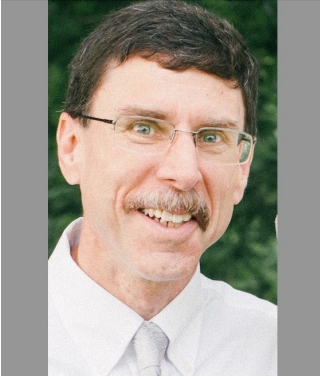


TODAY



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ARTICLE #1 OF 3

- Community News That Matters Nationwide • Award-Winning
- Recording Connecticut's Underreported Upside
- Covering the Heart of the Farmington Valley and Beyond

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Sacred Radio – WIHS carries torch as oldest Christian station



WIHS Offers Rare Blend as CT's Longest-Running Religious Radio Outlet

About 175 radio stations are based in Connecticut, covering the state's audio landscape with music, news and talk shows galore. From the Connecticut shoreline in the south to the Massachusetts line along the northern border, and from the eastern border of Rhode Island to the New York state line in the west, radio airwaves spread far and wide — blanketing and blessing and blitzing listeners across Connecticut's 5500 square miles.

Christian radio stations in Connecticut comprise a shorter and more select list. Christian radio is part of a broader classification typically identified as religious radio, encompassing broadcast formats that feature an established institutional religion such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism or another belief system.

Connecticut is home to 13 religious radio stations, according to the Pew Research Center, representing about 12% of all AM and FM stations licensed in the state — the lowest percentage of religious radio stations of any U.S. state. North Carolina has the highest percentage nationally: about 36% and 182 stations overall.

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Connecticut's oldest and longest-running religious station is WIHS.

Based in Middletown, WIHS identifies specifically as a Christian radio outlet. Eight radio stations in the Constitution State identify as Christian, according to WIHS general manager Matt Harper.

Located at 104.9 on the FM dial, WIHS debuted in 1969 — three months after the Apollo 11 moon landing, two months after the legendary Woodstock music festival, and one month before Sesame Street premiered on public television. The iconic Sesame Street show launched on November 10, 1969, and WIHS began broadcasting on October 11 after seven years of careful preparation and prayer.

A staff of 19 employees — seven full-time and 12 part-time — help WIHS broadcast on the air and online 24/7. The station's content features an eclectic blend of traditional and contemporary Christian music coupled with talk radio that includes devotional programs, radio drama and hourly newscasts. Some programs are nationally syndicated while others are produced locally in the Middletown studio.

WIHS is listener-supported and commercial-free. The station is operated by the nonprofit Connecticut Radio Fellowship.

"When responding to questions about other Christian radio stations in Connecticut," says Harper, "what I usually explain is that none of them have the same unique hybrid Christian format as WIHS: half music featuring the largest variety of Christian contemporary music in Connecticut, and half Bible teaching with exceptional content."

For many years, the WIHS slogan was: Your Station for Inspiration and Information. Today, the slogan is: Your Station for Hope and Encouragement.

The call letters WIHS stand for We're In His Service. In the radio realm, call letters are the unique sequence of letters that legally identify a broadcast station.

In the United States, call letters must be registered with the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC can assign the specific letters, or a radio station can choose the letters to boost and communicate its brand, with one caveat: Stations east of the Mississippi River must begin with a W, while stations west of the river must begin with a K.

For example, Chicago-based WGN stands for World's Greatest Newspaper given its connection to the Tribune Company. U.S. radio stations generally have four call letters, but several legacy stations that date back to the 1920s use three letters.

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The WIHS nomenclature has a double meaning. Besides the We're In His Service designation, the IHS in WIHS is an abbreviation of the Greek word for Jesus that was utilized in the early Church and in Christian art and architecture, according to a book about the station's history titled "Call of Service" — and this nod to Jesus of Nazareth explains who is referred to by the pronoun "His" in the WIHS call letters.

"Before WIHS launched, the New York and Boston areas had Christian radio stations, but Connecticut was a Christian radio desert," says Drew Crandall, WIHS board president and founder/president of Vernon-based marketing firm Keep In Touch.

While WIHS has existed for more than a half-century as the first religious and Christian radio station in Connecticut, the state's earliest stations overall date back over a century.

Here are the five oldest currently broadcasting Connecticut radio stations, ranked by their initial on-air broadcast:

- 1 — WDRC • December 10, 1922 • AM and FM presence — Connecticut's oldest surviving commercial station — originally WPAJ — WPAJ's call letters were changed to WDRC on February 21, 1925
- 2 — WTIC • February 10, 1925 • AM and FM presence
- 3 — WICC • November 8, 1926 • AM and FM presence
- 4 — WATR • June 15, 1934 • AM and FM presence
- 5 — WNLC • September 13, 1936 • AM-FM presence earlier • FM only today

Note that if the benchmark for Connecticut's oldest currently broadcasting station is when the call letters were established, WTIC claims the oldest and longest-running crown. But WDRC is the standard answer to the potential Jeopardy game-show question: What is Connecticut's oldest radio station?

However, several other state radio outlets that no longer exist were licensed before WTIC and WDRC, and began broadcasting earlier than those two granddaddy stations. The five-station answer to that trivia question is as follows — WCJ in 1921 and four stations in 1922: WAAQ, WDAK, WGAH and WKAX.

According to a spokesperson for the Connecticut Broadcasters Association, precisely 175 Connecticut-based radio stations are licensed by the FCC. But more stations might be present in the state because it's possible for an unlicensed, low-power pirate outlet to illegally broadcast over the airwaves. For example, per RadioWorld.com, the FCC identified several illegal or potentially illegal broadcasters in Connecticut in 2017.

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Among the state's 175 FCC-licensed outlets, the FM-AM split is as follows: 116 FM stations (66%) and 59 AM stations (34%) — and some outlets maintain a dual presence on both the AM and FM dials.

Crandall observes that definitively answering questions about the number of radio stations in Connecticut can be more complex than a surface query indicates.

"The radio landscape is complicated because listeners in southwestern Connecticut can listen to New York City radio stations, listeners in northern Connecticut can listen to Massachusetts radio stations, and listeners in eastern Connecticut can listen to radio stations in Rhode Island and metro Boston," says Crandall, who is a 1973 graduate of Simsbury High School, situated in the heart of the state's distinctive Farmington Valley.

The advent of the internet in mainstream American life three decades or so ago further conflates and complements the radio realm.

"Before WIHS launched, the New York and Boston areas had Christian radio stations, but Connecticut was a Christian radio desert" — Drew Crandall • WIHS board president

"With most radio stations live-streaming and having their own apps, the list of stations that broadcast in Connecticut is practically endless," Crandall notes. "But if you focus on radio stations that are based in Connecticut, including networks that own stations in Connecticut, the list can be trimmed significantly."

FM stations in the Constitution State include a mix of commercial music stations, college radio and public radio networks like WNPR. AM stations are typically dedicated to news, sports and talk radio. As a commercial-free and listener-supported enterprise, WIHS is unique.

"Regarding the number and type of financial supporters God has given us," Harper says, "WIHS has over 1600 financial supporters annually — how many of those supporters are churches vs. individuals, I am not able to say without diving into the data ... Our donor base has grown through the decades."

Harper explains that the term "financial supporters" includes individuals, couples, families, churches, parachurch ministries and businesses of various sizes.

More than 4000 terrestrial religious radio stations broadcast in the United States, according to the Pew Research Center report referenced earlier — about one-quarter of all U.S. stations licensed by the FCC.

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About 98% of U.S. adults live within coverage range of at least one religious radio station. Published in March 2026, Pew's online report focuses on AM and FM stations across America that primarily broadcast religious or faith-based content.

"When responding to questions about other Christian radio stations in Connecticut, what I usually explain is that none of them have the same unique hybrid Christian format as WIHS" — Matt Harper • WIHS general manager

Currently, through March 2026, the national total of religious radio stations is 15,667 — 4310 stations on the AM dial, 6574 stations on the FM dial, and 4783 educational FM stations. The FCC Media Bureau has historically released a Broadcast Station Totals report four times per year.

Regarding the term "terrestrial" when applied to radio stations, here is some elucidation:

A terrestrial radio outlet is an Earth-based broadcast station that transmits audio content via electromagnetic radio waves from physical towers directly to local receivers, such as a car radio. The term "terrestrial" distinguishes traditional over-the-air radio from satellite or internet-based broadcasts.

Terrestrial radio stations utilize ground-based antennas to send signals via line-of-sight transmission. Land-based stations transmit radio waves for free at a certain frequency — the specific AM or FM channel — while internet radio outlets may require a paid subscription.

Since these radio signals rely on an Earth-bound transmitter, a terrestrial broadcast is limited to a local or regional geographic area. A satellite- or internet-based broadcast can reach all human beings on the planet, as long as they have the necessary radio receiver or internet-enabled device.

By the way, AM stands for Amplitude Modulation and FM for Frequency Modulation.

Given the prevailing Christian belief that God not only operates in time and space but also transcends earthly realities, the staff and five-member board of WIHS evidently see their faith-based radio station as both terrestrial and heavenly.

"Our particular blend of local programming occupies a very specialized lane of media content that is distinctive and high-impact," Harper says. "It is a stewardship we take seriously."

• **This is the first story in an anticipated *Today Magazine* series on WIHS and the Connecticut radio realm**

TODAY publisher and editor-in-chief Bruce Deckert is a multi-award-winning journalist who believes all people merit awards when we leverage our various God-given gifts for good. He has previously worked in the communication realm at ESPN Digital Media, the Journal Register Company and The Master's School.

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