

IDEAS GLEANED FROM YEARS AT EAST ROCKINGHAM

By Agnes Robinson

COMMITTEES APPOINTED

Committees were appointed to utilize every person who would be willing to give their time and efforts in church work.

Committees included groups who weekly visited the two neighboring hospitals, the home for the aged, the T.B. Sanitarium. In each place they taught the Sunday School lesson if they could get the people in an assembly. If not, they distributed literature and prayed with the people. This also included the jail. On rare occasions when women were in the prison, a committee of women visited them.

There was a welcoming committee to greet visitors; a committee to send cards or flowers to those who were sick; a utility committee to be sure all utilities (including baths, lights, and heating) were in perfect running order; a grounds committee to keep the grounds neat and arrange proper parking; a bus committee to make contacts concerning the bus ministry and to aid in pick-up service; also a car brigade (individuals who would volunteer their cars for transportation to and from church activities).

SUNDAY SCHOOL PLAN

We set up a departmental structure with two departments since we only had two assembly rooms...an adult (including Teenagers) and a junior department.

The junior department had its own assembly, with an early bird pre-session time. Every pupil arriving between 9:45 and 10:00 were given a ribbon with a bird pasted thereon. He could wear this ribbon during the Sunday School and Junior Church session, at which time he dropped it in a box (to be used again).

If he were an early bird ten Sundays out of the quarter, he could take part in a special picnic or other treat. The record book was marked with an "E" rather than "P" if he were an early bird.

SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

An associate teacher was selected for each class. Teachers were required to attend special training sessions which included Teacher Training films from Moody Press with discussion periods. Associate teachers were to attend the class to which they were appointed and were to alternate with teachers in bringing the lesson. They were also to assist in contacts with absentees and visitors and with various class activities.

A TEACHER OF THE MONTH was selected based on progress of class, outstanding projects, visitation, and phone calls. A representative of the local press took a picture of the teacher which appeared in the newspaper. The award was a piece of equipment or teaching helps for the teacher.

Page 2

WORKERS CONFERENCE

The monthly workers conference conducted the last Thursday of every month included all Sunday School officers and teachers and at least the chairman of every committee in the church.

Report blanks were given to each person to complete and turn in along with a verbal report. The reports included (for teachers and associates) The name of the class, the average attendance as compared with previous month, new members, visitors, number of contacts by card or phone, number of visits. It also had a blank to be filled in showing any particular class project. These class projects help to build class spirit, sometimes including such things as helping a needy family, sending a boy to boy's camp, a class prayer meeting, etc.

One young woman teaching beginners started a story hour each Sunday afternoon in her neighborhood. She taught the S.S. lesson with her visuals, serving refreshments of cool aid and cookies. She could count these as extension pupils, but ended up bringing most of them to Sunday School. She built her class of eight to twenty-five. We split her class three ways, and she soon had it ready to split again. Another young woman who taught juniors caught the vision and soon built her small class to thirty (which of course we split, keeping each class small so as to have individual contact).

Our Worker's Conference was great. We began with a devotion and a challenge from the pastor. The month's progress and recessions were discussed, with evaluation being made of causes of both. Individual reports were given, after which each could bring out problems or needs. Time was given for discussion of possible solutions.

The projection for the coming month was given with explicit instructions for each person as to their involvement and responsibilities. Then--refreshments and fellowship!

JUNIOR DEPARTMENT TEACHERS' MEETING

Since our Junior department included all classes from Juniors to Cradle Roll, a weekly meeting was held in which a teacher from each age level was asked to prepare the lesson for the coming Sunday in some unique way. These were presented to the group, with comments for possible improvements or variations. This period was used to prepare all visuals for Sunday's lesson.

PROMOTION OF SUNDAY SCHOOL

Many, many ways were used to promote and advertise the S.S. through the ten years we served at East Rockingham. Here are a few.

Parking Meter Cards: After obtaining permission from the Police Department, the church had parking tickets printed to resemble those used by the town of Rockingham. On Saturdays volunteers would watch parking meters downtown. When they found one which

had expired, they would deposit a nickle and put a card on the windshield which read, "Your time has expired. A nickle has been deposited in the parking meter compliments of the East Rockingham Pentecostal Holiness Church. We invite you to join us at our Sunday School tomorrow."

BILL BOARD CARRIERS - Tall teenage boys carried signs over their shoulders (similar to advertising for cafes) saying, "It Can Be Done--1000 in Sunday School). When asked what S.S. they were representing they proudly said, "East Rockingham Pentecostal Holiness Church. Join us there tomorrow morning."

NURSES - Empty capsules were filled with paper on which was typed a salvation scripture verse followed by an invitation to S.S.)

EASTER PARADE - With permission from town officials, a piano was loaded on the back of a truck surrounded by a teenage choir. Enthusiastic Sign-carriers followed the slowly driven truck while the choir sang Easter songs. The signs invited people to S.S.

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN - With permission from town officials, a man with a small plane dropped leaflets all over town. To each leaflet was attached a penny. It said something like this:

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN - Don't miss the blessings from heaven that will be yours if you attend the Sunday School at East Rockingham Pentecostal Holiness Church this Sunday.

MOTHER'S DAY - Advertising ahead of time, we had a photographer to be present during the S.S. hour to take the pictures of all mothers with babies two years old or under. They had to be present the next Sunday in order to get their picture.

GRANDPARENTS DAY - All grandparents were honored guests, seated in a reserved section. Old songs such as "Amazing Grace", "How Firm a Foundation" etc were sung. A special was arranged by several old timers. The sermon was slanted towards the old days.

FATHER'S DAY - Fathers and Sons say in reserved section. A men's quartet was the feature number. Sermon was built around some of Solomon's sayings concerning Fathers and Sons.

FAMILY DAY - Each person was asked to have every member of his family there, to sit together. The largest family connection present received special honor.

FILL A PEW DAY - One hundred persons were asked to fill a pew. This particular Sunday was the Easter we had 1125 present. Boy Scouts who directed the parking turned cars away after all standing and seating room was filled. We don't know how many were turned away.

TEACHERS' SUNDAY - This day all teachers were seated in a reserved area. The pastor preached on "Thou Art a Teacher Come From God." At the close of the message he gave a challenge. "If you feel you are not willing to make this dedication, please step down from the job. At any time, if you cannot do the job, please don't wait for us to ask you to let someone else take your place." Then they signed a "Teacher's Covenant."

CAMPAIGNS. We had one special Sunday each month. All plans moved to build toward that special Sunday. Enthusiasm rose to a mighty climax. Interested business men often sent donations because they said such promotion had to cost a lot. The whole town of 20,000 was very much aware of what this church was doing, for it stayed on the front pages of the newspaper.

Previous to the IT CAN BE DONE--1000 in SUNDAY SCHOOL campaign, a series of openings were given in the S.S. with everybody meeting in the assembly.

The first Sunday a man dressed with an overcoat on and a small Church Building on his head walked down the aisle. He was carrying a brief case. At the front he paused at the communion table, opened his brief case and displayed a Bible, a song book, a Sunday School quarterly, a church manual. He held each up with a few words about each. He said in essence, "Our church is a place where the Bible is held to be the revelation of God to man. We believe the Bible is the Word of God, and contains the full plan and history of redemption." (Holding up the Bible)

Holding up the S.S. quarterly, he said, "Each Sunday our teachers bring biblical facts and pertinent applications to students according to age group characteristics. Whoever you are, you will find something you need at our Sunday School."

Holding up a Song Book, he said: "At our Sunday School you will hear and sing songs of worship and devotion that will inspire you and bring a deep sense of enjoyment."

Holding up the Church Manual; he said, "We believe that the doctrines as set forth in our Church Manual are Bible based, and our Sunday School teachers endeavor to make them clear and meaningful to each student."

When he finished, he replaced the things in the brief case and walked out the other door.

The next Sunday, he comes down the aisle as before. As he starts across the front of the church he is tackled by a man sitting on a front pew in disguise. The disguised man is dressed as the devil. We used long-handled underwear dyed red. A pillow case dyed red was placed over his head with eyes cut out. A mask of the devil's face was placed over that. He had on red gloves. Over this costume he had an overcoat turned up and a hat with the brim turned down.

The devil tried to steal the briefcase, but the church escaped intact. The children were prompted by the pastor or superintendent (In the struggle the devil lost his overcoat and hat revealing who he really was.)

to defeat the devil with a chant--"IT CAN BE DONE, IT CAN BE DONE, IT CAN BE DONE. Each time they chanted, the devil was driven towards the door. When he had been driven out, the pastor told them he was trying to steal God's Word, God's Worship, and God's People, but with faith they could be triumphant over him.

The next Sunday all during the S.S. and church hour the devil (without the overcoat) paraded before the church with a picket sign, "This Sunday School is unfair to me." This caused a lot of excitement.

It's hard to remember all the methods used during ten years, but one of our most effective was our visitation and follow-up method.

VISITATION

We had visitation night once a week. This was in addition to the contacts made by teachers and associates. Each volunteer was assigned certain names. They visited two by two.

A caller assignment card was given on each person to be visited. This showed times absent, visits made, and callers' names with a place for remarks showing reasons for absense.

We conducted a census of people in our community (East Rockingham) of 10,000. We contacted all people who indicated non-membership in any church or expressed an interest in our church.

From the church office we contacted by letter every absentee, every new member, and every visitor.

We obtained information from each S.S. member concerning other members of his family--his age, etc. This gave us a prospect list if they didn't already attend our church.

We also used the 6 point grading system for individual pupils.

RADIO PROGRAM

A weekly radio program brought many people into the influence of our church.

PRAYER PROGRAM - Last, but not least, all plans were literally saturated with prayer.

Before a major campaign, members were called upon to form a prayer chain to pray around the clock. There would be someone in the church praying at least 30 minutes every hour of the day.

Many times the pastor would go over to the church on Saturday night and lay his hand on every pew, asking God to bless the persons sitting there. Also, emulating the example set by Christ, he spent many hours in prayer, often praying in the church until the wee hours of the morning. This is probably the basis of all great success for God.

Note added by Ron White:

To say that Padgett Robinson was ahead of his time is an understatement. Reading through the notes above that Agnes wrote reveals just some of the things they did that were unique and ahead of what was to come a decade later in many churches across many denominations. Padgett was always thinking of novel and innovative ways to draw people in because once they were exposed to the church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they often were saved and became members.

In addition to what Agnes wrote about, there are two additional innovations that I've discovered in reading the many archive materials we have. First, he focused on teenagers. He believed that teenagers should have a wholesome place for fellowship and recreation. The Fellowship Hall was one of the first buildings he constructed at East Rockingham P. H. Church. One of its uses was providing a place for teenagers to come and have fun. In my years in the IPHC, I've run across scores of people who were teenagers in East Rockingham who have been faithful to Christ and His church because of the foundation laid at East Rockingham with a pastor who loved them and provided a place for them. Very few IPHC churches had an emphasis on youth until the 1970s. Padgett was doing this in 1948.

The second innovation was the idea of birthing new churches out of the East Rockingham P.H. Church. At least two churches were mothered by East Rockingham and for a while they were extensions of East Rockingham so I suppose you could say that Padgett started the first multi-campus church in the IPHC. The church growth movement was not born until 1970 with the publication of Donald McGavran's book, *Understanding Church Growth*. Padgett was doing this in the 1950s.

Is it any wonder that Padgett Robinson was such a successful pastor?