

TID DIGEST

RESEARCH DIVISION OF THE HOME MISSION BOARD, SBC

Vol VI, No. 8 September 1984

A STUDY OF FASTEST GROWING CHURCHES IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION 1975 TO 1980

A study of the fastest growing Southern Baptist churches from 1975 to 1980 has been completed by David B. Jones and Phillip B. Jones. The study, to a large extent, is a replication of a 1977 study for *Home Missions* magazine (December 1977). Four factors were used to determine the fastest growing churches: (1) net change in total membership from 1975 to 1980; (2) percentage change in total membership from 1975 to 1980; (3) net change in Sunday School enrollment from 1975 to 1980; (4) percentage change in Sunday School enrollment from 1975 to 1980. Based on these factors, 671 churches were identified as fastest growing. In order to serve as a comparison group, a random sample of 724 churches was selected. Pastors and laypersons of fastest growing and randomly sampled churches were surveyed in order to determine differences between fastest growing churches and randomly sampled churches. A series of questions were asked that attempted to examine community, congregation, pastoral leadership, program and outreach differences.

Ten Major Observations Drawn from the Study

1. The location of a church is a primary factor in its growth potential. The majority of fastest growing churches (60.0%) are located in neighborhoods growing in population. Most of the remainder are in stable neighborhoods. Only 3.3% of the churches are in neighborhoods described as declining. Furthermore, the composition of their neighborhoods is at least stable if not increasing economically. Compared to the random

sample of churches, fastest growing churches are under-represented in open country and small villages and more likely to be found in suburban areas of cities of more than 10,000 population. The most significant difference between fastest growing churches and typical Southern Baptist churches can be attributed to location as opposed to other areas of the survey such as pastoral style and ministry orientation.

2. There seems to be little difference in the church program orientation of the two groups. The groups promote their churches, evangelize, welcome visitors, disciple new members, equip old members, and prioritize church program areas in basically the same way.

Of course, certain variables that may be pertinent were not controlled or assessed in this study. For instance, the enthusiasm and polish with which these programs are undertaken may be a factor in their influence on church growth. It may be that the questionnaire used is too imprecise a measurement tool to detect any differences that exist.

3. The primary group being reached by the fastest growing churches is married persons with children. This holds true for the typical churches also, but not to such a large extent. On the other hand, larger percentages of the randomly selected churches reported that they were predominantly reaching children and youth than was the case for fastest growing churches. Furthermore, the average age of members in the fastest growing churches is significantly less than in the randomly sampled churches indicating that young families are an important part of their growth.

4. Most pastors of fastest growing churches perceive that the majority of their church growth is resulting from conversion of the unchurched. Transfer growth was cited less frequently. Only a small percentage indicated that the majority of their growth was biological. Randomly sampled churches were about evenly divided in specifying conversion of the unchurched and addition by letter in accounting for the majority of growth. A significantly higher percentage of the randomly sampled churches indicate the majority of their growth is biological.

An examination of the number of baptisms and the number of additions by letter reported on the Uniform Church Letter from 1976 through 1980 shows that the

(Continued on page 2)

CONTENTS

	Page
Additions to Library	4
After-Tax Household Income	3
Fastest Growing Churches	1
Household and Family Characteristics	3
New Editor	2
Religion in America	2
State Growth by Counties	3
Tid-Bits	2

Household and Family continued from page 3:
other families with female householders.

There were 22.5 million nonfamily households in 1983, representing 27% of all households. Examples of the various nonfamily living arrangements include a person living alone, an unmarried couple with no children or three unrelated college students sharing an apartment.

Male nonfamily householders accounted for 11% of households while female nonfamily householders represented 16% of all households. Persons living alone, all of whom are nonfamily householders by definition, constituted 85% of the nonfamily householders and 23% of all households.

Although 27% of households were nonfamily households, they contained only 12% of the 229.2 million persons living in households in 1983. Similarly, while persons living alone represented 23% of all households, they were just 8% of the total household population.

Although individuals will experience a variety of living arrangements during their lives, 103.4 million persons were living in families in March 1983 that included a husband, wife and children.

Black households are just as likely as white households to be composed of families—73% of the total in both groups. A much higher percentage of white households than black households, however, were married-couple families (62% versus 39%). Among black households, 31% were families maintained by a woman alone, compared with 9% of white households. Black households were also more likely to include own children than were white households, 44% and 36% respectively.

About 83% of households maintained by persons of Spanish origin were families, and 57% of Spanish-origin households included children. Women maintaining families (where husbands were not present) represented 19% of Spanish-origin households. Only 14% of Spanish-origin households contained persons who lived alone, compared with 23% of households in general.

Change in Household Formation Patterns

Family households increased by an average of 697,000 per year between 1970 and 1980, and the average since 1980 has not been significantly different (614,000 per year). Nonfamily households, by contrast, were increasing at an average of 874,000 per year between 1970 and 1980, but since 1980 the level of increase has been much lower (433,000 per year) than during the earlier period.

Among family households, there has been a striking turnaround in the number of married-couple families maintained by persons under 35 years old. During the 1970s these comparatively youthful households were increasing at an average of 147,000 annually. Since 1980 the number has not increased, but rather has actually declined by an average of 220,000 households per year. There has been a similar change among families maintained by female householders under 35 years of age.

These households increased by 162,000 per year during the 1970-80 period, compared with only 52,000 per year since 1980.

Since the pool of young adults available to become householders has not declined, the change in household formation patterns since 1980 seems more likely to be a response to economic conditions that may have discouraged the formation of new households, particularly among young adults. It is also possible that changes in the social climate have influenced the lower level of household formation experienced since 1980. For example, divorce rates have stabilized, more adult sons and daughters appear to be living with their parents, and many young adults are postponing marriage as they pursue educational and career goals.

Years of School Completed By Family Householders

About 15% of the 61.4 million family householders had completed no more than eight years of school in 1983, 14% had completed one to three years of high school, 36% had four years of high school, 16% had one to three years of college, and 20% had completed four or more years of college.

Approximately 73% of white family householders had completed at least four years of high school, and 21% had completed four or more years of college. By contrast, among black family householders, 56% had at least four years of high school, and only 8% had completed four years of college or more.

Among white female householders with own children under 18 years old but no husbands present, 28% had not completed high school as compared with 20% of all white householders maintaining families with children. For the corresponding group of black women maintaining families with children present, the proportion that had not completed high school (38%) was only slightly higher than the proportion of all black householders with children (35%).

ADDITIONS TO RD LIBRARY

- P-25, No. 948 *Projections of the Population of Voting Age for States: November 1984*
- P-25, No. 949 *Estimates of the Population of the U.S., by Age, Sex, and Race: 1980 to 1983*
- P-25, No. 950 *Estimates of the Population of the U.S. to March 1, 1984*
- P-25, No. 951 *Estimates of the Population of States, by Age: July 1, 1981 to 1983*
- P-25, No. 952 *Projections of the Population of the U.S. by Age, Sex and Race: 1983 to 2080*
- P-23, No. 130 *Population Profile of the U.S.: 1982*
- P-20, No. 388 *Household and Family Characteristics: March 1983*
- H-150-81 Part D *Annual Housing Survey: 1981*
- PC80-1-D12 *Georgia Detail Population Characteristics*

AFTER-TAX HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household income after taxes averaged \$18,910 in 1982, up 1.7% over 1981 after adjustment for price increases, according to a study by the Census Bureau.

The after-tax income increase in 1982 followed a 2.6% decline between 1980 and 1981.

Federal and state income taxes, FICA and federal retirement payroll taxes and property taxes on owner-occupied housing absorbed 22% of total household income, down slightly from 23% in 1981.

The white household after-tax income average of \$19,610 was 1.7% higher than in 1981. The black household average of \$12,960 and the \$15,300 average for Hispanic households did not change significantly.

Elderly households experienced a 5.2% increase, which brought their average to \$13,770 or 73% of the average for all households.

Families maintained by women with no husband present saw an income decline of 3.8%.

The report also contains estimates of taxes paid in 1982. Here are some of the findings:

- Taxes lowered the number of households with incomes of \$50,000 or more from 7.4 million before taxes to 2.5 million afterward.
- Overall, there was a 3.8% decrease between 1981 and 1982 in the proportion of before-tax income paid in the four taxes included in the study.
- About 92% of households paid at least one of the four taxes included in the study. The \$5,890 average was \$180 lower than in 1981 after adjusting for price changes.
- Three of four households paid some federal income tax, averaging \$4,270.
- About 63% of households paid state income taxes. The \$970 average was slightly higher than in 1981.
- Social Security payroll taxes were paid by 74% of all households. The average of \$1,470 was slightly higher than in 1981.
- The four taxes covered in the study amounted to \$455 billion. About 70% was for income tax (59% federal, 11% state), 20% for Social Security and 8% for property taxes.

The study's major purpose was to provide better estimates of yearly changes in household purchasing power. The information is based on a model combining data from a number of sources, including the March 1983 Current Population Survey, Annual Housing Survey and IRS Statistics of Income series reports.

Copies of *After-tax Money Income Estimates of Households: 1982*, Series P-23, No. 137, are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. (*Commerce News*, July 1984)

HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 388 *Household and Family Characteristics: March 1983*, Available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Changes in the number, composition and characteristics of households have a substantial impact on the level of demand for a vast array of public and private sector products and services including housing, durable consumer items, food, energy, education and health care. Consequently, variations in data from year to year constitute important information for the work of planners and decision makers.

Highlights from the Report

The number of households in 1983, (83.9 million) did not increase significantly over the number of households in 1982. About 73% of all households in 1983 were composed of families, compared with 81% in 1970.

Average household size dropped from 3.3 persons per household in 1964 to 2.73 persons per household in 1981, but there has not been a significant change in the average during the past 2 years.

One-parent families, as a percentage of all families with children, increased from 11% in 1970 to 22% in 1983.

Among all families with children, the proportion of householders that had completed four or more years of college in 1983 was 22%, compared with 9% for female householders maintaining one-parent homes.

Composition of Households

By Census Bureau definition, a family household requires the presence of a householder (a person who owns or rents the living quarters) and at least one other person related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption. In a nonfamily household, the householder either lives alone or has no relatives living with him or her.

About 61.4 million households, or 73% of all households were composed of families in 1983.

A majority of all households in 1983 (about 60%) were maintained by married couples, whereas only 2% were other families with male householders and 11% were

(Continued on page 4)

NEW REPORT ON STATE GROWTH BY COUNTIES

Series P-26, No. 82-(state number)-C Reports showing population growth for counties within each state are being released by the Census Bureau and most states are now available. Contact the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Ask for "Estimates of the Population of (your state), Counties and Metropolitan Areas: July 1, 1981 and 1982 (Provisional)."

Fastest Growing Churches *continued from page 1:*

perceptions of pastors of fastest growing churches are in error regarding the majority of their churches' growth. Transfer growth accounted for the majority of growth in the fastest growing churches. Transfer growth also accounted for the majority of growth of the randomly sampled churches. In general, churches grow at the expense of other churches.

5. Numerical growth is receiving priority in the fastest growing churches to a greater extent than the typical churches. This is not to say that other types of growth are slighted. We have already seen that there is little programmatic difference in the groups. However, the fastest growing churches do think more about numbers.

6. Pastors of fastest growing churches have longer pastoral tenures than those in the randomly sampled churches. The median tenure (based on 1980 Uniform Church Letter data) for pastors of fastest growing churches was four to five years versus two to three years for pastors of the random sample.

7. Fastest growing churches are much younger than the random sample of churches. The median age of fastest growing churches was 24 years versus 63 years for the random sample.

8. Laity of the fastest growing churches perceive themselves as being better equipped for ministry than do laity of the typical SBC church.

9. Laity of the two groups differ in how they view the basic interpersonal approach of their pastors. Laity in the typical SBC churches picture their pastor as being more warm, easy-going, and quiet than did the laity of the fastest growing churches who see their pastor as more dynamic and pulpit-oriented.

10. There is little difference in responses between the fastest growing churches as identified in the 1977 study and those in the latter study. Differences that exist may be attributed to a change in the indexing method used for determination of fastest growing churches between the two studies. (Phillip B. Jones)

Copies of the full report are available from Planning and Services Research Department, HMB. Contact Marjorie Bowman.

TID-BITS

A report by Kevin F. McCarthy reveals that the city of Los Angeles would have actually lost population between 1970 and 1980 had it not been for emigration from Latin American and Asian countries. For more information contact the Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, Santa Monica, CA 90406, for a copy of "The Slow-Growing Orange, a Demographer's Look at Future Los Angeles."

Cable television penetration grew from 15 million subscribers in 1980 to 25 million in 1983. (Census Bureau)

RELIGION IN AMERICA, 1984

The new 1984 report by George Gallup Jr. summarizes latest findings in a series of studies by the Princeton Religious Research Center. Findings show that the church continues to be the institution in which Americans place their greatest trust, with 62% expressing a positive confidence level. Confidence is lowest among young persons, educated persons and East and West regions of the United States. A rising percentage of Americans say that religion is very important in their lives (56%), with even higher percentages among evangelical denominations. Thirty-one percent say that religion is the most important thing in their lives.

Over the past 35 years, Catholics have experienced a large increase in persons preferring a religion (45%). Protestants and Jews had major declines during the same period (17% and 60%, respectively). Catholics show an increase in popularity among teenagers especially. Of note is that, despite their increase in popularity, Catholics have experienced a 30% decline in attendance since 1958.

The report indicates that large percentages of teenagers believe in God, pray, belong to an organized Bible study and call religion very important in their lives. Proportionately smaller percentages express their religion in, or have confidence in, the institutional church.

(Rudee D. Boan)

Copies of *Religion in America, 1984* may be ordered from the Gallup Organization, Inc., P.O. Box 910, Princeton, N.J. 08540. Cost \$25.00 per copy.

The full summary report by Rudee D. Boan is available without charge from the Planning and Services Research Department, HMB. Contact Marjorie Bowman.

NEW EDITOR FOR DIGEST

On September 1 the editorship of the *RD Digest* passed to Marilyn Kelly from June Brumbeloe.

Brumbeloe has served as editor since January 1, 1979, when the Research Division was created and is retiring after 19 years at the HMB. She and her husband will be moving to Florida.

Kelly is completing one year at the HMB, serving in the Language Missions Division. A native of Chicago, most of her life has been spent in Texas and Georgia. She has a BA in English from Valdosta State College (Georgia). Her background includes library, bookkeeping and secretarial services. Her husband is pastor of LaBelle Heights Baptist Church, Marietta, Georgia. (Orrin D. Morris)



RD Digest is published 10 times a year by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, SBC, 1350 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601. Orrin D. Morris, director; Marilyn Kelly, editor.