

SBC has lost 2.3 million since 2006

May 25, 2021

NASHVILLE (RNS)—The nation's largest Protestant denomination continues to get smaller.

There were 14 million members of Southern Baptist churches in 2020, according to a new report released May 20 by Lifeway Christian Resources, which compiles official denominational statistics.

That number is down 435,632 members since 2019 and down 2.3 million from 2006, when the Southern Baptist Convention's churches reached 16.3 million members.

Worship attendance was also down about 15 percent, with 4.4 million people attending in-person services on a weekly basis. That figure was likely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, where churches around the country shut down in-person services to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"COVID-19 clearly impacted in-person attendance," Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, said in a statement announcing the report. "Throughout much of the year, churches tried to find the right balance of both in-person and online events."

Southern Baptists, long known for denominational infighting, have seen several high-profile departures of leaders in the past year, including Bible teacher Beth Moore, ethicist Russell Moore and some prominent Black pastors.

The SBC also faced controversy over revelations of abuse, disputes over

support for Donald Trump and a debate over critical race theory.

The biggest decline in the report was seen in baptisms, a key measure for the evangelical denomination. In 2020, baptisms were down by about half, to 123,160, the lowest number since 1919.

“The last year Southern Baptists saw this few people follow Christ for the first time was 1918 and 1919, when the influenza pandemic was sweeping the world,” McConnell said.

Ronnie Floyd, president of the SBC’s Executive Committee, said the report showed a need for a renewed focus on evangelism, missions and church planting.

“It may take years for us to know the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our churches,” Floyd told Baptist Press. “There are lessons to be learned from 2020 as we put it behind us—such as the vital need for corporate worship, the value of being creative in developing ways to share the gospel, and how much local communities need our churches to minister in difficult circumstances.”

Total giving to Southern Baptist churches, according to the report, was \$11.5 billion, with a reported \$1 billion being given to missions.

The report was based on data from 69 percent of Southern Baptist churches, down from reports in previous years, which drew on data from three-quarters of churches.

Annual Church Profile Statistical Summary

2020 Southern Baptist Convention Statistical Summary¹

Item/Statistic	2020	2019	Numeric Change	Percent Change
State Conventions	41	41	0	0.00%
Associations	1,114	1,116	-2	-0.18%
Churches	47,592	47,530	62	0.13%
Church-type Missions Operating ⁽²⁾	3,104	3,608	-504	-13.97%
Total Members	14,089,947	14,525,579	-435,632	-3.00%
Total Baptisms	123,160	235,748	-112,588	-47.76%
Ratio of Baptisms: Total Members	1:114	1:62	—	—
Cooperative Program ⁽³⁾	www.sbc.net/missions/the-cooperative-program/	www.sbc.net/missions/the-cooperative-program/	—	—

Other 2020 Items – Not Asked by All State Conventions ⁴

Item/Statistic	2020	2019
Other Additions ⁽⁵⁾	112,953	175,915
Weekly Worship Average Attendance ⁽⁶⁾	4,439,797	5,250,230
Sunday School/Bible Study/Small Group Average Attendance ⁽⁷⁾	2,879,130	3,236,196
Undesignated Receipts ⁽⁵⁾	\$9,531,225,749	\$9,600,108,179
Total Receipts ⁽⁸⁾	\$11,526,598,340	\$11,640,670,559
Total Mission Expenditures ⁽⁹⁾	\$1,046,655,912	\$1,123,298,287
Great Commission Giving ⁽¹⁰⁾	\$409,835,470	\$540,859,296

NOTES:

1. Data reported for the 2020 statistical year include adjustments to the totals for some non-reported items (from individual congregations) using data reported in prior years. Similar actions occurred in 2019.
2. Some state conventions no longer use the designation of church-type mission to categorize congregations that are not self-determining, self-sustaining and self-propagating. This practice has impacted the number of churches and church-type missions.
3. Cooperative Program as reported on the Annual Church Profile is not included in this table. Cooperative Program, based on the actual amount given through the state convention, is provided in the SBC Annual in the Executive Committee Annual Report.
4. Totals for items in this table have incomplete data for 2020 due to the fact that not all state conventions asked the item or did so in a way not comparable with the standard definition. Thus, comparisons between the two years may not be appropriate. See the Notes in the 2019 SBC Statistical Summary for specific details to determine if a comparison is desirable.
5. Florida Baptist Convention, Baptist Convention of Iowa and the Baptist Convention of New York did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.
6. Florida Baptist Convention did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.
7. Baptist Convention of Iowa did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.
8. Baptist Convention of Iowa, Baptist Convention of New York, Florida Baptist Convention and the Georgia Baptist Mission Board did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.
9. Alabama State Board of Missions, Baptist Convention of Iowa, Baptist Convention of New York, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, Florida Baptist Convention, Georgia Baptist Mission Board and the South Carolina Baptist Convention did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.
10. Alabama State Board of Missions, Baptist Convention of Iowa, Baptist Convention of New York, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, Florida Baptist Convention, Missouri Baptist Convention and the South Carolina Baptist Convention did not ask this item or the information necessary to obtain the item.