

Editor's Preface

This seventy-third edition of the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* once again acknowledges the ever-changing religious context of our times. This 2005 edition is available in both hardcopy and electronic format. The electronic version can be accessed over the Internet using the unique pass code printed on the inside back cover of this volume. Updated information is reflected in the electronic edition twice during the year.

Recognizing the Contributions of Many

The field of church statistics is complex and, of necessity, filled with inconsistencies. In recent years, electronic reporting has enabled greater amounts of time at each data collection level to raise questions and to recalculate and refine reports. We at the *Yearbook* are pleased to take our place in this important task of annually capturing a snapshot of American religious life. Reflection upon such findings tells us much about ourselves as well as the institutional religious life in a country that has been referred to as a “nation with the soul of a church.”

Our colleagues—thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of individuals who keep church records—compile information for each edition of the *Yearbook*. We rely and build upon the efforts of church pastors, deacons, secretaries, and vestrymen and women who carefully review and report church membership statistics and financial giving. We acknowledge the contributions of those at congregational, regional, and especially denominational levels who respond with good cheer (most of the time!) and expeditiously (at least at our second request!) to provide us with the detailed data we require in the format that we request. We hope that being a part of the record and analysis offered by the *Yearbook* contributes to their sense of satisfaction for a job well done.

For various chapters of the *Yearbook* we are indebted to specific individuals for their assistance in gathering, analyzing, and corroborating the information we publish. As she has for the last several years, Nancy Merrill, of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, has furnished us with the data and analysis concerning seminary enrollments. Our colleague, Shanta Premawardhana of the National Council of Churches, updated and expanded our Directory of Selected Faith Traditions in America. Our colleague Ernest Rubenstein, Librarian of the Interchurch Center in New York, is a regular and reliable consultant to us. Likewise, Seth Kasten, librarian at the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in New York, is ever ready to offer able assistance and counsel. Dale Dickerson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America helped us to confirm the dates for the calendar. Cathy Lavendar of the United States Census Bureau confirmed that the Statistical Abstract remains current with *Yearbook* data.

In developing this year's theme chapter on the state of statistical reporting of North America mission personnel abroad, we turned to Jonathan J. Bonk at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven. His initial suggestions set our research off in the right direction. Later we returned to him with requests to reprint articles from the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, and he cheerfully granted permission. Although we did not use excerpts here we found the *Mission Handbook 2004-2006*, edited by Dotsey Welliver and Minette Northcott, to be an indispensable research tool for anyone interested in global mission.

In this 2005 edition we have deleted the chapter entitled “The Electronic Church.” That chapter offered a compilation of church related Web sites. We had initiated that chapter several years ago when the Internet was in its infancy and churches were

only slowly beginning to establish Web sites. Today, search engines provide excellent coverage in locating church Web sites. Moreover, readers can continue to explore the Yearbook Web site at www.electronicchurch.org.

Annual production of the *Yearbook* requires a variety of skills and commitments within our own editorial offices. Associate Editor, Marcel A. Welty gives leadership and prodigious effort to the logistics of researching, requesting, compiling, confirming, correcting, formatting and preparing data for analysis. Earl Davis is invaluable as the Editor's Assistant, aiding in confirming data and preparing the theme chapter text for publication. Patrick Bartlett joined us late in the year but still in time to give important assistance to the production of this year's edition. Almost as closely associated with us as those we see each day are our colleagues and friends of long standing, John and Sylvia Ronsvalle, of the *empty tomb, inc.* Nationally recognized for their steadfast attention to the patterns of church giving, the Ronsvalles are unfailingly gracious in providing expert assistance and in enabling our own analysis.

On behalf of those readers, we extend our gratitude for the wisdom, skill, patience and generosity of those we acknowledge here. No small group of individuals could hope to have the knowledge needed to compile a text as far-ranging as the *Yearbook*. Our efforts, strengthened by the contributions of all those named above, have led to the 2005 edition of the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*; we wish to express our deepest thanks to each of them.

The 2005 Edition Highlights

- Reports on 217 national church bodies which is reflective of the cultural and constitutional freedom of religion so characteristic of the United States.
- Signals that churches reporting in *Yearbook* statistics reflect continued overall growth of church participation, and account for the religious affiliation of more than 150 million Americans.
- Reports on 217 national church bodies including brief histories, leadership and headquarter information. Is broadly inclusive of the varieties of American Christianity.
- Ranks the 25 largest churches by membership. Only three of the top ten are "mainline" Protestant churches. Reports the fastest-growing churches as: the Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Assemblies of God.
- Offers a special focus on the state of research and statistical information on global missions, 36 years after the *Yearbook* ceased publication of such data.
- Analyzes the financial data from 63 churches representing almost 50 million members and more than \$32 billion dollars.
- In this day of increasing awareness of religious pluralism the *Yearbook* offers an updated and expanded Directory of Selected Faith Traditions in America.
- Continues to offer the only accurate and inclusive directory of US local and regional ecumenical bodies with program and contact information.
- Provides listings of theological seminaries and Bible schools, religious periodicals and guides to religious research including church archive listings.
- Provides accurate and timely information through the *Yearbook's* Internet edition, in its third year. As personnel change, area codes and old E-mail addresses are replaced with new ones, and any new information is submitted to the *Yearbook*, our readers are kept current of those changes through two regular electronic updates throughout the year.

Eileen W. Lindner
Editor
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