

Day of Prayer

Story by Debra Smith
Photos by David Yamamoto

Community Prayer Gathering Draws Nearly 1,000



Jamie Gonzales and Michael Halcomb pray during the candlelit conclusion to the National Day of Prayer event held by Calvary Chapel Nexus in Camarillo, CA's Constitution Park.

The evening sun cast long shadows over the crowd huddled in groups across the park. As dusk fell, each person received a candle; Pastor Bruce Zachary of Calvary Chapel Nexus in Camarillo, CA, explained, "These represent God's light shining in our community—and His people's responsibility to shine that light." After leading the believers in a closing prayer, Bruce dismissed the assembly.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

On May 6, 2010, the National Day of Prayer, Bruce and others from CC Nexus organized a prayer gathering that drew nearly a thousand people. Instead of leading the event solely from the podium, "We thought it would be beneficial if people were actively praying," Bruce said. So after each of eight invited community leaders shared needs relating to their vocation or ministry, those gathered prayed for the requests in groups of 8-10. "It gave people who'd never prayed publicly the experience of doing so," commented Bruce. "Several approached me afterward with tears in their eyes, saying they'd never prayed out loud before, and that they felt it strengthened them."

Each participating community leader, after explaining issues and needs relating to his or her field, prayed from the podium before the small groups interceded for the requests. The community leaders included two school headmasters, lifting up area students and teachers; the district attorney, requesting prayer for the justice system and



Ventura County Sheriff Bob Brooks leads the group in prayer for officers; Pastor Bruce Zachary of CC Nexus joins.

suppression of crime; the county sheriff and chief deputy, sharing the needs of law enforcement officers; and another local pastor, praying for the community's churches. "The leaders we asked to pray are ones we know have a mature relationship with Jesus," explained Bruce.

California State Assemblywoman Audra Strickland, one such invitee, asked the group to pray for elected officials and others with political power. "This was a unique opportunity to support the community by coming together and lifting up state officials," commented Assemblywoman Strickland. "So many people have authority over our lives," she continued. "There are big implications of who we put into office. They make decisions about what our children are taught in schools—which influences the choices they make. It matters who is in the Supreme Court and other positions of influence. I prayed that men and women of God would be raised up to fill these offices."

Carol Roberg directs the Ventura County Rescue Mission, a Christian organization that serves the needy in practical ways. Carol led the assembly in praying for struggling people, specifically asking God to deliver those addicted and their families. MaryAnn Ambroselli, executive director of the Ventura County Pregnancy Center, led prayer for expectant mothers and their unborn children. "I prayed God would provide the needs of pregnant moms and that they would choose life for their babies—even during a very scary time in their lives," MaryAnn said.

Seeing Him Through Others' Eyes

Jamie Gonzales, a college student who began following Christ and attending CC Nexus four years ago, said, "Having someone from a particular organization or group share a burden or issue helped us know how to direct our prayers. For example, it was meaningful to have police ask us to pray for the city's peace and safety. But I liked that it wasn't just them praying." Instead of the crowd becoming spectators, "It involved us," Jamie explained. "I was in a group with my friend Emily, who talks to God so humbly—but also like she knows Him, not using fancy words or clichés. Hearing her pray helps me remember that God is our Father, so I can bear my heart to Him honestly; but He's our King, too, so reverence is appropriate. I really enjoy hearing others pray. It challenges and teaches me."



The evening event attracted many who said work often prevents them from attending National Day of Prayer daytime events.

Jamie, who is also a part-time caretaker at a senior living facility, said the evening reminded her to pray for those she serves through her job. “While we were praying for the city, I was praying specifically for the facility where I work,” she explained. Because the location’s residents do not come and go often, “Most people don’t frequently see them. But they’re still a part of the community, and we need to pray for them.” Jamie added that in general, at the event, “I was convicted about how important prayer is—and how constant it should be for us.”

Pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Bruce said that months afterward, the gathering continues to impact the community. “I think people are praying more,” he commented. “Many pastors in the area have taught on prayer, and Christians are feeling more comfortable praying. ... We need to teach people not just to understand prayer intellectually, but to put it into practice,” he added. “We need to help them experience

it.” Since the event, other pastors have occasionally concluded sermons in a way Bruce sometimes does: by asking congregants to break into small groups and pray together. “That stretches some people,” he said. “But it’s like exercises for back pain—it may hurt at first, but it strengthens you.”

Another lasting effect has been area-wide weekly pastors’ prayer meetings. The 10-12 participants began praying together before the event, planning to do so only in anticipation of the gathering, but then decided to continue afterward. They rotate to a different church each month, where that fellowship’s pastor takes a turn leading the group.

Bruce said that in the community, “I think there’s a sense of anticipation for the next National Day of Prayer event. People have been asking, ‘When are we going to do it again?’ They seem to be looking forward to coming together to pray.”



People from all walks of life and a variety of churches joined to seek God together.

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