

# Southern Baptist membership continues decline

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) For the fifth year in a row, the Southern Baptist Convention has seen a drop in its total membership.

The denomination's membership in 2011 was 15,978,112, a drop of nearly 1 percent from the 2010 figure of 16.1 million, the denomination's LifeWay Christian Resources reported Tuesday (June 12).

On June 19, the denomination is expected to elect its first African-American president, the Rev. Fred Luter of New Orleans. Some black Southern Baptists hope more African-Americans may be drawn to the predominantly white denomination if Luter is elected.

Last year, as the denomination faced its fourth consecutive year of decline, members adopted a proposal to be more intentional about placing racial and ethnic minorities on SBC committees and agency staff.

As of 2010, African-American churches comprised 8 percent of the denomination's churches; 50 percent of Southern Baptist churches started in 2011 were non-Anglo.

Southern Baptists, who remain the nation's largest Protestant body, reported slight increases in total number of churches and baptisms last year.

The church total in 2011 was 45,764, a 0.08 percent increase over the 2010 total of 45,727. Baptisms rose 0.70 percent to 333,341.