

CITY EVANGELISM

When one is asked to speak on a subject of this matter, it is necessary to determine which aspects are to be emphasized. There are many types of evangelistic effort suited for use in cities. One might list some of these as:

(1) Personal witnessing on a consistent and systematic basis. In Viet Nam, the churches have organized Witnessing Bands who meet together for prayer, and then engage in house-to-house visitation and tract distribution.

(2) Institutional. Many opportunities are afforded for evangelism in prisons, hospitals, army camps. In the hospitals, bedside visitation coupled with weekly evangelistic rallies have resulted in hundreds of decisions for Christ. There have been some outstanding conversions in the prisons. Last year at Mhatrang the pastor saw 100 people pray for salvation in the prison services. He was able to organize a Bible instruction class for believers in the prison. Similar programs have been carried on in other city prisons. Army camps in and near the cities have afforded many opportunities and thousands of young men are hearing the Gospel and receiving tracts.

(3) Literature. There is a literature van which goes to different sections of the city of Saigon. Tracts are distributed and literature sold. Bookstores and Reading Rooms can be effectively used as centers of evangelism, and this is being done in a number of cities in Viet Nam.

(4) Preaching Crusades - Tent, Rented Chapel, Stadium, or Open-air.

(5) Capitalizing on special interests - English teaching and bi-lingual meetings.

(6) Planting New Churches.

All of the preceding 5 should be geared to contribute to this last. For all of our evangelistic efforts in the cities should be for the purpose of extending the invisible Church by bringing men to a saving faith, and then to extend the

visible church by establishing new churches. I am persuaded that we can better reach a city with the Gospel message, and thus evangelize it, by having many small churches scattered throughout the city rather than having only one large central church.

The rest of my paper will deal with what has happened in Saigon and other cities of Viet Nam, and an effort to define the methods used to achieve these results.

In 1950 there was one Vietnamese language church in Saigon, and one Chinese language church in the twin city of Cholon. By 1955 two other Vietnamese churches had been opened, and a second Chinese work had been started. Since 1955 the total number of churches in the city has risen to 21. Of this total 14 are Vietnamese, 6 Chinese and one English. Other cities in Viet Nam are following this pattern. A second church has been opened in the city of Nha Trang. Da Nang now has 3 strong churches, two of which were established during a two-year period.

A number of methods have been used with varying success. A few years ago we began a program of opening street chapels as preaching centers in cooperation with one of the already established churches. Under this program, the Mission guaranteed to pay two years' rent, and to assist with the preaching and visitation program. The cooperating church: (1) definitely indicated its desire to begin a new church, not just a preaching outpost; (2) assumed the responsibility of providing leadership for the services; (3) made financial provision for the furnishings in the newly-opened place; and (4) guaranteed the operating costs, i. e. utilities, supervision of the building, etc. In 1961 and 1962 seven such chapels were opened. One was an exception to the general rule. Because there was nothing available to rent in that particular area of the city, an old

building was purchased and renovated at a cost equivalent to two-years' rent. At this particular place the cooperating church was committed; they had a building as a permanent church home for the new group so a church committee was organized. One other place where there was a strong nucleus of laymen with a firm determination to succeed in their new venture quickly developed into a self-supporting church. However, in the other five locations we experienced some disappointment. Many people prayed in the initial and subsequent evangelistic efforts. The cooperating churches had every good intention to succeed. However, as the rental period ran out, one after another of the efforts failed to produce a new church. We took a close look at our results. In the two churches which were established, we saw two things of prime importance. In the one case it was a group of people definitely committed to identifying themselves as the nucleus for a new church, and in the other, a permanent meeting place was provided. Learning from both of these, the field Executive Committee approved in September 1963 a program for Church Extension in principal cities in cooperation with already established churches as follows:

- (1) Vietnamese churches in principal cities will be encouraged to establish new city churches.
- (2) The Mission will provide the equivalent of two years' rent to apply toward purchase or erection of a building.
- (3) The choice of location, building, and leadership in the new venture will be committed entirely to the sponsoring church, subject to approval by both the District Superintendent and the Mission.
- (4) In order to qualify for participation in this program, the sponsoring church must be willing for the following:

- (a) a minimum of five families must be released as a nucleus for the new congregation.
- (b) the new group must be organized from the beginning and a temporary church committee set up.
- (c) Sunday services must be held from the beginning.
- (d) a worker must be appointed from the beginning.
- (e) the sponsoring church guarantees financial assistance to supplement the income for the operating expenses for a specific period.

After a little more than two years, we have found this program to be very acceptable. Three new churches have been started in Saigon, and the two new churches in Da Nang have been launched on the same basis. At the time of this writing there are five churches in the Saigon area that are endeavoring to locate property for a new church venture.

There are some basic merits to this program:

- (1) It produces small community churches that are within the financial range of the sponsoring churches.
- (2) It produces new churches without the necessity for any other subsidy from the Mission.
- (3) It emphasizes the building of a church rather than the renting of a storefront.
- (4) It eliminates second-stage help; that is, it is not necessary for the Mission to give financial assistance a second or third time.
- (5) Responsibility is shifted immediately onto the nucleus of believers in the new congregation, thus more quickly developing leadership within the group.

Needless to say, the venture of launching a new church requires a sustained

evangelistic effort in the "target" area of the city. The Witnessing Band (detailed in Nr. Sang'n report) of the sponsoring church carries on an intensive program of visitation and tract distribution both before and after the new church is opened. Periodically a series of* evangelistic meetings are conducted.

Our field has attached great importance to this program, and has set aside a good portion within our field budget to finance it.

The results of this program have been most gratifying. One of the churches opened in Saigon in 196T was able to raise an amount of ^10,000 u'; for their building program begun in 1963 and completed in 196'i. This church now has the second highest income of any church in the southern district conference. This church is now actively seeking a location where it can sponsor n new church. Another church which was started in 1964 has joined hands with its sponsoring church in an effort to launch yet another new church in a near-by vicinity. In Da Nang, there was a reluctance on the part of some to see a second church opened for fear the "divided" congregation could not adequately support two pastors. However, not one but two churches were started within two years. The original church has maintained its level of attendance and income. The two new churches are both doing very well, and there is now a desire to start yet another church there in the immediate future.

City evangelism is difficult and it is expensive. However, it must be done. Here is where the masses are fount.. These city churches will then become the center from which the Gospel will reach out into the country areas and smaller towns.

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