

2022 ANNUAL COUNCIL STATISTICAL REPORT

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For those interested in this report, you can find more resources and data at the two websites in this slide. And this report will be uploaded to AdventistResearch.info soon after I sit down; ASTR's Twitter account will share the precise URL.

This first slide shows the world membership as of June 30, both for this year and the preceding six years. These are our latest membership figures. This chart hints at a recovery from the impact of COVID. It is confirmed when we look at this next slide which shows fifteen years' worth of data on accessions. They regularly exceeded one million each year up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to 2019, accessions in 2020 declined by more than half a million to 800,000, the lowest number of global accessions since 1997. But then we saw a resurgence which is more obvious if we zoom in, as in this slide, on the years since the 2015 GC Session. In 2021, despite the ongoing effects of the pandemic, accessions increased by more than 200,000 so that they once again topped one million.

What rebounded in 2021 was not just evangelism, but also church planting. This slide compares 2019, 2020 and 2021. Now, in 2019 there were 236 fewer companies, a *net* decline, not just fewer companies founded than in 2018, a point to which we will return; but 2,422 new churches were planted. As a result of COVID, the number of new churches declined by 29 per cent in 2020 – only 1,736 new churches were planted. However, in 2021 the number of new

churches rebounded to almost exactly the 2019 figures, while in addition 413 new companies were founded.

This slide provides some context. It gives 15 years of data on new congregations. What we see is that the annual totals of new companies and congregations have varied considerably, but that, from 2007 through 2019, new congregations always exceeded 2,000. So COVID had a major impact on church planting, but here, too, we are seeing a resurgence. However, what about the net decline in companies in 2019? Should we be concerned?

The purpose of companies is to become churches, and that is what happened in 2019 – you can see that in 2019 the number of new churches was 300 higher than the number in 2018, which is slightly more than the decline in net companies. We should be pleased when we see companies becoming churches.

What this next slide shows are *total* numbers of churches and companies, and thus of congregations. This shows how for the last 15 years there has been steady growth. The planting of 413 new companies in 2021 bodes well for increased congregational growth in the future.

Another area in which there has been a rebound since COVID is in tithes and offerings. These will be talked about in the Treasury report but what I just want to flag here is the comparison between 2019, 2020 and 2021. In 2020 global tithe was only marginally down on 2019, which is a remarkable blessing but also a remarkable tribute to the faithfulness of our members in

returning God's 10 per cent. You see how tithes are well up for 2021. But please note how there has *not* been a resurgence in *offerings*. Unlike tithes they went down *dramatically* in 2020, and while they increased in 2021 they have still not equaled offerings in 2019. When inflation is taken into account, the real-term drop in offerings is even greater. Yet mission offerings are crucially important for the world Church's mission program.

I want now to draw to your attention a more long-term problem in terms of offerings. Trying to assess long-term trends in tithes and offerings is very difficult, due to the conversion of multiple currencies into US dollars and also to multiple inflation rates. What we can do, however, is to assess how the different forms of financial stewardship compare over time. This chart shows the balance between tithes and offerings for the last century. What you see is that in 1922, church members gave, in offerings, almost exactly as much as they returned in tithe. Gradually, however, over the last hundred years that changed significantly. Today offerings are only just over a third of tithes. Of course, the net amounts given have steadily increased, partly due to the increase in church membership and partly because of inflation. But the whole time, the willingness of our church members to give to the Church's program, and particularly its mission program, has declined. This seems to be evidence of the workings of what sociologists call the Bystander effect. What that means is that, the more people there are involved in a group, the less willingness there is to get involved in its activities, because it's assumed there will always be other people who *will* get involved.

This slide again shows 15 years' worth of data on tithes and offerings. What we can see is that while the situation has only got slightly worse in that period, it has not got any better. Here is a major challenge for the Church.

As I move towards the end of my statistical report, Pastor Köhler has asked the Secretariat team to focus on challenges relating to discipleship, so now I will focus on losses, before I pass over to two colleagues.

This slide shows net changes in membership over the last five years. You can see the way that losses literally undercut accessions. And yet we know that the losses are minimum figures because membership reviews are still being carried out in some divisions. How do we know that membership is still overstated? For this we compare Adventist mortality rates with those for the general population. This can be done for a country, a union, a division, or the world, as in this slide. Given the Adventist health advantage, we would expect Adventist mortality to be around three-quarters or perhaps two-thirds of general mortality, but in fact the global Adventist mortality rate is less than half the world mortality rate. And this masks considerable variation in some divisions. So we have a good indication that there are more losses to come.

Yet the losses we suffer are bad enough. This slide is another fifteen years' worth of data, this time on losses. You see that in each of the last five years, and in twelve of the last fifteen, losses totaled more than half a million. This slide, which shows the last six years, brings out the scale of losses particularly starkly.

Where does this leave us? Starting in 1965 we have annual statistics on losses and accessions as well as total membership. What is the situation across the whole of the last 57 years? In that time, exactly 42,294,215 people have been members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In that time, at least 17.6 million have left. Our net loss rate is 42 per cent. Four of every ten church members slip away.

Of that 17.6 million, we know from research conducted by ASTR that most did not leave because of theological differences. Instead, they went through a crisis in life. And/or they experienced conflict in their local church community. They stopped attending church, not intending that to be permanent. But they felt unmissed, uncared-for, unimportant in the eyes of their pastors and fellow members, and so they did not return. Most did not take a conscious decision to cease being a Seventh-day Adventist. It just happened. Most of those 4 out of 10 members slipped through the cracks.

Having examined one of the most significant challenges that faces the world Church, let's now turn to what the General Conference Secretariat is doing to overcome the challenge. I turn to my colleagues Gerson Santos and Hensley Mooroven.