

Charismatic Churches See Growth, Miracles in Ireland

✖ **March 17, 2009** – As the world marks St. Patrick's Day today—remembering the Irish apostle who helped turn a pagan nation into a hotbed of Christianity—a Vineyard church in Coleraine, Northern Ireland, is helping spread a new wave of spiritual renewal across the nation.

(Photo: Causeway Coast Vineyard leading Healing on the Streets outreach)

"It seems to us that God is moving in our communities in Ireland," said Alan Scott, who with his songwriter-wife, Kathryn, leads the 350-member Causeway Coast Vineyard, where the worship projects *Hungry*, *Satisfy* and *I Belong* were birthed.

Instead of following the traditional model of commissioning couples to plant churches, Causeway Coast Vineyard has been sending teams into communities across Ireland, where they set up a banner in the street that says, "Healing," and place a few chairs where people can sit while receiving prayer.

"We are saying, let's see if we can go to an area, heal the sick and see what emerges from that kind of model—and see if ultimately a community forms around kingdom activity in that area," Scott said. "It's a lot messier."

But Scott said the results have been dramatic. South of the border in the Republic of Ireland, he said the team encountered a Gypsy woman who was diabetic and blind in one eye. "The Lord sovereignly healed her," Scott recalled. "Her son was lame in his right leg and was again sovereignly healed. They all just came from everywhere. It was book of Acts stuff."

The intercessors were invited to pray for others. A boy with scoliosis-a severe curvature of the spine-received prayer and "instantly straightened up." Similar experiences followed as the team visited other parts of the republic. "Every time we go we see the sick healed," Scott said.

Currently, five Vineyard churches meet around the island, which is divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Congregations are meeting in Belfast, Portadown, Dungannon, Coleraine and Dublin, and there are plans to set up more.

Ministry leaders say the Vineyard movement is just one of several growing Spirit-filled churches in Ireland.

"There are lots of encouraging things that are happening in the Church of Ireland, in Ireland-both north and south-at the moment," said Canon Rev. David McClay, a Church of Ireland rector in Belfast. "There are pockets of growth in different places, and there are new initiatives that are happening. I would say that today, probably more than ever, there is an atmosphere around that encourages fresh initiatives, that encourages different thinking, that encourages new expressions of ministering and worship."

In addition to leading his church, called Willowfield, McClay oversees New Wine Ireland, a network of nearly 100 churches promoting spiritual renewal across denominational and geographical lines. He said that in Dublin, a church known as CORE has grown from 10 people to a vibrant citywide fellowship. And in Redcross in County Wicklow, a tiny rural congregation of just a dozen has grown to 200 in the last five years.

"That has been brought about by just doing church differently, more open worship, more free worship, engaging with young people and running kids KIDS' clubs," McClay said of the Wicklow church.

Gary Davidson, leader of the Assemblies of God Ireland (AGI), believes there is a new openness to spiritual gifts among evangelical congregations, as the nation itself is challenged to show openness toward a new wave of immigrants from Africa and Eastern Europe. Those new citizens are forming their own congregations, radically altering the churchgoing map.

A “GI baby” born in England and brought up in Oklahoma, Davidson moved to the republic in 1980 to work with Teen Challenge, a substance abuse recovery ministry. He later helped plant St. Mark’s Church in Dublin—a 650-member congregation and now one of Ireland’s best-known Pentecostal churches. Today more than 30 congregations are involved with AGI, and the denomination runs its own Bible school.

“Our goal in the next two years is to have 50 churches,” Davidson said.

Davidson said that though renewal is spreading, Ireland is not like the nation depicted in the classic John Wayne film *The Quiet Man*. “The respect people would have held for God and the Roman Catholic Church is not there to the extent that it was,” Davidson said. “There is a huge moral vacuum in the nation. We need to pray that God will raise up godly leaders.”

Vineyard leader Alan Scott said the rich heritage of early Irish church leaders such as St. Patrick continues to influence him and his church. He points particularly to the monastic leader Columba, who sailed from Derry and set up a strategic mission base at Iona off the coast of Scotland. (Read about St. Patrick’s charismatic faith.)

“Part of our reason for existing is that we want to recapture some of that original mandate,” Scott said. “There was a group of crazy monks who were so captured by the Spirit of God they understood that community and mission are inseparable. They had something in their heart that wanted to care for the poor and change the community in which they functioned. Then they

would go out from here to England and then on to Germany from there.”

Scott said many Vineyard leaders have a sense that anything is possible. “We’re very excited about the future and about planting missional congregations throughout Ireland,” Scott told *Charisma*. “So there’s a vibrancy and an energy on it.”