

Canadian Churches:
The reasons they're dying &
What can be done about it



Less than half of Canadians (48%) now identify as Christian (down 20% since 2011*)

For Millennials (18-34)

27% identify as Christian

- **17% Protestant**
- **11% Catholic** (signals shift in Canadian Christian composition)

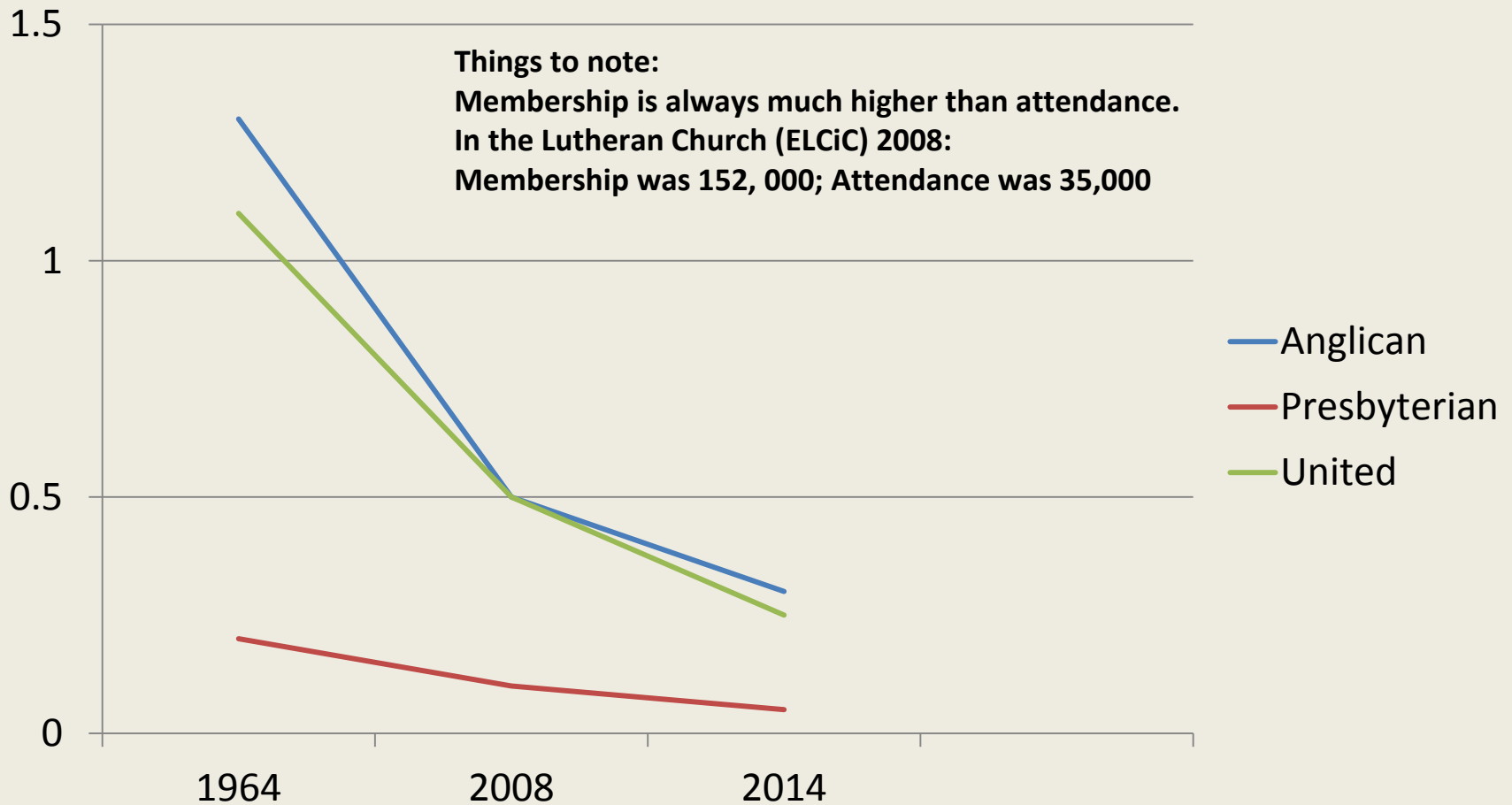
23% non-Christian religion

29% as atheist or agnostic

20% as spiritual NOT religious

***trends suggest Christianity will shrink while other groups grow**

Mainline Protestant Membership



What is the cause of the decline?

No consensus, but most agree it's not...

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Study Background Information

Methodological Approach:

Identify, analyze and compare the traits of growing* and declining* mainline Protestant clergy and congregations

* *Sustained numerical growth/decline of 2% per year over 10 years (2003 to 2013)*

Sample:

-22 mainline churches (mix of growing and declining from the four CND denominations)

-30 clergy (lead and associate pastor) surveyed and interviewed

-2250 congregants surveyed (near even split growing to declining)

-206 congregants interviewed by phone or email (70 new congregants of growing)



Distinct Papers/Results Published in:
Sociology of Religion
Review of Religious Research
Canadian Review of Sociology
Canadian Journal of Sociology
Journal of Cultural Geography

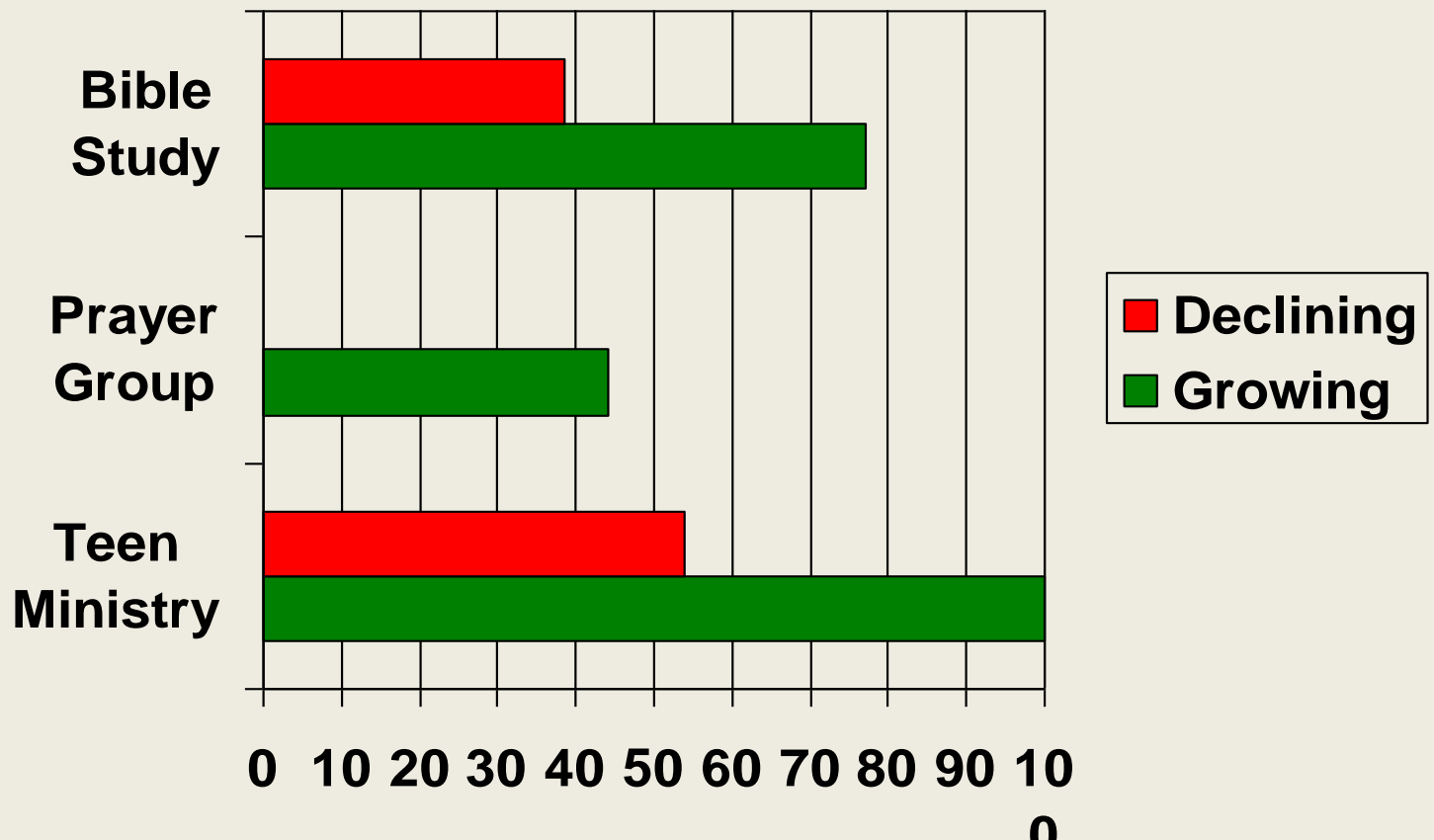
Characteristics of Growing and Declining Churches



Unique Program Emphasis of Growing Churches

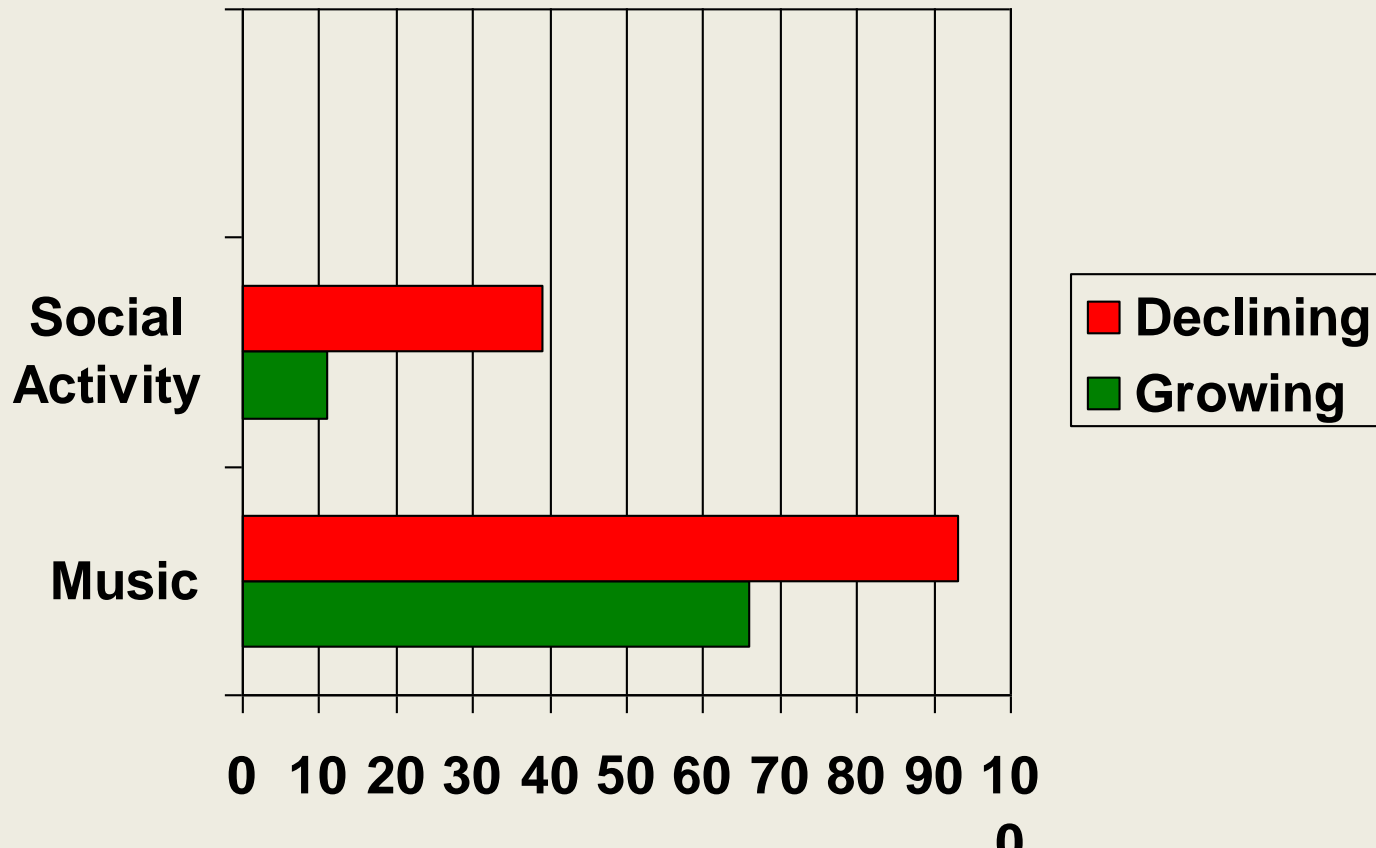
Combining “Key Emphasis” and “A lot of Emphasis”,

Growing Churches put greater emphasis on opportunities for *religious education* and *spiritual formation* than Declining



Unique Program Emphasis of Declining Churches

Conversely, combining “Key Emphasis” and “A lot of Emphasis”, **Declining Churches** put more emphasis on *Music for Worship* and *Social Activities* than Growing



Characteristics of Growing and Declining Pastors



Characteristics of Growing and Declining Church Pastors—Religious Behaviours

Growing Church Pastor

Bible Reading

71%... Daily

Prayer

93%... Several Times a Day

Declining Church Pastor

Bible Reading

19%... Daily

Prayer

69%... Several Times a Day

Characteristics of Growing and Declining Church Pastors—Religious Beliefs

“The beliefs of the Christian faith need to change to stay relevant.”

100% GCP DISagreed (57% strongly);
31% of DCP DISagreed (mix)

“Jesus rose from the dead with a real flesh and blood body, leaving an empty tomb.”

93% GCP agreed (86% strongly);
56% of DCP agreed (37% strongly)

Characteristics of Growing and Declining Church Pastors—Religious Beliefs

“God performs miracles in answer to prayer.”

100% GCP agreed (79% strongly);

44% of DCP agreed (6% strongly)

“It is very important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians.”

100% GCP agreed (79% strongly);

50% of DCP agreed (0% strongly)

Characteristics of Growing and Declining Congregants



Characteristics of Growing and Declining Church Congregants—Religious Behaviours

Growing Church Congregants

Bible Reading

46%... Weekly or more

Prayer

45%... Daily

Declining Church Congregants

Bible Reading

25%... Weekly or more

Prayer

29%... Daily

Characteristics of Growing and Declining Church Congregants—Religious Beliefs

*“The beliefs of the Christian faith need to
change to stay relevant.”*

36% GCC agreed

69% of DCC agreed

*“Jesus rose from the dead with a real flesh and
blood body, leaving an empty tomb.”*

83% GCC agreed

67% of DCC agreed

Characteristics of Growing and Declining Church Congregants—Religious Beliefs

“All major religions are equally good and true.”

43% GCC agreed

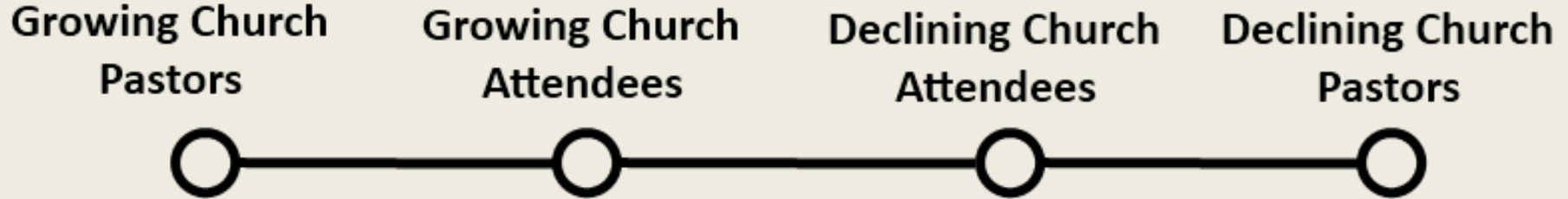
70% of DCC agreed

*“It is very important to encourage non-Christians
to become Christians.”*

78% GCC agreed

56% of DCC agreed

Spectrum of Belief— Greatest Christian Orthodoxy to Least



Spectrum holds true for:

- Belief in importance of evangelism
- Openness to supernatural
- General theological conservatism

Beyond Description to Prediction

Does conservative theology of clergy and congregants predict growth?

Does liberal theology lead to decline?



Our Regression Analysis— An unexpected result

Conservative
theological positioning
of clergy and attendees
is a *significant predictor*
of church growth.

This is NOT what other
research said we should
find



What's with the disconnect?



Church Growth and the “Power” of Conservative Theology



What Reasons Do Newcomers Give for Joining Their Church?

Canadian Review of Sociology

ARTICLE

Factors Influencing Church Choice: An Exploration of Responses from New Attendees at Growing Canadian Mainline Churches

David Millard Haskell , Stephanie Burgoyne, Kevin N. Flatt



Volume 53, Issue 4

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Pages 409-436



Related



Information

Why I Joined this Church

Top Answers

*the people in the congregation are friendly

*the pastor's preaching is high quality

*the church articulates a clear Biblical perspective



A Good Topic for the Q&A

You should want to know:

-What does a friendly congregation look like?
How do you ensure you have one?

-What does high quality preaching look like?
And are you willing to admit that you might not
be reaching that goal?

(e.g. 94% of University profs)

What do the Clergy & Congregants Say is Happening in their Church?

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Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline

Kevin N Flatt ✉, D Millard Haskell, Stephanie Burgoyne

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Supply vs. Demand

Problem with Supply:

People have a desire or need for the product (Christianity) but something about the “current version” of the product is flawed or the way its offered is flawed.

Problem with Demand:

People have less desire for the product (Christianity) because external forces are making people want it less



WHAT LEADS TO DECLINE

You believe that external factors,
not internal choices, have the
greatest impact on whether or not
you grow

You are NOT clearly,
passionately, unequivocally, and
repeatedly articulating a doctrinal
position that aligns with
traditional Christian beliefs

You are NOT making outreach to
the young and programs for
youth a top priority

You are NOT promoting a palpable
atmosphere of joy and friendliness
within your congregation

You are NOT providing a
contemporary worship experience
that is professional, innovative, and
sincere

You are NOT providing high quality
preaching

You are NOT providing parents with
adequate instruction as to how to
keep their kids in the faith