

The Lady is a Prayer Warrior

She is known as the mentor of dynamic preacher Juanita Bynum. But pastor Veter Nichols is committed to training an army of intercessors for God.

A long stretch of Interstate 94 leads to one of America's best-kept secrets. Port Huron, Michigan, about 60 miles east of Detroit, is a snapshot of Small Town, .

Falling leaves that mark the beginning of autumn in this city pale in comparison with the snow-covered trees of winter. The town is home to Michigan's oldest lighthouse, but it's the huge port that keeps the community bustling with commerce and tourism.

Though quaint and picturesque, Port Huron has a secret of its own. Her name is Veter Nichols. Deemed a prophet and a spiritual mother to the men and women whose lives she has influenced, the 57-year-old has the makings of a drill sergeant. Though she stands only 5 feet 3 inches tall, her presence is commanding, and she's not easily fooled by preachers who can swoon large crowds yet have little integrity. To Nichols, character matters most.

For 28 years, Nichols has worked alongside her husband, Apostle William Nichols, at New Covenant Life Ministries, formerly known as New Hope Tabernacle Church, where the couple pastor. She has spent much of her time quietly training an army of prophets and intercessors, but Mother Nichols, as she is known in Christian circles, is rising from obscurity to train others to work in the Lord's army.

Though some call it mentoring, Nichols says her work is simply discipleship. She sees it as a way to help other Christians grow in their faith and develop their God-given purpose. She believes it's something all believers should do on some level to help raise up strong Christian leaders.

In 1981 Nichols and her husband met Juanita Bynum, an itinerant preacher who eventually moved in with the couple. Bynum, 22 at the time, spent the next nine years of her life with the Nicholises, and much of what she learned during her sabbatical helped lay the foundation for her international ministry. But it wasn't easy.

"It was all-out war!" Bynum told Charisma, recalling her years in Port Huron. "Mother Nichols, especially, was not impressed with my singing, prophesying, directing the choir. She wanted to get to my inner core, to my character."

In Nichols' recent release, *The Birthing of a Prophet* (Flow Publishing), she details her life as a spiritual mother to Bynum. The book has paved the way for Nichols to share her mentoring ministry with millions of viewers on Christian television and has opened doors for her to preach the gospel to thousands more.

Charisma talked with Nichols about how God is using her Destiny Ministries to train and equip believers who sense a call to ministry. She told us why she believes it's time for Christians to report for duty in service to the Lord.

Basic Training

Nichols considers herself the prophetic type-she sees ministry

in others. Even as a small child she noticed something different about herself. At 8 years old, after receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Nichols said she somehow knew she was called to ministry. "The people I meet have an unction about their passion, and I help draw it out of them," she says.

Nichols says mentoring and discipling-she uses the two words interchangeably-are vital. "It's a person's lifeline," she says. "I don't think the person will fulfill the purpose of God in their life" without it. Christians who forego the "process," she insists, are ineffective and struggle with their purpose in ministry and being able to fulfill it with Christ-like character.

The process she speaks of is called brokenness. It's the same concept she used as a first-time spiritual mother to one of the most sought-after preachers in the country.

Bynum was slowly making a name for herself on the preaching circuit when she met the Nicholises some 25 years ago. She went to Port Huron to move in with the couple and their two young daughters, Cherise and Bridgette. But the first step to brokenness required Bynum to submit to spiritual authority.

First, Apostle Nichols exercised tough love with his surrogate daughter by insisting that she relinquish her appointment book, which contained an itinerary of her upcoming preaching engagements. "You aren't going to be like every other evangelist, preaching with no character or integrity," he told her. "We see greatness in you!"

Next, Mother Nichols spent years discipling Bynum, challenging

her to demonstrate Christ-like character and doing spiritual warfare on Bynum's behalf.

"Some people will allow you into their lives while others won't," Veter Nichols says. "They don't want to see the ugliness [in themselves] because it's painful and a lot of work. Juanita Bynum was our test case. She was the one God sent because He knew what our ministry would become. As iron sharpens iron, we were training her, and she sharpened our process."

During that nine-year training season, Bynum endured a failed marriage, an emotional breakdown and battles with sexual integrity-which she described in her 2000 book *No More Sheets*. But no one is more grateful for the experience than Bynum.

"Besides my own mother, Prophetess Nichols has one of the keenest eyes in the nation," Bynum said. "I tailored my mentoring ministry after her."

Many of the principles Bynum learned are detailed in her book *My Spiritual Inheritance* (Charisma House). The author unapologetically supports the need for submission to spiritual authority, insisting that it leads to spiritual growth and blessings.

Wanting to break from the traditional model of church, the Nicholises became trailblazers in their town in the late 1970s. They eventually adapted a charismatic worship style and popularized ministering deliverance to Christians and others struggling with demonic possession. They were transforming their church into an institute of training, and they were determined not to be bound by the spirit of religion.

It was after Bynum moved from Port Huron to Chicago and others began to look to the Nicholises for help that the couple realized they were called to mentor. Today their church is viewed as a kind of boot camp, and members who want to be active in ministry must first enlist in the Ministers Institute of Training.

The institute, which has graduated more than 100 students since it was founded in 2000, is designed to draw out the spiritual gifts housed in every believer. The program includes a school of ministry that offers classes on the tabernacle of David and the life of Moses to teach people the deeper meaning of worship, the gifts of the Spirit and deliverance ministry. Other coursework includes training in leadership for women to prepare them to teach, preach, lead and mentor.

With an emphasis on prophetic ministry for those who sense a call "to speak the mind of God to others," Nichols says, the church began to grow and attract gifted, charismatic people. But the Nicholises were unimpressed and remain so today. She says experience has taught them it's only a matter of time before "the good, the bad and the ugly comes out because of the anointing on the ministry."

Some people don't complete the institute because it requires self-denial, sacrifice, time and energy. But that didn't deter pastor Timothy Alden. He gave up his life in Pontiac, Michigan, to be mentored by Mother Nichols.

In 1983, when Alden attended nightly revival meetings in his hometown, he heard Nichols preach what he considered a life-changing message. Around 1985, he quit a "really good job at the bank," packed up his belongings and followed Nichols back to Port Huron.

“Her message was cutting-edge,” Alden remembers. “Her style of worship was new, and the Word was authentic. I wanted what she had.”

He moved in with the Nicholises when he was 19 and lived with them for nearly five years but has since moved to Los Angeles to start a church. He pastors City of Praise Christian Church using some of the same principles he gleaned from his mentor.

Nichols’ teachings on character and holiness left such an indelible mark on the now 41-year-old that he is outspoken about his commitment to remain a virgin until marriage. His teaching on abstinence even landed him an interview with People magazine in August before the film The 40-Year-Old Virgin released.

“The media is flooded with suggestive, sexual messages promoting promiscuity,” he says. “It is rare to find someone walking out self-control, even in the church.”

Though the Nicholises have discipled hundreds of believers through the years, they are quick to acknowledge their limitations. They weren’t always certain how to help Bynum through her struggles. But Mother Nichols is sure of one thing: God has given her a “finisher’s anointing.”

“It’s this anointing that has helped me not to give up on individuals,” she says. “Even when others have thrown their hands up and walked away, something inside me says, ‘Don’t let them go!’ It’s important for me to keep my ear attuned to the voice of God.”

Marching Orders

In her book, Nichols tells readers “the transformation of a prophet takes place in the furnace of affliction.” She speaks from personal experience. Fifteen years ago she battled lung cancer, and in 2002 she was diagnosed with colon cancer, which is now in remission. In March, her husband underwent heart surgery.

But difficult times only strengthen this woman. Having faced her own mortality, Nichols is even more committed to leading the unsaved to Christ. She insists that Christians must once again make winning souls their priority. “If the church would focus on the lost, I believe every promise, goal and dream God has for us will come to pass,” she says.

As a traveling minister, Nichols has seen flamboyancy and entertainment infiltrate churches, and she knows there is a lack of spiritual preparation among believers. Nichols founded Destiny Ministries in 1992 to first teach men and women the Word of God, then to train them to be effective soul winners. The mentorship program of the ministry is designed to help women fulfill their purpose in the body of Christ.

It’s this sort of commitment that drew worship leader Judy Jacobs to Nichols. While ministering at the Trinity Broadcasting Network two years ago, Jacobs said she was drawn to Nichols after hearing her story. “She was on the set with Juanita Bynum, and I was moved by Mother Nichols’ humble spirit, yet she had this powerful anointing,” Jacobs recalls.

Last October, Nichols ministered at Jacobs’ annual mentoring institute, which drew 150 women to Tennessee to be mentored by

Jacobs and other ministers.

Nichols launches her Elijah to Elisha mentoring conference November 3-5, with additional events scheduled in 2006. The goal is to mentor women toward the fulfillment of their God-given destiny.

This grandmother of five from Small Town, . believes Jesus is soon to come, and she is concerned that countless people still don't know Him.

"We are kingdom people, and we need to be walking in kingdom-mindedness and [following] kingdom principles," she says. "God is gracing us, and we need to access what He has provided for us as it pertains to winning souls. It's time! It's time to gather in the harvest. That's what's important."

Valerie G. Lowe is associate editor of Charisma. For more information about Destiny Ministries, visit or call 810-982-4673.