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CRUSADE DECISIONS: COUNTING AND ACCOUNTING FOR LOST SHEEP

HENRY J. SCHMIDT

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In the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15) Jesus conveys the Father's heartbeat for evangelism and for the reconciliation of people to Himself. The lost sheep parable is a reminder that counting the sheep is important because of the dual needs to "identify the found" and to "find the lost." Crusade evangelism has always been statistics conscious in reporting the number of public decisions. The emphasis on "counting decisions" and referring decision-makers to local congregations for further follow-up, nurture and assimilation has also made churches more aware of the strategic importance of counting and accounting for the lost sheep. However, in spite of agreement that "counting lost sheep" is both biblical and practical, questions persist about how crusade decisions are counted and what percentage of those counted actually become baptized, assimilated, functioning local church members.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the data gathered from a follow-up survey sent to pastors of Fresno area churches that participated in the September 21-26, 1986, Luis Palau Central California Crusade. In order to better understand the background and rationale for this analysis, four facts need to be underscored. First, this research was requested by the Luis Palau Central California Crusade. The writer has worked with Austin Morgan, chairman of the Follow-up Committee for the crusade and with Carl Lewis, crusade director for the Luis Palau Evangelistic Association (hereafter LPEA). As LPEA's North American director of crusades now, Lewis helped critique this article and provided updated information about

LPEA's current crusades ministries. The study represents an honest attempt to evaluate both "how" and "where" persons who made decisions were participating and functioning in specific Fresno area churches six months after the crusade. Although this study contains considerable data from the Central California Crusade Follow-up Committee, including other follow-up surveys, it deals primarily with the questionnaire this writer sent to Fresno area pastors. The questionnaire and the accompanying cover letter are reprinted in the Appendix.

Second, the writer is committed to crusades as one viable evangelism strategy. He was personally involved in the Central California Crusade as chairman of the Operation Andrew Committee, member of the Steering Committee, and as a participant in the counselor, nurture group and bridge-builder training. He has been an active participant in several Billy Graham and Bill Glass crusades. Beyond that, he has served as Crusade Director for Myron Augsburger in several major city evangelistic crusades. He has conducted numerous smaller community crusades and local church campaigns as an evangelist for the past twenty years. This experiential base brings more than a theoretical analysis to the subject of counting and accounting for lost sheep. He has personally wrestled with the perennial problem of getting crusade decisions translated into active committed church members and of assimilating new converts into local congregations.

Third, the purpose of this study is to strengthen the church's commitment to evangelism both through para-church and local church efforts. The gap must be bridged between crusade evangelism and local church outreach; between the work of "pastors/teachers/prophets" and "apostles/evangelists." The spiritually gifted leaders in the church must learn to function as allies complementarily and not as enemies in competition. The mission of the church is to reach people and to bring them to maturity in the context of a warm, nurturing family--the church of Jesus Christ. All spiritual resources and gifts must be mobilized in reaching the lost. The enemy is not other Christians with differing gifts, ministries, or perspectives, but the Prince of this World, who has blinded the minds of people to the truth.

Fourth, the writer assumes that careful evaluation and self-assessment is an important step in recapturing evangelistic vision and in refining evangelism strategies. The Church Growth Movement with its emphasis on assessing local church growth patterns (decadal growth rates, rapid growth, plateaus, decline), evaluating different kinds of growth (biological, transfer and conversion), and projecting growth plans (vision,

faith, and realistic planning) calls all Christian agencies to greater accountability in moving "from decision-making to disciple-making."

The primary question is, "How can the church more effectively evangelize?" But the secondary question is no less important, "What adjustments must be made both in crusade evangelistic strategies and in local church structures to increase and maximize the conversion, assimilation and mobilization of new believers?" The readjustment of strategies seldom happens without facing the hard data of rigorous self-assessment. The LPEA is to be commended for taking significant steps to restructure their strategies based in lessons learned from the Central California Crusade.

I. GATHERING THE DATA

A. THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO PASTORS

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was sent with an accompanying cover letter (see Appendix 2) in February, 1987, to 181 pastors of Fresno area churches that participated in the Central California Crusade. It was designed by Henry J. Schmidt in consultation with the Central California Crusade Follow-up Committee. Dr. Al Dueck, a research psychologist, and Phil Born, a first year seminary student, assisted in gathering and interpreting the statistical data. The questionnaire sought to measure the number and nature of referrals from the crusade; the participation of referrals in nurture groups, home Bible studies, baptism, regular attendance (initially and six months after); church membership and active ministry; the involvement of local church members in Operation Andrew, counselor, bridgebuilder, and nurture group training; the establishment of new nurture groups and evangelistic home study groups in local churches; and the pastor's response to perceived strengths and weaknesses of the crusade.

B. THE RESPONSE OF PASTORS

Of the initial 181 questionnaires, 51 were returned. A second mailing was sent to all pastors who had not responded by March 15, 1987, and whose churches had received 10 or more referrals from the crusade. This yielded another 9 questionnaires. This study is based on data from 60 churches (33.1% of total number surveyed) that participated in the crusade. These 60 churches represent a total of 15,142 church members; 22,157 church attenders, and 874 crusade referrals. The response represents a

cross section of churches; from small rural to urban superchurches; from strongly denominational to independent churches, and from traditional to newer, innovative congregations (see Table 2).

It is significant that pastors sometimes left blanks when asked to give a detailed breakdown of salvation, assurance, recommitment, and other referrals to their church. Pastors failed to specify 202 or 23% of all referrals. This suggests that some pastors lacked basic follow-up information.

It should be noted that this study is based on the assumption that the information submitted is fairly accurate. The writer is keenly aware of a negative bias on the part of some pastors when it comes to crusade statistics and referrals. The only way to establish the accuracy of the information reported on the 60 returned questionnaires would be a comparison with computer referral data compiled by the Follow-up Committee during the Central California Crusade.

C. A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF PASTORS RESPONSES

The statistics can be grouped into five major categories: referrals, local crusade participants, newly formed groups in churches, actual crusade results visible in the local church, and pastors' assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the crusade.

1. Crusade Referrals

a. **Table 1** - Referral Categories and Percentages

Type	Total Number	Percentage of Total
Salvation	285	33%
Assurance	98	11%
Recommitment	238	27%
Other	51	6%
Not Specified	<u>202</u>	<u>23%</u>
TOTAL REFERRALS	874	100%

b. **Table 2** - Church Membership and Four Size Categories

- I) Category 1: 60 members and below - 12 churches
 II) Category 2: 61 - 150 members - 15 churches
 III) Category 3: 151 - 300 members - 16 churches
 VI) Category 4: 351 members and above - 14 churches
 V) Membership not reported - 3 churches
 TOTAL CHURCHES -60

c. **Table 3** - Average Number of Referrals in Each Church Size Category

Church Size	1	2	3	4
Type of Referral				
Salvation	2.2	2.2	3.1	12.6
Assurance	2.1	0.8	1.2	2.3
Recommitment	0.4	1.5	2.8	10.1
Other	<u>0.8</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>0.5</u>	<u>1.6</u>
TOTAL REFERRALS	7.5	5.1	10.6	36.1

2. Local Church Participation in Crusade Training Options

a. **Table 4** - Local Lay Trainees and Crusade Categories

Type	Total No.	% of Total
Operation Andrew	946	34.9%
Nurture Group Leaders	230	8.5%
Bridgebuilders	483	17.0%
Counselors	<u>1073</u>	<u>39.6%</u>
TOTAL	2712	100%

b. **Table 5** - Comparison of Average Number of Lay Trainees, Crusade Categories, and Church Size.

Type of Lay Trainee Help	1	2	3	4
Operation Andrew	11.1	8.1	25.4	16.9
Nurture Group Leaders	3.4	3.5	2.9	5.4
Bridgebuilders	5.2	7.2	9.3	16.4
Counselors	7.9	8.7	16.9	11.0

3. Newly Formed Groups

a. **Table 6** - Newly Formed Nurture Groups and Post Nurture Evangelistic Home Bible Study Groups

Type of Group	No. of Churches	No. of Referrals	No. of Groups
Initial Nurture Groups	19	600	72
Post Ev. Home Study	4	39	6

b. **Table 7** - Comparison of Average Groups Formed Per Church in Each Size Category

Church Size	1	2	3	4
Initial Nurture Groups	0.6	0.1	0.6	3.7
Post Ev. Home Study	0.3	0	0.1	0

4. Net Crusade Results Reported in Local Churches

a. **Table 8** - Net Results of Total Referrals in Each Category

Type of Results	Total No.	Percentage of Referrals
Initial Attenders	108	12.4%
Present Attenders	65	7.4%
Baptized	13	1.5%
Joined Church	21	2.4%
Actively Involved	22	2.5%

b. **Table 9** - Comparison of Average Number of Referrals per Church According to Size Categories and Types of Results

Type of Result	Church Size			
	1	2	3	4
Initial Attenders	0.8	0.5	1.2	4.9
Present Attenders	0	0.5	1.0	2.9
Baptized	0	0	0.4	0.4
Joined Church	0.1	0	0.4	0.9
Actively Involved	0	0.5	0.4	0.6

5. Response of Pastors

a. **Table 10** - Perceived Strengths of the Crusade by Local Pastors

Strengths	No. of Times Mentioned
It provided good training for counselors	21
It brought churches together in a common effort	16
It exposed the city to the gospel	14
It brought unity to the church	11
It promoted good interaction among pastors	11
It prepared people for evangelism	10
It brought a good speaker to town	7
It was well organized	5
It gave an opportunity for service	4
It awoke motivation for evangelism	4
Luis Palau's TV exposure was good	4
It resulted in meetings outside the crusade	3
It was well advertised	3
Good counseling materials	3
Good public rallies	3
Good music	3
It resulted in new converts	2
The children's crusade was good	2

b. **Table 11** - Perceived Weaknesses of the Crusade by Pastors

Weaknesses	No. of Times Mentioned
Problems with follow-up (delay, inadequate or misinformation, mismatched referrals)	21
Bridgebuilding was too slow	6
Crusade was too far away from local churches	6
Lack of crusade awareness & promotion in churches	5
Luis Palau was not accessible enough to pastors	4

Time was not good because of fall church calendars	4
Types of decisions called for were unclear	4
Not enough emphasis on relational evangelism	4
Need to pay more attention to rural churches	3
Lack of honesty and accountability to churches	3
Lack of enthusiasm at the crusade meetings	3
Too much literature to pastors	2
"Altar call" counseling needs improvement	2
Scope of outreach was too narrow	2
It made no noticeable impact on the city	1

c. **Table 12** - Pastor's Response to Future Crusade Participation

Would Participate in a Future Crusade	Number	Percent of Total Responses
Yes	30	50.0%
No	5	8.3%
Uncertain	23	38.3%
No response	<u>2</u>	<u>3.4%</u>
TOTAL	60	100 %

II. INTERPRETING THE DATA

From data released by the Central California Crusade on October 1, 1986, the crusade attendance total was 55,656 with 2980 verifiable decisions (5.4% response). Only 2787 of the 2980 documented decisions contained enough information for follow-up referral to be accomplished. The breakdown of the 2980 decisions registered indicates: 1761 - salvation (59%); 576 - rededication (19.3%); 352 - assurance (11.8%); and 291 - unknown (9.8%). 1256 (42.1%) of the decision makers were male and 1680 (56.4%) were female. An age breakdown of those followed up (2787) reveals that: 40.4% were under 12; 18.9% 13-19; 11.7% 20-29; 8.6% 30-39; 5.3% 40-49; and 10.3% 50-90. 1355 (48.6%) of those making decisions were brought to the crusade by someone else, while the other 1432 (51.4%) gave no indication of attending with someone else.

When reporting on the Central Valley Crusade, however, the LPEA reported 3,345 public decisions for Christ.⁸ This is 365 more than documented by the follow-up committee, but LPEA in the same report notes that several hundred made Christian commitments at the crusade children's rally, but left before counselors (some of whom spoke to five children at a time) could meet with them. This situation was partly due to the unusually high number of children who made decisions for Christ, but the Palau Association acknowledged it could have better prepared counselors for the event.

The Palau Association also reported the findings of another Follow-up Committee survey with 30% of the adult inquirers six months after the crusade. According to this survey 73.1% of the inquirers who had been "unchurched" previous to the crusade were actively participating in local Fresno area churches, and overall, 89.9% of the adult inquirers were actively participating in local churches. These figures are similar to independent research data on adult inquirers from other Palau crusades. But the results of the Fresno adult inquirer's survey appears to completely contradict what Fresno pastors reported.

The discrepancy between the data collected from pastors, inquirers and the Palau organization illustrates the dilemma of "counting and accounting for lost sheep." This section will provide some interpretive and integrative analysis from the pastor/local church questionnaire, the inquirer survey, and several other independent surveys.

A. DO LOCAL CHURCHES KEEP ACCURATE RECORDS?

After analyzing the data compiled from the questionnaires returned by the 60 churches, it seems that they have a system of tracking membership, attendance, the number of crusade referrals and the involvement of local members in Operation Andrew, nurture groups, bridgebuilders and counselor training. Where record keeping is more problematic is in the categories of nurture group, post nurture evangelistic studies, initial attendance, present attendance, baptism, joining the church and active church involvement as these relate to the crusade referrals. How does one interpret the blanks? If one assumes that the blanks in the group life and church involvement categories mean "nothing to report," then the net

⁸Susan Holton and Randy Armstrong, "Fresno Crusade," Briefing: Luis Palau Evangelistic Team, Spring 1987, 10-12.

numerical impact of the crusade apparently was minimal. According to this interpretation, of the 874 crusade referrals pastors indicated that six months after the Palau meetings: only 12.6% initially attended church; 7.4% presently attend church; 1.5% were baptized; 2.4% joined the church and 2.5% were active in local congregations. If the data is accurate and the reporting complete, then the number of actual churches involved in implementing the crusade training into local church structures that accommodate new people is also very small; nurture groups - 19 churches; post nurture Bible studies - 4 churches; churches with initial attenders - 18; churches with present attenders - 10; baptisms - 5 churches; church membership - 6 churches; and active new participants - 7 churches.

Another option is to assume poor record keeping in local churches. However, since 60 pastors had enough interest in the study to take time to fill out the questionnaire and return it, this writer assumes that the blanks could mean "nothing to report."

Table 1 does show that pastors did have more difficulty in the designated categories, i.e. salvation, assurance, rededication, and other. Pastors did not specify what type of referrals their church had received 23% of the time. Additionally their percentages of referrals varied widely from the overall crusade statistics and the inquirer's (decision-makers) survey.

B. DO SUPERCHURCHES HAVE AN EDGE ON ASSIMILATING NEW PEOPLE?

The statistics in Tables 3-9 indicate that superchurches (category 4 - 351+ members) excelled in the number of crusade referrals, in the number of new groups formed, in the number of those new attenders and those who joined the church. While this may not be as significant regarding the effectiveness of the crusade itself, it is a commentary on the ability of larger churches to assimilate new people from the crusade. The strength of larger churches is their functional flexibility and ability to specialize ministries for new people. Because of a more massive people flow they tend to be geared more towards welcoming, including and enfolding new people. Churches in category 1 (membership below 60) also formed more nurture groups and evangelistic Bible studies than the middle two categories (61-150 and 151-350 members). Part of this may be due to survival concerns, feelings of inferiority, and the need for a broader base to build and expand the people, program and financial base in smaller

churches. New people are noticed, welcomed and recruited as part of the work force in the smaller church. The fact that small churches excelled in the number of evangelistic home study groups which were formed out of the initial nurture groups may also indicate that smaller churches find it easier to mobilize once new people have been assimilated.

Churches in category 2 (61-150 members), according to the survey, have the greatest difficulty organizing to include new people. This may be due to their awkward size. They have a large enough critical mass to maintain a program and find significant friends, but often are plagued with a single-cell mindset and with functional inflexibility. These churches function with the assumption that everyone is part of the family--both regular attenders and new comers. The problem with single cell churches is that newcomers are welcome, but not welcomed; they are part of the family, but they feel like they are attending someone else's family reunion; they are included in existing structures but they need new friends, bridgebuilders and classes to initiate them into a new value and social system.

C. HOW WERE LAY MEMBERS MOBILIZED AND TRAINED?

The pastors indicated that one of the greatest strengths of the crusade was the excellent training and mobilization of lay people in the church. Table 4 show that counselor training had the highest participation level by church members (39.6%), followed by Operation Andrew (34.9%), bridgebuilders (17%), and nurture group leaders (8.5%). Two observations are noteworthy as it relates to crusade evangelism and follow-up: 1) Church members seem eager for the training and experience of leading someone to a personal commitment to Christ. The benefits of this training are immeasurable in terms of facilitating evangelism in local churches long after the crusade. 2) Church members need more specific training in relational skills in dealing both with the unchurched and new converts. The percentage of church members involved in Operation Andrew and Bridgebuilding indicates that this part of the training needs to be strengthened if crusade evangelism is to build on the momentum of personal relationships. Since the Central California Crusade, the Palau Association has capitalized on these two facts by developing a new Operation Andrew (now called Partners in Evangelism) film and a new five-part Friendship Evangelism training course.

It is worth noting from Table 5 that churches in category 3 (151-350 members) had more people involved in Operation Andrew than any other

size category. This may reflect a higher level of evangelism awareness or may point to the great potential of training people in evangelism in these size churches.

D. DO STATISTICS TELL THE WHOLE STORY?

The Central California Crusade accomplished a number of good things. The most frequently mentioned strengths by pastors (Table 10) were the good training for counselors, the exposure of the city to the gospel, the heightened awareness of evangelism in the church, and the unifying impact among different people, groups, churches, and pastors. These are important benefits of the crusade which cannot be measured by statistical data or quantified results. Furthermore, according to the Follow-up Committee's survey, the 496 adult inquirers (decision makers) reportedly led another 208 people to faith in Christ through their personal witness.

Although the Palau Organization worked hard with Fresno area churches to prepare both for the event (September 21-28, 1986), and for the ongoing follow-up process, the main criticism of the crusade by pastors related to the follow-up system. Several factors contributed to the problem. One was the lack of clarity on deciphering decisions. Some people who had been active Christians and church members became referrals in the "salvation" category. A second factor was a computer malfunction which not only lost important data, but caused confusion in referrals and delays in the follow-up process.

According to Table 12, 50% of the pastors/churches surveyed indicated they would participate in a future crusade, 8.3% said they would not, and 38.3% were uncertain. The ambiguity of nearly half regarding future crusade participation should not be interpreted as a negative statement towards evangelism or the LPEA. It is probably more a question of mass evangelism strategy and its effectiveness in Western culture. Many pastors and churches invested vast amounts of time, energy, money, and people resources in the crusade with sometimes minimal visible results in terms of referrals, converts, baptisms, and members when it was over. One has to respect their honest questions about future participation in a crusade in view of the net results.

III. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CRUSADE AND LOCAL CHURCHES

The gaps between crusade evangelism and local churches, between decision making and follow-up, and between public commitments and local

church involvements provide a number of common agendas that need to be addressed by all concerned Christians.

A. THE REPORTING GAP: THE ISSUE OF ACCURACY AND INTEGRITY

Integrity, not performance, is the primary mark of God's people, be it in the local church or in a mission/evangelistic organization. Itinerant evangelists are frequently stereotyped for "over-stating, over-selling, and over-promising" good news. While Luis Palau's character, preaching, and commitment are above reproach, and his Evangelistic Association is a reputable, financially responsible organization, they have asked some tough questions about the Fresno crusade results.

One question some pastors raised was why LPEA reported 3,345 Christian commitments instead of 2,980. In part, the large response at the children's crusade accounts for this. However, the gap still has immediate implications for follow-up statistics and the assimilation process.

Another question is "What does 'registered public decisions for Jesus Christ' (stated in the LPEA crusade report) mean to the average person?" LPEA acknowledged after their Central California Crusade report was published that the word "registered" should not have been used, since it implies an inquirer has talked with a counselor and filled out a decision card (which was not the case for several hundred at the children's crusade). Still, what does "public decision for Jesus Christ" mean? It is accurate that all public decisions are in one sense "decisions for Christ," but what is understood by many readers, this writer believes, is "conversion decisions."

Additionally, the Crusade Follow-up committee findings as reported by the LPEA that 71.3% of the "churched" and 89.9% of the adult inquirers overall were active in Fresno area churches six months later raised further questions. These figures are at odds with what pastors actually reported, namely that 2.5% of the initial referrals to their churches were actively involved six months later. In actuality of the 60 Fresno churches surveyed pastors reported: 12.4% initial attenders; 7.4% present attenders; 1.4% baptisms; 2.4% joined the church and 2.5% are actively involved. One of the factors which makes the assimilation figure of 2.5% more believable to pastors is the set of follow-up statistics which Win Arn widely publicized

after Billy Graham's 1976 Seattle/Tacoma crusade.⁹ Several subsequent publications do present a different picture of crusade results.^{10 11}

The LPEA reports that in previous crusades a high percentage of inquirers were active in congregational life one year later may have raised expectations too high. Follow-up studies of MARC Europe and the British and Foreign Bible Society in London, for example, stated that almost 80% of those counseled during Palau's 1983-84 London crusade were actively involved in London area churches six months later. Such positive results raised the level of expectation among Fresno area pastors, who then probably monitored the visible response and new people flow to churches even more closely. If so, they probably were disappointed since pastors tend to generalize from their local crusade referrals (nature and number) in measuring the overall impact of a crusade.

B. THE COMMITMENT GAP: THE ISSUE OF UNDERSTANDING "COMMITMENT"

The issue in question here does not relate to necessity of personal commitment or the genuineness of those decisions made in response to the clear presentation of the gospel of Christ, but to how those commitments are understood. Luis Palau is a gifted evangelist and an articulate communicator. However, there was fuzziness on the part of decision makers regarding what commitment was really being asked for. There appears to have been more ambiguity on the nature of commitments in the specialized target group meetings than in the public crusade meetings. Based on this finding, Luis Palau and his team have carefully revised their invitation and counseling procedures. One entire lesson in their counselor training course now deals specifically with deciphering an inquirer's decision.

⁹Win C. Arn, ed., *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1979).

¹⁰Lewis A. Drummond, *The Impact of the Billy Graham Crusades: How Effective Are They?* (Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, 1982).

¹¹Glen Firebaugh, "How Effective Are City-Wide Crusades?", *Christianity Today*, March 1981, 24-29.

The comparative data (Table 13) from the crusade statistics, pastor's questionnaire and follow-up committee survey (of decision-makers, of unchurched decision-makers, and of counselors) further illustrates the diversity of understanding when it comes to commitment.

Table 13 - Comparative Analysis of Crusade Commitments From Five Sources.

Survey/Source	Total	Salvation	Assurance	Recommit	Unknown
Crusade Statistic	2980	1761(59%)	576(19.3%)	352(11.7%)	291(9.8%)
Pastor Survey	874	285(33%)	98(11%)	238(27%)	202(23%)
Decisn Makr Sur	496	88(17.7%)	48(9.7%)	291(58.7%)	69(13.9%)
Unchurched	130	41(31.5%)	12(9.2%)	65(50%)	12(9.2%)
Counselor Analysis	-	(55.2%)	(12%)	(32.6%)	0

What does the discrepancy in these different surveys tell us about how different people understand the meaning of commitment? Three observations seem pertinent. First, some of the statistics do not take into account that 40.4% of all crusade decision-makers were children under 13 years of age. Nearly 60% were nineteen years old or younger. The decision-makers survey, however, only collected data from adult inquirers. Pastors may or may not have included children when they reported on referrals to their church. Counselors, on the other hand, probably reported on all the people they counseled, young and old alike. Second, in attempting to understand the discrepancies regarding commitment, it would seem that the data from those who themselves make decisions must be weighted more heavily than data from other sources. This writer's impression is that the truth lies somewhere between the decision-makers' survey figures and the numbers reported in the pastor's questionnaire. Third, some of the discrepancy is rooted in lack of clear communication. It may have been due to lack of detailed instructions and understanding during the invitation. It could also be lodged with the counselors who were not sufficiently familiar with LPEA's "My Commitment" form. It is possible that some counselors worked on the assumption that those responding were making first time decisions without taking sufficient time to let inquirers articulate their own commitment. Another interpretation is that some counselors tend to be more skeptical of the genuineness of earlier decisions registered by counselees because of theological and vocabulary differences.

A related concern regarding the meaning of crusade commitments is a theology of child conversion. The large percentage (40.4% under 13)

of children's response raises a series of deeper questions about decision making and nurture. The issue is not whether children can, should, or need to make a decision for Christ, but the question is how does this happen with understanding, clarity, and sensitivity at their particular developmental stage. Just as evangelicals must exercise care in not hindering children from coming to Christ, so they must be equally discerning about hindering children's genuine conversion because of premature decisions based on curiosity, peer pressure and emotional appeal. If adults need individualized counseling to help them understand the nature of their decision, how much more is this true for children because of their stage in the developmental cycle? As a result, LPEA is working to develop new training course materials specifically designed for those who will counsel children during future Palau crusades.

Understanding and interpreting what it means to make a "commitment to Jesus Christ" is not limited to crusade evangelism. It is an important agenda in all local church ministries. In crusade evangelism, however, one must be particularly sensitive to the issue because if the statistical claims of crusade reports do not match the local experiential realities, both the credibility of the crusade organization and the validity of the decisions tend to be questioned.

C. THE COMMUNICATION GAP: THE ISSUE OF REACHING THE "UNCHURCHED"

If discrepancies in crusade decision categories are difficult to interpret, the agenda of understanding and reaching "the unchurched" is even more problematic in Western culture. This is so for a number of reasons. One, most North Americans have a church background, that is, they are loosely affiliated even though they may seldom or never attend. Church attendance in the United States has remained constant at 37-40 percent of the population during the last decade. The decision makers' survey indicates that 72% of the inquirers were church attenders prior to the crusade and of the 88 salvation decisions in that same survey, 53.4% claimed a church background.

Second, being religious and claiming a church affiliation is part of being a respectable, responsible American. Church affiliation, even without regular attendance, enhances social status and acceptance among politicians, business persons, entertainers and community leaders. This is perhaps best illustrated from the decision makers survey when 130 out of 496 decision makers said they had no church previous to the crusade.

However, when the same 130 "unchurched" people filled out the decision card at the crusade, 111 named a specific church where they had a church background.

Third, crusades and religious events tend to tap into the residual of nominally churchd persons more than they do the totally pagan unchurched. The crusade statistics from Appendix 4 state that of 2787 inquirers, 2026 (72.7%) had a church background, while 761 (27.3%) indicated no church affiliation. All data drawn from this survey in analyzing the various categories indicated the crusade audience was "churchd": 53.4% of those making salvation decisions had some sort of church background, as had 77.3% of those making rededication decisions, and 75% of those making assurance decisions and 71% of those in the "unknown" category.

The issue at stake is the increased paganization and pluralization of Western culture, including the church. The implications for crusade evangelism in Western culture are far reaching. One is that the role of crusade evangelism will probably be more effective in revitalizing the church than in reaching the lost in a mass context. Both agendas are important and are not mutually exclusive. However, given schedules and cultural pressures, crusades will appeal more to the religiously inclined and church-oriented. Crusades can still have an important function in revitalizing the church and in capturing a clearly focused commitment from masses of marginally churchd people. Because the crusade style is more informational oriented and monological, it will not be as effective in reaching the thinking, religiously pluralistic pagan.

Furthermore, the large number of crusade inquirers with some kind of church background also impacts the statistics regarding assimilation and retention in the local church. Even if a large percentage of decision-makers can be found in local churches six months after the crusade, these questions must be asked: "How many of them considered themselves a part of church prior to the crusade, even if they seldom attended?" and "How many were at least partially already socialized into the church system, even though they still need to be converted?" The crusade can be strategic in helping church oriented people find a personal relationship with Christ. However, in terms of assimilation it will be easier for them to transition into the church because they have some connection and familiarity with the church's social system. While one rejoices over every converted and assimilated person, it should be noted that crusades are reaching and retaining largely church oriented people rather than the pagan unchurched. In Western culture, the "churchd" and "unchurched"

categories are confusing and raise questions about what crusade follow-up statistics really mean.

D. THE EVANGELISM EFFECTIVENESS GAP: THE ISSUE OF CONSERVING RESULTS

It is clear that crusade evangelism in North America has changed significantly over the past 25 years.¹² With the exception of Billy Graham crusades, they no longer capture people's attention (crowds) and the support (churches) as they did in an earlier era in North America. This does not invalidate their legitimacy or necessity, but it does call for some revamping and retooling for greater effectiveness. It calls for a closer marriage between crusade strategies and church growth principles. The Palau organization is aware of this need and has a strong commitment to build the local church. They have captured the importance of group life as a key to transitioning new converts into the church. The pre-crusade training for bridgebuilders, counselors and nurture group leaders was most helpful for local churches. The monthly pastors' breakfast was also a step in the right direction, but it was not adequately coordinated topically, nor did it significantly impact local church structures.

Since the Central California Crusade, LPEA has redesigned their monthly pastors' meetings. During those meetings, pastors now learn how to implement LPEA's new six-phase crusade approach (Partners in Evangelism, mobilization, Friendship Evangelism training, Counselor and Bridgebuilder training, Nurture Group Leader training, Crusade meetings, the Follow-up and Ongoing Evangelism) to their local church setting. Furthermore, LPEA is working with Eddie Gibbs and C. Peter Wagner to develop seminars which integrate church growth principles together with the six-phase crusade approach.

The gaps between crusades and local churches, between decisions and active church involvement, can be bridged by more thorough application of church growth principle in the preparation process. Sinners need to be saved--but so does the church. The church must be saved from its tendency to become institutionalized, self-serving, and maintenance oriented. It must be revitalized in vision, structure, and

¹²Luis Palau, "Crusade Evangelism Today: An Interview with Luis Palau," *Moody Monthly*, April 1987, 14-18.

mobility to its mission in a lost world. If the evidence from church growth research is accurate that churches grow most rapidly the first 8-10 years and then plateau (seldom with a membership larger than at the 10 year stage), then there is the need for revitalization in an ongoing agenda. Howard Snyder aptly notes that if church renewal is to last, it must be personal and corporate to be genuine; ideological and structural to be ongoing; and have a clear missional focus if it is to be long lasting.¹³ The greatest need in the church is a thorough spiritual renewal that changes mind sets and structures. If the harvest of crusade evangelism is to be folded into the church, then the preparation must include the practical tools and skills of local church assessment, developing a healthy growth theology, expanding existing structures and implementing change. Pastors and churches will support crusade evangelism if they are convinced that it builds the local body, it is of mutual benefit, and it is part of an ongoing rather than "event only" evangelism strategy. The gap between crusades and local churches will not be bridged by defensiveness, finger pointing or the quoting of selective statistical evidence, but by working cooperatively and collaboratively on God's evangelistic agenda. Every evangelistic agency has struggled with follow-up and with the plight of the institutional church. The question is whether para-church evangelistic agencies will make the adjustment and accept responsibility for also working at change in the church. Crusade preparation must include just as thorough training for local church leaders on church growth principles as it gives to individuals for bridgebuilding, counseling and nurture group leading. The preparation and implementation must also provide Bible training and evangelistic mobilization of the new converts beyond the nurture group meetings. There must be a comprehensive plan of evangelism, nurture, training and mobilization.¹⁴ With this modification, crusades could not only have a more deeply unifying effect, but they would build trust, conserve the results, and more importantly, diminish the discrepancies in how churches and crusade agencies "count and account for lost sheep."

¹³Howard Snyder, "Renewal That Lasts," *Leadership*, Summer Quarter 1984, 90-93.

¹⁴Miguel Angel Palomino, "Lima Al Encuentro Con Dios: A New Kind of Urban Missiology," (Nyack: Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1983).

CONCLUSION

The Central California Crusade held in Fresno, September 21-26, 1986, with Luis Palau accomplished some good things for the Kingdom. It heightened awareness of the gospel and its proclamation; it brought unity to the Christian community in the valley, and it reached people for Christ. While the statistical data from the pastor/local church questionnaire points out areas where improvements could be made, it also raises several important questions. The discrepancies between what pastors and others reported suggest important new areas for future Church Growth study. The Luis Palau organization is to be commended for its willingness to examine the results of this follow-up study, make needed improvements, and endeavor to better "count and account for lost sheep."