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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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SBC Gains Reported
 In Nine Of Ten Areas

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Final statistical reports which track the annual progress of Southern Baptists in 10 key areas of church life over the past year reflect increases in membership, giving, number of churches and all church program organizations. Baptisms, however, are down from 1982.

Annual projections released in December 1983, based on the first 26,039 Uniform Church Letters received from churches, correctly predicted total membership in the nation's largest Protestant denomination would top 14 million for the first time. The final count of church members is 14,185,454, which is a 1.3 percent, or 187,202 increase over 1982. A 1.5 percent, or 209,974 increase was predicted.

Baptisms dropped below the 400,000 level this year for the first time since 1979, to 394,606. The 4.1 percent decrease (16,948) is 0.4 percent lower than projected.

The number of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention now stands at 36,531, according to the research services department of the Baptist Sunday School Board. This is an increase of 0.6 percent, or 229, for the year. There has not been a decrease in the number of churches in the SBC since 1931.

Included in the church total are 469 non-reporting churches, representing 1.3 percent of the total. To be classified as non-reporting, a church does not submit an annual letter for three or more years. A church is dropped only at the direction of the association because of merger, withdrawal or because it is disbanded. A total of 201 churches were dropped last year.

Giving for mission expenditures increased 8.7 percent, or more than \$42 million, to \$529,283,289. This total is approximately \$500,000 higher than projected.

Total receipts for the SBC increased 8.1 percent, or more than \$253 million, to \$3,370,450,615. This is 0.5 percent lower than the projected total.

Sunday school, the denomination's largest program, recorded a gain of 1.8 percent, or 136,839, which makes the ongoing total enrollment in Bible study 7,815,443.

This is the fourth consecutive gain for Sunday school, marking a new all time high for the program. The 1982 Sunday school enrollment surpassed the 1964 total, the previous highest enrollment. The final figure for Sunday school is 0.3 percent lower than projected.

Church training enrollment increased 2.0 percent, or 38,042, for the year, bringing the total to 1,987,390. This is approximately 9,000 fewer than the projected increase. This is the fourth consecutive for church training, which has registered a total increase over the four years of more than 235,000.

Ongoing enrollment for church music increased for the 18th consecutive year to a new total of 1,655,754, which is a gain of 1.3 percent or 21,990. The projection for church music was 0.4 percent higher than the actual figure.

Enrollment in Woman's Missionary Union programs increased in 1983 by 2.3 percent, or 26,088, to a new total of 1,175,354. The projection was almost equal to the actual enrollment.

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Ongoing enrollment in the Brotherhood program increased by 6.7 percent, or 35,707 last year, to a new total of 565,349. The new total is 0.8 percent lower than projected. The form for reporting Brotherhood enrollment was changed this year to allow concurrent enrollment of persons in two or more of the four Baptist men's categories.

Of the 14 million church members reported in Southern Baptist churches, it should be noted that almost four million, or more than one-fourth, of Southern Baptists are classified as non-resident members.

Information provided in the final statistical report of church programs is gathered from 35,334 Uniform Church Letters submitted by churches to the research services department, according to Martin Bradley, secretary of the department.

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Summary of the 1983 Southern Baptist Convention Statistics

	<u>1983</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>Gain or Loss</u>	<u>Percent Gain or Loss</u>
Churches	36,531	36,302	229	0.6
Baptisms	394,606	411,554	-16,948	-4.1
Total Membership	14,185,454	13,998,252	187,202	1.3
Sunday School Ongoing Enrollment	7,815,443	7,678,604	136,839	1.8
Church Training Enrollment	1,987,390	1,949,348	38,042	2.0
Ongoing Music Ministry Enrollment	1,656,764	1,634,774	21,990	1.3
Woman's Missionary Union Ongoing Enrollment	1,175,354	1,149,266	26,088	2.3
Brotherhood Ongoing Enrollment	565,349	529,642	35,707	6.7
Total Mission Expenditures	\$ 529,283,289	\$ 486,935,086	\$ 42,348,203	8.7
Total Receipts	\$3,370,450,615	\$3,117,387,150	\$253,063,465	8.1

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Dunn Challenges Intention
To Influence Holy See

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--A high ranking State Department official's assessment that sending an ambassador to the Vatican would allow the U.S. "to influence the political positions" of the Holy See has drawn sharp criticism from a Baptist church-state specialist.

Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs Executive Director James M. Dunn took strong exception to remarks by Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth W. Dam before a House of Representatives appropriations panel considering a request to reprogram fiscal 1984 funds for a full diplomatic mission to the Vatican.

"For the State Department to seek a relationship allowing the U.S. to influence the political positions of the Holy See reflects an arrogant and blatantly violative posture," Dunn charged. "The very idea we would enter this relationship announcing in advance that we intend to attempt to shape the political positions of the Roman Catholic Church is contrary to everything we mean by separation of church and state."

Dam urged the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, the Judiciary and Related Agencies to approve the \$351,000 reprogramming request, declaring it "will help achieve, in a cost-effective way, our foreign policy objectives."

Committee chairman Neal Smith, D-Iowa, gave no indication when the panel will make a decision on the State Department's request to reassign the \$351,000 upgrading the U.S. diplomatic mission to the Vatican. Currently, \$482,000 is budgeted for the office of presidential envoy William A. Wilson, who is non-salaried. President Reagan has nominated Wilson as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican.

In addition to State Department witnesses, Smith's panel heard from more than a dozen religious and civil liberties organizations opposed to establishment of full diplomatic ties to the Vatican. According to one witness, membership of U.S. religious bodies opposed to the move total more than 75 million according to one witness.

Baptist Joint Committee general counsel John W. Baker joined other witnesses who urged the panel to deny the reprogramming request, charging the church-state separation mandated by the Constitution "forbids the entanglement of church and state in precisely the fashion proposed by sending an ambassador of our government to the Roman Catholic Church."

Baker further challenged the State Department's claim the U.S. is establishing relations with the Holy See as an international legal entity rather than with the Catholic Church. "This is nonsense," Baker said, insisting the Holy See cannot be distinguished from the Roman Catholic Church.

Citing Catholic definitions of the Holy See, Baker said, "it becomes clear any ambassador to the Holy See is nothing less than an ambassador to the Roman Catholic Church."

Baker also said the stated purpose of the ambassadorship "to tap into the church's vast information network" amounts to excessive entanglement of government with religion, a violation of the Constitution.

A Senate appropriations panel reconsidering the reprogramming request after its chairman, Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., initially approved it, is expected to hear from public witnesses on the subject March 5 and from the State Department March 28.

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Reagan In 'Full-Court Press'
On School Prayer Amendment

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan and members of his staff and cabinet are preparing for a "full-court press" during February to have Congress pass an amendment to the Constitution restoring oral prayer in public school classrooms according to Newt Gingrich.

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Gingrich, an arch-conservative Republican member of the House of Representatives from Georgia, told two dozen evangelical pastors and student leaders Feb. 10 the upcoming debate over school prayer is "a collective battle of everyone in the world of (the) spirit against the forces of materialism."

Gingrich, a Southern Baptist from Carrollton, Ga., said the fight in the U.S. Senate will be led by fellow conservative William L. Armstrong, R-Colo.

Senate majority leader Howard H. Baker Jr., R-Tenn., announced Feb. 8 the Senate will consider the school prayer issue shortly after its return Feb. 21 from a brief recess.

According to Gingrich, Baker scheduled the prayer debate early in the year because of his judgment that upcoming debate over the federal budget "will dissolve the Senate into chaos."

Gingrich also said his own head count of the Senate on Reagan's amendment shows 64 or 65 votes in favor, with 67, or two-thirds of all 100 senators, needed for passage. Other estimates of the likely outcome show considerably less support for the Reagan proposal.

David Hoppe, an aide to House Republican whip Trent Lott, R-Miss., told the gathering if the president's amendment loses in the Senate it will not be considered by the House. He added a Senate defeat would probably mean "it won't come up again in the Senate for years and years."

Before the meeting with Gingrich, a larger group of the ministers and students met at the White House with presidential assistants who told them Reagan will settle for nothing less than his own amendment. They expressed the president's opposition to a competing amendment, proposed by Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, which would enshrine in the Constitution pupils' right to a moment of silence at the beginning of the school day.

The Hatch amendment would also give students access to school property and facilities for religious meetings on an equal basis with other student groups.

Presidential assistant Steve Galibach told the group the Hatch amendment "is out of line and not a serious possibility," and added: "The Supreme Court has never said silent prayer is unconstitutional...the Hatch amendment is an amendment to reverse a Supreme Court decision the court hasn't made yet."

Another Reagan aide, Carolyn Sundseth, said the president's amendment would resolve both the "equal access problem" and the "voluntary prayer problem."

Galibach said he hopes Hatch and Baker, who recently introduced a third amendment on school prayer, will decide to withdraw their proposals in favor of Reagan's.

Bob Riley, another White House official who addressed the group, declared, "There will be an all-out effort by the White House to push this amendment," including telephone calls from Reagan and members of his cabinet to "reluctant" senators.

Sundseth, who recently replaced Morton C. Blackwell as assistant to the president for White House relations with evangelical and fundamentalist groups, said Reagan's amendment would forbid states from composing the words of prayers to be recited but would permit states to pass laws requiring prayers be said.

Those attending the meeting were also given a White House document stating in part, "The Amendment leaves decisions regarding prayers to state or local school authorities, and to individuals."

Additionally, according to the document, "It would establish no uniform national prayer rule, but would allow a diversity of state and local approaches free of federal interference."

Condemned Men Find Freedom
Inside African Prison Walls

By Mitchell Land

BOUAKE, Ivory Coast (BP)--Four armed guards and two scouts, recently watched 26 convicts marched single file out of and Ivory Coast prison along a stony path to be baptized in a nearby lake.

On by one the prisoners stepped into the water as Charles Deevers, Southern Baptist missionary dentist, and Gaston Badiel, Ivorian Baptist pastor, baptized their first converts after three years' ministry to more than 1,700 convicts in the Bouake penitentiary.

"I have peace in my heart. Who would have thought I could find peace in a prison in a faraway country?" said prisoner Abraham Ouedragou of Ghana. "No matter what happens to me, I'll b with him (God) forever." Ouedragou, imprisoned since 1980, has two years left until his release, but says he's found freedom in Christ.

Scores of prisoners crowded against the barbed-wire fence along the outer perimeter of the prison, straining for a glimpse of the baptism. Guards, mesmerized by the sweltering afternoon sun, were tolerant as prisoners and guests laughed and took pictures.

The prisoners joined guests from three denominations in their first Lord's Supper. Afterward, leaders from Bouake's Bellevue Baptist Church distributed 100 cans of tuna, 100 oranges, 100 loaves of bread and 120 cans of sweetened condensed milk to the guards and prisoners.

"This is the first time anything like this has happened," said the prison's surveillance chief, Patrice Dion, a Christian. "Those people you thought were hopeless are suddenly rescued even in the middle of a prison. I just don't know how to express my joy."

The prison ministry began as an outreach of the Bellevue church when Deevers began visiting patients at the penitentiary in 1980. Deevers took church leaders with him to share th gospel and counsel with prisoners while he practiced dentistry.

Deevers would then join the crowd of inquirers under a mango tree in the middle of the prison yard for singing and preaching.

Because of the overwhelming spiritual needs of the men, the every-Thursday ministry soon grew to include Sunday afternoon worship services for about 80 prisoners led by lay ministers.

De vers got missionary Wilma Rodgers in Abidjan, director of Baptists' Bible correspondence school, to prepare a free study course for the new Christians and inquirers. Christian prisoners began sharing the gospel with others.

"The baptism touched those men in the prison," said Badiel. "Since that great day, attendance at our worship services has doubled."

Deevers praised the government of the Ivory Coast for allowing Baptists to reach out to people b hind prison walls. "We pray that we may continue helping these men," he said.

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(Mitchell Land is a Southern Baptist missionary in Ivory Coast.)

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