A U.S. study from the Pew Research Center grabbed headlines this spring when it reported a significant decline in the number of Americans who call themselves Christian and a huge jump in the numbers of adults who have no religious affiliation.

According to the study, the percent of the U.S. population that identifies as Christian shrank from 78.4% in 2007, when the first study was conducted, to 70.6% in 2014, the year of the second research project.

The biggest declines were in mainline Protestant denominations and among Catholics. Mainline Protestants represented 14.7% of U.S. adults in 2014, down from 18.1% in 2007. In seven years, Catholics declined to 20.8% of the population from 23.9%.

At the same time, Americans with no religious affiliation, referred to as the “nones,” now account for 22.8% of U.S. adults, up from 16.1% in 2007.

“Even though church participation and affiliation have declined, faith – the human desire to find meaning – persists…”

Dr. David Mellott, Dean of Lancaster Seminary and Vice President of Academic Affairs says “Even though church participation and affiliation have declined, faith – the human desire to find meaning – persists and is reflected in the increased attention, especially by Millennials, to social justice and social concerns like environmentalism and climate change.”

The study declares, “The growth of the ‘nones’ has been powered in part by religious switching. Nearly one-in-five U.S. adults were raised as Christians or members of some other religion, but now say they have no religious affiliation.”

Pastor of Bright Side Baptist Church in Lancaster, Rev. Dr. Louis A. Butcher, Jr., DMin ’15, researched the area’s changing religious landscape for his doctoral project.

“Shifting housing patterns have signaled the demise of the neighborhood church where everybody knew each other and lived in close proximity. Technology has opened up opportunities to experience spirituality and community in different ways, and millions are now considering themselves spiritual but not religious.”

The study reports that younger adults are “far more likely” than older Americans to identify as religious “nones.”

Rev. Dr. Barbara Kershner Daniel, MDiv ’83, DMin ’96, pastors Evangelical Reformed United Church of Christ in Frederick, Maryland. “We are seeing growth in younger people and families because we value the gifts of the youngest to the oldest. … People want genuine community and we provide that, welcoming all, open to all questions. … I do not see this as cause for alarm.”

Rev. Mark Kearse, MDiv ’08, says, “Structured church affiliation is unquestionably declining in America, and yes, this is cause for alarm.” As pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church, York, Pennsylvania, he is hopeful: “Can the church survive this season of flux and adjust accordingly? Sure it can! It has done it before and it can do it again. God is relevant in any and all seasons of human existence.”

When MDiv candidate Donte A. Jones reflected on how his field education experiences and his home church “are addressing the realities of America’s changing religious landscape,
There are some numbers that we don’t like to see: the increasing number on the bathroom scale, the number on the line “taxes owed,” and the poll numbers when our candidate is losing.

The numbers in a study released this spring by the Pew Research Center may not be what we would like to see: a decline in church affiliation and attendance in the United States. For years many thought America was “exceptional” compared to Europe, Canada and other countries that experienced decline in religious affiliation years ago. Since the founding of our country, a consistently high proportion of the American population has attended church. Americans have exhibited a notable pattern of volunteerism and philanthropy that springs from Christian stewardship. Now we must figure out what the declining numbers mean for the American church and for society.

If this shakes your confidence in God, it is worth reviewing Jesus’ parable of the wedding banquet. A magnanimous host extends a generous invitation to a wedding feast but the invited guests find excuses not to attend. On the day of the feast, messengers extend the invitation again. When they still don’t get the right number of RSVPs, they are instructed to go into the streets and invite the rabble. We recognize that pattern. Often it is the disenfranchised who respond to the good news of the gospel, not the rich and preoccupied.

I identify with the messengers of this generous host. I enthusiastically invite people to the fabulous feast of the church. The gospel is very good news. The reign of God’s love and justice coming in the fullness of time should command attention. The church is the joyous gathering of those who have been invited to a calling that is more grand and important than daily lives of toil and individual self-maximizing.

Do the numbers in the recent Pew report mean that something is wrong with the feast? With the host? Is this host unworthy of our attention? Of course not. The truth of the gospel is not determined by poll data. Einstein, the greatest numbers person of the 20th century, warned “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

While we are not living in a “post Christian era,” Christendom is shrinking. The culture and institutions of Christianity no longer dominate, and the church increasingly occupies a place on the margins of American society. We may need to live out our mission from a new place, in a way that is increasingly countercultural. In fact, this waning of Christian influence may be a helpful correction to the shrill voice of Christian fundamentalism coupled with partisan politics. Maybe we will rebalance and the Christian voice will be associated with advocacy for the poor, for the environment, and other justice issues.

I am, however, most concerned about the younger generation, to whom we bear a special responsibility. We must make the invitation to worship compelling to them by exemplifying the joy of those who are invited. The problem is not the feast or the host; it is how we live and how we invite. Let’s invite them in a winsome and meaningful way -- continues on p3
Michael Jackson’s song “Man in the Mirror” came to mind. The lyrics suggest that the best way to bring about change in the world is to first bring about change within yourself.”

Jennifer Potter, MDiv ’14, is co-founder and pastor of The Other Church Lancaster, which is reaching out to a younger adult population. “We in the church need to be better listeners than speakers, better at love than judgment, better at journeying with rather than pretending we have already arrived. We as church leaders should be authentic, risk-taking, engaged people of faith!”

To read the in-depth perspectives of those who shared their comments in this article, visit lancasterseminary.edu.

---

PEW RESEARCH: CHANGING U.S. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.

*Includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, other world religions and other faiths. Those who did not answer the religious identity question, as well as groups whose share of the population did not change significantly, including the historically black Protestant tradition, Mormons and others, are not shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>+6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mainline Protestant</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Christian faiths*</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>+1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


---

Leadership Letter

---

into a relationship with God and the Christian community. Let’s vitalize church life, Christian camps, college fellowships, and service/justice learning experiences. This will build on the formation most churches offer children so as they transition into adulthood they mature in their faith commitment.

The seminary’s role is more important than ever in educating the “inviters” who will present this opportunity in all its natural appeal. We need leaders who will equip families to nurture faith in the next generation from the youngest through the young adult years. We need congregations that embolden people to be committed and countercultural in forming distinctly Christian identities. We need leaders who will help older generations become mature mentors in the faith. This is what counts. We can trust the numbers to God who, in the eternal scheme of things, will fill the banquet hall of heaven for the feast that God has prepared.

---

March 7, 2015

Carol E. Lytle
Our new Master of Divinity program, which launched in August, makes it possible for students to balance both work and study.

With a relevant, refreshed curriculum, the program now offers two ways to earn an MDiv. The Day track offers classes 3½ days a week and leads to graduation in three years; the Weekend track holds classes on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, leading to graduation in four years.

“People want to cultivate lives that matter to themselves and to others,” says Dr. David M. Mellott, Seminary Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs. “Our newly designed degree program will help students engage human existence more deeply and teach them to put their talents at the service of God’s vision for a world where all creation flourishes.”

Twice as many students have enrolled in the Weekend track compared to the Day program, according to Rev. Ruth-Aimée Belonni-Rosario, Dean of Admissions, confirming the decision to offer this popular alternative.

“I believe this is a new opportunity for people to consider theological education in a dynamic way,” she says. “Everywhere I go, I hear positive comments about our new MDiv. Our prospects are excited with the classes and its professors. Our alums and friends are pleased with the direction Lancaster Seminary is taking.

“The idea of making an academic, thought-provoking, practical, diverse, and socially relevant curriculum accessible to all interested in theological education is pretty amazing and humbling.”

A few years ago, John Hocker was in the Army, jumping out of airplanes. After active duty, he landed an earth-bound job as a roadways program manager with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, based in King of Prussia.

John, 46, is a Lancaster native and graduate of Lock Haven University, where he studied geography.

Our weekend MDiv program allows John to keep his job and its benefits while he aims for a new career. “I would like to become a minister,” he says. “There are a lot of people walking around with holes in their hearts.”
Joshua Robertson, Class of 2019

Joshua C. Robertson, 30, is a pre-need counselor at Wallace Funeral Directors Inc. in Harrisburg, and an elder in the church where his father, Christian Robertson, is pastor, At the Cross Church of God in Christ.

“I do hope that one day I can do ministry full time,” Joshua says.

Even though his denomination does not require a Master’s degree for full-time ministry, Joshua enrolled in our new MDiv weekend program to continue deepening his faith journey and to complement his undergraduate degree in Business Marketing and Education, and Applied Business.

Joshua was attracted to Lancaster Seminary “because of the reputation for being a scholarly institution. Many of my friends, mentors, and associates praise the Seminary for its academic integrity and prestige.”

“I am honored and grateful to be a student at LTS!”

Tekoa Robinson, Class of 2019

Tekoa Robinson, 37, is director of Caring Carroll, Inc., a public service organization that helps residents of Carroll County, Maryland, who need assistance with daily activities. In addition to her career and roles as a wife and mother of two, Tekoa is now a seminarian, a member of the first class in our new Master of Divinity weekend program.

“I am pursuing a theological degree, not for a definitive end, but for the opening that it creates, whether in pastoral ministry, the academy, or in the totality of life. It is where I find my breath and where I learn to exhale,” she explains. “I don’t think I could have gone the rest of my life without doing this!”

Our new weekend schedule makes it possible for her to balance graduate studies with a job and a busy family life.

“I started looking at Lancaster Theological Seminary,” she recalls, “and (the new schedule) just made sense. Lancaster has done something I haven’t found anywhere else.”

Tekoa, who goes by Koa, is named for the Native American midwife who assisted at her birth. She is a member of St. Paul’s United Church of Christ in Westminster, Maryland.

Koa’s husband, Aaron, a high school teacher, is taking over grocery shopping and cooking duties. Their children “have been quite impressed with some of the meals he’s made so far, especially his Chinese roast chicken,” she says.

Koa received the Seminary’s Presidential Scholarship, a merit-based scholarship that covers the full cost of tuition and provides a $1,000 annual stipend.

“Alex and Ella (my children) overheard Aaron and me discussing what would happen if I didn’t get enough financial aid to help cover the cost of tuition, and would you know it, when I went up to bed that night, they had placed all of their own hard-earned cash on my pillow as a gift toward my education.

“As I cried over the beauty of their offering, I told them that although I was very appreciative of their loving support, if it was meant to happen, a way would be made for me to attend seminary. The following Friday I found out about my scholarship!”
A MILLION REASONS TO REJOICE
“It’s not magic, but it is a miracle.”

There’s a rule of thumb that says once is a phenomenon, twice is a coincidence, three times is a trend. Thanks to our faithful friends and generous supporters, Lancaster Theological Seminary achieved an important “trend-setting” milestone: for the third year in a row, we topped our million-dollar fundraising goal.

For the 2014-15 fiscal year that ended June 30, the Seminary received $1.2 million in gifts for the annual fund, scholarships, and other critical operations.

Significant gifts from Ann Barshinger (left) and Frank and Elizabeth Burke helped put this campaign over the top. We are grateful to all those whose unwavering support makes it possible for the Seminary to continue to educate and nurture leaders to join in God’s redemptive and liberating work so that all creation may flourish.

“The fact that we have met our $1 million goal three years in a row is a very positive sign,” said Seminary President Dr. Carol Lytch. “It’s not magic, but it is a miracle.”

RING, RING

Thanks to volunteer extraordinaire Rev. Patrick W. Morris, Sr., MDiv ’92, the bell on his desk rang out often during the spring phoneathon, signifying that when telephoned, a graduate made a gift to advance the Seminary’s mission.

“The amazing thing to me is how the people I called, some of whom have been out of seminary for decades, are excited about the new programs,” Pat said. “They really appreciate the excellent work that the Seminary and (Rev.) Paul Eyer do in staying connected to them.”

CUTTING IT CLOSE

At commencement, Garrett Book, MDiv ’15, a licensed landscape designer, surprised President Lytch with a little lawn and scissors representing one of the gifts from the Class of 2015 to the Seminary: a new lawnmower and snow blower.

Property and Housekeeping Manager Vic Wright, our own Lawn Ranger, couldn’t wait to take the Class of 2015 gift for a spin. The John Deere arrived just in time: Vic’s ancient mower had gone blades up, beyond repair.
ACADEMIC LECTURE SERIES

Wednesday, Oct. 7
4 p.m. Santee Chapel
The Politics of Public Space: Bodies, Restrooms & Social Justice
Dr. Judith Plaskow, Manhattan College

FALL ALUMNI/AE DAY
Wednesday, Oct. 28
2 p.m. Santee Chapel
Breathing Space: Finding Joy & Relationship in Heidi Neumark’s Story
Dr. Mary Clark Moschella, Yale Divinity School

Wednesday, Dec. 2
2 p.m. Santee Chapel
Medieval Modern: Church Architecture for the Present
Dr. Kostis Kourelis, Franklin & Marshall College

EXTRAORDINARY GIVE

Friday, Nov. 20
Midnight – 11:59 p.m.
Support Lancaster Seminary during the community’s biggest single day of online giving. Extragive.org

Mark your calendars for Friday, Nov. 20, for this special, one-day community online fundraising event. We’re hoping to top last year’s extraordinary results. Our generous donors contributed $53,810 for seminary scholarships, putting Lancaster Seminary in the Top 10 nonprofit organizations for total gifts raised in 24-hours! This means that more students are able to afford seminary. Watch for details coming in the fall.
During Alumni/ae Day this year, President Carol Lytch awarded Kim one of Lancaster Seminary’s highest honors, the Robert V. Moss Award for Distinguished Service in the Practice of Specialized Ministry.

Her nominators cited her ministerial achievements as a social worker for organ transplant patients at New Orleans’ Ochsner Health System, volunteer for Child Fund Kenya in Africa, and founder and director of a groundbreaking program for at-risk youth in Richmond, Virginia.

Fifteen years ago, athletics, not ministry, dominated her life. Kim, now 37, won an Olympic gold medal in the 800-meter freestyle relay in the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney, Australia. In 2001, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, better known as the NCAA, named her “Woman of the Year.”

Despite all of the accolades, she humbly credits others for her successes.

“You know, I have a lot of friends and family to make that happen,” Kim says, praising those who offered support over the years. She cited her family’s legacy of service, one with roots at Lancaster Theological Seminary. “My grandfather was actually ordained in Lancaster. My grandmother was super-active in the Seminary.”

Her grandparents, UCC minister Rev. Paul Gregory, and his wife, Kit, were missionaries in Japan and in China when the Communists came to power. They “opened my eyes up to the world,” she says.

She also cites the influence of her parents, James and Nancy Black, of Liverpool, NY, and her brother, Michael, who lives in Atlanta.

Kim says that her education at Lancaster Seminary also “opened my eyes.” She followed her call here because she “wanted to learn more about the Bible.”

After receiving a Master of Divinity degree, Kim moved to the Richmond Hill Ecumenical Retreat Center in Virginia, where she founded and directed the Armstrong Leadership program designed to increase on-time high school graduation among at-risk youth. Under her leadership, the successful program budget grew tenfold to more than $100,000.

In Kenya, she helped to raise more than $5,400 to purchase dairy goats from Heifer International to help people with HIV.

“I think that whenever you travel internationally, you get to know yourself better. You get to know God better,” she says.

For this former Olympic athlete, sports continues to play a role in her life. Kim developed and co-manages Team Louisiana, which helps transplant recipients train for sports competitions.

What is Kim’s guiding principle? “Life is short,” she says. “Go in peace and serve the Lord.”

Olympic gold medalist. Medical social worker. Ordained United Church of Christ minister.

To say that Kimberly Black has an extensive résumé would be an understatement. Fund Kenya in Africa, and founder and director of a groundbreaking program for at-risk youth in Richmond, Virginia.

Fifteen years ago, athletics, not ministry, dominated her life. Kim, now 37, won an Olympic gold medal in the 800-meter freestyle relay in the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney, Australia. In 2001, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, better known as the NCAA, named her “Woman of the Year.”

Despite all of the accolades, she humbly credits others for her successes.

“You know, I have a lot of friends and family to make that happen,” Kim says, praising those who offered support over the years. She cited her family’s legacy of service, one with roots at Lancaster Theological Seminary. “My grandfather was actually ordained in Lancaster. My grandmother was super-active in the Seminary.”

Her grandparents, UCC minister Rev. Paul Gregory, and his wife, Kit, were missionaries in Japan and in China when the Communists came to power. They “opened my eyes up to the world,” she says.

She also cites the influence of her parents, James and Nancy Black, of Liverpool, NY, and her brother, Michael, who lives in Atlanta.

Kim says that her education at Lancaster Seminary also “opened my eyes.” She followed her call here because she “wanted to learn more about the Bible.”

After receiving a Master of Divinity degree, Kim moved to the Richmond Hill Ecumenical Retreat Center in Virginia, where she founded and directed the Armstrong Leadership program designed to increase on-time high school graduation among at-risk youth. Under her leadership, the successful program budget grew tenfold to more than $100,000.

In Kenya, she helped to raise more than $5,400 to purchase dairy goats from Heifer International to help people with HIV.

“I think that whenever you travel internationally, you get to know yourself better. You get to know God better,” she says.

For this former Olympic athlete, sports continues to play a role in her life. Kim developed and co-manages Team Louisiana, which helps transplant recipients train for sports competitions.

What is Kim’s guiding principle? “Life is short,” she says. “Go in peace and serve the Lord.”
It was a joyous reunion weekend for the several hundred alumni/ae, families and friends who gathered on campus for worship, a banquet, and lecture by Dr. Peter Steinke, noted author and expert in family systems theory and congregational dynamics.

President Carol Lytch conferred the Seminary’s highest alumni/ae honors to four graduates during Alumni/ae Day ceremonies in May.

Recipients of the 2015 Robert V. Moss Award for distinguished service in specialized ministry were (from the left in the photo) Rev. Richard Whitney, ’52, former staff member of the Penn Central Conference of the UCC in Harrisburg, and Rev. Kimberly Black, ’05, of Ochsner Health System’s Multi-Organ Transplant Institute, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Receiving the 2015 Allen S. Meck Award for distinguished service in pastoral ministry were Rev. Dr. Lynn Martin, ’83, of St. Lucas UCC, Evansville, Indiana, and Rev. Ronnette Comfort-Butler, ’08, of Maytown Reformed UCC, Maytown, Pennsylvania.

Do you know of an outstanding graduate deserving of recognition? Nominations for the 2016 Meck and Moss awards will be accepted until Dec. 31. Get all the details at lancasterseminary.edu/alumni-ae.

SPRING ALUMNI/AE DAY: FELLOWSHIP. WORSHIP. SCHOLARSHIP.

top (l-r): Nathan Baxter, Howard Kriebel, Harry Royer, Sanford Sauer & Betty Jean Linh

bottom (l-r): Doyle Luckenbaugh & Richard Whitney, Paul Irion & Julia O’Brien, Monique & Harold Carter with President Lytch, Vernon Baum & Paul Eyer
Pursuing a seminary education is one of the most exciting and transformative adventures a person can have,” says Dr. Carol E. Lytch, Lancaster Seminary President. “The church needs seminary-educated pastors who are prepared to equip the saints — the whole congregation — for the work of Christ’s church. We need educated persons who combine ministry with other professions to infuse other public settings with a theological vision.”

Do you know someone who feels called to serve?

Do you know a person who may be considering a theological degree?

Is there a potential seminarian in your congregation?

Pursuing a seminary education is one of the most exciting and transformative adventures a person can have,” says Dr. Carol E. Lytch, Lancaster Seminary President. “The church needs seminary-educated pastors who are prepared to equip the saints — the whole congregation — for the work of Christ’s church. We need educated persons who combine ministry with other professions to infuse other public settings with a theological vision.”

Discover Days will be held in 2015 on Nov. 10-11, and in 2016 on March 4-5 and April 5-6.

Learn more about the opportunities that await at discoverdays.com