

# Evangelist Wins Souls Online

**Businessman-turned-preacher Bill Keller says mainstream television and the Internet are the best ways to reach the lost**

Some 21st century evangelists are winning souls one click at a time.

They are the missionaries of the Internet, and they claim hundreds of thousands—even millions—of salvations, healings and answers to prayer from their online ministries.

is one of the most successful examples. It finished up its 64th month online at the end of 2004 with 100,000 reported decisions for Christ, a daily devotional subscriber list of roughly 2 million and more than 40,000 prayer requests sent in every day. A volunteer team of more than 700 retired pastors responds personally to each request.

“Three to four times a month I will share an invitation for salvation in my daily devotional, and we mail out a booklet to those who let us know they responded,” said Bill Keller, who runs . “As of the end of December, we sent out our 100,000th booklet.”

offers video clips of people praying for finances, health and relationships, plus a 24-hour live video feed that usually features someone sitting at a computer reading prayer requests and praying aloud over them. A former salesman who claims to have amassed and lost several fortunes before finding the Lord, Keller believes that mainstream television and the Internet are the ways to reach lost souls today.

The founder and president of Bill Keller Ministries based in St. Petersburg, Fla., gave his life to Christ at the age of 12 and said he always knew he would be a minister. But he began selling computers in the late 1970s and found that he had a knack for sales. By his own admission, greed took over, and by the late 1980s he was consumed in a fast lifestyle that included alcohol, drugs and lots of wheeling and dealing. By 1990, he was sitting in federal prison, convicted of insider trading.

There, he turned his life back over to Christ, received a bachelor's degree in biblical studies from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., and became a traveling preacher upon his release in 1992. He then worked in Christian television but became frustrated when he began to feel he was merely "preaching to the choir."

"The lost are not sitting in church on Sunday mornings or watching Christian television," Keller said. "They are out there living their lives, so it was up to me to go outside of the Christian trough."

Keller started and two years ago launched a live call-in TV show, Live Prayer With Bill Keller, which airs from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. Monday through Friday on the UPN station in the Tampa Bay area.

Keller is not the only one using new millennium media to reach the masses. Presbyterian minister Charles Henderson launched The First Church of Cyberspace in 1994. The site says the outreach is "an attempt to bring Christianity online with thoughtfulness, humor and a willingness to address the more controversial questions that tend to be avoided in the traditional church."

The cyberspace church is just one of many that offer sermons, articles, devotionals, live forums and links to other resources. Few sites reach non-Christians the way does, but efforts are under way to change that.

The Internet Evangelism Coalition, a consortium of several outreach ministries, has designated April 24 as Internet Evangelism (IE) Day. An affiliated Web site, , will offer a five-minute video testimony from a student who found God online, short drama scripts, PowerPoint presentations, discussion questions and a variety of links.

The organizing team hopes IE Day will inspire churches to use their Web pages for more than just making announcements to their members. A 2001 study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project showed that roughly 25 percent of adult Internet users—around 28 million people—had gone online to get religious and spiritual material.

“It’s an exciting challenge,” said IE Day coordinator Tony Whittaker. “The potential of the Web is enormous.”

In addition to the IE Day efforts, a conference dealing with Internet evangelism for the 21st century also is scheduled this month at Liberty University.

The race to save souls can mask a desire to bring in the cash. Some sites prey on seekers by renting out their subscriber lists, placing ad banners all over the place and soliciting heavily for donations.

Keller insists that his goal is to reach the unsaved, not make

a buck. He said LivePrayer, which takes \$70,000 a month to stay online and on the air, is supported by anonymous ministry partners who give large monetary gifts. Some visitors also send in donations.

Keller knows it will take money to reach the millions of people who don't know Christ. "But I have to stand before God one day and give an accounting, so [exploiting subscribers] just isn't worth it."

**Natalie Nichols Gillespie**