

McConnell: Mississippians increasingly turning away from religion

By Lindsey Williams
Staff Writer

Associational Missions Directors and Mississippi Baptist Convention Board staffers were presented with the disturbing reality of the spiritual state of the state during a day-long presentation Sept.7 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton.



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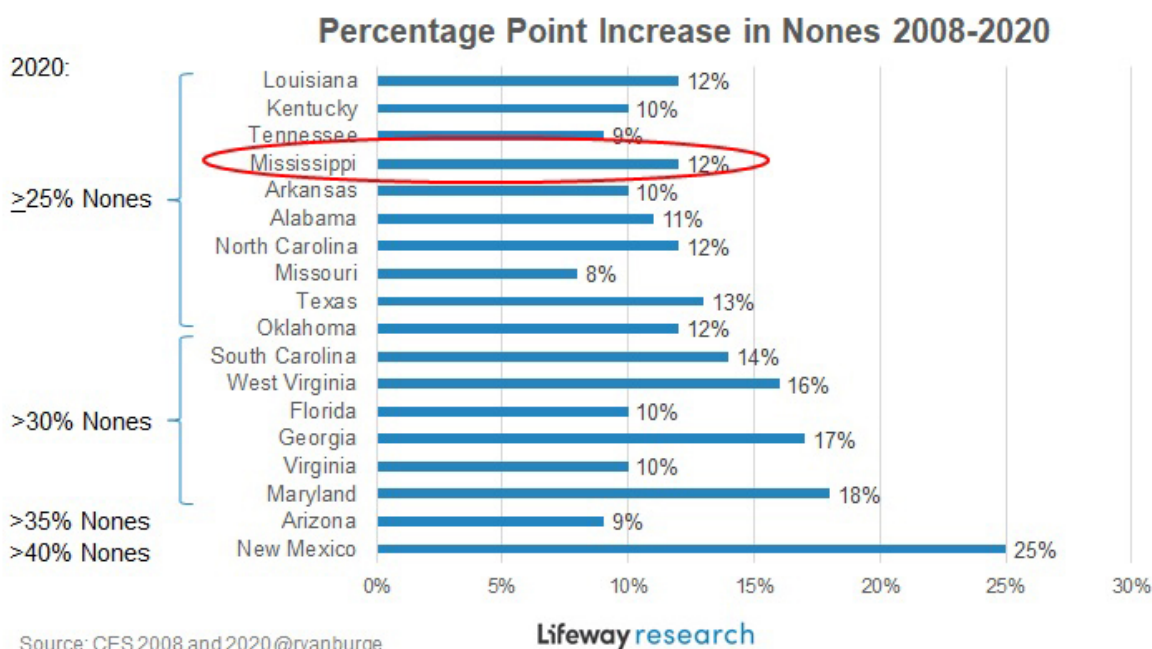
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Mississippians have become less religious over the years, but baptisms are largely unchanged

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In the nation as a whole, McConnell said, population growth has stalled and with that, Americans are less likely to believe the Bible is true and God cares about them.

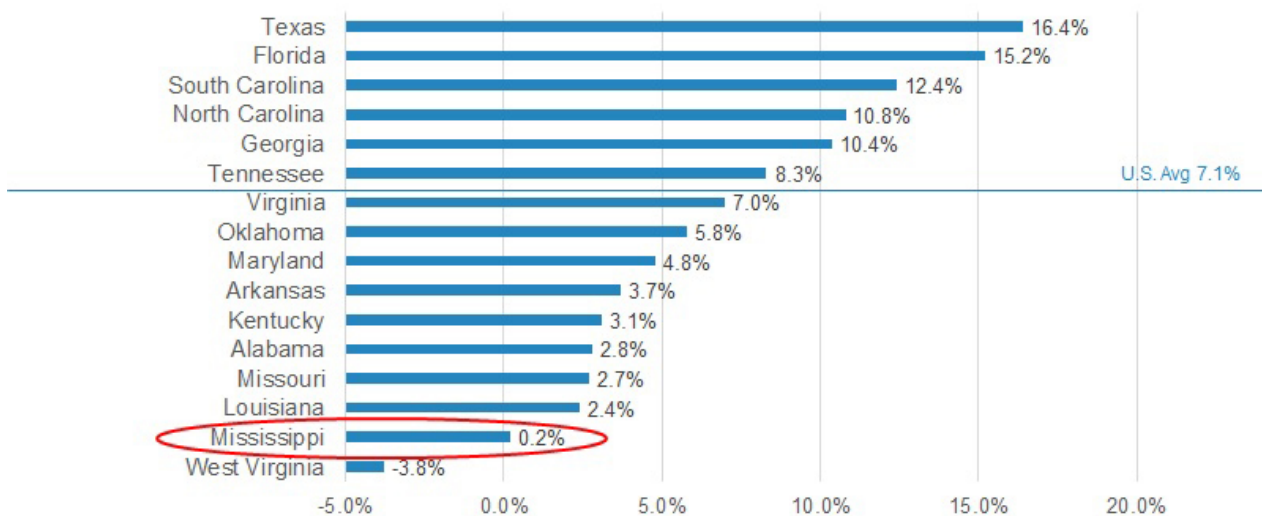
Statistics available for the years 2008-2018 show the most decreasing religion in Mississippi is Evangelical Christians, while the most increasing group is no religion – atheists, agnostics, and no preference.



From 2008-2020, McConnell said, the reality of nonreligious people in Mississippi has increased by 12%, which translates into an average of one out of four people professing no religion. Only 14% of Mississippi churches are growing in membership, McConnell said, while 32% are declining and 54% have plateaued.

While the national population growth rate stands at 7.1% for the 2010-2020 period, Mississippi's is less than .2%, making the birth/death rate close in numbers.

Estimated Population Growth 2010-2020



Source: William H. Frey analysis of Census Bureau Population Estimates, released Dec 30, 2019

Lifeway research

Along with an aging population, McConnell said, research suggests that a major factor in the decline of evangelistic activity is that 41% of Christian men and women of retirement age are not evangelizing, compared to the 12%-29% of non-evangelizing Christians in younger generations. As McConnell stated, "There is no retirement from evangelism."

McConnell said 50% of Americans – half the country – believe the Bible is only myth. Thirty percent of Americans believe God doesn't care about them.

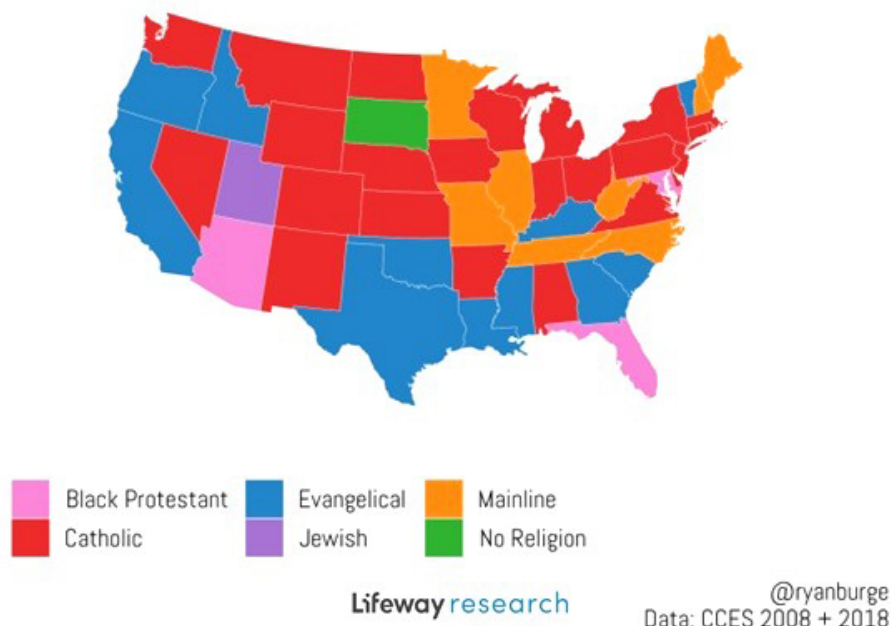
Surveys conducted in recent years reveal over half of Southern Baptist pastors agree with the statement that their role is isolating, and three-quarters agree that the almost constant work load frequently overwhelms them.

McConnell encouraged attendees to take heart. "When COVID hit, a lot of people believed, 'This changes everything.' When you really think about it, no, it doesn't. We still have the same God we serve. We still have guidance in Scripture that is timeless," he said.

McConnell quoted 1 Thessalonians 5:14, *And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the*

discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone (CSB).

Which Religious Group Has Declined the Most Per State? (2008-2018)



McConnell suggested that Mississippi Baptists can take positive steps to revitalize the spiritual state of the state by:

- Engaging in more evangelism of adults.
- Beginning new works to reach those not being reached today (new Sunday School classes/small groups, new church plants, new ministries).
- Adjusting conversations with the unchurched by meeting them where they are and helping them understand the Gospel.
- Supporting and encouraging pastors and church leaders. For more information on helping pastors/church leaders through discouraging times, visit <https://research.lifeway.com/pastorprotection/>.

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