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MILWAUKEE SENTINEL

Churches Surveyed on Probes by IRS

Washington, D. C. —UPI— The Church of Scientology said Sunday it has sent questionnaires to more than 7,000 churches on the East Coast to determine the extent of Internal Revenue Service "harassment" of churches and religious agencies.

A church spokesman said it took the action after hearing a number of complaints that the IRS was investigating churches involved in social action programs.

The Rev. Arthur Maren, of the church's headquarters in Los Angeles, said a similar survey had been completed on the

West Coast and the results were beginning to come in.

The questionnaire attempts to determine the extent to which churches, especially those actively engaged in social action programs, have had IRS investigations launched into their operations. Present law holds that churches and other nonprofit organizations may be granted tax exempt status if "no substantial part" of their activities are directed towards propaganda, "or otherwise attempting to influence legislation."

Maren said his questionnaire, sent to churches of ev-

ery denomination and reflecting a cross section of liberal and conservative religious activity, was completely confidential.

The questionnaire comes on the heels of a recently released report by the Guild of St. Ives, an Episcopal group of lawyers centered in the New York area.

The report said the IRS "seems to be taking a tougher approach to churches in an attempt to curb their activities on political and social matters."

According to the Scientologists, most of the churches in the IRS probes have been involved with such issues as the

Vietnam War, poverty, housing, welfare systems, medical care and economic maldistribution.

The Scientologists have had their difficulty with the IRS and their tax exempt status was lifted several years ago, but church officials claim there is no relationship between the questionnaire and their own difficulties with the IRS.

Recently Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which has lobbied heavily against federal aid to parochial education, had its tax exempt status lifted. And on the other side of the spectrum, the anti-Communist Christian cru-

sade of Billy James Hargis had its tax exempt status lifted in 1966 because it supported amendments favoring a return of prayer and Bible reading in public schools. A federal court later reinstated the exemption, suggesting that the IRS was entering "a dangerous area."

Congress is considering at least two bills that examine the lobbying and political activities of tax exempt organizations. One of them, sponsored by Rep. Al Ullman (D-Ore.), would limit groups to spending one-fifth of their budget on lobbying before Congress without losing their exempt status.