

An Average Article

Those of you who were at the January Church Meeting will know we have just put together a Summary Pastorate Profile (for use at the Missional Partnerships) describing our church and the surrounding environment in which we find ourselves. As part of this process, I dipped into the “religion” category for the 2011 census and I would like to share some of the statistics with you. (For those who care about such things, please note I have rounded some of the numbers while all percentages are of the total number of census entries, unless otherwise stated.)

The Burnage Ward contains just over 15,000 people. You may be relieved to hear that just over half consider themselves to be Christians. Next highest is the Muslim community with about one-fifth of the total. The rest of the mainstream religions - Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist & Jewish come in at just over 2%). Just under a fifth (18.5%) come in the “no religion” category, most of whom simply stated “no religion” although this figure does include 14 Atheists, 4 Agnostics, 1 Humanist, 6 Heavy Metalists and 41 Jedi Knights. Burnage, apparently, has no Free Thinkers or Realists!

The final category is “Other Religions” and I was surprised to find what a small percentage this constituted - 49 people (0.3%). The highest of this category are Jainists (10) followed by Paganists (7) and Spiritualists (6). Five each either have a “mixed religion” or simply “believe in God”. Somewhat pleasingly, given I'm writing this on Epiphany Sunday, there are 4 Zoroastrians (who practice the faith of the “wise men” of the Bible). There are none who claim to be Occultists, Satanists or those practising Witchcraft, although there is one Pagan Witch (Wicca).

965 people (6.3%) did not fill in the “religion” box on the census.

The census does not state how many of the 7,926 Christians regularly attend church on Sunday. I did find a “Manchester Evening News” article, which stated that this was only 1 in 57 Christians in the Manchester area. As this works out to be a number less than 3 times Christ Church's membership, I suspect this might be CoE attendance only. Talking of Christ Church, we have a current membership of 54 and an average morning attendance of 65 (including parade services), which tops not only the Jedi Knights but also all the "other religion" categories put together.

The Profile also asked some hard questions about our Mission Aims / Theology / Strategy. The above statistics perhaps give some context to what we should be thinking about. (Bear in mind you need to take care with statistics. For example, it can be shown that birthdays are good for health. Statistics have proved that those who have more birthdays, live longer.)

So, the figures appear to show...

- A fifth of the people in Burnage follow a religion that has differing views from Christianity
- Another fifth is composed of people who actively claim not to be religious (a few of whom prefer Rock Music or Star Wars)
- Of the remainder, some 6% of the Burnage population probably regard Christianity as irrelevant.

Subtract a guesstimate of the worshipping Christian Burnage community (say 300-400). That

still leaves a clear 50% of people in Burnage who are sympathetic to Christianity (or who are actual believers) but who do not feel the need to come together regularly to worship God and Jesus - or at least do not readily relate to the way we perform worship on a Sunday.

This begs the question, if we had to choose (and, with finite resources, we have to), “Who is it that God most wants us (Christ Church) to reach out to?”

David Blackburn

P.S. Hoping for feedback, as I don't know the answer any more than you do!