

Vibrant Church Brings Holy Spirit Overflow in Washington

It happened on a park bench, the same bench on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., where the homeless man occasionally made his bed. Andy Galatis' childhood was so sweet when he lived comfortably with his family on the island nation of Mauritius, but later, as a young immigrant to the U.S., he fell into a world of crime and addiction. Now, with ruined relationships, no job and nowhere to go, he was drowning in despair, thinking God had given up on him. "Is this how my story ends?" he cried out.

Moments later, a man with a familiar face approached from a distance. Paul Hanfere had been a friend of his during their teenage years, and they'd attended youth group together at International Ethiopian Evangelical Church in the nation's capital where Paul's father was the lead pastor. Even though Galatis' own dad was also on the pastoral staff, the two friends hadn't been in touch for over 20 years.

"Andy, is that you?" Paul asked.

Tears flooded the distraught man's face as he cried out for help. It was a divine appointment. Paul had no idea he would cross paths with his old friend. He listened to Galatis' story, gave him a place to stay that night and invited him to come back to church where Paul was by then serving as the young adult pastor.

Discipleship and restoration followed over the next year. Like the New Testament story of Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4, the encounter at the park bench was a drink of living water.

"That moment, indeed, changed my life forever," Galatis says. "I was able to encounter God and discover my purpose."

Living a new life, Galatis is now pursuing a college degree and serving on the media team at a new church co-founded by Paul and his wife, Christina.

Welcome One and All

Overflow City Church is a multiethnic congregation in Silver Spring, Maryland, that has seen nearly 300 decisions for Christ since its launch in 2018. Co-pastors Paul and Christina are both Ethiopian, and although the congregation is more than half Ethiopian, it's culturally a Western-style, English-speaking church that is growing in diversity.

"We try to represent the community that it's in," Paul says. "We want to create a ... centralized worship experience that's welcoming for everyone, no matter where you're from."

Encountering Jesus Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit, but it's not the same for everyone.

"It can be an emotion, but not always," Paul says. "It's engaging with God in a way that's tangible."

Whether that's in a worship service or through a healing or an answered prayer, or even a gradual realization of faith, it's transformational.

While Overflow attracts a high percentage of professionals, its food distribution outreaches connected with Montgomery County and Blessings of Hope enable the church to minister to people from all walks of life.

"You could have a high-powered attorney sitting next to a homeless person who pushes a cart," Paul says about the Sunday services. And just outside the theater where the church meets, you would find a Hare Krishna band, a Jehovah Witness booth and people of other faiths seeking converts.

Go Deep With God

Overflow's mission isn't unlike other churches—leading people to Christ and helping them find their God-given purpose. But its focus on discipleship is key to the personal and corporate inner growth the church is seeing.

“Our desire is not to be a church that's a mile wide and an inch deep,” Paul says. “We put a high premium on investing in people in a discipleship and spiritual growth manner.”

New believers and others who are involved in small groups find biblical teaching, prayer support and a sense of belonging. As people are spending more time alone, many are examining their lives and their faith, Paul says.

“They're a lot more open to going deeper with God and receiving healing and wholeness in their hearts,” he says.

Last October, 20 people who were ready to take their faith journey to the next level were baptized outdoors.

“We've been experiencing major traction and engagement from virtual Life Groups,” Paul says. “The hunger for God is what amazes me.”

Trudy Kaham discovered Overflow City Church after receiving a flyer in the mail. She had been looking for a church family in 2018 after moving to Silver Spring and found her home there after just one visit.

“I could feel the genuineness and the Spirit of the Lord, that feeling I had been longing [for],” Kaham says.

A year later, she was devastated when her grandmother, who had raised her, died. Although she was a new member of the church's First Impressions team, Kaham was comforted by the church's support during her time of grief.

“They barely knew me, but I was family, and they made sure I knew they were there for me,” she says.

Planting a new church comes with challenges, but nurturing one in the throes of a pandemic, along with the exploding political unrest and racial tensions the U.S. has recently experienced, has cast a heavenly light on the basics of the gospel.

“Relationship is huge, huge, huge, huge,” Paul says. “[Last] summer has called us to rise up and provide safe places [for people] to dialogue and share and vent their emotions. We have been called to be a bridge builder.”

The church’s response, say the Hanferes, is to face the issues head-on.

“Give it the major real estate on Sundays,” Paul says. “Bring in some folks who don’t look like the majority of your congregation to speak into the life of the church.”

They also engage people virtually via Zoom by encouraging honest discussions about racism and how prejudice impacts people’s hearts.

“It’s the stories that bring empathy in others,” Paul says.

Christina was born and raised in Greece and later lived in Canada. She said the racial turmoil in the U.S. was a culture shock when she arrived four years ago.

“The first few months were hardest, trying to grasp the history of it all,” Christina says. “...This is a deeply rooted sin issue. We need to go back to understand the heart of the gospel. All people are made in the image of God.”

Move in the Supernatural

Christina’s training began at Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Toronto.

“I learned a lot through highly disciplined involvement in the church,” she says.

Christina received a prophetic word at 13 saying she would someday lead a multiethnic congregation. Currently pursuing a pastoral ministry degree through Oral Roberts University, she shares the preaching/teaching responsibilities and oversees the discipleship element of the church and worship team. Her role has been welcomed and encouraged, she says.

In contrast, Paul never planned to be in ministry. Although he grew up as a pastor's kid, he says he never had a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ until his late 20s. After high school, he moved away to attend college and then began a career in finance and technology. But later, as God began to reorder his spiritual life, he felt led to seek out ministry training, thinking he might use it alongside his career path. But in 2014, while attending Global Awakening Ministry School in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Paul was overcome by a deep compassion for the lost and sensed the call to become a pastor.

For three years, he trained and traveled with the school's founder, Randy Clark, having witnessed the Holy Spirit's touch in supernatural ways.

"It was a constant, regular occurrence where you would see healings and impartations, seeing people baptized with the Holy Spirit with power, and words of knowledge," Paul says.

Clark, an internationally known revivalist and author, says he chose Paul to be an intern with his ministry because of his stellar ability, intellect, commitment, wisdom and anointing.

"I consider him a spiritual son of whom I am very proud," Clark told Charisma. "I watched him grow in his faith for the miraculous. We had many discussions about church planting and church growth in addition to moving in the supernatural. God has brought him an amazing wife, and together, Paul and Christina make a super couple for the kingdom of God."

Paul says he looks forward to opportunities to pray for people

without the constraints of a rented facility or virtual services.

“The church dynamic is different now,” he says. “[The challenge is] how to create a space where people can go further in prophetic ministry.”

Overflow is affiliated with the Assemblies of God and is an extension of Oaks Church in Red Oaks, Texas. The young D.C. church was the 500th plant in coordination with the AG Trust and Church Multiplication Network, which provides training, initial funding and ongoing accountability to new churches.

Oaks Church Pastor Chris Railey has mentored the Hanferes for three years.

“The metro D.C. area is a seat of influence for our nation and the world,” Railey says. “To bring the hope and transformation of the gospel to this place is an opportunity for that ... to be multiplied far and wide.”

Their fit for this assignment from God is evident in their attitude toward recent political happenings in Washington.

“The recent events that we have witnessed unfolding in the nation’s capital are a jarring reminder of the great threat this country’s peace and unity are facing,” they say. “In distressed times such as these, it has become abundantly clear that the church faces a great urgency of fulfilling the call of being the agents of unity, of healing, of compassion and of light. This will not be done by fighting over or choosing political sides. Rather, by remembering who we belong to and whose kingdom we have been called to represent here on earth. We need to hold fast to the reminder that the health, stability and well being of our nation depend on our prayers, and on our willingness to demonstrate the heart and attitude of Christ through our actions and speech.”

Railey believes the Hanferes are uniquely called and equipped

to bring the gospel to their strategic area. He says Paul and Christina are “two of the best leaders I know anywhere, and [they] know how to lead and love, both inside and outside of the church.”

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