

Memorandum

To: John Yarbrough
From: Phil Jones
Date: 3/30/2004
Re: Profile of Low Baptism Churches and High Baptism Churches

I have attached a table containing profiles of low baptism and high baptism churches. Per your instructions, low baptism churches are defined as those with 8 or fewer baptisms and high baptism churches are those with 9 or more baptisms. The profiles are based on 2002 Annual Church Profile (ACP) data. Only reporting churches (no church-type missions) have been included in computation of the statistics. Median statistics (rather than mean statistics) have been computed and included in the table. The median church is the middle church where half are smaller and half are larger. The profiles are based on data for over 37,000 churches—there are 25,250 low baptism churches and 12,219 high baptism churches. Low baptism churches outnumber high baptism churches by 2 to 1.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from the table is that size of church is a major determinant of whether a church is a low or high baptism church. Note that the median high baptism church is a little more than 3 times larger than the median low baptism church in resident members, primary worship service attendance, and Sunday School enrollment and attendance. I have attached a color chart that compares the percentage of low and high baptism churches based on several size categories of worship service attendance. Note that 78 percent of low baptism churches have fewer than 100 participants in their primary worship service(s). In contrast, only 23 percent of high baptism churches have fewer than 100 participants. Conversely, 35 percent of high baptism churches have more than 500 in attendance at a typical worship service compared to only 4 percent of low baptism churches.

While size is a major determinant of number of baptisms, there are other factors influencing baptisms. Specifically, when the baptism rate per 100 resident members is compared for the two groups (this controls for size of church), the baptism rate is still 3 times greater for high baptism churches versus low baptism churches. Note too, high baptism churches have a higher other addition rate per 100 resident members. Both the other addition rate and the baptism rate indicate high baptism churches are attracting people to a greater extent proportionally than low baptism churches.

When the age composition of baptisms is compared for the two groups (including only those low baptism churches that actually reported baptisms), there are not significant differences in the percentage of baptisms under age 18.

High baptism churches have about 4 times the financial resources of low baptism churches and their mission gifts are from 3 to 4 times greater. High baptism churches are supportive of the denomination to a greater extent—the typical church contributes 7.6 percent of its undesignated gifts to the Cooperative Program compared to 6.2 percent for low baptism churches.

The typical low baptism church is older than the typical high baptism church. The median low baptism church was constituted in 1929, while the typical high baptism church was organized in 1941. I have included a second color column chart that shows the percentage of low and high baptism churches for selected age categories. While low baptism churches are younger overall than high baptism churches, my interpretation of this chart is that this difference in age is of no practical significance.

One of the items that I examined was the racial/ethnic make-up of low and high baptism churches. I did not find anything of particular interest. Ninety-two percent of each group was predominantly Anglo churches.

I had Paulette Villarreal match-up data from the 1997 ACP with the 2002 ACP for 33,600 churches and compute the percentage change in resident membership over this five-year span. Those churches that increased membership by 10 percent or more over this time frame were defined as growing, those that decreased by 10 percent or more were defined as declining, and those in the middle were defined as plateaued. I have included a third color chart showing the relationship of low/high baptism churches by the categories of growth/plateau/decline. A higher percentage of high baptism churches were growing churches than were low baptism churches and conversely a lower percentages of high baptism churches were plateaued and declining. While these seem to me to be significant differences, I would have expected these differences to be more startling. A plausible explanation for them not being larger is that the distinction between high and low baptism churches is based only on one year's baptism count—2002. There might be some movement of churches between these two categories if data for each of these five years were considered. A second explanation is that possibly some of the high baptism churches might, in a sense, have revolving doors for members—they lose about as many as they gain.

One of the items that you are interested in is the extent that low baptism churches are pastored by bivocational pastors. Unfortunately, we do not have current data for bivocational pastors in the SBC. The most recently available data, which I would judge as good data, is from 1991. While this is old data, I have had Paulette match up as many churches as possible from the 2002 ACP with data from 1991. She was able to match for 32,000 churches. Of course, churches that were classified as having bivocational pastors in 1991 may not be classified as such today, if we had current information. Still, this gives us some indication about the extent bivocationalism has on the baptism classification. I have charted this relationship in the fourth figure attached. The precise question asked in 1991 was "Does the pastor have employment apart from the church?" Back in 1991, a third of the low baptism churches responded "yes." This was a little more than double the percentage of high baptism churches that responded likewise. Thus, low baptism churches appear to be more likely to have bivocational pastors than high baptism churches, but keep in mind that a majority (two-thirds) do not have bivocational pastors and even some of the high baptism churches are pastored by bivocationals.

Unfortunately, we no longer have a location code for churches that spans the rural-urban spectrum. (There was always a problem with the possible responses to this question, anyway, because they were very imprecise and open for various interpretations.) Still, I thought this might be a helpful variable for this analysis because I have a tendency to think that the low baptism churches are mostly small, old, rural churches. In the matched dataset containing 2002 and 1991 data, I was able to include the location code from 1991. I have attached a final table that shows the relationship between high and low baptism churches by location. There is a relationship between sizes of place where a church is located and whether it is has high or low baptisms. Low baptism churches are much more likely to be located in open country or small villages while high baptism churches are found to a greater extent in more urban locations. It seems obvious to me that location is highly correlated to size of church which in turn is highly correlated to number of baptisms. Note that 57 percent of low baptism churches can be found in open country and village locations, while 32 percent of high baptism churches are also found in the same places.

March 30, 2004

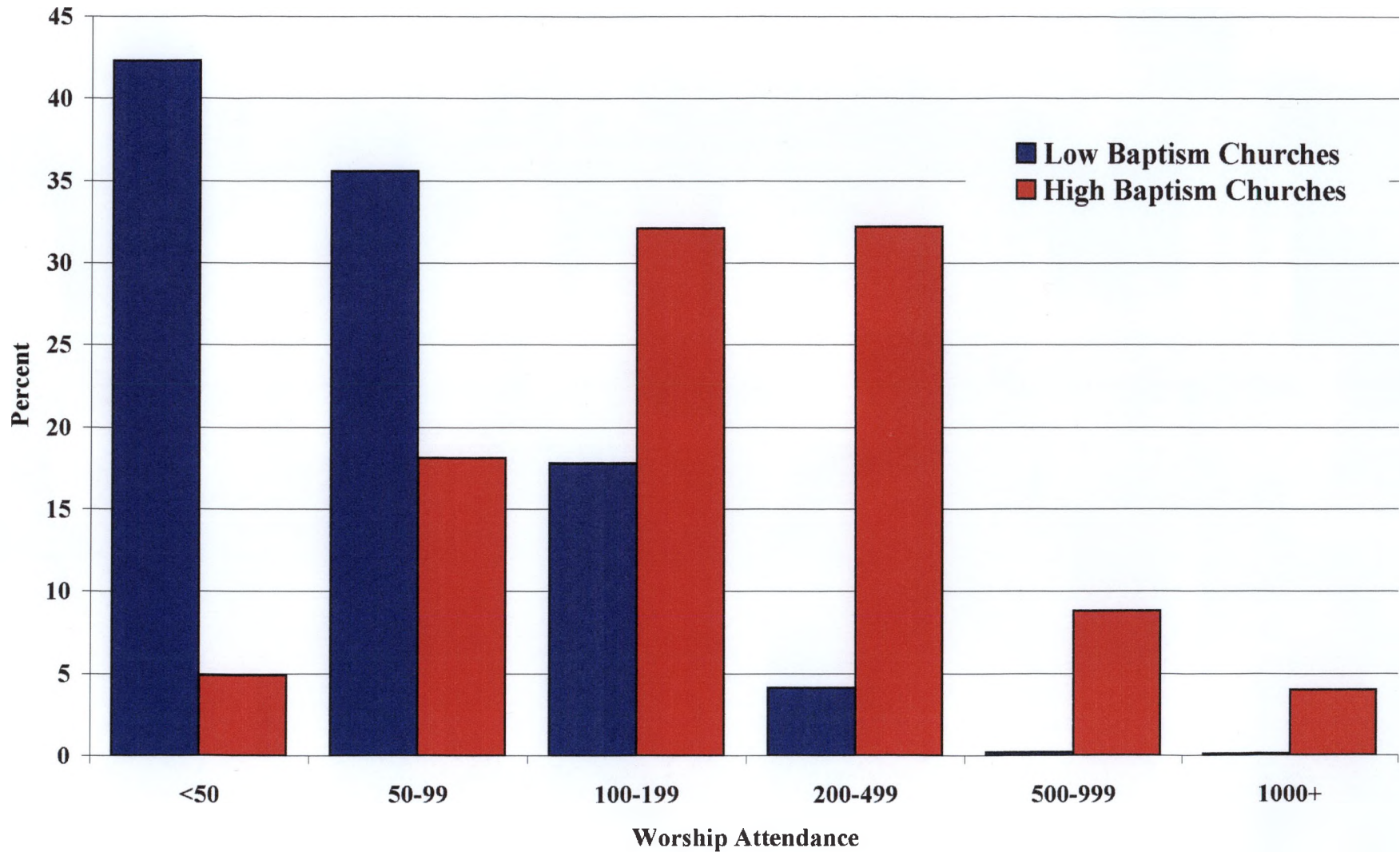
To summarize the above information, there is no single variable that fully explains why a church is a high or low baptism church—the relationship is more complex than that. However, we do know that low baptism churches tend to be smaller, they are less “attractive” than high baptism churches, they are slightly older, they tend to be located in rural areas, they are more likely to have bivocational pastors, and they have a greater tendency to be plateaued and declining.

Hope this helps.

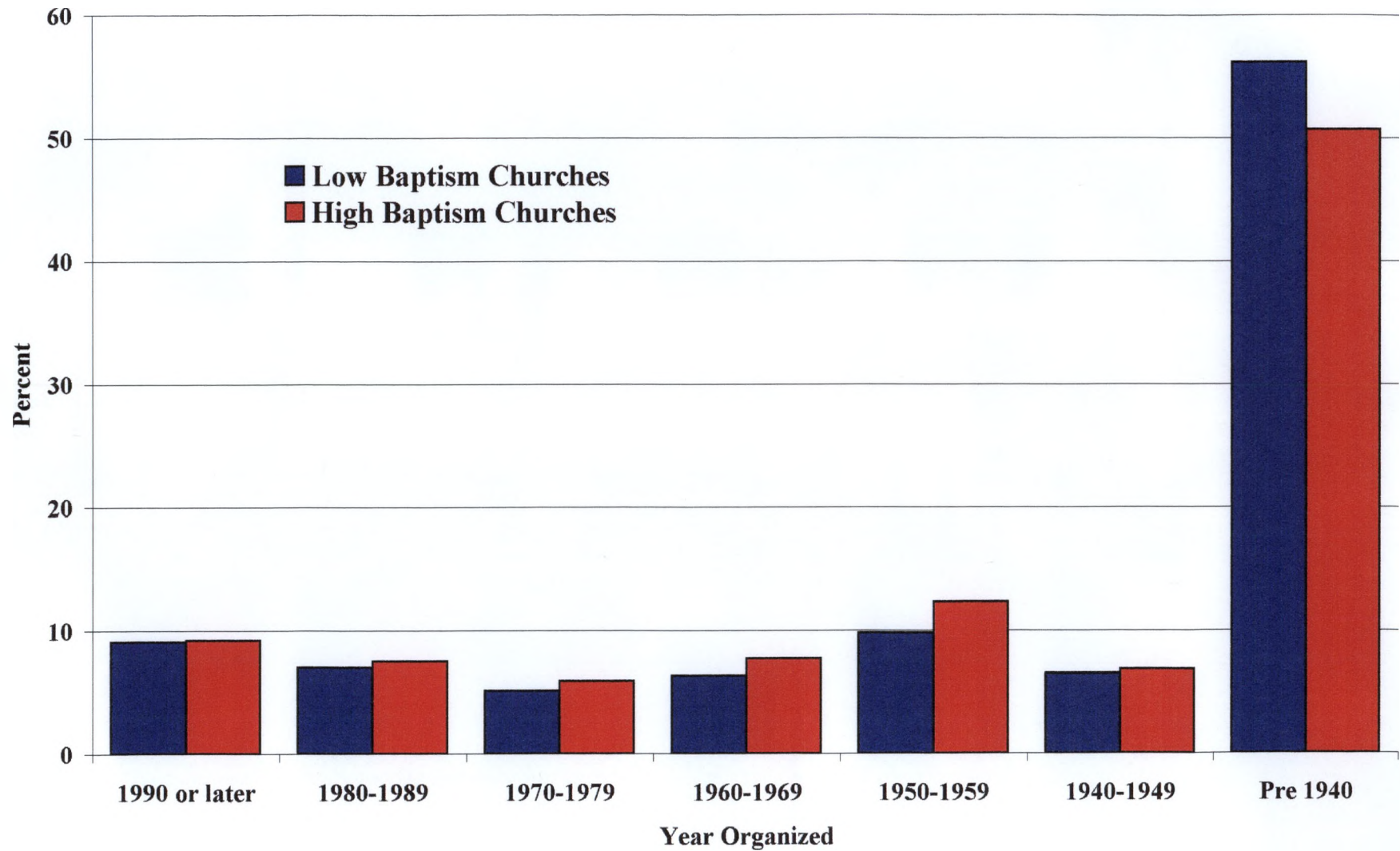
Comparison of Churches with Low Baptisms (8 or Fewer) and High Baptisms (9 or More)
2002 Annual Church Profile Data
Median Statistics

	Low Baptism	High Baptism
Total Members	160	471
Resident Members	106	350
Total Baptisms	2	16
Baptism Rate Per 100 Resident Members	1.5	5.0
Percentage of Total Baptisms Under Age 18	50.0	55.6
Other Additions	2	13
Other Addition Rate Per 100 Resident Members	1.6	3.8
Primary Worship Attendance	55	175
Sunday School Enrollment	62	218
Average Sunday School Attendance	39	121
VBS Enrollment	43	121
Discipleship Training Enrollment	0	50
Total Receipts	\$59,302	\$230,786
Undesignated Receipts	\$49,158	\$184,432
Designated Receipts	\$5,552	\$35,163
Total Mission Expenditures	\$5,912	\$24,435
Cooperative Program Gifts	\$2,600	\$12,374
CP as a Percent of Undesignated Receipts	6.2	7.6
Annie Armstrong Easter Offering	\$350	\$1,152
Lottie Moon Christmas Offering	\$510	\$1,949
Church Debt	\$0	\$3,000
Year Constituted	1929	1941
	N=25,250	N=12,219

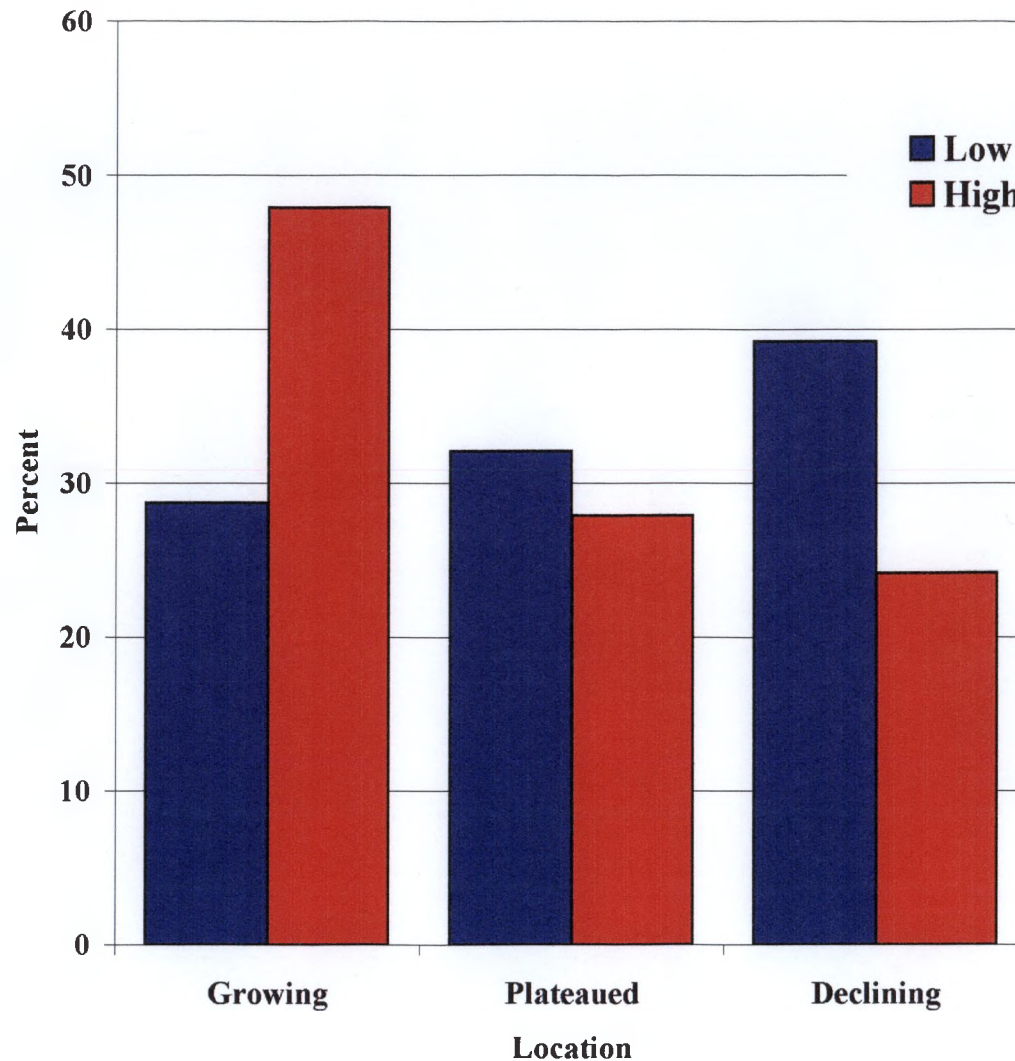
Percentage of Low Baptism (8 or less) Churches and High Baptism Churches (9 or more) By Primary Worship Service(s) Attendance



Percentage of Low Baptism (8 or less) Churches and High Baptism Churches (9 or more) By Year Organized

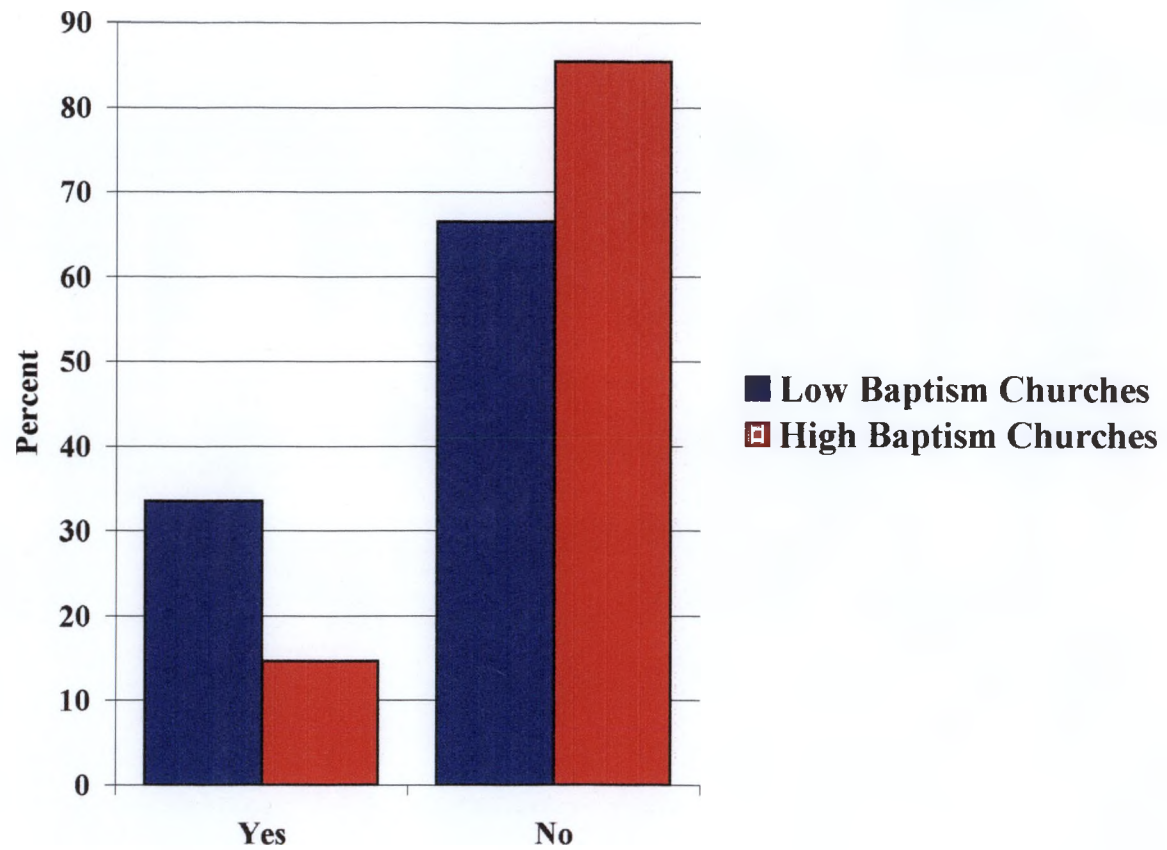


Percentage of Low Baptism (8 or less) Churches and High Baptism Churches (9 or more) By Whether the Church is Growing, Plateaued, or Declining from 1997 to 2002



Growth is defined by a 10 percent gain in resident members from 1997 to 2002. Decline is defined by a 10 percent or more loss in resident members. Plateaued churches are those within plus or minus 10 percent over the time frame.

Percentage of Low Baptism (8 or less) Churches and High Baptism Churches (9 or more) By Whether or Not the Pastor Has Employment Apart From the Church (Bivocational, 1991 Data)



Does the Pastor Have Employment Apart From the Church?

**Percentage of Low Baptism (8 or less) Churches and High Baptism Churches (9 or more) By Location
(1991 Location Data)**

