

Prophetic Dream Interpreters Spark Showdown With Psychic Readers

Stopping to read a “menu” of free spiritual services for people on the streets of Boulder, Colo., a teenaged girl who attends one of the nation’s fastest-growing megachurches voiced utter disgust.

“That’s just evil,” the girl, Mallory, said to Linnea Bennell, pointing at items on the menu. “Spirit reading—that’s evil. Spirit cleansing—that’s evil. Spirit encounter—that’s evil.”

Bennell’s husband, Ed, a Spirit-filled pastor, sat feet away from the confrontation, praying for a Vietnam veteran’s lingering back injury.

The Bennells, who believe in all of the Holy Spirit’s gifts, say that for every Mallory, there are five people who come to them and other church members for dream interpretation and destiny drawing—two of their six menu offerings—at venues around Boulder, where occult practices abound.

The Bennells and members of their team conceal their identities as pastors and Christian leaders, as well as any connection to a church. But Linnea Bennell assured Mallory that, despite the sign’s unusual language, the group members are followers of Jesus.

“There’s a nagging sense of longing that people have for peace with God and His love,” says Ed Bennell, who loves Boulder’s large New Age and psychic communities and hopes to build a bridge between them and Vinelife Church, where he leads a ministry training school under the senior pastor’s direction.

Other Vinelife pastors, prophetic ministers and students from

Vineliflife University joined the Bennells for a recent three-day downtown outreach—now an eight-year tradition—that’s planned each year to coincide with the acclaimed Bolder Boulder 10k road race. A city-sponsored festival during the Memorial Day weekend combines with the internationally recognized run to draw an estimated half-million people to Colorado—some seeking the services of palm, crystal ball and tarot card readers.

For the occultists, Vineliflife provided stiff competition this year and in previous years with its free spiritual services that produce loyal clients, including Muslim students from the University of Colorado. The students return year after year because they say they feel the love of God.

Over the recent three-day stretch, teams of two or three Vineliflife members offered prophetic words and Holy Spirit encounters to nearly 500 people who stepped inside the church’s roomy, carpeted tent next to a psychic reader’s booth. Two others psychics with their own tent a few doors away told Bennell that someone who looked like Vineliflife’s 6-foot-5, 200-pound pastor appeared to them in a vision during the festival, assuring them he could answer their spiritual questions and maybe even offer premarital advice.

Bennell says he’s happy to oblige seekers in this setting because, as a former New Ager, he loves psychics and other occultists for what he calls their “passionate pursuit of spiritual things.” He knows the journey leads to the truth that’s in Jesus Christ.

While Mallory’s contempt for the offering of free spiritual services wasn’t assuaged by Linnea Bennell’s efforts, another woman says she came back a second time because of the help she received from another Vineliflife pastor, Dee Dee Peck.

“I had an abortion, and I’ve not been able to let it go,” the woman said after a spirit reading.

“I had a dream reading with [Pastor] Dee Dee. It hit a very

deep, unhealed place where I need to ask for help in forgiving myself," she wrote in a journal after her second visit.

Trained in dream interpretation by prophetic minister John Paul Jackson, Peck has counseled at the occult festival Mystic Garden in Oregon. She plans to someday minister with Jackson and another prophetic minister friend at the pagan Burning Man festival in the Nevada desert.

"There are judgments in Boulder about Jesus," Peck says. "People here need to first taste and see that the Lord is good."

In some ways, Peck says, spiritual seekers' hearts are "more sincere, more pure than [some] Christians' hearts." Frequently Peck hears, "So, you do what Jesus said to do?" from psychics and "unchurched" people.

As a seeker in 2008, Roxanna DesJardins came to Bennell and Peck for a spiritual reading and was touched—more so than by what she'd heard from psychics in Boulder, where she has lived for 36 years.

"I was part of every kind of spiritual seeking group that you could mention. They [Vineline] were different than anything I'd ever experienced before," says DesJardins of her second visit in 2009.

A third visit in 2010 for a spirit-cleansing opened the door for DesJardins to become a follower of Jesus. "It opened it up so that I could accept Christ," says the recent first-year graduate of Vineline's three-year ministry school. In addition, DesJardins is now a member of the church's spiritual reading team.

Carrie Bowen, already a follower of Jesus when she came to Vineline University in 2012 from stints as a missionary to Mozambique and as a college campus ministry leader at the University of Central Arkansas, received a call to minister in

spiritual readings, encounters and cleansing that was confirmed when she heard about binding up broken hearts in a sermon based on Isaiah 61.

In the sermon, Vinelife pastor Walt Roberson preached that one mission of Vinelife church is to reach, with God's father heart of love, the hurting, broken people who've been wounded—even by some Christians. Today, two years after the sermon, Roberson remains committed to that goal, as well as to his role in equipping students like Bowen to do the works of ministry outlined in Ephesians 4.

"I wish the whole church was like them—telling people about the Father's heart," Roberson says. "We want people to connect with God's love in a non-religious context. Too many people have negative experiences with churches, and they're looking for a genuine connection that reflects God's heart and love to them."

That message resonates with Benny Nowell, also a minister-in-training at Vinelife who works with the homeless in Boulder.

"We come in love, trying to get a sense of how they might connect with God," says Nowell, whose religious background prior to Vinelife was strict, with no room for the Holy Spirit's gifts and little of the heavenly Father's love.

Nowell is excited about a continuing prophetic outreach, called Love in the Park, that is an effort by Vinelife to take God's presence to homeless and spiritual seekers who are hungry for a genuine word from God but are averse to going to church for one.

"Everybody knows what the church thinks about gay people, Buddhists and junkies. They know what we're against," Nowell says. "I tell people, 'I'm just trying to love you in the name of Jesus.' When it's time, they're going to seek out a believer or a church."

Among the Vinelife team of pastors, prophetic ministers and students is teacher Sarah McGee, who holds a Ph.D. in theoretical quantum physics. Despite the impressive credentials, McGee's business card reads, "Jesus Reigns Eternal."

The University of Colorado graduate, whose degree commands in excess of six-figure salaries in the public sector, is content to teach Vinelife students and church members how science and God work together.

"It's basic theology," says McGee, whose dad is a nuclear engineer and pastor and whose mom ministers to the homeless in the family's native North Carolina.