

Prayer Booths™ Erected in New York City

An art exhibit in the center of one of the nation's most liberal cities is inviting passers-by to think about faith and the power of prayer.



[. 08] They look much like typical phone booths, but instead of facilitating 50-cent local calls the two stalls sitting in the heart of New York City are designed to help passers-by make free long-distance calls to heaven.

Created by artist Dylan Mortimer, a pastor at Rivercity Community Church in Kansas City, Mo., the public prayer booths depict the word “prayer” instead of “phone” and include instructions for using the flip-down kneeler instead of a calling device.

And though Mortimer hopes New Yorkers will stop in to say a prayer, he also wants the booths to spark conversations about private faith in a very public place.

“I’m basically trying to make people talk about or dialogue about a subject that is often avoided,” he told *Charisma*. “It’s sort of ... an entry point to even having the conversation about faith, spirituality.”

The prayer booths, which sit near the Manhattan platform entry to the Roosevelt Island Tram Station, were erected on Nov. 7 as a temporary art display sponsored by the Roosevelt Island Parks and Recreation department.

“Most of my work is kind of developed by seeing things that already exist in the public and transforming them slightly,” said Mortimer, who received his MFA in 2006 from New York's School of Visual Arts.

“The prayer booth just came from looking at a phone booth,” he

told *Charisma*. "That idea of just going to make a private telephone call in public. I just transformed that into a private prayer in public."

Mortimer says he also wants to show people that they don't need a specific place to pray or talk about faith and spirituality. "That's what I hope is a fairly obvious humor of [the prayer booths]," he said. "Do you actually need to go to a booth to pray? Of course not. You can pray wherever you want."

Though people from many faiths have used the prayer booths, Mortimer said most of the people he has spoken with have been Christians, and they have appreciated the display.

"The more prayer there is in the world, I guess, the better as far as I am concerned," Mortimer said.

The prayer booths also have been displayed in sculpture shows in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Jackson, Tenn.

The New York City prayer booths will be on display until the end of November. —**Felicia Mann**