



STATISTICAL SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

2022



Livestream: Opening Worship @ 6:30 p.m. (ET)

Opening service with communion at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Mich.

- Rev. 1:4-8
- Presiding minister: Rev. Mark Schroeder, WELS President
- Preacher: Rev. James Huebner, WELS First Vice President
- [Opening Worship folder](#)

DELEGATE INFORMATION



Are you serving as a delegate? Access the important information about serving as a delegate to the synod convention.

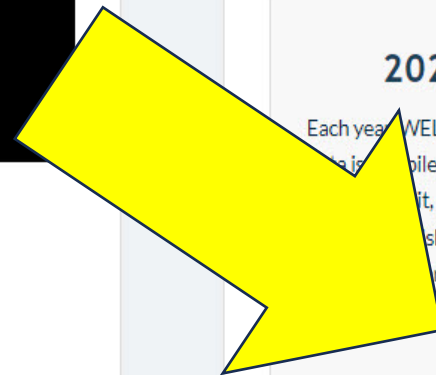
[Learn more](#)



2022 STATISTICAL REPORT

Each year WELS collects data from all congregations and schools. That data is compiled in a statistical report containing information for every district, conference, and district. WELS Congregational Services publishes an annual Statistical Summary & Analysis to help congregations and the synod plan how to best steward the resources God provides.

[Statistical Report](#)



Matthew 24:45: “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge . . .”

FAITHFUL

πιστός

- Believing God’s promises
- Trusting in the sufficiency of his Word
- Acting in line with God’s will
- Motivated by the gospel

WISE

φρόνιμος

- Using reason properly
- Demonstrating sanctified shrewdness
- Examining the context
- Exercising discernment

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Christian Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

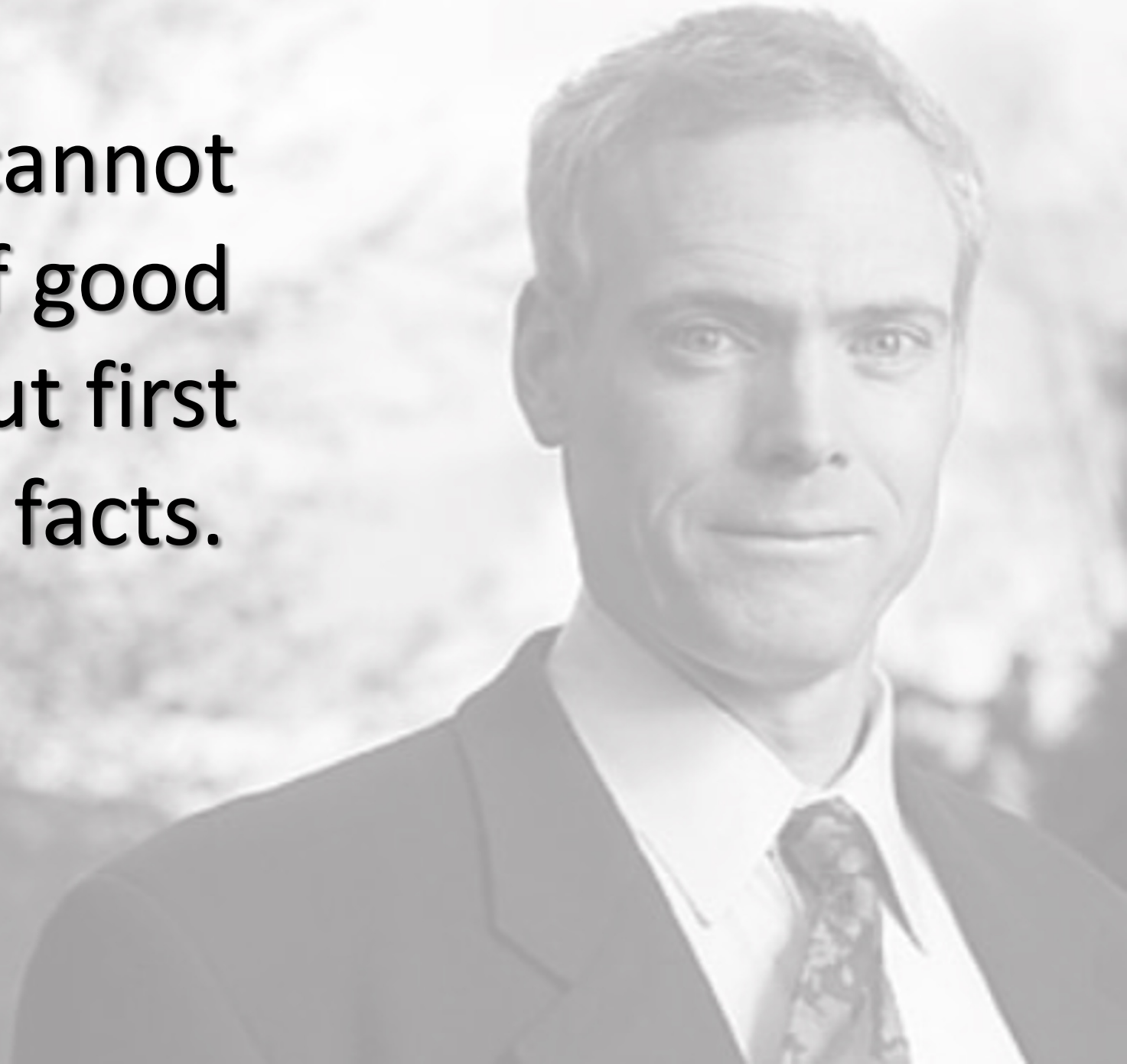
We use the FIRST
ARTICLE gift of reason
to think through how
best to proclaim

SECOND ARTICLE truths
about Jesus Christ

with THIRD ARTICLE
confidence that the
results of our efforts
are entirely up to the
Holy Spirit.

**You absolutely cannot
make a series of good
decisions without first
confronting the facts.**

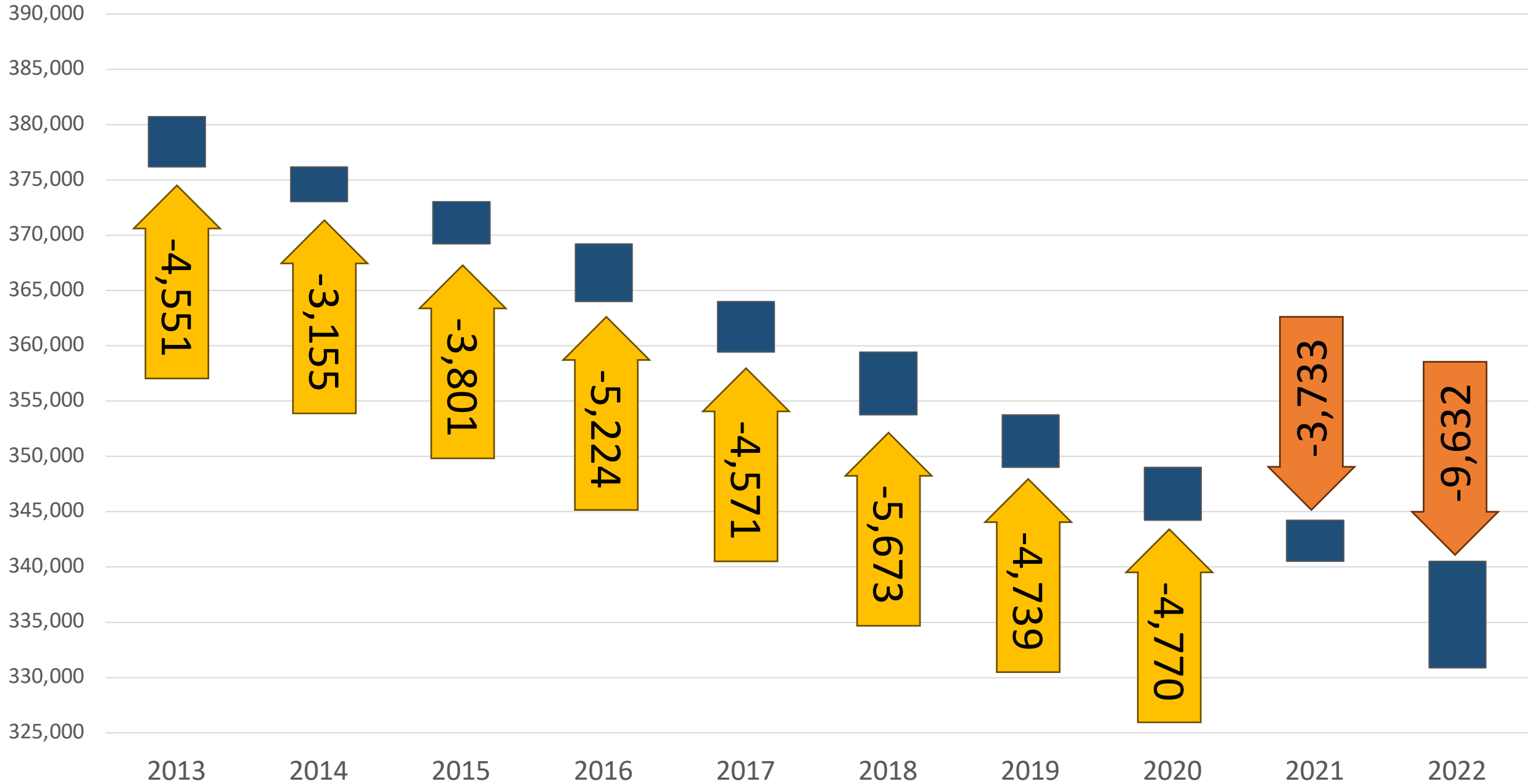
James C. Collins



Why the deeper dive in 2022?

- ❑ To assess how WELS congregations were doing coming out of COVID-19. What is the long-term impact?
- ❑ To examine the veracity of some common talking points about the challenges WELS is facing.
 - *“The problem is WELS couples aren’t having kids.”*
 - *“We have record pastoral vacancies.”*
 - *“We don’t have the people to open new churches.”*
- ❑ To assemble data helpful in the production of WELS’ next long-range plan.

WELS' TOTAL MEMBERSHIP—START AND END OF YEAR, PAST DECADE



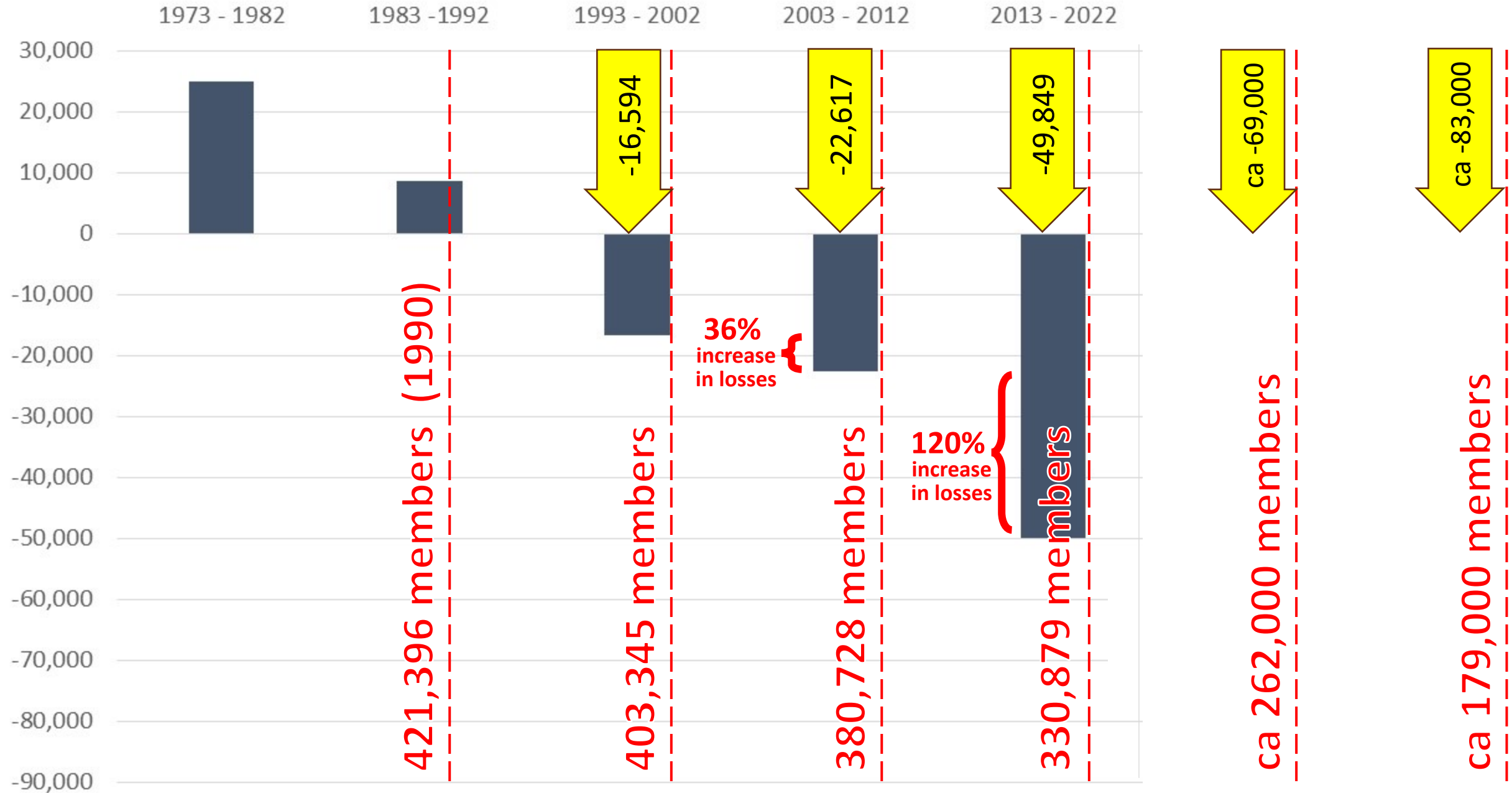
NUMERIC CHANGES IN WELS'

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP & WORSHIP ATTENDANCE



POST-COVID SORTING

WELS' NET GAINS/LOSSES BY DECADE



Types of Gains & Losses

LIFE-CYCLE

*GROWING THE CHURCH
FROM THE INSIDE*

SPIRITUAL

*GROWING THE CHURCH
FROM THE OUTSIDE*

WELS MOVEMENT

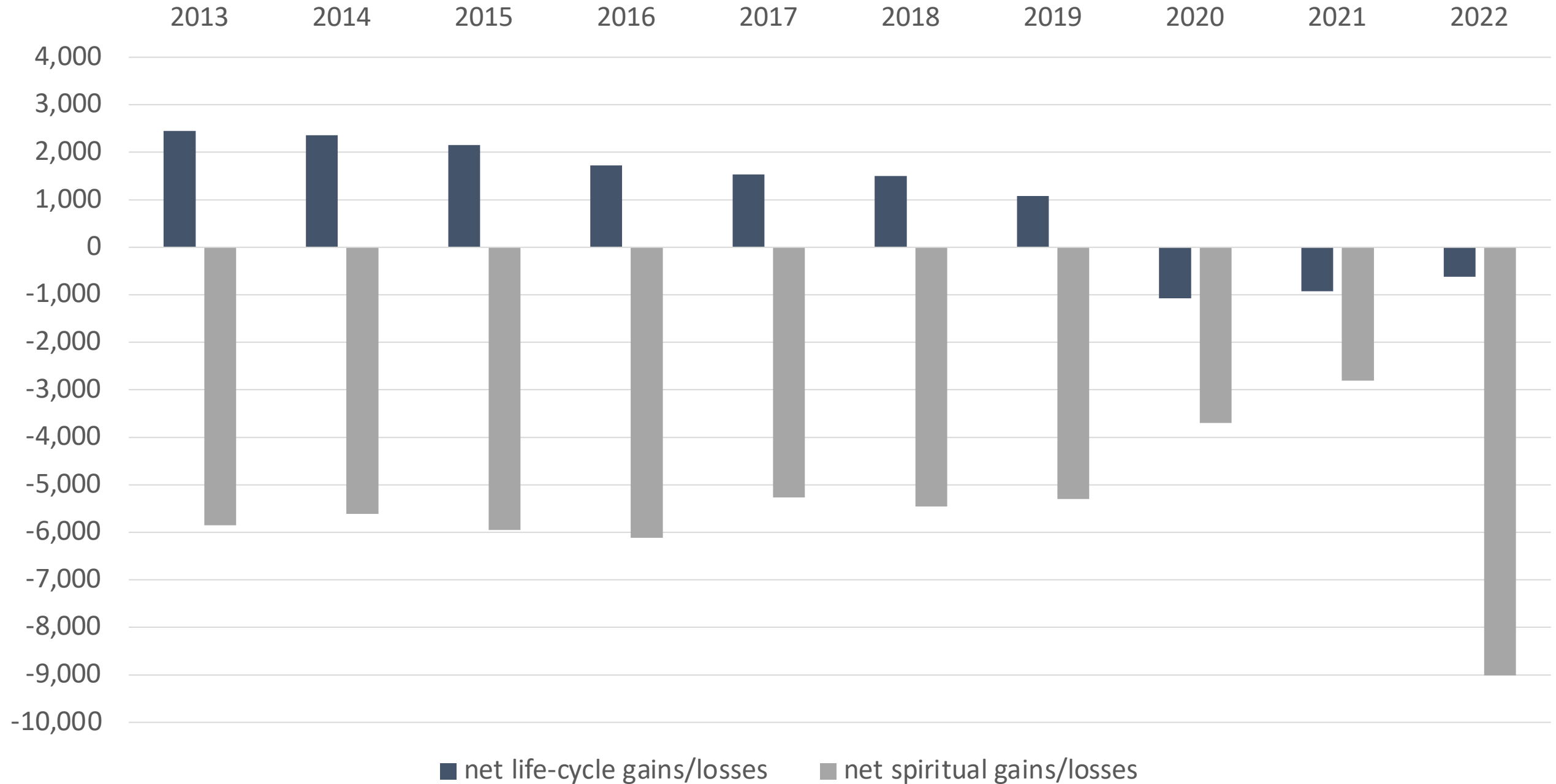
GAINS

- Transfers in

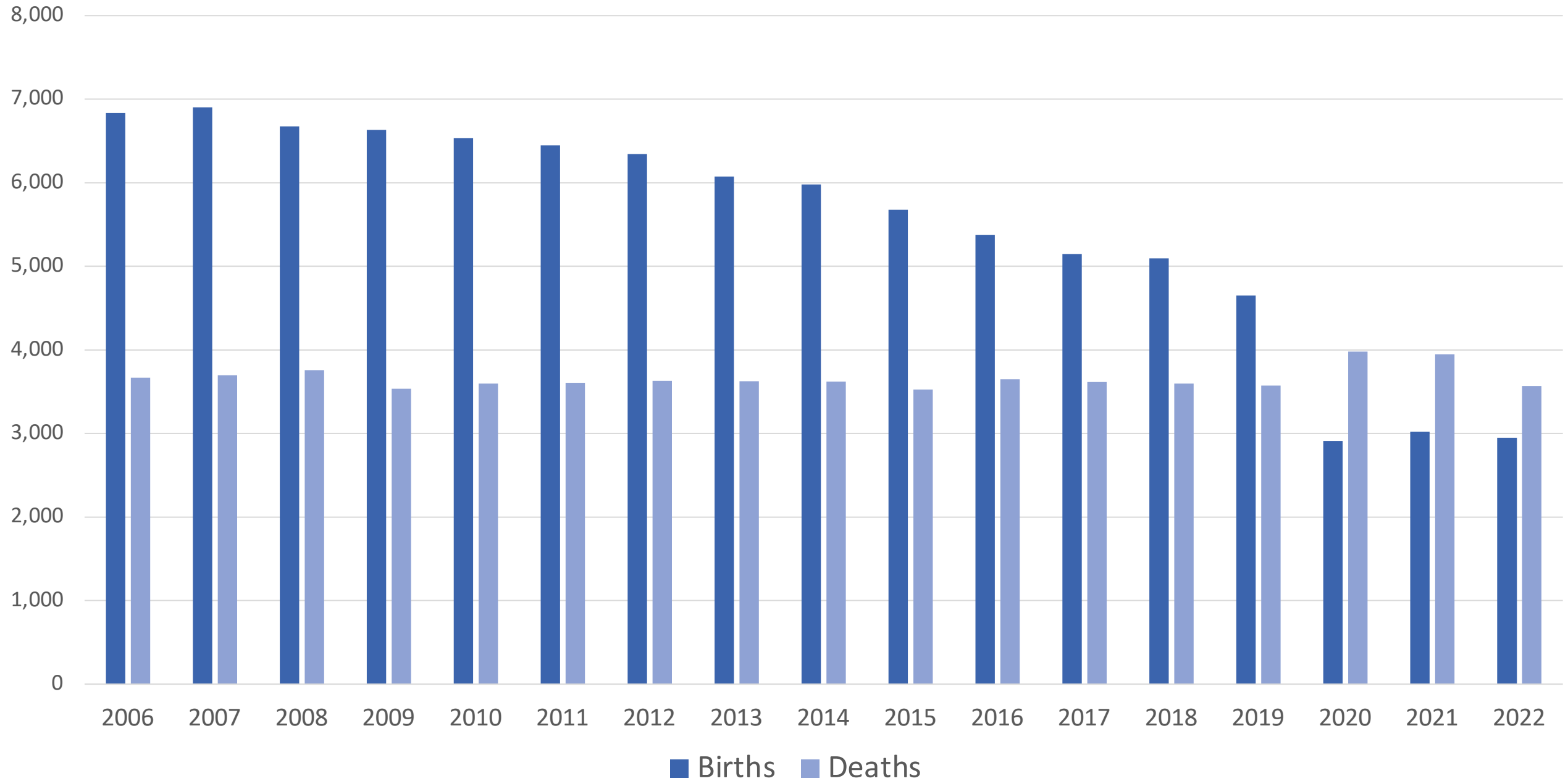
LOSSES

- Transfers out

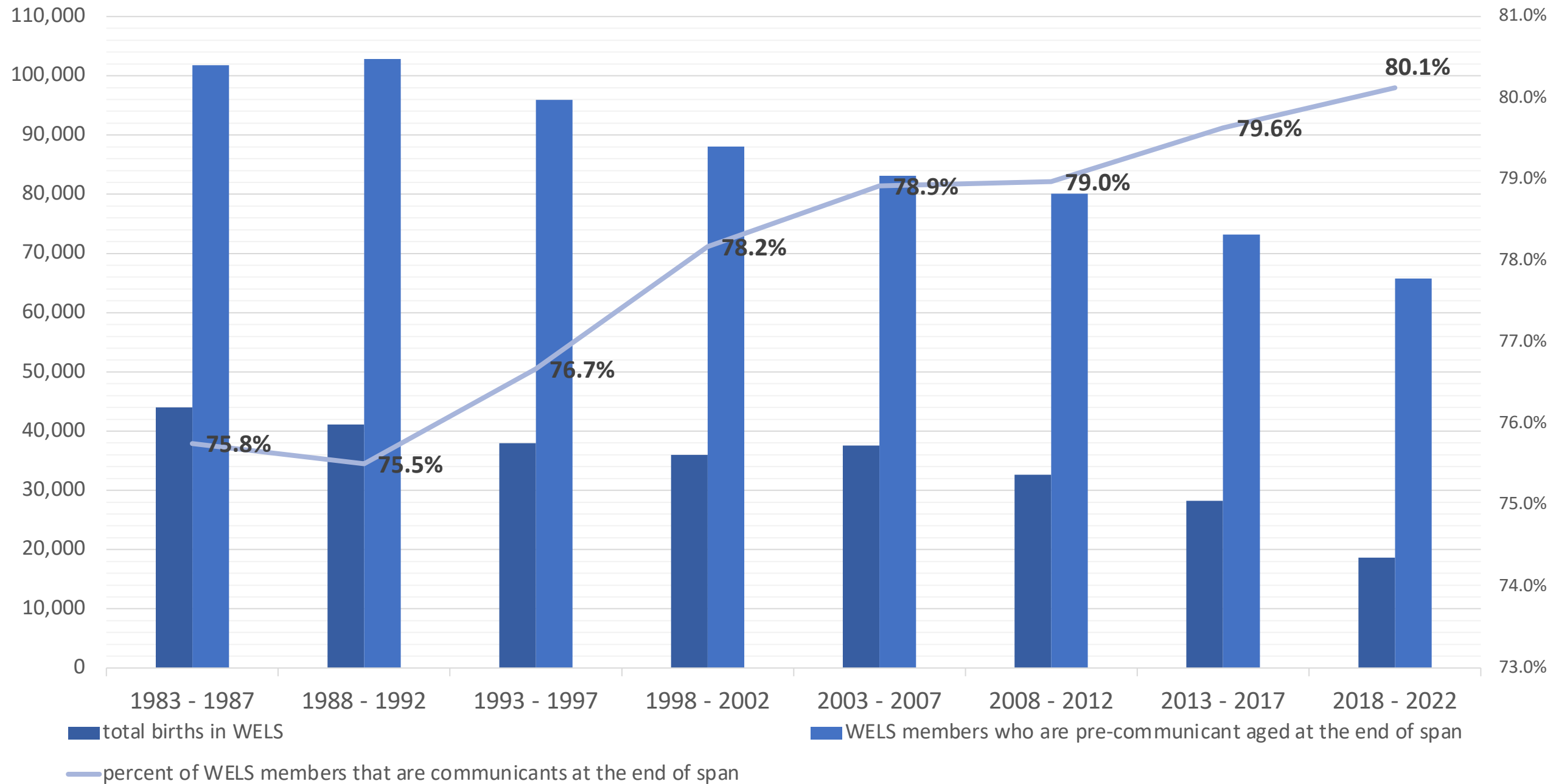
WELS' NET GAINS/LOSSES BY TYPE



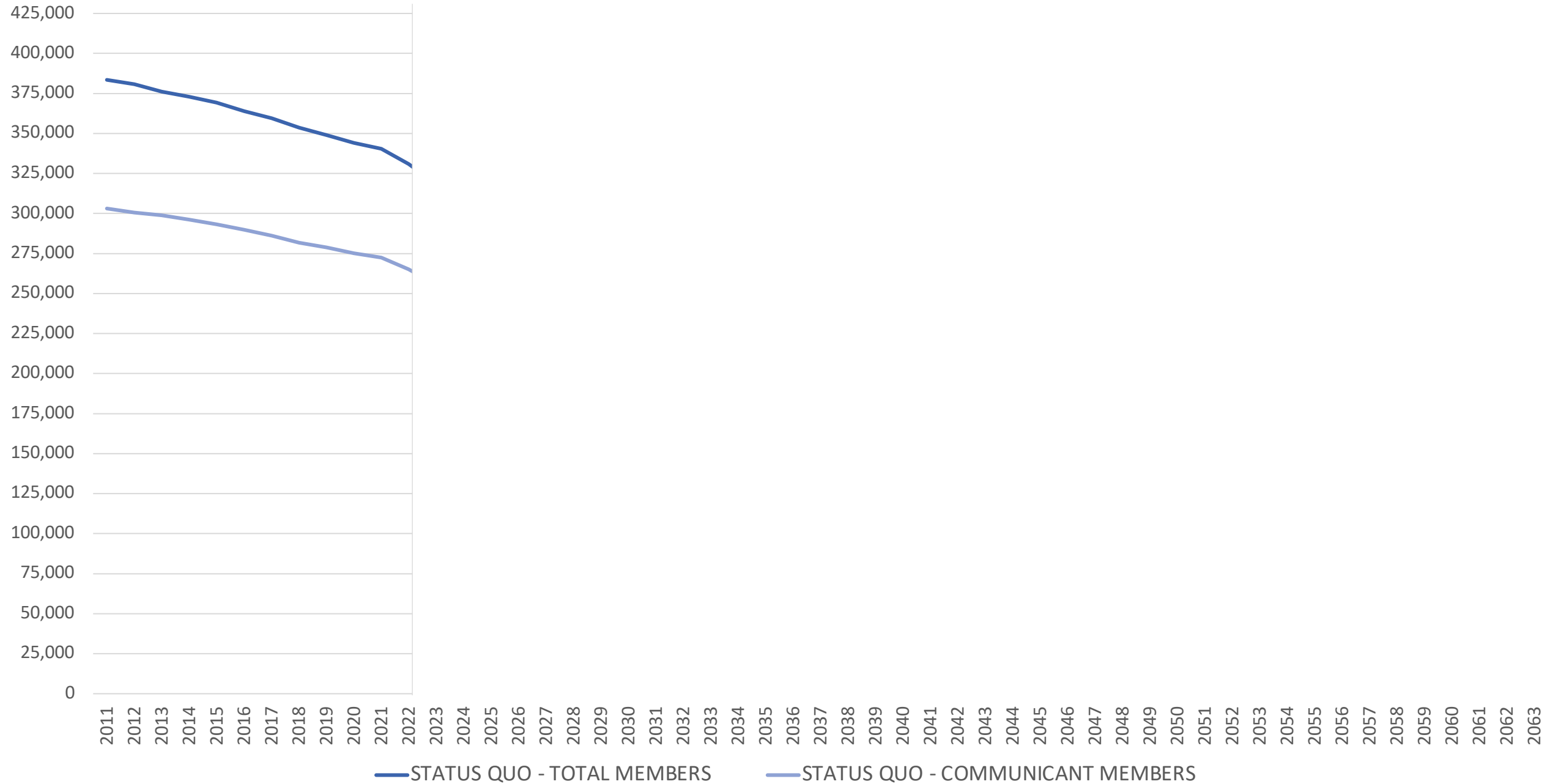
WELS' BIRTHS VERSUS DEATHS



WELS' BIRTHS & PRE-COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP IN FIVE-YEAR SPANS



STATUS QUO MODEL FORECAST



“We need so many more called workers.”

	1990	2022
WELS Members per Called Worker	91 to 1	70 to 1
WELS Communicants per Called Worker	70 to 1	56 to 1
Communicant Offerings (using 2022 per-communicant giving)	\$99,876	\$78,993

A photograph of five diverse babies sitting in a row against a light blue background. The babies are of various ethnicities and are wearing white diapers. The text 'A PRO-NATALIST STRATEGY' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

A PRO-NATALIST STRATEGY

WELS Members in Child-Bearing Years

	2015	2020	Change
Ages 18 to 24	29,945	25,732	-4,213 (-14.1%)
Ages 25 to 34	41,450	36,389	-5,061 (-12.2%)

As you look at your congregation over the past 20 years, what is the bigger change?



A

Young couples are having substantially fewer children.



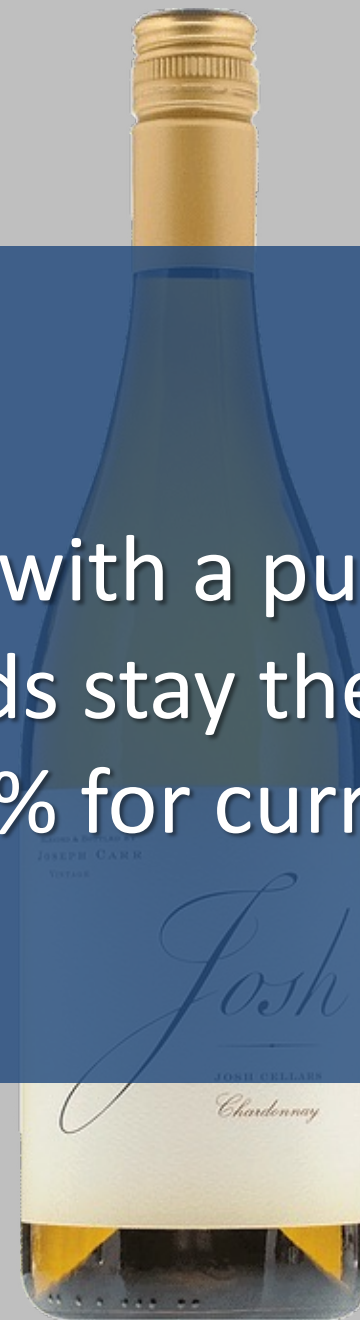
B

There are much fewer young couples; the congregation is aging.

*"Children are a blessing
from the Lord, and
the fruit of the womb
is his reward"*
Psalm 127:3

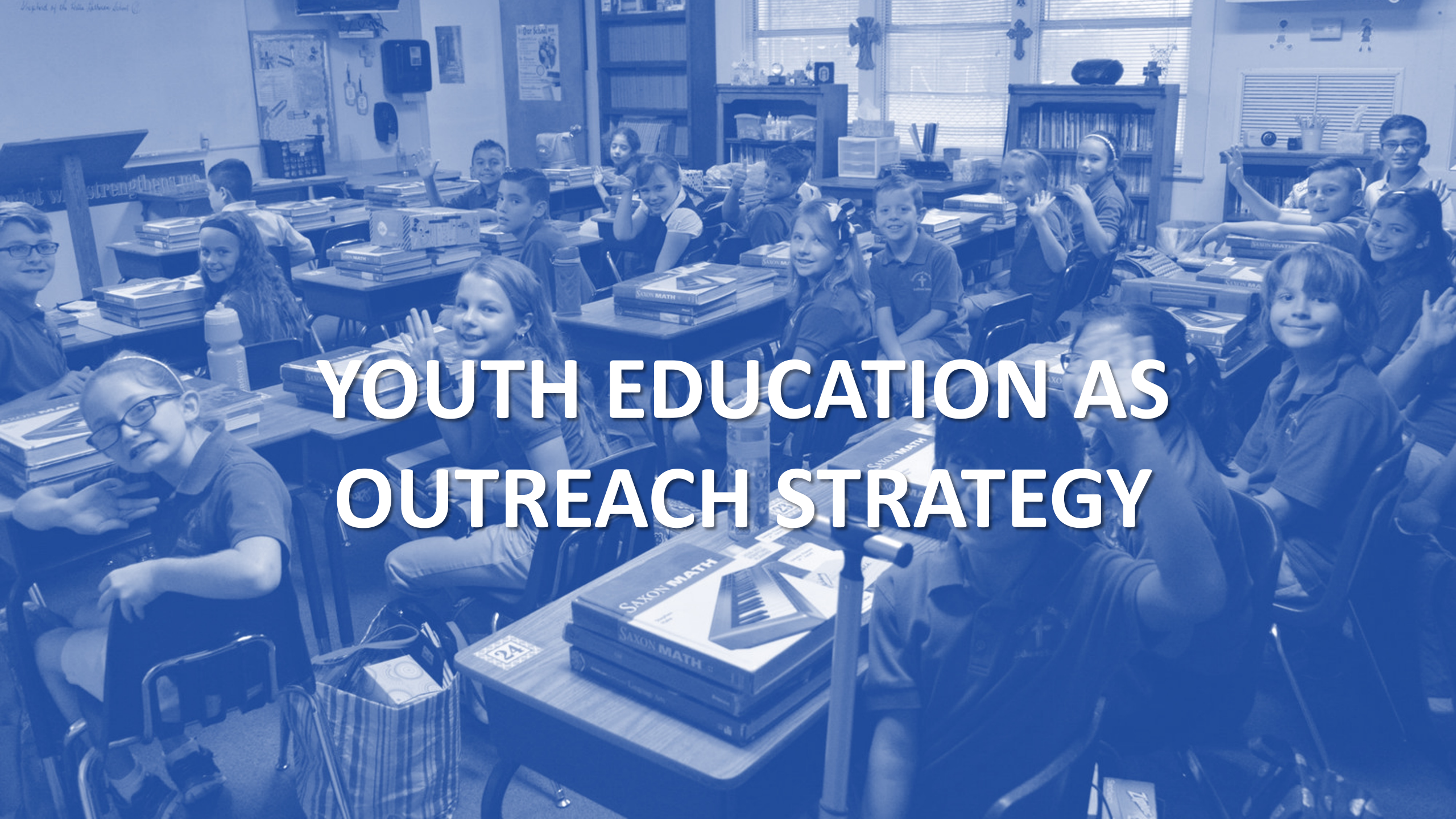
THE REALITY

To flatten the membership decline in WELS with a purely pro-natalist approach (assuming all other trends stay the same) requires our birth rate to increase about 300% for current levels.



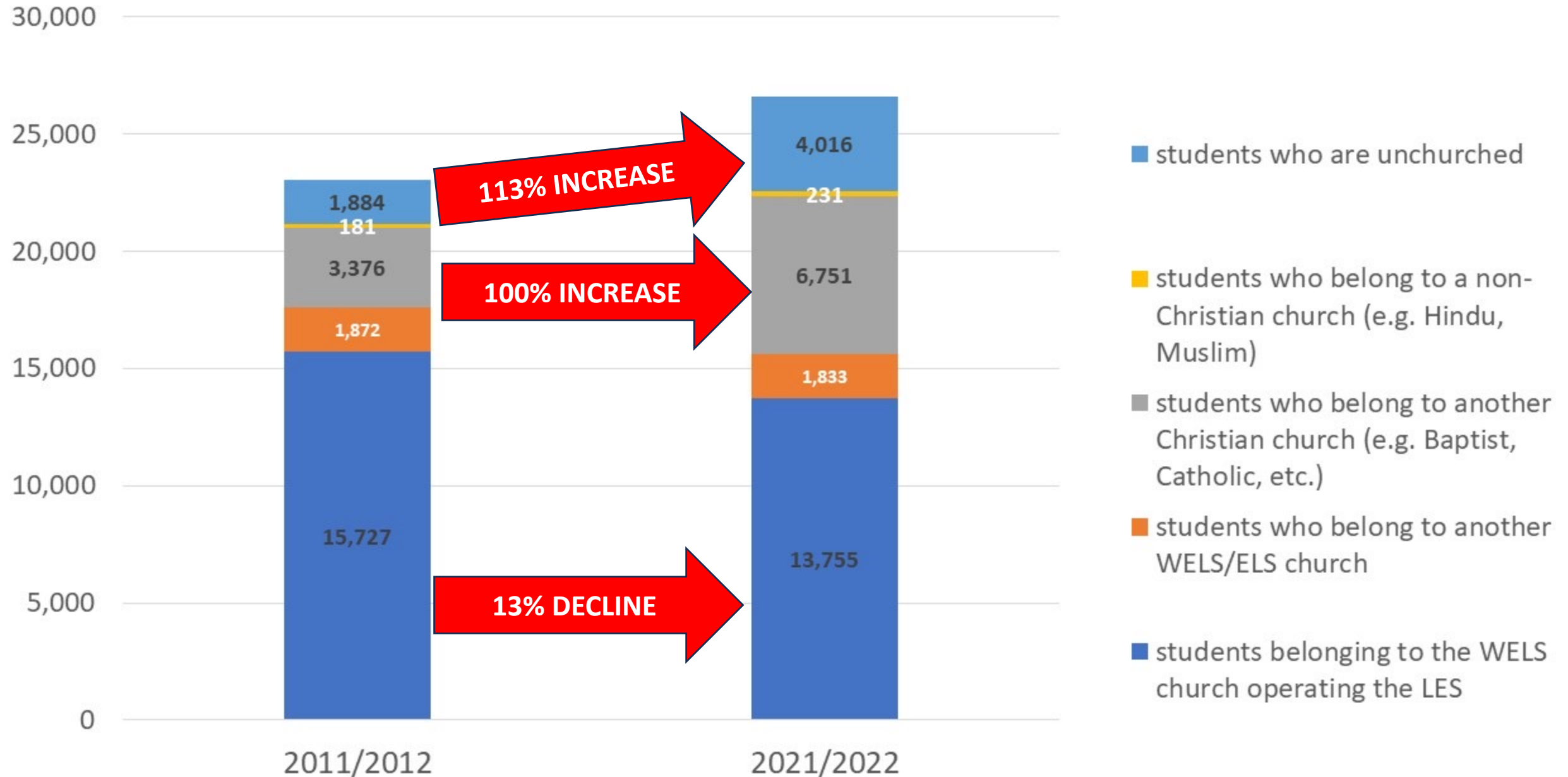
CONCLUSION

- ❑ We certainly want to teach young people that being a parent is a blessed, joyful vocation.
- ❑ The issue of fewer young WELS couples is substantially larger than young WELS couples having fewer children.
- ❑ Therefore, pro-natalist strategies, in the short term, could have at best a minimal impact.

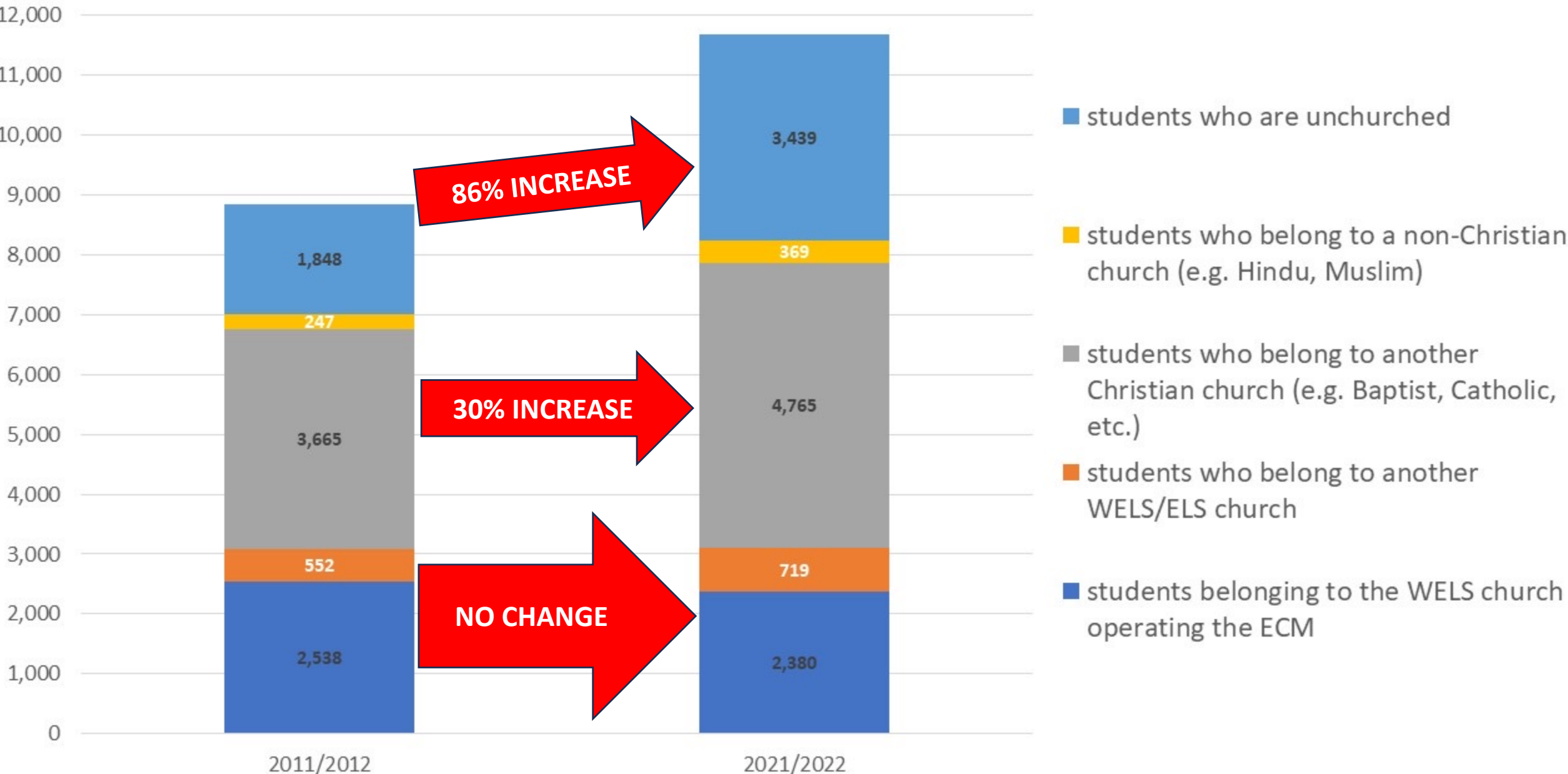


YOUTH EDUCATION AS OUTREACH STRATEGY

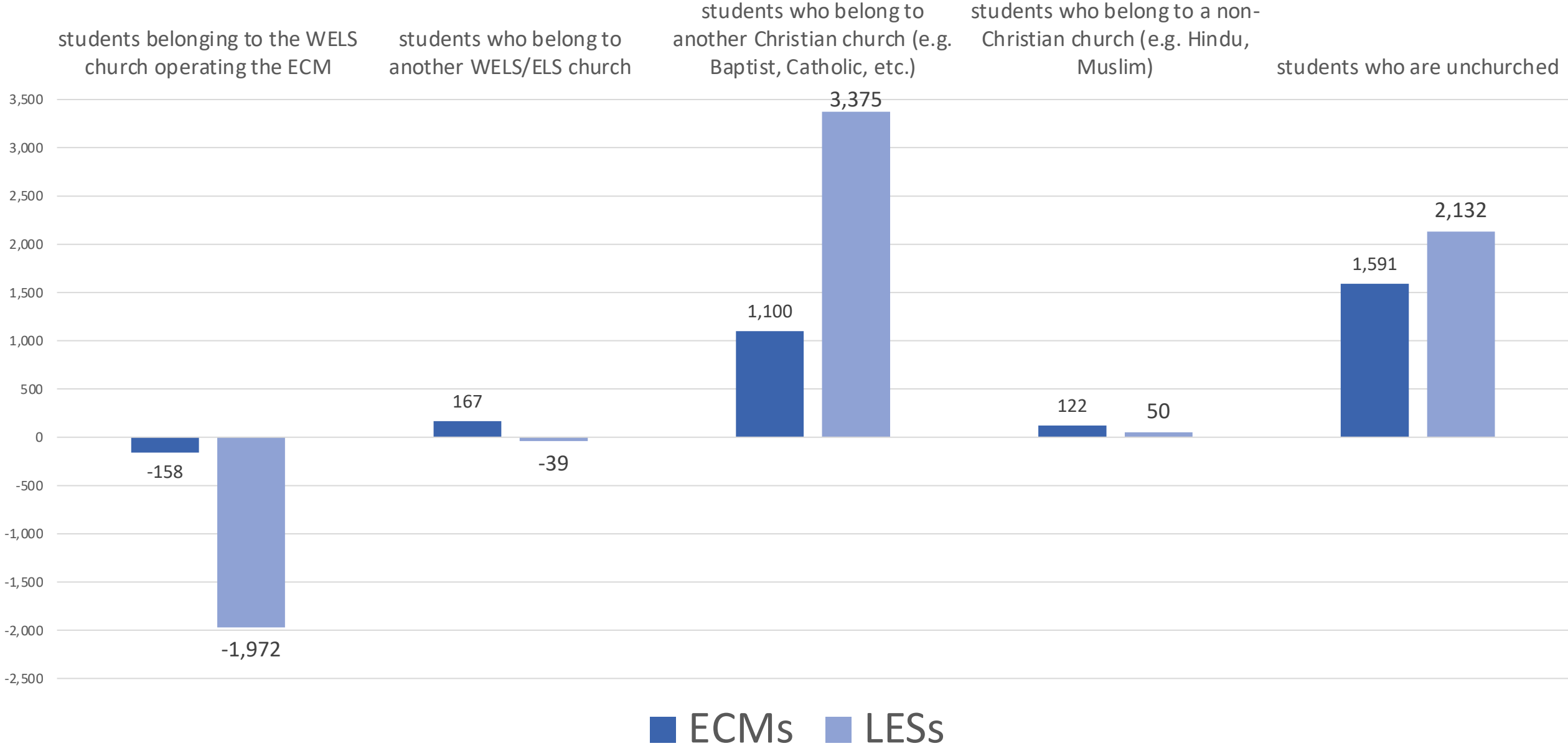
NUMBER OF TYPES OF STUDENTS IN WELS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, SCHOOL YEAR 11/12 AND 21/22



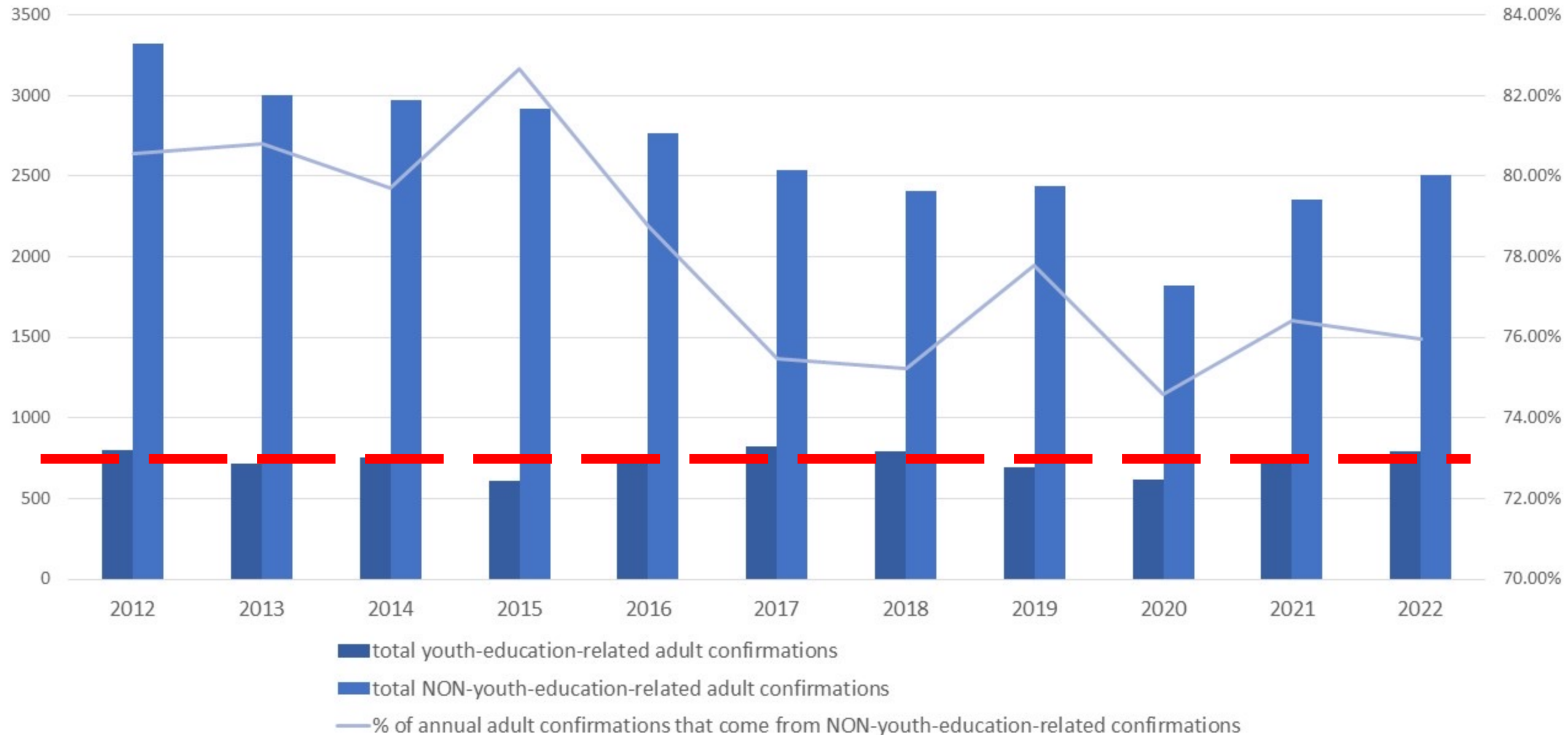
NUMBER OF TYPES OF STUDENTS IN WELS EARLY CHILDHOOD MINISTRIES, SCHOOL YEAR 11/12 AND 21/22



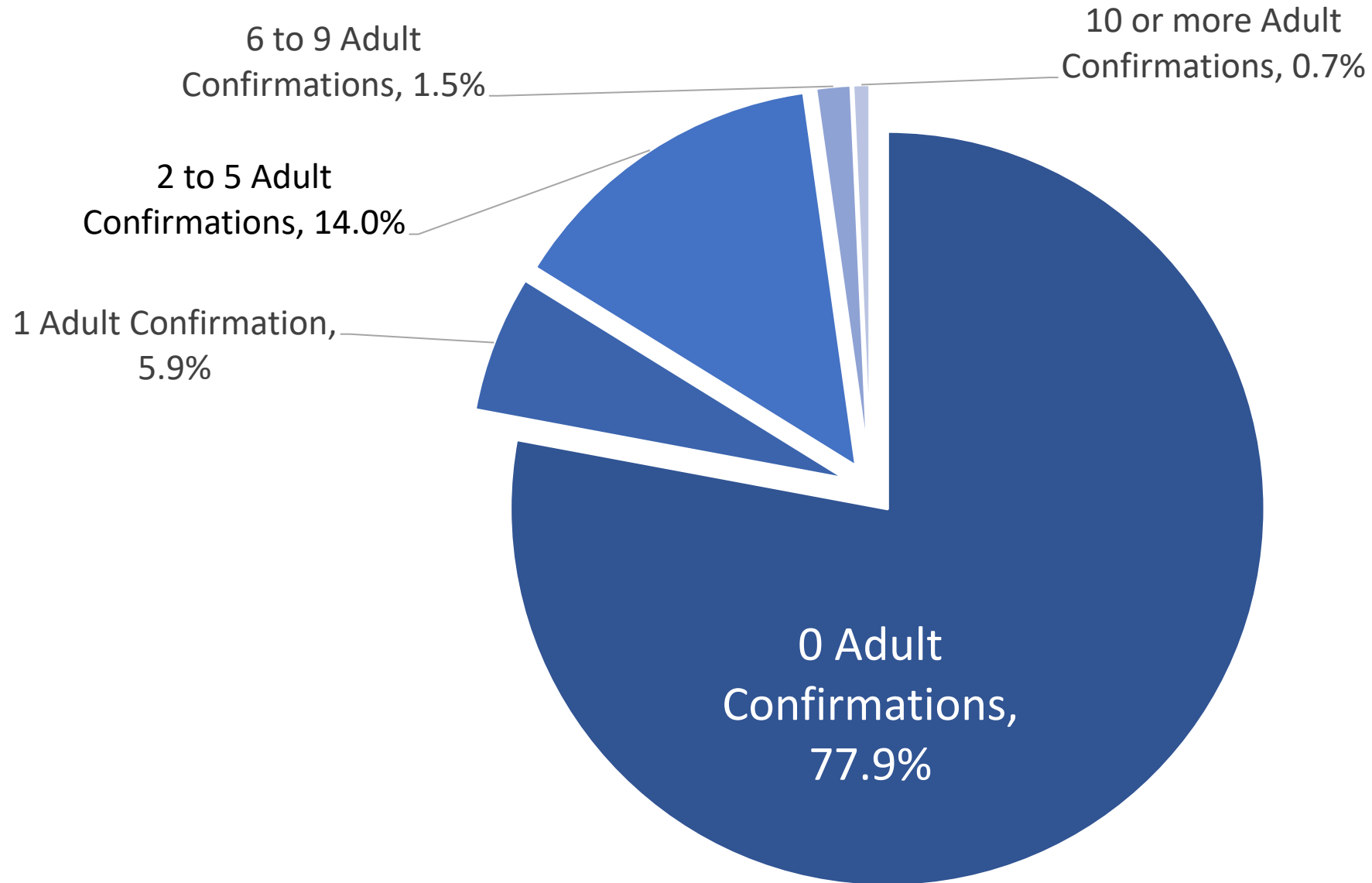
NUMERIC CHANGES IN TYPES OF STUDENTS BETWEEN YEAR 11/12 AND 21/22



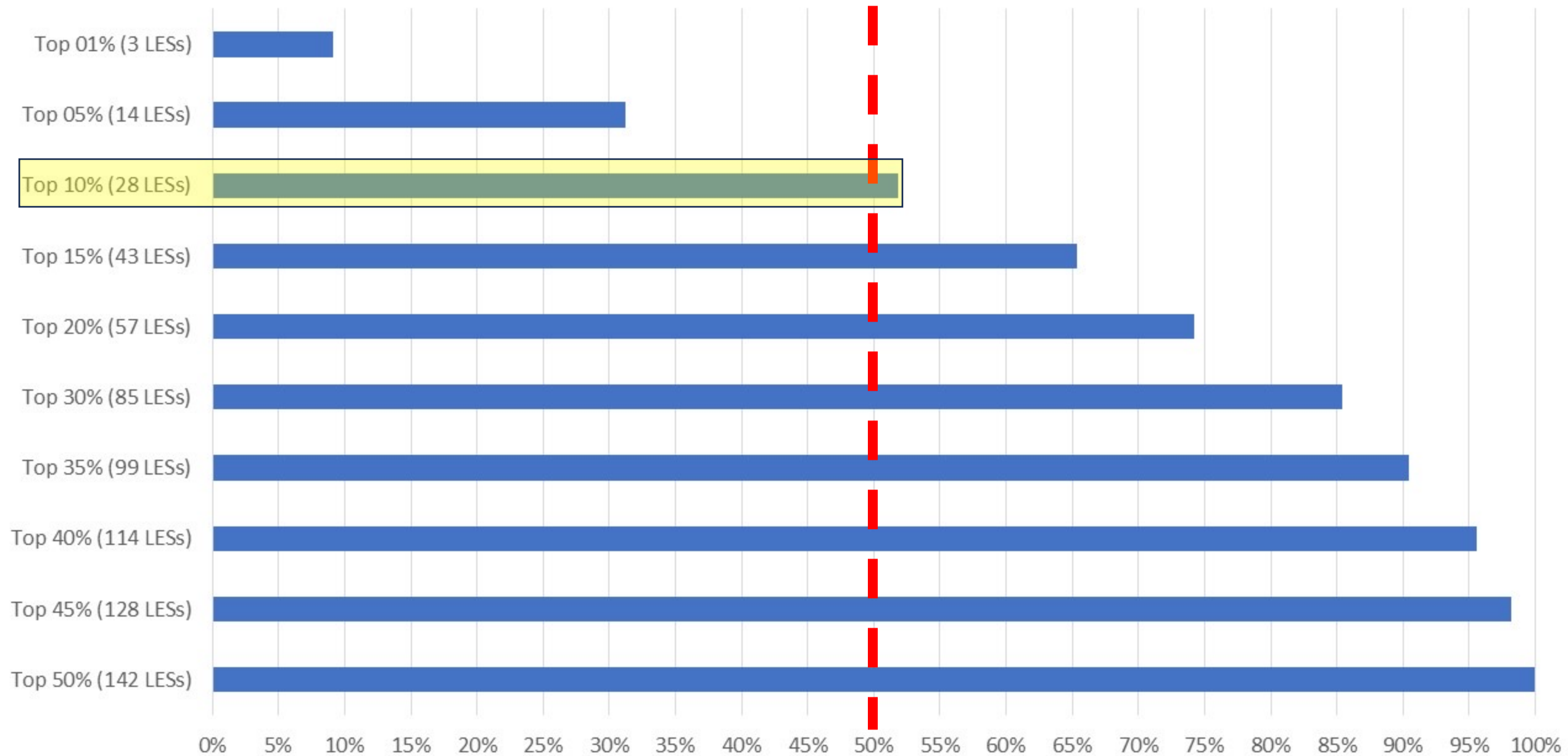
COMPARISON OF YOUTH EDUCATION RELATED ADULT CONFIRMATIONS TO OTHER ADULT CONFIRMATIONS



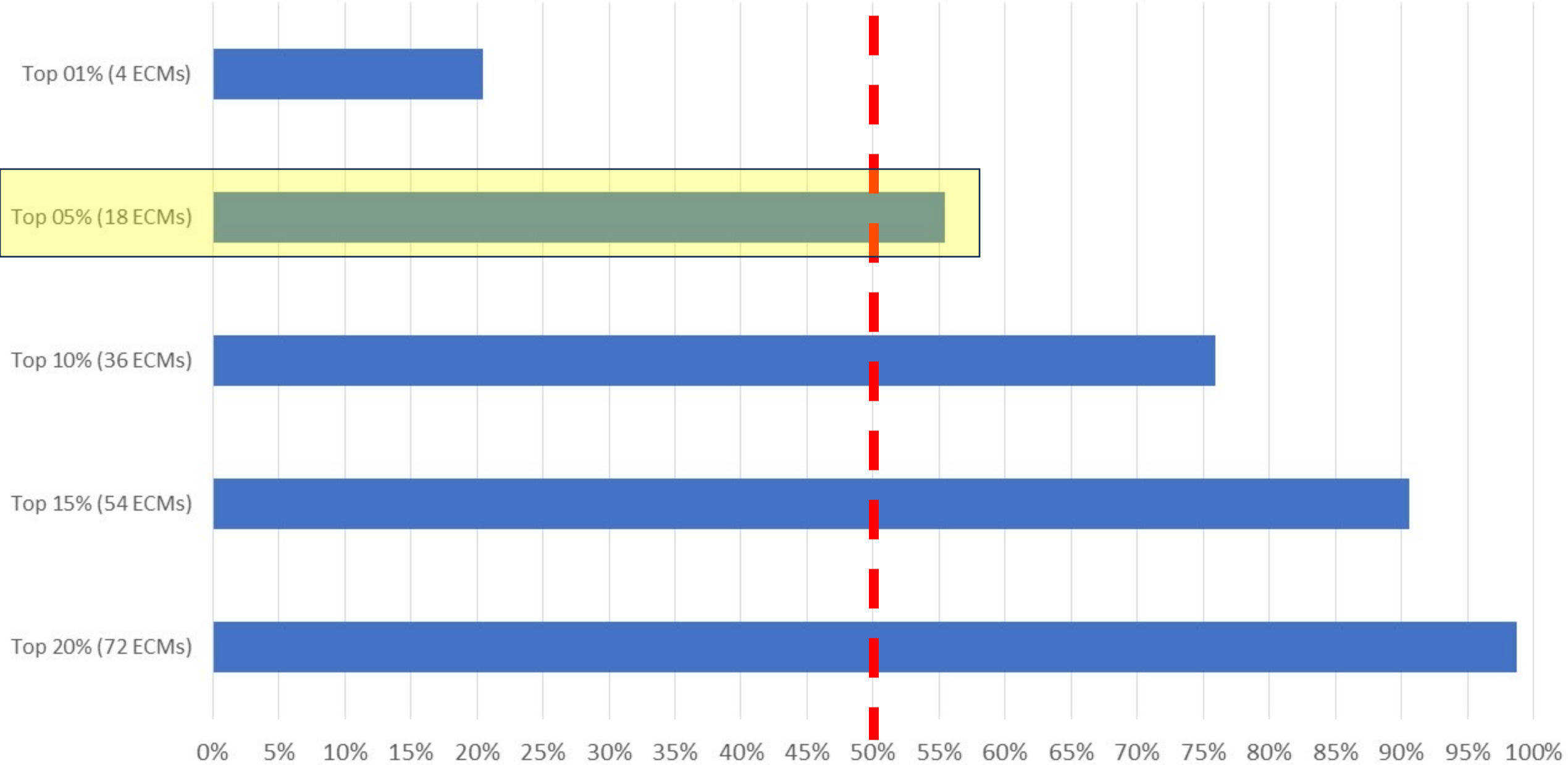
PERCENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD MINISTRIES IN VARIOUS AVERAGE ANNUAL ADULT CONFIRMATION CATEGORIES (2018-2022)



WHERE DID THE 570 ADULT CONFIRMATIONS IN WELS' 284 LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS COME FROM? (2022)



WHERE DID THE 224 ADULT CONFIRMATIONS IN WELS' 362 EARLY CHILDHOOD MINISTRIES COME FROM? (2022)



CONCLUSION

There is potential with this strategy

- ❑ IF harvest strategy tactics can be gleaned from locations where God seems to be blessing the effort, and
- ❑ IF those tactics could be more broadly implemented, and
- ❑ IF God would bless those tactics elsewhere.

A STRATEGY OF PERSONAL WITNESSING



Corporate Outreach vs. Personal Witnessing

CORPORATE OUTREACH:

efforts by a corporate entity (i.e., the congregation, LES, ECM, etc.) to connect with people in the community

PERSONAL WITNESSING:

efforts by a Christian to engage with the unbelievers and unchurched individuals that God brings into their sphere of influence

SIX TYPES OF UNCHURCHED AMERICANS



THE SHOPPER



THE DISENGAGED



THE TURNED OFF



THE HAPPY HUMANIST



THE ASSAILANT



THE UNEXPOSED

THE UNCHURCHED	1980	2000	2020
THE SHOPPER	33%		
THE DISENGAGED	38%		
THE TURNED OFF	13%		
THE HAPPY HUMANIST	9%		
THE ASSAILANT	6%		
THE UNEXPOSED	1%		



414 Mandan Dr

The 40% Exercise: *Imagine if . . .*

40% of WELS' 93,000 communicants who gathered for weekly worship regularly practice personal witnessing.

That is 37,200 believers regularly sharing the gospel with those God brings into their sphere of influence.

Those 37,200 believers all invite someone to attend their congregation's worship service (Christmas Eve, Easter, etc.), and 40% accept.

That is about 15,000 visitors who will hear the gospel in an assembly of believers.

Through a zealous worship-guest follow-up program and Bible Information Class, eventually 40% of those worship visitors join a WELS church.

That is 6,000 adult confirmations. Adding in children who come along with adult confirmations, it is 8,000 spiritual gains.

The Communicant to Adult Confirmation Ratio Exercise: *Imagine if . . .*

This year WELS had one adult confirmation for every 80 communicant members.

WELS would have 3,300 adult confirmations.

This year WELS had one adult confirmation for every 40 communicant members.

WELS would have 6,600 adult confirmations.

This year WELS had one adult confirmation for every 25 communicant members.

WELS would have 10,600 adult confirmations.

This year WELS had one adult confirmation for every 10 communicant members.

WELS would have 26,500 adult confirmations.

What this strategy of personal witnessing would take . . .

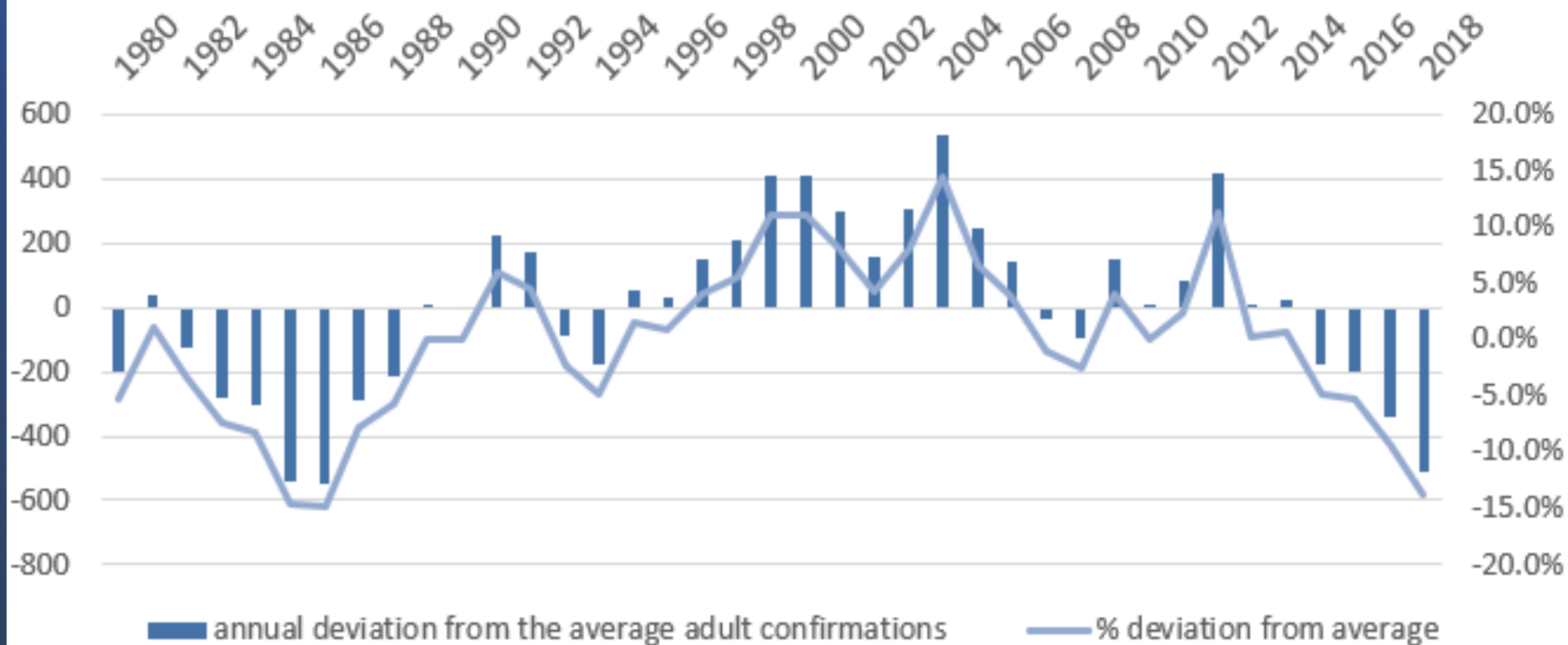
Called workers and lay leaders who modeled personal witnessing and talk often about it.

BECAUSE you cannot expect the average lay member to do something leadership does not themselves do.

Lay members who understand that they have been called by God to share their faith, not simply support called workers to do it on their behalf.

BECAUSE the lay members have countless people in their sphere of influence that are NOT in the called worker's sphere of influence.

ANNUAL DEVIATION OF ADULT CONFIRMATIONS COMPARED TO THE AVERAGE (1980-2019)



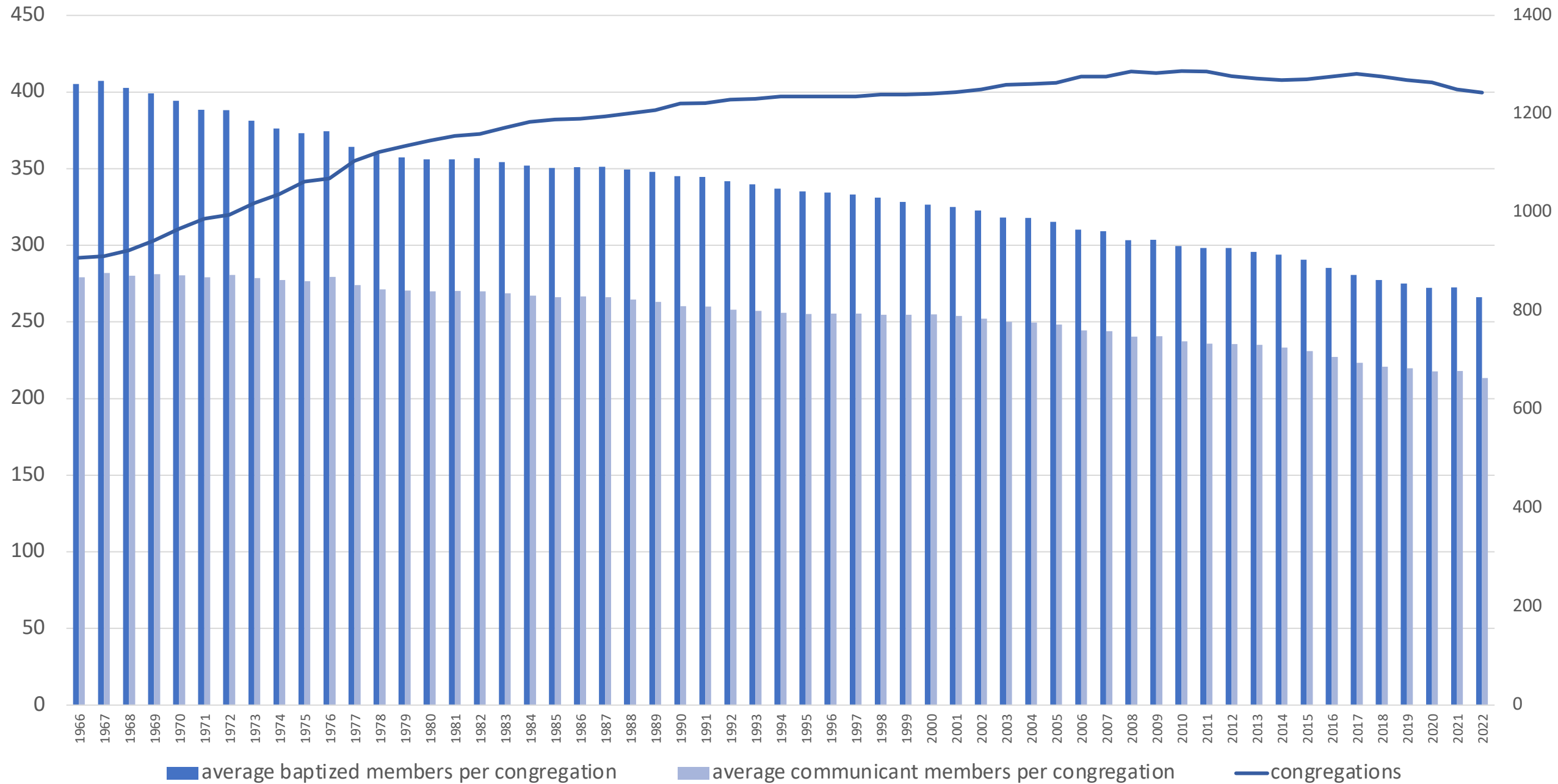
CONCLUSION

- ❑ A strategy of personal witnessing has the greatest potential, by a huge margin, to be impactful.
- ❑ It requires something of a culture shift, from thinking evangelism is primarily a corporate effort to thinking of evangelism as a personal privilege.
- ❑ Corporate outreach efforts still have their place. But that cannot lead us to neglect personal witnessing (which has a higher emotional cost and is “scarier” for many).



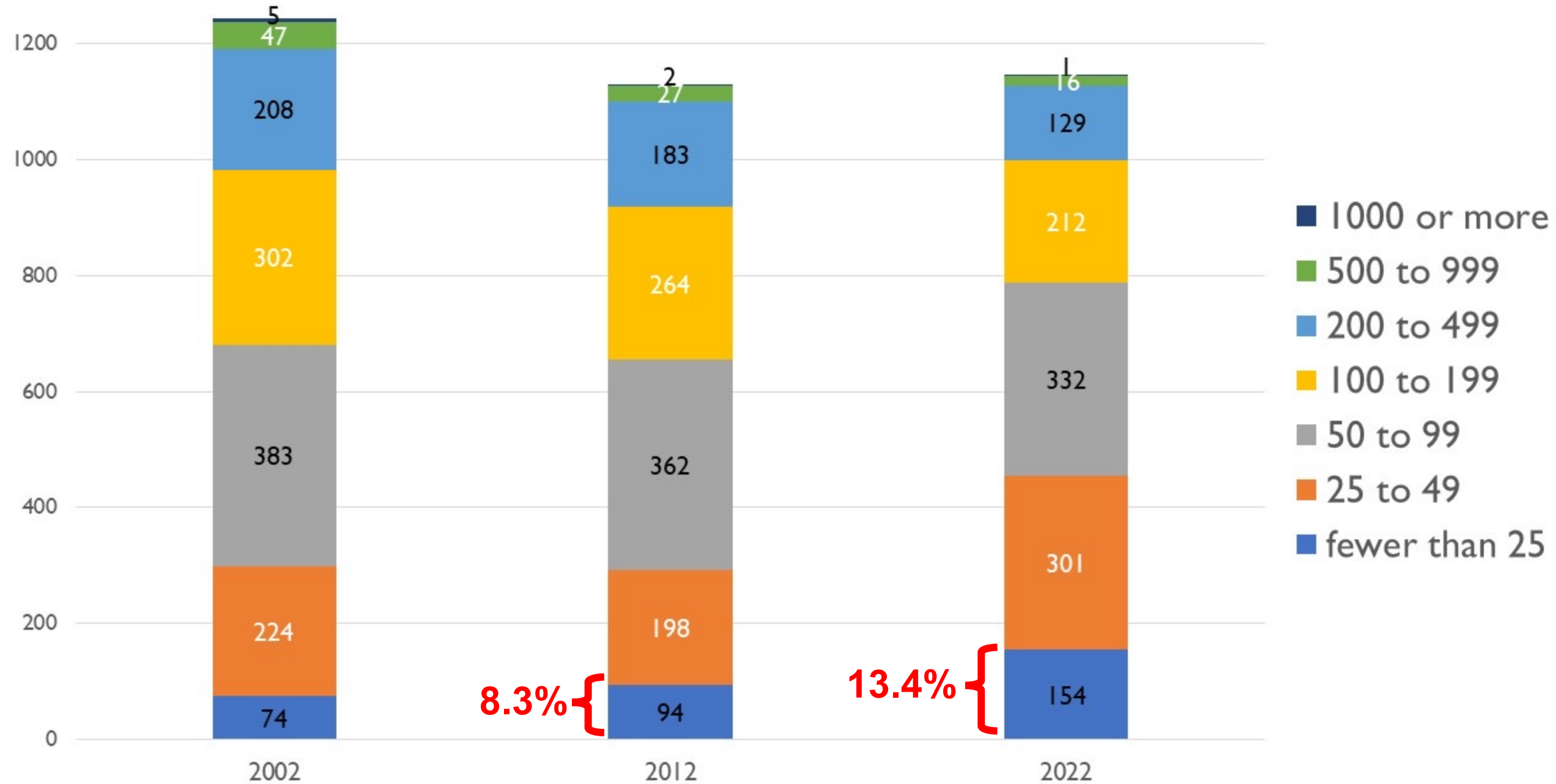
A CONSOLIDATION STRATEGY

AVERAGE MEMBERSHIP IN WELS CONGREGATIONS

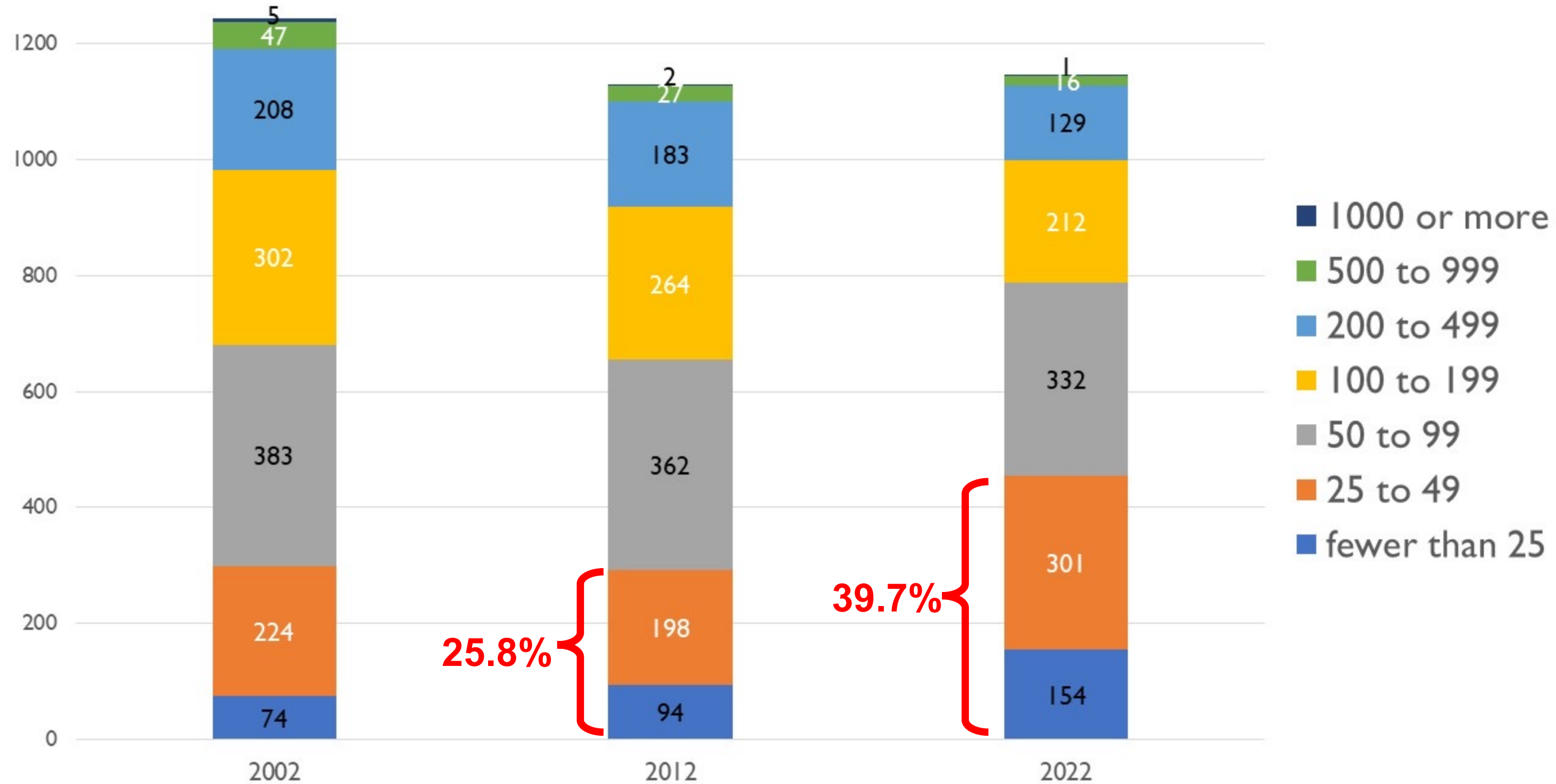


Year	1990	2022
Total WELS Members	421,396	330,879
Average Weekly Worshipers	193,747	116,265
Total Pastors	1,361	1,359
Total Congregations	1,221	1,243
Weekly Worshipers/Parish Pastor	163:1	92:1

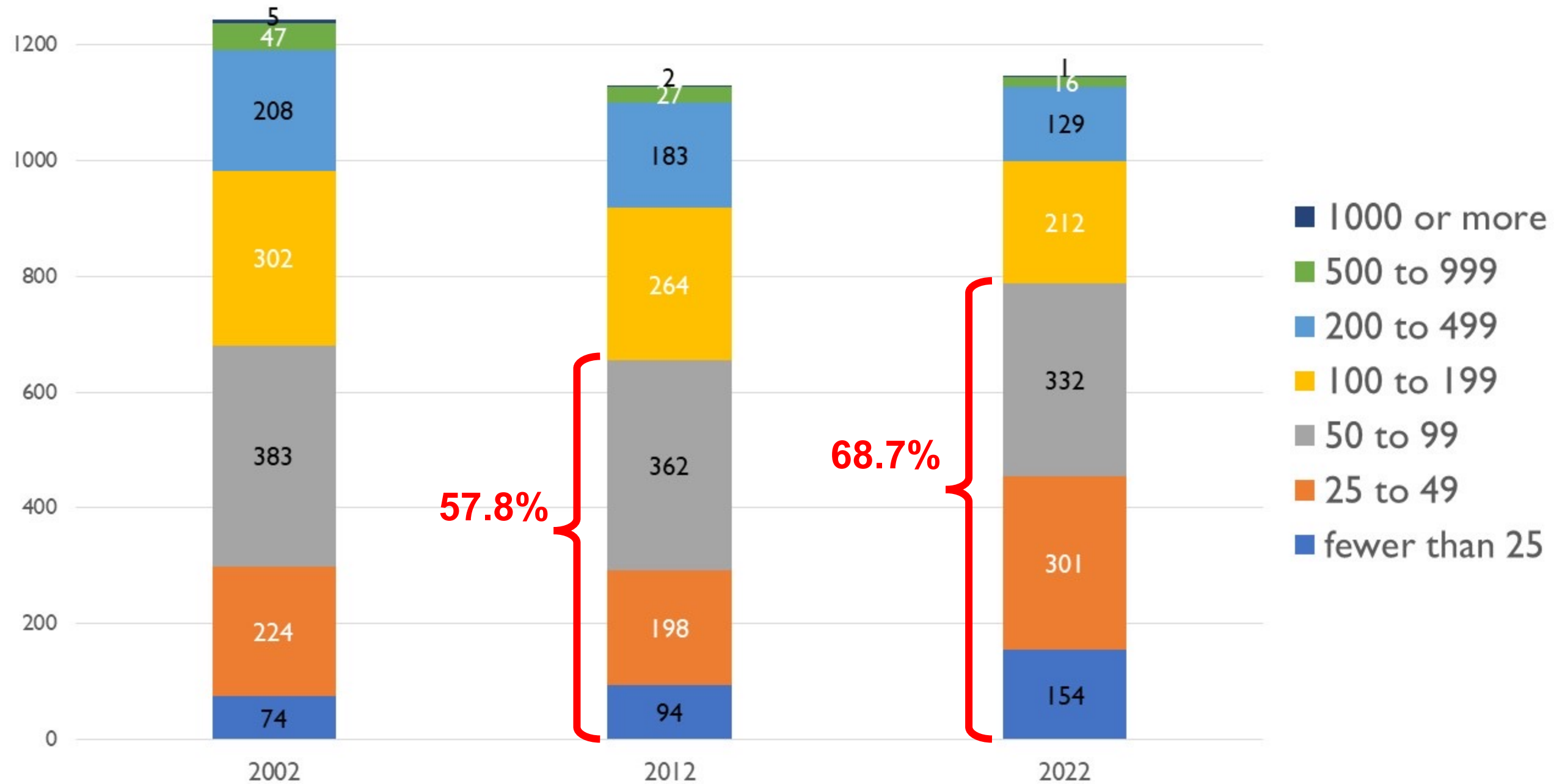
NUMBER OF WELS CONGREGATIONS IN WORSHIP ATTENDANCE CATEGORIES



NUMBER OF WELS CONGREGATIONS IN WORSHIP ATTENDANCE CATEGORIES



NUMBER OF WELS CONGREGATIONS IN WORSHIP ATTENDANCE CATEGORIES



CRITICAL MASS: How does it affect ministry when . . .



at a good service the sanctuary is 20% full.



there are four grades to a room in the elementary school.



two-thirds of the Sunday school are the pastor's kids.



your teen group's average attendance is two.

THE POSSIBILITY AND PRACTICALITY OF CONGREGATIONAL CONSOLIDATION

<50
in worship

460
congregations
(40%)

50%
are within 10
minutes of
another

230
congregations

2:1 =
115 fewer
congregations

3:1 =
153 fewer
congregations

What is better?

MORE
CONGREGATIONS

or

MORE/STRONGER
MINISTRY EFFORTS

THE MEANS & THE END

THE END

Christ. Christ's glory. Christ's mission.

THE MEANS

congregations & their ministry efforts

*Therefore, the right question is not, "How many congregations does WELS have?" The right question is, "**How can we best conduct ministry to impact the most people?**"*



LIVING HOPE

LUTHERAN CHURCH



● **Good Shepherd**

● **Jordan**

● **Woodlawn**

Aurora West Allis
Medical Center

2-mile diameter

CONCLUSION

- ❑ A consolidation strategy has the potential to help churches achieve a greater “critical mass” and thus enable them to do more ministry.
- ❑ It has the added benefit of reducing the total number of locations where a parish pastor is needed, helping address the vacancy problem.

100 MISSIONS IN 10 YEARS

WELS HOME MISSIONS 2023-2033

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us . . .”
Ephesians 3:20

A NEW START STRATEGY

The Decline and Renewal of the American Church

By Tim Keller



The Great Opportunity

The American Church in 2050

PINETOPS
FOUNDATION



Apples to Apples



Average number of annual adult confirmations in congregations with a total membership ≤ 250 , excluding all congregations that had zero adult confirmations

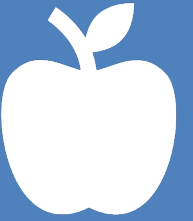
ESTABLISHED
CONGREGATIONS

3

HOME MISSION
CONGREGATIONS

7

Apples to Apples



Total adult confirmations in congregations with a total membership =<250 (1,197 total in 2022)

ESTABLISHED
CONGREGATIONS

753 (63%)

HOME MISSION
CONGREGATIONS

444 (37%)

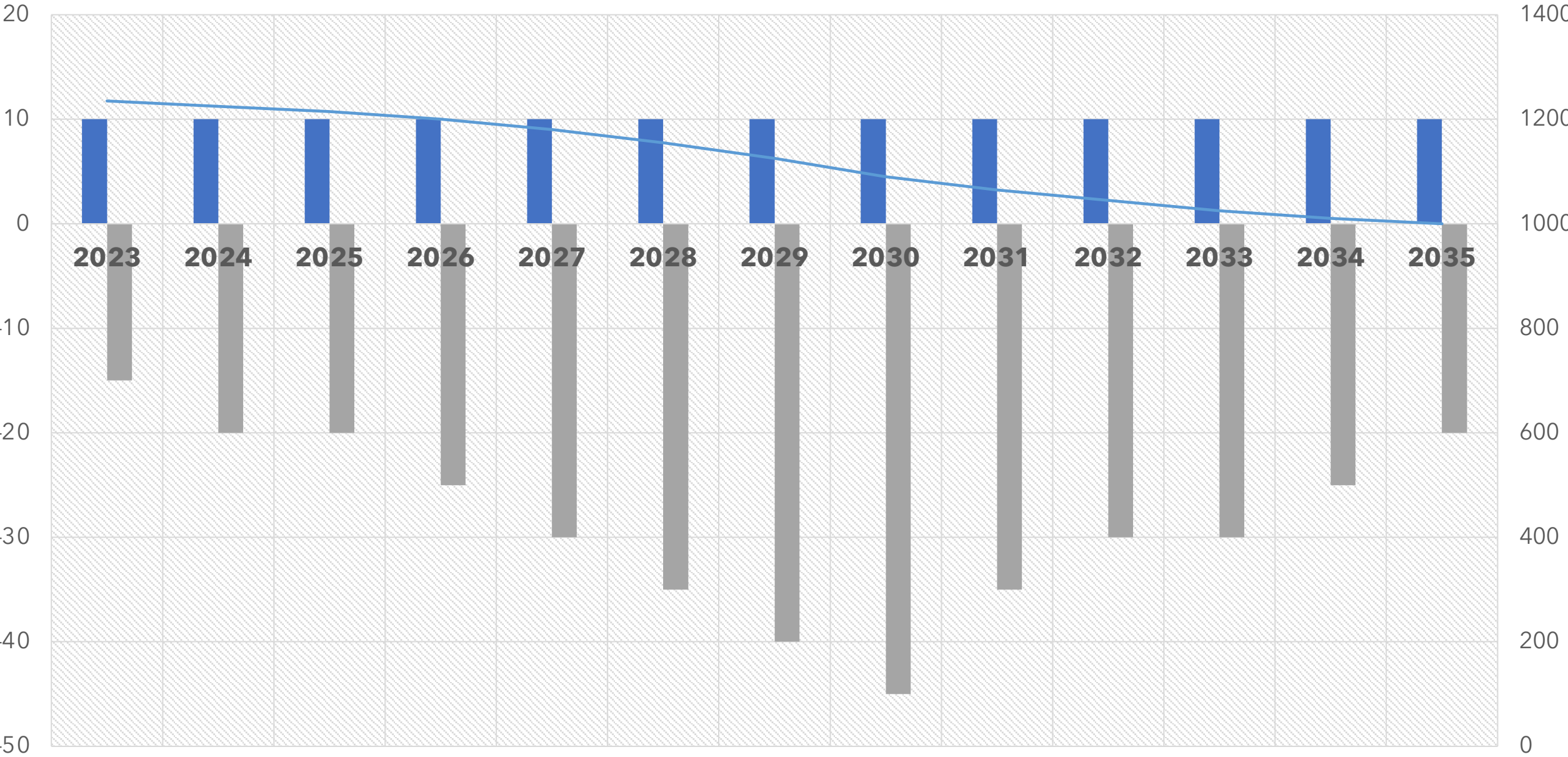
Two Sides of the Same Coin



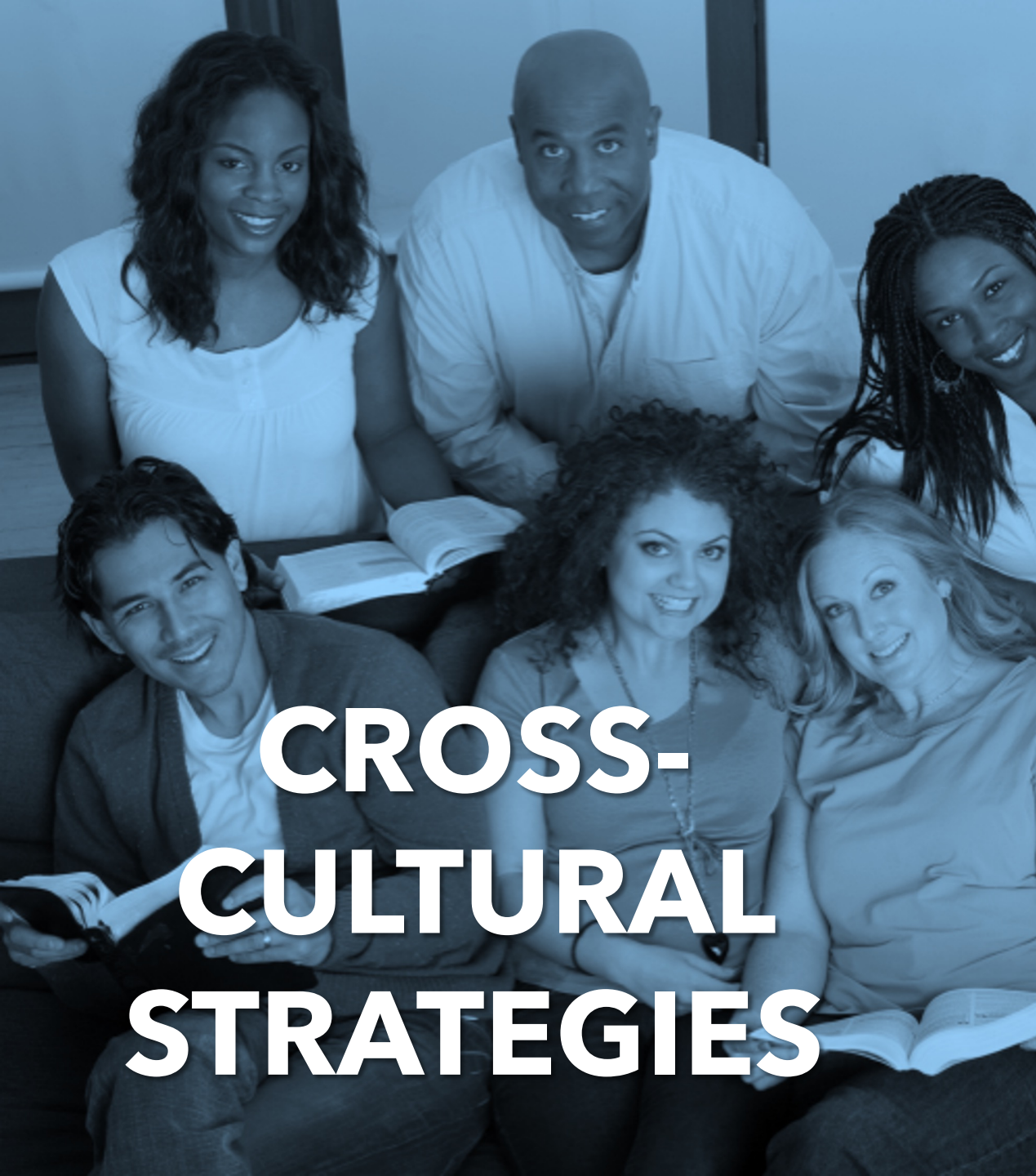
REASONS TO COMMIT TO *100 IN 10*

1. Opening new congregations fulfills Jesus' directive to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
2. Home mission congregations tend to model a culture that is laser focused on evangelism, providing abundant examples of the strategy of personal witnessing in action.
3. Opening new congregations in places of the country where WELS does not have any congregations nearby can help with WELS member retention.

CONGREGATIONAL OPENINGS & CONSOLIDATIONS: WHAT IF?



■ Churches Opened ■ Church Reductions (Consolidations and Closures) — Total Churches

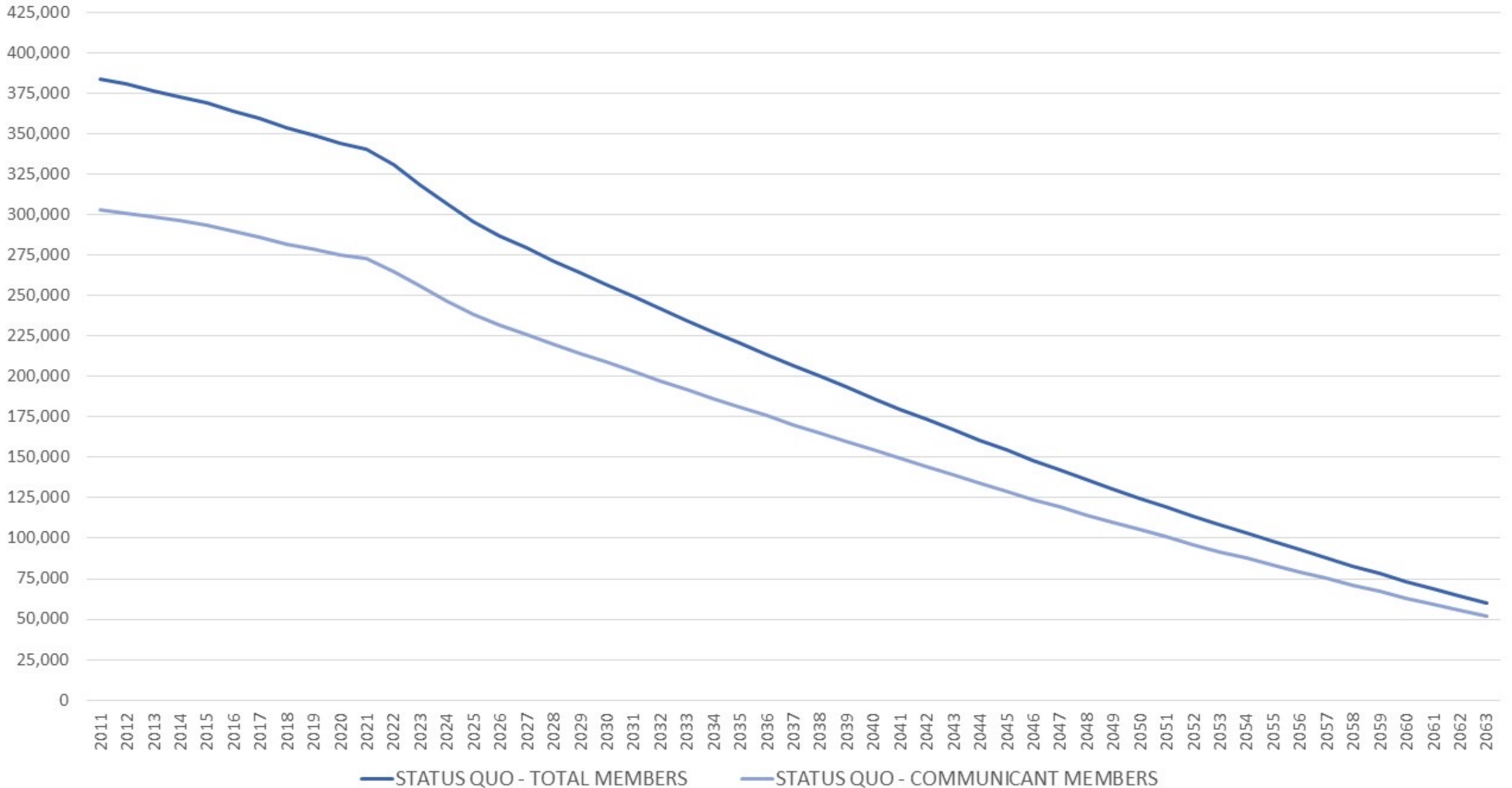


CROSS- CULTURAL STRATEGIES



MEMBER RETENTION STRATEGIES

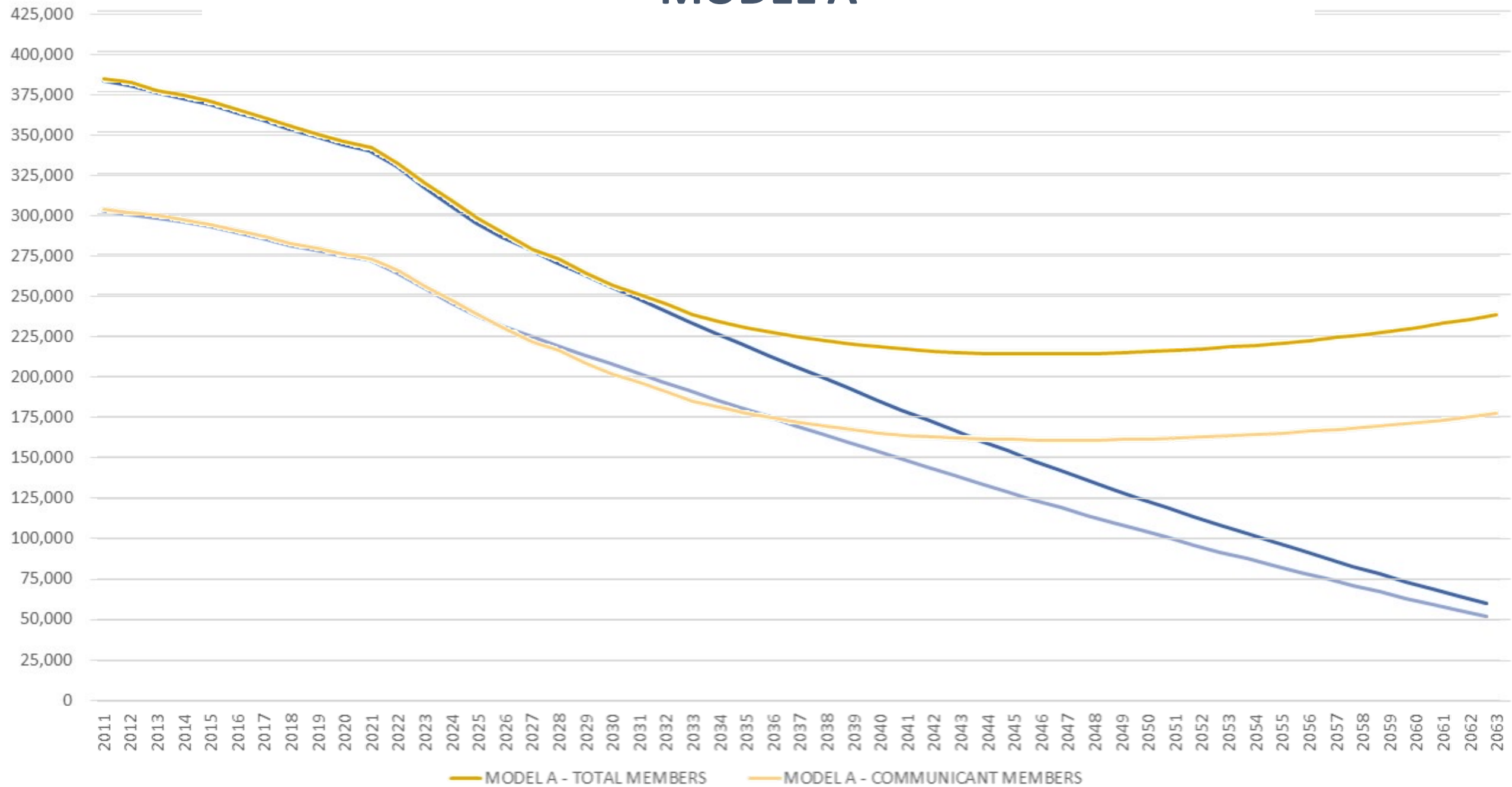
STATUS QUO MODEL



MODEL A ASSUMPTIONS

- ❑ Adult confirmation rate in top 5% of youth education outreach efforts is achieved in 20% of youth education efforts by 2035.
- ❑ Through personal evangelism efforts, the ratio of communicants to adult confirmations improves, peaking and holding at 40 to 1 in 2040.
- ❑ The Board for Home Missions opens 8 new congregations annually.
- ❑ Annual back-door losses are reduced to 2.3% of membership by 2035.
- ❑ WELS' fertility rate holds steady.

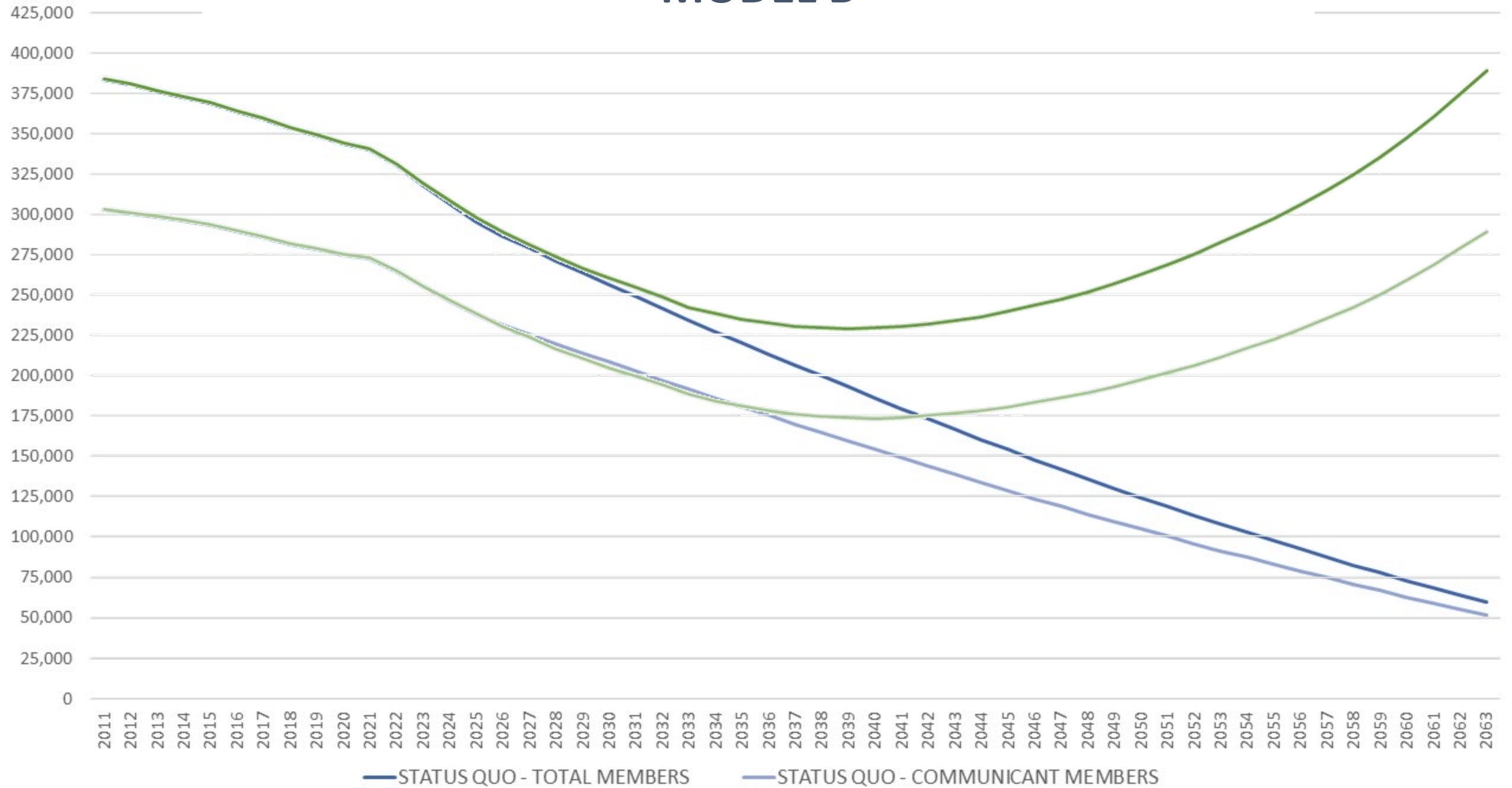
MODEL A



MODEL B ASSUMPTIONS

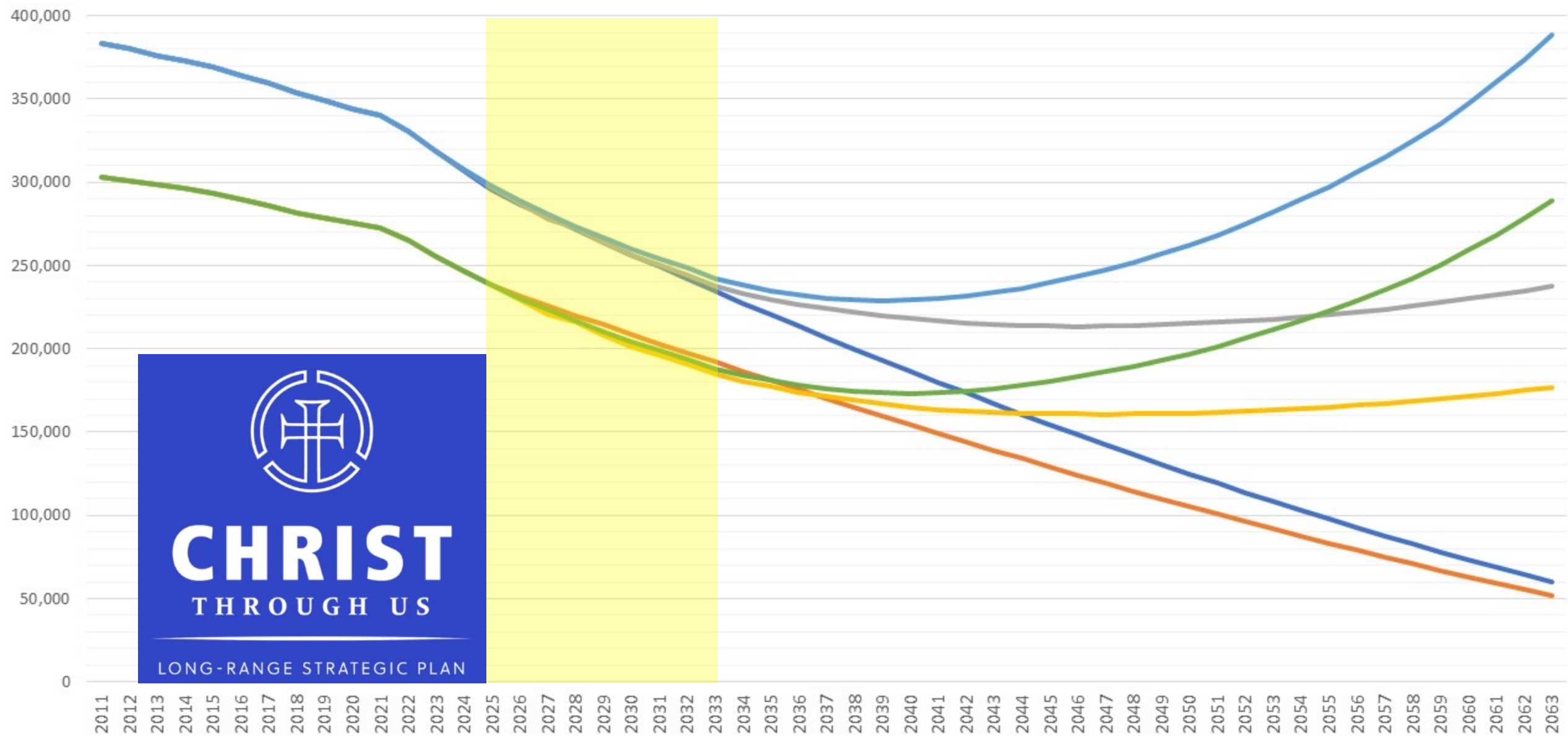
- ❑ Adult confirmation rate in top 5% of youth education outreach efforts is achieved in 40% of youth education efforts by 2035.
- ❑ Through personal evangelism efforts, the ratio of communicants to adult confirmations improves, reaching 45:1 by 2035 and peaking and holding at 21 to 1 in 2045.
- ❑ The Board for Home Missions opens 10 new congregations annually.
- ❑ Annual back-door losses are reduced to 2.5% of membership by 2035 and to 2.0% by 2045.
- ❑ WELS' fertility rate increasing by 0.2.

MODEL B



WELS' TOTAL MEMBERSHIP FORECASTS

- STATUS QUO - TOTAL MEMBERS
- STATUS QUO - COMMUNICANT MEMBERS
- MODEL A - TOTAL MEMBERS
- MODEL A - COMMUNICANT MEMBERS
- MODEL B - TOTAL MEMBERS
- MODEL B - COMMUNICANT MEMBERS



2 Corinthians 5:19,20

He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore **Christ's** ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal **through us.**

CHRIST THROUGH US

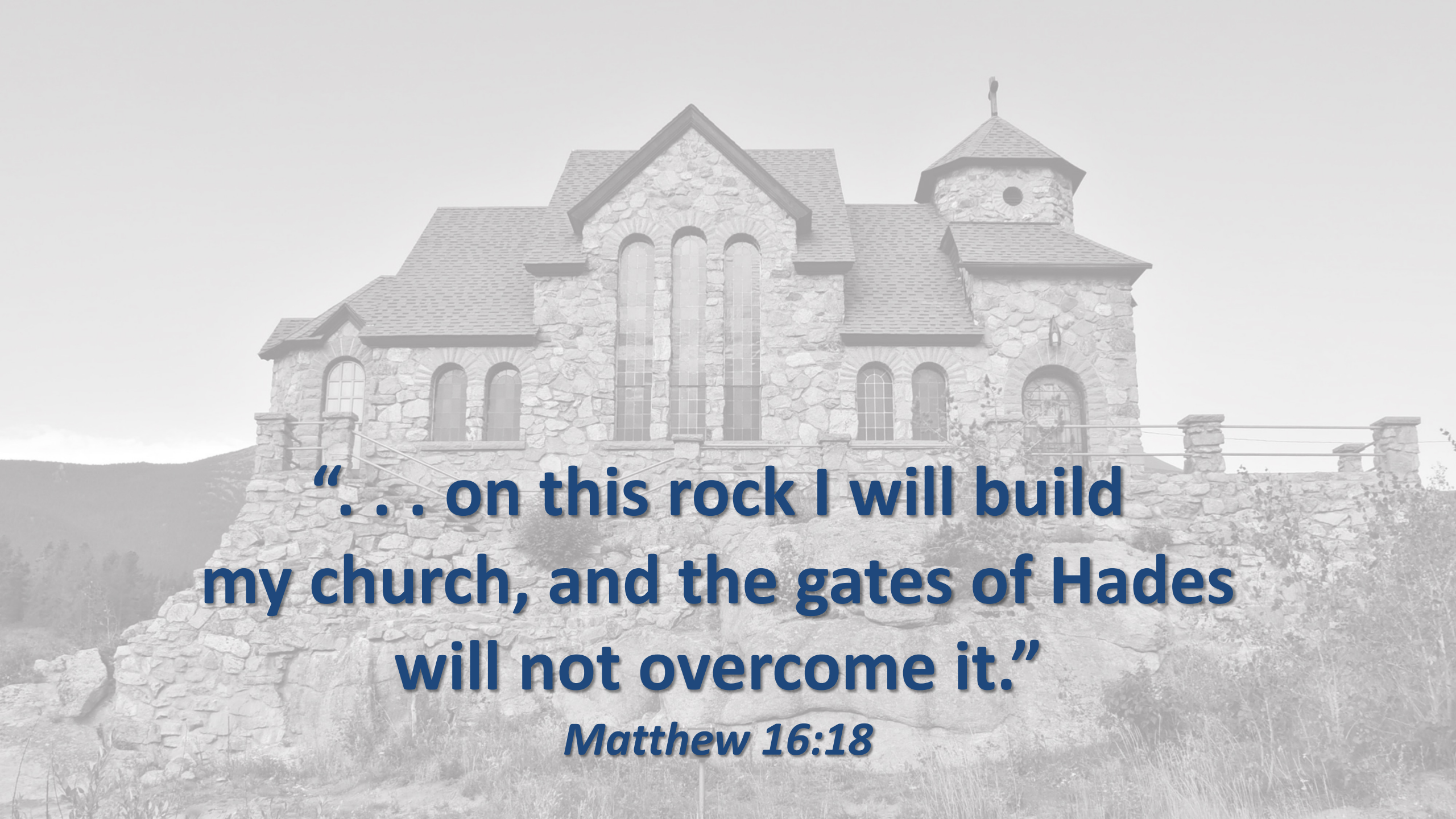


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What can we do now?

- ❑ Pray that through the gospel the Spirit would create in us the courage to fully embrace a strategy of personal witnessing.
- ❑ Pray that we can identify easily replicated tactics in the harvest strategies that God seems to be blessing, and that he blesses those tactics elsewhere.
- ❑ Pray that, in locations where consolidation might make sense, church leaders and members would prayerfully consider that idea.
- ❑ Pray that God blesses increased shepherding efforts with a lowered number of back-door losses.

A stone church with a gabled roof and a small tower, built on a large rock formation. The church features several arched windows and a central entrance. The background shows a hazy landscape with hills and trees.

**“... on this rock I will build
my church, and the gates of Hades
will not overcome it.”**

Matthew 16:18