



Supporting Places of Worship in Wales

July 2017

For people who love church buildings

Supporting Places of Worship in Wales Survey 2017

Key findings

- 50% of respondents were not attracting new volunteers.
- 60% currently have a project for which they are seeking funding. 65% of these were for fabric repairs and a further 38% for maintenance. 46% of projects included the introduction of new facilities.
- 41% of respondents were seeking funding for projects costing under £50,000 and 20% for projects under £100,000.
- 28% had no experience at all of making funding applications and 54% had a little experience. In terms of running a building project, 31% said neither they nor anyone in their team had any experience of this.
- 44% of respondents do not have an annual maintenance plan.
- To the open-ended question of what is the greatest challenge for their place of worship, the most common response at 32% was declining congregation numbers and attracting new members. 23% identified lack of funds and 20% maintenance and repairs as the greatest challenges.
- 32% identified attracting new users or volunteers as key to their place of worship remaining open and active within the community. A further 19% identified improved facilities, reordering or access as the most important means.
- For 31% of respondents, it was the feeling of being part of a community that was the most rewarding aspect of volunteering at their place of worship.

Method

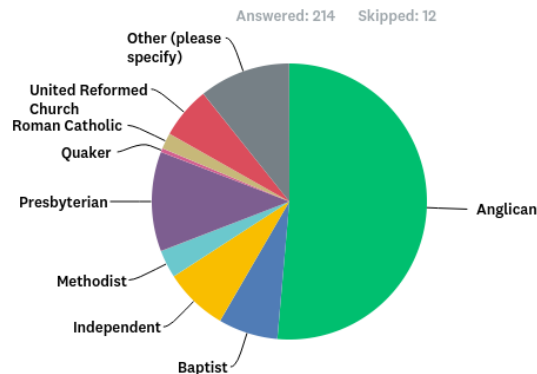
This survey was organised by the National Churches Trust on behalf of the Welsh Places of Worship Forum. It targeted people who look after a place of worship to inform the Forum about current and upcoming challenges.

The survey was circulated to all places of worship that have applied to the National Churches Trust in the last 5 years and was disseminated through the Welsh Places of Worship Forum members.

The Welsh Places of Worship Forum was established in 2015. It comprises organisations and statutory agencies concerned with faith and heritage that are either based in Wales or operating in Wales. The Forum aims to identify the most effective ways to help places of worship in Wales be more sustainable and engage the wider public.

Respondents

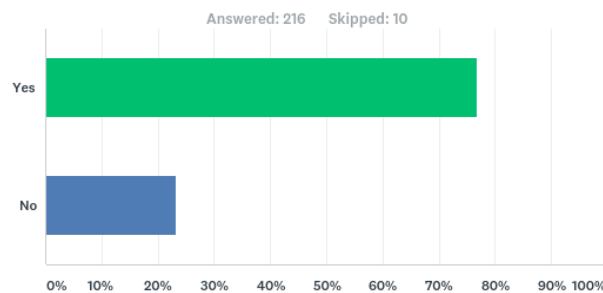
Q3 Which tradition or denomination is your place of worship?



- There were a total of 219 complete or partially complete responses. The survey was available to churches and chapels in both English and Welsh.
- 55% of respondents were Church in Wales. Other respondents included – 11% Presbyterian, 7% Baptist, 7% Independent, 6% United Reformed Church, 3% Methodist, 2% Roman Catholic, >2% Quaker, Congregationalist, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Unitarian, ecumenical.
- 64% of places of worship were listed.
- 77% of respondents were volunteers, while 9% were paid staff and 14% clergy.

Volunteers

Q6 Are you a volunteer?



77% of those who took part in the survey were volunteers. Among these volunteers, the hours contributed to building related matters in a typical month ranged from 1 to 80. The majority of respondents (70%) contributed up to 10 hours per month volunteering in their church or chapel, while 14% volunteer between 10-20 hours, and 16% over 21 hours per month.

Additional comments highlighted the range of ways in which people support places of worship. Some had very specific roles, such as "cleaning up after homeless meal on Saturday evenings", while others were responsible for a range of tasks with one respondent listing their regular activities as "maintenance, bins, heating, winding the clock, gaining grants for repairs and improvements [...], opening and closing the church daily." Common tasks included fundraising, opening up, cleaning, managing the accounts and managing building projects.

In terms of how they rated the impact of their contribution, 19% said 'a great deal', 32% said 'a lot of impact' and 33% 'a moderate amount'.

Those contributing 25+ hours per month tended to rate their impact higher, though there was no obvious correlation between fewer hours and rating their contribution lower.

50% of respondents said they were not attracting new volunteers. Of those that gave a reason for why they think their building is not attracting new volunteers, 53% identified dwindling congregations and a lack of new members as the key issue. Within this group, 40% specifically identified ageing congregations and a lack of young people joining as the key factors.

The biggest challenges facing churches and chapels

This was the first of three open-ended questions. Of the 145 who left comments, 32% felt that declining congregation numbers and the task of attracting new users to their place of worship was the greatest challenge. "Ageing congregation" and "attracting new members" were common phrases that came up.

23% felt that raising sufficient funds was the greatest threat, of whom 9% were directly concerned with the cost of maintaining their building. A further 20% identified maintenance and repairs to the fabric as the greatest challenge.

There was no obvious correlation between the denominations and the different challenges faced. This would suggest that issues such as lack of money, declining numbers, and maintaining the building fabric are inter-denominational challenges.

What would help places of worship remain open and serving the community

21% specifically identified attracting new members to the congregation, particularly young people, as key to their place of worship remaining open and serving the community. A further 11% felt that attracting new volunteers was a critical factor.

19% identified improved facilities, reordering work or access as key to improving their building's sustainability, whilst 18% called for greater external financial support.

In summary, people felt that encouraging more people into their building and introducing improved facilities would help their place of worship remain open and active. However, a large number feel inhibited by a lack of funds and the cost and challenge of maintaining the fabric of their building.

What is most rewarding aspect of volunteering at your place of worship?

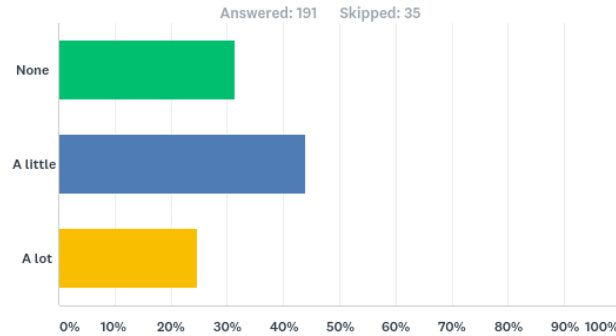
"The friendship of our close knit congregation", "being part of a close and lively community", and "being part of a dedicated group of like-minded people" were the most commonly sighted rewards people experience while volunteering at a church or chapel. The feeling of being part of a community and helping to bring people together featured in some 31% of responses.

"The knowledge that I am helping the building to continue to have a use for future generations." A sense of being part of the history and maintaining their building for future generations was another recurrent theme. Others drew reward from the feeling of giving something back and seeing people using and enjoying their building.

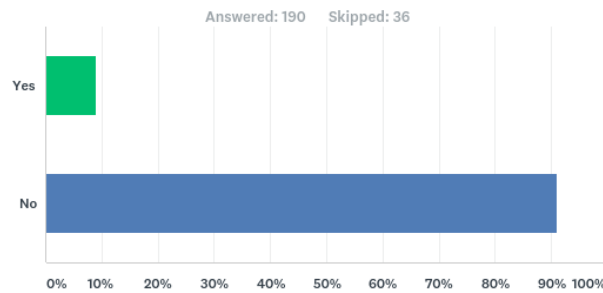
Prior experience

Responses showed that the people leading on projects had a mixed background. The majority of respondents had little or no experience in running a building project, or professional background in managing a building.

Q14 Do you or does someone else who is part of your team have previous experience of running a building project?

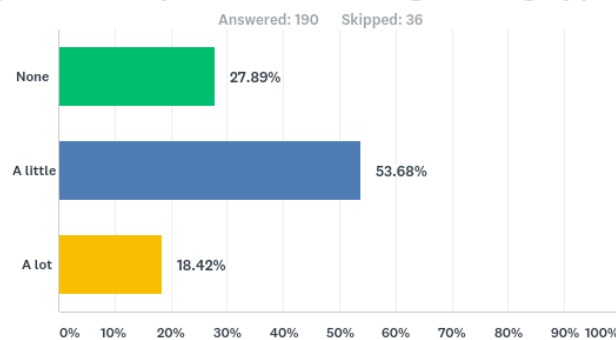


Q15 Do you have a professional background or experience in managing buildings?



Less than 20% of respondents had considerable experience making funding bids, while 80% had little or no experience with fundraising. 28% had no experience at all, yet of this group, 60% currently have a project for which they are actively seeking funding.

Q16 Do you have experience of making funding applications?



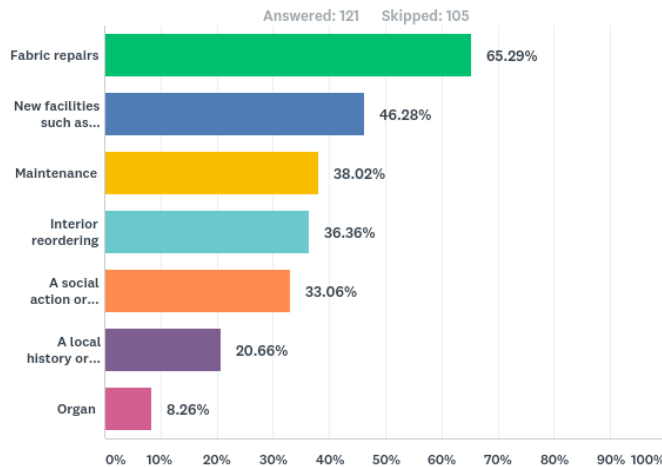
Where people would like to see more support

The question of where people would like to see more support allowed for multiple responses. The most popular answer was funding for maintenance with over three quarters of respondents (78%) saying they would like help with this. The other most popular topics were how to attract visitors (66%) and how to make their church more sustainable (67%). 33% said they would like to know more about how to carry out an annual maintenance plan.

These results correlate with the responses to the question of what would help the building remain open and serving the community, i.e. attracting more users and improved finances and funding opportunities, particularly in relation to maintenance.

Maintenance and current projects

Q20 The project is for (please tick all those that apply):



Maintenance and management issues were identified through the survey. Nearly half of respondents (44%) do not have an annual maintenance plan. While 83% of churches and chapels have a Quinquennial Inspection, a third of respondents felt that the inspection did not provide them with the information they needed, or were unsure of the value of the inspections. However, only 33% identified maintenance plans as an area where they would like to see additional support. Maintenance and repairs were identified as one of the biggest challenges, but it was finding appropriate funding rather than help with the task of carrying our regular maintenance that was the most common area where people would like to see more support.

Of those that were seeking funding for a project, 65% were planning a repair project. The next most common was for new facilities, such as kitchen, toilets and disabled access, for which 46% were seeking support, followed by maintenance at 38% and reordering work at 36%.

The majority of respondents were seeking funding for projects costing below £100,000. 41% had projects costing under £50,000 and 20% for projects under £100,000.

Recommendations

The survey results provide the National Churches Trust and the Wales Places of Worship Forum with evidence to develop a capacity building support project focussed on three critical outputs:

1. To provide greater fundraising and grant funding advice for places of worship, with a particular emphasis on grants for maintenance, repair and new facilities.
2. To provide greater practical support and advice on maintenance and encourage best practice, supported by grants.
3. To improve advice and support on community engagement. As well as helping places of worship find ways to better engage with the people in their communities and particularly young people, this final output would also seek to provide more support on and training in volunteer recruitment and retention.

It is recommended that the National Churches Trust and the Wales Places of Worship Forum collaborate on developing a capacity building project, with the aim of submitting a Resilient Heritage bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in late 2017 to cover the project costs.

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About the National Churches Trust

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