

# Memorandum

**To:** John Yarbrough

**From:** Phil Jones

**Date:** 4/22/2004

**Re:** Analysis of Baptisms and Population by Age Group

---

Per your request, I have taken another look at how baptisms by age group are related to changes in population. In particular, I have concentrated on age categories 9–11 and 12–17.

I have looked at changes over the time period 1980 through 2002. The reason for this time frame is I was able to locate (on the Census Bureau's Web site) a database that not only contains estimates for the total population and the White population, but more specifically the non-Hispanic White population, which we sometimes refer to as the Anglo population. Throughout this memo I will use the terms Anglo and non-Hispanic White population interchangeably. Southern Baptists are still primarily an Anglo denomination, even though we are getting more racially and ethnically diverse. At present, roughly 90 percent of our churches and members are Anglo.

As of 2002, there are an estimated 288 million people in the U.S.—197 million are Anglo (non-Hispanic White) and 91 million are non-Anglo. Thus, about a third of the nation's population (31.7%) is non-Anglo and about two-thirds are Anglo.

Southern Baptists do not track the race and ethnicity of individual persons who are baptized. However, in 2002, predominantly Anglo congregations reported 9 out of 10 baptisms (89.5%) in the denomination. Based on this information, we infer that most baptisms reported are Anglo. Thus, it comes as no surprise that later analysis will show that the number of baptisms of children, age 9–11, and youth, age 12–17, are moderately highly correlated with the Anglo population in the corresponding age group.

### Age 9–11

Figure 1 charts the number of baptisms age 9–11 for the time period 1980 to 2002. Overall, there is a downward trend of baptisms in this age category. However, the number of baptisms appears to have plateaued since 1990.

Figure 1—Baptisms, Age 9–11

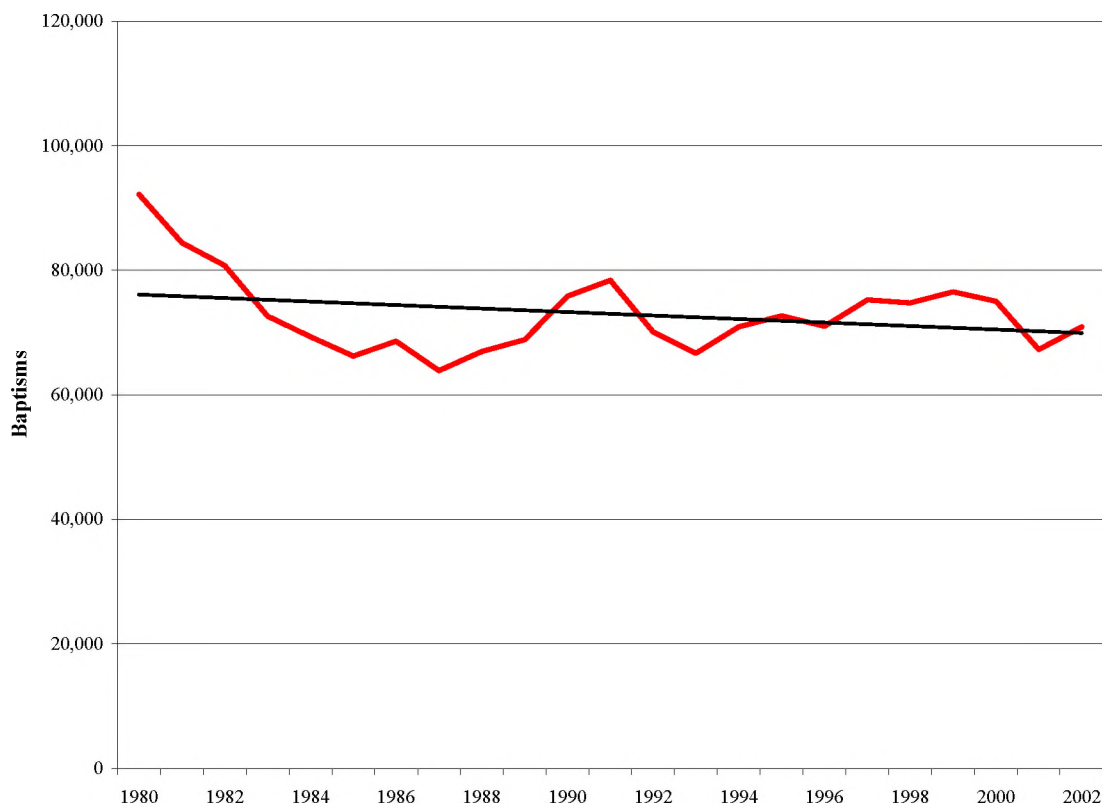
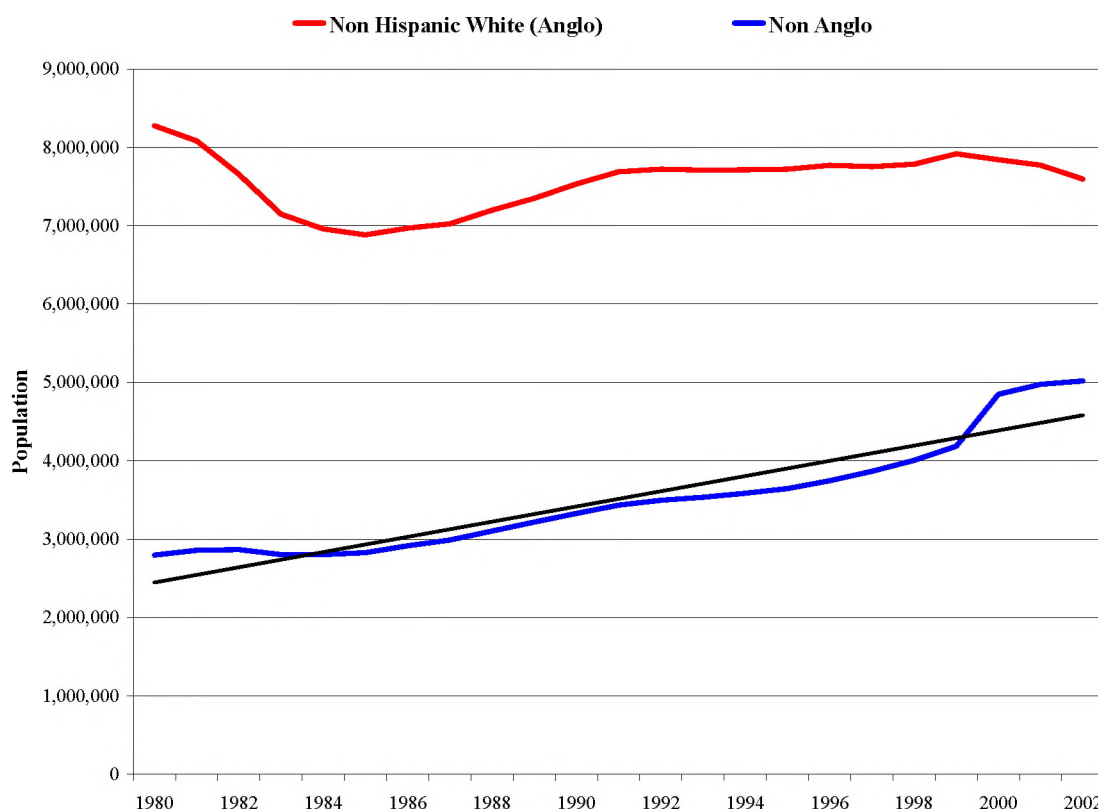


Figure 2 shows comparable trends in the Anglo and non-Anglo populations. Note the similarity of the shape of the line in figure 1 and the shape of the line plotted for the Anglo population in figure 2. As stated above, baptisms and the Anglo population for this age category are moderately highly correlated, i.e., they tend to track together.<sup>1</sup> About half of the year-to-year variation in baptisms of children age 9–11 can be explained by the variation in the number of Anglo children (White Non-Hispanic) in this age group. It appears that demographic forces are a major determinant of the number of baptisms for this age group; however, other factors are also at work.

Figure 2 also shows that the non-Anglo population is growing fairly rapidly. The non-Anglo population age 9–11 is slightly negatively correlated with baptisms in this age category, i.e., the non-Anglo population is growing while baptisms are declining. Baptisms are not benefiting from the growth of this segment of the population. In 2002, the non-Anglo population accounted for 40 percent of the total population in the 9–11 age category. In comparison, 93 percent of the baptisms, age 9–11 were reported by predominantly Anglo congregations.

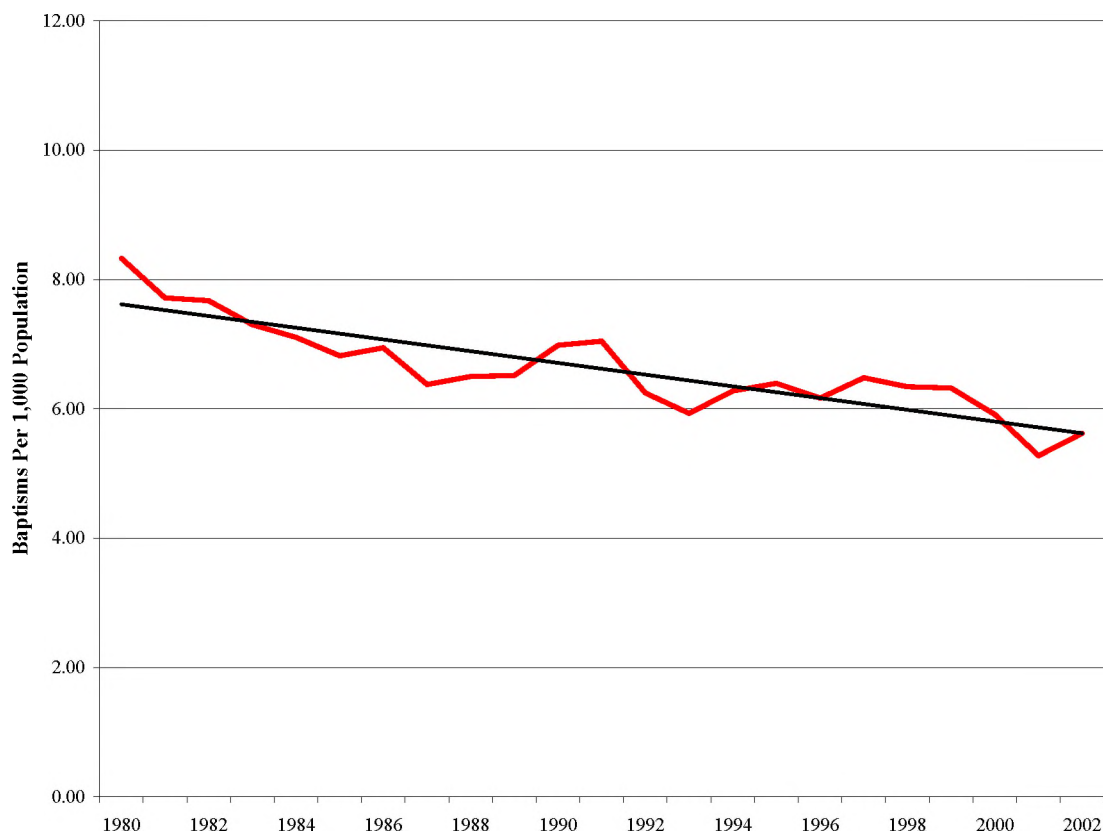
Figure 2—Anglo and Non-Anglo Populations Age 9–11



<sup>1</sup> Pearson correlation coefficients of .70 and .76 respectively. Thus, half of the variance in baptisms for these two age groups can be explained by the variance in Anglo population for the corresponding categories.

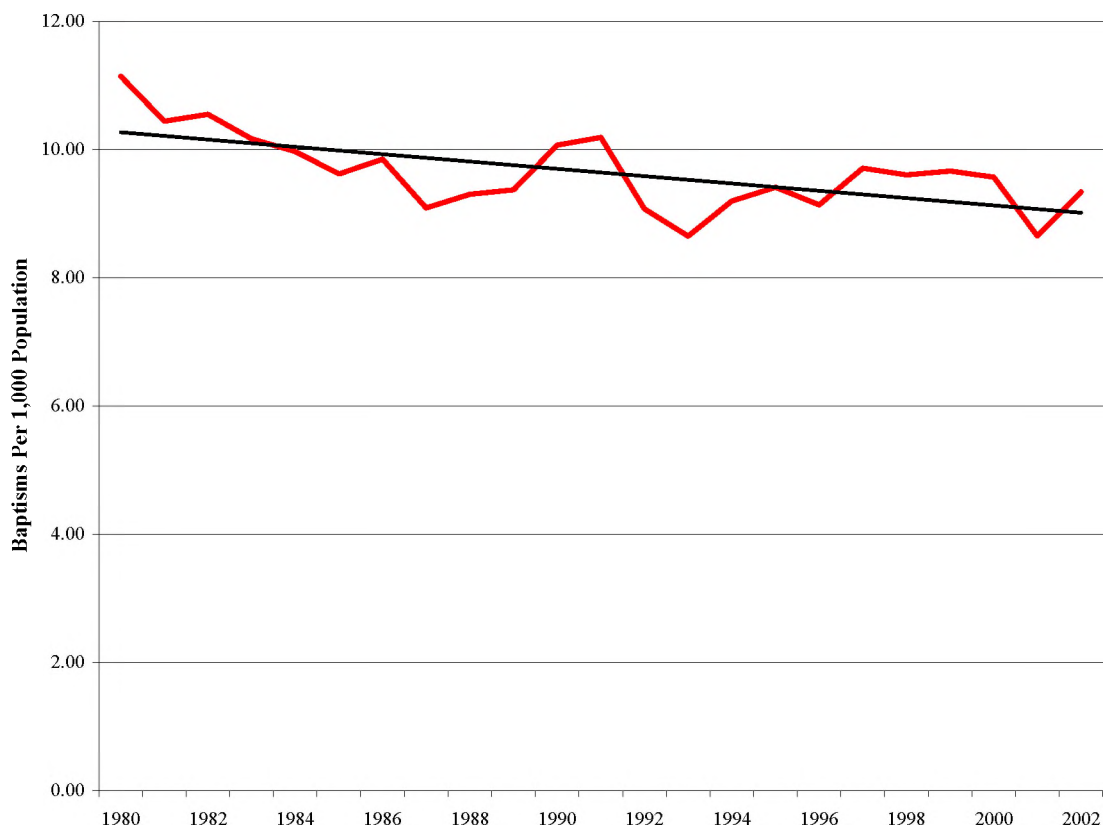
The relationship between baptisms and population is further explored in figure 3. Figure 3 shows the age specific baptism rate per 1,000 total population. This rate is calculated by dividing the number of baptisms age 9–11 by the number of people age 9–11 and then multiplying by 1,000. The graph shows that there is an overall decline in this rate from 1980 to 2002. The rate declined from 8.3 per 1,000 children in 1980 to 5.6 per 1,000 children in 2002.

Figure 3—Baptisms Age 9–11 per 1,000 Total Population



It might be expected that the age specific baptism rate is declining because the non-Anglo population is growing while we are holding our own with the Anglo population. However, figure 4 shows that the age specific baptism rate based on just the Anglo population is also declining. The baptism rate per 1,000 Anglo children, age 9–11, has declined from 11.1 in 1980 to 9.3 in 2002.

Figure 4—Baptisms Age 9–11 per 1,000 White Non-Hispanic Population



The conclusions from these four charts is that baptisms of children age 9–11 have declined because Anglo children have declined and Southern Baptists have become less efficient in baptizing Anglo children. Furthermore, we are not reaching non-Anglo children.

Despite these problems, Southern Baptists are more effective in reaching children ages 9 to 11 than any other age group. Table 1 below shows the average age specific baptism rate (based on total population) for each of the age groups that we track. Table 2 shows the age specific rates based on just the Anglo population. In either table, Southern Baptists are 60 percent more effective in reaching the age 9 to 11 population than any other age group—specifically the 6-8 or 12–17 age groups. Both these tables illustrate that we are more effective reaching children and youth than adults.

Table 1—Average Number of Baptisms per 1,000 Total Population in an Age Group, 1980–2002

Age Group	Baptisms per 1,000 Population
Under 6	0.15
6–8	4.06
9–11	6.62
12–17	4.06
18–29	1.64
30–59	0.85
60+	1.52
Total Population	1.52

Table 2—Average Number of Baptisms per 1,000 White Non-Hispanic Population in an Age Group, 1980–2002

Age Group	Baptisms per 1,000 Population
Under 6	0.23
6–8	6.01
9–11	9.64
12–17	5.85
18–29	2.33
30–59	1.11
60+	0.33
Total Population	2.03

### Age 12–17

Figure 5 plots the number of baptisms age 12–17 by year. Overall, there has been decline in the number of baptisms in this age group from 1980 to 2002. The number of baptisms in this age group appears to have plateaued since 1990.

Figure 5—Baptisms, Age 12–17

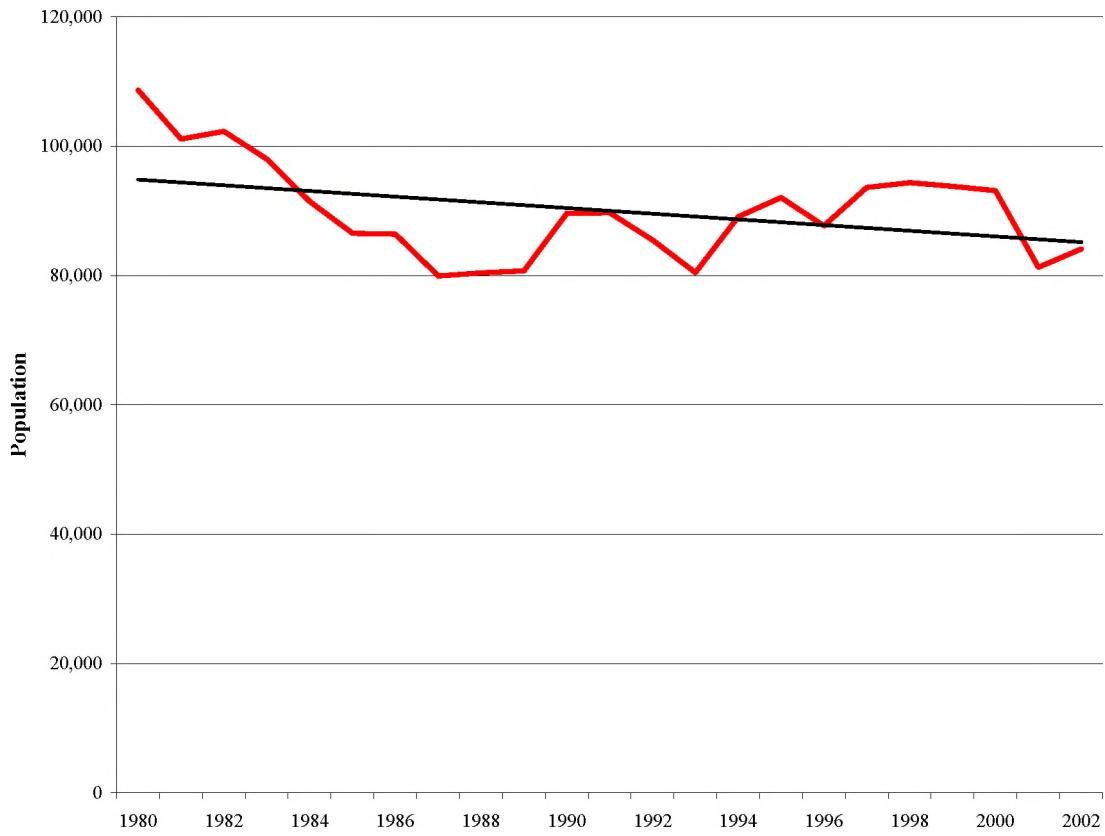
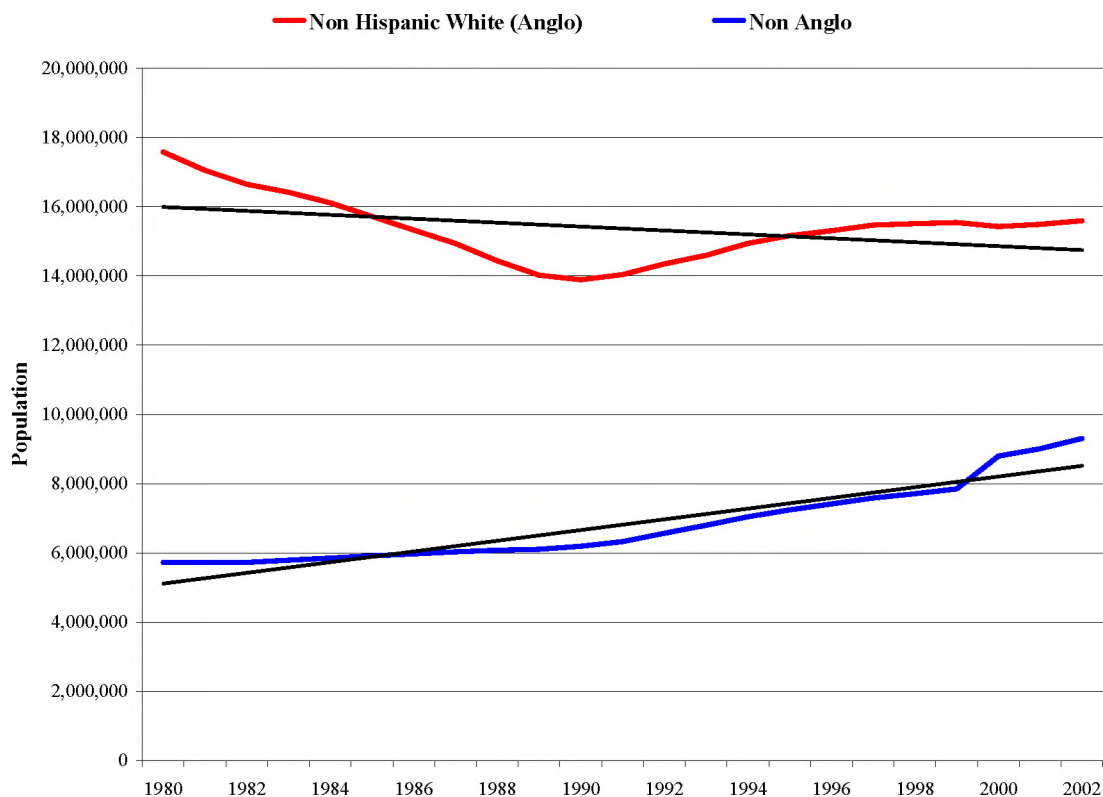


Figure 6 charts the Anglo and non-Anglo population for this age segment. Here too, baptisms are moderately highly correlated with the Anglo population.<sup>2</sup> Thus, much of the change in baptisms of youth age 12–17 can be explained by comparable changes in the number of Anglo youth.

As in figure 2, figure 6 also shows the comparable non-Anglo population to be rapidly growing. In 2002, non-Anglo youth comprised 37 percent of all youth. In contrast, 93 percent of the baptisms age 12–17 are reported by predominantly Anglo congregations. Again, it appears that Southern Baptists are not reaching the non-Anglo population.

Figure 6—Anglo and Non-Anglo Population Age 12–17



<sup>2</sup> Pearson's Correlation Coefficient of 0.76.

Figure 7 examines the age specific baptism rate (based on the total population) for those 12–17. As with children age 9–11, the baptism rate for youth 12–17 has also declined. It fell from 4.7 baptisms per 1,000 total population in 1980 to 3.4 baptisms per 1,000 population in 2002. Thus, Southern Baptists are less effective reaching youth in 2002 than they were in 1980.

Figure 7—Baptisms Age 12–17 per 1,000 Total Population

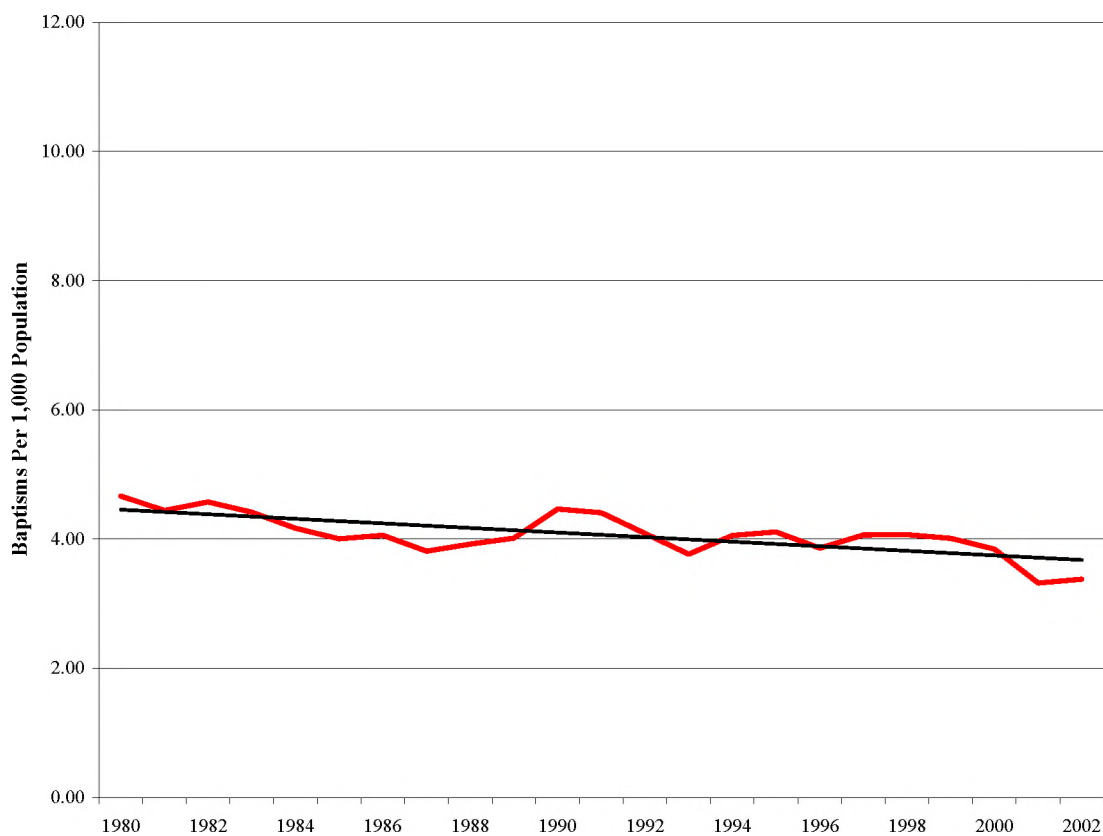
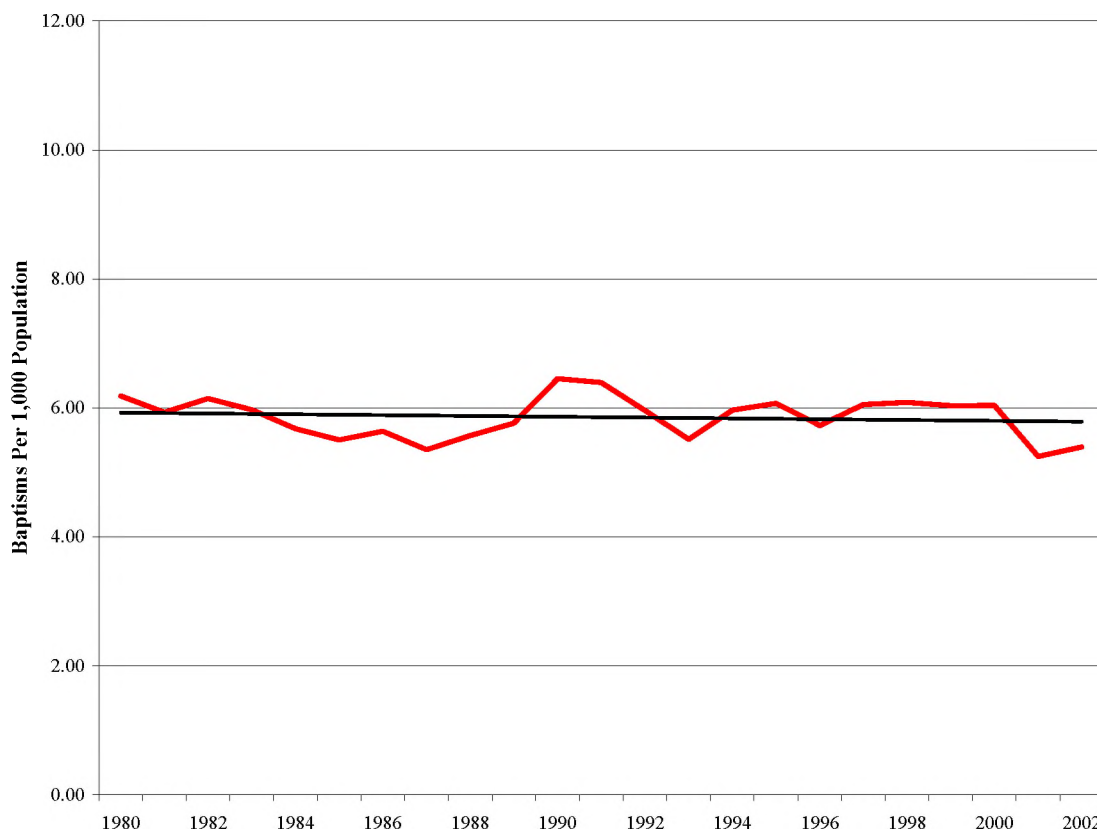


Figure 8 examines the age specific baptism rate based only on the Anglo population. It, too, has declined over time but not as rapidly as the rate based on the total population. The rate dropped from 6.18 baptisms per 1,000 Anglo youth in 1980 to 5.39 baptisms in 2002.

Figure 8—Baptisms Age 12–17 Per 1,000 Anglo Population



As concluded for children age 9–11, baptisms of youth age 12–17 are highly related to the Anglo population. Overall declines in baptisms of this group can be attributed to declines in the Anglo youth population, Southern Baptists less effectively reaching the Anglo youth, and the inability to reach an increasing number of non-Anglo youth.

## Other Age Group Observations

All the baptism age segments tracked are fairly highly correlated with the Anglo population and, in some of the cases, also correlate with the non-Anglo population. The correlations with the non-Anglo population that occur appear to be simply coincidental, i.e., the adult Anglo populations age 30+ are growing rapidly (thanks to the baby boomers) at the same time that the non-Anglo populations are growing rapidly.

The most unusual things I found are related to the under 6 baptisms. First, there are only about 4,000 children under the age of 6 that are baptized each year—about 1 percent of all baptisms. Thus, we don't want to make too much of the following but just keep our eye on it. The unusual thing is that they have steadily increased from 1980 to 2002, while the under age 6 Anglo population has steadily decreased, i.e., they are negatively correlated.<sup>3</sup> Just as strange, the under age 6 baptisms are very highly correlated with the non-Anglo under 6 population.<sup>4</sup> This got me looking further. Non-Anglo congregations (in 2002) account for 22 percent of the baptisms under age 6. This is high, given that non-Anglo congregations only account for 10 percent of all baptisms reported. So, non-Anglo congregations are having an impact on the increase in the under 6 baptisms. Also, the number of baptisms of Anglo children under age 6 per 1,000 Anglo population has increased over time. I'm not sure that this is a number we especially want to increase; however, I will let the theologians wrestle with this one. The bottom line is that about half of the increase in baptisms is due to predominantly Anglo congregations baptizing a higher proportion of the under 6 Anglo population over time and the other half is due to the addition of baptisms under age 6 by predominantly non-Anglo churches. If not for these two factors, the number of baptisms of children under age 6 would have declined from 1980 to 2002.

## Observations

For the 9–11 children and the 12–17 youth age groups, the Anglo population has declined since 1980. At best, these population age segments are plateaued since 1990. As a result, baptisms from these age groups have declined from 1980 to 2002 and plateaued since 1990. Also, Southern Baptists are slowly declining in effectively reaching these Anglo age segments. At the same time, Southern Baptists are having minimal impact on the rapidly growing non-Anglo age counterparts. Thus, I think this memo makes your point that Southern Baptists tend to be reaching people just like us. Furthermore, we are not reaching the Anglo children and youth age segments as we once did.

Because baptisms are so linked to demographic forces and the changes that occur in baptisms do so gradually over time, I doubt that anything can be done quickly to remedy the situation. The solution seems to me to require long term strategies to help churches understand the need and opportunities (ages 6–17 are the most effective years for reaching people) for evangelizing, and discipling children and youth. Think about some of the major Baptist programs, strategies or movements of the last century that had major impact on children and youth—Sunday School, BYPU, Church Training, RAs, GAs, youth programs. Some of them are on-going, some have died, and some are diminishing. Probably some new strategies or programs will need to be developed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I think that one such major long term strategy for reaching the non-Anglo population, which we've already been working on, is the planting of non-Anglo churches and missions. Hopefully, there are others.

---

<sup>3</sup> Pearson's correlation coefficient of -0.46.

<sup>4</sup> R=.92