

God Provides Nearly Homeless Megachurch \$5 Million

Living Hope Church proved God rewards the faithful and miraculously provides in abundance by raising more than \$1 million in just 40 days. Not only did the church meet its goal early; it raised more than it needed.

But John Bishop, senior pastor of the Vancouver, megachurch, said it wasn't easy. Not only did the 6,000-member church have its challenges, but he personally faced spiritual warfare in the form of health problems and his son's battle with drugs.

"This is a church that has learned what it means to be a church—to sacrifice, put the needs of others first, to learn what it means about the vision of Jesus more than our own comfort," Bishop, author of *Dangerous Church*, told Charisma News.

The church, listed as one of the fastest-growing churches in the nation by *Outreach* magazine in 2007, needed \$5 million to purchase the building they currently meet in, a former Kmart. After church members raised around \$4 million, the church was still in need of \$1 million. As part of the campaign, last month Bishop asked 1,000 churches to each give \$1,000 so the church could meet its goal.

"We are doing what God calls us to do. I know it's a risk," Bishop said. "I didn't want to ask a bunch of people to give. ... But I feel that the stakes are so much bigger than just money here."

The pastor told Charisma News that about 20 people donated diamond rings, several gave their cars, one person gave a motorcycle and another gave the church a duplex, which sold for \$100,000 in seven days. One generous family gave up the money it had been saving to go to Disneyland, and a struggling

church wrote Living Hope a \$5,000 check.

Bishop spoke of a parishioner who handed him a \$10,000 cashier's check last December when the church had no home. The woman—who is now bedridden due to brain cancer—put all her faith in Living Hope.

"She said, 'I have seen my entire family come to faith at Living Hope, 20-plus people baptized. I had to do this,'" Bishop said. "That became what I call Jennifer's challenge."

At one point the church—started in 1996—met in several different campuses and had up to 19 services in one day. Although the trend has become for churches to expand into multiple sites, Bishop decided it would be better to go back to one building. They moved everything over to a former Mervyn's, a department store chain based in California. The church was forced to leave seven months later when a movie theater bought the building.

"We were virtually just devastated. And when you feel devastated, it's the gate or the door—if you'll go through it—for God to do a massive thing in your life," Bishop said.

After moving into the former Kmart in January, the church raised \$2 million in less than nine months. For five months, Living Hope occupied the building on nothing more than a handshake. The church went into a purchase sale agreement with the owners in May and needed to have \$5 million by Thursday.

The megachurch has currently raised about \$5.2 million with money still coming in. What do they plan to do with the excess? Spend it on the least of these.

"We're going to ... have the biggest homeless outreach I believe our city's ever had," Bishop says. "Because we went beyond our goal we want to sew back into our community, specifically the least of these."

On Nov. 26, the Saturday after Thanksgiving, the church will go into the city with 20 buses and bring the homeless to its building. In its first official outreach, the church with a heart for the homeless will provide sleeping bags, socks, backpacks full of essential things, dinner and even a store. Church staff will dress up in formal wear and serve the homeless.

Bishop, who told the congregation the building was their promised land on its first Sunday there, said it wasn't about the money or the building; it was about faith.

"Christians, intrinsically, we're wired to be risk adverse. But God wants us to step out in faith," he explained. "It's faith that moved the mountains. Without faith you can't please God."

The pastor not only had faith God would provide the money, but that He would allow Bishop to keep his job. The pastor told Charisma News he planned to resign if they did not raise all of the money.

"I know in my heart if this didn't happen I would have to resign," he said. "How could I lead a church and say this is our promised land and it didn't happen? Either I wasn't listening to God or something went terribly wrong."