

In Philly, a 'Soul Patrol' Church is Out to Win the City

Thumping music filling the air. Smoke rising from barbecue grills. And the ice-cold beer flowing freely. That's the typical scene at block parties in north Philadelphia when  the Deliverance Evangelistic Church van turns the corner—right before these street missionaries change the spiritual climate.

Indeed, the secular street party doesn't daunt outreach leader David Young or his team of devil-busting soul-winners. As the group arrives, prayer, preaching and a call for souls goes forth in the City of Brotherly Love. Within 30 minutes, the block party bows to the gospel message.

It's called "Operation Take the City," a soul-winning program Deliverance Evangelistic Church runs in the hard streets of Philadelphia. Through its various outreach strategies the church sees about 3,000 people saved every year—in a city chilled by the realities of HIV infections that are dramatically outpacing the national average and one of the highest crime rates in the nation.

"It's fulfilling the Great Commission. We're not out to try to fulfill the vision of an individual. Lives are being changed," says Therlow Paulin, an outreach pastor at Deliverance. "Some of the people we've ministered to out in the streets are now pastors. There's the fruit—when you can see lives transformed."

Deliverance Evangelistic Church is celebrating its 50th year—and the chase for souls is stronger than ever. Seven hundred members of the megachurch are actively involved in outreaches.

Beyond its own city borders, Deliverance has equipped more

than 300 churches in street evangelism across Washington, New Jersey, Maryland, Connecticut and Georgia. The church is also reaching out globally. But the love begins at home.

Take the City is not for the faint of heart. Tailored suits, church titles, fancy hats and expensive bling have no place or power in the strategy that propels outreach teams to Philadelphia's most crime-torn sections. Deliverance lives up to its name by setting up soul-winning activities where many refuse to go. But it takes tactical planning to attack demonic strongholds in the city, along with a Holy Ghost boldness.

Beyond its regular outreaches, Deliverance gears up during the Christmas and Easter seasons for "The Outreach Thrust." As many as 200 workers descend upon Philadelphia's Broad Street Subway system and preach to riders—some appearing captivated, others repulsed and many surrendering to Christ. And a "Soul Patrol" of men gathers on Friday nights from 9 p.m. until 2 a.m. to tackle prostitution hotspots, notorious drug-dealing street corners and popular dance-club locations.

Teen males are among those accepting Christ. Fearing the elevated murder rate and the teen lives often claimed by it, Donald, 16, gave his heart to Jesus on the corner of Hope Plaza. Bernadette, a homeless drug-addicted mother desiring the return of her two children, found comfort in accepting Jesus on Broad Street. And Marie, her countenance revealing a weight of problems, welcomed relief by receiving salvation while she waited for the bus. The situations and Christ-affirming outcomes are endless.

"People are hurting because of the economic times we're in. Our emphasis must be in reaching and feeding the hungry and the suffering and the dying. We feed the homeless here," said Glenn Spaulding, who has pastored the church since 2002. "Thank God that with His help I believe better days are yet ahead."