

This is the fourth edition of *UK Church Statistics*. Each seeks to give an up-to-date overview of church life in the UK (across all four countries) culled from a thorough survey of Christian denominations serving in the UK. It looks at the number of churches, the number of ministers, their total membership and their Sunday attendance of each in the UK. The data survey and collection all took place before the coronavirus pandemic hit the UK, and the government closed all worship buildings. So all the numbers and analysis predate the 2020 lockdown.

The basic data was collected by inviting all 230 denominations to complete a form in 2019 giving their membership, attendance, number of churches and ministers for the years 2015 to 2020 in each of the four UK countries. Many kindly completed it either fully or partly, but not every denomination collects or has all this detail. In addition nearly all the websites of these denominations were visited to glean extra salient information and many others in case they also are or have become a “denomination”. What is a denomination? John Adair, the management guru of a generation ago, once defined it as “a Christian organisation uniting a number of local congregations” in his 1977 SPCK book *The Becoming Church*.

### **Preliminary observations**

Over the past 10 to 20 years there has been a perceptible change in the UK church position. Some (but definitely not all) of the larger institutional churches are declining, but there are numerous new churches being started. The British Church Growth Association may have closed in 2003 but its seed has come to fruition. There are literally thousands of new churches in the UK today, started in the last 20 years, as the Table on Page 12.19 in the Pentecostal and Smaller Denominations columns show. That growth has been accompanied by a spectacular increase in their membership as the graphs on Page 12.17 readily indicate.

In the five years 2015 to 2020 880 new congregations have been founded in the UK (see Table 1.1.2). In the years 2008 to 2013 over 1,050 started and in the years 2012 to 2017 some 1,140 started (figures taken from previous editions of this book). Historically many of these were associated with a particular denomination. A “church” and “daughter church” relationship existed (the language that was often used) when one church initiated, supported and helped a new congregation towards maturity as an independent, self-governing, financially solvent, administrative spiritual unit. The daughter church would invariably be of the same denomination as the “parent” church.

That kind of relationship still exists, of course, but is probably becoming rarer. Independent congregations are starting further independent congregations. Leaders in one congregation feel called by God to start another congregation perhaps fairly nearby or maybe some miles away. Emmanuel Church, Canterbury, for example, is hoping to start a new congregation, Redeemer Church, in Folkestone, 20 miles away. Sometimes the new church will be called by the same name as the earlier one and they form a loose association – some form a strong association, and effectively become a mini-denomination. Alternatively a “parent” church may infuse life into an ailing church of the same denomination, in essence, a “heart transplant” in a church about to die (something especially seen with the largest Anglican church, Holy Trinity Brompton, which has “transplant” churches in Brighton, Portsmouth and 52 other locations, plus 2 overseas, but still within the Anglican fold). But the relationship can vary from occasional to close or anywhere in between. There are strengths and weaknesses in this evolving situation.

Some of the **strengths** are that an individual’s gifting is used and the new fellowship can use the skills of those who come. Some of the evangelistic impetus is released and many people are reached. It is clear that this is not just a middle-class happening, but that churches are starting in what used to be called “working class” areas and are being led by those who live in those areas. Many who would never dream of going to a “proper” church are being reached with friendship, food (frequently) and fun. Some of these groups call themselves by the name “Messy Church” and join many thousands of others doing the same, but the use of the word “church” is ambiguous. But as a congregation or group of like-minded people meeting regularly for prayer, teaching and fellowship there is no question.

Some of the **weaknesses** include the fact that the theological background or training of the leaders of these groups will vary greatly from very little to years of relevant experience or study. Another – pragmatically from a statistician – is that there is little interest in being counted nationally as another congregation, or necessarily joining in the local Churches Together. If asked for details some will respond, but putting that congregation into convenient denominational pigeon holes is difficult and allocating them an appropriate churchmanship even more so, except that the large majority are certainly evangelical. Some will also be charismatic, but there are others which are Catholic, or have international associations.

What findings thus emerge at this stage? From personally viewing dozens and dozens of church websites some things stand out:

- While new congregations may be of any denomination or none, there are more in two groups than others – the Pentecostal and the Diaspora Churches (the latter being put here in the “Smaller Denominations” category).
- The websites show less interest in displaying the *size* of their congregation and much more its *location*. Google maps abound to help identify the latter!
- What a church *believes* may be described in a theological statement on its website but it will be well illustrated by the things which it organises and *does* for those who attend.

### Accuracy of counting

How then, in a book seeking to look at the church situation in the UK as a whole, can these new movements be accommodated? This book divides the many known denominations into 10 broad groups, two of which have been re-fused together (the Independent Churches and the New Churches). There is a Table in the Independent section, Table 5.5.6, which began by estimating the many independent churches which existed at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (from detailed records from the various Church Censuses which allowed such numbers to be cumulated), and adds into it a further number taken from reports of what's happening as far as can be researched. This is not a totally isolated event – lists of churches attending Conference Centres, for example, give a broad coverage into the type of churches being started, while the enormous use of the internet also makes a very valuable contribution.

Where churches are known to be “black” or more correctly “Black Majority” as they were called at one stage, they can be easily grouped not because of the colour of the participants in their congregations, but because most would accept the description of “charismatic” or “Pentecostal”. So in the Pentecostal section there are tables (Tables 9.5.1, 9.5.3 and 9.6.5) listing groups of independent congregations, or those which are bonded together in groups of perhaps 5 or 10 such congregations. A few congregations have grown very large and their central office has become a very real Administration Centre, and these are listed in the Tables separately by name. Their actual congregational sizes are usually unknown.

“Black” has also given way to “BAME” (Black, Asian and Middle Eastern) and there are numerous gatherings of Chinese, Filipinos, Romanians, and literally dozens of other nationalities (whose churches are usually non-charismatic, so are included among the “Diaspora Churches” on Pages 11.3-5). So while many of the Pentecostals are indeed Black, there are equally many who are not. Likewise not all the Independent churches are “White”; many of the congregations have different coloured skins, or are “Non-British White” and many of their families are “mixed.”

### Membership

Some denominations have a formal membership, others a looser grouping which the Church of England calls the “worshipping community” (its Electoral Roll no longer being considered a membership indicator) But the concept of “membership” retains its importance, for the following reasons:

- Population Censuses may ask for a person's religion, but at best all that these elicit is the number of *adherents*, certainly not the number of committed people or attenders, but rather those who usually have taken out at some stage some kind of formal association with a particular denomination or had it imposed upon them (such as infant baptism). A person's religion, though, is merely confusing as many, for example, will say they are “Christian” simply because they were born in a “Christian country.”
- “Membership” is the *lingua franca* used when counting those belonging to other religions, thinking of them as those who seriously belong to their religion irrespective of whether they attend mosque, synagogue, temple or whatever.
- It is the political language which is used in assessing the strength of different religions, rather than the Census reports which are known to include those who now have no real relationship with that religion of which they have stated they notionally belong. At one stage the US Government kept a membership list of numbers belonging to the different religions in each country.
- It is used in the academic world as the basic unit of measurement. Gordon-Conwell University whose main campus is in Massachusetts, is responsible for the *World Christian Database* which, under Prof Todd Johnson, published the third edition of the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* in February 2020, and this is based on membership, although attendance figures are also given.
- It is the one measure which can be traced through history. Section 12 in this book gives details of denominational membership history from 1900 through to an estimated 2025 figure. Apart from the number of sacred buildings (churches) there are no other figures which go back so many years.

So it is for these reasons that this volume focuses on “membership” even if attendance figures sometimes have to be used instead, or the figures have to be estimated. The information used is supplied by denominations directly (with a footnote <sup>3</sup>), or based on information received from past requests for earlier editions, or from their website, or other ways (with a footnote <sup>1</sup>). A few denominations do not have any ordained ministers.

However, attendance has become much more meaningful, especially after the first English Church Census in 1979 which asked each individual church numbers attending on a particular Sunday. When it was repeated more scientifically in 1989, some 70% of England's then 38,000 churches responded, some 27,000 forms coming back to what was then MARC Europe! Chapter 13 of this book looks at the attendance numbers in more detail.

The membership criteria used in this book is the same as that used in *The UK Christian Handbook* which between 1972 and 2006 issued some 12 editions<sup>1</sup> and confined itself to Trinitarian Christian organisations, defined as those which “accepted the historic formulary of the Godhead, as three eternal persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, in one unchanging Essence.” A fuller statement is available on request.

<sup>1</sup> Published originally by MARC Europe (edited by Peter Brierley) and then, from 1993, by Christian Research (co-edited or edited by Heather Wraight), Eltham, London, in 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006. A 2009 edition was published by the Bible Society with a different editor and to different criteria.

Apart from the fact that membership is defined differently from one denomination to another, so it is not a homogeneous figure, the huge weakness of using membership figures is that they have rarely been collected along with other factors, apart from denomination and country of origin. One can use the number of churches to ascertain average membership, but it is much more useful to have such broken down by gender or age which it isn't usually. Attendance, however, is measured with a number of other factors, such as geography, local environment, churchmanship, ethnicity as well as denomination. These are all explored in Chapter 13.

### **Units of measurement**

An additional trend seems also to have taken place over the last 15 years or so. The issue is less “how many attend?” but rather “how many units are open for outreach?” So the *number of congregations* becomes important. The word “Church” has various uses. We understand what we mean by the “Church of England” and think of it as the State Church, but in reality it is some 15,000 separate congregations, grouped together for administrative purposes into parishes, deaneries, and dioceses. Interestingly, as a result of lockdown, there is some consideration being given to re-defining this structure as well as giving more autonomy at the parish level.

So in Chapter 12 there are also summaries of congregations with a history showing their numbers over the last 120 years, as well as a history of membership. These are summarised on Page 12.19, and it should be noted that the graph at the bottom of that page is much smoother than its membership equivalent on Page 12.10. The average number of churches in the UK between 1900 and 2025 is 50,300, with a 7% increase to a maximum of 53,800 in 1965, and a likely 12% decline to 44,400, if trends are fulfilled, in 2025. (Membership by contrast averages 8.1 million over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but varies from 10.3 million in 1930 [+27%] to 4.5 million in 2025 [-45%]).

### **Attendance**

Attendance can only seriously be measured from 1979, 40 years ago, and then only for England and Scotland, but these figures are given on Page 13.3. The graph is smoother, but unfortunately overall in decline. Average attendance in England between 1980 and an estimated figure for 2030 is 3.4 million (but was 32% higher in 1980 and is likely to be 28% lower by 2030). In Scotland the figures are 550,000, 61% higher in 1980, and likely to be 57% lower by 2030.

Attendance is the collective total of number of people worshipping each week, mostly on a Sunday, though some denominations meet on Saturdays, and their numbers are included in the grand total. They include adults and children, and will count a few twice if they attend more than one service. Many churches have midweek meetings in addition, and some of those attending them do not also attend on Sunday. These “mid-week-ites” are frequently not regularly counted, although estimates have been made in some large-scale surveys. For example, three Church Censuses, one in England in 2005<sup>2</sup>, one in London in 2012<sup>3</sup>, and one in Scotland in 2016<sup>4</sup> all carefully measured the extent of mid-week activity in the form of youth activities, services, and other church-run events, and found that:

- English 2005 Sunday attendance of 3,166,200, 6.3% of the population + 720,000 attending mid-week only, 1.4% of the population, which was 19% of total attending of 3,886,200.
- London 2012 Sunday attendance of 721,500, 8.8% of the population + 116,800 attending mid-week only, 1.4% of the population, which was 14% of total attending of 838,300.
- Scotland 2016 Sunday attendance of 389,500, 7.2% of the population + 137,000 attending mid-week only, 2.5% of the population, which was 26% of the total attending of 526,500.

The weighted average of 19, 14 and 26 is 19%, suggesting that actual church attendance across all denominations, measured across of the order of 40,000+ churches, is about a fifth (19%) above that counted on a Sunday in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Churches in the UK**

In 2020 there were some 45,500 congregations in the UK, one for every 1,500 people in the population (there is 1 registered doctor for every 225 people). Not all the churches are *buildings*, as some congregations meet in homes, schools, rooms in pubs, community centres, village halls and other places. Perhaps 40,000 are actual church buildings.

What is the best way of grouping this number of units? There are three main mechanisms. One is by denomination – most people are familiar with the Church of England, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Salvation Army and so on, but in fact there are at least 225 such groups. Another is by what is termed “churchmanship”, or the ethos or the theology on which a church’s work, worship and practice is based – Evangelicals, Charismatics, Catholics, Liberals and others. The third is location – Rural churches, City churches, Council Estate and Suburban churches and so on.

<sup>2</sup> *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, A contemporary picture of churchgoing, Christian Research, Iltham, London, 2006, ISBN 978-1-85321-168-3, Table 10.9.

<sup>3</sup> *Capital Growth*, What the 2012 London Church Census reveals, Brierley Consultancy, Tonbridge, Kent, 2014, ISBN 978-0-9566577-6-3, Table 6.6.

<sup>4</sup> *Tiinclude adults and children Growth Amidst Decline*, What the 2016 Scottish Church Census reveals, Brierley Consultancy, Tonbridge, Kent, 2017, ISBN 978-0-9957646-0-6, Table 8.10.

A fourth descriptor sometimes used, size, is very relative, as “large” churches exist in every group though the actual number referred to by “large” varies considerably – over 10,000 in a single congregation in a few groups, but perhaps just a few hundred in others. Mega-churches are taken in America as meaning churches with over 2,000 attending, but there are very few with so many in the UK. Size is not used as a variable for analysis in this volume except in various Tables in Section 13.

There are a few Tables which look at churches by environment (such as Tables 6.2.2, Pages 13.20,21), and more which look at churchmanship (Pages 13.15 to 19), but most of this book focusses on denominational groups.

### **UK Denominations**

Table 1.1.3 shows that in this edition of *UK Church Statistics*, there are 228 denominations, rather less than the numbers listed in previous volumes. The Table shows that some of the groups have fewer individual denominations in than before (Anglicans, Independent, New Churches and Pentecostals) and one (the Roman Catholics) more.

The main decline in number of individual denominations is among the Pentecostal mega-group. The Charity Commission’s register of annual returns reveals that a number of these denominations have made no returns over the last five years or so and that they no longer have a live website. It maybe that the 75 Pentecostal denominations estimated previously was too high, but the starting of new Pentecostal congregations has slowed, partly because some of their churches have closed. It remains true, however, that the comment by Dr Joe Aldred, the Pentecostal and Multicultural Relationship Officer at Churches Together in England, that there could be as many as 8,000 Pentecostal churches in the UK is perhaps correct (we count only 4,000), since tracking these churches is incredibly difficult, and the ones just listed here have taken weeks of research to find them.

For simplicity the various denominations are collated into 10 broad groups, and when a denomination covers the whole of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, only the Northern Ireland component is included. As explained in the article on Pages 7.1 to 7.3, the New Church streams initially began as a separate group within the Independent Churches; then, as they became larger, and at their request, they were made into a separate grouping altogether in the 1990s. Now with reducing numbers, in this edition they are put back into the Independent sector, albeit being kept as a separate unit. The following percentages relate to 2020 membership figures, and the initial number refers to the section in this volume in which details may be found:

1) **Total** of (2) to (11).

2) **Anglican:** 82% of which are Church of England, 12% Church of Ireland [in Northern Ireland], 3% Church in Wales, 2% Scottish Episcopal Church, and 1% the much smaller Free, Traditional, Continuing or other ex-Church of England groups.

3) **Baptist:** 68% of which are Baptist Union of Great Britain, 8% Independent Baptists, 7% Baptist Union of Scotland, 6% Baptist Union of Wales, 5% Grace Baptist Churches, 4% Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland [in Northern Ireland], 2% Gospel Standard Strict Baptist churches.

4) **Roman Catholic:** 50% of which are the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales, 33% the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland [in Northern Ireland], 10% the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, 6% the Polish Catholic Chaplaincy and 1% all other Catholics.

5) **Independent and New:** 16% are Christian Brethren [Open], 11% are Newfrontiers, 9% are FIEC [Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches], 6% are Vineyard Churches, 5% the Union of Welsh Independents, 4% Christian Brethren [Exclusive], 4% are other Congregational churches, 3% Salt and Light Ministries, 2% Ground Level Network, 2% Pioneer Partnership, 2% Multiply Network, 2% Churches of Christ, 13% other independent (often individual) churches, and 21% other New-Churches-like churches..

6) **Methodist:** 91% of which are part of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, 6% the Methodist Church in Ireland [in Northern Ireland], 1% are Wesleyan Reform Union, 1% Independent Methodists and 1% Free Methodists.

7) **New Churches:** Now included with Independent Churches but as a separate section.

8) **Orthodox:** 44% of which are Greek Orthodox, 22% Romanian Orthodox, 16% Russian Orthodox, 9% other Eastern Orthodox, 9% Oriental Orthodox and 0.1% other Orthodox churches. The Orthodox churches in this volume are given in three groups: Eastern, Oriental and Other. The main change here is the huge growth in the Romanian Orthodox church (13% in 2013, 18% in 2017 and 22% in 2020).

9) **Pentecostal:** 19% are Redeemed Christian Church of God, 19% Elim Pentecostal Churches, 12% Assemblies of God, 4% Hillsong, 4% Oneness Churches, 2% New Testament Church of God, 2% Deeper Life Bible Church, 2% Church of Pentecost, 1% Kingsway International Christian Centre, 1% United Pentecostal Church of Great Britain, 1% Apostolic Church, 1% Mountain of Fire Ministries, 1% Church of God of Prophecy, 1% Potters House Christian Fellowship, 1% New Covenant Church, 15% other known African and West Indian Churches, and 14% numerous other smaller denominations.

10) **Presbyterian:** 51% are Church of Scotland, 33% Presbyterian Church in Ireland [in Northern Ireland], 7% United Reformed Church [URC], 3% Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, 2% Presbyterian Church of Wales, 2% Free Church of Scotland and 2% other smaller Presbyterian denominations.

11) **Smaller (or Other) Denominations:** 25% are Diaspora [overseas national immigrant] churches, 20% Seventh-Day Adventists, 18% Lutheran churches, 16% Salvation Army, 9% “Messy Church” and like synonyms, 7% Religious Society of Friends [Quakers], 2% Church of the Nazarene, 1% Moravian Churches and 2% other small groups.

These 10 broad denominational groups have been used for reporting church data over the last 45 years, in publications like the *UK Christian Handbook*, or, since 1998, in the seven volumes of *Religious Trends*, as well as the first three editions of *UK Church Statistics*.

### Data descriptions

All estimated numbers are indicated by the footnote <sup>1</sup>, sometimes placed by the date at the left hand side of a page or above a column of figures, where the footnote then refers to *all* the figures in that row or column unless indicated otherwise. Denominations were asked to give their own estimates for 2020 and 2025, and these, as with all data directly supplied by a denomination, are indicated by the footnote <sup>3</sup>, which again will apply to all the figures in a row or column if placed by the year date. Numbers previously published which have been superseded in this volume are all indicated by the footnote <sup>2</sup>. Some denominations do not have membership as such, the chief of which is the Roman Catholic Church, so Mass Attendance figures are used instead. The Church of England Electoral Roll is used for their membership figures.

The above is true for Sections 1 to 11. Section 12 gives the History of each of the Denominational groups given above, plus graphs to illustrate, and on Page 12.19 the number of congregations also.

### Diaspora Growth

One major change in this edition is the identifying of many of the *diaspora* churches which are Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal or simply non-charismatic from other parts of the globe, especially Asia. There have been huge numbers of immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, students and others flooding into the UK, details of which may be seen in Table 4.2.4 (Catholic Poles), Table 8.5.4 (Orthodox countries) and Table 11.5.4 (Non-charismatic and Lutheran countries). A combined list of these is given on Page 1.4 together with a chart illustrating the make-up of the huge number, nearly 5 million people, we have in the UK, some 7% of our entire population, one person in every 14 – and the Table on Page 14 only includes the main nationalities reflected in known churches, chaplaincies and excludes others not known. Given that much of this internal immigration has occurred in the last 20 years, its impact on the church scene in the UK has not been recognised for what it is. How much the numbers will be realistically affected by Brexit in 2021 and beyond is unknown.

Which of these various groups are involved in *church* growth? They include the following:

- The Romanians, many of whom belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church (Table 8.1.5). Their estimated numbers over the five years 2015 to 2020 have grown by 50% in that period.
- The Poles, of whom there were nearly a million in the UK in 2017 according to the Office for National Statistics, seen in the Polish Catholic Churches (Table 4.2.3 and Table 4.2.4 for the actual numbers). Like the Romanians they impact all four countries of the UK, although England has the major share (85%). There are also Lutheran and other church-going Poles (see Tables 11.7.4 and 11.5.1).
- The continuing growth among Black Africans especially in groups like the Church of Pentecost (Table 9.1.3), the Redeemed Christian Church of God (Table 9.3), Kingsway International Christian Centre (Table 9.5.1) and the Seventh-Day Adventists (Table 11.2.1).
- The ongoing growth in many of the Diaspora Churches (Table 11.3.1), especially seen in the Filipino, Iranian, Syrian, Tamil churches (all on Pages 11.3-5), all of which have increased at least 20% in the last 5 years (Syrians 10%).
- Similar growth is seen among the Finnish, German, Latvian and Norwegian Lutheran churches (Pages 11.6 and 11.7), all of whom have seen increases in their numbers coming to the UK of over 10% since 2015 (Page 1.4).

It should be noted that much of this diaspora growth is not the starting of new congregations but rather the expanding of existing congregations, and where services in a particular language have been spasmodic they have become more regular.

### Growing denominations

In the previous edition of *UK Church Statistics* three types of church were seen for the period especially 2010 to 2015 – newly planted Pentecostal churches (“come, I’m like you, join me” kind of approach), diaspora churches (“come, join me, I speak your language” approach) and what were called “opportunity churches” being started because of a deep concern

for evangelism in a particular context. This edition suggests that the first and third of these are much less than they were, probably because new starts need time to grow and consolidate, and continued start-ups are hard to maintain. The rate of growth for example of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a prolific church planter, has slowed, though not stopped.

The second type of growth has continued, however, but as stated above has been seen more in growing congregations rather than new churches. Messy Church, for example, also saw its numbers grow from 1,400 in 2012 to 2,600 in 2015 and to 3,300 by 2018 – still growth but at a slower rate. The actual rates of growth achieved by the growing denominations, and totalling all the other denominations, provides an interesting Table:

Table 0.2.1: Rates of growth of growing congregations in the UK, 2015 to 2020E

Group	No of denominations	Total 2015 membership	% change 2015-2020	Total 2020 membership	% of total in column		
					Denoms	2015	2020
Fastest growing	15	82,447	+69%	139,425	7	2	2
Growing more slowly	98	640,052	+13%	720,946	43	12	15
All growing	113	722,499	+19%	860,371	50	14	17
Static	26	27,315	0%	27,315	11	1	1
Declining	89	4,378,701	-10%	3,920,637	39	85	82
<b>All churches</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>5,128,515</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>4,808,323</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

This Table shows that of the 228 denominations in the UK in 2020, 113 or half (50%) of them are *growing*, and on average have increased by a fifth, 19%, in the last 5 years. This is 61 denominations *fewer* than were growing when the previous edition of this book was published 3 years ago, so the pace of church life has slowed somewhat. Fewer new churches are being started, fewer denominations growing (in membership).

Of the 113 growing denominations, 15 grew their membership more than 50% in the five years 2015 to 2020. Of these 15, one was a small Catholic denomination (the Old Catholic Church in the UK [Table 4.3.1]), 8 were Diaspora churches and 6 were Pentecostal. The 8 Diaspora churches saw their membership increase on average +65% over these five years, but the 6 Pentecostal churches more than doubled (on average +109%). However, the Diaspora churches included some large ones (the Iranian churches, Latvians, Romanians, Sri Lankan, Syrian and Turkish churches) while the growing Pentecostal groups were all small except for the Kingsway International Christian Centre which has grown greatly since it moved to Chatham, Kent, a few years ago.

Table 0.2.1 shows that almost 100 further denominations grew between 2015 and 2020, albeit at the more sedate rate of 13% over these five years, +2.4% per annum. These growing congregations were 12% of total church membership in 2015, but rose to 15% by 2020.

Which are the actual largest growing denominations? The 12 with at least 10,000 members in 2015 and which grew by at least 10% over the next 5 years are listed in Table 0.2.2 (percentages are based on full numbers):

Table 0.2.2: Larger denominations which have grown by at least 10% 2015 to 2020

Table	Denomination	2015 membership	2020 membership	Change 2015-2020
8.1.5	Eastern Orthodox: Romanian Patriarchate	69,000	104,000	+50%
9.1.5	Elim Pentecostal Church	65,000	72,000	+11%
9.3	Redeemed Christian Church of God	59,000	72,000	+22%
9.5.1,3	Collective small African and Caribbean Churches	57,000	65,000	+15%
9.6.5	Other Pentecostal Churches	36,000	41,000	+13%
5.6.5	Newfrontiers	35,000	39,000	+12%
5.1.2	Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches	27,000	32,000	+18%
5.7.4	Vineyard Churches	17,000	22,000	+30%
8.4.2	Oriental Orthodox: Armenian Orthodox Church	15,000	17,000	+13%
11.9.1	Messy Church	13,000	16,000	0.23
9.2.1	Hillsong	12,000	17,000	+41%
4.2.1	Catholic Foreign Community Chaplaincies	10,000	11,000	+11%

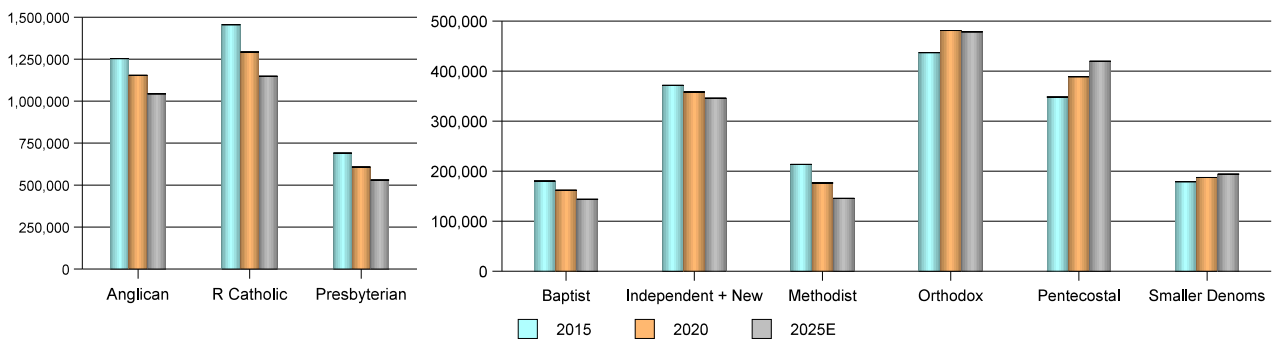
**Declining Denominations**

Two-fifths, 39%, of the denominations in the UK in 2020 have seen decline over the previous 5 years, and a further 26 have been static. The -6% shown in the above Table (0.2.1) is in line with that which was predicted in *UK Church Statistics No 3*, a rate of -1.3% per year, which has characterised the last 5 years and is likely to continue much the same to 2025. Despite the growth of some denominations, therefore, the overall rate of decline has not changed greatly since 2010, and statistically looks set to continue for the next few years. Which are the main declining denominations? They are readily seen in Table 0.2.3, set alongside the growing denominations:

Table 0.2.3: Rates of change by Denomination 2015-2025E

Denominational Group	No of denominations	Total 2015 membership	% change 2015-2020	Total 2020 membership	% change 2020-2025E	Total 2025E membership	% membership of total		
							2015	2020	2025E
Roman Catholic	21	1,455,260	-11%	1,293,020	-11%	1,148,285	28	27	26
Anglican	11	1,253,644	-10%	1,132,319	-10%	1,021,511	24	24	23
Presbyterian	16	690,328	-12%	607,429	-13%	529,776	13	13	12
Orthodox	25	436,890	+10%	481,135	-1%	478,460	9	10	11
Pentecostal	55	348,186	+12%	388,718	+8%	419,820	7	8	10
Independent + New	32	371,478	-4%	358,206	-3%	345,818	7	7	8
Smaller Denoms	55	178,993	+5%	187,179	+4%	193,634	4	4	4
Methodist	5	213,561	-17%	176,327	-17%	145,540	4	4	3
Baptist	8	180,175	-10%	161,990	-11%	143,723	4	3	3
<b>All churches</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>5,128,515</b>	<b>-7%</b>	<b>4,786,323</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>4,426,567</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Figure 0.2.1: Membership of Denominational groups, 2015 to 2025E



This Table shows that there are only two groups that are growing: the Pentecostals and the Smaller Denominations, while the Orthodox grew between 2015 and 2020 but are likely to decline between 2020 and 2025 as many of the Romanians and Poles return home. Previously the Independent and New Churches had been growing but are now declining. The growing groups were 22% of the total in 2020. Figure 0.2.1 illustrates Table 0.2.3.

**Which denominations are declining most?**

If the overall change is -6% in 5 years, it is worth asking which denominations have especially declined or grown. We have looked at the growing groups above, identifying the individual denominations. Taking the 17 with more than 10,000 members in 2015 which have decreased between 2015 and 2020 by at least -10% gives the results in Table 0.2.3 on the next page.

Three are in the Roman Catholic section and three among the Presbyterian churches. Decline may be seen in all four countries of the UK.

Table 0.2.4: Larger Denominations which have declined by at least 10% 2015 to 2020

Table	Denomination	2015 membership	2020 membership	Change 2015-2020
4.1.2	Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales	782,000	651,000	-17%
10.3.2	Church of Scotland	353,000	310,000	-12%
6.1.2	Methodist Church of Great Britain	195,000	160,000	-18%
4.1.3	Roman Catholic Church in Scotland	140,000	125,000	-11%
3.1.2	Baptist Union of Great Britain	124,000	110,000	-11%
4.2.3	Polish Roman Catholic Chaplaincy	83,000	74,000	-11%
5.8.6	Other New Churches	71,000	62,000	-13%
10.1.2	United Reformed Church	56,000	42,000	-24%
2.1.3	Church in Wales	47,000	40,000	-14%
2.1.4	Scottish Episcopal Church	32,000	27,000	-15%
10.1.3	Presbyterian Church in Wales	22,000	15,000	-31%
5.2.4	Union of Welsh Independents	20,000	18,000	-14%
8.2.2	Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia	18,000	14,000	-19%
5.3.4	Plymouth Brethren Christian Church	16,000	10,000	-40%
3.2.3	Other Baptist Churches	15,000	13,000	-11%
6.1.3	Methodist Church in Ireland	13,000	12,000	-11%
9.2.2	New Testament Church of God	11,000	9,000	-11%

### Church Membership by Country

Table 0.2.5 shows the membership changes by each of the 4 constituent countries in the UK.

Table 0.2.5 Church Membership in the UK, by Country, 2012-2022E

Country	No of denominations	Total 2015 membership	% change 2015-2020	Total 2020 membership	% which are Institutional	% change 2020-2025E	Total 2025E membership	% membership is of total		
								2015	2020	2025E
England	209	3,416,885	-6%	3,194,967	66%	-7%	2,958,971	67	67	67
Wales	92	189,707	-16%	159,912	58%	-15%	136,717	4	3	3
Scotland	104	643,795	-9%	586,530	89%	-11%	519,534	12	12	12
N Ireland	69	878,128	-4%	844,614	94%	-4%	811,345	17	18	18
<b>All churches</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>5,128,515</b>	<b>-7%</b>	<b>4,786,023</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>4,426,567</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The decline in membership seen over the five years 2015 to 2020 is set to continue and slightly increase in the period 2020 to 2025. It affects all four countries in the UK, with N Ireland least affected and Wales most affected. The dominance of England continues but is very slightly less than it was (67% to 69%) of total membership. If the major declining denominations in Wales (Union of Welsh Independents) and Scotland (Church of Scotland) are taken out, the declines in these three countries would be considerably less. Across the UK, three-quarters, 74%, of membership is Institutional.

In this period, however, the Scottish Church Census took place (in 2016) and while this is a prime measure of attendance, not membership, nevertheless the huge declines in the major Scottish denominations (Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church) simply emphasise the general trends observed throughout the UK. These seem to be as follows:

- English and Scottish church membership continues to decline, along with attendance, although the percentage of the UK adult population who are members is still likely to be about 7% in 2030 (Table 1.1.1).



- The dominance of the decline is in the major institutional denominations of Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians. The Orthodox are also institutional but contrariwise their membership is growing, though only because of the continued immigration, especially the Romanians in their case. However, Orthodox attendance is fractional in terms of their membership (8% of membership in 2015, compared with 88% generally).
- At the same time as this decline, there are pockets of growth across many denominations, including within the major denominational groups of Anglicans, Catholics and Presbyterians.
- Theology is important. Evangelicals are the spearhead of growth in many areas, including growing numbers of Evangelical Roman Catholics in Scotland (as also in England). Those with Broad/Liberal theology are declining slowly, but not disappearing, and some of their churches are seeing significant growth. See Pages 13.15-18 for the detail. Tensions over current issues within the Evangelical movement may hinder growth.
- Size does not seem to be a key factor for growth. The larger Anglican churches, for example, continue to grow, but more slowly than before. The quality of leadership is almost certainly the driving factor behind growth.

**Number of Churches**

UK Church Statistics also gives the number of churches or congregations by country, shown in Table 0.2.6. The average church in 2020 had 106 members and 61 attenders. The yellow column after 2020 gives the percentage of the 2020 churches which are part of the Institutional denominations.

Table 0.2.6: Number of churches in the UK, by country, 2015-2025E

Country	Total 2015 churches	% change 2015-2020	Total 2020 churches	% which are Institutional	% change 2020-2025E	Total 2025 churches	% churches is of total		
							2015	2020	2025E
England	36,699	-2%	36,132	55%	-2%	35,416	79	80	80
Wales	4,048	-8%	3,725	57%	-6%	3,491	9	8	8
Scotland	3,627	-2%	3,547	69%	-2%	3,476	8	8	8
N Ireland	2,176	-4%	2,088	69%	-3%	2,026	4	4	4
<b>All churches</b>	<b>46,550</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>45,492</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>44,409</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

England has four-fifths, 80%, of the UK's churches. While many churches (+900) have been started in the period 2015 to 2020, more have closed (-1,900). Of the net closures, -567 are in England (1.6% of the total number in 2020), -323 are in Wales (8.7%), -80 in Scotland (2.2%) and -88 in N Ireland (4.2%), so Scotland has seen fewer net closures than in other parts of the UK.

The yellow column shows that almost three-fifths, 57%, of the churches in the UK are either Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox or Presbyterian (in the proportions respectively of 68%, 15%, 1% and 16%). The Church of England already knows it has a problem with many of its buildings as it has some 9,000 rural churches, many with very small congregations. A large majority of these are historic and listed (see Page 2.3), involving expensive maintenance and upkeep. The emergence of localised groups wanting to spearhead action, perhaps enabling some of these churches to move from Diocesan ownership to village or group ownership, is a possible, partial solution.

Despite the growth of Pentecostal and Diaspora churches in England, closures by the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church of England and Wales, United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union and especially the Methodist Church (which closed over 500 churches between 2015 and 2020) exceeded the 300 new churches being started.

In 2015 the average number of members per congregation was 110. In 2020 it was 106, in 2025 it is likely to be 100, and, if present trends continue, it will be 94 in 2030. In 2020 the average was 89 in England, 43 in Wales, 165 in Scotland, and 405 in N Ireland, reflecting the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church in latter two countries.

In 2015 a typical Roman Catholic Church in the UK had an average of 370 members per church, and 340 in 2020, while all the other denominations together had an average of 86 in 2015 and 84 in 2020. Institutional churches had an average membership of 140 in 2020, while Free churches were half this at 65.

A Table and graph of the number of churches by denomination since the year 1900 is given on Page 12.19.

**Number of ministers**

The number of ministers in the UK is also given in UK Church Statistics. Numbers for the four countries are shown in Table 0.2.7 on the next page. Not all ministers are ordained; not all are full-time; not all are paid.

Table 0.2.7: Number of ministers in the UK by country, 2015 to 2025E

Country	Total 2015 ministers	% change 2015-2020	Total 2020 ministers	% which are Institutional	% change 2020-2025E	Total 2025 ministers	% ministers is of total		
							2015	2020	2025E
England	29,716	-1%	29,319	36%	-3%	28,468	83	83	83
Wales	1,583	-3%	1,539	39%	-5%	1,468	4	4	4
Scotland	3,043	-4%	2,910	53%	-4%	2,792	8	8	8
N Ireland	1,647	-1%	1,636	69%	-3%	1,591	5	5	5
<b>All churches</b>	<b>35,989</b>	<b>-2%</b>	<b>35,404</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>34,319</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The average minister was responsible for 1.3 churches in 2015, 2020 and 2025 if projected trends turn out for real. Across the UK, in 2020 the average was 1.2 in England, 2.4 in Wales, 1.2 in Scotland, and 1.3 in N Ireland. In Institutional churches the minister looked after an average of 1.8 churches, whereas Free church ministers looked after 0.9 churches, this latter because of the large number of part-time ministers working in Pentecostal churches. Across all denominations except the Roman Catholics, the minister was responsible for an average of 1.4 churches. In the Roman Catholic Church, the numbers are the other way round – they have an average of 1.2 priests per church.

The variations in the number of ministers by country is similar to the variations already seen in the number of churches. Growing denominations plant more churches and need more ministers; declining denominations normally see a reduction in both.

Church ministers were analysed by gender, and Figure 0.2.2 shows the overall trend in which the proportion of female ministers rises from 9% in 1995 (it was first measured in 1992) to 19% in 2020 and rising to 22% by 2030 if present trends continue.

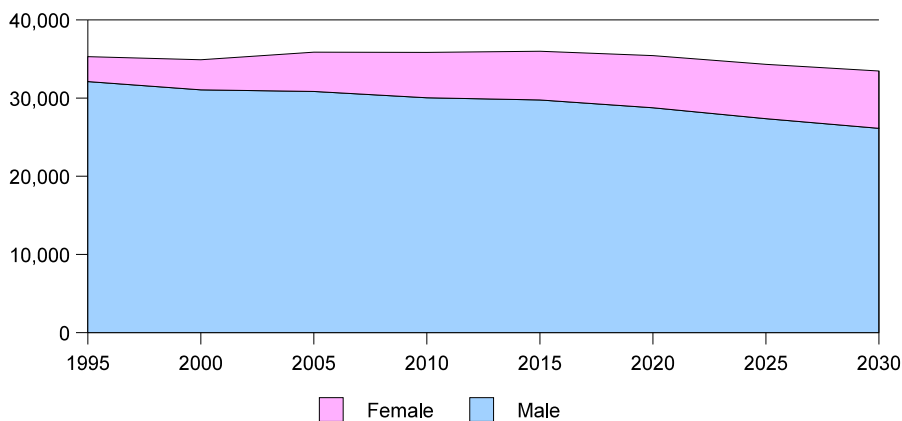


Figure 0.2.2: Number of UK ministers, by gender, 1995 to 2030E

Women are especially prevalent among Messy Church (50% in 2020), the Salvation Army (48%), Methodist (36%) and Anglican (32%) leadership, but are also present in other Small Denominations (26%), Presbyterian (20%), New Churches (16%), Baptist (15%), Pentecostal (14%) and Independent churches (5%).

**So what of the future?**

The mostly firm figures for 2015 to 2020 and the projections to 2025 show a declining number of church members across the UK, and especially in Wales and Scotland. The English membership figures show growth for three denominations not strongly present in Wales, Scotland or N Ireland – the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Smaller Denominations churches.

The analysis shows the impact of immigration in the Orthodox and Smaller Denominations (in the Diaspora churches) and continuing, though slowing, evangelicalism in the Pentecostal Churches and the consequential drive for mission and starting new groups of worshippers. Orthodoxy is not part of the evangelical scene but equally shares a vision for mission, undertaken by ordaining new priests and encouraging them to start new congregations.

True growth, as opposed to mere numerical growth, needs to be based on the authority of Scripture expressed in a person for mission, sometimes “outside the box” and independent of denominational structures. However, such experimentation involves the possibility of failure along the way, but crucial if the church is not only to survive but also to flourish.