

# Working Paper – Anglican Church of Canada Statistics

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## Introduction

Denominational statistics are an important source of data that keeps track of various forms of religious behavior and expression, but in Canada this data has not been extensively studied. Since we began working together in 2003, we recognized the value of this data and have attempted to compile and analyze that data for various religious bodies. In compiling this information, we have used the data generated by churches themselves as recorded in their archives or denominational publications, and we have not relied upon data in the *Yearbook of American and Canadian churches*.

We appreciate that some of these statistics may offer a more “realistic” picture than other sets of statistics. For example, we recognize that the number of “members” in a denomination often offers an optimistic picture. If a denomination’s membership is in decline, membership is often a lagging indicator as members remain on the books long after they have ceased participating in a congregation. However, this optimism is usually consistent, and thus comparisons over time do allow us to see real trends. We also recognize that statistics on other aspects of religious behaviour are more likely to offer an accurate picture. Churches are, for example, unlikely to record baptisms that didn’t happen. In sum, we believe that when we compare statistics that measure multiple aspects of religious involvement - such as membership, baptism, marriage and so on - a picture emerges that indicates how a denomination is doing and we need to take that picture seriously.

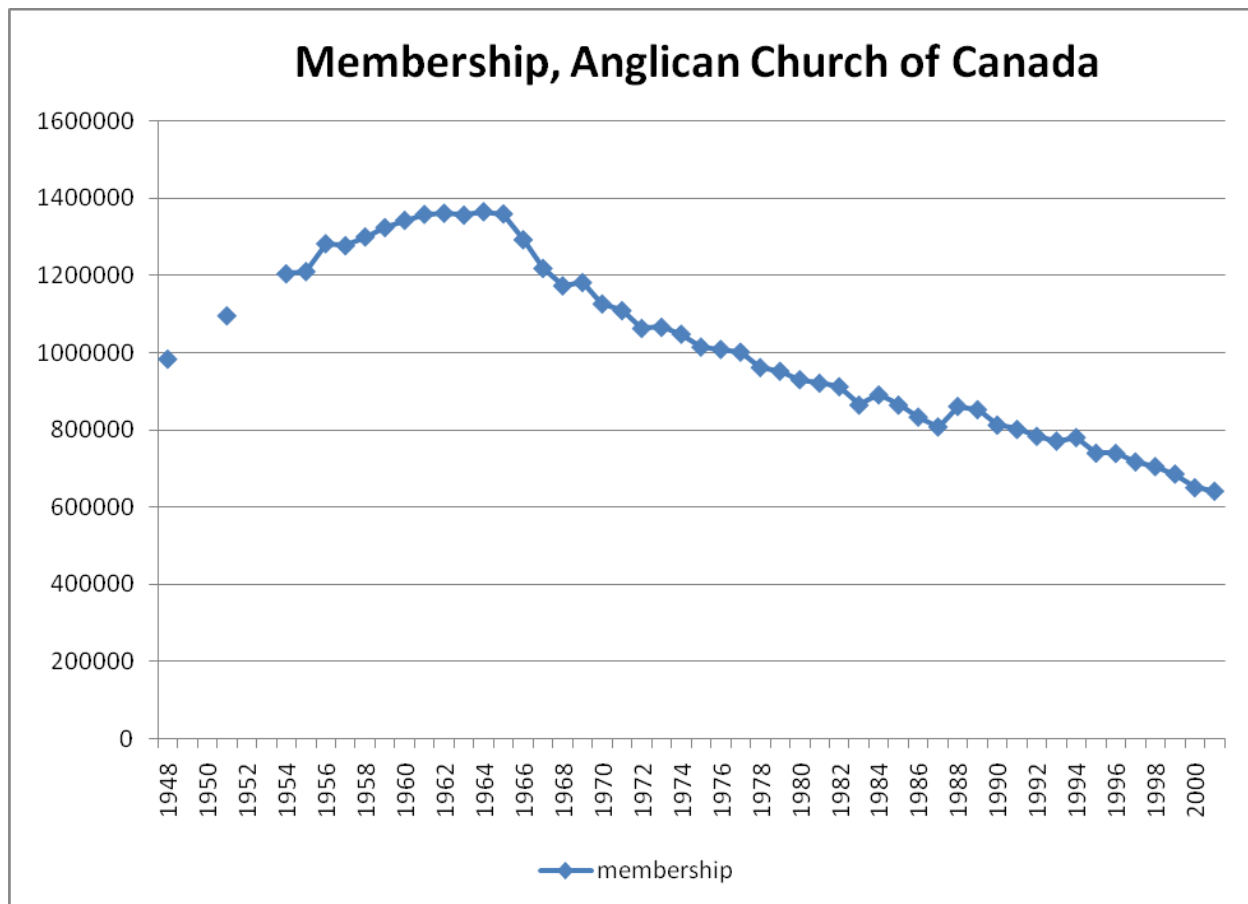
The purpose of these working papers is to make our findings available quickly and conveniently, and we welcome comments and feedback. Our main concern is how religious behavior has changed in Canada since World War II. We believe that the data from religious denominations will help us to understand the nature of this change, how it affected particular denominations, and, when looked at comparatively, this data will help us to understand the broader changes relating to religion itself and its place in Canadian society. The papers are intended to be primarily descriptive. Electronic dissemination allows us to share much more of the data that we have uncovered than would be possible in an academic journal article or book published in hard copy.

For the Anglican Church of Canada, we have obtained data starting in 1948, 1951, and running consistently from 1954 through to 2001 (the last year for which we were able to obtain national data on the Anglican Church of Canada). As will be noted in the text, there are some gaps in the data, but the overall picture that does emerge is quite clear.

Our discussion on what the Canadian Census reveals about long-term trends in the Anglican Church can be found in an article in *Studies in Religion* which is scheduled for publication in 2011.

## Denominational Numbers

### *Membership*



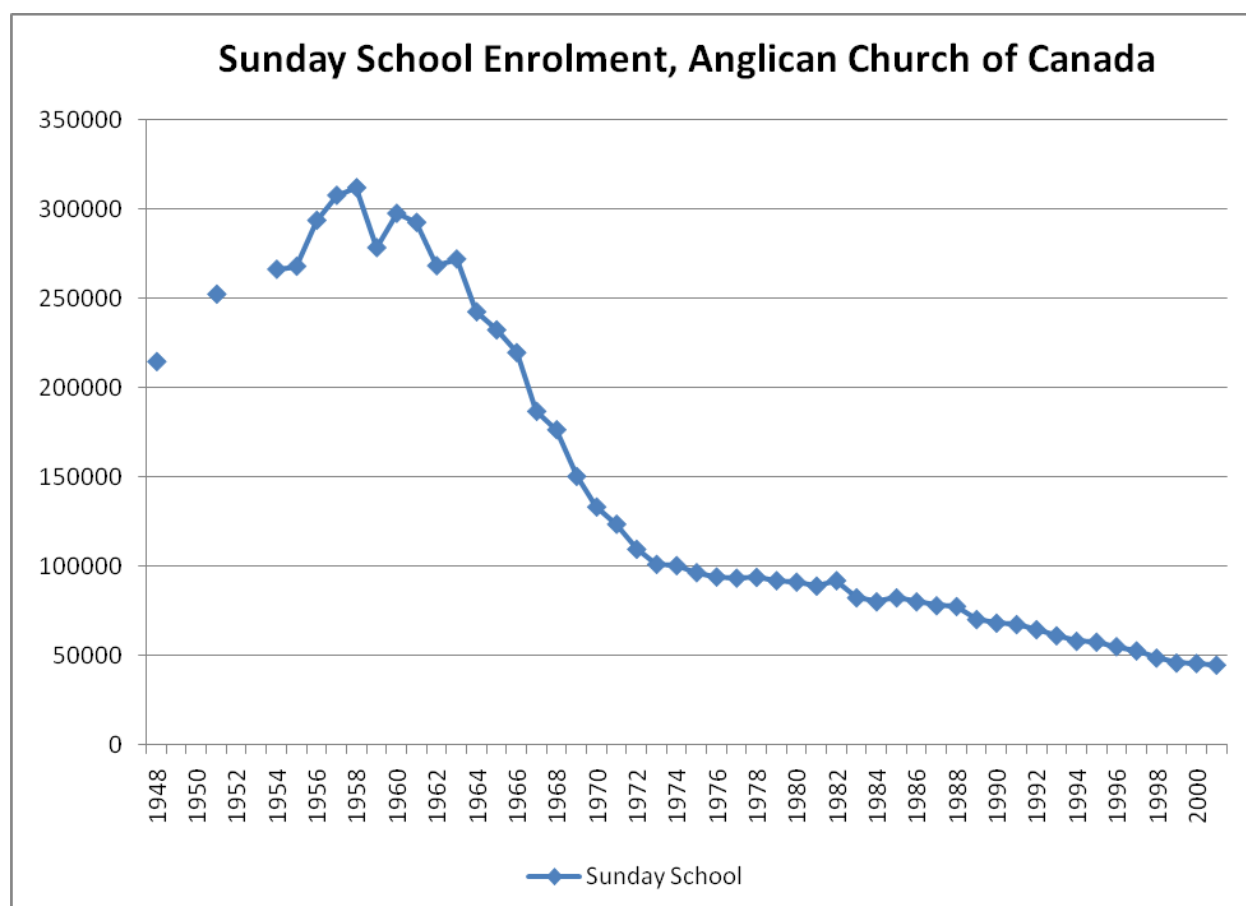
**Figure 1 – Membership, Anglican Church of Canada, 1948-2001**

We begin our discussion by looking at the national membership of the Anglican Church of Canada after World War II. The membership of the Anglican Church (Figure 1) rose steadily in the immediate post-war period. Starting at just under 1 million members (983,779) in 1948, the earliest year after the war for which we have such figures, membership grew over the next decade and stood at 1,300,029 a decade later (1958). The rate of growth over this ten year period was very high, a remarkable 32% increase. Membership continued to grow consistently for several years after 1958, reaching 1,361,463 members in 1962. Membership then dropped slightly to 1,356,424 in 1963, but rebounded the next year in 1964 to reach a peak of 1,365,313. This was to be, though no one could have predicted this at the time, a record high, one that the Anglican Church would never come close to achieving again.

After reaching a peak in 1964, a significantly different trend emerges as membership moved into steady decline. The initial decline was notably steep. By 1968 Anglican membership had declined to 1,173,519 – a decline of almost 200,000 members in a three year period. In just three years, almost 15% of the church's membership had vanished from its rolls. There was a small rebound in 1968, as there would be at various times in later years, but the downward

trend after 1964 is notable. By 1978 the Anglican church membership had not only fallen below 1 million members, it had also fallen below its membership level of thirty years previously (1948). There was a brief increase in the late 1980s, but this did not reverse the overall trend. By 2001, the last year the church reported such figures, Anglican membership had fallen to 641,845. To put this in perspective – membership was less than half of what it had been at its peak. And, of course, the overall Canadian population had been increasing in this period, with the national population increasing by just over 60% from 1961 through to 2001, that is from 18,236,247 people in 1961 to 29,639,030 in 2001.

### ***Sunday School Enrolment***

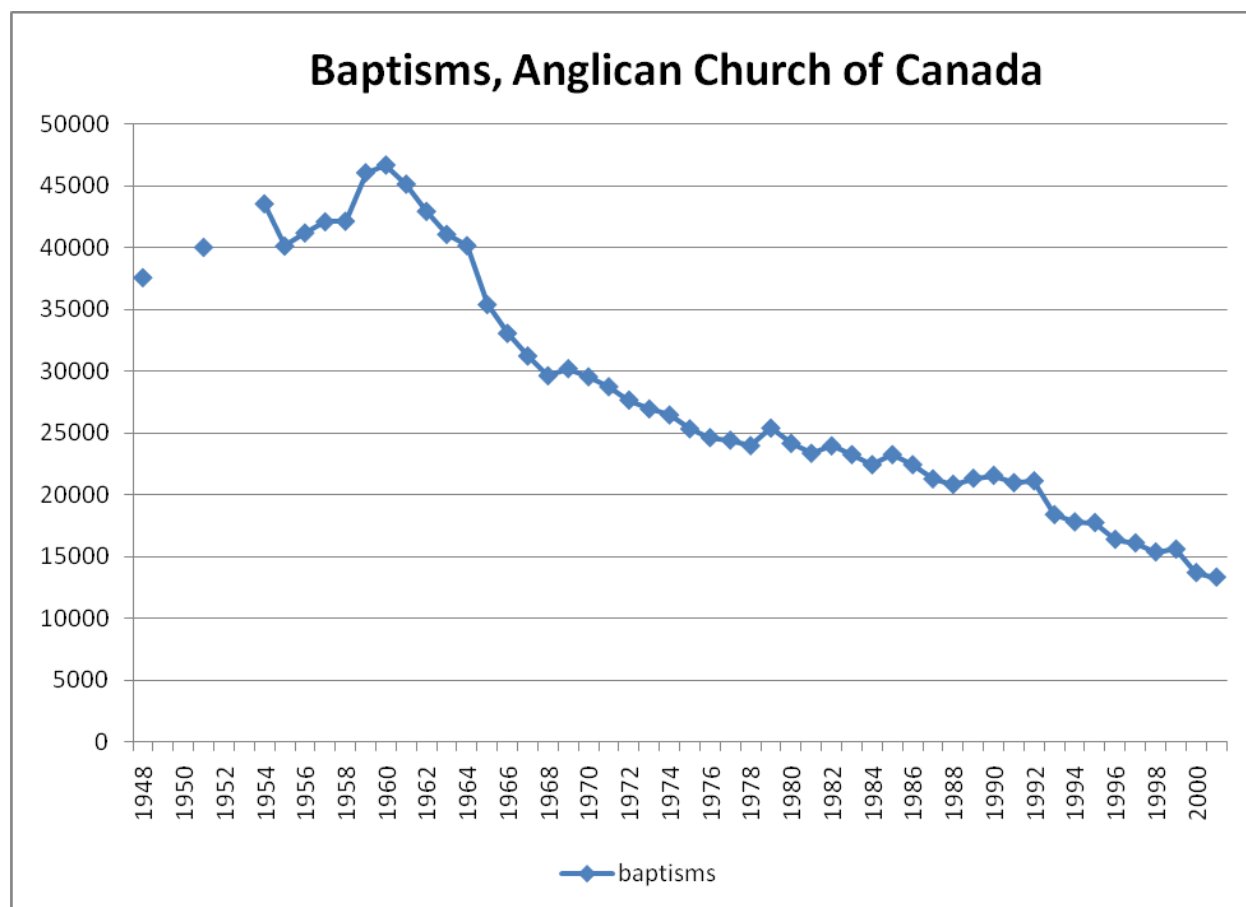


**Figure 2 – Sunday School Enrolment, Anglican Church of Canada, 1948-2001**

Not surprisingly, similar trends are evident in the data on Sunday School enrolment (Figure 2). Beginning with an enrolment of 214,532 in 1948, Sunday School enrolment grew to 267,897 by 1955, before moving dramatically higher, reaching a peak of 311,859 only three years later in 1958. This remains the highest recorded enrolment in Anglican Sunday Schools. A dramatic decline the next year (278,309) was followed by a significant increase the following year, where enrolment returned in 1960 to 297,527. These dramatic swings raise some questions, including questions about the accuracy of the number keeping. At the same time, we clearly see Sunday school enrolment above 278,000 throughout these years. Starting in 1961, Sunday School enrolment moved into decline. This decline preceded the introduction of the New Curriculum for

Sunday Schools in 1963. At any rate, after an uptick in 1964, Sunday School enrolment underwent a severe decline. By 1967, membership dipped (186,680) below the 1948 level. By 1970, membership had declined to 133,150, less than half of its peak membership. Subsequent decline has been steady, although less severe than in the 1960s. By 2001, the last year for which we have recorded data, the membership stood at 44,687. To consider this downward trend another way, Sunday schools were one quarter of the size in 2001 than they had been in 1948, and approximately one sixth the size they had been at their peak in the late 1950s.

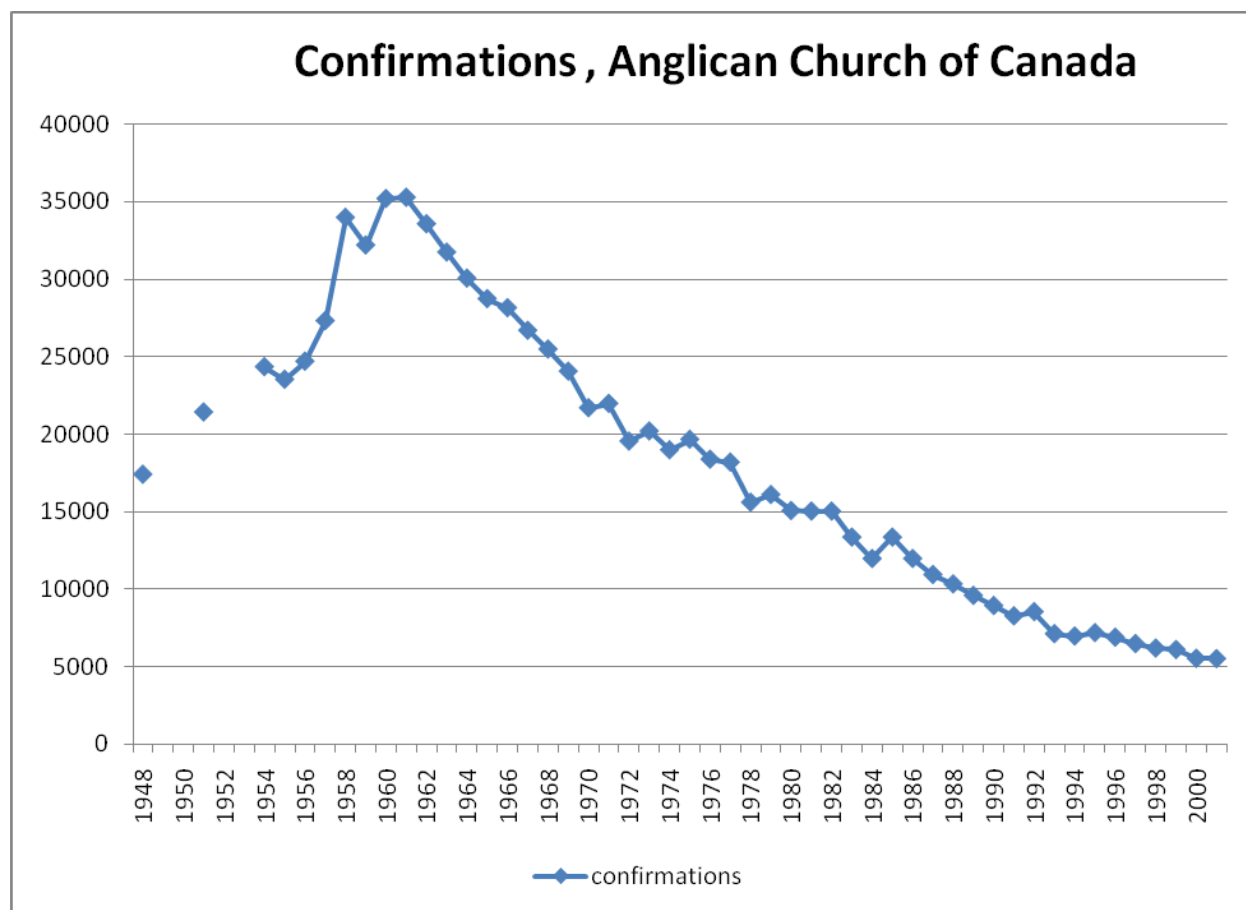
### ***Baptisms and Confirmations***



**Figure 3 – Baptisms, Anglican Church of Canada, 1948-2001**

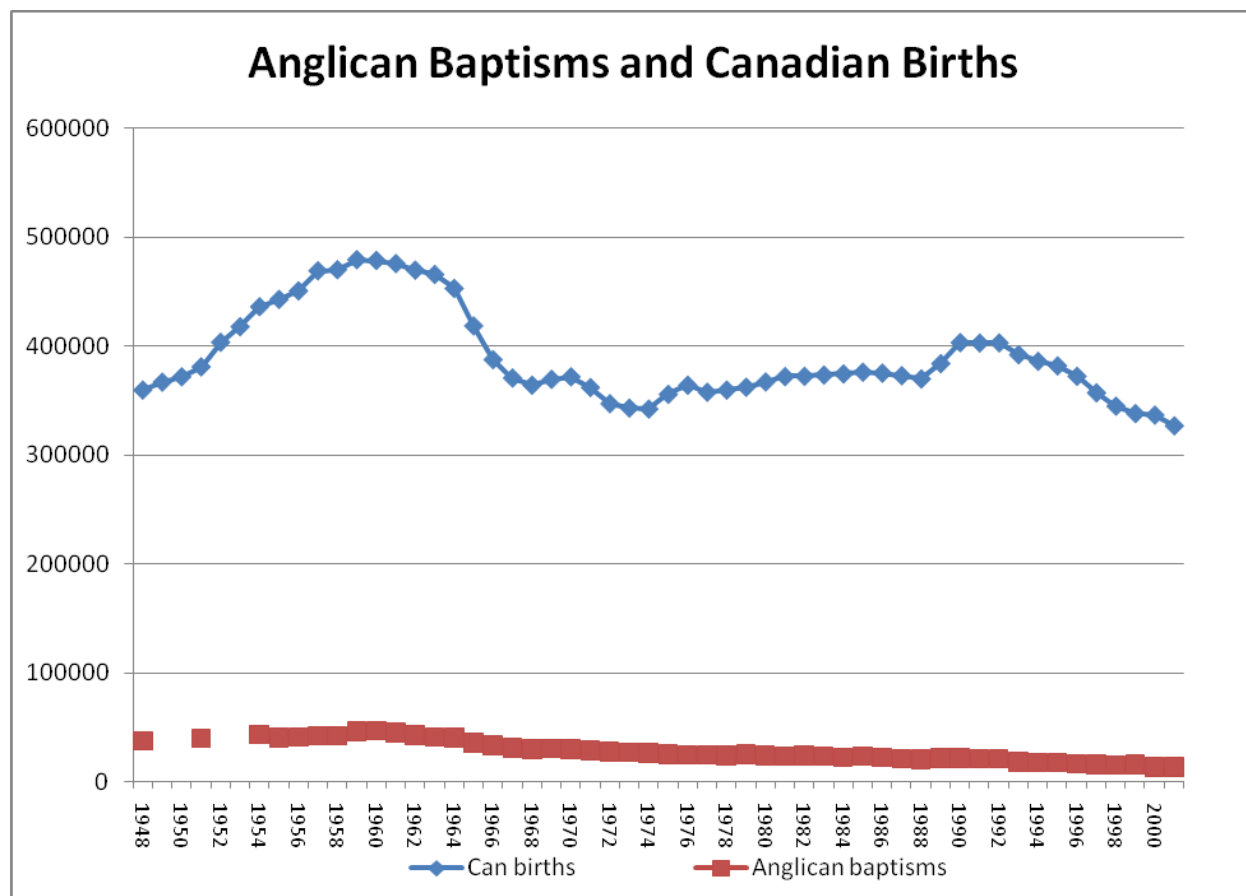
Broad trends already observed in the previous sets of data (over-all membership and Sunday School enrolment) are reflected in the data available on baptisms and confirmations. Baptisms grew (Figure 3) from 37,557 in 1948 to 43,538 in 1954, dipped to 40,118 in 1955 and then grew over the next five years to reach a peak of 46,681 in 1960. From this point on, baptisms in the Anglican church have declined. By 1970 baptisms had declined to 29,529. The last recorded year (2001) noted 13,304 baptisms. The enumeration for baptisms in the Anglican church includes the baptism of both adults and children. For just a few scattered years, we have the number of adult and the number of children being baptized recorded separately. In these years, adult baptisms generally account for 10% of baptisms, with infants obviously accounting for the

other 90%. The birthrate obviously affects the number of baptisms in any given year, and we will turn to this point in a moment.



**Figure 4 – Confirmations, Anglican Church of Canada, 1948-2001**

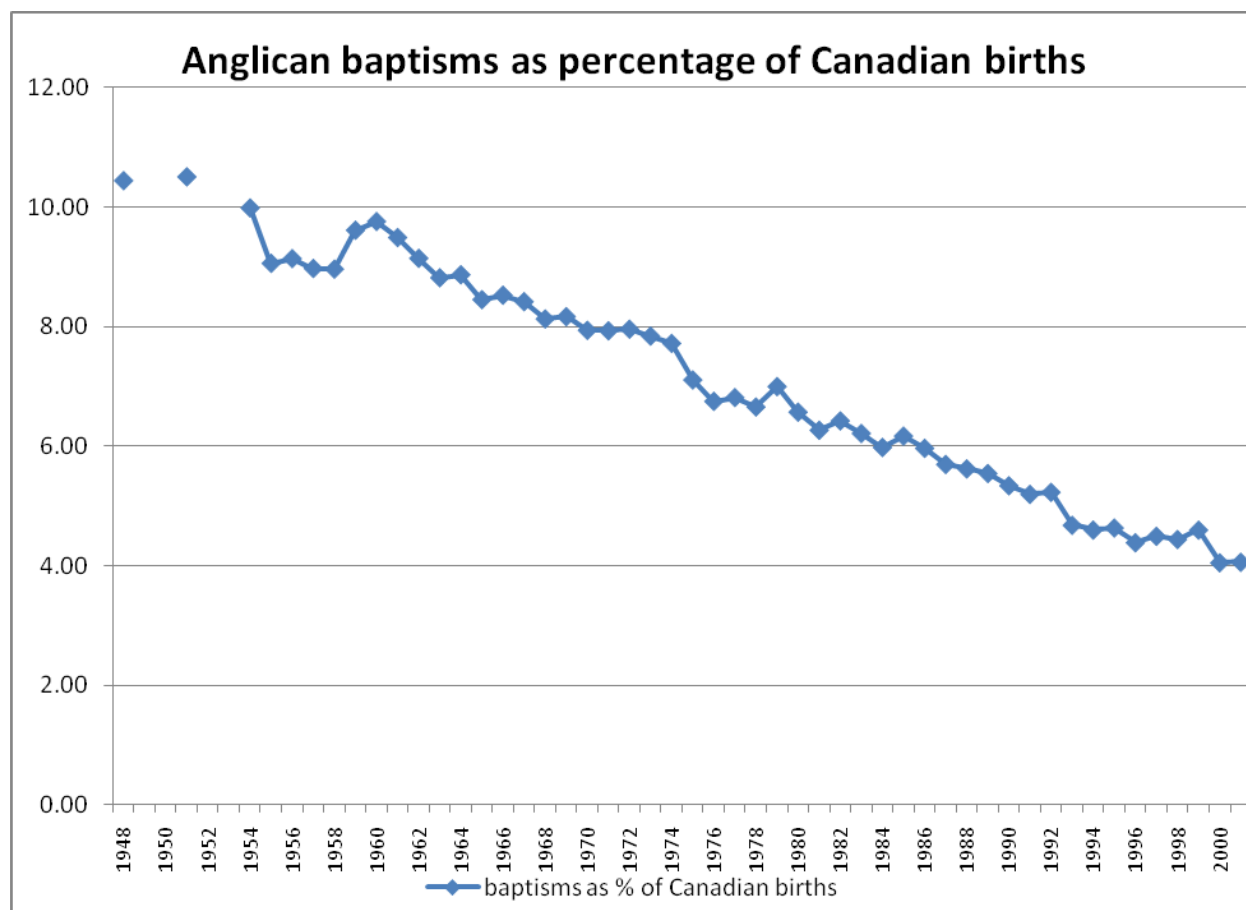
Confirmations (Figure 4) grew in the 1950s even more dramatically than baptisms. What the increase in church membership that we looked at earlier suggests to us that many people sought to reconnect with the church when they settled down to raise their families after the war. In this scenario, one can imagine that some adults who had not previously been confirmed would seek confirmation for themselves as they were considering having children baptized, and this would account for the increased number of confirmations. In 1948, the Church of England in Canada (as it was then known) witnessed 17,393 confirmations. This grew until 1954 (24,333), dipped in 1955 (23,520), then grew again until 1958 (33,963), saw a brief dip in 1959 (32,175), before increasing again in 1960 (35,175) and reaching the peak in 1961 (35,253). Ten years after the peak, confirmations were down over 10,000. There were only 21,600 confirmations in 1971. While there are considerable fluctuations in the number of confirmations, the trend has consistently been downward. In 2001 there were only 5,506 – or about one sixth of those experienced at the 1961 peak.

**Anglican Baptisms and Canadian Births: A Comparison****Figure 5 – Anglican baptisms compared to number of Canadian births, 1948-2001**

When we consider the number of baptisms, the obvious question we ask is how does this relate to the number of births. Put simply, denominations which practice infant baptism are highly responsive to changes in the actual incidence of births as this will affect the number of children who can be presented for baptism in any given year. We see this relationship in the Anglican church of Canada. Unfortunately, we cannot derive the number of births specific to Anglican parents from the census returns. Fortunately, the overall picture is clear enough. The peak year for births in Canada was 1959 (479,275) while the peak year for baptisms in the Anglican church was, as already note, the following year.

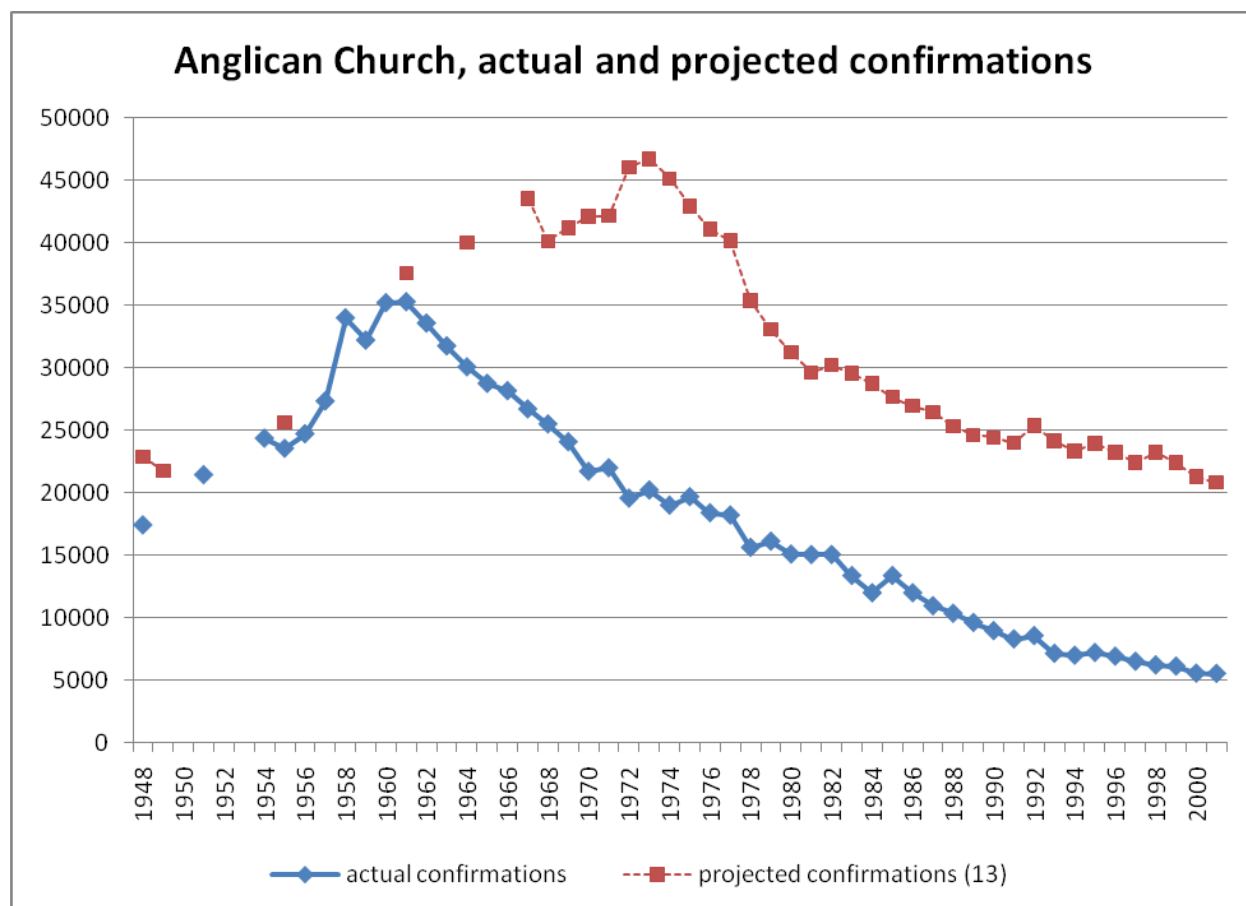
The huge difference in the numbers (479,275 births as compared to 46,056 Anglican baptisms) makes it difficult to determine on a graph, such as the one above (Figure 5), the extent to which these two trends were aligned. At the same time, what seems evident when we look at this graph, as well as the previous graph on baptisms, is that the recovery in births experienced in the early 1970s, and more significantly in the 1980s and into the 1990s was not reflected in the number of baptisms in the Anglican Church of Canada. We see a recovery in the number of births nationally, but baptisms in the Anglican church continue to decline. We have discovered that the best way to look at the relationship of the total number of births to Anglican baptisms is

not to put these two curves on the same graph, but rather to compare the number of Anglican baptisms to the number of Canadian births, expressed as a percentage (Figure 6).



**Figure 6 - Anglican Baptisms as a percentage of Canadian birth**

What we see is a decline from a peak of over 10% of Anglican baptisms to overall births in the early 1950s to approximately 9% through to 1958, when it recovered to over 9.5% for the next few years. After 1960 the ratio of Anglican baptisms to overall births enters into sharp decline. So not only did the overall number of baptisms decline, so too did the ratio that we have been looking at. What this means is the decline of overall baptisms was not simply a reflection of the decline of the number of births. Fewer and fewer of those children who were born in these years were brought to an Anglican church for baptism. This trend has continued, with only minor variations and the occasional recovery through to 2001 where it stands at approximately 4%. What is noteworthy is that this is half of the ratio of baptisms (over 8%) which the church experienced well into the early 1970s.

**Anglican Confirmations and Projected Confirmations****Figure 7 - Comparison projected confirmations to actual confirmations which occurred**

As disturbing as this trend in baptisms was, an even more significant one can also be seen when we compare baptisms with confirmations. The scenario we have in mind here is that children who were baptized as infants and maintained a significant relationship with the church would likely then be confirmed some 13 years after their baptism (Figure 7). So taking as an example the first generation born after the war for which we have data, that is in 1948, we would see those baptized in that year appearing for confirmation in 1961. After that date, confirmations should have grown in the Anglican church. We have already seen that this did not happen – and indeed – confirmations fell. It is instructive to recognize the extent to which actual confirmations lagged behind the level of confirmations that would have occurred had those baptised 13 years earlier had gone through their confirmation.

Those baptized during the baby-boom period did not have nearly the impact on the Anglican church one would have anticipated. This data suggests that a large proportion of late baby boomers were not brought to the Anglican church for baptism. Even more significantly, baby boomers were not confirmed in anything like the numbers one would have anticipated. The gap between those who were baptized and should have confirmed some 13 years later was slim

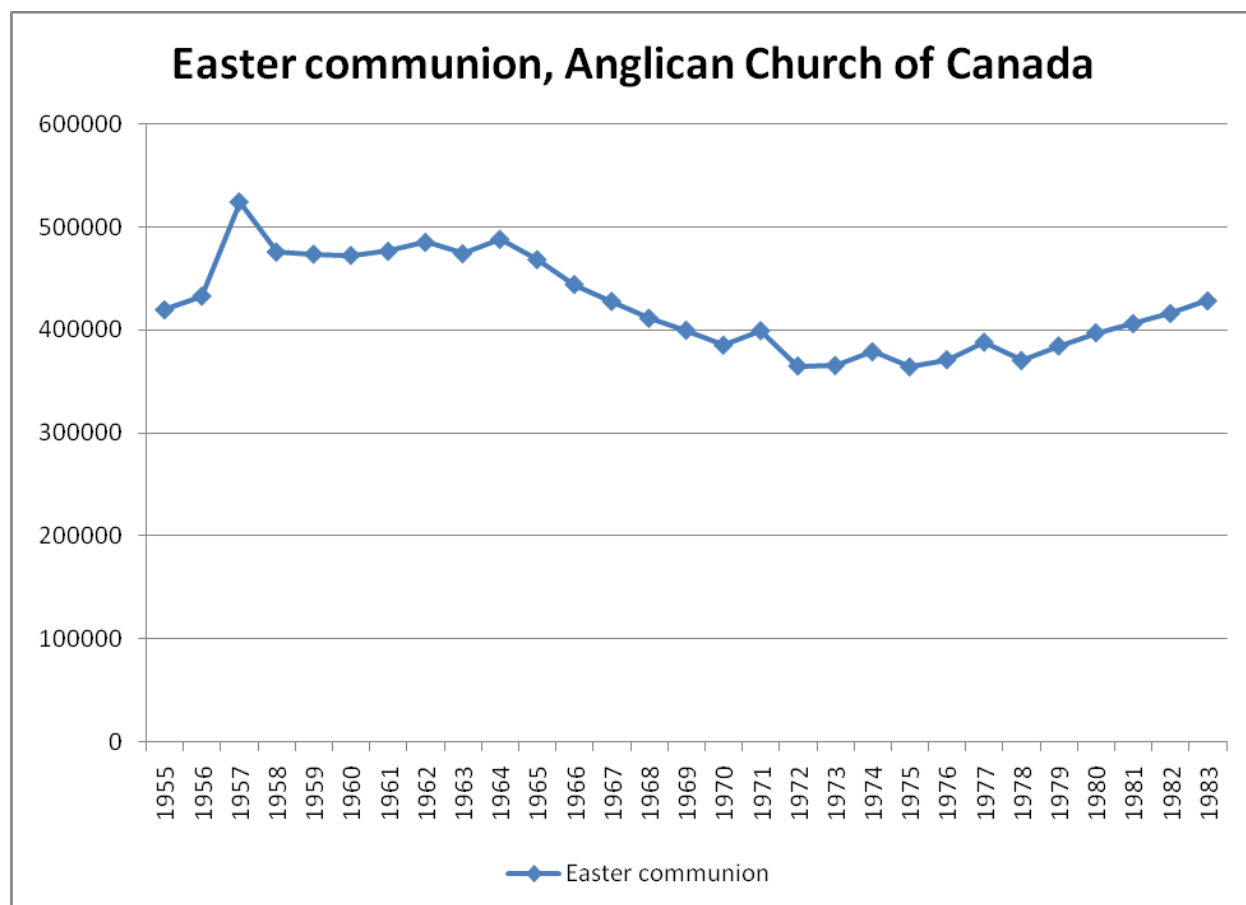


among the earliest baby boomers, for those born before 1950. The gap grows dramatically for those born after that date. Confirmations should have peaked in 1973 (i.e. among those born around 1960), but by then gap was simply huge, clocking in at 250,000. To put it another way, over half of those who were baptized in the Anglican church did not receive confirmation. If confirmation can be seen as a proxy for religious involvement and participation, what we see in the graph is that a large portion of the middle to late baby boomer generation ceased to be active in Anglican church. Moreover, this trend takes off in the late 1960's and accelerates as we enter into the 1970's.

### ***Other statistics***

The Anglican Church of Canada provides a wide range of other statistics, such as those on memberships in organizations within the church, communicants at Easter, identifiable givers, number of funerals conducted, and a great deal of financial data. We have selected just a few of these statistics to see what these show us.

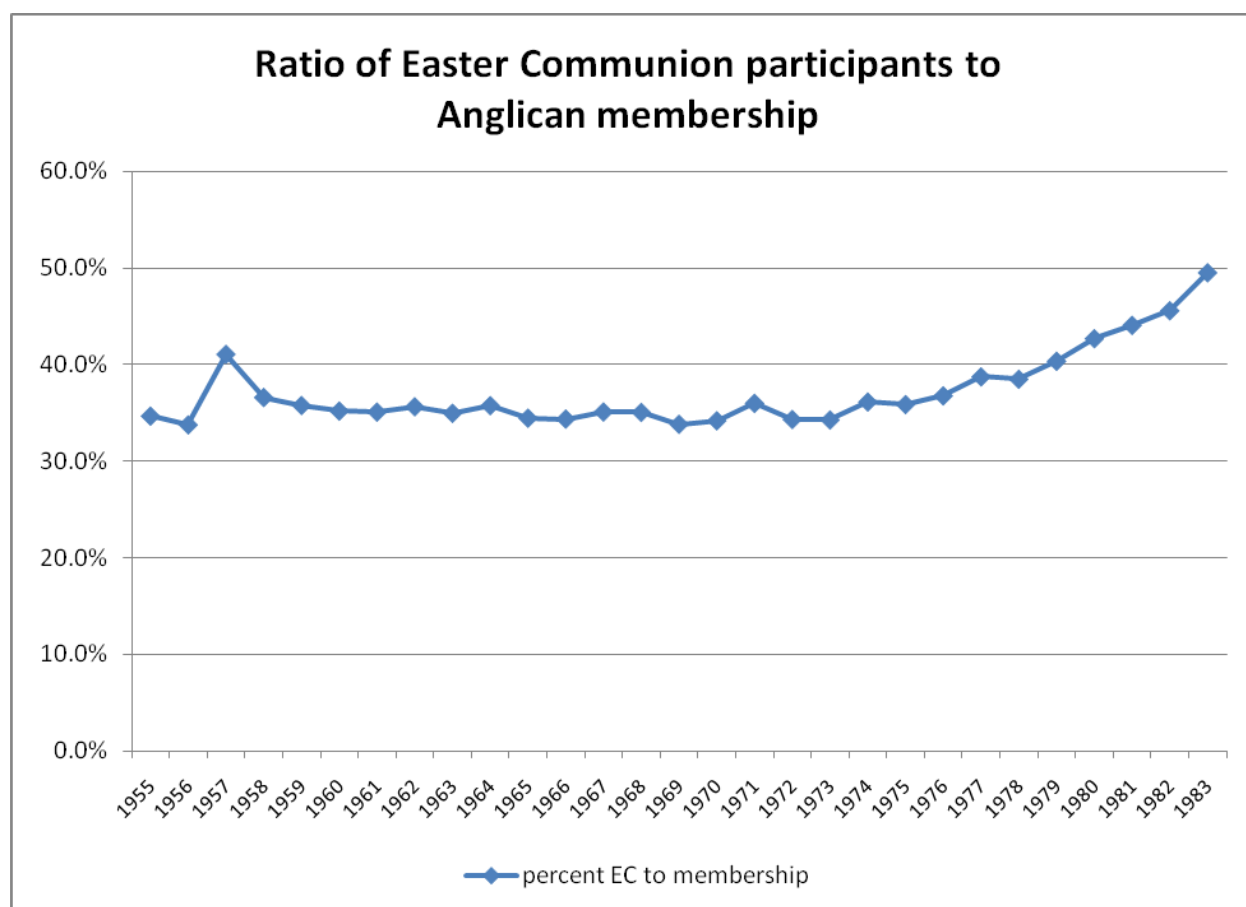
#### ***Easter Communion***



**Figure 8 - Easter communions, Anglican Church of Canada, 1955-1983**

Tracking those who communicated during the Easter season (Figure 8) is a very different indicator from weekly attendance, but it does open a window onto participation in the Anglican

communion. The church did not record this statistic for the entire period under review, but we do have the national numbers of Easter communicants from 1955 through till 1983. We have already noted in our comments on other trends that that this was the period of most dramatic change for the Anglican church. There are several features which would correspond to what we've already seen: there was a peak in the late 1950s (here a peak in 1957 of 524,621; this peak was followed by a decline beginning in 1964 (488,185). So far the picture is a familiar one. At the same time, there are several things that depart from the patterns we have observed so far. One is that the rate of decline does not seem to be as dramatic between 1964 and 1972 (364,867), when the number of Easter communicants seems to have more or less stabilized at slightly over 360,000 communicants. Even more interestingly, this number grew consistently after 1978 (370,236), increasing to 428,267 in 1983 (the last year this statistic was recorded).



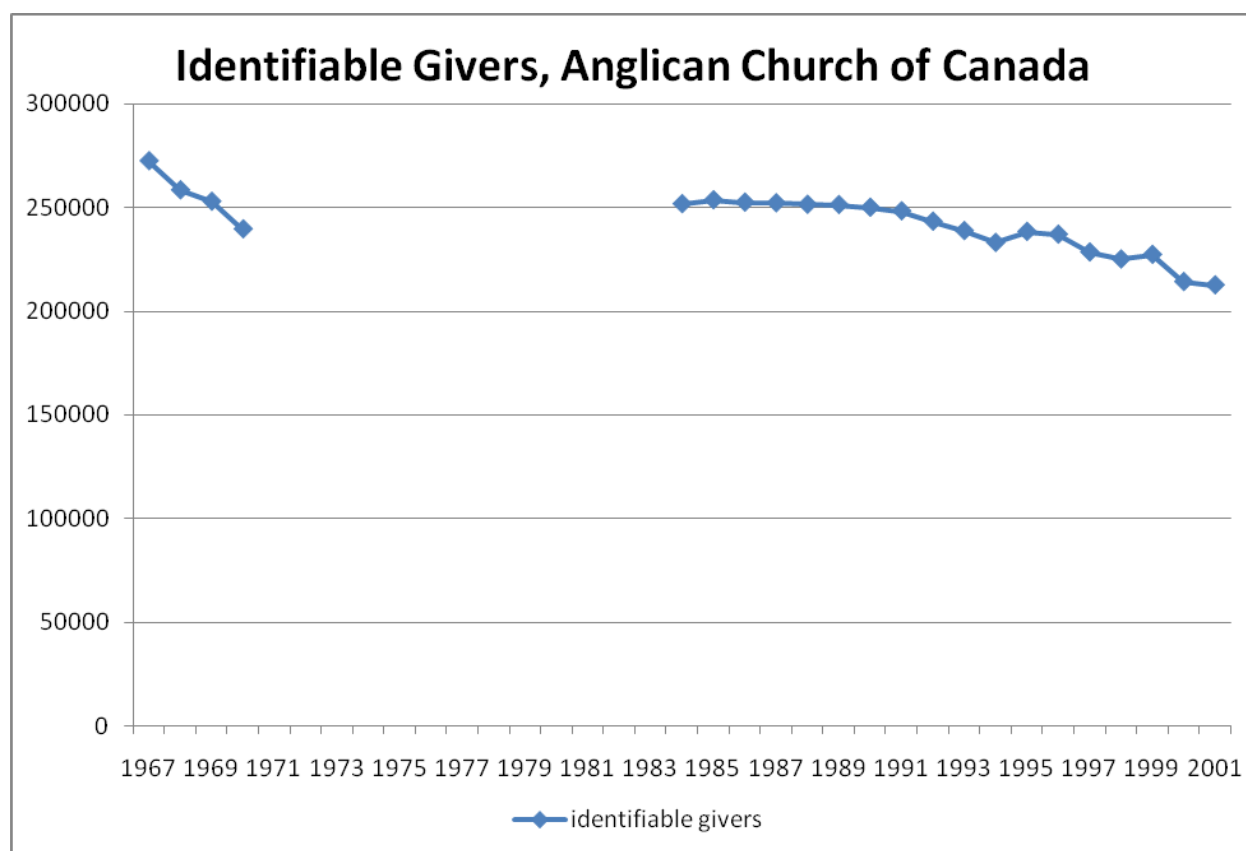
**Figure 9 - Ratio of Easter communicants to members, 1955-1983**

An even more dramatic picture is presented when we compare those who communicated over Easter to the membership of the Anglican Communion (Figure 9). Recall first that the Anglican membership grew in the late 1950s, and then declined steadily from 1964. What the ratio of Easter communicants to membership shows is remarkable stability. After experiencing a decline in the late 1950's, the percentage of Easter communicants to members barely budges for the

following two decades. Perhaps even more significantly, in the late 1970s and early 1980s we see an increasing percentage of Easter communicants to overall membership.

What we are seeing here is probably the result of two different trends. First, more members of the Anglican church communicated during Easter. If that is the case, membership did decline, but those who remained became more committed over time and demonstrated that commitment by communicating during Easter. Second, and we see this in the overall number for communicants towards the end of the seventies, is that more people communicated at Easter. This suggests that at least some people who had had a historic relationship with the church would at least come back for Easter. So there may be a pool of people whom we could label “cultural Anglicans.” They may not attend church regularly, may not even appear on the membership rolls of any Anglican parish, but they nevertheless come to church at Eastertide. We will never know whether this trend persisted, or not, as the church no longer collects this data.

### *Identifiable Givers*

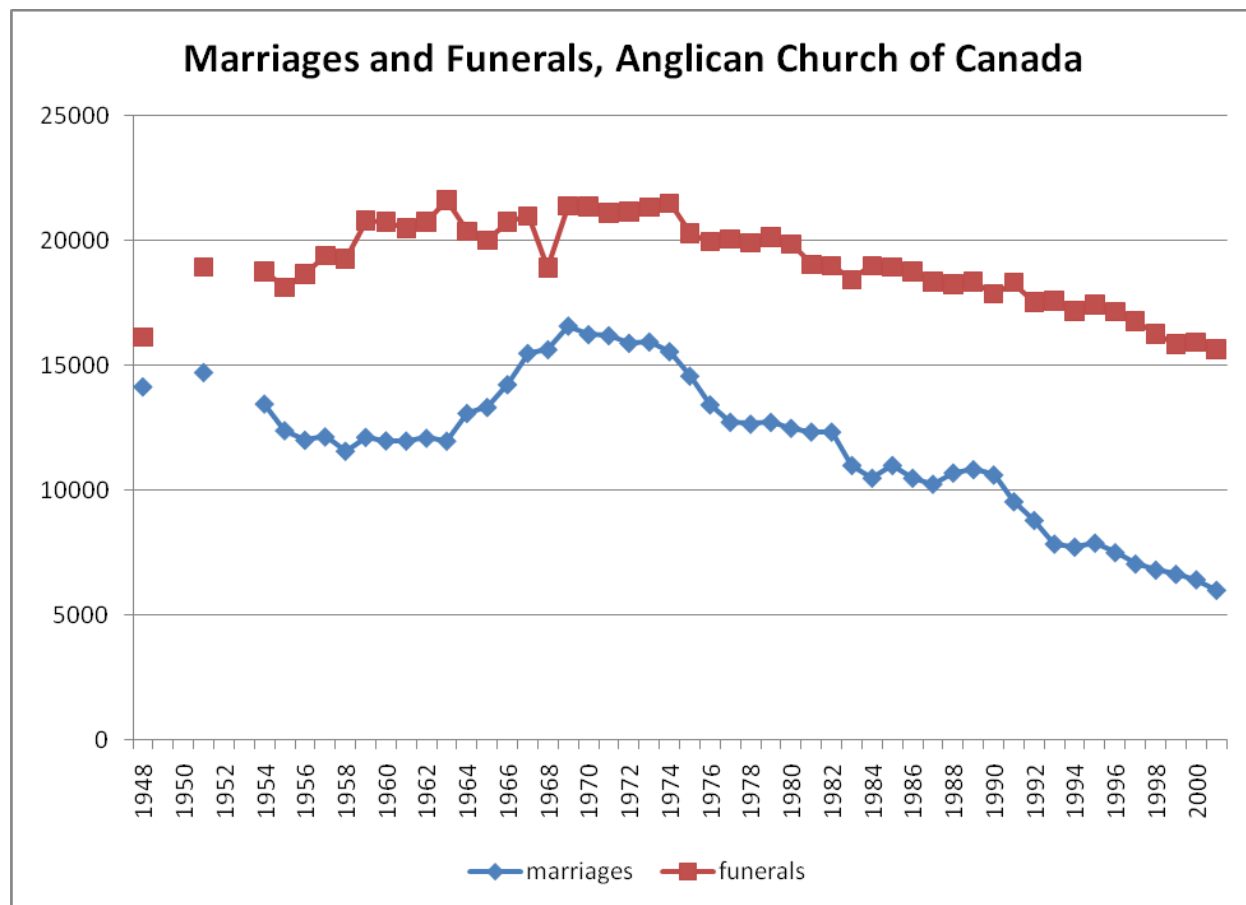


**Figure 10 - Identifiable givers, 1967 - 2001**

Identifiable givers, that is regular donors, usually envelope holders, is another statistic that we can look at (Figure 10). This statistic has not been kept consistently, leading to significant gaps in the record. At the same time, it is interesting to note that while the trend indicates decline, that decline is only gradual compared to other statistical trends (baptisms, confirmation, membership, etc.) that are in significant decline. Indeed, what data we have suggests that the number of

identifiable givers remained remarkably stable in the 1980's, and the decline that did occur happens much, much later than the other trends we have just mentioned, not occurring until the early 1990s. So while membership had been in severe decline since the late 1960's, the church's donation base has remained remarkably stable. Whether this was to be a good thing or not remains to be seen. On the one hand, this donor base kept the church alive financially. On the other hand, having such a stable donor base may have led to church to put off making difficult choices in the allocation of resources for its ongoing ministry.

### ***Pastoral care statistics: Weddings and Funerals***



**Figure 11 - Marriages and Funerals, Anglican Church of Canada, 1948-2001**

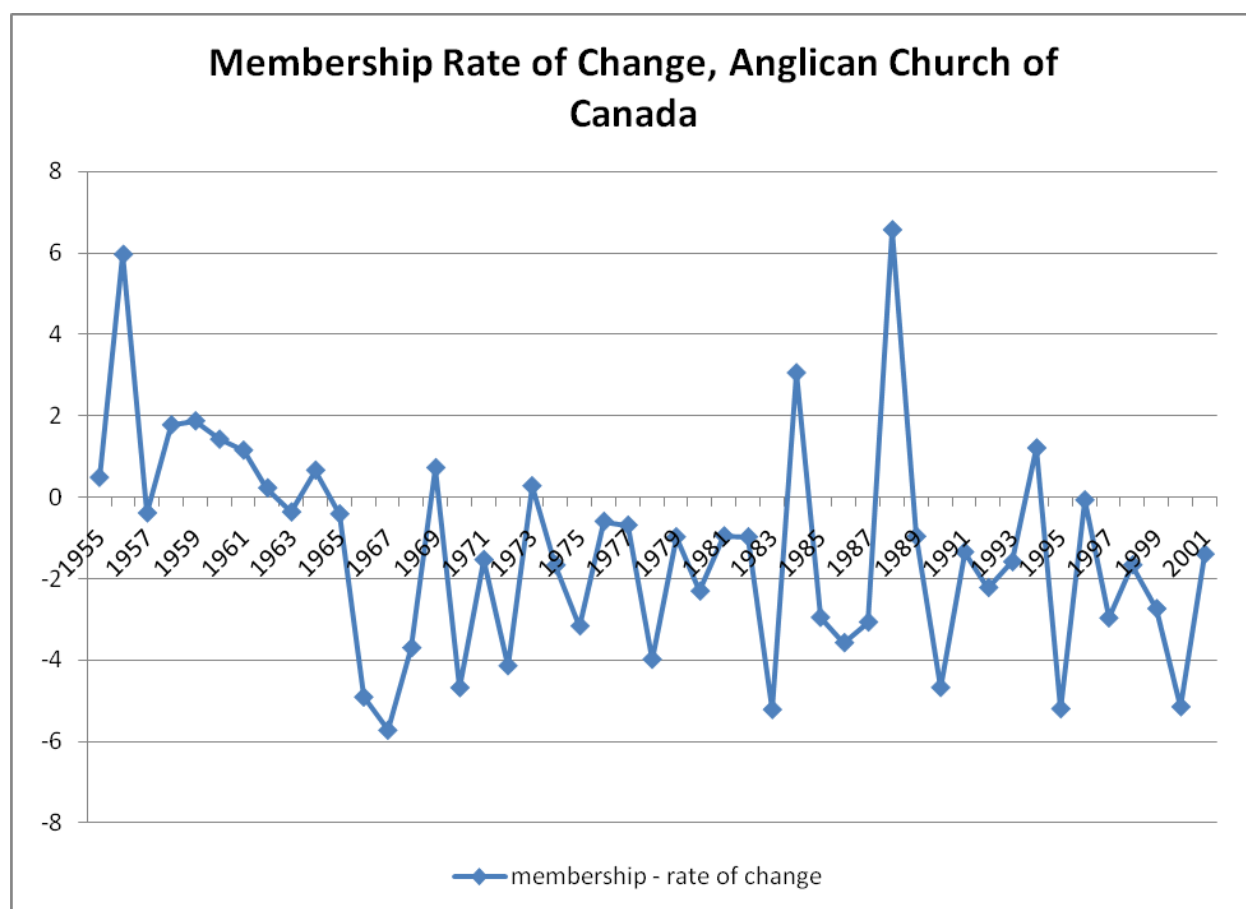
The Anglican Church of Canada provides a number of pastoral services to its members and the broader community. It also has recorded statistics that track some of this activity over the period we're looking at. The two most obvious pastoral services are weddings and funerals. We have placed these on the same graph so we can compare the two trends (Figure 11). We see that Anglican weddings grow during the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, something we would expect to see as the early baby boomers hit their twenties and enter into marriageable age. What is notable is that this did not continue into the late 1970s. By the time the members of largest birth cohort in Canadian history hit their 20<sup>th</sup> birthdays in 1978 the number of Anglican marriages had already entered into deep decline. Anglican marriages hit a peak in 1969, then entered into sharp decline starting in 1974. The trend line flattens at a couple of points

(1977-1983 and 1985-1991). What this suggests is that many baby boomers who were baptized in the Anglican church and had gone to Sunday School opted not to have a church wedding. After 1991, we observe another sharp decline, one that persisted to last recorded entry in 2001.

Funerals have also declined, but the pattern here was much more stable and gradual. In 1989 the Anglican church was still doing over 18,000 funerals a year. That dipped, the next year, and then recovered in 1991 to 18,316. Since 1992 the number has consistently fallen until in 2001 it stood at only 15,635. We would note that this is an indicator that has been slow to move into decline, but it now certainly has. Funerals, it would seem are a lagging trend. So it is significant that both funerals and marriages entered into significant decline beginning in the early 1990's.

## Rates of Change

### Membership

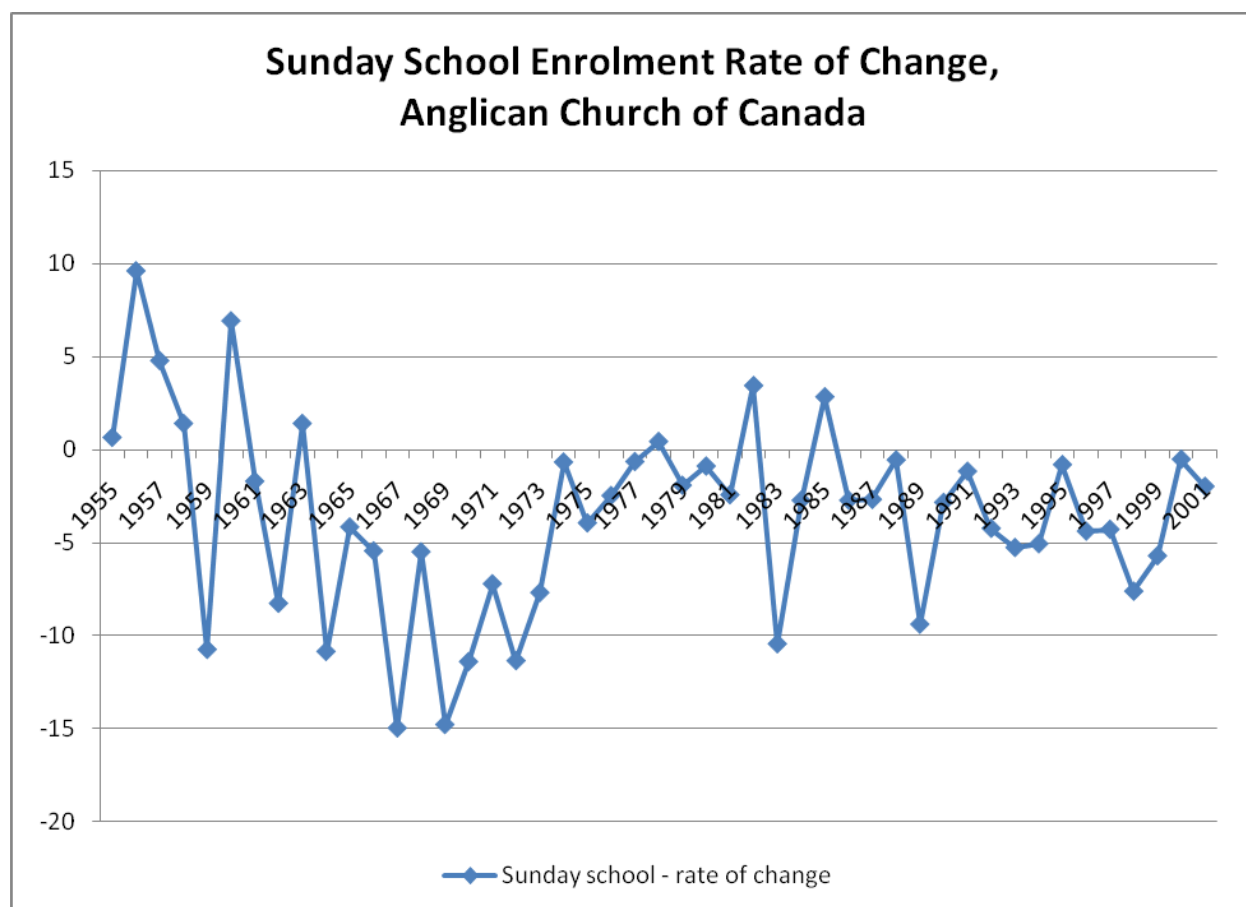


**Figure 12 – Membership rate of change, Anglican Church of Canada, 1955-2001**

The chart above (Figure 12) tracks rates of growth and decline on a triannual basis. Since the mid-1960's there been very few times that we see a positive number, and very few exceptions even the positive numbers have been quite small. By contrast, the rate of decline was over -4%

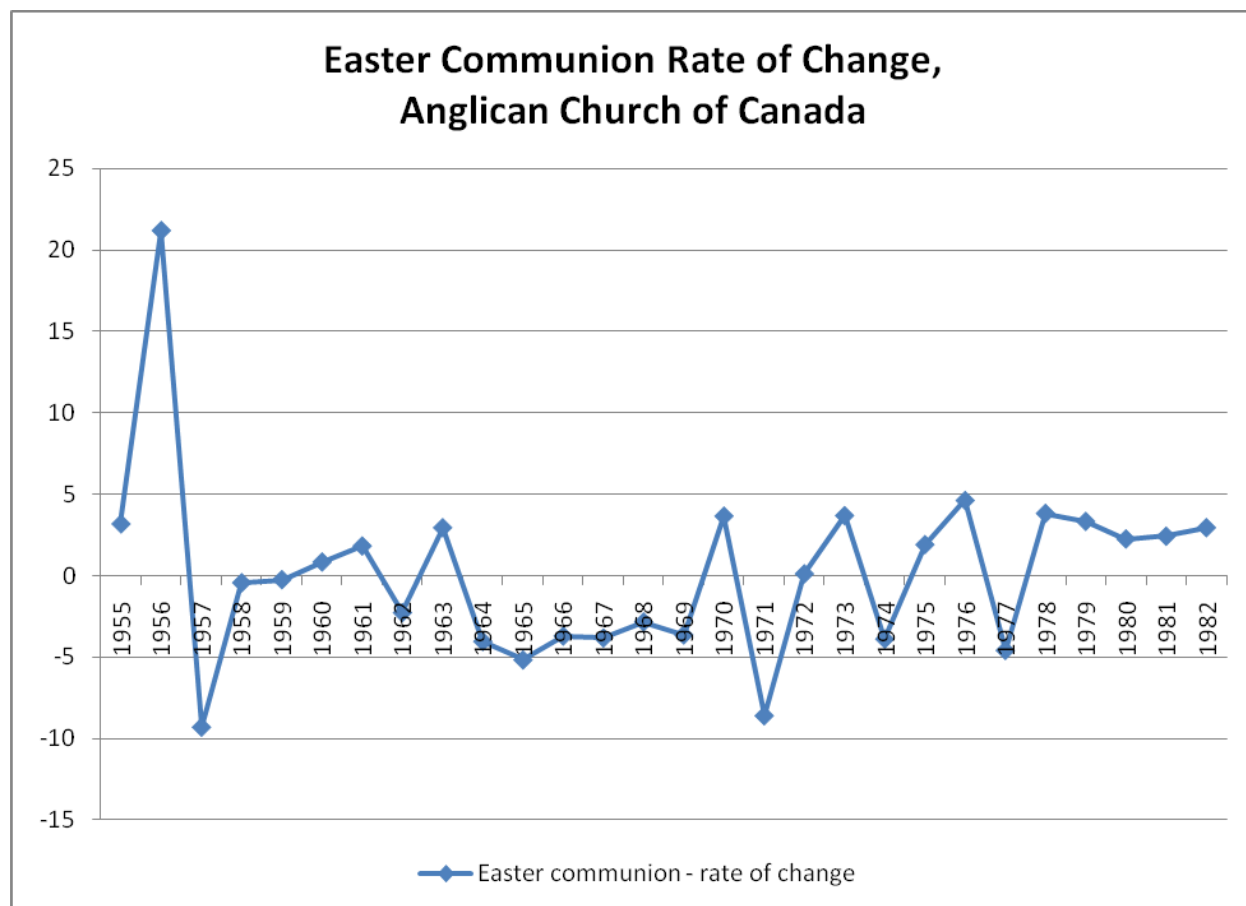
in nine instances for this period. Or to state what we see here in another way since 1965, there have 32 triannual intervals that witnessed decline compared to 5 that did not. All of which confirms what we said before: decline in membership has been sharp and pretty well relentless.

### ***Sunday School enrolment***



**Figure 13 – Sunday School enrolment rate of change Anglican Church of Canada, 1955-2001**

Rates of decline in Sunday school enrolment have been even more severe than what we see in overall church membership (Figure 13). Since 1963, Sunday school enrolment has declined in 34 triannual intervals compared to just 3 when it did not. Further, of these 34 triannual declines, 15 of them recorded a decline of -5% or more. As one might suspect, the rates of decline were biggest in the 1960s and 1970's, but even during the 1990's the rate of decline hovered at -5% for much of the decade. Sunday schools have been one the most important ways that the Anglican church has instructed its younger members in the faith. The ongoing decline in Sunday school enrolment thus has long-term implications for the formation of its younger members.

**Easter communion****Figure 14 – Easter communion rate of change Anglican Church of Canada, 1955-2001**

And finally, to end this review on a happier note, we see that attendance at Easter communion (Figure 14) departs significantly from all the other trends we have reviewed. With very few exceptions, rates of growth were positive, sometimes significantly so. This trend line reinforces our comments above that Easter communion was strengthening remarkably while all other measures of membership, baptism, Sunday school enrolment and so on were in decline.

**Change over decades**

Another way to track change is to look at rates of change over a decade. To do this we have used certain key years – the years in which the Canadian census is also taken (1951, 1961, etc.). We have then compared the data in ten year blocks, comparing 1961 to 1951, 1971 to 1961, and so on. These particular intervals will allow us to compare census figures and denominational data in study that we are currently engaged in. We believe, moreover, that this approach gives us a helpful lens to look at change over time. The results are summarized in the following table:

**Table 1: Change over decade**

	1951	1951 - 1961		1961-1971		1971- 1981		1981- 1991		1991- 2001	
		Change	%	Change	%	Change	%	Change	%	Change	%
Membership	1095875	262584	24.0	-249238	-18.3	-187676	-16.9	-119582	-13.0	-160118	-20.0
Sunday School enrolment	252290	40136	15.9	-168899	-57.8	-34622	-28.0	-21521	-24.2	-22697	-33.7
baptisms	40014	5118	12.8	-16410	-36.4	-5338	-18.8	-2381	-10.2	-7649	-36.5
Confirmations	21409	13844	64.7	-13288	-37.7	-6944	-31.6	-6754	-45.0	-2761	-33.4
Marriages	14723	-2741	-18.6	4215	35.2	-3854	-23.8	-2741	-18.6	4215	35.2
Funerals	18939	1560	8.2	609	3.0	-2065	-9.8	-727	-3.8	-2681	-14.6

The Anglican Church of Canada saw growth in all of its vital statistics between 1951 and 1961. A second reality is that the most significant period of change was the decade from 1961 to 1971. A subsequent period of decline occurred in the 1990s. The slower decline in the 1970s and 1980s seems to have given way to an increasing decline during the 1990s in almost all areas, such membership, Sunday school enrolment, and so on.

We also have compared used the same approach, but rather than considering the decline each decade, we have related this back to 1951 as a base year. So – given 1951 as a base, where is the Anglican church in relation to that year? The results:

**Table 2: Change from base line (1951)**

	1951	1951 to 1961	1951 to 1971	1951 to 1981	1951 to 1991	1951 to 2001	1951	1951 to 1961	1951 to 1971	1951 to 1981	1951 to 1991	1951 to 2001
Membership	1095875	262584	13346	-174330	-293912	-454030	0	24.0	1.2	-15.9	-26.8	-41.4
Sunday school enrolment	252290	40136	-128763	-163385	-184906	-207603	0	15.9	-51.0	-64.8	-73.3	-82.3
Baptisms	40014	5118	-11292	-16680	-19061	-26710	0	12.8	-28.2	-41.7	-47.6	-66.8
Confirmations	21409	13844	556	-6388	-13142	-15903	0	64.7	2.6	-29.8	-61.4	-74.3
Marriages	14723	-2741	1474	-2380	-5171	-8714	0	-18.6	10.0	-16.2	-35.1	-59.2
Funerals	18939	1560	2169	104	-623	-3304	0	8.2	11.5	0.5	-3.3	-17.4

What this table (Table 2) illustrates is not so much which decades saw the greatest change, but rather how marked the changes were over the past half century. The 82% decline in Sunday school enrolment, the 67% decline in baptisms, and the 74% decline in confirmations are all realities that have huge implications for church strategy and mission. The other thing this table captures is how decline in all key areas accelerates as we come closer to the present.



## Analysis

Our analysis at this point is not meant to be extensive, but it does seem helpful to draw a few conclusions from the data we have presented. We think several things are perfectly clear:

1. The Anglican Church of Canada witnessed significant growth in the immediate post-war period and into the mid 1950s.
2. This period of growth came to a dramatic end, and the denomination moved into decline. We see this confirmed in a variety of statistics – membership, Sunday School enrolment, number of baptisms, number of confirmations, etc. We would suggest that this decline (Sunday School enrolment, number of baptisms) began in the late 1950s/1960. The decline in membership (mid-1960s) was not the lead indicator. We would suggest that any explanation as to why this is the case will help to understand the dynamics of the changes in religious participation that we have observed.
3. The decline has continued and there have been no sign in the statistics that we have looked at up to 2001 of a reversal. We suspect that what we are seeing here is the working out of the momentous changes that occurred in the wider culture during the 1960s. We note that this as a hypothesis to pursue, not a theory that we can prove at this point.
4. Several statistical indicators show more stability and health than the overall membership numbers would first indicate. That the number who communicate at Easter and the number of identifiable givers has remained stable is notable, and they are good indicators of the church's current vitality.
5. Given our research on other denominational statistics, we would make the initial observation that the Anglican Church of Canada's experience fits a pattern we have seen in several other denominations – the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and the Maritime Baptists. This convergence in trends would argue against explanations that would see the cause of numerical decline in the Anglican church as a result of some decision(s) taken internally by the Anglican Church of Canada.

## Credits and Thanks

We would like to extend thanks to David Robinson who acted as our research assistant and obtained much of the raw data on which our analysis is based; Anne Miller from the Centre for Clergy and Congregational Health for ongoing administrative assistance; and, Dave Robinson, Michael Joshua and Peter Misiaszek who met with us to discuss our findings and offered invaluable assistance and insight.

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Statistics Canada, Table 051-0004 – Components of populations growth, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons), CANSIM (database), using E-STAT (distributor): [http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat/English.CII\\_1-eng.htm](http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat/English.CII_1-eng.htm) (accessed: May 21, 2010)

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