

# **(BP)---FEATURES**

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Tents Still Reach German  
Unchurched People Best

by Theo Sommerkamp  
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The day of the tent revival, with its sawdust trail, may almost be gone in America, but in Germany, it is still one of the best methods of reaching unchurched people.

More than 1,000 persons responded to calls to make some commitment to Christ during tent services conducted by the Union of Evangelical-Free Churches in West Germany during 1969.

That many or more are expected to respond during the current season for tent revivals, which extends from mid-May and reaches to nearly October 1, according to Freidrich Eckert of Kassel, one of three full-time Baptist tent evangelists in Germany.

Using six tents, Baptists maintain a form of outreach that stretches back to 1926, except for wartime years. Tent revivals are being held in about 30 cities in West Germany this year.

The tent mission is a key part of the home missions work of the Union of Evangelical-Free Churches. Purpose of tent evangelism is to reach those who do not maintain contact with any church.

Although 98 per cent of the German people consider themselves Christians, only 3 per cent regularly attend church, Eckert said. "Since people don't come to church buildings, we take the church to the people through tents.

"We have found that tents draw more outsiders than public indoor halls. Church buildings attract the fewest outsiders of the three," he went on.

From 30 to 70 per cent of those attending a tent meeting will be unchurched. The highest number of unchurched are present at "Neulandmission" (pioneer area) tent meeting sites.

"Our attendance has declined in the last few years but we are having more decisions," Eckert explained. The different tents can seat from 250 to three times that number.

One tent, seating 450, has remained in West Berlin for 19 years. Berlin's isolation from the rest of West Germany makes it very difficult to move this tent to other cities.

The pioneer mission tent, moves about in regions where there are few if any Baptist churches. It seats 250, and is the smallest tent of all.

This summer, another tent seating 250-300, visited Holland where it was equipped as a coffee "house" for youth. Pews out, chairs in. Fish netting decorated the tent's interior for the two 10-day Dutch visits.

More than 160 young people, two-thirds of them unchurched, came during the stop in Hoogerzand, Holland. Five made professions of faith. Between 7 and 11 p.m. each evening, the youth sipped coffee and Coke.

At intervals they considered the questions of drug addiction, whether or not God is dead, space exploration, and peace and freedom.

A Baptist layman who operates a long-haul trucking firm makes the arrangements each summer for shipping tents and accessories (pews, lighting, pulpit, book display) from place to place.

Finding qualified tentmasters is vital. The tentmaster has technical management of a tent everywhere it goes during a season. He might even preach in emergencies.

The tentmaster also arranges for afternoon services for children ages 4 through 14. Local churches provide children's helpers, night watchmen, and other needs.

The six tentmasters are selected by Eckert and chief coordinating tent evangelist Herbert Weinert of Cologne. Tentmasters are first of all spiritually qualified. Practical experience, financial know-how, and speaking ability are needed skills.

Working with each tentmaster is a tent deacon--more or less an assistant tentmaster, Eckert said. The same traits of character are sought in tent deacons as in tentmasters.

"Most tentmasters and tent deacons come from Bible schools in Germany. Not all are Baptists, but all are dedicated Christians. They would, if not Baptist, come from one of the other free church bodies (non-established Protestant groups)" according to Eckert.

Both the tentmaster (usually 25-30 years old) and the tent deacon (age 20 to 25) are ideally unmarried men. The tent work demands most of their time throughout the season.

They receive a modest income for their services--tentmasters 410 marks (\$112) and tent deacons 300 marks per month. Since many of them enter the pastorate or become missionaries, summer tent activity provides valuable experience.

Pastors are depended on also. Since there are six tents and only three full-time evangelists, pastors are called on to fill several engagements.

"We depend on the local Baptist church in each community to find a place for the tent to be put up, and provide a choir and organ or piano," Eckert said. The tentmaster and deacon usually find lodging with church families. The normal duration of stay in a community is 10 to 14 days.

The larger the city, the greater the problem of finding a site to erect the tent, Eckert said. Not due to any anti-clericalism, simply due to lack of physical space.

The largest tent, which is 25 meters (over 80 feet) in diameter and seats 750, is reserved for the largest cities. Its itinerary this season include Hanover (population 550,000).

Tent mission work not only supports itself, but carries most of the financial load for home missions for the entire year, Eckert said. The first Sunday of May each year is set aside in Baptist churches as "tent mission offering Sunday." Around 30,000 marks (\$8,200) is usually donated.

The tent evangelism budget annually is 260,000 marks. Of this, 180,000 marks is expected to come in offerings, which are collected at each service also. Separate individual contributions account for another 35,000 marks.

Weinert and Eckert are year-round evangelists. The Hollander, Jacob Polderman, serves only during tent time, and can preach in German, too.

Five other Protestant organizations support tent programs in West Germany. Baptists, however, have the most tents and greatest total seating capacity (2,550). Baptists coordinate their schedule with other tent mission groups to avoid overlapping in communities.

Weather influences attendance. Once it caused great trouble. In 1964, the largest tent in use was torn to shreds by a windstorm in Dortmund. No one was injured. Children attending the afternoon service had been taken to safety before the tent collapsed. The financial loss, however, was 50,000 marks.

Five tents are umbrella type with a single mast. One tent, seating 350, has three masts. Special pre-season training is provided for those engaging in tent work each year.

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Baptist Spanish Publishing  
House Names Hill New Director

9/25/70

EL PASO, Tex. (BP)--Thomas W. Hill, a Southern Baptist missionary, has been inaugurated during ceremonies here as the third director of the Spanish Baptist Publishing House

Hill, who has served as a book editor at the publishing house since 1964, succeeds Frank W. Patterson as director. Patterson has headed the publishing house for 27 years.

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During the inauguration ceremonies, tribute was paid to Patterson, who is leaving to accept a special literature promotion assignment for Spanish-speaking Latin America.

Speaking for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, which operates the publishing house, at the ceremonies was Charles W. Bryan, the board's secretary for Middle America and the Caribbean.

"Sixty-five years of history enables the publishing house to face the future with optimism and purpose," Bryan said. He characterized its ministry as one dedicated to raising "the spiritual level of the Spanish-speaking people of the world."

Special guests for the program were members of the institution's advisory committee which began a 10-day conference earlier in the day.

Also present were an estimated 500 El Paso residents, who joined in the honor paid to the Pattersons, who have been missionaries in the city for more than 30 years.

The ceremonies were climaxed by a commemorating of the 125th anniversary of the SBC Foreign Mission Board. The program was planned and directed by Mrs. W. Judson Blair, a missionary who also serves on the publishing house staff.

The Baptist Spanish Publishing House, now beginning its 65th years, includes on its staff 24 missionaries, most of whom have come to El Paso from missionary service in one of the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America.



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