

Statistician's Report June 2008

The 2007 statistical reports show the New England Conference had 90,974 members in 527 churches in 8 districts at the end of last year. Recently, the results of a large study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life were published. One of this study's findings was that there is a significant amount of movement among American adults from one religious group to another. This result is confirmed by our conference statistics. If we look at our collective statistics from the time of the 1994 merger, we can see that 31,632 people joined our churches by Profession of Faith. Nearly half of these are estimated to be youth who joined the church after taking a confirmation class. Another 8,203 people transferred their membership from another denomination and 16,421 transferred churches within the United Methodist Church. In all, this represents 56,256 people who became new members in one of our United Methodist churches in the last 14 years – and of these about 24,000 came from a non United Methodist background - a large number relative to our total membership. Of course, we not only have many new members, but we also have people who were removed from the membership rolls. The chart below compares the members received with the members removed in various categories. Although we record more new members through transfers from other denominations and transfers within United Methodism than we lose, we do not receive enough new members by Profession of Faith to outweigh the number of people who withdraw or die. The result is a consistent decline in membership numbers that has varied between 1% and 3% each year.

Membership Changes: 1994 thru 2007

	Members Received	Members Removed
Profession of Faith	31,632	
Withdrawn		41,830
Transfer (Other Denom.)	8,203	5,399
Transfer (UMC)	16,421	13,364
Deaths		22,262

After interviewing 35,000 adults across the United States, the Pew study determined that almost one quarter of American adults have left the faith tradition of their upbringing, either by switching to a different religious group or choosing not to affiliate with a faith tradition at all. This percentage rises to 44% when people who changed from one Protestant denomination to another are included. This means that there are many people who grew up in United Methodist churches but are no longer affiliated. It also means that there are a significant number of United Methodist adults who had a different faith tradition in their childhood. Another statistic from the Pew Study shows that while 65% of the U.S. adult population do not have children living at home, 72% of United Methodists have no children living at home. These statistics, I believe, are connected to trends that we have experienced. A number of our statistics related to young people have shifted dramatically since 1994. While our membership number dropped by 22%, the decrease in the percentage of youth enrolled in Sunday School is more than double that rate – 45% - from 5926 to 2925. The number of children enrolled in Sunday School has been more than cut in half – 17335 to 8248 (52%) as has the number of baptisms – 2815 to 1324 (53%).

In addition to numbers about membership, church school, and baptisms, the statistical tables also collect the average worship attendance for each church. 202 churches, 39% of all churches in our conference, increased their average worship attendance in 2007 compared to 2006. This percentage of churches reporting an increase is slightly higher than last year's. If we look at district-wide worship attendance figures, only one of the eight districts showed an overall increase. The Tri-State District had a collective attendance increase of 1.9%. It is worth noting that Tri-State has had a district worship attendance increase for two years in a row! Looking at the conference as a whole, 32,232 people attended a New England Conference United Methodist church on an "average" Sunday. This number is a 1.6% decrease from 2006, but once again this decrease is

smaller than last year's decrease of 2.0%. These percentage decreases have been successively shrinking in each of the last 5 years, and this year's is the smallest rate of decline since 2001.

These membership and worship attendance statistics as well as studies like the Pew Study are helpful pieces in thinking about how our church has changed and how best to respond to these changes. We know that we have fewer members, less people in church each Sunday, a marked decrease in children and youth, as well as fewer churches. Focusing on membership and worship attendance numbers is needed, but they only tell a piece of the story. When we turn to other statistics, we see several changes in our churches that point to our vitality as a community of faith.

The first encouraging sign is that we continue to see more adults coming together to grow in their faith and learn from each other. Last year there was a 4% increase in the adult participation in Sunday School after an 8% increase was posted in 2006.

Another important measure of growth in discipleship is peoples' giving. In 2006, the average weekly pledge for the conference as a whole rose last year from \$28.83 to \$29.65 – a 2.8% increase. This chart shows the average weekly pledges for 400 churches reporting the amount received in pledges and the number of pledging units for 2007. 15% of our churches, the last two rows together, report an average weekly pledge over \$40 per week.

Avg Weekly Pledge Amount	Number of Churches	Percent of Churches
Less than \$20	86	22%
\$20 to 29.99	161	40%
\$30 to \$39.99	91	23%
\$40 to \$49.99	33	8%
\$50 or more	29	7%

There also continue to be signs of increased participation in mission trips. According to the numbers reported on the statistical tables, both the number of churches participating in Mission Trips (VIM) and the number of people participating went up for the second straight year:

VIM Stats Year	Number of Churches	Number of People
2005	55	477
2006	71	608
2007	79	654

Finally, another statistic that reflects growth in discipleship is how our churches collectively spend their money. In 2007, our local churches together spent more money on mission than in 2006. Mission is defined for this purpose as the dollars given directly thru the conference office to General Church and Conference Advance Specials and Special Offerings, as well as money sent by local UMW units to the wider UMW, the mission dollars spent directly by churches for local missions such as shelters and soup kitchens, and money sent directly to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and Heifer International. These numbers do not include our mission share spending or Together for Tomorrow; they also do not include the collections of material aid that is so often done in our churches. Our 527 local churches spent \$2.78 Million last year helping others. This is an 18% increase in one year from the 2006 total of \$2.36 Million. This increase is despite fewer churches and fewer people! If we look back to 1995, when the mission spending was \$1.35 Million, local churches together have more than doubled the amount spent on mission!

I'd like to close with a quote from Rev. Taylor Burton-Edwards, Director of Worship Resources for the United Methodist Board of Discipleship. In responding to results of the Pew Study, Rev. Burton-Edwards offered these comments that I think capture a helpful perspective when looking at our statistics. He said that, "The study's data (Pew Study) is useful but shouldn't be the focus in measuring the church's vitality. It takes more than numbers, he said, to address the core question of whether the church is following Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." He goes on to say, "We've got the paradigm turned around... It's not about

getting people inside of the church; it's about getting Christians out. It's not about how many people are in our organization, but what level of spiritual impression people are experiencing. How are they being imprinted with the likeness of Jesus Christ? And what is the impact crater around them as a result?" May our spiritual impression continue to deepen and our impact crater continue to expand as we work together to proclaim Christ Boldly to this World.

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