

## **HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/31/2021**

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. They conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. They do not take policy positions. Among many areas of research and polling, Pew does annual studies of religion in America and around the world. A new study by the Pew Research Center provides some interesting information about religion in the world today.

There are 7.7 billion religious people in the world. This information was compiled from 198 countries. Pew divided religions into eight categories: Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Folk Religion, Unaffiliated, and Other. Their research concluded that the largest religious group in the world is Christianity with 2.383 billion people out of global total of 7.657 billion religious people.

Regarding Christianity, the largest group of Christians is in sub-Saharan Africa with 650 million, followed by Latin America with 585 million people, Europe with 535 million, Asia-Pacific with 320 million, and North America with 277 million. Among nations with the largest Christian populations are the United States (259 million), Brazil (185 million), Mexico (118 million), the Philippines (102 million), Nigeria (96 million), China (72 million), Ethiopia (62 million), Italy (48 million), Uganda (40 million), Tanzania (39 million), France (37 million), Spain (36 million), and India (34 million).

Pew also found that 41% of all nations ban some religious groups. Among them are two of the world's largest countries by population: Russia and China. But note that China was sixth in the list above with 72 million Christians. As an example of the extreme, in Russia, Jehovah's Witnesses have been detained and had their travel restricted.

In the United States, 63% of the population identify themselves as Christian. This is down from 75% just 10 years ago. Pew also found that 30% of Americans identify themselves as religiously unaffiliated. It is worth noting, however, that among this last group, there are many who will describe themselves as spiritual, but not religious. Among them, this spirituality includes a belief in a higher power, though not necessarily called God.

The shift away from organized religion presents challenges for us as we seek to invite others to join us in worship. Because of how many folks have been treated by the church in general, and for others who have observed how some portions of the church criticizes, ostracizes, and condemns some in our communities, becoming part of the church is, at best, a far distant option. There is a saying that there are two main reasons why someone does not believe in Jesus: either

they don't know any Christians, or they do. How we present ourselves to others, both in our treatment of other people and in identifying ourselves as active Christians will go a long way to changing the perceptions of those who have been damaged or rejected by the Church.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey