

Religion and Education

In 1952 the United States Supreme Court ruled that public schools were not acting in violation of the Constitution when they permitted so-called "released time" religious instruction. In the fall of 1952 the Delhi Consolidated School took advantage of this ruling and instituted such a program. Upon the request of parents, students are permitted to leave school, during regular school hours, for one-hour religious instruction twice a week at the church of their choice. Under this program in 1955 some 125 children attended classes at the Delhi Methodist Church, and 100 others received religious instruction at St. John's Catholic Church. School board president Howard Rentschler declared that they were "very happy about the program and we're glad we were one of the first to undertake it."

It remains to be seen whether such programs will prove a satisfactory answer to the demand that the public schools should do more along the line of religious education. A survey conducted by Principal James P. Lewiston of the Fontanelle High School in 1955 showed that 70 per cent of the high school administrators polled did not allow religious education. About 12 per cent

permitted "released time" religious classes, another 8 per cent had after-school religious training, and about 10 per cent allowed religious education classes in the school during regular school hours, a practice the State Department of Public Instruction declared was "obviously prohibited" by both the federal and state constitutions. It was apparent that school administrators had not yet arrived at any uniform solution to the question of religious training, although only 30 per cent were opposed to its inclusion in the school curriculum.

Summer youth camps sponsored by churches have become increasingly popular. In 1955 an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 young people attended Protestant education camps for periods ranging from one to two weeks. Many more would attend if there was room. To meet the growing demand the denominations were expanding their camps or building new ones. The Baptists in 1955 were working on their new camp at Forest Lake near Ottumwa, while the Congregationalists were building a new camp at Sportsman's Lake in Tama County, and the Methodists had begun development of a tract adjoining Lake Ahquabi, near Indianola. Presbyterians in northwest Iowa had purchased the Okoboji Club property on West Okoboji Lake and expected to have a camp completed by 1956. The trend in all denominations was away from rented camp facilities toward church-owned camps. Many were winterizing the

camp buildings so they might be used the year around.

The year marked the tenth anniversary of the Iowa Council of Churches, whose membership included 2,000 churches with about 650,000 members from fourteen denominations. Many churches also celebrated anniversaries. The most famous of these was the centennial of Nashua's historic "Little Brown Church." Hundreds of couples who had been married at the church returned in August as one of several features of the celebration.

The wide range of denominational interests is indicated by a recital of a few events. Mrs. Howard L. Roach of Plainfield, retiring head of the Iowa Baptist Women's Society, was elected in May to a two-year term as president of the 500,000 member American Baptist Women's organization. Delegates from the 520 churches of the Iowa-Des Moines Methodist Conference voted in favor of ending all racial segregation in Methodist churches and institutions. Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan of the Omaha Archdiocese forbade Catholics to attend a drive-in theater at Carter Lake for a 90-day period after the theater scheduled a picture not approved by Catholic censors. The same theater had suffered a similar ban earlier when it showed the films *The Moon Is Blue* and *French Line*.

Another round was fought during 1955 in the

perennial struggle to make Iowa's public schools better able to meet the needs of the modern world. The State Department of Public Instruction, with the support of Governor Hoegh, asked the General Assembly to make several changes in the school laws which would insure more efficiently run school systems. Besides asking for increased appropriations for the several types of state aid to schools already in existence, the department requested \$11,000,000 to be used as "incentive aid" which would be used to encourage the formation of larger school administrative units. The department also asked that the minimum number of pupils permitted in a reorganized school district be raised from 300 to 600. The legislature did not approve either of these two major changes, although it did grant most of the increased appropriations requested in existing school aid programs.

Advocates of the proposed school legislation were naturally disappointed. The Iowa Falls *Citizen* pointed out that the state was exactly where it had been in this matter in January. "The only difference is that now we know that it will be at least another two years before there will be any fundamental changes in our tax structure or in our school legislation." State Superintendent J. C. Wright was consoled by the fact that the legislature had seen "fit to discuss this issue rather thoroughly. This is a real gain. Perhaps in the next

session our department can prepare more pertinent facts for their consideration."

Progress was being made, however, in the reduction of the number of school districts. On July 1, 1954, there were 4,417 districts, but a year later the figure had dropped to 4,142. During the last half of 1955 the rate continued so that it was certain that the number of districts would drop below the 4,000 mark in 1956. The largest of the new districts was the one at Clear Lake which included 1,565 pupils. The new North Scott district in Scott County was next with 1,357 pupils. Superintendent Wright was greatly encouraged that about half of the new districts being formed had 500 to 600 or more pupils whereas a year before only about 10 per cent of the new districts were this large.

The National Education Association's committee on rural life and education singled out four school systems in Iowa as worthy of inspection by foreign educators. These included the Tipton Community Schools, rated the best of this type in the state, the LeMars public schools, commended particularly for its adult education program, the Fairfield Independent School District, an example of how agricultural, industrial, and business enterprises could be integrated into one educational community, and the Polk County schools, illustrating how the county could help local districts outside a large city (Des Moines)

to provide a comprehensive educational program.

Meanwhile, as school enrollment continued to rise new school construction underway in the state during 1955 was estimated at \$25,000,000. Among the schools opened was the \$3,500,000 West Senior High School in Waterloo whose central hall was as wide as a concrete highway and one and a half city blocks in length. In December voters of the Des Moines school district approved an \$8,165,000 bond issue to finance nine new schools and twenty additions to existing school buildings.

Nineteen private colleges in the state received a mighty uplift in spirits on December 12 when the Ford Foundation announced that it was giving them \$3,335,900 as part of that group's huge half-billion dollar grant to 615 colleges in the country. Individual grants were made in amounts about equal to each college's pay roll for its liberal arts and sciences faculty during 1954-1955. Grinnell and Coe colleges were also recipients of a "supplemental" grant made to colleges which had been leaders in increasing faculty salaries. These latter grants could be used for any purpose the college wished. The regular grants were to be used as endowments to increase faculty salaries. Drake University was the largest beneficiary in Iowa, receiving \$596,400. Grinnell with \$474,400, Coe College with \$320,900, Cornell College with \$211,200, and Luther College with

\$202,600, were the others who received over \$200,000.

Although the most spectacular, the Ford grant was only one of many contributions which Iowa colleges received during 1955 to help them expand their programs to meet rising enrollments. The Iowa College Foundation, the joint fundraising organization for eighteen of the state's private colleges, which had secured a modest \$17,000 from 28 contributors in 1952, received a record \$116,514 from 137 contributors in 1955. Cornell received a gift of \$750,000 from the Olin Foundation for a new library and student social center, making a total of \$1,350,000 received in two years from this source. The Cowles Foundation also gave Cornell \$200,000. The late Glenn L. Martin, the airplane builder, and a native of Macksburg, Iowa, left Iowa Wesleyan College \$100,000 in his will. Martin's first contact with the college had occurred when he saw its girls' basketball team play. His first visit to the school was only in June of 1955. His bequest came shortly after Iowa Wesleyan had begun a ten-year, \$5,000,000 development program.

At Parsons College, where Dr. Millard G. Roberts was inaugurated in October as the school's tenth president, a drive was begun to raise \$700,000 as part of a long-range expansion program. Construction of two new dormitories was to begin early in 1956. Dr. John A. Fisher

was formally installed as president of Buena Vista, a college which had completed renovation of its gymnasium and was building a new \$300,000 dormitory. Wartburg College at Waverly opened a new student union, part of a building program which had cost \$2,000,000 since 1948. Dr. Howard R. Bowen was installed as the seventh president in the 107-year history of Grinnell College. He declared that Grinnell's task was "to repair a fatal deficiency in our American educational system, which is neglect of talented students."

College enrollments in the fall were 12 per cent higher than those of 1954. The State Board of Regents (formerly known as the Board of Education) suggested that it might be necessary to limit enrollments in the three state institutions of higher education. After the legislature failed to approve the board's request for funds for a large-scale program of capital improvements to provide the facilities necessary to handle larger enrollments, it was proposed to finance this construction through bonds to be paid off by increased tuition charges. Most of the construction completed or in progress at the three institutions in 1955, such as dormitories, and the athletic office building and addition to the Memorial Union at the State University of Iowa, were already financed by funds other than those appropriated by the legislature.

In answer to criticism that athletic coaches received expensive gifts while other college faculty members were ignored, students and friends of M. D. Helser, Iowa State College's Dean of Student Affairs and Director of Personnel, decided to prove that non-athletic achievements were also appreciated. At the opening of the college's annual Veishea festival they presented the surprised 65-year-old dean with a Cadillac and notified him that a scholarship fund in his honor had been established.

GEORGE S. MAY