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February 15, 1971

Houston Church Reports
4,011 Revival Conversions

by Robert O'Brien

HOUSTON (BP)--Some 4,011 persons--about 95 per cent teenagers have made professions of faith in Christ in a crusade conducted by First Baptist Church here, and at least 639 of that number have been baptized.

Harvey Kneisel, director of ministries at the church where John Bisagno is pastor, said 1,061 of the 4,011 conversions and 35 baptisms were recorded during a two-month preparation phase of the campaign conducted by Evangelist Richard Hogue, 24.

The remaining 2,950 conversions and 604 baptisms came during a 2 1/2 week series of nightly services.

No other church in the Southern Baptist Convention is believed to have ever recorded 2,950 professions of faith during a church revival.

Dubbed "Spireno"--an acronym for "spiritual revolution now"--the campaign involved four phases.

During the first phase, Hogue spoke during assembly programs at more than 45 junior high and high school assemblies. The assemblies were followed up with rallies during the second phase at which young people heard Hogue's Christian folk group and sermons.

The third phase was the 2 1/2 week period, with services at the First Baptist Church, and on the last four nights, at the Sam Houston Coliseum here.

The fourth phase, underway now, is the follow-up, which according to Kneisel, has been interwoven with the other phases.

Church staffers and laymen have conducted extensive visitation and counseling with converts from the beginning, said Kneisel, a former Southern Baptist missionary.

"In every case, the youngsters were asked to get parental permission before being baptized," he added. "The crusade was characterized by short, difficult to accept, low-key invitations. Mr. Hogue stressed commitment of life to Christ, as well as personal acceptance of him," Kneisel said.

"In fact, during the invitation and throughout the counseling, they were told to delay their response if they were not certain what they were doing," he said.

Celebrities such as Phyllis George, Miss America; football stars, Terry Bradshaw and Roger Staubach; singers Pat Boone and Cynthia Clawson were featured during the second week.

Kneisel reported that large crowds attended services from the third night until the end of the 2 1/2 week phase. Average attendance per night at the church was 2,800 and at the coliseum, 5,000.

On the final night, he said, more than 3,000 teenagers, bearing placards and singing, marched from the coliseum to the church for mass baptism of 145 persons.

During the follow-up phase, which will run indefinitely, Spireno clubs have been formed in the schools and Spireno Bible classes and special services, retreats and other activities for Spireno converts are underway.

"The youth program at the church has already doubled," Kneisel reports, "and we expect it to quadruple." Spireno Bible classes, for example, he says, have averaged more than 400 young persons per Sunday.

Other phases of the follow-up will include questionnaires for the converts and four, three-day follow-up Spireno rallies by Hogue each year.

The 24-year-old evangelist, formerly Bisagno's youth director at First Baptist Church, Dell City, Okla., is moving his headquarters from Oklahoma City to Houston. The first Spireno follow-up rally was set for mid-February.

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Seminary Extension Offers
Courses for Undereducated Pastors and Seminary Grads

2/15/71

NASHVILLE (BP)--The administrative committee of the Seminary Extension Department of the six Southern Baptist seminaries has approved two major expansions of the department's curriculum.

The committee authorized the department, headed by Raymond M. Rigdon, to offer special courses designed for Baptist pastors with less than a high school education, and approved general plans for new kinds of continuing education materials, such as reading programs and cassette tapes, designed to help seminary-trained pastors face practical problems in their work. Approvals are based on the securing of necessary financial resources.

Rigdon recommended that the department begin a special series of courses for Baptist pastors with less than a complete high school education after surveys conducted by the department of research and statistics disclosed that about 6,000 pastors of Southern Baptist churches have only a high school education or less.

The surveys revealed that less than half of the pastors of Southern Baptist churches have seminary training. Approximately 2,000 pastors have less than a ninth grade education, and 4,000 pastors have from nine to 12 years of formal schooling.

In addition, 5,000 pastors have had some college work, but do not have a degree. Approximately 5,000 pastors have completed college, but have had no seminary training, and about 4,000 have had some training beyond college, but do not have a seminary degree. Approximately 10,000 pastors of Southern Baptist churches have three years or more of training beyond college.

Rigdon said that courses presently offered by the Seminary Extension Department are on a college level, and yet the background of the students included persons from secularly employed preachers with only a few years of formal school to seminary graduates.

The action by the administrative committee, said Rigdon, is one of "the most exciting developments in the history of the Seminary Extension Department." He added it will better enable the department to meet the different needs of students with varying backgrounds.

The Seminary Extension Department has field tested one experimental course in this "Basic Curriculum" for pastors with limited formal schooling. Entitled "Understanding the Bible," this course now available for general use. A second experimental course, "The Work of a Pastor," is also available for general use, although further field testing may lead to some revisions in it.

A third course in the "Basic Curriculum" entitled "The Life of Christ," is now being developed, and will be ready by September.

The "Basic Curriculum" courses will be offered in Spanish as well as English, and will be available both in the U.S.A. and internationally.

In the second major area of expansion, continuing education, the department is now offering cassette tapes and hopes to begin offering independent reading programs with specific, practical problems that ministers face, Rigdon said. Although these materials will be beamed primarily for the seminary-trained pastor, they will be useful to all ministers.

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Since several of the six SBC seminaries offer excellent resident continuing education programs, the Seminary Extension Department will major on informal training media which the seminary-trained pastor can use on the job, Rigdon added. Seminary Extension's strategy, said Rigdon, is to "take the training where the preachers are."

"Dramatic changes in American life make it imperative for the seminary-trained minister to continue his studies," Rigdon told the department's administrative committee. "A continuing education program, focusing on the relevance of the Christian faith to the critical issues and problems today, can help to revitalize the ministry of scores of pastors all over the convention."

He added that several crises in national life have emerged since most of the SBC's seminary-trained pastors completed their formal training. He cited as examples the crises in sexual behavior, the use of drugs by growing numbers, campus unrest, ecology, the hippie movement, and riots.

Also, astounding advances in science, technology, and space exploration are raising theological questions which many ministers need help in understanding and interpreting," Rigdon told the committee.

Specific projects for the department's continuing education program will be presented at a meeting later this month of the department's administrative committee, which is composed of the presidents of the six SBC seminaries.

Rigdon said that the new continuing education materials, and the development of the "Basic Curriculum" for pastors with less than high school education, will enable the department to strengthen and improve its present materials on a college level.

Last year, more than 5,000 persons from 45 states and eight foreign countries were enrolled in the department's 192 extension centers scattered across the country and in its school of correspondence.

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726 Member Florida Church
Reports 1,500 Revival Decisions

2/15/71

NICEVILLE, Fla. (BP)--The First Baptist Church here, with 726 resident members, reported more than 1,500 decisions during an eight-day revival sparked by the church's youth.

Of the 1,500 persons making decisions, 461 were on "professions of faith in Jesus Christ," and most of these were teenagers with no prior church affiliation, according to the pastor Fred Steelman.

On the fourth night of the revival, led by Houston Evangelist Freddie Gage, services were moved from the 600-seat church auditorium to the 1,000 capacity high school auditorium, and people were still turned away, Steelman said.

The pastor gave credit for the results to God at work among the church's teenagers.

The youth had numerous ways of sharing their witness with other teenagers, and a steering committee composed entirely of junior and senior high school students coordinated the revival.

A "witness committee" distributed 250 copies of the Gage's book, *Pulpit In the Shadows* to church youth, asking each person to read the book, sign it and pass it on until 10 friends had finished it, making a total of 2,500 persons to read the book.

The youth also led an auto cavalcade of the Bay area cities touting the revival, calling it an "Inner-Peace Parade."

For two nights, about 75 of the youth visited teen hangouts in the twin cities of Niceville and Valparaiso, handing out crusade literature, gospel tracts and "rapping" with any kid who would listen.

They played "crash"--a game whereby church youth would go to a friend's house, invite him to the revival that night, and then stay with the friend until time for the meeting. Steelman said many of the decisions were made by "crashed" young people.

Each night following the services, Gage and Steelman talked to youth during "God-raps" at the church's coffee house, "The Third Degree."

Steeleman said the attendance committee, also composed entirely of youth, worked itself out of a job. The committee enlisted 135 captains to "pack the pews," but the attendance plan was scuttled after two over-capacity nights.

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Attendance was so great that one night Steelman said he had to ask adult church members to give up their seats to non-members and assemble in an adjacent room. Over 200 went out, the auditorium filled again, and still more than 300 had to mill around outside, Steelman said.

Gage, a former Houston tough, spoke to daytime assemblies at local junior and senior high schools on the topic of drugs and delinquency.

Stelman said that trained personal workers from the church are now in the process of visiting each of the 461 persons who made professions of faith during the revival, and making personal contacts with all non-affiliated decision makers.



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