

Asbury and Beyond: Policeman Says 'Get in the River'

A deputy sheriff who loves police work and loves revival guarded and prayed for people who had traveled from around the world to experience the Asbury Revival.

"I'm policing here, but I am praying for people too," said Marty Elliott, a deputy sheriff who is also a retired elected sheriff of Boyle County in Danville, Kentucky.

The deputy worked undercover and in uniform during the 16 days when an estimated 100,000 people traveled to Asbury University, located in Wilmore, Kentucky. They had watched videos and read reports online about a revival that was drawing tens of thousands of people to where Asbury students had been leading praise and worship, reading Bible Scriptures aloud and testifying of personal breakthrough since Wednesday, Feb 8.

"I am praying for the power of God to come the way I have seen Him come," he said.

Although he had attended outpourings of God's manifested presence at Brownsville, Toronto and Rock Church in the Nineties and had pursued revival since then, he told Charisma that he had never seen anything like what he was seeing at Asbury.

"This is beyond what any of us have seen since the healing revivals. Unprecedented miracles are taking place."

Police presence became very visible after Asbury University leaders, on the tenth day of on-campus gatherings that had been open to the public, sped up a transition away from public access. The small Christian university has an undergraduate enrollment of 1,639 students from 40 states and 31 foreign

nations, and 80% of the students live on the 64-acre campus.

University leaders posted an announcement at 10:30 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 19, that public access would be reduced significantly that week and would end Thursday. Livestreaming in campus chapels might be available and another venue somewhere in Kentucky might open.

Earlier that Sunday, in the middle of the national holiday weekend commemorating President's Day, the city's infrastructure had been stretched so thin that state troopers closed entrance to Wilmore to everyone except residents. Within a 12-hour period, an estimated 28,000 people from various backgrounds from around the world overwhelmed the small town of only 6,000 residents. Cars had been hurriedly parked without permission on residents' front lawns and across public sidewalks as people raced to get in line.

Most of the people who arrived after the 10:30 p.m. announcement were unaware of the change.

A measured balance of crowd management and ministry was needed.

As Elliott slowly moved the growing crowd of anxious revival seekers to the front edge of Asbury University's property, he replied to questions with comforting words like, "The school administration is not trying to squash the revival, they are trying to father it and steward what God has given.

"You're not here by accident, you didn't miss it, you're here because God sparked it in you to come," explained Elliott. "God is a good, good Father and He loves you."

Elliott later told Charisma that a good father will push his chicks out of the nest because he loves them.

"Everybody wants this revival, including me," he said. "The Father who loves us is saying, 'Go out and spread the Good

News.'”

Among the new arrivals in search of an encounter with God at Asbury was a man who had been on his way to see Buddhist temples in Taiwan, but then suddenly changed directions when he read an online news report that the love of God was being poured out at a revival in Kentucky.

While waiting for his delayed flight at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport, he realized that the Taiwanese temples were not where he would find what he longed for. What he really wanted was to experience the love he’d heard so much about and so he rented a car and drove straight through to Wilmore.

When he arrived, several people surrounded him with prayer and friendship. That evening he was able to join other people over age 25 in an on-campus chapel to sing and worship along with the livestreaming of the service in the auditorium that was reserved for young people.

As the crowd grew from 19 students who lingered after a chapel service to 28,000 people hoping for a chance to get inside Hughes Auditorium, there was valid concern that not all the visitors to Wilmore were there for revival.

Wilmore’s mayor of 40 years, Harold Rainwater, pointed out the need to be vigilant.

The nine police officers employed by the city were working overtime in rotating shifts, and invaluable backup support was being provided by county sheriffs and police officers from nearby cities.

Noting the importance of being careful and protective, the longest-serving mayor in the history of the state of Kentucky told Charisma, “Large crowds always bring different personalities and so the police are profiling people as a precaution.”

Rainwater, who graduated from Asbury in 1969, pointed out that this revival outbreak had been sudden and completely unexpected, and so the city was not able to plan and prepare in advance for the arrival of an unprecedented number of visitors.

When there was a revival here in the 1970's, the students kept going to classes and only about 1,000 extra people came because there was no Internet in the Seventies, he said.

"When life was suspended and the altar was full on the morning of Feb. 3, 1970, the nation was being torn apart by the Vietnam War, segregation, riots, assassinations, protests, division over politics and division among races," he explained. "This is the world those students went out to when other schools invited them to share about the transformation they had experienced at the altar."

In 1970, Rainwater owned and operated a sandwich shop next to the Asbury campus that was popular with students and staff. He said the multiplication effect of those students, many of whom became missionaries in the Seventies, continues today.

"Now, just imagine the multiplier effect of what is happening today," he said. "I saw lasting change in those students in the Seventies and I am noticing a real shift in the Asbury students today."

Asbury University is no longer open to the public, but outpourings are reportedly breaking out around the world where people are gathering on sidewalks and other meeting places. Just thinking of it, the words of a policeman who loves revival come to mind:

"Get in the river, because that is where you will experience the love of God so that you can go out and tell other people about it. Then go back to the river and soak some more. You don't need to clean yourself up first. Jesus died on the Cross for that." {eoa}

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Renee DeLoriae: *During the Brownsville Revival, Renee was the managing editor of the Brownsville Revival Magazine, a columnist for the Remnant Newspaper and a freelance writer for Charisma magazine. Since then, she has edited books and written articles for numerous media outlets. She lives in Nashville, Tenn.*