

Calvary Chapel Old Bridge

story by Loretta Rogers
photos by Tom Price

"I thought this was the wildest idea we ever had," said Lloyd Pulley, senior pastor of Calvary Chapel in Old Bridge (CCOB), New Jersey. "God was in charge of the whole thing."

The story of CCOB leading a public worship session in a Manhattan park is a testimony of God's perfect timing - a sequence of events demonstrating how the Lord opens hearts. "It was amazing," said Lloyd.

Following the terrorist attacks and collapse of the twin towers, Lloyd and other Calvary Chapel pastors volunteered as chaplains for the Red Cross in New York City. They encountered some limitations, and even opposition, as they ministered in that capacity. At Union Square, however, people were more open, sitting on the ground, listening, crying, and embracing one another. They willingly approached the pastors, seeking a kind word and an attentive ear. Strangers prayed together. It was a heart-moving, soul-stirring scene for the group from Calvary Chapel as much as for the bystanders.

Initially, the CCOB team tried to minister from a corner of the park without a sound system, but the noise of the crowd drowned out the praise music. Meanwhile, at the other end of the park, a street musician had a battery-powered sound system. He quickly captured the crowd's attention.

"About four hundred people were listening," said Lloyd. "They gathered around him, but he didn't have a lot to say. When he opened up his microphone to the crowd, we got our musicians on and were able to share."

The team worked together with the street musician until he was unable to continue. He had been performing for 24 straight hours. To allow the ministry to go on uninterrupted, CCOB purchased an identical sound system and kept the mike open.

"The musician was so blown away when we said we would buy a system to keep this thing going," Lloyd recalls. "He asked the crowd, 'Can you believe this? These guys, they've got Jesus in their corner! They've got a whole system. Freedom of speech!'"



Pastor Lloyd Pulley, CC Old Bridge, tells the crowd at Union Square what an encouragement they are for those affected by the WTC tragedy.



Old Bridge residents show their support for America.

Bridging the Gap

"From the beginning, we knew there was no way we could run this outreach like a typical street ministry. It would just kill it because there was a sense, an atmosphere, in this park. People were mourning, and it was a solemn occasion. We kept the microphone open for people to share music, prayer, poems, and their own experiences. Our musicians led worship, and the pastors presented the Gospel. That's really how it all got started," Lloyd explained.

There were hundreds of people at a time listening and singing along with the performers. The crowd seemed to rotate almost every hour. The CCOB team delivered the Gospel message, but in an entirely different way.



Overflow crowds packed CC Old Bridge's four services in the wake of the terrorist attacks.



Pete Episcopo

“Speakers from the crowd added a dimension that kept everyone’s interest,” said Lloyd. “People who lost loved ones were relating their experiences. The crowd was riveted, and they continued to

listen as we shared the hope we have in Christ.”

“You people of New York are amazing,” Lloyd told the crowd. “This tragedy happened and brought people together. You don’t know how much of an encouragement you are. People just can’t stay home. The thoughts and the noises are too much for them to be alone.”

Lloyd has been ministering to New York audiences over the airwaves for eight years. His radio program, “Bridging the Gap,” airs twice a day, Monday through Friday, on WMCA 570AM, a Christian talk station in New York. Lloyd’s teaching also airs on the Calvary Satellite Network at 4:00 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday.

“Thank you for making the Scriptures so much easier to understand,” wrote one listener in Nanuet, NY. “Listening to you allows me to apply principles of the Bible to my life, where sometimes just reading doesn’t have the same impact.”

“Bridging the Gap” is also the name of CCOB’s communications and ministry arm, which includes a cable television show, an Internet presence, a news magazine, and an audiocassette distribution ministry.

Lloyd has been working and ministering in New Jersey even longer than the eight years he’s been reaching out in New York. In 1984, after serving as an associate pastor of Calvary Chapel West Covina, California,



Peter Episcopo, worship pastor at CC Old Bridge, at Union Square. He also directs Bridgesong Media, the recording label of CC Old Bridge.



Brian Brodersen coordinates the outreach as Lloyd makes calls to purchase a sound system.



Lloyd directs his staff, Mark Nigro, Eric Ceaser, and Dennis Mitchell.

under Pastor Raul Ries, Lloyd, his wife, Karen, and their two children, Jeremy and Jessica, left their home in California and moved to Old Bridge, New Jersey. They began a Bible study in the home of Ray and Vivian Fagin in Middletown, NJ.

The Fagins had heard Raul Ries and Greg Laurie teaching on local radio stations, and they contacted Raul to ask about a Calvary Chapel style ministry moving to New Jersey.

Lloyd hadn’t originally felt called to New Jersey, but he did believe the Lord wanted him back east. He considered his home state Michigan.

“I felt the Lord speak to my heart about the east coast before I received an invitation,” he said. “My wife and I were already preparing in our minds and hearts to go for it.”

A passage in Isaiah directed Lloyd.



Through this crisis Lloyd has felt led to change the approach of evangelizing.

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. Isaiah 58:11-12

That verse was crucial to his family’s decision to make the move to New Jersey. “The Lord encouraged me with the passage where He promises that those from among us will build the old waste places. I took those places to be areas where great revivals had once occurred, like New Jersey.”

The Pulley family now lives half a mile from Tennent Road Presbyterian Church, a famous place where George Whitefield,



CC Old Bridge is outgrowing their facility, despite having four services.



Altar calls soon after the WTC tragedy drew dozens each service. Those coming forward waited in a line extending across the front of the altar to the back of the church.

the “Great Itinerant,” preached in the 1700s along with the famous Tennents. The spiritual revival of the First Great Awakening had begun in New Jersey among the Presbyterians before sweeping through the American colonies.

“Revival happened here one time,” says Lloyd. “But when we first came out, it was dead, like some spiritual wasteland. Calvary Chapel was totally new. When we first came into the area, it wasn’t a matter of building on the Calvary Chapel name. No one knew about it,” he laughed. “Chuck who?”

After the first seven months in the Fagins’ home, the study grew to the point that it had to be moved to the Pulleys’ apartment. When they outgrew the apartment, they moved to a school. Today, thousands of people attend CCOB’s four weekend services and midweek Bible study.



Children enjoy Lloyd’s sense of humor and attention.



People are overcome with emotion responding to the altar call.

“When I came out here, it was pretty simple - I didn’t have a big ambition,” says Lloyd. “I came with the mindset that if I did a small Bible study, and it stayed a small study for ten years, then that would work. I would be faithful to teach.”

He recalls when he first felt impressed that the Lord was going to do a mighty work at Calvary Chapel Old Bridge. “I remember vividly one Tuesday evening when a dozen believers had gathered for prayer in our apartment in Old Bridge. I felt the Lord changing the direction of the ministry at that time. There were 30 people in the church, and I felt the Lord speak to me that there would be thousands one day. God has done exceedingly abundantly above what we could have imagined.”

At the beginning of his walk, Lloyd had thought the Lord would use his talents in wrestling, a sport in which he excelled, to reach out to other athletes. In high school he had achieved top ranking in the state of Michigan and had considered offers from the University of Michigan before settling on Michigan State. In his freshman year at Michigan State, he accepted the Lord. Lloyd later abandoned his dream of competing in the Olympics after setbacks and injuries sidelined him.

“Grappling with Ken Graves for fun at a recent pastors’ conference convinced me I am officially retired from wrestling,” Lloyd laughs. A promising career in chemical engineering was also set aside when he decided to go into ministry.

Lloyd believes it was his grandmother’s prayers for him as a youngster that finally brought him around. God really began to work in his life after his mother’s death when he was four years old. His godly grandmother cared for Lloyd and his three sisters. She took them to church regularly, and Lloyd states, “Even during my backslidden state in high school, she never stopped telling me

the Lord had a plan for me.”

Lloyd credits his time with Raul Ries with “loosening me up,” as he puts it. Lloyd’s high school friends once considered his prankster ways a means of attracting attention. Now they’re a part of his personality that the Lord uses to “break the ice” at home and overseas. Lloyd’s home life is a critical part of the foundation for his ministry. In addition to being Lloyd’s strong advocate and encourager, his wife, Karen, oversees the women’s



Broken Leaves, a ministry of CC Old Bridge, provides food for the needy.

ministry at the church. “It would be totally incomplete to think of what God has done at CCOB without Karen’s role,” says Lloyd. “She has been an incredible support from the beginning, willing to follow me away from her home in California and inspiring me at every turn. She is beyond uplifting.”

Karen oversees a lively women’s ministry and has many laywomen doing more in the church than most realize. To keep women from the spiritual dangers of isolation, the women’s ministry at CCOB holds a bi-monthly Bible study and encourages women to gather in home groups for additional fellowship and prayer.

Women Helping Women, the practical helps group of the CCOB Women’s Ministry, is one of the ways that Karen’s quiet leadership has impacted the fellowship. The group is responsible for providing prayer, meals, housing, visitation, transportation, encouragement, and other forms of support to hundreds in the body. If a need arises in the church, one phone call to a toll-free



Lloyd maintains a personal relationship with the congregation despite its size.



CCOB worship team.



Assistant pastor Ray Fagin, left, was instrumental in having Lloyd Pulley come to New Jersey. Mark Nigro, right, relinquished his duties as missions pastor to become a missionary in Italy.



The children's ministry, directed by Gary Rodriguez, is a top priority at CCOB. Children are taught Bible truths while the parents attend service.

number mobilizes help immediately.

The women of CCOB also host an annual Purity Seminar where nearly 500 young women renew their commitment to remain pure until marriage. "At a time when thousands are falling prey to impure relationships and being robbed of God's best for their lives, these seminars have been such a tremendous blessing," said Karen.

Like the women's ministry, other ministries at Calvary Chapel are committed to the spiritual and material needs of the surrounding community. Last year, Broken Loaves, the food ministry of CCOB, was responsible for feeding 3,000 families. Over 150,000 pounds of food was donated to Broken Loaves and distributed. Most of the families receiving assistance are comprised of single mothers with young children. Each family sees a living example of the Gospel in action.

To reach areas outside of New Jersey, CCOB's missions ministry, Bridging the World, currently supports many missionaries in nations like China, Hungary, India, and Russia.

Bridging the World also co-labors with mission outreaches in Nicaragua, Africa, Puerto Rico, and the Ukraine. In each nation and with each outreach, CCOB's focus is the same - to obey the Lord's command to go and make disciples of all nations.



Karen and Lloyd Pulley

Another key ministry is CCOB's worship team, which played an integral role in the outreach at Union Square. Under the direction of Pete Episcopo, the music ministry has reached audiences both locally and worldwide. They have their own recording

label, Bridgesong Media.

"The focus is on the Lord Himself," said Pete. "Our vision is to lead the body, and anyone who listens to our recordings, closer to the Lord through worship. It never gets old seeing people praise God through music and lyrics."

The ever-increasing fellowship, the radio outreach of "Bridging the Gap," Women Helping Women, Broken Loaves, Bridging the World, Bridgesong, and the tireless work of the other ministries remind Lloyd of the tremendous responsibility and privilege he has been given to minister to the Tri-State area, particularly in light of the attacks of September 11.

The wild idea that birthed a great ministry and touched so many hearts in Union Square is an example of the way God exceedingly and abundantly blesses this ministry. Calvary Chapel Old Bridge remains dedicated to sharing Christ's love with everyday people and giving God the honor.

"We pray that the Lord would be glorified and that His name would be proclaimed all over the world," said Lloyd. "Seeing God open doors for effective ministry in a place like Union Square has encouraged us to continue reaching out to those in need."



Associate Pastor Ed Seponosky with two Russian orphans. Russia is one of many countries where CC Old Bridge ministers.



photo by Craig Niedermejer

CCOB organized a memorial service at a sports facility to honor those from New Jersey who were killed in the tragedy. Left to right, Andy Deane, survivor of the WTC tragedy; Lisa Beamer, wife of Todd Beamer, who perished on Flight 93 in Pennsylvania; Mike MacIntosh, Horizon Christian Fellowship; and Lloyd Pulley.

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