

Appendix B: Non-denominational Christian Churches

Over the past two decades the primary researcher for this project has collected nondenominational and independent church lists found on the Internet. To this list were added ten additional listings of nondenominational congregations, house churches, megachurches, and networks of independent churches that were collected privately and from the web during 2019 and 2020. Three purchased mailing lists of independent and nondenominational Christian congregations were also added to the database. A large percentage of these purchased records included approximate size, email, and website information. After collection, these lists were merged, and the database was then screened for duplicates, incorrect entries, and non-church listings.

Following this effort, a team of eight part-time staff persons spent more than 3,200 hours culling the web to verify the status of these congregations. Every church in the database was checked on Google and online Yellow Pages to confirm its existence as an independent/nondenominational church. Every church was also emailed or called to confirm its independent/nondenominational status, membership, and attendance figures. One of the staff members spoke Spanish and tried to contact Hispanic/Latino churches in the listing. Approximately 30 percent of all congregations contacted in these ways responded to these requests and verified their information. While engaged in this research, the staff found additional church lists from local websites (e.g., of newspapers, municipalities, and counties) that added new independent and nondenominational churches. Staff further gathered church suggestions from Google and Facebook on previously unknown nondenominational churches. The team then attempted to confirm the information on these suggested churches using the above method.

The result was a database that contained over 69,127 potential entries. Nearly 30,000 were removed due to uncertainty about their existence, size, nondenominational status or being a part of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship or Calvary Chapel Networks (which are listed separately in the U.S. Religion Census). The resulting 44,319 congregations with 21,098,641 adherents in 2,753 counties are the best estimate of the independent and nondenominational churches in the United States.

Even given these efforts, the primary researcher is certain that the current listing is not entirely accurate. The independent status or exact size of many churches could not be confirmed. Additionally, doing random checks in several cities nearly a year later, the team found many of the previously confirmed congregations had already closed and a few new ones were discovered. A number of the nondenominational churches listed are likely to be affiliated with a denomination but did not indicate it on their website, in their published material, or in our contact with them.

Nondenominational and independent congregations are a very fluid grouping of churches. This label also can be, in the minds of many clergy, a nonexclusive category, and more of a marketing brand label than an explicit organizational or affiliation identifier. Therefore, while this is the best accounting of nondenominational churches, it is not to be assumed as comprehensive or totally accurate.

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