

THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH IN THE YAKIMA VALLEY

by Elmer Mundy

Tieton is a town of 600 people, but it is situated in an area rich with the fruit of the Yakima Valley, with at least 2,500 people with no Baptist Church.

The seed was sown for a church in Tieton when I visited a family who had driven 20 miles to the church where I was pastor. They were Baptists from Arkansas who pleaded, "Can't you start a mission in Tieton. We feel we could get our lost relatives to attend if services were near them."

Not long after that, God laid His hand on our Training Union Director, Travis Lawrence, and he accepted the call to preach the Gospel. I wanted a place for him to preach. On Sunday before Easter, 1956, we made plans to start a mission in Tieton. We rented the I O O F Hall. It was ideal for a starting place. Three families joined together to form a nucleus. God put his stamp of approval on their venture. The second Sunday they had 37 in Sunday School and saw the salvation of two Junior children.

Tieton <sup>has been</sup> ~~is~~ a church sponsored mission. The money ~~is~~ handled by the sponsoring church. The members of the mission are members of the sponsoring church; and the leadership of the mission ~~is~~ approved by the sponsoring church.

We made a good beginning, but then the work dwindled. Many times there were only the three families and whoever they could pick up on the way, and sometimes they could not pick up any. Sometimes they had only a prayer meeting instead of a regular preaching service. The outlook was very discouraging. People who had already invested much of themselves had heavy hearts. The townspeople thought this was just another passing fancy. Then God opened a door. The American Legion offered to sell their building for the amount which they had in it: \$7,000. This is a large two story building, but not finished on the inside. Terms were unbelievably easy--thirty dollars per month with the agreement that \$1,000 be paid on the principal in December, 1957. But we didn't even have the \$30. The matter looked hopeless and many were against it. It was brought to a vote at the June business meeting. Some of us were prepared to write it off. The facts were presented. A suggestion was made that we pray about it. Following the season of prayer a secret ballot vote was taken. God would not let us close the mission. For, by a vote of 22 to 17 we brought the building and continued the mission. The Sunday School Superintendent then testified that during prayer he had changed his vote from "no" to "yes". However, others got up and left the meeting because they thought such a foolish thing was being done.

The work was continued, but only on a trial basis. Our plan was to conduct a two week Vacation Bible School, then hold a 2-week Revival Meeting. We felt that this month of intensive effort would indicate whether it was possible to have a Baptist Church in Tieton.

Through our area missionary, B.E. Honeycutt, it was possible to have a student mission worker, Miss Elizabeth Walker, to help in the V.B.S. We pushed back the lumber, borrowed some chairs and a portable organ, and had a very profitable school. Then another summer worker, Jim Harris, held the revival meeting. At night he brought soul stirring messages and during the day did personal visitation. Good crowds attended; fourteen members were enlisted; a Church was born.

Up to that time the pastor and his family were preparing to leave for California to attend a Baptist College. Now it seemed that he could not leave



the young church without a pastor. He decided to stay on the field and attend the Yakima Junior College. We ordained him in October.

The developments in the past four months have been miraculous indeed. Brother Lawrence has been given employment at a Richfield Service Station and told he could set his own hours according to whatever fitted in with school and church. Mrs. Lawrence has found steady employment at a downtown department store. God has given good health to them and their two children. At the mission first plumb line was installed by the Brotherhood of the sponsoring church. Then a piano was given, then pews were made by one of the Tieton members, Mr. Lon Townsend, a carpenter by trade; he also installed the furnace that was given. Incidentally, the reason why this seemed such an impossible situation and undertaking was the heating problem. But in the basement of the building was found enough brick to build the flue. They now have an adequate heating plant which cost less than \$50. They are now collecting money to put in electricity.

Here is a picture of a young church. They have a building and it is warm. They have a full program of Sunday School and Training Union using the Standard of Excellence as their guide. During November they averaged 29 in S.S. and 23 in T.U. At their Christmas program there was one hundred in attendance. Ten percent of their offering goes into mission work through the cooperative program.

But what of the future? Facing them now is a cold winter with heavy snow and unemployment. Facing them also is one-thousand dollars to be paid next December. The group is planning to organize from a mission into a church next Easter, and then to enter into the simultaneous revival in May 1957. Already, Rev. Paul Stanley of Halltown, Mo. has been secured to be evangelist.

They want to do more for their pastor. He has been doing the impossible: supporting his family, making good grades in college, and pastoring a full time church. His salary has only been five dollars per Sunday, which has not even covered his traveling expenses. His own tithe put into the church treasury has been more the salary from the church. This is not right. Yet it is only through preachers (and their wives) who are willing to sacrifice in this way that God can start churches in such needy areas.

We feel that God is going to bless this church. The work will be slow and there will be many rough places. It takes so long to learn church loyalty and to accept financial responsibility. We are praying that some outside help can come to care for at least half of the one thousand dollars. If such could be the case, we believe the church could handle the rest.

Here is a real missionary field. Here is a place where people are lost: people of wealth, people in poverty, people with ability. The going with the gospel is not easy, but the going is essential. Let us pray that in two years when Travis Lawrence goes on to Seminary, he may leave behind a church that can support a pastor on the field.

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