

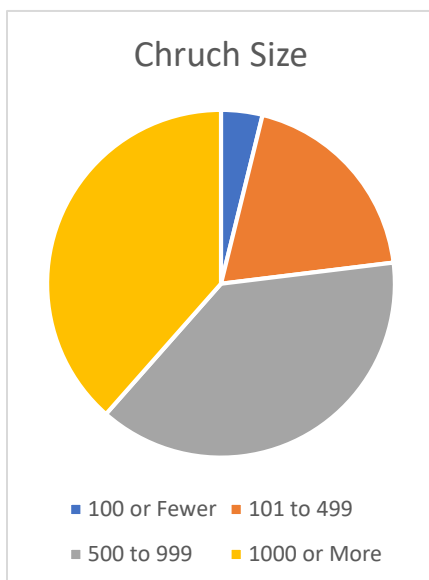
Jesus came to me in a dream. I was sitting on my patio enjoying a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon after church. Jesus came up and sat down beside me, surprisingly I knew who it was the moment he sat down. He sat for a few minutes saying absolutely nothing and then turned and looked me in the eye. I could see a tear running down his cheek and he asked me **“What is going on with my church in America, what is going on with my church in the world. Why can’t you work together?”** He just shook his head and then disappeared.

What a powerful question. I began doing some research on the state of the church in America and I found some very surprising and alarming statistics. The information came from the Barna Group, a group I believe to be the best authority on this demographic.

The Christian church has been a cornerstone of American life for centuries, but much has changed in the past 30 years. Americans are attending church less, and more people are experiencing and practicing their faith outside of the churches four walls. Millennial’s in particular are coming-of-age at a time of great skepticism and cynicism towards institutions particularly the church. Add to this the broader secularizing trend in American culture, and a growing antagonism toward faith claims, and these are uncertain times for the church in America.

In a recent study 73% of Americans identify as Christians, 20% say they have no faith at all, 6% are other and 1% are not sure. That really doesn’t look like a bad statistic.

If we consider a definition of a practicing Christian as a person that attends a religious service once a month and says their faith is very important to them, the number drops dramatically to 31%. That means that 41% are non-practicing Christians.



What does the Church in America look like as far as attendance?

46% who attend church go to a church with 100 or less attendees.

37% go to churches with between 101 and 499.

9% go to a church with 500 to 999 attendees.

8% attend churches with 1000 or more attendees.

How do American Believe, Experience and Express Their Faith?

It is very interesting to look at how Americans experience and express their faith. 75% of Americans say that they pray to God. This closely matches the 73% that would say that they self-identify as Christian. Only 35% attend church services and 34% read the Bible. 19% volunteer in a nonprofit and 18% volunteer at church. 54% of Americans have given money to a church in this past year while half that number, only 22%, have given to other nonprofits or charities and 24% have given nothing. Almost all of those claiming to be practicing Christians 94%, have given to a church compared to only 23% of atheists or agnostics.

Another very interesting thing is that 50% of all Americans believe that “God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today”. 33% have another view of God and 10% say there is no such thing as God. When Americans were asked “if good works result in going to heaven”, 25% strongly agreed 30% agreed somewhat, 14% disagreed somewhat and only 28% strongly disagreed. In addition, when ask if “Christians have a responsibility to evangelize others i.e. spread the good news of Jesus Christ” 26% strongly agreed 20% agreed somewhat, 19% disagreed somewhat, and 35% strongly disagree.

There are several key groups of Christians in America; born again Christians, Bible minded Christians and Evangelical Christians.

Born-again Christians make up approximately 35% and are those individuals who have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and believe that when they die, they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Bible Minded Christians make up approximately 23%. This group believes the Bible is accurate in all the principles it teaches and have read the Scriptures within the past week.

Evangelical Christians make up approximately 7%. These people meet all of the criteria for a born-again Christian plus additional beliefs in topics like evangelism, Satan, biblical inerrancy and salvation.

In trying to research just how divided we are, I was able to find the following statistics as to the number of different Christian denominations we have in the world.

- Independents: 22,000 denominations
- Protestants: 9000 denominations
- Marginals: 1600 denominations
- Orthodox: 781 denominations
- Catholics: 242 denominations
- Anglicans: 168 denominations

In looking at the Barna and other statistics I think there is no question that there is a great deal of uncertainty and separation in our Christian faith community.

After the strain and all the research that I have done I have to admit I was extremely concerned. This past Sunday in our worship service we recited the Nicene Creed. As I thought about it, this Creed does make up most of what we believe as Christians. In fact, I believe it was developed to help us have a foundation for our Christian belief. It goes as follows:

WE BELIEVE in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

After my dream I was particularly taken back to the very first paragraph on the top of this page it says “**We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church**”, and I ask myself “What is going on with my church in America, what is going on with my church in the world. Why can’t you work together?”

Please take some time to pray about how we can work together making our diversity a blessing not a division.