

A summary of the 2017 Statistics for Mission report, with particular attention to attendance trends in the Diocese of Lincoln.

Thomas Wilson, PA to the Archdeacons.

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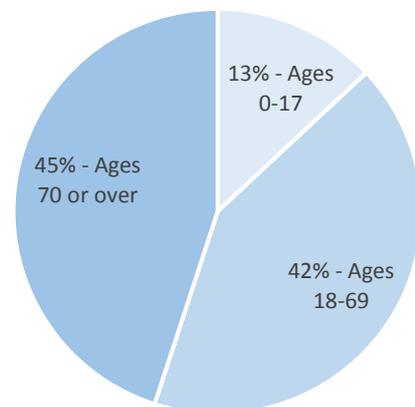
The implications of an aging population

- **Aging worshipping communities**
- **Few children in congregations**

The ratio of children to other age groups in Lincoln's worshipping communities is among the lowest in the country, with only 2 other dioceses scoring as low. The percentage of worshippers aged 70 or over (45%) is also among the highest in the country. Only 4 other diocese have a similar or higher proportion of worshippers aged 70 or over.

(It should be noted that since the percentage of worshippers aged 70 or over increased by 3% in 2017, and the ratio of children to the total aggregate remains unchanged, we may infer that there were more children in attendance in 2017 than in 2016.)

Age distribution of worshipping community



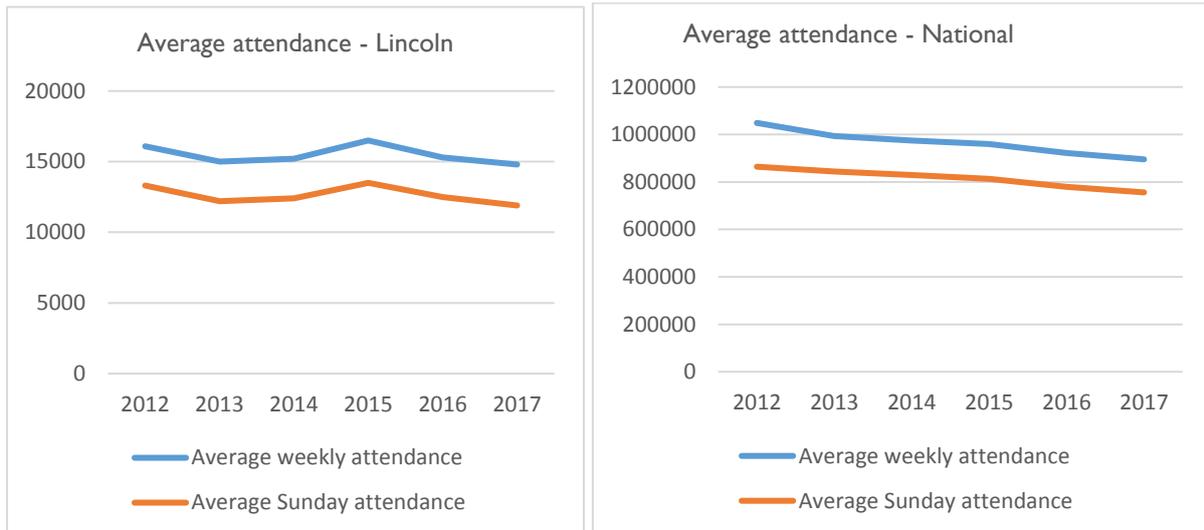
Lincoln is one of only 10 (21%) dioceses that reported fewer births than deaths in 2017. Of the 10,950 births in Lincoln only 19% were baptised, and of the 11,191 deaths, 29% were buried or cremated according to CofE rites. If we take these percentages as a representation of the in- and out-flux of the Christian population of the Diocese, it becomes axiomatic that we will continue to experience a decline in our worshipping communities.

What follows is a closer examination of the statistics submitted by 78% of the diocese's 625 churches, whether or not these data corroborate this prognosis, and how the data compare to the national average.

Average weekly and Sunday attendance

- **Rapid decline since 2015, but decline since 2012 less steep than national average**

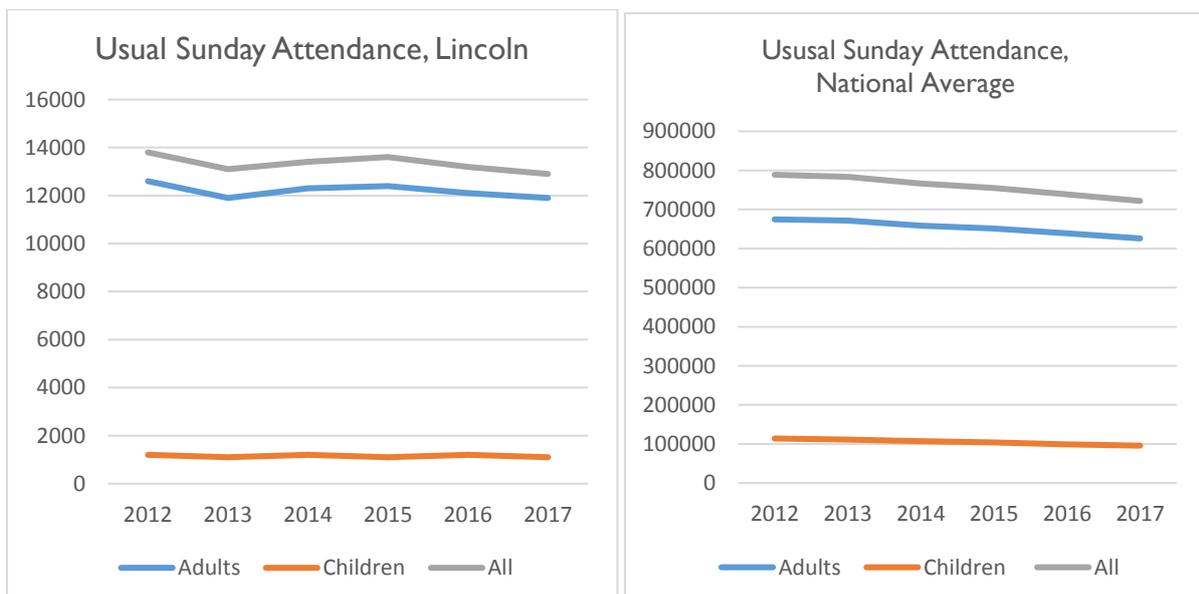
Like 91% of dioceses in the Church of England, Lincoln has experienced a drop in the number of regular congregants. Since 2012 Lincoln's **average weekday attendance** has declined by 8% from 16,100 to 14,800, and **average Sunday attendance** by 10% from 13,300 to 11,900. Lincoln recorded an anomalously high rate of attendance in 2015, meaning that the rate of decline in the quinquennial period between 2012 and 2017 is lower than the national weekday and Sunday averages of 14.6% and 12.5%, respectively, even though the rate of decline between 2015 and 2017 is steeper.



Usual Sunday Attendance

- **Decline since 2015, but less acute than national average**

Lincoln has experienced an overall decline in **Usual Sunday Attendance** since 2012, however the rate of decline is perhaps less severe than in most other dioceses. (65.2% of dioceses report a steeper decline in attendance figures than Lincoln, between 2012 and 2017)



Christmas and Easter Attendance

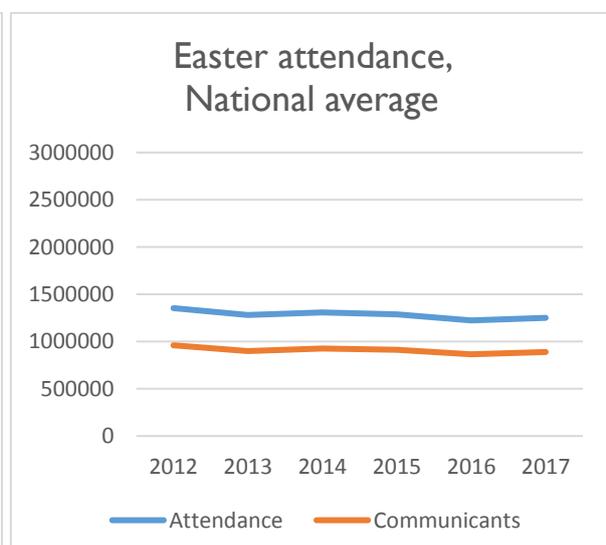
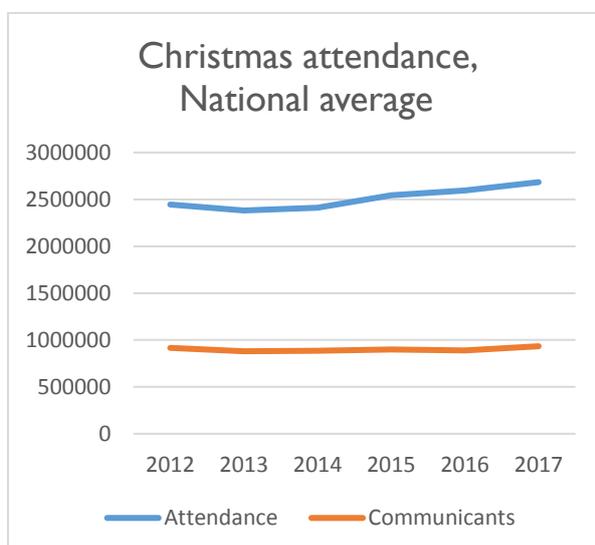
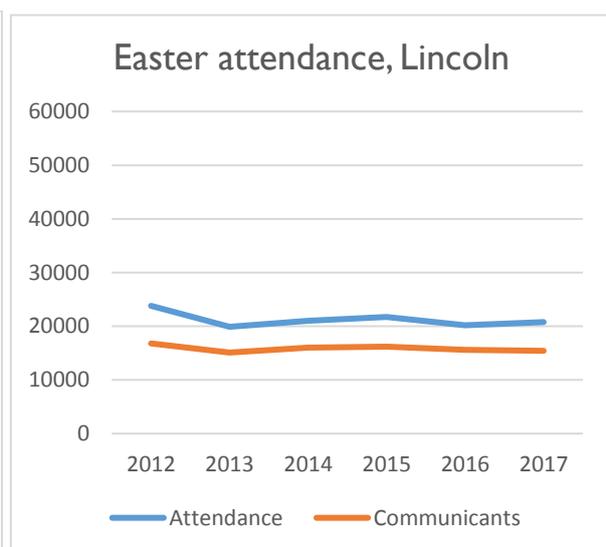
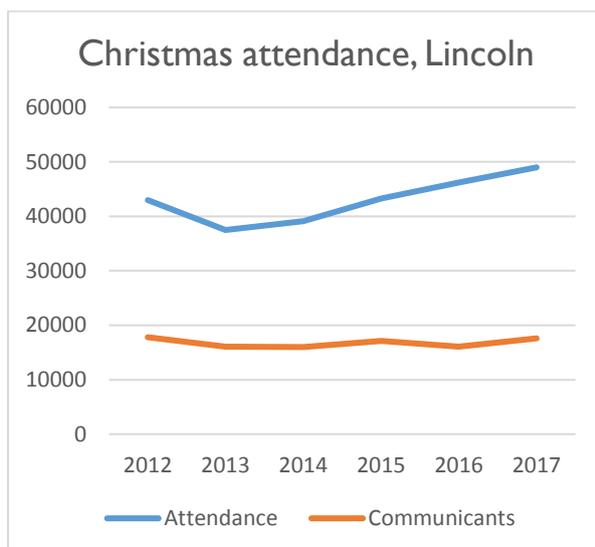
- **Positive Diocesan and National trends**
- **Increased attendance at Christmas services, also among Christian population.**

Christmas attendance has continued at a steady rate of increase since 2013 (5.71% increase from 2016). 49,000 people attended a Christmas service in 2017 (Of which 17,600, or 35%, were communicants; a 9.31% increase from 2016).

In terms of **percentage of population**, these 49,000 people represent 4.5% of the population of the Diocese (or 6.8% of the Christian population). This is up from 4% (5.9% of Christians) in 2015, and 4.3% (6.5%) in 2016. It should be noted that despite the increase in Christmas attendance, Lincoln is still slightly below the national average (4.5% vs 4.8%)

Easter attendance is slightly up from last year. 20,800 people attended an Easter service, which is an increase of 2.9% from last year. The data since 2012 are consistent and fairly stable, making it difficult to determine if this slight fluctuation represents anything particularly significant.

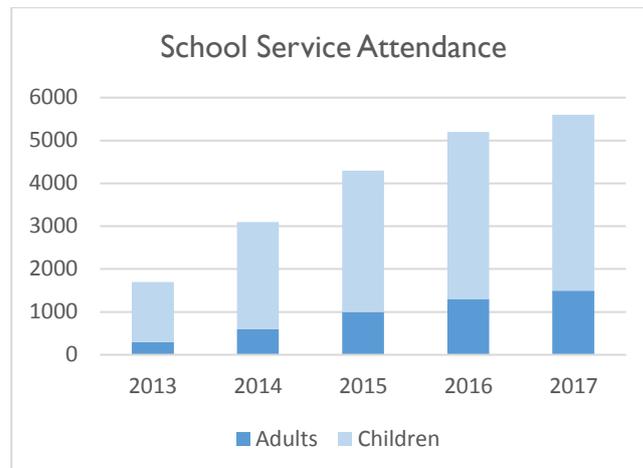
The number of Easter communicants dropped by 1.3% (from 15,600 to 15,400), contrary to the national average, which increased by 3%. Apart from this, both Christmas and Easter trends are closely in line with the National Average.



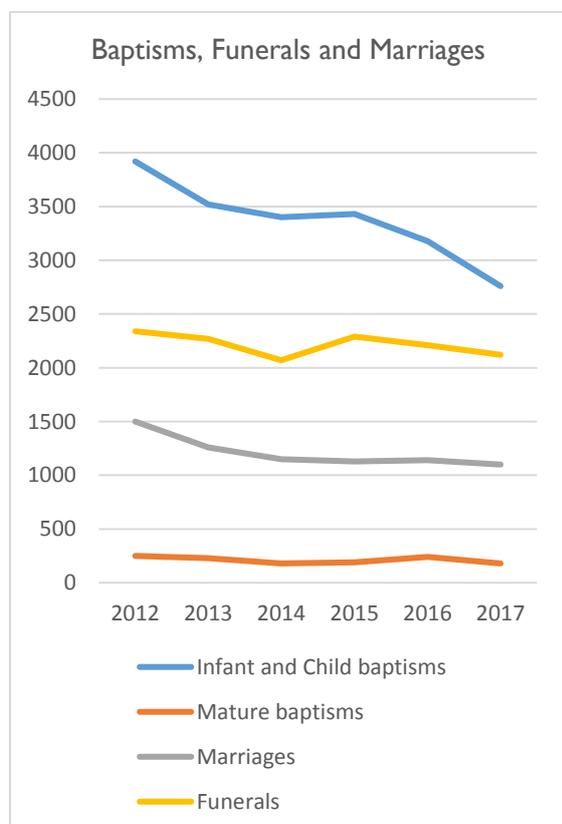
School service attendance

Despite a low (but slowly increasing) rate of average weekly attendance among children aged between 0-17, **school service attendance** is continuing to increase.

5,700 (of which 1,500, or 26.3% were adults) attended a school service in 2017 (National average = 4,300). This is an increase of 9.6% since 2016, and an increase of 235.3% since 2013. (The ratio of children to adults has remained constant) This rate of increase is higher than 80% of other dioceses.



Baptisms, Funerals, and Marriages



Since 2016:

- **Infant and child baptisms have decreased by 13.2%**
- **Mature baptisms decreased by 25%**
- **Marriages decreased by 3.5%**
- **Funerals decreased by 4%**

Since 2012:

- **Infant and child baptisms have decreased by 29.6%**
- **Mature baptisms decreased by 28%**
- **Marriages decreased by 26.7%**
- **Funerals decreased by 9.4%**

Summary

Areas of growth since 2016

- Christmas attendance increased by 5.71%
- Number of Christmas communicants increased by 9.31%
- School service attendance increased by 9.6%
- Child (ages 0-17) average weekly attendance, by 6.7%

Areas of decline since 2016

- Average weekly attendance down 8%
- Average Sunday attendance down 10%
- Child Baptisms and Mature Baptisms declined by 13.2% and 25% respectively
- Marriages down 3.5%
- Funerals down 4%

Areas in which Lincoln scores higher than national average

- Percentage of infants being baptised
- Percentage of funerals in churches, crematoria and cemeteries
- Congregants ages 70 or over

Areas in which Lincoln scores lower than national average

- Worshipping community
- Population per church
- Average weekly attendance
- Usual Sunday attendance
- Easter attendance
- Christmas attendance
- Percentage of children (ages 0-17) in worshipping community

Conclusion

Like 41 other dioceses, Lincoln has experienced decline in just about every method of measuring attendance. Lincoln's attendance appears always to have been below the national average, but the trajectory of decline is perhaps less forbidding than in most other dioceses. Recent 'Fresh Expressions' initiatives and other missiological campaigns may have restrained the speed of decline, but as the Revd Canon Dr Lynda Barley has pointed out, the positive influence that these sorts of enterprises have on worshipping communities may not be quantifiable for some time.

After travelling through Lincolnshire in 1791, The Honourable John Byng, later 5th Viscount Torrington, anticipated that *"Any church attendance will soon cease and I shall live to see when none will be present at a service but a reader, a verger, and two singing-boys who will gallop it over in a few minutes."* (*The Torrington Diaries*, 1794) Perhaps we may find some small consolation in the fact that poor church attendance is not a recent phenomenon in Lincolnshire, and that after 200 years Byng's prediction remains unfulfilled.

Please contact Thomas Wilson at the Archdeacons' Office if you have any questions or comments about this report.