

# **Investigating the invisible church: a survey of Christians in the Highlands and Islands who are not part of a church congregation**

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## **Abstract**

Changes in the church within the Highlands and Islands in recent years have generally been described in terms of decline. New data provided by telephone interviews with a random sample of 2698 people show that, while many have disaffiliated from congregational expressions of church this should not be interpreted as deconversion. This data also indicates a population of Christians who have never been affiliated with a congregation. Further new data, provided by 423 Christians who are not affiliated with a congregation and who completed a 76 item survey, provides insights into their faith, lifestyle, and their experiences and perceptions of church. These insights challenge some prevailing views of the nature of the Christian community in this region, highlight valuable areas of learning and suggest appropriate responses by local congregations and those with a concern for the wider Christian community.

## **Introduction**

The decline in UK church attendance during the latter part of the twentieth century and the opening decade of the twenty first century is well documented. The seven editions of Religious Trends, published 1998-2008 by Christian Research show tumbling church attendance in England (McAndrew, 2011). Many have chosen to interpret this change as constituting a corresponding decline in the Christian community and a rise of secularism. Some point to the rise of a “general relativism” that supposes that all beliefs and philosophies

are equally valid as being the engine that drives “the Secularisation paradigm” (Bruce, 2002). Others have theorised that changing attitudes to sex since the 1950s have been a key driver of religious decline and that “from the early 1960s changing attitudes led to rising levels of sexual activity, led by single women, which reduced religious attitudes and Christian churchgoing, thus constituting a significant instigator of the religious crisis” (Brown, 2011, Abstract).

Others have endeavoured to explain how both “secularization and sacralisation” are rooted in what has been called “the massive subjective turn of modern culture” (Taylor, 1991). This refers to the trend for people see their identity less in terms of roles and duties and place greater emphasis on subjective experiences. So, the Kendal Project, it is suggested, identified links between the decline in church congregations and a rise in more subjective expressions of spirituality (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005).

Research among church-leavers shows that a clear majority of those who disengage from their local church congregation continue to have a Christian faith (Richter and Francis, 1998). There is clearly a substantial proportion of church-leavers for whom disaffiliation should not be construed as deconversion.

Data for Scotland is less substantial than for England. However, the picture regarding patterns of church attendance is similar. The 2002 Scottish Church Census found 11.2 % of the country’s population attending church on a particular Sunday in May. That represented an 18% decrease compared with a similar survey in 1994; the 1994 figure had in turn been a 19% drop compared with the 1984 figure (Brierley, 2003).

Tearfund’s report, Churchgoing in the UK (Ashworth and Farthing, 2007), produced differentiated data for Scotland. This revealed that 39% of people in Scotland counted themselves as “dechurched” (former churchgoers, no longer engaged with a church

congregation). That data also showed that, UK-wide, the proportion of dechurched people was highest in rural areas, suggesting that the figure for the Highlands and Islands might be higher than the 39% Scottish average.

While the overall patterns of changing church attendance may be incontrovertible, the fact that “The country is littered with people who used to go to church but no longer do” (Brierley, 2000, p. 236) tells us nothing about why these people chose not to attend. Neither does it give insights into their post-congregational life. Titles of articles and books emerging from research in this area demonstrate that the motivation has usually been to learn lessons by which churches can retain their members more effectively: Closing the back door of the church (Kallmier and Peck, 2009), Closing the back door: Towards the retention of church members (Smith, 1990) and The sheep that got away (Fanstone, 1993). Meanwhile, those who have taken a more open-minded view of current data and suggested that it indicates a paradigm shift towards post-congregational expressions of church do so without empirical evidence to confirm their particular interpretation (Tickle, 2008; Brewin, 2007).

When the streams of data relating to church attendance and church-leaving are combined, there is a strong implication that those Christians who are not engaged with a church congregation comprise a large and growing sector of the Christian community. In 2001, the World Christian Encyclopaedia (Barrett, 2001), estimated that there were 112 million "churchless Christians" worldwide and projected that this number would double by 2025. Clearly the “churchless faith” phenomenon is important, yet little understood; the current pieces of the research jigsaw neither fit together seamlessly with one another nor provide coverage of the whole picture.

One piece of missing evidence relates to those Christians whose faith has its origins and development entirely outside the congregational context. These people have never been

“church-leavers” as they have never been church members or affiliates in the first place. A second gap in current research relates to the Highlands and Islands itself. Because this region has, in the past, had particularly high levels of church attendance and slower rates of decline in church attendance when compared with other areas of Scotland and the UK (Brierley, 2003) it has been assumed by some that the research on “churchless faith” in other parts of the world and data related to “church-leavers” have little to say in relation to the Christian community in this region. A third area of research need relates to post-congregational and non-congregational faith. Research to date has tended to focus on the leaving process of those who have disengaged from church and their reasons for doing so. With the exception of a longitudinal study in New Zealand (Jamieson, 2006), there has been no data gathered that enables us to understand the characteristics of Christian discipleship outside the context of a local church congregation.

A start was made in addressing these research needs in 2013, when a qualitative study, based on interviews with thirty Christians in the Highlands and Islands who were not engaged with a church congregation, identified a number of key themes (Aisthorpe, 2013). The study outlined in this paper explored these themes by surveying a large, random sample.

## **Method**

### **Survey**

The 76 item survey contained a mixture of positive and negatively worded statements that probed respondents’ experiences and perspectives in relation to the themes that emerged from a previous qualitative study (Aisthorpe, 2013). Those surveyed responded by using a five point Likert scale. Where possible the exact wording of questions used in previous studies was used. The ten item Hoge Intrinsic Religiosity Scale (Hoge, 1972) was embedded within the questionnaire. Personal characteristics of respondents were collected by a series of tick

boxes relating to age, gender, length of time living in the Highlands and Islands and length of time regularly attending a church congregation. The postcodes of respondents were also requested.

## **Procedure**

Random records were purchased by postcode for locations throughout the Highlands and Islands. A random sample of 5,523 people was contacted by telephone and 2,698 of these participated in a short interview. The interview used a set of screening questions to ascertain whether the person identified themselves as a Christian, whether they attended a local church congregation on a regular basis and whether they were willing to participate in a survey. “Regular attendance” was explained as meaning attending at least six congregational worship services (excluding weddings, funerals, Christmas and Easter) in a year, this being the widely used practice-based definition pioneered by Hoge, Johnson and Luidens (1993).

Of those interviewed, 44% identified themselves as Christians who do not attend church on a regular basis. Of those fitting these criteria, 79% indicated willingness to participate in the survey (69% by postal survey and 31% online). 430 surveys were returned. The return rate was 46.1%. 7 of the surveys returned were removed from the final data due to several questions being unanswered, leaving a total of 423 surveys for analysis.

In order to obtain the best possible estimate of the proportion of the region’s total population that would fit our criteria, follow-up phone calls were made to a random sample of the 2,825 who refused the initial interview in order to discover the proportion that would fit the main criteria.

## **Cohort**

Plotting the 423 surveys by postcode demonstrated that the cohort came from throughout the Highlands and Islands. The concentration of respondents in different sub-regions correlated well with population density.

60% of surveys were returned by females and 39% by males, with just a few people preferring not to indicate their gender. Just over half (52%) of the surveys came from people of the so-called baby boomer generation. That is, they were born in the period 1946 – 64 and spent their formative years in an era associated with redefinition of traditional values and of relative affluence. 18% of surveys came from people born in or before 1945. Many of this generation, especially indigenous Highlanders, had fathers who were involved in the First World War; most were too young to serve in the Second World War, but experienced the impact of the economic depression of the 1930s and/or the austerity of wartime. 23% of respondents, being born in the period 1965-81, were from “Generation X”, generally seen as more heterogeneous than previous generations and a generation that experienced notable moves towards the embracing of greater social diversity in terms of race, class, religion, ethnicity, culture, language, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Only 5%, born 1982 – 99, came from “Generation Y”, a generation who, among other things, grew up with information technology and the internet.

Nearly half (49%) of those surveyed had lived in the Highlands and Islands for their whole life; 32% had been in the region for more than twenty years; less than 20% of respondents had been in the area less than twenty years (8% less than ten years and 11% between ten and twenty years).

15% of respondents had never attended church regularly; 31% had attended regularly for less than ten years; half of respondents had attended church for more than ten years (23% more than 20 years; 27% 10 - 20 years).

## **Analysis**

Being satisfied that the 2698 people screened and the 423 surveyed were recruited randomly and were representative of our population of interest, it was possible to draw conclusions about the overall population using the 95% Confidence Level (CL) and thus calculating ranges (Confidence Intervals) for our study estimates.

It was also possible to identify some statistical differences (again using 95% CL) between population sub-groups on the basis of gender, generation, HIRS score, time spent living in the region and time spent regularly attending church. Difference testing was based on standard or modified binomial distribution tests, estimating the appropriate standard errors and comparing the differences between two proportions. When testing means, standard approximation to normal distribution tests were used, means and standard errors were estimated and the relevant two distributions were compared.

In choosing to report the particular findings represented in this paper, the most valid results were selected on the basis of strength of statistical data and triangulation or corroboration using multiple questions on the same theme.

## **Results**

### **The scale of “churchless faith”**

The results of the call-back exercise showed that the proportion of those who had refused to be interviewed who identified themselves as Christian but who do not regularly attend a local church congregation was similar to the interviewed sample. It can be concluded, with a confidence level of 95%, that 41.93% - 45.67% of the population fit these criteria. Based on the population of the study area as per the 2011 census this equates to 127,600 – 139,000 people.

## **Christian commitment and spiritual practices**

Whilst all 423 respondents identified themselves as “Christian” when interviewed by telephone, their responses to the survey questions indicate different understandings of what that means, including varying levels of commitment to living out Christian values and differing habits in terms of spiritual practices.

The Hoge Intrinsic Religiosity Scale (HIRS) examines the extent to which a person’s faith is integrated with the rest of life and the extent to which the person is determined that their faith governs and guides their choices and behaviour. A foundational and classic article on conceptualisations of religiosity says of people with high levels of intrinsic religiosity that they:

“find their master motivation in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, so far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions. Having embraced a creed the individual endeavours to internalize it and follow it fully. It is in this sense that he *lives* his religion” (Allport and Ross, 1967, p. 434).

One review of instruments for measuring religiosity, said of the HIRS “ this is by far the most accurate measure of what I think is at the heart of religious devotion – relationship with and commitment to God (the object of ultimate concern)” (Koenig, 2011, p. 229).

In many cases the data displayed a strong association between scores on the HIRS and differentiated responses to survey items. For this reason, where the data justifies it, this paper differentiates between the responses of “high scorers” (i.e. more than 30 on the possible scale of 10 – 50) and “low scorers” (i.e. those scoring 30 or less).



For example, in regard to practices of scripture reading and prayer, high scorers on the HIRS showed notably greater frequency in these activities. 33% of those with scores over thirty pray daily whereas only 3% of those with scores lower than thirty pray daily.

Those with higher HIRS scores also demonstrate a strong missional vision. 82% of those with HIRS scores over thirty agreed with the statement “The world needs to hear the teaching of Jesus Christ” compared with 34% of those with scores below thirty. Scores for a negatively worded partner statement, “The teaching of Jesus Christ has nothing to say to the modern world” underlined this difference, as 87% of the high scorers disagree compared with 55% of low scorers.

Those with scores over thirty are also more likely to discuss their faith with others. Overall, in response to the statement, “I occasionally talk to friends and neighbours about faith” more respondents disagree than agree (51% as opposed to 41%). However, high scorers are considerably more likely to agree than those with lower scores (57% as opposed to 26%). Gender also appears to be a factor here, as, overall, nearly half of females agree with this statement (48%), compared with only 30% of males.

The cohort was split almost equally between high scorers and low scorers, with 211 of the 423 surveys analyses (49.9%) scoring over thirty.

### **Disappointed with church, but not with God**

While the data suggests that many respondents are disillusioned, disappointed or frustrated with church, most are not disappointed with God. In response to the statement, “I feel disappointed with God”, an overwhelming majority disagreed (72% disagreed – of whom 33% disagreed strongly). High scorers are more likely to disagree than all respondents (87% compared with 72% overall). Males and females differ here, with females more likely to

disagree than males (77% against 66%). Also, the longer spent attending church the more sure people are of their view in this regard: 8% of those who attended church for more than 20 years stated that they were unsure compared with 20% overall. This group is also more likely to disagree with the statement (91%).

### **Sense of affiliation with the wider church**

While none of the respondents were engaged with a local congregation, half (50%) indicated that they feel part of the worldwide Christian community. Only a fifth (21%) disagreed with the statement “I feel part of the worldwide Christian community”. However, this is a statement to which some groups responded to in markedly different ways than the overall picture might suggest. Those with HIRS scores over thirty had a notably higher proportion agreeing with this statement (66%) compared with those who scored thirty or less - where only 34% agreed. Also, older respondents reported a greater sense of connection with the wider Christian community. Those born before 1945 are considerably more likely to feel part of the worldwide Christian community (68%) than those born between 1965 and 1981 (30%).

Also, nearly two thirds of respondents who had attended church for over 20 years (64%) agreed with this statement compared with less than half of all those respondents who had attended for less time (45%).

### **A sense of belonging**

Three survey items probed whether part of the reason for disengaging from church was the lack of a “sense of belonging”. The responses to these questions were remarkably similar across the board. Regardless of age, previous experience of church, HIRS score and gender, about a quarter (27%) agreed with the statement, “I used to go to church but felt that I didn’t fit in”.

## **The church and change**

35% of respondents agreed with the statement, “The church in this region is in need of radical change”. In fact, almost regardless of age, gender, and HIRS score, the sample was split evenly between those who agreed, those who disagreed and those who were unsure. The only difference of note is that those born 1946-1964 are more likely to agree (40%) than all respondents (35%).

In response to a statement, “I would like to help bring positive change within my local church, but feel powerless to do so”, whilst half (51%) of all respondents disagreed, there were some notable differences within the sample. Those with scores of over thirty on the HIRS had a lower proportion disagreeing with this statement (42%) compared with those scoring thirty or less. 58% of these low scorers disagreed. In fact nearly a quarter (23%) of high scorers agreed with this statement. In another variance from the overall picture, just over a quarter (26%) of respondents who were born before 1945 said that they would like to help bring positive change within their local church, but feel powerless to do so.

7% of all respondents (and 9% of HIRS high scorers) agreed with the statement, “I have tried to share my thoughts and ideas with my local church but feel ignored.

## **Leaving church: suddenly or gradually?**

Of those who had once been regular church attenders (it should be noted that 15% of the total sample indicated that they had never regularly attended church), most disengaged from church gradually. Over half (57%) of all respondents agreed with the statement, “I used to go to church but decreased attendance gradually over time”. In contrast, about a fifth (22%) agreed with the statement, “I used to go to church but left suddenly”. Those who have spent their whole lives in the Highlands and Islands are less likely to leave suddenly than others

(73% disagreed with the statement, “I used to go to church but left suddenly” compared with 65% of all respondents) and those who have spent over 20 years regularly attending church are more likely to leave suddenly (32% agreed with the statement, “I used to go to church but left suddenly” compared with 22% of all respondents).

### **The role of life crises and house moves:**

Just over a fifth of respondents (21%) and just over a quarter (26%) of those with scores of more than thirty on the HIRS indicated that some sort of crisis in their life led to them disengaging from church. It is notable that of those who previously attended church for more than 20 years 33% said that a crisis led to them disengaging from church.

In response to a separate statement, 20% of respondents stated that they had felt “let down by the church at a time of personal need”.

About one in six (17%) agreed with the statement, “I used to go to church but when I moved house I did not find a church I liked in my new area” and there was no particular difference on the basis of HIRS scores. Those who regularly attended church for more than 20 years are most likely to agree with this statement (20%) and also more likely to be “unsure” (18% compared with 12% overall).

### **Changes within individuals**

Whilst the overall findings suggest that issues connected to church or changes in circumstances were the main factors for those who have left churches, it should be noted that just over one in three respondents indicated that it was changes within themselves that led to them disengaging from church. Overall, 35% of those surveyed agreed with the statement “Changes that happened within me led to me stopping attending church”. The group that are

least likely to agree with this statement are those born in the period 1965-1981. Only a quarter of them (26%) recognised this as a key factor in disengaging from church.

### **Too much infighting within churches and between churches**

One of the clearest responses, with a strong consensus across all groups, related to the perception that there is too much infighting within churches and between churches. Nearly two thirds (63%) of all respondents agreed with this statement compared with one in ten (11%) who disagreed. The only noteworthy difference between groups was between male and female. A higher proportion of males (68%) agreed with this statement than females (59%). Those with most experience of church are least likely to disagree with the statement, “There is too much infighting within churches and between churches” (only 5%); two thirds (66%) of them agreed.

### **Issues of relevance**

We know that the majority of those surveyed (58%) and a large majority of high scorers on the HIRS (82%) are convinced of the relevance and importance of the Christian message because they agreed wholeheartedly with the statement, “The world needs to hear the teaching of Jesus Christ”. However, their views about the relevance of the church as they have experienced it were very different.

In response to the statement, “In my experience, sermons in church have little or no relevance to my everyday life” opinion was divided, with four out of ten (39%) disagreeing with this statement compared with 37% who agreed. A further quarter (24%) was unsure how to answer. High scorers on the HIRS are more likely to disagree (56% compared with 39% overall). Conversely, low scorers on the HIRS are more likely to agree (54% compared with 37% overall).

The proportion who disagreed with this statement increased with the time spent attending church. A fifth (19%) of those who had never attended church regularly disagreed compared with over half 53% who had been attending for over 20 years.

As well as asking about respondents' perceived relevance to themselves, the survey also explored their thoughts about the relevance of church to other people. In response to the statement, "Church feels like 'another planet' to most people" nearly half (48%) agreed, 23% disagreed and 28% were unsure how to answer. High scorers on the HIRS had similar views to all respondents and there were no noteworthy differences on the basis of gender, generation, time living in the region or time attending church.

### **Worship style, theology and accessibility of churches**

It appears that worship style is a decisive issue for only a few people: only 15% overall and 17% of HIRS high scorers would attend church regularly if a different style of worship were available. However, although these are not pivotal issues for most, what can be said is that there are few who feel that their local churches are too informal (11%) compared with those who feel that they are too formal (40%). Also, while only 5% felt that the teaching in church is too broad, 29% feel it is too narrow and 40% feel that "The church's teaching is too black and white in such a complex world". Whilst the "style" and theology of church are not decisive issues for most, the data do suggest that there are about 20,000 people in the Highlands and Islands who identify themselves as Christians, who do not currently attend church, but would do so if there was a different style of church on offer. Specifically, 8% overall and 15% of HIRS High Scorers indicated that they would welcome the opportunity "to join a small group of Christians who meet in homes and discuss faith and life together".

More important than worship style seems to be the way churches operate in relation to people's lifestyles. In response to the statement, "I would like to attend a church but find that

other commitments prevent it”, while more people disagreed than agreed (48% versus 34%), the data suggests that about 45,000 people would like to attend church, but feel prevented from doing so by other commitments. Those scoring more than thirty on the HIRS are more likely to agree with that statement than low scorers (42% compared with 27%) and those who have never regularly attended church are more likely to disagree than those who have attended church at some point in their lives (68% compared with around 45%). Over half (57%) of those who have lived in the Highlands and Islands for more than 20 years disagreed, compared with 48% of all respondents.

### **Contentedly non-congregational**

As indicated above, the data suggest that there are considerable numbers of people who would welcome opportunities to engage with a church if it fitted in with other commitments and constraints. However, the majority of those surveyed are not looking to engage with church. In fact, many appear to find life as a Christian beyond the congregational context both helpful to their spiritual journey and vocationally fulfilling.

In response to the statement, “I want to follow my own spiritual quest without religious institutions” four out of ten (41%) agreed, a quarter (27%) disagreed and a further 32% were unsure. High scorers on the HIRS have a higher proportion disagreeing with this statement (35%) compared with low scorers (18%).

Amongst respondents who had spent their whole life in the region, a lower proportion (36%) agreed with the statement, “I want to follow my own spiritual quest without religious institutions” compared with those living in the area for shorter times. Amongst respondents who had attended church for over 20 years a higher proportion (40%) disagreed compared with those who attended church for a shorter period.

Of those who had never regularly attended church, 57% agreed with this statement compared with just 25% of those who attended for more than 20 years.

In response to the related statement, “Not being involved in a traditional church congregation frees me to pursue what I believe is my Christian calling”, while just over a third (36%) disagreed, just under a third (31%) agreed. Compared with all respondents, those who had regularly attended church for more than 20 years are more likely to disagree (47% compared with 36%); those who had never regularly attended are more likely to agree (40%).

## **Discussion and conclusion**

It has been commonplace in some parts of the Christian community in the Highlands and Islands to view the population which attends church regularly and the Christian population as synonymous. This study indicates that this is incorrect. In fact, the larger part of the Christian community does not engage with a church congregation on a regular basis. It has been conventional in recent years, when thinking about Christian mission, to talk about “the 90%” (Church of Scotland Joint Emerging Church Group, 2013, p. 2), 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.

When views have prevailed that those who have left our churches are usually “backsliders” for whom a crisis of faith is the main reason for their departure, these must be revised. We must also recognise that Christians who do not attend a church congregation fall along a broad spectrum in terms of what their faith means to them – as do regular churchgoers (Woodhead, 2013).



Other prevailing views such as “churchless faith” being related to the impact of migration into the area from other parts of the UK (“incomers”) or that it simply reflects a “lack of commitment” in recent generations are also undermined by this data. Recent arrivals into the Highlands and Islands comprise only a small minority of those Christians who do not attend church congregations. It is probable that about half have been in the region their whole lives and that over 80% have lived here for over 20 years. The thousands of Christians who have attended churches, but no longer do so, in the main, disengaged after a lengthy period of commitment.

Whilst studies in other parts of the world have researched “church-leavers” (Richter and Francis, 1998), this survey has identified a population of Christians who have never been regularly involved with a congregation and about a third of this group are high scorers on the HIRS.

The data challenges congregations to ask searching questions about whether they are the kind of hospitable, welcoming and inclusive communities commended in the New Testament.

Other studies have shown that a few personality types tend to be over-represented in church congregations and that there is a corresponding under-representation of other types (Francis, Robbins, Williams and Williams, 2007). It seems likely that this kind of phenomenon (which is likely to be mirrored by other factors such as age, gender and a variety of personal preferences) has a self-perpetuating affect. It is not surprising then that some people struggle to find a sense of belonging in their local congregation. Those of us who are privileged to visit congregations throughout the region can testify to the fact that congregations have their own cultures, their own unique “feel”. To genuinely celebrate diversity and allow those who are different from the current core membership to be authentically themselves, congregations need to give constant attention to fostering habits of welcome and inclusion and to cultivate a culture of hospitality.

The data challenges congregations to look afresh at how they encourage discipleship.

Whether Christians are part of a congregation or not, it is important that faith is nurtured and worked out in the realities of daily life. It is clear that many of those who are not engaged with a congregation are serious about developing habits that sustain and grow their Christian lives, such as prayer, scripture reading and meeting with other Christians. Congregations need to re-evaluate the opportunities they provide for Christians to explore faith, work through questions and doubts, and grow in Christian character. It is clear that, for many, the congregation alone has not provided a helpful context for discipleship. Small informal groups can provide a safe space and the relational context in which people can grow.

The insights gained from this study suggest that there is important work to be done in connecting the wider Christian community. Whilst we should accept that most Christians who have left congregations have no intention of returning, they are still a part of the Christian community, the body of Christ. Perhaps the internet also has a key role to play in linking Christians together and providing a forum for encouragement, discussion, worship and prayer.

This study also highlights the importance of church congregations being “caring communities” and the need for diligence and excellence in “pastoral care”. Congregations would do well to review how they respond to their members and to those in the wider community at times of particular need and crisis. House moves, too, are times when Christians may re-engage with congregational life, move away from congregational life or just be on the lookout for others with whom to share the Christian journey. These are therefore key opportunities for congregations to extend welcome and support. The fact that most people who have disengaged from congregational life have done so gradually over an extended period suggests that congregations need to be better attuned to the ups and downs of people’s lives on an on-going basis - not only in the crisis times. This will require stronger relationships and open communication.

It seems that many of those Christians who are not currently engaged with a congregation but who would like to be are prevented more by practical considerations than matters of theology or style. Greater variety of opportunities to engage with congregations would be welcomed by some. This may mean looking at issues of timing, provision for all ages and exploring opportunities to gather for worship, prayer and study that take place beyond traditional Sunday services.

The data also underlines the need for teaching within congregations to connect better with people’s lives and contemporary issues if people are to sense that it is relevant to them and to their friends and neighbours.

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