

# Methodists see more no-growth churches: The one number that keeps going up

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“There is one number in our denomination that keeps going up,” observed Michael Coyner, a United Methodist bishop in Indiana and president of his church’s national Board of Discipleship. “It is the percentage of churches that did not receive even one person as a new member by profession of faith.”

That number rose to 43 percent of the 35,000 congregations in the nation’s second-largest Protestant denomination in 2004, the most recent year for which figures are available.

Both Coyner and Karen Greenwaldt, the top executive of the discipleship agency, cited that figure at a mid-March board meeting in Nashville. Congregations in that 43 percent “are in real trouble,” Greenwaldt said, pointing to their accompanying decline in membership, attendance and contributions.

The average age in the 8.1-million-member UMC is between 57 and 62, Greenwaldt noted, in contrast to what she said are millions of young people attending house churches, marketplace ministries and cyber-churches, reported the United Methodist News Service.

“They continue to avoid going to our churches and to similar denominations,” she said, blaming in part “passive” churchgoers’ addiction to a “consumer church.”