

# Changes in the Sunday School by Church Size

Research Center

The following two tables are just one way in which the Church Growth Research Center is trying to study and/or understand the change in Sunday School attendance from 1975 to 1994. Sunday School attendance in the U.S. and Canada has declined 68,936 since 1975, from 459,863 to 390,927. This trend does not seem to be isolated within the Church of the Nazarene and therefore may be caused by broader social issues such as: a decline in the population of age groups which typically attend S.S. (children, young families, etc.), changes in social values, mobility, more diversity in small group spiritual training, etc.

## ***Question:***

This brief study asks the questions: "Has the decline in Sunday School affected small churches more than large ones?" "Is the Sunday School more important to the small church in comparison to the large church?"

## ***Hypothesis:***

One could hypothesize that the Sunday School would be more important within the small church because it would serve as the church's basic small group (the place for friendship, intimacy, and accountability). One would think that large churches are able to offer a diversity of small group activities, and therefore not depend as heavily on the Sunday School.

## ***Method***

The data that follows tracks Churches of the Nazarene over two time periods: one from 1993 to 1994, and the other from 1975 to 1994. In both cases, churches must be active at both the beginning and ending time periods. This prevents some problems (inconsistencies in the data caused by new or disorganized churches) while causing others (bias toward growth in the 1–49 size category because of the many churches which would have been closed). The data is for churches in the U.S. and Canada. A gain in attendance was considered to be 1 or more. Churches with no gain or a loss were grouped together; however, in the 1975–94 period only 32 of the 3,056 churches qualified as having no gain (0 change), and in the 1993–1994 period there were 366 out of 2,909 such churches. The remainder of this paper will refer to this group of churches as those showing a loss.

## **Observations in the 1993–1994 data:**

All size categories showed a loss, except the 1–49 category. However, as church size increased, the percentage with a loss decreased.

A similar proportion of churches in all size categories showed gains. The percentages ranged from 38.2% (size 100–149) to 46.8% (size 300+).

A similar proportion of churches in all size categories showed losses. The percentages ranged from 53.2% (size 300+) to 61.8% (100–149).

All categories had more churches showing losses rather than gains.

The average size church was similar between: all churches, only churches with gains, and only churches with losses. This would indicate that our arbitrary church size categories did not influence what percentage showed a gain or loss.

## Observations in the 1975–1994 data:

All size categories showed a loss, except the 1–49 category.

For churches above 100, a similar proportion of churches showed gains.

The percentage ranged from 14.4% (size 200–299) to 17.3% (size 100–149).

In comparison to the 1993–94 table, all size categories showed a remarkably similar percentage of S.S. attendance loss. (The same is true for churches above 100 which showed gains.)

## Conclusion

While our hypothesis suggested that trends in Sunday School attendance would be affected by church size, the data shows that attendance has reacted similarly for churches of all sizes. A majority of churches in all church sizes have shown decline. It is not clear from this data whether the Sunday School would be more important in small churches or large ones; it is clear, however, that churches of all sizes have reacted similarly in attendance from 1975–1994.

[Membership and Attendance Growth Graph](#)

<b><i>Sunday School Change by Church Size, 1993 to 1994</i></b>						
<b><i>For All Active Churches in 1993–94</i></b>						
<b><i>Church Size</i></b>	<b><i>Number of Churches</i></b>	<b><i>Total 1993 S.S. Attn.</i></b>	<b><i>Total 1994 Gain/Loss</i></b>	<b><i>Avg. 1993 S.S. Attn.</i></b>	<b><i>Avg. S.S. Gain/Loss</i></b>	<b><i>% S.S. Gain/Loss</i></b>
1 to 49	2,269	66,287	1,964	29	1	3.0%
50 to 99	1,545	109,392	-3,563	71	-2	-3.3%
100 to 149	587	70,295	-2,214	120	-4	-3.1%
150 to 199	271	46,324	-970	171	-4	-2.1%
200 to 299	200	47,099	-1,051	235	-5	-2.2%

300+	109	52,7974	-654	486	-6	-1.2%
	4,981	392,371	-6,488	79	-1	-1.7%

**Only Those Churches Showing a Gain**

<b>Church Size</b>	<b>Number of Churches</b>	<b>% of All Churches</b>	<b>1993 S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>% of All S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>1994 Gain/Loss</b>	<b>Avg. 1993 S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>Avg. S.S. Gain</b>	<b>% S.S. Gain</b>
1 to 49	1,008	44.4%	28,546	43.1%	8,105	28	8	28%
50 to 99	594	38.4%	41,854	38.3%	4,871	70	8	12%
100 to 149	224	38.2%	26,814	38.1%	2,750	120	12	10%
150 to 199	109	40.2%	18,682	40.3%	1,647	171	15	9%
200 to 299	86	43.0%	20,170	42.8%	1,394	235	16	7%
300+	51	46.8%	24,977	47.1%	1,741	490	34	7%
	2,072	41.6%	161,043	41.0%	20,508	78	10	13 %

**Sunday School Change by Church Size, 1975 to 1994**

**For All Active Churches in 1975-94**

<b>Church Size</b>	<b>Number of Churches</b>	<b>Total 1975 S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>Total 1994 Gain/Loss</b>	<b>Avg. 1975 S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>Avg. S.S. Gain/Loss</b>	<b>% S.S. Gain/Loss</b>
1 to 49	1,019	34,001	8,659	33	8	25.5%
50 to 99	1,475	106,068	-21,273	72	-14	-20.01%
100 to 149	750	91,038	-26,881	121	-36	-29.5%
150 to 199	372	64,090	-20,270	172	-54	-31.6%
200 to 299	320	76,636	-24,670	239	-77	-32.2%
300+	195	79,130	-24,734	406	-127	-31.3%
	4,131	450,963	-109,169	109	-26	-24.2%

**Only Those Churches Showing a Gain**

<b>Church Size</b>	<b>Number of Churches</b>	<b>% of All Churches</b>	<b>1975 S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>% of All S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>1994 Gain/Loss</b>	<b>Avg. 1975 S.S. Attn.</b>	<b>Avg. S.S. Gain</b>	<b>% S.S. Gain</b>
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1 to 49	443	43.5%	13,350	39.3%	16,601	30	37	124%
50 to 99	362	24.5%	25,579	24.1%	11,488	71	32	45%
100 to 149	130	17.3%	15,736	17.3%	5,978	121	46	38%
150 to 199	62	16.7%	10,650	16.6%	3,642	172	59	34%
200 to 299	46	14.4%	10,918	14.2%	4,111	237	89	38%
300+	32	16.4%	13,608	17.2%	4,919	425	154	36%
	2,072	26.0%	89,841	19.9%	46,739	84	43	52 %

***Only Those Churches Showing No Gain or a Loss***

<b><i>Church Size</i></b>	<b><i>Number of Churches</i></b>	<b><i>% of All Churches</i></b>	<b><i>1975 S.S. Attn.</i></b>	<b><i>% of All S.S. Attn.</i></b>	<b><i>1994 Gain/Loss</i></b>	<b><i>Avg. 1975 S.S. Attn.</i></b>	<b><i>Avg. S.S. Gain</i></b>	<b><i>% S.S. Gain</i></b>
1 to 49	576	56.5%	20,651	60.7%	-7,942	36	-14	-38%
50 to 99	1,113	75.5%	80,489	75.9%	-32,761	72	-29	-41%
100 to 149	620	82.7%	75,302	82.7%	-32,895	121	-53	-44%
150 to 199	310	83.3%	53,440	83.4%	-23,912	172	-77	-45%
200 to 299	274	85.6%	65,718	85.8%	28,781	240	-105	-44%
300+	163	83.6%	65,522	82.8%	-29,653	402	-182	-45%
	3,056	74.0%	361,122	80.1%	-155,908	118	-51	-43 %
error check		100%		100%				