

Southern Baptist Pastor in Louisiana Opens Door for Charismatic Renewal

Riverside Church in Shreveport remains affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, but some members have left

Some of the strongest supporters of Rodney Howard-Browne's current Louisiana outreach—Good News Shreveport-Bossier—come from a local Southern Baptist congregation whose pastor was filled with the Holy Spirit just after the church called him to its pulpit.

Pastor Lee Jenkins and music minister Eddie Colvin of Riverside Church sought more of God and were answered with a full-blown Pentecostal revival that brought many in the Southern Baptist congregation to deeper spiritual lives, while sending many others packing after their protests failed to stop the revival.

The nontraditional-Baptist activity has upset some. Angered agitators once placed flyers on members' cars warning that their next step would be into snake handling.

Jenkins remains unruffled by the controversy that resulted in half his church members departing in June 1999. The walkout came a month after his 3-1/2-hour sermon on the reality of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

"We are such a committed people, it's amazing," Jenkins said. "People are calling me at home, excited because they're leading people to Christ. It's been an exciting journey. All

of a sudden some people turn their back on you and won't talk to you. But it's been worth it."

A lifelong Southern Baptist, Jenkins was a professional geologist and gave up a life of wealth to follow God. A 1987 Kansas oil-field strike had made him rich. Six years after that he sensed the Lord wanted him in ministry. After

graduating from seminary in 1996, he wound up at a tiny church 100 miles south of Shreveport.

There, two people told him God wanted him to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Though he resisted because he feared being expelled from his church, Jenkins began studying the issue.

After receiving a unanimous vote to become Riverside's pastor in September 1998—but before taking office—Jenkins attended an organizational meeting

with his new staff. He sensed something different about Colvin. Not knowing that three church secretaries also had been filled with the Holy Spirit, he asked a surprised Colvin, "Do you speak in tongues?"

Though nervous that it might cost him his job, Colvin nodded, "Yes."

While driving home that night, Jenkins prayed, "Lord, if the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for me today, I want it right now." Several minutes later, he heard words that sounded like the Hebrew he had once studied. When he uttered them aloud, God's Spirit overcame him so strongly he had to pull his car to the side of the road.

"I knew I had been filled," Jenkins said. "When I got here the Holy Spirit came with great power. People began to be set free because it was a new message, anointed by the Holy Spirit."

Some accused him of departing from accepted Baptist doctrine. His sermon on baptism in the Holy Spirit immediately sparked a deacon-led proposal to oust him from the pulpit. About 60 percent of the Bossier City church voted to retain him, but the vote didn't halt a large exodus of members.

Riverside has remained within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), though it has shed its denominational label. Colvin, a lifelong SBC member, said the church has departed from other Baptist traditions but that he is thrilled to see "a group of people who are hungry for God."

"[They're] open to what the Spirit wants to do. There's a difference in the hunger people have for God when they're filled with the Spirit," he said.

The changes include divine healing, which appeared in mid-February during a revival led by two evangelists. School librarian Ginger Dupree was the first to be healed dramatically.

Heart and brain ailments had forced Dupree to take nine different medications for years. But when Delhiah Hale touched Dupree's forehead, Dupree felt "an electrical charge" run through her body, she said. Falling to the floor, she lay there for 20 minutes.

When she arose, she felt so good she knew she was healed, she

told Charisma. Three separate tests confirmed it. Dupree's doctor provided Charisma with a letter verifying her healing from heart problems.

"They can't deny what they see," Dupree said of doubters, recalling how she used to come home from work and fall into bed. "Now I go till 11:30 or 12 at night."

Marvin Wrenn, the only charter member left at the 13-year-old church, is also claiming healing from Type 2 diabetes. Diagnosed five years ago, his gloomy

pro

gnosis included eventual insulin dependency and other physical ailments. But the week of the revival, after he fell under the power of the Holy Spirit for the first time, he said God told him, "I'm going to heal you."

He said the Lord confirmed it would come through medical advances rather than unconventional means. When he returned to his doctor for the first time in two years, the physician told him, "It's a new day with diabetics because of new medications."

"God can do anything He wants to do, any way He wants to do it," said Wrenn, a disc jockey on an oldies radio station. "He can heal instantaneously, but He also uses the medical profession. He gave them wisdom."

The Lord also cured several people after Jenkins and staff members attended an Awake America meeting in Little Rock, Ark., in February, sponsored by Brownsville Assembly of God,

home of the Pensacola (Fla.) Revival. Jenkins said he received a broader revelation of healing at the sessions.

Two men that he prayed for at the meeting were healed instantly, and two of Colvin's children were healed the month after. But the pastor deflects any credit for what has taken place.

"It's not me," Jenkins said. "It's nothing but God. I want to live in this till I die. We're standing in the presence of God, and we'll never go back."