

Business as Usual  
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Benton F. Baugh, Ph.D., P.E.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** If we continue with business as usual, the Churches of Christ will functionally disappear in the lifetime of those alive today. It is not inevitable whether we will grow or decline. It is impacted both by the environment around us, and how we react to the environment. We can change what is happening.

**KEY WORDS:**

Business as usual

**GLOSSARY:**

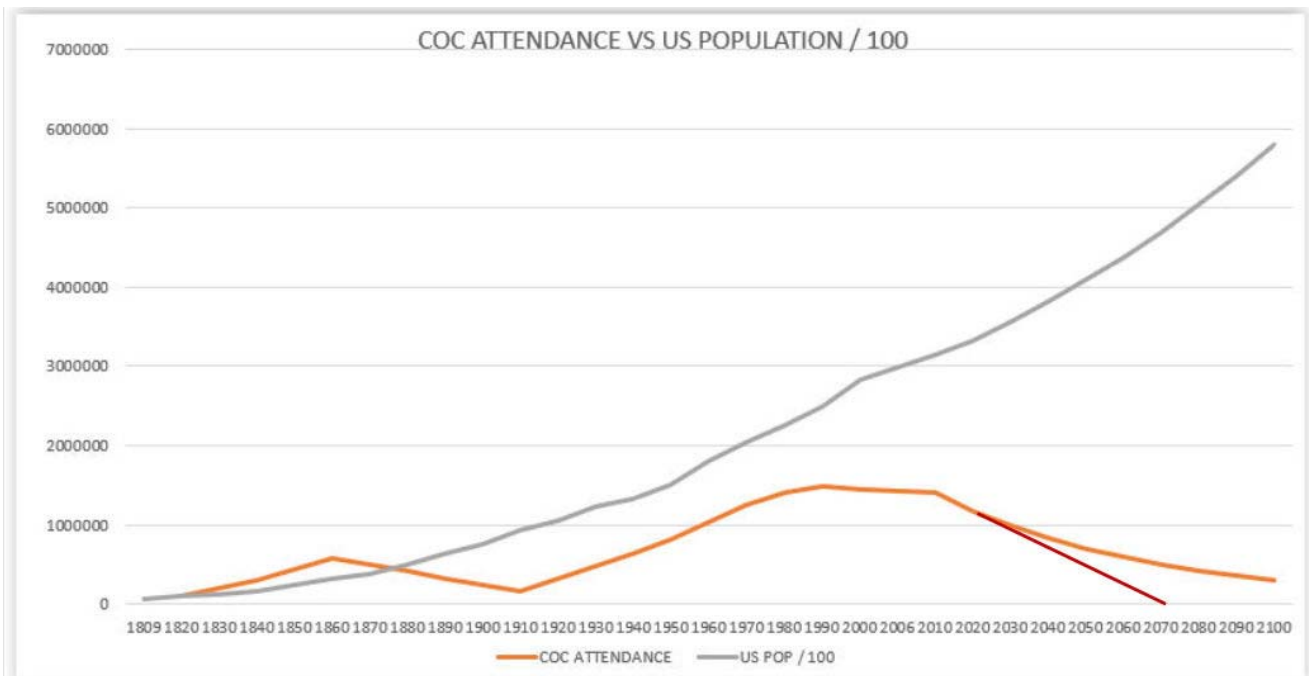
Business as usual: What you have been doing like you have been doing it.

**REPORT:**

**Five years ago**, the Churches of Christ in the USA were declining at -0.5% per year. The decline rate has now increased to -

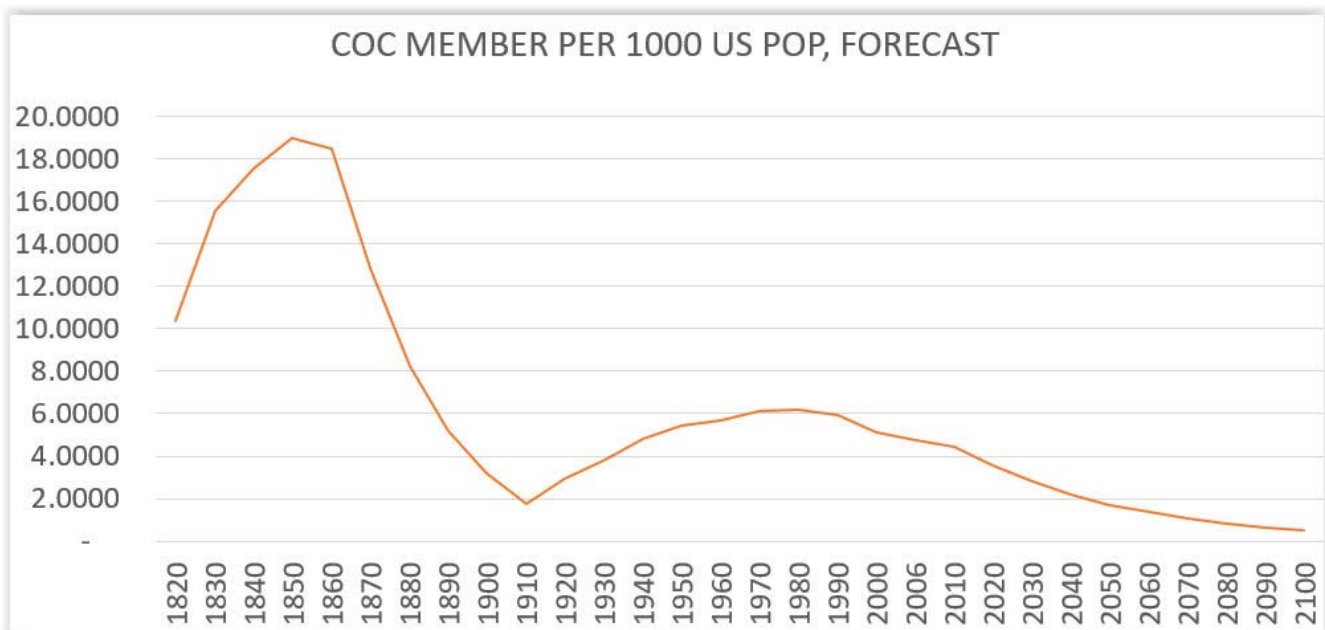
1.71% per year. Presuming the **decline rate** remains steady rather than accelerating more, the Church of Christ would look like the following graph<sup>1</sup> as shown by the orange line. It has a bend or inflection above the 2010-2020 dates showing the change from -.5% to the -1.71% decline rate. The US population / 100 is shown by the gray line. It is divided by 100 for scaled viewing in the graph below<sup>1</sup>.

With the decline rate remaining the same, the attendance never goes to zero, but simply gets a little closer each year. The graph also shows in the red line the effect if the **decline amount** remains the same rather than the decline rate. It says the Church of Christ in the USA would disappear in about 2071. An actual prediction result would be somewhere between the red and orange lines.



The second graph<sup>1</sup> below shows the same data displayed differently. It shows that in about 1860 19 in 1000 (or about 1 in 50) US citizens were a member of the Church of Christ, declining to 2 in 1000 in 1910 (or 1 in 500), increasing back to 6 in 1000 about 1980 (or 1 in 166), declining to about 4 in 1000 today or 1 in 250, and forecasted to drop to 0.51 per 1000 in 2100 (or 1 in 2000). That presumes a constant -1.71% decline rate (from the orange line) rather than the constant decline amount (from the red line).

future generation will wake up and stop the decline or whether Africa or India will send missionaries to help us. This article is about you and me. Is conducting business as usual in our generation going to be an acceptable excuse on Judgment Day? In the 1980s when we started growing less than the US population growth rate was that not a wake-up call. Apparently not, we continued with business as usual. In the 1990s when we collectively went flatline in our size was that not an adequate wake-up call? Apparently not, we continued with



Functionally, in the lifetime of someone born into the Church of Christ today, the Church of Christ will disappear as we know it if we continue with our business as usual.

We should keep in mind that the US population is only growing at 0.7% per year. If a 100-member congregation simply converted a net one person per year (births cancelling deaths), it would be growing at 1% per year or keeping ahead of US population growth rate. Rather than converting a net one per year on average, two net per year are leaving.

This article is not about whether some

business as usual. In the early 2000s when we actually started to decline numerically was that not an adequate wake-up call. Apparently not, we continued with business as usual. Today as our decline rate is accelerating will that not be an adequate wake-up call. We are going to find out together and will be responsible for the results.

We have gotten this far by effectively criticizing “business as usual” but haven’t defined it. We will slow down at this point and define business as usual for you as what you have been doing. That should be an obvious statement, and most likely what

you have been doing has resulted in a flatline (lukewarm) or declining (cold) congregation. **Business as usual is doing what you have been doing like you have been doing it.**

If what you have been doing has resulted in a flatline or declining congregation, continuing what you have been doing will continue to result in a flatline or declining situation.

**QUESTION:** The question at this point is whether there is some part of how we are operating which is the custom or tradition of the Churches of Christ, but which is not actually scripturally mandated which is preventing us from growing?

**PREDICTION:** We (or you) can almost automatically go into a Church of Christ and predict whether they are growing or are declining on one single factor. Would it be amazing to have that clear an indicator? That is not to say it is that simple to fix, but to recognize the common factor to declining congregations would be a serious start to fixing it.

That factor is the age of the congregation. If the congregation is more than about 30 years old, it is most likely flatline. If it is over about 50 years old, it will be in decline. These are not positive indicators but are probably 95% sure.

A major problem with the Churches of Christ is that most of our congregations were started in the 1950s and are over 50 years old. As we go further, more of our congregations will continue to age, so a more accelerated decline rate is likely until we collectively wake up.

**WHY AGE IS A FACTOR:** And why is being an older congregation a problem. It is business as usual. The typical

congregation naturally builds up restrictive customs and traditions on how they operate, they have passed their crisis point where most of the control becomes consolidated within the eldership, the elderships have aged along with the congregation and individual members, and most middle management members have become frustrated and left. Easy to

identify, not easy to fix. It has been this way a long time, it is accepted as the correct way and the

way is has to be, and it is choking our congregations.

Basically, a systemic change happens in the way a congregation operates at a point in time. The operating practices before and after the change were and are most likely completely scriptural so they are not necessarily

“noticeable”. They are within the range of discretion in operation, but not in the range of discretion in results.

**HOW TO CHANGE**

**THE IMPACT OF AGE:**

A systemic change has happened to your congregation as it aged to change it from a growth mode to a lukewarm or declining mode. Any change which does not reverse or at least substantially change that systemic change will at the most provide a temporary patch to your situation.

As the systematic change typically happened a long time ago, it is ingrained in the leaders, members, and procedures. The current procedures are frequently not only seen a normal, but as the only scriptural way to do things.

It is frequently not practical for leaders in

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the midst of the congregation which has become lukewarm to objectively evaluate the situation. If the current leaders knew how to make the required changes, they would have already done it. It is far better to seek outside help than to continue to be flatline or in a decline mode.

It is also frequent that someone offering advice on your situation will:

1. Accept your systemically changed congregation as the scripturally mandated model. The natural tendency of someone who accepts your post-change congregation as normal is to address the symptoms of your problem rather than the causes
2. Have the same problems at their congregation so are hesitant to make suggestions they would not make at their home congregation.

This means their best efforts will at most provide a temporary boost to your situation but will not fix it.

There is no reason the age of the congregation needs to be a factor in the

growth rate of your congregation. It naturally tends to be, but you can overcome that tendency just like most other tendencies. You can and it is appropriate to do so and not sit back and simply let it happen.

Anyone with ideas different enough to actually turn most congregations around today will of necessity be out of step with our usual business practices.

If you make the changes to turn your congregation around and become a growth mode congregation again, you will be a pioneer in our brotherhood. It is time for some pioneers.

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At the OC Church Growth Institute, we have been building a resource of materials to help you be a pioneer. If we can be of assistance to you, contact us at

[info@occg.institute](mailto:info@occg.institute) at any time. Some of our online resources are at:  
<https://occg.institute/papers/organization/>  
and <https://occg.institute/services/>.

References:

1. Graphs are from data collected and combined from various sources by the OC Church Growth Institute.