

HERITAGE USA RESURRECTED, AGAIN

The South Carolina resort facility that led to the eventual ruin of televangelist Jim Bakker has again been revived, this time by his good friend, Rick Joyner. Joyner's MorningStar Fellowship Church purchased 52 prime acres of the 2,200-acre property last fall for a reported \$1.6 million. MorningStar's parcel includes the 510-room Grand Hotel, an unfinished 21-story condominium tower, a restaurant, and parking lots.

Prior to MorningStar's acquisition and restoration, the complex had laid dormant for seven years: its buildings in disrepair with peeling paint, cracked sidewalks, and weeds growing throughout the exterior and parking lots. Almost immediately, 250 workers — many of whom were volunteers from Joyner's church — began the process of cleaning and making repairs. Initially, complete restoration was expected to take two years at a cost of between \$4 and \$5 million. More recent figures reduce the cost to between \$3 and \$4 million and cut the time of completion in half. According to Joyner, because of its hazardous condition, the condominium tower will be demolished. York County officials have given Joyner two years to tear down the tower.

Earl Coulston, who sold the tract to Joyner's ministry, also plans to develop single- and multi-family residences and townhouses on another 900 acres of the property.

The facility was renamed Heritage International Ministry and has become the headquarters for Joyner's organization. In addition to holding its regular worship services there, MorningStar also plans to use the campus for conferences and retreats, and hopes to establish a ministry training college.

On Dec. 5, the 2,000-member church dedicated the new location during a Sunday morning worship service in a temporary assembly hall located in the lobby of the former Grand Hotel. Following nearly an hour of music, Joyner addressed the congregation for more than an hour, saying he's committed to learning from Jim Bakker's mistakes.

Bakker's dream for Heritage USA as a Christian resort met its demise amid a sex and money scandal in the 1980s. Construction of the original Heritage structures was paid for by donations of at least \$1000 acquired by Bakker in exchange for the promise of lodging. However, Bakker allowed the number of donors to far exceed the recreational facility's lodging capacity. In 1989, he was convicted of defrauding 116,000 followers and was

originally sentenced to 45 years in prison. While serving jail time for his scheme, Bakker's wife Tammy divorced him. He was released from prison in 1994, remarried, and later connected with Joyner. MorningStar Ministries donated to Bakker a 17,000-square-foot log lodge in Charlotte. Bakker has since resurrected his own television ministry and is now headquartered in Branson, Mo.

—MKG

CONTROVERSY BESETS HINN IN INDIA

Faith healer Benny Hinn, whose miracle crusades continue to spark controversy, found his Jan. 21-23 meetings in Bangalore, India, igniting violent protests. Opposition to Hinn's assembly came from a variety of directions, including government and religious leaders.

Two days before Hinn began his three-day "Festival of Prayer for India," a dozen Swamijis staged a protest against Hinn and his prayer meetings. The group insisted the government withdraw its consent for Hinn to lead his series of meetings, claiming "Hinn was a hoax and his claims were false and misleading." However, not all of the antagonism toward Hinn came from Hindus. According to one government leader, "Even Christians have expressed displeasure over Hinn's meeting." Several petitions by various groups petitioning the Karnataka High Court to cancel Hinn's meetings were rejected by the court.

Hinn normally calls his assemblies "Miracle Crusades," but strict Indian legislation may be the reason he called these a "Pray for India" program. According to India's Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act of 1954, police can arrest anyone suspected of deceptive healing. A later ruling stipulated, "anyone advertising or carrying pamphlets or any related literature which claim that diseases can be cured by mere touch, hug or by chanting mantras is an offence and any violator can be jailed for six-months and later if found practising again, another one-year jail term."

Prior to Hinn's meetings, another self-styled healing guru appeared in Bangalore claiming divine power to cure ailments with his healing powers. Aslam Baba was arrested and jailed after gullible followers invested personal fortunes to receive healings. Baba's recent demise may have well been in the minds of the public as rumors and theories of a possible Hinn undoing were

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circulated before the faith healer even set foot on Indian turf.

Tension before Hinn's meetings also escalated when, on Jan. 18, police arrested a team of missionaries from Kanyakumari whom they identified as "Benny Hinn agents." Police cited the group for creating a riot and assaulting local youths in efforts to proselytize. A judge remanded them to judicial custody until Feb. 2, according to a *Star of Mysore* news report. Kanyakumari is located at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, about 300 miles directly south of Bangalore.

The day before the meetings began, Hinn and his entourage arrived at the Bangalore Airport in his private jet. Two full floors in the Leela Palace hotel where Hinn stayed were kept vacant for security reasons. Additionally, the city deployed 10,000 police during the days of the meetings.

As the "prayer meetings" were set to begin, violent protests broke out in the city. An article in *The Times of India* reported "widespread arson and stone-pelting across the city which left several persons injured." The report also stated that "angry mobs forcibly shut down shops and blocked traffic" and that over 110 buses and many private vehicles were damaged. One city bus was stopped by a mob, its passengers forced to get off, and the vehicle was then set on fire. Other buses parked in the terminal were also set on fire. At least 100 people were arrested in the fracas.

Despite the event's name change, on stage it was the same old Benny Hinn show. The musical prelude, the divine messages, and the bogus claims of healing were all part of the program. According to the *Star of Mysore*, "Benny Hinn is reported to start his show while the people in the large gathering were made to experience increased heart-beats due to loud music blaring through the speakers. He makes dramatic declaration saying, 'Christ has come. He is entering your body. You now have acquired a rare kind of strength.'"

When Karnataka Chief Minister Dharam Singh appeared at the meeting, Hinn singled him out and summoned him onto the platform. Once on stage, Hinn embraced the Chief Minister saying, "In your presence, I too feel that I am an Indian." Hinn then proceeded to prophesy over Singh, claiming that he is going to "experience a big change shortly." According to the *Mysore* newspaper, as Hinn spotlighted the official, "Dharam Singh seemed slightly taken aback as he reluctantly climbed on to the dais [raised platform]."

When it came time for the miraculous, there were many "who publicly announced that their illnesses were cured by the grace of Christ in the prayer meeting." However, an investigation by a fact-finding committee revealed that the only ones making professions were

Hinn's volunteers. "The volunteers who had mingled with the people in the large gathering to take part in the prayer meeting rushed to the raised dais soon after Benny Hinn's show started and also openly declared that they were suffering from specific illnesses which were cured by him, the Committee revealed," according to a further report in the *Star of Mysore*.

The report also emphasized, "The Committee members also found out that the volunteers, who could be seen everywhere among the large audience, were none other than the volunteers of the evangelist keeping company with him after dusk."

Other news sources in India questioned Hinn's claim of divine healing powers. The *Deccan Sunday Herald* reminded readers of a 2001 HBO special:

"One of Benny Hinn's miracles is worth recalling, as it involves an Indian family. The Prakash family converted to Christianity so that Benny Hinn could heal their son who was dying of a brain tumor. ... Benny prayed and assured the family of a miracle. Prakash felt that God was speaking to him during the service, and immediately pledged \$2,000 to the miracle man. The boy was dead seven weeks later."

The secular media appear to exercise a greater level of discernment regarding Hinn and a better biblical understanding than do many who claim Christianity. One Indian news report, drawing attention to Hinn and his meetings in Bangalore, warned, "Therefore, discernment is of utmost importance. Present day healing mass melas do not resemble healing as recorded in the Bible. While in the Old Testament there were only a few episodes of healing, in the New Testament, the miracles of Jesus were to the whole man. It was not just a physical healing, but a moral renewal and a call for total commitment of faith. Many times Jesus said, 'Tell no one,' because he knew people would follow him with wrong motives."

—MKG

BROOKLYN WATCHTOWER EXPANSION PLANNED

Brooklyn residents found themselves in what appears to be another losing battle with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Late last year, a Brooklyn City Council's zoning subcommittee approved the religious organization's plan to develop a three-acre waterfront parcel into a virtual residential nucleus. Two weeks later, the City Council approved zoning changes thereby allowing the Watchtower to clear its last major hurdle to begin the project.

For years, residents in what is known as the DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) neighborhood have fought in vain to stifle the incursion of the Watchtower's high-rise structures which, they say, de-