



The Revival 25 Conference was held January 22-25, as attendees from around the world gathered to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Toronto Blessing.

Beyond the Blessing

It's been 25 years since news of the charismatic 'Toronto Blessing' captured the world's attention

by Renae Jarrett

After twenty-five years of what's come to be known as the Toronto Blessing, the impact is still being felt from the epicentre to the ends of the earth. Catch the Fire Toronto (CTF Toronto), formerly known as Toronto Airport Vineyard Fellowship, celebrated its anniversary in January with the Revival 25 Conference. The four-day event had 2,900 attendees, featured founding pastors, John and Carol Arnott, senior leaders Steve and Sandra Long along with Shawn Bolz, Brian and Jenn Johnson and Banning Liebscher just to name a few, and included staff from thirty-four Catch the Fire churches worldwide. It was both a reunion of sorts and an opportunity to recast the vision.

"What we were trying to tell people is the fruit of what God started twenty-five years ago was wonderful. It is still happening, and there's still a lot more to go," said senior leader Steve Long.

As it was all those years ago, people came to the conference from across the world and from all walks of life to encounter God's

presence tangibly and corporately.

Pastor and itinerant minister Barry Maracle who grew up in the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and currently resides in Belleville, purposed to be present for this historic gathering. "It was important for me to be here because back in '93, '94 we started coming here and getting filled with the Spirit and so many times we came into this sanctuary at Attwell here and every time we came, we became freer and received direction."

Teresa Parrish from Minnesota was determined to attend Revival 25 after hearing the lineup. Having come and received, she said of her fellow Minnesotans often referred to as the chosen frozen, "They're not going to be so frozen when I get home!"

Looking back, it all began at CTF Toronto in 1994. The term the Toronto Blessing was coined by London Telegraph reporter in England, although at CTF Toronto it's referred to as the Father's blessing. It was twelve years of nightly meetings, six nights a week with four to five million people across denominations from around the world who

visited.

"The first meeting we saw the increase of God tangibly in the meetings was Jan. 20, 1994," Mr. Long reflected. "We had a guest speaker that night, Randy Clark, who at that point was a Vineyard pastor in St. Louis, so when he said, 'Come, Holy Spirit,' instead of one or two people feeling God, John Arnott describes it as a bomb that went off in the room and everybody was crying, laughing, shaking. It was like a gas attack and everyone's experiencing God in some way."

"I'd never seen piles of people on the floor like that," said John Arnott. "Right away Holy Spirit began impacting lives, doing miracles and healing marriages and restoring sick bodies and the fruit of it was so amazing"

Randy Clark who returned for Revival 25, said of John Arnott. "It was his wisdom to recognize the uniqueness of what God was doing. I remember he said, 'Randy, you and I have looked for this, desired this, our whole lives and now it's here, and you can't go home.' So I figured if he could call my wife and she'd let me stay, it'd have to be

God."

Linda Ferrante, an itinerant minister who's currently a part of the CTF Toronto family knew it was Holy Spirit-directed with the personal impact of it all having ripple effects. "It literally changed the trajectory of my life," she said. "First of all, you come back into renewed love with Jesus and then it was to take the Father's love and give it away, which was a totally new concept and then there was so much inner healing that happened."

After hearing through a local pastors meeting about it, Ms. Ferrante and her husband Tony began to attend. She later led the Saturday night ministry team. Speaking about her family and the Body of Christ who helped in the ministry she said, "We literally lived there and our children were brought up in it, so we were ministering to thousands and thousands and thousands of people from all over the world night after night after night."

Steve Long, who's been the current senior leader with his wife Sandra for ten years, was also invited having already attended Pastors' Day, hosted by founding pastor John Arnott. Through their relationship he even helped organize events for the church. But when Randy Clark was held over for a night at the church, Mr. Long along with other pastors got a call to come and attend one of those meetings.

"My wife and I came as guests for that meeting and we experienced the Holy Spirit for the very first time as Baptists," he said. "I knew I had the Holy Spirit, but I didn't have that level of encounter ever before with the Holy Spirit. I'd never spoken in tongues

In 1994, we had every major television station.camera crews came from around the world."

before that, so I had a definite blessing, refreshing, empowering. I got something that night."

Soon after he helped organize the nightly meetings – being "on loan" for five months as he put it to CTF Toronto Mondays to Fridays and then returning to his Baptist church on Sundays. But after awhile it became obvious that he needed to move on. He resigned from his church and joined the pastoral staff of CTF Toronto in June 1994.

For ten years Steve Long helped to organize the nightly meetings and during that time there were healings, miracles and "all kinds of God stuff taking place." As for getting the word out, John Arnott felt that God would do the marketing.