

Amalgamations and Teams
Presentation to Faith in Research Conference, 16 January 2014¹

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(NB all the material in the presentation comes from a report of the same name, which is available from Kevin Norris: kevin.norris@churchofengland.org and from the author. The author is very willing to receive questions and comments about the research and can be contacted on d.j.goodhew@durham.ac.uk)

Five Sections:

- (1) some general ‘framing’ questions, that need to be tackled
- (2) analysis of data regarding amalgamations of churches
- (3) analysis of data with specific reference to teams
- (4) a discussion of qualitative data
- (5) implications for practice

Section One: Five Framing Questions

- first, what about theology
- second, what is the value of the numbers being used in this study
- third, what about the church outside of Anglicanism
- fourth generation and church growth
- fifth, ethnicity and church growth

¹Many thanks to Ben Kautzer and Joe Moffatt who were researchers for this work; to Bob Jackson and Philip Richter, consultants; and to Kevin Norris and the staff of the Research and Statistics department at Church House for their help. None of the above are responsible for the conclusions in this presentation.

Towards A Theology of Church Growth (Ashgate 2014)

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Archbishop of Canterbury

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*Director of Ministerial Practice at Cranmer Hall, St John's
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*Director of the Anglican Episcopal House of Studies and
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Examples of empirical Data Indicating Church Growth

- Church attendance in Greater London grew by 16% between 2005 and 2012, from 620,000 to 720,000.
- This represents 9% of the capital’s population as of 2012.
- The number of places of Christian worship in London has grown by 17% from 4,100 to 4,800 in the same period

(figures from Peter Brierley’s London Church Census, 2012 – now published as P. Brierley, *Capital Growth* (ADBC 2013))

Section Two: Amalgamations

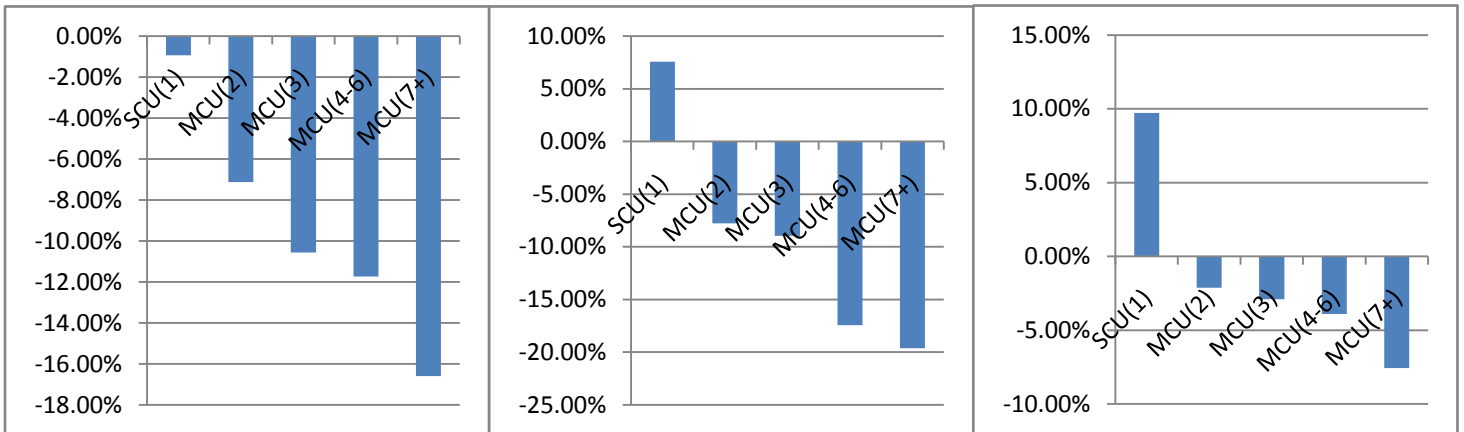
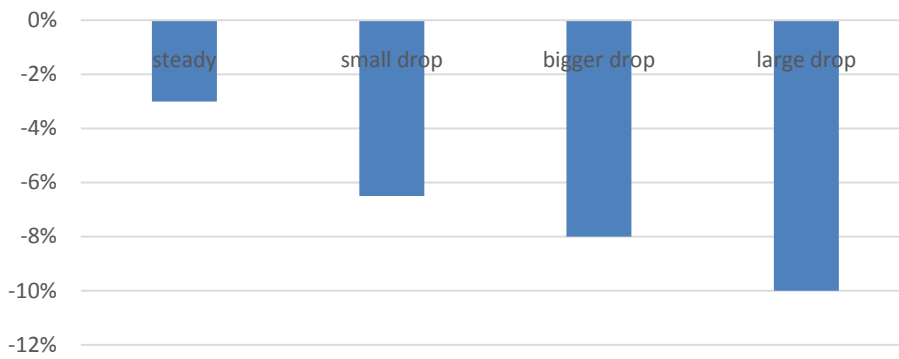


Figure 2.8: Comparison of average % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 30- 49 category for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

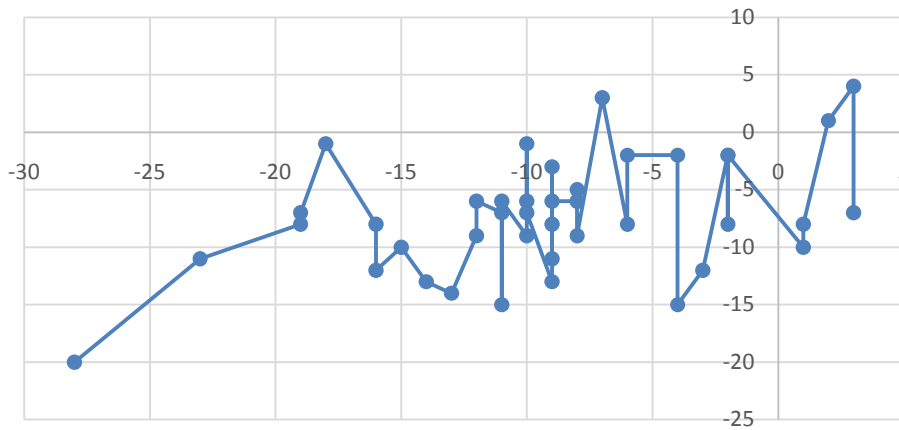
How Reliable are these figures ?

- Similar behaviour of three very different measures –which do not necessarily behave the same way
- Two different years used as a check (2005 and 2010)
- A variant of Strand One’s model used as a check
- Child uSa attendance
- Qualitative data
- sense-checking with two dioceses
- Comparison of dioceses which do/do not cut posts

% change in adult uSa 2006-2011 in groups of dioceses with different trends in numbers of parochial clergy



% fall in clergy nos. (horizontal) 2006-2011 against % fall in adult uSa (vertical)



Section Three: Teams

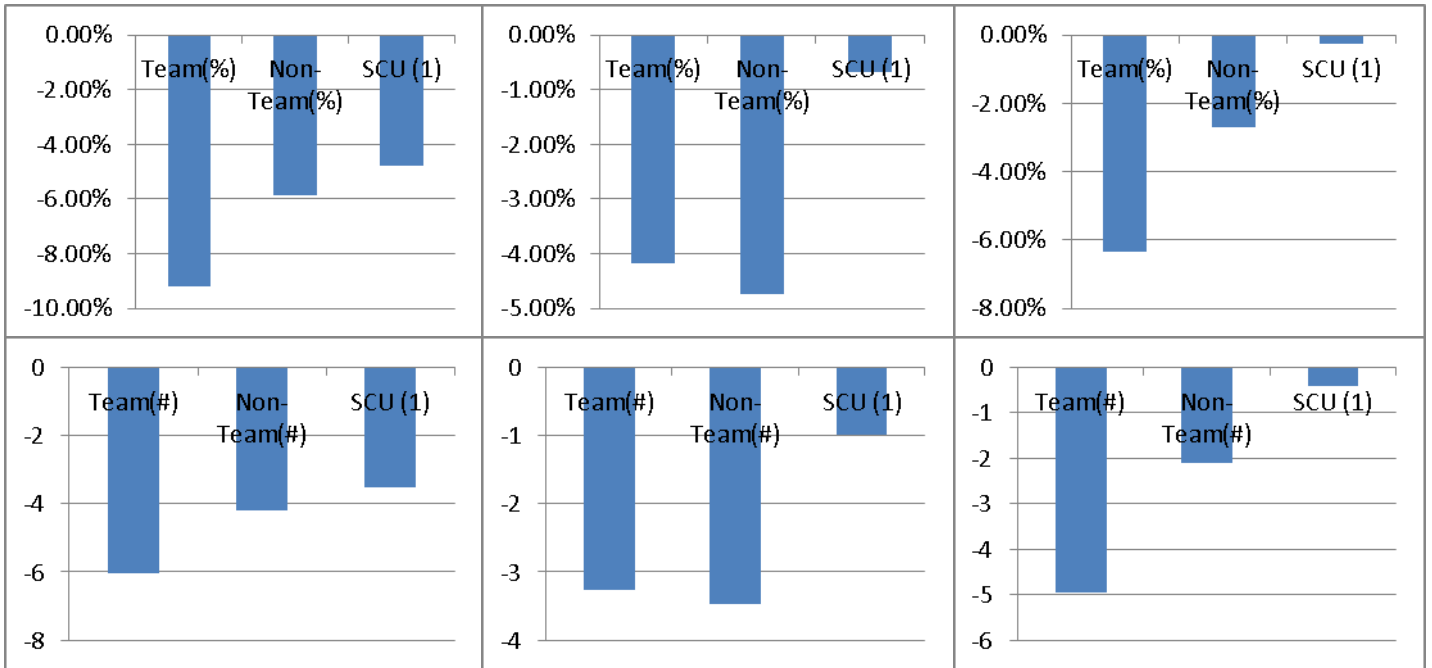


Figure 3.5: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) for the 50-99 size group from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

Section Four: Qualitative Research

Key Quote:

One northern vicar spoke of how she used to give much time to preparing people for baptism and confirmation, saying;

“...for me, one of the sadnesses is of going from having two parishes to having five and suddenly feeling ‘I can’t do any of this anymore.’”

Factors Frequently Mentioned in Qualitative Research that are seen as Leading to Growth(the order given does not indicate priority)

- Messy Church
- Use of a study course to nurture discipleship
- Focus on children, young people and families
- Focus on schools
- Trying new forms of worship/fresh expressions/church plants
- Events which connect with/serve the wider community
- An outward-facing mind-set
- Proliferation of lay leadership
- Clergy presence within a community
- Improvement of buildings
- Prayer
- A strong sense of fellowship within congregations
- The vitality of the surrounding community

Section Five: Implications for Practice

A Crucial Digression: Vocations

- 20% of churches (30-40% of benefices) have acted as ‘sending churches’ for ordinands in the past decade (based on a survey of four dioceses – York, Leicester, Norwich and Derby)
- 40% of fresh expressions surveyed across ten dioceses were led by a ‘lay-lay’ person – ie a lay leader who is not licensed in any shape or form.

Three Strategies:

- First, close a lot of churches
- Second, gradually amalgamate more and more churches into larger and larger units, as the ‘least worst’ strategy
- Third, seriously increase the numbers of ministers, lay and ordained, paid and unpaid (a ‘focal minister’ for every church)

Conclusion: Seven Points

(1) the fewer the number of churches that an incumbent oversees, the more they grow and churches grow best with a single incumbent

(2) team ministries are more likely to decline than churches not organised as team ministries

(3) multiply the number of lay and ordained ministers, paid or unpaid, with the aim of having a ‘focal minister’ (whether lay or ordained, unpaid or paid) for every church

(4) The concept of ‘focal minister’ should be based on a ‘gift-orientated’ approach.

(5) the age group from 0 to 25 is absolutely crucial for numerical church growth.

(6) develop good national training resources for multi church leaders and congregations in multi-church units, based on the primary premise of raising up focal ministries

(7) overcome the significant confusion and inaction in many local churches regarding Christian initiation and promotion of discipleship, so that all are active in disciple-making

An afterward about prayer...

‘Prayer changes things !REALLY REALLY!!!’

John Longuet-Higgins

BEACON BENEFICE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE



pass it on!

'Most of what I do, someone else will do better,' says John Longuet-Higgins, describing his counter-intuitive approach to 'enabling action' across his parishes in the Beacon Benefice, deep in the Cotswold hills.

My premise is based on the simple fact that there isn't enough time, or enough me, available for the six rural parishes that I serve. Consequently, over the last eight years I have chosen to develop these parishes by deliberately handing on to others the basics of my ministry: visiting, preaching, administration. And, with the guarantee of my continuous encouragement, I have left it to their good sense to get on with it.

So, our benefice office is run by over six people. Most of our vestries have a sizable team. Lots of people preach and lead worship. We have hospital visitors, baptism co-ordinators, dates co-ordinators, and our liturgy is written collaboratively. And, as far as I can help it, I don't chair church meetings.

Going up!

Now all this, I believe, has good biblical precedence. I'm writing this on the day following Ascension Day. Jesus spent three years preparing his disciples for his return to the Father. The day he left was the day the 'interregnum' started.

I urge church ministers to imagine what it would be like if they were not there. Who would run things? I believe it is a gospel imperative for a leader to prepare the church for Ascension Day, the day of interregnum. It is her or his job to help the church take on the running of itself – in short, to promote 'all-member ministry'.

St Paul assumed that new Christians would become church leaders. Within a few months of a church start-up he was either in prison or writing from somewhere else – or both. He wasn't around to run the new church – and that probably wasn't his gift anyway.

With this in mind, I have encouraged five of our people to go to theological college to train for priesthood, or to become a Reader. In an ideal world there would be a priest in each of our villages; there should certainly be effective ministry in every village.



John Longuet-Higgins has been vicar of Painswick and leader of the Beacon Benefice since 2002.

Homebase

Which brings me to a second radical principle that I apply to leadership: if you want to enable action, then 'local is best'. I am totally sold on local ministry.

Gloucester Diocese has helped us set up every parish in our Beacon Benefice as a 'local ministry parish', each having effective local co-ordination of every aspect of its life and ministry. So, with this in place, what would happen if I were to try to make myself indispensable to parish life? I'm convinced that the life of the Spirit would be stifled. In addition, when I left it would all fall apart. So, while I am useful (the church spent money training me and I have the gifting of a priest) I am not essential.

However, when a team is working well, it has a richer resourcing of the gifts of the Spirit than I could ever have as a solo leader – and, of course, a team has much more time to get on with things.

We have nearly 50 people in our local ministry team. Each person's ministry is local. Every member of the team understands his or her community well, and adapts the church to meet its needs. One person, one vicar, no matter how good, could not 'micro-manage' the needs of six different villages.

Entrepreneurial

I feel fortunate that I have a certain degree of ability as a 'spiritual entrepreneur', which is best explained by two examples.

First, a group of us noticed that church culture was unattractive to young people – not an uncommon problem! We did a little research among our young people and discovered that four out of five of them took part in sporting activities on a weekly basis.

This led to us setting up Painswick and Stroud Area Local Ministry (Psalms) in partnership with Scripture Union and the Gloucestershire University course in Sports Evangelism.

By the start of the 2009/10 school year, we shall have three youth sports ministers and a primary schools worker based in our area. Incidentally, each person employed by Psalms works on the strategic principle of training leaders to

eventually run the group they have set up. Now into our fourth year, we are presently running eight groups for children and young people.

The £150,000 of funding is raised by the supporters of Psalms (both individuals and churches) and a considerable amount by the generosity of trusts. When a church seeks to develop a Psalms project in their community, the ability of local Christians to fund the project over three years is one of the factors determining whether or not a contract is signed. We have six youth projects on the go in the Stroud area right now. We do children's outreach in the primary schools and two churches.

Secondly, we found that many of those who had done the Alpha Course were not attracted to Anglican church culture, particularly parents. So now we provide a service at 5.00pm on Sundays, combining the resources of the villages, providing a Sunday club for children and a discipleship group for teenagers. There is a leadership team which manages the service and keeps the vision fresh. About 30-50 people of all ages attend most weeks.

...when a team is working well, it has a richer resourcing of the gifts of the Spirit than I could ever have as a solo leader – and, of course, a team has much more time to get on with things.

Far from tidy

I'll finish with more numbers. On most Sundays we run approximately eight services. And there's a service in one or other of the villages daily throughout the week.

We have five school teams giving our three primary schools an acted-out Bible story each week. We call it 'Open the book'. Our biggest congregation is around the 100 mark, others vary from 15 to 40. At Holy Week and Easter we provide about 40 services and over 1500 attend. Of course, since this the countryside, the proportion of churchgoers to head of population is significantly higher than in urban churches.

Writing this shortly before the celebration Pentecost, a most untidy event, I have to say I love 'messy church'. There is a dynamic, chaotic side to church growth which feels authentic and 'of God'. Whilst we naturally continue with organised church programmes, most of what works well surprises me – and is an act of grace. I'm constantly amazed and humbled by the giftedness of others. My frequent comment to myself is 'O ye of little faith!'



PHOTO: KEITH HURSTHOUSE