This report presents some general analysis of the Triennial Membership returns and Statistics for Mission. Summary tables indicating the changes during the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 in membership and church attendance figures accompany it. Further details of attendance, membership, community roll figures, church-sponsored youth groups and other data can be obtained from the Methodist Church website www.methodist.org.uk and Methodist Church House.

This latest triennial period has seen an increasing turn towards web-based methods of recording statistics. Work is also underway to integrate the data about property and projects that are grant-funded that has been held in Manchester with the data that has been held in London.

The work of analysing the statistics is undertaken by the Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops' Council, Church of England on the Methodist Church's behalf, and provides the possibility of comparison with Anglican trends as well as the National Census. That plus the new ways of collecting the data means that the statistics can become a vital support in planning mission strategies both locally and connexionally.

It is proposed that a presentation be made to the Conference with the help of members of the Research and Statistics team to demonstrate the potential of this way of collecting and using the statistics.

## **Introduction: Statistics of Membership and Statistics for Mission**

- 1. The Triennial statistics for *Church Membership*, *Attendance at Worship* and *Local Influence* are now available. Thanks are due to everyone who helped to achieve this, particularly District Membership Secretaries who do a tremendous amount of work to ensure that the returns are made.
- 2. In the attached Summary and Comparison of some Key Figures for Membership and the summary of Membership in the Districts there is a continuing issue over how membership in Local Ecumenical Partnerships is reported to the various ecumenical partners. As reported to the Conference in 2005, following the introduction with ecumenical partners of a Joint Return a few years ago we now have a better range of data for most Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). Each LEP has some "traditional" members who belonged to a particular denomination before it became a LEP or who have transferred to it from another church of that denomination; and some "joint" members who have been made members or confirmed since the LEP began and who in a sense belong to all of the participating denominations. But if each denomination were to claim all the joint members as part of its own denomination, there would be multiple counting when the figures for all the denominations are added together. Moreover the LEP would not welcome it were each denomination to count all the joint members as its own for the purpose of calculating financial assessments. The Joint Return has therefore been used to calculate a more realistic figure for the Methodist membership. This only includes a proportion of joint members and excludes members of other denominations.

3. The Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England was commissioned to provide detailed analysis of some of the trends in the figures, including some of the growth points within them. We are grateful for the expertise and help that the members of that Department have provided, and the following paragraphs of this report are essentially their work.

## Triennial returns: Highlights

#### 4. Attendance

An average of 262,000 adults, young people and children attended Methodist worship each week in October 2007. Average weekly adult attendance, though still lower than in 2005, was higher in 2007 than in 2006. Most of the increase was at midweek services. After a long period of decline, it remains to be seen whether this represents a continuing reversal of a trend.

### 5. Growing Churches

1,265 congregations enjoyed higher levels of membership in 2007 than in 2005. That represents 23% of the congregations with membership<sup>1</sup> in 2005. Since many of the increases were in larger churches, it also means that 27% of the current membership belong to a growing church.

### 6. Later Baptisms Increasing

Numbers of mature baptisms, for candidates aged 13 years and above, have grown and now stand at around 900 in a year. Confirmations, by contrast, continue to decline steeply. The 3,000 confirmations in 2007 were 37% fewer than recorded in 2005.

### 7. Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Local Ecumenical Partnerships declined both in number and as a proportion of Methodist congregations. Methodist membership of LEPs fell by 13%, which is a steeper decline than in the rest of the connexion. The 508 partnerships now constitute 9.4% of Methodist congregations. The largest partners continue to be the Church of England (22% of the partnerships) and United Reformed (16%).

## 8. Scouting and Under-Five Groups

In common with growth in the rest of the Scouting movement, Scouting groups associated with Methodist churches have grown by 6% from 2005 to 2007.

8,700 under-fives participated in midweek children's groups in 2005, an increase of almost 3,000 on 2005.

## 9. Background

These highlights are set against a background where adult attendance has fallen throughout the connexion by 10% over the triennium, membership by 6% over the same period. Weddings, confirmations, and junior attendance

<sup>1 &</sup>quot;With membership" is used to denote churches that recorded non-zero membership for a year. Where a church had no members, had sent a zero return or had sent no return, it was not included in the count for that year.

have fallen at a faster rate. The highlights suggest that the pattern is neither uniform nor irreversible.

#### Results

## 10. Triennial Summary

Table 1

Thousands	2004	2005	2006	2007	Change	Change
					2004 to	2006 to
					2007	2007
Membership	294	284	273	267	-9%	-2%
Community Roll	797	756	710	648	-19%	-9%
Baptisms and Thanksgivings	15	15	13	11	-24%	-10%
Baptisms over 13	0.72	0.80	0.73	0.89	23%	23%
Confirmations	4.4	4.7	4.2	3.0	-33%	-29%
Couples Married or Blessed	6.8	6.3	5.3	4.3	-37%	-18%
Funerals	32	30	29	24	-25%	-16%
Average Adult Attendance All Week	244	236	212	215	-12%	1%
Average Adult Sunday Attendance	223	216	194	194	-13%	0%
Average Adult Midweek Attendance	21	20	19	22	4%	15%
Average Under 13 Attendance All Week	57	54	44	36	-37%	-17%
Average Under 13 Sunday Attendance	31	29	24	22	-28%	-7%
Average Under 13 Midweek Attendance	27	25	20	14	-46%	-29%
Average 13 to 19 Attendance All Week	16.4	15.3	12.7	10.7	-35%	-15%
Average 13 to 19 Sunday Attendance	8.8	8.5	7.1	6.8	-23%	-5%
Average 13 to 19 Midweek Attendance	7.6	6.7	5.5	3.9	-49%	-29%
Average Attendance All Week	317	305	269	262	-17%	-2%
Average Sunday Attendance	280	269	237	230	-18%	-3%
Average Midweek Attendance	37	35	31	32	-13%	3%

Attendance figures are recorded for four weeks of October each year, with midweek figures recorded for people additional to the Sunday attendance.

#### 11. Church Attendance

Average weekly adult attendance was higher in 2007 than in 2006. Each year, a count was made of people aged 20 and over attending on each of four Sundays in October and additional adults attending midweek services. The average for a whole week was 215,000 worshippers in October 2007, compared to 212,000 the year before. 20 out of 31 districts recorded an increase in this particular measure. Welsh-speaking Wales increased, from a small base, by 45%. Attendance in English-speaking Wales, Plymouth and Exeter and Lincoln and Grimsby all increased by over 1,000 adults.

October 2007, the period when attendances were recorded, experienced less rainfall than the corresponding period in 2006. There have also been great efforts to encourage churches to submit their statistical returns. However, these are not reasons to dismiss the improvement in adult attendance. Good weather makes people less likely to stay at home, but the church still needs to attract people more than outdoor alternatives. Adult attendance rose in congregations that supplied figures for both 2006 and 2007 so the rise cannot be attributed to better reporting.

After a long period of gradual decline, any comparisons with the less recent past will appear unfavourable. From 2002 to 2004, the previous triennium, adult attendance was stable at around 240,000. The 2007 figure represents a fall of some 10% from the end of previous triennium and 9% since 2005.

A similar pattern of decline among the total numbers was exhibited in all geographical categories of church, from rural village congregations to inner city. Most districts also showed the same pattern. Attendance levels were sustained or increased in Shetland, Chester and Stoke-on-Trent, Cornwall, the Channel Islands and Bedfordshire Essex and Hertfordshire, but they declined by 15% in Northampton and by 22% in York and Hull.

Average adult weekly Sunday attendance in 2007 was 194,000. 10% of adult weekly attendance in 2007 was midweek, an additional 22,000 people. Churches are asked to report "additional adults attending weekday services and worship activities." In an area that typically requires greater effort to offer worship outside the Sunday routine, this was an increase of 7% across the country over 2005. There was particularly strong midweek growth in villages and small towns. The effect did not show up among Local Ecumenical Partnerships. Among solely Methodist congregations, adult midweek attendance rose by 10%, compared to a fall among partnerships of 13%.

There was no noticeable change in patterns of frequency of attendance. For all age groups, the monthly high and the monthly low changed by proportions similar to the average for the age group. These statistics are the highest and lowest of the four weeks reported during the month. When reporting a total for a church, Circuit or District, all the figures are for the same week. There is no mixing high and low values from different weeks across October until connexional level, when the district highs and lows are added together. Although there are many cases where worshippers, sometimes whole congregations, attend different churches from week to week, this happens much less between Districts. If the monthly low fell by less than the monthly high, it would suggest that there was a core membership remaining loyal while less frequent attenders drifted away. There is no such difference to report.

There is a small change in patterns of service. Some churches recorded no adult attendance for any of the four weeks of October. Of those that met at least once in October 2005, 615 churches either held no service or had no adults attend for at least one service. In 2007, there were 673 such churches. Since even the most loyal cannot attend when there is no service, there is a possibility that the monthly lowest attendance figures for single churches would otherwise have been higher.

### 12. Children and Young People

Teenage attendance throughout the week, including activities involving an element of Christian nurture, fell by 30% from 2005 to 2007. That is a faster rate of decrease than if the upper two year-groups had passed out of the agerange without being replaced by any younger children. That signifies that at least some young people are choosing to leave or to attend less frequently. In October 2007, 10,700 young people from 13 to 19 took part in these activities. Only Bedfordshire Essex Hertfordshire and Plymouth and Exeter

recorded increases compared to 2005. The median attendance for a District was 365 young people. 36% of teenage attendance was midweek, compared to 44% in 2005. In 2006, the Office for National Statistics<sup>2</sup> estimated that the 13 to 19 age-group made up 9.1% of the population of Great Britain. The same age-group made up 5.1% of Methodist attendance in 2005 and 4.0% in 2007.

Attendance figures for children under 13 are not only valuable in themselves, they also serve as an indication of the numbers of younger adults attending. Numbers fell from 53,500 in October 2005 to 36,400 in 2007, a fall of 32%. Where Office for National Statistics estimates put the proportion of under 13s in the population at 15.1%, among Methodist congregations it was 8.1% in 2005 and 5.4% in 2007. The implication is that the younger adults that are the parents of children under thirteen are also under-represented in congregations. Increases in adult attendance in 2007 were not among people bringing children with them.

## 13. Young People's Activities

The young people's church attendance covers services and midweek activities with an element of Christian nurture. In addition, data are collected about participation in youth activities run by or connected with the churches but not necessarily overtly Christian. These data reveal some marked contrasts.

A broad categorization divides the activities into midweek children's activities, uniformed organizations, overtly Christian activities such as Junior Church, Junior Mission for All and Methodist Youth Conference, and others that fit into none of those categories. There is a risk of putting groups into the wrong categories, but the process allows a comparison to see whether trends are affecting all types of activity equally. Data are also collected separately for several age-bands.

Statistics were received from 7,300 clubs. 1,750 new ventures started after 2005 and a further 1,150 increased their participation between 2005 and 2007. The remaining 4,400 lost members (1,660) or ceased altogether (2,740). Among involved churches, over 1,000 increased youth participation, 200 remained steady but 2,200 lost members.

Among particular age-groups and particular organizations there have been areas of growth. Greatest success was evident among under 5s in midweek children's groups. Almost 3,000 more boys and girls participated in 2007 than in 2005, a total of 8,700.

Starting numbers were lower in older age-groups, so the increased numbers in certain activities could often be masked by greater movements among younger children. Under 5s attended children's midweek groups in much greater numbers, as already mentioned, but the only other area of growth at this age appeared to be younger sisters attending Rainbows, Boy's Brigade and Brownies.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for 2006. Crown copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.

Boys 5 to 13 attended Beavers and Cubs in greater numbers, but with some losses at the older age of Scouts and huge losses to junior church, other youth groups and miscellaneous uniformed organizations. Overall this age-group of boys fell by over a third, finishing the triennium just over 30,000. Girls were similarly affected. Brownies and Guides fared well but all other categories declined. The finishing figure of 51,000 was also a decline of almost a third from 2005.

Among 13s to 19s, there is evidence of young people attending activities for younger children. If this is a sign that they are there to assist then this must be encouraging. 142 boys and young men and 19 girls and young women attended Beavers in 2007, with a further 118 at Rainbows. For Cubs the respective numbers were 180 and 38. Scouts increased their membership among both genders and over 400 more girls and young women joined the Guides. Venturers approximately doubled, to 150. The movement as a whole appears to have fared particularly well with this age-group in this triennium.

Scouting shared the success with Boys' and Girls' Brigades in the 20 to 25 age-group. Overall numbers fell by 1,700 to 2,700 in 2007, but (non-miscellaneous) uniformed organizations attracted extra numbers of both young men and women.

Looking at the different categories, midweek children's groups saw increased take-up among under 5s but decreases in other age-groups. Overall they stayed similar in number but with a much younger age-profile.

Uniformed organizations (Scouting, Boys' and Girls' Brigades) enjoyed greater take-up than general (miscellaneous, youth group and others). Decline over two years was 23% and growth was generally confined to the Scouting movement.

Explicitly Christian activities apart from uniformed organizations declined by 30%, but not quite so quickly as miscellaneous groups, whose participation fell by 35%. At a time when it is difficult to attract young people into an activity, the presence of an explicit Christian purpose did not increase the difficulty and may marginally have eased it.

Although the overall picture is of steep decline, there are elements giving rise to hope. Scouting generally and Boys' and Girls' Brigades for some important age-groups are enjoying greater popularity. Parents are taking more under 5s to midweek children's activities, and a not negligible number of young adults are choosing not just to take part in activities, but to help run them.

## 14. Membership

Methodist membership levels held up slightly better than attendance, falling only 6% between 2005 and 2007, to finish at 267,300. Special arrangements are in place to establish a reasonable estimate of Methodists among Local Ecumenical Partnerships. In churches with any membership, average sizes remained steady, but with large differences between types of location. Churches in rural villages averaged 20, inner cities 122. However, the average does not describe a typical church. In all types of location, the most common size was around half the average, with higher numbers increasingly

rare. Across the connexion in 2007 the average (mean) church size in terms of membership was just under 49.

Chart 1 shows the sizes of the 5,400 churches that indicated non-zero Methodist membership. Approximately 1,200 have a membership of twelve or less. A further 1,200 have a membership of 13 to 25. 750 more have 26 to 37 members. These three bands account for over half the congregations, keeping the churches going despite very scarce manpower resources. At the top end, three single congregations are just visible above the axis, having memberships of over 450.

#### Chart 1

### All Congregations with Methodist Membership

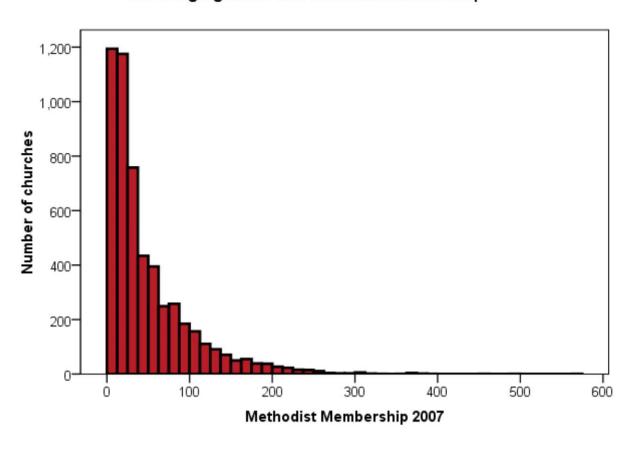
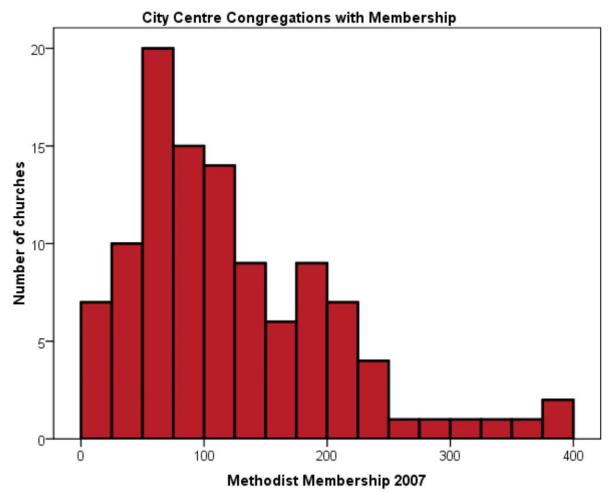
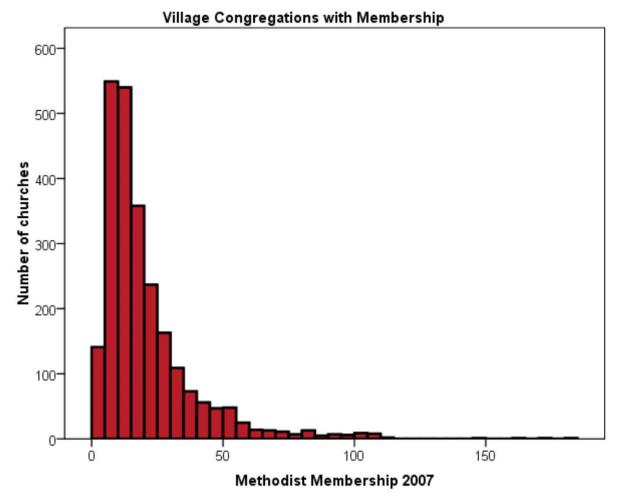


Chart 2



All the geographical categories show the same pattern. Charts 2 and 3 have examples. For the 110 city centre congregations, there are 20 churches, the most numerous group, in the range from 51 to 75. Seven churches number more than 250 members, but the average still reaches 120. In rural village congregations, there are three churches out of 2,450 with membership above 150. By contrast, more than half the congregations number 1 to 15 members. It is valuable to appreciate the differences when making plans. A scheme that requires twenty volunteers would be beyond the resources of more than half the country's rural Methodist congregations.

Chart 3



Aside from members, others on the community roll fell more quickly. In the two years from 2005 to 2007, those non-members for whom the church had pastoral responsibility declined from 470,000 to 380,000. The average fall was 19%, but where council estates fell by only 5%, city centres and inner city churches fell by 30%. The South East District and Bolton and Rochdale held steady, but only Birmingham and the smallest District of Shetland grew, Shetland adding 194 non-members to its roll. In the last year of the triennium, there were 2.4 on the community roll (including members) for every member. In 2005, there were 2.7.

## 15. Growing Churches

Every district and every geographical category reported at least some churches with larger membership in 2007 than in 2005. In all there were 1,265 such churches (23%) based on membership statistics reported by 7th April 2008. By number, 43% of growing churches, i.e. 541, were in rural village locations. The next largest categories, by numbers of churches, were suburban neighbourhoods (23%) and small towns (18%).

These proportions are similar to the numbers of congregations in the geographical categories, shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Geographical Category	Churches with Membership 2007	Proportion (rounded)
City Centre	108	2%
Council Estate	288	5%
Inner City	310	6%
Suburban Neighbourhood	1,205	22%
Small Town	1,025	19%
Rural Village	2,445	45%
Total	5,381	100%

Table 2 counts churches that had membership in 2007 and to which a geographical category has been assigned. (One church is of unknown category.) Statistics for attendance are slightly different because some churches reported attendance without membership and vice versa. Table 3 shows the numbers of churches either with more Methodist members than in 2005 or that were new since 2005. Although growing churches are in similar proportion to numbers of churches overall, the more urban and less numerous categories, city centre (34%) and inner city (31%) recorded higher proportions of growing congregations.

Table 3

Geographical Category	Growing Churches 2005 to 2007	Proportion (rounded) of churches growing	Proportion of churches growing, within category
City Centre	37	3%	34%
Council Estate	76	6%	26%
Inner City	97	8%	31%
Suburban	288	23%	24%
Neighbourhood			
Small Town	225	18%	22%
Rural Village	541	43%	22%
Total	1,264	100%	23%

There were proportionately more growing churches among the larger size brackets. Churches with Methodist membership in 2007 can be divided into five approximately equal groups on the basis of their numbers of members. Since membership must be reckoned in whole numbers, the groups cannot be precisely equal in size. There were 308 growing churches in the largest fifth (28% of the group), compared with 156 in the smallest fifth (15% of the group). As a result, 72,000 people belonged to churches that increased between 2005 and 2007. That is 27% of the connexional membership.

### 16. Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) have fared similarly to wholly Methodist congregations. There were 570 LEPs in 2005, representing 10.0% of congregations with Methodist membership. In 2007, there were noticeably fewer, 508 (9.4%). The overall partnership membership fell by 7%, which is similar to Methodism generally. The Methodist component fell slightly faster, by 13%. There is a possibility that this was only an apparent effect, caused by mis- or under-reporting due to the extra complexity of the statistical form.

In 2007 there were 20,300 Methodists worshipping in ecumenical partnerships, which numbered 37,700 altogether. Methodists therefore made up 54% of the partnerships in which they had a share. Their partners were Church of England (22% of the partnerships), United Reformed (16%), Baptist (2%) and others (6%). Two out of three members belonged since the beginning or defined themselves specifically as belonging to a denomination. The remaining third had joined the whole partnership and were only nominally apportioned to one particular church.

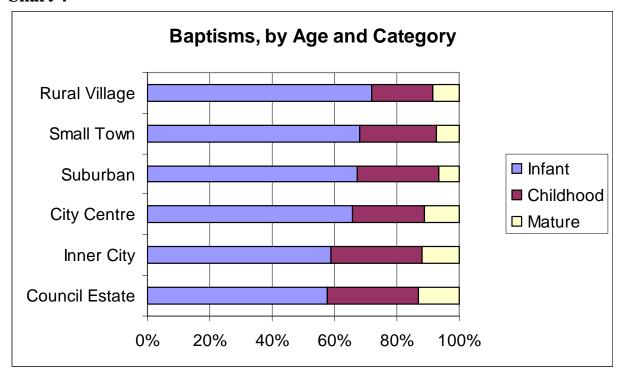
Different patterns emerge according to whether the Methodist church was the larger partner in the LEP. Numbers of Methodists in minority partnerships grew by 2% from 2005 to 2007. The share in minority partnerships grew from 30% to 36%. Where Methodists were the majority, their share and their number both fell. In 2005, 21,400 Methodists constituted 80% of the majority partnerships. By 2007, 17,900 worshippers represented only 73% of the partnerships.

## 17. **Baptisms**

Baptisms among people aged 13 and above, termed "mature" in this report, grew in 2007 to almost 900. The majority of baptisms continued to take place in infancy, where once again there was a decline from 2005 to 2007, in this case of 27%. There were 7,300 infant baptisms in 2007 and 490 thanksgivings for the birth of a child. 2,700 older children were baptized in 2007. In three Districts, London, North Lancashire and the Channel Islands, the overall number of baptisms grew, but elsewhere, such as Bristol and Birmingham the decline was as much as 40%.

Over the three years, around 7% of ceremonies for infants were thanksgivings rather than baptisms, but there were differences between districts. Thanksgivings were especially popular in the South East (12%) Southampton (12%) and Northampton (13%). A high rate of thanksgivings in Scotland in 2005 was due to a single church and has not been repeated since.

Chart 4



During 2007, patterns of baptisms were different between localities, shown in Chart 4. Villages recorded high proportions (72%) of infant baptism, in the children's first year. City centres, suburban areas and small towns recorded lower proportions, but not as low as inner cities (59%) and council estates (58%).

Chart 5

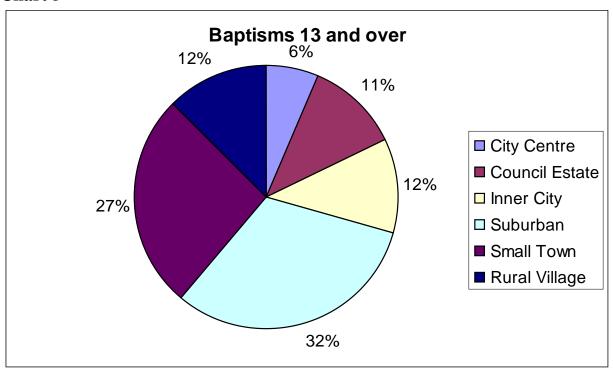


Chart 5 shows that, for baptisms at 13 years or over, the difference between localities was more striking still. Inner cities account for 8% of membership but 12% of mature baptisms. Council estates provide 4% of membership but a substantial 11% of mature baptisms.

## 18. Confirmations

In city centre churches, the decline in the number of confirmations from 2005 to 2007 was limited to 4%. Elsewhere, the decline was greater, contributing to a decline of 37% overall. There were just under 12,000 confirmations in the whole triennium, equivalent to 4.5% of 2007 membership. 3,000 confirmations took place in 2007.

Larger churches enjoyed a higher share of confirmations in all geographical categories. Over two thirds of the membership (184,000) belonged to churches with no confirmations in the year. The average membership of these churches was 39. Where there were confirmations, the total membership was much lower (79,000), but the membership per church was more than twice as high, at 86.

The effect was most evident in villages. 199 churches, making up 13% of the rural membership but with an average congregation of 37, witnessed confirmations. 2,252 did not, and had average congregations of 19. There is a strong implication that concentration of resources helps to encourage people into making the commitment of confirmation.

### 19. Weddings and Blessings of Marriage

Almost 16,000 weddings and blessings of marriage took place in Methodist churches during the triennium, of which 4,200 were in 2007. Numbers in 2006 and 2007 were down on 2005 in all geographical categories. The decline was shallower in small towns and city centres (29% and 17% respectively from 2005 to 2007), but very steep in inner cities (44%) and council estates (51%).

There was no distinct pattern in the ratio of weddings to blessings of marriage, which remained around 9 weddings to each blessing.

The number of people involved in marriages and blessings, remembering that these ceremonies are for couples, was approximately 2.2 times the number receiving mature baptism or confirmation. This ratio is an inexact measure, since not all choose to marry, some marry more than once, the age-spread is different and some people receive both mature baptism and confirmation. However, it offers an indication at the younger end of membership of how many people beyond the membership choose to use the church to mark an important event. For 2005 to 2007, that indication is slightly below the ratio of community roll to membership.

#### 20. Funerals

There were 20% fewer deaths and 21% fewer funerals in 2007 than in 2005. There were 23,000 deaths and 83,000 funerals during the triennium.

The ratio of funerals to members' deaths remained steady at just over 3.5 to 1. In a similar way to the ratio of marriages to confirmations described above, this ratio serves as an indication of the extent of the church's wider outreach among the older age-range. It is higher than the ratio of the community roll to membership. In city centre churches and inner cites, the ratio is below three, but in council estates, where membership is typically slightly lower relative to attendance, there were approximately six funerals for every death of a member.

#### **Conclusion**

21. Much of this report concentrates on changes within the triennium, in the interval of two years from 2005 to 2007. Reports in previous years have described a gradual decline in membership and attendance and this has continued up to 2006. After 2006 there are small signs of a possible change in direction. As mentioned above, adult attendance has held steady or even increased, especially midweek. Scouting has performed well, but almost all other statistics relating to younger worship, whether attendance among children and teenagers, confirmations or marriages, show a sharper decline.

The questions remain whether Scouting's success can be emulated elsewhere; whether under-five midweek groups can become a route into worship; and whether it is possible to sustain a recovery in adult attendance at worship even without improvements at the younger end of the age spectrum.

Research & Statistics Department Archbishops' Council May 2008

## \*\*\*RESOLUTION

**55/1.** The Conference receives the Report.