

KNOCKING ON DOORS AND HEARTS

From California to Oklahoma: Reaching Out to the Rural U.S.

Story by Nicole Passar Gebhardt
Photos courtesy of CC Open Door, CA, and CF Norman, OK



Gail and Hal Fandl, CC Truckee, CA, invite Norman, OK, residents to the worship service on Sunday.

As Rudy waited tables at the small restaurant in Norman, OK, he looked at the friendly group of out-of-towners who had been coming to the restaurant the past couple of days. They were full of joy and energy—and something else. It intrigued him. Why had they come from so far away just to speak to him, as they said? They had invited him to church. But, he thought, why should he go? He had everything he needed, right?

Yet deep inside, he knew there was something missing in his life. He had a wife, a job, a tiny newborn baby girl—but there was still a hole in his heart that desperately needed to be filled. And here was a group of strangers that presented him with an invitation. It seemed like it would be fun; after all, the invitation was to a concert. But going to church? Did he really want to do this? Rudy approached their table; and as he readied to serve them, he decided to accept their offer. When he arrived at church that night, he found more than a concert—he found Jesus, his Savior and his friend.

He returned to Calvary Fellowship Norman the next night. As he walked in, he was surprised as several people recognized him and welcomed him like one of the family. The clapping crowd chanted, “Rudy! Rudy! Rudy!” Holding his baby girl, he beamed back at his newfound brothers and sisters in Christ. He had finally found a place where he was loved and cared for. He returned every evening during the weeklong outreach to worship and to hear God’s Word.



CC Open Door, CA, missionaries share the Gospel in Oklahoma.

His was one of the many lives that was touched during the outreach in May, when a missionary team from CC Open Door of Anaheim, CA, partnered with CF Norman to reach out to the rural Oklahoma community. The Anaheim fellowship has sent many teams of West Coast believers on “missionary trips” to rural parts of the U.S., partnering with smaller local Calvarys.



Pastor Jim Lawrence of CF Norman and his daughter, Riley, 9, share Christ.

Led by Pastor Roger Stahlhut of CC Open Door, the team of 36 members from Anaheim, Truckee, and Grass Valley, CA; and Klamath Falls, OR, headed out in May to Norman—a small community of about 100,000 people in central Oklahoma.

Partnering with CF Norman, the group began their week with prayer, Bible study, training, and planning. Dividing the town into four sections, the group split into teams, visiting as many places as possible. Their prayer was to share the peace and joy that comes from a personal relationship with Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The team of adults and teens excitedly shared the Good News of the Gospel wherever the Holy Spirit guided them—at the University of Oklahoma, shopping malls, businesses, and people’s homes. As they went door-to-door, onto the streets, and into the city, they distributed nearly 6,000 flyers inviting people to free Christian music concerts each evening.

The Lord seemed to plant seeds of His Word and change several lives during the week. “I was blessed by how friendly and receptive the people were. They were curious about why we had come from so far to tell them about Christ,” said Cindy Stahlhut, Pastor Roger’s wife. She was surprised to find many people in the small midwestern town who did not know who Jesus was.



Pastors Roger Stahlhut, foreground, and Jaime Lucero, of CC Open Door, pray with Norman residents at the Farmer’s Market.



Assistant Pastor Lee Mathews of CC Truckee, left, and Pastor Roger pray for those who came forward to receive Christ.

One hot and humid afternoon, as the team ministered door-to-door, they were able to show Christ's love to an elderly woman who lived alone. "She was about 80 years old, and she had been suffering from a debilitating bone disease," said Stacey Wright of CC Open Door. "We asked if we could pray with her, and we told her that there was a church around the corner from her house. We said that if she ever needed anything—like tapes of the service, meals, or transportation—all she had to do was call CF Norman." The team prayed with

her. "Later, through the mailman we found out that she had cried and told him we had done more than her current church had ever done," Stacey said.

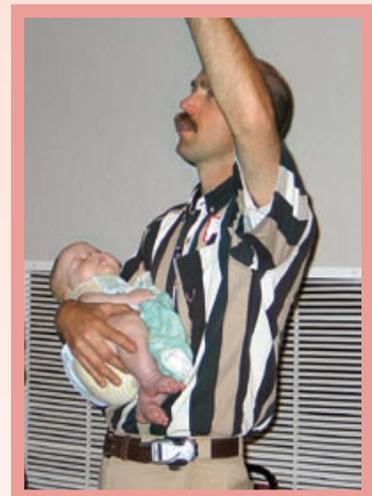
It was a growing experience for the team members as well, said Roger. Many learned to come out of their shells and speak boldly for Jesus. God knit together the hearts of His people from the various states to harvest abundant fruit during the outreach. Roger enthusiastically recalled: "God so splendidly blessed us all on Sunday to see

His increase from an average attendance of 70–80 to nearly 240 worshippers on the final day of the outreach."

There were many divine appointments: hurting Christians received prayer, many rededicated their lives to Christ, and new friendships were formed. Believers at CF Norman were encouraged by how many people are now going to church and how many lives continue to grow and change. The pastor of CF Norman, Jim Lawrence, said later that he was encouraged by the continued fruit in Oklahoma, and he welcomed future outreaches with CC Open Door. He gave the glory to God. "Our job as Christians is to present the Gospel, and the Lord does the rest," Pastor Jim said.

CC Open Door is planning similar outreaches in other parts of the U.S.—in the fall, they plan to reach out to communities in Sacramento, CA; Las Cruces, NM; and Greenville, TN.

"When it was time to say farewell, we knew that our efforts were like seeds being sown," Roger said. "We look forward to more opportunities to combine efforts with Calvary Chapel churches around the world." ✈



Clifton Touchstone, assistant pastor of CF Norman, worships.



Members of worship teams from CC Open Door, CC Grass Valley, and CF Norman join together to prepare hearts to receive the Gospel.

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