

## 40 Days of Prayer Stirred Embers into Flames

By Danell Czarnecki

Since October of 2006 we have seen a significant increase in visitors, and more than 20 households have joined our church—CrossPoint Church in Chino, California. Prayer intercessors for every ministry and staff person have emerged and been put into place. Our staff prays more regularly for one another and it is not uncommon to see people in a hallway or office praying together. What happened? Why is God blessing. In 1969, CrossPoint Church, formerly Calvary Christian Reformed Church, was literally “prayed” into existence. Prayer rooted itself deep in the hearts of the early visionaries and was the foundation by which ministry was developed. In 1983 Pastor Bruce Ballast became the pastor of this praying church and under his leadership prayer continued to permeate both ministry and the lives of the people of CrossPoint.

A prayer ministry structure began to emerge. Prayer teams prayed before, during and after the service, an intercessory prayer team for the pastors was launched, ministries developed prayer support structures, phone prayer chains started, a prayer and fasting group began meeting, prayerwalks through the neighborhoods were held, prayer teams were established to seek wisdom and support the building program. Prayer became a part of the life at CrossPoint. The Holy Spirit was moving and God was listening.

But in the spring of 2005, as CrossPoint Church moved into its new location and building, we got into the routine of ministry. Soon, many of our intercessors began to experience unsettledness. They felt a call to “shore up” and deepen prayer ministry at CrossPoint. There was an overwhelming sense that our church was called to “be on its knees” in preparation for what God had in store for us in this new place.

About this same time, our Home Group Team, (the team responsible for providing leadership to our small group ministry) began exploring potential materials for our annual Spiritual Growth Campaign scheduled for the fall of 2006. One of the materials they looked at was Alvin VanderGriend’s Love to Pray 40-day devotional. Though the team presented two possible options for study, Pastor Don Klop, our current senior pastor, felt strongly that the Love to Pray material would be perfect to help the church through a painful transition. The fact that it was the core of a 40 days of prayer initiative was a plus. VanderGriend’s definition of prayer, “... the conversational part of the most important love relationship in our lives . . .” captured the hearts of our leadership and so we began on a journey to literally saturate the church with prayer.

The home group and the prayer development teams began to pray about and then set goals for this 40-day prayer initiative. We had three goals: to see a deepening in prayer experiences personally and corporately; to experience a renewal for relational evangelism; and to sense a palpable presence of the mighty movement of God in our midst.

In October of 2006 the "40 Days of Prayer" campaign launched with more than 500 participants. The coaches of the groups were equipped and encouraged along the course of the eight weeks. Following the initiative one of our pastors shared this about his small group, "All of us confessed on the first session that prayer was our weakest spiritual endeavor. We all agreed that our prayer lives were more of a "Gimme please God," rather than a time of devotional communication with Him. The 40 Days of Prayer taught us what prayer really is." One small group participant shared, "It has changed the way I pray. I'm praying in a more appropriate, unselfish way. I pray more throughout the day. It has become a way of daily life."

One of the lingering fruits of "40 Days of Prayer" has been the renewed commitment to relational evangelism. The desire to reach out to our neighbors is rooted in loving them into the kingdom. We found that as we pray for someone, our heart softens toward them, their heart softens, than relational evangelism can begin. It was our experience that some of our groups committed to pray for a particular person for the duration of the series, resulting in doors opening for God-ordained moments.

When the whole church is playing the same symphony together, practicing the same notes and studying in accord with one another, something amazing happens. The synergy that spills from the group experience into the worship experience and visa versa is amazing. Entering into the "40 Days of Prayer" brought a sense of unity to the body, healing happened and a common thread was rediscovered and the fruits are still being revealed. A renewed commitment to prayer has risen up, prayer leaders have stepped up and new prayer ministries are being developed.

We pray, God listens, God speaks, we listen; simple, yet so complicated, complex, yet so simple. God is in the business of changing lives--and churches--through the power of prayer.

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