



BAPTIST PRESS
 News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
 460 James Robertson Parkway
 Nashville, Tennessee 37219
 Telephone (615) 244-2355
 W. C. Fields, Director
 Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

September 9, 1971

**33 SBC Churches Listed Among
 100 Largest Sunday Schools**

WHEATON, Ill. (BP)--Thirty-three Southern Baptist churches, the largest number from any one denomination, were listed among the 100 largest Sunday Schools in the nation by Christian Life Magazine, a non-denominational publication based here.

Baptist churches dominated the list. Of the 100 largest Sunday Schools, 72 were listed as "Baptist."

The statistical summary included 23 Baptist Bible Fellowship churches, nine Independent Baptist churches, one American Baptist church, two Baptist General Conference churches, two Conservative Baptist churches, and one Free Will Baptist church, in addition to the 33 Southern Baptist churches.

The summary ranked the 100 largest Sunday Schools in the U.S.A. on the basis of their reported weekly average attendance.

Ranked as the largest in the nation was the Sunday School of Akron Baptist Temple, a Baptist Bible Fellowship church in Akron, Ohio, which reported an average weekly attendance of 5,801. The church did not report any other data, however. The pastor was quoted as saying the reason was "unhealthy competition among the churches."

First Baptist Church, Dallas, was ranked as second in the nation, with 5,520 average weekly attendance out of a total enrollment of 9,449. The 15,919-member church is the largest in the Southern Baptist Convention. W. A. Criswell, immediate past president of the convention, is pastor.

Other Southern Baptist churches, their rank in the listing, and their average weekly attendance (based on the period from Sept. 13, 1970 to May 9, 1971) were:

First Baptist Church, Amarillo, Tex., 12th, 2,485; First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., 18th, 2,151; First Baptist Church, Lubbock, Tex., 20th, 2,106; Travis Avenue Baptist Church, Fort Worth, 24, 2,017; Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas, 27th, 1,932;

First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., 31st, 1,804; Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, 36th, 1,692; First Baptist Church, San Antonio, 37th, 1,687; First Baptist Church, Nashville, 39th, 1,625;

Cliff Temple Baptist Church, Dallas, 43rd, 1,588; Sagamore Hill Baptist Church, Fort Worth, 44th, 1,583; Tallowood Baptist Church, Houston, 45th, 1,579; First Baptist Church, Midland, Tex., 47th, 1,565; First Baptist Church, Wichita Falls, Tex., 48th, 1,555; Beth Haven Baptist Church, Valley Station, Ky., 49th, 1,550;

Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., 50th, 1,537; Broadmoor Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss., 52nd, 1,515; First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., 54th, 1,500; Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, 55th, 1,476; South Main Baptist Church, Houston, 56th, 1,464; Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., 59th, 1,442;

First Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C., 64th, 1,366; First Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla., 65th, 1,358; Calvary Baptist Temple, Savannah, Ga., 66th, 1,352; First Baptist Church, Arlington, Tex., 75th, 1,305; First Baptist Church, Beaumont, Tex., 76th, 1,289;

Forrest Hills Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga., 80th, 1,263; First Baptist Church, Irving, Tex., 85th, 1,208; Northwest Baptist Church, Miami, 86th, 1,205; First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C., 90th, 1,168; and First Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C., 94th, 1,135.

In an article interpreting the 4 1/2 pages of statistical data, Christian Life Magazine editors observed that "once again the limited listing of mainline denominational churches (other than Southern Baptist) appears to reflect their lack of emphasis on evangelistic outreach. Most growing churches believe the 'Sunday School is the evangelist arm of the church,'" the article said.

The article cited Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., a Baptist Bible Fellowship church, as having "the fastest growing Sunday School in America." The church jumped from eighth to fifth in average Sunday School attendance, with an increase in average attendance of 1,471 (from 3,387 to 4,858).

Ranked fourth in the category labeled "fastest growing Sunday Schools" based on the numerical increase in average weekly attendance over last year was Forrest Hills Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Decatur, Ga. Attendance increased by 542, from 721 to 1,263.

Commenting on the statistical report compiled by Christian Life Magazine, A. V. Washburn, the head of the Sunday School department for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, said that "it is gratifying that one third of the 100 largest Sunday Schools are related to the Southern Baptist Convention."

Washburn added however, that "many additional Southern Baptist churches are reaching people in large numbers in an equal percentage ratio to these 33 SBC churches. We rejoice in the growing commitment of the priority of reaching people for Bible study and for Christ," Washburn said.

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Mike Speer, SBC Stewardship
Leader, Robbed and Wounded

9/9/71

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Michael L. Speer, director of Cooperative Program Promotion for the Southern Baptist Convention Stewardship Commission in Nashville, was robbed and shot by two men who stopped him on the street three blocks from his motel here.

His injury was not considered serious. A small calibre bullet entered behind the left ear, passed through his mouth and jaw and came out his right cheek.

Speer was in California to speak at one of three state stewardship conferences scheduled here, in San Diego and in Fresno.

Richard Kay, staff member for the Southern Baptist General Convention of California who also spoke at the conferences, said Speer told him the incident happened like this:

Speer decided to go for a walk before retiring for the night on Monday, Sept. 6. Three blocks from the hotel near Los Angeles' Convention Center, two gunmen held him up, took about \$10 in cash, his billfold, credit cards, identification and motel room key.

Speer offered no resistance. As the two blacks turned to run, one of them, almost as an afterthought, fired, Speer told Kay.

The former Kentucky state stewardship secretary ran for nearly two blocks before he found help. A bartender called for an ambulance. He never lost consciousness.

After emergency treatment at Los Angeles County Hospital, Speer borrowed a dime from a nurse to call Kay in Fresno and tell him he could not speak at the conference and to call his wife in Nashville.

Both Kay and Speer's physician called his escape from death "a miracle." The physician, a Baptist deacon, said that if the bullet had hit one-quarter inch to one side, it would have severed a major artery. If it had passed one inch to the other side, it would have hit the brain.

Speer told his wife there was little pain and that the physicians said he was doing fine. He flew to Nashville two nights after the incident to enter a Nashville hospital.

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Kay said Los Angeles police had no leads on who might have committed the robbery and fired the shot. Speer said it was dark and he could not recognize the men.

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Wycliffe Translators Set
Dallas Linguistic Center

9/9/71

DUNCANVILLE, Tex. (BP)--The Wycliffe Bible Translators have broken ground in this Dallas suburb for a \$4 million international linguistics center which will serve as a world-wide research and training center.

Participating in groundbreaking and dedication ceremonies were W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas; Sir James Plimsoil, Australian Ambassador to the U.S.; and the Studio Ensemble, a musical group from Dallas Baptist College.

Construction plans call for initial educational, dormitory and administrative units to begin operation in September 1972. No date has been set for the final phase which will involve extensive educational, residential and cultural facilities, including a library and museum.

The center will help coordinate worldwide linguistics training, along with the translators' longstanding Summer Linguistics Institutes which have been based at universities around the world.

The center's research facilities will contain information on culture and languages during 37 years of field experience. During that time the Wycliffe translators have entered 21 countries and translated the oral language of more than 450 cultures into a written form. Then they translated the Bible into the newly written language to provide the Christian gospel to thousands of people who have never before heard it, a Wycliffe spokesman said.

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1,032 Professions Reported
At Gulfport Baptist Crusade

9/9/71

GULFPORT, MISS. (BP)--An eight-day evangelistic crusade here resulted in a total of 1,032 professions of faith, with Baptist leaders here calling it "the greatest Christian happening on the Gulf Coast" in recent history.

The interdenominational crusade, led by Evangelist James Robison of Fort Worth, was sponsored by 72 Gulf Coast churches.

Crusade Chairman John Taylor, pastor of First Baptist Church here, said the meeting involved more churches and surpassed attendance of any similar evangelistic meeting in the area "for as long as anyone here can remember."

Taylor said the attendance was even more remarkable in the light of rainy weather that caused services to be moved from the Joseph W. Milner Stadium to an indoor auditorium for two successive nights.

More than 6,000 persons attended the final service. Total decisions were reported at 1,600 including the 1,032 professions of faith.

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INSERT

Please add the following to the story mailed 9/8/71, headlined "Sammy Tippit, Chicago Jesus Movement Leader Arrested." This later action developed too late to include in the story. Insert should go following graph 7 of story which begins, "Tippit began his ministry... Add follows:

Four days after his arrest, the 72-member Board of Directors for the Illinois Baptist State Association adopted a resolution deploring the arrest on "disorderly conduct" charges, saying that "witnessing and passing out religious literature is hardly disorderly conduct."

Copies of the resolution, which cited increases in crime on the streets of America and the gospel of Jesus Christ as the power to change men's lives, were sent to Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Illinois Gov. Richard Ogilvie.

(End insert, pickup with graph 8 of story).

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Baptist Editor Urges Study
Of Finland's Church-State Laws

HELSINKI, Finland (BP)--A Baptist editor, in response to a political group's proposal which if made law would virtually do away with the state church, has urged a comprehensive study of church-state relations in Finland.

Ernst Jacobson, editor of Missionsstandaret, said that the proposal from the Social Democratic Party in Finland could be a suitable basis for a committee study by representatives of the government, the state church and the free churches.

"The basic principle of the present proposal is that the state should be religiously independent and that the church should be autonomous, without support and without limitations from the state," the editor wrote.

If the proposal is adopted into law, it could virtually end such special advantages to the state church as the right to impose a tax on business companies and other organizations. The Lutheran Church is the established church in Finland.

Other aspects of the proposal from one of the country's leading political parties affect education, marriage, funerals and appointment of Lutheran bishops.

Under the proposal, instruction in schools would be given about the Christian tradition and religions and denominations, but teachers would not have to belong to a religious organization or the state church.

Marriages would be performed only by community authorities, not by the church, according to the political group's proposal. All communities would grant without payment a place in the cemetery for everyone.

The president of Finland would no longer have the right to appoint bishops, and every member of the parliament could take part in decisions about church affairs, and not just members of the state church, the committee proposed.

Missionsstandaret Editor Jacobson disagreed with the proposal for only civil marriage ceremonies. Public opinion speaks in favor of legal ceremonies in religious organizations as well as through civil authorities, he wrote.

The editorial agreed with the proposal that every taxpayer should have a burial place without charge. "Not the price difference for graves is too great in the case of Lutherans and non-Lutherans," he wrote.

Calling for a joint study of church-state relations, the editorial said that "sooner or later the church-state problem must be brought into focus. The free churches have always emphasized that a free church in a free state best corresponds to the New Testament ideal.

"It would be better for the sake of Christianity if the state church long ago had listened to the justified demands for justice voiced by the free churches, as well as by others," the editorial said.

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Polly Wants A Press Card

9/9/71

RICHMOND (BP)--Arthur Haylock, Baptist mission press representative in the Dominican Republic, wrote to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board here requesting a new press card.

He said the family parrot had chewed up his original press card.

"Please send a replacement, and I will keep it out of sight," Haylock promised.

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