

DAVID YONGGI CHO: Pastor of the World's Largest Church

Not too many churches are listed in *Lonely Planet*, the quirky travel guide to the world, or in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Then again, not many churches have 1 million members. That astounding number is the membership of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, and *Lonely Planet* says a Sunday visit is “highly recommended” (and even tells foreigners where to sit to use multilanguage headphones).

David Yonggi Cho is co-founder and pastor of Yoido, considered the largest and fastest growing congregation in the world.

That's a far cry from the church's humble beginnings in 1958: a handful of people who gathered in a living room. Cho and another pastor hosted the group—all family members plus one elderly woman who came only to escape the rain.

It was just a few years after the Korean War, and the country's economy was in shambles with many facing poverty, hunger and hopelessness. The timing was right for explosive growth. Under Cho's leadership, Yoido grew like bamboo: It slept, it crept, it leapt. Within a few years, thousands were attending.

To accommodate the growth and minister to new members, Cho introduced a cell system with small home meetings and appointed women to make home visits—an unheard of move in post-war Asian society. In 1973, Prayer Mountain was launched to provide a secluded place of prayer and fasting.

Cho has also served as chairman of the executive committee of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, the first non-American to hold that position.—*Diana Scimone*