

Presbyterian numbers dip except for clergy: Fewer congregations, more ministers

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Active membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to drop, registering a dip of about 46,000 members last year to 2.26 million, according to statistics released by PCUSA officials in Louisville, Kentucky.

One upward trend was a net increase of 48 ministers to 21,360 in 2006, including 22 newly ordained clergy. While there were 56 fewer congregations last year (10,903) than in 2005, Laura Mendenhall, president of Columbia Theological Seminary, said she was “grateful” for the growth in clergy numbers “because so many of us are nearing retirement.”

Data also showed that the number of people transferring their memberships into PCUSA churches exceeds the number who transferred out. “Gains are higher than losses” in that category, said Kristine Valerius, manager of the PCUSA records.

However, the significant ongoing trend is fewer baptisms. Adult baptisms averaged less than one per church and child baptisms were just short of three per congregation, said Valerius. “Not the formula for growth,” she said.