

The Great

De Jim Davis and
Michael Graham
church
ing



Book of Common Prayer



“You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood...”

How We Got Here

A brief history of our
project



- Old data
- Not enough data
- Data not actionable pastorally



- Needed post-fracturing data
- Needed post-COVID data
- Needed academically credible data
- Needed granular insights that were pastorally & personally actionable



We are currently
experiencing the
largest and fastest
religious shift in
U.S. history.



40 million people
have left churches
and houses of
worship in the
last 25 years.



It is larger than the First
Great Awakening, Second
Great Awakening, and the
entirety of the Billy
Graham Crusades
COMBINED.



A definition of Dechurching

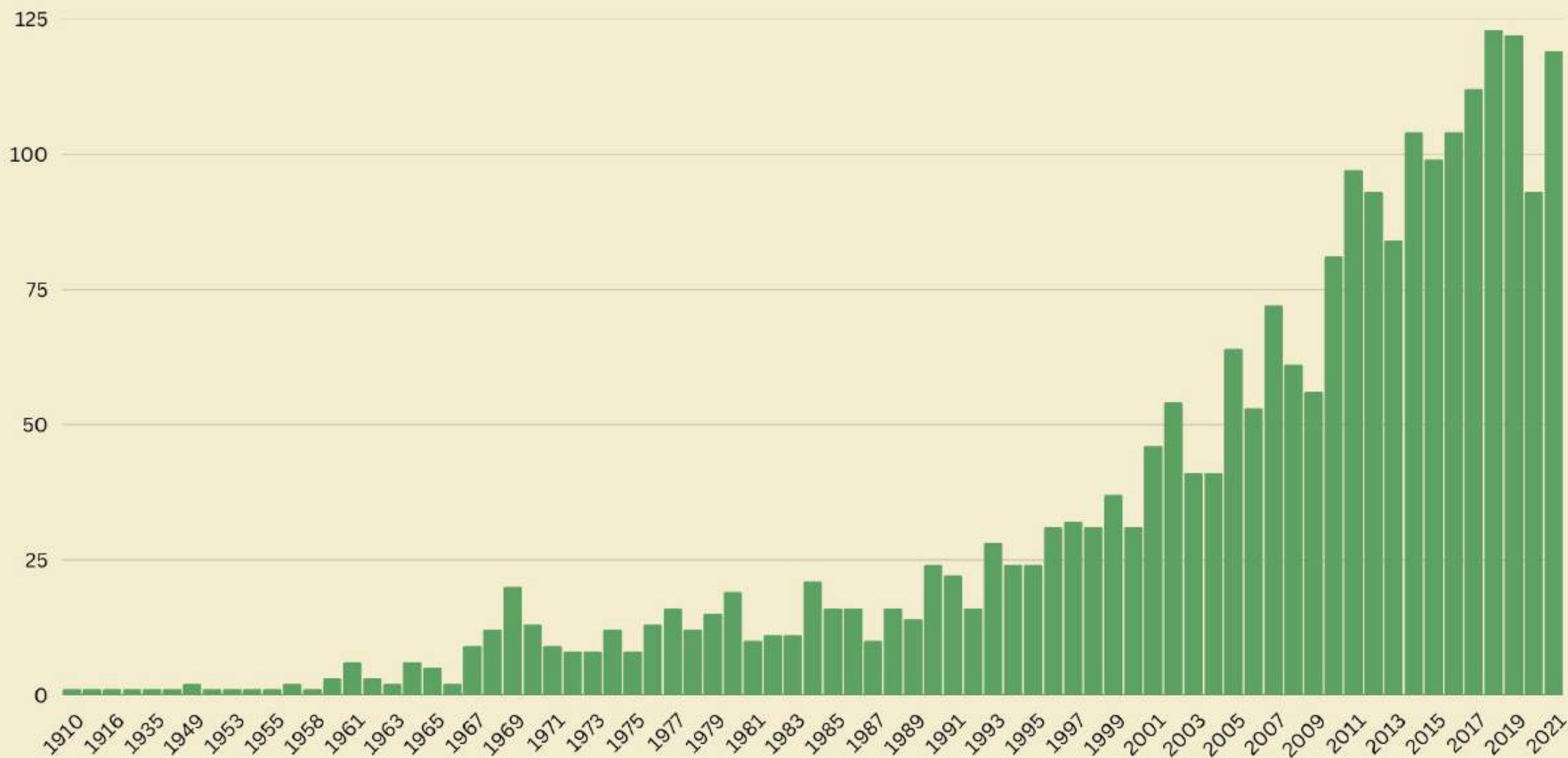
Adult Americans who used to attend a congregation monthly or more frequently and now less than once per year (seldom or never).



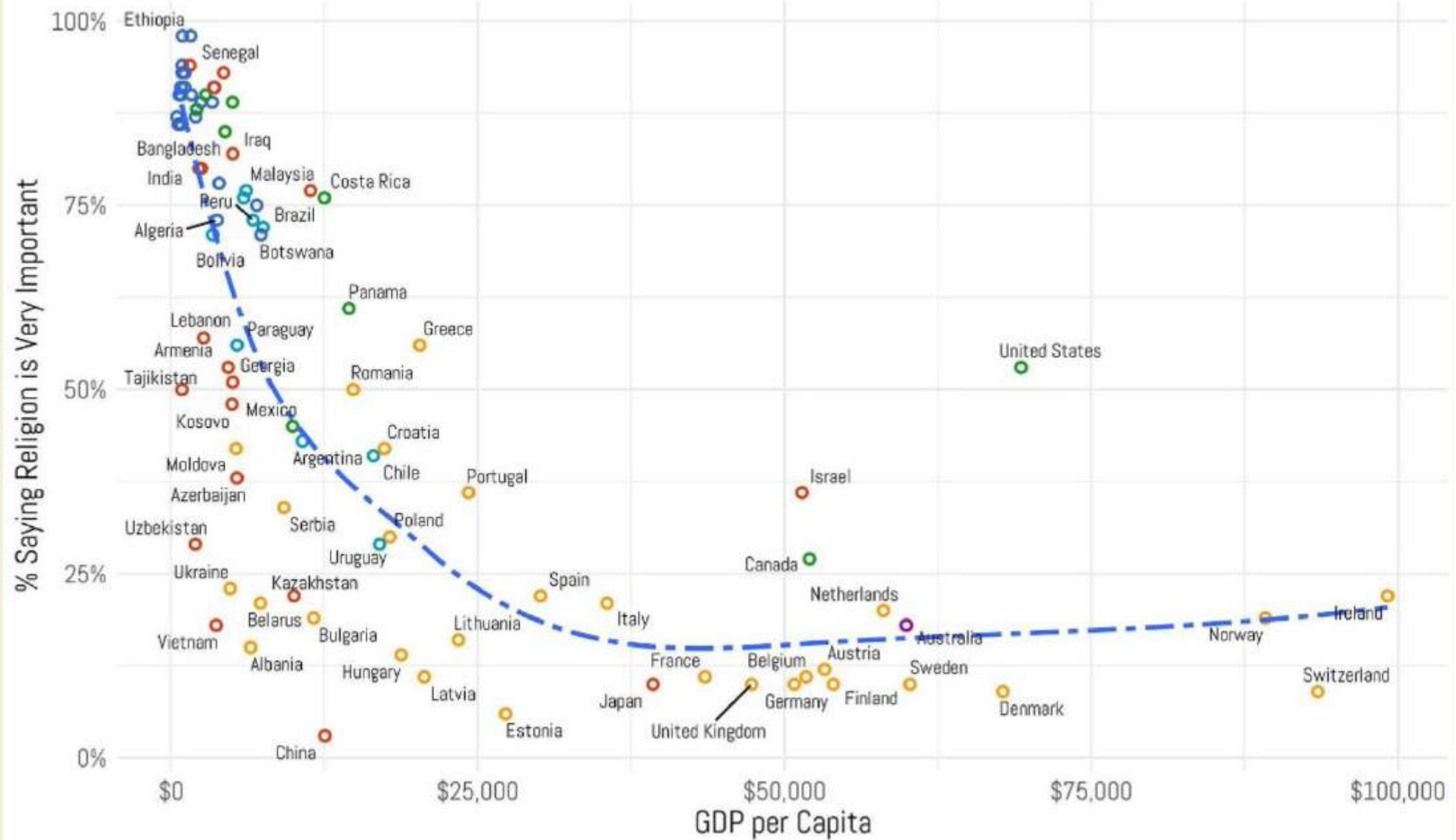
Dechurching Timeline



Most dechurching in America has occurred in the last 25 years.



What is the Relationship Between Economic Development and Religiosity?



Dechurching Size



- 15% of all adult Americans have dechurched
- This is 40M people
- 15M of these left evangelical churches

1990s Impact



- Fall of Soviet Union
- Rise of internet
- Rise of “Religious Right”
- 9/11

The Two Old Stories

People left because of:

- Racism
- Misogyny
- Clergy scandal
- Clergy abuse
- Christian nationalism



The Two Old Stories

People left because of:

- Secular progressivism
- Sexual revolution



Casually Dechurched:

30 Million



- Moved
- Attending inconvenient
- Family change
(marriage, divorce, remarriage, birth of a child... etc.)

Dechurched Casualties: 10 Million



- Didn't fit within congregation
- Suffering
- Church hurt
- Clergy scandal

Three Levels of Need



- Nudge
- Dinner Table
- Years or decades of deep friendship



4 Evangelical Dechurching Profiles

- 1 Cultural Christians
- 2 Mainstream Evangelicals

- 3 Exvangelicals
- 4 BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color)



Cultural Christians: **8 Million**

● 58% - male
42% - female

● 87% - Married

● Average Age - 40
Dechurch
Average Age - 29

● 98% - White



Cultural Christians

- Above Average Income
- Above Average Education
- 90% Heterosexual
8% Bisexual
- 87% Work FT
5% Retired



Cultural Christians

- 56% Orthodoxy Score
- 22% Bible is the literal word of God
- 1% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- High youth and college ministry involvement



Cultural Christians

- Center left politically
- U.S. institutions working well for them
- 54% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 32% CNN
- 20% FoxNews



Cultural Christians: Why They Left

1 Attending was inconvenient (18%)

2 My friends were not attending worship services (18%)

3 I moved to a new community (17%)

4 Suffering changed my views of God and/or the congregation (17%)

Cultural Christians: Why They Left

5 I wanted to be able to personally express my gender identity (17%)

6 I chose to worship completely online (16%)

7 Scandal involving clergy in the broader culture (16%)

8 I felt the church was being too restrictive of my sexual freedom (16%)

Cultural Christians: Why They Might Return

1 New friends
(28%)

3 Supernatural
phenomena
(19%)

2 Lonely and want
to make new
friends (22%)

4 Begin to miss
church (19%)

Cultural Christians: Why They Might Return

- 5 Friend invites me (18%)
- 6 Spouse wants to go (18%)
- 7 Move and want to make new friends (18%)
- 8 A good community (16%)

Cultural Christians: What Do They Need

1 Sincere
community

2 Mental health
help

3 Sound doctrine &
spiritual formation

4 Better
engagement in 18-
39 age range

Mainstream Evang

2.5 Million

- 39% - male
61% - female

- Average Age - 40
Dechurch Average
Age - 37

- 66% - Married
15% - Divorced

- 91% - White
6% - Black



Mainstream Evangelicals

● Average
Income

● Average
Education

● 97% -
Heterosexual

● 46% - Work FT
25% - Retired



Mainstream Evangelicals

- 86% Orthodoxy Score
- 59% Bible is the literal word of God
- 98% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- High youth and above average college ministry involvement



Mainstream Evangelicals

- Center right politically
- U.S. institutions working so-so for them
- 36% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 29% Broadcast News
- 23% FoxNews
- 18% CNN



Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Left

1 I moved to a new community (22%)

2 Attending was inconvenient (16%)

3 COVID-19 got me out of the habit (15%)

4 Divorce, remarriage, or another family change (15%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Left

- 5 I didn't fit within the congregation (14%)
- 6 I didn't experience much love within the congregation (12%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Might Return

1 New friends (38%)

3 I find a church I like (34%)

2 God tells me to go back in some significant way (35%)

4 Begin to miss church (33%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: Why They Might Return

5 Feel the distance
from God (32%)

6 A good pastor
(30%)

7 Lonely and want to
make new friends
(22%)

I find a church that
8 take both doctrine
and ethics seriously
(22%)

Mainstream Evangelicals: What Do They Need

1 Relational nudge
from church
person(s)

2 Take doctrine and
ethics seriously

3 Challenge distance
from God

4 Better engagement
in 18-39 age range

Exvangelicals: 2.5 Million

- 35% - male
65% - female
- 54% - Married
17% - Divorced
- Average Age - 53
Dechurch Average
Age - 34
- 82% - White
13% - Black



Exvangelicals

- 70% Orthodoxy Score
- 44% Bible is the literal word of God
- 97% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- Above average youth but low college ministry involvement



Exvangelicals

- Independent to center left
- 18% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- U.S. institutions working badly for them
- 23% Broadcast News
- 20% FoxNews
- 16% CNN



Exvangelicals: Why They Left

1 I didn't fit within the congregation (23%)

2 I moved to a new community (21%)

3 Attending was inconvenient (18%)

4 I didn't experience much love within the congregation (18%)

Exvangelicals: Why They Left

5

I disagreed with the politics of the congregation (15%)

7

I no longer believed what the congregation believed (14%)

6

Negative experiences you personally had in an evangelical church (15%)

8

I disagreed with the politics of the clergy (13%)

Exvangelicals: Why They Might Return

- 1 God tells me to go back in some significant way (28%)
- 2 I find a church I like (27%)
- 3 A good pastor (22%)
- 4 Never going back (21%)

Exvangelicals: Why They Might Return

- 5 Feel the distance from God (19%)
- 6 I find a church who cares about justice and compassion for vulnerable people (17%)
- 7 A good community (17%)
- 8 Begin to miss church (16%)

Exvangelicals: What Do They Need

- 1 Non-partisan church community
- 2 Take doctrine and ethics seriously
- 3 Mental health help
- 4 Empathetic community and clergy

BIPOC: 2.5 Million

- 68% - male
32% - female
- 80% - Married
4% - Divorced
- Average Age - 51
- 76% - Black
- Dechurch Average
- 13% - Hispanic/
Age - 27
- Latino



BIPOC

● Above Average
Income

● 96% -
Heterosexual
2% - Bisexual

● Highest Education ● 92% - Work FT
1% - Retired



BIPOC

- 58% Orthodoxy Score

- 13% “Jesus is the Son of God”

- 29% Bible is the literal word of God

- Low youth but high college ministry involvement



BIPOC

- Independent to center left
- U.S. institutions working badly for them
- 50% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
 - 27% - CNN
 - 27% - FoxNews
 - 14% - MSNBC



BIPOC

- Independent to center left
- U.S. institutions working badly for them
- 50% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
 - 27% - CNN
 - 27% - FoxNews
 - 14% - MSNBC



BIPOC: Why They Left

1 I moved to a new community (21%)

2 Faith just wasn't working (19%)

3 I had other priorities for my time and money (18%)

4 Suffering changed my views of God and/or the congregation (18%)

BIPOC: Why They Left

5

I began to doubt
God's existence
(18%)

7

I didn't see the
congregation doing
enough good in the
community (16%)

6

Scandal involving
clergy in my
congregation (17%)

8

The messages were not
relevant to my life (16%)

BIPOC: Why They Might Return

1 New friends (33%)

2 Move and want to make new friends (27%)

3 Lonely and want to make new friends (27%)

4 Child wants to go (22%)

BIPOC: Why They Might Return

5 Friend invites me
(21%)

7 Spouse wants to go
(18%)

6 A good community
(20%)

8 Feel the distance from
God (18%)

BIPOC: What Do They Need

1 Cultural and emotional intelligence

2 Deep friendship

3 Sound doctrine & spiritual formation

4 Better engagement in the 13-30 age range

Mainline

- 32% - male
68% - female
- 47% - Married
14% - Divorced
- Average Age - 58
Dechurch Average
Age - 32
- 95% - White



Mainline

- Average Income
- 96% - Heterosexual
4% - Bisexual
- Average Education
- 25% - Work FT
41% - Retired



Mainline

- 57% Orthodoxy Score
- 69% “Jesus is the Son of God”
- 15% Bible is the literal word of God
- High youth but very low college ministry involvement



Mainline

- Center left to left
- U.S. institutions working okay for them
- 14% “Racial issues are isolated and rare”
- 29% - Broadcast
- 20% - FoxNews
- 13% - CNN



Mainline: Why They Left

1 I moved to a new community (25%)

2 I had other priorities for time and money (15%)

3 I didn't fit within the congregation (14%)

4 I disagreed with the politics of the congregation (13%)

Mainline: Why They Left

- 5 I began to doubt God's existence (10%)
- 6 Attending was inconvenient (10%)
- 7 Divorce, remarriage, or other family change (9%)
- 8 I didn't experience much love within the congregation (8%)

Mainline: What Do They Need

- 1 Word and deed together
- 2 Avoid racism, misogyny, and partisan politics
- 3 Sound doctrine & spiritual formation
- 4 Higher regard for the Bible



Biggest Myths

1) People leave because of negative experiences with church.



Biggest Myths

2) Young people leave because of secular university.



Biggest Myths

3) People leave the church because they left the faith.



Biggest Myths

4) People are leaving primarily on the secular left.



Biggest Myths

5) People aren't willing to come back.



Biggest Myths

6) America's peak religiosity was around the time of our founding.



Biggest Myths

7) Dechurching is happening primarily to the upwardly mobile.





Biggest Myths

8) All is lost.



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Session 2

Implications for
church planting
& church growth



Session 2

- What can be done
- Top Challenges
- Top Opportunities



What can be done?

1) Hold firm to historic Christianity



What can be done?

2) Invest in 13-18 year olds



What can be done?

3) Learn from the back door



What can be done?

4) Develop substantive membership



What can be done?

5) Relationships!



What can be done?

6) Know when people are
at risk of dechurching:
Backdoor



What can be done?

7) Know when people are
at risk of dechurching:
Frontdoor



What can be done?

8) Find creative ways to use our buildings



What can be done?

9) Be intentional with your digital footprint



What can be done?

10) Take mental health seriously



What can be done?

11) Embrace an exilic posture





What can be done?

10) Take mental health seriously



Mental Health

The mental health of the dechurched evangelicals was not good, esp.:

1. Anxiety
2. Depression
3. Loneliness
4. Suicidal thoughts





Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

1) Need to embrace both confessional & missional framework



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

2) Need to return to the hard work of discipleship and evangelism



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

3) More churches are closing:
2014: 300 more churches
opened than closed
2019: 1500 more churches
closed than opened



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

4) It will be harder for medium sized (150-300) churches without buildings



Top Challenges for Church Planting & Church Growth

5) Need to fund church plants longer than the historic 3-5 year ramp



Book of Common Prayer



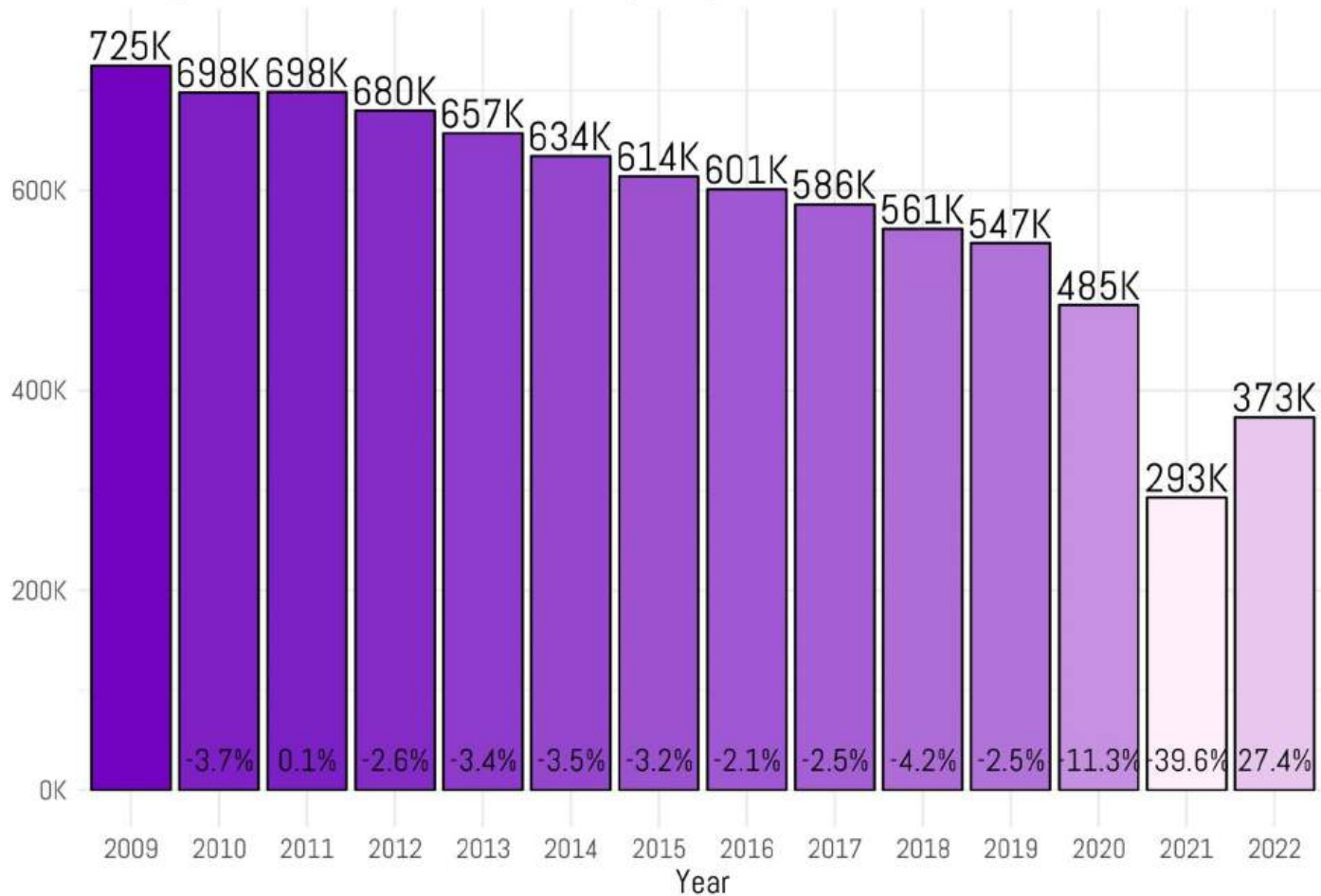
“You are to preach, to declare God's forgiveness to penitent sinners, to pronounce God's blessing, to share in the administration of Holy Baptism and in the celebration of the mysteries of Christ's Body and Blood...”





Open Q&A

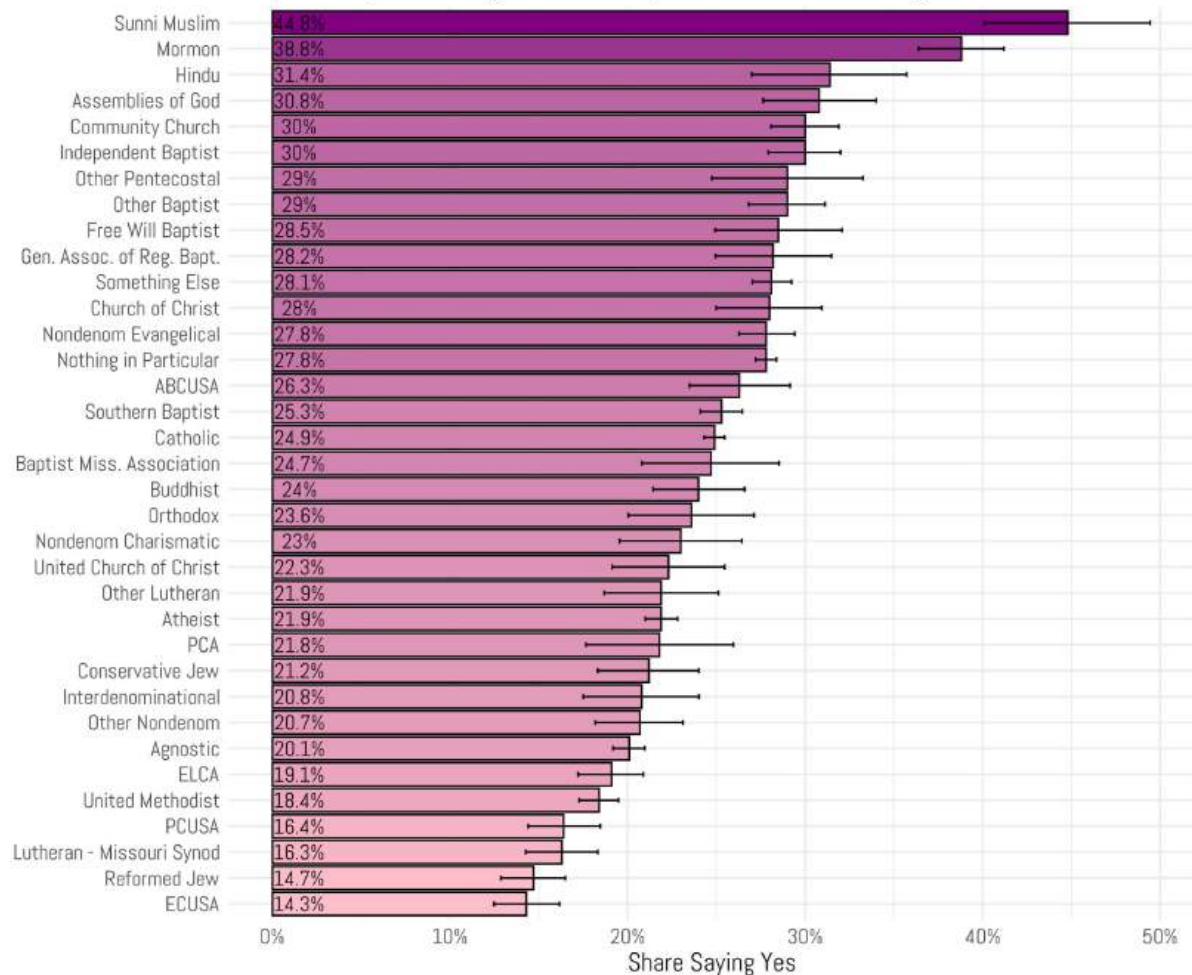
Sunday Church Attendance for the Episcopalians



@ryanburge

Data: <https://www.generalconvention.org/parochialreportresults>

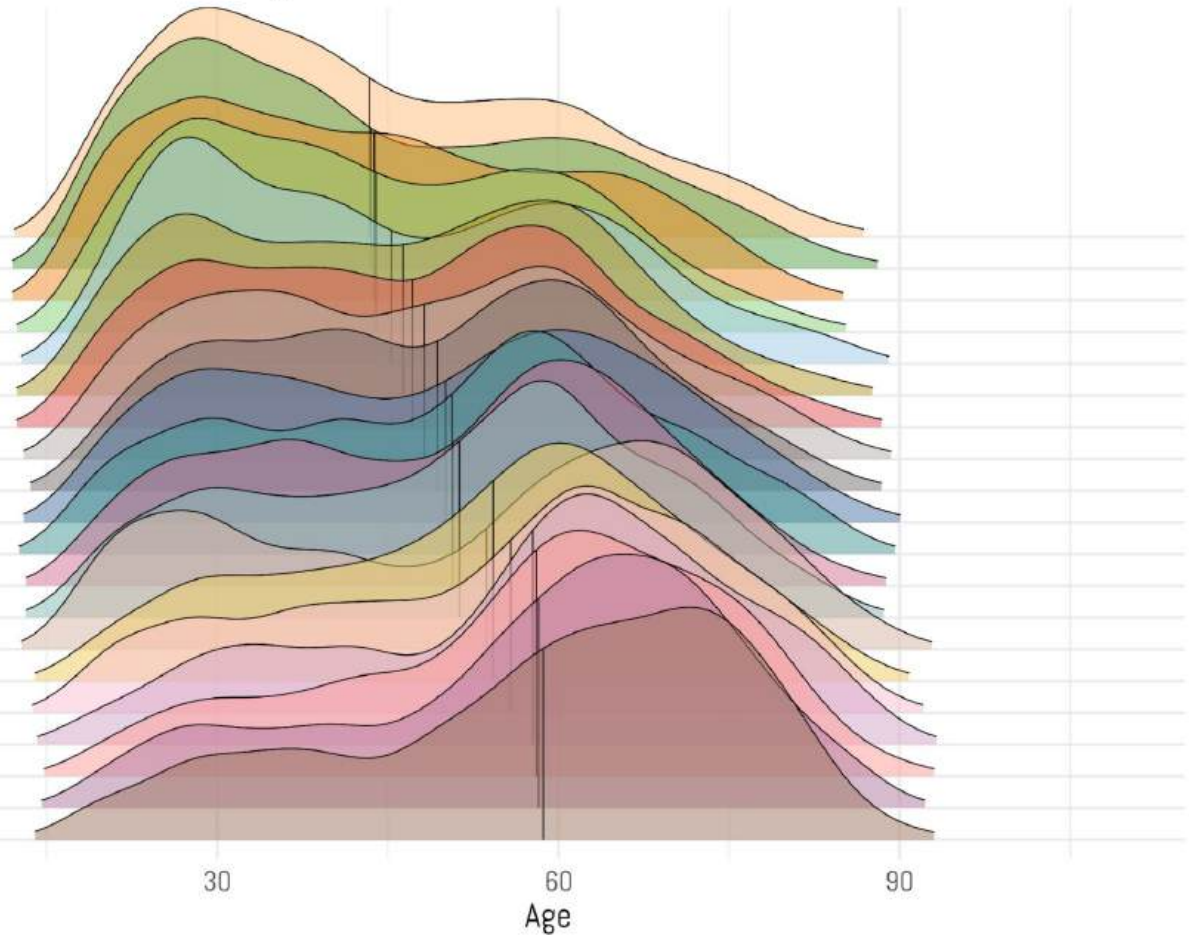
Are you the parent or guardian of any children under the age of 18?

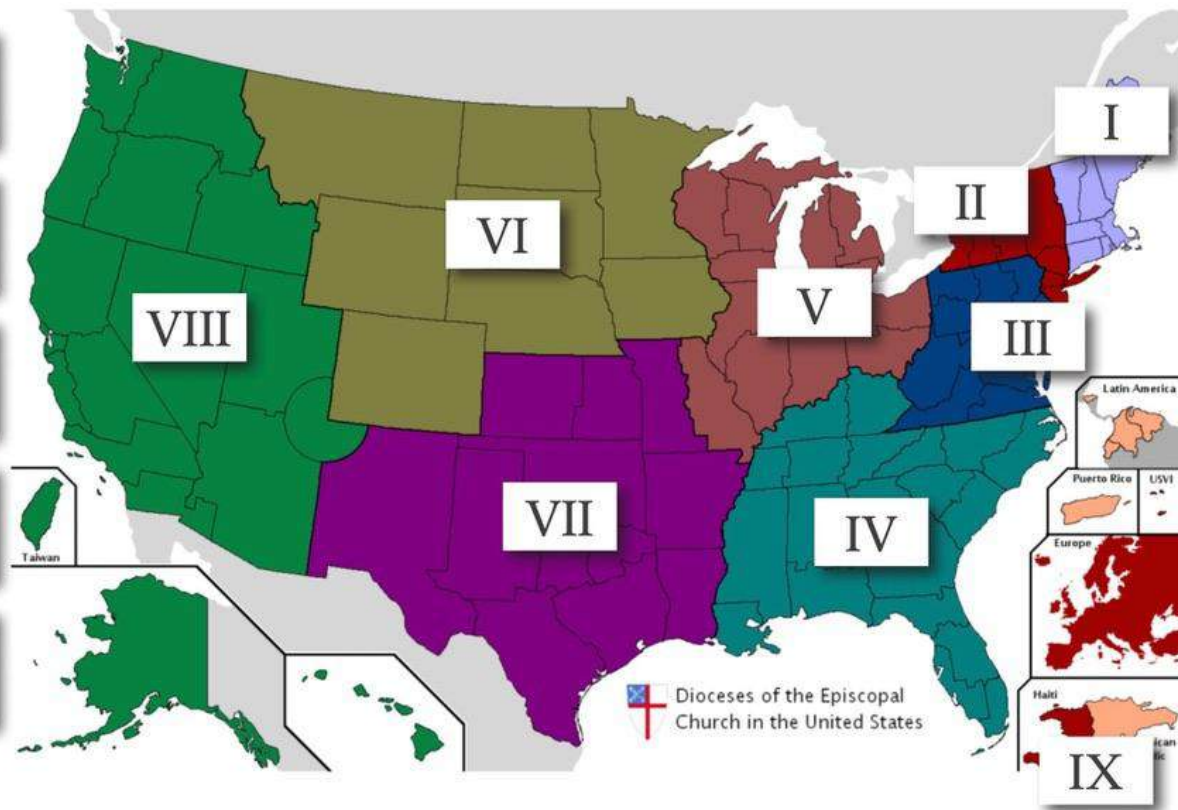


Age Distribution of Religious Traditions

Religious Tradition

Atheist
Agnostic
Buddhist
Nothing in Particular
Mormon
Something Else
Other Baptist
Community Church
Nondenom Evangelical
Catholic
ABCUSA
Other Nondenom
Independent Baptist
Reformed Jew
Southern Baptist
ELCA
PCUSA
United Methodist
Lutheran - Missouri Synod
ECUSA





PROVINCE V

11% of Open Parishes and Missions
7% of Active Baptized Members
9% of ASA

PROVINCE VI

7% of Open Parishes and Missions
4% of Active Baptized Members
5% of ASA

PROVINCE VII

10% of Open Parishes and Missions
12% of Active Baptized Members
13% of ASA

PROVINCE VIII

12% of Open Parishes and Missions
10% of Active Baptized Members
12% of ASA

PROVINCE IX

4% of Open Parishes and Missions
3% of Active Baptized Members
2% of ASA

PROVINCE I

8% of Open Parishes and Missions
8% of Active Baptized Members
7% of ASA

PROVINCE II

16% of Open Parishes and Missions
17% of Active Baptized Members
13% of ASA

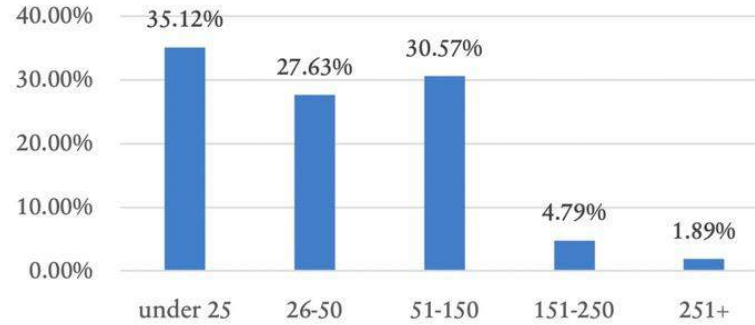
PROVINCE III

14% of Open Parishes and Missions
15% of Active Baptized Members
14% of ASA

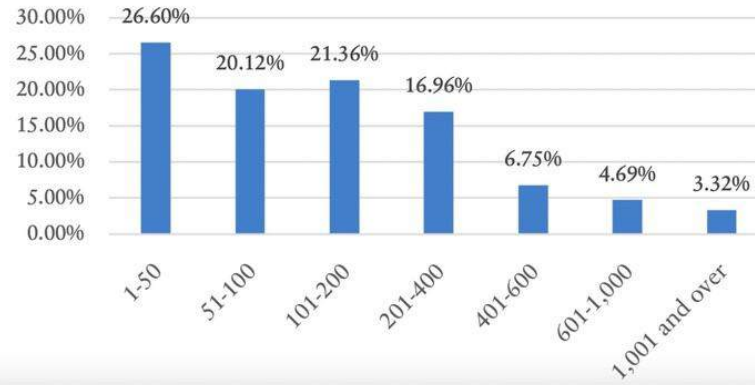
PROVINCE IV

18% of Open Parishes and Missions
24% of Active Baptized Members
25% of ASA

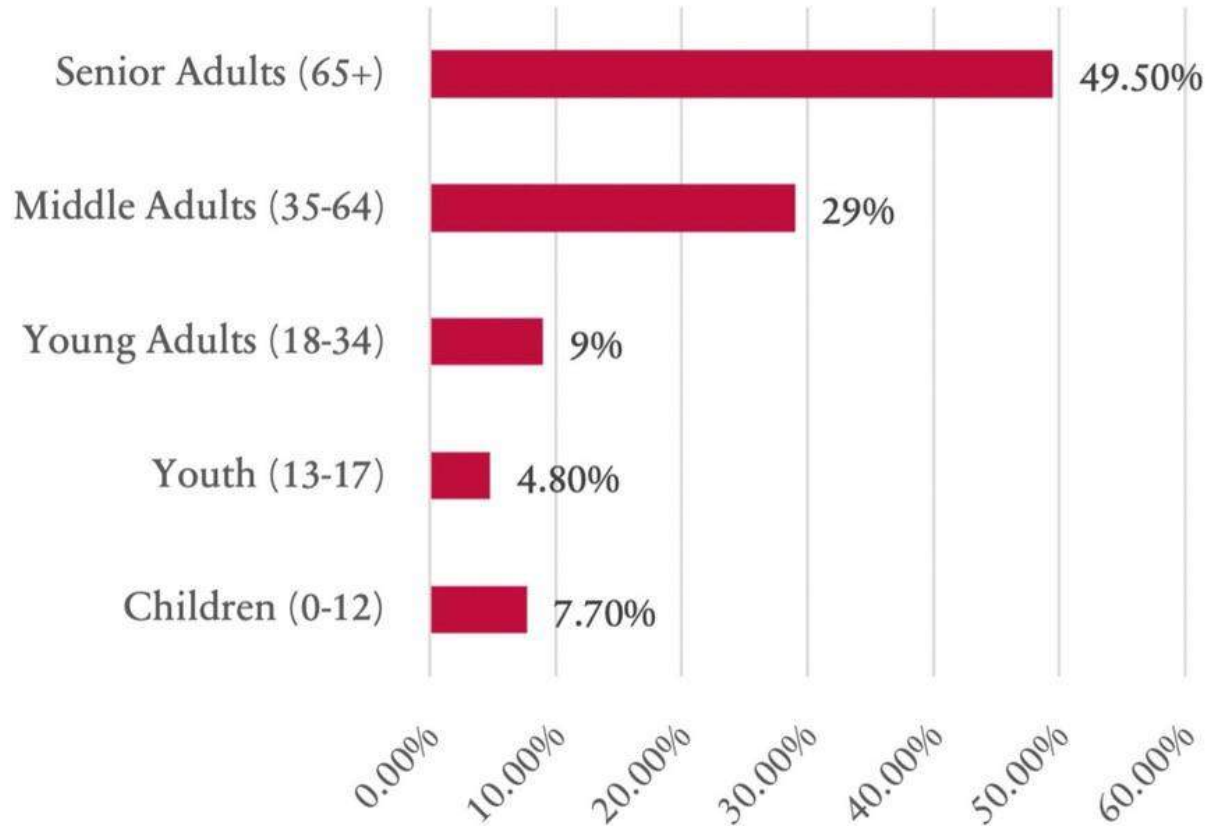
Percent of Congregations
in ASA Size groups



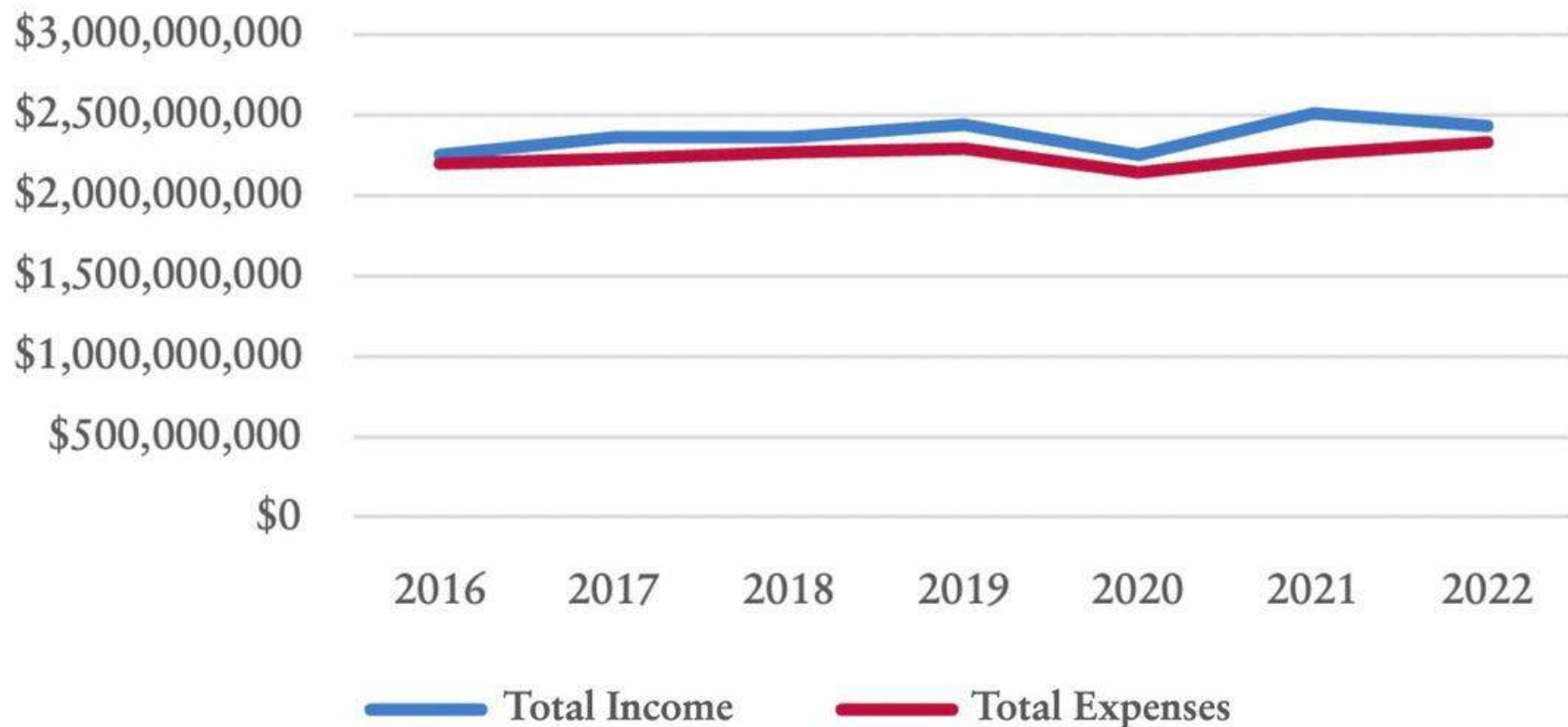
Percent of Congregations
in Membership Size Groups



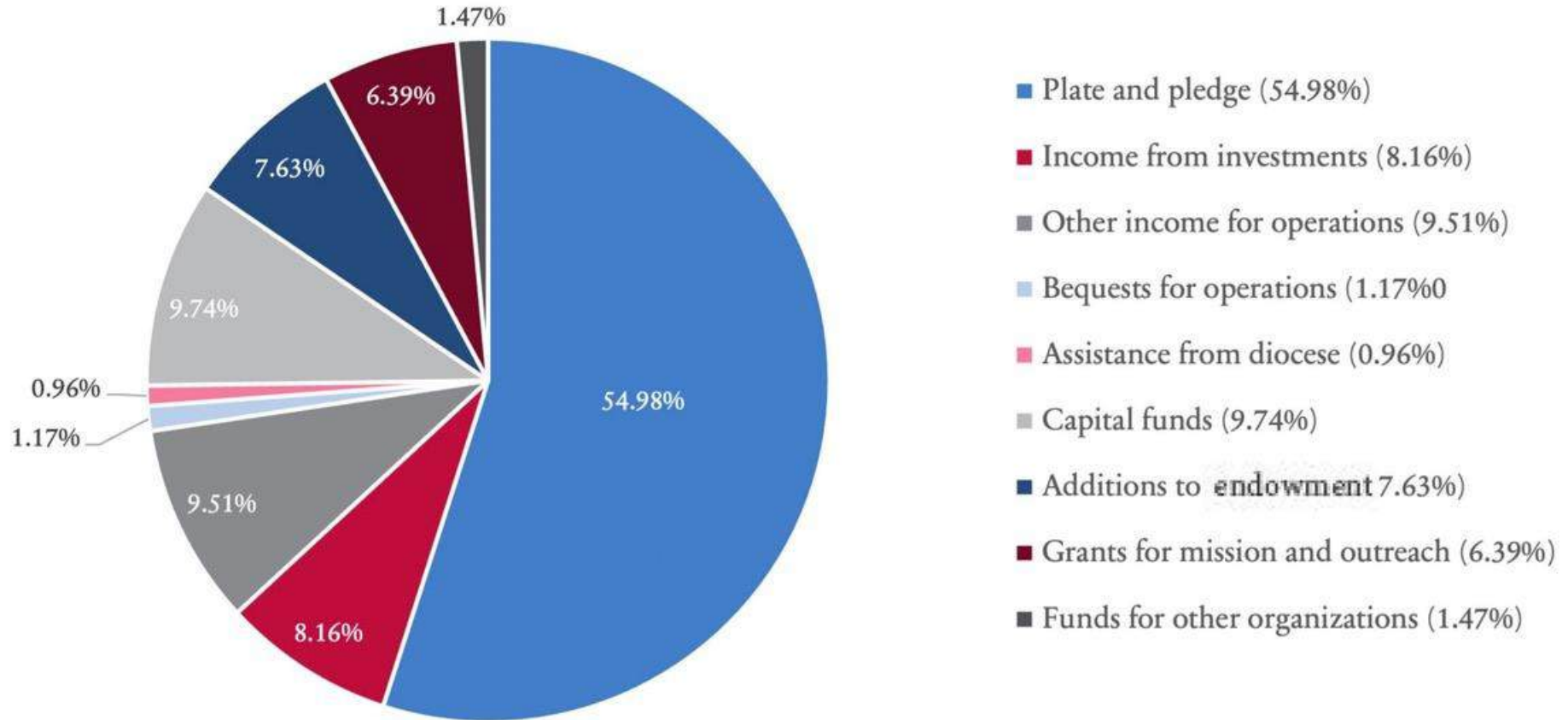
Episcopal Congregations by Age



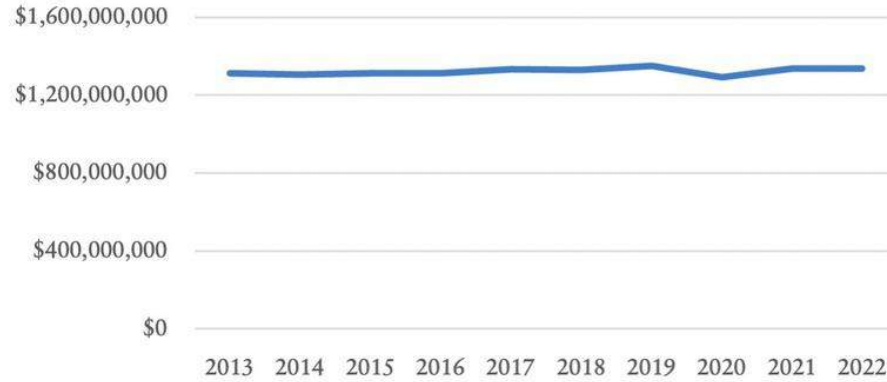
Total Income and Total Expenses



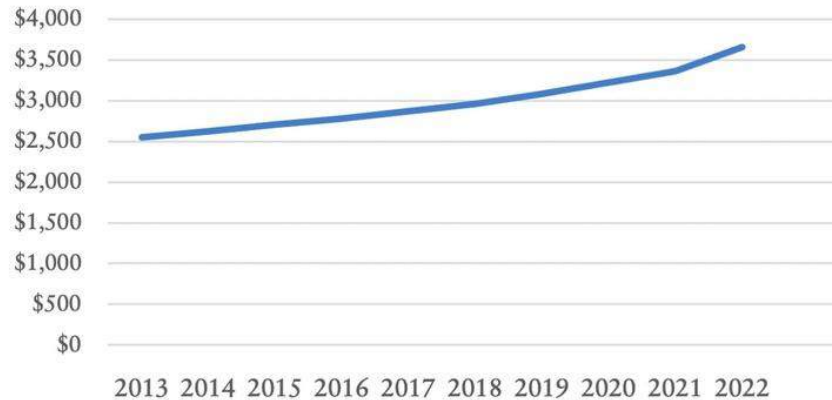
Breakdown of Total Income



Total Plate and Pledge



Average Pledge



Breakdown of Total Expenses

