

Global Worship Movement Awakens Hearts in an Explosive New Way

It's a global movement awakening hearts to worship and demonstrating the love and power of God. It's inspiring millions of hungry believers to press into an authentic encounter with Jesus. And it was named after a baseball cap Banning Liebscher stumbled upon in a mall. Well, sort of.

Banning, then-youth pastor at Bethel Church in Redding, California, was shopping when he saw a hat sporting a logo that daringly prophesied a "Counter Culture." The confrontational brand demanded attention, but Banning wasn't interested in cultivating a counter culture. His heart was set on fostering a Jesus Culture—and that's exactly what he's been doing for the past 15 years. Although it's not a replica of the Jesus movement, it is sweeping up youth in nations that are weary of powerless religion.

"After hosting many conferences, we were beginning to understand more of what the Lord had us establishing," Banning says. "We knew we didn't want to have only catalytic events, but desired to help people with the process of being a revivalist. In order for us to carry out the mandate of equipping and mobilizing a generation of revivalists, Jesus Culture focuses on events, music, campuses, leadership and resources."

Jesus Culture has held events in many nations, including Germany, France, Hungary, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Ireland, Brazil, Colombia, New Zealand and South Africa. Jesus Culture is introducing Christ's love to a broken world and equipping young people to disciple nations—but the ministry's beginnings were humble.

Born in a Manger

It all started in the summer of 1999, when Bethel Church's youth group launched the first Jesus Culture Conference with worship leaders Kim Walker-Smith, Chris Quilala and Melissa How. About 500 came out to meet God, and He didn't disappoint.

Jesus Culture cut its first album, *Everything*, in 2005. After a YouTube clip of Walker-Smith singing *How He Loves* in 2007, Jesus Culture gained mass influence in the Christian music world and became an official ministry of Bethel Church.

"We were just a bunch of kids going after God in a small Northern California town," Quilala told me. "To see where God has taken the ministry over the years ... it's beyond anything we could've dreamed of. We are having a lot of fun and have certainly enjoyed the ride, but the thing I love most about being a part of Jesus Culture is that our vision is still the same: We just want to see people encounter God."

Now, Jesus Culture is a church of its own where people encounter God on a weekly basis.

"When we knew that the Lord was sending us to go plant a church, we began to ask God where," Banning told me. "I would pray into different cities in the nation, and none of them were coming alive to me when I prayed. But then I remembered a dream someone had sent me in 2011, and in the dream, I had an office in Sacramento, and I was 39 years old. Then we began to pray into Sacramento. After that, it became alive to us and obvious that was where we were supposed to be."

Jesus Culture Sacramento Church was born in September 2014 with the tagline "Encountering God, empowering people, engaging our city." Sacramento is especially strategic. It's the capitol of what Banning calls a "critical state in the U.S.," where government and business is influential for California and the nation.

Labor for City Transformation

“Our passion is the same locally as what we are doing nationally,” Banning told me. “We want to see cities and nations saved and transformed. We want to see the presence of God come and awaken the church, save the lost and transform culture. We have a passion to see every Christian raised up and sent into society to see that happen, to raise up leaders and flood Sacramento with them. And our heart is to be a family that gathers every week and then is sent back into the city to make a difference.”

Despite Jesus Culture’s celebrity in the nations, Banning wasn’t sure how many would come to the church or how long it would take to establish culture. He admits he was a little nervous about his ability to build a thriving community, but he’s enjoying the rhythm of the local church.

“I love building a community that is impacting a city, seeing people encounter God week in and week out, people finding a deep sense of community, finding freedom, equipped to live out a life following Jesus that bears fruit in every area,” Banning says. “I also love the building of culture by steady base hits. Events and itinerant ministry are very home run-based. Every event or speaking engagement is a home run, one-shot kind of concept. But culture and community and impacting cities is more of a whole bunch of base hits put together that make it happen.”

Banning is reporting something special happening in Sacramento churches: true unity he hasn’t seen at this level in America among churches that want to see a genuine move of God. He is convinced Sacramento is called to demonstrate and inspire unity in other cities in America—and if God does something significant in Sacramento, he believes it will ignite faith in cities around the world to believe for the same revival fire. Even now, Banning marvels at what the Lord has done through the Jesus Culture movement in the United States and beyond.

“Our movement has transitioned from just teens or young adults to a broader spectrum of the body of Christ,” Banning says. “But right now, our focus is on establishing this church and developing a movement that will raise up leaders in church, campus and culture. And our heart will always be to ignite a passion for Jesus in the hearts of believers through worship.”

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