

**Church Growth Research Programme**

**Strand 3: Structures**

**Cranmer Hall, St Johns College, Durham**

# **Report on Strand 3c**

**Amalgamations, Team Ministries and  
the Growth of the Church**

**October 2013**

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**with**

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## Strand 3c report: Amalgamations and Team Ministries

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**Abbreviations:**

**uSa** – Usual Sunday Attendance

**aWa** – Average Weekly Attendance

**ER** – Electoral Roll

**%** - Percentage

**#** - Number

**SCP** – Single Church Parish

**MCP** – Multi Church Parish

**SCU (1)** – Single Church Unit (ie. Single church with incumbent, non-amalgamated with any other church)

**MCU (2)** – Multi- Church Unit with 2 churches (i.e. Amalgamation of 2 churches)

**MCU (3)** – Multi- Church Unit with 3 churches (i.e. Amalgamation of 3 churches)

**MCU (4-6)** – Multi- Church Unit with between 4 and 6 churches (i.e. Amalgamation of between 4 and 6 churches)

**MCU (7+)** – Multi- Church Unit with over 7 Churches (i.e. Amalgamation of more than 7 churches)

## Section one: Framing Questions

### *1.1 Introduction*

The 3c research team are tasked with asking how structures, in the form of team ministries and various forms of the amalgamation of churches<sup>1</sup>, impact on numerical church growth. This sub-strand has utilised data on three levels: (a) national church statistics, (b) detailed work with eight dioceses, broadly representative of the Church of England as a whole<sup>2</sup> and (c) qualitative research with lay and ordained leaders of teams and amalgamations. The report covers the following ground:

- Section One: an evaluation of the statistical evidence and the wider contextual framework in which the subject must be seen
- Section Two: an examination of numerical church growth of amalgamations of parishes
- Section Three: an examination of numerical church growth of team ministries
- Section Four: qualitative evidence on numerical church growth amongst amalgamations and team ministries
- Section Five: concluding remarks and recommendations

Debating the legitimacy of a focus on numerical church growth is beyond the scope of this work. However, it should be noted that, whilst there are dangers in such a focus,

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘amalgamations’ refers to where two or more churches are grouped together under an incumbent – although the resulting multi-church unit may be labelled in a wide variety of ways. See: introduction to section two, for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>2</sup> The eight dioceses are: York, Sheffield, Derby, Leicester, Norwich, Salisbury, Truro and London. They offer a balance of different socio-economic backgrounds, regions and differing views towards teams and amalgamations of parishes.



the subject is in itself theologically legitimate and the opposite practice, of downplaying or ignoring numerical church growth, is itself questionable, both theologically and pragmatically.<sup>3</sup> The Anglican church explicitly recognises the importance of numerical church growth, whilst stressing that such numerical church growth needs to be balanced with growth in personal holiness and service to the community.<sup>4</sup> This study focuses on numerical church growth, but is alive to the importance of balancing this by other aspects of growth in the Christian life.

Numerical church growth can be understood in a number of ways:

- Attendance at worship, especially Sunday worship
- Membership of the church – measured by such means as electoral roll, or via baptism and confirmation
- ‘vitality indicators’ which indicate a church’s inner energy

This study will focus on measuring growth via the first two measures, with some reference to the third. It will not discuss the issue of the wider diffuse influence of Christianity in England. This influence is important, but lies beyond the scope of this study and other studies exist on this matter.<sup>5</sup>

The research task for strand 3c requires three things: first, reliable data on church growth/decline (discussed in 1.2 of this section); second, an accurate record of what structures have operated and at what times (discussed in sections two and three); third, examination of five wider questions – (i) the crucial issue of age, (ii) the multiple

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example: ‘Towards a Theology of Church Growth’ Conference, St Johns College, Durham, 12-13 September 2013, due to published in 2014 by Ashgate.

<sup>4</sup> Address by the Most rev Rowan Williams to General Synod, 23 November 2010, <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/919/archbishops-presidential-address-general-synod-november-2010> consulted 30 October 2013.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Garratt (et al.) (eds), *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives*, (London, SCM, 2007)

contexts facing Anglican parishes, (iii) the role of London in church growth, (iv) the future supply of clergy and other leaders, and (v) the wider debate about church growth and decline (discussed in 1.3).

## *1.2 Discussion of national statistics*

The Church of England's Research and Statistics department have provided endless help with the statistics. A range of national statistics offer rich data for analysing church growth. However, such sources contain serious limitations, which must be discussed. The needs of strand 3c are different to the data needs of some of the other strands in the project. Strand 3c asks highly specific research questions, relating to how different configurations of parishes behave in terms of church growth (eg how team and 'non-team' ministries compare, or comparison of the growth rates of amalgamations of, say, 4 or 7 churches). In broader national discussions, it could be that the varying elements of 'noise' in the data cancel one another out. In the case of Strand 3c, the noise is more problematic, since it is more likely to affect comparisons of a more specific nature. Therefore such noise must be calibrated and, on occasion, screened out.

This section will focus on the main attendance measures of usual Sunday attendance (uSa) and average Weekly attendance (aWa), and electoral roll (ER) - the main measure of adult membership. A further range of factors specific to each measure need to be considered when looking at these measures.

### *1.2.1 The Issue of Single-Church and Multi-Church Parishes*

Data sets for the Church of England show a marked propensity to ‘spike’ and ‘trough’. Multi-church parishes are the cause of many of such spikes and troughs. Church of England data has been collected at parish level. When a parish is a multi-church parish (MCP), that is, when it contains more than one church, the data for the individual churches is aggregated. When a parish contains a single church (single church parish – or SCP), no such issue arises; either the parish submits figures (a ‘return’) – or it doesn’t. Appendix One gives details of data volatility due to MCPs, shown in two dioceses (Sheffield and Leicester) and nationally, together with statistical tests showing its significance.<sup>6</sup>

In a large number of cases a multi-church parish provides partial data ( i.e. not all of the churches in the parish return figures) but the national data-set usually does not recognise that the data is partial. Therefore, data from, one or two churches is treated as if it was data from, say, five or six churches.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, on one year, the figure for an MCP appears low (when few churches provide data), but in a different year when most or all provide data, the figure spikes upward – even though the reality has neither improved nor deteriorated.

The example of Great Snaith team, in South Yorkshire helps explain the issue. This is an MCP of five churches in one parish (Great Snaith, Pollington, Cowick, Henshall and Heck). Based on the national database it appears to have suffered serious decline: with an adult uSa of 65 in 2002, dropping to 41 in 2003, 24 in 2004 and holding

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<sup>6</sup> Detailed statistics and testing can be found in Appendix One.

<sup>7</sup> There is, within the statistics a mechanism known as ‘the included churches flag’, which is intended to flag which churches are giving data and which are missing. In practice, this flag is does not give reliable data for multi-church parishes – see Appendix One for details.

steady until 2009 when it dropped to 14. But this is not what it seems. Sheffield diocese collects data for individual churches. Its records for 2009 show that only one of the five churches returned figures – St John Baptist, Pollington, which has an usual Sunday attendance of 14 that year. Pollington’s 14 appears in the database as the uSa for the whole Great Snaith parish comprising five churches. In reality, the uSa for the whole parish is around 30 every Sunday, plus a further 50 people at churches which worship every other week.<sup>8</sup> For the years from 2001 to 2011, between one and three of the five churches have returned data, causing the national figure to spike and trough, but the ‘flag’ which should indicate a partial return of data failed to do so every year, apart from 2011. As a consequence, the Great Snaith parish uSa appeared to peak in 2002 and markedly decline thereafter, with a small upturn in 2011. In practice, none of this was true – and the national figures were a substantial undercount every year between 2001 and 2010.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that some MCPs behave impeccably, returning full figures or no figures – in which case their data is valuable. However, it is impossible to tell which MCPs are clean and unclean, without examining each individually.

Amalgamations and team ministries constitute 8863 of the Church of England’s parishes. Within these, there are 2381 MCPs in the Church of England, roughly a fifth of all parishes and over a quarter of all amalgamations - the parishes which form the focus of this strand of the research. A further significant number of parishes, which

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<sup>8</sup> Data obtained from [www.sheffield.anglican.org](http://www.sheffield.anglican.org) accessed 23 October 2013 and from a communication from Rev Eleanor Simpson, vicar of the Great Snaith Team, 23 October 2013. I am very grateful to Rev Simpson for her help in this matter.

<sup>9</sup> See appendix one for further details, including a copy of the actual return for Pollington, where it can be seen how the return refers to one church – and then is counted as if it were five.

are currently single church parishes, were formerly MCPs at some point in the past decade, meaning that, for the years when they were MCPs, their data is unreliable.

MCPs are erratically scattered across the Church of England. Looking at the eight dioceses with which we have worked especially closely, it can be seen that, whilst Truro has 30% of parishes as MCPs, Norwich has 10% and the average between the eight is 19%. There is further differentiation. The large majority of parishes in teams and amalgamations in London are in MCPs. 46% of MCPs containing two churches across the eight dioceses are MCPs, whereas only 18% of parishes containing seven or more churches are MCPs across the eight dioceses. Thus, for example, an attempt to compare amalgamations of two churches with those with more or fewer churches will be complicated by the high number of MCPs in amalgamations containing two churches.

The only way to correct MCP data would be to go through every paper return by hand – not a realistic possibility. It is not clear precisely how the errors linked to MCPs affect the data. But their presence in the data imports a large amount of erroneous material, whose affect cannot be quantified. As a consequence, MCP data has been excluded from the data presented in this report – meaning that a large minority of data will not be used.

### *1.2.2 Issues Concerning Uneven Data Collection*

All Anglican parishes are asked to collect data – but not all do so. Rates of return vary between dioceses and across years, but are well below 100%. Between 2001 and 2009, around 2500 to 3000 of parishes did not furnish returns on any given year –

representing between a fifth and almost a quarter of all parishes. In 2010 and 2011 the rate of return has improved. In the best year, 2011, 2116 did not provide a return, however this represents nearly one in six of all parishes.

There are dramatic differences between different periods in different dioceses, which broadly fall into three groups.<sup>10</sup>

- Some dioceses have seen marked improvement. Leicester and Sheffield from 2009 and Derby from 2010 have seen the rate of returns rise from around two thirds to over 90% by 2011.<sup>11</sup>
- Some - such as Norwich, Truro and Salisbury - have good and not so good years, with no marked improvement or deterioration across the years from 2001 to 2011
- Some have seen a limited improvement. London's non-returns have moved from around 100 in 2001 to 50/60 ten years later (out of 405 parishes). In York the rate of returns improves from 2008 onwards. Up to then there were 60 to 8 non-returns, from 2008 it is around 30 (out of 447 parishes).

The amount of data available is markedly less for the earlier period in many dioceses.

The period 2006-11 is noticeably better in terms of completeness of data for uSa than the period 2001-5. But, whilst data collection rates have improved in recent years, there remain a number of examples where dioceses have limited data, even in the recent past. There are dramatic differences between dioceses regarding rates of return.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 2 for detailed figures and analysis.

<sup>11</sup> Leicester: Return rates for uSa improve from 60% in 2008, to 87% in 2009, to over 90% in 2011, (234 parishes in total); Sheffield: In 2008 61 non-returns re. adult uSa; 32 in 2009, 14 in 2010, 11 in 2011 (175 parishes in total); Derby: 63 blank returns for adult uSa in 2009 and 3 blanks in 2011 (252 parishes in total)

Coventry and Leicester dioceses have no data at all for usual Sunday attendance between 2001 and 2004. Other dioceses have variable levels of returns, which, on occasion, mean that a large minority of the data is missing. For example:

- Salisbury in 2006 had 353 returns out of 452 parishes.
- Norwich in 2009 had 328 returns out of 561 parishes.
- Truro in 2010, had 157 parishes out of 218 parishes return figures.

It is important to recognise that the ‘noise’ in the data can have a compounding effect. Any attempt at comparing, for example, the behaviour of parishes in remote rural locations will require focus on particular regions and dioceses. If a diocese has a low number of returns and a significant number of MCPs, this can mean that half of the data is unavailable in a given year. The diocese of Norwich in 2009 had 328 filled in returns from 561 parishes. If MCPs which filled in returns are subtracted, the number of usable returns is 294 – meaning that the available data comes from just over 50% of the parishes. In Salisbury in 2006, with 353 returns out of 452 parishes, there are 287 usable returns when MCPs are removed, (ie over a third is unusable). In Canterbury in 2009, 148 parishes made returns; subtracting MCPs, this meant that 114 made reliable returns – well under half the 258 parishes of the diocese<sup>12</sup>

### *1.2.3 Average Weekly Attendance*

At the turn of the century, the Church of England began collecting a new measure, average weekly attendance, based on an account of church activity across the month

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<sup>12</sup> In Durham in 2007, out of 229 parishes, 127 put in their returns, of whom a further 18 were MCPs - ie 109 reliable parish returns, less than 50% of the diocese. In Lincoln in 2011 309 parishes made returns, with a further 49 deducted as MCPs, meaning that 260 parishes out of 499 made reliable returns that year. In Truro in 2010, 157 out of 218 parishes returned figures. When MCPs are removed, 110 parishes are left – fractionally over half of the diocese.

of October. This measure has two great virtues: first, it looks at church life across the week, rather than just on Sundays, thereby capturing much midweek life missed by other attendance measures; second, it is all-age, rather than, like electoral roll, confined to those aged 16 and over.

However, the measure also has major disadvantages. In its initial years, there was some confusion as to what it was measuring and whether, for example, funerals were to be included, leading to distortions. Like uSa, aWa suffers from uneven rates of return, especially in the first half of the decade. In addition, there are ongoing problems with the figures which make it more volatile than other measures. These are outlined in Appendix 2. That volatility is especially marked in child aWa and less apparent for adult aWa. So great is the volatility, that, whilst aWa is an invaluable indicator of how much worshipping activity happens outside of Sunday, aWa is seriously problematic as a measure of growth for strand 3c, which has to analyse growth within relatively small pockets of data – such as team ministries or amalgamations with a large number of churches. Volatile data will register as growth/decline, when it may well be due to other causes.. The team ministries of Derby diocese are an example. The aggregated aWa of Derby teams between 2001 and 2011 is highly volatile – moving between 783 and 1892, including two spikes where aWa seemingly doubles and one trough where it appears to drop by half.<sup>13</sup>. Such variations are widespread in this measure. Consequently, whilst fully recognising the value of aWa, we have decided to use only adult aWa as a measure for Strand 3c

#### *1.2.4 Electoral Roll*

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 2B for details of Derby teams.



Electoral roll does not have the best of reputations. It is often pointed out that people may join the roll in order to qualify to apply to a desirable church school or in order to marry in a church of their choice or as an expression of vague support which does not include attending worship. But it should also be noted that there are a considerable number of factors likely to depress the numbers on the electoral roll, outlined later in this study (section 1.2.4). Since the roll is revised every six or seven years, it tends to drop markedly each time a new roll is started, then numbers tend to rise until the next revision, at which point the figures drop back once more. This means that the best form of comparison is of years at the same distance from the last revision, rather than using a simple year on year comparison.

However, it is also important to note the positive aspects of electoral roll data. Firstly, an explicit application is required in order to join the electoral roll, so the numbers given are not the estimates of clergy or churchwardens, but record the actions of individual people. Second, the roll is revised every six/seven years, meaning a regular cleansing to remove those not meaningfully members. Third, it is dubious judgement to say that those who 'just' join an electoral roll for reasons of schooling/matrimony should be discounted – their motives may be mixed, but they are not ignoble per se and may shift faithwards over time. Fourth, it is a record of membership, rather than attendance. In a situation where many regular members of congregations are not in church every week (or may be in a home group or other activity which is not a worship service that generates a record every week), a membership measure is a valuable corrective. The electoral roll of the diocese of London has grown markedly more than its attendance measures in recent years and a recent survey concludes that the truth lies between these two measures – rather than assuming that electoral roll is

an inflated measure.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note how the total membership of English churches has been stable between 2000 and 2010 at 3 700 000 million and is now markedly higher than the reported usual Sunday attendance (which was 3 700 000 million in 2000 and 3 000 000 in 2010).<sup>15</sup>

### *1.2.5 Baptism, Confirmation and Membership Questions*

Aside from being on the electoral roll, Membership of the Church of England can be defined in multiple ways. At its most simple, it could be defined as those who are baptised by the Church of England. Since those baptised as infants usually attend worship little or never, confirmation was once used as an additional way of defining those who, beyond childhood, were committed to Christian faith, within the Anglican church. The advent of admission to communion prior to confirmation has further blurred the picture, meaning that a significant number of committed church members may not be confirmed.

Baptism figures are collected for infants, for children aged 1 to 12 years and for those aged 13 and over. The figures for children aged one to twelve are subject to the same qualifiers as for infant baptism, that most attend worship little or never. This may apply less to baptisms of those aged 13 and over, where the prime-mover is more likely to be the individual than their family. It is noticeable that the figure for such baptisms has risen over time, from around 8000 per annum in the early 2000s to over 11 000 per annum by 2010. This could be explained as merely the consequence of a declining rate of infant baptism, meaning that a certain proportion will 'catch up' in later life. However, Anglican figures are following a different trend to those of the

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<sup>14</sup> B. Jackson and A. Pigott, *Another Capital Idea*, (Diocese of London 2012) p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> See P. Brierley, *UK Church Statistics, 2005-15*, (ABDC Publishers, Tonbridge 2011), 1.1, 13.7

Methodist church, whose rate of baptism for those aged over 13 has been static for the last decade.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that 13+ baptisms could function as a missional measure in future. However, initial surveys of data show that it is not clear the extent to which they correlate with overall growth – with the possibility that many function akin to infant baptism (which has no clear correlation with church growth and some correlation with church decline) and the possibility that a number of growing churches are less than assiduous in baptising those who come to faith.<sup>17</sup>

Because of varying practices in the practice of baptism, communion and confirmation (to be outlined in the next section), the Anglican church currently lacks universally observed ‘hinge-moments’. The variable practice with regard to such ‘hinge moments’ limits the use of baptism and confirmation data, but some effort will be made to utilise such data in this report. This, in turn, means significant limitations on any statistical discussion of church growth.

#### *1.2.6 More General Issues*

There are significant issues concerning tabulation. We have uncovered a small number of instances where a tabulation error can have national implications. For example, the small Nottinghamshire parish of Stokeham St Peter has a uSa of around six, but in 2011, the national database shows its uSa as 673. Context shows this is a tabulation error – but it has the result of markedly inflating the performance of smaller churches nationally. A number of similar errors exist across a range of measures,

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<sup>16</sup> Church of England Research and Statistics Dept., *Church Statistics, 2010-11*, p. 19. By contrast, Methodist baptisms of people aged 13 and over averaged 805 per annum from 2003 to 2012, holding static across the decade, see: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/statistics-for-mission>. I am very grateful to Louise McFerran for this reference.

<sup>17</sup> High rates of baptism of those aged 13 and over do not neatly correlate with congregational growth measured by other means.

dioceses and types of parish.<sup>18</sup> Where identified, they have been removed – but it is highly likely that a number of others remain in the dataset and, if smaller, are more difficult to locate and remove. Further tabulation errors appear to exist and can be of similarly substantial size.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the above issues are the most important areas of ‘noise’, that does not mean that the remaining data-set is ‘noise-free’. There are a wide range of people inputting data for churches, parishes and benefices. The research team have looked at a wide range of the paper returns produced by individual parishes: it is clear that, very often, different clergy and wardens fill in the return for different years. The task is, for the most part, undertaken with great integrity, but, since there is usually little or no training there is considerable potential for personal assumptions to colour what is entered. There is the further question of whether the figures change depending on whether the individual is lay or ordained and depending on whether the ordained person is the incumbent or no. There is no research to confirm this, but we suspect that an ordained person is, overall, more aware of the breadth of worship happening in a parish than a churchwarden and an incumbent more aware of detail than other members of the clergy team, meaning incumbents are likely to provide more accurate figures – and that non-incumbents are likely to inject additional ‘noise’ into the process. During a vacancy, especially where the incumbent had previously overseen

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<sup>18</sup> For example: St Clements, York: uSa in 2005 73, in 2007 77, but in 2006 it was 753; from Leicester, the parish of Carlton which had an electoral roll of 14 in 2005, 17 in 2007 but 242 in 2006; from Norwich, Wighton, which had a child uSa of 0 between 2005 and 2010, which became 208 in 2011.

<sup>19</sup> The dataset includes figures which move up and down dramatically, raising concern as to whether the movement is due to tabulation or reality. For example, the diocese of Canterbury’s aWa rose by 3900 between 2009 and 2010 (a 17% rise), then fell by 2100 (a 10% drop) in the following year. When the largest congregations of the Church of England (uSa of 1000+) are isolated in the database, their figures move down and up dramatically in particular years.

data collection, we believe it likely that data entry will be significantly different and probably of worse quality.

A separate question is the way in which the circumstances of individual dioceses may colour the figures. Section 1.2.2 has discussed the dramatic variation between dioceses regarding the percentage of parishes that return data. Further variables include the way in which parish share is collected, which may exert a downward pressure on figures in some dioceses and not in others.

#### *1.2.7 The Danger of Undercount*

There is a right and good wariness of overcounting with regard to congregational life. However, the comments made above suggest a significant, arguably greater, danger of undercount.

- MCPs: partial returns are usually counted as full returns, meaning that the actual number of worshippers is an underestimate, often a substantial underestimate. Since this affects several thousand parishes, it is a certain and sizeable cause of undercounting
- Attendance Frequency: it is increasingly acknowledged that a ‘regular member’ of a congregation is present at worship two or three times a month. Such individuals may well be present at other forms of prayer and worship – such as homegroups. Consequently, to achieve, say, a uSa of 50 requires a worshipping community of 75 or more. It is striking that the diocese of London, which has seen dramatic growth in its electoral roll, has seen noticeably smaller growth in uSa – reflecting the fact that a large rise in

membership will mean a smaller rise in attendance, if the members are not all there every week.<sup>20</sup> Further research is needed on this matter, but it means that use of attendance data will significantly undercount the membership of the worshipping community.

- The discrepancy between uSa and aSa. There is a consistent pattern whereby the uSa is markedly smaller than the aSa.<sup>21</sup> Yet the aSa is based on actual Sundays and the uSa is an estimate. At the very least, it suggests that uSa is certainly in no danger of overcounting – and may indicate undercounting.
- Fresh Expressions and Church Planting: strand 3b has shown how many fresh expressions and church plants exist across the Church of England. It is unclear how many such entities are being counted in official figures, or whether, when counted, such tabulation lags several years behind what is happening on the ground. More research is needed, but fresh expressions and church plants may well be a significant cause of undercounting
- ER: electoral roll figures are often cited as an example of a figure inflated by extraneous causes. However, such factors (such as the presence of a desirable church school or a church seen as desirable for weddings) do not affect many parishes. Moreover, there is a counter-argument, that there are as many (arguably more) factors which minimise electoral roll (eg the way people who join a church may take some years before they join the roll; the way a significant number of regular churchgoers never join the roll; the way that fear of parish share being raised by a rising roll makes churches and clergy less than assiduous in ensuring people do go onto the roll)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson and Pigott, *Another Capital Idea*, pp. 8-17.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Church of England Research and Statistics Dept., *Statistics for Mission, 2011* and *Church Statistics, 2010-11*

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of ER undercount, see: *Another Capital Idea*, pp. 10-11.

- Finance: there is a significant link in many dioceses between attendance and ER data and calculation of parish share. Even where that link does not exist, it may be thought to in the minds of those filling in forms, making for a powerful financial incentive to under- rather than over-counting.
- Joiners and Leavers: the new ‘joiners and leavers’ measure, pioneered by a handful of dioceses requires further evaluation. But initial results from this new measure indicate that existing measures, such as uSa and aWa may not be picking up all that is happening in congregational life.<sup>23</sup>
- The Identity of the Person filling in Returns: it would be helpful to research whether there is any difference between the results given from returns made by wardens and those made by clergy and between returns when a single individual fills them in over a number of years and where a variety of individuals fill them in. Anecdotal evidence suggests the following: (a) that churchwardens are more likely to undercount, since they may not have a ‘global’ grasp of all the different acts of worship taking place; (b) that where a range of individuals fill in forms, there is considerable likelihood of omission.

The issue of under- and overcounting cannot be resolved here. The issue of multi-church parishes causes substantial undercounting and the range of other forms of undercounting suggest that this is a significant issue in the current figures.

### *1.3 Additional Factors*

Whilst Strand 3c is focused on the impact of amalgamations and teams in church growth, this debate has to connect with five wider debates, if it is to provide

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example: *Statistics for Mission Summary, 2011* and *Church Statistics 2010-11*, compared with , *Diocese of Leicester, Statistics for Mission Summary, 2011 and 2012*.

meaningful findings. There are five particular issues that need to be discussed: the crucial importance of age and church growth, the multiple contexts facing Anglican parishes, the particular role of London in church growth, the future supply of clergy and the wider debate about church growth and decline.

### 1.3.1 *Age and Church Growth: the Crucial Factor*

There is widespread consensus in research that most of those who have a Christian faith acquire this faith by the time they reach the age of 25. There are considerable debates as to how faith is mediated to children, young people and young adults – but the crucial importance of the first 25 years, or so, is not in doubt.<sup>24</sup> This is illustrated by a recent report which found that, in a large survey of church members:

84% become Christians by the age of 25

72% had done so by the age of 19

9% between the age of 26 and 40

3% between the ages of 41 and 60

0.2% after the age of 60

c. 4% said the age categories didn't fit<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Scott M. Myers, 'An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 5 (Oct., 1996), pp. 858-866; Jonathan Kelley and Nan Dirk De Graaf, 'National Context, Parental Socialization, and Religious Belief: Results from 15 Nations', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Aug., 1997), pp. 639-659; D. D. Voas and A. Crockett, 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging', *Sociology*, 39, 1, 2005, p. 19; M. Hout, 'Demographic Methods for the Sociology of religion', in M. Dillon (ed), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (CUP 2003), p.79; C. Smith, *Soul Searching: the religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, (OUP 2005); D. Voas and I. Storm, The inter-generational transmission of churchgoing in England and Australia, *Review of Religious Research* 53(4), 2012, pp. 377-95.

<sup>25</sup> The Evangelical Alliance, *Confidently Sharing the Gospel* (London 2012)



Such data should not be used to encourage fatalism towards the capacity of those aged over 25 to come to faith. However, it shows the enormous importance of ministry amongst all those under 25. Conversely, churches which are growing in their adult attendance, but declining in terms of attendance of those under the age of 25 lack an crucial aspect of church growth. In terms of analysis, this means that attention needs to be given particularly to rates of growth and decline amongst children – such as child uSa and, despite its problematic nature, aWa.

### *1.3.2 The multiple contexts facing Anglican parishes*

England is a remarkably diverse country. That diversity has a very significant impact on patterns of church growth and decline. Assessing the impact of different structures on church growth requires evaluation of the varied contexts that Anglican churches inhabit. It must be stressed that this is not to espouse a socio-economic determinism. The context of a parish or diocese is never an excuse for why it is not growing. Church growth is more pronounced in some contexts than other – but church growth is happening in a range of contexts, including those that appear ‘unpropitious’ and church decline and stasis is happening in contexts where there is widespread growth. London has a distinct trajectory with regard to church growth and decline – and so will be discussed separately in the following sub-section.

There is significant evidence to show that church growth is concentrated in areas which experience population growth, ethnic diversity and economic dynamism. Church growth, it could be said, clusters around ‘trade routes’. This is most pronounced in London, but is far from exclusive to London. Cities such as York and

Birmingham have seen significant church growth. Conversely, the further away churches are from ‘trade routes’ the tougher the soil for growing the church. To say this is not to succumb to some sort of ecclesiastical fatalism. However, it is crucial to note such variation. What can be expected, say, in North Cornwall and North Finchley is not the same.<sup>26</sup>

One key factor is population growth, stability or decline. Contemporary England is seeing dramatic demographic shifts in some areas and not in others. The population of the local authority area of Horsham in Sussex was c. 109 000 in 1992, c. 129 000 in 2008 and is expected to reach 144 000 by 2026 – a rise of over one third in 34 years. As a result, Horsham District Council is exploring plans to build between 11 800 and 14 600 new homes between now and 2031.<sup>27</sup> Compare this with the population of Liverpool, which is static, and the population of Redcar and Cleveland which is shrinking.<sup>28</sup> Whilst the need for church growth in every area is clear, areas with growing populations are likely to be easier ‘soil’ in which to grow churches.

Wealth and economic vitality interact with population growth to affect church growth. There is considerable evidence to suggest that church growth correlates with ‘trade routes’, corridors of economic dynamism and rising population. Examples of such

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<sup>26</sup> See: K. Roxburgh, ‘Growth amidst Decline: Edinburgh’s Churches and Scottish Culture’, J. Wolffe and B. Jackson, ‘Anglican Resurgence: the Church of England in London’, C. Marsh, ‘The Diversification of English Christianity: the Example of Birmingham’, in D. Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*, (Farnham, Ashgate 2012); see also Brierley’s London Church Census, which can be viewed at: <http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/images/londonchurches.pdf>, consulted 26 October 2013.; A. Rogers, *Being Built Together: a Survey of New Black Majority Churches in the London Borough of Southwark*, (2013)

<sup>27</sup> See the following sites, consulted 1 September 2013:  
[http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/LEA/Horsham\\_Spatial\\_Area\\_Factsheet.pdf](http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/LEA/Horsham_Spatial_Area_Factsheet.pdf) and  
<http://www.cpresussex.org.uk/campaigns/housing-and-planning/housing/in-depth/item/2123-housing-horsham>

<sup>28</sup> See: <http://liverpool.gov.uk/council/key-statistics-and-data/data/population/> and  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/census-result-shows-increase-in-population-of-the-north-east/censusnortheastnr0712.html> consulted 26 October 2013.

‘trade routes’ include the East Coast mainline, on which stand the cities of London, York and Edinburgh – all of which are experiencing markedly greater church growth than urban settlements that are more distant from this ‘trade route’ – such as Middlesbrough, Hull or Sunderland.<sup>29</sup> To say this is not at all to suggest any correlation between wealth *per se* and church growth – indeed, in the wealthiest parts of England, church growth appears strongest amongst poorer communities.<sup>30</sup> However, ‘trade routes’ offer more straightforward opportunities to grow churches and areas off trade-routes are more difficult ‘soil’. It is harder to grow churches in Peterlee than it is in Peckham.

Ethnicity is another key factor. The ethnic make-up of England is changing fast. In the 2011 census, Greater London is now officially, a ‘majority-minority’ city, in which no ethnic group is in the majority across the capital.<sup>31</sup> Other cities, such as Birmingham and Leicester are expected to follow London in becoming ‘majority-minority’ communities in the near future and the general ethnic diversification of England is set to deepen markedly across the coming decades.<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that large numbers of such communities are Christian and that Christians form the majority of recent immigrants into the UK.<sup>33</sup> And ethnic minorities are a key component of recent church growth. The London Church Census of 2012, organised by Dr Peter

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<sup>29</sup> See: Roxburgh, ‘Growth amidst Decline’, Wolffe and Jackson, ‘Anglican Resurgence’, H. Osgood, ‘The Rise of Black Churches’, and D. Goodhew, ‘Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present Day’, in Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*.

<sup>30</sup> Rogers, *Being Built Together: a Survey of New Black Majority Churches*.

<sup>31</sup> The 2011 census recorded that 44.9% of Londoners were ‘white British’, 12.6% were ‘White:Other’ and other ethnic minorities account for the remaining 40% or so of the population. See: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_290558.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_290558.pdf) consulted 26 October 2013

<sup>32</sup> David Coleman, ‘Projections of the Ethnic Minority Populations of the United Kingdom 2006–2056’, *Population and Development Review* 36 (3): 441–486 (September 2010). Coleman, one of Britain’s leading demographers, estimates that the non-white population will form around 30% and the ‘other-white’ around 10% of the total British population by 2050.

<sup>33</sup> Pew Foundation, *Religion on the Move – the religious Affiliation of International Migrants*, (2012), <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/> consulted 26 October 2013.

Brierley, showed that the dramatic church growth in London was largely due to the black, Asian and minority ethnic populations – a picture backed by other research.<sup>34</sup>

It is less clear as to whether ethnic minorities are being assimilated into the Church of England. A survey in 2007 showed that in the dioceses of London and Southwark, the proportion of ethnic minority worshippers is substantial, but some way below the proportion of ethnic minorities in the population. In other cities – such as Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester it was markedly smaller. In all dioceses, the proportion of clergy from ethnic minorities was far lower than the proportion of such minorities in the overall population. Evidence from Strand 3a shows that English Cathedrals are overwhelmingly white in terms of ethnicity, even in major cities.<sup>35</sup> A valuable piece of research would be to clarify the extent to which migrants to England, who previously worshipped in Anglican churches, continue to do so once they arrive here and, where they do not, why they do not. The potential for Anglican church growth through ethnic minority communities is likely to be much greater than has hitherto be realised.

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<sup>34</sup> The census results can be viewed at:

<http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/images/londonchurches.pdf>, consulted 26 October 2013. See also: Osgood, 'The Rise of Black Churches', in Goodhew, (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*; Rogers' recent report found 240 new black majority churches in a single London borough, *Being Built Together: a Survey of New Black Majority Churches*.

<sup>35</sup> Research and Statistics Dept., Archbishops Council, *Celebrating Diversity in the Church of England: National Parish Congregation Diversity Monitoring*, GS Misc 938 (Church House, London 2008), p. 15. This survey used figures from the 2001 census for the general population and figures from 2007 for Anglican congregations. Since the 2011 census showed the ethnic map of Britain to have changed markedly since 2001, the gap between the proportion of minority ethnic communities in Anglican congregations and that in the wider population was wider than stated in the report. In 2001 the proportion of Greater London classified as not 'white British' was 40%. By 2011 it was 55% - for 2001 figures, see: <http://legacy.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/factsandfigures/dmag-briefing-2003-23.pdf> consulted 28 October 2013. For cathedrals and ethnicity, see Strand 3a's Report, section 2.2.7.4. This surveys ethnicity amongst worshippers at four cathedrals (Wakefield, Southwell, Gloucester and Birmingham), showing that those congregations are startlingly monochrome. Three had almost no ethnic minority worshippers. One, Birmingham, has more – but a small proportion when compared to than the demographic profile of the city in which it is set.

Rural Britain offers a mosaic of varying contexts, which need brief mapping to make sense of many Church of England amalgamations and teams. ‘Rural’ England is dramatically different depending on where you look. Around 19% of England’s population live in rural areas. Rural deprivation is real; 15% of all deprived people are rural residents, but often fail to show up, since they are so scattered – with sparsely populated and remote areas tend to have the highest levels of poverty. Rural areas receive significant amounts of migration, but overall the population is aging. Of those who live in rural areas, half live in small towns and around 3.1% of the population live in settlements smaller than villages; 1.4% live in ‘sparse rural areas’. At the same time, the Church of England has 9639 rural churches, 60% of the total.<sup>36</sup> These operate in varying contexts – there is not one ‘rural Anglicanism’, but many.<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, the context of the most deeply rural parts of the England needs noting. There is widespread socio-economic data to show that sparsely populated rural areas (often called ‘Rural 80’) face particular challenges.<sup>38</sup> Government reports define ‘sparse rural’ as concentrated in parts of North Devon and North Cornwall, parts of Norfolk, parts of the border with Wales, parts of Cumbria, Northumberland, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire.<sup>39</sup> They have stable/declining and aging populations. They are, in some cases, distorted significantly by patterns of second

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<sup>36</sup> J. Bell, J. Hopkinson and T. Wilmott ‘Reading the Context’, in J. Bell, J. Hopkinson and T. Wilmott (eds), *Re-shaping Rural Ministry* (Canterbury 2009), pp. 5-26.

<sup>37</sup> C. Roberts, ‘Rural Anglicanism: One Face or Many?’, in L. Francis and M. Robbins, *Rural Life and Rural Church: Theological and Empirical Perspectives*, (Equinox, Sheffield, 2012)

<sup>38</sup> Government reports categorise the countryside in terms of ‘Rural-50’ and ‘Rural-80’. Rural-50: districts are those with at least 50 per cent but less than 80 per cent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. Rural-80 are districts with at least 80 per cent of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns.

<sup>39</sup> See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/227006/Statistical\\_Digest\\_of\\_Rural\\_England\\_Aug\\_2013.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/227006/Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_Aug_2013.pdf) p.44 consulted 26 October 2013.

home ownership. The societal infrastructure is, in a number of cases, in serious decline – with widespread closures of pubs, shops, post offices and schools. Agriculture employs only a small fraction of the workforce.<sup>40</sup> The Campaign for Real Ale noted that in 2003 there were 66690 pubs in the UK; as of March 2013, the total number of UK pubs is 57,008, many of the closures being in rural areas.<sup>41</sup> Against this, such areas also register a strong sense of community, fewer social problems and greater satisfaction amongst their residents over quality of life.<sup>42</sup> In many such communities the churches continue to function, albeit at great cost to faithful local congregations, whereas many other facilities have closed. Amalgamations and team ministries in such communities need to be seen differently to other rural areas, let alone non-rural areas of England.

It is also highly important that the specific demands of ‘Rural 80’ areas do not dominate the discussion. Discussion of team ministries and amalgamations of parishes has often centred around the phenomenon of large numbers of church buildings being clustered together across large, sparsely populated areas. Sparsely populated rural areas are a key part of England – but they are a small and, as a proportion, diminishing, part of England. Using such areas to guide the discussion is to ignore the bulk of the country, which does not live in such communities.

### *1.3.3 London and the Diocese of London*

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<sup>40</sup> From 1998 to 2009 there have been 285 rural primary school closures. See: *The Rural Coalition, The Rural Challenge: Achieving Sustainable Rural Communities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (London 2010), pp. 3-5. See also: M. Taylor, *Living Working Countryside: the Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing*, (London, Dept for Communities and Local Government, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Communication from Emily Ryans, Campaign Manager, Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA), 22 August 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Commission for Rural Communities, *State of the Countryside 2010*. See: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/crc/documents/state-of-the-countryside-report/sotc2010/> consulted 26 October 2013.

The most important contextual variable for numerical church growth in contemporary England is whether or not a church is in London. Christian churches, as a whole, behave markedly different if they are in Greater London. Peter Brierley's data for the past fifteen years, across all denominations, singles London out as the only area of the UK where there is net increase in uSa. And the pace of increase is rising. Brierley's recent London Church Census indicates rapid growth since 2005, evidence backed up by other studies. Church attendance in Greater London grew by 16% between 2005 and 2012, from 620,000 to 720,000, representing 9% of the capital's population at the latter date.<sup>43</sup>

For the Anglican church, what is striking is how varied the performance of the Anglican church in London has been. The diocese of London was, until the early 1990s, on a long downward trend, no better and often worse than that of many other dioceses in the 1970s and 1980s. However, this trend has reversed in the last two decades. It is the best performing diocese in terms of numerical church growth in England and also better performing than dioceses such as Southwark or Chelmsford, which contain significant parts of Greater London within them.<sup>44</sup> Insofar as specific contextual features apply to London (and clearly the trajectory of London and, say, Truro, are markedly different), such factors cannot be explanators for differences between London, Southwark and Chelmsford. There is an obvious discomfort about such a conclusion in the wider church – akin to the sense of unease found in a class of

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<sup>43</sup> Brierley, *UK Church Statistics, 2005-15*, 13.7; the census results can be viewed at: <http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/images/londonchurches.pdf>, consulted 26 October 2013.; see Wolffe and Jackson, 'Anglican Resurgence', Osgood, 'The Rise of Black Churches'; R. Burgess, 'African Pentecostal Church Growth: the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Britain', and A. Duffour, 'Moving Up and Moving Out; the Expansion of London-based "African Pentecostal" church' in Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*.

<sup>44</sup> Brierley, *UK Church Statistics, 2005-15*, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6. Compare these figures with 'Historical Data 1898-2006', data kindly provided by Louise McFerran. In the years from 1977 to 1992 the electoral roll of the diocese of London declined from 78 000 to 45 000. Between 1992 and 2010 it rose to 77 000 – Wolffe and Jackson, 'Anglican Resurgence', in Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*, p.32

school pupils, when one pupil is singled out for praise. But this discomfiture needs to be overcome. The question is: how can the experience of London be put to good use elsewhere. Conversely, there is considerable evidence to suggest that, positive as the experience of the diocese of London is, it lags behind many other denominations in London.<sup>45</sup> The experience of London therefore is significant both for what the diocese of London may have to share with other dioceses and for what the wider experience of churches in London may have to share with both the diocese of London and with the whole of the Church of England.

### *1.3.2 The future supply of Lay and Ordained Leaders:*

Discussion of amalgamation of churches and parishes tends to assume a fixed (or declining) pool of ministry. It is frequently said in church circles that the number of clergy is declining and how the ratio of parishes/church per clergyperson (and especially per stipendiary clergyperson) will have to rise. This assumption needs testing.

Patterns of ministry have historically always been in flux. In recent decades, the most striking change is the advent and rise of non-stipendiary ministry. The first ordinations of NSMs<sup>46</sup> took place as late as 1971, when 21 were ordained. By 2000, 256 were ordained, almost as many as the total number of stipendiaries. This pattern has continued in succeeding years, to the point where around 2500 NSMs are currently active.<sup>47</sup> A different question is the age of ordination candidates. The

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<sup>45</sup> London Church Census: <http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/images/londonchurches.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> A range of terms are used to describe clergy who do not receive a stipend, but for simplicity's sake, the term NSM will be used to cover all such terms.

<sup>47</sup> R. Reiss, *The Testing of Vocation: 100 Years of Ministry Selection in the Church of England*, (Church House Publishing 2013), p. 358; Church Statistics, 2010-11, p. 38, 52



number of younger candidates has fallen over a number of years, but recent efforts have seen the number of younger candidates stabilise and rise.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, the assumption that the number of clergy ‘can only decline’ is an assumption – not a fact set in stone. Specifically, it is pertinent to look at the sending churches of ordinands in the past decade. There is little available research on the churches and chaplaincies from which ordinands, whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary, arise.<sup>49</sup> Data on the sending churches/parishes for four dioceses, collected for the last decade, shows that the large majority of churches are vocationally inactive, with regard to ordinands (however active they may be in encouraging vocations to other forms of ministry). In the case of two – York and Leicester – around seventy per cent of benefices have not sent candidates for ordination in the last decade. If measured by parishes, the figure becomes more striking: of Leicester’s 242 parishes, less than 20% have acted as sending churches in the past ten years (since many parishes have more than one church, than equates to well under 20% of all individual church congregations). In Derby, between sixty and seventy per cent of benefices have not acted as ‘sending churches’ for any ordinands in the last ten years, In the case of Norwich the figure is over forty percent of benefices (although it should be noted that those benefices contain a much larger number of parishes and churches).<sup>50</sup> Such research is reinforced by an informal survey conducted in the

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<sup>48</sup> Church Statistics, 2010-11, p.53-4; the number of candidates recommended for training aged 29 or under has been gradually rising since 2001. In 2012 they numbered 113, the highest figure for over a decade: personal communication from Ministry Division staff, 25 September, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> An exception is: M. Sanders, ‘Encouraging Vocational Pathways’, in Bell, Hopkinson and Willmott, *Re-Shaping Rural ministry*.

<sup>50</sup> York produced 105 ordinands in twelve years, compared to Leicester’s 68 in ten years, whereas Norwich produced 137 in 12 years from 87 benefices out of the 182 benefices in the diocese. Norwich drew ordinands from over 40% of benefices, whereas York and Leicester’s sending benefices constituted c. 30% of the benefices in their respective dioceses. Derby provided sending benefices of BAP candidates for 2009 to 2013: 45 ordinands from 31 sending benefices – 20% of Derby benefices acted as sending benefices across five years. Assuming that in the years 2004-08, vocations arose at the

diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.<sup>51</sup> Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson, National Rural Officer for the Church of England, has commented:

In rural churches vocations to ordained ministry are generally infrequent - and one benefice may only produce one candidate every 10-20 years. In my experience vocation is not talked about frequently in many rural churches, especially to ordained ministry. In small communities and congregations it may also be more difficult for individuals to talk openly about vocation and calling.

The reality described above is far from solely a rural phenomenon; it is widespread across many urban parishes. Conversely, Jill notes how:

dioceses such as Worcester and Ely with very well developed and popular authorised lay ministry schemes have seen a large number of people offer themselves for all sorts of ministries. As one diocesan bishop said to me "it was like taking the lid off a pressure cooker - in a good way!".<sup>52</sup>

Such figures and comments on vocation to ordained ministry need qualification. They do not include readers and other lay ministries. Some benefices will be so small or in such difficult demographics that vocational activity is cramped. Some benefices which have been inactive in the last decade may have acted as 'seed-beds' for candidates more than a decade ago. Yet, having said all this, the figures are startling – in the past decade, the majority of Church of England benefices (and the large

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same rate and that some of the sending benefices of ordinands were the same as in 2009-13, this would mean the sending benefices constituted between 30 to 40% % of the benefices in Derby diocese. It should be noted that, whilst Norwich shows a high rate of benefices acting as sending churches, the diocese has 567 parishes in its 182 benefices – meaning it is likely that a large majority of its parishes did not meaningfully act as sending churches in the period under consideration. Data provided from the DDOs of York, Leicester, Norwich and Derby.

<sup>51</sup> Sanders, 'Encouraging Vocational Pathways', in Bell, Hopkinson and Willmott, *Re-Shaping Rural Ministry*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>52</sup> Communication from Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson, 23 October 2013

majority of parishes or individual congregations) has been vocationally inactive in terms of ordained ministry. In many dioceses, it is a large majority of benefices which are vocationally inactive in terms of ordained ministry.

In other words, a key reason why there is a shortage of clergy is not because there is some 'inevitable trend', but because so many parishes and benefices do not nurture vocations. Even if the church were to make a highly pessimistic assumption that a quarter of all benefices cannot be expected to act as 'sending churches', that leaves a huge number who could do so and have not done so for a decade or more. Conversely, making the assumption that parishes and benefices 'must' be amalgamated due to clergy shortage is an ecclesial fatalism that assumes that, because only a third of benefices have acted as sending churches for ordinands, only a third ever will.

### *1.3.5 The wider debate about church growth and decline*

There are extensive debates about church growth and decline in Britain within contemporary history and sociology of religion. Much church-based thinking on church growth pays little attention to wider debates, or references only one strand amongst them. Reference to the range of debate is important to obtain a wider context for the evaluation of amalgamations and team ministries.

Contemporary historians and sociologists of religion can be divided into three broad camps with regard to numerical church growth in Britain: advocates of the secularisation theory, advocates of 'secularisation theory-lite' and those willing to speak, to some degree, of church growth.

- Writers such as Steve Bruce and Callum Brown, view recent decades in British history in terms of the profound secularisation of Britain, including large-scale shrinkage of the churches organisationally and in terms of individual ascription to Christian belief.<sup>53</sup>
- Other leading writers offer a view which amounts to ‘Secularisation Theory–lite’, which is not quite as pessimistic - but hardly upbeat, pointing to ways in which faith and spirituality remain influential, but assuming that church congregations will keep shrinking.<sup>54</sup>
- A third strand of scholarship has emerged more recently, emphasising areas of church growth in Britain. This ‘church growth’ strand recognises the large-scale decline seen in many congregations and denominations. However, it argues that there is also major church growth in recent British history, notably in London, amongst black, asian and minority ethnic communities and amongst new churches.<sup>55</sup>

The following conclusions from sociology of religion are especially pertinent to this study:

- There is strong evidence to show both church decline and church growth in recent decades. Those who argue, either that there is much growth (eg based on evidence from London) or that there is only decline (based, say, on evidence from some regions or denominations, such as the United Reformed

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<sup>53</sup> Brown and Bruce differ significantly in how they view the trajectory and causation of secularisation but they are as one in their stress on the profundity of ecclesial decline: C. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, (London, Routledge, 2001), p. 198; S. Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularisation in the West*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002)

<sup>54</sup> G. Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); G. Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage 2007) R. Gill, *The Empty Church Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 211; P. Heelas and L. Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 41; L. Woodhead and R. Catto, *Religious Change in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 9–10.

<sup>55</sup> See: Brierley, London Church Census; Rogers, *Being Built Together: a Survey of New Black Majority Churches*; Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*.

Church or sparsely populated rural areas) need to be balanced by the other's viewpoint.

- The largest single 'engine' for church growth is growth coming from the black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
- The second largest engine for church growth is the advent of new churches – both inside and outside the 'mainline' denominations. Churches have grown more from proliferation of new congregations than expansion of existing congregations.
- Whilst church growth is concentrated along 'trade-routes', such trade-routes are widespread and operate on micro as well as macro levels. Most parts of England are not far from a trade route.<sup>56</sup>
- many churches which have few or no state links have experienced markedly greater church growth in England than the Anglican church, deeply connected with the state.<sup>57</sup>

Church of England thinking has interacted with the various strands of sociology of religion in significant ways. Crucial Church of England reports – such as the *Tiller Report*, *Faith in the City*, *Faithful Cities* and even *Mission Shaped Church* – have tended to internalise the secularisation thesis. Whilst valuable in other respects, they over-emphasise secularisation and (aside from *Mission Shaped Church*) show indifference to the need or possibility of church growth, assuming a much more pessimistic scenario for church growth than has subsequently been shown to be the

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<sup>56</sup> P. Chambers, 'Economic Factors in Church Growth and Decline in South and South West Wales' and Goodhew, 'Church Growth in Britain', in Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*, pp. 8-9, 224-6.

<sup>57</sup> I. Randall, 'Baptist Growth in England', Osgood, 'The Rise of Black Churches', in Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*. The expansion of churches not linked to the state is depicted in a Scandinavian context in: E. Hamberg, 'Christendom in Decline: the Swedish Case', in H. McLeod and W. Ustorf, *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2003).

case.<sup>58</sup> The limitations of such reports shows why it is vital for this research programme to engage thoughtfully with wider debates across a broad range of contemporary history and sociology of religion. If such engagement does not happen consciously, it happens implicitly, often by the internalising of assumptions about the supposedly ‘inevitable’ nature of secularisation.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

The research of church growth amongst amalgamations and team ministries requires three things: first, reliable data on church growth/decline; second, an accurate picture of the structures in which churches operate (discussed in the following sections). Third, the debate is also conducted on the basis of further assumptions that need testing – namely, the role of age and church growth, the multiple contexts facing Anglican parishes, the particular role of London, the future supply of lay and ordained leaders and the wider debate about church growth and decline.

There are significant problems in using the numerical data of the Church of England for the detailed analysis required for this section. Their impact can be minimised by excising the data most affected, as in the case of excluding data from multi-church parishes and the data from child aWa. However, to a significant degree, the data set is weaker than was assumed in the original tender documentation and the answers that can be offered will therefore be more limited.

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<sup>58</sup> J. Tiller *A Strategy for the Church's Ministry* (CIO Publishing 1983), pp.11-17, 164; Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City*, (Church House Publishing 1985), pp. 359-67; The Commission on Urban Life and Faith, *Faithful Cities: a Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice*, (Methodist Publishing House and Church House Publishing 2006), pp. 89-91. *Mission Shaped Church*, whilst much more explicit in its support of numerical church growth than the above reports, bases its analysis on the Callum Brown's *Death of Christian Britain*, (which strongly endorses the secularisation thesis) and does not utilise analysis that questions the secularisation thesis – see: *Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London, Church House, 2004), p. 11.

The recent history of Anglican parochial structures is discussed in chapter two. That history injects a further set of variables, which criss-cross those thrown up by the numerical data. The fallibility of the data means attempts to ascribe causation must be done with care. Attribution of causation may not be possible in great detail, since there are multiple reasons for growth and decline; they intersect in complex ways and often have limited connection with structures. We need to beware the notion that there is any structural 'magic bullet' out there, which can alleviate the current problems. But significant conclusions can be offered.

## Section 2 ‘Amalgamations’

### *Introduction*

This chapter explores the growth trends for amalgamations. The term ‘amalgamations’ refers to where two or more churches are grouped together under an incumbent – however that structure is named. Most amalgamations are benefices of one sort or another, but pluralities and any other informal process whereby churches are grouped together are covered by the term ‘amalgamations’. One specific type of amalgamations, team ministries, is discussed in the next section, so will not be discussed here.

A number of qualifying remarks need to be made. Section One describes a range of ‘noise’ in the data. Where possible, this has been excluded from data analysed in this chapter. The largest area of ‘noise’ comes from multi-church parishes. These have been cut out of the following analysis, removing around one quarter of all amalgamations in the Church of England. This is highly unfortunate, but such data is too unreliable to be used. A range of additional ‘noise’ has been uncovered during the research which, as detailed in section one, has been removed to prevent it distorting results.

### *2.1 Survey of amalgamations across dioceses*



Since the close of the Second World War, there has been a wide range of practices concerning the linkage of individual churches with one another. An understanding of how these practices have operated is vital to evaluating amalgamations in the present. There are certain key constants. The pressure of declining numbers of stipendiary clergy and declining funds have meant most dioceses have sought to amalgamate churches/parishes to deal with such constraints. The research process showed that dioceses are working with a wide range of structures, formal and informal, by which churches and parishes are amalgamated with one another.

Below is a list of the official terms<sup>59</sup> which relate to amalgamations:

- Multi-Church Parish
- United Parish
- Multi-Parish Benefice

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<sup>59</sup> Such terms are defined as follows:

**Multi Church Parish:** a parish comprised of a range of church buildings which may constitute a single benefice or be one of several parishes in a united benefice.

**United Parish:** a united parish may or may not be an amalgamation, since the union of parishes may have been the closure of one of the churches in which case the united parish may have only one. However, there are also united parishes which retain all the churches from the constituent parishes and are akin to Multi Church Parishes.

**Multi Parish Benefice:** a benefice comprised of multiple parishes, which may, themselves, be single or multiple church parishes.

**United Benefice:** This involves the simple union of two or more benefices by means of a pastoral scheme as described above. There is flexibility within the union to join as much or as little as is desired.

**Group Ministry:** An arrangement, authorised by the Pastoral Measure, involving the grouping of several benefices but where each benefice retains a separate and distinct existence. Incumbents of the individual benefices that make up the group have authority to perform the offices of an incumbent in every benefice within the group. They are also required to assist each other and to meet as a chapter.

**Plurality:** The holding of two or more separate benefices by one incumbent. This can only be authorised by a scheme or order under the Pastoral Measure. Pluralities are usually created by an order rather than a scheme, which means it may take less time to be put in place. They are much like a union, but with less permanency as they may be terminated on a vacancy by the Bishop or a PCC without a further scheme or order

**Team Ministry:** A special form of ministry whereby a team of two or more incumbent status clergy and possibly other clergy and lay people share the pastoral care of the area of a benefice. This can only be established by a pastoral scheme.

When the above refers to church buildings this includes parish churches, chapels of ease and licensed places of worship. I am very grateful to Peter Wagon and Canon Dr Jill Hopkinson for their assistance with the above definitions.

- United Benefice
- Group ministry
- Plurality
- Team ministry

These formal structures operate differently in different areas. In some dioceses, such as York, the practice of ‘pluralities’ is widespread<sup>60</sup>, where an incumbent holds two or more benefices in plurality. This means that the number of churches/parishes per incumbent can be markedly higher than it appears from national records. Group ministries are another instance where formal designations and practice on the ground often differ. York and Norwich diocesan directories refers to a significant number of group ministries, however only a minority are legally groups and on occasion those which are groups legally do not define themselves as ‘groups’.<sup>61</sup>

Groups function in the opposite way that pluralities do. Pluralities are a legal framework that is not always flagged nationally, but that has immediate and significant impact on local practice and ministry cover. Groups have a firm legal and national identity. They are very formal and recognized centrally. However, on the ground groups are likely to be forgotten about and to disappear from local practice though still retaining its official legal status. This tendency is fuelled when informal structures come into play as these are (often rightly) seen as having more immediate relevance than the old group structures. Because groups are not

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<sup>60</sup> There are 39 incumbents of a plurality in York diocese. Most have two benefices but the highest number is five. The total number of benefices in pluralities is 91, out of a total of 247 benefices in the diocese. A significant number of these benefices are single parish, and single church.

<sup>61</sup> York Diocesan Directory 2012-13 refers to Barmby Moor, Holme and Seaton Ross, Stamford Bridge, Bransholme groups. Of these, only Bransholme is legally a group. Cloughton is also a group, but is not so named in the directory. Norwich diocesan directory 2012 lists a range of ‘groups’ which are not legally groups. Historically, when teams/groups were being launched, Norwich Diocese was an enthusiastic supporter and had set up a lot of groups in the 1960s, before legislation was in place. By the time the legislation came about in the late 1960s, some were legalised, whereas others retained their ‘group’ identity in title only. Hence many entities listed as ‘groups’ in the diocesan directory are legally ‘multi-church benefices’.

tied to clergy roles in the ways that teams are (i.e. you are a 'team' vicar/rector but have no identifying role as a member of a group), it is sometimes harder for groups to sustain their 'collective memory' across multiple generations of clergy. Those who manage it, only do so by being intentional about it. They keep the memory of the group alive because acting as a group in collaboration is actually practised and has saturated into the self-understanding of the parishes involved.

Beyond formal structures, a wide range of informal structures operate. A striking instance of this came when a researcher asked a diocesan secretary 'can you tell me about your group ministries?', knowing that the diocese in question had six such legally constituted units. The diocesan secretary replied 'what group ministries?' This diocese had developed a separate, informal, method for amalgamating parishes. The latter informal structures act as the *de facto* structures on the ground. They can be different from and override the formal structures which are legally in place.

The following is a working list, not an exhaustive list, of different informal structures discovered:

- Cluster Partnerships (Blackburn Diocese)
- Local Ministry Group/Teams (Bath & Wells Diocese, Ely Diocese, Gloucester Diocese, Leicester Diocese)
- Local Ministry Development Teams (St Albans Diocese)
- Local Ministry Development Groups (Hereford Diocese)
- Local Representative Ministry (Gloucester Diocese)
- Localities (Durham Diocese)
- Ministry Leadership Teams (Coventry Diocese)

- Minster Model (Nick Spencer – but used in a number of dioceses)
- Mission Communities (Exeter Diocese)
- Mission and Ministry Areas and ‘Parish Plus’ (Derby Diocese)
- Mission and Ministry Units (Chelmsford Diocese)
- Mission Partnerships (Leicester Diocese, Sheffield Diocese)
- Mission Units (Carlisle Diocese)
- Shared Ministry Teams (Liverpool Diocese)
- Focal Ministries (Diocese of St David’s, Wales – but significant for debates in the Church of England)

Most of these local patterns of collaborative ministry have emerged within the last 10 years. They represent informal organisational structures to the extent that they are not technically outlined in the legislation of the Church’s Pastoral Measures. However, in many contexts these structures are dramatically reshaping the landscape of pastoral reorganisation. For example, in 2003, the diocese of Derby launched an initiative called ‘Renewing Ministry’ that led to the creation of new Mission and Ministry Areas (MMAs). According to the report, ‘We expect these normally to cover an area wider than the usual understanding of "parish". Instead of adding one parish to another, we suggest a new perspective – beginning with a bigger unit.’ MMAs thus represented a re-clustering of parishes and benefices together. The new relationships were solidified by the fact that the MMA became the basis for parish share calculation.<sup>62</sup> However, whilst some MMAs have been effective, others have not worked as well as hoped. There are many reasons for this, but one is confusion with regard to pre-existing (often legal) structures such as teams, groups and deaneries. A

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<sup>62</sup> Derby Diocese, *Renewing Ministry: Summary report* (2003), p. 8.

limited number of MMAs which have worked are continuing, but where they have not they are now being superseded in Derby by a new form of organisation, using the name 'Parish Plus'.<sup>63</sup> Analogous use of informal structures, such as the mission partnerships of Sheffield and Leicester, have been deployed in other dioceses.

The proliferation of informal structures is, in part, a reflection of the highly diverse contexts of parochial ministry in England. This can be seen by comparing dioceses – but it can also be seen within individual dioceses. What is officially the case is often different to the reality on the ground.

A further comment: a valuable way of classifying informal practices is to make a distinction between a **structural entity** (like an Ministry and Mission Area) which could effectively compete with a group, team or plurality as the dominant structure on the ground as the context for decision making, community life and identity - and a **functional pattern of relationships** (like 'ministry teams' of various sorts). In the latter case, ministry teams etc. attempt to take the strengths of a Team Ministry model, 'de-clericalise' it so to speak, and apply it in a multi-church context.<sup>64</sup>

### **Collaborative Structures**

- Cluster Partnerships
- Informal Clusters
- Local Ministry Groups
- Local Mission Groups
- Localities

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<sup>63</sup> Derby Diocese, *Parish Plus- the Next Chapter of Renewing Ministry*.

<sup>64</sup> I am indebted to to Revd Canon Jill Hopkinson and Ben Kautzer for this typology.

- Mission and Ministry Areas
- Mission and Ministry Communities
- Mission and Ministry Units
- Mission Areas
- Mission Communities
- Mission Partnerships
- Mission Units
- Missional Deaneries

### **Functional Arrangements**

- Co-ordinator for Local Ministry
- Focal Ministry
- Local Ministry Development Groups
- Local Ministry Development Teams
- Local Ministry Groups
- Local Ministry Teams
- Local Ministry Groups/Teams
- Local Pastoral Ministry Teams
- Local Representative Ministry
- Mission & Ministry Leadership Teams
- Ministry Leadership Teams
- Shared Ministry Teams
- elders as authorised lay ministers - St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

A further dimension is the policy of the diocese of London. The diocese of London stands in contrast to the rest of the Church of England in a number of ways, as is discussed elsewhere.<sup>65</sup> It is striking that London has taken a different approach to amalgamations from any other diocese, operating with a policy of ‘one parish, one priest’, whether that priest is paid or not, with the intention that that person be full time in the role.<sup>66</sup>

On one level, it would be possible to comment that ‘it is different for London’. London is, different, but London is not another planet. The diocese of London’s growth trends, until the early 1990s were similar to, or worse than, the rest of the Church of England.<sup>67</sup> Conversely, the social realities of London – such as large-scale migration, population growth and economic growth - are found in many other parts of England. The ‘one parish, one priest’ strategy raises the question as to whether the

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<sup>65</sup> See section 1.3.3

<sup>66</sup> London’s strategy has six elements:

- Principle 1: A viable local and missional neighbourhood church in every locality (parish-based)
- Principle 2: A full time leader (paid or unpaid), who will normally be a priest, for every worshipping community
- Principle 3: Overlaying other ecclesial communities on the base of the parish system by planting and evolving other forms of church (chaplains, mission initiatives, networks, youth congregations, ethnically-based, ambient, cell, workplace) as required, using leadership developed via ordained pioneer ministry and other training routes
- Principle 4: A thorough and clear process for the selection and training of ordinands, including a variety of training routes and clear policies for the creative deployment of new deacons
- Principle 5: Schemes for the selection, training and deployment of Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) and for the recognition and training of Commissioned Lay Ministers
- Principle 6: Developing a Leadership Team of clergy and laity in every worshipping community

The above material is based on communications from the Rt Revd Pete Broadbent, 21 May 2013; The Rt Revd Peter Wheatley, Bishop of Edmonton, 23 and 28 May 2013; the Rt Revd Adrian Newman, Bishop of Stepney, 23 May 2013.

<sup>67</sup> P. Brierley, *UK Church Statistics, 2005-15*, (Tonbridge 2011), 2.4, 2.5, 2.6. Compare these figures with ‘Historical Data 1898-2006’, data kindly provided by Louise McFerran. In the years from 1977 to 1992 the electoral roll of the diocese of London declined from 78 000 to 45 000. Between 1992 and by 2010 it was 77 000 – J. Wolffe and B. Jackson, ‘Anglican Resurgence: the Church of England in London’, in D. Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain*, p.32

diocese of London's distinctive experience of church growth across the past twenty years is, in part, a reflection of a distinctive approach to ministry.

All of the above have a very significant effect on the findings of Strand 3c.

'Amalgamations' are frequently fluid entities. Many are in stable configurations, but many have experienced reorganisation and/or periods of organisational limbo, whilst waiting for a new form of amalgamation to emerge. The forms of amalgamation are many and vary in the degree to which they are legally recognised. In some settings, different forms of amalgamation operate simultaneously in the same place. Many forms of amalgamation conform to central church data, many others fly beneath central church records. Any calculation of growth trends for amalgamations requires that such complexity be factored into analysis.

One key result is that it is not possible to trace growth and decline in terms of the overall units of amalgamation in which churches are gathered together (be they formal structures such as benefices, groups, pluralities etc or one of the informal structures), for the following reasons:

- Many amalgamations are amalgamated in two different ways, formal and informal. It is unclear whether they should be analysed by what is formally happening, or by what is informally happening.
- The transition point from one kind of unit to another (whether from formal to informal, or between different types of formal and informal) is difficult or impossible to discern with accuracy. The creation of a new legal entity may precede or follow its *de facto* operation – and the gap between the legal and the *de facto* can be a number of years.



- Whenever multiple numbers of churches are drawn together there is a high likelihood that the attendance data becomes confused. This has already been noted with regard to multi-church parishes, but it is a wider phenomenon. If a parish/church moves from one kind of unit to another, it is often problematic to record its statistical life in that new unit – numbers may not be collected for several years, or may be subsumed into a larger number and cannot be recovered for a specific church/parish.
- Where a church becomes part of a multi-church parish, or is removed from a multi-church parish and becomes a single church parish, the figures will markedly shift in ways which cannot be traced – as described in section 1.2

As a result, the research team have made the decision to focus analysis at the parish level, not benefice level. Comparing, for example, group ministries and united benefices can only be done by detailed study of one or two sample dioceses – a task beyond the remit of this project. Once growth is analysed at the parish, rather than the benefice level, the degree of uncertainty decreases, but it cannot be removed.

Analysing growth at the parish, rather than the benefice, level limits what can be said, but is a necessary step in order to ensure results are meaningful.

All multi-church parishes (and amalgamations which include a mix of single and multi-church parishes) have already been excluded from analysis for being unreliable data. Consequently, it is possible to obtain reasonably accurate data regarding the number of single church parishes per incumbent and contrast units with differing numbers of single church parishes per incumbent. Amalgamations have therefore been classified by the number of single church parishes under the oversight of a

particular incumbent in the year 2011, the latest year for which there is data, recognising that structures may have changed in preceding years (and may have changed since 2011). The degree of fluidity of structures injects uncertainty into analysis of wider data. However, the run of data covers a relatively short distance, from 2006 to 2011, and sense checking data from sample dioceses has confirmed its accuracy is sufficient to allow confidence in the results.<sup>68</sup>

## *2.2 Amalgamations: Statistical Analysis*

The research question for this section looks at a subset of Church of England parishes (amalgamations) and requires that they then be further subdivided (eg into different sizes of amalgamations, by region, by whether they are or are not in team ministries).

At this point, a number of methodological issues regarding the data become significant:

- 2.2.1 Exclusion of data known to be problematic
- 2.2.2 The time-span of the data to be analysed
- 2.2.3 Comparison of multiple measures
- 2.2.4 The importance of church size in any analysis
- 2.2.5 The process by which figures are compared

### 2.2.1 Exclusion of data known to be compromised

As discussed in section one, significant elements of the national dataset have to be excluded – most prominently multi-church parishes, which comprise over a quarter of all amalgamated parishes, as well as other smaller amounts of data. The remaining

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<sup>68</sup> The correlation of national records as to the number of churches per incumbent has been sense checked using diocesan directories and in consultation with senior staff of sample dioceses. Usually the data proved reliable, but where national data is problematic, this is indicated in the following pages.

data is much less volatile – but exclusion of such a large segment is not without problems. It means that a number of dioceses (such as London) and types of amalgamations (such as those with two churches) are disproportionately affected.

### 2.2.2 The time-span of the data to be analysed

A longer timespan for analysis of data is inherently desirable. Amalgamations have been analysed by use of figures from 2006 to 2011, for the following reasons. Church of England statistics underwent a major change in 2000, when ‘aWa’ (all age weekly attendance) was introduced. The aim of this measure was to supersede the primary measure up to that date (‘uSa’, usual Sunday attendance) by offering a measure which relied on a specific count for one month, rather than estimates and which measured attendance across the week, rather than just on Sundays. However, this highly commendable aim was difficult to achieve. The change was introduced in 2000 but the format for collecting aWa was subsequently changed, whilst it took several years for churches to grow used to the new measure. Consequently the years up to 2003 or 2004 are not wholly reliable. The older measure, uSa, was briefly abandoned, but then began to be collected again – since it was so useful in offering a long-term comparison. This makes uSa for the early years of the century patchy, moreover two entire dioceses – Leicester and Coventry – stopped collecting uSa until 2005, so a genuine national comparison using uSa cannot be done until that year. Electoral roll figures run on a cycle, in which the roll is completely revised every six/seven years. The pattern for electoral roll is that the figure markedly drops each time it is revised and then slowly climbs in the following years, as new people join the roll and less care is given as to whether some of those on it should be removed – ie electoral roll figures appear to rise/fall because of how near/far they are from the date of the last

revision, as well as because of congregational growth. Consequently, it is best, when using electoral roll, to compare years which stand at the same distance from any revision. The year 2006 is four years from the revision of 2002 and works well as a comparison with 2011, which is four years from the revision in 2007. Since 2011 offers the latest set of national data, it makes sense to run figures for the period 2006 to 2011. This has three virtues: by 2006 aWa had bedded down as a measure; by 2006 all dioceses were returning uSa figures; 2006 is a suitable year for comparison of electoral roll figures with 2011, the latest year for which national data is available.

### 2.2.3 The Importance of Multiple Measures

Multiple measures will be compared; usual Sunday attendance for adults and children (adult and child uSa), average Weekly attendance for adults (adult aWa) and Electoral Roll (ER). Each has strengths and weaknesses – but since those strengths and weaknesses are different, an aggregated picture offers much greater certainty than use of a single measure.

Average weekly attendance provides a picture of what happens across a week, rather than just on Sunday and is based on actual figures, not an estimate by clergy or churchwardens. However, aWa contains significant on-going volatility, especially with regard to children – as discussed in Appendix 2. Consequently, the measure used here is adult aWa. This is liable to distortion, but less so than all-age aWa. The measure needs treating with care, but does offer an indicator of the vital area of midweek activity. It should be used less for what it says regarding specific numbers, than for the trend it gives – also noting that growth/decline of adult aWa is an

indicator of what is happening to child aWa. The measure uSa, as was discussed in section one, is more limited in what it can say than aWa, but also markedly less volatile. It also complements the picture aWa paints – focussing on Sunday and, as an estimate of the regular congregation, consistently coming in below the actual figure for Sunday attendance measured in the October count, which measures all attenders. Child uSa allows some discussion of children and young people. It is hampered by not covering involvement of children in worship which happens midweek, but since the child aWa is too volatile to be of use, child uSa is used as an indicator of trend, rather than an indicator of the overall number of children at worship. Electoral roll (ER) has its weaknesses, as have been described in section one, but it is the only national membership measure the Church of England had in the time-period under consideration and as a measure of membership, not attendance, it is a vital comparison with attendance based measures.

#### 2.2.4 The importance of church size in any analysis

Before consideration of how the behaviour of the various different attendance or membership measures may alter depending on the amalgamation of which that church is a part, we can identify an underlying issue which exists when considering the numerical calculation of attendance change. This issue lies in how dramatically incomparable both percentage change and numerical change are between the large and small churches; the problems with the comparisons are as follows:

- **Percentage Change:** For churches with small attendance figures the percentage change is often volatile as a result of the small base, or earliest, value. Such small base values will cause distortion in the average percentage

changes, suggesting false growth; for example, a church which has an attendance of 10 in 2006 and an attendance of 15 in 2011 will exhibit a 50% growth in attendance. However factually correct, the small numerical increase represented by a large percentage increase, when contrasted with a church which has a large average attendance, in which an increase of say 50 will show as an increase of only a couple per cent, causes an exaggeration of growth amongst the smaller churches.

- **Numerical Change:** On the other hand, for a church with a small average attendance, a seemingly small increase in attendance can be quite significant to the parish community; whilst a large increase in a large church may go, essentially, unnoticed. Clearly the numerical change in this case is not commensurate.

Strand One has generated a standardisation technique intended to deal with this complication – the details of which will be discussed in 2.2.5. This standardisation method is intended to allow comparison of each of the standardised percentage changes with one another regardless of the size of the parish, thus removing the above issue. However when we consider the behaviour of the churches of different size groups, and the average church size within each amalgamation group, we discover that overlooking size categories as a factor dramatically affects results, even with the standardised values.

On the surface, we can generalise that small churches are displaying tendencies for growth, whilst larger churches exhibit trends of decline. Why larger churches are more prone to decline and small churches less so is an important research question, but beyond the remit of this section.<sup>69</sup> When considering the different amalgamation categories, it is therefore important to acknowledge that certain amalgamation groups will contain considerably more smaller churches and some will contain considerably more larger churches; comparisons made between these amalgamation groups in general then are less of a mark on the attendance trends of the type of amalgamation unit, but more a measure of how small churches are doing in comparison to large churches. For example, single church units and amalgamation groups with a small number of churches, will tend to have more of the larger churches, in turn leading to poor attendance trends amongst these amalgamation categories. This can be seen below in figures 2.1 and 2.2, in which we take the amalgamation groups as a whole and calculate the average percentage change and number change per parish.

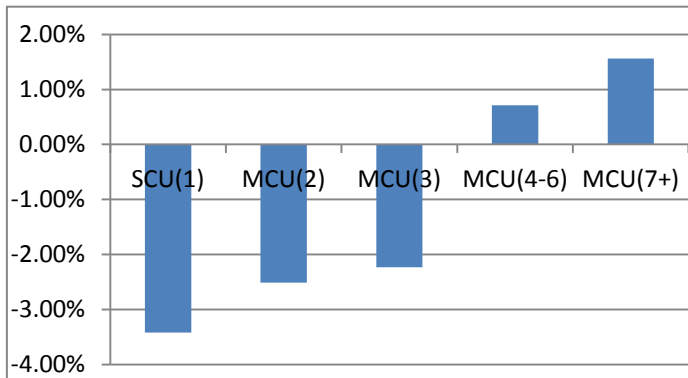


Figure 2.1: Average % change per parish amongst amalgamation groups from 2006-11

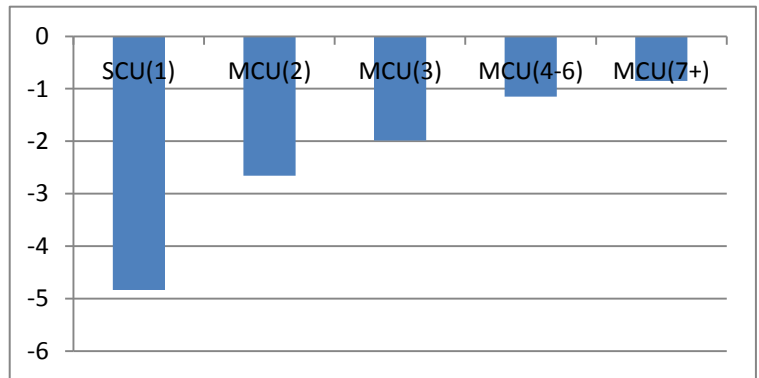


Figure 2.2: Average number change per parish amongst amalgamation groups from 2006-11

Figure 2.3 below displays how even with strand one's standardisation model when we compare the attendance trends between amalgamation groups without size categories

<sup>69</sup> 'Large' here means 100 to 300 adult uSa – churches with over 300 uSa have more positive growth trends, but represent a relatively small number of churches and attendees.

we get the similar results, although not quite as clear cut as with previous method – the details of which will be explained in 2.2.5.

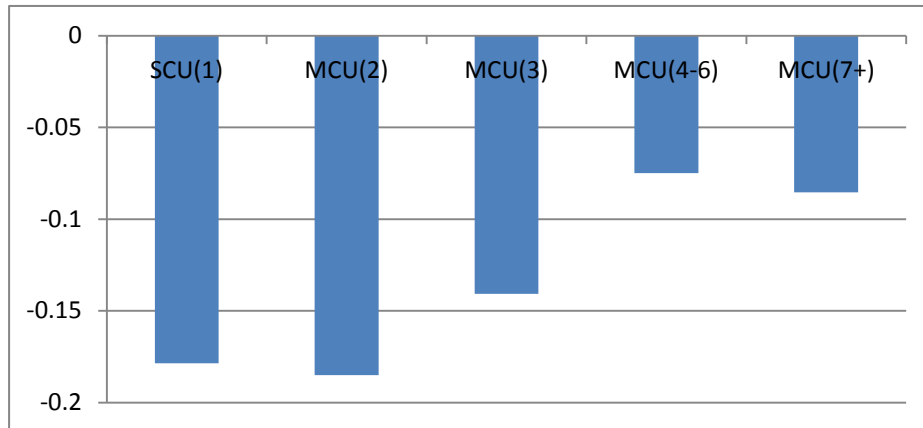


Figure 2.3: Average standardised percentage change per parish amongst amalgamation groups from 2006-11

It is a key concern of this research to clarify what effect the number of churches overseen by an incumbent has on the growth trends of those churches. From the crude figures above, it appears that the more churches an incumbent has, the more likely those churches are to grow. But this is an erroneous assumption – since data for very different churches is being put together.

By introducing size groups we ensure the percentage and number changes between 2006 and 11 for different parishes of different sizes are much more comparable, and create groups in which the different amalgamation groups can be compared without fear of creating misleading results which depend largely on the sizes of the churches in each group. The following size groups, based on the size of the entry of the respective attendance measure in 2006 have been implemented in order to deal with this issue:

- 0-14



- 15-29
- 30-49
- 50-99
- 100+

Such size categories need to be approached with caution. For example the amalgamation units with a large number of churches, can become unusably small in the category of 100+ for amalgamations with large numbers of churches. Nonetheless, the effects of including these size categories are profound. If we compare figure 2.4 below with figure 2.1 we observe the opposite results to those which we gathered without size categories.

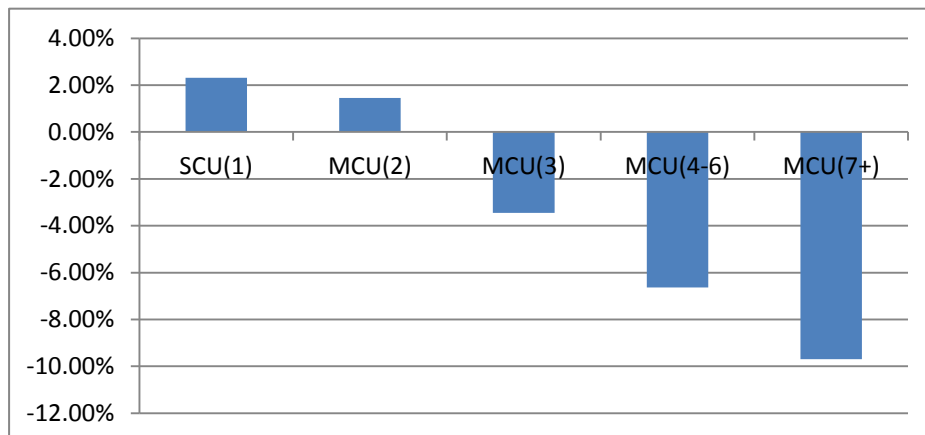


Figure 2.4: Average percentage change from 2006-11 for the 15-29 size category amongst amalgamation groups

Section 2.3 shows what happens when the various measures are analysed for various amalgamations using the above size categories. Analysing the data without size groupings seriously distorts the findings. Putting in size groupings allows us to compare like with like.

### 2.2.5 The process by which figures are compared

The method used by Strand One, in which an average of figures for 2001-3 and 2009-11 are standardised and compared has the advantage that by so doing it evens out annual fluctuations and weakens the impact of erroneous data by averaging out several years at the start and then end of the period. It mitigates the issue of non-returns by using the average of the years that are available. However there are problems for using this method in strand 3c. Strand 3c is using a significantly reduced time-span of 2006 to 2011 (see 2.2.2). Using strand one's method across a shorter range of years means flatter results, removing distortion but also flattening signs of growth. Most of the averages, in practice, include non-return years (which are very common) and often rely on only two or three years of data, the assumption being that these values correspond to the average of the missing data. It can be argued that 'noise' in the data can be smoothed out by use of averages or by other procedures (such as exclusion of maximum figures, which may be distortions). Such methods have the effect of identifying growing parishes – but also create a very large category of 'stable' parishes – amounting to 60 to 70% of all parishes. To classify the bulk of the dataset in this way means, for Strand 3c, that most of the data, including the different sorts of amalgamations will appear to perform similarly. It is also complex to explain and interpret the answers to the wider church.

Consequently, in strand 3c, we use two types of analysis. First, we use a single year comparison. For each parish we take a value for 2006 (if 2006 is missing we take an average of 2005 and 2007, if only one of these exists, that value is taken. If none of the three exist the parish is defined as "No Data") and a value for 2011 (if 2011 is missing we take 2010, if both entries are missing the parish is define as "No Data").

We then take the percentage change and the number change between these two values. We calculate both the number change and the percentage change as, especially for smaller churches, the percentage change has a tendency to skew false growth. A percentage change is bounded in decline, at most it can be minus 100%, a percentage change, however, is not bounded in growth.

Like all methods, it has advantages and disadvantages. Whether the average of the percentage changes or the percentage change in the total, this allows for the size of individual changes as well as the direction. The method can handle shorter time periods as well as long ones. It is based on actual figures, rather than an average or an amalgam of different measures. This makes it more straightforward to understand: results show that 'attendance went down in group A but up in group B between 2006 and 2011', so helping those without statistical understanding to grasp what is being said. This simplicity also accounts for the downside of the method: it is vulnerable to erroneous extreme values because there is no averaging out over a period of years. It follows that for the naturally more volatile measures, such as aWa, this method may struggle to identify attendance trends. This is countered partly by the use of three different measures – uSa, aWa and ER. Moreover, such fluctuations, as a handicap to whatever comparison is used, have been minimised where possible (eg by using adult aWa, rather than all age aWa) and are mitigated by comparing a range of measures, by running the single year comparison for two different sets of years (2006-11 and 2005-10) and by sense-checking with sample dioceses. All these checks show the reliability of the single year comparison method and are detailed below.

Secondly, the single year comparison is then checked against a variant of Strand One's Standardisation Method, for the years 2006-11. For each parish we take an average of the entries for 2006 and 2007 and an average of the entries for 2010 and 2011, if one of the values in the average is missing, then the remaining value is used. If both values are missing the parish is defined as "No Data". The percentage change between these two averages is then calculated and standardised appropriately according to the model<sup>70</sup>. As a part of Strand One's method, a series of growth thresholds have been introduced, for a standardised percentage change  $x$ :

- $x \leq -2$  : Strong Decline
- $-2 < x \leq 1$  : Moderate Decline
- $-1 < x < 1$  : Stability
- $1 \leq x < 2$  : Moderate Growth
- $x \geq 2$  : Strong Growth

This method has been completed as a comparison with the single year comparison method on adult uSa. The main advantage of this method does not have a strong bearing on this strands research; when comparing growth trends on a national level outside of the amalgamation groups it is important that the growth or decline of each parish is comparable with the next, which the standardisation allows. For Strand 3c, however, this does not overcome the fact that the amalgamation groups with more churches have a larger number of small churches, projecting false superiority in attendance behaviour. Taking the average of two early years in the run of data and two years at the end of the run of data reduces the likelihood of erratic values dictating the attendance trends; however, any attendance differences are "flattened"

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<sup>70</sup> Based on the outcome of the average of the 2006 and 2007 values, the parishes are put into one of three size categories; a linear model is then fitted to each size group and the percentage change between the two average points is standardised by the appropriate value from the linear model, based on the point marking the average between 2006 and 2007

by this shortening in the run of years, leading to less significant changes and more stable parishes. It should also be noted that it will be difficult for anyone without significant statistical understanding to comprehend the standardisation model, following this there is the difficulty of explaining exactly what the results mean. When we calculate an average uSa change per parish we have only the thresholds before to compare it with, and in most cases it will indicate stability, leaning towards growth or decline; for someone reading the report this value is difficult to assimilate.

For each of these methods we complete a series of unpaired statistical t-tests with Welch's adaption for unequal variances to test for significant differences in the average uSa change between 2006 and 2011 for parishes in different amalgamation groups. The unpaired t-test allows for comparisons of two samples of different sizes. We note here that when one of the sample sizes is small the power of the test is significantly reduced; meaning the chances of the test identifying a significant difference is significantly reduced.

Initial data was then checked with senior staff from the dioceses of Derby and Sheffield whom have detailed knowledge both of the statistics and of local churches, to provide a 'sense-check'. It was found that the 'single year comparison' method was generally more accurate on the basis of that 'sense check'. A related question, for any method, is the comparison of the three types of data – uSa, aWa and ER. If these, very different, types of data tell the same story – as they do – this gives much greater confidence in the method being used.

## 2.3 Statistical Data<sup>71</sup>

### Adult Data

Data below is for adult uSa, adult aWa and for ER (only eligible for adults). The data covers the years 2006 to 2011, the years for which we are most confident of the data and which allow meaningful comparison of electoral roll between years at comparable stages of the electoral roll cycle. From it, have been excluded any data deemed to be untrustworthy. The data has been broken down into size groups in order for comparable churches to be compared with one another.

#### (a) 0-14:

The 0 - 14 size category values need to be treated with care. When using the single year comparison method for percentage change in analysis for this group, we must remember earlier comments that for low base values -2006 values-, the percentage growth can be exaggerated and erratic. The mean values for the percentage change between 2006 and 2011 for adult aWa have the values ranging from an average growth per parish of 36.83% to 57.26%. This volatility will affect the tests' ability to find significant difference in the means. In addition, a significant number of small parishes recorded as SCUs were, when sense-checked with dioceses, found, in practice to be in different sorts of MCUs.<sup>72</sup> It is unclear how much this affects these figures. The data for 0 – 14 is also vulnerable to distortion for other reasons (see Section 1.2.6). However the data is significant since: (a) all three measures behave in

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<sup>71</sup> Alongside the figures in this section, detailed information regarding statistical tests can be found in appendix 3.

<sup>72</sup> Small congregations which, in the national database, appear to have a single incumbent are, mostly, clustered with other churches in practice. Of a sample of 110 such churches from eleven dioceses, 75 were found to be clustered with other parishes in practice.

a broadly similar way; (b) the 0-14 category behaves similarly to the other size categories.

The analysis produces a limited number of significant values for this size category. For percentage change we find a significant difference only between MCU (3)s and MCU (4-6)s for adult aWa -the MCU (4-6)s with the better average attendance change. For the number change, this value approaches significance, but does not achieve it, and we also have that, for adult uSa, the SCU (1)s have a significantly better average attendance change than the MCU (7+)s. Strand one’s standardisation technique for adult uSa agrees with single year comparison number change analysis for adult uSa.

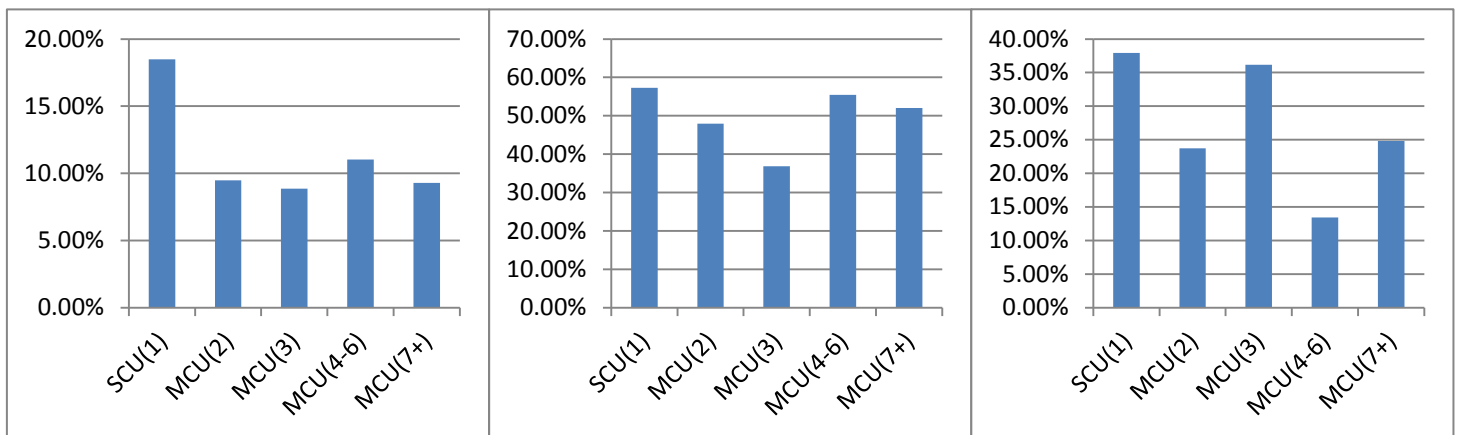


Figure 2.5: Comparison of average % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 0-14 category for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

When observing the graphs above in figure 2.5, for percentage change there is no clear trend. The SCU (1)s for adult uSa perform best, with the multi- church units for this size group performing similarly to one another. For adult aWa we see a negative trend from the SCU (1)s to the MCU (3)s, followed by a spike in the MCU (4-6)s and (7+)s. ER is more volatile, with MCU (2)s and MCU (4-6)s doing the worst.

Moving onto the number changes: still for the single year comparison method, the graphs are a little clearer; once again the SCU (1)s do the best for adult uSa, but with no clear trend between the others. The graph for adult aWa shows a similar picture to before, with the spike in MCU (4-6) and (7+) slightly calmed. The largest “flattening” here is seen in the graph for ER; with the spikes in MCU (3) and (7+) reduced, pointing towards the negative trend found for larger size groups.

The graph for the standardised percentage change, seen below in figure 2.6, for the Strand One method in this category most closely resembles the trend visible in larger size groups, whereby the amalgamated parishes grow less the bigger the number of churches involved, aside from a spike in the MCU (4-6).

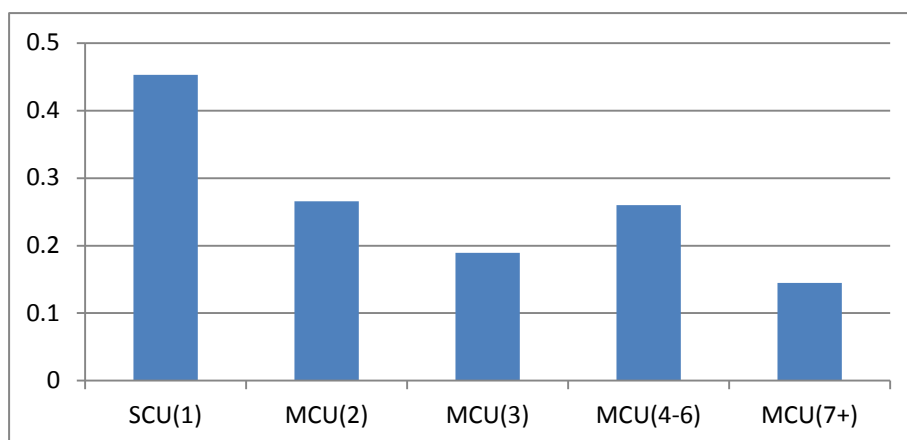


Figure 2.6: Comparison of average standardised % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 0-14 category for uSa for the Strand One method

For the 0-14 category the limited number of significant values hinders us in our conclusions, however the graphs in each case show the SCU (1)s to have the best average attendance change, with no real conclusions as to how the other amalgamation groups are behaving in this category.



(b) 15-29:

This category gives us much greater confidence in our results and conclusions. This confidence comes from the fact that all three measures behave in the same way despite their very different nature. In addition, the essentially unanimous agreement between percentage change, number change and standardised percentage change for each measure further solidifies our findings. This is clear from the graphs below in figure 2.7.

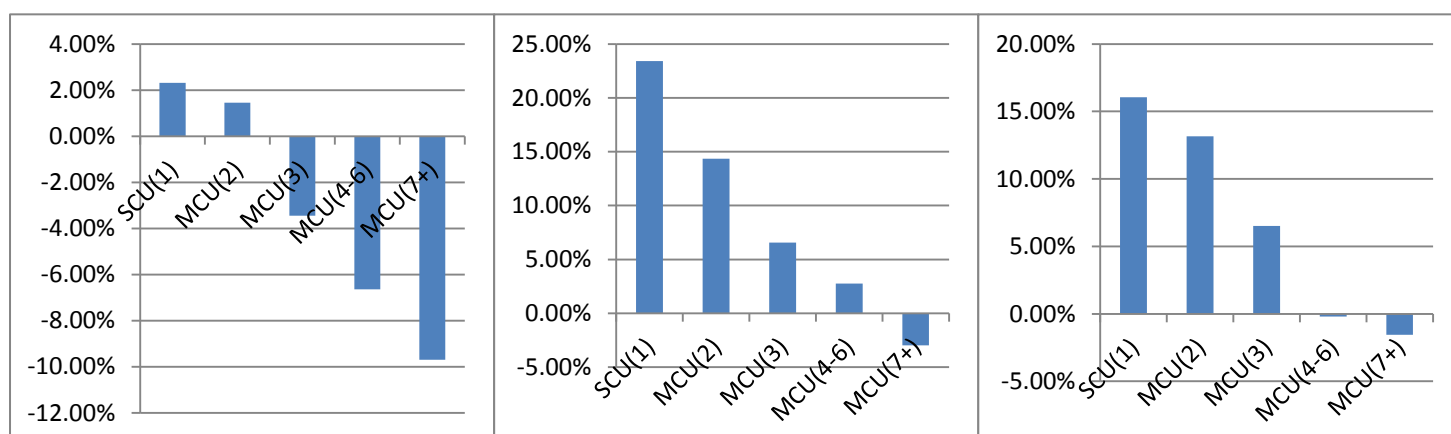


Figure 2.7: Comparison of average % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 15-29 category for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

We see a strong negative trend in each graph depicting that the greater the number of churches in the amalgamation, the worse the average percentage change between 2006 and 2011. We notice a difference in the mean percentage changes between measures, with uSa being considerably lower than aWa and ER; this may be due to previously discussed issues with potential undercount for adult uSa or over count for aWa and ER (see section 1.2).

We then consider the extent to which the statistical tests confirm these graphical results. First the percentage change between each parish in each amalgamation group: the uSa and aWa measures are agreeable in this analysis that, on average, the percentage change of a parish in a single church operating unit –SCU (1) – is significantly higher than the percentage change of a parish in a MCU (3), MCU (4-6) and MCU (7+); also that the average percentage change of a parish in a MCU (3) is better than that of a parish in a MCU (7+). ER agrees that the SCU (1)s are performing better than the MCU(4-6) and MCU(7+)s.

The three measures are unanimous in their conclusions that the MCU (2)s have a significantly higher percentage change than the MCU(4-6)s and (7+)s, with ER also finding MCU (3)s to have a significantly better attendance change than MCU (4-6).

When we compare the single year comparison method with the Strand One standardisation method, we find significant agreement; the Strand One method draws the same conclusions as the single year comparison analysis for both uSa and aWa, however not as strongly. We find with the strand one analysis that a parish in a MCU (3) closely approaches significance of a higher average than one in a MCU (7+), but does not achieve significance. Furthermore, we find the tests on the number change for each measure yields exactly the same significant values as the respective measure for percentage change. It is worth noting that although this will often be the case, it is not necessarily a given.

The extent to which each measure and analyses type matches in conclusion here gives us a very solid basis for the conclusion that the amalgamation units with more churches have a worse rate of attendance change than those with fewer churches. It is

worth noting that the previously described issue of SCU (1)s operating as part of a multiple church amalgamation group is found, to a degree, in the 15-29 category as well as the 0-14 size category. However, given that the figures for 15-29 behave similarly to those of 30-49, we do not believe they significantly affect the result. The extent to which we have such clearly defined results, mirroring those from the larger size categories leads us to believe that this issue is not as prominent in this size grouping.

(c) 30-49:

The shapes and trends of the graphs in this category are very similar to those of the previous category; the results of this size category instil large amount of confidence in our conclusions – especially as all three measures (uSa, aWa and ER) perform very similarly. We notice with the below graphs that the mean values are all lower than before, this continues as the size groups increase. This reflects earlier comments regarding small churches as exhibiting the best growth trends and large churches the worst; it also reiterates the conclusion that size groups are fundamental as a factor in testing the different growth trends between amalgamation groups.

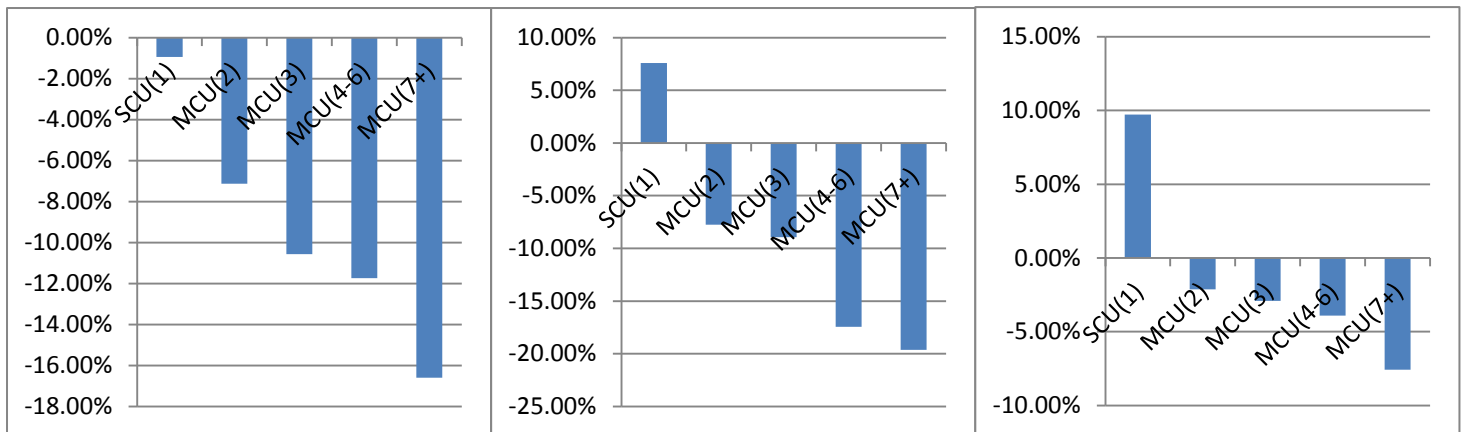


Figure 2.8: Comparison of average % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 30- 49 category for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

Figure 2.8 above shows the graphs for mean percentage change between 2006 and 2011 for a parish in each amalgamation group for each measure. Again we see a strong negative trend between the amalgamation groups and the rate of attendance change, and a strong association between each of the graphs.

Again we look to evaluate how much of what we are seeing can be confirmed by statistical testing for significance in order to gain confidence that these are the true trends. Starting with the t-tests for the single year comparison percentage change: our three measures each find the average percentage change for a parish in a SCU (1) to be statistically greater than a parish in each of the other amalgamation groups; uSa and aWa also find, on average, the MCU (2)s to have a better attendance change than the MCU (4-6)s and (7+)s, with ER finding the MCU (2) parishes as only statistically better than (7+) parishes. Adult aWa also finds that on average a parish in a MCU (3) will have a higher average percentage change than a parish in both a MCU (4-6) and a MCU (7+). ER finds that the mean percentage change of ER for a parish in a MCU (3) or a MCU (4-6) from 2006 to 2011 approaches significance of being higher than

that of a parish in a MCU (7+). When we observe the strand one uSa analysis, we again get coherence between these results and the results of the single year comparison analysis for uSa; additionally the strand one analysis here also finds the mean of a parish in a MCU (3) to be higher than that of MCU (7+). When we take the numerical change rather than percentage change for each measure we find the results for ER and aWa match exactly; for uSa, the results match in position, but numerically we only approach significance that the mean percentage change of a parish in a MCU (2) is better than the average of its counterpart in a MCU (4-6) or MCU (7+).

The fact that each of the analysis types and each of the measures are in agreement of conclusion breeds confidence that what we are witnessing through the analysis, mirrors the true trends in the statistics. The extent to which the results for this 30-49 category match with those in the 15-29 category are significant for two reasons: firstly, it acts as another check of the statistics, further strengthening the emerging picture that the more churches in an amalgamation, the worse the attendance trends of that operating unit. Secondly, it suggests, as we mentioned before, that the issue of parishes defined as SCU (1)s in the database running as MCUs on the ground may not be a problem which affects our results in 15- 29 size category.

(d) 50-99:

For this size category and those larger, sample size begins to limit analysis. The amalgamation of several large churches into an amalgamation of seven or more churches is likely to be unwieldy. This is why we have just 5 parishes in a MCU (7+) in this size category for uSa and just 17 in a MCU (7+) for aWa in this size category.

We note that it is not as uncommon with ER, as more of a membership measure than an attendance measure, to have more than 50 adults on the register for a church with a smaller Sunday attendance, thus the sample size is usable here.

Observing the graphs below in figure 2.9: ignoring the figures for the parishes in MCU (7+) for uSa and aWa, as the sample sizes are too small, we see that adult uSa and aWa have similar trends to before –albeit less definitively so for uSa. For ER we observe a less clear trend in the graph. We do notice, however, that the SCU (1)s remain the group with the highest attendance average in this measure. The graphs for the number change and the strand one standardised percentage growth in this size category show a similar picture to the percentage change, the only difference being that for the single year comparison uSa number change and strand one standardised uSa percentage change the MCU (2) mean is lower than it should be to mirror a linear negative trend amongst the averages.

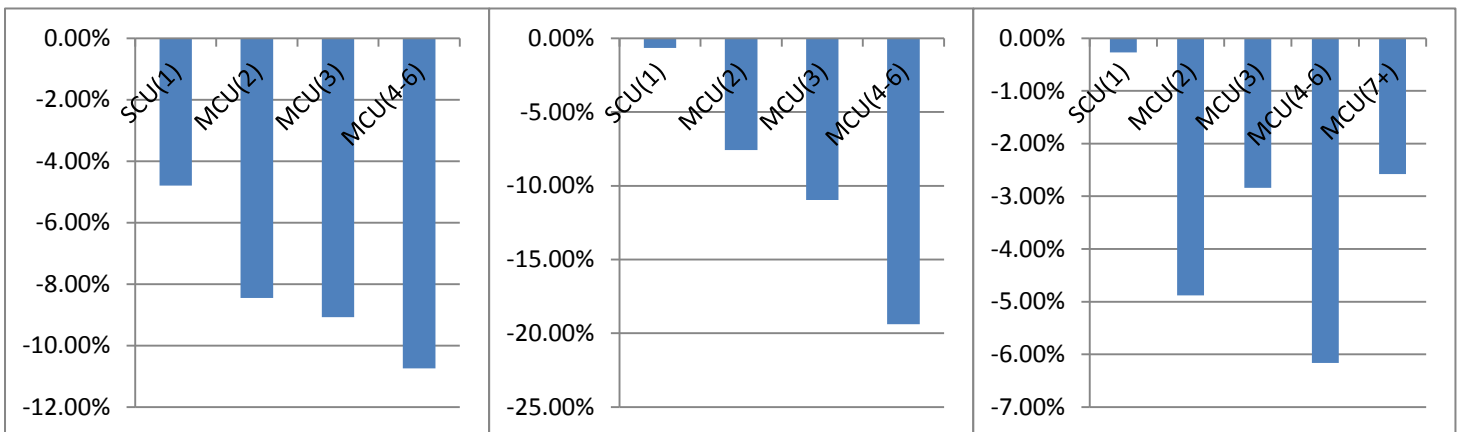


Figure 2.9: Comparison of average % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 50- 99 category for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

Adult aWa and ER both find the average percentage change for a parish in a SCU (1) to be considerably better than that of a parish in any of a MCU (2), MCU (3) or MCU (4-6). Adult uSa agrees with this, however this measure only approaches significant evidence that the mean of a parish in a SCU (1) is better than that of a parish in a MCU (3). We also find the average percentage changes of a parish in a MCU (2) and a MCU (3) to be significantly larger than that of a MCU (4-6) for aWa, and just the average of a MCU(3) as being larger than the MCU (4-6) average for ER. We also note that for adult aWa, each of the operating units SCU (1), MCU(2) and MCU (3) have a significantly higher mean than the MCU (7+) category; the small sample size here causes us to approach with caution, as the 17 entries we have may be misrepresentative of the population.

Again here we find the different analysis types align with each other. The analysis using the number changes matches the percentage change exactly and the strand one analysis on uSa matches the single year comparison method apart from that the mean of the SCU (1)s does not approach proof of being significantly larger than the mean of the MCU (3)s. The fact that we have good agreement throughout, both in measure and in analysis, builds confidence further that our statistical outcomes are in fact representative of the data set.

For this size category, therefore, the results confirm the findings for the previous two size groupings, but are not quite as clear cut. For uSa and aWa, excluding the MCU (7+) class on the premise that the sample size is not large enough to be representative, we see much of the same as before particularly in terms of the shape and trends of the graph. We see the significant differences we obtained in the previous part; although

we do notice, particularly with uSa, that there becomes much less of a visual difference between the multi church units averages. ER is the measure which agrees the least here with the others. The MCU (2) and MCU (7+) categories lessen the sense of trend in the results. The MCU (7+) category appears to perform much better – but this may be a point where the combination of a larger size group (which has already rendered analysis of uSa and aWa impossible for MCU (7+) is coming into play. The average change in the MCU (2) class fit less well (though it does not contradict) the behaviour of that category for churches in smaller size bands. To a certain extent, adult uSa agrees with ER here in this “drop in performance” of the MCU (2) category.

(e) 100+:

Many results in this section must be taken with caution as we witness the problem with sample sizes, present in the previous size category, develop further. The number of churches in the MCU (7+) category is so small that it cannot be used and the number of churches in the MCU (4-6) category is problematic. Although the t-test can be carried out on a small sample, the more important point to consider is what size sample to we trust to be truly representative.

Observing the graphs below for percentage change we witness the SCU (1) category switch from having the highest mean throughout, to obtaining a lower mean value than the MCU (2) category for adult uSa; we then see the trend we would expect between the MCU (2), (3) and (4-6) categories. Unlike previous results, aWa and ER both disagree with the uSa depiction of the SCU (1) category as having a lower mean than the MCU (2) group; and, if we exclude MCU (7+) from these groups, these



graphs show similar trends to those which have been narrating the results of our analysis throughout. As before the number change graphs match closely, as does the graph for the strand one analysis.

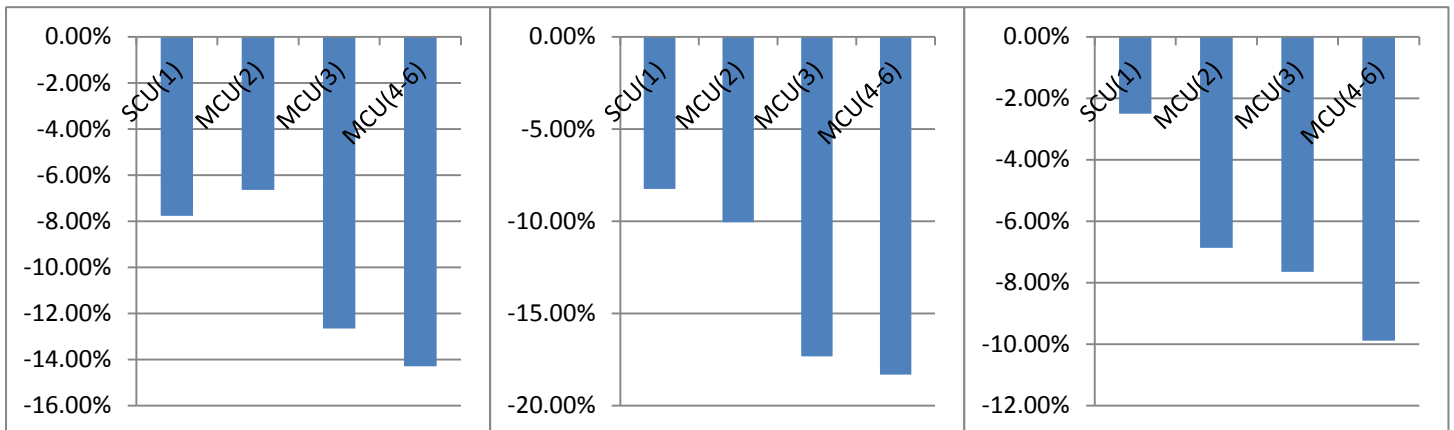


Figure 2.10: Comparison of average % change from 2006 to 2011 for the 100+ category for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

With regards to statistically significant values, the added caution which we feel we should be exercised is reflected in these results. For uSa we find no significant evidence to suggest a difference in any of the means, regardless of whether we use the single year comparison method for number or percentage change, or the strand one standardised percentage change method. For aWa there is sufficient evidence to suggest the mean percentage change of the SCU (1) group is greater than that of the MCU (3) group, and approaches significantly greater than the MCU (4-6) group; when we consider the number change, however, we find no significant evidence that any of the means differ. ER is the most usable measure in this size cluster; we have previously discussed how the Electoral Roll as a membership register will often be larger than the attendance figures. The ER analysis returns the mean change, both

percentage and number, for a parish in the SCU (1) category as significantly larger than the mean change of a parish in any of the MCU (2), (3) or (4-6) categories.

Despite a dip in confidence in results due to the marked contrast in sample size when comparing SCU (1)s with the others, apart from the SCU (1)s being slightly worse than the MCU (2)s for adult uSa, we still largely see the trends in the graphs and figures which the other size groups exhibit.

Broadly speaking, the three measures suggest that for 100+ churches, as for smaller churches, the more churches put together in an amalgamation, the more they decline. Moreover, it can be seen that the biggest churches in amalgamations with the largest number of churches in them are most prone to decline.

From the above results we can state with confidence that the more churches an amalgamation unit has operating within itself, the worse the attendance change per parish will be between the years 2006 and 2011. This is confirmed on almost every platform of analysis and measure. Some of the results provide a stronger basis for making this statement than others depending mainly on the size category for which the analysis takes place, however there is little variation in the results between measures. It is striking how each size group approximately supports the conclusion, even if the figures don't quite achieve significance. The agreement of the three measures of uSa, aWa and ER on the results and significant values is startling confirmation of this conclusion, considering the amount of 'noise' each measure contains and the dissimilarities between what each measure represents and how it is collected. It should be noted that in section three the same measures, when analysed

with regard to team ministries, give a less clear result, suggesting that the unanimity they offer with regard to amalgamations is both distinctive and significant.

The fact that the results match the results which we would expect using common sense gives us confidence in each of these methods as capturing the true attendance trends.

### *Child uSa*

Child uSa is a category which is important and problematic. There are many children who attend worship outside of Sunday and whose presence is recorded in aWa.

However, the distortion of figures due to school assemblies and the overall volatility of aWa means that it is difficult to use such data in detailed questions relating to assessing the impact of amalgamations. This leaves child uSa as a vital measure of how amalgamations affect this crucial constituency.

Child uSa needs to be understood in comparison with adult uSa. The distribution of child uSa for 2011 is markedly different to that of adults for the different size bands of church. The proportions of children and adult attendance falls as follows:

#### **Child uSa:**

**0-14:** 3.21%

**15-29:** 7.20%

**30-49:** 11.15%

**50-99:** 33.11%

**100-199:** 30%

**200-299:** 6.89%

**300+:** 8.44%

#### **Adult uSa:**

**0-14:** 5.97%  
**15-29:** 10.97%  
**30-49:** 13.22%  
**50-99:** 32.36%  
**100-199:** 26.26%  
**20-299:** 5.32%  
**300+:** 5.90%<sup>73</sup>

As can be seen from the figures above, a markedly smaller proportion of children are found in congregations with 49 or less people than the proportion of adults in those same congregations. This is especially true for the smallest congregations (under fifteen adults, by adult uSa). Such congregations have almost 6% of adults, but just over 3% of children. A noticeably larger proportion of children are found in congregations with 100+ people than the proportion of adults in such congregations, especially the largest.<sup>74</sup> That is to say, churches with 100+ adult uSa are more significant for children's ministry on Sundays and churches with 0-49 adult uSa are disproportionately less significant for children's ministry on Sundays.<sup>75</sup>

The proportion of Child uSa in churches not in an amalgamation (ie which are a single church with an incumbent) compared to those in some form of amalgamations is of significance. Overall, single churches with an incumbent comprise 3166 parishes offering usable data, around a third of the usable data. Yet they account for over two thirds of child uSa. Those in some sort of amalgamation with usable data comprise two thirds of the parishes but one third of the child uSa. The role of larger churches is also worthy of note. There are around 118 churches with an attendance of 300+, yet these provide around 8% of all child uSa and are markedly more resilient to decline.

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<sup>73</sup> These figures are based on a cleaned dataset, in which multi-church parishes and other tabulation errors have been removed.

<sup>74</sup> 30.16% of adults attend congregations of 0 to 49 size, but 21.56% of children attended such congregations. 37.48% attend congregations of 100+ size, but 45.33% of children attended such congregations.

<sup>75</sup> 'Largest' here is defined as congregations of 300 or more adult uSa.

Churches over 200+ in adult attendance account for around 6% of child uSa, but have been prone to decline in recent years.<sup>76</sup>

The child uSa data presents specific problems in statistical analysis, requiring careful handling.<sup>77</sup> One further issue to consider is that the attendance figures for children do not necessarily follow the same trends as adults; on the whole the figures are declining on a Sunday but are often growing midweek, which is not taken into account using this measure. We must also bear in mind that many of the new ‘fresh expressions’ on Sundays are forms of church at which many children are present, but often not recorded in child uSa.

We notice when looking at the results from the analysis of child uSa that the trends are far less clear here than when we used the adult data for comparing different types of amalgamation. As discussed earlier, we will focus here on the results using the actual number change. Without the inclusion of size groups we find similar results to that of the adult uSa without size groups, show below in figure 2.11.

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<sup>76</sup> These findings are based on the Strand 3c’s processing of the national dataset – having excluded MCPs and other problematic data.

<sup>77</sup> We have already noted the issue in calculating the percentage change as a representative measure of attendance trend when the entries are small. The entries for child uSa, in general, are small and thus this problem of small base values exists when using this measure for attendance analysis. Furthermore, when using adult uSa, if an entry is a zero it is reasonable to assume the entry as missing; in child uSa a zero could mean either a missing return or that there are no children in the congregation. If both adult and child uSa register as zero, this is treated as missing data. We have identified a “true” zero in the child uSa data where there is a valid entry in the corresponding year for adult uSa for the parish. The inclusion of such entries of value zero proves problematic in the sense that a percentage increase with a base value of zero is an infinite percentage increase; in order to combat this, we define an increase of nought to one as a one hundred per cent increase. Whilst removing the issue of analysis with infinite percentage changes, we amplify the issue of small base values as it is frequently the case that we will have an increase of several hundred per cent. This issue results in the means massively reflecting false growth; for example, if we take the mean change per parish for an SCU (1) in the 30- 49 size category, we find the mean percentage change to be 35.67% and the average number change to be -0.35103. For this reason the analysis here uses the single year comparison method from before for number change, comparing this with the percentage change between the cumulative uSa for 2006 and 2011.

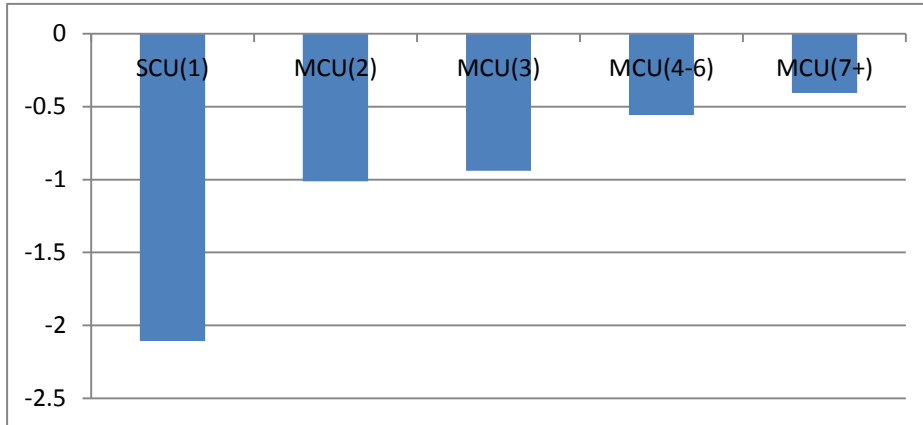


Figure 2.11: Comparison of average # change from 2006 to 2011 for child uSa

(0-14):

Churches in this size bracket are vulnerable to mis-tabulation for reasons discussed with regard to adult measures. Observing the graphs we see the SCU (1), MCU (4-6) and MCU (7+) categories to have a similar mean, with the MCU (2) and MCU (3) categories having a lower mean value; upon consultation of the t-tests we find no significant evidence to suggest that the any of the means differ.

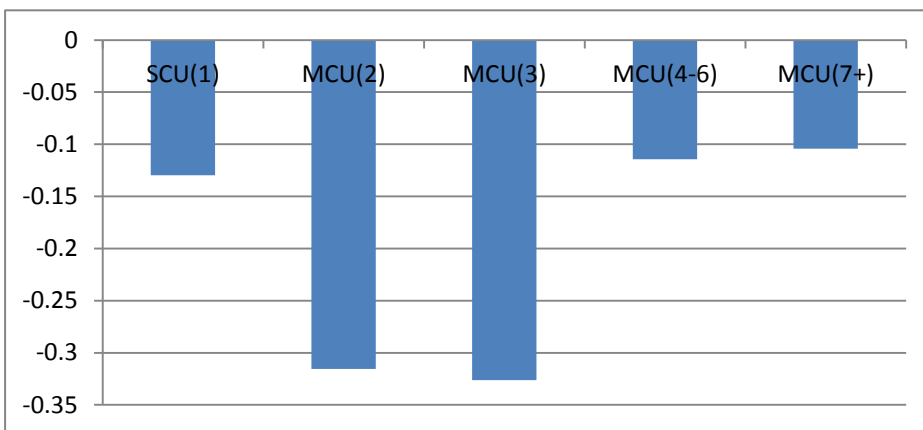


Figure 2.12: Comparison of average # change from 2006 to 2011 for the 0-14 size category for child uSa

(15-29):

The graph for this category shows SCU (1) as the only category with a positive mean number change per parish with the others showing similar magnitudes of average number change, with the MCU (2) category mean as the lowest value and the MCU (7+) mean as the highest. The significance tests reflect this; we find significant evidence to suggest that the mean of a parish in a SCU (1) is higher than each of the other amalgamation groups. We have some loose agreement with the adult data in the sense that the SCU (1)s are doing best, however there is no trend as far as the other amalgamation groups are concerned.

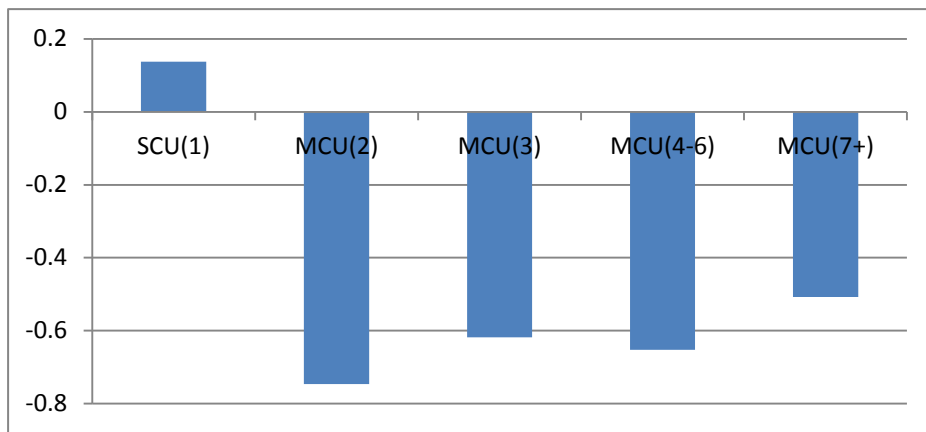


Figure 2.13: Comparison of average # change from 2006 to 2011 for the 15- 29 size category for child uSa

(30-49):

The main thing we notice from the graph here is how much lower the mean is for the MCU (7+)s than the others; this is reflected in the statistical tests with significant evidence to suggest that the mean of the MCU (7+) category is lower than each other category. The SCU (1) category mean is significantly higher than the MCU (3), as well as the MCU (7+), category, and approaching significantly higher than the MCU

(2) category mean – which suggests that the SCU (1) category is behaving similarly to the adult measures in showing greater propensity to grow in this size category.

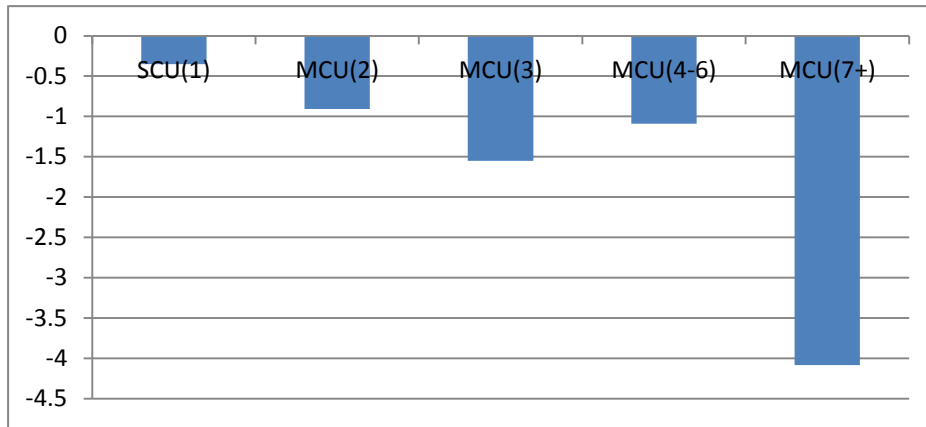


Figure 2.14: Comparison of average # change from 2006 to 2011 for the 30- 49 size category for child uSa

(50-99):

As with adult uSa for this category we find sample size becomes an issue for the MCU (7+) category, with only five pieces of usable data. It should also be noted that the number of usable pieces of data for SCU (1)'s is much higher than for all the other size categories – nearly three times the number of all the others added together. The graph reflects the lack of significant values in the table, showing no real difference between the mean values for the different amalgamation groups.



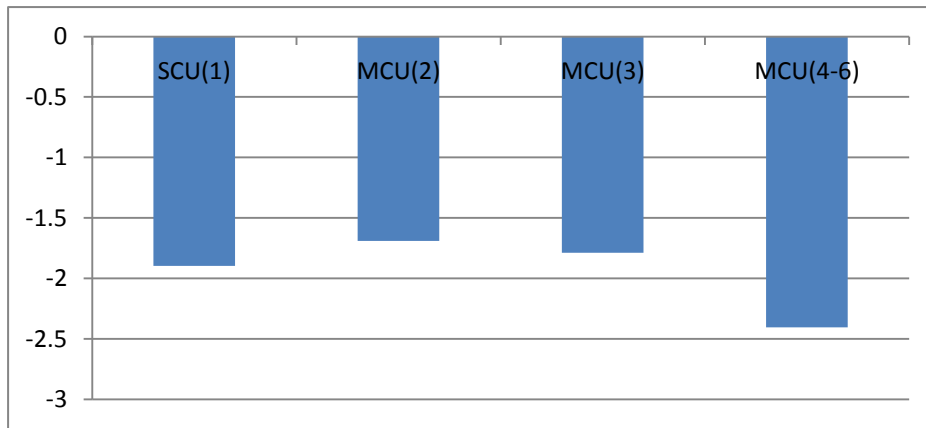


Figure 2.15: Comparison of average # change from 2006 to 2011 for the 50- 99 size category for child uSa

(100+):

For this group we have no data for the MCU (7+) category and the amount of data for the MCU (3) and (4-6) is too small to make them usable. Moreover, the number of usable pieces of data for SCU (1)'s is ten times that for MCU (2)'s, which have only 88 pieces of data – so small and disproportionate a number as to make it of debatable value. The mean of the MCU (2) category is higher than that of the SCU (1) category; but concerns of sample size mean it is not possible to put too much weight on this finding.

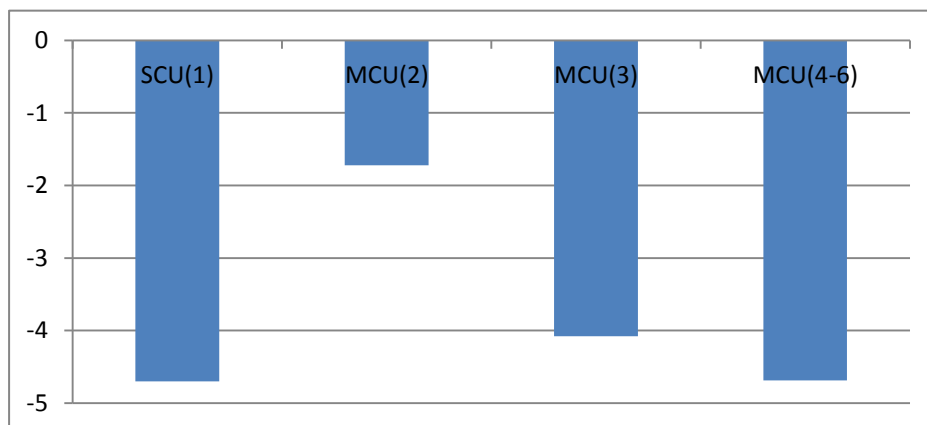


Figure 2.16: Comparison of average # change from 2006 to 2011 for the 100+ size category for child uSa

The results from the child uSa data are less clear-cut than those for the adult measures, but are of significance. There are far less obvious visual trends available in the graphs, and we do not find significant agreement in how the amalgamation groups operate between size groups. We find some agreement between the child uSa data and adult data for churches in the size groups 15-29 and 30-49 in the sense that the SCU (1)s tend to have the best average attendance change, however the other amalgamation groups have no clear trend, and do not closely match the results we have previously obtained. The child uSa data is less reliable than the adult measures. What can be said is that the child uSa partially supports the evidence of the adult measures; leaving aside the smallest and largest churches, whose data is not secure, child uSa for SCU (1)'s is better or as good as that for the various types of amalgamations. Child uSa does not allow for any distinguishing between the different types of amalgamation, but neither does the data contradict the conclusions regarding amalgamations suggested by the adult data.

All adult measures (uSa, aWa and ER), when organised by size of congregation, point in the same direction. The more churches that are amalgamated together, the less the numerical church growth. Those that perform best are those which have one incumbent to a single church. This picture is confirmed when a variant of strand one's method is used for adult uSa data. It is confirmed by sense-checking with staff of two dioceses. It is confirmed also when two different years were compared for adult uSa – 2005 and 2010.<sup>78</sup> It is confirmed by data from child uSa which, although markedly

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<sup>78</sup> Details of the comparison can be found in Appendix 3G

cloudier, broadly supports (and does not contradict) the above conclusion. It is striking that, when the same analysis is done for team ministries, a far less clear-cut result emerges (see section three) – which indicates that the measures are not biased towards seeing decline as linked to amalgamation, but genuinely reflect trends happening on the ground.

#### *2.4 Analysis of missional measures*

National data on attendance and membership are valuable but flawed. One way forward is to create ‘missional measures’, which indicate a church’s ability to grow. The Australian National Church Life Survey has done excellent work in this area.<sup>79</sup> Analysis of British churches is much further back, but some work can be done. As was discussed in section one, figures for baptisms ought, in theory, to be an obvious metric for congregational growth, but, for a range of reasons, they cannot be used as they currently stand. But other measures can be used. This section looks at confirmation figures and the incidence of fresh expressions and church plants in sample dioceses – and how they map against the incidence of amalgamations – thereby offering ‘missional measures’ to compare with national data.

#### *Confirmations*

Data collection of confirmations was a complex task. Some dioceses do not hold data on the parishes from which candidates are sent and the data has the limitations already outlined in section 1.2.5 – which outlined some of the erratic aspects to Church of England initiation practices. Nonetheless, confirmation data has value as a ‘missional

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<sup>79</sup> It has devised a set of ‘vitality indicators’ for congregations, which offers help in clarifying not only the size of a congregation but its capacity to grow, see: <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6940> (accessed 25 October 2013).

measure.’ Evidence from four dioceses – Norwich, Derby, Leicester and Salisbury - indicates that there is some correlation between low rates of confirmation and benefices with a large number of churches. The data is most marked for parishes in amalgamations of four to six churches. Parishes in amalgamations of seven or more churches do not show such a trend – but their number was too small to offer a good enough sample size.<sup>80</sup>

Parish practices vary markedly towards confirmation – a significant number of active parishes may score low for confirmation either because they focus on admission to communion before confirmation or because they simply do not emphasise the practice. One example may be Cromer Parish Church, which appears by other metrics to be a highly active fellowship, yet scores lowly by this indicator. However, there is no reason to think that varying levels of enthusiasm towards confirmation have any relationship with the number of parishes in a benefice. The evidence of confirmation backs up the wider statistics, which suggest that amalgamations struggle more with mission than single church units and that the more churches amalgamated, the more the struggle. It must be stressed that there are notable instances of benefices comprised of many parishes which have high levels of confirmations. The above remarks indicate overall trend – and remarkable and impressive exceptions to this trend do exist – but they are the exception, not the norm.

The correlation is striking, given that historically rural areas were noted for higher than average rates of confirmation until recent years. Earlier research by Francis, Roberts and Lankshear shows that historically rural churches (which form almost all

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<sup>80</sup> Diocesan Confirmation records, Norwich, Salisbury, Derby, Leicester.

amalgamations with four to six churches) had a markedly higher rate of confirmations, which has dropped more swiftly than in urban areas to the point where, around 2000, rural congregations were behaving similarly to urban congregations with regard to confirmation.<sup>81</sup> Evidence from confirmations chimes with this picture, suggesting that amalgamations with four to six churches are doing worse than single church benefices and amalgamations with two or three churches.

Attributing causation is difficult. The changing face of rurality could be as much a factor in the decline of confirmations as the effect of churches being amalgamated with large numbers of other churches. Although it should be noted that Francis and Lankshear suggest, amidst a range of explanations for why rural confirmations are dropping faster than urban confirmations, that one explanator is that rural clergy are spread so thinly around multiple churches that their missional effectiveness is blunted.<sup>82</sup> Two conclusions can be drawn: first, confirmation patterns tally with evidence from national statistics that the more churches that are combined together, the more they decline; second, confirmation patterns suggest that amalgamations with four or more churches have to take special care to focus on the nurture of Christian faith – since that work of nurture is more vulnerable to decline in their type of structure than in others.

### *Incidence of Fresh Expressions*

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<sup>81</sup> L. Francis and D. Lankshear, 'The Rural Church is Different: the Case of Anglican Confirmation', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 10, 1, 1997; C. Roberts, 'Is the Rural Church Different? A Comparison of Historical Membership Statistics between an Urban and a Rural Diocese in the Church of England', *Rural Theology*, 1, (1), 2003; D. Lankshear, 'Is the Rural Church Different? The Special Case of Confirmation', in L. Francis and M. Robbins, *Rural Life and Rural Church: Theological and Empirical Perspectives*, (Bristol, Equinox, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> L. Francis and D. Lankshear, 'The Rural Rectory: the Impact of a resident Priest on Local Church Life', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 8, 1992.

To a limited degree, a similar picture appears when the incidence of fresh expressions is plotted. Data for fresh expressions was plotted against parishes from Derby, Norwich and Leicester dioceses and, again, the incidence fell in amalgamations with four or more churches. These comprise one third of benefices in these dioceses, but 25% of fresh expressions have arisen from such benefices. Single church benefices comprise 38% of all benefices and produce 32% of fresh expressions. Two church benefices constitute 20% of the three dioceses and 29 % of fresh expressions. Three church amalgamations are 17% of all benefices, but 11% of fresh expressions. In other words, there is a general tendency for the incidence of fresh expressions to fall amongst amalgamations, with the caveat that two-church amalgamations perform better than all other groups.<sup>83</sup> Again it must be stressed that there are striking instances of benefices comprised of many parishes which have been highly effective in terms of fresh expressions. The above remarks indicate overall trend – and, while remarkable and impressive exceptions to this trend do exist, they are the exception, not the norm.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that this data is not offered as a criticism of benefices and parishes comprising more than one church, especially those with many churches. In this study, we have been continually struck by the quality and commitment of ministry in multi-church settings. Rather, the data is offered as an indicator of how structures can help release or repress missional activity overall.

### *3.5 Attendance Loss During Reorganisation and Vacancies*

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<sup>83</sup> Actual figures, aggregated from Norwich, Leicester and Derby: number of benefices, single (160), twin (90), trio (60), 4+ (135), total 445; incidence of fresh expressions, SCU (51), MCU 2 (47), MCU 3 (17), MCU 4+ (39), 160 in total.

Originally, this research project hoped to examine what effect reorganisation had on amalgamations, exploring the time taken for the reorganisation, any ‘reorganisation loss’ and comparing growth trends before and after reorganisation. However, owing to the serious problems with both the national data sets and identification of the nature of amalgamations described in sections 1.2 and 2.1 such detailed analysis is not possible. Clarifying when a reorganisation happened is difficult, sometimes impossible; the tension between formal and informal structures creates ambiguity over which reorganisation should be examined and for which parishes; many reorganisations happen across a vacancy/vacancies, but this raises the question as to whether the reorganisation is causing loss, or whether the vacancy causes the loss. Consequently, only detailed examination of a single diocese as a case-study would provide sufficiently nuanced data to discuss how reorganisation affects growth trends in amalgamations.

The research team ran tests on parishes whose benefice codes had changed in the period 2004-11, since such code changes indicate pastoral reorganisation. All parishes with a benefice code change between 2004 and 2008 were isolated and compared with those that had not had such a change. However, the sample size provided was mostly too small to provide useful data and the results were inconclusive and where it was large enough, the results here were similarly inconclusive with no significant values. In the majority of cases, those parishes without a benefice code change have a better rate of attendance change over the time period, this isn't a strong conclusion however with plenty of case in which the opposite is true and without the backing of the

significance tests.<sup>84</sup> This may well be linked to the way that changes in benefices codes often happen several years after actual changes on the ground and the way growth and decline is affected by such a range of contextual factors – blurring the results of the exercise.

One key issue needs to be emphasised. There is considerable evidence to suggest that vacancies (interregna) are a crucial (possibly, the crucial) cause of church decline in the Church of England. Evidence strongly suggests that the longer the vacancy, the bigger the decline. There are a few occasions where a vacancy can be beneficial in particular circumstances, but we believe the damage caused by vacancies substantially outweighs whatever benefits they bring. There is a strong argument for suggesting that, if vacancies could be minimised and better managed, much church decline would be prevented.<sup>85</sup> Any reorganisation of parishes into amalgamations (or from one sort of amalgamation to another) is highly likely to involve a vacancy – since it is when one or other incumbent moves that the opportunity is often taken to reorganise. Reorganisation may prolong a vacancy. Further research to confirm the extent of attendance loss during vacancies would be of great value.

### *3.6 Additional Issues*

One further additional issue concerning amalgamations is worth discussing; the question of whether there is a correlation of decline in clergy numbers and numerical decline. As we have seen, the data strongly suggests that amalgamating parishes increases the propensity of those parishes to decline. A corollary of this view is that,

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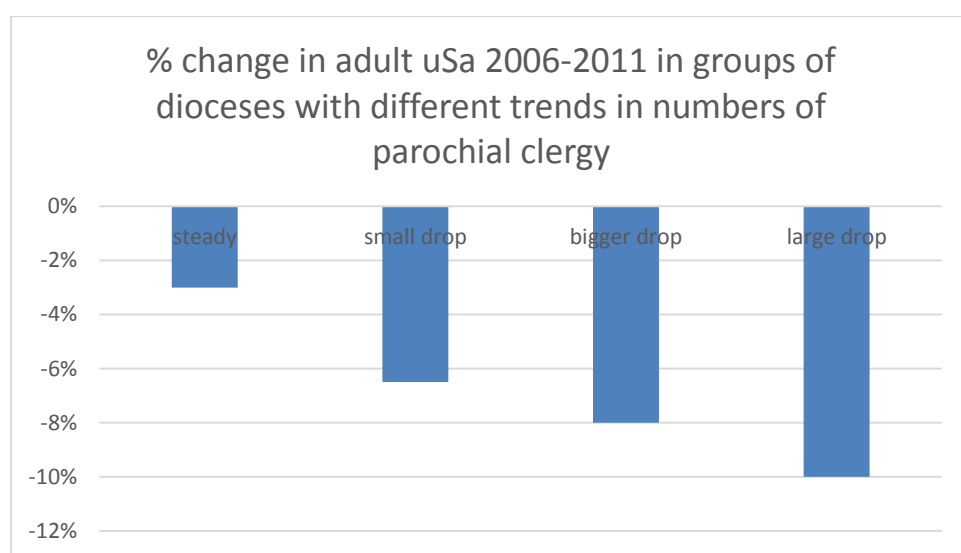
<sup>84</sup> Data available on request.

<sup>85</sup> Jackson, *Road to Growth*, pp. 19, 25-29, 129-32, 195; B. Jackson, *Growing through a Vacancy: a Handbook for Wardens, PCC Members, Readers and Clergy*, (CPAS 2013).



since the primary driver for amalgamation is reduction of clergy, when dioceses cut the number of clergy, they will decline faster than if they do not cut the number of clergy. Research for the years 1997-2002 appeared to show that reducing stipendiary clergy numbers did not correlate with decline, nor retention of clergy with growth. It should be noted that these figures cover a short period and do not allow for how rates of growth/decline of dioceses were influenced by other factors.<sup>86</sup>

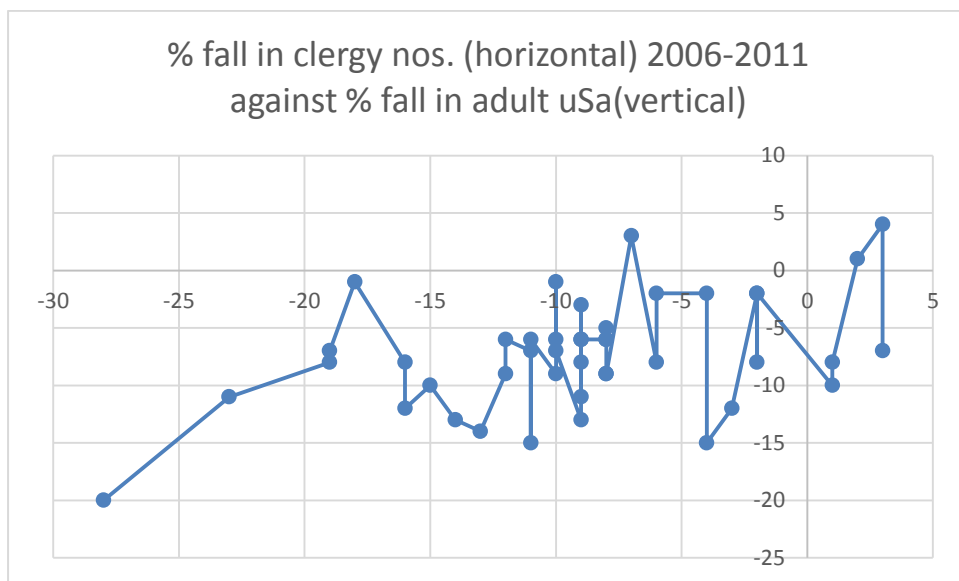
A survey of adult uSa for dioceses between 2006-11<sup>87</sup> shows a clear correlation between fall in clergy numbers and increased decline. Eight ‘steady’ dioceses varied between a growth of 3% in clergy numbers to a loss of 2%. ‘Small drop’ dioceses lost 3-9% of their clergy; ‘larger drop’ dioceses 10-14%; and ‘large drop’ dioceses lost 15-28%. As the charts below show, the larger the drop in the number of clergy, the larger the drop of adult uSa.



<sup>86</sup> Jackson, *Road to Growth*, pp. 125-6

<sup>87</sup> These figures do not exclude multiple-church parishes, however we believe that their effect on such large-scale analysis is more limited than the specific analysis of amalgamations. ‘Steady’ dioceses are: Guildford, Southwark, London, Norwich, Leicester, Oxford, Eds and Ips, Lichfield. ‘Small drop’ are: Liverpool, Birmingham, Chester, Gloucester, Salisbury, Southwell, Bath, Bradford, Ely, Newcastle, Carlisle, Derby, Exeter, Hereford, Portsmouth. ‘Larger drop’ are: Chichester, Coventry, Rochester, St Albans, Ripon, Wakefield, Winchester, Bristol, Manchester, Truro, Canterbury. ‘Large drop’ are: York, Durham, Peterborough, Sheffield, Lincoln, Worcester, Blackburn, Sodor.

The scatter graph shows the variability between dioceses.  
 R squared/t test value and  $Y = a + bX$  equation?



This chimes with anecdotal evidence from observers who have commented to us that in the past they felt dioceses were cutting out some ‘fat’ when it came to clergy posts, but that in recent years dioceses have been cutting into the ‘bone’. The above data supports this view – and chimes with the results of this section, since lower clergy numbers means more churches amalgamated under one incumbent, both of which correlate with more decline.

### *Conclusion*

The national picture indicates very clearly that church decline correlates with amalgamation of churches. The data shows that churches where there is a single minister for a single church are markedly more likely to grow than churches which are amalgamated with others. And the more churches amalgamated together, the more

likely that those churches are to decline. In addition, the propensity for amalgamation-related decline increases as churches get larger. If a large church (100+ uSa) has additional churches added to it, it declines to a greater degree than smaller churches, when they have other churches added to them. And the more churches added to that larger church, the more it declines.

The correlation of better growth rates and single church benefices and the correlation of greater numerical church decline and amalgamations is found across all measures and in both methods used in this study. The agreement of data from uSa, aWa and ER is especially startling. That these very different measures point the same way gives very firm confidence that they are telling the truth. Using a range of standard statistical tests, the amount of decline has been found to be statistically significant. Of course, not all amalgamations are declining (just as not all single church benefices are growing). And whether growing or declining many congregations and clergy of many amalgamations are doing a superb job under often difficult conditions. However, the national data shows clearly that amalgamating churches encourages church decline and the more churches you amalgamate together, the bigger the decline gets.

There is one exception to this picture. Very small churches (those under fifteen members) behave differently to the rest of the data. In part, this reflects additional data problems, which mean such data needs treating with caution.<sup>88</sup> They are all performing better, but small churches which are single church benefices seem to perform better than small churches which are part of amalgamations. However these very small churches cannot be simplistically used for generalisations. They are more

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<sup>88</sup> See note 13 for details.

likely to grow than other churches – but contain only a small fraction of the membership of the Anglican church. They are mostly situated in small rural communities where only a small fraction of the English population live and which, given rapid population rise elsewhere, are a diminishing percentage of that population. They contain very few children and a disproportionately smaller number of children than larger congregations – a crucial fact, given the huge importance of children and young people for church growth both now and in future decades.

This section is, we believe, the most significant part of the project. The correlation between decline and amalgamation – and the parallel linkage of greater propensity to grow with single church benefices presents a profound challenge to current practice. The practice of amalgamating churches has been driven not by theology but by finance and a shrinking pool of clergy. The strategy of amalgamating churches has been, for the most part, decline management. It does not solve the problem of decline. Rather it makes decline worse. It is kicking the ecclesial can down the road. If the Church of England wishes to grow numerically, rather than manage decline, it must find a different strategy.

### **Strand 3: Team Ministries**

Team ministries came into being after the Second World War. They began to proliferate in the 1970s, peaked in the 1990s and their numbers stabilised thereafter. The attitude of dioceses has varied from enthusiasm to unease. An earlier critique of teams by Bob Jackson, which saw them as a feature which actively caused numerical decline in the church remains contentious – fuelled both agreement and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of team-ness.<sup>89</sup> This section will: first, look at the history and geography of team ministry in recent years; second examine statistical evidence as to whether teams are or are not more prone to decline; third, examine missional data to what light it sheds on the subject.

#### *3.1 Survey of the recent History of Teams*

South Ormesby Group started in 1949 with three clergy, a lay reader and a deaconess in place of six elderly clergy, seeking to cover twelve parishes across 75 square miles of Lincolnshire with lots of church buildings and dwindling congregations. It was a precursor to ‘team ministry’ in England.<sup>90</sup> Such team ministries grouped parishes under the care of a team rector plus one or more team vicars. They resembled amalgamations, but were distinct in terms of the role of the team vicar, who had a quasi-incumbent status – whereas amalgamations had clergy teams of varying sorts, but did not define and formalise such posts to the degree that the role of ‘team vicar’ was defined and formalised.

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<sup>89</sup> B. Jackson, *The Road to Growth*, (London: Church House) pp. 17-20

<sup>90</sup> A.C. Smith, *Team and Group Ministry*, (Westminster, 1965), p.81

The formal process for setting up teams began in 1968. By 1985 there were 333 teams with 1005 clergy of incumbent status involved in them. By 1989 there were 410 teams – but also stirrings of concern over teams were conflict and lack of collaboration were problems. The figure climbed further in the early 1990s, but then began to stabilise, with a rising number of teams being dissolved growing as others were being established. Nonetheless, by 2000, the number of teams was around 500.<sup>91</sup> Subsequently, enthusiasm for teams began to wane and in 2005 it was even suggested that teams themselves might be unwitting agents of church decline.<sup>92</sup>

Between 2002 and 2011 116 new teams were created and 107 teams were dissolved. There are currently 493 team ministries operating across the Church of England. Some dioceses have actively disbanded teams (York, London, Bristol, Chester, Chichester, Newcastle, and Norwich).<sup>93</sup> Some dioceses are stable, neither creating nor disbanding teams (Derby, Coventry, Birmingham). Some are increasing the number of teams (Southwark, Manchester, St Albans). Whilst teams are less popular than they were in the 1980s and 1990s, they remain a significant feature of the ecclesial landscape. Appendix 3H charts the patterns between dioceses in founding/disbanding teams in recent years.

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<sup>91</sup> *Team and group ministries: a report by the Ministry Co-ordinating Group*. Church of England. Ministry Co-ordinating Group, (London : General Synod of the Church of England), 1985, p.5; ABM/ACCM Occasional Paper No. 39 *Good Practice in Group and Team Ministry*; Church Commissioners Board of Governors' Report of Pastoral Committee, Data on Team Ministries, 1979-2000.

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, *Road to Growth*, pp. 17-20

<sup>93</sup> Calculating the number of active team ministries in the Church of England has been a complex task, since various datasets do not always agree. Furthermore, on occasion, a team may exist officially but not in practice.

The eight dioceses which are especially mined for data in this strand can be subdivided as follows:

- keen on teams (Salisbury, Truro)
- neither keen or wary (Derby, Leicester, Sheffield)
- tending to disband teams (York, London, Norwich)

Such dioceses embody wider trends, since there is marked variety between dioceses as to their interest in teams. This data indicates important trends. It is sometimes suggested that teams have tended to be created in ‘difficult’ areas, where parishes and clergy had been struggling. This may, on occasion, be so – but many poorer dioceses have seen few teams founded and a significant number of those that were founded have been disbanded. Conversely, a number of more affluent southern dioceses, such as Oxford and Salisbury are at the forefront of team ministry. There is no correlation between ‘difficult’ areas and teams. Indeed, there is a limited drift towards teams being more prevalent in more affluent rural regions in the south of England. The pattern of team ministry has been skewed and is becoming more skewed between dioceses. Six dioceses have over one third of the active teams in the Church of England. Conversely many dioceses have almost no teams.<sup>94</sup>

In practice, the number of teams is smaller than it appears. Of the 493 teams operating in 2013, 66 have not had a team vicar since 2011. They are being run by a team rector alone, who might have additional staffing, but whose additional staffing is not different to any other benefice – ie they are a team in name, but operate as an amalgamation in practice. This process affects the eight dioceses differently

- Derby: 7 teams, all have team vicars

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<sup>94</sup> The ‘top’ dioceses for teams active in 2013 were: Oxford (32), Salisbury (32), Exeter (27), Lichfield (22), Manchester (22), Southwark (21).

- Leicester: 19 active teams, 4 have no TVs in recent times
- London: 10 active teams, 2 have no TV in recent times
- Norwich: 9 active teams, all have had recent TVs
- Salisbury: 32 active teams, all have had TVs in recent times
- Sheffield: 7 active teams, 5 have no TV in recent times
- Truro: 8 active teams, 4 of which have no TVs in recent times
- York: 6 active teams, 2 of which have no TVs in recent times

The above data shows that most of the teams in Sheffield and half of those in Truro are effectively running as amalgamations.

One question is the extent to which teams are used as a means to cut posts and how this feeds into decline. The following table indicates the number of team vicar which should, in theory, be assigned to the teams of the eight dioceses, together with the actual number in post.

#### **Clergy Reduction Through Permanent Team Vicar Vacancies**

<b>Diocese Name</b>	<b>Pastoral Scheme</b>	<b>Currently in Post</b>	<b>Percentage Loss</b>
Derby	15	8	46.7
Leicester	30	15	50.0
London	15	8	46.7
Norwich	13	8	38.5
Salisbury*	54	45	16.7
Sheffield	9	3	66.7
Truro	11	4	63.6
York	13	4	69.2
	<b>160</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>40.6</b>

It can be seen that in most cases, the number is markedly smaller. Partially, this reflects an overall reduction in the number of clergy since the pastoral schemes for such teams was initiated. Partly, this may reflect a deliberate decision to cease using



teams – as in the case of the diocese of York. Whatever the reason, many teams are working with a semi-permanent state of vacancy. It should be recognised that such reductions come at a time when many non-team benefices have seen a reduction in the number of clergy.

A further question is whether teams in recent years have been run differently to hitherto. It should be noted (to preview the argument of this section), that whilst recent evidence suggests limited evidence that teams have been disproportionately liable to decline, evidence from the 1990s suggests that they were. What shifts in recent history might have caused the change? Jackson critiqued teams for being overly bureaucratic, for being beset by conflict within the clergy teams and for having a high rotation of clergy which diminished their effectiveness.<sup>95</sup> The smaller number of clergy in teams, as shown above, may, paradoxically have assisted their functioning – with fewer personalities to clash with and a heightened sense of the magnitude of the task of ministry. Jackson’s critique of team practice in the 1990s may have been heeded more recently and led to better practice. Some teams have decided on a looser affiliation without going to the trouble of formal legal disbandment. We are aware of some examples of this process.

### *3.2 Analysis of statistical data*

In undertaking the analysis of difference in attendance trends between parishes in team ministries and parishes which aren’t in team ministries we carry forward the analyses methods used for the analysis of the amalgamation categories; we also bear

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<sup>95</sup> Jackson, *Road to Growth*, pp. 17-20

in mind many of the realisations about the data which came as a bi-product of the analysis.<sup>96</sup> Such realisations have proven vital to ensuring the statistical output is as representative of true trends as possible. The inclusion of size groups, as well as the removal of MCPs and any clearly incorrectly input entries have proven crucial in extracting reliable results from the data set in the amalgamation analysis and therefore cannot be disregarded here.

The results which we gather for the team analysis are markedly less solid than the results which the amalgamation analysis returned; one possible reason is the sample size of the teams. The numbers of parishes within a team ministry are a small minority; 814 which are part of an active team ministry, out of 8669 parishes with usable data. Although the Welch's adaption of the t-test allows for different sample sizes, the test loses power for a smaller sample size and when there is volatility within the data, it is far less likely to identify a significant difference. This can be reflected in our own logic; we are much more confident drawing conclusions on a group which has 1526 pieces of data, than a group with 80 pieces of data. Teams are also compared with 'SCUs', meaning 'single church units', churches where there is one incumbent to one church. These are also included in the 'non-team' figure, but by also showing them separately, it can be seen how they behave differently.

### Adult Data

For completeness we complete the analysis on the full data set without sectioning the various parishes into appropriate size groups, despite the proven importance of

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<sup>96</sup> See Section 2.2 and 2.3 of this report.

size as a factor. Immediately, from observation of the graphs we notice that the different measures are not in agreement. Adult aWa shows teams have a higher mean percentage and number change, whilst ER shows non- teams to have a higher mean and Adult uSa is split, with non- teams having the higher mean for percentage change and teams having the higher mean for number change.

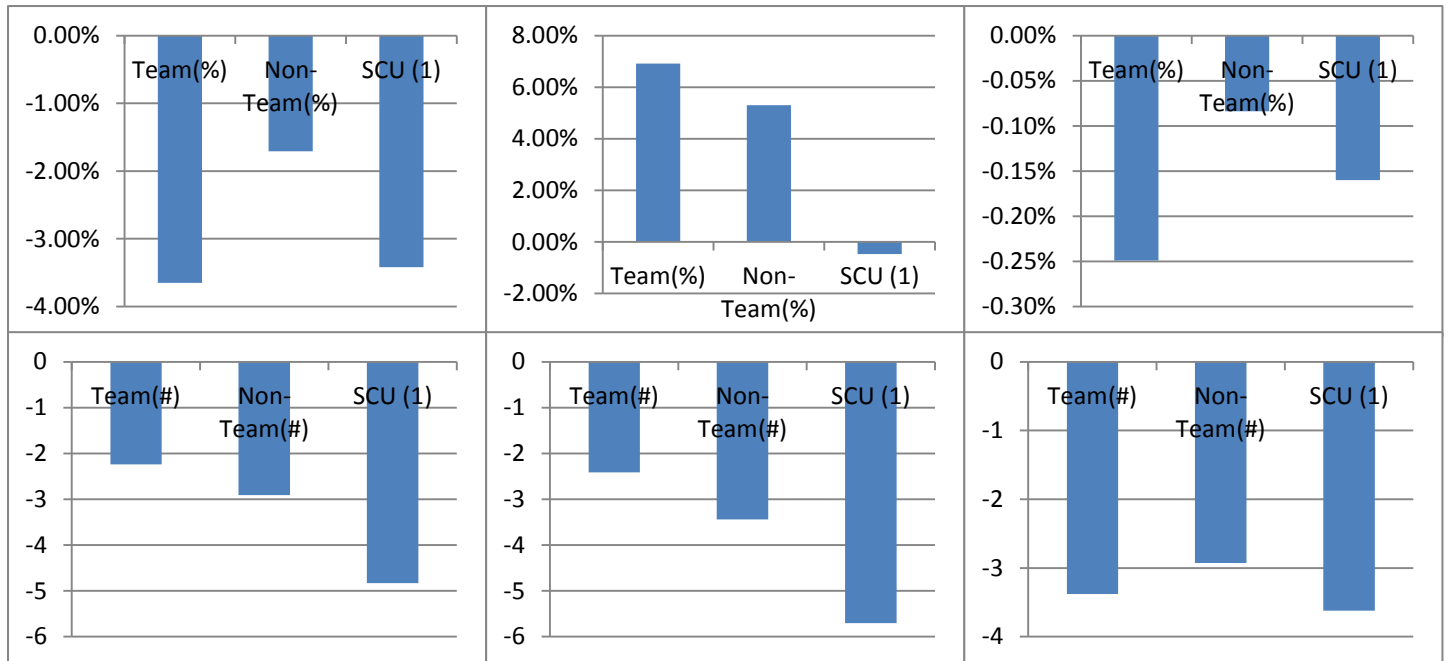


Figure 3.1: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

When we complete a variant of the strand one standardised percentage change analysis on the data with no size groups, the graph shows, on average, the parishes within a team will have a lower mean standardised percentage change; this is, however, not confirmed by the t-tests which find no significant evidence of a difference in the true means for teams and non- teams for this method. Consulting the statistical t-tests for the single year change method, we find no significant evidence to suggest a difference in the means of team and non- team parishes for any of the measures, neither for number change nor percentage change between 2006 and 2011.

(a) 0-14:

Again, as we can see below in figure 3.2, the measures do not match. The graphs for adult uSa show that the mean change, both percentage and numerical, for team parishes is less than that of non- team parishes. In contrast, the data for aWa and ER, graphically, presents us with the mean value for the team parishes as larger than the mean of non- teams. It is, however, the uSa data here which provides us with significant results; we find sufficient evidence to suggest that the mean change, again both numerical and percentage, to be larger for non- team parishes. The variant of the strand one method, taking the standardised percentage change agrees with the adult uSa graphs in this size group; we do not, however, calculate any significant p-values for a difference between the means for this method. The results from this size group are relatively unclear, this group, however, has previously been flagged as a volatile group – especially with regards to percentage change – and did not give us as comprehensive results as some of the other size groups for the amalgamation work. We also note the issues present in this size class for the amalgamation analysis, are also present here; for example, the problem of parishes categorised as SCU (1)s in the database in actual fact operating as part of a multi church unit.

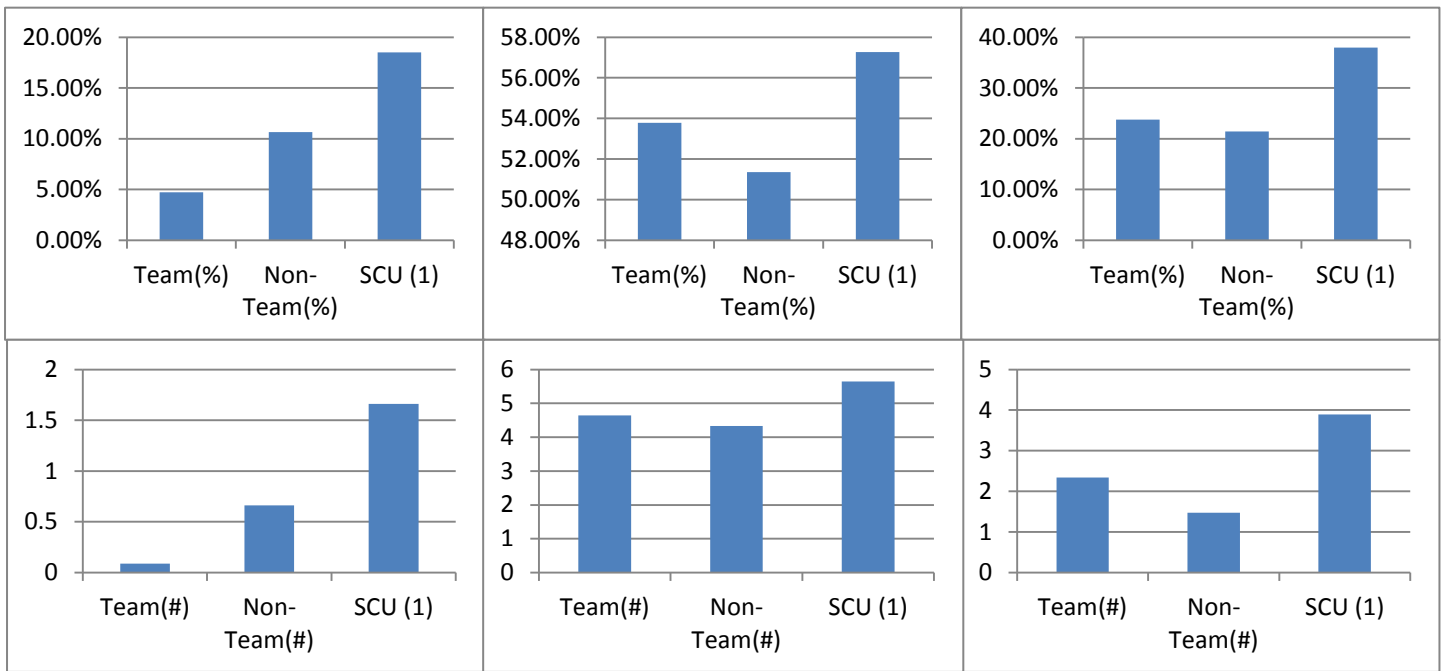


Figure 3.2: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) for the 0-14 size group from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

(b) 15-29:

As in the previous two graphs, the three measures are not in unison with regards to results. We can see below in figure 3.3 that the graphs for adult uSa and aWa show the mean value for the non- teams to be higher than that of the teams; this is contrary to ER which shows the mean of the teams to be higher than that of the non- teams. The t-tests on the ER data show no significant evidence to suggest that, in either case, the mean change between 2006 and 2011 differs between team parishes and non-team parishes. On the other hand, we find significant evidence to suggest the mean for team parishes, for both percentage change and number change, is lower than that of the non- team parishes for adult aWa and we find that we approach significance of the mean values differing for adult uSa. Furthermore, the variant strand one method for adult uSa finds significant evidence to suggest the mean standardised percentage change for non- team parishes to be greater than that of team parishes. Here we are

inclined to conclude that team attendance change in this size group is worse than non-teams; the p-values for uSa, both for the single year change method and variant strand one method, and aWa are more significant than for ER, and as stated before, ER often does not pick up the attendance trends as well as the other measures.

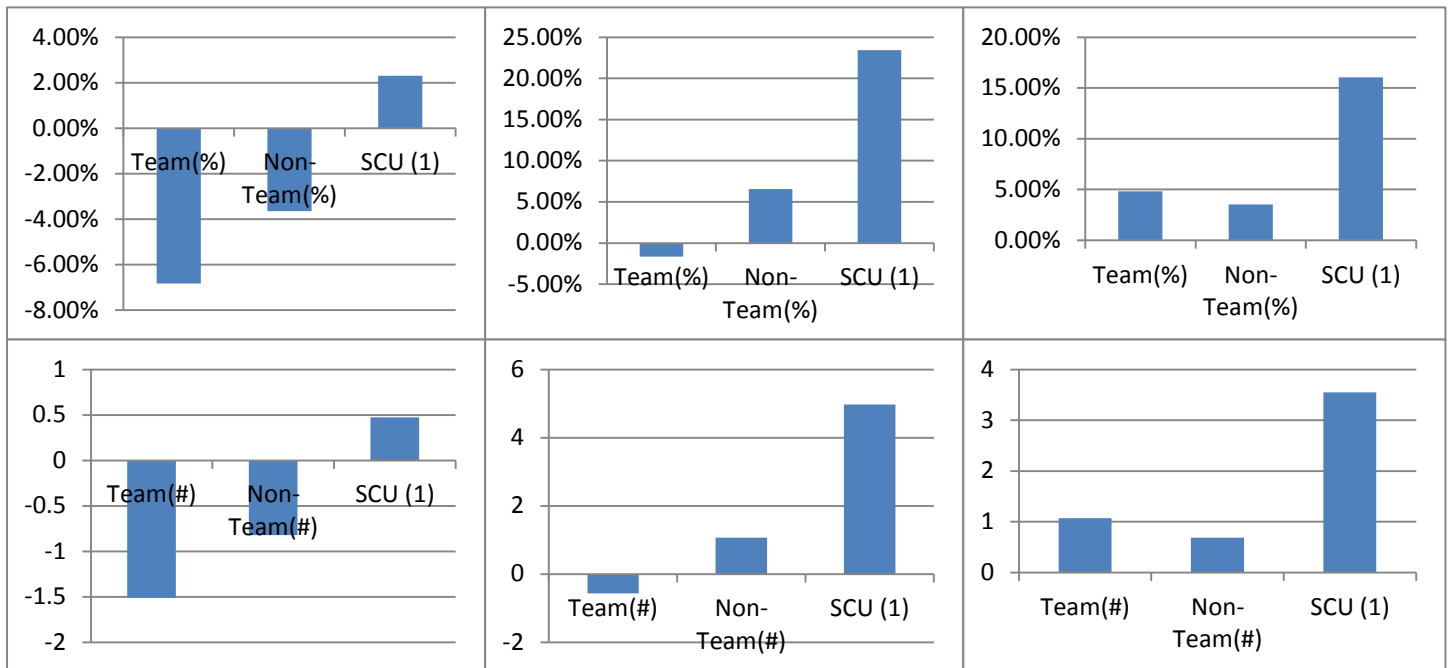


Figure 3.3: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) for the 15-29 size group from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

(c) 30-49:

In this size category each measure agrees that the mean change, in each case, for a parish in a non- team is higher than that of a parish which is part of a team.

Adult aWa is the only measure here for which the t-tests return a significant p-value suggesting that the mean number and percentage change of a parish in a non- team is larger than that of team parish. Suggesting here, as before that teams have a worse rate of attendance change between 2006 and 2011 than non- teams. The other measures do not show any significant evidence of a difference in means for teams and

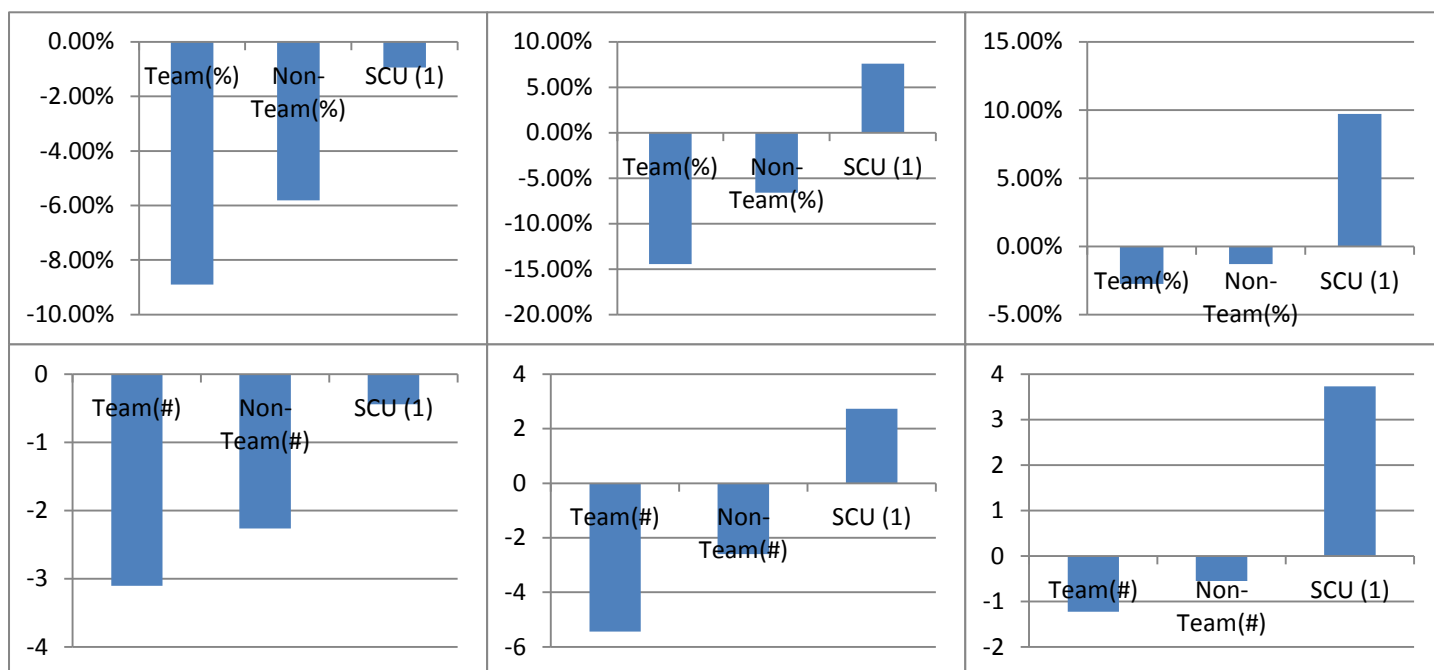


Figure 3.4: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) for the 30-49 size group from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

non- teams. The variant strand one method for uSa approaches a significant p-value of differing means, however does not quite achieve the required 95% significance level.

(d) 50-99:

Graphically, for this size class, we find that adult uSa – for single year change and variant strand one methods– and ER present a mean for team parishes which is lower than that of the non- team parishes, with ER finding significant evidence to suggest that this is the case. The aWa graph shows the non- team mean to be lower than the team mean; like the uSa data for this size category there is no significant evidence to suggest a difference in the means. Upon observation of the mean values for aWa we find the differences in the mean to be marginal. Again, we do not receive clear conclusions from this size group; the graphs and tests suggest to us that there is not substantial difference between the attendance changes on average for teams and non-

teams, perhaps leaning towards non- teams have a slightly better trend of change in

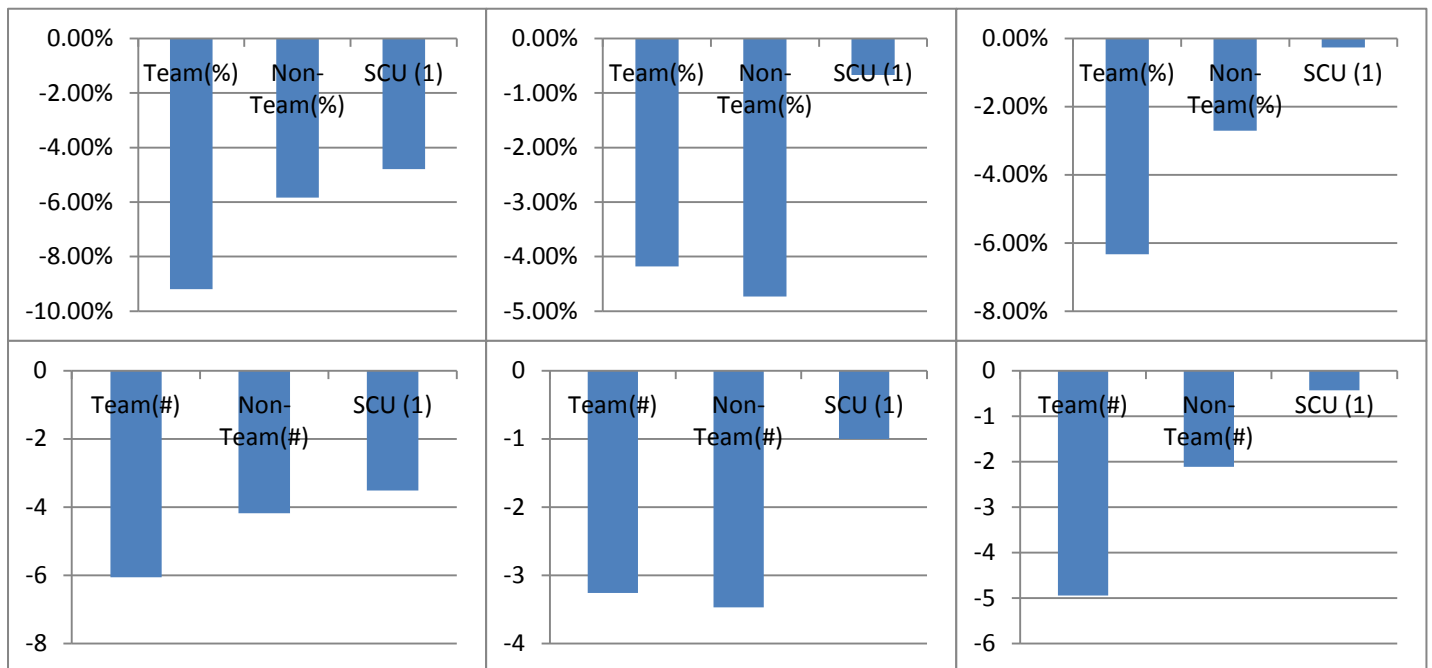


Figure 3.5: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) for the 50-99 size group from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

the time period.

(e) 100+:

For this size category, the ER and aWa measures both find the mean values of the changes for teams to be lower than non- teams; the ER data finds significant evidence of this difference for percentage change and approaches significant evidence of this for numerical change using t-tests. Adult uSa – for percentage change, standardised percentage change and number changed – shows the opposite graphically, with no significant evidence to suggest a difference in means using the t-tests. The sample size for adult uSa here is just 38 parishes for the single year change method and 37 parishes for the variant of strand one method, it would therefore not take many



anomalies in this category to skew the results; this is not necessarily the case as in most size classes we get some sort of disagreement between the measures, however the adult uSa data for this size category must be approached with caution.

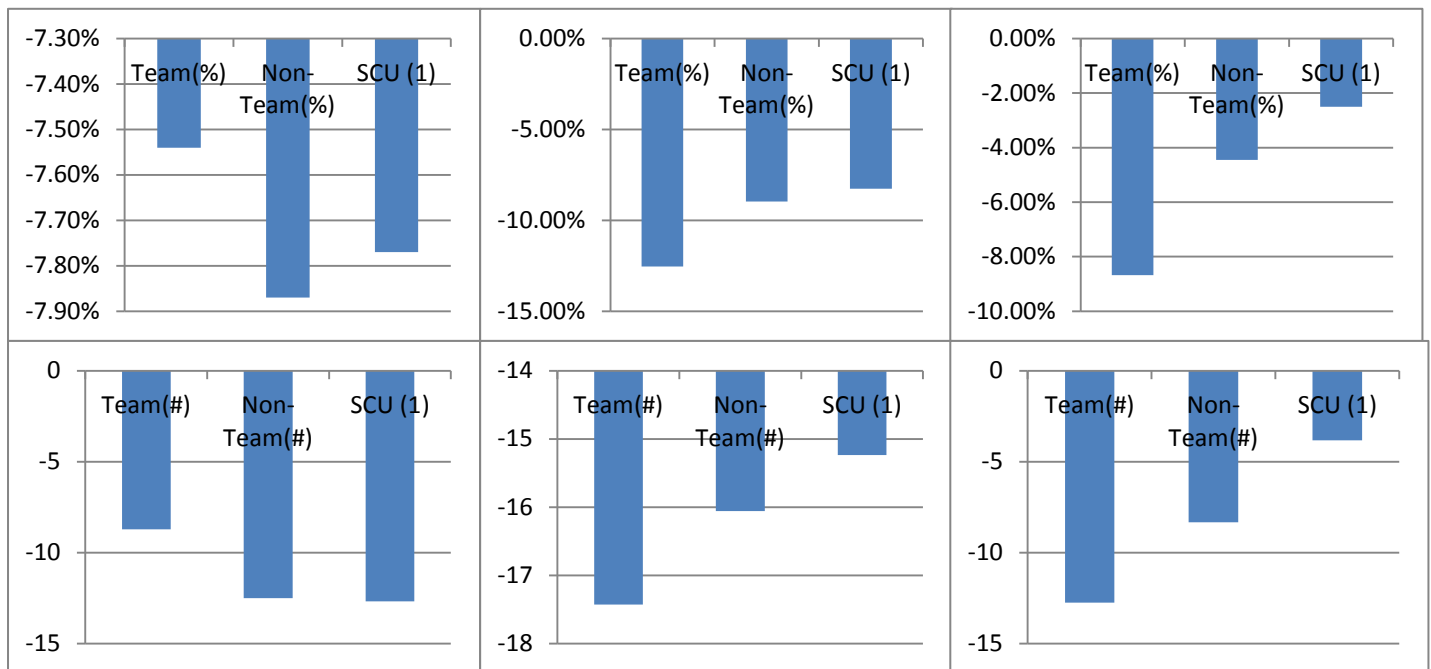


Figure 3.6: Comparison of average change per parish (% change on top and number change on bottom) for the 100+ size group from 2006 to 2011 for uSa (left), aWa (centre) and ER (Right)

(f) Cumulative Adult uSa

Rather than taking the change, be it numerical or percentage, from 2006 to 2011 and calculating the average for a single parish in either a team or non- team, it is possible to check results by calculating the total adult uSa for 2006 and the total uSa for 2011 for both teams and non- teams and checking if the percentage changes follow the same trends as we have just described above. We note here that, due to the uneven

nature of the sample size, we are unable to compare cumulative number change as there are far more non- team parishes than there are team parishes.

	TM (% Change)	Non TM (% Change)
0-14	0.85%	6.61%
15-29	-7.51%	-3.99%
30-49	-8.13%	-5.94%
50-99	-8.76%	-6.00%
100-199	-9.55%	-8.01%
200-299	-2.33%	-9.19%
300+	16.73%	-5.72%
Total	-6.78%	-5.91%

Table 3.1: Cumulative Adult uSa percentage change from 2006 to 2011 for teams and non- teams

Table 3.1 shows us that largely these values match the conclusions we made in the above analysis, especially for adult uSa. We see that although the values can often be quite similar, in general the teams tend to have a worse rate of change between the two values. This is until we get to the 200- 299 and 300+ categories, but the sample size for team parishes will be extremely small for these size groups and weight should not be placed upon such results.

(ii) Child Data

As in the amalgamation class analysis, we use child uSa. It is important we recall the various problems with the child uSa data which makes analysis using this measure difficult; the main hazard being the distorting nature of the percentage change, therefore we will focus mainly on the number change.

The results for the team analysis on child uSa are relatively inconclusive, as it was for the amalgamation work; for each size category under 100+ we find no significant

evidence, using t-tests, of any difference in the mean number change of a parish which operates as part of a team and a parish which does not. We find that without a size category, as well as in the 0-14, 15-29 and 50- 99 category, the graphs portray data in which the average number change is larger for a parish within a team than a parish not within a team; for the 30-49, and 100+ categories we find the opposite. In the 100+ size category, we find that we approach significant evidence that the mean number change of the parishes in teams is lower than the mean number change of the parishes in non- teams, but do not quite achieve this significance.

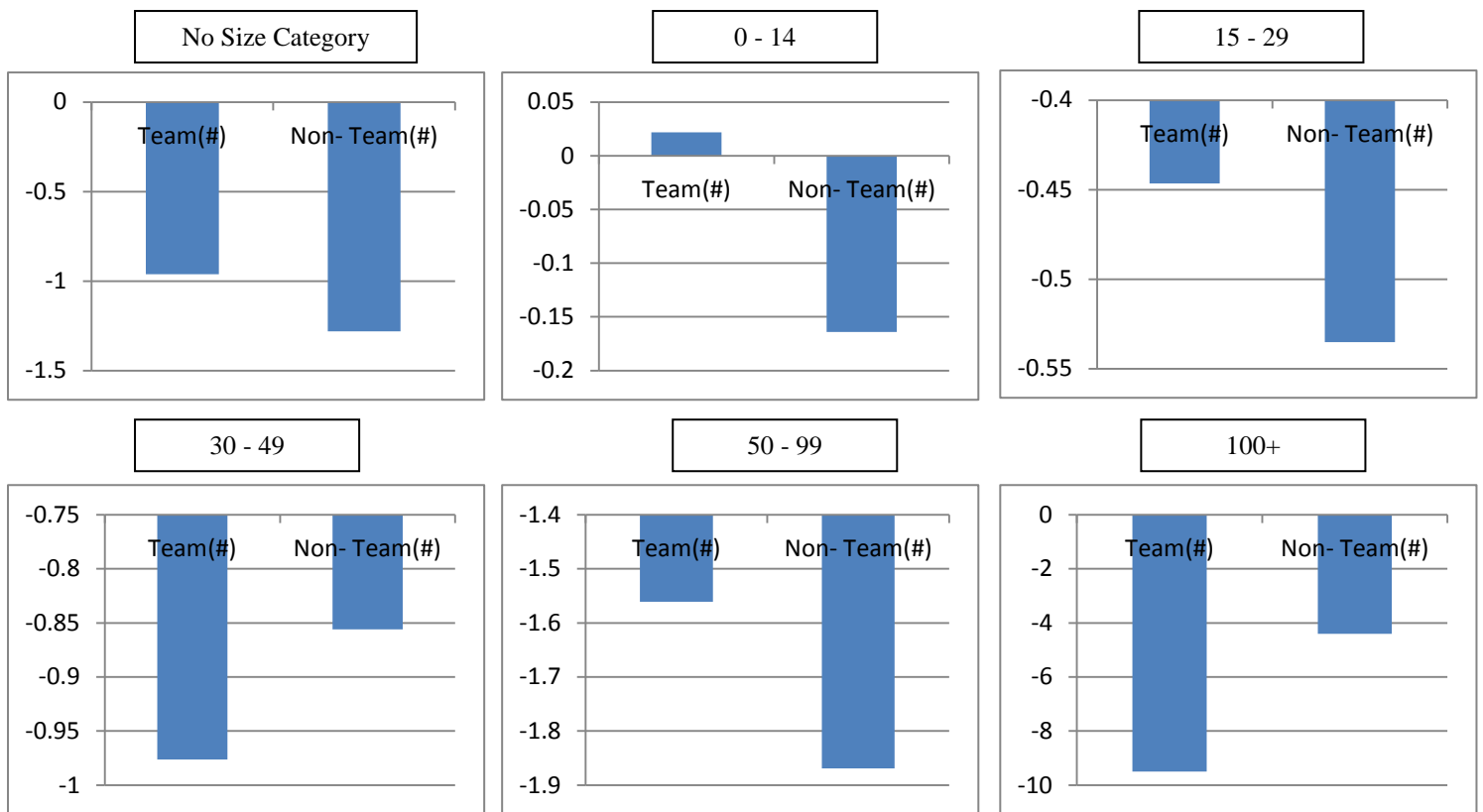


Figure 3.7: Graphs for average number change per parish from 2006 to 2011 for Child uSa

.It is worth noting that the sample size for teams in this category is 38; although this does not make the t-test incorrect in the calculation of the p-value, it does mean that a sample with just 38 pieces of data is more likely to be corrupted by rogue values.

The cumulative percentage changes are significantly more usable here than the average percentage changes per parish as they remove the issue of low base values. We find here that the analysis of the cumulative child uSa for percentage change between 2006 and 2011 matches the results from the tests above for the average number change per parish, with the percentage change values similar between teams and non- teams, the non- teams doing slightly worse below 100 and somewhat better above 100.

### *Conclusion*

From the results section above, the data on teams is far less clear than that for the amalgamation analysis. However, the data suggests that there is no marked difference in the rates of change of attendance between teams and non- teams from 2006 to 2011; that said, the data leans towards the parishes in the non- teams having a better trend of attendance change than the team parishes.

We can make this conclusion on these grounds:

- firstly, although the different measures tend not match and despite the lack of significant p-values (those which we obtain from the t-tests results suggest that there is no significant evidence of a difference in the mean of a team parish and a non- team parish), whenever we do find a significant p-value, in each case it finds that on average the mean value for the team parish is lower than that of the non- team parish.
- Secondly, rather than comparing results on a size group basis, if we compare the data on a measure by measure basis we find that adult uSa in particular

supports the view that teams are doing worse than non-teams. For adult uSa, for percentage change, numerical change and standardised percentage change in each size group bar the 100+ category (whose sample size makes for less stable results), we find the mean of the non- team parishes to be greater than that of the team parishes. For the single year change method, both using the percentage change and number change, we find significant evidence of this for the 0-14 size group, and we approach a significant difference for the 15-29 size group. For the variant strand one method, we find significant evidence of this in the 15-29 category and that the data approaches significance for the 30-49 category. For adult aWa, we find that the 0-14 size group finds the mean of the team parishes better; however we know this size category to be volatile and to not always follow the trends which the rest of the data shows. We also see this in the 50-99 size group here; the difference here is marginal, and in neither of these groups do we see significant evidence of this difference in means via t-tests. In the other size groups for this measure we find the mean of the team parishes to be less than the mean of the non- team parishes; significantly so in the 15-29 and 30-49 categories. Finally ER: we have the two smallest size groups presenting the team parishes with a greater mean value – neither group achieving significant p-values in the statistical tests-, for the size groups of 30 and above we find mean comparisons which support our conclusion, with the largest two size groups achieving significant p-values.

The majority of the time we do not find enough evidence to confidently define one mean value as higher or lower than the other, however when we do, it is in each case the non- team mean which is higher. Furthermore, there are some measures in certain

size groups which have a higher mean for the team parishes; although this difference at no point achieves a significant p-value and these cases are a minority. Conversely, it can be said, with some conviction, that teams are not performing better than non-teams – on that the evidence is reasonably strong.

The analysis completed on the team and non- team parishes, despite having a somewhat clouded conclusion, provides positivity in what the results imply for the amalgamation group analysis. The fact that each of the measures does not always find agreement in results in the team analysis further strengthens the conclusions we previously made in the amalgamation analysis in which we found a striking level of unison amongst the results of the different measures.

### *3.3 Analysis of missional measures*

Analysis was made of confirmation data collected from five dioceses – Derby, Leicester, Norwich, Salisbury and Sheffield. As with amalgamations, we believe the data is valuable but complex, in similar ways to those outlined in section 2.4.

This data for teams is problematic to analyse, owing to the varying size of the team ministries and non-team ministries across different dioceses. Thus, Salisbury diocese shows team ministries providing a large number of confirmations – but its teams are also often much larger than non-team benefices and the figure is a consequence of the benefice size. Analysis at a parish level is not always possible and time constraints make it prohibitive to undertake such analysis. Confirmation data has its drawbacks, but it also offers a highly valuable metric of the propensity or lack of propensity of particular parishes and benefices to grow numerically. We believe, in particular, that

where confirmation data flags parishes and benefices which produce few or no confirmation candidates over a long period, that ‘flag’ is of great value – showing where missionality is dormant and where additional effort and input may well bear significant fruit in the form of numerical church growth. Further research into confirmation patterns would be of considerable value.

Data concerning the incidence of fresh expressions is not usable for team ministries in the same way that it has been used for amalgamations owing to the smaller incidence of team ministries – making detailed comparison easily affected by small shifts in data.

### *3.4 Conclusion*

Assessing the performance of team ministries in terms of church growth requires an accurate picture of team ministries. As with amalgamations, obtaining an accurate picture of the structures is a complex task, but the picture so obtained contains key features which need flagging, to dispel misapprehensions:

- The number of teams has been broadly static for the last decade at around 500. However, since around fifty of such teams have operated for some years without any team vicars (ie they are amalgamations in all but name), the number of genuine teams is around 450.
- The incidence of teams is far from uniform. A small number of dioceses have a large number of teams and a significant number of dioceses have very few.

- In socio-economic terms, teams are found most often in rural southern dioceses, though there are many exceptions to this comment. The assumption that teams are mostly to be found in ‘difficult’ areas is untrue.
- During the last decade roughly as many teams have been disbanded as have been created, but there is marked variation between dioceses. Some are ‘team enthusiasts’, some are deliberately reducing the number of teams. Over a third of the active teams are to be found in just six dioceses.
- In a significant number of cases, team vicar posts are being left in a state of semi-permanent or permanent vacancy. However, given overall cuts in clergy numbers, it is not clear whether teams are particularly disadvantaged in this manner, compared to non-teams.

The statistical data on teams is noticeably less clear than that for the amalgamation analysis. However some conclusions can be drawn. First, negatively, there is no evidence to suggest that team ministries show more numerical church growth than non-team ministries. Second, the range of measures analysed – uSa, adult aWa and ER – show, overall, that teams grow less than non-teams. The difference is not large and the measures do not always point in the same way – but the difference is there. Missional measures provide more difficult to use for teams than for non-teams and so are not able to clarify the picture further. A further key point, with the exception of sizes 0-14 and 100+ which can be difficult owing to small sample size and other factors, teams markedly perform worse than SCUs (churches where there is one church to an incumbent). In this they behave similarly to amalgamations.



This is significant because a number of dioceses are currently actively creating new teams. There may be benefits to team ministries which are unrelated to numerical church growth, such as greater mutual support for clergy.<sup>97</sup> During the qualitative research, a significant number of lay and ordained leaders from teams were positive about these structures with regard to numerical church growth.<sup>98</sup> However, the statistical evidence suggests that team structures have a propensity to impact negatively on numerical growth – and that any non-numerical benefits to teams should not be used to trump the vital importance of numerical church growth.

A further important point is that the analysis completed on the team and non- team parishes, despite having a somewhat clouded conclusion, gives greater solidity to the results for the amalgamation group analysis. The fact that each of the measures does not always find agreement in results in the team analysis makes the almost complete agreement of the varied measures in the amalgamation analysis all the more startling, confirming that section two's conclusion – that the larger the amalgamation, the more it declines – is indeed correct.

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<sup>97</sup> See: section 4.4.

<sup>98</sup> See: section 4.

## Section Four

### Qualitative Research on Team Ministries and Amalgamations

*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 sadness [sic.] is of going from having two parishes to having five and suddenly feeling ‘I can’t do any of this anymore.’”*

#### 4.1 Introduction

Numbers can only get the discussion so far. As part of the research for this strand, eighty lay and ordained leaders from team ministries and amalgamations came together in a series of day conferences. Their names were obtained by asking senior staff in their dioceses for a balance of people from teams and amalgamations which were growing and those which were not. Care was taken to obtain amalgamations with varying numbers of churches in them. Their experiences and views were surveyed using a mix of questionnaire and focus group discussion. These experiences were given, in part, in groups which divided between lay and clergy members, in order to ensure that lay voices were clearly heard. The leaders were drawn from the dioceses of Salisbury, London, Norwich, Leicester, Derby, Sheffield and York – and from a highly diverse range of contexts ranging between highly urbanised and deeply rural. The evidence so gathered is wholly different to that offered in earlier chapters and cannot offer an ‘overall’ picture. Rather, the viewpoints offered act as ‘leaven’ to

the statistical work, providing insights which the numbers cannot give and giving the human reality to which the numbers point.<sup>99</sup>

This chapter is divided as follows: first a section on contextual factors; second, a survey of what the eighty leaders saw as encouraging and hampering church growth; third, how such leaders felt structures acted to foster or prevent growth.

One key finding from the qualitative research was that the potential for growth and the problems hampering growth look similar in both teams and amalgamations. Consequently, although the research conferences separated out these two strands – with team ministry leaders interacting solely with fellow teams and amalgamations likewise – this chapter combines their insights, making clear points at which team and amalgamation experience converge and diverge.

#### *4.2 Context*

Context is crucial in any discussion of team ministries and amalgamations. Amongst the leaders from teams and amalgamations were those drawn from deep rural areas and intensely urban settings. One striking theme was the way the debate over teams and amalgamations becomes dominated by the extreme context of deeply rural benefices, where leaders face large areas, with sparse populations, spread amongst many communities and church buildings, usually ancient and often of great historical

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<sup>99</sup> In footnotes, the following abbreviations are used: ‘TeamQ’ and AmalQ’ refer to detailed questionnaire data from individual team ministries, filled in jointly by one lay and one ordained leader from that team. TeamN, TeamS, AmalgN and AmalgS refer to verbatim transcripts of group discussions between leaders of teams and amalgamations held in Sheffield (N) and London (S). The group discussions were, on occasion, based on groups entirely composed of lay or ordained leaders and, where this is the case, it is indicated in the footnote.

distinction. Qualitative discussions sometimes resembled the ‘Four Yorkshiremen’ sketch popularised by Monty Python – in which four Yorkshiremen compete with each other to prove that their own experience is tougher than the others. This dynamic needs to be resisted in any discussion. Sparsely populated rural areas have particular challenges (which will be discussed in due course) – but represent a small and diminishing fraction of the overall population. The setting of sparsely populated rural areas must not dominate a debate in which a wide range of contexts need to be considered.

The contexts broadly divide into four types – but the concerns within these overspill all neat boundaries – and such a typology needs further nuancing for any wider application:

- Rural (Limited Trade Route)
- Rural (Major Trade Route)
- Urban (Limited Trade Route)
- Urban (Major Trade Route)

A ‘trade route’ is a major artery of trade, population movement and (often) migration. To some degree, not least due to the internet, everyone is on a ‘trade route’, but some are more on a trade route than others – hence the classification above.<sup>100</sup>

Rural (limited trade route) benefices are benefices where the overall rural community is stable or shrinking. Facilities such as pubs, shops and post offices have been closing; some schools struggle to stay open, communities may be aging, agriculture is in decline and/or using a fraction of the labour it once used. There is often strong

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<sup>100</sup> The concept of ‘trade route’ is discussed in greater detail in D. Goodhew, *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present*, (Farham, Ashgate 2012), pp. 8, 9, 224-6, 255.

community cohesion – but this is focussed on villages, rather than the larger agglomerations that teams and amalgamations cover. There remains a deep appreciation of faith at certain moments in the year and moments of birth, marriage and death – but this is coupled with many small/tiny congregations. It should be noted that where parishes are some distance from ‘trade routes’ (transport networks, commercial centres, with static or falling populations) they still experience migration, (hence the reference to Portuguese and Lithuanian migrants in rural Norfolk), new housing and new industry to some degree.<sup>101</sup>

Rural (major trade route) consist of areas within striking distance of major towns and/or transport networks, where, often, the rural community is growing – sometimes growing fast. They share many aspects of ‘Rural (limited trade route)’ areas: even as populations grow, facilities such as pubs and shops may fold, whilst the influx of commuters may mitigate against community, with occupants of new housing living highly individualised lives. The parochialism which focuses on the village may also continue. However, such communities tend to see livelier schools, a broader range of ages and ethnicity and better transport links make building secular and Christian community more feasible. Context varies hugely – even within a few miles or between different villages within a single team/amalgamation.<sup>102</sup>

Urban (limited trade route) consists of areas in which the overall community is stable or shrinking. As in their rural counterparts, facilities such as pubs and shops may be closing; some schools struggle to stay open, communities may be aging, industry and state employment are in decline and/or using a fraction of the labour it once used.

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<sup>101</sup> TeamN/lay/DG 2-4; TeamS/lay/1-8; TeamS/clergy/BK 3-4; AmalS/lay/DG 1-4; AmalN/lay/DG 1-7; AmalN/clergy/BK 10, 12; AmalS/clergy/BK 5; AmalN/clergy/BK 12

<sup>102</sup> TeamN/Clergy/BK 3; TeamS/clergy/BK 3-5; AmalS/lay/DG 1-4; AmalN/lay/DG 1-7;

There is sometimes strong community cohesion. In some areas there remains a deep appreciation of faith at certain moments in the year and moments of birth, marriage and death – but this is coupled with many small congregations. It should be noted that where parishes are some distance from transport networks, commercial centres and have static or falling populations they experience migration, (hence the reference to Asian migrants in parts of South Yorkshire), new housing and new industry to some degree.<sup>103</sup>

Urban (major trade route) consist of areas of major towns which show signs of economic vitality (even where there remain many people in poverty), which are plumbed into transport networks and where the population is growing. They are strikingly different from the ‘Rural (limited trade route)’ areas: seeing populations grow (often growing fast), increasing ethnic diversity, significant new housing, expansion of schools and other community facilities – even though occupants of new housing may have highly individualised lives. Populations are often younger – but also ‘time poor’. Parochialism may exist, but local identity is markedly more fluid and congregation members may travel to connect with a church. Such contexts offer easier sociological ‘soil’ in which secular and Christian community can grow – although such growth will never be easily attained. Context varies hugely – even within a few miles. All this is especially true for London. During the qualitative research the input of lay and clergy leaders from London was strikingly different to most other participants. Churches were more likely to experience growth, had greater resources and were generally more upbeat. This is not to say, for a moment, that such churches

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<sup>103</sup> TeamN/lay/DG 2-4; TeamS/lay/8; TeamS/clergy/BK 3; AmalS/lay/DG 3; AmalN/lay/DG 1-7; AmalN/clergy/BK 10, 12; AmalS/clergy/BK 5; AmalN/clergy/BK 12

‘have it easy’. They face many challenges.<sup>104</sup> However, just as it would be wrong to let deeply rural contexts dominate discussion of church structures, so the structural developments in the diocese of London, in which church growth in Britain has centred, will not necessarily be appropriate elsewhere.<sup>105</sup> Contextual factors show that one type of structure may not fit all.

It was striking that lay and clergy leaders for both teams and amalgamations found the rural (limited trade route) contexts highly challenging. Conversely, teams and amalgamations in urban (major trade route) settings were more likely to experience church growth. This is not to suggest – at all – that one context is ‘easier’, let alone ‘better’ than another.

#### *4.3 Factors that Encourage and Hamper Growth*

Lay and clergy leaders from across teams and amalgamations were deeply heartening in the way they indicated a wide range of settings in which they had seen numerical church growth. This growth was found on both Sundays and midweek; it was more noticeable in London and the south, but was found in a range of northern contexts too. A recurrent theme was how one church in a team or amalgamation was growing, but another (or others) were not – further indicating how collecting data at benefice or parish level can obscure what is happening on the ground.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> This was most plainly expressed in: AmalS/clergy/BK 1-4

<sup>105</sup> TeamN/lay/DG 2-4; TeamS/lay/1-8; TeamN/Clergy/BK 3; TeamS/clergy/BK 3-5; AmalS/lay/DG 3; AmalN/lay/DG 1-7;

<sup>106</sup> Teams/Q/5.1/6-27; Amalg/Q/4 and 5.1/6-25

There were a range of practices that were persistently cited as contributing to church growth:

- Messy Church<sup>107</sup>
- Use of a study course to nurture discipleship<sup>108</sup>
- Focus on children, young people and families<sup>109</sup>
- Focus on schools<sup>110</sup>
- Trying new forms of worship/fresh expressions/church plants<sup>111</sup>
- Events which connect with/serve the wider community<sup>112</sup>
- An outward-facing mindset<sup>113</sup>
- Proliferation of lay leadership<sup>114</sup>
- Clergy presence within a community<sup>115</sup>
- Improvement of buildings<sup>116</sup>
- Prayer<sup>117</sup>
- A strong sense of fellowship within congregations<sup>118</sup>
- The vitality of the surrounding community<sup>119</sup>

Citation of these factors is nothing new. Indeed, what was striking was how the eighty lay and ordained leaders, from markedly different regions and contexts, from both teams and amalgamations so consistently said similar things. It should be noted that

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<sup>107</sup> Team/Q/14.1,2 amd3/6-27; Amalgs/Q/14.1,2 amd3/6-25

<sup>108</sup> Team/Q/13.2/6-27; Amalgs/Q/13.2/6-25

<sup>109</sup> Team/Q/6 and 7/6-27; Amalgs/Q/6 and 7/6-25

<sup>110</sup> Team/Q/6 and 7/6-27; Amalgs/Q/6 and 7/6-25

<sup>111</sup> Team/Q/6 and 7/6-27; Amalgs/Q/6 and 7/6-25

<sup>112</sup> Team/Q/6 and 7/6-27; Amalgs/Q/6 and 7/6-25

<sup>113</sup> Team/Q/6, 7, 8 and 9/6-27; Amalgs/Q/6, 7, 8 and 9/6-25

<sup>114</sup> Team/Q/13.1/6-27; AmalS/Q/13.1/6-25

<sup>115</sup> TeamS/clergy/BK 9; AmalS/lay/DG 8

<sup>116</sup> Team/Q/15/26

<sup>117</sup> Teams/Q/10/27; TeamN/2/DG 9; AmalN/clergy/BK 9; TeamN/Clergy/BK 4-5

<sup>118</sup> Team/Q/9/6-27; Amalgs/Q/9/6-25

<sup>119</sup> Team/Q/6, 7, 8 and 9/6-27; Amalgs/Q/6, 7, 8 and 9/6-25



the above is a list of positives – and a list of negative behaviours, which correlate with decline and are best avoided, could be constructed from the qualitative research. Moreover, the above list chimes strikingly with existing work on church growth by Robert Warren, Bob Jackson and Christian Schwarz.<sup>120</sup> Such factors correlate with the insight that numerical church growth and overall church health are umbilically linked.

There are particular factors which were cited as having the capacity both to empower and to compromise numerical church growth; administration, Christian nurture and fostering vocation.

Administration was frequently cited as major encumbrance to church growth in both teams and amalgamations. The converse was also true. Administration well conducted, especially with regard to communications, acts as a facilitator of church growth. Employment of paid administrators has been found to free clergy to engage in the practices cited above that foster church growth. ‘Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday we have a paid administrator...[administrators] carry in their heads all of those kind of things that come into such an office and they can then move them around and send us off to do our various things...She does all of that initial stuff and then that frees it up for us.’<sup>121</sup> One exasperated incumbent of multiple rural parishes commented:

I did say to our suffragan bishop...’It’s a stupid idea having the diocesan mission fund because you’ve got paid missionaries in every parish in the diocese, it’s just we don’t have time to do it because we are doing admin. We need a diocesan admin fund to release your already trained missionaries to do the missionary work.’ And he said ‘Oh yeah’.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> B. Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, (London, CHP 2002); R. Warren *The Healthy Churches Handbook* (London, CHP 2012); C. Schwarz, *National Church Development: A Practical Guide to a New Approach*, (Moggerhanger, BCGA, 1996)

<sup>121</sup> TeamN/3 1,7; AmalS/3 4; AmalN/clergy/BK 13; AmalS/2/DG 10; AmalS/3 2.

<sup>122</sup> AmalS/clergy/BK 16-17

The eighty leaders were specifically asked about what their parishes did regarding the nurture of faith and ongoing discipleship. Some leaders had a wide view of what might constitute nurture – stretching from a very small act (such as lighting a votive candle) through to specific programmes of discipleship.<sup>123</sup> But there was very considerable haziness amongst many lay leaders as to what Christian nurture and ongoing discipleship were.<sup>124</sup> There was considerable confusion, with a readiness to see any activity and social occasion as Christian nurture – from flower arranging to reading a lesson in a service. Participants were not only suggesting that such acts may have a nurturing function (a reasonable statement) but that they were all that is needed for Christian nurture.<sup>125</sup> One lay leader commented on how she wished she could receive help and training in sharing faith her faith.<sup>126</sup> One clergyperson commented that church members need Christian nurture themselves.<sup>127</sup>

It was striking that Messy Church – frequently cited as an engine of church growth across teams and amalgamations – was not often seen as being instrumental in people being baptised and/or confirmed. Whilst there is considerable effort being put into helping those at Messy Church become messy disciples, it is unclear to what extent this is yet happening.<sup>128</sup>

There was considerable evidence of interest in initiation into the Christian faith, but alongside this some confusion over practices such as communion before confirmation,

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<sup>123</sup> TeamN/2/DG 2-3

<sup>124</sup> AmalS/2/DG 1-3, 9; TeamN/2/BK 2; TeamS/2/BK 1

<sup>125</sup> TeamN/2/BK 2; TeamS/2/DG 3; TeamS/2/BK 2

<sup>126</sup> AmalS/2/DG 9

<sup>127</sup> TeamN/2/BK 3 VGQ

<sup>128</sup> Teams/Q/14.2 and 3/6-27; Amalgs/Q/14.2 and 3/6-25

baptism of older children and adults and confirmation.<sup>129</sup> Admission of people to communion before confirmation or regardless of confirmation was limiting the take up of confirmation. One southern clergyperson commented ‘You see confirmation isn’t really on our radar at all’.<sup>130</sup> There are a range of views within the Church of England on the practice of baptism, confirmation and admission to communion. The above is cited, not to indicate preference for one or another view, but to note that (a) one or another form of initiation is an essential part of church growth and that (b) the potential for expanding the number of those baptised (at whatever age), admitted to communion and confirmed may be very considerable, (c) confusion over initiation may hamper such expansion. Conversely, there was a correlation between experience of growth and vision for nurture and discipleship. Readiness to use a course of Christian nurture correlated consistently with experience of growth – whatever the nature and theology of the course.<sup>131</sup>

The fostering of vocations to lay and ordained ministries was a crucial aspect of promoting church growth. Clergy presence in a community was seen as aiding growth.<sup>132</sup> More generally, anyone who acted as a ‘focal minister’, embodying and encouraging Christian ministry in a specific locality was seen as a contribution to numerical growth.<sup>133</sup> Lay worship leaders were specifically cited as assisting church growth.<sup>134</sup> Alongside this, it was felt that there was an art to empowering – it needed to be done gently and gradually, that it was a skilled process, in which existing clergy

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<sup>129</sup> TeamsQ/11 and 12/6-27 and AmalgsQ/11 and 12/6-25

<sup>130</sup> TeamS/2/DG 2

<sup>131</sup> Team/Q/13.2/6-27; Amalgs/Q/13.2/6-25

<sup>132</sup> TeamS/clergy/BK 9; AmalS/lay/DG 8

<sup>133</sup> TeamN/Clergy/BK 5, 16

<sup>134</sup> TeamN/Clergy/BK 16; TeamS/lay/14

had a key role.<sup>135</sup> One person commented that, with a small, elderly congregation, low on energy, raising up lay leaders was a difficult task.<sup>136</sup>

A related issue is that of training to empower ministry. When asked if they had received any training for working in the structures in which they found themselves, most respondents said that they had not, but a number said they thought it would be helpful. Of the minority who had had training a significant number did not find it helpful.<sup>137</sup> Some clergy felt ordination training should emphasise training in leading teams and collaborative work.<sup>138</sup>

#### *5.4 Structures and the Encouragement and Hampering of Growth*

The qualitative research voiced the view that the more churches in a team or amalgamation, the less mission done by that team or amalgamation. One northern clergywomen articulated this most clearly, when speaking of how she used to give much time to preparing people for baptism and confirmation, saying “...for me, one of the sadness [sic.] is of going from having two parishes to having five and suddenly feeling ‘I can’t do any of this anymore.’”<sup>139</sup> Another commented

You seem to be spending all your time thinking about PCC agendas or buildings or sorting out arguments...you know the more churches, you’ve got more arguments. The focus somehow moves...it’s very easy for the focus to move off helping people to grow in their faith and just become about keeping the show on the road.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> TeamN/2/BK 5; TeamS/2/BK 3; TeamN/lay/DG 14

<sup>136</sup> TeamS/2/BK 7

<sup>137</sup> Team and Amalgamations Questionnaire 2/32.2

<sup>138</sup> TeamN/3 2, 8

<sup>139</sup> Amalgs (N) 2 DG (2)

<sup>140</sup> AmalgsN 2 DG 5; see also TeamN/clergy/BK 16

Many other lay and clergy leaders commented on the sense of being pulled in too many directions. One described it as ‘juggling jelly’.<sup>141</sup> One team rector felt endlessly split a dozen ways.<sup>142</sup> A lay leader commented how doing new things was very difficult with lots of churches and few clergy.<sup>143</sup> Coordinating multiple PCCs was flagged as a specific issue.<sup>144</sup> Clergy leave service to get to another service, thereby failing to build relationships with the congregation, which stifles mission.<sup>145</sup> Managing lots of buildings, especially those with a high historical value was particularly draining.<sup>146</sup> These views were expressed by a wide range of people from both teams and amalgamations, but were primarily expressed by those in rural contexts, especially those with large numbers of churches. One northern team rector commented:

Spreading clergy ever more thinly means they focus more on maintenance, conducting communion, baptisms/thanksgivings, weddings, funerals, and less time on training and equipping others. Many times folk have offered to help carry the load, but the load has been nothing I could delegate.<sup>147</sup>

In terms of perceived constraints to growth, the one most mentioned was the limited number of people able and willing to take on tasks.<sup>148</sup>

With regard to the specific structures the lay and ordained leaders found themselves in, there were mixed feelings. Team ministries attracted positive and negative comments.<sup>149</sup> There was a sense with teams that they could be better for clergy (providing mutual support, cover when sick/on holiday etc) than for the churches themselves, which were seen as inhibited from growing by cumbersome structure

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<sup>141</sup> TeamN/2/BK 1, 3-4

<sup>142</sup> TeamS/clergy/BK 13; see also AmalN/3 3

<sup>143</sup> TeamS/Lay 12

<sup>144</sup> AmalS/clergy/BK 8-9, 12, 16

<sup>145</sup> TeamN/Clergy/BK 16

<sup>146</sup> TeamN/Clergy/BK 17; TeamS/clergy/BK 15

<sup>147</sup> Teams/Q/35/10

<sup>148</sup> Teams/Q/8/6-27; Amalgs/Q/8/6-27

<sup>149</sup> Teams/Q/33/6-27

which cut across natural geographical patterns.<sup>150</sup> It was suggested that bigger teams work better, ‘since when you are 10 or so, you have to work differently, whereas when you are 3-4 the temptation is just to run a bit faster’.<sup>151</sup> In discussions with lay and clergy in team ministries there was a sense of some feeling very at sea with teams and others finding them really helpful as a source of support and ideas. Clergy were asked, if they were moving to a different post, whether they would prefer not to be in a team again – and only a small minority took this viewpoint, most being neutral or positive about teams.<sup>152</sup>

A similar picture emerged from discussions with those in amalgamations; some were floundering – and others flourishing. One spoke of the structure of his five church benefice as ‘rubbish’; another commented that being part of a bigger group was essential for survival and allowed a crucial sharing of gifts, another of how a well-functioning clergy team was a big help.<sup>153</sup> As with teams, there were mixed views of amalgamations, which were seen as good and bad.<sup>154</sup>

It is pertinent to consider a related question, clergy stress. It has been suggested that the larger the number churches which an incumbent oversees, the greater the likelihood of stress-related illness. Research by Dr Michael Clinton, overseen by Tim Ling, into clergy work patterns, is important for this discussion. Their research suggests that being part of a team positively impacts on clergy welfare, by and large. Their research does not specifically discuss multi-church ministry, although there is

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<sup>150</sup> TeamS/clergy2/BK 12; TeamN/Clergy1/BK 17; TeamS/clergy/BK 12. A point echoed in evidence provided by Cling and Ling – see note 57.

<sup>151</sup> TeamN/2/BK 4

<sup>152</sup> Teams/Q/34/6-27

<sup>153</sup> AmalS/clergy/BK 15; AmalS/2/DG 12; AmalS/3 3

<sup>154</sup> AmalS/3 5

some evidence to suggest that rural clergy struggle slightly more than those in other contexts – but there are a great many variables and assuming this is due to the number of churches being overseen is far from clear. Furthermore, this research notes that clergy have lower levels of stress overall than many other professions.<sup>155</sup> Extensive research by Leslie Francis and others confirms this picture, indicating little or no correlation between the number of churches overseen and clergy stress.<sup>156</sup> To further test this assumption, archdeacons from a range of dioceses were asked if they saw any correlation between a higher number of parishes and increased incidence of clergy stress or between involvement in team ministries and increased incidence of clergy stress. Of the twelve who replied, from five dioceses, none saw any correlation between stress and team ministry and ten of the twelve saw no correlation between stress and the number of parishes a clergyperson had care for. Most stated that stress-related illness was usually connected with the particular circumstances of the person. The two archdeacons who did see a correlation between the number of churches and clergy stress both came from the same very rural diocese and, since the bulk of their benefices were multi-church, it is likely that most clergy stress they encountered would come from such contexts.

There was no correlation between experience of growth and a particular governance structure – rather, of the teams which had experienced most growth there was an even split between those which had a single PCC for the whole team, those which had

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<sup>155</sup> M. Clinton, Experiences of Ministry Survey, Findings Report 2011, prepared on behalf of the National Continuing Ministerial Development Panel, pp. 7-10. Drs Clinton and Ling will be presenting additional research findings to inform this issue in forthcoming reports based upon the Experiences of Ministry Survey 2013 and the Patterns of Priestly Practice 2013 I am very grateful to Dr Michael Clinton and Dr Tim Ling for permission to use this material.

<sup>156</sup> L. Francis and C. Rutledge 'Are rural clergy in the CofE under greater stress ? *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 11, 2000; L. Francis and C. Brewster, 'Stress from Time-related Over-extension in Multi-parish Benefices', *Rural Theology* 10, 2, 2012

multiple PCCs and those which combined a mix of a team PCC and DCCs. There was no correlation between a particular structure and church growth. There was evidence to suggest that teams were moving towards a pattern whereby individual team members had specific responsibility for specific churches, rather than being expected to serve across the whole team – this was true in 14 of the 21 teams, although this was often combined with a significant degree of interchangeability. Those teams which reported significant growth were predominantly those which gave team members responsibility for specific churches.<sup>157</sup>

Many contributors commented on the importance of the process by which a team or amalgamation was set up in the first place. Those working in small villages stressed that the smallness of many villages is what people love about them – so amalgamating them together goes against grain.<sup>158</sup>

...the kids run from one side of the village to the other and they drop in and play for four hours and I'll eventually get a phone call from mum saying 'Is Sam with you?' I'll say 'Yeah' 'Oh we didn't realise he'd left the house until three hours ago'. And its really genuinely like that. And so there is a sense in which it's very intensely parochial, people feel very safe in their little environment and actually going to church somewhere else is not part of the deal as far as they're concerned.

There is often to be a very hazy awareness of the back story of whatever team or amalgamation church members and clergy find themselves in.<sup>159</sup> Yet the process of setting up the amalgamation/team is very important to its later functionality. Those thrown hastily together with little preparation and/or dubious reasons for being put together tend to struggle. One northern team rector commented 'the parishes were thrown together without any sort of looking at how they fitted socially, economically, what sort of people they were'. A lay leader said:

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<sup>157</sup> Team/Q/16: 6-27

<sup>158</sup> AmalS/3 6-7

<sup>159</sup> TeamS/clergy/BK 6; AmalS/3 6



‘We had amalgamation thrust upon us, it wasn’t an amicable setting, hopefully it is now, but at the time it was not. When you have things imposed upon you, and are done imposed, then it ends up with a few years of acrimony. It’s not nice, it’s hard work.’<sup>160</sup>

Other voices stressed the value of careful preparation before any amalgamation/team was created.<sup>161</sup>

A range of other comments were made regarding structures, which are pertinent to flag. The question of whether significant numbers of churches should be closed was raised. Whilst it was clear in one or two instances that churches were decidedly fragile, the idea of closing many was not widely voiced.<sup>162</sup> The question as to whether tiny congregations were at all capable of growth was raised, but drew differing conclusions.<sup>163</sup> The ecumenical dimension was largely absent. There were a handful of references to ecumenical cooperation, but it was little mentioned overall. Aside from the current structural models, little was said of other models. The ‘Minster model’ was raised, but, again, it received both positive and negative evaluation.<sup>164</sup>

### *5.5 Conclusion*

The qualitative research supports the view that there is a limited amount to choose between team ministries and amalgamations. It also supports the view that the more churches that are collected together, the less likely they are to grow. Further points need to be made.

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<sup>160</sup> AmalN/3 3; TeamN/Clergy/BK 2; AmalgQ/36/18

<sup>161</sup> AmalS/3 3 VGQ; AmalN/3 3

<sup>162</sup> AmalS/clergy/BK 17; AmalgQ/35/15. It should also be noted that the evidence as to whether church closure ‘helps’ is equivocal. There is evidence to suggest that those dioceses which close most churches are more likely to decline: C. Roberts and L. Francis, ‘Church Closure and Membership Statistics: Trends in Four Rural Dioceses,’ *Rural Theology* 4.1, 2006, pp. 37-56.

<sup>163</sup> TeamS/clergy/BK 16-17

<sup>164</sup> AmalN/3 3-4

There is considerable church growth happening. It is, by and large, happening in ways that chime with earlier descriptions of factors that lead to growth – outlined in section 4.3.. There is a dramatic variety between different parish contexts within the Church of England. One size of structure is unlikely to fit all. The greatest difficulty is amongst sparsely populated rural areas, however, since such areas have only a small minority of the population, they should not dominate the debate. There is need for greater clarity re. what discipleship is and training for clergy and laity to encourage it, given how central discipleship is to church growth. Good administration facilitates mission – and poor administration stifles it. Clergy, in particular, need administrative support to be freed to do mission. Additional lay and ordained ministers make a big difference. Additional training, of the right sort, may help both clergy and congregations.

## Conclusion

*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 sadness [sic.] is of going from having two parishes to having five and suddenly feeling ‘I can’t do any of this anymore.’”*

Strand 3c is tasked with asking how structures, in the form of team ministries and various forms of the amalgamation of churches, impact on numerical church growth.

This concluding section has two sections:

- Seven Framing conclusions
- Seven Core conclusions

### *Framing Conclusions*

- (a) There is much evidence to suggest that churches can grow in England, even Anglican churches. Assuming that decline is inevitable does not fit the evidence.
- (b) Many more Anglican churches are needed: the expanding and diversifying population of England necessitates founding additional churches, whether they have a traditional shape and building, or no. The recent London Church Census and wider research shows that the multiplication of churches has been happening apace in England, although mostly by non-Anglican churches. This consideration needs to frame the debate about structures, which otherwise tends to centre on the problem of sparsely populated areas which have large numbers of ancient churches. That context is important, but it must not be allowed to drown out the imperative to grow new churches.

- (c) Church growth cannot be manufactured to order, but neither is it a total mystery. The Christian churches have much wisdom on what encourages growth – as codified in works by such writers as Robert Warren and in the lived experience of many congregations and clergy. Implementation of such wisdom will, more often than not, lead to numerical growth.
- (d) Church structures affect church growth – but only as one of a wide range of factors affecting such growth. This study of amalgamations and team ministries in the Church of England shows clear correlations between certain structures and growth/decline – but these must always be set alongside other factors. The most important non-structural factor is the context in which a parish or diocese operates. The possibilities of and constraints on church growth in Truro, Tadcaster and Tooting are drastically different.
- (e) We do not see closing churches as a ‘solution’ to the issue of amalgamations. Many small churches are currently growing, albeit by small amounts. Research suggests that when a church closes many of the congregation will not transfer to another church, but simply stop going to church. Closing churches is difficult and would make little difference unless large numbers were closed. Closures are decline management, not a growth strategy. There will be a limited number of churches which will close in future years and the process for doing so should be made as straightforward as possible – but churches have closed in previous decades and centuries. We do not see mass closure of churches as either necessary or desirable.
- (f) All Church of England churches need to practice collaborative and team working. But much discussion of collaboration and team working is sentimentalised or even platitudinous. Stress on collaboration or team working

does not remove the need for structure, leadership and hierarchy, in the right sense of these terms. Good practice in collaboration and team working requires serious thinking about leadership and accountability. They are not mutually exclusive.

- (g) There are serious problems within the Church of England's data for attendance and membership and concerning the structures that are in operation. These problems exist at national, diocesan and local levels. Whilst important conclusions can be drawn, these problems have significantly limited what can be said in this report. We are very grateful for the tireless work of the Research and Statistics department on the statistics and the insights of dioceses such as Leicester, London, Lichfield, Derby and Sheffield – which offer examples of good practice which deserve to be more widely shared. Nonetheless, we believe that further major reforms are needed to improve the dataset, especially if detailed analysis of church growth is to be obtained.

*Seven Core Conclusions:*

- (1) First, the fewer the number of churches that an incumbent oversees, the more likely that those churches are to grow. Incumbents who have a single church to oversee are more likely to be growing than those looking after multiple churches within a similar size band. Conversely, the more churches that are amalgamated under a single incumbent, the more likely those churches are to decline. This is was found to be true across three very different measures – usual Sunday attendance, average Weekly attendance (adult) and electoral roll. It is confirmed by a range of other evidence and by the qualitative data. Whilst there are many amalgamations where energetic ministry and mission are

producing growth, the overall trend is that amalgamating churches encourages them to decline. There is, in some quarters, a debate as to the ‘maximum’ number of churches which an incumbent should have. The national data offers an unequivocal answer to that question; as a general rule, the maximum number of churches a single incumbent should oversee is one church. Such a picture is reinforced by findings that show that dioceses which cut the number of parochial clergy decline faster than those which do not. It is likely that more recent clergy cuts have been more harmful than the earlier ones and it is likely that future cuts will be even more damaging if core posts looking after larger churches are abolished. Amalgamating churches has been, all too often, an exercise in managing decline, in kicking the ecclesial can down the road. It does not solve the problem of decline and it tends to make decline worse. If the Church of England wishes to grow numerically, rather than manage decline, it must find a different strategy.

(2) Secondly, team ministries are more likely to decline than churches not organised as team ministries. However, the gap between teams and ‘non-teams’ is not large (although it may have been larger in previous years) and may be partly the result of other factors. Attendance and membership data were much less conclusive than for amalgamations, but the data tended to show non-team parishes doing better than team parishes. Qualitative data did not show teams behaving differently to non-team parishes. However, as with amalgamations, teams grew markedly less than churches which had their own incumbent. We do not believe team ministries are behaving sufficiently distinctively to amalgamations to require different recommendations. Hence

the recommendations that follow apply to all units where churches are amalgamated together, whether team or non-team.

- (3) Third, much larger numbers of vocations to ordained ministry, especially amongst the majority of churches which have been vocationally inactive, is both possible and necessary, doing much to break the cycle of clergy shortage, that fuels amalgamations. The fact that only 30 to 40% of benefices (and a much smaller percentage of parishes or individual churches) acted as ‘sending churches’ for ordained ministry in the past decade (plus the evidence of widespread unofficial ministers thrown up by fresh expressions) shows that the pool of lay and ordained (whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary) ministries is much larger than is currently assumed. All ordinands and current clergy need training in practices likely to foster lay and ordained vocations. Clergy must see as one of their most important tasks as empowering other ministries.
- (4) Fourth, since single-church benefices grow better than similar multi-church benefices, the Church of England’s response to this finding should be to increase the number of lay church leaders. Whilst we should do all we can to promote vocations and employ as many clergy as possible this is takes and is limited by money. If this is our only alternative to amalgamations, then they may continue to increase and accelerate decline. But we also believe that the principle we have uncovered is not that a church needs its own full time paid vicar to grow best, but that, rather than sharing a leader with other churches, it needs its own designated leader whatever their ecclesial status. The evidence comes from the Fresh Expressions Strand of this research found that 40% of all the fresh expressions have as their main leader an unpaid and often

untrained lay person. These are among the Church of England's best growing church communities. A term coming into use to describe such local church community leaders is 'Focal Minister',<sup>165</sup> with the idea that such people (lay or ordained) are overseen by stipendiary clergy who act as 'mini-bishops' – but the 'mini-bishops' do not have the responsibility of incumbency. Responsibility for 'the cure of souls' of the parish will pass from the incumbent to the church congregation, led by the focal minister. We believe this alternative approach to future leadership arrangements needs trialling and monitoring to find out whether it is indeed a better way forward. From enquiries with 7 dioceses we found 25 small churches with this sort of leadership often where the *de jure* 'incumbent' leaves the *de facto* leader to be the leader. Adult uSa at these churches grew from 2006 to 2011 by 21%. 19 of the 25 grew and only 3 shrank. The small sample size means that this is only a straw in the wind, but it is an encouraging straw and we recommend that further research be done to increase the numbers identified.

(5) Fifth, the age group from 0 to 25 is absolutely crucial for numerical church growth. Churches with a significant ministry amongst this age group are the 'crown jewels' of the Church of England and need cherishing (and this is not always the case in current practice). Churches without a significant ministry amongst this age group should regard the creation of such a ministry as their top priority.

(6) Sixth, whatever long-term alternatives are adopted, in the short to medium term there will continue to be many multi church benefices. To date there has

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<sup>165</sup> An example of a diocese utilising the concept of 'focal minister' is St David's in Wales, see: <http://stdavids.churchinwales.org.uk/resources/diocesan-strategy-for-growth/> consulted 1 November 2013.



been very little training and support offered either to clergy or to congregations in how to do multi-church benefices well. It is clearly not enough to ask someone to take on an extra church or two and to ‘do your best’. We recommend that a major programme be undertaken to develop good national training resources for multi church leaders and congregations, based on the premise of raising up focal ministries as described in (4).

(7) Seventh, there remains significant confusion and inaction with regard to Christian initiation and promotion of discipleship, which needs to be overcome. The legacy of ‘Christendom’ – in which it is assumed that ‘most’ people get baptised and that schools and other bodies help encourage faith – dies hard. The waning of Christendom makes Christian faith counter-cultural – which clarifies what discipleship is and emphasises the need for energetic efforts to nurture discipleship. It is striking how the word ‘sacramental’ in church parlance often refers to being Eucharistic, thereby sidelining the second and most missional dominical sacrament of baptism – the sacrament intrinsic to numerical church growth. Seeking numerical church growth is about becoming fully sacramental. Essential metrics for whether the Church of England is numerical growing are the numbers of infants, children and adults being baptised and the numbers being admitted to communion and confirmed. We recommend that the national church, dioceses and local churches regard as one of their core aims as to increase markedly the number of those being baptised, confirmed and admitted to communion. This is most pressing with regard those aged 25 and over, since this is the age by which the majority of people come to faith. Messy Church is one of the great successes of the last

decade – but unless it leads to ‘messy baptism’ and ‘messy communion’, it will be only a partial success.

We note, in particular, the experience of the diocese of London which, after a period of decline has grown across the last two decades and has sought to maintain/increase the number of parochial clergy and operate a policy of ‘one parish, one priest’. That the diocese of London is far and away the best performing diocese of the Church of England in terms of numerical church growth is, we believe, connected to that policy. Whilst not all areas can emulate that policy of ‘one parish, one priest’, its central idea – that there should be a focal leader for each church – can be used anywhere.

Churches grow most where there is one leader for one community. The fundamental problem of the amalgamation approach that it is difficult if not impossible for anyone to lead several churches effectively all at once. Churches naturally and easily thrive when clustered around one leader. Their natural state is to each have their own leader, their own core person who is part of the community of the church rather than a fraction of a leader spread thinly and often preoccupied with the issues of other churches. Amalgamating ever more churches together is bad for church growth and the assumption that such amalgamations are ‘inevitable’ is misplaced fatalism. Recruitment of many more lay and ordained leaders is possible and necessary. The central structural change this report proposes is to move to a situation where there is a ‘focal leader’ in every church, whether ordained or not. This will be difficult, but ‘difficult’ is not ‘impossible’. Doom-mongers have long ago written off Christianity in England, but in many places it is growing. We do not need to accept the fatalism of the secularisation thesis and its eschatology of decline.

*An Afterword on Prayer:*

‘Prayer changes things ! REALLY REALLY!!!’ This was the comment of one of the eighty lay and ordained leaders whose insights were particularly sought for this report. Whilst not all those involved in the qualitative consultations expressed themselves so vigorously, a significant number stressed the value of prayer as the foundation for and numerical church growth.<sup>166</sup> There is a danger in any church activity of allowing a desire to be ‘spiritual’ to act as a displacement activity, which evades facing hard questions,. But there is an equal danger – of trying to construct human strategies for which the strength of God is not sought and which are all too human in their fragility. We regard prayer for the numerical growth of the Church of England as both legitimate and something that has to happen on a national and local scale, if the church is to grow numerically.

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<sup>166</sup> Teams/Q/10/27; TeamN/2/DG 9; AmalN/clergy/BK 9; TeamN/Clergy/BK 4-5;