

Servicemen Given Lounge at Temple

Ample Furnished Room Provides Welcome Spot

Editor's Note: This is the eighth of a series of articles on the contribution of Houston churches to the war effort. The ninth will appear next Sunday.

By BESS W. SCOTT

The first Church in Houston to set aside, equip and open a recreation lounge for servicemen was the Evangelistic Temple, at Capitol and Riesner.

The big room, as large as many chapels, is on the second floor of the temple, with wide windows opening east and south. Cheery chintz-covered chairs, wicker couches and tables, bookcases, a piano, growing plants and inviting magazines and books afford men on week-end leaves many a pleasant hour. Neither dancing nor smoking is allowed in the lounge, but according to Mrs. C. L. Bailey, head of the Servicemen's club of the church, the boys do not mind.

Rules Not Resented

"We've never had a young man resent our rules, and only twice have I even had to ask a boy to step outside to smoke," Mrs. Bailey said. "The boys have a good time here in a wholesome way and they appreciate the lounge. The same boys come back week after week and feel they have a real home to come to."

The lounge is open each day and evening. Sing-songs are held there, many of them impromptu and led by the boys themselves. Games are played, and young women of the

church assist Mrs. Bailey and her committee as junior hostesses.

A Sunday dinner is served at the church following the morning service, to which servicemen are invited. Women of the church prepare and serve the meal provided from a fund set aside by the church. An average of 45 men are served each Sunday, Mrs. Bailey said.

Many Letters Written

Members of the Servicemen's club write personal letters to the 112 men of the church who are in the armed forces and send them church literature. They keep a record of every serviceman who visits the church and put his name on the mailing list. Club members also keep up to date the service honor roll which hangs in the church office.

A very special wartime service of the Temple is done by the Light Brigade, an Organization of young people sponsored by the church. Members of the light Brigade meet every train that comes into Houston or leaves the stations, day or night,

to distribute to men on the troop trains the many types of literature that the Evangelistic Temple sponsors. This literature includes Testaments, religious pamphlets, booklets and papers, many of them illustrated with photographs or cartoons.

Booklets Given

Since its organization in February, 1942, the Light Brigade has contacted personally 125,000 servicemen, giving away approximately 500,000 pieces of religious literature. Mrs. Bailey and her groups are firmly "sold" on this method of evangelism.



'WELCOME' is on the mat of all doors that lead into the Evangelistic Temple, Capitol and Riesner, first church in Houston to open a recreation center for servicemen. A typical week-end in the lounge is pictured at upper right, where the Light Brigade of the Temple is distributing religious literature to recruits bound for boot camp. In the foreground, Gideons are giving out the Gideon testaments to the same group. At lower left is a "graduating" class from the children's church of the Temple on promotion day. At lower right, the co-pastors, Rev. E. G. Gerhart, left, and Rev. E. N. (Dad) Richey, stand at the altar, flanked by the flags of the United States and the Cross.

"I remember one flyer who wrote us resentful at being conscripted, came that he took a Testament we gave out at the train and, because he 'had nothing else to do,' started reading it. He got so interested and so impressed that he accepted God, and wrote us from India that he was convinced that this faith so gained had saved his life on occasions when many of his buddies were killed," she said.

"We have constant testimony of the helpfulness of our work, through letters from the boys who have gone and from the lips of those who come to our lounge," continued Mrs. Bailey, whose own son is in the armed service. "Some time ago a young boy, far from home and

resentful at being conscripted, came down here drinking too much. We talked to him, and made him welcome, and he came back. He told me that he had been in Houston seven months, and every week-end he did nothing but get drunk. He was just mad and disgusted."

Visits Often

"After that first visit he came down here every week-end, and entered into our fellowship. A letter from him recently thanked us for what we did for him. He appealed to me particularly because he saw something in me that reminded him of his mother, and he showed me that he was just a homesick boy.

"We feel that if we had done nothing else but get this boy over that hump, our work would be justified."

Other wartime activities of the Evangelistic Temple are the Red Cross unit which to date has made 947 garments for the Red Cross; small organizations of the church, especially of young people; and the Women's Benevolent society of the church, which works with the needy and whose work has been greatly increased by war conditions.

Rev. E.G. Gerhart, co-pastor of the temple with Rev. E. N. (Dad) Richey, has definite ideas about the place of the church in War times.

"In these times the church should be two things—loyal to God, and loyal to the nation," he said. "The church should carry on its work, but perhaps with a little more fervor in prayer. The church should stick close to the teachings of Jesus and teach love, not hate."

The teaching of "love thy enemies" is not incompatible with the church's loyalty to the nation and its prayers for victory, Reverend Gerhart said.

"The executioner does not have to hate the man he executes," he said. "The soldier does not have to hate his enemy, by the same token. Our soldiers are fighting for a principle, and for the right of the Christian church to exist."

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"If we teach hate, we are building up something that will turn on us and destroy us.

"I do not think there can be any improvement on the teachings of Jesus, and they answer every argument."

Reverend Gerhart cited Lincoln, the Bible and Joe Palooka of the comic strip to prove his arguments that righteousness, not hate, is the best armor.

"Lincoln said, 'I am not concerned with whether God is on my side so long as I am on His side.' The Bible says, 'Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.' I like Joe Palooka because he considers prize fighting as a profession and always had the attitude—'I'm sorry to hit you so hard, but you see I have to'—then lets go his punch without rancor.

"It is good to note, too, that war has not changed Joe's character. He has gone on into war with the same attitude of fighting hard, without hate, for a principle."

Church Independent

The Evangelistic Temple is an independent church, founded by Rev. E. N. Richey and Reverend Gerhart, who is Mr. Richey's son-in-law. It is often erroneously referred to as a "Raymond T. Richey church," one member said, but is not to be so considered. Evangelist Raymond Richey, a son of the founder, helped to establish the Temple and in return was given headquarters there for the Richey Evangelistic association, which he heads. These offices are in the basement of the temple. The Raymond Richey party also holds frequent revivals at the temple.

"Dad" Richey, as Richey is known, is 82 and is the oldest active minister in Houston. Long ago he was pastor of the old West

End tabernacle, which he founded as an interdenominational independent church. Mr. Gerhart, then in secular work but devoting much of his time to religious work, was active in the church with Mr. Richey, and in 1921 became co-pastor. About 1924 the congregation of about 200 members voted to seek a downtown location.

New Building Erected

The congregation continued worship, at first in the old City Auditorium annex, then in a temporary tent at Capitol and Reisner. Later the church bought a lot at McKinney and Chenevert, and the foundations of a church were laid. But they sold the property and bought another site near what was then the Baptist, now the Memorial, hospital.

Objections on the part of the hospital to church services in the quiet hospital zone led the congregation to sell the site and buy the present ground. This was in the late '20s. A beautiful church was built, slowly, as funds permitted, worship being carried on in a part of the building as other parts were erected.

Twice the flood waters of Buffalo bayou, on whose banks the church stands, have damaged the church property and once a disastrous fire almost totally destroyed the church and caused the death of a faithful member, Mrs. Emma Rayburn. She was in the tower prayer room, praying for the success of a current revival.

The floods were in 1930 and 1935. On the latter date a party of 29 was marooned in the temple by high waters and were sent food by other members in boats. A dog shared the experience.

Say Prayer Answered

"I'll never forget that flood for two reasons," said Mrs. Bailey. "First, we had just completed the

beautiful altar, and everybody was afraid the water was going to ruin it, for the water was up in the auditorium and rising. I prayed most of the night, as did many others, that our altar be spared. Finally, about 3:30 a.m., I knew I had an answer to that prayer. I telephoned Brother Gerhart and told him they could rest easy, for the water would not go any farther.

He said, "Well, I have just drawn a pencil mark in front of the altar on the floor and asked God—thus far and no farther." I told him the water would not go farther.

"And, sure enough, the water reached that pencil mark and didn't go a fraction of an inch over it!"

Mrs. Bailey's other experience was the loss of her big pressure cooker in which she sent oatmeal to the stranded party, "We never knew what happened to it," she said.

Fire Sweeps Building

The great fire was on Feb. 3, 1932. It started from combustion of a floor preparation for the new building. In 20 minutes, the flames were shooting out of the third floor prayer room. This tower room—a unique feature of the church, where members went for silent prayer—was rebuilt in the new church that was soon erected, through "a miracle," members say, because it was financed by members, none of whom is wealthy.

The temple now is mainly of concrete, three stories high. It has 1100 members. The organization is divided into the adult church; the children's church for children from birth to 15 years, with a membership at present of 230; the adult Sunday school, and four leagues for young people known as the Aaron Hur league, the

Crusaders, the Gleaners and the Victors.

Since the war started the temple has held daily services from 10:30 to 11:30 a. .m., 365 days in the year in a "victory for our nation" movement. Leaders of the church at present are Reverend Richey and Reverend Gerhart, co-pastors; H. C. Meyer, director of service; C. L. Bailey, Director of membership; F. G. Archer, director of finance; and A. H. Smotherman, director of edification. Leaders in the women's work are Mrs. George Noyes, benevolence; Mrs. G. M. Rumel, Red Cross; Mrs. Vera Burrows, the Light Brigade; Mrs. C. L. Bailey, superintendent of the children's church and director of the Servicemen's club; and Mrs. A. W. Ilberry, servicemen's dinner chairman.