

## Times Square/New York City outreach: success and more

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What began as an unprecedented opportunity for the Assemblies of God to offer God's hope and prayer to literally millions of people on Times Square in Manhattan, concluded this past Sunday with organizers' expectations being far exceeded.

During the November 13-26 outreach, hundreds of 15-second video messages appeared on the News Astrovision electronic billboard (formerly the NBC Jumbotron). The spots focused on addiction, terminal illness and marital conflict that concluded with the tagline, "Life is never hopeless, call 1-800-4-Prayer" (the number for the AG National Prayer Center) and the [www.GodGivesHope.org](http://www.GodGivesHope.org) Web site link.

The eye-catching message was backed by hundreds of volunteers on Times Square and in the boroughs of New York City, in the Times Square Church prayer room, by more than 200 Satellite Prayer Centers and through the personal and corporate prayers of individuals and churches across America.

Over and over again, prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit have been cited as the reasons for the incredible acceptance and success of the event.

"Prayer was a priority," says Peter Tembo, assistant pastor at Englewood (New Jersey) Assembly of God. "It was a great covering . . . and people responded in a miraculous way."

Tembo says that the anointing of the Holy Spirit was evident throughout the event as volunteers, who began with some fear, found the presence of God with them. They were able to speak boldly to people and freely distribute God Gives Hope literature.

"People, even with their busy schedules, stopped to ask what we were doing," Tembo says. "[In Times Square] that's rarely done, most don't have time to stop."

U.S. Missionary Don Geraci, who headed up the prayer room located in the Times Square Church, says that the prayer room was ideally located. The room looked out onto Times Square and had a view of the electronic God Gives Hope messages.

"Intercessors could gaze out of these large windows on the masses of people, so many people without hope - it was an outstanding venue from which to pray," Geraci says. "And to see God's faithfulness as we prayed . . . it was really just amazing. We'd come up against a problem and think, 'How are we going to do this?' God would make a way, always on time and faithful to meet every need."

Geraci came away from the experience being personally blessed and inspired many times over. The tears of intercessors, the "armies" of Christians coming from local churches to evangelize, witnessing God work through the lives of Russian youth as they worked in Penn (train) Station, the 24-hour prayer service held by Filipino

leaders and the miracle of a couple from Texas just showing up in the prayer room looking for someone to pray with them - all left lasting impressions on Geraci.

Phil Goble, another U.S missionary, joins in with Geraci, stating that the outreach was a wonderful investment.

"Prayer under girded the entire event - there was prayer all the time," Goble says. "The Assemblies of God was right where they needed to be with the right people and the right literature."

One of the impacting moments for Goble was when the delivery truck driver arrived with a rush order of additional tracts for the outreach, Goble asked if he knew what he was delivering. Before long, Goble was reading the sinner's prayer from the tract with the truck driver and leading him to Christ!

Don James, New Jersey District assistant superintendent and pastor of Bethany Church, led two teams from his church into Times Square. He says that he viewed the outreach as a way to introduce God, perhaps for the first time, to a mass audience.

"I saw this as a huge seed operation," James says. "And if you don't sow the seed, you don't get a harvest."

But James doesn't see the harvest limited to the Times Square area, New York or even the United States.

"Most of the people I talked to that received the materials were not from New York or New Jersey, they were from all over the world," James explains. "I spoke with people from Japan, Croatia, Brazil, Canada, Kenya, England, Ireland, Denmark as well as people from across the U.S."

James believes knowing the entirety of the impact of this outreach will be limited to heaven.

"I believe the brochure will sit with a lot of people, tucked away somewhere . . . but when crisis occurs, it will be available to them," James says.

In addition to the ministry and miracles occurring on Times Square and in the Times Square Church prayer room, other portions of New York City were also seeing the Holy Spirit at work.

"There was a peace throughout the city," explains Steve Kulish, an AG U.S. missionary who worked with Masters Commission students and churches in the boroughs of New York. "Some of these churches minister in downright difficult areas, with all kinds of problems with gangs, immigration, financial difficulties . . . ."

But the Holy Spirit was ever present, Kulish says, calming even tense situations.

Kulish says that as inroads were made into neighborhoods and people responded, he witnessed another miracle. "Hope began to pour back into the hearts of lives of the pastors and their parishioners," he says. "You could see it in their eyes and faces . . . . It was like a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit had moved into the neighborhoods."

Haniff Bachus, pastor of Calvary Assembly, says that from the very beginning, he knew the God Gives Hope campaign would not just be for outreach, but also stimulate a new spirit among his congregation.

"We had four teams," Bachus explains. "One team visiting Times Square, a second team doing neighborhood tract distribution, a third team connected to the National Prayer Center taking prayer requests and a fourth team with Masters Commission students helping us reach the students from John Adams High School [located across the street from the church]."

Bachus' prediction proved accurate. Not only was the community impacted for Christ, his entire church has been energized.

"There is a high level of evangelistic fervor among our members now," Bachus says. "People are still mobilized, wanting to do more - there's been a burst of revival among our believers."

U.S. Missionary Jeremy Sweeten, who also escorted Master's Commission students to different areas of ministry, is planting a new church in Forest Hills, Queens, New York, with his wife Christine. He was nothing short of amazed at the effectiveness of the Master's Commission students in his neighborhood.

"The students were dedicated to telling people about Jesus," Sweeten says. "They were able to build relationships in a relatively short period of time and people were getting interested in the local church through their efforts."

Sweeten says that people have started coming to Forest Hills Assembly as a result and people in the neighborhood are now connecting with him as they ask about the Master's Commission students. "I even had a guy call me up because he had a rough day and wanted to know if we could talk," Sweeten says.

One of the more unique outreaches of the event occurred when Jan Berkman, pastor of Hope of Israel AG in Brooklyn, received permission to translate a God Gives Hope flier into Russian.

According to Berkman, 7 out of 10 in his neighborhood speak Russian. So, with the approval of Gospel Publishing House, he had the flier reprinted in Russian and inserted into the "Stories of Hope" booklet being distributed in his neighborhood.

"One woman, recognized booklet from when she has been in Times Square, came up to me and very much wanted to see it," Berkman says in somewhat broken English. "She was smiling and weeping over the good stories . . . the stories of hope. 'This is very simple, very good message,' she says."

Berkman believes that hope is exactly what the Russian Jews in his community need as so many had been deceived when they lived in Russia.

"They need to see something that is God, not just talking," he says. "Sharing with them this sort of hope, how God is working in lives of individuals, how God can change their lives involved in same situation - it's very personal."

Berkman, who has received much positive feedback on the effort and has even been interviewed by a Russian radio station about it, says that he plans on keeping the message of God Gives Hope.

"What people need is to see how God can work in the lives of children and families, they need hope," Berkman states. "We are not going to deviate from this [God Gives Hope] message."

Another unexpected result of the outreach was a unity among ministers, evangelists, missionaries and others that hadn't been experienced before. Even organizations not part of the Assemblies of God joined in what could only be called a spirit of cooperation and unity.

"It was like a knitting of parts together," Kulish says.

John Maempa, director of the National Prayer Center, says he and his staff were nearly overwhelmed with the many churches that stepped forward to become Satellite Prayer Centers.

"At the center in Springfield alone, we had 1,180 prayer slips [filled out by prayer volunteers]," Maempa says. "With the involvement of more than a hundred additional satellite prayer centers, we had nearly midnight to midnight coverage almost the entire two weeks - a 'first' in the National Prayer Center's 12-year history."

Maempa says that the response by churches indicates that having the 1-800-4-Prayer line phones staffed around the clock is very doable.

"People are fearful to try to do this at first, but after they take a few calls, they discover how wonderful and exciting it is," Maempa says. "Once people realize the Spirit helps us know how to pray, that we don't have to rely upon our own skills or knowledge, attitudes change."

Although there was an abundance of "good news" coming as a result of the outreach, the number of people that said they didn't believe in God or just didn't want to hear about God was sobering. Simply by some of the responses, the need for this outreach was re-emphasized.

Assemblies of God Director of Communications Juleen Turnage agrees with Don James' assessment of the event being one of sowing seeds. But now, she encourages believers to bathe the planting in prayer.

"During these past two weeks, seeds of the gospel were sown," Turnage says, "but we are urging believers and churches to pray for these seeds over the next several months that God will grow this into a great harvest for His kingdom. I really believe this is only the beginning of what God wants to do in New York City."

"God brought together a powerful and united team that was able to accomplish about twice as much as we had hoped to," says Scott Temple, director of Intercultural Ministries. "And the credit goes to all the prayer that went up before hand and that went on throughout the ministry every day."

However, Temple believes that New York continues to be a great opportunity for continuing evangelism.

"As I was coming back on the subway one night, I mentioned to Don Geraci that we were probably the only two people in that crowded car born in the U.S.," Temple says. "New York really is an entry point to America for millions and millions of people. We need to be there on the threshold of their [immigrants'] American experience to reach them with the message of the gospel while they are most reachable."

But for now, Temple is thrilled with the results, expected and unexpected, that have resulted so far from the outreach. He sums the experience up in one final thought: "We experienced the leading of the Holy Spirit every day."

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