

**EXPANDING / DECLINING CHRISTIANITY**  
**St. Mark's and Other Denominations and Other Faiths**  
**Then and Now**

**A. St. Mark's Then: Why and How Did It Come to Be, to Grow, to Thrive?**

1. *Immigration*: A steady stream of European immigrants in the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s.
2. *Religion* (Christianity) central in their home countries and in Kitchener-Waterloo; familiar worship, even in one's mother tongue.
3. *Unfamiliar*: churches in Canada are voluntarist, unlike state churches in the Old Country (everyone belonged; the state paid the bills): here you *joined* and members are responsible for calling pastors, buying property, erecting buildings, financial support of their congregation and the wider church ("benevolence").
4. *Benefits*: Churches offered comfort and meaning through the gospel (life fragile, often short) as well as acceptance; community and fun (women's/men's/youth/family groups), especially important in the Great Depression; familiar customs/language/foods; entree to the new society; training in leadership.
5. *Founding/Growth*: 1913, First English Lutheran formed, offering worship and community in English, for immigrants but especially for their children. 1939, First English, now re-christened St. Mark's, dedicates its new building.
6. *Growth*: After World War II, St. Mark's is part of the religious revival and the baby boom that filled pews and Sunday Schools. Family central, with singles ("bachelors"/"spinsters") recognized but somewhere off to the side in church and community.
7. *Change*: Affluence, consuming, suburbs, environment, feminism (women clergy – maybe?).

**B. St. Mark's (and other Mainline Churches) Today**

8. Across the board, two main issues for mainline churches today: **(a) Loss**: Churches on the margins of society; declining memberships; aging members (Lutherans' median age of 43.3 [2001] the 4th highest among denominations in Canada); declining finances; large, aging buildings. **(b) Immigration**: New immigrants come from developing world, commonly non-Christian.
9. *A 24/7 world*: work, working out, education, entertainment, sports, shopping, travel, cottaging. *Church?*
10. *Benefits* previously sought and found at St. Mark's (No. 4. above) now often found in "spirituality" apart from church (perceived by many, especially youth, as "past," irrelevant, bigoted); in self-help; at home (home entertainment centres; video games; the internet); in school; on the job; in communal activities in a boundless variety of times and venues.
11. *Life seemingly less fragile*: modern scientific medicine, OHIP, social-safety nets, boom economic times until recently, so that the threats to life and well-being that earlier generations faced now seem remote, placing God and religion on the periphery – not really needed, unless maybe things turn out unexpectedly.
12. *"Family"*: still important for many, but changed in composition, with everything from traditional nuclear families to couples living together without marriage/with or without children, to single-parented and blended families, to same-sex families, to families that are rarely together at one time because of tightly scheduled lives or geography.
13. *Singles* a much more significant and recognized sector of the population. Women clergy now common.
14. *Church?* Still "there," but for many, including many on membership rolls, primarily at Christmas/Easter and in a service role at hatching, matching, and dispatching times ("state church" mentality). Sunday worship a low priority.
15. *Immigration*: Most immigrants now from developing world, bringing with them the religions of those countries and commonly sticking to those religions. All maintain ties of varying firmness to their indigenous culture.
16. *Immigration*: Mainline churches alien to most of these immigrants, and vice-versa. Exceptions: the (very

few) mainline congregations that worship and work in the languages and cultures of "home" but also minister in English to the children of such congregations.

17. **Expansion:** Christianity is rapidly expanding, but it is happening in the developing world ("majority world"), such as Africa and China. In Europe and North America, mainline churches are in decline, becoming a minority population—as was early Christianity in the Roman Empire. **Exceptions to decline in developing world:** Some Evangelical churches; Lutheran churches working with Asian populations.

### C. What Next for Mainline Churches? The Gospel and Today's Challenges

18. The Gospel of Jesus Christ still rings true: churches are called to proclaim that Gospel and to provide the sacraments; to offer acceptance and community; and in response to the Gospel to be Christ's hands and feet in our changed and changing world.
19. How to be true to that Gospel in a very busy culture fixed on values and goals quite different from those of the earlier generations that built our present edifices to accommodate throngs of believers?
20. How to minister to long-time members as well as how to relate to those of their offspring who expect the church to be there for their pastoral or ritual needs but are otherwise absent?
21. How to find our way and make our witness in a pluralistic society where organized religion is seen as unnecessary, even while "spiritual" is valued and other faiths are steadily increasing in numbers, thanks to immigration and "brand loyalty" among immigrants, to say nothing of those of no professed beliefs?
22. How and in what ways to follow Christ's command today to proclaim the gospel to all "nations"—ethnicities? ages? To be a "neighbour" to those in need (Luke 10: Good Samaritan)? To feed the hungry, quench thirst for drinkable water (and for meaning), welcome strangers, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned (Matt. 25.34-40)?
23. How to reach out in a digital age to those remote from church? Example: St. Mark's website: (<http://www.stmarkskw.org/>).
24. How to work with other faiths for the common good, eliminating poverty, bringing about peace and social justice here and globally, a more equitable economic system, and respecting and saving this earth—in all its magnificence and munificence—from unbridled human exploitation?
25. Where do I as a follower of Christ fit in?

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"the gospel . . . the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1.16).

"Do this [Lord's Supper] in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11.24).

"Just as you did it [feeding, clothing, visiting those in need] to one of the least of these . . . you did it to me" (Matt. 25.40).

"whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. . . . For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. . ." (Mark 10.43, 45).

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28.19).

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12.7, 27).

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord in its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29.7).