

Shereen's Letter October, 2007

I was driving to work almost exactly a year ago when the thought came to me to have a "crusade." I dismissed the thought, because in America we do not have "crusades" unless we are radical fundamentalists or unless we are Billy Graham. I assumed I had the thought because I had just come back from Uganda, where I had spent ten days praying in a healing crusade. It had been an exciting time in Uganda. For example, there had been deaf and dumb people who were healed before our eyes, lame people who walked, etc. Heady stuff, but not the kind of stuff that we see often in America.

As I continued driving, I suddenly had this "knowing." I said to God, "This idea for a crusade isn't my thought, is it?" I got this clear thought back: "No, it isn't. It is mine. I want you to have a night to pray for healing for people in Champaign-Urbana a year from around the time of your birthday.

"I am a middle-aged Asian woman with few connections. How were we supposed to have a citywide prayer event in November 2007? I had no idea. What I decided to do was to bring up the idea in my small group that meets every Friday and prays for people for healing. We decided to set the first Friday meeting of every month to pray for this event.

From this time of praying, we got a clear sense of what this night would look like. It was to be a service that would make space for God through worship and praise, and through the telling of testimonies by local people whom God had already healed. It seemed God wanted the Prayer Service for Wholeness to have groups of pray-ers from local churches in Champaign-Urbana. Instead of being centered around one person who had a gifting as a healer, it was to be everyday Christians praying for healing for other everyday people of Champaign-Urbana—because God is committed to our wholeness. All people matter to him, no exceptions, ever! And because God from the beginning sent his followers out to heal the sick.

To put together this night of praying for wholeness that involved different churches was a daunting thought. So far as we knew, it had not been done in Champaign-Urbana for over 30 years; and trying to get different churches to pray together for healing seemed nearly impossible. All through this process, there seemed to be a sense of pacing that came from God. We began by asking The Vineyard church because they are known in the community for their healing ministry. We met with the lead pastor, his intern, and the leader of the healing ministry, among other people. For 30-40 minutes they were telling us why they should not be part of this. Suddenly, the lead pastor stopped the meeting, saying we were done—and my heart sank, because there was no evidence that they were for this service. The pastor said, however, that God had just told him not only to join with us, but to donate money to the effort! This felt like a miracle. We had only been asking for pray-ers—and in a brief moment, we had not only the pray-ers but also a large donation we hadn't asked for! The intern came up to me after the meeting and said, "Be encouraged. I have been in many meetings with this pastor and I have never seen this happen." This built a real faith in us that God was indeed in this. We quickly found what we believed to be an ideal location for the event. Finding a venue freed us to begin organizing in earnest. And God helped us find other groups that wanted to participate—black, white, Roman Catholic, Protestant.

It has been exciting to see how God has been very faithful in each step of this process. It has not been a straight line, however. We learned fairly late in our planning that our original venue would not be available to us after all. But God provided a location that some of our group believe is even better—the Holiday Inn in Urbana—because people who would avoid church-affiliated settings may come to a meeting in such a secular location. We were surprised again with a completely unexpected door opening. We had asked Provena if they would be willing to donate the cost of 1500 color flyers, as it fits with their mission. Not only did they agree to do that. . . they emailed me and asked me if they could be listed as a Sponsor. It appears that not only did God want local churches praying for wholeness; but I think for the first time in Champaign-Urbana's history, medical organizations (Champaign County Christian Health Center and Provena Covenant Medical Center) and churches are joining together to pray for healing.

He has provided us with a new location and an audio-visual system. If that was not enough, he gave us a financial miracle. We needed about another \$500-\$1000 and were preparing to do another fundraiser. We had a prophetic word telling us that it was not needed—that God was going to provide the money. During the next three weeks, two couples gave out of the blue \$350. Then the most frugal couple I know found, in the corner of a room in their house, a hundred-dollar bill and three fifty-dollar bills. Given that they don't lose money, they felt it was a gift from God for this prayer service. That money is what will allow us to provide 200 New Testaments to those who come and do not have access to a Bible. We now have not only everything that was crucial paid for, but everything on our wish list paid for as well.

I am looking forward with great expectancy to November 11th because I know that God is going to come in with his healing mercies. It has been exciting to watch God's hand at work. What I have learned is that God asks us only to do the next thing in our hands to do; when we do that as faithfully as we know how, he steps in abundantly.