

Charismatic Pastors Build 'Giant Jesus' Along Interstate 75

Ohio ministers Lawrence and Darlene Bishop say the six-story King of Kings statue has helped lead travelers to faith in Christ

A 62-foot statue outside a charismatic church in Monroe, Ohio, got people across the country talking about Jesus.

After the replica of Christ was unveiled in November along Interstate 75 roughly 20 miles outside Cincinnati, the statue won cheers and jeers from observers nationwide.

Some decried it as a highway distraction or an idolatrous "graven image," said Lawrence Bishop, co-pastor of Solid Rock Church, which funded the project. Others, however, said the statue reminded them of Christ's love. Bishop said the statue motivated one man not to end his life. "He passed by and saw that statue and said at the next exit he started weeping, and he got off the exit and gave his heart to God, saved his life," Bishop said.

The "Giant Jesus," whose hands are the size of dump trucks, has become something of a tourist attraction. Considered the largest image of Christ in North America, the statue soon was to be included in the Guinness Book of World Records. But Bishop and his wife, Darlene, a popular conference speaker, say the \$250,000 project wasn't designed to make history.

"We've had people say, 'Why didn't you take that money and

feed the poor?'" Darlene Bishop said. "Maybe we could have fed a few hungry people, but for years to come, I believe, this is going to give people hope. Not just a meal to eat, but hope for their eternal life."

"We tell them, also, that we do feed the poor," Lawrence Bishop added. "That's why we can afford to build this Jesus. Because God has blessed us because we do help the poor."

Nashville, artist Brad Coriell has designed paintings and sculptures for several charismatic ministries and has artwork in four presidential libraries, but he said the "King of Kings" project, which took almost a year to complete, is his largest to date. He believes God gave him the idea to make the steel-and-fiberglass sculpture that started at 45 feet but later was altered to be more than six stories tall.

"It's the witnessing tool I always wanted," Coriell said. "Everybody's talking about Jesus. Negative or positive, they're all talking about [the statue], and that's what I wanted. Because someone that doesn't know Jesus is going to hear that talk, or someone's going to use that as the witnessing opportunity to get to that person and get that soul saved, and that's what it was all about for me."

Adrienne S. Gaines