



# Faith in the Future

1000 people share the story of their faith journey

# Facing the facts

## Reasons for the faith journeys study

We've been involved with youth ministry at Summer Madness for almost three decades now and throughout that time we have been amazed at the ways in which God has stirred the hearts and minds of young people during these types of 'get-away' experiences. As youth workers we are also well used to hearing anecdotal evidence in church circles about how and when people come to faith - and it is sometimes used to justify a preoccupation with 'youth ministry'. That was not our motivation here, our concern is for the whole mission of the whole church. We're all probably very aware of the strong \*public perception of declining church attendances and we would simply love to encourage real dialogue in our faith communities about Christian mission and service in wider society.

(\*The Nolan show recently ran a poll North and South in Ireland and determined that only 14% of under 50s go to church once a week or more and 42% of over 50s did the same)

## How might the results shape our approach to mission

The study attempts to analyse the current picture of the average church congregation in relation to their faith journeys - across all ages. The results themselves are not in any sense prescriptive. Although we did elicit quite a lot of discursive feedback from the participants the raw data simply portrays the outworking of the churches' current missional strategy. We each must draw our own conclusion. So our hope and desire is that we might have a discussion about the future of faith in our society and community and how the church can best reach out in love to those around us.

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### **Who should respond to the findings...**

Well if you are reading this, it probably means you! I know that Church leaders, Bishops, youth pastors, volunteers, parents, decision-makers and strategists within the church and para-church world will all wish to think this through. So I am slightly concerned about the 'by-stander effect' - where everyone in the 'crowd' thinks that someone else will make a move, call 999, etc. Please don't believe / hope / pray that someone else will take the initiative, you can make your own response.

It may only be asking some questions, or perhaps will be taking on some hard decisions.

### **What is next...**

We will try to make some space for those conversations to happen; a lunch 'launch' or two around the country, etc. We shall also ask if those with influence and responsibility for youth ministry of various sorts could initiate their own responses, within whatever context or church setting that might be. Ultimately this is a whole church concern and a shared inter-church concern so we expect that there might be several layers of conversation to be pursued. We don't believe that we have established all of the facts! We have begun to paint a picture and churches and denominations may wish to follow this up with their own research but at least one option is certainly off the table - complacency!

(The results from 1000 people across a wide variety of churches and contexts might not be conclusive but at least somewhat compelling. The survey itself is included in the appendices should you wish to undertake the survey on your own congregation or community)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Kee'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'John' written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name 'Kee'.

**John Kee**  
Director, Summer Madness

# Meet the respondents

## Denomination

- Baptist
- Church of Ireland
- Elim
- Methodist
- Non-denominational
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Other
- Roman Catholic



## Prior church connection



- **Always been connected**  
48%
- **Somewhat involved**  
32%
- **Involved then lapsed**  
10%
- **No prior connections**  
10%

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## Age

- **Under 20 yrs**  
8%
- **21 - 29 yrs**  
21%
- **30 - 39 yrs**  
21%
- **40 - 54 yrs**  
29%
- **55 - 65 yrs**  
15%
- **65+ yrs**  
6%




# How they came to faith



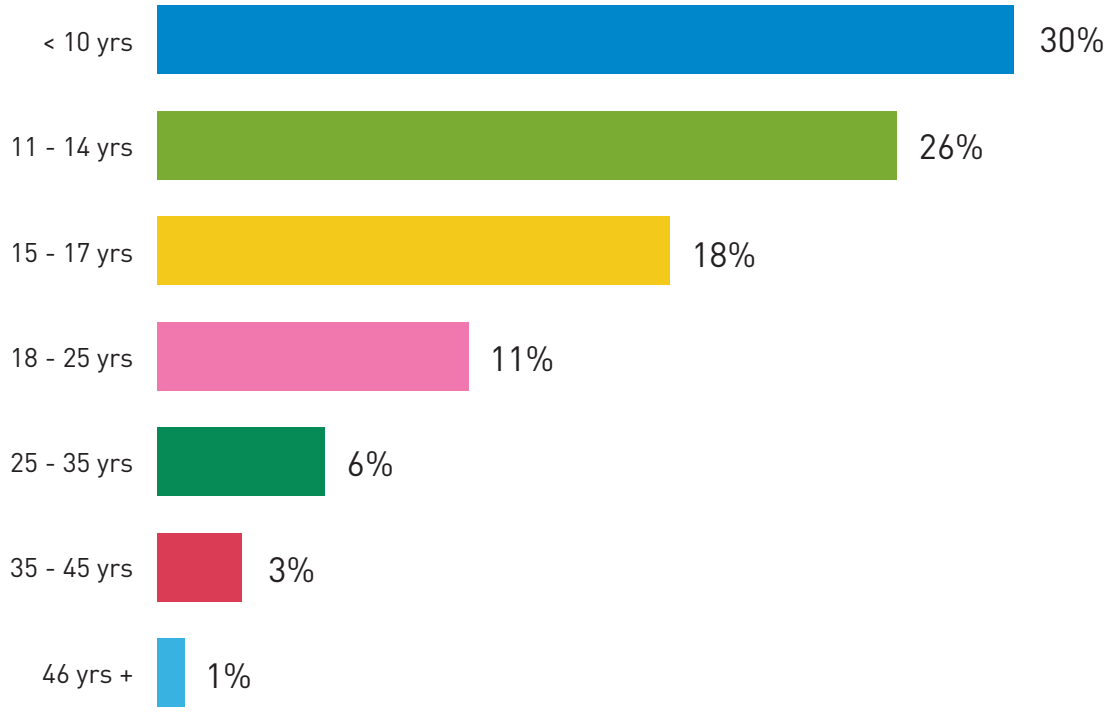
 **A definite conversion moment**  
26%

 **Both a process and an event**  
40%

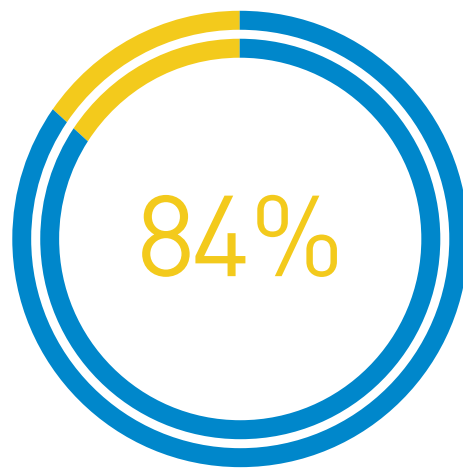
 **Can't remember a time without God**  
14%

 **Gradual awakening**  
20%

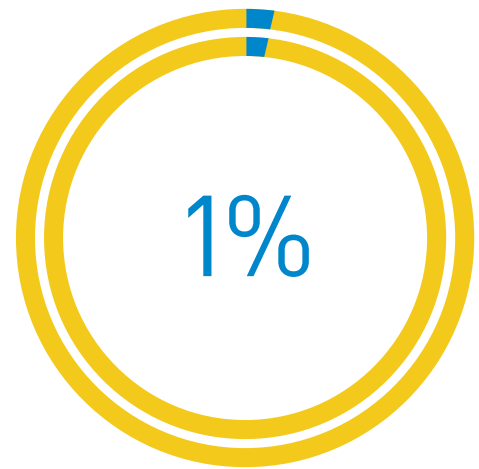
# When faith became real



5% Couldn't define an age

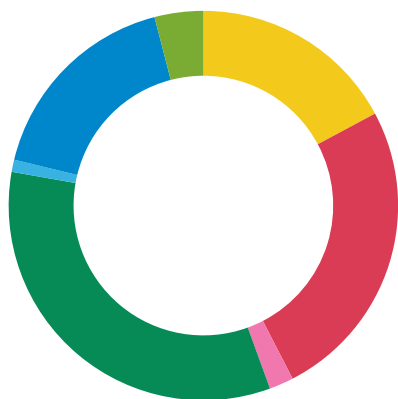


Came to faith before age 25 yrs



Came to faith after age 46 yrs

# What made the difference?



**Results U17 yrs**

- **Church / preaching**  
17%
- **Family**  
25%
- **None of the above**  
2%
- **Residential camp or other Christian event**  
34%
- **Reading the bible**  
1%
- **Relationship / influence of other Christian**  
17%
- **School meeting or project**  
4%



**Results 18 - 35 yrs**

- **Church / preaching**  
19%
- **Family**  
9%
- **None of the above**  
7%
- **Residential camp or other Christian event**  
16%
- **Reading the bible**  
5%
- **Relationship / influence of other Christian**  
44%



**Results 35+ yrs**

- **Church / preaching**  
37%
- **Family**  
12%
- **None of the above**  
12%
- **Residential camp or other Christian event**  
7%
- **Reading the bible**  
5%
- **Relationship / influence of other Christian**  
12%
- **Alpha / Christianity Explored / other**  
15%

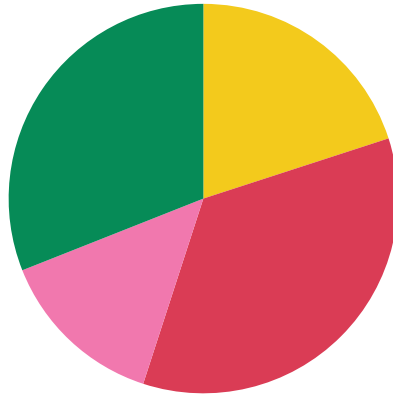


# Who made the difference?



**Results U17 yrs**

- Family member  
28%
- Friend or colleague  
12%
- Minister / Priest  
7%
- Not easy to identify a single individual  
30%
- Youth worker / Youth pastor  
23%



**Results 18 - 35 yrs**

- Family member  
20%
- Friend or colleague  
35%
- Minister / Priest  
14%
- Not easy to identify a single individual  
31%



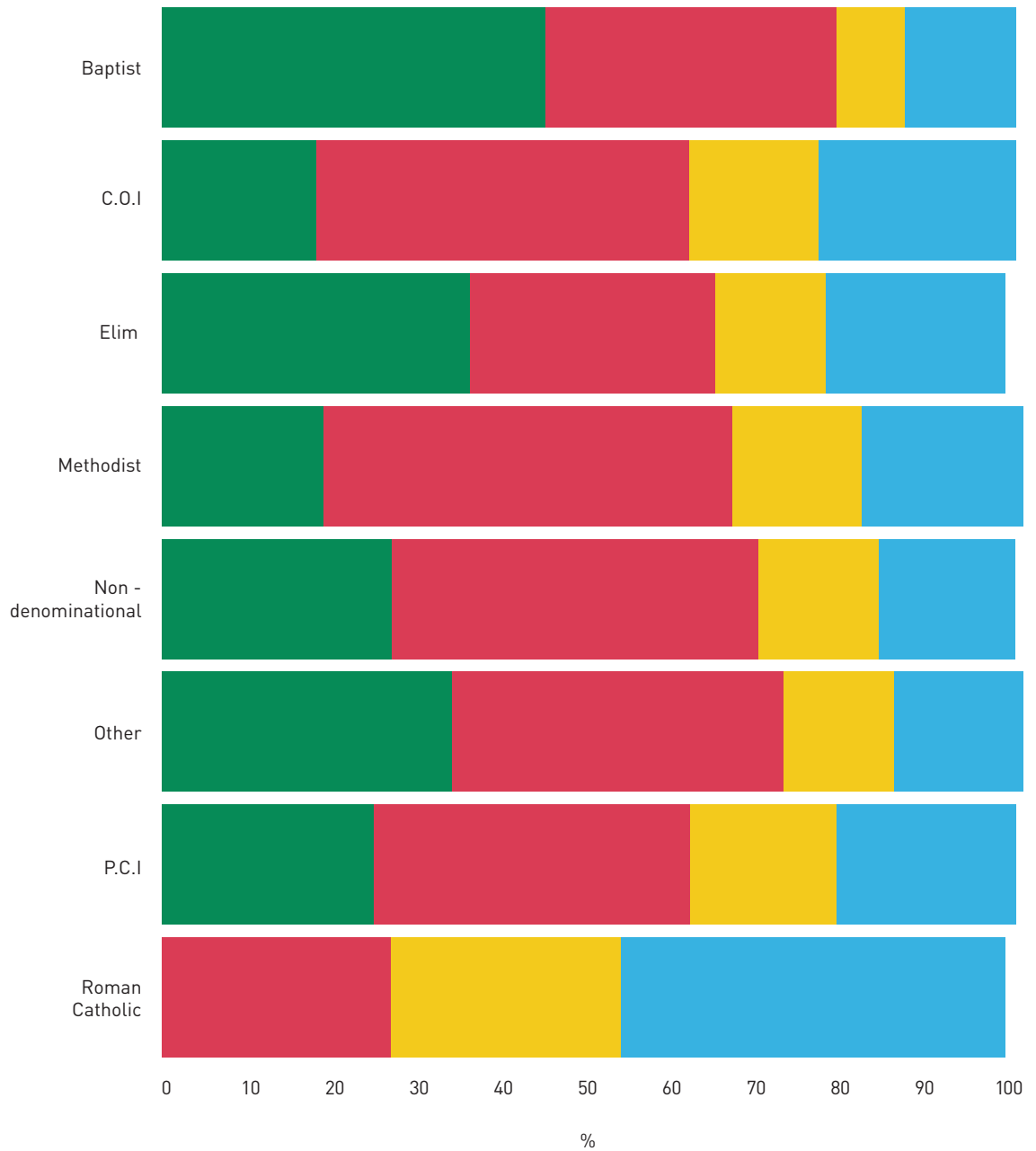
**Results 35+ yrs**

- Family member  
20%
- Friend or colleague  
27%
- Minister / Priest  
17%
- Not easy to identify a single individual  
36%

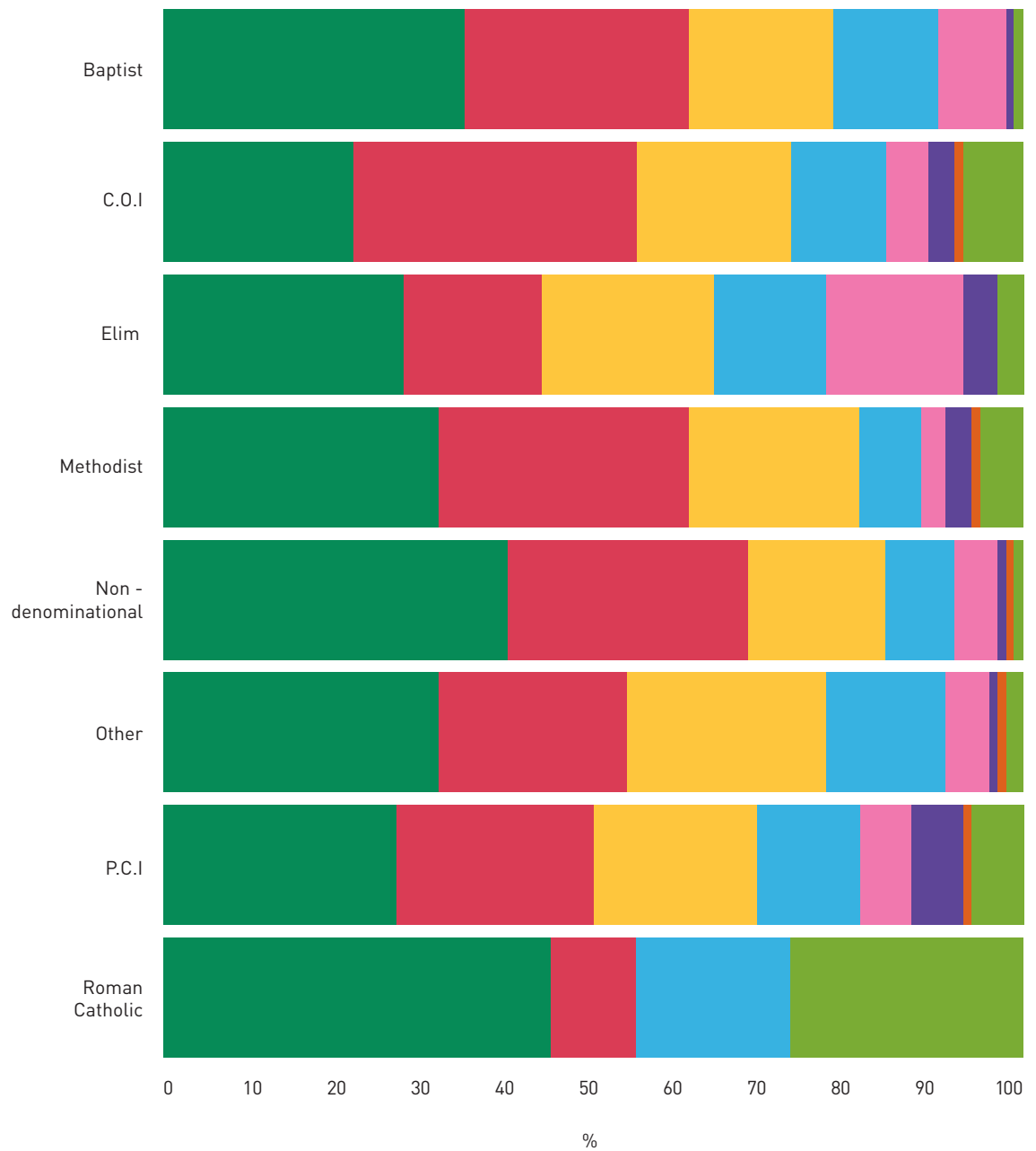
# Denomination differences

## Style of 'conversion'

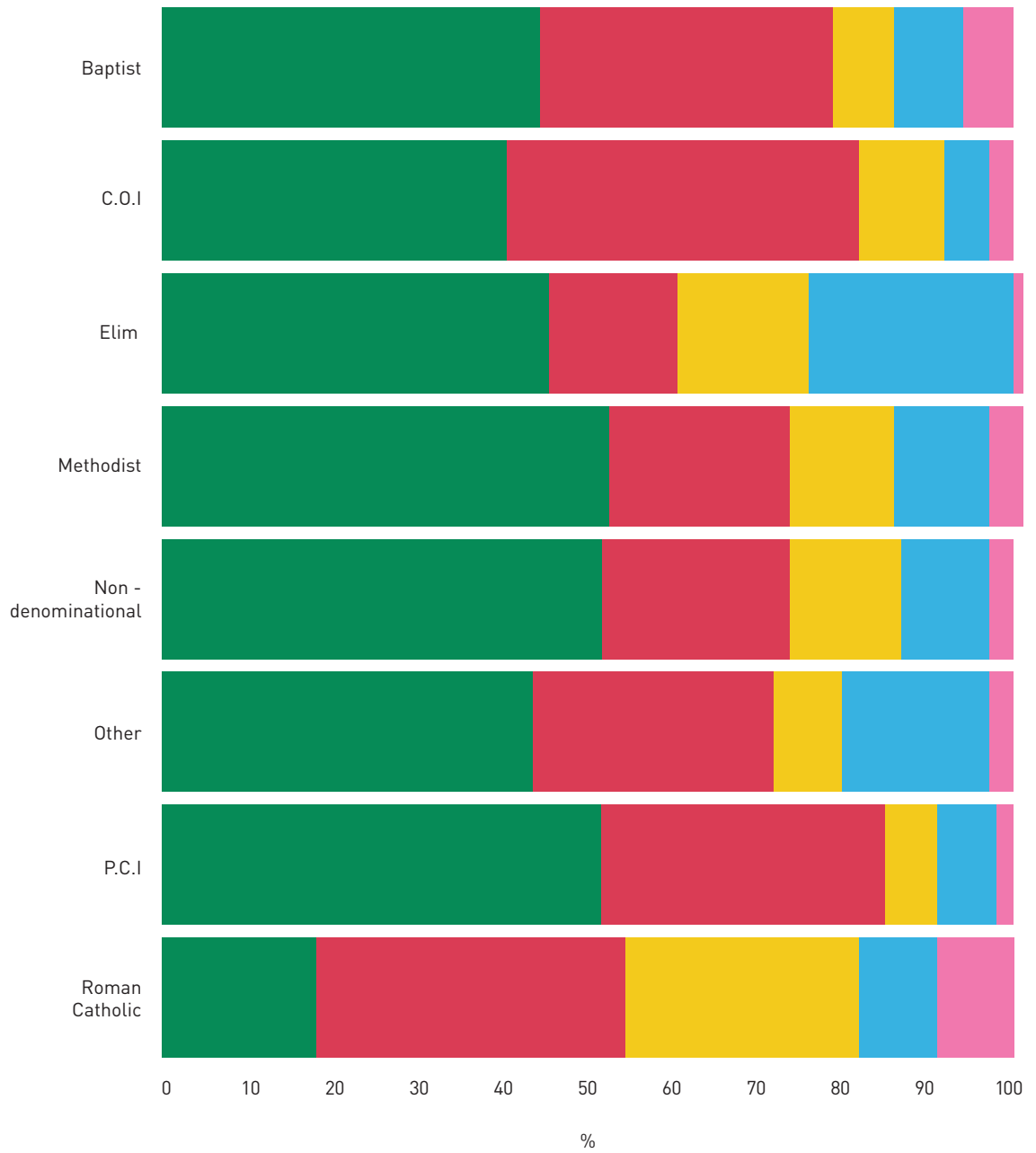
- A definite conversion moment
- Both a process and an event
- Can't remember a time without God
- Gradual awakening



## Age of 'conversion'



## Prior church connections



# Appendices

Our survey contained two larger discursive questions which provided some really important comments from our respondents. We have summarised the key themes from these comments in the pages below.

## Key themes from conversion 'details'.

Standout quote: It was like a jigsaw piece with numerous people playing small parts until one day it all seemed to click. But that was only the start of the journey as the journey still continues. With each step and each day I learn more. The most powerful witness is not necessarily a great preacher but the great people who practiced Christianity with passion and authenticity.

### **Losing faith and then re-commitment:**

- Faith walk dissipated 20-40 Return to faith followed a child's illness and was a personal journey with some key people on the way.
- A childhood faith became a distant experience. Then life's experiences brought me back to God.
- Made a childhood profession at 11. Drifted as a teenager. Dramatic faith experience at 40.
- I made that decision at a conversion moment - however because of lack of discipleship I floundered. Not fair to blame all on others...I didn't try either... however God spoke again after 5 years and I re-committed. Now going strong and loving the journey of faith...wonderful adventure that is being a Christian.
- I started my journey with God when I was a child and became a Christian at a young age, and had a strong relationship with Jesus up until my early 20's. I then started to doubt my faith and ask questions such as 'Do I believe because it's been what I've been brought up and taught to believe or because it's actually true?' I then spent the following nine months on a journey of self-discovery and discovered more about who I am and also that God is real and Jesus is who He said He was. This has greatly impacted me and more importantly who I am in Christ. I now have a stronger faith because I now know that God is real.
- Came to faith as a child. Walked away from God in my early twenties. Returned to God at 28 through the influence of a pastor / friend.
- Losing faith and finding it again over 20 yrs later.

### **Influence of Sunday School Teacher or Youth Leader:**

- I grew up in church and heard the gospel so many times but one day in Sunday School, however my teacher explained it, it was all clear to me and an obvious decision to make.
- It was definitely the influence of a youth worker who came to our church which I went to organisations in but was not too involved in who made an effort with us as young people and took an interest, and the opportunities she gave me to participate and help out at things were the times that my faith was tested and so became more real.
- Was most influenced by youth workers who were honest about their faith - both the good things and the struggles.
- My Sunday school teacher was the person who most influenced me and still 23 years later is still my greatest prayer warrior and a wonderful mentor.

- When I was younger I would have believed in God and went to church, but would never have said I was a Christian. Reason being I didn't think I was worthy enough. No one at the start told me that becoming a Christian was a journey. I felt that people had a 'now your saved you're own your own" approach. I met then a youth worker who challenged me, helped me to understand not everyone is perfect. That I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Now I tell the world I'm Christian unashamed of the judgements that will come with it.

### **Saw something different:**

- I grew up in a Christian home but had not considered faith for myself until something happened which turned me away from God completely (the actions of two Christians towards me). Following that a group of Christians from my church's youth fellowship befriended me and showed me kindness. I saw something different in them as a group of friends and wanted what they had. I discovered that was Jesus. One of these friends challenged me directly on my faith and the result was my personal recognition of Christ and my personal commitment to him.
- Impressed by a friend's quality and consistency of life, which led me to the camp where I was converted at 17.
- I came to faith through the influence of a couple training to plant a church. They always showed me such genuine love and took interest in me despite my stubbornness towards them and church.
- The biggest influences on my life have been the Christians who quietly and faithfully walk the walk rather than those who are vocal about it all.
- The undeniable presence of Jesus Christ in several people's lives.
- A couple of close friends came to faith and their lives changed dramatically. I had never seen this before and it had a huge impact.

### **Struggles with church but loving Jesus:**

- I grew up in a church going family, was bored senseless by the traditional church, then met Jesus during a youth worship event - that made things real for me! We've been journey deeper ever since.
- As a child I totally fell in love with God but the traditional church I grew up in actually took me further away from Him. I have now re-established the love connection with God that drew me in initially and have never been more joyful.

### **The work of the Holy Spirit:**

- At a youth meeting the Holy Spirit gripped my heart, convicted me of sin in my life and moved me to surrender my whole life to Christ. Everything changed. Jesus was not only Saviour but also Lord of my life.
- Baptism in Holy Spirit just over four years after committing my life to God. This was in 1994. This was a major crisis time in my life and spiritual journey which was painful at the time but ultimately massively life transforming. God redirected my life into a whole new arena of service, meaning and purpose for living. He also deepened my understanding of God's love for me in a way I had not experienced before. This deepening understanding is still a work in progress today.

### **The influence of parents:**

- My parents were missionaries and led me to Christ when I was 5 - our home was always full of God growing up.
- Grew up in a Christian home with amazing Christian, godly parents - what a privilege. Never didn't believe in God, or Jesus for that matter.
- Seeing faith lived out in the life of my parents was crucial.
- Yes. I was very far from God but heard mums prayers every night as I came in. One day when things were very bad and I caused a lot of problems, Mum told me she had given me to God and wasn't going to pray for me any more. I was shocked. Every night after that, the silence made me nervous. But she put a Bible in my room and even though I removed it, she replaced it, until one night after a very bad night and in my room at the point of suicide I picked up that Bible and, fighting with God, I read that he loved me no matter what. There I gave my heart to Him.
- My family have been an incredible witness in my life. I've seen faith lived out, day by day, in hard times and in the joyful moments. I cannot remember a time when I didn't know Jesus but I met him in my lowest of times.

### **The role of prayer:**

- I know that many people were praying for me.
- The continual fervent prayers of Godly Grandparents were vital in the conversions of my brother and myself. Today's churches need to get prayer back in its proper place if we are to see revival return to our land.
- A process lasting 20 years, and a praying grandmother.
- Granny spending time each evening with 4 of us to say our prayers, then she prayed for us aloud and by doing so taught us how to pray.
- Finding out afterwards that so many people had been praying for me for many years.
- Also I had a specific prayer answered in an amazing way.
- Grandmother prayed for me always.

### **Acceptance:**

- Once I cried out to God and first experienced his presence and knew he loved me, life all made more sense than ever. I was 15, went to church just for youth club, and someone allowed me to play my own music (Guns n Roses / Metallica) and just wanted to get to know me. They asked me about God and encouraged me to keep asking questions. Then about a month later I first met him and was undone. I thank God regularly for being allowed to play Guns n Roses and Metallica in a Methodist church hall and play 5-a-side whilst thinking about God. I'm still to this day really close with the guys who were key in that time in my life.



**Painful circumstances:**

- Bullied, turned to God.
- Suffered from a skin condition, doctors tried various medications to no avail. Prayed about situation and received complete healing of body and spirit in a short period.
- The death of my parents and the illness of my son from birth definitely made me more aware of my need to have a relationship with Jesus. It also makes you aware of what is really important in life.
- I suffered from illness and severe anxiety, which caused me to seek God.
- The death of my mother had a huge impact on me coming to faith in Jesus.
- Cousin was dying of cancer and The Lord used this to open my heart to him. Many painful trials that have shown me more and more every day, just how much The Lord loves us and others. I fail him so much and yet he is so merciful!

**Motivated by fear:**

- I made a commitment out of fear of going to hell rather than Jesus loving me so much...It took me ten years to realise the love bit.
- I remember being scared of dying and going to hell without my family. I knew what I had been saved from but I had no concept of being saved "to" anything or any concept of having a relationship with God.
- Young and fearful of going to hell and being separated from family.

**Reading the Bible, books or tracts:**

- I was searching and reading the bible and talking with God and even reading the prayer of salvation months before I figured out Jesus role - then I went on an Alpha course and it all clicked.
- My journey started reading an evolution textbook and thinking the evidence did work.
- I started reading the Bible for myself.
- I came to make a Christian commitment through reading a book by Billy Graham and seeing how it explained the mess of the world - through sin and they way to align oneself to Jesus.
- I actually came to faith as a result of reading a tract. 'Fully involved with the church, but not connected to Christ' best described me all those years ago.

### **Summer Madness: (key role for 16 people!)**

- The first time attended Summer Madness at the age of about 13/14, coming from a traditional church background and being a Christian started to seem "real" and a way to live, not just a Sunday thing. Summer Madness 2013 made me realise to the fullest, I need to live out my faith and what I believe.
- Had a serious encounter with Jesus during worship at a Summer Madness event.

# Advice for Church Leaders about Evangelism

## Key themes

### Just do it:

- Step up (into everything God has called you) and step out (into everywhere he has called you).
- Do it! Methods are secondary to getting out to people (or getting them in) to tell them about Jesus. If we wait for the perfect method we will fail to reach today's generation.
- Get out there and do it! We need to be in the streets reaching out and not sitting in our church buildings hoping people will come in.
- Actions speak louder than words. Show love, stop just talking about it!
- Get off your backside and do it.
- Go! Don't sit.
- Step out. Be bold. Get a move on. We're all in it together so let's support each other knowing that if we stumble as an individual or as a body there are many around us willing to pick us up again. Let's go!
- Get off your butt!
- Time is short. Life is a blink. Just do it.

### Get outside the walls of the church:

- The church must look outside its own walls reaching into community and responding to its needs while living out and proclaiming the gospel.
- Get out of the pews: Christ's people have to go out as never before as fewer people come to us and find what we do relevant. It's not about bums in pews, it's about souls in heaven.
- Get out there, Get out of the boat with faith, and meet others at their point of need.
- As a church, we can no longer expect people to come into our church. We will have to really take evangelism back onto the streets.
- We need to think outside the box or perhaps outside the church building. Should we not be taking the gospel to where the people are rather than expecting the people to come into the church? We must not water down the gospel but perhaps we need to be a little more creative in how we reach the lost!
- The church needs to 'leave the building' and get out among people sharing the love and truth of God in every context and level of society. If the people won't come to Church we must bring Jesus and the Church to them.
- Get out of your pews and go out into the community, find ways to connect.

- We need to go to people where they're at - we need to break out from the walls of church on Sunday morning and start to actually live out church as Jesus did.
- We need to get into the community and out of the buildings. The next generation is more important than the traditions (particularly when the traditions have little to do with the Gospel).
- Go to where the lost are. Don't wait for them to come to church.
- Time to get out of the building and back in the streets. Those highways and byways.
- Tear down the walls and meet people at their point of need with love
- Stop inviting people to a building or a Sunday service. Instead equip them for going out and being involved heavily in community. Stop mid weeks and join some form of club in your town and get to know people. Then invite them on an alpha course or something. Build the relationship first.
- We need to go to people and not live in our Christian bubbles or wait for them to come to us.

### **Love people / social justice / meeting needs:**

- Simple. Just love!
- There are a lot of broken people in this world. We need to shine the light of Jesus into these dark places. We need to show people they are loved and valued.
- Shut up and listen. Love first, ask questions later.
- The church has to Be Jesus to the broken, they key is being in the community. Turning the church inside out. Loving people with practical help and care.
- Not to condemn people but embrace their differences and show them love.
- We all need to show the love Jesus showed to those in need within our communities - addicts, homelessness, broken families, criminality etc.
- We need to continue to step outside our churches, to walk away from what is comfortable into the path of most resistance. Og Mandino says, 'Treat everyone you meet as if they were going to be dead by midnight. Extend all the care, kindness and understanding you can, with no thought of reward, and your life will never be the same.'
- Increasingly the right model is to meet physical needs, particularly in ways that make people say, "Why are these people doing this unselfishly? Why are they different?" The challenge is to be people who recognise the reality of this broken world and to be people who reach out rather than being a holy huddle (see James 2:15)
- As a church body do we show Christian practical help within the community that our church is in such as painting someone's home, gardening, etc.? Show Christ in what we do and be bold in sharing our faith as we do such tasks!!
- Be accepting of all no matter what background personality or beliefs. Love the young people as Jesus loves and accepts you.

- People need to feel loved by Jesus, not be preached at.
- If we aren't able to respond and care well for our hurting young people, we will not reach the next generation.
- We need to build sincere friendships with people and genuinely care for them. "People don't care how much you know, but they know how much you care".
- To really 'evangelise' we need to see shifts in our community and towns and cities that lead to the health and bettering of those spaces - evangelism will come after. Not be apologetic or hide our faith, but to be the influencers and the culture shapers that can see better education achieved in our lifetime; that can see better healthcare; that can see a political system not derived from conflict and stagnation but change for the better that breathes life into the community of this land. The pursuit of hope will be like a beacon on a hill that won't fail to draw people into life change in the name of Jesus.
- We need to love our neighbours. Faith in action is essential. Small acts of kindness.
- We need to show others we love them through practical ordinary things, feed the poor, take care of the widows and orphans, love justice, show mercy and we need to clearly preach the good news of Jesus Christ. People have closed their ears to high spiritual thinking that has no obvious impact on the community.
- In the same way that Christ loves us unconditionally we need to love others. People need to feel loved, respected, and valued as people not just as potential converts.
- Social justice is the key; people do not care about the words we have to say if they do not see action attached to them. Faith without works is dead; evangelism without action falls on deaf ears.
- Social action to back up words. Take on roles soon to be voided by govt. cut backs in social need. Meet needs of community in community for community.

### **Equip people for everyday evangelism:**

- Corporate church gathering should be about enabling and equipping God's people to minister in the places where they spend most of their time, i.e. work places/families, rather than sucking them into volunteering in the "church".
- My ecclesiology is that the church is for the nourishing, encouraging and up building of the 'saints'. Evangelism takes place in the workplace, across the garden fence etc. - the gospel is gossiped.
- Live out your faith in the everyday. Not just on a Sunday morning but in schools, workplaces and relationships.
- Church needs to equip all people in being missionaries in each of their own contexts. Less programmes and mission events and more focus on having intentional relationships with people outside the church.
- Seeing ourselves as informal missionaries rather than putting on events.
- Stop making your folks feel guilty about not attending events at church and send them out to get involved in things they enjoy where they will meet like minded people with whom they can build genuine relationships and hence have the right to share their faith with.

### **Discipleship is key:**

- Discipleship is key. Jesus said go and make disciples, not converts. A missional approach to life, under the leading and guiding of Holy Spirit is key.
- We must disciple the disciples to make disciples! Lower the 'evangelism' bar from some 'special' ministry or programmed event that allows us to opt out or abdicate our responsibility. At the same time raise the 'evangelism' bar by discipling all followers of Jesus that we are all called to point people to Him.
- Discipleship is a vital part of effective evangelism.
- Evangelism will need to have an emphasis on becoming disciples rather than just 'saved'.
- I have realised it's hard getting people to come to Christ; it's even harder getting them to stick at it - that's the biggest challenge.

### **A changed context:**

- We (our societies) have and are drifting soooooo far away from God's plan that I fear for our future and our well being.
- The church in Northern Ireland has a PR problem related to religious judgementalism.
- It is massively challenging to counter the idea that Christianity is irrelevant, bogus, sometimes overly judgmental on the one hand or soft on the other, intellectually daft and unscientific in a climate of marginalisation by the media in general and across increasingly secularised (sometime aggressively secularised) society in general. Oddly, however, being increasingly marginalised may allow Christianity's counter-cultural strengths (active concern for the poor and forgotten, an anti-materialistic/beauty-myth emphasis) to come to the fore.
- People of today are not really interested in where they are going to spend eternity.
- We have at least one "lost generation" who have little or no contact with our formal churches. Our Sunday schools are getting smaller and a large percentage of our congregations are made up of the older generation.
- The dynamics of younger people's lives have changed dramatically and we are not addressing this. We have to speak in the language of the popular press rather than The Times.
- Increasing relativism and secularisation have removed the clarity of what constitutes sinful behaviour. Christian values are no longer regarded as having merit.
- Secular life is becoming easier and more appealing for young people and increasingly the general public is portraying an anti-Christian ethos.
- Biggest challenge will be the secularisation of the UK.
- It is going to get tough with the laws marginalising Christianity and moral standards falling. People will have even less understanding of the message of Jesus than in the past. We will be working in a more hostile environment.

**Be real / authentic:**

- As Christians we need to live out our relationship with Christ and show integrity when dealing with others. People will watch us to see if our faith is real. Only then will they consider coming to church. Our lives should literally be slicing witness.
- Keep it real with folks and communicate in plain English. Don't be weird!
- Be real, don't preach but listen and show how faith can be an asset in peoples lives in a practical way.
- Be authentic. People now recognise it's not about strategy and entertainment. It's about authentic living in a broken world. Mission/evangelism should be about producing hope, changing communities not just producing respectable people with alleged good character!
- We need to be real, genuine and not self-promoting whilst having a love and compassion for the lost.
- The church needs to be real and not caught up in gimmicks to attract unbelievers.
- People want friends who are genuine and real. We (Christians) need to learn to live authentic lives (and allow each other to live these, messy as they may be) in community with other people, reflecting the trust and hope we have in Christ - unafraid to admit uncertainty and willing to accept and honestly grapple with the grey areas in life where we may not agree and not always have an answer.
- Be bold with great love. Be real - do not be afraid to be vulnerable, learn from your mistakes, say sorry, and talk about it! In a word - AUTHENTICITY.
- Don't do "sexy" or "cool" Christianity - do Jesus, and don't fluff it up. Be real.

**Don't compromise the truth:**

- Don't compromise on the core of the gospel for cheap worldly gimmicks.
- The church needs to be relevant without compromising core values and beliefs. We need to work to change culture, not attempt to go with the flow.
- A lot of the bible seems to be taken out of context, so stronger teaching is needed in churches. I hear a lot of non-Christians complaining about the choices and lifestyles of known Christians. When Christians don't live out the message it weakens the message of the Gospel that all Christians try to show/ share.
- Do not conform to the ways of the world!
- Be Biblically accurate rather than politically correct.
- We shouldn't be willing to compromise our beliefs just to evangelise.
- It's important to remain relevant to the world around us but not that expense of Biblical truth and teaching.
- You cannot take a back seat or be too nice and gentle! People need to get the hard hitting facts.

### **Time for a change:**

- Don't be stuck in the past. Times and technology change - need to adapt to what is current, use new social media sites, offer contemporary services that match the types of music people listen to on the radio/at clubs/gigs etc. rather than singing the same old dull songs in ye olde traditional style that no-one voluntarily listens to.
- We need to make both our buildings and our worship formats MUCH more contemporary to mean anything at all to generations with no traditional church background. We need also to let go of our love for tradition and be prepared to think outside the box!
- Making our faith relevant to the man in the street and not some fusty Victorian or even late 20th century thing. Jesus talked to all strata in society (not just middle class professionals). He also spoke in a contemporary language relevant to the context/listener. When the Anglican Book of Common Prayer was originally published, the intention was to revise it every 30 years to remain contemporary- its authors had it right even if the church didn't follow through!
- We need to change how we approach evangelism - hitting people over the head with KJV and handing out tracts and preaching on street corners doesn't work anymore - the world is hungry for God but they want real and meaningful spirituality: signs and wonders and Holy Spirit and Christians willing to live radical lives for God.
- The Church has been one of the largest driving forces behind people abandoning their faith. It has not always been a welcome place for the 'strangers in our midst'. Many people within our churches have looked down upon those who do not conform to their standards. If the Church is serious about evangelism then it must wake up and realize that it must be seen as a welcoming place for saint and sinner alike.
- The church needs to know how to treat each other within and display to the world the beauty of Christ as an amazing bride. Gossip, slander and backbiting is not living Gospel lives.

### **Unity:**

- Bitterness among different denominations is stupid. I believe is letting the devil gain victory. This love of God should unite us. We should not allow ourselves to become divided by secondary issues.
- Work to get rid of the scandal of disunity by engagement with all local churches in a united witness to the relevance of the gospel. A Church which refuses to recognise other denominations has nothing much to say to our divided society.
- If ALL Christian denominations work together we have the best hope of reaching those who have never met Christ. We must show those who are not Christians that we love and respect all Christians or why would they follow an example of criticism and judgement?
- UNITY!! Showing the world that there is one church of God who members just worship in different buildings and in different styles but to the one God.
- The sooner we begin to realise that other Christians are not the problem, and start to work towards true Biblical unity within the Body of Christ, the sooner the Light will shine in the darkness.



- Less about denomination and more for the kingdom.
- Working together as the bride of Christ.
- No single church or denomination can hope to do it alone. We have to work together in relational unity, trust and love across the denominations, generations and income brackets. Jesus is out there in the community with his sleeves rolled up waiting for us to join him. The church must leave the building. But the power comes from a passion for the Presence, not any specific formula.

#### **Focus on Men:**

- Males are the unevangelised masses on our doorstep. Church life, including workshop and preaching, needs to become less feminised and feeling-orientated. This is why we are losing our sons.
- There is a massive decline of men in the church. When was the last time you saw a husband in church on his own without the family? Yet compare that to how often you see the family in church without the husband. Win men you win the family.
- It's all about getting the men back out to church. They have disappeared from the pews.

#### **Intergenerational Focus:**

- Focus around all ages - in churches that don't reach out to youth, try and get teenagers involved with church.
- Don't just target youth but work with other age ranges too.
- Be intergenerational in your approach - bring young and old together in Christ.

#### **Focus on youth and children:**

- Need to focus on the children and youth - they are the next generation.
- We need to appreciate our young people and encourage them to be more involved.
- Think youth.
- Focus on children and young people - this ministry may look different to previous models of youth work.
- We need to engage our young people and keep connected with them.

#### **The priority of evangelism:**

- Top priority.
- It's one of the major things that has to be done for the church to progress. Evangelism and Discipleship are so important.
- The Gospel is the most important thing.

- Evangelism is vital. The Gospel must be preached. People need to know their need of a Saviour.
- It should be the number one priority. Investment should be made. Without evangelism there is no church. It's what we're called to do.
- We need to refocus as a church on seeing people coming into the kingdom; all too often we focus on programmes and providing for our members. Although these are good things, we need to have a passion for evangelism and break out of our safe comfort zones and proclaim the good news more than we ever have before!

**A few random quotes that raise various issues:**

- Stop wringing your hands about the parlous state of the church and start preaching about the fact that faith is about a relationship with God.
- I have no idea what evangelism is.
- I can't emphasise the importance of corporate prayer (not split into little groups) enough. No prayer, no power. Young people are not being shown by example how to pray so they are afraid of the prayer meeting and don't attend, they need to learn the importance of talking and listening to God so as not to do it their way.
- Be a voice, not an echo. Don't always be merely defending the faith, but also go on the offence, setting the standard in morality, integrity, compassion, joy and contentment. Know and believe the Bible; listen to and obey the Spirit's voice; claim the promises of God and believe that you can make a difference.
- Living in a rural context, I am disturbed at the way churches in the bigger towns, through no fault of their own, suck Christians out of rural villages and away from where I believe they can be the most use. If you like, we collect all the salt together in a few big saltshakers instead of spreading it. I would like to see groups of Christians from each village meeting to pray fervently for their neighbours, asking God to show them how best to reach them, supporting such local expressions of the Body as there may be, and then perhaps coming together with other similar groups once every so often for fellowship and encouragement - some kind of Christian Fellowship or Christian Network.
- The kingdom of God is power, not words. Less preaching more love and miracles!
- The sons of Issachar would say it should be a primary focus; we need to look at the times!
- The church has no clue how non-believers view them. As someone who has almost lost their faith I can look at it from both sides. Church just seems weird from the outside and lots of bible teachings seem unbelievable. Also bad connotations between right wing politicians in NI and USA quoting Christianity don't help. Need to strip out all that is cultural about churchy life and just show Jesus. Need to really think what is biblical and what is NI tradition.
- Always preach "ye must be born again".
- Forget religion and BE Church.
- Be radical and relevant.

- We need the presence of God in our churches, we need the holy spirit to move in the church, the people are the church and it is through God's people that God will move. Jesus told his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel baptising, healing the sick, and even raising the dead, that was his commission to them Jesus has not changed. We Christians are not obeying the word we need to awake and show to the world that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.
- "The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men." - EM Bounds - Power Through Prayer. If we are serious about God in our own lives and we seek him and are filled with the Holy Spirit and share his heart, everything else will fall into place.
- 95% of people who have left the church have not actually walked out on Christianity; they've walked out on religion/self-righteousness/Pharasee-ism instead. We need to show them the difference between religion and genuine Christian faith. We need to rediscover the gospel if we're going to be effective gospel witnesses.
- I do not believe evangelism to be a good/necessary thing.
- Worship God with all your heart. A worshipping people is irresistible both to the powerful life changing presence of God and to all who come into contact with it.
- Possibly radical Christianity - as in the first century - healing, speaking in tongues and really cheerful giving of ourselves and all we have. Thinking about the time we waste on television watching - do we need television?

## **Early responses to the report**

We asked a number of church leaders from across the denominations and organisations to provide some feedback on the survey and what it means for the Church moving forward.

## **Pat Storey**

### **Bishop of Meath and Kildare**

The results of the recent faith survey make fascinating reading. In one way there are no surprises, and yet the plain facts of the survey should make us sit up and listen – really listen to what they are saying.

#### **Here are a few key results which I particularly noticed and which are so relevant for today's Church:**

1. Of 100 people of faith, 84% came to faith at under 25 years of age and 74% of these were under 18.
2. 27% describe this 'coming to faith' as sudden and definite, 19% described it as gradual and 40% put it down to both a process and an event eg if they had been brought up in church circles but still had a moment when they made a decision.
3. The key role of youth residentials, camps and church youth groups played a central, integral part in both the process, and in the decision.

#### **What can we deduce from this? I would like to make a few suggestions:**

1. Youth work, children's work, and youth workers are not peripheral to church life. They are, and ought to be, utterly central to all that the church does
2. Youth leadership and leadership training is vital as a priority for the Church of Ireland if we are to really recognize the validity of these results, and put money and energy into making the best of this key information
3. Young people need to be taken seriously in the leadership of the local church eg Vestries, leading of worship, speaking, discipling. This is particularly true of decision-making. Young people and youth leaders need to be at the very core of church life.
4. If this is to happen, our central church meetings need to reflect this vacuum. Some things will need to change: dates and times of meetings are usually during the day when young adults are working. Meetings need to be less boring and more strategic (not just about admin but to include real discussion)
5. The big and small youth camps and residentials around the whole country need to be financially and spiritually supported from all leadership in the Church, including the House of Bishops. If the findings of this survey are to be taken seriously, then change needs to happen from the top down. At the end of the day, the Anglican church is a hierarchical structure and thus the House of Bishops would need to be consulted and encouraged to make necessary changes.
6. This has huge implications for our strategies for outreach. Most traditional church missions have very few young people at them, and they are literally preaching to the converted. Is there a place for a central vision and strategy for reaching young people and young adults under the age of 25, where often they are looking for something meaningful to which to commit, and which may last them then their whole lives. I came to faith at the age of 19 in my first year in University, and it was only the beginning (but it was a beginning) of a life of faith and church investment.

7. Money and energy needs to be invested into present and emerging leaders in order that the Church resources a favourable context for young people to come to, and to grow in, a living faith.

It is interesting simply to note that 1 in 100 people come to faith at the age of 45+ and yet most of our leaders and parishioners are well over this age bracket. Is there more research that could be undertaken to consider the integration of young adults into central church life in Parishes, Dioceses and at central committee level?

There are shining examples where this is actually happening and we can only applaud the young adults concerned who are willing to give up their time and energy to sometimes sit through boring meetings, but who are determined to make a difference for the future. Some meetings are intrinsically boring though, as business just has to get done by someone, but I do feel that we could have more strategic discussions if time were so allotted.

## **Peter Lynas**

Director Evangelical Alliance NI

This is a really helpful piece of work by the team at Summer Madness providing statistically robust data that really should cause people to pause and think. The first key insight confirms what many have suspected for some time – that almost three quarters of those who are Christians came to faith before they were 18.

This research shows the importance of family, residential camps and other Christian events. Youth workers also play a key role, but as people enter their twenties friends become the most significant influence. It is so important that the church invests in families and effective work with children and young people.

Research conducted for the BBC shows that 42% of people over 50 go to church but only 10% of 18-24 year olds go to church weekly. Given that most people meet Jesus before they turn 18 and so few 18-24 years olds go to church, we have a real problem. This survey suggests that the church is not good at attracting those who are over 18 and so we are going to have to significantly change the way we do evangelism.

The other hugely challenging statistic is that only 1% of people come to faith over 46 years old. This means that 42% of the population has almost no likelihood of meeting Jesus unless we radically change things. This is possibly the most worrying result of the survey. The fact that most of the church is over 50, and yet almost no-one over 50 is coming to faith should raise serious questions. It means that evangelism as a way of life is not being modeled in most churches.

However, I am encouraged that everywhere I go at the minute I am hearing stories of people meeting Jesus. The pastoral care model of looking after those already within the church hasn't worked. Keeping an aquarium is no longer an option – its time to go fishing! The good news from surveys in the rest of the UK is that Christians are becoming bolder in talking about Jesus – a third had talked about Jesus in the last week and two thirds in the last month. As people get older friends are the most significant influence and so we need to train people in how to talk about Jesus to their friends.

Please invest time in reading this report and working out what it means for you in your context. Data is great, but only if it directs our actions.

## **John Peacock**

(BA Hons) Degree Programme Leader - Youth Link

Summer Madness recently surveyed 1000 people from a wide range of denominational backgrounds about how and why they came to faith. The results give us some hard evidence of what we intuitively knew but nonetheless important to make us sit up and respond if we want to see our churches grow and develop.

85% of those surveyed began their faith journey under the age of 25 and 74% under the age of 18. Should churches be channelling 85% of their resources to work with this age group or at least ensuring that they have a robust strategy for reaching them?

19% of those surveyed, pointed to their coming to faith being a gradual process and a further 40% pointed to a process and an event. 23% pointed to a youth worker/youth pastor making a difference in their faith journey (as opposed to 7% stating a minister/priest). Is it reasonable to conclude from this that there is significant benefit to be gained by churches employing youth workers/youth ministers to have an ongoing long term relationship with young people and travelling with them on their faith journey?

Comments from survey participants clearly point to the value of ongoing organisations such as youth fellowships as well as bigger one-off events such as summer camps.

While volunteers, families and friends have a great influence on young people's lives, this survey supports the value of investing in the training of youth workers and youth ministers so that they are equipped to be role models for the next generation.

Comments in this survey also indicate that young people (and older people) are no longer impressed by words alone but want to see churches and Christian leaders put their words into action and take the lead in social action and social justice. Respondents commented on the need for churches to think outside 'the box' and outside their own walls to the community around them.



## John Duncan

Executive Director YFCI Foundation for the Nations

There's a proverb in English which says: "Make an impression on the clay while it is soft." The wisdom of that is wonderfully illustrated by this Faith Survey. It's an enormously-encouraging piece of work - unless your calling happens to be outreach to the elderly! We have always known anecdotally that most people come to faith in Jesus early in life. Now we have careful research to back up the anecdotes, and the figures are stark. No fewer than 84% of the 1000+ Christians surveyed had made their commitment to Christ before the age of 25. Only 1% had done so after the age of 46 - and lest you think that the respondents were all young people, about 4 in 10 of them were over the age of 40. That's an enormous bias in favour of youth work, and it provokes one clear question to anyone in church leadership. If evangelism and discipleship are your priorities, and if as seems likely, that is most effective among the young, does your church budget reflect that priority?

Careful reading of the responses to the survey provide great encouragement to everyone involved in Christian work at any level. Ministers, youth pastors and youth workers are mentioned frequently as contributors to someone's decision to follow Christ, but so are Sunday-school teachers, BB and GB leaders, godly parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and school and university friends. Camps and other Christian events are mentioned repeatedly, and if you've ever helped with any christian event in Northern Ireland - all of them and more were referenced in the survey as contributors to the spiritual conversion or growth of someone, as were tracts, books, music and Christian concerts. And of course, the Bible was mentioned, although significantly, the question of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8: "How can I understand what I am reading unless someone explains it to me?" - was borne out by the survey. Only 1% quoted the Bible on its own as the key "accelerant" in their conversion. Can we presume that the other 99% needed to see it lived out, fleshed out or explained to them?

This survey is not for shelving. It deserves to be read in detail, analysed and dissected by every church leadership team and by every Christian organisation. Churches can't drop all their other programmes and concentrate solely on youth work. Their mandate is "from the cradle to the grave". But given the overwhelming evidence of this and other similar surveys, it might be time for a radical rethink of budget priorities, and in particular, whether enough is being poured into those denominational and other organisations whose specific mandate is "youth work". If the key priority in investment is "the best return for the money" the answers provided by this survey speak for themselves.

## **Graeme Thompson**

Youth Development Officer - PCI

I get a little fed up with people quoting statistics about the number of people who have come to faith by the age of 18 (or 17 or whatever made up age is used) as I have no doubt that what they are quoting is a fourth hand, made up statistic which has absolutely no basis in scientific research or reality. Yet we all have a feeling that there may be some truth in the statement so people keep on repeating it and we keep on wondering what the truth is. For that reason, this is a significant and useful survey which has taken a lot of effort and received a significant response so should make all of us in the church within this Island sit up and take note. But what does it tell us exactly?

First of all we should note that there is a good breadth of response in terms of age and the various sectors within the protestant, evangelical church. Also, the statistics on how and when people came to faith seem to ring true to what we might expect, so it is useful to have that response, though even with a large sample like this, we need to be careful what definitive statistical significance we give to this. For the purposes of this reflection, though, let us assume that this is a reasonable reflection of the coming-to-faith experience of the sector who have responded. Even if such a large proportion came to faith before age 25, we need to be careful what conclusions are drawn in terms of future ministry. For instance, as much as it may tell us about the success and importance of reaching under 25s, it may tell us more about how the church is poor at intentionally reaching over 25s. So we need more detail, probably qualitative data, for us to understand more about people's stories – yes, it should encourage us to continue to invest in ministry with those under 25, but it should cause us to ask much bigger questions too.

There is an interesting pattern on the influences on faith. The importance of landmark events such as residential events is underlined, but more so is the influence of a steady influence of important relationships in a person's life. Again, we need to know more and be careful about drawing too many quick conclusions – for instance, it would be dangerous to assume that only 1% of under 17s who came to faith were influenced by reading the Bible! Though preaching becomes more influential with the older age groups, perhaps this should cause us to wonder about how we teach the bible to those who are younger. In conclusion, it is the word cloud of recurring themes from the open responses which I find particularly interesting: Friends, Church, Bible, Family. In terms of our future reflections on youth ministry, these are 4 words I would certainly love us to think about very carefully!

## **Dr. David Rock**

Team Leader Irish Methodist Youth & Children's Dept.

For me the encouraging thing about this piece of research is that the vast majority of people came to faith before the age of 25. If we can encourage the conversations to happen with families and young people about faith whether inside or outside the church before this point there is more chance that faith will be awakened. **Our dilemma is how do we make those links again?**

### **So my questions are:**

1. If the church is in steady decline and we are reaching approximately 60% of those who are involved somewhat or completely during the early years, how long before the church as we know it dies?
2. If events play a part in choosing faith, what else can we as a church do to encourage parents, children's and youth leaders? Can we do events differently so that more children and young people come to faith? Should the concentration be on children rather than young people?
3. If the relationships that are made through connections with church are as important as the church itself, what do we need to do differently to encourage better relationships, within church and outside of it, that will lead to faith?
4. This information is helpful for those who have a connection already with the church, but how do we connect with those outside the church?
5. How does church (people) need to change in its thinking to become more missional (outward looking)? If it doesn't the church as we understand it will decline even more.

## Mitch

### Director Crown Jesus Ministries

1. No big surprises...phew! This is a good thing. it shows that the church/ agencies are not disconnected from reality as much as I sometimes fear.
2. My heart is strangely warmed by the feedback section 'what would you like to say to Church leaders about the future?' Just do it, get outside the walls, equip people for everyday evangelism, don't compromise truth and making a priority on evangelism are wonderful wise and practical words. I suspect a modern day letter from the Apostle Paul would include these.
3. 'Who helped in the process': Love the fact that it cannot be put down to a particular person or group of persons. Across all the age ranges the 'not easy to identify a single individual' is strong. This highlights the need for diversity in our outreach efforts and I am reminded by the results that salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit not the work of individuals.
4. One challenge that stand out: How effectively we are connecting with the disconnected? On the results "prior church connections" it highlights that not many unchurched people are coming to faith through the most prominent denominations. Culturally we are seeing a significant increase of unchurched people and we need to take significant steps forward in how we connect with them effectively. Congratulation to Elim on that result!

# Survey Questions

## 1. Which of these statements best describes the start of your journey with God?

A definite conversion moment  
Gradual awakening  
Both a process and an event  
Can't remember a time without God

## 2. At what age did you become a Christian/start your walk with God?

<10 yrs  
11-14 yrs  
15-17 yrs  
18-25 yrs  
25-35 yrs  
35-45 yrs  
46 yrs +

## 3. What best describes the crucial context/influence regarding your conversion to Christ?

Reading the bible  
Church / preaching  
Family  
Relationship / influence of other Christian  
Residential camp or festival  
Other Christian event or ministry  
School meeting or project

## 4. Who was the most influential in you coming to faith?

Not easy to identify a single individual  
Youth worker / youth pastor  
Minister / priest  
Friend or colleague  
Family member

## 5. Any specific aspects of this journey you might care to mention?

## 6. How would you describe your church connections before finding faith?

Somewhat involved – but it hadn't really connected before  
Have always been well connected to church  
Was quite involved at a time but stopped going for various reasons  
No church connection at all

## 7. What have you found to be the greatest support in sustaining your Christian walk?

## 8. Do you exercise any Christian leadership role in the church or other context?

Yes  
No

**9. If yes, could you identify which is your primary role?**

Minister of religion  
Volunteer in local church work  
Paid staff in Christian ministry  
Volunteer role in other Christian context

**10. What would you say to the church regarding the challenge of evangelism in the next 10 years?**

**11. Gender?**

Male  
Female

**12. Age?**

Under 20  
20-29  
30-39  
40-54  
55-65  
65+

**13. Where are you currently living?**

Belfast  
Co. Armagh  
Co. Antrim  
Co. Londonderry  
Co. Down  
Co. Fermanagh  
Co. Tyrone  
Dublin  
Republic of Ireland  
Other

**14. Denominational Affiliation?**

Baptist  
Church of Ireland  
Elim  
Free Presbyterian  
Methodist  
Non-denominational  
Other  
Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
Reformed Presbyterian Church  
Roman Catholic



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