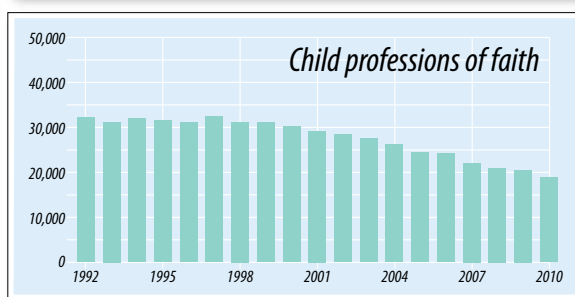
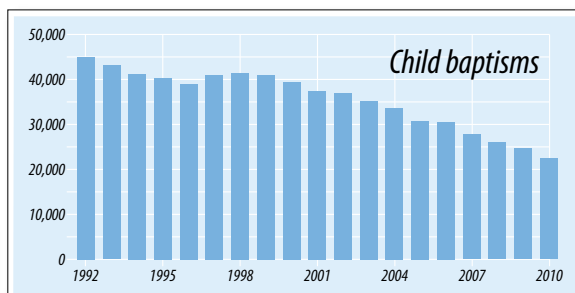


Where have all the children gone?

Child baptisms and child professions of faith are declining in the PC(USA).



What the research shows

Most readers already know that PC(USA) membership has dropped annually for several decades. So it's not surprising that the number of child baptisms and professions of faith has also dropped.

What, then, do we make of the fact that child baptisms have dropped at almost twice the rate of membership? U.S. birth rates have been fairly steady over this period, so it's unlikely that smaller families are the reason. More likely, this faster drop owes to fewer young, childbearing families participating in church, compared with adults of other ages and life stages.

That the ratio of confirmations to baptisms a decade earlier has also been dropping faster than membership is consistent with this explanation. An increasing dropout rate among young families would mean that a shrinking number of the children who are baptized would still be around when they reach confirmation age. Another possibility is that baptisms increasingly occur at the request of grandparents of children whose parents are not active in a church.

Whatever the cause, the declining numbers of child baptisms and professions of faith are troubling. These trends strongly suggest that membership drops will accelerate in coming years, even as they have already recently accelerated.

Having endured 45 straight years of net membership losses, perhaps Presbyterians have grown inured to the steady drip, drip, drip of declines. If so, it's time to take notice. The findings presented here are the most sobering I've seen in more than two decades studying the PC(USA).

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Child baptisms and professions of faith have been falling in Presbyterian churches. Some statistics:

- **Child professions of faith have declined** from 32,226 in 1992 (the first year they were tabulated separately) to 18,895 in 2010, a drop of 41 percent.
- **Over the same period, child baptisms fell** from 45,017 to 22,460 (down 50 percent).
- **In contrast, membership dropped** 27 percent from 1992 to 2010.
- **A comparison of child baptisms each year with child professions of faith a decade later—a rough indicator of how many baptized children continue to confirmation—stayed quite stable through 2006.** In that year, child professions of faith (24,221) were 62 percent of child baptisms in 1996 (39,060).
- **By 2010, however, that comparison had dropped sharply,** to 48 percent (18,895 child professions of faith, compared to 39,444 child baptisms in 2000).
- **If the pattern stabilizes at 48 percent, the church would have about 10,700 child professions of faith in 2020, or only about one per congregation per year, on average.**

» Other findings www.pcusa.org/research