

SBC baptism rate lowest in two decades: Membership sees slight drop

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The number of baptisms by Southern Baptists—who consider the rite a gauge of their evangelistic success—has dropped to the lowest rate in two decades.

The denomination, which has also seen a slight decrease in membership numbers, recorded 342,198 baptisms in 2008, a decrease of 1.1 percent from the previous year, according to LifeWay Christian Resources, a division of the Southern Baptist Convention that compiles annual statistics.

The baptism rate is the lowest for Southern Baptists since 1987 and represents the fourth consecutive annual decline, demonstrating a continuing challenge for the nation's largest Protestant denomination. Total SBC membership fell to 16,228,438, a drop of 38,482 members, or 0.2 percent.

LifeWay produces the Annual Church Profile by compiling information from state conventions affiliated with the SBC. *—Religion News Service*