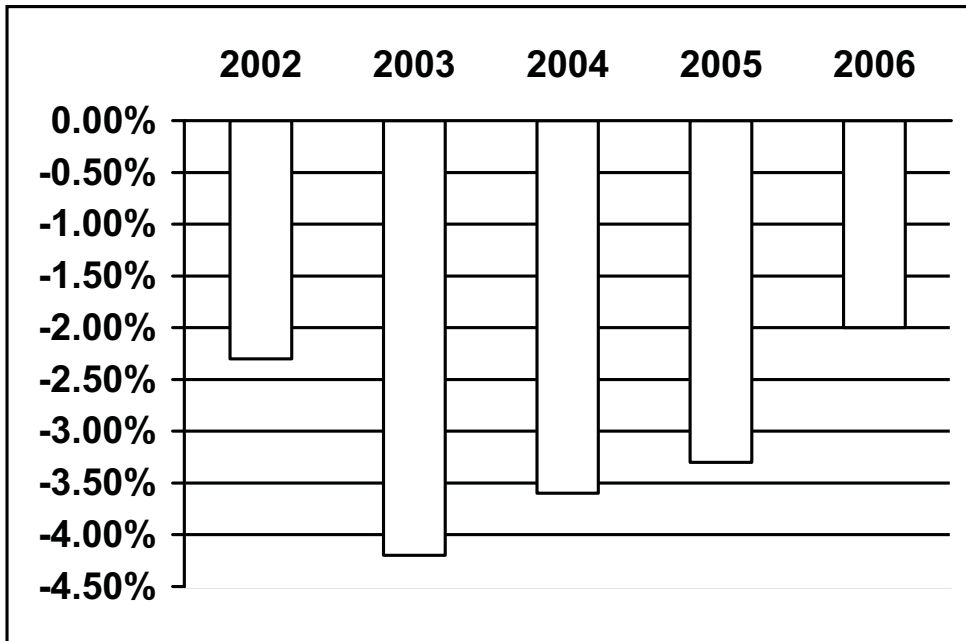


## Statistician's Report

I'd like to thank everyone who contributed to this report by submitting the 2006 statistical tables. The statistics are one way for United Methodists to develop a picture of how we are being the church. Although each congregation reports more than 75 numbers, I will focus on one statistic today: worship attendance and use this to explore ways to look at the New England Conference picture.

Last year, during a typical week in New England, 32,803 people gathered for worship in United Methodist churches. For our conference, with 531 churches, an "average size" congregation has 62 people attending worship. Using the attendance statistic in conjunction with the membership number (93,459), we can calculate a ratio of worship to membership of 0.35. One interpretation of this ratio is that less than one-third of our members are attending church on a typical Sunday since the worship attendance figure includes children and visitors who are not members. But this ratio does not mean that only one third of our members ever attend worship since there are often members who attend once or twice a month instead of weekly. It does challenge us, however, to continue to find ways to deepen the commitment of our existing membership to make weekly worship a priority.

Another perspective on worship attendance is developed when looking back at changes from previous years. If we go back one year, we find that the average worship attendance declined from 2005 to 2006 by slightly less than 2%. If we take a longer view (shown in the graph below) and look back at 5 years, we see that this year's decline is small compared to previous decreases recorded in the past four years. While, in general, a decrease is not something we celebrate, it is good to see this pattern of shrinking bars. It prompts the question, what will next year's bar look like? Can we picture next year's bar even smaller? Can we envision that new bar near zero? Can we even see the bar changing direction from negative to positive? If we can envision a positive outlook, we are already taking an important step toward making it a reality.



### 5 Year History: NEC Worship Attendance Declines

Another frame of reference, is to shift from examining attendance for the conference as a whole to the statistics for individual churches. We find that 37% of all churches reported an increase in attendance last year. Some increases were small and others were substantial; some were part of a pattern of growth and others were the first increase in a number of years. What would it take to make this 37% become 47% or 57%? Worship attendance is influenced by many different factors – nurture of members, quality worship services, evangelism, snowy winters, shifting demographics, effective Christian Formation programs, and the list goes on! A key to increasing this number is to recognize what changes are needed in a particular setting that will encourage additional persons to worship consistently.

Another view of worship attendance is to look at groups of differently sized churches.

<u>Worship Size Category</u>	<u>Percent of NEC churches</u>
0 to 50	51%
50 to 99	32%
100 to 149	9%
150 or more	8%

The majority of our churches have less than 50 people in attendance on an average Sunday. Only 17% of our churches have attendances of 100 or more. But if we shift this frame of reference, it allows us to see something else.

<u>Worship Size Category</u>	<u>% of People Attending Church</u>
0 to 50	23%
50 to 99	36%
100 to 149	17%
150 or more	24%

We are a conference of mostly small churches, but nearly half of New England United Methodists attend a church that has an average attendance larger than 100. To say it another way, although 51% of our churches have less than 50 people in attendance, only 23% of all people attending worship in our churches go to one of these small churches. On the other hand, only 8% of our churches have an average worship higher than 150, but 24% of the people attend one of these largest churches.

Still another interesting perspective when looking at these groups of churches is that the group of churches with the smallest attendance size showed an overall increase in their worship attendance last year— the only group to do so.

<u>Worship Size Category</u>	<u>Change in Worship Attendance 05 to 06</u>
0 to 50	+ 0.4%
50 to 99	- 1.7%
100 to 149	- 1.2%
150 or more	- 5.3%

The middle two groups had a decrease that was less than the conference average. Not every large church had a decrease last year, but as a group, the largest churches had a percentage decrease that was more than twice the conference average. These statistics do not provide an answer to why our largest churches struggled more while our smallest churches grew stronger, but they certainly call for further examination.

Finally, taking a geographic view, and comparing the changes in worship attendance for each district, we find that 3 of our 8 districts had high declines in attendance last year: Metro Boston Hope, Central Massachusetts, and Connecticut/Western MA all showed declines of more than 2%. (Mid-Maine and RISEM had smaller than average declines.) But there is good news too! Congratulations to Northern Maine, New Hampshire, and the Tri-State Districts. These 3 districts all reported increased worship attendance!

<u>District</u>	<u>Change in Worship Attendance 05 to 06</u>
Northern Maine	+ 1.0%
New Hampshire	+ 0.4%
Tri-State	+ 0.04%
Mid Maine	- 0.02%
RISEM	- 1.6%
Metro Boston Hope	- 3.2%
Central Massachusetts	- 5.3%
Connecticut/Western Massachusetts	- 5.9%

There is also a good story here. Two years ago, in my report, I cited the Tri-State District as having one of the largest declines in worship attendance. Later, I received a call from a Tri-state pastor, Ev Kuder, asking for more information. He told me that the clergy in his cluster wanted to respond in some way. Some of these people pastored churches that were growing, but wanted to work with others to strengthen their district. The Merrimack Valley Cluster, held a summit for clergy in their district to find out what type of resources were needed. Six months later, they held an event designed to provide training, support, and encouragement for each other. What a great example of United Methodists working together for change! Now, there is no way to statistically link the increased attendance to this story, but I don't think we need a statistic to convince us that if we continue to come together to vision, to support each other, and to work together, we will strengthen our witness for the Gospel here in New England.

*By Joy Mueller, Conference Statistician*