



New Worshipping Communities and Mission in Today's Context

Worcester Diocese

The Christendom Contract

- 650 – 1950, over half of Christian history
- A 'one size fits all' approach based on how it's done in Rome replaces earlier model of contextual expressions of faith and church.
- Everyone is Christian in Christian nations, mission abroad by conquest
- Children automatically raised Christian. Confirmation the passing out parade for many

The Census

2021

- Christian 46.2%
- No Religion 37.2%
 - Agnostic 0.06% (32,000)
 - Atheist 0.03% (14,000)
 - Humanist 0.02% (10,000)
- Muslim 6.5%
- Hindu 1.7%
- Sikh 0.9%
- Jewish 0.5%
- Buddhist 0.5%
- Other 0.7%

2011

- Christian 59.3%
- No Religion 25.1%
 - Agnostic 0.06% (32,000)
 - Atheist 0.05% (29,000)
 - Humanist 0.03% (15,000)
- Muslim 4.9%
- Hindu 1.5%
- Sikh 0.8%
- Jewish 0.5%
- Buddhist 0.4%
- Other 0.4%

2001

- Christian 72.1%
- No Religion 14.8%
- Muslim 3.0%
- Hindu 1.1%
- Sikh 0.4%
- Jewish 0.5%
- Buddhist 0.3%
- Other 0.3%

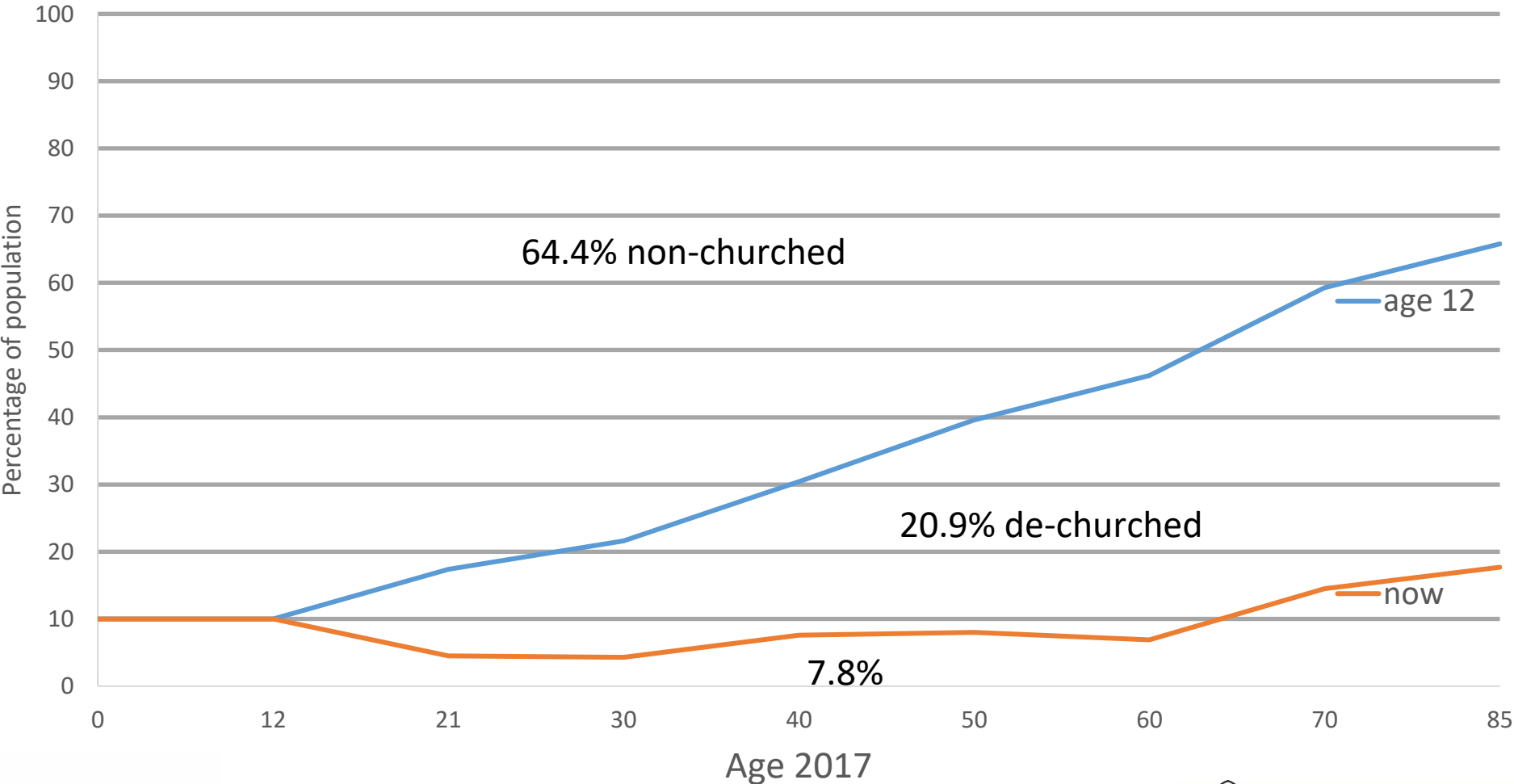


What does it mean to put 'Christian'?

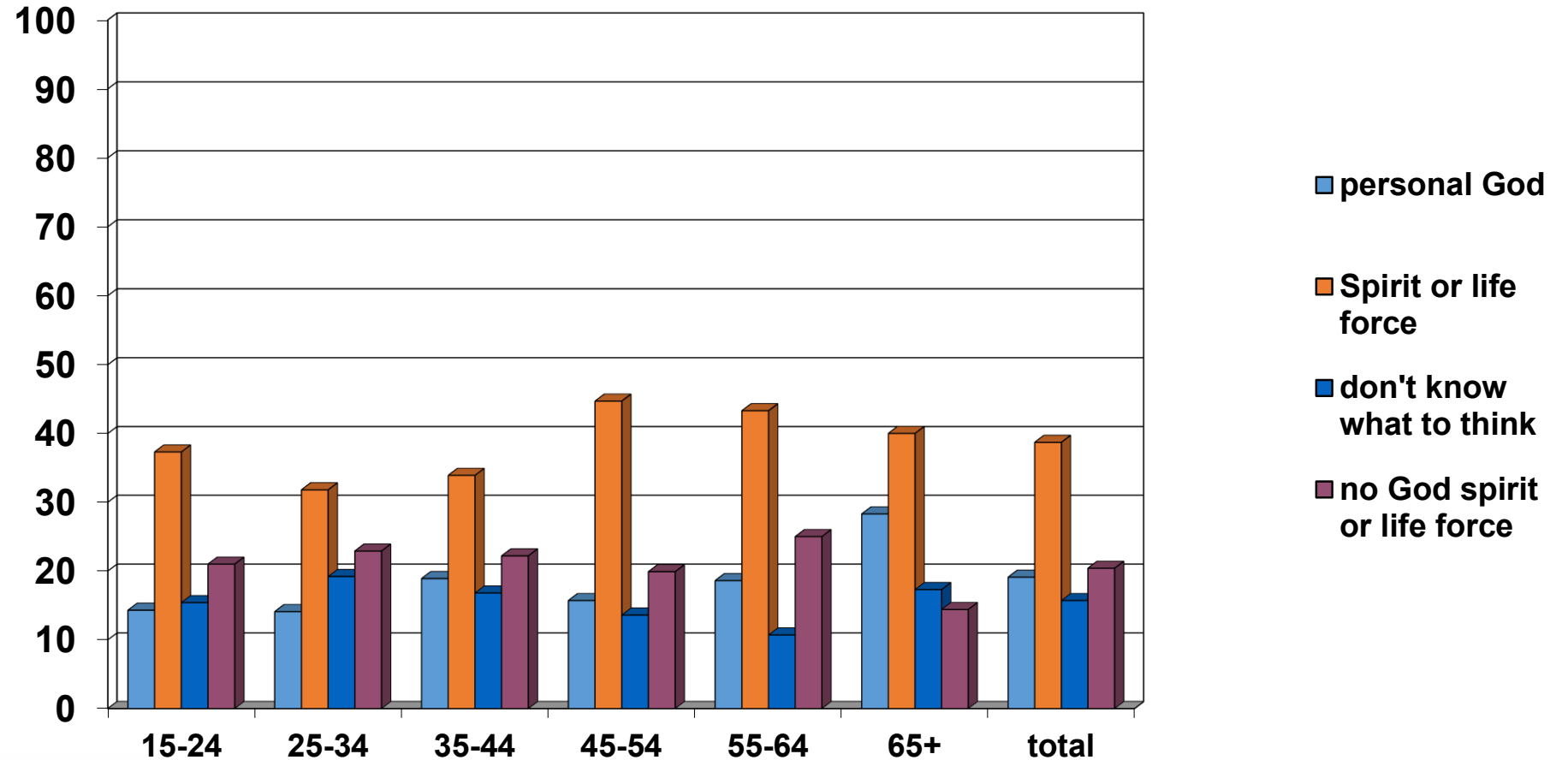
- 2012 Richard Dawkins commissions a MORI Poll on this subject based on 2011 census
- of 54% who put Christian their main reason was
 - Baptized as a child – 46% (25% population)
 - Believe Christian teaching -18% (10% population)
 - Sunday /church school/church as child -15% (8% pop)
 - Christian Parents – 13% (7% population)
 - Current church attendance – 3% (1.5% population)

Church attendance weekly 2017 European Values Survey

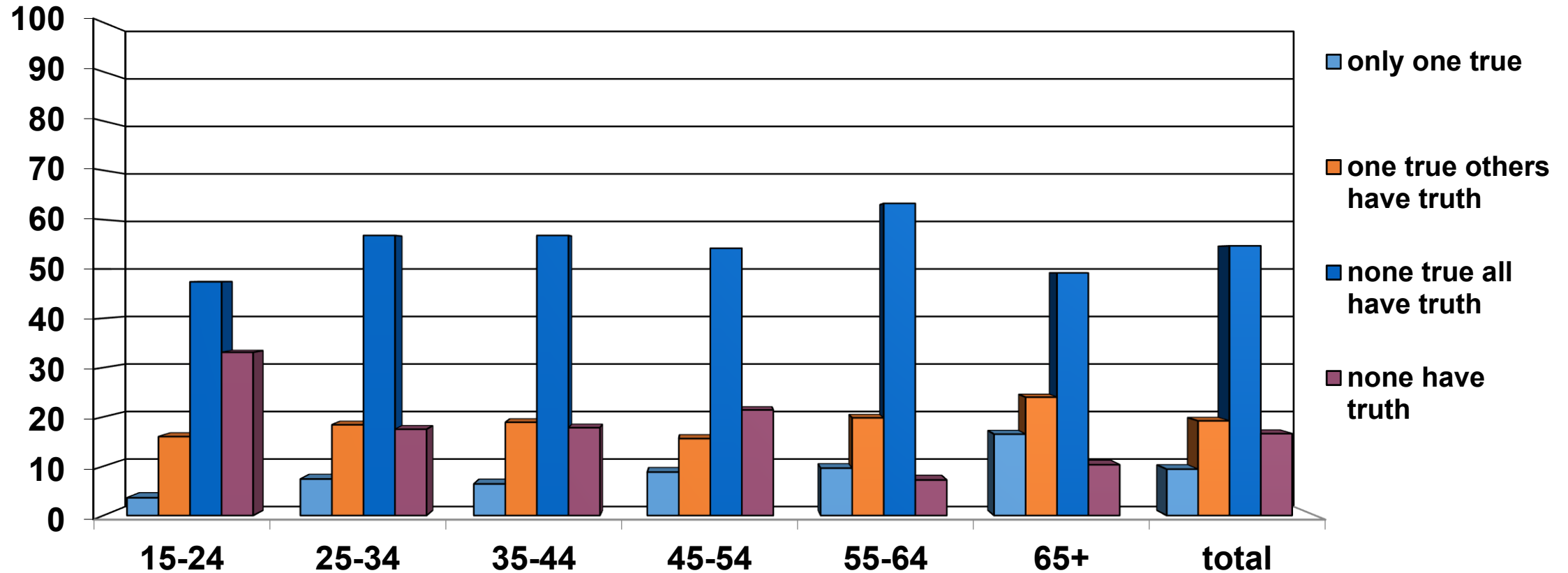
about 90% of adults regularly attending church went to church or Sunday school as children



Belief in God? by Age (EVS 2017)



Truth in religion? by Age (EVS 2008)



The Nones: Who are they and what do they believe?

- Three groups of Nones – 32% Spiritual, 34% campaigning and 35% tolerant.
- Spiritual
 - spiritually open
 - less atheistic and more agnostic in their belief about God
 - more likely to believe in a higher power of some form than a personal God
- Campaigning
 - spiritually closed (only 20% hold any form of spiritual belief)
 - individuals who believe science is the only reliable way to describe, explain and understand reality
 - strongly atheistic (80% are atheists)
 - extremely hostile to religion (78% believe it is comparable to smallpox, vs 29% of Nones overall)
- Tolerant
 - are generally atheistic in their belief about God, although around a quarter are agnostic
 - are more tolerant and accepting of religion than Campaigning Nones
 - believe religion has some helpful things to say about ethics.
 - believe that science cannot tell you how to live your life

The concept of 'missio Dei' God in Mission

- 'It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.' *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology, London: SCM Press, 1977, by Jurgen Motlmann (p64)* – this can be simplified as 'it is not the church that has a mission, but the missionary God who has a church'
- 'mission is seeing what God is doing and joining in' *Archbishop Rowan Williams*
- God goes ahead of us in mission from creation to new creation. We serve in that mission

Intercultural approach based on foreign mission

- 'Do not try to call them back to where they were,
- and do not try to call them to where you are, beautiful as that place may seem to you.
- You must have the courage to go with them to a place neither you nor they have been before.'

Vincent Donovan 2001 'Christianity re-discovered' from the preface to the second edition London SCM

- Our situation more like that of St Paul moving from mission to Jews who shared his religious background to Gentiles who did not – or of the Celtic Missionaries in a Pagan country
- Making our case in today's spiritual market place like the experience of Paul in Athens and Ephesus

Where are we?

- Target of 100 new worshipping communities by 2030 started since 2023
- 56 April 2025 64 end of 2025 now about 68 (there are some that are older)
- Significant variety
- We aren't 100% sure they are all still going.
- Some will exist we don't know about
- Issue of sustainability and limited human resources

Priorities going forward

- Help build a culture of mission in contemporary contexts into training programmes working with colleagues in the Transformation team and Mission and Ministry team.
- Enable collaborative working within the priorities in the Transformation team and with other teams in the DBF staff.
- Establish Greenhouse with support from national church as an umbrella for training of those starting out in NWC leadership but also as learning communities for ongoing pioneers, working across staff teams.
- Develop approaches to NWCs on New Housing
- Addressing the particular context of rural mission
- Build sustainability into existing and new NWCs.
- Add support during vacancy and new incumbency when NWCs are vulnerable
- Create good practice agreements between NWCs and incumbents and PCCs
- Remain open to God surprising us.

What about us in our context?

- Where might God be at work outside church in our context? How might we 'join in'?
- Where might people be 'spiritual but not religious'?
- What activities are people in our community engaging with? How might these be ways into faith?
- Where might this involve digital culture? nature and the environment? Sport and wellbeing? Exploring ideas? The Supernatural?
- Where are the areas of need?

For discussion

- In your context/ parish who are the people who you feel are unlikely to join your church? What might church look like for them?
- Where are the places people meet each other in your community? How might the church build relationships with people there?



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