FIEC
How are we looking?

Trends and Statistics from FIEC churches
Why a data survey?

In 2014/15 we asked our family of churches to provide us with some statistics about their congregations and ministry. More than 8 in 10 churches responded – but what did the data show?

What follows is a summary of the information received from our churches.

The first thing to say is thank you! Your responses have given us a better idea of the size and scale of the FIEC across Great Britain. This is far more than a report of statistics, rather it helps us to better understand if we are achieving the objectives set out in the FIEC Strategic Plan which was unveiled to churches at our Leaders’ Conference in 2014.

Andrew Nicholson
Operations Director, FIEC
1. Reaching more communities

More Independent churches are choosing to join the Fellowship, new churches are being planted and churches are becoming multi-site to reach new communities. As we end the current FIEC year 545 local congregations are part of the FIEC family, a rise of 4% on the previous year.

FIEC is now running Vision Evenings once a term in various regions of Great Britain, for leaders of Independent churches not yet part of the FIEC family. The first one took place in Leicester in June and the next one will follow in November in the Birmingham area.

More than 50 FIEC churches are investigating the possibility of planting a new church in the coming year and an increasing number are taking advantage of the resources highlighted in our Church Planting Pack launched at the 2014 Leaders’ Conference.

2. Reaching more people

More than 39,000 people meet for worship in FIEC churches on a typical Sunday – with adults accounting for 31,000 and young people under 18 accounting for 8,000. That’s up 10% on a similar survey carried out in 2003, against an increase in the general population of around 7%.

The challenge remains of reaching the millions who still need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Other than Sunday services and weekday meetings, FIEC churches are reaching almost 40,000 people every week. As this relates only to church organised activities the reach will be much greater.
3. More people, less often?

Defining as ‘regular attenders’ those who come at least monthly, the number of people meeting for worship in FIEC churches increases to 46,000. This is almost a fifth (19%) more than a typical Sunday and prompted several pastors to remark that they see ‘more people, less often’, for which they acknowledge there are a variety of reasons.

We are liaising with FIEC pastors to help us tease out some of the challenges this presents and how churches might constructively address the trend.

4. Willing to join?

Of those who attend FIEC churches, 27,000 are in membership. That’s 9 in 10 (88%) of those adults present on a typical Sunday morning and 6 in 10 (59%) of regular attenders. It will be interesting to note over succeeding surveys the direction of any trend as, in 2003, the percentage was 64% of regular attenders.

It’s interesting to note that mainstream denominations often have more members than attenders, whereas in FIEC churches attendance is usually higher than membership.

5. Not just Sunday morning

Many new churches / congregations are being intentional in holding a single gathering on a Sunday afternoon – almost half of those started in the past two years. There are no doubt a variety of missional reasons for this trend and we have started conversations with FIEC pastors to help others to better understand their rationale.

6. No longer Sunday evening?

There is a noticeable trend of established churches no longer gathering on a Sunday evening, with fewer than eight in ten (77%) now doing so, compared to more than nine in ten (93%) twenty five years ago. And morning attendance as a proportion of total Sunday attendance has increased from 58% in 1989 to 70% today.
7. Where are the young people?

Just over 9,000 children are regular attenders at FIEC church services. And over the past quarter of a century the ratio of children to adults at Sunday morning services has decreased from around one third (32%) to only one fifth (20%). One in seven (13%) of churches have no young people attending and one third (35%) of churches have five or less.

In October 2015 FIEC hosted a consultation for selected youth and children’s workers to help us map out how FIEC could facilitate work amongst young people in our churches. And in future surveys we hope to gather data more widely on youth and children’s work outside of Sunday services.

8. Small but healthy?

More than half (54%) of FIEC churches have fewer than 35 members – this is virtually the same as in 2003 (57%). The smaller the church the more likely it is to be in numerical decline.

Small does not necessarily mean lack of gospel vision, but almost one third (29%) of FIEC churches have expressed an interest in Church Revitalisation. We are now recruiting for a Church Revitalisation Coordinator to help develop this initiative.

9. Baptisms

In future surveys we will ask about professions of faith alongside recording the number of baptisms. It is encouraging to note that the latter shows an average of 16 baptisms each week across the FIEC family. Totalling more than 800 in the year, this is a quarter (27%) more than shown in a similar survey from 2003.

Conversely, half of churches (53%) had no baptisms in the past year and this rises to almost nine in ten (86%) of churches with fewer than 15 members.
10. Ethnic diversity

Across the family of churches one in seven (13%) of attenders is from an ethnic minority group. This is largely in line with the population at large, even though one third (34%) of churches report no-one attending from an ethnic minority group. In future surveys we also hope to ask questions about different nationalities attending FIEC churches as, anecdotally, this is a growing trend.

FIEC expects to host a consultation of significant ethnically-diverse churches and ethnic church leaders in 2016.

11. Growing older?

Almost one in seven (13%) of people attending FIEC churches are age 75 or over. This is greater than the general population of just under one in ten (8 – 9%), which is perhaps not surprising and not to be devalued.

There is a real ministry in reaching out to a population that is living longer than even one generation ago and our National Director recently met with the Chief Executive of the Pilgrims’ Friend Society as they explore from a mission and ministry perspective the extent to which churches see this as a God-given opportunity.

We will be monitoring the trend over future surveys to establish whether church attenders are ageing faster than the general population.

12. Training

There appears to be an encouraging level of training for those in FIEC churches, with up to 500 people receiving Bible ministry training outside of church and over 1,500 having in-house training.

However, just over half (59%) of churches had no one receiving external training – perhaps reflecting the proportion of small churches in the Fellowship.

Taking a wider training perspective, more than one in ten churches have now benefited from the FIEC Training Fund, which we are looking to put onto a more sustainable funding basis with the recruitment of a Development Officer to raise funds from a wider variety of sources. We are grateful that the post is being funded for three years by a generous donor.
Conclusions

A danger of publishing statistics from a data survey is that it makes for interesting reading but then we don’t do anything with the findings. That’s why we’re asking for your help.

We would love to hear from you if you have any advice and wisdom for our Fellowship about how to tackle some of the conclusions from our survey. Are you coming up with creative ways to pastor people who you only see once a month? Have you changed service times to reach more of your community? Do you have creative ways to share the gospel with those who engage with your church family? If you can help us to better think through these challenges and others highlighted in our survey, please get in touch.

So what next?

The data survey commenced in November 2014 and ran for the succeeding ten months. We anticipate conducting a similar data survey every two years, with the next one due towards the end of 2016.

With an 84% response rate we have extrapolated the figures to give us a full picture across our whole family of churches.

If you want a copy of the full report, which will be available before the end of the year, please email us (admin@fiec.org.uk).