

Toronto Blessing Church 'Exports' Revival Through New Network

✖ The church that housed the Toronto Blessing revival hopes to "export" the values of the renewal through a new network of churches.

Dubbed Catch the Fire World, the denomination officially launched in May when Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF), the church that housed the revival services for 12 years, changed its name to Catch the Fire Toronto. The new group already includes congregations in Oslo, Norway; Reykjavik, Iceland; Montreal; London; and Raleigh, N.C. Another church is expected to open in Switzerland later this year.

Photo: John and Carol Arnott leading a Catch the Fire meeting

The new name reflects the church's growing influence beyond Toronto as well as its evolving mission to spread the revival's core message of knowing God's love and deepening one's intimacy with the Father, said Steve Long, senior pastor of the Toronto church and vice president of Catch the Fire World.

"Our initial focus wasn't ... on building a church; it was to facilitate what the Holy Spirit was doing—a revival," said Long, whose 2,000-member congregation meets in 11 locations across Toronto. "We really feel the Lord's changed us to now giving it away, hence the new name."

Long said revivals that don't export their values are barely remembered. He points to the Azusa Street and Welsh revivals, which took place around the same time in the early 1900s. Azusa Street resulted in the formation of hundreds of Pentecostal churches worldwide, he said, while the revival in

Wales left few remnants.

"There's no evidence other than in history that that revival took place because what happened was they never got to the second part of the revival," Long said. "The first part is people come to the meetings; the second part is your values get defined and exported."

The Toronto Blessing began in January 1994 at a small church led by John and Carol Arnott that was then known as the Toronto Airport Vineyard. The revival drew hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world, but controversy over unusual manifestations such as barking and uncontrolled shaking led to a break with the Vineyard denomination in 1995.

Renamed Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, the church organized a fellowship of likeminded churches called Partners in Harvest and continued holding revival services until 2006.

That year, Arnott resigned as pastor of TACF and founded Catch the Fire Ministries, which hosted leadership schools for pastors and encouraged the founding of "soaking centers," where people sit for hours in prayer and worship.

"We began to formulate strong revival relationships with these people," said Duncan Smith, who was director of Catch the Fire before becoming a vice president of Catch the Fire World. "It began to create a gigantic wealth of people that were already immersed in our values. When God thrust us into this church-planting phase it was just so natural to go and plant churches in those places where there had been a tremendous sowing of these values through our Catch the Fire schools."

Some of the soaking centers became churches that wanted to formally affiliate with the Toronto church, Long said. They were invited to join Partners in Harvest, but many of the ministries wanted even closer ties. "A lot of them were saying, We want to be closer than just being friends with you; we want to be you," Long said.

Then in 2008 Smith moved from Canada to North Carolina to launch a church that he said God directed him to name Catch the Fire Raleigh.

“Our ministry has always been fire, ready, aim,” Long said. “The Holy Spirit just kind of does stuff, then we have to figure out how to facilitate what God is doing.”

Churches that are part of Catch the Fire World, headed by Arnott, send a portion of their tithes to the international headquarters, which supports global missions such as Rolland and Heidi Baker’s Iris Ministries outreach to children in Mozambique. But Long said most of the structure is still being developed.

Catch the Fire leaders plan to spend 2010 establishing the organization’s base and preparing for future church plants. Long said the new congregations are a sign that the Toronto Blessing hasn’t stopped.

“Our tag is ‘churches in revival,’” he said. “So we would feel that we are still living in the revival values, but we are very cognizant that our primary role now is not for people to come and watch us, but for us to go and equip and train.”