

Church of England's donation cash falls despite income boost

Parish Share system said to be cause of shortfall with average churchgoer giving around three times more in 2019 than they did in 1989

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The Church of England (CofE) almost halved the proportion of money it spent on charitable donations over 30 years, despite [congregants having become more generous](#), analysis shows.

Although [the number of Christians in the UK is declining](#), individuals [are donating more money to the Church](#).

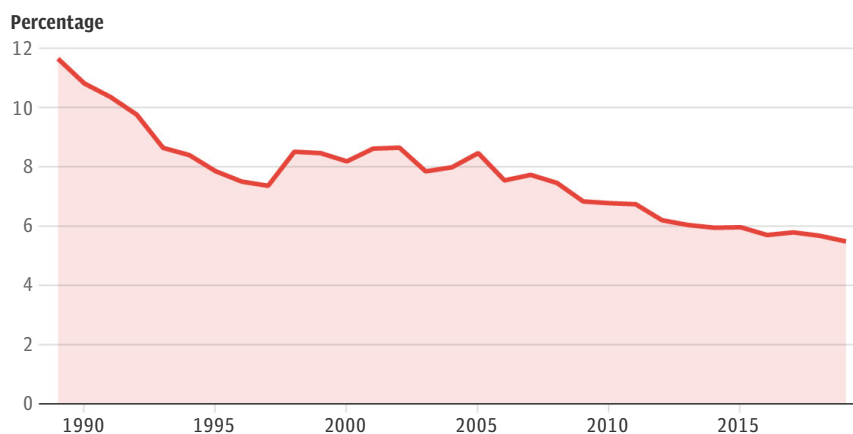
Churchgoers gave £409 million through collection plates or donations in 2019, over 60 per cent more than the £252 million (adjusted for inflation) given in 1989.

However, the proportion of spending on charity has plummeted. In 1989, the Church was spending around 11.5 per cent of its outgoings on charity projects. However, by 2019, this figure fell to just 5.5 per cent and was mainly spent on “trading” expenses, such as setting up shops and staffing costs, as opposed to charity donations.

The (CofE) on Friday night insisted that its charitable spending “has gone up in line with charitable giving to the Church over the long term”. However, it did not provide any publicly available data to illustrate this point.

Clergy have suggested that the reason for the proportion of spending on charity decreasing, while parishioners' donations have increased, is because of mounting “pressure to pay the Parish Share” which, in turn, funds a “ridiculously bloated central church”.

Charitable share of the Church of England's expenditure



SOURCE: CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The Parish Share is a voluntary contribution paid by each of the 12,500 parishes towards the work of the Church in each Diocese and beyond. It can range from just a few thousand pounds to over £200,000 each year.

Rev Simon Grigg, the Rector at St Paul's Church, in Covent Garden, London, known as “the actors' church” due to its location in the heart of the West End and longstanding association with the theatre community, said: “My guess for the reasons why would be: it's all down to the centralising of the church that's been going on for the past 30 years.

“The central church has been pushing more and more demands on congregants for the Parish Share. It's gone up and up ridiculously. My Parish Share is expected to be around £86,000-a-year.

“Folk will be generous to their local church, but this share keeps going up and up. It's a complete failure to understand our parishes ... I can see why individual parishioners' contributions are going up – they're under pressure to pay the Parish Share.

“And now they need to start cutting this ridiculously bloated central church. People will fight for and support their local church but they don't feel support or love for the Diocese or Church House.

“The 30 year experiment is over ... and money needs to go back to the parishes. The people who run the Church of England don't understand or love the parish system.”

‘Hard to swallow for local parishioners’

Responding to the data, Rev Robert Campbell Paget, vicar of All Saints Church in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, added: “Sadly, 'ridiculous' is hardly hyperbolic given the empirical evidence and stated intentions.

“The argument for increased giving from the parishes but with fewer and fewer incumbents – and even those just to 'manage decline' – is not only hard to swallow for local parishioners' families and businesses attempting to cut their cloth according to their means, it flies in the face of sound financial and strategic sense.

“For some years now my own PCC [Parochial Church Council] has reduced its freewill offering to the diocese until we are presented with a realistic strategy for growth that does not entail selling off the family silver in the form of church properties or continuing to run a nearly seven figure current deficit.

“Increased centralisation in the Church of England generally, throwing money at virtue-signalling projects – not the same as 'charity' – and employing more and more advisors and experts will only accelerate its implosion as an institution.

“It is the hierarchy's strategic planning and financial acumen we question: localism, not centralism should be the order of the day.”

‘Overburdened’ parishes

The Parish Share often goes towards vital resources such as paying for a vicar. However, rural congregants and clergy are warning that they have been forced to share one vicar across multiple parishes, or claim they have been threatened with not receiving a vicar unless they pay thousands of pounds to the Church.

The wide range in suggested donations aims to reflect the different sizes of parishes and the difference between very small operations in rural areas, compared to larger urban churches which have more congregants and resources.

However, a marked increase to the Parish Share since the 1990s has “overburdened” parishes – church wardens, treasurers and clergy have claimed.

According to The Telegraph's analysis of the latest publicly available data, the CofE has halved the proportion of money it spends on charitable donations in 30 years.

Since 1989, the church has reduced the proportion of overall expenditure on charitable causes from 11.5 per cent to 5.5 per cent in 2019.

In real-terms, the church's annual non-capital expenditure has increased from £500 million-a-year to around £870 million in real terms, an almost 80 per cent increase.

However, the amount spent on charity has declined from £58 million to £48 million in the same period of time.

The figures also show that the average churchgoer gives around three times more in real terms in 2019 than they did in 1989.

For example, churches saw an explosion in donations through collection plates and planned giving in the 1990s which means that in 2019, the average church goer would give £11.80 (up from £4.10 in 1987).

Across the 44 Dioceses, average payments range from £7.20 in Lincoln per individual churchgoer, per week, up to £17.80 in Guildford.

‘All Church expenditure is charitable’

The figures come as data showed that Sunday service attendance has nearly halved in 30 years, Between 1987 and 2019 the number fell from around 1.2 million to 679,000. However, In London, over the same time period, churchgoers increased from 52,700 to 53,600 – an increase of 1.7 per cent.

A CofE spokesman said: “Parish churches do great charitable work in their local communities every day. This includes soup kitchens, homeless support, foodbanks, English language courses to help people find jobs, support for older people, work with schools and other community agencies, bereavement and other pastoral care.

“All Church expenditure is charitable, including this amazing work done by clergy and parishioners, and there are 35,000 social action projects like this delivered by our parish churches. Church-giving to third-party charities is just one part of the broad missional work they do.

“Charitable spending by the Church has gone up in line with charitable giving to the Church over the long term, and we are grateful to those who support the mission and ministry of the Church faithfully. At the same time, total Parish Share has increased by less than inflation.”

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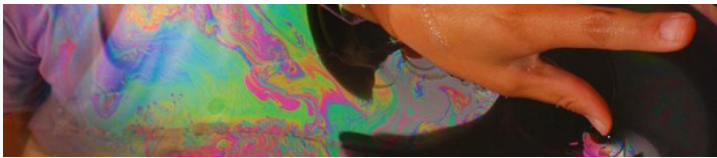


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