

Methodists grow abroad, continue slippage in U.S.

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World membership in the United Methodist Church has risen above 12 million for the first time, but U.S. professing members dropped 1.2 percent to 7.8 million in the most recent data.

The major growth areas for the denomination are Africa and the Philippines, according to Scott Brewer, an official in the United Methodist Council on Finance and Administration.

Methodist membership in Africa, Asia and Europe grew from 3.5 million to 4.4 million in the five-year period ending in 2009, the United Methodist News Service reported. The U.S. membership decline of 1.2 percent occurred from 2008 to 2009.

A United Methodist spokesman said the remedy for a U.S. recovery in membership is well known. "There's no future for the United Methodist Church in the U.S. unless it can demonstrate that it can reach more people, younger people and more diverse people," said Lovett H. Weems Jr. of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.