

## Adventist Church: *Membership audits planned, revised figures contemplated* | MARK A. KELLNER, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

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The General Conference leadership is urging the world church's divisions to carefully audit membership rolls and remove the names of those no longer active in the movement or who have passed away, said David Trim, director of Archives, Statistics and Research at the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Silver Spring, Maryland, world headquarters.

"The stones can cry out, but so can membership statistics if we have ears to hear. [The numbers] are telling us they are not entirely accurate," Trim told delegates to the church's 2011 Annual Council meetings. "I believe that inaccuracies have not crept in through a desire to deceive, but by not keeping proper records. Have we overstated gains and understated losses?"

The proposed audits and reviews are expected to take place over the next few years, Trim said, and likely will result in a lower overall membership number than the recent claims of between 16.5 million and 17 million baptized members worldwide. Although it has been estimated by church officials that as many as 25 million to 30 million people worldwide attend Adventist worship services weekly, the church only counts as members those who have been baptized. Traditionally, the Seventh-day

Adventist Church has only baptized those old enough to make a conscious decision to unite with the church, and does not baptize infants.

The call for greater scrutiny of membership statistics reflects a desire for accuracy and transparency, Trim said. As servants of God and of His church, the first need is to be open and above-board in representing its membership numbers.

"This doesn't mean that God hasn't blessed the church or is not blessing," Trim said before his report. "It's just that we're being honest."

G. T. Ng, Adventist Church executive secretary, told Annual Council delegates on October 9, "The numbers game is not about numbers. It's about people—souls that are lost twice. If these souls had not been lost, we would have a membership of 24 to 25 million."

Such losses may only be for a season, however. On October 7, Jairyong Lee, president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, acknowledged the loss of tens of thousands of names from the rolls during a recent audit. However, new evangelistic efforts in China and other nations in the division have replenished those numbers, and new members are being disciplined and nurtured so they remain active.

Another division president voiced



**David Trim, director of the Archives, Statistics and Research department, calls for the denomination to reassess its membership records. Church mortality rates have been found in some regions to be vastly lower than mortality rates of the general population in those local areas.**

support for the move: "I really appreciate the Secretariat's...bold move," said Paul Ratsara, president of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, one of the world church's largest regions. "This is a test of accountability and transparency for all of us. I believe we really have to do this."

Organized in 1863, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the top administrative body for the church, which is active in 203 countries and territories worldwide. The Annual Council meetings are designed to inform the movement's world leaders of current trends and needs, as well as to take actions necessary to carry forth Adventism's mission. ■