

'Rage Against Destruction' Takes Gospel to High Schools

The affiliate of Joyce Meyer's Life in the Word ministries is reaching youth with an anti-violence message

Colorful beams of light slice back and forth through the fog. The loud hip-hop music inspires some of the students at North Kirkwood Middle School in St. Louis to bob their heads in rhythm with the beat. Others, eyes wide with curiosity, stand motionless with jaws agape as rap artist DJ MAJ spins a few records at his turntable.

"North Kirkwood check it out!" he yells into a microphone. "I'm here with Rage Against Destruction, which is a national tour supporting and promoting the message of anti-violence."

Seconds later, two Rage Against Destruction (RAD) team members pop onto the stage from behind a gigantic TV screen that acts as a backdrop. Within minutes they have worked the throng of young teens into a frenzy with the random distribution of \$50 gift certificates, a Razor scooter and a compact disc player.

After a dance competition between a seventh-grade boy and an eighth-grade girl, the rapper known as Knowdaverbs (his real name is Michael Boyer) takes the stage and raps before Tom Woodcock, the 41-year-old director of RAD, shares his anti-violence message.

"We do these assemblies for a couple of reasons," Woodcock tells the students. "But one of the main reasons is for students to have a chance to show they have dreams and desires for their lives, and they're not all carrying pistols to school."

This year RAD will share its anti-violence message in places such as St. Louis; Providence, R.I.; Reno, Nev.; St. Paul, Minn.; and Tulsa, Okla. By the end of the year more than 100,000 students will have heard RAD's simple message of ending violence and saving dreams.

"We are trying to put acceptance, tolerance of one another's differences and hope for the future into this generation," Woodcock told Charisma. "We want to point them in a direction of working out their problems rather than using violence as an answer."

Each month RAD invades a selected city and pumps its high-octane assembly into as many public schools as it can free of charge. But RAD's \$3 million state-of-the-art set and pricey giveaways are not the only means Woodcock uses in his attempt to quell violence among teens. After each school assembly students are given a free ticket to another concert called Firefest.

There, the anti-violence message continues, but Woodcock and the others are free to share Jesus Christ—and the gospel they believe is the real key to stopping all violence. "The focus of Firefest is salvation," Woodcock said. "It's threaded throughout the whole evening."

According to RAD spokeswoman Annie Dollarhide, 22, nearly 150

teens make a commitment to Christ at each Firefest concert. "This is a way for kids to invite their friends to something that is cool, yet it has an eternal effect on them," said Lacy McAdams, 27, a youth pastor from Arnold, Mo.

In 1999, RAD was adopted by Joyce Meyer Ministries, based in Fenton, Mo., and serves as the youth ministry for Meyer's Life in the Word. Though taking RAD and Firefest nationwide costs nearly \$4 million annually, Meyer believes it is worth it.

"By investing in our youth, we are investing in the future of America," Meyer told Charisma. "We feel the youth of today are in tremendous need. They need real answers and real heroes, and they need the message of hope to free them to dream."

Woodcock and RAD members never mention faith, God, prayer or religion during school assemblies. Students usually do.

"It's always of their own. We don't prompt them," Dollarhide said. "It's very tempting [to share the gospel], but we have to respect the law of the land—otherwise we will never make any progress."