

Revival at Asbury

A spontaneous marathon revival among students and faculty at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, resulted in a week-long shut-down of classes and reached out to other colleges and communities from coast to coast this month.

Students, faculty, townspeople, and visitors wept, and smiled through their tears. They surrendered to the [Holy Spirit](#), they said, and felt victorious. They confessed secret hates, frustrations, and weaknesses, and felt cleansed. They asked forgiveness, forgave, and embraced. They counseled together, quoted Scripture to one another, prayed singly and in groups, and sang.

During the first six days of the revival, delegations of students were invited to at least fifty-nine colleges and churches in sixteen states to tell the Asbury story.

A short-wave radio “college prayer net” linked Asbury daily with sixteen colleges from Wenham, Massachusetts, to Azusa, California. Asbury asked for prayer support and fulfilled hundreds of prayer requests received by mail and radio.

Although Asbury classes were resumed on the eighth day, the revival continued. It surpassed in length earlier spur-of-the-moment revivals that broke out at the college in 1950 and 1958. “It was a witnessing, not a preaching, revival,” Academic Dean Custer Reynolds said.

Even after classes resumed, the school’s Hughes Memorial Auditorium remained open around the clock with “unstructured” services for witnessing scheduled for six o’clock nightly.

Visitors from several states, including a Canadian family from Regina, Saskatchewan, were attracted to Wilmore by news of the revival. Wilmore is a hamlet nestled in the rolling Kentucky bluegrass fifteen miles south of Lexington. Asbury is an independent Wesleyan college of 1,000 students from thirty-eight states and twenty-four foreign countries. Slightly more than half of the students are Methodist. The remainder represent twenty other denominations. “This is not a fanatical school, but they are religious kids,” said Dean Reynolds.

The dean, a Methodist layman, explained the administration’s decision to resume classes by saying that the revival was “a mountain-top experience, but we cannot live at the mountain top.”

The revival began at one of three morning chapel periods held each week at the college. The program was one of singing and personal testimony. Dean Reynolds, who presided, said this type of service is held periodically at Asbury. He had no inkling it would continue past the scheduled fifty minutes.

Reynolds gave his own testimony and several students spoke. Then, Reynolds related, shortly before dismissal time, Dr. Clarence Hunter, professor of religion and philosophy, walked to the platform in front of the auditorium and said in a quiet voice: “I wonder if there are any here with hungry hearts who would like to come and accept Christ as your personal Saviour.”

The students started pouring to the altar rail. Two lines formed at either side of the auditorium,” the dean recounted. Regular classes were suspended then and there for an indefinite period. “There was no recruiting to sing or testify” at any time during the revival. Dean of Students Harold Spann said. “I feel it was a genuine movement of the

Holy Spirit.”

Dean Reynolds didn't leave the auditorium for the first two days of the revival except for food. His wife prayed and sang with the students for thirty-six hours before she succumbed to sleep. She described the revival “as a beautiful thing that you have to see to appreciate.”

Uncounted hundreds of Asbury students and unknown numbers of townspeople and visitors gave testimony or made some commitment to Christ during the week, a college official said. At times the 1,500-seat auditorium was jammed to capacity. At others, only a few persons were in the room—some seated, others kneeling in clusters.

On the fourth day, 20-year-old Gary Montgomery of Miami, Florida, walked slowly from the speakers' platform, his eyes red from crying through a five-minute testimony before 200 schoolmates.

“I don't know why I came to Asbury,” the long-haired, mod-dressed youth said after his testimony. “I don't even know why I came to this revival, but I'm glad I did. I wish everyone could come.”

During his talk, Montgomery told the audience it had taken him forty hours of prayer to “get saved.” He said he now plans to spend much of his time talking to his friends about Christ.

“I had taken trips on everything before coming here,” Montgomery said later. “Drugs, sex, booze, gambling, everything. I was smoking joints [marijuana] like they were going out of style... With drugs you get high and then come down hard. With Christ, I'm going to try to stay on an even keel and try to get all my friends to do the same.”

By the second day, the revival had spread to the Asbury Theological Seminary across the street from the college. The two schools enjoy a close relationship but are independent of each other.

The revival “gave me a new outlook,” reflected David Hill, 24, a seminary student from Los Angeles. “I was just drifting along. I feel now that God can really use me. I work in a factory in Wilmore. Now I can witness for the first time to the man who works next to me.”

By the sixth day, a Sunday, the revival had spread throughout Wilmore (population 2,800), with church groups by the busload coming to the college.

The Reverend David Seamonds, pastor of Wilmore United Methodist Church, publicly confessed his dislike for two Asbury college faculty members and asked their forgiveness and God’s. The pastor’s wife confessed her aversion—kept buried for years—to the town, its people, and her husband’s ministry there. But this feeling had been supplanted by love, she said.

“She’s shy, inarticulate, but you would have thought it was St. Peter on the day of Pentecost,” Seamonds said of his wife’s testimony. “The adults were hitting the altar like flies the minute she got through.”

Dr. Frank Stanger, president of the seminary, was away at the start of the revival (as was the college president, Dr. Dennis F. Kinlaw). “As soon as I got back on campus,” Stanger said, “I noticed a new sense of kinship, a new sense of unity, a new demonstration of love, a new consciousness that God is able to meet every personal need.”

“It was a baptism of love and power,” Seamonds said. “We were skeptical when it started, but by the first night, the Spirit of God was upon us ... I have never seen such an awesome demonstration of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit ... My faith is just leaping out! Why not let God start it all over the country?” Seamonds asked.

Seminary president Stanger was a bit more guarded in his initial

evaluation. “Don’t ask me about the revival now. Ask me thirty days from now. If it’s genuine, this will show in what happens in the weeks ahead.”

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