

PCUSA membership drop in 2012 exceeds 2011 slide

News in the [June 26, 2013](#) issue

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which voted to ordain openly gay and lesbian ministers in May 2011, continued its multidecade membership losses, reporting the loss of more than 100,000 members last year.

The PCUSA—like other mainline denominations—has been the victim of demographic factors, such as an aging membership, and prolonged disputes over volatile social issues. Many doctrinally conservative congregations have debated over the past two years whether to join like-minded denominations or fellowships.

The total membership now stands at 1,849,496, compared to 1,952,287 at the end of 2011. The number of congregations at the end of 2012 stood at 10,262, 204 fewer than a year earlier.

“Even as congregations and their respective (regional) presbyteries faithfully, although often painfully, sought to discern their denominational affiliation in serving Christ’s mission—in some cases resulting in dismissal from the PCUSA—only 29 percent of the denomination’s 173 presbyteries dismissed churches in 2012,” said a spokesperson.

Decisions by discontented congregations picked up last year, according to statistics released May 30 by the denomination’s General Assembly office in Louisville, Kentucky. The PCUSA relinquished 21 congregations to other denominations in 2011, but 110 made transfers, or “dismissals,” last year.

Membership losses came mostly through such transfers—52,064 individuals—nearly double the departures in membership in 2011.

Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons, the top executive in the PCUSA, noted that current numbers only “follow a trend that began in the 1950s.” Citing a recent Pew study on the declines in membership common to all Protestant denominations, Parsons said, “The 2012 statistics challenge us as Presbyterians to connect with the ever-growing

number of those with no religious affiliation.”