

Conclusion

Here then, is a strategy for achieving the goal — to disciple the whole urban population for Christ. The key factor lies in the church's ability to train sufficient leaders to become "church planters" so that new centers of witness may be rapidly extended to all areas of opportunities.

There should not be tens or hundreds but thousands of new churches. The challenge before the Christians is "not to be limited by the small expectations of our forefathers nor measure tomorrow's advances by yesterday's defeats." In making this proposal for thousands of new house-churches we would not minimize the role and contribution of the larger and older established churches. It calls for a re-evaluation of the role of these older churches. In one respect they can function as the "cathedral church" — in a satellite pattern — with perhaps ten to fifteen smaller house-churches related to them for the purpose of wider support, teaching, and large-scale assemblies. In this way the weaknesses and limitations of the smaller house-churches can be remedied by the larger and more established congregations. Likewise, the lack of vitality and static nature of the older churches will have the stimulation of these fresh and dynamic youthful congregations.

As this plan for growth is implemented, the seemingly static churches in our cities can be transformed into growing and dynamic churches during this decade of the seventies. This then could conceivably become the turning point of Christianity in the world: as it moves rapidly towards the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our generation.

HIGHRISE, FLAT AND APARTMENT EVANGELISM REPORT

Secretary: Waldron Scott

The group consisted of approximately 15 North Americans and 10 Europeans, plus two or three participants from other continents. There were no representatives from Latin America, except on the final day. Africa had no representation except for one white South African. Similarly, Asia was meagerly represented by two from Singapore and two Americans working in Korea and South Vietnam respectively.

Attention is drawn to the composition of the group because this had a clear bearing on some of the conclusions reached by the participants.

Main Conclusion

This study group wishes to call attention, as much as possible, to the fact that the global evangelical community appears to be unaware, or far too inadequately aware, of the significance of urban evangelization in general and of highrise evangelism in particular.

Urban areas represent perhaps the most underestimated evangelistic need in the world today. This especially appears to be the case with respect to Third World countries. Between 1920 and 1960 urban population increased 500% in Latin America and Africa, 400% in South Asia and nearly 400% in East Asia. Most of this urban increase is focused in huge housing complexes which fill the horizons of modern cities everywhere.

In Singapore 60% of the population lives in these highrise complexes. The percentage is even higher in other major metropolitan areas. This is the fastest-growing sector of urban life. Yet most highrise dwellers are unevangelized and unchurched. Unless evangelicals awake to the challenges and opportunities represented by highrise housing, we are likely to fail altogether in our objective of fulfilling the Great Commission.

The conclusion just expressed is the most important statement the group wishes to make known to Congress participants and other readers. In addition to evaluating the need for highrise evangelism, the group discussed the special character of highrise residents and the evangelistic problems presented by them. The group also considered at length the strategy proposed by Rev. James K. Wong of Singapore as well as other alternatives and modifications.

Characteristic Features

Highrise dwellers tend to be suspicious of outsiders (though perhaps no more so than other urbanites). They are frequently lonely and isolated from community life. Many complexes are locked and guarded against outsiders. In some metropolitan areas highrise occupants are transient, in other cities they may be quite permanent.

Highrise dwellers are not confined to a particular economic class. But where a particular complex is primarily composed of residents from lower economic levels, conditions are apt to be crowded. Consequently

residents tend to spend much of their time out on the streets or at entertainment areas away from their flat or apartment. All this presents special problems to the evangelist.

Problems

The biggest problems identified by the study group are not immediately related to the highrise situation itself. Rather, they are related to the church: the evangelical community's lack of vision, awareness, and concern for highrise residents; its unwillingness to allocate personnel to evangelize this huge sector of urban life; its inability to modify its own structures to accommodate to this new reality. These appear to be the greatest obstacles to evangelism and church planting.

As in regard to the highrise complexes themselves, the most difficult problem evangelistically seems to be that of penetration: actually contacting residents to present the Gospel to them. Reasons for this have been noted in the paragraphs on characteristic features, above. This is compounded by lack of privacy, the inability to get along with people. Still other problems peculiar to highrise evangelism are considered in James Wong's study paper.

Problems, of course, point to opportunities. And Wong's paper also lists the special advantages inherent in highrise complexes. The study group endorsed these and then turned its attention to the consideration of various strategies.

Strategies

Wong's own strategy for Singapore is impressive. It could well be the model for church-planting endeavors in many metropolitan areas. In brief he proposes (a) that evangelists consult beforehand with city planners to eliminate some of the obstacles, (b) that evangelistic teams serve highrise residents through special ministries, (c) that Christian families in highrise complexes act as nuclei for the development of "house churches," and (d) that parish churches become training centers and support facilities for these house churches. Congress participants are urged to study his paper carefully.

At the same time it was recognized that situations vary and that alternative approaches must be considered for different cities.

Two participants from Rome reported successful attempts using a direct visitation approach, as well as a plan which included the presentation of small gifts to residents at Christmas. The Roman evangelists also urged the military principle of concentration of forces. In one instance they allocated 25 evangelistic church planters to a single sector of the city, with gratifying results.

Some participants recommended the use of surveys and questionnaires. Others emphasized the value of ministries such as day-care centers for children, dog-walking services, recreational and adult educational facilities, etc. In France and Singapore Navigator materials are used for initiating evangelistic Bible studies in flats and apartments. In general, participants emphasized the need to identify the "felt needs" of highrise residents and then meet those specific needs.

One approach *not* recommended is the widescale distribution of notices (usually left in mailboxes) or other pamphlets. One participant,

for example, reported zero response from 20,000 tracts distributed throughout a highrise complex. In contrast, a participant from Johannesburg reported a high response from leaving cassette recorders (inexpensive models, of course) with an evangelistic message with residents. Apparently people respond to his expressed trust in them.

A Canadian reported that one church in his area asks newly married couples to establish residence in designated housing complexes with a view of utilizing their flat as an evangelistic base. Other participants pointed out the importance of family "web relationships" as a means of penetrating highrise complexes. Where Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons have preceded the evangelical witness it may be wise to have material explaining who evangelicals are.

Church Relations

The group seemed to take for granted that the objective of highrise evangelism is church membership, not merely the conversion of isolated individuals. This raised questions about the nature of the church which the participants discussed at some length.

Wong envisioned the multiplying of house-churches in every highrise building. Such churches, however, would be related to a central church outside the housing complex. This seemed to some participants to suggest that these house churches were mere satellites, evangelistic extensions of the mother church, rather than full-fledged churches in their own right. These group members felt it unnecessary to attempt to relate highrise house churches to a central church located outside the complex. They emphasized the legitimacy of house churches as true churches in every respect.

A church capable of sustaining a highrise evangelistic endeavor will be characterized by (a) converted people, (b) sound teaching, (c) inspired leaders with clear vision, and (d) a solid training program for laymen — especially those laymen who already reside in highrise complexes.