

Diocese of Canterbury
Larger Churches Day
December 2nd 2023

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PART 1 INFORMATION – What the data says

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What we learned from the 2022 Stats for Mission returns

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Some key findings

- Attendance went down 5% in 2022 but up 8% across the C of E
- October attendance was about 71.5% of 2019

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Some key findings

- Child attendance was down more than adult attendance
- The average age of congregations rose a lot – half are now over 71

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Some key findings

- The number of Fresh Expressions of church fell by a half from 2019 to 2022
- Attendance at them fell by two thirds
- This was a much bigger fall than in other dioceses

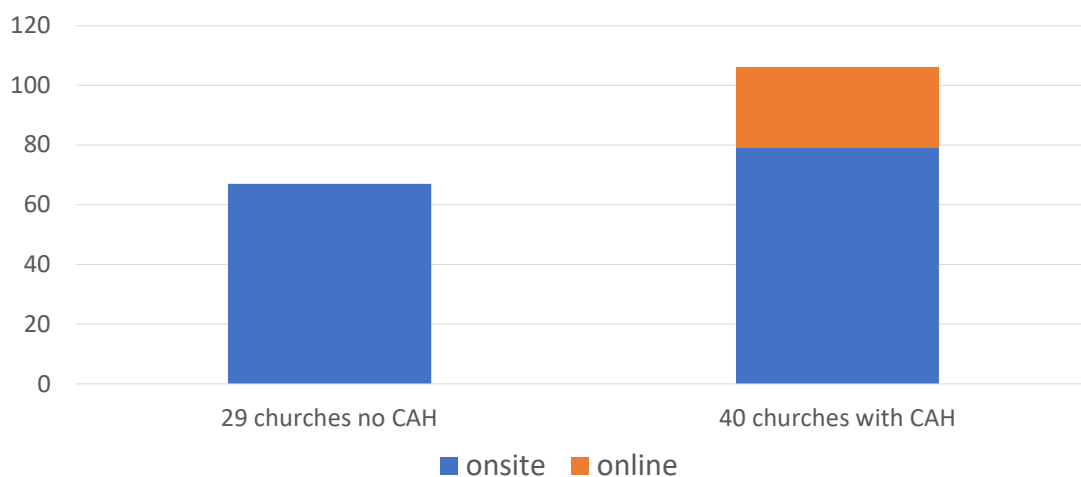
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Some key findings

- Membership of the worshipping community fell less than attendance – 2022 was 83% of 2019
- But online attendance made the total attendance change about the same as membership
- The cathedral has a vast online congregation

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Diocese of Leeds larger churches 2022 average weekly attendance as % of 2019



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Some key findings

- Many churches were offering fewer services than in 2019
- These churches were the ones with attendance loss
- The problem is not declining demand for church services but difficulties on the supply side

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Some key findings

- Large churches (AWA 100+) had shrunk much more than small ones
- Turn round the large churches & turn round the diocese

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That is why we are here today

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We have moved rapidly and have results from 2023 to share

- You only did your October attendance return for the diocese a few weeks ago
- We've already analysed the answers and are teeming with a lot of news today
- The C of E moves like lightning

6a.1	Number of services	Adult			Children and young people		
		Church	Fresh expressions	School service	Church	Fresh expressions	School service
Sunday 1 st October							
Weekdays 2 nd -7 th							

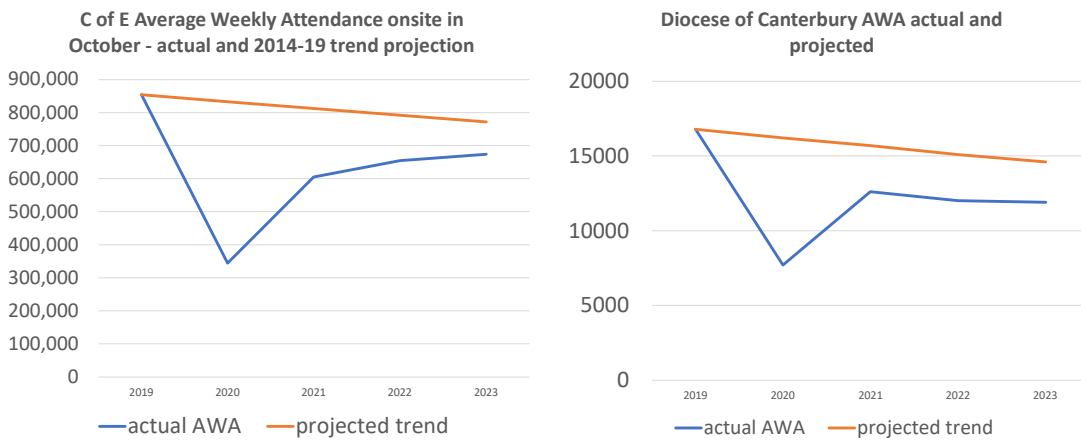
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AWA went down slightly in 2023

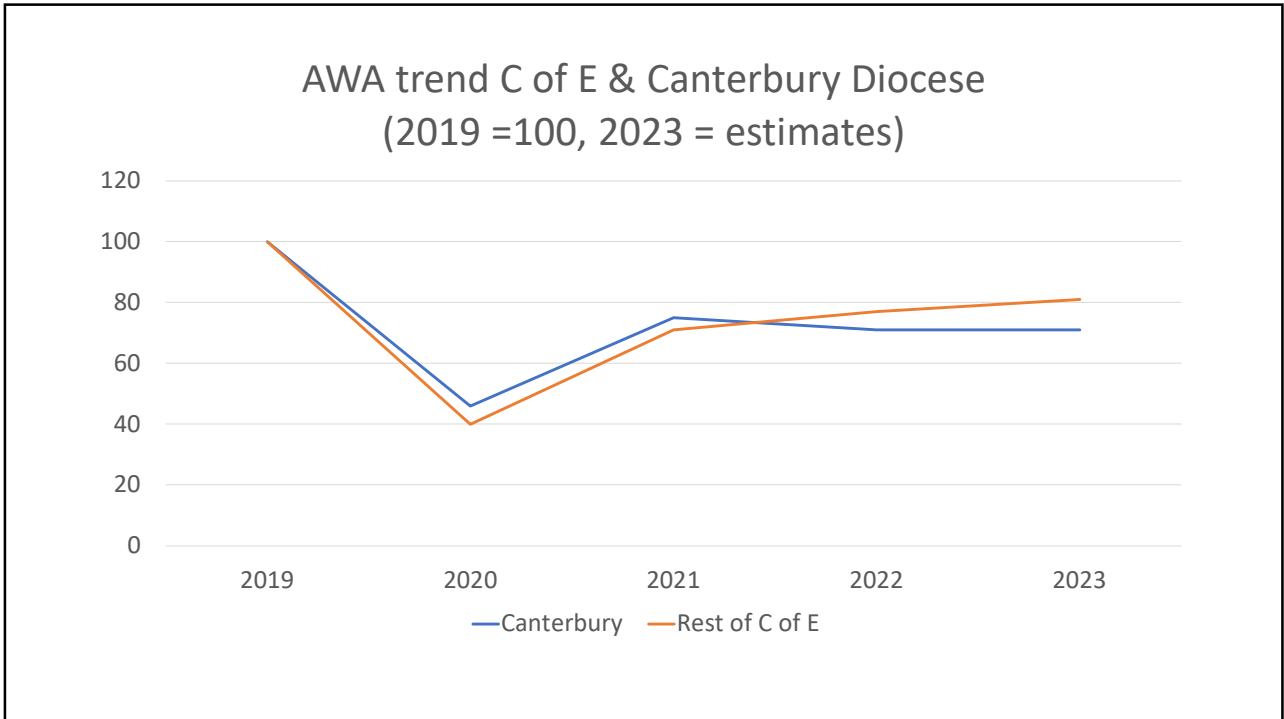
- In 2023 there was continued attendance recovery in the C of E generally – first indications are that October 2023 is between 3% and 6% up on 2022. But in Canterbury average weekly attendance in October was about 2% lower than in 2022

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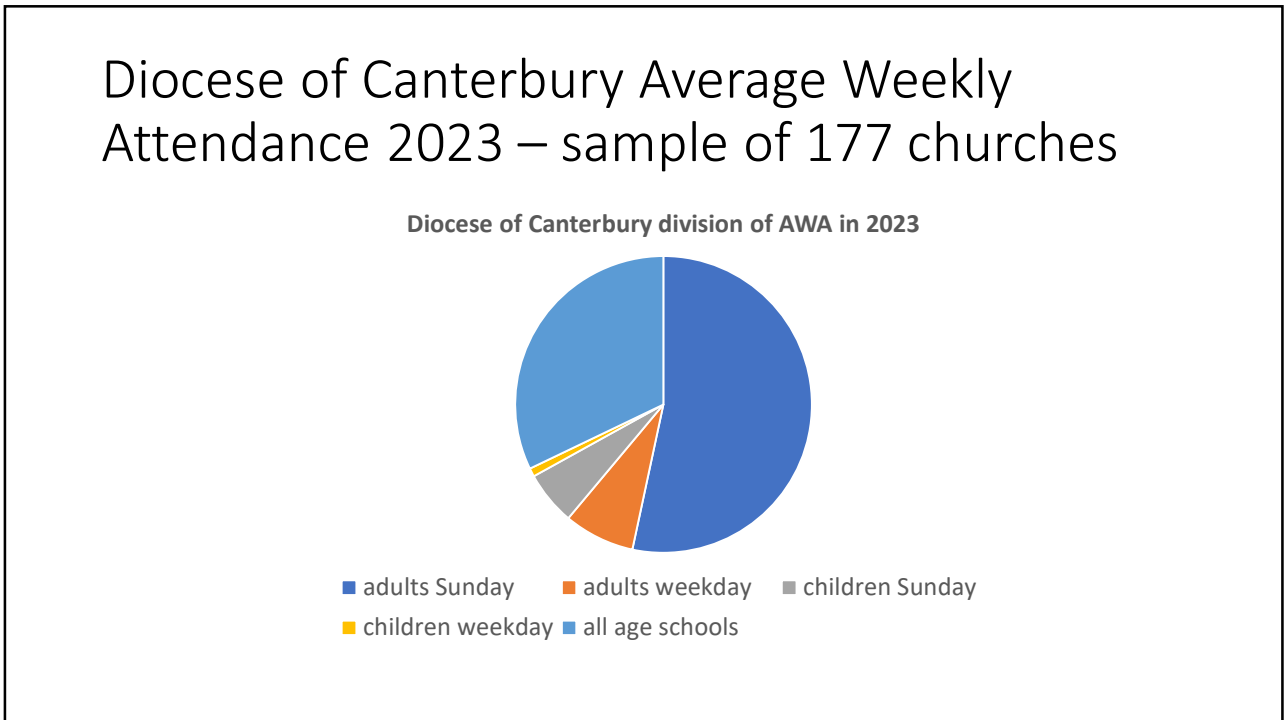
Actual AWA v 14-19 projected trend, C of E & Canterbury Diocese



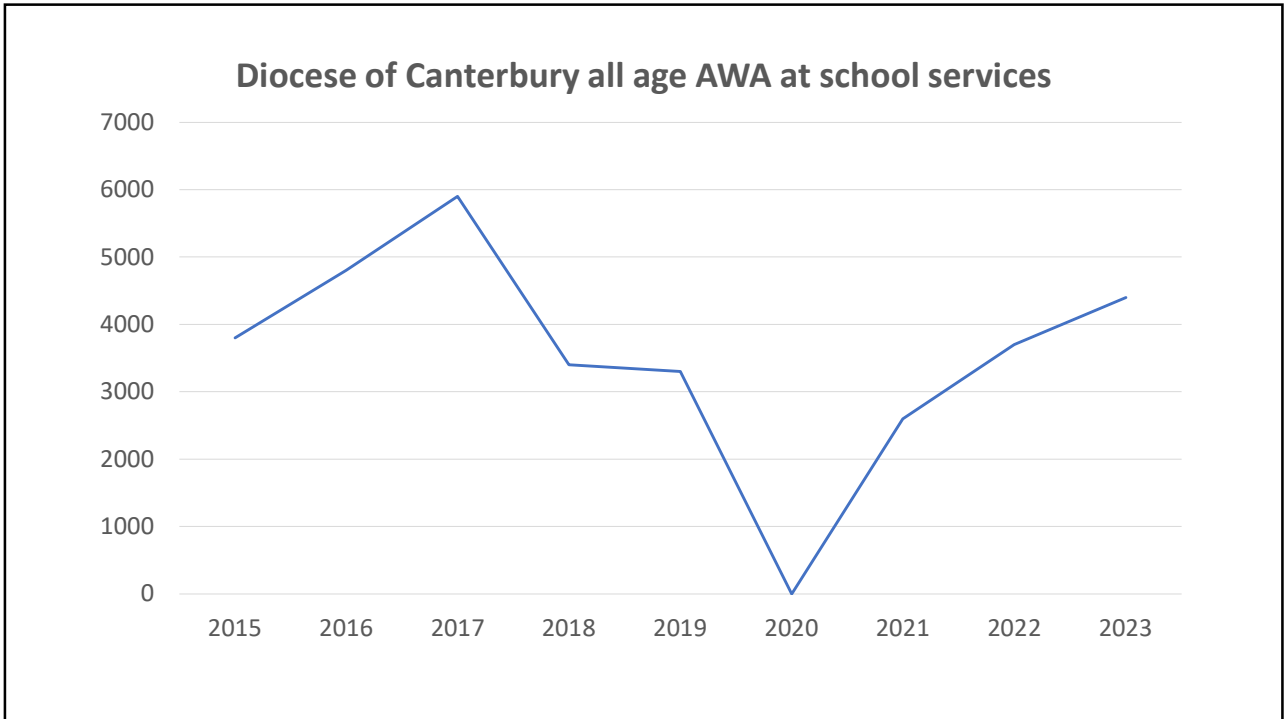
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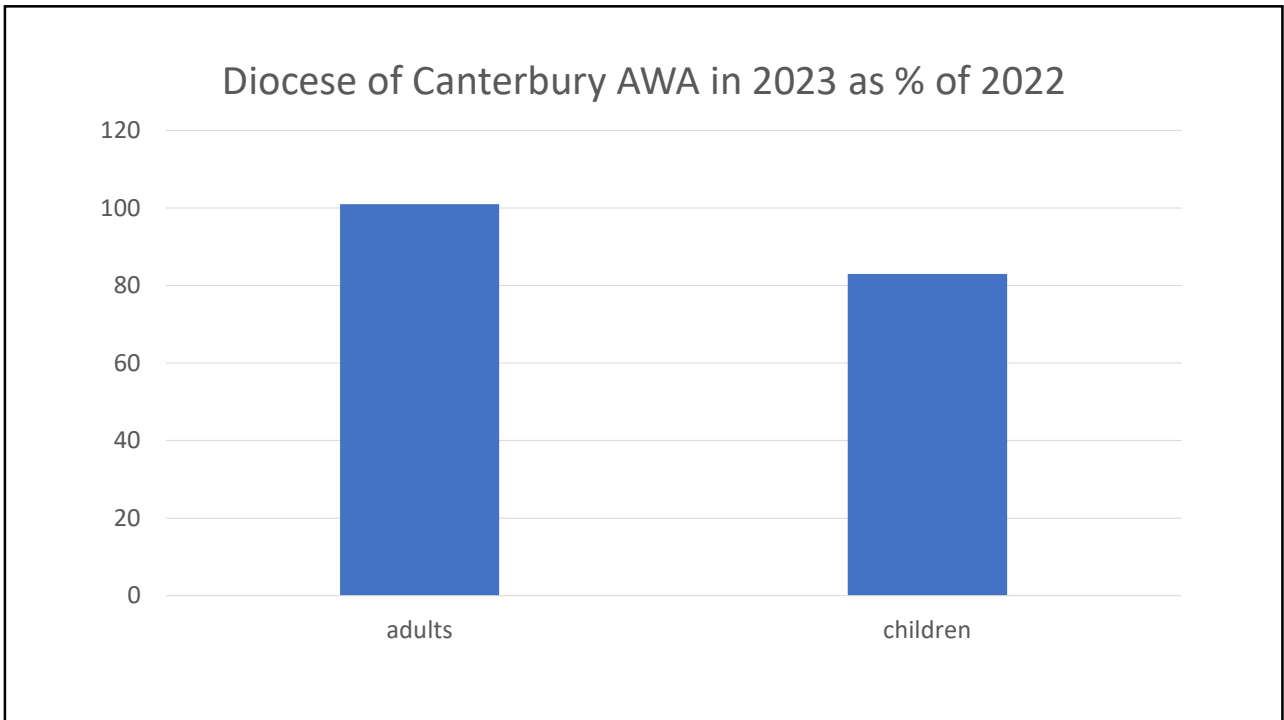
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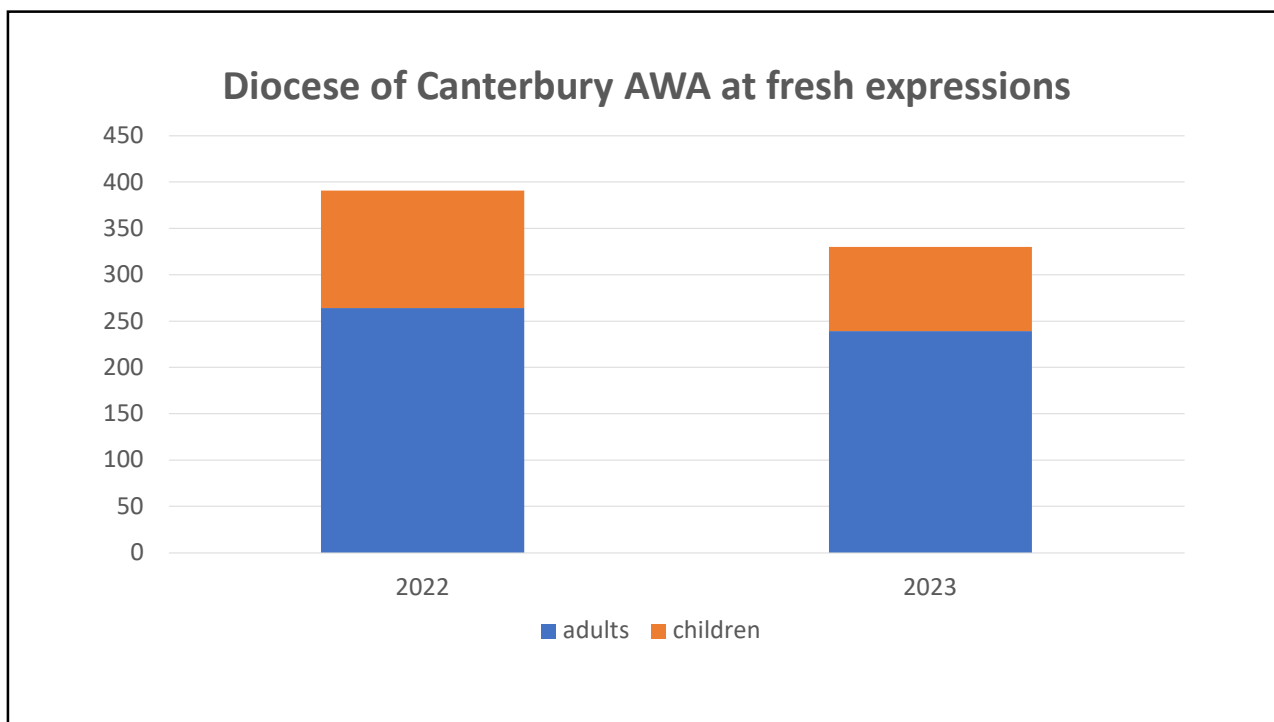
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We have AWA data on the churches with 5 of the new Ignite congregations

- Total AWA in 2022 413
- Total AWA in 2023 526 +27%

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FxC – small, monthly, die young BUT – they grow the churches younger if they survive

- 14 FxC in 2022 disappeared in 2023 – their church AWA went down 29%
- 17 FxC in 2022 were reported still alive in 2023 – AWA up 6%
- 12 FxC appeared in 2023 – AWA at their churches up 29%

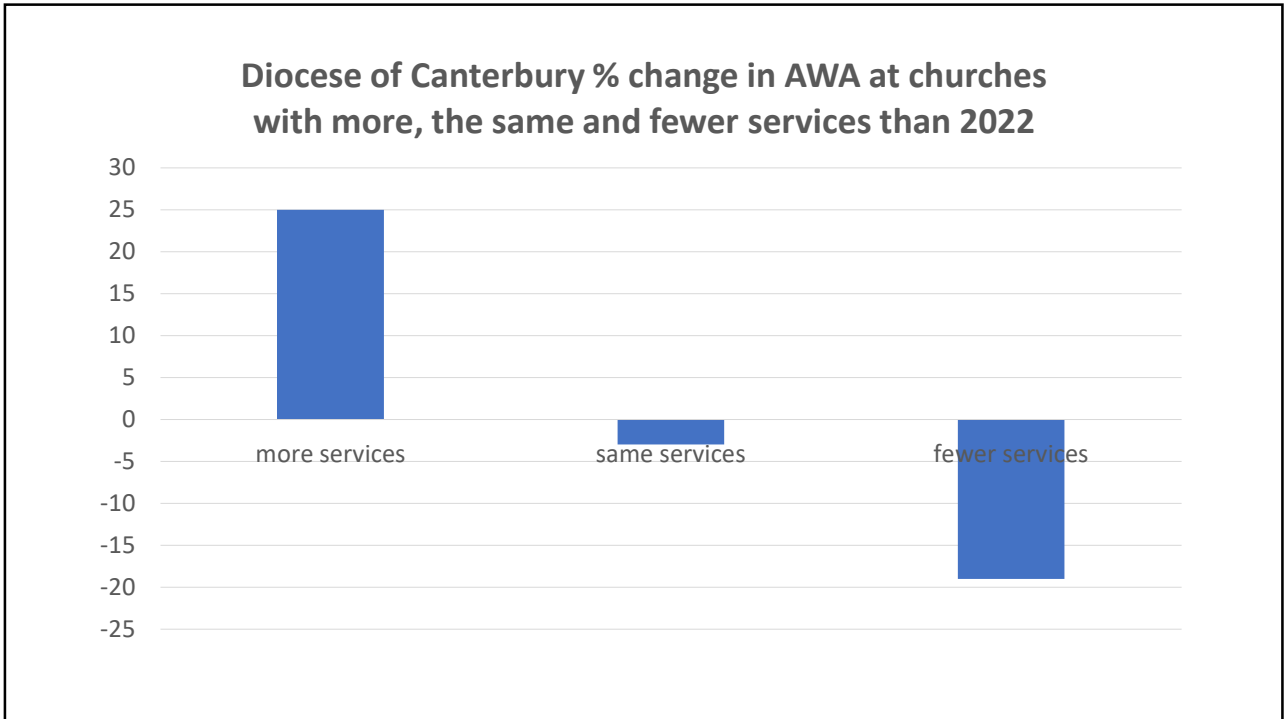
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Fewer services continue to drag AWA down

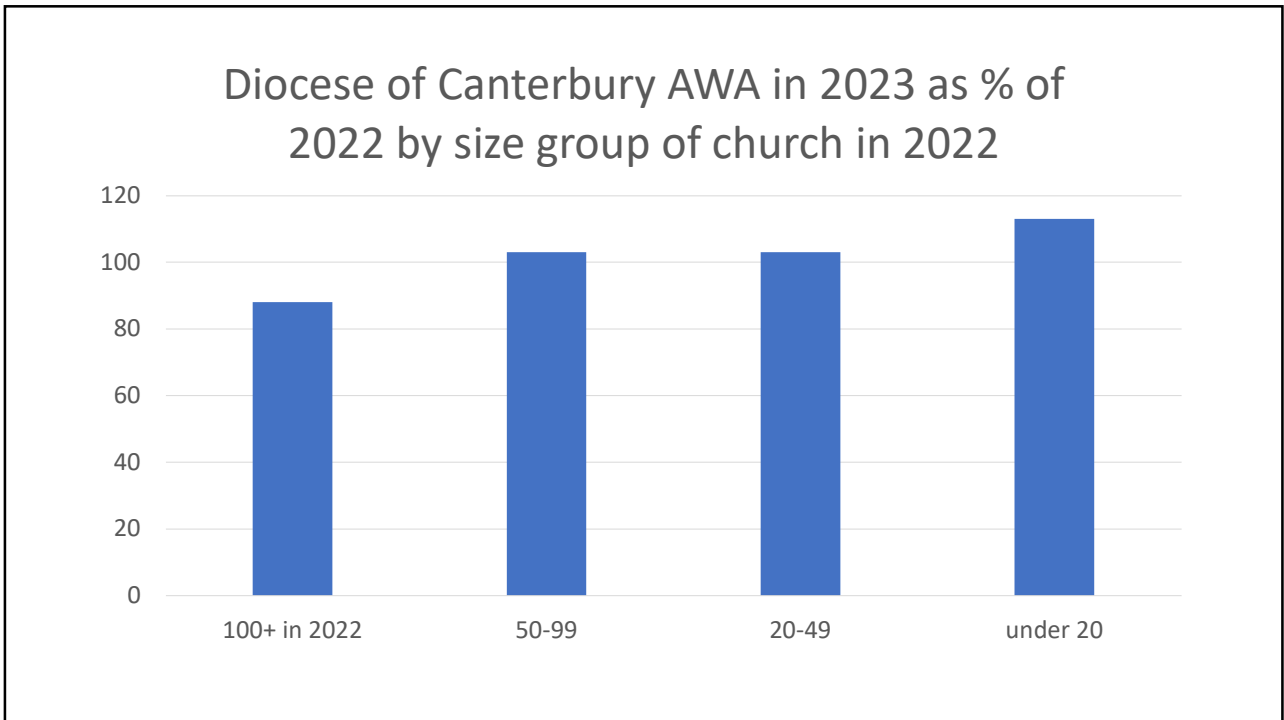
- For every 100 services in 2019
- There were 76 in 2022
- And 69 in 2023

- 42 of 177 churches did not offer a service every week in 2022
- And 47 of them in 2023

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19 churches in our sample had 100+ in 2022

- Some increased their AWA in 2023
- More had a fall in 2023
- And a few had a major fall
- Net result – falling attendance in these 19 large churches more than offset small growth in attendance at middle-sized churches and a further large % growth in the small churches

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Why have the larger churches found recovery harder than the smaller ones have?

- Gathered congregations scattered across towns are harder to re-assemble than village church communities that stayed in touch
- Larger churches had more families in them – children had grown up and families moved on when onsite services resumed
- People were more wary of returning to a building full of people
- Some churches did not have good records of their members and have not been able to contact and invite again
- Large churches need energy and rotas to maintain their programmes. Many people have been reluctant to resume their roles and rotas

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Is it all doom and gloom?

- Oh no! Some large churches have adapted and grown a lot
- The demand – the spiritual hunger – is probably greater than pre-covid
- Online is a new resource for evangelism and church growth
- There have never been so many lapsed churchgoers to invite back

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And we have uncovered some things that work and make vicars happy

- **Don't cut service numbers**
- **Multi-congregation models rather than one large congregation**
- **Start new worshipping communities**
- **Focus on families**
- **Stay or go online & do it well**
- **Work with schools**

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What you told us in your survey
questionnaires for this conference

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AWA change 2019-2022-2023 at churches
represented today

- 137-82-100
- 129-80-78
- 121-83-85
- 219-134-153
- 199-104-106
- 114-63-?
- 146-194-193
- 91-101-97
- 129-58-73
- 136-131-109
- 114-90-176
- 175-103-80
- 131-83-73
- 125-67-27
- 109-60-140
- 150-138-127
- 126-121-105
- 148-109-102
- 214-198-203

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The churches here today seem to have a slightly better trend than the average

- **2022 Total = 74% of 2019**
- **2023 Total = 105% of 2022**
- NB there are always anomalies eg one church with an apparent increase in 2023 had a confirmation service and another had a licensing. Without those two churches the remainder total an AWA in 2023 of 95% of 2022

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Factors impeding attendance & membership recovery

Factor	churches
Older people not returned - age, infirmity, death, care homes	7
Changed habits and priorities, reluctance to turn out, coming less often	7
Families, fringe not returned	5
Vacancy issues	3
People moved away	2
Lack of volunteers to re-start old programmes or fill rotas	2
Some now attend online -though could be only way they can	2
Congregation or Sunday School not restarted	2
Loss of bus service	1
Lack of opportunities for new people to join *	1

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Factors helping attendance & membership recovery

Factor	churches
Opportunity to re-imagine what we do & who can contribute	4
Having a spread of services offering a range of styles	3
Kept contact in lockdown - YT, daily blog, newsletter	3
Social, community & toddler groups crossover into Sundays	3
Started a new service - café, messy	2
Working with schools, schools attending for worship	2
Better provision for children at Sunday services	2
Better fellowship time, refreshments after services	2

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Factors helping attendance & membership recovery

Appointment of FT Youth Minister	1
Choir grown through inviting friends	1
Stance on inclusive welcome	1
Faithful service from the core	1
Keeping the building open as soon as we could	1
Happy, welcoming, friendship atmosphere	1
Strong small groups and community structures	2
People looking for spirituality	1
People moving church to us as we are more local-community	1
Stopped online to encourage return to church	1
Continue online to keep people connected	2

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What is the attendance trend at the moment?

Attendance trend this autumn	Churches
Growing slowly, slightly up	6
About the same	8
Decreasing	1

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Plan for mission and growth?

Do you have a clear plan for mission and growth in 2024?	
Yes	8
Working on it	2
No, not yet	7

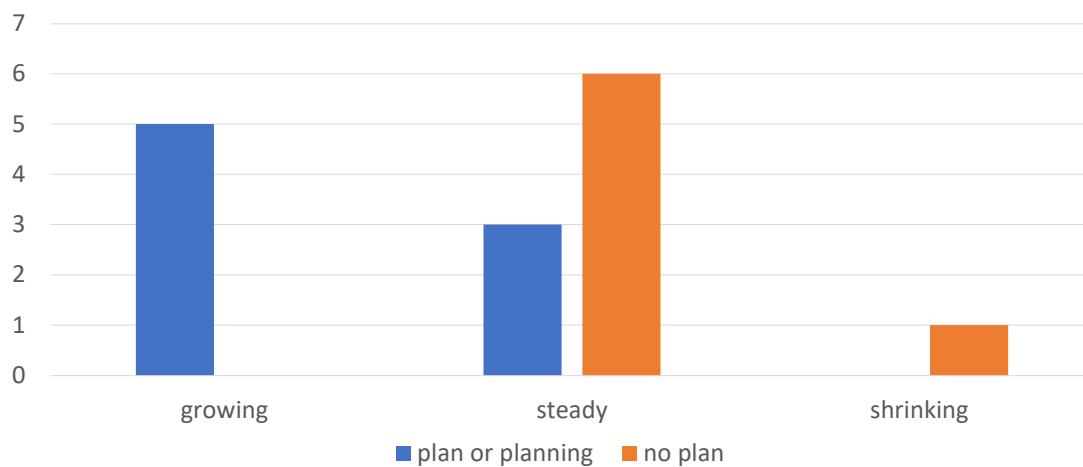
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What are the plans about?

Strengthen work with children, YP & schools	7
Staff appointments – Childrens & Families ministers, clergy	5
Pathways to church from community groups	4
Range of services including more informal types	3
Discipleship courses planned for 2024	3
Work on church buildings	2
Prayer for growth	1
Focus on building up small-group leaders	1

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Diocese of Canterbury 15 larger churches in October 2023 -current attendance trend



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What do you make of all that?

- How does our story fit with the general picture?
- How do we feel about our present situation?

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2. Inspiration about Growing Churches

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Twelve changes that lead to numerical church growth today

“Change OR decay in all around I see”

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Every move to grow the church involves change

- **Having led growing churches and researched how churches grow for decades I do know how our churches can grow numerically providing that they do not have major problems**
- **I can take the horse to water**
- **But I can't make it drink!**

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Statistical evidence lies
behind each change

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1. Plant new churches and congregations

- Existing worshipping communities can grow, but starting new ones is usually the main way to reach new people
- New wine – new wine skins

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2. *Do transplants and grafts*

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3. Go or stay online and use the tech well

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Online for ever

Physical limitations

Away, busy, poorly this Sunday but can catch up later

Live too far away

First step in joining the church community

“All the new people in the last year came online for a few weeks before turning up in person”

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4. Improve invitation, welcome & integration

- Average retention rate of newcomers trying churches out is no more than 10%. But a properly welcoming church can make it 60-70%

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5. Grow lay & unpaid leaders

Clergy should be the leader in mission and the enabler of other people's ministries

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Sometimes paying someone to do a job well
can grow the church

For example, a Families Minister

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6. Appoint focal ministers to lead some of the church communities

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7. Meet weekly
(in Canterbury diocese 35-40% of the churches now don't meet every Sunday)

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8. Be intentional Use MAPs

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9. Prioritise children & young people
Focus on families

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10. Make worship less stiff, formal, repetitive

more joy and laughter!

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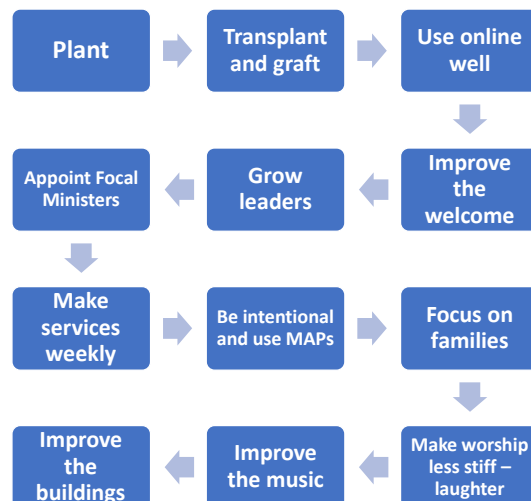
11. Improve the quality & variety of music

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12. Improve the buildings for the sake of those who don't yet come

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12 categories of change – what are the priorities where you are today?



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Part 1 was about information
Part 2 has been about inspiration

- In groups
- What do you think of it so far?
- What has inspired you?

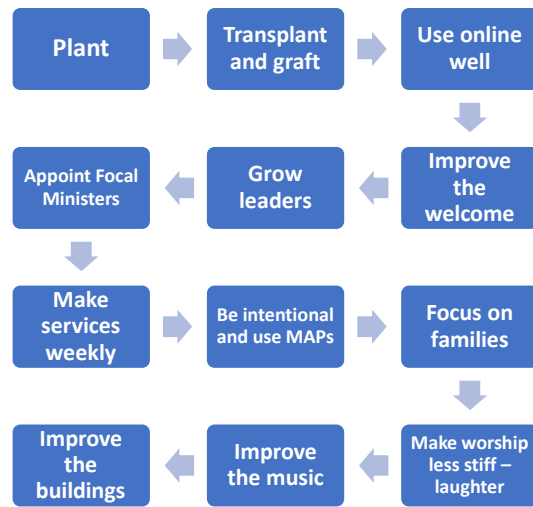
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PART 3 IDEAS

- We've had some information and inspiration on growing our churches back after the covid shock
- All of us are working on this
- Time now to review what ideas might work where we are

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12 categories
of change –
what are the
priorities
where you
are today?



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My hunch is that
the three most
productive areas for
you to focus on in
the next year or
two are:

Planting – starting new services or new worshipping communities in your own parish not just in response to capacity but also to reach new groups of people

Online – developing your online offering so that online becomes both a fuller expression of churchgoing and a more compelling route into onsite attendance

Welcome – there have never been so many recently lapsed churchgoers in this country and the general population has become more open to the Gospel since covid, war in Europe, inflation, global warming etc

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To support and enable initiatives in these three areas you will need to focus on:

Praying	Praying – specific, church-wide, focussed
Planning	Planning – making what you do part of a strategy, not a series of disconnected one-off initiatives
Preparing	Preparing new leaders for new roles – techies, online pastors, planters, welcome team

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Prayer for growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition for it to happen

God of Mission
 Who alone brings growth to your Church,
 Send your Holy Spirit to give
 Vision to our planning,
 Wisdom to our actions,
 And power to our witness.
 Help our church to grow in numbers,
 In spiritual commitment to you,
 And in service to our local community,
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen



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Over to you in church groups

- **Make a plan**
- **What are your priorities for mission and growth in 2024?**
- **Appoint a scribe and a spokesperson for reporting back**