

Jesus.net Founder Gives God Glory for Online Ministry

Eric Célérrier was a 22-year-old new Christian, looking for work.

Sure, he had three years of French cooking school under his belt, but he felt God was calling him to do something else.

But what?

A new believer—someone from his church—asked him if he would be interested working for the 1986 Billy Graham Crusade coming to Paris.

“I said I don’t know who Billy Graham is,” Célérrier said. “But I’m looking for a job.”

More than a quarter of a century later, Célérrier, wearing his trademark ultra-hip European eye-glass frames, smiled as he looked out across the dining room at The Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove.

More than 100 people from more than 20 countries involved in – the Internet evangelism movement he founded—had gathered in Asheville, N.C., for a five-day conference with one unified purpose: using the Internet to reach people for Jesus.

“I praise God every day,” the modest Frenchman said. “It’s really a movement of God.”

The Night That Changed His Heart

It was a simple prayer that night, but it’s about the only thing Célérrier can point to as to why God has blessed the ministry.

It was one of the final nights in the September 1986 Crusade at Paris’ Bercy Stadium, which drew an estimated 100,000 over

five nights. Célérier had been asked to sit up on the stage with Graham, George Beverly Shea and Cliff Barrows, among others.

Célérier was wearing “four or five” different hats by the time the crusade unfolded, starting off putting stamps on envelopes and moving into the counseling and follow-up ministries.

It’s been 26 years since that night sitting on stage, but Célérier can still remember the firsthand view of Graham preaching and a front-row view of thousands flooding the stage to give their life to Jesus.

“I saw him preaching and it really impacted my life,” Célérier said. “When I saw all the people come to receive Christ, I said a prayer. I told God I want to be an evangelist. I want to win people to Christ like this man.”

Little did Célérier know that several decades later, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association would be partnering with his vision, which is now and is reaching millions around the world with the gospel.

“It started there,” Célérier said. “That was my prayer.

“Maybe God was laughing or smiling at the time, but saying one day you’ll see.”

Connecting With the Local Church

Tracing the steps of exactly when the online **evangelism movement** began is a little like figuring out who really invented the Internet.

Célérier recalls 1997 as the first time he started building tools for online evangelism, and 2001 when the first evangelistic website went live.

But April 2005 was when the Knowing God website—the model that BGEA is using for — went live.

In the 7 1/2 years since launching in France, Célérier has seen more than 36.8 million people click on one of the websites that deliver a gospel presentation through video format and then ask users to pray to receive Christ.

More than 4.5 million people have indicated they prayed to receive Christ and roughly 25 percent of those have filled out a personal information form, which has been used to send discipleship material as well as help new believers get plugged into a local church.

“Recording decisions is just one step. It’s a measurement, not a goal,” he said. “The goal is that they would grow in their faith and get involved in a church.”

A network of 330 churches has signed on to help new Christians grow in their faith. Célérier’s team in France has worked hard to make sure new followers of Christ are given proper follow-up with discipleship information and connected with a local church in their area.

“We try to move people along their spiritual journey, just like they would do at a Crusade,” Célérier said. “For them to connect to a local church is extremely important.”

The movement, which began in August of 2009, is quickly spreading around the globe.

Many other countries are getting involved under the umbrella and this year’s conference marks the fourth one—two previous ones in Paris and one in Rotterdam, Amsterdam. Poland and Switzerland are possible host sites for conferences in future years.

BGEA has currently developed five websites—English and Spanish sites for the U.S., as well as ones in Portugal, Mexico and the Philippines.

And since launching in April 2011, more than 7 million

visitors have landed on the U.S. site, , including more than 1.3 million who have indicated decisions and approximately 185,000 who have asked for more information.

Discipleship coaches and e-counselors play a key role in answering questions from new believers and delivering discipleship information.

“It’s such an honor and privilege for me to see the BGEA move toward Internet Evangelism,” Célérier said.”

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