

1,500 Get Saved at Festival de Esperanza

✖ His words struck a chord. Maria felt chills run up her spine when Franklin Graham talked about the temporal nature of the human body on this final night of the Festival de Esperanza.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association hosted the Festival de Esperanza, the first-ever American Hispanic festival, Saturday and Sunday at the Home Depot Center in Los Angeles.

“The body is made out of dust of the ground,” said Graham. “Your soul is the real you and it will never die. What should it profit a man to gain whole world but lose his soul?”

Death was on Maria’s heart. Several miles away, her 89-year-old father was resting at Memorial Hospital of Gardena in preparation for open heart surgery.

“I am worried about my papa,” she said after coming forward to recommit her life to Christ at The Home Depot Center in Carson. “The message about eternal life—I hope to share with him tomorrow. I want to know for sure he understands about salvation.”

Maria, a native of Mexico, understood Graham as he preached in English, but when Festival Director Galo Vasquez translated the message into Spanish, it resonated in a deeper way.

Carlos understood only the Spanish translation.

A recent arrival to the United States from El Salvador, he told a bilingual festival advisor that he is grateful to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for bringing the festival to the greater Los Angeles area.

“I needed this,” he said with a tear running down his cheek.

"I carried so much guilt. I did bad things at home for money when I was very young, but now I can have a brand new beginning in Jesus."

Yolanda committed her life to Jesus in 2004 at a Billy Graham Crusade held at the Rose Bowl in nearby Pasadena. But then the pressures of raising a child on her own led her back to the bottle. "Tonight I feel strong to live again for Jesus after listening to the son, Franklin. I will be filled with the Holy Spirit instead of wine."

Miguel also rededicated his life to the Lord. The 24-year-old was baptized as a baby and attended church as a child, but when he entered his teen years, he wanted to enjoy an intimate relationship with his girlfriend. "I didn't want to follow what the Bible says, but I heard what Franklin said about sin and burning in hell."

"I didn't believe that just trusting in Jesus could save me—until now," said Miguel. "I am glad for this festival."

And so are local pastors and church leaders. For months they have joined together in prayer for the Hispanic community in greater Los Angeles. "We pray the Lord will heal this city, heal our schools and heal our families," said Pastor Roberto Moreno. "We have been praying this festival will begin a revival, especially in the hearts of pastors."

Carlos Quintero, president of the Festival Executive Committee, presented Franklin with a plaque at the end of the evening, thanking him on behalf of Hispanic churches in Los Angeles for "the seeds of love and compassion you have planted in our city during this first Hispanic Festival."

"We say, 'Muchas Gracias.'"