

When the Saints Go Marching In

Next week, for the first time in its 103-year history, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) will not hold its annual Holy Convocation in Memphis, city officials there have been bracing all year for the economic hit.

The nation's largest Pentecostal denomination is still headquartered in the city known for its blues and barbecue. But the \$35 million its 40,000 delegates spend each November on hotels, food and shopping is headed to St. Louis. With nearly twice as much hotel space, St. Louis offered COGIC deeper discounts and facilities that allowed all of its activities to be housed in one 500,000-square-foot location.

But COGIC leaders say they plan to leave more than a financial deposit in St. Louis Nov. 8-16. This year, also for the first time ever, hundreds of COGIC members will go door-to-door, introducing residents to the 5.5 million-member denomination—and the gospel. “By and large the objective is that the Church of God in Christ will leave a distinctive imprint upon the city of St. Louis, showing the love and grace of Christ,” says COGIC Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake.

Training sessions begin a week before the convocation, and several area churches and visiting delegates are expected to get involved. Whether it benefits COGIC or not, evangelism should be the church's No. 1 priority, says Bishop Bob Jackson, pastor of Acts Full Gospel COGIC in Oakland, Calif., and the denomination's soul-winning director.

“America needs to be saved,” he says. “The devil is really busy in our world, and I think the church needs to get busy and fight against the devil and his kingdom. And the way we do that is we pull sinners out of the kingdom of the devil and

bring them into the kingdom of God.”