

Group Splits From Pensacola Revival

A rift between Brownsville Assembly of God leaders in December has resulted in two churches.

The abrupt firing of Michael L. Brown, Ph.D., as president of the Brownsville Revival School of Ministry (BRSM) in December has produced a serious rift among members of Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla., where a fervent spiritual revival erupted more than five years ago.

The pastor of Brownsville Assembly, John Kilpatrick, says the move of God that began in his church in June 1995 will survive this altercation, which has resulted in the formation of a separate church and ministry school, now headed by the exiled Brown.

The Brownsville church and Brown founded the school in 1997 after the Assemblies of God (AG) provided a \$3 million loan to enable the church to pay a total of \$4.5 million for a nearby college campus. The facility was converted into a training base for spreading the gospel around the globe.

Students at BRSM can pursue a two-year associate of arts degree in practical ministry, a degree that includes Bible and theology, pastoral leadership, personal discipleship, missions and revival history. A third-year program is led by BRSM graduate Ward Simpson. The student body is made up of students from all 50 states and 15 countries and has averaged about 1,100 students during semesters.

Brown formed his own organization, Fellowship of International

Revival and Evangelism (FIRE) School of Ministry, after the BRSM board voted in December to fire him as president following discussions during which Brown suggested selling the school property so that the Brownsville school could protect itself from AG control. Brown first supported the appointment of Kilpatrick as executive president of BRSM but later protested the decision. Also, Brown refused to take a proposed leave of absence from the school to "re-establish a proper working relationship" with the board and Kilpatrick.

A spokesman for the Assemblies of God said no one tried to force Brown, a Messianic Jew, to obtain AG credentials.

"Dr. Brown was dismissed over the issue of wanting to take the school in a different direction and to separate it from the church," said Bob Phillips, chairman of the BRSM board. "This issue is not an issue between Brown and the Assemblies of God. However, the request for accountability regarding the financial position opened the door to the present issue."

BRSM students can earn ministerial credentials from several independent agencies as well as from the AG. George Wood, general secretary of the AG, said the denomination has no official tie to BRSM.

However, in previous statements Brown has said that AG General Superintendent Thomas Trask suggested that he obtain AG credentials. Brown also claims that Kilpatrick insisted that he obtain them, lest he be fired for insubordination and lose the school. Brown denies trying to take BRSM in a different direction, but now says he won't defend himself further because of his desire "to not embarrass any of my brothers or co-workers."

In an unexpected move, Brown's new school also has formed a new church—in Pensacola. About 500 people attended the first service held by FIRE. Its staff is made up of several faculty from BRSM who left Brownsville with Brown, along with many students. Brown said the church's formation was a natural development, since many people who had transferred to FIRE asked about accompanying services.

Brownsville has replaced all of the faculty who left, and the original school is carrying on its mission, Kilpatrick said in a personal statement to the BRSM students who remained. The school, Kilpatrick said, began as a non-denominational school and will remain so.

"My first priority is to allow the Holy Spirit complete freedom to do whatever He wants, however He wants and whenever He wants at BRSM," Kilpatrick said. "That has been the hallmark of the Brownsville Revival these last 5-1/2 years."

Not since the so-called Pensacola Outpouring began have more Brownsville members left—this time after a falling out over what some say is an intrusion of denominational politics. Others argue that Brown should have submitted to AG leaders.

After the revival's birth on Father's Day, June 1995, a few members left in protest of the abrupt changes that weeknight meetings, charismatic manifestations and marathon prayer sessions brought to the church's campus. Brownsville easily survived that small exodus as hundreds of thousands of believers from around the world lined up for days to come get a fresh touch from God. Evangelist Steve Hill was a visiting speaker when the revival began, and he became the harbinger of the revival's message of repentance and holiness.

Kilpatrick slipped when he offered an ill-fated prophecy during the summer of 1997 that predicted that Brownsville critic and Christian radio apologist Hank Hannegraaf—"the Bible Answer Man"—would fall within 90 days if he didn't repent for his attacks on the revival. Hannegraaf didn't fall, and Kilpatrick apologized.

Then in September 1997, Kilpatrick survived a serious fall that broke several bones and left him in a wheelchair. He fully recovered while Hill and others led the nightly services.

Hill preached hundreds of fiery sermons during the revival that left a trademark and set

a precedent that some observers thought couldn't be maintained if he left. But Hill did leave in March 2000, on good terms, to focus his ministry on international evangelism. He relocated his evangelistic ministry to Dallas.

Attendance at the revival in Pensacola has since waned, and the marathon lines outside Brownsville's doors are no more. But souls continue to be converted, and the revival has spawned other similar revivals in Missouri, Iowa, Michigan and elsewhere.

But Brown's dismissal as president of BRSM has for the first time produced angry accusations and bitterness among church board members, pastors and administrators, parents of students and the students themselves.

Kilpatrick declined further comment on the matter to maintain a proper spiritual direction for all involved.

“One thing I have concluded,” he states on the Brownsville Web site at : “Change is painful, but change is inevitable. I know we all have experienced some painful change recently, but I must confess. I am not discouraged, and I don’t want you to be. I have fresh vision, more so than I have had in many years.”

–Billy Bruce and Andy Butcher