

Southern California Conference

64th Constituency Session

Report of the Secretary

What He Has Done and What He Can Do Among His People

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave to His disciples one last command and one last promise: *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. I am surely with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19, 20)

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we have believed these two statements from our Savior Jesus Christ. We have gone into our Southern California communities, in which there are more than 224 different people groups, nationalities and languages, and we have shared the Good News of Jesus and His soon return. Doing so, we have no doubt that He has been with us every single day, providing encouragement, direction and joy as we witnessed for Him.

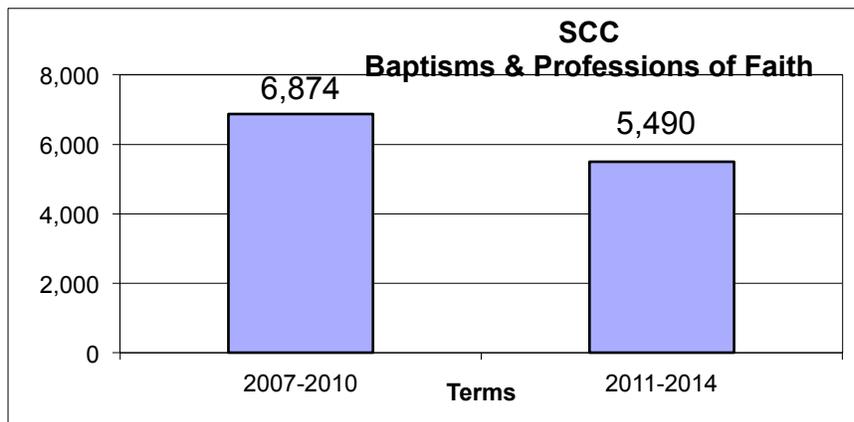
It is my privilege to present to you the following report, which is one of the functions of the office of the Secretary in this conference. This office also oversees and supports multiple administrative functions—among them, the statistical record keeping of membership of the local churches, and the minutes of key governing boards and committees in the conference.

The members of the conference are people who follow Jesus Christ, not statistical numbers. Every single person added as a member in any of our churches, or individuals who have died, or who have been removed from membership has a personal story.

Our records show that during the last quadrennium, our conference added an average of 1,375 new members each year, by either **baptism or profession of faith**. We praise the Lord for each one of them! They are our family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers who have accepted Jesus as their personal Savior and who wanted to be part of this big family of God waiting for His Second Coming.

Although **Chart A** below exhibits an 11% decrease in baptismal numbers in comparison with the last two quadrenniums (resulting in a reduction in our accession rate), these approximately 5,500 souls have significant value to us and to God. They are family!

CHART A



One question coming to our minds is what happened to the high growth rate we experienced two or three decades ago? There are a couple of noticeable explanations: 1) the slower immigration of people to southern California, and 2) the generational gap between the first and second generation of immigrants. While the first factor relates to those who are more open to accept a new set of religious/spiritual ideas, views and practices when moving into a new community, the second factor describes a generation that is seeking for a relevant church and spiritual life suited to their specific needs. It is a real challenge for evangelism.

Another area our statistical reports look at is the **membership transfers** to and from our conference. **Chart B & Chart C** show that during our last quadrennium the transfer out almost doubled the number that transferred in. In other words, these transfers mean that an annual average of 90 families of three members each transferred into our conference while 150 same-sized families transferred out to another conference. Comparing both charts, we are pleased that this exodus has decreased by 11% in the last term compared with the previous one.

As residents in southern California, we are familiar with the common reasons for these social and demographic changes occurring in our territory during the last two decades. Additionally, reasons for changes could be highly varied. Some very significant issues, for example, have impacted our southern Californian communities and churches in recent years:

- 1) the reduction or relocation of the aerospace industry
- 2) the high cost of living in Los Angeles metropolitan area
- 3) the slowing international and national immigration to California
- 4) the lack of jobs for the large middle class.

And, to these, we can add one recent denominational reason: the closure of the Adventist Media Center in Simi Valley, and the relocation of these media ministries outside of our conference territory.

All of these sociological, economic and denominational factors have impacted the membership composition in our churches.

CHART B

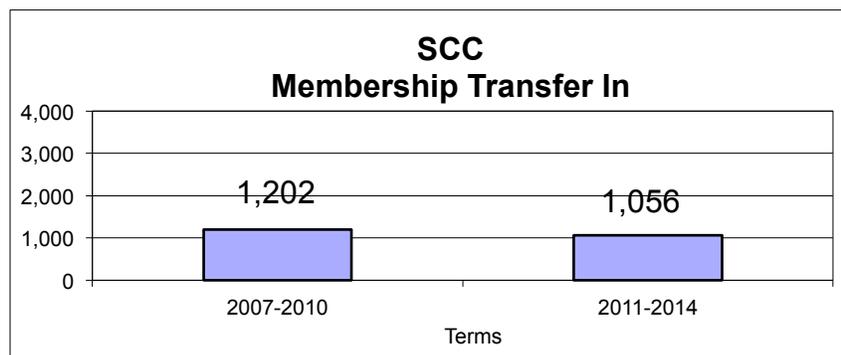


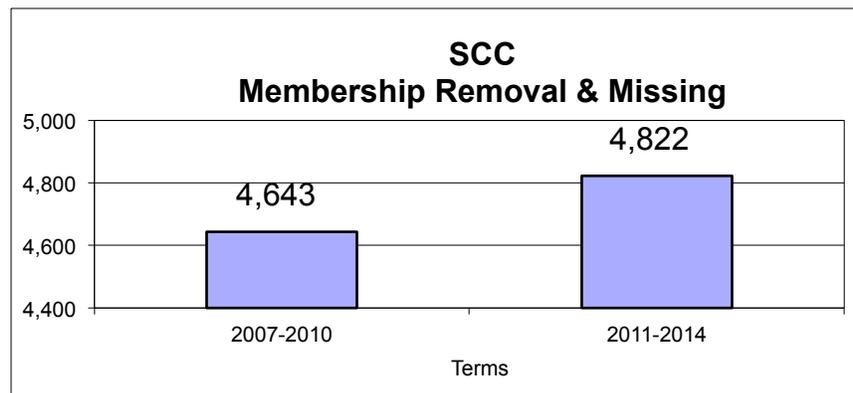
CHART C



Although we cannot do much about the mentioned exodus from our southern Californian territory, we could do something more to retain our current church membership. **Chart D** indicates that we lost 179 more members this quadrennium than the previous one, resulting in a total reduction of 4,822 members by **removal or reported missing**. That is a lot of people! Again, they are our family members, friends, neighbors and coworkers. This hurts!

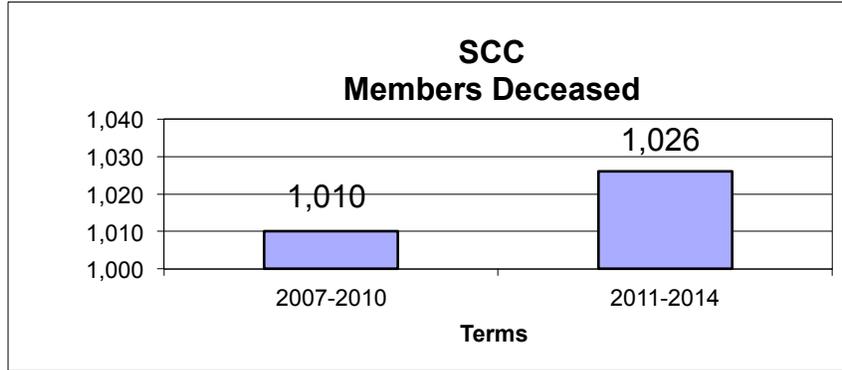
Primary concerns among the administrative and pastoral leadership in our conference are, how can we retain our current membership? How can we involve our church family members and make them feel secure and loved in their church families?

CHART D



Another painful loss we experienced during the same four-year period, as **Chart E** shows, was that 1,026 members who were worshipping, having fellowship and witnessing with us, **passed away** and now are sleeping in Jesus, waiting for the glorious day when He returns and calls them to eternal life. He, Who once was in the grave Himself, knows how we miss our love ones. He reminds us that "whoever believes in Him, will live, even though he dies." Let's pray that that encounter can be soon!

CHART E



With this additional loss of about 1,000 members at the end of this quadrennium, the **total membership** of our conference is 2.7% less than four years ago, as indicated on **Chart F**. On the other hand, after all the hundreds and thousands of movements within the membership in our conference, the percentile **composition of the Regions** in the conference remains intact after four years, as **Chart G** indicates.

CHART F

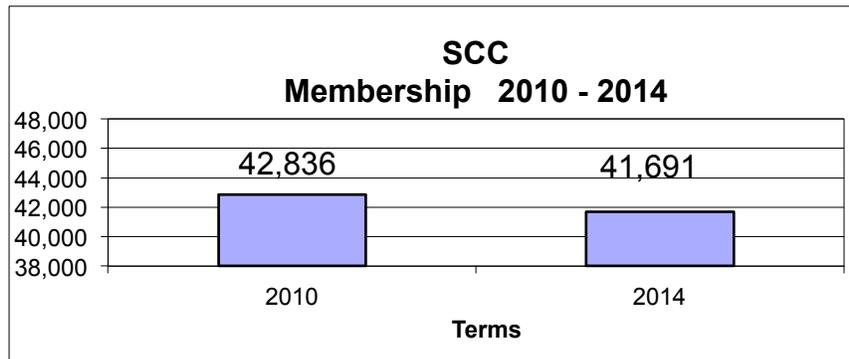
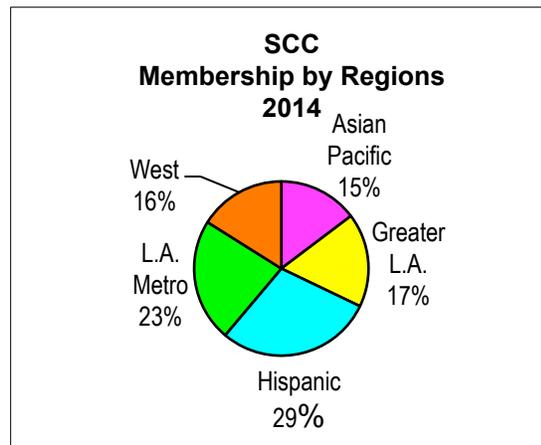
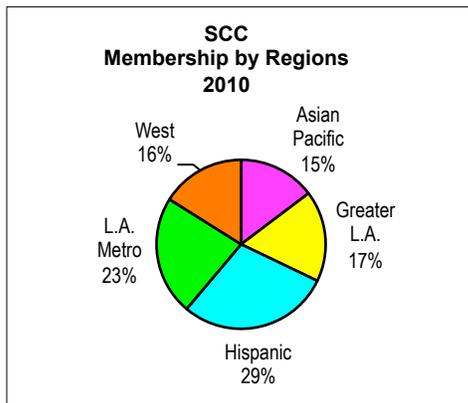


CHART G



What else can we say at the end of this quadrennium? We are just praising God for His goodness to His people. Once again, God has been faithful to His promises. He has asked us to share with others what we know about Him and we've done what he has commanded: we have told about Him, we have taught what He said and we have testified about what He has done.

During the last quadrennium each of our churches launched initiatives to reach out to their communities for Christ through many kinds of evangelistic approaches. These approaches include:

- The English as Second Language classes and small groups Bible studies conducted by the Los Angeles Chinese church.
- The Antelope Valley church doubled their church attendance through intense prayer, involvement in the community and messages on relationships.
- The Huntington Park Spanish church added 100 members in three years with traditional evangelism.
- The South Bay church reached more than 1,200 people through Natural Cooking schools.
- The Ventura church reached out through homeless ministries, and small group Bible studies.

Although the numbers and statistics can serve as visible indicators of accomplishments, they cannot describe completely what has been done for Christ. The solid preaching and constant visitation of our ministers, the faithful teaching and Christlike modeling of our educators, the constant witnessing and intercessory prayers of our members have blessed the thousands of members and non members of our churches, schools and neighborhoods. Only in eternity will we know all of the results!

We have done our part during the last four years, and we have been abundantly blessed as we served God's people. Let's continue to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit so we can be useful instruments for His honor and glory.

I don't want to conclude this report without expressing special gratitude to our Secretariat office team: Mrs. Donna Gohr and Mrs. Araceli Diaz for their faithful ministry in this office serving God's people, through their administrative and clerical work.

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

Yours on His mission,

Velino A. Salazar
Executive Secretary
Southern California Conference