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Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota: VIII Religious Organizations

W. F. Kumlien

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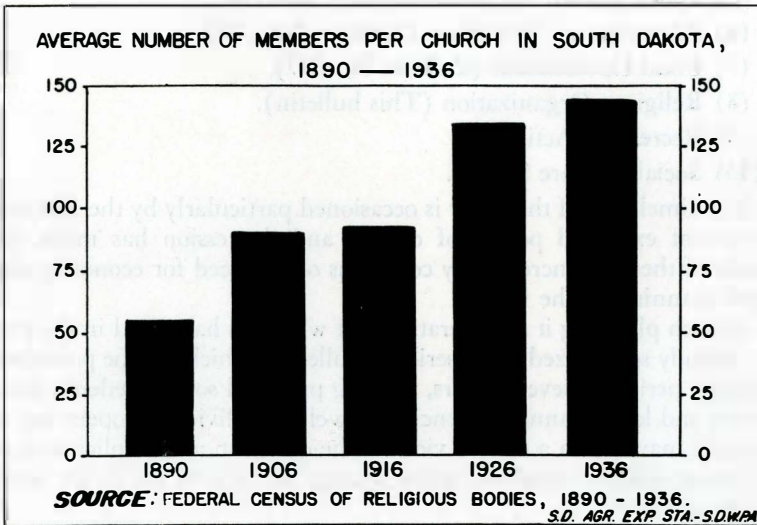
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Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota

VIII. Religious Organization

W. F. Kumlien



The average number of members per church in South Dakota has increased consistently since 1890. There was an increase even between 1926 and 1936 despite a decrease in the number of churches and in the number of church members. This is an encouraging trend and indicates a greater degree of socialization on the part of the people of the state. This is similar to the trend toward fewer but larger units in other social institutions.

Department of Rural Sociology
AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
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Brookings, S. D.

Explanatory Note

This is the fifth publication in a projected series of 10 carrying the general title of "Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota." Appropriate subtitles for each field covered will appear as follows:

- (1) Population Tendencies (Bulletin No. 327).
- (2) Rural Life Adjustments.
- (3) Community Organization.
- (4) Family Relationships.
- (5) Public Health Facilities (Bulletin No. 334).
- (6) Education in Transition (Bulletin No. 338).
- (7) Local Government (Bulletin No. 347).
- (8) Religious Organization (This bulletin).
- (9) Recreation Activities.
- (10) Social Welfare Service.

The timeliness of the study is occasioned particularly by the fact that the recent extended period of drouth and depression has made the people of the state increasingly conscious of the need for economic and social planning in the future.

In such planning it is imperative that what has happened in the past be carefully scrutinized. This series of bulletins, which will be published during a period of several years, is being prepared so that federal, state, county and local planning agencies, as well as individuals, operating in the state may obtain a clearer view of the direction and implications of the more definite trends of social change in each of the fields listed above.

Whenever possible, data were obtained for the years 1890-1936, although in some cases data were not available before 1906 or 1916.

This bulletin attempts to treat only the social institutional phases of the church.

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Digest

1. The number of church and Sunday school members increased throughout the period from 1890 to 1926, but there was considerable decline between 1926 and 1936. (Page 6)
2. Although there were 45 different denominations in the state in 1936, 94 percent of the church members in the state belonged to churches of ten denominations. (Page 7)
3. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of men to women members. (Page 8)
4. The relationship between denominational preference and nationality background is very distinct. There is a close correlation between the leading denominations of the state, and the number of persons coming from the countries in which these churches originated. (Pages 9-12)
5. Despite the loss of church members and of churches in the state between 1926 and 1936 the average number of members per church increased. (Page 12)
6. The number of different denominations in the state has decreased, and there is some indication that denominational overlapping has been somewhat decreased. (Page 13)
7. The amount of the average church budget was greatly decreased between 1926 and 1936. (Page 16)
8. As a general rule churches have not taken a very active part in community affairs, but there is a tendency toward a more realistic program. (Page 16)
9. Many of the ministers in the state are stressing doctrinal subjects less, but giving more attention to present day ethical problems and social relationships. (Page 19)
10. All data seem to indicate that the ministers of the state are on the average better trained now than they were formerly. Despite the rapid aging of the population there has been little change in the average age of ministers. (Page 20 and 21)

BASIC TRENDS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN SOUTH DAKOTA

VIII. Religious Organization

W. F. Kumlien¹

I. Introduction

The Problem. The people of South Dakota have a great many problems of adjustment to make in order to cope successfully with their physical and social environments. Social institutions are also faced with many problems which require detailed study in order that they may be better understood and proper steps taken to remedy them. Certain recent trends in the churches of the state have intensified these problems. Some of these are:

1. A considerable decline in the number of churches between 1926 and 1936. This decline has been entirely in the rural churches, and most of it in the open country.
2. Church membership and attendance have also declined, due partly to economic conditions and partly to competing social activities such as Sunday amusements, etc.
3. For a number of years, there has been considerable over-churching and denominational over-lapping in most sections of the state. This has resulted in weaker churches than might have been the case if each church could have served a sufficient area to provide adequate support.
4. In general, churches have not taken an active part in community life, except those events which pertain to their immediate church activities. Much of this is due to a lack of community consciousness even on the part of the community itself.
5. During the last 20 years there has been a great shrinkage in the amount of money available for rural church expenses and this, of course, has resulted in a curtailment of the services of the church.

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to portray as simply and clearly as possible the basic trends in the religious organization of South Dakota.

Scope and method. This study attempts to cover the main phases of religious organization emphasizing particularly changes in the number of churches, of church members and also changes in the services of the church to the community. Data have been secured from the Federal Census of Religious Bodies for the years 1890, 1906, 1916, 1926 and 1936, Denominational Year Books where available and in a few instances from the federal and state census of population.

¹1. **Acknowledgements.** This study was made possible by the generous cooperation of the State and Federal Work Projects Administration (formerly Works Progress Administration), the Division of State and Local Planning, BAE, USDA, and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The official name of the project has been "Basic Trends of Social Change in South Dakota." The original project was designated as WPA Project No. 665-75-3-143. The WPA financed part of the study by furnishing clerical helpers. The experiment station provided project supervision and bore the cost of publishing the manuscript. The author gratefully acknowledges the faithful assistance rendered by all those working on the study. Particular mention is made of the valuable contribution given by Vera Petheram Woolbert, analyst.

II. Participation in Church Affairs

The numbers and kinds of people who take part in church activities greatly influence the number and kinds of churches in the state and also their organization. In this section we will attempt to show what changes have taken place in church participation.

1. Both church and Sunday school members have declined in numbers and in proportion to the total population. The number of church and Sunday school members increased from 1890 to 1926 but declined between 1926 and 1936. (Table 1.)

Table 1. Increase and Decrease in Number of Churches, Church Membership, and Sunday School Membership, Compared to Population Increase and Decrease

Year	Population*	Percent Increase Over Previous Decade	Total Number of Church Orgs.	Percent Increase Over Previous Decade	Total Number of Members	Percent Increase Over Previous Decade	Sunday School Members	Percent Increase Over Previous Decade
1936	675,082	-2.6	1,923	-13.3	278,476	-5.5	99,892	-19.0
1926	681,260	16.7	2,217	1.7	294,622	48.0	123,270	24.7
1916	583,747	28.2	2,179	21.2	199,017	22.9	98,825	38.1
1906	455,185	30.6	1,798	13.2	161,961	89.5	71,554	—
1890	348,600	—	1,589	—	85,490	—	—	—

* Population figures are for 1935, 1925, 1915, 1905 and 1890.

Source: Population—Federal Census, 1890 and State Census, 1905-1935

Churches, Members and Sunday Schools—Federal Census of Religious Bodies, 1890-1936.

Church and Sunday school membership increased much more rapidly than did the population or the number of churches throughout the period from 1890 to 1926. Between 1926 and 1936, the number of church members declined less than did the churches themselves, but the number of Sunday school members decreased more rapidly than the number of churches. All showed a greater decline than did the total population.

Before 1926 the population of South Dakota grew rapidly. It was one of the most prosperous periods in the history of the state, and property value, income and standards of living were all rising. At the same time relatively large amounts of Home Mission money were sent into South Dakota from various denominations to bolster up weak churches.² As a result there was a tendency for the churches to overexpand.

The greater decline in church members than in population is reflected in the decreasing ratio of members to population as shown in Fig. 1.

There are several reasons for this decline. A smaller number of children has probably caused a decrease in Sunday school membership.

The depression and drouth, with the consequent lack of money have also cut church and Sunday school membership. Farm tenancy, which is generally not conducive to church attendance, has increased. As farm tenants frequently move from one community to another every few years, there is a tendency for them to lose interest in the church.

2. Kumlien, W. F., "The Social Problem of the Church in South Dakota," S. D. Agric. Exp. Sta. Bul. 294, May, 1935, p. 24.

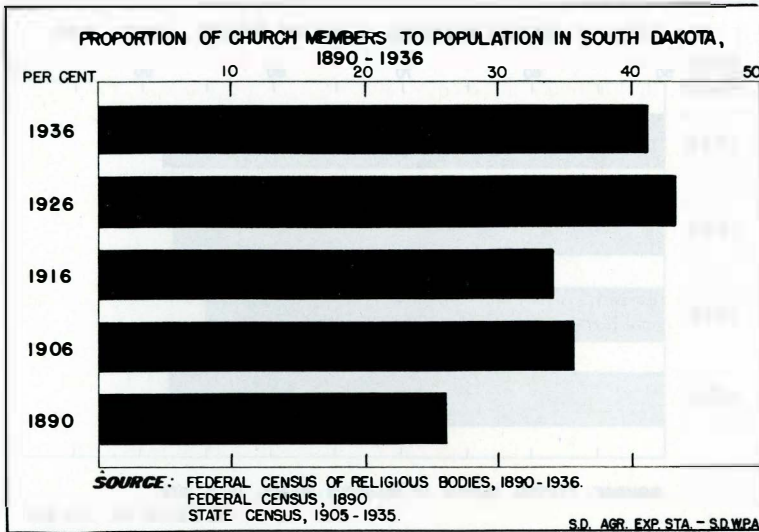


Fig. 1. Proportion of Church Members to the Total Population in South Dakota, 1890-1936

Paralleling this has been the gradual breakdown of the neighborhood which has long served as a strong influence for building up church membership and attendance. This breakdown is especially evident in the open-country churches, where the neighborhood consciousness has been strong until recent years.

In addition, the widespread use of the radio and the competition of commercial amusements on Sunday have reduced church attendance.

Table 3 shows the number of churches and the number of members by denominations in South Dakota in 1926 and 1936. Although there were churches of 45 different denominations in South Dakota in 1936, 84.5 percent of the total membership was found in the 5 largest churches and 94.1 percent of the membership was found in the 10 largest churches. Similarly the 5 lead-in denominations had 74.1 percent of all church units under their jurisdiction and the first 10 denominations had 85.4 percent of all church units in the state.

A few denominations merged between 1926 and 1936. Some denominations which had church organizations in 1926 no longer listed them in 1936, and certain other denominations not represented in 1926 had established churches by 1936.

2. The ratio of male to female church members has increased slightly. This increase is only slight as shown in Fig. 2, and the women members still far outnumber the men, as has been true throughout the history of the state.

Two changes may account for this trend. First, the emphasis of the church program has been changed considerably, especially among the older denominations. Sermons are being designed to make more of an intellectual appeal

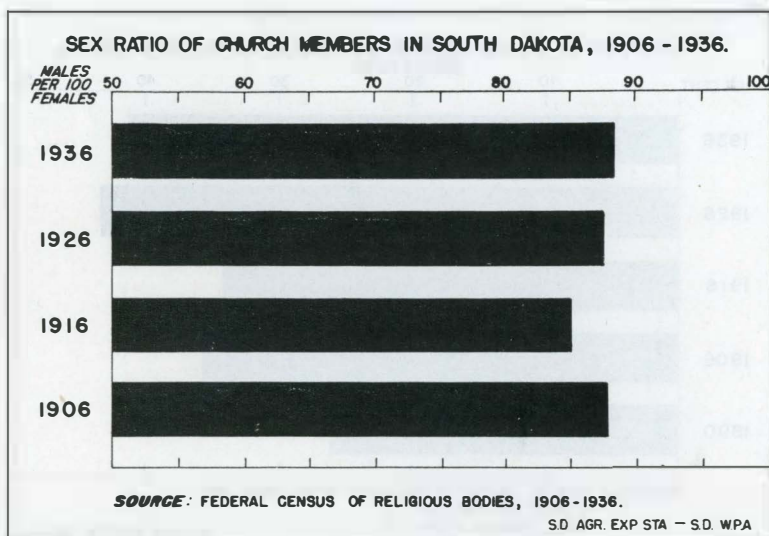


Fig. 2. Number of Males Per 100 Females Among Church Members in South Dakota, 1906-1936.

rather than the strongly emotional appeal of earlier years. This change has made the church more attractive to men.

Second, there has also been an increase in the proportion of church members who belong to the Lutheran churches. These churches have a much higher proportion of males to females in their memberships than do the other leading denominations. (Table 2.) The three Reformed churches have high ratios of males to females, and have increased their membership since 1926. The Catholic Church also has a large number of men in its membership.

This trend may result in a total church constituency having a stronger, more progressive program and with a much greater influence upon the economic, social and political policies of the community.

Table 2. Ratio of Males to Females in the Membership of the Ten Leading Denominations in South Dakota, 1936*

Denomination	Males Per 100 Females
Lutheran	96.3
Roman Catholic	98.8
Methodist Episcopal	69.2
Congregational and Christian	71.3
Presbyterian	69.8
Baptists	71.6
Protestant Episcopal	78.5
Evangelical and Reformed Church	97.3
Christian Reformed Church	109.1
Reformed Church in America	94.4

* Federal Census of Religious Bodies, 1936.

Table 3. The Number of Church Organizations, and Members of the Various Denominations Located in South Dakota, 1926 and 1936*

Religious Denominations in South Dakota	Number of Church Organizations		Number of Members	
	1936	1926	1936	1926
1. Lutheran Churches	602	634	96,865	90,190
(a) Norwegian Lutheran Church of America	243	266	45,084	41,778
(b) Ev. Luth. Synod of Mo. and other states	133	137	19,771	16,813
¹ (c) American Lutheran Church	82	80	13,043	13,385
(d) Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wis. and other states	71	67	8,931	7,318
(e) Ev. Luth. Augustana Synod of North America	30	32	5,467	5,141
(f) Lutheran Free Church	18	18	1,327	1,623
(g) United Danish Ev. Luth. Church in America	6	7	669	832
(h) Danish Ev. Luth. Church in America	4	7	620	780
(i) Finnish Apostolic Luth. Church in America	5	6	814	988
(j) Finnish Ev. Luth. Church of America or Synod Suomi	4	5	335	578
(k) United Lutheran Church in America	3	4	543	499
(l) Ev. Luth. Church in America (Eielsen Synod)	1	3	205	377
² (m) Negro Mission of the Synodical Conference	1	—	23	—
(n) Finnish Ev. Lutheran National Church	1	1	33	26
(o) Independent Lutheran Congregations	—	1	—	52
2. Roman Catholic Church	370	409	89,001	97,077
3. Methodist Episcopal	182	239	23,928	29,514
³ 4. Congregational Church (and Christian)	169	202	14,595	15,392
5. Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.	102	156	10,933	12,800
6. Baptists—Northern Baptist Conv.	65	93	8,521	9,284
7. Protestant Episcopal	70	142	8,269	17,601
⁴ 8. Evangelical and Reformed Church	44	43	5,003	2,790
9. Christian Reformed Church	12	11	3,011	2,694
10. Reformed Church in America	27	25	2,616	1,787
11. Evangelical Church	35	47	2,001	2,350
12. Gen. Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America	7	6	1,525	1,263
⁵ 13. Assemblies of God, General Council	31	—	1,236	—
14. Disciples of Christ	13	20	1,179	2,278
15. Seventh-Day Adventist Denominations	28	30	1,178	1,439
16. All other denominations	166	160	8,615	8,163
Total	1,923	2,217	278,476	294,622

1. Formed by a merger of the Lutheran Synod of Buffalo, the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio and other states, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa and other states.

2. Had one or more church organizations in the state in 1936, but none in 1926.

3. Formed by a merger of the Congregational and Christian Churches.

4. Formed by a merger of the Reformed Church in the U. S. and the Evangelical Synod of North America.

* Source: U. S. Census of Religious Bodies, 1926 and 1936. Ranked according to the number of members in 1936.

3. A distinct relationship between denominational preference and nationality background has developed. The leading European countries represented in the foreign-born and the native-born-of-foreign-parentage listed in the population of South Dakota in 1930, are shown in Fig. 3.

Table 4 shows the countries of origin of the leading denominations in the state. Immigrants into South Dakota, whether from foreign countries or other states, brought with them their customs including religious affiliations.

Very soon after coming here these people established churches of their preference. The settlers who came from south Germany, south Ireland,

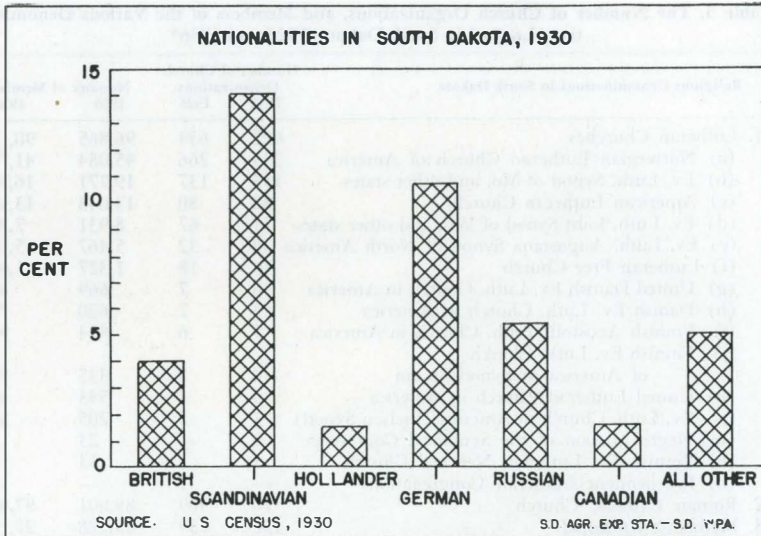


Fig. 3. Proportion of the Population of Certain Nationalities in South Dakota, 1936.

Table 4. Country of Origin of the Ten Largest Denominations in South Dakota, 1936*

Denominations	Countries of Origin	Parent Churches
1. Lutherans	North Germany, Scandinavia and Russia	Lutheran State Churches in Europe
2. Roman Catholic	South Germany, South Ireland, French Canada, France, Poland, Bohemia and Austria	Roman Catholic
3. Methodist Episcopal	England	Church of England
4. Congregational and Christian Churches	Congregational: England Christian: United States	Church of England (Separatists) Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist
5. Presbyterian	England	Church of England (Puritans)
6. Baptists	England	Church of England (Separatists)
7. Protestant Episcopal	England	Church of England
8. Evangelical and Reformed Church	Evangelical: United States Reformed: United States	Independent German Speaking bodies of Lutheran or Reformed backgrounds. German Reformed
9. Christian Reformed Church	United States	Dutch Reformed Church
10. Reformed Church in America	Holland	Reformed Church in Holland

* Federal Census of Religious Bodies, 1936.

France or Poland established Catholic churches. The settlers from north Germany and the Scandinavian countries soon formed flourishing Lutheran churches. The Hollanders founded congregations of the Christian Reformed Church or of the Reformed Church of America. The British people and many of the migrants from other states established churches of British origin such as Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal and Congregational.

The Russians who settled in South Dakota were originally of German stock. Their ancestors left Germany in the eighteenth century and settled in Russia to obtain religious freedom. This group founded largely Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite churches.

In recent years certain denominations of United States origin have established churches in South Dakota. These churches are largely evangelistic. The only one to have more than 1,000 members in South Dakota by 1936 was the Assemblies of God, General Council. This particular group had no churches in the state in 1926.

A comparison of Fig. 3 and Table 4 shows the close relationship between the denominations and nationality groups as related to the total church membership. For instance, the people of Scandinavian and German backgrounds make up a large proportion of the population; the proportion of the total church members who belong to the Lutheran churches is correspondingly high.

Data secured in a study of the church preference of families in Brookings County, South Dakota³, also indicate that there is a very distinct relationship between nationalities and church preference (Fig. 4). Persons of foreign descent, who still have a nationality consciousness, cling to the dominant church or churches of their native land.

Practically 80 percent of the Scandinavian people and 35 percent of the Germans gave their church preference as Lutheran. Over 60 percent of the Hollanders gave their preference as the Christian Reformed Church or the Reformed Church in America, both of which are of Holland origin.

After several generations have passed the original nationalities are mixed through intermarriage and these people are likely to give their nationality as "American" or "mixed." These groups show a much greater diversity of denominational preference.

The close relationship between nationality and church preference has several effects on the church program as a whole. The churches which are established by a definite nationality group are more likely to keep the interest of their people than are churches whose membership is made up of people with more varied nationality backgrounds. However, these distinct nationality groups with their own churches exhibit little inter-denominational cooperation. They also have tendencies toward over-churching and denominational overlapping in some areas of the state.

Churches whose membership is made up of a definite nationality group, tend to keep alive in this country the customs and habits of their native country. No other organization or institution does this to so large an extent.

3. A study made by the Rural Sociology Department of South Dakota State College as a part of a community and county social survey.

There are, however, a number of factors which are making the churches of foreign origin more indigenous and better adapted to local American needs, rather than adhering to the culture patterns of the old world.

Some evidences of this change are (1) most church services are now in the English language; (2) ministers are now largely native-born and educated in the traditions and needs of this country; (3) the percentage of the foreign born population in the state is declining; and (4) there is a tendency for nationality groups to break down and become affiliated with other churches, particularly through intermarriage.

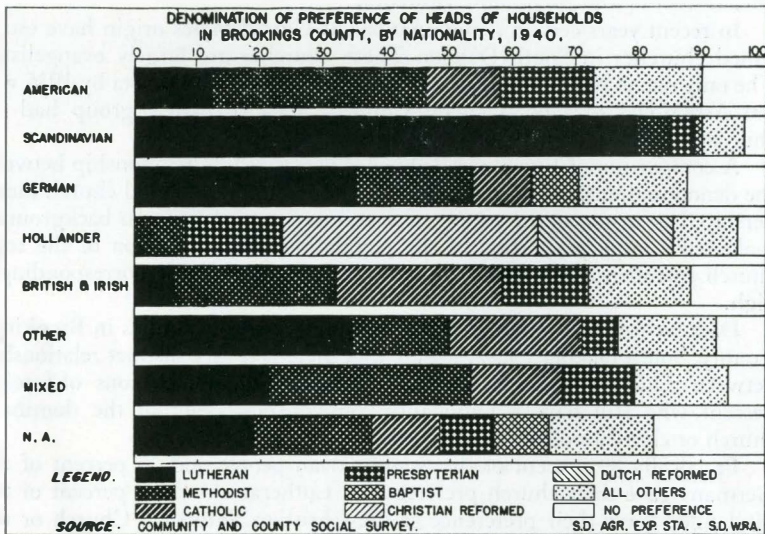


Fig. 4. Denomination of Preference of Heads of Households in Brookings County, South Dakota, by Nationality, 1940.

III. Church Organization

The most striking change in the church situation during the period between 1926 and 1936 has been the decline in the number of churches.

4. The number of church units in the state has decreased since 1926; the average number of members per church has increased. During the early years of settlement the number of churches increased quite rapidly, although never as rapidly as did the population. Since 1906 the increase in the number of churches has been even less rapid, and between 1926 and 1936 they declined more rapidly than the population did. (See table 1, page 6.)

There was a total loss of 294 churches during this 10 years, but this loss was apparently entirely in towns of less than 2,500 population and in the open country. The urban places of the state gained 24 churches, while the rural areas lost 318. The decline in the rural areas no doubt occurred in both the towns and open country.

A decreasing number of churches was an expected development of the last 10 years. The drouth and depression of the early 1930's greatly reduced the income of families in South Dakota, and it became more difficult to secure sufficient money with which to support as large a number of churches as were present in South Dakota in 1926. In addition roads and automobiles have been so greatly improved that it is possible for people to travel much farther in order to go to church. At the same time that the income of farm families declined there were fewer farm families. This further reduced the amount of money available to support the churches.

However, there is some indication that the number of churches may have increased slightly since 1936, or at least that there has been no noticeable decline. This may be true even of open-country churches, but their services probably have been decidedly curtailed because of their limited financial resources. The leading denominations in the state indicate little or no abandonment of churches, either open-country or town.⁴

Despite the fact that both the number of churches and the number of members decreased between 1926 and 1936, the average number of members per church increased. (See cover page.) This indicates that even though a number of churches were forced to disband, many of their members joined churches of other denominations or else went greater distances to reach a church of their preference. Many members from the open country are attending church in the villages and towns.⁵

Nearly all the 10 leading denominations in South Dakota show an increase in the average number of members per church between 1926 and 1936 (Table 5.) The only exception was the Protestant Episcopal Church.

The greater average membership per church should somewhat lessen the financial burden upon individual church members and should also help to develop a better church program and more cooperation between churches. With fewer churches there is less competition between churches for members. Consequently each church can serve a wider area.

5. Church comity⁶ has slowly decreased denominational overlapping and overchurching at certain crucial points in the state. There has been considerable denominational overlapping in the state, especially where there has been one or more distinct nationality groups in the same community. However, the number of different denominations has been decreasing since 1906. There were 57 different denominations in the state in 1906 as compared to 45 in 1936. (Fig. 5.) This represents considerable change in the particular denominations in the state, since some denominations die out and new ones appear.

Table 6 indicates that the various denominations are beginning to recognize that the very small towns cannot support a large number of churches. Approximately 60 percent of the towns with less than 250 population had only one church, and only eight towns had as many as four. However, some of the larger towns had a large number of churches in relation to their popu-

4. Returns from a questionnaire sent to leading denominations in the state.

5. In the survey of churches in Brookings County previously referred to, it was found that 74.4 percent of the farm people in the county attended church in town. Only 12.6 percent attended open-country churches, and 13 percent did not attend church.

6. Church comity in this connection refers to the process of centralizing or combining churches of one or more denominations so that a church of adequate size is maintained in the community.

Table 5. Average Membership Per Church of the 10 Leading Denominations in South Dakota, 1926 and 1936*

Denomination	Av. Membership Per Church, 1936	Av. Membership Per Church, 1926
Lutheran	161	142
Roman Catholic	240	237
Methodist Episcopal	131	124
Congregational and Christian	86	76
Presbyterian in the U. S. A.	107	82
Baptists—Northern Baptist Convention	131	100
Protestant Episcopal	118	124
Evangelical and Reformed Church	114	65
Christian Reformed Church	251	245
Reformed Church in America	97	71

* Source: Federal Census of Religious Bodies, 1926 and 1936.

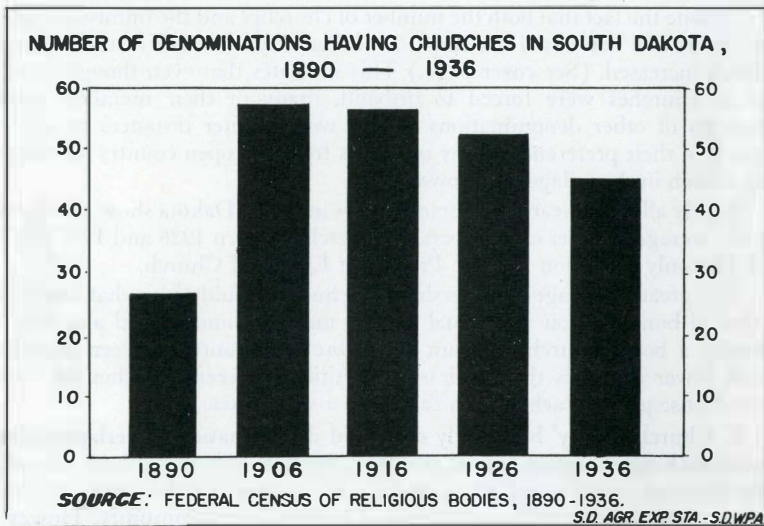


Fig. 5. Total Number of Denominations Which Have Churches in South Dakota, 1890-1936.

lation. Half of the towns of 2,500 population and over had more than ten churches. Only two had as few as seven churches. Some of the smaller towns between 250 and 2,500 population also had an excess number of churches for the number of people served.

This denominational overlapping has resulted in a number of small churches which cannot serve their community as adequately as could larger, stronger churches. If a strong church organization would seem to be most desirable, then it is evident that the various denominations must in some manner endeavor to cooperate so that all churches of the community may be well organized on a self-supporting basis.

Table 6. Number of Denominations in South Dakota by Size of Town, 1938.*

Number of Denominations	Size of Town			
	0-249	250-999	1000-2499	2500 and over
Total	295	166	40	16
One	173	15	—	—
Two	89	32	1	—
Three	25	40	2	—
Four	8	47	7	—
Five	—	22	9	—
Six	—	7	10	—
Seven	—	2	6	2
Eight	—	1	4	1
Nine	—	—	—	3
Ten	—	—	1	2
More than ten	—	—	—	8

* Source: Mailing lists of ministers prepared by the Rural Sociology Department in 1938.

The following quotation shows some means by which this may be accomplished.

“Some progress has been made by certain denominations toward church comity—although the work has just begun. While the problem is perplexing at times, its solution can best be brought about by the churches themselves. So far there are four types of church comity which have proven to be fairly workable.

1. Denominational exchange. In this arrangement two denominations agree to an exchange of churches in two different localities. For example, the members of a weak church in a given locality agree to merge with a strong church in the other denomination. In another locality just the opposite process may be carried out within the same two denominations.

2. Undenominational. In this type of union the uniting churches sever all connections with denominations.

3. Federated. This is where two or more denominations maintain a joint local worship but each of the uniting bodies continues to keep affiliations with its own denominations.

4. Affiliated. When this type of union takes place a loose connection is maintained for certain purposes with some one denomination. Some advantage may be gained by such an arrangement in receiving financial help, help in securing pastors, or for protection from denomination competition.”⁷

There are a number of instances of church comity in the state carried out by one of the above methods. Several instances can be found where one denomination has left a field, giving the preference to some other similar denomination. Out of 40 counties, in which the location of all churches was secured as of 1941, nine instances were found in which churches had federated; one instance in which an open-country church was non-denomination and one example of the larger parish plan. All federations have been among two or more of four denominations, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Baptist.

7. Kumlien, W. F., *op. cit.*, p. 38-39.

6. **The average church budget has been decreased in amount.** The average church budget showed a very sharp decline between 1926 and 1936 (Table 7). Total expenditures declined almost 50 percent. The average expenditures per church almost doubled between 1916 and 1926, but they dropped to almost their 1916 level between 1926 and 1936. Although the average expenditures per church member did not rise so rapidly before 1926, they fell abruptly during the next decade.

Table 7. Expenditures of the Churches in South Dakota, 1916, 1926, 1936*

Year	Total Expenditures	Av. Expenditures Per Church	Av. Expenditures Per Church Member
1936	\$2,244,742.00	\$1,268.93	\$ 8.05
1926	4,378,366.00	2,112.00	14.86
1916	2,360,111.00	1,188.37	11.86

* Source: Federal Census of Religious Bodies, 1916, 1926 and 1936.

The great decline in incomes due to the drouth and depression of the early 1930's was probably the greatest reason for the drop in church expenditures. People had to cut down on expenses and, in many cases, felt that the church could get along without their contribution or with a much smaller one.

The decline in amount of money available for church expenditures has resulted in the closing of a number of churches. It has also resulted in a sharp curtailment of the activities of many of the churches which remained open. This curtailment of church activities had a great effect upon the work and influence of the church in community life.

IV. Services of the Church

There have been changes not only in the number of churches and number of members, but also in the services of the church to the community and in the preaching message brought to the congregation.

7. **Church programs have tended to become more realistic and community-centered.** The program of the church has shown a gradual tendency away from its early emphasis upon the preaching of the gospel and has now come to stress the position of the church in community life.

Formerly the church was concerned mainly with soul-saving; now it is an institution concerned with the varied problems of rural life in the fields of education, government, health, etc. It has gradually developed a program which attempts to serve the needs of the various classes in the population, the young and old, the various occupational groups, and those with varying educational backgrounds.

In pioneer days the church was truly a community center, a neighborhood meeting-place. However, the church was not used except on Sunday and the sole service of the church was preaching. The pioneer farmer desired only preaching from his church, and his needs were met. This has changed as the years have passed, and today the church must include many other phases in addition to preaching if it is to serve its members adequately.

However, in South Dakota the majority of the churches are conservative and closely bound to tradition. It was found in a study made of community activities of churches in South Dakota in 1935⁸ that the large majority of the churches in South Dakota did not attempt to serve the community as a whole, but rather served only its church membership. In general they have interpreted literally their mission to preach the gospel, teach their doctrines, cultivate family life, and guide members in morals and temperance.

In most instances churches paid little attention to community activities outside the traditional functions, other than to influence social legislation, particularly that affecting family life.

Replies to a questionnaire sent to churches of the state in 1935 gave the following answers to the question, "What do you regard as the outstanding contribution your church has made to local community life?" These answers are ranked in order of number of replies.

1. Preaching the gospel.
2. Character training through religious instruction.
3. Exerting a Christian influence on family life.
4. Moral and temperance guidance.
5. Special effort to reach the unchurched.

According to the same study about one-third of the churches of the state were trying in some definite manner to help promote community activities which were outside the jurisdiction of the church.

Certain factors affecting the extent of community activities in the churches of the state, include the following:

1. The majority of the church members of the state belong to churches which are strongly influenced by the foreign culture patterns and ideas of their countries of origin. This influence is declining quite rapidly, and these churches may come to take a more active part in community affairs in the future.

2. Since the churches are supported by their members they feel their greatest responsibility to their own membership.

3. Most of the communities of the state are not "community conscious" as yet and have not attempted to organize their social institutions on a community basis.

This lack of community enterprise on the part of the churches probably has not changed greatly since 1935. Money has not been plentiful, and churches have not been able to expand their activities to a great extent. There has also been an increase in the number and membership of certain evangelistic denominations which hold very rigidly to the belief that the chief function of the church is to preach the gospel.

8. **The ministers have begun preaching less theology and doctrine and are including more discussion of present-day social problems and world events.** Just as there is a tendency for the church to take a more active part in community affairs, there is also a tendency for ministers to preach less on strictly theological subjects and to discuss more of the present-day social problems and world events.

⁸ Kumlien, W. F., *op. cit.*, p. 34.

This tendency varies among ministers and among denominations, however. Certain ministers and denominations believe that their function is to preach the Gospel, and that anything but the Gospel is entirely outside their province. Other churches believe that they should influence certain phases of life, such as the family and care of the poor, but that they have no place in any recreational or social activities of the community.

As a general rule the ministers of the non-evangelistic churches, which had their origin in the United States, are more inclined to discuss social problems in their sermons than are the ministers of either the churches greatly influenced by their foreign origins or the evangelistic churches. The latter two types constitute a large majority of the churches in South Dakota.

V. Church Leadership

The recognized leadership of the churches is that of the ministers. In this section an attempt is made to discover the trends in the training and ages of the ministers in the state.

9. The ministers now have more professional training. The data which are available seem to indicate that the ministers now in the state have received more professional training than those of earlier times. From a study made by C. Luther Fry⁹ of unpublished data collected by the Bureau of the Census for the Religious Census of 1926, it was found that South Dakota had a slightly larger proportion of ministers with both college and seminary training than did the United States as a whole, and at the same time had a somewhat lower proportion who had neither college nor seminary training.

In the study made in 1935 it was found that slightly over 70 percent of the ministers had both college and seminary training, while only approximately 5 percent had neither college nor seminary training. This was based upon a 25 percent return of a questionnaire, but it indicates that there has been some increase in training.

In the present study, a questionnaire was sent to leading men in the largest denominations of the state, asking whether the amount of training their ministers received was increasing. All of the replies stated that training was increasing or that their standards have not lowered. The Congregational and Christian Church was the only one which stated that there was any increase in the number of lay-workers in charge of their churches.

Various studies made in all sections of the United States also indicate that there has been at least a slight increase in the number of trained ministers.

South Dakota's rather favorable showing may be partly due to the fact that approximately half of its pastors belong either to the Catholic or Lutheran denominations. These two denominations insist upon doctrinal training for their ministers.

10. The average age of ordained ministers has changed little during the past decade. Despite the increase in the proportion of older persons in the population there seems to be little indication that there has been any increase

9. Fry, C. Luther, "The U. S. Looks at its Churches,"—New York Institute of Social and Religious Research.

in the age of ordained ministers. Out of nine replies to a questionnaire sent to the larger denominations of the state, only one stated that the age had definitely raised and one that the spread between young and old was too great leaving a lack of middle-aged, but that this situation was being remedied. One other replied that the age of their ministers increased between 1930 and 1935, but that many more young ministers have come into the state since that time. All others stated that the average age of their ministers had not raised. The questionnaires were sent to supervisors of approximately two-thirds of the pastors in the state.

VI. Implications and Conclusions

Below are listed the more significant trends in the church situation in South Dakota between 1926 and 1936. Following each trend are the factors believed to be responsible for it and the probable results.

1. Both church and Sunday school members have declined in numbers and in proportion to the total population.

a. Factors responsible for this decline.

1. Declining birth rate has resulted in smaller families.
2. The increase in farm tenancy, particularly if tenants move often, has tended to decrease community stability. The church is one of the first social institutions to suffer in such a situation¹⁰
3. Some decrease has been due to a growing policy of certain denominations to drop inactive members from the church rolls. This is especially true in those denominations which make budgetary assessments on the basis of membership records.¹¹
4. The wide-spread use of the radio for religious programs probably has reduced church attendance.¹⁰
5. The competition of com-

mercial amusements on Sunday has grown. This competition has developed increasingly with the wider use of the automobile.

6. There has been a gradual decline of the neighborhood, a social unit which traditionally has long served as an influence for building up open-country church membership and attendance.¹⁰

b. Probable results of this trend.

1. Inter-denominational cooperation may be increased.
2. More open-country churches probably will be abandoned and the members either will cease going to church or will become members of village churches.
3. The influence of the church in community life may decline or conceivably the very opposite might be true. The direction of the

10. These are the factors which especially affect the open-country church.

11. See Brunner, E. de S., & J. H. Kolb, *Rural Social Trends*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York and London, 1933, p. 219.

trend will probably depend upon a number of other factors such as an increase

in the appeal of the church program, church policy, etc.

2. The ratio of male to female church members has increased slightly.

a. Factors responsible for this trend.

1. Adjustments have been made in church programs so that they appeal more strongly to men.
2. There has been an increasing proportion of the total church membership who belong to the Lutheran churches and to a few oth-

er denominations which have a relatively higher ratio of males to females.

b. Probable results of this trend.

1. A stronger, more progressive church program may result if more men are attracted to membership.
2. The church may have more influence upon social and political policies.

3. A distinct relationship between denominational preference and nationality background has developed.

a. Factors responsible for this relationship.

1. Immigrants to South Dakota have brought with them the customs and habits of their native country.
2. European immigrants coming to the state have tended to settle in those areas where there were people of the same nationality. Naturally, they have helped to establish more firmly and maintain those churches to which they were accustomed.

phasis on inter-denominational comity and community cooperation.

2. These nationality-conscious churches, however, will probably keep up the interest of their own people better, than do those churches whose membership is made up of a mixed nationality grouping, especially where they have been forced by circumstances to cooperate prematurely.

3. Because of this distinct correlation between nationality and church affiliations there will, no doubt, continue to be more over-churching and denominational overlapping in some areas of the state.

b. Probable results of this trend.

1. As long as there are distinct nationality-conscious groupings thus maintaining their own churches, there is not likely to be much em-

4. The number of church units in the state has decreased since 1926; the average number of members per church has increased.

a. Factors responsible for this trend.

1. The number of churches has been too large to be

adequately supported, especially now when we have a decreasing population.

2. The drouth and depression

of the last 10 years have added to the difficulty of supporting so many churches.

3. As the number of churches decline, competition between churches for members also declined. As a consequence each church serves a wider area with more members.
4. Better means of transportation and lack of topographical barriers have made it possible for people to go much farther to church.

b. Probable results of this trend.

1. The burden of support upon individual church members should be somewhat lessened or else the churches involved should be more adequately supported.
2. A better church program should be developed.
3. Cooperation between churches should be improved.
4. More farm people will probably attend church in town.

5. Church comity has slowly decreased denominational overlapping and over-churching at certain crucial points in the state.

a. Factors responsible for this change.

1. The decrease in the number of churches has made it possible to avoid overlapping church areas.
2. In many instances the lack of funds has made it necessary for churches to combine resources in order to survive.

b. Probable results of this trend.

1. As the effects of this trend are felt there should be a

further reduction in the number of churches in over-churched areas.

2. There may be an increase of better trained, better paid full-time resident ministers for the churches of the state.
3. Church programs can be improved if churches have larger memberships in less divided communities.

6. The average church budget has been decreased in amount.

a. Factors responsible for this decline.

1. The main factor is the drouth and depression of the last 10 years which has made it difficult for many people to help support the church.

b. Probable results of this trend.

1. More churches have been

closed.

2. More churches are having a non-resident pastor.
3. Many of the activities of the church have been closed down. Such curtailment of programs has been detrimental to their best influence in the community.

7. Church programs have tended to become more realistic and community-centered.

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| <p>a. Factors responsible for this trend.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased interest in social problems.¹² 2. The average extent of education has been increased in the state. 3. The belief has been strengthened that the church has a place in community life as a social institution | <p>rather than a special interest group.</p> <p>b. Probable results of this trend.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More members are being attracted. 2. A greater influence in community life is being exerted. 3. It will probably make for greater community consciousness. |
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8. The ministers have begun preaching less theology and doctrine, and have included more discussion of present-day social problems and world events.

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| <p>a. Factors responsible for this trend.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The church is no longer people's only emotional outlet. 2. The church has had to modify its program somewhat to meet competition with other institutions. | <p>b. Probable results of this trend.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A greater appeal will be made to the better educated groups and to young people in the population. 2. The church will become more influential in community life. |
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9. The ministers now have more professional training.

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| <p>a. Factors responsible for this trend.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The average extent of education for adult South Dakotans has raised from a fifth to a tenth grade level during the past 25 years. 2. Several churches have raised the minimum educational qualifications for their ministers. 3. South Dakota has a high proportion of Lutheran and Catholic churches, both of which require college and seminary training. | <p>b. Probable results of this trend.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Better trained ministers will probably strive more for inter-denominational cooperation and church comity. 2. Better trained ministers, no doubt, will take a more active part in community affairs and organizations. 3. It will probably result in a demand for more artistic, better equipped church buildings. |
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¹² These are also factors in the change in the preaching message.

10. The average age of ordained ministers has changed little during the past decade.

- a. Factors responsible for this trend.
 - 1. The rapid turn-over in personnel has had the effect of bringing more young ministers into the state.
 - 2. Many native South Dakotans who become ministers come back to the state after receiving their training.
- b. Probable results of this trend.
 - 1. An increasing proportion of younger ministers may make church policy less conservative in the future.
 - 2. The average extent of training will tend to increase as long as younger ministers continue to come into the state.