

**OC International Research Project Report:
Interviews with South East of England Pastors**
21 December 2010

Introduction: The purpose of this research project is to understand better the church of Southern England in its context in order to discern how OCI-UK as a mission might best minister to and assist these churches.

This project was carried out during 2009 and 2010. It involved the identification of as many churches as possible in the target region, random selection of churches for interview and the interviewing of the pastor or other church leader in person or by phone.

Procedures: Several methods were employed to locate churches in Southern England. Existing databases were used as available from other organizations in the area. However, it was found that many more churches could be located via Internet searches, so this became the primary method of building our church database. In the end, 1440 churches were identified and classified by location and denomination. In order to obtain information from a broad cross-section of churches, a random selection of churches was made. This was accomplished after grouping them into 30 different subsets, being 5 geographical divisions and 6 denominational groupings. The following table shows the number of churches in each category:

Denominational Grouping	Post Code Groupings					Total
	BN	TN	SO,PO	GU,KT	CR,RH,SM	
Church of England	140	94	161	121	132	648
Baptist	27	26	33	24	38	148
Methodist	22	34	39	19	25	139
United Reformed Church	21	18	26	16	22	103
Other denominations	57	14	49	37	51	208
Denomination not known	24	62	50	16	42	194
Total	291	248	358	233	310	1440

A random sampling of churches in each of the above strata was chosen for interviewing. The target number of churches was 3% for the Church of England and 6% for all others. Each sample stratum was ordered randomly and, if after repeated attempts an interview could not be scheduled at a church, the next one in the random listing was substituted. The target number of churches to be interviewed, according to the percentages listed above, was 81.

Each church was approached by letter introducing the survey and its purposes and then contacted by telephone within two weeks to try to schedule the interview. The preference was to do the interview in person; as time went on, however, more of the interviews were done by phone in order to speed up the process.

The questionnaire was developed and tested with several pastors of local churches to ensure clear understanding. Introductory statements and answers to frequently asked questions were also developed so that all contact by phone and in person would be carried out in as similar a manner as possible. The questionnaire focused on topics/areas in which OC International historically has been able to assist churches, including church growth, lay leadership development, discipling of new

believers, missions and evangelism, youth outreach and prayer ministries.

Interviews were completed during a one-year period from September 2009 to end-September 2010. Interviews lasted an average of 54 minutes (ranging from 10 minutes to 109 minutes). In total 189 churches were contacted, leading to 71 interviews being performed; complete data was available for the analysis of 64 interviews. The following table shows the number of churches interviewed in each of the sampling strata:

Denominational Grouping	Post Code Groupings					Total
	BN	TN	SO,PO	GU,KT	CR,RH,SM	
Church of England	5	2	5	2	2	16
Baptist	2	2	3	1	3	11
Methodist	2	1	2	1	0	6
United Reformed Church	1	0	3	2	3	9
Other denominations	4	1	4	3	4	16
Denomination not known	2	0	4	4	3	13
Total	16	6	21	13	15	71

The data from each interview were entered into an on-line database using Lime Survey, which allowed tabulation and statistical analysis of the demographic data. It was then exported for theme analysis. The remainder of this report will describe the results of this analysis.

Analysis of Demographic Data Gathered: Even though the focus of these interviews was to obtain qualitative information regarding the felt needs of churches in the South-East region of England from the perspective of their leaders, certain "demographic" indicators were included in order to understand and classify the group being studied. This section will summarize the demographic data obtained.

The interview questions were designed to be presented to a church leader, but in some cases when a church leader wasn't available, a church administrator or secretary provided answers to the interview questions. This is the breakdown of **position in the church**:

Pastor, Minister, Vicar, etc.	76.0%
Lay Leader (elder, deacon, etc)	15.5%
Administrative position	8.5%

We asked **how long the person had served** in the current church and in the ministry in general. This question was intended to evaluate longevity of the pastors in their ministries, so calculating for only the pastors interviewed:

Years in this local church:	7 years average (ranging from less than a year to 29 years)
Total years in the ministry:	18 years average (ranging from 1.5 to 41 years)

The **ages of people interviewed**: 28% from 25 to 49 and 72% over 50.

The **gender of interviewees**: 79% male and 21% female

The interviewee was asked to describe his or her **church context** choosing among 3 choices:

- Rural Church: 18%
- Small-town Church 58%
- City Church 24%

It was noted in several interviews that the interviewee had difficulty deciding between the rural and small-town options, considering their church to be a village church.

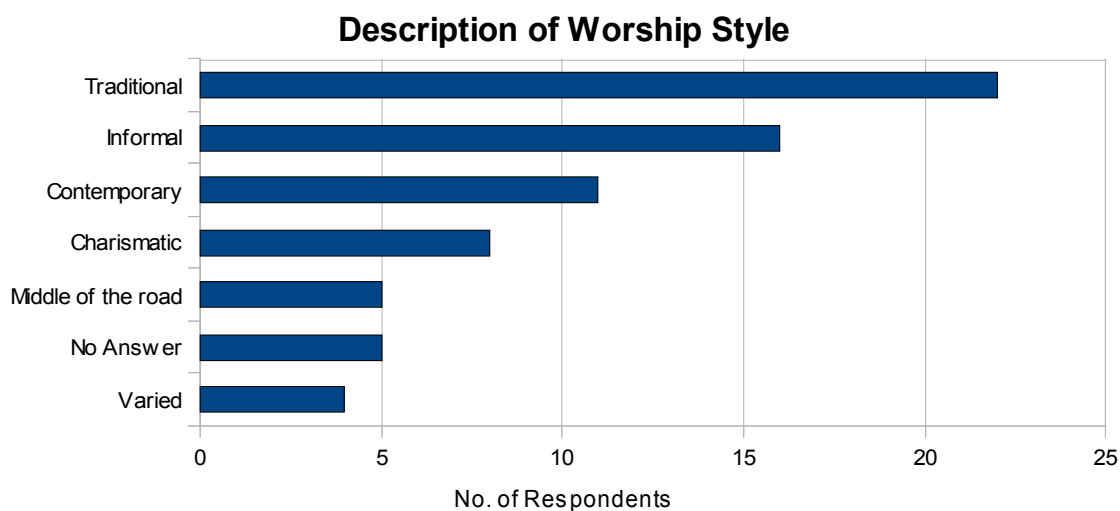
The **average church membership** was asked, as well as **average weekend attendance**. This information is compared with church context in the following table:

	Total	Rural	Small-town	City	Small-Town and City combined
Membership	111	74	120	113	118
Average Attendance	101	48	105	127	112

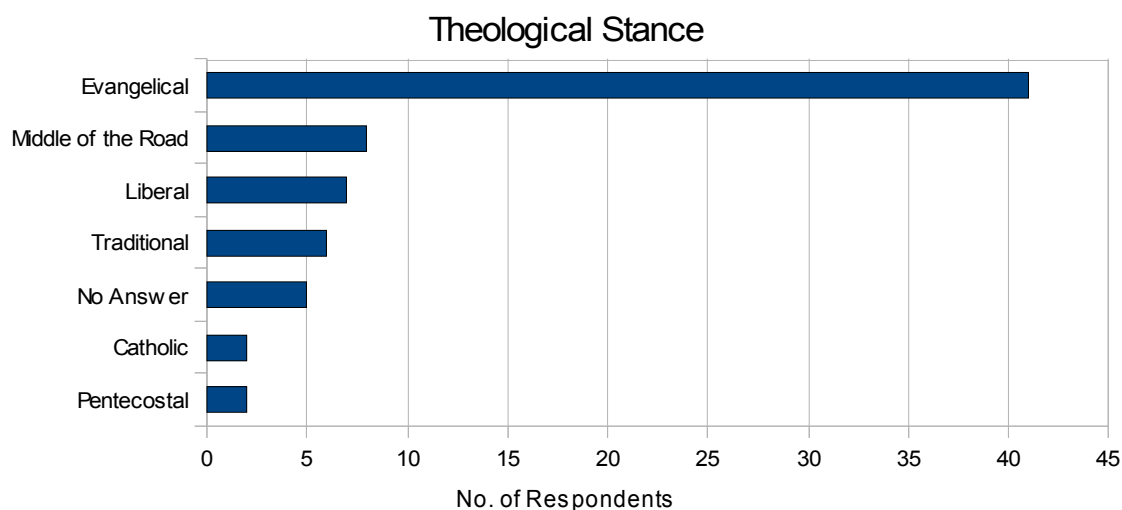
On average the churches have 1.44 Sunday services, 0.63 mid-week services and 0.03 Saturday services. The total **number of services** of the churches interviewed ranged from one meeting per month to 7 per week, with nearly half of the churches having only one service per week on Sunday.

The churches interviewed varied greatly in age, based on **the year founded**, ranging from the year 635 to 2009 with the median year (half before and half after) being 1927.

The following graph shows the ways the respondents described the style of worship of their churches:



The following graph shows how the respondents described the theological stance of their churches:



The **average age of members** of the congregations studied was as follows:

- Up to 24 years of age: 21% (minimum stated was 0% and maximum was 55%; the UK average is 31%)
- Between 25 and 49 years 28% (minimum stated was 2% and maximum was 68%; the UK average is 36%)
- 50 years or more 51% (minimum stated was 10% and maximum was 97%; the UK average is 33%)

This shows that the church is aging as well its leadership, but also that there are some churches attracting the younger generations.

Interviewees were asked to describe the **past and expected future growth** of their congregations both numerically and spiritually. The following table summarizes these responses:

	Numerical Growth		Spiritual Growth	
	Past 5 years	Expected over the next 5 years	Past 5 years	Expected over the next 5 years
Strong decline	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Some decline	22.5%	4.2%	5.6%	0.0%
Static	31.0%	14.1%	14.1%	2.8%
Some Growth	28.2%	49.3%	52.1%	40.1%
Strong Growth	15.5%	29.6%	22.5%	50.7%

When comparing the membership and attendance figures with the churches that are growing or not, a clear correlation can be seen in that the static and non growing churches have an average of 26% **fewer** people attending than they have members, and the churches which are growing have 6% **more** attendees than members. This percentage increases to 13% when considering only those churches that have shown strong growth. This seems to support the common assumption that one way to increase growth is simply to get more visitors from the surrounding community to come into/have contact with a church.

When comparing the responses of interviewees under the age of 50 with those over 50, both groups had higher expectations for spiritual growth than for numeric growth, with the expectations of the

younger group being only slightly (i.e. not statistically significant) greater than that of the older group.

Conclusions from the Demographic Analysis: A clear conclusion from this demographic data is that a broad cross-section of the churches in the region has been represented in this study. From the age of the church to the style of worship, the variety is wide. This increases the validity of the findings concerning felt needs identified in the rest of this report.

The age distribution of our interviewees is a strong indicator of the need for more young leaders to ensure the future of the church in Southern England. The growing churches tended to have more people attending than were members, while non-growing churches had fewer attending than their official membership. The leaders interviewed showed a positive outlook toward the future as demonstrated by the fact that the percent anticipating both numerical and spiritual growth over the next five years was substantially higher than those who had experienced such growth over the past five years.

Themes: The bulk of the interviews was focused on open or free-text questions about the church in the areas of Numerical Growth, Spritual Growth, Leadership Development, Missions and Evangelism, Prayer, Counseling, and Youth Ministries. What follows is a summary of the most common opinions expressed in each subject area.

Numerical Growth: The interviewee was asked two open questions about the numerical growth of his or her church:

- *In what ways would you like the church to change in size in the next 5 years?*
- *In order to produce the change you would like to see, what do you feel you need to have?*

The majority of the pastors/ministers questioned said they would like to see growth. Those who sought growth often expressed this through a desire to reach out to the local community and draw people into the church, either by making their buildings and worship more inviting or by getting church members themselves involved in the community. Specifically, the most frequently expressed need was for additional staff (9 citings). This included a desire for full-time, part-time and volunteer assistance. Youth (meaning a desire for more young people as well as for those to minister to them), and simply "people" were the next greatest felt needs (8 citings each). More prayer (7 citings), community contact (6 citings) and evangelism and intervention/empowering by the Holy Spirit (5 citings each) followed. In conclusion, many ministers wished to see greater numbers in their churches and more trained people to work with them.

Spiritual Growth: Spiritual growth was probed at two points in the interveiw. First, near the beginning regarding the interviewee's perspective for the future spiritual growth of the church, and later on regarding what the church does to encourage spiritual growth in new believers and in general. These were the questions asked:

- *In what ways would you like the church to change spiritually in the next five years?*
- *In order to produce the change you would like to see, what do you feel you need to have?*
- *How do new believers in the church grow in their Christian faith?*
- *What programmes do you have to teach the basics of the faith?*
- *What programmes do you have to encourage spiritual growth?*
- *Is there anything else you would like to have in place to help new believers?*

Apart from house groups, there was no mention of regular adult learning opportunities other than regular attendance at worship services. When asked how new believers learned the basics of the

faith, the most common response was “The Alpha Course.” A few stated that they preferred to create and use their own “in-house” materials which they believed better met the level of the community at large and did not appear too “slick” or “middle class.” In many cases small groups/cell groups, when they existed, provided for both discipleship of new believers as well as on-going spiritual development. There was admittedly very little offered by the churches in terms of training and empowering the house group leaders to provide this for their members.

In summary, the most specifically articulated need for enhancing spiritual growth was for “leaders” (10 citations). This included the raising up of new leaders, youth leaders, children's leaders, as well as stronger, more spiritually mature leaders. Not surprisingly, this was followed by the stated need for more Bible exposure (7 citations) including Bible study, Bible knowledge, and simply greater interest in the Bible. Greater “commitment”, “discipleship”, “prayer”, and “people” followed (6 citations each). Many ministers surveyed would like their members to grow spiritually strong, but were hampered by a lack of commitment and/or manpower. They felt they needed more, and more Biblically literate, leaders (lay and otherwise) who could mentor (disciple) others, model commitment, and stimulate prayer.

Leadership development: The interviewee was asked three open questions that related to the development of lay leadership in his or her church:

- *How do members become church leaders?*
- *What programmes or training do you have in place to develop leaders?*
- *What else would you like to see done to develop lay leaders to increase you church's ministry potential?*

The question "How do people become leaders?" almost always elicited the response that they were elected or chosen by the existing leadership, by church meetings, or by the local diocese. Some interviewees stated that the development of new leaders was ‘ad hoc’ and people were given leadership responsibilities by having meetings with the current pastor or, in one case, the church just “let it happen.” Responses to the question that followed about how leaders were trained often revealed that the minister sought to empower lay leaders on some level. Some offered in-house programs and courses, whilst others took advantage of resources prepared by other churches. Those churches which were part of a diocese or similar appeared to have a more rigid training program in place. What seemed to be the most common practice, however, was that leaders were either elected, volunteered or got invited to lead in the church based on their being responsible people. Once chosen, many ministers helped these leaders in some way through mentoring or directing them to some structured training.

Those churches where leadership training was offered prior to a person being chosen to lead were few and were limited to the larger, faster growing churches. There was no mention of developing leaders in order to send them out into missions or to plant new churches.

In summary, the specific need that was most frequently cited was “training” (e.g. for children's work, nurture groups, for outreach, etc.), with 8 citations. The need for “people” and “mentors” was also recognized, with 4 citations each. Four ministers shared that simply receiving some encouragement in this area, having some enthusiasm expressed, would be of help.

A number of ministers weren't sure where to start, although they recognized the need for more lay people to assume leadership roles. Several pastors stated that they would love to have help in training up lay leaders, by way of materials, seminars, or whatever could be offered.

Missions and Evangelism: The interviewee was asked three open questions regarding missions and evangelism:

- How does your church minister in the areas of missions and evangelism?*
- What missions and/or evangelism programs do you have in place?*
- Is there anything else you would like to have in place to help the church grow in missions and evangelism?*

Several churches shared that they were not involved in local or foreign missions. Some stated that they felt they should start something but didn't know what yet, or were waiting for the Spirit of God to bring the need to them. Many, however, were quite open in this area locally, offering various activities such as parent/toddler groups, youth clubs, harvest services, Christingle, Brownies, etc. There was mention of involvement in local missions such as the Worthing Churches Homeless Project. At the other extreme, quite a number of churches were actively involved in overseas missions, especially in Asia and Africa.

Evangelism was nearly exclusively carried out through the development of community activities. There was very little mention of training church members in evangelism. Several pastors said they would welcome evangelism training for their people along with practical evangelistic experience.

One specific need which was articulated in this area was assistance with the development of missions/outreach web resources (2 citations), both to disseminate new community needs as well as to make an existing website more comprehensive. The main thrust though, would seem to be the need for more resources in the form of finances, space and manpower.

Prayer Ministries: The interviewee was asked three open questions regarding prayer ministries:

- How does your church grow and develop in its prayer ministries?*
- What programs do you have in place to promote prayer?*
- Is there anything else you would like to have in place to help the church develop more in prayer?*

This section of the survey revealed the second-to-fewest number of felt needs. More than half of the respondents stated 'No' or 'I don't know' to the first question. One church said they didn't have enough corporate time for prayer. Another church stated they didn't want to "get stuck in a prayer rut." Many of those asked did appear to see this as a failing. They stated they would like to see more prayer in their churches and wanted to develop this area throughout church life. They expressed an openness to new, fresh ideas. Indeed, quite a few shared that they currently have several prayer meetings on weekdays, prayer prior to worship services, once-a-month prayer times on Saturday mornings, prayer retreats, and annual 24/7 prayer campaigns. A higher level of commitment to prayer appeared to be characteristic of the older churches.

One specific need which was identified was for help to create more time for prayer (2 citations). Two ministers stated that simply receiving some encouragement/enthusiasm in this area would be of help.

Counseling: The interviewee was asked two open questions regarding how they meet the counseling needs of their members:

- How does your church meet the counseling needs of its members?*
- Is there anything else you would like to have in place to help the church develop in the area of counseling?*

This was the area with the least expressed need for help. Most in-house counseling needs fell on the minister/rector, as a majority of those questioned did not have dedicated counseling teams. Some churches had staff and/or members who were trained counselors. More difficult counseling

needs were frequently referred to other organizations.

A few ministers admitted that this was not a strong point in their church and there were two citations of the need for training. One person expressed a wish for the counseling needs of ministers to be met!

Youth Ministry: The interviewee was asked two open questions regarding youth ministry:

- *What programs do you have in place for youth ministry?*
- *Is there anything else you would like to have in place to help the church develop in youth ministry?*

Assistance with youth ministry was the most frequently identified need. There were 16 specific citations for the need for a youth worker of any sort (i.e. intern, youth pastor, youth specialist, etc.) and 30% of all the interviewees said they were currently seeking a youth minister for their church. Many churches reported that they didn't have a youth program in place at this time, sometimes because of a lack of funds to hire a youth worker, sometimes because of the non-availability of youth staff, and sometimes because there were simply no youth in the area, as many had left their smaller towns for university, etc. Even so, many ministers who did not currently have youth, nor active ministry for youth in their churches, still felt they needed a youth minister, presumably to help change that reality. Those churches that did have youth ministry often reported running various age-grouped clubs and youth versions of courses like Alpha and "Christianity Explored." Very few churches reported offering specific training for their lay people to work with the youth, and several said they could use outside help to do so. Several churches stated that they can't do youth ministry due to a lack of adequate facilities, and that they desired to obtain their own building, not because they needed it for Sunday services but in order to provide a venue for youth ministries to take place.

In summary, the main way churches expressed their need for help with youth ministry was to have more staff – leaders and volunteers.

Other Comments: At the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked the following question:
• *Are there any other areas we have not talked about that you would like to have in place to help the church grow and minister?*

Some observations on the responses follow here:

This final question presented a few concerns which had not been raised in any other section of the survey. Among them were a "church mission action plan" or the need for strategic planning on the local church level. Another was "ethnic ministries", demonstrating an awareness of the cultural diversity in the community and a desire to address it well. One church mentioned they have a large Korean population and have a Korean Assistant Pastor. Presumably they would like to network with other churches to grow in this area. "Policies" such as health and safety regulations revealed that at least one church would like help in this area. "Relevant sharing" was mentioned by at least two churches, communicating that they would like help in making their message and ministry more appropriate in the marketplace. Finally, at least one church wished to develop its ministry to people with "special needs" more effectively.

Conclusions:

One of the obvious benefits of this study was the impact it had on the pastors and leaders interviewed. In more than one case, at the end of the interview, a statement was made to the effect

that these questions helped the pastor to think through issues in a new way. In at least one case, the pastor asked that we send back to him the responses he had given during the interview, because he felt they would help him with his future planning. Nearly all of the interviewees requested that copies of the final report be sent. In some ways, this interview process has been the first ministry of OCI-UK to come along side and assist the UK church to grow, both in size and in scope of ministry.

In terms of future ministry for OCI-UK, several of the leaders stated that a ministry to assist the church in the ways OC has done in other countries is greatly needed. One pastor prayed a beautiful prayer at the end of the interview asking the Lord to help OC grow and be able to help many churches in this way.

Most of the areas queried in these interviews revealed needs that are not being adequately met in the UK churches which participated in the study. These included means for creating greater relevant contact with the community, raising up and training lay leaders for ministry, developing effective youth engagement, and the discipling of new believers. Many of the churches seemed content with their current ministries in some of the areas studied, especially counseling and prayer ministries. This, however, did not mean that there were no needs, and several pastors did express a desire for assistance in these areas.

Finally, there are areas that history has taught OC as a mission organization, through studies of church growth, missiology, and experience, which may not present themselves as needs experienced by a local church minister but which are none-the-less critical areas for the growth. These would include church planting and multiplication, effective personal evangelism and missions.

In summary, the desire and need for a ministry of the type that OC has offered in other countries around the world is verifiable in the churches of Southern England at this time.