

Congregations Leaving the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Joelle Kopacz, Presbyterian Mission Agency

Jack Marcum, Independent Scholar

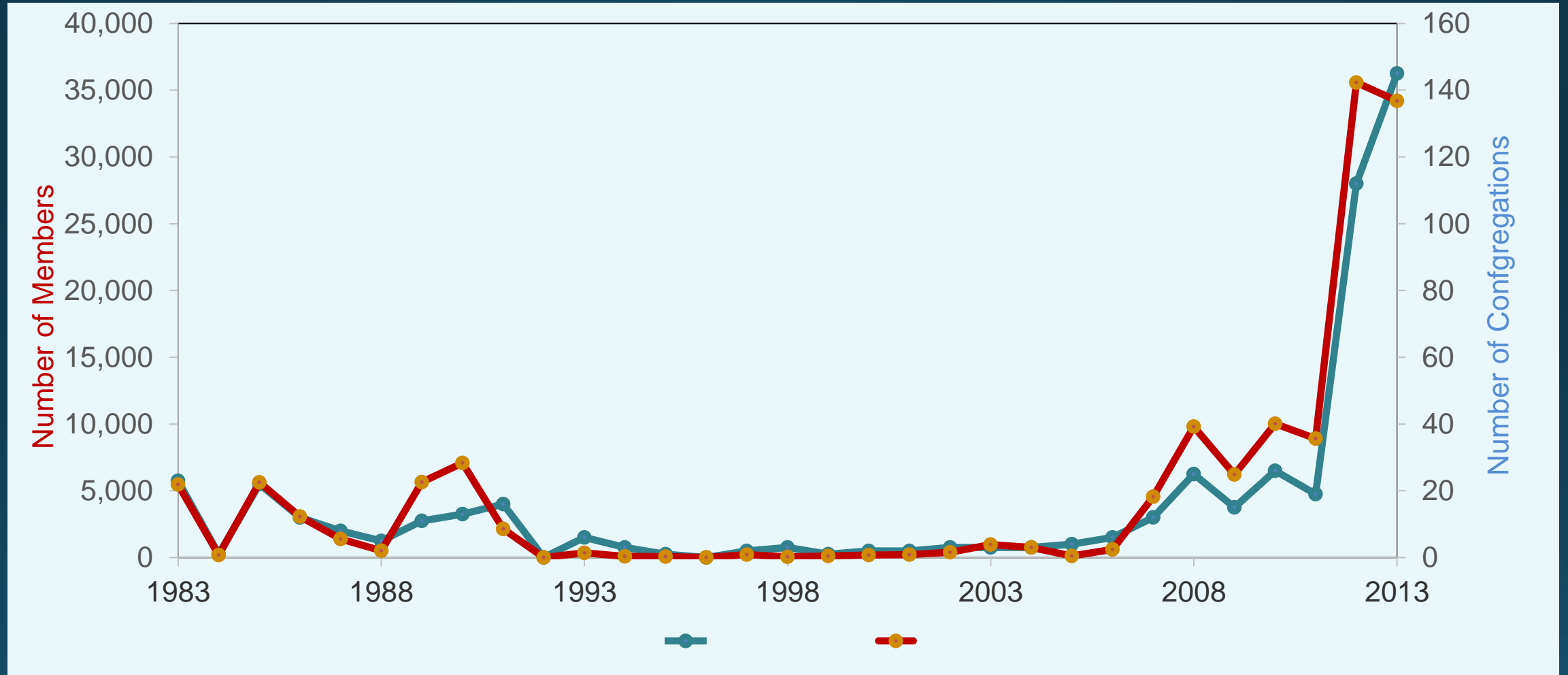
Ida Smith, Independent Scholar

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Background

- Presbyterians in the United States have long been characterized by schism, linked to a variety of social and theological differences. This pattern has continued over the past three decades since the two major Presbyterian denominations—the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPC-USA) and the Presbyterian Church, U.S. (PCUS), which had split over the Civil War—were reunited in 1983.
- There have been two major periods of congregational departures, one from 1983 to 1991, and the other beginning in about 2006 that remains ongoing.

Figure 1. Number of PC(USA) Departing Congregations and Members Since 1983, by Year



1983-1991 Departure Era

- The PCUS, the southern denomination, did not have a trust clause, a feature of the new PC(USA), so PCUS congregations were given a seven-year window to leave with their property after the merger.
- Most congregations went to the Presbyterian Church in America, or PCA, which had been founded in the early 1970s over the issue of women's ordination, and was concentrated in the South.
- A total of 111 congregations with 31,107 members left during this window.

The 2006-Present Departure Era

- This era began slowly and cannot be traced with certainty to any particular event, but rather appears to have started in a few of the 1,000+ member, more conservative PC(USA) congregations that were tired of battling the more moderate majority over various issues, pre-eminent among them the question of ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians to the ministry. (232 of 383 departures—61%—to other-than-Mainline denominations were in the “confessing church” movement.)
- The exodus grew slowly at first, then especially in 2012 following the removal of the ban on such ordinations (July 2011) and the creation of a new denomination, the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, or ECO (early 2012).
- Momentum continues with efforts in the PC(USA) to change the definition of marriage to “two people.”

Table 1. Congregations Departing PC(USA) Since 2005, By Denomination

	Congregations	Members
Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)	251	74,365
Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)	99	38,324
Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)	7	550
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	2	96
Independent Presbyterian	1	459
Evangelical Covenant Church	5	861
Korean Presbyterian Church in America	2	286
Conservative Congregational Christian Church	1	65
Evangelical Free Church	1	80
Other independent congregation	9	959
Mainline denomination	13	650
Unknown denomination	5	1,829
Total	396	118,524
Total minus Mainline	383	117,874

Table 2. Number of Congregations Departing the PC(USA), by New Denomination and Year*

	EPC	ECO	Other Presbyterian	Other Cons. Denomination	Independent/ Unknown	Total
2005	1	0	1	0	0	2
2006	2	0	1	0	0	3
2007	10	0	1	0	0	11
2008	26	0	2	0	1	29
2009	16	0	1	1	2	20
2010	19	0	1	2	4	26
2011	19	0	1	0	2	22
2012	85	27	2	2	3	119
2013	73	72	2	2	2	151
Total	251	99	12	7	14	383

*Excluding congregations departing for a Mainline denomination

Table 3. Number of Members in Congregations Departing PC(USA), by New Denomination and Year*

	EPC	ECO	Other Presbyterian	Other Cons. Denomination	Independent/ Unknown	Total
2005	63	0	16	0	0	79
2006	376	0	21	0	0	397
2007	4,776	0	80	0	0	4,856
2008	12,828	0	232	0	262	13,322
2009	6,316	0	265	198	815	7,594
2010	9,650	0	459	170	1,184	11,463
2011	8,907	0	10	0	140	9,057
2012	20,923	14,645	158	294	232	36,252
2013	10,526	23,679	150	344	155	34,854
Total	74,365	38,324	1,391	1,006	2,788	117,874

*Excluding congregations departing for a Mainline denomination

Table 4. Presbyteries with Most Departing Congregations and Members*

	Congregations	Rank
Charlotte	17	1
Mid-South	16	2
Cascades	14	3 (tied)
Central Washington	14	3 (tied)
Beaver-Butler	12	5
San Joaquin	11	6 (tied)
Shenango	11	6 (tied)
Tropical Florida	10	8
Mississippi	9	9 (tied)
Sacramento	9	9 (tied)

	Members	Rank
Sacramento	5,581	1
Pueblo	4,417	2
Central Florida	4,234	3
Foothills	4,166	4
Cascades	4,132	5
Central Washington	3,906	6
San Joaquin	3,753	7
Tropical Florida	3,519	8
Charlotte	3,402	9
Mid-South	3,365	10

*Excluding congregations departing for a Mainline denomination

Table 5. States with Most Departing Congregations and Members*

	Congregations	Rank
Pennsylvania	59	1
California	34	2
North Carolina	24	3
Ohio	21	4 (tied)
Washington	21	4 (tied)
Tennessee	16	6
Illinois	15	7
Florida	14	8 (tied)
Oregon	14	8 (tied)
South Carolina	14	8 (tied)
Virginia	14	8 (tied)

	Members	Rank
California	16,376	1
Pennsylvania	13,985	2
Florida	8,021	3
Washington	7,379	4
Ohio	6,369	5
South Carolina	6,027	6
Tennessee	5,255	7
Colorado	4,951	8
Oklahoma	4,489	9
Illinois	4,259	10

*Excluding congregations departing for a Mainline denomination

Table 6. Largest Departing Congregations at Time of Departure

	Members	Year	Denomination
First, Colorado Springs	3,824	2012	ECO
First, Orlando	3,521	2011	EPC
First, Greenville, SC	3,385	2012	ECO
Menlo Park, Menlo Park, CA	3,324	2014	ECO
Kirk of the Hills, Tulsa	2,665	2008	EPC
Grace, Houston	2,465	2014	ECO
Eastminster, Wichita	2,302	2012	EPC
Fair Oaks, Fair Oaks, CA	2,295	2010	EPC
Bay, Bay Village, OH	2,071	2008	EPC
Signal Mountain, Signal Mountain, TN	2,013	2007	EPC
Sunset, Portland, OR	1,957	2008	EPC
Community, Danville, CA	1,862	2012	EPC

Table 7. PC(USA) Membership Losses from Departing Congregations as a Share of Total Net Losses*

	Membership Losses from Departing Congregations	Total Net Membership Losses	Percent of Net Loss Due to Departures
2005	79	48,474	0.16%
2006	397	46,544	0.85%
2007	4,856	57,572	8.43%
2008	13,322	69,381	19.20%
2009	7,594	63,027	12.05%
2010	11,463	61,047	18.78%
2011	9,057	63,804	14.20%
2012	36,252	102,791	35.27%
2013	34,854	89,296	39.03%
Total	117,874	601,936	19.58%

*Excluding congregations departing for a Mainline denomination

Table 8. Percent of Churches' Total Expenditures Given to PC(USA) Five Years Prior

	Congregations Departing in Year Specified*		All Other Congregations in Year Specified		Difference
	n	Median % of budget given 5 years prior	n	Median % of budget given 5 years prior	
2005	1	47.9%	9,624	6.4%	41.5%
2006	2	3.1%	9,309	6.4%	-3.3%
2007	10	3.7%	9,371	6.3%	-2.6%
2008	27	3.0%	9,115	6.2%	-3.2%
2009	16	3.3%	8,931	6.0%	-2.7%
2010	25	3.5%	8,821	6.4%	-2.9%
2011	14	6.1%	8,678	5.7%	0.4%
2012	96	4.0%	8,496	5.6%	-1.6%
2013	134	4.2%	8,276	5.4%	-1.2%

*Excluding congregations departing for a Mainline denomination

Current Situation

- Congregations continue to depart in 2014, but at this point there are no official numbers. Based on current unofficial records, we estimate upwards of 100 congregations will leave by the end of the year, including four with 1,000+ members that have already departed.
- The pace in 2015 will depend in part on how presbyteries vote on a constitutional amendment to redefine marriage from “between a man and a women” to “between two people,” which presbyteries will vote on over the next ten months. A two-thirds majority is needed for passage.

Contact Information

- Joelle Kopacz
Research Services, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
joelle.kopacz@pcusa.org
- Jack Marcum
Independent Scholar (emeritus, Research Services, PC(USA))
jpmarcum@gmail.com
- Ida Smith
Independent Scholar (formerly with Research Services,
PC(USA))
idasw615@gmail.com

