



Counselors at the Graham crusade hold cards to identify themselves amid a sea of people wanting to dedicate or rededicate their lives to Christ.

## Ecumenical spirit pervades Rochester's Graham crusade

By Rob Cullivan

The Rev. Billy Graham ended his crusade on Sunday, Sept. 18, leaving behind him a revitalized Christian community including enthusiastic Catholics who had come out in record numbers to hear him.

The Rev. Graham visited Bishop Matthew H. Clark at Sacred Heart Cathedral last week, telling the bishop that he had never before experienced such a high level of Catholic involvement in a crusade. "I think that's a wonderful tribute to the sense of ecumenism among our people," Bishop Clark said.

Although the Rev. Graham preached a fundamentalist interpretation of the Gospel, his ecumenical message won over many Catholics in his audience. Father Edward L. Palumbos, pastor of Good Shepherd Church in Henrietta and a supervisor/counselor for the crusade, said that the Rev. Graham concentrated on what Christians share. "We could have spent all this time focusing on doctrinal differences," Father Palumbos said. "He (Graham) went way out of his way to make sure (Catholics) knew that he knew we were there."

Ron Jodoin, a parishioner at Good Shepherd, agreed with Father Palumbos. "He was so careful to be non-denominational," Jodoin said of the minister. "His message was for everybody."

Yet the Rev. Graham's ecumenism wasn't the only factor in his appeal to the Catholics in his audience. Some felt Catholics could learn from his extensive use of Scripture to justify his beliefs.

"I'm a Bible Catholic," remarked Father Joseph Catanise, assistant pastor at St. Charles Borromeo in Rochester. "I just wish more people in our Church would stress the Bible; we have too many cultural Catholics."

Others observed that the Catholic Church would benefit from revivals similar to the Silver Stadium crusade. Noting the large number of Catholics attending the Protestant evangelist's services, Ron Jodoin's wife, Martha, said, "I think they need a place where Catholics can come and commit themselves, maybe once every three years or so."

Father Palumbos reported that many of the people he met at the crusade were Catholics who had left the Church to join a Protestant evangelical denomination. He said many of them told him of their "spiritual hunger" for Christian fellowship, a fellowship they didn't find in their former Catholic parishes. "We have to show people how to access it in their parishes," Father Palumbos said. "They can have it right here in their own tradition," he said, suggesting that Catholic Bible-study groups can fulfill the same needs met by the Protestant churches.

Many listeners also found inspiration in the Rev. Graham's enthusiasm for the Gospel. "We need these little jabs once in a while to keep it going," remarked Father Elmer J. Schmidt of St. Ann's in Hornell. "I was very impressed by his direct approach," he said.

Mimi Wakefield, a parishioner at Holy Name of Jesus in Rochester, thought the large number of people who came forward to verbally commit themselves to Jesus should remind Christians to not be content with the Church as it is. "It was an encouraging kick in the pants to get off our butts and preach the Gospel," she said.

The Rev. Graham's nightly call for verbal commitment to Christ drew 11,340 of the 143,780 who attended over the course of the weeklong crusade. These people — "inquirers" as they are called by crusade personnel — constituted almost 8 percent of the audience, which is nearly triple the percentage that comes forward at the usual crusade, according to A. Larry Ross, media spokesman. Such large numbers surprised Wakefield's fellow parishioner, Marion Toth. "I'm amazed at the number

of people who've never heard of (the Gospel)," she said.

The Rev. Graham's invitation to the audience to come forward to his outfield platform reminded some Catholics of their own liturgical practices. Barbara Pilato, a parishioner at St. Charles Borromeo, turned to Father Catanise during the Sunday service and said: "I never thought of it before, but we make an altar call every Sunday when we receive the Eucharist."

Each inquirer filled out an information card, which will be forwarded to a pastor in the denomination the inquirer wishes to join. Information cards naming Catholic parishes will be distributed to parish representatives at three separate Masses — at the Pastoral Center chapel in Gates, St. Stephen's in Geneva and St. Mary's in Elmira — celebrated simultaneously on Friday, Sept. 23, from 7:30-9 p.m.

Although he would not release specific figures on how many Catholics came forward during the crusade, Rick Marshall, resident crusade director, called the Catholic response "tremendous," attributing it to Bishop Clark's efforts and to the area's large Catholic population.

Many parishes have geared themselves to handle an influx of new parishioners. Father Bob Werth, pastor of St. Bridget's in Rochester and a member of the committee that served as a liaison between the diocese and the crusade, said that 106 of the diocese's parishes are formally prepared to welcome inquirers. These parishes will offer Bible-study groups, prayer groups or "some other mechanism" to welcome potential members, Father Werth said.

Sixty-one parishes, on the other hand, have no formal welcoming set-up, but will follow up on the information cards from the crusade. For various reasons, 15 diocesan parishes did not participate in the crusade. Some were too far from the city to consider sending parishioners, while others were theologically opposed to the Rev. Graham's message.

Several members of the diocese were critical of the diocesan support of the crusade. Among them were Father John Roach, pastor of St. Felix's in Clifton Springs, who based his criticism on the Catholic faith's unique qualities. Father Roach said he was concerned that Catholics unsure of their own beliefs might be harmed by the Rev. Graham's preaching. "Someone who is vacillating... I just wonder what would happen to them," he said.

Although his parish publicized the crusade, Father William Hart of Holy Trinity in Webster doubted that practicing Catholics would profit from it. "If they've already got a devout life of their own, I don't think they'd need a crusade."

A group calling itself Catholics Against Billy Graham sent a press release to the *Courier-Journal* last week, denouncing the Rev. Graham as a "phony" and an "unethical Christian." The release contained several unsubstantiated allegations against the evangelist and compared him unfavorably with Mother Teresa.

When reached for comment, J. Donald Stewart, the group's spokesman, said the release was sent to all the major wire services, newspapers and TV networks. "I don't like the way (the *Courier-Journal*) supported (the crusade)," he remarked. "I wasn't in favor of it at all."

Stewart said that 35-40 area Catholics made up his group, although he would not release any of their names. He also said the release's allegations against the Rev. Graham — which included charges that he has mishandled crusade finances — were based on newspaper accounts Stewart has collected "through the years."



Crusade counselor Joy Jenks (left) talks with inquirer Sally Kepplinger, both of Rochester, at

## Counselors experience taste of

By Lee Strong

During his Rochester Crusade, Billy Graham concluded each of his sermons by inviting those who wanted to rededicate their faith or begin an involvement with Christianity to come forward to the platform area.

One by one or in small groups, people began to trickle down the aisles of Silver Stadium, heading for the gathering area in front of the speaker's lectern. Rapidly, the trickle became a flood of men, women and children of various ages and races, dressed in everything from shorts and T-shirts to jackets and ties. Each night, more than a thousand people — whom the Graham crusade call "inquirers" — crowded the open space.

When the flood subsided, Graham spoke to the inquirers briefly, then told them that counselors were standing nearby to help each of them determine his or her spiritual needs, and to offer support, encouragement and prayer. Almost miraculously, a counselor was generally standing next to each inquirer.

But the real miracle of the crusade was the incredible preparation and organization demonstrated by the Graham organization.

Approximately 2,700 counselors — all local volunteers — were trained by crusade organizers, beginning with counselor classes in April. These classes were followed by nurturing classes designed to prepare volunteers to work with inquirers after the crusade, Bible-study courses, prayer meetings, and support and discussion groups that continued until the crusade's start.

Each night of the crusade — even as the inquirers made their way forward — counselor supervisors were signalling counselors, unobtrusively seated near the platform area, to pair up with inquirers. Before they reached the assembly area, a majority of the inquirers had already been assigned counselors of the same gender and the same approximate age.

Counselors gave each of the inquirers a copy of the book *Living in Christ*, which includes the Gospel of John and a study guide. Counselors also helped inquirers fill out commitment folders that help inquirers — and their counselors — assess their faith.

The counselors then filled out cards for each inquirer, listing name, address, and why they came forward. The cards also list the individual's church or religious preference, and counselors were strictly enjoined not to influence inquirers' decisions concerning denomination. These cards were later gathered by supervisors and sorted each night after the service concludes. Data from the cards are now being sent on to the appropriate churches.

Like the inquirers, counselors varied widely in age, race, education and denomination. Approximately 235 of them were Catholic.

"I decided to be a counselor to be of help — to help someone get closer to God," explained Sister Francis Mary Rossi, SSJ, pastoral assistant at Most Precious Blood Church. "I was very interested as a Catholic to lead people to Christ."

Sister Campion Bush, SSJ, evangelization director at St. Augustine's Parish, had a more prosaic reason for becoming a counselor: she wanted to complete the crusade's counselor-training course with evangelization-training program she had at Franciscan University of Steubenville. "I was curious about what is the Billy Graham method and what I can learn from it," she noted.

What Sisters Bush and Rossi and the other counselors discovered is that the key to Graham's success is careful advance planning. "If we've learned anything from the crusade, we learned that long-range planning is necessary," observed another counselor, Sister Dore SSSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Ambrose Parish. The planning process for the crusade began a year ago with the formation of an executive committee consisting of local clergy and laity. This committee appointed a number of subcommittees, including one that directs counseling and follow-up.

In April, prospective counselors from local parishes were invited to attend the "Christian Life and Prayer" training program, which consisted of four classes. The sessions also included periods of prayer and study — and memorization — of Scripture. The sessions also included periods of prayer and study on the applicants' faith. In between classes, counselors were also given homework, consisting of readings and additional Scripture study.

At the end of the course, each applicant was interviewed by members of the Counseling and Prayer Committee. Based on the interview, complete course and evidence of faith in Jesus Christ, the applicants for the crusade were then chosen by the committee.

This process of study, self-assessment and prayer was necessary because "you can't have an inquirer come forward and ask a question, and you're not telling them yourself," explained Marjorie Liddle, a counselor from St. Charles Borromeo Parish.

Liddle noted that when she began training as a counselor, she did not realize how extensive the training would be. Nevertheless, after five weeks of counselor classes, she chose to attend nurturing classes, prayer meetings and talks so that she would be better prepared.

The actual counseling went smoothly because of the intense preparation, Liddle noted. For example, on Sept. 11, the first day of the crusade, she counseled a Catholic woman. "She wasn't really assured of her faith, even though she had been faithful all her life," Liddle reported. "She just wanted that assurance that she would have eternal life."

Liddle gave the woman that assurance, and the woman called her, fulfilling her commitment to continue contact with the people she counseled. Liddle invited the woman to attend a prayer group. "We can't have these people come forward