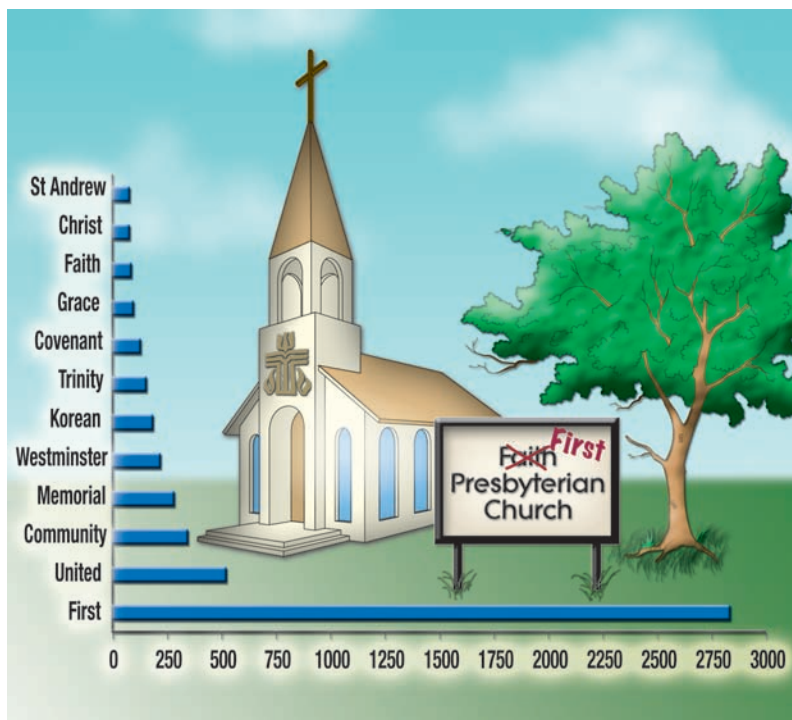


GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



GRAPHICS BY KATE ANYAN

‘First’ is first in church names

A glance through the list of all 11,019 PCUSA congregations turns up a variety of congregational names. Many are one-of-a-kind monikers derived from local features or place names (e.g., Congruity, Black Jack, Raccoon). Others, however, tend to recur, and a look at their type and frequency provides an interesting glimpse into Presbyterian culture and history.

Numbers. By far the most common name is First: 2,842 congregations (26 percent of the total) have this word as part of their name. However, only 64 are named Second, and only 26, Third. The series ends at Seventh (3 congregations), which is actually more common than Fifth (1). Overall, 2,949 congregations have an ordinal number in the name.

Ethnicities. Despite our roots in Scotland, only 13 congregations have Scots, Scotch or Scotland in their names. That’s less than one-tenth of those with Korean (189). The only other ethnic name to appear more than ten times is

Taiwanese or Taiwan (19).

Other secular terms. Besides numbers, the most common secular naming words are United, found in 526 congregations (94 percent of which are found in the geographical area of the former United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), and Community, in 350. Also, 287 congregations have Memorial in their names.

Biblical figures. Christ or Jesus is found in 82 congregational names. Another 124 have these other names for Jesus: Emmanuel/Immanuel (51), Good Shepherd or Shepherd (47), Redeemer (10), Master (7), Savior (7), or Prince of Peace (2).

St. Andrew(s) is the name of 81 congregations, followed by St. Paul(s) (34), St. Luke(s) (18), St. James (17), and St. Mark(s) (15). The other evangelist, St. Matthew, has only three namesakes, the same as for St. Philip and fewer than for St. Stephen (7). (I couldn’t find a single congregation with the name of an Old Testament personage.)

Biblical places. Bethel is the most common Biblical place name,

What the research shows

Such a broad overview of congregational names raises more questions than answers. Nevertheless, a few conclusions seem warranted.

First, secular terms are more common than religious ones.

Second, when past persons and places are found, they refer to Biblical Palestine and the New Testament more often than the Reformation.

And third, a huge variety of names are represented. In short, the overall picture is that of a Reformed church, solidly in the world, with an emphasis on the Bible, theology and freedom of choice: sound like Presbyterians to you?

found in 74 congregational names, followed by Bethany (70), Calvary (67), Salem (39), Mt. Zion or Zion (33), Bethlehem (23), Ebenezer (23), and Hebron (15).

Church history. Knox or John Knox is the name of 40 congregations, more than those identified as Calvin or John Calvin (36). A total of 223 congregations are named Westminster, along with 45 named Northminster; 27 Eastminsters; 25 Southminsters; one Northeastminster; and one Yorkminster.

Christian concepts. Trinity is the most commonly found Christian concept, appearing in 159 congregational names, followed by Covenant (133), Grace (100), Faith (90), Hope (76), Providence (31), and Harmony (15). □