

STATISTICS REPORT TO GENERAL SYNOD 2023

In the fall of 2019 we were able to report on the diocesan statistics for the whole Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) for the first time since 2001. The numbers were challenging and started a national debate about the outlook for the ACC. Then Covid came and churches were forced online for much of 2020 and long periods of 2021. We had to find new ways to operate, new tools to work with and new metrics to assess how we were fulfilling the mission of God.

This report is the first statistics report to General Synod in at least 15 years. It contains data from a variety of sources and years. Unfortunately the current reporting cycle means that the latest complete diocesan data available is from 2021. This report also identifies systemic issues with the way we count membership, and points to two areas where we need to make progress in order to be relevant to the changing church.

1) Parish Changes 2019 to 2021

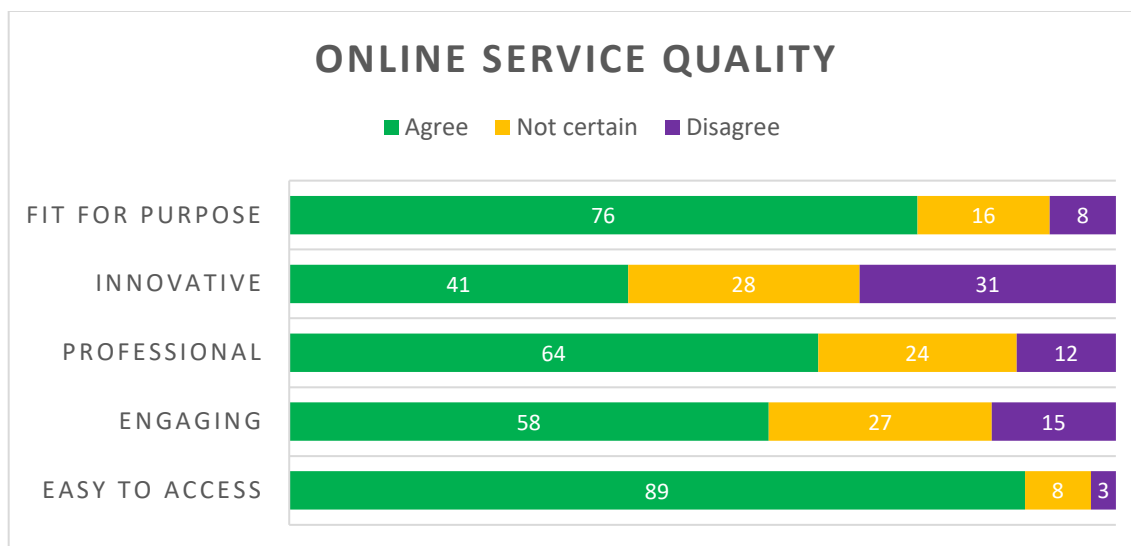
	2019	2021	Decrease
Parish Workers	1200	1000	17%
Congregations	2100	1800	14%
Parish Roll	333000	292000	12%
Donors	121000	97000	20%
Baptisms	4800	2100	56%
Confirmations	1900	560	71%
Marriages	1400	790	44%
Funerals	8100	6180	24%

I have chosen the years 2019 to give a sense of how things were immediately before the pandemic. It can be seen that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the ACC. The numbers which are most significant in my opinion are those for donors and baptisms. Donors is the number which best offers a consistent measure of the membership of the ACC across the dioceses. The number of baptisms represents both those entering the Church and a significant opportunity for the Gospel to be proclaimed. I will say more about the Parish Roll numbers below.

2) Online Services

The Covid pandemic was a great challenge for the Church, but it was also a great opportunity for the Church. During the pandemic we started to record the number of churches which were holding online services of some kind. At the height of the pandemic in 2020 approximately half of them (750/1550) were offering online services; by 2021 this had reduced to around one third (550/1550). I will discuss the metrics we use for measuring online participation later.

The chart below shows some results from a 2021 survey carried out on clergy and congregants' perceptions of the effects of Covid. It demonstrates the high quality of services offered by Anglican clergy when we were unable to meet in person.



One significant aspect of the shift online is that church members have made their own choices about what services to connect with – and this has been true whether or not their local church has provided online offerings. Surveys I have conducted and seen have shown that a significant number of those who have connected to churches online have *connected to more than one service* on a regular basis.

The provision of online services has given congregants the choice of whether to return to in person services where that choice exists. For housebound and other congregants there is now an opportunity to engage in worship with the local congregation where none existed before. In some rural congregations there are "online only" Sundays and other services. This is of course creating new patterns of worship attendance as well as new audiences.

I have data for online attendance metrics from my own diocese. It is notable in this data that where there continues to be an online provision, there generally appears to be a substantial take up reported. In some cases this seems as large as the in person congregation. Whilst some church leaders are expressing concerns about whether online provision is encouraging congregants not to return to in person, my expectation is that online services will continue to be an important part of the ways we connect with God and each other.

3) Bounce Back from Covid?

As I write this report the AGM season has just wrapped up and dioceses are still collecting in the 2022 data. However I felt it was important for General Synod to have some understanding of how the attendance numbers have changed over Covid. I have gathered data from the early reporting churches in two dioceses; Kootenay and Fredericton. I was able to get the numbers for ASA (Average Sunday Attendance), and for attendance at Easter 2022 and Christmas 2022. The data is from 30 churches, from small to large. This is therefore not comprehensive but is likely to be representative. I have included in the table below specific data from 3 churches for each diocese as well as the totals.

	Attendance decline 2019-2022		
	ASA	Easter	Christmas
Kootenay - Cathedral	29%	46%	48%
Nelson	11%	44%	85%
Mission.	32%	38%	38%
Total (of 8 congregations)	37%	47%	48%
Fredricton - Cathedral	31%	35%	31%
Campobello	6%	76%	66%
Coldbrook.	62%	47%	45%
Total (of 21 congregations)	32%	49%	41%

We should note for context that before Covid there was a general steady decline of 2.5% yearly in most metrics. Thus these numbers might have been expected to go down by around 7.5%. Clearly the actual decline far exceeds that number. I also want to identify that in a few smaller churches there was some growth reported. This is much to be celebrated but is not representative of the trends.

There is a substantial difference between the decline in ASA (about 1/3) and that of Christmas and Easter (almost half). These may represent visitors or "C. and E. Anglicans" who were not yet comfortable returning to churches. At Easter 2022 the pandemic was still fresh in people's minds. But by Christmas the pandemic had become an epidemic which we were learning to live with.

The question is whether these numbers represent a new reality of some sort for the church or whether we will recover to pre-pandemic numbers. Covid may have broken the habit of church for some who were previously attenders - either regular or occasional. I would suggest there are three options for our attendance numbers: maybe they will bounce back to pre-pandemic norms; possibly they will continue in this steep decline; most likely (in my opinion) they will stabilise back to 2.5% annual decline, from this new lower base.

4) Measuring Membership and Attendance

Members of General Synod should know that collection of data within the ACC is problematic and inconsistent. I have three particular examples:

- There are substantial variations in definitions of "membership" across the country: for some it is the total membership of a town or village; for others it is the number on their mailing list, no matter how the people got on the list.
- Through Covid the numbers reported for membership varied significantly. In some dioceses number changes were huge, dipping by 2/3rd in one case, rising by 1/3 in another. In both cases the number returned to more 'normal' values the next years.
- Other dioceses reported exactly the same numbers for membership and other metrics year after year. These numbers will always change, even a little, so it appears these dioceses have not been reporting accurately.

There has also been a concern expressed, including by the House of Bishops, that the data we currently collect does not fully represent who we are as a church. Thus there is an urgent need for us to have consistent, collectable, and accurate metrics, particularly for membership, that helps us plan as we go forward into a challenging time.

5) Attendance - Towards 2050

As we return to more 'normal' times we are again collecting attendance data. This data is used among other things to establish the number of General Synod delegates each diocese is entitled to. Our current data collection is focussed on traditional, in-person services, generally Sunday Eucharists. This has been an issue before Covid and has been exacerbated since Covid. Other types of service are excluded from our data. We believe these other services are vital for the ACC going forward, particularly as we look beyond 2040 and towards 2050. There are two particular areas where we need to make progress

- i) Online services - During Covid we chose to collect data on the *number of online services* in each diocese. This is because there is no standard metric available for measuring *attendance* at online services. Every metric which has been proposed to give an equivalent to in person numbers has significant problems. It is not even appropriate to compare between the common online platforms of Facebook, YouTube and Zoom. We believe online services are very significant but the metric we are collecting is the only one we believe will be consistent across ACC.
- ii) Non-Traditional Church Services - There are a variety of in-person services that are not traditional format. These are places where Anglican worship is happening in new ways, which brings new life and new people into the church. These are themselves services and Anglican communities, not just entry points for "real" church. They are more than study groups or social meetings. For a long time there have been questions about whether care home services should be included, and under what criteria. More recent examples might be "Fresh Expressions", "Messy Church", or "House Church". We will be asking dioceses for the *numbers of such non- traditional services* beginning in the collection of data for 2023.

Respectfully submitted
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