

Methodist giving dropped as membership declined: But number of churchgoers up

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U.S. membership in the United Methodist Church fell to 7.77 million in 2008—its biggest one-year percentage drop (1.01 percent) since 1974.

Giving was down as well in that first year of the recession as the largest mainline denomination received only 89 percent, or \$126.3 million, of what was budgeted for domestic and foreign missions. Average worship attendance was down 1.83 percent for that year, officials told the United Methodist News Service.

Though figures are not yet tallied for 2009, “church leaders are reporting that ministry happened on tighter budgets,” said Moses Kumar, top executive of the United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration.

Methodists saw an upturn in 2008, however, in a lesser-known category of churchgoers counted by the UMC. The number of “constituents,” persons who are not church members but for whom the church assumes pastoral responsibility, increased 1 percent over the 2007 total. Increases in that category were reported by 36 of the 63 annual (regional) conferences.

“This indicates the picture may not be as bleak as the membership data alone indicate,” said Scott Brewer, an official with the finance council. “We assume that increasingly people getting active in churches today are more reluctant to officially become a member of the church.”