

PCUSA reports steepest member loss in 25 years: Nearly 70,000 people

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The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) last year suffered its largest single-year drop in membership—nearly 70,000 people—since the denomination’s creation by merger in 1983.

Church officials at the Louisville, Kentucky, headquarters announced June 22 that the 2008 decline was the biggest numerical and percentage net membership loss in the 25-year period. Total membership is now 2,140,165 in 10,751 congregations.

Nearly 104,000 people joined the PCUSA last year, but the good news was offset by losses, according to the Presbyterian News Service.

Death claimed 34,101 Presbyterians, and another 34,340 were members of the 25 congregations that left the PCUSA for other denominations. But the crusher was “a staggering 104,428” people who were removed from congregations’ rolls and who, for the most part, did not join any other church, according to the PCUSA’s annual statistical report.

Those who have “gradually drifted away from our congregations” are a particular cause for concern, said stated clerk Gradye Parsons in a statement.

Parsons said the trend was also reflected in a recent study on religious affiliation by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, which found that seven in ten former Protestants had left their childhood religious affiliation. “Initially, they are in worship every Sunday, then every other Sunday, and then gone,” said Parsons.