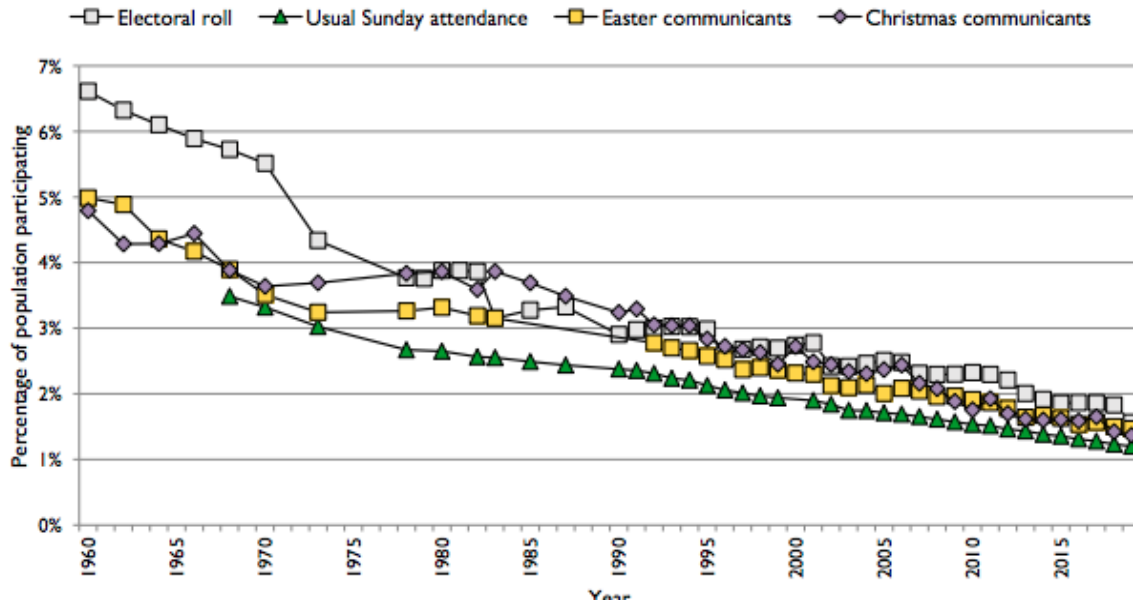


CHURCH IN CRISIS

Figure 11: Church of England participation summary, 1960-2019



IT'S TIME TO STOP THE ROT!

The Church of England (and other denominations) have been in steady decline since the First World War. The sum total of our efforts and those of our parents and grandparents is shown in the graph above from the Church of England Research and Statistics department. The percentage of the population participating in C of E activities is halving every thirty years.

What could the future hold for us? If we do nothing, each year costs will rise with inflation and it is likely that the number of lay people participating in the church will continue to decrease. We will either have to accept increases in parish share above the rate of inflation or we will be forced to accept cost cutting proposals – which would inevitably mean further reductions in the number of stipendiary clergy.

In 1990 church attendance in Rochester diocese was 26 per 1000 of the population. It is barely half of that today.

Our God loves to be worshipped and one of the important functions of our parish churches is to cause this worship to happen. I doubt there will be much joy in the Kingdom of Heaven if the amount of worship continues to decrease every year. When our friends and neighbours can say “Jesus is Lord” then the outlook will change dramatically.

If we do nothing, the Church of England will not implode overnight. The Church Commissioners have enough money to fund a very basic Church presence in England indefinitely. But what sort of Church will our grandchildren inherit? Do we want churches with one service a month? Do we want our buildings repurposed as sub Post Offices, community halls, museums or village shops?

“The financial demands are sending many village churches to the wall. In my own, the parish share accounts for well over half our annual income, which has now been severely hit by lockdown.” *Parishoner, Tunbridge Wells Deanery*

Somehow we have to challenge the pervasive mindset of “Managed Decline”. If we are to be the Church OF England rather than a sect IN England, then we have to grow. That means teaching the faith to a rising generation and to our friends and neighbours who often know surprisingly little about Jesus.

General Synod could start to change the atmosphere in the C of E, encouraging every parish to pray for growth and to devise ways of teaching the faith to people in their locality.

I want to see a vibrant and growing Church of England and if you elect me to General Synod, I will do everything I can to get the Church at all levels to wake up and smell the coffee while there is still time. The Anglican Church is growing apace throughout the world – except in Europe and North America. We must not listen to the siren voices that say decline is inevitable. Please give me your first preference vote in this election.

Gerald O'Brien



Lay member of General Synod for Rochester diocese 1995-2015

I was a member of the General Synod's Business Committee and the House of Laity's Standing Committee

Currently a member of Bishop's Council

Chairman of the Diocesan Board of Patronage

One of the six people elected from the diocese to join the Crown Nominations Commission to select the next Bishop of Rochester

I worked in marketing for most of my career with BT and subsequently with Intercontinental Church Society and Crosslinks, two of the Anglican mission agencies.

I was a member of the CPAS Council (until 2004) and the Church of England Evangelical Council (until 2015)

I have attended church conferences in Jerusalem, Abuja and Nairobi as an English delegate

I am on the electoral rolls of St George's, Weald and St Nicholas, Sevenoaks.

"Congregations must be set free (from unsupportable financial burdens) for ministering to people's souls. But the biggest concern is surely the size of those congregations. Many new people have been reached by the Church going online during the pandemic. Alleluia to that! But some of these will be lost after the pandemic, as well as some of the previous regulars who will not return to physical services. What is being done to make sure that people are disciplined for membership of the Church? How can churches be equipped to reach out not only to their own members but to the fringe and to the casual visitor who like Philip Larkin, only step inside 'when nothing is going on'? At present, there appears to be no answer to these questions.

The Church has much going for it in its people and buildings. Rather than getting rid of those, let us revitalize them for serving the nation's spiritual, mental and physical needs."

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, former Bishop of Rochester

I agree wholeheartedly with Bishop Michael's comments above. The diocese of Rochester has tremendous resources which could be deployed to build the Kingdom of God right here. We have two bishops, 200 clergy and 20,000 laity. I believe that the immense resources of the Church of England must be focused on helping parishes to grow. If elected, I will urge the Archbishop's Council and the Church Commissioners to empower parishes to deliver the growth we so desperately need.

If you agree with me that the time for action is now, please start by casting your vote to let me speak for you in Synod.

Gerald O'Brien

Tel: 07711 938517

E-mail: gmobrien@btinternet.com