

Church of England Sunday attendance continues downward slide

by [Trevor Grundy](#)

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Attendance figures released by the Church of England show that Sunday worship attendance continues its downward slide and now stands at about half of what it was 45 years ago.

The report from the Archbishops' Council Research and Statistics Department, released Friday (March 21), shows that on average in 2012, 800,000 adults, or about 2 percent of the adult population, attended church on Sunday. That's down from 1.6 million Sunday worshippers in 1968.

Christmas and Easter services continue to attract the highest number of worshippers. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day bring in around 2.5 million people and Easter services attract approximately 1.4 million.

One of England's top women judges, Baroness Brenda Hale, said the Church of England is in decline because it is so undemanding.

She recently told a conference at Yale Law School: "It has no dietary laws, no dress codes for men or women, and very little that its members can say is actually required of them by way of observance."

Her comments came in a lecture following a series of court cases in which British Christians claimed to be suffering from religious discrimination but lost their cases.

She described England as a "paradoxical country" when it comes to religion, saying that even though the Church of England is the "established" church (and has been

since Henry VIII broke from Rome in the 16th century), half the population does not profess any religious affiliation.