

Good News: Once-Thriving Calvary Assembly Finds Revitalization Under New Pastor

Many of you know that *Charisma* magazine started at Calvary Assembly in Winter Park, Florida. Back in the 1970s, it was one of the largest churches in the nation. Sadly, Calvary Assembly has experienced many problems in the past few decades, yet I'm happy to report good news!

After Calvary Assembly came within a few months of being insolvent, things turned around so much that it is embarking on an \$11 million renovation, which it will do debt free. This is only one indication that the church is being "revitalized" under the ministry of Pastor Ed Garvin, who moved here from Illinois in January 2014.

I had the opportunity earlier today to interview Pastor Garvin in the form of a podcast. I will air it next week and you can listen to him tell in his own words the exciting story of what's happening.

Nationwide, 70 percent of churches are static or declining. Many of them need the kind of turnaround that Calvary is experiencing. A couple of years ago, there were rumors that Calvary's 5,000-seat auditorium and large campus area were for sale. In fact, I did a Strang Report about it and the previous pastor put that rumor to rest.

Under Pastor Garvin's leadership, he told the church that they needed to take the resources they had and have "open hands" toward the Lord unto what He wanted them to do with it. They seriously considered relocating and building a 1,600-seat auditorium. They even had an offer of \$49 million cash for

their facility.

Pastor Garvin told me that in the natural it seemed the thing to do, but “the Lord said no” and that He had them at that location in Orlando for a reason.

Joy and I moved to Orlando 43 years ago this week. We went to Calvary Assembly the first Sunday and never went anywhere else. We saw Calvary grow and we were there when the very popular pastor had to step down in disgrace.

We also know the area and realize that the church is in the very center of the urban area just a couple of miles north of downtown sitting next to Interstate 4 at a strategic exit. In my opinion, no church has a better location than Calvary.

But when the church dwindled to only 500 people in a 5,000-seat auditorium, it was a very discouraging environment.

✖ Pastor Garvin shared with me that he found some “toxicity” in the church when he arrived. It involved certain leaders being in positions that were not their gifting. But he also found a culture where the church was led by the board and the paid staff and the congregants didn’t always feel a level of trust for leadership.

He has tried to rebuild all that.

Pastor Garvin has done this before. This is his fourth “revitalization.” In the process, he has learned that what John Maxwell said—“Everything rises and falls based on leadership”—is true. In fact when he encourages other pastors, he tells them that the first thing that they have to do is lead. They are not there to be popular. They are not there to be a buddy or a bully, but they have to lead.

He also says that leaders cannot do God’s job. He’s the one that will “build My church.” And of course the Scripture says that unless the Lord builds the house they labor in vain who

build it. The church needs to be healthy, and if it is healthy, it will naturally grow.

The third thing he tells pastors who are turning around a church is they can't do Satan's job, which is being an accuser of the brethren. Garvin said Satan, since the fall of man, has always used questions such as "What about this?" and "What about that?" He says pastors should never do that.

I was encouraged to talk to pastor Garvin to sense his spirit and to hear about the encouraging things that are happening at Calvary. There aren't many leaders who would turn down a \$49 million offer to relocate with millions of dollars left in reserve.

A year or so ago, I wrote a Strang Report about the 10,000-seat Carpenter's Home Church in Lakeland being torn down. That is the church I grew up in when I was teenager. That was a very sad column for me to write. Interestingly, it had more "shares" than any other newsletter I've ever written, so there was obviously a lot of interest in that very sad story. This time, it's good news. Both Calvary and Carpenter's Home Church were booming during the same time. The issues that they faced were different and the outcomes have been different.

The Scripture is true, and God is the one who builds the church. His church is resilient, and even the Carpenter's Home Church resulted in two other congregations being spawned, so in that way, the church is continuing.

I'm grateful for the start that Calvary Assembly gave a young newspaper reporter-me. *Charisma* magazine started at Calvary, and we were there six years. We had an amicable parting 35 years ago this week. That's not something that's widely known, but I have taken time this week to pause and thank God for His blessing. And now I'm thanking God for the way He's blessing Calvary Assembly. {eoa}