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Holiness: an international journal of Wesleyan theology

The changing face of British Methodism between 1997 and 2008:

A study in empirical theology

John M. Haley

Methodist Circuit Minister (Presbyter), Torbay, UK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7910-9425>

Leslie J. Francis*

Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, UK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2946-9980>

Author note:

*Corresponding author:

Leslie J. Francis

Professor of Religions, Psychology, and Education

World Religions and Education Research Unit

Bishop Grosseteste University

Email: leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk

Abstract

This study compares the findings of two population surveys of Methodist ministers (presbyters) serving in Great Britain in 1997 and 2008. The findings identified nine areas of change: the quality of Methodist worship is improving; Methodist worship is becoming less traditional and less distinctively Wesleyan; Communion is becoming less prioritised; ministers are learning to implement a better work-life balance; the work-related psychological wellbeing of ministers is improving; there is an increase in conservative religious beliefs; expectations on the practices and values of members is being relaxed; homosexual practice is becoming more acceptable; and welcome for Methodist-Anglican unity is receding.

Keywords: British Methodism, empirical theology, survey, change over time

Introduction

One of the core biblical roots for the emerging field of empirical theology resides in the dominical invitation to go to observe the sower at work (see Francis & Village, 2015). In step with Jesus' invitation, empirical theology has a keen eye for observing God's activity in God's world. Empirical theology is grounded in the disciplines of the theological academy, including biblical studies, systematic theology, church history and pastoral sciences, but also integrates within the theological academy insights, methods, and theories borrowed from the social sciences. Jesus' invitation to go to observe the sower at work is an observational theology that takes human experience seriously and applies both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, techniques that have been sharpened by the social sciences.

Watching the sower of good seed at work in the broad light of day, according to Mark 4: 39 (and followed closely in Matthew 13: 3-9), Jesus' listeners were first invited to employ qualitative techniques, noting the predictable patterns that occurred, distinguishing four kinds of soil. On the path, the birds ate the seed; on the stony ground, the seed failed through lack of moisture; among the thistles the seed failed because it was choked; on the good soil the seed flourished. The initiative to observe did not end there with qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were brought into play as well, noting the variation in the quantity of growth, distinguishing between thirty fold, sixty fold, and a hundred fold. Building on the foundations that he found in Mark, Matthew added a second narrative about the sower of weeds at work in the darkness of the night (Matthew 13: 24-30). On this occasion the empirical theologians were caught off guard and had failed to observe the activity that had taken place under the cloak of darkness.

The notion of empirical theology is generally attributed to Hans van der Ven and his research group in Nijmegen (see van der Ven, 1993, 1998). The maturity of the field of study was consolidated by the founding of the *Journal of Empirical Theology* in 1987 and the

International Society for Empirical Research in Theology (ISERT) in 2002. In the mid-1990s a research group working within the field of empirical theology in England and Wales initiated a series of four studies designed to observe the sower at work within four major Churches. The first of these studies, initiated by Stephen Louden in 1996, conducted a survey among Catholic parish priests, leading to the book, *The naked parish priest: What priests really think they're doing* (Louden & Francis, 2003). The second study, initiated by William K. Kay, also in 1996, conducted a survey among pastors serving in Pentecostal denominations (Assemblies of God, Elim, and the Apostolic Church), leading to the book, *Pentecostals in Britain* (Kay, 2000). The third study, initiated by John M. Haley in 1997, conducted a survey among Methodist circuit ministers (presbyters), leading to the book, *British Methodism: What circuit ministers really think* (Haley & Francis, 2006). The fourth study, initiated by Leslie J. Francis in 2001, conducted a survey among readers of the *Church Times* and drew from these data profiles of parish clergy alongside committed laity, leading to the two books, *Fragmented faith: Exploring the fault-lines in the Church of England* (Francis, Robbins, & Astley, 2005) and *The mind of the Anglican clergy: Assessing attitudes and beliefs in the Church of England* (Village & Francis, 2009).

One of the core intentions behind these four studies of Catholic priests, Pentecostal pastors, Methodist circuit ministers, and Anglican parish clergy initiated during the mid-1990s was to establish a series of base-line studies against which future developments and changes could be mapped. For example, in 2013 the study originally conducted among Anglicans in 2001 was replicated, again in collaboration with the *Church Times*. Placing the 2001 and 2013 studies side-by-side, it was possible to offer a multi-textured profile of the trajectory of the Church of England over this 12-year period, leading to the book, *The Church of England in the first decade of the 21st century* (Village, 2018).

Against this background the aim of the present study is to introduce the findings from the replication of the 1997 study among Methodist circuit ministers in 2008. First, however, it is necessary to introduce the context of the 1997 study.

British Methodism in 1997

The Methodist Church of Great Britain recognises two orders of ministry, presbyters and deacons. Originally, only men were trained as ‘ministers’ (meaning ‘presbyters’) and the diaconal order was only open to women to train and serve as deaconesses (from Methodist Union in 1932 these were known as ‘Wesley Deaconesses’). After women were accepted as ‘ministers’ (presbyters) in 1974 the diaconal order faced an uncertain future and candidates were not received from 1978 to 1986. From 1987 onwards the order accepted men and women and a clearer distinction between the orders of ministry and an affirmation that both orders were equal expressions of ministry was necessary. In the circuits, while using the term ‘presbyter’ is now more common, Methodist members and many of the presbyters themselves still use ‘minister’ to mean ‘presbyter’, although the practice is slowly changing. The two surveys referred to in this work used ‘minister’ to mean ‘presbyter’ without any intention to denigrate the role of deacons in the Methodist Church. Future research ought properly to make the distinction and use the term ‘presbyter’ to indicate a minister of Word and Sacrament.

The *Methodist circuit ministers’ survey* was distributed by post in May 1997 to the ministers published in the *Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory* for the Methodist Church year 1996-1997. Appropriate follow-up reminder letters resulted in the return of 1,339 thoroughly completed questionnaires, a response rate of 74%, of which 1,269 were from ministers engaged in itinerant ministry. The findings from these data were organised around 23 themes, exploring five main issues: Sunday services, doctrinal diversity, multiple

pastorates, itinerancy, and future church structure. Distilling these data, Haley and Francis (2006) draw attention to 14 main conclusions.

In terms of Sunday services, two thirds of the ministers made the point that, for them, Methodist worship is often dull.

In terms of preaching, the majority of ministers showed a lack of confidence in the quality of preaching offered within Methodist churches. Fewer than half of the ministers considered that Methodist ministers are generally good preachers.

In terms of competing demands, one major reason behind the dissatisfaction which ministers experience with the worship and preaching in their churches concern the multiple and competing demands on their time. Two unhealthy consequences of this experience may be the erosion of proper boundaries around work, and the erosion of work-related satisfaction.

In terms of doctrinal diversity, the rich diversity within Methodism and the nature of itinerancy suggest that individual congregations may be exposed at different times to both rigid doctrinal orthodoxy and to more liberal interpretations of the Christian tradition. The ministers were aware that such experience may challenge and strengthen some congregations, but also discomfort and weaken others.

In terms of the nonconformist conscience, the data suggested that British Methodism had lost its clear disapproval of alcoholic beverages and of small-scale gambling.

In terms of multiple pastorates, although the majority of Methodist ministers continued to value the positive aspects of multiple pastorates, many were now feeling frustrated by spreading their ministry too thinly and by feeling that congregations fail to recognise the competing claims made by other congregations on their time, attention, and resources of the ministers whom they share in common.

In terms of local church growth, the majority of ministers were far from convinced that the system within which they operated incentivised church growth. Many of them felt that the model of the circuit plan militated against implementing the very changes that local churches need for the potential for growth to be realised.

In terms of closing churches, although many ministers recognised that there are strong grounds to resist the closure of churches in an attempt to rationalise the provision of Methodist worship, around one in three ministers saw the continuing existence to separate congregations within their circuit in much more negative terms.

In terms of itinerancy, although the majority of Methodist circuit ministers clearly value itinerancy, nearly two-fifths of them felt that the system has located them in an appointment that does not particularly suit their individual gifts.

In terms of ecumenical considerations, although many ministers are very open to ecumenical collaboration, they also remain very conscious of the distinctive heritage of their Methodist tradition. Just one in six believed in the three-fold order of ministry in the Anglican style and only a minority would welcome episcopacy.

In terms of stress and burnout, the data drew attention to the unacceptably high proportion of Methodist circuit ministers who felt emotionally drained by their ministry and who displayed other signs of work-related stress, professional burnout, and poor work-related psychological health.

In terms of satisfaction in ministry, the data drew attention to the strong sense of work-related satisfaction and enjoyment and to a strong sense of calling. The presence of a high level of positive affect helps to offset the negative consequences of the equally high level of negative affect as evidenced by emotional exhaustion.

In terms of the future, the data drew attention to high levels of anxiety about the future of the Methodist Church, in spite of high levels of emotional loyalty to the Methodist

Church. The worrying feature of these data concerned the way in which, among the younger generation of ministers, loyalty was lower and anxiety was higher.

In terms of age trends, the data drew attention to ways in which younger ministers differed from their older colleagues. Younger ministers were more orthodox in their religious beliefs, more conservative in their theological position, and less liberal in their ethical values.

Research question

It is against this background that the present study considers the findings from the replication conducted in 2008. The research question identifies the areas showing the greatest differences between the two sets of data collected in 1997 and in 2008.

Method

Procedure

The *Methodist Circuit Ministers' Survey 2008* was distributed in May by post to the ministers published in the *Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory* for the Methodist Church year 2007-2008. The survey was accompanied by a pre-paid reply envelope. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Appropriate follow-up reminder letters resulted in the return of 951 thoroughly completed questionnaires, a response rate of 60%, of which 874 were from ministers engaged in itinerant ministry.

Measures

The 24-page questionnaire comprised six sections. The present analyses are derived from the second section. This section presented 225 short focused items that had also been used in the 1997 survey. Participants were informed that the section 'explores your views on circuit ministry. Please read each sentence carefully and think, "How true is this of me?"' Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1).

Participants

The 874 itinerant ministers comprised 282 female ministers (31%) and 592 male ministers (69%). In terms of age, 31 were under the age of 36, 160 aged between 36 and 45, 332 aged between 46 and 55, 322 aged between 56 and 65, and 29 aged over 65. In terms of status, 345 were superintendent ministers, 481 ordained ministers, and 48 probationer ministers.

Results

The levels of endorsement for many of the 225 items in this part of the survey were remarkably similar in 1997 and 2008: 29 received the same rating on both occasions; for 45 there was a difference of one percent, for 38 of two percent, for 30 of three percent, for 15 of four percent, and for 10 of five percent. Of the remaining items, 31 fell into nine clear themes which we have characterised as concerning Methodist worship, identity of Methodist worship, Communion, work-life balance, work-related psychological wellbeing, religious belief, expectations as members, attitude toward homosexuality, and Methodist-Anglican unity. These nine themes summarise the main shifts in the overall views of Methodist circuit ministers between 1997 and 2008. Each of these nine themes will be reviewed in turn.

- insert table 1 about here -

The four items in table 1 capture the change in Methodist circuit ministers' views on Methodist worship. Between 1997 and 2008 Methodist ministers have grown in confidence regarding the quality of Methodist worship. While in 1997 65% of Methodist ministers rated Methodist worship as often dull, the proportion fell to 56% in 2008. While in 1997 under half of Methodist ministers generally rated Methodist ministers as good preachers (46%), the proportion rose to 56% in 2008. While in 1997 under a quarter of Methodist ministers generally rated local preachers as good preachers (23%), the percentage rose to 33% in 2008. Consistent with this greater confidence in Methodist worship, there was an increase in the proportion of ministers who felt that they were giving adequate time to preparing for services.

While in 1997 52% of Methodist ministers felt that they spend too little time in preparation for sermons and worship, the proportion fell to 46% in 2008. Although the figures for 2008 may still be read as a fairly damning assessment of Methodist worship, the trajectory is in the right direction toward improvement.

- insert table 2 about here -

The four items in table 2 capture the change in Methodist circuit ministers' views on the identity of Methodist worship. This change in the identity of Methodist worship is reflected in two primary shifts. The first shift concerns a movement away from what may be regarded as traditional Methodist hymnody. While in 1997, three quarters of Methodist ministers regarded singing traditional hymns as a vital part of their Christian ministry (74%), the proportion had fallen to 59% in 2008. While in 1997 over half of Methodist ministers regard using the hymns of Wesley in worship as important to them (55%), the proportion had fallen to 42% in 2008. The second shift concerns a movement away from what may be regarded as traditional ministerial dress for conducting worship. While in 1997 61% of Methodist ministers maintained that ministers should wear clerical collars for Sunday worship, the proportion fell to 55% in 2008. Over the same period there was a similar drop in the proportion of Methodist ministers who maintained that ministers should wear vestments for Sunday worship (from 18% to 10%). Under the influence of the liturgical movement from the mid-1980s there was a fashion among circuit ministers to replace the traditional black robes with an array of more colourful alternatives, which may have been considered vestments. The comparison between 1997 and 2008 suggests that what ministers wore for Sunday worship had become much more a matter of personal choice.

- insert table 3 about here -

The three items in table 3 capture the change in Methodist circuit ministers' views on communion. This change is reflected in two primary shifts. The first shift concerns the fall in

emphasis on weekly communion. While in 1997 over a third of Methodist ministers preferred weekly communion to be the norm (37%), the proportion had fallen to a quarter in 2008 (25%). The second shift concerned the rise in opening the table to children. While in 1997 87% of Methodist ministers agreed that children aged 7-11 years should be welcome to receive communion, the proportion rose to 95% in 2008. While in 1997 66% of Methodist ministers agreed that children aged under 7 years should be welcome to receive communion, the proportion rose to 84% in 2008.

- insert table 4 about here -

The four items in table 4 capture the change in Methodist circuit ministers' views on their work-life balance. Between 1997 and 2008 Methodist ministers have made progress in separating private life from ministerial duties. While in 1997 just over a third of Methodist ministers agreed that they were able to keep their private life and their ministerial duties separate (36%), the proportion rose to 45% in 2008. This trajectory is reflected both in family life and in friendship patterns. In 1997 58% of Methodist ministers felt that they spent too little time with their family, but the proportion had dropped in 2008 to 53%. In 1997, 57% of Methodist ministers felt that most of their close friends were not members of their church, but the proportion had risen in 2008 to 67%. This trajectory is also reflected in a growing tendency to take time away from work. While in 1997 59% of Methodist ministers regularly took their weekly day off, the proportion rose in 2008 to 70%. While in 1997 24% of Methodist ministers regularly took their three quarterly days off, the proportion rose in 2008 to 34%.

- insert table 5 about here -

The three items in table 5 capture the change in the work-related psychological wellbeing of Methodist circuit ministers. These data demonstrate some improvement. The key statistics that reflect this improvement relate to the sense of resilience in overcoming

difficulties. In 1997 59% of Methodist ministers regarded themselves as successful in overcoming difficulties in their ministry, but then the proportion increased in 2008 to 67%. The other two items in table 5 do not reflect the same magnitude of change. They have been included because they are indicative of improved work-related psychological wellbeing as conceptualised by the model of balanced affect. The balanced affect model suggests that improved work-related psychological wellbeing involves both decrease in negative affect and increase in positive affect. The item concerning accomplishing worthwhile things in ministry belongs to the domain of positive affect, and here endorsement rose from 61% in 1997 to 66% in 2008. The item concerning feeling emotionally drained belongs to the domain of negative affect, and here endorsement dropped from 45% in 1997 to 42% in 2008.

- insert table 6 about here -

The four items in table 6 capture the change in the religious beliefs of Methodist circuit ministers. The move is toward a more biblically conservative system of religious beliefs. While in 1997 three quarters of Methodist ministers believed that Jesus physically rose from the dead on the first Easter Sunday (75%), the proportion rose in 2008 to 83%. While in 1997 a third of ministers believed that the Bible is the infallible word of God (34%), the proportion rose in 2008 to 41%. While in 1997 half of Methodist ministers believed in the personal and visible return of Jesus (50%), the proportion rose in 2008 to 60%. While in 1997 14% of Methodist ministers believed that Christians are in daily conflict with demons, the proportion rose in 2008 to 23%.

- insert table 7 about here -

The four items in table 7 capture the change in the expectations placed by Methodist circuit ministers on the behaviour of church members. The move is toward a more liberal position. While in 1997 88% of Methodist ministers maintained that church members should attend worship each Sunday, the proportion fell in 2008 to 76%. While in 1997 64% of

Methodist ministers maintained that church members should not buy National Lottery tickets, the proportion fell in 2008 to 47%. While in 1997 45% of Methodist ministers maintained that church members should not smoke, the proportion fell in 2008 to 39%. While in 1997 40% of Methodist ministers maintained that church members should not normally buy or sell on Sundays, the proportion fell in 2008 to 27%.

- insert table 8 about here -

The four items in table 8 capture the change in the attitudes of Methodist circuit ministers toward homosexual practice. The move is toward a more accepting attitude. In 1997 the majority of Methodist ministers had accepted that homosexual orientation should present a bar neither for membership (90%) nor to ordination (90%). This level of endorsement remained virtually unchanged in 2008. In 1997 Methodist ministers were more cautious about homosexual practice, with 45% maintaining that homosexual practice should not be a bar for membership and 29% maintaining that homosexual practice should not be a bar to ordination. The level of endorsement was raised in 2008 to 61% in respect of membership and to 43% in respect of ordination.

- insert table 9 about here -

The four items in table 9 capture the change in the attitude of Methodist circuit ministers toward unity with the Anglican Church. The move is in the direction away from Methodist-Anglican unity. While in 1997 over half of Methodist ministers said that they would welcome Methodist-Anglican unity (54%), in 2008 that proportion has fallen to under half (44%). While in 1997 a quarter of Methodist ministers said that they would accept episcopal ordination after their Methodist ordination (25%), the proportion fell in 2008 to 15%. While in 1997, 21% of Methodist ministers said that they would welcome assimilation into the historic episcopate, the proportion fell in 2008 to 15%.

Conclusion

The present study set out to compare the findings from two population surveys conducted in 1997 and 2008 among Methodist ministers serving in Great Britain in circuit ministry. Of the 225 items in the survey that were completed on both occasions, separated by a period of 11 years, for 167 items there was less than 5% fluctuation in the level of response between 1997 and 2008. In other words, three out of every four items in the survey showed little change over this period of time. It is, however, the items that revealed change over this period of time that may be of most interest in assessing the trajectory of the Methodist Church, as seen through the eyes of circuit ministers. These items have been analysed and discussed within nine main themes leading to the following conclusions.

The findings suggest that the quality of Methodist worship is improving. At the same time, the 2008 data give little room for complacency. In 2008 56% of circuit ministers rated Methodist ministers as good preachers and 33% rated local preachers as good preachers. If preaching were to be central to the character of Methodist worship, there may still be room for improvement.

The findings suggest that Methodist worship is becoming less traditional and less distinctively Wesleyan. The 2008 data are interesting because they raise questions about the distinctiveness of the Methodist offering within the contemporary Christian landscape. Does Methodist worship need to have a distinctive contribution to make to this changing landscape, or is it content to merge alongside other providers?

The findings suggest that the Methodist position on communion is changing in two important directions. On the one hand, lower priority is given to communion. In 2008, just 25% of circuit ministers preferred weekly communion to be the norm. On the other hand, greater priority is given to opening the table to young children. In 2008, 84% of circuit ministers agreed that children aged under 7 years should be welcome to receive communion. These shifts have clear implications for positioning Methodism within the ecumenical

landscape, for shaping ecumenical partnerships, and for determining the mobility of those who came to faith in a Methodist context for migration within other church traditions.

The findings suggest that ministers are learning to implement a better work life balance. In 2008, 45% of circuit ministers agreed that they were able to keep their private life and their ministerial duties separate. This statistic can be read in a variety of ways. Those who applaud the professionalisation of Christian ministry may read this as progress in the right direction. Those who maintain that Christian ministry is a distinctive way of life may show somewhat less enthusiasm. What is evident from the data, however, is the clear division between 45% of circuit ministers who maintain this approach and 55% who do not. The principle of itinerancy suggests that individual circuits have a fifty percent chance of their minister being replaced by candidates who take a different position on this matter from their predecessors.

The findings suggest that the work-related psychological wellbeing of ministers is improving. At the same time, the 2008 data demonstrate further room for improvement. The balanced-affect model of work-related psychological wellbeing (Village, Payne, & Francis, 2018) suggests that improved work-related psychological wellbeing involves both lower levels of negative affect and higher levels of positive affect, since positive affect serves to neutralise the detrimental effects of negative affect. As an indicator of negative affect, in 2008 42% of circuit ministers reported that they felt emotionally drained by their ministry. This is not a healthy situation in which to operate ministry effectively. Here is a statistic worth bringing down further. As an indicator of positive affect, in 2008 66% of circuit ministers reported that they were accomplishing many worthwhile things in their ministry. The finding that 34% of circuit ministers did not feel that they were accomplishing many worthwhile things in their ministry, is a second statistic worth bringing down further.

The findings suggest that there is an increase in conservative beliefs among Methodist circuit ministers. In 2008, 83% believed Jesus physically rose from the dead on the first Easter Sunday, 41% believed the Bible is the infallible word of God, and 23% believed Christians are in daily conflict with demons. These statistics can be read in a variety of ways. Theological diversity may be a recognised strength within Methodism. At the same time, however, such diversity, viewed within the context of itinerancy, carries implications not only for the identity of individual circuits, but also for the ecumenical links forged within circuits. Issues may need to be faced at local levels when circuit ministers who proclaim biblical inerrancy are replaced by more liberal ministers, and equally when more liberal ministers are replaced by those who preach biblical inerrancy.

The findings suggest that expectations held by circuit ministers on the practices and values of members is being relaxed. For example, while in 1997 40% of circuit ministers maintained that church members should not normally buy or sell on Sundays, the proportion fell in 2008 to 27%.

The findings suggest that homosexual practice is becoming more acceptable to circuit ministers, both for membership and for ordination. In 2008 61% of circuit ministers agreed that homosexual practice should not be a bar for membership, and 43% agreed that homosexual practice should not be a bar to ordination. These statistics may be read in a variety of ways. Ethical diversity may be a recognised strength within Methodism. At the same time, like theological diversity, ethical diversity carries implications within itinerancy for stationing, acknowledging sensitivity for local circuits, and for ecumenical collaboration. This shift, however, is puzzling in light of the growth in the proportion of circuit ministers who accepted the Bible as the infallible word of God from 34% in 1997 to 41% in 2008. Further research may be needed to explain the intellectual coherence of those diverging patterns of response.

The findings suggest that welcome for Methodist-Anglican unity is receding. Between 1997 and 2008 the proportion of circuit ministers who said that they would welcome Methodist-Anglican unity had fallen from 54% to 44%. These statistics may carry implications for the longer-term trajectory of Methodist partnering within the field of local ecumenical collaboration. If Methodism is not seeking alliances with the Anglican Church, then the future of Methodism may be tending toward alliances with those denominations and streams of Church that see themselves as more clearly differentiated from the Anglican Church.

When Haley established his initial study in 1997 he saw this as providing a baseline against which subsequent shifts in British Methodism could be mapped. The first replication of that original survey in 2008 has demonstrated and documented the interesting shift that had occurred over the 11-year period. Perhaps the time is right, during the inevitable re-assessment that is needed following the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, to conduct the same survey for the third time.

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Table 1

Methodist worship

	1997	2008
	%	%
Methodist worship is often dull	65	56
Methodist ministers are generally good preachers	46	56
Local preachers are generally good preachers	23	33
I spend too little time in preparation of sermons and worship	52	46

Table 2

Identity of Methodist worship

	1997	2008
	%	%
Singing traditional hymns is a vital part of my Christian ministry	74	59
Using the hymns of Wesley in worship is important to me	55	42
Methodist ministers should wear clerical collars for leading worship	61	55
Methodist ministers should wear vestments for Sunday worship	18	10

Table 3

Communion

	1997	2008
	%	%
I would prefer weekly communion to be the norm	37	25
Children aged 7-11 years should be welcome to receive communion	87	95
Children aged under 7 years should be welcome to receive communion	66	84

Table 4

Work-life balance

	1997	2008
	%	%
I am able to keep my private life and my ministerial duties separate	36	45
I spend too little time with my family	58	53
Most of my close friends are not members of my church	57	67
I regularly take my weekly day off	59	70
I regularly take my three quarterly days off	24	34

Table 5

Work-related psychological wellbeing

	1997	2008
	%	%
I am successful in overcoming difficulties in my ministry	59	67
I am accomplishing many worthwhile things in my ministry	61	66
I feel emotionally drained by my ministry	45	42

Table 6

Religious belief

	1997	2008
	%	%
Jesus physically rose from the dead on the first Easter Sunday	75	83
The Bible is the infallible word of God	34	41
I believe in the personal and visible return of Jesus	50	60
I believe Christians are in daily conflict with demons	14	23

Table 7

Expectations on members

	1997	2008
	%	%
Church members should attend worship each Sunday	88	76
Church members should not buy National Lottery tickets	64	47
Church members should not smoke	45	39
Church members should not normally buy or sell on Sundays	40	27

Table 8

Attitude toward homosexuality

	1997	2008
	%	%
Homosexual orientation should not be a bar to ordination	80	81
Homosexual orientation should not be a bar for membership	90	91
Homosexual practice should not be a bar to ordination	29	43
Homosexual practice should not be a bar for membership	45	61

Table 9

Methodist-Anglican unity

	1997	2008
	%	%
I would welcome Methodist-Anglican unity	54	44
I would accept episcopal ordination after my Methodist ordination	25	15
I would welcome assimilation into the historic episcopate	21	15