

Assemblies of God Partners With Billy Graham on Evangelism Campaign

Alton Garrison knows there are “millions of testimonies” when it comes to lives changed by Billy Graham’s ministry.

But the one story Garrison—the Assemblies of God assistant general superintendent—shared while introducing Franklin Graham at Wednesday’s discipleship luncheon wasn’t just one in a million.

It was one that hit very close to home.

Just before Franklin Graham took the podium to share his vision for November’s My Hope America With Billy Graham outreach, Garrison briefly talked about how the direction and spiritual destiny of his wife and ministry partner, Johanna, was forever changed.

It was 1954 in Amsterdam when Johanna’s mother, Jan, was rescued from a dark life when she accepted Christ as her Savior at a Billy Graham crusade.

“We wouldn’t be here if that hadn’t occurred,” Garrison shared. “I know there are millions of testimonies like that, but when it’s up close and personal, it means a lot.”

Talk about a segue. “Up close and personal” is perfect shorthand to describe what My Hope America is all about: sharing Christ in a close and personal environment.

“Instead of in a stadium, this will be in your living room,” Franklin Graham explained of the nationwide event, which culminates on Nov. 7, Billy Graham’s 95th birthday.

Franklin Graham, the CEO and president of the Billy Graham

Evangelistic Association, shared his heart for reaching America with more than 400 Assemblies of God pastors at the 55th General Council, held at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla.

Graham shared stories about his father, the famous international evangelist, whom he visits nearly every Sunday for lunch at his Montreat home. He talked about his father's burden for this country at the age of 94. He gave an account of the humble beginnings of Operation Christmas Child, which celebrated its 100 millionth shoebox this year.

But Franklin Graham was never more focused or passionate than when he talked about the impetus of My Hope America.

"Our nation needs a touch with the Lord Jesus Christ," he said. "We're in a battle. All you have to do is turn on the media and see how they treat Christians. Or look at Hollywood and see how they portray Christians.

"We have an opportunity to do battle in our living rooms."

Each pastor received a packet to sign up for My Hope America, which more than 18,000 churches have already done across all 50 states. Also given out was a DVD of one of the three 28-minute evangelistic My Hope America programs called *Defining Moments*, which weaves three life-changing stories around powerful messages from Billy Graham. The second program, *Lose to Gain*, can be seen online, while *The Cross* will be released on TV and online on Nov. 7.

"The gospel is so clear, and it's so well done," Franklin Graham said about the *Defining Moments* program. "Take this DVD. Watch it and show it to your church."

Both Garrison and Dr. George O. Wood, the Assemblies of God general superintendent, were already sold on My Hope America.

In the opening welcome at the luncheon, Wood called it a

“wonderful opportunity,” while Garrison said he “knows it will work.”

“We’re very excited to be a part of My Hope,” Garrison said. “We are confident that this relationship evangelism is coming at a perfect time for our country.”

In fact, November can’t get here soon enough, according to Franklin Graham.

“I don’t know how much longer we’ll have a window of opportunity to preach the gospel in this country,” he said, adding, “The gospel is simple, and it works.”

“It’s fun telling others about the Lord Jesus Christ, then giving an invitation and letting the Holy Spirit take over.”

And that’s My Hope America in a nutshell.

“It’s a way to tell your family and friends about Jesus,” one of the My Hope regional coordinators, Robert T. Schlipp, shared with one of the pastors.

Schlipp has been canvassing the southwest U.S. for months, sharing about the My Hope project, but was excited to be on hand to hear Franklin Graham share his passion for this country.

“When Franklin shares his heart and his father’s heart, it resonates with the hearts of the pastors,” Schlipp said. “Having Franklin here makes My Hope personal. He communicates the project in a relevant way the pastors can apply to their congregations.”

And many pastors, leaving the fourth-floor ballroom Wednesday afternoon, had their minds spinning about the possibilities.

Pastor Brian Corkum, of First Assembly of God in Salem, N.J., loves that My Hope America is “all about relationships” and the fact that “some people will come to your house before

they'll ever come to church."

Pastor Barney Walker, of First Assembly of God in Elkhart, Texas, calls it "outstanding," adding, "I'm taking the lead and going to try to get the First Baptist Church involved too."

Coming from the panhandle of Florida, pastor Gueary Clendening hadn't heard much about My Hope America, but his eyes started to light up a little when he thought about how his church was in the process of refocusing their mission on discipleship.

"We're not seeing people saved in services, so this may work," he said. "I'm going to go back and share this with our vision team."

Wes Bartel, the national discipleship ministries director, closed out the luncheon, encouraging all the Assemblies of God churches to get involved.

"It's the neighborhood concept," Bartel said. "What was shared today could have the biggest impact our country has seen."

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