

# Jim's Tool Box

## Attendance in the CAS District - The Longer View - 2000-2010

Last month in the Tool Box, I reported on statistics from the 2010-year end reports on the attendance patterns in congregations in the Capitol Area South District and in the West Ohio Conference. I commented on some of the trends that seemed evident from the short-term view of looking at the attendance figures for last year. You can read the article by clicking [HERE](#).



In this month's article, I want to take a look at the relative longer view of a decade (actually an eleven year pattern) of the attendance patterns for the period of 2000-2010 for congregations in what is now the Capitol Area South District.

Here are the top twenty congregations in attendance for 2000:

1. Reynoldsburg	1756	11. Circleville Community	308
2. Hilliard	627	12. Pickerington Trinity	292
3. Lancaster First	625	13. Etna	277
4. Grove City	583	14. London First	276
5. Pickerington Peace	516	15. Lithopolis	273
6. Brice	515	16. Millersport	246
7. Newark First	504	17. Baltimore Christ	236
8. Scioto Ridge	454	18. Marne	235
9. Granville Centenary	395	19. Glenwood	230
10. Village Chapel	346	20. Columbia Heights	214

For comparison, here are the top twenty congregations in worship attendance in 2010:

1. Reynoldsburg	2173	11. Lithopolis	312
2. Grove City	785	12. Brice	296
3. Lancaster First	629	13. Pickerington Trinity	275
4. Hilliard	591	14. Jacksontown	255
5. Pickerington Peace	552	15. Asbury South	249
6. Village Chapel	479	16. Marne	247
7. Scioto Ridge	476	17. London First	244
8. Newark First	444	18. Church for All People	227
9. Circleville Community	388	19. Millersport	210
10. Granville Centenary	343	20. Columbia Heights	196

As you can see from the above lists, most of the congregations on the list in 2000 are still there in 2010. The order of listing has changed somewhat. Glenwood, Etna, and Baltimore Christ dropped off the 2010 listing while Asbury South, Church for All People, and Jacksontown appear on the

2010 list. The Church for All People is the only “new” congregation on the list having been chartered in 2003.

Here are two other views of the attendance trends over the span of the 2000-2010 period. The chart below shows the top twenty churches in the numerical growth (the actual numerical increase) from 2000 through 2010:

<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Attendance Gain</b>	<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Attendance Gain</b>
1. Reynoldsburg	417	11. South Bloomfield	64
2. Grove City	202	12. Asbury South	62
3. Summit Station	161	13. Gethsemane	51
4. Jacksontown	159	14. Lithopolis	39
5. Church for All People	157	15. Pickerington Peace	36
6. New Life Community	142	16. Crossroads	34
7. Village Chapel	133	17. Wright Memorial	23
8. Circleville Community	80	18. Scioto Ridge	22
9. Amlin	77	19. Hilltop	20
10. Miller Memorial	70	20. Grove City Trinity	18

This chart lists the top twenty churches in the district in the percentage increase in attendance during the 2000-2010 period:

<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Percentage Growth</b>	<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Percentage Growth</b>
1. Summit Station	268%	11. Village Chapel	38%
2. Church for All People	224%	12. Crossroads	36%
3. South Bloomfield	183%	13. Grove City	35%
4. Amlin	179%	14. Asbury South	33%
5. Jacksontown	166%	15. White Chapel	32%
6. Miller Memorial	117%	16. Wright Memorial	26%
7. Orient	88%	17. Circleville Community	26%
8. Gethsemane	75%	18. Lafayette	26%
9. Hilltop	57%	19. Brushy Fork	25%
10. Liberty	56%	20. Reynoldsburg	24%

These listings bring several additional congregations into the listings. Most notably Summit Station and Jacksontown show up as among the congregations with a higher actual number or percentage increase in growth in attendance. Other churches with large increases include Church for All People and Amlin. New Life Community is another new congregation that shows up since it did not appear in the 2000 listing of congregations. Other churches showing large numerical (for their size) or percentage growth include Orient, South Bloomfield, Liberty Gethsemane, Crossroads, Wright Memorial, White Chapel, Lafayette, Brushy Fork and Hilltop.

When looking at these numerical or percentage growth numbers over the eleven-year period of these numbers, it is hard to characterize where most growth has occurred. Some of these locations are suburban, but others are found in the city of Columbus, county seat towns, villages, and in open rural areas. These congregations are literally “all over the map” when it comes to their locations.

When it comes to percentage of growth, only **37** congregations in the district show a **percentage growth** in attendance in the period. **One** congregation reported the same attendance (**0.0% growth**), and 90 churches showed a **percentage decline** in attendance ranging from **0.8% to a 72.6% decline** in attendance between 2000 and 2010. Needless to say that does not bode well for the attendance pattern in the district as a whole.

I have focused on attendance in this article, because it is one of the measurements that is readily available to us, and it is one that we have historically used to measure congregational vitality. It is certainly more accurate than the number of members a congregation reports.

Worship attendance is one of the measurements that will be used in the Vital Congregations “dashboard” (along with Professions of Faith, Number of Small Groups, More Money for Mission, and Number of Disciples Engaged in Ministry). In his article critiquing the Vital Congregations dashboard concept, Dan Dick on his blog “United Method deviations” reminds us that there are shortcomings in these measurements including worship attendance. Dick points out the weakness of measuring worship attendance, “Getting more people to sit in the pews at a service is as healthy as gaining weight – it does little to promote health, and over time can cause more harm than good.” Dick’s issue is that when passive worship becomes the norm, moving people to any action becomes more difficult. As he says, “Christian worship is more than just showing up.” You can read Dan Dick’s article about these measurements and the Vital Congregations dashboard concept by clicking [HERE](#).

So with that word of caution from Dan Dick, I offer these statistics for your perusal. They are an interesting record of the life of our congregations over the last decade. What will the attendance figures be like in 2020? Will your congregation grow? Will your congregation still be on the list? Which congregations will be growing? Will there be new congregations on that list that have not been launched yet?

This we do know. The average attendance for each congregation represents persons who are present in worship. Whether they are active disciples, seekers, or folks who attend out of habit with no passion. These numbers do represent the souls of folks who under the care of our congregations. Each one is a child of God and beloved by God.

I want to invite and to encourage participation by a team from your congregation in the major training that the district is offering this fall. During October 21-22, we will host Debi Nixon and a team from the Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, KS as they lead us in training on “Leading Beyond the Walls.” This event will focus on many of the best practices in hospitality, worship, small groups, and mission outreach that will assist your congregation on focusing on the things that really matter as you seek to connect with and make a difference in the lives of persons in the neighborhood and community around your church.

Click [HERE](#) to download a copy of the registration flyer for this event. I hope to see you and a team of folks from your church at **Scioto Ridge UMC on October 21-22**.