

KENTUCKY

Unity, organization among factors for Graham crusade

By David Winfrey
News Director

LOUISVILLE—Unity and organizational skills were among the factors cited for Billy Graham's accepting an invitation to lead a crusade in Louisville next year, a spokesman said.

Officials announced last week that Graham, who turned 82 in November, will speak June 21-24 at Papa John's Cardinal Stadium.

"Louisville has long desired a crusade, and the churches there have been working toward unity," said A. Larry Ross, spokesman for Billy Graham. "This has been a longstanding invitation with correspondence going back to 1973."

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association does not plan its events in isolation, but only responds to the invitation of local churches, Ross noted.

Even then, he added, Graham and others are looking for evidence that area churches are united in their effort to create an evangelistic event that will include all segments of the community. "It's really the churches that own the crusade."

Racial and spiritual unity was a major theme earlier this year when Tony Evans preached at a three-day crusade June 19-21 at Louisville's Freedom Hall.

Dan Garland, leader of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's evangelism growth team, said that helped show Graham officials that Louisville could host a Graham event.

"At the end of the Tony Evans crusade we asked for Franklin Graham (to lead a Louisville crusade), never dreaming we could get Billy Graham," Garland said.

Because of health concerns for Graham, who has Parkinson's disease, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association now schedules crusades with less lead time than in the past, Ross added.

"Louisville seemed to be the one (location) most at the point where the preparations could be completed for a June crusade," he said.

Officials had held off planning Graham's 2001 schedule until after the November crusade in Jacksonville.

Graham has responded well to a medical procedure this past summer at the Mayo Clinic, Ross added.

In Jacksonville, "he had the energy and strength of five to 10 years ago when he preached his sermons," Ross said Monday. "I was just with him yesterday and he looks better than he even did in Jacksonville."

Approximately 242,000 people attended the Jacksonville event.

A formal announcement of the Louisville crusade is scheduled for Jan. 16. Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, will serve as chairman of the Louisville crusade's executive committee. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association will announce in the ensuing weeks and months the speakers and recording artists who will participate in the crusade.

"There are few events that can come to a city that will have the kind of sig-

nificance and profile as a Billy Graham crusade," Mohler said.

Local officials are hoping for about 200,000 people to attend the four-day crusade, he added. "We look forward with expectation to what God is going to do during those very critical days."

This will be the second Graham crusade in Louisville. The first was Sept. 30-Oct. 28, 1956. That month-long event drew a total attendance of 492,740 with 6,870 spiritual decisions, Ross said.

Nell Bruce, prayer consultant for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, said she looks forward to helping coordinate an area-wide prayer emphasis in preparation for the crusade.

"To be able to pray across denominational lines and racial lines and look to Jesus is absolutely wonderful," she said. "Many people have prayed over the years that Louisville will be a place that radiates the presence of God."

Bruce, who was prayer coordinator for the recent Tony Evans Crusade in Louisville, said one goal of the prayer emphasis is to "pull together an ongoing Louisville prayer group that will meet several times a year."

Citing Graham's declining health in recent years, Bruce said, "This man of God is coming to the end of the road. These days of opportunity that God is giving us in these closing years are very, very important. I look with anticipation to this being one of his greatest crusades; at this point in life you give it all you've got."

With additional reporting by Baptist Press

Frequently asked questions

How do churches participate in a Billy Graham crusade?

In addition to prayer and inviting friends and family to the event, there are three common volunteer opportunities: Counselors help inquirers at the meetings; singers are needed for the volunteer choir; and several hundred ushers are required for each service. Officials will announce next month how to contact the Louisville planning office.

How is the administration of a crusade organized?

The actual administration is in the hands of a local executive committee of Christian laity and clergy. Members of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association work closely with the executive committee, giving it the benefit of their experience. This executive committee is the policy-making body for the entire crusade. It selects the chair and members of the general crusade committee and leaders of the working committees and subcommittees for the crusade.

How is the money raised to meet budget requirements?

The largest single source of crusade income is the offerings taken at the meetings. Usually, about half of the budgeted amount will be received from offerings, while the other half usually comes from individuals and organizations supportive of the crusade.

What happens to the thousands who respond at Billy Graham crusades?

A study completed in 1988 involved 15,000 interviews with BGEA inquirers, over a 30-year period. Findings from this research were published in a book, "Billy Graham: Do the Conversions Last?" by Robert Ferm. That research indicates that 70-80 percent of inquirers remain steadfast in their decision to follow Christ. Also, approximately one out of every 100 of those converted in a BGEA crusade has entered the Christian ministry in some way.