

# 21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK [Series A: Issue 1](#)

## Does belief touch society?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance  
September 2011

# Foreword

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**E**arly in 2011 the Evangelical Alliance produced the report of our groundbreaking snapshot survey of some 17,000 *21st Century Evangelicals*.

This new report continues to fill out the picture, asking a smaller sample of respondents about a range of different issues which help map out the beliefs, habits and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK today.

This is the first wave of an ongoing panel survey which will delve deeper in the coming months and years. We are so grateful to our panel for the time they spent telling us about their beliefs and activities which will help to shape our understanding of the Church and develop strategies for mission.

Once again it is an encouraging picture. These evangelicals are solidly committed to orthodox Christian beliefs about the Cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These beliefs in sin forgiven and the hope of eternal life are the

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**'Evangelical Christians are not bystanders. We are actively involved in our communities.'**

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bedrock of their personal faith. Yet again we see a group of Christians who are amazingly aware and engaged with the wider world and active in community work and politics. Over 90% said they were voting in the referendum and local elections, large numbers are involved in Trade Unions, serve as school governors and as trustees of charitable organisations.

For these evangelicals the Big Society is more than a political slogan. They have already taken a Kingdom Opportunity for service and witness.

It is this faith that undergirds their involvement in the life of churches and their mission in the wider world. The vast majority were present at worship on Easter Sunday, and while there are some indications that busy younger people struggled to attend church

activities on Good Friday and during Holy Week, very large numbers were involved in public witness and outreach events. Many of these involved partnerships between churches and a significant number represent exciting and innovative ways of sharing the good news with the community at large.

There is much to celebrate in this report. Evangelical Christians are not bystanders. We are actively involved in our communities. But yet we must also rise to the challenge presented to us by some of these figures. Some of those in our congregations are unsure of what they believe, whether biblically or politically. We hope that this report, by holding up a mirror, will inspire us to seek – and be certain of – God's truth in our lives and our communities.



**Steve Clifford**  
General Director,  
Evangelical Alliance

# Introduction

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In 2010, we set out on a journey to discover what we as a body of evangelical Christians in the UK look like, what we think about certain issues and how we behave in our households and in society as a whole. Some 17,000 people responded to the landmark *21st Century Evangelicals* survey which provided a snapshot of our beliefs, habits and practices.

More than 3,300 of those initial respondents agreed to join us on the next steps of our journey, signing up to become members of our Research Panel – a group of people willing to help us as we ask more questions and track more issues in the months and years to come.

The pages that follow show the results of the first in a series of mini-surveys we plan to publish in the coming months and years following on from the initial survey.

In this survey, which was conducted online around Easter 2011, 1,151 people answered questions on a range of topics including whether they observed Lent, how they work with other churches in their communities, their beliefs about the central tenets of the faith and their opinions on certain current affairs topics.

Capturing a demographic profile of our respondents allowed us to understand something of the background of those completing the survey. Our Research Panel was well balanced in terms of gender and was in comparison

with the population as a whole highly educated. This group hails from a broad range of church backgrounds, but it seems likely that younger people and ethnic minorities were under-represented.

As we look to future surveys, we plan to extend and develop the panel group to portray a picture which more accurately represents the evangelical Church in the UK.

We looked at the possibility of using sample weighting methods to compensate for these biases, but bearing in mind that since there has never been a full census of evangelicals and reliable demographic statistics for the whole of this particular population are hard to find, we have decided to present only raw figures.

As with the initial survey, the findings from this study are sure to spark further questions and debate, which we hope will inform the shape of our future research.

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**1,151**

responded to our online Easter survey

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**57%**

say their church joined with others in Easter events

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**89%**

strongly agree Jesus defeated the powers of evil through his death

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**25%**

are trustees of a charity

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**55%**

say their church had been covered in the press in the past 12 months

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**91%**

said they were intending to or had voted in the May elections

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**38%**

in favour of the Alternative Vote prior to the referendum

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# Celebrating Easter

We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song...

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Easter is the most important date in the Christian calendar, so it's unsurprising that the vast majority of evangelicals gather to worship together on Easter Sunday, as well as use the occasion to reach out to non-Christians in the community. But age and denomination are likely to influence whether you observe other dates in Holy Week, including Lent and Good Friday.

## Snapshot

95%

were in church on Easter Sunday

65%

attended a church service or services on Good Friday

45%

attended a special church event in the week before Easter

57%

said their church had been involved in inter-church activity over Easter

41%

took part in a public act of witness or evangelistic outreach over Easter

19%

went away to a Christian event such as Spring Harvest or a church convention over Easter

23%

went on holiday or to visit friends and family over the Easter break



## Good Friday

While nearly all of the respondents were in church on Easter Sunday, this dropped to 65% who attended a Good Friday event. Older people were more likely to attend a Good Friday event. Some 74.6% of over-55s attended church on this day, compared to 51.9% of under-35s. Is less observance of Good Friday among younger people down to a decline in the importance we place on this holy day, or simply a result of time pressures preventing them from getting to church?

## Lent

Whether you give up chocolate, alcohol, Facebook or watching TV, Lent has become a period in which Christians and non-Christians abstain from things. Just under a third of respondents had given up or taken up something in the weeks before Easter, with women and younger people significantly more likely to do so.

## Evangelism

Many evangelical Christians see Easter as a pivotal time to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ. Around 41% of respondents said they took part in an evangelistic event over Easter, with the most common activities being walks of witness on Good Friday and Palm Sunday, open air Easter morning services, giving away hot cross buns or Easter eggs to the public and holding Passion plays or even offering shoe-shining services.

## Getaways

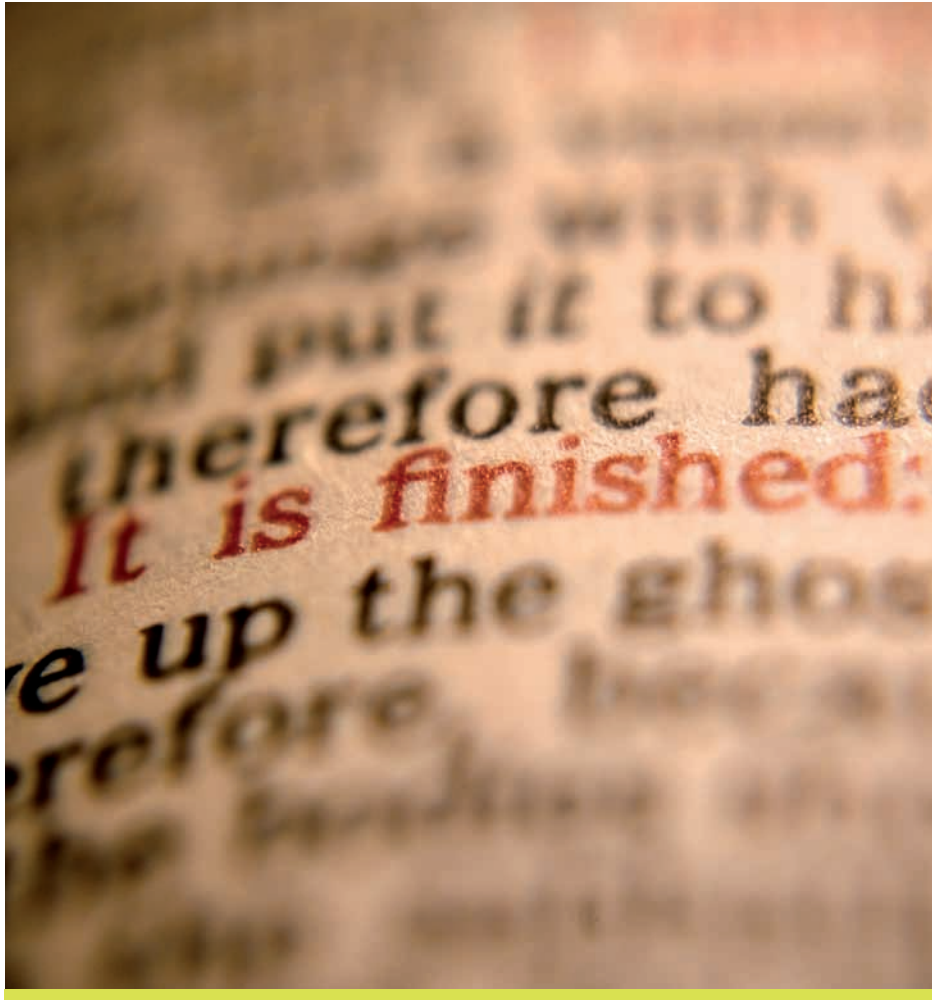
While Easter is of huge significance to Christians, 22.6% also take the opportunity of the holidays to take a well-deserved break or go and visit friends and family. Easter getaways were most common among the under-35s and those with a degree. Nearly one in five said they went to a Christian event such as Spring Harvest or a Christian convention over Easter.



# The Cross

Beliefs about the crucifixion and what it means for evangelical Christians today.

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Jesus dying on the cross is a central tenet of Christianity. But what is the understanding of the crucifixion among evangelicals, and what difference does it make to the way they live their lives?

## Snapshot

# 99%

either agree or strongly agree that the message of the cross has made a huge difference in their own lives

# 91%

strongly agree Christ's blood is the final and only effective sacrifice for our sins

# 91%

strongly agree that on the cross Jesus bore the punishment for their sins

# 89%

strongly agree that Jesus defeated the powers of evil through his death

# 84%

strongly agree that God Himself was suffering in Christ for us in the crucifixion

# 59%

strongly agree that Jesus' sacrifice inspires Christians to make sacrifices for others

# 40%

strongly agree that at the cross God poured out His holy anger upon His son while

**16%** strongly disagree



## Atonement

The cross is clearly an important part of evangelicals' faith, with the vast majority of respondents agreeing with the survey questions which looked at different emphases on the biblical beliefs about the atonement. The most popular statement was the simple statement that Jesus bore the punishment for our sins on the cross.

## Holy anger

But the most interesting response in this section was to the statement that at the cross God poured out His holy anger upon His son. Just 51% of people agreed with this particularly stark formulation, with 22% unsure, and nearly 27% rejecting it. Women were less likely than men to agree, while those aged 35-55 were less likely to agree with the statement than younger people or older people. There was a significant variation in terms of denominational beliefs about the statement: members of the Pentecostal tradition and the Church of Scotland had high levels of agreement (50%+), compared with Anglicans, Methodists and those from emerging churches (less than 30%).

## Sacrifice

Although just a few denied the statement that Jesus' sacrifice inspires Christians to make sacrifices for others, the number strongly agreeing (59%) with the statement was significantly lower compared to the other statements, suggesting that this is not seen by many evangelicals as the central message of the cross.

# The Resurrection

The stone rolled away, the empty tomb...

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The gospel centres on Jesus being crucified and raised from the dead. But what significance does the empty tomb have for evangelical Christians today and what impact does the risen Christ have on their daily lives and their beliefs about the afterlife?



## Snapshot

91%

agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Jesus rose from the tomb with a physical body

91%

agreed or strongly agreed that at the end all who have died will be raised to face judgment

85%

strongly agreed that after death Christian believers will enjoy everlasting life

82%

strongly agreed that belief in the resurrection shapes the way they live now

78%

strongly agreed with the statement 'I am confident that when I die I will enjoy everlasting life'



## Assurance

A large majority of respondents expressed confidence in their eternal hope, Pentecostals (91%), members of the Church of Scotland (90%), Charismatics (87%) and Free Evangelicals (84%) were most likely to strongly agree on this statement of personal faith and assurance. Anglicans and Methodists were less certain than other traditions, with lower (around 70%) percentages of respondents strongly agreeing. However, a striking statistic in responses to the statement 'I am confident that when I die I will enjoy everlasting life' was that 4.25% were not sure whether they were confident about this.

## Judgment

It would seem there are a minority of evangelical Christians who find the concept of judgment distasteful and perhaps difficult to deal with. When responding to the statement 'At the end all who have died will be raised to face judgment', a significant minority (7.7%) were uncertain and relatively high numbers agreed but less strongly. These uncertainties regarding judgment were consistent with the *21st Century Evangelicals* survey where only half of respondents agreed with the traditional view that 'hell is a place where the condemned will suffer eternal conscious torment'.

## Daily life

There were significant denominational differences in response to the statement 'Belief in the resurrection shapes the way that I live now'. Anglicans (76%) seemed less likely than average to strongly agree with the statement, compared to Pentecostals (93%), the Church of Scotland (92%) and charismatic church members (89%).

# Public life

How evangelical Christians engage in society...

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Many evangelical Christians take seriously the call to be salt and light in all areas of societies. They believe that it is our duty to transform the world around us into God's good society, to engage in politics, to help our neighbours, and to change our communities. This section of the survey looked at the ways in which evangelicals are getting stuck in to various areas of public life.

## Snapshot

**25%**

trustees of a charity (compared to 2.2% nationally)

**19%**

members of a trade union (compared to 19% of the working age population nationally)

**9%**

school governors (compared to 0.7% nationally)

**4%**

members of a political party (compared to 1.3% nationally)

**0.96%**

local councillors (compared to 0.04% nationally)

**0.78%**

magistrates (compared to 0.06% nationally)



## Salt and light

In all of the areas of political and civic engagement we measured, these evangelical Christians are doing more and are more engaged than the average Briton. Getting involved in these sectors on top of the work they undertake in paid employment and in the life of the local church demonstrates a commitment among evangelicals to being salt and light in wider society. As the 21st Century Evangelicals survey showed, 81% of evangelical Christians do some kind of voluntary work at least once a month, contributing a total of around half a million hours each week to their communities. While the nature of our sample and the online method of carrying out this research may have over-represented people who are more likely to be active in public life, the results represent a huge investment of unpaid time and energy by evangelical Christians in the voluntary and community sector, in education and health services, in politics and in the trade union movement.

### Trustees

An amazing 24.5% (282) of the survey respondents say they are trustees of charities, compared to 2.2% of the population. While around 62 of these are trustees of their churches, more were trustees of other Christian and secular-based charities. In 21 cases, respondents were trustees of more than one charity. Taking a look at the background of these respondents, charity trustees were significantly more likely to be university-educated, over-55 and twice as likely to be men than women. Pentecostals were less likely than average to serve in these roles.

### Trade unions and political parties

Around 4% of respondents were members of a political party compared 1.3% of the population. They were probably more likely to be members of a trade union than the average Brit - 18.5% were members compared to 23.5% nationally for those in employment, which reduces to 19% of the working age population and our sample includes many people who are over retirement age. Membership of trade unions was slightly more frequent among women, (while men were more likely to hold membership of a political party), and significantly more frequent among 35 to 55-year-olds, and graduates. The most frequently named trade union was Unison, followed by the NUT, NASUWT and Unite. These results suggest a strong representation among our respondents of those in the education, health and general public service sectors.

# Working together

Without unity we're a noise, with unity we're a voice...

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How do Christians work together in their communities and how do they view the importance of social and political engagement, as well as media presence? The questions on the following page were included to assess the outward-facing activities of the churches to which respondents belong. What is clear is that the vast majority go to churches that do work with other local congregations on evangelism and outreach, as well as social engagement. Social action projects were more popular among Charismatic, Anglican, Methodist and emerging church members than among those from the Church of Scotland, Free Evangelicals, and Pentecostals. It seems more than half had appeared in local or national media although the survey did not gauge whether this was positive or negative coverage.

**Does your church collaborate with other churches in your area on evangelism or outreach work?**

YES	71.2%
NOT SURE	5.3%
NO	23.5%

**Does your church collaborate with other churches in your area on social engagement projects?**

YES	66.7%
NOT SURE	5.5%
NO	27.8%

**Has something your church done been covered in the local or national press or media in the past 12 months?**

YES	54.9%
NOT SURE	15.0%
NO	30.1%

**Has your local MP, councillor or other political representative attended any services or activities that your church has run in the past 12 months?**

YES	37.7% <small>(47% of Anglicans)</small>
NOT SURE	18.5%
NO	43.8%

What is clear is that the vast majority go to churches that do work with other local congregations on evangelism and outreach, as well as social engagement.



# Current affairs

Evangelical responses to war and peace, voting and other social issues

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US Defense Imagery

Is there an 'evangelical' way of thinking about the topics that hit the headlines? In the final section of the survey, we asked respondents a handful of questions on politics and current affairs.



## Voting

### Do you plan on voting or have you voted in the elections and referendum on 5 May?

YES	90.9%
UNSURE/DON'T KNOW	4.5%
NO	4.5%

### How do you plan to vote (or how did you vote) in the referendum on changing the voting system to Alternative Vote? (yes = in favour of AV)

YES	38.2%
UNSURE/DON'T KNOW	22.5%
NO	39.3%

## Civil partnerships

### Should the legal status of marriage be extended to include other relationships including partnerships between same-sex couples?

YES	10.5%
UNSURE/DON'T KNOW	9.5%
NO	80.0%

## War and Peace

### Do you think the UK should have entered into military action in Afghanistan (2001)?

YES	29.0%
UNSURE/DON'T KNOW	37.8%
NO	33.2%

### Do you think the UK should have entered into military action in Iraq (2003)?

YES	22.5%
UNSURE/DON'T KNOW	32.2%
NO	45.4%

### Do you think the UK should have entered into military action in Libya (2011)?

YES	35.4%
UNSURE/DON'T KNOW	33.4%
NO	31.2%

## Voting

An astonishing 91% said they would vote or had voted in the Alternative Vote referendum which took place in May 2011. This compared with a UK-wide turnout of 42% and showed evangelical Christians feel it is important to carry out their civic duties, regardless of which way they intended to vote. In line with national trends, evangelicals under the age of 35 were less likely to be voting (80%), while the over-55s were more likely (94%). When it came down to the choice between electoral reform or not, the respondents showed a slight majority against the proposal for the Alternative Vote. But evangelicals were more evenly divided than the electorate as a whole. Graduates were more likely to vote in favour of AV and 29% of the female respondents said they were unsure which way they would vote.

## Same-sex marriage

Unsurprisingly, 80% of the survey respondents were against proposals for same sex 'marriage', while one in 10 were in favour. This rose to 15% in favour among Anglicans, while pentecostals and charismatics were particularly strong in their opposition – around 88% in both cases. Under-35s were less likely to oppose the extension of the legal status of marriage to include same-sex couples, with opposition to the idea falling to 69% among this age group. Among the over-55s however, this was up to 85%. Gender was also significant, with 76% of women opposed, compared to 84% of men.

## War and peace

Christians have long been divided between those who are pacifists at heart and those who believe that a just war is sometimes necessary as the lesser evil. There are also differences in particular cases in deciding whether a war meets the criteria around justice and political necessity. Our survey sought to gain insight into evangelical opinions on instances in which the UK government has intervened in conflicts using military force. Our survey reveals there is a slight majority in favour of the most recent intervention in Libya, a slight majority against the involvement in Afghanistan and less than a quarter feeling the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was justified. Some 45% believe it was wrong.

The differences in opinion regarding the rights and wrongs of the three conflicts varied significantly in terms of the age and gender of the respondents. Half of under-35s and 48% of women were not sure what they thought about the Afghan conflict. The response to the Iraq conflict was similar, although graduates were more likely to be sure they were opposed than people with fewer qualifications. On the intervention in Libya, there was a significant age difference, with older people more likely to be against armed intervention and under-35s more likely to be in favour or unsure.

# So what?

In the light of these findings how should the Church react?

## Celebrate

- that so many Christians affirm the bedrock truths of the faith: that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave
- that so many testify that these truths give them confidence in their personal salvation and hope of eternal life
- that so many Christians are enthusiastically engaged in politics, trade unions, education and the voluntary sector seeking to be salt and light in the world
- that so many churches work together in social action and evangelism, and make use of the Easter season as an opportunity to witness in public, often in innovative ways.

## Recognise

- that for various reasons Christians, especially in the younger age groups are less likely to take part in some of the traditional religious observances of Good Friday and Holy Week

- that the denomination evangelicals belong to does have a bearing on their attitudes, theological understanding and social engagement

## Be concerned

- with encouraging and pastoring the small but not insignificant number of Christians who lack assurance in their faith
- that large numbers of people find it hard to come to a view on a number of political issues, and probably have not been equipped to think about these topics in the light of scripture.

## Promote biblically-informed and gracious debate

- about theological understandings of the last judgment, the atonement and eternal life
- about pacifism and just war in the light of recent patterns of intervention in international conflicts.

## What next?

We must confront the potential challenges that the research presents. Do people feel equipped to follow Jesus through the news agendas and through the realities of every day life? What does it mean to be a 21st century evangelical Christian? We must prayerfully reflect on what these results say about us as a body of evangelical Christians in the UK. We must stimulate conversation.

## And then we need to take action.



To find out more and get involved with future research go to [www.eauk.org/snapshot](http://www.eauk.org/snapshot)



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