



An early Sunday school class at The Gospel Tabernacle, New York City, N.Y.

The church founded by A. B. Simpson in 1881 soon became a model of vital congregational life. The Gospel Tabernacle, as it was named, differed most from conventional churches in its unconventional evangelistic activities. The members and adherents preached in open-air meetings, visited jails and hospitals to preach the gospel, evangelized the dock workers in New York's harbor, and ministered in the Bowery to the down and out. Wherever an open door could be found, those zealous believers entered it in the name of Christ.

Format for Ministry

While retaining orderly worship, the observance of water baptism and Communion, regular preaching and teaching, this first Alliance church seemed to the observers of that day inordinately innovative in its



outreach ministry. In reality, Simpson and his fellow-workers were rediscovering some apostolic patterns of church life. They were not afraid to forsake the dead traditionalism of the established Protestant churches so long as the innovations were Scriptural.

One cannot read the account of the early years of The Gospel Tabernacle without sensing the excitement that prevailed there and without desiring to be a part of that same kind of healthy, dynamic church life. The fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit enjoyed at the Tabernacle was not retained within the four walls of their church. The blessings of God overflowed and like streams of living water touched every part of the New York metropolitan area. A.W. Tozer wrote of the Tabernacle, *"It was as if a burning core of power had been tossed into the center of New York, radiating heat and light in all directions!"* Both millionaires and gutter bums were reached by the spiritual energy of this congregation. The many ethnic communities heard the gospel. Orphans, fallen women, criminals and the outcast experienced the love of Christ as the kind hands of Tabernacle members ministered to their needs and told them of the Savior.

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All the sophisticated methods of urban ministry that have developed in the last decade were at work in The Gospel Tabernacle a century ago. With Simpson and his flock, outreach was not a matter of methods, but of walking in the Spirit.

The story of the Tabernacle is incomplete without remembering their burning desire to evangelize the world. The proportion of giving to missions, the intercession for the nations, the recruitment of missionaries, the colorful methods of educating the congregation in world missions made it utterly unique in the church world. In apostolic fashion they understood the local church to be the wellspring of world evangelism.

Alliance churches one century later can find no better format for ministry than that of the spontaneous, Spirit-led church that helped to give birth to our movement.