

Street-corner 'prayer stations' comfort New Yorkers

New Yorkers shattered by September's terrorist attacks are turning for comfort and strength to local churches—who are praying for them not in sanctuaries but on the streets near Ground Zero.

Youth With a Mission (YWAM) Metro New York director Nick Savoca said that two days after the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) about 50 churches mobilized "prayer stations" on street corners and outside hospitals and impromptu missing-persons sites.

"We pray for the people's needs, then look to share the gospel," he said. "The response has been unbelievable. We're presenting the Lord Jesus in that way so they will understand that He cares, His heart is broken, and He wants a relationship with every New Yorker."

YWAM, an international missions organization that pioneered the prayer-station concept in New York City in 1992, is working with Campus Crusade for Christ and area churches for the outreach, which has attracted ministries, parachurch groups and congregations from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas and Minnesota.

The outreach has not just been effective in providing comfort to those rocked by the tragedy. Savoca said 32 people made commitments to Christ when they received prayer at one of the stations during September.

Jason Ureanski, volunteer coordinator for the prayer stations at Glad Tidings Tabernacle, located near the WTC, said members have ministered to hundreds since their prayer booths went up on Sept. 15. The 600-member Assemblies of God church also has dispatched "mobile prayer groups" to pass out Bibles and pray with firemen from the more than 20 firehouses in Manhattan.

"Usually when you offer prayer here, New Yorkers look at you weird," he said. "Now, they're practically begging us. We keep throwing the nets out, and the fish keep coming in. It's God's appointed time for New York City."

Meanwhile, hours before he addressed the nation in his Sept. 20 speech, President Bush told a group of more than two dozen religious leaders that he had been sustained by people's prayers. Evangelist Luis Palau, one of the group, told The (Portland) Oregonian that the president had said: "I've never felt so strong as I'm feeling now. There is a God who answers when we call for help."

Others who took part in the White House meeting included Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse; author Max Lucado; Bishop Charles Blake, pastor of West Angeles Church of God in Christ; Southern Baptist Convention President James Merritt; and Bishop G.E. Patterson, presiding bishop of the Church of God in Christ.

-Eric Tiansay