

Study: Longer life spans mean less need for church

by [Al Webb](#)

April 14, 2011

LONDON (RNS) Researchers at two of Britain's top universities claim that church attendance in many Western nations is falling because people are living longer and therefore have less fear of death.

The result, the studies say, is a "graying church." In Britain, one in four older adults (65 or older) attends church, while just 11 percent of those between 16 and 44 are regular churchgoers.

The project was conducted by researchers at St. Andrews University in Scotland and the University of East Anglia in England and published in the International Journal of Social Economics.

East Anglia's Elissaios Papyrakis wrote that younger people question the benefits of going to church year after year, whereas the elderly are far more apt to consider religion's promise of life after death. Some critics, however, say the theory is a harder match for the U.S., which leads other industrialized nations in church attendance.

Papyrakis said churches should concentrate more on the good things religion can offer, starting early. That, he added, "can counterbalance the negative impact of life expectancy on religiosity -- which in effect reduces concern about life after death."