

More Than 59,000 Make Decisions For Christ During Louisiana Campaign

South African evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne attracted big crowds when he invaded downtown Shreveport in July

Churches

continue to follow up and disciple more than 53,000 people who accepted Jesus as Savior in northeast Louisiana during Rodney Howard-Browne's Good News Shreveport-Bossier evangelism campaign this past summer.

Good News Shreveport-Bossier (GNSB) tallied 59,263 decisions during the six-week crusade, about 6,000 of them recommitments to the Lord. The count was 23 percent higher than Howard-Browne's New York campaign in the summer of 1999, in an area representing just a fraction of the Big Apple's population.

Three dozen Louisiana congregations are trying to get converts involved in church. Churches that participated in the crusade and supplied the Good News office with a draft of a follow-up letter received converts' names and addresses.

"We have a list of more than 10,000 we're working on," said Sam Carr, pastor of Word of Life Church. "On Sunday and Wednesday night half of our congregation is not there because they're out witnessing."

Despite its enormity, the task is yielding more souls, said Carr, whose church's avid support of Good News New York

influenced Howard-Browne's decision to come to Louisiana. Many members who went to see new believers after the crusade returned with 15 or more names of family members and friends who received Christ during their visit.

"The repercussions are ongoing," said the full-gospel pastor. "It's made our people aware of how simple it is to minister the gospel. This has given them a freedom. We are in a season where the window of heaven is open."

Howard-Browne expressed mixed emotions about the results. He was delighted at the avid response encountered on the streets of Shreveport and Bossier City. It showed him that many churches are "living in their little huddle" and that Christians have to go into the world's environment to reach them.

However, the crusade fell short of its goal of 100,000 salvations, and the South African native said the results could have been much better. Although his office mailed a series of invitations to 5,500 churches within a 100-mile radius, only 67 registered to help with the soul-winning effort. "We could have been even higher," he said. "There's no telling what could have happened. I guess you're never happy."

Crusade director Eric Gonyon sounded a happier note. Because of the influx of volunteers

from 26 other states and five countries, he said approximately 2,100 volunteers participated in the crusade. Witnessing teams went out six days a week, knocking on more than 100,000 doors and sharing the gospel. People ranging in age from 9 to 80 joined the street teams, which registered three-fourths of the decisions.

"Our youth group loved it," said Ty Tyler, minister of music at Victory

Fellowship in Metairie, La., which performed its popular Beyond the Grave drama for four nights in July. The play drew 4,500 to its last performance at Hirsch Coliseum, the largest crusade crowd. Tyler took his teens to

the streets to evangelize the day before the drama presentation.

"We saw phenomenal things happen on a daily basis," said crusade evangelism director Jennifer Gonyon. "We preached in a fire station, and six people got saved. We went in a [convenience store] preaching openly. Several people got saved, including the owner."

GNSB also distributed 200 tons of food in poor neighborhoods, sparking more conversions. In late July, it gave churches 35,000 pounds of frozen chicken so they could host barbecues later for new believers.

The crusade stirred controversy too, with some Christians refusing to participate for doctrinal reasons. Critics also questioned the validity of the salvation count. One Southern Baptist pastor told the Shreveport Times that volunteers counted a decision after praying with someone, even if they were already a Christian—a claim Eric Gonyon labeled "totally inaccurate."

Among the few Baptists who joined in, the reaction was much different.

"Rodney Howard-Browne said he was coming for souls and he did," said Lee Jenkins, pastor of Riverside Church in Bossier

City. "There were no manifestations of the Holy Spirit, no laughter, nothing. This city has been shaken. It's the presence of God sweeping across denominational barriers."

Although Howard-Browne intended to visit Los Angeles next year, that crusade has been postponed until 2002, and he plans to focus on his home church next summer.

—Ken Walker