



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Refreshing Politician

The other night I drove up to Cocoa to sit at the head table and introduce Mayor Hans Tanzler at a dinner meeting of the Full Gospel Businessmen. Although the mayor is an announced candidate for governor, he admits he hasn't done as much politicking as he should. He's been spending most of his speech-making time traveling around the nation talking in churches and to groups of Christian businessmen.

Getting elected doesn't seem to be the driving, compelling force that dominates the lives of most men running for public office. Very few seriously doubt Tanzler's ability. All you have to do is take a look at the changes which have taken place in the City of Jacksonville and you get an idea of his leadership capability. But the mayor seems to be far more interested in telling people about his dramatic conversion experience, and how it has transformed his life, than he is in garnering votes.

The switch is downright refreshing.

After the meeting I heard a

skeptic grumbling about politicians who show up at church during the campaign, but never darken the door the rest of the time. Well, there's a lot of that breed around also. But the mayor isn't one of them. He began his "stumping for Christ" more than three years ago — long before he thought of announcing for governor.

In talking about his BC life Tanzler had some interesting comments to make on the church — from an average layman's perspective. He described himself in his earlier days as a "secret service Christian," saying he never let anyone know he was a believer until he knew it was safe. I guess he's the kind of fellow who wore his little fish pin on the inside of his lapel, rather than out in the open. He said he only went to church when it was convenient. If the sun was shining he headed to the beach, football game, lake or hunting lodge. Only if it was raining, and he couldn't do anything outside, would he consider going to church.

Now he travels all over the state to speak in churches — and even though it may be offensive to some, he flashes his badge every place he goes.

Tanzler said one of the things which turned him away from the church was the lack of joy. "Why, I've been to some funerals which were more joyful than the church I grew up in," he said.

I looked around the restaurant and a lot of folks were nodding their heads in agreement.

But things are changing. Now it's not unusual to hear people testify that church-going isn't half bad any more. In fact, there are a lot of churches where people actually smile. And if you look hard enough, you'll find places where they applaud the choir and shout "Amen!" at the preacher.

There are all kinds of explanations for this new enthusiasm in the churches, but the one I like best is that there are a lot of folks coming along who, like the mayor, don't know any better than to say things like, "By golly, Jesus is a darn nice guy!"