

International Churches of Christ

2009 Membership Survey: Report and Analysis



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Summary

The 2009 survey shows a continuing trend of approximately 4.4% growth since 2006.

- God grew our total membership by approximately 4,000 members from 2006 to 2009.
- At the end of 2009, the ICOC has about 92,524 members in 574 churches in 145 countries.
- For churches that participated in both the 2007 and 2009 surveys, about the same number of churches reported growth as those who reported decline or zero growth.
- Turnaround among our largest churches has become clear. For the first time since 2001, our 20 largest churches reported a net gain in membership.
- 429 churches have committed to the Plan for United Cooperation. These represent 81,646 disciples or 88% of our total membership.

Background

ICOC membership grew dramatically to a high of 135,000 in 2002 followed by a large decrease to about 88,597 in 2006 during our crisis. Our attendance has always been significantly higher than our membership due to the commitment of our members and the addition of children and guests in our services.

The 2007 survey indicated a slight growth in membership to just over 90,000, and the 2009 survey confirms that our overall membership has grown approximately 4.4% since 2006.

The 2009 survey indicates that the membership losses of 2003-2005 have not only stopped, but that as a family of churches the ICOC is growing again at a slower, steadier rate than in years past, approximately 1.5% per year.

Since 2003, participation in the surveys has been voluntary. Of the 574 churches we counted in the 2009 survey, only 27 did not report membership (4% of churches). Each year we conservatively estimate the membership of the non-reporting portion of churches. For those not reporting to the 2009 survey, we simply used the last reported membership.

Help with Future Surveys

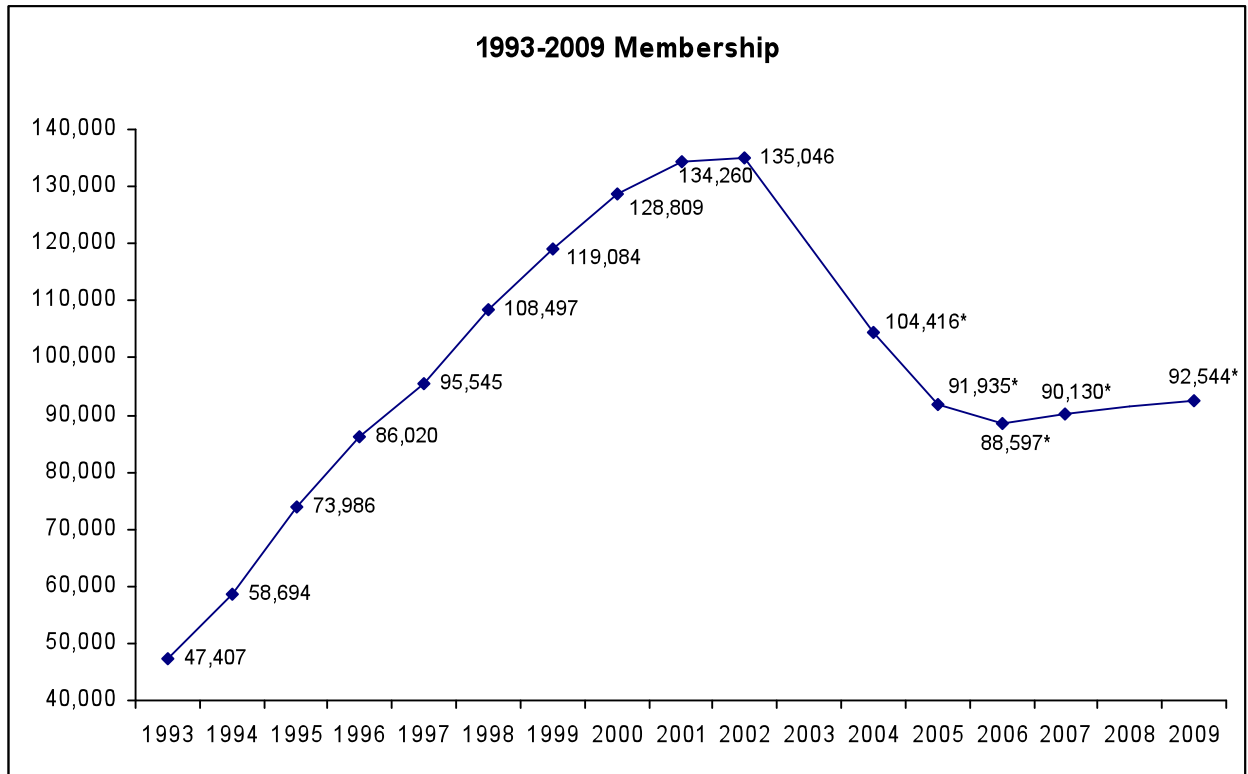
Disciples Today is gathering the data and providing the analysis for the ICOC Church Membership Survey. Many thanks to Paul Ramsey of Columbia, South Carolina and others for hours of tireless service as volunteers.

1) Gathering the church survey updates. This survey required four months and hundreds of phone calls, emails, etc. It seems to be much more efficient for the various regional families of churches to gather the data and send it to Disciples Today for compilation, analysis and reporting.

2) Determining the basic data that are Vital Signs. While we have matured in our view of statistics, we have seen that neither overreporting nor underreporting are helpful to sowing, watering and God's giving the increase. In caring for the body of Christ, certain additional Vital Signs can be gathered to give basic information of the health of our churches: attendance, baptisms, restorations, etc.

3) Central Contact Database: Key church leader contact info to communicate and connect churches in 145 countries. Evangelist, Elder, Teacher, Administrator, Campus, Youth, Singles, Web, etc. This would help all Cooperation Service Teams and various ministries.

I. Total Membership



The 2009 survey provides an additional indication that the membership losses of 2003-2005 have not only stopped, but that as a family of churches the ICOC is growing again, albeit at a much slower rate than in years past, approximately 1.5% per year.

Surveys were not conducted in 2003 and 2008.

Data collected in five surveys, conducted in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009, provide the basis for the analysis in this report. In each of these years, the number of participating churches varied. Therefore, in each survey a part of the membership is estimated, not reported.

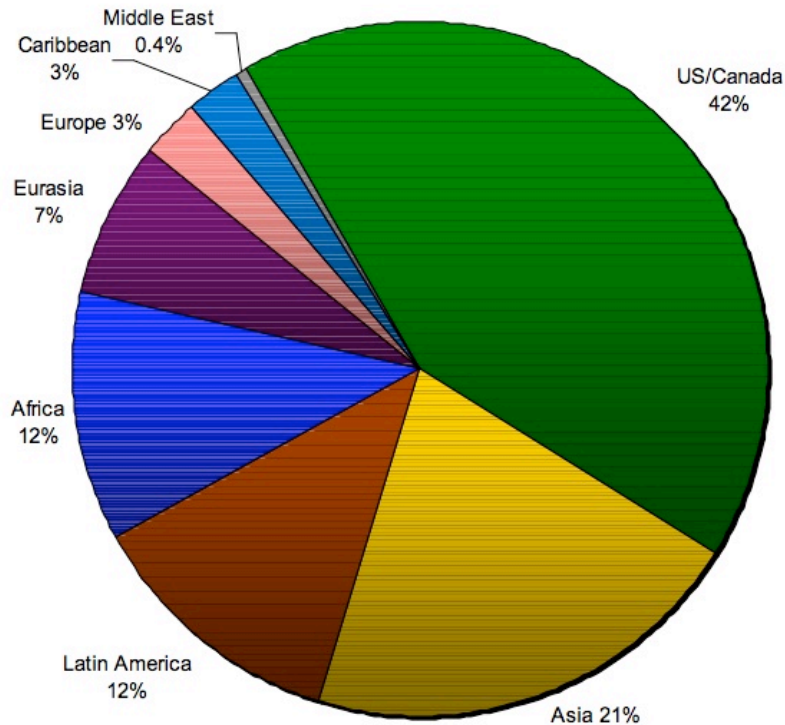
The following chart indicates the reported vs. estimated membership in each year starting with 2002, the last year in which all churches participated:

Year	Reported Membership	Estimated Membership	Total Membership	Percent Estimated	Reporting Churches	Non-reporting Churches
2002	135,046	0	135,046	0%	429	0
2004	97,056	7,360	104,416	7%	416	85
2005	82,096	9,839	91,935	11%	413	117
2006	84,554	4,043	88,597	5%	476	70
2007	89,131	999	90,130	1%	545	17
2009	88,607	3,937	92,544	4%	547	27

Looking just at the reported membership figures, we can draw similar conclusions as can be drawn using total membership, which includes conservative estimates for the non-reporting churches. With or without the estimated portion, a turning point can be seen in 2005-2006, and thereafter, moderate growth.

II. Geographic Distribution

At least one ICOC exists in 145 countries.



While we have a wide distribution of churches, two-thirds of ICOC members are found in just six countries (**U.S., Mexico, India, Philippines, Russia and Indonesia**).

There are 100 nations in which we have just 5% of our membership.

A third of these 100 nations have 20 or fewer members of the ICOC.

There are 24 nations in which we, at some time since 1994, had at least one church. In these 24 nations there is no longer any presence of the International Churches of Christ. Most of these nations are in the Middle East and Europe.

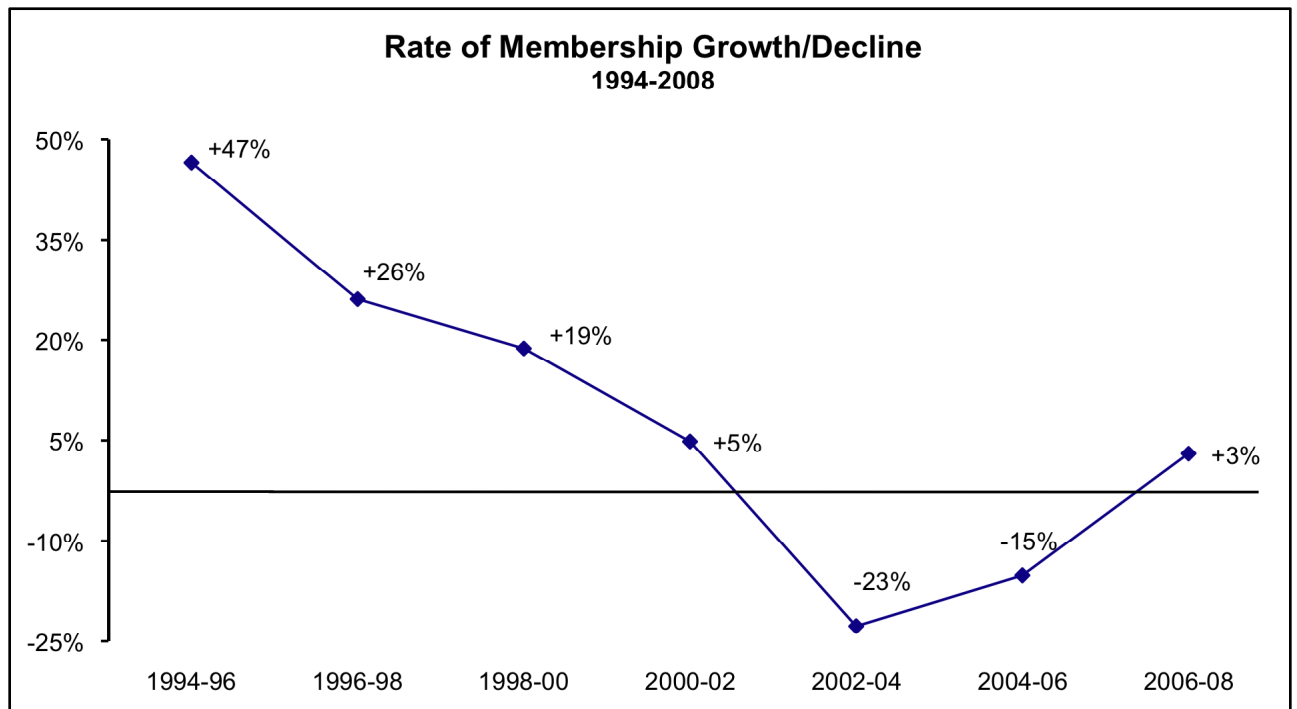
There are approximately 30 nations, mostly small, in which we have never planted a church.

[Click the Church Locator](#) tab at the top of any page of Disciples Today to see the list of International Churches of Christ and links to their websites.

III. Rate of Membership Growth/Decline

In each of the post-2003 survey reports, we included charts showing the declines that occurred in 2003-2005 were “in the works” for many years previous. We included these charts to correct an erroneous narrative, one that explained the 2003-2005 losses in terms of events that happened in 2003.

In fact, our growth rate had been declining precipitously for almost 10 years, and the 2003-2005 losses, in this context, were a continuation of this trend.



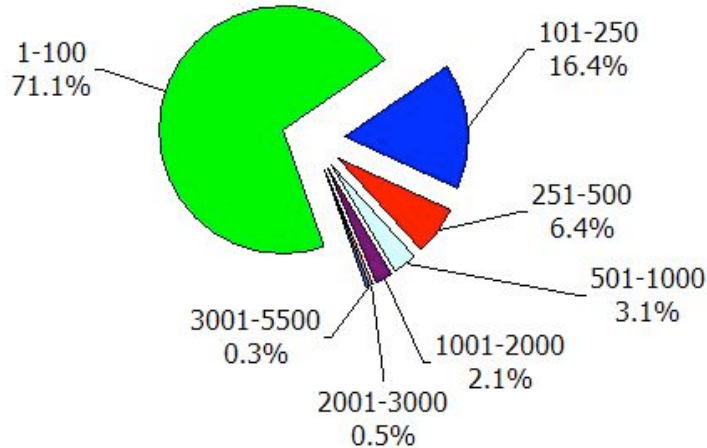
[We use the midpoint membership number from 2008 to keep the consistency of this graph, which has been given in past reports in two-year increments, since no survey was conducted in 2003. No survey was conducted in 2008, either, but we can reasonably infer 2008 membership from the 2007 and 2009 surveys.]

The 2009 survey does not add anything to this analysis, but it does contribute an additional data point to the turnaround narrative, now even more clearly indicated as having begun around 2005 or 2006.

-18 churches over 1,000 - 9 grew, 8 lost members
- 20 churches between 500-1,000 - 9 grew and 11 lost members
- 60 churches between 200 and 500 - 27 grew, 23 lost members, 10 the same or unknown
- 79 churches between 100 and 200 - 45 grew and 28 lost members, 6 the same or unknown
-122 churches between 50-100 - 64 grew, 33 shrunk, 25 the same or unknown
-275 churches under 50 - 97 grew, the rest lost members, unknown and includes new churches
-72% of our membership is in churches of over 200 members which is 16% of our churches.
-49% of our churches are under 50 members with 7% of the total membership.
-93% of members are in 51% of the churches.

Membership by Size of Church

ICOC Worldwide Membership

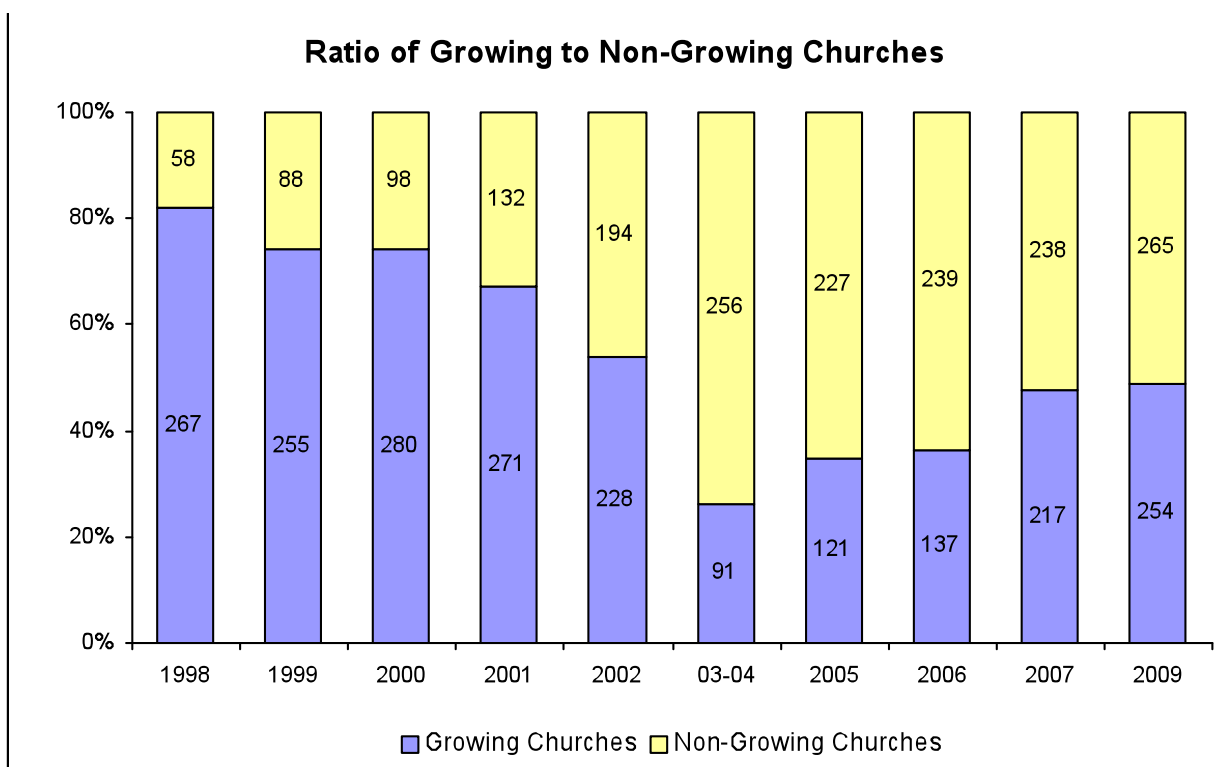


IV. Growing to Non-Growing Church Ratio

In 2005, for the first year since 1998, an increasing percentage of churches reported growing. There was another slight increase in churches reporting growth in 2006. In 2007 we saw a definite increase in both the overall number and percentage of churches reporting year-on-year growth.

The 2009 survey indicates a continuing, but very slight, improvement in the ratio of growing to non-growing churches. Still, fewer than half of the churches that reported membership in both 2007 and 2009 reported growing in that period.

This ratio of growing to non-growing churches may be more helpful to understanding what is really happening among the churches than the overall membership growth rate itself. It is a leading indicator of future overall growth or decline, since a few large, fast-growing churches can mask underlying declines in a greater number of small, newly planted, or struggling older congregations—but only for a time.



One counter-intuitive finding from the 2009 survey is that our growing churches were, on average, 30% larger than our non-growing churches. Conventional wisdom (and a great deal of research!) holds that it is easier and more common for smaller churches to grow than for larger churches.

Two possible explanations for this result:

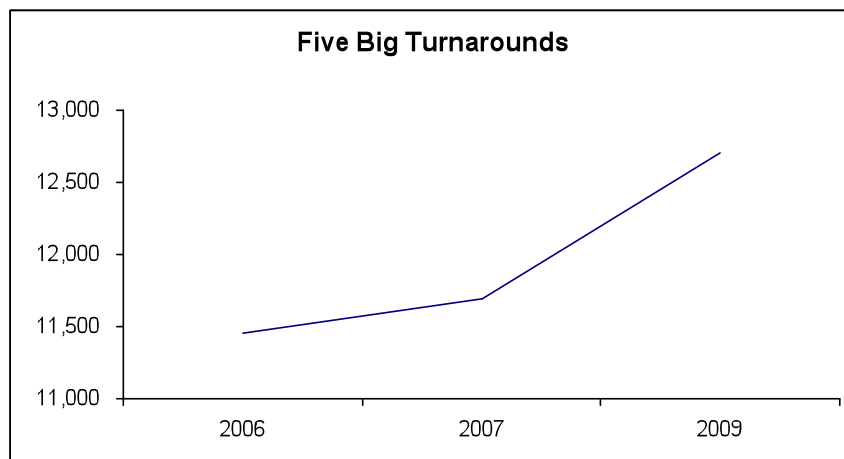
- Many large congregations have only recently attained their own turnaround, and have not yet had the resources to help smaller, struggling churches in their field.
- Our comparatively small number of well-executed church plantings over the past seven years means there are few young, vibrant small churches growing among us.

V. Victories

The 2009 survey revealed a number of positive trends:

- The continuing turnaround of our largest churches

Five of our largest churches (**LA, NYC, Manila, Bangalore and Singapore**) reported growth in both 2009 and 2007, continuing turnarounds from lows that occurred in 2006.



Three others of our largest churches achieved turnaround milestones. The **Hong Kong and South Florida** churches reported their first growth since 2001. The **Boston** church reported its first growth since 2000.

These eight are among our oldest churches, all with long histories of sending out other churches and providing money and leadership for hundreds of smaller churches. As a group they suffered disproportionately from 2003-2005, losing 43% of their members. Their combined membership growth since 2006 is 1,253.

– **Growth in several groups of related and individual medium-sized churches**

The **Japan** churches reported the first growth, as a group, since 2001.

Our churches in **Indonesia** have grown by over 10% since 2006.

Our underground churches in **China** grew by 110 and planted two new churches between 2007 and 2009.

Our **Canadian** churches reported growth of 5% from 2007-2009.

Seattle and its recent plantings (**Spokane, Tacoma and Bellingham**) grew by 5% to almost 800 members.

Several other medium-sized churches reported strong growth over the 2007-2009 period: **Richmond** (20%), **St. Louis** (15%), **San Antonio and Columbia, SC** (13%), and **Athens, GA** (8%).

Four churches over 200 members are now larger than at any time in their history, and all were planted in the 1990's: **Hampton Roads, Medan (Indonesia), Hartford and Gainesville**.

VI. Challenges

In the past three years we've seen a number of churches go out of existence.

We no longer have churches in 12 nations we had churches in as recently as 2002.

- Our only church in **Poland** had attained to a membership of 70 in 2002. Poland is now the largest nominally Christian country in the world in which we do not have a church.
- Our only church in **Portugal** was planted in Lisbon in 1996, but after 10 years of existence dwindled down to a half dozen members, and is no longer meeting.
- Our church in Vienna, **Austria**—which had reached 47 members by the end of 2002—merged with a mainline Church of Christ.
- Our only church in **Slovenia** had reached 18 members by 2001, but went out of existence before its tenth anniversary.
- Our only church in **Slovakia** reached 29 members by the end of 2002 but lost two-thirds of its membership by then of 2004, and is no longer in existence.
- Small church plantings in some Muslim countries went out of existence some time after 2007. Valiant efforts to establish churches in two others persisted with a handful of members for over 5 years each, came to an end sometime after 2002.
- Our church in **Curacao**, which had reached a high of 36 members in 2000, dwindled to a handful of members, then joined the Sold Out Discipling Movement. Another small island

nation church, in Cape Verde off the western coast of Africa, went out of existence sometime after 2005.

- Our church in the Caribbean nation of **Martinique** reached 34 in 2002, but is no longer meeting.

We now lack a presence in several cities in which an ICOC had existed for many years.

- Churches in **Rhode Island** and **Riverside**, California are no longer a part of our movement.
- We no longer have a church in **Adelaide** (planted in 1993) or **Canberra** (planted in 2001) Australia.
- We no longer have churches Germany at **Ramstein Air Base** (planted in 2000) or in **Cologne** (planted in 1997 and with a peak membership of 78 in 1999) or **Hamburg**, Germany.
- Our churches in **College Station**, Texas and **Portland, Maine** went out of existence. Both had existed over 10 years before failing. Plans are in the works for both of these to be replanted.

We were able to report the existence of almost 100 new churches planted from 2003-2008, but 31 of these do not appear as separate churches in the 2009 survey.

- In India, 15 churches we had previously counted as new churches are once again counted as a satellite of another church in India.
- Five plantings reported to have happened in Kenya, four in the Ivory Coast, two each in Guatemala and Romania, and one each in Malaysia, Sierra Leone, and Malaysia never reported membership in any survey year, and are either already out of existence, or still being counted with another church's membership.

Survey and Report Prepared by [Disciples Today](#)

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