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July 7, 1967

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United Methodist Church
Bigger Than SBC, Maybe

NASHVILLE (BP)--The merger of The Methodist Church and the United Evangelical Brethren approved recently by two-thirds of the general conferences for both churches makes it the largest Protestant denomination in the nation, exceeding Southern Baptist Convention membership.

Latest statistical information from all three denominations indicate that the combined membership of the merged Methodist-Brethren group exceeds Southern Baptist Convention membership by 117,557.

The newly-created United Methodist Church however may be the largest Protestant denomination in the nation only for about eight months.

The merger will not be final until April of 1968, and the new statistics for the church years of 1966 become available from both Methodists and Southern Baptist in February.

If past trends are any indication, the increase in Southern Baptist Convention membership may exceed the 117,557 figure next February, said Martin Bradley of the research and statistics department for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

"Actually," said Bradley, "an increase of only 117,557 would be considered a small year of growth for the Southern Baptist Convention. I would think we would surpass that," he said.

Last year the SBC total membership increased by 179,751, and Bradley said that increases was not as great as in years past. Total SBC membership reported for 1965-66 in February was 10,952,463.

Methodist membership, however, decreased last year. In February, the Methodist Church reported a total 1965-66 membership of 10,318,910, down 12,664 from the previous year.

Latest information from the United Evangelical Brethren indicates their membership is 748,080. Their 1964 membership was listed as 735,723.

The merger of the Methodist Church and the United Evangelical Brethren was announced on June 29 after an audit showed that the action of the United Evangelical Brethren Ohio Sandusky Conference had pushed the EUB church over the necessary two-thirds of the aggregate votes of the annual (regional) conferences of each denomination. Two-thirds of the Methodist conferences had already approved the merger.

The merger will not be consummated until April 24-May 4 when the new United Methodist Church meets in Dallas to constitute the new church.

By that time, it is possible that the new statistics released by the Southern Baptist Convention will indicate that Southern Baptists have surpassed the combined church's membership.

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Walker Returns To Seminary

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Clyde R. Walker returns to the faculty of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary after serving a year with the Training Union Department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville as a consultant in vocational guidance.

Walker, assistant professor in the school of religious education, will again teach psychology and counseling. He received his doctorate of religious education from the New Orleans Seminary and has served on the faculty for two years.

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14,794 Registered At SBC;
Florida Tops Attendance

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NASHVILLE (BP)--More Baptists from Florida attended the Southern Baptist Convention in Miami Beach than any other state.

A breakdown of registered messengers attending the convention was released here by the convention's registration secretary, W. Fred Kendall, executive secretary of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

The final tabulation also reported that the final official registration figures at the convention totaled 14,794 messengers, slightly less than the unofficial hand count of more than 15,000 reported during the final session of the convention.

Kendall said that there is always some difference in the tabulation at the convention and the final machine count of the registration cards following the convention, and that the only explanation is the danger of error in rush of counting so many cards during the hectic four days of the convention.

Of the 14,794 registered, Florida led the list with 1,726 messengers to the convention.

North Carolina was next with 1,452, South Carolina third with 1,353, Georgia fourth with 1,339, and Alabama fifth with 1,157 messengers.

Texas, the largest state in the SBC which often sends the most messengers to the convention, ranked sixth this year in the number of messengers, with 1,123. Tennessee was the only other state with more than 1,000 messengers, with 1,032 registered.

Of the 29 Baptist state conventions, only one, Alaska, was not represented at the convention. Seven messengers each attended from the Panama Canal Zone, and from Puerto Rico.

Other state conventions represented at the convention and the number of registered messengers from each state, include:

Arizona, 34; Arkansas, 357; California, 129 (including three from Nevada); Colorado, 34; District of Columbia, 73; Hawaii, 12; Illinois, 240; Indiana, 97; Kansas, 72;

Kentucky, 725; Louisiana, 492; Maryland, 315; Michigan, 72; New Mexico, 55; Missouri, 594; Mississippi, 806; Ohio, 192; Oklahoma, 391; Oregon-Washington, 23; Idaho-Utah, 8; and Virginia, 864.

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Seminary PR Man Resigns
To Return To Pastorate

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Joe H. Courson has resigned as director of development and public relations of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary here to become pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Myers, Fla.

The seminary administrator is a native of Florida and a New Orleans Seminary graduate. Courson, 36, served as assistant to the president for two years and as director of development and public relations for one year at New Orleans Seminary.

He had been pastor of three rapidly-growing churches in Florida, the Azalea Park Baptist Church, Orlando; Pinecrest Baptist Church, Sanford; and the Terry Park Baptist Church, Jacksonville.

"Knowing his deep desire to return to pastorate, where he had uncommon success in his native state before coming to the seminary; we reluctantly yield to his request to be released from the responsibility," said seminary president, H. Leo Eddleman.

He is a graduate of Stetson University, Deland, Fla., and has taken advance studies at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary at Wake Forest, N.C.

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