

CHRISTMAS SERVICES SURVEY

An online survey was undertaken during January in relation to Christmas services and outreach activities across the southern region. The results gave an overall impression of how parish's approached the Christmas period, of the style and range of services offered, and attendance trends, together with a range of practical thoughts, suggestions and reflection. Just over half of the parishes in the Southern Region completed the survey.

Key findings were:

- Most parish's provide Christmas services in the community – on the site of schools, kindergartens, nursing homes, and communal Carols by Candlelight etc., in the lead up to Christmas. Close to half hosted groups of school children in the church for a Christmas service.
- A growing number (40%) used social media (Twitter, Facebook), as well as traditional forms of media (newspapers, advertising boards) to advertise Christmas service times. Many relied on personal invite and some made use of the 'invite your friends' model familiar through Back to Church Sunday.
- The vast majority of parish's provide a service specifically for children and families, either on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, and for many this service is the most well attended and has experienced significance growth.
- About half of those providing children's and families services used a screen to display the whole liturgy and hymn words etc. A further quarter used a printed order of service.
- Almost every respondent parish has a 'Midnight' (or thereabouts) service on Christmas Eve, that includes Holy Communion, and provide services of Holy Communion on Christmas Day.
- The use of digital displays (screens) seems to be growing. Half of all respondent parish's used a screen, or a combination of screen and printed booklet, to display the whole of the liturgy at all of the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services.
- More than half (60%) did not seek to collect any personal information or data from those attending the Christmas services. All who did so left the filling out of response cards by those attending as voluntary.
- Only about 10% of parish's had total attendances over Christmas Eve / Day of more than 500. Most reported total attendances of between 100 and 500.
- Few respondent parish's (18%) reported a decline in the overall Christmas Eve / Day attendance, when compared to the previous year, a third thought the attendance was 'about the same,' whilst almost half said it was 'significantly' up.
- Similar patterns were reported for attendances over a five year period – more than 40% thought the pattern was 'about the same,' whilst 35% reported an increase. Only 10% reported decline in Christmas attendances over the past five years.

Some of the thoughts and suggestions, and 'good ideas,' reported by participating parish's were:

- Remember that, even though there may be a dedicated children's service Christmas Eve, some parents will bring their children on Christmas Day.
- Invest in good quality visuals.
- Let interested people in the congregation take up roles – i.e. delegate!
- Include playgroup and kindergarten 'break ups' in the regime of Christmas services.
- Be as short as possible!
- Involve yourself in the community as much as possible.
- A picnic hamper service was well attended by playgroup and Mainly Music families.
- Make good use of the tradition – this is who we are, this is what we do.
- Messy Christmas was an outreach success, especially to the 'unchurched.'
- One parish handed out show bags with coloring in pages, sweets, a Gospel, and details about Messy Church, to all children attending all services over Christmas.
- A Jesus birthday party children's service went well in one place – a traditional Crib service in another.
- One parish used a well received You Tube clip at the Children's Service.