

Christians meet on National Mall for Prayer and Worship

Numbers were down but hopes were up Memorial Day weekend when intercessors, worshipers united in Washington

A recent worship memorial that honored the faith and heroism of 9/11 while praying for America's future failed to meet attendance expectations but managed to deliver the hoped-for spiritual punch.

Christians who converged on Washington, D.C., Memorial Day weekend to participate in the American Worship Gathering celebrated their faith, honored America's heroes and prayed for the nation's leaders. The National Park Service estimated attendance between 5,000 and 10,000. While those numbers were much lower than host Worship Alliance expected, the group believed the event still made a significant spiritual impact on the nation's capital.

The six-hour worship extravaganza featured many well-known Christian artists including Tom Brooks, Don Moen, Rick Muchow, Jeff Deyo, Lenny LeBlanc, Tommy Walker, Bob Fitts and John Tesh, as well as several distinguished guest speakers including J.C. Watts, R-Okla.; Julie Laipply, Miss Virginia USA 2002; Pentagon survivors; and NFL players.

Organizer Tom Brooks, senior producer, arranger and keyboardist with Hosanna!Integrity Music, said the idea for the event was birthed shortly after the attacks of 9/11. "Our team of musicians were standing in an airport security line waiting to fly to Korea when we heard the news of allied bombing raids taking place in Afghanistan," Brooks said. "It was then that we realized how much our own nation needed

prayer.”

The Worship Alliance team had only five months to plan the Washington event, but Brooks said he believed the timing was right because people’s hearts were still open after the tragedy of 9/11.

“Calling Christians together to worship and pray for our nation in an organized way is very significant at this time,” Brooks told Charisma. “And we liked the idea of holding the event in a place where the entire nation could see it—not inside a church building, but right out on the Mall in D.C.”

Christians came from as far away as California to participate. Reagan Bennett, 15, of Raleigh, N.C., said she came with 30 members of her church youth group “to praise, worship and redeem our nation for Christ again.”

Dennis Pisani, a local pastor, said he saw the event as foundational in building an altar [of praise] in the capital. “God inhabits the praises of His people, and we are enthroning Him right now in the middle of our city, in front of the White House, in front of the Capitol,” he said.

Between songs, speakers honored the country’s recent heroes. Watts told the crowd that since 9/11, America has discovered who her real heroes are. “A crisis does not make heroes. A crisis reveals heroes,” he stated.

Laipply, who works at the Pentagon, shared how she overslept the morning of 9/11, missing a meeting in the Pentagon near the crash site. “I feel so fortunate,” she said. “That event has made me focus so much more on my faith.”

Washington Redskins Chaplain Brett Fuller told the audience: "What I see out here today is what heaven looks like. It's white, it's black, it's cross-denominational, it's Korean, it's Hispanic—it's people dwelling together."

The Worship Alliance team plans to hold a similar gathering in New York City on Sept. 7 and possibly one in Los Angeles in November. Next year they expect to return to South Korea where they hosted the first Worship Explosion Festival last year at the Demilitarized Zone.

"When God gives you a vision, you don't see the whole picture at once,"

Brooks explained. "But I believe our job is to bring people into God's presence through praise and worship, and when we do that, God can do exactly what He wants to do."

A live benefit album, CD and video were recorded with the proceeds to go to the Todd M. Beamer Foundation. More information about the project is available at .

Sandra K. Chambers
in Washington, D.C.