

Good news people

A report on evangelicals in Northern Ireland

northern ireland
evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



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Research method

This report was created by pulling together the results of two research studies:



1. **A nationally representative poll of the general public across Northern Ireland.** This poll was conducted by Savanta ComRes and comprised of 1,005 participants who were asked to complete a set of questions. The results were weighted by age, sex, religion, ethnicity and council region, ensuring a representative picture of the Northern Ireland population.
2. **A self-selecting online survey of Christians in Northern Ireland.** This survey was created by the Evangelical Alliance on Typeform and shared widely on social media, email and WhatsApp. A total of 2,083 people responded, the majority of whom were Protestant evangelical Christians.

This report is based on the results from both the poll and the survey. We commissioned researcher Dr Emma Soye, who aided in testing and developing the questions. We asked some of the same questions in both the poll and the survey so that we could compare the results. Dr Soye gathered and analysed the results from both data sets.

For ease of reference, we have used different colours in the report to clarify when we are talking about **data from the poll of the general public** and **data from our survey**.

Both the survey and poll launched on 21 April 2023. The church survey was open for three weeks and the poll of the general public was closed by Savanta ComRes at around the same time, after the response quota had been fulfilled.

For more details, see the methodology in appendix 1.

Introduction

Local: “Welcome to Belfast... by the way are you a Protestant or a Catholic?”

Local: “Yes ok... but are you a Protestant atheist or a Catholic atheist?”



Tourist:
“I’m an atheist.”

Many of us have heard, or even told, this old joke ourselves. It’s a cliché, but true enough that we recognise something about ourselves in it.

In many respects, Northern Ireland today is much like other parts of the United Kingdom or Ireland. The internet, global markets and emerging social trends mean that teenagers in North Antrim or South Armagh can easily connect across cultures with friends in London or even New York. And yet, we are something of a place apart. Religion remains an integral part of the social, political and cultural fabric of life in Northern Ireland.

The Evangelical Alliance has been around since 1846 and has had a presence in Northern Ireland for almost 40 years. Today, more than 25 years since the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and following a decade of huge cultural and political change, we are keen to better understand evangelicals in Northern Ireland.





Here are some of the things we are curious about:

- Who are the evangelicals?
- How many of us are there?
- What do we do?
- What do we believe?
- In what ways are we similar to the general population? In what ways are we different?
- What do people think about us?
- What does all this mean for our faith and witness?

These questions led us to conduct this research, and we want to share our findings with you. We hope that, like us, you will be challenged, perhaps surprised, and ultimately encouraged by what you discover.



David Smyth

Head of Evangelical Alliance
Northern Ireland

Key findings

Northern Ireland general population

(Findings based on a weighted poll of over 1,000 people by Savanta ComRes)



50%

would describe themselves as practising Christians.

21%



(equating to approximately 400,000) would describe themselves as evangelical Christians.



35%

pray on a weekly basis.



23%

say they go to church each week

(that's more people than attended an Irish League football match in the past year).



13%

read the Bible each week.

67%

understand 'evangelicalism' as a stream within Christianity.

65%

agree that there is a role for faith in society in general.

Respondents frequently described evangelicals they encounter in the media as being '**religious**', '**extreme**', and '**loud**' but the evangelicals they know personally as being '**friendly**', '**kind**', and '**honest**'.

Evangelical Christians in our survey

(Findings based on a self-selecting survey of over 2,000 practising Christians in Northern Ireland)



96%

pray weekly.



95%

attend church weekly.



92%

read the Bible weekly.



Evangelical Christians are **similar** to the general population in their beliefs around asylum seekers and refugees, peace and reconciliation in NI society, climate change, economic policy and reform of the NI Assembly.

Evangelical Christians **differ** from the general population when it comes to their beliefs on abortion and the freedom for churches to dissent from conducting same-sex marriages.



Evangelical Christians are almost **twice as likely** as the general population to volunteer for community-based activities, and over half (55%) of evangelicals volunteer every week for activities run by churches.

Church leaders report that their churches are mostly involved in:

pastoral
care

92%

children and
youth activities

84%

Christian
outreach

77%

(eg courses exploring
the Christian faith)

“My research as a sociologist has always highlighted the importance of religion in Northern Ireland. But even I was surprised that these surveys found such high rates of religious practice; as well as a much more widespread willingness to identify with evangelicalism than I would have anticipated.

These surveys provide us with a valuable new snapshot of Northern Ireland’s religious field. It has been almost two full decades since we have had such a broad range of data on religion in Northern Ireland. I hope the surveys will inspire further research in areas like the cultural influence of evangelicalism, differences between young and old, the beliefs and practices of self-identifying Catholic evangelicals, and commonalities and differences between evangelicals and the wider population on a range of political and social justice issues.

These surveys remind us that those seeking to understand Northern Ireland must not neglect the role of religion – either in politics or in everyday life.”



**Dr Gladys Ganiel, Professor in the Sociology of Religion,
Queen’s University Belfast**

“This in-depth report from the Evangelical Alliance paints a fascinating picture of the state of the evangelical church in the context of the changing face of Northern Ireland. As well as the numbers (a feast for statisticians), the report includes several thought-provoking reflections and takeaways and should generate many ongoing, and hopefully transformative, conversations on both faith and practice. A big thank you for providing this rich resource.”



**Dr Alan Wilson
Author, lecturer and board member of Evangelical Alliance UK**



Poll of general population

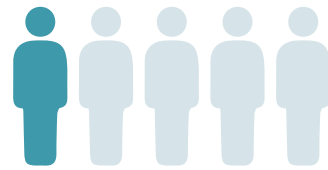
The following findings are based on a weighted poll of over 1,000 participants across Northern Ireland, conducted by Savanta ComRes.

Key findings



50%

of the general population say they are practising Christians.

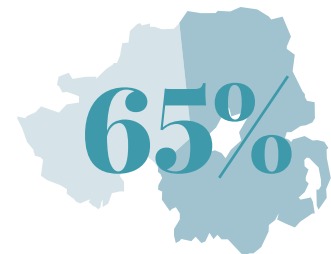


21%

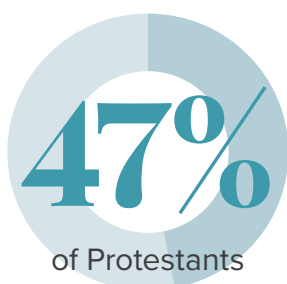
of the general population say they are evangelical Christians.



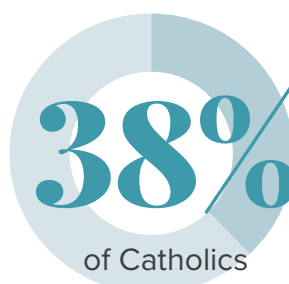
18–24-year-olds who are practising Christians are more likely to identify as evangelical than people aged 65+ (70%, versus 46%).



of the general population agree or strongly agree there is a role for faith in society in general.



and



who consider themselves to be practising Christians also consider themselves to be **evangelicals**.

Practising Christians



In the 2021 census,



80%

of the Northern Ireland population **identified as Christian** (42% Catholic, 17% Presbyterian, 12% Church of Ireland, 2% Methodist, 7% other Christian denominations).

In contrast, the 2021 census for England and Wales reported that



46%

of people **identified as Christian**.



It's clear that religious identification is much higher in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK. We understand that this religious identification is often bound up with cultural and political identities here. We were keen to understand how many people considered themselves to be an active or practising Christian rather than simply identifying as Christian in the census.

So, in our poll of the general population in Northern Ireland, we asked people if they considered themselves to be a 'practising Christian'.

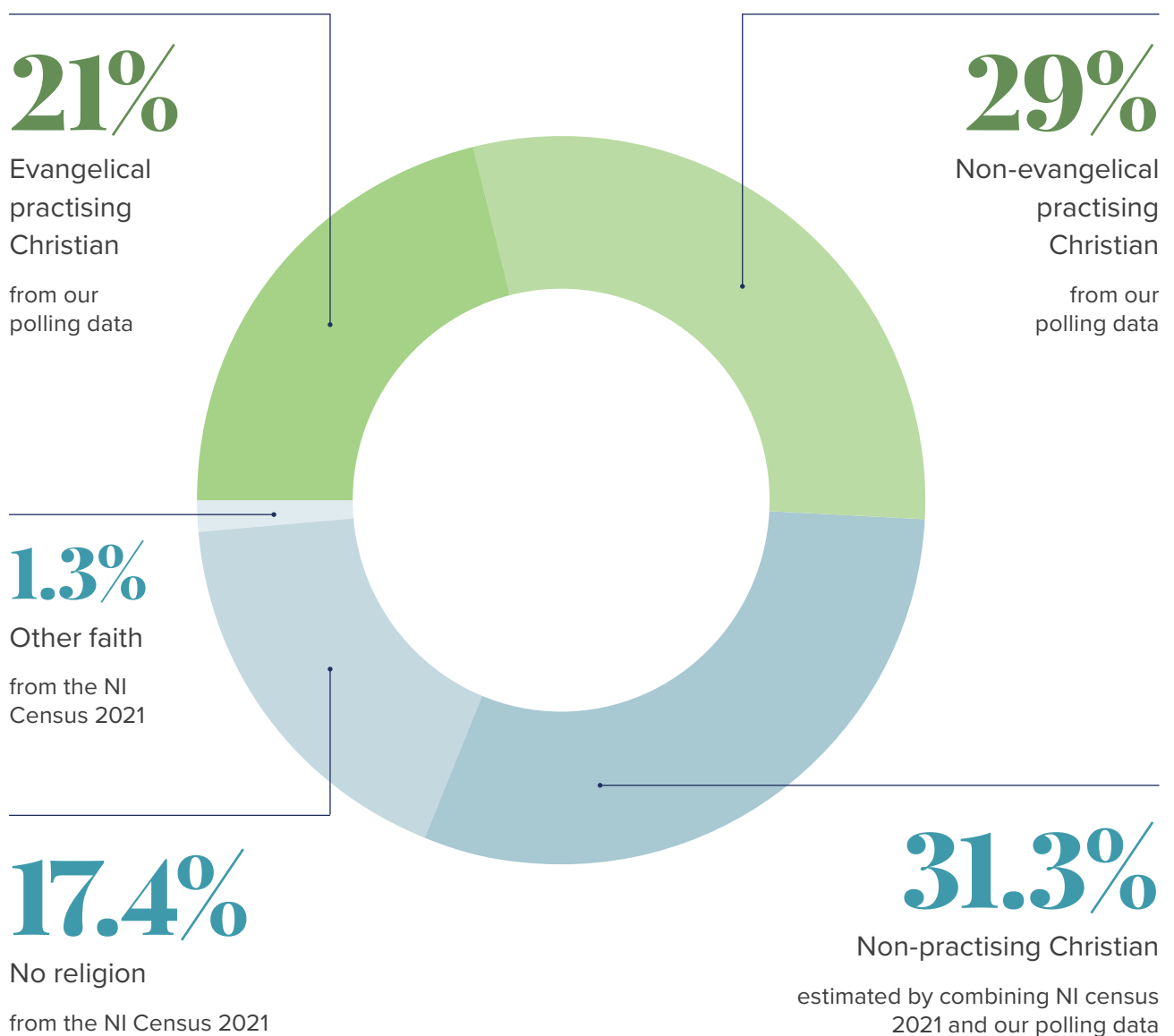
50% of people said 'yes, I am a practising Christian'. This was something of a surprise and an encouragement. We found that Catholics were significantly more likely to consider themselves to be practising Christians (62%) than Protestants (46%). Perhaps unsurprisingly then, 38% of Protestants have never considered themselves to be a practising Christian, compared to just 22% of Catholics.



We did not define what constitutes a 'practising Christian'. We would assume however, that for the people answering this question, they are combining some element of Christian belief with some degree of practice.

50% of people said 'no, I am not a practising Christian'. Applying this to the census data, it would suggest that approximately 30% of people in Northern Ireland identify as 'non-practising Christians' and approximately 20% have no religion or follow another faith (see chart below).

This would seem to correlate with the 2021 census data which indicated a significant increase in those who say they have 'no religion' (from 10.1% in 2011 to 17.4% in 2021). This is an increase that we want to understand better, for example is the rise coming from non-practising Christians changing their designation to 'no religion' or practising Christians losing their faith? Is a coherent set of non-religious beliefs and practices emerging or is this a disparate and individualistic trend?



Christian practices

Each week:



35%

participate in
personal Christian
prayer.



23%

of people attend a
service of Christian
worship.



13%

personally read
the Bible.

Talking Jesus

The Evangelical Alliance are partners in the *Talking Jesus* study which also asked questions about whether respondents

are practising Christians. Rather than a self-identification, this is based on three measures: worshipping regularly as part of a church community at least monthly and praying and reading the Bible at least weekly.

Talking
Jesus

Talking Jesus found that 6% of people in the UK did all three of these things. Our poll found that 36% of the general population in Northern Ireland attend a service of Christian worship at least monthly, 35% pray at least weekly, and 13% read the Bible at least weekly.



Researchers at Savanta ComRes were able to extract a figure of 9% of the population who did all of these things in Northern Ireland.

Proportionally, this is 50% higher than in England and Wales and equates to over

171,000

people in Northern Ireland.



44% of people aged 65+ and 29% of 18–24-year-olds pray every week.



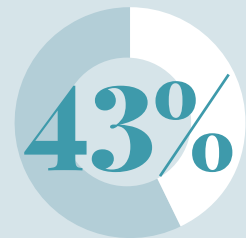
Catholics (28%) are more likely than Protestants (23%) to go to church at least once a week.



People aged 65+ are more than twice as likely to read the Bible every week than people aged 18–24 (19%, versus 8%).



18–24-year-olds who are practising Christians are more likely to identify as evangelical than people aged 65+ (70%, versus 46%).



of the general population say that they currently attend a church.

57%

of the general population don't currently attend a church. Of those:

- Around half say they would not consider going to church.
- About a third say they would consider attending a church service.
- A third would consider going to a community event/activity at church.
- About one in six would consider getting in touch if they needed practical or pastoral support.

49% of the general population know of churches in their local areas providing children and youth activities, while 45% know of churches providing pastoral care eg visiting the sick and bereaved.

Only 21% of people don't know anything about what churches in their local area are doing.

So, while 25% of the population don't attend church and aren't planning to, a significant number of those who don't currently go to church say they would consider some form of engagement. This is hugely encouraging and suggests significant openness.

Social and political issues

82%

of people **agree** or **strongly agree** that more effort is needed to encourage peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland's society.

81%

of people **agree** or **strongly agree** that it is time to reform the Northern Ireland Assembly to bring more stability and accountability.

Interestingly, answers to both of these questions were fairly similar among those who identified as Catholic and those who identified as Protestant.

69%

of people **agree** or **strongly agree** that we need urgent and radical action from the government on climate change (64% of Protestants and 77% of Catholics).

65%

of people **agree** or **strongly agree** that asylum seekers, refugees and other newcomers should be supported in practical ways and made to feel welcome in our communities (47% of Protestants and 64% of Catholics).

55%

of people **disagree** or **strongly disagree** that current economic policy distributes money and power fairly across society.

54%

of people **agree** or **strongly agree** that people should be free to express their beliefs in the workplace.

41%

of people **agree** or **strongly agree** that abortion should be available for any reason, while 34% of people **disagree** or **strongly disagree**.

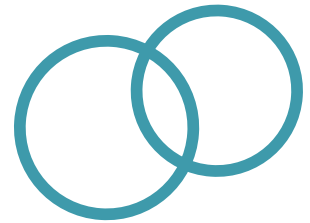
40%

of people **disagree** or **strongly disagree** that churches should be compelled to perform same-sex marriages by the government, while 32% of people **agree** or **strongly agree**.



The general population **agree/strongly agree** there is a role for faith in society in general (65%) and in education (57%). They are more divided about politics, with 39% **disagreeing/strongly disagreeing** and 32% **agreeing/strongly agreeing** that there is a role for faith in politics.

Some of the biggest differences of opinion on abortion and freedom of religion on same-sex marriage were between 18–24-year-olds and people aged 65+.



The views were:

- Abortion should be available for any reason (34% of 18–24-year-olds **strongly agree** compared with 16% of people aged 65+)
- Churches should be compelled by the government to perform same-sex marriages (18% of 18–24-year-olds **strongly agree** compared to just 5% of people aged 65+)



Those in the oldest bracket (65+) were more likely to **strongly agree** that we need urgent and radical action on climate change than 18–24-year-olds (37%, versus 25%).

Those who are 65+ were significantly more likely to **strongly agree** that more effort was needed to encourage peace and reconciliation than those aged 18–24 (46%, versus 33%), and **strongly agree** that it is time to reform the Northern Ireland Assembly to bring about more stability and accountability (48%, versus 32%).



What do people think about evangelicals?

- 79% of the general population had heard the term ‘evangelical’ before (85% of Protestants and 72% of Catholics). Notably, only 50% of 18–24-year-olds had heard of the term evangelical. This rises to 93% amongst people aged 65+.
- 67% of people who have heard of the term evangelical before understand ‘evangelicalism’ as a stream within Christianity. They see evangelicalism as linked more to the Protestant church (24%) rather than the Catholic church (5%). Around 10% had heard of the term but were not sure what it meant.

We asked people to describe evangelicals. The responses were put into a word cloud generator – the more often it appeared in people’s responses, the larger the word in the cloud.

The general public describe the evangelicals they encounter **in the media** using these words:



The general public describe the evangelicals they know **personally** using these words:



Survey of practising Christians

The following findings are based on a self-selecting survey of over 2,000 practising Christians in Northern Ireland.

Key findings

The evangelical Christians surveyed have high levels of engagement with Christian practices:



96%

weekly prayer



95%

church attendance



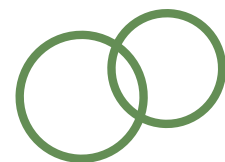
92%

Bible reading



Evangelical Christians are **similar** to the general population in their beliefs around asylum seekers and refugees, peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland's society, climate change, economic policy and reform of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Evangelical Christians **differ** from the general population when it comes to their beliefs on abortion and the freedom for churches to dissent from conducting same-sex marriages.



55% of evangelical Christians volunteer for activities run by churches at least once a week.

Who completed it?

A total of 2,083 people responded to the survey which was shared through social media, WhatsApp and email.

Christian?



99% described themselves as a practising Christian.



83% described themselves as evangelical.



12% were practising Christians who have never identified as evangelical.



5% said they used to identify as an evangelical Christian but no longer do.

Denomination

Presbyterian

33% (679)

Church of Ireland

13% (273)

Baptist

13% (272)

Non-denominational

13% (269)

Elim

5% (112)

Methodist

4% (81)

Vineyard

4% (81)

Pentecostal

3% (52)

Other

3%

Catholic

1% (19)

Brethren

2% (48)

Evangelical Presbyterian

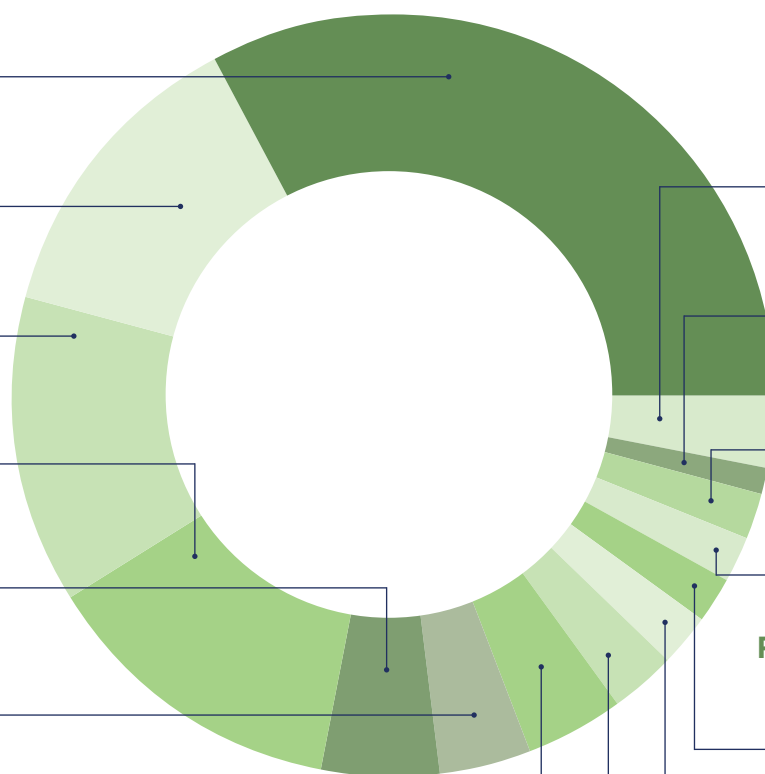
2% (47)

Free Presbyterian

2% (33)

Reformed Presbyterian

2% (33)



The denominational breakdown reflects something of the membership of the Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland and its wider engagement.

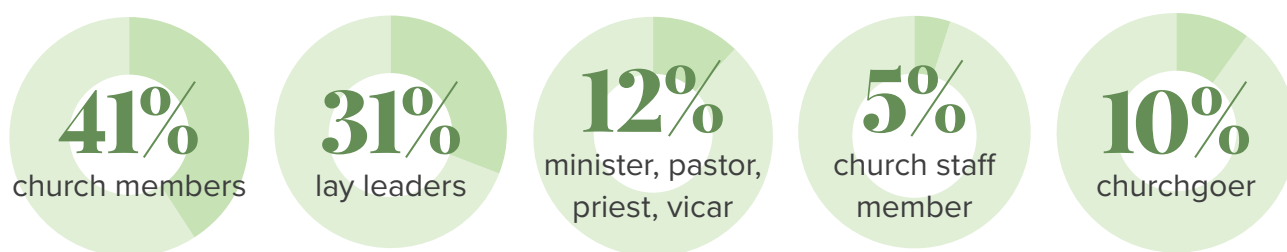
It is worth noting that while we share a lot of common ground and work with the Catholic church on issues of public policy, only 19 individual Catholics completed this survey.

There was comparatively little response from smaller Reformed denominations such as the Free, Reformed and Evangelical Presbyterians and a very small response from churches formed almost exclusively of People of Colour.

While it is obviously not representative of the general population, or even of the wider church, the results coherently reflect a relatively broad sub-section of Protestant evangelicalism in Northern Ireland.

Role at church?

Respondents described themselves as:



Demographics

Age

18–24

6%

25–34

15%

35–44

20%

45–54

19%

55–64

22%

65+

18%

Sex

Male

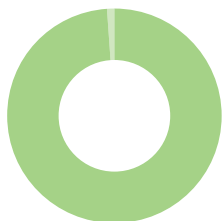
47%

Female

52%

Ethnicity

White
99%

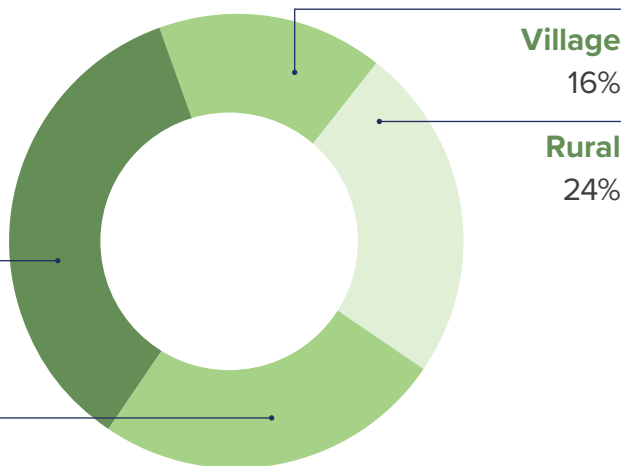


(While representation for People of Colour is lower than we would have liked, it is not unreflective of the Northern Ireland census results from 2021, which showed the population was 97% White)

Location

Large town/city
35%

Small town
25%



What do evangelicals do?

The evangelical Christians who responded to our survey are highly committed to the universal Christian practices of regularly meeting together as the church, reading the Bible and praying.



96%

participate in personal Christian prayer **at least once a week.**



95%

attend a service of Christian worship **at least once a week.**



92%

personally read the Bible **at least once a week.**

“My faith deeply enriches my work as a music therapist. Reading the Bible guides me and reveals God’s heart for people. Prayer is my source of strength. Regular church attendance refreshes my soul, providing a safe space for sharing experiences and deepening my faith. These three things positively influence my role as a music therapist, beautifully blending God’s teachings with my daily life.”



Bethany Coulter
Music therapist, Belfast

“From our own work we are acutely aware of the increasing number of people in communities across Northern Ireland with multiple and complex needs. It is really encouraging to see the extent to which the church is engaged in this space, knowing the value this brings, well beyond any physical needs which are met. Thank you to Evangelical Alliance for producing this report and for the insights it brings.”



Alison Flanagan
National leader – CAP NI

55%

volunteer for
activities run by
churches **at least**
once a week.

31%

volunteer for
community-based
initiatives outside of church
several times a year.

60%

give money to
development projects or
humanitarian relief **at least**
every month.

Church leaders report that their churches are mostly involved in:

pastoral
care

92%

children
and youth
activities

84%

Christian
outreach

77%

(eg courses exploring
the Christian faith)

addressing wellbeing

67%

(eg food banks, warm banks,
homeless support, mental health support)

campaigns for social justice

21%

(eg climate action,
anti-poverty campaigns)

peacebuilding activities

12%

pregnancy crisis support

5%



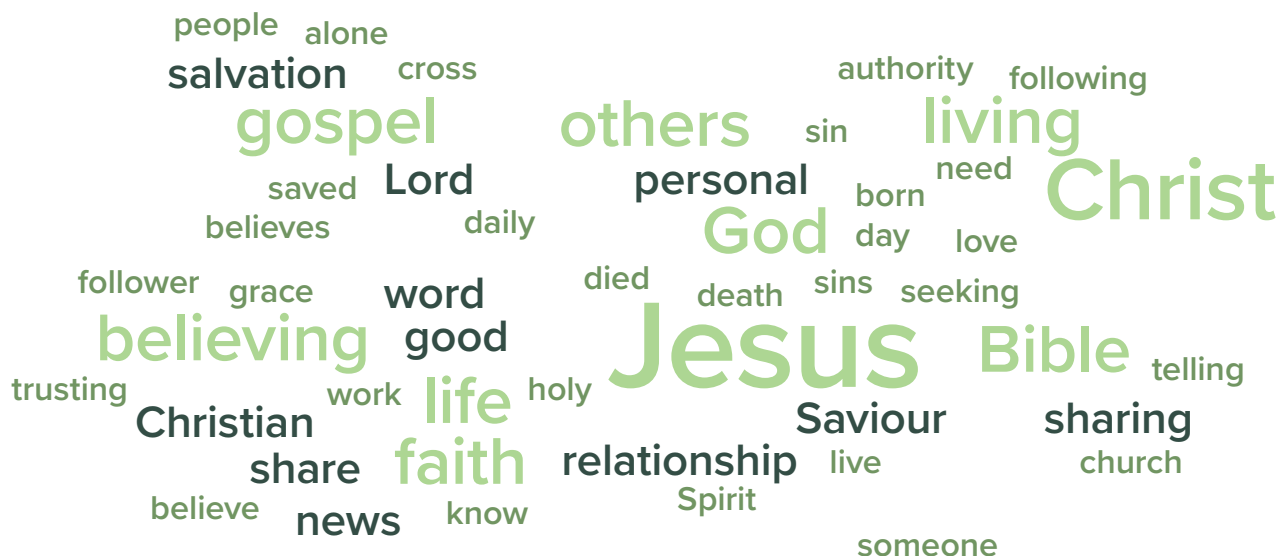
What do evangelicals believe?

Theological

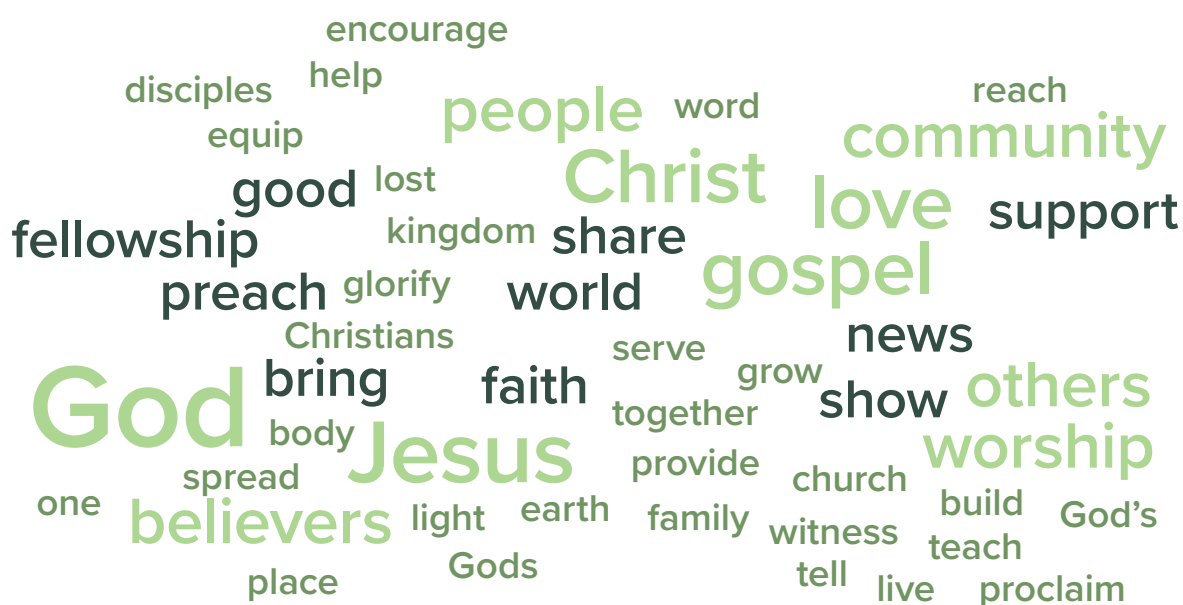
- 99% of **evangelical Christians** believe that the Bible is the word of God. About a fifth (19%) believe that the Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally, word for word. 77% believe it has no errors, although it should be read in context and some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal. Around 3% of evangelicals believe the Bible is the inspired word of God but contains some historical or factual errors.
- 84% of **total respondents** believe the Bible to be the highest authority for how they live their lives. 81% strongly agree that they read the Bible seeking wisdom to apply to their own lives. 79% read the Bible to receive comfort and feel closer to God.
- 94% of **total respondents** believe that Christ's death and resurrection were real historical events, while 92% believe that Christ had to die on the cross so that sin and death could be defeated and individuals could be reconciled to God.
- The vast majority (95%) of **evangelical Christians** believe that the church should both preach the gospel and demonstrate the good news of Jesus through its actions.
- Overall, the respondents strongly believe in the four tenets of Bebbington's¹ quadrilateral: redemption through Christ's sacrifice and victory on the cross, the centrality of the Bible as the inspired word of God, the importance of personal conversion and/or relationship with God, and the imperative of sharing the good news and social action.

1 eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/Evangelicalism-a-brief-definition.pdf

We asked evangelical Christians what being an 'evangelical Christian' means to them. The most common words were:



When we asked evangelicals about their views on the purpose of the church, the most common words were:



“Of particular interest to us at CARE are the findings in relation to socio-political issues in Northern Ireland. We can see that many of Jesus’ followers are indeed putting their faith into practice, even if this means swimming against the tide and living at odds with views of wider society.”



Ian Bingham
Head of CARE Northern Ireland

Socio-political issues

Evangelical Christian beliefs on socio-political issues in Northern Ireland:

89%

agree or strongly agree that people should be free to express their beliefs in the workplace.

92%

disagree or strongly disagree that abortion should be available for any reason.

83%

agree or strongly agree that more effort is needed to encourage peace and reconciliation in NI society.

81%

agree or strongly agree that asylum seekers, refugees and other newcomers should be supported in practical ways and made to feel welcome in our communities.

49%

agree or strongly agree that we need urgent and radical action from the government on climate change.

96%

disagree or strongly disagree that churches should be compelled by the government to perform same-sex marriages.

83%

agree or strongly agree that it is time to reform the NI Assembly to bring more stability and accountability.

47%

disagree or strongly disagree that current economic policy distributes money and power fairly across society.

Comparing evangelical Christians with the general population

Having run a poll of the general population and a survey that highlighted the beliefs of evangelical Christians over a similar time period, we are able to look at some of the areas of similarity and difference.

Similarities

Evangelical Christians are just like their family, friends and neighbours in many ordinary and everyday ways. Just like the wider population, the evangelical community is made up of different personalities, life experiences and political outlooks resulting in a wide range of nuanced views across many social issues. Our research doesn't explore all the ways we are similar, but here are three interesting and timely points of agreement:

83% of evangelical Christians in our survey and 82% of the general population **agree/strongly agree** that more effort is needed to encourage peace and reconciliation in NI society.

Most evangelicals (83%) in our survey and most of the general population (81%) **agree/strongly agree** that it is time to reform the NI Assembly to bring more stability and accountability.

47% of evangelical Christians in our survey and 55% of the general population **disagree/strongly disagree** that current economic policy distributes money and power fairly across society.

Differences

Our research, both the survey and the poll, has revealed that evangelical Christians are distinct from the wider population when it comes to some key practices and beliefs.

While the rates of church attendance, prayer and Bible reading were still perhaps higher than we anticipated in the general population, there is a clear distinction between the evangelicals who responded to our survey and the general population.

- **96% of evangelical Christians in our survey** participate in personal Christian prayer **at least once a week**, compared to **35% of the general population**.
 - **95% of evangelical Christians in our survey** attend a service of Christian worship **at least once a week**, compared to **23% of the general population**.
 - **92% of evangelical Christians in our survey** personally read the Bible at least once a week, compared to **13% of the general population**.
-

Almost all **evangelical Christians (96%) in our survey** **disagree/strongly disagree** that churches should be compelled by the government to perform same-sex marriages, while a much smaller proportion **(40%) of the general population** **disagree/strongly disagree**.

Almost all **evangelical Christians (92%) in our survey** **disagree/strongly disagree** that abortion should be available for any reason. In contrast, only **34% of the general population** **disagree/strongly disagree**.

89% of evangelical Christians in our survey **agree/strongly agree** that people should be free to express their beliefs in the workplace, compared to **54% of the general population**.

81% of evangelical Christians in our survey **agree/strongly agree** that asylum seekers, refugees and other newcomers should be supported in practical ways and made to feel welcome in our communities, compared to **56% of the general population**.

Analysis: Four interesting kinds of evangelical

We explore the definition of ‘evangelical’ at various points in this report, including in Appendix 2. However, we did not provide a definition of evangelical in either the poll, or the survey. Therefore, everyone who claims to be an evangelical Christian in our research has self-identified as such.

However, it is worth noting that we found some **significant statistical differences** between the answers from the evangelicals in the poll of the general population compared to those in our survey.

Some of these differences can be seen in the table below, shown alongside the general population for comparison:

	General population poll	Evangelicals in the poll of the general population	Evangelicals in our survey
Data source	The total 1,005 people who participated in the poll of the general population, weighted to be representative of NI demographics.	This group comprised of 21% of the total poll of the general population (approx 211 people) weighted to be representative of NI demographics.	This group comprised of 83% of our total survey responses (1,694 people). Not representative of wider NI demographics.
Weekly worship	23%	57%	95%
Weekly Bible reading	13%	40%	92%
Weekly prayer	35%	61%	96%
Disagree or strongly disagree to abortion for any reason	34%	47%	92%
Disagree or strongly disagree that government should compel churches to conduct same-sex marriages	40%	46%	96%

As we analysed the data further, we discovered four distinct types of evangelicals that are worth exploring. We have called them:

Broad-church evangelicals

Classic evangelicals

Catholic evangelicals

Ex-vangelicals

1. Broad-church evangelicals

This group includes everyone who self-identified as a practising evangelical Christian within the poll of the general population. It will include some who could be defined as classic evangelicals or Catholic evangelicals – see below. They are all connected, to some extent, through their identification as evangelicals.

They are significantly more likely to go to church, read the Bible, and pray on a weekly basis than the general population. There is also a noticeable difference between these evangelicals and the general population on the most distinctive socio-political issues. However, a gulf remains between this broad group and the sub-section of evangelicals who completed our survey.

The poll of the general population reveals and reflects a broader range of people who associate with an evangelical identity across the population.

Perhaps the fluidity of the term and the breadth of church expression which can be accommodated within the umbrella of evangelicalism helps to explain how it can exist and thrive in very different theological and cultural contexts, here and across the globe.

While we could speculate further, perhaps with some accuracy, about why so many different people are willing to identify as evangelical, we cannot explain it all. The reality is that these results may raise more questions than answers and this could be the basis for further research.

2. Classic evangelicals

This group has been identified using only data from our survey of 2,083 people, where evangelical Christians made up 83% of respondents. They were largely already within the orbit of the Evangelical Alliance and interested enough to spend 10 minutes completing the questions. This group was almost entirely Protestant – only 19 respondents were Catholic, around 1%.

These evangelicals come from a wide diversity of churches, including Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist and Pentecostal. The churches vary when it comes to female ordination, baptism and eucharist practices and style of worship. The responses from this group provide a clear and consistent picture of ‘classic’ evangelical practice and belief. These evangelicals take the Christian practices of gathering together for worship, personal prayer and personal Bible reading very seriously. Over 90% of this group did all three of these things every week.

They are also committed to serving within their local church. Around 90% give financially to their church or mission organisations at least every month, and 55% volunteer for a church activity each week.

They have consistently strong beliefs around the centrality and value of scripture as God's inspired word, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the Saviour and victor over sin, the need to be in personal relationship with God and that the good news is to be both preached and practised (95%).

Compared to the general population, they have distinctive beliefs when it comes to limiting the availability of abortion, the government not compelling churches to perform same-sex marriages, the need to care for asylum seekers and refugees and the freedom to share beliefs in the workplace.

3. Catholic evangelicals

38% of practising Catholics also consider themselves to be evangelicals.

Evangelicalism has historically been associated with Protestantism.^{2,3} Our research confirms that Protestants in Northern Ireland are more likely than Catholics to identify as evangelical. However, 38% of practising Catholics polled in Northern Ireland also identify as evangelical Christians. This surprised us (in a good way!) and we wanted to find out more...

Since Vatican II, there has been an increasing focus by the Catholic church on evangelisation and this has continued in 'the new evangelisation' of Pope Francis.⁴ Catholic theologian George Weigel has noted the rise of evangelical Catholicism in the USA.⁵ Some of those we spoke to also referenced this look towards the States, facilitated by social media and the impact of books like 'Divine Renovation' (by Father James Mallon) and 'Rebuilt' (by Michael White and Tom Corcoran) which both consider approaches to parish renewal and evangelisation. In the UK, and across Ireland, there has been a recent uptick in the number of Catholic parishes running Alpha courses, and this may also have had an impact on these figures.⁶

These results are fascinating. The willingness of many Catholics to use the term evangelical has proved surprising to many. There does need to be caution as this is a self-definition and there may be a lack of clarity around evangelical and evangelistic. There are also significant doctrinal differences between evangelicals and Roman Catholics on issues such as the supreme authority of the scriptures, justification solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ, and the nature of the church and the priesthood of all believers. However, in a historically divided society, it is hoped that these findings help better understanding and creates space for further conversations.

2 Bruce, S. (2001) 'Fundamentalism and Political Violence: The Case of Paisley and Ulster Evangelicals.' *Religion*, 31(4) pp. 387–405.

3 Mitchell, C. and Tilley, J. R. (2004) 'The Moral Minority: Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland and Their Political Behaviour.' *Political Studies*, 52(3) pp. 585–602.

4 Swindal, J. (2014) 'Pope Francis and the New Evangelization.' *Spiritual Horizons*, 9(9).

5 Weigel, G. (2014) *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*. New York: Basic Books.

6 alpha.org.uk/catholic-context

We asked some evangelical Catholics to share their thoughts with us:

“Many Catholic respondents may understand the word ‘evangelical’ to mean that they have come into a personal relationship with Jesus, many through the various renewal movements in the church, and that they are evangelical in that they have received the gospel, accepted Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour and manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit. They would also have a love and respect for scripture as the word of God.”



Paddy Monaghan
– The Evangelical Catholic Initiative

“I am from Belfast, Northern Ireland and was raised Catholic. Growing up I learned about God but didn’t really know him personally. I still prayed but it was prayers of petition, and I hadn’t read the Bible very often. When I was 17, two parishes came together and I joined with some 50 other young people to do a 10-week Youth Alpha course. This was where I encountered the person of Jesus which changed my life.

I experienced Jesus’ love for me in a wonderfully personal way. Faith was now something I had chosen for myself instead of being part of a childhood routine. I received a new thirst to read the Bible and to pray using the Bible. I also found a sense of belonging in knowing Jesus – this was of great help when I felt rejected by some on account of my faith. Since then, I sought more opportunities to grow in a personal relationship with Jesus.”



Ciara Cunningham

“I grew up in Belfast during the ‘Troubles’ in a traditional Catholic family. It was during A-levels that I began to read a small Gideon’s Bible in my bedroom and encountered the presence of God. I began studying to be a Catholic priest but halfway through seminary I took time out as I wasn’t sure if this was what the Lord was asking of me.

I began attending an evangelical church in Belfast as well as a Catholic charismatic prayer group. The Christian Renewal Centre in Rostrevor and the ministry of people like Rev Cecil Kerr and Dennis Wrigley of the Maranatha Community had a big impact on my life. I recognised a deep brokenness in my early 30s and was led to fully surrender to the Lord, trusting in Christ Jesus as my only Saviour and Lord as I sat in my small Renault car. The love of the Father and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit became like rivers of living water flowing from within. The scriptures became more alive than ever and I received an assurance ‘by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of your own doing’ (Ephesians 2:8).”



Fergus McMorrow
– Divine Healing Ministries

“I serve as parish administrator in Duneane, Co. Antrim. I grew up in Poleglass/Lagmore, West Belfast. I grew up in a beautiful yet nominal Catholic family. I was mad about football, mainly Liverpool, but didn’t know the Lord. My life changed forever when I joined Youth Initiatives. The Christian staff made an impact on my life and God was working. A year later, as a 17-year-old, I had an encounter with the love of Jesus. From that moment, I knew I would never be the same again.

I went on a crazy journey of seeking after the Lord, attending different Christian churches. I learnt how to read the scriptures. I was ordained as a Catholic priest in June 2016, and was appointed to Antrim parish before moving to Duneane in August 2023. I’m so thankful to the Lord for His faithfulness and love for me. My greatest passion is to see lives transformed by the gospel.”



Father James O'Reilly

The leader of the Catholic church in Ireland, Archbishop Eamon of Armagh, kindly provided some very helpful analysis too:

“Catholics will see evangelisation as involving transformation of the person in living the word of God and reception of the sacraments and insertion into communities of faith at a local level of the church, while linked to the universal mission of the church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Catholics recognise evangelisation is not just about an individual encounter with Christ but also about permeating culture and structures with the light of the gospel, sometimes indeed being countercultural in the face of aggressive secularism, relativism or nihilism in a confused and complicated world.

The personal encounter and friendship with Jesus Christ is central to the Catholic evangelical outlook, conforming one’s life more and more with the life of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life and in whom we see the merciful face of God. This encounter is nourished for Catholics by prayerful reading of the word of God (including lectio divina), and by the seven sacraments (especially Baptism and Eucharist).

Evangelical Catholics do not proclaim an isolated personal or private interpretation of the gospel but are conscious, respectful and fervent to present the truth of the gospel in tune with the mission of the Catholic church in the world.”



**Archbishop Eamon Martin
of Armagh**

There are undoubtedly important theological and cultural distinctives and nuances between Protestant evangelicals and Catholic evangelicals. It would be interesting and fruitful to explore this further. However, there is also a lot of common ground and similarities. Much theological agreement has been achieved between the Roman Catholic church and many strands of the church, such as Reformed, Pentecostal and Messianic Jewish Christianity, in recent years. We would be keen to encourage and help facilitate new conversations among these evangelicals across the wider church in Northern Ireland.

In the early 2000s, Mitchell and Tilley argued that while evangelical Protestants were attitudinally different from other Protestants in Northern Ireland, their distinctiveness arose not from their unionism (as was the popular perception at the time) but from their conservative moral attitudes.⁷ If the number of Catholics identifying as evangelicals grows, the perceived link between evangelicalism and unionism in Northern Ireland may become weaker. Future research could explore how evangelicals, both Protestant and Catholic, approach political engagement and representation here.

7 Mitchell and Tilley, 2004.

4. Ex-vangelicals

There has been much debate within American, and to some extent British evangelicalism, about an increase in those who might describe themselves as post-evangelical or ‘ex-vangelical’.⁸

Around 5% (109 individuals) of those who responded to our survey said that they used to identify as evangelical but no longer do. In the poll of the general population, around 1.6% said that they used to identify as an evangelical Christian but no longer do. While these numbers are relatively small, applying the 1.6% figure to the population would result in more ex-vangelicals in Northern Ireland than the number of people who hold any religious faith other than Christian (1.3% according to the 2021 NI census).

Our survey found that the highest percentage of ex-vangelical Christians (36%) were in the 35–44 age category and that they were significantly more likely to be male (64%).

Our research does not capture how many ex-vangelicals stay in their own church despite a personal theological shift, how many retain a strong faith within a different expression of church and how many ultimately leave the faith completely. Some of the reasons cited for no longer identifying as evangelical are included below.

We found both common ground and significant differences between ex-vangelicals and classic evangelicals in terms of their practices and beliefs on theological and social issues. The ex-vangelicals who responded to our survey displayed a high commitment to Christian practices. They were much more likely to go to church, read the Bible and pray each week than the general population or the group of overall evangelicals. However, they were less likely to attend church each week (69%) than classic evangelicals (95%) or read the Bible each week (71%), compared to classic evangelicals (92%).

29% of ex-vangelicals believe that ‘the Bible is the inspired word of God but has some factual or historical errors’, compared to 3% of classic evangelicals.

Ex-vangelicals (76%) are **more likely** than classic evangelical Christians (49%) to agree/strongly agree that we need urgent and radical action from the government on climate change. They are **less likely** to agree/strongly agree that people should be free to express their beliefs in the workplace (59%, versus 89%).

Ex-vangelicals (22%) are around four times **more likely** than classic evangelical Christians (5%) to agree/strongly agree that abortion should be available for any reason, and that churches should be compelled by the government to perform same-sex marriages (10%, versus 2%).

8 [theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/03/evangelical-christians-religion-politics-trump](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/03/evangelical-christians-religion-politics-trump)

Ex-vangelicals (24%) are **more likely** than classic evangelical Christians (18%) to give money to development projects or humanitarian relief at least once a week. They are **less likely** than classic evangelical Christians to give money to the church and/or Christian mission organisations or activities at least once a week (40%, versus 54%).

22% of ex-vangelical Christians believe the priority of the church should be to demonstrate the gospel through actions, compared to 2% of classic evangelicals (95% of whom believe the priority of the church should be to both preach and demonstrate the gospel).

It would be interesting to conduct further research to determine the number and rate of people entering and leaving evangelicalism and how many move into different expressions of faith, or towards holding no faith at all.

Non-evangelical Christians

Around 12% of the respondents to our survey were practising Christians who had never considered themselves to be evangelical.

Non-evangelical Christians are **less likely** than classic evangelical Christians to attend a service of Christian worship (79%, versus 95%), personally read the Bible (71%, versus 92%) or participate in personal Christian prayer (86%, versus 96%) at least once a week.

The socio-political views of ex-vangelicals closely aligned with non-evangelicals.

Reasons for not associating with evangelicalism

We asked ex- and non-evangelical Christians for the reasons they no longer or have never identified as evangelicals. There was a strong overlap in themes which included:

Strongly associating evangelicalism with negative and 'pushy' evangelism. They preferred to put more emphasis on **social action** alone.

Disliking labels or categorical approaches, instead describing themselves as just 'Christians', seeing the term 'evangelical' as unnecessary.

Perceiving evangelicalism as having been taken over in the US by fundamentalist, conservative and right-wing politics. Relatedly, viewing evangelicalism as **associated with Protestantism** and linked to unionist, conservative and loyalist politics in Northern Ireland.

Viewing evangelicalism as involving '**out-dated**' and '**intolerant**' attitudes, particularly towards LGBTQ+ people.

Feeling shame or shyness around identifying as an evangelical and **not wanting to offend people**.

Perceiving evangelicalism as **not engaging** with 'real world problems'.

Top takeaways

1

50% of people say they are practising Christians

There is both huge encouragement and challenge in this statistic.

If one in two people consider themselves a practising Christian already, there is surely a huge opportunity for discipleship and helping people to grow in their faith.

If one in two people do not consider themselves a practising Christian, then there is a huge mission field of people to graciously and lovingly share our faith with.

- How can we respond well in both instances?

2

Hundreds of thousands of people practise their Christian faith every week

Praying, worshipping with others at church and reading the Bible are core Christian practices the world over.

Each week in Northern Ireland, 35% of people participate in personal Christian prayer, 23% of people attend a service of Christian worship and 13% personally read the Bible.

The total population of Northern Ireland in the 2021 census was 1,903,175 so this would equate to something in the region of over **600,000 people who pray weekly** and around **450,000 people who go to church every week**.

For comparison, the Irish Football League announced its highest-ever figures of match attendance in 2022–23 with 360,000 tickets sold across the entire season.⁹ These figures would suggest that more people go to church each week than attend a local football match in a year.

⁹ [belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sport/football/irish-league/irish-premiership-attendances-hit-record-high-as-majority-of-clubs-report-increased-ticket-sales/1977058074.html](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sport/football/irish-league/irish-premiership-attendances-hit-record-high-as-majority-of-clubs-report-increased-ticket-sales/1977058074.html)

3

One in five people consider themselves to be an evangelical Christian

According to our poll, 42% of those who identified as a practising Christian also consider themselves to be an evangelical Christian. This is 21% of all respondents equating to approximately 400,000 people in Northern Ireland. This is higher than we anticipated and in many ways, really good news!

- How can evangelical Christians better unite to make even more of an impact for God's kingdom?
- How can this be reflected fairly and accurately in media coverage, political spaces and across wider society?

4

Over half of people don't currently attend church

A YouGov survey of 19,000 people in 2022 found that 7% of the population in England and Wales went to church 'at least weekly'¹⁰ which shows a significant difference in the culture of Northern Ireland.

Yet, while rates of church attendance are much higher in Northern Ireland, 57% of the general population don't currently attend a church. Of those who don't currently go to church:

- Around half say they would not consider going to church.
- Around a third say they would consider attending a church service.
- A third would consider going to a community event or activity at church.
- Around one in six would consider getting in touch if they needed practical or pastoral support.
- How do our churches engage with the six out of ten people who don't currently go to church? How do our current outreach and evangelistic activities land with this group of people?

¹⁰ psephizo.com/life-ministry/is-church-attendance-in-england-and-wales-in-decline/

Relationships can override perceptions

People have contrasting views about the evangelicals they encounter in the media and those they know personally. Our research finds that the view of the general population of evangelicals in the media is generally negative, tending to use words such as ‘religious’, ‘extreme’ and ‘loud’ to describe them. Other terms include ‘judgemental’ and ‘pushy’. There also appears to be a strong perception of evangelicals in the media as ‘right-wing’ and ‘conservative’. 81% of American evangelicals voted for President Donald Trump and, even though this is a completely different country and culture, this came up in our research as a reason why some people did not want to be associated with evangelicalism.¹¹

In contrast, the general population appear to have a much more positive perception of the evangelicals they know personally, largely describing them as ‘friendly’, ‘honest’, and ‘kind’. Other words included ‘sincere’, ‘caring’ and ‘loving’. This seems to confirm Hewstone’s ‘social contact hypothesis’, which suggests that social contact plays a key role in countering stereotypes.¹²

At the same time, not everyone was positive about their personal encounters and words such as ‘bigoted’ and ‘pushy’ were used in some instances too.

Our research finds that the general population, as well as ex- and non-evangelical Christians, often equate evangelicalism with ‘pushy’ evangelism.

Making an exclusive truth claim, like ‘the good news of Jesus’, will always be contentious. This potentially points to the need for many evangelicals to understand that their faith-sharing is perceived as pushy even where this is not the intention.

- Which biblical methods of witnessing and sharing the gospel might bear the most fruit in our current culture?

¹¹ patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2017/10/16/burying-word-evangelical/

¹² Hewstone, M. (2015) ‘Consequences of Diversity for Social Cohesion and Prejudice: The Missing Dimension of Intergroup Contact.’ *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(2) pp. 417–438.

Abortion and same-sex marriages are the most contested topics

The research shows that evangelical Christians, like the general population, care about a wide range of socio-political issues. When it comes to differences in beliefs between classic evangelicals and the wider population, the clearest are around abortion and the freedom of churches not to perform same-sex marriages.

While perhaps not a surprise, these differences can be frustrating for everyone. Many non-Christians will struggle to understand a classic evangelical theology of the body, marriage and the image of God.

In public discourse, however, evangelical beliefs and approaches to these issues are often framed negatively as being ‘anti-choice’, ‘anti-LGBT’, ‘regressive’ and ‘bigoted’. In our view, this language is highly politicised and simplistic, failing sometimes deliberately, to engage in any meaningful way with a Christian worldview.

At the same time, the church has not always articulated itself well, or worse, failed to treat people with the dignity that they deserve. Being aware of these very different beliefs around these sensitive issues, we wish to proceed with humility, truth and grace, in both our public and pastoral conversations.

- How can evangelicals better communicate their distinctive beliefs positively?
- How can space be made in the wider discourse to better understand and protect the expression and practice of minority beliefs and worldviews?



Most evangelical Christians volunteer every week

Our survey shows that 55% of evangelical Christians volunteer for activities run by churches at least once a week, and 31% volunteer for community-based initiatives outside of church several times a year.

NISRA statistics reported that 17% of the adult population in Northern Ireland volunteered during the financial year 2021–22.¹³ Classic evangelical Christians are almost twice as likely as the general population to volunteer for community-based activities and over half of evangelicals volunteer every week for activities run by churches.

67% of church leaders reported that their churches are involved in addressing wellbeing, eg foodbanks, warm banks, homeless support and mental health support. 21% are involved in campaigns for social justice, eg climate action and anti-poverty campaigns.

The disparity between the number of churches involved in addressing wellbeing and the number involved in campaigns for social justice suggests that churches are not necessarily recognising the link between grass-roots action and advocacy or are maybe unsure about how best to connect these things. This is notable when we consider that 47% of the general population agree or strongly agree that there is a role for faith in social justice. It points to the potential for an increased role of the church in advocacy campaigns as well as to the need for education and guidance for churches in doing so. This is an area where the Evangelical Alliance is well-placed to offer support.

¹³ communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/engagement-culture-arts-heritage-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202122.pdf (page 20)

A clear consensus for reconciliation, stability and accountability

Over 80% of both classic evangelicals and the general population agree or strongly agree that ‘more effort is needed to encourage peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland’s society’ and that ‘now is the time to reform the Northern Ireland Assembly to bring about more stability and accountability’. These were the two areas with the strongest alignment between these groups.

In the early 2000s, Jordan¹⁴ and Mitchell¹⁵ found sharp divergence in the attitudes of evangelicals in Northern Ireland towards political reconciliation. Yet our research suggests that 20 years later, the situation may have changed. It indicates a strong desire among the majority of evangelical Christians and the general population for more effort to be made to encourage ongoing peace and reconciliation. There has long been a difference in approach between, for example, the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) and a more fundamentalist ‘Paisleyism’¹⁶. This divide may remain, however, these results suggest that classic evangelicals want to see more effort in peacebuilding and reconciliation.

- How can evangelicals across the churches help to better engage individual denominations and local congregations in the vital work of peacebuilding?

14 Jordan, G. (2001) *Not of This World?: Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

15 Mitchell, C. (2003) ‘Protestant identification and political change in Northern Ireland.’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Routledge, 26(4) pp. 612–631.

16 Ganiel, G. (2008) *Evangelicalism and Conflict in Northern Ireland*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Conclusion

Our research would suggest that around half the population in Northern Ireland consider themselves to be a practising Christian, with one in five people considering themselves to be an evangelical.

This term 'evangelical' includes a wide range of people from across the church. It is a phrase which makes some people wary when they see us on the media, but when they encounter us in person, they are more likely to see us as honest and kind.

Classic evangelicals are a distinct but significant part of community life here. We are very committed to our local churches and global mission, practically serving the needs of the communities we live in, and the good of wider society. We care about the protection of human life and dignity, marriage, refugees and reconciliation. This group is broadly represented by the Evangelical Alliance.

According to our survey, this week, one in three people will pray, one in five will go to church, and one in eight will read the Bible.

There is so much in this report to be encouraged by and much which will challenge us.

Please use and share this report widely. Don't leave it on the shelf, but use it to fuel better-informed conversations about the place and posture of evangelicals in the wider church and society in 2024 and in the years ahead.

Some questions for reflection...

- What three or four key statistics stand out to you?
- What are you encouraged by?
- What causes you concern or has challenged you?
- Who can you share this with?
- How could this data start or shape a new conversation in your church, ministry or organisation?
- Where are there opportunities to share Jesus more widely or more wisely?
- How can you begin to shape a better, more honest, more gracious conversation about evangelicals in Northern Ireland today?

Membership

This research was only possible thanks to the kind support of our members. Find out more about the Evangelical Alliance and how you can become a member today.

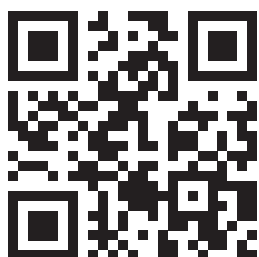
The Evangelical Alliance is made up of hundreds of organisations, thousands of churches and tens of thousands of individuals, joined together for the sake of the gospel.

Representing our members since 1846, the Evangelical Alliance is the oldest and largest evangelical unity movement in the UK.

United in mission and voice, we exist to serve and strengthen the work of the church in our communities and throughout society. Highlighting the significant opportunities and challenges facing the church today, we work together to resource Christians so that they are able to act upon their faith in Jesus, to speak up for the gospel, justice and freedom in their areas of influence.

Working across the UK, with offices in London, Cardiff, Stockport, Glasgow and Belfast, our members come together from across denominations, locations, age groups and ethnicities, all sharing a passion to know Jesus and make Him known.

It is quick and easy to become an Evangelical Alliance member online. We are an alliance dedicated to sharing a wealth of resources with the church, representing the church in politics, media and civil society, and building strong relationships across the church – all because we know that together we can achieve much more than we can ever achieve alone.



**Together, we make
Jesus known.**

eauk.org/joinus





Thanks

A special thank you to Dr Emma Soye who was instrumental in co-ordinating this research, cross-tabulating, analysing and presenting our findings. We so appreciate all of her wisdom and hard work.

Thanks to Savanta ComRes for conducting their poll with such professionalism and skill.

Thanks to Dr Gladys Ganiel, Dr Alan Wilson, Amanda Mitchell, Rev Dr David Bruce, Barry Forde, Donna Jennings, Peter Lynas and many others who helped to shape the questions we asked and much more.

Finally, a special thanks to everyone who completed the survey!

Appendix 1 – Notes and methodology

- The Evangelical Alliance has conducted various pieces of research on evangelicals in the UK in recent years, such as ‘21st century evangelicals’ (2015) and *Talking Jesus* (2022). The latter showed that 48% of UK adults identify as ‘Christian’ (6% as practising and 42% as ‘non-practising’). However, we had never specifically researched evangelicals in Northern Ireland.
- Data from the 2021 NI census highlighted to us a need for more probing. In 2021, the census found that 42.3% in NI said they were Catholic, while 37.4% said they were Protestant. 17.4% had ‘No religion’ – a marked increase from 10.1% in 2011. Early analysis of these figures suggested that most of these people were from Protestant backgrounds.¹⁷
- We were interested to go beyond the identification of ‘Christian’ or denominational affiliation in the census. We wanted to understand how many people considered themselves to be practising, evangelical, what they believed and how they practised their faith.

Survey and poll design

- The content of this report comes from polling of the general population and a survey of Christians in NI. The survey and poll questions were discussed and reviewed by a steering group on two separate occasions. The steering group gave feedback on question rationale, wording and logic.
- We mostly used closed-ended questions given the large-scale nature of the study.
- We aimed to keep the number of answer choices relatively low at an average of 4–5 per question. We used more categories when asking about facts and/or demographics.
- We ensured that choices included all reasonable responses. In questions where only one answer could be chosen, we ensured that the answer choices were mutually exclusive.
- For the wording of statements about current issues, we reviewed other surveys/scales, eg ‘The measurement of attitudes toward abortion’ by Taylor and Whitehead (2014).
- A version of the Likert scale was used to help measure responses in both the survey and the poll.
- To identify ‘practising Christians’ amongst the general population by their practices, we drew on the definition used in the Evangelical Alliance’s 2022 *Talking Jesus* study. The study used ‘attendance at church at least once per month’ and ‘read Bible’ and ‘pray’ every week to define practising Christians. We adapted definitions where necessary to fit the specific requirements of the survey and the Northern Ireland context.

¹⁷ Ganiel, G. (2022) ‘And No Religion, Too: Who are the “Nones”?’ Slugger O’Toole. [Online] sluggerotoole.com/2022/10/30/and-no-religion-too-who-are-the-nones/.

- For the wording of questions and statements relating to beliefs and practices of evangelicalism, we drew on Bebbington's quadrilateral.

Research process

- The church survey was conducted by the Evangelical Alliance on Typeform.
- The general population poll was conducted by Savanta ComRes on their own platform.
- The general population poll had 1,005 respondents in total. The church survey had 2,083 respondents, 10 of whom were not living in Northern Ireland. These 10 responses were removed from the survey analysis.
- Both survey and poll launched on 21 April 2023. The church survey was open for three weeks. The general population poll was closed after the response quota (1,000 respondents) had been fulfilled.
- We reviewed the responses to the church survey at three different time points during the survey process. Responses remained consistent over time.
- Savanta ComRes aimed to conduct a nationally representative poll by using a nationally representative sample. Where they lacked data for specific demographics, they weighted the results to ensure a nationally representative sample.
- The church survey is not representative of all churches in Northern Ireland. Apart from ages 18–24 being slightly underrepresented, the survey responses broadly reflect Northern Ireland demographics in terms of age and sex. People of Colour are slightly underrepresented in the data.

Data analysis

- We designed some of the questions and data points so that comparisons could be drawn between the results in the survey and the poll.
- Savanta ComRes cross-tabulated the (weighted) results of the general population poll. Dr Emma Soye used a statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) to cross-tabulate the results of the church survey. This provided the core of our analysis.
- Dr Soye also conducted thematic analysis on the results from both the survey and the poll on perceptions of evangelicalism and generated word clouds for these results. Spellings were corrected, and blanks and some words eg 'n/a', 'don't know' were removed before putting them into the word cloud generator.
- The more regularly a word appeared in the results, the larger the word is represented in the word cloud. The less regularly a word appeared, the smaller the word in the word cloud.

The full results of the poll and survey can be found on our website at eauk.it/good-news-people

Appendix 2 – What is an evangelical?

Names matter, and the term ‘evangelical’ has become contested – rejected by some and stretched to breaking point by others. So what is an evangelical?

Well, it comes from the Greek word ‘evangelion’ which is usually translated ‘gospel’ or ‘good news’. So, evangelicals are passionate about, and want to be defined by, the good news of Jesus. Those who adopted the evangelical label were often contrasting themselves with those who were simply religious or defined by tradition. There is an inherent passion to share the good news about Jesus in the way that the New Testament gospel writers are called ‘evangelists’.

So, evangelicals are defined by good news – in the form of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Evangelicals can trace their roots (beyond the New Testament) to the radical preacher and translator John Wycliffe and the prophetic Czech church leader Jan Hus. Evangelicalism as we know it today was decisively shaped by the Protestant Reformation and particularly the ideas of scripture alone, grace alone and faith alone. Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield and John Wesley stressed assurance of salvation and activism in preaching the gospel and engaging in good works. The Evangelical Alliance cannot control the definition of ‘evangelical’ in the wider world but we do have a Basis of Faith¹⁸ which we ask individuals, organisations and churches to affirm as part of our membership.

A seminal study by David Bebbington¹⁹ identified four key characteristics of an evangelical:

1. **The centrality of the Bible** – Through the Bible, the God who is objectively there has revealed universal and eternal truth to humankind in such a way that all can grasp it. This is not about literalism, but whether the Bible is true and authoritative for our lives.
2. **The centrality of the cross** – The good news of God’s revelation in Christ is seen supremely in the cross, where atonement was made for people of every race, tribe and tongue.
3. **The importance of conversion** – The truth of the gospel becomes personal through repentance – that is, a discernible reorientation of the sinner’s whole life towards God.
4. **Activism** – Gospel truth must be demonstrated in evangelism and social action.

Though some have conflated evangelicalism with the Christian right and fundamentalism, they are not the same. In simple terms, the Christian right often includes non-evangelicals and many are concerned that at times it pushes a political and ideological agenda at odds with the gospel. Also, many evangelicals would identify with the political left.

Fundamentalism and evangelicalism share some history, but the former tends to be more prescriptive on some ‘secondary’ issues which evangelicals tend to agree to disagree on.

¹⁸ eauk.org/about-us/how-we-work/basis-of-faith

¹⁹ eauk.org/assets/files/downloads/Evangelicalism-a-brief-definition.pdf

Evangelicalism will always have local expressions, but it is a growing and global, multicultural and multi-racial movement. According to Operation World, the fastest growing evangelical movement in the world is in Iran²⁰ and today the average Anglican is a Black woman living in sub-Saharan Africa.²¹

It is worth noting that while the term evangelical is used to distinguish, it has a rich history of uniting people. Our churches contain a diverse range of people and beliefs. Many have found it helpful to unite across church boundaries around the characteristics listed above.

For me, evangelicalism is not so much about drawing boundaries and deciding who is in or out. Rather, it is a dynamic movement, calling people to the standard or banner of the King of Kings. We love Jesus and want people to encounter Him. We love the Bible and take it seriously, letting it rule our lives. We love the church and want it to thrive. We love the public square and want to equip Christians to flourish in it.

Given all that, I confess – I am an evangelical!



Peter Lynas
UK director, Evangelical Alliance

20 thegospelcoalition.org/article/meet-the-worlds-fastest-growing-evangelical-movement/

21 anglican.ink/2022/08/02/as-bishops-meet-anglican-future-is-already-written/



“This report helps Christians from different denominations and backgrounds to better understand one another, and how we currently relate to the wider society. Churches have important insights to share about the major challenges facing the whole of society, as is evident from the high levels of engagement in pastoral care and social outreach revealed in the report. I hope that these findings will help build the confidence of churches and individual Christians to share their values and experiences in the public square with ‘humility, truth and grace’ as advocated in the report.”



Dr Nicola Brady

General secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

“What a superb piece of research! There is encouragement and challenge in equal measure. Churches and individuals committed to the spiritual flourishing of this nation should engage now. A must read. Well done Evangelical Alliance, Northern Ireland. *Good News People* has shown me the light and the shadows across our spiritual terrain.”



Rev James Burnett

Principal, Belfast Bible College

“At the Bible Society in Northern Ireland, we want to reach everyone with God’s word, so it is encouraging to read that many people here are regularly reading the Bible. However, there is much to be done to help everyone engage with the Bible well, so that this ‘living and active’ text changes individuals, churches, and most of all our society here in Northern Ireland.”



Catherine Hillcox,

General secretary of the Bible Society in Northern Ireland

“This survey highlights the opportunities for evangelism on our doorsteps. If the general population mostly trust and like the Christians they know personally and many would consider attending a church service or event if invited, then what’s stopping us? The key for moving forward is building confidence in personal evangelism and finding a place for both the evangelist and evangelism in the church.”



Amanda Mitchell

Chief operating officer/evangelist, Crown Jesus Ministries



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