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1. Introduction

1.1 Every three years, the Conference requires a report on the Church's membership returns to both the Presbyteral and Representative Sessions of the Conference in accordance with Standing Order 382. While these statistics are not the sole way of measuring the health of the Connexion and cannot offer a complete account of the Church's readiness for ministry or effectiveness in mission, they are a crucial instrument for understanding current conditions, for reflecting honestly on our fruitfulness, and for discerning and taking clear corporate action to increase our faithfulness, by God's grace, to the 'doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which [we] first set out'.[1]

1.2 Standing Order 382(2) specifically requires the Connexional Team to present to the Conference every three years 'the membership returns'. However, membership numbers are only one part of the dataset that the Team accumulates through the annual returns and other sources. The membership numbers, therefore, are presented here alongside data that have been collected on attendance at worship and other forms of engagement within the life of the Connexion and with a reminder of the priorities which the Conference has previously set in responding to the current trends. This report, therefore, endeavours to set the statistics within the context of trends that stretch back several decades and of the work that has begun over the last ten years to address those trends; by looking below the headlines, the Team is able to point to real signs of growth within the returns.

1.3 The Team is grateful to Superintendents, Circuit and District Administrators and others who made statistical returns at the end of 2025 and is pleased to report to the Conference that data were submitted from more than 92% of churches. In table 3, therefore, an adjustment has been made to estimate the total membership of the Church had the return been 100%.

2. Attendance

We now live in a digital age and the way in which people engage with the Church reflects that. Since the pandemic of 2020, many churches have included worshippers who

1 John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Methodism*, 1786

have joined services online. The calculations for 2025 indicate that the total number of attendees at Methodist worship on average each week is just short of 100,000.

2025 Attendance Data – figures below reflect in-person and online church attendance reported for the year 2025.

Table 1

Measure	**Total**
Average weekly in-person attendance	89,540 people
Online attendance total	10,273 people
Total	99,813 people

Given the slow recovery in some places following the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 and some inconsistency early on in including online attendance, it is difficult to assess the trend, but it would seem that over the course of the Triennium, this represents at worst a small decline.

Table 2

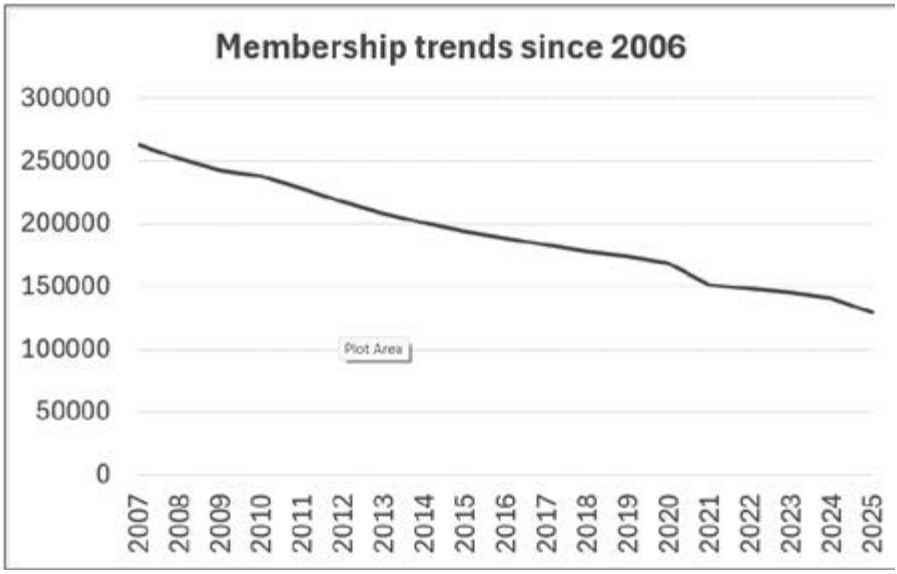
Year	**Total Attendance (Inc Online)**
2023	101,382
2024	98,063
2025	99,813

3. Membership

The decline in the number of members, however, is greater, both in absolute terms and as a proportion. The pattern of decline reported continues a trend which now can be traced over several decades and which, as the graph below Table 3 indicates, means that the membership of the Church has approximately halved in the last 20 years.

Table 3

	2023	2024	2025
Number of Churches Submitted	3,234	3,226	3,098
Total Number of Churches	3,650	3,466	3,357
Reported Membership	128,742	125,504	119,691
of which are LEP members	22,606	20,815	19,238
Attendance	89,991	89,478	89,254
% Complete	88.6%	93.0%	92.3%
Membership adjusted for missing data	**145,303**	**134,950**	**129,697**



These trends of aggregate decline are broadly consistent with those of other historic Christian denominations in Britain.

4. Digital Engagement

4.1 Over the triennium, digital has become a settled part of how the Methodist Church worships, learns, serves and shares the gospel. Many worship leaders and local preachers now rely daily on methodist.org.uk for prayers, Bible studies and worship materials, with more than 364,000 downloads in the past year. The Church's online reach continues to expand: social media followings now exceed 65,000, the website welcomes over half a million new visitors annually—most arriving through search—and 30% of users are under 35, a demographic often harder to reach in person.

4.2 The Advent and Christmas campaigns have become the Church's most significant outward-facing digital witness, with four successive campaigns refining a repeatable, evidence-led model that blends film, worship resources, email journeys and social media. Engagement has grown year on year, with email reflections rising from 235 sign-ups in 2022 to more than 13,000 in 2025, and 71% of churches using the resources locally. The 2025 campaign's strong reception among people with no prior connection to the Church shows that digital outreach is helping the gospel reach those beyond our usual circles.

5 Is the decline reversible?

5.1 Whilst any reduction in membership is disappointing, the report the Team brings is not without signs of hope. In 2017, the Conference responded to the Statistics for Mission report by adopting a commitment to invest in significant strategic commitments in justice, evangelism, ecology, and safeguarding. Together these provide a coherent missional direction of travel and a foundation for faithful attentiveness to church growth – spiritual, missional, and numerical. This is good news: it demonstrates that the Methodist vision to be, by God's grace, a growing, inclusive, evangelistic, and justice-seeking Church is increasingly clear and has serious prophetic intent.

5.2 In 2020, the Conference agreed a strategy for evangelism and growth: God for All. Effectively, the Strategy offers a number of challenges to Local Churches and Circuits and the Team has been closely involved in supporting and making available resources as those challenges are accepted.

5.3 The Conference has encouraged **each church to discern a growth plan** that begins with listening, in order to decide how to focus on what is most

important.[2] The Conference's core resource *Our Church's Future Story*[3] guides and accompanies churches on how to discern and create growth plans that are life-giving and reflect a simple orientation to Gospel transformation.

2 *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2020 Section C 6, *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2024, paragraph 65
3 https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/lead-churches-into-growth/planning-for-growth/

5.4 The Conference has encouraged **each church to reclaim evangelism as a spiritual practice** and develop an evangelistic culture – a "bias for the Good News" throughout the congregation – that suffuses every dimension of the church's mission and ministry.[4] The Conference's core resources for *Evangelism at Festivals*[5] and this summer's inaugural *Methodist Day of Outreach*[6] guide and accompany churches in participating in community events and having authentic conversations with religiously-unaffiliated people.

5.5 The Conference encouraged **each church to have a clear and flexible discipleship pathway.**[7] Those interested in spiritual exploration and curious about faith formation, especially among the rising generations, are often looking for wise guidance, not merely a random buffet of activities from which to self-select. They often ask: "Could you show me how?" The Conference's core resource *On the Way*[8] (part of *A Methodist Way of Life*) guides and accompanies churches so that they can confidently respond: "Here's how, and we'd love to join you on that journey."

5.6 The Conference has encouraged **each Circuit and District to normalise pioneering and planting new Christian communities** in their growth/mission plans.[9] The Conference's core resources on *New Places for New People*[10] guide and accompany pioneering individuals and churches on how to do this in a sustainable way.

5.7 The Conference has recommended that each church develop a strategy **significantly to increase the number of children and young active disciples** in our churches and new Christian communities.[11] Over the last year, the Conference has refreshed 3Generate,[12] the Methodist Church's annual youth assembly, to strengthen its purposes of (1) the evangelism, spiritual exploration, and discipleship of children and youth people at the event, and (2) ensuring that Local Churches are guided and accompanied in ministry strategy and structures for a consistent commitment to children and young people across the Church.

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4 *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2020 Section C 2, *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2024 paragraph 64
5 https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/festivals-and-events/volunteer-with-us-at-festivals-and-events/
6 https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/practise-evangelism/day-of-outreach/
7 *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2020, Section C 1. *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2024, paragraph 66.
8 https://www.methodist.org.uk/faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/on-the-way-signup/
9 *God For All*, Conference Agenda 2020, Section C 4. *God For All,* Conference Agenda 2024, paragraph 63.
10 https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/new-places-for-new-people/
11 *3Generate*, Conference Agenda 2024, Resolution 14/4
12 https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/children-youth-family-ministry/3generate/

5.8 We believe that prioritising the above five commitments in every church and Circuit – and reducing barriers that distract us from these commitments – will be essential, if not non-negotiable, for the growth of the Church.

5.9 An in-depth reading of the 2023-2025 statistical returns reveals some important signs of growth. While the overall trend of decline is real, it does not represent the fuller picture: that statistically significant percentages of Methodist churches are experiencing numerical growth:

- **28%** of churches recorded confirmations and/or other gains in 2025.
- **43%** of churches recorded confirmations and/or gains and/or transfers in 2025.
- **21%** of churches recorded overall growth: that is, their growth (from any source) exceeded any decline (from any source).

5.10 While we cannot definitively link strategic missional clarity to these positive outcomes, the fact that 43% of Methodist churches are testifying to some numerical growth in different ways warrants ongoing attention to what may be possible when the Church is intentional about growing. At any rate, this news is for cause for acclamation, gratitude, and a fuller dependence on God in our future missional action.

5.11 The developments in digital engagement also form a strong foundation for the future. A new Digital Engagement Strategy and a full audit of methodist.org.uk have set priorities around accessibility, content quality and search visibility, while also highlighting ongoing challenges—particularly supporting smaller churches with limited digital capacity and ensuring online activity strengthens rather than replaces local congregational life. The task for the next triennium is to build steadily on what is already working: deepening relationships with the audiences we are now consistently reaching, equipping churches with better tools and ensuring that every part of our digital presence serves the Church's calling to worship, learn, care, serve and share the gospel.

5.12 The Conference has directed a programme of digital transformation[13] to relieve the burden of compliance on managing trustees and ministers, and to support membership growth and discipleship. A key strand of this work concerns how the Church collects, manages and uses its data – including statistical returns. The current Statistics for Mission process asks churches to report at a fixed point once every three years, producing a retrospective snapshot that arrives too

13 https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/digital-transformation-programme/

late to inform timely missional action. The Digital Transformation Programme is exploring how future returns could instead become a continuous, lightweight process – updating as churches' circumstances change, reducing the annual burden on local officers, and making the resulting data available to circuits, districts and the Connexion in real time so that patterns of growth, decline and opportunity can be identified and acted upon throughout the year. Done well, this shift would mean that the data the Church holds is not simply a record of where we have been, but a living resource that supports the prayerful, missional discernment described in this report.

6. Conclusion

6.1 In adopting the God for All Strategy, the Conference recognised that "In the short-term … we expect that Methodist membership numbers will continue to decline. [However, we] envisage, in both existing churches and new churches, the stewarding of [missional] cultures so that over the long-term, growth does occur: in the numbers of new disciples of Jesus Christ, the numbers of missional risks taken and new churches started, the numbers of people who offer themselves for ordained and lay leadership for such a time as this, and the numbers of lives and communities transformed".[14]

6.2 The Conference is therefore invited to receive this report and in doing so to note the signs of hope that are contained within these returns and to encourage continued engagement with the strategies that the Conference has put in place to meet the aspiration to be, once again, a growing Church.

*****RESOLUTION**

43/1. The Conference receives the Report.

14 *God For All* (2020-2025), paragraph 26.