

Lighting the Way to Jesus in Brighton

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins

The assistant pastor unlocked the pantry door and pointed to the bags hanging on the wall of the food bank at Calvary Chapel Brighton, CO. "Take anything you want," he directed the couple. Then he walked down the hall to his office.

"We were astounded," Pete Gerrity said later. "Mary and I looked at each other in disbelief, thinking, *You trust us?*" Pete and his wife Mary had been homeless for about six weeks. "We felt dirty and looked down upon," recalled Pete. "Our friends had rejected us, and I had no respect for myself."

Pete and Mary selected some groceries and went to thank the man. Noticing their canned goods, he walked them back to the food closet and gave them a can opener. They welcomed the steaming hot coffee he then offered, remembering the February Colorado air they would encounter upon venturing back outside. Then he asked, "Can I pray with you?" and laid his hands on the couple to pray. "That made a real impact," said Pete. "The Holy Spirit was there. It was so moving, so convicting." As he walked the couple to the door, the assistant pastor invited them to church on Sunday.



Believers leave CC Brighton's Thursday evening Bible study.



CC Brighton

In addition to preaching on Sundays, Pastor Paul Boutan teaches after the Thursday evening fellowship meal.



Joel Lindow gives a brief Bible teaching before the church takes communion.



Believers worship God in song.



Paul's wife Amy Boutan (in pink), enjoys interacting with other women during the midweek dinner together. The meal is followed by worship and Bible study.

The Gerritys were eager to visit. Pete had long thought that “Christians are so cool—you never met a happier bunch. It doesn't matter what's going on; it's how they handle it that's significant. I wanted that.” Pete and Mary began staying up late at night, talking in the dark under layers of blankets in their storage unit, where they had slept since losing their home. “We'd talk about God, asking what all this means,” said Pete. “We'd go to the church on Sundays and back to the food bank when needed.”

On Palm Sunday of 2004, Pete and Mary gave their lives to Jesus at CC Brighton. “It was like Christ washed us,” described Pete. “You can read about it in the Bible; it says you will become a new person, a new being.”

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17

For the previous five years, the Gerritys had been addicted to methamphetamines, which they made at home. Without a place to cook drugs while homeless, they had no supply—“And there were cravings during that time,” Pete said emphatically. But from the moment they accepted Christ, they experienced, “No cravings, no wants. It was done,” said Pete.

From their current home in downtown Brighton, the Gerritys can see the house that Pastor Paul Boutan of CC Brighton rented

for them about six years ago. Pete said that when Paul first suggested a home, “You don't understand,” he replied. “I don't have a job.” Pete and Mary's addictions had prevented them from finding work; still, Paul insisted. A congregant soon hired Pete to help in a concrete business, and the church paid the Gerritys' past bills so they could be financially self-sufficient. Today, Pete is a certified addictions counselor and Mary has served in the food bank. She said their experience reminds her of Psalm 126:2-3: “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, ‘The LORD has done great things for them.’ The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad.”

A New Church's Beginning

In 1997, Pastor Tom Stipe of Crossroads Church of Denver, CO, received three letters requesting that he send someone to plant a Calvary Chapel in Brighton, 20 miles northeast of Denver. Tom presented the letters to Paul Boutan, who was then an assistant pastor at Crossroads. Paul and his wife Amy had been praying for almost a year about planting a church. But they were initially uneager about Brighton: “As a teen, I went to jail in Brighton,” recalled Paul. “It was just for a day or two, but it still wasn't the happiest place in my mind! When Tom asked me to pray about Brighton, I did—quickly—and then hoped the idea would go away.”

But it wouldn't, and Paul and Amy soon began a Sunday evening home Bible study in Brighton. About 30 people came the first



Dominique Montano is baptized by Paul, right, and Assistant Pastor David Cronk, left. About 15 people were baptized in 2009 at the church's annual picnic and baptism party. The celebration was held at a local indoor pool and outdoor recreation center.



Nine-year-old Gabriel Rice worships before he and others are baptized.

week. These continued faithfully, and the study soon moved to a school and doubled in attendance. “People began viewing it as their church,” remembered Paul. “They started to tithe.” After six months, the group switched their gathering time to Sunday mornings.

Paul remained on staff part-time at Crossroads until CC Brighton could support a full-time pastor. After one year at the school, Pastor Paul found a building that was ideal for the church—except for the rental price. He and his wife discussed making an offer that he recognized was low but was what the church could afford. “Meanwhile, I prayed,” he said. “I knew if God was in this, He would provide.” The next day, the landlord called and offered the facility for the exact amount Paul had considered proposing. CC Brighton still uses this building 12 years later, having more than doubled the space they lease.

By Hearing

CC Brighton welcomes new area residents by mailing them a Sunday service CD. “Our question is, How can we get the message to people?” Paul explained. “Instead of advertising our strengths, we try to get the Word out. Our desire is not to get people into our church—Jesus didn't say to do that—but to get the Gospel to people who would never come to church.”

When Adam and Brooke Mutzbauer moved to Brighton in 2008, they tried several churches without finding one to call home. After receiving a CD from Calvary Chapel, they decided to visit. “Our 7-year-old son

Logan loved it,” said Brooke. She and Adam were impacted by the friendly atmosphere and the teaching that illuminated the Scriptures’ history and background.

In December 2009, that teaching debuted on the airwaves. “We’ve prayed for years about radio ministry,” said Paul, “but we couldn’t afford it.” Recently, the church’s insurance company realized they had inadvertently overcharged them for several years. “We got a refund for exactly what was needed for a year’s worth of radio,” Paul said.

A Family with a Vision

Danny and Brisa Byrnes have attended CC Brighton for almost five years. “My family is in Mexico, where I grew up,” said Brisa, “so I really need family-type support, and I have found it at Calvary Chapel. Also, this is where I started learning the Bible.” Brisa is currently in her fourth women’s Bible study; though she grew up in church, she had never before been offered the opportunity to study the Word for herself.

“Our vision is to equip God’s people with God’s Word to go out ... and reach the lost,” said Paul. “Three years ago, I felt the Lord prompting me to cast the vision before the



Curtis Jackson holds his 5-year-old daughter Curnisha Green at the baptism party. He was invited to the event by Curnisha’s foster parents, Jeremy and Arisa Rice, right, who were encouraged to begin foster care by Pastor Paul’s testimony (below).

people.” Paul was challenged by God’s words in Habakkuk 2:2b, “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.” CC Brighton now has banners posted throughout the church proclaiming their vision—“So that,” Paul explained, “people may know that our vision is to ‘Go,’ and that they may run with that vision.”

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Praying Under a Pickup Truck: Paul Boutan’s Story

Paul Boutan’s parents separated on his third birthday. The state of Colorado soon removed him from the abusive care of his mother, and by age 15, he had lived in 20 different foster homes. During this time, his father committed suicide.

In 1985 Paul moved back in with his delusional mother, where he was abused verbally, emotionally, and physically. After she woke him one night at 2 a.m. with outlandish and false accusations, Paul threw his clothes into trash bags and left his mom’s apartment. He began sleeping in the complex’s laundry facilities. Paul continued to attend school—“I just didn’t shower for two weeks,” he remembered.

Residents doing their laundry late at night, afraid of the unknown teenager in the corner, soon complained to the manager. Chased out of the facility, Paul slept that night under a pickup truck. Lying on the cold asphalt, he cried out, “God, I don’t know if You’re real, and if You’re not, I’m

dead. Frankly, I’d rather be dead than keep living this way. But if You are real, please help me.”

The next day after school, Paul returned to the complex and spotted his uncle, Larry. Figuring Larry would beg him to return home, Paul tried to sprint away without being noticed. But Larry saw him—and invited Paul to come live with him and his wife, Patty. There was only one condition: Paul must attend church with the couple. “I had no desire for that,” said Paul. “I had no experience with church, and I thought it was for do-gooders and losers. But I was hungry, so I took the option that involved food and a bed.”

Larry also explained that Paul’s mom had not called him, as Paul had assumed. Instead, the previous night while praying, Larry and Patty had sensed God directing them to come get Paul. “Later,” recalled Paul, “I realized that was the night I was sleeping under the truck, asking God to help me.”

At Crossroads Church of Denver with Larry and Patty, Paul began listening to Pastor Tom Stipe preach God’s Word. “I hated to admit it, but I kind of liked the Bible,” said Paul. One evening after an invitation to accept Christ, Paul grabbed his chair and mentally fortified himself: *There’s no way I’m standing up*, he thought. “And the next thing I knew, I was standing up—with the chair stuck to my bottom.”

Though Paul’s life changed dramatically, he backslid when he was 18 and got involved in alcohol, drugs, and theft. He was running from God, he said; he sensed God calling him to preach but he feared exposing himself to the public critique of others. But in this lifestyle of rebellion, “I was miserable,” he remembered. “I could feel the Holy Spirit convicting me.” Paul’s surrender to the Lord began one Saturday night, when he resisted partying and got up instead the next morning for church. Soon after, he started working with the youth group at Crossroads, where he began teaching the Word of God.