

Former football player leads Canadian prayer movement

Brian Warren says God is using unified prayer to prepare Canada for carrying revival and healing to the world

Can anything good come from the barrios of south Phoenix, where in 1977 the National Guard shut down race riots between blacks and Hispanics? Brian Warren, who calls the turf of south Phoenix home, implies this could be a reason why God commissioned him as a missionary to Canada: to bring unity to the body of Christ through prayer.

Since coming to Canada in 1986, the former United States Football League and Canadian Football League linebacker/defensive end and two-time Grey Cup champion has not only shaken hands with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, but also has shaken divisions along denominational and ethnic lines among Canadian Christians.

By facilitating unity among believers through focused corporate prayer, Warren believes he is fulfilling his part of a divine mandate to prepare Canada for her prophetic destiny as a "sending" nation that will carry revival and healing around the world. "Whenever God is getting ready to do something He gets His people praying," said Warren, quoting historian J. Edwin Orr.

Based in Burlington, Ontario, Warren, now ordained with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, is a guest co-host of the daily national Christian TV broadcast 100 Huntley Street. He also is the founder and CEO of Canada in Prayer—the first national Internet-based prayer network—which calls the body of

Christ to pray for Canada on the first Friday of every month, and equips intercessors and local congregations with strategic local and national prayer requests electronically.

“Our mission is to deepen the prayer movement in Canada and position it firmly in the local church because a church without an effective prayer ministry is simply operating a religious treadmill,” Warren said. “For the first time intercessors in [the Canadian territory] Nunavut can pray specifically for Winnipeg [Manitoba], and vice versa.”

Warren takes his assignment very seriously. “God has burned the zeal to see Canada fulfill her destiny in my heart,” he said. “I sleep, eat and drink Canada. I say, ‘God, give me Canada.’ I have heart-guts and heart-beat for Canada.”

Statistics show that Warren’s commission is timely. Canadian believers say they feel marginalized in a secular society where church growth is declining rapidly, explains Karen Warren, Brian’s wife and publicist. With less than 7 percent of Canadians professing a personal relationship with Christ, “Problems arise, like feeling that you aren’t impacting society.”

“People look at us as isolated and insignificant—a laughing stock,” Brian Warren adds. He says the current isolation is largely the church’s fault.

“So much has been done in the name of Christ that our words and deeds seem hollow to the world,” Warren said. “The gentle disassembling of the old order that is now taking place through prayer will make us a church of substance, where the presence of God can dwell and be manifest.”

He points out that reconciliation is first needed within the church before it can be attempted outside the church. He says unified prayer is key to overcoming these barriers.

Warren is convinced that repentance on behalf of the church also requires the body of Christ to unite corporately. The Canadian Prayer Assemblies, an initiative of Canada in Prayer, is a tool for realizing this vision. The first assembly, held last year in Ottawa, centered on reconciliation and drew 8,500 intercessors, including teams from 27 national prayer ministries. It was dubbed the most denominationally, ethnically and racially diverse gathering in Canadian history.

This year's assembly, held in Winnipeg, focused on unity through the shared tenets of the Christian faith. "Churches that probably would never have worked together are now gathering all over the nation," Karen Warren said. "They're finding common ground through takes away the pettiness and brings the church to a place where we are one in Christ."

The Assemblies have been so unique in their ability to unify believers nationally that Gary Walsh, president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, described them as "a new beginning for the church in Canada."

-Daina Doucet in Hamilton, Ontario