

**Church Decline in England:
Towards a Problem and an Answer**

by

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(A Summary of the Presentation)

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My presentation to this conference is based on research conducted by the Christian Research Association and reported in my book, *Time is Running Out: What the English Church Attendance Survey reveals* (London: Christian Research, 2000). The following "Executive Summary" is taken from pages 9-10 of that book, which will be given to each participant:

This book contains the results of the 1998 English Church Attendance Survey, a two-page questionnaire sent to every church in England and answered by 33% of them. The results give a picture of church life in the 1990s. The top 12 key findings are as follows:

- The steep decline in numbers attending church on Sunday in the 1980s has continued at about the same rate in the 1990s.
- The actual decline in the 1990s has been made much worse by the large numbers of churchgoers (about a third) now attending less frequently than they used to.
- Whereas 12% of the English population went to church weekly each Sunday in 1979, and 10% in 1989, this has dropped to 7.5% in 1998.
- A further 2.7% attend once or twice a month, and 6.0% more less frequently.
- Many attend worship services during the week instead of Sunday, equivalent to a further 0.9% of the population, half in adult services and half at special youth events. A further 2.4% of the population go to mid-week church activities but do not attend church on Sunday.
- Many others are involved in church like activities but not at church, such as the 1.9% of the population who watch *Songs of Praise* but who do not go to church, or the 0.4% of the population at an Alpha course.
- There is however a very serious decline in the number of children (under 15 years of age) attending church. We are currently losing 1,000 a week (net).
- The number of older people, 65 or over, attending church on Sunday, however, is increasing, with 32,000 more in 1998 than in 1989.
- One person in 8 going to church is non-white, double the percentage in the early 1990s.
- In the late 1990s far fewer new churches were being started than in the early 1990s.
- Evangelicals have declined less than non-evangelicals: the Mainstream have grown while Broad and Charismatic Evangelicals have declined.
- The Charismatics however have the greatest expectancy of significant growth by 2010, but they account for only 14% of all English churchgoers.

The tide is running out. We need leaders and lay people of enough vision who can implement strategic cultural change in the church for a vibrant 21st century impact.