

Overview of Membership, Attendance and Giving Trends in the Episcopal Church

The final active baptized membership total for domestic parishes and missions in 2005 was 2,205,376, which represents a decline of 42,443 members from 2004. This 1.9% loss follows declines of 1.6% in both 2003 and 2004, 0.4% in 2002, and was the most serious percentage decline in membership during the last 25 years. For each of the three years prior to 2002, domestic membership in the Episcopal Church increased slightly.

Only 16 domestic Episcopal dioceses increased in active baptized membership in 2005. During the past five years the number of dioceses with growth declined each year, from 55 growing in 2001, 49 in 2002, 21 in 2003, 20 in 2004 and 16 in 2005.

Average Sunday worship attendance (ASA) also declined in 2005, but the loss was not as serious as in 2003 and 2004. Average Sunday attendance in 2005 was 787,271, down 8,494 from 2004. This 1.0% loss follows declines of 3.3% in 2004, 2.8% in 2003 and 1.4% in 2002. In the decade prior to 2002, average Sunday worship attendance grew in seven out of ten years. The moderation in the decline in ASA in 2005 may result in part from the fact that Sunday fell on Christmas in 2005. Churches counted Christmas Eve services along with all Christmas day services—greatly increasing Sunday attendance over a typical weekend. Without the Sunday on Christmas effect, it is likely that average Sunday attendance would have dropped by around 26,000 (-3.0%) in 2005—which would make the loss in attendance more consistent with the 2005 loss in membership.

Due to the moderation in the decline in average Sunday worship attendance, more domestic dioceses experienced attendance growth (35) in 2005 than was the case in 2004 (only 11). In 2001 a majority of dioceses grew in worship attendance (58), but this number fell to 14 in 2002 and 13 in 2003.

The number of domestic, active, filing parishes and missions dropped from 7,200 to 7,155 in 2005. The net loss of 45 congregations resulted from closing 37 congregations (due to declining membership), 3 mergers, 7 newly non-filing (but not closed) congregations, and 9 withdrawals. The loss of 56 filing congregations was partially offset by 11 new, newly filing or re-instated congregations. Because four of the congregations that withdrew from The Episcopal Church averaged over 300 in worship attendance, the total loss in members and attendees due to withdrawals was fairly large: -4,537 active members and -2,715 attendees.

Membership and attendance increased in Episcopal dioceses outside the 50 states in the USA, resulting in a lower overall decline for all Episcopal dioceses than for domestic Episcopal dioceses. As shown in Episcopal Statistical Totals: 2004-2005, the 2005 PECUSA membership total was 2,369,477—down 35,688 from 2004. Average Sunday attendance for the Episcopal Church was 830,706—down only 2,966 from 2004. Much of the increase among non-domestic dioceses resulted from more complete reporting from the Diocese of Haiti in 2005. Nevertheless, most non-domestic dioceses experienced some growth in 2005—particularly the Dominican Republic.

The decline in membership within the Episcopal Church is similar to that occurring in several other mainline denominations. Our loss of 1.9% in 2005 can be compared to losses of 1.6% by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and 2.1% by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Losses in the United Church of Christ were more serious (-3.3%), but less serious than projected losses in the United Methodist Church (-1.1%). Since 2000, losses in the Episcopal Church are nearly identical to the ELCA (-5.3% and -5.4%, respectively). United Methodist losses were 4.2%, followed by Presbyterians (-8.4%) and the United Church of Christ (-10.7%).

Unlike membership and attendance, church income and spending were up in 2005. Among domestic dioceses, Plate and Pledge giving was almost \$1.3 Billion in 2005. This total was up 2.9% over 2004, and was just below the rate of inflation (+3.4%). Total income and total investments both increased at rates higher than inflation (+5.6% and +4.9%, respectively), resulting in real gains. Part of this increase was due to a marked rise in large gifts and bequests in 2005, some related to capital campaigns. In addition, several churches had very large increases in income through real estate transactions.

Among non-domestic dioceses, Plate and Pledge giving and total expenses were also higher in 2005 than 2004. However, total income dropped slightly. Due to the variety of currencies involved, it is not possible to calculate a rate of inflation for non-domestic dioceses.

Summarized by C. Kirk Hadaway, Director of Research, DFMS