

Membership trends for U.S. churches reported to be "stable"

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New York, February 14 (ENInews)--Trends in church membership in the United States remain stable, with churches that have grown in recent years showing continued growth and those with declining memberships experiencing continued drops, according to an annual publication that tracks church membership.

So-called "mainline" Protestant denominations continued to lose members, but so did the Southern Baptist Convention, the second largest denomination in the United States and its largest Protestant grouping, according to the 2011 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches, published by the New York-based National Council of Churches.

"The direction of membership (growth or decline) remains very stable," the Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, the Yearbook's long-time editor, writes in the 2011 edition being released this week, which tallies membership figures provided to the Yearbook in 2010 and were collected in 2009.

Among the churches recording gains: Jehovah's Witnesses, an increase of 2 percent, to 1,092,169 members; the Church of God, up 1.76 percent to 1,053,642 members; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, up 1.42 percent to 6,058,907 members. Also showing a slight gain was the Roman Catholic Church, the nation's largest church body, up 0.57 percent to 68.5 million members.

The Southern Baptist Convention, which the NCC described as "long a reliable generator of church growth," reported the third decline in as many years, down 0.42 percent to 16,160,088 members. The so-called "mainline" churches showing declines included the United Church of Christ, a drop of 2.83 percent to 1,080,199 members; the Presbyterian Church (USA), down 2.61 percent to 2,770,730 members; the Episcopal (Anglican) Church, down 2.48 percent to 2,006,343 members; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, down 1.96 percent to

4,542,868 members; the American Baptist Churches USA, down 1.55 percent to 1,310,505 members; and the United Methodist Church, down 1.01 percent to 7,774,931 members. Also showing a decline was the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), down 1.08 percent to 2,312,111 members.