The United Methodists of Eastern Pennsylvania

Recruit and develop transformational leaders to make disciples and grow vital congregations for the transformation of the world.

Statistical Report

The following report was prepared by Paul Bernhardt, EPA statistician for the Extended Cabinet. The numbers included in this report represent not just statistics, but people—children of God whom we are called to serve. There are two ways we seek to discern our impact with people and serving people.

1. Qualitative: We share stories of God sightings and stories of how lives are changed. These stories are shared in congregations, in EPA leadership meetings and with the wider conference through the New*Spirit* and the EPA Digest.
2. Quantitative: Statistical data shows trends of our engagement with people. Each statistic represents a disciple of Jesus Christ, or a new disciple or someone our disciples serve.

We can be encouraged that we are emerging from the pandemic and making strong progress as evidenced in the first table below. We thank God for our pastors and lay leadership who are leading well.

You will also see in the second table our 10-year trends. There are areas for us to be concerned about. While challenging 10-year trends are being experienced in many other conferences across the United States, these trends can be slowed and even reversed over time as we focus on our strategic direction, **engage** with our congregational leaders and pastors to support and grow their leadership, and assist congregations in one or more of the **Pathways**.

EPA Comparison in the Northeastern Jurisdiction

In addition to the statistical report from Paul Bernhardt, the conclusion of this report includes a comparison of EPA with the nine other conferences in the northeastern part of the United States. This report measures key indicators of an annual conference. This component of the report delivers essential insights into the various key indicators of each annual conference. It illuminates our current rankings, identifies our strengths, and pinpoints areas where our endeavors could be intensified. This comparison allows us to reflect, learn, and grow together in our journey of serving the Lord and His people.
We thank Paul Bernhardt for his report and work with our statistical data.

2021 to 2022 Comparisons

The following congregational data is very encouraging. As you can see from the chart, churches are making progress as we emerge from the pandemic in six of the nine categories.

Statistical Category	2021	2022	% Change
Membership	81,143	78,536	-3.2
Average Weekly Worship Service Attendance	40,760	45,051	+10.5
In-person	16,844	20,169	+19.7
Online	23,916	24,882	+4.0
Average Weekly Church School Attendance	5,581	5,411	-3.1
Professions of Faith	593	925	+56.3
Baptisms	496	595	+20.0
Congregants in Christian Formation Groups	17,255	18,864	+9.3
Congregants Engaged in Missions	12,504	13,401	+7.2
Individuals Served by Missions	522,275	475,647	-8.9
Participants in Vacation Bible School	3,445	4,875	+41.5
Number of Households Giving to Local Church	27,893	28,142	+0.9

Note 1: Online worship attendance numbers are incorrectly inflating overall attendance numbers. Specifically, there are a number of churches with online worship numbers that are much higher than in-person attendance. Online attendance estimates may be inflated for multiple reasons, including using generous multiplier factors (for example, assuming there are 2.5 viewers per screen watching a service) and looking at Facebook views (which are significantly higher than number of screens actually tuned in for the service). Even with vigorous methods, online attendance is hard to estimate accurately.

Note 2: The attendance numbers in general (both in-person and online) are inaccurate for 2020 and 2021, where most churches had only online attendance for at least part of the year. In 2020, for example, it appears that many churches reported an in-person attendance average not for the whole year but for the pre-pandemic period. Similarly, online averages were likely only calculated using the weeks where virtual options were provided.

10-Year Changes (2012 vs. 2022) The 10-year category comparison is more concerning than the 2021 vs. 2022 comparison, generally showing decreasing participation in worship over the past decade. Note that since online attendance numbers are not accurate, I have included two estimates of overall average weekly attendance for 2022: a conservative approach assuming actual online attendance is 25% of what was reported and an optimistic approach assuming actual online attendance is 50% of what was reported. Based on trends occurring prior to the pandemic, the conservative approach is likely the more reasonable estimate for 2022 average weekly attendance.

Statistical Category	2012	2022	% Change
Membership	111,148	78,536	-29.3
Average Weekly Worship Service Attendance (conservative and	41,779	26,390	-36.8
optimistic estimates for 2022 are provided)		32,610	-21.9
Average Weekly Church School Attendance	13,592	5,411	-60.2
Professions of Faith	2,086	925	-55.7
Baptisms	1,303	595	-54.3
Congregants in Christian Formation Groups	36,991	18,864	-49.0
Congregants Engaged in Missions	9,345*	13,401	+43.4

*2013 data was used because 2012 data was not available

As can be seen, while attendance/membership is down significantly, Sunday School attendance, number of new professions of faith and baptisms, and formation group participation are down more severely (roughly half or less of 2012 numbers). On a positive note, mission involvement has increased significantly.

Questions and responses from our statistician.

1. *Do you have any projections for EPA's future?*
   Projections are always challenging, but even more so due to the effects of COVID (2022 was the first year since 2019 where many churches weren't operating under relatively strict COVID protocols). Thus, it is hard to say if attendance/participation numbers in 2023 will resume a downward trajectory, similar to the past 10 years, or whether they will continue to bounce back as they did in 2022. The in-person attendance at my home church, for example, is actually up significantly from last year. So, I am optimistic that numbers across the conference will continue a post-COVID bounce-back. Here are some projections for membership and attendance for 2023 compared to 2022, determined by combining recent trends together with the loss of five churches disaffiliating (statistical confidence intervals are not provided since there are a great number of unknown factors):

   a. Membership by end of 2023: 74,200 (-5.5%). Or if disaffiliating churches are still included, 75,860 (-3.5%)
   b. In-person attendance in 2023:
      i. Optimistic (assuming trends prior to COVID but no loss due to COVID): 25,690 (+21.5%). Or if disaffiliating churches are still included, 26,360 (+23.5%)
      ii. Pessimistic (assuming no further bounce back from COVID but also no further decline): 19,470 (-3.5%); if still including disaffiliating churches, 20,170 (-0%);

2. *Do you see any correlations in the data?*
   Many of the categories seem to be trending together pretty closely, with the exception of missions involvement. Here are a few categories with the highest correlations over the past ten years:
   a. Membership and attendance (correlation= 0.987)
   b. Membership and Sunday/Church School attendance (correlation=0.977)
   c. New Professions of Faith and Baptisms (correlation=0.955)
   d. Sunday/Church School and Formation Group involvement (correlation=0.954)

3. *Are you seeing any bright spots in the data?*
   There are definitely several bright spots.
   a. *There has been a post-COVID rebound in all categories except membership and Sunday/church school attendance*. In a worst case scenario, we may have feared no bounce back at all. I am optimistic that attendance and other category numbers may increase further in 2023.
   b. *The churches in our conference have a greater virtual presence than before COVID.* While online attendance may not be measured very accurately, I think we can safely say that it is much higher than before the pandemic. The livestreaming of services has made it possible for homebound members, traveling individuals, immunocompromised individuals, etc., to attend church virtually. Many churches were also forced to learn other new technologies that have provided positive benefits. For example, virtual meetings have been shown to be shorter on average, which combined with less travel time, may lead to fewer church leaders experiencing burnout. Additionally, virtual meetings are more environmentally friendly, with less paper printed and less use of fossil fuels for travel.
   c. *The number of individuals involved in missions is up significantly in the last decade*. This is true even after taking into account a large drop in participation since the start of the pandemic and despite a decrease in membership and attendance overall. Hopefully this is a sign that our churches are becoming more outwardly focused.

4. *Are you seeing any caution signs in the data?*
   As mentioned in the document, membership and attendance are down. That said, there are a few related caution signs that could be even more serious in the long term.
   a. Involvement in Christian formation groups and Sunday/Church School is down much more significantly than church attendance, which could indicate lesser levels of spiritual maturity and commitment among those who are attending church.
   b. New professions of faith (through confirmation or other means) and baptisms are both down much more significantly than attendance, indicating that church involvement with the younger generations is down more than older adults. Obviously, involvement by younger individuals is crucial to the future of the church.

Jurisdictional Key Indicators

The following chart has seven key indicators of a conference's health in discipleship and leadership areas. EPA is highlighted in yellow. Because the conferences have different size of memberships, the rankings are weighted by membership so that larger conferences are not given an advantage over smaller conferences. For example, conference 1 and 7 have similar size membership and conference 10 has almost twice the membership of conference 1.

Conference	# of Baptisms Ranking	# of Children in Sunday School Ranking	# of Youth in Sunday School and Youth Groups Ranking	# of clergy under 35 years of age Ranking	# of Profes-sions of Faith Ranking	Small Groups Partici-pation Ranking	# of People Engaged in Hands on Mission Ranking	Average Rank
Conference 1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1.4
Conference 2	4	4	4	7	5	3	1	4.0
Conference 3	9	2	3	1	8	2	3	4.0
Conference 4	3	3	2	4	7	6	8	4.7
Conference 5	1	7	6	6	2	9	9	5.7
Conference 6	6	6	9	3	4	8	5	5.9
Conference 7	5	5	5	10	3	7	6	5.9
Conference 8	7	8	7	5	9	4	7	6.7
Conference 9	8	9	8	9	6	5	4	7.0
Conference 10	10	10	10	8	10	10	10	9.7

EPA is ranked in the second half among our sister conferences. We are ranked high in professions of faith (new disciples); and there is room for growth in the other areas. The Extended Cabinet believes that in time, EPA can be at or near the top. Conferences that focus on the key indicators tend to have an increased number of healthier vital congregations. We are not looking to be better than other conferences but to better serve God and sustain the mission of our congregations and EPA. As stated at the beginning of this document, the numbers represent people. We want to serve God faithfully and serve our people well.