

# 2015 General Conference Session Report Membership Audits and Losses

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# Membership Audits

- In the past quinquennium the world church carried out a series of far-reaching membership audits
- Analysis by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) indicated that Adventist membership was overstated—in some cases, very considerably overstated



# The Mortality Rate

- Often just one key statistic affords vital insight into the accuracy of all other data
- For Adventist membership metrics, that is the *mortality rate*
- The number of **deaths per thousand** members of a population
- Can be a whole population or specific groups within wider populations



# Adventist Mortality Rates

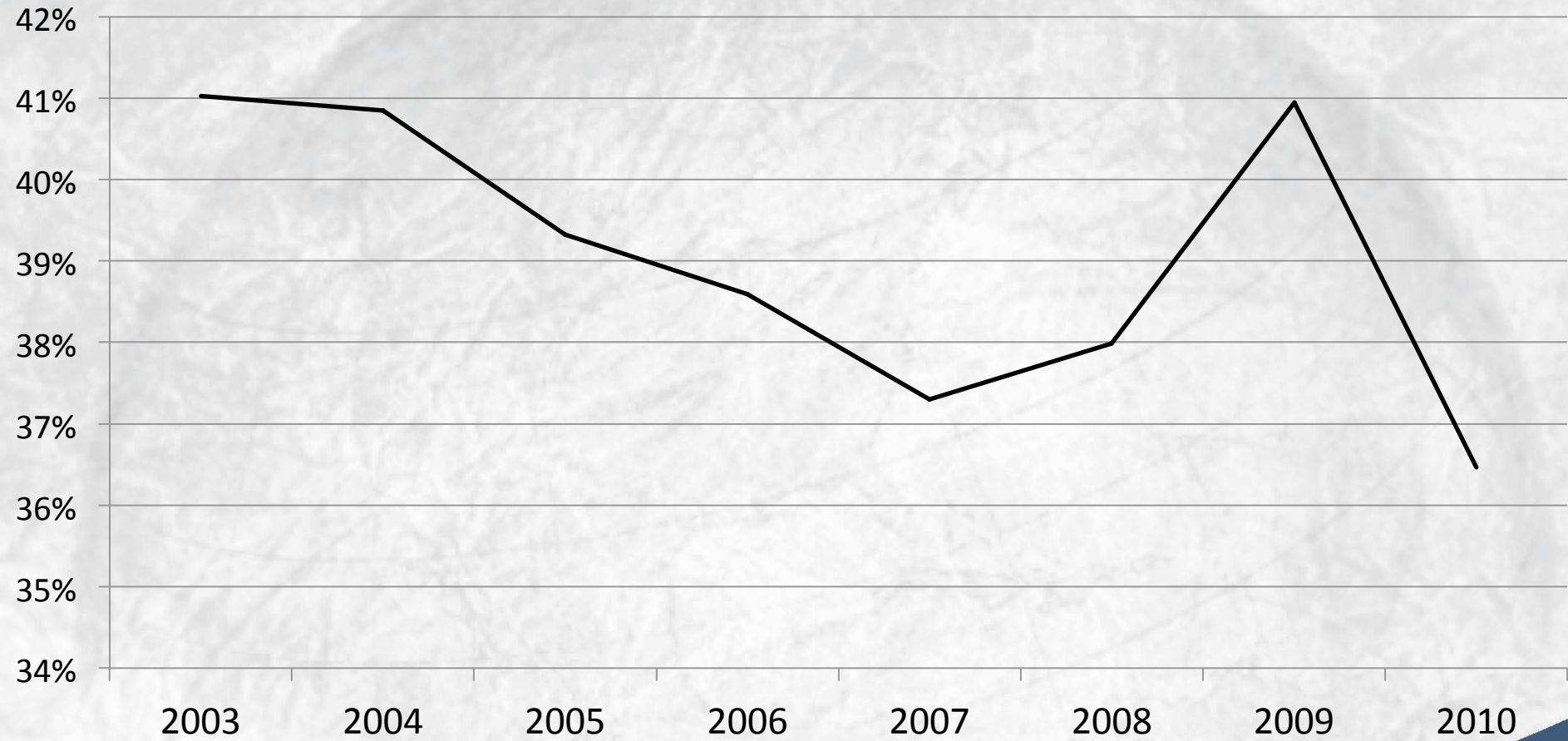
In ASTR's analysis:

- To compare like with like, Adventist mortality rates were **calculated for each division** as well as **globally**
- Then compared with mortality rate of the general population in the respective divisions, as well as worldwide.
- Finally, because one year does not reveal a trend, we carried out this analysis for the period from 1995 through the end of 2010.





# Global Adventist Mortality as Percentage of General Mortality, 2003–2010



- In the 21st century: average of 3.39 Adventist deaths per thousand church members, worldwide
- General mortality: 8.55 deaths per thousand people
- So our average mortality has been just 39.65% of general mortality, on average, this century



# Adventist health advantage?

- Major study by Loma Linda University: “death rates” of Adventist males and females are 66% and 88%, respectively, of the rates in the non-Adventist population.
- Study of Norwegian Adventists: Adventist men at 82 percent of the expected death rates for the general population, and Adventist women at 95 percent.”





# Adventist health advantage?

- The effect of following an Adventist diet and lifestyle on mortality rates would be, at best, to make them around two-thirds of general population mortality rates.
- Logical conclusion: our reported membership was (and is) overstated





# Measures to achieve accuracy

- I presented ASTR's analysis of mortality rates and membership statistics to 2011 Annual Council.
- Regular attendance counts added to the statistics that all local churches and administrative units are asked to report annually.
- In 2012, the GC Office of Seventh-day Adventist Membership Software was created

# Audits are historically Adventist!

- Report of the Battle Creek Church, May 1863:
- “This church was organized Oct. 24, 1861, with seventy-two members. Admitted since, thirty-six. Removed nine. Deceased two. Membership at present, ninety-seven.”
- Membership audits are as old as our church! And older than the General Conference!



- In 2014 a total of 55,320 deaths was reported: 3 deaths per 1,000 Adventists worldwide:
- Up from 2.67 early last quinquennium = one-third of the general global mortality rate—the lowest such percentage in our history.
- The 2014 mortality rate = 39 per cent of net global mortality (7.84 deaths per thousand)
- Accuracy of our records is improving



# What did the audits reveal?

- Not just that deaths were underreported...
- So, too, were the numbers of those who left the church.
  - First, the “dropped,” a term that has replaced the older term “apostasies”.
  - Second there are the “missing”: that is, people who simply can’t be found when an audit is carried out



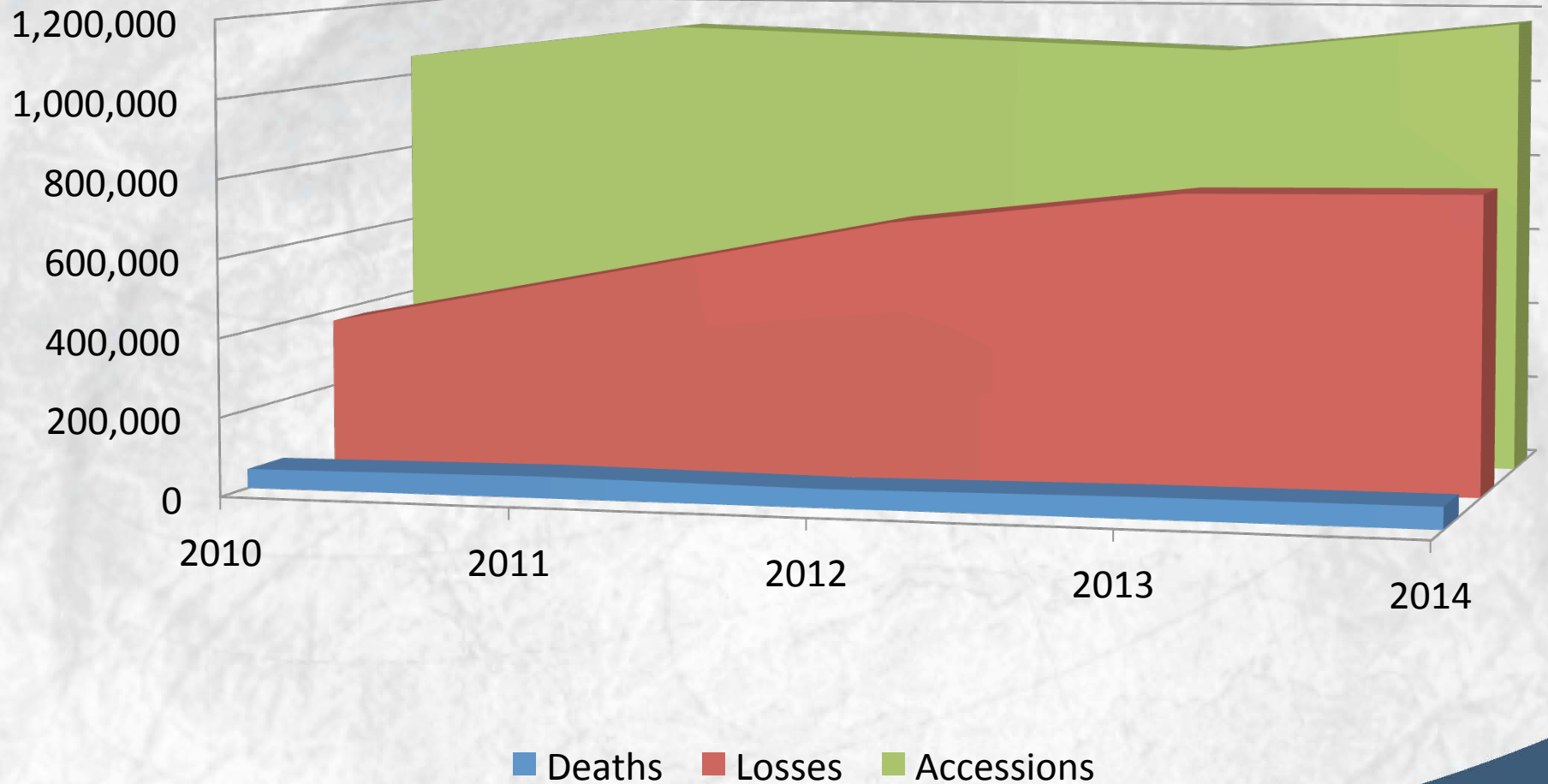


# Last five years: 2010–2014

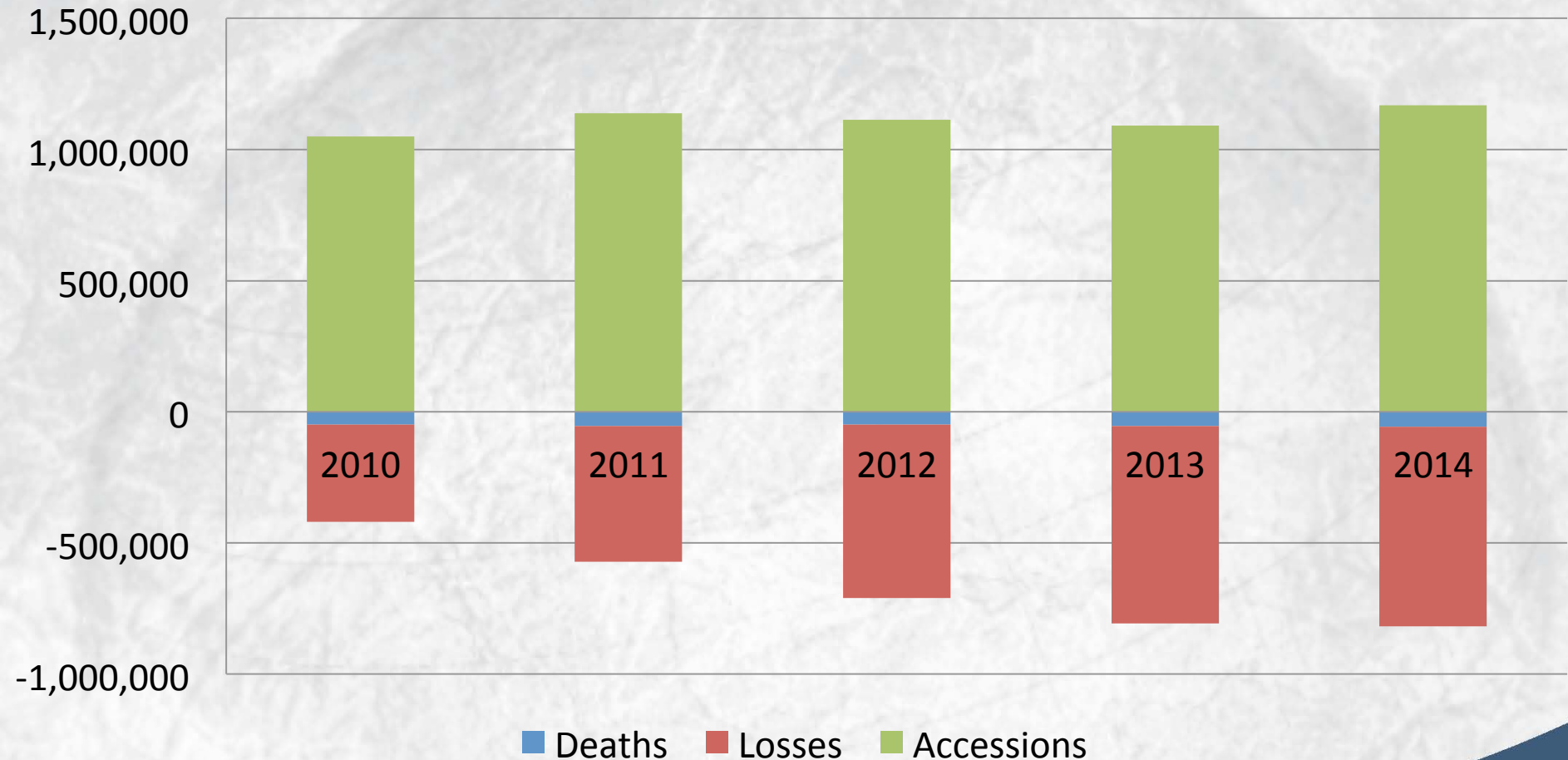
- **3,068,141** church members were dropped or registered as missing
- 261,888 deaths were recorded
- **5,563,377** church members were added by baptism or profession of faith



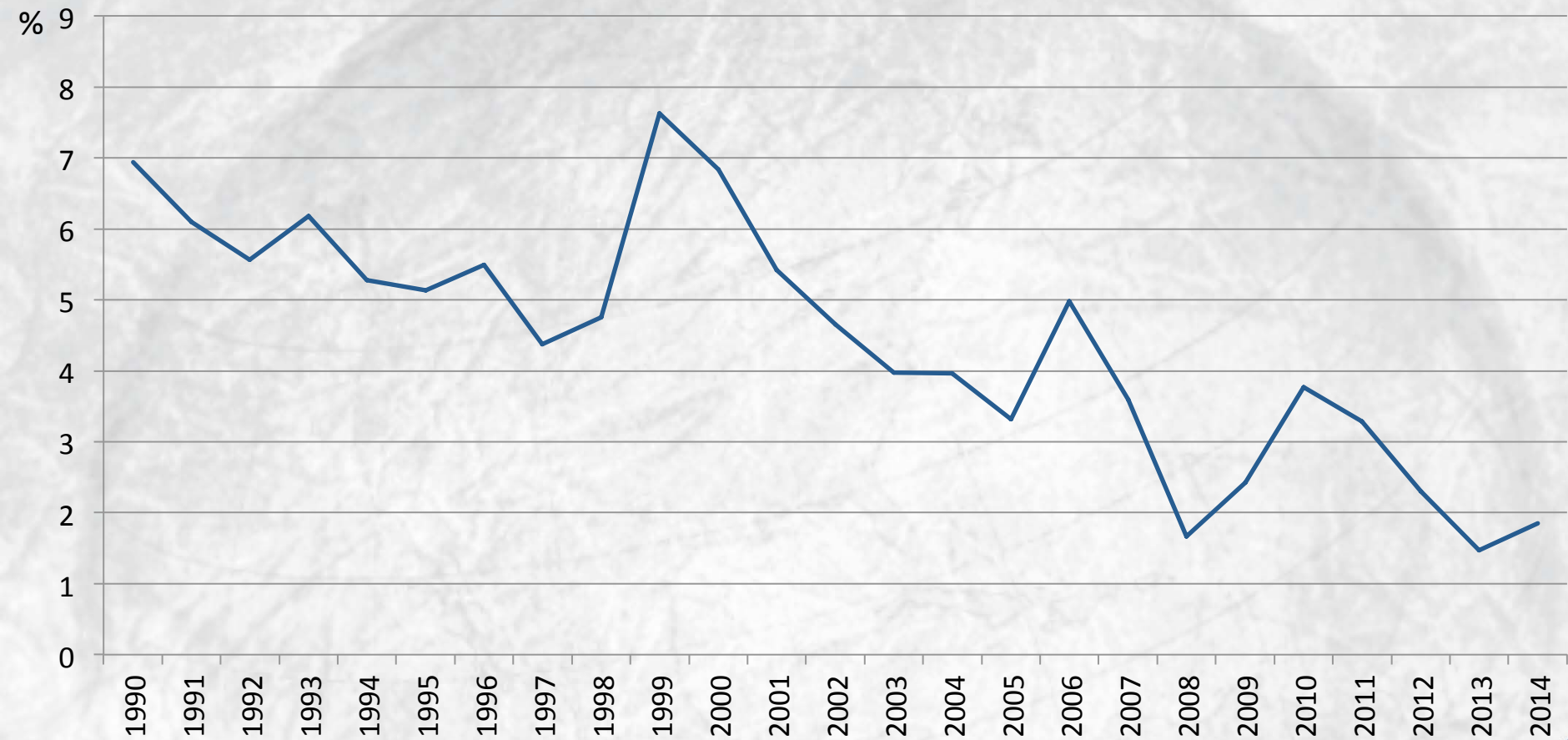
# Changes in Membership, 2010–2014



# Net Accessions, Net Losses, and Deaths, 2010–2014



# World Membership Annual Growth Rates, 1990–2014



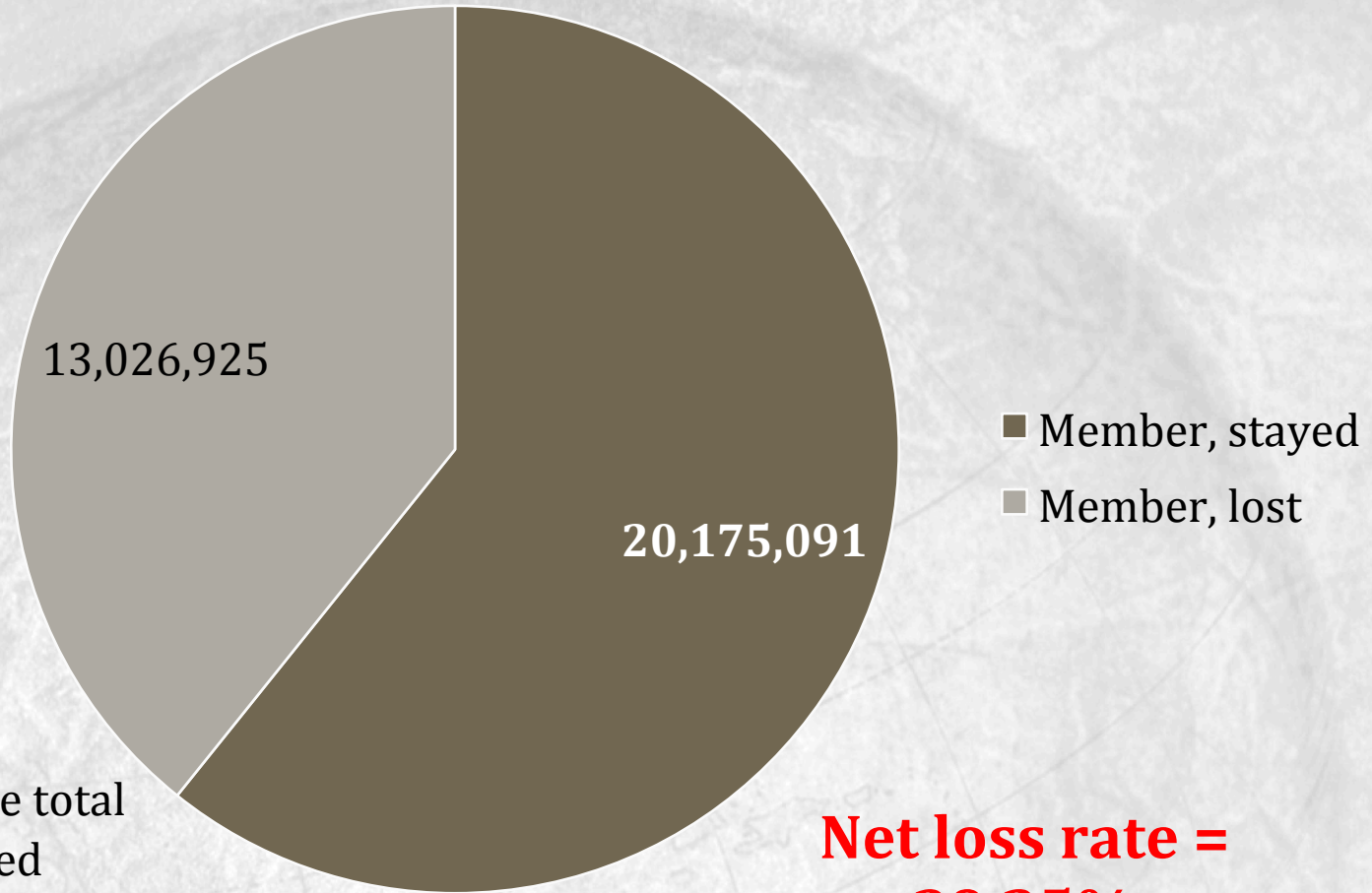


# A VITAL POINT TO MAKE!

- We are *not* suffering a church growth crisis
- We are feeling the effects of a statistical correction.
- The growth rates of the 1990s and early 2000s were actually lower than we thought
- Our real growth rate in this quinquennium is probably higher than it appears



# Global membership and loss, fifty years, 1965–2014



In the last 50 years the total number of baptized Seventh-day Adventists

**= 33,202,016**

Of these, **13,026,925** have left the Church

**Net loss rate = 39.25%**



# Conclusions

- In several regions, membership statistics are still overstated. It is vital that membership audits continue ...
- Why?
  - 1. As church leaders we aim for transparency and integrity
  - 2. To improve strategic planning and enable good stewardship of resources





# Conclusions

- The parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd (Luke 15) indicates that knowing how many sheep are in the fold is foundational for the divine shepherd
- Every one of the 2,983,905 members who left our ranks in the last five years (and every one of the 13,026,925 members over the last fifty years) was a soul precious to Jesus





# Conclusions

- Audit should become a permanent part of the way God's remnant Church does mission and ministry
- Membership care is the business of every believer in Jesus Christ. The local church must rally together to nurture, disciple and retain members, and not just leave it to the pastor



*Let us as Seventh-day Adventists  
strive to emulate the divine Good  
Shepherd, who is our example*

