

Kansas City Church Celebrates Five Years of 'Smithton Outpouring'

A celebration at World Revival Church commemorated the revival that started in a tiny town in central Missouri

As the music reaches near eardrum-bursting decibels, hundreds of people begin jumping. Some pop skyward on beat; others are a jump behind. Arms flail wildly as cries of praise and adoration pierce the air. Even the children, many of whom are wedged between adults, shout to the Lord with searing intensity.

Suddenly, there is a rush to the altar. Within seconds the pews have emptied as most of the 800 gathered cram themselves into the altar area. There, the worship escalates as about 100 worshipers fall to the floor as if hit by a gigantic wave.

The singing continues as intercessory-prayer-team members fan through the throng. Like doctors in a triage they assess needs, but instead of medical treatment they offer fervent prayers.

To the uninitiated the service may seem overwhelming, but for those who have been part of this congregation since revival began five years ago it is standard operating procedure. This night is one of three celebrating the fifth anniversary of a revival known widely as the "Smithton Outpouring."

Though the location and scope of the revival has changed, the same Spirit that struck Steve Gray, 49, pastor of World Revival Church in Kansas City, Mo., (formerly Smithton Community Church) continues to fuel these intense gatherings and radically change people's lives.

"To this day I am more convicted and sure that this is right," says Randy Lohman, 43, who has been a member of the church for six years. "Jesus used to be a part of my life, now He is my life."

The revival started during a Sunday evening service in March 1996 at Smithton Community Church in central Missouri after Gray returned from revival services at Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla. Without hesitation the entire Smithton congregation followed suit, and revival was officially under way. Over the next four years more than 225,000 people from every state and more than 60 countries attended Smithton's revival meetings.

Last year, Gray moved the revival to Kansas City, some 90 miles from Smithton. More than 60 families from the close-knit Smithton congregation left jobs, families and homes to stay with the revival. The church relocated to 62 acres of land near I-470 in Kansas City and changed its name to World Revival Church. From June 2000 to January of this year services were held in a tent while the new church was constructed.

"We had gone as far as we could go in Smithton," Gray said. "But God was not finished with us or with what He wanted to do through us—so we've adapted. One of the reasons we came here was to build a congregation that could accommodate what God is going to do in the next five years. We are focusing on the

nations of the world with the theme of revival.”

As a result of the revival, Gray said, numerous people have been healed, delivered and transformed. Doug Smith, 25, an ex-drug dealer who was facing 13 years in prison, agrees.

He came to a service three years ago and said he felt the presence of God as soon as he walked through the doors. That night, he committed his life to Jesus Christ.

In doing so, he said, he was set free from his addiction to alcohol and drugs. After serving a short prison sentence, he pursued and obtained his master’s degree and now works at a local university.

“The Lord’s presence came on me,” Smith said, recalling his conversion experience. “Words can’t describe how different I am today compared to how I was three years ago.”

Although the parking lot was not completed as promised and new chairs for the sanctuary did not arrive on time, the anniversary celebration proceeded as planned. John Kilpatrick, pastor of Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla., preached, a special video chronicled the history of the revival, visitors from around the globe worshiped with regular attendees, and the presence of God descended once again.

Lohman summed up the feelings of many who have been touched by the revival during the last five years. “We are living our dream,” he said. “We get to see the power of God in our day.”