



Foreign &  
Commonwealth Office  
London

INSIGHT UK

# Religion

1942 – Council of Christians and Jews founded to promote Christian/Jewish understanding. Its work is ongoing.

1987 – The Inter-Faith Network of the United Kingdom established: 85 member organisations who work together to make the UK ‘a country marked by mutual understanding and respect between religions, where all can practise their faith with integrity’.

1992 – Inner Cities Religious Council set up to be a ‘forum for faith communities and the Government to discuss policy issues and provide assistance to faith communities wishing to develop work that contributes to urban regeneration’.

2000 – The Human Rights Act passed. Article Nine enshrines the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

## BELIEF in GOD

- People with no doubt of God’s existence: **21%**
- People with doubts, yet still believing in God: **23%**
- People believing at some times and not others in God: **14%**
- Belief in some Higher Power: **14%**
- Don’t know: **15%**
- Not believing in God: **10%**

## FREEDOM of WORSHIP

- No church in the UK receives direct funding from the Government.**
- A law against blasphemy against Anglican doctrine dating back to 17th Century still exists in the UK.
- No religious bar to the holding of public office.
- Senior Anglicans with right to sit in House of Lords: Archbishops of Canterbury and York • The Bishops of Durham, London and Winchester • 21 other bishops in order of rank.

## PARTICIPATION

- There are 7.9 million active members of religions in the UK.***
- Many other people take part in religious ceremonies to mark birth, death and marriage.



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## CHARITABLE STATUS

Most religious institutions are classified as charities and so are free from income tax and capital gains tax.

## MAIN FAITHS

Vast majority of British people are Christian.

Population percentages identifying with specific religions:

- 45% - Anglican churches
- 10% - Roman Catholic Church
- 4% - Presbyterian churches
- 2% - Methodist churches
- 4% - other Christian churches
- 2% - non-Trinitarian churches (Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.)
- 5% - non-Christian religions
- 28% - non-religious

## The CHURCH of ENGLAND – ANGLICAN

The Queen is 'Supreme Governor' of the Church of England.

*'I accept Your Majesty as the sole source of ecclesiastical, spiritual and temporal power.'*

Oath of loyalty sworn by Church of England bishops

574 members make up the General Synod which governs the Church of England. It meets twice a year.

25 million people baptised into the Church of England.

Average attendance at Sunday Services: 1.1 million.

71,000 weddings and 187,000 baptisms took place in Church of England churches (1996).

The Anglican Church is responsible for 42 cathedrals and 16,000 other church buildings.

In all 13,000 church properties listed by the Government as being of historic importance.

Between 1987 and 1997 – 131 new churches built.

## The CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Archbishop of Westminster is Cormac Murphy O'Connor who succeeded Cardinal Basil Hume who died in June 1999 aged 79.

Governing body: The Bishops' Conference.

The UK Catholic Church has 12,800 staff and 8,600 churches.

*Over the last 20 years Catholic church attendance has dropped by 29%.*

One of the holiest sites of pilgrimage for Catholics in England is Walsingham in Norfolk.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

The largest Protestant Church in Northern Ireland is the Presbyterian Church with 300,000 members.



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The Roman Catholic Church is organised as a single unit covering both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There are over 2,100 churches. Some dioceses cover areas on either side of the border.

### The CHURCH of SCOTLAND

Organised around presbyteries – local bodies composed of bishops and elders. Also known as the kirk.

The church divides Scotland into 47 districts.

Governed by a General Assembly of around 850 ‘commissioners’ – ministers, elders and members of the Diaconate. It has over 600,000 adult members and thousands more children.

### The EPISCOPAL CHURCH in SCOTLAND

Authority in the church rests with its bishops – hence ‘episcopal’.

It has 53,599 members of which over three-fifths are communicants.

### The CHURCH of WALES

This is the largest of the Free Churches in Wales with 49,500 members. The Union of Welsh Independents has 40,740 members.

### FREE CHURCHES

These are Protestant churches not officially recognised by the state (not-established). They include:

#### Methodist Church

353,000 members. Largest congregations: Northumberland, Durham, North Yorkshire.

#### Baptist Church

Around 160,000 members with 1,780 pastors and 2,150 churches.

#### United Reform Church

96,500 members, 1,090 serving ministers and 1,775 places of worship.

#### Salvation Army

Officers can be male or female. There are nearly 59,000 people active in the Army’s various corps.

### OTHER PROMINENT UK RELIGIONS

#### Muslim

1.5–2 million Muslims in the UK worship in over 1,000 mosques and prayer centres. One in four of the minority ethnic population of London

is Muslim. There is no overarching organisation but the Islamic Cultural Centre at the London Central Mosque is very influential.

#### Sikh

The Sikh population of the UK is between 400–500,000 people. Largest concentrations of Sikhs live in London, Manchester and Birmingham. 1911 – first UK Sikh gurdwara (temple) built in London.

#### Hindu

The Hindu community comprises between 400–550,000 people. There are over 120 Hindu Temples in the UK – also known as ‘mandirs’.

#### Jewish

There are some 283,000 Jewish people in the UK. Three in ten are affiliated to a synagogue. There are approximately 365 Jewish congregations in the UK. One in two British Jews lives in London.

#### Buddhist

There are 500 Buddhist groups in the UK, with 50 Buddhist monasteries and temples.

#### Jain

Between 25,000 and 30,000 members in the UK. The Jain Centre in Leicester is one of the finest examples of traditional Indian architecture in Western Europe.

#### Zoroastrian

Possibly the world’s oldest religion has between 5–10,000 followers in the UK concentrated in London and the North West.



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## NEW RELIGIONS

The Church of Scientology's UK membership has doubled since 1980 and totals 100,000 currently.

There are an estimated 70,000 Rastafarians in the UK.

Every year on the Summer Solstice (22 June) druids gather at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain to mark the rising of the sun. They are one sign of an increasing interest in 'pagan' beliefs and alternative spirituality in the UK.

## DEFINING PEOPLE'S LIVES

Six in ten Christians claim religion is important in the way they live their lives compared to nine in ten Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims.

## RELIGION and EDUCATION

One in three state schools in the UK are run by the Christian or Jewish faiths – 7,000 Christian and 24 Jewish.

1998 – first two state-funded Muslim schools open.

Schools have to provide the opportunity for a daily act of worship.

*All parents have the right to withdraw their child wholly or partly from religious education.*

## PRESERVING RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

Church of England established a special fund in 1969 to preserve 'redundant' church buildings of historic importance.

Historic Chapels Trust founded in 1993 to 'preserve repair and maintain non-Anglican houses of worship', mosques, temples and synagogues in England.

Grants from English Heritage and the Lottery Heritage Fund to churches – £26 million in 1998/99.

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# BRITAIN

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