

## **Movements of God in Fresno Over The Past 30 Years**

**By George Ordway**

Over the past 30 years God has poured out His favor and grace upon the Central San Joaquin Valley in remarkable ways. Fresno, a city of 509,000 found in the center of God's great garden, has particularly received incredible favor from God. This letter is an attempt to capture from the limited perspective of one man's journey the things that I have personally watched God do in Fresno. In this letter I will use the terms movements and ministries, although I recognize they have overlaps. The distinction of movements is that they are catalytic, many times drawing and converging leaders together for a specific purpose or related purposes that yield huge collective impacts but are not intended to sustain long term. A movement is like the breath of God blowing a wind across a city for a specific or a limited time. Whereas my definition of a Christian ministry is created when a champion and vision arise to form a network, organization or church to both establish the vision and to sustain this work long term. In short, ministries have champions and movements are more catalytic. That being said both are organically moving and flowing as the Holy Spirit leads.

*Fresno ministries and movements from one man's view:*

My Christian journey began in 1985 as I heard the gospel for the first time at a Christian Business Men's Connection (CBMC) businessman's luncheon. It was there that I heard for the first time "you can have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ."

### The Church of Fresno in the 1980's

CBMC, Youth for Christ (YFC), Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) and the Fresno Rescue mission were predominately the citywide ministries of Fresno in the 1980s. CBMC had four chapters throughout Fresno and was recognized as one of the largest most effective business men's ministry in the U.S. ESA had launched the Love INC Church Services Network and is seen as a hub for churches and ministries coming together to mobilize the Churches to engage in loving people. Youth for Christ has been and continues to be one of the most effective ministries for youth and evangelism. The nationally known Fresno Rescue Mission is one of the largest Christian ministries in the history of our city. The leadership in the churches was very well established with Bishop John David Schofield, Pastors G. L. Johnson, Bufe Karraker, Roger Whitlow, with many other pastors who were considered 'city fathers' entering into their second and third decades in ministry released incredible cooperation and spiritual direction over Fresno.

**The ESA/Love INC Movement** started in 1982 and added the National affiliation with Love INC in 1986. Love INC provided a powerful vehicle for mobilizing the churches and individuals to engage in meeting the needs of people through a clearinghouse approach, which called together churches and social services that had the potential to meet almost every need in the city. Fresno Love INC, under the leadership of Alan Doswald, not only established a local solution to meet felt needs but had influence regionally and nationally in developing the Love INC movement and was instrumental in seeing the Love INC model established in 144 US cities.

### The Church of Fresno in the 1990's

While ministries and churches were doing well in Fresno there were still many prominent issues in the city and within the Body of Christ. The rub between Pastors and the para-church ministries, the denominational divide, and the theological divide were a few predominant divisions in the body of Christ in that decade.

**The March for Jesus Movement** came to Fresno in 1992 and untied 7000 Christians to a march that started in front of City Hall and was over two miles long. The focus was 'For an Audience of One' and was a global event that united the Body of Christ to give God the glory through prayer and praise citywide.

The **Fresno Promise Keepers Movement** started in Fresno in 1993 when five laymen attended the first ever California Promise Keepers event in Anaheim California. These laymen came back with a vision to “raise up men of God and establish men’s ministry in every church.” George Ordway was asked by Promise Keepers National to be the Promise Keepers Task Force Chair for the Fresno Area in 1994. A 2000 man volunteer army was mobilized over a period of three years. Hundreds of men’s ministry leaders were equipped with Men’s Ministry Leadership (MML) training establishing over 100 men’s small groups in churches. Two Promise Keepers state conferences were held in Bulldog Stadium drawing a total of 90,000 men. The Promise Keepers Taskforce leadership transitioned to Ferrell Henderson and continued to seek ways to build men’s ministry for ten more years. The culmination of the Promise Keepers movement catalyzed the National Coalition of Men’s Ministry consisting of 150 regional and National men’s ministries.

The **Pastors Prayer Summit Movement** came to Fresno in 1992 as key pastors saw a crisis in Fresno on the horizon and asked leaders from the Northwest Renewal Movement to come and facilitate a Pastor’s Prayer Summit. They agreed, and three leaders from Portland area came three consecutive years setting a foundation for what has become an annual event for over 25 years. ESA provided the backbone organization with connection to start this event and still provides leadership to this day. The late **Bishop John David Schofield** emerged as the convener and facilitator after the first couple of years and became one of the foremost spiritual directors of the pastors and ministry leaders in the history of Fresno.

Some of the Fruit that emerged from these Prayer Summits:

- Pastor Roger Minassian started Hope Now for Youth that has gone on to find employment for more than 1,900 ex-gang members
- Pastor clusters came from Pastor G.L. Johnson calling pastors and ministers to pray together weekly
- The No Name Fellowship emerged as Christian leaders sought to engage leaders into societal change
- Valley Hispanic pastor summits emerged
- There are too many spiritual and personal impacts that happened through the prayer summits to list

From this man’s perspective after being at all of the Prayer Summits starting in 1993 and catalyzing the transfer of the Prayer Summit encounter to multiple cities and to the Hispanic pastors of our Valley.

The three predominate gifts to all that attended prayer Summits:

1. A return to the ‘first love of Jesus’ and a fresh renewal for their heart and life.
2. God brought leaders to a corporate place of listening to him in such a way as to transcend our individual and organizational uniqueness’s building lifelong covenant relationships with each other, answering Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20-23.
3. A spiritual strategic plan that united us to seek collective impacts that no one organization, church or individual could realize. Psalm 133

The **No Name Fellowship Movement** was an amazing societal vision that resulted from developing covenantal relationships and focused specifically on uniting Christians cross-sector to address our community’s issues. The mission statement of No Name Fellowship (NNF) emerged and captured everyone who came into contact with the NNF vision and mission of ‘Reconciling relationships to release resources to rebuild our city’. The intentionality to host the NNF meetings at the ground zero sites of the most difficult issues of our city made this movement very effective. Every NNF meeting ended with a challenge to one of several action points. The NNF was not about information but about a call to societal change. There was so much fruit both spiritually and in the covenant relationships that were deepened. NNF injected a new hope in the community, that together under Christ’s leading we could change our culture.

**Care Fresno** started with a cross-sector partnership between the Fresno Police Department (FPD), ESA/Love INC and local churches. The focus was on the most crime ridden apartment complexes near churches. The FPD would drive out the criminal elements living in the apartments and the Churches would send in volunteers to occupy one of the apartment’s rooms that had been donated by the landlord for the benefit of the residents. After school programs, reading programs, several types of meeting-the-need events emerged as churches reached out

to the community and formed lasting, life changing relationships. The Care Fresno outreach became a model that was nationally recognized and helped win Fresno the All America City award in 2000.

**Fresno Leadership Foundation and One by One movement** came about as the NNF, ESA and other organizations gained traction from the NNF movement. The exposure of the NNF site visits and seeking collective impacts caused the need for a flagship backbone organization to establish key objectives and bring long term capacity to them through funding and staff. Many believed One by One was the societal strategy of God paralleling the spiritual strategy of mobilizing the Church carried by ESA/Love INC. The cooperation between Alan Doswald and H. Spees was essential to the balance, effectiveness and success of these two much needed organizations. One by One's strongest influence from outside of Fresno came through the Leadership Foundation of America and Reed Carpenter. One by One helped to be an intermediary organization leveraging community assets through large grants and corporate donations to meet large projects resulting in rebuilding our city.

**Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)** headed up by John Perkins has had a profound influence in the Fresno area and around the Nation. Mr. Perkins is a prophetic catalyst that sparked ESA, One by One, and many other areas of ministry, too many to list. Mr. Perkins brought bold vision accompanied with action to Fresno leaders H Spees, Randy White, Alan Doswald, myself and many others. The influence of CCDA and the training of Bakke University established spiritual and societal action that has been sustained for over 40 years. Today, the Center for Community Transformation CCT lead by Dr. Randy White, City Summit youth engagement conferences, neighborhood thrift stores, approximately 40 families relocating into the Lowell neighborhoods (formerly labeled the Devil's Triangle) not only changed the way citywide ministry looked, but open innovative ways on how Christ followers would address the needs of the people in our city in an incarnational life exchange.

**Valley Communities for Christ (VCC) movement** began in 2000 with a vision from God to connect the 1400 Christian churches throughout the Central Valley to gospel outreaches. George Ordway under the covering of ESA/Love INC expanded ministries and resources to the people of our Valley through a call to the Church of Fresno called 'What About Samaria' today VCC has work in and alongside 53 Valley cities. This work began to be too large for ESA/Love INC Fresno/Clovis service area catalyzing the start of Communities INC in 2013. Today Communities INC has four ministry initiatives serving Fresno, the Central Valley, California and nationally.

**Billy Graham Crusade** of 2001 was held one month after 9/11 drawing National interest. The crusade rallied pastors, community leaders and thousands of Christians to invite their family, friends and neighbors to hear the Good News of the Gospel. An estimated 160,000 people attended, thousands of people received Christ. Some of the long term effects of the crusade are the Love In Action committee formed and later became Missions Network that continues to meet today.

**Youth Network movement** started 18 years ago by just a few youth ministry leaders seeing the need to connect and encourage youth and children's leaders to meet monthly, to shepherd and sharpen each other. Today The Youth network has over 90 youth and children's leaders on their list and organizes several citywide functions together.

**Our Valley exports** many types of agricultural products more than anywhere in the world, we also spiritually exported ministry, movements and leaders throughout the world. It is amazing to see how God has grown leaders, visions, ministries, movements and connected them to the Kingdom of His global influence. Just a couple of examples as there are too many to list. Fresno Pastor Powell Lemons of Bethel Church reached out to the Philippines over three decades ago not realizing that over 2,500 churches would be established. Local pastor Jim Cecy founded Jaron Ministries which provides leadership to the Nations. Gordon Donoho presides over Christians in Action which plants, establishes and helps to grow churches all around the world, just to name a few.

**City Advance movement** emerged from Mission America Coalition and Movement Day in New York City. These two National organizations have carried a vision for decades that is many times identified as 'City Reaching' or 'Citywide Gospel Movements'. The common vision is how can we connect, equip and coach Christian city leaders from different spheres to come together to seek Christ for a spiritual and strategic vision that unites the Body of Christ to take the whole gospel to the whole city. After four years in New York, City Advance became regional

making this equipping tool accessible, affordable and contextual. Fresno California hosted the first regional City Advance in the US in February 2015, now three states and India are hosting a City Advance.

**Citywide EVENTS** have catalyzed many movements, presented the gospel to the whole city, and jump started many ministries.

Here are just a few:

- Promise Keepers in the early 1990s. – Increased awareness for building men of God in the churches
- The Billy Graham Crusade in 2000 activated the relational network of Fresno leaders and presented the gospel to thousands of people at Bulldog stadium. – Evangelistic yet trained thousands of Christians and churches in creating small groups through Operation Andrew. Sparked the establishing of Missions Network that still meets monthly today
- Pentecost Sunday at McLane High School stadium, where 15 churches gathered and met at the stadium to worship God together and acknowledge Pentecost. Built deeper relationship among churches in the McLane High School neighborhoods and increased the pastor's cluster there
- Winning our World through Jesus and Music- WOW JAMS held 16 events both locally and throughout the Central Valley where 20,000 people heard the gospel in parks, fairgrounds and other public places. WOW JAM united churches in many cities to take the gospel to their neighborhoods and communities. It sparked the 'Sanger Caring Taskforce', empowered the Madera Ministerial, catalyzed the Hanford ministers and gave hope to thousands who received Christ and were baptized
- 'Heavens Gates and Hells Flames' hosted by Peoples Church saw thousands of people come to see the need for the gospel of Christ
- The recent "99" event hosted by Cornerstone Church in October of 2014 proclaimed the gospel to thousands of people

As mentioned, God has poured out his favor upon Fresno and through Fresno to influence the world and there are too many ministries and movements to list, with over 450 churches and 66 Christian ministries networked with relationship Fresno has seen Gods amazing works in the past.

*Isaiah 43:18, 19 says "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

This letter has been one man's perspective for where Fresno is today. I have witnessed God do amazing things over the years and have personally caught his love for Fresno and the Central Valley in my heart. I would suggest that the 'Church' of Fresno is poised to emerge from a season of leadership succession. Most of the largest churches have new senior leadership who have begun to establish trust with their congregations over the last five years. It would appear that God is drawing the 'new to Fresno' leaders, and the more established leaders together with a desire to seek God for how "The whole church can take the whole gospel to the whole city." A pastors meeting has started a task force to pray into and discover what God is speaking to the church.

In closing I would like to say this has been an incredible journey continuing the Acts of the Apostles into our time and our city. I would ask for huge grace and forgiveness for not being able to adequately capture all the amazing things that God has done and is doing in Fresno/Clovis and Central Valley region. This is only a humble attempt to capture a few of the historical Movements that Fresno and our region has experienced while we seek to discern what God has for us next.

Thank you

George Ordway  
Communities INC

*"To know Him and to make Him known"*