

Confirming the Faith:
A Revised Approach to Confirmation
August 1 or 2, 2017

Our desire is that confirmation will entail and facilitate the process of Christian young people maturing into Christian adults. This maturation process doesn't happen quickly, and it requires more than gaining information. It also requires participation from the entire community—not just parents and pastors. This plan is designed to incorporate young people into the Christian life in meaningful and sustained ways, while continuing to teach them the basics of the Christian faith and how it applies to everyday life today.

New Concept – an “Eagle Scout” model

Instead of a 2-year class focused primarily on imparting information, confirmation will look more like eagle scouting. Youth will complete a series of learning and growth activities (called “Benchmarks”). Some of these activities will be done as a group, some will be done with one or two other individuals, and some will be done alone. The process can be tailored to fit individual needs and schedules. Youth will proceed at his or her own level of spiritual maturity, removing the expectation that everyone matures at the same age and rate. This concept also gives young people freedom to choose some elements of their process. It also gives the pastors and other leaders freedom to meet young people and their families where they are at.

*If a young person joins South Shore Trinity part way through confirmation from another congregation, the pastors and/or other leaders will meet with the youth and parents to tailor the confirmation process to his/her experience and learning.

The Beginning

Young people may (but aren't required to) begin the summer before entering 5th grade. The pastor contacts parents to let them know this is available and initiates a conversation about the child's faith maturity.

*So that youth begin this process in community, this process should not begin until **at least 3** youth are ready to start together. It may be the case that some youth might not begin until 6th or 7th grade to make this happen. **THIS IS OKAY!**
The 5th grade start age should not be automatic.

The End

There is no end to Christian learning and growth, but this specific confirmation process does have an endpoint. In order to complete this process (and thus be “confirmed”) they must have completed all the requisite “Benchmarks” (see below). Confirmation Sunday takes place on Reformation Sunday and involves a simple confession of faith. Youth must be at least 15 years old (or in their freshman year of high school) to complete this process.

For those who do not complete the confirmation process, there will be no stigma or punishment. Instead, there will be a commissioning of all young people in the spring of their senior year in high school. This will be separate from the confirmation process. It will acknowledge that these young people are entering the adult world and send them with the blessing and prayers of the congregation.

What is a Benchmark

In place of a traditional 2-year catechism curriculum, the heart of the confirmation process will involve individual youth completing a series of “Benchmarks.” Some of these are more experience-driven, others are more content driven. All of them include some in-depth learning and hands-on experience. They are meant to incorporate young people into the Christian life and community in a holistic way.

Each of the following categories summarizes the “benchmarks” that must be completed in order to complete the confirmation process (and thus be “confirmed”). The numbers in parentheses indicate how many marks must be earned in each category. A total of 40 Benchmarks must be completed to become confirmed. (The 40 sermon notes count as 1 Benchmark.)

Schedule

In order for youth to stay on track and complete confirmation between the ages of 15-18, it is advisable that at least 6-8 Benchmarks be completed each year after beginning the process.

The Rite of Confirmation

After all Benchmarks are complete, “Confirmation Sunday” will take place on Reformation Sunday. It will involve a traditional ceremony (robes optional) during which young adults publically declare their intention to live as Christians throughout their lives.

Challenges and Benefits

This process presents a number of new and significant challenges to the congregation. But it also provides lifelong benefits—both for the youth confirming their faith and the congregation that helps them along the way.

The challenges include the need for...

- ...active participation and ownership of the **entire** congregation
- ...someone (other than the pastor) to administer the details and keep track of Benchmarks
- ...thorough and regular communication with parents and encouragement for young people
- ...training for mentors
- ...clear and consistent background check system

The benefits will help us accomplish our mission to...

- ...make **holistic disciples** of Jesus Christ who live out their faith in concrete ways
- ...serve our young people more fully and more faithfully
- ...**be served** by our young people in meaningful and sustained ways
- ...equip the next generation of Christians to stand firm in an increasingly post-Christian culture

THE BENCHMARKS

My First Catechism (1 Benchmark)

If the pastor and parents agree that the child is ready to begin moving toward Christian adulthood, they begin by scheduling a meeting with the pastor, child, and parents in the Spring (of their 4th grade year, at the earliest). At this meeting the child is given a copy of **My First Catechism** and corresponding workbook (available at CPH). The first step is for the young person to complete this workbook at home with parental oversight. The pastor/youth team performs regular check-ups to keep them on track. If the youth finishes this workbook by December 31, he or she is eligible to take an early communion class during Lent. (If not, there is no punishment. He or she simply waits until the next year to begin the process. Extensions are possible for extenuating circumstances, but this work **MUST** be complete before Maundy Thursday as a final deadline.) After this is complete, and before any further steps are taken, the pastor interviews the prospective confirmand to discuss any questions that may have arisen. The point of this interview is **NOT** to test the student, but to summarize with and for them what they just learned.

First Communion (1 Benchmark)

Eight weeks before Holy Week the pastor teaches an early communion class using the curriculum **This Is the Feast** (available at CPH). **Youth and a parent/sponsor are required to attend this course together.** Attendance in this class should take priority over all sports/extra-curricular activities. Sunday evening proved to be a good time for this class, but depending on the schedules of the families involved, days and times should be chosen to avoid conflicts. **Youth and parents should be notified of these dates when they receive My First Catechism.** If youth complete the class, and if they and their parents and the pastor agree that the child is ready to receive the Lord's Supper, they celebrate their first communion on Maundy Thursday. This officially begins their confirmation process.

Faith Alive (10 Benchmark) *Faith Alive Benchmarks are designed to take the content of the Christian faith (as summarized in Luther's Small Catechism) and apply it in real life ways. Each Benchmark involves an in-depth Bible study (2-4 sessions), an activity associated with the topic, and an opportunity for reflection (including a parent/sponsor conversation component). The specifics for each activity will be determined by the pastor/other adult. This is only a partial list. As opportunities arise, pastor/youth team will create new Benchmarks. When a "Faith Alive" Benchmark is planned, plenty of advance notice will be given. At least three "Faith Alive" Benchmarks will be offered throughout the year.*

Confirmation 2.0 - Wednesday's - 2017-2018 Tentative Schedule												
	September	October	November	December	January	February *	March *	April *	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
1st Wed	(No Class before Labor Day)	Class A	Class A	Advent Worship Service	Class B	Class B	Lent Worship Service	Easter (No Class)	Class C	Summer Schedule - TBD		
2nd Wed	Kick-Off to School Year (after Labor Day)	Class A	Class A	Advent Worship Service	Class B	Ash Wednesday Service	Lent Worship Service	Confirmation Mentor pizza party --- Confirmation Retreat at Camp Omega (April 6-7)	Class C	Summer Schedule - TBD		
3rd Wed	Confirmation Mentor pizza party	MEA Week		Advent Worship Service	Class B	Lent Worship Service	Lent Worship Service	Class C	Class C	Summer Schedule - TBD		
4th Wed	Class A	Class A	Thanksgiving Eve Worship Service (No Class)	Christmas/New Year's (No Class)	Class B	Lent Worship Service	Wednesday of Holy Week (No Class)	Class C	Class C	Summer Schedule - TBD		
5th Wed	-	-	Not sure	-	Class B	-	-	-				

1. “The Resurrection of the Body”

Study: 3rd article of the Creed (resurrection of the body, the life everlasting)

Activity: Visit a funeral home with pastor

Reflection: Plan your own funeral service and what you would like people to hear about your faith and your life.

2. “What’s Up with Worship?”

Study: 1st Commandment, 3rd commandment

Activity: Visit two congregations (one other LCMS, one non-Lutheran) and fill out a provided evaluation form

Reflection: Plan and participate in a worship service as a group with pastor

3. “Talking to God”

Study: Lord’s Prayer, 2nd commandment

Activity: Participate in a Prayer Vigil (or other prayer event)

Reflection: Create a prayer journal and keep track of your prayers for one month

4. “The Freedom of Forgiveness”

Study: 4th Petition of Lord’s Prayer, Office of the Keys, 2nd article creed

Activity: Visit a courtroom and/or jail

Reflection: Participate in private confession/absolution

5. “God’s Design for Sex”

Study: 6th Commandment, 1st Article of the Creed

Activity: Visit and serve in a crisis pregnancy center

Reflection: Identify 5 characteristics that your future spouse must have (in advance of meeting him/her!) and share that list with the youth group, parents, and pastor

6. “Life Support”

Study: Abortion/Euthanasia, 5th Commandment

Activity: Make a hospital visit to a member with the pastor

Reflection: Include this member in your personal prayers

7. “God’s Good Creation”

Study: 1st Article of the Creed

Activity: Camping trip as a youth group

Reflection: Make a plan with your family to be a good steward of the environment in a small, but specific way

8. “On a Mission”

Study: 3rd Article of the Creed, Baptism

Activity: Mission trip/Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ/etc.

Reflection: Make a plan to share the Gospel with a friend/neighbor/family member, and implement it

9. “Eternal Friendship”

Study: Baptism, 8th Commandment

Activity: Invite a friend to come to church and Bible class with you

Reflection: Write a one-page essay that describes what makes being a *Christian* friend different from being any other kind of friend. This essay will be printed in the congregation’s newsletter.

10. "You Visited Me"

Study: 3rd Article of the Creed (communion of saints)

Activity: Visit a homebound member with the pastor

Reflection: Send a thank you card to this member and incorporate them into your prayers

11. "Faithful Money Management"

Study: 7th Commandment

Activity: Participate in a Thrivent Financial Seminar

Reflection: Prepare a budget, including a plan for savings and giving

12. "Caring for the Poor"

Study: 5th commandment

Activity: Participate in a "Feed My Starving Children" project

Reflection: Identify something you could give up to help others in need, and then make a plan to give it up

13. "Church and State"

Study: 4th Commandment, Two Kingdoms

Activity: Visit state capitol as a youth group

Reflection: Contact your state or federal representative and interview them about the state's view of the church

14. The Lutheran Distinction

Study:

Activity:

Reflection:

*Other options as pastors/other leaders see fit

Service (9 Benchmarks)

These are more traditional service projects. Some are designated specifically for service to the community. Others are designated as service to the congregation.

1. Community Service (3)

Food Shelf Volunteering – 10 hours

Trinity First Volunteering – 10 hours

Road-side Clean-up—2 times

Other options agreed upon by parents, youth, and pastor/other leaders

2. Congregational Service (3) (only one at a time)

Banner Committee for 1 year

Altar guild for 1 year

Crew leader/helper /station assistant for VBS for 1 week

Other year-long options for service in congregation

3. Sunday Morning Service (4) (must be at least 14)

Read Scriptures in Worship (twice during midweek and twice during Sunday morning)

- Sing in Praise Team for 1 year (including attendance at practice)
- Serve on an usher team for 1 year
- Play instrument during the service 4 times
- Help with PowerPoint during the service for 8 times
- Acolyting

The Lutheran Distinction (1 Benchmark)

This Benchmark is designed to help youth understand the differences between various Christian denominations and non-Christian world religions. There are two parts to this Benchmark. They might be done over a lock-in, or during a weekend retreat.

Part 1: World Religions

- a. Together the youth group does a study of the major world religions, including their distinctive teachings about God, human nature, and salvation.
- b. Each youth chooses a religion (non-Christian) and compiles an informational powerpoint or poster to share with the rest of the youth group (and maybe also with the adult Bible class). It will highlight the important differences between Christianity and this other religion.

Part 2: *Lutheran* Christians

- a. Together the youth group watches *Luther*, the movie.
- b. The pastor leads us a study about the various denominations, and what makes Lutherans unique among Christians.
- c. Each youth produces a PowerPoint or poster that explains the biblical background for an important Lutheran teaching. Emphasis will be placed on how Lutherans can be helpful to the Christian “family” on earth through their faithfulness to the Scriptures.

Vocation (2 Benchmarks)

These Benchmarks will help youth understand and use the gifts God has given them. Youth must be at least 14 years old to complete these Benchmarks.

1. Read and discuss with the youth group *The Calling* by Kurt Senske, *God at Work* by Gene Veith, or a similar book on vocation
2. Take a vocational inventory and discuss the results with parents/pastor/youth group
3. Shadow a (non-family) member of the congregation at work, and then discuss with them how they live out their Christian faith through their vocation.
4. Attend a “church worker” fair/workshop at Concordia University, St. Paul

Retreats (2 Benchmarks)

These marks will provide the context for the unique learning that takes place when we get out of our normal routines. The Board of Education will include in its budget funds to support these retreats for those who might have a hard time affording it.

1. National Youth Gathering
2. Camp Omega
3. Other retreat agreed upon by pastor/other leaders

Sunday Morning Attendance (4 Benchmarks)

Because participation the local congregation is central to the Christian life, this is a simple attendance requirement. It must be achieved during 4 different quarters. (This mark will need to be flexible for youth whose parents split custody.)

75% attendance for a quarter in both worship and Bible class (9 out of 12 sessions) excluding summer

Dynamic Listening (1 Benchmark earned after 40 sermon notes completed)

*This mark will be comparable to traditional sermon notes. (Forms are found at the end of this document.) These forms will help teach kids how to listen actively to a sermon. Part of this form will include a conversation piece with a mentor. In order to complete this mark the young person will need to complete **40 sermon notes**. 10 per year, beginning the fall after their first communion, is a good number to stay on track.*

By Heart (6 Benchmark—one for each chief part)

This mark is comparable to traditional memory work from Luther's Small Catechism. At any time during the confirmation process the youth may memorize a chief part, including the questions and answers. In order to complete each Benchmark, the youth must recite this portion of the catechism to the pastor or your mentor.

Mentoring (2 Benchmarks)

These marks are designed to build relationships within the congregation. These options only scratch the surface. A more substantive mentor relationship can be forged in a variety of ways, which would require training for potential mentors.

1. Read a book with mentor (book list will be provided, as well as a list of trained mentors.)
Possible books include *The Bronze Bow*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*
2. Interview three people from three different generations (20-30, 50-60, 70+)
Conversation will explore how society has changed, and how Jesus has impacted their life over the years
A form to guide the conversation will be provided.
3. Marriage mentors (after 14 years old)
With a friend, go to dinner at the home of a married couple in the congregation. Discuss blessings and benefits and challenges of marriage, and what they have learned as a married couple. A form to guide the conversation will be provided.

Lift High the Cross (1-The Final Benchmark)

This benchmark should come at the end of the process. In many ways it is the culmination of this entire process. It will involve the young person proclaiming Christ crucified in his or her own way. This project will be completed and presented during Holy Week the spring before the confirmation ceremony.

According to the young person's own ability and gifts, he or she will complete this sentence through this project: "Jesus' death and resurrection is the most important thing in my life because..."

Options include, but are not limited to:

- An essay to be read
- A piece of art to be displayed
- A PowerPoint/electronic presentation to display
- A poem, song, dance to be performed

Dynamic Listening

Turn in this form together with the bulletin

Name: _____
Date of Worship Service: _____
Season of the Church Year: _____
Preacher's Name: _____
Who did you worship with? _____

List the hymns/songs sung during worship. Circle the one you enjoyed singing the most.

What stanza or phrase from one of the hymns was meaningful to you today? Explain why.

Which Scripture reading was the focus for the sermon? _____

Please respond to the following questions, identifying key points you heard?

1. What did you hear today about sin?
2. What did you hear today about Grace (the forgiveness of sins)?
3. What did you hear today about living the Christian life?

What did you hear specifically about Jesus? What would you like to know more about?

What 2 questions you have about today's sermon message: (ex. What did you mean about...? Hey I don't get...?)

- 1)
- 2)

What change can you imagine taking place in your life based on what you heard today? Or what will you keep doing based on what you heard today?

Based on what you heard today, who or what will you include in your prayers for this upcoming week?

Retreat (2 Benchmarks)

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Dates of retreat</i>	<i>Type and Location</i>	<i>Parent's signature</i>	<i>Pastor's signature</i>

Vocation (2 Benchmarks)

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Date completed</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Parent's signature</i>	<i>Pastor's signature</i>

Sunday Morning Attendance (4 Benchmarks)

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
<i>Date completed</i>	<i>Parent's signature</i>	<i>Pastor's signature</i>

Active Listening – Sermon Notes (1 Benchmark)

Dates of each sermon, 40 sermons total

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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By Heart (6 Benchmarks)

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Date completed</i>	<i>Chief Part</i>	<i>Parent's signature</i>	<i>Pastor's signature</i>

Mentoring (2 Benchmarks)

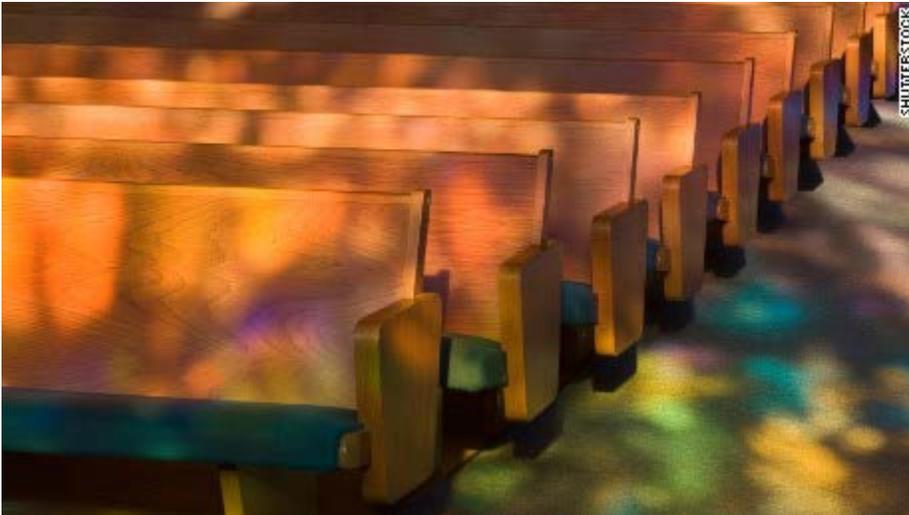
_____	_____	_____	_____
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<i>Dates completed</i>	<i>Mentor and Activity</i>	<i>Parent's signature</i>	<i>Pastor's signature</i>

Lift High the Cross (1 Benchmark)

_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Date presented</i>	<i>Type of Presentation</i>	<i>Parent's signature</i>	<i>Pastor's signature</i>

Millennials leaving church in droves, study finds

By [Daniel Burke](#), CNN Religion Editor Updated 1:57 PM ET, Tue May 12, 2015



Source: CNN

Story highlights

- Pew Research Center survey shows Christian percentage of population dropping to 70%
- More than one-third of millennials say they are unaffiliated with any faith, study finds
- Just 3% of the religious "nones" call themselves atheists, a small bump from 2007

(CNN) Christian life is a set of sacred traditions -- an unbroken circle, in the words of an old hymn -- connecting generations of Sunday school stories, youth ministry morals and family gatherings sanctified by prayer.

In modern America, that circle may not be completely severed, but it is wobbly and severely bent, according to a new landmark study conducted by the Pew Research Center.

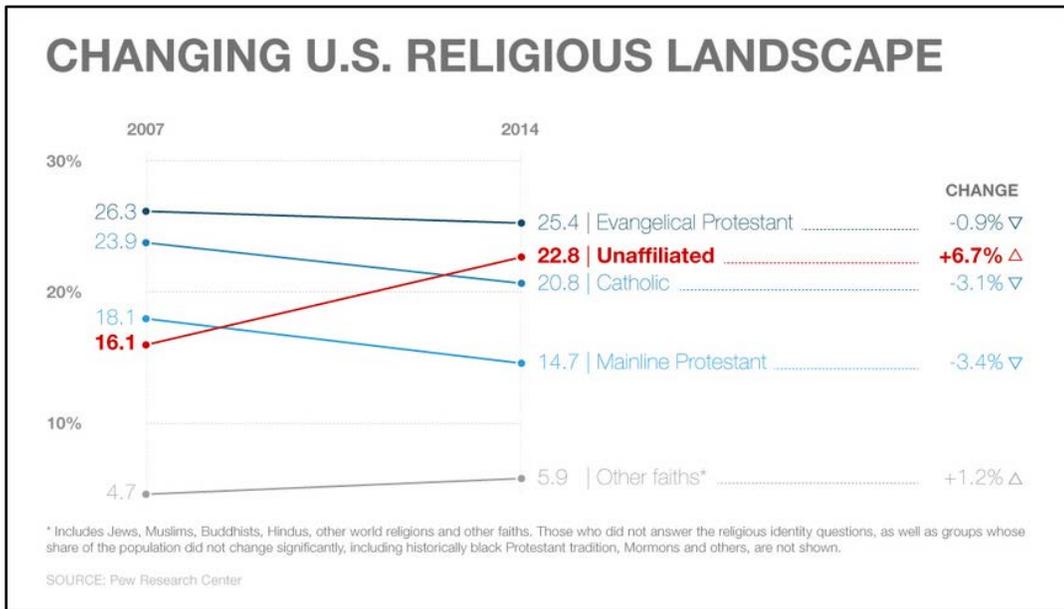
Released Tuesday, the survey of 35,000 American adults shows the Christian percentage of the population dropping precipitously, to 70.6%. In 2007, the last time Pew conducted a similar survey, 78.4% of American adults called themselves Christian.

In the meantime, almost every major branch of Christianity in the United States has lost a significant number of members, Pew found, mainly because millennials are leaving the fold. More than one-third of millennials now say they are unaffiliated with any faith, up 10 percentage points since 2007.

The alacrity of their exodus surprises even seasoned experts.

"We've known that the religiously unaffiliated has been growing for decades," said Greg Smith, Pew's associate director of religion research and the lead researcher on the new study. "But the pace at which they've continued to grow is really astounding."

It's not just millennials leaving the church. Whether married or single, rich or poor, young or old, living in the West or the Bible Belt, almost every demographic group has seen a significant drop in people who call themselves Christians, Pew found.



The drops have been deepest among two of the country's most formidable faith traditions: Catholics and mainline Protestants, so-called for their prominence in American history. At the same time, Hinduism and Islam, religions tied to recent immigrants, according to Pew, have made small but significant gains. While they have declined as a percentage of the overall population, the number of evangelicals has remained relatively steady in the past seven years.

Because the U.S. census does not ask questions about religion, Pew's survey, called "America's Changing Religious Landscape," provides one of the most reliable sources of data about the country's religious demographics. Based in Washington, Pew calls itself a nonpartisan "fact tank" and regularly produces vast and detailed studies of religion.

People who profess no faith affiliation -- often called "nones," as in "none of the above" -- now form nearly 23% percent of the country's adult population, according to the Pew study. That puts the unaffiliated nearly on par with evangelicals (25.4%) and ahead of Catholics (about 21%) and mainline Protestants (14.7%). Seven years ago, according to Pew's previous study, the unaffiliated formed about 16% of the population, mainline Protestants were about 18%, Catholics were about 24% and evangelicals 26.3%.

Looking at the long view, the generational spans are striking. Whereas 85% of the silent generation (born 1928-1945) call themselves Christians, just 56% of today's younger millennials (born 1990-1996) do the same, even though the vast majority -- about eight in 10 -- were raised in religious homes.

To put it simply: Older generations of Americans are not passing along the Christian faith as effectively as their forebears. "It's not as if young people today are being raised in a way completely different from Christianity," said Smith, the Pew researcher. "But as adults they are simply dropping that part of their identity."

While Pew's study will likely to cheer the hearts of atheists, the rapid rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans hasn't necessarily spawned a generation of infidels. Just 3% of the "nones" call themselves atheists, a small bump from 2007, when 1.5% did the same. Four percent say they are agnostic, meaning they don't know if God exists, a gain of 1.6 percentage points from seven years ago. "We are very cognizant that this does not mean there's been a straight-up spike in nonbelievers," said Paul Fidalgo, communications director for the Center for Inquiry, a secular advocacy group. "But it's still really good news to see a whole generation of people who are making their own decisions about belief, religion and spirituality."

It's also good news for strict church-state separationists, Fidalgo said, especially those who want to see traditional religious morality disappear from debates over women's health, abortion, same-sex marriage and climate change.

While the study isn't likely to surprise many mainline Protestants, it throws their decades-long collapse in membership into stark relief. Almost every American town is dotted by historic Episcopal, United Methodist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches. Increasingly, those churches are empty of young faces. Just 11% of millennials call themselves mainline Protestants. (Only 16% identify with Catholicism.)

Of America's major faiths, mainline Protestants have the worst retention rate among millennials, with just 37% staying in the fold, Pew found. By contrast, nearly two in three millennials raised without a faith continue to eschew organized religion as adults.

The collapse of American Christianity can't simply be laid at the feet of religious leaders, demographers say. There are bigger societal swings in play: Americans are marrying later, increasingly to spouses who don't share their faith, and having fewer children. (Mainline Protestants have particularly low birth rates.)

Other experts blame new innovations such as the rise of the Internet, where religions can be fact-checked in real time and seekers can find communities of like-minded iconoclasts.

But Christian leaders still bear some responsibility for not connecting with younger believers, said L. Gregory Jones, a senior strategist for leadership education at Duke University in North Carolina.

Many young Christians seemed bored by church, he said, pointing to youth ministers as particularly ineffective at engaging their intellect. One study cited by Jones showed that nearly 70% of full-time youth ministers have no theological education.

"Christianity in the United States hasn't done a good job of engaging serious Christian reflection with young people, in ways that would be relevant to their lives."

Instead, many Christian denominations have been riven by internal struggles over same-sex marriage, particularly in the last decade. While most millennials back gay rights, according to separate surveys, they are more interested in engaging with the wider world than holding endless debate over sexual morality, Jones said.

"If it is the case that millennials are less 'atheists' than they are 'bored,' then serious engagements with Christian social innovation, and with deep intellectual reflection (and these two things are connected), would offer promising signs of hope," Jones said.