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### OTHER STATISTICS

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The article by Brian Green highlights the collapse of confirmation in the Church of England. Almost every statistic shows that the Church is in grave decline. In recent decades it has been claimed that many things would halt this decline (the ASB!, women priests etc.) but mostly they seem to have accelerated it.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Church of England saw growth in membership for the first 40 years and since then has lost six in every ten of its members.

All the mainline churches have seen decline although there are marked differences. In the last 20 years the Church of England has lost nearly three in every ten of its members, this is similar to the Church of Scotland. By contrast the Roman Catholics in England, the Methodists and the United Reformed have all lost nearly four in every ten. Honours appear to go to the Church in Wales which in the last two decades has lost over four in every ten of its members. Proportionately most of this loss has been in the last ten years when it has lost over a quarter of its members. (Clearly, whatever else might be said, having Bishops and Archbishops who deny the truth of the Bible does nothing to help churches either grow or even slow decline.)

Within the Church of England the numbers in ministry has not fallen as sharply as the general membership, that is to say there are proportionately more ministers today than there were in 1940. However the signs for the future are not good. In the few years up to 1995 the number of people attending ministry selection conferences rose but since then it has declined sharply with a drop of one in six from 1998 to 2001. A larger proportion of people are now recommended but this has also fallen sharply.

From 1994 to 2001 the number of ordinations of stipendiary (full time and paid) clergy has fallen by one in every fifteen (6.6%). However, the number of stipendiary men has fallen by nearly one in four (22%). The total number of men in stipendiary ministry has fallen by nearly a quarter in a decade.

Moreover there are concerns about the fact that clergy are generally older. Statistically the average age has not risen a great deal. In 1963 the average age was 49 whereas in 2001 it was 51. The fact that clergy did not have to retire in 1963 makes easy analysis difficult (there were 26 working clergy over the age of 70 in 2001 but 820 in 1963 - and two in their 90s!). It is at the younger age range that there is more cause for concern. In 1963 there were 4367 working clergy under the age of 40, in 2001 this had fallen to 1482, an incredible drop of two thirds.

Another interesting feature shown by the 2001 statistics is that although there are very few women in posts such as Deans and Archbishops they are on average about 5 years younger. This can probably be interpreted in different ways but suggests a form of positive discrimination.

Is there any good news in the statistics? For the mainline churches the news is generally not good. However, we need to go on stating and remembering that whilst overall attendance is declining it is among the evangelical churches that there is sustained growth. From 1989 to 1998 there was a drop of

just over one in five. This fall is most marked amongst the Catholics (-48%), and 'broad evangelicals' (-47%) and there has even been decline amongst 'charismatics' (-16%). The Anglo-Catholics have remained static but the growth has been amongst those classified as other (+56%) and most of all the 'mainstream evangelicals' where the growth has been over two thirds (+68%). Whilst these figures have to be treated with some care they suggest that where a clear bible teaching message is the focus of ministry and there is a real concern to make the gospel message known then churches can and do grow in the modern world.

*Sources:*

*Statistics of licensed ministers 2001 : Archbishops' Council (2002)*

*Facts and Figures about the Church of England number 3 : CBF (1965)*

*Religious Trends 2002/2003 : Christian Research ed. Peter Brierley (2001)*