

REPORT ON LAY EVANGELISM OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIET NAM

Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates:

First, I want to thank the Lord for the honor of being allowed to explain the LAY EVANGELISM program of the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam.

The most important organization for Lay Evangelism in Viet Nam deserving first mention is the Witness Band.

The Evangelical Church of Viet Nam has had Witnessing Bands almost from its inception. But beginning in 1938, with Dr. John Sung's visit to Viet Nam, new strength and impetus were given to the witnessing movement in all of the churches. Many Christians offered themselves and the Witnessing Band was well organized. Today this work is organized on a country-wide basis with a National Director to give overall supervision, and a District Director for each of the four church districts. In each local church, a Local Director organizes and leads the Witnessing Band. He calls on the Christians to join the Band and then divides it into cells of two or more persons. Peoples of every age group take part but the majority are adult church members. The young people and children take the lesser part, possibly from natural shyness or lack of mature understanding of the importance of Christian witness. Usually the Director arranges for a new member, a young person or a child, to accompany an older witness to give him the benefit of experience. The Witnessing Band often goes out on Sunday afternoon because it is the only day of the week that many people are free of their daily work. In order to give a systematic witness, many of the churches divide their area of responsibility into zones, and beginning with the nearer ones, the Witnessing Band visit and give out tracts, working its way through the city and surrounding villages. Or sometimes they assign the witnessing cells a zone of responsibility. The names of people interested in the Gospel are recorded and they are revisited

as soon as possible. Sometimes on holidays or special family days a Christian will invite the whole Band to operate in his neighborhood for one or more days according to the occasion. By this method the church is recognized and a whole village is influenced by the Gospel. Some churches will send a letter to the people they intend to visit, asking for an appointment. This practice makes the master of the house feel important and he will usually receive the Witnessing Band sympathetically. This seems most effective in the cities where people live a busy life and have little time for informal visiting.

A few churches among the Tribes peoples have a special way of their own which I think is very good. After the harvest there is a period of time when there is very little farm work to be done. The church sends the Witnessing Band to a distant village for a week or ten days. The entire expenses are borne by the church or the members of the Band to avoid putting a burden on the host village. This method has been effective in reaching distant jungle villages with the Gospel. However, at the present time it has been practically discontinued because of the disruption of the war.

To help and encourage the spirit of witnessing in the church, many of the churches draw a graph of the activity of the Witnessing Band members. They give praise to the champion witness of the month, the quarter, or the year. In a few churches the Witnessing Band has a special day each quarter. They invite a special speaker to come for the day. Report of the activities of the Witnessing Band are given, offerings are taken for the work, new members are invited to join the Band and a magazine describing the program of the Witnessing Band is published and distributed free to the Christians. Consequently, in these churches the interest in witnessing has risen to a high level.

Today the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam has more than 350 churches. According to the report of the past several years about 40 to 45 percent of the churches have a continually active Witnessing Band. On an average of the past few years there are 2,100 Witnessing Band members who have witnessed to 251,000 people and prayed with 3,300 who indicated a desire to believe on the Lord. No figures are yet available for 1965, but in 1964 there were almost 5,400 professed conversions. It is not true that the other 55 percent of the churches have no Witnessing Bands, but in many cases they are not organized on a regular basis. Some do not have members enough to organize and in some areas the war makes organized witnessing impossible. The situation should be studied by the church to find ways to increase participation in this ministry.

Although the young people participate in the Witnessing Band of the church, many of the youth groups organize their own Witnessing Band and plan their own program. They organize occasional area-wide youth meetings. The program includes a preaching service, plenty of singing and testimonies, and an outing for fun and for witnessing in the area. The meetings not only build up the spiritual life of the young people but they also have the important emphasis on evangelism.

A goodly number of the youth of the church have responded to an appeal by the Child Evangelism work and have organized Bible classes for unchurched children. Ordinarily the class is conducted on Sunday afternoon in the church, the home of a Christian or any place where there are many children. Though no great results have been recorded, the seed of the Gospel of salvation has been sown in the hearts of many impressionable children, and this should be encouraged as another important method of evangelism.

For the past few years the Christian university students have organized into

an Evangelical Students' Fellowship. Their purpose is to build up each others' faith and to spread the Gospel among the students and the better educated people. Besides their regular activities, sometimes they arrange special meetings with a speaker and period for discussion with the presence of non-Christian students. They have published a number of booklets to explain the Gospel and have their own magazine. Their activities have gotten a good response among students of Viet Nam. I myself have heard some very good comments.

To talk about Lay Evangelism without mentioning the personal witness of the individual Christian would be incomplete. Over the past 35 years since the Gospel first came to Viet Nam, scores of churches have been started through the faithful testimony of individuals or small groups of Christians. During the early years the church of Hoi-An city was started by an old Confucius scholar who had been converted in Da-Nang. South of Saigon a group of farmers came to the city of Mytho to hear the Gospel, believed on the Lord and returned home to found the An-Hoa church. About ten years ago a widow by the name of Tran-Thi-Hua was used by the Lord to begin the church of Thang-Binh. Today they have over 500 members. The Christians of this church took the Gospel to Binh-Que and now there are over 400 Christians there. About the same time some fishermen from the island of Phu-Quy came to Phan-Thiet to buy supplies. They heard the Gospel and believed. Returning to their island, they remained faithful and brought several others to the Lord. A representative of another religion tried to lure them away from their faith but they were amazed at the determination of these Christian fishermen. Very recently, because of the war several Christian families from Binh-Dinh province were brought with other refugees to An-Khe. They witnessed to their new neighbors and 50 families made decisions to follow the Lord. This year

the Church District Counittee plans to send a student preacher to start a new church.

Among the Tribespeople uany similar ezauples could be cited.

The results noticed here prove the value of the personal witness of Christians. If the Church could mobilize the witnessing siirit of every one of its members, the result would be far greater. The fast expansion of the Church during the first century was recorded to be the consequence of the individual witness of its members as well.

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