

Make Way for the Women

Although chauvinistic attitudes still stand in their way, a new group of women has risen to the challenge of leading the 21st century church.

Early in her ministry career, Bible teacher Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham, was snubbed when a group of male pastors turned their chairs around to indicate their objection to being addressed by a female preacher. Yet since that time—the early 1980s—she has traveled around the world, speaking to audiences of both men and women from platforms offered to her not by women only but also by prominent male leaders, including, in the years before his death, Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright.

Lotz's current liberty to preach to both genders in high-profile venues

is not singular. Throughout Christendom "something is happening for women," as Bonnie and Mahesh Chavda declare in their 2006 book, *The Hidden Power of a Woman*. In both denominational and nondenominational—particularly Pentecostal-charismatic settings—women are taking their places alongside men as ministers of the gospel.

Biblical records prove that in the days of the early church, women played an important part in advancing the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul refers to many of them—believers such as Phoebe and Priscilla, for example—as deacons, teachers and partners with him in spreading the gospel throughout the ancient world.

Women have continued to serve in many capacities both within the organized church and without—as Sunday school teachers, choir directors, and even missionaries and traveling evangelists. More recently, they have been given the opportunity to act as leaders of worship teams, Bible studies, intercessory prayer groups and cell groups, and in some cases

as assistant or associate pastors.

But what is perhaps most amazing about the current scene is the number of women in church leadership—those who are senior pastors of a church or heads of apostolic ministries. In spite of the obstacles many women have faced, this number has continued to rise during the last half-century.

Though there are some Christians—both leaders and laymen—who would contend that God never meant for women to take on such roles, the women themselves point to the sovereign nature of their calls and the fruit of their ministries as proof that God has chosen and appointed them for the work He put in their hands. Rather than being outside His will, they claim, they are right in the middle of it.

“Some people have told me I can’t do what I’m doing,” says Paula White, who recently took over the duties of senior pastor of 26,000-member Without Walls International Church in Tampa, Florida, a church she and her husband, Randy, co-founded in 1992. “I tell them, ‘You told me a day late because not only can I do it, I’m doing it.’”

Recently, Charisma spoke with a dozen highly effective women who are leaders in the North American church (see page 58). We learned that they never planned to be where they are today, nor did they feel prepared for what God was asking them to do. Some didn’t want to do it, and many faced serious opposition along the way.

Today they not only have world-changing ministries but also are training a new generation of women to help lead the church through the next 50 years.

An Unexpected Call

White is a good example of one who didn’t expect to end up in her current position. “It’s still very surreal to me,” she says. “I never in my life dreamed [about] ... the phenomenal

doors that are opened to me.”

Now 41, White didn't hear the gospel until she was 18, and even after she gave her life to the Lord and sensed He was calling her into ministry, she had no idea she would one day be the pastor of a church—nor did she strive to attain such a position. She simply had a heart to serve, she says.

Her “training” consisted of working in various capacities in her local church, the National Church of God in Washington, D.C., as the pastor requested. She cleaned the building, then helped in the nursery, then taught 2- to 4-year-olds and finally did youth ministry. Ultimately, she was placed on staff as an evangelist and the director of children's church.

After she met and married Randy, the two of them were impressed by God to move to Tampa while flipping through a copy of Charisma and seeing an ad with the words “Tampa, Florida,” in it. The name seemed to jump out at them, and they left Washington with their pastor's blessing to begin a new work.

“We started with five people as an outreach in the inner city,” Paula says, “and people started calling us ‘pastor.’ So we started in a little storefront church, and it just continued to grow and evolve, and here we are today.”

“Here” is now a megachurch that is home to hundreds of evangelistic and humanitarian outreach ministries and missions efforts. Until recently, the couple co-pastored the church, but Randy now serves as bishop while Paula fulfills the role of head pastor as well as continuing her evangelistic ministry.

Naomi Dowdy, head of Naomi Dowdy Ministries and resident apostle of Trinity Christian Centre in Singapore, at first tried to circumvent her call to pastor a church. In 1972, after having ministered throughout the Marshall Islands as well as other places in the Orient for seven years, she sensed

change was on the horizon. About this time she was invited to Singapore to minister.

“I had already felt God leading me to leave the islands, to go out ... but I didn’t know where or what,” she says. “So I went to Singapore, and they wanted me to come back.”

But because of her busy schedule, Dowdy didn’t make it back for three years. While she was there the second time, the pastor of one of the churches had a problem with his visa and was ordered out of the country. On her way up the stairs to the immigration office with someone who was explaining the visa situation to her, she heard an audible voice say, “You are going to take the church.”

To avoid being asked to take the exiting pastor’s job, Dowdy changed hotels. If they can’t find me, they can’t ask me, she thought. But they did find her—and asked.

Dowdy, who was also an Assemblies of God (AG) missionary, tried one more escape route. She called AG headquarters to see if her supervisor would enforce an existing rule that missionaries couldn’t be pastors.

He wouldn’t. Instead he told her: “I think it’s great. At least I’ll know where you are now.”

Dowdy’s church, which had only 42 members when she stepped in, quickly became the fastest-growing church in Singapore. She turned it over to a new pastor nearly 30 years later with 4,500 members.

Today, because of the unique care-cell model Dowdy implemented and her vision to disciple every member to fulfill his or her destiny, the church has expanded to more than 5,500. It continues to grow, under different local leadership but with her apostolic oversight.

White and Dowdy aren’t the only women leaders on the scene

today who were surprised by God's call and its ultimate fulfillment.

Marilyn Hickey, 75, whose weekday TV program, Today With Marilyn and Sarah, reaches 1.5 billion people and whose international healing crusades are bringing many Muslims to Christ, might not have married her husband, Wally, if she had known he was called to pastor a church. "I did not want to marry a minister," she says.

Yet it was her interest in reaching out to the lost through their church that led her to host multiple Bible study groups and go on the radio and later television teaching the Word; to write books; and eventually to begin a worldwide ministry.

"I never anticipated doing what I do now," she says. "It was just a process. And I had such a passion. I knew that God's Word was the answer to people."

Challenging Old Mind-Sets

Whether they are apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists or those who move in the fivefold ministry, women such as White, Dowdy and Hickey who have been called by God are fulfilling their destinies in Him. But it hasn't been an easy road for many of them.

Cindy Jacobs, 55, co-founder with her husband, Mike, of Generals International in Dallas, has a number of horror stories from her early days in ministry. Several relate to her attempts to get ordained.

"I think the hardest thing that ever happened to me," she recalls, "was when the pastor at our church ... said: 'I'm not going to ordain you. I may ordain your husband, because I'm going to push you down so he can come forward.'"

Another time, her ordination was canceled right before the ceremony because the group she was applying to decided a woman

couldn't be ordained. When she finally did receive papers from another group, the leaders simply handed them to her at the end of a service, even though the other applicants—all men—had been called up to the platform by name to receive theirs.

Jacobs also endured a lot of criticism from people who thought she should be home with her husband and children rather than out ministering. Once, when she was speaking about women in leadership as a member of the board of March for Jesus, a man in the audience abruptly interrupted her message.

"A man stood up right in the middle of it and began shouting at me," she says. Claiming she was a heretic, he said, "I'm taking my wife and leaving," and stormed out.

"I just kept on teaching," Jacobs says. "I got a standing ovation at the end." And though she believes that gender is less an issue today than it used to be, she says women in leadership have to be prepared to deal with rejection.

"Rejection can be your daily bread. If you're not secure in the call of God, you might not make it," she says.

Charismatic Bible teacher Joyce Meyer, whose ministry through books and television now spans the globe, would agree.

"When God first called me, I probably got rejected by everybody I was close to at the time, other than my husband," she says. "We got asked to leave our church. Our family said: 'You guys are off the wall. You know this is not right.' And our friends said, 'If you're going to do this ... we just can't have anything to do with you.'"

"It was a very lonely time for me," she continues. "The devil screamed in my ear all day that I was crazy."

Beverly Crawford, 62, founder and senior pastor of Bible Enrichment Fellowship International Church in Inglewood, California, also paid a high price to fulfill God's call. When, at God's prompting, she stepped out to start her own

church in 1989, she went through “a very rough time.”

“I had threats on my life,” she says. “And men would write me letters. They threatened to come in and physically remove me from the church—from my own church.”

Worse, her husband chose to remain committed to their former pastor.

“I would have to do things,” Crawford says. “Hide my Bibles. Hide my books. Stop studying when he’s home. ... It became very tyrannical.”

Ultimately, her marriage ended in divorce because she refused to turn her back on the call and step down from being a pastor.

“That was one of the high costs,” admits Crawford, who never remarried. But she says she would do it again if she had to, to be in the will of God. “I don’t think there’s anything more powerful or beautiful than knowing that you are in the heart of God’s perfect will.”

Not all women in church leadership have run into as many obstacles as Jacobs and Crawford have. Dowdy says of her ministry career: “I don’t have a lot of the horror stories. Have there been people who would challenge the fact that I’m a woman? Yes, but ... I just felt: ‘You got an argument? Talk to God. I’m not in this because I want to be; I’m in this because He put me here.’”

Still, she acknowledges that barriers exist. One is “the old, traditional thinking, which comes out of the Dark Ages and bad hermeneutics,” she says. That thinking, according to Dowdy, is based on a misinterpretation of Bible passages that talk about women being submissive, being quiet in church, needing a covering and not having anything to say over men. And that point of view crosses the evangelical-charismatic and denominational divides, she claims.

Another barrier is the cap women put on themselves. "Because they have come out of all this [traditional] teaching, women have become their own worst enemy," Dowdy says. They believe a lie and suppress not only themselves but also women around them who try to break out of the old mind-set, she explains.

Cultural barriers exist, as well. But Dowdy believes many of the obstacles women have faced in the past are coming down. "I see that glass ceiling breaking," she says. "People have matured more in understanding now that we ... are able to go back to the original languages and study the Scripture rather than just regurgitating what the theologians coming out of the Dark Ages told us."

Training a Generation of Leaders

Dowdy is doing her part to topple the barriers. She's teaching men and women alike about God's design for them to work together to advance His kingdom by mentoring those who desire to fulfill His call on their lives. With the help of Barbara Wentroble, founder of International Breakthrough Ministries in Dallas, and Barbara Yoder, founder of Shekinah International and senior pastor of Shekinah Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, she developed a mentoring conference called Apostolic Women Arising that is held in the U.S. and abroad.

Every conference begins with two days of intense interaction between the leaders-in-training and the host leaders and speakers. They are followed by two additional days of teaching and equipping.

In addition, Dowdy, Wentroble and Yoder all offer more individualized mentoring through the apostolic networks they founded—providing leadership training to pastors and heads of ministries worldwide. Because they lacked mentors when they were starting out in ministry, they are passionate about helping others avoid the pitfalls they encountered and reach their destinies more quickly.

“That’s why I have such a passion for it,” Wentroble says. “I want other women to get there faster than I did.”

Jacobs also experienced the lack of a mentor and believes some of the difficulties she lived through were the result. Through her leadership network, the Deborah Company, she hopes to help upcoming female leaders circumvent those adversities.

“One reason I want to raise up a new generation of Deborahs is that I don’t want them to suffer like I suffered,” she says. “Some of the things were because of my own lack of knowledge. But I didn’t have a mentor. When I first started preaching, I didn’t know one woman in leadership.”

Rebecca Greenwood, 40, founder and president of Christian Harvest International, has benefited from knowing and being mentored by many women—and men—in leadership. They include Alice and Eddie Smith, co-founders of the U.S. Prayer Center; Doris and Peter Wagner of Global Harvest Ministries; and Jacobs and Dowdy.

“Mentoring has helped me know who I am in the Lord, grow in my confidence in the Lord and also in the giftings the Lord has given me,” she says. “Mentoring is what has opened the doors for me to enter into my ministry.”

The current emphasis on mentoring is an encouraging sign to many that women who have paved the way in church leadership will not be the last of their breed. Besides training up their own replacements, they are equipping large numbers of other women leaders to fulfill their unique calls.

“For me,” Yoder says, “it’s really thrilling to see great women arising as church leaders in this hour—women who have the heart of God, women who are following God with all their heart and who are not afraid to do what God has told them, who are radical in their obedience. Because it’s always been possible to be a woman teacher—but a great woman church leader, no.”

Here are 20 tips from women currently in apostolic leadership that will help make your journey to full-time ministry a successful one.

1. Develop an intimate relationship with God and learn to know His voice.
2. Have a heart to fulfill God's kingdom vision and your destiny.
3. Find your identity in God. Determine what your calling is, and step out in it with confidence as God provides opportunities.
4. Don't get frustrated trying to make it happen. Put your hand to what is already in front of you, study to show yourself approved and enjoy where you are on the way to where you're going.
5. Start serving in small ways. Prove your faithfulness in those and then follow God's direction from step to step as He expands your responsibility.
6. Get a core group of people around you who believe in you and who will support and pray for you.
7. Do not be diverted from your call by circumstances or people who don't line up with it. Be sensitive to ungodly counsel.
8. Find a mentor who has experience, who believes in you and your potential, and who is willing to provide the necessary training and equipping to help you fulfill God's call on your life.
9. Go to places where the Spirit of God is moving and get around people who are anointed, particularly in the areas in which you feel called, so you can receive an impartation from them.
10. Attend short-term apostolic training events.
11. Study the lives of women who have gone before you in ministry, including women in the Bible, to learn from their

experience.

12. Prepare in every area of your life to pursue God's call. Be ready financially, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually for what God is asking you to do.

13. Remember that ministry comes out of relationship. Continually seek to deepen your relationship with God through prayer and study of the Word.

14. Have a clear understanding of what ministry is. Ministry is simply helping somebody with the love of Jesus wherever there's a need.

15. Don't neglect your family. Take care of your husband, children and responsibilities at home.

16. Don't become a prima donna. Remain touchable.

17. Make sure you don't hold any bitterness in your heart toward men.

18. Do what you do with excellence.

19. Attend a strong local church for accountability purposes and as a covering for your ministry.

20. Grow in authority by continually obeying God.

Women on the Rise

Even critics of women in ministry can't deny the supernatural call of God on these female leaders' lives.

Most of the women profiled below did not set out to become full-time ministers, let alone apostolic church leaders. In fact, many of them had no formal Bible-school training when God first tapped them on the shoulder and they, like the prophet Jonah, tried to run from His call. But in spite of their seeming lack of preparation, their initial resistance and persecution from those around them, God led them supernaturally into leadership and is using them mightily to advance His kingdom.

Beverly Crawford

Beverly Crawford has been hungry for God since she was a little girl. But after her mother died when she was 10, she turned away from Him and focused on other pursuits.

In 1974, a friend invited her to church, and Crawford, at 29, gave her life to Christ and was filled with the Holy Spirit. She joined a large West Coast congregation and became involved in ministry, teaching Sunday school and a Bible study for women that eventually attracted men as well. It grew so large that the only venue big enough to host it was the 1,400-seat sanctuary.

“That’s how things got started,” she says. “That’s how I learned to flow in the gifts.”

During her 10 years at the church, Crawford was licensed and given responsibility for the youth department, the women’s ministry and the singles ministry—yet she had never been to Bible school. All her training came from the Holy Spirit, she says.

In the mid-1980s, she stepped down from her church duties and began an outreach Bible study. At the time she had no intention of starting a church, but on the way to joining a different congregation, God spoke to her.

“He told me, ‘I didn’t tell you to join a church; I told you to start one,’” she says.

Today Crawford’s Bible Enrichment Fellowship International Church in Inglewood, California, has 4,000 members and supports radio and television ministries as well as an apostolic network, prophetic seminars, and numerous community outreaches.

Kimberly Daniels

To look at her now, poised and well-dressed, expounding on God’s Word before her 500-member congregation at Spoken Word

Ministries in Jacksonville, Florida, you'd never know Kimberly Daniels spent her youth on the streets of that same city, running with a gang and becoming involved in crime and violence. A prostitute and drug addict for a time, Daniels was anything but the picture of a future pastor.

Today, however, the only hint of her former life is her familiarity with the devil's ways—and her willingness to confront the enemy when she discerns he is encroaching on God's territory. In fact, it was her boldness to take on the devil in order to bring deliverance to inner-city youth that first earned her a reputation as the "Demon Buster."

Daniels kicked her cocaine habit when she joined the Army and then gave her life to Christ while on active duty in Germany. She immediately began leading a Bible study and was preaching within six months.

When she returned to the U.S., she started a center to help girls get off drugs but had trouble finding a church that would accept them. Finally, God told her: "You pastor them." And out of her drug center came a church.

In addition to pastoring Spoken Word and overseeing Word Bible College, Daniels leads Commanders of the Morning, a large network of intercessors she trains in prayer and spiritual warfare. Through her Iron Sharpens Iron ministry she equips believers to operate in the fivefold ministry and encourages them to fulfill their God-appointed roles in the church. She also travels worldwide to minister in conferences and plans to open a second church, Rhema Way City Church, in Jacksonville this year.

Naomi Dawdy

When Naomi Dowdy was a girl, God spoke to her through the hymn "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," a song that likens believers to the lights around a lighthouse. While she was singing the words of the chorus—"Let the lower lights be

burning/ Send a gleam across the wave!”—in a church service one day, she heard a voice say aloud to her, “That’s what I want you to do.”

Later, in San Diego, Dowdy sat on the shore as often as possible—but it wasn’t to let her light shine for sinners. She had drifted from God and was working the night shift so she could spend all day on the beach.

But immediately after she gave her life to Christ at age 25, Dowdy says, she began preaching, first on Skid Row in San Diego and later on the radio. Then God appeared to her in a vision and told her He was going to send her to “the islands of the sea.” For nine years she worked as a missionary in the Marshall Islands, teaching at Bible schools, planting churches and training pastors throughout Asia—until God offered her her own church.

“I didn’t want to be a pastor,” Dowdy says. “It was not even on the radar screen.”

But she agreed to lead the pioneer Assemblies of God church in Singapore for six months. Nearly 30 years later, she resigned as senior pastor of Trinity Christian Centre. She had grown the church from 42 to 4,500 members, founded a Bible school and seminary—now TCA College—and developed a cell model currently used by thousands of churches around the world.

Dowdy, with bases in both Dallas and Singapore, continues to give spiritual oversight to the church as the resident apostle. She is also the founder and president of Global Leadership Network and the Global Covenant Network.

Pat Francis

Pat Francis didn’t set out to be a pastor. Born in Jamaica, she immigrated to Canada after graduating from college and began her professional career as a radiographer and certified psychotherapist at a Toronto area hospital.

She had committed her life to Christ at age 8 but backslid until she was 18, when she renewed her commitment to Him in a Brethren church. Through her involvement in Women's Aglow, she was baptized in the Holy Spirit and started attending a Pentecostal church.

Francis began serving God wherever needed, teaching Sunday school, leading a cell group, speaking at Aglow meetings and going on short-term mission trips. She also started a Friday night Bible study in her home. When the Bible study outgrew her home, she rented a church—which was soon too small as well.

"I didn't hear a word from the Lord that said, 'Start a church,'" she says. "I was still a professional." But she leased a larger facility for the Friday night meetings, and several hundred people attended.

"After one year, there were so many people being saved that I got the confirmation that we needed to have a Sunday morning service," she says. In addition, Francis was beginning to feel uneasy about whether people would view the Friday night gathering as some type of cult. "That was when it was confirmed to me that I must start a Sunday morning fellowship and that God was going to break through in revival."

More than 700 people showed up at the first Sunday service—and the numbers have continued to increase. Today, Kingdom Covenant Ministries is 3,000 members strong and supports a media arm that includes a weekly TV program; a missions arm that establishes medical centers in other nations and provides aid to orphanages and victims of disaster; a youth services arm that helps at-risk youth and those who have been in trouble with the law; a school; and numerous community programs and outreaches.

Marilyn Hickey

Marilyn Hickey says she has more energy now, at 75, than she

had when she was 30. It's a good thing, because as president of Marilyn Hickey Ministries she spends about 60 percent of her time traveling, mostly to lead healing crusades in Muslim countries, and 40 percent ministering at churches and conferences. And that's when she's not filming the weekday TV program she co-hosts with her daughter, Sarah Bowling.

Marilyn is a founding pastor with her husband, Wally, of Orchard Road Christian Center outside Denver. Three years ago the two of them turned the leadership of the church over to Sarah and her husband, Reece, but Marilyn and Wally remain in supporting roles.

From her earliest days, Hickey has had a passion for God's Word. She was raised a liberal Methodist, but at age 10, before she gave her life to the Lord, she began to read the Bible and memorize Scripture. After she and Wally were married and founded the church, Hickey had a desire to get other people in the Word as well and started teaching home Bible studies.

"This was right at the beginning of the charismatic renewal, so we had a lot of denominational people who came, got born again, Spirit-filled and healed," she says. The people who attended convinced her to go on the radio and paid for a daily five-minute spot that quickly grew to 15 minutes. Then, in 1970, she began a Sunday morning TV program.

In spite of these opportunities to minister, Hickey didn't know she was called to ministry until she was 42, when she asked God what He wanted her to do. "It was that day He called me to 'cover the earth with the Word,'" she says.

Hickey has worked to fulfill that mandate both in the U.S. and abroad through TV; books; teaching tapes, CDs and DVDs; the Internet; crusades and other teaching opportunities; and by taking food and Bibles to other nations. She also mentors women through clinics and team ministry trips.

Joyce Meyer

Joyce Meyer is probably one of the most visible charismatic ministers in the world today. She is the author of more than 70 books and has a daily TV and radio program, *Enjoying Everyday Life*, that is broadcast in more than 30 languages and reaches a potential audience of 3 billion people. In addition, she hosts conferences or crusades in numerous cities in the U.S. and abroad.

Yet, considering her background, she is one of the most unlikely people to have achieved such success that a person can imagine.

Born in St. Louis, Meyer was sexually abused as a child, married at a young age, received no college education and was divorced from her first husband during her early 20s. Before she was filled with the Holy Spirit, she was “hard, bitter and full of resentment,” as she puts it, even though she gave her life to Christ when she was 9.

Yet only a few weeks after being baptized in the Holy Spirit at age 33, Meyer started teaching a Bible study, believing God had spoken to her about teaching other people His Word. “At that point I had no idea I had a call on my life,” she says. “I just thought I was teaching a Bible study.”

But one morning when she was listening to a teaching tape, she sensed God saying to her: “You’re going to do that. You’re going to go all over the world and teach My Word, and you’re going to have a large teaching tape ministry.”

Since that day she has “pursued that calling with a passion,” she says.

Meyer’s ministry today consists of a missions and a media arm. She and her husband, Dave, to whom she’s been married 40 years, founded St. Louis Dream Center, a church patterned after Tommy Barnett’s Dream Center in Los Angeles. Their

church has numerous outreaches to the inner city, and the Meyers also sponsor humanitarian efforts overseas.

Doris Machin

Doris Machin has always loved to sing. But music took on a new meaning for her after her first encounter with God at age 20. She was listening to a Christian music tape and began singing background vocals with the song. She kept repeating the words "Jesus, Jesus is my Savior" without realizing what she was singing, and as she began to hit notes way outside her normal range, she sensed what was happening was supernatural.

Falling to her knees, she felt God all over her, she says. "My passion from that moment—because I received the Lord singing—became singing for Him."

Machin pursued her passion by singing in and later directing a musical group at her church in New Jersey. In 1990, she recorded her first worship CD, and God started opening doors for her to minister in churches around the country and in Puerto Rico.

In 1997, He prompted her to move to Miami as a takeoff point for international ministry. There she opened a school for worship leaders called Glory Worship Institute and founded her own music recording and distribution company, Glory Music Group, as a way to fulfill God's mandate to raise up an army of music ministers who had servants' hearts.

In August 2004, she started her own church, The Worship Tabernacle, to minister to those in the school and others who began coming to her for help. "I had received so many prophecies throughout the years of being a pastor," she says. "But I would say, 'That prophecy is not of God.'"

However, when the Lord gave her a vision and provided a covering for her through some seasoned apostles in Brazil, she had to say yes. "I was just burdened with the needs of the

people,” she says.

Barbara Wentroble

Raised a Southern Baptist, Barbara Wentroble didn’t become interested in the gifts of the Holy Spirit until her 2-year-old son, Mark, was miraculously healed of a potentially fatal condition in 1974. “[That] just grabbed me because I’d never known of anybody being healed by the Lord,” she says.

She began attending Women’s Aglow meetings and was made president of her local chapter—and eventually of an entire region. During her leadership, she received numerous invitations to minister but declined because she didn’t see herself as a speaker. “I came from one of the most timid, shy, bashful, introverted backgrounds you could ever imagine,” she says.

But when God made it clear He wanted her to accept, she did—and His presence was so powerful in the meetings, she says, that her ministry grew rapidly. She pulled away from it for four years in the 1980s while she and her husband, Dale, pastored a church, but in 1990 they moved to Dallas, and Barbara founded International Breakthrough Ministries, a unique apostolic network that brings together business and church leaders to advance God’s kingdom. She also leads prayer teams into nations and hosts business conferences to minister to those in the marketplace.

Luz Saavedra

Luz Saavedra sensed the call of God on her life when she was just 15 years old. “I could see clearly the moment God called me to the ministry,” she says. In that moment she was overwhelmed by the great need for workers in God’s kingdom and committed to being one of them.

Saavedra was not raised in a Christian home but asked Jesus into her heart on a visit to her grandmother’s at age 11. A

few years later, after dedicating herself to serving God, she began to prepare for ministry by attending a local Bible school in Monterey, Mexico. Her plan to work full time for God was delayed by marriage and starting a family, but in 1979 at age 22 she took on her first pastorate as an ordained Assemblies of God minister in Chihuahua, Mexico.

“We were there for about eight or nine years,” she says, “and God moved in extraordinary ways.”

But it was also hard because the people were needy and the church was not growing as Saavedra hoped it would. Finally she flew to Las Vegas to stay with a family she knew there and seek God about her situation. As the plane was descending, she heard His voice in her heart saying, “This is the city where you will lift up My work.”

In 1996, she and her family returned to Las Vegas to start a church. They began in a home with just a few relatives but quickly added to their numbers through cell groups. “From the beginning it was difficult—without friends, without knowing the city, without work, without the language, without the help of any organization,” Saavedra says.

Yet today, Centro Evangelistico Palabra Viva is one of the largest Hispanic churches in Nevada, with 1,300 members and 90 cell groups. Senior pastor Saavedra recently completed the purchase of a multimillion-dollar complex to further expand the church’s influence. Her goal is to bring not just revival but also reformation to a place known as “Sin City” and “The Entertainment Capital of the World.”

Paula White

By way of introducing herself and sharing her testimony, Paula White used to tell audiences that she is from five generations of heathens. But not anymore.

She recently learned that her great-grandmother on her

father's side, who often rocked White when she was young and "babbled" over her, was not crazy as other family members had insisted, but was actually a Christian who was praying in tongues. White believes it was her great-grandmother's prayers that helped her get where she is today—a place no one would have expected to find a woman with her personal history.

White's father committed suicide when she was 5, and she was sexually abused from ages 6 to 13. As a teenager, she developed a deep hunger for love that caused her to work at making herself loveable, controlling her weight through purging and engaging in sex with boyfriends. It wasn't until she was 18 that White heard the gospel for the first time and gave her life to Christ.

Soon afterward, God made clear to her the call on her life through a vision. "There were millions of people as far as I could see," she says. "Every time I opened my mouth, people were getting saved, healed or delivered. When I shut my mouth, they fell into outer darkness. ... And the Spirit of God ... said, 'I've called you to preach the gospel.'"

And preach it she does—at the church she pastors, Without Walls International Church in Tampa, Florida; at churches and conferences around the world; and on her daily TV program, Paula Today, which airs globally on numerous Christian and secular networks. White also oversees an affiliation of more than 200 churches worldwide.

Barbara Yoder

Barbara Yoder grew up listening to some of the greatest preachers of the American evangelical revival at the Billy Sunday Tabernacle in Winona Lake, Indiana. Her intellectual pursuits in college influenced her to become an atheist for a time, but a Damascus Road-experience, during which she says Jesus personally revealed Himself to her, changed her mind-set and led her to give her life to Christ.

While she was working toward a master's degree and then teaching at Wayne State University in Detroit during the 1970s, she attended Bethesda Missionary Temple, a hotspot of Pentecostal and charismatic revival pastored originally by founder Myrtle D. "Ma" Beall and later by her son, James. Yoder received the baptism of the Holy Spirit there and began attending ministry school because of a prophetic word spoken over her during her childhood.

"I wouldn't have called it a 'prophecy' when I was a child because I was an evangelical, not a charismatic, but a woman in the church ... came up to me, called my parents over, put her hands on my shoulders and said, 'This child is called to raise up a great work for God.'"

Yoder remembered the word again in 1984 when a pastor she had been working with in Ypsilanti, Michigan, suddenly left town, turning his struggling church over to her. Instead of shutting it down, she and her husband, Paul, took the people and started a new work in nearby Ann Arbor, co-pastoring until 1999, when Paul passed away.

Yoder continues to serve as the senior pastor of Shekinah Christian Church and the head of its umbrella organization, Shekinah International, which includes not only the local church but also a prayer network; Breakthrough Apostolic Ministries Network—her network of pastors, churches and ministry leaders; a healing house; and a leadership institute, Transformational Breakthrough School. She also travels internationally, training leaders and ministering in churches, conferences and seminars.

Cindy Jacobs

Cindy Jacobs was only 9 years old when she first heard God tell her He had something special He wanted her to do for Him. She assumed the "something special" would be taking on a traditional female role in ministry—as a missionary or a

pastor's wife, for example.

She was surprised to discover many years later that He was calling her to be a prophetic intercessor and international Christian leader who would mobilize a global army of prayer warriors. At first she tried to sidestep the call. "I asked God to use my husband instead of me," she says. "You know the prayer: 'Here I am, Lord, send someone else.'"

But God made it clear that He had chosen her for the unlikely assignment—even though she was a woman. He told her: "Stop fighting against the way I've made you. If I am going to pour My Spirit out on all flesh in the last days, then some people I choose have to be women!"

Jacobs' gifts as an intercessor became evident when she was in her early 30s. But with two young children to raise, she didn't see how she could respond to God's directive to go to the nations. God gave her peace, she says, when she consciously released her children to Him.

In 1985, Cindy and her husband, Mike, co-founded Generals of Intercession, now Generals International, to assemble intercessors in cities, regions and nations for the purpose of developing prayer strategies that will help bring revival. Cindy also ministers in conferences and hosts the weekly TV program God Knows.

Maureen D. Eha was the features editor of *Charisma*. This article was from *Charisma's* June 2007 issue.

Exclusive interview content and contact information for leaders profiled on pp. 58-62 is available at