

Christians Head to World Cup to Evangelize Soccer Fans

✖ Christians from across the globe are gearing up to share the gospel with the thousands of soccer fans expected to attend the world's biggest sporting event which starts June 11.

Some 200 Brazilian Christians began arriving in South Africa this month for the FIFA World Cup with plans to target a very specific group when the games begin: North Koreans.

The Baptist team led by pastor Marcos Grava Vasconcelos, a former handball player, prayed for North Korea to qualify for the games and be placed in the same group as Brazil so they could evangelize fans from that country, the *Guardian* newspaper reported.

"We were praying for North Korea to qualify and when we found out they [the North Koreans] would be playing in the same city as Brazil we glorified God for the opportunity to announce to their fans the message of Jesus," said Vasconcelos, according to the *Guardian*.

Pastor David Botelho of the Brazil-based missionary group Missão Horizontes, which targets the 10/40 Window, said the World Cup presents a rare opportunity to reach the people of North Korea, which he called "a champion in the persecution of Christianity."

"There will be many tourists there from countries which

are closed off to the Word of God and who we couldn't reach any other way," Botelho told *Eclésia*, a Brazilian evangelical magazine.

North Korea last competed in the World Cup in 1966 and joins Brazil, the Ivory Coast and Portugal in Group G. The Brazilian evangelists planning to reach out to North Koreans may face an uphill battle, however.

North Korea's closed regime has imposed travel restrictions on all but a few government officials, the *Guardian* reported. And Xinhua, a Chinese news agency, reported that North Korean officials have been trying to recruit Chinese fans to cheer for their team when it competes against Brazil in Johannesburg June 15.

The Brazilian missionaries will join Christians from around the world who also have their sights set on sharing Christ with those attending the games, which will be held in several cities across South Africa.

Britain-based Operation Mobilization is rallying teens and young adults to participate in its Ultimate Goal Campaign, a partnership with local South African churches. And the World Cup Evangelism Project is training local Christians to use evangelist Ray Comfort's Way of the Master outreach strategy to witness to soccer fans one-on-one.

"Many of the Christians down here in our country wish that they could go across the borders to other countries to spread the gospel, but just due to resources

we're just not financially able to do that," said Nigel Titus, an evangelist in Cape Town, South Africa, and an organizer of the World Cup Evangelism Project. "We're having people coming from all countries, tribes, tongues, nations—they're coming to our shores. We don't have to go over to them. So it's an opportunity for us now to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to them."

Several Christians will be bearing witness from the field. At least four members of Brazil's soccer team—Kakà, Lucio, Luisão and Felipe Melo—reportedly are Christians. Kakà has worn T-shirts beneath his jersey that read "I Belong to Jesus," though the FIFA World Cup recently outlawed the use of clothing carrying political, religious or personal statements.

Italian defender Nicola Legrottaglie and U.S. goalkeeper Tim Howard are also outspoken Christians.

Kakà and Legrottaglie are featured in *The Prize: Chasing the Dream*, a half-hour DVD filled with testimonies of Christian soccer players that Athletes in Action is distributing during the World Cup. Tim Howard previously released an evangelistic DVD through Athletes in Action.