

Make Christianity cool again: Why Gen Z is flocking to church

As a new report suggests that the number of young churchgoers has quadrupled, [Helen Coffey](#) investigates this potential UK spiritual revival – and asks why the next generation is more likely to be keeping the faith



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It's 10am on Sunday, and people are already starting to filter through the doors of Harbour Church. Sun streams through the windows – there's an air of anticipation as congregation members greet each other and catch up on the week just gone. Soon, the room is filling up, the sound of gentle chatter swelling as the throng grows and people take their seats. The five-piece worship band strikes up; the crowd gets to its feet; the air vibrates as more than a hundred voices sing praises to [God](#).

There's no special occasion to pin the numbers on – it's not Christmas or [Easter](#) on this particular Sunday, nor is there a [wedding dress](#), christening gown or coffin in sight. It's just a regular, run-of-the-mill service at this church in Folkestone, Kent.

It was a different story 25 years ago when church leaders Sarah and Gareth arrived. Back then, 15 people would show up on a Sunday morning; these days, there are somewhere between 150 and 180 attendees every single week. This, in itself, feels a miraculous feat amid a wider trend that has seen [Christianity](#) in modern Britain [stuck on a](#)

[constant downward trajectory](#). But perhaps the most surprising thing of all is the number of young people who are going against the secular grain. Looking around on a Sunday morning, the demographics are wildly different from the expected cluster of silver-haired worshippers – instead, there’s a diverse spectrum comprised of teenagers, young adults and extended families with [toddlers and kids zooming around](#), as well as people in their thirties, forties and every decade beyond.

It's a trend that is being seen far beyond the confines of this one church, according to new research. The Bible Society’s [“The Quiet Revival” report](#) has made some remarkable claims about a resurgence of Christianity in the UK. Although the percentage of Brits identifying as Christian has fallen to 39 per cent, “The Church is in a period of rapid growth, driven by young adults and in particular young men”, reads the report, which analysed the results of a largescale YouGov survey asking participants how often they attended church aside from weddings, baptisms and funerals. The number of people reporting monthly attendance has risen from 8 per cent in 2018 to 12 per cent in 2024. But the most remarkable jump in reported attendance has been among [Generation Z](#), quadrupling from 4 per cent to 16 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds. There’s been an even more dramatic shift for young men: a fivefold growth from 4 to 21 per cent.

“These are striking findings that completely reverse the widely held assumption that the Church in England and Wales is in terminal decline,” said study co-author Dr Rhiannon McAleer. “While some traditional denominations continue to face challenges, we’ve seen significant, broad-based growth among most expressions of church – particularly in Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism. There are now over 2 million more people attending church than there were six years ago.”

There are other markers, too, that indicate a potential reversal of fortunes for the Christian [faith](#). According to [Nielsen BookScan data](#), UK Bible sales went from netting £2.69m in 2019 to £5.02m in 2024 – an increase of £2.33m in just five years. To put this in context, Bible sales increased by just over £277,000 in total in the 11 years from 2008 to 2019. This renewed interest in scripture is also being attributed to Gen Z; the *Good News Bible – The Youth Edition*, for example, has seen sales nearly double since 2021. And it’s not a UK-only phenomenon: US Bible sales have seen a 22 per cent uplift in the past year alone, with publishers reporting more first-time buyers than ever.

A [recent piece of research](#) commissioned by Christian student movement Fusion, meanwhile, found that even non-religious students were open to exploring Christian ideas. Survey data from 2,030 undergraduates, of which 39 per cent identified as Christian and 36 per cent identified as “no [religion](#)”, revealed that half of all respondents said they were interested in reading the Bible in their spare time. Some 37 per cent of students with “no religion” stated that they already owned a copy of the Bible; 13 per cent of the same group claimed they prayed weekly. “This indicates that for some students, spiritual practices persist even without a formal religious identity,” the report concluded.

Gen-Zers have even been dubbed the “spiritual generation” after research found that they are far more likely to describe themselves this way: [62 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds claim to be “very” or “fairly” spiritual](#), compared to just 35 per cent of those over 65. Only 13 per cent of Gen-Zers identify as atheists, in contrast to 20 per cent of millennials and 25 per cent of Gen X. It makes sense; for the two generations above, Christianity was presented in popular culture as deeply uncool at best – think *Songs of Praise* stuffiness combined with Ned Flanders’s brand of “Okily dokily!” cringe in *The Simpsons* – and sexist or homophobic at worst, darkly epitomised by the dangerous “pray the gay away” ideology espoused at conversion therapy camps. It coincided with the rise of populist atheism, pedalled by academics like [Richard Dawkins](#) in the Noughties, to create an environment in which professing to have faith of any kind felt like deviant behaviour.

But we’re now witnessing a “significant cultural shift regarding matters of faith and religion”, argues Sam Richardson, CEO at Christian publisher SPCK. “We are seeing an increased curiosity about Christianity,” he says. “Rather than relying on atheist thought leaders (or, for that matter, church leaders), we are seeing people want to draw their own conclusions by reading Christian books in general and the Bible in particular.”

So what’s the appeal and relevance of Christianity, often presented as something quaintly “traditional” or hopelessly antiquated, for today’s young people?

Much has been made of the fact that young men seem to be flocking to religion, potentially drawn by alt-right content creators – [for instance, Jordan Peterson](#) – who weave Christianity into problematic narratives

around masculinity and traditional gender roles. But that doesn't reflect the reality of many of the Gen Z [Christians](#) I encounter.

As someone who struggles with depression and anxiety, my faith gives me some peace and clarity

Lizzie, 27

For Harry Clark, the 24-year-old winner of season two of *The Traitors*, his Catholic faith helps him feel less "lost". In advance of his appearance on the latest series of BBC 1 show *Pilgrimage*, in which he'll explore all things faith with his fellow celebrity castmates as they trek through the Austrian and Swiss Alps, Clark told [The Telegraph](#): "You can be so lost but then you are found. God is the only one who knows everything about me. It's like a vase that shatters and God is the one that can put together the shards."

The young Christians I speak to share similar stories of feeling fully "known" and loved by God. Jordan, 26, tells me that faith has given her "an overwhelming sense of peace". Yes, being religious has been framed as profoundly countercultural throughout her life – "As a uni student I didn't get swept away with the drinking culture; I got married young (engaged at 19, married at 21), which blew a lot of my non-Christian friends' minds" – but she has no regrets. "Am I allowed to say everything?" she responds when I ask her to name the best thing she gets from her faith. "Knowing it's not my strength I rely on, but God's, brings such peace and joy. And a sense of community and family with other Christians."

Josh, 27, was raised in a Christian household and has gone to church since he was a child. While growing up he felt part of a tiny minority, he's noticed a real change in the past few years – particularly since Covid. "People have become much more receptive to faith; they're searching for answers and a need for something bigger than themselves," he says. Josh's own reasons for keeping the faith also include the community aspect, plus "knowing God personally": "He is a comfort in hard times. I like seeking Him for guidance in everything."

What has been described as a global "[mental health](#) crisis" among young people is perhaps one potential explanation for faith's renewed appeal in 2025. Between 2010 and 2015, suicide rates among 10- to 14-year-old girls and boys increased by 167 and 92 per cent, respectively; self-harm

rates for teenage girls in the UK soared by 78 per cent; and anxiety diagnoses for those aged 18 to 25 jumped by 92 per cent. These grim statistics have gone [hand in hand with the stratospheric rise in social media and smartphone use](#), according to social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, author of the bestselling book *The Anxious Generation*.

By contrast, “The Quiet Revival” report found that Christians reported higher life satisfaction than non-churchgoers, with a greater connection to their community and less stress and anxiety. Interestingly, a major piece of research on teenage wellbeing conducted by scientists at the University of Oxford and Swansea University last year found that just three elements strongly correlated with better adolescent mental health: getting enough sleep, regular exercise and – wait for it – attending religious services. “These three consistently predicted low anxiety, low depression, high wellbeing, high flourishing, and high agency,” according to the report.

It's something that 27-year-old Lizzie has found hugely beneficial in terms of being a Christian. “As someone who struggles with depression and anxiety, my faith gives me some peace and clarity,” she says. “I know there’s always someone there who loves me unconditionally and will never judge me for the things I do or don’t do. Sometimes it feels freeing to give myself over to a higher power, and let the chips fall as they may as part of a greater plan.”

Lottie, 28, agrees that “it massively helps with mental health. It gives you a sense of purpose that drives you.” It’s also helped her in supporting her husband, a fellow Christian who suffers from depression: “I needed faith to help us through that situation. Mental health isn’t absent in church – and it doesn’t mean that if you have faith, you’re not going to have mental health difficulties – but it’s something that can help, knowing that there’s a higher meaning to it all.”

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Lottie, 28

The Bible Society report posits two interlinking factors for the uplift in young people seeking religion: a “change of climate” as the perception of Christianity has shifted from hostility to apathy to openness, and the quest for belonging. The former has been reflected in various media

moments in recent years, from Phoebe Waller-Bridge's ["hot priest" love interest in *Fleabag*](#) to praise for Church of England priest [Richard Coles's faith-infused wisdom](#) during his stint on *I'm a Celebrity...* last year. The latter, meanwhile, could well be fundamental; every Christian I interview cites the sense of [belonging that comes from being part of a loving church](#) as one of the major benefits. "I feel like I can be vulnerable; I feel like I can be honest about who I am, the struggles that I'm going through," says Lottie. "I think it's hard to come across a community like that that looks after you so well."

And research supports the theory that getting involved in a community could have a positive impact on young people's mental health. Andrea Danese, a professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at King's College London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, says that participation in community activities and access to safe social spaces "can provide adolescents with opportunities to build social skills and resilience", acting as a [buffer against social anxiety](#).

In an unstable world where uncertainty reigns, perhaps the biggest gift that religion can provide young people with is a pathway through the chaos, a light in the dark. As Lizzie puts it: "Hope is one of the biggest things I get out of my faith ... You're never alone, no matter how much you may feel it. And I think that's beautiful."