

Hundreds make spiritual decisions at Tulia crusade

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TULIA—Some thought an evangelistic crusade in Swisher County wasn't economically possible, but the sacrifice proved worth it when hundreds made life-changing decisions.

Although planning took almost nine months, local residents were astonished as hundreds attended the Panhandle Plains Go Tell Crusade led by evangelist Rick Gage. By the crusade's end, 343 spiritual decisions had been recorded, including 175 first-time professions of faith.

Many people made first-time professions of faith in Christ during a crusade held at the Tulia football field.

"It was an amazing week," said Bryan Schrader, crusade chairman. "I knew God was really about to do something big in our community when we started out Saturday evening with a precrusade youth rally. When Rick Gage talked to an area high school football team, 15 of them made life-changing decisions for Jesus Christ. The crusade was the greatest, most impactful event our county has ever seen."

"What I witnessed happen in our county cannot be humanly explained," said Pastor Eddy Helms of Calvary Baptist Church. "Our community needed hope, and God moved in mighty power. Our people have watched Billy Graham on television, but to see that same kind of thing happen here has deeply touched and moved us. This is just the beginning for us."

"The economic downturn has hurt our community, but we believed God and stepped out in faith to see this crusade happen," Helms continued. "When

Rick Gage left town, all the bills were paid. People were sacrificial in their giving, knowing their gifts will reap eternal rewards. One lady in my church was asked by her hairdresser when she was coming in for her regular permanent. She said: 'I'm skipping this one. I gave my perm money to the crusade.' We are continuing what the crusade started and will feel its impact for years to come."

Helms' congregation held a block party for those who had made decisions during the crusade, complete with bounce houses, face painting, games, hamburgers and hot dogs.

"Our people just walked around and asked them if they had found a place to go to church yet, and if they hadn't, to let them know we would be glad to see them," he said.

The church followed that up the next week with notes and then with personal visits to homes.



Evangelist Rick Gage

More than 80 first-time professions of faith were made Wednesday night following a pizza supper that drew more than 600 youth.

A counselor for the crusade, Barry Street, took his mission of loving young people seriously. He hired two school buses from another county and brought 40 students from Kress, a neighboring community, to the Wednesday night crusade service. Of those, all but seven made first-time salvation decisions for Christ at the crusade.

“What Barry did for those students was phenomenal,” Schrader said. “The demeanor of those kids going up and going back was totally different. It was a God thing.”

Counseling Co-chairman Don Sanders said: “We had trained what we thought were a lot of counselors, but nothing could have prepared us for what we experienced the last night of the crusade. As young people began to respond to the invitation, I told the counselors, ‘You’re each going to have to counsel two people.’ But as waves kept coming, some had to help even more.”

Greg Culwell, executive director of Driscoll House, a faith-based halfway house recovery program, was elated when each of the men going through his program made a decision for Christ. “The sight of the men huddled together at the altar—with their arms wrapped around each other praying—was priceless. The work the Lord did and continues to do in their lives will be felt in their homes and communities. One young man, who was 19 years old, had the greatest change I have ever seen in an individual. We are deeply grateful to God.”

Linda Foster worked with children during the crusade. “An orphanage from the Plainview area brought some children, and several of those precious ones were saved,” she said. “When one of the little girls was asked what happened to her, she replied, ‘I found Jesus in my heart.’”