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## Mission planning announced

*By Carla Hinton  
The Oklahoman*

Oklahoma City leaders entered into a faith partnership with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association on Tuesday, uniting in prayer and commitment for a local mission with the Rev. Billy Graham in June.

"It's a uniting purpose," said Cliff Barrows, the evangelistic association's program director and Graham's longtime friend. "We come to present the message of Jesus Christ.

"We are looking forward to it with excitement and anticipation as if it were the very first time, but with an added urgency and perspective that it may be the last," he said.

Barrows formally announced mission plans during a program at the Cox Convention Center, with Gov. Brad Henry and Oklahoma civic and clergy leaders in attendance.

Barrows challenged Oklahoma City to stand in readiness for a move of God and to pray for Graham's strength in the months leading to the mission. Graham, who has Parkinson's disease, has scaled back his speaking engagements.

Barrows said Graham, 84, asked him to give Oklahoma City his love and "tell them that I feel better than I've ever felt in years.

"I said, 'Are you up to it?' He said, 'By the grace of God, I am.'"

The mission will be June 12-15 — Father's Day weekend — at the Ford Center. Mayor Kirk Humphreys, chairman of the mission's executive committee, said the Cox Center will be used for overflow seating.

If the downtown facilities swell overwhelmingly with crowds during the first portion of the event, it could be concluded at the Gaylord Family — Oklahoma Memorial Stadium on the University of Oklahoma's Norman campus, Humphreys said. The mayor said he would like to see 100,000 to 120,000 people attend the four nights of the mission.

The mission budget, estimated at between \$1.5 million and \$2 million by Larry Ross, director of media relations for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, was boosted Tuesday with a \$100,000 seed gift from the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex Mission.

Jim Nichols of Fort Worth, Texas, said the Metroplex Mission was blessed with excess funding. Leaders wanted that money to go to the Oklahoma City mission. The Metroplex Mission, held in October, set a new stadium attendance record of 83,500 for Texas Stadium in Irving.

"The thought occurred to me, even though we are rivals on the football field, there is no rivalry when it comes to the work of the Lord," Nichols said.

Humphreys and Susan McCalmont, mission executive committee secretary, said the timing is right for a mission in Oklahoma City.

McCalmont said she joined Humphreys and 17 other civic and clergy leaders 17 months ago to discuss a possible mission and invite Graham.

"Could this be the right time in our city's history for a powerful move of God?" McCalmont told those gathered Tuesday. "Is the timing right for spiritual renewal in Oklahoma City and the state? ... The answer is yes."

Humphreys said he would like the mission to help families who "need a touch from God."

Barrows said churches, pastors, congregations and the evangelistic association will team up to hold the mission. More than 15,000 volunteers from 500 churches representing 40 denominations across the metro area are expected to help prepare for the mission.

Mission leaders said the fact that Oklahoma City has emerged united after tragedies such as the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building shows a steadfastness that can help in the months-long mission preparation process.

Graham's mission in June will mark his first return to Oklahoma City since his visit in 1995, when he helped lead the "Time of Healing" prayer service conducted after the bombing.

Information seminars will begin Monday and continue through Feb. 1. The meetings Â for pastors, their key lay leaders and others who want to be involved Â will outline mission ministries and opportunities.

Oklahoma Executive Mission Committee members, along with Humphreys and McCalmont, include: vice chairmen, John Benefiel, director of the Oklahoma Concert of Prayer and pastor of Church on the Rock; Marty Grubbs, pastor of Crossings Community Church; Major Jemison, pastor of St. John's Missionary Baptist Church and president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and Anthony Jordan, executive director- treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

Also: treasurer, David Rainbolt; finance chairman, Ed Martin; and members-at-large, Patrick Bright, Barbara Green, Mike Hayes, Mark Henderson, Kevin Jacobs, Kirk Jewell, Mel McCullough, Tom McDaniel, Doug Melton, John Reid and Jay Swallow.

This will be Graham's third mission in Oklahoma City. The previous two were June 3-July 1, 1956, and Oct. 23-30, 1983. Graham will hold a mission on Mother's Day weekend in San Diego.

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