

Presbyterian losses largest since '83: Decline "should call us to prayer and repentance"

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Last year the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) suffered its biggest single-year loss in communicant members since the reunion of the “northern” and “southern” denominations in 1983. The net decline during 2003 was 46,658 members, leaving the year-end membership at barely above 2.4 million.

News of the continuing membership decline, released three weeks before the start of the General Assembly June 26-July 3 in Richmond, Virginia, “should call us to prayer and repentance,” said PCUSA executive Clifton Kirkpatrick, who faces opposition for reelection as stated clerk of the denomination.

Following a pattern of recent years, the church body gained more members through new professions of faith and membership transfer from other churches than it lost through death and members switching to other denominations, said the Presbyterian News Service. That net gain was more than 47,000 people.

“Statistically, we are not losing people to other churches,” Kirkpatrick wrote in an analysis for *Presbyterian Outlook*. “Our problem is that we are losing our people to the secular world—to no active church affiliation.” That number, compiled under “other losses,” amounted to 112,624 people who simply left the church.