

Thousands Report Decisions for Christ at Billy Graham Crusade

More than 240,000 believers and seekers endured 90-degree weather to hear evangelist Billy Graham speak at his final mass crusade June 24-26.

The crowd at the Greater New York Billy Graham Crusade at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens was a mosaic of colors, ages and ethnic backgrounds. Many came to see Graham in person for the first and last time. "I have listened to Billy Graham all my life and read his books," said Gail Yawn, a member of Shirley Hills Baptist Church who traveled from Warner Robins, Ga., to hear Graham. "I know he's a man anointed of God. I felt led to be a part of [the crusade]. I felt the Spirit of the Lord moving."

"God uses Billy Graham in a tremendous way," said Patrick Nocerato of Jackson, N.J. "You get encouraged in the Lord. I'm blown away."

Muddying the waters about his future, Graham, 86, told the audience at the beginning of his sermon on June 26: "This is not the end. They may think so, but I don't."

However, insiders report that his health problems make another mass crusade unlikely. In July he declined an invitation to hold a crusade in London later this year. Graham suffers from prostate cancer and hydrocephalus (water on the brain), a condition that mimics symptoms of Parkinson's disease. A

frequent patient at the Mayo Clinic, he wears a hearing aid and needs a walker to get around. Graham told CNN talk-show host Larry King during a pre-crusade interview that he travels with a nurse, who also attends to his medical needs at home.

Steered to the podium by his son Franklin Graham, the evangelist appeared fit as he delivered his final sermon holding on to the podium. In a surprisingly strong voice, he warned the audience of 90,000 about the approaching end of the world system and the return of Jesus Christ. "I believe today that God is warning the United States," he said.

"When he began to share God's word I saw such power and the anointing come over his frail body, " said Jimmy Jack, director of Long Island Teen Challenge. "God took over. He doesn't preach as fast as he used to, but it's more clear."

Thousands crammed the platform area each night when Graham invited seekers to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Counselors fanned out, assisting seekers in 20 languages. The crusade generated 9,445 decisions for Christ, half of which were said to be first-time conversions. "God is saving," said prayer counselor Mary Roacher. "It's incredible what He does."

About 1,400 churches representing 82 denominations backed the crusade with 11,000 volunteers, prayer and help in raising the \$6.8 million budget. A.R. Bernard, senior pastor of the Christian Cultural Center in Brooklyn and chairman of the crusade executive committee, said the event coalesced both charismatic and non-charismatic evangelicals in metro New York—a trend that he believes will continue. "The crusade brought diverse evangelical groups to the forefront," he said.

Peter K. Johnson in Queens, N.Y.