

Churches lost \$1.2 billion in recession

by [Annalisa Musarra](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Even as membership remains relatively stable in U.S. churches, the effects of the recession have caused contributions to drop by \$1.2 billion.

According to the 2012 Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches, the almost \$29 billion contributed by church members represented a 2.2 percent decrease in terms of per capita giving.

The \$1.2 billion decline in 2010 was nearly three times as large as the \$431 million in losses reported in 2009, and "provides clear evidence of the impact of the deepening crises in the reporting period," the Yearbook's editor, the Rev. Eileen Lindner, wrote.

The Yearbook is produced annually by the National Council of Churches and is considered one of the most authoritative sources of church membership. The 2010 figures, released Tuesday (March 20), were collected from 228 U.S. denominations in 2011.

The Roman Catholic Church (No. 1) and the Southern Baptist Convention (No. 2) continued as the nation's largest churches in 2010, and both posted a decrease of less than 1 percent, the fourth year in a row of declining membership for Southern Baptists.

Overall, total membership in the top 25 largest churches declined 1.15 percent, to 145.7 million.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, though still in the top 10, reported the sharpest decline in membership, dropping 5.9 percent to 4.3 million members.

Four Pentecostal churches out of the top 25 showed a continuing increase in membership, with the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. jumping up 20 percent, the highest out of all reporting churches.

Only six out of the top 25 increased in membership, according to the Yearbook. Some of those growing denominations include Jehovah's Witnesses (up 1.85 percent), Seventh-day Adventist Church (up 1.61 percent) and the National Baptist Convention, USA (up 3.95 percent).

The 10 largest U.S. Christian bodies reported in the 2012 yearbook are:

1. The Catholic Church: 68.2 million, down 0.44 percent.
2. Southern Baptist Convention: 16.1 million, down 0.15 percent.
3. The United Methodist Church: 7.7 million, down 1.22 percent.
4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 6.2 million, up 1.62 percent.
5. The Church of God in Christ: 5.5 million, no membership updates reported.
6. National Baptist Convention, USA: 5.2 million, up 3.95 percent.
7. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: 4.3 million, down 5.9 percent.
8. National Baptist Convention of America, 3.5 million, no membership updates reported.
9. Assemblies of God: 3.03 million, up 3.99 percent.
10. Presbyterian Church (USA): 2.7 million, down 3.42 percent.