

# Statistics for Mission 2023



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Published 2024 by Data Services

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## Commentary

The annual Statistics for Mission survey seeks to collect summary attendance and participation information from Church of England churches. It is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of everything that every church does, rather to be an overview of aspects of church activities that are part of the life of most churches, such as attendance at worship, including at Easter and Christmas, along with baptisms, weddings, and funerals.

This report focuses, in the main, on national totals and trends (with equivalent information for each diocese available in accompanying published spreadsheets); however, much of the use of the information takes place locally, by diocesan colleagues and others working to understand and support local churches. The national figures are simply the aggregated stories of thousands of churches, big and small, seeking to worship faithfully and serve their communities as best they can.

The information contained in this report has been provided by thousands of clergy, churchwardens, and others. On behalf of all of those who make use of this information, I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to respond to the survey.

By many measures of attendance and participation, the Church of England grew from 2022 to 2023. Nevertheless, it remains smaller than it was in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendance, by most measures, remains below the projected pre-pandemic trend. For many people, therefore, the response to these figures will understandably be a combination of both optimism and concern.

Based on personal observations and what I have heard from churches, the growth from 2022 to 2023 is a combination of “new” joiners and people who have returned to in-person worship following the pandemic. I do not have sufficient information to allow an informed assessment of the balance between the two; indeed, in some cases such a simple distinction would not apply. The situation is likely to vary from church to church, particularly since those people who have returned to church may have done so because of the revival of some church services and activities that have taken time to restart.

Different users of the information summarised in this report will focus on different things, depending on their interests and responsibilities. In general I would encourage everyone to make use of as much of the information as they can, since everything sheds a little light on some part of the complex and multi-faceted Church of England. As ever, if there is additional analysis that would be of use, please let me know (see contact details on page 2): I would be delighted to receive suggestions for others ways in which the detailed dataset that I am privileged to curate, provided by thousands of churches over many years, can be put to good use.

## Church of England attendance and participation

### 2023 overview and recent trends

The Church of England’s Worshipping Community – its number of regular worshippers – was 1,007,000 people in 2023.

The Church of England’s all age average weekly attendance, which includes Sunday and midweek attendance, was 693,000 people in 2023 – 598,000 adults and 95,000 children aged under 16.

Many measures of church attendance and participation fell sharply from 2019 to 2020, because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, then recovered somewhat, including with further increases from 2022 to 2023, whilst remaining below their 2019 levels (Table 1).

Adult average weekly attendance in 2023, based on in-person attendance in October, was 19% lower than in 2019, and 4.5% higher than in 2022; child average weekly attendance in 2023 was 24% lower than in 2019, and 4.9% higher than in 2022.

The Worshipping Community of a church is defined as those people who attend worship regularly, once a month or more (whether in-person or “at home”). The total Worshipping Community of regular worshippers in 2023 was 10% lower than in 2019, and 2.5% higher than in 2022. Churches were once again encouraged to count their regular Church at Home worshippers in their Worshipping Community, to avoid excluding those people who were worshipping entirely at Church at Home services, and those people who attended a mixture of in-person and Church at Home services.

The number of people on church Electoral rolls in 2023 was 3.0% lower than in 2019, and 0.8% lower than in 2022.

Easter, Advent and Christmas attendance were all substantially higher in 2023 than in 2022, whilst remaining below their 2019 levels.

The numbers of baptisms and marriages in 2023 were lower than in 2022, approximately 25% below their 2019 levels. It appears that 2022 included significant numbers of baptisms and marriages that were rescheduled following pandemic-related disruption, and although some further rescheduling appears to have taken place in 2023 this fact in part explains the fall from 2022 to 2023.

The number of funerals taken by churches in 2023 was 15% lower than in 2019, and 6.4% lower than in 2022. The post-pandemic shift of funerals back to churches from crematoria/cemeteries continued in 2023.

The number of confirmations in 2023 was 20% lower than in 2019, and 1.3% lower than in 2022.

Table I: Changes in church attendance and participation from 2019 to 2020, from 2019 to 2023, and from 2022 to 2023

	Estimated change, 2019 to 2020	Estimated change, 2019 to 2023	Estimated change, 2022 to 2023
Worshipping Community	-7.3%	-10%	2.5%
Adult average weekly attendance (October)	-57%	-19%	4.5%
Child average weekly attendance (October)	-77%	-24%	4.9%
All age average weekly attendance (October)	-60%	-20%	4.6%
Adult average Sunday attendance (October)	-55%	-20%	3.4%
Child average Sunday attendance (October)	-74%	-22%	4.0%
All age average Sunday attendance (October)	-58%	-20%	3.4%
School service attendance (October)	Not available	0.5%	12%
Adult Usual Sunday attendance	Not available	-16%	3.9%
Child Usual Sunday attendance	Not available	-19%	5.7%
All age Usual Sunday attendance	Not available	-16%	4.1%
Electoral roll	-1.3%	-3.0%	-0.8%
Easter attendance	Not available	-20%	8.6%
Christmas attendance	-79%	-16%	20%
Advent attendance (congregation and community services)	-78%	-17%	11%
Advent attendance (civic and school services)	-97%	-18%	14%
Baptisms and thanksgivings	-81%	-24%	-17%
Marriages and services of prayer and dedication	-71%	-25%	-25%
Funerals in church	-35%	-10%	-2.8%
Funerals at crematoria/cemeteries	48%	-25%	-13%
Funerals total	-3.9%	-15%	-6.4%
Confirmations	-84%	-20%	-1.3%

## Comparing 2023 figures with the pre-pandemic situation

A great deal has changed over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. This section summarises some of the changes for several key measures of attendance and participation. Wherever possible, comparisons are based on the subset of churches that submitted information in both 2019 and 2023.

### Worshipping Community

The total Worshipping Community was 1,114,000 people in 2019; 982,000 people in 2022; and 1,007,000 people in 2023 (Table 2).

The Church of England's Worshipping Community in 2023 was 1.7% of the population of England.

The reported age distribution of churches' Worshipping Communities has changed somewhat since 2019, with a greater proportion aged 70 and over in 2023 than in 2019. It continues to be the case that people aged 70 and over make up a considerably larger proportion of the Church of England's Worshipping Community than of the population of England.

Table 2: Worshipping Community age distribution, 2019 and 2023<sup>1</sup>

		Age 0-10	Age 11-17	Age 18-69	Age 70+	Total
2019	Number	155,000	62,000	526,000	371,000	1,114,000
	Percentage	13.9%	5.6%	47.2%	33.3%	100%
2023	Number	129,000	55,000	465,000	357,000	1,007,000
	Percentage	12.8%	5.5%	46.2%	35.5%	100%
Population of England	Percentage	12.6%	8.2%	65.6%	13.5%	100%

Approximately 5% of the members of churches' Worshipping Communities in 2023 were people who were entirely or predominantly Church at Home worshippers, compared to 10% in 2021 and 6% in 2022.

### Average weekly and average Sunday attendance (October count)

Average weekly and average Sunday attendance figures are based on in-person attendance during October. Figures include attendance at church services and fresh expression of Church. Attendance at services for schools taking place in church is reported separately.

- The total all age average weekly attendance, which includes Sunday and midweek attendance, was 864,000 people in 2019; 663,000 people in 2022; and 693,000 people in 2023 (Table 8).
- 14% of the average weekly attendance was children and young people aged under 16 years old in both 2019 and 2023.
- The total all age average Sunday attendance was 716,000 people in 2019; 554,000 people in 2022; and 574,000 people in 2023.
- 14% of the average Sunday attendance was children and young people aged under 16 years old in 2019, and 13% in 2023.
- The total all age average weekly attendance at services for schools taking place in church was 182,000 people in 2019; 164,000 people in 2022; and 183,000 people in 2023.
- 77% of school service attendance was children and young people aged under 16 years old in 2019, and 76% in 2023.

<sup>1</sup> Age distribution is based on 9,749 returns from churches that submitted information in 2019 and 2023 and for which the Worshipping Community age breakdown matched the Worshipping Community total. Population figures are 2021 census data for England, taken from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/filters/71fa48fc-cbdf-44cd-8555-19908cb947e0/dimensions>

## Fresh expressions of Church

In October 2023, 17% of churches reported some attendance at in-person fresh expressions of Church (fxCs)<sup>2</sup>, compared to 21% of churches in October 2019<sup>3</sup> (Table 3).

The October attendance figures include attendance at church services and at fxCs. Some people attend both; in such cases, to avoid misleadingly inflating the figures through double-counting, we ask that, if possible, attendees are recorded only once per week. Reported attendance at fxCs should therefore be thought of as “additional” attendance, since it might not include those people who also attended a church service in that week.

In 2019 additional attendance at fxCs was 5.6% of the October average weekly attendance; in 2023 the figure was 5.5%. The change in adult and child attendance at fxCs was similar.

**Table 3: Attendance at fresh expressions of Church as a percentage of average weekly attendance (AWA), 2019 and 2023**

	% of churches reporting some fxC attendance during October	fxC attendance as % of adult AWA	fxC attendance as % of child AWA	fxC attendance as % of total AWA
2019	21%	3.9%	16.0%	5.6%
2023	17%	3.9%	15.3%	5.5%

## Baptisms and thanksgivings

The total number of people baptised or for whom a birth or adoption thanksgiving service was held was 89,600 in 2019; and 82,100 in 2022; and 67,800 in 2023.

The fall in baptisms from 2019 to 2023 was accompanied by a change in the age groups of people baptised, with a greater fraction of baptisms in 2023 being of children aged 1-4 than in 2019<sup>4</sup>. This suggests that, as we would expect, some of those people who would have been baptised as babies in 2020 or 2021 were baptised in 2023 as slightly older children (Table 4).

**Table 4: Age groups of people baptised and of people for whom there was a birth or adoption thanksgiving service, 2019 and 2023**

		Infants (<1 year)	Children (1-4 years)	Children (5-10 years)	Young people (11-17 years)	Adults (18+)	Total
2019	Baptisms	49,000	22,800	5,200	2,300	7,300	86,700
	Thanksgivings	1,980	800	120	20	30	2,950
	<b>Total</b>	<b>51,000</b>	<b>23,600</b>	<b>5,300</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>7,400</b>	<b>89,600</b>
2023	Baptisms	28,800	22,500	5,100	2,000	7,700	66,200
	Thanksgivings	860	620	100	20	30	1,630
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29,700</b>	<b>23,100</b>	<b>5,200</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>7,800</b>	<b>67,800</b>

Thanksgivings made up 3.3% of the total in 2019, and 2.4% of the total in 2023.

Following an increase in baptisms from 2021 to 2022, most likely including some that had been rescheduled following pandemic-related disruption, the number of baptisms fell sharply in 2023, though remained above the projected pre-pandemic trend. Despite the substantial bounce-back in baptism numbers, there are in the region of 50,000 people not yet baptised who would have been baptised had there not been a pandemic<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> A fresh expression of Church is a form of Church established primarily for people who are not yet “members” of any church – for more information see the notes on the Statistics for Mission survey in Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> Based on 11,386 returns from churches that submitted information in 2019 and 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Based on 11,386 returns from churches that submitted information in 2019 and 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Based on comparing baptism figures with the projected pre-pandemic trends from 2020-2023.

Despite the fall in baptisms overall between 2019 and 2023, the number of adult baptisms has increased, from 7,400 in 2019 to 7,800 in 2023. Again, some of this increase may be the result of baptisms that were postponed during the pandemic.

### Marriages

The total number of marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriage was 31,700 in 2019; 31,700 in 2022; and 23,800 in 2023.

Following an increase in marriages from 2021 to 2022, most likely including some that had been rescheduled following pandemic-related disruption, the number of marriages fell sharply in 2023, though remained above the projected pre-pandemic trend. There are in the region of 5,000 weddings that did not take place in churches because of the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>

Services of prayer and dedication after civil marriage made up 6.3% of the total in 2019, and 7.3% of the total in 2023<sup>7</sup>.

### Funerals

The total number of funerals was 114,700 in 2019; 103,900 in 2022; and 97,200 in 2023.

In contrast to many other aspects of church life, churches were able to continue to offer funeral ministry during the pandemic. However, there was a pandemic-associated shift of funerals away from churches and to crematoria/cemeteries in 2020; this shift seems to have been temporary, with the percentage of funerals that took place in church having returned to pre-pandemic levels (62% of funerals were in church in 2019, 42% in 2020, 58% in 2021, 64% in 2022, and 66% in 2023).

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<sup>6</sup> Based on comparing marriage figures with the projected pre-pandemic trends from 2020-2023.

<sup>7</sup> Based on 11,386 returns from churches that submitted information in 2019 and 2023.

## Church-level summary information

The continued impact of the pandemic and associated lockdowns on the distribution of church sizes is shown in Table 5. In 2019, a “middle sized” church had an all age average weekly attendance of 34.5 people; in 2023 the equivalent figure was 26 people<sup>8</sup>.

Table 5: Church size distribution summary, 2019 and 2023<sup>9</sup>

	5th percentile		25th percentile		median (middle) church		75th percentile		95th percentile		mean (average) church	
	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023	2019	2023
Worshipping Community	9	8	21	19	<b>45</b>	<b>38</b>	95	82	249	226	77	69
All age average weekly attendance	3	2	13.5	10	<b>34.5</b>	<b>26</b>	79.5	62	195	158	62	49
Adult average weekly attendance	3	2	13	9.5	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	68	53.5	162	131.5	53	43
Child average weekly attendance	0	0	0	0	<b>3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	10	7	35	29	8.9	6.8
Adult Usual Sunday attendance	7	6	14	13	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>	51	42	125	100	42	36
Child Usual Sunday attendance	0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	7	5	26	21	6.3	5.1
Easter attendance	0	0	25	20	<b>52</b>	<b>40</b>	103	82	254	201	84	67
Christmas attendance	0	0	33	27	<b>82</b>	<b>68</b>	200	165	585	492	170	143
Baptisms and thanksgivings	0	0	1	0	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	8	6	24	18	6.3	4.7
Marriages and services of prayer & dedication	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	3	2	8	6	2.1	1.6
Funerals in churches, crematoria, & cemeteries	0	0	1	1	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	10	9	28	23	7.9	6.7

<sup>8</sup> For comparable figures from 2020, see Statistics for Mission 2020, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/26026>; for figures from 2021, see Statistics for Mission 2021, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/2021StatisticsForMission.pdf>; for figures from 2022, see Statistics for Mission 2022, <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/statisticsformission2022.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Worshipping Community figures are based on 10,330 churches for which single-church returns with non-zero Worshipping Community were received in 2019 and 2023. All other figures are based on 11,064 churches for which single-church returns were received in 2019 and 2023.

### Longer-term trends

It is often helpful to consider attendance and participation numbers over a longer time period than just a few years, particularly given the recent pandemic-related disruption. Figures 1-6 and Tables 8-10 make it clear what a huge impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on church activities in 2020. For most measures, the sharp fall in 2020 was followed by a steep rise in 2021, and further increases in 2022 and 2023.

Figure 1: Summary attendance figures, 2009-2023

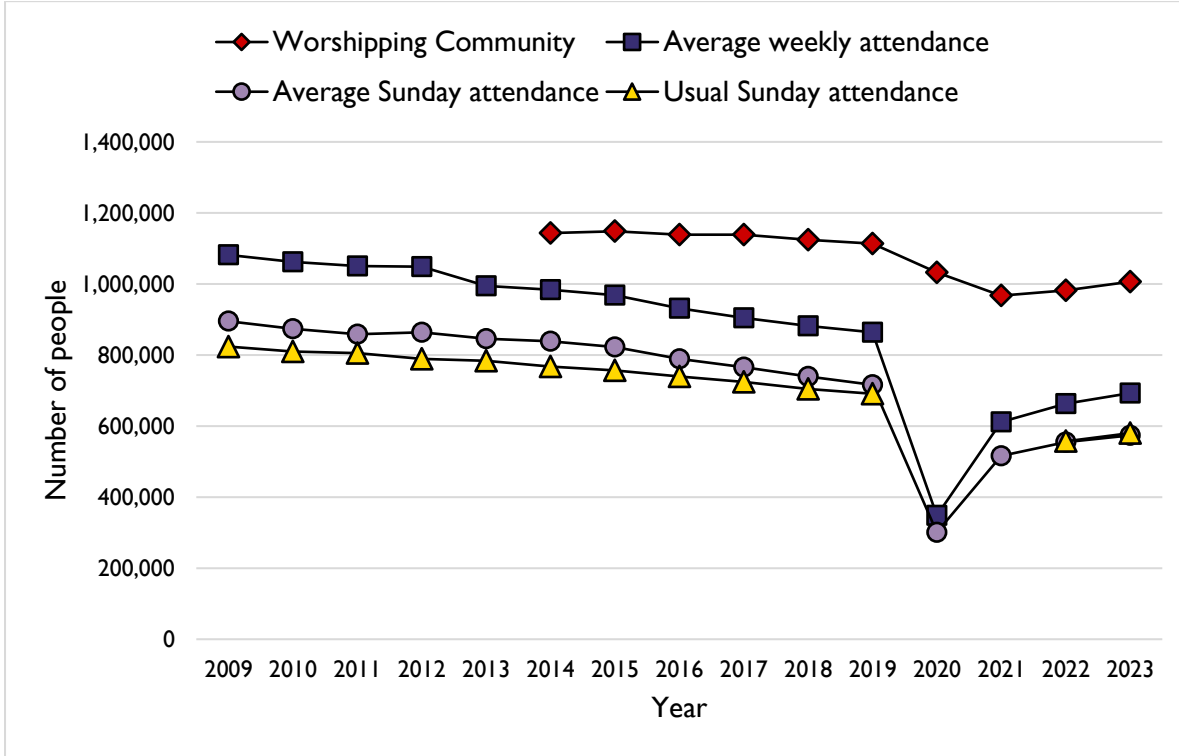
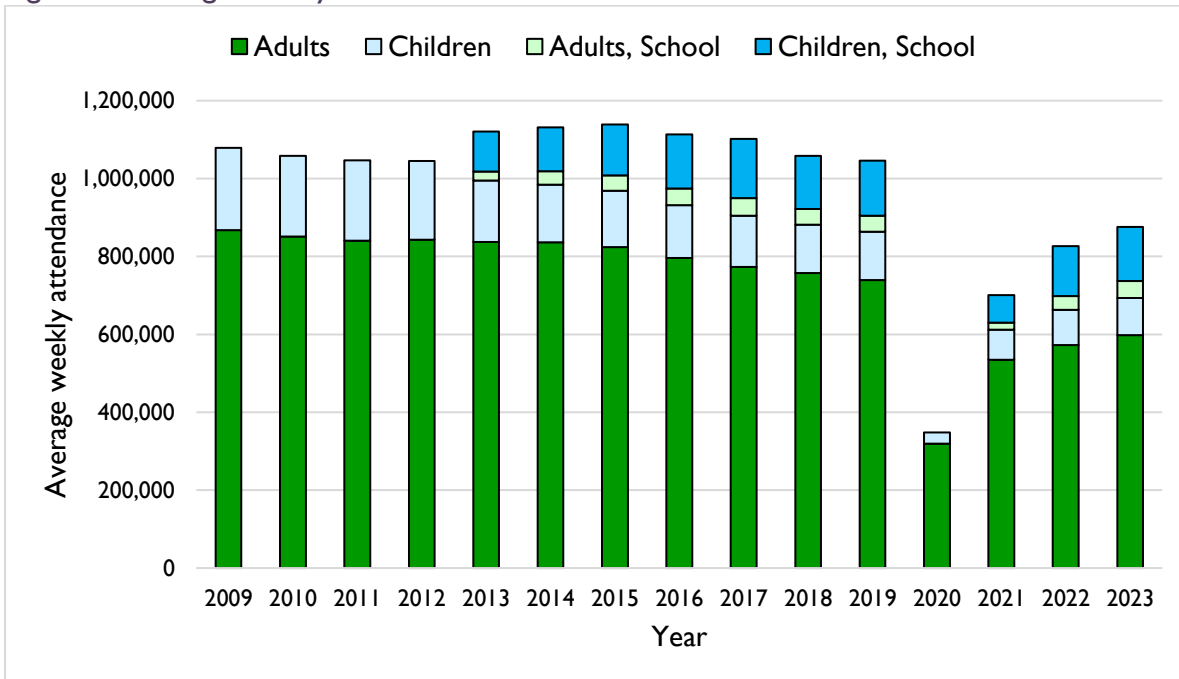


Figure 2: Average weekly attendance, and school service attendance, 2009-2023<sup>10</sup>



<sup>10</sup> Attendance at services for schools taking place in church was first collected separately in 2013 (but not collected in 2020). Prior to that, some churches included attendance at school services in with their “church” attendance figures.

Figure 3: Easter attendance and communicants, 2009-2023<sup>11</sup>

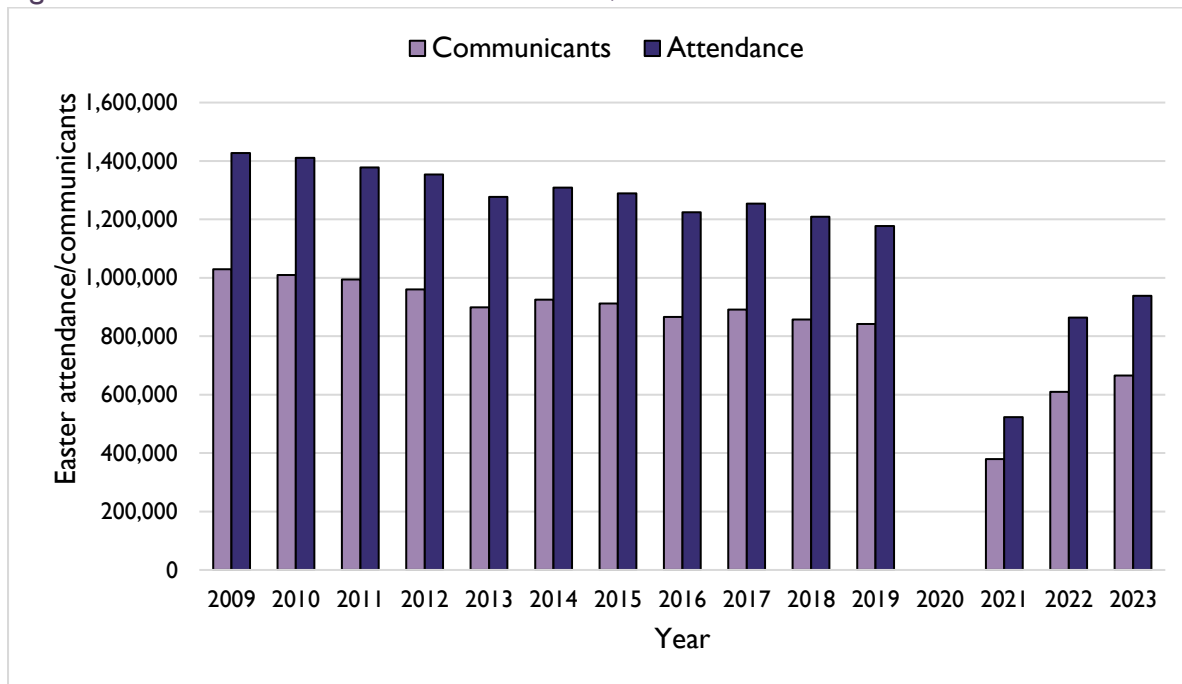
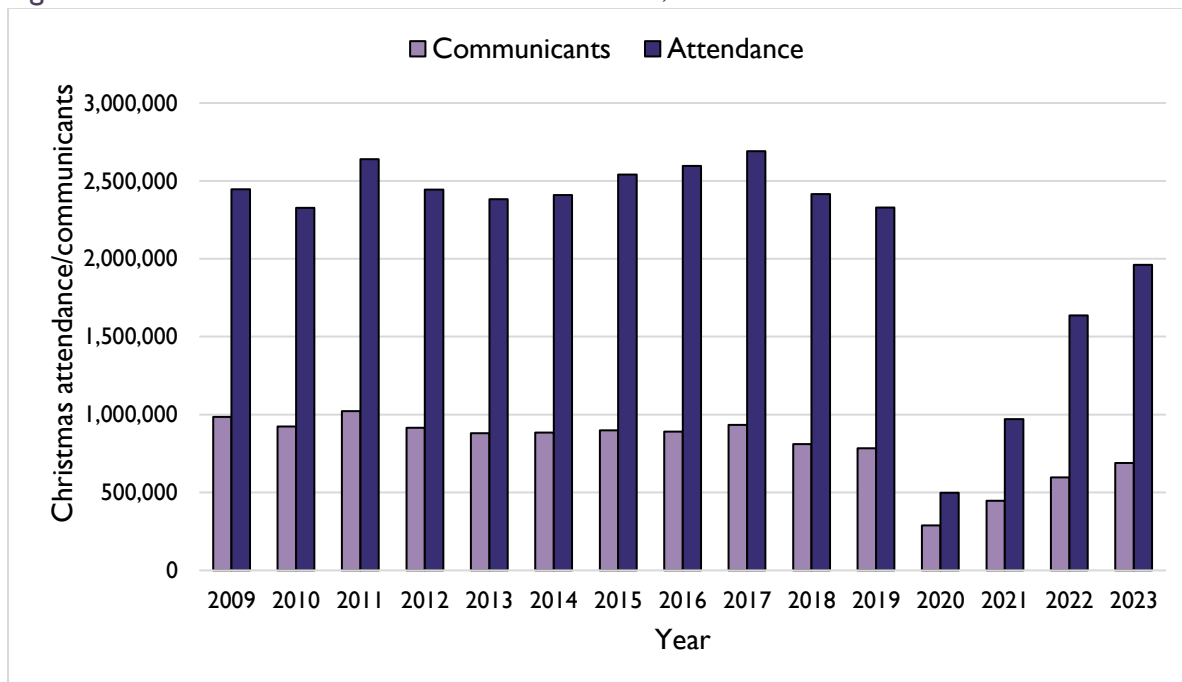


Figure 4: Christmas attendance and communicants, 2009-2023



<sup>11</sup> Easter communicants and attendance figures were not collected in 2020.

Figure 5: Numbers of baptisms, marriages, and funerals, 2009-2023

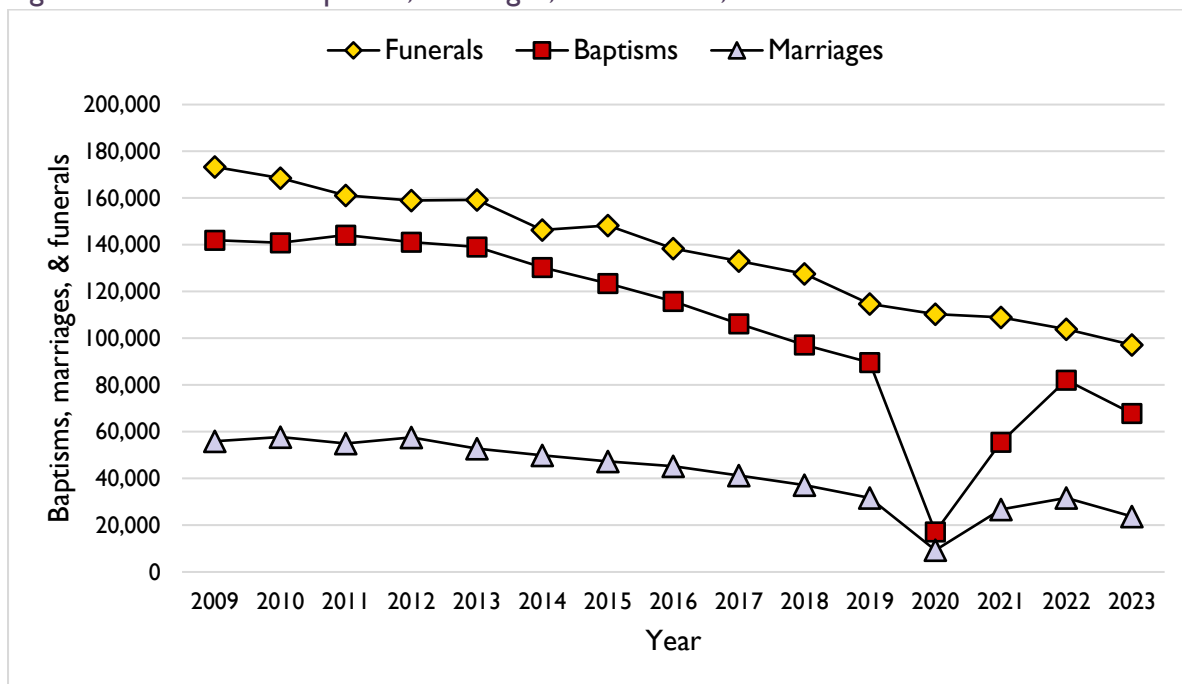
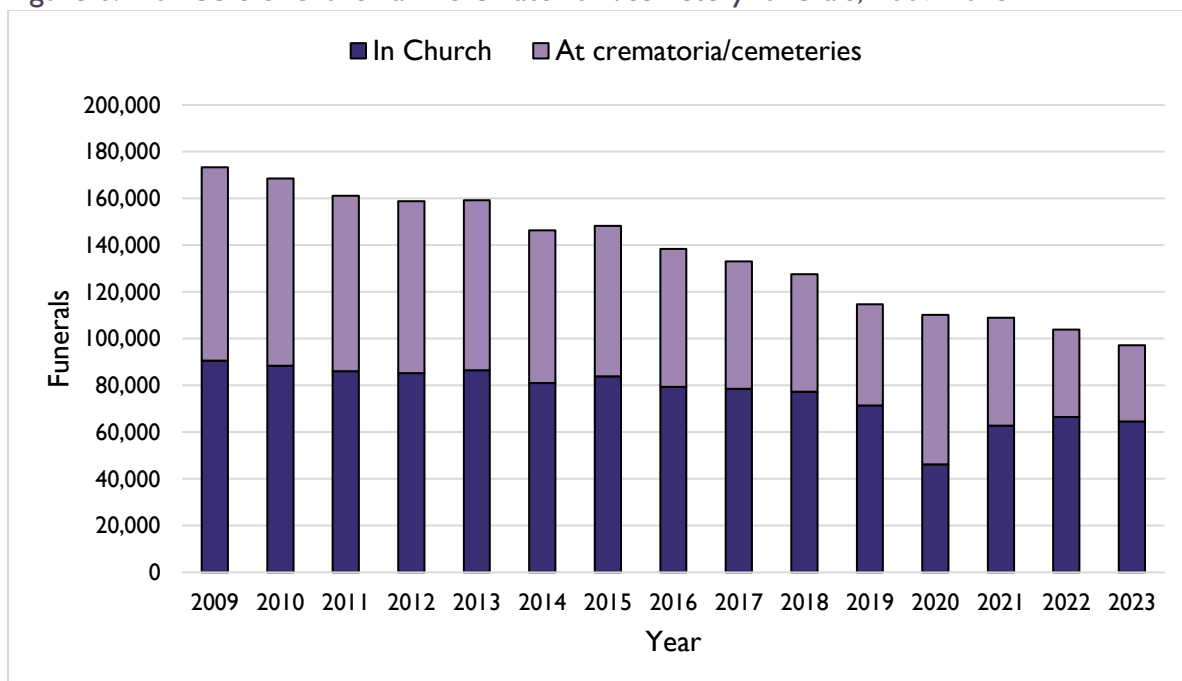


Figure 6: Numbers of church and crematorium/cemetery funerals, 2009-2023



### Comparison with projected pre-pandemic trends

As previously reported<sup>12</sup>, most measures of attendance and participation were showing a gradual decline over many decades until 2019. It is impossible to say what would have happened if there had not been a pandemic, but it is reasonable to assume that the decline would have continued. We would therefore not expect numbers to automatically return to their 2019 values, even once all pandemic effects are over.

Figure 7 shows recent October attendance data alongside projected pre-pandemic trends. These trends are not telling us what would have happened if there had not been a pandemic, but they show what would have happened if the pre-pandemic trends (from 2014 to 2019) had continued.

Adult attendance, as well as being some way below its 2019 levels, remains below the projected pre-pandemic trend. Child attendance is closer to the projected pre-pandemic trend (indeed, child average Sunday attendance is slightly above the pre-pandemic trend).

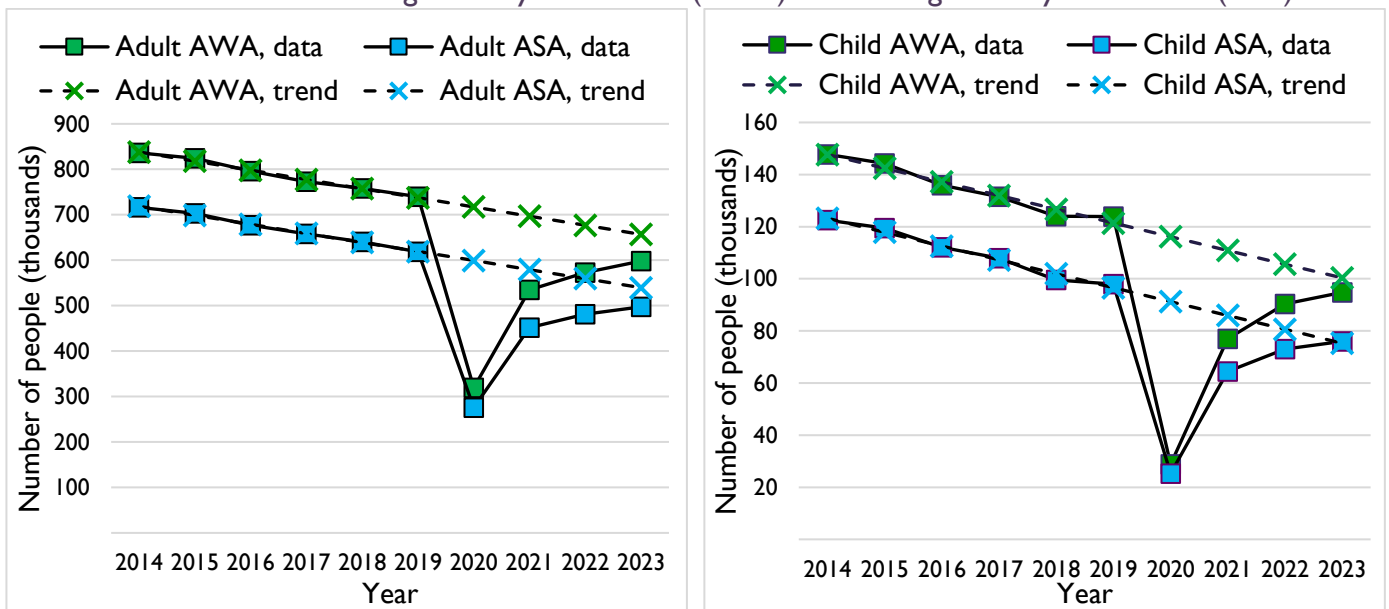
Table 6 shows the comparison between the 2023 figures and the projected pre-pandemic trend, for those variables where the trend is a good fit to the data. In general, child attendance is closer to the projected pre-pandemic trend than adult attendance, though it should be noted that child attendance was declining at a faster rate than adult attendance prior to the pandemic.

Adult average weekly attendance (AWA) in 2023 was 9% below the projected pre-pandemic trend; Child average weekly attendance (AWA) was 6% below the projected trend.

Adult average Sunday attendance (ASA) in 2023 was 8% below the projected pre-pandemic trend; Child average Sunday attendance (ASA) was 1% above the projected trend.

Baptisms and marriages in 2023 were above the projected trend, suggesting that during 2023 there was some further catching up of baptisms and marriages that were postponed due to pandemic-related disruption.

Figure 7: Comparison of data with projected pre-pandemic trends; figures show attendance data derived from the October count: Average weekly attendance (AWA) and Average Sunday attendance (ASA)



<sup>12</sup> Statistics for Mission 2019, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/21969>

Table 6: Comparison between 2023 and projected pre-pandemic trend<sup>13</sup>

	Difference between 2023 data and projected pre-pandemic trend
Adult average weekly attendance (October)	-9%
Child average weekly attendance (October)	-6%
All age average weekly attendance (October)	-8%
Adult average Sunday attendance (October)	-8%
Child average Sunday attendance (October)	+1%
All age average Sunday attendance (October)	-7%
Adult Usual Sunday attendance	-8%
Child Usual Sunday attendance	-1%
All age Usual Sunday attendance	-8%
Baptisms and thanksgivings	+20%
Marriages and services of prayer and dedication	+26%
Funerals total	+5%

## Children and young people

One of the three priorities of the Church of England’s “Vision and Strategy” is “to be a church that is younger and more diverse”<sup>14</sup>. Ministry with children and young people is, of course, of great importance in this.

Churches’ engagement with children and young people is measured in a number of different ways, including: October attendance and Usual Sunday attendance; being part of a church’s Worshipping Community; baptisms; school services taking place in church; leading acts of worship in schools.

Some of this information is summarised above. Additional information can be found below.

### October attendance at school services taking place in church

As well as the children included in each church’s average weekly attendance and average Sunday attendance, described above, the October count includes attendance at services for schools taking place in church. 19% of churches reported some child attendance at services for schools in October 2023, with an average weekly attendance at school services taking place in church of 140,000 children, down by 1.1% from 2019 and up by 9.1% from 2022.

### Acts of worship in schools

Churches’ ministry teams were less likely to have led acts of worship in schools in 2023 than in 2019. In 2019, 40% of churches led an act of worship in schools at least monthly; the equivalent figure in 2023 was 35%<sup>15</sup> (Table 7).

<sup>13</sup> Table 6 only contains information for those variables where the straight-line trend has a correlation of >0.9 with the data from 2014-2019

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-and-strategy>

<sup>15</sup> Based on 11,386 returns from churches that submitted information in 2019 and 2023.

Table 7: Frequency with which churches led acts of worship in schools, 2019 and 2023

	More than weekly	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Once or twice a term	Occasionally	Never
2019	3.4%	17.5%	9.0%	10.3%	11.7%	11.0%	37.0%
2023	2.8%	15.6%	7.9%	8.6%	12.2%	14.5%	38.5%

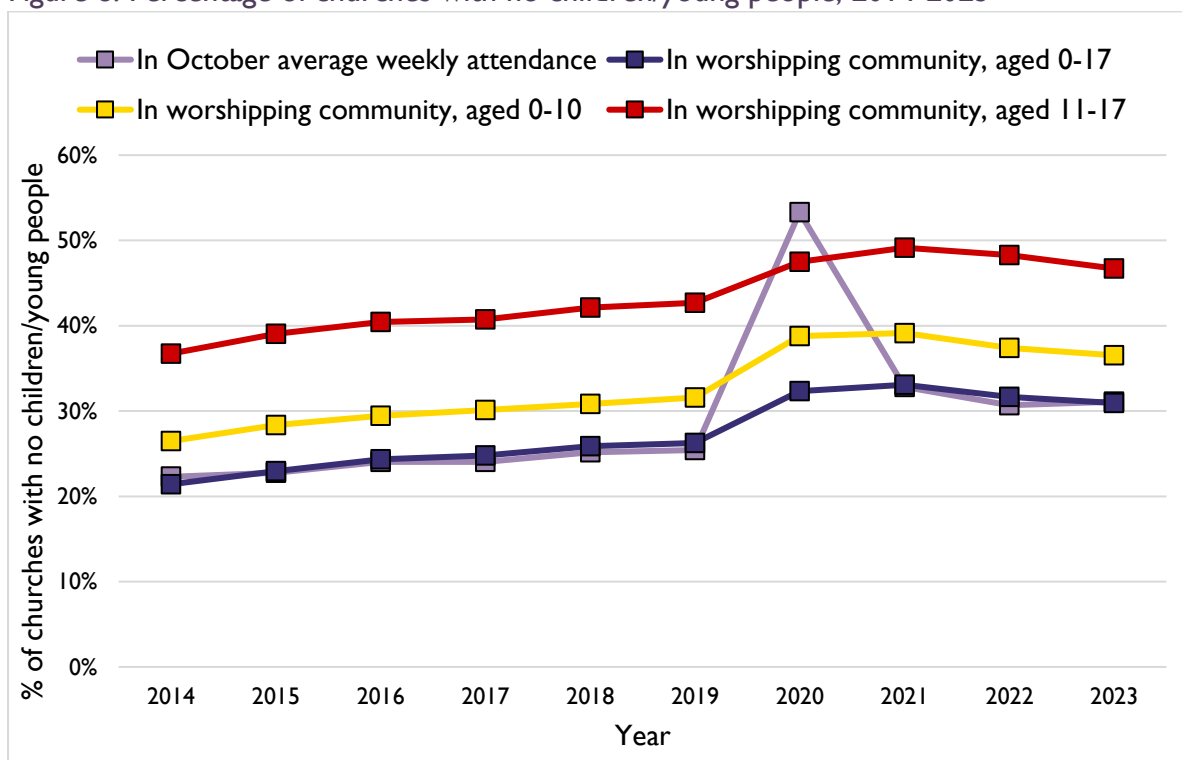
### Churches with no children and young people

As shown in Table 5, above, a significant number of churches report no children/young people worshipping with them in October, or as part of their Usual Sunday attendance. Similarly, a significant number of churches report no children/young people in their Worshipping Community of regular worshippers.

In 2023, 31% of churches had an October average weekly attendance of zero children aged under 16, compared to 25% of churches in 2019. Similarly, in 2023, 31% of churches had no children in their Worshipping Community, compared to 26% of churches in 2019.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 8 shows trends in the proportion of churches with no children worshipping with them in October and with no children as part of their Worshipping Community.

Figure 8: Percentage of churches with no children/young people, 2014-2023



### Churches with large numbers of children and young people

In 2023, there were 830 churches with an October average weekly attendance of 25 or more children aged under 16, compared to 760 churches in 2022 and 1,270 churches in 2019<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Average weekly attendance figures are based on those churches that submitted data; Worshipping Community figures are based on those churches with a non-zero worshipping community for which the total matched the age breakdown. A different set of churches is included each year, so the comparison over time is not perfectly like-for-like.

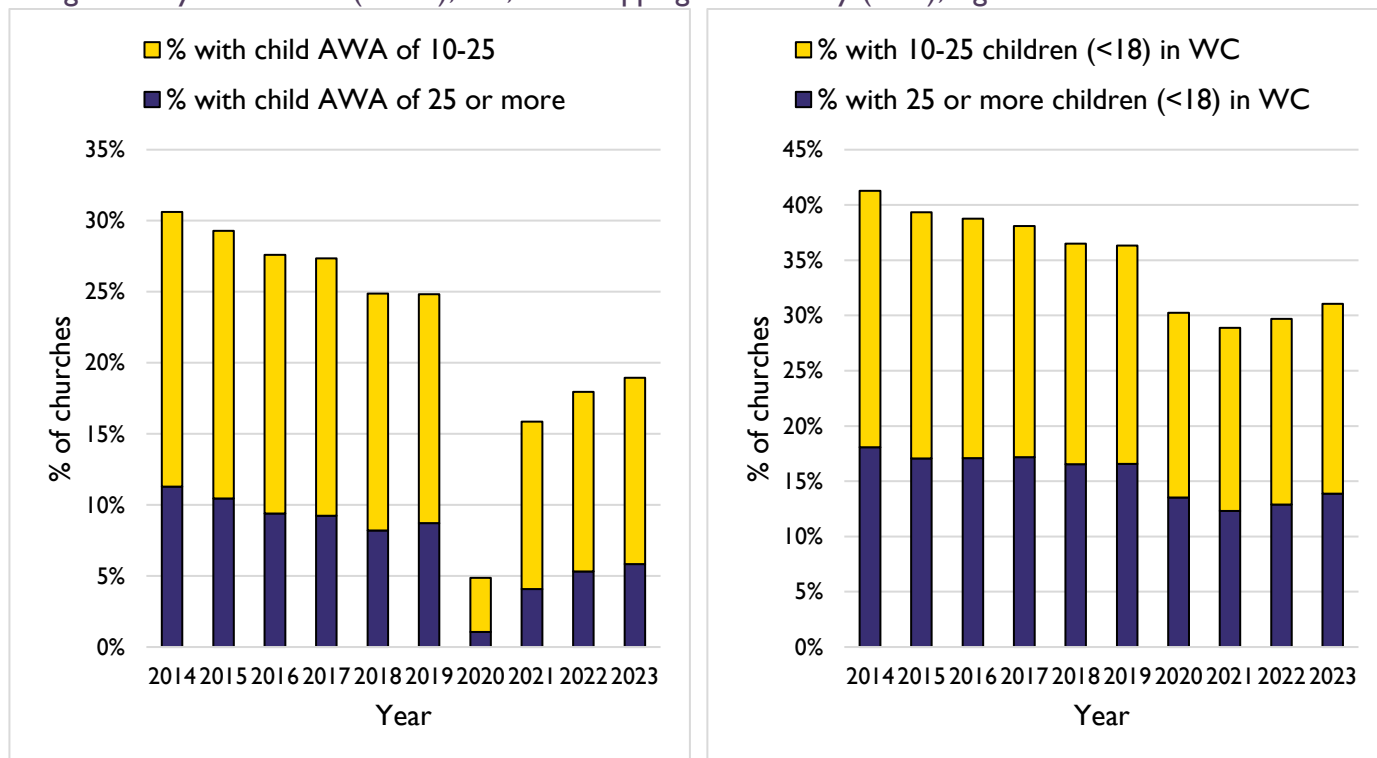
<sup>17</sup> These figures include data submitted by churches as well as estimated figures for churches that did not submit returns; some of the records are joint returns on behalf of more than one church.

In 2023, there were 1,810 churches with an October average weekly attendance of between 10 and 25 children aged under 16, compared to 1,750 churches in 2022 and 2,300 churches in 2019.

Trends in the proportion of churches with large numbers of children/young people are shown in Figure 9.

Figures 8 and 9 both illustrate the gradual reduction of children and young people in church prior to the pandemic. The large impact of the pandemic on child average weekly attendance is very clear, along with some post-pandemic recovery.

Figure 9: Percentage of churches with large numbers of children/young people, 2014-2023<sup>18</sup>: October average weekly attendance (AWA), left; Worshipping Community (WC), right



## Church at Home

Many churches began offering “Church at Home” services – those services offered online, by phone, post, email, and other means – in 2020. Many churches have continued to offer Church at Home services since.

Unsurprisingly, as pandemic-related restrictions eased, and people began to return to church, not all churches have continued to offer these services. There are several reasons why churches might have stopped offering Church at Home services, including lack of demand and lack of resources to offer both Church at Home services and to revive in-person services and other activities.

In 2020, 71% of churches reported offering at least one type of Church at Home service during October. Directly comparable figures are not available for 2022, because of a reduction the number of questions asked of churches; however, a direct comparison can be made between the number of churches reporting offering Church at Home services during October 2023 (31%)<sup>19</sup>, October 2022 (35%) and October 2021 (51%)<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> More precisely, this is the percentage of records, not churches, some records being joint returns on behalf of more than one church. Average weekly attendance figures are based on those churches that submitted data; Worshipping Community figures are based on those churches with a non-zero worshipping community for which the total matched the age breakdown. A different set of churches is included each year, so the comparison over time is not perfectly like-for-like.

<sup>19</sup> Based on 11,623 returns from churches that submitted information in 2022 and 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Based on 11,225 returns from churches that submitted information in 2021 and 2022.

Church at Home services, for those churches that offer them, are generally part of their weekly pattern of worship, rather than being occasional events. Of churches that offered Church at Home services in October 2023, 78% offered them each week, compared to 79% in October 2022, 84% in October 2021, and 90% in October 2020.

Churches were asked about the number of people attending their Church at Home services. These numbers are almost impossible to collect consistently, given that it is hard to know how many people are viewing a service on any one device and the fact that many of the headline measures offered by popular online platforms refer to very short-duration views, often unhelpfully and artificially boosted by “autoplay”. While large reported figures can help to highlight those churches whose Church at Home services might be particularly popular, because of the variable and sometimes wildly misleading numbers that online platforms provide, aggregating the figures to produce national or diocesan totals would be not be meaningful<sup>21</sup>. However, it is likely that tens of thousands of people each week attend Church at Home services, some of whom may also attend services in person.

Although Church at Home attendance numbers should not be aggregated because of the challenges involved in counting such attendance accurately, the *trends* may be informative; overall Church at Home attendance halved from 2021 to 2022, and fell by a quarter from 2022 to 2023<sup>22</sup>. Church at Home attendance in 2023 was therefore approximately a third of what it was in 2021.

Churches were also asked to report the number of people in their Worshipping Communities who were entirely or predominantly Church at Home worshippers. Given the anonymity of many online platforms, this is not necessarily straightforward, so the figures need to be treated as rough estimates. As an indicative aggregate figure, churches reported that approximately 5% of their Worshipping Community at the end of 2023 was people who were entirely or predominantly Church at Home worshippers, compared to 6% in 2022 and 10% in 2021.

One example illustrates the challenge of counting Church at Home attendance meaningfully: I have come across a weekly service that is viewed a few thousand times, where “viewed” means that the service was played in full<sup>23</sup>. This number contrasts markedly with the headline metric presented by Facebook that gives a figure of over 100,000 “views” per service; however, in the region of 98% of those views are of very short duration – just a few seconds – likely as a result of Facebook’s “autoplay” function. To report a figure of 100,000 as though it were equivalent to people attending an act of worship would be extremely misleading, akin to counting those people driving past a church while a service is taking place as part of a church’s attendance figures. In this example the inflated number is so large as to clearly ring alarm bells, but there are likely to be cases where much smaller numbers are similarly inflated (e.g. from 5 to 200). Without detailed case-by-case investigation it is not possible to determine which are meaningful and which inflated, and therefore it is not possible to give meaningful national or diocesan totals for attendance at Church at Home services.

### New congregations and new worshipping communities

One of the three priorities of the Church of England’s “Vision and Strategy” is “to be a church where mixed ecology is the norm”, as part of which there is a mission to create “ten thousand new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social, and digital”<sup>24</sup>. This work is being monitored in a number of different ways, one of which is the “one off” question asked in the 2023 Statistics for Mission survey (and to be repeated in the 2024 survey). This question asked each church to report the number of new congregations/new worshipping communities that began in 2023, as well as the number of congregations/worshipping communities that came to an end in 2023. It is likely that some of those things that started in 2023 were revivals of congregations/worshipping communities that had ceased to meet during the pandemic.

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<sup>21</sup> Further discussion of this point can be found in Church at Home 2020, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/25151>

<sup>22</sup> Based on the proportion of churches offering Church at Home services in each year, with “attendance” trends estimated from the subset of churches that reported some Church at Home attendance in both of the years in question.

<sup>23</sup> Some of those views are likely to have involved more than one person watching on a single device (though some might have played to an empty room), so the number of “viewers” may well be somewhat higher.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-and-strategy>

In total, 1,410 new congregations or new worshipping communities were reported as having been started in 2023, while 540 congregations/worshipping communities came to an end in 2023 – i.e. a net increase of 870 congregations/worshipping communities.

Because information was not received from all churches, these numbers are likely to be a slight underestimate.

9% of churches started at least one new congregation/worshipping community in 2023, while in 4% of churches at least one congregation/worshipping community came to an end in 2023.

Of those churches starting a new congregation/worshipping community in 2023, 82% started one, 14% started two, and 4% started three or more.

Of those churches where a congregation/worshipping community came to an end in 2023, in 88% one came to an end, in 10% two came to an end, and in 2% three or more came to an end.

Table 8: Attendance and participation summary, 2009-2023<sup>25</sup>

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Worshipping Community	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,143,000	1,148,000	1,139,000	1,139,000	1,124,000	1,114,000	1,032,000	967,000	982,000	1,007,000
Adult average weekly attendance	867,000	851,000	840,000	843,000	837,000	836,000	824,000	796,000	773,000	758,000	740,000	319,000	535,000	572,000	598,000
Child average weekly attendance	211,000	208,000	207,000	202,000	158,000	148,000	144,000	136,000	132,000	124,000	124,000	29,000	77,000	90,000	95,000
All age average weekly attendance	1,082,000	1,062,000	1,050,000	1,049,000	995,000	984,000	969,000	932,000	904,000	882,000	864,000	348,000	612,000	663,000	693,000
Adult average Sunday attendance	758,000	741,000	728,000	733,000	722,000	716,000	703,000	677,000	658,000	640,000	619,000	276,000	451,000	481,000	498,000
Child average Sunday attendance	134,000	130,000	127,000	128,000	124,000	123,000	119,000	112,000	108,000	100,000	98,000	25,000	64,000	73,000	76,000
All age average Sunday attendance	895,000	874,000	858,000	864,000	846,000	839,000	823,000	789,000	766,000	740,000	716,000	301,000	516,000	554,000	574,000
Adult average school service attendance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	23,000	35,000	40,000	42,000	46,000	40,000	41,000	n/a	18,000	36,000	43,000
Child average school service attendance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	103,000	113,000	131,000	139,000	152,000	137,000	141,000	n/a	71,000	128,000	140,000
All age average school service attendance	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	126,000	148,000	171,000	182,000	198,000	177,000	182,000	n/a	89,000	164,000	183,000
Adult Usual Sunday attendance	704,000	692,000	689,000	675,000	672,000	659,000	652,000	640,000	629,000	613,000	602,000	n/a	n/a	489,000	508,000
Child Usual Sunday attendance	120,000	118,000	116,000	114,000	112,000	108,000	104,000	100,000	96,000	92,000	89,000	n/a	n/a	68,000	72,000
All age Usual Sunday attendance	824,000	810,000	805,000	789,000	784,000	767,000	756,000	740,000	725,000	705,000	691,000	n/a	n/a	557,000	580,000

<sup>25</sup> In 2013 the October count question was altered to ask explicitly about attendance at school services taking place in church, and therefore October attendance figures pre- and post-2013 should be compared with caution, particularly in the case of child attendance, since it is clear that prior to 2013 some school service attendance had been reported in the October figures.

Table 9: Easter, Christmas, and Advent attendance summary, 2009-2023

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Easter communicants	1,030,000	1,010,000	994,000	960,000	898,000	926,000	912,000	866,000	891,000	857,000	842,000	n/a	379,000	610,000	665,000
Easter attendance	1,427,000	1,411,000	1,378,000	1,354,000	1,277,000	1,308,000	1,289,000	1,224,000	1,254,000	1,209,000	1,177,000	n/a	523,000	864,000	938,000
Christmas communicants	985,000	923,000	1,023,000	916,000	880,000	885,000	898,000	891,000	934,000	810,000	784,000	288,000	447,000	596,000	689,000
Christmas attendance	2,446,000	2,327,000	2,639,000	2,445,000	2,382,000	2,409,000	2,541,000	2,596,000	2,691,000	2,416,000	2,328,000	499,000	970,000	1,636,000	1,961,000
Advent attendance (congregation & community services)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,229,000	2,377,000	2,481,000	2,334,000	2,551,000	2,547,000	563,000	1,309,000	1,894,000	2,104,000
Advent attendance (civic & school services)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,578,000	2,780,000	2,878,000	2,808,000	3,009,000	2,873,000	95,000	800,000	2,059,000	2,346,000

Table 10: Numbers of baptisms, marriages, funerals, and confirmations, 2009-2023

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Baptisms and thanksgivings	141,900	140,900	144,200	141,100	139,100	130,300	123,400	115,800	106,200	97,200	89,600	17,200	55,500	82,100	67,800
Marriages and services of prayer and dedication	56,000	57,700	55,000	57,600	52,800	49,900	47,300	45,300	41,300	37,200	31,700	9,300	26,800	31,700	23,800
Funerals in church	90,600	88,400	86,000	85,300	86,600	81,000	83,800	79,400	78,500	77,400	71,400	46,200	62,800	66,400	64,600
Funerals at crematoria/cemeteries	82,800	80,200	75,100	73,500	72,700	65,400	64,500	59,000	54,500	50,300	43,300	64,100	46,200	37,400	32,600
Funerals, total	173,300	168,600	161,100	158,900	159,300	146,400	148,300	138,400	133,100	127,600	114,700	110,300	109,000	103,900	97,200
Confirmations	25,000	22,300	22,200	22,500	19,900	18,000	16,700	15,900	15,300	14,500	13,400	2,200	6,400	10,900	10,700

## Diocesan statistics

Diocesan summary information is shown in Table I I. Diocesan attendance and participation trends, showing figures from 2009-2023, can be found in an electronic appendix: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/research-and-statistics/key-areas-research#church-attendance-statistics>

Table I I: Diocesan summary statistics, 2023

Ref. no.	Diocese/area	Province	Population (2021 census)	Area (square miles)	Population density (people per square mile)	Number of benefices	Number of parishes	Number of churches	% of churches providing figures in both 2019 and 2023
1	Bath & Wells	C	980,000	1,610	600	173	459	558	73%
2	Birmingham	C	1,599,000	290	5,420	137	147	180	94%
3	Blackburn	Y	1,384,000	930	1,480	167	225	275	79%
5	Bristol	C	1,065,000	470	2,230	99	167	200	83%
6	Canterbury	C	981,000	970	1,020	99	199	313	69%
7	Carlisle	Y	498,000	2,570	190	106	226	325	67%
8	Chelmsford	C	3,279,000	1,530	2,130	303	466	575	85%
9	Chester	Y	1,677,000	1,030	1,600	213	264	336	68%
10	Chichester	C	1,704,000	1,450	1,180	273	347	469	82%
11	Coventry	C	896,000	700	1,320	125	204	240	90%
12	Derby	C	1,064,000	990	1,080	134	252	312	91%
13	Durham	Y	1,475,000	980	1,530	168	205	257	82%
14	Ely	C	803,000	1,530	500	141	303	326	77%
15	Exeter	C	1,214,000	2,570	470	146	483	594	70%
16	Gloucester	C	690,000	1,130	610	90	295	376	85%
17	Guildford	C	1,077,000	530	2,020	138	157	211	82%
18	Hereford	C	322,000	1,650	200	77	339	398	79%
19	Leicester	C	1,086,000	830	1,290	102	245	312	82%
20	Lichfield	C	2,202,000	1,730	1,270	233	422	542	85%
21	Lincoln	C	1,093,000	2,670	410	180	476	622	43%
22	Liverpool	Y	1,621,000	390	4,130	124	160	232	70%
23	London	C	4,246,000	280	16,010	408	402	469	80%
24	Manchester	Y	2,233,000	420	5,330	176	256	318	79%
25	Newcastle	Y	832,000	2,100	400	123	170	235	68%
26	Norwich	C	928,000	1,800	520	158	554	640	52%
27	Oxford	C	2,511,000	2,210	1,100	286	607	810	80%
28	Peterborough	C	971,000	1,140	830	127	347	380	83%
29	Portsmouth	C	784,000	420	1,900	102	129	165	90%
31	Rochester	C	1,375,000	540	2,570	170	210	258	88%
32	St. Albans	C	1,978,000	1,120	1,750	187	338	402	90%
33	St. Edms & Ipswich	C	684,000	1,430	480	111	444	481	74%
34	Salisbury	C	1,148,000	2,130	539	163	459	608	70%
35	Sheffield	Y	1,278,000	610	2,140	139	167	207	83%
36	Sodor & Man	Y	86,000	220	390	11	15	36	75%
37	Southwark	C	2,880,000	320	9,030	263	295	354	85%
38	Southwell & Nottingham	Y	1,152,000	840	1,390	151	228	296	83%
39	Truro	C	573,000	1,390	420	89	211	298	74%
41	Winchester	C	1,255,000	1,130	1,100	129	230	349	76%
42	Worcester	C	908,000	670	1,350	83	166	273	83%
43	York	Y	1,457,000	2,670	550	229	439	573	65%
44	Europe	C	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	175	78%
46	Leeds	Y	2,777,000	2,630	1,060	261	438	572	90%
	<b>Church of England</b>		<b>56,766,000</b>	<b>50,630</b>	<b>1,120</b>	<b>6,594</b>	<b>12,146</b>	<b>15,552</b>	<b>77%</b>

In a change to previous years, figures for the Channel Islands are reported under Salisbury.

In a change to most previous years, Table I I includes the chaplaincies of the Diocese in Europe.

The final column shows the percentage of churches on which the comparison between 2019 and 2023 figures was based.

## Appendix I: Methodology

Where possible, the 2023 Statistics for Mission data collection and analysis followed similar steps to previous years. Some changes were necessary because of the changed circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. I have noted changes below.

This report uses data submitted through annual Statistics for Mission returns from churches, and from government statistics. The majority (87%) of the Church of England's churches submitted data (down slightly from 89% in 2019). Most returns were on behalf of a single church; 4% of returns were joint returns submitted on behalf of several churches. Most returns were submitted through the online parish returns system (<https://parishreturns.churchofengland.org/>). One diocese used a different electronic system, and some churches completed paper forms.

Unlike in 2020-2022, finalised attendance and participation figures from cathedrals were ready in time for incorporation in this report; I have replaced the estimated cathedrals data from 2022 with the information received from cathedrals for 2022. The 2020 and 2021 figures used estimated figures for cathedrals.

In several places in this report I have shown comparisons between 2019 and 2023 figures. Wherever possible, these have been calculated using data from the subset of churches that submitted information in both 2019 and 2023, in order that the comparison really is "like for like". It does, however, mean that the 2019 information shown in those comparisons differs slightly from any stand-alone figures published for 2019, and from year-on-year comparisons published in recent years.

As usual, because of late returns and corrections, this report contains updates to some previously-published figures. Additionally, I have made a methodological improvement to how fractional church-level figures are handled; the updated figures are more accurate and also slightly higher than previously-published figures. The impact is barely noticeable for most variables, since for most variables fractional figures only appear in the minority of churches for which estimation is necessary. The impact is most apparent in the case of variables derived from the October count, particularly child average weekly attendance and child average Sunday attendance, since these variables may well be fractional even in the absence of estimation. To avoid introducing discontinuities into the time series I have recalculated figures going back to 2013. In 2013 the October count question was altered to ask explicitly about attendance at school services taking place in church, and therefore October attendance figures pre- and post-2013 should be compared with caution irrespective of the recent methodological improvement. Full details of the methodological change are available on request.

### The content of Statistics for Mission

The annual Statistics for Mission survey measures several different aspects of church life. While no study could cover every facet of the life of the Church of England, Statistics for Mission seeks to provide a broad picture of those key elements that are common to the vast majority of churches. For reference, the 2023 Statistics for Mission form, including all questions and explanatory notes, can be found in Appendix 2.

A large part of Statistics for Mission is related to attendance at worship services. Attendance is measured in several different ways:

- 1) **Worshipping Community:** those people attending the church regularly, for example at least once a month (or those who would attend if not prevented by illness, infirmity, or temporary absence), including attendance at church services and fresh expressions of Church; in a change from previous years, since 2020 churches have been asked to include in their Worshipping Community people who regularly "attended" their "Church at Home" services – e.g. services that were live streamed, or offered by telephone, or post.
- 2) **October count:** the number of adults and children attending in person during each of the first 4 weeks of October, at church services, fresh expressions of Church, and (since 2013) at services for schools taking place in church. Sunday and weekday attendance is asked about, with the instruction that those attending on Sunday and during the week in any given week should only be counted once that week (on Sunday) if possible. Churches were not asked to report their attendance at services for schools taking place in church in October 2020 (few such services took place in autumn 2020); these questions were re-introduced in 2021.
- 3) **Usual Sunday attendance:** the number of adults and children attending in person on a usual Sunday. This question was not asked in 2020 or 2021 (since "Usual Sunday" did not really apply to much of 2020 and 2021), but was reintroduced in 2022.
- 4) **Number of people attending and number of people receiving communion at Easter and Christmas (Christmas Eve and Christmas Day).** Churches were not asked to report their Easter attendance and communicants figures in 2020 (most churches were closed at Easter 2020); these questions were re-introduced in 2021.

## 5) The Electoral roll of the church.

Churches were asked to report the age distribution of their Worshipping Community and the numbers of adults and children leaving and joining their Worshipping Community.

The October count data are used to calculate average weekly and average Sunday attendance, for adults and children. Average Sunday attendance is defined as the total attendance at church services or fresh expressions of Church on Sundays over the 4 weeks of the October count, divided by 4. Average weekly attendance is defined as the total attendance at church services or fresh expressions of Church on Sundays or weekdays over the 4 weeks of the October count, divided by 4. Churches are asked to include attendance at baptisms in their October count, since baptisms often take place as part of normal worship services, but not attendance at weddings and funerals.

Statistics for Mission asks about the numbers of baptisms and services of thanksgiving for the gift (birth or adoption) of a child; marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriages; and funeral services conducted on behalf of the church/parish by any minister held in church or at a crematorium or cemetery (excluding committal only and burial of ashes only). Note that funerals conducted by licensed Church of England ministers that are not held on behalf of a church/parish might not be included in the reported figures.

Additionally, Statistics for Mission asks about attendance at special services during Advent and details of fresh expressions of Church.

Unlike in previous years, churches were not asked about members of ministry teams leading assemblies in schools in 2020; this question was reintroduced in 2021.

In 2020 a one off question was included asking about the “Church at Home” services that churches may have been offering or referring people to; a slightly shorter version of this question was asked in 2021; a further shortened version of this question was asked in 2022 and 2023.

In 2023 a one-off question was asked about the number of new congregations/worshipping communities that started in 2023, and about the number of congregations/worshipping communities that came to an end in 2023.

Information about the number of confirmations taking place in each diocese is provided by diocesan Bishops’ offices.

## Data accuracy and data checking

Data reported by each church were compared with figures from previous years, and substantial changes were queried with churches and/or dioceses. Predominantly, these checks corrected typographical errors during data entry, although they also highlighted occasions when questions had been misinterpreted. The first stage of checks was automatic, at the point of data entry, for those returns submitted through the online parish returns system. Further checking was carried out by staff in the Data Services team, with particular scrutiny of figures that had changed significantly from year to year, and of unusually large (or small) values. Useful additional explanation and information was often provided by churches in the comments box on the Statistics for Mission return; as far as resources permitted, comments were read and acted on where appropriate. Where it was necessary to query any of the figures submitted, in the vast majority of cases we did this directly with the person who entered the figures; we are grateful for their prompt and helpful responses to our queries.

I checked the 2020-2022 datasets using adapted versions of the usual process. In normal times, large increases or large decreases would be queried; given the circumstances, for some variables it did not seem sensible to query large decreases during this period.

Where estimation has been required to provide national or diocesan totals, the figures used in this report have been calculated using several different approaches. Figures up to 2019 are based on the methodology as described in detail in Statistics for Mission 2019 (<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/21969>), amended as a result of the methodological improvement as outlined above. In broad summary, for those churches that did not send in their figures estimates were carried out church-by-church based on data received from those churches in other years.

I calculated estimated figures for 2020-2023 using a different approach, since the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic means that church-level estimates were unlikely to be useful or reliable. I calculated figures for these years by looking at the subset of churches that submitted data in 2019 and the year in question, and used data from these churches to estimate diocesan and national trends, with 2019 as the baseline. In 2023, this subset included 77% of Church of England churches. I used

these calculated trends to estimate diocesan totals. I assumed that the trend in these churches was representative of the diocese as a whole.

Unlike for most other variables, until 2019 no estimation of school service attendance or Advent attendance was carried out for those churches that did not submit figures; as a consequence of the change in estimation methodology, estimation for these variables was carried out from 2020 onwards. Changes in school service and Advent attendance over time up until 2019 will therefore, in part, be related to changes in the set of churches from which information was received.

Values in the data tables are reported to the nearest 1000, 100 or 10, as appropriate. Percentages are reported to the nearest 1%, 0.1%, or to two significant figures, as appropriate. Totals, percentages, and averages have been calculated before rounding, so row and column totals may not always agree with the sums of the amounts shown.

### Reliability of the figures

For most variables, there is no reason to suppose that figures have been reported less accurately since the pandemic than previously. The exception is Worshipping Community, where churches are endeavouring to include their regular “Church at Home” worshippers. Given the anonymity of many forms of Church at Home this is more challenging than reporting an in-person Worshipping Community, and there is likely to be more estimation involved.

As far as it is possible to tell this has not resulted in any particularly odd numbers once figures are aggregated to diocesan level, but I advise treating the Worshipping Community figures with more caution than was previously the case.

### Representativeness of the sample

It is impossible to tell whether non-responding churches differed from responding churches in terms of the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent bounce-back. However, on the basis of their 2019 All age average weekly attendance, the dataset included in the analysis is broadly representative, slightly oversampling large churches. The impact of the pandemic on churches’ reported figures is reasonably consistent across church size, so the effect of this oversampling is likely to be small and not worth attempting to adjust for.

I calculated estimated figures for 2023, using the same methodology (i.e. based on the subset of churches from whom data had been received in 2019 and 2023) at several points as data were coming in, as I did in 2021 and 2022. I found no indication that the early-responding churches were notably different in terms of their attendance and participation trends than the later-responding churches.

### Projected pre-pandemic trends

In order to get a sense of how recent figures compare to what might have been if the COVID-19 pandemic had not taken place, I have calculated projected pre-pandemic trends. The projection was based on a straight-line fit to data from 2014-2019. In all cases where I have referred to the projected pre-pandemic trend, a straight line was a close fit to the data (correlation>0.9). Although there is, of course, no guarantee that, had there not been a pandemic, the figures would have continued to follow this straight line, and no expectation that such a projection would continue to be appropriate it were to be continued for many years, in my judgement it is a suitable model for the purpose to which I have put it.

### Age groups

Ideally, a single set of age groups would be used throughout the Statistics for Mission return. However, for a variety of reasons, this has not been the case in the past, and the desire to be able to make comparisons with historical data has discouraged further changes.

- October count attendance and Usual Sunday attendance are divided into adults (aged 16 and over) and children and young people (aged under 16). It should be noted, therefore, that for these variables the “adult” figure includes some people who are legally not adults.
- Worshipping Community age groups are 0-10; 11-17; 18-69, and 70+, while leavers and joiners are categorised as adults (aged 18+) and children and young people (aged under 18).
- Baptisms and thanksgivings are categorised as infants (aged <1 year); children aged 1-4 years; children aged 5-10 years; young people aged 11-17, and adults (aged 18+); this is a slight change from the age groups used until 2018, when there was a group for children aged 5-12 and young people/adults aged 13 and over were grouped together.

## Diocesan boundaries

Diocesan and parish boundaries as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 were used as the basis for the collection of Statistics for Mission data.

Unlike in previous years, figures for the Channel Islands have been included with those for the Diocese of Salisbury. However, given that the pandemic followed a different course in the Channel Islands from that on the mainland, estimated totals were calculated separately for the Channel Islands before being added to figures relating to churches on the mainland.

## Population data

Diocesan population statistics were estimated using 2021 census data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html>), mapped on to diocesan boundaries. This mapping is an approximation, since the boundaries of regions at which population data are reported do not coincide with diocesan boundaries. Data for the Isle of Man have been taken from [http://countrymeters.info/en/Isle\\_of\\_Man](http://countrymeters.info/en/Isle_of_Man); data for the Channel Islands have been taken from [http://countrymeters.info/en/Channel\\_Islands](http://countrymeters.info/en/Channel_Islands) (both relating to the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2021, and accessed 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023).

## Further information

I would be delighted to talk about the methodology with anyone who would be interested. Any reader who would like further details regarding the methodology behind this report is very welcome to get in touch: please see the contact details on page 2.

## Appendix 2: 2023 Statistics for Mission form



### Statistics for Mission: January to December 2023

Church name:	Parish name:
Deanery:	Diocese:

We hope that most questions will be simple to answer, but we recognise that others might be difficult to answer in your context. We're keen to find out anything you can tell us, and your best approximation is fine if you don't have precise numbers.

#### Reminder: please complete this form online if possible

<https://parishreturns.churchofengland.org/>

The online returns system includes existing information about your church. It automatically checks for typographical errors and minor mistakes and gives you the opportunity to revise your figures before final submission. You can see the data for your church over time and download copies for your records.

- ✓ Please complete this form for your **Church**. If there is more than one church in your parish, then please complete and submit a separate form for each church
- ✓ Where activities – e.g. acts of worship in schools or conducting funeral services at crematoria - are shared between several churches then please ensure, where possible, that they are only reported once
- ✓ Questions 1a and 1b about the **Electoral Roll** refer to the **ecclesiastical Electoral Roll**. Question 1a asks about the ecclesiastical Electoral Roll for your **parish**. Question 1b is optional and only applies if you are in a multi-church parish AND keep a separate roll for your church
- ✓ **Fresh expressions of Church** should be included in your numbers, unless they have submitted a separate return. For help in identifying fresh expressions of Church please use the "Choice tree" at the end of this form or visit <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>
- ✓ Please complete all questions as far as possible, using "0" or "unknown" or "no services" if necessary. Unless otherwise indicated, empty fields will be treated as incomplete and may be queried later as missing data
- ✓ In rare circumstances where a single congregation worships evenly between several churches (i.e. there is no difference in who attends and how often at each church), a single return may be submitted. The churches included in the return should be noted below

A single return is submitted on behalf of (please list all included churches here, with church codes if known\*):

\* N.B. church codes are not needed if you are planning to submit this return online.

**1a. How many people were on the ecclesiastical Electoral Roll for your parish, as reported at your Annual Parochial Church meeting in 2023?**

✓ Please write "unknown" if the figure is not available

1a. Number on the ecclesiastical Electoral Roll for your PARISH	
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If your parish has more than one church **and** keeps a separate roll for your church, please **also** provide the total electoral roll for your church.

✓ Please write "N/A" if this is not applicable to your church

**1b. How many people are on your church Electoral Roll?**

1b. Number on the CHURCH Electoral Roll	
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**2. How many people attend your church in person on a usual Sunday, when there is a service?**

- ✓ A usual Sunday is one that is not a major festival or contained in a peak holiday period
- ✓ Wherever possible, please do not count the same person multiple times – if someone attends more than once on a usual Sunday, please only count them once
- ✓ Only think about the Sundays when you hold at least one service (ignore the Sundays when you do not hold a service at your church)

2a. Adults (16 years old and over)	
2b. Children and young people (under 16 years old)	

The following questions are about **how many people came in person** to a service or act of worship at **Easter** (Easter Day and vigil services on Easter Eve), **Advent** (Advent Sunday until 23<sup>rd</sup> December) and **Christmas** (Christmas Eve and Christmas Day).

- ✓ If you did not hold any services or acts of worship at your church during these periods, please enter "0" in the relevant box

**3. How many people came in person to your church at Easter 2023?**

3a: Number of communicants at service(s) on Easter Day and vigil service on Easter Eve	
3b. Total number of people attending worship (including communicants) at service(s) on Easter Day and vigil service on Easter Eve	

**4. How many people came in person to special services run by your church during Advent 2023?**

- ✓ Include attendance at special services – e.g. nativities, carol services, carols on the green, crib services - run by your church from Advent Sunday until 23<sup>rd</sup> December

4a. Total number of people attending special services held for the <b>congregation and local community</b>	
4b. Total number of people attending special services held <b>specifically for civic organisations or schools</b>	

## 5. How many people came in person to your church at Christmas 2023?

5a. Number of communicants at service(s) on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day	
5b. Total number of people attending worship (including communicants) at service(s) on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day	

The next section is the **OCTOBER COUNT** of the number of people attending your church **in person** for **services and other acts of worship** during the first 4 weeks of October. This includes the number of people attending on Sundays and during the week (Monday-Saturday). We will ask later about people who have engaged in other ways (such as online or through other means such as telephone or posted service sheets).

You are asked to enter a count for each of the first 4 weeks of October 2023. The count is split into Sundays and weekdays; adults and children; and type of service (Church, fresh expressions of Church and school services).

Wherever possible, please **do not count the same person multiple times in the same week** – if someone attends your church more than once during Sunday, please only count them once. If someone attends on a Sunday, please do not include them again in the midweek count for that week.

**Number of services:** The number of services or fresh expressions of Church held on Sundays & weekdays. Enter "0" if there were none.

**School services:** These are services held in your church (or church building) that are attended by a school(s). There is a later question about acts of worship held in schools.

**Adults:** 16 years old and over. Please include those leading the service(s).

**Children and young people:** Under 16 years old.

### Please **INCLUDE**:

- ✓ People attending your church **in person** – we will ask later about people who have engaged in other ways
- ✓ Clergy and other ministers attending or leading services
- ✓ Adults and children attending Sunday schools or equivalent activities
- ✓ Attendance at baptisms, including any visitors
- ✓ Any **fresh expressions of Church**, unless they have submitted their own return. A fresh expression of Church is a form of church established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet "members" of any church. For help identifying fresh expressions of Church, please use the "Choice tree" at the end of this form or visit <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>
- ✓ Any other of your church's activities in which worship is the primary purpose and predominant feature, including any new congregations/new worshipping communities (include as Church or Fresh expression attendance, as appropriate)
- ✓ Attendance at services outside the church, e.g. at home, in care homes, prisons, or hospitals (include as Church or Fresh expression attendance, as appropriate)

### Please **DO NOT INCLUDE**:

- ✗ People who did not attend in person
- ✗ Attendance at weddings or funeral services
- ✗ Activities with only some worship element, such as house groups, parent and toddler groups, youth clubs, Alpha courses, and social events such as harvest supper

**6. How many people attended your church in person in October 2023?**

- ✓ If possible, please count each person only once in any week, even if they attended more than once
- ✓ If there were exceptional circumstances that led to unusual October attendance figures in 2023, let us know in the comment box at the end of this form

6a.1	Number of services	Adult			Children and young people		
		Church	Fresh expressions	School service	Church	Fresh expressions	School service
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> October							
Weekdays 2 <sup>nd</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>							

6a.2	Number of services	Adult			Children and young people		
		Church	Fresh expressions	School service	Church	Fresh expressions	School service
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> October							
Weekdays 9 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup>							

6a.3	Number of services	Adult			Children and young people		
		Church	Fresh expressions	School service	Church	Fresh expressions	School service
Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> October							
Weekdays 16 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup>							

6a.4	Number of services	Adult			Children and young people		
		Church	Fresh expressions	School service	Church	Fresh expressions	School service
Sunday 22 <sup>nd</sup> October							
Weekdays 23 <sup>rd</sup> -28 <sup>th</sup>							

**7. How often does your ministry team lead acts of worship in schools?**

- ✓ This question refers to acts of worship in school buildings rather than in your church or church building (services held for schools in your church should be included within the October count, Easter, or Christmas figures where appropriate)
- ✓ Include any school-based acts of worship led by a person who holds office or responsibility for ministry (ordained or lay) within your church, whether or not the school is in your parish
- ✓ 'Usually' refers to during term-time or when the school is open, ignoring school holidays
- ✓ Tick one box as the closest estimate

Never	Occasionally/ ad hoc	Usually once or twice a term	Usually once a month	Usually once a fortnight	Usually once a week	Usually more than once a week

If there is no school in your parish, tick here:

## 'Church at Home' Services

By "Church at Home services" we mean "any and all services offered remotely", including online services (live streamed or pre-recorded), services by telephone, or services that were emailed or posted. These services may be "attended" from home or in some cases from another location such as a hospital or whilst on holiday. For some churches the focus has been pastoral care and practical ministry, with people being referred to 'Church at Home' services from elsewhere, such as from other local churches or the cathedral.

**8a. Did your church offer any 'Church at Home' services during October 2023?** You may have offered these at church, parish or benefice level or as other groups of churches.

Yes       No

**8b. If Yes, in how many weeks during October did your church offer any 'Church at Home' services?**

4 weeks       3 weeks       2 weeks       1 week

**8c. If Yes, What was the usual number of people "attending" your 'Church at Home' services each week that you offered Church at Home services in October?**

- ✓ Please see <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/25032> for some guidance about how to count 'Church at Home' attendance
- ✓ If you do not have exact figures, please give **your best estimate**
- ✓ If 'Church at Home' services were offered as a group of churches, for example as a parish, benefice or group, then please agree which church will report the 'Church at Home' attendance to avoid double counting attendance

## Worshipping Community

The following questions are about your "**worshipping community**". Think about your regular worshipping community at the **end of 2023**. For more information about worshipping communities, please refer to <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/WorshippingCommunity.pdf>

- ✓ Do include anyone who attends your church regularly, for example at least once a month, or would attend if they were not prevented by illness, infirmity or temporary absence
- ✓ Do include anyone who regularly attends (on any day of the week):
  - any of your congregations/worshipping communities whose purpose is worship and whose practices include two or more of: prayer, scripture, praise, sacrament, and acts of service
  - your fresh expressions of Church
  - your 'Church at Home' services
- ✗ Do not include visitors, e.g. holidaymakers, baptism parties etc.
- ✗ Do not include people who consider their 'home' church to be another church
- ✗ Do not include people who left your church earlier in the year (they are counted in the next question as 'leavers') and were not part of your worshipping community at the end of 2023

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**9. How many people were in your “worshipping community” at the end of 2023?**

- ✓ Please complete all boxes, as far as you can. If there is no-one in a category, please write “0”. If the age groups of your worshipping community are unknown, please use your best estimates. If you are unable to estimate people’s ages, please enter the total figure only
- ✓ Please include both those people who attend regularly in person and those who regularly attend your ‘Church at Home’ services

TOTAL	Children (Age 0-10)	Young people (Age 11-17)	Adults (Age 18-69)	Adults (Age 70+)

**10. How has your worshipping community changed during 2023?**

- ✓ Please enter the number (or your best estimate) of people who have joined your worshipping community. This includes people new to your church (whether in person or through ‘Church at Home’ services), and people who are now worshipping more frequently
- ✓ Please enter the number (or your best estimate) of people who have left your worshipping community. This includes people who have left your church, people who are now worshipping less often than monthly, and people who have died
- ✓ If there is no-one in a particular category, please write “0”
- ✗ Do not count as joiners or leavers members of your worshipping community who have moved from “Children and young people” to “Adult”

How many adults and children joined or left your worshipping community during 2023?		
	TOTAL joined	TOTAL left
Adults (Age 18+)		
Children and young people		

**11. How many of the people in your worshipping community, as reported in question 9, are entirely or predominantly “Church at Home” worshippers? If you are not sure, please give your best estimate**

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The next questions are about **fresh expressions of Church**. A fresh expression of Church is a form of Church established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet “members” of any church. Here you are asked to describe aspects of the way the fresh expression of Church is run, rather than providing numbers attending.

- ✓ For help in identifying fresh expressions of Church please use the "Choice tree" at the end of this form or visit <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>. If you remain unsure about whether an activity or service meets the definition of a fresh expression, please DO include it here
- ✓ If you have more than three fresh expressions of Church, please continue on an additional sheet
- ✗ Do not include Alpha courses or outreach activities that do not include worship

## 12. What regular fresh expressions of Church are supported by your church?

**No fresh expressions of Church** (If your church did NOT support fresh expressions of Church during 2023 please tick here and leave the rest of this section blank)

Name of fresh expression	
Description of activity	
Where is it held? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Church <input type="checkbox"/> Church Hall <input type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note where): _____
How often?	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note how often): _____
Age group aimed at? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL ages <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> 0-4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-17 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70+
Who attends? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who regularly come to other services <input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who occasionally come to other services <input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who never come to other services

Name of fresh expression	
Description of activity	
Where is it held? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Church <input type="checkbox"/> Church Hall <input type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note where): _____
How often?	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note how often): _____
Age group aimed at? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL ages <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> 0-4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-17 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70+
Who attends? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who regularly come to other services <input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who occasionally come to other services <input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who never come to other services

Name of fresh expression	
Description of activity	
Where is it held? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Church <input type="checkbox"/> Church Hall <input type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note where): _____
How often?	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note how often): _____
Age group aimed at? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL ages <input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> 0-4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11-17 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70+
Who attends? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who regularly come to other services <input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who occasionally come to other services <input type="checkbox"/> Attendees include people who never come to other services

**13. How many baptisms and thanksgivings for the gift of a child were held in your church during 2023?**

✓ If separate services of thanksgiving and baptism were held for an individual both should be recorded here

	Infants (<1 year)	Children (1-4 years)	Children (5-10 years)	Young people (11-17 years)	Adults (18+)
Number of persons <b>baptised</b>					
Number of persons for whom a birth or adoption <b>thanksgiving</b> service was held					

**14. How many marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriage were held in your church during 2023?**

Number of couples <b>married</b> in your church	
Number of couples for whom a <b>service of prayer and dedication after a civil marriage</b> was held in your church	

**15. How many funeral services were held at or on behalf of your church during 2023?**

- ✓ Include all funerals that were held at your church
- ✓ Include all funerals conducted by any member of your ministry team (including Readers, stipendiary clergy, self supporting clergy, and retired clergy) at a crematorium, cemetery, or other non-church location

Number of deceased for whom a <b>funeral service was held at your church</b>	
Number of deceased for whom a full <b>funeral service</b> was conducted by a member of your ministry team <b>at a crematorium, cemetery,</b> or other non-church location, excluding committal only & burial of ashes only	
Number of deceased for whom a committal only or a burial of ashes only was conducted by a member of your ministry team	

**16.** Finally, there is a special focus question about new congregations/new worshipping communities.

A "new congregation" or "new worshipping community":

- Has as its purpose the worship of Jesus Christ and helping people grow in their faith. Its practices will include two or more of: prayer, scripture, praise, sacrament, and acts of service.
- Aims to reach people who were not previously attending church regularly and to make new Christian disciples.
- Meets at least once a month on any day of the week, in your church building or elsewhere (such as in a café, in a school, or online). It is connected with the wider Church through the parish church, deanery, or diocese.

If your church supports fresh expressions of Church, as reported in section 12, above, some or all of those fresh expressions of Church might meet the definition of a new congregation/new worshipping community. If so, please include them in your responses to the questions below.

**Q16a: How many new congregations or new worshipping communities did your church start in 2023?**

- None
  One
  Two
  Three or more

Please list them below:

	Name of new congregation/new worshipping community that began in 2023
1	
2	
3	
Any additional	

**Q16b: How many of your church's congregations or worshipping communities came to an end in 2023?**

- None
  One
  Two
  Three or more

Please list them below:

	Name of congregation/ worshipping community that came to an end in 2023
1	
2	
3	
Any additional	

Were there any **exceptional circumstances** (e.g. an interregnum or building works) or **significant changes** that may have led to **unusual** figures in this return?

**Thank you for completing your annual return on behalf of your church.** Your contribution is essential to the on-going care and understanding of our churches and congregations; your diligence, time, and effort are greatly appreciated. Please take a moment to review your answers. Make sure that you have completed every question as far as possible and not left any answers blank (use "0" or "unknown" or "no services" if necessary). Blank answers may be queried with you later.

Please record below the contact details for the person who has completed this form.

**Name:**

**Position:**

**Email address:**

**Date of completion:**

**Identifying fresh expressions of Church: fresh expression choice tree**

