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**SBC Leaders Express Delight
At Record Baptisms, Growth**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist leaders, meeting here for the denomination's Executive Committee, expressed joy and gratitude in response to a statistical report showing 1972 was a record year in baptisms, church membership and total gifts.

Last year, Southern Baptists reported a record 445,725 baptisms (conversions)--the greatest number since 1959. In addition, total church membership passed the 12 million mark for the first time, and total gifts exceeded the \$1 billion milestone.

The statistical report also indicated that enrollments increased for the Sunday School, Brotherhood, and church music organizations; but decreased slightly in Training Union and Women's Missionary Union.

In response to the news, several SBC leaders rejoiced at the gains, and sought to understand the factors involved in gains and losses.

"Statistical reports never tell the whole story, but numbers do represent persons and reflect compassion and concern," commented Porter W. Routh, executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee.

Routh pointed out that the 12 million milestone in church membership represents the first time in the past 10 years that the denomination has exceeded two per cent in its growth rate. He attributed the growth partly to the record number of baptisms.

Routh added that the \$1 billion figure in total gifts represents stewardship growth, but also represents missionary zeal and outreach. Included in the \$1 billion figure was a total of \$174.7 million given to Baptist mission causes.

The acting director of the SBC Home Mission Board's evangelism division, Fred B. Moseley, of Atlanta, attributed the record year of baptisms to a national climate of religious concern and the effective involvement of the laity in evangelism.

Last year, Southern Baptists trained more than 100,000 laymen to be more effective in bearing a Christian witness through lay evangelism schools promoted by the board, Moseley pointed out.

Moseley observed that there seems to be a moving of God in the nation, as evidenced in the Jesus movement, renewal of the church and laity resulting in increased evangelism, and other national concerns for religious values.

Glendon McCullough, executive secretary of the SBC Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, pointed out that Brotherhood enrollment in men's and boys' missions organizations had increased for the second year in a row. The report indicated Brotherhood enrollment reached 454,272, an increase of 2,734 or .6 per cent.

McCullough said the increase was evidence of "an increasing interest of Southern Baptist men and boys in becoming meaningfully involved in missions.

Last December, a statistical projection had predicted a loss in Brotherhood enrollment, but the final tabulations showed an increase of about one-half of one per cent.

As usual, the biggest percentage gain in church organization enrollments came in the church music organizations. Music enrollment reached 1,173,004, up 84,024 or 7.7 per cent compared to last year's all-time high.

William J. Reynolds, secretary of the church music department for the SBC Sunday School Board, attributed the 7.7 per cent growth factor to "the strong leadership in the churches and in the state music departments. We are grateful to God for what this means to Southern Baptists--the opportunities it provides and the responsibilities it brings," he added.

Sunday School enrollment, which like Brotherhood increased by about one-half of one per cent, reached 7.1 million, up 36,198 from the previous year's enrollment.

A.V. Washburn, secretary of the Sunday School department for the board, expressed thanks to God for "the new spirit in the churches which has come through His spirit."

This new spirit, he observed, is evidenced by "a renewal of the spiritual life of members and workers, a deeper concern for people and reflected in a gain in Sunday School enrollment and in the greatest number of baptisms in Southern Baptist history."

Two organizations in the SBC reported decreases in membership--the Woman's Missionary Union and the Training Union. WMU membership decreased by an even one per cent, from 1,137,586 to 1,125,641. Training Union dropped to 2,044,445, a change of about three per cent.

Miss Alma Hunt, executive secretary of Southern Baptist Women's Missionary Union in Birmingham, pointed out that the loss is relatively small compared to losses in other years.

"We recognize the loss for what it is--a reflection of changing times and changing roles of women," she added. "Southern Baptist women are not exceptions to the changes affecting all American women. The women we try to involve in missions are the same ones who are taking employment outside the home, who are sought by secular service and social organizations, who manage hectic family schedules, who are intimidated by the crime wave, and who are returning to college by the thousands.

"The loss in membership shows that some church WMU's must not be confronting times with the appealing WMU options that are available today," she commented, adding that she continued to receive many "exciting reports of WMU growth.

"Apparently, in many areas, the recently overhauled WMU plans are beginning to meet the needs and preferences of today's women," she stated. "Last month the number of subscribers to WMU magazines increased as much as the membership loss of last year, indicating that more women and girls are now being enlisted in WMU."

Although Training Union enrollment decreased during 1972, two SBC leaders here predicted a new growth in church training next year.

"An about face is evident in the decline of church training enrollment," stated Philip B. Harris, secretary of the board's church training department. "This decline is being slowed considerably. The direction now is upward and forward."

Both Harris and Allen B. Comish, director of the Church Services and Materials Division for the board, said they felt the impact of a new convention program called "Church: The Sunday Night Place" would spur new interest in Training Union.

In addition, pointed out Comish, Training Union curriculum materials have been redesigned to meet the churches' requests to include more Baptist doctrines and studies in personal spiritual life.

"These two factors," Comish claimed, "signal a new growth of training in the churches."

The statistical reports were based on uniform church letters returned by all but 108 of the SBC's 34,534 churches, according to Martin B. Bradley, secretary of research services for the board. Bradley said Southern Baptists do a marvelous job of reporting their statistics, much better than most other Protestant denominations.

Starkes Answers
Jewish Criticism

ATLANTA (BP)--As criticism of Key 73 by the American Jews mounts, Southern Baptist interfaith leader M. Thomas Starkes of Atlanta issued a statement saying at no place are Jews singled out as special targets of evangelism.

"Key 73 can be a process of learning for both Christians and Jews for mutual social service for the kingdom of God. It must be experienced in an atmosphere of keen understanding," said Starkes, who heads the Home Mission Board's department of interfaith witness here.

Starkes said that witnessing is an integral part of the Christian essence and Key 73, the combined evangelistic effort of more than 140 Christian denominations to "bring our continent to Christ", is a part of a continuing emphasis of Christian life.

However, "care should be taken by Christians to witness with caring love, being careful not to exploit or manipulate any person simply because he has a Jewish-sounding name," Starkes said. "Choice for or against Jesus as Messiah is an individual matter, involving the free exercise of conscience. Any attempt to limit this freedom, either by representative or recipient is to dehumanize the process of exchange."

Criticism of Key 73 by the Jews has come since the announcement of the evangelistic effort.

Rabbi Solomon Bernards, a director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and one of the leaders with Starkes of the nation's first Jewish-Christian dialogue held last summer, was among the first to express doubts about Key 73.

"I affirm the right of all Christians and other individuals and groups to proclaim their witness as vigorously and forthrightly as they are able," Bernards said. "But the apparent monolithic, triumphalist tone and approach of the Key 73 outreach disturbs me. The campaign may result in a backlash or resentment against the religious enterprise as a whole."

More recently Rabbi Jacob Rothschild of Atlanta's reform Jewish Temple, said that Key 73's "efforts to make a Christian country of America defy and defeat the very essence of American democracy--the pluralistic nature of our land."

Jews have resisted conversion to any other religion for 4,000 years and conversion to Christianity for 2,000, Rothschild said in a luncheon of the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta.

"The goal of creating a Christian America frightens me," the Atlanta Jewish leader said, "The return to an America in which one religion sees itself as having an exclusive patent on spiritual truth brings us back to the climate in colonial America and earlier in other lands."

In contrast, Rabbi Henry Siegman of the Synagogue Council of America, charged that criticism by some Jewish leaders was "alarmist" and "harmful to Jewish interests."

Siegman said the "threat to the Jewish survival in modern society" does not come from Christian proselytism. Although he himself finds Key 73 unappealing, Siegman said the threat comes "instead from religious indifference, from the allurements of a secular and irreligious society."

Other aspects of Key 73, such as a full emphasis on service to society as part of one's witness, should be noted by American Jews, Starkes said.

"Because each denomination is free to choose its own means of evangelistic efforts, there will doubtless be some which seem untasteful to certain segments of Judaism," Starkes said. But, Starkes re-emphasized "care should be taken by Christians to witness with caring love."