

# Evangelistic Temple holding year-long anniversary celebration

A year-long celebration of the 70th anniversary of Evangelistic Temple began with special services and an anniversary dinner on March 2.

Festivities continued March 9 with a reunion and homecoming of former students of the Southern Bible College and Temple Workers League, both of which were a part of the original Temple in the late 1920s.

The Temple had its birth in the joining of a dynamic preacher from Zion, Ill., Eli Noble Richey, and a dwindling congregation meeting in a frame building at Patterson and Eli streets in Houston.

In January 1916, the Rev. E.N. "Dad" Richey, his wife Sara Jane, and their children, Raymond T., Leonard P., Roxana N. and Ziona were on the train to Houston. On the last Sunday in February 1916, the first service was held by "Dad" Richey and Raymond T. Richey in the West End Full Gospel Tabernacle, the precursor of the Evangelistic Temple.

Hours of prayer and work at the tabernacle with its sawdust floor filled with fleas soon bore fruit and the congregation grew quickly. "Dad" Richey's son Andrew J. Richey, and his wife Anna came from Illinois to join the ministry team.

During World War I, Raymond Richey headed a drive to construct a large building on Washington Avenue near Camp Logan, where more than 33,000 men were stationed. By agreeing to allow the soldiers to use the facility for films and lectures on personal hygiene, Raymond Richey was allowed to deliver a brief sermon and distribute Christian literature.

As Raymond's commitment to ministry on military bases grew, his sister Bessie and her husband, the Rev. E.G. Gerhart, were called to Houston to help with the growing church. They arrived in June 1917.

Meanwhile, Raymond toured various military bases in the midst of a flu epidemic, which ultimately killed more than 20 million people worldwide.

Back in Houston, the church grew steadily. The old "barn-like" structure was replaced

in 1920. There were more than 1,400 people attending services and within the next five years, from 1919 to 1924, the facilities would be enlarged twice more to keep pace.

As the home church grew, Raymond began working with evangelist Warren Collins in his crusade meetings across the country. Collins married Raymond and Eloise May after a meeting during a crusade at Camp Logan.

Raymond and Eloise, joined by his brother Andrew and his wife Anna, began criss-crossing the country in crusade meetings.

A prominent Houston attorney began a drive in 1922 to finance more permanent headquarters for the Richey Evangelistic Team and the home church. Meetings were held under the open air at a downtown location on Capitol and Riesner streets. The name Evangelistic Temple was decided upon with local businessman M.E. Layne, who had originally recruited "Dad" Richey, casting the deciding vote.

The congregation moved into a new building in the summer of 1928. During the 1930s men such as Mack Wyatt, Paul and Luke Rader, Willard Cantelon, Phil Kerr and the Rex Humbard family held revival meetings there. The Evangelistic Temple pastors and the Richey Evangelistic Team continued their ministry.

On Feb. 3, 1932, hot wax and chemicals being used to treat the wood flooring on the platform ignited, and the entire church building went up in flames. One woman was stranded in the prayer tower where she died before firemen could reach her.

A new building was completed soon on the same location. The Southern Bible College was begun, missionaries were commissioned, ministers were ordained, new churches started and the ministry to American servicemen continued.

A weekly newspaper called the Temple Trumpet was published and distributed to local members and servicemen abroad. The Full Gospel Advocate also was published and distributed by mail and at the evangelistic crusades.

During World War II a large second floor auditorium was dedicated as a servicemen's center. A young group, the "Light Brigade" distributed over one-half million pieces of literature to servicemen traveling through Houston. Raymond Richey held several crusades on military installations nationwide. In the closing days of the war, "Dad" Richey was called by Houston newspapers as the "oldest active minister in Houston." He and "Mother" Richey had just celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary when, on Feb. 25, 1945, he had a stroke while preaching and died March 3, 1945.

On June 10, 1947, Chaplain J.W. Hulme Jr. married Raymond and Eloise Richey's only daughter, Rae Marie. They arrived in Houston in 1952 to find that the city planned to build a freeway system which would include the property at Capitol and Riesner streets occupied by the Evangelistic Temple. With Ralph M. Buffington as architect and Bill Hulme as general contractor, the temple was built at its present site at 2025 W. 11th St. Chaplain Hulme became Temple pastor and served for 10 and a half years.

Raymond Richey had a stroke in 1961 which caused the cancellation of his evangelistic crusades. Attendance at the

home church began to decrease and financial problems arose.

About this time, in another area of Houston, the Rev. W. Austin Wilkerson and the congregation of Central Assembly of God were looking for a larger building. The deacons of the two churches discussed their mutual needs and in August 1966, the two congregations merged. The church retained the name Evangelistic Temple and operated under the pastoral leadership of Wilkerson.

Following Raymond Richey's death in 1968, his wife Eloise continued her teaching and evangelistic work by traveling to the Philippine Islands. She helped build and establish several Bible schools and churches there. Upon returning home she taught weekly Bible studies at the Christian

Village Apartment Complex where she lived on the property of Evangelistic Temple Central.

During the 1970s nationally-known ministers came to the Temple as Wilkerson and his staff sought to win and disciple thousands of young people who were coming to church. The Temple ministry grew so dramatically that the facilities had to be expanded twice during the 70s. The church also was deeded 65 wooded acres on the San Jacinto River near Humble. A Christian camp was built on this property.

As the decade came to an end, the church completed several facilities at what has come to be known as the "north campus." The property now houses Camp

M c C l e l l a n, a Christian overnight and day camp used by various age groups during the summer and for special weekend retreats. The facility can sleep up to 500 people.

Also on the property is the Kingwood Academy, a Christian day school providing Christ-centered education for children in grades kindergarten

through high school. This location also is the home of the congregation of Evangelistic Temple North.

Today, there is a combined church membership of 5,000 for both congregations.