

Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Winter 2009 No. 111

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

ATTENDANCE AND MINISTRY STATISTICS

By David Phillips

The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. (Mtt 9.37-38)

The official Church of England attendance statistics for 2006 were released in November along with the Ministry figures for 2007 and various other statistics. The unofficial figures for attendance had been released earlier in the year.

Ministry

The number of men in full-time ordained ministry has now dropped by more than a third since 1991 (the year the Church voted to ordain women). Although the proportion of women in ministry has increased every year the overall number of stipendiary women shows signs of having come close to a peak at around 1,500. This means that overall there are 2,000 fewer stipendiary clergy than there were in 1991. For an average Diocese that is approximately 46 fewer clergy.

Even more sobering is the comparison with 1963 (a year chosen because full figures were produced that year and we have the report in the Church Society office). The fall in stipendiary clergy is over 7,000 (5,500 men), which average out at 160 per Diocese. It is not difficult to see therefore why parish amalgamation is taking place at such a rapid rate.

Variations over 1 year are not usually significant but it is worth commenting that from 2005 to 2006 the number of men fell by its highest proportion, over 5% or more than 1 in every 20 men.

As we regularly report with all this decline in clergy the number of Bishops, Archdeacons and Deans has remained pretty much static for some time. There has, however, been a gradual drop in the number of other stipendiary clergy on the staff of Cathedrals.

On the positive side the number of people recommended for training in 2007 was higher than it had been for a long time at 595 and this continues an upward trend. This is good, but it covers all clergy. The number of these who were men entering full-time stipendiary ministry was 162 and 102 women which is still significantly down on what it was in the 1990s. Amongst non-stipendiary clergy the number of new women (so to speak) has exceeded the number of new men for some time.

The average age of stipendiary parochial clergy is 50 whilst the average age of non-stipendiary clergy is 57.

Attendance

The downward trends in the long-term statistic of Usual Sunday Attendance (USA) has continued with the official figure for 2006 being 871,000. The rate of decline in this figure does seem to have slowed slightly. Just to give meaning to this, since 1990 it means that the average parish has 20 fewer people in Church on a Sunday.

The more recent indicators of Average Sunday Attendance shows a similar decline as the USA figure but the Average Weekly Attendance has not dropped as sharply in recent years suggesting that there are changing patterns of attendance.

With regards children the figures show a 25,000 (14%) drop in the number of children attending on a Sunday although again the drop in Weekly Attendance (ie including services other than Sunday) is less marked. The average parish would appear to have around 12 children under the age of 16 on a Sunday.

Funerals

One other interesting figure is the proportion of deaths where CofE clergy or readers conduct the service. The national average remains at above 40% and varies from 20% in London to 62% in Hereford with perhaps Sheffield being the most surprising figure being a city with great diversity but still 57% of the funerals conducted by the Church of England and comparing favourably with the godless Lancastrians across the Pennines in Manchester where the figure was 32% (I perhaps ought to admit to Sheffield being my birthplace).

David Phillips is General Secretary of Church Society.