

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

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21ST CENTURY EVANGELICALS – A SNAPSHOT OF THE BELIEFS AND HABITS OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IN THE UK

The Evangelical Alliance and Christian Research have recently published the results of a survey of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians.

The survey is based on 17,000 questionnaires returned from a range of evangelical festival venues, including Keswick and Spring Harvest, and from 35 EA churches. Only one of the 35 churches sampled appears to be in fellowship with Affinity. The survey gives an insight, therefore, into the beliefs and habits of our fellow evangelicals who do not belong to Affinity. The results of the survey give us an important insight into the challenges facing us as evangelical Christians and churches.

Here are some of the results of the survey:

Beliefs and Doctrines

93% strongly agree that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

54% strongly agree that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error.

91% strongly agree that Jesus is the only way to God.

26% agree that evolution and Christianity are incompatible.

37% strongly agree that hell is a place of conscious eternal punishment.

The Christian Life

96% attend a church service at least once a week.

82% read, or listen to, the Bible at least a few times a week.

96% pray at least a few times a week.

77% pray every day.

88% say their faith is the most important thing in their life.

83% agree that it is a key factor in their decision-making.

Moral and Ethical Issues

62% strongly agree that sexual intercourse outside marriage is wrong.

59% believe that homosexual actions are always wrong.

42% believe that assisted suicide is 'always wrong'.

37% agree that 'abortion can never be justified'.

The result on abortion is probably unreliable because of the way in which the question was asked. Respondents were asked to reply to a statement that 'abortion can never be justified.' Faced with this absolute statement, those who believe that an abortion is justified in the small number of cases where the mother's life is at risk would have been unsure how to answer. In its report on the survey findings, the EA itself has rightly qualified the response to the abortion question, warning that: 'Until more research is conducted to explore the circumstances where evangelicals find abortion justifiable, it is unwise to interpret the findings in any great detail.'

Church Life and Giving

71% agree that women should be eligible for all roles within the church on the same basis as men are.

60% practise tithing, half of these giving at least 10% of their household income to their church.

75% of the over-65 age group practise tithing.

53% in the 25-34 age group practise tithing.

Twice as many in the over-65 age group support missionaries compared with those in the 16-24 age group.

Evangelism and Witness

51 per cent of the over-65s talk to a non-Christian about their faith at least once a month.

77% in the 16-24 age group talk to a non-Christian about their faith at least once a month.

Overall the survey revealed that younger Christians are less likely than older believers to be guided by the Bible in their beliefs, views and behaviour and decision-making, to give financial support to Christian causes, and to pray and read the Bible every day. Younger Christians are, however, more active in witnessing to their faith.

Identity

An interesting subject covered by the survey was the extent to which people professing to be Christians regarded themselves as 'evangelical' Christians.

87% of those in the over-65 group regard themselves as 'evangelical' Christians.

67% of those aged 16-24 regarded themselves as 'evangelical' Christians.

The EA recognises this as a significant issue, and acknowledges the uncertainty as to whether this means that younger people are identifying less with the word 'evangelical' or whether evangelicalism itself is in decline.

While this survey did not include many people from Affinity churches it is likely that at least some of the issues identified also affect, to some extent, people in our churches.

Good Bible teaching and effective discipleship training are always a priority. The spirit of the age is insidious and inevitably affects the way Christians think and behave.

Older Christians have received a lifetime of Bible teaching which has established them in the things they believe and their devotional lives. They seem, however, to have little contact with the non-Christians among whom they live. Younger Christians seem to be more in touch with their non-Christian contemporaries, but are less clear on what they believe and how they live their Christians lives. Their contact with non-Christians is important for evangelism but carries with it the danger of imbibing non-Christians beliefs and behaviour.

We face a challenge on two fronts. We need to train and encourage Christians to understand and to be committed to the truths of the faith and to live authentic Christian lives which are compatible with those truths. At the same time, we need to equip Christians to be effective witnesses to the people around them who need to know God and Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

The survey report makes fascinating and important reading, and reflects the professional competence both of the EA and of Christian Research. You can find the full report at <http://www.eauk.org/articles/faith-survey-launch.cfm>

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