

Comparing church attendance in October 2025 with 2024 and 2019

A report for the diocese of Oxford

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1. Summary

- 1.1. October 2025 saw the first decrease in attendance since the pandemic; attendance as measured by the Average Weekly Attendance (AWA) saw a small decrease of 1.4% between October 2024 and October 2025 overall in the Diocese of Oxford.
- 1.2. Adult AWA decreased between 2024 and 2025 by 1.6% whereas over the same time period there was no change in the child AWA. If this decrease had been seen across all our churches in the diocese, it would represent 540 fewer adults and no change in the number of children attending our churches. This may not mean a loss of 540 adults from church; instead, it may be some people coming to church less frequently each month, for example.
- 1.3. The small decrease in attendance of 1.4% between October 2024 and October 2025 was not reflected in a separate analysis comparing 2025 October attendance figures with those for 2019; this showed attendance in 2025 at 86% of the 2019 level, the same level as seen in 2024.
- 1.4. If the pre-pandemic trends (from 2014 to 2019) had continued, our estimates show that in 2025 Adult AWA, while still being below its 2019 level, was 1.7% above the projected pre-pandemic trend. Child AWA, however, has exceeded the projected trend figure since 2023, and in 2025 the Child AWA was 31% above the projected trend. However, it should be noted that child attendance was declining at a faster rate than adult attendance prior to the pandemic. Therefore, whilst overall average attendance did show a small decline, this is a slower decline than seen in the years before 2019.
- 1.5. If we just consider Sunday attendance, however, average Sunday attendance between 2024 and 2025 increased slightly by 0.2%, with adult average Sunday attendance increasing by 0.1% and child Sunday attendance by 0.8%.
- 1.6. Whilst the overall change in AWA between 2024 and 2025 was a decrease of 1.4%, this varied considerably by Archdeaconry, with Oxford seeing a decrease of 3.5% whereas Dorchester saw a very small increase of 0.2%.
- 1.7. Adults saw a decrease in AWA in all archdeaconries, whereas three of the archdeaconries saw an increase in child AWA – the fall of 3.7% in child AWA in Berkshire resulted in no overall change in average child attendance across the diocese.
- 1.8. Between 2024 and 2025 the number of services offered across the diocese fell by just a few. However, those churches that held between 1 and 4 fewer services in 2025 than in 2024 saw on average a decrease in AWA of 10%, and those that held 5 to 10 fewer services saw a decrease in their AWA of 24%. Those that held the same number or more services in 2025 saw an increase in their AWA of 4%, and 5% in their child AWA. On average if a church

held one extra service a week compared with 2024, it was associated with an increase in AWA of an extra 6.5 people attending per week.

2. Background to the report

- 2.1. The main purpose of this exercise was to compare attendance in October 2025 with 2024 and with the last 'normal' pre-pandemic year of 2019, to see what could be learned about how church attendance has changed over this period, and to help understand how the churches could grow and develop in the future.
- 2.2. This report is a mix of objective statistical analysis and some contextual discussion following conversations with colleagues in the Diocese and a few churches.

3. Response rate

- 3.1. For this study I have linked information for 544 churches in the comparison between October 2024 and October 2025. This represents 60 more churches than were available for analysis last year, and 67% of the 808 churches in the diocese. In the comparisons between 2019 and 2025, I linked information for 446 churches which represents 11 more churches than last year and 55% of all churches in the diocese. The total number of churches responding to our request for October 2025 data was even greater than this, but some responses could not be included in this study as either they had not responded in 2019 or 2024 (so we could not link their figures) or a church had included figures for another church in one of the years but not the other. Finally, we excluded data from a few churches that had reported no attendance in either 2019 or 2024 but, knowing the churches, we believe it was unlikely they had no attendance during October.
- 3.2. The original response rate to our request asking churches to complete their October 2025 figures earlier than usual was 70%, the same as for October 2024. This is a magnificent achievement in such a tight time scale. We are very grateful to those involved in providing their church's data. This result also shows the practicality of collecting and analysing any 'Statistics for Mission' data in a short time-period in the future.
- 3.3. To help interpret the findings from this sample of churches, it is important to know whether the sample is biased in any way. All churches were classified by size as either small, medium or large based on their 2019 AWA. When the churches in the sample were analysed by size, we see that proportionately slightly more of the large churches are included in the sample, 85%, compared with 75% of the medium sized churches and 72% of the small churches. This means there is a slight bias in the sample towards the large churches, which tend to be in urban areas, so this may have influence on urban rural comparisons. It does also mean, however, that since the large churches are the biggest contributors to the overall attendance totals, as more of them are included in the sample, the final total attendance is less likely to change significantly than if the sample comprised mainly smaller churches.
- 3.4. An analysis of our previous early October 2022 analysis ([Post-Covid-19 Trends, Patterns and Possibilities - Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](#)) compared with the final figures published by the national church in November 2023([statisticsformission2022.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#)), showed that our early analysis of change in AWA between 2019

and 2022 had been within one percent of the final figure. We saw a similar close agreement between early estimates and final figures in October 2023 and October 2024. Therefore, we can have confidence in the methodology behind our early October analysis, especially as for 2025 it continues to be based on a high proportion of our churches. This year we have a high response rate, and we cannot see any significant biased pattern in the churches not responding other than slightly fewer smaller churches, so we have confidence that our sample is representative of the whole diocese. Of course, when the full figures are published in late 2026, they may show slightly different patterns.

3.5. Possible confounding factors

3.5.1. Timing of October Count. In 2025 the first Sunday in October was 5 October. Many churches hold weekday worship, and the first week of the month is often a popular timing for worship that is held monthly – for example a monthly messy church. Several churches commented that their October figures did not include a monthly event that had taken place in the days before 5 October. The reporting period ended on Saturday 1 November, so before these events in the first week of November took place.

4. Does attendance matter?

4.1. The mission of the Christian church is not so much to attract crowds to worship events as to make disciples and serve the Kingdom. But how do we know if we are fulfilling our mission effectively? Counting attendance is one important pointer, an indicator of the numerical size of the Body of Christ. It helps monitor our success in holding and making disciples. It can show where we are making and where we are losing disciples. It can inform and challenge churches and dioceses about how we go about our mission in the future. Church attendance numbers do not tell us everything, but they can tell us quite a lot.

5. How does attendance in 2025 compare with 2024?

5.1. **There has been a small decrease in attendance as measured by AWA in our diocese of 1.4% between October 2024 and 2025.** The measure ‘Average weekly attendance’ figures are the average over four weeks of October beginning with the first Sunday in October, including weeks where the number is zero. If this decrease had been seen across all our churches in the diocese, it would represent 540 fewer adults and the same number of children attending our churches. This may not a loss of 540 adults from church; instead, it may be some people coming to church less frequently each month, for example. If people come less regularly then we would expect the church’s AWA to decrease, but their worshipping community (the number of people who attend at least once a month) to remain the same. We can test this once full 2025 SfM data are available later in 2026.

5.2. Linking attendance data for church in our early sample for October 2025 with our figures for the same churches in October 2024 gives the following estimated percentage change between the two years for all-age AWA, Adult AWA and child AWA.

	% change AWA 2024 to 2025
All age	-1.4%
Adult	-1.6%
Child	0.0%

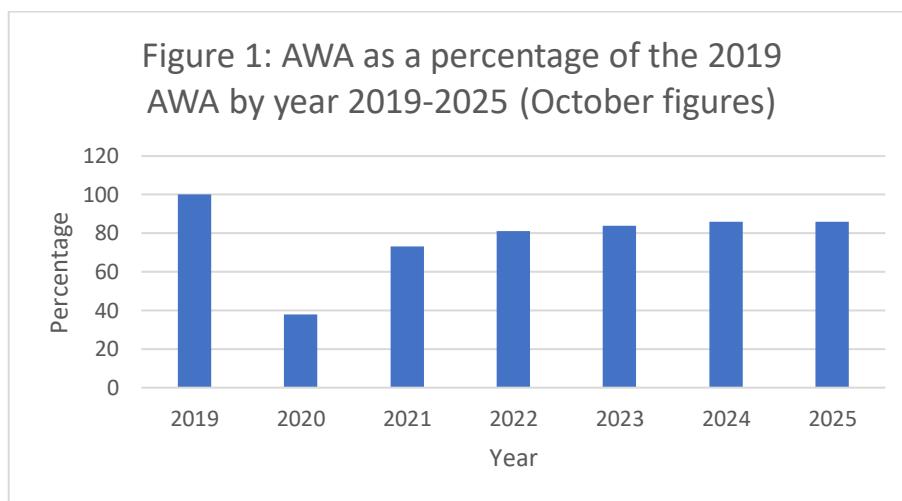
5.3. The small decrease in AWA between 2024 and 2025 has been among adults, with the AWA for adults decreasing by 1.6% between 2024 and 2025, compared with no change for children.

5.4. If we just consider Sunday attendance, however, average Sunday attendance between 2024 and 2025 increased slightly by 0.2%, with adult average Sunday attendance increasing by 0.1% and child Sunday attendance by 0.8%.

6. How does attendance in 2025 compare with 2019?

6.1. Last year overall attendance in October 2024 was 86% of the October 2019 figures, 2 percentage points higher than in October 2023. This comparison enabled us to measure recovery in attendance following the pandemic with the last attendance figure immediately before the pandemic. Attendance in October 2025 remained at 86% of the 2019 level.

6.2. That there was no change in attendance relative to 2019 shows a slightly different response compared to the fall in attendance seen between 2024 and 2025. This will partly be due to this being a slightly different sample of linked church information compared to 2024. These figures are shown in Figure 1 below.



6.3. Nevertheless, between 2024 and 2025 we have seen some churches grow their congregations of adults and children in different ways. Further growth in attendance is possible and will be through new initiatives and learning from those churches that have introduced new initiatives and seen growth.

7. How have the different components of attendance fared between 2024 and 2025?

7.1. Archdeaconry

7.1.1. Whilst the overall change between 2024 and 2025 was a decrease of 1.4%, this varied considerably by Archdeaconry, with Oxford seeing a decrease of 3.5% whereas Dorchester saw a very small increase of 0.2%.

7.1.2. Adult AWA decreased between 2024 and 2025 by 1.6% whereas over the same time period there was no change in the child AWA. Adults saw a decrease in AWA in all archdeaconries, whereas three of the archdeaconries saw an increase in child AWA – the fall of 3.7% in child AWA in Berkshire resulted in no overall change in average child attendance across the diocese.

% change in AWA 2024 to 2025			
Archdeaconry	AWA	Adult AWA	Child AWA
Oxford	-3.5%	-4.2%	3.7%
Berkshire	-1.9%	-1.5%	-3.7%
Buckingham	-1.1%	-1.5%	2.3%
Dorchester	0.2%	-0.1%	2.0%
Total	-1.4%	-1.6%	0.0%

Figure 2. Percentage change in AWA 2024 to 2025 by archdeaconry



7.1.3. The large decrease in Oxford archdeaconry was due to a decrease in adult attendance as their child AWA increased by 3.7% over the period. Oxford archdeaconry, however, is much smaller in terms of number of churches than the other archdeaconries, so large changes seen in just one or two large churches can affect the AWA of the archdeaconry. Much of the fall in adult attendance is due to three churches having understandable changes in their circumstances. These examples are shared here as illustrations of why AWA might be affected year on year: in October 2024 one church had a festival weekend celebrating the 950th

anniversary of their dedication, plus a requiem mass with a visiting choir for All Souls, which artificially inflated their adult AWA in 2024 by over 100; the large fall of over 100 to 2025 was as their adult AWA returned to a more usual level. Another church had reduced attendance in October 2025 as their church had been closed for renovations and they were meeting in the local neighbourhood centre. The third example is a church that in October 2025 had planned fewer services and events in anticipation of their vicar going on paternity leave. The 3.7% increase in child attendance was spread across several churches with no individual church seeing a large increase. Across the archdeaconry, 17 churches saw a small increase in child AWA, one stayed the same, and ten saw a small decrease.

7.1.4. Berkshire archdeaconry saw an overall decrease in AWA of 1.9%, with a fall of 1.5% in adult attendance and a larger fall of 3.7% in child attendance. The largest decreases in AWA were seen in the largest churches, but this is to be expected as these are the churches with the highest number of people. Nevertheless, over half of the twenty churches with the largest numerical decrease, saw their attendance fall by over 20% between 2024 and 2025. For some churches, the fall in attendance was because 2024 had seen a higher attendance due to additional services such as a special service for the uniformed organisations, the induction of a new vicar, or a baptism during the Sunday morning service. In another church they had to cancel one Sunday service in October 2025 as they had unfinished works in the building. 44% of churches in Berkshire Archdeaconry saw a fall in child average attendance. The largest falls were seen in the largest churches, but again this is to be expected. In one rural church with a large decrease in child AWA the vicar had been ill so unable to run activities for children and young people. In another church, a 'light' service for children at the end of October that ran in 2024 had not been repeated in 2025.

7.1.5. Buckingham archdeaconry saw an overall decrease of 1.1%, with a fall of 1.5% in adult attendance but an increase of 2.3% in child attendance. Almost half of all churches in the archdeaconry (49%) saw a reduction in their average adult attendance between 2024 and 2025. Some of the churches that saw a larger decrease explained that in 2024 their services had included a baptism with a large number of family members, and others mentioned deaths of congregation members and church families moving away. A few churches had held their harvest festival in September in 2025 whereas in 2024 it had been in October so included in the October count. In general, however, we would expect other churches to have harvest festivals in October in 2025 where they had been in September in 2024 so the changes would roughly balance out across the diocese. Of those churches that saw an increase in adult average attendance, some mentioned an interregnum ending, and for others clergy were now offering additional services. 45% of churches saw a small increase in their child average attendance in 2025, 20% remained the same and 35% saw a small decrease. One church had a relatively large increase in child average attendance due holding a "Bright Party" service in church as an alternate to Halloween. There were songs, a Christian message on the theme of Jesus being the light of the world, as well as prayers.

7.1.6. Dorchester saw a very small decrease of 0.1% in adult AWA between 2024 and 2025 but an increase in child AWA of 2.0%. The churches with the relative largest decreases in AWA included one church that in 2024 had hosted the annual young farmers service. Their attendance figures saw a commensurate fall in 2025 when another church saw the increase as they hosted the service in 2025. Another church saw a fall in average attendance because their messy church had taken place immediately before the start of the October count period, and another had had two baptisms in October 2024 during their main Sunday service but the congregation was increased by family and friends of those being baptised. 39% of the churches in Dorchester archdeaconry saw an increase in child attendance in 2025, 23% saw their attendance remain the same, and 38% saw a decrease in child attendance. Most of the changes in attendance numbers were relatively small, but one church saw a large increase in adult and child attendance due to their various groups in church each week, which have a study/worship element and serve a variety of age groups. It is likely that at least some of these groups had been running for a while but had not been included in their attendance figures previously.

7.2. Change in number of services.

7.2.1. In the first analysis in this series, comparing 2019 October AWA with that in 2022, we saw that the decrease in AWA between the two years was associated with a similar fall in the number of Sunday services offered by churches. So, one explanation for the fall in AWA was that rather than there being fewer people at each service, the total might be down because there were fewer services.

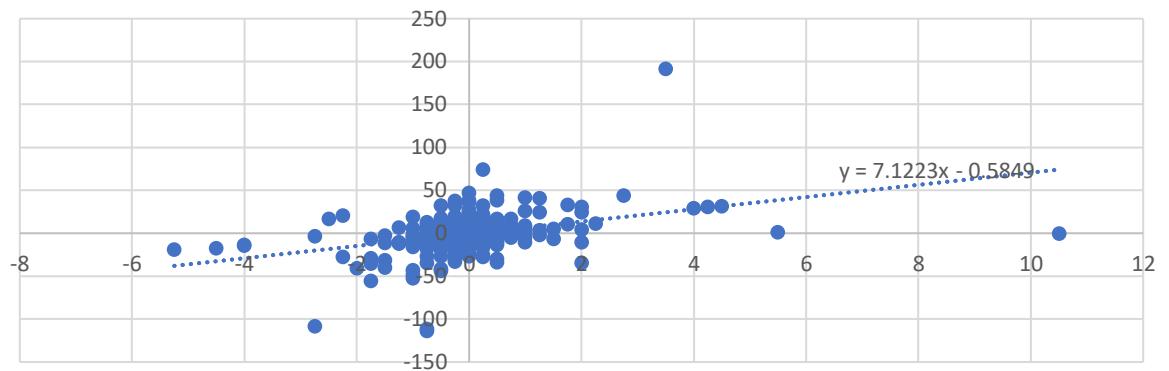
7.2.2. Between 2024 and 2025 the number of services offered across the diocese fell by just a few. However, as shown below, those churches that held between 1 and 4 fewer services each week in 2025 than in 2024 saw on average a decrease in AWA of 10%, and those that held 5 or more fewer services saw a decrease in their AWA of 24%. However, those that held the same number or more services saw an increase in their AWA of 4%, and 5% in their child AWA.

Change in number of services	Percentage change 2024 to 2025		
	AWA	Adult AWA	Child AWA
-1.25 to -5.25'	-24.1%	-20.7%	-45.2%
-0.25 to -1'	-10.4%	-11.2%	-5.3%
0 to 1	4.4%	4.4%	4.9%
Total	-1.4%	-1.6%	0.0%

7.2.3. So, on average if churches reduced their number of services between 2024 and 2025, this was associated with a fall in their AWA, whereas on average if they increased their number of services this was associated with an increase in their AWA. Figure 3 below displays these changes for each church with a trend line

fitted. On average if a church held one extra service a week, it was associated with an increase in AWA of an extra 6.5 people attending per week. So, for example, starting a service which takes place once a month and to which 26 people come, would result in an increase in AWA of 6.5.

Figure 3. Change in AWA 2024 to 2025 by change in number of services

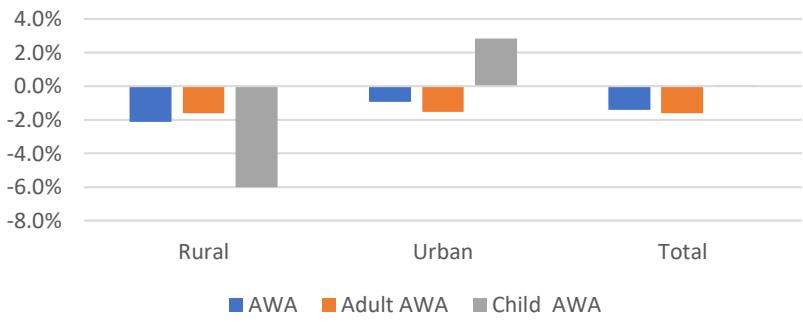


7.2.4. In October 2025, 150 (28%) of the churches in our sample no longer had at least one Sunday service each week. This was an increase from 25% seen in the analysis of October 2024 attendance. None of the large or largest churches in 2025 had fewer than one service per week on average. In 2025 20% of our churches held exactly one service each week on average and 52% held two or more services on average each week.

7.3. Rurality

7.3.1. As seen in Figure 4 below, Adult AWA fell between 2024 and 2025 for both churches in an urban and a rural context. However, child AWA fell by 6% in rural churches but increased by 2.8% in urban churches. The urban churches on average tend to be larger and therefore more likely to have resources for a children's worker which in turn will attract more children to church.

Figure 4. Percentage change in AWA, 2024 to 2025, by rurality



7.4. Longer time trends

7.4.1. Figures 5 and 6 show October 2025 attendance data together with projected pre-pandemic trends. These trends are not telling us what would have happened if there had not been a pandemic, but they show what would have happened if the pre-pandemic trends (from 2014 to 2019) had continued. The 2025 figures are estimated from our sample of linked 2024 and 2025 information and assume the remaining churches in our diocese show the same overall average changes in Adult and Child AWA.

7.4.2. These estimates show that in 2025 Adult AWA, while still being below its 2019 level, was 1.7% above the projected pre-pandemic trend. Child AWA, however, has exceeded the projected trend figure since 2023 and in 2025 the Child AWA was 31% above the projected trend. However, it should be noted that child attendance was declining at a faster rate than adult attendance prior to the pandemic.

Figure 5. Actual and 2014-19 trend in Adult AWA 2014-2025

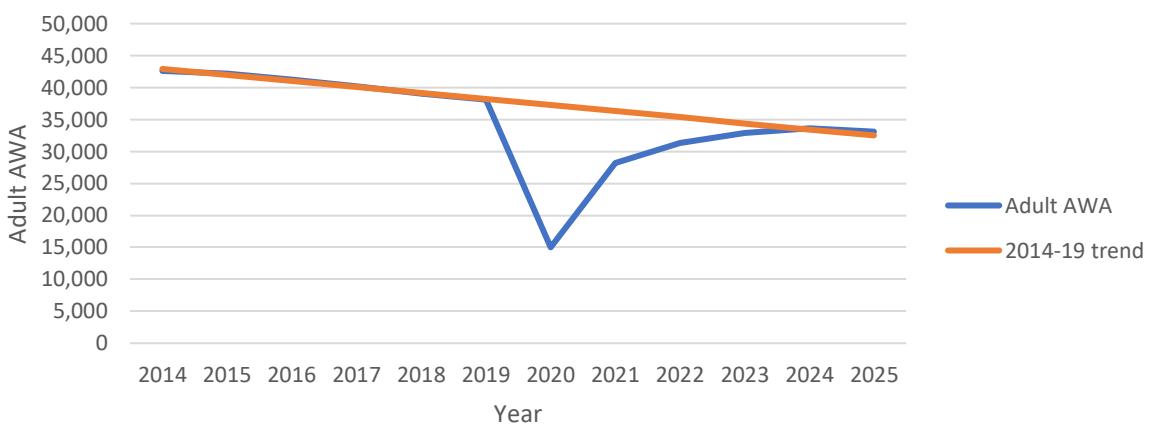


Figure 6. Actual and 2014-19 trend in Child AWA 2014-2025

