

The Relationship Between The Local Church and The BSU

Mary Frances Jones

Research Services Department, Sunday School Board

From *Quarterly Review*, Oct.-Dec. 1980 © Copyright 1980.
The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.
All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Editor's note: The most important aspect of the relationship of campus ministry to the denomination is found at the local level in the relation of campus ministry to the churches. This has been the focus of much discussion in recent years. National Student Ministries had commissioned a new survey of attitudes of pastors and church staff persons toward BSU in 1985. A summary and discussion of the results of that survey will be published in our next issue. For this issue we thought it would be useful to reprint this 1980 survey, both for purposes of comparison with the 1985 version and because its findings have not been taken seriously in the current panic over relationships with churches.

* * * * *

Student ministry can be a tremendous challenge to any church that is located in or near a college or university town. Students in colleges and universities are being challenged intellectually and may well expect an equally challenging spiritual program. Outside of the student's own motivation, there are two Southern Baptist organizations that can assist in stimulating students' spiritual growth: (1) a local church, and (2) the Baptist Student Union.

Because decisions made during this period of a student's life will have such a strong influence on the student's future (spiritually as well as physically, and emotionally), it becomes vitally important for these two organizations to coordinate their effort into a well-rounded ministry to the student. Because of this need the National Student Ministries Department of the Sunday School Board requested the Research Service

Department to design and conduct a survey among the pastors of churches near colleges or universities. The purpose of the survey was to answer such questions as:

1. Do pastors view the BSU as competitive with or supportive of the local church?
2. Do pastors participate in BSU programs and do BSU directors participate in local church programs?
3. Do pastors perceive the campus minister as helping the local churches to develop their ministries to the students?
4. What church programs are offered specifically for students?

Methodology and Response

Sample—The sample for this survey was designed to include only pastors of churches in cities where a BSU was located. Some of these cities have full-time BSU directors, some have part-time directors, and others have both (full-time and part-time directors).

Data Collection. - The data was collected by mail. Sample members were sent a letter and a questionnaire at three different times, approximately two weeks apart. Only nonrespondents were contacted by mail subsequent to the first mailing. The usable response rate from the mail survey was 61.1 percent. A sample of nonrespondents were contacted by phone to complete a shortened version of the survey to determine whether nonrespondents differed from the respondents. The nonrespondents were slightly more likely to say that their church had been helped by the work of the BSU directors than were mail respondents. However, this was primarily among churches with more than three hundred members. Several factors were used to determine whether the pastors perceived the BSU as competitive with or supportive of the local church. These factors dealt with:

1. Whether the pastors perceived the students as making their time and financial contributions through their church or the BSU.
2. The pastors' opinions of whether students would be more active in their church organizations if they were not involved in the BSU program.
3. Whether the pastor perceived his church as being helped by the work of the BSU director.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Do Pastors View the BSU as a Competitive or a Supportive Factor in Student Ministries

Most of the pastors (61.3%) tended to feel that students made their regular financial contributions through their church; approximately 37 percent indicated that missions contributions were also made through the local churches.

An almost equal number of pastors perceived that students made their leadership and evangelism effort through the church as through the BSU.

A large number of pastors perceived that students depended on the BSU more than the local church to satisfy their social needs.

Refer to Table 1.

Out of a list of eight types of activities and programs, not more than 25 percent of the pastors felt that the students would be more active in any one of the particular activities or programs if they were not involved in BSU. In the opinions of these pastors, the three programs that were most negatively affected by participation in the BSU programs were: (1) Sunday morning Bible study, (2) worship services, and (3) music programs.

Refer to Table 2.

Only 9.4 percent of these pastors have experienced conflicts in scheduling programs involving the local church and the BSU. Thus, it appears that the pastors did not view the BSU as a competitor of the local church. On the other hand, neither did the majority of the pastors view the BSU as a supportive factor for the local church as shown by the following:

Approximately 45 percent felt that the BSU director promoted attendance in the local churches.

Only 23 percent felt the director promoted student giving through the local churches.

Nearly 41 percent thought the BSU director promoted student participation in the mission or evangelism activities of local churches.

Approximately 13 percent thought the BSU director had met with the elected leader of any local church to train leaders for student ministry.

Approximately 41 percent thought the director had

18 *Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers*

encouraged students to assume responsibilities in the local churches.

Nearly 28 percent thought the director had met with staff members of any local church to prepare them for student ministries.

Thirteen percent felt the director had trained host families for international students.

Slightly over 18 percent felt the director had trained students for leadership positions in local churches.

Refer to Table 3.

Approximately 29 percent of the pastors felt that their own church had benefited in at least one of the ways listed in Table 4 (mostly from the promotion of attendance in the local churches).

Almost 11 percent indicated the director had met with their staff to help them prepare for student ministries.

Refer to Table 4.

Pastors from large churches (1,500 or more members) were somewhat more likely to feel that the BSU directors had helped the area churches than were pastors from smaller churches.

The smaller the church, the less likely it was for the pastor to view the BSU as a supportive element.

Refer to Table 5.

What Church Programs Are Offered Specifically for Students?

Refer to Table 6.

A further examination of these programs by church size indicate that the programs were much more likely to be offered by churches with at least 750 members than by smaller churches.

Refer to Table 7.

Do Pastors Participate in BSU Programs on Campus?

Approximately 52 percent of the pastors had been asked to participate in BSU programs or activities in the past two years and of these, 81 percent had participated. This is approximately 43 percent of the pastors who were in areas near a BSU.

Do BSU Directors/Leaders Participate in Church Programs Off Campus?

Over 24 percent of the pastors had at some time had a BSU director participate in a student-related program in their church.

How Do Pastors Evaluate The BSU Program? What Changes Are Needed?

Of these nearly three hundred pastors, approximately 57 percent did not name a change they would make. However, the changes named most frequently related to the desire for a closer relationship between the churches and BSUs, or more support for local churches from the BSU members (especially for small churches.)

Refer to Table 8.

Do Pastors Perceive the Campus Minister as Helping the Pastor Develop a Ministry to Students?

Approximately 13 percent of the pastors perceived the BSU director as having met with the elected leaders of any of the local churches to train those leaders for a student ministry and no more than 28 percent are *aware* of the director having met with any local church staff to prepare for student ministries.

Approximately 28 percent of the pastors felt that their specific church had benefited from the BSU director's work in one or more of the ways examined in this survey.

The location of a BSU director's church membership appears to have had some influence on the extent of participation of the pastor of the local church in the BSU program and the students' participation in the local church program.

In 67 percent of the churches where a BSU director held membership, students were holding elected positions in the church. This was approximately 19 percent higher than in churches where no BSU director was a member.

Approximately 62 percent of the pastors who did not have a BSU director as a member indicated that they were personally acquainted with the director.

Pastors did not indicate that their church had been helped by the BSU program in approximately 74 percent of the churches where a BSU director was not a member.

Approximately 83 percent of the pastors who had a director or leader in their membership had been invited to participate in a BSU program as opposed to only 43 percent of the pastors who did not have a director or leader in their church's membership.

According to this sample, BSU directors or leaders have participated in student-related programs in only 15 percent of the churches where they were not members.

CONCLUSIONS

- The pastors who participated in the survey did not appear to view the BSU either as a direct competitor or as a supporter of the local church.
- The smaller the church, the less likely the pastor is to view the BSU as a supportive factor.
- There appears to be little communication between local churches and the BSUs. This situation was directly mentioned by some respondents and implied by others.
- There seems to be a correlation between the location of the BSU director's church membership and the positive attitudes toward the BSU and the local pastor's participation in the BSU.
- A factor that may help to develop an even better rapport with the churches is to respond to the desire expressed among smaller churches to share in the benefits of having students support their churches by attending and assuming leadership positions.

In your opinion, which of the following channels (local church, BSU, both, neither) do students use or depend on most often to make their religious contributions or satisfy their needs in each of the areas of emphasis listed below?

TABLE 1

Areas of Emphasis	Channels				
	Church	BSU	Both	Neither	N.I.
a. Regular financial contributions	61.3%	3.7%	11.1%	10.1%	13.8%
b. Missions contributions	37.4	26.8	14.4	7.0	14.4
c. Assume leadership responsibility	23.5	26.2	26.5	6.0	17.8
d. Evangelism effort made through	23.2	29.5	21.8	8.7	16.8
e. Most social activities	23.5	33.9	21.1	5.7	15.8

In your opinion, which of the following programs or activities in your church would students be more involved in if they were not involved in BSU programs?

TABLE 2

24.5% Sunday morning Bible study	24.5% Music program
24.5 Sunday worship services	19.1 Evangelism activities
14.1 Church Training program	17.1 Missions programs
20.1 Wednesday evening programs	3.7 BSU is not a conflict

As far as you know, has the BSU director at the school in your area helped the churches develop a ministry to students in any of the following ways?

TABLE 3

Activity	Yes	No	Don't Know	N.I.
a. Promoted attendance in the local churches . . .	45.3%	12.4%	35.9%	6.4%
b. Promoted students' giving through the local church	22.8	15.1	55.4	6.7
c. Promoted students' participation in the local church's missions or evangelism activities	40.9	13.1	38.6	7.4
d. Met with the elected leaders of a local church to train leaders for a student ministry	13.4	41.3	37.9	7.4
e. Encouraged students to assume responsibilities in the local church	40.6	9.7	42.7	7.0
f. Met with staff members of any local church(es) to prepare for student ministries	27.9	23.2	40.5	8.4
g. Trained host families for international students	13.1	28.2	51.3	7.4
h. Trained students for leadership positions in local churches	18.1	20.5	54.4	7.0

Please indicate the ways in which your particular church has been assisted by a BSU director or leader.

TABLE 4

Activity	Percent of Pastors Specifically Helped
a. Promoted attendance in the local church.....	17.1%
b. Promoted students' giving through the local church....	8.4
c. Promoted students' participation in the local church's missions or evangelism activities.....	13.8
d. Met with the elected leaders of the local church to train leaders for a student ministry.....	5.0
e. Encouraged students to assume responsibilities in the local church.....	13.8
f. Met with staff members of the local church to prepare for student ministries.....	10.7
g. Trained host families for international students.....	3.4
h. Trained students for leadership positions in the local church.....	5.7

TABLE 5

As far as you know, has the BSU director at the school in your area helped the churches develop a ministry to students in any of the following ways?

Program	Church Membership							Total
	Less than 300	300-499	500-749	750-999	1,000-1,499	1,500 and Over		
Promoted attendance in the local church.....	39.5%	50.0%	38.2%	52.4%	37.5%	76.9%	60.0%	
Promoted students' giving through the local church	27.9	23.3	9.1	28.6	18.8	30.8	29.4	
Promoted students' participation in the local church's missions or evangelism activities.....	35.6	46.6	38.2	47.5	34.4	57.7	48.2	
Met with the elected leaders of a local church to train leaders for a student ministry.....	14.4	15.0	7.3	19.0	9.4	19.2	17.6	
Encouraged students to assume responsibilities in the local church	32.7	46.7	32.7	52.4	37.5	69.2	48.2	
Met with staff members of any local church to prepare for student ministries.....	25.0	25.0	29.1	33.3	15.6	53.8	37.6	
Trained host families for international students	10.6	13.3	10.9	28.5	15.6	11.5	11.8	
Trained students for leadership positions in local church	20.2	18.3	10.9	19.0	9.4	34.6	20.0	
Base	104	60	55	21	32	26		

Which, if any, of the following activities or programs does your church provide for college students?

TABLE 6

Program	Percent of Churches
College or College and Careers Sunday School Department	62.1%
College or College and Careers Church Training Department	22.1
A College Baptist Young Women (WMU group)	0.7
On-to-College Day	17.1
Join the Church Day	2.3
Student Day at Christmas	26.2
Welcome social or breakfast at the beginning of the school term	15.4
Department socials	35.6
College or College and Careers Choir	10.4
Student adoption program	2.7
Other	11.1
None of these offered	25.2

Which, if any, of the following activities or programs does your church provide for college students?
 Check all that apply.

TABLE 7 Church Membership

Program	Less than 300	300-499	500-749	750-999	1,000-1,499	1500 and Over	Total
College or College and Careers Sunday School Department.....	36.5%	51.7	81.8%	81.0	90.6%	96.2%	62.1%
College or College and Careers Church Training Department.....	12.5	16.7	20.0	28.6	37.5	53.8	22.1
A College Baptist Young Women (WMU group)	-	-	-	-	3.1	3.8	0.7
On to College Day.....	4.8	6.7	14.5	38.1	40.6	50.0	17.1
Join the Church Day.....	1.0	-	1.8	4.8	-	15.4	2.3
Student Day at Christmas.....	16.3	11.7	27.3	47.6	53.1	46.2	26.2
Welcome social or breakfast at the beginning of the school term.....	3.8	10.0	14.5	23.8	25.0	57.7	15.4
Department socials.....	13.5	25.0	47.3	42.9	59.4	88.5	35.6
College or College and Careers Choir.....	2.9	5.0	7.3	19.0	15.6	46.2	10.4
Student adoption program.....	1.0	-	1.8	-	6.3	15.4	2.7
Other.....	8.7	8.3	5.5	19.0	18.8	23.1	11.1
None of these offered.....	45.2	28.3	14.5	9.5	3.1	-	25.2

If you could change one thing about the BSU program, what would you change?

TABLE 8

Types of Changes Suggested	Percent Suggesting Change
Closer relationship between the church and the BSU	16.3%
More support for the local church/not separate and independent organization	10.9
Devised system to make BSU responsible to associations and churches.	2.3
Give BSU more staff/funds/building/time.	13.2
Encourage students to participate and serve in all churches, not just one or two (especially serving in small churches).	9.3
Make BSU emphasis more spiritual/evangelical/Christ-centered than social	8.5
Change the types of directors/leadership.....	8.5
Improve flow of information to churches/better communication. ...	8.5
Would not make any changes	3.1
Other	15.5

EDITOR'S COMMENTS ON THE TABLES:

Table 1. Students are perceived as giving financially through the church not the BSU, so apparently summer missions fundraising is not seen as a threat. In missions, leadership, and evangelism, students are split fairly evenly. Ironically (given recent pressures on us), students are perceived as doing more evangelism through the BSU than through the local church! It may be good that BSU meets more social needs than the church, but this may reflect the old "ping-pong" stereotype of campus ministry.

Table 2. Is the BSU in competition with the local church? Fewer than 25% of pastors felt that students would be more active in church programs if they were not involved in BSU. We have a problem with the 24.5%. Are these the persons denominational leaders are trying to address with all the talk of "church and campus working together"? Is it not possible that some of the 24.5% responded out of a realistic sense that students have only so many hours to give, rather than out of negative feelings toward BSU? Are there some who feel that BSU involvement *increases* church involvement? That question was not asked. In any case, this statistic can hardly be construed as a major indictment of BSU.

Tables 3, 4, and 5. These results look more negative. Fewer than half the pastors perceive the campus minister as helping local churches in general to develop ministries to students. Table 5 shows that the percentage was much higher in larger churches. This may mean that we help larger churches more frequently or that the smaller rural churches in the sample have less contact with students and therefore the campus ministers. Art Herron has suggested in conversation that this sampling was random and included pastors of churches not near colleges or campus ministry programs. He expects the 1985 survey to show a greater percentage of church staff receiving help from campus ministers partly because the sample was weighted toward churches in communities with institutions of higher education.

Nevertheless, Table 4 remains troubling. If only 28% of pastors feel that we are helping their churches in any way, we are not providing adequate services to our primary constituency (or at least not communicating what we are providing). This is where Charles Johnson and company have a point. Art Herron believes that this percentage will be much higher in 1985, but

our goal must be to have a solid majority of pastors feeling that we are strengthening their ministries. One revealing statistic is not found in the tables but is cited at the end of the article: "BSU directors or leaders have participated in student-related programs in only 15% of the churches where they were not members." This figure calls for a response from campus ministers.

Table 8. It is important to note that 57% of the pastors did not suggest *any* change in BSU. Ron Brown commented that "the survey affirms BSU and in no way calls for a 'two-track' approach from NSM." Those who did suggest changes were, in a sense, self-serving, concerned more about the church than about the students. Should we try to meet the expectations of those who want campus ministry to support their own institutions? This has become a political question rather than a vocational one. While part of our calling is to develop leaders for the churches, our ministry cannot be reduced to recruiting for the churches. We are not, after all, the P.R. arm of the church's ministry; we ourselves are involved in ministry to persons in higher education. We seek to enable the churches to minister more effectively not out of our need for support but out of concern for these persons in need. While the needs of persons may at times be in tension with the needs of the institutions to which we are related, we must be clear that it is persons which take priority in our ministry.