

Decline of evangelical clout

By RACHEL ZOLL
AP Religion Writer

Conservative Christians are anxious about their future after losing the fight over gay marriage, and amid the growing share of Americans who have left organized religion. Here's a look at why white evangelicals are feeling so alienated from other Americans and at the changes fueling this anxiety.

WHAT'S CHANGING?

The U.S. remains solidly Christian, but between 2007 and 2014, the share of Christians in the country dropped from about 78 percent of the population to just under 71 percent, according to the Pew Research Center.

The decline was fueled mostly by losses among Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants. However, even in parts of the Bible Belt, conservative Christians who hadn't been very active in church are now feeling more comfortable saying they're no longer religious. The membership ranks of some evangelical denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, are shrinking.

At the same time, the segment of Americans who say they have no particular religion has increased from 16 percent to 23 percent, Pew found. That's close to the share of evangelicals, who comprise just over 25 percent of the population.

At the same time, evangelicals are wrestling with being on the losing side of the fight over same-sex marriage. It was not only a defeat on a deeply significant religious and moral issue, but also evidence of a lack of conser-



AP Photo/David Goldman

In this Sunday April 10, 2016 photo, parishioners pray during a service at the Christian Fellowship Church in Benton, Ky.

vative Christian influence over public opinion. More than half of Americans now support same-sex marriage.

Politically, white evangelicals remain one of the most important blocs in the Republican Party, and they continue to shape the early presidential primaries. But with the diminishment of old-guard religious right groups, Christian conservatives no longer have a unifying leader. As a result, evangelicals are splintering, diluting their influence. And they can't match the growth rate of groups who tend to support Democrats: Latinos, young people and people who are unaffiliated with a religion.

WHY SO ANXIOUS?

Evangelicals are deeply worried about the fallout from the spread of LGBT rights and the growth of secularism.

They point to cases like the fines levied on a New Mexico photographer and Oregon baker for refusing business related to gay weddings. Conservative

Christians fear their schools and colleges could lose their tax-exempt status or accreditation over codes of conduct barring same-sex relationships.

A 1983 U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowed the IRS to revoke tax-exempt status from religious schools that banned interracial dating. In the Supreme Court gay marriage case last year, U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli, representing the government, was asked whether something similar could happen to Christian schools, which often provide housing for married students. "It's certainly going to be an issue," he responded, causing alarm in the evangelical blogosphere.

And religious conservatives worry about new rules added to government contracts that will affect faith-based social service agencies. For example, Catholic Charities in Illinois shuttered its adoption program over a new state rule that agencies with taxpayer funding can't refuse placements with same-sex couples.

Gay rights groups consider these changes a welcome corrective to decades of discrimination. They contend conservatives are using conscience rights and religious freedom complaints as an end run around advances for LGBT people. But conservative Christians say they are just seeking a balance between religious liberty and civil rights.

WHAT'S THE REACTION?

Evangelicals are debating whether they should even more fiercely wage the culture war, withdraw back into their own communities or stay engaged with Americans of other views, not only to help shape public discussion of morality but also to try and bring people into the church.

Christian publishers are churning out books and Bible studies on this last strategy, such as "Onward," by Russell Moore, "Thriving in Babylon," by Larry Osborne, and "Good Faith, Being a Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant or Extreme," by Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman.

Advocates of this strategy generally feel the sharp rhetoric of the religious right — on homosexuality and other issues — ultimately hurt Christians. This group aims to confidently advocate for their beliefs, no matter how unpopular, but without vilifying their opponents. These evangelicals are also emphasizing issues that can cross ideological lines, including fighting racism and human trafficking, as part of highlighting the more compassionate side of their faith.

LIMEY PASTOR IN BOARDMAN

Heat without the hellfire

I was below the hill at the western end of Interstate 84 when the boiling orange globe of fire roiled up into the hills above Mosier like a napalm fireball. Far enough away to take time to prepare a detour — one that would take me on an extra two-hour drive to add to the already three-hour marathon of the return journey to Boardman.

I was prayerfully thankful that no human got hurt in this, and grateful too when I was driving towards the danger zone to get the all clear from ODOT over the radio. A great blessing. The responders had been working all through the night to resolve the emergency. It was a strange scene — a great fire next to the great water.

The morning after, Mosier itself seemed unharmed as I passed by the emergency crews in their special gear as they continued to mop up the scene. Although, I understand that for a time the whole city was evacuated in case the highly volatile Bakken oil exploded in the other trucks, in which case a mile around would not have been safe. However, the whole Mosier sewer system has been damaged, putting all the residents into a caravan of porta-potties outside their houses.

I recalled many years ago, driving in Los Angeles after picking up my



COLIN BROWN
Faith

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parents for a visit, that a gasoline truck upturned and exploded in front of us. My parents took it in their stride as they had been in London during the

Blitz, so a small explosion like this was not much to them. I didn't have that background, though, and found I was not comfortable with the experience.

Last year, I had been making a run for my mechanic in my late Nissan Altima because of a strange knocking sound from the engine and I tried to get myself up the hill to his place. It conked out and rolled to the side of the road, where it started to smoke and then burn quite vigorously. When I told the story to the people in the fire truck in retrospect my choices did seem unwise — I had just filled my tank with gasoline, which certainly gave the firemen something exciting to practice on.

Life is always unexpected, and events like these are provided without any warning. We find we live in a precarious world. The heat in Boardman on arrival reminded me

of the precarious nature of us all on this beautiful planet with its majestic scenery and incredible variations. As I write this piece I heard of a young man who fell into one of the hot springs in Yellowstone today. My deepest sorrow for his family.

Our world is a wild place and combines all elements in its bosom: earth, fire, air, water and spirit. I become extra vigilant in the heat, careful not to repeat foolish mistakes. I can feel the ears of my soul prick up to listen to the world. Anything might happen.

I pray this weekend for a cooler climate and a mellow content of the weekend. This week all my pianists are in absentia — and I will be praying for the tonality of my church in a capella and playing some music to soothe their heated souls. I am lucky to have Christ as my co-pilot and trust that we will stay together whatever happens and that, at the end, it will be cooler rather than hotter.

Colin Brown is pastor of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Boardman.

Nazarene church sets week-long programs

HERMISTON — A pair of Vacation Bible School programs are planned at Hermiston Church of the Nazarene.

Cave Quest: Following Jesus, The Light of the World is for children ages 4 through second grade and MegaSports Camp: "Epic Moments" is for third-through fifth-graders.

Younger kids will enjoy games, crafts, snacks, songs and story time. The older children will participate in a variety of sports activities, as well as team huddles, songs and snacks.

Both programs run Monday, June 13 through Friday, June 17 from 6-8:30 p.m. at and near the church, 1520 W. Orchard Ave, Hermiston.

For more information, contact 541-567-3677, hermistonnaz@gmail.

com or visit www.hermistonnazarene.org.

Aglow speaker highlights prayer, healing

WALLA WALLA — Esther Flesland, director of the Spokane Healing Rooms, is the guest speaker for the upcoming Walla Walla Aglow Community Lighthouse meeting.

With a passion for the gifts of the God's spirit, she provides encouragement to others. Flesland also will be available to pray with individuals.

Everyone is invited to the gathering Saturday at 10 a.m. at Whitman Court, 305 Ash St., Walla Walla. A freewill offering will be taken for the event, which includes lunch.

The local group also has weekly Bible studies and prayer meetings. In addition, it hosts special activities, including an evening

meeting the first Sunday of each month

For more information, call Paula McKee at 509-220-1408, Darya Tucker at 509-876-1668.

Peace Lutheran highlights biblical times

PENDLETON — Children ages four through sixth grade are invited to travel back to biblical times during Vacation Bible School at Peace Lutheran Church.

The program, which is open to all kids in the community, is Monday, June 20 through Thursday, June 23 from 8:45 a.m. to noon at 210 N.W. Ninth St., Pendleton. In addition, family and friends are invited to a special evening session Wednesday, June 22 at 6:30 p.m. T-shirts are available for those who register in advance. For more information or

to pre-register, stop by the church Monday through Friday mornings or call 541-276-7592.

Bible school features Everest theme

HERMISTON — Kids are invited to learn how to conquer challenges with God's power during Vacation Bible School at Trinity Lutheran Church.

With a Mount Everest theme, children ages 4 through fifth grade will participate in crafts, singing, games, Bible stories and snack time. Children don't have to belong to the church to attend the sessions.

It runs Monday, June 13 through Friday, June 17 from 9 a.m. to noon at 485 W. Locust Ave., Hermiston. There is no charge to participate.

For more information, call Nancy Carlson at 541-567-9660.

Worship Community

Living Word Christian Center

Sunday Worship 10:00am

Wednesday Bible Study 7:00pm

Youth Classes - Nursery-6th grade Sun & Wed

YOUTH GROUPS: Jr Hi, Wed 7pm

Sr Hi, Sun after the service

Sharon Miller, Pastor

401 Northgate, Pendleton

541-278-8082

www.livingwordcc.com

Peace Lutheran Church

210 NW 9th, Pendleton, ELCA

Join us Sundays

9:30 am Sunday Worship

10:30 am Fellowship

11:00 am Sunday School & Adult Class

~Come and be at Peace~

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Sunday Worship

10:30 am

Sr. Pastor,

Ray O'Grady

pendletonfaithcenter.org

NEW HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH

1350 S. Highway 395, Hermiston

Sunday Worship Services

English- Pastor Dave Andrus

9:00 & 10:45 am

Spanish- Pastor Genaro Loreda

9:00 & 10:15 am

Classes for kids during all services

For more information call

541-567-8441

Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Saturday Services

Pendleton

1401 SW Goodwin Place

276-0882

Sabbath School 9:20 am

Worship Service 10:45 am

Community Presbyterian Church

14 Martin Drive, Umatilla, OR

922-3250

Worship: 10 AM

Sunday School at

11:30

First United Methodist Church

352 SE 2nd Street

Pendleton, OR

541-276-2616

Sunday Worship 9am

Open Hearts, Open Hands, Open Doors

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FUMCPendleton

Services are broadcast every Sunday on KUMA-1260 AM @ 11am

Rev. Dr. Jim Pierce, pastor

PILOT ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH

585 SW Birch, Pilot Rock, OR 97868

(541) 443-2500

prbcnline.blogspot.com

Sunday School: 9:30 am

Worship Service: 10:45 am

Kids' Club: 6:00 pm

Wednesday Services:

Youth Group: 7:00 pm

Grace Baptist Church

555 SW 11th, Hermiston

567-9497

Nursery provided for all services

Sunday School - 9:30 AM

Worship - 10:45 AM

6:00 pm

Wed Prayer & Worship -

7:00 PM

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Fr. Dan Lediard, Priest, PH: 567-6672

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(DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

215 N Main • Pendleton

Sunday Worship: 10:40a

Bible Class: 9:30a

Office 276-5358

M-F 8:30-12:30

WWW.FCCPENDLETON.ORG

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OPEN HEARTS - OPEN DOOR

www.graceandmercy.org

Sunday Worship 9:00 a.m.

Sunday School 10:00 a.m. (Nursery Provided)

Fellowship, Refreshments & Sunday School

Check out our Facebook Page or Website for More Information

541-289-4535

Tom Inch, Pastor

Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church, ELCA

164 E. Main St. / P.O. Box 1108

Hermiston, Oregon 97838

Redeemer Episcopal Church

241 SE Second St. Pendleton

(541)276-3809

www.pendletonepiscopal.org

Sunday Holy Communion 9:00 a.m.

Wednesday Holy Communion Noon

Weekly Adults Spiritual Life Group

All Are Welcome

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

-Presbyterian Church (USA)-

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Pendleton

Service of Worship - 10:00 am

Children's Sunday School -

10:20 am

Fellowship - 11:00 am

www.pendletonpresbyterian.com

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541-276-7590

Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 AM

Sunday Bible Classes 9:45 AM

Sunday Youth Group 6:00 PM

Mon. Community Women's Study

9:30 AM & 6 PM

Awana Kids Club (K-6th grade)

Wed Men's Study 6 PM

MOPS meeting the 1st Thur of the Month 6 PM

The Salvation Army Center for Worship & Service

Sunday Worship Service

9:30 - Sunday School

10:30 - Worship Service

Wednesday Bible Study

5:30 Family Fellowship Meal 6:00 Bible Study

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AM Kids Place -10:00am

The Connection--6:00pm

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Celebrate Recovery-6:00pm

Celebration Place-6:00pm

Other Groups Available Weekly

For more info visit

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