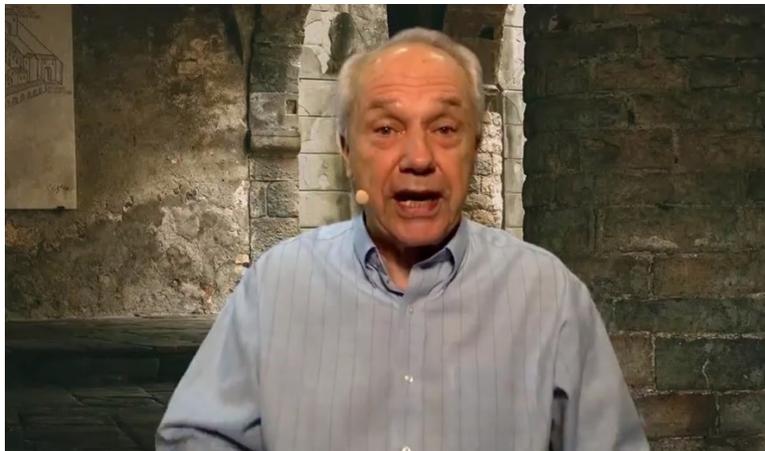


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SBC Evangelists' Easter livestream nears 400,000 views

by David Roach/Southern Baptist TEXAN, posted Wednesday, April 15, 2020 (12 days ago)

SAN ANTONIO (BP) -- When COVID-19 shut down the church and conference venues at which evangelists traditionally conduct their ministries, that didn't slow the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists (COSBE). Over Easter weekend, the group held its largest evangelistic event ever -- online.



Sammy Tippit (left), president of the Conference of Southern Baptists Evangelists, hosted "Covered by the Cross," a Facebook Live evangelistic event featuring music, testimonies and several Gospel presentations.

Screen capture from Facebook

Covered by the Cross, an hour-long Facebook Live event April 9, garnered nearly 400,000 views Easter weekend across several evangelism-focused Facebook pages. Nearly 90,000 viewers watched it from beginning to end, and reports of decisions for Christ have begun to emerge. The program featured singing, Gospel presentations and testimonies -- including the story of an evangelist who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

"It was a historic moment for COSBE," said the group's president Sammy Tippit, a San Antonio evangelist. "I don't think that the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists has ever hosted an event with 90,000 people who attended from beginning to end."

In addition to the livestream's U.S. success, a Pakistani television network translated the program into Urdu and broadcast it three times on Easter Sunday. The network's call center "could not handle all the calls coming in from people wanting to be saved every time the program was shown," Tippit said.

The success of Southern Baptist evangelists' online outreach came amid an overall spike in internet evangelism. Three of the largest online evangelism ministries -- Global Media Outreach, Cru and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association -- told Christianity Today their volume of internet Gospel presentations has increased since the coronavirus was declared a pandemic.

Global Media Outreach reported a 170 percent increase from mid-March to late March in clicks on search engine ads about finding hope. Cru has added 52 coronavirus resources to one of its most popular evangelistic websites and is on pace in 2020 to eclipse last year's total online decisions for Christ by more than 300,000. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association saw 173,000 visitors to coronavirus-focused landing pages the first four weeks they were online.

Southern Baptist evangelists are seeking to determine whether the surge of internet witness can be sustained.

Among highlights of Covered by the Cross, Louisiana music evangelist Price Harris, 78, shared his testimony of not being afraid despite a COVID-19 diagnosis. Feeling "a little feverish," he went to the doctor, then learned on Palm Sunday he had the coronavirus. Harris' lack of fear is rooted in "the peace of God," he said. There are times in a believer's life "when God just seems to take over, and that's the way it's been with us."

Keith Fordham, a Georgia evangelist and former COSBE president, told about his cancer diagnosis and how an initial surgery was not able to clear the malignancy. Consequently, he likely will have a second surgery April 16, approximately the same time some models predict Georgia hospitals will be grappling with a peak in coronavirus deaths.

"I know if God wants to cure me, He can cure me," Fordham said. "If He wants me home, He'll take me home. I'm ready either way because the Lord Jesus indwells me."

The livestream included four segments, each with a testimony and a Gospel presentation.

"You may be wondering what's going on in the world with this pandemic," Tippit said in the program's closing Gospel presentation, while encouraging viewers to "trust the heart of God."

"He loves you," Tippit said, "but you've got to be willing to let go of trying to do it yourself."

Tippit has been exploring various avenues of online evangelism the past four years, including preaching evangelistic meetings in India via Skype and launching a campaign next month through the messaging application WhatsApp that is expected to deliver Gospel presentations to 10 million people in 70 countries. Now Tippit is encouraging his fellow evangelists to consider similar ventures as COVID-19 limits their traditional ministry opportunities.

As its next online venture, COSBE is considering an apologetics-themed internet broadcast in June to coincide with the dates the Southern Baptist Convention was scheduled to meet. Last month, leaders canceled the annual meeting due to coronavirus concerns.

The Easter livestream, Tippit said, "was a great start" to COSBE's online ministry.

David Roach is a freelance writer in Nashville.