

RESEARCH REPORT

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*A Study of Church-type Missions Removed from
Southern Baptist Convention Rolls During the 1990s*

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Executive Summary

- ◆ 2,628 congregations that reported as a church-type mission at least once during the 1990s were missing from the 1999 Annual Church Profile.
- ◆ These congregations accounted for 31 percent of the total of 8,557 that reported as a church-type mission during the 1990s.
- ◆ Associational directors of missions (DOMs) were surveyed to determine what happened to the missing congregations. A remarkable 89 percent (448 of 501) of DOMs responded.
- ◆ 92 percent of the congregations were appropriately removed.
Only 8 percent (168 congregations) still existed as part of the association.
- ◆ Considering congregations removed appropriately:
 - 7 of 10 simply disbanded—they closed up shop
 - 1 of 8 either merged or was reorganized
 - 1 of 14 changed affiliation in some way
 - 1 of 11 experienced some other fate
- ◆ The racial/ethnic makeup of the missing congregations was similar to that of all existing 1999 church-type missions.
 - 2 of 5 were Anglo
 - 1 of 4 was Hispanic
 - African-American, Asian, and Other each accounted for about 1 of 10
 - 1 of 20 was Native American
- ◆ The current denominational reporting process, while performing well, may be improved with better communication, cooperation, and training.
- ◆ A greater concern is the identification, categorization, and tracking of the 1,500 to 1,700 church plants reported by state conventions each year.

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Introduction

A primary emphasis of the North American Mission Board (and the former Home Mission Board) during the 1990s was reaching America by starting new congregations. The Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has an ongoing interest in the health of these young congregations.

During the years from 1991 to 1999, a total of 8,557 congregations reported as a church-type mission¹ at least once on the Annual Church Profile (ACP, formerly the Uniform Church Letter prior to 1994). Some of these church-type missions were started prior to 1991. In a perfect world, each church-type mission would flourish and become a healthy constituted church within a reasonable timeframe.

The 1999 ACP provides a reality check. Of the 8,557 congregations reported as missions during the 1990s, 22 percent (1,905) reported as constituted churches in 1999, 47 percent (4,024) still reported as church-type missions, and 31 percent (2,628) no longer reported at all.² Thus, one-third (1,905 of 5,925) of the surviving church-type missions reported as churches in 1999.

The primary purpose of this report is to describe what happened to the 2,628 church-type missions not included on the 1999 ACP. The scope of this research was limited to describing outcomes rather than giving in-depth reasons why congregations failed. The assumption that response rates would be higher with a brief survey instrument proved to be accurate. Future research projects may look at the entire life cycle of church-type missions, including details on why some fail while others flourish.

Methodology

An attempt was made to identify each missing congregation with its most recently reported associational affiliation. Of the 2,628 missing church-type missions, 342 could not be identified by state convention and association.³ Another 25 could not be matched to a current list of associational directors of missions (DOMs). Eliminating these 367 units left the remaining 2,261 congregations as the target population for this study.

The 2,261 missing church-type missions were affiliated with 501 associations. These 501 DOMs received a questionnaire for each of their missing congregations consisting of three questions plus an opportunity for comments. (A copy of the questionnaire is provided in appendix B.)

Sampling

In 43 instances, 10 or more missing congregations were affiliated with a single association. Even though the questionnaire was quite brief, it was decided not to burden any DOM with more than 10 forms. In each of these 43 associations, a random sample of 10 congregations was selected. Responses from these 43 associations were weighted to represent all of their missing congregations. (For example, if an association had 20 missing congregations, responses for its 10 sample congregations were weighted by a factor of 2.) After the sampling was performed, 1,656 congregations were targeted for response from the DOMs.

¹ The definition of a church-type mission, as agreed upon by the denomination and used for the Annual Church Profile, is “*A body of baptized believers having a distinct identity that meets regularly for worship, engages in Bible study and evangelism, and provides opportunity for stewardship and fellowship, but has not yet constituted as a church.*”

² Tables in appendix A show the 1999 outcomes of the 8,557 church-type missions by state convention. Table A-1 provides counts and Table A-2 provides percentages for each convention.

³ All 342 church-type missions with no state convention identified were most recently included in the denominational statistics in 1991. Data for missions were kept in a separate file that year, and it had incomplete information regarding state convention and associational affiliations.

Response rates

The cooperation of the DOMs in completing and returning the questionnaires was remarkable. All but 53 of the 501 targeted DOMs completed and returned their questionnaires, a response rate of 89 percent. The number of forms received by a DOM did not impact his willingness to respond. In fact, responses were received from 60 of 63 DOMs (95%) who were sent eight or more questionnaires.

The 448 responding DOMs provided information on 1,512 of the 1,656 church-type missions in the sample. A total of 2,095 (all but 166) of the 2,261 church-type missions were represented among the 1,512 responses received from the DOMs. Thus, the effective response rate for the targeted congregations was 93 percent after weighting (2,095 of 2,261).

The total number of responses in the following tables should equal 2,095—the weighted total of all responses. However, there were instances when the DOM did not answer one or more of the survey questions. When the total listed for a table below is less than 2,095, the difference is due to item non-response.

Survey results

DOMs were first asked to verify that the congregation named on each questionnaire was reported as a church-type mission between 1991 and 1998, and that it was part of their association. Responses to this query were 86.7 percent positive and 4.0 percent negative. Another 9.4 percent of the responses indicated a lack of knowledge of the congregation, which may be explained by turnover of DOMs and the number of years since some of the congregations reported.

Table 1—*The congregation named above was reported to be a church-type mission at least once during 1991 to 1998, and was part of your association. Is this information correct?*

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	1,798	86.7%
No	83	4.0
Do not know	194	9.4
Total	2,075	100.0

The large positive response to the first question indicates that associational affiliation of a large majority of congregations participating in the ACP's collection of denominational statistics is accurately reported. An issue for future study is whether some legitimate church-type mission congregations are not being incorporated into the ACP process.

Outcomes reported

The second question asked the DOM to relate what happened to the church-type mission. Responses are given in table 2.

The most common outcome (65%) was that the congregation disbanded. Sometimes an effort was made to salvage the work by either merging it with another denomination (8%) or reorganizing it (5%). In other cases there was a change of affiliation between the congregation and the association—5 percent withdrew from the association, about 1 percent had fellowship withdrawn by the association, and another 1 percent changed denominations.

Details about the causes of the disbandment or disaffiliation of church-type missions were not collected. Yet, DOMs reported in written comments that 5 percent (108) of the congregations experienced some difficulty with the pastor or lay leaders.

Table 2—*This congregation was not included on your list of congregations used for the 1999 Annual Church Profile process. What happened to this congregation?*

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Disbanded (no longer in operation)	1,235	64.8%
Withdrew from our association	96	5.1
Association withdrew fellowship	11	0.6
Affiliated with another denomination	16	0.8
Merged with another congregation	144	7.6
Reorganized as another congregation	87	4.6
Deletion was an error, it is still part of our association	135	7.1
Other	183	9.6
Total	1,907	100.0

In 135 cases, the DOM reported that an error had occurred and the congregation still existed as part of the association. After examining the written comments (see next section), this number should be increased to 168 cases. Thus, only 8 percent of the missing church-type missions were inappropriately removed from the 1999 ACP process.

Written comments

DOMs were given the opportunity to write comments about each congregation. Twenty-three percent (448 of 2,095) of the forms contained comments, some of which are included verbatim in appendix C. The comments were grouped into eight broad categories as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3—*Please use the space below to share any additional information about the circumstances or fate of this particular congregation.*

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of all Respondents</u>
Church name or location changed	112	5.4%
Pastor/leaders left or caused problems	108	5.1
Preaching or ministry point only	65	3.1
Still exists, not in association	45	2.2
Still exists, in association	69	3.2
Merged with another congregation	56	2.7
Reorganized as another congregation	27	1.3
Congregation never really cooperated with association	7	0.3

A cross-tabulation of responses to question 2 and the categories of written comments was used to determine whether each congregation still exists.

Table 4—*Does the church-type mission still exist?*

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes, as part of the association	168	8.0%
Yes, but not in the association	135	6.4
No	1,792	85.5
Total	2,095	100.0

As mentioned previously, only 8 percent (168) of the removed church-type missions still exist as part of the association. Another 135 still exist, but are no longer part of the association. The vast majority (92 percent) of the missing church-type missions (1,927 of 2,095) were appropriately removed from the 1999 ACP process.

Name or location changes

A name or location change was mentioned in the comments for 112 of the missing congregations (see Table 3). Only 15 were among the 168 still existing in the association. Thus, removal of church-type missions due only to change in name or location rarely happens.

There are times when LifeWay Christian Resources is contacted for a new SBC identification number only because of a name change or relocation. The official identifier should remain with a congregation through these types of changes. Changing denominational identifiers because of a name or location change creates the false impression that one congregation failed and a new congregation started. An inappropriate change of the SBC identification number also prevents tracking the progress of ongoing congregations.

Mergers and reorganizations

The DOMs responding to this survey indicated (either by response to the second question or by written comment) that 152 congregations had participated in a merger and that 88 had undergone reorganization. None of the congregations reported as merged and only nine reported as reorganized were among the group of congregations still in existence. Thus, the vast majority of mergers and reorganizations of church-type missions are handled properly.

Mergers and reorganizations of congregations can cause confusion in the reporting of denominational statistics. For example, when two congregations merge, the newly created congregation may be considered a continuation of one of the merged congregations with the other partner being eliminated from the reporting process. In this case, the new congregation should keep the official SBC identification number of the “continuing” congregation.

Another merger scenario would be that both merging congregations could be eliminated with a new identification number assigned to the merged congregation. Either scenario results in the net loss of one congregation, but the second scenario indicates two dropped congregations with one added.

Reorganizations may also cause confusion. Reorganization technically means that a congregation disbands and is reborn. Perhaps the reorganized congregation has the same name, facility, or core members as the defunct congregation. If there is a strong link to the former congregation, the reorganized unit may retain the SBC identification number.

Race and ethnicity

The third and final question on the survey instrument asked about the ethnic and racial makeup of the church-type mission. If the response was “Asian” or “Other,” the DOM was asked to write in a specific group. Incorporating the specified responses with question 3 yields the following breakdown.

Table 5—*Primary ethnic or racial makeup of the church-type missions.*

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
White non-Hispanic	736	42.3%
African-American	166	9.5
Hispanic	430	24.7
Native American	31	1.8
Asian	192	11.0
Other	188	10.8
Total	1,742	100.0

Table 5 shows that slightly more than two-fifths of the missing congregations were primarily white non-Hispanic (Anglo) in racial/ethnic makeup. One-fourth was Hispanic, and about one-tenth each was African-American, Asian, and “Other.”

The racial/ethnic distribution of the missing church-type missions was similar to the distribution of church-type missions that were in the 1999 ACP database. Those church-type missions were 36.2 percent Anglo, 11.3 percent African-American, 27.3 percent Hispanic, 1.4 percent Native American, 14.5 percent Asian, and 9.3 percent “Other.” There is no evidence to suggest that church-type missions of one racial/ethnic group are more likely to fail than any other group.

Asian sub-groups

Given the opportunity to specify Asian sub-groups, DOMs most often said the missing congregation was Korean (64), Filipino (31), or Chinese (16). Table 6 provides detailed responses for other groups.

Table 6—*Detailed breakdown of missing Asian congregations.*

	<u>Number</u>
Chinese	16
Japanese	4
Korean	64
Filipino	31
Asian Indian	3
Cambodian	9
Hmong	3
Vietnamese	5
Other Asian	57

The “Other” category of race and ethnicity was also sub-divided based on DOM responses. Groups with more than 10 congregations specified included Haitian (28), Middle Eastern (22),

Jewish (16), and Brazilian or Portuguese (11). Another 59 congregations were identified as multi-ethnic.

Conclusions

The associational directors of missions were extremely willing to assist the North American Mission Board in studying the outcomes of church-type missions. This most likely indicates that DOMs are aware of and interested in the denominational emphasis on church planting. NAMB is blessed to have 1,200 potential partners in planting and nurturing young congregations.

About 7 of every 10 church-type missions reported through the denomination's data collection process during the decade of the 1990s were still reporting as of 1999. In fact, 2 of every 9 had become a constituted church by 1999. This indicates that new congregations participating in the ACP have a high survival rate.

Only 8 percent of the church-type missions not participating in the 1999 ACP process were said by the DOM to still exist in their association. Given the complexities of data collection and tracking, the fact that 92 percent of the missing congregations were appropriately removed seems remarkable.

Yet there is room for improvement in the tracking of congregations through the ACP process. Events such as change of church name, change of meeting location, mergers of congregations, and reorganization of previously disbanded congregations provide challenges to the statistical tracking of young congregations.

Improving communication among associations, state conventions, and LifeWay should be a goal of each entity. Understanding and applying definitions, incorporating new congregations in the reporting process, and properly handling the addition and removal of congregations are all processes that may benefit from better communication and training.

Additional challenges and opportunities

One challenge in the realm of denominational statistics is reconciling the number of church plants reported annually by state conventions (usually 1,500 to 1,700) with the annual net increase in the number of congregations included in Annual Church Profile database (usually 200 to 400).

Maybe some of the 1,500 to 1,700 church plants reported each year do not meet the definition of church-type mission as stated in the footnote on page one of this report. (DOMs indicated that 15 congregations removed as of 1999 were never more than preaching or ministry points.)

Additional subcategories of church plants may be defined, such as preaching or ministry points. Definitions need to have measurable criteria and need to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive.

Tracking the 1,500 to 1,700 new starts each year from birth through inclusion in the ACP process and maturity as a congregation will require much effort and cooperation among state conventions, associations, and denominational staff at both NAMB and LifeWay. A possible tracking system might include some or all of the following components.

- 1) Each state convention provides a file containing minimal information about its church plants, including name, address, and type of unit (church, church-type mission, preaching point, etcetera).
- 2) DOMs and state staff assist LifeWay in adding the plants into the Southern Baptist Directory Services.⁴
- 3) New units are encouraged to participate in the denomination by reporting an ACP.

⁴ The new, internet-based, Southern Baptist Directory Services operated by LifeWay currently contains both churches and church-type missions. This system could be expanded to include other types of units such as preaching or ministry points.

Creating a tracking system is inherently difficult. Cooperation and communication among all the involved entities will be necessary to overcome the difficulties. The benefits of better denominational statistics justify the extra effort.

Appendix A

Table A-1
Survival of Congregations Reporting as Church-type Missions,
1991 to 1999, by State Convention

State Convention	Total	Not on 1999 ACP	Still on the 1999 ACP	Church in 1999	Mission in 1999
Alabama	89	25	64	32	32
Alaska	39	9	30	5	25
Arizona	185	43	142	35	107
Arkansas	113	19	94	50	44
California	762	252	510	131	379
Caribbean	22	11	11	5	6
Colorado	137	25	112	30	82
District of Columbia	32	4	28	2	26
Dakotas	40	16	24	7	17
Florida	990	310	680	188	492
Georgia	405	86	319	102	217
Hawaii	38	5	33	10	23
Illinois	119	39	80	80	0
Indiana	200	85	115	39	76
Iowa	45	12	33	12	21
Kansas-Nebraska	109	28	81	32	49
Kentucky	85	25	60	28	32
Louisiana	305	66	239	52	187
Maryland	103	26	77	27	50
Michigan	134	58	76	33	43
Minnesota-Wisconsin	70	22	48	14	34
Mississippi	66	9	57	28	29
Missouri	149	49	100	36	64
Montana	47	13	34	15	19
Nevada	160	55	105	21	84
New England	142	63	79	22	57
New Mexico	89	20	69	22	47
New York	164	48	116	33	83
North Carolina	225	36	189	68	121
Northwest	148	56	92	30	62
Ohio	146	40	106	26	80
Oklahoma	157	27	130	59	71
Pennsylvania	94	24	70	21	49
South Carolina	87	12	75	46	29
Tennessee	152	20	132	57	75

Table A-1 (continued)

State Convention	Total	Not on 1999 ACP	Still on the 1999 ACP	Church in 1999	Mission in 1999
Texas (BGCT)	1,928	587	1,341	417	924
Texas(SBCT)	14	0	14	9	5
Utah-Idaho	79	24	55	24	31
Virginia(BGAV)	85	17	68	23	45
Virginia(SBCV)	4	0	4	3	1
West Virginia	53	6	47	20	27
Wyoming	31	8	23	10	13
SBC Exec Committee	6	6	0	0	0
Unidentified	509	342	167	1	166
Total SBC	8,557	2,628	5,929	1,905	4,024

Source: Strategic Planning Support, North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Georgia

Table A-2
Survival Percentages of Congregations Reporting as Church-type
Missions, 1991 to 1999, by State Convention

State Convention	Not on 1999 ACP	Still on the 1999 ACP	Church in 1999	Mission in 1999
Alabama	28.1 %	71.9 %	36.0 %	36.0 %
Alaska	23.1	76.9	12.8	64.1
Arizona	23.2	76.8	18.9	57.8
Arkansas	16.8	83.2	44.2	38.9
California	33.1	66.9	17.2	49.7
Caribbean	50.0	50.0	22.7	27.3
Colorado	18.2	81.8	21.9	59.9
District of Columbia	12.5	87.5	6.3	81.3
Dakotas	40.0	60.0	17.5	42.5
Florida	31.3	68.7	19.0	49.7
Georgia	21.2	78.8	25.2	53.6
Hawaii	13.2	86.8	26.3	60.5
Illinois	32.8	67.2	67.2	0.0
Indiana	42.5	57.5	19.5	38.0
Iowa	26.7	73.3	26.7	46.7
Kansas-Nebraska	25.7	74.3	29.4	45.0
Kentucky	29.4	70.6	32.9	37.6
Louisiana	21.6	78.4	17.0	61.3
Maryland	25.2	74.8	26.2	48.5
Michigan	43.3	56.7	24.6	32.1
Minnesota-Wisconsin	31.4	68.6	20.0	48.6
Mississippi	13.6	86.4	42.4	43.9
Missouri	32.9	67.1	24.2	43.0
Montana	27.7	72.3	31.9	40.4
Nevada	34.4	65.6	13.1	52.5
New England	44.4	55.6	15.5	40.1
New Mexico	22.5	77.5	24.7	52.8
New York	29.3	70.7	20.1	50.6
North Carolina	16.0	84.0	30.2	53.8
Northwest	37.8	62.2	20.3	41.9
Ohio	27.4	72.6	17.8	54.8
Oklahoma	17.2	82.8	37.6	45.2
Pennsylvania	25.5	74.5	22.3	52.1
South Carolina	13.8	86.2	52.9	33.3
Tennessee	13.2	86.8	37.5	49.3

Table A-2 (continued)

State Convention	Not on 1999 ACP	Still on the 1999 ACP	Church in 1999	Mission in 1999
Texas (BGCT)	30.4	69.6	21.6	47.9 %
Texas(SBCT)	0.0	100.0	64.3	35.7
Utah-Idaho	30.4	69.6	30.4	39.2
Virginia(BGAV)	20.0	80.0	27.1	52.9
Virginia(SBCV)	0.0	100.0	75.0	25.0
West Virginia	11.3 %	88.7 %	37.7 %	50.9
Wyoming	25.8	74.2	32.3	41.9
SBC Exec Committee	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Unidentified	67.2	32.8	0.2	32.6
Total SBC	30.7	69.3	22.3	47.0

Source: Strategic Planning Support, North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Georgia

Appendix B

**Survey of Church-type Mission Congregations Removed From the Southern Baptist
Convention Since 1991**

Association _____
Congregation Name _____
Street Address _____
City, State, ZIP _____
SBC ID Number _____
Most recent year included in Annual Church Profile _____

The congregation named above was reported to be a church-type mission at least once during 1991 to 1998, and was part of your association. Is this information correct?

- [1] Yes [2] No [3] Do not know

This congregation was not included on your list of congregations used for the 1999 Annual Church Profile process. What happened to this congregation?

- [1] Disbanded (no longer in operation)
 [2] Withdrew from our association
 [3] Association withdrew fellowship
 [4] Affiliated with another denomination
 [5] Merged with another congregation
 [6] Reorganized as another congregation
 [7] Deletion was an error, it is still part of our association
 [8] Other (please explain)

What was the primary ethnic or racial makeup of the congregation?

- [1] White Non-Hispanic
 [2] African-American
 [3] Hispanic
 [4] Asian (please specify) _____
 [5] Other (please specify) _____

Please use the space below to share any additional information about the circumstances or fate of this particular congregation.

Appendix C

Selected Comments From Directors of Missions

The mission changed their name to __ Church, and was constituted in 1998 (SBC ID no. __).

This was a mission; they constituted and became a full church known as __ Baptist Church, SBC ID __.

Those attending were assimilated into the sponsoring church, Lakeside Community.

This congregation disbanded but has started again this year. Their new SBC ID Number is __. Their pastor is __.

This is now __ Baptist Church. They moved in 1994 to donated land.

Church name now is called The Church of __; Dr. __ is the pastor. He is a medical doctor and a bivocational pastor.

Called a non-SBC pastor who led them to leave the associational convention. Has since disbanded.

The church is without a pastor but turned in an ACP for 1999.

This church is a full active church on report each year. The above listed SBC ID Number is incorrect.

When our DOM retired and we had no DOM they left and are now affiliated with a Baptist church (in another town).

Merged with another Korean group of another denomination. That group later split.

People moved, housing project.

Native American. Never heard of them.

Ethnicity is Muslim. When couldn't come up with enough funding, planter moved to (another state).

This mission has constituted as __ Baptist Church.

Will probably be considered mission status by next ACP.

An Arab mission congregation within an Anglo congregation.

This church started out of a church split over tongues and lasted only a very short time before disbanding.

This mission was organized as the result of a church split; it had no change for survival. Changed name to __ Baptist.

Merged with New __ to form Hispanic Baptist Mission of __.

Church Planter resigned.

This mission merged with the Korean mission in ___ Association. Now it is a Korean Church affiliating with ___ Association.

There is and has been for a number of years an Ethiopian group meeting in the ___ Church. Some are Baptist and some are not. They are not an organized mission of the church.

Poor leadership by pastor.

This work never progressed. Was an outreach Bible study.

Mother church waned in size and interest in support. Need is still there.

Members joined other SBC churches when pastor left. Pastor appointed a replacement pastor when he left. He stayed 3 months, did not move to field, and then left the area too. Church voted to disband. DOM was never consulted until vote had been taken.

The members decided to participate in two other existing works in the community.

The mission still exists and was not reported by mistake. Average worship is 50, baptisms 2. Became a church: 2000 ACP ___ Baptist Church”.

Merged with another congregation and is now called ___, SBC ID number ___.

Still exists but as a Bible Study only.

Merged with ___ Korean in the same location.

This was ___ Haitian. Figures for 1998 are ___ Haitian. Don't know how they got our address. They never met at this location.