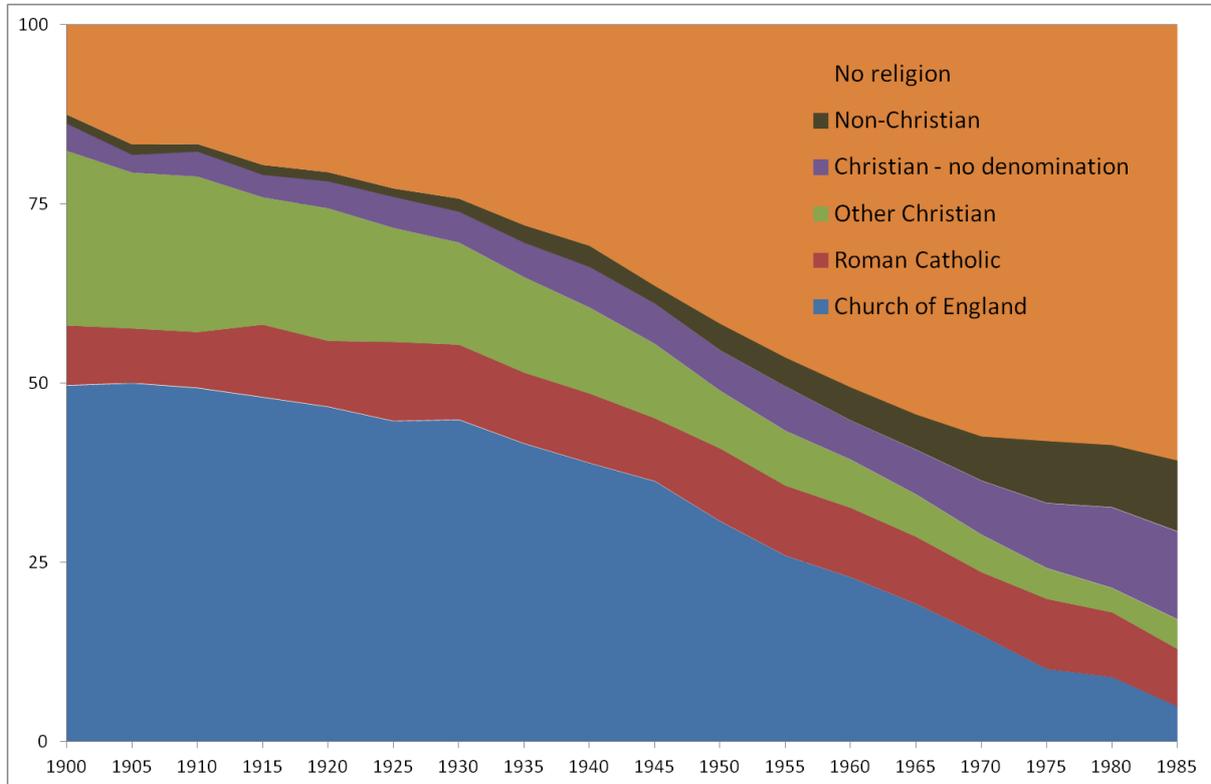
Notes: Excludes non-white respondents. Graph shows three-survey moving average.

The evidence is shown graphically in Figure 1.1. While we know that many individuals enter or leave the Church as adults, net change within any given generation has historically been small. If people belong in their 20s, they will probably stay for the rest of their lives – but if they don't, it will be hard to bring them in. (Because this graph is designed to show change *within* a population, only survey respondents of white ethnicity are included. The total number of people in Britain today who say that they have a religion is of course very influenced by immigration.)

The obvious conclusion is that the Church must retain its young people if it is to thrive. Unfortunately the Church of England has not done well in keeping the children and grandchildren of its members. Figure 1.2 shows that for each successive year of birth over the 20th century, a smaller and smaller proportion of people regard themselves as belonging to the Church.

Figure 1.2: Religious affiliation by year of birth

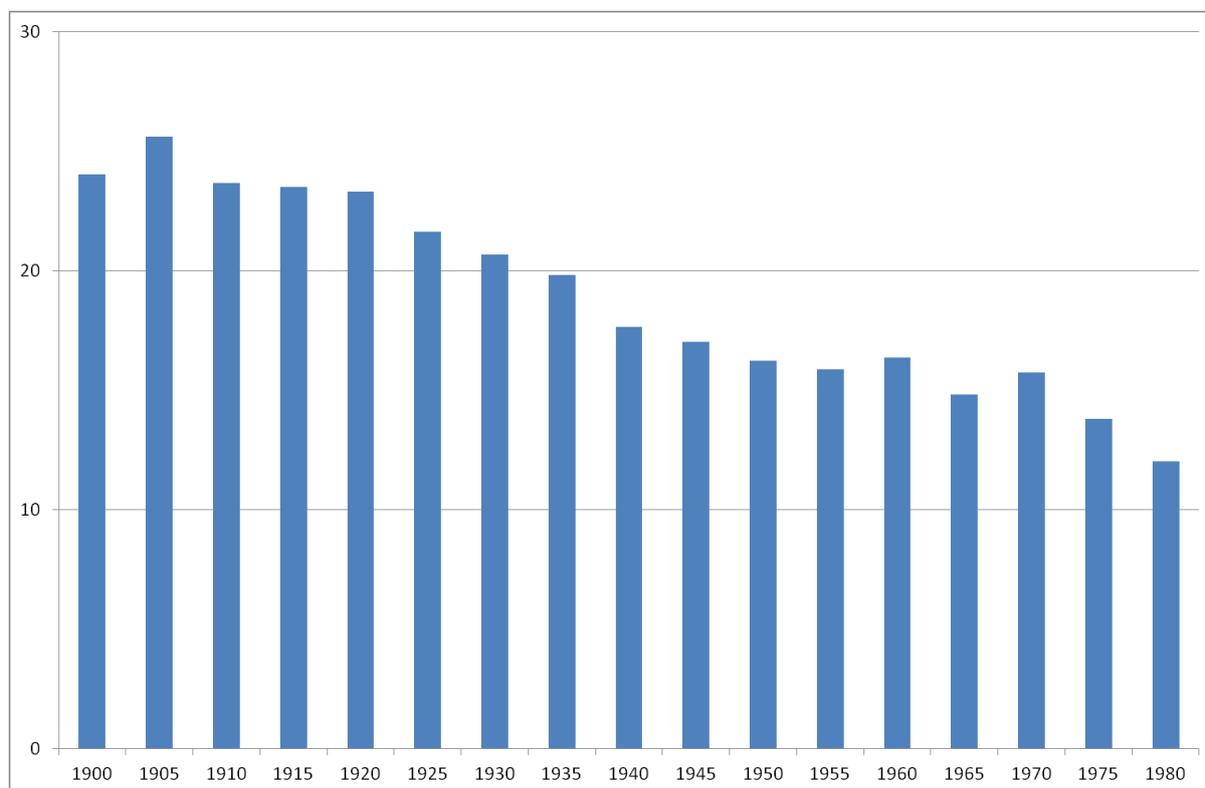
Among the old, 1 in 2 are C of E; among the young, 1 in 20



Source: British Social Attitudes survey 1983-2010, pooled

It is tempting to suppose that the figures for church attendance are less alarming. Perhaps the young people who still call themselves Anglicans are more committed than in the past. At least as measured by churchgoing, however, that does not appear to be the case. Figure 1.3 shows that average participation among young Anglicans is lower, not higher, than in the older generations.

Figure 1.3: Monthly or more frequent attendance for Anglicans by year of birth (%)



A related conjecture is that the number of churchgoers is not so much lower than in the past; the declines we observe are simply the result of people attending less often. The survey evidence does not support this suggestion. We can use the British Social Attitudes survey to compare the past few years with the situation 25 years earlier. In the mid-1980s, 42% of people in England said that they regarded themselves as belong to the C of E; the figure has dropped to 25%. Self-described Anglicans report virtually the same frequency of attendance now as in the past, however. In fact it appears from Table 1.1 that the proportion attending at least weekly is slightly higher now (though half never go at all).

Table 1.1
Frequency of attendance for self-identified Anglicans in Great Britain

	1983-86	2008-11
Once a week or more	7.3	8.6
Once every two weeks	2.8	2.6
Once a month	7.2	7.2
Twice a year	17.8	14.3
Once a year	10.2	8.7
Less often	9.2	7.2
Never or practically never	45.0	50.5
Varies too much to say	0.6	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0
N	3,201	3,388

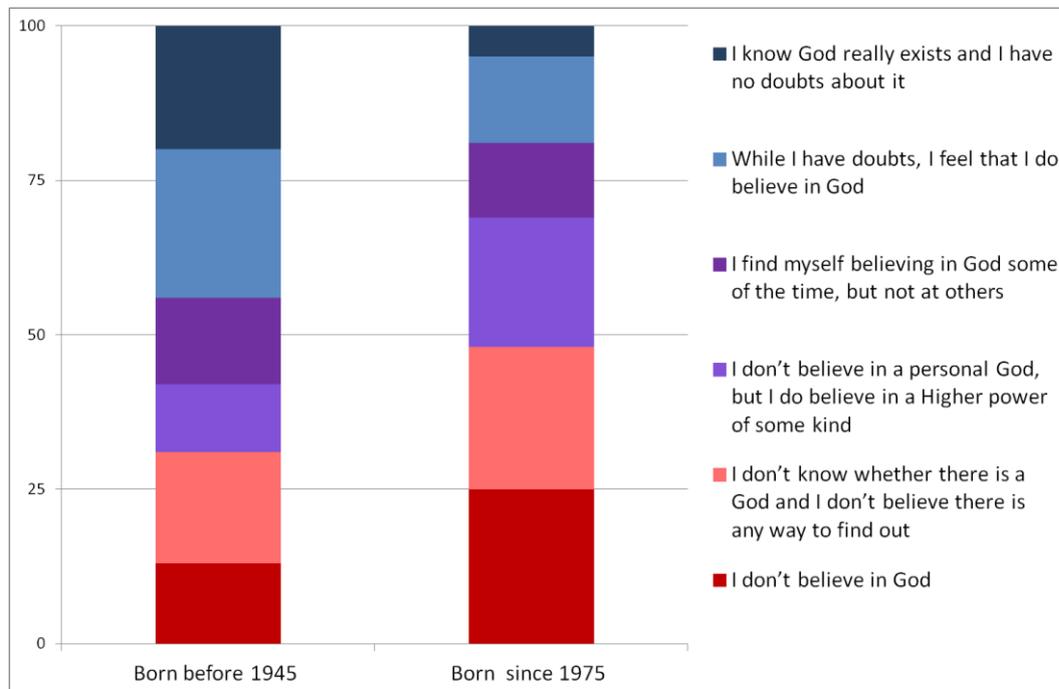
Source: British Social Attitudes survey

So far we have looked at self-identification and attendance at worship; the other key dimension of religious involvement is belief. ‘Believing without belonging’ (a phrase popularised by the sociologist Grace Davie) has been a popular description of the British approach to religion. The evidence shows that this label is mistaken, at least in its usual interpretation. Belief may be higher than active belonging (churchgoing), but it is not necessarily higher than passive belonging (identifying yourself as Christian). More importantly, religious belief, and the importance that people attach to those beliefs, has declined at least as fast as attendance and affiliation. People haven’t stopped wondering what makes a good and meaningful life, of course. We can no longer assume, though, that they are going to agree with Christian answers to these questions.

We can return to the British Social Attitudes survey – specifically the detailed set of questions on religion used in 2008 – to see how belief in God has shifted across the generations. A considerable range in conviction is found in both the old and the young, but the distribution is skewed towards belief for the people born before the end of the Second World War and towards unbelief for people born since 1975 (Figure 1.4). Belief is both a cause and effect of religious participation, and it may be the case both that churchgoing is

low in young generations because Christian belief is weak, and that belief is weak because religious practice is now less common.

Figure 1.4
Belief in God among old and young (%)



To summarise, religious decline is often misunderstood. Bringing people back to church will not be simply a matter of gathering up believing Christians who have fallen by the wayside. The creators of Alpha and similar programmes are correct in supposing that knowledge of, or agreement with, Christian principles cannot be taken for granted. It is very unlikely, though, that decline can be reversed simply by bringing adults into the fold. The early church grew rapidly through conversion and the same has occurred from time to time since, but for maintaining numbers it would be unwise to rely on an exceptional revival. The crucial problem is that change has been generational: children have been lost to the church, and to them Christianity may seem no more attractive an option than Buddhism or Hinduism. The future of the church will depend on its success in transmitting Christian commitment to the young.

Local church leaders are well aware that ageing congregations are the leading cause of numerical decline. Hundreds of respondents to our survey attributed decline to older members of the congregation dying or being unable to attend. Some younger people are joining, but not at a fast enough rate to compensate. A common observation was that

whatever growth was achieved could barely keep up with the forces of ageing and mortality: it was a matter of running to stand still.

Some respondents noted that church attendance figures are not wholly adequate as a measure of worship by the elderly. One priest commented that “the ageing population means we have more home communions; currently six residential homes and an increasing number of people at home which means church attendance is not a real indicator of church membership. There are approximately 60 people who are worshipping outside of church services.” This point is worth noting, but the problem that the older generation is not being replaced in church services remains.

There is no simple answer to why the church has been losing the young. Some respondents explained decline with a tautology: “People are not as interested in going to church.” The statement that “regularity and real commitment seem to be a problem for new families” does not go much further. Some ministers argued that younger members do not attend church as frequently as older members with the result that, as the older congregation dies off, the weekly attendance figures are affected. As suggested above, there are reasons to be sceptical about this explanation. Perhaps a more plausible way of presenting the story is that the older generation “saw their Christian discipleship as a weekly commitment to worship”.

In any event, the problem of attracting younger people, especially parents with young children, is a recurring theme. The notion that less frequent attendance (or non-attendance) is the result of being busy is common.

- “Our congregation, because of what are perceived to be increasing pressure of work and domestic demands, attend less frequently than was the case in the past.”
- “We are struggling to interest families wanting to join us for worship, although we meet many through toddler group and the few families who ask for baptism for their children. They seem to be too busy at weekends to join us or not interested in our traditional ways of doing things.”
- “Changes in society which means that some folk are committed Christians but no longer attend church every week. So many calls on people’s time and church is getting pushed out.”
- “Family and social commitments of congregation means even the most faithful are frequently absent.”
- “People have other commitments, especially children needing to go to various activities on a Sunday.”

- “People are going on holidays more, have second homes, and have numerous other weekend activities. Now coming once every 6-8 weeks.”

The problem with this account is that it implies that church was never more than a moderately worthwhile pastime, which in the past offered a useful way for people to fill their otherwise empty lives. The reality that needs to be faced is that churchgoing is not a priority when Christianity is not a priority. Of course it is easier and easier to find other distractions on a Sunday morning, but it is also easier and easier to go to church. Services at every time and of every duration are not difficult to reach by public or private transport, and the dress code is ‘come as you are’. If people cannot find an hour to spare, it reflects the lack of importance they attach to worship.

Some ordained ministers do concede that while contemporary culture offers a rich set of diversions, and church is just one more thing to dip into and out of, “many people do not have time for God!” This observation may be a reproach to the Church as well as its members, and the comments like the following point to the challenge:

- “More competition with secular activities, Sunday no longer seen as a Holy Day. Generations growing up ‘unchurched’, so Church is becoming a smaller part of our culture.”
- “Football and sport on a Sunday!”
- “Failure to engage with younger families; pressure on their time (Sundays is too precious to be spent going to church).”

But perhaps the frankest statement is that “the most repeated experience is a lack of belief in the Christian story itself and of the church being of any saving significance.” The standard complaint about competing commitments and Sunday attractions sounds hollow when set against the supposed significance of the Christian story.

2 The critical objective: Keeping young people in the Church

The key findings from the previous section have important implications. Retaining children and youth is critical; it is easier to raise people as churchgoers than to turn the unchurched into attenders. There is no harm in pursuing programmes aimed at former or non-churchgoers (Back to Church Sunday, Alpha, etc.), but expectations need to be realistic. Recent history suggests that gains and losses during adulthood are roughly in balance; the challenge is to retain the new generation.

We know something from previous research about the impact of parental practice, affiliation and belief on the religiosity of their children. Two non-religious parents successfully transmit their lack of religion. Two religious parents have roughly a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith. One religious parent does only half as well as two together. The results for attendance, self-described affiliation, and the importance of religious belief are very similar. If belief were really more resilient than religious practice, we would have expected to find that children are not so different from their parents in this respect.

There is a fairly constant chance – about 8% – that the child will become religiously different from both of its parents. Whether or not the parents share the same religious identity, or even say that they have none, makes no difference: roughly one child in 12 will choose a denomination not mentioned by either parent.

What these results suggest is that in Britain institutional religion now has a half-life of one generation, to borrow the terminology of radioactive decay. The generation now in middle age has produced children who are only half as likely as they are to attend church, to identify themselves as belonging to a denomination, or to say that belief is important to them.

The situation seems paradoxical. For decade after decade, children have become less religious than their parents. To put it another way, there are many families in which parents continue to identify themselves as belonging to the Church and to attend services while their adult children do not. (There are some families, but far fewer, where the reverse is true.) If parents regard religion as important – and one presumes that they do – why have they failed to pass it on to their offspring? One key question is whether we are seeing the effects of value change among young people or of value change among parents. It is possible that parents have simply become less committed to religious involvement by their children. As the value attached to autonomy has increased, adolescents are increasingly allowed to avoid church.

The European Values Study allows us to investigate this issue. There is a battery of items introduced as follows: “Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five.” Eleven qualities are listed: good manners; independence; hard work; feeling of responsibility; imagination; tolerance and respect for other people; thrift, saving money and things; determination, perseverance; religious faith; unselfishness; obedience.

The sample included 505 respondents who identified themselves as Anglicans. Religious faith was by a considerable margin the quality that was mentioned least often by this group as something that children ought to acquire. It was included as a priority by only 11%, as compared to good manners by 94%, tolerance and respect by 83%, independence by 47%, or even imagination (the second-least popular) by 27%. On average, people who call themselves Anglican seem unconcerned about transmitting religion to the next generation.

Perhaps, though, things change if we exclude nominal Anglicans. We might naturally suppose that people who say that religion is very important in their own lives would include religious faith in their list of qualities that are especially important for children to learn at home. In fact, however, only 36% do so. Of the much larger number who say that religion is ‘quite important’ to them, a mere 10% mention faith as something important for their children to acquire. Among Anglicans who say that they attend services at least once a month, the figure is 28%. In other words, even religious Anglicans seem surprisingly reluctant to make inculcation of religion a priority in child-rearing.

The key finding from analysis of the full dataset (for many countries and denominations) is that institutional involvement in a religion, including respect for the role of religious organisations, is the crucial characteristic in distinguishing between respondents who do or do not make religion a priority in raising children. It is not enough to regard religion as important, or to be ‘spiritual’: without some tie to an institution – past or current involvement in church, or a high regard for its functions – people tend not to make religious transmission a priority. The religiously unaffiliated and people who say “I have my own way of connecting with the divine” are unlikely to see transmission as important, even if they regard religion as important in their own lives. By contrast, churchgoers or members of religious organisations, and people who say that the church answers moral and family problems, do want to see children raised in a faith. Being connected to church makes one significantly more likely to see religious faith as important for children.

Secularisation cannot be explained solely in relation to the intergenerational transmission of beliefs and values, of course. Secular activities (including television, music, the internet, games and so on) compete with religion for time and attention. Geographical mobility may have positive or negative effects on churchgoing. These and other factors are important, but ultimately religion depends on the commitment of one generation to pass it on to the next.

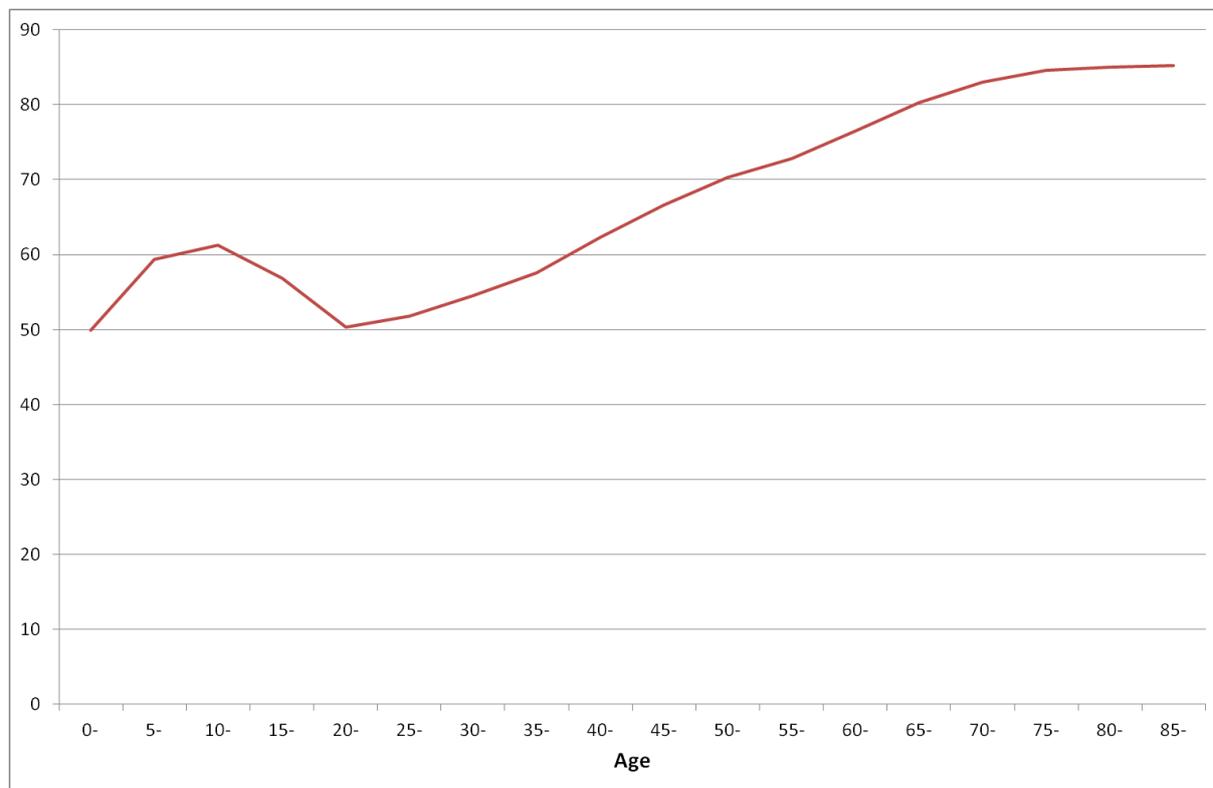
The 2011 census of population tells us that there are about 23 children under the age of 16 for every 100 adults in England. Interestingly, the Statistics for Mission 2011 report produced by the Church gives a marginally better ratio for average weekly attendance. The national totals are 216,900 children and 874,600 adults attending (either Sunday or mid-week), or almost exactly one child for every four adults. If those children continued to participate in adulthood, weekly attendance at worship would be maintained at current levels. It needs to be noted that the Sunday figures are less favourable; with midweek services excluded, the ratio is closer to one child for every six adults.

The gap between weekly and Sunday attendance is important. For adults average weekly attendance is only 15% higher than average Sunday attendance; for children it is 61% higher. A substantial proportion (38%) of children are only counted midweek, and these services may be their only exposure to church. The positive interpretation is that there may be considerable scope for innovation in midweek worship, as well as real opportunities to reach children from non-churchgoing families. The cautionary note is that some of the events – particularly those at schools or in playgroups – may not be especially effective in producing an enduring connection to religious activity.

Another implication is that the point at which most young people are lost to the Church comes during youth and early adulthood rather than childhood. Although connections may be weak if children are not attending Sunday school or Sunday services, a large number still have some association with the Church. Generational replacement is breaking down at the point where young people are making their own decisions about what to do.

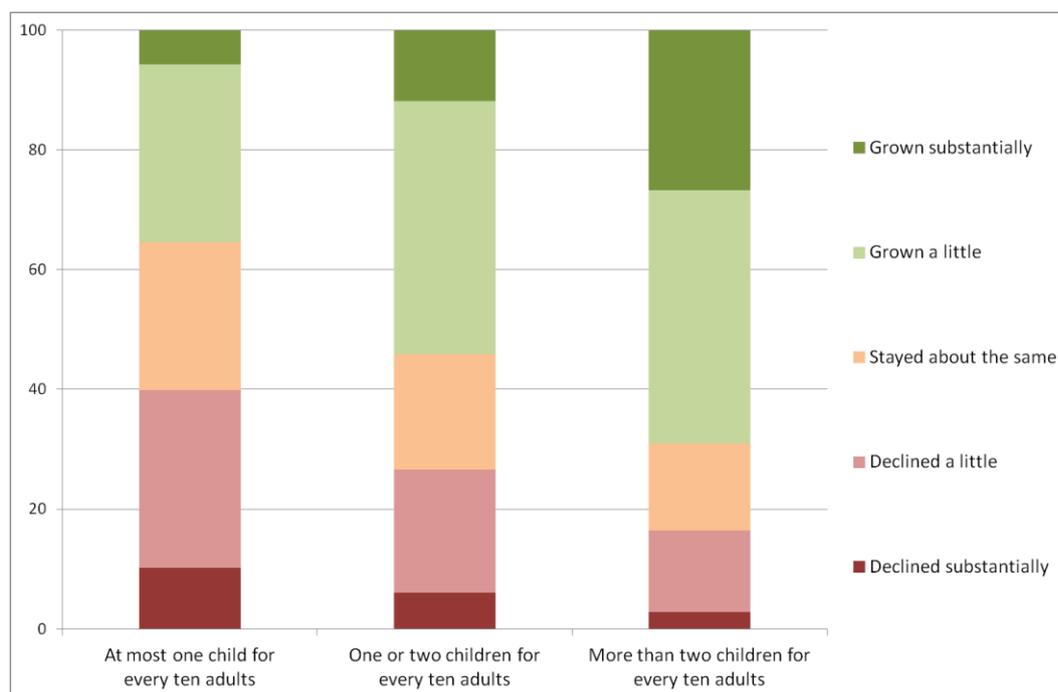
This point is underlined in the 2011 census results (Figure 2.1). Parents answer the census questions for their children, and unsurprisingly children aged 10-14 are described as Christian with about the same frequency as their parents (aged 40-44 on average). Many people are not inclined to ascribe a religious affiliation to infants or very young children, and conversely adolescents aged 15-19 are starting to demonstrate their independence: these two factors produce the characteristic hump in the reported affiliation of children. The defection at age 20-24 is even greater. Thereafter one finds the typical generational profile of religious belonging, and affiliation rises steadily from young adults to the elderly.

Figure 2.1: Christians as a percentage of the population, minority religious groups omitted (England and Wales, 2011 census)



While retaining the young generation is crucial to the Church as a whole, it does not necessarily follow that parish churches will only grow if children are well represented. As it happens, though, there is indeed a positive correlation between the child:adult ratio and church growth at the local level. These positive correlations are found for all measures of growth, including growth in adult usual Sunday attendance. Although it is never easy to identify the causal mechanisms – families produce growth, but they are also attracted to churches that are growing – it seems plausible that children help to keep churches healthy. Figure 2.2 shows the relationship between the child:adult ratio and self-reported growth. Churches where children are well represented are twice as likely to be growing as those where they are scarce.

Figure 2.2: Child:adult ratio and self-reported growth



The survey included a number of questions about activities and staffing for young people. Of course there is a chicken-and-egg problem of interpretation: parents may only come to a church that provides for their children, but the amount of provision for children is strongly influenced by how many there are. Thus it is no surprise that churches with a good proportion of children are more likely than others to have a range of appropriate programmes. With data from just one year, we cannot say how far the activities attract the children or the children generate the need for the activities. In any event supply and demand are likely to be mutually reinforcing.

What we can do, however, is to see which types of programmes or staff are most closely associated with growth. The relevant questions include:

Is this church linked to a Church of England school? [If yes] Is it over-subscribed?

Does your church have any of the following programmes or activities? If yes, do they involve only existing members or do they attract new people to join?

- Sunday school or children's groups
- Youth/young adult activities or programmes

During the past 12 months, has your church run any of the following services for your own members or for people in the community?

- Child day care, pre-school, before or after-school programmes

Which of the following does your church provide for children? (Tick all that apply)

- Leader for children's activities
- Worship services designed for children
- Midweek worship with pre-school children
- Holiday clubs
- Admission to communion before confirmation
- Special services for schools (e.g. carol services)

Which of the following does your church provide for youth? (Tick all that apply)

- Youth worker, minister or leader for youth activities
- Organised youth group
- Choirs or other music groups
- Retreats, conferences or camps
- Worship services designed for youth
- Holiday clubs
- Confirmation classes
- Congregational events planned or led by youth
- Special services for schools
- Counselling (e.g. sex education, substance abuse)
- Uniformed youth organisation

We are particularly interested in which variables show the largest influence on two outcomes: the ratio of children to adults, and church growth. It is no great surprise that every item listed above is correlated with the child:adult ratio. The strongest association is with Sunday schools, not because they are unusual (81% of responding churches had them) but because not having a Sunday school is a sign that there are no children. Most of the items are also correlated with growth, though the associations are a good deal weaker than for the child:adult ratio. Interestingly, having a uniformed youth organisation is related to church decline. Presumably Boys' Brigades tend to be found in parishes with traditional activities that for other reasons are struggling to maintain their numbers.

In multivariate analysis, the explanatory variables that show the largest effects on the proportion of children are Sunday schools and worship services designed for children. Being linked with a Church school (particularly if it is oversubscribed) also has an important

influence. The existence of youth programmes has an impact, suggesting that the churches that are most successful in attracting children have provision for teens/young adults as well.

The results for church growth are interesting. Here the Church school has a key role, with youth programmes also appearing to have an effect (if falling just short of statistical significance, controlling for all of the other variables listed above). Youth retreats, conferences or camps make a difference; only 21% of churches in the sample have them, and they may be taken as a sign of real investment in youth work. Uniformed youth organisations remain negatively associated with growth, as are (more surprisingly) special services for schools, which more than three quarters of churches provide. Overall the findings underline the importance of retaining young people, particularly in the critical period of adolescence and early adulthood. They also suggest that the best programmes are likely to involve new ways of building community with and among the young, and may require considerable amounts of time and effort.

In their written comments on the reasons for church growth, our survey respondents recognised the importance of attracting young families to church. It is obvious to all that many congregations are ageing and new members must come from the younger generation. If church is appealing to children, then parents may attend and with luck and hard work the children will continue to come.

Family ministry commonly includes Sunday School, toddler groups and youth groups. (Baptism will be considered below.) A handful of respondents wrote about youth work or 'young people' in general, but most gave the impression that they are primarily interested in children. While that strategy has the benefit of focusing on families, it may not address the crucial transition from child to adult attendance. One difficulty is that extensive provision for children and especially youth requires a critical mass and so may not be possible for smaller churches. Some degree of specialisation, whereby one particular church in an area becomes the 'family church', is probably inevitable.

Family services around worship are the most commonly discussed means of attracting the young generation. These include:

- Family services, commonly once a month; 'wriggle and worship'.
- Being very child-focused in special services may draw in families, who might go on to attend ordinary services.
- Sunday school/children's corner during services.

- Making children and families feel welcome in the main service, for example with the vicar commenting that it was no problem for children to run about. (“Children are welcomed and parents feel comfortable having their children with them in any service.”)
- Managing trade-offs; some respondents acknowledged that older people were not always pleased to be distracted by lively children during worship.
- Attention to timing and worship style. One minister noted that “Our 9.30 a.m. service appeals to families. It is titled ‘30 minute worship’ and is the right length and the right mix of church tradition and informality to attract them.” Another commented that “Young families have little knowledge of Christianity and I think prayer book is impenetrable to them.”
- Messy Church.

Connections with schools are also frequently cited. The most direct impact on attendance may be felt in areas where a popular C of E school is over-subscribed. Some churchgoing is clearly motivated by a desire to qualify for school admission, but the boost to attendance may last into the longer term if families decide to stay. In other circumstances the school may still be important where the vicar is involved in assemblies. There may also be deliberate networking with families at the school gate.

Baptism provides an obvious opportunity for outreach to young families. There are very substantial differences in the theology and practice of christening from one parish to another, however. Some priests advocate a completely open policy, in which requirements are kept to the minimum. Others are far more demanding and insist on extensive preparation and prior attendance before performing a baptism. Many fall at some point between these positions.

Because the debate is theological as well as practical, it would be inappropriate to come down strongly on one side or the other. It is worth being explicit about the trade-offs, however. Advocates of restrictive policies point out that:

- There is little prospect that non-churchgoers will take up attendance unless they are first initiated into it.
- Given the nature of the vows being made, some preparation is needed.
- It makes little sense for the congregation to welcome new members who have no real intention of staying, and baptisms disrupt regular services. If they are performed separately, much of the point is lost.

As against those arguments, and in favour of a more open policy:

- Occasional offices are often the only services that non-churchgoers deliberately seek.
- Christening brings the church into contact not only with the parents, but also with their family and friends.
- A warm welcome and good programmes for young families can help to establish a continuing connection. (One respondent commented “Contact with baptism families are developing into a monthly Sunday morning ‘Messy Church’ type group”, which apparently has produced some strong relationships.)
- Even if there is no immediate benefit in attendance, the child and its family establish a bond with the Church that may be further developed at a later stage.
- In the mid-1930s, three quarters of English children were baptised by the Church of England. Now hardly more than one in ten infants receive Anglican christenings, and although Thanksgivings and baptisms in later years add to the total, this sacrament is in danger of falling out of favour with ordinary people.
- The cultural strength of churches elsewhere in Europe, whether in the Catholic south or in Lutheran Scandinavia, rests on an attachment to occasional offices. Very low take-up is characteristic of sects rather than national churches.
- Parents facing high hurdles to baptism in one church will simply go elsewhere or abandon their interest.

3 The geography of church participation

Numerical growth must be distinguished from the level of participation, and the socio-demographic context is important to both. Often attendance is highest as a proportion of the population in rural areas where growth is hard to achieve; growing churches are often found in cities where relatively few people are active Anglicans. Middle class suburbs with church schools, or inner city parishes with Christians arriving from overseas, offer great opportunities; rural districts and areas of industrial decline can be far more challenging. One of the difficulties for the Church of England is that its traditional rural strongholds and its new centres of urban growth are so different.

The comparatively low attendance levels found in towns and cities are in part the legacy of urban decline that began many decades ago, though is now potentially being reversed. Village churches have more participants relative to population, but they are often struggling to maintain their numbers. Elderly, rural, white congregations are important but becoming comparatively less so. Vitality is easier to find in areas with younger, urban, ethnic minority attenders.

In addition, the ethnic composition of the laity is changing rapidly, while the leadership is still largely old and white (if increasingly female). The Church is faced with a strategic challenge: the question is whether the focus should be on supporting areas of existing strength or on developing churches that are growing but not yet as significant in absolute terms.

There is a clear urban/rural divide in Anglican churchgoing. In towns and cities, 2% of adults (aged 16+) will attend services in a parish church on a usual Sunday. In villages the corresponding figure is 4.5%. The difference has two components: religion is comparatively stronger in the countryside than in the cities, and the Church of England has a smaller share of the actively religious population in urban areas. Not only are cities home to many followers of non-Christian faiths, they also offer a large number of independent churches.

Levels of Church of England attendance are highest in rural parishes where the population is predominantly Christian and white British, with older people well represented. For growth, however, it is a different story. Unsurprisingly, population growth is linked to increased church attendance, just as rises in the percentage of the people identifying with no religion on the census are associated with decline. Areas with substantial Christian ethnic minority populations – which of course tend to be urban – are most likely to see church growth. Higher education is also associated with growth.

It should be noted, though, that these factors account for only a very small fraction of the overall variation in church growth. Demographic change makes a difference, but it is not remotely necessary or sufficient for growth to occur.

At a local level, people moving into an area can make a difference. New housing will bring in new people, some of whom will transfer from other churches. The arrival of retired people or Christian immigrants can be a boost to growth. In most of these cases, of course, the growth is not produced by making new Christians but through drawing in existing ones.

Demography is more frequently mentioned as a cause of decline. Young people move out of parishes where houses are expensive or from rural areas where there is little work. Where many houses in a parish are holiday homes, attendance will be affected. In very small parishes there are few new people available to attract in any case.

Some problems are especially acute in cities. In some instances elderly members of the congregation tend to retire out of the area. Populations are relatively mobile, with the result that people do not stay long enough to develop enduring ties in the local church. And of course the growth of non-Christian minority groups may mean that the pool of Christians is smaller. In some instances the composition of a parish has changed significantly. Growth in the number of new immigrants from a Christian background can provide a boost, but some of the new attenders move away from relatively deprived areas as soon as they are able to do so.

Merging churches will boost the numbers meeting in one building, which in itself does not constitute real growth; indeed, net losses are common, as some members stop attending if their church is closed. In some instances, however, the process may lead to genuine growth. One vicar wrote that their growth was explained by:

“A graft from HTB to serve the evening service. We had tried a contemporary service once a month but it never grew beyond 30. A decision was taken to seek a graft onto that service and grow it. It started with an aggregate of 60 and has grown to 200 in six months. Young adults realised they didn’t have to commute into London churches and want to worship in a smaller church in which they are known and in which they can serve. A delight.”

Churches are well embedded in rural communities, but they are often numerically weak and financially struggling. In towns and cities that have experienced economic decline, the church may have more potential for mission but its ties to the local population are often

disintegrating. Church is often strong in suburban areas where civic engagement is valued, young families produce and consume worthwhile activities for their children, and there is still a cultural link to Christianity. Finally, Christians from overseas are revitalising many urban congregations; for them religious participation is a normal part of life, and the main challenge for the Church of England is marshalling that energy rather than losing it to independent churches. All of these statements describe tendencies; there will be many exceptions at a local level. A growth-share matrix would be:

	High share	Low share
Good growth potential	Middle class suburbs	Urban areas with many Christian immigrants
Poor recent growth	Rural villages	Towns and cities with struggling white British populations

The traditional recommendation would be to focus on the ‘stars’ and to wind down poorly performing sectors. The church – not to say Christian – context is different. Nevertheless it is helpful to think about the different strategies that are appropriate in each type of area.

For example, offering a suite of services is only viable if you have the numbers to fill them. Churches in rural parishes would struggle to offer such a variety and are left to deal with a ‘one size must fit all’ mentality. Is it then the case that while in urban parishes church attendance can be more about choosing (and consuming) a specific type of worship, in rural parishes church has to be about something else (such as community)?

One particularly interesting example of geo-demographic variation is in Christmas attendance. Christmas is an important case study for two reasons: it attracts much larger numbers of irregular or non-attenders than other services (bar occasional offices), and the number of Christmas churchgoers has been comparatively resilient. Whereas average Sunday attendance fell by 10% between 2005 and 2011, Christmas attendance was only 6% lower in 2011. (Christmas fell on a Sunday in both years, which makes them suitable for this comparison.) To put it another way, the ratio between Christmas and usual attendance has been edging upwards. The holidays are an opportunity for outreach, but the nature of this opportunity is different in different areas.

The social geography of Christmas attendance

More than a third of adults in the country go to church at some point during the Christmas season (if only for choral concerts or nativity plays), and holiday attendance is a good case study in the social geography of attendance. The Church had more than 2.6 million people attending for Christmas (Eve and Day) in 2011, compared with fewer than 1.4 million at Easter. The Christmas turnout at parish churches in England is nearly three times what one would find on an average Sunday.

To find the Christmas spirit in your parish church, Gloucester is the place to go. Close to 10% of the population in that diocese will be in an Anglican church at Christmas, which is three times as many as in London, four times as many as in Liverpool, and five times as many as in Manchester.

To find people who don't usually go to church but like to attend at Christmas, Guildford is the destination. Christmas congregations there are nearly four times as high as on an average Sunday and two and a half times higher than at Easter. Fewer than 30% of the attenders take communion. These are Christmas tourists mixing a little ceremony into their festivities.

What explains these differences? The main factor is a rural / urban / suburban effect. In rural areas people are connected to their churches, attendance is fairly good even on ordinary Sundays, and the big Christmas boost seems to be mostly from occasional attenders who make a point of coming on the holiday. In urban areas people are less likely to attend (perhaps because the culture is less traditional and there are more alternative activities), and at Christmas one finds the regular participants and a few extras. Suburbanites try to have the best of both worlds: they may not go during the year but Christmas is special.

Rural versus urban

Institutional religion embodies tradition, and tradition is strongest in rural areas. People live in small, natural communities (as opposed to the virtual communities of friends scattered across a big city). They are likely to be in closer contact with their neighbours. Many have a connection with a particular church going back a few generations, and even those who do

not may see it as a focal point for community activities. It is still common for children to be baptised, couples to have church weddings, and families to attend services at least occasionally. Times are changing everywhere, but the countryside remains a more favourable environment for religious participation, especially on special occasions, than the large towns.

In contrast, Anglican attendance is low in the major cities. Part of the reason is that other denominations are well represented there and hence the Church of England accounts for a lower proportion of the churchgoing population than elsewhere. The difference between rural and urban attendance at any church is thus not as extreme as implied by the Anglican figures discussed here. In addition, because more Muslims, Hindus and other non-Christians live in urban areas, we would expect church attendance to be somewhat lower as a percentage of the total population anyway. In very few places, though, are other religious groups large enough to make a real difference. In Greater Manchester, for example, 11.3% of the population identified themselves with a non-Christian religion in the 2011 census, but this figure is not a great deal higher than the national average of 8.7%.

Even allowing for the religious variety found in cities and the dominant position of the Church of England in the countryside, we are still left with a contrast in levels of churchgoing. Attendance levels are high among the populations of African and some other immigrant origins, but otherwise city-dwellers are relatively poor churchgoers. A traditional explanation would be that the cultural and religious variety found in urban areas undermines religious commitment, which relies on shared beliefs and practices. Traditions that can be preserved in villages tend to be eroded in cities, especially when there is little sense of community.

What is especially noteworthy, though, is not so much the level of urban churchgoing as how little it increases at Christmas. Just why the holiday gives attendance such a small boost is something of a puzzle. Again, it may be that traditional activities (like going to church) are being pushed out by new options. The anonymity of city life may work against holiday attendance; not only is there little social pressure to go to church, it is more likely that everyone else there will be a stranger.

Suburban holidays

Christmas lifts church attendance in both rural and suburban areas, but the causes are different. In the country it is a matter of usual churchgoers making a point of attending at

Christmas, even if ordinarily they only turn up every couple of weeks. In the suburbs, by contrast, the influx consists of people who do not usually go to church.

Two pieces of evidence give us reason to suppose that these people are – to be blunt – consuming a little religious theatre for the holidays. The first is that a lower proportion of people in suburban areas take communion at Christmas than elsewhere, suggesting that they do not regard themselves as belonging (though perhaps the churches are more focused on carols than communion). Moreover, fewer than half the people in Anglican churches in southern England at Christmas will be there again when Easter comes around. People who see themselves as churchgoers, even if just occasional ones, will make a point of attending at Easter.

Of course these people may think of themselves as Christian or as being ‘spiritual’, even if they are not normally churchgoers. Nevertheless it seems likely that what motivates many of them to attend at this particular time of year is nostalgia for a real or imagined past. In their search for the magic of Christmas they embrace traditions of every sort, from the secular (listening to the Queen’s speech, going to the panto, making mince pies) to the religious (carols, nativity plays, church services). The holiday season is so important as an opportunity for outreach, though, that churches should consider how Christmas might come more than once a year, figuratively speaking.

Services could be devised for Easter, mid-summer and Harvest that would attract many among the unchurched. The example of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols suggests that it is possible to have broad appeal without sacrificing the religious message. The point is that neither liturgy nor preaching works well in attracting the public to holiday events, but they will turn out for a festival if it is well done.

A north-south divide

There is another interesting story here. There is a north/south divide, or in Anglican terms a provincial divide. Of the 23 dioceses in which Christmas attendance was more than three times as high as average Sunday attendance in 2011, all except York and Newcastle are in the Province of Canterbury. The places where Christmas makes less difference to attendance are mostly further north, aside from London and Southwark and a few other southern dioceses. It is worth stressing that there is no relationship between average weekly attendance and the percentage increase at Christmas. Places where churchgoing is

high in ordinary weeks also do well at Christmas, but the proportional rise is no greater there.

Why the south is different from the midlands and the north is not at all clear. When faced with these kinds of questions, sociologists often start by looking for differences in the composition of the population. For example, 'Christmas tourists' may be predominantly middle class professional people whose relative numbers are highest in the south. The contrast is also apparent between rural dioceses in the north and south, though, so this explanation is not entirely persuasive.

Another kind of hypothesis relates to the social or cultural context. Perhaps northern churchgoing is a more all-or-nothing affair, so that people are more inclined to come either regularly or not at all. It seems that fewer non-churchgoing northerners are interested in being Christmas tourists. As suggested above, some people clearly enjoy a holiday tour through Christmas traditions, both secular and sacred; 'Merrie England' sentimentality may be especially strong in the south.

4 Church profiles: Where growth is found

There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context. What works in one place may not work in another. There are no strong connections between growth and worship style, theological tradition, and so on. What seems crucial is that congregations are constantly engaged in reflection: churches cannot soar on autopilot. Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment.

Worship

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions about the frequency and style of worship at the church. They were asked to place the main Sunday service at a point along three scales: low to high church, non-liturgical to liturgical, and contemporary to traditional music. The first two of these were very highly correlated, and music was closely if not quite so strongly associated with those dimensions. Further questions asked:

Over the course of a month, how much variation is there in the worship style of your main Sunday service?

How much variety is there in the worship styles of the different services held in any given week (if applicable)?

How much change in services and worship styles has there been in the past several years?

Taken individually, the factors associated with growth are non-liturgical worship, contemporary music, variety across the week, and change in recent years. The number of services (Sunday or midweek) appears not to be relevant, nor is variation from one Sunday to the next. Analysing all of the factors at the same time, so that the effect of each is assessed while holding the others constant, the picture is somewhat different. Once again contemporary worship is associated with growth, and the number of Sunday services has no effect, but the number of midweek services approaches statistical significance. Consistency in the style of the main Sunday service emerges as something favourable to growth, whereas variety during the week drops out. Change in recent years seems positive but is no longer significant (by the conventional standard).

It should be noted that these associations are all rather weak. Churches that place themselves at the very end of the 'high church' dimension are in fact the most likely to be

growing, closely followed (perhaps paradoxically) by those at the non-liturgical end of the accompanying scale. Growth is least likely to be found in the middle of these scales, or perhaps more accurately in the 'middling to old-fashioned' range: somewhat high church, somewhat liturgical and with relatively traditional music, without being self-consciously at the limits. One might suggest that this kind of worship is symptomatic of stagnation rather than being the direct cause of decline. Vitality comes with reflection and choice; the particular style is less important than the fact that it has been considered and embraced, rather than adopted by default.

These conclusions are consistent with the written comments on the survey. While worship style was one of the most frequently cited reasons for growth, there was no real consensus over what style was best. Changes to services – that is, innovation – was often claimed to be what helped to produce growth.

Many respondents did attribute their success to informality in worship, using terms such as relaxed, easy going, lively, open, friendly, flexible, or even “a light-hearted approach to worship”. This type of service is thought to be especially suitable for people who are not usual attenders; one vicar referred to “A more relaxed worship style that makes them feel welcome and comfortable.”

A related theme was ‘accessibility’, which is viewed by many as important for retaining visitors. Here the descriptions included accessible, seeker-friendly, user-friendly, and simplicity; ministers were “always aware there might be visitors to service” and tried to provide “preaching and teaching that connects with the unchurched.” If the quality of the preaching is high, people will enjoy it and come back. Being clear, engaging and addressing issues that people actually face were mentioned.

Accessibility was often regarded as implying less formal and more contemporary services, and definitely not those based on the “impenetrable Prayer Book”. This view was not universally held, however. In a characteristically Anglican compromise, many respondents said that they adopted a relaxed or informal approach within *traditional* services. Here the lack of formality was in the way the service was conducted rather than in the content of the worship. Typical comments included:

- “Relaxed style though still with the formality of the liturgy.”
- “We offer a traditional style of worship with a contemporary mix.”
- “We have worked hard to liven up the liturgy such as the setting for the Mass whilst maintaining a traditional Catholic ethos.”

Advocates of contemporary worship wrote about simplifying the liturgy, offering “short and punchy” services, and “shifting the emphasis of our music from Radio 3-style to Radio 2-style”. The aim is to produce “vibrant worship” that is accessible. By contrast, some respondents asserted that it was the *traditional* nature of their services that made them popular.

- “We have picked up a number of Roman Catholics who are dissatisfied with trendy services in their former churches.”
- “Traditionally the high church liturgy has attracted an eclectic congregation as we are really the only church representing this tradition in this part of the diocese, consequently we tend to attract those looking for this style of worship.”
- “The church offers a liturgically-based traditional style of worship which is not common in our region of Bath and provides a warm welcome.”

No single style of worship of popular with everyone, nor is it clear that contemporary worship always has an advantage in producing growth. Many churches deal with the problem of varied tastes by offering different types of service, with some attributing their growth to this variety.

- “We have four Anglican churches which offer distinctive styles of worship and we believe we offer something separate for those who prefer a service which balances sacraments, teaching and music.”
- “Wider variety of services means more choice for people.”
- “There has been significant growth as a result of offering a wider variety of worship on different days and at different times. We now have five different services with some overlapping attendance which whilst not huge in terms of numbers do bring in quite distinct congregations.”
- “The growth in these three churches is due to diversity and a willingness to change by the growth of and development of Cafe Church monthly as well as Traditional Evensong.”
- “Being able to provide two distinctive styles of worship every Sunday so that people attend church and know the type of service they are coming to. (Definitely a sung communion with traditional hymns or informal service with contemporary music and coffee).”
- “We are developing a suite of services focusing on particular Homogeneous Units. That way, people can pick and choose ‘which church they want to belong to.’”

To reiterate the original point, the relative success (to the extent that it exists) of less liturgical worship results not so much from the particular style as the fact that it was chosen rather than inherited. Decline may come about because of “a degree of stagnation in the approach, variety, vitality and inclusiveness of our worship.” Traditional translates into unimaginative. Sometimes the service becomes more important than the ultimate end, with one respondent mentioning “poor leadership that refused children/youth access to worship.” By contrast, successful churches described “a ‘let’s give it a go’ mentality. We try different initiatives as experiments. If they work we invest in them, if they don’t we drop them. Examples: ‘Sunday Night Live’, live secular entertainment in Costa Coffee with a short non-creaky 5-minute message.”

Many churches are trying to enhance the social aspect of services, sometimes through elaborating the traditional route of tea and coffee into breakfast or lunch before or after the service, and sometimes through ‘café church’ worship.

Church programmes (internal)

The survey included a number of questions about church programmes. Although the boundaries are fuzzy, for the sake of convenience we can consider the activities in three groups: those promoting church life for members, those aimed at serving the community, and those that seek to bring non-participants into contact with the church.

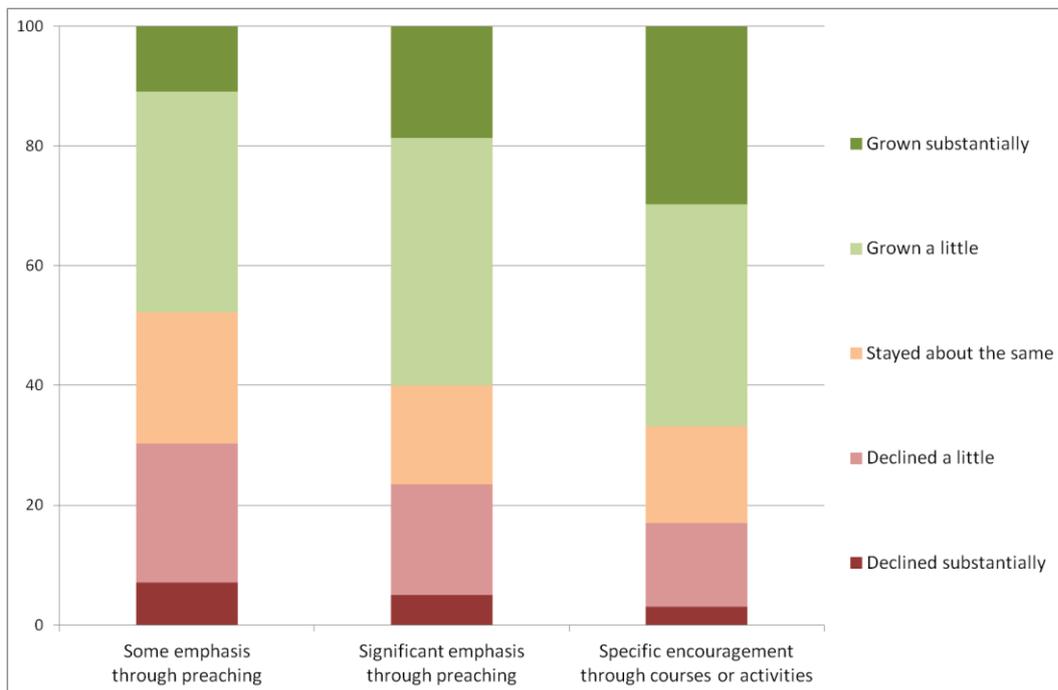
In the first category are Bible studies; home groups, prayer groups, or fellowship groups; choir; and spiritual retreats. In addition, there was a question about the amount of emphasis on preparing members to serve as a Christian witness in their daily lives. Of these, only Bible studies and an emphasis on discipleship show a clear association with growth. The wording of the latter question was as follows:

- Is there much emphasis on preparing members to serve as a Christian witness in their daily lives?
- No, or very little emphasis
 - Some emphasis through preaching
 - Significant emphasis through preaching
 - Specific encouragement through courses or activities

A contrast emerges between three sets of churches: those where at most the issue is mentioned in sermons, those with significant emphasis through preaching, and finally those where there is specific encouragement. Self-reported growth ranged from 11% to 30%

across these three groups (Figure 4.1). Only one church in seven shows the strongest level of commitment to Christian witness, but they have reaped rewards in numerical growth as well as (presumably) increased discipleship. What works for some may not work for all, of course, and strong promotion of Christian witness may put off some churchgoers while attracting others. Nevertheless the findings underline the importance of reflecting on what church has to offer.

Figure 4.1: The impact of promoting Christian witness



Church programmes (external)

The second broad category of activities includes those that are primarily directed at serving others. One particular question asked:

During the past 12 months, has your church run any of the following services for your own members or for people in the community? (Tick all that apply)

- Child day care, pre-school, before or after-school programmes
- Elderly or care in the community programmes
- Environmental projects
- Social services: debt counselling, aid work, shelters, etc.

All of these activities are worthwhile and churches organising them should be applauded, but the first two do not seem to make much difference to growth. It is intriguing that environmental projects and social services do have an impact. Only a minority of churches are active in these ways – about an eighth and a quarter respectively – and struggling churches are probably unlikely to undertake such programmes. When all of these activities are considered at once, only environmental projects have statistically significant effects.

In their written comments, respondents were generally doubtful that community involvement influences growth. Perhaps community work ‘prepares the ground’ for conversion, but the link is often unclear. A school connection was often cited as having the potential to lead to growth. More generally, “rootedness in the local community” is a factor, reinforced though lay leadership or clergy having roles in various community bodies, and simply “being seen”. Some vicars are well known in the community. Community engagement can help in increasing the visibility of the church.

The hopeful thought expressed was that “We are church of community and for the community – we have excellent links within our community and believe that after considerable sowing we are heading into a period of reaping.” More commonly, ministers see the connections as important even if they do not lead to numerical growth:

- “A growing confidence that the Church has something to offer as an active part of the wider community and a growing confidence within the congregation to see their wider community involvement as Christian service and outreach.”
- “We are in an area of great poverty and of great transition. In any year people move out of the area and leave church but new people always move in and replace them. The church is seen as relevant in our area, and the services of the church are sought at times of need.”
- “Continuing efforts to make the church community-focused rather than building-focused.”
- “Although the numbers have not moved, this does not represent complacency. This is a place that attracts high numbers of very elderly so there’s natural loss. But close proactive links with schools and the working community has meant that people who live and work here do regard the church as ‘theirs’”.
- “Contact through outreach by the Women’s Fellowship, Little Fishes parents and Toddlers, and sometimes the Monthly coffee mornings. It is focused on the pastoral rather than the evangelical outreach: however, all outreach is evangelistic!”

Clearly these issues are bound up with different views of mission and evangelism. There are large questions about the relationship between numerical growth, discipleship, and the purpose of the church.

Church programmes (evangelistic)

Finally there are activities that seek to bring new people into church. Outreach events or services such as Back to Church Sunday are linked to self-reported growth, though the association with the objective measure falls short of statistical significance. Hosting Christian nurture courses (e.g. Alpha, Emmaus, Credo) is also associated with growth. In multivariate analysis, these two approaches have very similar effects. As always, it remains an open question whether special events and courses help churches to grow or growing churches are the most motivated to organise them (or both, in all probability).

We asked respondents what they thought had been the most effective way of connecting with potential new members, offering the following options:

- Don't know
- Evangelistic services or events
- Websites or social media
- Leaflet drops or notices
- Invitations to friends from existing members
- Networking in the wider community
- Occasional offices (baptisms, weddings, funerals)
- School entrance
- Other

Occasional offices received the largest number of ticks, with 35% choosing it. Interestingly this selection is inversely associated with growth. The implication is that while baptisms, weddings and funerals do indeed bring new people into church, relying on these services is not conducive to vitality. The answer 'Don't know' is also negatively correlated with self-reported growth, although it falls just short of statistical significance. It may be that some declining churches have tried everything and are at a loss as to how to attract new members, but it seems more likely that a lack of reflection is associated with a lack of success.

Trying to contact potential new members after they attend services or other activities is associated with growth (unlike trying to contact a regular attender who had stopped coming

to church, where there is none). With occasional offices the position is less clear cut. A large majority (about 80%) of churches claim to try to stay in touch with non-attenders who arrange baptisms or funerals, with a somewhat lower number (61%) doing the same for weddings. It is not obvious, however, that these efforts make a difference.

Few respondents mentioned the influence of advertising or social media, though most churches have websites (of varying quality, and often with minimal reference to the Church of England). Facebook updates are becoming increasingly widespread – a third of churches in the sample used them – and the days of the parish newsletter are likely to be numbered. Podcasts are still a comparative rarity (one in 16 churches responding) and for the most part they are likely to be of interest principally to the existing congregation. Use of Facebook and podcasts are associated with growth, but almost certainly because they are a sign of young and dynamic leadership rather than because of their direct effects.

Churches are becoming increasingly creative in organising social activities. Some of the events mentioned were large and occasional, for example a beer festival, food festival, wedding fair, bring-and-share lunches, tea dances, and concerts, while others were small and more regular, such as coffee mornings, mums and tots, or games afternoons for the elderly. One popular effort is to combine a social event with special services. A respondent commented that “this church has several significant special services during the year, often with 70+ attending: Christmas, Harvest, Songs of Praise, choral Evensong. The last three are followed by a social event (wine and cheese or supper).”

Vision

Often the reasons given for growth were general rather than specific, and this very generality may capture an important truth: growth is not the output of a mechanical process. Instead, it results from deep reflection and commitment, a willingness to experiment, and a desire for renewal. This sense was communicated by the many respondents who referred to prayer as a factor, or sometimes the Holy Spirit. A number of people also referred to having vision. The idea was often hard to pin down, but comments included (from least to most specific):

- “Energy”
- “Vision for growth”
- “Renewed sense of mission”

- “We have a clear value system that helps people grow as disciples, connect with God, each other and the world around them.”
- “We have developed a strategic and detailed Mission Action Plan, based firmly on the Five Marks of Mission. All decisions made in the church are now done so in the light of the Five Marks and we have Reference Groups for each one to ensure that we remain holistically mission-focused.”

5 Lay attitudes to stability and change

For there to be growth, the existing congregation must be willing to experience change. At a minimum the arrival of new people disrupts what might be a cosy club. In all probability there will need to be larger changes, in the timing and type of worship, in how and when the building is used, and crucially in shifting lay leadership towards younger and more recent members. Such changes are uncomfortable. It is also necessary for a significant subset of lay participants to be active in assuming responsibilities, rather than passively leaving things to the ordained minister.

The problem

Unwillingness to change was commonly cited as a reason for church decline. Elderly congregations can be inward-looking and resistant to change. Even a change in incumbent may be upsetting. Long-time attenders may be reluctant to try new forms of worship. Many village churches are seen as traditional and wanting to stay that way, with little to make them distinctive. One vicar linked the problem of generational replacement to these obstacles: decline results from “Members ageing and dying, not replaced by younger ones. Younger people do occasionally come, but don’t become permanent – probably because they can’t identify socially with the generally elderly congregation. Most of the regulars are very warmly welcoming to newcomers, but they nevertheless expect them to fit in with existing patterns, because they themselves don’t take kindly to radical change. It is frustratingly difficult to initiate anything new or different.”

A recurring theme is that established congregations are interested in social reproduction – that is, continuation or growth without change.

- “The majority still want to attend a communion service once a month or every week and they are content. They work only to ensure the church will still be here for them, they are not wanting to grow or change. They actually don’t want new young people.”
- “The church does want to grow, but *only* if the new people keep everything the same, behave in an ‘appropriate’ manner, are from ‘nice’ families, etc. etc.”
- “This church seems to have had little teaching about the faith for some time. I do the work, most are quite happy to sit in the pews. ... There has been a realisation that they need new people if the church is to survive, but for most that is ‘new but on their terms’.”

- “There is a welcoming culture in the congregation, but when newbies come they want them to fit in. It’s as if they’re saying ‘this is how we do church, you are very welcome but this is how it is.’ There is a big resistance to change.”

Lay leadership may be weak or worse. In some ageing congregations there are fewer and fewer people to serve; faithful members, weekly attenders who were willing to volunteer, are dying or becoming infirm. Younger members often attend less often and are less willing or able to volunteer because of other commitments.

Some of the written comments are hair-raising:

- “The church was in decline and has not changed much. No willing adult to support the work with children, no Sunday school, no change allowed to service. The choir refuse to attend evening or all age worship and don’t like contemporary stuff. PCC same people year after year. Apathetic uninvolved congregation want to come be fed go home and forget church till next week. Very few willing and even fewer able to work for growth.”
- “I have come to a beleaguered churchy group which has no prayer, no Bible study, no expectation of God speaking to them, no children’s work other than family services, no visiting of members, and rigidity in worship style. ... many have no experience of the Holy Spirit and no real commitment to Christ.”
- “It’s like trying to do palliative care, midwifery and in-vitro fertilisation on the same ward. Congregation elderly and dying. I do a Fun@4 service once a month, and this is starting to build up at last. Can’t call it Messy Church, as we don’t have enough people to run it as Messy Church. We have one church warden who gets flummoxed if you ask her to photocopy the notice sheet. I have to put out the bins, count the money, do the accounts, photocopy the notice sheet – because there isn’t anyone else to do them! I would love to delegate. I would love a ministry team, but there isn’t anyone. At present all the PCC is indisposed: broken leg, broken wrist, pacemaker, psych care. Just me and the church warden are reasonably fit and she has MS.”
- “This has actually been an extremely difficult parish to minister in. I could write essays about the difficulties that the headstrong laity has caused both in and out of the church. ... The diocese and deanery have been totally supportive but one of our great Anglican problems is that too much power can be vested in indolent and obnoxious laity. ... The great joys in this parish and, in fact, the great demonstrations

of Christian faith in this parish are found outside of the small number who have called themselves ‘church’ here.”

Being welcoming – a start but not enough

Many survey respondents attributed growth to the welcoming culture of their church. The terms used included: welcoming atmosphere, happy atmosphere, hospitality, friendliness, openness, inclusive, non-judgemental, loving, made to feel at home, “creating a family feel of belonging and welcome”, “caring for people – showing interest in them”. Some churches have welcoming committees but most people talked instead about the welcoming ‘atmosphere’, ‘culture’ or ‘attitude’ of the church – a general sense in the congregation that visitors and newcomers are welcome regardless of their background. An understanding that not everyone is the same was mentioned more than once; “Welcome and genuine love of people for all people no matter who they are”, or “Sensitive welcome, not forcing people into ‘be like me’ groups.”

Being non-judgemental is seen as central to the notion of being welcoming. There is a view that the church or vicar will chastise people for not living the right way; the aim is to foster an image of inclusivity. Regardless of background or behaviour, people will be made to feel that church has a place for them. One respondent wrote “We are unashamedly inclusive with an open Eucharistic table. We offer Holy Communion unconditionally to all who come. We offer intelligent preaching and stimulating non-judgemental discussion.” Another mentioned the importance of “allowing everyone to try out their gifts with the recognition that when it doesn’t go well we can learn from each other. To step away from the blame culture and into forgiveness.”

While the vicar has an important role to play (as discussed in the next section), it is natural to focus on the welcome given by the congregation. The treatment of children was commonly cited as an important aspect of welcome; people need to feel comfortable that their children are allowed to be children, and even to run around. Some people referred to specific steps taken to ensure that visitors received a warm welcome, but most implied that it was a natural feature of their congregation. There is a danger to this taken-for-granted friendliness, as external and internal perceptions may not always match.

Building relationships

Extending a welcome is at best a first step. People must come to feel part of the church, which involves building relationships. This process of integration was described in various ways:

- Helping people belong
- People have made friends here
- Fellowship
- Close relationships, care, to be made to feel a part of a Christian family
- Creating a family feel of belonging
- Good follow-up and fellowship groups for nurture and discipleship
- Building up of personal relationships
- Greater desire to love and serve one another
- Spending time with them and finding ways of making them feel included (but doing so in a sensitive way)

At its simplest, building relationships may be connected to the social aspects of church life, such as talking to people while having refreshments before or after a service. In general, though, something more is likely to be needed. For example, there is the church already mentioned where “contact with baptism families is developing into a monthly Sunday morning ‘Messy Church’ type group. There is contact with bereaved people through a twice monthly friendship group and a quarterly lunch group. Both have resulted in the development of strong relationships.” Or it could be the result of particular projects; a few respondents mentioned fundraising for the church or hall and so on. “Raising money to build a new church hall drew in lots of people which established a strong feeling of fellowship (which has lasted).”

The most direct route to growth comes via existing relationships: family, friends and acquaintances who come by invitation or out of interest and then stay. People who already have contacts in the congregation are easier than others to attract and to retain. Inviting friends to church does not come easily to most English people, which is partly why it is helpful to have non-threatening ‘half-way house’ events like carol services as a draw. A corollary of the social difficulty of extending an invitation is the reluctance to refuse them. Ours is a culture in which asking is a powerful act: it is hard to do but correspondingly hard to decline.

The next step is overt evangelism, and relatively few respondents gave it as a reason for growth. There will be some people who are comfortable with a call to Christian witness in the workplace or community, but they are rare.

Statistical findings

Growing churches (as identified from the parish statistics) were deliberately targeted for inclusion in the sample, with the result that the distribution of churches in the survey across the range of growth categories is more even than one would find for all churches.

Nevertheless it is a surprise to see that 35% of respondents claim that the age profile of attenders is now younger than in the past, versus only 26% who admit that it is older.

Whether or not these reports reflect optimism rather than reality, they are associated with growth. Using the objective measure, growth is found in exactly half of churches where the average age is falling, as against only 29% in ageing congregations. For self-reported growth the contrast is even more dramatic: 82% for churches in which attenders are younger than before versus 23% where they are older. The correlation between self-reported growth and more youthful attenders is high (0.5).

Having more ethnic minority attenders than previously is also associated with growth, though it is much weaker (particularly with objectively measured growth).

Respondents were asked:

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Our church:

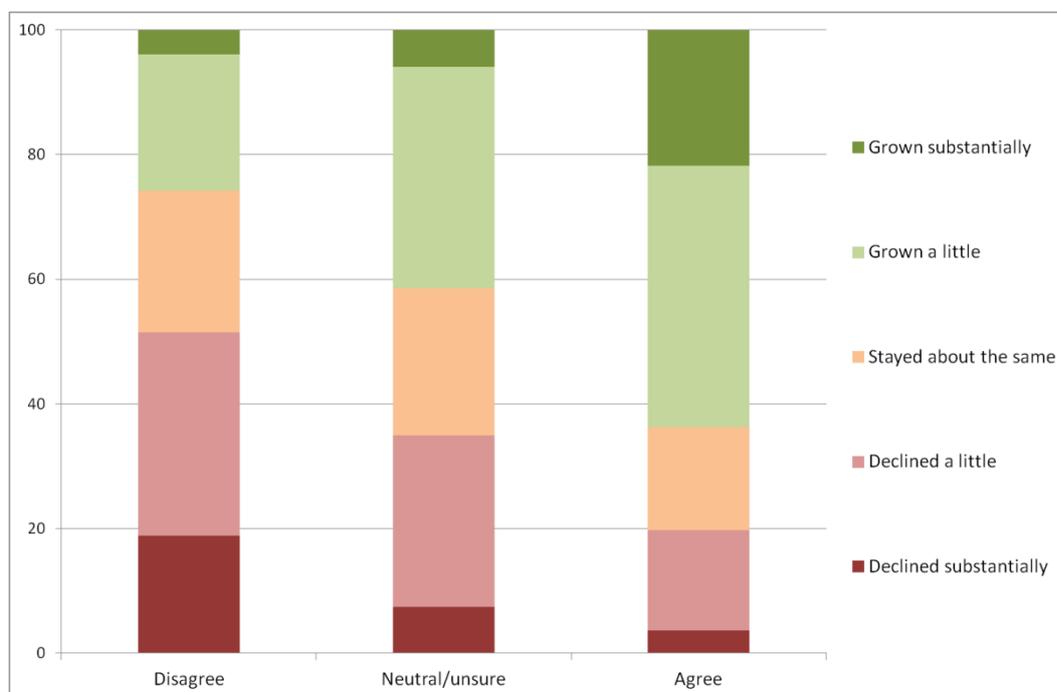
- Has a clear mission and purpose
- Wants to grow in membership
- Wants to be racially and culturally diverse
- Is working for social justice

'Neutral / unsure' was an option along with agree and disagree. As one might expect, the overwhelming majority (92%) pay lip service to the desirability of growth, with very few disagreeing. Whether in practice members act accordingly is an issue to which we shall return. A smaller majority agree that their church has a clear mission and purpose, with most of the remainder being unsure. (The fact that a quarter are unsure suggests that the mission is not clear, even if it exists!) Interestingly the proportion agreeing that the church wants to be diverse falls short of half (48%), while agreement that the church is working for social justice is only a bare majority (53%). Again, most of the remainder are unsure, although 11% concede that their church does *not* want to be racially and culturally diverse.

One suspects that the true figure is a good deal higher. In fairness, however, most rural churches and many in towns have little opportunity to become more mixed.

All of the variables are correlated with self-reported growth, while with the objective measure neither wanting to grow nor working for social justice are significant. Growth is most strongly linked to having a clear mission and purpose (Figure 5.1), and this finding is reinforced by multivariate analysis. Its effects substantially outweigh those of the other variables in this set, though wanting to grow is also significant in explaining subjective growth, while wanting to be diverse is relevant in explaining objectively measured growth.

Figure 5.1: Growth and agreement that “Our church has a clear mission and purpose”



Respondents were asked whether lay members are regularly involved in:

- Home visiting
- Speaking/preaching in church
- Running clubs for young people
- Preparation for baptisms/weddings/etc.
- Planning/leading worship
- Leading prayer/fellowship/study groups

Self-reported growth was significantly correlated with all of these activities; objectively measured growth with none of them. Lay involvement in running clubs for young people (reported by just over half of churches) had the largest effect; the explanation might be found in the mere existence of such clubs. Speaking/preaching and leading small groups also remained significant when all variables were considered simultaneously.

When asked approximately how many lay people are regularly involved in these activities, ten was the number most commonly reported, and it was also the median value: half gave a smaller estimate and half gave a larger one. The count is correlated with growth, though the proportion of people involved (lay leaders divided by the number of adults attending services at least monthly) is not. (Oddly, 20 churches recorded a higher level of lay involvement than participation at worship.)

The key question was:

Do the same people tend to serve in volunteer leadership roles year after year, or does your church rotate volunteer service among a larger number of people?

- The same people tend to serve
- Although there is some rotation, it tends to be among a limited number of people
- We have a lot of rotation among persons in volunteer leadership roles

The answers show highly significant associations with church growth, however measured. Revealingly, although the sample contains a disproportionate number of growing churches, only 7% selected the third option. The majority stated that rotation tends to be among a limited number of people, and 38% admitted that the same people tend to serve. Lack of rotation is linked to decline; substantial rotation is linked to growth.

Although it is hard to avoid the suspicion that when lay roles seem fixed the opportunities for growth are much reduced, the direction of causality is not clear. It is no surprise that growing churches find it easier to fill lay leadership roles, including:

- Licensed Reader
- PCC officer (e.g. secretary or treasurer)
- Sunday school teacher
- Youth leader
- Organist/music director/worship leader
- Churchwarden
- Committee member

There is good reason to believe (not least from previous research in the United States) that conflict leads to decline. Respondents were asked:

During the past five years has your church experienced any conflict concerning....

- Finances or budget
- Worship style or content
- Priorities for activities or mission
- The issue of gay priests/bishops
- The issue of women priests/bishops
- Priest's leadership style or personal behaviour
- Members' personal behaviour
- Use of facilities
- Other area

The answer options were:

- No
- Yes but it was not serious
- Yes, some people left
- Yes, some people withheld donations
- Yes, minister or staff members left

Worship style was the most frequent cause of conflict, with close to half of churches reporting problems in this area. The issue of gay priests or bishops was the least likely to cause conflict at a parish level, though even so one church in six had experienced some difficulty. An impact on growth is only apparent when there have been problems with finances or the priest. It is worth noting that in most cases the reported conflicts were not serious, though roughly one church in nine had had people leave because of disagreements over worship, leadership or members' behaviour. Some of the causes of conflict appear to be related; with the exception of the items on women and gay priests, the variables can be combined to form a single scale.

6 Clergy characteristics

Serving the Church as an ordained minister is a vocation. All clergy have a calling; the question is exactly what they are called to do. Not everyone is equally well suited to every role, and parish ministry involves many functions, from consoling individuals to inspiring whole congregations, from running the organisation to creating new forms of church. To point out that people have different talents is not intended to make invidious distinctions. Generating numerical growth is an important objective for the Church, but it is far from being the only one.

The survey findings described below highlight the key importance of particular strengths, in particular the ability to motivate others and having a vision for the church. Less comfortably, it also suggests that these qualities are not easy to acquire. There are strong associations between growth and personality type, but none between growth and attendance on leadership courses.

This message may come as no surprise. A number of people commented to us that a newcomer's first contact is often with the vicar; it has to be positive. Some ordained ministers made the wry comment that social events are about showing the community that the vicar is a happy, normal person. The personality of the vicar is crucial to the experience people have at church. As suggested in the previous section, clergy are often faced with ageing and unchanging congregations in which negativity is rife: one vicar commented that she had to "jolly them along with a 'can do' attitude: it's like being with a bunch of children." Managing (and avoiding) conflict may be important; people leave when disputes get out of hand. Knowing how much a church can change is no small skill; the most serious conflicts can actually concern, or be caused by, the ordained minister.

Even on the end of a phone, clergy whose churches are growing often exude charisma. Through a natural reluctance to criticise or to take personal credit, vicars tend to attribute their success to being new and enthusiastic. Some, though, were frank in saying that "it is the personality of the vicar/leader that makes the difference", or "I'm increasingly convinced that the biggest issue with church growth and decline is the vicar", and even "It's scary how much a church has to do with the personality of the main pastor." Sometimes the qualities cited were comparatively mundane – someone "with a good sense of humour who is easy to understand" – and sometimes they are larger: "fresh vision, leadership and impetus for growth." In a number of instances, though, people looked back on particularly successful predecessors: "The previous vicar was well known, extravert and larger than life and the impact of his moving on was significant."

Some of the stories of dynamic clergy are remarkable. One minister described his predecessor as being “very evangelical: he was out and about in village with his dog, building relationships. He had a very bold personality; he just asked people to do things. He was pioneering and quite visionary. He would just outright ask someone who hadn’t been to church for a while to run a youth group. He was very skilled at persuading people to do things. Some might describe him as cheeky. He managed to draw in a core group of really committed people.” Another described a major renovation project that involved raising a very substantial amount of money. The project reinvigorated the community; the previous minister’s enthusiasm and energy prompted the same belief in others. “There is a degree of personality about these things. You can get some people who can just bounce a community along in a village parish. It’s just a case of getting a few key people willing and enthusiastic.”

Of course not everyone has these qualities, and clergy would often be frank in private conversation. One person said that he used plenty of humour, commenting “I’m not a grumpy vicar like some of them.” Another remarked that prior to his arrival, four people would be a normal attendance; the vicar put people off and annoyed the community. An incumbent described a predecessor who had tiny congregations but seemed to do little apart from play bridge! The most worrying account was of a vicar who had reduced baptism to very low levels. There were no children’s groups, no Sunday schools, and he had not been to the local primary school for 20 years. He asked people not to bring children to church because they are disruptive.

No doubt these are extreme cases, but there are undoubtedly some very poor leaders as well as many very good ones. Most vicars fall somewhere between the extremes, of course. It is possible to be popular and hard working but to run out of steam and ideas, or to become too busy with administration.

None of these stories are meant to suggest that everything is down to personality. Hard work and acquired skills are also relevant. The leader has to delegate and facilitate; it is not possible to do everything, at least in a large church or benefice.

Personal characteristics and churchmanship

Younger clergy are more likely than their elders to report growth. (The association is not statistically significant when using the objective measure of growth.) Gender makes no difference in this respect, nor does ethnicity. Marital status is not associated with growth,

but having children living at home is, even when controlling for age. Young vicars with young families have the edge in leading vital churches. They need some time, though: controlling for age, growth is associated with tenure in the post. While new incumbents may be seen as a breath of fresh air, stability can also bring benefits. Some very long-serving vicars continue to achieve growth.

Theological controversies have had practical consequences in church governance and public perception. It is natural to suppose that theological orientation (or ‘churchmanship’) may be connected to growth or decline. Indeed, a number of respondents to our survey offered such reasons. Some were rather cryptic, for example “The mess the Church of England is in spiritually.” In other cases the messages were diametrically opposed; one referred to the “abject failure” to pass legislation on women bishops as “the single most traumatic event of the last decade”; another cited the “liberal agenda and priestesses” as the main cause of decline.

To test the relationship between churchmanship and numerical change, clergy were asked to place their theological orientation along three seven-point scales, running from Catholic to Evangelical, from Liberal to Conservative, and from Charismatic to non-Charismatic. The distributions along each dimension were remarkably uniform. There is a very slight skew towards being evangelical, but otherwise roughly equal proportions of respondents chose each of the seven points. The same is true for the liberal-conservative scale, though here the skew is slightly in the direction of liberalism, and there is an aversion to identifying with the extremes (particularly the conservative pole). Those with and without charismatic tendencies roughly balance, though being slightly charismatic is considerably more common than being extremely so.

The association between churchmanship and growth is not very strong. Using the objective measure, the only significant correlation is found with the charismatic scale. Self-reported growth is associated with evangelical and conservative as well as charismatic tendencies, but only the charismatic variable has an effect when all three dimensions are considered simultaneously. Controlling for other characteristics nearly always reduces churchmanship to insignificance.

Respondents were also asked whether they thought that they should conduct funerals for non-churchgoers, baptise infants from non-churchgoing families, make regular pastoral visits, and so on. These items arguably serve as proxies for churchmanship, and clergy in growing churches were less enthusiastic than others about the three activities just mentioned. The strongest association is found with funerals: almost no one disagrees that conducting them is

part of the job, but a substantial number of people merely 'agreed' rather than 'strongly agreed' that this duty extends to non-churchgoers. This variable remained significant in some (though not all) multivariate analyses.

A further question asked:

Which of these three church objectives is your priority?

- Numerical growth
- Spiritual growth/discipleship
- Social transformation

Numerical growth was only the priority for 13% of respondents, but it is significantly associated with growth.

Measuring personality

By kind permission of Professor Leslie Francis, the survey included a battery of items for the Francis Personality Type Scales (FPTS). Like the familiar Myers-Briggs system, these scales represent an attempt to operationalise psychological type theory rooted in the pioneering work of Carl Jung. The strength of the FPTS is that it was designed for use in large scale surveys, while the Myers-Briggs inventory was designed for use in individual consultation or clinical contexts. There are four dimensions, identified by the letter in upper case: Extraversion – Introversion, Sensing – iNtuition, Thinking – Feeling, Judging – Perceiving. An additional dimension in the FPTS was called neuroticism by Eysenck (and is also in the Five Factor model of personality), though it might more helpfully be referred to as emotional stability.

Extraverts (type E) draw their energy from external sources while introverts (type I) are energised by their inner world. In gathering new information and making meaning from it, some people prefer a process of sensing (S) while others prefer intuition (N). Some tend to make decisions via an objective thinking orientation (T), while others make decisions based on their subjective values, or a weighing up of feelings (F). The final dimension relates to a person's attitude to the outer world, and concerns the preference for judging (J) or perceiving (P) processes.

The first two dimensions will be particularly relevant; further descriptions follow (drawing on Francis, L J. 2005. *Faith and Psychology*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd).

Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)

Extraverts prefer to focus on people and events in the wider world and draw their energy from outside themselves. They are energised by experiences, events and interactions in the outer world. They like variety and action and often engage the wider world to be able to shut off the distractions from inside. Introverts tend to focus their attention and efforts on the inner world of ideas and draw energy from within – from their own thoughts and reflections. They will look for energy inside themselves when they are tired. They may want to shut off outside distractions to focus inwards. Extraverts enjoy meeting people. They can become impatient with long, slow jobs and can easily become more engaged in the relationships and events involved in doing the job than in the job itself. Introverts can work at projects with high levels of concentration for long periods of time. They can easily become absorbed in the ideas that lie behind the task. They often work best alone. Introverts will tend to want to think things through before they act. They may take considerable time reflecting on issues before they act. Extraverts often clarify their own ideas by sharing them with others.

Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)

Individuals who prefer sensing tend to take in information through their five senses. They are good at recognising the realities of a situation. They are readily able to retain facts and information and have great focus and ability to see the world in detail. They tend to rely on experience rather than theory, trusting past experience as a way of solving problems and preferring a practical focus. Those who prefer to gain information in an intuitive way are likely to focus on possibilities and the bigger picture. They look at the underlying inter-relationships between different aspects of a situation. They are interested in the new and untried and are quickly aware of new challenges and possibilities, seeing beyond data to its meanings. Intuitives are quickly bored by repetitive tasks. They may work with bursts of energy, coupled with times of relative inactivity. They tend to follow their inspiration or hunches. Sensate people are less likely to trust inspiration and are very methodical in what they are doing. While an intuitive may prefer to raise questions than to give answers, a sensate person will observe the small details of everyday life and in a step-by-step way.

The following paragraphs summarise (with permission) some key points made by Leslie Francis and his collaborator Andrew Village.

Looking at each dimension separately, E might be associated with growth because outgoing and socially interactive types may be more likely to engage outsiders and newcomers. Introverts do better with fewer social contacts, and so might prefer the stability of small congregations that are changing slowly if at all.

Those classed as N are more likely than their S counterparts to have the vision needed for growth and are more likely to do new things to make it happen. They may not be very good at the nuts and bolts of making it work. Clergy characterised as S may be more comfortable

with the familiar and the routine, and so may be more likely to favour traditional worship, whereas N is linked to the promotion of change. Interestingly high N seems to be characteristic of Anglican clergy, and previous work suggests that stipendiary clergy have higher N than either NSM or OLM.

The Thinking-Feeling dimension describes whether someone makes decisions in a logical, objective way (T) or on the basis of more subjective assessments of what is felt (F). As an example, doctrinally conservative clergy of type T are inclined to be firm even if it makes people upset, while the F tendency is to be more doctrinally relaxed if it maintains harmony.

Leaders with a judging orientation tend to favour establishing clear structures and maintaining resolve. Those with a perceiving approach feel they are best at exploring options creatively, listening and helping people to contribute.

Francis hypothesises that different psychological types are capable of nurturing church growth in different contexts. For example, if the aim is to achieve growth through social encounters, structured programmes, and direct conservative teaching, the evidence suggests that the ESTJ profile is appropriate. Extraversion leads to privileging group activities and social encounter. Sensing is concerned with getting the detail of church infrastructure right and not taking speculative risks. Thinking leads to a teaching ministry that may be attracted more to the God of Justice than to the God of Mercy. It is easier for this kind of preacher to discern the will of God and to drive that through in a congregation. Judging leads to privileging organisation, structure, and programmes.

This approach would not produce the kind of church that all Anglicans would find congenial, however. The INFP church would look quite different. Introversions would privilege quiet contemplation, and there are strong cells of meditative Anglicanism. Intuition would foster religious quest rather than religious certainty, and there are strong liberal Anglican churches. Feeling would foster a congregation of inclusivity and warm social service. And historically this perspective has characterised many Anglican churches. The perceiving preference is what is needed for the flexibility and spontaneity that may be characteristic of many new fresh expressions of church.

These ideas should be taken as indicative of some of the relative strengths of different personality types rather than as definitive statements about what works in which contexts.

Previous research suggests that extravert and intuitive leaders are good at developing a vision and goals for the future, and at training people for ministry and mission. Extraverts

also have an advantage when it comes to converting others to the faith. By contrast, introverted leaders prefer to be involved with the sacraments and administering the parish; sensing leaders are also orientated towards visiting, counselling and helping people (Kaldor & McLean 2009, *Lead with your Strengths*, p. 150).

Findings from the survey

The data show a reasonably strong association between self-reported growth and E, N and emotional stability. The combination of E and N is particularly effective. Of survey respondents who are of neither type, 10% reported substantial growth. Being either E or N raised the level to 19%, while 31% of clergy belonging to both the extravert and intuitive categories asserted that their churches had grown substantially. Only 15% in this group reported decline, as compared to 30% among those who are neither E nor N. To put it another way, I-S clergy among our respondents are three times as likely to preside over decline as substantial growth; E-N clergy are twice as likely to experience substantial growth as decline.

It is worth offering the caveat that some of this difference may be in subjective assessment or accuracy of reporting. The association between objectively measured growth and E and N is less strong, although it is still very significant. (The association between objectively measured growth and emotional stability is very low and not significant.) The F-T and J-P dimensions have no obvious influence.

These links between clergy personality and growth are corroborated by results from a much larger sample of clergy of all denominations in Australia. Researchers there found that “Churches that are growing numerically or where there is an owned vision for the future are more likely to be led by leaders who are extraverted, intuitive and, to a lesser extent, with a perceiving approach to the world. This profile is the opposite to the most common personality types among church leaders ... The current majority of ISFJ and ISTJ church leaders are generally more suited to pastoral caring roles – to encouraging and empowering others and establishing clear structures. They are not as suited to developing vision, moving in new directions and inspiring heart commitment” (Kaldor & McLean, p. 151). It should be noted that a minority of Australian ministers are of type N, whereas it is the majority orientation among Church of England clergy.

The effectiveness of a leader is ultimately a matter of specific qualities or skills rather than personality itself. If personality has an effect on church growth, it is because the

characteristics that matter (such as offering inspiration, for example) come more or less naturally to different types of people. Note, though, that people are capable of performing in ways that may not come naturally to them. Many ordained ministers are highly versatile and successfully deploy different traits in different roles. It is important to try to identify the key qualities, not least to decide whether they can be taught.

Clergy were asked for their own self-assessment:

What do you see as your strengths? Some of your qualities will be more or less developed, either in relation to each other or relative to the characteristics of others. How would you rate yourself on each of the following attributes?

(Scale from 1 to 7: 'no special talent' to 'better than most people')

Empathising: sensing what other people are feeling; listening and counselling

Speaking: being confident when giving a sermon or addressing a formal meeting

Innovating: regularly coming up with new ways of doing things

Connecting: spending time with people in the community and listening to their views

Managing: creating good systems and providing clear expectations to lay leaders

Envisioning: having a clear vision for the future and being focused on achieving it

Persisting: finishing what you start, despite obstacles in the way

Motivating: generating enthusiasm and inspiring people to action

The analytical strategy is as follows. First we will see whether each of these strengths on its own is correlated with growth. Then we will look at them all collectively. Finally we will introduce additional controls, such as age and tenure.

Motivating, Envisioning and Innovating are strongly correlated with growth (whether subjectively or objectively measured). Speaking, connecting and managing are associated with self-reported growth. Empathising and persisting are not linked to growth.

Figure 6.1: Growth and clergy strength in motivating

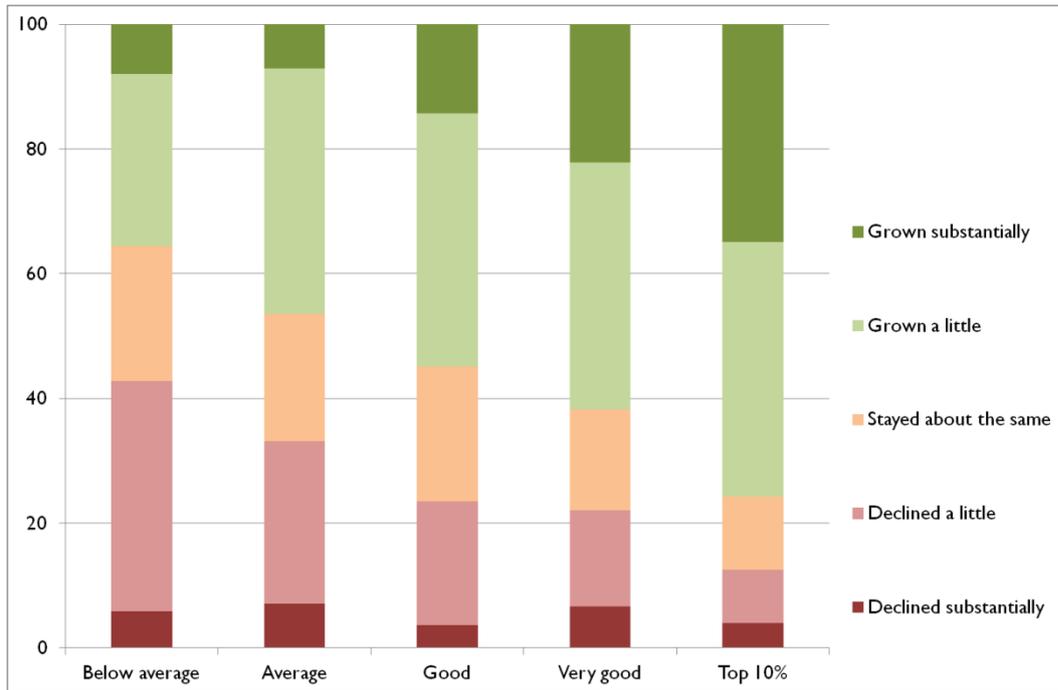
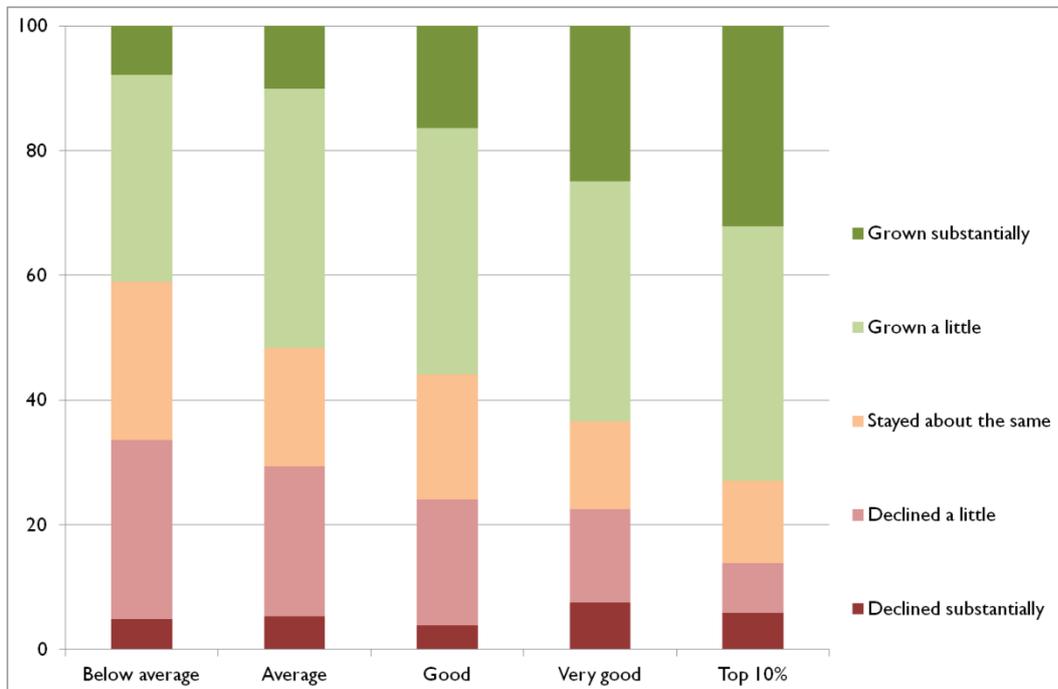


Figure 6.2: Growth and clergy strength in envisioning



Multivariate analysis produces some interesting results. Motivating and envisioning remain important, positive effects. Controlling for those attributes, innovating and connecting fall short of significance. Managing and speaking no longer have any real influence. Persisting and empathising now have negative effects – not, presumably, because these are bad qualities to have, but because those strengths are not congruent with flexibility and a willingness to push people in new directions. To the extent that these latter characteristics are helpful in achieving growth, some strengths seem in this context to be weaknesses.

Despite the considerable disparity between self-reported and objectively measured growth, the pattern is very similar when using the latter. Motivating and envisioning have positive effects. The other variables are not significant, except for persisting and managing (rather than empathising), which have negative associations with growth.

When clergy characteristics, personality and strengths are all included, the ability to motivate people and being young emerge as the strongest effects, with extraversion and vision occupying the next tier. Other significant variables include length of tenure, emotional stability, being full time and (with a negative impact) persistence. Theology has no effect. With objective growth, only the strengths are significant: positive effects of motivating and envisioning, and negative of persistence.

More than half of the survey respondents had been on a leadership course, but no association with growth can be found. Perhaps there is an adverse selection effect (if people from declining churches are more likely to attend), but it is hard not to be sceptical about the effectiveness of these courses in producing growth, however helpful they might be in other respects.

7 Resources

The easiest (and even in the short term the most fruitful) steps at parish level may not promote the strategic mission of the wider Church. To take an extreme example, local churches might find that the largest gains were made by focusing on the elderly. While improving provision for the oldest generation is admirable, it will not solve the underlying problem of generational decline. A more common situation is that some churches grow at the expense of others. Sheep are not stolen; they simply chose their fields, and it is helpful to understand why they roam. Nevertheless it would be pointless (from the perspective of the Church as a whole) to put enormous efforts into activities that simply shift people from one parish to another, unless the aim is to invest in some churches and to close others.

Resources make a difference, and the most important returns come from human resources. With some 12,500 parishes, it is unfortunately not financially feasible to have a full-time ordained minister exclusively dedicated to each one. Active and able lay involvement is crucial. Just as there is a vicious circle of declining numbers leading to declining resources, there can be a virtuous spiral of increased resource producing growth.

The building

The Church of England has a wonderful stock of beautiful old buildings. Unfortunately many of them are cold, uncomfortable, over-large, and require considerable maintenance. They are not distributed in the same way as the population of churchgoers, and not all are in convenient locations. The need to look after the church fabric sometimes requires an unwelcome emphasis on fundraising. Some of the respondents were blunt:

- “The minister has said on several occasions that he did not get ordained to become a building conservationist!! Living museums are a ball-and-chain to mission.”
- “The incumbent spent almost a year fundraising for a major building project which seriously hampered his ability to focus on mission.”
- “The future of our buildings is likely to be decisive for the future of our church. We have extensive buildings, which are costly, inhospitable and generally unfit for purpose.”

Buildings can be improved, however. Even efforts needed to maintain them can have positive effects on growth.

- Raising money to build or refurbish a church/hall can promote an enduring sense of community.
- The new building can enable more activities.
- Renovations can make the building seem more friendly and inviting; “We have recently completed some building works, so we have a welcoming glass door, disabled access and toilets. This means we can offer a wider range of activities to a full age-range and be more inclusive.”
- Worship may become more comfortable (for example with better heating, or by using chairs instead of pews).
- Reordering the interior can allow for more varied activities and hence a more varied congregation. “We have completed a building project and the new centre is used for Messy Church, after-school club, etc. We are reaching a much wider group of folk than when I came 21 years ago.” Or again: “The recently reordered building gives us a more friendly space for worship, and also makes it more usable during the week, so our contacts through weekday activities have grown.”

Other expenses

The building is not the only expense, and grumbling about parish share payments is widespread. One vicar (whose church was apparently a net contributor to central funds) contrasted their position with that of non-denominational churches that are able to spend any money they raise on their own facilities. He claimed that his church sometimes lost people to others that were not similarly constrained. “We could do with a full time youth worker, children’s worker, pastoral worker. Could afford it if didn’t have to subsidise other churches.”

Not everyone feels the same way. Although the pressure of paying the parish share can mean that energy is channelled into fund raising activities, one person commented that “these are popular in the community as they are often socially based. They tend to raise the profile of the church in a positive way as people from the wider community get involved by attending different events and enjoying themselves!”

A small majority of survey respondents felt that they managed reasonably well with the resources available, but as growing churches (which are most likely to agree with this statement) are over-represented in the sample, only a minority of churches in the country

as a whole would say the same. Roughly half of churches attribute at least some of their problems to the need to fund building maintenance or their parish share.

How would you describe your financial situation? (Tick all that apply)

	%
We manage reasonably well with the resources available	54
The need to fund our Parish Share/quota limits our ability to grow	43
Building maintenance is a significant burden	47
We devote too much time and energy to fundraising rather than mission and service	27

In multivariate analysis the first (positive) view and the last two (negative) views have significant associations with growth or decline. Naturally numerical growth often generates additional financial resources, so the causal arrows are likely to point in both directions.

As parishes sometimes regard the diocese as a drain on ‘their’ resources, it is interesting to check on attitudes towards diocesan personnel, policies and structures. While a small majority agreed that they offer helpful support, the overall picture suggests a lack of enthusiasm. Fewer than half even in this sample claimed to enjoy good relations with the diocese, and significant minorities saw them as distant or troublesome.

How would you describe your diocesan personnel, policies and structures?
(Tick all that apply)

	%
They offer helpful support	57
Their decisions can cause difficulties	24
They seem distant from our concerns	31
We have good relations with them	43

The idea that diocesan decisions can cause difficulties was not associated with growth, but the other statements were: growing churches have more positive views, declining churches more negative ones. Taken together just the 'good relations' factor is significant.

Human resources

There are marked associations between growth and staffing levels. Churches served by an incumbent and one or more curates or associate ministers are more likely than others to be growing, and conversely declining churches are more likely to have an incumbent who is also responsible for other churches. The associations are found even controlling for size, so it is not simply a matter of the absolute level of resources. Nevertheless it is difficult to be sure about the direction of causality. Investment can produce growth, but growth is needed to justify investment.

It does seem highly plausible, though, that more clerical resource is helpful in producing growth and vice versa. The number of licensed readers does not appear to have an effect. Having paid staff other than clergy is also associated with growth, even controlling for adult attendance. While growing churches may have the confidence to employ lay workers, it seems very likely that the additional staff are themselves a cause of growth.

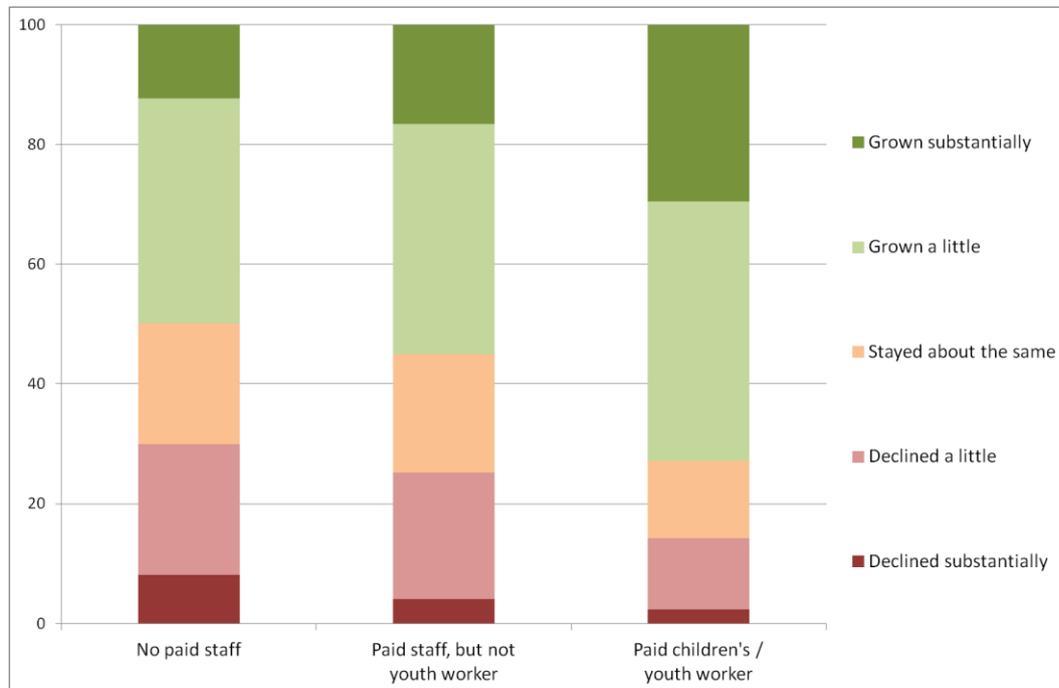
Where there were paid staff, we asked which roles they filled:

- Administrator
- Music director
- Verger/caretaker
- Worship leader
- Pastoral worker
- Community development worker
- Children's/youth worker
- Other

Three quarters of churches with paid staff have an administrator. The next most commonly held position was that of music director (in 43% of churches with lay employees). These churches were less likely to grow than others in this group. Controlling for other variables, the largest effects came from employing a children's or youth worker, and a third of these churches had someone in that role. Churches that employ a children's / youth worker are only half as likely to be declining as those with paid staff in some other function (Figure 7.1). The only other significant function in multivariate analysis is 'pastoral worker'.

As these are found in only 7% of churches with paid staff, they are probably an indicator of substantial resources.

Figure 7.1: Growth and employment of a children's/youth worker



Once again, then, we find a connection between the investment in young people and church growth. While the long-term importance of generational replacement is clear at a national level, it is striking to find that it also seems to be in the interests of parish churches to make youth ministry a priority.

Lay leadership

The number of paid staff, whether ordained or lay, is a function of financial resources. The numbers will not increase substantially in the medium term, though funding may be redistributed. Any boost must come from self-supporting leadership, including lay volunteers.

The importance of good lay leadership is clear, and many respondents identified it as a reason for growth. Conversely a weakening in lay involvement can be very damaging. One vicar described starting a children's corner for the family service, with arts and crafts and

toys for babies. It can involve a major effort and then no children may appear. She runs the church on her own, with no able-bodied people to assist in running things; it is frustrating not to be able to innovate for lack of help. “Rural ministry is lone ministry in a way that I have never worked before.” In the past she has worked in a team with lay people; she could say “I need 50 meals throughout the week and they would just go and do it.” People in rural churches may want new activities but the numbers aren’t there to run them.

In written comments, explanations for decline included:

- “Lack of lay leadership and time resource – there is only one paid church leader – and many of the older people are no longer willing and able to take on leadership roles. Some younger people in the congregation are feeling very pressed by work pressures and family pressures – both from children and from their own ageing parents.....My impression is that we are ripe for some new things, but we are struggling to get enough volunteer time of the right sort. We are at a critical point in the life of our church.”
- “Young people are not willing or able to sustain contact. For example the effort of a lay led Sunday school is too much for them due to pressures of work.”

Small churches will only be sustainable with lay involvement – and in the longer term, probably full lay leadership. It may be hard to substitute for reductions in the time available from ordained ministers, but only freely donated time and effort can fill the gap. If successful, increased resources may make it possible to pay for additional staff. If unsuccessful, it is likely that people will continue to drift away.

More than one person pointed out that in a consumer culture, people will attend church where they want to go. Some attenders have only a weak Anglican identity and so might move elsewhere if they find something that they prefer. There is competition from non-denominational churches, among others. Sometimes the competition comes from closer to home; in one case decline was blamed on “the activities of our large conservative evangelical neighbouring Anglican church – because of their size they can offer things we can’t. (It’s like trying to run a village shop when you have a Tesco superstore up the road.)”

A degree of specialisation and consolidation seems inevitable, however. Increasingly people will go where the facilities and programmes are attractive; parish geography matters less and less. It makes more sense to have good activities of a particular sort in one church in an area than mediocre versions in all of them. There is already theological specialisation: people sort themselves into particular churches according to churchmanship and preferred

styles of worship. To some degree there is a less intentional sorting by age, ethnicity or other characteristics. This type of rationalisation is at odds with the philosophy of the parish system, but it is inescapable in contemporary society. It is only a small step to give some particular churches responsibility for distinct groups or functions.

Decisions about the allocation of resources within the Church will not be made according to a formula. Numerical strength is not the only consideration. It would be helpful, though, to understand the trade-offs that underpin the difficult decisions to be faced in the future: if not now, then 10 or 20 or 30 years from now. Closing churches will save money and might convert some assets into liquid form. In the short term such steps would almost certainly reduce total attendance, as some people would not transfer. The investment of additional resources elsewhere, though, would be very likely to produce growth. How much growth can be produced for every £X, and how should funds be applied to maximise that value? This question is not easy to answer, but it is one that the Church will need to consider.

Appendix I: The survey

Our church profiling survey obtained information on both the nature of the church and the background and aptitudes of the ordained minister most closely connected to it. Its aim was to assemble data that had never previously been available in this country on the associations between numerical change, social environment, church profile and clergy characteristics.

A considerable amount of work went into designing the questionnaire. The initial draft was based on the Faith Communities Today (FACT) study, which has been conducted multiple times in the United States over the past decade. After extensive consultation spread over several months, the final form is essentially a bespoke product. The role of Kevin Norris in managing the process and providing good humoured advice in countless meetings deserves special acknowledgement.

Ultimately a high degree of consensus was reached on the topics to be covered. The questionnaire was pilot tested on some 20 ordained ministers in different parts of the country with responsibility for churches of various types and sizes. The comments received during this phase were helpful in arriving at the finished product.

The survey was launched in early April 2013, a week after Easter. Invitations were sent to 3,883 ordained ministers or churches for which e-mail addresses were available; people who had already been contacted for a different Church survey were not included.

Despite the considerable effort made to use current addresses, a few hundred messages were bounced or generated automated replies. Where possible corrections were made, but in many instances the church had to be dropped from the sample. The effective sample size is therefore 3,735.

Data collection was done entirely online using survey software available through the University of Manchester, where the research associate on the project is based. The system seems to have worked well; there were minor technical problems in a small number of cases, but the survey administrator dealt with them effectively. Overall acceptance of the intention, design and content of the survey was also good; only a handful of people wrote with objections. (The number of silent objectors is of course not known.) Both the strand leader and survey administrator were available to answer queries or address concerns from those who were invited to take part.

The survey was kept open for as long as possible in order to achieve the best possible response rate. A few gentle reminders were sent out and each of these had an appreciable effect in boosting the response rate. More than 1,700 responses had been received when the survey closed on 10 July 2013. The response rate was 46 percent, which is only slightly short of the 50 percent target. This level of response is comparable to that obtained in major national surveys; the 2012 British Social Attitudes survey, for example, received self-completion forms from 47 percent of its sample. The total number of responses is highly satisfactory and provides a good foundation for the analyses planned.

Not all of the church profile returns were completed in full; about one in seven forms have significant gaps. In many instances these responses are missing the section for clergy, either because there is currently a vacancy or because someone other than the ordained minister filled in the form. We were able to use all of the data collected for most of the analyses.

The tables below show the breakdown of responses (received shortly before the survey closed) by diocese, church size, and clergy age/sex. At least on those criteria there are no obvious biases. The total number of responses equates to a quarter of the number of full-time stipendiary parochial clergy, and this proportion is reasonably stable across dioceses. The median sizes of responding and non-responding churches are very similar; the average attendance is slightly higher among the respondents, principally because the figure is raised by a few large churches. Clergy age is slightly higher among respondents than all parochial clergy (from the 2011 statistics), but the latter figures include curates.

We conducted follow-up telephone interviews with 30 ordained ministers from churches of particular interest. These interviews were helpful in elaborating on the factors that marked out more and less successful congregations.

Church Growth survey: Characteristics of parishes responding by 2 July 2013

Basic counts:

Effective sample	3,735				
Responses	1,703 (46%)	Of which:	Complete	1,458 (86%)	
			Partial	245 (14%)	

Table AI.1: Responses by diocese

	Responses	Sampled	Parishes	FT paid clergy	Response %	Responses relative to FT clergy (%)
Bath & Wells	42	92	469	187	46	22
Birmingham	31	75	149	147	41	21
Blackburn	41	102	224	154	40	27
Bradford	25	48	125	83	52	30
Bristol	26	54	163	103	48	25
Canterbury	25	64	261	118	39	21
Carlisle	27	59	263	116	46	23
Chelmsford	92	191	461	342	48	27
Chester	61	149	272	224	41	27
Chichester	69	152	363	266	45	26
Coventry	28	53	198	105	53	27
Derby	27	75	253	136	36	20
Durham	38	64	227	148	59	26
Ely	27	64	306	115	42	23
Exeter	37	88	489	194	42	19
Gloucester	27	57	304	117	47	23
Guildford	46	93	164	162	49	28
Hereford	24	50	342	83	48	29
Leicester	19	49	236	123	39	15
Lichfield	65	126	421	275	52	24
Lincoln	28	78	492	139	36	20

Liverpool	35	73	202	196	48	18
London	133	250	393	481	53	28
Manchester	44	103	249	220	43	20
Newcastle	28	57	171	115	49	24
Norwich	64	106	567	170	60	38
Oxford	73	163	616	358	45	20
Peterborough	29	73	343	117	40	25
Portsmouth	22	46	142	94	48	23
Ripon & Leeds	20	49	165	108	41	19
Rochester	46	112	215	186	41	25
St. Albans	49	114	336	223	43	22
St. Edms & Ipswich	29	67	445	130	43	22
Salisbury	44	96	452	186	46	24
Sheffield	32	66	173	130	48	25
Sodor & Man	2	8	28	13	25	15
Southwark	63	151	290	326	42	19
Southwell & Nottingham	28	61	256	124	46	23
Truro	11	45	219	90	24	12
Wakefield	32	77	183	125	42	26
Winchester	47	80	258	184	59	26
Worcester	20	43	175	108	47	19
York	47	112	452	189	42	25
	1,703	3,735	12,512	7,210	46	24

Table AI.2: Responses by size

		Electoral Roll	AWA (all age)	uSa (adult)
Median	Complete	113.0	101.0	64.0
	No response	107.0	97.0	60.0
Mean	Complete	145.4	141.8	86.7
	Complete (excl. HTB)	143.4	139.4	84.5
	No response	131.3	128.2	79.0

Table AI.3: Clergy gender for responding parishes

	Survey clergy	%	Total parochial clergy	%
Male	1,195	79	5,694	78
Female	320	21	1,630	22
Total	1,515	100	7,324	100

Table AI.4: Clergy age for responding parishes

Age group	Survey clergy	%	Total parochial clergy	%
20-	1		86	1
30-	95	6	822	11
40-	327	22	1,854	25
50-	671	44	3,119	41
60-	409	27	1,648	22
70+	13	1	30	
Total	1,516	100	7,559	100

Appendix 2

Identifying thresholds for church growth or decline

The basic problem is simple: how much numerical change do we need to see in order to be confident that a church is growing or declining? The Church has recognised that even using percentage change (rather than absolute change) to define the thresholds, the values will depend on church size. Small numbers are more volatile than large ones.

Based on evidence and their expert knowledge, our colleagues in the Research and Statistics Unit had suggested that a church can be considered to be growing if the observed change meets the following thresholds, for three categories of attendance:

0-15:	30%
16-199:	20%
200+:	10%

Our concerns were as follows:

- 1) Despite being based on deep familiarity with the topic and the individual cases, the threshold figures look somewhat arbitrary.
- 2) There are discontinuities at the boundaries of the size categories.
- 3) It seems undesirable to use a constant figure within each category when the jumps from one category to the next are so large.
- 4) Given the different degrees of variability in each measure of attendance, it seems unlikely that a single set of thresholds should be applied to all of them.
- 5) It is hard to say whether size is relevant to growth using this convention.

We therefore attempted to devise an improved classification system to address these concerns. The basic concept is to look at variation in attendance by size and to treat one standard deviation as a consistent threshold across the full range of parish attendance levels. On the (non-trivial) assumption that the functional form of the attendance probability distribution is similar for small and large churches, this approach sets a benchmark that is equally challenging for all.

We started with Usual Sunday Attendance (adult uSa), 2001-2011. For each parish, one can calculate the mean and standard deviation of this attendance measure. We then excluded all cases where there were fewer than five values recorded for the 11 years (889 out of 13,188) or where only zeros were entered (8 cases).

We calculated the coefficient of variation, which is simply the standard deviation divided by the mean. We excluded another 59 cases where this value was 1.00 or higher (in other words where the standard deviation was as large or larger than the mean). From an inspection of a few of these instances, the high dispersion seems to be the result of unreliable data rather than real change. It might even be preferable to treat more cases as outliers (for example by excluding any with a coefficient of variation higher than 0.6 or some such value).

The next step was to sort the parishes by size (measured by adult uSa) and then to average the means and standard deviations in batches of 100. Different mathematical approaches to describing the relationship between size and variation could then be used with this smoothed and reduced set of points.

It turns out that the simplest and most effective representation is similar to that previously arrived at more intuitively. There are again three size categories; a linear formula (or 'spline') is used to set the growth threshold within each. The boundaries between each category (or 'knots' connecting the splines) are at attendance levels of 10 and 50. A good fit to the data results from the following, where Y is the percentage threshold and X is attendance:

$$\text{For } X \leq 10, \quad Y = 42 - 2X$$

$$\text{For } 10 \leq X \leq 50, \quad Y = 23 - X/10$$

$$\text{For } X \geq 50, \quad Y = 18$$

The graphs below show how this proposal compares to the earlier one, and the fit in each size category.

Figure A2.1: Percentage change in attendance needed to qualify as growing/declining

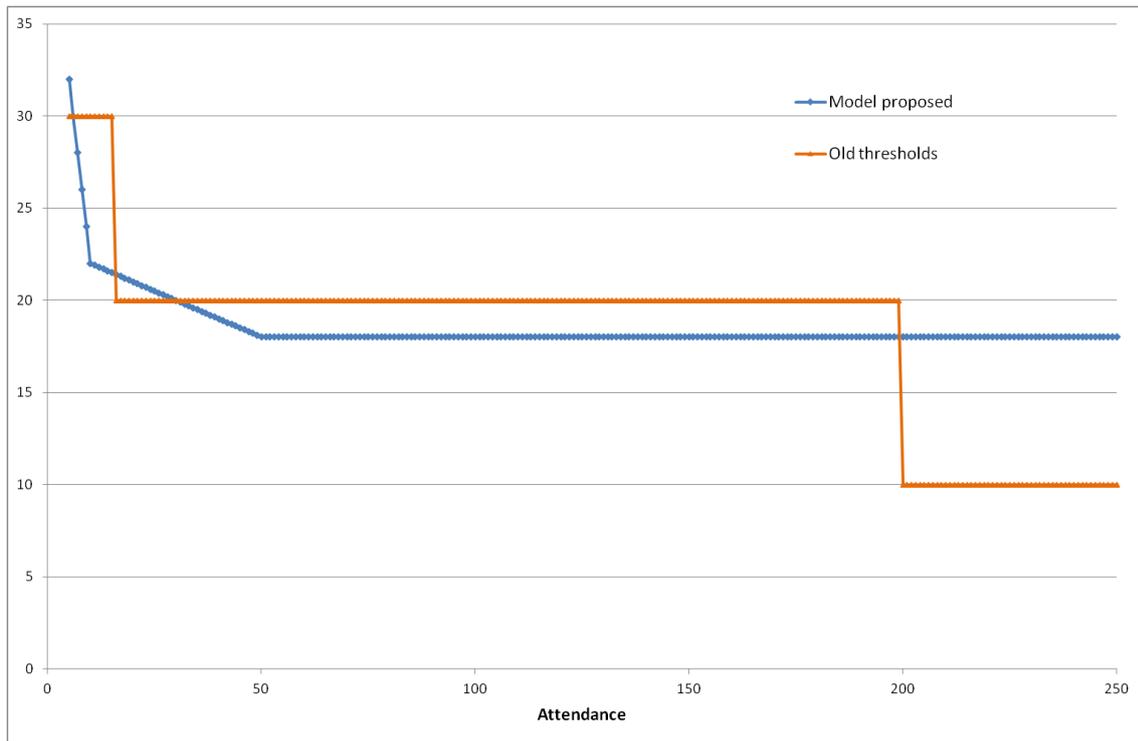


Figure A2.2: Data and proposed model for very small churches (uSa)

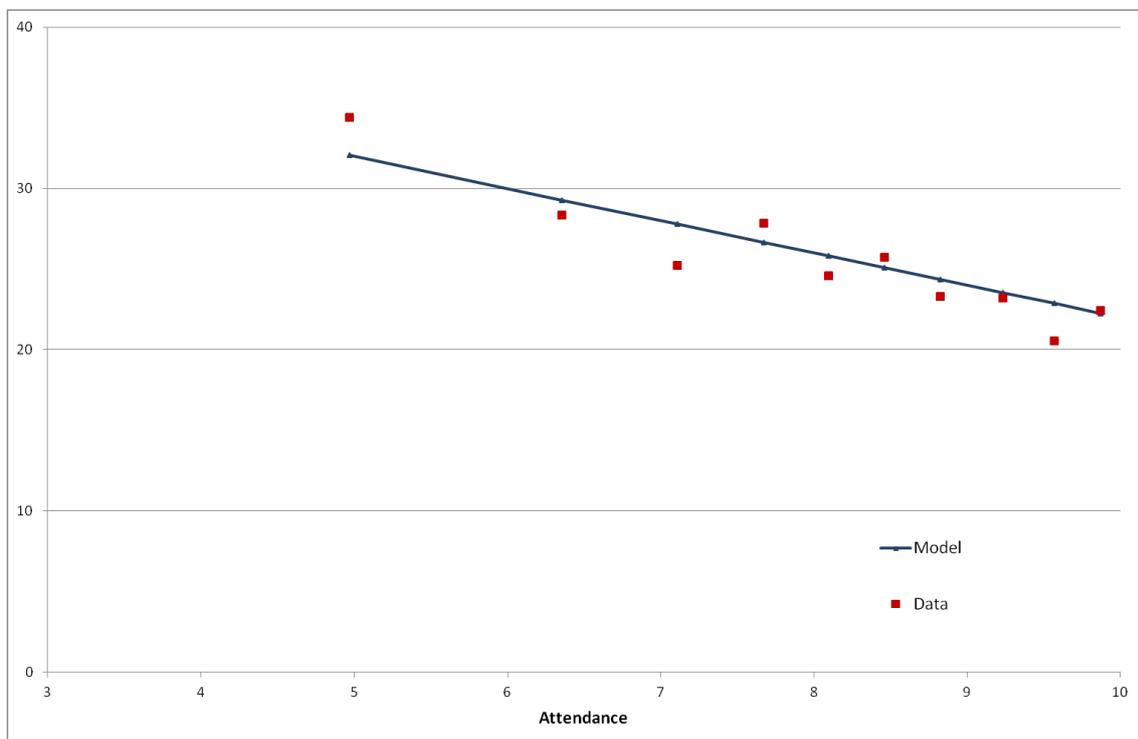


Figure A2.3: Data and proposed model for small to medium-sized churches (uSa)

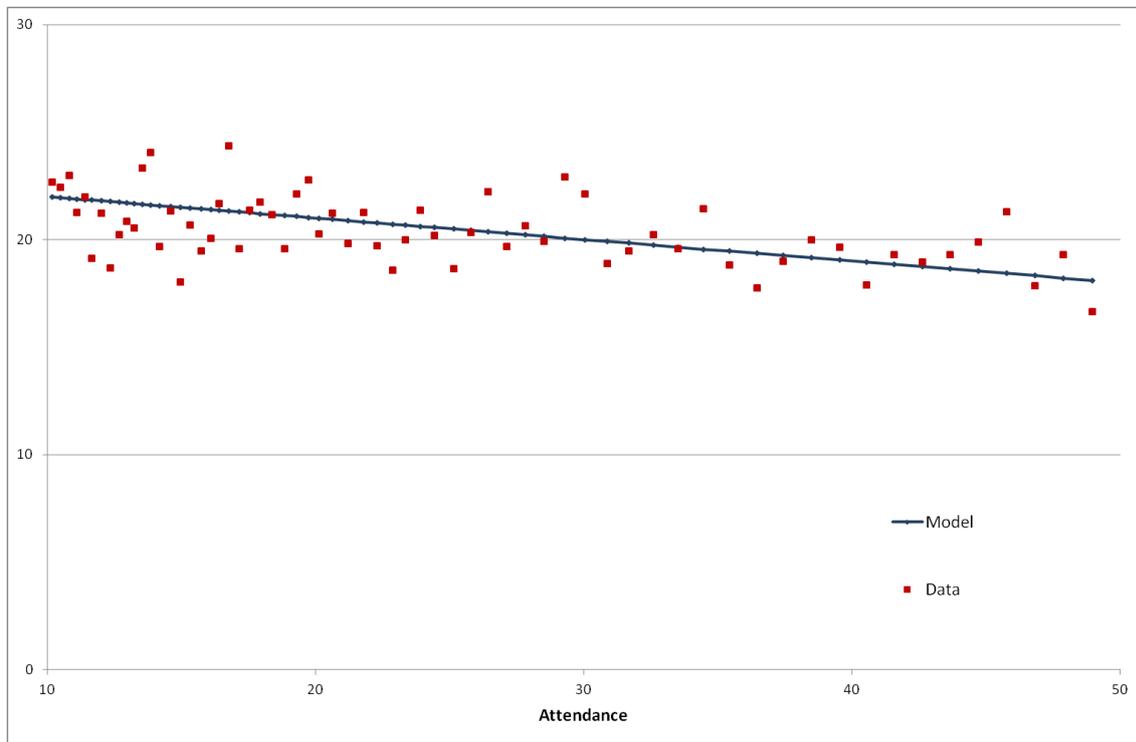
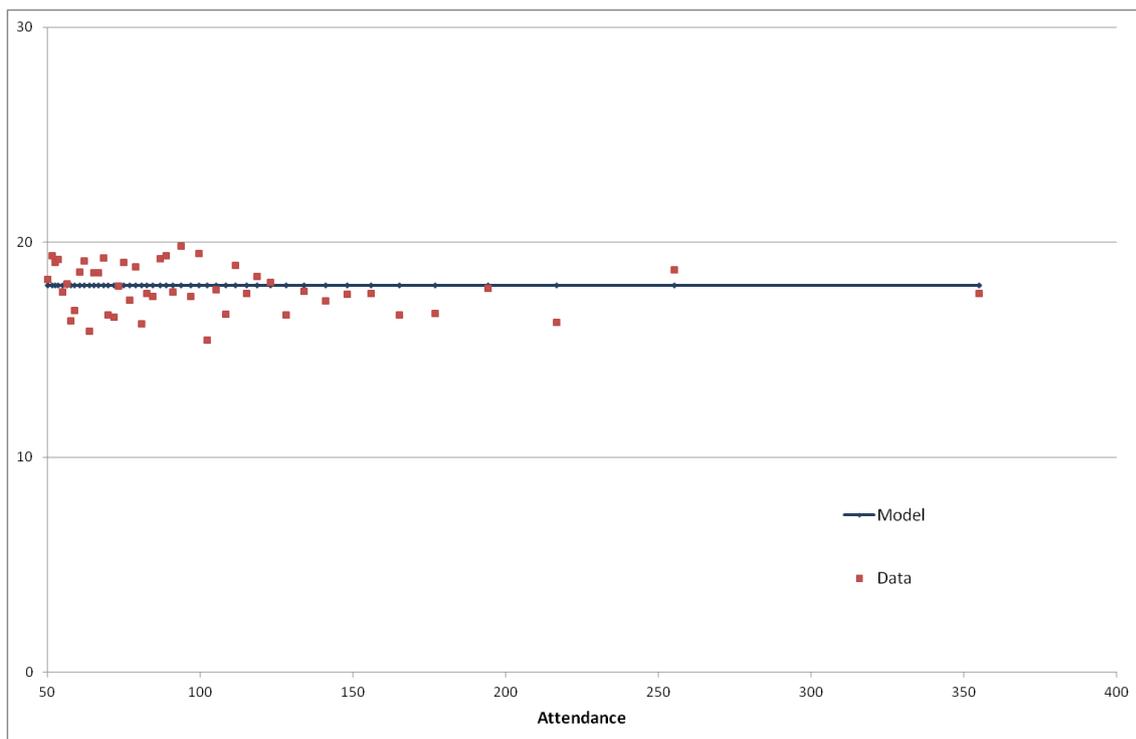


Figure A2.4: Data and proposed model for medium to large churches (uSa)



Note that as well as addressing the issues raised at the outset, this method also makes it easier to define growth and decline in five rather than three categories (e.g. substantial growth, some growth, stable, some decline, substantial decline), or indeed as a continuous variable. By standardising observed numerical change using the predicted standard deviations from the model, growth and decline can be made comparable across the full size range.

It may help to illustrate the approach with an example. How does growth of 30% from a base of 20 attenders compare with growth of 25% from a base of 100 attenders? The model gives the value of one standard deviation relative to the mean as 21% in the first case and 18% in the second, so the standardised measures of growth are $30/21 = 1.43$ and $25/18 = 1.39$ respectively.

The same method can be used with different measures (for example average weekly attendance, minimum weekly attendance, and so on), but it is not to be expected that the actual thresholds will be the same. All age average weekly attendance (AWA) is more variable than usual Sunday attendance. The advantage, however, is that standardised measures are comparable with each other, so that for example numerical change of one standard deviation in uSa gives us the same amount of information as a change of one standard deviation in AWA, even though the percentage movements will be quite different.

We applied the method sketched above to all-age AWA; in this case 885 parishes were excluded because fewer than five years of data were available, and 204 cases were excluded where the coefficient of variation was greater than or equal to 1.

For all-age average weekly attendance, a good fit to the data results from the following model, where Y is the percentage threshold and X is attendance:

$$\text{For } X \leq 30, \quad Y = 42$$

$$\text{For } 30 \leq X \leq 95, \quad Y = 48 - X/5$$

$$\text{For } X \geq 95, \quad Y = 29$$

The graphs below show the fit in each size category. (Attendance is on the horizontal axis; the vertical axis shows change as a proportion rather than a percentage.)

Figure A2.5: Data and proposed model for small churches (AWA)

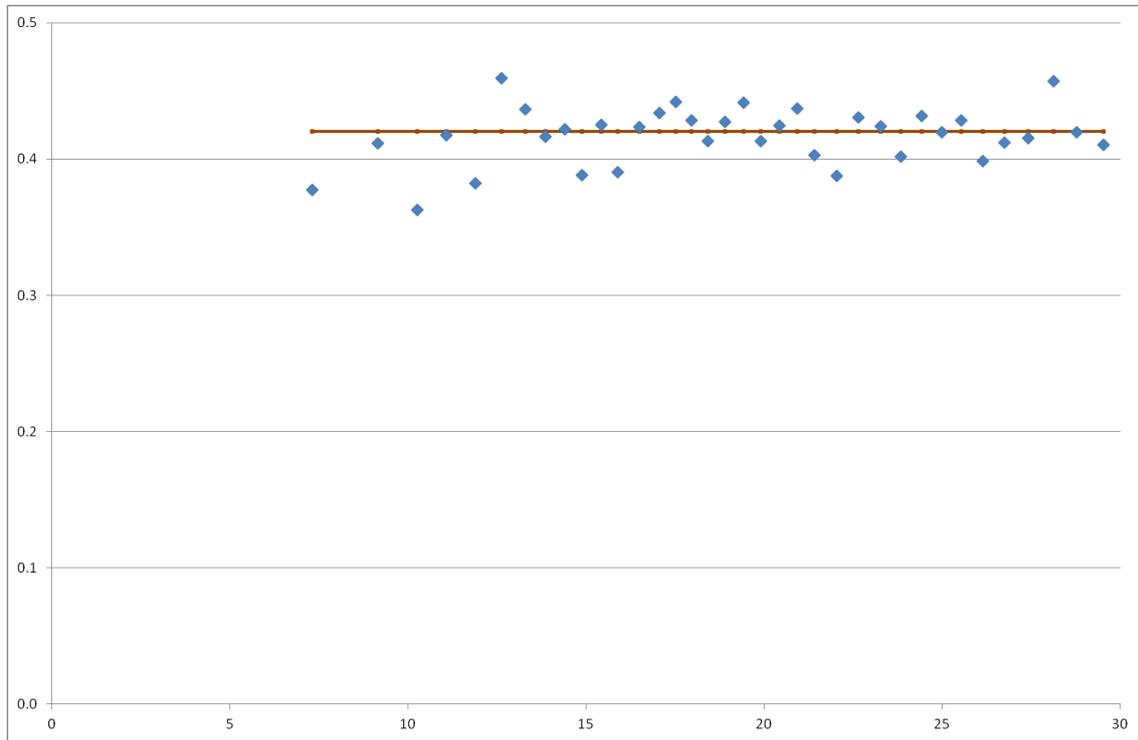


Figure A2.6: Data and proposed model for medium-sized churches (AWA)

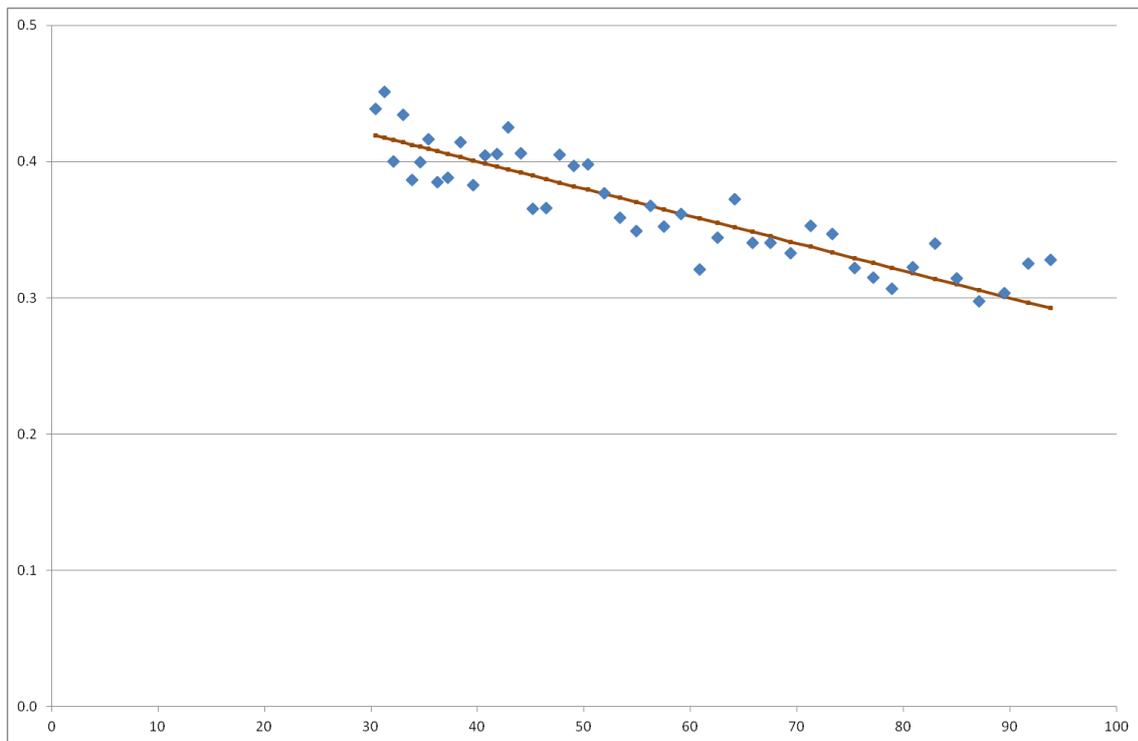
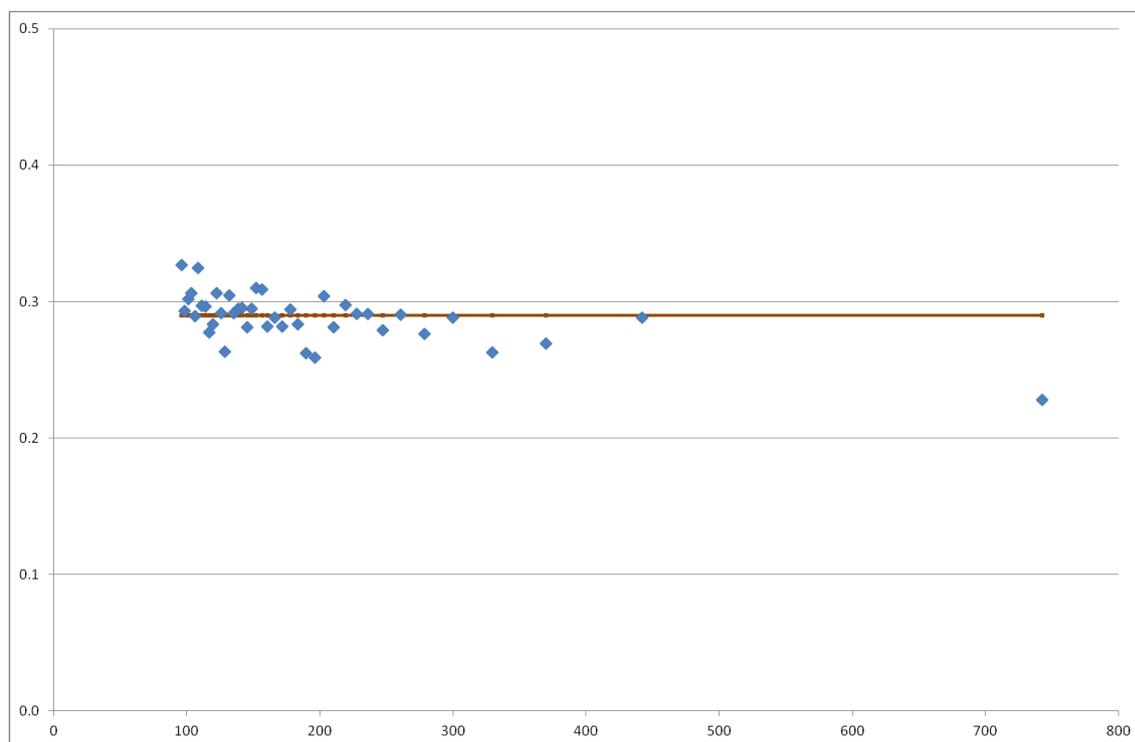


Figure A2.7: Data and proposed model for large churches (AWA)



Note the much higher variability of AWA compared to uSA (or other measures such as minimum weekly attendance). For a church with 60 adult usual Sunday attenders, for example, we might take a rise of 18% as an indicator of growth, whereas with an all-age average weekly attendance of 60, the increase would have to be twice as high (at 36%) to make us equally confident that we were seeing growth and not just statistical noise.

Similar models were produced for child average Sunday attendance and all age Easter attendance. The percentage changes between 2001-3 and 2009-11 were calculated for all four indicators (adult usual Sunday attendance, all age average weekly attendance, child average Sunday attendance, and Easter attendance). These figures are then standardised by dividing them by the modelled standard deviation for the relevant measure and starting size. The values were averaged, having first been capped at 4 (or for declining churches, -4) so that no single extreme measure swamped the rest.

Missing values were replaced where possible by growth rates calculated in the same way for the period 2006-7 to 2010-11. If the value was still missing, self-reported growth was used as the basis for imputation, where the figure used was the average 'objective' growth corresponding to each of the five 'subjective' growth categories.

Size and growth

One of our colleagues in the research programme expressed the concern that few large churches would be able to meet the threshold of 18% suggested as the benchmark for growth in usual Sunday attendance. Intuitively it does seem surprising that the percentage change threshold for large churches should be little lower than for much smaller churches. Nevertheless, the data show that there is almost as much variation in the high attendance parishes as in the low.

As a further test, we did the following:

- 1) We looked at numerical change from 2001-2 to 2010-11 for parishes for which we have figures for all four of those years (55% of the total).
- 2) Taking one standard deviation as the threshold value used to classify parishes as growing, stable, or declining, we can see what happens using the 2001-2 average as the base and calculating the threshold as proposed above. We use usual Sunday attendance for this example.
- 3) The table below shows the percentages falling into each category for a few size bands: 20-40 (representing smallish churches), 100+, and then 400+ (which of course is a subset of the 100+ group).

Table A2.1
Percentage of parishes showing growth or decline in uSa, 2001-2 to 2010-11

	Usual Sunday Attendance (adults)		
	20-40	100+	400+
Declining	39	46	29
Stable	47	45	55
Growing	14	9	17
<i>N</i>	<i>1,541</i>	<i>1,387</i>	<i>42</i>

It is not obvious that the thresholds proposed are more difficult to meet for large churches compared to smaller ones. A smaller proportion in the 100+ category are growing, but more are classified as declining (which involves a change of the same magnitude, just in the opposite direction). Looking at the very largest churches one actually finds the highest percentage that are growing (though the difference is marginal).

Appendix 3: Problems in analysing numerical change

Changes in the way that participation in 'Fresh Expressions of Church' has been treated in parish statistical returns gives rise to some concerns. In the early period they were not counted; churches were subsequently instructed to include them in the overall totals, and then in later years the figures were recorded separately, although they are not distinguished in the summary statistics prepared for analysis. There are a number of problems here. One is comparability over time, if some activities are counted now that previously were not. Another is volatility, as the numbers involved can go up and down rapidly for reasons that may not be closely related to the general performance of the church. Finally, but importantly, there is the issue of comparability between different types of attenders. Participants in Fresh Expressions may have – or come to have – a deep commitment to the mission of the Church, but one suspects that many are attracted by the 'expressions' themselves. These problems may not be insuperable, however, and the separate report on Fresh Expressions will be the best guide.

Another preoccupation concerns the identification of causality, which for practical purposes is a key objective. Finding associations between numerical change and particular factors is not enough; we wish to have a reasonably clear idea of what is causing what. As an example, members of the different project teams have discussed the difficulties of analysing team ministry, parish amalgamations and other kinds of multi-church units (MCUs). There may be an association between MCUs and decline, but we are only justified in pointing to MCUs as the cause of that decline if parishes were randomly allocated. In fact, though, parishes that were 'fragile' were probably more likely to end up as part of a MCU than those that were more robust. 'Before and after' statistics are therefore crucial in assessing the magnitude of the numerical consequences of parish reorganisation. The aim would be to identify a benchmark against which the parishes affected can be measured.

As an aside, this approach also applies to other characteristics; ideally one looks for the consequences of change. If we want to investigate the effect of a particular factor, one option is to compare churches that do or do not have that feature. Any differences in outcomes might be produced by unobserved characteristics, however. We can have more confidence that the factor has a direct causal effect if churches that gain or lose that attribute perform differently than those that do not.

With vacancies the issues are similar, though here the main problem is an absence of data. It appears to be very difficult to say at a national level which parishes have experienced vacancies when and for how long. Anecdotal information suggests that prolonged vacancies

can have serious effects, but we are not well placed to investigate this hypothesis with the data currently available. One possibility that has been discussed is to approach several diocesan secretaries for lists of parishes (not necessarily complete) that experienced vacancies of more than a few months, in which years, and for approximately how long. By focusing on vacancies that occurred around 2004-2009, one would have data from both before and after the event. Such 'before and after' studies may help in assessing the impact of vacancies.

Appendix 4: A general model

To supplement the discussions in the main report, we have constructed regression models that include all of the variables that seem possible candidates for overall significance. The results are shown in the tables below. Positive or negative coefficients indicate that the variable is associated with growth or decline respectively. The size of the coefficient reflects the size of the effect; a value of 0.1 means that a difference of one standard deviation in the explanatory factor produces a change of one-tenth of a standard deviation in the measure of growth. The asterisks show the level of statistical significance, i.e. the probability that the results could be produced by chance.

It should not be assumed that only these variables are ultimately important. A number of different factors may be associated with growth along the same causal chain, and there is an element of chance about which one emerges with the largest coefficients. The factors that are less proximate to growth will often be pushed out of the picture by those that mediate their effects, but that is not always the case. And sometimes the variables that appear to be most significant are simply proxies for causal factors to which they happen to be related.

We have not included some variables that seem too closely related to growth, for example the child:adult ratio or the statement that the age profile is now younger than previously. These variables are arguably aspects of what needs to be explained rather than being helpful components of an explanation.

The factors all seem easy to understand, with the exception of the contextual variable for the proportion of people in the parish with higher education. This variable on its own is associated with church growth (as seen in the second table, where objectively measured growth is the dependent variable). High levels of education are inversely correlated with area deprivation, and deprivation is associated with decline. The complications arise when both variables are included in the model. (As a technical aside, they are not so highly correlated that multicollinearity is an issue.) When self-reported growth is the dependent variable, the direction of the higher education effect is reversed, implying that controlling for deprivation, areas with more highly educated people are unfavourable for church growth. One speculation is that students or young professionals living in relatively deprived areas could further depress churchgoing in those areas. Another might be that prosperous areas with slightly older populations and a lower prevalence of university degrees are more favourable than equally prosperous areas with younger, more highly educated residents.

The models account for only a modest amount of the variance in the dependent variables: about a quarter for self-reported growth and a tenth for objectively measured growth. Random measurement error, or noise, will be part of the reason. It is also probable that numerical growth in any given case is the product of a host of idiosyncratic factors that cannot easily be detected. We cannot rule out the possibility that some major explanatory factor has escaped consideration, but the sheer diversity of parish experience is more likely to be responsible. The amount of variation that cannot be pinned down may ultimately be good news; the scope for action is broad. Growth does not result from following a rule book, but from local reflection on what the church and its parish need.

Table A4.1

Dependent variable: "During the past five years, has the number of people who attend for worship at least monthly declined or grown?"

Standardised regression coefficients for significant explanatory factors

<i>Socio-demographic context</i>		
Parish ethnic minority % (excl. non-Christians)	.095	*
Parish deprivation	-.142	**
Parish higher education %	-.106	*
Church school over-subscribed	.081	**
<i>Worship services</i>		
Variety of worship (within a week)	.087	**
<i>Activities</i>		
Retreats, conferences or camps for youth	.093	***
Uniformed youth organisation	-.056	*
Bible studies that attract new people	.070	*
<i>Outlook</i>		
Church has a clear mission and purpose	.139	***
Church wants to be racially and culturally diverse	.087	**
Conflict concerning priest's leadership style or behaviour	-.125	***
<i>Finances</i>		
Manage reasonably well financially	.115	***
Building maintenance is a significant burden	-.054	*
<i>Clergy</i>		
Vacancy	-.069	**
Age of ordained minister	-.119	***
Part-time appointment	-.065	*
Strongly agree should conduct funerals for non-churchgoers	-.058	*
Extraversion	.081	**
Better than most at motivating people	.110	***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A4.2

Dependent variable: Growth 2001/2 to 2010/11 based on parish statistics for usual adult Sunday attendance, all age average weekly attendance, child average Sunday attendance, and Easter attendance (with imputed values and trimming outliers)

Standardised regression coefficients for significant explanatory factors

<i>Socio-demographic context</i>		
Parish ethnic minority % (excl. non-Christians)	.116	**
Parish higher education %	.100	*
Urban	-.063	ns
Church school over-subscribed	.078	*
<i>Activities</i>		
Events such as Back to Church Sunday	.072	+
Bible studies that attract new people	.061	+
<i>Outlook</i>		
Emphasis on Christian witness in daily life	.071	+
<i>Finances</i>		
Conflict concerning finances or budget	-.116	**
Paid children's/youth worker	.073	+
<i>Clergy</i>		
Multiple priests/deacons serving just this church	.083	*
Part-time appointment	-.051	ns
Strongly agree that should conduct funerals for non-churchgoers	-.075	*
Better than most at having a vision for the future	.105	**

ns = not significant, + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Appendix 5

Bivariate correlations between growth and potential explanatory factors

Variable	Self-reported growth	Objective growth
Self-reported growth	1.000	.287**
Objective growth	.287**	1.000
Parish % with higher education	.078**	.127**
Parish deprivation (based on 2011 census)	-0.048	-.053*
Urban parish	.084**	-0.019
Parish % Christian (2011 census)	-.057*	-0.036
Parish % Non-Christian religion (2011 census)	0.011	0.004
Parish % no religion (2011 census)	.061*	0.024
Parish % aged 45+ (2011 census)	-.087**	-0.044
Index of Multiple Deprivation	-0.044	-0.010
Parish % not white British (2011 census)	.067**	.063**
Parish % ethnic minority excluding non-Christians (2011 census)	.106**	.105**
Parish change 2001-2011 in % Non-Christian	0.030	-0.039
Parish change 2001-2011 in % with no religion	0.000	-.061*
Number of Sunday services	0.024	0.011
Number of midweek services	0.021	0.017
Worship style, largest service (1=low church; 7=high church)	-.096**	-0.031
Worship style (1=non-liturgical; 7=liturgical)	-.148**	-.089**
Worship style (1=contemporary music; 7=traditional music)	-.192**	-.072**
Variation in style of the main Sunday service (1=none; 7=a lot)	.087**	-0.023
Variety in style over a week (1=little variety; 7=wide variety)	.182**	.059*
Services in recent years (1=no change; 7=substantial change)	.271**	.077**
Linked to a Church of England school	.064**	0.038
School is over-subscribed	.094**	0.046
Sunday school or children's groups	.239**	.050*
Youth/young adult activities	.225**	.093**
Bible studies	.215**	.083**
Home groups, prayer groups, or fellowship groups	.213**	0.012
Choir	.103**	0.009
Spiritual retreats	.137**	0.015

Community service activities	.171**	0.008
Child day care, pre-school or after-school programmes	.123**	0.026
Elderly or care in the community programmes	.135**	0.029
Environmental projects	.162**	.064**
Social services: debt counselling, aid work, shelters etc.	.141**	.049*
Leader for children's activities	.190**	.077**
Worship services designed for children	.205**	.054*
Midweek worship with pre-school children	.172**	.051*
Holiday clubs for children	.168**	.051*
Admission to communion before confirmation	.088**	.061**
Special services for schools (e.g. carol services)	.066**	-0.023
Youth worker, minister or leader for youth activities	.178**	.104**
Organised youth group	.196**	.083**
Youth choirs or other music groups	.144**	0.034
Youth retreats, conferences or camps	.231**	.102**
Worship services designed for youth	.179**	.064**
Holiday clubs for youth	.102**	0.030
Confirmation classes	.087**	-0.006
Congregational events planned or led by youth	.173**	0.026
Special services for schools	.101**	0.021
Youth counselling (e.g. sex education, substance abuse)	.117**	0.043
Uniformed youth organisation	0.030	-.077**
Christian nurture courses (e.g. Alpha, Emmaus, Credo)	.196**	.059*
Back to Church Sunday or similar initiatives	.188**	0.045
Try to contact potential new members after they attend	-.187**	-.056*
Evangelistic services or events most effective method	0.030	0.016
Websites or social media most effective method	0.011	0.029
Leaflet drops or notices most effective method	-0.038	-.058*
Invitations to friends most effective method	0.020	0.027
Networking in the wider community most effective method	.051*	0.004
Occasional offices most effective method	-.070**	-0.046
School entrance most effective method	0.028	0.013
Emphasis on Christian witness in daily life	.186**	.060*
Maintain contact with people who have arranged baptisms	-0.006	.055*
Maintain contact with people who have arranged weddings	0.017	0.037
Maintain contact with people who have arranged funerals	0.004	.082**

Would contact regular attender who stopped coming	-0.015	0.017
Use e-mail to parishioners	.133**	.059*
Have website	.147**	0.032
Use blogs	.077**	-0.002
Use Facebook or other social media	.180**	.076**
Use podcasts	.133**	.078**
Seating capacity	.088**	0.013
Teenage children of adult members come to church	.215**	.096**
Age profile becoming younger	.515**	.193**
More ethnic minority attenders	.172**	.057*
Church has drawn in people who previously attended elsewhere	.054*	0.016
Church has a clear mission and purpose	.281**	.089**
Church wants to grow in membership	.156**	0.021
Church wants to be racially and culturally diverse	.177**	.075**
Church is working for social justice	.172**	0.021
Vacancy	-.071**	0.046
Multiple priests/deacons serving just this church	.138**	.068**
Incumbent responsible only for this church	0.019	-0.047
Incumbent also responsible for other churches	-.131**	-0.017
Multiple ordained ministers serving this and other churches	-0.023	-0.003
If a team, number of churches	-.131*	0.034
If a team, number of clergy	0.075	0.024
Paid staff apart from clergy	.150**	0.023
Number of paid staff	.119**	.100**
Paid administrator	0.058	0.061
Paid music director	-.085*	0.006
Paid verger/caretaker	0.059	0.002
Paid worship leader	.123**	.129**
Paid pastoral worker	.161**	.165**
Paid community development worker	.076*	.090**
Paid children's/youth worker	.152**	0.026
Laity involved in home visiting	.066**	-0.026
Laity involved in speaking/preaching in church	.150**	0.021
Laity involved in running clubs for young people	.185**	0.034
Laity involved in preparation for baptisms/weddings/etc.	.077**	-0.024
Laity involved in planning/leading worship	.111**	0.023

Laity involved in leading prayer/fellowship/study groups	.144**	0.016
Number of lay people regularly involved	.193**	.120**
Volunteer leadership rotates	.266**	.104**
The same people tend to serve year after year	-.227**	-.053*
Considerable amount of rotation	.188**	.140**
Easy to find Licensed Readers	.134**	-0.004
Easy to find PCC officers (e.g. secretary or treasurer)	.228**	.113**
Easy to find Sunday school teachers	.255**	.110**
Easy to find youth leaders	.251**	.117**
Easy to find organist/music director/worship leader	.179**	.094**
Easy to find churchwarden	.205**	.115**
Easy to find committee members	.278**	.087**
No conflict over finances or budget	.076**	.106**
No conflict over worship style or content	0.011	0.023
No conflict over priorities for activities or mission	0.034	0.008
No conflict over the issue of gay priests/bishops	0.011	0.020
No conflict over the issue of women priests/bishops	0.032	0.039
No conflict over priest's leadership style or personal behaviour	.130**	.064*
No conflict over a member's personal behaviour	0.016	0.001
No conflict over use of facilities	-0.018	-0.019
Conflict experienced - partly moved on, some remains	-.121**	-0.056*
Diocese offers helpful support	.051*	.051*
Diocesan decisions can cause difficulties	-0.016	0.000
Diocese seems distant from our concerns	-.054*	0.014
Good relations with diocese	.073**	-0.017
Manage reasonably well with the resources available	.203**	.057*
Need to fund Parish Share/quota limits ability to grow	-.092**	-0.047
Building maintenance is a significant burden	-.126**	-0.010
Devote too much time and energy to fundraising	-.151**	-.061*
Clergy - age	-.154**	-0.038
Clergy - female	-0.013	-0.044
Clergy - single	0.025	-0.013
Clergy - married	0.038	-0.013
Clergy - number of children living at home	.140**	0.022
Clergy - White	0.045	-0.012
Clergy - Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	0.043	-0.013

Also responsible for other churches	-.092**	0.000
Number of other churches	-.093**	.080*
Percentage of your time going to this church	.131**	-.119**
Other responsibilities (area dean, diocesan officer, etc.)	.062*	0.041
Outside responsibilities occupy much time	0.022	0.030
Number of ordained ministers active in this church	.072*	.076*
Time contributed by other ordained ministers	.119**	.097**
Part-time	-0.013	-0.016
Stipendiary	.048*	-0.011
Self-supporting	0.042	-0.009
House-for-duty	0.043	-0.008
Year appointed to this post	-0.001	-0.022
Year ordained as a deacon	.118**	0.009
Theological outlook (1=Catholic; 7=Evangelical)	.078**	0.006
Theological outlook (1=Liberal; 7=Conservative)	.080**	0.032
Theological outlook (1=Charismatic; 7=Non-charismatic)	-.129**	-.052*
Priority is numerical growth	.065*	.052*
Priority is spiritual growth/discipleship	-.061*	-0.027
Priority is social transformation	0.009	-0.028
Participated in a leadership development course in past 5 years	0.043	-0.007
Teaching the Christian faith important in current role	0.025	-0.014
Pastoral care important in current role	0.004	-0.014
Celebrating the sacraments important in current role	0.018	-0.012
Developing a vision and set of goals important in current role	0.026	-0.006
Ensuring the organisation works important in current role	0.019	-0.009
Involvement in community groups important in current role	0.023	-0.011
Relating to people in need important in current role	0.022	-0.010
Preaching the word of God important in current role	0.026	-0.010
Identifying and enabling gifts in others important in current role	0.039	-0.009
Support from professional advisors	0.027	0.028
Support from family, colleagues and contacts	.083**	.076**
Should conduct funerals for non-churchgoers	-.086**	-.078**
Should baptise infants from non-churchgoing families	-.068**	-.069**
Should be active in local community life	0.019	-0.008
Should make regular pastoral visits	-.061*	-.062*
Should involve laity in taking worship services	0.022	-0.014

Should delegate other aspects of ministry to lay leaders	0.049	0.014
Should encourage a lay person to chair the PCC	-0.042	-0.001
Decision making (1=everyone involved; 7=senior leader decides)	0.021	0.001
Preference for decision making (1=everyone; 7=senior leader)	.125**	0.011
PCC effective	.161**	0.032
Self-rated effectiveness in present role	.265**	.053*
Stressed in your present role	-0.048	0.044
Empathising	0.011	0.007
Speaking	.083**	0.045
Innovating	.164**	.071**
Connecting	.102**	0.049
Managing	.066*	0.005
Envisioning	.183**	.100**
Persisting	0.008	-0.032
Motivating	.225**	.098**
Extraversion (versus Introversion)	.188**	.072**
Intuition (versus Sensing)	.122**	.087**
Feeling (versus Thinking)	0.027	0.012
Perceiving (versus Judging)	0.027	0.008
Emotional stability	.099**	0.012
Child / adult ratio (among monthly attenders)	.231**	.098**
Child / adult ratio deciles	.300**	.151**

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01