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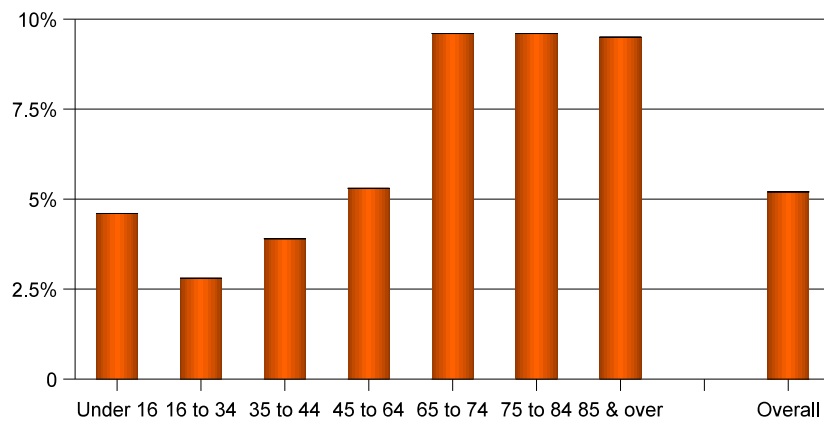
Exactly who are the “Millennials”? The idea of calling a generation by a name began long before we started naming hurricanes! After the Second World War returning American GIs married and started families, so the number of Americans born in the early 50s was considerably greater than in previous years. There was a “boom” in families. In Britain our boom came in the years of the early 1960s, the “Baby Boom” generation, soon abbreviated to “Boomers”, usually taken for simplicity as those born between 1945 and 1963. Those coming afterwards were far fewer in number; they “stopped the boom”, or “Busted” it, and so for a while were called the “Baby Busters”. This is a disparaging title, however, and when Douglas Coupland published his book *Gen X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* in 1991 the phrase instantly stuck and they became “Gen X” (born 1964 to 1982) from then on.

The children of Gen X could naturally be called Gen Y and they were for some time, and their grandchildren Gen Z, but with the Gen Y cohort being those born between 1983 and 2001, around the time of the dawn of the new Millennium, the term “Millennials” became fashionable and has stayed ever since. Different people give slightly different years for each cohort, but the years given here are seemingly the majority usage. That means that in 2017 Millennials are those aged between 16 and 34. This article keeps broadly to this age-range.

**Millennials and the Church**

The one thing most Christians know about the Millennials is that by and large they are missing from the church. In 2017 in England there are about 380,000 people aged 16 to 34 attending Sunday church services, about 13% of all the 2.89 million people attending, but only 2.8% of all in that age-group in the population (some 13.4 million English people), the smallest age cohort attending church as Fig 16.2.1 shows, less than a third (at 2.8%) of those attending three times their age (9.6%). The overall average in 2017 is 5.2%.

Figure 16.2.1: Percentage of relevant population attending church in England in 2017



Of the 380,000 churchgoers aged 16 to 34, 75,000 are aged 16 to 19, 165,000 are in their 20s, and 140,000 are aged 30 to 34. It should be noted that these numbers are dropping quite rapidly as Table 16.2.1 indicates.

The Millennials were a fifth (19%) of all churchgoers in the year 2000, the year from which they get their name. By 2010, they were only 15% of all churchgoers and, if existing trends continue, their proportion in 2020 will be 12%. The age-group declining most rapidly in this range are those under 30.

Table 16.2.1: Number of churchgoers in the Millennials age-groups

Year	Under 16	The Millennials				35 & over	Total
		16 to 19	20-29	30-34			
2000	740,000	160,000	300,000	190,000	2,060,000	3,450,000	
2010	580,000	100,000	205,000	160,000	2,025,000	3,070,000	
2017	490,000	75,000	165,000	140,000	2,020,000	2,890,000	
2020	450,000	60,000	150,000	130,000	2,000,000	2,790,000	
<i>Percentage of the total</i>							
2000	21	5	9	5	60	100	
2010	19	3	7	5	66	100	
2017	17	2	6	5	70	100	
2020	16	2	5	5	72	100	

**London and those aged 20 to 29**

Those in their 20s who do regularly attend church, however, tend to be concentrated in particular locations, of which London is chief, as Table 16.2.2 indicates, with the 2005 figures coming from the English Church Census that year, and 2015 figures based on the 2012 London Church Census. The percentage of those in their 20s attending church in London, at 6%, is more than double the proportion shown in Figure 16.2.1.<sup>1</sup> Note that the years used here are intermediate to those shown in Table 16.2.1.

Table 16.2.2: Churchgoers aged 20-29, by geographical area, 2005 and 2015

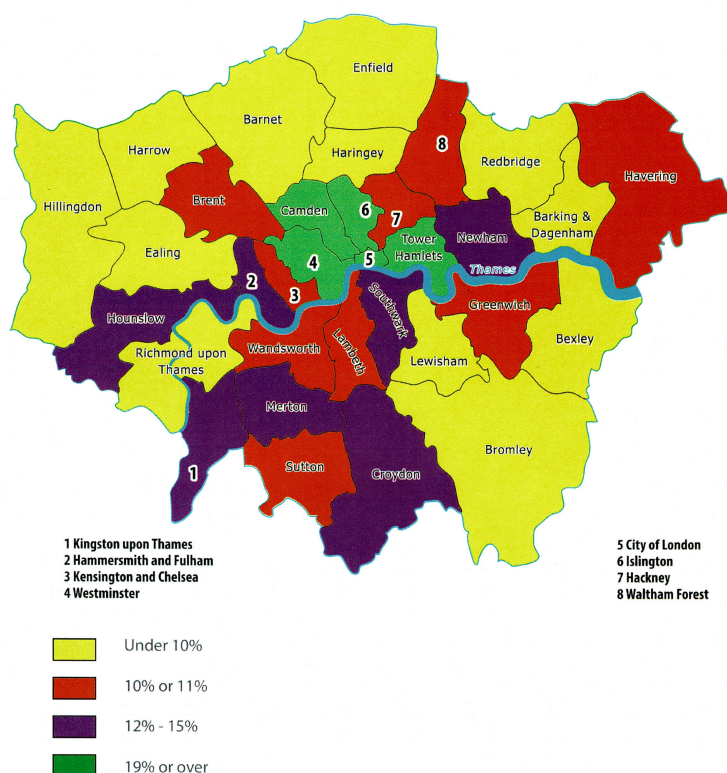
Geographical area	Churchgoers in their 20s		Total churches		Aver churchgoers in 20s, per church	
	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
London	64,800 (28%)	80,000 (44%)	4,100	4,800	16	17
28 Local Authorities each with more than 1000	49,000 (20%)	34,000 (20%)	4,800	4,900	10	7
Rest of England	126,800 (52%)	61,000 (36%)	29,700	29,600	4	2
TOTAL	240,600 (100%)	175,000 (100%)	38,600	39,300	6	4

London attracts a high percentage of worshippers partly because 18% of London’s population is in their 20s (against 11% in Britain as a whole), and also because London has many immigrants, a large proportion of whom are in this age-group.

Outside of London’s 33 Boroughs there are 313 other Local Authorities or Unitary Authorities in England. Based on the 2005 English Church Census, in only 28 of these were there more than 1,000 people in their 20s attending church across the whole Authority. Total attendance in these 28 Authorities was 49,000 people, or 20% of the then total of churchgoing twenties; it is assumed to be a similar percentage in 2015. The heaviest concentrations (over 2,000) were in Nottingham (3,200), Leeds (3,100), Liverpool (3,000), Oxford (2,800), Manchester (2,500), Bristol (2,200), Sheffield (2,200) and Cambridge (2,100), all university cities and all with some larger churches (attendance 400+).

The total of 44% London churchgoers aged 20-29 and 20% churchgoers in these 28 Local Authorities aged 20-29 in 2015 was 64%, which leaves the remaining 36% or about 61,000 churchgoing folk in their 20s in 2015 scattered across the rest of England. It is of course true that not all those in their 20s will go to “student-churches” but a majority will do so (as young people tend to follow the crowd), so while not all of this 64% of the 20s will be in larger churches, probably at least 50% will be. These numbers and the remaining 36% of the 20s shown in the Table.

Figure 16.2.2: London Boroughs and their percentage of churchgoers aged 20-29



London shows that Millennials *do* go to church, and it is worth asking why. One reason is that many large evangelical churches in London attract people mostly because of firmly based exegetical Biblical teaching, especially in the many lunch-time services which are held in the City, for example. Young people with little Biblical background from previous school, home or church experience, if attracted to the Christian faith, will want to know what it means to be Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These churches give that teaching, and their services are full. Figure 16.2.2 shows the Boroughs in which those in their 20s particularly attend, those coloured green being the chief 5 (with 19% or more of their churchgoers in this age-group) – Camden, City of London, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Westminster, which are Boroughs where many of the larger churches are located, Anglican and others.

In the 10 years in Table 16.2.2 (2005 to 2015), churchgoing twenties have increased significantly in London, reduced in the 28 “big” Authorities and more than halved in the rest of England, largely because so many in their 20s have dropped out of church altogether. 20-year olds in a congregation are an increasing rarity! A keen Christian musician in the mid-1990s, then in his 20s, was worshipping in a Lincoln church, and said to his father on the phone one day, “Dad, I’m the only one here in my 20s.”

### ***Millennials and technology***

Research is being undertaken on how best to reach those who “prefer watching to reading, screens to paper, interacting to writing, dialoguing to listening to lectures, and group activities to individual activities,” a quote by Tom Steffen of the Morality Movement.<sup>2</sup> The Barna Group in California has undertaken much research on the Millennials over the past few years, the key results of which are freely available on their website, and it maybe that the sheer volume of their work has inhibited similar research in the UK. What is fairly certain, however, is that most of their findings will be equally true of Millennials in the UK, so their results are extensively quoted.

Their looking at the ongoing trends from Millennials and their “digital lens” showed that a third of American adults of this age group, 36%, stop whatever they are doing to check their device when they get a new text or message. However, the same proportion, 35%, also realise that these devices can separate them from people they are with.

- Half, 53%, find that smart phones and tablets can become a distraction
- Half, 55%, wish they had accomplished more the previous day (having been hindered in the process by using social media).

In other words, some American Millennials, while agreeing life is fast and furious, are reporting they are getting less done than they would wish. Three-fifths, 62%, reckon they know more about technology than other adults, but at the same time are looking for substance, not flashing lights. Seven out of eight, 87%, of Millennials say they want to live a meaningful life. Despite high rates of cohabitation and delayed marriage, four-fifths of American Millennials, 82%, want to get married. Born-again Millennials, notable for social activism, are also the generation practising evangelism most.<sup>3</sup> A similar survey among British Millennials would probably yield similar results.

While technology is a pervasive part of life for Millennials, they are beginning to realise that it can burn them out. Few ever log off, half (46%) never ever reckon on relaxing. As a consequence, less than half (42%) of these Americans are satisfied with their work/life balance, their practice of rest (39%) or their level of stress (28%). Only a fifth spend between 8 and 12 hours a day being truly productive, and, as given above, half (55%) wish they had accomplished more the day before.

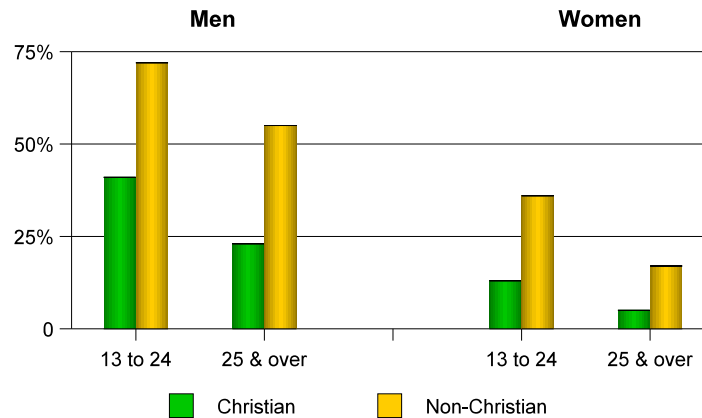
### ***Pornography***

There is also the problem of watching pornography. Barna’s research found that a quarter of the American population, 26%, of those aged 12 to 17 actively seek out porn at least once a week; two-fifths, 38%, of those aged 18 to 25; a quarter, 25%, of those aged 25 to 30; a quarter, 23%, of those aged 31 to 50; and it only reduces to 9% for those aged 51 to 69. Seeing porn at least once a month Barna found to be true of 71% of the population, with only 29% saying they never see it.

Only half of adults, 25 and over, 54%, think watching porn is wrong, and they put over-eating and not recycling waste as higher wrongs! Just a third, 32%, of younger adults and teens think it is wrong, and nearly half, 43%, assume that everyone looks at it sometimes. The morality of it is hardly ever discussed. Americans spend \$2.8 bn in internet pornography each year (=£1.9 bn), equivalent to £6 per person in the USA.

Christians watch porn less than non-Christians.<sup>4</sup> Two-fifths, 41%, of practising Christian men aged 13-24 view porn frequently against 72% non-practising Christian men. For those aged 25 or over these percentages are 23% and 55% respectively, as shown in Figure 16.2.3 on the next page. For women they are 13%, 36%, 5% and 17% respectively. About a third of practising Christians feel a sense of guilt when watching porn. Only 9% of Americans have tried to stop using porn, and 16% of practising Christians.

Figure 16.2.3: Christian and non-Christian watching of pornography



### Attracting Millennials

As the Barna research organisation is Christian, it focusses on Christian Americans, but the similarity of outlook, aided by extensive social media, almost certainly means that much of their findings will be true of Christian Millennials in the UK also.

A survey a few years ago<sup>5</sup> showed three strong factors for attracting Millennials: they are more likely to go to churches experiencing rapid growth or decline (more than 10% have changed churches during the last decade); more are likely to stay at those churches with multiple full-time leaders; and men are more likely to remain in those churches where a quarter or fewer leaders are women.

The Barna Group undertook an unusual survey<sup>6</sup> a few years ago – if a church was being built for those in their 20s, what kind of design would be most appreciated? Nearly half the respondents, 44%, said they would like a conventional looking church but not too big and not too small. Very big churches were felt by some to appear as “really a big business”, and while they would like such big enough to give some anonymity as a visitor, they also wanted a church small enough to feel part of a community. Only a fifth, 20%, wanted a permanent lectern at the front, and almost the same proportion, 18%, did not want either to look at a pleasing picture at the front, or (another 18%) to have rank upon rank of long pews.

What did respondents want to look at or felt should be at the front? Something fairly simple and distinctively Christian, such as a wooden crucifix. Unsurprisingly, Protestants preferred a crucifix without Jesus on it, while the Catholics preferred a crucifix with Jesus. More than two-thirds of those in their 20s gave this preference for a wooden cross. A fifth, 19%, were in favour of a fixed table at the front, while the remaining 11% preferred something with more design. The basic preference was for a straightforward, overtly Christian style of imagery. There was no agreement, however, on the type of windows preferred.

Youth Clubs are *not* the place to attract younger Millennials. A UK Youth for Christ survey<sup>7</sup> found that very few 15 to 18 year olds will spend time in such a place. They prefer to spend time with their school friends (61%), friends from outside school (19%), family/wider family (12%), with their boy/girlfriend (3%), on line (3%) or by themselves (2%).

Another Barna study<sup>8</sup> asked why attending church was important for those Millennials who said it was. The main reason was that they “go to be closer to God” (44%), “to learn about God there” (27%), and that “the Bible says we should go” (22%). Church was deemed a place “to find answers if you want to live a meaningful life” (65%). However the Millennials in their sample felt that Christianity’s image was primarily of pointing the finger (37%), or as a protestor (16%). A quarter (24%) saw it as a helping hand reaching out to a person in need.

The key reason why Millennials stay in church is that they form a close personal friendship with an adult in the church or parish (59%). They have also learned how Christians positively contribute to society (46%), and have seen their own gifts and passions as part of God’s vocational calling (45%). Regular prayer (60%) and reading the Bible (27%) are also key. For older Millennials, having children is also important and helps to make their faith grow.<sup>9</sup>

### Pushing Millennials Away

What puts Millennials off church? Barna interviewed a sample of those who had regularly gone to church up to the age of 15 and subsequently had drifted off,<sup>10</sup> and found 6 reasons why:

- Churches seen overprotective
- Teens’ and twenty somethings’ experience of Christianity is shallow
- Churches come across as antagonistic to science
- Young Christians’ church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic and judgmental
- They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity
- The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.

Barna also investigated the truths about the common explanations of why young adults drop out of church. Their study<sup>11</sup> found that it is not true to say that many lose their faith on leaving school; for many their faith remains, but attendance stops. Nor is it true that College experience causes them to drop out; religious experience at College is often hugely important, but young Christians need to be taught about their “faith, calling and culture” and adult friendships can help enormously. Nor is it true that dropping out of church is the usual way to mature as a Christian; many do drop out and are staying out of church longer (an Eddie Gibbs’ survey in 1993<sup>12</sup> found the average time out was 10 years; a more recent study put it as 14 years).

Some consider that the present generation of young people are “Biblically illiterate”, but many young Christians have had to absorb their Christian understanding in an era of antagonism to the faith, giving them a different perspective on sharing and expressing one’s faith. Will young people who drop out of church come back again? Barna made it clear that this is not necessarily true. Others have also researched this issue finding that the number of “invisible” Christians is high. Patrick Johnstone suggested that 17% of the UK population could be “invisible Christians”<sup>13</sup> and a recent study in rural Western Scotland by Steve Aisthorpe gives a much higher percentage.<sup>14</sup>

### **Living Arrangements**

Millennials are the first generation to begin to take cohabitation as the norm prior to getting married. Cohabitation<sup>15</sup> in the UK is now also seen as consistent with starting a family should you wish to do so. One household in seven, 14%, in the UK was cohabiting in 2017, and three-fifths of these (61%) had a family.<sup>16</sup> The cohabiting percentage is higher for those aged 20 to 29 – a quarter, 24%, but a further three-fifths (63%) are still single, the remainder being married. A very small proportion (0.5%) are already divorced.<sup>17</sup> In America, two-thirds (65%) agree that cohabitation is a “good idea” in order to test compatibility – a percentage fluctuating between 88% for Non-Christians and 41% for practising Christians, although it was only 6% for Evangelicals.<sup>18</sup> Online dating would appear unpopular (73% of Millennials would never do it, nor would 85% of Evangelicals). Some 2% of UK churchgoers were cohabiting in 2012, mostly Millennials, but only 1% of Evangelicals.<sup>19</sup>

A 27-year old, writing in *The Daily Telegraph*,<sup>20</sup> said that “the goalposts of adulthood have shifted: since 2000, the number of UK homeowners under 35 has halved, while the average age of first-time marriage is now 34 for women and 36 for men.” She went on to say that “nothing forces you to grow up more than ending a serious relationship, especially when it is done amicably. I’m now in break-up number two, and the pain of losing someone is no easier than it was when I was 20.” She would suggest Millennials should “self-care” (look after number one), set goals, temporarily stop using their smart phone sometimes and fail well. Quality relationships are key to a Millennial’s understanding of well-being and a happy social life. It therefore takes time and patience and persistence if they are to be won for Christ in a suitably ambient atmosphere, which is why so many churches are trying different kinds of places to meet and chat. Good coffee is also essential!

A totally different facet to living arrangements is the fact that many teenagers live in fear of being stalked or assaulted – a third of females and a quarter of males. A second major fear was becoming a victim of crime. These fears were found to be more true for mostly younger teenagers rather than with Millennials *per se*, but the relevant study did include 16 and 17 year olds in the basic survey.<sup>21</sup> Some of those fears will continue as they get older. The research found girls less happy with their lives than boys, especially over their appearance and friendships. It should be noted that 51% of those attending church aged 15 to 19 in 2005 were young men, a much higher percentage than the overall percentage of 43%.<sup>22</sup>

### **Millennials and Work**

Millennials are “tech savvy and ambitious, passionate and serious about work, yet job-hop as they experiment with and explore where to meaningfully direct that passion,” reports Barna in yet another study.<sup>23</sup> They expect to wear casual clothing to work, including jeans and sneakers, for meetings and day-to-day work. They are usually sociable, consultative, unassuming and optimistic, but they have a low loyalty to their (usually Gen X) manager or (Boomer) employer.<sup>24</sup> They are happy to talk about anything including their personal life, and will constantly communicate via Twitter or Facebook, multi-tasking, wanting frequent rewards and recognition, and have an active focus on their professional development. They dislike having vague instructions and those who do not share their beliefs and priorities.

“They have many other projects and priorities outside of work,” and building a career isn’t usually one of them. “Family” and “personal interests” are more important than “career.” They want to make an impact on the world, and do not assume that has to be solely through their career. One might add that some of these traits are also true of their parents, the Gen X generation. Christian Millennials will usually share the same type of dreams. Some of these dreams cause conflict in, for example, political parties. Youthful idealists and hard-left or -right veterans may well cause splits.<sup>25</sup>

Locked within this is the importance of education. The popularity of Religious Studies (RS) as an A Level subject in the UK is seen in the number of pupils taking the exam, which has doubled between 2003 and 2016 to over 27,000,<sup>26</sup> although numbers slightly fell in 2017. On average students also get higher awards for RS (28% obtaining A or A\* for their GCSE in RS than 20% across all subjects). While it may be argued that RS is seen as an “easier option” by some, for others it may be a “spiritual interest” in various belief systems as well as Christianity.

### **Immigrants**

Another, totally different factor, and an article in its own right (see article on Page 16.5 of *UK Church Statistics* No 3), is the simple fact that many of our Millennials are immigrants, often students. In 2017, some 624,000 immigrants are expected, partially offset by 289,000 emigrants, leaving a net balance of 335,000 people just for this one year, a third of a million people. Two-fifths, 39%, of these are aged between 16 and 24, and a further fifth, 22%, are between 25 and 34. Three-fifths, 61%, of our immigrants are Millennials and may well have similar issues, once they have learned our language, as UK Millennials. If accurate, and the age of immigrants is hard to establish, these would number about 2% of all the Millennials living in the UK. This reflects the fact that many Millennials are students at our universities and colleges.

### **What is unique about the Millennials?**

They are the latest adult generation. They are very energetic, and committed to changing the world. They are mostly determined and sometimes hot-headed. Spiritually, many are lost, more so than in any other living generation. Some churches and agencies are successfully reaching them with imagination.

Millennials are the first generation to grow up with continuously improving smart phone technology. They are the first generation to widely practise cohabitation before marriage. They are not particularly loyal workers, and will frequently switch jobs if the challenge they are looking for cannot be found in their current employment.

Does the Kingdom of God need them? Absolutely. As Donald McGavran said many years ago, "God wants His lost sheep found." Can you enable some to be found?

### **Endnotes**

- 1) *Capital Growth*, What the 2012 London Church Census Reveals, Peter Brierley, ADBC Publishers, Tonbridge, Kent, 2013, Table 4.2.
- 2) Article "Tracking the Orality Movement" by Tom Steffen in the *Lausanne Global Analysis*, Vol 3, No 2, March 2014.
- 3) [www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/657-three-digits](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/657-three-digits), accessed March 2014.
- 4) [www.barna.org/research/culture-media](http://www.barna.org/research/culture-media), accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2<sup>nd</sup> February and 10<sup>th</sup> April 2016.
- 5) *Christianity Today*, Jan 2014, reported in *Great Commission News* Spring 2014, Page 7.
- 6) Designing Worship Spaces, Barna Group, November 2014, [www.barna.org/barna-updatye/millennials/](http://www.barna.org/barna-updatye/millennials/)
- 7) *Gen Z Rethinking Culture*, Youth for Christ, 2017, Page 17.
- 8) *What Millennials want when they visit church*, March 2015, [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials)
- 9) Five reasons Millennials stay connected to Church, [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials)
- 10) *Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church*, June 2015, [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials)
- 11) *Five Myths about young adult dropouts*, [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials), June 2015.
- 12) *Winning Them Back*, Eddie Gibbs, Monarch, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 1993.
- 13) *Operation World*, Patrick Johnstone, OM and WEC International, 2001.
- 14) *The Invisible Church*, Steve Aisthorpe, Church House, Norwich, 2015 and St Andrew Press, 2016.
- 15) This is for opposite-sex cohabitation. Same-sex cohabitation and civil partnerships are an additional 0.5%.
- 16) Office for National Statistics website Family Tables No 2, also given in *UK Church Statistics* No 3 2018 Edition, Table 14.8.
- 17) There are a few in civil partnerships (0.2%) or who have been widowed (0.02%).
- 18) *The Trends Redefining Romance Today*, Barna article on "Family and Kids", 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2017.
- 19) Survey on *Living the Christian Life* for Langham International Partnership, Brierley Consultancy, 2013.
- 20) Issue of 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017.
- 21) Children's Society survey, *Good Childhood*, reported in *Church Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2017, Page 6.
- 22) 2005 English Church Census results given in *UK Church Statistics*, No 3, 2018 Edition, Table 13.9.2.
- 23) *Barna Trends: What's New and What's Next*, Culture and Media article, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016.
- 24) Article "The Trouble with X" by Laura Evans, *The Professional Manager*, Summer, 2013, Page 58f.
- 25) A comment in an article "Corbyn's path to power" in *The Week*, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Page 4.
- 26) From [www.bstubbbs.co.uk/gender](http://www.bstubbbs.co.uk/gender), and given in *UK Church Statistics* No 3 2018 edition, Page 14.2.