

# Charleston sees God save souls in crusade

By Allen Palmeri

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**CHARLESTON**—This Mississippi County town of around 5,000 residents just experienced what may have been its greatest event in a history that dates back to the formation of a community in 1837 on the segment of southeast Missouri land that nestles beside Illinois and Kentucky.

The Rick Gage Go Tell Crusade from Sept. 28-Oct. 1 drew 3,400 to the local high school football stadium and reached about 3,000 in the public school system. There were 282 decisions for Christ, including 165 professions of faith.

“God still does the impossible and the miraculous,” said Michael Brewer, pastor, First Baptist Church, Charleston, and point person for the crusade.

Gage, the evangelist from metropolitan Atlanta, described it as a move of God through a faithful, holy remnant on the ground that refused to get discouraged in the face of financial, emotional and spiritual oppression.

“They could have thrown in the towel, but they didn’t,” Gage said. “They were adamant about seeing God touch their town and touch their community.”

The idea for bringing a crusade to Charleston began within the Charleston Ministerial Alliance, which held a prayer meeting in January at First Charleston, a church that generally runs 130-140 in Sunday worship.

“We were lying prone on the altar of First Baptist in Charleston, and after an hour and a half of crying out to God, we stood up,” Brewer said. “It was the unanimous consensus that God meant for us to go forward with this, and that the body of Christ needed unity to see souls saved and to see Charleston changed.”

By February an organizational plan was in place that would eventually train 75 counselors and pull in more than a dozen churches from Charleston, East Prairie, Scott County, and surrounding communities in the Charleston Baptist Association. It even spread to the point where churches from Illinois and Kentucky, who began to hear about the plans, said they wanted to help.

The original budget was \$83,000, but because of the economic downturn both Go Tell and local organizers had to work together to trim it to \$52,500, Brewer said.

“We knew that we were going to have to streamline this as much as we could without hurting the overall goal and impact of the crusade vision,” Gage said. “My hat goes off to the local community.”

What the local community did was give.

“One church went into a business meeting and the board recommended to the church family that they give \$5,000 to the crusade,” Brewer said. “The people stood up and said, ‘That’s not enough.’ They voted to up it by another \$2,500.”

Businesses wrote checks for \$1,000, and Charleston Baptist Association Director of Missions Richard Smith delivered a check for the same amount plus another \$1,000. The Missouri Baptist Convention (MBC) came through with \$4,000, local people donated items, participants stayed in homes instead of hotels, and meals were provided by the Charleston church community instead of by local restaurants.

It all came together on the morning of Oct. 1 when the last dollar amount that was needed was received.

“God just did a miracle,” Brewer said. “He didn’t come in early, and He didn’t come in late. He came right on time with the resources to do this.”

Brewer said he and other ministers working on the crusade overcame Satan in spiritual warfare by “prayer, fasting, weeping, prayer, weeping, prayer, prayer. My wife and I felt it in our home. Other ministers shared (that) they felt the struggle in and out of Charleston.”

Gage, who has been in full-time evangelism since 1986, has seen the devil try to disrupt a lot of crusades around the country, but the spiritual reality of Satan sowing discouragement in Charleston by planting seeds of cancelling the crusade amid the financial difficulties, human frailties and skepticism of “small vision” church members around town really hit home.

“There was a lot of resistance,” Gage said. “You could sense and feel the resistance from the evil world. Satan is fighting and bidding for every lost soul. Evangelistically, nothing like this has ever occurred in Mississippi County Missouri. Many have stated that there’s been a stronghold on this area for quite some time, and so when a vision like this comes to enemy territory, you’d better expect opposition.”

One of the more dynamic successes connected to the week of the crusade was in the area of football. A total of 27 players at East Prairie High School made professions of faith, and another seven players plus one coach at Charleston High did the same. The head coach at East Prairie, Jason Acock, is a member of Elm Street Baptist Church in Charleston; the Charleston head coach re-dedicated his life to Christ.

All in all, God showed up.

“The budget was met, souls were saved, and they accomplished something that they had never been able to do, ever,” Gage said. “We’re all in agreement that God gets the credit and the glory.”