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**Baptists Dominate Top  
100 Sunday Schools List**

WHEATON, Ill. (BP)--Southern Baptists placed more church Sunday Schools than any other group on the national listing of The 100 Largest Sunday Schools compiled here by Christian Life magazine.

The list includes 37 Southern Baptist churches and 80 Baptist churches of one variety or another. Forty-three of the top 50 churches are Baptist.

The SBC's largest church, First Baptist Church, Dallas, which runs only six Sunday school buses, reported an average weekly attendance of 5,676, finishing third behind two independent Baptist churches. They are First Baptist Church of Hammond, Ind., with 139 buses and an average attendance of 7,837, and Highland Park Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., with 18 buses and 5,756 average weekly attendance.

First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, Calif., whose pastor had earlier recommended abolishing the list because "it makes liars out of some pastors," finished fifth. It has 11 buses and 3,695 average attendance.

The independent Baptist church's pastor, Harold Fickett, said in March at a conference in Fort Worth, "Six out of the 10 largest Sunday schools (on the national list) include attendance at early morning worship services as the pastor's Sunday school class." He specifically noted that First Baptist Church, Dallas, does not inflate its totals in such a manner.

Although agreeing with Fickett that such padding is improper, A.V. Washburn, secretary of the Sunday School Department of the SBC's Sunday School Board, said "The list of top Sunday schools creates excitement and proves that people can be reached.

"I don't know of any Southern Baptist church which pads its Sunday school with large, worship-service type attendance," Washburn said. "Southern Baptists concentrate on lay-led Bible study, approaching laymen on their level of learning.

"Inspirational early morning services do some good, but that approach alone leaves undone some of the basic teaching elements so vital to bearing permanent fruit."

Commenting on the Baptist domination of the list, Washburn said, "The thing that ultimately creates a growing church is to center on reaching people for the Lord. If there isn't an evangelistic emphasis, it becomes purely academic. A cold, intellectual approach never attracts multitudes of people."

A breakdown of states showed Texas churches led Southern Baptist representation on the list with 13. Florida followed with six and others were scattered in nine states.

Besides the 37 Southern Baptist churches, the 80 Baptist churches on the list included 23 categorized as "independent," 15 from the Baptist Bible Fellowship, 2 from the Baptist General Conference and 1 each from the American Baptist Churches, Conservative Baptists and World Baptist Fellowship.

No predominantly black church has appeared in the listing yet, according to Christian Life magazine, but Allapattah Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Miami, jumped from 65th to 29th on the list "on the strength of an aggressive busing ministry in a racially mixed neighborhood."

The annual listing, now in its sixth year, "reveals the Sunday schools appearing on the listing are bucking an overall downward trend in Sunday school attendance by showing increases each year," Christian Life magazine said.

"The excitement stirred up by the publication of the...listing increases each year," said Robert Walker, the magazine's editor. "Many churches appear to set their attendance goals to achieve a place on the listing. And when this is coupled with an active evangelistic program, the results are astonishing."

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Baptists Implement Project  
To Help Families of Runaways

9/21/73

HOUSTON (BP)--Southern Baptists here have implemented a pilot project, Operation Peace of Mind, to help families hear from runaway children.

Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe announced the project after he became concerned, in the wake of Houston's mass homosexual murders, about families who just want to hear from runaway teenagers.

Operation Peace of Mind, operating out of a Holiday Inn, takes toll free phone calls from youths who want their families notified they are alive and well. The nationwide number is 1-800-231-6946. For calls from within Texas, the number is 1-800-392-3352.

Phil Strickland, an associate in the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, enlisted the Houston Baptist Association to initiate the plan of Briscoe, who attends a Baptist church with his wife.

The volunteers, collected from area churches by Travis Key, the Baptist association's director of missions and social ministries, rotate on a 24-hour-a-day basis.

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Catholic Bishops Ask  
Religion in Schools

9/21/73

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--The United States Catholic Conference (USCC) injected "a whole new ball game" into the national controversy about prayer in public schools by proposing a comprehensive constitutional amendment that would include not only praying in schools but also religious instruction.

The Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments is currently conducting a series of public hearings on proposed constitutional prayer amendments similar to the Wylie Amendment, defeated in the House of Representatives in 1971.

Senator Richard S. Schweiker (R.- Pa.) and others have vowed that the Senate will be forced to vote on a prayer amendment before the adjournment of the first session of the 93rd Congress sometime before Christmas.

The U.S. Catholic Conference is the action agency of the Catholic Church. It has an administrative board of 28 bishops.

The Catholic conference was opposed in 1971 to the Wylie Amendment, and, judging from its present proposal, has not changed its opposition to this type of amendment.

Bishop James S. Rausch, general secretary of the USCC, explained the Catholic Bishops opposed the Wylie Amendment in 1971 because it "would accomplish nothing on behalf of the goals it purports to serve and would represent a threat to the existing legality of nondenominational prayer."

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It would be expected that those who have opposed constitutional prayer amendments, including most of the major denominational bodies in the United States, would continue to oppose the new proposal of the Catholic bishops.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, indicated in a statement that no ground would be given in any effort to upset the present protection of religious liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment as interpreted by the Supreme Court.

Wood said he profoundly regretted the action taken by the 28 bishops who comprise the administrative board of the USCC. "Their action," he continued, "cannot help but bring confusion concerning the whole issue of religion and the public schools."

The Baptist executive was distressed that the Roman Catholic bishops would draw up a constitutional amendment to be presented to Congress. He said, "It is not difficult to imagine the religious tensions which may be created if each religious denomination were to submit its own version of a proposed constitutional amendment affecting religion and the public schools."

"To provide that religious instruction in public schools must not be prohibited, even if under private religious auspices, is to nullify the landmark decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, as in the McCollum case. In that decision religious denominations were clearly denied the right to provide religious education on school property during regular school hours, whether such instruction was taken voluntarily or not," Wood pointed out.

"Such a proposal cannot be taken lightly," he declared, "and will provoke vigorous opposition from many Americans who view such legislation as eroding both the 'no establishment' and 'free exercise' clauses of the First Amendment."

The proposed amendment by the Catholic bishops has three major provisions: 1. It allows prayer in public places, including schools; 2. It allows religious instruction in public places, including schools, "if such instruction is provided under private auspices whether or not religious," and 3. It provides the right of the people to participate or not to participate in such prayers and religious instruction.

The immediate effects of the proposal by the Catholic bishops are speculative. However, here are four possibilities:

1. It could divide the religious community of the nation as to the best way or ways to solve the problem of the proper relationship between religion and public education.
2. It could have the effect of avoiding an immediate crisis in Congress on proposed prayer amendments. The fact that an entirely new type of religious constitutional amendment is being proposed should demand long and thorough national discussion and debate. A constitutional amendment of this impact should not be approved without a complete understanding of what it means.
3. It could create such national discussion as to result in a better understanding and support of the Supreme Court decisions on prayer and Bible reading in public schools.
4. If ratified as a part of the U.S. Constitution, it could open the doors to extensive abuses of separation of church and state and make it possible for public funds to be available to private and church-related education.

At the time of the USCC proposal, no member of Congress had introduced the Catholic proposal into the legislative hopper. It is not anticipated, however, that it will be difficult to find sponsors in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.