

While churches in some denominations, especially some Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, have had mid-week services for many years, among other churches it was relatively rare 20 years ago. Such activities increased in popularity during the 1990s especially. The English Church Census in 1989 did not ask about them, but the 1998 one did, and found that 42% of churches were then holding some kind of mid-week service or meeting for worship. Some denominations counted home Bible studies in this category.

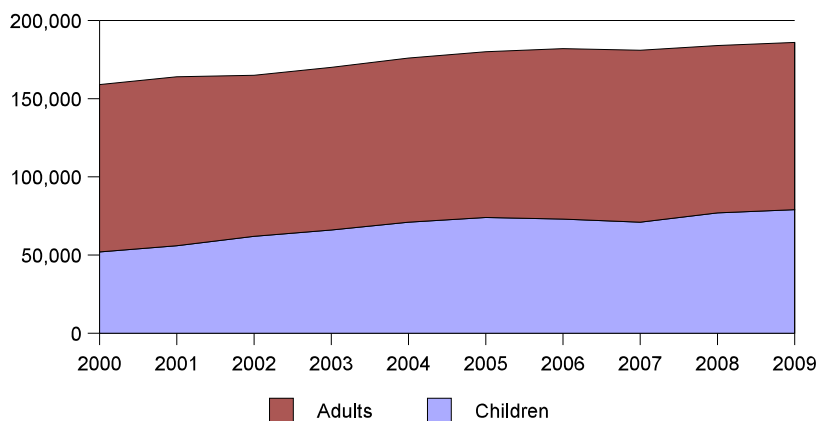
Pentecostal churches had the most (66%), followed by Independent churches (59%) and Anglicans (51%), with the overall percentage being 42%. The United Reformed, Methodist and New Churches held the least (respectively, 19%, 22% and 23%). Collective attendance in 1998 was 335,000 people. In Scotland the percentage of churches holding a mid-week service was 56% in 2002.

Mid-week services

At the time of the next English Church Census, in 2005, the number attending these services had increased to 460,000, a 37% increase, although the percentage of churches holding such remained the same, at 42%. This gives an average congregation of 29 people mid-week (compared with 21 in 1998). Some of those attending mid-week also attended on a Sunday – in fact virtually half, 46%, of churches said that *all* who attended mid-week also came on Sunday. However, that means that in 54% of churches some coming mid-week did not come on Sunday, the proportion *not* doing so averaging 27%. Collectively this proportion adds an additional 0.3% of the population attending a church service, which with the 6.3% who attend on an average Sunday, makes 6.6% of the population attending a service sometime during a typical week.

The Church of England collects the numbers attending mid-week (or “weekday”) services. It also breaks the numbers down between adults and children (taken as those under the age of 17). Table 2.3.1 gives the detail from 2000 to 2009 which is illustrated in Figure 14.1.1:

Figure 14.1.1: Midweek Church of England attendance, adults and children, 2000-2009E



The numbers have steadily increased since the turn of the century, although not sufficient to offset the drop in the numbers attending on a Sunday. The number of adults attending has varied a little, but the reason for the increase is the ever larger number of children attending which rose year on year from 2000 to 2005, although it has dropped slightly since then.

The Church of England does not give the number of churches holding such services, though the Census found it was 45% in 2005, which would make the average congregation that year 25 people, 15 adults and 10 children. The Church of England accounted for two-fifths, 39%, of attendance at mid-week services that year.

The 2005 Census showed that those coming mid-week were 58% female, 42% male, the same proportions as attended church on Sundays, but that on average the age of midweek attenders was about 5 years younger than Sunday attenders. This is because mid-week services attract a higher proportion of teenagers (13% to 6%) than Sunday services and a lower percentage of those 65 and over (26% to 36%).

Other mid-week ministry

Not all ministry mid-week is in the form of services. There are a multitude of other activities! A quarter, 27%, of churches provide some kind of meeting or activity specifically for young people, a fairly small percentage but consistent with the fact that many churches have no young people – 39% had no children attending under 11, 49% had none aged 11 to 14, and 59% had none aged 15 or over in 2005.

Altogether in 2005, some 329,000 young people attended a mid-week activity run by churches, an average of 32 per church. A third, 36%, of these are run by an Anglican church. Almost half, 45%, of these young people went to church

as well on the Sunday (and were counted in with Sunday attendance), and obviously therefore 55% didn't, equivalent to another 0.3% of the population involved with church but mid-week.

In 1998, half, 45%, of churches had some kind of adult ministry mid-week, such as social events or activities for particular groups (as readers' groups, women's meetings or debt counselling, for example). The average attendance given worked out at 70, which seems rather large; in 2005 the question was poorly answered as a breakdown of age of attenders was also requested and many churches, not having that data, didn't answer the question at all even though they had a ministry mid-week. Of the 20% who did have age information, the average number attending was 55 per church, 70% of whom were over 18. Using the 2005 age information but 1998 church information, that would suggest some 552,000 adults were attending some kind of church-run activity each week.

Putting this all together in a comprehensible way is not easy, and there are several assumptions involved, but the overall pattern beginning to emerge seems something like that shown in Table 14.1.1.

Table 14.1.1: Mid-week attendance, by adults and children, 1998-2009

Mid-week activity	Children			Adults			TOTAL		
	1998	2005	2009	1998	2005	2009	1998	2005	2009
Services	44,000	60,000	60,000	291,000	400,000	459,000	335,000	460,000	519,000
Youth work	}232,000	}316,000	}363,000	9,000	13,000	15,000	241,000	329,000	378,000
Other events				454,000	552,000	500,000	454,000	552,000	500,000
TOTAL	276,000	376,000	423,000	754,000	965,000	974,000	1,030,000	1,341,000	1,397,000

The derivation of the 1998 and 2005 numbers is as follows. The 2005 totals are taken from the results of the 2005 English Church Census (given in the book *Pulling out of the Nosedive*), with the "other events" figure calculated as above. The 1998 total figure for services is from the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey, while the other total figures are based on 1998 measurements but estimated for the split shown. The split between adults and children is based on survey results for 1998 and 2005, the youth work adult figure largely being helpers. The "other events" were counted as adult only in 1998, and the youth element in them for 2005 put in with the 2005 youth work number. The 2009 figures are described below.

Latest data

A major survey on Child Protection policies in 2009 asked questions about mid-week attendance as background for the questions on safeguarding. However, "attendance" in this context was to any mid-week activity, and not just services.

Numbers attending midweek from the 2009 survey were measured by size of church, and if the survey figures are amended to represent the national church size and then grossed up for all churches, then the total number coming midweek is 974,000, an increase of 1% over the 2005 figure, but essentially static as the difference is well within measurement error.

In other words, the number of people coming to mid-week events has increased over the last decade, a continuing trend at least since 1998, but, with the number for the last few years static, the growth took place around the turn of the century. This is for mid-week attendance as a whole, and it remains true more or less for attendance at mid-week services. The Church of England figures given in Table 1 have the same features, and show that what is happening to the Church of England mid-week is being replicated across the other denominations.

However, Table 14.1.1 shows an ongoing increase in youth and other mid-week activity for young people, but that the numbers of adults coming to "other events" mid-week has fallen off from 2005 to 2009. The differences are not huge and since the 2005 increase was especially large over 1998 figures it might mean that the number reported in 2005 was unrepresentatively large. It is possible to break down the adult figures into at least two age-groups, and these are shown in Table 14.1.2, although the children's figures are repeated for completeness and comparison.

Table 14.1.2: Mid-week adult attenders by age-group, 2005 and 2009

Mid-week activity	2005			2009			% change 2009 over 2005		
	Under 19	19-44	45 & over	Under 19	19-44	45 & over	Under 19	19-44	45 & over
Services	60,000	137,000	263,000	60,000	157,000	302,000	0%	+15%	+15%
Youth work	}316,000	13,000	0	}363,000	15,000	0	}+15%	+15%	~
Other events		236,000	316,000		237,000	263,000		0%	-17%
TOTAL	376,000	386,000	579,000	423,000	409,000	565,000	+13%	+6%	-2%

The final columns showing the percentage change between 2005 and 2009 are the most interesting here. Attendance increases at mid-week services have been among the adults not the children in these four years, and the increase is equally shared among those under 45 as well as over.

However, while numbers of young people under 19 coming to youth or other events has increased by 15% between 2005 and 2009 (as has the number of helpers), the number of adults aged 19 to 44 has remained static and the number of older people has dropped quite substantially. It might mean that some in this older group are “switching” from other events to services, but it is unlikely this is the total explanation, and may not be even a partial explanation.

Could a lack of volunteer or paid helpers, and hence presumably a smaller number of actual activities, be part of the reason why numbers have dropped? As older people need more in the way of transport and individual help, could activities for them have declined, or is the decline due to mortality? The decline is quite steep and it is unlikely that any one reason is the main cause – rather a combination of different factors. Older people are increasingly wary of coming out to mid-week evening activities because of safety concerns.

Midweek and Sunday

There is one more analysis which can be extracted from these figures – the proportion of those attending mid-week who also attend on a Sunday. This information is not available unfortunately at all for 1998, but Table 14.1.3 gives it for 2005 and 2009.

Table 14.1.3: Mid-week attenders coming on Sunday or not, 2005 and 2009

Mid-week activity	Both Sunday and mid-week		Mid-week only		Base figures	
	2005	2009	2005	2009	2005	2009
Services	73%	77%	27%	23%	460,000	519,000
Youth work	45%	51%	55%	49%	329,000	378,000
Other event	0%	0%	100%	100%	552,000	500,000
TOTAL	36%	42%	64%	58%	1,341,000	1,397,000

Table 14.1.3 shows that more of those coming to the church mid-week are also coming on Sunday, whether they are young people or those coming to services. Whether this means that more of those attending mid-week are already Sunday church people or whether it means that more of the mid-week visitors, the “fringe” as some would call them, are coming on Sunday as well is not definitively known. However, the number coming mid-week to services and *not* attending on Sunday was 124,000 in 2005 [the 27% in Table 4], and was 121,000 in 2009 [the 23%], suggesting that the “fringe” numbers are static (or even slightly declining) making the mid-week increase more of church people who would be likely to attend on a Sunday as well.

Table 14.1.3 is slightly misleading in that it puts all those coming to “adult” events mid-week in a church as only coming mid-week. In practice some of these – if only the church volunteer helpers – will also come on Sunday but this percentage isn’t known. If it was, say, 10% in both years, then the overall percentages coming both mid-week and on Sunday would be 50% and 54% respectively for 2005 and 2009.

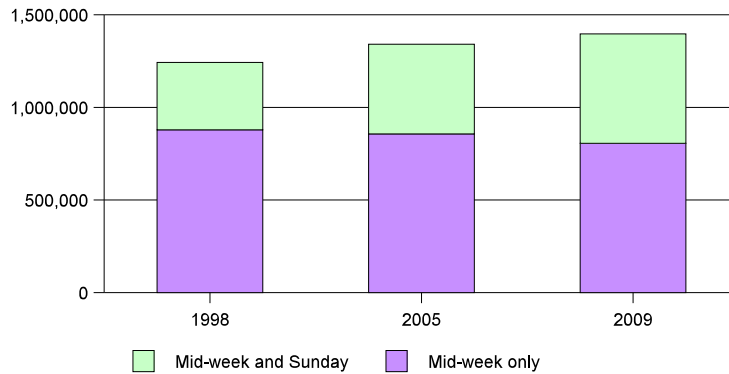
The Child Protection Survey broke down the 51% “youth work” percentage for 2009 in Table 14.1.3 into smaller age-groups for the first time, and this detail is given in Table 14.1.4. It can be seen that the older the child/teenager, the more likely they were to come on Sunday, which suggests that if churches can keep their young people past key breakpoints (going to secondary school at 11, and after the “rebellious” phase at about 13 and 14) they are likely to continue to come for the next few years. This replicates the finding in a large 2001 research project published as *Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers*.

Table 14.1.4: Percentage of midweek attenders coming on Sunday by age

Age-group	2005 all churches %	2009 sample %
0 to 10	} 45	42
11 to 14		53
15 to 17		59
18 and over	73	77
Base	37,501	661

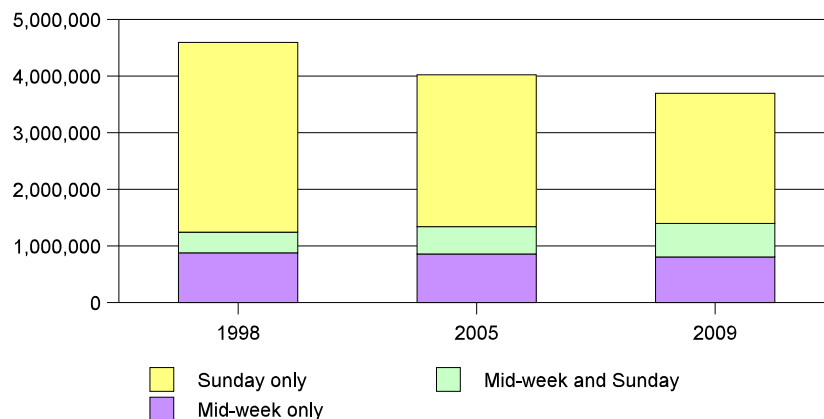
The only 1998 figure known for the numbers in Table 14.1.1 is the 335,000 people who attended services mid-week. How many of these only came mid-week or on Sunday as well is not known but could be approximately estimated from the proportions in 2005 and 2009. Likewise the youth work figures could be estimated; there were 220,000 youth coming to services in 1998, a question not repeated in 2005. The figures for 1998 therefore can only be very approximate, but are useful in assessing broad trends, and they are reflected in Figure 14.1.2.

Figure 14.1.2: Numbers attending mid-week and on a Sunday



There is a further group of people who come to church – those who only come on a Sunday. These are the majority of church people, and the numbers reflected in Figure 14.1.2 are put into this wider context in Figure 14.1.3. In 1998 “mid-weekers” were 27% of all attenders; in 2009 they are 38%.

Figure 14.1.3: English church attendance, midweek and Sunday



While total church numbers decline, that decline is mostly among those who only come on a Sunday. Should churches therefore encourage yet more their mid-week ministry? But this supposes a further question – is the purpose of mid-week ministry to get people to come on a Sunday? As is discussed in the last section of this paper, for some the answer is undoubtedly YES. However, for some who come to a spiritual activity midweek, this could easily be “church” for them. Does it matter is that is not held on a Sunday? Some, especially perhaps from the New and Pentecostal churches, would answer NO.

Purpose of mid-week ministry

There is a key question in this: “What is the purpose of mid-week ministry?” Is it to disciple the saints or reach those outside or both? A 2003 survey focussing on why churches grow, and published as a booklet entitled *Leadership and Vision in Growing Churches*, asked about mid-week ministry and the number of people who had started coming to church as a consequence of it. The results are shown in Table 14.1.5 on the next page.

Table 14.1.5: Average attendance at mid-week meetings and numbers subsequently coming to church

% churches with activity	Type of activity	Average attendance	New church attendance	% new attendance
65	Parents and toddlers	30	7	22
64	The elderly	32	12	39
38	Those getting married	14	4	25
31	Those wanting child's baptism	20	6	32
26	Young adults	21	11	52
17	Those requiring counselling	15	5	36
16	The bereaved	17	6	34

The most popular mid-week ministry, run by more churches than any other single type of event – a Parents' and Toddlers' Club – actually produces only a relatively small number of people on a Sunday. More targeted ministry, sometimes of a specialist kind, can be more fruitful in terms of subsequent Sunday attendance. This then re-inforces the question of why mid-week ministry is being undertaken.

In yet another study, this time of the largest churches in the country, in 2008, it was found that the churches which had an *intentional* reason for holding a mid-week ministry, rather than just having one to meet demand or because there was a spare room on the church premises, were the ones more likely to grow in Sunday attendance. Some of these meetings would certainly include a Parents' and Toddlers' Club, but the adults attending would be specially drawn into the church family and perhaps at some stage invited to a particular event just for them, for example, a Parents' Alpha Course run alongside the Club or on a special evening.

Growing churches have enormous opportunities through mid-week ministries, and are undertaking more and more such activities, with greater and greater attendance. It is those churches who plan strategically the outcomes of each of their mid-week ministries that seem to be the more successful.

There are other implications behind these statistics, beyond the scope of this paper. How far are church premises important for building the church? Should "church" include only those who interact on a Sunday or mid-week in a denominational context, or should it also include many who have genuine spiritual fellowship in their places of work or study, especially perhaps in Christian agencies, or in Christian Unions which have not been included at all in the above analysis? All this paper has done is to raise a few questions about the extent, nature and purpose of mid-week ministry and to look at the trends as they are being revealed by some of the latest research which may be of some use to churches in evaluating their mid-week ministry.

Sources: The Church of England website, www.cofe.anglican.org/info/statistics; *Pulling out of the Nosedive*, Peter Brierley, Christian Research, Eltham, 2006; *Leadership, Vision and Growing Churches*, Peter Brierley, Christian Research, Eltham, 2003; *Safeguarding the Church's Children*, Brierley Consultancy, 2009; *The Significance of Larger Churches*, Brierley Consultancy, 2008.