

Mario Murillo's Tent Crusades Spark Revival That Is Spreading Like Wildfire

Fifty-four years ago, a young California evangelist named Mario Murillo emerged as a key voice in the Jesus Movement. His fiery message, accompanied by signs and wonders, profoundly influenced a generation of leaders.

Today, Murillo is holding tent crusades up and down California's Highway 99, drawing thousands to services where they encounter the power and grace of God. The meetings, foretold in a dream, are one evidence of the arrival of a large-scale move of God that many have expected and prophesied.

"Powerful. Unbelievable," is how Greg Fairrington, founder and pastor of Destiny Christian Church Assembly of God in Rocklin, California, a suburb of Sacramento, describes the tent meetings Mario held in Sacramento earlier this year. "Nobody was expecting the crowds that came out. People told me, 'Don't do that. Outdoor revival meetings are a thing of the past.' We had 4,000 people come, four nights in a row, but the best was the hundreds of people who came to give their hearts to the Lord. The presence of God was so evident. There was a spirit of expectation every single night."

Further south, in Fresno, Jim Franklin, longtime pastor of Cornerstone Church Assembly of God, has attended all but one of Murillo's nearly 40 "highway" meetings, and hosted some of the first.

"These meetings are amazing," Franklin says. "They are a return not to the days of old but to the days of the power of God. The crowds grow every night."

Franklin firmly believes something new is sweeping California.

"I want to be part of it," he says. "I believe in the vision God gave Mario. As a local pastor, I have to engage in the revival that is happening now, not just wait for it to happen with me."

The Highway 99 tent revival began with an unusual experience in Stockton, an hour south of Sacramento. In 2014, Murillo was taking a nap after preaching a morning meeting and had a spiritual dream ("I'm not given to that kind of thing myself," he says). In it, he was hovering over California and saw Highway 99 stretching from beginning to end, 470 miles or so from south of Bakersfield to Red Bluff. The highway then turned into a river, and Murillo heard a voice say, "This is a corridor of My glory."

Thinking it was a word for Stockton, he shared it that night and let it go. But five years later, his ministry was given a tent and a thousand chairs, and he says it became clear he was to start doing tent crusades at the bottom of Highway 99 and work his way up. He wondered, "What in the world does a highway have to do with it?"

He then realized that Highway 99 is California's devastated corridor, passing through some of the richest agricultural land in America, but also some of the poorest cities. Rocked by drought, the housing bust, political mismanagement and the arrival of foreign gangs, the Central Valley still produces much of the world's almonds, fruit and vegetables, but also an outsized amount of violence, poverty and despair.

Sparking a Flame

When planning the first set of meetings in Bakersfield, at Canyon Hills Assembly of God, with Pastor Wendell Vinson, Murillo says he didn't expect crowds.

"I thought I was just kind of obeying God, and we'll see," he

says. "But then the sovereign hand of God began to descend on each crusade that we did, and the momentum began to get stronger and stronger."

Thousands showed up in major cities along the 99, including Fresno, Bakersfield, Modesto and Sacramento. "Amazing miracles" took place, Murillo says.

He dubbed the meetings "Living Proof," because he preached a straightforward gospel message, then saw it confirmed with signs and wonders. Linda Noonan, who has served in Assemblies of God ministries and churches for several decades, was on a prayer team for the Sacramento meetings. She had never attended a tent revival before.

"I was sitting up in the front. [Murillo] had an altar call, and people just swarmed our altars," she says. "I had never seen that before. It was the most beautiful thing, and I started weeping. I didn't expect that."

Noonan, who has attended Destiny for 27 years, sat next to a woman in a wheelchair at a pre-meeting dinner. That night, Murillo called the woman out and said, "God is healing you." The woman stood up from her wheelchair and walked up to the platform.

"That was miraculous," Noonan says. "I had people come [receive prayer] for salvation, for healing, for a miracle in their life. ... It's phenomenal, what's going on."

Fairrington says there is "a genuine hunger for God that I have never seen before. People want the truth, something they can put their hope in, not something just to make them feel good."

Murillo's meetings "felt like the book of Acts being revisited—signs, wonders, and the miraculous," Fairrington says. "People were healed every single night, and we're still sharing the reports of that four months later."

In Redding, California, a few miles north of where Highway 99 terminates, Bill Johnson, senior leader at Bethel Church, recalls being strongly impacted by Murillo's ministry in the early 1970s. Johnson calls Murillo "a messenger from God for me in my youth."

"While my generation was celebrating compromise and independence from God, Mario made no concessions," Johnson says. "He preached a no-compromise gospel. That gospel was backed with power. It's exactly what I needed in order for me to be willing to forsake every other ambition in life but to serve Jesus."

At the time, Johnson's parents, Earl and Darliene, were leading Bethel, and Bill and many others were in the midst of what came to be known as the Jesus Movement. Murillo's ministry center in Berkeley, called Resurrection City, drew many young people for outreaches that marked their entire lives.

"I've told him and others many, many times that I owe him my life," Bill says. "I know it was Jesus who saved me. But it was Mario who brought me into a life-changing encounter with the love of God—it was authentic, life-changing, filled with power—the only kind of gospel worthy of giving our life for."

Spreading the Fire

In Laverne, Tennessee, just south of Nashville, evangelists Jennifer and Munday Martin heard about Murillo's tent meetings in early 2021.

"We said, 'There's a movement happening right now,'" Jennifer explains. "'We need to do that here. Let's see what God does.'"

An unexpected donation allowed them to buy a tent, and favor allowed them to place it in a field along Interstate 24 in Murfreesboro for three weeks, starting last April. The Martins

sensed “something different and special was going on,” but neither expected the Holy Spirit to lead meetings the way he did, forcefully encountering and driving darkness out of young people. Spontaneous responses often overwhelmed their preaching, with people coming forward, crying out to God and being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

“Preteen kids would walk up weeping, with stammering lips,” Jennifer says. “Nobody taught them praying in tongues. Nobody was praying for them. It was just them and God.”

Then demons started manifesting, which Jennifer had never witnessed except on internet videos. By faith, she, Munday and a team of volunteers cast them out. She estimates they have performed more than 100 deliverances since April.

“The tent was such a free atmosphere that people could open up, and the Holy Spirit could finally get to the places in them that needed healing,” she says. Still, it was initially so far beyond their normal experience that “we didn’t even know how to do this. I felt like God dropped us in a different pond and said, ‘Figure out how to swim.’ He didn’t prepare me, didn’t tell me in any dreams that this would happen.”

Many were baptized in a silver horse trough volunteers filled with water every night at the local Speedway gas station. Visitors said the meetings had a Brownsville-like environment with a strong repentance message. In May, the Martins moved the services indoors on Friday nights at a nearby church. Everyone is invited to eat a free dinner together before meetings begin, which has helped create what Jennifer describes as “a family.”

Birth of a Revival

Due west of Highway 99, during the riots and lockdowns of 2020, another outdoor evangelistic event was born. “Let Us Worship,” led by worship leader and recent congressional candidate Sean Feucht, bloomed from an oceanside gathering to

the most popular traveling meeting in America.

Jay Koopman, associate pastor of Ché Ahn's Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena and a Teen Challenge graduate with an eye-popping testimony, has preached in all 130 of the events except the first two. Koopman and Feucht were only passing acquaintances until both took flak from some Christians for not submitting to all government guidelines. In the same week that Feucht held the first Let Us Worship events, Harvest Rock Church sued California's ultra-liberal governor. The ministers, both around 40 years of age, bonded under friendly fire from fellow believers.

"He was getting rejected for doing what he was doing, I was getting rejected for suing Gov. Newsom with Pastor Ché, but out of that birthed a move of God, man, and we locked in forces, because we were like Jonathan and David," Koopman says. "We just said, 'We've got to do this.'"

The largest church gathering in America in 2020 was the Let Us Worship event at the National Mall on Sept. 11, 2020, he says. Koopman describes their gatherings as having "that impartation from Brownsville," which he experienced as a young Christian. People ran to the altars to get right with God.

Sometimes the collision of kingdoms is dramatic.

A recent event in Portland, Oregon, was preceded by an attack on a church outreach in the same park Let Us Worship would use the very next day. About 6,000 believers showed up, and "the power of God hit that place," Koopman says. "Needles, heroin, drugs all thrown on the stage. One of the antifa members ended up coming down, demonically possessed, and gets completely delivered—and that's on video."

In places like California and Oregon, known for their liberalism, "people are carrying a fire like never before," Koopman says. "They are preaching on airplanes, they are open-air preaching on trains, they are preaching in restaurants,

and so it's giving the church this boldness to not just fight for America, but also to win souls and make disciples."

In little more than 12 months, with no paid marketing, Let Us Worship has gone from being a worship-centered protest of church shutdowns, to what Koopman calls "a full-blown revival."

"The Lord was shifting us from being this worship movement to being this revival movement," he says. "We kept prophesying revival, but we didn't know it was going to happen like this."

Multiplying the Momentum

In part, that has meant reviving Christians who lapsed into sin during extended lockdowns.

"The body of Christ has been shut down for so long because of COVID, and a lot of them got back into bondage and started coping," Koopman says. "The Christian church needs to be set free and healed."

The Let us Worship team plans to start holding statewide events, as the team continues to function as a firestarter of revival that flows into local churches.

Murillo says more and more people are ready to give Jesus a try. "Everyone is stunned by how many people want to be saved."

Miracles also play a major role. He tells of a man healed of an injury due to a punctured lung. He speaks of a woman he called out of a crowd who was healed of liver cancer and neuropathy that caused extreme pain in her hands and feet. He says a major drug dealer walked down the aisle while he was preaching, waved at Murillo and announced, "I need to get saved right now," then threw a big bag of marijuana on the ground and started stomping on it.

Murillo's ministry has had to buy a new, larger tent to

accommodate the crowds. "The momentum is just intensified," he says.

He is now receiving invitations from other states, such as New York, where he will hold his first tent crusade outside of California this fall.

"People are hungry for miracles in this time," says Franklin of Fresno, whose church continues to reap a harvest of people from Murillo's meetings. "They don't need another fancy sermon. They don't need another show or song; they need a demonstration of the power of God that is relevant to their lives in these critical times."

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