

New York Evangelist Uses Subway System as Ministry Platform

Frank Meyer recently launched Evangelism for Cowards to teach Christians how to boldly share their faith

New York City minister Frank Meyer isn't afraid to go public with his faith, and the city's subway system is his pulpit.

Preaching and staging evangelistic skits on crowded, noisy subway trains, Meyer said he's used to facing rejection, weird stares and insults. "The Holy Spirit gives me courage," he said.

The 42-year-old usually opens with a song such as "Amazing Grace" or "Blessed Assurance" before jumping into a mini-sermon or leading a team in an attention-grabbing skit. "I just sing quietly and very mellow," he said.

He earned his evangelistic spurs in 1990 serving a one-year internship at Calvary Baptist Church in Manhattan while attending Dallas Theological Seminary. Searching for a strategy to share the gospel with city dwellers, he took a leap of faith into the subway. He began by singing hymns while commuters waited for trains. "I stood there and just was scared, scared, scared," he said.

Feeling crushed from a barrage of negative jibes, he recovered his confidence when a man urged, "Don't ever stop what you're doing."

Meyer became a born-again Christian through Campus Crusade for Christ at Cornell University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. After working in the industry for two years he heeded God's call to ministry. Following seminary he worked for a homeless program in Dallas and then the Bowery Mission in Manhattan before transitioning into subway evangelism.

Every skit presentation is an adventure. "The Matrix Man" skit begins when the team casually enters a subway car. A man conspicuously bothers a woman team member who rebuffs him. Meyer, dressed in black and wearing sunglasses, stands up shouting, "Sir, would you mind leaving the woman alone!" After more banter the man pretends to start a fight with Meyer who yells, "I can whip you with my pinky."

The man collapses on the floor when Meyer points a finger at him, then another team member challenges the crowd about death and eternity and commands the man on the floor to arise. The skit ends with a short gospel message, tract distribution and talks with willing passengers. The team then boards another train.

"Evangelizing on the subway has helped me to be more public with my faith in my neighborhood, in my apartment building and in my work," said team member Kate Gleason, a college professor who describes herself as a quiet person.

Some passengers respond favorably and gladly accept tracts while others show hostility. "I think it's disgusting," a sneering woman told Charisma after refusing a tract.

New York City Transit spokesman James Anyansi said Christian

groups are allowed to hand out free information to passengers as long as they don't disrupt the flow of traffic. Unless a passenger is being harassed, he said, the transit doesn't respond to complaints about not wanting to receive information.

Besides weekly subway runs, Meyer trains church groups in evangelism under the umbrella of Mission NYC (), an evangelical ministry that sponsors short-term missions programs.

Mission NYC will train 60 to 100 teams totaling 2,000 to 3,000 people this year, reported Executive Director Rick Camacho. He endorses Meyer's style of initiative evangelism. "There is not a single cookie-cutter approach to evangelism," he said. "Frank offers a vehicle that is unique and breaks through the noise."

Meyer recently launched Evangelism for Cowards, a ministry aimed at helping Christians share their faith one-on-one. He conducts seminars in churches and provides eye-catching literature. "It's focused on helping people who never share their faith learn simple ways of getting involved," he said.

One of his favorite ploys is asking a stranger, "Could you give me a really difficult question about God?" He claims that people respond favorably 80 percent to 90 percent of the time.

"Christians live their lives so afraid of evangelism," he said. "Christ said the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. It's scary at first, but it's so rewarding."

Peter K. Johnson in New York City