

Hundreds Gather for Prayer, Worship at The Response Florida

A prayer movement that began with a Texas gathering in August, organized by former presidential hopeful Rick Perry, made its way to Orlando, Fla., Tuesday night ahead of the Republican primaries in the state.

The Response drew roughly 800 people to Church in the Son in Orlando for two hours of worship and prayer for a spiritual awakening in the nation. Participants also included online viewers, who had access to the event via 225 host sites.

"We're in a historic time where we know there isn't going to be salvation in the next election," The Response director Luis Cataldo told the Orlando crowd. "There isn't going to be an economic policy that's going to rescue us. We the church, in unity and in humility, are saying, 'Lord, have mercy. Lord, we're responding to the trumpet sound. But, Lord, You have to respond from heaven.'"

More than 40,000 people gathered in Houston's Reliant Stadium Aug. 6 for the first Response, which Gov. Perry helped organized shortly before he announced his bid for the Republican nomination. Since then similar prayer meetings have been held in Iowa and South Carolina, and were intentionally timed to precede the Republican primaries in those states.

"We're doing this very purposefully right before the primary elections in each state because we want governmental officials to know there is a voice in the church," Cataldo said. "There is a voice in the church that will not stop. It will not relent. We're not contending for a king; we're contending for an awakening, and we will not stop."

Although the solemn assemblies are not affiliated with any particular candidate, Perry prayed during The Response held last week in South Carolina, and Cataldo said Ron Paul hoped to attend, but was unable to do so. Neither Perry nor any of the Republican nominees were present at the Orlando prayer meeting. But Florida Republicans Gov. Rick Scott, state Rep. Scott Plakon, who attends the host church, and state House Speaker Dean Cannon addressed the crowd by video.

Scott said he learned to rely on his faith as a child. He asked participants to pray that state and national leaders would govern with wisdom, for jobs and the economic well-being of the nation, and for the safety of U.S. troops. "We join with you today in calling on God for His guidance and direction, but most of all we ask Him for wisdom for our leaders and the people of our nation," Scott said.

Plakon made a similar appeal as he prayed from the floor of the Florida Legislature, which is currently in session. "We pray that every decision, every policy, every vote and every interaction here reflect Your will on earth today," Plakon prayed. "Even as we differ, let our differences be settled in Christian love and tolerance.

"God, help us and our fellow elected officials in Washington make decisions based not on what is best for the next election cycle but on what is best for the next generation."

Cannon quoted 2 Chronicles 7:14: "Lord, we know that Your Word says, 'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways and seek My face, then I will hear from heaven and I will heal their land.' And I pray Lord that you would just hear our prayers for all government leaders everywhere in Florida, in our country and throughout the world, that we would turn to You as the King of kings and Lord of lords."

Despite the political backdrop, The Response had a decidedly

spiritual focus. The first half was spent in worship and repentance. During the second hour, participants prayed for justice and that the church would be a tangible expression of Christ in the world. Local believers took the microphone and prayed for God's mercy, salvation, revival, a spirit of repentance, "Saul of Tarsus encounters," an end to abortion and for the eradication of sex trafficking in Florida. The crowd divided into groups of three, four or five and prayed—in English, in tongues, in Russian and Spanish—for revival in the church and the nation.

"Everything uncovered, Lord," one young man prayed. "We ask for a wind of Your Spirit on this issue. End modern-day slavery in the state of Florida!"

Doug Stringer, founder of Somebody Cares International based in Houston and a participant in the first Response in Texas, said the church is called to be a people of reconciliation and justice. But it must be revived before it can reach the world.

"For us to impact the soul of our nation, the heart needs a defibrillation," Stringer said. "What is the heart? The heart is us, the church. We need an individual and corporate heart awakening if we're going to impact the soul of this nation. We do that by seeking God, touching His heart, attracting His presence."

The crowd was then led in praying to heal rifts across genders and generations. Larry and Leah Ramirez, founders of Resound, an Orlando-based ministry that seeks to bring revival in every sphere of life, prayed for marriages to be strengthened and led couples in pronouncing blessings over one another. An older man prayed a blessing over a young girl, symbolizing the older generation blessing the younger. She in turn blessed his generation, thanking them for standing for truth and apologizing on behalf of her generation for dishonoring them. Several young adults prayed for the peace of Jerusalem and for the Jewish people to know Jesus as Messiah.

“For the church to remain strong, we must learn to honor, to release, and to bless,” Stringer said.

The next Response event is to be held in Arizona in February. Cataldo hopes to follow that meeting with prayer gatherings in Washington state, Tennessee, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri and Ohio before the primaries or caucuses in those states. The dates of those events are pending funding, as all of the prayer gatherings are free. No merchandise is sold, and no offerings are collected to offset the costs. Visit The Response website for more information on upcoming events.

Cataldo said now that Perry no longer has to balance his position as a candidate with his desire to see a spiritual awakening in the U.S., he wouldn't be surprised if Perry became more involved in The Response, though Cataldo has not spoken with Perry about that possibility.

“What really moved [Perry to initiate The Response in Texas] was not only his genuine faith, but he was saying America is really in trouble, and the answers aren't political; the answers are spiritual,” Cataldo told Charisma News. “We need righteous leaders, for sure. We need godly men and women to serve in government, for sure. But the answer's in the church. So I wouldn't be surprised if Gov. Perry gets more engaged.”

Even if Perry does not get more involved, Cataldo said other governors have expressed interest in hosting a Response in their states.

In the meantime, Cataldo encourages Christians not to wait for a mass event, but to respond to God's call to prayer right now.

“You can do this,” he told the Orlando crowd. “There was nothing flashy here. You can put in a CD, gather around the kitchen table, and then pray. This isn't going to look the same everywhere. This is just going to look like people saying, ‘We need the Lord and we're going to gather together

in two or three or 2,000 or 3,000. We're going to worship Him. We're going to come in unity and humility; then we're going to engage the culture for righteousness and justice.'

"Continue to respond," Cataldo added. "Create a culture of prayer in your church, in your home, in your marriages. Let's bring an awakening to America."

Click below to watch a video of Stringer speaking at the event.