

Still Happy After All These Years

Charles and Frances Hunter have ministered together from the moment they were married on New Year's Day 1970. Thirty years later, their love is stronger than ever.

PLUS: Catherine Marshall

By the time most people reach their 80s, they have all but forgotten the many years spent punching a clock to fulfill the occupational demands of the daily grind. After decades of dedication to their profession, they gladly forsake their career for the greener grasses of retirement living. It's time for leisurely strolls in the park, fierce bingo competitions at the community center and fervent shuffleboard tournaments at the senior's club.

Unless your name is Charles or Frances Hunter, that is.

The beloved octogenarians, affectionately known the world over as "The Happy Hunters," have never slowed down—and they are not about to start now. Well into what many would consider to be the zenith of retirement, the Hunters carry a ministry schedule that would wear out people half their age.

Charles and

Frances Hunter made famous what are known as "Healing Explosions": large-scale citywide campaigns in which the key focus is to pray for the sick to be healed. The crusades are typically held for one night in a large stadium and attract people from all walks of life.

Months before launching a Healing Explosion, the Hunters contact pastors within a 100-mile radius of the venue and set up training sessions for church members

members who want to be on the prayer teams that minister to those who come up to the altars for healing. Each healing-team member reads *How to Heal the Sick*, one of dozens of books written by the Hunters, and attends 15 hours of video training supplied by the Hunters to Video Healing Schools that are set up in churches throughout the area.

The first Healing Explosion was in Pittsburgh in July 1985. More than 170 Healing Explosions have taken place since and have been attended by literally hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. The Hunters have taken these unique ministry campaigns overseas to such places as Taipei, Taiwan; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Kiev, Ukraine.

The most recent Healing Explosion was in Bogotá, Colombia, in December 1998. But it isn't the last: The Hunters are conducting one in Germany this coming October, and their spring-summer ministry itinerary included trips to Dewitt, Michigan; Memphis, Tennessee; San Francisco; and Toronto—to name a few.

Charisma met with Charles and Frances Hunter on their 82-1/2 acre ministry campus in Houston to talk about what God is doing in their lives. The couple, who have been married for more than 30 years, spoke candidly about their life together, their recent adventures in ministry and what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today.

No Time to Retire

Although large-scale Healing Explosions have waned in recent years, the Hunters' busy ministry schedule has not. In fact, on March 31, 1990, the couple says God birthed a new vision in their hearts, launching them into a totally different but equally exciting ministry focus.

"We were in Abilene, Texas," Charles says, "and God spoke six words to me: 'Take a census of the world.' We had no idea what to do. We knew it meant door-to-door evangelism. We didn't think of financing or how to do it, but we just heard God."

At the same time, Frances says God told her that Honduras would be the first nation where they were to take the census.

"We had been to Honduras with Healing Explosions," she says. "It was a natural country to start, since we were well-known down there. We felt led to call for a pastors meeting there."

So the Hunters telephoned a man who had worked for them when they ministered in Honduras. He told them that he had just scheduled a pastors meeting, not knowing why; he simply felt the Lord told him to.

"We said, 'Great, we'll be there,'" Frances says. "We had about 250 pastors there. We started training pastors how to go back and teach their people to knock on doors and lead people to Jesus."

The Hunters' new ministry outreach was dubbed the World Evangelistic Census (WEC). The second WEC was held in Panama, followed by one in the United States. And that's when the

trouble started.

“The census in the U.S. took every cent we had in the ministry and every cent we had saved in all the years of our life,” Frances told Charisma. “Charles went out and picked up the last [of the money] we had—he was running down to take it to the accountant.

“I said, ‘If that’s the last dollar we’ve got, let me touch it.’ I put it up in the air and said, ‘God, if I can’t trust you with my money, I can’t trust you with my soul.’

“We went out to eat that night,” she continues. “We had just enough money for two bowls of soup and one piece of cornbread. When we went home and were laying in bed, we said, ‘God, we don’t have a cent!’ If there ever was a time where we had to depend on God, that was it. But we never missed a payroll. God brought us right back up.”

And so He did. Three years ago, the Hunters felt the Lord tell them to take WEC to the entire world. They have since established a leadership team which oversees the work in each country conducting a census.

Local pastors train their congregations to witness door to door. Each person who receives Christ fills out a form to provide documentation of their salvation. Pastors compile the forms and send the count to a regional coordinator. The regional coordinators—who each oversee several countries—then forward their totals to the Hunters’ office in Houston.

All information is carefully documented, and the Hunters say they periodically send out one of their coordinators to

investigate the works in different countries to make sure that salvations are being documented truthfully and accurately.

WEC is active in dozens of nations, from Argentina to the Philippines to Vietnam to Zimbabwe. At the time of Charisma's interview with them, the Hunters claimed 265,621,226 documented salvations worldwide.

In addition, the Hunters use the WEC network to establish Video Home Churches. As people are saved through WEC, home groups are formed and provided with a video that includes one hour of teaching by the Hunters and one hour of the church service at Lakewood Church in Houston, pastored by Joel Osteen. The Hunters report more than 24,000 Video Home Churches meeting throughout Cuba, Ghana, India, Kenya, the Philippines and Uganda. And they believe they've only just begun to see what God is going to do.

Marriage and Ministry

Charles and Frances Hunter have ministered side by side from the moment they were married on Jan. 1, 1970. With such rigorous ministry demands, just how have The Happy Hunters stayed so happy? Charisma asked them for the top five keys to a successful marriage.

"There's only one key," Charles says. "Death to self. When you're dead to self, you can't have bad attitudes. We've found that the only way to get rid of the 'I' feeling is to give up everything and let the fire of God fall—and it burns out the nature of the devil in you.

"If I [said something to Frances I shouldn't have said],"

Charles continues, "I would have to look up and say, 'Jesus, that goes for You, too.' Because He lives in her, and whatever I say to her, I say to Jesus."

Frances believes one of the keys to a fulfilling marriage is for a couple to be completely committed to God. "Both of us love God with our heart, mind, body, soul and might. We're not interested in anything else. We only care about souls."

"We made a covenant before we were married that our marriage was going to work. We are so totally in harmony. We thoroughly enjoy each other. After 30 years, I still think he's the most interesting man in the world to talk to."

Charles smiles. "She's fun to live with," he says. "She does some of the neatest little things. I just laugh. I wish I could tell you how much I love her."

But has there ever been any competition between them in ministry? The Hunters deliver a resounding no. "I'm not the exuberant one, she is," Charles says. "We're balanced in ministry. She made an absolute abandonment of her life to Jesus in 1965, and I did in 1968, and then God put us together."

Together, this father and mother of the faith have witnessed some of the greatest moves of God in modern history. They have seen a lot of changes, too—in society, in the church and in the charismatic movement in particular.

And they have a lot to say about what charismatic believers are doing right and doing wrong. For example, do Spirit-filled believers walk in the gifts of the Spirit as they should?

“No,” Frances challenges, without hesitation. “Because we’re not witnessing like we should either. It kind of all goes together. The trouble is, everyone wants the gifts of miracles and healing, but they don’t want to get out and witness.”

Charles has additional insight about what he believes the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today: “God is saying, ‘Holy living.’ He really proclaims in the Bible, only the holy will see God.

“We frequently ask in churches, ‘How many of you felt a drawing to get closer to Jesus?’ Almost every hand will go up, because there is a drawing [today] of the Spirit of God.”

And Frances says it doesn’t end there—God calls us to holy living for a purpose: “I believe God is saying, ‘Get off the pew and get out there. Start doing what you’re supposed to do: Go into all the world and preach the gospel.’

“Get out and find the ministry God’s called you to do. Once you accepted Jesus, He didn’t call you to come in and sit down on a pew. The Christian life is a life of activity.”

Despite the areas in which the body of Christ needs to grow, the Hunters believe the Holy Spirit is moving today like never before.

“I see pastors with tremendous hunger,” Frances says. “And the

world is hungry for Jesus. So many people say, 'There's a dark cloud over my city.' I don't see a dark cloud over any city. I think we just have sunglasses on and think it's a dark cloud. Because I think the average person is hungry for Jesus."

And that's why Charles and Frances Hunter haven't slowed down—too many people are hungry.

"I believe the gospel must be preached to every creature before Jesus comes back," Charles says. "That's our aim, to keep busy. To keep on the cutting edge of what Jesus is doing."

So what's ahead for The Happy Hunters?

"The rapture!" Frances says.

And together—as always—they laugh.*

Bill Shepson is associate editor of Charisma and managing editor of Ministries Today magazine.