

ELCA membership drops for 16th straight year: Lutheran churches growing worldwide

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Membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the country's largest Lutheran denomination, has fallen for the 16th consecutive year, the ELCA has announced.

While Lutheran churches are growing worldwide—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa—baptized ELCA membership declined by more than 64,000 in 2007, a 1.34 percent drop. The church now counts 4.7 million baptized members in 10,448 congregations, and it showed a net loss of 22 churches.

Statistics released from the Chicago headquarters in mid-August also showed that although average weekly attendance dropped from the previous year, the ELCA gives generously and has valuable assets.

Total receipts for ELCA churches exceeded \$2.8 billion in 2007, a rise of more than \$67 million from the year before. Average giving went up 3.96 percent over 2006. The value of church assets increased to \$20.6 billion, a year's increase of nearly 7 percent.

"Congregational reports reflect the wealth of many ELCA congregations and the opportunities for expanding ministry," said David D. Swartling, national secretary for the denomination.

The church has made a concerted effort in recent years to diversify its membership, more than 98 percent of which is white. According to the report, multiethnic membership rose by 13.3 percent from 2006 to 2007.