

How Billy Graham Still Influences Youth for Christ Staff

It started with an invitation to share a bit of our personal stories, a dozen of us, my Youth for Christ (YFC) Cabinet. Some shared stories that mirror mine.

Then Danny ...

In the early days of Youth for Christ, it was Billy, the first full-time evangelist in Youth for Christ, working for just \$75 a week.

He was passionate, powerful, focused, vigilant, fierce, humble and gentle.

Billy.

Then Danny ...

Danny was a New York City local, not from Charlotte—a street kid, not a farmer. Billy moved from Bob Jones University to Wheaton College. Danny went from juvenile hall to Sing Sing.

At 27, Billy was preaching at Soldier Field. At 27 Danny was sentenced and serving. At 31, Billy had a crisis of faith, an inflection point, a crossroad experience. Danny fell to his knees in a prison cell. “I’m sorry, God,” was his simple, profound and effectual prayer.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:4-5).

His love. Our mess. Alive.

A farm boy—and a felon. Our first evangelist—and our current evangelist ... one of many. From the green rolling hills of North Carolina to the concrete jungle of Manhattan. One battled through the confinement of doubt, the other through the suffocating reality of incarceration.

Then came redemption, adoption and freedom.

First they were rescued, then they were called.

One wore a skinny black tie, the other a cap. Both fighters—evangelists—with a shared mission. Our first mission and our current mission.

One held a Bible, the other holds a Bible. One stood on a platform, the other on the street. Once Soldier Field, now the hood. Both with a rap sheet. One polite, and one a matter of public record.

Billy. Danny.

Because the love of Christ compels us ... in 1945 and in 2020—past, present and, by God's grace, future.

Geared and anchored. Then and now.

Always only Jesus. {eoa}

Dan Wolgemuth *is president and CEO of Youth for Christ. Youth for Christ has been a pillar of missional ministry since 1944, when the Rev. Billy Graham served as YFC's first full-time staff member. Since then, Youth for Christ has continued to be both a rural and urban ministry on mission, and always about the message of Jesus*