

Evangelist Peter Youngren Hopes Toronto Church Will Be Healing Center

Youngren, who directs missionary ventures in Africa, believes God wants the new Canadian church to be a center for healing

When they heard that international evangelist Peter Youngren of St. Catharines, Ontario, was planning to launch a church, some of his Canadian colleagues shook their heads and sighed in deep sympathy: "You're starting a church in Toronto? It's so hard."

"I was amazed," Youngren reflected. "The gospel is a joyous message, and I'm not going to let it be a burden. I believe if we have the right presentation and the right structure people will respond."

Response since Youngren opened the doors to the Toronto International Celebration Church (TICC) last September has been that a core group of more than 400 attends each Sunday service, and 6,400 people receive regularly mailed updates on church activities.

Youngren is no novice at church planting. His apostolic and evangelistic ministry is known for miracles, and Youngren started the 2,000-member Word of Life church in St. Catharines where he is pastor.

He maintains an international missions ministry comparable in size and scope to that of Reinhard Bonnke in Africa. Through it, more than 3 million have come to Christ in 70 countries and thousands of churches have been planted worldwide.

Youngren believes a prophecy by intercessor Cindy Jacobs confirmed that God wants a center for healing and miracles in Toronto and says that miracles are a vital part of TICC's meetings. He adds that his desire to see Toronto changed by the gospel had been with him 10 years before he responded to it.

"I act when the burden and spiritual desire become so strong that I'm in disobedience if I don't do it," he said.

In early 1999, he asked his son, Peter Karl Youngren, 24, to co-pastor the new church. Peter Karl drove through the streets of Toronto for a year, praying for the city and searching for a building for the new congregation while the elder Youngren organized prayer in the streets as a way to evangelize.

"We invested a lot of time and money in reaching new people before we started the church," Peter Youngren said. "We formed a task force. We sent 15 to 20 young people in red T-shirts all over Toronto in pairs.

"We set up kiosks—like the sausage vendors by the SkyDome—and offered prayer. People could get prayer for their uncle or for their rabbit—whatever."

Task force members prayed with people to receive salvation and told them about the new church, offering to mail them information. That strategy added 2,600 names to the mailing

list.

They worked the streets in the prospective church neighborhood for six weeks, four nights a week, knocking on doors and surveying the attitudes and beliefs of residents. This strategy is consistent with Youngren's community-oriented overseas outreaches, in which he personally mingles with locals and shares the gospel with them. "The questions drew people into conversation that broke mind-sets and allowed us to minister to their needs," said Dean Jenkins, evangelism pastor at TICC.

"We pulled up to a low-income apartment complex in a bus loaded with groceries, knocked on doors and gave them away. People wept. They were blown away. Some said they didn't need food, but others—like a woman whose husband had just left her—said, 'I don't have anything.'"

Youngren says Toronto is wide open for evangelism. "Many miracles happened," Peter Karl said. "There was no demographic on it. A whole Muslim family got saved. I knocked on doors in some of the richest neighborhoods, and no one rejected me. It's unbelievable."

With winning people to Christ as their primary objective, and from five to 15 converts per service, Youngren's team is immersing new believers in a personal experience with God and teaching them God's Word. They are preparing a small-group structure as an avenue for one-on-one ministry.

Visiting new believers and community contacts is an ongoing part of the ministry. Currently their rented building, the Garden Church in North York, holds 900, but Peter Karl is

looking into new facilities as big as 88,000 square feet.

“I believe we’re at the beginning of a huge harvest, and if we’re talking a year from now, five years from now, there’s going to be an avalanche of souls coming to the Lord in Toronto—and that’s not a credit to TICC. It’s a credit to God.”