

<https://authentictheology.com/2018/11/14/code-blue-church-of-christ-2018-report-shows-accelerated-membership-decline/?fbclid=IwAR1VO-axbG78mn-na5EX8Yr4LHAZ2zL7mwA3AvuHiQestTlp1dHNUZI1h7Q>

(the link above includes the comments as well.)

WOMEN

The Code Blue Church of Christ: 2018 Report Shows Accelerated Membership Decline



Date: November 14, 2018 Author: Steve Gardner 31 Comments

The rate at which people are leaving the Churches of Christ denomination accelerated markedly over the past 3-4 years.

The denomination was already losing members and congregations at an astounding rate.

The Churches of Christ shrunk by an average of over 930 adherents a month every single month over the past 18 years.

And about 5 Church of Christ congregations dissolved every month, on average, during that time frame.

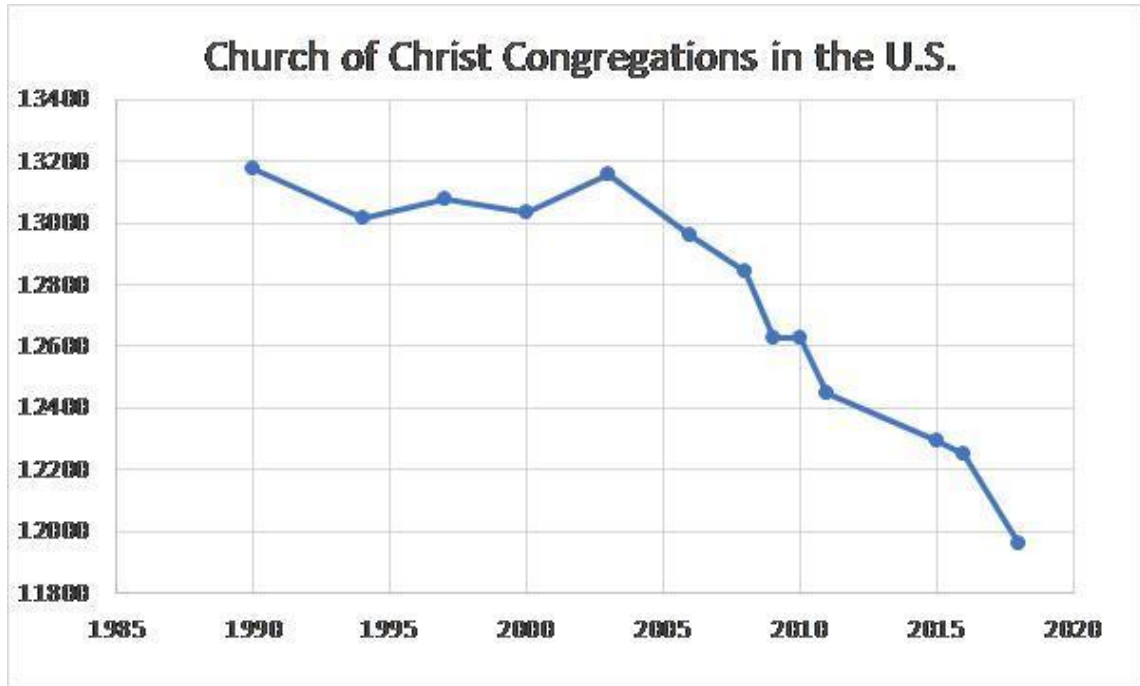


Fig. 1: U.S. Church of Christ Congregations, 1990-2017 (Source: 21st Century Christian)

New Bad News

The news gets worse: Data released earlier this year by 21st Century Christian, a publisher that tracks Church of Christ demographics, indicates the rate of decrease greatly accelerated over the last 3 years. In that time, the number of Church Christ adherents decreased approximately 5% – by far the largest decrease in Church of Christ history that I could find. That is over 2000 people

departing and over 9 congregations dissolving each and every month, on average, for the last 3 years.

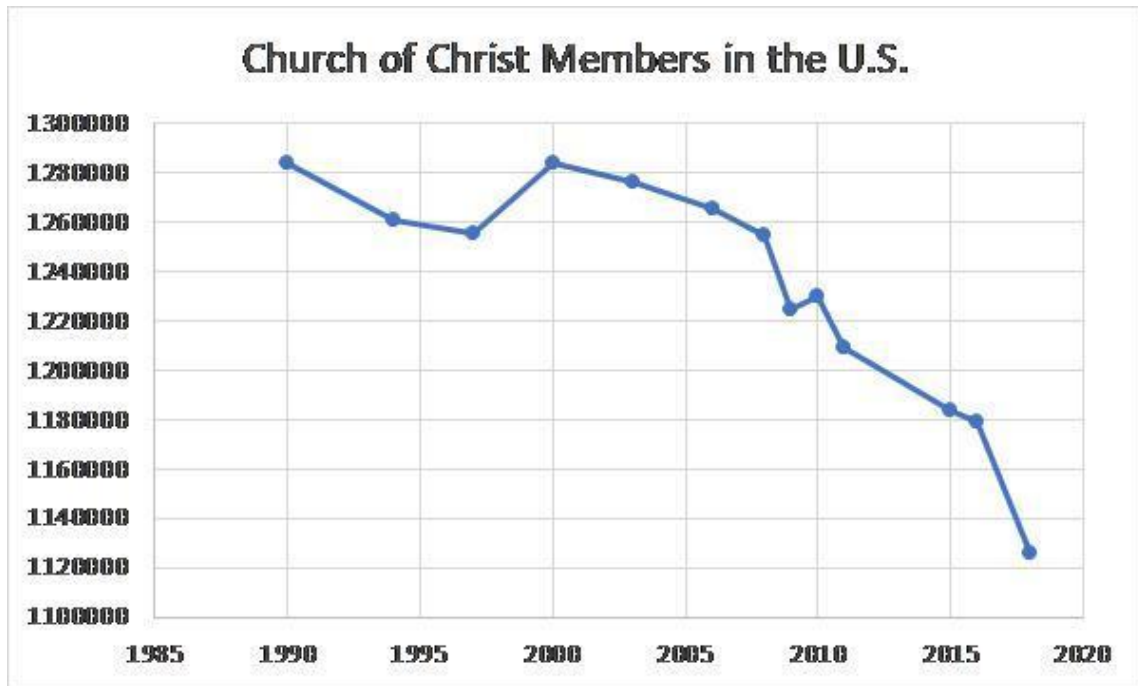


Fig. 2: U.S. Church of Christ Members, 1990 – 2017 (Source: 21st Century Christian)

Not in the Same Boat or Even the Same Pond

It is not true that all Christian denominations are shrinking and that the Churches of Christ are simply going through the same thing as others. A great deal of decline in Christian numbers in the United States is due to the decline of the Catholic Church in the wake of sex-abuse and other scandals and of several mainline denominations.

Christianity Today reports that evangelical church numbers, on average, have stayed steady recently. Some have grown long term. The US Assemblies of God (Evangelical), for example, has experienced over 27 consecutive years of growth in adherents.

Good News if You Like Bad News

The news gets even worse: *The Christian Chronicle*, in an August 2018 article titled “Can Churches of Christ be saved?,” reports that Heritage 21, a foundation established by members of Churches of Christ to help dying congregations achieve renewal or secure a legacy, compared the Churches of Christ to national benchmarks that a denomination should have 16% of their congregations as new launches or young congregations (2-10 years) in order for the denomination to be healthy. The Churches of Christ has less than 4% in these categories, with a barely registrable number of church plants and new congregations.

And worse: The number of unbaptized children and youth in the church has likely shrunk by more than 20% since 1990, even more than the overall decline. This would mean fewer young people growing up in the church to replace those who pass away.

Still worse: A traditional source for new Church of Christ members is the colleges affiliated with the Churches of Christ. *The Christian Chronicle* reports that freshmen who self-identify as part of the Churches of Christ has dropped by over 50% since 1990.

Conclusion

Congregations thus cannot depend on children “born into” the church or on people from Church of Christ colleges to maintain their congregation’s size, much less grow it.

Inviting and recruiting people from outside the Church of Christ tradition is necessary if Church of Christ congregations are going to survive.

What is holding them back?

I am relatively confident that people will join a church that does not have a piano or an organ. We are one of only a tiny number of denominations that restrict women to the extent we do – around 90% of U.S. Christianity is less restrictive.

In the 21st century, will people from outside (or even inside) the Church of Christ tradition want to join a church that prohibits women from speaking in the assembly?

No.

Will they want to join a church that discriminates against women based on their sex, prohibiting them from teaching Sunday School to adults and high schoolers?

No.

Will they want their daughters to sit there Sunday after Sunday after Sunday watching and being trained to accept discrimination?

No.

Sources and Notes

For a discussion about the relevant scripture, see Steve Gardner, “[20 Scripture Passages Telling Women to Speak, Teach, Lead, and Have Authority Over Men in the Assembly and Elsewhere](#),” AuthenticTheology.com (September 3, 2018).

21st Century Christian: <https://www.21stcc.com>.

21st Century Christian publishes “[Churches of Christ in the United States](#)” approximately every three years. It publishes data sheets at other times, too.

Most all of the data mentioned comes from 21st Century Christian, some directly and some indirectly (see source cites below).

The 930 and 5 are net numbers. For example, if 500 people began attending in a month, 1430 departed.

Base data gathered:

Year Congregations Members Adherents Attendance

1990 13174 1284056 1684872

1994 13013 1260838 1651101

1997 13080 1255834 1647078

2000 13032 1284056 1645645

2003 13155 1276621 1656717

2006 12963 1265844 1639495

2008 12846 1255149 1622101 1238766

2009 12629 1224404 1578281

2010 12625 1230391 1585966 1211864

2011 12447 1209259 1554579 1185781

2015 12297 1183767 1519251 1159563

2016 12251 1178976 1511500 1153613

2018 11961 1126347 1443738 1105498

The calculations based on these numbers are approximate — the build month is not consistent for each year.

Congregation, Member, and Adherent data is from these sources:

Bobby Ross, Jr., “Church in America marked by decline,” *The Christian Chronicle* (Feb. 1, 2009)

Bobby Ross, Jr., “165,000 fewer souls in the pews: Five questions to consider,” *The Christian Chronicle* (March 2, 2015)

Erik Tryggestad, “Can Churches of Christ be saved?,” *The Christian Chronicle* (Aug. 29, 2018).

Bobby Ross, Jr., “Christian universities feeling the pinch as Churches of Christ shrink,” *The Christian Chronicle* (Dec. 26, 2017).

Jay F. Guin, “The 2015 Churches of Christ in the United States, Part 1,” OneinJesus.info (February 2015).

21st Century Christian: https://www.21stcc.com/pdfs/ccusa_stats_sheet.pdf (newest data)

WayBack Machine – 21st Century Christian
(https://www.21stcc.com/pdfs/ccusa_stats_sheet.pdf)

Calculations:

2018 minus 2000	Per year (/18)	Per month (/12)
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1071	59.5	4.958333	Congregations
201907	11217.05556	934.7546	Adherents
2018 minus 2015	Per year (/3)	Per month	
75513	25171	2097.583	Adherents
336	112	9.333333	Congregations

Christianity Today reports that evangelical church numbers are, on average, have stayed steady. <https://www.christiantoday.com/.../is-the.../55989.htm>; Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “[Pew: Evangelicals Stay Strong as Christianity Crumbles in America](#),” *Christianity Today* (May 11, 2015).

The US Assemblies of God (Evangelical) “has experienced 27 consecutive years of growth in adherents,” up 14.6% 2006 to 2016: <https://ag.org/About/Statistics>.

The Southern Baptist denomination has seen such decline that Christian Today asks if the denomination is in “terminal decline”— that denomination fell by 2.6% from 1995 to 2017 while Churches of Christ fell by 10.7% from 1994 to 2018 (the closest comparable time frame I could find): Mark Woods, “[Is the Southern Baptist Convention in terminal decline?](#),” *Christian Today* (June 11, 2015).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Baptist_Convention#cite_note-100

“The Christian Chronicle, in an August 2018 article titled “Can Churches of Christ be saved?” reported ...”: <https://christianchronicle.org/can-churches-of-christ-be-saved/>

“the number of unbaptized children and youth in the church has likely shrunk by more than 20%”: I calculated this number by subtracting the number of members (baptized) from the total number of adherents and calculating decline rate, and I assumed that all the non-baptized adherents are children and youth (I know that not all of them are, but I think it is a reasonable assumption to assume that nearly all of them are).

Calculations: Difference in adherence and members for 1990 is 400816 and for 2018 is 317391. Assume 90% are children and 10% are adults and youth who have not been baptized. , so use 360734 and 285652 for 1990 and 2018 respectively for the number of children. $360734 - 285652 = 75082$, which is 20.8% less than 360734. The percentage decline of children stays the same if assume 70% are children. The decline rate in adherents from 1990 to 2018 is $(1684872 - 1443738) / 168482 = 14.3\%$.

“The Christian Chronicle reports that enrollment at these colleges has fallen by 15% since 1990 and their freshmen who self-identify as part of the Churches of Christ has dropped by over 50%.”: <https://christianchronicle.org/christian-universities-feeling-the-pinch-as-churches-of-christ-shrink/>

90%: *See, e.g.*, Steve Gardner, “David Lipscomb, Church of Christ Foundational Leader: ‘All the Teaching of the Bible is Against Women Speaking in Public’ (It Gets Worse),” AuthenticTheology.com (April 12, 2018) (discussing evangelical denominations in the main body and in the notes); Pew Research’s religious landscape study, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>(includes percentages reflected by various denominations). It appears that, of the sizeable evangelical denominations, only three others (the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (1.1%), Presbyterian Church in America (0.4%), and Independent Baptist (2.5%)) are generally as restrictive as the general Church of Christ (1.5%) approach. Notes and sources regarding the larger evangelical denominations are in the David Lipscomb article cited above.

Updated: Fixed typo in opening to say over 930 and about 5 rather than over 1000 and about 6 and made the acceleration clearer by comparison by noting that the denomination has decreased by over 2000 people and over 9 congregations each and every month, on average, during the last 3 years. Noted that CT’s report relative to numbers staying steady is recent (2007, 2015) and that growth in some denominations has been long-term.