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7/9/92

92-110

U.S. church membership study shows strong SBC presence

By Charles Willis

NEW YORK (BP)--An extensive demographic study of churches and church membership in the United States shows Southern Baptists strong in numbers of churches, numbers of adherents and geographic presence.

Southern Baptists are among the 133 Judeo-Christian church bodies reporting an overall total of 255,173 churches with 137,064,509 adherents in a study based on the 1990 U.S. census and on data supplied by the participating church bodies.

Results of the study were unveiled July 7 by sociologist William McKinney on behalf of the sponsoring Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) at a news conference in New York. McKinney is dean and professor of religion and society at Hartford (Conn.) Seminary.

The study reports Southern Baptists with 18,940,682 adherents (full members, their children and other regular participants), up from 16,281,692 adherents reported in the 1980 study. Southern Baptists remain second in size to Catholics, with a reported total of 53,385,998 adherents.

Martin Bradley, chairman of the study's operations committee and director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's corporate planning and research department in Nashville, said Southern Baptist totals, as well as those for some other groups, do not match official membership records. Figures from the study generally are higher because of the inclusion of persons who participate but are not considered full members.

Southern Baptist adherents are reported in 2,514 of the 3,105 U.S. counties. County totals may reflect persons who live in one county but worship in another, Bradley noted.

"Only United Methodists (2,965), Catholics (2,965) and Assemblies of God (2,575) are more geographically extended," Bradley observed.

In numbers of churches, Southern Baptists lead with 37,922, followed by United Methodists (37,238) and Catholics (22,441).

Bradley said Southern Baptists are most dominant in numbers of adherents in Mississippi and Alabama, where about three of every 10 persons are identified as Southern Baptists. They are strongly dominant in 10 other states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Georgia and Texas.

While Southern Baptists dominate in numbers and land area in Texas, Catholics are noticeably strong in the state, especially in south and southwest counties, he added.

McKinney said the study is "the closest thing we have to a census of American church groupings. For the first time we have good data on independent and Jewish congregations and estimates of black Baptists. As a result of ASARB's careful work, we are able to obtain a religious profile of any county in the United States."

McKinney cited data he believes will be useful in outreach and church planting. For example, more than 70 percent of the population of six states are churched. Those are Utah (80 percent), Rhode Island (77 percent), North Dakota (76 percent), Alabama (71 percent), Louisiana (71 percent) and Mississippi (70 percent).

In contrast, the study indicates four states have fewer than a third of the population on church rolls. Those are Nevada, Oregon and Alaska, each with 32 percent, along with Washington, with 33 percent.

The 137 million adherents counted in the study represent 55.1 percent of the total U.S. population, up from 112.5 million or 49.7 percent of the total U.S. population in 1980. The 1980 study, however, included 22 fewer church bodies.

Among the participating church bodies, the 15 denominations with adherents of 1 million or more account for 81.6 percent of the reported adherents.

Other bodies among those having the largest number of reported adherents are the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1,142,016), American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (1,873,731), Assemblies of God (2,161,610), Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (1,037,757), Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (1,213,188), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (3,540,820), Churches of Christ (1,681,013), Episcopal Church (2,445,286), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (5,226,798), Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (2,603,725), Presbyterian Church (USA) (3,553,335), Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ (1,993,459) and United Methodist Church (11,091,032).

The 22 groups with adherents of 100,000 to 999,999 accounted for an additional 4.9 percent. Another 80 groups reporting adherents account for 1.2 percent. Eleven groups reported only church locations but were unable to estimate adherents. Black Baptists; Congregational Christian Churches not part of any national body; independent, charismatic churches; independent, non-charismatic churches; and Jewish adherents are not denominations or fellowships but account for 12.2 percent of the adherents in the United States.

The 54 bodies participating in 1990 but not in 1980 represent a total of 25 million adherents. The largest among the new participants are the estimates for black Baptists (8.7 million), Jewish estimates (6 million), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (5.2 million), the Presbyterian Church (USA) (3.6 million), independent, non-charismatic churches (1.2 million), independent, charismatic churches (.8 million), the National Association of Free Will Baptists (.3 million) and the Wesleyan Church (.3 million).

The 1990 study does not include 32 denominations that participated in 1980, some of which merged with other bodies.

Authors of the volume in addition to Bradley are Norman M. Green Jr., American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.; Dale Jones, Church of the Nazarene; Lou McNeil, Glenmary Research Center (Catholic) of Atlanta; and Mac Lynn, David Lipscomb University (Churches of Christ) of Nashville.

Funding for the project was provided by a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc., of Indianapolis, 17 of the participating denominations and from the Glenmary Research Center.

The study, "Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1990," is copyrighted by the ASARB and includes a color map of major denominational families by counties of the United States. Cost for the 456-page volume is \$36. The map may be purchased separately for \$8. Orders may be placed through Glenmary Research Center, 750 Piedmont Ave., N.E., Atlanta, GA 30308.

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A map of all Baptist adherents by counties and charts providing regional and national summaries is being mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the SSB bureau of Baptist Press.

BookLink announces first
regional collection point

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
7/9/92

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The National Fellowship of Baptist Educators' BookLink ministry has named its first regional shipping director and collection point, with an eye to establishing three more collection points as soon as possible.

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Tom Booth, a Baptist layman in Aberdeen, Miss., has accepted the duties of director of shipping in the Central time zone for the ministry that provides Christian reference and study books for Southern Baptist missionaries and Baptist pastors in 52 countries.

Hal Buchanan, BookLink executive director, said Bible reference, doctrinal and discipleship materials are "sorely needed" to fill current requests.

"We send a special appeal to retired ministers, teachers, missionaries and other missions-minded servants who would share their Christian library reference tools," Buchanan said.

Packages of books should be sent via Parcel Post at the Fourth Class Book rate to Tom Booth, director of shipping, BookLink, Route 1, Box 271, Aberdeen, MS 39730. For now, contributors in all time zones should mail to this address.

According to Bob Salley, director of the National Fellowship of Baptists in Missions, BookLink has been one of the organization's most successful ministries. The educators' fellowship is one of 14 under the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's NFBM umbrella.

Since its inception four years ago, BookLink has shipped 59,599 books, tapes, tracts and other items weighing 11.4 tons to five states and 52 countries. Estimated value of all items shipped is \$137,323.

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Florida Baptists allocate
money for refugee relief

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
7/9/92

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Throughout south Florida and as far north as Orlando, Winter Haven and Tampa, thousands of Haitian refugees are trying to find a new home in the United States. Their plight has left Florida Baptist Haitian churches scurrying and struggling to cope with their needs.

Even before Florida Baptists' 1992 Hunger Awareness Offering is taken in July, state convention officials have allocated \$25,000 from its receipts to meet critical hunger and relief needs among Haitian refugees in Florida. Another \$5,000 has been allocated by the SBC Home Mission Board to help in the refugee resettlement.

Florida Baptists have no choice but to respond to the needs of the Haitian refugees, said John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention. "The Haitians are here as a result of action taken by the U.S. government whether we have reservations about them being here or not.

"If we are not there with the witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are going to miss the opportunity," Sullivan said. "They will be won over to someone's ideology. They won't recognize our mission until they receive our ministry."

He added, "The people who are helping the Haitians are our fellow Florida Baptists. It is a privilege to help our pastors and laypeople."

According to Church World Services, a total of 10,000 legal Haitian refugees have come to the United States since Nov. 18, 1991 -- 700 entering the United States weekly. About half of them live in the south Florida area, with the remainder scattered throughout Florida, Colorado, Oregon, Kansas, Illinois, New York and Pennsylvania.

The money provided by Florida Baptists will help Haitian Baptist churches provide for their basic needs -- food, shelter and utilities.

Meeting basic needs is fast overwhelming the churches, said Ray Carvajal, language missions director for the Miami Baptist Association. He reported a large number of Haitian churches are flooded with refugees throughout metropolitan West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami.

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Once the Haitian refugees have been brought to the United States, each refugee receives an employment authorization card valid for three-to-six months and a one-time benefit of \$175 per person. That is the only help they can receive until their asylum papers are filed and processed.

"That money will not pay rent for a month," Carvajal said.

Their only choice is to move in with people willing to share their living accommodations.

Jean Alfreide, pastor of the Evangelique Baptist Mission in Homestead, reports 180 refugees are being helped by the families in the church. "Everybody in our church has refugees living with them. We need food, clothes and money to help them pay rent."

Carvajal visited the Homestead church and reported one young couple has nine refugees in their two-bedroom apartment. Another woman has 48 refugees in her home. "They have to sleep by shift," Carvajal noted. "And it takes a giant effort to feed them day after day.

"We don't have all the answers they need," Carvajal said. "But we're trying to keep them off the streets and help them with their major needs. One of their needs is to know Jesus Christ."

To that end, Carvajal reported the Haitian churches are growing "by leaps and bounds" as they minister to refugees. "The churches are doing a good job. There is standing room only in their worship services. People are receiving Christ as Savior. They are experiencing a revival."

According to James Goodson, director of the missions division at the state convention, Florida Baptists often have responded to refugees in crisis, including the Cubans and the first wave of Haitians. "We've invested considerable money in literacy training, food distribution, job training and operated a refugee center in Miami for the first Haitians. We've also resettled refugees from other parts of the world," he said.

"The convention and our churches in south Florida have had an open hand, open heart relationship for as long as I've known," Goodson noted.

"The needs are here," Carvajal said. "We need to pray for the refugees. Pray for the Haitian Baptist churches. They are like the church in Macedonia. They are giving beyond their means."

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HMB offers census helps
to Baptists for outreach

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
7/9/92

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Census data and their applications to church starts, ministry and evangelism are available from the Home Mission Board.

Reports on the data are broken down by age, race and ethnic groups and include information about households and housing values, said Orrin Morris, HMB research department director.

Morris said his church has used the data to evaluate the use of Vacation Bible School compared to the number of children nearby.

An 11-page census guide offers suggestions for applying regional data for more effective church planting, church growth, evangelism or ministry.

The reports, available free to any Southern Baptist church, association or state convention, can be tailored to cities, counties, zip codes or census tracts, Morris said.

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Because the information is two years old, some data should be checked against more recent information available from real estate agents or chambers of commerce, said Morris, who conducted a conference on interpreting the 1990 census during Home Missions Week at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center, June 27-July 3.

For more information, contact Cathy Harper at the Home Mission Board's research department, (404) 898-7644 or 1350 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601.

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Speaker explains bonsai
theory of church growth

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
7/9/92

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Churches, like bonsai trees, are susceptible to stunted growth, church growth specialist Ken Hemphill said during Home Missions Week.

"The real key to the bonsai (staying the same size) is that you keep it in the same pot," said Hemphill, who recently was named by the Home Mission Board and Baptist Sunday School Board to be director of the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth.

Hemphill, author of "The Bonsai Theory of Church Growth," said many congregations remain trapped in "bonsai pots" that prevent them from growing more. Among those pots, he said, are:

-- Space. "When any portion of the (church) building is 80 percent filled, the church's natural growth will be inhibited and finally stopped," Hemphill said.

Churches can easily increase their available space without construction by offering multiple times for worship services and Bible classes, he said.

In addition to gaining more space, churches offer greater access to their community and create a sense of excitement in their program by offering multiple services, he said. "Today people do want choices."

-- Land. Current parking trends show a maximum of 100 people park on one acre of land. Limited parking will mean limited access to the church and limited growth, Hemphill said.

-- Organization. Church Bible classes should offer sub-groups of 12 to 15 members each so visitors can feel welcome in an intimate environment and the church will not appear impersonal, Hemphill said.

-- Leadership. Research indicates one pastor can handle about 150 to 200 people, he said.

Not that one person can't preach to a larger group, Hemphill said, but larger groups often want more activities than one person can effectively administer.

Business journals suggest one manager can handle no more than three or four projects, he said. "It is at that point that he doesn't have enough fingers for the dike."

This can sometimes lead to discord when congregations don't think they are large enough to need another pastor but still demand more quality programming than one person can oversee, he said.

-- Vision. "Some people think they're in an impossible task to grow a church," Hemphill said.

Pastors must keep their congregations in touch with the vision of the church so "pilgrims" don't become "settlers," he said.

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