

Researchers find growth in Churches in Britain



MORE THAN 5,000 churches have opened in Britain in the last 30 years, and there are many examples of “substantial and sustained church growth” across the country, according to new research. “Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present” found substantial growth among black, Asian and ethnic-minority churches, and among churches that are less than 100 years old, such as those in the Pentecostal movement. High levels of immigration along with an emphasis on evangelisation were given as two of the major causes behind the growth.

The book-length work, edited by the Revd David Goodhew of Cranmer Hall, a theological college that is part of St John’s College, University of Durham, is a collection of studies by academics into areas of pronounced church growth. It found growth in parts of the Catholic Church and Church of England, for example in cathedral congregations and in urban areas. The biggest increase has been in the Anglican Diocese of London, which has seen a 71 per cent rise in congregations since 1990. But there has been substantial decline in some areas.

According to the research, almost 3,000 churches opened in England between 1989 and 2005, and in the following five years another 2,680 churches opened, with this figure including the whole of Britain. However, roughly the same number of churches closed during that period, mostly among the longestablished denominations.

One chapter shows the diversity of Catholics now living in the East End of London, once a heartland of Irish diaspora Catholicism. Research by Catholic academic Dr Alana Harris found in a parish in Canning Town

1,200 people from 40 countries including the Philippines and Nigeria, and also parts of the Caribbean and south-east Asia.



The Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, has endorsed the research, saying it challenges “the widespread assumption” that

Christianity is “suffering terminal decline”.

Speaking at the launch of the book on Tuesday, Dr Goodhew said: “Church growth in Britain is large-scale, geographical and speeding up.” He explained: “There’s no inexorable process of secularisation of Britain going on ... When churches pray, plan and work for growth it tends to happen.”

The research also found that 54 per cent of immigrants were Christians while there are now 500,000 Christians in black-majority churches founded over the last 50 to 60 years.

There are a further 500,000 from Asian and other ethnic-minority churches.

Abigail Frymann