

Lakeland Revival Officially Ends

After a major scandal and dwindling crowds, the Lakeland Outpouring concluded Sunday.



[]The Lakeland Outpouring's final meeting was held at Ignited Church on Sunday—six months after Canadian evangelist Todd Bentley launched daily meetings in the small Lakeland, Fla., community and left without warning Aug. 11 in a cloud of scandal.

“None of us knew how long this would last,” said Ignited Church senior pastor Stephen Strader, who announced on a blog Oct. 2 that, with the outpouring ending, he intends to set up a global apostolic base in Lakeland. “Ignited Church has had a vision [for] an International Apostolic Center. The Lakeland Outpouring has catapulted our vision forward.”

Strader said with the support of “dozens of major leaders” for his apostolic center, he envisions a place for hosting conferences, special events and training workshops. He also announced the creation of Ignited Network of Ministries (INM), an initiative to connect Ignited Church with Lakeland-spawned revivals worldwide.

Days after Bentley told his Fresh Fire Ministries (FFM) staff in August that he and his wife were separating, the 10,000-seat air dome

used for the revival meetings was taken down. Bentley resigned his position at Fresh Fire, stepped down from public ministry and faded from the public eye.

It was his FFM board in Abbotsford, British Columbia, that later announced that Bentley had confessed to an inappropriate relationship with a female staff member. At the time, a senior board member told *Charisma* that Bentley's alcohol consumption also had "crossed the line."

Rick Joyner, founder of MorningStar Ministries in Fort Mill, S.C., has since taken the lead in helping Bentley find healing and restoration. Joyner appeared on the platform in Lakeland in June when Bentley publicly submitted himself to the oversight of apostolic leaders Bill Johnson, John Arnott and Ché Ahn.

Joyner told *Charisma* that Johnson and Texas pastor Jack Deere would assist him in Bentley's restoration. He admitted that the process would not be easy. "Todd does have some serious issues he must deal with, and he knows it more than anyone," Joyner said.

Observers say that worldwide, via GOD TV and the Internet, Bentley's involvement in the Lakeland Outpouring sparked genuine renewal among Christians despite criticism of his theology and character stirring among some charismatic leaders.

Bentley's faith and exuberance impressed seasoned, prominent

revivalists

while his wild tactics often tempered the enthusiasm of other leaders. When praying for healing, the tattooed evangelist was known to hit the sick in the stomach with his knee in a move more common among wrestlers than preachers. Bentley even recounted kicking a woman in the face in an act of "obedience to the Lord."

Yet, with the exception of a few ministers, many charismatic leaders chose to overlook Bentley's peculiar methods for the sake of what they saw as "fruit." They claimed the revival stirred many Christians worldwide to pursue God with a renewed hunger.

"Personally, I believe that the Lakeland Outpouring was another wave of revival like Toronto and Brownsville," said Los Angeles-area pastor Ahn, referring to the Toronto Blessing and the Pensacola Revival, both of which occurred during the 1990s. "Each wave has its own life span."

Johnson, senior pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, Calif., told *Charisma* that many people were deeply saddened over the revelations of Bentley's moral failings, "but people have also come to grips with the fact that it was never about Todd, it is really about God."

"The impact of the Lakeland Outpouring is quite significant on a global level," Johnson said. "There are fires of revival all over Europe that are the direct result of what God was doing in Lakeland."

The reason so much of Europe was impacted by what occurred in Lakeland was largely because daily meetings were broadcast on GOD TV, a satellite-based TV network with millions of viewers in 200 nations.

More than a month after Bentley's problems became public, GOD TV co-founders Rory and Wendy Alec issued a statement defending the outpouring and Bentley's work in Lakeland. "[Todd] was consistently and unrelentingly criticized, maligned [and] persecuted," they stated. "The attacks grew increasingly violent, and the heartbreaking thing was that so much of it came from the church." The couple said they would never regret airing the Lakeland Outpouring because tons of e-mails from people claiming to be healed, transformed or revived inspired a "fear of the Lord" that motivated them to continue the broadcasts. "It was not a mistake," the Alecs said. "It was not by mistake. We believe it was a clear instruction from the Lord" to air the meetings.

The network plans to broadcast other offshoots of Lakeland, including current revival meetings in Dudley, England.

As repercussions of the Lakeland Outpouring continue spreading across the globe, leaders who are ministering to Bentley said they are not overly concerned with seeing him quickly return to public ministry. "The focus is not of Todd the evangelist; it is on Todd the person," Johnson said. "We want him healed up, not because of what he can do, but because God loves him and

treasures him as a
son.” **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**

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