



# Evangelical Faiths, Mormon Church Grow Rapidly

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The Mormon church and evangelical faiths grew during the past decade while more liberal Protestant denominations shrank, according to a new census of U.S. religions conducted by a Roman Catholic research group.

The study found the Los Angeles metropolitan area was the most diverse urban center, with 106 different denominations reporting members. Illinois was the most diverse state, with 120 different faiths, according to the data from the 2000 Religious Congregations & Membership study.

Nationwide, the Roman Catholic Church posted strong growth while its population shifted, the study found. More Catholics now live in the West than the traditionally Catholic Midwest, and the Catholic population in the South grew faster than it did in the Northeast.

“That has a lot to do with the growth of the Hispanic population in the United States,” said researcher Clifford Grammich, who collected Catholic figures for the study. “How well the church has been holding onto Hispanic Catholics, a study like this can’t determine.”

The survey is conducted once a decade.

The latest version includes Muslims for the first time, finding 1.6 million in the United States. The count was lower by millions than in some other surveys, but researchers said the figure was only a tally of those active in mosques, not the total

American Muslim population. Estimates of all Muslims vary dramatically, with some Muslim organizations claiming 6 million, while others estimate 2 million.

The study put the Jewish population at 6 million, but that number includes Jews who are not members of congregations and therefore is difficult to compare to the other figures in the study, said the Rev. Dale Jones, a minister in the Church of the Nazarene who oversaw the survey.

The fastest-growing major denomination in the study was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination, followed closely behind. The Mormon church grew about 19% to 4.2 million members, while the Assemblies of God grew nearly as quickly to 2.6 million.

The study was conducted by the Glenmary Research Center in Nashville, a Catholic research and social service organization that coordinates the study with analysts from several faiths. The U.S. Census Bureau does not collect information on religion.

The 149 participating faiths sent membership estimates to Glenmary, which adjusted the figures to make them comparable.

Jones said one of the most troubling trends was that, in most areas, religious groups failed to increase the percentage of members compared with the total population. This was especially pronounced in the West, where denominations claim the smallest percentage of members.

People there “consider themselves religious, but some will say you don’t need to belong to a church to be religious,” Jones said.

The evangelical Southern Baptist Convention grew by only 4.9% during the last decade, but remained the nation’s largest Protestant group, with nearly 20 million members, according to Glenmary.

Roman Catholics remained the largest denomination in the country, growing 16% to 62 million believers. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was among moderate and

liberal Protestant denominations posting a significant loss, dropping by nearly 12% to 3.1 million. Mainline Protestant churches have been losing members for decades.

Predominantly black denominations, such as the National Baptist Convention, did not participate in the study, since many lack the resources to count their membership.

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## Religion in America

The Catholic Church is the largest in the United States. Denominations within the Protestant churches collectively have 66 million adherents, with Southern Baptists being the largest group.

## Top 15 U.S. faiths

### FAITH and ADHERENTS

1. Catholic --62,035,042
2. Southern Baptist Convention --19,881,467
3. United Methodist --10,350,629
4. Jewish --6,141,325
5. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America --5,113,418
6. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints --4,224,026
7. Presbyterian --3,141,566
8. Assemblies of God --2,561,998

9. Lutheran Missouri Synod --2,521,062

10. Episcopal --2,314,756

11. American Baptist --1,767,462

12. United Church of Christ --1,698,918

13. Churches of Christ --1,645,584

14. Muslim (estimate) --1,559,294

15. Christian churches --1,439,253

### Key statistics

Fastest-growing church --The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

County with the most people in a congregation ... Los Angeles County reported 5.5 million people in 4,044 congregations.

... and with the least --Loving County, Texas, reported none in any congregation

State with the highest percentage of Catholics --Rhode Island, 52%

Most widespread religious groupSources: --United Methodist congregations are present in 96% of counties

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Sources: Glenmary Research Center; Associated Press

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