

## Key findings

- 50% of respondents said they were not attracting new volunteers.
- 60% currently have a project for which they are seeking funding. 65% of these were for fabric repairs and a further 38% for maintenance. 82% of projects included reordering or the introduction of new facilities.
- The majority were seeking funding for projects costing under £100,000, with 41% costing £50,000 or less.
- 28% had no experience at all of making funding applications and 54% had a little experience. In terms of running a building project, 31% said neither they nor anyone in their team had any experience of this.
- 44% of respondents do not have an annual maintenance plan.
- To the open-ended question of what is the greatest challenge for their place of worship, the most common response at 32% was declining congregation numbers and attracting new members. 23% identified lack of funds and 20% maintenance and repairs as the greatest challenges.
- 32% specifically identified attracting new users or volunteers as key to their place of worship remaining open and active within the community. A further 19% identified improved facilities, reordering or access as the most important means.
- The most popular reason for volunteering was the sense of community that people feel, accounting for 30% of responses.

## Method

This survey has been organised by the National Churches Trust on behalf of the Welsh Places of Worship Forum. It is for people who look after a place of worship to inform the new Welsh Places of Worship Forum about current and upcoming challenges.

The survey was circulated to all places of worship that have applied to the National Churches Trust in the last 5 years and was disseminated through the Welsh POW Forum members.

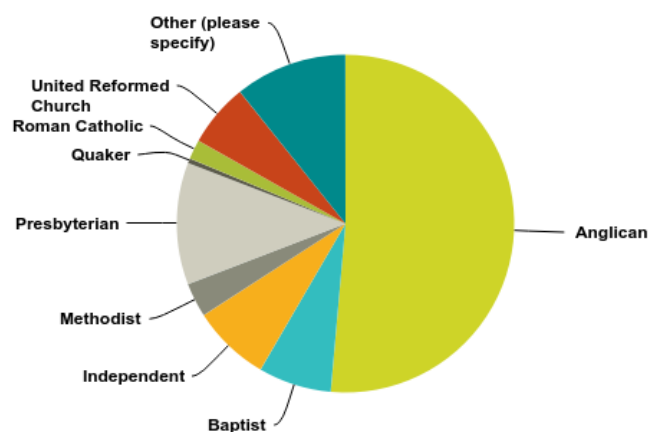
The Welsh Places of Worship Forum was established in 2015. It comprises organisations concerned with faith and heritage based in Wales and other organisations where no



dedicated Welsh organisation exists. It aims to identify the most effective ways to help places of worship in Wales to more easily manage their buildings and engage the wider public.

## Respondents

- There were a total of 219 complete or partially complete responses.
- 55% of respondents were Church in Wales (11% Presbyterian, 7% Baptist, 7% Independent, 6% United Reformed Church, 3% Methodist, 2% Roman Catholic, >2% Quaker, Congregationalist, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Unitarian, ecumenical)



- 64% of places of worship were listed.
- The majority of respondents (77%) were volunteers, leaving 9% paid staff and 14% clergy.

## Volunteers

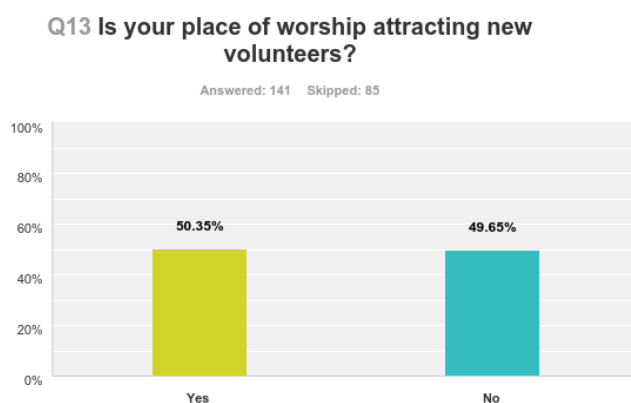
77% of those who took part in the survey were volunteers. Among these volunteers, the hours contributed on building related matters in a typical month ranged from 1 to 80. 22% estimated their hours contributed to be at 20 hours or above.

Additional comments highlighted the range of ways in which people support places of worship. Some had very specific roles, such as "cleaning up after homeless meal on Saturday evenings", while others were responsible for a range of tasks with one respondent listing their regular tasks as "maintenance, bins, heating, winding the clock, gaining grants for repairs and improvements [...], opening and closing the church daily." Other common responses included fundraising, opening up, cleaning, managing the accounts and managing building projects.



In terms of how they rated the impact of their contribution, 19% said 'a great deal', 32% said 'a lot of impact' and 33% 'a moderate amount'.

Those contributing 25+ hours per month tended to rate their impact higher, though there was no obvious correlation between fewer hours and rating their contribution lower.



50% of respondents said they were not attracting new volunteers. Of those that gave a reason for why they think their building is not attracting new volunteers, 53% identified dwindling congregations and a lack of new members as the key issue. Within this 53%, 40% specifically identified ageing congregations and a lack of young people joining as the key factors.

### **The biggest challenges faced**

This was the first of three open-ended questions. Out of 145 responses, 47 felt that declining congregation numbers and the task of attracting new users to their place of worship was the greatest challenge. "Ageing congregation" and "attracting new members" were common phrases that came up.

34 felt that raising sufficient funds was the greatest threat. Within these 34, 13 were directly concerned with the cost of maintaining their building. A further 29 identified maintenance and repairs to the fabric as the greatest challenge.

There was no obvious correlation between the denominations and the different challenges faced. This suggests that issues such as lack of money, declining numbers, and maintaining the building fabric are very much inter-denominational challenges.

### **What would help places of worship remain open and serving the community**

Out of 141 responses, 30 felt that attracting new members to the congregation, particularly young people, was key to



their place of worship remaining open and serving the community. A further 15 felt that attracting new volunteers was a critical factor.

27 identified improved facilities, reordering work or access as being a key to improving their building's sustainability, whilst 26 called for greater external financial support.

The results appear to show that whilst people feel that getting more people into their building and introducing improved facilities would help their place of worship remain open and active, a large number feel inhibited by a lack of funds and the cost and challenge of maintaining the fabric of their building.

### **What is most rewarding aspect of volunteering at your place of worship?**

"The friendship of our close knit congregation", "being part of a close and lively community", "being part of a dedicated group of like-minded people". These were some of the common themes in response to the question of what is the most rewarding aspect of volunteering. The feeling of being part of a community and helping to bring people together featured in some 31% of responses.

"The knowledge that I am helping the building to continue to have a use for future generations." A sense of being part of the history and maintaining their building for future generations was another recurrent theme. Others drew reward from the feeling of giving something back and seeing people using and enjoying their building.

### **Prior experience**

69% of respondents answered that they, or someone else in their team, had at least some experience of running a building project. However, only 9% had a professional background or experience in managing buildings.

<b>Do you have experience of making funding applications?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>



None	27.9%	53
A little	53.7%	102
A lot	18.4%	35
Any other comments		22
<b>answered question</b>		<b>190</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>35</b>

The majority had some experience of making funding applications, though 28% did not. Of those that do not, 60% currently have a project for which they are actively seeking funding.

### Where people would like to see more support

The question of where people would like to see more support allowed for multiple responses. The most popular answer was funding for maintenance with over three quarters of respondents (78%) saying they would like help with this. The other most popular topics were how to attract visitors (66%) and how to make their church more sustainable (67%). 33% said they would like to know more about how to carry out an annual maintenance plan.

<b>What topics would you like to know more about? (Please tick as many as you like)</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Funders who support the maintenance of places of worship.	77.5%	138
What makes a successful funding application/how to apply for funding.	59.0%	105



How to claim back VAT.	34.8%	62
How to manage a building repair project.	24.7%	44
How to carry out annual maintenance plan.	32.6%	58
Quinquennial Inspections.	19.1%	34
How to find out what is heritage interest and value of my place of worship.	34.3%	61
How to share the heritage interest in my place of worship with others.	44.4%	79
How to attract more visitors to my place of worship.	65.7%	117
How to make my place of worship more sustainable, i.e. warmer and cheaper to maintain.	67.4%	120
Other (please specify)	8.4%	15
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>178</b>
<b><i>skipped question</i></b>		<b>47</b>

These results correlate with the responses to the question of what would help the building remain open and serving the community, i.e. attracting more users and improved finances/funding opportunities, particularly in relation to maintenance.

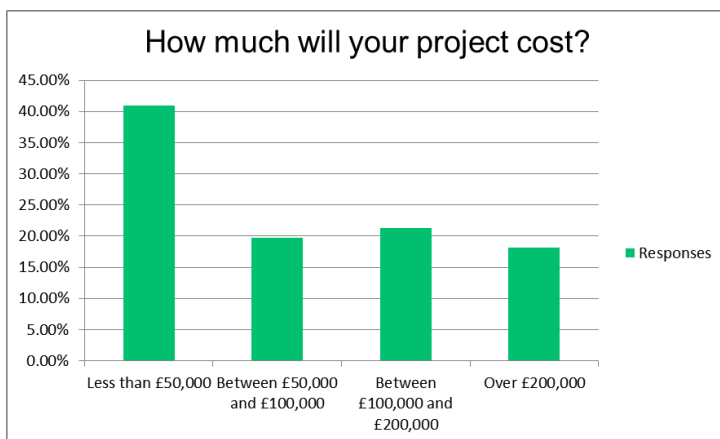
### **Maintenance and current projects**

44% of respondents do not have an annual maintenance plan, while 66% believe that their Quinquennial Inspection Report provides them with all the information they need. However, only 33% identified maintenance plans as an area where they would like to see additional support. Maintenance and repairs were identified as one of the biggest challenges, but it was finding appropriate funding rather than help with the task of carrying out our regular maintenance that was the most common area where people would like to see more support.



The project is for (please tick all those that apply):		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Fabric repairs	65.3%	79
Maintenance	38.0%	46
Organ	8.3%	10
Interior reordering	36.4%	44
New facilities such as kitchen, toilets, disabled access	46.3%	56
A social action or community project to help local people	33.1%	40
A local history or heritage based project	20.7%	25
Something else (please specify)		21
<b>answered question</b>		<b>121</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>104</b>

Of those that were seeking funding for a project, 65% were planning a repair project. The next most common was for new facilities, such as kitchen, toilets and disabled access, for which 46% were seeking support, followed by maintenance at 38% and reordering work at 36%.



## Recommendations

It would appear that there is enough evidence here to consider the development of a capacity building support project focussed on three critical outputs. The first of these would be focussed on providing greater funding advice for places of worship, with a particular emphasis on grants for



maintenance and repair. Secondly, it would seek to provide greater support and advice on maintenance and encourage best practice, addressing in particular the issue of annual maintenance plans. The final output would be focussed on improving advice and support on community engagement. As well as helping places of worship find ways to better engage with the people in their communities and particularly young people, this final output would also look at the issue of volunteer recruitment and would seek to provide more support and training in this area.

Experience suggests that there is a strong demand for more hands on training days, particularly in relation to funding. An NCT/HLF funding workshop being hosted in Cardiff on the 13 July and other training days held over the past twelve months have quickly reached capacity. Looking at the other areas where people would like to see more support and the stats on previous experience, there is also perhaps an argument for workshop

