

Introduction

In November 2018, we released data regarding offertory income and demographic trends for the Oil City Catholic Community (OCCC). The release of that data prompted many discussions about what the future might look like for the Catholic Church in our region. These discussions are still ongoing, and we know that many more discussions will follow. At the time of the initial “data blast,” I expressed my intention to release more data – this time, regarding Sacraments – in the future. This document fulfills that promise.

On April 23, *The Derrick* published an article entitled, “Venango among counties with highest population loss percentage.”¹ The article presents data from the U.S. Census Bureau (compiled by the Pennsylvania State Data Center) showing that Venango County experienced a 6.8% population drop in the eight year period from 2010-2018. This represents the third highest population loss (by percentage) in the state. In human terms, this means that between 2010 and 2018, the population of Venango County dropped by 3,726 people.²

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Venango County peaked at 65,328 in the 1950 census. Estimates in 2017 show the County’s population at 51,726, a 20.86% decrease. Oil City reported a population peak of 22,075 in the census of 1930. As of 2017, Oil City has an estimated population of 9,863, a decrease of 55.32%. The amount of change in these statistics can be stark. The sacramental data for the Oil City Catholic Community is even more stark.

Baptisms reached their peak at 323 in 1950. By 1975, the number of Baptisms had already dropped by 58.2% to 135. In 2018 there were only 14 baptisms, a 95.67% decrease from the high point in 1950. (For comparison, there were 55 burials in 2018, about four times the number of baptisms).

First Communion also reached their peak of 153 in the year 1950. The number remained fairly stable in 1975 (143 first communions) but has dropped precipitously to 24 first communions in 2018, an 84.31% decrease.

Confirmation by its nature of being delayed until adolescence has declined slightly less than Baptism, with the number of Confirmations have dropped by only 94.54% from the high point of 348 Confirmations in 1950 to 19 Confirmations in 2018. It’s worth noting that in 1950, St. Joseph’s alone had almost 200 Confirmations, with St. Stephen’s having well over 100 (see explanation of 1950s Confirmations below). By 1975, that number had already dropped dramatically; St. Joseph’s had 54 Confirmations that year, and St. Stephen’s had 75.

¹ “Venango among counties with highest population loss percentage.” *The Derrick*. 23 April 2019.

² “2018 County Total Population Estimates Released.” PA Data Center. <https://pasdc.hbg.psu.edu/sdc/pasdc_files/researchbriefs/Apr_2019_CntyEst18.pdf>

The pages that follow are spreadsheets and graphs illustrating the data which I have presented in summary here. You will note that the data is not entirely complete. Data from pre-1950 tends to be incomplete, especially in the smaller parishes. Confirmation data is also somewhat difficult to utilize because in the 1950s, the sacrament was only offered in each parish once every 3 years or so. For that reason, the high water mark of 348 Confirmations can be somewhat misleading, as it really represents almost 5 years of Confirmation classes. Even if that were accounted for in calculating, annual classes at the time would have been 4 times greater than each of our most recent Confirmation class. Ultimately, the baptismal numbers are easier to follow.

Marriage is a difficult Sacrament to understand by numbers alone. There has been an 88.12% decrease in the number of marriages in our parishes since 1950, from the high point of 101 marriages in 1950 to only 12 marriages in 2018. Furthermore, of those 12 couples, 7 couples live locally. The remaining 5 couples reside outside Venango County.

These statistics can make for sobering and even painful reading. Nevertheless, they reflect a reality that we are all aware of but are unsure of how to face; namely, that the Church – and indeed the whole population - is shrinking in western Pennsylvania. Rapidly. We can be sure that the baptismal number will continue to drop in the coming years unless we are able to refocus our efforts on living our faith fully and living our lives as missionary disciples who draw others into the beauty of the faith.

The Tomb of Christ is still empty. The stone has still been rolled away. The prison bars of death have still been broken. Despite the stark reality of the data before us, one thing is clear: Jesus Christ is Lord. And we are called to worship Him, to serve Him, and to proclaim Him to the world. That task is unchanged.

The task which our ancestors carried for 2,000 years has fallen squarely on our shoulders. We must preach the Gospel. “Cultural Catholicism” is no longer enough. We must face the reality of our situation. We must equip ourselves to face the task ahead of us – the task of Evangelization. We must commit ourselves more fervently to the Lord. We must surrender our lives to the will of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.. To Him be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Ian R. McElrath
Parochial Vicar

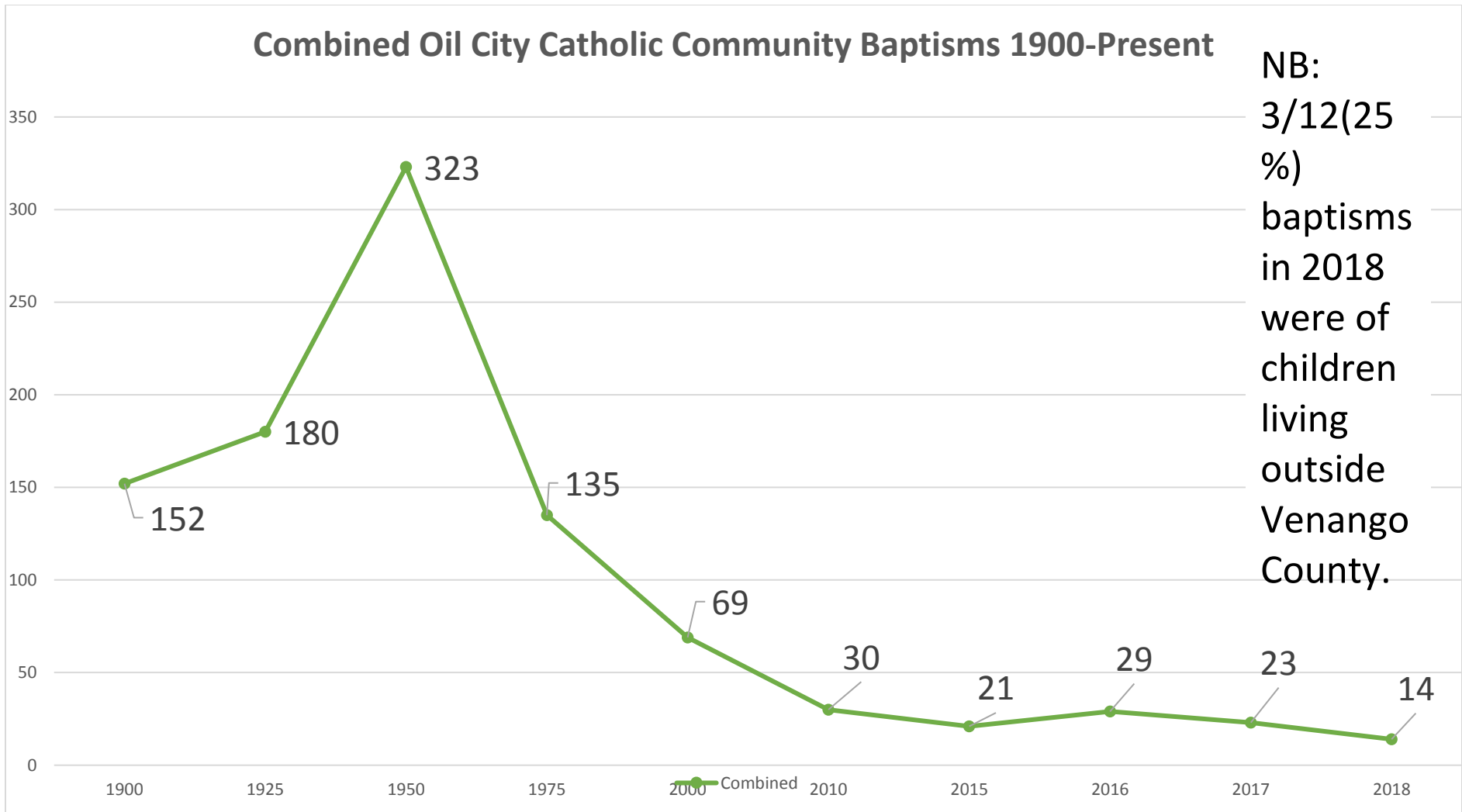
Oil City Catholic Community Baptismal Statistics 1900-Present

	1900	1925	1950	1975	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018
SJ	88	71	94	59	24	10	7	7	16	7
SS	28	73	150	50	33	18	10	16	7	7
Assu.	36	18	47	4	4	1	2	3	0	0
OLHC		18	32	11	5	1	2	3	0	0
Venant.				11	3					0
Combined	152	180	323	135	69	30	21	29	23	14

Graph below.

Combined Oil City Catholic Community Baptisms 1900-Present

NB:
3/12(25
%)
baptisms
in 2018
were of
children
living
outside
Venango
County.

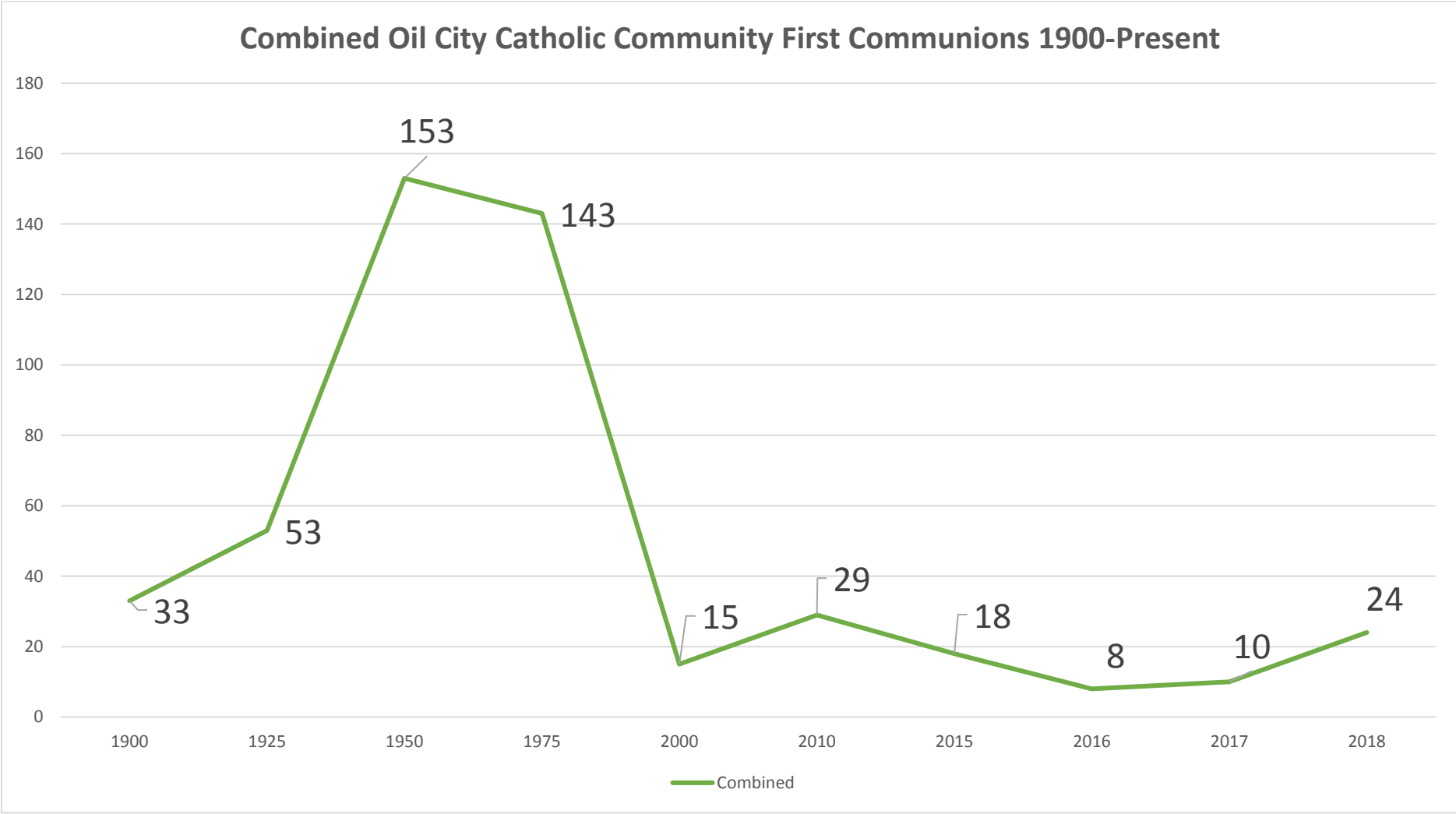


Oil City Catholic Community First Communion Statistics 1900-Present

	1900	1925	1950	1975	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018
SJ	28	53	74	50	8	6	7 ?		3	7
SS			52	79 ?		23	11	8	7	17
Assu.	5		17	4	5					0
OLHC			10	10	0					0
Venant.					2					0
Combined	33	53	153	143	15	29	18	8	10	24

Graph below.

Combined Oil City Catholic Community First Communions 1900-Present

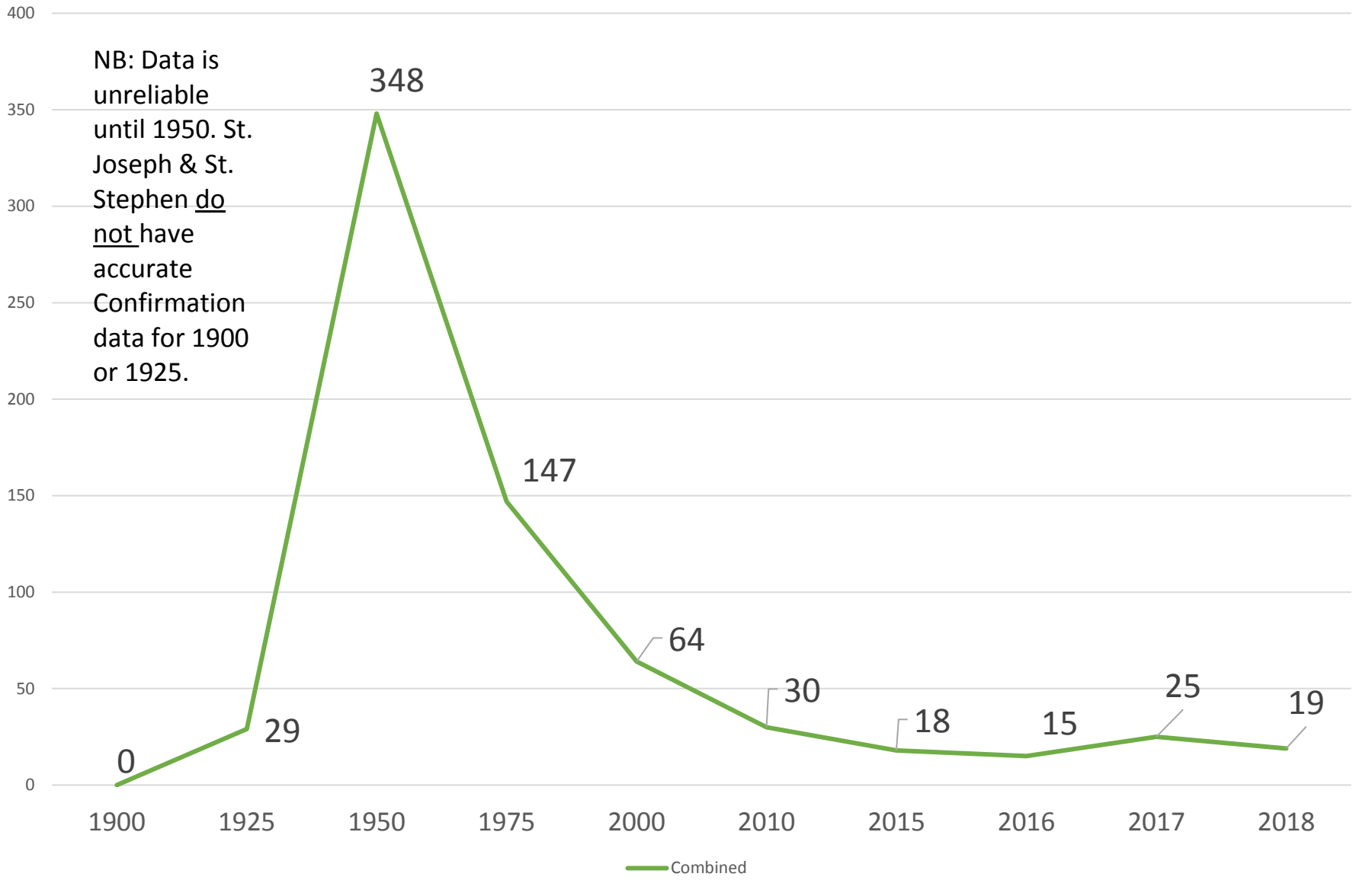


Oil City Catholic Community Confirmation Statistics 1900-Present

	1900	1925	1950	1975	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018
SJ			191	54	23	10 ?	?		10	7
SS			120	75	27	18	16	13	13	12
Assu.			31	0	5	1	1	1	1	0
OLHC			6	18	8	1	1	1	1	0
Venant.		29			1					0
Combined	0	29	348	147	64	30	18	15	25	19

Graph below.

Combined Oil City Catholic Community Confirmations 1900-Present



Oil City Catholic Community Marriage Statistics 1900-Present

	1900	1925	1950	1975	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018
SJ	19	17	37	32	8	5	4	0	3	7
SS	18	13	34	32	11	8	10	5	4	5
Assu.	13	23	23	9	0	0				0
OLHC			7	5	1	2				0
Venant.										0
Combined	50	53	101	78	20	15	14	5	7	12

Graph below.

