

On the Front Lines of Children's Ministry

Bill Wilson has spent the last 30 years taking Sunday school to inner-city kids

Bill Wilson has been thrown off a building, mugged and shot in the face. But none of that has stopped him from leading sidewalk Sunday school every week in New York's inner city.

As he marks 30 years of ministry this year, he says the thing that has kept him going is simply commitment. "It's like anything else; it's a decision," Wilson says.

Wilson leads the world's largest Sunday school, reaching 40,000 kids each week through his Brooklyn-based Metro Ministries. His Sunday school materials are used around the world and have created a template for urban children's outreach.

Today it's not uncommon to hear of ministries that host children's church at housing projects and inner-city community centers. But back in 1980, many people thought Wilson was crazy. "The church ... by and large had left the inner city for the suburbs," he says. "The term that kept coming up was *hopeless*. I said: 'These kids aren't hopeless. They just don't have any hope.'"

Wilson has watched a generation of kids grow up and become ministers, husbands, wives and college graduates. Many have returned to serve at Metro.

Though he preaches around the world, Wilson still drives Bus 3 every week and continues to live on the fourth floor of the warehouse where Metro Ministries is based. "It's by being there, living there, driving the bus, spending the time, you build a respect, you earn a credibility that you don't get

just because you're a preacher or a minister," he says.

He worries sometimes that many Christians are still reluctant to get their hands dirty in ministry, though he is encouraged by younger believers who he says are willing to get spit on and "slapped around" to tell a child about Jesus.

Even after 30 years, Wilson still gets into fights. "I've been stabbed a couple of times, had ribs broken, jaw broken," he says.

But he says he learned about ministry from Pentecostals who'd had relatives die on the mission field and understood sacrifice. "Somehow in our American mindset, we've lost that," Wilson says.

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