

Article reprinted from Cross†Way Issue Autumn 2004 No. 94

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HOW MANY PEOPLE IN THE PEWS?

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Church Statistics, whilst not perhaps the most gripping reading, give important information about the shape and numerical health of the Church. Provisional attendance figures for 2002 had been released at the end of 2003 but the full report was not available until September. Once again these make grim reading as virtually every category, except giving, points to decline. These statistics are nearly 2 years out of date and, in fact, date to before the controversies over the promotion of sexual immorality exploded shortly after Rowan Williams had been installed as Archbishop.

Attendance

Three measures of attendance are used. The most useful for long-term comparisons is the figure for Usual Sunday Attendance (USA). In 2000 the Church spin doctors dropped this figure in favour of two other statistics, Average Sunday Attendance and Average Weekly Attendance (both based on a 4 week survey conducted in October) which gave higher figures. USA was reinstated in 2001 and all three sets of figures provide evidence for the continuing decline of the Church of England.

Average Weekly Attendance and Average Sunday Attendance both show a drop of 39,000 people over the single year representing an average of 3 people per parish. Average Sunday Attendance now stands precariously above the 1 million mark (1,002,000) and represents about 77 adults and children per parish (considerably less per church service). The most striking thing about this decline is that it appears to be almost entirely a drop in the number of adults.

Usual Sunday attendance also fell again by 19,000 to 917,000 and the accompanying graph will show how this number has fallen relentlessly year-by-year since it was first calculated in 1968.

Some Dioceses have bucked the trend and shown modest increases in the various statistics over a year or two but the only Diocese to have done this over a sustained period is London where Usual Sunday attendance has grown from 51,900 in 1993 to 54,700 in 2002.

The introduction to the report draws attention to the fact that, contrary to what we might imagine, in the 2001 national census 72% of the population (nearly three in every four people) gave their religion as Christian and only 6% (1 in every 16) claimed to be of other faiths. England is clearly not a multi-faith society and our parishes are packed with people who consider themselves Christian but have no contact with any Christian churches. There is a large mission field right outside our front doors.

The introduction also uses the statistics to claim, on the basis of occasional and mid-week attendance that *'the size of the Anglican Church in England... is approaching 3 million people'*.

Baptisms and Confirmations

The new figures for baptisms show that over the 10 year period 1992 to 2002 infant baptisms in the Church of England have fallen by over one third and now stand at 106,900 per year. This is still nearly one fifth of all children. The statistics would appear to imply that more than 10 million people, possibly as many as 15 million, have been baptised in the Church of England.

Confirmations are also down, 3% over the year 2001-2 and again something over one third since 1992.