

---

## Congregations buck trend to prove Christianity is alive and kicking in the 'Godless city'

5:40pm Tuesday 2nd April 2013

By Neil Vowles

---

Congregations spilling out of the front doors into the street and cars lined up bumper-to-bumper on pavements outside churches may not be the image that people associate with the UK's God-less City.

But the weekend's Easter celebrations are a clear indication that Christianity is alive and kicking in Brighton and Hove.

Ministers have told The Argus that it was standing room only in their churches as many came to devotedly mark this most important of Christian festivals.

Hundreds also turned out to see the re-enactment of the Passion of Christ in its new location outside St Peter's Church in Brighton.

Religious leaders said that events like the Passion Play were an effective tool in spreading the message of Christ to the general public.

Any visitor to the city seeing a bloodied Christ being crucified may well be surprised to learn that they were visiting the UK's Godless City based on the 2011 census data which revealed that more than 40% of Brighton and Hove residents describe themselves as having no religion with only marginally more people declaring themselves Christian.

### Standing room only

The Argus visited three churches during Easter services on Sunday in Hollingdean and Westdene and found there was standing room only.

Reverend Andy Bousfield is minister of Ascension Church Westdene in Mill Rise, Brighton – one of the churches we visited.

He said the church's Easter service attracted extra numbers than a usual Sunday service.

He said: "With Easter as well as Christmas, churches do put in a lot of effort into these festivals because they are so central to our faith.

"We believe our message is a public rather than a private message.

"We take our inspiration from Jesus Christ who took the message outwards, he came out to people who didn't want to believe in God but he showed them the character of God and that's what our churches should be doing.

"We should be thinking of more public things like the Passion of Christ to bring the message of Jesus Christ to our city."

Director James Burke-Dunsmore hailed the Passion performance as a "beautiful" success.

He said that the performance was so engrossing that neither cast nor crew felt the almost freezing temperatures.

The 41-year-old said that the intention of the play wasn't to preach to people about the correct way of celebrating Easter but he agreed that it had a profound spiritual effect on both cast and audience.

He said a recently-married couple spoke to him during the performance saying they had returned to the church following their wedding and were pleased to be able to enjoy a "non-preachy" Christian spectacle.



He said: "A lot of people feel that we have thrown the baby out with the bath water.

"With all the bad news about the church, people may feel uncomfortable saying they are Christians.

"But all those Christian teachings we grow up, we're not going to throw them away as well.

"I hope that people will turn to the church after experiencing the story in such a moving way and end up fuelling the church.

"I hope that people will go back to churches or maybe go having never been before full of this experience.

"The location worked so well, people had seen that it was on by just walking past it."

Father Ray Blake, of St Mary Magdalen Church in Upper North Street, Brighton, announced earlier this month that he would no longer perform the traditional foot-washing ceremony of Holy Thursday because it "exploited" the poor.

He said that the church had up to 1,500 people attending Easter services with the congregation stretching out of the door and into the street.

#### **Numbers boosted by visitors**

He said his numbers may have been boosted by people visiting the city on holiday and because the bank holiday allowed more shop workers to attend.

He added: "So many of our people can't come to mass on a Sunday because they are working so I think the fact that so many shops were shut helped.

"We are not like the Anglican churches full of the wealthy middle-class, they are the poor.

"Our Philippine, Polish and Slovak members will make a special attempt not to work at Easter.

"A few have complained about the street being blocked on Sunday but there's nothing we can really do about that unless we start broadcasting our services in the church hall but we can't really afford that."

- [Gritters out as snow falls in Sussex](#)
- [Four arrested on suspicion of aggravated burglary in Shoreham](#)
- [Four students charged following University of Sussex occupation](#)
- [Teenage jaw fractured in Worthing assault](#)
- [Photos get Brighton traffic warden the sack](#)

[Back](#)

© Copyright 2001-2013 Newsquest Media Group

