

## 2023 ANNUAL COUNCIL STATISTICAL REPORT

I'd like council members and viewers of the livestream to know that if they want to find out more about the subjects covered in this report, then they can access historical and current church statistics at [adventiststatistics.org](http://adventiststatistics.org). And soon after I sit down, my report will be available online at [adventistresearch.info](http://adventistresearch.info).

First let's look at our latest membership figures, from June 30, 2023, and compare them to statistics for the mid-year point of each year since the start of last quinquennium.

Now let's focus in on net accessions in the last fifteen years – these are for the calendar year, rather than the twelve months ending June 30. We see that accessions have now fully rebounded after the challenging circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, with 1.358 million people added to the church, 2022 had the second highest number of net accessions of any year, after the 1.383 million of 2018.

But church growth is the function both of accessions and of losses.

This next graph shows losses also over the last fifteen years. These statistics exclude deaths. With a total of 961,037 living losses, 2022 was also the second highest year for net losses after the 1,107,514 of 2019.

On Friday, Edward Heidinger shared an Ellen White quotation from *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 187, about how the divine good shepherd of Luke chapter 15 "counts and recounts the flock". That is how He knows sheep are missing. In that spirit, each year I update members of this council on total losses. Starting in 1965, church statistical reports provided data on losses as well as baptisms, so that, through 2022, we have 58 years of data on accessions and losses.

We know that in those nearly six decades, a total of 43,652,857 people have been members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Of those, **18,555,581** have chosen to leave.

This means that **our net loss rate is 42.5%**.

In effect, more than **4 of every 10** church members are slipping away. The world Church continues to address this challenge, but it is a challenge to every church member – to every disciple of Jesus – to be their brother's keeper, and their sister's too.

These are global totals, but I want to turn now from the world to particular regional trends. First, let us look at how we are doing in the 10/40 Window. Since the adoption of the Global Strategy in 1990, this has been a high priority for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are going to look in a moment at twenty years' worth of data that compares the Adventist presence *inside* the 10/40 Window to our presence in the rest of the world. But first, let's establish a baseline.

In 2003, 4.1 billion people lived in the countries of the 10/40 Window, and 2.1 billion lived outside. This was exactly a two-thirds/one-third split. But the percentages for church membership were much more than reversed.

There were 1.8 million church members in the 10/40 Window, but that was only 13.5 per cent of the total church membership, with 11.6 million Adventists living outside the 10/40 Window.

What about congregations and institutions?

This third graph shows the total number of churches, companies and institutions, again inside and outside the 10/40 Window. In 2003 there was a total of 16,233 in the countries of the 10/40 Window, but this was only 14% of the total, with an extra 99,693 located outside the 10/40 Window.

What we are going to look at now is a twenty-year sequence. You won't have time to check the precise figures each year, but what I want you to look at is the proportions and see whether they shift.

So let's start.

Did you notice, the numbers increased – for church members, institutions, and congregations, as well as for the general population – but the **percentages** remained essentially the same. In 2023, the proportion of the world's population in 10/40 Window countries has risen slightly to 35%. But the proportion of Adventist church members in the 10/40 Window has actually gone down slightly to 12 per cent instead of 13.5 per cent. As for congregations and institutions, the percentage inside the 10/40 Window has fallen by a fraction of a percent to 13.8 per cent.

Thus, in 2023 as in 2003, the majority of the world's population live inside the 10/40 Window, but the great majority of Adventist church members and its congregations and institutions are located outside the 10/40 Window. We praise God for the additional 890,000 church members we have in the 10/40 Window today in contrast to 2003, but this doesn't change the basic problem we face. How are we ever going to reach the world unless we reach the billions of the 10/40 Window? At the moment, our membership there is increasing not quite in step with the increase in its general population. Brother Chairman—and brothers and sisters—these statistics suggest that there needs to be a refocusing of world Church resources, into the countries of the 10/40 Window.

Let's turn now to another way of looking at how the church is doing in regions, by looking at how we are doing on different continents. Now first let me say that in the following analysis I have added Central America and the Caribbean as a region to the six inhabited continents of the world, and include Oceania with Australia. The reason for this is that geographers count North America as extending as far south as Panama, but we are familiar with the North American Division and to add the statistics of Central America into those for NAD would give a considerably

distorted impression of NAD's statistics. So, in the following slides, North America is the United States and Canada, the Central American and Caribbean region equates to the Inter-American Division, including Colombia and Venezuela, while South America is the territory of the South American Division, even though geographically Colombia and Venezuela are part of South America. I combine Oceania and Australia because there is considerable membership in the Pacific islands, and of course in terms of church organization, the islands are linked with Australia.

First, let's establish a base line again.

We are going to look at population to member ratios. With such ratios, lower numbers are better, because the calculation is the number of people in the general population to each church member. In 2003, there were 329 people for every church member in North America;

- 105 people for every Adventist in Central America and the Caribbean;
- 133 people for every church member in South America;
- 1,955 for every Adventist in Europe;
- 198 for every Adventist in Africa;
- 1,522 for every Adventist in Asia;
- and 89 people for every church member in Oceania.

Again, we're going to see a sequence of twenty years' worth of data, and the thing to look for here is the relative proportions and to see how they shift.

So, let's see the progression.

Here we see the ratios at the end of last year. It's worth noting that the continental aggregation does mask some variation. In the Middle East and North Africa Union, for example, which is split between Asia and Africa, the current ratio of population to members is 94,663 to 1. Although the current **Oceania** ratio is 70 to 1 (which is the lowest of any continent or region), the ratio in **Australia** is 405

to 1, whereas in **Papua New Guinea** it is an extraordinary 23 to 1. Still, on the whole, these charts give us a sense of where in the world the church is doing well and where it is struggling.

I want to stress that, in all these regions, church membership has risen since 2003. Further, we can praise the Lord that in the last twenty years the ratios have improved for every continent and region – but there is an exception, which is Europe, where the current ratio of population to members has declined from 1,955 to 1 in 2003 to 2,049 to 1 today.

Brother Chairman, and brothers and sisters, what does all this show? It is a reminder that we are a worldwide church with a worldwide mission that is, moreover, focused on the end of all things. Other people fear the end of days, whereas we eagerly look for the second return of Christ. But let us remember Matthew 24:14: “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and **then** the end will come.” If the end for which we so fervently wish is to come, our message must truly go “to every nation, tribe, language, and people” (Rev. 14:6).

It does not matter how much the population to member ratio improves in Sao Paulo, Kingston, Port Moresby, Lusaka or Harare, if we continue to barely have a presence in Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad, Athens, Lille and Glasgow. We could convert 100% of the population in some countries and still not see the end of days. In closing, Brother Chairman, these statistics highlight the need for mission refocus, with the resources of the world church allocated to where they are most needed. In 1863 we were chosen for mission. Today, we have the urgent need to make sure our mission goes to all the world.