

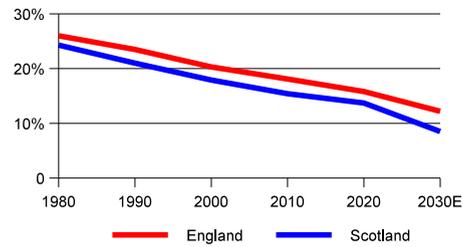
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If there was a prize for the number of key people you've influenced before you are 18, Greta Thunberg would probably be a strong contender. She has had an extraordinary time in the last year speaking at major conferences, going to key places, and meeting so many important world leaders. It's sometimes hard to remember she will only be 18 later on in 2020. She is part of the "Gen Z" generation. (Then follows a similar description of how the "Gen Z" generation got its name as given in the previous article on Page 16.2, and is not repeated here).

Different people give slightly different years of birth for each cohort, but the years for Gen Z are here taken as 2002 to 2020, that is, they are all 21st century! They weren't born when 9/11 happened (that's history for them); only a few were born when Concorde was mothballed in 2003 and someone born in 2005 was only 11 when the Brexit Referendum took place! In 2005 39% of the churches in England had no-one attending under the age of 11, and 49% had no-one between 11 and 14, so the number of Gen Z children in church is alarmingly few.

The latest large scale count of numbers of children at church was the 2016 Scottish Church Census where, as an overall percentage, rather more go to church than in England (nationally 6.4% across all ages in 2020 compared with 4.9%). The Scottish Census, however, broke down the numbers of children under 16 attending into three age-groups. It showed there was very little difference between boys and girls but a quarter, 27%, of all children in church were under 5, half, 52%, were between 5 and 11, and the remaining group, a fifth, 21%, were between 12 and 15. Collectively they were 15% of all Scottish churchgoers in 2016. In England the percentage in 2020 is estimated at 16%. These percentages differ significantly from earlier figures, as the graph indicates:

Figure 16.3: Percentage of total churchgoers who are aged under 15



A 1994 survey "Finding Faith" asked current churchgoers at what age they had started coming to church. Three-quarters, 72%, said before they were 15. Some of these had stopped going to church, but at the time of the survey had returned. Of those who had stopped going to church, 2% had done so when aged between 6 and 10 and 16% when aged 11 to 15. When did those now at church first experience a personal faith? Half, 51%, before they were 15. These results are similar to other surveys asking similar questions in years before 1994.

The peak age for leaving church was between 16 and 20, when two-fifths, 42%, had done so. The average length of time "out of church" was 10 years, but for those who had stopped before they were 15 it was longer, some 16 years.

The results of these studies are seriously challenging. What caused young people and those in their 30s to actually find faith? The 1994 survey asked this as well, and the results by age of commitment to Christ are shown in the following Table (note churchgoing was not in the 30s list!):

Table 16.3: Finding Faith by Age of Commitment

Teenagers	Those aged 26-40
POSITIVE FACTORS	
86% Church Attendance	74% Reading the Bible
68% Reading The Bible	66% Experience of Home Group
60% Friends	49% Reading a book other than a Bible
55% Worship experience	34% A particular Life event
34% Church activity	
NEGATIVE FACTORS	
39% Those content with no faith	36% Christian integrity
	33% Not knowing how to pray

A further survey along these lines for Gen Z and their parents would be invaluable in clarifying these trends for the new decade. Almost certainly the results today would be somewhat different, although friends, worship experience and Christian activities would still play a strong part. A recent Barna survey showed the huge importance of mothers encouraging churchgoing, and Christian grandparents also. Christian mothers also talk about the Bible (more than fathers), and especially about God's forgiveness (as do grandparents). Somewhere into this mix social media would also feature.

Sources: *Finding Faith in 1994*, CCBI Steering Committee, Christian Research, Eltham, London, 1994 Report; *Quadrant*, Christian Research, March 1998, Pages 1, 5 and 6; *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, English Church Census results, Christian Research, 2006; *The Powerful Influence of Mums in Christians' Households*, Barna Research, 13th May 2019, www.barna.com/research.