



EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE IRELAND  
2018

# GROWING & VIBRANT

A census and survey of  
**Christian Churches**  
**Beyond the Traditional**  
**Four Main Denominations**

## MAIN POINTS

### A Growing Church

- The survey identified over 500 non-mainstream Christian Churches across Ireland.
- 58% have grown in size over the last five years and only 11% report a decline in numbers.
- 88% expect to see further growth over the next five years.

### A Vibrant Church

- 46% of members are under 30 years of age, while 75% are under 50 years of age.
- An average of 5 gatherings per week attended by the majority of members.
- A strong emphasis on working within their community.

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# REPORT SUMMARY

**T**raditionally, discussion of Christianity in Ireland concentrated on 'the Four Main Churches' – Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist. Other forms of Christianity were usually seen as insignificant, both statistically and in terms of societal influence. However, in recent years the shifting religious landscape has rendered this traditional classification obsolete. There is much anecdotal evidence of the growth of Christianity beyond the traditional four main denominations, but little in the way of verified statistics and analysis. The official Irish government census is of little help in this regard. There is no central authority within Evangelicalism so, when completing census forms, Evangelicals use a whole host of terms to describe themselves, ranging from the name of their individual congregation to simply writing in 'Christian.'

This report deals with the findings of a census and survey of Evangelical Christian churches beyond the traditional four main denominations carried out by Evangelical Alliance Ireland (EAI) over the course of 2017. Of course there are considerable numbers of Evangelical congregations and individual Evangelical believers in the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church and Methodist Church. There is even a movement of 'Evangelical Catholics' in the Roman Catholic Church. This report should not be interpreted as a survey of Evangelicalism as a whole in the Irish Republic, but rather as of that hitherto underreported segment of Evangelicalism which falls outside the old 'Four Main Churches' classification.

Even the title of the report posed a problem, as common designations for such churches are notoriously inaccurate. 'Independent' would be incorrect as many of these churches belong to denominations – varying in size from just a handful of member churches to over a hundred. Many commentators refer to 'new' churches, and certainly the great majority of these congregations have sprung up in the last 50 years – but a handful are considerably older. Therefore, we have chosen the clumsy, but more accurate, designation of 'Evangelical churches beyond the traditional four main denominations.'

The census or count of churches identified a total of five hundred and four (504) such churches which were spread across all twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland. The heaviest concentration of churches was in the Dublin area (141), followed by Cork (45), Kildare (33), Galway (27) and Louth (24).

Four hundred and forty-eight (448) churches were contacted either by email or by telephone and were requested to complete a survey. One hundred and eighteen (118) valid responses were received giving a response rate of 26.30% of those contacted or 23.41% of total active churches.

The findings of the survey point to a young, active and growing church which is highly representative of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Ireland of today. This is in stark contrast to the overall picture of gradual decline and aging congregations reported by the older, more traditional Churches mentioned above and which is frequently accepted as being a true picture of Christian activity in Ireland today. This survey goes a long way to showing that this is not the complete picture.

In summary, the sector of Evangelical churches beyond the traditional four main denominations was found to be relatively young with 56.78% of churches being less than 15 years old. The congregations of these churches were, by and large, as diverse as Irish society. 56.41% of them described themselves as ethnically mixed and 18.80% as predominantly African. Only 21.37% of responding churches described themselves as being predominantly Irish. Churches were requested to have regard to the country of origin of members, rather than current citizenship, when answering this question. Membership was also evenly spread across age groups with 46% being under thirty years of age.

When asked about their growth or decline, 58.26% reported either some or significant growth in the last five years with only 11.31% reporting any decline. Expectations of future growth were likewise very strong with 88.70% of churches expecting to experience growth over the next five years.

The majority of churches were set up as either Companies Limited by Guarantee or as Trusts. The average size of churches was in the 41 – 60 person bracket with 75.22% of churches having less than 100 members. Churches are very active with a mean of 4.9 meetings or services per week attended by the majority of members. In terms of activities they tended to prioritise In-House Faith Development, Evangelism, Prayer and Community Outreach programmes.

Taken in its entirety the survey paints a picture of a very active and growing church which is appealing to people of all ages and backgrounds.

## BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

In early 2017 Evangelical Alliance Ireland (EAI) decided to review and update its database of Evangelical churches in Ireland not belonging to either the Roman Catholic tradition or to one of the three older Protestant churches, (The Church of Ireland, The Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church.)

EAI had a number of aims in mind while conducting this review:

- to arrive at a realistic count of the number of such churches in Ireland.
- to chart the location of these churches
- to measure the size, activity levels and health of the churches.

We went about this task in two ways.

Firstly, we attempted to identify as many churches as possible in a variety of ways, as outlined below, building towards as complete a listing of churches as possible. Secondly, we invited all churches to participate in a short survey in order to get a more in-depth picture of their activities. The survey was conducted both on-line and by manual survey instruments and all churches were invited to participate.

The above work was carried out in the period from December 2016 to October 2017.

The following report details the results of the above efforts and in particular the results of the survey of churches. While the census count does not purport to be 100% complete in that we cannot guarantee that all churches are included, we can, with a reasonable degree of certainty, be satisfied that we have captured the majority of such churches. In regard to the survey we can also confidently assert that the survey results represent an adequate sample level of the total population of Evangelical churches outside of the traditional four main denominations and, as such, gives an accurate picture of the current situation in Ireland.

## CENSUS RESULTS

It is notoriously difficult to put a figure on the exact number of Evangelical churches outside of the traditional four main denominations operating in the Republic of Ireland. Nevertheless, we attempted to do this in the following manner.

We contacted as many churches on our current database as possible by telephone and confirmed their details. We did this to ensure that all the churches on our database remained active. We also requested details from them of any other local churches that they might be aware of and we added these to the existing database, contacting them also for confirmation of their details. We then trawled through any known on-line resources for lists of churches and cross-checked these against our database. After checking that churches that were new to us had an up to date on-line presence or

could be contacted by phone, we added them to our database. This enabled us to get an accurate picture of the numbers and locations of churches, deleting churches that were no longer active while adding new churches that we were previously unaware of. A total of 124 churches were newly identified while 14 churches were deleted

The result of the above exercise was the identification of a total of 504 active churches situated in the Republic of Ireland.

## SURVEY RESULTS

### Population

The survey was conducted among Evangelical churches outside of the traditional four main denominations. The survey was conducted in association with a census of the same group of churches. The aims of the joint operation were to:

1. Establish the number and location of churches (see above)
2. Gain insight into the overall makeup of the churches in terms of their demographics
3. Establish the priorities of the churches in terms of their operations
4. Measure the past performance and future growth prospects of the churches

### Response Rates

The survey of churches took place between December 2016 and October of 2017. Respondents were contacted firstly by email and directed to an online survey. This email was then repeated after a number of weeks. A team of researchers also telephoned individual churches and forwarded manual survey instruments to those who indicated a willingness to respond.

Three hundred and forty-eight (348) churches were initially contacted by email. Approximately one hundred additional churches were contacted individually either by researchers or, in the case of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), through their denominational head office. This brought the total number of churches contacted to approximately four hundred and forty-eight (448). The total population of such churches in Ireland was subsequently found to be 504 (see above)

A total of one hundred and twenty-nine (129) responses were received. Of these, eight (8) were found to be duplicate responses and were removed from the survey. An additional three (3) responses were found to come from Methodist or Church of Ireland churches which were outside the scope of the survey. These were also removed. This left a total of one hundred and eighteen (118) valid responses. This represents a valid response rate of 26.34% of those directly contacted or 23.41% of all identified Evangelical churches outside of the traditional four main denominations.

# CHURCH LOCATIONS AND RESPONSE RATE BY LOCATION

Evangelical churches beyond the traditional four main denominations were found in every county in Ireland. The majority of churches, 141 or 28% of the total, were located in Dublin city and county. Dublin plays host to the largest number of churches by some distance. The next highest density of churches was to be found in County Cork with 45 churches or 8.9% of the total, followed by Kildare, Galway, Louth and Kerry, all of whom had in excess of 20 churches.

The tables below show the number and percentage of churches in each county and the survey response rates per county. Responses were received from 22 of the 26 counties and rates were approximately equal to the church density rate in each county.

## CHURCH NUMBERS BY COUNTY

County	No. of Churches	% per County
Dublin	141	28.0%
Cork	45	8.9%
Kildare	33	6.5%
Galway	27	5.4%
Louth	24	4.8%
Kerry	22	4.4%
Limerick	20	4.0%
Meath	20	4.0%
Waterford	20	4.0%
Donegal	16	3.2%
Westmeath	15	3.0%
Wicklow	15	3.0%
Clare	14	2.8%
Carlow	13	2.6%
Wexford	13	2.6%
Tipperary	11	2.2%
Laois	9	1.8%
Mayo	9	1.8%
Longford	7	1.4%
Cavan	6	1.2%
Monaghan	5	1.0%
Offaly	5	1.0%
Kilkenny	4	0.8%
Leitrim	4	0.8%
Roscommon	3	0.6%
Sligo	3	0.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## SURVEY RESPONSE RATES PER COUNTY

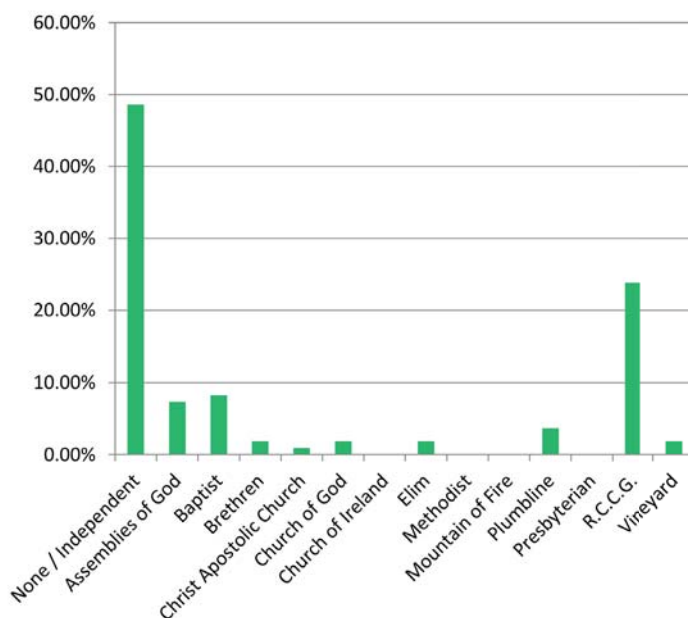
County	No.	%
Dublin	35	29.7%
Cork	11	9.3%
Kildare	6	5.1%
Galway	10	8.5%
Louth	2	1.7%
Kerry	3	2.5%
Limerick	7	5.9%
Meath	5	4.2%
Waterford	3	2.5%
Donegal	3	2.5%
Westmeath	5	4.2%
Wicklow	8	6.8%
Clare	1	0.8%
Carlow	0	0%
Wexford	4	3.4%
Tipperary	0	0%
Laois	2	1.7%
Mayo	4	3.4%
Longford	1	0.8%
Cavan	1	0.8%
Monaghan	0	0%
Offaly	3	2.5%
Kilkenny	2	1.7%
Leitrim	1	0.8%
Roscommon	1	0.8%
Sligo	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	

## CHURCH DENOMINATIONS

**Question: Please identify any denomination that you are part of.**

A total of 109 churches responded to this question with 9 abstentions. Of these almost half of those responding (53 or 48.62%) identified themselves as being non-denominational or independent. The next largest group was the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) (26 respondents or 23.85%), then came Baptist churches (9 or 8.26%) followed by Assemblies of God (now renamed as Christian Churches Ireland) (8 or 7.34%).

Answer Choices	Responses	
None / Independent	48.62%	53
Assemblies of God (now known as Christian Churches Ireland)	7.34%	8
Baptist	8.26%	9
Brethren	1.83%	2
Christ Apostolic Church	0.92%	1
Church of God	1.83%	2
Elim	1.83%	2
Mountain of Fire	0%	0
Plumblin	3.67%	4
R.C.C.G.	23.85%	26
Vineyard	1.83%	2
Other	13.76%	15
Answered 109		
Skipped 9		

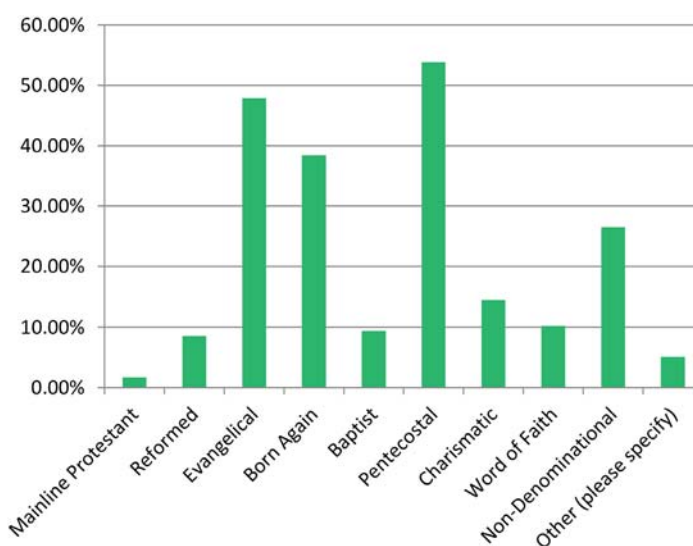


## CHURCH CATEGORIES

**Question: Which of the following would best describe your church? (you may choose more than one category)**

The responses to this question point to the interchangeability and lack of clarity around labels in this sector. Of the two largest groupings, Pentecostal (63) and Evangelical (56), 23 churches used both categories. Another way of looking at this is that 40 Pentecostal churches did not describe themselves as Evangelical and 33 Evangelical churches did not describe themselves as Pentecostal.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Mainline Protestant	1.71%	2
Reformed	8.55%	10
Evangelical	47.86%	56
Born Again	38.46%	45
Baptist	9.40%	11
Pentecostal	53.85%	63
Charismatic	14.53%	17
Word of Faith	10.26%	12
Non-Denominational	26.50%	31
Other	5.13%	6
Answered 117		
Skipped 1		



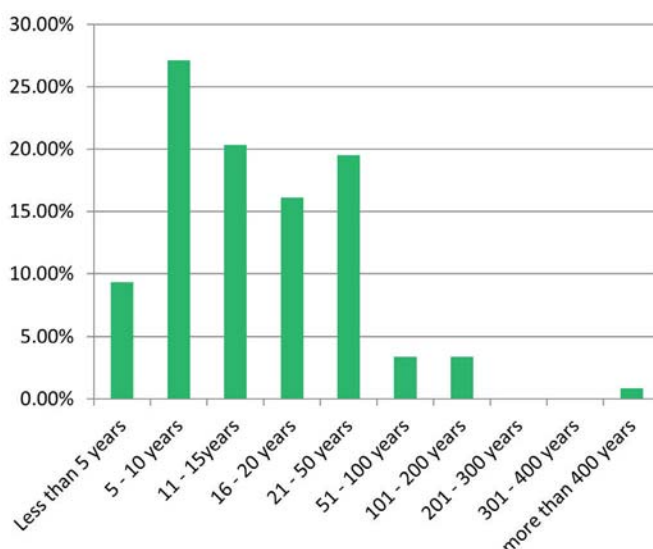


## CHURCH AGE

**Question: How long has your own individual church been in existence? (your own church, not your denomination)**

The majority of churches (56.78%) are less than 15 years old and only 9.32% are less than 5 years old. The age pattern reported below points to a rapid growth in the number of churches coming on stream in the recent 5 to 15 year period but a slowing down in church planting within the last five years.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Less than 5 years	9.32%	11
5 - 10 years	27.12%	32
11 - 15 years	20.34%	24
16 - 20 years	16.10%	19
21 - 50 years	19.49%	23
51 - 100 years	3.39%	4
101 - 200 years	3.39%	4
201 - 300 years	0%	0
301 - 400 years	0%	0
More than 400 years	0.85%	1
Answered 118		
Skipped 0		

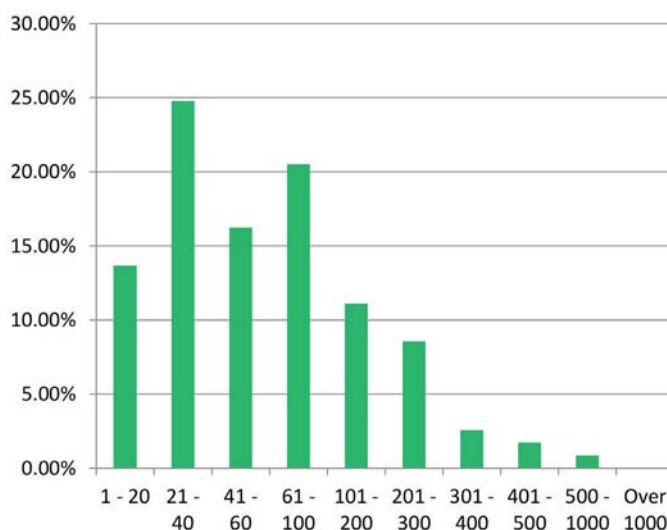


## CONGREGATION SIZE

**Question: Congregation Size: How many persons (adults and children) are part of your church community? For the purposes of this survey "community" is defined as the number of people who would consider themselves to be part of your church or group.**

The world of Evangelical churches outside of the traditional four main denominations is dominated by smaller churches with 75.22% of them having congregations of less than 100 people. The average size is between 41 and 60 people and only 5.12% declared congregations in excess of 300.

Answer Choices	Responses	
1 - 20	13.68%	16
21 - 40	24.79%	29
41 - 60	16.24%	19
61 - 100	20.51%	24
101 - 200	11.11%	13
201 - 300	8.55%	10
301 - 400	2.56%	3
401 - 500	1.71%	2
500 - 1000	0.85%	1
Over 1000	0%	0
Answered 117		
Skipped 1		

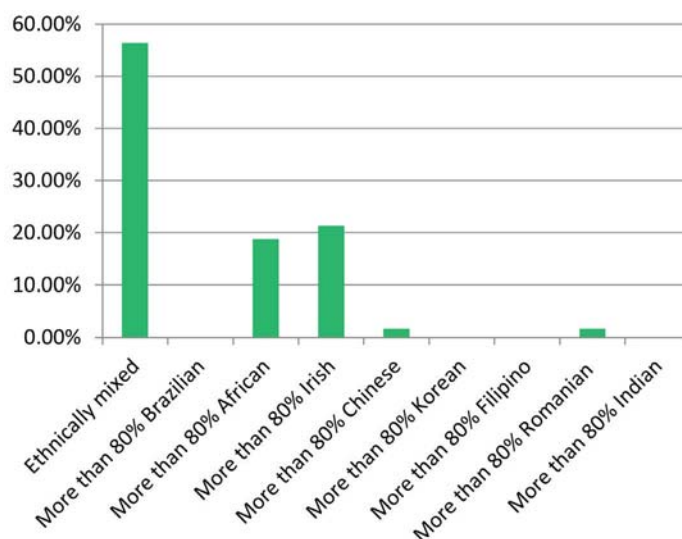


## ETHNICITY

**Question: How would you best describe the ethnic makeup of your church? (For the purposes of this question groups such as African or Brazilian etc. include those of that ethnic origin who have become Irish citizens)**

The results of this question point to the changing face of the Irish Church. Only 21.37% of churches report a predominantly Irish congregation. The majority of churches (26.41%) are now best described as ethnically mixed, with African dominated congregations coming a close third.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Ethnically mixed	56.41%	66
More than 80% Brazilian	0%	0
More than 80% African	18.80%	22
More than 80% Irish	21.37%	25
More than 80% Chinese	1.71%	2
More than 80% Korean	0%	0
More than 80% Filipino	0%	0
More than 80% Romanian	1.71%	2
More than 80% Indian	0%	0
Answered 117		
Skipped 1		



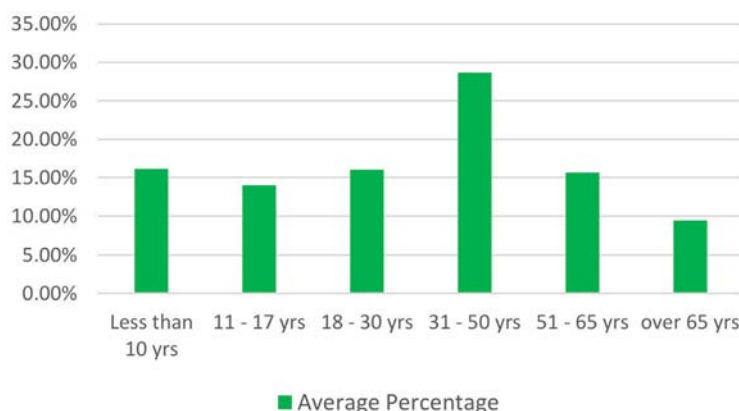
## CONGREGATION - AGE PROFILE

**Question: What approximate percentage of your congregation fall into the following age ranges? Please add a figure for each category with the total adding to 100. An approximate estimate will be OK.**

Many respondents failed to answer this question correctly, inputting numbers of people rather than percentages, or failing to ensure that the total of percentages equalled 100. Accordingly, the following data was derived only from the 73 respondents who answered correctly.

This data gives a picture of a relatively young church with 46.22% of total congregations being less than 30 years of age, 28.68% being in the age group 31 – 50 and the remaining 25.10% being over 55 years.

Answer Choices	Average Percentage
Less than 10 years	16.15%
11 - 17 years	14.04%
18 - 30 years	16.03%
31 - 50 years	28.68%
51 - 65 years	15.66%
Over 65 years	9.44%
Sample size: 73	



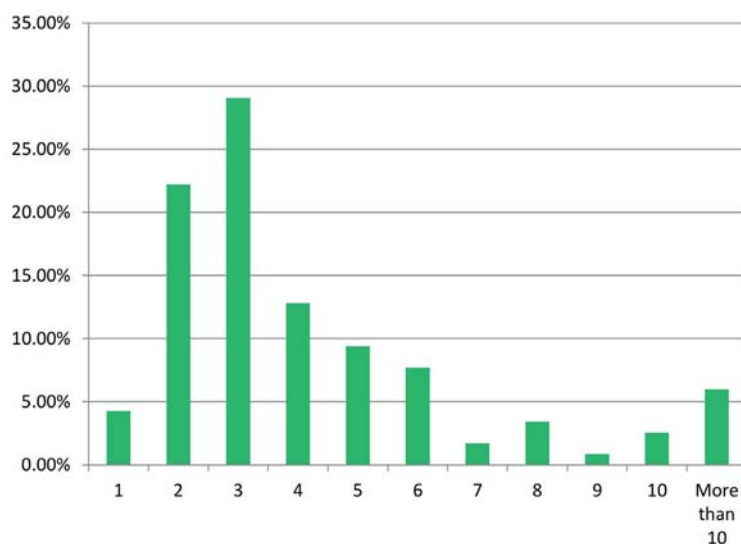


## ACTIVITY LEVELS

**Question: On average, how many services and/or group meetings do you hold per week? This includes main worship services, cell groups, bible study groups, children's groups or other gatherings, but does not include administrative meetings.**

Activity levels are high given the relatively small size of most churches as reported above. The mean number of services / group meetings is 4.19 with a median of 3.

Answer Choices	Responses	
1	4.27%	5
2	22.22%	26
3	29.06%	34
4	12.82%	15
5	9.40%	11
6	7.69%	9
7	1.71%	2
8	3.42%	4
9	0.85%	1
10	2.56%	3
More than 10	5.98%	7
Answered 117		
Skipped 1		

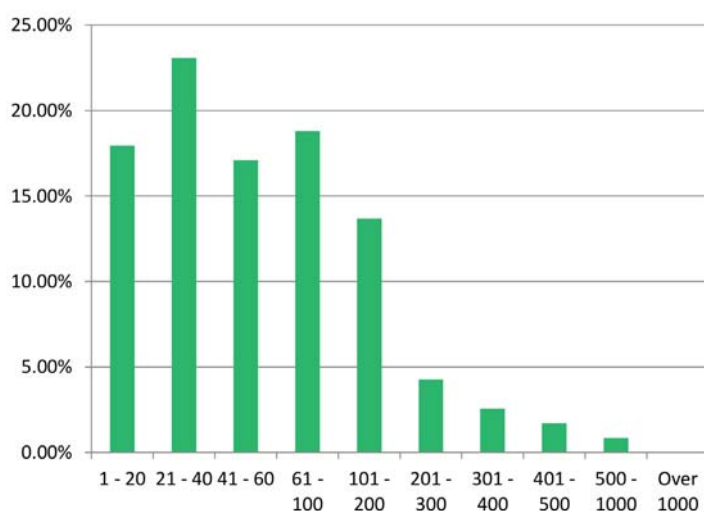


## SERVICE ATTENDANCE LEVELS

**Question: Of your total congregation, how many persons attend services at least once a month?**

The response to this questions shows a remarkable similarity between the size of the congregation as measured in the last question with the numbers from those congregations attending church on a regular basis. This points to a high level of commitment among church members across the board.

Answer Choices	Responses	
1 - 20	17.95%	21
21 - 40	23.08%	27
41 - 60	17.09%	20
61 - 100	18.80%	22
101 - 200	13.68%	16
201 - 300	4.27%	5
301 - 400	2.56%	3
401 - 500	1.71%	2
500 - 1000	0.85%	1
Over 1000	0%	0
Answered 117		
Skipped 1		

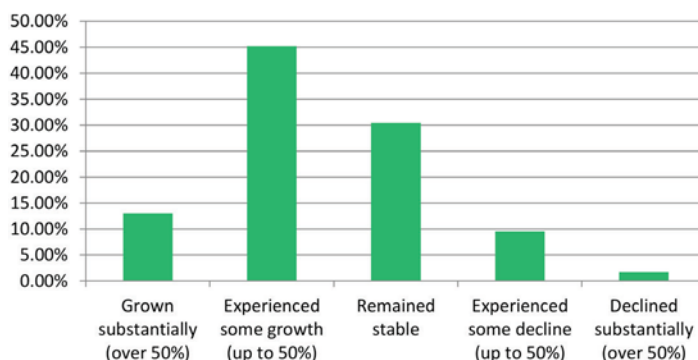


## CHURCH GROWTH RECORD

**Question: Would you say that, over the last five years, your congregation has grown or declined?**

The largest group of churches (45.22%) report some growth (up to 50% growth) over the last five years. A further 13.04% reported significant growth of over 50% in the same time period. When added to those who report a stable situation (30.43%) we can say that the vast majority of Evangelical churches outside of the traditional four main denominations (88.69%) either grew or remained stable over the past five years with only 11.30% reporting a decline in numbers.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Grown substantially (over 50%)	13.04%	15
Experienced some growth (up to 50%)	45.22%	52
Remained stable	30.43%	35
Experienced some decline (up to 50%)	9.57%	11
Declined substantially (over 50%)	1.74%	2
Answered 115 Skipped 3		

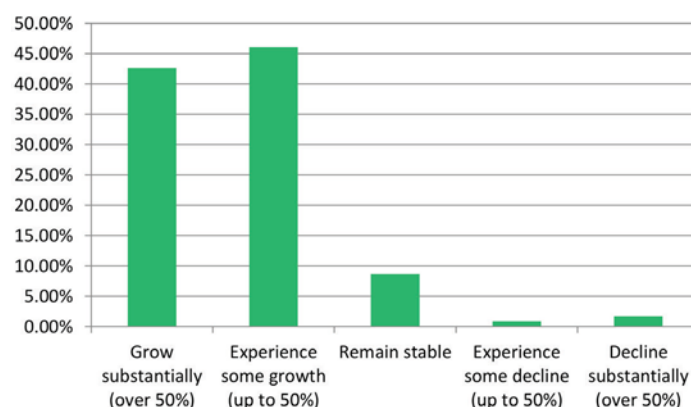


## CHURCH GROWTH - EXPECTATIONS

**Question: Over the next five years do you expect your church will grow or decline?**

When asked about their future expectations of growth, the majority of churches (88.70%) reported an expectation of growth in the next five-year period with 8.7% expecting to remain stable and only 2.61% expecting to decline.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Grow substantially (over 50%)	42.61%	49
Experience some growth (up to 50%)	46.09%	53
Remain stable	8.70%	10
Experience some decline (up to 50%)	0.87%	1
Decline substantially (over 50%)	1.74%	2
Answered 115 Skipped 3		



## CHURCH ACTIVITY PRIORITISATION

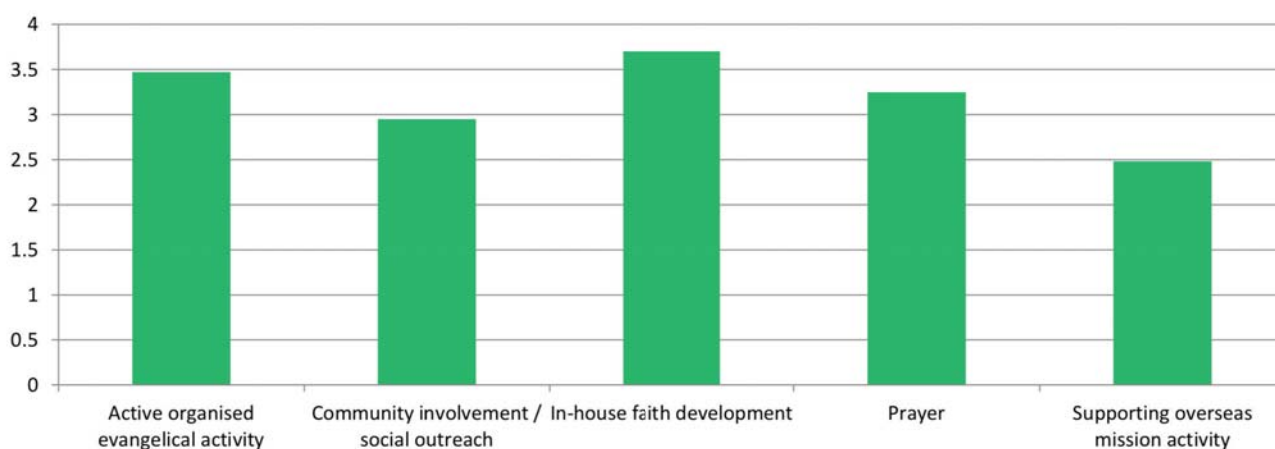
**Question: In terms of your actual activity levels what ranking would you give to the following?**

(1 = most involvement, 5 = least involvement)?

(Note: Not all respondents gave a complete 1 to 5 ranking.)

In-house faith development received the highest number of "1" rankings at 40.8%, followed by Evangelistic activity at 25.9% and Prayer at 21.5%. On the other end of the scale, Supporting overseas missions received the most "5" rankings (36.7%) followed by Community outreach (16.9%). The overall score attempts to give an overall ranking to the data with In-house faith development being the most prioritised, followed by Evangelistic activity, then by Prayer, Community outreach and finally by Supporting overseas missions.

	1		2		3		4		5		Total	Ranking Score
	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	No.	
Organised evangelistic activity	25.9%	15	29.3%	17	19.0%	11	17.2%	10	8.6%	5	58	3.47
Community involvement / social outreach	13.3%	11	24.1%	20	24.1%	20	21.7%	18	16.9%	14	83	2.95
In-house faith development	40.8%	31	15.8%	12	22.4%	17	14.5%	11	6.6%	5	76	3.7
Prayer	21.5%	20	23.7%	22	22.6%	21	22.6%	21	9.7%	9	93	3.25
Supporting overseas mission activity	10.2%	10	16.3%	16	21.4%	21	15.3%	15	36.7%	36	98	2.48
Answered 111 Skipped 7												





**Evangelical Alliance Ireland**

Ulysses House  
22 - 24 Foley Street  
Dublin 1  
Email: [office@evangelical.ie](mailto:office@evangelical.ie)