

Brooklyn Tabernacle Moving to \$30 Million Facility

The property will house a youth center, soup kitchen and adult-literacy program

The Brooklyn Tabernacle continues to thrive in The Big Apple, so much so that the church plans to move into much larger facilities in 2001. In 1998 the congregation purchased a 4,000-seat theater and two buildings on nearby Fulton Street in the heart of downtown Brooklyn, N.Y., one subway stop from Manhattan.

The new center is located next to Macy's department store and a new Marriott hotel. Funds are still needed for the \$30 million project that includes a youth center, adult-literacy program, soup kitchen, preteen outreaches and other ministries.

"We have the heart and personnel to do even more for God but presently lack both space and money," pastor Jim Cymbala reports on the Brooklyn Tabernacle (BT) Web site.

Cymbala refuses media interviews because he's shy about personal publicity, even though he speaks regularly at large conferences and has written three books. He told a producer from CBS' 60 Minutes, "If you want to do a story, it should be about Jesus and not about a church or preacher." He avoids the Christian media, including Charisma, claiming that Christian publications lift up man and human talent and not Jesus.

Evidence of BT's thriving, multiracial ministry was apparent on Palm Sunday in April. Lines of Bible-toting worshipers

snaked along busy Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, waiting for a seat in the 3 p.m. service. Ushers herded them into the church's 1,400-seat former theater 30 minutes before a recent service began.

Meanwhile, other ushers helped noon-service worshipers exit the building. It was standing room only, and close to 1,800 squeezed together to hear Cymbala preach and the Grammy Award-winning choir sing praises.

Carol Cymbala, Jim's wife, steered the final rehearsal and prayed with the 275-member choir that stood seven rows deep on the large stage behind the pulpit. Eyes closed, they raised their hands, imploring God to anoint their voices.

"This is the highlight of my trip," said a woman visiting from Newport-Mesa Christian Center Assembly of God in California. A Baptist minister from Georgia noted, "The Spirit of God is in this service."

After the first chorus of the service, the worship leader shouted, "Let's put our hands together and clap to the Lord!"

The clamor swelled up to the balcony. Other choruses followed. Before Cymbala stepped to the pulpit, the choir sang "Jesus We Crown You With Praise." Swaying with the music, they also gestured the words in a stirring pantomime of sign language.

"Let's just praise the Lord," Cymbala pleaded as the congregation joined him without any coaxing. "We love You! We adore You!" he shouted. "We worship You, Lord Jesus. Open the windows of heaven and pour out Your Holy Spirit!"

Cymbala and his wife assumed leadership of the ministry in 1971. Operating out of a shabby two-story building, the church dwindled to 28 members.

Cymbala had no Bible school training. He attended the U.S. Naval Academy and graduated from the University of Rhode Island where he was captain of the basketball team. After working a secular job in Manhattan, he was persuaded by his father-in-law, a pastor and overseer of several independent churches, to join the ministry.

He struggled to keep the church going and almost quit until God gave him a revelation to lead the congregation into a deeper prayer life. The result was a Tuesday-night prayer meeting that now numbers 2,000 intercessors.

In his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Zondervan, 1997), Cymbala says, "I have seen God do more in people's lives during 10 minutes of real prayer than in 10 of my sermons."

The ministry accelerated quickly, along with the choir started by Carol Cymbala with only nine singers. Today the church needs four services on Sundays to accommodate 6,000 members and many visitors. BT has planted 20 churches in the New York City area and elsewhere.

Cymbala, a youthful 57, speaks in a low-key, almost conversational style. He encourages lengthy episodes of praise as he slowly paces the platform. "How many believe God can still do miracles?" he asks during an altar call.

Cymbala eschews religious labels. Pointing out that the body of Christ is not Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian,

Pentecostal or charismatic, he says it is one church made up of sinners saved by grace and refers to BT as a nondenominational Christian church.