

United Church of Canada Trends - 2010

The following charts show the history up to 2010 of selected United Church of Canada data, and, based on the previous 10 years of data (2001-2010), projects what the data might be in 2025.

The chart below gives the actual data for 2008, 2009, and 2010, and compares the actual results for 2010 with the forecast from the 2000-2009 trend.

	2008 Actual	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	Change from 2009 to 2010	2010 Forecast Based on 2000-2009	Difference between Forecast and Actual	2025 Forecast Based on 2008	2025 Forecast Based on 2009	2025 Forecast Based on 2010	2025 Forecast Change from 2009
Pastoral Charges	2,248	2,240	2,223	-17	2,220	3	2,014	2,020	2,020	0
Preaching Places or Congregations	3,308	3,255	3,196	-59	3,206	-10	2,444	2,420	2,383	-37
Membership	525,673	510,672	494,791	-15,881	495,671	-880	260,779	257,716	252,726	-4,990
Resident Membership	406,400	395,266	382,640	-12,626	381,565	1,075	184,684	182,627	181,274	-1,353
Financially Supporting Households	262,789	254,348	245,371	-8,977	247,247	-1,876	127,332	123,609	118,439	-5,170
Average Weekly Attendance	193,512	183,153	174,660	-8,493	174,590	70	33,705	26,000	22,136	-3,864
Received on Profession of Faith	5,083	4,724	3,847	-877	4,275	-428	0	0	0	0
Baptisms (Children)	10,173	9,470	8,828	-642	8,416	412	0	0	0	0
Baptisms (Adults)	1,066	1,048	905	-143	869	36	0	0	0	0
Baptisms (All Ages)	11,239	10,518	9,733	-785	9,285	448	0	0	0	0
Marriages	9,255	8,557	7,837	-720	7,659	178	0	0	0	0
Funerals	21,292	20,009	18,910	-1,099	19,676	-766	9,728	9,380	8,676	-704
Sunday Schools	2,344	2,277	2,188	-89	2,215	62	1,165	1,095	1,025	-70
Sunday Schools Membership	74,453	68,947	64,586	-4,361	59,501	5,085	0	0	0	0
Through-the-week Membership	136,016	134,789	130,453	-4,336	130,284	169	73,250	78,433	74,101	-4,332
Local Support	276,795	268,076	257,799	-10,277	259,913	-2,114	128,845	129,299	125,238	-4,061
M&S Givers	126,747	121,629	116,349	-5,280	115,775	574	33,206	31,158	29,364	-1,794
UCW	62,141	59,235	56,729	-2,506	55,922	807	10,317	9,787	11,813	2,026

In all cases the data declined from 2009 to 2010.

United Church Pastoral Charges

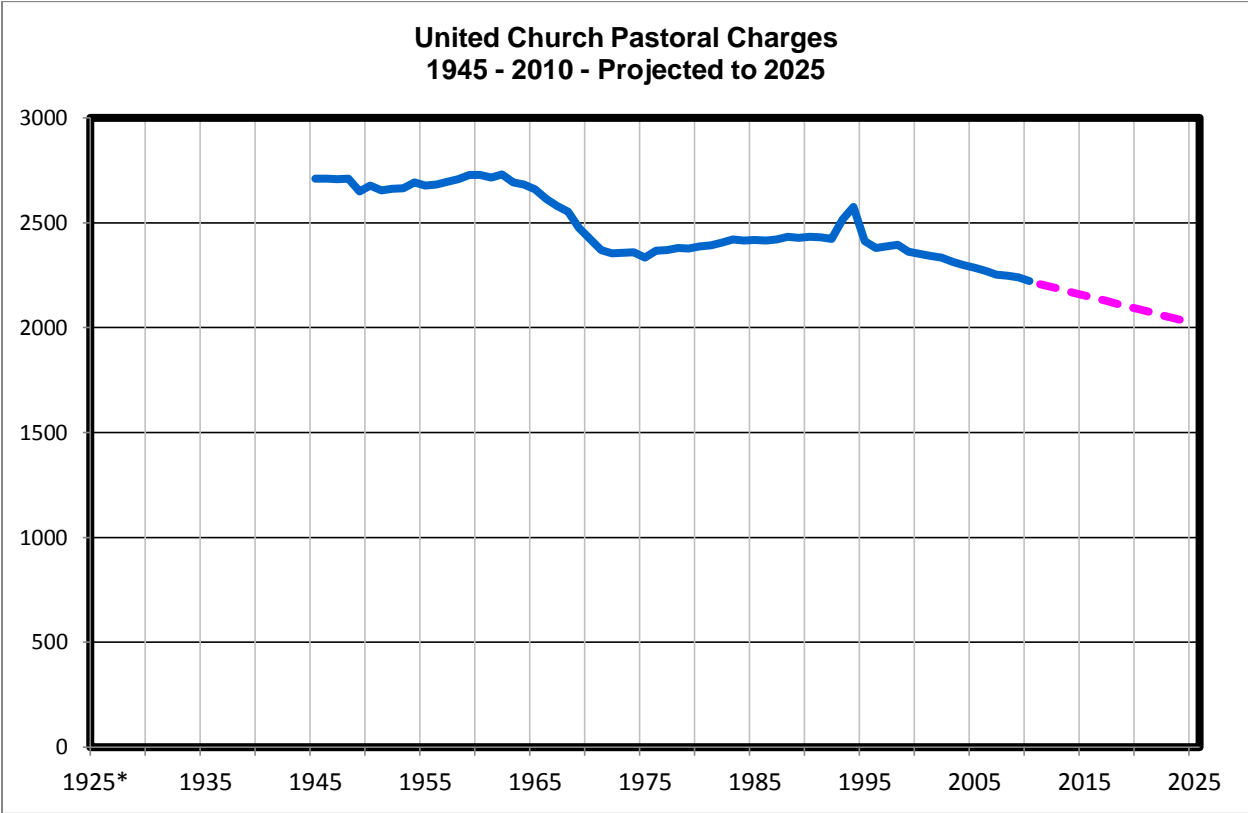
As of December 31, 2010 the number of United Church Pastoral Charges was 2,223.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Pastoral Charges in 2025 will be 2,020.

This will be a loss of 203 or 9% of 2010 Pastoral Charges.

Note: This data indicates the resilience of Pastoral Charges, especially when compared with the other data that follows. Urban and suburban areas where amalgamations are more feasible may experience higher rates of decline.

Note: I have only been able to record data for the number of Pastoral Charges beginning in 1945.



TREND $r^2 = 0.989$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

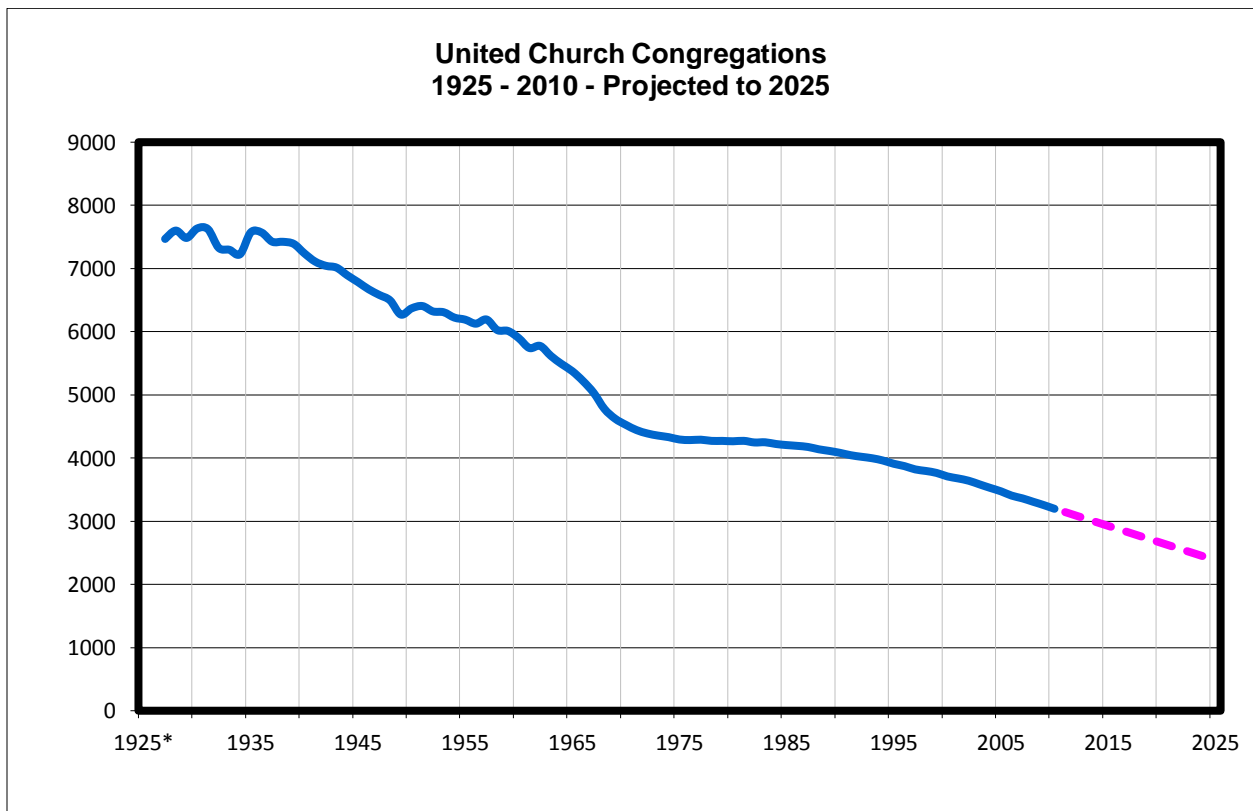
United Church Congregations

As of December 31, 2010 the number of United Church Congregations (or Preaching Places) was 3,196.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Congregations in 2025 will be 2,383.

This will be a loss of 813 or 25% of 2010 Congregations.

Note: The rate of decline of Congregations is much higher than that for Pastoral Charges. The result is that more Pastoral Charges have fewer Congregations, and more Pastoral Charges have part-time Ministers.



TREND $r^2 = 0.999$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

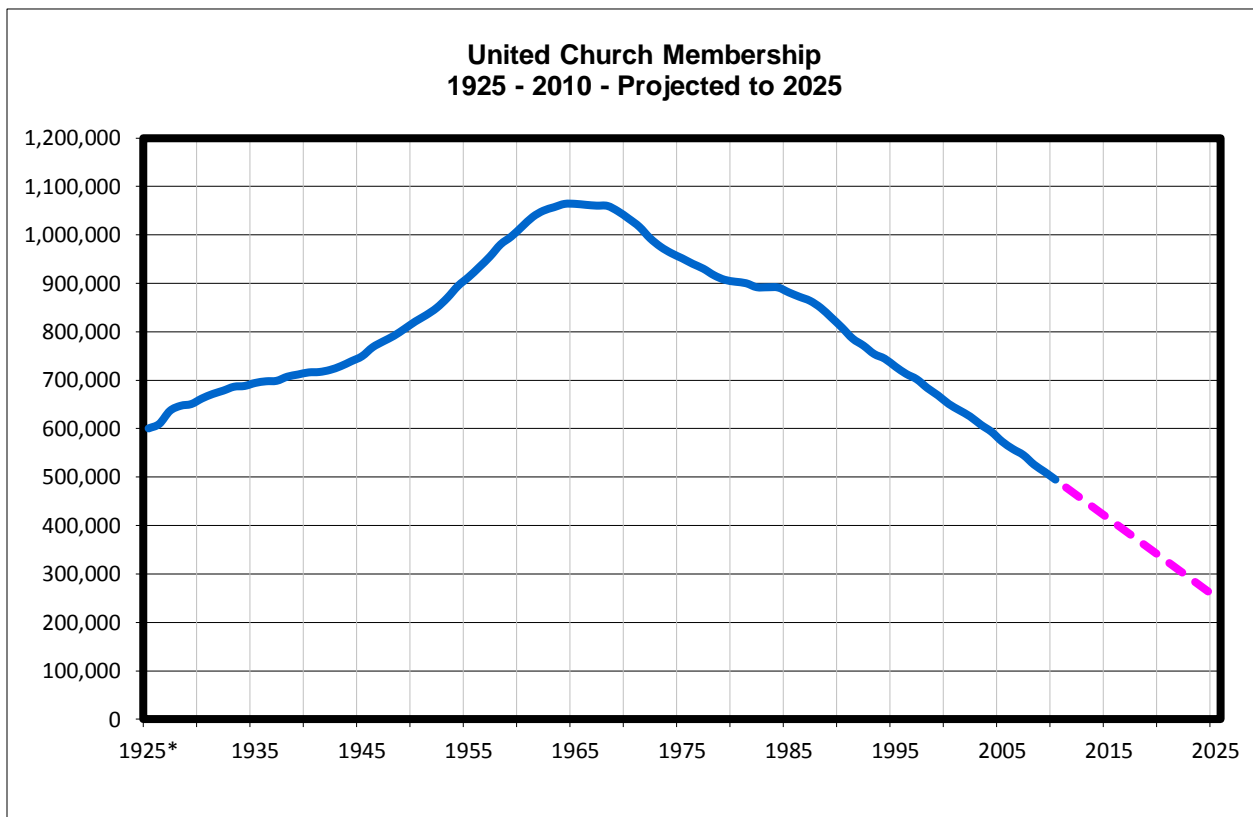
United Church Membership

As of December 31, 2010 United Church Total Membership (Resident and Non-Resident) was 494,791.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, Membership in 2025 will be 252,726.

This will be a loss of 242,065 or 49% of 2010 Members.

Note: The decline of Membership is much higher than the decline of Pastoral Charges and Congregations. This results in many Congregations having significantly fewer Members.



TREND $r^2 = 0.999$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

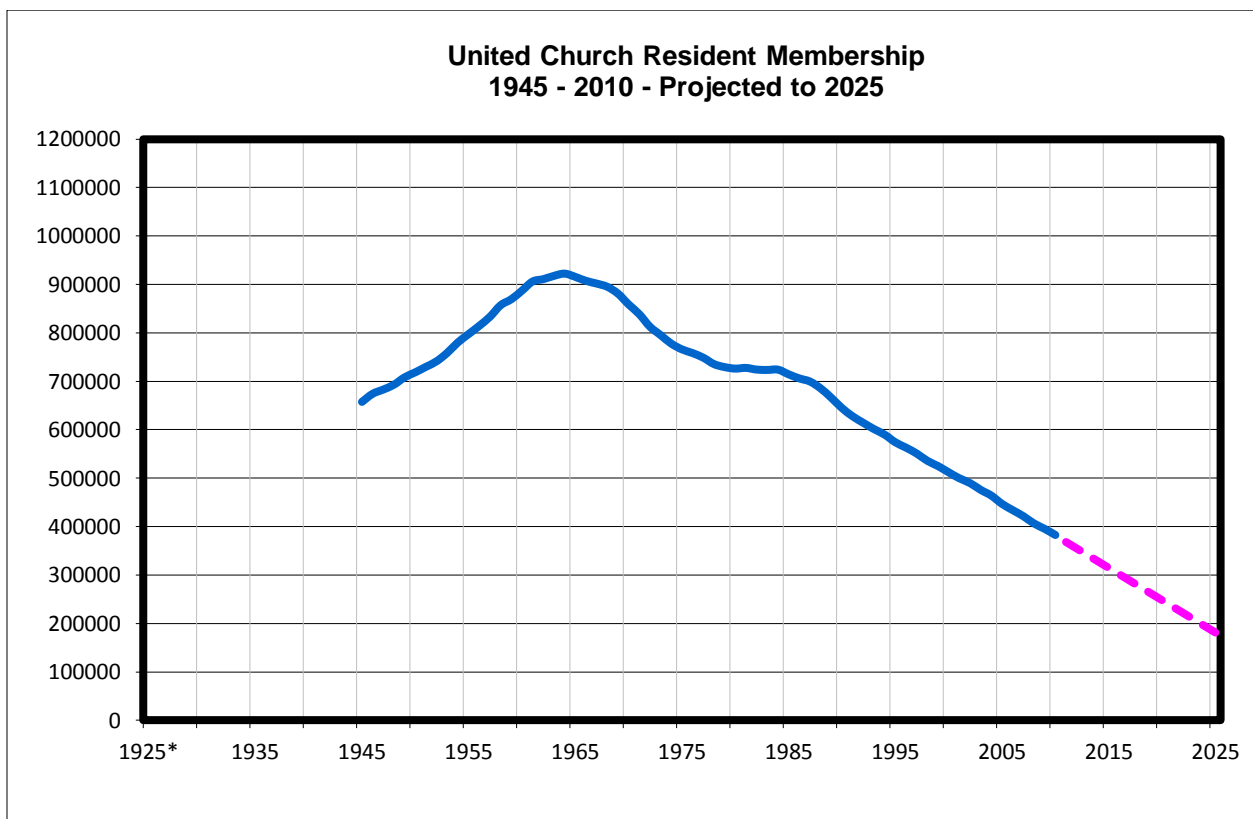
United Church Resident Membership

As of December 31, 2010 United Church Total Resident Membership (i.e., not counting Non-Resident Members) was 382,640.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, Resident Membership in 2025 will be 181,274.

This will be a loss of 201,366 or 53% of 2010 Resident Members.

Note: The decline of Resident Membership is much higher than the decline of Pastoral Charges and Congregations. This results in many Congregations having significantly fewer Resident Members.



TREND $r^2 = 0.999$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Average Weekly Attendance

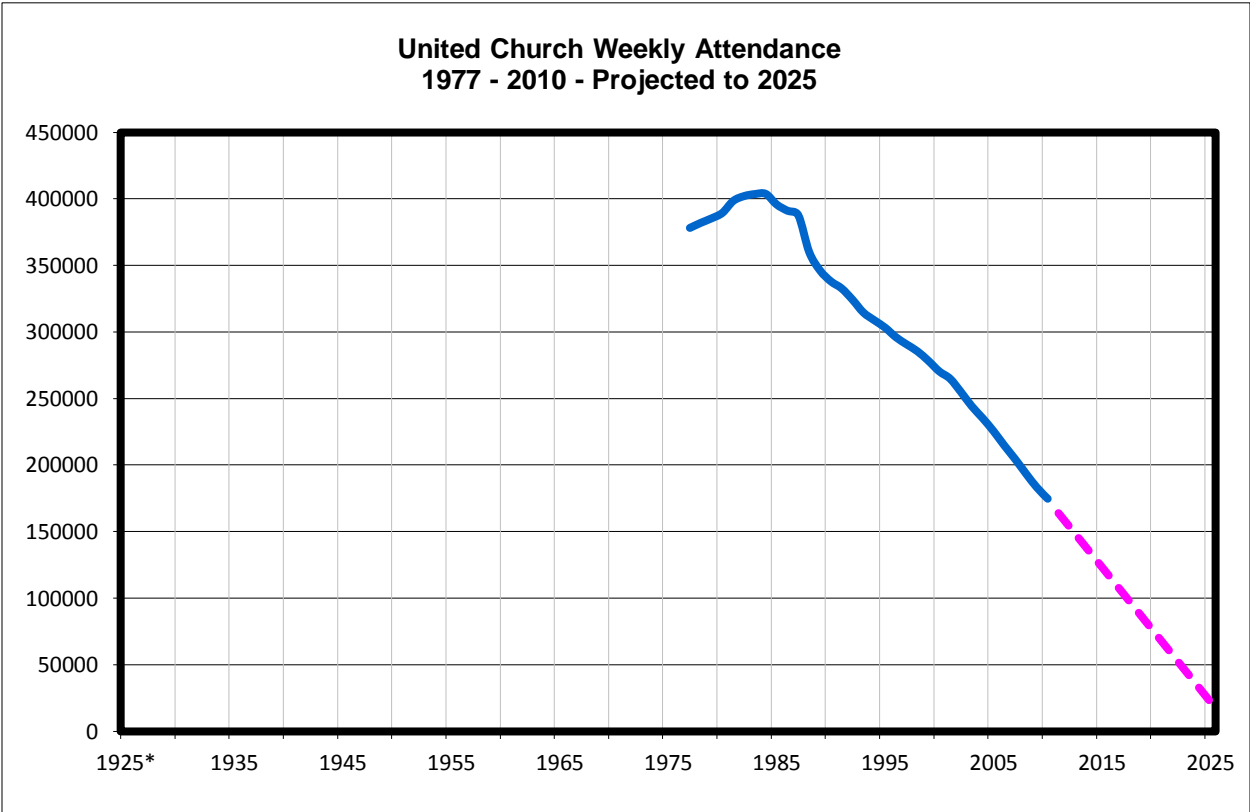
As of December 31, 2010, the Average Weekly Attendance was 174,660.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, Attendance in 2025 will be 22,136.

This will be a loss of 152,524 or 87% of the number attending church in 2010.

Note: Average Weekly Attendance is declining much faster than the number of Congregations. This results in many Congregations having significantly lower Attendance.

Note: The Average Weekly Attendance was nationally recorded beginning in 1977.



TREND $r^2 = 0.999$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Financially Supporting Households

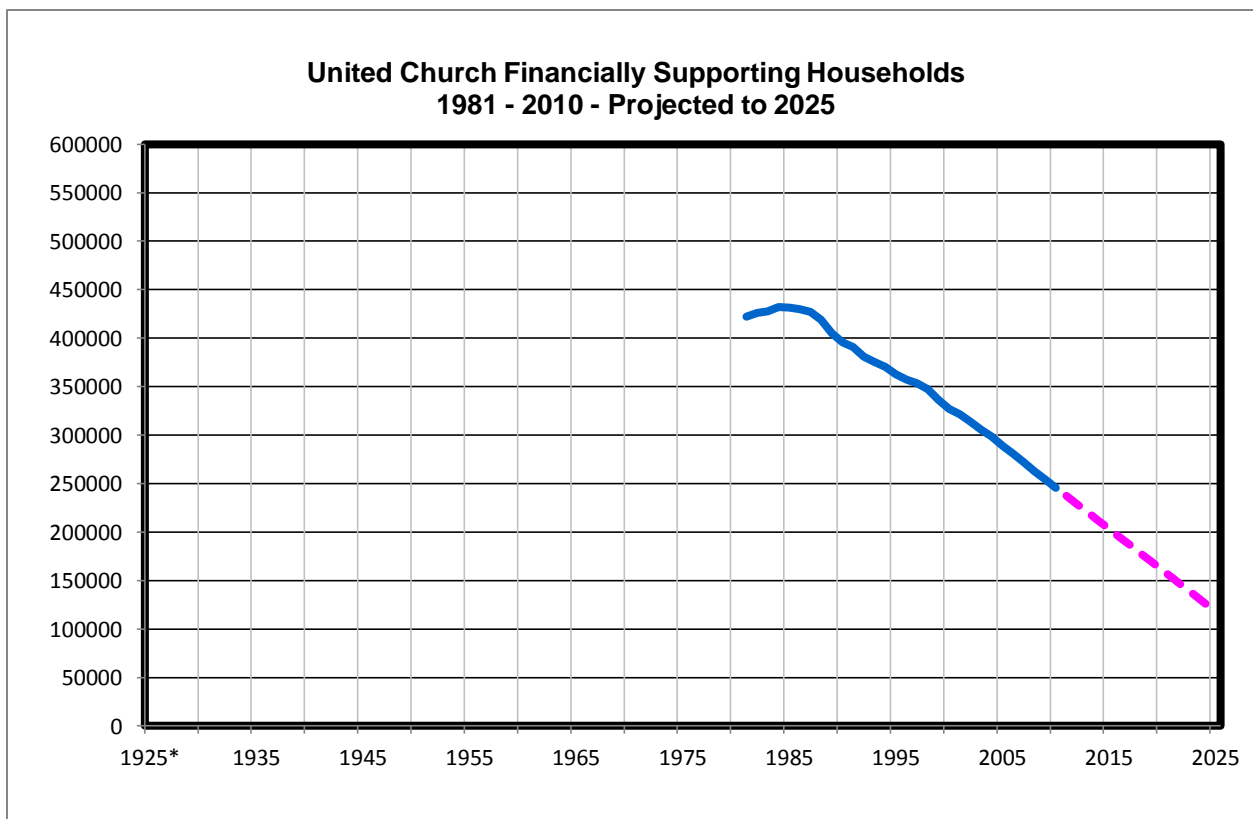
As of December 31, 2010, the number of Financially Supporting Households was 245,371.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Supporting Households in 2025 will be 118,439.

This will be a loss of 126,932 or 52% of the number of Supporting Households in 2010.

Note: The number of Financially Supporting Households is declining much faster than the number of Congregations. This results in Congregations having significantly lower Supporting Households.

Note: The number of Financially Supporting Households was nationally recorded beginning in 1981.



TREND $r^2 = 0.999$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Identified Givers to Local Expenses

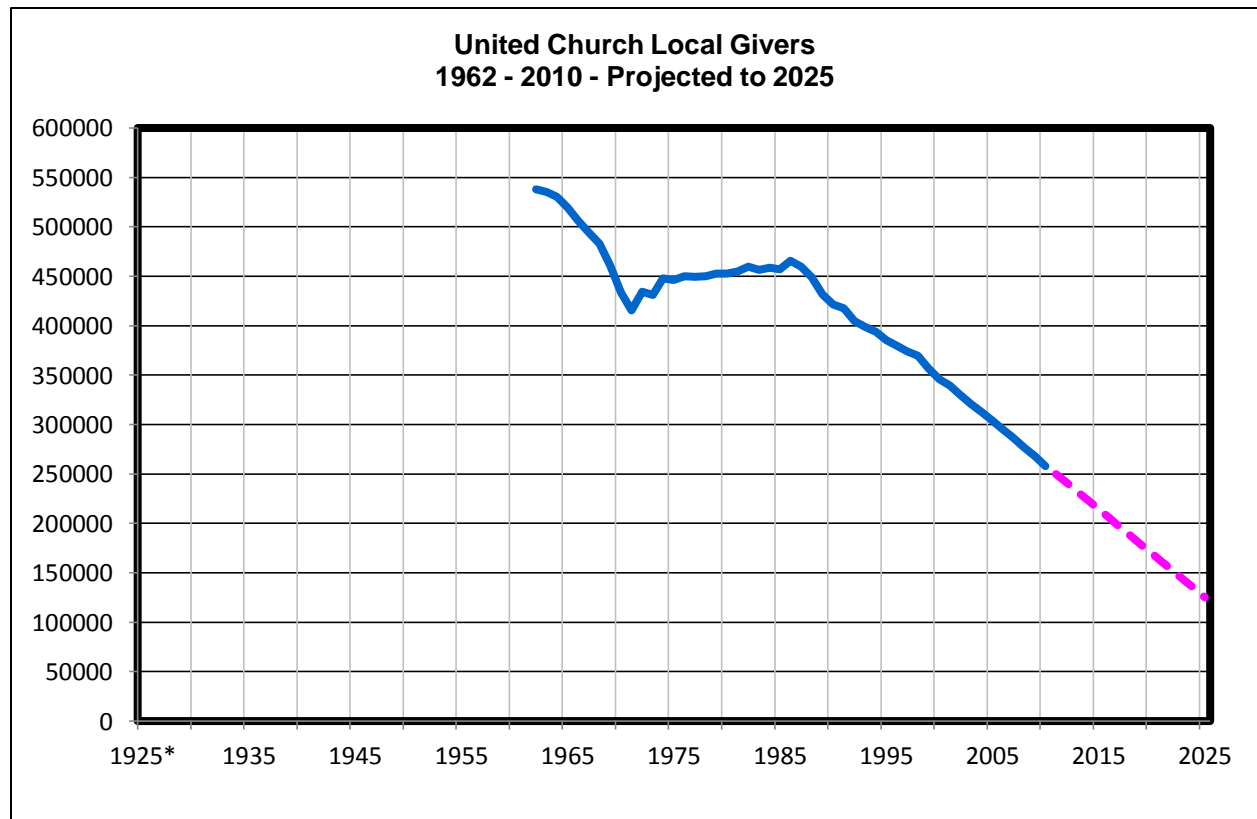
As of December 31, 2010, the number of Identified Givers to Local Expenses was 257,799.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Local Givers in 2025 will be 125,238.

This will be a loss of 132,561 or 51% of the number of Local Givers in 2010.

Note: The number of Local Givers is declining much faster than the number of Congregations. This results in Congregations having significantly lower Local Givers.

Note: The number of Identified Givers to Local Expenses was nationally recorded beginning in 1962.



TREND $r^2 = 0.999$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Identified Givers to the M&S Fund

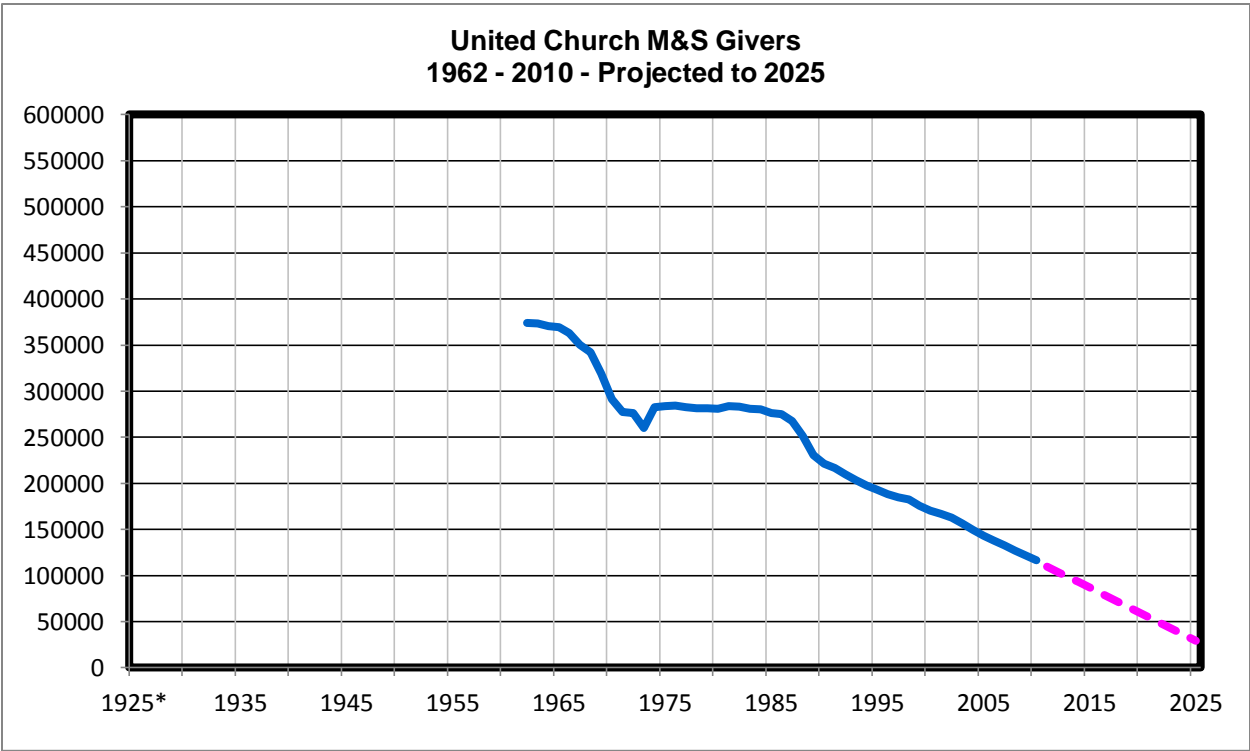
As of December 31, 2010, the number of Identified Givers to the M&S Fund was 116,349.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of M&S Givers in 2025 will be 29,364.

This will be a loss of 86,985 or 75% of the number of M&S Givers in 2010.

Note: The number of Identified Givers to the M&S Fund is declining much faster than the number of Congregations. This results in Congregations having significantly lower M&S Givers.

Note: The number of Identified Givers to the M&S Fund was nationally recorded beginning in 1962.



TREND $r^2 = 0.998$

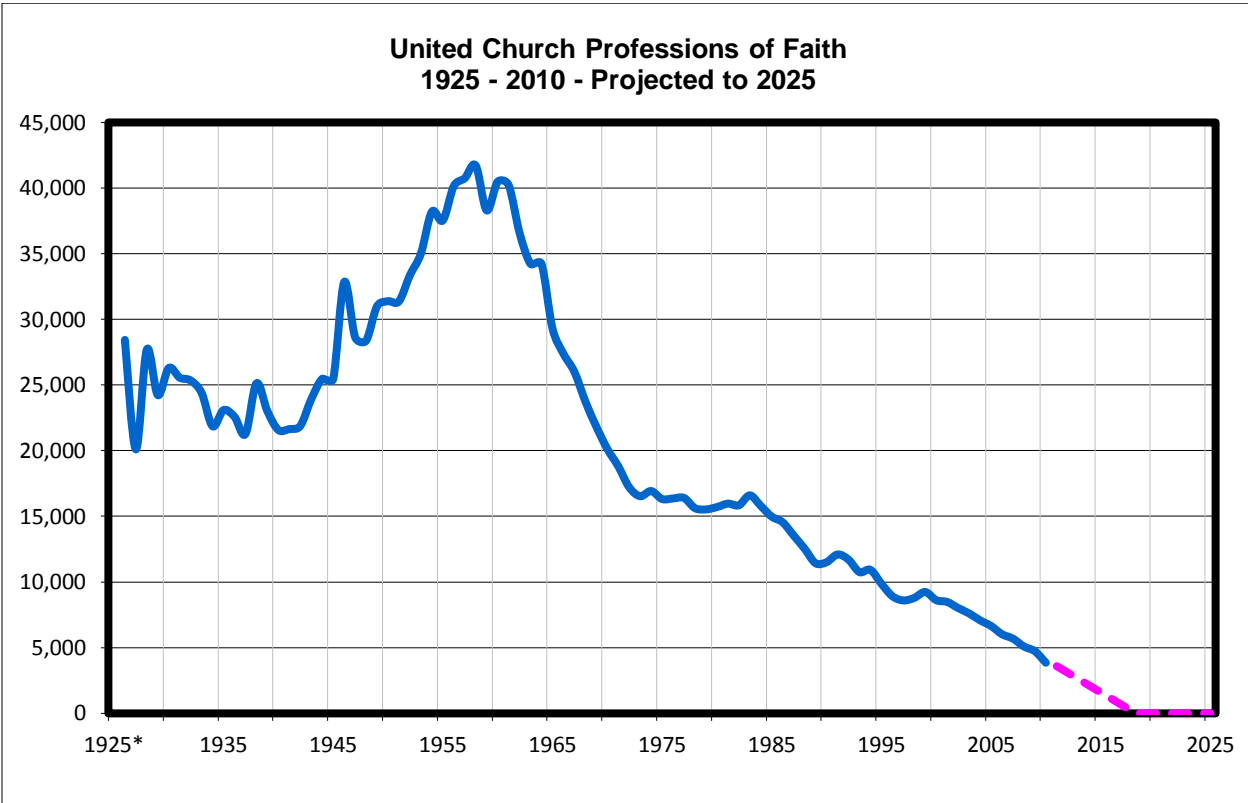
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church New Members Received by Profession of Faith

As of December 31, 2010, the total New Members received by Profession of Faith (that is, those who have never been members of any church before) was 3,847.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of New Members in 2019 will be zero.

This will be a loss of 3,847 or 100% of the New Members Received in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.995$

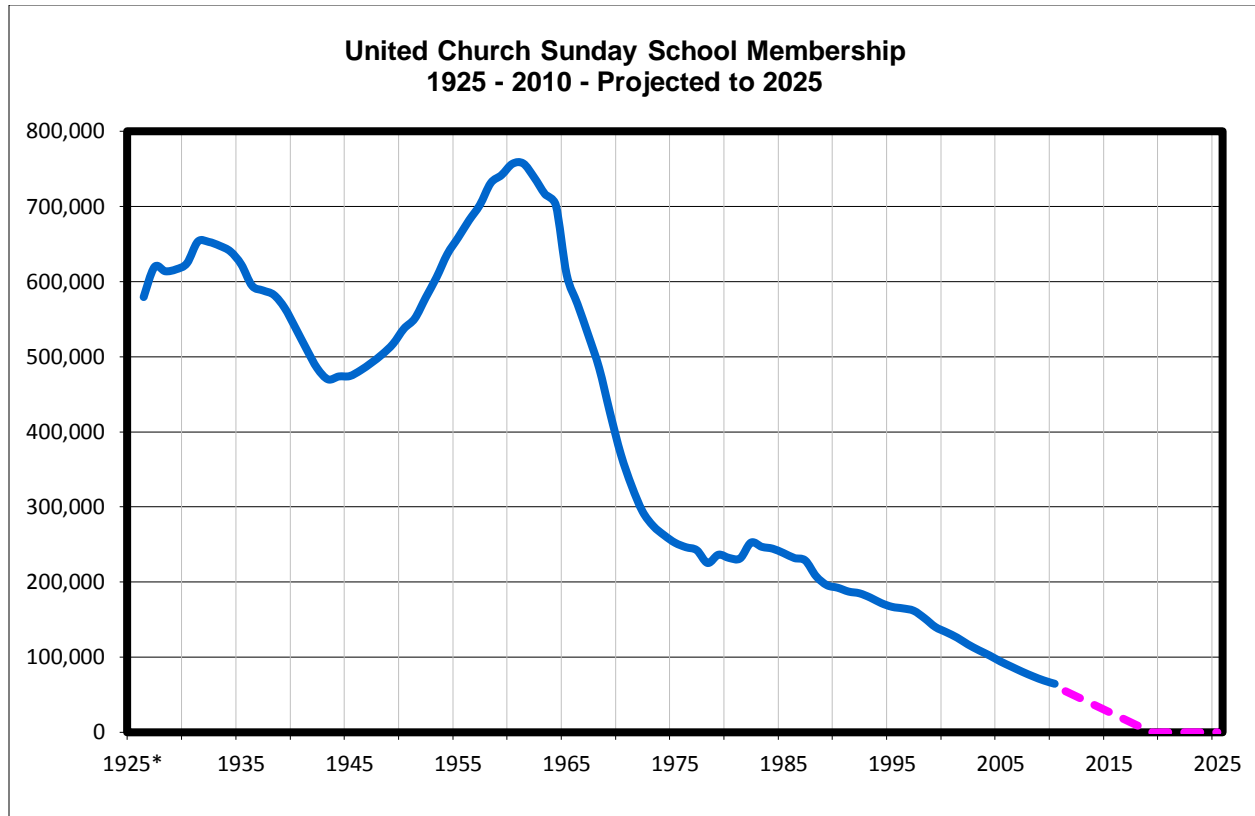
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Sunday School Membership

As of December 31, 2010, United Church Sunday School Membership was 64,586.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, Sunday School Membership in 2019 will be zero.

This will be a loss 64,586 or 100% of the Sunday School Membership in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.993$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

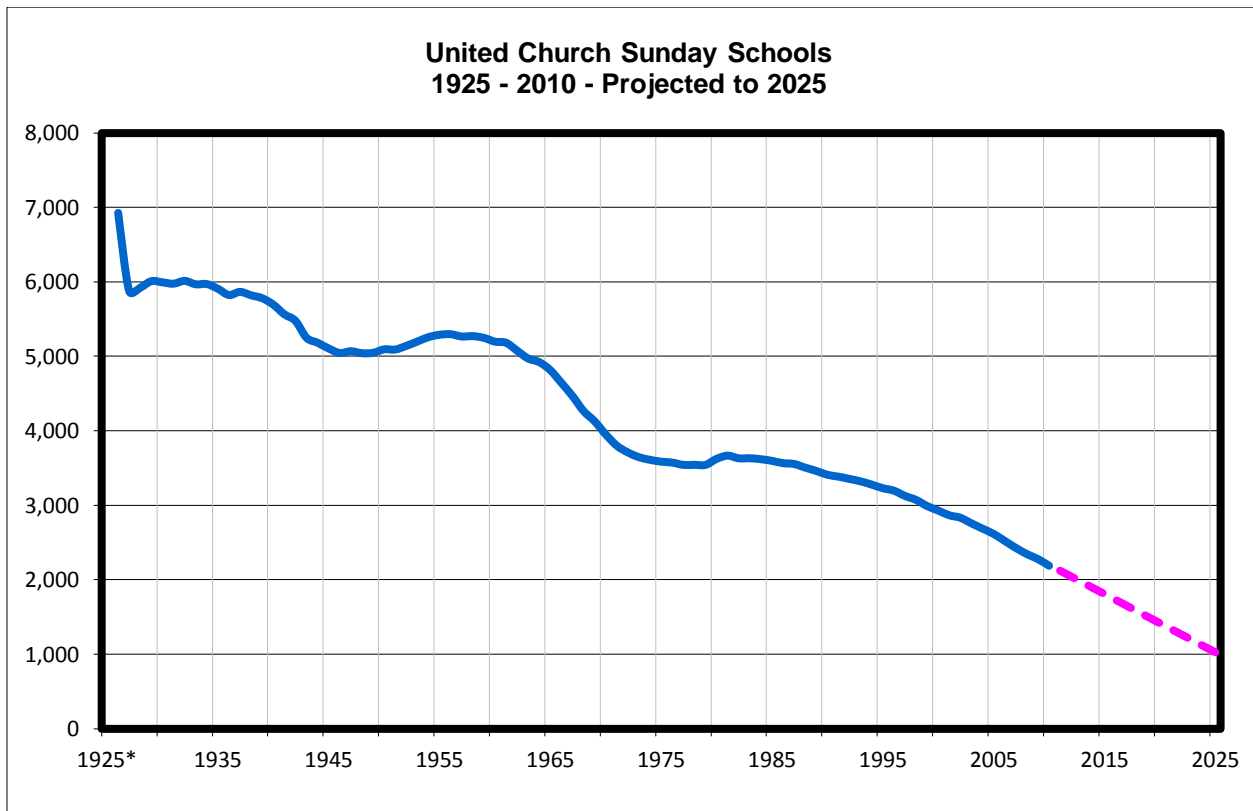
United Church Sunday Schools

As of December 31, 2010, the number of United Church Sunday Schools was 2,188.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Sunday Schools in 2025 will be 1,025.

This will be a loss 1,163 or 53% of the number of Sunday Schools in 2010.

Note: The rate of decline of Sunday School Membership is much higher than that for Sunday Schools. The result is Sunday Schools with significantly fewer members.



TREND $r^2 = 0.994$

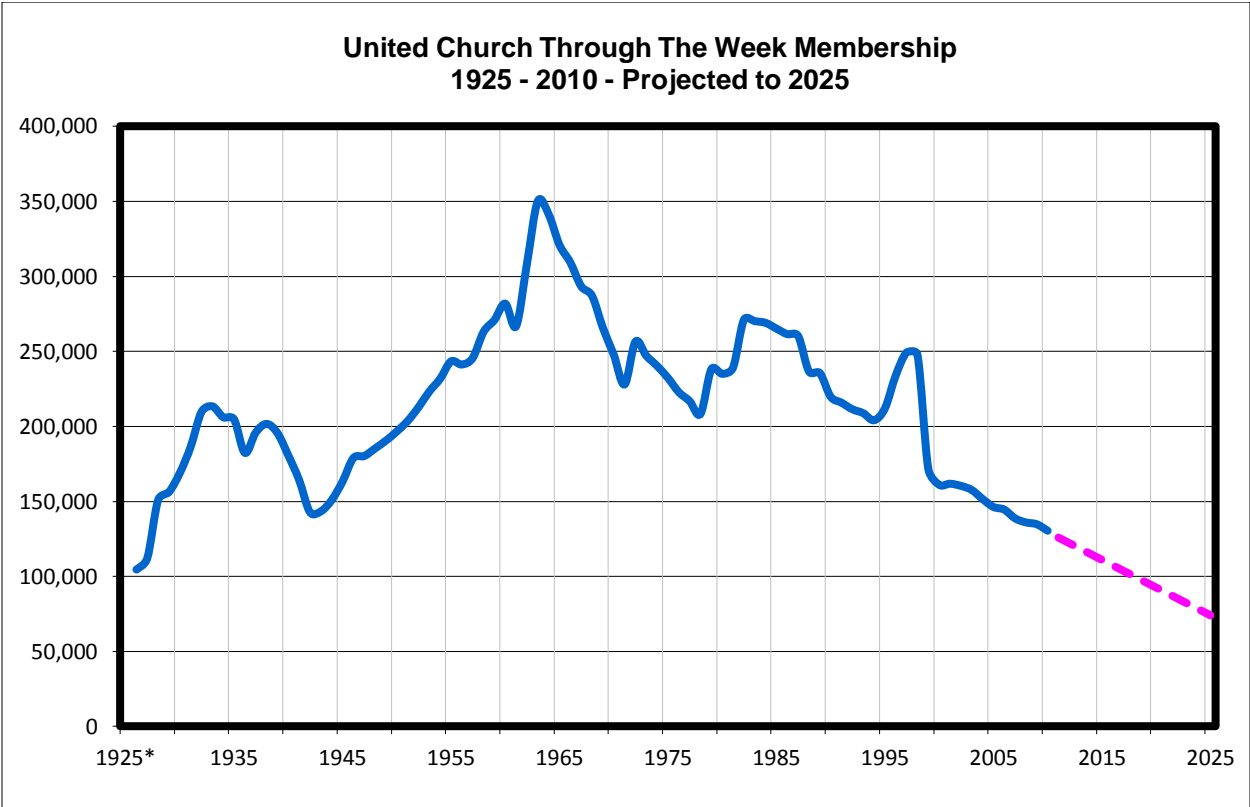
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Through-the-Week Membership

As of December 31, 2010, United Church Through-the-Week Organizations Membership was 130,453.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, Through-the-Week Membership in 2025 will be 74,101.

This will be a loss 56,352 or 43% of the Through-the-Week Membership in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.984$

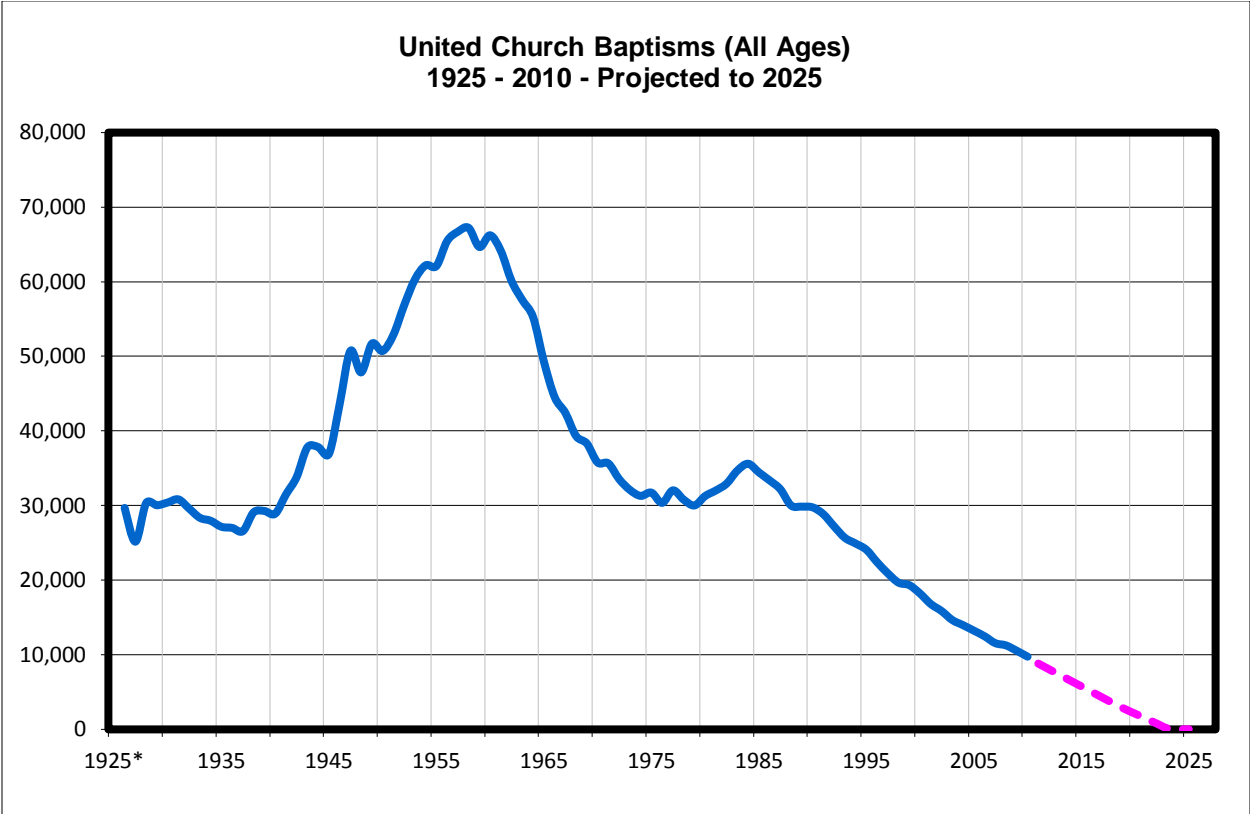
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Baptisms (All Ages)

As of December 31, 2010, the total of all Baptisms was 9,733.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the total of all Baptisms in 2024 will be zero.

This will be a loss of 9,733 or 100% of the Baptisms (All Ages) in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.990$

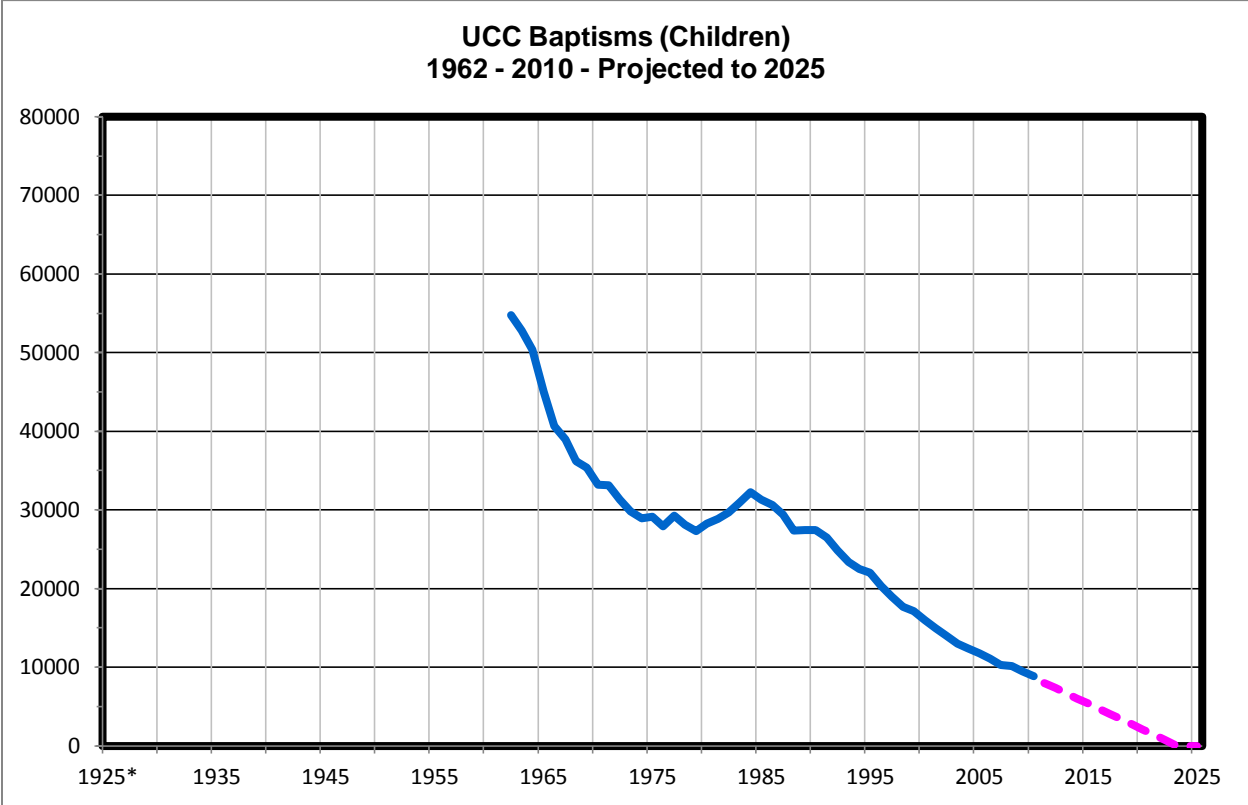
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Baptisms (Children)

As of December 31, 2010, the total of all Baptisms (Children) was 8,828.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Baptisms (Children) in 2024 will be zero.

This will be a loss of 8,828 or 100% of the Baptisms (Children) in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.986$

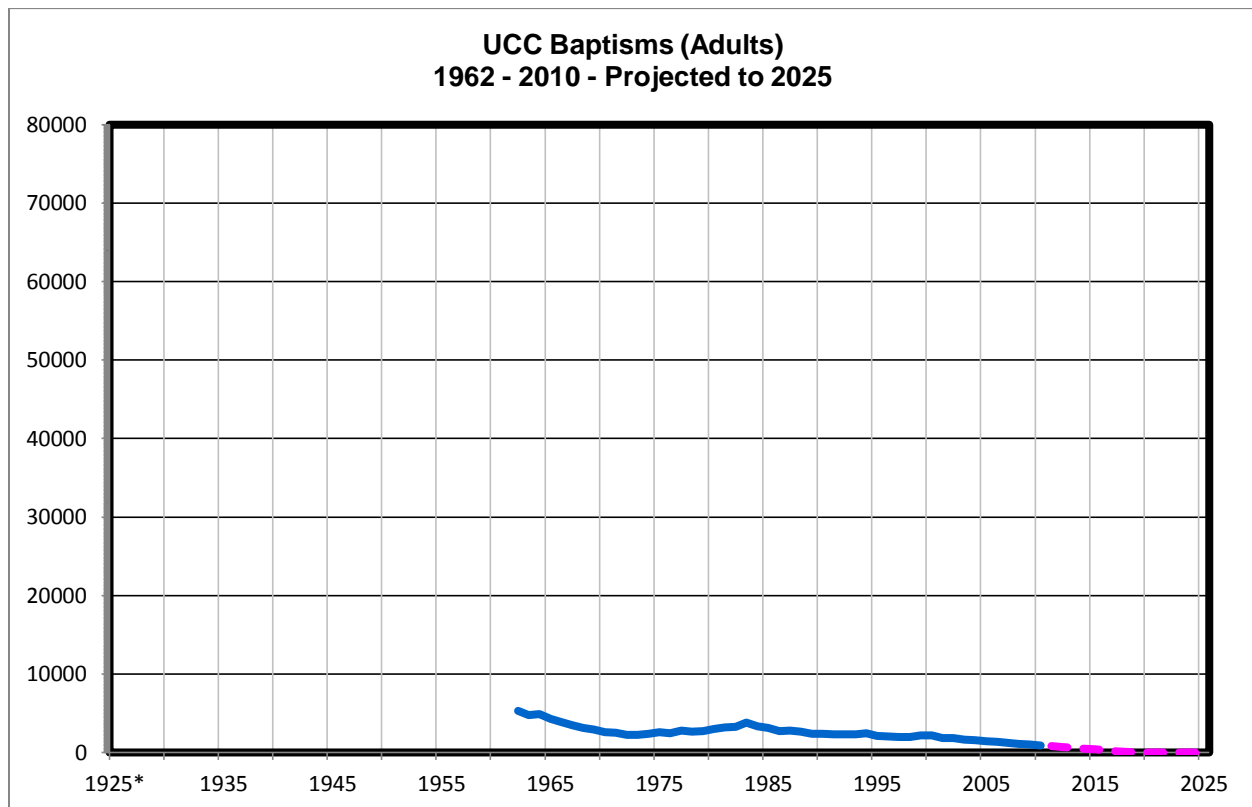
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Baptisms (Adults)

As of December 31, 2010, the total of all Baptisms (Adults) was 905.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Baptisms (Adults) in 2019 will be zero.

This will be a loss of 905 or 100% of the Baptisms (Adults) in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.990$

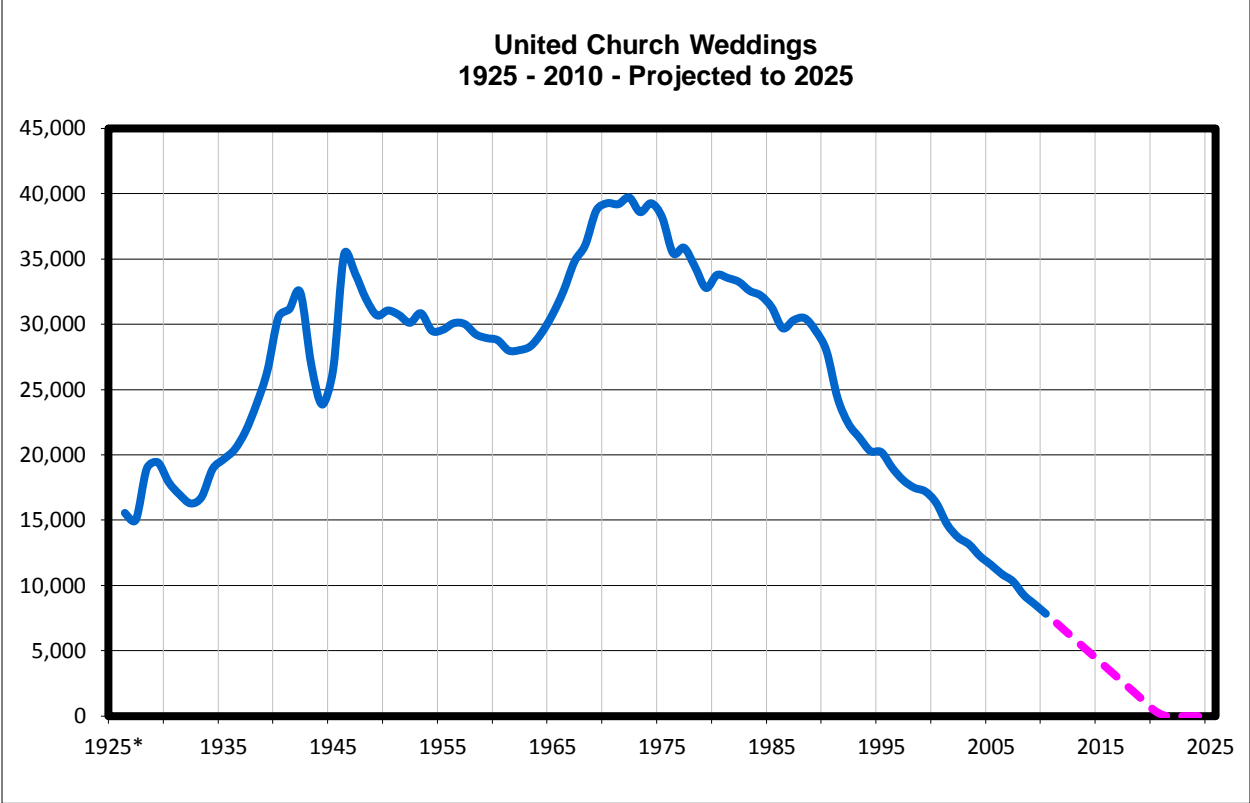
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Weddings

As of December 31, 2010, the total number of United Church Weddings performed was 7,837.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Weddings in 2021 will be zero.

This will be a loss of 7,837 or 100% of the Weddings in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.998$

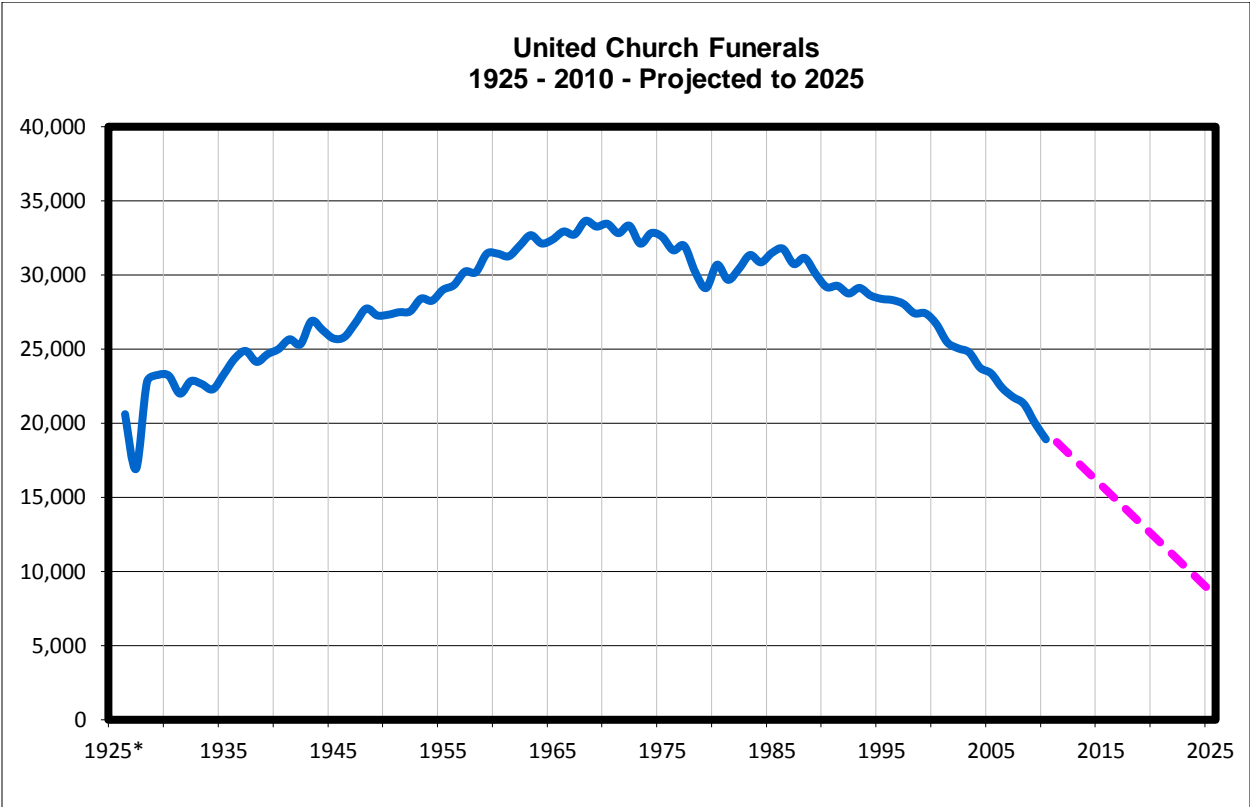
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Funerals

As of December 31, 2010, the total number of United Church Funerals performed was 18,910.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the number of Funerals performed in 2025 will be 8,676.

This will be a decline of 10,234 or 54% of the number of Funerals in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.979$

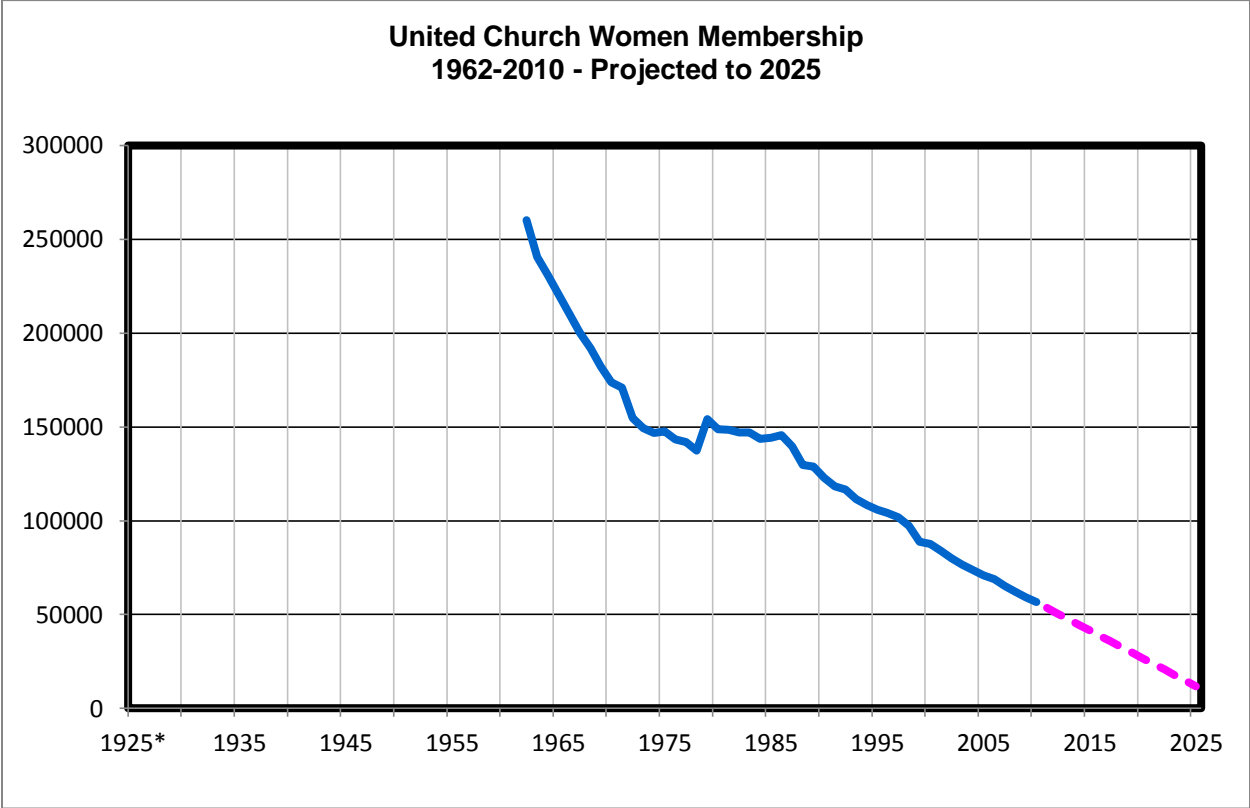
Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

United Church Women

As of December 31, 2010, the total membership of United Church women's groups was 56,729.

If the trend for the past 10 years continues unchanged, the United Church women's group membership in 2025 will be 11,813.

This will be a decline of 44,916 or 79% of the membership in 2010.



TREND $r^2 = 0.997$

Note: Please read, *What Is A Trend?*, at the end for a discussion of how to understand and interpret these graphs.

What Is A Trend?

A “trend” is an indication of the general direction of change.

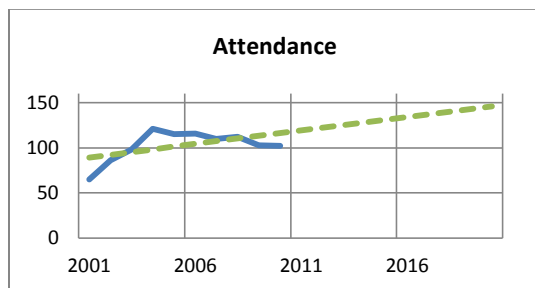
I use the Microsoft Excel TREND function. I do so because it does in fact give a good indication of the general direction of change, and because as a straight line it is easy to understand. And I do so for reasons that it is important to understand what a trend is NOT.

A trend is NOT a single example. A trend looks at a history of events – the more the better – and summarizes the overall change.

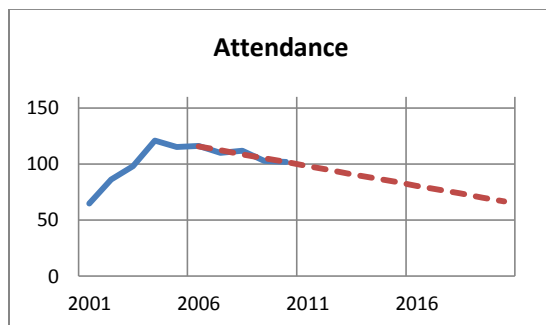
There will always be examples that contradict the overall trend. Because that is precisely what a summary is; it is roughly the average with examples that are better than the trend, and examples that are worse than the trend. And so, a trend is not proven false by examples that are “bucking the trend.”

A trend is NOT a prediction of the future. It is an analysis of the present and recent past.

For example, suppose that ten years ago, your congregation had set a goal to increase average worship attendance from 65 to 100. Suppose the results for those 10 years was, 65, 86, 98, 121, 115, 116, 110, 112, 103, 102. This is great news as the goal was achieved quickly and is still above 100 at the end of 10 years. And the overall trend, shown as the dotted green line, is quite promising.



But what is the trend of the past 5 years? Are we still tending in the general direction of achieving our goal? This trend, shown as the dotted red line, is more worrisome.



Both trends are correct as showing the overall direction of change for 10 and 5 years. Projecting them into the future helps give a sense of whether we are moving in a desired direction or not. But.

The question to ask about these two trends is not: Which is correct? The question to ask is: What factors created the overall trends? And.

When searching for factors that may have created the overall trend, it is crucial to look at factors OUTSIDE the church as well as inside. For example, it may very well be that a change of leadership in the church was a key turning point. Or perhaps this is a small town and a major employer has shut down.

Which leads to my third point about trends.

A trend is NOT just about the United Church. It is also about changes in Canadian society and our neighbourhoods.

It is my strong conviction that when we look at United Church charts and trends and only ask:

What did we do wrong?

We are asking the wrong question. And so end up trying to solve the wrong problems.

If we only ask about what we did wrong, we will spend fruitless time, energy, and money trying to fix ourselves: get a new minister; get an overhead projector; get a new choir director; get a new board structure; etc., etc. But these solutions don't work over the long term because they are trying to solve the wrong question. They are trying to solve only one half of the whole question.

The question we must also ask is:

How has Canadian society and our neighbourhood changed?

There is no single source to present graphs of all the ways Canadian society has changed over the decades. There are many sources. Too many for me to gather here. But here is my quick summary:

- There has been a huge population shift from rural to urban.
- There has been increased diversity of ethnicities and their languages, cultures, and values.
- There has been increased secularization of the public realm, and privatization of religion as a personal opinion. Religion is no longer publically valued and is often characterized as problematic.
- There has been increased web-based social networking and decreased real-time face-to-face community-based networking.
- Initial gains of increased wealth across all sectors has shifted to concentration of wealth amongst the wealthiest and a decrease amongst the middle and lower classes. This results in more adults – and teens – working more and having less free time.
- There has been a shift from volunteer participation to consumer purchasing of services. Membership in volunteer organizations of all types has declined and grown older, and organizations have increasingly relied less on volunteers and more on fees. Sunday School is one of the last remaining non-fee organized children's programs.
- With the exception of congregations populated by recent immigrants, there has been an across the board decline in religious organizations of all faiths and theological spectrums. People are not being religious like they used to – and this trend applies to second and third generation immigrant populations.

So when we look at these graphs and trends, the right questions to ask are:

- What are we doing wrong? What can we learn from programs such as Emerging Spirit? From congregations that are “bucking the trend?” From non-United Church sources such as Natural Church Development? Maybe we should get an overhead projector or Wifi, or allow coffee in worship? Or maybe we should become more intentional about inviting ourselves, our friends, neighbours, and strangers to openly commit to Jesus and to following his way? Or maybe we should become spiritual but not religious? Or?
- Who are our neighbours now? What might be our ministry with and to them? What sustenance might we receive from them that will nurture the health of our faith community?
- Given the changes in Canadian society that have taken place, and are taking place now, how might we expect those changes to impact the United Church? Does our experience confirm or question those expectations?
- Given that changes in Canadian society are not a problem that we can fix – and are not our fault – how can we best respond to them in ways that are faithful to the Gospel of Christ and also practically sustainable for the next generations? Some of the areas that come to mind where specific responses are needed are:
- Given that people are just not going to church like they used to, what do we do with the over-capacity of our existing buildings?
- Given that people are not volunteering like they used to, what forms of organization can we adopt to use less volunteer time more effectively and with greater pay off in service and satisfaction?
- Given that people are not donating like they used to, what sustainable balance of revenue streams and expenses will support life-changing, service-oriented, Gospel communities?

To re-cap. Remember what a trend is not:

1. **A trend is NOT a single example.** A trend looks at a history of events – the more the better – and summarizes the overall change.
2. **A trend is NOT a prediction of the future.** It is an analysis of the present and recent past.
3. **A trend is NOT just about the United Church.** It is also about changes in Canadian society and our neighbourhood.

And use these graphs to expand and sharpen the questions you are asking about your situation as a congregation. Without the right questions, you will try and solve the wrong problems.

And widen the conversation as far as possible. Within your own congregation, but also with as many neighbours and neighbouring congregations as will join in. Jesus has promised to be present when we gather in his name. I am sure that God is not done with us yet.

David Ewart,
www.davidewart.ca