

Southern Baptists Decline in Baptisms, Membership, Attendance

The number of baptisms in the Southern Baptist Convention fell by nearly 5 percent in 2010, according to the Annual Church Profile, compiled by LifeWay Christian Resources in cooperation with Baptist state conventions.

Southern Baptist churches reported 332,321 baptisms in 2010, down from 349,737 in 2009, which represents a 4.98 percent decline. Total membership in 2010, reported at 16,136,044, represents a 0.15 percent decline from 2009 and marks the fourth straight year of decline.

The profile did, however, indicate one positive change: the number of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention rose to 45,727, an increase of 1.59 percent from the 45,010 reported in 2009. Thom Rainer, the president and CEO of LifeWay said, "I pray that all of us will see the urgency of the moment. We must make the Great Commission the heart of all we do and say. These latest numbers should be received with a broken spirit and a God-given determination to reach people for Christ."

This Month You Can . . . Participate in "Season of Service"



Season of Service, a ministry arm of the Luis Palau organization, puts the love of Jesus Christ into action as the physical needs of a community are met. It establishes and strengthens networks of churches and business and civic leaders for the purpose of serving the community. Individual volunteers are then mobilized through these networks.

Many churches are already serving their communities through service projects, but Season of Service opens more opportunities

for expanded and sustainable partnerships. A greater platform is established for being the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. Unity, collaboration, and innovation abound as needs are met and people are blessed.

With the help of your church, Season of Service can flourish. This generation can be reached for Jesus Christ. Together, we can participate in meeting the urgent physical needs of our world. As Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40 NIV).

A Season of Service campaign usually begins when churches come together to coordinate the activities they are already doing to serve their communities. This allows for a more strategic allocation of resources. Once a strong network of churches is established, areas of citywide focus can be defined and project opportunities discussed.

For more information on the Season of Service initiative, visit www.palau.org or write to the Luis Palau Association, PO Box 50, Portland, Oregon 97207. You can also e-mail the organization at info@palau.org.

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CHURCH AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS OF SIGNIFICANCE TO CHRISTIANS

Some news that's encouraging—some disturbing. Please read with discernment. Watch and pray.

Focus on . . . *Democratic Republic of the Congo*

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly known as Zaire and often referred to as "the DRC" or simply "Congo") is home to nearly 250 ethnolinguistic groups. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced people have moved back and forth between the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, and Tanzania over the last 20 years, following outbreaks of violence and civil unrest. Despite its diamond mines, natural resources, and fertile farmland, the DRC has suffered tremendously under a series of corrupt governments. Yet the number of professing Christians in the country has grown dramatically, from 1 percent of the population in 1900 to 90 percent today, though many of these believers are nominal Christians. The evangelical presence has increased tenfold since 1960.



Pray that

- the evils of the DRC's tragic history can be overcome through repentance and reconciliation,
- all hostilities cease and that peace can take hold,
- Congo is delivered from powerful spiritual evil and animistic beliefs that preside over much of the country, and
- the Christian church will develop strong believers and reject nominalism.

Calm in Congo Opens Door for Bible Translators

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been plagued by civil wars over the past two decades, resulting in the deaths of more than five million people and the displacement of another two million. But Wycliffe Associates president Bruce Smith says his group is taking advantage of a lull in the storm. "We're working on developing a national translator training center, and looking forward to equipping local people so that they can bring God's Word to their own communities."

More than 200 languages are spoken in Congo, making it a country that greatly needs Bible translations; there are about 120 languages still without Scripture. Wycliffe Associates is currently raising the \$100,000 needed to build the translation center at Shalom University in Bunia, and the organization is also working to gather the volunteers who will build it.

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. —JAMES 5:16

Would You Go to Church If Services Were Shorter?

The Reverend Jonathan Gledhill, Bishop of Lichfield, recently told a group of British clergy that church services have become too long, recommending that “clergy should aim to keep the time of worship to no more than 50 minutes.” He added that worship has become “too complicated, leaving people who are not regular churchgoers feeling confused and excluded. One of the reasons for our recent decline in churchgoing is we are not making the occasional worshiper feel welcome.” Bishop Gledhill continued, “You have got to be quite tough to come to some of our services if you are not a regular attender. We’re praying for longer and we’re singing for longer.”

Most religious leaders say Sunday morning church services already have to compete with shopping, lying in bed, or taking the day off, and the idea of spending two hours dedicated to worship is not very appealing in today’s society.

One blog reported that people who are in favor of longer church services frequently use the argument that “we need to give God the time that he deserves. If we can make time for everything else, we

can make time for God.” But Clifton Holmes, a Christian writer for the Gospel Blog, said, “In my opinion, being in service for three hours on Sunday is not a badge of honor. It means that there are many people in your church that waste a lot of time during service.”

Research conducted for the church website Ship of Fools found some Anglican clergy are preaching for as long as 42 minutes. With the addition of songs, fellowship, and prayer, the worshiping public spends about two hours in church.

Bishop Gledhill said there had been a tendency to devise “more and more intricate and beautiful services for our own use, forgetting those who might come if we made things simpler for them to start with.” He said clergy need to make sure their sermons are not too long, arguing that “attention spans aren’t what they used to be.”

Recent research shows only 26 percent of the world attend church services, and in a recent poll, only 20 percent of those surveyed said their church services were timed just right.

Unprecedented Appearance of Foreign Evangelist in Vietnam

The first appearance by a US-based evangelist preaching at a major event since the 1975 Communist victory in Vietnam helped celebrate the country’s Centennial of Protestantism. Argentinian Luis Palau, who has preached to 28 million people in 72 countries, delivered the gospel message.

Despite the lack of government cooperation and a last-minute forced change in venue, the leader of Vietnam’s Evangelical Fellowship (of house churches) said the fact that the event went ahead at all was “an absolute miracle.” By word of mouth, Twitter, Facebook, and especially

text messages, thousands of people got word of the change as technicians and hundreds of volunteers made heroic efforts to ready the new stadium site. Vietnamese police also proved surprisingly helpful in redirecting people from the original site to the new location.

At the event, Palau offered a concise and clear evangelistic sermon, and about 800 came forward as he invited attendees to receive Christ. More than 12,000 people attended the second night of preaching, and more than 1,000 came forward in response to the call to follow Christ.

India Expels Christian Women

Indian officials have expelled three women for seeking to attend Christian prayer meetings. Three Americans, including a 15-year-old girl, were forced to leave India after Hindu groups accused them of working to convert others. The three women were about to attend prayer sessions, and even though Indian officials did not have any evidence that they were evangelizing to non-believers, authorities said their visas did not permit them the freedom to attend any meetings.

But Jonathan Racho of International Christian Concern stated that India is a popular tourist destination, and tourists are always allowed to attend religious ceremonies. “In the past, Indian officials have never expelled Americans or other tourists for attending these services. They have never told them to leave the country for attending Hindu services or Buddhist services, but when it comes to Christian services, the Christians are being expelled, simply for planning to attend prayer sessions.”

Pilots Help Quell Measles in Congo

Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), whose pilots are specially trained to land in difficult areas, is working hard to help deal with a measles outbreak in Congo, which has had a number of health crises including tuberculosis, cholera, and malnutrition. “The most recent one has been measles,” said David Wunsch of MAF, “and Doctors Without Borders has been trying to get vaccinations out to the very remote areas of the country.”

Wunsch said MAF is shipping 600,000 measles vaccinations to remote areas by air because the roads that exist are few and unreliable. “I understand that it’s moving towards some of the urban areas, so it seems to be fairly severe,” he added.

Measles can lead to pneumonia, severe dehydration, blindness, and death—especially among children. Providing the vaccinations is a lifesaving mission in Congo, whereas in the United States they could be obtained by a simple trip to the doctor.

Miss USA—Only for Liberals?

A controversy over political correctness is brewing in the Miss USA competition. Two years ago, Miss California Carrie Prejean, the runner-up in the national contest, claimed she did not win the competition because she affirmed traditional marriage when asked by a judge about same-sex marriage. This year contestants were asked, “Do you think evolution should be taught in schools?” Only two of the 51 contestants said they believed in evolution, with one of the two eventually winning the crown.

Discovery Institute president Bruce Chapman says the Miss USA pageant has become too politicized. “What’s sad about it is that lots and lots of people take part in this, and they spend a great deal of time . . . competing,” he observed, “and it means a lot to them and to their families and their communities and so forth. And then at the end to get walloped with a political-correctness test, I think is really low.” Chapman continued, “There’s a right answer and a wrong answer and you’d better get the right answer. The right answer is the politically correct answer on the left. So why don’t they put up a sign for Miss USA to say ‘only liberal, progressive women need compete?’”

