

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK – Spring 2012

How's the Family?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance

71% less young people in church over the last twenty years

What are we passing on to our children?

A major national initiative from Care for the Family

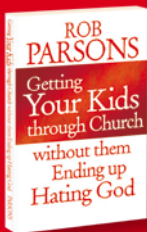
Mostly, our children don't turn their backs on God but on something else. This initiative is designed to help parents, church members, youthworkers and church leaders understand what that "something" may be - and together do something about it.

Getting
Your Kids
through Church
without them
Ending up
Hating God

Ways you can help stop a generation being lost to the church:

1 Read the book

This initiative is based on this bestselling book by Rob Parsons – available at most Christian bookshops.



2 Join us on tour

As we tour the UK this year we'll discover together how to prevent a generation of young people walking away from church.



3 Share online

Keep up to date with the initiative and add your voice to the conversation by joining us on Facebook and Twitter.

 www.facebook.com/gyktc

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For more information visit www.gyktc.org.uk or call (029) 2081 1733

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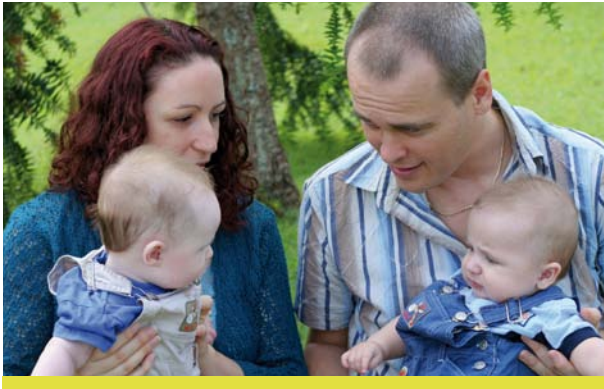


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Foreword

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How's the family? It's messy, but it's good, according to the latest in our online quarterly surveys following on from our groundbreaking *21st Century Evangelicals* published in 2011.

Marriage and family life are working well with committed Christians placing a high value on commitment and faithfulness in relationships. Evangelicals also place a high value on parenting and churches are places where family life is celebrated, honoured and nurtured, providing a strong surrogate extended family.

But not everything in the garden is rosy. There are unhappy and unfaithful, even violent marriage relationships. There are also significant numbers of single people – especially women – who would like to be married but can't find a Christian partner, or have gone into relationships or marriages with non-Christians, in some cases with unhappy results. The survey shows that for many people who are not in traditional married or family situations there

is a sense that the Church is not as welcoming as it ought to be.

Individualised lifestyles are impacting family life with less time available to eat or relax together. Even so, many Christians are prioritising quality time in family life. Nearly one in three married people have sought specific help to improve the quality of their relationships – at least they don't simply give up and walk out.

Evangelical Christian families are not immune from social trends which have seen an increase in single-person households, family breakdown and divorce and the fragmented lifestyles which mean we spend less time together.

But it's here that the Church has a responsibility to model what it is to be a family within the family of God. Despite weakened family ties and a rise in individualism, we long to restore families to what God wants them to be.

Today, organisations such as Alpha and Care for the Family offer marriage courses and enhancement activities. Historically and into the present day,

organisations such as Barnardo's (founded by Christians but now secular), the Children's Society, the Mothers Union, Action for Children, Spurgeons and many more have worked to support family life. Churches can support this work through prayer, fundraising and volunteering.

We're so grateful to our research panel for the time they spent telling us about their personal experiences of marriage and family life, and in so many cases for their honesty in sharing some intimate and sometimes painful experiences.

We are launching this report to coincide with Marriage Week 2012 and within a political context where the government is planning legislation to redefine marriage in ways which are deeply disappointing to the majority of Christians across the country. We hope that our report will be a significant contribution to debates and towards the promotion of healthy faithful marriages, and stable loving families throughout society.

Please bear in mind that this report is only a brief summary of the key findings of this survey. We have a more extensive and more technical version which we can make available to anyone who requests it by email and our research manager is willing



to discuss specific questions about the underlying data.

Steve Clifford

General Director,
Evangelical Alliance

Imagine

A DAY WHEN CHRISTIANS
LOVE EACH OTHER WITH A PASSION.
WHEN WE PRAY, WORK AND SPEAK
AS ONE BODY – FULL OF HOPE, LIVING
TO CHANGE **THE WORLD.**

Together we can make that imagination

A REALITY

So come with us.

evangelical alliance 
better together

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Introduction

How we did the survey

We are thankful to those who take part in the research panel for these reports.

In November 2011, we emailed 3,061 people who said they wanted to help us. We asked them to complete our survey on marriage and the family hosted online by Survey Monkey. Our survey is based on the 1,219 that responded – 188 of these are new to the panel – and representing a 39.5% response rate.

As usual in these surveys we need to begin with a warning. We are using an opportunity sample of self-selecting volunteers so it is not legitimate to extrapolate from these findings to the whole population of evangelical

Christians in the UK. We can hope however that it does paint a fair picture of keen and committed believers; the kind of people who are likely to be influential in their local churches and communities. The sample is large enough to explore in a meaningful way significant differences between various sub-groups in the sample, for example by gender, age group and church denomination, and crucially in this survey by marital status and whether or not they are parents.

Among the respondents we found:

- An almost equal number of men and women, although men outnumber women by three to two among the over-55s and women predominated in the younger age groups.
- A good geographical spread across the UK though there

is a noticeable shortage of respondents in the north-east, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- A wide spread of denominations represented with Anglicans accounting for a third of the sample, charismatics for one in five, followed by Baptists and other Free Church denominations. Pentecostals at only 5% are probably underrepresented.
- All except two respondents were happy to call themselves committed Christians, and 90% to describe themselves as evangelicals. Only 2% rejected the label 'evangelical' but 8% were hesitant about applying it to themselves.

Greg Smith

Research Manager,
Evangelical Alliance



What our families look like

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What does a typical evangelical family look like? Just like any other, according to our survey. It found that evangelical families – while strong and secure – are not problem-free. The picture of the 'nuclear' family with mum, dad and 2.4 children didn't seem to present itself in our survey. While a third lived in families of parents with children, just as many lived as couples – mostly 'empty nesters', and one in seven was living alone. The rest lived in a variety of different types of households.

Our survey did reveal evangelicals are far less likely than the average Briton to live in single-parent households – 4% compared to 12% nationally. If lone parents are so under-represented in the Church – are we actually doing our best to reach out to the whole of our society?

Most of our respondents live in entirely Christian households (72%), while 28% live in homes where there are both Christians and non-Christians.

The Christian community is not immune from chronic illness, or physical and mental disabilities,

and one in eight respondents had someone in their household with a disability or care support needs.

Singles

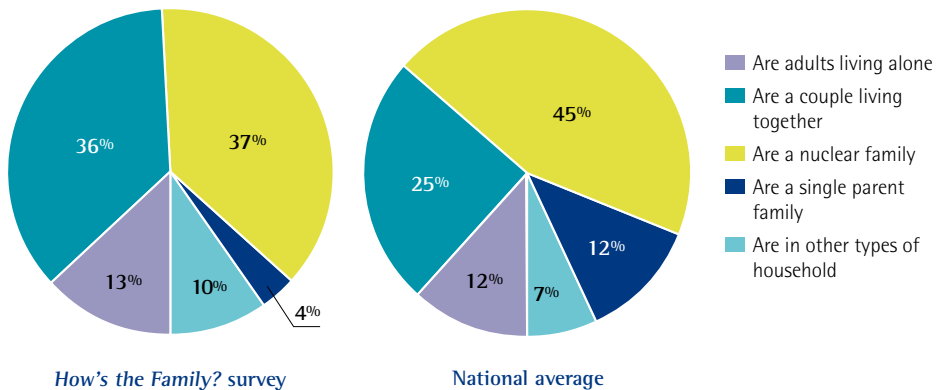
Around 22% of our respondents were single, with 37% of them living alone. There are 1.7 single females to each single man and among the over-55s, the imbalance rises to three single women to one single man.

Around 61% of the under-35s said they were single, compared to 7.5% of the over-55s.

If these patterns are in any way typical of the population of evangelical Christians in

British churches there are some serious questions as to the scarcity of unmarried men. Are men in general less likely to have found faith, or do they feel uncomfortable in church unless they are part of a couple or family? Are the churches a particularly congenial environment for women who are on their own, where they can find fellowship, support and activities that in some way compensate for not having a marriage partner? Or is church culture simply reflecting broader social patterns and becoming increasingly feminised or emasculated?

Snapshot Household types

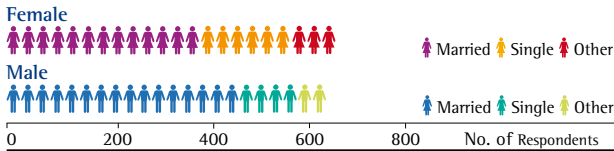


'Is it that men in general are less likely to have found faith, or is it that they feel uncomfortable to be in church unless they are part of a couple or family?'

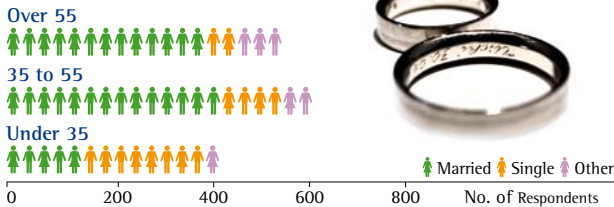


Single & married

Marital status and gender



Marital status by age group



Single evangelical Christians, who make up around a fifth of respondents, are less confident about being integrated, valued and cared for by their church than married people are. On questions relating to 'feelings', between 20% and 30% feel discontented about their place in the Church. But in responses to a number of attitude statements answered by all panellists about how singleness is regarded in the Church, a large majority thought singleness does offer opportunities for discipleship, and that single people are valued and integrated in local church life. Most people also acknowledged the difficulties single people face such as isolation, sexual frustrations and temptations.

Alongside the strong emphasis on marriage, there was a general acceptance that churches were not very good at teaching about issues of singleness, or at offering pastoral support to people struggling with relationships.

Meeting a partner

Just one in five singles and one in four married people supported the use of introduction agencies and online dating agencies (although we did not ask specifically about Christian agencies which may have yielded a different result).

The local church or another Christian context was the place for meeting and 'courting' for over 56% of our respondents,

with educational contexts such as school or university accounting for around one in five romances.

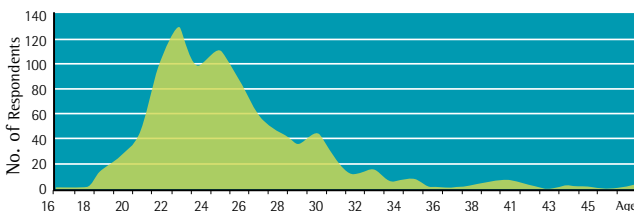
Around 12.6% said they had lived together as a couple before getting married. Although this suggests a not insignificant number of Christians are perhaps not living up to the biblical expectation, the figure is still much lower than the three-quarters of couples living together before marriage nationally (*Daily Telegraph*, July 2009). There was however a greater difference when this was cross-tabulated against faith status at marriage – around 38% for those who were not Christians when they got married, compared to 8% for people who were Christians when they wed.

Marriage

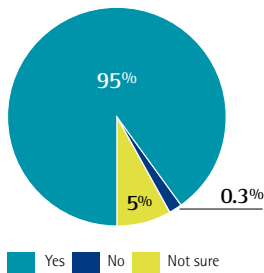
The evangelical community clearly values and honours marriage and although it is not immune to some of the social changes that have seen higher levels of divorce and cohabitation over recent years, marriage remains the norm and celibate singleness the most acceptable alternative to it. This is clearly counter-cultural.

Over two thirds of our respondents are married, compared to only 49% of the adult population of England & Wales – a figure that is projected to decrease over the 25-year period from 2008 to 2033, falling from 49% to 42%. The proportion of evangelical Christians who are divorced is about half the national average.

Age when first married



Would you recommend marriage preparation to other engaged couples?



Some 80% of the male respondents were married, compared to 58% of the women – who are almost twice as likely as the men to be single, widowed or living in a relationship other than married. They are also four times as likely to be separated or divorced. Around 89% (of married respondents) had been married before the age of 30, with the average age of marriage 25 for men and 24 for women. That's significantly lower than the national average of 30.7 for men and 28.5 for women.

Have you ever done any of these things to strengthen or enrich your marriage?

Read a book about marriage or relationships	84%
Looked online for help or advice on relationships	15%
Gone on a marriage enrichment event (a seminar, event, course or weekend)	48%
Talked to friends	51%
Talked to a church leader or pastor	37%
Benefited from specific teaching on marriage through your church	38%

It is likely that Christians decide to marry young because they feel it wrong to live together or have sex before marriage. But there is some evidence which shows that marrying before the age of 25 means you are most likely to get divorced.

Marriage preparation

Over 40% of the married respondents had had no formal preparation for marriage, and only 30% had been on a multi-session course at church. Significantly the pattern varied over the age groups. Among the over-55s 61% had had no preparation, compared with 15% of the under-35s. Indeed for the under-35s, as many as 61% had been on an extended course. Over time it appears that the dominant pattern for Christian couples changed from no preparation to a single session with a minister and now to a multi-session course. Almost everyone seems to think marriage preparation in some form is a good thing.

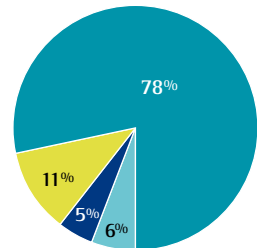
Our respondents seem to take their marriages seriously enough to make some efforts and take opportunities to think and talk about marriage. Over four out of five had read a book on the subject and nearly half had been on a seminar or course. Among other things frequently mentioned were counselling, spending time together as a couple and praying together.

Unequally yoked?

Around 81% of our respondents who had ever been married had married a committed Christian. But while around 87% of men had married a woman who was a Christian at the time they got married, 23% of women had married a non-Christian man. This probably reflects more than anything else the comparative absence of eligible men in churches.

Snapshot

Saved after marriage

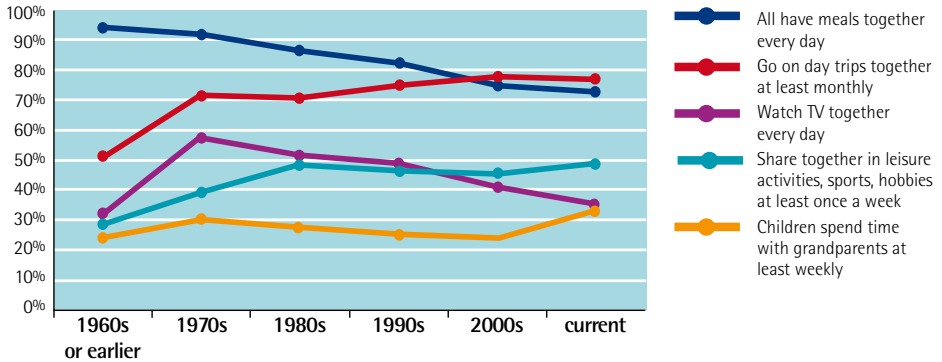


- Both partners were committed Christians at marriage
- Neither the husband nor the wife were Christians when they married
- The respondent was a committed Christian but spouse was not at marriage
- The spouse was a Christian but respondent was not at marriage

The changing face of the family

Two thirds of our respondents has had some experience of parenting, despite the majority not having children currently at home. In addition almost everyone has had the experience of living in a parental home.

Social trends in family life



We asked respondents about their experiences of family life at the most recent time they were part of a family where there were primary school age children. This allowed all to give an answer, some as parents (today or in the past) and others remembering back to when they were children. The data was broken down first of all according to the decade they were referring to, and the graph shows some of the well documented social trends which have affected Christian as much as other families.

The research also presented a series of attitude statements around gender roles in the

family. The responses revealed some significant differences according to the decade which people were referring to, and can be seen as reflecting general social changes in the UK.

From the 1960s to the current decade, the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that:

- **Mother goes/went out to work most of the time children were growing up** – rose from 22% in the 1960s to 37% in the current decade.
- **The child(ren) were/ are looked after by a child-minder or nursery from a very early age** – rose from 3% to 31% over this period.

- **It is/was mother who does/ did almost all the childcare** – declined from 87% to 47%.
- **It is/was mother who did almost all the house work** – declined from 88% to 49%.
- **It is/was father who makes/ made all the important decisions** – went down from 43% to 14% by the noughties and later.
- **We are / were always short of money** – The worst decade seemed to be the 1980s where 36% agreed with this while the number declined to 21% for the first decade of the millennium then rising back to 26% for the current period.

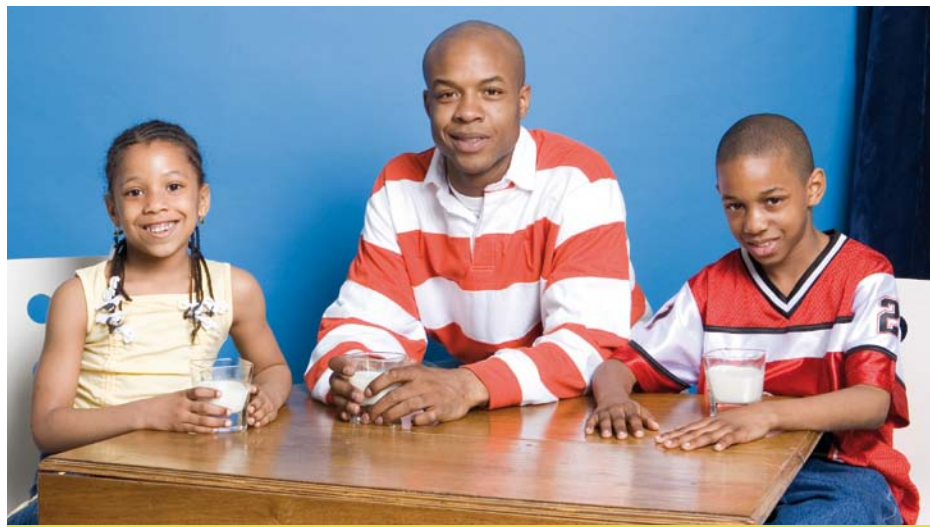
"The pressures of modern life can make it challenging to prioritise time together as a family. Planning family time means that it is more likely to happen, whether that's a meal together, a 'date night', a family games evening or simply one to one time with a child, doing an activity of their choice. Time together gives the opportunity to build strong family relationships."

Katharine Hill, Director of Family Policy, Care for the Family

Family faith

How are Christian families distinctive in their way of life and how do they practise their faith together as a family? Again we asked people to refer to the most recent time they were part of a family where there were young children. Here we needed to break the responses down somewhat differently as some people had grown up in non-Christian families and would be thinking of their experience as a child.

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Within the families we can assume to be Christian, just 40% report praying together daily, and 12-15% reading the Bible together. Weekly church attendance is claimed by well over 80% although it appears to be lower among current families with children. Between 21% and 33% discuss their giving as a family each month – indicating this may be resuming levels of an earlier generation. The figures about families discussing world mission and the global Church have risen to over 50%, and this may reflect a growing awareness of globalisation.

Cross-generational faith

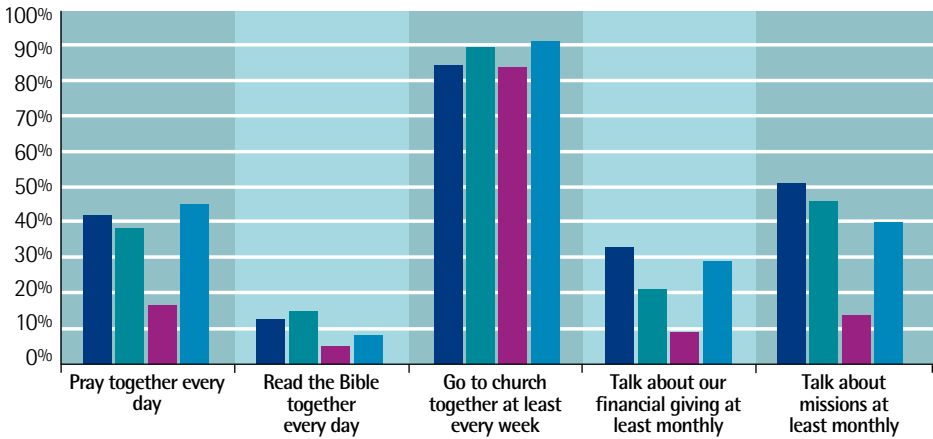
As the old slogan has it “God has no grandchildren”. To test this we asked everyone about the faith environment of the family they grew up in, and parents about their children’s faith.

Although under half of the respondents had both parents as committed Christians, nearly a third were not brought up by Christian parents and another 11% were not sure about their parents’ faith (suggesting it was nominal rather than substantive). This suggests that a high

proportion have come to faith as evangelicals from non-Christian backgrounds.

There are 669 respondents who have children aged over 11. Although 129 (19%) of them do not have children who are committed Christians, the remaining 540 claim to have produced a total of 679 offspring who are committed Christians. Assuming that each respondent is one of a couple of Christian parents, the biological replacement rate of committed Christians is only just over 50%. However, the next two

Social trends in family life



questions suggest that 408 of their offspring are involved in leadership or active ministry in a church, and more than 100 are in full time Christian service, suggesting that it is common for high levels of Christian commitment to flow down the generations.

Clearly, alongside the need for conversion growth to stem the lack of biological growth (or decline) that seems evident in the Christian community in the UK, there is also a need for church to provide practical help for Christian parents as they seek to nurture their children into spiritual life and Christian discipleship.

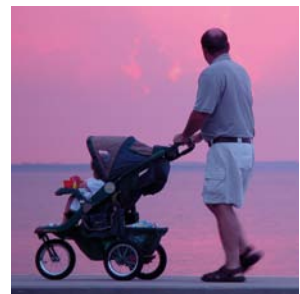
The role of grandparents

The majority of grandparents (over 70%) seemed to keep closely in touch with at least some of their grandchildren,

seeing at least one of them a month. However, only one in five were able to see all their grandchildren every week, suggesting that families no longer live as close together as they used to.

Over a quarter of the grandparents see themselves as having an important role in the Christian nurture of their grandchildren and a further 45% as sometimes doing this. Only 1 in 12 faced the situation where none of their grandchildren were being brought up as Christians.

- Currently a family with children
- When my children were at primary school
- When a child without both parents Christian
- When a child with both parents Christian

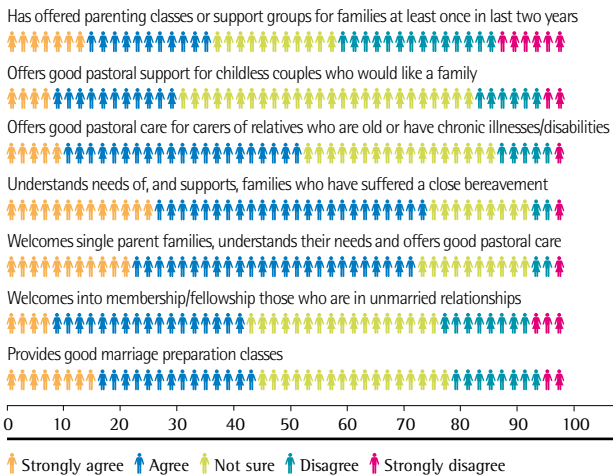


“Youth and children’s work needs grandparents! The cry ‘I’m too old for this’ simply isn’t true. So if there’s still breath in your body the good news for you is this: there’s a generation of children and young people who are crying out for your compassion and wisdom. Go for it. You’ll be so blessed by the special role you can play in their lives.”
 Matt Summerfield, Urban Saints

Church family

We asked our panel questions to find out how the Church is ministering to singles, married people and families? Bear in mind that large churches generally can sustain a wider range of activities and ministries than small ones and, around 60% of our respondents came from medium-sized churches of between 51 and 200 people.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your church?



Respondents rated their churches as most likely to provide good support on bereavement and for single parent families, as well as offer pastoral support for people with parenting issues. Churches also seem to do well on supporting carers, marriage preparation and helping those in financial difficulties. But it seems there is some ambivalence about accepting people in relationships other than marriage into full fellowship. Respondents also seemingly think that churches do not provide adequate support for childless couples.

Children & youth

We may need to treat with a degree of skepticism the confidence that young people are understood, listened to, given responsibility and coming to faith in large numbers. We need to note there are no under-16s in our panel and no objective data about the effectiveness of outreach to young people.

Of the respondents, 45.5% agree that *'In my church many young people have stopped attending on Sundays in their teenage years'* almost exactly the same number who agree that *'we have*

seen many young people come to faith.' At the same time only a small minority of respondents are in churches where lots of un-churched under-18s attend and that offer significant outreach activities for children and young people. It seems that even if churches are relatively successful in bringing youngsters from Christian families to faith, too many are drifting away and outsiders are not being gathered in large numbers. As Christians committed to sharing the gospel and making disciples, this presents evangelicals with an urgent challenge.

For all of these questions respondents who attend larger churches are more likely to rate the ministries provided as excellent. What does this say about the ethos of success and assumed excellence in large organisations? Is bigger always better?

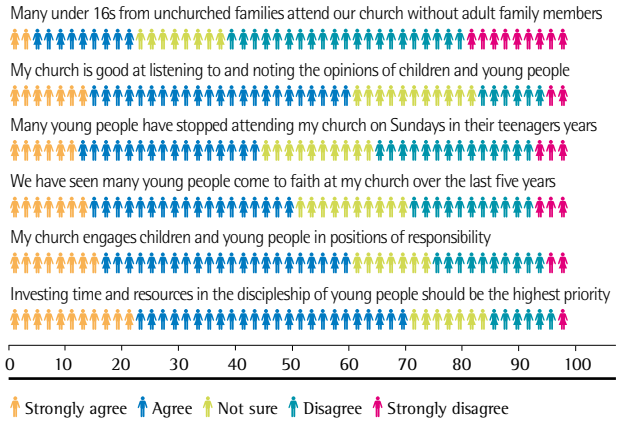
It is noticeable that there is a widespread lack of outreach activities for children and young people from non-Christian families and less confidence in its quality compared with all the other ministries. Is this another example of Christians being happier talking to their own kind than in reaching out to unbelievers? If so it would

seem to confirm what we found in our recent report *Are we Communicating?*

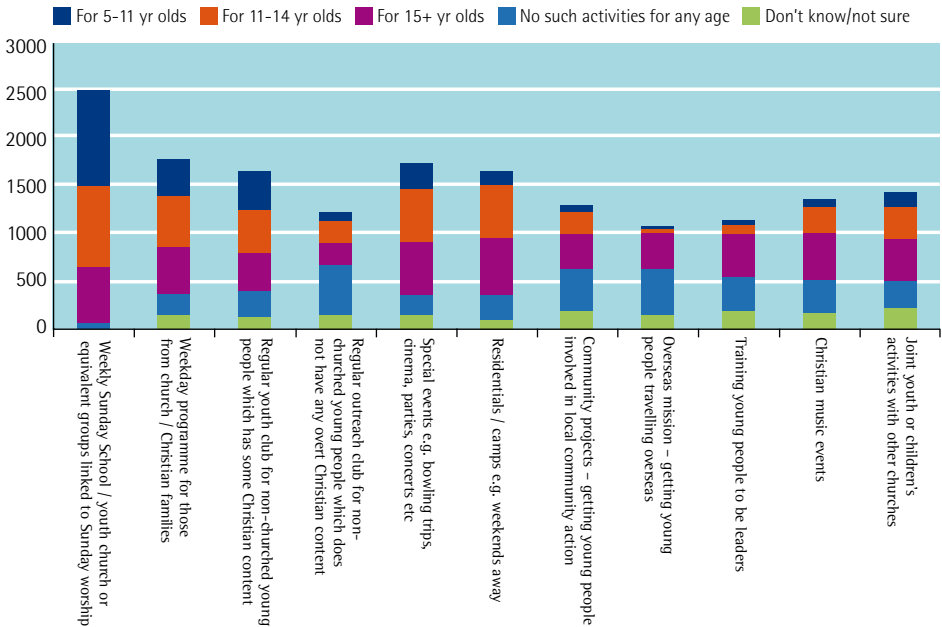
It is also noticeable that around 20% -30% of respondents say they don't know much about such ministries other than the all age services which they all have no option but to be involved in.

Assuming all or most churches have some contact with children and young people the gaps in youth ministry sit badly alongside the finding that over two thirds of respondents agree or strongly agree that *investing time, people and resources in the outreach and disciple-making of children and young people should be the church's highest priority.*

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your church?



Which of the following activities does your church run?



Church for all?

Most church congregations have members who have disabilities, learning difficulties or who are carers for vulnerable people. How well do churches welcome and cater for the needs of such people?



In terms of awareness of people in the congregation two thirds of respondents knew there is at least one family who attends with a child with a physical or learning disability, or other special need. A further 39% were aware of someone with sight loss

beyond wearing glasses. It was not surprising that these figures tended to rise with congregation size. However, for sight impairment there was a levelling off for those in churches of more than 300, suggesting that people either get lost in the crowd or

are not attracted to such large churches. Very few respondents were aware of people who had felt unwelcome or embarrassed out of the church because of a disability.

In terms of provision of assistance, 59% reported

The Church and people with disabilities

In our regular church congregation there is at least one family who attends with a child with a physical or learning disability, or other special needs.	68%
Is there anyone with sight loss beyond correction with spectacles?	39%
Does your church provide 'minders' or assistance to offer parents or carers some 'respite' while they worship?	38%
In our regular church congregation there is at least one adult with a learning disability.	66%
I know at least one person or family in our church community with a learning disability who feels so embarrassed or unaccepted in church that they sometimes prefer to stay away from worship.	4%
Is anyone with a learning disability involved in the service - reading, serving, welcoming?	33%
Does anyone with sight loss play an active part in the leadership of your church?	9%
Does your church organise any specific activities or groups for people with learning disabilities?	12%
Does your church mark Disability Sunday with a special service?	1%
Does your church have signers interpreting services for deaf people?	11%
Does your church offer help with appropriate transport for people with disabilities or problems with mobility?	59%
Does your church make provision to help people with sight problems e.g. large print Bibles, magnifiers, or other technology?	48%
Is the language in prayers, sermons, worship songs inclusive and simple enough to be understood by people with limited reading abilities?	44%

transport was offered at their church and this was actually significantly more likely to happen in the smaller churches than in the larger ones (possibly also including a good proportion of rural ones where public transport is not available). Nearly half of respondents were aware that the church provided some help with reading materials and 38% that personal assistance was on offer to allow carers to worship. A third of churches tried to involve people with learning difficulties in the service, with just two thirds of respondents' churches having such a person in the fellowship. Only 1% of respondents were in churches that marked Disability Sunday.

It is surprising that as many as 44% thought language in prayers, sermons, and worship songs were inclusive and simple enough to be understood by people with limited reading abilities. This could reflect a lack of awareness of the complexity of religious language and the assumed high literacy levels among evangelicals.

Despite the positive responses, it is unclear how far the panellists' perception of what their churches offer matches up to the lived experience of people with disabilities, learning difficulties or their carers. A more focused and expansive study (involving large numbers of disabled people themselves) may be required to establish how the evangelical Church welcomes and supports such people.

The family in society

Is there a distinctive evangelical view of marriage and family in contemporary British society? Are there clear opinions on what government should do for families? We tested these questions by presenting a range of attitude statements.

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Only two of these attitude statements are overwhelmingly endorsed, (by over 90% of respondents): that Fathers should be fully involved in caring for, and raising, their children; and that many children today suffer because there is no good male role model in the home.

There is also a broad agreement (74%) that child poverty is a significant problem in the UK. In addition, 87% of respondents thought that children have more stuff than time and love; 82% that children and young people face pressure and stress; and 87% that the government should encourage and support marriage through tax and benefits.

Over two thirds are strongly opposed to government proposals to legislate for gay marriage. Half of men strongly agree with the statement compared with 34.5% of women.

The remaining statements are more contentious.

In relation to the issue of male headship, a majority endorse some concept of it in marriage, although 28% disagree or strongly disagree. Women are significantly more likely to be against the idea. Denominationally, Pentecostals are most likely to be in favour (80%), followed by charismatics and (independent) evangelicals (38%) with Free Church

denominations (38%). Anglicans and Baptists are most likely to disagree. The survey also showed that older people are also more likely to agree with the idea of headship than younger ones.

Around 45% of respondents endorse the statement that **a woman's main role in a family is to care for and nurture the children**. Church denomination again makes a difference with the Pentecostals and (independent) evangelicals, followed by charismatics are most likely to hold a traditional view.

Younger people are also likely to have more progressive views than older ones.

A slight majority favour the view **that there are many different types of family today and we should accept all of them as equally valid** – although as many as a quarter are undecided, with women (49%) being much more likely to agree than men (31%). Age also makes a difference with agreement at 57% among under-35s. Married people are most conservative here (only 36% in agreement) while those who are neither married nor single (including cohabiting, the widowed and divorced) agree as much as 63%.



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

Celebrate

- That Christian marriage and family life appears to be alive and well in the 21st century.
- That Christian family life remains strongly counter-cultural against many negative social trends.
- That the majority of marriages among evangelicals are happy and faithful.
- That the majority of people brought up in Christian homes feel they have had a secure and loving family life.
- That Christians want to model positive patterns of involved fatherhood with their children.
- That the Church does offer fellowship, support and an inclusive family ethos for many in people in society.
- That most churches continue to offer activities and Christian learning opportunities for children and young people.

Recognise

- That times and culture have been changing and there are a wide variety of family and household types even among believers.
- That the stereotype of mum, dad and 2.4 kids is less applicable than it was in previous years.

- That Christian couples tend to marry at an early age and therefore need support and guidance from church and family if their marriages are to survive and flourish long-term.
- That marriage and family life for Christians is not problem-free, but an act of will that requires sacrifice, prayers and practical support.
- That singles, empty nesters, grandparents and people with disabilities are found in large numbers among Christians and need to be valued and involved in church life.

Be concerned

- About the feminisation or emasculation of the Church – and that the shortage of un-married men in the Christian community means that Christian women often have non-Christian partners sometimes with unhappy outcomes.
- About the minority of marriages involving Christians where abuse or unfaithfulness are found.
- About our limited success in passing on the faith to the next generation, and our real difficulty in communicating the Good News to the majority of un-churched young people.

- About our difficulty in truly welcoming people who do not fit the mould of nice healthy, happily married, mature adult into our church fellowship in the way that Jesus would have done.

What next?

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.

Academic research advisors

Keith J. White, Visiting Tutor; Spurgeons College; Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary; Asian Graduate School of Theology.

John M Evans, Research Director of Gweini (The Council of the Christian Voluntary Sector in Wales)

Dr Mandy Robbins, Senior Lecturer, Division of Psychology, Institute for Health, Medical Science and Society, Glyndwr University, Wrexham

Dr Matthew Guest, Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religion, Durham University

Dr Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Criminology and Sociology Department, Kingston University

Benita Hewitt, Partner at Christian Research Consultancy

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To find out more details of the findings, comment on the report or join our research panel and get involved with future research go to www.eauk.org/snapshot



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