



MORGAN COUNTY CITIZEN

Morgan County churches band together with the goal of sharing the gospel

Story By Jessica - Photos By Angelina Bellebuono

A mother dances with her toddler, a teenage girl smiles coyly at the boy sitting next to her, an elderly man sits wearing a three-piece suit in 80 degree weather, a black woman shouts "Hallelujah," young people sing with uplifted hands stretched toward the sky, and a teenaged son runs down the center aisle during an emotional moment to tearfully embrace his father.

At the Morgan County Go Tell Crusade, people of all ages and stages in life were brought together over a five day period by one uniting purpose: to share and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Go Tell Crusade, a nationwide ministry founded in 1990 by evangelist Rick Gage, travels around the country going to small towns to present the gospel. "The Go Tell Crusade brings the Billy Graham model to small towns," Gage said. "People in small towns need Jesus just like people in big towns need Jesus."

Gage and other speakers involved with the group also meet with inmates at nearby prisons in towns to share the gospel and with students at schools to present his "On Track" program, which warns young people about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. Gage has spoken to over two million students across the country.

Gage was accompanied in the Morgan County Go Tell Crusade by worship leader Chuck Sullivan, soloist Joy Waters Fowler, and speaker Rick Stanley, known best for being step-brother to "The King of Rock n' Roll," Elvis Presley.

"The crusade brought 17 churches together with the common goal of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the people of Morgan County and the surrounding area," said Keith Kelly, general chairman of the event and member of Centennial Baptist Church in Rutledge.

The five-day event started on Saturday, August 16 with a pre-Crusade youth rally at 7 p.m. at Heritage Park with games and other activities sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. The Crusade officially kicked off Sunday evening, with an event at 7 p.m each night through Wednesday.

At the Monday evening event, the program began with music performed by the praise team and a reading from 2 Corinthians 9, which encouraged followers - "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Ushers then collected offerings in Kentucky Fried Chicken buckets from attendees. These offerings help benefit mission trips in countries such as Russia, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic.

Stanley, author of "The Touch of Two Kings," was the key speaker for the evening, telling of his troubled childhood and wild youth and the influence of both Elvis and Jesus on his life.

“I’ve been through it all,” Stanley said. “You have a story so you can let people know what Jesus Christ has done in your life.”

Earlier that day, Stanley spoke with inmates at Jasper County jail and Gage had the opportunity to speak at Social Circle High and Middle schools with over 900 students and with the Morgan County High School football team.

“I had the privilege and the liberty to present the gospel right there in the locker room and many young men prayed to receive Christ,” Gage said.

Tuesday night’s presentation featured a casting lesson with famed fisherman Hank Parker followed by his testimony.

Each day during the event, the crusade team and members from the involved churches met at Adrian’s Place at noon for a lunch featuring fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, cornbread, mashed potatoes and gravy and sweet tea. The group gathered there to eat soul food while feeding their souls spiritually and reflecting on the past day’s events. Those who just happened to show up at Adrian’s were treated to impromptu concerts by Sullivan and Waters Fowler and preaching by Gage. At lunch on Wednesday, Gage encouraged members of local churches to follow-up with those who made decisions at the crusade events.

Many may wonder how to keep lit the spiritual fires that were ignited at this event. For worship leader Sullivan, it takes three kinds of pepper sauce, hot sauce, Tabasco to spice up his meal, but according to Gage, the real work of the crusade occurs after the main events, when it is necessary to encourage new believers by following up with them, inviting them to church, providing them a Bible if necessary, and visiting their homes.

“We know the real work kicks in now,” Gage said.

“The follow-up process is the most important thing we’ll do in the whole crusade,” said Kelly. “If not as important maybe more important than sharing the good news of Christ is helping a person get started in their work.”

Afterwards, the group headed to Morgan County High School where they presented the “On Track” program to an assembly of ninth graders. Stanley told his story again and encouraged the youths to make good decisions.

“When you act up in your teens and get into trouble, it affects your life,” Stanley said. “We want you to make the right decisions in life.”

Gage spoke candidly, with a hard-hitting delivery, about the importance of abstaining from drug and alcohol abuse.

“We’re here to remind you that you were born to be a winner in this game called life,” Gage said. “We’re looking for young men and young women who have the backbone and the courage and the guts to take a stand against drugs, alcohol, premarital sex and anything that could ruin or destroy your body, your mind, your life, your future.”

Gage’s speech was peppered with examples of those who had lost their life or were seriously injured in an alcohol or drug-related accident. One example was about Gage’s college roommate, Clay Nelson, starting linebacker for the college football team and a potential NFL draftee, who was killed when his car was hit by a train while he was driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

“You know what caused me to decide to speak to youth all across America?” Gage asked. “It was the night I received a telephone call explaining to me the death of my college roommate.”

According to statistics presented by Gage, 10,000 teens die in alcohol-related incidents.

“Ten thousand of your peers in this nation, in America, will be buried because of this liquid drug called alcohol,” Gage said. “Alcohol and drugs thrill, but they also kill. They fascinate, but they also assassinate.” Wednesday night was the youth emphasis night where young people were lured in by offers of free pizza. “Pizza is good bait for young people,” Gage said. “I don’t care why they come as long as they leave with Jesus.”

Overall, Kelly considers the crusade to have been a success.

“I think it was very successful,” Kelly said. “It was better for me personally than the last one was. It led me into a place of looking at my own life.”

“All the churches I’ve talked to said it was a success, not just for those who accepted Christ, but for the Christians at the churches who rededicated their lives,” Kelly said.

In total, the crusade resulted in 221 professions of faith and more than 400 decisions by attendees to rededicate their lives to Christ and other spiritual decisions. The youth night saw the largest number of professions of faith, with 102.

“Wednesday was by far the biggest night,” said Kelly.

“There’s nothing that brings God more glory than the salvation of sinners,” said Gage.