

Why do local church statistics matter?

So a church gains or loses a few members from year to year... no big deal, right? But what if that church has doubled (or halved) in membership in the span of 40 years? Church statistics not only help answer the question of “How are we doing right now?” but also, “How are we doing in the long run?” A church’s leadership can review this data to interpret underlying meanings and help the congregation assess the story being told.

Apart from a church’s internal check-in, statistics provide information about the big picture and help researchers see trends, which in turn aid Church leaders in making decisions. For example, the number of Hispanic/Latino church members has gained more than 20,000 members in the past five years and is increasing at a rate of approximately 3% per year. This sort of information is integral when making a decision about languages used in church materials, for example. On a more local level, many bishops and annual conference cabinets use these statistics to assist in the clergy appointment process. Churches enjoying extraordinary success in a certain aspect of ministry, as well as those struggling in the same, can be identified.

In The United Methodist Church, the statistics are used by the general agencies for a variety of purposes:

- The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) uses them to help annual conferences, districts, and local churches plan how to more effectively minister within their own communities. Church statistics are combined with demographic data by the office of research to help local churches analyze where there are new opportunities for outreach.
- The United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH) uses them to assist in planning resources and marketing. The statistics help to determine where resources are already being used and where there may be opportunities to provide new resources to local churches.
- The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) and the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) use the information to assist in monitoring and raising consciousness of gender and racial/ethnic inclusiveness in The United Methodist Church. Gender and Racial/Ethnic membership information provides a measure of progress toward the United Methodist Church's commitment toward becoming a fully inclusive denomination.

While it is recognized churches are about more than the number of persons attending worship or how many persons are baptized in a year, those numbers help bring attention to matters warranting concern or celebration. Sharing with each other the objective data numbers provide helps us to keep our connection vital.