

A STUDY OF NEW CHURCHES AND CHURCHES LEAVING  
THE ASSOCIATIONS IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, 1963-1972

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Prepared by  
Don F. Mabry and Paul W. Stuart

DEPARTMENT OF SURVEY AND SPECIAL STUDIES

HOME MISSION BOARD, SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION  
Arthur B. Rutledge, Executive Secretary-Treasurer  
1350 Spring Street, N. W.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30309

## INTRODUCTION

This brief paper has been prepared to illustrate the number of new churches established in the "newer" and "established" areas of the Southern Baptist Convention and to give some indication as to the number of churches leaving the denomination during the ten years from 1963 to 1972. The target group for whom the paper is intended is the staff members of the Home Mission Board and other persons responsible in this area of work. This study was first distributed at a meeting of state convention executive secretaries in Atlanta on September 15, 1973.

The report is an attempt to assemble several data which are important in the understanding of the subject and to give some brief interpretation as to the collation and manipulation of these data. The report is selective in the trends that are illustrated and does not attempt to be exhaustive of the subject.

The methodology of this study involves two separate research activities. The data in the first section of the report were collated from computer printouts compiled by the Research Services Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board from 1972 Uniform Church Letters. Also involved in this section are data which came from the "Southern Baptist Handbook," July, August, and September issue of The Quarterly Review for each of the ten years in the study. The "newer" areas mentioned in this study are those areas of the nation which were entered in an organized way by Southern Baptists after 1940. The "established" areas are those organized previous to 1940.

The data on Tables 1 and 3 in the report display the number of new churches organized in each of the ten years studied. These data were compiled from the computer printouts provided by the Department of Research Services.

Listed in these computer printouts is the year of organization for each congregation reporting. A tally was made of the year of organization for all churches reporting each of the years 1963 through 1972. The data were further collated into the "newer" and "established" areas.

The data contained in the second section of the report was obtained from the distribution of a questionnaire to 298 selected associations regarding the number of new churches established and the number of churches leaving the associations. A controlled random sample of associations in the established areas of the convention was made. The size and location of the 1,002 associations in the established areas of the Southern Baptist Convention was compiled. Representative associations in each state were then selected for examination. The data on Table 9 in the appendix of the report indicates that 219 or 73.5 percent of the associations returned the questionnaire. The initial request was mailed on May 2, 1973, and the closing date was July 15, 1973. Normally, mail questionnaires will produce about a 20% return and it is unusual for a mail questionnaire to produce a 40% return. Thus, the 73.5 percent return of the questionnaires in this study is highly unusual. It likely indicates the significant interest in the subject of churches leaving affiliation with the local association.

Appreciation must be expressed to several staff members at the Home Mission Board who have provided valuable assistance in designing the research instruments and in counseling with the researchers. Mr. Leonard G. Irwin, executive assistant, has contributed greatly to the development of the research materials. Also, three office secretaries in the Department of Survey and Special Studies have contributed significantly to the report.

These are Miss Cathy Hulsey, the department office secretary, Miss Carolyn Thigpen, and Miss Lynn Parrish. Their diligence in preparing statistical tables and in typing this report have made the preparation of the document possible.

Don F. Mabry, Secretary

Department of Survey and Special Studies

## SECTION I

### New Churches Organized, 1963-1972

The data on Table 1 display the trend in the number of new churches established in newer areas from 1963 to 1972. During this decade, 981 new churches were constituted in the newer areas. The range in the number of new churches established by years is from 123 in 1964 to 60 in 1972. There was a downward trend from 1964 to 1966, with a recovery in 1966 to 104 and 105 in 1967 and 1968. Since 1968, there has been a downward trend in the number of new churches organized in the newer areas. No investigation was made as to the reasons behind this downward trend and, therefore, no observations are made regarding its cause. The largest number of churches have been established in California, followed by Ohio, Indiana, and Northern Illinois.

Several explanations should be given regarding the areas listed under state conventions on Table 1. Northern Illinois is listed here, due to the fact that there was no organized Southern Baptist work north of Springfield until after 1940. Six areas, Iowa, New England, Delaware, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Southern Nevada, are all listed on the table as state conventions, although they are not technically in this category. Each of these are affiliated with other state conventions, but are listed on this table since they do represent "pioneer areas." (Northern Nevada is affiliated with the California convention.) All of the other states listed on the table are organized state conventions and are listed as such.

### Net Change in Churches by State Conventions

The data on Table 2 were collated from the "Southern Baptist Handbook" of The Quarterly Review for the years 1962 through 1973. Several selected

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF NEW CHURCHES ORGANIZED IN THE NEWER AREAS<sup>b</sup> OF THE SBC, BY STATE CONVENTIONS, 1963-1972<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	NUMBER OF CHURCHES BY YEARS										
	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	TOTAL
TOTAL	60	81	89	99	105	104	85	119	123	116	981
Alaska	1	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	1	2	9
California	10	26	11	17	26	21	19	32	23	34	219
Colorado	4	6	1	4	4	3	2	3	5	7	39
Hawaii	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	8
Illinois (No.) <sup>c</sup>	4	2	2	11	5	9	8	6	16	14	77
Indiana	6	4	8	7	8	10	5	12	8	13	81
Kansas-Nebraska	2	2	2	6	3	4	7	6	2	3	37
Michigan	2	3	10	1	10	8	8	7	16	3	68
Missouri (Iowa)	0	0	4	1	1	0	0	2	4	2	14
Maryland (New Eng. and Delaware)	1	0	2	1	3	3	0	0	0	1	11
Minn.- Wisc. (Texas)	0	3	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	19
New York	4	3	8	13	14	6	4	2	4	6	64
Northern Plains	0	1	1	4	2	4	0	4	4	4	24
Northwest	8	9	13	8	7	6	4	5	8	0	68
Ohio	13	16	12	7	11	13	17	26	20	16	151
Pa.- So. Jersey	4	3	5	9	4	5	7	3	2	2	44
So. Nevada (Arizona)	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	0	1	8
Utah-Idaho	0	0	1	2	3	3	2	4	3	3	21
West Virginia	1	1	4	5	0	2	1	0	4	1	19

<sup>a</sup>Source: Data from 1972 Uniform Church Letter computer printouts provided by the Research Services Department, Baptist Sunday School Board.

<sup>b</sup>Newer Areas - Those entered after 1940 by SBC in an organized way.

<sup>c</sup>Northern Illinois not entered by Southern Baptists until after 1940.

TABLE 2

NET CHANGE IN CHURCHES BY STATE CONVENTIONS AND YEARS IN NEWER AREAS<sup>b</sup> OF SBC, 1963-1972<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	NUMBER OF CHURCHES BY YEARS										
	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	Total
TOTAL	61	46	85	56	86	97	71	125	115	74	816
Alaska	0	1	0	(-1)	2	1	0	1	3	0	7
California	17	12	4	4	6	13	19	18	18	21	132
Colorado	7	0	0	3	7	(-7)	(-2)	2	(-2)	0	8
Hawaii	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	8
Illinois (No.) <sup>c</sup>	1	(-3)	0	5	4	12	8	10	22	NA	59
Indiana	6	0	7	(-5)	12	7	3	13	11	11	65
Kansas-Nebraska	(-2)	0	2	1	0	15	6	10	1	6	39
Michigan	0	1	7	2	8	9	5	9	16	4	61
Missouri (Iowa)	3	2	3	2	(-1)	1	(-1)	8	2	0	19
Maryland (New Eng. and Delaware)	2	4	1	4	2	2	0	6	1	5	27
Minn.- Wisc. (Texas)	0	1	3	1	1	4	2	1	2	1	16
New York	7	4	13	11	16	8	4	2	7	6	78
Northern Plains	2	2	3	1	0	2	(-2)	8	3	11	30
Northwest	2	10	8	9	7	4	4	4	3	4	55
Ohio	11	10	19	1	10	21	17	30	12	NA	131
Pa.- So. Jersey	6	(-1)	5	9	3	2	6	0	6	(-1)	35
So. Nevada (Arizona)	0	0	(-1)	0	2	2	4	0	0	0	7
Utah-Idaho	(-2)	1	5	4	5	(-1)	(-3)	3	5	3	20
West Virginia	1	1	4	5	0	2	1	0	4	1	19

<sup>a</sup>Source: Baptist Sunday School Board. "Southern Baptist Handbook," The Quarterly Review. Nashville: 1962-1973, and selected state convention annuals.

<sup>b</sup>Newer areas - Those entered after 1940 by the Southern Baptist Convention in an organized way.

<sup>c</sup>Northern Illinois not entered by Southern Baptists until after 1940.

NA - Not Available.

state convention annuals were also utilized in the computation of these data. The obvious question after examining the data on Table 1 was, "What was the net gain in new churches?" These data have been collated in order to display an answer to this question. Table 2 indicates that there has been a net gain in new churches in the newer areas of 816 during the decade. The range in the net gain is from a high of 125 churches in 1965 to a low of 46 in 1971. It can be seen on the table that there are several years when some of the areas had net losses in churches when actually they were starting new churches each of these years. For instance, Kansas-Nebraska started two new churches in 1972 but shows a net loss of two churches in 1972. This means that actually four churches were lost to the state convention during 1972.

When the net change in churches is subtracted from the number of new churches established ( $981 - 816 = 165$ ), it can be seen that there has been a loss of 165 churches. The 165 churches could have been established at any time during the history of the area rather than just the ten-year period of study. Computations indicate that when comparing the loss of 165 churches to the number of new churches started that there is a loss rate of 16.8 percent. This indicates that for every seven churches started in the newer areas, one church is lost.

It is interesting to note on the table that California and Ohio had almost exactly the same net change in churches during the ten-year period (132 to 131). These two states are followed by New York (78), Indiana (65), and Michigan (61). Only four of the state conventions showed a net gain in churches during all of the years under study (California, New York, Northwest, and Ohio).

### New Churches Organized in Established Areas

Table 3 indicates the data for the established areas of the Southern Baptist Convention by state conventions as to the number of new churches organized in each of the years, 1963-1972. The table indicates that a total of 1,792 new churches were organized during the decade of study. The range is from 254 new churches organized in 1964, at the conclusion of the "30,000 Movement," to the 60 organized in 1972. Interestingly, the same number of new churches were organized in the newer and established areas of the Convention in 1972 (60). The number of new churches established in 1972 is a drastic reduction from all previous years. The next lowest year is 137 new churches organized in 1970, which was more than twice as many as in 1972. No explanation can be given as to this drastic reduction. It is likely, however, that many of the churches organized in 1972 were not admitted to their associations until the fall of 1972, and thus did not complete a 1972 Uniform Church Letter. Likely, at the end of the 1973 church year, there will be an increase in the number of churches reporting 1972 as their organizational year. Actually, most new churches are admitted to their association in the year when they are organized, but do not make a report until their second year. Therefore, the new church would not show up on a roll of churches until one year after their acceptance by the association.

The state with the largest number of new churches established during the decade is Texas (246), followed by Florida (228), Tennessee (125), and Georgia (122). Again, the list of state conventions should be noted, as only the southern portion of Illinois is carried on this table while the northern portion is carried on Table 1.

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF NEW CHURCHES ORGANIZED IN ESTABLISHED AREAS<sup>b</sup> OF THE SBC, BY STATE CONVENTIONS, 1963-1972<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	NUMBER OF CHURCHES BY YEARS										
	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	Total
TOTAL	60	144	137	159	195	188	189	227	254	239	1,792
Alabama	5	7	8	8	9	10	12	17	18	19	113
Arizona	1	6	2	3	3	12	10	8	8	11	64
Arkansas	3	4	7	7	6	8	8	12	10	11	76
D. C.	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
Florida	12	23	15	20	30	23	23	13	38	31	228
Georgia	5	6	10	12	15	13	12	15	24	10	122
Illinois (So.)	0	1	2	1	4	1	1	1	2	2	15
Kentucky	0	4	6	3	2	3	3	9	7	5	42
Louisiana	0	4	2	3	6	2	5	7	10	18	57
Maryland	4	2	7	7	10	7	4	6	2	3	52
Mississippi	3	5	6	8	7	7	15	15	10	18	94
Missouri	1	12	6	14	10	13	14	11	11	14	106
New Mexico	6	4	10	16	15	7	5	6	5	12	86
North Carolina	3	12	6	8	12	11	8	19	18	14	111
Oklahoma	6	10	9	9	5	15	9	14	19	14	110
South Carolina	2	6	7	3	10	8	12	12	14	11	85
Tennessee	5	15	12	10	16	16	13	13	15	10	125
Texas	4	22	21	20	31	25	28	37	28	30	246
Virginia	0	1	1	7	4	7	6	11	14	6	57

<sup>a</sup>Source: Data from 1972 Uniform Church Letter computer printouts provided by the Research Services Department, Baptist Sunday School Board.

<sup>b</sup>Established areas - Those organized before 1940.

On Table 4, the data are indicating that the net gain in churches has not been nearly as significant as has the number of new churches in the established areas. The net gain reflected on Table 4 is 768, while the number of new churches indicated on Table 3 is 1,792. This means that there has been a loss of 1,024 when comparing the net change to the number of new churches. The highest year in net gain was in 1965 (271), and the lowest year was in 1970 when there was a net loss of 28. This indicates that in 1970, there were 137 new churches started in the established areas, with a net loss of 28, resulting in a net loss of 165 churches ( $137 + 28 = 165$ ).

In 1965, there was a greater net gain in churches than there were new churches established, which would indicate that there was a fairly significant number of churches added to the conventions of the established areas which were taken in by the associations, but had been established before 1963.

The largest net gain occurred in Florida (159), followed by North Carolina (112), and Alabama (111). Perhaps the greatest surprise on this table is the net loss of 72 churches during the decade by Texas. While the state actually started 246 new churches, there was a net loss of 72 churches during the decade. In only three of the study years, Texas did show a net gain in churches while showing a net loss in all others. This would indicate that over the decade, the state convention lost 318 churches ( $246 + 72 = 318$ ).

#### Summary of New Churches and Net Change For SBC

The authors felt that a summary table of data on the two areas (newer and established) would be helpful in indicating the trends in the total

TABLE 4

NET CHANGE IN CHURCHES BY STATE CONVENTIONS AND YEARS IN ESTABLISHED AREAS<sup>b</sup> OF SBC, 1963-1972<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	NUMBER OF CHURCHES BY YEARS										
	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	Total
TOTAL	29	23	(-28)	(-19)	56	94	80	271	153	109	768
Alabama	8	10	5	(-1)	9	13	2	31	17	17	111
Arizona	2	5	(-1)	(-2)	2	6	8	9	15	8	52
Arkansas	6	(-4)	3	(-2)	(-4)	1	(-3)	14	10	1	22
D. C.	0	2	0	(-2)	1	0	2	2	2	0	7
Florida	13	20	8	11	11	22	10	16	28	20	159
Georgia	(-14)	(-24)	(-31)	(-18)	6	3	(-2)	13	21	12	(-34)
Illinois (So.)	(-6)	(-4)	0	1	(-2)	1	1	(-4)	0	NA	(-13)
Kentucky	4	3	2	(-17)	2	(-13)	13	10	(-4)	18	18
Louisiana	(-1)	1	(-3)	2	7	(-2)	1	10	12	9	36
Maryland	0	21	24	(-1)	3	0	(-4)	5	9	8	65
Mississippi	(-2)	4	2	(-5)	9	11	10	17	13	(-2)	57
Missouri	(-11)	2	(-1)	9	10	4	4	8	2	8	35
New Mexico	2	4	1	(-6)	(-7)	4	6	0	5	(-7)	2
North Carolina	18	(-6)	(-6)	(-1)	5	9	9	46	38	0	112
Oklahoma	12	6	2	0	4	(-2)	7	17	5	7	58
South Carolina	8	(-2)	6	11	9	17	8	9	24	13	103
Tennessee	11	13	(-1)	17	4	(-2)	11	20	(-53)	7	27
Texas	(-17)	(-9)	(-39)	(-15)	(-13)	8	(-9)	26	7	(-11)	(-72)
Virginia	(-4)	(-19)	1	0	0	14	6	22	2	1	23

<sup>a</sup>Source: Baptist Sunday School Board. "Southern Baptist Handbook," The Quarterly Review. Nashville: 1962-1973, and selected state convention annuals.

<sup>b</sup>Established areas - Those organized before 1940.

NA - Not Available.

Southern Baptist Convention. Table 5 contains this summary and it indicates that there have been 2,773 new churches organized in the past ten years and that the net gain has been 1,584, which means there has been a net loss of 1,189 churches during the period ( $2,773 - 1,584 = 1,189$ ). This is a loss rate of 42.9% or 4 out of 10 churches.

The number of new churches ranged from 274 to 355 during the first six years (1963-1968) of the decade, but since 1969, there has been a downward trend in the number of new churches organized. The established areas (which have a total of 31,475 churches) actually started more new churches during the period of study than did the newer areas (which have a total of 3,059 churches). However, the net change has been greater in the newer areas (816 to 768). In the first four years of the decade, the established areas had a greater net gain, but during the last six years, the newer areas have had the greater net gain.

#### New Churches Constituted in Selected Associations

As was mentioned in the introduction of this report, a questionnaire was distributed to 298 selected associations in the established areas of the Southern Baptist Convention. One of the questions dealt with the number of new churches established in the association returning the questionnaire. The association was asked to list the number of new churches started by the association and the number of churches joining the association during the ten-year period that were started by some entity other than the reporting association. The data on Table 6 indicate the trends in new churches among the 219 associations who returned the questionnaire.

TABLE 5

NUMBER OF NEW CHURCHES ORGANIZED AND NET CHANGE IN CHURCHES  
IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION BY AREAS, 1963-1972<sup>a</sup>

SBC AND AREAS	NUMBER OF NEW CHURCHES BY YEARS										
	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	Total
TOTAL SBC	120	225	226	258	300	292	274	346	377	355	2,773
Newer Areas	60	81	89	99	105	104	85	119	123	116	981
Established Areas	60	144	137	159	195	188	189	227	254	239	1,792

SBC AND AREAS	NET CHANGE IN CHURCHES BY YEARS										
	1972	1971	1970	1969	1968	1967	1966	1965	1964	1963	Total
TOTAL SBC	90	69	57	37	142	191	151	396	268	183	1,584
Newer Areas	61	46	85	56	86	97	71	125	115	74	816
Established Areas	29	23	(-28)	(-19)	56	94	80	271	153	109	768

<sup>a</sup>Source: Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

TABLE 6

NUMBER OF NEW CHURCHES ADDED TO SELECTED ASSOCIATIONS 1963-1972,  
BY NATURE OF ORIGIN AND STATE CONVENTIONS<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	NATURE OF ORIGIN				TOTAL NEW CHURCHES
	Started by Association <sup>b</sup>		Started by Others <sup>c</sup>		
	Number	Percent <sup>d</sup>	Number	Percent <sup>d</sup>	
TOTAL	695	73.9	245	26.1	940
Alabama	38	73.1	14	26.9	52
Arizona	30	88.2	4	11.8	34
Arkansas	18	78.3	5	21.7	23
Florida	73	82.0	16	18.0	89
Georgia	48	60.8	31	39.2	79
Illinois	74	90.3	8	9.7	82
Kentucky	77	84.6	14	15.4	91
Louisiana	14	87.5	2	12.5	16
Maryland	21	91.3	2	8.7	23
Mississippi	34	75.6	11	24.4	45
Missouri	29	58.0	21	42.0	50
North Carolina	29	67.4	14	32.6	43
Oklahoma	39	83.0	8	17.0	47
South Carolina	41	85.4	7	14.6	48
Tennessee	34	69.4	15	30.6	49
Texas	71	52.6	64	47.4	135
Virginia	25	73.5	9	26.5	34

<sup>a</sup>Source: Questionnaires returned by selected associations.

<sup>b</sup>These churches were started by the association that they are presently affiliated with.

<sup>c</sup>These churches were started by some other group, church, or another association.

<sup>d</sup>Percent is of the total number of new churches.

The associations indicated that there were 940 new churches added during the ten years 1963-1972. The number of churches started by a church, group of churches, or the associational leadership of the reporting association is 695 (or 73.9% of the total). The largest number of new churches started by the association was in Kentucky, followed by Illinois and Texas. The largest number of churches started by other groups was in Texas, followed by Georgia and Missouri.

#### Churches Leaving the Fellowship of Their Association

On Table 7 are data indicating the number of churches which have left the fellowship of the 219 associations returning the questionnaire in the study.

The total indicates that there were 432 churches which left the fellowship of their association during the period 1963-1972. Of these, 177 disbanded, 51 merged, 128 went independent, 10 withdrew fellowship, and 66 disassociated themselves for other reasons. The largest number of churches disassociating themselves from their associations appears in Texas, which also has the largest number of disbanded churches. The second largest number of disassociations appears in Georgia, followed by Illinois.

The percentage of churches falling into each category has been calculated and placed on Table 8. This data indicates that 41% of the churches leaving their association were disbanded, while 29.6% "went independent." The state convention with the greatest percentage of disbandments is Missouri, with 73.7%, followed by Illinois and Oklahoma, with 66.7%. The state with the largest percent going independent was South Carolina, with 66.3%, followed by North Carolina (60.0%) and Kentucky (52.6%).

TABLE 7

NUMBER OF CHURCHES THAT LEFT THEIR ASSOCIATIONS 1963-1972,  
BY REASON FOR LEAVING AND BY STATE CONVENTION, 1973<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	NUMBER OF CHURCHES					
	Disbanded	Merged	Went Independ- ent	Withdrew Fellowship	Other	Total
TOTAL	177	51	128	10	66	432
Alabama	7	0	7	0	7	21
Arizona	1	2	0	0	1	4
Arkansas	7	2	0	0	5	14
Florida	3	2	7	0	9	21
Georgia	26	14	34	1	1	76
Illinois	22	2	7	0	2	33
Kentucky	5	0	10	0	4	19
Louisiana	7	3	2	0	2	14
Maryland	1	3	2	0	3	9
Mississippi	7	2	6	0	2	17
Missouri	14	0	4	0	1	19
North Carolina	5	0	18	6	1	30
Oklahoma	8	0	3	0	1	12
South Carolina	0	1	8	0	3	12
Tennessee	2	3	7	1	6	19
Texas	59	17	10	2	15	103
Virginia	3	0	3	0	3	9

<sup>a</sup> Source: Questionnaires returned by selected associations.

TABLE 8

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHURCHES THAT LEFT THEIR ASSOCIATIONS 1963-1972,  
BY REASON FOR LEAVING AND BY STATE CONVENTION, 1973<sup>a</sup>

STATE CONVENTIONS	PERCENT <sup>b</sup> OF CHURCHES					
	Disbanded	Merged	Went Indepen- dent	Withdrew Fellowship	Other	Total
TOTAL	41.0	11.8	29.6	2.3	15.3	100.0
Alabama	33.3	-	33.3	-	33.3	99.9
Arizona	25.0	50.0	-	-	25.0	100.0
Arkansas	50.0	14.3	-	-	35.7	100.0
Florida	14.3	9.5	33.3	-	42.9	100.0
Georgia	34.2	18.4	44.7	1.3	1.3	99.9
Illinois	66.7	6.1	21.2	-	6.1	100.1
Kentucky	26.3	-	52.6	-	21.1	100.0
Louisiana	50.0	21.4	14.3	-	14.3	100.0
Maryland	11.1	33.3	22.2	-	33.3	99.9
Mississippi	41.2	11.8	35.3	-	11.8	100.1
Missouri	73.7	-	21.1	-	5.3	100.1
North Carolina	16.7	-	60.0	20.0	3.3	100.0
Oklahoma	66.7	-	25.0	-	8.3	100.0
South Carolina	-	8.3	66.3	-	25.0	100.0
Tennessee	10.5	15.8	36.8	5.3	31.6	100.0
Texas	57.3	16.5	9.7	1.9	14.6	100.0
Virginia	33.3	-	33.3	-	33.3	99.9

<sup>a</sup>Source: Questionnaires returned by selected associations.

<sup>b</sup>Percent is of the churches leaving associations for each state convention.

Further examination of the data has indicated that 51 of the 219 associations reported having no new churches organized during this period of study, and 74 associations reported that no churches left their fellowship during the period of study. Further, 17 associations reported that they had no new churches and that no churches left the fellowship of the association during the period.

#### Characteristics of Churches Which Left Their Association

Also included on the questionnaire were data which indicated the size of the churches which left their associations. About 74% of the churches which disbanded had less than 200 total members and 57% had less than 100 the year before they left the association. More than half of the churches which "went independent" had less than 200 members, and 27% had less than 100. The churches that disbanded tended not to have any baptisms the year before they left the association, and those that merged or "went independent" tended to have less than 20 baptisms (77% and 57% respectively).

As might be expected, the churches that left their associations did not have very large incomes, since 67% of the whole group had receipts of less than \$20,000. Eighty-five percent of the disbandments were in this category, 65% of those going independent were and 54% of the mergers were. These churches also tended to give very little to the Cooperative Program. Eighty percent of the total group gave less than \$1,000, 90% of the disbandments were in this category, 63% of the mergers were, and 96% of those that went independent were.

These churches seemed to have more differences in building value, however, since 48% of the total group had buildings valued at less than \$50,000 and 32% had buildings valued at more than \$100,000, and with

more than 10% having building worth more than \$250,000. Sixty-five percent of the disbandments were worth less than \$50,000 and 51% of the "independents" were in this category.

No investigation was made as to the reasons for the churches leaving their associations. The study was designed only to establish the number of churches leaving the fellowship of a random sample of associations. This being the case, the authors do not attempt to explain the reasons behind the number of churches which disbanded, merged, went independent, withdrew fellowship, or had other reasons for disassociating themselves from their association. For instance, it is not known regarding the disbandments as to the number of these that were caused by fellowship disruptions within the congregations and a dwindling of attendance to the extent that the church closed. In like manner, it is not known how many of these churches were located in communities of racial transition. It has been observed that some churches do not survive when a community makes a transition, whether the transition is racially or socio-economically oriented. In some cases, churches which have formerly had an affluent membership are unable to make the transition when the community changes to a lower socio-economic group and thus continue to decline until they disband. On the other hand, some churches which have had a rural orientation and community for many years suddenly find themselves in the midst of the affluence of the suburban sprawl, and they are unable to cope with their "new community".

The authors did not investigate the reasons for churches merging. However, a casual observance of Southern Baptist life would indicate that many churches merge for the same reasons they disband. They decline in membership and attendance until the church seeks fellowship with a sister church in a neighboring community or in a suburban area of a metropolitan

city. It has been observed that some churches merge during the early stages of transition rather than allow themselves to decline to the extent that they are weakened.

In regard to the reasons for churches "going independent," again no investigation was made, but casual observance could list several reasons. The pastor is the key in many churches "going independent." The educational background of the pastor who has been educated in a non-Baptist, but church-oriented college, university, Bible school, or seminary leads him to be suspicious of Southern Baptist leadership. In time, he leads the leadership of the Southern Baptist church to become distrustful and eventually to disassociate itself from its local association, state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention. In addition to this, other pastors become disenchanted with the "bigness" of the denomination and seek the fellowship of independent groups of churches. It is not known how many of the churches "going independent" join another so-called "independent" group or association of churches either on a national, state, or local basis. It is likely, however, that many of the churches which "go independent" do affiliate with one of the so-called independent groups.

In some cases, the membership of the church is changed by the influx of a large number of people with little understanding or appreciation for Southern Baptists. These persons gain the leadership positions in a church and lead it to disassociate itself with the association, state convention, and Southern Baptist Convention. Also, some churches have been border-line in their cooperation with Southern Baptists and finally make the decision to disassociate.

APPENDIX

TABLE 9

NUMBER AND PERCENT OF ASSOCIATIONS IN STATE CONVENTIONS  
AND INCLUDED IN THIS STUDY, 1973

STATE  CONVENTIONS	TOTAL ASSOCIATIONS <sup>a</sup>	ASSOCIATIONS IN STUDY			
		Questionnaires Mailed to		Questionnaires Returned	
	Number	Number	Percent <sup>b</sup>	Number	Percent <sup>c</sup>
TOTAL	1,002	298	29.7	219	73.5
Alabama	75	15	20.0	11	73.3
Arizona	15	6	40.0	5	83.3
Arkansas	44	13	29.5	12	92.3
Florida	47	18	38.3	11	61.1
Georgia	93	24	25.8	18	75.0
Illinois	35	11	31.4	9	81.8
Kentucky	80	22	27.5	16	72.7
Louisiana	51	9	17.6	6	66.7
Maryland	14	5	35.7	5	100.0
Mississippi	76	24	31.6	19	79.2
Missouri	79	26	32.9	18	69.2
North Carolina	80	27	33.8	18	66.7
Oklahoma	41	14	34.1	9	64.3
South Carolina	43	12	27.9	10	83.3
Tennessee	68	24	35.3	16	66.7
Texas	118	37	31.4	26	70.3
Virginia	43	11	25.6	10	90.9

<sup>a</sup>Source: Baptist Sunday School Board. "Southern Baptist Handbook," The Quarterly Review. Nashville: July, 1973, and questionnaires returned by selected associations.

<sup>b</sup>Percent is of the total associations.

<sup>c</sup>Percent is of the associations that received questionnaires.