

Many 'See Jesus' for First Time in Iceland

Was this really happening?

In the concourse outside Iceland's Laugardalshöll Arena, Bryndis Stefánsdóttir pumped both fists in the air, jumping up and down like a schoolgirl on Christmas morning.

Only Bryndis is 49.

But she had just led 18-year-old Erna to Christ.

"Wow—an 18-year-old girl responding to the **gospel**," Bryndis says. "Her life is now changed. Totally."

Bryndis just couldn't stop smiling.

"I've never done this before," she says, recounting the counseling session. "She was looking straight into my eyes. She was looking at me with her whole face."

Bryndis will tell you she is not an **evangelist** by nature. She's not bold. She's rather passive, actually, with her faith.

But she felt God tugging and tugging and tugging. And this weekend was a big deal in Reykjavik, not just for her church but for all 41 churches that are participating in the **Franklin Graham** Festival of Hope.

So when Erna, 18, came forward in response to **Franklin Graham's** passionate invitation to accept Christ on Saturday night and her path meandered to Bryndis like a Plinko chip on the *Price Is Right*, Bryndis knew this was her chance.

"She was hungry," Bryndis says. "It was almost too easy."

But then she remembered all the praying she did personally,

all the praying her church had done. And suddenly, “too easy” felt more like “God-ordained.”

Erna drove more than 50 kilometers from the town of Selfoss to Laugardalshöll arena at the invitation of a relative. She’s a very introverted teenager, very private about her **faith**.

But it was a perfect match. Here is Bryndis, introverted herself, who could totally understand a young woman like Erna. And so in her sensitive way, Bryndis kept asking probing questions of Erna.

“How she answered my questions, how she looked at me,” Bryndis says, “it was what I was hoping for.

“She really wanted me to talk to her. She was so determined.”

And using up nearly every drop of the 15-minute counseling time, Bryndis, with the front stage mostly scattered, made sure Erna understood what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. She led her in a prayer to receive Christ as her personal Savior.

“Are you with me?” Bryndis asked one last time. “Are you sure you know what you are doing?”

And Erna repeated Bryndis’ every word.

“She had no connection with any other church,” Bryndis says. “But she really wanted to meet Jesus.”

And one last time, Bryndis pumped her fist in the air, giving praise to the Father. She could get used to this evangelism thing.

“I really loved it,” she says. “I have a really good feeling.”

‘See Jesus’

Take Bryndis’ experience and imagine it in hundreds of groups of two or three Icelanders, and you’ve got a picture of what

transpired in Reykjavik on Saturday night.

The first Billy Graham Evangelistic Association outreach to Iceland in its 60-plus-year history had Holy Spirit handprints all over it.

Backed by a choir that Franklin Graham gave a shoutout to as one of the best he's ever heard, the variety of local musicians didn't just entertain the crowd; they set the stage with powerful worship.

Dennis Agajanian treated the crowd to "Ain't No Grave," while the Tommy Coomes band wowed a packed house of nearly 3,000 people with "My Hope," performed in Icelandic. Michael W. Smith closed out the night with a set full of new and old favorites, highlighted by the crowd singing "Angus Dei" a cappella.

But in between, **Franklin Graham** brought a bold gospel message, preaching out of Luke 19 about Zacchaeus—read to the crowd in Icelandic. "Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Maybe tonight you'd like to see Jesus," he said.

'Straightforward With the Gospel'

For a country like Iceland, settled in the ninth century as a Christian nation but one that sees very little commitment to Christ (Operation World estimates the nation is only 3.8 percent Christian), this Festival of Hope can be a game-changer.

While gathering over 2,900 believers and seekers together may not seem like a huge number, for a country with only 320,000 residents, it's enormous. In fact, scaled to size, it would be the equivalent to an evangelistic meeting in the U.S. of about 3 million people.

For young people like Einar, a 17-year-old from Filadelfia Church who led a couple in their 50s who had only been to

church once in their life to a relationship with Christ, Saturday was an encouragement like none other.

“It’s amazing,” Einar said.

For people like Bryndis who have been private with their faith, it’s a chance to finally be bold. Bryndis especially appreciated Franklin Graham’s direct “black and white” presentation of the gospel, including an interview earlier in the week on Iceland’s nationwide news show, similar to *60 Minutes*.

“He was very straightforward with the gospel,” Bryndis says. “Something the church isn’t teaching here.”

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