

# Members down 3 percent in PCUSA, adult baptisms up: The lowest yearly drop in the last decade

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The net losses in membership in 2009 amounted to the lowest yearly drop in the last decade for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), though the 3 percent decrease to 2,077,138 members was part of a good news/bad news assessment from the denomination's top executive. "The good news is that adult baptisms rose for the first time in at least four years," said Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the PCUSA.

The total number of congregations, now at 10,657, included the loss of 94 churches, 15 of them dismissed to other denominations. The latter figure of defecting congregations was down from 25 in 2008. Newly organized churches numbered 26 in 2009.

"What continues to sadden me is that the overwhelming majority of the loss in membership is in the category of 'other,' which means these are brothers and sisters in Christ who did not die or transfer to another congregation, but probably quietly slipped out the back door," Parsons said to Presbyterian News Service.

Although controversial social issues are thought to take their toll on mainline denominations, a number of evangelical church bodies have seen their numbers drop as well in the last decade—symptomatic of "aging" traditional congregations.

A survey of PCUSA congregations in late 2008 and early 2009 indicated that the median age of Presbyterians is 61, up from 58 in 2001. Four out of five worshipers in its pews are age 45 or older, the study showed.