

Revival in the Heartland

How God used Pekin Bible Church to witness to the Nation

Pekin

On July 4, 1975, the First Baptist Church of Pekin, Illinois, was filled for a revival conference. No matter that this was America's busiest holiday weekend, 900 people gathered. Many of them had come by bus and plane from various points in the United States. One couple sold their color television to be at the conference. A man who had been saved for forty-three years and never expected to see a revival had come to tell what was happening at his home church: "I'm glad God let me live until I could witness revival sent by the Holy Spirit."

Why was Pekin chosen for the site of the conference? In the fall of 1973 Henry and Freda Teichrob came to Pekin Bible Church, met with the board members and their wives, and then spoke in the Sunday morning service. They sensed that the people were receptive to revival. In response to the church's invitation, the Suterases began a crusade at the Pekin Bible Church on January 7, 1975. After three and a half weeks, the crowds began to swell and the auditorium was packed. Already 360 people had been in the prayer room.

The pastor of the church, Reverend Harold Pothoven, and the crusade team invited the Reverend Al Kurz and the congregation of the First Baptist Church to cosponsor the revival crusade. The response was positive. In fact, the revival crusade moved to the 1,000 seat sanctuary of the First Baptist Church.

The revival was now in high gear. Hundreds of people came from all parts of the state to see what was happening. Missionary conferences were cancelled and other programs were rescheduled to make way for what God was doing.

The March 1, *Journal Star* of Peoria carried the story. Among other matters, it reported, "So successfully has the Holy Spirit reached the people of Pekin and surrounding communities that crowds of more than 1,000 have invaded the church the last few nights. Noon prayer meetings are still held at Pekin Bible."

Dr. Peterson from Back to the Bible Broadcast flew to Pekin to observe the revival first-hand. His initial skepticism was alleviated after attending services. He reported that he was gratified to find that "the

revival was based solidly on the Scriptures.”

When it was all over eight and a half weeks later, more than 1,200 people had been to the prayer room and had received counsel. People from seventy different churches had come to the meetings. At least eight churches in the area cancelled all meetings except their Sunday morning services to encourage their people to attend the crusade. *The Christian Inquirer* carried an article entitled, “Suteras See Revival Again.” Revival had indeed come to the heartland of America.

Again God was at work rebuilding family relationships. Harold Pothoven observed that those who had prayed for revival did not know what they had been praying for. Like so many others they expected that God would reverse the evil trends in society of that America would turn to God. But no one expected God to deal so personally and thoroughly with *them*. Along with the people in Canada and Michigan they were learning that revival has a high price tag. True, God’s gifts are free, but the humility needed to receive those gifts can be painful.

The revival conference on July 4 confirmed the powerful results of a revival. People who had been involved in the meetings three months before now told of fresh victories in their lives. A mother told how bitter she had been because her daughter had been in jail, but now God had given her peace and the ability to accept the situation. A man told how God had delivered him from an inferiority complex. “I used my lack of education and my lack of ability as excuses for not taking the spiritual leadership in my home,” he acknowledged. “Six months ago I could never had stood up here, nor could I have prayed in public-now I see that the root of my problem was self, the fear of failure.” For many, revival had become a way of life.

This excerpt was taken from the book, *Flames of Freedom* by Erwin Lutzer,

pages 114-116, published by Moody Press, 1976.