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Initial Moves

It takes only a brief encounter with the North American Church in its extreme fragmentation to understand why the amount of initial involvement in Key '73 was considered in some quarters as little short of a miracle.

However, although the early response to the editorial in Christianity Today, "Somehow Let's All Get Together", was representative of a fairly wide church spectrum, it was only as a result of invitation to suitable key persons that the Executive Committee became as representative as it did. Approaches were made to all major denominational bodies. In the case of the Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest in North America, the programme was delayed two years so that their own commitments could be fulfilled and participation be achieved. The Episcopal Church, by reason of its structure, had to leave the question of involvement to individual dioceses. This was also true of Roman Catholics. Presbyterians decided to leave the matter to individual churches largely because, right now, there is already a strong breakaway movement involving some 300 churches based on difference of emphasis. Lutheran churches of the Missouri Synod (which is a large section of the Lutheran Church, reflecting a doctrinal emphasis rather than an area) gave support, and the Executive Director, Dr. Ted Raedeke, was Director of Evangelism for this church at the time of his appointment to Key '73.

The major involvement was the ten million strong United Methodist Church. This was largely due to the vision and drive of Dr. Joe Hale who is the UMC representative on the Key '73 Executive Committee and a director in the Department of Evangelism of his church. There has of course been enthusiastic involvement on the part of a number of organisations such as the Bible Society and the Home Bible League. This has especially related to supply of materials in the Bible focus of Phase Two, and has not necessarily influenced the actual involvement of churches to any extent, rather it has made materials available for those churches already wanting to be involved.

Launch

Although the Committee had to severely prune its original ambitious programme for national exposure by television of the launch film, nevertheless, a very good coverage was achieved on free time, which, of course, was at off-peak viewing periods. A great deal of enthusiasm was developed by local committees in certain areas, but there remained great expanses of the country where key '73 was not noticed. Where local committees had done their homework, great benefit was derived by the national emphasis which fed into the mass media as a news item especially in the rural cities. In some

cities even decisions of the local steering committee got press coverage because of the combined emphasis of the enterprise. The noon prayer emphasis was even lent support by the city council in the case of Los Angeles and possibly elsewhere.

Involvement

While all would plead that more could have been done had more time of preparation been available, yet it is clear that most were very slow to move even when approval in principle had been gained. Although it had been implicit from the start that the Central Committee would provide a minimum of materials, yet denominational departments seemed to await some probe rather than to take the initiative. The notable exception was the United Methodist Church which set about stimulating the involvement of every member of the church both through existing information channels and by the development of new ones. It was made quite clear to members that the denomination was officially involved and care was then taken to provide practical means by which congregations could get involved. The materials developed were in a form which was appropriate to the church life of that particular denomination and helped to dispel the fear of being harrassed with foreign concepts.

One of the great surprises I sustained was to find that after two years delay had been suffered to secure their involvement, the great Southern Baptist Convention, while accepting a \$50,000 financial commitment by way of a grant to Central Funds, had not really gotten under way. This again underlined the importance of the vision and drive of the Evangelism Department of the denomination because it was a sad fact that three different people have been representatives during the brief period of the Key '73 development. All the persons concerned were great men in their own right, but they evidently accepted a job with inadequate motive, failed to catch the vision of what was involved, or were on the scene too late.

The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Long Island, New York, which provides an acceptable lead to many other dioceses, had suffered a sixty per cent retrenchment of headquarters staff at the very time Key '73 development was taking place. This severely discouraged commitment and drained away the staff who may have been most able and acceptable for central promotion within the denomination.

In Canada the Anglican Church appointed a representative and made funds available but the person concerned encountered domestic problems personally, which left all the work to Canon Hunt, a college principal already fully committed to a busy academic responsibility.

Most of the Bible Churches are independent of each other and their involvement or otherwise was usually the result of a congregational vote. Where they chose to be involved they could do little in the production of independent promotion materials and so they functioned by using materials produced by others and it is difficult to trace through the degree to which they became involved.

Opposition

As with any attempt to stimulate interest and growth, Key '73 has found those who have spent their time finding a reason why it won't work. When the announcement was made that the aim was to confront every person on the North American continent with the claims of Christ, the Jews became convinced this was an attack on them. When Roman Catholics decided that they were keen for the claims of Christ to be made known through a Bible distribution, extreme Protestants took to rereading Fox's Book of Martyrs. Some could not contemplate fellowship with others who differed in theology, ministry or church discipline as if even the loosest association was paramount to marriage with the scarlet woman or league with the anti-Christ.

However, by and large Key '73 has encouraged a very generous spirit. Those committed to Christ as members of His body have endeavoured to engage as far as conscience will allow, in an objective to see that every person on the North American continent has a chance to at least hear of God's love and concern and their need to respond in a personal way.

Materials;

These can perhaps best be divided into three categories.

- 1) Prepared for the Central Committee as promotional material. This included the Resource Book, information brochures, various novelty items with the Key '73 motif, and news bulletins which were circulated regularly. In addition members of the Central Executive were supposed to receive a copy of all materials prepared independently by participating groups.
- 2) Prepared by Denominational Headquarters. This was used to officially inform church members as well as provide material appropriate to the denominational emphasis and programme. In most cases the normal promotional news and prayer bulletins were given a particular Key '73 emphasis and all materials and letters had the Key '73 motif on them.
- 3) Prepared by various organisations whose work and materials were suitable for adaptation and use within the Key '73 programme. These were generally appropriate to one particular phase of the programme.

Finance

The original plans for Key '73 included a very ambitious budget of three million dollars. This was never accepted by the Central Committee and plans for the production of a launch film and the purchase of prime television time were curtailed. Even a fractional budget was hard to raise partly because denominations had to meet a two way involvement -- a grant to Central Committee and the expense of the production of denominational materials in addition to their central budget quota.

However, once a congregation had received enough information for them to desire involvement, the materials they used were purchased by them at their own expense. This offset the cost of some denominational materials, the resource material, and many of the brochures and items prepared for promotion of the Key '73 concept, by a congregation, among its own members.

The balance of the Central Committee budget was necessary to maintain the office and staff, provide travel expenses for the Executive Director and the general expenses associated with administration. The travel expenses of executive members were met by the body they represented.

Current Development

It should be borne in mind that this report is being prepared at the halfway point of 1973, when phase four in a six phase programme is in progress. Following the excitement of the launch phase, with television and news media coverage, horns, bells and sirens announcing the noon prayer call there was a comprehensive Bible distribution and study group programme. This varied in intensity with the vision and commitment of the local group that undertook the organisation. In some instances a single congregation accepted the responsibility of Scripture distribution in a relatively small area. In others (e.g. Nebraska) churches cooperated to ensure that every home in the State received a copy of the Scriptures.

Not only was Bible distribution encouraged with special editions of portions of Scripture prepared by a number of interested publishers, but group Bible Study with an evangelistic impact was planned and encouraged. Special literature was prepared by some, while others had materials which were already suitable for use. Information on these was available through the Resource Book.

Phase three included special emphasis at Easter and beyond which was preceded by training sessions for personal witness. Many churches where it has been the custom to observe a particular emphasis during the Lenten season prior to Easter, used this period for preparation and training for a sharing of the Easter message in the community.

Phase four was actually in operation during my time in the United States. I had the opportunity to attend a youth rally at the Coliseum in Los Angeles which attracted a large crowd with a heavy emphasis on youth, both in programme and attendance. There were of course many other like events in various parts of the country although the fact that this was the vacation period meant that few of them were actually part of a church programme.

The next phase is due to commence in September and emphasises proclamation of the Gospel message. It is anticipated that the momentum gained in churches through the work of the earlier phases will issue forth into an outburst both through lay personal ministry and continued group outreach as well as crusades, rallies and every type of evangelistic programme.

The end of the year brings together three festivities- Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year and there has been intensive preparation to make the most of these emphases.

Australian Potential

While Key '73 is by no means a magic formula for miracles, it certainly has much to commend it and there is every reason for enthusiasm on the Australian scene. I cite the following:

- 1) Due to the basis of co-operation which allows complete conscience freedom, no major denominational group has discouraged its members from participation.
- 2) Some whose evangelistic interest you might have questioned have assisted in seeing that the Scripture distribution was thorough.
- 3) Where the denomination took the initiative, tremendous advantage was gained through the involvement, both of some member churches which have previously had little evangelism experience, and also through churches of other denominations working within the same areas as one of their member churches.
- 4) The pooling of materials has made available the services of gifted experts whose involvement could not normally be expected.
- 5) The quantity of similar materials has reduced costs and made a much wider range and improved quality available.
- 6) The impact of many different churches in an area co-operating in a common or similar venture has excited attention.
- 7) Small churches have had the opportunity of being part of a grander scheme and yet preserve their identity.
- 8) Finances have mainly been provided by those actually using the materials so there has been a minimum of waste and finance responsibility has approximately matched involvement.
- 9) With comparatively very few different denominations and groups, and a climate of co-operation already prevalent, Australia should experience a much quicker and deeper involvement across the country.
- 10) While time is an issue, a tremendous amount of concept development and material production has already been done from which Australia can profit.

- 11) World involvement by their denominations will greatly magnify the efforts of the Methodist and Baptist churches in 1975.

Necessary Immediate Steps

Each group and denomination should immediately aim at gaining a maximum involvement by their membership. This would seem to imply:

- 1) Some approval in principle by the Federal body if such exists.
- 2) Appointment of a full time representative where possible who will concentrate on making Key '75 relevant and insistent to the denomination and individual churches and members. This person could be a present evangelism director or coordinator, but would need to concentrate on the Key '75 expression during 1974 and 1975.
- 3) While one person on a Federal level may be sufficient as a full time co-ordinator, one of his first tasks would need to be the search for, and appointment of, key representatives at a state level, diocesan, corps or other similar level. The aim should be to have every minister's fraternal involved, with the clergy representatives of each denomination being contacted by their central representative.
- 4) While the informing of clergy is vital it is not the way to get things done. They must be encouraged to appoint another corresponding member of their congregation so that the central officer for the denomination can not only keep the clergy informed but also get the information beyond the clergyman's desk to an active responsible group within the church.
- 5) Appointment should be made of an Executive Director and he, with a team of volunteers, should immediately set out to promote the acceptance of the project and the appointment of suitable representatives throughout Australia.

Conclusion

I have never seen a project which offered better cooperative effort in evangelism while still observing and allowing for the distinctions which good conscience has dictated. I believe with this framework as a tool we could make a satisfying effort to reach every person on the Australian continent and I pray we will.