

# Reverse Church Plant

Calvary Chapel Thousand Oaks, CA, planted CC Skyline, not by sending the new fellowship out to meet elsewhere, but by giving its daughter church the building that had been its own.

Story by Ellen Gaston & Debra Smith  
Photos by Jason Redmond

At the scheduled service start time, only seven people sat in the new sanctuary. The building, a largely vacant industrial facility, was the new home of Calvary Chapel Thousand Oaks, a Southern California fellowship that was planting a new church by dividing its congregation into two.

Pastor Rob McCoy had asked the people to pray about which church to attend: The 30-year-old fellowship he had led since 2001, CC Thousand Oaks, or the new church it was planting, Calvary Chapel Skyline. It was to be a private decision, Rob had instructed—made by seeking the Lord alone, without consulting fellow church members. As Rob and his wife Michelle waited in the parking lot that Sunday in 2008, they didn't know who would come. They exchanged

glances; later, they admitted they had been thinking, *we might be looking for another job.*

But the parking lot soon began to fill with cars and the excited voices of newly-arrived congregants. “We gave them to the Lord and He gave them back,” said Rob, who originally sparked the idea for what he calls a “reverse church plant.”

## Multiplication by Division

Over the past few years, CC Thousand Oaks had grown too large for its walls. Saturday night prayer meetings had instigated community outreaches and burgeoning Sunday attendance. “We were at peak capacity, and we had decisions to make,” Rob said. “Would we go toward becoming large, potentially a megachurch—or did we want to plant

small fellowships?” Through prayer, over the course of a year, leaders decided not to expand the facility. Since their vision was to multiply the Gospel's impact throughout the city and to preserve intimacy, they would plant. “I want a church on every corner of Thousand Oaks,” explained Rob, “so everyone knows their pastor and he knows them.”

The method was unique: While the initial church retained its name and pastor, it moved to an industrial site seven miles westward. Rob's assistant pastor of three years, Manny Olivas, assumed leadership of the new fellowship—in the original congregation's building. The name of the new church, CC Skyline, was derived from the facility's location on North Skyline Drive. Both churches are in Thousand Oaks, CA.



Pastor Rob, left, welcomes home Jim and Linda Mather, missionaries to Mexico.



Believers read from God's Word together at one of CCTO's two services.



Senior Pastor Rob McCoy of Calvary Chapel Thousand Oaks, CA (CCTO), greets congregants before beginning his sermon at the church's new location in an industrial facility.



Believers worship at CCTO's new site. Both churches strongly emphasize prayer, which pastors Rob and Manny said sparked the growth that led to church planting.



Rob of CCTO talks with Mark Lunn, newly-elected county clerk and recorder.

CC Thousand Oaks/CC Skyline



Pastor Manny, left, greets a congregant after an English service. CC Skyline also began a Spanish service after Manny learned of the area's need for Bible teaching in Spanish. Knowing his language skills were not sufficient to teach biblical truths in Spanish, Manny asked for help. An elder from CC Oxnard, CA, teaches CC Skyline's Spanish service.

Rob invited the entire congregation to fast for 10 days before deciding which fellowship to join. "A lot of people lost a lot of weight," remembered Tim Hutchinson, a current elder at CC Skyline who then served at CC Thousand Oaks. Of the elders, he said, about half stayed with the first church and half moved to the new. "No one talked about it," he added. "Rob said, 'Don't make a flippant decision; ask the Lord,' and people did. It would have been easy for my wife and me to go with Rob because that's what we knew, but we sensed we should get out of our comfort zone in order to trust the Lord more."

On their first Sunday as separate churches, CC Skyline had nearly 200 attendees and CC Thousand Oaks more than 300—which alone was more than at the previous facility.

"You can't give away and God not replace it faster," said Rob. "We were in the middle of the worst economic downturn of my life, and we basically doubled our liability. Yet within six months, we had two financially independent churches."

**Lord, Teach Us to Pray**

Pastors Rob and Manny both consider prayer vital to church growth and missions. Rob commented, "Jesus said in Matthew 21:13, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer.' I know how easy it is to preach on unceasing prayer—and how foreign it is for me to apply it. But prayer is my declaration of dependence on God."

In 2007, Rob challenged the congregation to join him, his wife, and their five children in prayer at the church on Saturday nights.

He said they would intercede for the community and the church. "There cannot be power behind the pulpit unless there's prayer behind the preacher," Rob stated. "Nothing is going to happen until we pray."



Senior Pastor Manny Olivas teaches at CC Skyline.

Believers at both Calvary Chapels said they learned much from the resultant focus on prayer and the church-planting process it spawned. Tim said that though many view prayer as a complicated mystery, "Prayer



**Manny and another believer pray for Alex Gaddis, a recent law graduate who requested prayer in preparation for his bar exam.**

is as simple as talking to God as a child talks to a loving father. That's like cookies stored on the bottom shelf."

One Saturday night before the reverse church plant, the group prayed for Muslims in the community. The following morning, a woman in traditional Islamic dress attended church, and she continued coming every Sunday. After a few weeks, she told Rob she had been prompted to come by a dream in which God revealed that Jesus was His Son. She was now a Christian, she added. "I had nothing to do with her salvation—except through prayer," said Rob.

CC Thousand Oaks witnessed another response to prayer when in 2009, after planting CC Skyline, they acquired a

preschool and elementary school. The church had long desired to offer parents an affordable way to educate their children in a Christian environment. "For the nine years I'd pastored here, we had prayed to own that school," Rob said. A local foundation's leaders were so impressed with the church's "multiplication by division" strategy that, in spite of the organization's assets' devastation in the economic downturn, they assisted the fellowship with the purchase. The school went from secular to Christian in a matter of months. "I'm now a headmaster," Rob said. "That wasn't my goal—but I can testify to the power of prayer."

Pastor Manny observed, "I'm a product of prayer. My grandmother prayed for my family continually, and that led to my salvation.

We have prayed about everything, including this church plant; and now, as a church, we ask God to supply all our needs—wisdom, direction, provision of people to serve in different ministries." Like CC Thousand Oaks, CC Skyline holds weekly church-wide prayer meetings. "We teach people how to pray and then lead them in prayer," explained Manny. "Since we often don't know what to pray, we get discouraged and don't do it. But once you learn what it is, you look forward to praying. Prayer is much more than asking for things. It's entering God's presence. Sometimes we use the acronym ACTS—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication—to guide prayer time. This teaches people how to approach God and see Him for who He is."

"Prayer has taught me absolute dependence on God," Manny added. "I don't have anything to build God's kingdom with except prayer; I don't possess enough talent or experience. Every revival in history has resulted from dedication to prayer."

As Rob challenged his congregation, "Is what we're doing really worth doing if we can do it apart from prayer? The answer is, no." 🙌

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**CC Skyline's praise team leads worshipers in song.**



**Believers worship at CC Skyline in the city of Thousand Oaks, CA.**



**People fellowship between CC Skyline's two English services.**

## Pastors at Prayer

CC Thousand Oaks/CC Skyline

Each Thursday morning, Pastors Rob and Manny help host a region-wide pastoral prayer meeting in Thousand Oaks, CA, for the entire Conejo Valley. Between 10 and 20 pastors, from multiple denominations and with varying doctrinal positions, kneel together weekly for one hour. "These meetings are truly about prayer," explained Rob. Leaders are careful to keep the focus on praying, rather than planning, learning, or talking.

"Pastors are generally jealous about their congregations," said Marty Richter, an associate pastor who is also recognized as "Chief Hugger" at CC Thousand Oaks. An Orthodox Jew by background, 80-year-old Marty came to Christ at age 50 and was ordained 24 years later. Prayer is essential in bringing pastors and their congregations together, Marty said.

***Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!***

Psalm 133:1

At the meetings, "We don't talk about our churches as individual entities," Manny said. "We ask how each other are doing in brotherly love because we care for each other. Genuine camaraderie has come through prayer." Rob added, "We don't discuss theology or anything divisive. Prayer is the only thing we can do that crosses boundary lines."

### **That They All May Be One**

From these pastors' prayers arose a spring 2009 outreach called One Voice. Eighteen churches in the Conejo Valley acted together to share the Gospel and invite people to Resurrection Sunday services—at any area church. Believers distributed 13,000 Bibles door-to-door, along with flyers of service times and locations.

***Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.***

Ephesians 4:3-4

The response was enormous. "We saw an increase on Easter," remembered Manny, as did other area churches. A local pastor subsequently canceled his fellowship's Sunday evening service and invited area churches to join in prayer. More than 500 people attended, and the meetings became recurring. Pastors of participating churches take turns directing the prayer time topically. Groups of 8 to 10 people pray together in circles, asking God to move in the Conejo Valley and the world.

"To carnal eyes, prayer makes no sense; it's not practical," observed Manny. "But prayer is practical: It keeps our hearts fully reliant on the power of God."