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Prayer Station volunteers in New York City minister on the streets.

“Prayer is something almost every religion understands. We broke down barriers with prayer, not taking something from them but giving something to them.” —Anita Setran

PRAYER POWER

Formed through Youth With a Mission, the Prayer Stations ministry offers on-the-spot intercession—and an effective gospel witness.

BY SHAWN A. AKERS



Prayer Stations were set up around ground zero for a year following the 9/11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center.

Prayer warrior and missionary Nick Savoca loves to share the Acts 3 account of Peter and John.

“When Peter and John were going to the temple, they were stopped by a man who was lame from birth and who was asking for money,” Savoca said. “That’s when you hear Peter’s famous words: ‘I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ In that moment, I believe Peter gave away the greatest asset and resource that Christians have—our access to God.”

To Savoca, the account is more than a Bible story. It’s the foundation of Prayer Stations, a ministry formed in 1992 with his wife, Rozanne, and a team at Youth With a Mission (YWAM).

The focus of the ministry is the prayer station setup, which can be used anywhere to invite people to drop by and pray with a volunteer. Each station includes a table and a tall red banner emblazoned with the words “Prayer Station.” The full package comes with a training kit that churches, ministries or individuals can use to train volunteers.

Idea and Inception

During Savoca’s time in New York City, he served as executive director of YWAM Metro New York. He and his YWAM team served the local area and ran Discipleship Training Schools. In conjunction with other ministries such as Jews for Jesus, they conducted a New Year’s Eve outreach every year on the city streets. In 1992, the team prayed into God’s plan for the outreach months ahead of time. The Lord sent Savoca a message, loud and clear.

“God spoke to me and said we needed to pray for people on the street and to incorporate prayer into our evangelism,” he said. “I asked Him what He meant, and He poured an idea into my mind: Put up a table on the sidewalk, identify it—the words ‘prayer station’ came to me—and put a banner above the table. We then would ask people if they would like prayer and give them a little flyer.”

Savoca, his family and his team began setting up prayer stations in the city.

“From Day One, we were absolutely astounded at the reception,” he said, adding that this outreach has proven to be one of the most effective and disarming street-evangelism methods he has seen in his 45 years of ministry. He attributes this success to one factor: Prayer stations focus on the felt needs of the individuals who request prayer.

Anita Setran, the Savocas’ oldest daughter, who is now Prayer Stations’ executive director, agrees.

“I remember that first day on the streets that New Year’s Eve,” she



Volunteers prayed with students, parents and faculty at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida after the school shooting.

“I have served at prayer stations in New York, Houston and South Africa and find the experience to be like being in God’s microwave oven of spiritual growth.” —Nick Savoca

said. “It was bitter cold, and we had set up stations all around Times Square. We were giving out hot chocolate. It was awesome to see that we were reaching every demographic.

“Prayer is something almost every religion understands. We broke down barriers with prayer, not taking something from them but giving something to them. It wasn’t about a person and their ideology; it was about trying to reach out to others and meet their personal needs. It was their felt needs that were being met.”

Setran recalls joining her family, from age 11 on, for those Sunday afternoons in New York, sometimes spending three hours praying with people.

“It’s exciting that I’ve been able to work with my parents my whole life,” she said. “At an early age, God began to knit my heart for the ministry of New York. It was an incredibly valuable time God carved out for me. I was 20 when the prayer station ministry was birthed.”

Mobilization and Ministry

After that first New Year’s Eve event, YWAM began to use prayer stations as one of its main outreach tools, and the results were more than gratifying. Individuals from a variety of faith backgrounds—Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and even atheists—not only stopped by the booths but returned later to let volunteers know the powerful impact of their prayers.

Sept. 11, 2001, proved pivotal for New York City, for the U.S. and for the prayer station ministry.

“The week of 9/11 was a radical point of change for us,” Savoca said. “We were in a prayer meeting, preparing to open a new training school in two weeks, when someone told us to come watch the TV. As we watched things unfold that day, we began to pray and intercede, and to seek what we should do to minister.

“God told us we already had the tool with the prayer stations. A pastor from Queens told me that if New York ever needed the prayer stations, it was now. That was a solid confirmation for me.

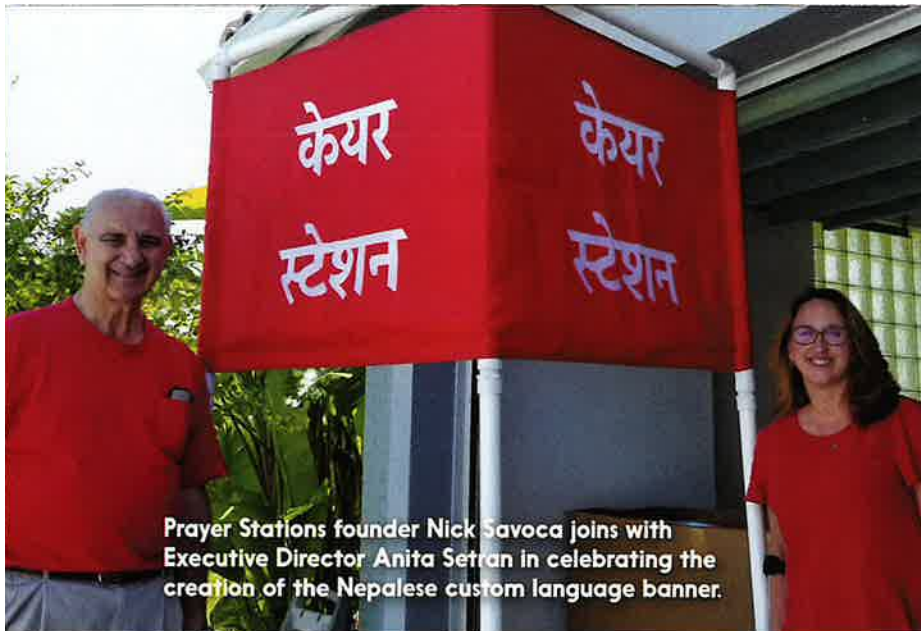
“God told me, ‘Nick, I want you to make a commitment for a solid year to be at ground zero six days a week.’ We were understaffed, and I didn’t know how we were going to do it.”

But within two days of the attacks, Savoca and his team helped nearly 50 churches set up prayer stations on street corners outside hospitals and impromptu missing-persons sites.

“Somehow, we mobilized and took to the streets; and some days we had as many as 14 different prayer stations around ground zero,” Savoca said. “That year, we had 2,000 volunteers, and we led 3,000 people to the Lord. We did a lot of follow-up, and we saw a lot of people turn their lives over to the Lord, not just because of a tragedy, but because they believed in God’s goodness.”

Savoca recalled the story of a Muslim leader who, during the ministry at ground zero, approached a prayer station and asked a volunteer to pray for his wife, who desperately needed a job.

“He thanked our volunteers for praying with him, and our volunteers



Prayer Stations founder Nick Savoca joins with Executive Director Anita Setran in celebrating the creation of the Nepalese custom language banner.

said they thought he went away expecting good things to happen,” Savoca said. “Two hours later, the imam returned to the booth with a big smile on his face. He said his wife had texted him and that she had a job with the company where she wanted to be employed.”

What happened next was even more amazing.

“The volunteer asked [him] if we could share the gospel with him, and he, surprisingly, agreed,” Savoca said. Although the ministry doesn’t know the end result, “the answered prayer planted the seed of Jesus Christ within him.”

Presence and Prayer

Having lived and served in Long Island since 1986, the Savocas couldn’t imagine doing ministry anywhere else. In 2015, however, as the couple approached their 70s, the harsh winters got to be too much for Rozanne. She became a chronic asthmatic and was hospitalized with pneumonia several times. After diligent prayer, the Savocas decided to move to a warmer climate.

The Savocas ended their work with YWAM in September 2017 after taking several trips to Jupiter, Florida, in the Miami metropolitan area, where their youngest daughter, Melissa Schindler, lives. They sold their YWAM property in New York and purchased land in Jupiter for their ministry’s new headquarters. Nick, Rozanne and Anita and her family made the big move. Today, the family is in the process of incorporating the ministry as Prayer Stations Inc.

Prayer stations can now be found on every continent except Antarctica, the ministry says, and tens of thousands have participated in its efforts. The Prayer Stations banner is available in 11 languages, including English, Spanish, Russian, French, Hebrew, Arabic, Nepalese, Chinese, Korean and Fijian.

“Prayer stations have had a profound impact on reaching those who would not normally walk into a church,” Sarah L. said on the ministry’s website. “Using this tool has helped countless people in Yonkers. ... We have prayed for the brokenhearted, helped those who were feeling crushed by sin and led many people to the Lord!”

Others also recognize the importance of prayer stations. Collin Millar of Igniting Prayer Action, an international

organization that mobilizes and equips prayer warriors, said the stations represent “PRAY NOW Evangelism” and are the best platform to see God transform one life at a time.

“I have been teaching about the intimacy and joy of sharing Jesus through prayer over the last 20 years,” Millar said. “As I have prayed one on one for literally thousands of people all over the world, I have had the joy and privilege to witness hundreds of people come to salvation, be healed, encouraged, challenged to great intimacy with Christ or just simply experience the presence of our wonderful Lord and Savior through prayer. I have served at prayer stations in New York, Houston and South Africa and find the experience to be like being in God’s microwave oven of spiritual growth. ... I absolutely believe and strongly support Prayer Stations.”

“We are completely focusing on Prayer Stations now,” Savoca said. “We believe that is God’s plan for us moving forward, and we have a lot of great plans and great ideas.”

Mandate and Mission

One of those plans, reminiscent of the way God used prayer stations at ground zero, is to raise up an army of its own first responders throughout the country and eventually, the world. With extensive training, this group would mobilize quickly following any major catastrophe, such as Hurricane Harvey or the mass shooting in Las Vegas. Savoca intends to conduct training seminars throughout the country and to compile a list of people willing to help.

“Two summers ago, I was watching the news after the Dallas police officer shootings, and God clearly spoke to me,” Savoca said. “He said, ‘I want you to work for me with a strategy of having prayer stations set up within 48 hours of any natural disaster or man-made tragedy.’”

“When these terrible things happen, we want to make sure we’re there for these people, because what they need most is prayer. We hope to do this both domestically and internationally. It’s going to be a challenge, and it may take us a while, but we’ve begun the process because we want to follow through on what the Lord has mandated.”

Prayer Stations experienced a test of the importance of its trauma-related work in February 2018, when Savoca sent his staff and volunteers to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, after the mass shooting there. The faculty, school board and sheriff’s department in Parkland all welcomed them, Savoca said, and Prayer Stations staff and volunteers prayed with students, parents and faculty to help them navigate their grief.

Like Peter and John, the Savocas have no silver or gold to share with those who visit their prayer stations. But they offer something much more valuable: the opportunity to pray in agreement and the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. ■

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