

Easter 2025

Anecdotes from churches

Church was absolutely packed at Holy Trinity on Easter Day. So, encouraging! (Holy Trinity Aylesbury).

and yes, we were pleasantly surprised by a very healthy number in our congregation on Easter Sunday!) (St Nicolas Taplow)

1. Summary

- 1.1. Across the diocese we heard many stories of bumper attendance at Easter in 2025, but was this just anecdote or was there any evidence to support an increase in the number of people attending our churches on Easter Day 2025?
- 1.2. We therefore decided to ask churches to record their Easter attendances immediately after Easter. This would mean that we could make an estimate of our Easter figures within a few weeks instead of having to wait until the full Statistics for Mission returns are completed in early 2026.
- 1.3. There was an overall increase in Easter Day attendance of 15 per cent between 2024 and 2025. This did vary by archdeaconry, with Berkshire seeing the largest increase of 22 per cent and Buckingham the smallest, still showing at 9 per cent increase.
- 1.4. Linking 2025 Easter figures with those for 2019, showed that the Easter attendance 2025 figures were estimated to be 93% of those in 2019.
- 1.5. There was variability in the change in Easter attendance between 2024 and 2025 by size of church, this almost disappears when considering the smaller three quintiles and the larger two quintiles as two separate groups. Every size group saw an increase in Easter attendance between 2024 and 2025 of at least 6 per cent.
- 1.6. There was no difference in the changes from 2024 to 2025 in Easter attendance by whether the church was in an urban or rural setting. Rural churches had a slightly higher percentage change in the number of communicants compared to churches in an urban setting.
- 1.7. In 2024, Easter Day fell on one of the earliest possible dates in late March, and in 2025 it was one of the latest dates in late April. Therefore, Easter Day in 2024 was associated with being at the beginning of the school holidays when families might have gone on holiday and the clocks had gone forward the night before. In 2025 Easter Day was at the end of the school holiday and families are likely to have returned home for the children to go back to school. This might explain some of the increase in Easter attendance between 2024 and 2025.

2. Postscript - Does chocolate help? Anecdotes from our churches

We did have a good attendance for our two services at Easter for 8 am at Avington it was 40 and then 9,45 HC in Kintbury St Mary's it was 220 adults with 24 children as well. I guess the Easter egg hunt in the churchyard was an added attraction!

We organised a big village Easter Egg hunt centred around the service, which increased numbers substantially, so it may be interesting to ask what initiatives other churches are using to increase numbers as that's the sort of data we can use going forward which would be tremendously helpful for PCCs...as it's the ideas we need help with ☺☺

When we have had processions with a donkey, from pub to church, children and families seem to evaporate before they go through the church doors. The egg hunt, however, can only be accessed once they have arrived at church so there is no back sliding at the last minute!

There is a built-in slot in the service during which the adults are going through the preparation for communion and the kids are hunting eggs outside. Michael Lakey then does a child-friendly Communion surrounded by children at the altar. This means we get a one-off influx of families - large numbers compared to the usual congregation, but sadly no permanent increase following. (Berrick Salome)

3. Background

- 3.1. The aim of this study was to compare attendance at our churches on Easter Day 2025 with Easter attendance in 2024 to help answer anecdotal messages of increases in attendance seen in our churches this year at Easter.
 - 3.1.1. It is possible to add Easter figures plus electoral roll numbers into the online parish return system from a few days after Easter when part of the 'Statistics for Mission' form opens. These figures are stored securely so there is no need to re-enter the figures when the full return is completed in January of the following year.
- 3.2. Easter Day 2025 was 20 April. Churches were all actively invited to provide their Easter attendance figures and by 19 May responses had been received from 477 churches, 59% of churches in the diocese. 37 of these churches reported that they had not held a service on Easter Day, often because the main service was at another church in their benefice. This gave attendance figures from 440 churches.
- 3.3. To compare with Easter attendance in 2024, the returns from 2025 were linked to their 2024 Easter attendance figures where these had been reported. A few linked records could not be included in this analysis as in one year the figures had been reported combined for one or more other churches but not in the other year. As a result, 432 churches from our diocese (53% of our churches) are included in this analysis.
- 3.4. This is the same methodology as used in other analyses comparing figures from one year with another. Easter figures are just based on one day and subject to more variability. However, we have a relatively high response rate, and we whilst there are differences in the proportions of churches of different sizes included in our sample, cannot see any biased pattern in the churches in respect of their Easter attendance, so we have confidence that our sample is representative of the whole diocese.

- 3.5. On the other hand, there could be a bias in that this sample may be skewed towards churches who were pleased with their Easter attendance and so more likely to be report. To try to reduce this we did include a message in our final reminder asking churches that had not seen increases to ensure they reported their figures too. We will be able to measure the impact of these biases when we have the full dataset. When the full figures for 2025 are published in late 2026, they may show slightly different patterns.

4. How does attendance at Easter in 2025 compare with Easter 2024?

4.1. *Change in Diocesan and Archdeaconry Figures*

- 4.1.1. Table 4.1 shows the percentage increase in both Easter Day attendance and Easter communicants by Archdeaconry between 2024 and 2025. This shows an overall increase in Easter Day attendance of 15 per cent between 2024 and 2025. This did vary by archdeaconry, with Berkshire seeing the largest increase of 22 per cent and Buckingham the smallest, still showing at 9 per cent increase.

Figure 4.1: Percentage change 2024 to 2025

| Archdeaconry | Easter Day attendance | Easter Communicants |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Oxford | 17.6% | 24.2% |
| Berkshire | 22.3% | 12.1% |
| Buckingham | 9.2% | 7.2% |
| Dorchester | 13.9% | 8.2% |
| Total | 15.1% | 11.3% |

- 4.1.2. Some churches saw big changes in Easter attendance, from decreases of up to 137 to increases of up to 399. Some of these changes will be due to purely statistical reasons – for example, ‘We had a joint service on Easter Sunday 2019’. Others will reflect an underlying real change.
- 4.1.3. Thinking about the ten churches that saw the biggest increase in Easter attendance, 9 were among our churches with largest average weekly attendance and 8 were in an urban setting (where we find most of our churches with largest attendance. One of the largest increases was St John the Baptist in Cookham Dean in Berkshire, but this increase was mirrored with a similarly large decrease for their sister church, Holy Trinity in Cookham that was undergoing major reordering works.
- 4.1.4. One possibility is that some of the changes in Easter attendance seen here is the impact of groups of churches (e.g., multi church parishes/benefices) where the “big” Easter service is not in the same church each year. So, a change from 5 to 100 people should not be unexpected, because there is a linked church that has changed from 100 to 5.

5. How does Easter attendance in 2025 compare with 2019?

- 5.1. Linking 2025 Easter figures with those for 2019, estimated Easter 2025 figures to be 93% of those in 2019. This is higher than that seen for October attendance figures between 2019 and 2024 given in my report earlier this year [october-2024-attendance-report-march-](#)

[update.pdf](#) which showed that by October 2024 attendance was estimated to have reached 86% of the 2019 level. However, Easter 2025 figures are not directly comparable with the October figures as they are based on just one day rather than four weeks, and variability in Easter figures is different from October, as discussed later.

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

6.1. *Size of church*

6.1.1. In this analysis, before linkage, I grouped churches into five equal groups (quintiles) ordered by their AWA in 2024 (1= 0.25 to 7, 2=7.25 to 16, 3= 16.25 to 32.75, 4=32.5 to 69.75, and 5= 70 and higher. There were about 150 churches in each quintile in the full 2024 dataset. In our linked sample, 18 churches have an AWA of 200 or over and of these 2, Oxford churches, At Aldate and St Ebbe's are over 1000.

6.1.2. As shown in Figure 6.1, a higher proportion of larger churches (quintiles 4 and 5) had responded to our request for Easter figures than smaller churches. This will affect the reliability of the overall total Easter estimates if the different size churches have different changes in Easter attendance totals between 2024 and 2025.

Figure 6.1 Number of churches in sample by quintile, and as a percentage of all churches in the quintile

| Quintile | No. churches providing figures | % churches in linked file |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 52 | 34.7% |
| 2 | 86 | 57.3% |
| 3 | 83 | 55.3% |
| 4 | 108 | 72.0% |
| 5 | 103 | 68.7% |
| Total | 432 | 58.4% |

6.1.3. Figure 6.2 shows that while there is variability the change in Easter attendance between 2024 and 2025 by size of church, this almost disappears when considering the smaller three quintiles together and the larger two quintiles together as two separate groups. Every size group saw an increase in Easter attendance between 2024 and 2025 of at least 6 per cent.

Figure 6.2 Percentage change in Easter attendance and communicants between 2024 and 2025, by size of church in 2024

| Quintile | Easter attendance | Easter communicants |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Smallest</i> 1 | 6.1% | 4.1% |
| 2 | 24.8% | 14.3% |
| 3 | 11.9% | 20.2% |
| 1, 2 and 3 | 15.2% | 15.6% |
| 4 | 7.9% | 8.3% |
| <i>Largest</i> 5 | 17.6% | 10.9% |
| 4 and 5 | 15.0% | 10.2% |
| Total | 15.1% | 11.3% |

6.1.4. The lower number of the smaller church in this sample may in part be due to these being the churches where it is more likely that the main Easter service moves from church to church each year, so the church may not have had a service in one of the two years and hence not be included in the sample. In addition, it is possible that smaller churches were less likely to hold an Easter Day service in 2025 and so were not inclined to complete their figures - indeed, if they had nothing to report, that is perfectly understandable. Therefore, when the data for all the churches in the diocese are available, and the smaller churches are better represented, then the overall increase in attendance might reduce.

7. *Rurality*

7.1. Figure 7.1 shows that there was no difference in the changes from 2024 to 2025 in Easter attendance by whether the church was in an urban or rural setting. Rural churches had a slightly higher percentage change in the number of communicants compared to churches in an urban setting.

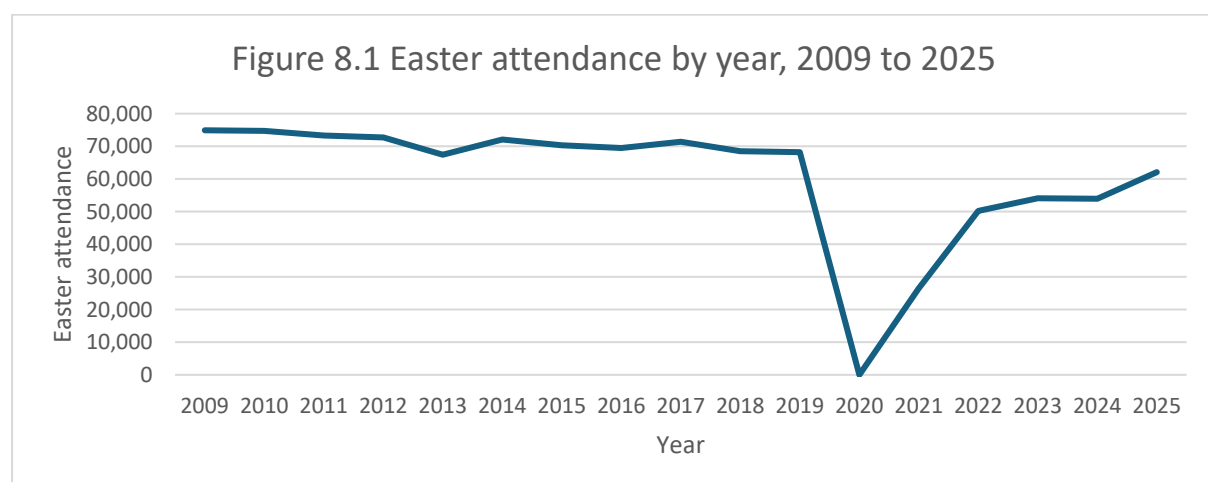
Figure 7.1 Percentage change in Easter attendance and communicants by rurality, 2024 to 2025

| | Easter attendance | Easter communicant |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Rural | 15.1% | 13.1% |
| Urban | 15.0% | 10.0% |
| Total | 15.1% | 11.3% |

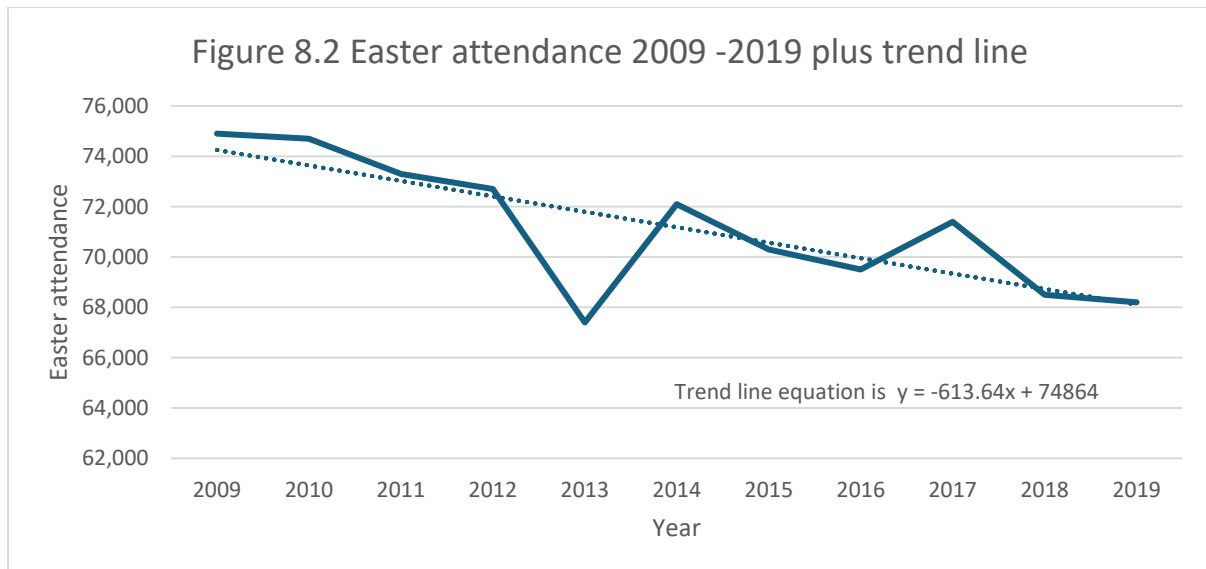
8. Longer time trend in Easter Figures

8.1. Figure 8.1 shows a longer time series of Easter attendance in our diocese from 2009 to 2025. Final figures for 2024 and 2025 are not yet available so these have been estimated from earlier linked data from 2023 and 2024, and the estimated change from 2024 to 2025 in Easter attendance.

8.2. All our churches were closed at Easter 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, so we had no attendance in person at Easter 2020.



- 8.3. Between 2009 and 2019 our Easter figures had varied from year to year but showed a small downwards trend year on year. Figure 8.2 shows the Easter attendance figures plus the associated trend line. This looks steeper than in Figure 8.1 as the vertical axis starts from 62,000 not zero. The trend line estimates that each year Easter attendance reduces by a further 614.



- 8.4. Had this trend continued, the 2025 Easter attendance figure would have been 64,400, compared to our estimate which was 3.7% below this trend figure. 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 2024 and 2025 figures used to compare with the trend figures are estimated from our sample of linked 2024 and 2025 information and assume the remaining churches in our diocese show the same overall changes in Easter attendance.

9. Timing of Easter

*We were up 22% on 2024 but 2024 was 5% lower than 2023 because the clocks went forward that day and it was right at the beginning on the school holidays [lots of families away]
(Buckingham: St Peter & St Paul)*

- 9.1. Easter attendance can vary more than some other measures as it falls on a different date each year. Attendance can be affected by school holidays, and how these fall in relation to Easter. In addition, Easter attendance could be affected by whether Easter Day coincides with the clocks going forward and everyone having an hour less sleep the night before – and maybe failing to reset alarm clocks! Luckily many these days change automatically! In the UK, the clocks go forward 1 hour at 1am on the last Sunday in March.
- 9.2. Easter can fall any date between 28 March (27 March in a leap year) and 25 April. Easter was last on Sunday, April 25 in 1943. Easter will not occur as late again until 2038—a span of 95 years. The second latest date for Easter, April 24, or day 114, occurred last in 2011. Easter also occurred on the 114th day of the year on April 23 in 2000, a leap year.

- 9.3. When Easter is early (late March) then the school holidays will tend to begin on Maundy Thursday, whereas if Easter is very late then schools may return the day after Easter bank holiday Monday. Hence an early Easter could be associated with families going away on holiday when the school holidays began and not being at home to attend the Easter Day service, whereas with a late Easter families would need to be back home for the children to return to school immediately after Easter so would be able to attend. Also, families might struggle to get to church on a very early Easter date if the clocks also went back the night before.
- 9.4. Figure 9.1 gives Easter attendance by year with an indication of whether Easter was earliest, early, medium, late, or latest among the possible dates for Easter. In both 2014 and 2017 a late date for Easter followed an earliest date the year before. In both cases, their Easter attendance figures saw an increase in the year with the late Easter date despite the overall downwards trend in Easter attendance over this period.

| Year | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| Easter attendance | 74,900 | 74,700 | 73,300 | 72,700 | 67,400 | 72,100 | 70,300 | 69,500 | 71,400 |
| Date of Easter | Medium | Early | Latest | Medium | Earliest | Late | Early | Earliest | Late |

| Year | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|
| Easter attendance | 68,500 | 68,200 | n/a | 26,500 | 50,200 | 54,100 | 54000 | 62100 |
| Date of Easter | Early | Late | Median | Early | Late | Median | Earliest | Latest |

- 9.5. In 2024 Easter Day fell on one of the earliest possible dates in late March, and in 2025 it was one of the latest dates in late April. Therefore, Easter Day in 2024 was associated with being at the beginning of the school holidays when families might have gone on holiday and the clocks had gone forward the night before. In 2025 Easter Day was at the end of the school holiday and families are likely to have returned home for the children to go back to school. This might explain some of the increase in Easter attendance between 2024 and 2025.