

The 'Feel Good' Approach is Not Working for Churches

Late last week, I ran across an [intriguing article](#) on the state of the Church of England in *The Telegraph*. According to the paper:

"Churches with small and declining congregations may no longer have to hold weekly Sunday services as the [Church of England](#) considers dropping the legal requirement.

A Church of England task group may change clauses in canon law which obliges all parish churches to hold morning and evening prayer every Sunday amid concerns that priests who look after a number of parishes are unable to abide by the law."

The main reason for this pullback appears to be the low attendance at services:

"Official figures from January revealed that only 1.4 per cent of the English population now attend Anglican services on a typical Sunday morning, while 'weekly' attendance figures fell below one million for the first time ever."

In comparison to the Church of England, attendance in American churches is looking downright rosy. But even in the U.S., the number of adults attending weekly church services every week dropped [three percent](#) between 2007 and 2014.

So why is church attendance dropping to ever lower levels?

The answer to that question may be found in a nineteenth century quote by Henry Ward Beecher, the brother of famous author and abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Beecher [noted](#):

“The Church is not a gallery for the better exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones, a nursery for the care of weak ones, an hospital for the better healing of those who need assiduous care.”

It has been noted in recent years that the church is increasingly trying to [make itself relevant](#) to society by doing everything from bringing in popular music bands, to chasing after the rich at the expense of the poor, to watering down sermons so as not to offend. By aiming to make everyone who comes through its doors “feel good,” the church has indeed become that gallery in which every individual can view themselves in their best light.

If declining membership and attendance are any indication, such a tactic is not working. Is it possible that there would be a resurgent interest in church if it changed its approach, emphasized its differences from the rest of the world, and began to educate its members with deep, challenging truths?