

Atheism is down as UK gets spiritual

Kaya Burgess
Religious Affairs
Correspondent

The number of atheists in Britain has fallen in the past year, according to a survey suggesting that more people are attending church, albeit irregularly.

It has long been assumed that the decline in weekly congregations is down to Britons losing their religion and abandoning church. However, a YouGov survey commissioned by *The Times* of 1,660 people found that the number of those going to church may have grown in the past year — though it also found that people are attending less often, pointing to a generation of occasional worshippers.



Worshippers attend Mass at St Joseph's Cathedral in Swansea, South Wales
ALAMY

The proportion who said they “do not believe in any sort of God or greater spiritual power”, definable as atheists, fell from 38 per cent in 2016 to 36 per cent in 2017, and to 33 per cent in 2018. Belief in a God was steady at 29 per cent but those who “don’t know”

increased from 12 to 14 per cent, while those who believe in “some sort of spiritual greater power” rose from 23 to 24 per cent. Respondents were not asked which God they believed in or prayed to.

Asked how often they attended church, not count-

ing weddings or funerals, those who said “never” fell from 63 per cent in 2016 to 61 per cent in 2017, and 56 per cent in 2018. Those attending “every week” has fallen in the past year, from 6 to 5 per cent, but those saying “several times a year” grew from 6 to 7 per cent and “once a year or less” was also up, from 20 to 24 per cent.

Factoring in those who were not sure the figures suggest that 39 per cent sometimes attend, up from 36 per cent in 2017 and 34 per cent in 2016.

The proportion who “never” pray fell from 54 to 50 per cent from 2017 to 2018. Those praying daily fell from 11 to 10 per cent and those who do “several times a month” fell from 7 to 6 per cent, but the proportion who pray “a few times a year” increased from 10 to 13 per cent. ■