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February 23, 1995

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TENNESSEE--1994 Southern Baptist statistics released.
TENNESSEE--Annual Church Profile is more than a name change.
PANAMA--Nicholsons return to Panama, continue grieving son's death.
TENNESSEE--Correction.

1994 Southern Baptist
statistics released

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
2/23/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The annual report of Southern Baptist Convention statistics usually includes numbers from 10 ministry areas, accompanied by information on gains and losses from the previous year.

Not so for 1994.

Dramatic changes in the reporting process, separate reporting of churches and missions and changes in data collection and verification made the 1994 figures statistically noncomparable with the numbers of previous years, according to Cliff Tharp, supervisor of the strategic information unit at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Even the name has changed from Uniform Church Letter to Annual Church Profile (ACP).

"We have completely re-engineered the process," Tharp said.

For 1994, the SBC statistics include only totals for the year. Tallying increases or decreases from 1993 figures would be misleading, he emphasized.

Church totals for 1994 include:

- churches -- 39,910.
- baptisms -- 378,463.
- total church membership -- 15,619,912.
- ongoing Sunday school enrollment -- 8,263,558.
- discipleship training enrollment/participation -- 2,223,955.
- ongoing music ministry enrollment/participation -- 1,841,583.
- ongoing Woman's Missionary Union enrollment -- 1,104,706.
- Brotherhood enrollment/participation -- 646,028.
- total tithes, offerings and special gifts -- \$5,572,451,828.
- mission expenditures -- \$815,640,533.

While the number of Southern Baptist churches, 39,910, represents an increase of 1,169 from the 1993 total of 38,741, Tharp strongly advised against any such comparisons. He said the 1994 increase in number of churches includes both new churches and many existing churches that simply have not been counted before. Also, in past years, the statistics for churches and any missions they sponsored were counted together. For 1994, churches and missions reported separately.

In another area, the BSSB in past years counted churches differently than they were counted by associations and state conventions. The measure for the BSSB was whether the church had turned in a UCL while associations and state conventions counted churches based on their definition of a church in "friendly cooperation," Tharp said.

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As a confusing result, an association, state convention and the BSSB often would have different statistical totals.

Tharp recalled a meeting he attended in a state convention several years ago where he was the third speaker in one session. Each speaker had used a different set of statistics in making a presentation.

"We spent all our time dealing with discrepancies in the statistics rather than helping churches," he said.

Beginning with 1994, associations and state conventions are tallying the totals, usually electronically (92 percent of associations for 1994,) and forwarding them to the BSSB.

"As part of a new partnership, we have agreed with the states that our statistics will be the same as theirs," Tharp said. Major responsibility for checking and verifying church statistics is being done at the associational and state levels which are closer to and more knowledgeable about individual churches.

"An important result of the changes will be more accurate totals that help churches, associations, state conventions and the SBC have a more valid measure of growth or decreases," he said.

In another area, throughout the year when changes or corrections are discovered in statistics, they will be made immediately rather than waiting until the next year. However, Tharp said for historical and comparison purposes, statistics will continue to be announced annually as a "historical snapshot."

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Publications may use the 1993 chart but are asked not to tally increases or decreases in totals since totals are not statistically comparable. State convention totals are available from state statisticians.

1994 Annual Church Profile Totals

Churches -- 39,910
 Ongoing Music Ministry Enrollment/Participation -- 1,841,583
 Baptisms -- 378,463
 Ongoing WMU Enrollment -- 1,104,706*
 Total Church Membership -- 15,619,912
 Brotherhood Enrollment/Participation -- 646,028
 Ongoing Sunday School Enrollment -- 8,263,558
 Total Tithes, Offerings, and Special Gifts -- \$5,572,451,828
 Discipleship Training Enrollment/Participation -- 2,223,955
 Mission Expenditures -- \$815,640,533

* Church statistics only. Does NOT include 2,719 from Campus BYW and Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

1993 Annual Church Profile Totals

Churches -- 38,741
 Ongoing Music Ministry Enrollment -- 1,876,875
 Baptisms -- 349,073
 Ongoing WMU Enrollment -- 1,149,085
 Church Membership -- 15,404,621
 Brotherhood Enrollment/Participation -- 613,774
 Ongoing Sunday School Enrollment -- 8,246,250
 Total Tithes, Offerings, and Special Gifts -- \$5,054,436,650
 Discipleship Training Enrollment/Participation -- 2,328,082
 Mission Expenditures -- \$761,639,840

Due to changes in reporting, the 1993 and 1994 totals are not statistically comparable.

Annual Church Profile is
more than a name change

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--In past years, most Southern Baptist churches filled out the annual Uniform Church Letter (UCL), perhaps read a summary of their statistical report at a church business meeting, sent off a copy to their association and never looked at it again.

Introduced in 1994 as the UCL replacement, the Annual Church Profile (ACP) is first of all a tool by which a local church can measure its progress, according to Tom Carringer, denominational statistics specialist at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

The UCL was viewed primarily as an annual report to "denominational headquarters."

Associations then compiled letters of their churches and forwarded copies to state conventions and the Baptist Sunday School Board. The result was useful compilations of statistics. However, totals often were in conflict with each other. It was not uncommon for associational, state and SBC totals to differ.

"The by-product with the ACP will be more complete and accurate denominational statistics," Carringer said. Reports for 93 percent of the associations were received electronically using software with built-in error checking.

In addition to accuracy, electronic reporting has reduced the amount of time required to process reports, Carringer said.

At the BSSB, temporary workers have spent a total of more than 1,000 days over a four-month period each year checking and verifying associational records. The 1994 report took about 30 days of temporary time.

Consistent totals at the associational, state and SBC levels also will be available with ACP. Verification is done by associations and state conventions which are closer to and more knowledgeable about the status of individual churches.

Three state convention statisticians -- Clay Price of Texas, Ted Evans of South Carolina and Don Magee of Louisiana -- highlighted benefits of the ACP.

"We will have better data," Price, research information specialist for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, emphasized. The next step is "building a data base for churches to use in growth planning. We must build a software package for them to use in tracking their progress."

For 1995, churches will receive guidance for evaluating their progress in with the use of a sheet accompanying the ACP materials. Questions are provided to assist churches in evaluating their progress in reaching, assimilating, discipling, ministry and worship.

Evans, director of information services for the South Carolina Baptist Convention who headed the team that designed the associational reporting software, said 100 percent of associations in the state filed electronic reports in 1993 and 1994.

This enabled his staff to compile 97 percent of associational reports in time for the state convention annual meeting in November. All were completed by Christmas, one month earlier than years past.

"Electronic error checking starts at the church level. We now get a picture that has fewer errors. We think we have the best set of stats we've ever had," Evans said.

More importantly, he said, "we have useful figures that can help our churches grow. The bottom line is increasing the size of heaven."

Evans and Price agreed further changes will be needed in the questions asked on ACP to give greater emphasis to church needs.

"We need to continue to evaluate the items on ACP and ask questions such as, 'Do we need everything?' and Can we simplify it?" Price said.

Carringer agreed, noting ACP items will be evaluated during the next six months on their usefulness in measuring the progress of churches.

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Magee, director of information services for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, cited a direct link between benefits to churches and accuracy of their ACP reports.

"If they get a benefit out of it, they'll be even more careful about how it's prepared," he said.

Magee uses statistical information from the ACP, along with census data and geo-demographic information in growth consultations with churches.

Carringer emphasized integration of information from various sources provides the greatest value to churches. The list of uses is almost endless, he noted.

For example, by being able to locate their members and prospects on a map and also look at growth patterns of their city or town churches can make effective decisions about relocating or where to focus their outreach efforts, he noted.

"Our goal is that ACP become a part of a strategic information environment for churches, associations and state conventions," Carringer said.

The massive changes introduced with ACP, which Carringer characterized as a "total re-engineering of the process," resulted for 1994 in SBC totals which are not statistically comparable with previous years. However, 1995 totals will be comparable with 1994.

"We had to start somewhere," he noted. "This is the beginning of a process."

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Nicholsons return to Panama,
continue grieving son's death By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
2/23/95

CORONADO, Panama (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries Pauline and Glenn Nicholson, whose 14-year-old son, Andrew, died Jan. 28 from killer bee stings in Panama, have returned to their work in Coronado, Panama.

"Continue to pray for us. We're back here with our memories," said Pauline Nicholson in a Feb. 22 phone interview, the day after arriving at the family's home in Coronado.

The Nicholsons spent most of February in their home state of Arkansas, mourning Andrew's death with family and friends. Funeral services were Feb. 3 at Cherry Valley (Ark.) Baptist Church.

"We still feel our commitment is to be here in Panama," said Mrs. Nicholson. "The only temptation we had to stay in the States was that our family is there, and their support was wonderful. We needed that. But we also have our mission family (fellow missionaries) here. And they've given us a great deal of support. It's almost like we have two families."

The Nicholsons have a married daughter, Jennifer Holloway of Fayetteville, Ga. Their other son, Nathan, 16, returned home with them to Panama.

When they arrived in Coronado Feb. 21, they took Nathan by the school he and his brother attended near their home. "He wanted to play basketball with his friends. I think that helped him," Mrs. Nicholson said.

Nathan started back to classes Feb. 22 at the school, Escuela Hogar Misionera, operated by the New Tribes Mission for missionary children.

"I think it's helping him to be back at school with people he knows and go through the grief process with people who knew Andrew," his mother said.

Nathan and some classmates saw Andrew die during a school camping trip in Panama's Chame Mountains. Andrew and New Tribes missionary kid Andrew Scoble, 16, were climbing near a ridge Jan. 28 when a swarm of African killer bees attacked. Andrew Nicholson, who was allergic to bee stings, fell about 120 feet over the edge while trying to fight off the insects. An autopsy revealed he died of the stings. Scoble has recovered from several hundred stings.

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Missionaries and students at the school conducted a memorial service for Andrew Nicholson Feb. 1, the day the Nicholson family left Panama to bury him in Arkansas. School officials videotaped the service for the ~~Nicholsons~~.

Mrs. Nicholson said it has helped her family to be around "people who knew Andrew and appreciated his sense of humor."

Andrew received a compact disc player for Christmas that he listened to often. He took it to school in January with some Christmas music, asking the teacher if the class could start its Christmas celebration early this year.

"He was quite a charmer," said Mrs. Nicholson.

"The one thing I didn't think I could ever stand was to lose a child, but God gives you the strength when you need it," she said. "The support everyone's given us has helped tremendously. So many people have been praying for us. It's been a big comfort."

But she knows her family is just starting the grief process.

"No one can take your pain away," she said. "It's a process. Sometimes you just have to hurt to get better. That's where we are right now."

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Executive Committee recommends record SBC budget, new structure," dated 2/22/95, please add the following sentence to the end of the third paragraph:

"However, the Foundation would be administered by the Executive Committee."

Also, in the 15th paragraph, which begins "In another Annuity Board issue . . .," please replace the second sentence to read:

"The board provides retirement and insurance benefits to the moderate C&F organization as well as to conservative Criswell College, Dallas, and Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tenn. -- none of which are structurally a part of the SBC."

Thanks,
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