

Detroit Pastor Marshals African-American Support for Israel

Glenn Plummer believes that by supporting Israel, the African-American community will experience blessing. Photo: Glenn Plummer (left) with Israel President Shimon Peres



[06.12.08] A Detroit minister is on a mission to mobilize African-American support for Israel, which he said was commonplace during the civil rights era.

Through the Fellowship of Israel and Black America (FIBA), founder Glenn Plummer hopes to revive a relationship between African-Americans and the Jewish community that he said civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. nurtured. The senior pastor of Ambassadors for Christ Church in Detroit said during the 1950s and 1960s Jews marched for racial equality alongside King, defended African-Americans in court and even died in the struggle against discrimination.

Calling King a black Zionist, Plummer, 53, said the Baptist preacher encouraged African-Americans to support the Jewish community and planned to spend Passover 1968 with his close friend Rabbi Abraham Heschel but was assassinated days before the holiday. In the 40 years since King's death, Plummer said the relationship between the two groups has been strained, though black pastors have always been largely pro-Israel.

"When it comes to the issue of whether we're supportive of Israel or not, we're very particular not to violate Scripture," Plummer said. "Black believers are much more careful not to speak words that would curse Israel" than secular black leaders.

To show that many African-Americans are still friends of Israel, Plummer founded FIBA in 2005. The following year, when

Israeli rockets bombed Hezbollah, he flew to Israel to help and show solidarity with the Jewish nation. Also in 2006, Plummer hosted a national Black-Jewish Summit to help reconnect the two groups.

Founder of Christian Television Network in Detroit and former chairman of the National Religious Broadcasters, Plummer frequently takes groups of African-Americans to Israel and speaks often at U.S. synagogues. "During civil rights, white Christians, by and large, were nowhere to be found. But you know who was? Jews. Jews were there when black folks were fighting," Plummer said. "So I say to Jews: 'On behalf of African-Americans, thank you. Whether it was you or your parents,' I say, 'thank you.'"

In January, the month of King's birthday, FIBA presented the Martin Luther King Jr. Israel Award to recognize those who have helped advance relations between African-Americans and the Jewish community. The State of Israel and the U.S. Embassy in Israel have officially recognized the awards event, which is held annually in Israel. The 2008 recipients included Israeli President Shimon Peres, Detroit pastor Kenneth James Flowers and Israeli musician Miri Ben Ari, who developed a creative outreach to African-American culture through her *Symphony of Brotherhood*.

Plummer believes that by blessing Israel, Christians will experience blessing themselves. "God promised in the Bible that whoever blesses Israel, He will bless them," said Plummer, who believes an ongoing revival at his church is partly a result of his support for Israel. "I do believe that if we bless Jews openly, unapologetically and clearly, God is obligated to bless us."

So far, FIBA has chapters in Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, Tampa, Fla., and Columbus, Ohio, and an office in Israel.

Linda Olmert, director of the Israel FIBA office and FIBA vice president, understands Plummer's passion. While growing up in Toronto, she declared that she would march with King when she

turned 11. He died before that birthday, and for years she searched for a way to join forces with African-Americans.

“This has incredible potential,” she says of FIBA. Olmert also is the prime minister’s sister-in-law. “Plummer believes Martin Luther King was a Zionist, and in the early 1960s when no one else was speaking out for Israel, King was, and African-Americans were blessed. During the civil rights movement, we marched and were jailed. We died with African-Americans. Now is the time to return that friendship and support Israel.”

To that end, FIBA plans to build a Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Israel, conduct tours of historic sites from the civil rights movement and grow FIBA chapters. Flowers, whom FIBA honored for his church’s musical celebrations, dinners and dialogues with Jewish leaders, said these efforts are necessary. “We have to work together,” he said. “The Jews are God’s chosen people, and God would not go back on His word.”

Plummer also has support from other black ministers such as Ben Kinchlow, who co-hosts the international radio show *Front Page Jerusalem*. “I see this as a movement of evangelical Christians embracing their Jewish roots,” Kinchlow said. “African-Americans, in particular, we say yes to Israel.”
–**Kimberly Hayes Taylor in Detroit**

Documentary Raises Awareness of Persecuted Church

A Cry From Iran, the story of martyred pastor Haik Hovsepien, has been shown in churches across the U.S. to raise awareness about the plight of Iran’s Christians.



[06.11.08] Two California-based brothers are using their gripping documentary about the martyrdom of their father to encourage American Christians to support the persecuted church.

Jospeh and Andre Hovsepien have shown *A Cry From Iran* in churches across the country since its release in September 2007. "Our goal is to see support through prayer and anything else that can be directed toward Iran," Joseph Hovsepien said. "Also we want to encourage the Iranians and the persecuted church no matter where in the world."

In 1994, Haik Hovsepien, an Assemblies of God pastor and leader of the Protestant churches in Iran, rose to the defense of a Christian man sentenced to die for converting from Islam. Leading an international protest, Hovsepien campaigned successfully for the condemned man's release.

But three days later, Hovsepien himself disappeared. His body was soon found riddled with knife wounds. Two other prominent Iranian Christians were martyred six months later, leaving the church stunned and grieving. Hovsepien left behind a wife and four children.

Using real footage from inside Iran to depict life under one of the world's most Christ-hostile regimes, the brothers, now professional television producers living in Burbank, Calif., issue a call to action to the American church for support and prayer.

"We thought this would be a very powerful story," said Joseph Hovsepien, 34, Haik's eldest son and producer and director of *A Cry From Iran*. "At the time my view was very personal. I saw it as something that would please our family and families of martyrs and the Iranian church. But later, after living in America and seeing Christians who didn't care or know about the persecuted church, we saw another need—to inform Westerners [about the persecution in Iran] so they could start supporting the church there with the power of prayer and in every way."

Joseph Hovsepian began planning the documentary about his father within a year of Haik's death, and he and brother Andre covertly shot much of the footage before leaving Iran in 1999. "We did a lot of James Bond stuff" like hiding the camera on a motorcycle and filming in sensitive areas, Andre Hovsepian said.

Finishing the film was a family affair. Their sister logged the video footage from nearly 200 tapes and came up with the name *A Cry From Iran*. Brother Gilbert wrote and performed the soundtrack. "During the editing process, we felt we would go to that office day or night and my dad was there," Andre Hovsepian said. "We relived with him. It was comforting, but when it came to the graphics it would bother us emotionally."

Andre Hovsepian, 24, played the young version of his father in the re-enactments. "That was emotional for me, to feel my dad's suit, standing there preaching at almost the same age [as when he began his ministry]," he said.

"There were moments where Andre and I, in late nights of editing in the office ... sometimes shed some tears together, especially seeing my dad and his smile and his peace," Joseph Hovsepian said. "But at the same time it would encourage us toward our goal to grow more victorious and not be scared or worried about anything else."

Carl Moeller, president and chief executive officer of Open Doors USA, said his organization has been a friend of the Hovsepian family since the days when Haik was still ministering in Iran. Two years ago the ministry funded the completion of the documentary and has since screened it in hundreds of churches, small groups and other gatherings around the country.

Open Doors also helped the Hovsepians take the movie to leading film festivals, where it has won numerous awards, including half a dozen Best Documentary prizes from festivals such as the International Christian Film Festival.

"We're using the documentary in churches to mobilize people on

behalf of their Christian brothers and sisters in Iran," Moeller said. "It's been really well-received. ... The Hovsepians have made a great contribution to the awareness of Christians worldwide about the state of the church in Iran and how Christians are persecuted there. ... The Open Doors team looked at it as an excellent opportunity to inform Americans about the state of Christians in Iran.

"It's not history; it's going on right now. This isn't just a story about what happened in the past but is the active present for hundreds of thousands of Iranian Christians."

To finish the film, the Hovsepian brothers traveled to Turkey and other countries to shoot re-enactments and interviews. Soon the brothers "realized this wasn't a story about Hovsepians or even about martyrs and their personal feelings. ... There was a bigger vision for us—bringing the body of Christ in Iran and around the world together," Joseph Hovsepian said.

They also wanted to make it "as real and true as possible," Andre Hovsepian said. "We didn't want to exaggerate or make it emotional."

"We didn't want to create false excitement," Joseph Hovsepian added. "We wanted to create the feel of what the situation of Iran was like, and [present a] call for action and challenge the Western audience, but in a very natural way. ... And we wanted to introduce a few heroes. Of course their names will be written in heaven, and we will recognize them there with their reward, but we need to honor their names, and this was the most we could do. ... If we could do one film for my dad, this would have been it."

According to many with firsthand knowledge, Iran is now experiencing one of the great revivals of modern times due to supernatural phenomena such as dreams and visions, and to satellite television and the Internet, which now connect Iranian believers instantly—and, for the most part, safely—to Christians around the world. The church in Iran has grown from a few thousand people in the mid-1990s to several hundred thousand people today.

But there is already a new wave of persecution against Christians, according to the U.S. government and ministries such as Open Doors. Pastors and converts from Islam are regularly interrogated, beaten and imprisoned. Police burst into church services to frighten congregations. Christians are routinely excluded from good jobs and schools.

Although martyrdom is not common, the government is now considering making the death penalty mandatory for anyone who leaves Islam. And pastors still face dire threats. In 2005, a church leader was killed at his front door.

The regime also tries intermittently to clamp down on the free flow of information. In the last few years it has jammed satellite signals during Christian programs, banned high-speed Internet service, closed Internet cafés, destroyed satellite dishes and censored blogs. Arab advertisers sometimes threaten to boycott stations that carry Christian programs.

Spies also have infiltrated online church meetings and gathered information on the people involved. Now underground church members use elaborate techniques to verify the identities of participants. They also disallow the sharing of information such as names and locations during online meetings.

The Hovsepian brothers are convinced that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

“You look at the numbers at the time [of our father’s death]: Assemblies of God churches had 1,000. The total number of Christians in Iran was 2,000,” Joseph Hovsepian said. “Now it’s 100,000.

“I think that is something even my dad didn’t expect to happen. ... All of that speaks of the power of the blood of the martyrs.”

“One of the direct results of martyrdom in Iran has been the increasing zeal of Christians, especially Muslim-background

Christians,” Andre Hovsepian said. “When they see an Armenian man, my dad, who gave his life for Iran and for his faith, that really increases their passion for God.

“They ask, ‘Why would someone give their life?’ And this journey starts within them. Then they go tell their friends, and this is how it multiplies.” – **Joel Kilpatrick**

'The List' Released on DVD June 10

Robert Whitlow's The List, which explores spiritual warfare, generational curses and the power of prayer, released on DVD nationwide Tuesday.



[06.10.08] Based on the best-selling novel by Robert Whitlow published by Thomas Nelson eight years ago, *The List* is scheduled for release on DVD Tuesday from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Rated PG for thematic elements, *The List* follows the journey of Renny Jacobson as his father's last will and testament leads him to uncover the mysterious secrets behind a clandestine society in his native hometown of Charlotte, N.C.

Described as “the John Grisham of the Christian market,” best-selling author Robert Whitlow has written a total of six legal thrillers with *The List* being the first novel to be adapted for film. Along with his DVD release he is simultaneously releasing his latest novel, *Deeper Water*.

Whitlow, a Charlotte-based attorney, says the book's main theme of prayer and spiritual warfare comes from his own experiences as a charismatic Christian, as well as those of other Christians he has known.

Set in the South, the book traces the effects of a secret society formed during the Civil War to its members' modern-day descendants, who must battle hidden spiritual forces that threaten to unravel their lives.

The List is based on a spiritual truth Whitlow said he has seen worked out in the lives of many people who have been influenced both for good and for bad by past generations of their families. "My own grandmother Daisy was a great [positive] spiritual influence in our family," said Whitlow, who named one of the characters in the book after her.

Whitlow won a Christy Award for Contemporary Fiction for his second novel, *The Trial*. He said the basic theology he hopes to get across in all his novels is that God is real and wants to interact with people across the whole spectrum of life and experience.

"Christian ideas can be communicated in every style of story and in every kind of writing," Whitlow said. "There is a place Christian writers can go that nobody else can go because we have an understanding of the kingdom of God and the ways the Spirit of God works in the lives of people."

Whitlow said he was approached more than once about adapting *The List* into a film but never had confidence the story would be presented faithfully until he met Gary Wheeler of Level Path Productions, an independent film company out of Boone, N.C. In 2004 he signed an agreement to co-produce the movie with Wheeler.

As the director, producer and co-screenwriter, Wheeler said what drew him to the project was the challenge of depicting the element of prayer that was at the center of the story. "Plus, I'm a Southerner," Wheeler said, "and it's a Southern story that captures the reality and faith of these people."

Mark Fincannon, casting director for the film *End of the Spear*, also did the casting for *The List*. "There's a story for every actor who ended up working on this film," Fincannon

said. "I can't take credit because I believe God had already chosen these people, and it was more about me putting myself in the position to see whom He had chosen."

The movie, which released in 2007 to a limited audience, co-stars Hilarie Burton, from The WB's *One Tree Hill*, and Chuck Carrington, who appeared in the series *JAG*. Other actors include Afemo and Elizabeth Omilami, who lead a homeless street ministry in Atlanta.

Wheeler sees good things in store for faith-based films. "It's up to us filmmakers to hone our craft and make better movies," he said. "There are a lot of great stories of faith out there, and film is ... a way to tell those stories to a wider audience." —**Sandra Chambers in Wilmington, N.C.**

Amish Man Leads Healing Revival

An Amish man who literally fell into ministry is stoking a healing revival in a small Pennsylvania community.



[06.10.08] Steve Lapp said he had never heard about supernatural healing before he fell from the second story of his barn in 1999, crushing his pelvis in nine places. He said doctors weren't sure if he would ever walk again.

"Then I heard about having hands laid on and getting prayed for healing as well as nutritional supplements to help build your body up," Lapp said. "That was my first experience with knowing about what the Bible talks about healing and it being real and especially it being for today."

Lapp received prayer and experienced an immediate healing. He went from a wheelchair to crutches to being completely

restored physically. Word spread quickly throughout the Amish community, and people began coming to Lapp's home day and night asking for prayer. Soon, the 29-year-old started praying for Amish and non-Amish and saw people healed from maladies ranging from Alzheimer's disease to broken bones.

When the leadership of his local Amish church caught wind of Lapp's burgeoning healing ministry, they censured him. "It came to the point where it became a threat to the leaders in the Amish community, and they asked us to stop praying for people," he said.

Being raised to respect authority, Lapp stopped praying for people for several months. But people from the local community continued to seek him out for prayer. Eventually, Lapp told Amish leadership that he and his family could no longer stop the healing ministry. "We ended up getting ex-communicated from the Amish church and moved to Pennsylvania [from Ohio]," Lapp said.

Now based in Ephrata, Pa., located in the Lancaster County area, Lapp and five of his siblings and their families formed Light of Hope Ministries. For the last three years the ministry has hosted a 52-day Glory Barn revival that featured 24/7 prayer and personal ministry. Although the Glory Barn meetings ended in May, Lapp continues to lead revival services at Breakout Ministries in nearby Leola, Pa.

Despite being excommunicated from their Amish community, Lapp and his family continue to embrace many aspects of the Amish lifestyle, such as wearing traditional Amish attire, because they believe God has called them to be a bridge to reach the Amish. They no longer use a horse and buggy, however, due to their need to drive cars for everyday travel and the family's full-time healing ministry.

"We are not necessarily wanting to see everybody leave the Amish," Lapp said. "We just want to see the Amish be set free from some of these misuses [excommunication and shunning] and still be able to keep the culture. Our passion is to see the truth become real in the Amish community, not just in the

Amish, but in the whole community.”

John Paul Peters, pastor of Eagle Focus International Ministries in Ephrata, said he believes God wants to bring an explosive revival to the Lancaster area and that He is using the Lapp family to bring it about. “Steve Lapp is an apostle,” Peters said. “I believe this is one of the fire starter movements of revival in this area.” **–Paula Hornberger**

Learn to Set Aside Time for God

Do you want to be like Abraham—close to God, and blessed in your life? Then begin now to set aside time to be with God. Here’s what that involves:

At a Glance

- Commitment
- Choice
- Focus
- The Word of God
- Obedience

A childlike approach. Spending time alone with God is simple. God is good, and He wants to have relationship with us. In fact, He has taken the initiative. We should not be discouraged from pursuing what He so longs to give us.

Jesus Himself told us, “‘Seek, and you shall find’” (Matt. 7:7). James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

A time commitment. We need to set aside time to be alone with God on a regular basis. Whether early or late, it is best to make it around the same time each day so that we will develop a habit and begin to look forward to it with anticipation.

A choice. This has nothing to do with personality or whether you are a morning person or a night person. But it has everything to do with choosing your priority. Mary chose the better part by sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to Him (see Luke 10:39-42). However, it is not a question of spending time with the Lord or doing the work of ministry. We can—and must—do both.

Focus. Even when we are set apart in a quiet place to spend time with God, we can have difficulty maintaining our focus. Because of the busyness we are accustomed to, with so many things going on at once, our minds are unused to concentrating on God alone and on His Word. We will have to practice regaining our focus regularly until it becomes second nature to us.

The Word of God. Studying God's Word is essential to our growth as Christians. The Bible says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom.12:2).

The way we renew our minds is through the Word. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (see Ps.119:105), helping us to discern God's plans for us, understand His nature and overcome the enemy. When Jesus was tempted He didn't fight the devil with emotions or positive thinking, but by quoting to him the Word of God.

Obedience. Why did God tell Moses not to draw near to Him? (See Ex. 3:5.) It was because the place of His presence is holy ground. If you seek the Lord and yet are unwilling to

stop sinning, you will not find Him because you are seeking Him in a place where He is not. But if you sincerely forsake your sins and draw near to Him, you will surely find Him.

God is not distant, and He does not want us to worship Him from afar. He wants us to draw near to Him in intimacy so that He can have fellowship with us and reveal Himself to us. But it's up to us to respond. When we do, we will find in His presence "pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

Texas Embroiled in Debate Over Evolution Education

A battle is brewing in Texas over whether both the "strengths and weaknesses" of evolution will be taught to students attending Texas public schools. The outcome could affect schools around the nation.



[06.09.08] A battle is brewing in Texas over how the theory of evolution is taught from science books throughout the state.

This summer, as members of the board of education decide textbook curriculum for the next decade, they will have to decide whether both the "strengths and weaknesses" of evolution will be taught to students attending Texas public schools, *The New York Times* reported.

Proponents of teaching both sides of the theory say it will give students a well-rounded view of evolution, while those opposed say that teaching the "weaknesses" is an attempt by those with religious objections to undermine evolution.

According to the *Times*, the pending decision by the Texas

board of education could affect schools around the nation because Texas is one of the nation's biggest textbook buyers and manufacturers do not like producing different versions of the same material.

The debate in Texas comes on the heels of *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, a provocative documentary released nationwide in April that suggests science professionals are not allowed to discuss evidence of design in the universe. It follows actor and social commentator Ben Stein as he travels the globe interviewing educators and scientists who claim they were denied tenure and even fired for questioning Darwinism.

In addition to the critically acclaimed movie, lawmakers in several U.S. states have introduced academic freedom bills that would allow educators to challenge flaws in Darwinian evolution with objective scientific data.

"There is a nationwide trend going on in which people are becoming aware of the fact that scientists have been persecuted because they questioned Darwinism and that there is a need for protections of teachers and scientists to challenge evolution," said Casey Luskin, program officer for public policy and legal affairs at the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based intelligent-design think tank.

"The movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* is raising consciousness about this problem," he said, "and there is now a nationwide movement to protect teachers who challenge evolution."

More than 700 scientists from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and from universities such as Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rice and UCLA recently signed Discovery Institute's "Scientific Dissent From Darwinism" list.

By signing the document, the prominent scientists and professors acknowledged that they are skeptical of the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. They call for a careful examination of the

evidence for Darwinian theory.

Patricia Reiff, a professor of physics and astronomy at Rice University and the director of the Rice Space Institute in Houston, said she agreed to have her name added to the list because there are certain events in the evolutionary process that are mathematically "quite improbable."

Reiff is convinced by evidence for evolution and does not discuss religion in the classroom, but said "life from nonlife is very, very improbable."

She added: "Astronomer Fred Hoyle once said, 'It's like having an explosion in a junk yard and ending up with a 747.' I think there is an option for people of faith to say, 'Look, there are certain places in the evolutionary structure where the hand of God can be seen.' "

Although many Christian observers praised *Expelled*, it was met with sharp criticism from both scientists and mainstream media. After the documentary's release, John Lennon's widow, Yoko Ono, and his sons Sean and Julian, filed suit in a federal court. The action attempted to force filmmakers to remove a clip of Lennon's 1971 song "Imagine" from a segment of the documentary that apparently portrays how contemporary culture imagines a world without "the hand of God." The highlighted portion of the song included the lyrics: "Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too."

However, the court ruled June 2 in favor of the filmmakers, pointing to a legal doctrine known as "fair use."

This year, lawmakers in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Michigan, South Carolina and Missouri introduced academic freedom bills that would allow public schoolteachers to present diverse views on biological and chemical origins.

"What these bills would do is give protections to teachers and students that they could not be reprimanded or terminated because they engaged in a robust discussion, not on creationism or intelligent design, but just on the scientific strengths and weaknesses of evolution," said John Stemberger,

president and general counsel of the Florida Family Policy Council, which joined Stein at a March press conference to support the state's Academic Freedom Act.

Stein and the producers of *Expelled* hope lawmakers in all 50 states will introduce similar legislation.

"People don't like to be told what is obviously true is not true," Stein said. "People don't like to be told that the God who made them in a loving way helps them and is their shepherd every single moment of every day doesn't exist. We're sick and tired of being pushed around, and it stops now." **-Troy Anderson with Felicia Mann**

Former New York Gang Leader Fights for Souls

Nicky Cruz is still carrying the message of the cross half a century later through evangelistic events worldwide.



[06.06.08] After more than 50 years, a former knife-wielding gang leader from New York City is still mixing it up with young people. Only now the 69-year-old fights for their souls. Evangelist Nicky Cruz has a gut-wrenching story of violent gang activity and the mercy of God. But his tormented past has given him a deep compassion for those caught in addiction and sin. Of the millions he has met over the years, Cruz said he thanks God for the gift and privilege of "seeing the needs of hurting people."

Raised in Puerto Rico in a family steeped in witchcraft, Cruz moved to New York as a teenager. As the chief warlord of the Mau Maus gang, he was known as a vicious knife-fighter.

He capped off his teen years of gang violence by giving his

life to Christ in 1958 at an evangelistic rally conducted by David Wilkerson, founder of Teen Challenge. That organization celebrates 50 years in ministry this month, and the book inspired by Wilkerson and Cruz's relationship, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, marks its 45th anniversary this year.

During the last half-century, teenagers have jammed altars at his international crusades with tears streaming down their faces. "Nobody can connect like Nicky to young people," said Michael Chorey, executive director of the Niagara Falls, N.Y.-based Joshua Revolution. "When Nicky speaks you feel the love of Jesus coming out of his heart."

Cruz ministered last December to several thousand at a Joshua Revolution youth convention in Niagara Falls, N.Y., leading to almost 400 decisions for Christ. While ministering for four weeks in July 2006 in East London, his outreaches generated 1,800 conversions.

Crusades last year in Australia and New Zealand drew crowds of nearly 30,000 people—comprised of gang members and government leaders alike—and resulted in 5,000 decisions for Christ. "There were more sinners attending than Christians," Cruz said.

At the London outreach gay activists attempted to pressure city officials to deny Cruz access to the public facilities. New Testament references on his Web site critical of homosexual behavior stirred the controversy. Even members of the Church of England, which is currently embroiled in internal disputes over gay ordination, asked that he apologize to the gay community.

Cruz told *Charisma* that although he opposes discrimination against anyone for any reason, he believes in upholding biblical standards on the issue. He denied reports that he apologized or pandered to the gay community. Other activists in London also lobbied him to distribute condoms at youth

meetings, which he refused to do.

Distractions aside, Cruz keeps his eyes on the prize of winning souls. During a 2007 outreach in Reading, Pa., where gangs roam industrial streets plagued by crime and drugs, he quieted a large unruly crowd gathered on a street corner. "I could feel the spiritual warfare," recalled Craig Nanna, pastor of Reading Dove Christian Ministry Center. "It was a real fight for souls."

Drunks and junkies mocked Cruz, spewing curses and insults. But the Holy Spirit saturated the crowd as Cruz opened his heart and shared his testimony. "People sobered up immediately," said Nanna, adding that physical healings and salvations occurred.

Included in Cruz's ministry are school assemblies, television specials, outreach literature and humanitarian projects, such as the Holy Ghost Hospital he opened in Guatemala in 2005. The hospital functions as a drug rehab facility, and Cruz is planning to open more centers like it in El Salvador and Honduras.

A part of his ministry also involves evangelistic events called To Reach Urban Communities Everywhere (TRUCE), which are open-air outreaches where reformed drug dealers and gang members who use dance, rap and drama to evangelize inner-city youth.

In New York City, TRUCE's performing artists often execute three "hit and run" half-hour spots in one night that include songs, preaching, testimonies and an altar call. Those who respond to altar calls are linked with local churches. "Our bread and butter is on the street," said David Ham, New York's TRUCE director.

Cruz has written more than a dozen books, including his 1968 best-selling autobiography of redemption titled Run Baby Run. Convolo Productions and Inferno Distribution are currently

working on a PG-13 feature film based on the book (runbabyrunmovie .com). Scheduled for theatrical release in 2009, the film's budget is \$15 million.

In December 2007 Cruz was diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare form of cancer. After completing a series of radiation treatments, his prognosis is good. "Faith never tested can never be trusted," he said.

He expected to resume a full evangelistic schedule beginning in April. "I'm going to do everything to give a black eye to the devil," he said. "The tool to hurt the devil is evangelism. As long as I have the breath of life, I'm going to talk about my Jesus the same way that I started."

—Peter K. Johnson

Gay Marriage Legal in California Beginning June 17

On Wednesday, California's highest court reaffirmed in a 4-3 decision that gay marriage would be legalized.



[06.05.08] Yesterday, California's highest court denied a stay to its May 15 ruling, which in effect will legalize gay marriage at close of business June 16.

The 4-3 ruling, which split along the same lines as the initial ruling, denied a petition by Christian legal advocacy group Liberty Counsel to stall the May decision until the issue was voted on in November elections.

Earlier this week, a petition signed by more than 1 million California citizens to establish a state constitutional

amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman was approved for placement on the Nov. 4 ballot.

Mathew D. Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and a litigator during the California proceedings, argued that only confusion would set in if gay marriages were validated in June and then nullified in November.

“The people will decide in November,” he said. “If any same-sex marriage licenses are issued before November, the passage of the constitutional amendment will make them invalid and invisible.”

The May 15 California Supreme Court ruling that overturned two state laws banning gay marriage has already had an impact on gay marriage in other states.

Attorneys with another Christian legal group, the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), filed a lawsuit Tuesday to stop New York Gov. David Paterson’s directive to state government agencies to recognize gay marriages legalized in other states.

In 2006 the New York Supreme Court upheld a state constitutional amendment to define marriage as between a man and a woman.

“New Yorkers have a fundamental right to set marriage policy through the legislative process, but the governor has ordered a radical redefinition of marriage without the consent of the governed,” said Brian Raum, ADF senior counsel.

Cindy Jacobs, co-founder of Generals International, said the church must fight back against this ruling to halt lasting effects.

“The ramifications of this ruling are huge for our nation as a whole,” she responded on her Web site. “It is time for moral activism. When the laws of man break the laws of God, we ought to obey God. Let this ruling by the California Supreme Court wake up the sleeping giant of the church.” **–Felicia Mann**

American Missionary Says Death Toll in Myanmar Worse Than Reported

Disaster-relief expert Joe Hurston was one of the first Americans allowed entry to the repressed nation devastated by Cyclone Nargis.



[06.05.08] A shrewd missionary pilot who recently returned from a humanitarian mission to Myanmar says the death toll from the nation's catastrophic cyclone last month far exceeds international media reports.

"We will never know how many people died, but the death toll is likely more than 1 million people," Joe Hurston, founder of Titusville, Fla.-based Air Mobile Ministries, told *Charisma*.

He bases his information on eyewitness accounts he received during his weeklong operation to the ravaged nation and also on his assertion that a census has not been taken in Myanmar for decades.

"[The government] has no idea how many people are down there," he said, referring to southern Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta. "For them to say the death toll is 133,000—I absolutely don't believe it, not for a second."

Many peasants and rice farmers on the Indian Ocean-fed Irrawaddy Delta who survived the storm are now receiving clean drinking water, an essential necessity following any natural disaster, thanks to Hurston.

The missionary adventurer's specialty is transporting water-purification units into international disaster areas and then training native professionals how to operate them.

The units, called Vortex Voyagers, turn polluted water into drinking water using ultraviolet rays and various filters. Each unit provides drinking water to more than 40 people per hour.

Hurston bases his ministry on the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:35: "I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink."

Media outlets in the central Florida area have long recognized Hurston as the consummate Good Samaritan, since the Titusville businessman seems compelled to take action whenever and wherever disaster strikes.

He has led more than 2,000 relief missions around the world since 1978, burrowing into disaster areas such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the Pakistani earthquake of 2005 and various volcanic catastrophes in Indonesia.

"I've been running after these disasters for 30 years now," he said. "I knew we had a tsunami-type of disaster when I heard about Myanmar."

Possibly Myanmar's worst cyclone in recorded history, Cyclone Nargis formed in the Bay of Bengal in late April. After tracking northwest toward India and Bangladesh for a couple days the storm intensified and boomeranged eastward toward Myanmar (formerly Burma). It made landfall May 2.

Because a restrictive military junta rules the country, international aid over the last month filtered in slowly—sometimes not at all.

U.S. military commanders were forced earlier this week to turn back Naval vessels off the coast of Myanmar after their many requests to assist with relief efforts went ignored.

And though the U.S. has provided Myanmar with millions of

dollars in aid since early May, Hurston was one of the first Americans granted a visa to travel to Yangon, the nation's largest city and former capital.

Hurston said he and his small team flew into Yangon aboard a commercial airliner on May 13, along with roughly 25 Vortex Voyagers stored in suitcases.

"Myanmar is not known for its openness and is a fairly closed society," Hurston said. "I don't want to be trite in this statement, but God made a way where there seemed to be no way."

He said all the units went through customs without any delays, and he was amazed by the positive attitudes and "exceptional organization" of the Christian leaders and medical professionals on the ground in Myanmar. "They were all brilliant," he said. "Against almost impossible odds, it went so smooth. It was a mission from God."

The devastation and suffering left in the wake of the storm is "unimaginable," he said. "Survivors said the water that came through was heavy and full of sand. So the storm had no resistance. There were no structures [nor] mountains to stop it at all."

Nearly 20-foot walls of water driven by 120 mph winds decimated towns with populations as high as 100,000, leaving the landscape strewn with corpses, Hurston said.

And because most of the Irrawaddy Delta is at or below sea level, he said the carnage is much worse than many fear. "If you look at a map of Myanmar about a third of the bottom of the country is below sea level."

During the week that his team was in Myanmar, Hurston said checkpoints and barricades blocked their travels on 10 separate occasions.

They also worked closely with three other groups—Terry Law Ministries, Feed the Hungry and In His Image Ministries. Terry

Law sponsored 21 of Hurston's Vortex Voyagers; the other two groups sponsored four and three units respectively.

Hurston is planning to return to Myanmar this month with more water-purifying units. He said because of the extraordinary attitudes of the suffering people of Yangon, he's looking forward to returning to help.

"I've done a lot of missionary work over the years, but these guys were amazing," he said. "They were so sharp. I can't tell you the sweetness that these guys worked together with." **–Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**

American Indians, Prayer Leaders Mark Anniversary of "Trail of Tears"™

During the Day of Remembrance, U.S. lawmakers apologized for the government's inhumane treatment of the Cherokee people.



[06.04.08] Members of the Eastern and Western bands of Cherokee Indians, North Carolina lawmakers, prayer leaders and nearly 150 onlookers gathered May 30 in Murphy, N.C., to mark the 170th anniversary of the Trail of Tears.

The Day of Remembrance event, sponsored by Friends of Native America, took place within miles of Fort Butler, the site of the first roundup of approximately 3,000 Cherokees in preparation for their forced removal from their North Carolina homeland to Oklahoma Indian Territory. The Cherokee people called the journey the "Trail of Tears" because of the suffering it caused. Of the 15,000 forced to leave their land, approximately 4,000 died.

North Carolina state Sen. John Snow joined U.S. Rep. Roger

West, also of North Carolina, in issuing an apology for the forced relocation that began in 1838. "On this Day of Remembrance, Rep. Roger West and I, your state senator, extend our heartfelt apology for the wrongful taking of the land of the Cherokee and for the inhumane way that the Cherokee people were gathered and forced to travel the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma," Snow told the crowd.

Clifton Pettit, a representative of the Western Band of Cherokee Indians, said he believed the lawmakers were sincere. "I believe ... they spoke from the heart," Pettit said. "They really meant what they were saying, so as a full-blooded Cherokee Indian, I really felt the words, and I felt them within. I really do believe that there is a lot of success and a lot of things are going to come out of this in the future."

The Day of Remembrance event was the result of a dream South African pastor Andre Vaynol had about the Trail of Tears. Unfamiliar with American history, Vaynol researched the Trail of Tears and said God then told him that the cycles of drought in the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee were due to the fact that government officials had not repented of the historic injustice.

"Today is the beginning of the end of an atrocity done many years ago, Vaynol told attendees. "We are going to see some blessings of God, not only upon the Cherokees but upon the people, especially the people in Murphy and especially the people in North Carolina."

To continue the reconciliation that began during the Day of Remembrance and to help bring healing among Native people groups from around the world, a Restoration of the Nations prayer and worship event is being planned in Murphy, N.C., on Aug. 8. **-Paula Hornberger**