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## America's Fastest Growing Sunday Schools

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# AMERICA'S FASTEST-GROWING

## THE FASTEST GROWING SUNDAY SCHOOL IN EACH STATE

Nation's Fastest Growing	First Baptist Church Harmond, Ind.	Jack Nyles	3,460	11,303	7,837
Alabama	Huffman Assembly of God Sirmingham, Ala. 35215	Daniel Ronsivelle	260	492	223
Alaska	Anchorage Baptist Temple Anchorage, Alaska	Jerry Prevost	174	935	761
Arizona	Grace Community Church Tempe, Ariz. 85282	Guy Davidson	386	1,470	1,104
Arkansas	Victory Baptist Church Pine Bluff, Ark. 71601	J. C. House	212	223	11
California	South Memorial Baptist Church San Diego, Calif. 92116	Tim F. LaHaye	392	1,039	1,267
Colorado	First Assembly of God Grand Junction, Colo. 81501	Clarence Cope	179	1,113	934
Connecticut	Farmington Ave. Bapt. Church West Hartford, Conn. 06107	Wendell Mullen	155	511	346
Delaware	First Baptist Church Georgetown, Del.	Al Jewal	107	383	255
Florida	First Bapt. Church of Temple Heights Tampa, Fla. 33617	Ronald Schaffer	432	2,055	1,613
Georgia	Phillips Dr. Baptist Church Forest Park, Ga. 30050	Tom Smith	297	722	408
Hawaii	L. I. King Baptist Church Waipahu, Hawaii 9, 797	Robert Knutson	152	871	341
Idaho	First Assembly of God Lewiston, Ida. 83501	Charles Mooney	64	435	363
Illinois	Averyville Baptist Church E. Peoria, Ill. 61611	Bobby Lounsbury	213	1,079	772
Indiana	Palmover Church Chatterton, Ind. 45302	Roger Voegtlin	420	367	712

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# OWING SUNDAY SCHOOLS

The staggering total of 15,827 new Sunday School pupils was chalked up by the fastest-growing Sunday Schools in the U.S. this year—a testimony not only to hard-working pastors, but to committed laymen.

BY ELMER TOWNS

**A**stonishing as it may appear, a massive increase in attendance is being recorded in Sunday Schools across the U. S. this fall. Not since the late 1800s and the early days of the 20th century have the numbers been so great. What is appalling, however, is that official church statistics do not reflect these attendance gains. The reason is plain. They are not being recorded in big city churches, nor in many old-line denominations. Rather this Sunday School resurgence is taking place in smaller cities and towns and in lesser-known denominations such as Bible Baptist, Nazarene, Baptist General Conference and Assemblies of God. But no matter how esoteric the location, the certainty of this resurgence is no less real.

And you can begin to grasp the significance of this renewed interest when you realize that among the 50 fastest-growing Sunday Schools (we've really included two more: The First Baptist Church of Hammond, Ind., which no one seems able to top; and the District of Columbia), the increase in one year amounted to 15,827 persons.

To get a more specific idea of what is happening, you must visit Cobo Hall in downtown Detroit this month. There, more than 14,000 Sunday School enthusiasts are expected to crowd into the opening session of the Mid-America Sunday School Convention (Nov. 7) to witness, among other events, *Christian Life* magazine's awarding of banners to these fastest-growing Sunday Schools.

The banners—approximately 5' high, beautifully handfashioned, with red letters on white satin—will be presented to representatives of each of the 50 states as they march across the platform.

"I wouldn't miss this for anything," says Mike Simmons, insurance agent and Sunday School superintendent of the First Baptist Church, West Point, Miss. His was a traditional Sunday School in a small town. Then the people attended a Sunday School bus convention in Kentucky and returned to work with renewed zeal, pushing attendance from 481 to 616 for a growth of 135 pupils over the previous year.

"We'll probably be the fastest growing in Georgia only once," says the

teaching Sunday Schools of all denominations in all sections of our country."

These 50 growing churches should motivate all Christians because small mid-size and large congregations are involved. And the growth is a testimony not only to the pastors but to hard-working laymen who teach Sunday School, drive buses, collect collections, and visit during the week. *Christian Life* salutes the lay workers of these winning churches as well as the multitude of other workers in growing churches everywhere.

Increasing attendance is synonymous with healthy Sunday Schools because individuals are being won to Christ, students are studying the Bible and teachers are obeying the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19,20).

Contrary to expectations, not just Baptists are growing. Fifteen churches with Pentecostal doctrine are among the award winners, plus a number of other denominations. Also, not just southern churches record fast growth. For example, Open Door Church in Chambersburg, Pa., shows an increase of 472 pupils, and the West-side Assembly of God, Davenport, Ia., registers an increase of 403 over the previous year.

Some schools in the smallest populated states had the highest percentage of growth. One is the Bible Baptist Church, Minot, N.D., which shows a 200 percent increase by jumping from 49 scholars in a small frame building to an average of 182. During the year the church occupied a new large block and steel \$75,000 structure. To get this growth the church added six buses and began the Ward County Christian School. Four more buses this fall will push attendance over 300 each week. (continued on page 87)



Rev. Tom Smith of Phillips Dr. Baptist Church in Forest Park. "So I'll be there for this once-in-a-lifetime presentation."

A flood of letters and phone calls has revealed extreme excitement over the fastest-growing Sunday School competition and awards.

"Everyone is excited because any church can win," says Clate Raymond, executive director of the Mid-America Sunday School Convention. "We are happy that the awards will be made during our convention because this will stimulate growth in all Bible

STATE	CHURCH	PASTOR	INCREASE	AVERAGE	
				THIS YEAR	LAST YEAR
Oregon	Central Assembly of God Salem, Ore.	Dennis Davis	132	766	634
Pennsylvania	The Open Door Church Chambersburg, Pa.	Dino Pedrone	472	1,284	812
Rhode Island	Trinity Assembly of God Providence, R.I.	Melford Carriere	36	120	84
South Carolina	Florence Baptist Temple Florence, S.C.	William Monroe	272	790	518
South Dakota	First Assembly of God Brookings, S.D.	Wesley J. Brooks	14	83	69
Tennessee	Madison Ch. of God of Prophecy Madison, Tenn.	Jim Garner	202	250	48
Texas	Canyon Creek Bapt. Church Richardson, Texas	Perry Purtle	376	570	194
Utah	Southeast Christian Church Salt Lake City, Utah	LeRoy Herder	64	212	148
Vermont	North Ave. Alliance Church Burlington, Vt.	Albert Runge	20	242	222
Virginia	Open Door Baptist Church Richmond, Va.	Danny Smith	264	712	448
Washington	Evergreen Christian Center Olympia, Wash.	Glen Cole	318	1,081	763
West Virginia	Fellowship Baptist Church Huntington, W.Va.	Fred Brewer	135	484	349
Wisconsin	Central Baptist Church Milwaukee, Wis.	James Mastin	232	550	318
Wyoming	Cheyenne Baptist Temple Cheyenne, Wyo.	E. Thomas Starr	215	606	391
Washington, D.C.	Faith Bible Church Washington, D.C.	Lewis Tait	505	620	115

*America's Fastest Growing . . .*

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These fast-growing churches are not old established congregations with a financial basis for growth, either. Fifteen have been established since 1970. Typical of these is the Central Baptist Church of Milwaukee, begun in February 1970. Without knowing anyone in the city, James Mastin, pastor, drove his family in a rental truck from Miami to face the sub-zero winds off Lake Michigan. He visited door-to-door, leaving his car and heater running so he could run back and warm up at the end of the block.

"No one let me in," says Mastin, who claims he didn't get discouraged. "But I got mighty cold." After two years of growth, Central Baptist was evicted from the YMCA where it had begun, and the congregation agreed to temporarily use an abandoned furniture warehouse. Later,

when nothing else could be found, the congregation refurbished the warehouse, making it into a 900-seat auditorium. Now, four years later, they average over 600 in Sunday School, have an annual budget of \$120,000.

Several denominations are exerting influence through programs, campaigns and attendance-building seminars. Growth is reported in the Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn.; the Assembly of God; Nazarene churches; and The Baptist General Conference which adopted the motto, "Double in a Decade." They aim to add 20 new churches per year to their 700 churches.

Growing churches testify that soul winning and ministering to the needs of the people are the reasons for growth. In the 1950s American churches experienced natural growth by proper location, efficient services, and "hanging out the shingle" to let the public know the church existed. That was when people were inclined to

attend church. But today the mood of our country seems to be anti-institutional. Church attendance is no longer prized. A family doesn't attend Sunday School because "it's the thing to do." A church, to grow, must offer something people want or need.

"Why are churches growing now after the decline of the 60s?" *Christian Life* asked these churches.

"Up-to-date know-how," was a frequent answer.

"The pastor must be the leader of the church," said Carl Godwin of Calvary Bible Church, Lincoln, Neb. "I find committee-controlled churches are more willing to allow the pastor to coordinate soul winning activities in the church."

Many pastors have discovered how to build churches by reading recent books on the subject, by attending church growth seminars, and by studying accounts of explosive expansion in *Christian Life*.