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**Statistics, Planning and the Mission of the Church of
Scotland:**

a critical examination of quantitative data as a resource
for national, regional and local engagement.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of PhD

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role and importance of numerical data for the Church of Scotland in relation to areas of mission and planning at a time when the Church of Scotland has experienced sustained numerical decline in formal membership and in church attendance.

Within the various chapters of this work, the historical connection of the national church with numerical information is charted, detailing the long association it has had with the gathering and assessment of statistical data. The role of data as a valid component within an understanding of practical theology is discussed as is the connection between mission and measurement through an assessment of 'data rich' missiological schemes, including the Church Growth Movement, Healthy Church and the Natural Church Development Process.

Three significant surveys of Church of Scotland leaders examine whether the national Census of 2011 and other statistical information was considered useful to local clergy for strategic purposes. Ministers were surveyed about their use of data prior to and following the release of the 2011 census data. They were subsequently surveyed following distribution of initial data from the Scottish Churches Census of 2016. This study therefore provides essential insights into the use made and the value held by ministers of data of this nature. The analysis carried out encourages the Church of Scotland nationally to further develop and enhance data provision for the benefit of their leaders.

The response of the Church of Scotland to numerical decline has been to engage in an exercise of managed organisational planning in partnership with presbyteries. This thesis includes a critical examination of presbytery planning by the Church of Scotland and an attempt by one presbytery to utilise quantitative data as its key determinant for ministry allocation. The case studies undertaken identify a range of issues, some being attitudinal in nature and others, practical. An additional case study provided insight into the extent to which strategic information was available within a local congregational setting and the part it played in local decision making.

The practical nature of this thesis is evidenced in a wide-ranging list of recommendations offered to the Church of Scotland towards the creation of a new organisational framework for dealing with data, new training offered to church leaders and the enhanced provision of data for use in planning and mission - nationally, regionally and locally.

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I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of other, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Allan Scott Vint

Chapter 1: Introduction

Numbers are not everything, by a long shot. But they are something. The churches ignore them at their peril (Mead, 1995, p. 39).

The genesis of this thesis arose out of my personal interest in the use and potential benefits of ‘hard’ data to gain insights which might aid the development of mission within the Church of Scotland. This, at first sight, might seem a non-controversial area of study, given that in many parts of society and in various sectors of industry, data of diverse kinds is gathered regularly and analysed carefully, in order that crucial decision-making will be developed on a clear, evidential base. Many non-profit organisations acknowledge and lay appropriate emphasis on the benefits that quantitative data can bring to them to further their key objectives.

It is my contention that the Church of Scotland, in a number of central areas of work, appears at times reluctant or slow to utilise the plethora of both available and potential numerical information and to interrogate in detail, the vast array of data which is there to be used. It is also my belief that the Church of Scotland, in an era of decline, needs to invest time, money and energy into the further development of a data analysis infrastructure, along with increased data processing capacity to aid its mission and planning activities.

Clearly, it is important at the outset of such a project to acknowledge that ‘hard’ data, such as numbers, measurements, scores and quantitative information of various kinds, has significant limitations. Such data contributes only partial insight and limited avenues of understanding and will often require qualitative information to enhance the detail and provide a more nuanced account.

I come to this study with an undergraduate degree which includes elements of statistics, computer science, mathematics and numerical analysis. However, my early interest in science was overtaken when I entered training for ministry in the Church of Scotland in 1985. It was evident to me during my training, that consideration of numbers and data gathering was not simply absent; there was a decided antipathy towards what might be viewed as impersonal and perhaps even unspiritual approaches to pastoral care, church management and practical theology in general.

My undergraduate university days are long behind me, but I have always been acutely aware that, during the whole period of my ministry, the Scottish church context has been one of severe national church membership and church attendance decline as well as the increased shortage of clergy (Faithsurvey). The response of austere presbytery planning attempted to steward the limited resources of ministry throughout Scotland by closing congregations and restricting ministry deployment to regions of the country.

In this context, data of one kind or another has increasingly been viewed by some, like myself, as an underused asset which could assist in key aspects of the tasks of practical theology which lie before us, though one not without its pitfalls and problems.¹ There is a plethora of questions concerning the appropriate role of data within an ecclesiastical environment, the type and the quality of data which might be utilised and the value of such data for the purposes to which it may be put. Is there indeed any kind of theological rationale for engagement with quantitative data, such as demographics or statistical analysis of trends, or are these purely a set of worldly managerial exercises which do not rightly belong within the workings of a church? What also of the attitude and outlook of the ministers and other church leaders towards the use of data for strategic church management and for effective community outreach and mission? Would available data be accepted and utilised? What about its use in the cause of presbytery planning or in national strategic development?

The aim of this study is to critically assess and consider these and other related questions and to interrogate the strengths and weaknesses of applied statistics and quantitative data for the benefit of the Church of Scotland at national, regional and local levels. All three levels of church governance and activity being inter-related. Nationally, the Church of Scotland, through its central offices, assists in the distribution of information and through the operation of annual General Assemblies and its committees, determines both policy and the overall allocation of resources. National policies drive the implementation of regional presbytery planning, although there is latitude given for strategic decisions in the light of local information. The heart of the Church of Scotland though is, at the local level, where individual congregations connect with local communities to serve and to share.

¹ The subject of my Master of Theology thesis looked at the Natural Church Development process and charted some of the issues of implementing that particular scheme within one Church of Scotland congregation. (Vint, 2007)

Previous Research

Institutions such as the Church of Scotland have, historically, provided fertile ground for academic research. The greater part of the research undertaken has related to issues around history, including biography and of course, theology. The latter area has encompassed a wide and diverse field of subject areas, but to date, there has been little formal research in relation to the value and use of collected or computed numerical information for the furtherance of the strategic mission and planning work of the Church of Scotland.

Academic research projects concentrating significantly on data associated with the Church of Scotland include a sociological study by Peter Sissons, commissioned and published by the Church of Scotland, which considered ‘The Social Significance of Church Membership in the Burgh of Falkirk’ (Sissons, 1973). This detailed study employed a mixed-method approach to data collection so that there is both extensive statistical information as well as comment based on careful ethnographic qualitative engagement. Sissons’ analysis noted the correlation between church membership and a number of social variables, including that of class. Sissons’ findings clearly highlighted a link in the Falkirk Presbytery area between the social world of the Church and the social life and beliefs of its members.

The families which very largely constitute the Church of Scotland congregations are substantially those of non-manual workers. The modes of communication and social organisation of the Church of Scotland in Falkirk are primarily middle-class in character...The non-aspiring manual worker and his family would find little to attract them to the social world embodied by the majority of the congregations of the Church of Scotland in the burgh... (Sissons, 1973, p. 290).

Sissons endeavoured to examine the nature of church membership within sociological categories relating to community and society, following the ‘Gemeinschaft’ and ‘Gesellschaft’ social groups set out by German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies.

Another more recent PhD study similarly took the Falkirk churches as a focus to consider the place of churchgoing as it affected the town during a period of industrialisation, ‘Falkirk in the Later Nineteenth Century: Churchgoing, Work and Status in an Industrial Town’ (Guasp, 2012). The focus of the study was an examination of the social composition of four Presbyterian congregations derived from a review of valuation rolls.

A presbytery-wide study, this time in Dundee, was conducted by Cleveland Yates in his PhD research 'A sociological and demographic analysis of patterns of church membership in the Church of Scotland in the urban city (Dundee)' (Yates, 1985). The study gave consideration to a detailed examination of descriptive membership statistics and information gained from a survey of church members from across the Dundee Presbytery area. Yates, in this research, uncovered changing patterns of church membership related to mobility which interfered with the normal operation of a parish system and which led towards membership loss. Based on the results, Yates called for a review of the current approach taken by the Church of Scotland, suggesting a more pastoral response and more imaginative development of congregations and their processes.

The motivation of Yates for his study, was an acute awareness of membership decline in the Church of Scotland and his various recommendations address aspects of reorganisation both locally and nationally which he thought would address some of the issues arising from his urban study. The focus of the study is, however, limited to those already part of the church and there is no real missional focus to his understanding of the greater problem of fewer new members joining churches. In this regard, this work may have set out some idea of how to slow decline through local church reorganisation, but not how to attract more members.

Edinburgh Presbytery served as the research focus for J.F.Kirk for his thesis on 'A comparative statistical analysis of the churches of the Presbytery of Edinburgh from 1960 to 1974' (Kirk, 1978). Kirk's work, like those previously listed, does not engage in a local congregational study but is a regional analysis based largely around known quantitative data. There are two volumes explaining the research of Kirk, the first giving consideration to membership statistics and the second, financial data. Kirk recognises that the basic problem of the Church of Scotland and the root of its decline lies in its failure to attract first communicants, i.e. new members. He identifies changes in the Scottish cultural landscape, including outlook and attitudes which affect how people view and engage with the work of the church. He is also clear that the church itself is limited in the effectiveness of its outreach activity, generally seeking to reach only those who are already involved in church activities.

In his analysis, Kirk suggests that an annual membership replacement percentage rate greater than 2%, would indicate a healthy position for a congregation; lower than this

would lead towards decline. Since the time of his study and with an increasing age demographic within Church of Scotland congregations, a 2% replacement rate would now be too low for many congregations. Of course, it is important to note that such a figure, whilst it may be useful as an overall mean, does not take into account the variability found in population and congregational demographics around Scotland.

Additional works, both from within the church and by secular analysts, which comment significantly on Church of Scotland statistical information, will be examined in some detail in Chapter two, which provides a history of the development of data usage for the Church of Scotland. The study, unlike those before it, surveys the Church of Scotland and its relationship with numerical data, employing a comprehensive approach engaging with all three tiers of church governance: national, regional and local.

In the following chapters, I chart major aspects of the historical, theological, phenomenological and practical engagement of the Church of Scotland and its functionaries with empirical data.

Thesis Structure

The thesis comprises four distinct sections. Part one, comprising chapters two to four, examines relevant historical, theological and practical contexts for the use of numerical data in the Scottish church. In part two, chapters five and six, three different surveys of church leaders are analysed, providing insight into the views and practices of church leaders in relation to statistical type information for their ministry. In the third part, chapters seven to nine, three case studies are examined, critically assessing the use of empirical data at national, presbytery and local levels. The final chapter concludes the thesis by providing a summary of findings and setting out a number of recommendations for improved good practice and avenues for future development.

Part One - Contexts

The thesis commences by setting the use of quantitative data within a Scottish historical timeline. The range and type of ecclesiastical, demographic and sociological data which has been gathered by churches in Scotland is examined, with a primary focus on the activities of the Church of Scotland. The chapter will also point toward the types of information gathered and made available by governmental bodies, independent groups and

individual researchers which have been appropriated by the Church of Scotland for its own purposes and understanding.

Chapter three charts how practical theology has been understood since Schleiermacher, in its relationship with the insights that came from the ‘sciences’, noting the development of empirical theology as a discipline. This chapter presents the pastoral cycle offered by Richard Osmer (2008) as an example of the practical and theological importance of data for the development of praxis.

Chapter four considers the importance and impact of specific influential ecclesial approaches to church mission and planning which employ quantitative information and measurable goals, namely the Church Growth movement, Church Health, Purpose Driven Church and The Natural Church Development Process as well as some dimensions within Congregational Studies.

In summary, part one provides a three-part foundational platform indicating the long history and close connection of the Church of Scotland with statistical and numerical data. It outlines an understanding of the crucial role data plays in the development of ecclesial praxis. Thirdly it provides insight into a number of common missiological schemes in which the role of hard fact and relevant data is critical.

Part Two - Surveys

Two specially designed surveys are presented in chapter five which investigate the general attitudes and perceptions of Church of Scotland ministers towards actively working with statistics and demographic information. The first is a general survey of attitudes towards those church statistics and data pools which were available prior to the release of data from the 2011 UK population census. The second survey was carried out as a follow up shortly after the release of that data by the Church of Scotland Statistics for Mission group, providing ministers and church leaders with parish level statistics for each congregation derived from the census.

A further survey, detailed in chapter six, was undertaken following the release of the initial data from the 2016 Scottish Churches Attendance Census to probe the effect on ministers of this largely negative raft of quantitative information.

Part Three – Case Studies

Having mapped out an understanding of various historical, theological and missional landscapes and the levels and types of engagement by individual church leaders, I turn, in chapter seven, to consider recent developments in the Church of Scotland in the use of statistics, as evidenced chiefly through deliverances and decisions of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and a number of its key Councils and Committees. I will chart its own self-appraisal of key data indicators such as church membership and how that metric has been viewed and treated.

Chapter eight, the regional case study, examines in detail one particular presbytery which sought to put an emphasis on numbers of various kinds for its own presbytery planning decision making. A critical analysis of the data utilised for that process will be undertaken along with an assessment of the handling of that data. This section of the study will highlight some of the problems, pitfalls and potential involved in such an enterprise.

In chapter nine, I use a congregational case study to investigate the practical benefits and the limitations which faced one congregation as it gathered numerical data to inform local decision making. The study considers the type of data currently available and how it has impacted on the understanding of the congregation and the decision-making processes of the church leadership. In this chapter, I outline a method of planning based on Peter Drucker's *The Five most important Questions*, which utilises both quantitative and qualitative data for its operation.

Chapter ten moves beyond the critical assessment to bring forward twenty-eight recommendations detailing a list of practical responses to the issues encountered throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2: History and Use of Religious Statistics in Scotland

Church historians are privileged by the volume of statistics they have at their disposal. There is no other area of popular culture for which such data are so profuse (Callum G. Brown, 2001, p. 145).

Introduction

The Church of Scotland has a long tradition in the collection and analysis of Scottish religious statistics. In the 17th and 18th centuries, surveys of the Scottish religious geography by prominent churchmen became a mechanism to confirm the protestant church's pre-eminent place in society. The changes in urban society, brought about by the industrial revolution and with the growth and the intensification of denominational politics in the 19th century, encouraged church leaders to again utilise data of various kinds, this time in the furtherance of their cause or dispute (C. G. Brown, 1997, p. 42). In entering the 20th century, the focus for the use of statistics by the churches centred initially around aspects of mission, before changing focus to be used for measuring, mapping and managing decline. As the Church of Scotland entered into the 21st century, attitudes to data began to change; in some parts of the church there is scepticism around the real value of any numerical measures and in others, a new confidence and determination to collect and use information in fresh and creative ways, for the benefit of the church.

This chapter charts the history and extensive engagement with quantitative data by the Church of Scotland in its quest to fulfil the role outlined in its constitutional declaration:

As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people, it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry (The Church of Scotland, 2017b).

Early Surveys

Around 1650, Sir John Scott sought permissions to conduct a survey of Scottish parishes. The necessary approvals were given for this to take place but local ministers were reluctant to participate and so little useful information was returned (Kyd, 1947, p. 310). In 1755, the earliest successful Scotland-wide demographic survey was undertaken by Rev. Alexander Webster. (Kyd, 1952). Webster was moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and therefore a person of significant influence amongst Church of Scotland clergy; this, combined with support gained from the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), meant that Webster was able to succeed in

gathering detailed statistical returns from ministers in every part of Scotland. Webster was interested to find out, among other things, both the number and the religious affiliation of the population. In his resulting summary tables, Webster highlights the number of ‘Protestants’ and those who were Roman Catholic, whom he refers to as ‘Papists’ in each place.²

The religious landscape, as presented by Webster, indicated that from a total Scottish population of 1,265,380 the vast majority, 1,248,890 (98.7%) were considered ‘Protestant’ with only 16,490 ‘Papists’ (1.3%), the greater part of the Roman Catholic population being located in some of the Scottish islands or in small sections of the northern mainland. He indicates, for example, that in Barra, Inverness-shire, there were 1100 ‘Papists’ and only 50 ‘Protestants’ (Kyd, 1947, p. 59). This group of Roman Catholics, like others, were rare, thus demonstrating both the effect of the Scottish reformation along with the largely successful efforts toward the religious suppression of the Roman Catholic faith (Pacione, 2005). Active suppression will mean, of course, that there will be a level of hidden religious adherence, which will explain why so many areas registered a nil return for Roman Catholics.

In this first attempt of a comprehensive survey of the country, there are fundamental questions around the issue of accuracy. How true are the figures given? What is the level or scale of error? These questions arise, to some degree, with every survey, census or set of statistics presented. It is a common error and misconception that numerical data of this kind has absolute precision when, in reality, it provides an estimate.

Statistical Accounts of Scotland

The next great 18th century gathering of information was the First Statistical Account of Scotland organised by Sir John Sinclair of Ulster. It was in the reporting of this information that the terms ‘Statistics’ and ‘Statistical’, derived from the German language, were first used. Sinclair gave it a new emphasis, explaining that it meant,

² Additionally, Webster attempts to compute the number of men of ‘fighting age’. This statistic is a derived number, based on the returned age profiles of a large number of parishes and estimating those men between eighteen and fifty-six not being disabled. Age profile information collected was not originally requested by Webster but having obtained it he was able to go and to construct an approximate population profile for Scotland.

An enquiry into the state of a country for the purpose of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants and the means of its future improvement (Kyd, 1947, p. 312).

Sinclair, being a product of his time, attempts to utilise statistics as a tool for 'social progress' (Plackett, 1986, p. 249). It was indeed this same social development which lay behind the formation of the Statistical Society in 1834 with the similar aim to deal with

facts calculated to illustrate the condition and prospects of society (Mouat, 1885, p. 16).

In the First Statistical Account, sometimes referred to as the 'Old' Statistical Account of Scotland, Sinclair approached parish ministers for information concerning their district. The method used to gather information was to pose one hundred and sixty questions covering everything from geography to local social customs.

The 60 questions regarding population deal not only with the trend of population in the past, but with its present distribution, the annual vital statistics in regard to births, marriages and deaths, and the number of centenarians, with the social classes of the people and their occupations, also with migration to and from the parish. Several of the clergy, from the data which they had gathered, constructed tables which I believe are the earliest attempts, in Scotland, to use scientific methods for measuring mortality and morbidity (Kyd, 1947, p. 311).

Sinclair published the results between 1791 and 1799 in twenty-one volumes; in so doing he paints a picture of Scottish society which is rich with detailed local information. After a period, an updated version was thought desirable and this proposal was subsequently approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This work came to be known as the 'New' or 'Second' Statistical Account of Scotland with the efforts of this labour published between 1834 and 1845.

In the time between the 'Old' and 'New' Statistical Accounts, society in Scotland had undergone dramatic changes due to the industrial revolution. In presenting the information for publication, the committee noted that this was 'in great measure, the Statistical Account of a new country'. As before, the information was mainly collected by parish ministers, responding to a set list of questions. There was, however, the opportunity in this edition, for additional contributions from other trusted local figures such as schoolmasters and doctors.

The Third Statistical Account was undertaken in the mid-20th century and published over the period 1951 to 1999.³ This time, the survey was not commissioned by the Church of Scotland but the work of four Scottish Universities. Previously the parish reports were composed most commonly by one individual, usually the parish minister, but this time a more diverse body of local people engaged in the task.

Once again, the questions posed looked towards information regarding the local environment and history. Additionally, the survey asked for details concerning population, housing and public life. This third survey is primarily a work of social history with less interest in population ‘vital statistics’, which from 1855 were gathered and collated by statutory governmental agencies.

Church Extension and Denomination Rivalry

The Industrial Revolution brought with it not only a growing urban population but also one of greater mobility. New population centres were created and often grew quickly. In this changing social landscape, questions began to be asked about the number and location of churches serving the people of Scotland. Thomas Chalmers, a prominent churchman, was a passionate advocate and activist for mission and church extension work. Chalmers had skills in mathematics, having previously lectured on the subject, and had a keen interest in the intersection of science and its methodologies with religion (Roxborough, 1999, p. 82). On becoming aware of the social landscape in the large industrial centres, Chalmers saw a desperate need to provide an appropriate number of churches for the rising population.⁴ Chalmers’ motivation led him to survey ministers and to ask for details about available ecclesiastical accommodation (T. Chalmers, 1835)

Chalmers gathered information on the extent to which church seating was available to the general public, what he terms ‘the really effective and serviceable church room’ (T. Chalmers, 1835, p. 6). Chalmers understood that some churches were too distant from parts of the parish to be useful for those sections of the parish community; he also knew that in the countryside and various towns some churches engaged in restrictive practices in

³ Access to a digital version of the Statistical Accounts of Scotland is available at the National academic data centre webpages (University of Edinburgh).

⁴ In arriving at St. John’s Church in Glasgow Chalmers became aware of only 2930 places available for 10,304 parishioners. In the Barony parish in Glasgow, there was one church and three chapels meant to serve a parish population of 51,861 (Drummond & Bulloch, 1973, p. 171).

the allocation of seating, making them effectively unavailable to the general public. It was not unknown, for example, in some places for pews to be paid for and effectively reserved, though hardly ever used, as a mechanism for excluding some groups or classes of people viewed as ‘undesirable’.

This survey by Chalmers was to map the full extent of ‘ecclesiastical destitution’ by which was meant the ability of individuals to be in church on a Sunday (it was assumed that the population was almost entirely Christian). The Church Extension Committee, by this method, attempted to provide positive statistical evidence of a need for the provision of additional churches and ministers. Although Chalmers saw merit in conducting a full population survey, to ascertain the true and exact scale of the need, given the logistical and financial implications of this particular methodology, he was forced to concede that a sample of the population was the most practical way to proceed. Chalmers is also well aware that his case for additional resources for church extension would be strengthened if the number of available ‘seatings’ took into consideration other denominations (the voluntary churches) in the same parish.

In Chalmers’ survey, a number of pieces of statistical information were requested:

1. What is the population of your parish?
2. How many places for public worship are there in your parish, and to what denomination of worshippers do they respectively belong?
3. How many persons can be accommodated with sittings in the parish church, and in any chapel or chapels connected with it?
4. If the deficiency of the church accommodation be considerable, in what part of the parish would it be most desirable to have an additional church erected?
5. In what way is the required increase of church accommodation most likely to be supplied?
6. Any additional information.

(T. Chalmers, 1835)

Supplementary questions were asked which related to the distance of people from the church – for example, how many lived further than two miles away and if so, where would be a good place within a reasonable distance for around 300 worshippers? There was interest also in the level of pew rent and the proportion of various rates in local use (T. Chalmers, 1835). The evidence gathered and the work carried out by Chalmers made a case for new parishes around Edinburgh, Leith and Glasgow, leading to the construction of many new churches.

The patronage of the State in providing financial backing for new churches would, after the disruption, become a very contentious issue particularly with those associated with the Free Churches who raged against the privileged position of the Church of Scotland, by disputing and critiquing the statistics advanced by the Church of Scotland.

Rev. James Johnstone of St. James' Free Church in Glasgow and then later Robert Howie, minister of St. Mary's Free Church in Govan, both produced significant compilations of Scottish church statistics (Howie, 1893; Johnston, 1874). The stated reason behind both projects was evangelical in nature and motivated to highlight the extent of spiritual need. However, there was another agenda at work, even though it was strongly denied. In his introductory statement, Howie contends that,

When he criticises the returns of any denomination he does it not as an ecclesiastic showing animus towards those who differ from him on church questions, but solely as a statistician desirous of getting at the facts (Howie, 1893, p. ix).

Given that Howie's statistics often present the established Church of Scotland in a negative light, it is not therefore surprising that, following publication, there was controversy, particularly by sections of the established church who took issue with the meaning and inference of the various numbers presented (Simpson, 1895). The Rev. William Simpson, minister of Bonhill in Glasgow, for example, conveys his discontent with the paper by Robert Howie arguing that so suspect are the statistics presented that

his 'facts' are fictions and his 'figures' figments (Simpson, 1895, p. 10).

Howie is further vilified and accused of using

absurd and fallacious methods of computation, followed by baseless inferences... (Simpson, 1895, p. 24).

It is evident from the comments made that the key issue at play during this period is denominational conflict, statistics now being one of the main weapons deployed.

Statistics may, at face value, appear as simple objective facts, yet in the hands of a particular pressure group or lobby, they can aid the presentation of a compelling case to further a cause. In Scotland, the gathered religious statistics became such a powerful lever. Numbers were produced to strengthen calls for the separation of church and state and the

discontinuation of the important financial support given by the State, in support of the Church of Scotland (Scottish Central Board of Dissenters, 1835; The Church of Scotland, 1882).

The mid-19th century was a time of intense debate both between and within denominations and so, a point of discussion, which newspapers highlighted and to some extent promoted through the gathering and publishing of church attendance details.⁵ In general, newspapers and periodicals took a keen interest in the intersection of religion and society and often gathered data through readers' polls highlighting the attitudinal position of the general population to the religious debates of the day (C. D. Field, 2010, p. 48). Local news titles were also keen to report on ecclesiastical data arising from local congregations or local presbytery reports.⁶

Government Censuses

While it is useful to have local ministers or other civic leaders gather information about the population, to obtain the greatest possible accuracy, a full population census is required. In the UK, the government began a ten-year cycle of population census in 1801; however, it was almost 50 years before information was sought specifically on religious adherence or practice. When agreement was finally reached on the form of gathering religious information, it was non-compulsory and, rather than request information on the beliefs or church affiliation of individuals, it was decided that church attendance data would be collected instead (Bruce, 1995).

The stated purpose was

to collect statistics as to the accommodation afforded by the various Churches and other Places of Public Religious Worship and the number of persons frequenting them (Graham, 1854, p. vii).

⁵ The Daily Mail in the West of Scotland, the Northern Daily News in Aberdeen and the Dundee Advertiser were prominent in this area of work

⁶ For example, the Falkirk Herald of 9th of April 1904 gave an extensive and detailed report on the Linlithgow and Falkirk United Free Presbytery which provided a range of data covering the number of congregations; the number of communicant members; the change from the previous year's statistics along with detail of the numbers joining and leaving by various mechanisms. The data covered the number of elders, managers and deacons along with the number of baptisms, Sabbath schools, scholars, numbers in the bible classes, societies for youth and the number in temperance groups both adult and juvenile. Further to this data there is a range of financial information given together with comments. This type of local report would be relatively common until recent times when regular reporting of presbytery business became less common in line with diminishing public interest.

The voluntary nature of the exercise and the allegedly relaxed, even carefree, attitude of the enumerators, suggested that the resulting data was less reliable than hoped (C. G. Brown, 1997, p. 43). The data collected indicated 3395 places of worship, 1,834,805 sittings which represented 63.5% of the population. The total number of people attending on census Sunday (March 30, 1851) within all denominations was 943,951 in the morning, 619,863 in the afternoon and the evening, 188,874, representing 32.75%, 21.55% and 6.55% of the population, respectively.

These results of the 1851 census for Scotland were published in 1854. Analysis of the UK data provoked heated debate and, south of the border, the English data, fuelled arguments for the disestablishment of the Church of England. The result of this was, that in the years which followed, each time a religious question was mooted for inclusion in the decennial census, its particular form and focus was contested, such that no agreement could be reached and the possibility was each time abandoned.

The inclusion of the next question on religion in the general population census came in 2001.⁷ The reason for the change was that there was now an increased appreciation of societal change where the population was becoming more multi-faith and multicultural (Aspinall, 2000). In light of the new situation, it was decided to include another voluntary question on religion, this time directed towards asking about an individual's religious profession. In Scotland, the question was modified to gather denominational affiliation both past and present. The wording used continues to provoke much debate about how the question was understood and whether it properly ascertains religious practice beyond notions of national identity or cultural norms (C. D. Field, 2001; Voas, 2006).

Church of Scotland Committees

In 1868 the Committee on Statistics, under the convenorship of Rev. J. Elder, sent out a statistical questionnaire to all 1254 ministers requesting information on the number of communicant members of the church; the number that had taken communion at least once in the year; the number of baptisms, elders, and details of financial contributions. What becomes clear in the early attempts to collect such statistics is that there is a reluctance by many ministers to comply with the request for information. In 1869, 510 ministers made no return (The Church of Scotland, 1869, p. 1).

⁷ The arguments and counter-arguments see (Drake, 1972, pp. 17-19) and (Snell & Ell, 2000, pp. 449-452)

In 1873 the work carried out previously by the Committee on Statistics was taken over by the newly formed Committee on Christian Life and Work. This committee, under the convenorship of Rev. Professor Charteris, sent out an expanded questionnaire, which asked:

1. Total number of souls in your parish and number connected with
 - a. Church of Scotland
 - b. Other Presbyterian Churches
 - c. Other churches (Not Presbyterian)
 - d. No church

2. Number of
 - a. Communicants at each of the last two occasions of dispensation of Lord's Supper
 - b. Average number of congregation in Church
 - c. Number of baptisms in past year
 - d. Number of marriages in past year(The Church of Scotland, 1874).

Tables and reports were compiled from the responses received, but once again there was difficulty in gaining responses from parishes. After a few years attempting to obtain the missing statistics, the Committee on Christian Life and Work departed from the matter and instead passed the collection and compilation of statistics to another committee, the 'Committee on Statistics of Church Connection' (The Church of Scotland, 1875).

The Committee on Christian Life and Work itself went on to produce other compilations of statistics, publishing them in its report of 1876 with details of 'lay workers', 'Sabbath-school teacher', 'district visitors' and those who 'take part in conducting meetings' (The Church of Scotland, 1876, p. 448).

Each year, the committee examined additional aspects of the life and work of the Church of Scotland, part of their process being to send out questionnaires to collect information on that particular subject matter and giving a statistical 'snapshot' for that area of work.

The Committee on Statistics of Church Connection, in light of the difficulties previously experienced, suggested that a decennium collection of church membership, in line with the government's population census, might be sufficient (The Church of Scotland, 1876, p. 489f). However, by 1881 the principle of the collection of regular statistics became

established, and in the following years this was acknowledged by the creation of the ‘Committee on Statistics of the Church’. The result of this development was that in 1886 the Church of Scotland began publication of a yearbook containing a digest of key statistical information (C. D. Field, 2010, p. 15). Reports to the annual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, likewise, would highlight, on a regular basis, the results of surveys undertaken or commissioned by various committees.

As the Church of Scotland entered into the 20th century, the convention of gathering regular and comprehensive statistical information became universally accepted. The resulting information now, not only allowed for a clearer picture of what was happening in congregations across Scotland but also gave an appreciation of developing trends and patterns which the Church, nationally, could use strategically to steward its resources and focus its energies (Wolfe & Pickford, 1980).

Mission and The Churchless Million

‘The Churchless Million’ began as a rallying cry arising from reports presented to General Assemblies of the United Free Church of Scotland.⁸ The phrase, which referred to the 36% of the Scottish population who were not in attendance at any church on a Sunday, became a powerful ‘banner’ to motivate evangelistic activity both of that denomination and in this time of pre-union discussions, also the Church of Scotland.

Newspaper reporting on a speech delivered at the Assembly of 1927 conveyed the passion attached to the headline figure,

Did they know that there were one million men and women of this description – 36 per cent of the adult population of the country? There were 140,000 children believed to be of Presbyterian parentage outside their Sunday schools. There were 250,000 adolescents of the same class with no connection with their Bible classes or other young people’s societies. Did they know that 30 per cent of the children born in Scotland were unbaptised? That was a distressing situation.⁹

‘The Churchless Million’ quickly became a powerful motivational catchphrase or slogan for the mission work of the churches, capturing within a single headline number, both the scale and urgency of the evangelistic need, as well as calls for mission and reform (Macleod, 1936). It was used extensively in published sermon titles, in public comment

⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland 1927 VI p3

⁹ Dundee Courier, Tuesday 31st May 1927

and for publicity around organised evangelistic events.¹⁰ Almost twenty years later the phrase still contained significant power and meaning so that, at the General Assembly of 1945, the Very Rev. Dr John White was still using it to illustrate the issue of large scale non-attendance at church. Whether the assessment was correct, given the time gap since it was first suggested, is a moot point, since no survey was conducted to confirm it.

One major initiative arising from ‘The Missing Million’ situation was the proposal put forward in 1926 for a ‘Forward Movement’ in home mission.¹¹ Following the union of the United Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland in 1929, the purpose of the ‘Forward Movement’ was to encourage, inspire and enable congregations and church people to engage in the work of mission.¹² The practical outcome of this initiative was that a large number of conferences, events and missions were organised and the committee in charge reported to the General Assembly in 1933,

The desire for, and expectation of, religious revival have been greatly quickened and in many places there are heartening signs of movement.¹³

From such a statement, it might have been expected that in addition to the number of missions, there might also be further hard data on the extent of the ‘revival’ looked for and anticipated. Though there seems to have been a greater sense of unity engendered throughout the recently reunited denomination, the result was much more qualitative than quantitative or as stated in the report of the following year,

the things of the spirit cannot be tabulated or measured.¹⁴

One might initially wonder whether this marked a change in attitude towards numerical information or whether it is, in fact, an example of the spiritual type of statement found when the hoped or anticipated results of efforts are not immediately obvious or forthcoming. Later in this thesis, when examining the church in the midst of decline and difficulty, statements of this kind are found to be more prevalent.

In 1933, the Church of Scotland held a positive outlook to the outcome of its efforts and the Home Mission committee proposed a major new church buildings’ initiative under the

¹⁰ Examples include Motherwell Times Newspaper of 19th August 1927, 9th September 1927 and 25th September 1931

¹¹ Reports to General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland 1926 VI p32

¹² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1931 p151

¹³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1933 p1150

¹⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1934 p1191

heading ‘Churching the People’.¹⁵ The aim of the scheme was to raise the sum of £180,000 to erect 30 new church buildings.

There were, however, some worrying signs that, as the years progressed, the ‘Missing Million’ might, in fact, be increasing.¹⁶ John Highet, lecturer in the Department of Social and Economic Research at the University of Glasgow and a Church of Scotland elder, undertook studies on the Scottish Churches, based on ‘the most recent facts and statistics available’ (Highet, 1950, p. 4). He is, in this period, according to Field, ‘the sole representative of the academic sociology of religion in Scotland’ (C. D. Field, 2010, p. 87).

Highet commented extensively, examining both ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ church statistics, subsequently publishing his findings in a number of books and articles (Highet, 1950, 1953; Highet, 1960, 1964). In addition to his work mapping out the major denominations in Scotland, Highet also examined in detail, the empirical impact of the ‘Tell Scotland Campaign’, the mission visit of the evangelist Billy Graham to Scotland and the evangelistic work of Rev. Tom Allan on the Scottish churches.

The work of John Highet provided the churches with both data and insight at a time when patterns of churchgoing and church affiliation were beginning to change. He was, for example, able to provide expert assessment of the limited value of ‘campaign evangelism’ in bringing the ‘churchless’ into regular church fellowship (Highet, 1960).

The value of gathering wide-ranging data by the Church of Scotland to aid the development of its own mission activities was highlighted when the ‘Committee of Forty’, under the convenorship of Professor Robin Barbour, set out on the task

to interpret for the Church the purpose towards which God is calling his people in Scotland, to investigate and assess the resources of the Church in persons and property for the fulfilment of this purpose, and to make recommendations for the re-shaping of the life and structure of the Church.¹⁷

The final report focused on a range of statistical information including projections for the number of ministers, the number and nature of declining membership and

¹⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1933 p324

¹⁶ Highet reports 1,200,000 ‘with not even a tenuous Church connection’ (Highet, 1960)

¹⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1972 p773

baptisms. It also looked at the economic situation, present and future of the Church of Scotland, in order to inform its range of recommendations for change.¹⁸

Strategic decision making in every aspect of the Church's life, ministry and mission, has required reliable data and in the modern era, there has been an increasing awareness of that reality. Data gathered has not been limited to that found in the standard annual returns from congregations but has also been generated through targeted surveys and information gathering. For example, *The Lifestyle Survey* from the Board of Social Responsibility was designed

as a means to learning something of the involvement and influence of Church of Scotland members in the life of the whole community... a comparison of the attitudes, beliefs and habits of members of the Church of Scotland with those of members of other Churches and of the general public may not only reveal how distinctive Presbyterians and other Christians are in facing contemporary issues in the light of their faith and beliefs, but also provide strategic information to assist with future policy and planning (Church of Scotland, 1987, p. 1).

The Church of Scotland recognised the usefulness of empirical information and many of its initiatives have been proposed, and many of its schemes designed, around an appreciation of the truth held within the analysed numbers.

Scottish Churches Censuses

I previously highlighted that national information, directly related to church attendance, had been largely unavailable, that part of the census having been discontinued in 1851. However, it has long been recognised that official church membership figures, whilst indicating some historical measure of affiliation, do not properly reflect the active participation of individuals in Sunday morning worship. The clearest and most direct measure of religious participation is obtained by means of a church attendance survey. The absence of this crucial information, important for strategic decisions, has, in part, been remedied through the efforts of Peter Brierley, who helped design, organise and interpret a number of Scottish Church censuses.¹⁹

¹⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1975 p509

¹⁹ Dr John Hight had arranged for an attendance census in Glasgow churches in 1954 and follow up censuses in 1955 and 1956 to quantify the effect on church attendance of the Billy Graham/Tell Scotland campaign. In 1959 information on church attendance was gathered from around Scotland. Hight explains that 'though lack of resources at that time made this investigation less extensive in its scope than I would have liked' (P. Brierley & Macdonald, 1985).

Brierley is a statistician having worked for the civil service within the Central Statistical Office where, among other tasks, he compiled information on religious statistics (Peter William Brierley, 1976). In 1978, he took a position within the Bible Society and was involved in the first English Church Census and the publication of the results.

In 1984, a census of the Scottish Churches was undertaken under the auspices of the National Bible Society of Scotland with Peter Brierley taking the leading role. The census achieved a response rate of almost 75% (82% for the Church of Scotland), giving the results statistical credibility. In addition to the facts and figures listed, a number of prominent church leaders and relevant experts of the time were asked to provide commentary on various aspects of the results. Among the articles included is one by Dr John Highet, whose earlier pioneering work on Scottish Church statistics and particularly information relating to 1959, providing a useful discussion on trends in church-going over that period (Highet, 1950, 1953; Highet, 1960).

Ten years later, a second census was organised by Christian Research, (the successor to MARC Europe), where once more Peter Brierley played a vital role; again an earlier English church census in 1989 provided a useful template and learning tool (P. W. Brierley, 1991). The response rate in 1994 was over 80% (91% for Church of Scotland) (P. W. Brierley & Macdonald, 1995, p. 102). A wealth of information on the situation in the Scottish Churches was now becoming available along with some general trend information and insights into geographic and denominational variations.

It would have been logical for another census to take place in 2004 but in 2001 the Board of National Mission of the Church of Scotland, conscious of continuing church decline and concerned to have accurate information for its strategic mission planning, arranged to conduct one earlier. An interdenominational steering group was again established and in 2002 another census was undertaken in partnership with Christian Research, Peter Brierley being commissioned to collect, collate and analyse the data. The published report (P. W. Brierley, 2003) highlights that, although participation in the survey process fell to 52% (64% for Church of Scotland), the results were still considered statistically valid and so from a planning point of view, extremely valuable.

In 2016 the fourth Scottish church census was undertaken with Brierley Consultancy taking the lead in collecting, analysing and distributing the data. The initial results were

released at Easter 2017 (P. Brierley, 2017a), followed by a full report published in the book *Growth Amidst Decline* in August 2017 (P. Brierley, 2017b). The results of the 2016 census, like those before them, provoked a media storm of negative stories concerning the decline of religious observance in Scotland.

I will examine the 2016 census in more detail in chapter six. In particular, I will look at the response of the Church of Scotland to the negative news stories and the reaction of Church of Scotland ministers, both to the results themselves as well as the efforts of the denomination to manage the story by employing a counter narrative to deflect from the challenging statistical truths.

Understanding the Statistics of Decline

The delay in supporting another Church census gave the impression of reluctance on the part of the Church of Scotland towards looking at the numerical situation it faced. The downward statistical trends of church membership and church attendance, had, of course, been uncomfortable reading for the national church.²⁰ Many commentators have analysed the statistical information and have concluded that the Church of Scotland is in a dire situation (Brierley, Bruce, Brown, Gill, et al.). Analysts such as Calum Brown attribute the noted decline to the effects of increasing secularisation (Callum G. Brown, 2001). Currie, reflecting on trends in the UK Churches wrote,

One of the problems considered is the extent to which a church is able to generate its own growth, for example, by recruitment and church-building programmes; and we conclude, from the available data, that church policy is on the whole of less significance than external influences such as secularization, industrialization, urbanization, trade fluctuations, political changes and war (Currie, Gilbert, & Horsley, 1977).

Professor Callum Brown, likewise, concludes that all the data underscores a social process, which, post Second World War, has led to a continuous ‘haemorrhage of faith’, which is leading inexorably, he believes, to the demise of the Church. His assessment, he suggests, is borne out simply from the evidence.

Statistics provide a stark guide to Scottish secularisation (C. G. Brown, 1997, p. 158).

²⁰ Decline meant not only a loss of members but also a resultant impact on necessary financial resources (I. Smith, 1993).

There are those whose investigations do not reach the same conclusion concerning the eventual loss of the Church (Robin Gill, Hadaway, & Marler, 1998). The contention of Gill is that faith itself is not simply dying but rather, is changing. Aisthorpe's recent research has also indicated a significant group which he terms 'the invisible church', who do not exhibit Sunday attendance characteristics and who will not then feature in data gathering of this nature (Aisthorpe, 2016). Goodhew, in his work examining growing churches, notes that whilst there is decline being experienced in the mainline denominations, there are areas where the Church is on the increase (Goodhew, 2012). The 2016 Scottish Churches Census has also identified growth within Scottish Pentecostal churches (P. Brierley, 2017). There are some signs that the secularisation thesis may not be the last word to understand church trends. John Hayward, a mathematician from the University of South Wales, for example, suggests that if there arose a group of passionate 'enthusiasts', then church growth would take place (Hayward, 2005).

At present, it is undeniable that the landscape of religious observance and formal affiliation is changing. The most recent data collected by the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey has indicated that the Church of Scotland has seen the percentage stating they belong to the Church of Scotland almost halve from 1999 to 2017 (35% to 18%) (ScotCen Social Research, 2017).

Data and the Church Today

The Committee on Mission of the British Council of Churches in the early 1970s looked afresh at the nature type of information being gathered by the various UK church bodies and groups

in the conviction that a fresh approach to the collection and use of statistical information is the basic prerequisite of any realistic planning for mission in the United Kingdom (Department of Mission and Unity, 1972, p. 1).

In the production of their report, *Stand up and be Counted*, the Council set out a rationale for data collection at 'national', 'regional', 'local authority' and 'local' levels, highlighting the importance of an agreed set of data standards to facilitate efficient future planning in and between denominations. This work identifies some discrepancies of meaning. For example, how different denominations understand and record 'membership' figures. It

also helpfully tabulates what kind of data different denominations gather, along with a digest of the actual numbers of members, clergy and church buildings.

The initial survey of national data concluded that,

the data base is poor, and that attention needs to be paid to the actual collection of data before anything sound can be achieved by way of further analysis, projections or research in depth (Department of Mission and Unity, 1972, p. 11).

The Church of England took up this challenge and has been leading the way in the development of extensive databases of statistical information both for its own purposes and for assisting the Methodist Church in the collection and collation of its statistics. The work was built on principles outlined by a Statistics Review Group. The principles are succinctly summarised in their report in the following terms,

Any data-gathering exercise should only be commissioned against a clearly defined objective, and should always lead to the recommendation of specific action steps. Statistics are of the appropriate quality and produced to the highest professional standards.

All work is conducted with transparency.

All statistical exercises should be validated against the following criteria

- That the information has been appropriately collected;
- That appropriate sampling methods have been used;
- That appropriate methods of calculation have been used to derive any statistics from the raw data;
- That the inferences drawn are based on sound statistical techniques;
- That the presentation of the information minimizes the risk of misrepresentation;
- That all the above work has been conducted in accordance with the best statistical practice. (Church of England, 2000, p. 26f).

The Church of England, seeing the value of statistical information both for the renewing of present structures and systems and as tool to help understand and develop new initiatives towards Church Growth, has invested significantly in a Statistics and Research Unit (Archbishops' Council, 2017d) and in a Church Growth Research Programme (Archbishops' Council, 2017a), which commissions research to be presented annually, through its Faith in Research Conferences (Archbishops' Council, 2017c).

In Scotland, religious research, using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies has been undertaken by a variety of agencies, charities and churches.²¹ However, an issue which has again become prominent is that the work undertaken often has had an agenda or was designed to appeal to a particular constituency or group. One recent piece of work was conducted by the American Christian research company Barna. The Barna survey had the bold target of an analysis of the current state of Christianity, faith and the Church in Scotland. Their work resulted in the *Transforming Scotland* report. This report presents a number of detailed recommendations which, it claims, will lead towards church renewal. The validity of their claims is questionable, since the methodology used, providing advice on what will work for churches, was based on the views of a relatively small number of carefully chosen participants (Barna Group, 2015).²²

This plethora of available information highlights an important point - we have entered an era of 'Big Data'.²³ UK Data Service (University of Essex & University of Manchester, 2017) now holds a significant number of searchable databases referencing many aspects of human beliefs and activities drawn from a wide range of sources. The ability to 'mine' and cross-reference this data opens up new avenues for the analysis of religious activity in Scotland and beyond.

Concluding Comment

The availability of data on religion in Scotland, with particular reference to the Church of Scotland, is extensive and is growing. It is not, however, without issues. Early efforts in data collection and interpretation were variable in extent, reliability and trustworthiness. The motivation for statistics gathering and analysis was often linked to contemporary political or social issues, and those engaged in the task were not likely to be as objective or detached as might be desired to satisfy modern data gathering standards. That said, the fact remains there does exist an illuminating compendium of statistical information which

²¹ A detailed compendium of research continues to be gathered by the British Religion in Numbers Project (BRIN) (C. Field & Voas) Field has also published key sources for the statistics of religion in Review Of United Kingdom Statistical Sources Volume XX (Maunder W.F. (Ed), 1980)

²² The analysis involved 29 in depth interviews with unidentified Christian leaders 11 of whom were church leaders, the other 18 being 'strategic thinkers'. The leaders chosen reportedly represent a range of theological and denominational backgrounds, an array of geographies and widely varying churches, ministries, businesses and political affiliations. This wide diversity with such a small sample having a unity of thought casts some doubt on whether the sample chosen is in any sense representative even of growing churches. It might be noted that the 29 leaders also do not represent 29 different churches. (Barna Group, 2015, p. 169)

²³ 'Big data' does not simply reference the increasing volume of information but is linked to the technological ability to link and analyse a wide variety of discrete data sets to identify patterns and trends in the pursuit of a greater degree of insight. (Press, 2013)

can be mined and examined to aid our understanding of the historical religious landscape and geography of Scotland, particularly as it has existed over the last 300 years.

In the examination presented above, I have highlighted that the Church of Scotland has, historically, greatly valued data for its essential function as a driving force within the planning processes and strategic mission of the national church. Indeed, much has been built on the foundation of the insights afforded by the various strands of information gathered and interpreted.

As I have also noted, statistics and church or denominational politics have often gone hand in hand since data can provide a powerful and potentially effective tool, often used to good effect, for the benefit of those who wield it wisely. Sadly, the side effect of statistics being employed within areas of ecclesiastical conflict is that, understandably, some suspicion now often accompanies the collection, collation, interpretation and publication of quantitative data. If there was one phrase heard more often than others throughout this study, it was a variation of the well-known expression

There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics.²⁴

This political dimension of data, especially in an age where such information is much more extensive and readily available, is one which presents both a practical and a psychological barrier to statistics being considered as an appropriate tool for use by the Church.

In this era of sustained church decline, particularly in the Church of Scotland, this common wariness of statistics bolstered by active attempts to subvert the true extent of institutional demise can too easily lead to vital information often carried within quantitative data, to be hidden or even discarded. To disregard the gathered data would be to make critical mistakes both for the damage it would do to the necessary activities of proper theological praxis and the need of church leaders for information necessary for ongoing presbytery and congregational mission planning.

I believe there is a desperate need, in this time, to recapture the earlier dynamic, writ large in the missional fervour of Thomas Chalmers and others, to engage with and to utilise

²⁴ Often attributed to Mark Twain who himself attributed it to Benjamin Disraeli, although its actual origin may have been earlier.

every useful tool at the disposal of the Church of Scotland towards its continuing reformation. Chalmers, for example, demonstrated the power of numerical and statistical evidence to address issues as diverse as poverty and church extension. This pastoral and managerial epistemology complemented and informed his theological understanding to give rise to renewed praxis and it can, in my view, similarly serve the Church of Scotland well, in this time.

In the next chapter, I will examine further some important theological justification for using data in this way in the service of the Church; in particular, I will outline the role of empirical information as a vital tool within practical theology and the development of praxis.

Chapter 3: Theological Value of Empirical Information

Schleiermacher suggested that there are three levels in theological study. The foundation is philosophical theology... Then comes historical theology... Finally, as the ‘crown of theological study’ comes practical theology, which is the ‘technique’ of church leadership (Forrester, 2000, p. 36).

There may be some who imagine that to talk of theology and statistics, or theology and data is to produce an idiom similar to ‘chalk and cheese’. That, however, would be to fundamentally misunderstand the nature, role and function of theology within the realm of practical theology. In this chapter, I have set out a short history of how practical theology has been understood since Schleiermacher, in its relationship with the insights that came from the ‘sciences’. In particular, I have drawn attention to the development of appropriate praxis through the pastoral cycle offered by Richard Osmer (Osmer 2008).

Practical Theology and Statistics

Practical theology, as it was traditionally taught in universities in Scotland, had as its particular focus the practical application of systematic theology within church liturgy, pastoral care and homiletics (Woodward, Pattison, & Patton, 1999, p. 61). This practice orientated focus was the standard pedagogical strategy advanced amongst my peer group as we engaged in the prescribed training for ministry in the Church of Scotland. The key concern within practical theology at that time, was still preparation for parish ministry, with a variety of courses providing the tools to translate the broad principles of theological thinking into specific practical action.

This manner of approaching practical theology within theological education found its origins with Friedrich Schleiermacher. Gräß explains Schleiermacher’s view that

Practical theology had to provide technical instructions or ‘rules of art’ (‘Kunstregeln’) for those who are active in leadership positions in the church, in order for them to be able to fulfil their leadership tasks expertly and in a well-considered way (Gräß, 2005, p. 188).

Schleiermacher, in his book, *Brief Outline on the Study of Religion* however, also proposed that practical theology needed to connect with both historical and philosophical theology in order that lived Christianity might feed into an understanding of the whole (Schleiermacher & Tice, 1966). At this early stage, there are indications that Schleiermacher also ascribes value in connecting with ‘sciences’. In addition to areas such as sociology and

anthropology, Schleiermacher proposed a specific place for church statistics, which he views as representing the social circumstances of the church over a historical period (Niebuhr, 1962; Schleiermacher & Tice, 1966, p. 82ff).²⁵ Though only fleetingly mentioned by Schleiermacher, empirical, or quantitative aspects of theological thinking within practical theology, has developed as a means of charting and interpreting religious behaviours and practices, both internal and external to the church.

Schilderman explained that,

Practical Theology as an empirical discipline corresponds to practical reasoning. It helps to interpret the existential, moral and religious significance of texts, belief and practices and it supports the clarification of our questions about what to accept and what to discard on rational grounds (Miller-McLemore, 2011, p. 124).

This ‘practical reasoning’ looked towards the insights and tools afforded through the social sciences and the field known as ‘empirical theology’ was born.²⁶ The aim was to connect theology and practice through the reality of research (Heimbrock, 2011).

In essence, empirical theology is concerned with those kinds of theological data that are properly amenable to empirical investigation. While many theological notions say those concerning an invisible and immortal transcendent deity, rightly elude empirical investigation, many other theological notions, say those concerning the relationship between God and the created order, rightly demand empirical investigation (Francis, Robbins, & Astley, 2009, p. xv).

Empirical theology, therefore, takes seriously the well-known formula of Anselm, ‘faith seeking understanding’ (*fides quaerens intellectum*), with the scientific empirical method providing some of the insights necessary for ecclesiological praxis.

Historically, the relationship between theological thinking and ‘concrete’ evidence provided by the sciences has led to a number of key theoretical developments from the method of correlation set out by Paul Tillich, in his *Systematic Theology* (Tillich, 1978), where theology and science are viewed as equal partners. This was later adapted by David Tracy who expressed a more dynamic and reciprocal relationship,

²⁵ Schleiermacher has his section on church statistics in his chapter on ‘historical theology’ but Van Der Venn notes that in a letter to a student Schleiermacher says that it can also be placed within ‘practical theology’ which was the place afforded it by some (J. A. Van Der Ven, 1988, p. 15).

²⁶ In Europe Werner Gruehn invented the label ‘empirical theology’ though in application it was contextualised within the field of psychology of religion. Earlier in the 20th century Douglas Macintosh, as part of what was known as the ‘Chicago School’, had attempted to bring the disciplines of scientific logic to theological thinking in a different development of empirical theology (MacIntosh, 1919).

practical theology is the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation (Tracy, 1983, p. 76).

Don Browning, an advocate of what is known as the ‘revised critical correlation method,’ explained,

The view I propose goes from practice to theory and back to practice. Or more accurately it goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices (1996:7).

The stress Browning places on the term ‘theory-laden’, highlights his belief that engagement in practical theology is situated within a culture and place and that we come to any study with assumptions and understandings which are often unexamined. Browning builds on the work of David Tracy with his aim to work towards a

fusion of horizons between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts (Browning 1996:51).

Further developments continue to be proposed, amongst them the revised praxis method of correlation’ by Rebecca Chopp. Chopp links ‘scientific understanding’ with ‘faith seeking understanding’ explaining that,

By using the term ‘scientific understanding’, we are not raising issues of comparison between theology and natural or social sciences but rather emphasizing that theology has an interest in theoretical clarity. This clarity pertains not only to its beliefs but also to the way it analyses its contexts and methods. In addition, this interest in theoretical clarity includes Christian thinkers’ interests in presenting their claims as truth, according to contemporary views of truth (Chopp & Taylor, 1994, p. 12).

Each development and revision brought theology and the sciences into a closer inter-relatedness for the purpose of greater knowledge and better praxis.

Van der Ven, a central exponent of empirical theology, suggests a dialectical spiral of movement from theory to empirical research of praxis back to theory as the best method through which this engagement is made. (J. A. Van Der Ven, 1988).²⁷ The key consideration is to avoid simple deductive reasoning based on idealist principles. Bazzell likewise argues for an empirical ecclesiology based around an epistemology which locates

²⁷ This being a development of the theory – practice – theory movement as proposed by Don Browning ((Browning, 1991)

itself in specific locality and context rather than what he takes as ‘blue-print ecclesiology’, a term coined by Healy (Healy, 2000) to describe normative images or ideas of the Church (Bazzell, 2015).

Empirical research may, methodologically, involve quantitative and/or qualitative elements. Within the arena of science, quantitative information is often considered to be the most objective²⁸ and precise, whereas, within the area of the social sciences, qualitative data is often highly valued for its ‘thick description’²⁹ nature in that it contains a wealth of often multi-layered meaning and significance. In empirical theology, both quantitative and qualitative elements contain methodological aspects, each with their particular strengths and weaknesses, as well as the ability to complement one another towards the construction of an holistic understanding (Francis et al., 2009). Therefore, we find theologians such as Van der Ven calling for the sciences to be used within theology in an intradisciplinary approach as a way of engaging in a hermeneutics of praxis (J. Van der Ven, 1993).³⁰

To clarify, the point is, that practical theology needs to both carefully investigate and then to deeply reflect on the connection between faith and life in order that there may be engagement in the transformative potential of the process for the ‘Missa Dei’ (Woodward et al., 1999).

Osmer’s Pastoral Cycle

A general mechanism proposed for ecclesial reflexivity involving empirical theology is contained in various versions of the ‘hermeneutical’ or ‘pastoral cycle’. In relating church statistics to the work of mission at local, regional or national levels, it is instructive to consider the pattern provided by Richard R Osmer (2008). Osmer presents a basic outline of a pastoral cycle as four key tasks which are both clear and easily grasped by practitioners.

²⁸ Objectivity in science should be understood as a general concept since all measurement and human involvement necessarily introduces elements which would negate any absolute form of objectivity.

²⁹ The term ‘thick description’ was first used by the philosopher Ryle and applied by Geertz in the field of ethnography. It not only involves detailed accounts of what is experienced but also relates this to wider relational connections setting these within the larger lived context (Holloway, 1997).

³⁰ ‘The term intra-disciplinary refers to the idea of borrowing concepts, methods and techniques from other disciplines and integrating these into another science’

The first task is one of orientation towards answering the question, ‘What is happening?’; Osmer terms this the ‘The descriptive-empirical task’. The task is one in which attentiveness plays a crucial role; hence he typifies it as ‘priestly listening’ which

involves attending to others in personal relationships, it also includes investigating the circumstances and cultural context of others in more formal and systematic ways (Osmer, 2008, p. 37).

It is in the formal actions of ‘attending’ that empirical research, both qualitative and quantitative, finds its locus as the primary movement within locality. Listening, of necessity, must come prior to any attempt at understanding a situation or context. Attending also must give due regard to the subjective awareness and response of the researcher in the interaction so that consideration and regard can be given to the theories and the values being imputed. It is important to remember that no observer is able to be wholly neutral in their environment.

The interpretive task which follows draws on the appropriate theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why certain patterns and observations have been recorded. This moment within the hermeneutical circle asks for discernment, judgement and wisdom for its effective operation.

Prophetic discernment becomes the key component of the third movement in Osmer’s scheme which he calls ‘the normative task’, where

Theological and ethical interpretation is the most formal dimension of the normative task, Just as attending in the descriptive task opens out to empirical research and sagely wisdom in the interpretive task, to dialogue with theories of the arts and sciences, so too the normative task opens out to form of theological and ethical reflection (Osmer, 2008, p. 139).

The hermeneutic circle closes with a movement towards action with Osmer’s ‘Pragmatic task’. The practical and transformative nature of the exercise is now in view with strategic outcomes being found and implemented. Osmer couches his call for effective praxis within the language of ‘servant leadership’, a reminder of the essential nature of the role of those who lead the process of change within congregations and Christian groups.

Osmer’s scheme is presented here to underline and to understand that the process of practical theology comprises several essential stages, which require the need to take

evidential information seriously and to treat it appropriately. The operation of this pattern in practice can take a variety of forms. In chapter nine, for example, two different schemes for congregational development are discussed, each seeking renewed praxis though lacking explicit theological expression. In such instances Osmer's scheme assists us in framing an understanding the dynamic at work behind a proper working of, in this case, Drucker's 'Five Questions' or the 'Local Church Review Process' towards praxis. It also provides church leaders with an appreciation that what, at first, may appear to be simple management tools can, with the correct application, be helpful mechanisms for genuine praxis.

Conclusion

Quantitative information, including statistical data of various kinds, is an often-undervalued component of the practice of attentiveness in which ecclesiastical practitioners must engage.

Shilderman observes,

Empirical scholars in practical theology study a domain that is often left uncharted by behavioural and social scientists, namely the conceptual and empirical characteristics of moral and religious signification of practices (Shilderman, 2011).

In light of the growing impact of sciences as part of the discipline of practical theology, Pattison asks the question: 'Practical Theology: art or science?' The answer given indicates that there are elements of both. Pattison's warnings against an understanding of the sciences as containing a panacea of true, unbiased knowledge and wisdom serves as a helpful reminder that whilst it has its place within a descriptor of reality experienced, it is not without reservation and certainly not complete in and of itself (Pattison, 2007).

Having set down some foundations justifying the place of data, as at least one component within practical theology, I turn now to assess some incarnations of church based data gathering and assessment processes.

Chapter 4: Reference Frames for Using Metrics for Mission and Planning

Employing numerical measures as an aid towards the goals of Christian mission is not a new phenomenon or practice. This chapter examines some of the more prominent schemes which have actively engaged metrics, of various kinds, to inform and guide the development of their strategy and direction.

The Church Growth Movement

If there is one particular area of ecclesial development which has been more closely associated with the use of numbers and data than others, then it is surely that which became known as the Church Growth Movement. To help understand and assess the place and value of quantitative data within this area, it is key to understand its origins and the motivation behind it, the philosophy and theology it employs, as well as the practical tools which it commended for use by church leaders. To simply look at the various numerical tools in isolation from the overall scheme, may lead to misunderstanding and misjudgements.

Church growth, as a distinct system for helping the Christian church and local congregations be more effective in mission, is credited to the work and the enthusiasm of Donald A. McGavran. McGavran was a missionary, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, determined to fulfil the Gospel imperative to go and make Christian disciples,

it became clear to me that God was calling me to be a missionary, that he was commanding me to carry out the Great Commission...that decision lies at the root of the church-growth movement (D. A. McGavran, 1986, p. 53).

McGavran was opposed to what he saw as a sea change in the core philosophy of mission arising from the works of William Ernest Hocking (Hocking, 1932) and H. Richard Niebuhr, which saw a primary focus on a social gospel.

Hocking's view within the *Re-thinking Mission* report gave a clear expression of this new emphasis,

We believe that the time has come to set the educational and other philanthropic aspects of mission work free from organised responsibility to the work of conscious and direct evangelism. We must work with greater faith in

invisible successes, be willing to give largely without any preaching, to cooperate whole-heartedly with non-Christian agencies for social improvement... (Hocking 1932).

McGavran stood apart from this method and although he viewed social action by way of education programmes, improvements in living conditions and political change as by no means bad, he did not view mission in the same way.

It was not that he saw these activities are unnecessary, on the contrary, they provided means towards leading men and women into discipleship. What McGavran objected to was a perception that this new approach was becoming the *raison d'être* of Christian mission, a perception which found support as he read the preparatory document of the 4th World Council of Churches assembly due to be held in Uppsala in 1968 – a situation which McGavran considered unbiblical.

Instead of seeking to disciple *panta ta ethne*, winning them to Christian faith, and multiplying churches among them, the effort would be to spread brotherhood, peace and justice among all people regardless of what religion or ideology they espoused (D. A. McGavran, 1986, p. 54).

In 1955, McGavran set out his own approach in the book *Bridges of God* which has been termed the 'Magna Carta' of the Church Growth Movement (Wagner, Arn, & Towns, 1986, p. 22).

McGavran had been stimulated by his own experience of mission and by the research writings of J. Wascom Pickett and Roland Allen considering how churches grow. His own extensive research in India and Asia generally, convinced him that effective Christian mission was best served through the operation of what he termed 'people movements' (D. A. McGavran, 2005, p. 26). This approach was contrasted against the 'mission station approach' in which the church focused its available energies in the creation of an enterprise which evidenced limited growth through a philosophy of local social action and individualistic Christian conversion.

For McGavran, the aim of mission was the growth of the church (Donald Anderson McGavran, 1955, p. 107). He held that effective mission could be measured, at least in part, by numerical increase in the local church. Since 'responsible church membership' (Wagner, 1985) was set as the 'fruit' or 'validating criterion for discipleship'.

From the outset, McGavran understood that an emphasis on numerical measures would raise objections and arguments concerning quantity versus quality. However, he is forthright in how he views this argument

Some people question any emphasis on numbers...no numbers of redeemed persons are ever 'mere numbers'... We consider any disparagement of 'numbers' of converts ridiculous and do not believe that on second thoughts many would advance the objection (D. A. McGavran, 2005, p. 97).

The Church Growth Movement has always struggled to distance itself from the simplistic interpretation that its only concern lay in numerical increase. McGavran, Wagner and others considered this to be a vital indicator of overall health, which would normally (though not exclusively) indicate such a condition.

We who are in the field of church growth too frequently hear the criticism that we are 'playing the numbers game'. Or that we stress quantity to the detriment of quality. This is unfair, because church-growth leaders consistently declare that their intension is to build the Body of Christ in its full biblical sense...we know that church health is of vital importance to church growth. Churches grow because they are healthy. When churches are healthy they grow (Wagner, 1985, p. 12).

Alister McGrath, like many observers, considers much of what is presented as 'Church Growth' 'disturbing' since it appears that 'Spirituality became a matter of playing the numbers game.' (McGrath, 2002, p. 53).

Whatever was claimed by the proponents of the Church Growth Movement, it has always been difficult to shake off this accusation, given that many of the resources produced to help churches towards a local Church Growth strategy, attempt to utilise tools derived from research dealing with statistics, surveys or polls. Counting, in one form or another, has always been important, not for the numbers themselves but for what they represent – people. In particular, McGavran was interested in helping 'lost people' come to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

To be sure, no one was ever saved by statistics; but then, no patient was ever cured by the thermometer to which the physician pays such close attention ... Similarly, the facts of growth will not in themselves lead anyone to Christ. But they can be of marked value to any church that desires to know where, when and how to carry on its work so that maximum increase of soundly Christian church will result (D. A. McGavran, 1990, p. 67).

It was recognised that quality was as important as quantity, albeit more difficult to measure and identify.

Quantity is not enough without corresponding quality. But quality is not self-explanatory (Wagner, 1985, p. 24).

Peters likewise cautioned using simple quantitative measures for assessment,

Quantitative growth, however, can be deceptive. It may be no more than the mushrooming of a mechanically induced, psychological or social movement, a numerical count, an agglomeration of individuals or groups, an increase of a body without the development of muscle and vital organs (Peters, 1981, p. 23).

It, therefore, became important that the 'quality factors' for church growth were identified. Peter Wagner together with Richard Gorsuch of Fuller University, attempted to draw up a list of such factors which are presented below in order of importance (Wagner, 1985, p. 25ff).³¹

- 1 Bible knowledge
- 2 Personal devotions
- 3 Worship
- 4 Witnessing
- 5 Lay ministry
- 6 Missions
- 7 Giving
- 8 Fellowship
- 9 Distinctive life-style
- 10 Attitude towards religion
- 11 Social service
- 12 Social justice

Wagner acknowledged that if this list was to be useful, it would require work on validation and application methodology. A mechanism for measuring spiritual quality was produced by Fred Smith in his PhD Thesis, which acknowledged its role in completing the work begun by Wagner and Gorsuch (F. H. Smith, 1985, p. 71). The Spiritual Life Survey (SLS) was the practical result of the study. Smith suggests that further research would need to be undertaken to identify whether the quality growth identified via SLS is directly correlated to quantity growth in a particular church (F. H. Smith, 1985, p. 193).

³¹ According to Smith an alternate ranking order was originally produced when the various factors were presented to conference attendees by Wagner (F. H. Smith, 1985).

Church Growth Developments

Various lists of supposed important characteristics for church health and/or church growth have been presented by a wide variety of church leaders, each proposing to define the 'essential' or basic activities and/or attitudes which would lead a church towards greater health and/or growth. For example, George Peters gives consideration to qualities apparent in the early New Testament church and derives from his study a list which he considers essential qualities for 'fitness' (Peters, 1981, p. 139). Stephen A. Macchia claims to have extensively researched growing churches and this, allied to information derived from a series of surveys of church leaders, arrived at a set of ten Characteristics of a healthy church (Macchia, 2003). Mark Dever looked more directly at biblical teaching to arrive at his own Nine Marks of a Healthy Church (Dever & Harris, 2004). Neither Dever nor Macchia claim their list to be exhaustive and indeed this is something noted from amongst the various publications -there does not appear to be a critical list of attributes which are agreed by all.³²

It is clear that for some writers, their list of 'essential' activities to stimulate church growth is derived from their own experience within a bounded cultural and ecclesiastical context and may or may not have external relevance (although many obviously believe it is the case). In fact, the historical development of the Church Growth Movement saw a distinction emerge between what might be termed 'Classical Church Growth' and 'Popular Church Growth' (McIntosh, 2010), the latter often moving beyond the basic principles set out by Donald McGavran and sometimes specifically rejecting particular elements of his work. A difficulty emerging over time is that not everything given the title 'Church Growth' would be acceptable to all those within the Movement.

Criticisms of the Church Growth Movement

Some criticisms levelled against the Church Growth Movement have already been encountered, in particular, that it is over-concerned with numbers and values, quantity over quality. Already noted in the formation of the movement by Donald McGavran is that it arose partly as a reaction against the 'Social Gospel' movement in mission. It might, therefore, come as little surprise that some critics have been unhappy about the priority given to evangelism over ministry. Leslie Newbigin concedes that the Church Growth school of missiology

³² A useful collection of lists of healthy church characteristics from various authors can be found in Reeves (Reeves & Jenson, 1984).

contains important elements of truth (Newbigin, 1995, p. 124).

However, he remained unconvinced about the role or meaning given to numbers as a way of assessing or monitoring the ‘success’ of a church (Newbigin, 1995, p. 140). Robin Gill suggests that Newbigin’s objections are, however, ‘more moral than theological’ (R. Gill, 1988, p. 76). His view is that there are methods which a church in decline may usefully employ and points toward the value of functional membership, population statistics and other empirical data to inform mission and strategy (R. Gill, 1988, p. 81).

Three additional common criticisms might be added; firstly, that of pragmatism, secondly a concern for the possible uses of manipulative strategies and thirdly, a dislike for the ‘homogeneous unit principle’.

Pragmatism

A key principle operational within the Church Growth Movement is neatly expressed in the phrase,

if it is not unbiblical, and if it contributes to the growth of the church, then do it (Rainer, 1993, p. 30).

This kind of permission-giving to engage in a wide range of activities, though echoing the sentiment expressed by the apostle Paul

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some (1 Corinthians 9:22 New International Version, 1984).

has often been seen as a dangerous route to travel. The issue for many Evangelicals centres around the role of the Bible in the determination of church activity and ministry methods. While the Church Growth Movement might argue that if it is not disapproved of in the Bible, it may be acceptable; more fundamentalist voices want to contest that, to be legitimate, the Bible needs to give more explicit approval.

Pragmatism also allows scope for creative cultural engagement. This is evident in the desire of some churches to be ‘user friendly’ or ‘seeker friendly’, an obvious example being Willow Creek community church which began with the idea of

a weekly seeker service that would provide a safe and informative place where unchurched people could come to investigate Christianity further (Hybels & Hybels, 1995, p. 41).

This congregation, though highly successful in terms of numerical growth, is continually criticised for its desire to be culturally relevant, which affects how the church looks and feels and what kind of service and content is offered.

Manipulation

In an effort to find effective tools for mission, George Barna and others found the insights provided by the strategic use of marketing techniques helpful. In publishing his first book on church marketing, Barna was denounced by many church leaders, and for many, his book was ‘scandalous’. He became

a persona non grata in many places (Barna, 1992, p. 13).

In essence, the use of ‘business’ approaches in the realm of church and ministry endeavour has often been viewed suspiciously, given the aim of business is to sell a product or a service with the result of generating profit. This seemingly unspiritual and worldly backdrop does not sit well with many critics, who are also suspicious that marketing techniques may involve forms of psychological manipulation.

The mission and ministry potential of marketing is easily seen in the definition of marketing provided by Stevens and Loudon,

Church/Ministry Marketing is the analysis, planning and management of voluntary exchanges between a church or ministry and its constituents for the purpose of satisfying the needs of both parties. It concentrates on the analysis of constituents’ needs, developing programs to meet those needs, providing these programs at the right time and place, communicating effectively with constituents, and attracting the resources needed to underwrite the activities of the organisation (Stevens & Loudon, 1992, p. 4).

Churches are naturally involved in marketing, using a variety of methods, though they will often prefer to use terminology which is less commercial and controversial.³³

Homogeneous unit principle

Bill Easum, a noted advocate of many aspects of Church Growth, commenting on the homogeneous principle said that it

³³ Marketing in a general sense involves the promotion of a business and its services through advertising and other methods, something which churches may refer to as outreach, evangelism, mission, communications or some alternate term.

destroyed much of the integrity of church growth. It does not reflect the diversity of biblical faith or the richness of American culture (Easum, 1996, p. 30).

The principle itself is, of course, sociologically descriptive, highlighting a common feature in human behaviour, namely that

People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers (D. A. McGavran, 1990, p. 163).

McClintock sees in McGavran's principle an example of poor sociological understanding

From a sociologist's viewpoint, it is difficult to regard the sociological content of McGavran's missiology with respect. The inherent weaknesses in his sociology that have been identified in this paper are so fundamental that they undermine his whole missiological approach (McClintock, 1988).

Wagner was a strong advocate of the principle and saw it not only as a pragmatic approach to mission work but also one which was morally important,

When the Gospel moves cross-culturally, it is unloving to require the people of the second culture to adopt the behaviour patterns or the language or the socioeconomic level of the preachers or missionaries in order to become Christians. They should not even be required to come halfway – they should be encouraged to become Christians right where they are (Wagner, 1978, p. 13).

Critics see in this principle at least two major issues, firstly the call upon Christians to be 'counter cultural' appears to be challenged if Christians are not required to renounce at least some aspects of their cultural background. Secondly, in attempting to plant churches using this principle, there is a fear that it would create segregated congregations, hence the concern of Easum to have churches containing a diversity of people groups and ages.

To suggest that McGavran desires segregated Christian communities, or that he sees the Gospel as less than counter-cultural, is to misunderstand him. McGavran's view was that whilst the 'perfecting' processes in discipling are necessary, as a secondary stage, the first task is to lead men and women to conversion, which must be arrived at without having to cross human barriers (D. A. McGavran, 1990, p. 168). Peter Wagner, who took over as the leader of the Church Growth Movement, sought to gain academic credibility and approval for the homogeneous principle through the production of a PhD thesis on the subject (Wagner, 1978).

Church Health

There have been many detractors from the outworking of the Church Growth Movement. The emphasis on numerical growth being a particular area of dispute seems to have led on to a reframing of 'growth', now, not in terms of numbers, but in relation to a concept of 'health'. Indeed, even the leading advocates of the Church Growth Movement, including Peter Wagner, undertook this shift of presentation, writing books on what might constitute 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' churches (Wagner, 1976, 1979, 1985, 1986; Wagner & British Church Growth, 1988).

Wagner makes frequent use of health metaphors as he looks towards the creation of church growth strategies.

Lack of church growth is a serious disease, but in most cases it is a curable one... (Wagner, 1976, p. 41).

healthy churches, like healthy people, exhibit certain vital signs. If the Church is the body of Christ, then there is some biblical justification in taking a rather clinical approach to analysing the health of a church (Wagner, 1976, p. 32).

Wagner proposes seven vital signs of a healthy church

1. A pastor who is possibility thinker and whose dynamic leadership has been used to catalyse the entire church into action for growth.
2. A well-mobilized laity which has discovered, has developed, and is using all the spiritual gifts for growth.
3. A church big enough to provide the range of services which meet the needs and expectation of its members.
4. The proper balance of the dynamic relationship between celebration, congregation and cell.
5. A membership drawn primarily from one homogeneous unit.
6. Evangelistic methods that have proved to make disciples.
7. Priorities arranged in biblical order.

Wagner went on to write extensively about these signs, though he is most noted for the emphasis placed on the role of leaders and the use of spiritual gifts in church development and health. Many publications have followed Wagner's lead to continue with this new presentation (Dever & Harris, 2004; R. Warren & Warren, 1995).

Some approaches to Church Growth or Church health have drawn up their own particular lists of critical factors, some of which have become popular and therefore significant within the UK context. These include the seven signs of a healthy church as proposed by

Peter Wagner and assessed in the UK by Paul Beasley Murray and Alan Wilkinson (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981). The seven ‘marks’ of a healthy church as proposed by Robert Warren and presented in his book *The Healthy Churches’ Handbook* (Robert Warren, 2004). The eight quality characteristics as suggested by Christian Schwarz arising from his international research related to church health and administered in the UK via Healthy Church UK. The five purposes arising from Rick Warren’s writings on *The Purpose Driven Church* (R. Warren & Warren, 1995) and in Scotland the Church of Scotland report entitled *Church without Walls* offering their own ‘marks of a healthy church shaped by Jesus’ (Church of Scotland, 2001).

Turning the Tide

Paul Beasley-Murray, as minister of Altrincham Baptist Church, became interested in the thinking and methodology of the Church Growth Movement and in particular the Seven Vital Signs as proposed by Peter Wagner. In 1977 Beasley-Murray was keen to examine whether the insights gained in the USA could be useful in the UK context and developed a survey which was conducted with a sample of UK Baptist Churches. The results are reported in the book co-authored by Alan Wilkinson called *Turning the Tide* (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981).

Beasley-Murray believes that the results support Wagner’s proposition that ‘dynamic leadership’ is a key component for growth although he goes on to suggest

it is perhaps more important that he should have a willingness or ability to delegate or share his responsibilities with the members of the fellowship (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 38).

The dynamic of a visionary leader with a committed and active membership, is one Beasley-Murray endorses, although there seems to be little attempt in the survey to assess whether active lay involvement is related to ideas of spiritual gifting which, for Wagner, would be an important consideration.

The findings from the survey did not give any support to Wagner’s third vital sign in that no direct correlation could be found between the number of church activities and rates of conversion (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 42). The fourth vital sign relating to cell, congregation and celebration dimensions of church activity was another area that

Beasley-Murray had some difficulty relating directly to the UK context. Looking at the size of different church activities, Beasley-Murray concluded that,

as the percentage of cell activity increases in the total programme, so does the probability that a church is a growing one (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 46).

An examination of the survey data for evidence to support Wagner's fifth vital sign, the Homogeneous Unit Principle, was unsuccessful. Beasley-Murray saw no indication that the surveyed congregations were drawn primarily from one ethnic, cultural or one sociological group (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 47).

Beasley-Murray is much more confident in Wagner's sixth vital sign being supported by the evidence he collected; for example, he said,

It came as no surprise to find that the more evangelistic activities undertaken by a church, the greater is the probability that the church is growing (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 48),

However, he comments he is not convinced that it is the programmes themselves which generate the results but rather 'faith, expectancy and commitment' and 'love and witness' of the people (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 50).

The final vital sign of Wagner's list argues for a priority of evangelical activity over social work or social action. In *Turning the Tide*, Beasley-Murray validates this sign by noting that churches which placed outreach activities as a high priority, had a 'strong bias towards growth' whereas those who placed community focused activities high 'had a definite bias towards non-growth' (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 51).

In addition to Wagner's seven signs, Beasley-Murray notes an important characteristic of growing churches to be that of faith. He says,

Growing churches seem to be those, predominantly, that are expecting great things from God and have that conviction underlying all their activity' (Beasley-Murray & Wilkinson, 1981, p. 75).

Disease - Wagner

The model of health active for Wagner was clearly based on a biomedical understanding that, for health to be present, possible church ‘disease’ would need to be absent. In his book *Your Church can be Healthy*, Wagner sets out eight ‘diseases’ which he said

...are maladies which occur in churches with significant frequency (Wagner, 1979, p. 15).

The first two church diseases listed by Wagner, ‘Ethnikitis’ and ‘Old Age’ he characterizes as ‘terminal illnesses’ (Wagner, 1979, p. 28) both being ‘local contextual factors’ and so outside the direct control of the church. The others, albeit serious, he suggests are recoverable because they have an institutional dynamic which can be altered.³⁴

In putting forward the imagery of disease in the body of Christ, Wagner created stimuli encouraging others to give consideration to this metaphor and to expand upon it. Dr Hollis Green, a student of the Church Growth Movement, presented his views on the necessary requirements for church health in the provocatively named book, *Why Churches Die* (Green, 2007), as he identifies some thirty-five reasons that might lead in that direction. Donald McGavran in the foreword commends this work for use by American churches.

Mac Brunson and Ergun Caner in their book *Why Churches Die – diagnosing lethal poisons in the Body of Christ* similarly draw up a list of twelve of what they consider to be the most

debilitating diseases in the body of Christ... an autopsy of churches that have died and a biopsy of churches that are seriously ill (Brunson & Caner, 2005, p. 5).

Of course, in order to diagnose ‘disease’, tests would be required. Charles L.Chaney and Ron S Lewis in *Design for Church Growth* (Chaney & Lewis, 1977) in a chapter entitled ‘How to diagnose the growth health of your church’ suggest a battery of six ‘tests’:

- 1 The numbers test (membership Statistics)
- 2 The percentage test (rates of growth/ decline)
- 3 The body count tests (types of growth)
- 4 The geographical test (local opportunities)
- 5 The leadership test (numbers involved in active ministry)
- 6 The time use test (priority audit)

³⁴ The other church ‘diseases’ were termed, ‘People-blindness’, ‘Hyper-Cooperativism’, ‘Koinonitis’, ‘Sociological Strangulation’, ‘Arrested spiritual development’ and ‘St.John’s Syndrome’ (Wagner, 1979).

The tests proposed focus primarily on quantifiable indicators and measurements and generally do not address issues relating to the qualitative aspects of being church and any relationship they may have to overall church health.

Christian Schwarz - Eight Quality Characteristics

How to measure 'quality' was also a concern of Christian Schwarz. Schwarz received part of his theological training at Fuller Theological Seminary where he was exposed to the theories of the Church Growth Movement. In order to inform his own thinking about church growth and possible quality indicators involved in church growth, Schwarz initiated a major research project which initially involved over one thousand churches in thirty-two different countries. Each congregation was asked to complete a number of questionnaires, the aim of which was to attempt to determine universally valid quality indicators for growing churches.

Schwarz engaged the assistance of Christoph Schalk, who acted as scientific and statistical advisor. Schalk studied Organizational Psychology and Theology at Wuerzburg. His areas of study included organizational diagnosis and organizational development.

On the basis of the study, Schwarz makes the following statement,

To my knowledge, our research provides the first worldwide scientifically verifiable answer to the question, 'What church growth principles are true, regardless of culture and theological persuasion?' (C. A. Schwarz, 1996).

On the basis of a scientific analysis of the evidence collected, Schwarz proposed a new approach to church growth. His findings are presented in a number of publications, most notably, *Natural Church Development Handbook* (1996) with practical advice in the further volume *Natural Church Development Implementation Manual* (C. Schwarz & Schalk, 1998) and a theological underpinning in *Paradigm Shift – How Natural Church Development can transform theological thinking* (C. A. Schwarz, 1999). A number of further publications have expanded and clarified his original works.

Key to his findings is a set of eight 'Quality Characteristics'.

- 1 Empowering leadership
- 2 Gift-based ministry
- 3 Passionate spirituality
- 4 Effective Structures
- 5 Inspiring Worship Services

- 6 Holistic small groups
- 7 Need-orientated evangelism
- 8 Loving relationships

These characteristics, allied to a process of implementation which includes a ‘minimum strategy’ and utilisation of what Schwarz terms ‘growth forces’, provide a health development model for churches. A key factor within Natural Church Development (NCD) is the belief that growth will happen when potential barriers to growth are removed. Schwarz calls this the ‘all by itself’ principle (Schwarz 2006: 14) or ‘pneumatic functionality’ (Schwarz 1999, p74).

The model indicated by Schwarz is that of the church as a living organism. He explains:

The natural approach follows entirely different laws; it is the logic of life versus the logic of machines. Regretfully, much of church growth literature in recent years comes closer in its thinking to the ‘robot’ model than to the ‘organism’ approach (Schwarz 2006, p:66).

A key concern in the thinking of Schwarz is related to what he terms ‘functionality’ which are those activities and attributes useful for the proper working of the church which enables it to grow and develop appropriately. His thinking is stated in this manner,

The criterion for all churches should be whether faith, fellowship and service become a reality; whether God becomes manifest in them; whether the Holy Spirit works in them; whether their many forms and structures are such that love is facilitated and encouraged. In other words, the criterion for every institution should be how useful it is for building up the body of Christ. To the extent that it fulfils this criterion, it is a ‘true church’ (Schwarz 1999, p73).

Health is achieved when there is a creative cycle achieved between what Schwarz calls the ‘dynamic pole’ (organism) and the ‘static pole’ (organisation) of church (Schwarz 1999, p16f). When such a cycle is not present or is limited to some degree, the NCD process is offered as a mechanism to examine the extent of present functionality and to highlight those areas of church life that require development.

In the UK, administration of NCD material is administered by the national partner, Healthy Church UK, which was the successor to the British Church Growth Association.

Over the period 1997 to 2010, Healthy Church UK collected 1,054 NCD church surveys, of which 56 surveys relate to 34 unique Church of Scotland congregations,³⁵ some

³⁵ Excel spreadsheet of scores provided by Dr Philip Walker, Healthy Church UK

congregations having undergone multiple surveys. The survey is intended to provide an initial diagnostic tool, the results of which the church is expected to use for church development and movement towards greater health.

The Healthy Churches Handbook

Canon Robert Warren had been involved in a variety of initiatives commissioned by the Church of England to investigate how to help churches develop missionally and to grow as a result. In the course of his work, Warren identified a number of attributes or values which he noted as common to 'Healthy Churches' and became interested in examining these factors. In the book *The Healthy Churches Handbook* Warren sets out, 'the fruit of over ten years of research and reflection' (Robert Warren, 2004, p. 1). This he codified in his seven marks of a healthy church (Warren 2004, p47f),

1. Energized by faith
2. Outward-looking focus
3. Seeks to find out what God wants
4. Faces the cost of change and growth
5. Operates as a community
6. Makes room for all
7. Does a few things and does them well

Warren became aware of NCD after the development of his own seven marks of a healthy church and he views the insights of NCD not in opposition but as complementary to his insight. The key difference, as he sees it, is that

the marks of a healthy church identified here are expressed in terms of values, goals and characteristics...whereas in Natural Church Development they are expressed in terms of activities (Warren 2004, p5).

He suggests that his material is more user-friendly being based less around numbers and statistics. It is certainly true that Warren's scheme has the advantage of having a significantly shorter questionnaire than NCD. It is, however, based on a narrower statistical base and is much more general in nature.

The Purpose Driven Church – Rick Warren

Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church, sets the scene in saying,

The problem with many churches is that they begin with the wrong question. They ask, 'What will make our church grow?' ...The question we need to ask instead is, 'What is keeping our church from growing?' (Warren 1995:15)

He goes on to explain

I believe the key issue for churches in the twenty-first century will be church health, not church growth (Warren 1995, p17).

The Purpose Driven Church outlines five key activities which Warren suggests ought to be adopted by churches seeking to establish greater health,

- 1 Warmer through fellowship
- 2 Deeper through discipleship
- 3 Stronger through worship
- 4 Broader through ministry
- 5 Larger through evangelism

Whilst Saddleback church is based in the USA, its influence is noted in the UK through the operation of Purpose Driven Ministries UK (2015) which promotes and retails the purpose driven materials – often with UK adaptation. The launch in 2011 of a UK version of the Purpose Driven Church Manual, highlights the UK presence of this programme.

Rick Warren and the Purpose Driven ministries do not set out to identify specific disease or problem but to create systems and structures which they believe to be based on the twin biblical themes of ‘The Great Commandment’ and the ‘Great Commission’.

The UK

Prompted by the Lausanne Congress of 1974, conversations took place in the UK between those committed to church growth. This led to the formation of the British Church Growth Association (BCGA) in 1981. This was supported by the Bible Society and the Evangelical Alliance both of whom produced church growth materials and publications.

Dr Roy Pointer, in presenting Church growth thinking, looked to the insights of Dr Orlando Costas to argue that church growth should be holistic and encompass four key growth dimensions (Pointer, 1987, p. 6).

1. Growing up to maturity – conceptual growth
2. Growing together in community – organic growth
3. Growing out in service and evangelism – incarnational growth
4. Growing more in numbers – numerical growth

Philip Walker, formerly director of the British Church Growth Association, argued that in the UK many found the terminology of ‘growth’ difficult, particularly at a time when

churches were evidently in numerical decline. With this backdrop, BCGA became Healthy Church UK, an international partner of NCD International. Walker explained,

It is time to change, develop and move into a new millennium. For there is a new paradigm arising: health before growth... (Walker, 2004, p. 8).

Church Without Walls Report (CWW)

In 1999, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, seeking to address questions surrounding the future shape and function of the national church, set up the Special Commission anent Review and Reform. The task given to the group was

to re-examine in depth the primary purposes of the church and the shape of the Church of Scotland as we enter into the next Millennium; to formulate proposals for a process of continuing reform; to consult on such matters with other Scottish Churches; and to report to the General Assembly of 2001 (Church of Scotland 2001, p8).

The resulting report entitled *A Church Without Walls* set the context for more than a decade of ecclesiastical effort, aimed towards the creation of a renewed denomination through multifaceted change, designed to effect positive change in both central and local aspects of the Church of Scotland. Subsequent reports and deliverances brought to successive annual General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland helped realise a number of structural changes.

One key focus for the work of the Special Commission and then the later Panel on Review and Reform was to help stimulate the mission of local congregations around Scotland – partly through study of the CWW report. The report utilises within its proposals, a number of traditional church growth strategies, such as Wagner’s threefold church structure of cell, congregation and celebration as well as suggesting a variety of audit tools to assess effective worship and outreach (Church of Scotland 2001, p75).

Contained within the report in Appendix 3 (2001, p50f) is a list of characteristics which are claimed go towards the creation of ‘A Healthy Church’. Six headings, ‘Integrity’, ‘Body and Soul’, ‘Open House’, ‘Growth’, ‘Local’ and ‘Love and Care’ are given together with a descriptive commentary. There is no indication in the report how these six characteristics were chosen or any supporting evidence to justify inclusion within in the report.

The CWW report was, however, intended to be the starting point for refocusing on key priorities and the desired renewal within the Church of Scotland. The various deliverances

approved by the General Assembly of 2001, passed responsibility to study and/or implement various parts of the report to Ministers, Kirk Session, Boards and Committees of the church and future Kirk Sessions as appropriate (Church of Scotland 2001, p75ff). What is clear is that whilst 'growth' was a desire indicated by the reports' authors, growth in terms of membership numbers (nor indeed the slowing of decline) has not been evident.

Summary

Measuring the mission and ministry effectiveness of churches using quantitative indicators has a long-established pedigree with a number of competing paradigms, each purporting to be the definitive tool for aspirational congregations. There are indeed many supporters of each of the schemes mentioned and each highlight examples of successful implementation. The common thread through each is that empirical measurement, whether direct (as in the case of the Church Growth Movement) or phenomenological (as in NCD), plays a key role in the testing and assessment processes.

A question faced by each scheme is whether growth is being viewed purely as an exercise primarily in numbers, as proposed by their detractors, or whether the aim is for something else. As has been amply highlighted, the argument linked to each scheme is that quantity is directly related to some element or dimension of quality within church activity.

Furthermore, there is assumed to be some direct correlation between biblical faithfulness and the blessing of God demonstrated in evidence of fruitfulness. How clear and how far these relationships and correlations exist, is a matter of some debate and certainly, there is an argument that fruitfulness may not always be directly evidenced within a particular time period or geography following faithful work done.

The ongoing missiological debates concerning the strategic role of pragmatic approaches have undoubtedly shaped both the thinking and the practice of Church of Scotland ministers. In the next two chapters, I will survey those practices and views to determine both if and how ministers, and other church leaders, use and respond to empirical information.

Chapter 5: 2013 and 2015 Surveys of Church Leaders

The days when theology used to doubt that empirical ways of describing reality were legitimate or reasonable are over. Even if there are still church officials who, when confronted with critical empirical data, say 'Let us pray that the figures and numbers are incorrect' (Schmälzle, 2003).

Introduction

Workers require the right tools and correct information for the job. Ministers, as church leaders, need to be able to access a wide array of data pertinent to their locality and particular to the task in which they are engaged. Church of Scotland ministers have always had access to numerous data sources - local, national and international, usually in a printed form. The advent of modern computing, together with high-speed internet access, has put many additional online statistical databases within easy reach of ministers. To supplement data collected by others, Ministers and Kirk Sessions have sometimes arranged for congregational and community data to be gathered for local use.

This chapter investigates a number of questions related firstly, to the level of awareness, Church of Scotland ministers have of various data sources; secondly, the extent to which data is viewed as valuable and helpful to the work of ministry and mission and thirdly, the attitude of ministers towards information, particularly from the 2011 census.

As this part of the study commenced, the Church of Scotland was awaiting publication of data by the National Records of Scotland relating to the 2011 Scottish Population Census (National Records of Scotland, 2017b). In anticipation of the information to be released, the Church of Scotland had set up a group, 'Statistics for Mission', to collate and to publish the information for use within congregations, presbyteries and the wider Church. The Statistics for Mission Group was also tasked with making the data accessible and understandable.

In order to investigate both the general attitude and the broad usage of statistical data sources, it was decided to conduct two surveys to ascertain the views and practices of ministers. The first survey was conducted prior to publication of the 2011 census information for churches and the second once that information had been distributed and a period had elapsed to allow church leaders to judge the usefulness of its contents.

Survey Methodology (Survey 1)

Given the geographical spread of Church of Scotland ministers, four possible methods of engaging with ministers was considered. The first option was to carry out a series of 'face to face' interviews, possibly during the week of the General assembly of the Church of Scotland. This would provide one of the few occasions when a large number of Church of Scotland ministers would gather in one location. This option was rejected on the grounds of both reach and timing. In terms of reach, only a proportion of Church of Scotland ministers gather at the time of the General Assembly and those willing to participate in a survey would be a subset of this group. In terms of time, with a lone researcher involved, the potential survey completion rate could be anticipated to be small compared with the overall population size. In addition, the timing of the General Assembly, meeting as it does in May, placed the event after the release of the Scottish census results and after the publication of a raft of statistics relating to parishes. Since this first stage was intended to gain insight into the settled views of ministers before the release of data from the 2011 census, which would be accompanied by active encouragement from the Church of Scotland for ministers to interact with that data, this approach was rejected.

A second method, potentially overcoming the issue of geographical spread, would have been to conduct a telephone based interview. However, the time and effort it would take for a solo part-time researcher to contact and interview a large enough sample was considered prohibitive, as was the alternative cost of employing an individual, or agency, to conduct interviews.

The third option considered was to conduct a survey using postal questionnaires. This method would allow the fullest potential accessibility to participate in the survey since every minister could be invited. However, postal surveys tend to be relatively costly and can be time intensive, particularly in the area of later computer input for analysis.

In terms of efficiency, cost and potential effectiveness, a fourth option, a web based survey system, appeared overall to be a better option.

SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>) was the chosen internet based platform for the questionnaire as it provided a flexible and customisable product and one with which the researcher was already familiar. SurveyMonkey also provided both internal analysis features and export options to Microsoft Excel and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences) which later would be invaluable in adding efficiencies during the processing and analysis stage.

Survey Design

The survey was designed, being conscious of the limited length of time which busy parish ministers were likely to spend on its completion, with many of the questions only requiring answers via multiple choice or Likert scale options, (though usually with an additional option inviting comments, should any explanation be felt useful by the respondents). The number of questions which requested free form written answers was deliberately limited to encourage full completion of the survey. A series of screenshots of the SurveyMonkey questionnaire can be found below in Appendix 1: Online Survey 2013 - Forms. An explanation of the purpose of each question is included along with the results below.

Survey Distribution

A survey web link for the online survey was sent out to ministers in the Church of Scotland, using a variety of information vehicles (Vint, 2013). An internet hyperlink to the survey was posted on a number of Facebook pages popular with ministers; it was also sent out by email through the Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council email contact list and details were posted in the Ministers' Forum magazine, which was distributed by the Church of Scotland to all ministers.

The web link was active between the 21st of January 2013 and the 15th of April 2013 to allow time for the fullest participation. In total, 316 respondents took part in the online survey (255 in the first two weeks). This sample of 316 from a population size of 847 ministers (37.3%) gives a high level of confidence in the results.³⁶

Statistical Analysis using SPSS and Chi Square Testing

Glasgow University affords access to the computer program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) which provides a powerful and useful tool for the purpose of analysis. The tables below provide both descriptive statistics and, where necessary, a cross tabulation of results. Where there was a question whether a statistically significant difference existed between observed and expected values in the survey results, then a chi-square test was employed to test the null hypothesis that there was no difference between

³⁶ Results provide a 95% confidence level with a 4.37 confidence interval

the observed and expected values. SPSS output tables for the relevant chi-squared test can be found in Appendix 2.

Survey Questions

The online survey began by displaying a page indicating the nature of the study as approved by Glasgow University's ethics procedures. The first question invited the respondent to agree to take part in a survey which was part of a postgraduate study.

Question 2: 'What is your Gender?'

The initial demographic questions allow us to test that the survey sample is broadly representative of the population of Church of Scotland ministers. In Question 2 the consideration is the gender balance within the Church of Scotland clergy. As can be seen from table 1 (below), there is a small over-representation of female participants in the survey, (27% as compared to 23%) when compared with the whole population of ministers.³⁷ When tested against the expected values, if in strict proportion, using a chi-squared test, the difference was significant at the 90% confidence level ($p=0.091$).

	Sample		Population		Expected Value
	Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)	
Female	84	27.45	196	23	71.5
Male	222	72.55	643	77	234.5
Total	306	100	839	100	306

Table 1: Survey Question - Gender

Question 3: 'Which category below includes your age?'

Information received from the Church of Scotland Ministries Council indicated that 282 ministers were under 50 years of age, of which 55 were under 40.³⁸ Although only partial information was received, it does, however, support the hypothesis that the sample was broadly representative of the age structure of clergy.

³⁷ Information on ministerial numbers and gender balance received by Rev. Angus R. Mathieson on behalf of the Ministries Council of the Church of Scotland 1st March 2013

³⁸ Email from Ministries Council (Angie Traynor) March 2013

Category	Sample		Population	
	Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
21-29	2	0.64	}	
30-39	16	5.10	55	6.55
40-49	66	21.02	282	27.05
50-59	148	47.13	}	
60-69	77	24.52	}	
70 or older	5	1.59	}	66.4
Total	314	100	839	

Table 2: Survey Question – Age

In seeking to discover any possible correlations with age group and the use of statistics it was noted (again using a chi-squared test) that statistically significant results were obtained in a number of areas.

The data indicated that clergy under 50 years of age were significantly more likely than other age groups to use the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics ($p=0.007$) and The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Usage ($p=0.025$) and valued more than the other age groups the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation ($p=0.01$). There were no other items where age group produced a significant result.

Question 4: ‘How many years have you been ordained?’

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Less than 5	42	13.38
5-14	63	20.06
15-29	142	45.22
30+	67	21.34
	314	100

Table 3: Survey Question - Years ordained

This question was included to test whether there was a discernible difference between years engaged in ministry and use of statistics. Again, using a Chi-squared test there was statistically significant difference noted between years ordained and the use of the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics website ($p=0.000$), the use of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation website ($p=0.023$), the value given to the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

website ($p=0.025$) and the value given to Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation website ($p=0.003$).

The data indicated that the difference lies in the higher use being made of these two websites by clergy less than 15 years ordained. Whilst it might be tempting to think initially that this may indicate younger clergy are using modern media to a larger degree than older clergy, the data does not support this link, given that no correlation with age occurs with usage of the other websites. The question might be asked whether younger, early career clergy might be more socially conscious or indeed more likely to serve in areas of social need (hence wishing to obtain information of this type). The questionnaire does not give us an answer to these questions.

The only other factor where significance is noted with years ordained is in the keeping of Communion attendance ($p=0.004$). Clergy who were less than fifteen years ordained were less likely to keep this particular record of attendance. This pattern of result would reflect the fact that a change in practice occurred, coming from a change in Church of Scotland legislation in 1991, which allowed for a discontinuation of the practice of recording communion attendance in Kirk Session records.

Question 5: 'Which one of these terms or which combination of them, would describe your congregation?'

This categorisation of theological emphasis was intended to test for spread of participants when compared against the previously known data gathered by the Scottish Church Census for Church of Scotland participants and to test whether congregations expressing a particular theological style or leaning were more or less likely to use quantitative measurements for use in the local congregation.

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Reformed	105	33.87
Evangelical	104	33.55
Radical	16	5.16
High Church	16	5.16
Broad	179	57.74
Liberal	73	23.55
Charismatic	22	7.10
Low Church	69	22.26

Table 4: Survey Question - churchmanship original

The initial dataset, which allowed for multiple categories to be chosen, is summarised above in Table 4. Utilising a process by Peter Brierley the data was analysed and choices were combined to produce broad categories termed ‘Churchmanship’ in the Scottish church census; this resulted in table 5 below:³⁹

³⁹ The process which was used by Peter Brierley is outlined in the 4th Edition of the UK Christian Handbook. (P. Brierley, 2003, p. 12.12) The combinations of boxes ticked were used to derive six groups: Board, Catholic, Evangelical, Liberal, Low Church and Reformed. The Evangelical category is further broken down into Reformed, Mainstream and Charismatic Evangelicals

Churchmanship	Number	Percentage (%)	Group (%)
Broad (B)	124	39.4	39.4
Mainline Evangelical (ME)	49	15.6	
Reformed Evangelical (RE)	26	8.3	
Charismatic Evangelical (CE)	15	4.8	28.6
Liberal (LIB)	57	18.1	18.1
Low Church (LOW)	4	1.3	
Reformed (REF)	40	12.7	14.0
	313	100	100

Table 5: Survey question - churchmanship computed

In addition to the answers submitted via the available tick boxes, a number of individual comments were added to suggest some other preferred labels such as ‘contemporary’, ‘liturgical’, ‘traditional town kirk’, ‘creative and eccentric’, ‘middle of the road’, ‘rural’ as well as a few responses indicating a difficulty in selecting any appropriate category.

Having placed the respondents’ congregations into theological groupings, it was possible to test whether Churchmanship plays any part in the attitude towards or use of statistics in ministry. Interestingly, there was no discernible statistical difference between different ‘Churchmanship’ categories in how ministers value, or use, the various sources of information listed in questions 6 or 7 below. No difference was found in the types of statistical information collected, nor in how statistics are viewed or utilised.

It was postulated that ‘evangelical’ congregations would be more concerned about quantifiable results than more liberal or indeed theologically broad congregations, but that hypothesis is not supported by the data collected.

Cross Tabulation Male/Female with Churchmanship

It is noted that when a chi-squared test is applied to consider the null hypothesis that there is no gender difference between the various Churchmanship categories then the results (see table in Appendix 2: Statistical Test Results) indicate that it should be rejected ($p=0.000$)

as female ministers were statistically much less likely to be associated with the 'Evangelical' churchmanship category than expected and more likely than expected to be considered in the 'Broad' or 'Reformed' categories.

The result from the survey data is similar to results from the National Congregations Studies carried out in the United States, where a statistically significant result is also observed when gender is cross tabulated with the religious identity of the congregation or indeed with the theological orientation of the senior or head pastor (Department of Sociology, 2014).

Question 6: 'Please indicate YOUR USAGE of the following information sources to inform ministry and/or mission.'

A list of known, accessible data sources likely to be used by church ministers for general information and statistical data, was presented to the survey participants, who were then asked to indicate their USAGE of the various sources.⁴⁰ Options given were, 'None', 'Rarely', 'Occasionally' and 'Regularly'. Table 6 below summarises the data by giving a weighted average so that one source can be easily compared with another. It is clear from the results that the Church of Scotland Yearbook, issued annually, without cost, to every Church of Scotland minister currently employed in a church, was the most accessed resource both for general information and for statistical data.

At the bottom end of table 6 are more specialized data sources which, though freely available online, are perhaps less well known and, may also, in some cases, be more difficult to navigate. We should also note that in relation to the defined data areas available, these may not correspond neatly to parish areas and therefore could cause some difficulty, both in application and interpretation.

The statistical data source reported to be least used is the Statistics for Mission data CD which was specially produced by the Church of Scotland to contain relevant information from the 2001 census relating to parish areas. The Statistics for mission CD was sent to every church minister free of charge in 2003. The data provided on the CD Rom gave both national and presbytery wide information including age profiles, household composition, religious affiliation as well as other data types gathered as part of the census.

⁴⁰ Appendix 3 provides further details of the data source options presented in the survey.

Given the 10-year gap between the production of the CD-ROM and this particular survey, it may be that the information was considered too outdated to be of significant use, so reflected in the low score. It is also understood that mapping the census data areas to parish locations was done using postcodes to assign data zone, the results of which had known limitations and errors. Finally, the CD-ROM required a specialist interface which, for the novice computer user, may also have had a detrimental effect regarding accessibility of the information.

Source	Weighted Average
Church Year Book for contact information	3.83
Blue Book for general information	2.58
Church Year Book for statistical information	2.55
Local council website	2.30
Statistics reported on Television/ Radio	2.07
Statistics reported in Local/ National Newspapers	2.07
Blue Book for statistical information	2.05
Statistics reported in Magazines	1.88
Scotland's Census Results Online	1.74
Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (sns.gov.uk)	1.63
Scottish index of multiple deprivation (simd.org)	1.57
Statistics for Mission Data CD	1.45

Table 6: Information sources scores – usage

Question 7: ‘What VALUE do you place on the following information sources (1=Lowest Value, 5=Highest Value)’

In this question, the same group of sources as question 6 was presented but the question this time indicated that a VALUE judgement was required and a numerical scale was offered between 1 as the lowest and 5 as the highest value. The tabulated results are seen below in table 7.

Source	Weighted Average
Church Year Book for contact information	4.35
Church Year Book for statistical information	3.48
Blue Book for general information	3.35
Blue Book for statistical information	2.96
Local council website	2.59
Scotland's Census Results Online	2.31
Statistics reported on Television/ Radio	2.25
Statistics reported in Local/ National Newspapers	2.14
Scottish index of multiple deprivation (simd.org)	2.03
Statistics reported in Magazines	2.02
Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (sns.gov.uk)	1.99
Statistics for Mission Data CD	1.79

Table 7: Information sources scores – value

In comparing the tables 6 and 7 for USAGE and VALUE, there is clearly a strong correlation⁴¹. It is worth noting that, although the statistical data available in the Church of Scotland blue book is not used as frequently as other sources, it never the less is given a high score for its value.

Question 8: ‘How IMPORTANT are statistics for local church planning processes?’

This question highlights how ministers view the importance of statistics in the key area of church planning. It is clear from table 8 below that the majority (approximately 56%) see this as an area of worth. The remainder are either ambivalent (23.6%) or view statistics as unimportant relative to other factors involved in church planning. (20.4%)

⁴¹ Correlation coefficient 0.934

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Very Important	33	10.82
Fairly important	138	45.25
Neither important nor unimportant	72	23.61
Fairly unimportant	53	17.38
Very unimportant	9	2.95

Table 8: Perceived Importance of Statistics for local church planning

From the information collected, it was clear that, for the majority of ministers, statistical information given to them or made available to them, was considered important. However, the survey also sought to look beyond the general data pools to consider other possible avenues of data collection.

Question 9: ‘At a practical level do you keep a record of:..’ (a list of options was presented- see table 9 below for full list)

The object of this question was to ascertain which local church statistics were gathered in addition to those normally requested by the Church of Scotland via the annual statistical return.⁴² The options given were ‘Always’, which was given a value of 1 for the purpose of evaluation, ‘Usually’, given value 2, ‘Occasionally’, given value 3, ‘Seldom’, value 4 and ‘Never’, value 5

Category	Weighted Average
Church attendance outwith communion	3.42
Numbers attending special events	2.97
Attendance at adult organisations/ groups	2.91
Communion attendance	2.69
Attendance at youth organisations/ groups	2.58

Table 9: Scores for statistics recorded regularly

⁴² The Annual Statistics gathered by the Church of Scotland includes, number of members (with details indicating the mode by which people joined the church or left it), adherents, elders, managers, board members of deacons, Guild members, children associated with the church, children who are eligible to take communion, Sunday school and bible class. The pro forma supplied also asks for information on the number of baptisms administered subdivided into adults and children, infant dedications, weddings and funerals.

Table 9 above gives a calculation of a weighted mean, using the value substitutions noted. Clearly, it is church attendance when there is no communion, which is the least likely to have statistical data collected. This result is surprising given that Sunday worship is the central practice of Church of Scotland congregations. Of all the data to be collected, the omission of this particular information stands out. In the discussion section at the end of the chapter, a brief examination of the reasons for this will be considered.

Female clergy in the survey noted a greater likelihood to record attendance at both youth organisations ($p=0.002$) and adult organisations ($p=0.013$) than male clergy in the survey. There is no noted difference in record keeping of the other categories presented in the survey.

Question 10: ‘How do you intend to use any information gathered (if applicable)?’

A total of 134 responses were received for this open question and qualitative analysis of answers was undertaken, which was coded to produce a list of common themes. The results are displayed in table 10.⁴³

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Planning purposes	67	50
Follow trends/ make comparisons	47	35.07
Report writing	22	16.42
Review of membership	7	5.22
Personal use	5	3.73
Motivational tool	5	3.73
Uncategorised	3	2.24

Table 10: Table of intended use of quantitative data by ministers

As is immediately obvious from the limited number of categories, there is a high degree of uniformity in the responses given. The largest group of responses indicated ‘planning purposes’ as the major role for their current practice of gathering and analysing local

⁴³ Some responses contained answers which contained elements within multiple categories and therefore it should be noted that the table provided below will not sum to 100%

statistics (50%). ‘Planning’ would include responses which indicated an element of evaluation of past events or practices and some responses where future strategic decision making was noted, along with more general responses.

A set of respondents (35%), pointed towards the value of the information in highlighting trends and patterns to deepen knowledge and aid understanding. This may have been for planning purposes, but in many cases, this was not explicitly stated. It was noted by some respondents (16%), that statistics were gathered for report writing purposes, which may also include information required and specified for particular funding sources or grant-making bodies. A small number monitored the information they received or gathered to aid them in reviewing membership (5%); in providing them with a motivational tool (4%) or indeed for some unspecified personal use (4%).

Question 11: ‘When making decisions at the Kirk Session do you aim towards SMART goal-setting (Goals which are Specific, MEASURABLE, Attainable, Realistic and Time-limited)?’

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Always	19	6.17
Usually	82	26.62
Occasionally	85	27.60
Seldom	66	21.43
Never	56	18.18

Table 11: Use of SMART goals

As is obvious from the way in which Question 11 was framed, the measurement aspect of SMART goal setting was a primary focus. SMART goals, although seen as coming from the business world, have also been used by the Church of Scotland in training modules for those in ministry of different kinds. It is noted that only 8 survey participants skipped this question (2.5%) so it would appear the practice is one with which ministers were familiar.

Those who would use SMART goals only ‘occasionally’, ‘seldom’ or ‘never’ make up the greater number of ministers (67.2%), with those who utilise this tool more regularly (‘always’ or ‘usually’) being much smaller. (32.8%).

Question 12: ‘During 2013/14 the Church of Scotland Statistics for Mission Group hopes to produce and distribute parish statistics derived from the 2011 census results (e.g. age profile, household composition, religion claimed etc.) - how might this information be useful to you?’

Responses to this open question were grouped and coded; a summary of the group heading is listed Table 12.

Category	Number	% of respondents
Demographic community information	106	40.5
Mission	89	34.0
Better insight or greater understanding	54	20.6
Not useful	49	18.7
Useful (particulars not specified)	33	12.6
Future planning	30	11.5
Able to make comparison and quantify change	12	4.6
Funding applications	9	3.4
Don't know yet	9	3.4

Table 12: Potential usefulness of Parish Statistical Profile

A majority of respondents who answered this question anticipated the information to be produced as potentially useful for them in a number of areas. The greatest and most obvious use for the forthcoming statistical release would be in gaining an accurate picture of the composition of the community being served by the local church and congregation. The census data, which then was being compiled, would be presented as parish statistics and therefore would have immediate application for this purpose. A group of respondents (34%) specifically indicated a hope or a desire to utilise the information as a tool to guide or help to direct local mission activity or focus. It might be noted that the groupings of ‘Mission’ and ‘Funding applications’ were the only areas which were obviously action based. The other groupings appeared to be more centred around reflection or information gathering.

There was a significant minority of those who answered this question (18.7%), who anticipated the information not to be useful in their area or for their ministry context. A group of a similar size did not answer this question, so, potentially the figure who might be considered sceptical or hostile could be larger.⁴⁴

Question 13: 'Please add any comment you have about the use and/or limitations of numerical or statistical information in the work of ministry.'

There were 156 answers to this open question. The answers given were analysed and coded to reflect the themes contained within the content. Table 13 contains the summary information:

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Useful Tool	74	47.44
Statistics alone insufficient	51	32.69
Dislike Statistics	45	28.85
People not numbers	34	21.79
Interpretation required	31	19.87
Provides trend information	26	16.67
Statistics manipulated/unreliable	24	15.38
Statistics not relevant or not required in current situation	14	8.97
Uncategorised	4	2.56

Table 13: Attitudes towards Statistics in Ministry

47% of responses indicated an acknowledgement that statistics provided a useful tool for the work of ministry, a sub group of 17% indicating the role statistics played in identifying trends and patterns. However, it was noted by some that, in order to have continuing usefulness, statistics must be kept current, reflecting the most recent information available. A group of respondents (33%) sought to highlight a concern that statistics, on their own, were not sufficient and that qualitative information was required to usefully interpret the local situation. Additionally, it was held that whilst statistics played a role in producing a partial picture of the situation within a parish, this required to be augmented by qualitative

⁴⁴ 32.6% of the total number surveyed did not answer or answered negatively

data. Indeed 22% of respondents represented the view that, both in terms of understanding the local context and planning for the future, people, rather than numbers, needed to be at the heart of that task. Whilst for some, numbers would play a role in strategic planning, for others there would appear to be a wholly negative view taken towards statistics playing any significant role in ministry and mission. Overall 29% of respondents to this question indicated a dislike for statistics in ministry. A significant group (15%) indicated concern about the manipulation and misrepresentation of statistics for ecclesiastical planning purposes.

The picture produced from the answers to this question exhibits a wide range of attitudes, sometimes strongly stated, positively and negatively, towards the place of statistics and quantitative data. This becomes clearly evident when such a strategic approach is employed at congregational or presbytery level planning.

Introduction to Survey 2

In the Spring of 2014, the Statistics for Mission Group released online Parish Statistics for each Church of Scotland congregation, containing a range of data from the 2011 census mapped according to newly digitized parish boundary information. This wealth of new information provided ministers with fresh data on the demographic and social make up of their local community. At the beginning of the chapter, it was noted that previous data, provided by the census of 2001, was, with time, considered unreliable by ministers and consequently less frequently referenced for mission and planning purposes. Now that new and more precise data⁴⁵ was available, new questions emerged, such as, ‘were ministers likely to engage with this improved information?’ and ‘If the Parish Statistics package of information was well presented, would it encourage a greater proportion of ministers to view statistics in a more positive light?’ This survey also investigates possible gaps in available information as judged by ministers.

Methodology

This survey, like the survey previously conducted, was designed and delivered using the SurveyMonkey survey tool, for the same reasons outlined in Chapter 5. The survey contained only nine questions to allow full participation by as many respondents as possible. The transport mechanism for distribution of this survey was first of all via a

⁴⁵ Previous Parish Statistics were based on postcode to determine parish which was an imprecise process.

number of minister specific Facebook pages.⁴⁶ Further distribution was initiated by sending an email to all Presbytery clerks to distribute the survey web link via their email distribution list. Through the offices of Mission and Discipleship and the statistician working with the Church of Scotland, Rev. Dr Fiona Tweedie, further emails were also sent encouraging recipients to respond.

Although the survey had been targeted at ministers, the distribution mechanism involving Presbytery Clerks had resulted in the web link being sent to elders and session clerks, in addition to ministers, who were part of Presbytery distribution lists. The situation was noted at the outset and the online survey form was modified to include an additional question to identify the leadership position held within the congregation (Appendix 4: Online Survey 2015).

Responses were collected over the period 19th of October 2015 until 7th of December 2015 during which time 411 individuals took part. The respondents were grouped to produce Table 14:

Category	Number
Minister	138
Elder	184
Session Clerks	58
Others: Retired ministers and church members	13
Others: Church of Scotland employee including OLM, Deacons, MDS, probationer ministers	18
	411

Table 14: Categories of Survey Respondents

Question 3 of the online survey asked participants to select one or more responses from a list of options. The choices would indicate knowledge, or otherwise, of the Parish Statistics project, details produced for their particular parish and whether or not it had been used as a point of discussion or a tool for planning with the Kirk Session, Presbytery or

⁴⁶ The rise of Social Media use by ministers allowed immediate, direct contact with groups of ministers, a mechanism previously of limited use.

others. The checklist also allowed a simple response to indicate whether data was generally helpful or not.

As is obvious from

Table 15, the vast majority of ministers both knew about the project (93.5%) and had, at some point, accessed the available Parish Profiles online (92%). The extent to which the project was known demonstrates a keen interest by ministers and perhaps also an effective communication system between the work of central church committees and church leaders. Even those who were not ministers still had a high level of awareness of the project (72.5%), with 61.5% having accessed the available information.

The majority view (84%) was that the statistics and information contained in the Parish Statistics profiles (appendix 5), was helpful. It might be noted that the majority of those who checked the statement ‘found the data presented to be unhelpful’ also ticked the statement ‘found the data to be helpful’. In the text comments, connected to those responses, it appears to be the case that the answer reflected ongoing debates and discussions over the placement of parish boundaries. There was no indication, in those particular responses, that the data itself was erroneous.

Statement	Number	%
know about this project	129	93.5
have accessed, downloaded or viewed the data for your parish	127	92.0
have used the data in your own planning	86	62.3
have used the data with your congregation or Kirk Session	92	66.7
have used the data in a Presbytery context	38	27.5
found the data to be helpful	117	84.8
found the data presented to be unhelpful	8	5.8 ⁴⁷
were unaware of the available statistical information	3	2.2
Total Respondents: 138 (Ministers)		

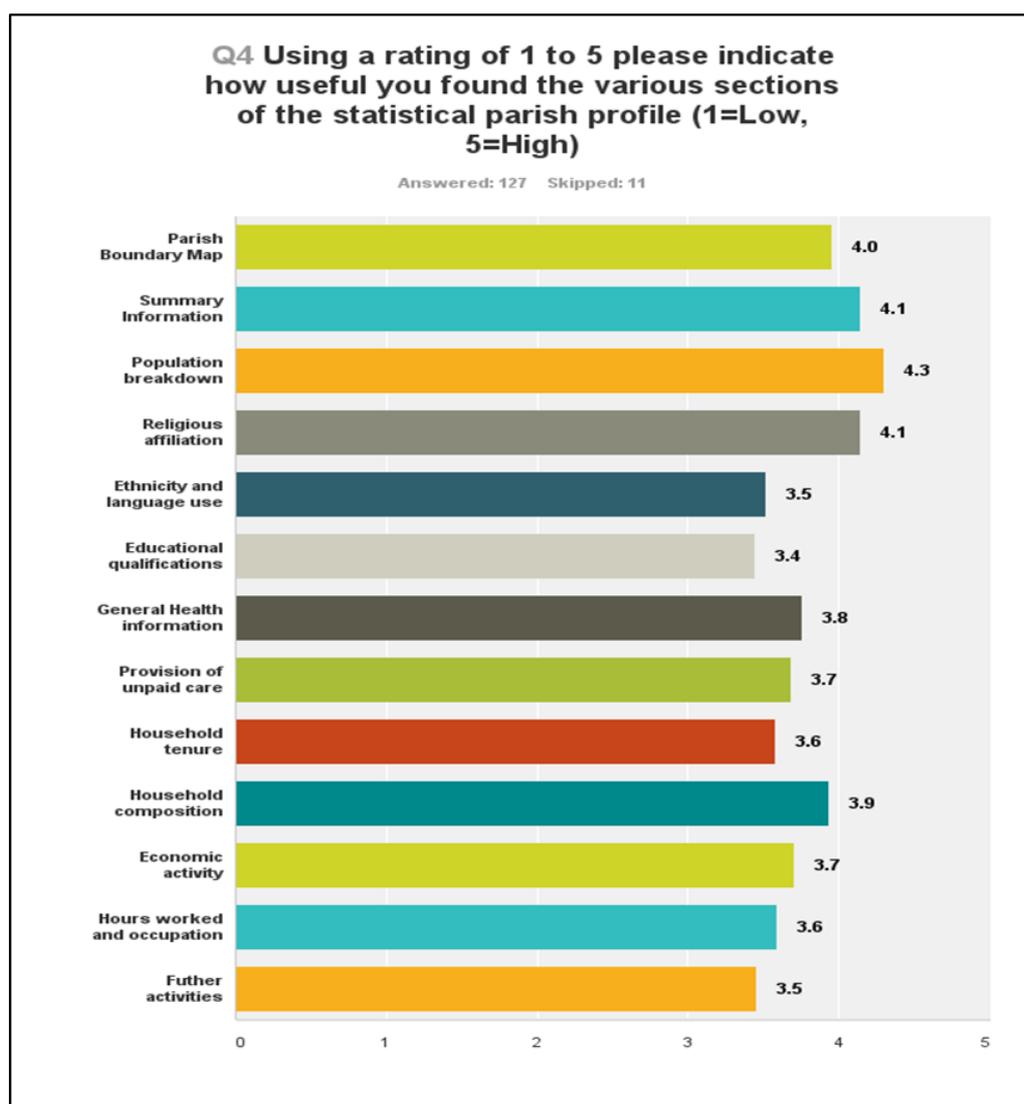
Table 15: Usage of Parish Statistical Profiles by ministers

⁴⁷ It should be noted that of the 8 ministers indicating that the ‘data presented to be unhelpful’ 6 also indicated that they ‘found the data to be helpful’. An analysis of later sections of the survey pointed towards a belief that there was part of the profile was incorrect e.g. the local parish boundaries. Only 2 individuals (1.4%) therefore found the data presented to be unhelpful without reservation.

Table 15 responses, when compared with responses in the 2013 survey above (see Table 13 etc.), appears to show a more positive response both to the initial approach to data and its practical worth at congregational and presbytery level to inform decision making.

The produced Parish Statistics profiles (Appendix 5) contain a wide range of detailed information and question 4 asked respondents to give a rating between 1 and 5 for each item category in respect of its usefulness. A summary graph (Graph 1) presents a weighted average score for each. What might be noted, initially, is that every part of the Parish Statistics profile was considered useful, the lowest scores given producing 3.4, out of 5, for 'educational qualifications'. The community demographic information in 'Population Breakdown' attracted the highest scores. Later in the survey, the view is expressed by respondents that information of this type is valuable, but only if it is current. The suggestion put forward is that the Parish Statistics profiles should be regularly updated, perhaps using mid-year population estimates between the times of the larger census.

As might be expected, another area of particular interest, was the information on religious affiliation. Comments made by some survey participants suggest that providing trend information from the previous census for this and some other values might also be helpful.



Graph 1: Parish Profile – usefulness of information areas

Question 5: ‘In what ways have you made use of the information presented in the parish profile?’

This free form question elicited an array of responses which were grouped according to themes which emerged. These are listed along with examples of the type of submission which gave rise to the headings. Table 16 includes the percentage of respondents mentioning each item, with bracketed percentages being added to distinguish the answers of the 110 respondents who were ministers)⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Percentage totals exceed 100 since respondents would typically include multiple themes within their response.

Understanding the community	35.3% (51.0%)
<i>'To understand the make up and needs of the community and to their lifestyle. To focus on certain age groups and to think more of sections of the community that we are not touching with the gospel.'</i>	
Mission Planning	34.9% (42.7%)
<i>'Background to thinking and planning outreach policies and practice.'</i>	
Aid to reflection	23.3% (29.1%)
<i>'I have found the information useful in helping the congregation and the Kirk Session to reflect on the position we hold within the parish.'</i>	
Help direct resources	19.0% (21.8%)
<i>'In particular it has been useful in funding applications and consideration of how and where to focus resources and mission activities.'</i>	
Local Church Review	16.7% (10.9%)
<i>'Used as part of Local Church Review process.'</i>	
Vacancy information	16.7% (9.1%)
<i>'To help prepare our parish profile for a vacancy', also 'In understanding a parish for which I was applying, and preparing for interview.'</i>	
Hard Facts	10.1% (13.6%)
<i>'it gave Session a picture of the parish based on actual facts and figures.'</i>	
Challenge assumptions	7.8% (10.0%)
<i>'To prove to ourselves that we don't know the community as well as we think we do.'</i>	
Not used	7.4% (5.5%)
<i>'Haven't used the information yet.'</i>	

Table 16: Utilisation of Parish Statistical Information

Question 6: 'Is there any other information collected in the 2011 census which you would have liked to have included within the parish profile datasheet? (Topics included were Education, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing, Labour Market, Population and Transport)'

Although 157 individuals answered this question, it was most often an answer in the negative (70.1%). Those who did forward suggestions most often called to have information relating to transport (15.3%) either related directly to that used by workers or more generally as means to investigate the local transport infrastructure. The only other significant response was a call for greater detail within the information for the areas already presented in the profiles (9.6%).

Question 7: ‘Is there any other statistical information from non-census sources which would be helpfully included within a parish profile datasheet? (e.g. Health measures, deprivation indicators, annual population estimates)’

As noted elsewhere in this work there are a variety of other statistical sources of information beyond the census which may be useful for congregational work and planning but which may not easily or quickly relate to parish areas.

The answers from a total of 184 respondents (including 76 ministers) are given in the table below.

Category	% all	% ministers
Deprivation indicators	49.5	55.3
No/none	28.8	26.3
Health measures	18.8	25.0
Population estimates (<i>in period between census</i>)	25.0	29.0
Local economy information	11.4	10.5
Comparison or trend information	4.4	4.0
Transport	2.2	1.3

Table 17: Non Census information requested

The expressed desire for social deprivation, health and updated population information is significant and would point strongly towards the need for the Church of Scotland to find ways of making this data easily accessible, perhaps by integrating and displaying it within the systems currently used, e.g. the online Parish Statistical Profiles or to develop a related mapping application (The Church of Scotland, 2017c).

Questions 8: 'Do you have any additional comments or reflections on the use of statistical information for ministry and/or mission purposes?'

This final question which was answered by 149 individuals was used by 41.6% of respondents to express their gratitude for the work done in creating and presenting the parish statistical profiles. A smaller group (15.4%) expressed a measure of dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of the profile presentation or content. One area of dispute related to the parish boundaries information or of the age ranges used in the population category. Only 2% expressed the view that the exercise was unhelpful.

Discussion

A number of elements arise from these surveys. At the point of the first survey conducted in 2013, ministers who used quantitative data, did so, largely having sought it out. The survey taken at this baseline highlighted quite divergent attitudes and practices amongst ministers towards gathering and using statistical information for the purposes of ministry. Those who viewed statistics positively attempted to put the information to use for the benefit of the mission of the congregation to their parish. However, there is clearly a concern felt by others, that numbers may, in some sense, dehumanise the task before them, reducing people to mere numbers, or simply fail to adequately represent people and their circumstances. This latter group were ambivalent at best and some were openly hostile to statistics from almost any source.

Only two years later, with ministers and other church leaders now having had exposure to data which was relevant to their locality and presented using simple graphs and explanations, views seem to be changing. Data was now largely being viewed as a useful tool for ministry and, according to the responses given, attempts were being made to make strategic plans and decisions guided, at least in part, by the numbers.

However, there are repeated calls for such local data to be kept updated and where errors or issues were present, as was the reported cases with parish boundaries, then these needed to be addressed. Of course, Parish Statistics gave only some basic information about those who resided in the local area, but for mission planning to be truly effective, then additional pools of information would also be required. Such information requires to be both quantitative and qualitative in nature, concerning the church and its activities as well as further, more detailed information, concerning the community.

In the next chapter, I consider the Scottish Church Census, another crucial information source which more directly speaks to the nature and strength of congregations. As above, those in church leadership were invited to reflect on the value of that data source and to respond to its perceived usefulness.

Chapter 6: Scottish Churches Attendance Census 2016 – a Survey of Ministers

To understand God's thoughts, one must study statistics, for these are the measure of His purpose – *attributed to Florence Nightingale* (Pearson, 1924)

In 2002 the Scottish Church Census gave valuable insight into the condition of the various Christian denominations in Scotland. That census, when linked to previous similar exercises, provided trend information which, at the time, caused much discomfort for the main denominational groups, not least the Church of Scotland.⁴⁹ Given the national prominence of this exercise and that the Church of Scotland supported it both practically as well as financially, it is disappointing to note only a few passing references to this significant and extensive piece of research in the formal reports to the General Assembly.⁵⁰ The absence of high-level, church wide engagement with the census data may reflect its unease with the outcomes and the perceived effect on ministerial morale. It may be that the church authorities did not see particular value in the process or the results, preferring instead to focus their own initiatives including the outworking of the *Church Without Walls Report*.⁵¹ Whichever is the case, it is clear that in the years that followed, when calls for another attendance census were made, they were largely ignored.⁵²

Peter Brierley attributes a change of direction to September 2013 when a colloquium, convened by Rev. Dr Doug Gay of Glasgow University, was held. This forum gathered together key personnel and provided the necessary stimulus towards a new attendance census taking place in 2016 (P. Brierley, 2017, p. vii). In October 2014 denomination leaders had already pledged support for the project and financial arrangements were made for a census to take place on 8th of May 2016; this was to be the fourth such census over a period of 32 years, providing an extended period over which trends might be viewed and analysed.

⁴⁹ In the National Mission report to the General Assembly of 2002 it was suggested that if church membership trends continued then the Church of Scotland would cease to exist by 2050 (Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002 20/6 1.1.3).

⁵⁰ Report from Board of National Mission 2004 notes that the census took place and that the results were published and that a number of roadshows were arranged by Christian Research, but no details are given or discussions presented on the data as it related to the Church of Scotland (Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2004 20/34 17).

⁵¹ The *'Church Without Walls Report'* uses data from the Scottish Census of Attendance from 1994 to make its point that the Church of Scotland must change because attendance is in decline (Church of Scotland, 2001, p. 11).

⁵² I raised the possibility both privately and at the General Assembly, but no progress was made.

The rationale for another census was to extend knowledge concerning rates and patterns of church attendance across Scotland, noting regional, denominational, gender, age, ethnicity and other variations. Trend analysis would allow projections of possible future conditions and provide insight for local, regional and national strategic planning. In addition to Sunday activities, the Scottish Attendance Census gathered information on a range of numerical data on various church based or church initiated events and behaviours at other points in a week. Additional questions were commissioned by partner organisations and other groups. As a package of information, the census had the potential to provide a level of knowledge and insight which no other method has thus far provided.

The basic information, projected from the 40% of congregations which took part, was that 390,000 people or 7.2% of the Scottish population attended worship on a given Sunday.^{53,54} The total was broken down for analysis into the broad denominational groupings of ‘The Church of Scotland’, ‘Other Presbyterian’, ‘Episcopal’, ‘Baptist’, ‘Independent Churches’, ‘Smaller Denominations’, ‘Pentecostal’ and ‘Roman Catholic’.⁵⁵

Over the time period of the various historical Scottish Church attendance censuses undertaken, the overall number of church attendances in Scottish churches has reduced significantly from 16.9% of the Scottish population in 1984 to 7.2% in 2016. The greatest part of that fall is due to decline in attendance of Church of Scotland congregations which was 361,340 in the 1984 census and then 136,910 in 2016. Although the Roman Catholic church has also shown a significant decline in attendance (from 345,950 reducing to 135,600), it is at a slightly slower rate, meaning that it is anticipated that, if the present trend continues, the Roman Catholic church will soon be numerically the largest denomination (by Church attendance) in Scotland.⁵⁶ These two large denominations accounted for 58% of all church attendances in the census of 2016 (in the 1984 census their combined strength was 83% of attendances in Scotland).

⁵³ The figures were subsequently adjusted to give computed figures for the whole population of congregations. It is suggested that a 40% return rate is ‘statistically sufficient to give valid results’ (P. Brierley, 2017, p. 29). As a comparison, we might note that as part of Barna’s *Transforming Scotland* survey 2300 churches were contacted with only 200 completing a survey, a response rate of 8.7% (Barna Group, 2015, p. 170).

⁵⁴ The date was chosen to attempt to avoid special service with elevated number of attendees and advice was provided to informants that an alternative date could be used to avoid special event Sundays in a particular congregation.

⁵⁵ Previous censuses did not include the Pentecostal grouping as a separate entity but the growth of that group in recent years has given it greater significance.

⁵⁶ A fact highlighted by the Scottish Catholic Observer newspaper (Dunn, 2017).

The census results show not only that the Church of Scotland is exhibiting a reduction in overall church attendance but that it has already lost its dominant place with sections of the religious landscape of Scotland. For example, in many of the extensive western ‘central belt’ urban areas, the Church of Scotland is no longer the largest active denominational presence. Table 18 lists local council areas where the Roman Catholic church reported higher or similar levels of congregational attendance for the census, compared to the Church of Scotland. The situation described begins to call into question the claim of the Church of Scotland to be considered the ‘national church’ and may indeed be part of the reason why the Church of Scotland is often reluctant to discuss the census findings. In chapter 2 we noted the discussion surrounding the disestablishment of the Church of England following the findings of the 1851 census which highlighted weakness in the numerical strength of the organisation resulting in its negative response to further censuses.

Council	2016 population	Church of Scotland	% Population	Roman Catholic	% Population	Difference
Glasgow City	608,820	12,870	2.1%	38,570	6.3%	25,700
North Lanarkshire	338,950	8,220	2.4%	16,340	4.8%	8,120
Renfrewshire	174,920	4,290	2.5%	9,980	5.7%	5,690
South Lanarkshire	316,880	6,000	1.9%	8,540	2.7%	2,540
East Renfrewshire	93,130	1,700	1.8%	3,960	4.3%	2,260
Falkirk	158,780	2,200	1.4%	3,750	2.4%	1,550
West Dunbartonshire	89,770	1,300	1.4%	2,800	3.1%	1,500
Eilean Siar	27,130	2,130	7.9%	2,130	7.9%	0
East Dunbartonshire	107,180	3,070	2.9%	2,910	2.7%	-160
West Lothian	178,920	3,180	1.8%	3,010	1.7%	-170

Table 18: Attendance Census results for selected Council areas⁵⁷

It was noted in previous census results that particular risk factors for the long term future sustainability of the Church of Scotland were the age structure of congregations and the effect of low rates of youth retention as part of the worshipping community. The census of 2016 underlined these problems noting that, of all the denominational groups, the Church of Scotland exhibited the highest average age (60 years). It is also evident that 56% of all attenders are 65 years or over. At the same time, it also has a relatively small proportion of people under 25 years old attending (13%) which highlights both a demographic danger for the Church of Scotland and, given the large dropout rate of

⁵⁷ Derived from downloadable Council area data tables published by Brierley Consultancy (P. Brierley, 2016).

children from church attendance, the danger of non-replacement, unless there is a significant, successful, outreach programme.

One statistic gathered which points towards the evangelical vigour, or missional effectiveness of the denomination might be the length of time someone is present in the congregation. The assumption being that the proportion recently joining the congregation points toward effective outreach activity.⁵⁸ This measure further highlights the predicament of The Church of Scotland in that it has the smallest percentage of attenders who have been in the congregation for 5 or fewer years (19%).⁵⁹

The basic results from the Scottish Church Census raise significant issues of interest and one might think also, some considerable concern for the Church of Scotland. However, when the main results became public, comments promoted by the Church of Scotland appeared to downplay the data's importance. The convenor of the Mission and Discipleship Council concluded a long press statement which highlighted areas of church attendance growth recorded in another denominational group together with a list of present Church of Scotland initiatives already in effect and said,

In the midst of decline you can find growth and in the midst of growth you can find decline. That is how it has always been (The Church of Scotland, 2017d).

This seemingly nonchalant official comment stands in stark contrast to analysis and comment published by a range of national newspapers. The Herald newspaper, which allegedly broke a news embargo on publication of the census results to print the story at Easter, carried a front page headline, 'Why Christianity is in Crisis in Scotland: Easter Sunday shock leaves clergy reeling as new figures reveal church attendance at all-time low'. The stark contrast between the responses prompted me to design a survey for Church of Scotland ministers to ascertain their level of engagement with the attendance census (Appendix 6). I was interested to discover the general level of knowledge of the results, any response to those results and any reaction to the press comments put out by the Church of Scotland communications department, the Herald newspaper or other news comment (Appendix 7: Sample Media Coverage of the Scottish Attendance Census 2016).

⁵⁸ There are of course reasons to be cautious with this statistic since it may reference people having come to a congregation by various means not related to outreach or evangelism activity, e.g. Christians moving into an area because of work or retirement.

⁵⁹ Given that 3% of the attendances relate to children under 5 that number should be borne in mind.

Methodology

Based on the style of previously well supported surveys, this online survey was devised using the SurveyMonkey platform which provided a web link for invited participants to access the survey questions. Ministers were made aware of the link and encouraged to participate via three primary routes, firstly, through placement of the invitation to participate within a number of social media channels whose main constituent members were Church of Scotland ministers, secondly by contacting all Scottish Presbytery clerks requesting that they distribute the invitation via their own internal mail systems and thirdly through the email list of ministers maintained by the national Mission and Discipleship Council. The survey was open for responses from 6th May 2017 until the 5th of June 2017 and resulted in 291 full or partially completed surveys. Since the survey was directed specifically towards ministers active in local church leadership positions, entry to participation in the survey questions was gained by both indicating a willingness to participate in an academic survey to be used for the purposes of this thesis (Survey Question 1) and that the participant met the desired criteria of being a minister leading a local Kirk Session (Survey Question 2).

What follows is an explanation of each question asked in the survey, an indication of the response level and an examination of the information collected. This is presented in text or table, as appropriate.

Survey Question 3

The first substantive question allowed multiple answers and was designed to gauge both the level of knowledge about the census having taken place, as well as the response ministers made to the invitation to participate. Table 19 reports that of the 290 respondents only 7.9% did not indicate receiving information concerning the attendance census. A number of the responses in the 'other' option elaborated on having not received information, not recalling having received information, having passed it on to others to deal with or not being in a position to participate. The proportion of respondents who indicated participation in the census is comparable with the overall completion rate for Church of Scotland congregations, which was around 60%.⁶⁰ This then provides us some

⁶⁰ Information received via personal email correspondence with Peter Brierley

evidence to suggest that this survey will accurately reflect the views and actions of both those who did and those who did not participate in the Scottish Census.

During 2016 all congregations were sent information about the Scottish Church Census, did you...?	Responses	Percentage
RECEIVE the information	267	92.1%
DISCUSS the census arrangements with the Kirk Session(s)	102	35.2%
Decide NOT TO PARTICIPATE In the Census	44	15.2%
TAKE PART in the Census	178	61.4%
other (please specify)	34	11.7%
Total Respondents:	290	

Table 19: Participation in the Scottish Church Attendance Census

Ministers who indicated that they had discussed the census with their Kirk Session were much more likely to participate in it, with only 4 out of 44 ministers who did not participate having discussed it with Kirk Sessions. This lack of Kirk Session engagement raises important questions about how decisions are made at congregational level and the particular role of Kirk Sessions in playing an active part in local leadership. The data here is suggestive rather than conclusive, but it does prompt the question, that if individual ministers were negatively inclined towards participation in the census, then it appears they were likely to decide without reference to the Kirk Session on that course of action.

Survey Question 4

The question was framed in these terms, ‘Can you briefly outline why you decided to participate or not participate in the Scottish Church Census?’ This section sought to identify both barriers to participation as well as providing some degree of insight into the positive motivation which helped others to invest the time and energy into this exercise. The question solicited 242 individual responses which were analysed for common themes and grouped together for reporting.

Response Summary	Number
I believe it to be helpful or useful	150
It was my duty to respond	32
I am sceptical of the value	21
I was too busy	20
Administrative issues	17

Table 20: Reasons for response to Scottish Church Census

Negative Responses

Those who did not take part gave reasons which covered three broad areas. Firstly, there are those who indicated administrative issues, which included three who did not receive any information concerning the census, seven who indicated that forms were lost, misplaced or forgotten after having received them. Two responses indicated that there was no minister in the congregation at the time of the census and five that the administration was delegated to others and so there was uncertainty about completion.

A second group of non-completers indicated that they considered themselves to be too busy to participate and/or viewed completion of the paperwork as too burdensome.

The third group of non-responders made a decision not to take part because they did not consider the exercise to be worthwhile for them locally and/or helpful to the denomination as a whole. There were a few who considered the collection of census data to be contrary to the Word of God, but most were likely to dismiss the scheme as having little perceived value or benefit.

Positive Responses

Thirty-two of those who completed this question saw the collection of the data as part of their duties within a national church structure. Some of this group considered the completion of the census paperwork as an instruction, having been encouraged to fill it in by national or presbytery representatives. Others indicated that they would have considered it, in some sense, 'churlish' to object to the request for the information. Another group did it thinking that it might be helpful in some way to others. This section although positive in tone was passive in voice.

The largest group responded by actively voicing their approval for the census and indicated that they saw it as helpful or useful for work at congregational level, presbytery planning or national understanding. The breakdown of this group's submissions indicated a number of strands within the comments made. The most frequent comments noted that the census would provide the church with better understanding of the context in which it operates; it would also provide relevant information which would be useful in helping the local leadership develop their knowledge of the congregations. Some respondents made specific note of the value of knowing trends through repeated census exercises. A more complete or comprehensive picture of the church was viewed as important by many, as was the regular updating of information to provide greater accuracy. A number of general comments were made indicating that the participants saw the census as important for the church and that research was welcomed and should be supported.

Overall it is clear that there was strong support for the principle and practice of a Scottish Church Census. This outcome is particularly interesting given that this survey was conducted in the wake of largely negative Media reporting of the survey results. However, it also highlights the fact that ministers will assess a project on its potential benefits, apart from popular Press responses.

Survey Question 5

Question 5 seeks to explore further the level of engagement with the census results through the question, 'Have you previously reviewed the available information on the website or sent to you concerning the Attendance Census?'. Brierley consultancy had published a summary of the key census findings on its website in the April of 2017. This survey, available in May 2017, gave some insight into how proactive ministers were in seeking out and reading the available information, prior to publication of the full results, which would not be available until the summer of 2017. Even at this early stage, the majority of ministers indicated (Table 21), that they had already engaged with the available output.

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	146	56%
No	116	44%
Total	262	100

Table 21: Levels of engagement with Church Census initial results

Survey Questions 6,7 and 8

A key characteristic necessary to engender confidence in the usefulness of statistics is that of 'Trust'. Three questions asked respondents to score 0 to 100, using a slider, to indicate the level of trust they had in the census. In addition, to contextualise the score given, participants were asked to indicate the level of trust they had in the Parish Statistics profiles produced by the Church of Scotland, in the wake of the 2011 census, as well as governmental statistics in general.

The results in Table 22 below are cross tabulated for those who indicated in Question 3 of the survey that they did or did not participate in the church census. Those who did participate exhibited a high degree of confidence in the process and output, with respect to both the census and the Parish Statistics profiles, whilst having a lower degree of confidence in government produced statistics.

Those who did not participate, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not have the same overall degree of trust in the statistics, not that their trust was wholly absent, but certainly, it was at lower levels. Of note might be the considerable degree of confidence still given to the parish statistical profiles, which were constructed from data wholly derived from the governmental population census outputs. Having the data presented with Church of Scotland official approval does appear to enhance the level of trust given to the data.

Answer Choices	Average Score	No of Responses	Did Participate	Did not participate
What is your level of Trust...?				
in the statistics presented in the SCOTTISH CHURCH ATTENDANCE CENSUS?	69.1%	256	74% 160	50% 37
in the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND PARISH STATISTICAL PROFILES?	72.2%	258	74% 160	58% 38
in religious statistics provided by GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES?	56.6%	255	61% 150	37% 37

Table 22: Levels of Trust in the attendance data and other statistics

Survey Question 9

It has been argued by some in the Church of Scotland that, since negative statistics adversely affect the morale of both ministers and members, then we ought to distance ourselves from them to concentrate on more positive aspects of the church's work.

Question 9 then presents the survey participants with an opportunity to directly respond to that suggestion. The question was designed to be open-ended but with a focus on the impact to morale of negative information, hence the capitalisation of those key words, ‘It has been suggested that NEGATIVE church statistics affect the MORALE of ministers and church leaders. How do you respond to this suggestion?’

There were 245 responses to this question with 28 respondents giving an unqualified ‘yes’; a further 88 ministers agreed that morale is affected by negative reporting but within this group, there were two subgroups. The first and largest group acknowledged the negative impact of bad news but also valued the reflection of lived reality it brings and the impetus it provides towards change and renewal. This group wants to know the information and to use it for the development of mission. A second smaller group argues for statistics not to be gathered and numbers not to be published to remove this particular pressure.

Some 52 ministers denied any personal negative effects resulting from the given statistics. Within this grouping, the majority pointed towards the understanding that statistics cannot present the full picture of what is happening, particularly at local level. Another subgrouping viewed the information given as a positive motivation for ministry. The smallest of the groups in this category pointed towards a spiritual dimension for their positive morale, claiming that their particular focus helped towards maintaining an equilibrium.

A relatively large number of responses did not directly address the issue of personal morale with respect to negative statistics or were vague in their answer on that subject, preferring instead to either state the usefulness, even essential nature of statistical information irrespective of the effect on morale or that its use was limited.

Overall, although this particular survey question was the most difficult to categorise, it did highlight something of the dilemma of presenting difficult statistical information to ministers. Ministers, presumably dependant on factors such personality, temperament and theology of ministry, will receive and internalise data in radically different ways. This presents something of a challenge, especially when the voices of dissent are heeded by the church authorities, even if they represent the minority view.

Survey Question 10

Question 10 was intended to gauge the level of interest among ministers to participate in further census exercises and, if so, at what scale of interval between them. The question put was, ‘Scottish church attendance data has historically been gathered infrequently. Looking at the statements below, which statement do you most closely agree with?’

Answer Choices	Responses	Percentage
I have NO INTEREST in Scottish church attendance data	23	9.0%
I believe Scottish church attendance data should be GATHERED ANNUALLY	61	23.9%
I believe that Scottish church attendance data should be gathered EVERY 5 OR 10 YEARS	136	53.2%
I believe that Scottish church attendance data should NOT BE GATHERED	9	3.5%
I believe that Scottish church attendance data is UNHELPFUL	27	10.6%
Other Responses (please specify)	32	12.5%
Total Respondents	273	100

Table 23: Levels of interest by minister in having further attendance censuses

The results indicate that 77.1% of survey respondents, given these choices, would opt for ‘annually’ or every ‘5 or 10 years’. Within the ‘other’ responses, four indicated that their preference would be somewhere between the two options given for another census with respondents suggesting possibly every two or three years, thereby making the aggregate for another census within the ten-year period of 78.8% of respondents. This overwhelming endorsement by ministers of engaging in a process of gathering regular attendance data would obviously provide an encouragement to the central church authority to consider a more systematic and regular gathering of data of this type.

There was a small number in the ‘other’ choice, who indicated their strong belief that data of this type has little or no value or that it may even be harmful to the organisation or its ministers, by way of demotivating and demoralising the workers.

Survey Question 11

This question is similar to Question 5 above except that here the question, ‘Would it be your intention to read/study the full report on the Scottish Church Attendance Census when published?’, looks at whether ministers are interested and motivated enough to do additional reading around the Church Census figures. Obviously, the table is one which reflects aspirations but, none the less, it does highlight a significant level of interest and engagement on which the Church of Scotland could build.

Answer	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	134	52.3%
No	56	21.9%
Undecided	66	25.8%
Total	256	100

Table 24: Ministers intending to read the full report on Scottish Church Attendance Census

Survey Question 12

In the wake of Press reporting about the Scottish Churches Attendance Census, there was much social media comment about the nature and timing of the headlines and the stories carried by the Herald newspaper as well as the reaction of the Church of Scotland Communications Department. This survey question set out to ascertain what ministers thought and felt about the different kinds of press coverage. The question presented to them was, ‘Church statistics can be presented either positively or negatively. (examples of both are shown for the Church Attendance Census below.) How do you react to these different presentations?’ The images referenced in the question can be viewed in Appendix 6.

This question generated 231 responses and contained the greatest levels of expressed emotion. There was, with respect to the Herald headline, a great amount of criticism focused around a headline which, for some, exhibited a lamentable level of Press ignorance about the true state of Christianity in Scotland. Many respondents expressed a level of upset that the Herald ran this story at Easter, during a treasured Christian festival, when many churches were reporting higher than usual attendances. This timing was perceived

by some as a direct attack on the churches in Scotland and somewhat anti-Christian in nature.

There was a general view expressed that the Herald newspaper was being sensationalist simply to sell newspapers by appealing to the concerns and interests of their readership or grabbing the attention of those browsing the newsstands. A word used repeatedly by respondents in respect of what many saw as a deliberate distortion or partial telling of the truth was the word 'spin'. The idea that statistics can easily be manipulated for the purpose of 'spin' was also strongly expressed, causing a number to conclude that this makes numerical data potentially unreliable or, in some way, unsafe.

The perception of press 'spin' was further advanced as the rationale behind what many saw also as 'selective reporting' by the Church of Scotland. Whilst some saw the Church of Scotland story as positive and encouraging and even as a necessary balance to the negative production by the Herald, it was still recognised as only 'partial' truth. This led some to suggest that the Church of Scotland appeared 'desperate' and that the bias they exhibited was no more truthful than that of the Herald. Indeed, a number of contributors suggested that the real truth lay somewhere 'between' the reporting of the Herald and the Church of Scotland.

Ministers in the survey were wary of accepting news reporting at face value, whether from secular or church sources and a number of participants noted that the raw data would be much more helpful.

Survey Question 13

The final question of the survey gave participants the opportunity to add any final thoughts on the value or practice of a Church census. The wording for the question was, 'Do you have any additional comments or reflections on the use of the Church attendance census for ministry and/or mission purposes?'

In the main, the 127 responses offered were restated or reinforced statements made earlier in the survey. However, what many answers had in common was a concern to express the view that statistics, however positive they might be viewed by individual ministers, and however accurate they might be, still presented only a partial picture of the life a local

congregation. Many contributors were anxious that numbers should not be used as the sole or key measure of what constituted success for a church.

There were a few comments which dismissed the role of statistical information in church assessment or planning as anti-spiritual and a few others which saw the part they might play as marginal. Others were concerned that numerical measures beyond church attendance were included, or that the idea of attendance went beyond that of Sunday or Midweek worship.

In general, there was an appreciation that numerical data, such as that contained within an attendance census offered a helpful tool for ministry and mission but that it must not be the sole measure relied upon for insight or decision making.

Summary

The message which is heard loudly from this survey is that the majority of ministers view statistics and data positively and as a helpful tool in the ministerial toolkit. The Church Census results, by the timing of their release and the negative image it presented of the Church of Scotland, clearly upset or annoyed the Church of Scotland establishment. The attempts by the Church of Scotland to negate the negative press around the census results by producing only positive comment appears to have given the impression of a church running from the full truth of the hard facts – an assessment made by their own ministers. The level of dissatisfaction expressed about this particular response was significant even if it was not publicly expressed.⁶¹

The other area where there appears to be something of a gulf between the central administration of the church and parish ministers is in the desire to engage a programme of more extensive data gathering, which would include regular church attendance censuses. This type of data would, of course, benefit the national church with specific local information which could be linked to resource and ministry allocation management by presbytery and by central bodies.

⁶¹ Expressions of dissatisfaction found in the survey were seen in some sections of closed social media sites used by ministers, little of which made its way into the public domain. There was also little comment made at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, held in May 2017.

Over three quite different surveys, related to the role of quantitative data in ministry, there have been consistent messages. The majority of ministers recognise that statistics of various kinds can be helpful for their work. Ministers are well aware that numbers provide only some pieces of information they require but pieces which are necessary, even if they also need to be handled carefully. To that end there is a general understanding that they might, at times, require the assistance of those who can translate the bare numbers into something meaningful and relevant for the local situation. In this survey, there is an appreciation that, where statistical data is gathered and produced by the Church of Scotland, there is also a level of trust afforded to that information. This fact, allied to the call to have a census on a more regular basis would argue for the church itself being the originator, organiser and publisher of such a census. Such an undertaking would surely need to come with a promise for full and open disclosure of the statistical reality, not seeking to hide or deviate from the full truth, whatever it might be. This may require a fundamental cultural change within the organisation.

In the following chapter, I examine the historical interaction of the church nationally with regards to congregational statistics and why there is at least some cause to be concerned with attitudes exhibited previously towards the collection and collation of statistical information.

Chapter 7: National Church Response to Statistics

Good research helps the Church to understand more of what it is, what it has been and what it can or might become. Only by learning about itself can the Church make informed decisions about how best to focus its resources and energies to serve its God-given mission (Stephens, 2011).

Every organisation requires data to understand the context in which it operates, to organise its activities and to determine whether its plans are being fulfilled. Historically, the Church of Scotland has gathered a range of statistical information to aid it in its assessment of praxis and as a guide to the development and effectiveness of its mission endeavours. The data gathered has, historically, provided valuable insight and has enabled careful future planning for all levels of its structures. Even a casual glance at most editions of the large volume of annual reports submitted to the General Assembly, reveals a plethora of tables, graphs and charts to support the various assertions and submissions made by almost all the councils and central committees of the Church of Scotland.

Scope

In this chapter, I engage in a critical analysis of how sections of the Church of Scotland, dealing primarily with mission and discipleship issues, engage with quantitative information. The analysis will describe the dominant actions and attitudes conveyed. This chapter will give consideration to weaknesses and deficiencies in the approaches often taken. Out of this chapter will come a number of recommendations which will be set out in the final chapter of the thesis.

The primary methodology in the analysis undertaken is to survey the reports and deliverances contained within the volume of reports prepared for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Focus will centre on the reports of the Board of Practice and Procedure, Council of Assembly,⁶² Assembly council and the Statistics for Mission Group within the Mission and Discipleship Council and the Committee on Review and Reform. A second strand of information will contain views expressed both publicly and from interview with key officials within the structures of the Church of Scotland.

⁶² The function of the Assembly Council is the setting of priorities among the councils and committees, and taking necessary administrative decisions between General Assemblies.

Where the topic specifically relates to presbytery planning, those issues will be dealt with in Chapter 8: Appraisal of a Planning Process - Glasgow Presbytery.

I have not attempted to follow the development and use of financial statistics or similar information of that nature, nor to evaluate the type and range of data utilised by the various other Church of Scotland committees and councils such as the Committee on Social Responsibility or the Church and Nation Committee. Research in those areas would, I believe, be worthwhile but lies beyond the constraints of space and scope of this particular study.

General Assembly 1996

The work of the Church of Scotland is continually evolving. Therefore, choosing a point of entry for any investigation of this nature has some aspect of arbitrariness about it. As a convenient starting point of departure for this journey, I have selected a significant deliverance passed by the General Assembly of 1996. The deliverance was directed to the Board of the Practice and Procedure in these terms:

In consultation with other Boards, to review the collation, presentation and interpretation of Church statistics with a view to helping the Church monitor its current health and missionary challenges, as far as may be usefully discerned from such statistical reporting.⁶³

This addendum was moved by a commissioner at the General Assembly and whilst initially resisted by the Board of Practice and Procedure; the proposal was passed by a vote of 284 for and 252 against.⁶⁴

What follows below is, in part, an attempt to chart the progress of this work. The initial response came the following year when the Board noted that the task was still under its consideration. It signposted its intention, conscious of the public image of the church, to construct a positive narrative rather than concentrate on the more negative image of church membership decline. The Council explained,

On occasion, the image the Church of Scotland conveys is of an organisation battling against the odds to stem relentless and debilitating decline. There is more talk of

⁶³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 p1/3

⁶⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1996, Part 3 Section B – Minutes page 7

falling membership than of the new and deep commitment that there is year by year on the part of many.⁶⁵

Additionally,

We have had more than enough surveys about the reasons for membership decline. I believe we need to concentrate on the growth points...⁶⁶

This tactic of attempting to ‘sidestep’ the issue or redirect attention when the issue of falling numbers is raised, is employed regularly by the central administration of the church. At times there appears to be a sense of denial and at other times a deliberate policy of distraction and diversion – possibility for both internal and external political reasons. In the September of 1997, there was to be a Scottish devolution referendum, the outcome of which was understood potentially to have a significant impact on the position and power of the Church of Scotland in Scottish society and culture. It would have been in the interests of the Church of Scotland to project itself as a strong and significant component of national self-understanding so that its rights and privileges would continue and be safeguarded, whatever the outcome.

In 1996 the committee for National Mission was subject to restructuring and in 1997 new remits were presented to the General Assembly including, for the committee on Mission and Evangelism, the task, of among other things,

Developing vision for the work of mission and evangelism in Scotland:
Encouraging mission and evangelism in Presbyteries and parishes through congregations of the Church of Scotland by means of research, development and training...⁶⁷

It would be natural for this particular branch of the church’s work to be directly concerned with issues relating to the decline of church membership, attendance and community engagement, but in line with the apparent policy of creating and promoting a positive image for the work of the church, there is a noted emphasis on ‘good news’ stories and ongoing work which is classified as ‘successful’. For example, the report given on the Schools of Mission and Evangelism⁶⁸ highlighted a positive engagement and response, but

⁶⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 10/4

⁶⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 3.2.2

⁶⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/17 6.1

⁶⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/42

there is no indication in this report, or in any years following, whether the outcomes of attendance at Schools of Mission and Evangelism was demonstrably effective in quantifiable terms in helping churches grow. As noted within the chapter on presbytery planning and the presbytery assessment of congregations, activity in itself is often viewed as a valid measure of success rather than any numerically measurable missional effectiveness of a particular activity.⁶⁹

‘Good news stories’ usually fall into the category of ‘anecdote’ rather than any serious qualitative research which aids strategic insight, as Rendle reminds us,

Anecdotal evidence, as used by most nonprofits, is commonly a collection of the wrong stories told for the wrong reasons. Most often these stories are told for the purpose of persuasion (Rendle, 2014, p. 80).

Beyond Barriers to Belief Study

Whilst the overall view from assembly reports in 1997 is that great work is being done and innovative work is being taken forward there is very little mention made about the constant decline being experienced throughout the church. One significant piece of work which does seek to address the root cause of the situation is a survey entitled ‘*Beyond Barriers to Belief*’.⁷⁰ The study came from a proposal at the General Assembly,

to carry out a study of parishes where effective evangelism is taking place with a view to identifying clearly the factors which have enabled congregations to overcome these barriers to belief.

The focus of the study was on congregations which had one or more identifying features of success, such as having numerical growth over a period of five years, or being over 1000 members strong or ‘Known to be actively developing a missionary lifestyle’. To ensure that numerical features were not overly dominant, there was to be an additional group of congregations included who were deemed ‘missionary minded’. However, there is clearly concern about how the term ‘effective evangelism’ might be understood and so the report is at pains to address the point that ‘effective’ is not necessarily related to, nor to be understood in numerical terms. The report explains,

⁶⁹ In correspondence with the convenor it was suggested that there was ‘some evidence’ of those going to the school benefiting from attendance though such evidence was subjective in nature rather than objectively quantifiable.

⁷⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/53

‘effective evangelism’ is ultimately not open to measurement by human perception.⁷¹

Although it also goes on to concede,

‘Effectiveness’ was at least something to do with numerical increase...⁷²

The report concludes that,

‘effective evangelism’ is not simply about size and numbers, since ‘a purely numerical measure will miss many of the promptings of the Spirit’.⁷³

A reading of this section of the report conveys mixed messages as it seeks to attempt to satisfy potential criticisms both in the use or non-use of statistics.

A major concern regarding the use of the statistics generated by the report came from the construction of the study, where ‘effective evangelism’ was defined as those who were worthy of inclusion within the parameters which were set at the outset of the study. The conclusions reported on the common themes which emerged from the seventy-eight returns received from that original group. However, what is clear from the report is that little thought was given to the design of the survey. Therefore, any conclusions drawn are vague and are generally based on very small numbers of congregations or different types of congregations, including those which fell into the various categories of effectiveness chosen for the study. Some of these grew numerically over a five year period, some were historically large and some simply open to new ideas and categorised as ‘mission minded’.⁷⁴

As an example of the conclusions reached, it was suggested that a possible measure of ‘effectiveness’ was where congregations found over 35% (of their membership) was in attendance on a given Sunday. The report concedes that this figure only related to thirteen of their sample of successful congregations and noting that, of that group, most were geographically north of ‘the Highland line’.⁷⁵ To arrive at the conclusion of ‘effectiveness’ on such a small number with a likely cultural causation is dubious. It might be the case that this group of congregations was particularly diligent in updating their membership rolls to reflect active and interested individuals – a natural consequence of which would be to have a high attendance/membership ratio.

⁷¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/53 1

⁷² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/53 1

⁷³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/54 2

⁷⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/54

⁷⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/54 a

Under the heading ‘Professions of faith,’ it is suggested that,

one measure of effectiveness will be where congregations add more than one profession of faith for every hundred members. In National terms, if every congregation added 3 members by profession of every hundred members, the Church of Scotland would be growing again.⁷⁶

There is a note that twenty-eight congregations in the group indicated more than 1% in professions of faith, but detailed information relating to that group is not given though further analysis was promised.

This basic reporting of this survey may have some value but it is, in fact, extremely limited in helping congregations or the church, nationally, discover the key growth points, since there does not appear to be any attempt at a cause and effect analysis, or to set the results gained against a randomised group of congregations. As previously noted, the selection itself was relatively vague and without any hard and fast metrics, therefore making any conclusions very uncertain and potentially unreliable.

Committee on Practice and Procedure – Data Analysis

In addition to the natural locus for the gathering and use of statistics within National Mission, it is historically the role of the Committee on Practice and Procedure to collect, collate and present the annual statistics of the Church of Scotland. In 1999, in the midst of the ongoing concern about continuing falling church membership and in the wake of being asked to monitor the health of the church through the gathered statistics, the committee gave voice to the limitations of their required technical ability, essential for involvement in any analysis of the information which was received. The proposal it made instead, was that other sections of the central administration of the church might engage with this work; however, it would appear from the report that such engagement was not welcomed by the other boards and committees, perhaps because they too lacked the expertise, and so a project of detailed membership analysis was shelved. The outcome was presented to the General Assembly of 1999 in these terms,

The Board has come to the conclusion that while collation and presentation of the raw data is properly the function of the Board, it does not have the professional expertise to analyse or interpret this data to provide accurate statistical information.

⁷⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1997 17/54 b

The Board proposed to other Boards and Committees that a professionally undertaken statistical survey of the current health of the membership of the church be carried out during the year 1999 with a view to reporting the results to the General Assembly of 2000 and possibly to a wider constituency thereafter. This project, which would have required the active participation of other Boards and Committees, did not receive a sufficient degree of support and the Board, having fulfilled to this extent its remit of 1996, therefore departs from this project meantime but acknowledges that it may in due course be a useful tool in the work of the Assembly Council and others.⁷⁷

Rather than dispensing with the task completely, it pointed towards work which was underway within the Panel on Doctrine who were in the process of preparing a report on 'membership'; therefore, the proposal was made that this report should be available before any significant or large scale statistical gathering changes were suggested or introduced.

Committee on Mission and Evangelism

As might be imagined and highlighted above, the Committee on Mission and Evangelism had particular concern for numerical evidence of effectiveness around the country. In 1999, it gave voice to the national drop in membership over the years but, in keeping with other pronouncements from the central administration groups, even from this group, there was caution expressed concerning taking figures at face value and counsels that the Church should see the health of congregations in other ways:

while the strength of a congregation cannot be solely measured in number all must be concerned that the membership of the Church of Scotland is half what it was at the beginning of the 1960s. The task of the Church will always be to win followers for Jesus Christ.⁷⁸

Nationally it was further noted that not only was adult membership in dramatic decline so also were other areas of the life of the church. An area under scrutiny by National Mission in 1999 was the decrease in the incidence of infant baptisms. The committee concedes that in tandem with an overall decline in church membership there would be an inevitable decline in administration of baptisms:

It must be noted that the decline in the proportion of babies baptised is part of a wider picture; that of an increasing disengagement of the people of Scotland from the Kirk. Baptism is associated with believing faith. If Christian faith drains from a

⁷⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1999 1/4

⁷⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1999 20/49 1.2

society, a declining number of baptisms (whether of infants or adults) is to be expected.⁷⁹

Special Commission on Review and Reform

As the Church of Scotland prepared to enter the 21st century, it was facing significant questions about its place in society. On a national level, the General Assembly, sometimes in the past termed an unofficial Scottish parliament, had lost that place as a result of an earlier devolution vote. The continuing consciousness of ever smaller numbers of church members gave rise, in some quarters, to a recognition that something needed to be done to change the trajectory of the church, even if this was being voiced largely ‘off the record’ rather than within its official papers. In 1999 the General Assembly welcomed the creation of a special commission in response to an Overture from the Presbytery of Edinburgh in these terms,

appoint a multi-disciplinary special commission of fifteen people, including a convenor and vice-convenor, to re-examine in depth the primary purposes of the church and the shape of the Church of Scotland as we enter into the next millennium: to formulate proposals for a process of continuing reform; to consult on such matters with other Scottish churches; and to report to the General Assembly of 2001.⁸⁰

As part of the initial work of the Special Commission on Review and Reform, the statistics project, which had previously been shelved by the committee on Practice and Procedure, was placed on their agenda.⁸¹ In addition to this review, there was also put in place, by National Mission, the foundations of the Statistics for Mission group whose task would be to provide, from the National Census, accurate statistics for each individual parish.⁸²

The Commission was charged with the development of a revised vision for the Church of Scotland. It does appear that at the heart of the various deliverances, was what amounted to an existential crisis for the Church of Scotland. Questions such as, ‘Who are we?’, ‘What are we to be about?’, ‘How are we to determine our wellbeing?’, are all part of the mix of drivers behind the various new initiatives. What was also clear, was that there was still a real reluctance to openly acknowledge the fundamental importance of numerical decline. This was repeatedly mentioned in reports, but within those submissions, it was

⁷⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1999 20/85 11.8.2.2

⁸⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1999, page 9, 2.

⁸¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2000 1/11

⁸² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2000 20/18 7.3

also actively downplayed. Indeed, there was a determined effort to find new metrics which would give more encouraging results rather than simply consider the fact itself.

If numbers are not the only index of health, the church needs to identify other indices of spiritual life and vitality so that the state of the Church can be assessed from a variety of perspectives and give a ‘balance scorecard’...presentation of other indicators so that success can be celebrated.⁸³

The Special Commission on Review and Reform, as part of its task of finding a new vision for the church, undertook a consultation with various church groups and individuals. The published results from the consultation produced a picture which was somewhat confusing, in that it appeared to both hold that participants were deeply concerned about falling church membership numbers and fewer numbers of young people in church, but also presented the conclusion that respondents held that these numbers were not entirely diagnostic and that growing numbers were not entirely necessary for healthy churches. The narrative produced, highlights the view that discipleship stands over against membership, in a similar way to which quality is said to be preferred over quantity.

As a facilitator involved in similar types of exercises across a number of presbyteries, it was consistently made very clear to me by participants, that falling numbers of church participants, of all ages, is one of the major concerns held by local congregations (since the result is the eventual closure of local churches and fears for the remaining congregations). Issues therefore around mission, evangelism and other aspects of practical church growth were, by extension, the most likely items to be raised as a response. That this does not feature as prominently as one might expect in these reports, must, therefore, raise questions concerning the way in which reports are presented and conclusions drawn.

An example of a typical ‘summary of findings’ is,

While a lot of people still find falling numbers a great concern and express a wish to find a way of halting the decline, there is a growing number who regard numbers as only one of the measurements of the health of a church. Many point out that the remaining people are more committed and that quality is more important than quantity.⁸⁴

⁸³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2000 11/6 2.1

⁸⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2001 3.12.1

Of note, within the statement, is that a narrative is produced (and on that basis policy is determined) which is essentially constructed on a slim evidential base, with vague and unquantifiable assertions. When ‘growing numbers’ are mentioned, there is no indication of scale or level. When ‘one measurement of health’ is referenced, it is not given a context or said what kind of health is being addressed or what kind of measurements are being noted. The reader is given only a vague idea of what the writers mean since the pronouncements lack real substance or clarity. What the reader is left with is simply a list of questions concerning the details, for example, ‘Is there indeed any measurable indication that the remaining members are ‘more committed’ than those who have left?’⁸⁵ Other than a widely accepted and often repeated mantra, in what respects are churches to value quality over quantity? Is fruitfulness unimportant?

Church Membership

The Assembly Council determined, in the light of its consultations, that there required to be consideration of the overhaul of the approach taken towards formal church membership and it gives voice to that desire for a change of practice and policy in its report of 2001:

while some feel that membership still has a role to play; and would not like any changes to be made, many more are in favour of a complete or partial overhaul of the membership system. Among the sources of dissatisfaction are that the rolls so often bear no relation to reality; that nominal membership is a weakening influence on the Church; that Communion ought to be more open and that the rules and regulation put potentially interested people off...the emphasis should be on journeying, not arriving.⁸⁶

A similar question concerning the desirability of formal church membership is raised within the ‘*Church Without Walls*’ report, which shares both a similar theme and imagery,

Membership is alien to people who see life as a journey, or who want a real challenge. Church membership seems too static for the searchers and tamely passive for the adventurers. They are looking for looser patterns of belonging and activities that make a real difference to the world (Church of Scotland, 2001, p. 13).

⁸⁵ One metric previously gathered by the Church of Scotland until was ‘the number who communicated at least once a year’. This number provided one possible proxy measure for commitment (even if it was to be commitment at a low level by some). When the total number of those who communicated once is set against the Church of Scotland membership over time then on that metric there is no noted increasing commitment indicated.

⁸⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2001 11/16 3.12.2

At this point, there were a number of initiatives to enhance the statistical veracity of congregational work. First of all, the Statistics for Mission initiative was formally launched with a task group formed;

to develop a scheme of providing accurate population statistics and trends for all Church of Scotland parishes based on the 1991 and 2001 statistics.⁸⁷

The double reason, of benefiting the church locally and nationally, is clearly stated.

They should be invaluable in assisting congregations to understand their parish area and tailor-make their missionary endeavours and will enable the Committee on Parish Reappraisal to come to decisions about parish staffing with accurate population statistics available.⁸⁸

Through a process of matching census data to postcode areas, the committee sought to make available relevant information which they hoped would produce insights and information for local Kirk Sessions as well as presbyteries and which could be utilised by the national church for its presbytery planning processes.

In line with seeking a broader understanding of the strength of congregations, outside formal membership, the Board of Practice and Procedure, in partnership with the Board of Parish Education proposed an expansion of the 'Persons and Agencies Schedule'. The new section requested three additional pieces of information relating to the number of young people involved in congregational life, including the number of children who received Holy Communion, this having recently been allowed formally by the Church of Scotland in the year 2000.^{89,90}

The Board of Practice and Procedure, as noted earlier in the chapter, approached the Panel on Doctrine to give consideration to the nature of church membership. Clearly, there is a movement concerned with changing the system of formal membership, the rationale for which is contained in the report of 2002. The insights provided in the report are instructive, in that we note again, how the committee highlights what it perceives as the negative effect of adverse statistics on the morale of the church. The text of the report reads:

⁸⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2001 20/31 7.6.1

⁸⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2001 20/31 7.6.2

⁸⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002 1/9 10.

⁹⁰ Section IV of the example Persons and Agencies Schedule in Appendix 19 contains the questions added.

the impetus for such an investigation stems partly from the belief that conventional statistics, which can seem to chart decline and which may contribute to a loss of morale, may not adequately measure the health of the Church or sufficiently assist in its missionary task and partly from changing habits and attitudes in our day to relationships and belonging...⁹¹

This reaction to decline has been voiced publicly by some of the Church of Scotland's most senior church leaders. As Moderator of the General Assembly, the Very Rev. Dr John Chalmers' views gave rise to a headline carried by the BBC,

The moderator said that he was 'fed up' with the church publishing annual statistics which showed membership decline (BBC News, 2014).

His views on the matter have been published in Life and Work magazine and were also the subject of a sermon delivered at Dunfermline Abbey where he asserted,

...it may be that we as a church should be deeply regretting the day and hour that we became a membership organization, for us to begin to count numbers on a register. As soon as you make people carry attendance cards and soon as you organize yourself in the shape of a club, you leave yourself open to be measured by the indicators of club success - money in the bank, the number of boys in the B.B. your children in the Sunday school. And when these things start to drift, so too does morale and purpose and popularity (J. Chalmers, 2016).

This outlook from a respected church leader stands in stark contrast to the 'official' position of the church as set out by Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland who do not view church membership as merely some kind of 'club affiliation' (J. Chalmers, 2016), but as an important indication of a person's response to their baptism. Although there was no section on church membership within their report on Baptism which was presented in 2003, the panel in 2004 went on to produce a separate Report on Church Membership, which they headed 'Measuring Membership'.

The overall aim was to identify the statistical information which would 'offer an accurate reflection of the present health of, and missionary challenge facing, the Church'.^{92,93}

⁹¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002 13/19

⁹² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2004 12/1

⁹³ The quote included within the aim, 'offer an accurate reflection of the present health of and missionary challenges facing, the Church' is a direct reference to the Report of the Board of Practice and Procedure, 1998 1/4

The panel gives consideration to the trustworthiness of statistics, particularly as they related to the numbers gathered for church membership. While it did concur, to a limited extent, with some of the concerns and limitations of statistics, such as the disparity of numbers on the formal church rolls against those who attend worship, they also noted the change in society's understanding of church membership as culture has changed from the point of the inception of its collection in the 18th century. However, even taking these issues into consideration, it none the less concluded

‘membership’ in the church is a different kind of concept from that which defines who is one of the in crowd and who is an outsider. It is a concept which does not have a counterpart in ‘secular’ parlance but finds its meaning in the unique event known as baptism... Baptism and membership cannot be separated. Nor is it possible, as some suggest, to abandon the notion of ‘membership’ altogether. What is necessary is to distinguish between biblical and unbiblical uses of the word. Behind the phrase ‘members of the church’ lies our gift and calling as ‘members of Christ...what is clear from New Testament teaching about the Church is that a ‘roll of members’ is quite a different matter from a list of those belonging to any human society or grouping.⁹⁴

The panel does suggest that local congregations may wish to gather additional information for the purposes of pastoral administration, including gathering information on services where infants or children are blest or dedicated, but it wholeheartedly stands behind the continued use of membership rolls and related statistics, which it views not simply as administrative, but reflecting something more fundamental concerning the nature of the church.⁹⁵

What appears to lie behind the difference of outlook and understanding expressed by the Principal Clerk on the one hand, and the Panel on Doctrine on the other, are different theological outlooks and understandings on the nature of the church. Another excerpt from the sermon ‘Let’s stop counting members’ illustrates this. The Very Rev. Dr Chalmers said,

...we need to stop talking numbers and instead we need to let the people of Scotland know that they already belong to God. And that the church belongs to them... We have lazily accepted the ancient traditions which paint God as the separator of sheep and goats, as the stern judge, rather than God who is the ground of all our being. (J. Chalmers, 2016)

⁹⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2004 12/5

⁹⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2004 12/7

To say that Chalmers was unconcerned with the falling numbers in the Church of Scotland would be untrue. As Moderator of the General Assembly in 2014, Chalmers raised questions concerning whether the Church of Scotland was asking too much of people to assent to particular questions of Christian belief before taking on full participation in local congregations. This apparent concern to grow the institutional membership without seeking baptism and personal profession of faith was criticised and condemned in the press, most notably by Rev. David Robertson of the Free Church of Scotland (Robertson, 2014a).

In the early years of the 21st century, in addition to church membership becoming a topic for study and examination by Boards and committees, it was also highlighted to the General Assembly that a projected decline in ministerial numbers was cause for concern. The obvious statistical trends helped to inform a disciplined strategic response by the church, to shape and to drive forward policy to address the issue. Whilst it might be expected that such policy might attempt a reversal in the known pattern, in reality, the Board of National Mission took the view that the change required was ‘to prepare the Church for what are inevitable consequences.’⁹⁶ This provided a clear mandate for the kind of radical presbytery planning processes which were to be implemented in the years which followed, details of which are provided in a later chapter.

A more positive exercise would find expression through the *Church without Walls Report* of 2001, which, in part, set out a broad vision for the future shape and work of the Church of Scotland, and the Special Commission on Review and Reform which followed after it, which was given the remit ‘to consider the changing needs, challenges and responsibilities of the Church.’⁹⁷

Statistics for Mission group

The Statistics for Mission Group also became active and in the November of 2003 officially launched their data project which would produce a data CD giving parish based information for each congregation, based on the 2001 census. It provided a workbook called *Stats have Faces* to assist congregations to make the figures provided useful for their mission planning.⁹⁸ The Statistics for Mission material would also assist those involved in

⁹⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002 20/6 1.1.3

⁹⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2004 10/24 appendix 2

⁹⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2004 20/19 Statistics for Mission

the larger presbytery planning initiatives, this requiring to be supplemented with additional data. In 2005, the Board of Practice and Procedure also began to gather data on the number of weddings and funerals performed in each parish. It may have been a useful exercise for the church, nationally, to record the overall levels at which these rites were delivered to the people of Scotland. But since the purpose was only to measure potential parish workload levels weddings and funerals, which are not directly parish related, are not recorded.⁹⁹

At this point in the history of the Church of Scotland, statistics for strategic mission and ministry resource planning were being given a more central place. They were being used in the work of Church Without Walls, The Commission on Review and Reform, Presbytery Planning and the ongoing work of resourcing congregations through National Mission. There are, however, signs of the church's caution in appearing to be too empirically based in decision making. An illustration of the expressed caution is seen in the excerpt below, made in a report by the Commission on Review and Reform,

We cannot serve Christ or his church well by using purely pragmatic, functional images of the management of ministry and mission. Forward planning and leadership skills must always work in dialogue with Scripture, reason, tradition and experience so that our mission is an expression of sound theology, the life of prayer, the study of Scripture and sacramental life.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, the activity of the Statistics for Mission group, which has already been mentioned in this chapter, would provide a focal point for the development of statistical gathering and analysis; however, this group had a very limited remit. The sub group began with a key function, that of making the results of the 2001 census available to local congregations for local planning purposes. In light of the movement towards greater presbytery planning, the data, being available on a presbytery wide level, also provided much needed detail for that work. The national patterns of population similarly provided a rich vein of planning information. However, the Statistics for Mission group became inactive after it had completed the primary task given to it following the 2001 census and it remained that way until the next nationwide census in 2011 was instigated.

⁹⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2005 1/9

¹⁰⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2008 19/227.2

In 2011 the Statistics for Mission Group was highlighted by the Report of Mission and Discipleship indicating that it had the ability to provide a range of ‘accurate, accessible information’¹⁰¹ which could be used at every level of church planning and which had the potential to be a key driver enabling Outreach and creative discussion for re-imagining the local church.

In this new digital age, the Statistics for Mission Group implemented a sophisticated digital geographical mapping system (GIS) to link data more closely to parish areas (the previous system relying on postcodes being much less precise). Information produced through the census or from other sources could be overlaid on the available parish map and made available through online web based resources. Data considered key for the missionary work of congregations such as age profiles, levels of health and employment statistics among others, including religious belonging, were chosen for dissemination. To help facilitate the smooth integration of census data with the needs of the church, the Statistics for Mission group entered into a working collaboration with the National Records of Scotland and its Census division.¹⁰²

The end result of this work was a statistical profile for each parish available via the Church of Scotland website webpage http://cos.churchofscotland.org.uk/church_finder/. To assist congregations in the use of the statistical profile information, the Council also commissioned a guide to statistics for parishes called *Who is my Neighbour?* (Statistics for Mission, 2016). This eBook, an updated version of an earlier guide, contains much useful information though it is not directly connected with the online statistical profiles and their use but is more general in nature. The Council also offered trained individuals who were willing to meet with congregations or presbyteries to assist them in making sense of the information available. At the time of writing this resource has apparently been seldom used.¹⁰³

As highlighted in the survey of ministers and church elders earlier, in Chapter 6, the reception of this information was extremely positive, with a number of respondents making the point that it is important for information contained in the profiles, to be as current as

¹⁰¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 5/12 5.7.1

¹⁰² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2012 5/8 3.7.1

¹⁰³ Interview with Lesley Hamilton Messer, Secretary to Mission and Discipleship Council

possible. This view is evidently shared by the Council of Mission and Discipleship who, on reporting on the Statistics for Mission work concluded,

the Council believes that when this work is completed, there will be a need for some other group/council/committee covering the whole of the Church to take on board the ongoing work of updating and progressing the data and statistics which we are certain will be invaluable for the whole Church in its mission and strategic planning. It may be that such a group would sit independently but be representative of all Councils such as the Council of Assembly.¹⁰⁴

Although the Mission and Discipleship Council formally discharged the Statistics for Mission group in 2014, it asks the General Assembly to give the Council the instruction

to build on the work of the Statistics for Mission group in order to ensure that the most up to date statistics are always available and well presented for the use of the whole Church.¹⁰⁵

It is not clear why the Statistics for Mission group was not simply given an updated remit to continue to serve the church in the production of statistical information and reports and to deal with new or additional statistical databases considered helpful to the work of the church. The group was disbanded, with one of its key assets, Rev. Dr Fiona Tweedie, a professional statistician by training, being retained. Dr Tweedie, who is also an Ordained Local Minister in the Church of Scotland, was engaged to work for ten hours per week, in part, developing worship in the Church Offices, but crucially also:

maintaining an overview of the collection and use of statistics in relation to Ministry and Mission; liaising with external bodies on the maintaining of the Statistics for Mission profiles; advising Councils and Committees on the construction and use of questionnaires relating to the work of the Church; and offering advice to Councils and Committees on quality assurance issues in the use of statistics in research.¹⁰⁶

In a report to the General Assembly of 2016, an extensive list was presented of the contribution made to statistical understanding of the church, across many councils and committees by Rev. Dr Tweedie.¹⁰⁷ In addition, she has been commissioned to facilitate an examination and revision of the type of data being gathered and to bring forward recommendations for development.¹⁰⁸ Recommendations arising out of this exercise

¹⁰⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2013 5/18 38.2

¹⁰⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2014 Mission and Discipleship

¹⁰⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2015 8/17 10.1

¹⁰⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2016 4/26 10

¹⁰⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2015 6/6 8.

include encouragement for individual Presbyteries to ‘develop their own metrics appropriate to their context.’¹⁰⁹ This recommendation moves away from the previous pattern of having a strict standardised set of data across all congregations and presbyteries towards a more flexible and contextualised approach; however, details of what such metrics might be are unspecified.

What was outlined more directly was that, in addition to the breadth of the current information collected, other items of data would be added such as the number involved in worship and activities related to discipleship development. However, it was noted that with congregational worship being made available outside buildings via the use of video streaming, social media and other technologies, statistics on engagement will be difficult to gather and interpret.¹¹⁰

The level of work to be undertaken by Dr Tweedie is remarkable given the short engagement window available each week in her contract. Given the accepted usefulness of having the onsite services of a professional statistician, it does beg the question of why such a position is not full-time since this would allow a fuller opportunity to analyse and present the large amount of available information as well as allow for the development of appropriate research streams.

The Church of England

At the same time as the Church of Scotland was being asked to review its engagement with statistics, the Church of England was also involved in a similar process. In October of 1998 a conference entitled, ‘Statistics, A Tool for Mission’ was held, bringing together key individuals with expertise in relevant areas of data analysis, communication and mission. The participants concluded that within the Church of England, attitudinal, methodological and missional changes were required in the gathering and practical use of statistical information, the quotations below from their resulting report capturing the essence of their thinking,

...a change of attitude with the adoption of a more positive view of the use of statistics; not simply to analyse historical data, but to use information to plan for the future (Church of England, 2000, p. 39).

¹⁰⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2016 10.5

¹¹⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2016 5/11 9.3, 2016 5/12 9.6

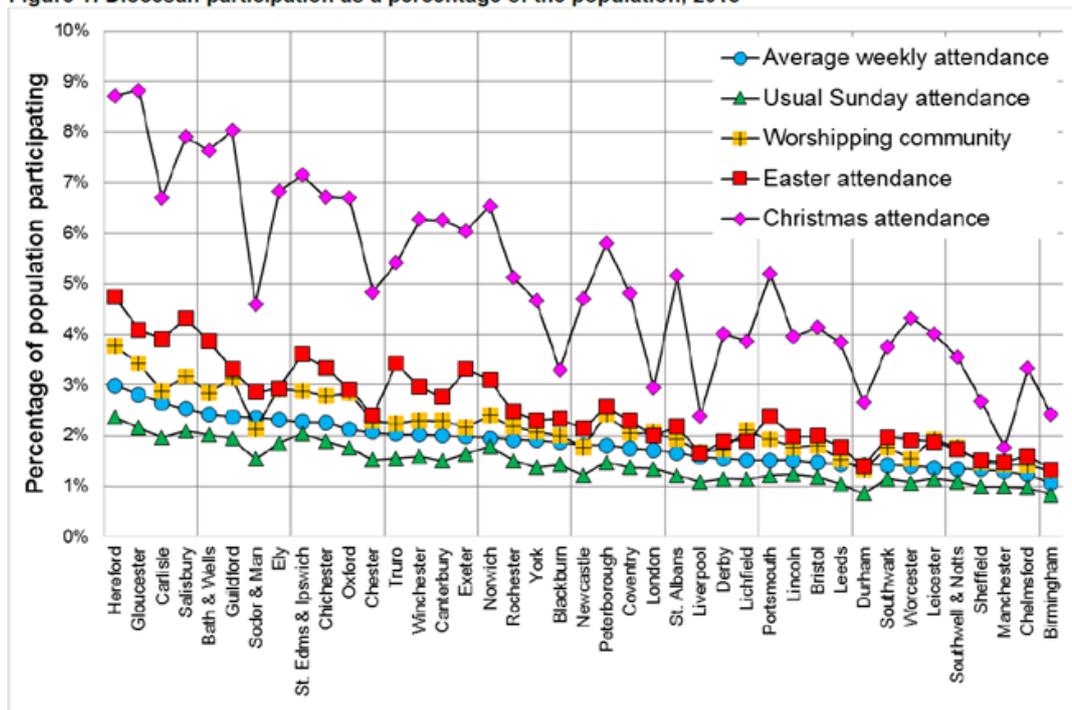
...a more systematic approach to gathering information and using and reporting statistics (Church of England, 2000, p. 39).

the use of statistics not only for administrative purposes but also a tool for mission, may help the Church engage more fully in its prophetic, pastoral and evangelistic role – by enabling it to face with honesty the implications of changing patterns of attendance (Church of England, 2000, p. 40).

The Church of England has built on its positive approach to statistics and the result has seen a number of fundamental changes introduced to expand and enhance the statistical detail available. Of note, given the earlier review of the Church of Scotland, is that the Church of England introduced new attendance measures in the year 2000. During a four-week period during October each year, congregations are now asked to record church attendance information. This information was in addition to the measure previously collected, namely the Usual Sunday Attendance. There was also the gathering of attendances at the major Christian festivals of Easter and Christmas. Vivaly the statistical exercise also asked congregations to estimate the size of their ‘Worshipping Community’. This concept would include people who come regularly to church including those who come less frequently than weekly; it also includes those who, were it not for illness, infirmity or some other impediment would otherwise be in church for worship services. The chart below (Graph 2) provides an example of the type of rich data presentation which can be generated from elements of the church attendance data (Archbishops' Council, 2017e).¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Appendix 13 contains the data gathering form used by the Church of England and appendix 14 further examples of the range of statistical output which is generated for reporting purposes.

Figure 1: Diocesan participation as a percentage of the population, 2015



Graph 2: Example of Church of England data chart

Benefits of more focused engagement with statistical data is evident in reports presented at regular intervals to both the Church of England (Archbishops' Council, 2017e) and the Methodist Church in the UK (Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes). An ongoing partnership between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in the collection, collation, analysis and presentation of Statistical data highlights clearly the benefits of a central processing bureau for church statistics across the UK.¹¹² It is clear from both denominations that the analysed and presented data provides invaluable guidance for strategic planning purposes. Rev. Dr Tweedie has already developed strong personal links with the Archbishops' Council Research and Statistics group and her expertise has been used by them in detailed analysis of aspects of the Church of England Church Growth initiatives (Tweedie, 2014).

Clearly, the technical aspects of statistical analysis require specialists, which small denominations such as the Church of Scotland, have difficulty financing. It, therefore, appears to be an efficient and wise approach to pool both people and resources in this area for the good of all. The 2016 'Columba Declaration' between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England has provided a useful, official framework for such mutual

¹¹² The Methodist Church depends on the Statistics Unit of the Church of England to process its collected data

cooperation through its commitment to strengthen partnership in mission (The Church of Scotland, 2015).

It could be envisioned that partnerships with other ecumenical partners would allow for enhanced religious statistics on a UK wide basis. As mentioned previously, the Scottish Church Census has taken place at irregular intervals, dependant on the will and finance of participating denominations and para church groups. Each census has required contracting with a freelance independent statistics consultancy to provide the necessary expertise and staff.¹¹³ An expanded central statistical group representing the churches of the UK would have the means to conduct more regular nationwide data gathering initiatives of this kind and others, which would have the potential to radically enhance the information gathering and analytical powers of the churches in the UK, including a more uniform approach which would aid research of trends and patterns across the whole of the UK.

Invisible Church

To count those who come through the doors of churches, or who are willing to engage in the normal practices of church life, is relatively straightforward, but what of those who once came but don't anymore, or those who don't come at all? National census returns and other social research has consistently identified a larger group of people who self-identify with the denomination or with the Christian faith in general. It is with this background knowledge that Steve Aisthorpe, one of Mission and Discipleships Council's mission development staff, undertook research centred initially around a group known as the 'de-churched', those who were once part of a local congregation, men and women with some degree of Christian faith, but who subsequently departed from those congregations. The research was extended to consider the 'unchurched', those who claim a Christian faith but who do not participate in regular congregational worship. The research reported a number of challenging conclusions.

It was reported to the General Assembly in 2012,

Research suggests that in Scotland, more than twice as many people are 'de-churched' as those who count themselves as 'regular churchgoers'. These are people who were once engaged with a local church but are no longer. Evidence suggests that most of these people have not lost their Christian faith. Rather, they make up

¹¹³ Dr Peter Brierley has been the lead consultant and has had the responsibility to design, gather and analyse church census data. The raw data gathered has remained the property of Mr Brierley.

one part of that growth sector of the Christian community that lives out faith in a non-congregational way.¹¹⁴

And in an article written by Steve Aisthorpe,

It has been conventional in recent years, when thinking about Christian mission, to talk about ‘the 90%’, those with no regular contact with a congregation, as being those who need to be reached with the gospel message. However, it is now clear that a sizeable proportion of that 90% represents people who are already on a journey of discipleship with Jesus Christ (Aisthorpe, 2014).

The findings have been seized on by the Church of Scotland as providing some with a sense of hope that amid the formal numerical decline within the membership of the church organisation there is, outside the church, a vibrant Christian community, many of whom have simply disengaged from organised religious worship but who none the less remain ‘committed to their Christian faith’ (Aisthorpe, 2016, p. 31).

The results are undoubtedly thought provoking for the Church of Scotland, in that they point towards a growing irrelevance for some current congregational practices - although Aisthorpe does not concede this point, suggesting instead,

The fact that some people feel the need to escape the Christian bubble does not necessarily suggest a shortcoming of a congregation (Aisthorpe, 2016, p. 181).

Perhaps most surprising of all is that the Mission and Discipleship Council appears to extrapolate this research as being useful and applicable across the whole of Scotland. This may indeed turn out to be the case, but clearly, the research itself is limited to a geographical area and so the particulars may reflect a local or regional phenomenon or pattern. Aisthorpe is clear in his thesis which forms the foundation of later publications, that

The themes that have emerged from this qualitative study require quantitative inquiry in order to ascertain their prevalence in the experiences of a wider population (Aisthorpe, 2016, p. 182).

The national church has rightly invested significant effort towards charting the scale of those who have ceased to participate in local congregations and that is to be welcomed. However, the current pressure in some areas to pull back from taking careful measurement

¹¹⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2012 5/8 3.6.1.1

of numbers and trends of those within or around the church is therefore surprising, as is the tendency to shy away from careful and systematic examination of numerical data from a variety of sources.

Criticism

The Rev. David Robertson, a fierce critic of the Church of Scotland from within the Free Church of Scotland, has, over a number of years, publicly highlighted not only the ongoing decline of the Church of Scotland but also the type of responses made by its leaders and official communicators (Robertson, 2014b). Rev. Robertson, on his regular online blogs and in printed articles, has accused the Church of Scotland of gross negligence in its response to the downward trends, of producing ‘spin’ in its communications designed to hide or to distract from the situation and has instead given a stark assessment,

The C of S will have its committees, press office, projects and politicised structures for many years to come. But will it be a living and growing church or just one in which the spiritual parasites live off the rotting carcass of a once vibrant body? I suspect that it will be the latter (Robertson, 2016).

The Rev. Robertson is not an unbiased commentator; his criticisms in many ways reminiscent of the denominational war of words of an earlier era.¹¹⁵ Although both the tone and the motivation of his comments are suspect, there is undoubted substance to many of his criticisms, which have already been highlighted in this chapter.

Firstly, Rev. Robertson as an external commentator, is aware that the reaction and response to the quantitative indicators of decline have been, at best, muted or even completely ignored. This stands in contrast to the more transparent approach of the Church of England, which produces an extensive report and commentary on its various statistics (Archbishops' Council, 2016). Secondly, there is a question raised concerning the substitution of ‘Good news stories’ for raw data, in order to provide a positive gloss on an otherwise negative situation. Rev. Robertson may well be shining a light on the Church of Scotland for his own ecclesiastical political purposes, but that does not nullify his contribution.

¹¹⁵ Chapter 2 highlights something of the friction and debate between elements in the Free churches and the Church of Scotland

Rev. Robertson views the situation of the Church of Scotland as one of general decline and demise. His assessment finds unlikely support from research carried out by Jim Collins, who writes extensively concerning companies and organisations and what principles, based on historical data, lead towards their growth and vitality (J. C. Collins & Porras, 1994). Although his publications are chiefly concerned with large scale profit making enterprises, at least one of his works, *'Good to Great'* (J. C. Collins, 2001) has been interpreted for the non-profit making organisations (J. Collins, 2005). His book charting the stages of organisational decline, *'How the Mighty Fall'* (J. C. Collins, 2009), although referencing profit generating companies and groups, does appear to align well with non-profits such as the church.

The negative role, place and treatment of statistics is, in Collins' five stage scheme of deterioration, viewed as strongly symptomatic of the pattern of behaviours of a declining organisation. In stage 3, which Collins terms 'Denial of Risk and Peril' there is an active refusal to heed the message of the metrics. Alongside this tendency, there is often an unhealthy focus on positives in order to play down the evident negatives. Collins says,

There is a tendency to discount or explain away the negative data rather than presume that something is wrong with the company, leaders highlight and amplify external praise and publicity (J. C. Collins, 2009, p. 81).

As an example, we might examine the response of the Church of Scotland to the publication of the 2016 survey church attendance, in April 2017, which was announced publicly by the Sunday Herald with the headline 'Why Christianity is in Crisis in Scotland – Easter Sunday shock leaves clergy reeling as new figures reveal church attendance at all-time low'. Within the newspaper itself, there is comment from a variety of Scottish church leaders indicating a general disquiet over the drop in numbers.¹¹⁶ The Church of Scotland contributor, by contrast, attempts to give societal reasons behind the drop together with a list number of recent Church of Scotland initiatives to stem the decline. The Church of Scotland, carrying a fuller version of the commentator's views, trumpets the census results online with the headline, 'Green shoots of growth as 390,000 Christians regularly attend church' (The Church of Scotland, 2017d). In explanation of the green shoots, it points towards growth in the Pentecostal group of churches and to the rise in churches linked to immigrant populations. The news piece produced by the communications department also

¹¹⁶ Sunday Herald newspaper 16th April 2017, p4,5

sets against the statistics of church attendance decline, a number of other unrelated pieces of statistical information, attempting, it seems, to downplay the fact of, or the importance of, the decline being reported. Three areas of civic life are highlighted to make the point: weekly cinema going, football match attendance and political party membership.

Stage 3 in Collin's scheme, also sees a number of other points of failure, such as setting goals that fly in the face of the facts or run counter to experience. There is also a move towards activity and programs which are not backed up by clear evidential base. Collins notes that a component, often seen at this stage, is the movement towards internal re-organisation as a method of not facing the facts and even of blaming external forces to avoid accepting responsibility and changing processes of discernment.

Sadly, the scheme which Collins outlines, reflects some of the organisational behaviours currently at work in the Church of Scotland. On examination, there is evidence to suggest that the Church of Scotland has moved beyond stage 3 and has entered into the activities of Collin's stage 4, 'Grasping for Salvation', the stage prior to 'Capitulation to Irrelevance or death'. In stage 4, hopes are placed on unproven strategies, with more desperate movements towards finding a 'big new thing' on which to focus.

The research of Collins does indicate that even at stage 4 there are activities which have led companies to have reversed this level of decline; these include,

Formulate strategic changes based on empirical evidence and extensive strategic and quantitative analysis, rather than make bold, untested leaps... Get the facts, think and then act (or not) with calm determination;... Gain clarity about what is core... Focus on performance, letting tangible results provide the strongest case for a new direction... (J. C. Collins, 2009, p. 90).

This pattern of viewing data as instructive stands in contrast to what is sometimes the expressed attitude of some church leaders concerning the futility of statistical data.¹¹⁷

Collins might attribute such an attitude to 'hubris', a type of arrogance or self-importance borne out of past success. Those within the Christian church often possess a kind of hubris which believes that God will not let the church die; however, there is sometimes within that mode of thinking, a confusion between the church as a human constructed organisation

¹¹⁷ Chapters 5, 6 and 7 reference some of the negative attitudes along with those already expressed in this chapter.

and the church as a theological entity. As a minister of a congregation which has previously belonged to three denominations which have totally or largely disappeared from Scotland, it is clear to me that the 'old organisation' can disappear. The question facing the Church of Scotland is, 'should it allow itself to die in the hope that something better and more alive will take its place' or 'should it strive towards recovery and renewal'?

Conclusion

The national statistics of decline are not, of course, deterministic of what the future might hold but I would submit that it would be very unwise to close our eyes to the message being given by the numbers and what they represent. The Church of Scotland needs to become much more serious about how it engages with metrics of all kinds. As the Church of England helpfully acknowledged, to make statistics work effectively for the organisation, there needs to be a change in attitude within the church itself.

Such changes in attitude need, however, to be translated into practice, such as a ruthless determination for honesty and transparency to be pursued without recourse to the use of propaganda materials to obscure reality. As an organisation which holds 'truth' to be invaluable, even sacred, then the Church ought to distance itself from activities which attempt to subvert even part of the truth, for such would constitute an unworthy practice. It may be that those in positions of authority are genuinely concerned for the morale of those within the organisation, but surely morale is truly countered by ensuring that obstacles and challenges are faced and overcome rather than ignored for a time.

The role of statistical data, in this arena of current membership decline and potential future church growth, is vital. Data has the power to inform and guide, help and direct and in various individual aspects of the work of the Church of Scotland, that is how it is utilised, but we must strive to be more open and more responsive to where that leads, not simply as human exercise, but as guided by the Holy Spirit. Some have viewed numbers as somehow unspiritual and their message unholy. I believe that is to misunderstand the divine/human interaction in the totality of our work as part of the kingdom of God.

Chapter 8: Appraisal of a Planning Process - Glasgow Presbytery

Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted (Henshaw, 2006, p. 55).¹¹⁸

Introduction

In this chapter, consideration will be given to the use of statistical data gathered both locally and nationally, for the purpose of regional church planning. In particular, the case of how Glasgow Presbytery utilised quantitative data during the years 2012 and 2013 for the creation of a Presbytery Plan, will be examined. This example provides an excellent illustration of both the strengths and weaknesses of choosing this method and approach to church planning, which is based largely on quantitative data and, to a lesser extent, qualitative data, transformed or translated for quantitative analysis and use.

The process used and the decisions eventually taken by Glasgow Presbytery were directly shaped by a set of guidelines, both legislative and advisory, which were established by the national Church of Scotland prior to Glasgow Presbytery beginning its work. In particular, Act iv 1984 of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, provided a regulatory framework for filling vacancies where, as part of those regulations, there is a key role played by the central church administration in permission giving for presbyteries to enact their decision to fill a particular vacancy or post.

An overview of the nature of the permission giving and how presbytery planning has over the years changed will be helpful as a context and backdrop to the discussion. Set out below is a synopsis of the recent historical developments indicating how the courts and administration of the Church of Scotland have been involved in guiding and directing the planning process for presbyteries.

Modern History of Presbytery Planning in the Church of Scotland

In the report to the General Assembly of 1983, the Committee on Union and Readjustments highlighted what it considered good practice by presbyteries in preparing ten-year plans, which took seriously the limited national resources available to it in terms of available ministers. The context was that of a shrinking church with the need to

¹¹⁸ From a sign that hung in the study of Albert Einstein

rationalise church plant and to create parishes which have the potential to be both sustainable and effective.

The object of Presbytery Plans was then to 'create charges with sufficient potential in people, money and buildings to maintain the witness of the Church throughout the country.'¹¹⁹ The number of ministries available to each presbytery was advised by the central committee. There had been discussion and debate, as early as the 1978 General Assembly, about whether this kind of interference by an assembly committee on the judgement of presbyteries was justifiable. The issue was finally settled in 1981 when an Act of the General Assembly came into effect to give the committee power to raise the question of readjustment with presbyteries.

By 1984, the projected number of available ministers over the next decade prompted a significant revision of the quota given to presbyteries. The report states that

In light of the continuing trend of declining ministerial manpower it would be necessary to base their calculation on a 10% reduction in the number of charges throughout the church by 1993; the 1982 figure being 1480 and the figure to be achieved by 1993-1327. Figures were submitted to presbyteries reflecting this kind of proportional reduction...¹²⁰

The process of rationalisation, although notionally set within a context of resource sustainability, was always framed within the over-arching vision of the Church of Scotland's self-imposed obligation to provide a parish ministry throughout Scotland, as detailed in Article III of the Articles Declaratory in the Church of Scotland's constitution (Cox, 1976). In the 1980s the aim of the committee was to

encourage readjustment in an orderly way so that there can be created parish units which follow logical and natural bounds and which are within the compass of a minister to perform his duties.¹²¹

The tenor of General Assembly reports of this period indicated the desirability of presbyteries towards making plans and of the willingness of the central committee to aid and assist presbyteries in the formulation of such plans. However, it is evident in follow

¹¹⁹ 1983 Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland p190

¹²⁰ 1984 Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland p291

¹²¹ 1989 Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland p272

up reports that, whilst some presbyteries were actively working on producing detailed future plans, others were not so forthcoming.

At the beginning of 1990, there was a major reorganisation of the Church of Scotland committee structure. One result of the change was that the Union and Readjustments Committee was placed within the new Board of National Mission; this new location for its work meant that a priority of mission was clear and to help create a more positive tone for the work of the committee it was renamed as the Parish Re-Appraisal Committee.

In 1990 the newly formed General Assembly Board of National Mission sent out an instruction to presbyteries that they should conduct a review and directed presbyteries to give careful consideration to population and other changes locally which might affect how mission was to be carried out in the presbytery area.¹²²

The Board of National Mission, setting out its aims, included,

A belief in the need for reappraisal that in our generation we might marshal our God-given resources for the mission of the Church.¹²³

However, it was obvious that to assuage fears of how this work might be undertaken; there was a clear statement given in 1992 that reappraisal would not be carried out as a statistical exercise. This was to negate the expressed fear that a population based numerical exercise would concentrate ministers in the more populated areas of Scotland. Indeed, the Board, for its part, saw the need to facilitate the continued aspiration of the national church whereby there would be

a fair distribution (of ministers) throughout the land.¹²⁴

This statement was being made as it was also becoming clear that there was a likely shortfall in the number of available ministers in the years ahead. Indeed, throughout the 1980s ministerial shortage was a recurrent theme. However, things were to change focus as the General Assembly was alerted to another looming crisis, this time financial. The

¹²² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1990 p267

¹²³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1991 p330

¹²⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1992 p261 2.7

question now facing the Church of Scotland - could it afford to pay for the ministers it already had?

The report of 1993 contains the assessment that,

The crisis of the Church in the 1980s was an insufficient number of ministers; the crisis of the church in the 1990s is insufficient money to pay the number of ministers required.¹²⁵

This new landscape prompted a new and tougher approach by the committee – now instruction was given that presbytery plans should be examined, the concern being that where they already existed these may be outdated and not suitable for the new challenges being faced. It was now proposed that another set of statistics should be considered in the planning process, that of financial stability and related to that the issue of necessary buildings (too many buildings presumably would mean further financial drains on congregations).¹²⁶

As might have been anticipated, the 1995 General Assembly report provided a new set of guidelines and principles upon which presbyteries were obliged to base their plans. It might be noted at this stage that presbyteries had not yet been issued with a direct instruction to produce a Presbytery Plan, given that it was not yet a legal requirement. However, the committee was obviously committed to pushing presbyteries towards that end.

In 1998 it was reported to the General Assembly that presbytery planning, as a tool, had been ‘highly successful’.¹²⁷ The ongoing work of the Committee on Parish Reappraisal was now strengthened by an Act of the 1998 General Assembly which made it mandatory that presbyteries prepare a Presbytery Plan.¹²⁸

The use of governmental census data as part of the presbytery planning process took a step forward when, in 2001, the General Assembly approved the creation of a ‘Statistics for Mission’ group. This group was tasked with providing accurate population statistics for

¹²⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1993 p367

¹²⁶ Ibid 1993 p367 2.7, 2.9

¹²⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1998 17/20 3.11

¹²⁸ The presbytery plan was for the deployment of ministers spanning originally over a ten-year period. In 2002 there is a change to have rolling five year plans.

presbyteries so that parish reappraisal decisions might be based on information which would become available from the 2001 census.

At this time, the Board of National Mission also produced a report entitled '*Responding to Change*'. Societal changes were affecting the Church of Scotland in a number of ways, not least in declining membership.¹²⁹ In this context, it became more obvious that numerical data would play a key role in the further determination of how decline would be managed. However, there was caution in the assembly reports around concerns about decisions being primarily data driven. For example, a remit was given to the Board of National Mission by the 2001 General Assembly to draw up guidelines which would take into consideration the size of a charge; however, in 2002, the response in the report indicated that it regarded this as unworkable, preferring to remain with the present system. They stated that,

The committee believes that the way in which it currently works using Presbytery Planning, Reappraisal Congregational Survey forms, visits where required, with a sensitivity to local issues...leads to the fairest possible distribution of ministers.¹³⁰

However factual, numerical data cannot be ignored; in the General Assembly of 2003, there was a report presented by the Board of National Mission '*Towards a National Plan*' which was in response to the strategic deployment of ministers arising out of ministerial shortage. It was noted in the report that the number of vacancies had risen from 71 in 1991 to 163 in 2002.¹³¹ The solution proposed was to balance the number of charges with the number of ministers available.¹³²

The totality of ministry was only one component of the calculation required since the Church of Scotland also sought to have ministry distributed in a fair manner across the country; a formula was devised to achieve this particular aim. Presbyteries were given an allocation of ministers based on factors such as congregational figures for church membership and adherents. The calculation also factored in overall parish population, using figures provided by the Statistics for Mission project, making adjustments for geography and poverty.¹³³

¹²⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002 20/5 1.1.2

¹³⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002 20/31 3.1.8.2

¹³¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2003 20/5 4.2.2

¹³² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2003 20/5 4.2.2

¹³³ A statistical approach taken by the Church of England used to place clergy called 'The Sheffield Formula' was also highlighted as a tool for consideration. See Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/7

Whilst global numbers were submitted to presbyteries by the central committee; it still lay with each presbytery to decide, using their own local calculations and information, where that ministry should be deployed.

To this point in time, the main focus for presbytery planning was in deciding where and how to engage full-time ministers of the Church of Scotland. A major change to this pattern came in the wake of the General Assembly of 2010 where the Ministries Council formally reported to the Church of Scotland a financial crisis whereby the Ministries Council faced a £5.7 million deficit in its budget which could not be sustained. The solution is very simply stated,

The only way a serious difference can be made to the deficit is by reducing the amount of money spent on paid ministries.¹³⁴

The solution proposed was set out in a document entitled ‘20:20 Vision – Building for Sustainable Future Patterns and Ministries, Finance and Presbytery Planning’. A number of key strands run through the document. First of all, there is a clear priority to be given to ‘the poor’.

In giving priority to the poorest in our country, the *Priority Areas Action Plan (1.3)*¹³⁵ represents the Council’s vision towards a more just and equitable society in the decade ahead.¹³⁶

The rhetoric of the document was that the intended cuts in ministry would give opportunity for growth. This appeared to be growth in the type and variety of ministry positions and perhaps also growth in areas of partnership between and with other churches. In seeking to reshape patterns of ministry, the Council also sought to put a Mission gloss on the presentation, pointing towards the potential for new emerging ministries as one possible alternative way forward.

Given the financial nature at the genesis of this particular process of presbytery planning, the Ministries Council noted that what can be afforded by the church was one thousand

¹³⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/7

¹³⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/18 1.3

¹³⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/3

full-time equivalent posts (FTE).¹³⁷ The obvious stated route towards achieving this scale of reduction was the presbytery planning process.¹³⁸

The 1000 FTE ministries were allocated across presbyteries on an equitable basis according to the National Guideline for the Deployment of Ministries approved by the General Assembly in 2005. Each presbytery was allocated a percentage of the total ministries available to the Church, taking into account population, poverty and geography (albeit with a small adjustment to include provision for the Presbytery of England as well as a contingency figure which could be used where a special case was made for additional resources).¹³⁹

‘Planning with purpose’ was a key theme and it was envisaged that presbyteries would approach the task of planning by considering each charge under the headings of Vision, Audit and Objectives. It was consideration of these elements which were to guide presbytery.¹⁴⁰ Whilst it was noted that the results of the 2011 census, when published, may potentially have changed the initial calculation for ministry distribution, in the meantime Presbyteries’ plans were drawn up, using earlier census and population figures.¹⁴¹

In the 2010 reports to the General Assembly, Glasgow Presbytery was allocated 12.24% of ministries which translated to 122.6 posts with 9 locums giving a total of 131.6 FTE posts, a reduction of 28 posts from the previous plan.¹⁴²

When the 2011 Assembly considered the report ‘20:20 Vision’ it is of interest to note that the subtitle had now changed to ‘refocusing the Ministries of the Church on Mission’,¹⁴³ presumably indicating a desire to redirect focus from a financial to a missional imperative or possibly an attempt to ‘repackage’ the endeavour to be more palatable. It is of interest to note that the 2011 report sought to provide a theological justification and rationale for

¹³⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010/3/8

¹³⁸ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010/3/24 1.4.2.3

¹³⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010/3/25 1.4.3

¹⁴⁰ Vision – what does God want for this area?

Audit – a wholesale consideration of the church and its environment. Strengths, opportunities as well as weaknesses and threats. Church health is to be part of the assessment – particularly as it relates to mission Objective Setting is key, congregations needing to have 5 or 6 SMART goals. (Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/25 1.4.3)

¹⁴¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 3/31 1.4.8

¹⁴² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/26 Appendix 1

¹⁴³ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011/4/2 0.1

the proposals being made.^{144,145,146} There was also an attempt to spiritualise the process by linking the human endeavour of statistical analysis with the sought guidance of the Holy Spirit, an association normally implicit in church process but felt necessary to be made explicit at this point.¹⁴⁷

The methodology of the statistical calculation of ministries to Presbyteries is set out in the Assembly reports of 2011 page 4.27. In general, ministries were allocated proportionally according to Church of Scotland population figures.¹⁴⁸ Information derived from the 2001 census was used for this derivation of ministerial numbers assigned to Presbyteries. The calculations initially made were further enhanced by using 2009 population estimates, with these mapped as near as possible to presbyteries.¹⁴⁹

‘Geography, after population, is the most significant factor in determining what percentage (of the ministries available to the church) each presbytery should be allocated,’¹⁵⁰ though as we shall see in the exercise undertaken by Glasgow Presbytery, population was not taken to be the key factor in the local determination of ministry allocation. What is significant for Glasgow Presbytery is that defined areas of concentrated urban poverty were ring-fenced and given a double weighting for ministry allocation by the Ministries Council.

In 2011 the population figures were recalculated with information from the latest (2009) population estimates. This revision saw the weighted population for Glasgow Presbytery rise by 8,835 over the 2005 weighted population which resulted in a higher percentage of ministry allocation, and so a new allocation figure of 133.7 was calculated.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 4/3 0.2

¹⁴⁵ The report claims to come out of the thinking of Barth and the writings of Bosch on the church as part of the *Missio Dei* and also being a natural follow on to the ‘Church without Walls’ report of 2001

¹⁴⁶ ‘Mission is not something that happens at the periphery of the church rather mission is the life of the church. Mission is not something to which a few specialists are called, rather it is the core calling of every follower of Jesus’ (Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 4/4 0.3.4)

¹⁴⁷ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 4/26 1.3

¹⁴⁸ This figure is the population which the Church of Scotland has decided it is responsible for and therefore excludes those who claim allegiance to another faith or denomination.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Population is the primary factor in determining the number of ministries to which each Presbytery is entitled’ (Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 4/26 1.3.1.1.1)

¹⁵⁰ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 4/29 1.3.2.1.2

¹⁵¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 4/34 Appendix 1

Presbytery Planning in Glasgow Presbytery

The historical backdrop given above helps provide us with context and understanding as we turn to consider the particulars of the planning process undertaken by Glasgow Presbytery in the wake of the various decisions and calculations taken by General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

In order to fulfil the requirements of producing an appropriate plan for ministerial deployment in the Glasgow Presbytery area, the presbytery decided, on the 14th September 2010, that the existing Strategy Advisory Group (STAG) should be tasked with reviewing the former presbytery plan with a view towards the implementation of the new guidelines and revised numbers set out by the General Assembly of 2010. The STAG group was a committee of ministers and elders¹⁵² which comprised, initially, key presbytery leaders; this was later widened to better represent viewpoints and knowledge from across the presbytery area. It would also better reflect a balance between male and female members, minister and elder members, and give representation to key groups such as those within the priority areas.

Given the size and complexity of Glasgow Presbytery, and the potential impact on the long-term life and witness of the Church of Scotland over such a highly populated area, it is perhaps surprising that the assigned group was made up of non-specialists in the area of organisational planning. Neither did they co-opt nor employ an experienced consultant to lead or advise on the processes chosen.¹⁵³ What specialisms did exist within the group were either more general in nature or in a few cases related to profit organisations. It is also of interest to note that at the outset there was a determination that meetings would be held during the working day which therefore effectively excluded elders and others in employment outwith the Church of Scotland.

The given framework for the STAG group was the set of guidelines presented by the Ministries Council along with the number of allocated FTE staff¹⁵⁴ for the presbytery. In October 2010 Glasgow Presbytery had 144 FTEs in post, comprising 109 ministers of

¹⁵² The initial group comprised 12 ministers and 2 elders. 1 elder being employed full time by Glasgow Presbytery and the other engaged widely in presbytery training. Shortly afterwards additional elders and a deacon was added to the group.

¹⁵³ One elder in the process did have knowledge and experience of change management gained from working within financial institutions.

¹⁵⁴ FTE was now the preferred terminology since it included all paid ministries and was not restricted to ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament

Word and Sacrament, 1 interim minister, 1 New Charge Development minister and 33 Presbytery and Parish workers (PPWs). There were also 23 vacancies which meant a starting point of 167 FTE posts. This number was to be reduced to a base number of 131.6 FTE posts.¹⁵⁵ The total allocation of FTE posts was further subdivided into posts which could only be allocated to particular areas of poverty or Priority Areas (PAs) and Non Priority Areas (NPAs).¹⁵⁶

The STAG group gave consideration to a number of methodological options in fulfilment of their task. In order that the work would be as fair and as objective as possible, it was decided that use would be made of data coming from 4 distinct sources.

1. Statistics coming from returns which are submitted annually by congregations to presbytery
2. Statistics from congregations on church attendance and other local activities
3. Statistics available or deduced from governmental bodies to provide parish population, measures of deprivation etc.
4. Qualitative information arising from visitations made to each congregation

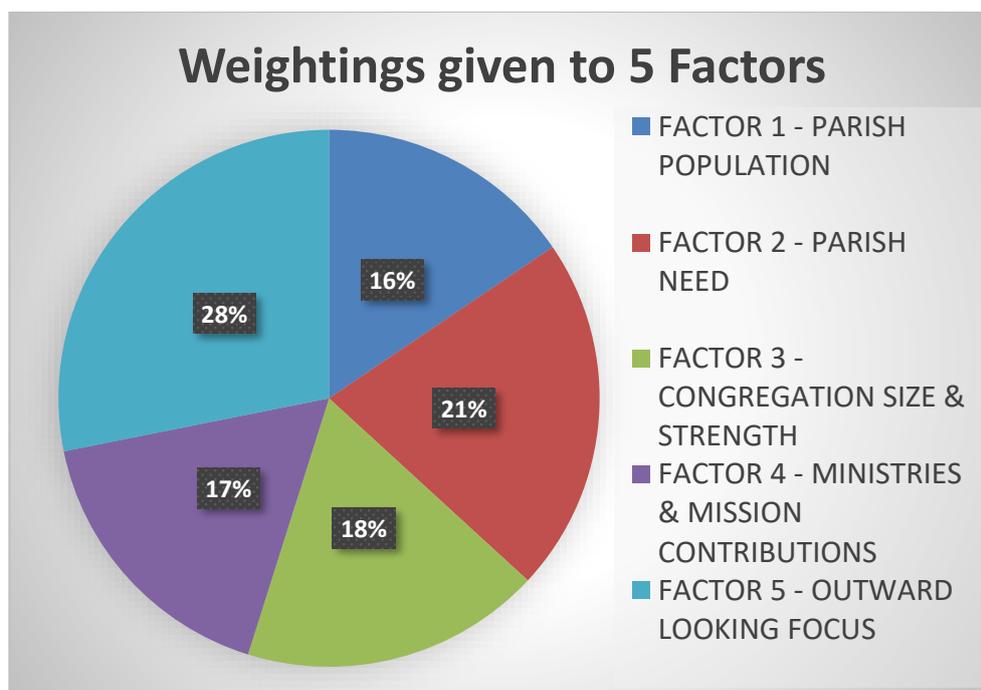
The Five Factors

The information gathered was constituted into five broad assessment factors. The factors were then given a weighting based on the felt preferences of members of presbytery via a crude scoring exercise where presbytery members were given 10 'points' and asked to distribute these between the 5 factors as they saw to be appropriate, the aggregated total scores produced the eventual weighting.¹⁵⁷ The objective was to use the factor score and weighting to produce an overall index score which would then be used by the group to 'objectively' compare congregations and to determine ministry allocation.

¹⁵⁵ Unpublished committee minutes October 2010

¹⁵⁶ The eventual figure agreed with Ministries Council was 71.7 Non-Priority area FTE posts and 59.6 FTE posts for Priority areas.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix 8: Presbytery Planning Forms and Questions



Graph 3: Weightings given to 5 Factors

It could be argued that any ideal of ‘objectivity’ had been lost at this first stage of working and instead replaced by a form of ‘democracy’. Given that the weighting exercise happened at the outset of the process, then those who participated would not be aware of the overall effect of the decisions they took; nor was there any opportunity later in the process to correct any imbalance or unintended consequence. The basis on which the weightings were given were, of course, personal to each participant and may have involved a number of presuppositions. Clearly ‘Outward looking Focus’ was the primary concern being expressed and whilst it may have been noble to assign resources of personnel to congregations who already took seriously their missional role and were busy about that task in a number of ways, it did not necessarily give resources to these who were fruitful in that area of work or those who would have been fruitful given appropriate resources. This will be examined later as Factor 5 is considered in detail.

‘Parish Need’ was also weighted strongly by presbyters which, when taken together with the ‘Outward Looking Focus’ factor, accounted for almost half of the available score. The large number of presbyters who ministered within urban priority areas or who have areas of concentrated poverty within their parish might have accounted for this emphasis.

Turning now to consider each of the five factors in more detail, presents an opportunity to highlight the strengths and difficulties associated with both the methodology and execution in concept and in detail.

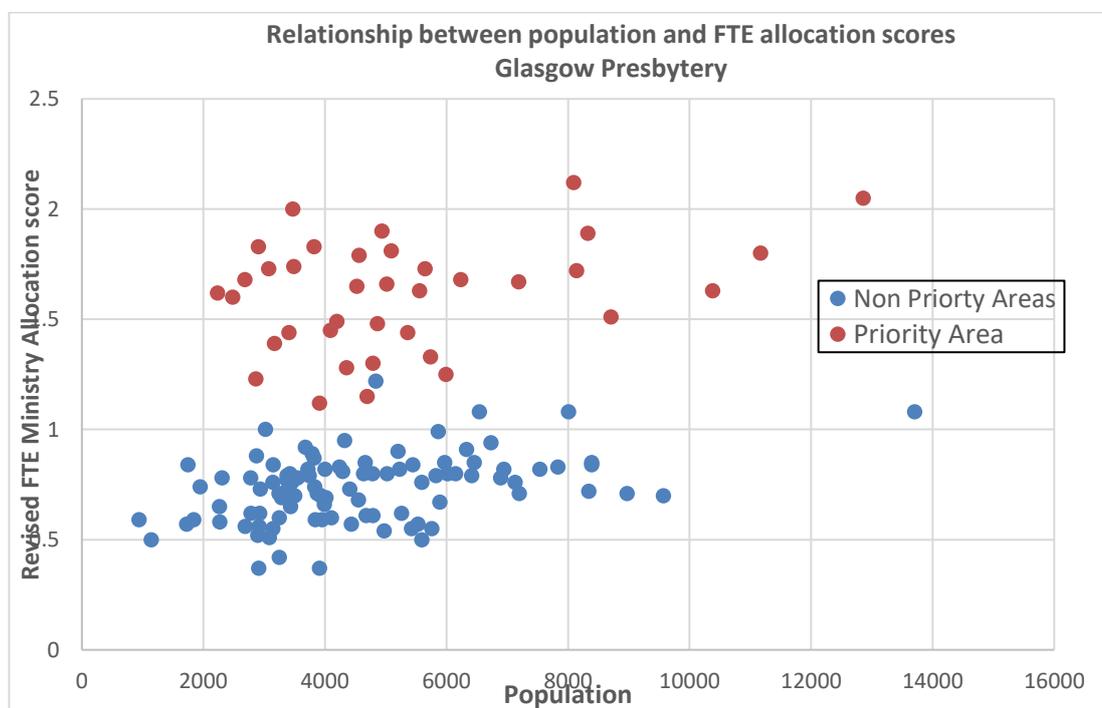
Factor 1 – Parish Population

At the outset of the national process and discussion on presbytery planning, it was proposed that population would be the primary factor in the determination of placing ministry personnel. As is evident from the graph above, within the Glasgow system of 5 weighted factors Population now accounts for only 15.5% of the final index scoring for the presbytery plan.

For the purposes of the planning process, the STAG group further decided to subdivide the population of each parish to represent various faith positions. The main group of interest for scoring purposes was the ‘Church of Scotland’ population, by which is meant that proportion of the population which, according to the 2001 census, self-identified as having a belonging to the Church of Scotland. In addition to those who positively identified as ‘Church of Scotland’ that section of the population which didn’t identify with either another Christian denomination or another faith group was counted to form a ‘Church of Scotland population’. The Church of Scotland based its calculations, for ministry resource allocation, on this construct of the population figures.

However, Glasgow Presbytery decided to take a slightly different line from the national church, who based their resource allocation only on ‘Church of Scotland populations’ in that they also decided to take into consideration the populations belong to other denominations and other faiths since it was suggested that they too may access services and facilities of a local church and therefore generate a resource implication. For the purposes of calculation weightings, presbyters gave a weighting of 1 to the Church of Scotland population figure, a weighting of 0.509 to the population of other Christian denominations and of 0.544 to those of other faith groups. The method by which an eventual index score is calculated for each parish involves multiplying various weightings and components and creating a standardised index between 1 and 20. The end figures are eventually used, along with other scores from other factors, to create a total score.

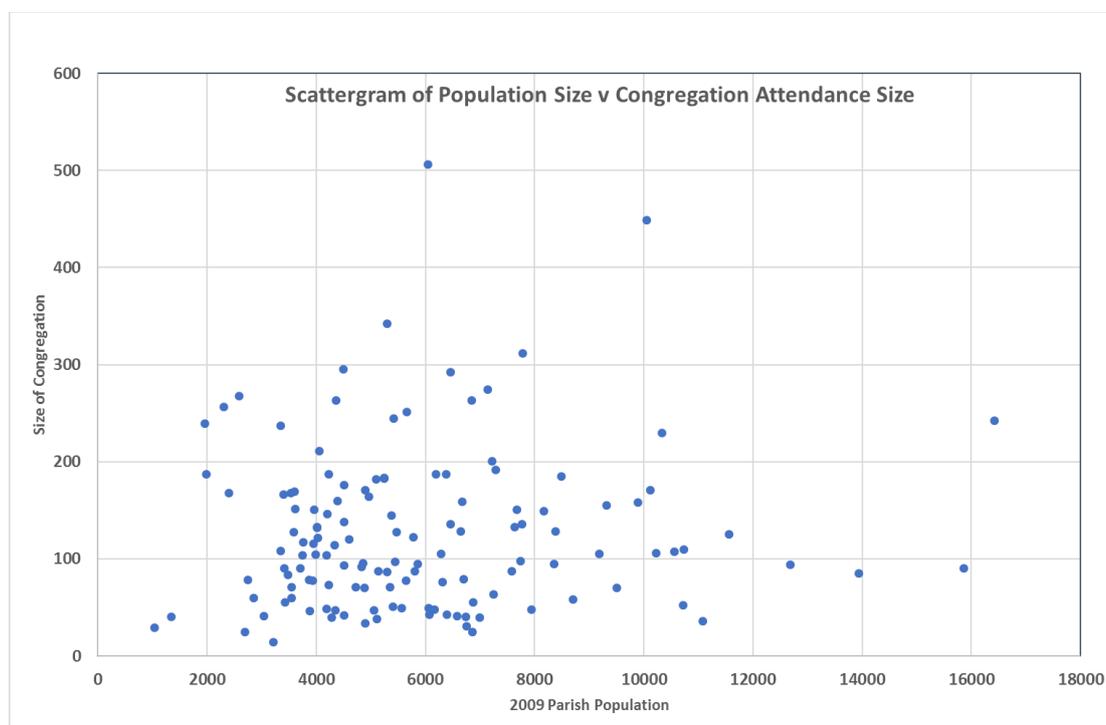
The calculations carried out are comprehensive but are they necessary or equitable? Congregations gaining from the original calculation are those which have a relatively high proportion of mainly Roman Catholic population or of other faith groups, which, in the context of Glasgow as a presbytery, often are in areas of greater parish need. Conversely, parishes which lose out in this methodology are in the more affluent sections of the presbytery area. The graph below indicates the relationship between the Glasgow population figures and the eventual FTE ministry allocation score. The correlation between population and FTE allocation is very weak with computed scores of $r = 0.40$ for non-priority area and $r = 0.33$ for priority areas. The result, therefore, indicates a weak association between parish population and ministry allocation.



Graph 4: FTE allocation scores and population

There is, however, a more significant question and that is, should population be used to determine the allocation of ministry resources? As previously encountered in the national strategy, population size is the main determinant of FTE post allocation to a presbytery area. There is an assumption in the process, which is that a larger population requires more ministry. Interestingly, in the case of this presbytery, when the total population for each parish is plotted against the total attendance gathered for each congregation then as *Graph 5* highlights, there is no obvious relationship between the two factors. Indeed, when correlation is computed, that is confirmed ($r=0.07$). If an adjustment is made to only include the proportion of 'Church of Scotland' respondents the correlation is still

negligible ($r=0.11$). The actual computed ‘Glasgow Presbytery Population’ figures used in the production of the final index scores was once more not found to correlate with the congregation attendance figure ($r=0.09$).



Graph 5: Total Parish Population plotted against Total Congregational Attendance

Factor 2 – Parish Need

Within the vision of the Strategy Advisory group, there was a clear statement of the centrality of supporting congregations ministering within areas of deprivation in that it,

Affirms that the gospel imperative is giving priority to the poor and actively supports marginal communities where churches are perhaps fragile and small.¹⁵⁸

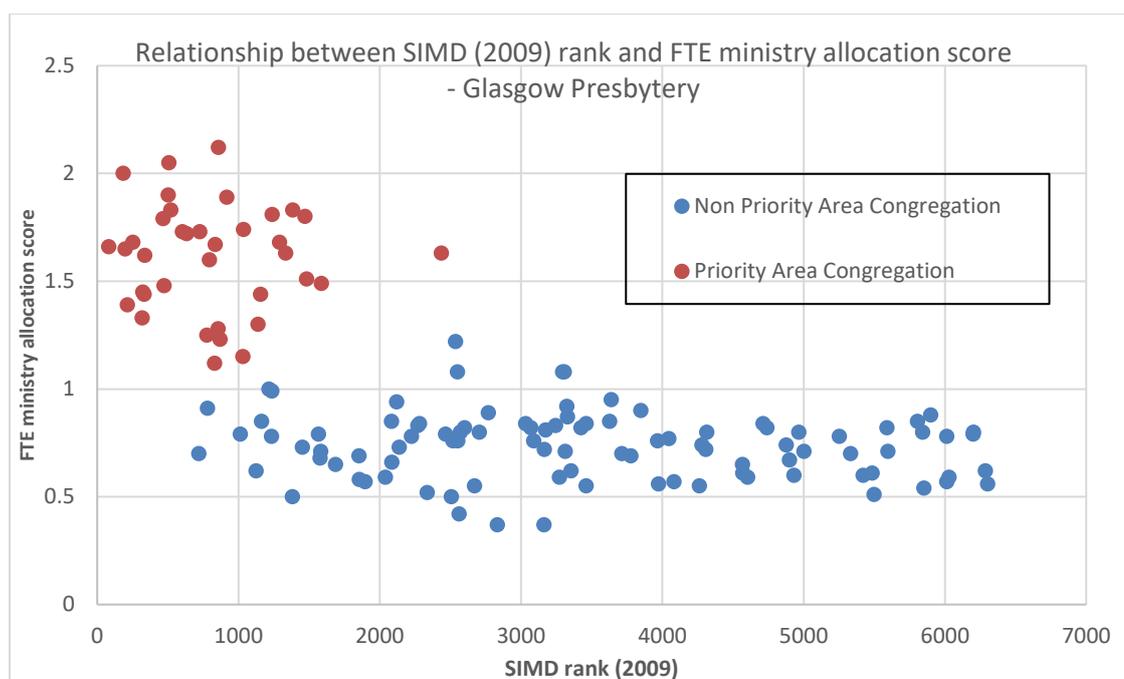
The Church of Scotland, nationally, had previously decided that areas of particular poverty as defined by the priority areas list, which it revised and published periodically within the reports of the General Assembly, should be given special attention; in the case of Glasgow Presbytery, 59.6 FTE posts had been ring-fenced for such areas. The planning process weighted ‘Parish Need’ as 21.4% of the eventual index scoring; this was deemed to be the second most important factor overall in the determination of ministry deployment and people resource allocation.

¹⁵⁸ Glasgow Presbytery Plan Project Briefing v1.1, February 22nd 2001. P13

Parish Need, for the purposes of this process, was seen to be directly linked to the issues of deprivation as determined by governmental bodies; so, in order to determine the level of poverty of a parish area, information derived from the 2009 Scottish Index of multiple deprivation (SIMD) was utilised. Since the SIMD data did not conform to parish boundaries, an exercise was carried out to map SIMD data zones as closely as possible to parish areas. Where a data zone encompassed two or more parish areas, then an estimate was made of the population in each sub-area.

The index figure for this factor came from a calculation which summed the population of the individual datazones and used that figure to divide the sum of datazone population multiplied by the SIMD rank. The result of this calculation was a derived 'parish SIMD rank 2009'. This computed figure was standardised using a scoring system similar to Population to give an outcome of 1 to 20, which was then multiplied by the presbytery weighting to give a weighted score, which was used in the final calculation for ministry allocation.

It is of interest to note that the correlation between Parish Need as defined by the SIMD (2009) rank score and FTE allocation is very weak with computed scores of $r = -0.15$ for non-priority area and $r = -0.05$ for priority areas. In the scattergram below the effect of the ring fenced, enhanced FTE allocation figure for priority areas is clearly seen but although the presbytery wanted poverty issues to relate strongly to the allocation of ministerial resources there is, in fact, no discernible direct relationship.



Graph 6: SIMD rank and ministry allocation

Factor 3 – Congregational Size and Strength

In any strategic planning exercise, it is crucial to identify the present situation. In the case of Glasgow Presbytery, an assessment of the current strength or weakness of existing local congregations was considered important. The data to calculate this factor was collected from a number of different sources: self-reported annual statistics submitted to central church administrators; official financial statistics also held centrally; and to gain additional insight, a special church attendance census was organised for two specific Sundays.¹⁵⁹

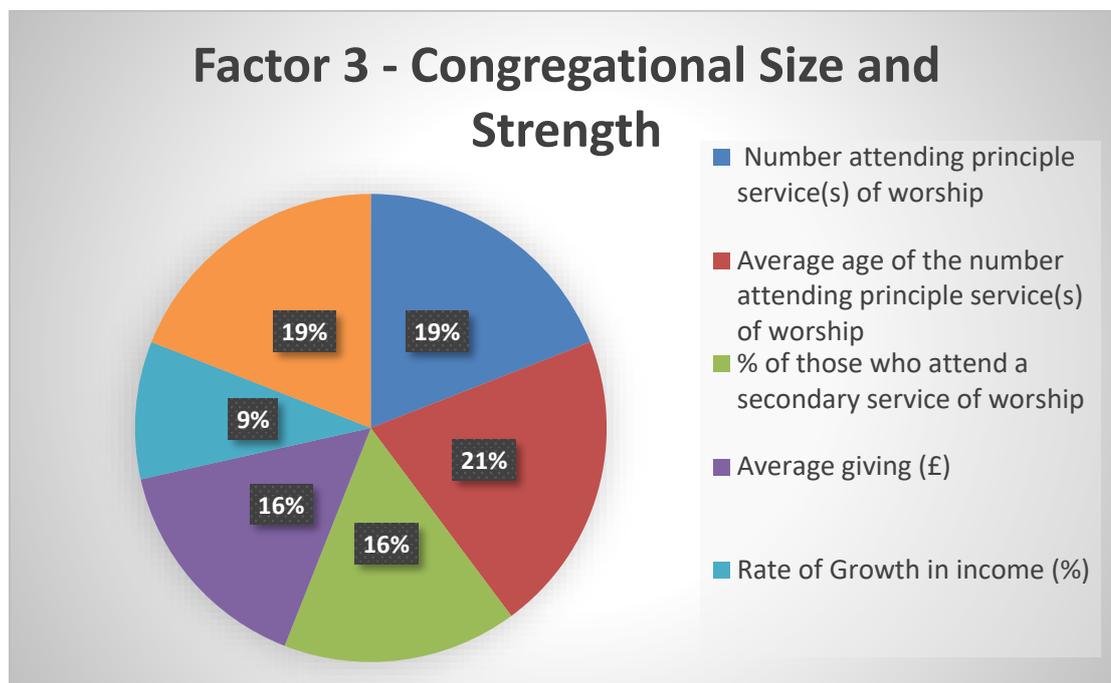
The data gathered from all sources was used to construct a set of six sub factors, each given a weighting, decided upon by an aggregation of votes cast by presbyters. The resultant weighted index score was used towards the final calculation for FTE deployment.

The six sub factors used were:

1. Number attending principle service(s) of worship (weighting 0.19)
2. Average age of the number attending principle service(s) of worship (weighting 0.208)
3. % of those who attend a secondary service of worship (weighting 0.161)
4. Average giving (£) (weighting 0.155)

¹⁵⁹ The dates for the census were the 3th of October 2011 and the 6th of November 2011.

5. Rate of Growth in income (%) (weighting 0.095)
6. Rate of Growth in membership (%) (weighting 0.19)



Graph 7: Pie chart of factors with Congregational size and strength

Sub Factor 1 - Number Attending Principle Service(s) of Worship

Clearly vibrant and fruitful congregations are evidenced, in part, by the number of people who attend one or more worship services. This is often a key statistic which might reasonably drive the placement of ministers of Word and Sacrament and other congregation facing employees. Other workload considerations for a post of this type might be related to statistics detailing other weekday opportunities for worship or bible study.¹⁶⁰ On its own, the item, ‘number attending principle service(s) of worship’ accounts only for only 3.4% of the final score in this planning process.¹⁶¹

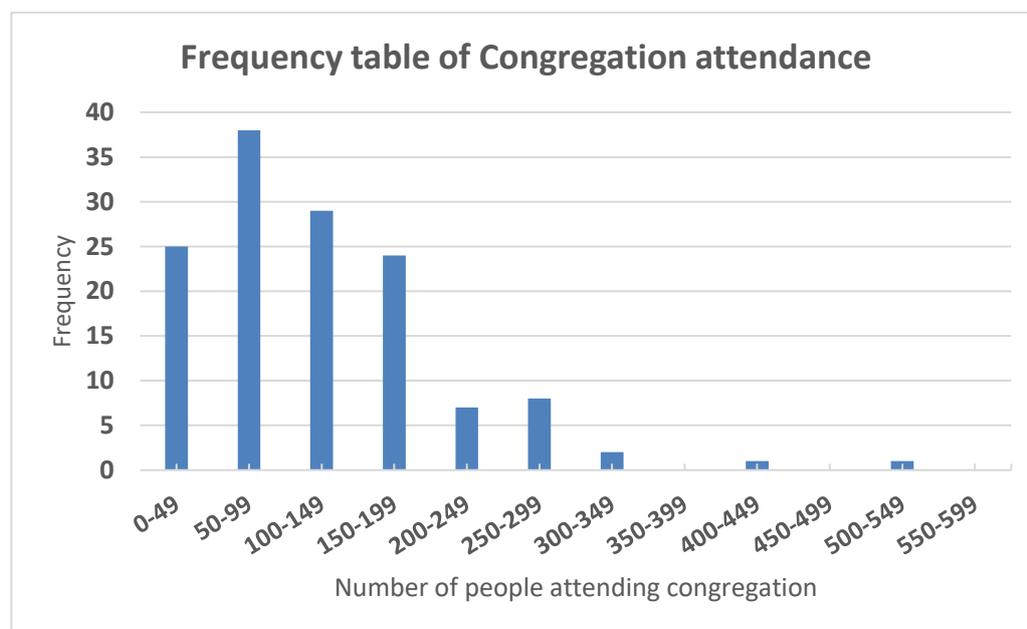
In the presbytery census exercise, congregations were asked to indicate demographic details of the congregation by listing numbers of individuals within age categories. The actual process of data collection was left to the discretion of the local congregation. In some cases, this would mean local church representatives effectively guessing the age of those present. Since the attendance census took place over only two Sundays, there existed

¹⁶⁰ Where additional service existed, there is no note whether those in attendance were the same or a different group from the primary Sunday service.

¹⁶¹ It is 19% of the score for factor 3 which is worth a total of 18%.

the possibility that those services may have been atypical (for example a baptism or communion service taking place giving an unusually high or low number). To account for this possibility, congregations were invited to indicate any unusual circumstances. A number of congregations did specify where a service with abnormal numbers took place; however, it was suspected by the advisory group that some congregations did not make this clear. The extent of any misreporting was not investigated, leaving a serious question concerning not only this single item but other calculations within the factor where the attendance figure was also used. The extent to which a potentially unreliable figure was used, is a significant concern.

As is noted in the statistical auditor's report,¹⁶² the distribution of data for this item was highly skewed.



Graph 8: Frequency table of Congregation attendance numbers

We can see in the graph above two outliers, the data for these reference two nonstandard parish church situations. The most significant outlier is known to be a gathered congregation, drawn from a much wider area than the local parish, which comes together to hear a prominent preacher of a particular style. Since this 'preaching station' church is not of the same type as other congregations, it might be asked whether it was correct to include it in the data, since its inclusion in the dataset significantly distorted the range and therefore the eventual index figures. The second noted outlier is where the attendance

¹⁶² Presbytery of Glasgow: STAG spreadsheet, auditors report. Dr Fiona J Tweedie p5

figure relates to a church which had multiple congregations operating under a single leadership structure. This multiple figure refers to services in two distinct locations. There were other congregations which operate under a linkage model where the attendance figures (and all other figures) were separated, so it might, therefore, be asked whether there would have been some value in separating out the two congregational numbers.

Sub Factor 2 - Average Age of the Number Attending Principle Service(s) of Worship

Data was collected on numbers within specific age groupings, i.e. under 16, 16-25, 26-40, 41-65, 66-80, 81-100 and 100+. No reason was given why these particular age bands were chosen. It may be that the age groups correspond to the category of 'children', 'young adult', 'young adult (of child rearing age?)', 'middle age', 'retired', 'elderly' and 'centenarian' (although why data would be specifically collected on people over 100 years of age attending worship is difficult to imagine (only 5 people of that age group was recorded across the presbytery)).¹⁶³

The number within each age category was used to determine the average age of the congregation. The average age statistic does, however, suffer from some significant issues; it must be noted that the average is calculated from taking the midpoint of the age categories since specific discrete data relative to individuals was not collected by congregations. Had this been the case, then it would have given a more detailed picture. However, even with more detailed information, the mean is not likely to produce the most useful information since the main groupings of people attending church are those within the child or elderly categories; instead, the median would have been the most appropriate measure. A population median still does not take into account the fact that for many, if not most churches, the majority of children and youth are unlikely to transition to adult attendance and so it would be better to treat child and adult data separately.

There is also the larger question of the relationship between a healthy church and average age. Since it is unlikely that any congregation is near saturation point with any particular age group and therefore has the potential for further growth, in that age category and others, then from a mission point of view the scoring system employed by STAG appears

¹⁶³ The Scottish Church census of 1994 (and following census) used the following age categories, 'Children aged 14 and under', 'Teenagers aged 15-19', 'Young adults 20-29', 'Adults 30-44', 'Adults 45-65', 'Older people aged 65 and over' (P. W. Brierley & Macdonald, 1995, p. 111).

to be simply discriminating against those congregations who naturally attract a greater proportion of older people. This is emphasised by the fact that this item is given a larger weighting than the number attending the principle service of worship.

Additionally, there is an argument that the older the congregation the more likely the need for a pastoral member of staff, since age generates a particular pastoral workload including hospital visits, care home visits, members ill at home, support for those with dementia and other age-related diseases and of course higher average age would indicate a higher rate of funerals.

Sub Factor 3 - % of Those Who Attend a Secondary Service of Worship

The reference in this factor to a second service of worship covers a number of different types of gathering including a Sunday evening service, a midweek service, a bible study or house groups, among others. The data for this item shows significant divergence between congregations with some having no opportunities for such gatherings and hence being assessed as 0% and those with multiple groups, with percentages being assessed as greater than 100%. The percentage is derived against the number of adults who attended the principle service of worship. There is no mechanism to discern where the same people attended a variety of different groups and therefore the final number is simply a reflection of the total number of attendances rather than attenders.

This item highlights activity levels in a congregation both perhaps, as a reflection of the number of groups which are available, as well as the totality of participation. The purpose of expressing the relationship with the primary service of worship is simply to provide a reference of scale which can be used as a comparison with other congregations. In many cases, this kind of comparison is unlikely to be appropriate, for example when comparing very small and very large congregations.

A question may be posed about whether this item gives a clear indication of resource allocation since it may be that in certain churches the level of present activity is simply a reflection of current resourcing, including present staffing numbers, and does not necessarily indicate whether this could be maintained under a different resource allocation or staffing regime.

Sub Factor 4 - Average Giving (£)

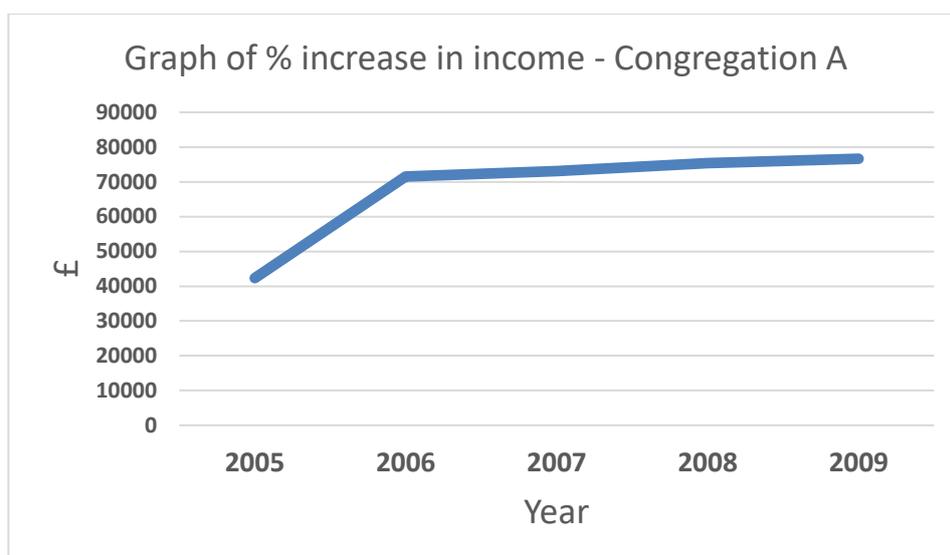
In this section of congregational size and strength, one item of financial data is now considered. It should be noted that under Factor 4, considered later, finance is further assessed following the guideline of the Ministries Council to give consideration to financial sustainability. The question might, therefore, be asked why part of the data is included in this section. One answer might be related to the Strategy Advisory Group's decision to give consideration to relative, as well as absolute giving and the decision to incorporate per capita giving figures into their calculation scheme.

Average giving was calculated using total offerings from 2009 and dividing that figure by the adult attendance figure obtained two years later. An assumption being made in this calculation was that the 2009 offerings were representative of, and normal for, the present congregation. Had any major changes taken place during the intervening time then the link would not be valid. Validity may also be considered in relation to the adult attendance and the total offerings, since in congregations with large housebound numbers, a significant proportion of the offering may, in fact, come from those not present at Sunday worship.

Sub Factor 5 - Rate of Growth in Income (%)

In deciding to determine a rate of growth in income, the strategy group did not use, as its yardstick, the actual income of a congregation, but a derived income base figure from ministry and stewardship, which was used to calculate ministry and mission allocations. The year 2005 is used as a comparison year against which the next 5 following years were compared. The resultant comparison gave the committee their rate of growth figure.

There are some difficulties in using this analysis; not least is having a single year as a reference point. If there was recorded an exceptionally poor figure for 2005, then the % increase might be substantial even though that year was an outlier. The chart below illustrates this point from the dataset.



Graph 9: Percentage increase in income for Congregation A

Secondly, using percentage as the determinant of score magnifies the effect of changes, whether positive or negative, in congregations with small income base figures.

Sub Factor 6 - Rate of Growth in Membership (%)

Although given the title ‘Rate of Growth in Membership’, this item did not directly reference the membership information of congregations except in as much as it relates to one sub item of membership change which is ‘profession of faith.’¹⁶⁴ The calculation carried out here saw the adult attendance figure, given for the principle service of worship, being used as a proxy for the official membership figure. Against the attendance figure is set the number of professions of faith, recorded over a five-year period to give a percentage for growth.

The strategy committee did have access to the annual statistics submitted by congregations and therefore would know current and historic church membership along with information relating to profession of faith as well as the other modes by which membership can increase. This would include transference certificates (from another congregation), resolution of the Kirk Session (often used when transfer is from another denomination) and restoration from the supplementary roll. The official statistics also give information where membership increase was from union with another congregation.

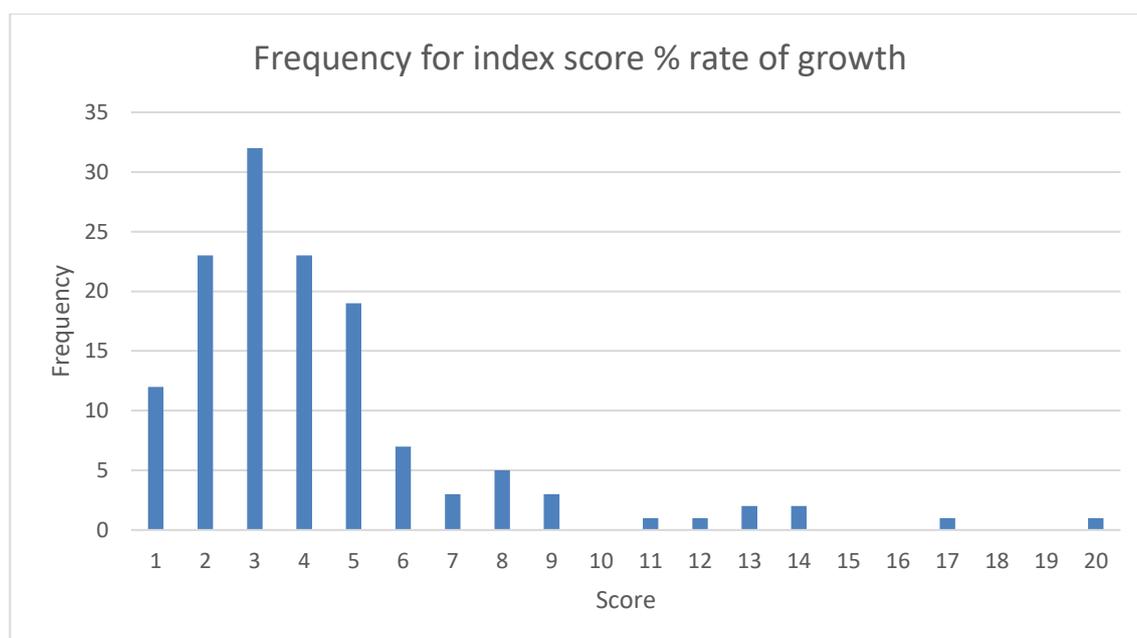
¹⁶⁴ Profession of faith refers to the particular mechanism in the Church of Scotland where an individual makes a public statement of Christian Faith on the basis of which is then admitted to the membership roll of the congregation.

The usefulness of official church membership statistics as truly representing the strength of a particular congregation has been questioned by many within the Church of Scotland. This concern undoubtedly led the committee to disregard that particular statistic.¹⁶⁵ However, even if attendance was used as a form of membership proxy, it is not clear why the other pathways into church membership were not added to the number of professions of faith to gain a clearer overall view of the recent increase in the number of people joining. It may have been helpful also to gain an insight into the retention rates, or at least attendance rates of those who join congregations by profession of faith, to avoid the problem of people joining but not actively participating in the worship and mission of the congregation.

As previously cautioned, using a percentage figure when some of the numbers involved were very small, gave the potential for large percentage figures which, when then used as a comparison with other congregations, can be wholly misleading. For example, church A with 6 professions of faith with an attendance of 26, registers a 25% rate of growth. Church B has 62 professions, but with an attendance recorded at 256, is given a rate of growth of 26%. In terms of ministerial resources Church B has many more people to look after than church A, whilst the scoring system employed would, on this factor, make virtually no distinction between them.

In addition, the indexing system is prone to distortion due to the outliers in the data which varies between 0% and 100%. The indexing is therefore heavily skewed (Graph 10);

¹⁶⁵ Information from interview with STAG members which reflects official comments for example Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002, 13/19 'Membership'.



Graph 10: Frequency table for index score and % rate of growth

Factor 4 – Ministries and Mission Contributions

One of the primary drivers behind presbytery planning in the 21st century was that of finance. It was estimated that the national budget deficit for ministries in 2010 would be £5.7 million.¹⁶⁶ This deficit, along with other national financial constraints, was highlighted to representatives of the Strategy Advisory Group at a consultation day with Ministries Council.¹⁶⁷ It is therefore not surprising to discover that financial sustainability should be a major factor when determination of future ministries was considered. In the model used by Glasgow Presbytery, Finance was given the second lowest weighting and therefore was not as significant a factor as might be imagined.

The Presbytery Strategy Advisory Group decided not to take a simplistic view of financial sustainability where congregations who could presently financially support one or more FTE ministries were given preferential treatment in the planning process. Instead, it was agreed that a range of financial indicators would be part of the scoring exercise. As previously discussed, Factor 3 contains within its calculations various financial data - why all the financial information is not contained within a single factor is unknown.

A particular issue faced by Glasgow Presbytery in taking Finance into consideration was that, as a group, priority area churches were guaranteed 59.6 FTE posts, although they were financially unable to fully fund these positions, which meant that the remaining 71.1

¹⁶⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/7 1.4

¹⁶⁷ Information contained in unpublished minutes of the Strategy Advisory Group, October 2010

FTE posts required to be spread among all the remaining non-priority area congregations. It was reported that if 1FTE post were to be allocated to congregations who could fully meet the cost of a FTE worker, this would mean that 53 congregations would benefit leaving 18 FTE posts to be distributed between the remaining 45 non-priority area congregations.¹⁶⁸ The Strategy Advisory Group made no special exceptions or preferences for congregations giving over any threshold, self-supporting or otherwise and treated all congregations in the same way.

The calculation for Factor 4 was centred around one measure of financial strength - the Ministries and Mission Contribution (M&M) made to the Church of Scotland. The M&M figure is an amount requested from congregations, which is arrived at taking into consideration the level of income of the congregation, against which is set allowable deductions. There is some complexity to the actual figure arrived at since it is subject to national scales and local moving average calculations.

For the purposes of the planning exercise, calculations were based on the average M&M contribution of a congregation over the period 2007 to 2009. The resultant figure was then placed in a range and given a weighting (rounding up). When the presbytery multiplier was then added a weighted score was produced.

The committee noted difficulties in collecting the necessary information due to the fact that whilst requested amounts of M&M figures were available, actual payments did not necessarily match for all congregations; indeed, a number of congregations defaulted in full or in part of the payments due.

This particular Factor, in contrast to the others in the presbytery scheme, has a general simplicity since it considers only one item, albeit averaged over a three-year period. This approach attempts to circumvent the complexity of congregational finances and whilst it might be argued the M&M calculations take many local factors into consideration, it is none the less only a computed figure requested of a congregation and gives no indication of any additional financial power which congregations might have (for example where finance is exempted from M&M contributions because of ongoing special projects or ministry support payments).

¹⁶⁸ Unpublished Strategy Advisory Group minutes, May 2012

Factor 5 – Outward Looking Focus

In guidance documents transmitted to the presbytery committee, it was made clear that ‘mission should be a first priority’ in the process of presbytery planning.¹⁶⁹ This was also reflected in the substantial weighting which was given by the presbytery via the presbytery scoring exercise. Mission is, however, a concept with wide divergence of practical meaning within the Church of Scotland and difficult to define in practical terms with any unanimity.

On engagement with the Church of Scotland, Mission and Discipleship Council (some members of STAG were members of the council), a variety of approaches and concepts were explored and collated in an ‘Outward Looking Focus paper.’¹⁷⁰ The paper appears to draw its content from both church and secular approaches in assessment. There also appear to be echoes of the seminal report *Church without Walls* (Church of Scotland Special Commission anent Review and Reform in the Church, 2001) behind some of the areas chosen to be assessed.

What was eventually produced was a set of qualitative statements covering eight ‘Aspects’ of mission which were scored and summed for insertion into the indexing spreadsheet.

The eight ‘Aspects’ drawn up for this factor were given the titles¹⁷¹

1. The impact made on the local community through the Christian witness of organisations run by the Church
2. The impact made on the community through the Christian witness of the individual Church members/ attendees
3. The vision for, planning and delivery of outreach events and programmes
4. The provision for welcoming newcomers
5. The willingness of the congregation to change for the sake of others
6. The sharing of the workload between paid staff and volunteers

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Glasgow Presbytery Plan Project Briefing v1.1, Feb 22, 2011 as taken from ‘Clarifications and Guidance Notes, Section 1 from Ministries Council, undated

¹⁷⁰ Dated March 3rd 2011

¹⁷¹ In version 1.1 of the Presbytery briefing document circulated to Presbytery an initial list of 6 items was given. The 6 were a) impact made on the local community through church organisations and the use of church premises; b) involvement in the local community by church members as Christian witnesses; c) the vision for planning and delivery of outreach events and programmes; d) the willingness of the congregation to adapt to welcome newcomers; e) the sharing of the workload between paid staff and volunteers; f) the intention of the congregation to give priority to the most vulnerable in their communities.

7. The priority given by the congregation to the most vulnerable in their communities
8. The involvement and engagement with World Mission

To assess and to score these ‘aspects’ of outward looking focus, a congregational audit form was issued to each congregation for completion. A team of trained facilitators visited the congregation to discuss with congregation representatives and to give scores for each of the ‘Aspects’ based on the submissions made and information presented.

The scoring system used was different from those used in previous factors since the data being assessed was qualitative in nature. A scale was constructed which gave a list of statements indicative of increasing missional effectiveness. For each aspect there were either four or five categories, each mission category being assigned a score between one and ten. In aspects which had five subdivisions, there were, therefore, two possible points for each, when only four categories then the top category could be scored as an eight, nine or ten. It is important to note at the outset of this discussion that scoring of this type produces an ordinal scale - that is a scale which gives an indication of rank.

Aspect 1: The impact made on the local community through the Christian witness of organisations run by the Church

There were four distinct points to be addressed:

1. Who was being involved in church organisation and groups, whether congregational and/or community?
2. The level of deliberate Christian witness aimed for in the groups or organisations
3. The level and complexity of any church marketing strategy
4. Whether and how feedback from the community is pursued in respect of future planning.

The visiting group was asked to score between 1 and 10 dependant on the answers given (Appendix 8: Presbytery Planning Forms and Questions).

Whilst the questions asked related to coverage, availability, advertising and community engagement with regards to church organisations; there is little evidence of trying to assess the ‘impact’ of the organisations themselves. Evidence of impact might have come from data such as the raw number of attendees, proportion of the target group from the available

population, numbers who attend multiple groups and correlation with Christian discipleship or engagement with Christian worship activities.

The scoring on this aspect rewards church missional activity whether fruitful or not. Scoring which looks to reward churches which are busy runs counter to the findings of the missional work of Robert Warren whose marks of a healthy church include ‘does a few things and does them well’ (Robert Warren, 2004). Warren makes the point that healthy churches were ‘focused rather than frantic’ (Robert Warren, 2004, p. 44).

Aspect 2: The impact made on the community through the Christian witness of the individual Church members/ attendees

Here the assessment focuses on two areas

1. The level of non-Christian contact by members and attendees of the congregation in the local community and local involvement
2. The level or intensity of member and attenders in wider charity work or involvement in other Christian organisations

This second aspect is, like the first activity, based on looking at the activity levels of congregational members with reference to engagement with non-Christians in the community or through activity with more general charity, mission work or activity with organisations. Alongside this is the question of how much of an encouragement for the task the church leadership is found to be.

The same general question relating to the concept of ‘impact’ would again be asked of this item. There are other concerns which might be raised with this assessment, once again linked to the idea of ‘focused rather than frantic’, i.e. is it necessarily better to have a greater quantity of activity or indeed to have a smaller quantity but of higher quality? In congregations with a higher proportion of elderly people or a congregation drawn largely from outside the local community (i.e. a gathered congregation), this aspect of assessment has the potential to unfairly penalise them.

Aspect 3: The vision for, planning and delivery of outreach events and programmes

This aspect seeks to assess

1. The regularity of outreach events and/or programmes
2. Intentionality of mission endeavour in the congregation

3. The level of missional spirit or engagement in the congregation

In the 'Outward looking Focus Paper' presented to the Strategy Advisory Group the merits of having multiple entry points, through which the church could engage with the community, was highlighted. Aspect 3, like aspect 1 and 2 before this has sought to characterise the busyness of the congregation as a predictor of how missional the church is – high score being awarded to congregations who already had the resources and the energy to engage in a multiplicity of activities.

Once again there was no attempt to link the activities themselves with actual results. The evaluations themselves fail to establish activity relevance, community impact and effectiveness, nor have they reported on any aspect of community satisfaction (albeit in Aspect 2 the activity of monitoring is included, but the results from such exercises are not reviewed). There is no attempt to assess how the activities themselves have aided or furthered the vision or strategy of the local church.

Aspect 4: The provision for welcoming newcomers

The outward focus aspect of mission was concerned with the internal operation of welcome to church services. The scoring for this Aspect sought to reflect the availability and complexity of the systems, both formal and informal, which operate to make people feel welcome.

Clearly having good and efficient systems is a benefit particularly to larger congregations; one must ask whether they would be as necessary in a smaller congregation or indeed in a close knit community where personal relationships already existed between regulars and visitors.

Aspect 5: The willingness of the congregation to change for the sake of others.

Questions in this area of evaluation relate to a willingness to accept a philosophy of change in church, along with evidence that change is an activity actively pursued in the congregation.

This aspect carries with it the implicit value that change, for the sake of others, is good and therefore beneficial. Warren's 'Marks of a Healthy Church' include 'faces the cost of change and growth'(Robert Warren, 2004, p. 31), although he is clear that the kind of

change under discussion is not organisational in nature (a change of church times, order of service or hymnbook) but a change of ‘norms, habits, skills, beliefs’.

Aspects 4 and 5 deal with activities and issues within the church itself and one wonders whether they should be grouped together with the community focused activities of mission.

Aspect 6: Sharing of the workload between paid staff and volunteers

This section relates to the level of volunteering in the congregation and the level of responsibility (and autonomy) which volunteers have been given by the church leadership. High levels of active participation can be an indicator of a healthy church (Robert Warren, 2004, p. 39). However, Schwarz and others would argue that it is when volunteers are engaged in their particular area of spiritual giftedness, the church benefits most greatly (C. A. Schwarz, 1996, 2005, 2006).

There is also a particular danger, in the context of church decline, that in order to keep previous high levels of church activity going, more people are being engaged in activities to which they are not well suited or likely to sustain over a long period. In this context, churches with the highest scores may, in fact, be those facing the greatest danger of volunteer burnout.

Aspect 7: The priority given by the congregation to the most vulnerable in their communities

In each subcategory for scoring, three areas of activity are identified; local, presbytery-wide and worldwide. This question, therefore, is, in reality, three different questions, since there is no essential link between the three areas of activity mentioned. The scoring moves from understanding (low score) to awareness, having some focus to evidence of engagement (high score). Congregations with obvious and pressing needs around them might find this aspect, at the local level, fits more naturally with their circumstance and therefore ministry to the community. Likewise, those congregations who have some individuals actively engaged in the work of presbytery or in national groups or charities will undoubtedly be able to relate to those areas and gain a benefit for their congregation.

Loving our neighbours, particularly those in need, near or far away, is a biblical prerogative and therefore a clear issue of Christian discipleship. The question of whether

this engagement fits with strategic planning for the presbytery in the allocation of resources is not necessarily clear.

Aspect 8: The involvement and engagement with World Mission

The final aspect within Outward Looking Focus is related to how congregations interact with overseas mission or world mission. The interaction would range from receiving and disseminating information to personal engagement and support of missionaries.

At a time when the Church of Scotland is less engaged in sending and supporting missionaries and also less active in the creation and support of church partnerships with missionaries, it seems a little out of place that this aspect should be given the same level of importance as some others within the Outward Looking Focus factor. Indeed, to have such a wide ranging and divergent set of aspects in this factor given equal weight for the purpose of the calculations is surprising – especially in light of the decision to have weightings both between and within other factors.

Issues with Factor 5

The transition from qualitative information into quantitative data carries with it a number of dangers. Ordinal data, such as the scoring system devised by the strategy group, does not naturally lend itself to normal arithmetical calculation since the score indicates rank and not a true number. It has, however, been treated here, in that manner.

There is also a significant issue relating to variability between visiting groups. A statistical analysis of the scoring by different groups indicated ‘very significant differences between the groups’.¹⁷² The lack of uniformity in the scoring process calls into question both the reliability and suitability of using this data without further investigation.

Discussion

Good and worthwhile planning processes in any organisation is vital for the well-being and goal fulfilment of that organisation. The church is no different in this regard. Indeed, some would go further to suggest that, given the eternal significance of its mission, it has a particular responsibility to carry out its missional task with great care and clarity of vision.

¹⁷² Unpublished report – ‘Presbytery of Glasgow: STAG spreadsheet, auditors report’, Dr Fiona J. Tweedie 31st January 2014

The process adopted by Glasgow Presbytery during the period 2011/12 was one which was heavily criticised by the local stakeholders to the extent that it did not find final approval from them and was ultimately rejected. A later report reflecting on the negative outcome states,

There was general acceptance that there was disappointment that the planning process had come to an abrupt halt but it was recognised that this was largely due to the confusion over the use of percentages in the 1st Draft which had caused anxiety, discouragement and in some cases demoralisation for some within the presbytery.¹⁷³

This evaluation clearly sees blame in the use of a detailed numerical approach to evaluation. However, the roots of dissatisfaction go much deeper. Given the widespread angst amongst ministers and congregations from other presbyteries using quite different approaches, it is likely that the attack on the novel and complicated system adopted by Glasgow Presbytery was as much a general hostility to planning itself, and the cuts in FTE, than simply the process employed. This is not to say that there are no significant issues with the process; clearly, there are, and many of these have been highlighted in the discussion above.

There are questions which might be posed about this example of presbytery planning among them:

1. Was there a clear understanding of the objective?
2. Was a suitable methodology employed to reach the objective?
3. Did the process have a firm theological foundation?
4. Did it achieve what it set out to do?

Understanding the objective

The primary objective, which was given to the presbytery, was one which they could not alter - they were to produce a plan for fewer paid ministries within the presbytery area. The key driver for this objective was to maintain a particular understanding of the integrity of the 3rd article declaratory of the Church of Scotland which puts forward a vision to provide a parish system, throughout Scotland. The reality of the declining number of ministers meant that, in order for the 3rd article declaratory to be effected, restrictions

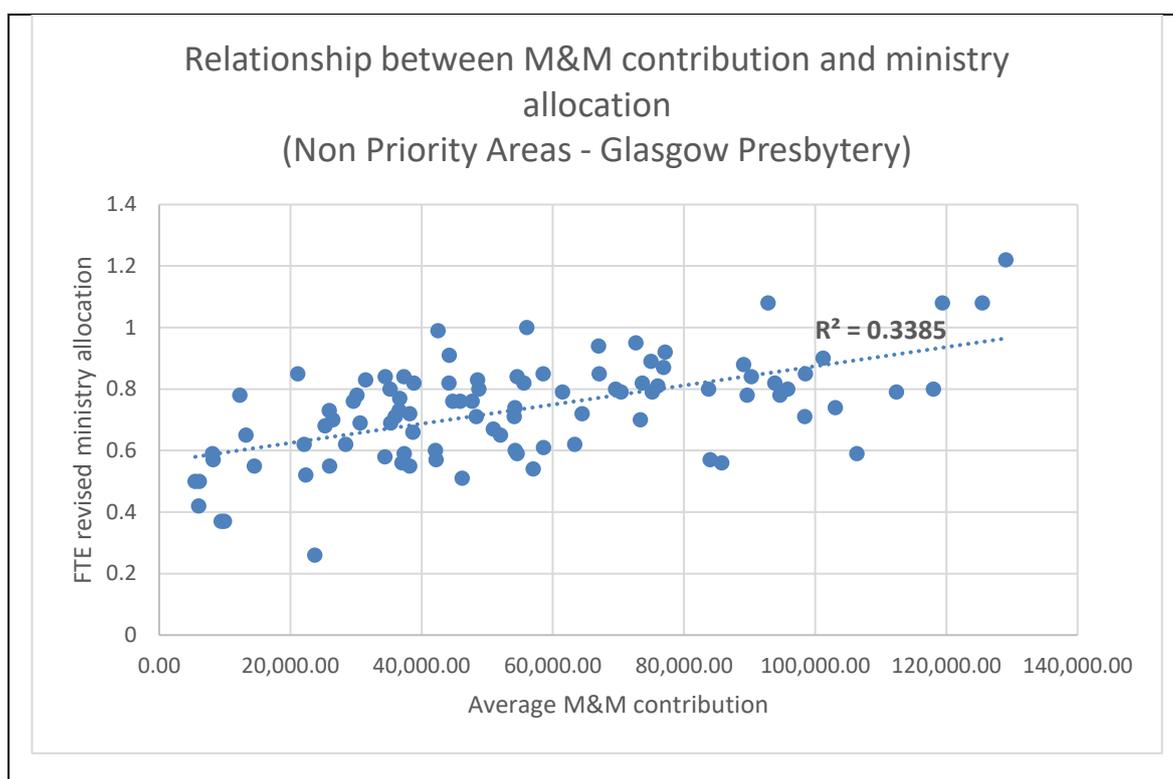
¹⁷³ Summary of the report on the outcomes of the presbytery plan consultations, April 2012

would need to be put in place via the presbytery planning system to distribute the available ministers throughout the country. This over-riding national missional objective to have presence ministry throughout the nation was foundational to the whole enterprise.

Once the numerical parameters were worked out and given to presbyteries,¹⁷⁴ other sub-objectives were introduced. Of particular significance for Glasgow Presbytery was that a fixed proportion of their ministry allocation required to be directed towards designated areas of priority. Areas of priority were agreed by the General Assembly based on indicators for multiple deprivation.¹⁷⁵ In addition to this fixed allocation, the Presbytery Strategy Committee, plus the presbytery as whole, decided to give advantageous weighting to other areas of relative poverty within the presbytery area. This specific ‘bias to the poor’ focus was to be held in tension with another focus, that of financial sustainability. The title of the original report, ‘20:20 Vision – Building for Sustainable Future Patterns and Ministries, Finance and Presbytery Planning’ suggested that this might be a major focus but the process adopted by Glasgow Presbytery did not put finance as an over-arching principle for ministry deployment. Indeed, the computed correlation coefficient (r) between the average Mission and Ministry contribution made by the congregations in non-priority areas and the eventual FTE revised ministry allocation is 0.58 (see graph below). The relationship in priority areas is much weaker (correlation coefficient $r = 0.19$). As the graph indicates, even congregations with six times more M&M contributions, were only likely to receive, at most, an additional 0.5 FTE worker.

¹⁷⁴ This was on the basis of raw population with an additional weighting given for island areas and areas which were substantially rural. Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2006

¹⁷⁵ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2008, Appendix XI 3/99 – 3/100



Graph 11: Scattergram of M&M contribution and ministry allocation

As policy evolved nationally, so the objective of mission was raised together with the heading, 'we need to prune in order to grow'.¹⁷⁶ It might, therefore, be a reasonable assumption that church growth was to be a sub objective; however, there is little attempt to assess how much growth potential existed within congregations. Neither is there any evidence of an attempt to quantify the impact of changing the ministry resources across the presbytery.

Like many organisations, the Church of Scotland has become adept at presentation and many aspects of the factors chosen highlight the importance of appearance. What seems to be lacking overall, is any significant evaluation of performance as a key driver towards resource deployment.

Was a suitable methodology employed to reach the objective(s)?

With regard to the primary objective to provide a roadmap towards restricting the number of FTE ministries in the presbytery, the report which was produced certainly meets that criteria, but it did so employing a system of calculations which was deeply flawed. The issues of methodology are many and a number have been raised in relation to each factor within the general discussion.

¹⁷⁶ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 3/3

A number of recurrent themes have been observed. Firstly, there is a question about the particular data items gathered (and the data items which were ignored or rejected). Secondly, there is a question about how data was handled (particularly the repeated use of scaling and indexing), thirdly there are problems related to the deductions made from the results presented.

The data used

Sometimes less is more. That statement points us towards the sheer volume of the data gathered. While it might be tempting to suggest that the committee gathered every piece of information it could. In reality, that was certainly not the case. Statistics, regularly submitted by local congregations to the national church, were largely discarded in favour of alternative data which was hoped to be more diagnostic of the situation within individual congregations. However, given that actual measures of ministerial workload (along with trends in workload) were available by looking at the actual numbers of weddings, funerals and baptisms over a period of time, then it is difficult to understand why those were neglected in an exercise of FTE ministerial resource allocation. It was expressed in discussion with committee members that such figures were not used because there were concerns over reliability of the data. Reliability is, of course, a justifiable concern but, as has been noted above, the alternative data gathered also suffered at points from reliability issues.

The theology of the planning process

A number of theological issues arise in how the planning process was both conceived and executed. It is outside the scope of this chapter to attempt an analysis of theological justifications or rationale for what was done. However, it should be noted that the strategy group did provide some theological background to how it was going about its task. It did this by providing a set of reflections under three headings.

- A. New Testament Thoughts
- B. The Mission of the Church of Scotland Today
- C. The Five Factors

Section A highlights eight short texts which highlight the ministry of Jesus which is seen to have a particular ‘focus on reaching the sinful, marginalised and excluded.’ The primary principle for deployment of ministry is ‘a participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ’.¹⁷⁷

The second aspect highlighted in this section is the role of God’s people in ministry, some of whom are financially supported by the Christian community for the tasks of mission.

Section B offers a statement by the General Assembly of 2010 affirming the missional understanding of the 3rd Article declaratory.¹⁷⁸ This section is noted for its brevity and a few questions on mission and ministry to which no answers are offered.

Section C lists each of the 5 factors to be used in the planning process and in one or two sentences gives a statement of ‘strength’ and one of ‘weakness’ relating to the use of each.

The paper highlights for presbytery that the group had engaged in some form of theological reflection and offers this to members for their benefit. Clearly, the offering is minimal in scope and has the appearance of attempting to give some general justification to a process which had already been decided and whose areas of focus had already been delineated at the national level. Indeed, it had been stipulated that an acceptable presbytery plan was one which could demonstrably be aligned to the principles set out by the national committee in the 20:20 document and other guidance material provided to presbyteries.

The outcome of the process

At the presbytery meeting in early 2012, the STAG group convenor offered his resignation and the presbytery plan, as had been outlined and worked on over many months, came to a halt. The presbytery was, however, still under an obligation from an instruction of the General Assembly, to draw up a suitable plan and within a short period of time another group was tasked to complete the process of planning but without recourse to the detailed computations of the exercise previously undertaken. Clearly, the new group would require to draw on the knowledge gained from the previous exercise to make its recommendations and it did this in formulating another plan, which took cognisance of the previous data

¹⁷⁷ Glasgow Presbytery Advisory Group – Presbytery weightings exercise paper. 13/09/2011 page 2

¹⁷⁸ Expressing that the Church of Scotland has: continuing responsibility to engage the people of Scotland, wherever they might be, with the gospel of Jesus Christ and a commitment to maintain worshipping, witnessing and serving Christian congregations through Scotland.

collected, but which did not use it in the complex number centred manner as previously attempted.

The decision, taken early on, to use an objective pseudo-scientific approach to the planning process of Glasgow Presbytery was a bold and radical step. As highlighted, it was a task of complexity which was attempted with genuine motives but which ultimately was deficient in having the complete confidence of presbyters. There are also many areas of concern which call into question the validity of the process as a whole, given the many defects in how data was handled and in particular, how the data was understood to relate to the task of resource deployment within a forward planning process.

In chapter eleven, dealing with conclusions and recommendations, a number of proposals relating to presbytery planning have been outlined, having come from the situation presented by Glasgow Presbytery.

Chapter 9: Case Study - Local Church Statistics

Good research can help us properly reflect on the place we find ourselves. Evidence-based research is an accepted part of modern life and the dialogue it creates can powerfully help local churches consider before God their place in the mission to today's world (Barley, 2006).

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of one Church of Scotland congregation allowing an examination of concrete examples indicative of the range and types of data available in a congregational setting. Locally generated and collated material was gathered and augmented with information from a variety of other sources including the Church of Scotland statistical parish profile information (derived from the 2011 census) as well as relevant regional and national statistics. This information was presented to a variety of audiences within the congregation including the Kirk Session, committees and focus groups, each engaging in what might be termed 'reflexive monitoring' (Carroll, 2000), that is, being aware of information to guide decision making.

As the various groups or entities interacted and responded to the information, a critical examination of how members and office-bearers of the congregation responded and reacted to data of a quantitative nature being offered to them for their consideration and forward planning. Areas of interest include the general attitude to statistics, the perceived value or otherwise of the data offered and ultimately whether the data presented can, and does, lead to new outlooks and altered actions.

The congregation participating in this examination was Kilsyth Anderson Memorial Church, the congregation where the writer is currently the minister of Word and Sacrament and has been since 2013. As a minister, I have ready access to a wide range of local resources, including the opportunity to observe and to interact regularly with the principal office-bearers and others, both within and external to the church community.

Congregational Information and Data

This congregation of Kilsyth Anderson Memorial Church (referred to locally as the Anderson Church) is typical of many Church of Scotland congregations, both in its composition, and its modes of operation. Geographically, it is situated in a central location within the town of Kilsyth on Kingston Road, part of the main highway through the town. It is adjacent to a busy hotel and restaurant and arguably placed in an advantageous

position regarding both visibility and accessibility. The Anderson Church has occupied this position since 1893 and is, therefore, a local landmark as well as a cherished local institution.

Historically, the congregation had denominational affiliations to the Relief Church, United Presbyterian Church, then the United Free Church, before coming into the Church of Scotland in 1929. In terms of character, Kilsyth Anderson has enjoyed a long history of evangelical polity and in recent years a strong preaching tradition has been evident, enjoyed and valued by church members.

In the town of Kilsyth, there are six other congregations representing a variety of Christian traditions, so within the 'Christian marketplace', there is both choice and competition. Furthermore, many community groups and leisure activities exist, creating a vibrant and challenging social environment for the available time and the attention of local people. How the local congregation understands its 'ecology' (Ammerman, 1998, p. 40) its potential and its dangers will undoubtedly have a significant impact on both its present and its future.

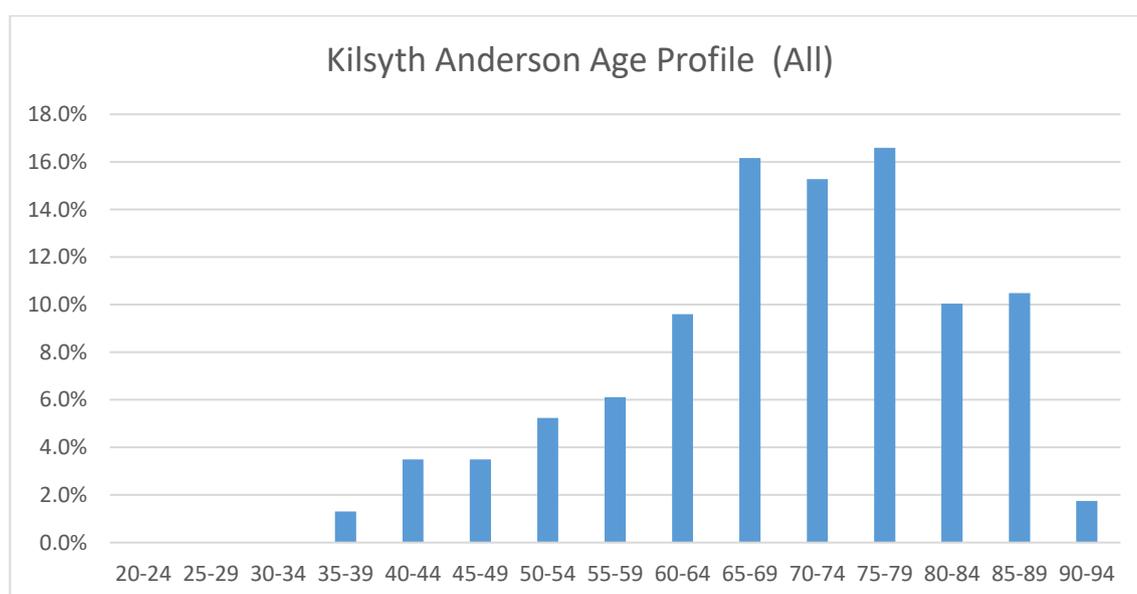
My initial reaction, when inducted into the charge in March 2013, was that there were clear indications that the people of this congregation exhibited a passion for their local church fellowship.¹⁷⁹ What was also obvious was that the congregation was composed predominately of retired and older adults. The stories of the congregation's identity emphasised an evangelistic orientation, but first impressions were of a congregation reflecting the values and practices of a 'sanctuary' church (Ammerman, 1998, p. 100).

Part of any new minister's activities involves gathering pertinent information on their charge and its people. From the outset, I decided to collect, collate and to analyse as much information as possible to provide an evidence base from which to make strategic leadership decisions. At various points, the data has been shared with the Kirk Session of the congregation and with a small number of focus groups; information gathered from these various bodies will comprise parts of the discussions below. In particular, I have detailed response and reaction arising out of their encounter with various pieces of data.

¹⁷⁹ There were many involved in the physical upkeep of the buildings including a rota of cleaning teams. There were also groups involved in pastoral visiting and a group of people with a passion for prayer and for Bible study.

Congregational Demographics

From the outset of my tenure, it was clear that beyond basic numbers of members and adherents there was limited information on congregational demographics. An update of our data records carried out to conform to new data protection legislation provided an opportunity to confirm the veracity of our information and to gather some additional information including the dates of birth. In light of this new data an age profile of those who were members or adherents of the church was constructed (Graph 12). 70.7% of the church membership was found to be aged 65 or more; indeed, the median age of members or adherents of the congregation was 71 years old.¹⁸⁰ Given that life expectancy is approximately 76.6 for males and 81.3 for females in this part of Scotland (National Records of Scotland, 2015) then it is reasonable to deduce that, on the face of it, this congregation is in desperate need of attracting new and younger members if it is to thrive.^{181,182}



Graph 12: Kilsyth Anderson Age Profile

When this specific issue was raised with the focus groups, the point was quickly recognised and agreed and had indeed also formed part of previous discussions within the

¹⁸⁰ An adherent is a person accepted by the Kirk Session as a regular participant in the life and worship of the local congregation.

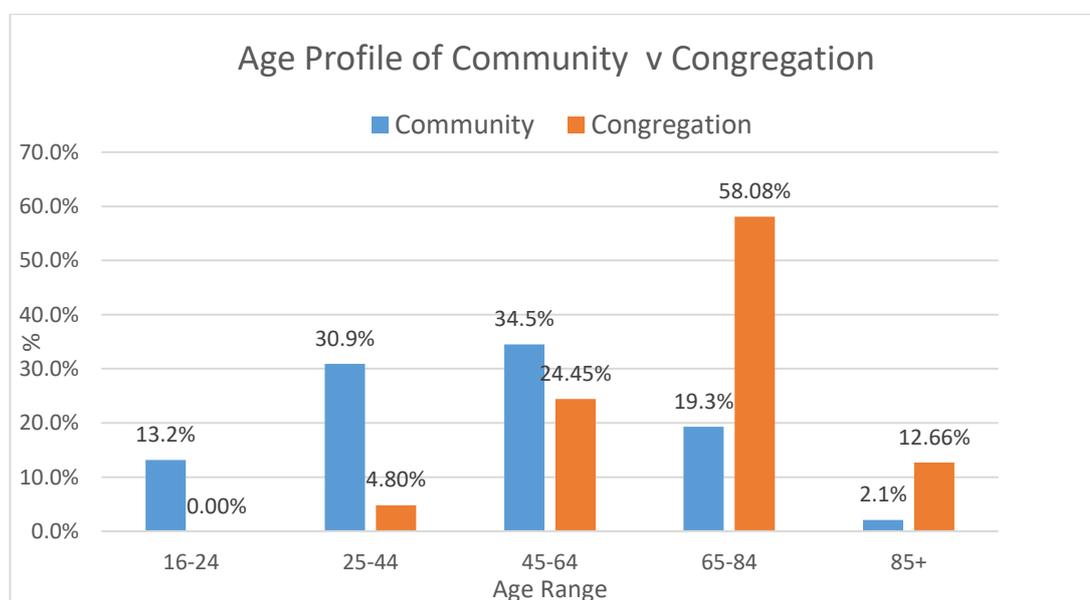
¹⁸¹ In Kilsyth Anderson Church 33.3 % of males are aged over 75 or over and 21% of females are age 80 and over.

¹⁸² Historically Kilsyth Anderson church has attracted older members from nearby congregations and therefore it is possible that it could be sustained by a combination of that process and attracting older members from the community. This idea of an older persons church would be rejected by the congregation as an ideal they would wish to embrace.

Kirk Session. The Kirk Session similarly, and in parallel to this congregational demographic, faced the problem itself of an ageing church leadership with the average age of elders being 72 years old.¹⁸³

The Kirk Session, as the key decision-making group of the church, was broadly representative of the age profile of the congregation. Whilst this is positive, in some respects, it does, however, pose questions relating to the ability of leaders to adequately understand and respond to age groups of the different generations – precisely the groups which were either entirely missing or comprising very small numbers within the congregation. The national church, being aware of a similar pattern in many congregations, highlighted the need for Kirk Sessions and other church bodies to engage young people in church decision making¹⁸⁴. However, to date, this has not been acted on locally.

Whilst it is clear that the congregation is predominately elderly in composition, this information stands in contrast with the community in which the church is situated (Graph 13). The early suggestion of the congregation exhibiting a ‘sanctuary’ orientation appears to have some validity.

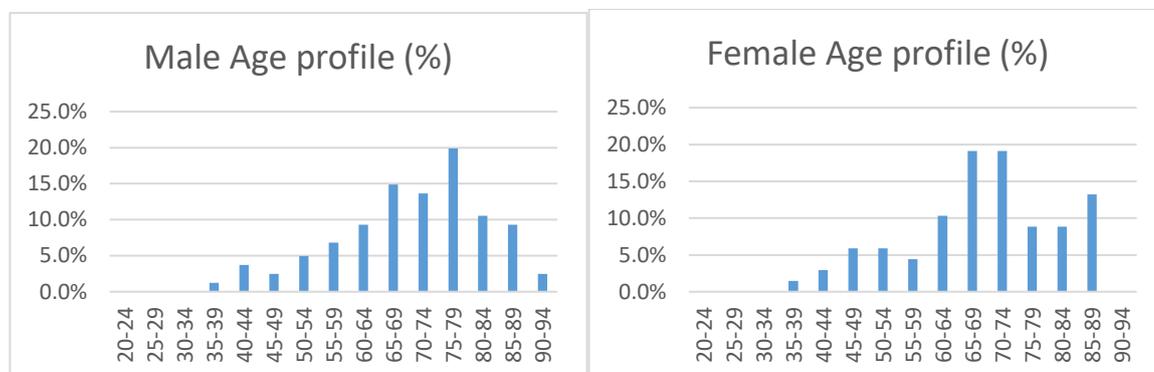


Graph 13: Age Profile comparison of Community with Congregation

¹⁸³ With the addition of 6 additional elders this was later reduced to 68 years old.

¹⁸⁴ Church of Scotland Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2011 3/20

A further analysis of the age profile by gender of the congregation (Graphs 13 and 14) highlighted that, given life expectancy information, there was a particular vulnerability in the potential near future loss of a significant number of men. At present, there is a group of men, being retired and still physically able, actively holding key leadership positions within the congregation.¹⁸⁵



Graph 14: Male and Female Age Profiles

Church Response

The age profile of church members, adherents and office-bearers allied to an acknowledgement that fewer men are associated within the life of the local church generated a number of discussions and decisions.¹⁸⁶

First of all, the Kirk Session gave permission for workgroups to be formed. The groups were to bring initiatives and recommendations to the Kirk Session and would also be given a fair amount of latitude to act in accordance with the understood values of the congregation, without having specific permission given. Areas of work designated for these new groups were: Mission, Membership Issues (Pastoral care), Ministry (of God's people), Spiritual Maturity and Youth. The groups were open to involvement by all interested people within the congregation. This initiative immediately drew in individuals previously outside the decision making processes and allowed various strands of new work to be developed. Having the groups led by trusted people and with regular reporting back to the Kirk Session has allowed this to be a welcome and at least initially, productive innovation.

¹⁸⁵ In the Kirk Session, the average age of male elders is 72.6 years (median=77 years).

¹⁸⁶ There are 222 females and 96 males listed as a church member or adherent

In addition to the wider informal participation in decision making, the Kirk Session has also subsequently admitted, through ordination, six new elders thereby reducing their average age as a group.

It was acknowledged by all the focus groups that the congregation was an older group of people. The view was expressed that there was, within the congregation generally, a desire to see younger people become involved in the life of the congregation. The solutions proposed by participants tended to be expressed in terms of bringing children and youth into church related activities, even though recent retention rates from youth programmes was negligible.

There was little consideration of direct engagement with people in the age range of 25 – 64 years, even though they comprised 65% of the local community. Specific programmes and activities directed towards the adult cohort were not initiated for various reasons. Firstly, there was an expectation that existing groups and activities already fulfilled the role of actively engaging with the larger adult community by offering opportunities. Secondly, even though the evidence was clear that it did not reach that portion of society, the logic would be considered validated when one or more individuals took part in activities or meetings, even when it was only for a limited period.

One useful insight that explains why the majority segment of the community was not directly targeted came to light within one focus group when it was suggested that the age structure of the congregation was not, in fact, dissimilar to that of the wider community. When Graph 13 was presented to that group, it came as something of a surprise and one which caused an immediate re-evaluation of the situation.

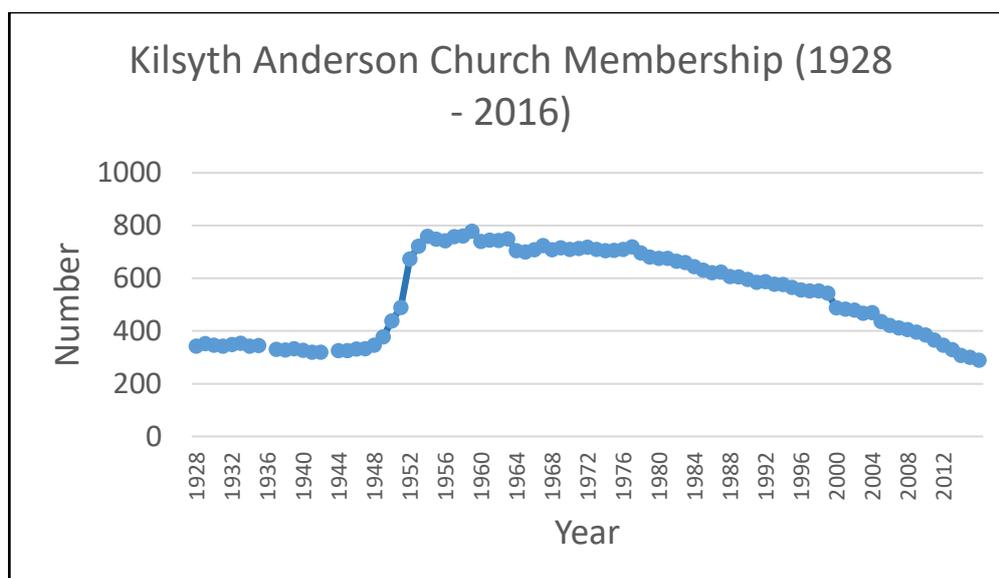
This particular episode highlights that, without access to concrete statistical information on the parish composition, it is possible that church people will make decisions based on a distorted view of reality. The distortion here is likely to come by being reliant on personal experience gained largely through informal and unconscious sampling processes, undertaken during personal activities. On analysis, such activities might be based on their experience of congregation events and groups or during the normal routines of everyday living, such as shopping, which of course would normally happen during the late morning, early afternoon periods of the day when fewer younger people would be present.

Community profiling through experience can create a misleading and distorted understanding of reality. The benefit of ‘hard’ data in understanding the local context should not be overlooked or underestimated. However, it has been my experience, working within both presbytery and congregation positions, that local church members often have a limited comprehension of community demographics, particularly sectors of the community in which they do not regularly participate or associate

The local congregational situation, where there is a smaller proportion of men involved in the congregation, reflects a situation noted in the various Scottish attendance census reports (P. Brierley, 2017; P. Brierley & Macdonald, 1985; P. W. Brierley, 2003; P. W. Brierley & Macdonald, 1995). As a response to our local situation, discussion centred around how bridges could be built with the local Boys’ Brigade company, to facilitate greater participation by boys in the life and worship of the congregation. This hope of boys connecting with the congregation again runs counter to experience and for many years the congregation has experienced an absence of young men from formal participation.

Church Membership

The slide away from organised religion, in the Scottish context, has been widely examined by many researchers (P. W. Brierley & Macdonald, 1995; Callum G. Brown, 2001; Bruce, 1995) and that downward movement is reflected in the graphed number of official members of Kilsyth Anderson Church (Graph 15)

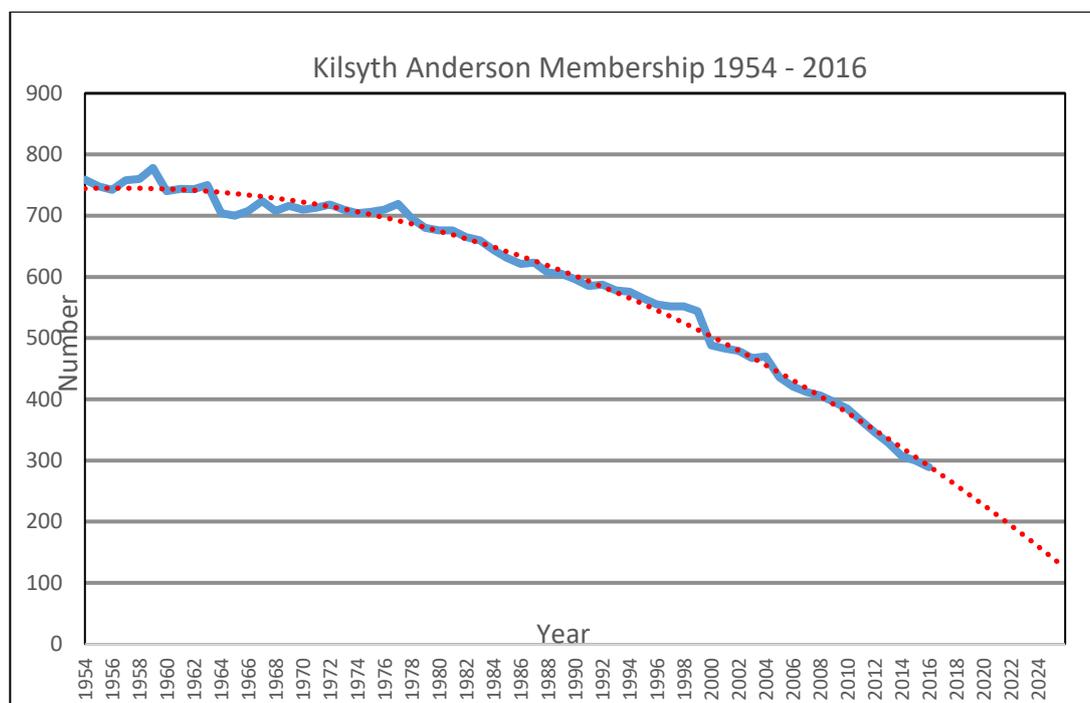


Graph 15: Kilsyth Anderson Church Membership numbers 1928 – 2016

Recording local church membership has been a requirement of congregations for many decades and hence provides a relatively clear picture of the historical trends in the local church. To be considered as a church member, the Kirk Session is required to assess the individual as suitable, through a willingness to undergo baptism, if not previously administered, and making a public profession of Christian faith after appropriate instruction.

Like most congregations of the Church of Scotland, the majority of membership losses at Kilsyth Anderson church occur through the death of members. This loss is augmented with a process, at infrequent periods, when inactive members are removed from the membership roll. These losses together account for the greater part of the annual decline. To counteract the effect of membership loss, a congregation requires to continually add new members. It is worth noting that in addition to a public profession of faith, entrance to membership can also come via other means such as transference from another Church of Scotland congregation or Christian denomination or returning to active participation in membership having been previously removed from the membership roll for lack of interest or participation.

When Graph 15 was made available to the Kirk Session and the focus groups for discussion, it appeared as something of a revelation for although people knew the church had, over a period, lost members, the duration and the extent of that decline had been largely unexamined. The stark reality of their situation as a congregation was clear and obvious and for some in the groups, quite shocking. This was particularly true when a further graph of the period of decline was produced (Graph 16) incorporating a trend line (red dotted line) indicating one possible future regarding membership numbers.



Graph 16: Kilsyth Anderson Membership 1954 – 2016

The immediate and heartfelt response was that something needed to be done or a response had to be found to counter the anticipated trend. Individuals were able very quickly to understand the present situation but also, without much encouragement, to predict possible future scenarios. For example, given the age profile of the congregation, there was an understanding that the effects of members dying would mean a quickly diminishing essential resource of people. The ‘demographic time bomb’ facing the Church of Scotland generally, is an issue also clearly facing Kilsyth Anderson Church and therefore a key motivation towards discussion of the future shape of the church and the possibility of change.

An issue which was common in the local conversations and responses was that little, if anything, proposed was novel. There were no new insights into community dynamics or better engagement with the personal spiritual search of a different generation. Indeed, the ideas proposed were often a newer version of what had happened at some point in the past without necessarily having any deeper understanding of the significant changes in society or that the church’s modes of operation might require to be significantly revised to connect with its community.

If there was a point of challenge to the data itself, then it would normally be manifest towards the accuracy or meaningfulness of the church membership figures. Locally, this

point made good sense for two reasons; firstly, there was a significant number of members who did not attend Sunday services; secondly, the local congregation comprised many regular adherents, whose activities and level of engagement in the life of the church were comparable or greater than that of fully fledged members. It was, therefore, proposed and acknowledged, that the church membership data did not accurately chart the actual vibrancy of the congregation. The church administration did keep records of people in regular contact with the congregation. This information has been streamlined into four categories: members, adherents, associates and visitors. In line with the understanding of the Church of England, the first three categories would constitute the number considered to be part of the worshipping community.¹⁸⁷

At the same time, there was general agreement that the church ought to be missionary in its outlook, calling on men and women to make a public profession of their Christian faith. It was suggested that the Anderson church had a history of being ‘evangelical’ in orientation. It was further stated in one focus group that Kilsyth Anderson church also regarded itself currently as ‘evangelical’ in nature.¹⁸⁸ When pressed on the meaning of ‘evangelical’ it was indicated that the intended meaning of the word was ‘seeking to win people to Christ’. Given that self-understanding when the group was presented with Graph 17, indicating the number of individuals who had made a profession of faith over time, it was hugely disappointing. The recent segment of the chart was again generally known, but there was surprise at the extended period during which small numbers made a profession of faith.

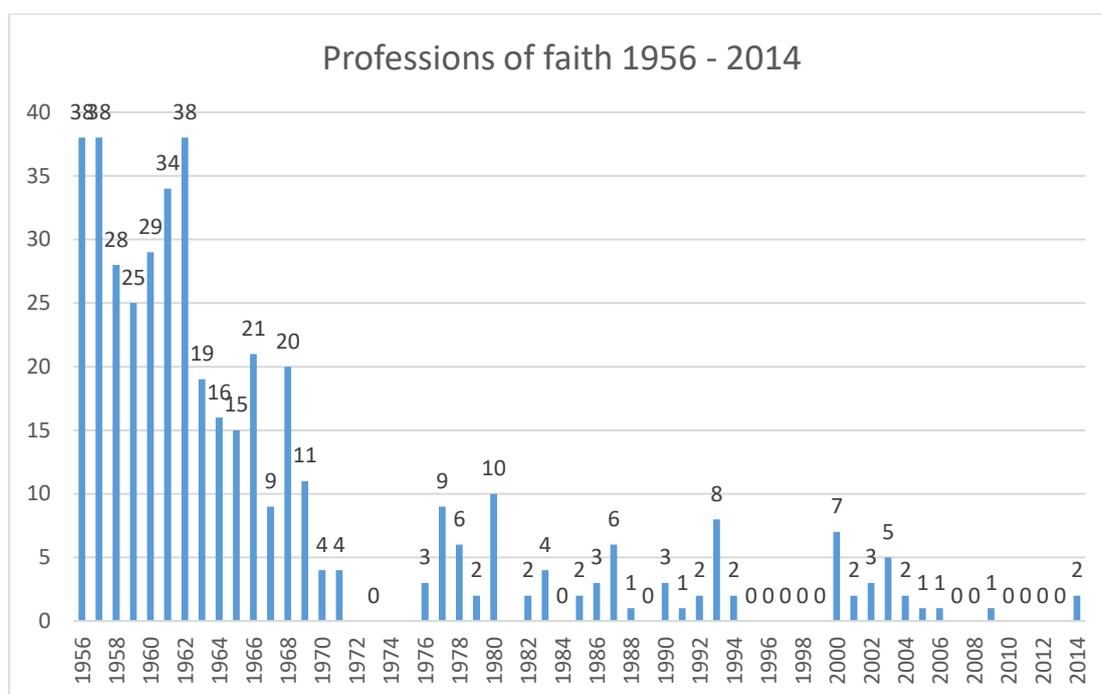
¹⁸⁷ Appendix 10 provides details of how ‘Worshipping Community’ is calculated by the Church of England.

¹⁸⁸ David Bebbington’s description of Evangelical includes, Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a ‘born-again’ experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus.

Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts

Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority

Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity (Bebbington, 2002).



Graph 17: Kilsyth Anderson Professions of Faith 1956 – 2014

Each segment of data presented, began to build a clear and consistent message, that the local congregation had been in a situation of decline for many years, which prompted one contributor to suggest that the evidence might indicate that in the near future a union with a nearby church was now perhaps very likely. This indicated the second type of response which was one containing a mixture of fatalism, demoralisation and sadness.

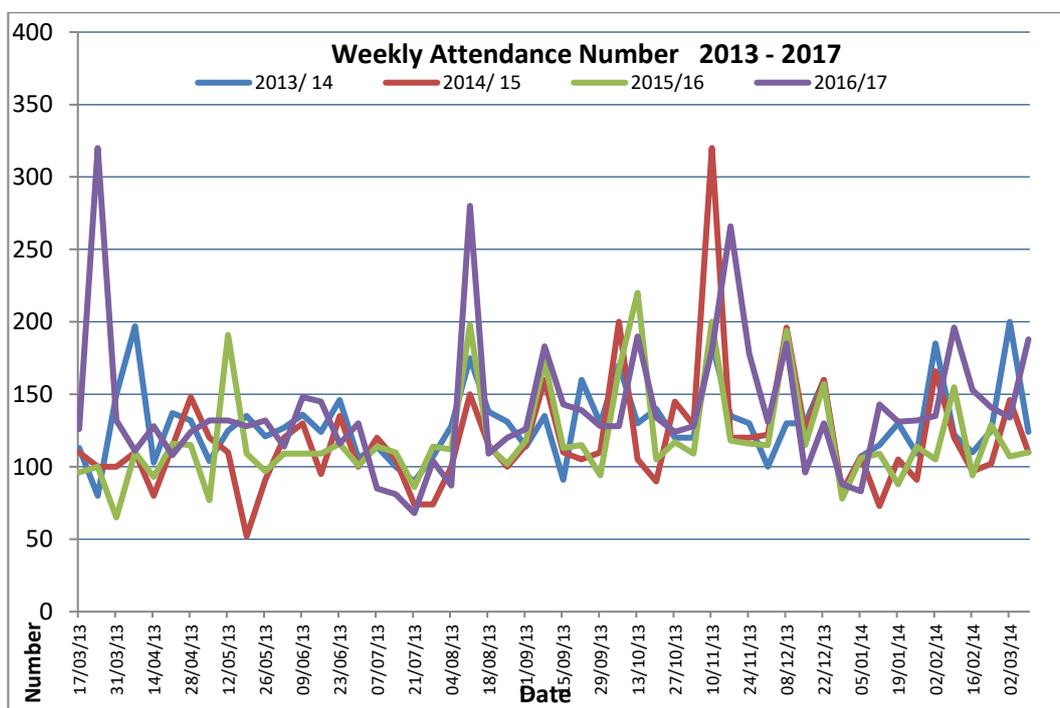
In the main, groups presented with factual information would often exhibit a mixture of emotions, both positive determination towards change and weary despondency, within the same meeting. The negative effect on morale in the face of challenging statistics is one which some church ministers highlighted in the earlier survey of ministers.¹⁸⁹ This unsettling of a congregation was cited by some ministers as a reason not to employ statistics (or at least bare statistics) with church groups and individuals. An alternative approach is to accept that disaffection with the present is a necessary precursor towards a movement for change. Bridges, highlighting the power for change that comes from dissatisfaction said,

the first task of transition management is to convince people to leave home (Bridges, 2009, p. 37).

¹⁸⁹ This was noted in the survey of ministers' attitudes to statistics in chapter 5 and in some response in chapter 7 to information from the Scottish Church Census.

Church Attendance

An analysis of church attendance has long been regarded a better measure of the life of a congregation than church membership (Hoyt, 2007). Kilsyth Anderson church has, during this ministry, collected weekly figures in this regard. However, as is clear from Graph 18, interpretation of such figures is not without difficulty. The issue, which is apparent, is that of considerable weekly variability. During a normal year, all congregations have a range of special services and special seasons which directly affect attendance levels. Peaks in attendance may occur when, for example, there is a baptismal service to which the family group invite family and friends to attend. Services which include youth organisations such as the Boys' Brigade or Girls' Brigade, will likewise show as a peak with their attendance and the presence of supporting parents and grandparents. Other special services where attendance might show a marked increase would include civic services such as Remembrance Sunday or event based celebrations such as Harvest Thanksgiving or Christmas. Troughs in attendance can be noted during holiday periods and, in this particular congregation, at services where the sacrament of communion is celebrated.¹⁹⁰



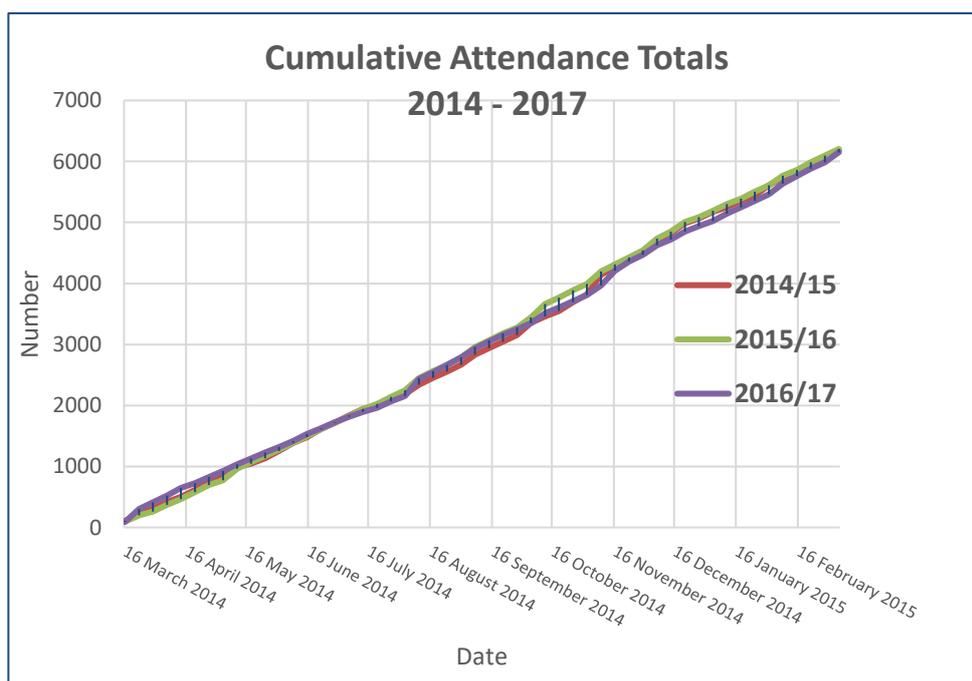
Graph 18: Kilsyth Anderson Sunday Morning Church Attendance 2013-2015

Although the attendance chart is complex, the focus groups were none the less able, with the help of a church calendar of Sunday events, to discern the general pattern that when

¹⁹⁰ It has been suggested that communion attendance is low due to the significant numbers of church adherents but this has not been verified

special services were held, then more people came to services. Given that particular causal link, discussion immediately turned towards whether additional special services or events could be added during the year to boost attendance and therefore the missionary potential of the congregation. It was understood that attendance, in itself, was not the important thing except that it represented a measure of opportunity to make a presentation of the Christian message to those who might otherwise not hear one.

One question which groups found difficult to answer from Graph 18 above is ‘do we know if the overall attendance is increasing or decreasing?’ A useful tool in this regard is the cumulative attendance total chart which, in graphical form, presents the same information for weekly attendance through the year. This simple graph (Graph 19), therefore can, at a glance, tell how well attendances are doing when compared with previous years. The graph below, gives the cumulative attendance information for the year beginning 16th of March 2014 for 12 months alongside the same period the following two years, for comparison.



Graph 19: Kilsyth Anderson Cumulative Attendance 2014 to 2017

Coming after previous graphs, this particular information and visual brought some measure of hope that people were at least coming along to worship, even if, at this point, attendance was not being seen in new professions of faith. This insight led on to further discussion about the changing nature of membership, as viewed by the general population and the inherent limits and dangers of relying completely on official membership figures. At the

same time, it also negated some of the imperative for change since it removed any immediate threat to the Sunday morning gathering for worship; of course, in the face of the picture from the data as a whole, such complacency would be misguided.

Worshipping Community

As a concept, that of the worshipping community gives an additional and helpful understanding of the true scale of involvement in worship. Gathering statistics on the true size of the worshipping community, however, presents some challenges in an age where there is more variability in the frequency of worship attendance even amongst those considered core members of the congregation. Research presented by Benson and Roberts (2002) highlights the benefits in conducting an attendance census over a period of eight weeks, compared to a single Sunday or an average of Sundays. This work, likewise, draws attention to an important distinction to be made between Sunday worshippers (modal participants) and those involved in other weekday opportunities for worship (church life participants).

The method used by the Church of England is less onerous in that it asks congregations to record the number of worship participants over the course of a month. During this period, data is gathered on all who attend both Sunday and other services, by means of a register of people, from which is compiled a set of data indicating attendance in three groups – a ‘core’ number who attend 3 or 4 Sundays, a ‘regular’ group who attend twice in the month and a ‘casual’ group who attended once during that month.

In June of 2017, an attempt was made to measure the size of the local worshipping community.¹⁹¹ The methodology used was, first, to produce a printed list of all registered members, along with lists of church adherents and associates, which was marked up over four Sundays to indicate a person’s attendance. If a person was not on the list, having been omitted or was a visitor to the church, then that would be recorded on a blank piece of paper. The data from the information collected was then easily tabulated in Table 25: Adult Worshipping Community June 2017.

¹⁹¹ June in 2017 included a service of communion, which has often been poorly attended and a Sunday School presentation service which attracts a few extra visitors. The other two Sundays, leading into the time of holidays often have smaller than usual attendance.

Number of Sundays in attendance	Category of attender	Number of adults
1	Casual	39
2	Regular	44
3		37
4	Core	37
Total		157

Table 25: Adult Worshipping Community June 2017

The total of 157 refers to unique individuals, a statistic which is not apparent when looking at the total adult attendance for each Sunday, which in this case was 101, 97, 92 and 93 adults for the respective Sundays.

There are three other categories which ought to be considered in this discussion. The first is the number of ‘visitors’. A ‘visitor’ is someone who is a member of another church (worshipping community) or who is present for a one-off special service or event and unlikely to return, except in the case of another similar occasion. Over June Kilsyth Anderson had only two visitors.

Secondly, children and youth present will also be part of the worshipping community and information on the composition of this group can be obtained from crèche and Sunday School registers.¹⁹² The third group which should also be formally included within the data to compute the size of the community comprises those, who are listed as church members or adherents, but who, over the chosen month, were unable to attend due to illness, disability or general debility.

These numbers as demonstrated above, are not difficult to ascertain and do present a much more realistic figure representing the true size of the Sunday worshipping community. An extension of the process to discover the levels of participation at midweek services or groups can, of course, also be undertaken relatively easily.

¹⁹² In the case of Kilsyth Anderson church this did not happen since two of the four Sundays were times children were on holiday.

Youth Work

In light of the absence of young people and young adults in the normal Sunday congregation, discussions during congregational conference sessions and within the Kirk Session Youth Committee raised the desire for a locally employed worker. The role of such a worker would be to build bridges between the church and local families and between the youth organisations and the church. The Board of Managers¹⁹³ was approached to identify sources of revenue for such a post and an amount of money was identified within church reserves which they were willing to release to support the employment of a part time youth and family worker over an initial one-year period. After a 6-month period, it was clear that there was little impact being made by this approach. The solution to missing young people often is the employment of a youth worker. The evidence, however, of this approach, is unproven locally.

Youth activities in the congregation have, in recent years, focused largely around the uniformed organisations of the Boys' and Girls' Brigades, both being well regarded and very active (Graph 20: Youth Organisations Membership). The clear objectives of both organisations are that they act as evangelical agents, in their respective spheres, for the local church.^{194,195,196} Locally, the brigades do attract a proportion of young people from the community (approximately 9%),¹⁹⁷ many of whom do not have active church connections. In a small local survey of the parents of young people in the church uniformed organisation, it was found that whilst 69% of parents completing the survey indicated that they do not attend church regularly 91% of those parents still expressed the view that the Christian nature of the organisation was important to them. There is, however, international research evidence to suggest that the formal religious participation of young people follows closely to that of parents or peer pressure. (Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982; Vaidyanathan, 2011). If this pattern is true locally, then the later non-involvement of the young people in formal church participation, is explained.

¹⁹³ The financial court of the congregation during that period.

¹⁹⁴ The Object of The Boys' Brigade is: 'The advancement of Christ's kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness.' (The Boys' Brigade).

¹⁹⁵ In the booklet 'Information for Churches' it is asserted that 'We want to be your partner in outreach' (The Boys' Brigade, p. 3).

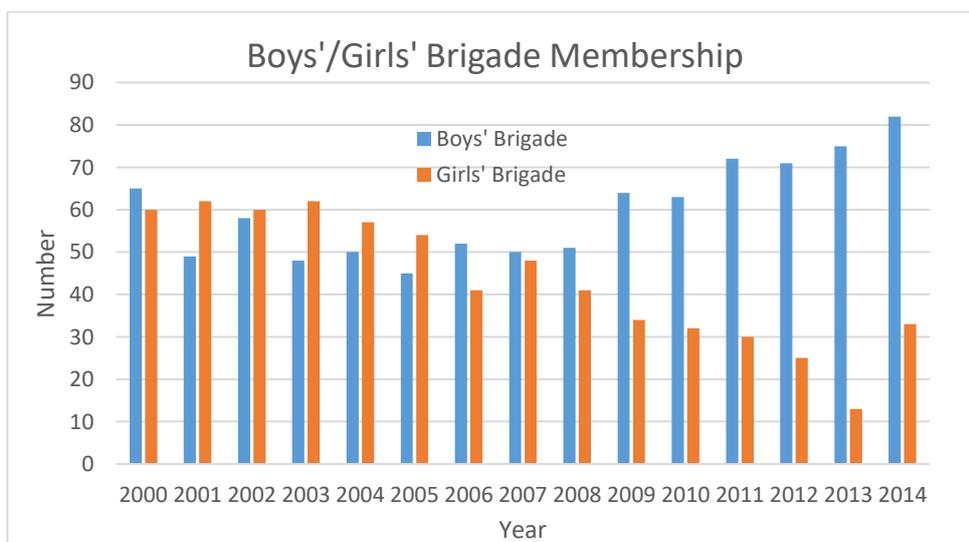
¹⁹⁶ Girls are encouraged towards the Queens Award which sets out as one of its requirements within the 'Faith Journey' section, 'To encourage girls to develop a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. To develop a commitment to Church and Christian service' (The Girls' Brigade).

¹⁹⁷ From Parish Profiles for Kilsyth Anderson and Kilsyth Burns and Old Parish there are 1339 young people between 5 and 15 years of age.



Graph 20: Youth Organisations Membership

An issue raised early on in most of the focus groups was the danger of statistics being potentially misleading or at least only giving a partial report. This was highlighted well when looking at the statistics for the youth organisations which in Graph 20 above appear to show a reasonably stable picture of attendance over time. When the numbers are disaggregated into the component organisations then a different picture of reality is displayed (Graph 21). It becomes evident that there is growth within the Boys' Brigade company whilst the Girls' Brigade is seen to be having difficulty recruiting new members, retaining current members, or both.



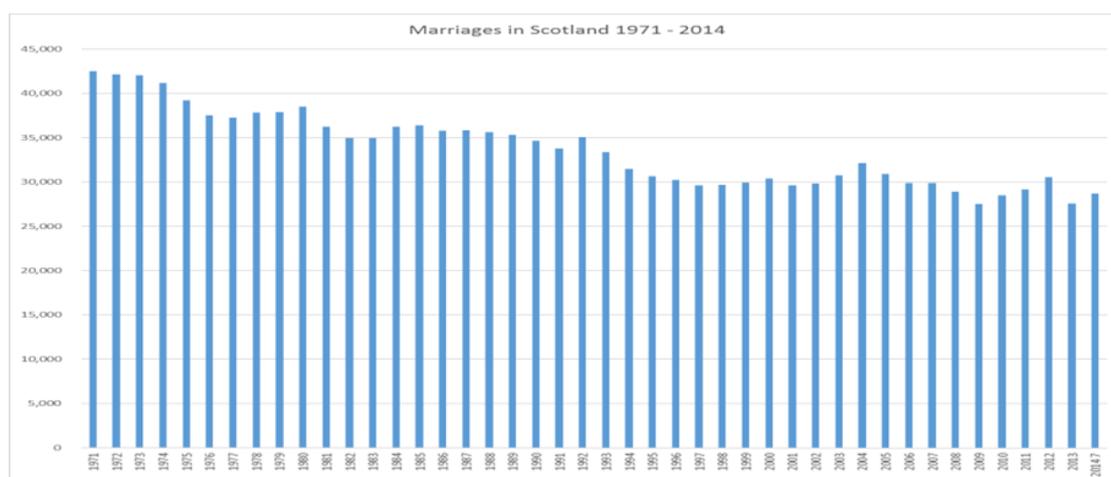
Graph 21: Disaggregated Membership Numbers for BB and GB

As the focus groups discussed the differences, it was noted that on the same night the Girls' Brigade meets, some other groups, aimed at young females, meet in the community, with the same intensity of competition not apparent for young males. The issue of competition for the time and attention of young people is one which churches have sometimes ignored in favour of retaining traditional patterns, which may need to react to a changing social environment.

Marriage

Additional evidence of the reduction of young adults actively connecting with the church can be seen in the liturgies which mark rites of passage previously undertaken by that age group such as marriage and the arrival of a baby.

It is certainly true that the number of marriages throughout Scotland has declined in recent Scottish history. However, that decline has been relatively gradual (Graph 22), whereas local church records indicate an almost complete collapse. Here in the Anderson Church, marriages moved from a peak of around 30 per year in 1956 (corresponding to the period of highest membership in the local church) to only a few weddings in recent years (often of non-church attending people). Nationally the percentage of weddings conducted by the Church of Scotland, almost halved in the period 2005 to 2015.¹⁹⁸



Graph 22: Total of Marriages in Scotland 1971 – 2014

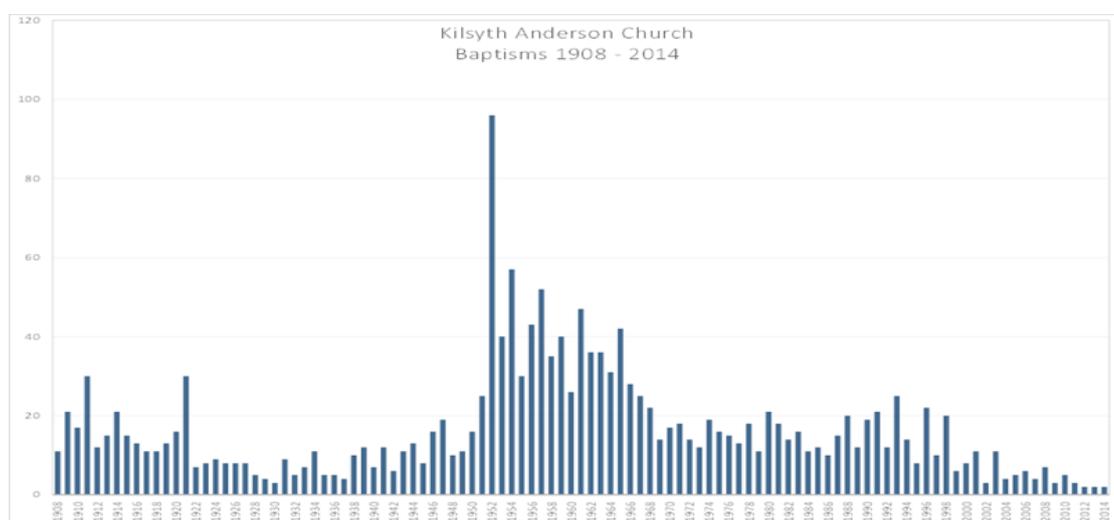
¹⁹⁸ 23.5% of marriages reported at the end of 2005, 12.4% of marriages at the end of 2014 (Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2005....2014).

The focus group discussion considered and agreed with the proposal that changes in public morality meant that couples often now choose to live together prior to marriage and indeed continue to do so without being married. However, this response again seems to miss the statistical point, that the state of marriage per se, is still being entered into but that the local church is now not the preferred venue for an increasing number of couples.

Unmarried partners deciding to have children together without the early consideration of marriage is also becoming more common. It is possible, even likely, that the church's stated or perceived view of a morality of sex only within marriage may mean that many young people and adults feel uncomfortable, even alienated, given the choices they make and certainly there is some evidence to suggest a negative correlation between sexual permissiveness and church attendance (Jensen, Newell, & Holman, 1990),

Baptism

As the focus groups examined the statistics relating to baptisms, (Graph 23) it was acknowledged that with fewer young people seeing the relevance of the church to their life and situation, then this practice would naturally, also be adversely affected. It might be noted that requests for baptism when they do arise, often come as a direct result of prior discussions with parents and grandparents who, having had a previous church upbringing or present church connection, see some particular value in the action (sometimes of a superstitious nature). When approached for infant baptism to be dispensed and having had some discussion with the parents it is often felt by the parents that a church ceremony of thanksgiving and blessing would be more appropriate.



Graph 23: Number of Baptisms 1908 – 2014

The recent statistics of Kilsyth Anderson church would validate the declaration contained in a report of the 2003 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on baptism which states,

we must face the truth that, for large sections of the Scottish population, the celebration of baptism has ceased to have the meaning and significance that it had for previous generations.¹⁹⁹

Voas highlights the reducing cycle of intergenerational transmission of the faith with the consequential decline, over time, of the practices of the faith such as baptism (Voas, 2006).

A secular rite of passage to highlight and celebrate a new baby has been initiated by the government through the provision of a 'Name of the Baby' ceremony administered by local registrars. At present, the uptake of this service in North Lanarkshire is limited²⁰⁰ by parents seeking an alternative rite to mark the addition of a child into the family, but its existence provides another signal of a more general move away from the church for the general population.

Sunday School

The other central area of regular active work with children and young people in Kilsyth Anderson Church has historically been through the Sunday School and Bible Class, both of which currently meet on a Sunday morning during the normal morning service. The size of these groups, which numbers fewer than ten children most Sundays, is a direct reflection of the small number of young families present in the congregation. Indeed, in some cases, young children are brought to church by their grandparents, though this tends to result in erratic patterns of attendance for the children.

Statistical information, historical or current, has not been gathered for Sunday school attendance or involvement, but it is widely known and accepted that current levels of involvement are much smaller than in previous years. Discussion with the Sunday School leadership has resulted in only a limited response to this information, involving their attendance at some regional training events or in initiatives to maximise invitation to participation during special services when more families (and hence children) will be

¹⁹⁹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2003, 13/7 1.5.2

²⁰⁰ There were 31 recorded naming ceremonies in Lanarkshire over the period 2005 to 2014 (North Lanarkshire Council, 2014).

present. The results of these efforts have made no real impact towards increased weekly involvement.

Community Statistics

The local church, if it seeks to connect with its local community in a meaningful way, needs both to understand the community and also to understand its role within it. As discussion took place within church groups about how the congregation might grow numerically in areas such as attendance, membership or general participation, naturally there was necessarily reflection required on the composition and nature of the local community.

The focus groups and the more formal church groups had a high level of confidence that they both knew and adequately understood the community, in which many of them have lived in since birth. There was an appreciation that it was a community which had undergone some significant changes in past years but that did not diminish their view that the community was a well-known entity to them. Information was presented to the various groups arising out of statistics gathered from the 2011 census.

The Parish Statistics Report provided had been produced by the Church of Scotland Statistics for Mission group for each congregation.²⁰¹ This is the second compilation of parish statistics developed specifically to assist with local mission planning.²⁰² Originally, it was considered to be a tool which would assist in the implementation of the recommendations found in the Church without Walls report. Part of that report was that congregations should undertake a community audit (Church of Scotland Special Commission anent Review and Reform in the Church, 2001). In 2013 the Church of Scotland Statistics for Mission group produced and disseminated updated parish information based on the results of the 2011 census. The information was accompanied by a self-help PDF booklet for congregations entitled, 'Who is my neighbour?' written to assist congregations using the census information to determine 'real needs' as opposed to 'perceived needs' (Statistics for Mission, 2016, p. 4). The writer from 'Faith in

²⁰¹ It should be noted that since Kilsyth operates as a complete unit, the given parish boundaries for Kilsyth Anderson Church are entirely artificial and in most senses meaningless for understanding the local situation in isolation from the data for the neighbouring parish of Kilsyth Burns and Old. The statistics presented therefore are for the combined dataset of both parishes from the profiles (Statistics for Mission, 2014a, 2014b).

²⁰² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2001 20/31 7.6

Community Scotland', a charitable body working with faith communities to address issues of poverty and justice, claim that

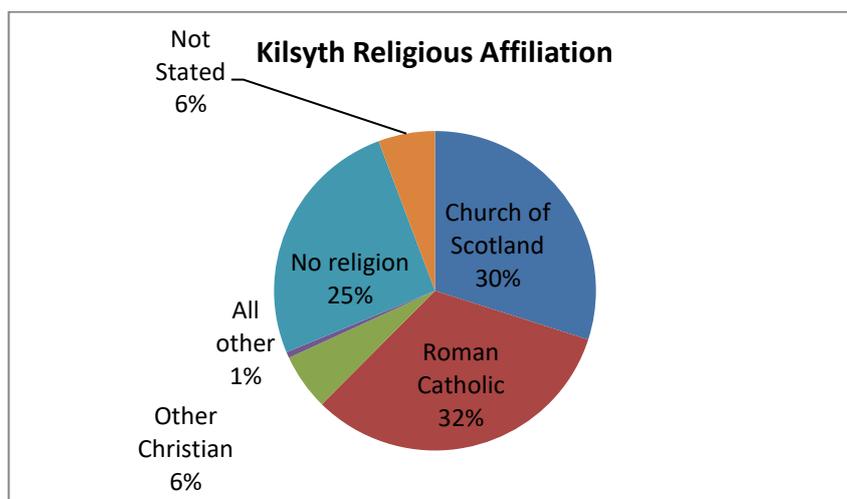
Community research is a necessary part of the foundation upon which good effective church activities are built (Statistics for Mission, 2016, p. 5).

The strategic value of this information is underlined by the assertion,

The more we understand our parishes, those that live in them and their needs, the more we can serve God in being effective in mission (Statistics for Mission, 2016).

Sadly, though the booklet produced gives much encouragement to use the facts and figures to understand the local community better and to assist the local congregation in making plans, it does little to connect the actual production of the Statistics for Mission parish statistics and the pieces of advice or examples cited. What at first appears to be a practical guide turns out to be anecdotal, theoretical and with links to information sources, but without much guidance on how best to make use of the information presented.

The local church groups provided with the parish information from the 2011 census discussed key areas. The first related to the demographics of the area, already highlighted above. The second area of interest was the religious makeup of the community which, according to responses given in the 2011 census, meant that 30% of the population of the town of Kilsyth identified themselves as 'belonging to the Church of Scotland (Graph 24).²⁰³



Graph 24: Kilsyth Anderson Census Religious Affiliation

²⁰³ The graph presented is a compilation of figures for the two Kilsyth parishes.

This figure represents 3,138 people, relating that number to the estimated number²⁰⁴ regularly attending church services, means that around 93% of that group of affiliates are not currently active in attending either of the two local Church of Scotland congregations.²⁰⁵ Whilst this might, in one sense, be discouraging, it does, however, point towards a large group within the community who claim some level of sympathy or alignment with the denomination. This group, whose sense of belonging is by association rather than by participation, identifies an important segment within the missionary challenge of the local church (Thomas, 2003).

In terms of mission to the community, it may be anticipated that this group would be the most receptive to an invitation to attend a church based or church run event and therefore, appropriate resources ought to be channelled towards this end.²⁰⁶ When this figure was raised within meetings, there was scepticism about whether this group was the most open to being approached. Individuals from within the community could be cited as once having come to church but were known to be disenfranchised and alienated.

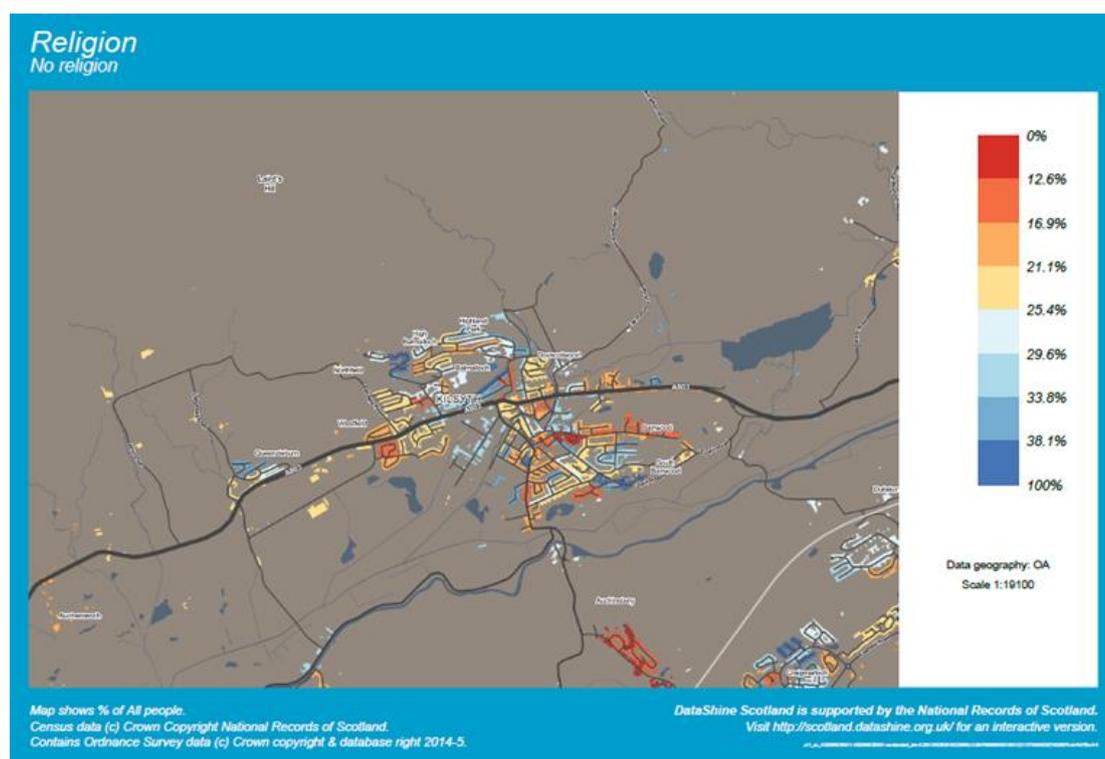
Research undertaken by Tearfund (Ashworth & Farthing, 2007) highlighted that within the 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994) segment of the community, the largest segment could be considered 'closed de-churched', that is one-time churchgoers who are unlikely to return. More recent Scottish based research conducted by Dr Steve Aisthorpe, examining *The Invisible Church*, similarly notes that there are significant groups within a community who claim some measure of faith but who do not regularly engage with local congregations (Aisthorpe, 2016). While some perceive difficulties in re-engaging with this group, others suggest that given the correct approach, along with relevant activities and genuine Christian community, then the human desire for a sense of belonging will bring people back (Richter & Francis, 1998).

While it is helpful having the numbers of the various religious allegiances within the area, it would be helpful for planning purposes to know where different belief groups were concentrated. The mission group of the Kirk Session was provided with data from the

²⁰⁴ The total number of individuals, of all ages, who regularly attend either Kilsyth Anderson Church or the Burns and Old Parish Church, based on average weekly attendance, was estimated to be 230 people.

²⁰⁵ If the concept of 'worshipping community' were used instead of average weekly attendance, then an estimate based on the total in Table 25 above with the addition of children and household members would give 477 out of the 3,138 Church of Scotland affiliates. This would mean that approximately 85% of that group could be considered as outside the worship life of the Church of Scotland.

²⁰⁶ Mead (1995, p. 15) notes that although many clergy treat these 'Mental Members' with contempt his view, like mine, is to approach them with hope and expectation.



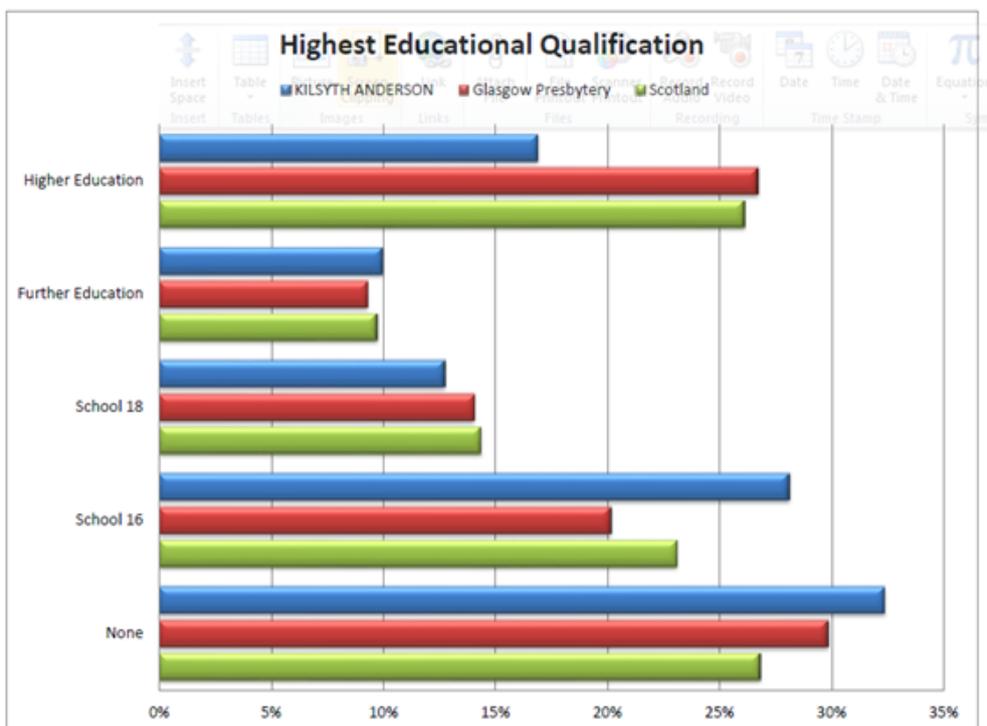
Map 2: Kilsyth - Distribution of 'No Religion' Affiliation

However, it was discovered that, when faced with novel information of this type, group members were unable to transition easily from the data towards action. The idea of targeted mission initiatives to different faith positions was not something previously encountered locally. Both the parish statistical profile and the Datashine maps provided information previously unexamined but which contained important strategic data.

A piece of data which was noted within the Parish Statistics compilation was that relating to educational attainment levels within the parish area. On examination by the groups, it was discovered that there were lower levels of attainment than had been expected (Graph 25).²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ The graph shown is for Kilsyth Anderson Parish. The corresponding graph for Burns and Old Parish also shows a low number of people with Higher Education qualifications. It was suggested that older people not taking qualifications when younger was the reason, but since the age profile of the town of Kilsyth is close to the overall Scottish profile that reasoning cannot account for the difference.

Population Breakdown by Qualifications



Graph 25: Local Census data on Highest Educational Qualification

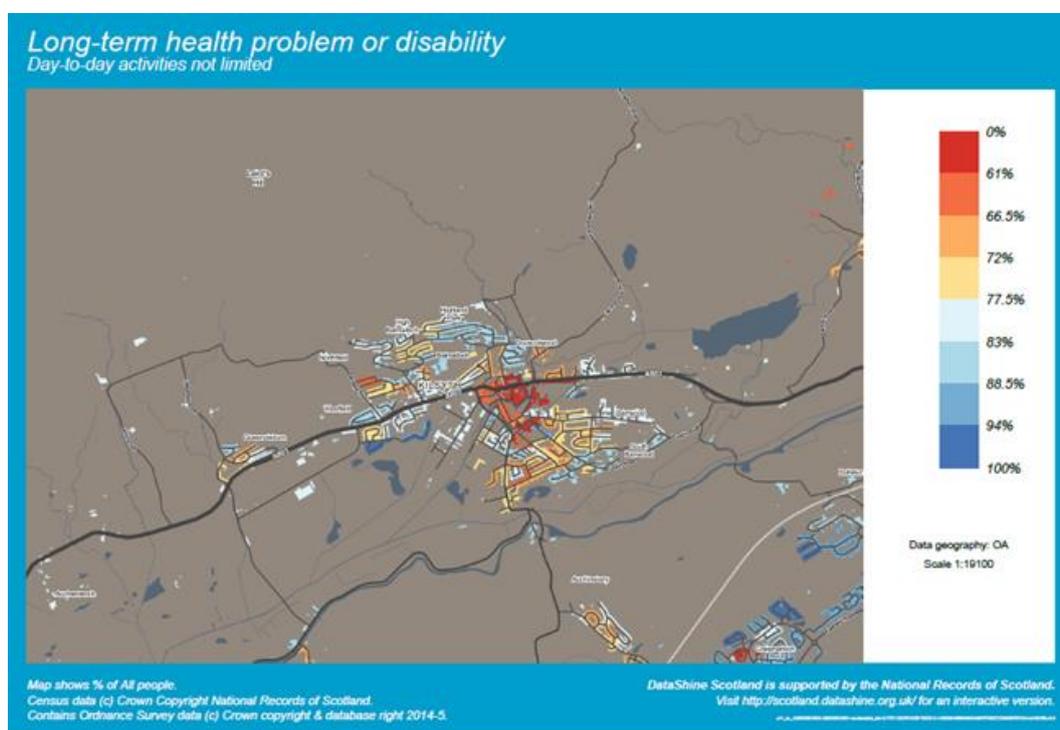
The significantly lower number with basic or higher education qualifications raised questions about the content and presentation of church communications generally. Is the language used appropriate and accessible? Are the, often formal, styles of delivery helpful? These questions specifically challenged the modes of preaching and teaching engaged.

This most recent discovery about the community brought into relief the educational ability of the current congregation, many of whom are from professional occupational backgrounds or have benefited from engagement in higher educational courses. This finding gives rise to challenging questions; ‘should there be a re-evaluation of what works best in this context?’, ‘Is the preaching model used still the best method of presenting the biblical message and meaning for this community?’ and ‘Is passively sitting in pews, so reminiscent of an academic lecture, helpful for discipleship?’.

Of course, it may be that within the local Christian marketplace, our unique selling point and point of departure from other congregations is that we cater to that particular segment of Christians. There is also an argument to be made that, to alter the present practices significantly, would be to change the ethos of the congregation and its cultural homogeneity (D. A. McGavran, 2005).

Another possible option is to widen accessibility rather than changing focus entirely. To fulfil that methodology, in addition, and alongside traditional means of communication, new technologies for communication can be engaged. This has happened to some degree under my ministry with the installation of a large projection screen linked to computer presentation software which has enabled a visual liturgy with video clips, photographs, PowerPoint presentations and bible verses. Further to this, I have had installed a Wi-Fi system which allows the use of interactive and internet learning for Sunday School children and for organisations both of whom now make extensive use of the facility, through linked laptop computers and personal tablets.

Visual learning gives a section of the congregation some assistance. However, it can also create difficulties for others. The congregation has within it those who are wholly, or partially, blind. The provision of large screen devices for this group does not deliver any positive effect and indeed where visuals are used exclusively, then they create barriers to participation and even lead to exclusion.²⁰⁸



Map 3: Census question on Long-term disability – Map of Kilsyth

²⁰⁸ The congregation does provide printed and braille hymn books but on-screen hymn words are sometimes different.

The present church plant is situated in the part of Kilsyth which, according to the population census, has the highest concentration of people with long term health problems or disabilities (map 3). The high incidence, in the immediate locality, of individuals with specific needs was known but had not been an issue reflected upon at a strategic ministry level. The church, therefore, had made little effort to offer additional support groups or specific worship opportunities for those affected.

At present, the physical layout of the church sanctuary creates issues of accessibility for those with mobility problems.²⁰⁹ Whilst a small ramp at the rear of the church building does offer entry for wheelchair users; there is only limited space for such users due to the floor space comprising mostly fixed church pews.²¹⁰ The present seating arrangement is limiting in a number of regards. It creates an inflexible learning space; it is unhelpful and potentially discriminatory to those with disability. The seating is uncomfortable and given the dominance of current Sunday attendance by older people, often with musculoskeletal and other relevant medical issues, it creates a further disincentive to continued attendance.

Finance

No assessment of the local congregation can pass without at least some consideration of the financial statistics of the church. Since Kilsyth Anderson church is within the Church of Scotland denomination, there is only a limited significance attached to the financial strength of the local congregation. Indeed, as has been seen previously in the presbytery planning process adopted regionally, congregations with limited funds are not necessarily penalised. Furthermore, the denomination is organised, so that money to enable local ministry, is provided from a central fund comprising mandatory contributions from congregations assessed as able to make such contributions.

Financially, the congregation of Kilsyth Anderson demonstrates a pattern of declining ordinary general income (Table 26), that is, income from congregational offerings. This situation is unsurprising given the ageing and declining membership numbers. Since attendance is relatively stable, it might be imagined that would offset, financially, the loss of members. This is not the case since committed members give at a higher level and more

²⁰⁹ Congregations are required by law to be aware of their responsibilities under disability discrimination legislation to be a responsible 'service provider' with due diligence towards the inclusion, as far as is practically reasonable, towards those with disabilities (The Church of England, 2010).

²¹⁰ A small number of pews have been removed at the front of the church to give space for wheelchairs but the area has only a limited capacity. A further removal of pews is hampered by the presence of cast iron pipes above floor level which provides heating for the church.

consistently than occasional visitors. This fact is reflected in the low correlation figure of 0.3 between weekly attendance and weekly general offering (Ammerman, 1998, p. 141).

Year	Ordinary General Income
2013	£76,068
2014	£75,419
2015	£70,220

Table 26: Financial Information 2013-2015

Discussion

The collection and analysis of quantitative data for local church development, planning and mission endeavour, is an obvious part of church administration, management and strategic planning, yet activity of this type is often haphazard or indeed entirely neglected. Reasons to explain this situation are many and include a lack of strategic intent, a deficit of available planning skills or abilities, even just simple fear of what might be uncovered, the possible resultant effects on the morale or the operation of the organisation.

It is, however, widely accepted that strategic planning has an important part to play in the potential effectiveness of a church's missionary endeavour (Burns & Hunt, 1995). A key recommendation, following the 2002 Scottish Church census, was that those in leadership should seek to become skilled in 'strategic thinking and vision building' (P. W. Brierley, 2003). Although church growth in terms of numbers is, in itself, not the goal of mission work, it is clear that any church not being actively engaged in recruiting new members and new leaders will die for failing it to align itself with the biblical imperative to engage new disciples (Mead, 1995). The good news, coming from chapters five and six of this thesis, is that the majority of ministers express the view that strategic planning for mission, based on good data, is important.

Objections

It has been argued that to treat the church as merely a human organisation or as a pseudo business and to utilise the ideas and understanding which lie behind strategic planning (with a view to growth) is to fundamentally misunderstand the Church and its impulses. Some would claim it to be unspiritual to engage the tools provided by human psychology, economics or statistical trend analysis (which are a few examples of a much larger group of business disciplines and sciences). The basic contention is that since the Church is dependent on the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit and that the 'Spirit blows where it will' (John 3:8 New International Version, 1984), then it cannot be contained or directed.

Planning, in that context, is seen as simple folly at best and at worst directly dishonouring the headship of Christ. Church planning is viewed, by some, as attempting to ‘demystify the mysterious’ (Hudnut, 1975) and in that sense considered, by detractors, to be a destructive task.

The double action of the church, as both a conduit of divine agency as well as the place of human endeavour, is one of complexity and mystery. However, it is important that both poles of the church’s existential reality are acknowledged and appropriate attention is given to them.

Organisational psychology, management theory and political science may offer rich sources of insight to add to divinity’s traditional mix of disciplines. There is an appropriate theology of institutional reform which goes along with this, neither harbouring ‘pelagian’ ambitions for the church, nor engaging in ‘docetic’ fantasies about it. Humble, imaginative, wise reform, according to Holy Scripture, interpreted under the guidance of the only-wise Holy Spirit - that is what the Church of Jesus Christ aspires to (Gay, 2017b).

To pray and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit is critical to the life and health of the church but so also are the patterns of practical wisdom made available via the tools of the social science or world of business. The issue is one of practical balance where our view of the church is neither over spiritualised nor seen as essentially mechanical. Schwarz, like Gay, argues directly against this ‘bipolar paradigm’ and favours instead a more dynamic interaction between ‘organism’ and ‘organisation’, in which both play a key role (C. A. Schwarz, 1999).

Strategic Intent

For any congregation, resources and energy are limited. It is imperative then, that as good stewards of those resources, strategic decisions are taken to maximise their usefulness – this requires goal setting and planning. Resources fall into either a ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ category, ‘hard’ being countable items such as people and money with ‘soft’ referring to the connections and experiences within the congregation (Ammerman, 1998, p. 132).

An obvious resource available for the work of the church is those who participate in the life of the church. However, as Ammerman points out, people involved in the life of the local church can only be regarded as ‘potential resources’ (Ammerman, 1998, p. 135) at least until they become active in their participation and engage energy towards engagement in the work and witness of the local congregation.

Peter Drucker

The writings of the management guru Peter Drucker on non-profit organisations have provided groups, like the church, with useful tools for both self-assessment and forward planning. In Kilsyth Anderson Church, the pattern for reflection and strategic planning is based on a system proposed by Drucker and set out succinctly in the book, *The Five Most Important Questions You Will Ever Ask About Your Organisation* (Drucker, Hesselbein, & Economy, 2008). The system, which facilitates organisational self-awareness and aids focused action, is outlined and explained below.

I will later compare and contrast this method with another strategic planning tool in common use called 'Local Church Review'. I will further discuss the function of these tools to inform the 'pastoral cycle', as previously encountered in Osmer's description as set out in chapter 3.

The Five Most Important Questions

Drucker frames the questions in these terms,

1. What is our mission?
2. Who is our customer?
3. What does the customer value?
4. What are our results?
5. What is our plan?

(Drucker et al., 2008, p. xii)

Question 1: What is our mission?

This system begins by asking for clarity about purpose. If you like, why does the organisation or group exist? All non-profit organisations share a common mission and that is to bring about change.

The business or mission of non-profit organizations is to make a difference in human lives. The mission comes first. Non-profit institutions exist for the sake of their mission (Drucker, 1993, p. 11).

As the Church, we have a message to proclaim of 'Christ crucified' and 'risen'. We reference Biblical revelation and truth, supremely encountered in the life and person of Jesus, which moves and motivates us to be changed as individuals, to bring about positive change to society and even to effect change throughout the world, as participants in the ongoing 'Missio Dei'.

Meantime the Church exists in mission, living by what it proclaims, and pouring its life out in service for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. It preaches reconciliation, embodies it in its own members, and seeks the reconciliation of all mankind, and so lives in Christ. Until He comes again Jesus Christ is to be found wherever there is darkness in which to shine the light of God, wherever there are lost men and women to be saved, wherever there is alienation and estrangement and division, for He has made all that His very own in order to overcome it in Himself (Torrance, 1966, p. 140).

The statement above highlights something of the theological complexity of trying to formulate a statement, concerning the mission of the Church, which is easily accessible and understandable, for church leaders at the congregational level. For the purpose of planning, simple is often best and so the approach of leaders such as Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, has some merit, where mission is simply expressed as working out the Great Commandment (Matthew 22: 34-40 New International Version, 1984) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20 New International Version, 1984) (R. Warren & Warren, 1995). Simpler still is the formulation used by Bill Hybels of Willowcreek Community Church, whose mission is stated as,

... to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ (Braoudakis, 1997, p. 55).

The aim of sharing Jesus to facilitate the movement of men and women under the 'unction' of the Holy Spirit towards committed discipleship and all that means for the individual, the community and creation itself is a mission which meets Drucker's requirement that mission for the non-profit organisation ought to have 'deep meaning' (Drucker & Collins, 2008, p. 13).

Question 2: Who is our customer?

The terminology at this point needs to be adjusted in an ecclesiastical environment. The question is to identify who will be involved in taking forward the mission, both the volunteers, and those who will receive the services being offered. The 'customer' therefore, is not a single entity, but a multiplicity of individuals with whom the church is engaged.

Those who are 'volunteers' may be termed 'workers' or 'supporters', even 'partners' in the mission, but whatever term is used, these individuals are crucial for the mission to be advanced. In chapter 2 it was noted that, in the work of John Hayward, those who were identified 'enthusiasts' are the necessary core building blocks for church growth (Hayward,

2005). In this chapter, it is clear that there are a number of identifiable constraints affecting the volunteers in Kilsyth Anderson Church. Issues that range from lack of confidence in sharing the Church's message, to having limited time and energy to be actively involved in activities which support or further the mission.

A second group of 'customers' are those who might receive and benefit from the services of the Church.

As a denomination, local congregations are given special responsibility for the needs of those within the parish area. In the case of Kilsyth Anderson, there is an understanding that the responsibility is not limited to the formal parish area but encompasses the whole town of Kilsyth, a responsibility which we share in partnership, through a parish grouping agreement, with the other local Church of Scotland congregation.

The local data, highlighted earlier in the chapter, provides the church with demographic profiles of various potential 'customer' groups in the town. However, in order to effectively engage or communicate with any customer, we need to be aware of something of their value system.

Question 3: What does the customer value?

The question, What do customers value? – what satisfied their needs, wants, and aspirations – is so complicated that it can only be answered by customers themselves. And the first rule is that there are no irrational customers. Almost without exception, customers behave rationally in terms of their own realities and their own situation (Drucker & Collins, 2008, p. 39).

Statistics have their limitations. There are times when qualitative information must be gathered and evaluated to inform and guide decision making. Without direct input from those with whom the church is trying to engage, will mean that, necessarily, critical decisions will be based on assumptions (often false) and/or hope.

In truth, the church often does hear and listen to the values and views of 'internal customers', that is those within the congregation and will, as a consequence, shape activities around their needs and aspirations. However, if the mission of the congregation is to engage those beyond its walls, then intentional mechanisms for hearing the views of the 'outsider' will be required. The outcome of listening ought to provide useful information for the development of appropriate initiatives.

Question 4: What are our results?

So far, the questions posed by Drucker, though couched in unfamiliar language for churches, are relatively uncontroversial. Question 4 however introduces the idea of measurement and performance. It may be that, in the present context of church decline, this area of investigation is one of extreme sensitivity for church leaders. For some, the concept of 'fruitfulness' is one unrelated to that of 'faithfulness'. Certainly, the issue at the heart of question 4 is one on which Drucker was challenged. He reports that when working with churches,

People ask, 'How do you measure results when you know our rewards are in heaven?' While the ultimate measurement is clearly not of this world, some measures are possible...In the church, the first measurement may be the level of new membership and the church's ability to hold them and keep them coming and becoming more involved as unpaid staff. These may not be precise measurements, but they are meaningful (Drucker, 1993, p. 40).

Discipleship, sanctification, personal holiness and a range of other outcomes related to the type of change the church works to facilitate and support are not amenable to direct measurement. True Christian faith may reside within the heart, but an individual making a profession of personal faith may serve as a useful external proxy, though imperfect, for that inward change and reality. The same is true of other aspects of the work of the Spirit in the life of an individual – the wind itself might not be seen, but the effect often is.

Church attendance may, for example, indicate one level of activity, as might involvement in various church groups, organisations or participation in church events and programmes. This is an important point when assessing congregations using numerical facts – they may point towards a facet of reality but it is only ever part of a much more complex picture, and the numbers gathered and analysed are in many ways proxies for aspects of those.

Question 5: What is our plan?

Questions one to four provide the church leadership with a rich array of information which, after prayerful consideration, will help determine next steps towards missional objectives.

Drucker explains that,

Objectives are the specific and measurable levels of achievement that move the organization towards its goals (Drucker & Collins, 2008, p. 68).

In the construction of objectives, it is imperative that there are measurable assessment criteria included as a means of monitoring whether the continuing investment of congregational resources is appropriate. The active review of any plan is a central role of leadership in order that, if required, adjustments can be made. In a situation where an objective, after a defined period of time, demonstrates no discernible benefit towards the mission of the church, then it should be abandoned.

The wise application of data available within a congregation, when linked directly to the mission of the congregation, can become a powerful instrument for productive change.

Drucker's scheme is clear and logical. It engages with a range of information of all types and uses it to assess the progress of an organisation, or in this case, a congregation, towards fulfilment of its missional objectives. It is self-reflective, flexible but with concrete outcomes, which can be easily assessed.

Local Church Review (LCR)

The Church of Scotland encourages all local congregations to be intentional and thoughtful in the work they undertake. In 2010 the Panel on Review and Reform placed before the General Assembly proposals to replace the Quinquennial visitation scheme with a new system of presbytery review and oversight.²¹¹ The purpose of the LCR is contained within Act 1 (2011)

The object of the review by members of the Presbytery is to give encouragement and counsel to the congregation; to facilitate the congregation in setting out their priorities and plans for at least the next five years; and where anything unsatisfactory is found in the state of the congregation or not in accord with church law and order they shall give advice or take supportive or remedial action (The Church of Scotland, 2011).

An innovative feature in the LCR process was the proposal to assist a congregation, through the guidance and help of presbytery representatives, to engage in a process of creative forward planning. This scheme has, with modifications, now been in operation by Glasgow Presbytery since it took part in a pilot scheme in 2008. The process used, therefore, by Glasgow Presbytery, can be considered both stable and mature.

²¹¹ Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2010 19/16 3. Local Church Review

During 2017 Kilsyth Anderson Church received paperwork from the Glasgow Presbytery to initiate a local church review process in the congregation. The system of review is facilitated firstly by the completion of a set of paperwork in which a number of pieces of information is required to be completed. Section 1 asks about the history of the congregation. The congregation is invited to chart details of its values, strengths, celebrations and learnings. The review documentation chronicles information about the congregation as it is at present and the challenges it faces. In section 2, items of statistical information about the congregation is presented by the presbytery. In section 3 there is an exercise in self-assessment which uses a basic scoring system, translated into graphical form, which purports to represent the 'shape' of the local church. The assessment is intended to be a reflective exercise on perceived areas of strengths and weakness within the congregation.

Following completion of sections one to three which is the 'preparatory phase', the 'consultation phase' then begins. This phase consists of a visit by a local review team which is intended to assist the church leadership to review sections 1 to 3 in order to move towards completion of section 4.

Section 4 offers a grid in which the plans that the congregation hopes to implement over the next five years are outlined. The plans to be submitted, include details of what chosen action is to be addressed, when it begins and when might it end, the person responsible and what support might be required from the presbytery or wider church. When section 4 is completed, the final 'Reporting Phase' results in a report being agreed by the presbytery Superintendence Committee and presented to presbytery itself for its information and approval.

As a tool for forward planning, there is much to commend the LCR process. It is participative and open, allowing for flexible responses according to the differing circumstances and contexts of congregations. This new system encourages congregations to look forward, to develop a vision for their work and to make plans. However, as a system of planning, it also has, in my view, significant flaws and limitations.

Firstly, there is little emphasis on setting out the specific mission of a congregation within its locality. During the LCR process, there is discussion concerning the local community and the place of the congregation with it, but that is limited in its scope and detail.

It has been my experience visiting congregations as part of a LCR review team that the idea of mission has often been linked, either directly or indirectly, to the expressed 'Vision' of the Church of Scotland.

The vision of the Church of Scotland is to be a church which inspires the people of Scotland and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ through enthusiastic worshipping, witnessing, nurturing and serving communities (The Church of Scotland, 2017a).

That is a church whose mission is the activity of 'worshipping', 'witnessing', 'nurturing' and 'serving'. Information on the extent to which it 'inspires' the people locally is not gathered except possibly through anecdotal type evidence.

There is, of course, an opportunity to give some consideration of the Church Statistics profile which is available for each parish to help identification of the demographics of the local community. There are no formal questions which link the details of parish structure with the structure of the worshipping community. The statistics which are provided, are those of church membership, which has been examined in earlier chapters as not often representing the scale or vibrancy of the worshipping community.

The tool available in section 3 of the documentation presents a spider diagram indicating responses given about the relative strengths of a congregation's life. This innovative approach using a visual representation of the nature of the congregation is perhaps a helpful overview. However, its ease of construction is offset by the limited information it contains – each item of the congregation's life being reduced to a score between one and five.

The plans produced in section 4 are intended to flow consequentially from reflective work discussed in section 1 to 3.

The process should result in a Plan of Action for the congregation. The plan should bring together the vision of the congregation for its mission over the next 5 years, taking account of its present position, its capacity and finances. This should highlight the following as a minimum:

- A plan of action for the forward mission and ministry of the church with goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-limited (SMART goals)
- Resources available locally including human resources, buildings and finance

- New resources required and who shall provide them.²¹²

SMART goals, and variations of it, have been used in the world of business for many years. The purpose is to provide focus, to consider performance and to produce discernible results. The LCR process involves a partnership between congregation and presbytery and, through the plans presented, a measure of accountability.

The potential of the LCR process to provide a platform for innovative change is tremendous but only if it integrates a clear sense of local mission, with detailed understanding of the local community and the real potential existing in the local congregation, to produce effective plans. Plans ought to be substantial and robust, certainly, if they are going to be in operation over at least a five-year period and able to be productive. The measurable component of the SMART goal pattern is the one most often omitted, which inhibits the ability to review locally and defeats an important aspect of wider accountability.

There are a number of alternative similar processes which leaders can use – one of the most detailed, UK tried and tested systems for congregations, is the Mission, Action, Planning approach (Chew & Ireland, 2009).

The Pastoral Cycle

In chapter 3, using a pastoral cycle outlined by Osmer, the idea was highlighted that within practical theology there ought properly to be a dynamic interplay between theological theory and practice to produce renewed praxis. In this chapter, I have noted schemes of organisational development using a system of questions proposed by Drucker and a scheme for development by the Church of Scotland which, again through a series of questions, leads towards the creation of development goals.

In implementing either of the schemes outlined within the context of a local congregation, clearly renewed action is the desired outcome, focused towards the development of church mission and ministry. What is also clear is that such considered action must be borne out of an appreciation of the available data. Drucker expressed his scheme using the language of ‘results’ and ‘customers’; the LCR process noted ‘statistics’, ‘scores’ and ‘experiences’.

²¹² Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland of the Church of Scotland 2010 19/27

In whatever way the stages of this process are described, the central consideration is to diligently collect, interpret and analyse the available pertinent 'hard' and 'soft' data.

What is fundamental for the operation of the pastoral cycle, as outlined by Osmer and others, is that within it appropriate reflection takes place, noting issues of purpose and meaning, particularly within biblical and theological idioms. In Drucker's scheme this comes through an evaluation of the 'mission' of the organisation. Mission, for Drucker, can be the fundamental purpose of the enterprise or indeed component parts within it. In the context of ecclesiastical engagement or the prosecution of elements of mission or ministry, a consideration of purpose leads inevitably into contemplation and reflection on normative Christian texts and ideas. In the LCR scheme there are explicit questions for congregations which invite consideration of the ethos and purpose of their particular congregation, along with encouragement to link Christian values and norms to various elements of forward planning. Each scheme, when carefully applied, taking into consideration the local information, with appropriate interpretation linked to normative Christian revelation and insight, leads to improved praxis. It is important that the theological framework which provides both the causation and the guiding principles for action for Christian congregations are kept always in view, since these are not explicitly voiced in the language used by Drucker or LCR, so that what is ultimately proposed moving forward is based on a clear Christian foundation and understanding. Osmer's framework therefore provides the rationale, the process and the theological language to understand how to engage with either Drucker or LCR correctly.

Conclusion

This case study of one typical Church of Scotland congregation has brought into view the wide array of information which is available to the local church leadership. It highlights some examples of what kind of statistical data it may be possible to gather from various sources to illuminate both the nature of the congregation and the local community. This chapter has also provided some insight into the emotional and practical interaction of people, in leadership and outside, with the data.

Contemplation of the truth carried in numbers, graphs and tables proved to be interesting and often motivating for those who interacted with it. To those who shouldered the weight of decision making it has also provided welcome help and guidance. When allied to

appropriate processes of planning, such as outlined in the scheme proposed by Drucker or in a properly focused presbytery LCR process then data is an invaluable asset.

Chapter 10: Recommendations

Businesses want to measure those things that are of the most importance to the organization...This is because 'what gets measured gets done' (Henshaw, 2006, p. 57).

Introduction

Numbers matter to organisations. The Church of Scotland cannot and must not ignore numerical data. Instead, it is crucial that the right data is available, in the right way, at the right time, to provide the necessary information to facilitate church leaders' capacity to plan sensibly and purposefully. This is not to suggest that the Church of Scotland does not already engage, to some degree, with quantitative data; it does, but more and better data is required. This thesis set out to examine the extent and the nature of the relationship between statistical data and mission, and between statistical data and planning. In the analysis in preceding chapters, I have identified areas requiring significant attention and change in the configuration of the data management structures of the church, in the current data practices of the church and I have identified where specific changes should be introduced to build a stronger empirical foundation to aid the mission and planning of the Church of Scotland.

I began this investigation and examination by charting and detailing the long historical connection between the Church of Scotland and data usage in its endeavours to engage the people of Scotland with the Christian message. I then outlined, in chapter two, how this engagement was not only practically helpful but also ecclesiologically, politically and theologically significant. Statistical data allowed the Church of Scotland to have confidence in its role within Scottish society and to project greater influence, through its planning and mission processes. However, I also highlighted that in a changing modern context, where the available metrics pointed towards reduced church affiliation and activity that the Church of Scotland began to distance itself from data which it found uncomfortable, such as that on church membership. The result of this change in outlook was clearly evident in the response of the Church of Scotland to church census data, seen in chapter six and also more broadly through recent national strategic planning attempts, detailed in chapter seven.

The ability to work with concrete information, both quantitative and qualitative, may be of practical interest but I have highlighted in chapter three that it is also an important

constituent part of the work of Practical Theology. Chapter three introduced the role of statistics and quantitative data within a broad understanding of empirical theology. The chapter went on to set out a typical scheme, using Osmer's Pastoral Cycle, illustrating how data is not an optional component for such theological insight and understanding, but a crucial part of it.

In chapter four I provided examples of some major ecclesiological and missiological schemes developed specifically to embrace and maximise the insights provided by quantitative data. This chapter highlighted the desire within the Church Growth Movement and its successor movements to aid the missionary endeavour of the church, whilst noting that such approaches have also generated some controversy, particularly as they relate to the understanding or implementation of numerical measures and indices. Although personally being positively inclined towards the desire to engage creatively with data for missiological purposes, I present the approaches in chapter four as useful frames of reference without offering a wholesale endorsement of any particular system. I have, for example, written previously, as part of my Masters thesis, of the strengths and weakness of engaging the Natural Church Development Process (C. A. Schwarz, 1996) within a Church of Scotland congregation. (Vint, 2007).

The background work contained in chapters one to four provided an historical, theological and missiological backdrop highlighting how data has been and continues to be integral to the endeavour of mission and planning. In the chapters five to nine, the focus turns towards the specific experiences and needs of Church of Scotland congregational leaders and then to three recent case studies bringing insight to the work of the Church of Scotland at national, regional and local level.

A key contribution of this thesis is that it provides a unique insight into the use of data sources by ministers and the value they attribute to appropriate data for information, planning and mission purposes. The survey work undertaken for the thesis has also, for the first time, allowed those 'at the coal face' of mission, ministers of congregations, to express their desire for an enhanced provision of local data. Their articulated positive engagement is, however, conditional on an understanding that any provided data is robust, recent and relevant for their ministry. Chapter five brings to the fore a new awareness that the practical local work of mission and planning is often facilitated and informed by quantitative information.

The general confidence expressed by the majority of ministers in dealing with data, stands, at times, in contrast with the central administration of the Church of Scotland, which often appears to approach data cautiously and with some measure of suspicion, particularly where that data does not directly serve the ambitions or interests of the Church of Scotland as some within central councils perceive them. A recent tendency, explored in chapter six, by the Church of Scotland to effectively ignore or downplay negative data in favour of constructing a more positive narrative, was interpreted by ministers as ‘spin’ and ‘unhelpful’. The ongoing tension, sometimes leading to disappointment, between the data agenda of the Church of Scotland centrally and the needs of the Church of Scotland at the local level is another new insight provided in this work.

In the three case studies presented in chapters seven, eight and nine I offer a careful analysis, firstly, of how the Church of Scotland establishment has handled key statistical information for mission and planning. In chapter seven the political machinations of the organisation, detailing its uncomfortable relationship with negative statistics, has been described and assessed. This has uncovered some of the mechanisms through which various data indicators and measures have, at various times, been denied, considered theologically inappropriate, or viewed as potentially damaging to church morale. The role of this work as a cultural audit of central church attitudes towards the publication and dissemination of data offers a basis for framing recommendations which can contribute to the major cultural shift I believe is needed.

The presbytery planning case study in chapter eight plainly underlines some of the practical difficulties encountered by the Church of Scotland when attempting an exercise in complex, extensive planning, requiring substantially more time and statistical expertise than was available to them. The analysis offered in this chapter calls into question many of the underlying assumptions made about the data used by church leaders in the design and implementation of their strategic plans. This thesis is the first detailed study to raise important questions concerning the principles and practical calculations surrounding resource allocation through the Church of Scotland planning process.

In my local case study, contained in chapter nine, I provided a comprehensive analysis of data available to one local congregation, for tactical and for strategic planning purposes. It is clear, even from that singular example, that extensive insights, arising from internal and

external sources for local mission planning, can be made easily accessible to local church leaders. There remain questions about the levels of local knowledge and understanding needed to make the best use of the data. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that given appropriate help and support local decision makers could be empowered by the information available.

It is my submission, arising out of the evidence provided in this study, that there is currently a significant deficit in fully appropriating and employing statistical data for church planning and mission; nationally, regionally and locally. There is, therefore, a pressing need for a fundamental reassessment and review of the framework for gathering, processing, communicating and engaging with numerical data throughout the Church of Scotland.

I have set out in the paragraphs below, twenty-eight recommendations arising out of the discussions contained in previous chapters which will, I believe, assist the Church of Scotland to create a more dynamic organisational environment for dealing with empirical data. I believe, however, that the potential of this data will be realised only through an enhancement of the skill set of church leaders, backed up with an extended toolbox of relevant data for mission, strategy and planning.

Firstly, I will highlight some general recommendations applicable across the Church of Scotland, with a number of items which would require initiatives to be taken at national level. Secondly, I will consider a set of recommendations arising principally from the presbytery case study, with the potential to re-shape practice in strategic presbytery planning. Thirdly, from the congregational case study, I will draw out recommendations that will enable local congregations to more fully engage statistics for mission or strategic planning purposes. The recommendations, in the main, are broadly based and strategic, providing a solid platform on which to build new practices and processes. I could have gone further in providing a more extensive and detailed set of specific data items to be collected for analysis but given my call for an urgent in-depth review of current practice, that would be premature.

As the research and writing of this thesis has progressed, I have been fully aware that through the recent part-time employment of a professional statistician, a range of changes, initiatives and developments have taken place or are under consideration. This is to be

welcomed and has highlighted the fact that the organisation has the flexibility to respond when developments are necessary and where improvements can be identified. However, and I say this in full support of the (unpaid) statistician now in place, substantially more is required, hence the recommendations which now follow.

It is my submission that each of the following proposals are both necessary and important, however, from a practical standpoint there does require to be some consideration given to issues around prioritisation, resource implication, management responsibilities and other related matters. I have attempted to address some of these matters by providing a summary of the recommendations now being proposed in Table 27, which provides a possible staged timeframe and the group or groups which might be responsible for the practical implementation of the recommendation highlighted.

As a guide to potential resource implications which might arise, general estimates are also provided in table 27 based on available information. Where ‘no new cost’ is entered against a recommendation this is to indicate that any potential resource implication would be covered by what had been previously identified in an earlier recommendation or where there already exist people and money within, for example, a church council or committee, with a related resource budget. As is evident from this column the Church of Scotland may need to spend in excess of £100,000 per annum to enact the proposals. Over a ten-year period, this is a substantial spend but one I would consider a worthy investment.

A fourth column in Table 27 notes which recommendation(s) require effect, in my view, for the best implementation of the recommendation highlighted. A graphical representation of the dependency of recommendations is also presented in Table 28

The recommendations are offered to the Church of Scotland along with a short additional explanation of each with the desire, on my part, that a mechanism might be found, perhaps through the establishment of a review group, to consider the validity, the practical implications and the potential impact contained within this thesis and its recommendations. It would then be my hope that this group might then oversee the prioritisation and implementation of the tasks outlined.

Table of Recommendations

For the attention of Central Church Administration	Timeframe	Group Responsible	Resource Implications	Dependency	Page
Within 2 years					
Recommendation 1: To introduce a new organisational structure, with appropriate funding for dealing with statistical data.	Stage 1: Setup	Assembly Council	Statistics specialist plus admin support Possible Cost £80,000 per annum ²¹³	None	215
Recommendation 2: To ensure that a 'Statistics for Mission Group' is free and independent	Stage 1: Setup	Assembly Council	No new cost	R1	216
Recommendation 3: To adopt sound principles for data gathering	Stage 1: Setup	Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2	217
Recommendation 4: To review current data gathering practices	Stage 2: Review and Revise	Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3	217
Recommendation 5: To audit, review and renew data sets	Stage 2: Review and Revise	Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4	218
Recommendation 6: To review and revise the collection of data on children and young people involved in the life of congregations	Stage 2: Review and Revise	Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4	218
Recommendation 7: To review data transmission, storage and retrieval protocols	Stage 2: Review and Revise	Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4	220

²¹³ This estimate based on the current salary scale for Church of Scotland staff being employed at grade 5 and grade 6 together with the necessary additional costs to the organisation of pension contribution and National Insurance contribution.

<p>Recommendation 8: To standardise data - with clear guidelines on data gathering and reporting</p>	<p>Stage 2: Review and Revise</p>	<p>Statistics for Mission</p>	<p>Possible investment required in specialist computer software with licence costs around £20,000 per annum²¹⁴</p>	<p>R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7</p>	<p>221</p>
<p>Within 5 years</p>					
<p>Recommendation 9: To include an enhanced attendance census every five years.</p>	<p>Stage 3: Data expansion</p>	<p>Statistics for Mission</p>	<p>No new cost</p>	<p>R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8</p>	<p>222</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: To instruct ministers and congregations to comply with data gathering exercises</p>	<p>Stage 3: Ministerial Training /Engagement</p>	<p>Ministries Council</p>	<p>No new cost</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>223</p>
<p>Recommendation 11: To develop courses for ministers, in association with academic partners, on empirical dimensions within practical theology</p>	<p>Stage 3: Ministerial Training /Engagement</p>	<p>Ministries Council</p>	<p>Budget for academic course development Cost dependant of length of course and complexity of material Indicative possible costs £5000²¹⁵</p>	<p>R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8</p>	<p>223</p>

²¹⁴ This estimate may be higher or lower depending on commercial negotiation with companies able to provide the necessary software. This point was chosen from indications given on possible costs with one such company.

²¹⁵ This budget cost for course development is a broad estimate for a short course requiring 200 hours of work if the rate of £25 is applied. These figures would require further detailed examination.

Recommendation 12: To run training modules for ministers at regular intervals	Stage 3: Ministerial Training/Engagement	Ministries Council	Budget for training material production and delivery Indicative costs £7,000 ²¹⁶	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R11	225
Recommendation 13: To provide regular data briefing materials to aid planning and decision making	Stage 3: Data dissemination	Statistics for Mission	Possible costs dependant of method of delivery – if electronic then no additional costs added	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R11, R12	225
	Within 10 years				
Recommendation 14: To promote evidence-based research project(s)	Stage 3: Research and development	Statistics for Mission with all Councils	Research costs minimal if conducted in-house	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	225
Recommendation 15: To develop useful church performance indicators	Stage 3: Research and development	Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	226
Recommendation 16: To assess and monitor the level of ministerial workload	Stage 3: Research and development	Statistics for Mission with Ministries Council	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	227
Recommendation 17: To reconsider the nature and duration of ministerial tenure	Stage 3: Research and development	Ministries Council with theological commission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	228

²¹⁶ This figure assumes that the training material is produced by the staff of the ‘Statistics for Mission’ group and is presented as part of the Church of Scotland Ascend training programme. Final costings would require variables such as place of presentation, number of participants, length of course, whether residential or day to be identified. The figure given is for 50 participants at an Edinburgh conference location where the whole cost is being met by the Church of Scotland. Currently the Church of Scotland offsets the cost of courses by levying charges on participants.

Recommendation 18: To rethink the allocation of ministry without reference to parish population size	Stage 3: Research and development	Planning Group with Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	228
Recommendation 19: To reflect on alternative models of ministry to areas of social deprivation.	Stage 3: Research and development	Mission & Discipleship	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	229
Recommendation 20: To challenge negative attitudes	All Stages: Ethos and Culture	All Councils	No new cost	None	229
For the attention of Presbyteries					Page
Recommendation 21: To engage with professional statistical support	When support is available	Presbytery and Statistics for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	230
Recommendation 22: Presbytery to provide regular opportunities for eldership training towards an enhanced understanding of local church statistics and their use for church planning and goal setting	As soon as practicable	Presbytery and Statistics for Mission	The required budget for training elders will vary according to Presbytery and may already exist in many areas	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8	230
Recommendation 23: To set out clear goals and objectives directly related to the task of presbytery planning	As soon as practicable	Presbytery and Mission Council	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R22	230
Recommendation 24: To plan using appropriate forward planning statistical tools and techniques	As soon as practicable	Presbytery, Mission Council and Statistic for Mission	No new cost	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R22, R23	231

Relating to local congregations					Page
Recommendation 25: Church courts to fulfil their functions in actively revising and superintending church roll data	With immediate effect	Kirk Session and Presbytery LCR teams	No new cost	None	232
Recommendation 26: Kirk Sessions to collate a roll of 'adherent' and 'associate members'	With immediate effect	Kirk Session	No new cost	None	233
Recommendation 27: To expand and enhance the level of demographic information in church roll data	With immediate effect	Kirk Session	No new cost	None	233
Recommendation 28: To implement an annual month-long census of attendance of all congregations to compile a 'Worshipping Community' statistic	As soon as practicable	Kirk Session	No new cost	R25, R26, R27	234

Table 27: Table of Recommendation

Stage Name	Recommendation Number									
Setup	R 1	R 2	R 3							
Review and Revise				R 4	R 5					
					R 6					
					R 7					
						R 8				
Data Expansion							R 9			
Ministerial Training/ Engagement	R 10							R 11	R 12	
Data dissemination										R 13
Research and Development							R 14			
							R 15			
							R 16	R 17		
							R 18			
							R 19			
Ethos and Culture	R 20									
Presbytery								R 21		
								R 22	R 23	R 24
Congregations	R 25									
	R 26									
	R 27	R 28								

Table 28: Logical dependency progression of recommendations

Central Church Administration

Recommendation 1: To introduce a new organisational structure, with appropriate funding for dealing with statistical data.

The gathering of annual church statistics is presently a function of the Principle Clerk's Office. Committees and Councils currently make their own arrangements for gathering, analysing and presenting statistical information pertinent to the work under their consideration. The veracity and quality of statistical productions across the church is however unassessed. Given the limited availability of an appropriately trained statistician working in the Church of Scotland, it would be natural to be wary of the statistics produced.

I would, therefore, recommend that the Church of Scotland set up a new 'Statistics for Mission' group with sufficient personnel to provide a hub for numerical and statistical work servicing all such needs of the central Councils and Committees. In addition, the group would have the related task of providing training resources and courses for those who use statistics at regional or local level. Such a group would necessarily include individuals equipped with appropriate professional knowledge and understanding of what constitutes best data practice. Knowledge requirements would include techniques for data gathering, the choice and use of appropriate statistical tools and the appropriate presentation of statistically sound conclusions. Having adequately skilled people on staff would also, I believe, provide increased confidence and trust in the data provided to committees, presbyteries and ministers. This belief is borne out by the elevated level of trust expressed by ministers in the Church Statistics profile versus official governmental statistics as noted in the survey in chapter 6.

The cost implications of this recommendation would be dependent on the eventual range of activities to be undertaken but, initially, certainly during the first period involving the review and revision of datasets, as outlined in recommendations below, the group might simply comprise one suitably experienced full-time statistician assisted by another individual who could deal with database handling and more general clerical duties. In addition to the cost of employing these two full-time members of staff, a budget would be required for the necessary computer equipment and software licences as required.

Clearly, as activity moved beyond the initial stages of data review to data expansion, database development, data analysis and graphical presentation tasks, and beyond these to fulfilling remits related to training and support for Presbyteries and local congregations, additional funding may be required to enable this work. The main budget considerations here are largely dependent on whether additional paid staff or unpaid trained volunteers would be required.

Recommendation 2: To ensure that a ‘Statistics for Mission Group’ is free and independent
The present sub-divisions within the structures and organisation of the Church of Scotland provide an environment where in-house political power relationships can exist, with a resultant effect on the work of Councils and Committees (Gay, 2017a).

Scepticism concerning data in decision making has sometimes originated from examples, both in church and in the wider society, where select or distorted data has been utilised deliberately for political purposes and in support of partisan policies or decisions.

Considering these general concerns, it is important that the church appropriates and engages with any data with full integrity, transparency and with a genuine willingness to hear the truth and wisdom it might contain.

I have outlined in previous chapters how, at times, the Church of Scotland has effectively chosen to ignore or sidestep discussion around inconvenient data and uncomfortable trends. On occasion, it has processed and presented data in ways which will portray a positive image, while discarding or ignoring data that would do otherwise. To act in such a manner is not only to do damage to the totality of the situation encountered but also to harm both the reputation and the function of the Church of Scotland as a guardian of truth in its fullest sense.

It is, therefore, imperative that not only is data openly received and wisely reviewed, it must also be allowed full freedom to inform and help drive appropriate responses. To facilitate this may mean that a ‘Statistics for Mission Group’ will require to remain organisationally at ‘arm’s length’ from the established church Councils and be provided with its own budget allocation to facilitate the work it does.²¹⁷ Not only must it be free

²¹⁷ All groups and committees within the Church of Scotland require systems of appropriate oversight and accountability making total ‘freedom’ practically unobtainable. I suggest that a ‘Statistics for Mission Group’ might exist within the Central Services Committee of the church alongside the IT department. This places the group outside any one Council and is clearly a resource which supports and informs all.

from interference, it must also be seen to be free to provide the fullest range of objective data and informed analysis.

Recommendation 3: To adopt sound principles for data gathering

The work carried out by a ‘Statistics for Mission’ group ought to set explicitly within the framework of principles first proposed by the Church of England’s Statistics Review Group which were previously expressed within this useful summary statement.

Any data-gathering exercise should only be commissioned against a clearly defined objective and should always lead to the recommendation of specific action steps. Statistics are of the appropriate quality and produced to the highest professional standards.

All work is conducted with transparency.

All statistical exercises should be validated against the following criteria

- That the information has been appropriately collected;
- That appropriate sampling methods have been used;
- That appropriate methods of calculation have been used to derive any statistics from the raw data;
- That the inferences drawn are based on sound statistical techniques;
- That the presentation of the information minimizes the risk of misrepresentation;

That all the above work has been conducted in accordance with the best statistical practice (Church of England, 2000, p. 26f).

I would view such a framework as foundational and providing a core set of behaviours and standards designed to generate confidence in any data work undertaken. This summary of principles needs to become a standard against which all our data activity is measured. The question as to how far this is presently the case is important and so my four recommendations naturally follows.

Recommendation 4: To review current data gathering practice

It is recommended that a wholesale review of practice is undertaken to determine which data is presently gathered, and for what practical purposes, within the Church of Scotland. The church itself considers it good practice to gather information that is of practical use to an organisation.

The statistical process should not simply be about ‘collecting information for information’s sake’, it should be about collecting the right information, interpreting it wisely, and using it appropriately to further the mission of the Church (Church of England, 2000, p. 3).

At present, the range of statistical information regularly gathered from church employees, congregations and Presbyteries is wide-ranging, some of the information is actively and immediately analysed, reflected upon and reported. Some information appears to be used only occasionally and other pieces of gathered data are either not actively used by any group or committee or considered robust enough to use for planning or strategic purposes. Data providers, often local parish ministers, experience a sense of frustration when the effort expended in collecting data locally is not honoured by being used. The same can be said when identical or similar information is requested by different parts of the organisation. In light of this uneven pattern of data gathering and potential wastage of time and effort in collecting, collating and reporting some data items, it is important that the current situation, as it exists, is closely examined and that where possible, is streamlined.

Recommendation 5: To audit, review and renew data sets

Attitudes within the Church of Scotland certainly vary towards the role of statistical data but from the surveys carried out as part of this thesis, in chapters five and six, it is clear from participants that where the data is considered fresh, reliable and pertinent, then many of those tasked with ministry in the church are happy to have and to use it. However, we must take cognisance of the fact, also highlighted earlier, that where data is old or stale, as for example as in the Statistics for Mission CD or considered not to be ‘fit for purpose’, as perhaps with membership figures being used as a proxy for attendance, then confidence falls. It is, therefore, crucial that there are effective systems put in place which continually amend and update data as required.

There is, as previously highlighted, in addition to locally generated data and statistics, a wealth of available data both from governmental and private agencies, which can be utilised by the Church of Scotland to enhance local, regional and national understanding of trends and patterns.²¹⁸ It is proposed that as part of this general audit and review process information should be gathered on what data is available and how it could be best developed and presented for use within the Church of Scotland.

Recommendation 6: To review and revise the collection of data on children and young people involved in the life of the congregation.

In research conducted by the Church of England, it was highlighted that

²¹⁸ Mapping information by Datashine, church census information by Brierley, SIMD and Health Board information are a few of the many, diverse datasets, which can provide layers of information not collected by the Church of Scotland, but which might aid congregational, presbytery and national planning.

Growth is found where there is a high ratio of children to adults. Churches which offer programmes for children and teenagers are more likely to grow. Three quarters of churches that offer retreats, conferences or camps for youth report church growth (The Church commissioners for England, 2014, p. 10).

Knowing that this correlation exists in UK congregations, it is surely appropriate to collect a range of information related to the number of children and teenagers involved in the life of a congregation and the type of activities involved.

In 1995 the annual data on Sunday school and Bible class membership was not included within the report of Board of Practice and Procedure statistics. The report of that year from the Board of Parish Education is a detailed appraisal of the decline in numbers of children and young people in the church, within which is highlighted the inadequacy of the practice to that point of only counting Sunday School and Bible Class attendees when there were often more children and youth engaged with various aspects of a local churches work and witness.

The report argued that,

The Church has no idea how many children it has. Our only 'head count' is through Sunday Schools and other organisations. Many members, even good members, may have their children involved in worship and other activities yet they do not appear in our statistics.

It is not good enough to total the past fifteen years of annual baptisms and say this figure represents our total child complement. We know we lose lots of people for all kinds of reasons. We also know that we have not a few children around the Church who were never baptised.²¹⁹

Whilst there appears to be a disenchantment with the gathering of data centrally, the Board of Practice and Procedure does recommend that Kirk Sessions should keep records of children, but only in relation to communion. There is permission given that Kirk Sessions can record additional data on groups and categories of people as it wishes.

As instructed, the Board has considered the matter of roll-keeping. Recognising the need for flexibility and acknowledging that rolls serve both an administrative and a pastoral function, the Board recommends that only one roll be kept, but in such a way that names can be coded or annotated so as to identify members, adherents,

²¹⁹ 1995 Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Board of parish education 4.7.4.4.2

children attending communion, children not attending communion, persons on the supplementary roll and any other categories a Kirk Session may choose.²²⁰

At a later point, there is the introduction of a general question in the annual statistical return asking for the number of children aged 17 and under involved in the life of the congregation. This question is vague and gives no indication of the type of activities being attractive, to which age group and which gender. If the Church of Scotland is going to plan with reference to work among the youth, then surely robust and detailed data will be required.

It is, therefore, recommended that as part of the annual statistical return by congregations, data on the extent of direct engagement with children and young people, is collected. Such a return must include information on the type of group or activity along with a breakdown on the age groups and gender involved.

Recommendation 7: To review data transmission, storage and retrieval protocols

The current data collection processes use a combination of paper forms, telephone and email mechanisms. In an age where fast and ready internet access is at high levels across the UK,²²¹ it makes sense that congregational data is gathered electronically and stored within a central secure database. Moving to a direct electronic entry method of data input by ministers would lessen some of the current workload undertaken by individual presbyteries who at present engage with congregations for the information, input it to their computer system and then send it electronically to the central administration. This cumbersome method of collection should now be replaced by a more efficient and direct method.

The creation of a password protected central database of information relating to each individual congregation would be helpful not only to the central administration of the Church of Scotland but, if it was also made available to local congregations for reference, it would present them with a repository of useful strategic planning information. At

²²⁰ 1995 Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Board of Practice and Procedure p3

²²¹ The Scottish Government report that 82% of all Scottish adults use the internet (Scottish Household Survey, 2016). It would be expected that when that figure is adjusted to take into consideration those who cannot use the internet for example a proportion of elderly, infirm and disabled adults then the percentage representing the general population will be considerably higher. All Church of Scotland ministers have an email identity provided by the Church of Scotland IT department but how many don't have ready internet access is unknown but presumed to be small, if any.

present, a time intensive manual search is required through previous Kirk Session minute books and other records to find some, if not most, of the data transmitted to presbytery.

The Church of Scotland IT department may be able to design a bespoke information submission and retrieval database. However, given that stable and tested software is already available and in use by the Church of England via the provider, Z/Yen, that may be a logical starting point.²²² The cost of commissioning a similar system with the same company would be dependent on the functions required and is likely to be available at a reasonable cost.²²³ The availability of an electronic dataset has also been valued as a helpful source for academic research to identify and investigate church growth and the mechanisms leading towards growth (Archbishops' Council, 2017b).

One additional and more controversial idea which might be considered in this area is for the creation of centralised church membership database. Congregations at this time, keep membership information on paper files or on a computer spreadsheet or database. A centralised database, which can be accessed remotely, would allow for greater continuity of data, improved security and additional facility.²²⁴

Recommendation 8: To standardise data - with clear guidelines on data gathering and reporting

As part of the review proposed above, consideration ought to be given to the appropriate level of standardisation and continuity required within data sets. At present, there is wide variability in how data is collected by Presbyteries and how requests for information are understood by ministers and office-bearers. Differences in understanding or interpretation directly affect the quality and usefulness of the data eventually submitted.

The call for specific items of data from the central church to congregations is often frustrated, in part, by a lack of definitive specifications of the data required which leads to variability in local interpretation and submission. If data is going to be useful for purposes of national comparison and analysis, then every effort must be made to minimise this issue.

²²² The system has been in operation since 2011, initially with a limited number of dioceses and is now in use nationwide with the Church of England (Harris, 2017).

²²³ Costs are difficult to define without specific specifications but informal discussions with company place it in the '10's of thousands of pounds'. In terms of software licencing for a large organisation this is in line with the scale of cost normally expected.

²²⁴ These might include regular backups, ease of moving from one roll keeper to another when required and would also allow automatic transference to membership to another congregation when members move home. It would also greatly enhance the ability to provide members with publications and central communications (if email contact information was to be included).

Recommendation 9: To include an enhanced attendance census every five years.

In chapter six the clearly expressed will of the majority of Church of Scotland ministers was that data beyond the normal annual submission of congregational information should be collected.²²⁵ In the submissions received, there was a noted desire that this should include a wide range of congregational data including levels of participation in Sunday and weekday activities.

An extended attendance census taken over a four-week period would enumerate attendance at Sunday worship services, detailing the number of children and adults present, along with additional information on the number of church members present, the number of adherents, the number of associates of the church and the number of visitors.²²⁶ The data gathered would then be used to derive a Sunday Worshipping Community statistic. If the local church also has weekday worship events, then a similar process that collects weekday information would allow details of additional ‘Worshipping Communities’.

The true size of a ‘Worshipping Community’ includes those who are ‘members’, ‘adherents’ or ‘associates’ but who were only absent from worship due to illness or disability, in which case this information should also be recorded. This group is part of the church community, receiving the active care of the church. It represents an often unrecorded component of the pastoral workload of the local ministry team.

During the census period, any group directly associated with the local congregation should be recorded, together with an indication of the age group involved, using age bands, along with average attendance. Such groups might include Bible Studies, prayer meetings, Boys’ Brigade, Girls’ Brigade, Church Youth Clubs, Guild, Men’s Fellowship etc.

Groups which use the church premises either on a ‘let’ basis or free of charge, whether charity, community or commercial groups, should also be listed along with an estimate of average attendance (if possible) and the age group likely to be involved. This information will begin to build a rich picture of the church at work and the level of engagement at worship, in church activity and in community connection

²²⁵ 80% of those who responded to the census survey indicated that least every 10 years another census should be conducted.

²²⁶ Details of terminology can be seen in Appendix 12: Regulations on Keeping Church Statistics

If the cycle of information gathering coincided with the timing of the government's own population census, the next to be held in 2021 (National Records of Scotland, 2017c), this would allow population data and the derived parish data to be linked directly to congregational participation data so providing a rich stream of information reflecting the life of the local church. Although the national census is only carried out every 10 years, governments are conscious that the time period is too long in an ever changing social environment and so annual mid-term population estimates are also constructed (National records of Scotland, 2017a). Ten years between detailed information gathering would likewise be too long for Church planning purposes and so the proposal I make is for a five-year cycle of information gathering.

Recommendation 10: To instruct ministers and congregations to comply with data gathering exercises

It was noted in some of the survey responses that there is variability in the willingness of some ministers and local office-bearers to fully and diligently participate in data gathering exercises. Various reasons were forwarded for this, including giving the task a low priority within a busy schedule, scepticism in the value of the exercise and even hostility towards statistics for ministry and mission. Whilst variation in personal viewpoints is to be expected, none the less, noncompliance with a reasonable request for information might be interpreted to run contrary to the oath taken by ministers of the Church of Scotland at their ordination and/or induction prior to taking up an appointment.

Do you acknowledge the Presbyterian government of this Church to be agreeable to the Word of God; and do you promise to be subject in the Lord to this Presbytery and to the General Assembly of this Church, and to take your due part in the administration of its affairs? (Mission and Discipleship Council, 2013)

Central councils and committees of the Church of Scotland and Presbyteries, for their part, also need to provide clarity about what data is required of ministers and what items can be expected to be given voluntarily.

Recommendation 11: To develop courses for ministers, in association with academic partners, on empirical dimensions within practical theology

As highlighted in chapter three of this thesis, there is a general need for the church, not only to provide a practical and pragmatic narrative for the use of statistics but also to provide a confident theological underpinning and understanding for the use of statistics in ministry and mission. As part of this engagement, I would suggest a renewed emphasis on the empirical dimensions of practical theology. The ability of ministers to be able to work

with the type of pastoral cycle outlined by Osmer, as an aid towards a more holistic and renewed ecclesial praxis would, I believe, provide a powerful tool for ministry today.

It is insufficient simply to put powerful tools into the hands of leaders without also providing relevant training in both the uses and limitations of those tools. If these tools are to be utilised within an appropriate theological framework, to aid ministry and mission, then appropriate training should be incorporated within the syllabus required for Church of Scotland leaders.

It was clear from the responses given to the surveys conducted as part of this thesis, that a significant proportion of ministers do not understand the purpose or value of statistics, or how to make use of them in a parish church setting. The views expressed in the surveys indicated both theological and practical obstacles to affect change. A small number of ministers suggested that involvement in census type activities might violate God's will, as evidenced by David taking a census.

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1 New International Version, 1984).

Some ministers voiced a confidence in their own personal assessment of numbers both within the congregation and the local parish. Some have a general distrust of statistics as a valid method of measurement or assessment and others hint at their own technical inability to deal with statistical analysis and utilisation.

In addition to the theological and technical aspects relating to statistics, there is also an issue around both awareness and availability of useful datasets, which may helpfully enhance and deepen local demographic and community understanding.

All of this strongly indicates a multi-strand group of training needs ranging from issues around the legitimacy of statistics as a tool for ministry and of its implementation for church management, mission planning and strategic development. Given the global nature of this training necessary for ministers prior to taking up a position, it would seem reasonable that such training be gained as part of the Church of Scotland training syllabus during a candidate's time at university.

Recommendation 12: To run training modules for ministers at regular intervals

Both the range and type of data available, as well as the tools to process the data, have changed and will continue to change over time. It is, therefore, imperative that training courses be available at regular intervals to continue to develop the skills and knowledge of those charged with church leadership. This aspect of ongoing professional development could be delivered through the new Ministerial Development Review and Continuing Ministerial Development processes.

Recommendation 13: To provide regular data briefing materials to aid planning and decision making

Data provides evidence, gives insight and helps in the formulation of plans. In this sense, data is invaluable. It is recommended that data, with explanatory commentary, is published and distributed regularly by the ‘Statistics for Mission’ or similar group. Distribution should be prior to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, thus providing commissioners with a full and timely source of information on which debates can take place and decisions taken.

Secondly, further relevant data should be distributed to Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions, as might be required for local discussions and deliberations. For example, in 2017 the General Assembly was informed by the Convenor of the Council of Assembly that decline was a major concern. The response elicited was contained in the deliverance,

Issue a call to the Church of Scotland to pray that God will do a fresh work amongst us as God’s people and instruct Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to consider how best to respond to this call.²²⁷

The basis for this action emerged from various pieces of data including the Scottish Church Census, Church Membership Data and Church of Scotland Financial Data. Neither this data nor any helpful briefing material on which it was based was given to Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to inform and guide their instructed response.²²⁸

Recommendation 14: To promote evidence-based research project(s)

As a general principle of good and wise stewardship, the Church of Scotland should engage in more rigorous research into what works in helping churches to grow in Scotland.

²²⁷ General Assembly Remits Booklet 2017 p3

²²⁸ Sections of the data may be available to ministers and commissioners to the General Assembly within the Reports to the General Assembly book, supplementary reports and daily papers but no coherent briefing paper or document has been produced to contain all the necessary information.

The Church of England has given a lead in this area through its Church Growth research programme and it looks towards the fruits of such research guiding its management of resources and strategic decision making (Archbishops' Council, 2017a).

Research by the Church of Scotland, looking at patterns and models of church growth in Scotland, was discontinued previously by the Committee on Review and Reform. The new pilot scheme for congregational renewal has, however, engaged a university practitioner to evaluate its effectiveness and potential. Evidence based research is a persuasive mechanism to help guide the church in its decision making and, at its best, will engage the best of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Far too much of what is initiated by the Church of Scotland in the realm of mission, planning or strategic initiative is presently unexamined by the standards of modern research. In business and management, there is a requirement that evidence of success, or at least fruitfulness, is required for a course of action to be prolonged or for an allocation of funds to be continued. If the evidence does not realise the results or benefits anticipated, then there would be a change of direction to attempt another solution. This, of course, is the wise principle of good stewardship.

Recommendation 15: To develop useful church performance indicators

Whilst trend analysis and similar tools might point towards possible trajectories for a congregation, church performance indicators, gathered regularly, would allow presbyteries to be proactive in monitoring and adjusting presbytery plans. Although church attendance statistics need to be treated with caution, an annual attendance census with detailed demographic information on attendees would be particularly useful, not least in building a database of information which allows better analysis of trends and patterns. Information of this type, allied to other data, e.g. Sunday School and Bible Class numbers, weekday activity, levels of engagement with the local community and a range of others, would give excellent church health insight.

In addition to Church Performance Indicators, Mission Performance Indicators could be further developed in order to create some measure of how missionally active and effective congregations are beyond the normal Sunday or weekday activities, frequented by members, adherents or associates of the congregation.

The Local Church Review process, recently introduced, provides a helpful mechanism for ongoing congregational assessment and review and therefore a useful tool for dynamic and ongoing presbytery planning. This should be developed further. In its present form the process is non-directive, containing no set criteria against which to judge 'effectiveness' in the life and work of a church. This lack of objective markers or 'yardsticks' against which to gauge 'effectiveness', severely limits both the ability of local congregations to properly assess themselves and to prepare plans which are carefully calibrated to address their needs.

In the world of non-profit organisations outside the church, there are a number of ways in which the effectiveness of a hospital, school or other agency is measured. One such tool used by Education Scotland is called HGIOS (How good is our school?) (National Improvement Hub, 2016). This assessment process is one which engages a suite of quality indicators to be employed by education establishments as an aid to the delivery of its core purposes. Much of that scrutiny is undertaken locally within an honest self-assessment process, which can be examined and assessed for accuracy by those with oversight within local authorities.

As a major piece of additional research, I would suggest that this work is both essential, and, given the nature and extent of the decline of the Church of Scotland, also urgent.

Recommendation 16: To assess and monitor the level of ministerial workload

The planning process is closely related to the provision of ministry in each parish and yet there is little assessment of ministerial workload, potential workload or future workload. This is surely wholly inadequate in a planning process of this type.

The number of Sunday services, funerals, weddings and baptisms are currently values known or can be easily ascertained by presbytery. Through regular attendance censuses and computation of the size of the worshipping community, there would be metrics indicating the size of the congregation and some indication of the pastoral load on the ministry. Gathering information on weekday activities and chaplaincy, where the paid church employees play a role in leadership, would provide further strata of information. The emphasis would be on gathering information on 'core' activities relevant to ministry and not every piece of work undertaken, in order to provide some indication of workload.

This recommendation may not be welcomed by ministers who traditionally, have been able to minister without the requirement to account for the viability of their position. On a more positive note, active monitoring workloads of ministry could provide presbyteries with a dynamic indication of the need for additional ministries.

Recommendation 17: To reconsider the nature and duration of ministerial tenure

A major restriction in allowing presbytery plans to be dynamic and flexible relates to ministerial tenure. The permanent nature of many ministerial positions means that issues relating to performance and capacity, both for the minister and for the congregation involved, are not necessarily a high priority. The General Assembly has attempted to address this issue through the appointment of a special commission, but, to date, has found it difficult to resolve.²²⁹

While varying the arrangements for a minister ‘in situ’ with unrestricted tenure is difficult, the situation presented at a time of vacancy can allow presbyteries, in some circumstances, to designate a congregation as a ‘reviewable charge’ (The Church of Scotland, 2003). This designation may be appropriate where there is data indicating that changed circumstances may exist requiring some future modification of the congregation’s status or ministry. Such data may be derived from the aforementioned trend analysis or scenario planning.

Recommendation 18: To rethink the allocation of ministry without reference to parish population size

Population has been the main determinant of ministry allocation at the macro level. It might, therefore, appear logical to use the parish population figures as one of the major factors for presbytery planning. However, as was highlighted in Chapter 8: Appraisal of a Planning Process - Glasgow Presbytery, there was no correlation found between gross parish population size or the ‘Church of Scotland’ proportion of the parish population.²³⁰

It was also noted in Chapter 9: Case Study - Local Church Statistics, that the mobility of people in a town or urban locality means that church allegiance has little real meaning. While parish areas may have a use in terms of an area of responsibility (for services²³¹), it is limited in its connection to the required resources of a local congregation.

²²⁹ Reports to General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2014 23

²³⁰ Derived from the census responses on religious belonging

²³¹ ‘Services’ in the broad sense implied by the declaratory articles of the Church of Scotland which includes ‘distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland’ (The Church of Scotland, 2017b) .

Recommendation 19: To reflect on alternative models of ministry in areas of social deprivation.

Clearly, at both national and regional level, ministry to those who suffer the most severe consequences of deprivation, is viewed as important. At the same time, it appears, from the available data, that the church, as presently configured and ministry as it is traditionally offered, is unlikely, to create and sustain numerically strong communities of faith.²³²

The present system of diverting traditional, ministerial resources away from churches in areas without significant deprivation, often with larger congregations, to churches with smaller numbers based solely on social indicators of material poverty, does not appear to be logical or relate to sound principles of good stewardship. The 'two times multiplier' on population figures for ministerial provision in defined priority areas is an arbitrary number and unrelated to any known measure of effectiveness.

Those with the responsibility for presbytery planning, therefore, might consider a fresh approach to resourcing the church's work among the poor and disadvantaged by looking at alternative models of ministry rather than a simple diversion of scarce ministerial resources.

Recommendation 20: To challenge negative attitudes

We have noted at various points in the thesis the existence, amongst some ministers, of negative stereotypes and erroneous assumptions concerning the general reliability of statistics and of their worth for church strategic operations in mission, planning, management and a host of other related areas. In previous generations, it might have been argued that numerical data which was both reliable and inclusive was limited. However, we now live in a 'data rich' world. In our present context of 'big data', the challenge is often not availability but making wise choices around what data to process and utilise.

Negative attitudes often stem from limited knowledge and/or understanding concerning the role and function of quantitative data. They can also stem from bad experience or suspicion about how data has been or will be used. The church has a role nationally to

²³² According to the data produced by Glasgow Presbytery Planning group, Non-Priority Area parishes averaged attendances of 148 people (median = 133), Priority area parishes average attendance was 67 people (median = 52)

build a strong reputation as a trustworthy and transparent data user and provider, thereby creating a positive culture around the use of data.

Presbytery

Many of the more general recommendations above which are directed towards the central administration of the Church of Scotland are also pertinent to the work of presbytery. Statistical information used for presbytery planning or mission strategy should be relevant, robust and suitable for the task. I have added below a further group of recommendations which I believe to be particular to the role and function of presbyteries and which follow from consideration of the presbytery case study found in Chapter 8.

Recommendation 21: To engage with professional statistical support for presbytery planning.

In order that data analysis is both robust and consistent, presbytery planning should engage directly with the 'Statistics for Mission' group to assist in the creation of local plans. This may necessitate a sub-group of skilled individuals whose job will be peripatetic in nature. A system of mobile help is already a pattern adopted both by the Mission and Discipleship Council, who employ mission development staff and by the Board of Stewardship and Finance who have stewardship promoters assigned to groups of presbyteries.

Recommendation 22: Presbytery to provide regular opportunities for eldership training towards an enhanced understanding of local church statistics and their use for church planning and goal setting

In order to facilitate implementation of Recommendation 26 below, elders will require some basic tools and strategies to decode statistical information and to appropriate it for the purposes of local church planning. It is therefore proposed, that presbyteries arrange for the dissemination of relevant training materials and provide regular training opportunities, perhaps with the assistance of the 'Statistics for Mission' peripatetic personnel referenced in Recommendation 22.

Recommendation 23: To set out clear goals and objectives directly related to the task of presbytery planning

Presbytery planning is, at its most basic level, an exercise in resource management. Presbyteries, having been allocated a fixed number of full-time equivalent (FTE) posts are asked to decide, based on local information, where ministry might be required, at what level of allocation and what type(s) of ministry would likely be most effective.

There is a fundamental question to be answered by presbyteries concerning the purpose of the various ministries. In the case study, we noted an attempt to frame the answer in terms of ‘mission’, though there was little attempt to outline what ‘mission’ meant. Was the mission to support and encourage existing congregations who were strong in number? Was the mission to support and encourage existing congregations who were strong in financial resources? Was the ministry intended to demonstrate God’s ‘bias to the poor’? Was the mission to generally serve a local population and to respond to their spiritual needs? Was mission to be directed beyond the local church to make new disciples? The answer is likely to be different in different places, dependant on the local context. However, the answer arrived at, by averaging responses in a scoring exercise detailed in the case study, found in chapter 8, was all of these. presbytery planning, attempting to satisfy a diversity of goals which may or may not be relevant in each unique locality, is likely to be confused, more so, as observed, when a raft of divergent data is introduced to attempt an exercise in uniform ‘objectivity’.

Recommendation 24: To plan using appropriate forward planning statistical tools and techniques

The majority of the analysis carried out by Glasgow Presbytery gave consideration to historical data along with whichever current data could also be quickly and easily gathered. There was little evidence of detailed trend analysis or of actuarial type computations that could predict how congregations might progress or decline, given current conditions, in five, ten or more years. There was also no analysis of the likely impact related to the addition or removal of FTE posts.

In a situation where ‘mission’ and not ‘maintenance’ is being promoted as a central concern for presbytery planning, there requires to be some attempt at basic scenario planning or alternative future projections to aid in planning for the distribution of personnel.

Congregation

Congregations are unique, each with their own peculiar and special character and culture. The recommendations set out below build on the findings of the thesis, as a whole, to highlight a number of changes which would benefit all local congregations.

Recommendation 25: Church courts to fulfil their functions in actively revising and superintending church roll data

The task of leadership in a congregation is one given to the Kirk Session as a body. The Kirk Session is responsible for the gathering and submission of annual statistics to presbytery for onward transmission to the Church of Scotland central administration.

The church regulations for the keeping of records requires that church membership rolls be revised annually by the Kirk Session.

The Communion Roll and Supplementary Roll shall be submitted once a year to the Presbytery of the bounds for attestation, and Presbyteries are enjoined to see that each Kirk Session keeps a Communion Roll and Supplementary Roll in terms of this Act, and submits the same annually to the Presbytery (The Church of Scotland, 2000 subsection 14).²³³

A major issue raised within the General Assembly and other discussion forums is a frustration that church membership rolls are not being revised in accordance with the guidelines set down. Furthermore, it is also formally set out in the regulations, that one of the functions of presbytery is to superintend the regular revision of church rolls.

It is usual practice for a presbytery to check annually on the existence and format of church rolls, but questions regarding the veracity of the roll as a correct record are not often tested. The system, as it operates at present, means that there is little confidence in the communion roll information, the default position being that the roll misrepresents the strength of a local church. This situation does a dis-service to the importance of church roll information and the churches own understanding of both professions of faith and discipleship.

It is recommended that this annual submission should continue to be engrossed within the Kirk Session minutes. However, rather than simply being an item for noting the annual statistics, it should also become an active agenda item as part of the ongoing process for reflection, discussion and forward planning, including an annual revising of the goals associated with the congregation's local church review.

²³³ The full text of the regulations concerning the administration of the Communion Roll of a congregation can be found in Appendix 12: Regulations on Keeping Church Statistics.

Recommendation 26: Kirk Sessions to collate a roll of ‘adherent’ and ‘associate members’
The gathering of basic membership information has a long history in the Church of Scotland and therefore is useful in providing a baseline figure and an indication of trends. It is however insufficient, since it provides only a partial picture of the size of the worshipping community, even when it is correctly revised. To build a fuller and richer depiction, indicating the true dimensions of a local congregation, it is recommended that information is collected on a number of additional categories of participants. Firstly, the group known as ‘adherents’, that is, those who are regular in attendance but whose details are not contained within the roll of church members, given the regular attendance of this group it is not a practical challenge to collect and collate their information.

A second group might be termed ‘associates’; that is those who, not being members, still participate in the congregation perhaps at special events and services, or regularly at midweek events and activities where worship is a feature.

Another group of people whose presence can distort local congregational statistics are ‘visitors’. Visitors will come to special occasions such as a baptism, wedding, funeral, school or other service. Visitors may include those involved with other congregations as their base community, those who have travelled from outside the district and those who do not intend to make a return visit (except for another special event).

Recommendation 27: To expand and enhance the level of demographic information in church roll data

Kirk Sessions are required by church law to keep a number of formal records, including a roll of all communicant members, along with a supplementary roll of people who have been removed from the main roll of members. The information contained in these papers varies in detail from congregation to congregation but often contains only very basic information, such as the name, address, the date and means of joining the congregation (The Church of Scotland, 2000). It is recommended that for the purpose of compiling a demographic profile of the congregations, both date of birth and gender are added to the information held.

Church membership data is, by its nature, sensitive information and congregations would be required to gather and keep such information in accordance with best practice as outlined by the Data Protection Act and guidance issued by the Church of Scotland legal department.

Recommendation 28: To implement an annual month-long census of attendance of all congregations to compile a ‘Worshipping Community’ statistic

As a concept, ‘the worshipping community’ gives a helpful understanding of the true scale of involvement in worship and so an excellent piece of information for the allocation of ministry resources. Appendix 10, Worshipping Community Guidelines issued by the Church of England Statistics Unit provides information on the process they have adopted. In Chapter nine, I have also included a worked example of how the ‘worshipping community’ can be calculated.

My recommendation is to designate one month each year for the purpose of gathering data on all who attend both Sunday and other worship services. I recommend that the information of who is in attendance is gathered unobtrusively by means of a prepared register of people, comprising registered members, adherents and associates, which is completed by a few designated church elders²³⁴. Visitors, and any who are found not to be on the prepared list, can be noted on a blank sheet.

I have chosen a scheme similar to Benson and Roberts (2002) but shorter in duration both to match the practice of month long census of attendance conducted by the Church of England and to avoid an overly burdensome collection period, as would be the case with eight weeks or more.

²³⁴ In the exercise carried out in the Chapter 8 case study only one individual was required each week to complete the paperwork, larger congregations may require 2 or more.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Online Survey 2013 - Forms



Use of Statistics in Ministry Survey

Consent Approval (as required by University of Glasgow Ethics committee)

17%

To take part in this research survey please please answer the question at the bottom of the page indicating your acceptance of the following statement and associated information:

I acknowledge that this data is being collected as part of a research study conducted by Rev Allan Vint looking at how Census and other quantitative data is being utilised by Church of Scotland congregations. The research is part of a PhD project under the supervision of the department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Glasgow. It is hoped that the information provided will help build a clearer understanding of both the potential and limitations of quantitative information for church development.

I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Should additional information be required then please contact the researcher Rev Allan S Vint via email at a.vint.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Alternatively contact can be made with the research supervisor Rev Dr Doug Gay via email doug.gay@glasgow.ac.uk or via mail at Theology and Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, 4 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QQ

*** 1. Do you wish to proceed with the survey?**

Yes
 No

Next

About You

33%

2. What is your gender?

Female
 Male

3. Which category below includes your age?

21-29
 30-39
 40-49
 50-59
 60-69
 70 or older

4. How many years have you been ordained

Less than 5
 5-14
 15-29
 30+

5. which one of these terms or which combination of them, would describe your congregation.

High Church

Liberal

Radical

Reformed

Low Church

Broad

Charismatic

Evangelical

Other (please specify)

Prev
Next

Sources of Information

50%

6. Please indicate YOUR USAGE of the following information sources to inform ministry and/or mission

	None	Rarely	Occasionally	Regularly
Church Year Book for contact information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Church Year Book for statistical information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blue Book for general information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Blue Book for statistical information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (sns.gov.uk)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scottish index of multiple deprivation (simd.org)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local council website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scotland's Census Results Online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Statistics for Mission Data CD	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Statistics reported in Local/ National Newspapers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Statistics reported in Magazines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Statistics reported on Television/ Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

7. What VALUE do you place on the following information sources (1=Lowest Value, 5=Highest Value)

	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
Church Year Book for contact information	<input type="radio"/>					
Church Year Book for statistical information	<input type="radio"/>					
Blue Book for general information	<input type="radio"/>					
Blue Book for statistical information	<input type="radio"/>					
Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (sns.gov.uk)	<input type="radio"/>					
Scottish index of multiple deprivation (simd.org)	<input type="radio"/>					
Local council website	<input type="radio"/>					
Scotland's Census Results Online	<input type="radio"/>					
Statistics for Mission Data CD	<input type="radio"/>					
Statistics reported in Local/ National Newspapers	<input type="radio"/>					
Statistics reported in Magazines	<input type="radio"/>					
Statistics reported on Television/ Radio	<input type="radio"/>					

Prev Next

Appendix 2: Statistical Test Results

Gender v Churchmanship (Theology)

Crosstab								
			Churchmanship (Theology)					Total
			Broad	Evangelical	Liberal	Low church	Reformed	
What is your gender?	Male	Count	78	83	41	2	18	222
		Expected Count	87.8	63.1	40.6	2.9	27.6	222.0
	Female	Count	43	4	15	2	20	84
		Expected Count	33.2	23.9	15.4	1.1	10.4	84.0
	Total	Count	121	87	56	4	38	306
		Expected Count	121.0	87.0	56.0	4.0	38.0	306.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	39.920 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	46.542	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.954	1	.047
N of Valid Cases	306		

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.10.

Gender v Attendance at Youth Organisations/ Groups

Crosstab								
			At a practical level do you keep a record of: Attendance at youth organisations/ groups					Total
			Always	Usually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	
What is your gender?	Male	Count	22	86	39	18	42	207
		Expected Count	31.3	80.2	35.0	21.9	38.6	207.0
	Female	Count	21	24	9	12	11	77
		Expected Count	11.7	29.8	13.0	8.1	14.4	77.0
	Total	Count	43	110	48	30	53	284
		Expected Count	43.0	110.0	48.0	30.0	53.0	284.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.134 ^a	4	.002
Likelihood Ratio	16.086	4	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.441	1	.118
N of Valid Cases	284		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.13.

Gender v Attendance at Adult Organisations/ Groups

		Crosstab						Total
		At a practical level do you keep a record of: Attendance at adult organisations/ groups						
		Always	Usually	Occasionally	Seldom	Never		
What is your gender	Male	Count	13	64	58	28	47	210
		Expected Count	19.6	59.4	56.5	31.9	42.7	210.0
	Female	Count	14	18	20	16	12	80
		Expected Count	7.4	22.6	21.5	12.1	16.3	80.0
Total		Count	27	82	78	44	59	290
		Expected Count	27.0	82.0	78.0	44.0	59.0	290.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.658 ^a	4	.013
Likelihood Ratio	11.831	4	.019
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.851	1	.174
N of Valid Cases	290		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.45.

Importance of Statistics v ALL questions

As might be expected those who are positively disposed towards the use of statistics also tend to be more active in their use

	How IMPORTANT are statistics for local church planning processes?			
	Pearson Chi-Square			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Result at $p <= 0.05$
What is your gender	4.607	4	.330	Not Significant
Which category below includes your age	16.752	20	.669	Not Significant
Theology numeric	21.702	16	.153	Not significant
Church Year Book for contact information usage	20.242	12	.063	Not Significant
Church Year Book for statistical information	21.684	12	.041	Significant
Blue Book for general information	15.084	12	.237	Not Significant
Blue Book for statistical information	23.985	12	.020	Significant
Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics	36.624	12	.000	Significant
Scottish index of multiple deprivation	20.270	12	.062	Not Significant
Local council website	27.118	12	.007	Significant
Scotland's Census Results Online	41.266	12	.000	Significant
Statistics for Mission Data CD	38.367	12	.000	Significant
Statistics reported in Local/ National Newspapers	42.421	12	.000	Significant
Statistics reported in Magazines	28.995	12	.004	Significant
Statistics reported on Television/ Radio	36.372	12	.000	Significant
Church Year Book for contact information value	26.737	16	.044	Significant
Church Year Book for statistical information	25.377	16	.063	Not Significant
Blue Book for general information	32.146	16	.010	Significant
Blue Book for statistical information	33.791	16	.006	Significant
Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics	27.498	16	.036	Significant
Scottish index of multiple deprivation	26.545	16	.047	Significant
Local council website	19.654	16	.236	Not Significant
Scotland's Census Results Online	33.950	16	.006	Significant
Statistics for Mission Data CD	21.255	16	.169	
Statistics reported in Local/ National Newspapers	33.453	16	.006	Significant
Statistics reported in Magazines	40.935	16	.001	Significant
Statistics reported on Television/ Radio	32.708	16	.008	Significant

Church attendance outwith communion recorded	32.342	16	.009	Significant
Communion attendance	33.725	16	.006	Significant
Attendance at youth organisations/groups	15.936	16	.457	Not Significant
Attendance at adult organisations/groups	27.541	16	.036	Significant
Numbers attending special events	41.978	16	.000	Significant
SMART goals	30.874	16	.014	Significant

Appendix 3: Notes on Data Sources Referenced in Survey 1

Church Year Book: The Church of Scotland Yearbook is an annual publication of Saint Andrew's Press, the official publishing house of the Church of Scotland. The volume contains a range of information considered to be useful for Church of Scotland ministers and others. The volume gives the majority of its pages to a simple contact directory of Church of Scotland congregations and ministers. Contact information is also provided for the standing committees and Councils of the Church of Scotland with information on officials, as well as information relating to agencies and groups affiliated or linked to the work of the Church of Scotland. There is a range of helpful resource information concerning charitable trusts, church law and procedures - such as those relating to church vacancies. Towards the end of the book, there is a set of condensed annual church statistics which gives details of church membership; the number of church elders; the number of Guild members; church income; mission and ministry payments and the number of children under the age of 18 associated with the congregation.

Blue Book: The official Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland are often referred to as the 'Blue Book' due to the colour chosen for it. This two-volume publication is a compilation of material for information and discussion at the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Volume 1 provides the main printed reports made available prior to the General Assembly whilst volume 2 is a digest of supplementary reports, including annual statistical tables. Statistical information would include details of changes in membership numbers; office bearer statistics as well as the numbers of baptisms, weddings and funerals recorded. The publication includes a digest of the deliverances passed by the General Assembly of that year and any relevant legislative materials.

Local council website:

Scottish Local Government consists of 32 elected councils which provide services to the people of Scotland - services such as education, social care, waste management, cultural services and planning (Scottish Government, 2017a)

Most council websites contain a range of factual information and statistical data relating directly to the local area. Examples might include current and projected population figures for towns and villages, age profiles, health measures, housing information etc.

Scotland's Census Results Online: The General Register Office for Scotland published online details of the 2001 census, allowing for local, regional and national information to be examined and downloaded. The relevant website has now been updated with information relating to the 2011 census at <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/>

Statistics reported on Television/ Radio/ Local/ National newspapers: Media outlets report on statistics of public interest and also collect or commission information likely to be of interest to the readers or viewers of the particular publication.

Scottish Index of multiple deprivation (SIMD) (Scottish Government, 2017b). Originally this was a unique website which has become part of an integrated matrix of information provided by the Scottish Government alongside other Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (see below). SIMD gives information on relative poverty levels at data zone level – Scotland being divided up into 6505 data zones of similar size. The index itself for 2012

combines 38 indicators across 7 domains, namely: income, employment, health, education, skills and training, housing, geographic access and crime (Government, 2017).

Statistics reported in magazines: Many magazines are produced for a specialist readership or for purely entertainment purposes. This printed media item has, for the purpose of this survey, been differentiated from the other media channels.

Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (www.sns.gov.uk).

This site provides access to a wide range of information and statistics on health, education, poverty, unemployment, housing, population, crime and social/community issues in Scotland. The data was available at a range of different geographic levels (Scottish Government, 2013)

The original website has now been replaced by <http://statistics.gov.scot/>.

Statistics for Mission Data CD: This data source was produced by the Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council as a digest of statistical data from the Scottish Census of 2001. The data is presented for each parish which was identified by mapping postcode level data.

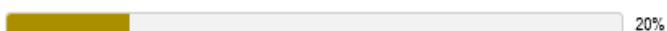
Appendix 4: Online Survey 2015



University of Glasgow

Statistics in Ministry Survey 2015

Consent Approval (as required by University of Glasgow Ethics committee)



To take part in this research survey please please answer the question at the bottom of the page indicating your acceptance of the following statement and associated information:

I acknowledge that this data is being collected as part of a research study conducted by Rev Allan Vint looking at how Census and other quantitative data is being utilised by Church of Scotland congregations. The research is part of a PhD project under the supervision of the department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Glasgow. It is hoped that the information provided will help build a clearer understanding of both the potential and limitations of quantitative information for church development.

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- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Should additional information be required then please contact the researcher Rev Allan S Vint via email at a.vint.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Alternatively contact can be made with the research supervisor Rev Dr Doug Gay via email doug.gay@glasgow.ac.uk or via mail at Theology and Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, 4 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QQ

* 1. Do you wish to proceed with the survey? 

- Yes No

Next

About You

2. Please indicate your role in the local church 

- Minister
- Elder
- Interim Moderator
- CLM
- Deacon
- MDS
- Other (please specify)

Census Profile Example Page 3. The Church of Scotland 'Statistics for Mission' group produced a statistical profile for each parish based on the 2011 national census data. Please indicate whether you.....(choose all applicable responses) 

- know about this project
- have accessed, downloaded or viewed the data for your parish
- have used the data in your own planning
- have used the data with your congregation or Kirk session
- have used the data in a presbytery context
- found the data to be helpful
- found the data presented to be unhelpful
- were unaware of the available statistical information

Parish Data Profiles



4. Using a rating of 1 to 5 please indicate how useful you found the various sections of the statistical parish profile (1=Low, 5=High) 

	1	2	3	4	5
Parish Boundary Map	<input type="radio"/>				
Summary information (<i>if your parish were village of 100 people...</i>)	<input type="radio"/>				
Population breakdown by age group	<input type="radio"/>				
Religious affiliation	<input type="radio"/>				
Ethnicity and language use	<input type="radio"/>				
Highest educational qualifications	<input type="radio"/>				
General Health information	<input type="radio"/>				
Provision of unpaid care	<input type="radio"/>				
Household tenure	<input type="radio"/>				
Household composition	<input type="radio"/>				
Economic activity	<input type="radio"/>				
Hours worked and occupation profiles	<input type="radio"/>				
Further activity and information section	<input type="radio"/>				

5. In what ways have you made use of the information presented in the parish profile? 

Feedback



6. Is there any other information collected in the 2011 census which you would have like to have included within the parish profile datasheet? (*Topics included were Education, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing, Labour Market, Population and Transport*) 

7. Is there any other statistical information from non-census sources which would be helpfully included within a parish profile datasheet? (*eg Health measures, deprivation indicators, annual population estimates*) 

8. Do you have any additional comments or reflections on the use of statistical information for ministry and/or mission purposes? 

Appendix 5: Parish Statistics – Kilsyth Anderson Parish



Church of Scotland Statistics for Mission Group

1 of 12

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If KILSYTH ANDERSON were a village of 100 people...

- > 8 would be in primary school; 5 would be in high school
- > 25 would be aged between 25 and 44
- > 20 would be aged 65 or over
- > 73 would be of working age (16-74), including
 - 27 who have no qualifications; 14 who have a University degree
 - 28 who work full time; 14 who are retired
- > 95 would describe themselves as 'White - Scottish'
- > 8 would describe their health as bad or very bad
- > 10 would be providing unpaid care
- > 33 would say they belonged to the Church of Scotland

If KILSYTH ANDERSON were a village of 100 households...

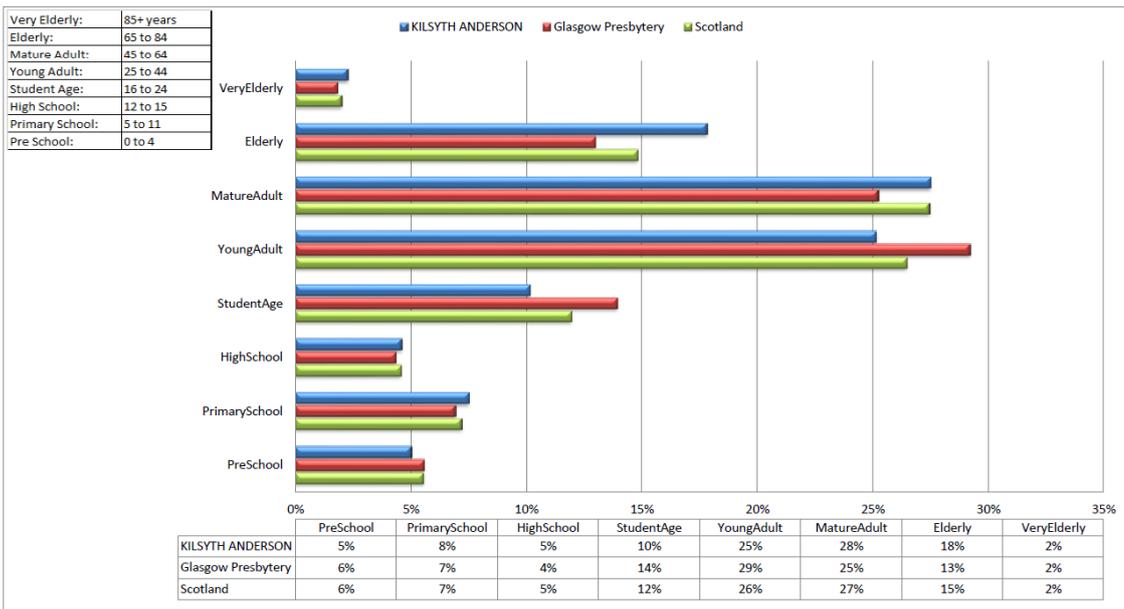
- > 36 households would consist of one person, 17 of whom are aged 65 and over
- > 25 would have dependent children (aged under 16, or under 18 in full-time education)
- > 35 would be in rented accommodation
- > 68 would have access to at least one car or van
- > 2 would speak a language other than English in the home

Church of Scotland Statistics for Mission Group

2 of 12

(C) Crown copyright. Data supplied by National Records of Scotland

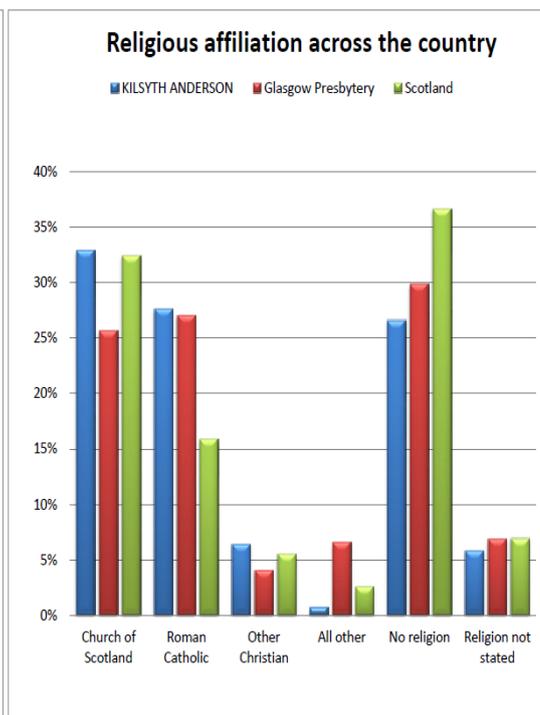
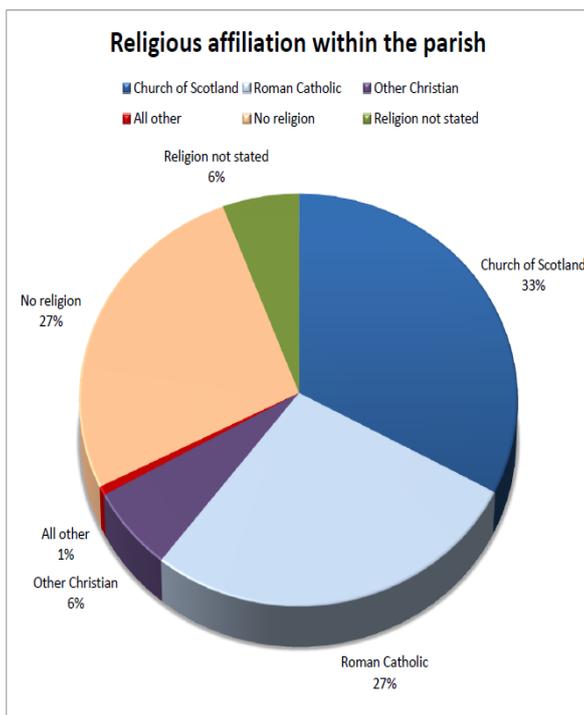
Population Breakdown by Age-group



Name	PreSchool	PrimarySchool	HighSchool	StudentAge	YoungAdult	MatureAdult	Elderly	VeryElderly	Total
KILSYTH ANDERSON	238	356	218	481	1,192	1,304	845	107	4,741
Glasgow Presbytery	45,430	56,502	35,472	113,753	238,449	205,974	105,925	14,800	816,305
Scotland	292,821	381,453	242,057	632,488	1,402,081	1,454,169	784,431	105,903	5,295,403

Census Table:KS1025C

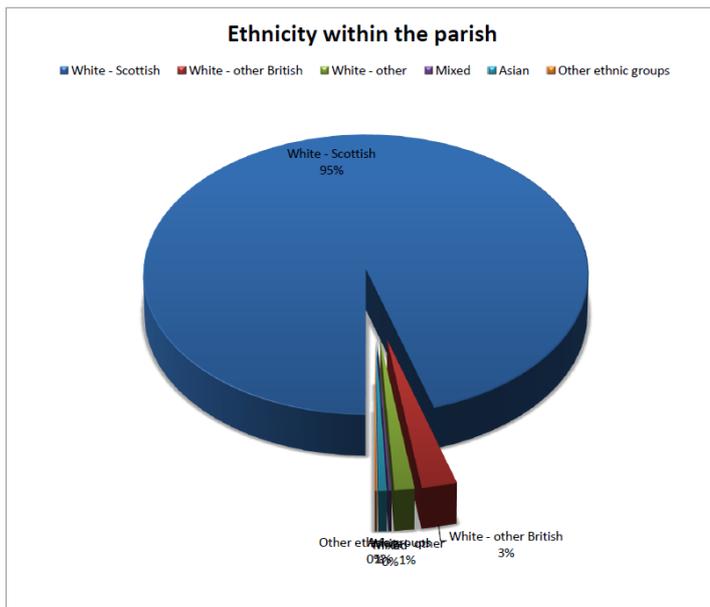
Population Breakdown by Religion



Name	Church of Scotland	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	All Other	No religion	Not Stated	Total
KILSYTH ANDERSON	1,559	1,308	304	33	1,261	276	4,741
Glasgow Presbytery	209,251	220,453	32,959	53,832	243,703	56,107	816,305
Scotland	1,717,871	841,053	291,275	136,049	1,941,116	368,039	5,295,403

Census Table:KS2095Cb

Population Breakdown by Ethnicity/Language

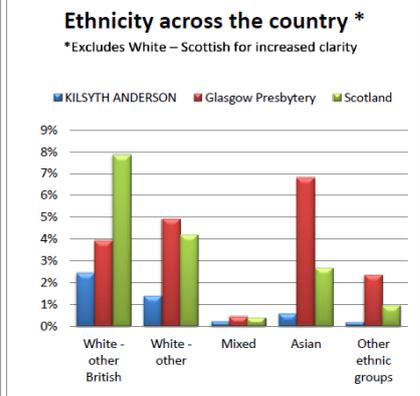


Language Use

99% of people over 3 in the parish speak English well (98% Presbytery; 99% Scotland)

0.3% can speak Gaelic (0.9%; 1.1%)

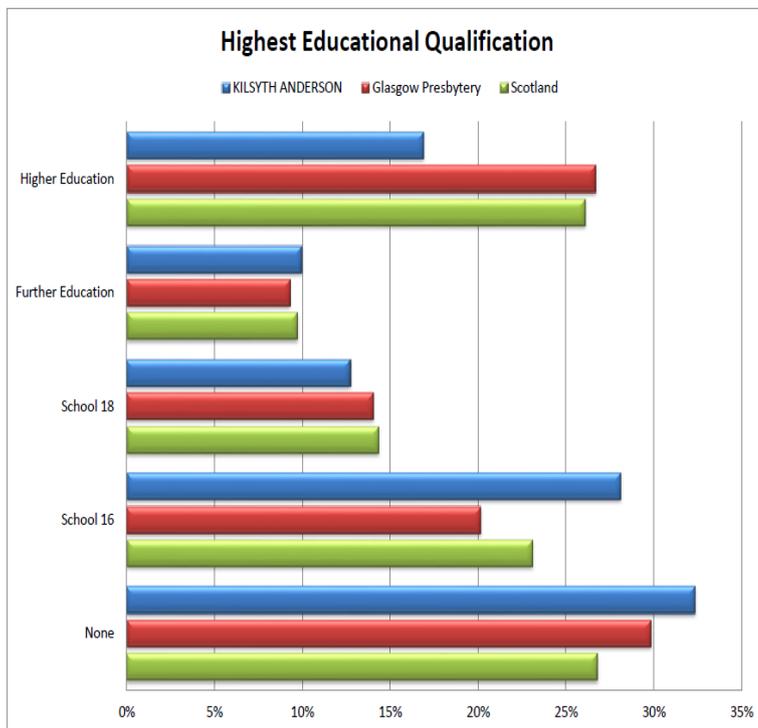
2% of households use a language other than English in the home (11%; 7%)



Name	White - Scottish	White - other British	White - other	Mixed	Asian	Other ethnic groups	All people
KILSYTH ANDERSON	4,514	116	66	10	27	8	4,741
Glasgow Presbytery	665,550	32,110	40,161	3,646	55,753	19,085	816,305
Scotland	4,445,678	417,109	221,620	19,815	140,678	50,503	5,295,403

Census Tables:KS2015C/KS2065C

Population Breakdown by Qualifications



Population in Full time Education 16 and over

6% of people aged 16 and over in this parish are in full time education (11% Presbytery; 8% Scotland)

Definitions

Higher Education includes Degree, Postgraduate qualifications, SVQ Level 5, Professional Qualifications or equivalent

Further Education includes HNC, HND, SVQ Level 4 or equivalent

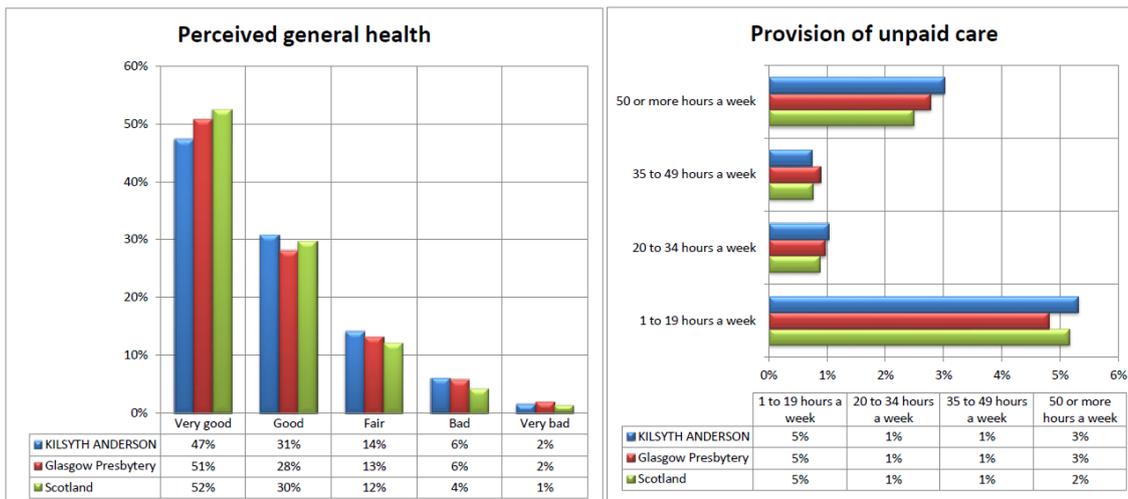
School 18 includes SCE Higher Grade, Higher, Advanced Higher, CSYS, A Level, AS Level, SVQ Level 3 or equivalent

School 16 includes O Grade, Standard Grade, Intermediate 1 or 2, GCSE, CSE, SVQ Level 1 or 2, or equivalent

Name	None	School 16	School 18	Further Education	Higher Education	All people over 16	Full Time Education 16+
KILSYTH ANDERSON	1,271	1,104	500	391	663	3,929	219
Glasgow Presbytery	202,579	136,792	95,322	63,036	181,172	678,901	76,506
Scotland	1,173,116	1,010,875	627,423	424,996	1,142,662	4,379,072	360,893

Census Table:KS5015C

Population Breakdown by Health and Care Provision

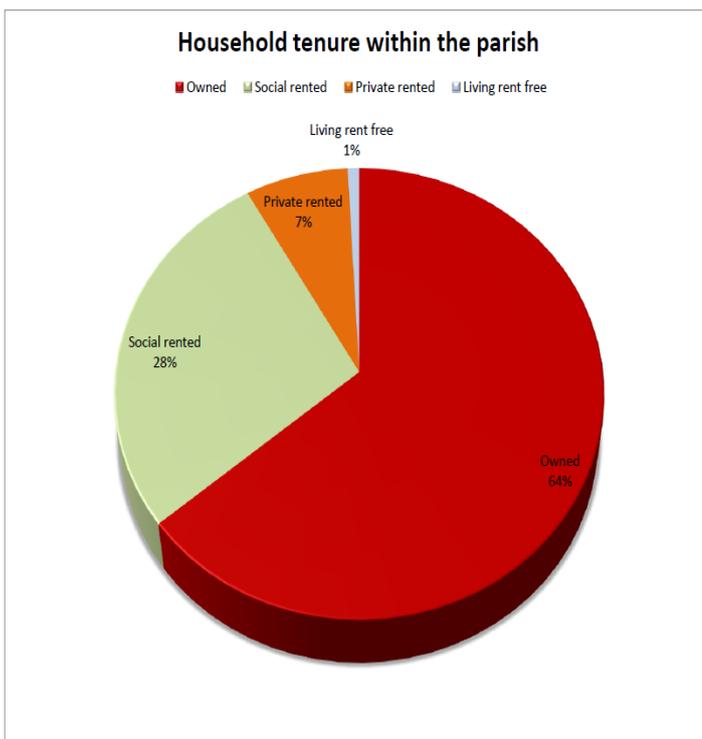


13% of people in KILSYTH ANDERSON said that their day to day activities were limited a lot (12% Presbytery; 10% Scotland) and 10% said that their day to day activities were limited a little (10% Presbytery; 10% Scotland) by their health.

Name	General Health					Providing Unpaid Care, hours per week				
	Very good	Good	Fair	Bad	Very bad	None	1-19 hrs	20-34 hrs	35-49 hrs	50+ hrs
KILSYTH ANDERSON	2,248	1,458	673	287	75	4,262	252	49	35	143
Glasgow Presbytery	415,063	229,634	107,901	47,497	16,210	739,078	39,326	7,963	7,228	22,710
Scotland	2,778,481	1,575,000	644,881	226,154	70,887	4,803,172	273,333	46,315	40,501	132,082

Census Table:KS3015Cb

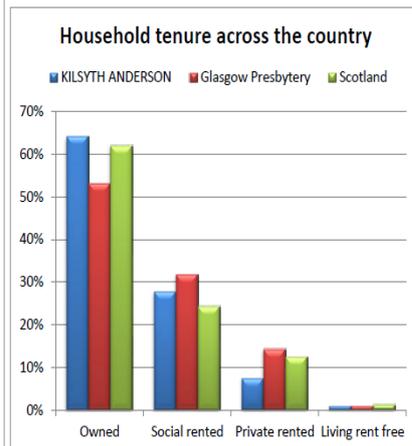
Household Breakdown by Household Tenure



Household Occupation
 97% of the household spaces are occupied (97% Presbytery; 96% Scotland)
 0.0% are second or holiday homes (0.2%; 1.5%)
 2.6% are vacant homes (2.4%; 2.6%)

25 people in the parish live in 2 communal establishment(s)

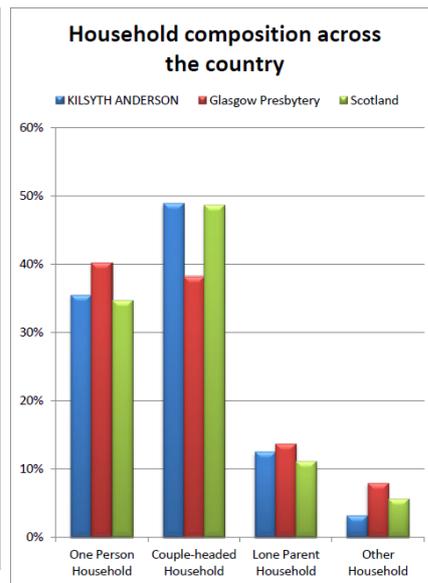
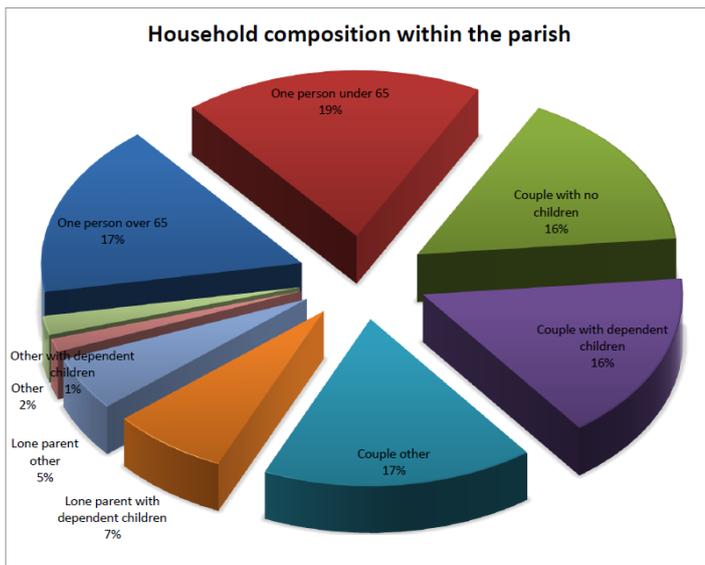
Access to a Vehicle
 68% of occupied households have access to at least one car or van (56%; 69%)



Name	Owned	Social rented	Private rented	Rent Free	Occupied Hholds	Car/Van Access	Holiday Homes	Vacant Hholds	All Hholds
KILSYTH ANDERSON	1,383	598	161	18	2,160	1,459	1	57	2,218
Glasgow Presbytery	202,102	120,656	54,145	3,422	380,325	212,193	696	9,248	390,269
Scotland	1,470,986	576,419	294,892	30,480	2,372,777	1,648,633	36,642	64,462	2,473,881

Census Table:QS405SC/KS401SC/KS405SC

Household composition

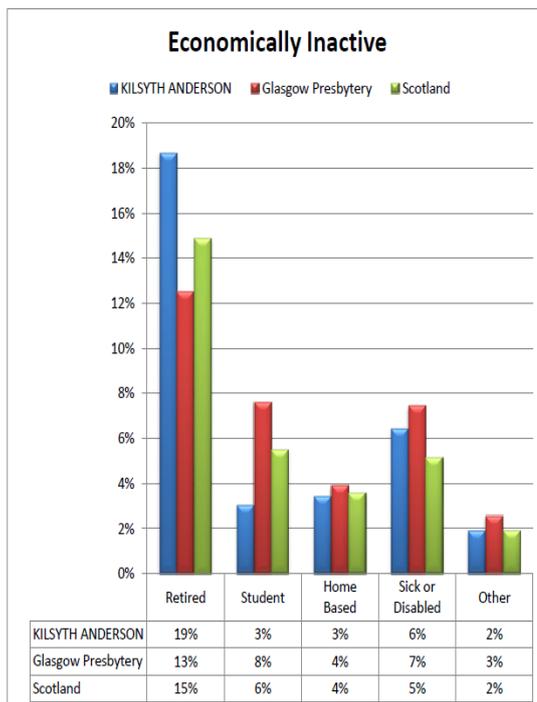
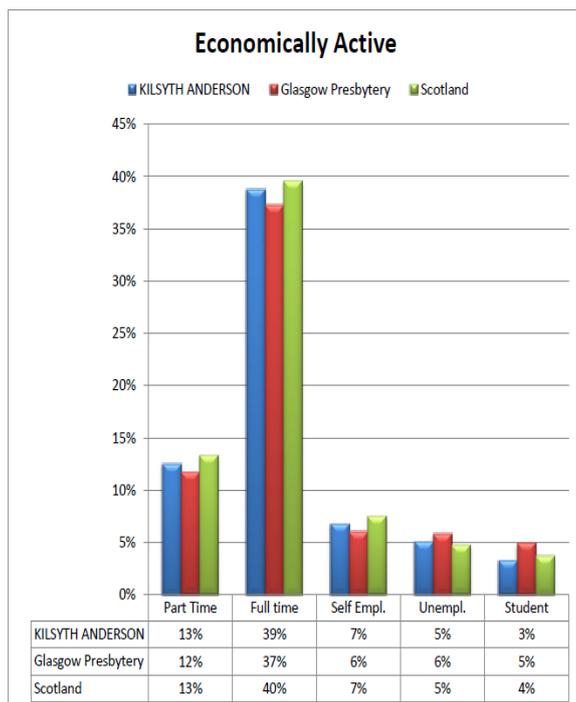


For definitions of household type see www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/en/censusresults/variables.html

Name	One Person Household		Couple-headed Hhold		Lone Parent Household		Other Household		All Hholds
	under 65	65 and over	dep't child'n	other	dep't child'n	other	dep't child'n	other	
KILSYTH ANDERSON	402	365	352	704	156	113	28	40	2,160
Glasgow Presbytery	103,438	49,425	53,145	52,109	33,272	18,837	7,472	22,536	380,325
Scotland	511,447	311,867	409,533	263,360	170,002	93,358	36,954	94,501	2,372,777

Census Table:KS1055C

Economic activity of those of working age (1)



Name	Economically Active (parish: 2317, 67%)					Economically Inactive (parish: 1165, 33%)					Aged 16 to 74
	Part Time	Full time	Self Empl.	Unempl.	Student	Retired	Student	Home Based	Sick or Disabled	Other	
KILSYTH ANDERSON	437	1,351	237	178	114	650	106	119	224	66	3,482
Glasgow Presbytery	72,922	231,832	37,737	36,457	30,721	77,855	47,251	24,257	46,260	16,002	621,294
Scotland	529,816	1,573,416	297,693	189,414	148,560	591,667	218,412	141,542	203,975	76,035	3,970,530

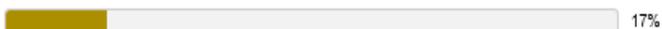
Census Table: KS6015C

Appendix 6: Online Survey 2017 – Church Census

University
of Glasgow

Scottish Church Census Survey

Consent Approval (as required by University of Glasgow Ethics committee)



To take part in this research survey please please answer the question at the bottom of the page indicating your acceptance of the following statement and associated information:

I acknowledge that this data is being collected as part of a research study conducted by Rev Allan Vint looking at how Census and other quantitative data is being utilised by Church of Scotland congregations. The research is part of a PhD project under the supervision of the department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Glasgow. It is hoped that the information provided will help build a clearer understanding of both the potential and limitations of quantitative information for church development.

I give my consent to the use of data for this purpose on the understanding that:

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Should additional information be required then please contact the researcher Rev Allan S Vint via email at a.vint.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Alternatively contact can be made with the research supervisor Rev Dr Doug Gay via email doug.gay@glasgow.ac.uk or via mail at Theology and Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, 4 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QQ

* 1. Do you wish to proceed with the survey? 

- Yes No

* 2. Are you a moderator of a kirk session? 

- Yes
 No

Next



University
of Glasgow

Scottish Church Census Survey

Consent Approval (as required by University of Glasgow Ethics committee)



To take part in this research survey please answer the question at the bottom of the page indicating your acceptance of the following statement and associated information:

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Alternatively contact can be made with the research supervisor Rev Dr Doug Gay via email doug.gay@glasgow.ac.uk or via mail at Theology and Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, 4 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QQ

* 1. Do you wish to proceed with the survey? 

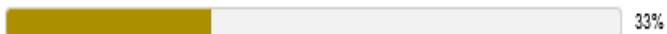
- Yes No

* 2. Are you a moderator of a kirk session? 

- Yes
 No

Next

Census Awareness



3. During 2016 all congregations were sent information about the Scottish Church Census, did you...? 

- RECEIVE the information
- DISCUSS the census arrangements with the Kirk Session(s)
- Decide NOT TO PARTICIPATE In the Census
- TAKE PART in the Census
- other (please specify)

4. Can you briefly outline why you decided to participate or not participate in the Scottish Church Census? 

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Census results



A summary of the results of the Scottish Church Census is available online on the [Brierley Consultancy Website](#) and a copy was sent to all participating congregations

5. Have you previously reviewed the available information on the website or send to you concerning the Attendance Census?

Yes

No

6. What is your level of TRUST in the statistics presented in the SCOTTISH CHURCH ATTENDANCE CENSUS? (using a sliding scale where 0=No trust and 100=complete trust)

0 50 100

A horizontal sliding scale with a grey track. The track has a white circle at the 0 position and a white square at the 100 position. The numbers 0, 50, and 100 are marked above the track.

7. What is your level of TRUST in the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND PARISH STATISTICAL PROFILES? (using a sliding scale where 0=No trust and 100=complete trust)

0 50 100

A horizontal sliding scale with a grey track. The track has a white circle at the 0 position and a white square at the 100 position. The numbers 0, 50, and 100 are marked above the track.

8. What is your level of TRUST in religious statistics provided by GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES? (using a sliding scale where 0=No trust and 100=complete trust)

0 50 100

A horizontal sliding scale with a grey track. The track has a white circle at the 0 position and a white square at the 100 position. The numbers 0, 50, and 100 are marked above the track.

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Feedback



9. It has been suggested that **NEGATIVE** church statistics affect the **MORALE** of ministers and church leaders. How do you respond to this suggestion?  1

10. Scottish church attendance data has historically been gathered infrequently. Looking at the statements below, which statement do you most closely agree with? 

- I have NO INTEREST in Scottish church attendance data
- I believe Scottish church attendance data should be GATHERED ANNUALLY
- I believe that Scottish church attendance data should be gathered EVERY 5 OR 10 YEARS
- I believe that Scottish church attendance data should NOT BE GATHERED
- I believe that Scottish church attendance data is UNHELPFUL
- Other (please specify)

11. Would it be your intention to read/study the full report on the Scottish Church Attendance Census when published?



- Yes
- No
- Undecided

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Newspapers



12. Church statistics can be presented either positively and negatively. (examples of both are shown for the Church Attendance Census below.) How do you react to these different presentations. 

Herald headline 



C of S website 

Green shoots of growth as 390,000 Christians regularly attend church

17 April, 2017

Eighty per cent of church goers attend weekly services with almost half (45%) having attended their present church for over 20 years.

According to the latest Scottish Church Census (May 2016), a third (35%) of all churchgoers (counting congregational numbers against churches) were Evangelical, up from 26% in 1994, while another third (32%) were Catholic, with 16% Broad/Liberal, 13% Reformed and 4% Low Church.

Catholics and Charismatic Evangelicals recorded the youngest followers.

Although overall church attendance figures show a continued decline, the rate of such decline has slowed significantly, with some denominations and geographical regions seeing encouraging signs of growth. This is partly due to a significant influx of immigrants coming to Scotland and the growth of Pentecostal churches



Parishioners at Cardross Parish Church on the banks of the Clyde near Helensburgh release balloons, with a message of fellowship attached, at 8.30am on Easter morning. Photo courtesy of John Young media

13. Do you have any additional comments or reflections on the use of the Church attendance census for ministry and/or mission purposes? 

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Appendix 7: Sample Media Coverage of the Scottish Attendance Census 2016

Sunday Herald (16th April 2017)

Reported with the headline:

Why Christianity is in Crisis in Scotland – Easter Sunday shock leaves clergy reeling as new figures reveal church attendance at all-time low.

Column inside has the headline

Scotland's top clergy in state of panic over decline in number of churchgoers (Page 4).

Church of Scotland Website (2017)

The Church of Scotland website carries the headline, 'Green shoots of growth as 390,000 Christians regularly attend church' (accompanied by a photograph of a group of people outside a church smiling and holding colourful balloons)

Eighty per cent of church goers attend weekly services with almost half (45%) having attended their present church for over 20 years.

According to the latest Scottish Church Census (May 2016), a third (35%) of all churchgoers (counting congregational numbers against churches) were Evangelical, up from 26% in 1994, while another third (32%) were Catholic, with 16% Broad/Liberal, 13% Reformed and 4% Low Church.

Catholics and Charismatic Evangelicals recorded the youngest followers.

Although overall church attendance figures show a continued decline, the rate of such decline has slowed significantly, with some denominations and geographical regions seeing encouraging signs of growth. This is partly due to a significant influx of immigrants coming to Scotland and the growth of Pentecostal churches

Aberdeenshire, for example, has seen the number of its churches increase from 196 in 2002 to 228 in 2016, due to an increase of Polish labourers working in the oil industry and north east of Scotland.

More people (75,350 or 1.4% of the population) are also now attending midweek worship.

Reverend Colin Sinclair, Chair of the Scottish Church Census Steering Committee and Moderator of the Presbytery of Edinburgh, said: 'Whilst there are a number of challenges facing Christian churches in Scotland, including a broadly aging demographic and ministering in an increasingly individualised culture; these are similar challenges facing society at large both in Scotland and across Western Europe.

As a nation, we are seeing less attendance at various mass cultural activities. Only around 4% of people (213,108) visit the cinema at least once a week – a great deal less than the 390,000 Christians regularly attending Church (2013 Scottish Household Survey: Revised October 2015).

Indeed, in an atomised society to be part of a formal community worship is unusual and countercultural. Yet, the fact that many people stay and frequent the same church for over 20 years is an indication of the stability they bring to a community. As well as being sacred places of worship, our churches act as hubs for the community to come together and provide vital social capital to the wellbeing of our society.'

Rev Norman Smith, convener of the Mission and Discipleship Council of the Church of Scotland, responded to the report saying: 'This Easter Sunday, hundreds of thousands of people across Scotland will gather in church to celebrate Christ's Resurrection and the faith which forms the foundation of their lives.'

At the same time decline in church attendance has been well documented over the past few decades. In 1984 17% of the nation regularly attended church on a Sunday whilst in the 2016 census that figure had declined to 7.2%. That percentage represents 390,000 people which is still a significant number of people. In fact, more people attend church every week than go to the cinema or to football matches and more Scottish people are church members than belong to a political party.

These figures show that churches remain an important and relevant part of Scottish life. That is before you consider the enormous contributions that church members are making to communities across Scotland. Church members are involved in everything from staffing foodbanks to running dementia cafes, welcoming refugees, youth work and much more. Church members also raise hundreds of thousands every year for charities here and overseas.

The reasons for decline in church going are many and have been well researched. Changes in working patterns, leisure activities and family life have all contributed as has increasing secularisation. Within our society, Sunday is increasingly no longer seen as Sabbath or the Lord's day but another day to cram full of activity. In addition, church-going used to be something you learned from your parents, so the pattern of going to church was instilled in you as a child. However, as each generation has moved further and further away from that inherited pattern less people have learned about going to church. All of this has contributed to the decline of church-going in Scotland.

Our response is not driven by numbers. At the heart of our faith, there is what is called the great commission, (Matthew Chapter 28 verses 16 – 20) which has compelled the Christian church throughout history to share the good news of Jesus. This means the church is always looking for opportunities to communicate the faith and that declining attendance has been accompanied by greater opportunity for faith sharing.

The Church of Scotland has taken a number of positive actions to foster growth. We have created five new pioneer ministries in areas as diverse as the farming community of Ayrshire, the arts community of Glasgow, the student community of Stirling, the inner-city community of Paisley and a new housing development in East Lothian. Our 'Path of Renewal' initiative, which is helping 40 congregations engage with today's world in new ways has proved so successful that 40 more congregations are being invited to join. Another exciting new development is the growing enthusiasm for Pilgrimage, a way to worship that appeals to many people today.

Alongside this the Church continues to produce resources to help people share their faith, be more confident in their faith and deepen their understanding of faith. The primary task of the church has not changed throughout the ages, but the way we tackle that task continues to evolve.

In the midst of decline you can find growth and in the midst of growth you can find decline. That is how it has always been.'

BBC News (2017)

Dramatic drop in church attendance in Scotland

The number of people who regularly attend church services in Scotland has fallen by more than half over the last 30 years, according to a new survey.

A census of Scottish Christians found that there are around 390,000 regular churchgoers north of the border, down from 854,000 in 1984.

The research also revealed that 42% of churchgoers were aged over 65. One leading cleric said the findings presented a 'crisis and an opportunity' for Christians in Scotland.

The statistics were revealed in the results of 2016 Scottish Church Census, which was recently published by Brierley Consultancy.

Other key findings include:

- 7.2% of Scotland's population regularly attend church, down from 17% in 1984;
- The number of congregations dropped from 4,100 in 1984 to 3,700 in 2016;
- 40% of churchgoers are male;
- Four-fifths of church leaders (79%) are male, with an average age of 57;
- 43% of leaders are responsible for more than one church.

Lead researcher Dr Peter Brierley said the figures indicated a crisis in Christianity across Scotland.

'We are living in the 21st century and one of the features of the 21st century is that people's allegiance to particular faiths is no longer as strong as it used to be,' he said. *an opportunity*

He said the main reason for the decline in church attendance was the deaths of elderly churchgoers.

'Part of the problem is the proportion of people in the church who are elderly is much greater than in the population of Scotland as a whole,' he said.

'So, you have a great number of churchgoers dying. The rate of replacement is not as many. That's the basic reason for decline.

'It's not that people are moving away from the faith, although I'm sure some are, but in general terms that is not the case.

‘There are also quite a lot of invisible Christians who used to go to church, still believe in God, but they have moved house, perhaps to a rural area, and simply haven't found a church to go to.’

The census also revealed growth among some denominations in some parts of Scotland.

Attendance among the Pentecostals has doubled since 2002 and now stands at 19,000, making up 5% of all churchgoers in Scotland.

The census also revealed a growth in new churches - 12,000 people regularly attend around 300 new churches started since 2002.

Researchers said many immigrant churches and so-called ‘Messy Churches’, which are more informal gatherings, account for much of the new growth.

They credit a 2% growth in church attendance in Aberdeenshire to the influx of a large number of Polish migrants, mostly Roman Catholic, to the oil industry.

The Reverend Dr David Pickering, Moderator of the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland, said the census did not make ‘terribly happy reading’.

‘Opportunity and challenge.’

He said: ‘It's a crisis and an opportunity. Both present themselves’.

‘The Scottish Church Census doesn't make terribly happy reading. But it also presents a new opportunity for the church to portray the love of God and the good news of Jesus in a new way for a new generation. That's an opportunity and a challenge for us.

‘Although I wish it were different, I think we must acknowledge that most congregations have more older people than younger, and most young people simply do not see the relevance of God, of Jesus, of the church, to their lives.

‘And, of course, there are now more things to do on Sundays than there were even a generation ago.

‘I think if the church doesn't respond [to the decline in numbers], it is a crisis. If it does respond and it embraces the situation, that's positive.’

The Bishop of Paisley, John Kennan, admitted he loses sleep over church attendance figures.

He said: ‘The real crisis that's going on is not that people aren't coming to us, it's that we've stopped going to them. It's a geographical and a human reality. Essentially, we've stopped being part of the homes and lives of ordinary people.

‘To be honest with you, I lose sleep over the declining numbers. If the numbers are declining because there's something we could be doing that we're not doing then that's something we should lose sleep over.

‘There's a sense that we could do this better if we thought about this, came together, and had some kind of a plan.

The Free Church of Scotland (2017)

Moderator Designate Responds to Scottish Church Census

Rev. Derek Lamont of St. Columba's Free Church and Moderator Designate, responds to the 2016 Scottish Church Census. I sometimes think that the church's response to declining numbers can be to panic – ‘change the message!’ Some would have us morph the Gospel into something different – more palatable to sophisticated, 21st Century ears! Cut out the bits that don't fit! Give people something new, and bury that old rugged Cross.

The church in Scotland would do well to consider the recent findings about declining church attendances, but instead of being tempted to make excuses or think about re-inventing the Gospel we should wholeheartedly re-commit ourselves to introducing people to the life-giving and life transforming message of Jesus Christ. If He no longer matters to us, then He sure won't matter to anyone outside of the Church. If we no longer believe He is relevant or offers His unique message of redeeming love to a cynical and broken world, then we will feel no compassion or love to introduce Him to others.

The Free Church has often been the object of mockery and derision in Scotland – a typecast parody – dull, black and negative - insular and judgemental. Doubtless, there is much for which we need to be forgiven – but we have also fought hard over the last decade during which some of the current research has been done, to bring the unchanging, living and powerful message of the Gospel to a new generation. It is living truth from the Living God, so will always be contemporary, cutting edge and supremely relevant.

So, as a Church, we want to reach out with His love – it is tough because the authority and love of Christ challenges the genesis of so many of the core values of our secular society – it is about ultimate truth, human value, image, identity, guilt and forgiveness, life and death, hope and despair: the big issues.

Yet, we know the reality of Christ's forgiveness and transforming power in our own lives – even if we are often a poor reflection of what we should be. We rejoice in the growth of some Scottish churches as well as seeing Christianity flourish in many parts of the world, despite it being the object, in some places, of the severest persecution.

We are thankful to see this growth but also thankful for the growth within the Free Church. We have welcomed new congregations, planted new churches, witnessed people coming to faith and our overall membership is following an upward trajectory.

There is no room for complacency but we know where our hope lies for the future of the church. We have absolute confidence that Jesus Christ will build His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail.

Telegraph online (Cramb, 2017).

The number of people regularly attending church in Scotland has fallen by more than half in the last 30 years, according to a new survey.

The survey of Christians across the country found there are around 390,000 regular Sunday churchgoers, down from 854,000 in 1984.

The research also revealed that two fifths are over 65, prompting a warning that Christianity is 'in crisis' in Scotland.

The statistics were revealed by the 2016 Scottish Church Census, published by the Brierley Consultancy.

It shows that just 7.2 per cent of the population attend church on a regular basis, compared to 17 per cent in 1984, while the number of congregations has dropped by 400.

Other key findings include the fact that 40 per cent of churchgoers and nearly 80 per cent of church leaders are male.

Dr Peter Brierley, the lead researcher, said the figures indicated a crisis, adding: 'We are living in the 21st century and one of the features of the 21st century is that people's allegiance to particular faiths is no longer as strong as it used to be.

'Part of the problem is the proportion of people in the church who are elderly is much greater than in the population of Scotland as a whole.

'So, you have a great number of churchgoers dying. The rate of replacement is not as many. That's the basic reason for decline.

'It's not that people are moving away from the faith, although I'm sure some are, but in general terms that is not the case.

'There are also quite a lot of invisible Christians who used to go to church, still believe in God, but they have moved house, perhaps to a rural area, and simply haven't found a church to go to.'

However, the census also revealed growth among some denominations, with attendance at Pentecostal churches almost doubling to 19,000 since 2002.

Aberdeenshire was the sole area bucking the downward trend with 350 more people attending church in 2016 compared with 2002.

This was credited to Polish immigrants working in the oil industry, with 25 Polish churches in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

The Rev Dr David Pickering, Moderator of the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland, said the census did not make 'terribly happy reading'.

He added: 'It's a crisis and an opportunity. Both present themselves.

‘It presents a new opportunity for the church to portray the love of God and the good news of Jesus in a new way for a new generation. That’s an opportunity and a challenge for us.

‘Although I wish it were different, I think we must acknowledge that most congregations have more older people than younger, and most young people simply do not see the relevance of God, of Jesus, of the church, to their lives.

‘And, of course, there are now more things to do on Sundays than there were even a generation ago. I think if the church doesn’t respond, it is a crisis. If it does respond and it embraces the situation, that’s positive.’

The Bishop of Paisley, John Kennan, said he loses sleep over figures. ‘The real crisis that’s going on is not that people aren’t coming to us, it’s that we’ve stopped going to them,’ he added. ‘It’s a geographical and a human reality. Essentially, we’ve stopped being part of the homes and lives of ordinary people.

‘There’s a sense that we could do this better if we thought about this, came together, and had some kind of a plan.’

Scottish Episcopal Church (2017)

The Most Rev David Chillingworth, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld & Dunblane and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church says:

‘The results of the 2016 Scottish Church Census are on some levels entirely predictable. Historic institutional churches are in decline across the developed world, particularly when seen against the ‘narrow band’ measurement of church attendance. The processes of secularisation are systemic in modern societies and are rooted in factors such as population mobility, an individualism which leads to a reluctance to commit and ever-widening ranges of choice. While we may wonder at the apparent success of churches in the developing world, the same inexorable process of change will in time have a similar effect on them as our societies become more globalised.

‘The challenge for faith communities in Scotland and elsewhere is to find ways in which churches can learn to survive and thrive in this kind of social context. Social change – and the Holy Spirit – are creating a situation where the status quo is no longer a ‘safe option’ and the challenge of change is unavoidable.

‘Of all the factors which have led to decline, one of the most obvious is a generational failure. The children and grandchildren of today’s churchgoers have not followed them into active membership.

‘But it is not all bad news or cries of ‘crisis’. The results of the 2016 Scottish Church Census offer some encouragement to churches. There is a slowing of decline and some signs of recovery.

‘If we are to ‘survive and thrive’, the way ahead will require prayerful faithfulness with hard work. It will need visionary and skilled leadership. It will be a long but also a rewarding road. Churches will look very different. Some suggest that there are particular values which will bring growth. But there is no alternative to a path of

spiritual faithfulness lived with an outward-facing commitment to growth and with integrity of life, community and service. I believe that many congregations in the Scottish Episcopal Church are already on that journey.

‘Churches offer community and belonging in an age of individualism. They encourage people to explore the deepest issues of life in times which often seem troubled and alarming. Institutional patterns of religion may not hold the loyalty which they did in the past – but people everywhere are on journeys of spiritual exploration and yearn for spiritual experience.

‘In recent times, the Scottish Episcopal Church has had a renewed focus on mission. We are developing outward-facing, welcoming and inclusive patterns of congregational life and offer attractive worship and engaging presentations of faith. We care for those in need and we have a passion for justice.

Appendix 8: Presbytery Planning Forms and Questions

Factor weighting scoring sheet

**GLASGOW PRESBYTERY STRATEGY ADVISORY GROUP
PRESBYTERY PLANNING
PRESBYTERY WEIGHTINGS EXERCISE 13TH SEPTEMBER 2011**

WEIGHTINGS SCORING SHEET

NOTES:

- The purpose of this exercise is to determine the relative importance to be attached to each of the 5 Factors that are being taken into consideration during the Presbytery Planning process.
- Only those Presbyters who are full members of Presbytery, (i.e. **NOT** Corresponding Members or Visitors), who are present at the meeting of the Presbytery of Glasgow on 13th September 2011 are eligible to take part in the Weightings Exercise.
- Each person eligible to take part has **10 points** on which to allocate **between the 5 Factors** outlined below. These could be allocated equally (2 points to each of 5 factors), or distributed in any other way so long as the total number of points allocated adds up to 10. (e.g. all 10 points allocated to one factor and none to any of the others; or 4 points given to one factor, 3 to another, 2 to a third, 1 to a fourth, and none to a fifth etc.)

N.B. – You have 10 points to allocate between the 5 Factors, NOT 10 points for each Factor.

FACTOR	WEIGHTING
1 PARISH POPULATION	
2 PARISH NEED	
3 CONGREGATIONAL SIZE & STRENGTH	
4 MINISTRIES & MISSION CONTRIBUTIONS	
5 OUTWARD LOOKING FOCUS	

Example of scoring sheet for congregational size and strength

**GLASGOW PRESBYTERY STRATEGY ADVISORY GROUP
PRESBYTERY PLANNING
STAG WEIGHTINGS EXERCISE 27TH SEPTEMBER 2011**

WEIGHTINGS SCORING SHEET – FACTOR 3 – CONGREGATION SIZE & STRENGTH

NOTES:

- The purpose of this exercise is to determine the relative importance to be attached to each of the 6 Sub-Factors that are being taken into consideration under Factor 3 – Congregation Size & Strength.
- All members of STAG will take part in the Weightings Exercise.
- Each person has **12 points** on which to allocate **between the 6 Sub-Factors** outlined below. These could be allocated equally (2 points to each of 6 sub-factors), or distributed in any other way so long as the total number of points allocated adds up to 12. (e.g. all 12 points allocated to one sub-factor and none to any of the others; or 4 points given to one sub-factor, 3 to another, 2 to a third etc.)

**N.B. – You have 12 points to allocate between the 6 Sub-Factors,
NOT 12 points for each Sub-Factor.**

SUB - FACTOR	WEIGHTING
1 No. attending main diet of Worship	
2 Average age of those attending main diet of Worship	
3 % of those who attend a secondary diet of worship	
4 Average Giving	
5 Rate of growth (or decline) in income	
6 Rate of growth (or decline) in membership	

Parish population scoring sheet

**GLASGOW PRESBYTERY STRATEGY ADVISORY GROUP
PRESBYTERY PLANNING
STAG WEIGHTINGS EXERCISE 27TH SEPTEMBER 2011**

WEIGHTINGS SCORING SHEET – FACTOR 1 – PARISH POPULATION

NOTES:

- The purpose of this exercise is to determine the relative importance to be attached to each of the 3 Sub-Factors that are being taken into consideration under Factor 1 – Parish Population.
- All members of STAG will take part in the Weightings Exercise.
- Each person has **9 points** on which to allocate **between the 3 Sub-Factors** outlined below. These could be allocated equally (3 points to each of 3 sub-factors), or distributed in any other way so long as the total number of points allocated adds up to 9. (e.g. all 9 points allocated to one sub-factor and none to any of the others; or 4 points given to one sub-factor, 3 to another, 2 to a third.)

N.B. – You have 9 points to allocate between the 3 Sub-Factors, NOT 9 points for each Sub-Factor.

SUB - FACTOR	WEIGHTING
1 OTHER CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS	
2 OTHER FAITHS	
3 CHURCH OF SCOTLAND	

KEY:

Other Christian Denominations = those claiming adherence to other Christian denominations – mainly Roman Catholic (and therefore ministered to by our Ecumenical partners, but possibly still accessing any community groups and facilities we run).

Other Faiths = those belonging to other faiths (who may not represent “workload”, e.g. funerals; but whom we still want to reach with the Gospel).

Church of Scotland = (as per the 2007 Presbytery Plan); those who indicated adherence to the Church of Scotland; those who claimed to have no faith; and those who did not answer the question in the 2001 Census.

Example of congregational attendance form



PRESBYTERY OF GLASGOW

**PRESBYTERY PLANNING NUMBERS AT WORSHIP SUMMARY FORM****SUNDAY 6TH NOVEMBER 2011****NAME OF CONGREGATION**

Please indicate in the table below, by collating the returns received from the exercise into the categories provided, the number of people that attended the main diet of worship on the date listed above:

Age Range	Under 16	16-25	26-40	41-65	66-80	81-100	100+	TOTAL
Numbers Attended								

Please indicate in the box below, any unusual patterns of attendance on the date listed above (e.g. Baptism or Special Service, 'Back to Church Sunday' etc), so that this can be taken into account and the figures adjusted accordingly:

DECLARATION

To be completed by the Minister or Session Clerk.

I can confirm that the information detailed in this Summary Form regarding the above named congregation, is correct and provides an accurate account of the number of people that attended the main diet of worship on Sunday 6th November 2011.

NAME:
ROLE:
SIGNATURE:
DATE:

Example of mission audit question

i. The impact on the local community through the Christian witness of organisations run by the Church

Assessment	Tick the Statements that apply	Score Range
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No church organisations or church organisations only used by existing church members (e.g. a church choir) 2. Little or no publicity of church organisations 3. Never any feedback from the community as to the impact of church organisations on the local community 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	1-2
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Church Organisations available for limited interest/age groups (e.g. a group for the elderly but no youth group), with little deliberate Christian witness 2. There is limited publicity of church organisations, but only within the church community 3. Occasional feedback from the community as to the impact of church organisations on the local community 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	3-4
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Church organisations available for multiple interest/age groups, with little deliberate Christian witness 2. There is limited publicity of church organisations outside of the church community (e.g. occasional use of some publicity media) 3. Feedback is sought from the community as to the impact of church organisations on the local community 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	5-6
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Church organisations available for limited interest/age groups with clear Christian witness (e.g. a youth group where exploration of spiritual issues is encouraged) 2. There is wide publicity of church organisations outside of the church community, (e.g. regular use of print or web media) 3. Feedback is sought from the community and evaluated, as to the impact of church organisations on the local community 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	7-8
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Church organisations available for multiple interest/age groups, with a clear Christian witness 2. There is intentional, coordinated publicity of church organisations outside of the church community, effectively targeted at potential users, including personal invitations 3. Feedback is sought and evaluated from the community as to the impact of church organisations on the local community, and this feedback is actively used in future planning 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	9-10
NOTES		
	SCORE ALLOCATED	

Example of congregational audit form



PRESBYTERY OF GLASGOW



PRESBYTERY PLANNING CONGREGATIONAL AUDIT FORM

1. **NAME OF CONGREGATION**

2. **WORSHIP ACTIVITIES**

- (i) Please indicate the types of additional worship activities (e.g. second or midweek service, prayer meeting, bible study, house group etc) that occur in the life of your church outside of the Sunday morning service and the numbers who regularly attend these. Please also indicate the number of those who attend these worship activities who are not regular attendees at Sunday morning Worship. *(Please indicate below if any of these activities are shared across a Parish Grouping or Twinning).*

TYPE OF WORSHIP ACTIVITY	NUMBERS ATTENDING REGULARLY	FURTHER DETAILS

Appendix 9: Congregational Datasets

Quantitative data relating historically to the local congregation of Kilsyth Anderson is, in some areas, plentiful but suffers from a lack of consistency, both in collection and in presentation. Data is also scattered in that, where it does exist, it may be contained within formal or informal collections and not always held by a central person, body or at a singular location. This diffuse nature to the existence of data means that it can be difficult to gather and attempt to correlate one set of numbers with another, having also to deal with missing data or data collected with changed procedures or understandings. This haphazard method of handling valuable local information is a concern for anyone investigating historic trends and for the ability to properly understand the congregation and its component parts.

There are a number of primary formal sources of information available in the congregation. The main sources would be minutes of Kirk Session meetings and meetings of the Board of Managers, along with minutes taken of meetings of the congregations as a whole.

The Kirk Session minute books, being available from 1881, means that it is theoretically possible to build a full and rich picture of the congregation over time and one might have hoped to discover in this record insight into trends within the congregation in relation to membership, attendance, baptisms, weddings and other events which shaped the congregation. A number of problems were encountered in attempting to undertake this task.

Firstly, the nature and the quality of Kirk Session minutes were found to be highly variable. In the early period (pre-world war two) the official written minutes were minimal in content. It was often noted that meetings were held but aside from what was often routine and repetitive business (e.g. arrangements for communion services or holiday pulpit supply) nothing much beyond this was entered into the record.²³⁵

It is clear from references made in the minutes that statistical data was being gathered and regularly submitted to the relevant church authorities, as the following typical entry in the Kirk Session minute testifies,

²³⁵ Deaths, resignations and replacement organs being further examples of what might be occasional items.

The moderator reported having made the necessary return to the Presbytery Clerk regarding the statistical side of the church affairs and Christian liberality schedule²³⁶

The statistics submitted would include a range of figures relating to church membership and church organisations, financial data was recorded separately. The original data presented to presbytery and those sent to the church offices were later destroyed, except where figures were collated for the annual publications, such as the Year Book or for inclusion in the Reports of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in these cases information was still available.

In the post-war period (after 1945) more regular statistical data was engrossed within the local Kirk Session minutes. Whilst this, at times, this varied in the detail recorded it normally did include the total number of church members for each year. Events relating to the movement of people in or out of the church roll, for example, profession of faith or death were also more consistently recorded.

²³⁶ Kilsyth Anderson Kirk Session extract January 24th 1937

Appendix 10: Worshipping Community Guidelines – Church of England

Worshipping Community information sheet

The Worshipping Community questions were first introduced in the 2012 Statistics for Mission form as a means of trying to get a better indication of the size of the Church of England. Any drop in average weekly attendance could actually be reflecting a reduction in how often people come to church rather than a drop in the number of individuals who are regularly a part of the church. Whilst the electoral roll does include those individuals who are unable to attend services, for example, because they are too ill, but are still a committed part of a church, there are a number of other problems with this figure and how accurately it reflects the shape and size of the church.

Many dioceses already use this concept, and use a number of different terms to describe this including 'participants', 'Agreed membership figure', 'members', 'declared members', 'regular worshipping community', 'active members', 'committed members'.

We are defining the 'worshipping community' to include anyone within your parish who attends your church, including fresh expressions (if they have not completed their own return), regularly, for example at least once a month, or would do so if not prevented by illness, infirmity or temporary absence. This includes all ages, but it is useful to count separately from adults (18+) those under 11 (primary) and those 11-17 (secondary). It includes activities such as fellowship groups and other activities which have a distinct act of worship or prayer. It also includes activities not on church premises (e.g. school or community centre).

We include those who:

- come to midweek services
- are ill and unable to come to church
- are away on holiday or business
- have home communions
- are part of a 'fresh expression' of church
- live in care or residential homes and would consider themselves to be full members of your church
- give regularly to the church

- lead worship (e.g. your clergy)

We do not include those who:

- are visitors - holidaymakers, baptism parties etc.
- are pupils attending school assemblies
- consider their 'home' church to be another church.

How do I accurately calculate my worshipping community? We know that many churches keep a list of those who come regularly and others of you who live in rural areas told us that you know each of your congregation well. If you do not have such a list you may start with your Electoral Roll as a base, in particular as a reminder of those unable to attend because of sickness or infirmity, then add other people to the figure if they attend regularly but are not on the roll. You may have a 'prayer diary' with current members, which is regularly updated and this might remind you of people who are unable to attend due to illness or who have recently died.

This year we have added an option to the joiners and leavers questions to reflect those who have transferred from or to a different local church. We would be very grateful if you could fill in as much as possible of this question. We realise it is sometimes difficult to know why people have left, so just use the 'total leaving' box if you can't break it down and leave blank the individual parts. Thank you so much. With your help, we will be able to give a more true picture of the size of our Church.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss this question further, please email statistics.unit@churchofengland.org

Appendix 11: Congregational Annual Statistic Return 2017

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND STATISTICAL RETURN AS AT 31 DECEMBER

2017

Presbytery: 1 Edinburgh

Congregation: 010105 EDINBURGH OLD KIRK AND MUIRHOUSE

	TOTALS		TOTALS
I Members on Communion Roll:			
1. Communicants on Roll as returned in Schedule for 31 December 2016 (This number must not be altered)	0		
2. Communicants admitted during the year ended 31 December 2017			
(a) By Profession (for the first time)			
(b) By Certificate			
(c) By Restoration or Resolution of Kirk Session			
(d) For Start of Union			
3. Communicants removed during the year ended 31 December 2017		To Add	
(a) By Death			
(b) By Certificate			
(c) Otherwise			
(d) To Join a Union			
		To Deduct	
4. Communicants on roll as at 31 December 2017		Net Total	
II Members in respect of whom intimations of removal to another district have been sent			
III Number of Persons on Supplementary Roll			
IV Involved in Life of Congregation			
(a) Children 17 or under			
(b) 18 years of age or over who are not on the Communion Roll			
(c) Children receiving Communion			
V Number of Office Bearers:		Male	Female
(a) Elders			
(b) Deacons (Not Elders)			
(c) Managers (Not Elders)			
(d) Members of Congregational Board (Not Elders)			
VI Number of Baptisms during the year			
(a) Total number of Baptisms (including adult baptisms)			
(b) Adult Baptisms			
(c) Number of 'Thanksgiving and Blessing of Children' services			
VII Weddings and Funerals			
<i>(In each case count all of such services (i) held in the church (by whomever conducted), or (ii) conducted elsewhere by the minister or a member of a ministry team as part of their duties)</i>			
(a) Weddings			
(b) Funerals			

In name, and by authority, of the Kirk Session, Minister (or Interim Moderator) January 2018
 Session Clerk

Please return this form to your Presbytery Clerk

06/10/2016

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND STATISTICAL RETURN AS AT 31 DECEMBER

2017

Presbytery: 1 Edinburgh

Congregation: 010105 EDINBURGH OLD KIRK AND MUIRHOUSE

Additional Information

Age range of worshippers (enter number in each range):	
Under 16	
16 - 24	
25 - 44	
45 - 64	
65 - 84	
85 and over	
Usual number of Worshippers	

Is your congregation involved with (tick any that apply):	
School chaplaincy	
Youth work	
Community development in the parish	
International Links	
Environmental issues	
Political issues	
Health/addiction issues	
Tackling economic inequality	
Food poverty	

In name, and by authority, of the Kirk Session, Minister (or Interim Moderator) January 2018
 Session Clerk

Please return this form to your Presbytery Clerk

06/10/2016

Appendix 12: Regulations on Keeping Church Statistics

VI. COMMUNION ROLLS ACT (ACT VI 2000)

Edinburgh, 20th May 2000, Session 1

(incorporating Acts XXIII 1933, VI 1938 (as amended by Acts I 1972, IV 1977 and III 1991), and VI 1951 and Regulations IV 1964 and I 1996)

The General Assembly enact and ordain:—

Communion Rolls

1. There shall be a Communion Roll, made up and kept by the Kirk Session of every parish, containing the names and addresses of the communicants. A record shall be kept in this Roll of the dates:

(1) of enrolment

- (a) by profession as First Communicants
- (b) by receipt of Certificates of Transference
- (c) by special resolution of the Kirk Session

(2) of removals

- (a) by death
- (b) by issue of Certificates of Transference
- (c) by special resolution of Kirk Session.

2. For the purposes of attestation by the Presbytery, Communion Rolls kept manually shall be submitted in their entirety.

Communion Rolls on Computer

3. A Congregation's Communion Roll may be kept on computer provided that an up-to-date printout of the Roll as at 31st December, duly attested by the Kirk Session, is produced at the annual inspection of records.

4. The printout shall contain the names and addresses, with date and manner of admission, of all members as at 31st December of the year under inspection. It shall also contain an appendix recording the names and addresses of people who have been removed from the Roll during the year, along with the date, reason and means of removal. The form and style of the printout shall be approved by the Superintendence Committee, or other committee appointed by the Presbytery for this purpose, before it first comes into use, and the committee shall report such approval to the Presbytery.

5. After attestation by the Presbytery, annual printouts shall be kept as historical records, and shall be preserved in a substantial loose-leaf binder, or permanently bound at intervals not exceeding ten years.
6. Kirk Sessions proposing to store data in a computer must ensure before doing so that the requirements of the Data Protection Act will be satisfied, and to this end they should record their intent with the Presbytery Clerk.

Certificates of Transference

7. A communicant's name shall be transferred from the Communion Roll of one congregation to that of another congregation only by a Certificate of Transference, and 110 such certificate shall not entitle to enrolment after the expiry of one year from the date which it bears. A Kirk Session receiving a Certificate after the period of validity has expired shall investigate the circumstances carefully and may thereafter resolve to add the name of the person concerned to the Communion roll or to take such other action as it shall deem appropriate.

In the case of persons presenting Certificates of Transference, the date of enrolment shall be the date of lodging the certificate; and, in other cases, it shall be the date of the resolution of the Kirk Session to add the name to the Roll. The date of removal shall be the date of death, or the issue of a Certificate of Transference, or of a resolution of the Kirk Session to remove the name.

Annual Revision and Pastoral Oversight

8. The Kirk Session shall revise and attest the Communion Roll, as at 31st December in each year, the attestation to include a statement of the number of names on the Roll after revision, and shall at the same meeting make an entry in the Minutes that it did so. It is recommended that intimation be given from the pulpit on each of the two preceding Sundays that this procedure is to be taken.

9. At the annual revision of the Communion Roll the question of adherence to vows of Church membership shall be raised in the case of any person who during the year under review, without obvious and sufficient reason, has not, in the opinion of the Kirk Session, shown sufficient interest or taken an adequate share in the worship, mission and service of the Church. In the case of every such person whose address is known, the question shall be raised personally.

10. If any person with whom the question of adherence to vows has been raised does not respond in a manner satisfactory to the Kirk Session, the Kirk Session may remove the

name of such person from the Communion Roll at the next annual revision. The names of persons whose names have been removed from the Roll under this Section shall be recorded in the Minutes and may be restored to the Roll only by resolution of the Kirk Session.

11. The Kirk Session, with a view to lessening the danger of lapsing from Church connection, shall issue to every member in full Communion when leaving, or immediately after leaving, the parish or district to take up residence elsewhere, a Certificate of Transference, unless the communicant has expressed a definite desire to retain his or her connection with the congregation and the minister and Kirk Session are prepared to accept pastoral responsibility for him or her; and, if their destination be known, shall intimate accordingly, either to the minister of the parish within which the communicant is going, or has gone, to reside, or to the Presbyterian Correspondent. Kirk Sessions receiving Certificates of Transference shall acknowledge receipt of the same to the Kirk Session which has issued them.

12. (1) The Kirk Session, with a view to continued supervision, shall keep a Supplementary Roll, on which shall be placed the names of those who have been removed from the Communion Roll without a Certificate of Transference and who continue to reside in the parish or district.

The Supplementary Roll shall be revised and attested annually.

(2) While persons whose names have been placed on the Supplementary Roll of a 111 congregation have had their names removed from the Communion Roll of that congregation, they are in no way debarred from being admitted to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper if they so desire, nor from being restored to the Communion Roll of a congregation by special resolution of the Kirk Session.

(3) Persons whose names have been placed on the Supplementary Roll are not eligible to be elected as office-bearers, nor to take part in, nor vote in Congregational Meetings. They may be admitted on application to the Electoral Register.

(4) Persons whose names are on the Supplementary Roll and who remove to another parish should have their names removed from the Roll and intimation sent to the minister of the parish to which they have gone to reside.

13. It is the duty of the Kirk Session to exercise pastoral care throughout the parish and to take due account of persons who have no connection with any Church.

Attestation by Presbytery

14. The Communion Roll and Supplementary Roll shall be submitted once a year to the Presbytery of the bounds for attestation, and Presbyteries are enjoined to see that each Kirk Session keeps a Communion Roll and Supplementary Roll in terms of this Act, and submits the same annually to the Presbytery.

15. Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, access to the Lord's Table shall not be refused to any person who desires to communicate, provided such person has previously been admitted a member in full communion and is not under discipline by a court of the Church.

16. The right of the Kirk Session to admit to the Lord's Table a member of any Christian Church is expressly affirmed.

17. This Act shall come into force on 1 January 2001 and Acts XXIII 1933, VI 1938 (as amended by Acts I 1972, IV 1977 and III 1991), VI 1951 and Regulations IV 1964 and I 1996 shall be repealed as at that date. 112 113

Appendix 13: Church of England Statistics Reporting Form 2016

 STATISTICS FOR MISSION: JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2016	
Church name:	Parish name:
Deanery:	Diocese:

REMINDER: PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM ONLINE IF POSSIBLE

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

The online returns system has existing information about your church already saved. 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; conducting funeral services at crematoria - are shared between more than one church then please attempt, where possible, to ensure 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 prefer to complete a separate return. For help in identifying fresh expressions of Church please visit <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk> or use the ‘Choice tree’ at the end of this form
- ✓ 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 a number of 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):

1a. How many people were on the ecclesiastical electoral roll for your parish, as reported at your Annual Parochial Church meeting in 2016?

- ✓ Please write 'unknown' if the figure is not available

1a. Number on the ecclesiastical Electoral Roll for your PARISH	
---	--

If your parish has more than one church **and** also 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	
---	--

The next question is about church attendance on a **'USUAL' SUNDAY**

- ✓ 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)

2. How many people attend your church on a usual Sunday, when there is a service?

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

The following questions are about **how many people attended** a service or act of worship at **Easter** (Easter Day and vigil services on Easter Eve), **Advent** (Advent Sunday until 23rd 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 to your church at Easter 2016?

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 to special services run by your church during Advent 2016?

- ✓ Include attendance at special services run by your church from Advent Sunday until 23rd December, for example nativities, carol services, carols on the green, crib services.

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

5. How many people came to your church at Christmas 2016?

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 for **services and other acts of worship** in October. This includes the number of people attending on Sundays and during the week (Monday-Saturday).

- ✓ Please include 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 visit <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk> or use the 'Choice tree' at the end of this form

You are asked to enter a count for each of the first 4 weeks of October 2016. 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 held on Sundays and 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.

Weekdays (Monday-Saturday): This should include people attending ONLY during the week and NOT on Sunday, i.e. if they have already attended a Sunday service, please try not to count them again if they attend another activity during the week

Sunday 16th October							
Weekdays 17th – 22nd							
	Number of services	Adult			Children and young people		
		Church	Fresh expressions	School service	Church	Fresh expressions	School service
Sunday 23rd October							
Weekdays 24th – 29th							

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)
- ✓ Please include any school-based acts of worship that are led by a person who holds office or responsibility for ministry within your church
- ✓ ‘Usually’ refers to during term-time or when the school is open, ignoring school holidays
- ✓ Please 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

The following questions are about your ‘**worshipping community**’. Think about your regular worshipping community at the **end of 2016**. For more information about worshipping communities, please refer to

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1529895/worshippingcommunityinfo.pdf>

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Include all congregations in your church, including fresh expressions of Church
- ✗ 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 the church earlier in the year (they are counted in the next question as ‘leavers’) and are not part of your worshipping community at the end of 2016

8. How many people are in your 'worshipping community' at the end of 2016?

- ✓ Please complete all of the boxes, as far as you can. If there is no-one in that category, please write '0'. If the age groups of your worshipping community are unknown, please enter the total figure only

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

9. How has your worshipping community changed during 2016?

- ✓ If you know how many people have left/joined your worshipping community but you do not know their reasons for leaving or joining, please enter the total figures (or your best estimates) only
- ✓ If there is no-one in a particular category, please write '0'
- ✓ **If you are unable to complete this question, please leave it blank**

9a. How many adults and children joined your worshipping community during 2016?					
	TOTAL	Worshipping for the first time	Moved into the area	Moved from a local church	Returned to church
Adults (Age 18+)					
Children and young people					

9b. How many adults and children left your worshipping community during 2016?					
	TOTAL	Death or illness	Moved away	Moved to a local church	Not worshipping anywhere
Adults (Age 18+)					
Children and young people					

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.

Age group aimed at? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL ages <input type="checkbox"/> 11-17	<input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> 18-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-4 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-69	<input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 70+
Are attendees also worshippers at other services in your parish? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> Never	<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular	<input type="checkbox"/> Previous attendees	

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"/> Other (please note where): _____			
How often?	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly	<input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please note how often): _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly	
Age group aimed at? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> ALL ages <input type="checkbox"/> 11-17	<input type="checkbox"/> Family <input type="checkbox"/> 18-39	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-4 <input type="checkbox"/> 40-69	<input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 <input type="checkbox"/> 70+
Are attendees also worshippers at other services in your parish? (please tick all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> Never	<input type="checkbox"/> Irregular	<input type="checkbox"/> Previous attendees	

11. How many baptisms and thanksgivings for the gift of a child were held in your church during 2016?

- ✓ 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 (5-12 years)	Youth/ adults (13+)
Number of persons baptised				
Number of children for whom a thanksgiving service for the gift of a child (birth or adoption) was held				

12. How many marriages and services of prayer and dedication after civil marriage were held in your church during 2016?

Number of couples married in your church	
Number of couples for whom a service of prayer and dedication was held in your church (after civil marriage)	

13. How many funeral services were held at or on behalf of your church during 2016?

- ✓ Include all funerals that were held at your church

- ✓ Include all funerals conducted by any member of your ministry team (including Readers, stipendiary clergy, non-stipendiary clergy and retired clergy) at a crematorium or cemetery
- ✗ Do not include services that performed only a burial of ashes or only a committal

Number of deceased for whom a funeral service was held at your church	
Number of deceased for whom a full funeral service was conducted by a member of your ministry team at a crematorium or cemetery , excluding committal only and burial of ashes only	

Finally, there is a special focus question about **visitors to your church**. In the following questions, by **visitors** we mean people coming into your church for reasons **other than** to attend services or to attend a particular group or activity (e.g. reasons for visiting would include coming to see the building and/or its artefacts; private prayer or reflection).

14a. How often is your church open to visitors outside of service times?

- ✓ Please tick one box as the closest estimate.

Never	Occasionally/ ad hoc	About 1-2 days a month	About 1-2 days each week	About 3-4 days each week	5 or more days each week

14b. For how many hours in a typical week (not including service times) is your church unlocked and open to visitors?

Number of hours the church is open to visitors in a typical week	
--	--

14c. During a typical week, approximately how many visitors come to your church?

Number of visitors in a typical week	
Tick here if you are unable to estimate this figure	

Thank you for completing your annual return on behalf of your church. 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), aside from where instructed in question 9. Other blank answers may be queried with you later.

Please record below the contact details for the person who has completed this form (or the lead person if more than one individual has helped with the return).

Name:

Position:

email address:

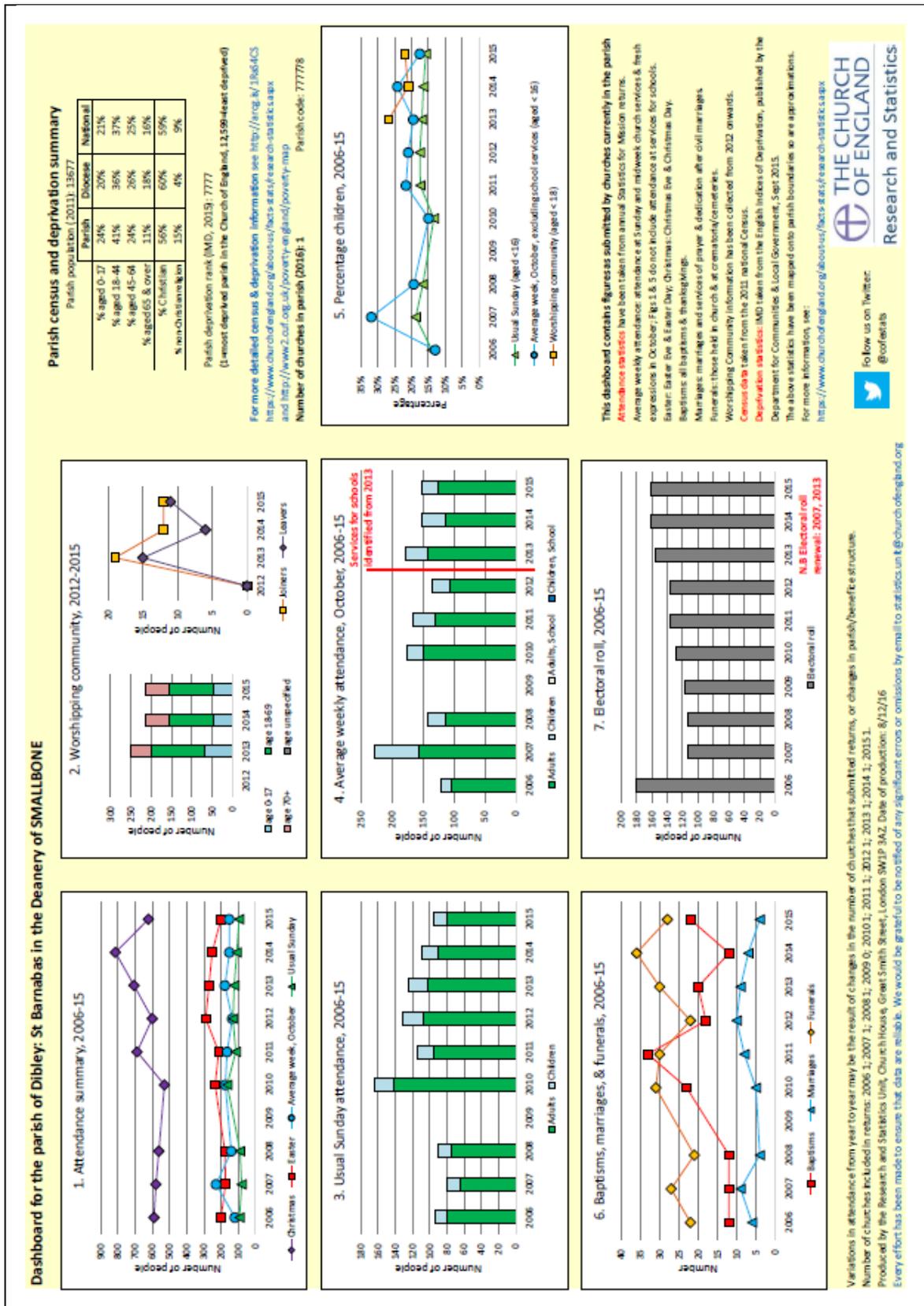
Date of completion:

Looking back across 2016, 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?

Is there **anything additional** that we should note when including your annual return within the Statistics for Mission?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Your contribution is essential to the on-going care and understanding of our churches and congregations; your diligence, time, and effort are greatly appreciated.

Appendix 14: Sample Church of England Output



Variations in attendance from year to year may be the result of changes in the number of churches that submitted returns, or changes in parish/benefice structure. Number of churches included in returns: 2006 1; 2007 1; 2008 1; 2009 0; 2010 1; 2011 1; 2012 1; 2013 1; 2014 1; 2015 1.

Produced by the Research and Statistics Unit, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ. Date of production: 8/12/16

Every effort has been made to ensure that data are reliable. We would be grateful to be notified of any significant errors or omissions by email to statistics.unit@churchofengland.org

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