### GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS: A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE UNITED STATES 2008

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by

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#### Preface

Studies reveal good news and bad news about Churches of Christ in the United States.<sup>1</sup> That was the case in 1994 when the Harding Center for Church Growth Studies published the booklet *Separating Fact From Fiction: A Realistic Assessment of Churches of Christ in the United States.* That is still the situation today.

That 1994 report has long since been out of print and out of date. It included figures from the 1994 edition of *Churches of Christ in the United States.*<sup>2</sup> It also included data from two studies by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies: one for 1990<sup>3</sup> and an earlier study for 1980.<sup>4</sup> However, the report needed more recent data.

The current report includes the most recent figures from the 2006 edition of *Churches of Christ in the United States* and from the CD update.<sup>5</sup> It also includes data from the study by church statisticians for 2000.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, some preliminary results are now available from a nationwide research project. In 2006 the presidents of Christian colleges and universities provided a Christian Higher Education Foundation grant to cover expenses for a major study. This research project was designed to provide current reliable answers to several questions of interest to these presidents and all church leaders.

How many young people who are members of the Churches of Christ when they graduate from high school continue as members after they leave home?

How many leave the Churches of Christ and join some other religious group?

How many currently have no religious affiliation?

How many of those who stay in Churches of Christ fill any church leadership or service roles?

What is the divorce rate among members of Churches of Christ?

How many young people in Churches of Christ graduate from high school in the United States each year?

How many young people in Churches of Christ attend college?

How many of these attend a Christian college or university?

What are the differences between those who attend a private Christian college or university and those who attend some other kind of school?

This study comprises several major parts. More than 3,000 students at Christian colleges and universities completed a Student Survey. More than 2,000 alumni of Christian colleges and universities completed an Alumni Survey. Both of these studies have been completed. A third part of this research has involved a study of campus ministries operated by Churches of Christ at state-supported colleges and universities — one survey for campus ministry leaders and another for students who participate in campus ministry activities. That study should be completed by fall 2008.

The largest part of this study involved a survey of more than 3,000 congregations in the United States. Church leaders were asked to make lists of young people in their congregations who graduated from high school in the last 10 years (1997-2006). Then these church leaders were asked several questions about each of these individuals.

Is this person still a member of your congregation or of another congregation of the Churches of Christ? If not, has he or she joined some other religious group or does he or she have no current religious affiliation?

What is this person's marital status?

Does this person fill any church leadership or service roles?

Did this person attend college?

If so, did he or she attend a Christian college or university?

These individuals were not contacted directly. Previous efforts have found that most of those who are no longer affiliated with the Churches of Christ do not respond to surveys such as this. The indirect approach is a method that I have used with more than 100 churches where I have conducted congregational assessments over the last 30 years. Church leaders have been able to answer these questions about most of these individuals. But given the time and effort required to collect this information, we expected a low response rate. Thus far we have information on almost 3,000 individuals. We now have more than 80 percent of the data need to fill all of the slots for a valid cluster sample.<sup>7</sup>

This report is intended to provide much more than an update and revision of that 1994 booklet. The goal is to provide church leaders with current reliable information regarding a wide variety of issues.

#### Introduction

As the title of this booklet suggests, studies reveal good news and bad news about Churches of Christ in the United States. The good news is that most of the bad news church members are likely to hear is not true. The bad news is that the good news is not as good as it ought to be.

At least three groups of people in Churches of Christ may find it difficult to believe some of the things in this report.

1. Some people advocate various changes. In order to establish their case, they must first establish that there is a need for change. They may find it hard to believe parts of this report indicating that things are not as bad as they have claimed.

2. Others defend the *status quo* and argue that there is no need for change. They may find it difficult to believe parts of this report indicating that things are not as good as they have claimed.

3. A much larger group includes people who have a tendency to notice a few dramatic cases that they have observed and project them onto all Churches of Christ throughout the nation. They may know several members of their generation who left the Churches of Christ. They may know several Christians who divorced. Most of the congregations they know personally may be declining as younger members leave and the average age in the congregation increases. Such people may find it hard to believe that Churches of Christ throughout the nation may not be exactly like congregations in their limited field of experience.

The only thing that I know to do is to ask those who are skeptical to study the report carefully.

#### **Relative Size**

Although the Churches of Christ has almost 13,000 congregations in the United States, 45 percent of these have fewer than 50 members and more than 70 percent have fewer than 100 members.<sup>8</sup> Many members of the Churches of Christ grew up with the perception that they belong to a religious group that is

very small when compared with large denominations. Such individuals may easily grow discouraged thinking that they and just a few others who share their beliefs are virtually alone. In 1 Kings 19:1-18, that is what happened to the prophet Elijah. He thought he was the only one left who served Jehovah. He was so discouraged that he wanted to die. But Elijah's perceptions were not accurate. God told him there were still "7,000 who had not bowed down to Baal." Knowing he was not alone gave Elijah the courage to return to the work God had given him to do.

The Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies has identified approximately 250 separate religious groups in America that are identified as "Christian." Each of the 14 largest of these groups has 1 million or more adherents.<sup>9</sup> They account for more than 90 percent of all adherents in all groups identified as "Christian." Thirty religious bodies have 100,000 to 999,999 adherents. They account for 7 percent of the nation's adherents. Each of the rest has fewer than 100,000 adherents. All of these together account for just over 2 percent of adherents. Table 1 shows the number of adherents in the 14 largest religious groups in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

## Table 1 Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by Number of Adherents in 2000

Religious Bodies	Adherents
Catholic Church	62,035,042
Southern Baptist Convention	19,881,467
United Methodist Church	10,350,629
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	5,113,418
Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints	4,224,026
Presbyterian Church (USA)	3,141,566
Assemblies of God	2,561,998
Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)	2,521,062
Episcopal Church	2,314,758
American Baptist Churches in the USA	1,767,462
United Church of Christ <sup>11</sup>	1,698,918
Churches of Christ	1,645,584
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ <sup>12</sup>	1,439,253
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	1,017,784

Table 2, on the following page, lists these same 14 religious bodies ranked by number of members rather than by adherents. But in the 2000 study, three

groups did not report the number of members (Catholics, Mormons, and Episcopalians). In this table, the adherent statistics are listed for these groups. The number of members in these three groups could not be more than the number of adherents and probably is a lot less.

## Table 2Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by<br/>Number of Members in 2000

<b>Religious Bodies</b> Catholic Church	<b>Members</b> *62,035,042
Southern Baptist Convention	15,922,039
United Methodist Church	8,326,616
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	3,798,370
Later Day Saints (Mormon)	*4,224,026
Presbyterian Church (USA)	2,516,816
Episcopal Church	*2,314,758
Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)	1,922,763
Assemblies of God	1,489,281
American Baptist Churches in the USA	1,417,543
United Church of Christ	1,371,593
Churches of Christ	1,264,808
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	1,156,699
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	817,902

## Although 250 religious bodies in America are identified as "Christian," only 11 denominations have more members or adherents than the Churches of Christ.

In Table 3, on the following page, the 14 largest religious bodies identified as "Christian" are ranked by number of congregations.

### Only the three largest denominations have more congregations in the United States than the Churches of Christ.

Part of the reason for this is that the Churches of Christ has a relatively large number of small congregations. This, however, is not a total explanation. In his book *The Small Church IS Different*, Lyle Shaller claims that 25 percent of all Protestant congregations in the United States and Canada have fewer than 35 people in attendance at their largest weekly worship assembly, and one half average fewer than 75.<sup>13</sup> In church growth literature, a "small church" is defined

as a congregation with fewer than 200 in attendance, no more than one full-time church-supported minister, and the dynamics of a **family reunion**. A "large church" is defined as a congregation with 300 or more in attendance, two or more full-time church-supported ministers, and the dynamics of an **organization**. Congregations with 200 to 299 in attendance are classified as "**transitional churches**," and most of these never make the transition to "large churches." By this definition, 87.9 percent of all congregations of the Churches of Christ in the United States are "small churches," 5.5 percent are "transitional churches," and only 6.7 percent are "large churches."

## Table 3Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by<br/>Number of Congregations in 2000

Religious Bodies	Congregations
Southern Baptist Convention	41,514
United Methodist Church	35,721
Catholic Church	21,791
Churches of Christ	13,027
Assemblies of God	11,880
Later Day Saints (Mormon)	11,515
Presbyterian Church (USA)	. 11,106
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	10,739
Episcopal Church	7,314
Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)	6,077
United Church of Christ	5,863
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	5,471
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	3,339

#### **Geographic Distribution**

Are Churches of Christ concentrated in just a few states? The answer to that question is "Yes, but...." It is not really that simple. On the following page, Table 4 shows the geographic distribution of Churches of Christ by states. In 13 states, the percentage of adherents, members, and congregations among the Churches of Christ in the United States is greater than that state's percentage of the nation's population. In these 13 states, the Churches of Christ have a relatively high concentration of adherents, members, and congregations. More than one-third of adherents, members, and congregations are located in just two states: Texas and Tennessee. More than half are located in these two states plus Alabama, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. More than 70 percent are in the 13 states shown in Table 4.

#### Table 4

#### Distribution of Churches of Christ in States With a Relatively High Concentration of Adherents, Members, and Congregations

		Cumulative
States	Percent	Percent
Texas	22.4	22.4
Tennessee	13.2	35.6
Alabama	7.2	42.8
Arkansas	5.3	48.1
Oklahoma	4.9	53.0
Kentucky	3.6	56.6
Georgia	3.2	59.8
Missouri	2.7	62.5
Mississippi	2.6	65.1
Indiana	2.1	67.2
West Virginia	1.5	68.7
Kansas	1.1	69.8
New Mexico	1.1	70.9

This distribution makes a good argument for those in favor of more domestic church-planting mission work in the other states. The 37 other states have more than three-fourths of the nation's population but less than 30 percent of adherents, members, and congregations among the Churches of Christ.

But this level of concentration is not unusual when compared with other religious groups in the United States. Church statisticians regard the number of counties in which a religious group has a presence as being a good indication of how dispersed that group is throughout the nation. Table 5, on the following page, provides such a comparison. When this study was done in 2000, there were 3,141 counties or county-equivalents in the United States.

### Churches of Christ have a presence in more counties than all but four denominations.

Furthermore, three of those denominations are the largest in the nation. All other things being equal, one would expect them to be present in a large number of counties. The only denomination about the same size as the Churches of Christ that had a presence in more counties was the Assemblies of God.

#### Table 5 Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by Number of Counties in Which Each Had a Presence

Nu	Number of Counties in Which	
Religious Bodies	Each Group Had a Presence	
United Methodist Church	3,003	
Catholic Church	2,987	
Southern Baptist Convention	2,670	
Assemblies of God	2,616	
Churches of Christ	2,429	
Presbyterian Church (USA)	2,377	
Episcopal Church	2,118	
Later Day Saints (Mormon)	1,802	
Lutheran Church (Missouri Sy	nod) 1,801	
Evangelical Lutheran Church	in America 1,756	
Christian Churches and Church	hes of Christ 1,600	
Christian Church (Disciples of	Christ) 1,290	
United Church of Christ	1,229	
American Baptist Churches in	the USA 1,111	

Another factor to consider is how evenly a religious group is distributed throughout the nation. The average number of adherents per county shows this.

## Table 6 Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by Average Number of Adherents Per County

	Average Number of	
Religious Bodies	Adherents Pe	er County
Churches of Christ		677
Christian Church (Disciples o	f Christ)	789
Christian Churches and Churches	ches of Christ	900
Assemblies of God		979
Episcopal Church		1,093
Presbyterian Church (USA)		1,322
United Church of Christ		1,382
Lutheran Church (Missouri S	ynod)	1,400
American Baptist Churches in	the USA	1,591
Later Day Saints (Mormon)		2,344
United Methodist Church		3,447
Southern Baptist Convention		7,449
Catholic Church		20,658

The lower the average number of adherents per county, the more evenly a group is distributed throughout the nation. The comparison in Table 6, on the previous page, takes size into consideration.

### Churches of Christ are more evenly distributed throughout the nation than any other American religious body.

The other two Restoration Movement heirs are in second and third place on Table 6. There may have been something about the Restoration Plea that motivated pioneers of the Restoration Movement to move their families into areas where they could preach the gospel and plant new congregations. Would that it were so today!

#### **Growth and Decline**

Some members of the Churches of Christ in the United States have grown up in congregations that are declining. It is easy for them to project their experience onto all Churches of Christ throughout the nation. Actually, Churches of Christ are not declining. The following tables report growth or decline in the amounts and percentages of adherents, members, and congregations in major religious bodies in the United States.

## Table 7Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by Amount of<br/>Growth or Decline in Number of Adherents, 1980-2000

Religious Bodies	Growth or Decline
Catholic Church	14,532,890
Southern Baptist Convention	3,599,775
Later Day Saints (Mormon)	1,539,282
Assemblies of God	949,343
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	311,328
Churches of Christ	45,407
Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)	-101,785
American Baptist Churches in the USA	-155,005
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	-195,193
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	-266,525
United Church of Christ	-397,096
Episcopal Church	-508,641
Presbyterian Church (USA)	-871,269
United Methodist Church	-1,201,482

## Although 250 religious bodies in America are identified as "Christian," only five had more growth in number of adherents from 1980 to 2000 than the Churches of Christ had.

Valid comparisons of growth **rates (percentages)** must be limited to groups in the same size category. Table 8 shows the growth rate among the 14 largest religious groups identified as "Christian" in the United States.

## Table 8 Major American Religious Bodies Ranked by Rate of Growth or Decline in Number of Adherents, 1980-2000

Religious Bodies	Percentage of Growth or Decline
Assemblies of God	58.9
Later Day Saints (Mormon)	57.3
Catholic Church	30.6
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	27.6
Southern Baptist Convention	22.1
Churches of Christ	2.8
Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)	-3.9
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	-5.0
American Baptist Churches in the USA	-8.1
United Methodist Church	-10.4
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	-16.1
Episcopal Church	-18.0
United Church of Christ	-18.9
Presbyterian Church (USA)	-21.7

Among major religious bodies identified as "Christian" in the United States during the last three decades of the 20th century, the best growth rates per decade were:

1970s	Assemblies of God	70.0%
1980s	Assemblies of God	35.0%
1990s	Later Day Saints (Mormon)	16.1%
	Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	16.0%
	Assemblies of God	15.9%

In the 1990s, there was a virtual tie for first place among these three groups. Notice, however, that the growth rate was cut in half in each of these decades. The climate for church growth in America has declined.

## The six major American religious bodies that grew in the last two decades of the 20th century are much more conservative theologically than the eight that declined.

The same pattern is observed when the comparison is based on number of members or number of congregations. The next decadal study of American religious bodies will not be conducted until 2010. Therefore, it is not possible to do a more recent comparison of other major religious groups with the Churches of Christ. But it is possible to compare figures for 2000 with the most recent (2006) figures for the Churches of Christ.

### In the last two decades of the 20th century, the Churches of Christ in the United States grew by:

2.8 percent in number of adherents,

2.0 percent in number of members, and

2.4 percent in number of congregations.

In the period from 1980 to 2006, the Churches of Christ in the United States grew by:

2.5 percent in number of adherents,

2.1 percent in number of members, and

1.9 percent in number of congregations.

### While Churches of Christ have not grown very much since 1980, *Churches of Christ have not declined as many people have claimed*.

Later in this report, when we consider the "Bad News" side of the ledger, we will see that Churches of Christ in some states have declined throughout this period. But churches in other states have grown by just enough to offset the decline elsewhere.

#### **Correcting Misunderstandings**

In the 1960s, several almanacs and yearbooks reported that the Churches of Christ had 17,000 congregations with more than 2 million members and 2.5 to 3 million adherents. In 1980 a very careful and systematic census of congregations by Mac Lynn found only 12,762 congregations with 1,240,820 members and 1,601,661 adherents.<sup>14</sup> That seems to show a major decline.

This, however, is like comparing apples and oranges. Those reports of 17,000 congregations in the 1960s were based on inflated mailing lists that often included multiple names and addresses for the same congregation. The reports

of 2 million members and 2.5 to 3 million adherents was based on estimates of how many people throughout the nation would indicate "Churches of Christ" as their religious affiliation if asked. Mac Lynn's report counted the number of people claimed as members by a congregation.<sup>15</sup>

Another possible source of misunderstanding comes from reports that church members connected with Christian colleges and universities may have heard. These schools buy lists of high school students who take the ACT or SAT and indicate "Church of Christ" as their religious affiliation. Just a few years ago, those "Church of Christ" lists included more than 23,000 high school students. In recent years, however, the number of high school students indicating "Church of Christ" as their religious affiliation has declined to only 18,000. That appears to indicate a major decline in number of members.

Most church members who heard about this decline probably noticed the size of it. As a student of church statistics, however, I noticed that those numbers were far too large. One percent of the U.S. population graduates from high school each year. The study I am currently conducting for the Christian Higher Education Foundation has found that 1 percent of adherents in Churches of Christ also graduate from high school each year. But that would be only 16,000. Furthermore, high school students who do not plan to attend college do not usually take the ACT or SAT. In preliminary results of the study I am conducting for presidents of Christian colleges and universities, 80 percent of young people in Churches of Christ who graduate from high school go on to attend college. That would bring the number below 13,000.

The reason for "Church of Christ" numbers being so large in ACT and SAT lists is that some students from the fellowship identified as "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" are probably checking the "Church of Christ" box since the only other close options are "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or just "Other." One indication that this is the correct explanation is that ACT and SAT lists show Ohio as the state with the greatest number of "Church of Christ" students. In Ohio most congregations of the "instrumental brethren" use the "Church of Christ" designation rather than "Christian Church." But Ohio is not the state with the most members of the non-instrumental fellowship.

That probably explains why those "Church of Christ" numbers in ACT and SAT lists are so large. It does not explain why they have declined from more than 23,000 to only 18,000. That decline is real, and it is important. As an educated guess, I would offer a suggestion that this decline may reflect some uncertainty on the part of young people in either or both of these fellowships. They may not be sure if they will want to continue as members of these religious groups after they leave home. Scholars who study the sociology of religion have suggested that "denominational loyalty" is not as strong with young people today as it was in the past.

One other misunderstanding needs to be corrected. This one comes from a comparison of 1990 and 2000 figures for Churches of Christ in the United States. That comparison indicates a decline of 1.1 percent in number of congregations, 1.6 percent in number of members, and 2.3 percent in number of adherents. But the 1990 figures included congregations identified with the Boston/Crossroads Discipling Movement. In 1990 Kip McKean, the leader of that movement, wanted these congregations to be listed with all other Churches of Christ. In 1994, however, McKean asked that these congregations be listed separately as "International Churches of Christ." In 2000 they claimed to have 99 congregations in the United States with 56,952 members and 79,161 adherents. That means that Churches of Christ not identified with the Discipling Movement actually declined by only 0.3 percent in number of congregations, and they grew by 3.0 percent in number of members and 2.5 percent in number of adherents.

#### **Retention/Dropout Rates**

Some members of the Churches of Christ in the United States may know several individuals in their home congregation who have left Churches of Christ and joined other religious groups or just have no current religious affiliation. Since these church members may not have access to any reliable current data on averages throughout the nation, they may simply project what they have observed in their limited field of experience onto all Churches of Christ throughout the nation.

These church members may not know what scholars who study the sociology of religion have known for a long time: Young adulthood is a period in life when there is a sharp decline in all of the "indices of religiosity" — such things as church membership, church attendance, Bible study, prayer, etc. The opening paragraph in an article by Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler is worth considering:

The young adult years of many Americans are marked by a clear decline in outward religious expressions, which is popularly thought to hit bottom during — and perhaps because of — the college experience. This is not news. In the early 1980s, nearly 60 percent of young adults reported attending church less frequently than they did during adolescence. Dropping out of organized religion altogether is also evident. Estimates of religious disaffiliation in emerging adulthood typically fall between 30 and 40 percent. Seemingly no religious group is immune to this phenomenon:

Catholics, Presbyterians and Mormons all lose more members during this stage of life than during any other.<sup>16</sup>

A recent issue of the Christian Chronicle ran an article titled "Are We Losing Our Young People?" One of the people they interviewed was a campus minister at a large public university in Florida. He estimated that the dropout rate was around 80 percent. That figure is probably accurate for members of the Churches of Christ at the state-supported school where he leads a campus ministry. One of the writers at the Christian Chronicle also interviewed me. I told him that the last time anyone conducted a nationwide survey studying this question was in the early 1990s when Lewis, Dodd, and Tippens were doing research for their book, The Gospel According to Generation X.<sup>17</sup> They reported that 55 percent of young people in Churches of Christ were staying in Churches of Christ, and 45 percent were leaving. I gave that figure to the reporter from the Christian Chronicle as the most recent estimate based on a nationwide survey. But I also told the Chronicle reporter that over the past 30 years, I have conducted congregational assessments in more than 100 churches. In those churches. I used the same method that I have recently employed in the Christian Higher Education Foundation research. I asked church leaders to make a list of all young people who were members of their congregation when they graduated from high school and then answer a few questions about each one. In the combined results from these congregational assessments. I have found the same thing that Lewis, Dodd, and Tippens did: Approximately 55 percent are staying in Churches of Christ. But I found something different about the remaining 45 percent.

In these congregational assessments, I asked church leaders to focus on the previous 10 years. I then asked them to go back as far as they could in church records and in collective memories of youth ministers, high school Bible class teachers, parents, grandparents and friends in order to answer questions about these individuals. I found that on average, approximately one-third dropped out of the church and never returned. However, I also found that approximately 12 percent dropped out of the church when they left home but then returned after they married and had children. Lewis, Dodd, and Tippens were not going back far enough to pick up the return phenomenon. The study I am presently conducting for the Christian Higher Education Foundation has the same limitation. It does not go back far enough to pick up the return phenomenon — if it is still happening.

Preliminary results of this study have yielded some interesting results: 59.7 percent still list "Churches of Christ" as their religious affiliation, 18.9 percent are now members of some other religious group, and 21.4 percent have no present religious affiliation.

There were also some interesting results in a survey of alumni who were members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled at a Christian college or university:

- 83.5 percent are members of a local congregation of the Churches of Christ,
- 7.8 percent are not presently members of a local congregation but would still indicate "Churches of Christ" as their religious affiliation,
- 6.5 percent are now members of some other religious group, and
- 2.4 percent have no present religious affiliation.

When all alumni are included in the report — members of the Churches of Christ and others — results show:

- 83.1 percent were members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled and are still members,
- 2.0 percent were not members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled but are now,
- 8.1 percent were members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled but now are members of a different religious group — or have no present religious affiliation (that is the dropout rate), and
- 7.0 percent were not members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled and still are not.

Keep in mind that the dropout rate of 8.1 percent applies only to alumni of Christian colleges and universities. The dropout rate of 40.3 percent was limited to those who graduated from high school in the past 10 years. It would take a much larger study to determine the exact dropout rate among members of Churches of Christ in all age groups. But both of these "snapshots" would indicate that the dropout rate is not as large as it was in the early 1990s and is far lower than many church members would have guessed.

#### Factors Involved in Retention/Dropout Rates

Many church members have heard the claim that "a large majority of young people in Churches of Christ who attend college do not go to a Christian school, but a large majority of those who go to a public institution have dropped out of the church by the time they graduate."

That statement may be true, but it is also misleading. I have conducted several congregational assessments for churches that have campus ministries at a state-supported college or university. Church leaders in these congregations tell me that Christian young people who drop out while attending one of these schools never attended church services at a local congregation and never participated in

campus ministry activities. They dropped out of the church as soon as they left home.

Those who attend a Christian college or university are more likely to continue as members of Churches of Christ after they graduate from college. But the factor that best indicates the probability that a young person in the Churches of Christ will stay in this fellowship is his or her level of involvement with a local congregation while in school.

Christian young people who attend somewhere other than a Christian college or university but are actively involved with a local congregation while in school are more likely to remain as members of Churches of Christ after they graduate than those who attend a Christian college or university but are not actively involved with a local congregation while in school.

This is not to suggest that there is no advantage to attending a Christian college or university. There is a clear advantage. When young Christians graduate from high school and leave home, they are faced with some of the most serious spiritual challenges. If they do not attend college but go straight into the workforce, they may find little help in dealing with these spiritual challenges. If they attend a state-supported college or university, they are not likely to find the help that they need to deal with these spiritual challenges. The best place to be when going through this transition from the "faith of our fathers" to one's own living and personal faith is at a Christian college or university where there are people with answers to their questions. That is where they are most likely to find support from peers for a Christian worldview and high moral standards.

Staying actively involved in a local congregation is very important, but those who do not attend a Christian college or university are far less likely to stay involved in a local church.

One perception that may keep Christian young people from attending a Christian college or university is the idea that most other Christian young people are going to public institutions. Even at Christian colleges and universities, one is likely to hear the claim that "only 15 percent of college-bound Christian young people attend a Christian school." That just is not true. A recent study of 16 Christian colleges and universities found that a little more than 4,000 young people from Churches of Christ enrolled as freshmen at one of these schools each fall for the past 10 years. The preliminary results of the survey of congregations I have been conducting show that 50 percent of high school graduates from Churches of Christ attend a public college or university, 30 percent attend a Christian college or university, and 20 percent do not go to college. But the 4,000 young people from Churches of Christ who enroll as freshmen at a Christian college or

university represent more than 30 percent of college-bound high school graduates from Churches of Christ. That is a lot more than the 15 percent that we so often hear.

Attending a Christian college or university is important. Being actively involved in a local congregation while attending college is even more important. But there are other factors related to a high retention rate.

In 1985 the *Youth Ministry Bulletin*, published by Abilene Christian University, reported results of research I did comparing congregations with above-average retention rates among their young people with those whose retention rates were below average. That study found three significant factors.

Churches that had an active youth ministry had higher retention rates than churches that had no special ministry for young people. "Active youth ministry" did not always mean having a full-time church-supported youth minister. But it did mean having some special activities for young people, something in addition to Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening services attended by all members.

Although this study found no significant difference in the Bible class curriculum through high school in the two groups of churches, those that had a challenging *adult* Bible class curriculum kept more of their young people than churches where members of adult Bible classes just rehearsed doctrine week after week without ever being expected to study and learn anything new. Leaders in these churches may have assumed that adult members already knew everything about the Bible that they really needed to know and that their only concern was getting their children into good Bible classes. Unfortunately, when the adult Bible classes had little to offer, parents did not attend and did not bring their children. Furthermore, parents in these churches were never taught how to pass on faith to their children.

The most important factor was the average level of involvement by parents in the congregation. If, in the typical church family, both parents were active and involved members (that is, they attended services regularly and had some specific area of ministry responsibility), around 80 percent of the children in these congregations stayed in Churches of Christ.

If, in the typical church family, one parent was active and involved in the congregation and the other parent was not, the retention rate was around 50 percent.

If, in the average family in the congregation, neither parent was active or involved, the retention rate for that congregation was between 20 and 30 percent.

One other part of that 1985 study that has not been reported previously was that we asked how many members of the congregation married people who were not members of the Churches of Christ. The results showed a much higher retention rate when members of the Churches of Christ married other members of the Churches of Christ.

#### **Divorce Rates**

One would assume that a goal of church leaders and Christian parents would be to prepare the next generation for marriage. One indication of success in this effort would be a low divorce rate among those growing up in these congregations. It is important to recognize that some people have divorced for no fault of their own. The divorce rate, therefore, is not an indication that all who have divorced have failed as Christians. But this is one statistic worthy of attention.

In the 1985 study mentioned above, there was a higher divorce rate among those who had married someone who was not a member of the Churches of Christ. My own personal belief is that Christians should marry people who will help them go to heaven. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers" (NAS). I do not understand this to be limited to marriage, but I believe that it includes marriage. Furthermore, I do not understand this to mean that a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever is invalid in the sight of God. This same apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:12, "If a brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away." I believe that it is wrong for a Christian to marry an unbeliever, but if they do, they are married in the sight of God. However, my main point here is simply about divorce rates.

#### When members of the Churches of Christ marry those who are not members of the Churches of Christ, the divorce rate is higher.

Reports of divorce statistics are often misunderstood. Various reporting agencies generally provide information on the total number of marriages and total number of divorces each year in the nation, each state, or each county. That is not the same as the claim often heard that "*The divorce rate in the United States is greater than 50 percent.*"

A divorce rate is the percentage of people in a population who have divorced divided by the percentage of those who have ever been married. But some people have married and divorced several times. If one looks only at first marriages for both husband and wife, more than half the couples are likely to stay married until one partners dies. The divorce rate throughout the nation is not good, but it is not as bad as many people have claimed.

In the study I have been doing of young people in the Churches of Christ who graduated from high school in the past 10 years, one of the questions regards marital status. In an effort to simplify the survey, only two response options were listed: (a) divorced and (b) everything else — still single (never married), still married to first spouse, single again or remarried following the death of a spouse. I now regret that simplification because it made it impossible to calculate a divorce rate. But we do have information on the number and percentage of those who have divorced. Those figures can be compared with the number and percentage of all people throughout the nation who graduated from high school in the past 10 years and have already married and divorced.

# Among young people in the Churches of Christ who graduated from high school in the past 10 years, only 4.2 percent have divorced. In the general population throughout the nation, 8.1 percent of those who graduated from high school in the past 10 years have already married and divorced.<sup>18</sup>

The survey of alumni at Christian colleges and universities has provided more detail about marital status. Table 9 shows the marital status of those who were members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled at one of these Christian colleges or universities and of those who were not.

### Table 9 Marital Status and Religious Affiliation at Time of Enrollment

Marital Status	Member of the Churches of Christ	Not a Member of the Churches of Christ
Single (never married)	22.1%	35.7%
Married to first spouse	71.7%	51.9%
Divorced and now single		
again or remarried	5.4%	11.4%
Single again or remarried following death of a spous	se 0.8%	1.1%

In this survey, 77.9 percent of those who were members of the Churches if Christ when they enrolled in one of these schools had married, and 5.4 percent had divorced, so the divorce rate was 6.9 percent. That is far lower than the national average. Among alumni who were not members of the Churches of Christ when they enrolled at one of these Christian schools, the divorce rate was 17.7 percent. That is still lower than the national average.

Remember that these two studies are only "snapshots" of two limited groups: (1) young people in Churches of Christ who graduated from high school in the past 10 years and (2) alumni of Christian colleges and universities. If the scope of the study were enlarged to include all members of the Churches of Christ in the United States regardless of age or where they attended college, the divorce rate would likely be higher. But if these two studies were any indication, that figure would probably be much lower than the national average.

In Table 10, the marital status of alumni of Christian colleges and universities is compared to four categories of *present* religious affiliation.

## Table 10Marital Status and Present Religious Affiliation in aSample of Alumni of Christian Colleges and Universities

	Member of e Churches	Churches of Christ	Other Religious	No Church
Marital Status	of Christ	Preference	Group	Affiliation
Single (never married)	19.2%	46.1%	29.3%	48.2%
Married to first spouse	75.6%	42.9%	58.2%	41.1%
Single again or remarried				
following a divorce	4.4%	11.0%	11.3%	10.7%
Single again or remarried following death of a spo	ouse 0.9%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%

#### Divorce Rates by Present Religious Affiliation Categories of these Alumni:

Members of the Churches of Christ	5.4%
Church of Christ Preference	20.4%
Member of Another Religious Group	16.0%
No Church Affiliation	20.7%

These results do not mean that marital stability will be guaranteed if one is a member of the Churches of Christ, marries someone who is also a member of the Churches of Christ, and attends a Christian college or university. But these results suggest that local churches, Christian homes, Christian schools and Christian young people are doing something right.

#### Division

Some critics have claimed that "The Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement has divided more times than any other religious movement in history, and the Churches of Christ have divided more than any other heir of the Restoration Movement." I view this from a different perspective and have come to a very different conclusion.

Psychologists have clearly demonstrated that people tend to notice similarities among individuals in groups with which they are less familiar, but they notice differences among individuals in their own group.<sup>19</sup> It is not unusual, therefore, that members of the Churches of Christ would tend to notice the divisions within the Restoration Movement and especially divisions within the Churches of Christ while perceiving other religious groups as being more united than they really are.

For example, when most people hear the word "Baptist," they think of the largest Protestant denomination in America — congregations affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. But those who are familiar with the Southern Baptist Convention will generally agree that there is more theological diversity within this one denomination than there is among all the different kinds of Churches of Christ. Furthermore, the differences between instrumental and non-instrumental fellowships that have caused these two Restoration Movement heirs to be reported separately are far less significant than the theological diversity that exists within the Southern Baptist Convention. Furthermore, the Southern Baptist Convention is just one of more than 30 different denominational organizations included in the Baptist family of denominations.

In the 1980s, the Lutheran family of denominations saw the merger of three denominations into one. The American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church in America, and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. But even after that merger, there were still 13 Lutheran denominations in the United States.

Also in the 1980s, the Presbyterian Church in the USA and United Presbyterian Church in the USA merged to form the Presbyterian Church (USA). Additionally, the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod merged into the Presbyterian Church in America. But even after those two mergers, there were still four other Presbyterian denominations.

In the same way, there are 11 different Methodist denominations and also 11 different Mennonite denominations. Even such a small group as the Friends includes seven separate denominations. This list could go on and on, but there

probably is no need to extend it any further. This should be enough to make the point that most other religious groups in America have experienced far more fragmentation than what has been experienced among heirs of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.

The Churches of Christ exists and functions as an informal fellowship of independent congregations with no formal, written creed and no central denominational headquarters with the power to impose conformity. More than three-fourths (75.6 percent) of these independent congregations are similar enough to one another that no significant barriers to fellowship exist among them. These "mainstream" congregations have 80.2 percent of the members, 87.3 percent of the adherents, and 85.8 percent of the total attendance among Churches of Christ in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

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I would not defend division, but I have tried to understand it. Throughout the 57 years I have been preaching, I have studied the history of the Restoration Movement. For several years, I taught Restoration Movement History at Harding University. My M.A. thesis at the University of Houston was a study of why the Restoration Movement split over some issues but managed to differ without dividing over other issues.<sup>21</sup> This has helped me to understand a little bit about these divisions.

In addition, however, I have had an opportunity that most members of the Churches of Christ have not had. I have worked in several organizations with leaders from many different denominations. These experiences have helped me to see how leaders of other religious groups perceive the Churches of Christ. I served as chairman of the committee that drafted the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the American Society for Church Growth and served as president of this organization in 1993. For many years I have been a member of the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. I have attended and presented papers at conventions of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious Research Association. That experience helped me to see the Churches of Christ through the eyes of others.

While most members of the Churches of Christ notice divisions within the Restoration Movement and especially within the Churches of Christ, leaders of other religious groups notice what they regard as a remarkable degree of unity. They tell me that they do not understand how Churches of Christ can be as united as we are without a formal, written creed and a central denominational headquarters with the power to impose conformity.

#### Divisions within the Churches of Christ and among heirs of the Restoration Movement are bad, but they are not as bad as some critics claim.

#### Sect, Denomination, or Neither?

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Heirs of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement have stressed the importance of people studying the Bible for themselves and not being bound by a formal, written creed of any denomination. Most of these Restoration Movement heirs have also stressed the independence of each local congregation. In such an environment, it is not unusual that congregations are not all alike.

There may be some ultraconservative congregations of the Churches of Christ in the United States that clearly fit the definition of "sectarian." Of course, they would not use that term to describe themselves. In fact, one characteristic of genuine sects is that they call all other believers "sectarian." I do not believe, however, that these sectarian congregations represent a majority or even a significant minority of congregations among Churches of Christ.

There may also be some ultraliberal congregations of the Churches of Christ in this nation that are denominational and see themselves in that way. But I do not believe that such congregations represent a majority or even a significant minority of congregations in the United States.

It is important to note, however, that there appears to be a relationship between the kind of congregation and its retention (or dropout) rate.

In the survey I have been conducting for the Christian Higher Education Foundation, I have asked church leaders how they thought other members of the Churches of Christ would view their congregation. The five response options from which they could choose were:

- A. Much more liberal or progressive,
- B. A little more liberal or progressive,
- C. About middle-of-the-road,
- D. A little more conservative or traditional, or
- E. Much more conservative or traditional.

Their responses, of course, were at least two steps away from reality. This was their perception of other church members' perceptions, and that might not always be totally accurate. There was, however, an interesting relationship between their responses to this question and retention rate in their congregations.

The highest retention rates were in congregations where church leaders selected response "C," "About middle of the road."

The retention rates were also relatively high in congregations where church leaders selected response "D," "A little more conservative or traditional," or response "B," "A little more liberal or progressive."

Congregations in which church leaders selected response "E," "Much more conservative or traditional," had retention rates that were significantly lower.

The lowest retention rates in this study were in congregations where church leaders selected response "A," "Much more liberal or progressive."

There was also a pattern in regard to what happened to church members who dropped out. In congregations where church leaders selected response "A," *"Much more liberal or progressive,"* or response "B," *"A little more liberal or progressive,"* members who dropped out tended to join other religious groups. In congregations where church leaders selected response "D," *"A little more conservative or traditional,"* or response "E." *"Much more conservative or traditional,"* most members who dropped out have no current religious affiliation.

### Retention rates appear to be higher in congregations that are seen to be relatively similar to other Churches of Christ.

In his history of the Churches of Christ in America, Richard Hughes claims that "the Churches of Christ began as a sect in the early 19th century and evolved into a denomination during the course of the 20th century."<sup>22</sup> The sect-to-denomination framework has been used previously by several other writers.<sup>23</sup> In the sociology of religion, as Hughes understands that discipline, there are only three possible categories for religious bodies: *church, denomination,* and *sect.* In this sociological sense, the word "church" applies only to an ecclesiastical institution legally recognized by the government as the official state religion. In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution prohibits such an arrangement. Hughes argues, therefore, that there are only two options in this country: A religious group in America must exist either as a *sect* or *denomination.*<sup>24</sup>

Hughes uses only two defining characteristics to distinguish between sect and denomination: (1) attitudes toward other believers and (2) attitudes toward the dominant culture. According to Hughes, a sect "insists that it — and it alone — constitutes the entirety of the kingdom of God" while a denomination recognizes that "it is only a part of the universal body of Christ."<sup>25</sup> A sectarian approach, in effect, says, "*The only saved people are those who agree with us on all issues that we define as being important.*" A denominational approach regards other believers as being saved in spite of what one might see as being wrong in what

they teach and practice. The denominational view says, "We are all going to the same place." In regard to the other defining characteristic, Hughes suggests that sects reject the dominant culture while denominations have made peace with that culture.

In the 1999 Christian Scholars Conference, I presented a paper that was critical of Hughes' approach.<sup>26</sup> My primary criticism was that Hughes treated his two defining characteristics as dichotomies. In his view, a religious group must either judge other believers to be saved or judge them to be lost. I believe that there is another alternative: Christians can preach plainly what they understand the Bible to teach but leave it up to God to pronounce judgment on others. Hughes also sees only two alternatives in attitude toward the dominant culture: Christians can reject it or make peace with it. I believe that a policy of constructive engagement is a better alternative. Instead of withdrawing from the dominant culture, Christians can address culturally relevant issues from a biblical perspective.

Another criticism is that Hughes uses only these two defining characteristics, while ignoring two others defining characteristics of denominations discussed by other writers. One of these is organizational, and the other is theological. In regard to organization, a denomination is a religious group that has some kind of central headquarters with some degree of power over affiliated congregations. In this sense of the term, individuals do not join denominations. Individuals join local congregations, and the congregations are affiliated with the denomination. But it is possible for a religious group to exist and function as an informal fellowship of independent congregations. That is what the Churches of Christ have tried to do in the effort to be neither sect nor denomination.

The other defining characteristic of a denomination is theological. Ecclesiology is that branch of theology dealing with doctrine concerning the nature of the church. A denominational ecclesiology affirms that denominations are part of God's plan for the church. A nondenominational ecclesiology regards denominations as human innovations that never were part of God's plan for His church.

In my evangelism classes at Harding University, I do not recommend that my students spend much time arguing that "We are not a denomination." The people we are trying to reach do not care about that. Being nondenominational may be important to us, but it not to most others. Furthermore, most people use the word "denomination" simply to mean "a group of Christians who see themselves as a group that can be identified by name." In that popular sense of the term, it would be hard to prove that "We are not a denomination."

I believe, however, that Churches of Christ can and should see themselves as being nonsectarian and nondenominational if they have the following four characteristics. Two of these are characteristics that distinguish sects from denominations. The other two relate only to defining characteristics of "denominations."

- Churches of Christ are nondenominational and nonsectarian if we refuse to judge others to be saved in spite of what we see as serious errors in what they teach and practice but leave it up to God to pronounce judgment on those who are lost.
- Churches of Christ are nondenominational and nonsectarian if we do not withdraw from the dominant culture or make peace with it, but instead follow a policy of constructive engagement.
- 3) Churches of Christ are nondenominational in the organizational sense of the term if we function as an informal fellowship of independent congregations with no formal, written creed and no central headquarters with power to enforce conformity.
- 4) Churches of Christ are non-denomination in the theological sense of the term if we reject a denominational ecclesiology and affirm that denominational organizations were never a part of God's plan for His church.

#### And Now the Bad News

Seven billion people live in this world today, but 70 percent of them do not claim to be Christians. Among the other 30 percent, most are only nominal members — generally of a state church.

A large majority of people in the United States say that they believe in God. Most would say that they are Christians if anyone ever asked them. But only half of the people in this nation are claimed as members by any local congregation of any "Christian" religious body.

Earlier in this booklet, we reported the good news that Churches of Christ in the United States are not declining. But that good news should be balanced with the bad news that there has been no really significant growth since 1980. The growth curve has been essentially flat.

The population in the United States has increased by more than 30 percent since 1980. Membership in Churches of Christ throughout the nation has increased by less than three percent during this same period. Even in most states where the Churches of Christ had the greatest increase in the number of congregations,

members, and adherents, the percentage of increase was far less than the rate of population growth.

Since 1980 most growth among Churches of Christ has been in "U.S. Mission Field" states. Table 4 on Page 7 listed 13 states where Churches of Christ are overrepresented in the population. The other 37 states are, by this standard, "domestic mission field" states.

The general trend since 1980 has been for Churches of Christ to grow in "U.S. Mission Field" states, but to decline in states where the Churches of Christ have the greatest concentration of congregations, members, and adherents. Table 11 reports both amount and percentage of decline in number of congregations. States are ranked by amount of decline.

## Table 11 States Ranked by Amount of Decline in Number of Congregations Among the Churches of Christ, 1980-2007

	Amount of	Percent of
States	Decline	Decline
Missouri	-98	-18.0
Texas	-85	-3.8
Oklahoma	-45	-7.1
Illinois	-18	-5.9
Kansas	-17	-9.3
Michigan	-16	-7.5
Arkansas	-15	-2.0
Massachusetts	-6	-18.2
Oregon	-5	-4.3
Ohio	-5	-1.2
North Dakota	-5	-41.7
Alaska	-5	-16.7
Vermont	-3	-23.1
Nebraska	-2	-3.9
New Hampshire	-1	-6.3

All other things being equal, change in number of congregations is the best indication of church growth over the next generation. Change in number of members shows what has happened in the past. If present trends continue, they are the best indicators of what is likely to happen in the immediate future. Change in number of adherents is a better indication of what is likely to happen in the next decade. If you subtract the membership statistic from adherent statistic, what you have is an estimate of how many children below the age of 13 are attending the congregation. If the adherent statistic is changing more than the membership statistic, that may indicate a higher dropout rate among young people or just a major increase in the average age of members.

Tables 12 and 13 rank states by the amount of decline in number of members and number of adherents. Church leaders in states near the top of these two lists should be especially concerned.

	Amount of	Percent of
States	Decline	Decline
Oklahoma	-9,406	-13.1
California	-5,995	-8.7
Tennessee	-5,479	-3.1
West Virginia	-4,880	-21.2
Missouri	-3,749	-9.8
Ohio	-3,204	-8.2
Indiana	-2,543	-8.5
Illinois	-2,174	-8.9
Arkansas	-1,499	-2.1
Michigan	-1,030	-4.3
Kentucky	-612	-1.3
Oregon	-479	-5.5
Iowa	-399	-11.2
Nebraska	-367	-9.9
New Mexico	-270	-1.9
Vermont	-175	-25.0
Massachusetts	-81	-4.5

## Table 12States Ranked by Amount of Decline in Number of<br/>Members in Churches of Christ, 1980-2007

#### Table 13

	Amount of	Percent of
States	Decline	Decline
Oklahoma	-11,011	-12.0
Tennessee	-10,187	-4.5
West Virginia	-7,774	-25.5
California	-6,866	-7.8
Missouri	-5,311	-10.7
Indiana	-4,102	-10.5
Arkansas	-3,470	-3.8
Ohio	-3,125	-6.1
Illinois	-2,244	-7.1
Kentucky	-1,146	-1.9
Nebraska	-945	-17.7
Iowa	-710	-14.2
Michigan	-419	-1.4
Vermont	-164	-18.3
Idaho	-130	-3.8
Massachusetts	-46	-1.8

#### States Ranked by Amount of Decline in Number of Adherents in Churches of Christ, 1980-2007

The good news that the retention rate is higher than in the past and higher than many people would have guessed must be balanced by the bad news that the dropout rate is still far too high. That is especially the case in the states shown in Table 13. States where Churches of Christ have grown since 1980 have generally been those where missionaries are still planting new congregations and where there is a major emphasis on local evangelism. States where Churches of Christ have declined since 1980 have primarily been those where new congregations are not being planted and where there is less emphasis on local evangelism.

The divorce rate is lower than the national average. But that good news must be balanced by the bad news that it is still far too high. Furthermore, some licensed marriage and family therapists in Churches of Christ who have seen this report have pointed out that the number of divorces throughout the United States has declined in recent years — but only because the marriage rate has declined. One reason for the decline in the number of marriages is an increase in the number of cohabitating couples. The following figures suggest reason for concern.

#### Percent of Females Who Are Currently or Have Ever Cohabitated<sup>27</sup>

Age Groups	Percent
15-19	8.9
20-24	38.3
25-29	49.3

The term "cohabitation," as used in this article by the Center for Disease Control, is more than having sexual intercourse. Instead, it refers to couples who move in and live together without being married. These figures are just on females, but cohabitation usually implies a male and female — unless it refers to the gender confused.

The concern of these Christian counselors is that some clients who are members of Churches of Christ are living together without being married. Follow-up studies are needed to find out how widespread this practice is in the Churches of Christ.

The good news about most congregations of the Churches of Christ striving to be nonsectarian and nondenominational must be balanced by the bad news that most of the noise is coming from the far left and far right. Moderates have been a silent majority. Most moderates do not like exposing errors of others. They prefer to focus on more positive things. But this is an area where silence may not be golden — just yellow.

My personal belief is that the time has come when the silent majority of moderates must speak out to condemn the sectarian extreme of the ultra-conservative faction and also the opposite extreme of the ultra-liberal group.

The counsel that God gave to Joshua before he led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land should guide Christians today.

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go (Joshua 1:7).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Churches of Christ often use a small "c" in the word "churches" in order to stress identification with the spiritual fellowship of all the saved and the purpose of being nondenominational and nonsectarian. That style is not used here because references here are to the "Churches of Christ" as a category reported in almanacs, yearbooks, and directories. The emphasis here is not on the theological purpose, but rather on the social and historical reality.

<sup>2</sup> Mac Lynn (Brentwood, Tennessee: Morrison and Phillips Associates, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Bradley and others, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990* (Atlanta, Georgia: Glenmary Research Center, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Quinn and others, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1980* (Atlanta, Georgia: Glenmary Research Center, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Carl H. Royster, (Nashville, Tennessee: 21st Century Christian).

<sup>6</sup> Dale E. Jones and others, *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States 2000* (Nashville, Tennessee: Glenmary Research Center, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> In this cluster sampling methodology, we needed to match congregations to known characteristics of congregations in regard to size, location, and racial/ethnic makeup.

<sup>8</sup> Royster, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Church statisticians use the term "adherents" to include all members plus their children who attend church services but who are not yet old enough to be baptized — or, in denominations that practice infant baptism, are not yet confirmed.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, pp. 1-4.

<sup>11</sup>The United Church of Christ was formed in 1957 when the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged with Congregational Christian Churches. In 1931 the Congregational Church (heirs of the Puritans) merged with the Christian Denomination in America, and this group had roots in early restoration efforts by Abner Jones and Elias Smith in New England and James O'Kelly in Virginia. But heirs of those restoration efforts did not join in efforts by Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell, and other pioneers of the Restoration Movement. So, in spite of the name being similar, this group has little historical connection with the Churches of Christ.

<sup>12</sup> This informal fellowship of independent congregations uses instrumental music in congregational worship assemblies, and that is the most obvious way in which they are different from Churches of Christ that do not use instrumental music. In 1906 the U.S. Census Bureau first listed Churches of Christ and Christian Churches as separate groups in its reference book, *Religious Bodies.* In the first half of the 20th century, a division developed in Christian Churches. In the 1950s, a more liberal group formed the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The more conservative congregations that refused to join this new denomination are now known as "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ." Some of their congregations use the "Christian Church" designation, while others use the "Church of Christ" designation. That is the reason for the way in which these "instrumental brethren" are listed in almanacs and yearbooks.

<sup>13</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church IS Different* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), p 11.

<sup>14</sup> Royster, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> The adherent statistic is calculated by taking the percent of county population 13 years of age and under as an estimate of how many children should be added to the member statistic.

<sup>16</sup>Jeremy E. Uecker, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret L. Vaaler, "Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood," *Social Forces*, Volume 85, Number 4, June 2007 (The University of North Carolina Press).

<sup>17</sup>David K. Lewis, Carley H. Dodd, and Darryl L. Tippens (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1965).

<sup>18</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2006*, Table 51, "Marital Status of the Population by Sex and Age," 2004.

<sup>19</sup>Terry F. Pettijohn, *Psychology: A Concise Introduction*, Third Edition (Sluice Dock, Guilford, Connecticut: The Dushkin Publishing Group, 1992), pp. 348-351. See also: Ezra Stotland and Lance K. Canon, *Social Psychology: A Cognitive Approach* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1966), pp. 388-394; and Peter B. Warr and Christopher Knapper, *The Perception of People and Events* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1968), pp. 241-253.

<sup>20</sup>Royster, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup>Flavil R. Yeakley Jr., *Rhetorical Strategies Analyzed by Social Movement Theory as Applied to Conflict within the Restoration Movement* (University of Houston, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), p. 2. Other writers have developed this same thesis. For example: Don Haymes, "The Road More Traveled: How Churches of Christ Became a Denomination," *Mission Journal 20* (March 1987): 4-8.

<sup>23</sup>David O. Mobert, *The Church as a Social Institution* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962). Moberg summarizes the study by Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942). Still earlier, distinguishing characteristics were discussed in Ernst Troeltesh, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931). Troeltsch said that he received inspiration for the sect-church distinction from Max Weber. See: Hans H. Geuth and C. Wough Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 287-288, 305-306, 313-319. See also: J. Milton Yinger, *Religion in the Struggle for Power* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1946), pp. 19-26, 219-227.

<sup>24</sup>Hughes, pp. 4-5.

<sup>25</sup>Hughes, pp. xii-xiii in his Glossary.

<sup>26</sup>Flavil R. Yeakley Jr., "How the Sect-to-Denomination View of History Among Churches of Christ in the United States Influences Perceptions of Missions."

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