



Gazette photo by WILLIAM TIERNAN

Rehearsing for his three-day crusade at the Civic Center is the Rev. Jimmy Swaggart.

Leading television evangelist received the calling at age 8

By Edward Fox
STAFF WRITER

The Rev. Jimmy Swaggart started preaching full-time 26 years ago, when he was 21. "The Lord saved me when I was a child 8 years old. It was then that I felt called to preach. I didn't see any flashing lights or angels, but I saw it in my heart," he said.

He started preaching in small churches in Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas. His ministry grew from small churches to big churches, and from auditoriums to stadiums.

Recent TV ratings show that Jimmy Swaggart is now the No. 1 TV evangelist in the country, surpassing Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Rex Humbard and Jerry Falwell.

"The aim of the crusades is to get people saved. That's my never-dying purpose," Swaggart said Friday in an interview between rehearsals with his 11-piece band at the Civic Center Coliseum.

Swaggart's Charleston crusade, which continues tonight and concludes Sunday, follows crusades in New York and Chicago. He appeared before a crowd of 21,000 at New York's Madison Square Garden September 24-26, when 5,000 were turned away at the door.

"I have never preached to an audience as alive and responsive. It was the most exciting crusade I have ever preached," he said.

One thousand souls have been saved at a Swaggart crusade, said crusade coordinator Gerald Ogg, but Swaggart himself does not keep count. "Man looketh on outward appearance," Swaggart said, "but God looks at the heart. We hope it's a lot."

Swaggart travels with a 50-member entourage, which includes his son Donnie, who heads crusade development, his wife, other relatives and often

(Please turn to Page 12A, col. 3)

from page one

TV preacher discusses famous cousins

his three small grandchildren.

Five tractor-trailers carry the crusade's sound system, lighting rig, TV cameras, musical instruments and the plants which decorate the stage. Even Swaggart's own grand piano, which occupies center stage, travels with him from city to city.

He tours from January to November and covers between 250,000 and 500,000 miles a year.

Swaggart and his two celebrated cousins, country singer Mickey Gilley and rock 'n' roll legend Jerry Lee Lewis, all play the piano the same way. No one taught them their distinctive pounding piano style.

"It's in the blood. We didn't sit down and read music or listen to records, it just came naturally. Of course, I moderated mine for church. Jerry Lee didn't moderate his and he got thrown out of church.

"Music has always been an integral part of gospel crusades. When Dwight L. Moody held crusades 100 years ago, he had a music

leader. In Billy Sunday's crusades, music played an important part. It's something you're born with.

"I'm prejudiced of course, but I think Jerry Lee in his own field is probably one of the greatest talents who ever lived. He wasted most of it in excesses which hindered him greatly. But at one time he probably had the fastest hands in the world on the piano.

"Mickey is a lot more steady than Jerry Lee. He's a very accomplished musician, but he's not in the same league as Jerry Lee and he would say that too. He doesn't have the tremendous forces tearing apart that Jerry Lee has."

Over the years Swaggart has tried many times to reform his wayward cousin, known in rock 'n' roll mythology as The Killer. "Jerry Lee has probably the most tender heart in the world, but he's his own worst enemy. A couple of years ago, his wife called me several times and said he was in a dreadful state."

One night he learned he was in

the same town as his cousin. "I went on stage, and when I found out he was there I stopped the show. I put him on a plane and took him home to Baton Rouge and tried to get him off drugs. I think he's doing better now. I think an awful lot of him and hope with all my heart that he'll make it."

Swaggart Ministries, based in Baton Rouge, La., employs 300 people and has offices in Brazil, Australia, South Africa, the Philippines and Canada. This year, he said, it will spend \$55 million on its combined ministerial operations.

The entire Swaggart operation costs a quarter of a million dollars a day to run. "Most of it goes on TV time," Swaggart said. His two TV shows are shown on about 350 stations in the United States and 300 overseas, many dubbed into foreign languages.

The missionary arm of the Swaggart organization is involved with projects in Africa, India and Latin America. Schools are being constructed in El Salvador and Honduras, and 50 are being con-

structed now in Haiti. He says 50,000 children worldwide are schooled or fed or both by his missionary work.

After every "message," or service, Swaggart invites those who had a religious experience during the event to gather in a room where their names and addresses are taken by ushers.

The names are given to pastors of local churches. The "new babes in Christ" are mostly directed to Assemblies of God, but also to Church of God, Pentecostal Holiness and Four Square churches. The Swaggart organization continues to send them literature "to help them in their new walk with the Lord."

Swaggart is pastor of his own church in Louisiana, the Family Worship Center in Baton Rouge, where he preaches on Sundays when he is not on the road.