

Churches Unite for Olympics Outreach

Christian community uses More Than Gold banner to make life-changing impact at London's Summer Games

With the 2012 Olympics in London only weeks away, outreach ministries are gearing up to reach the sports-loving masses with the love of Christ.

Christian leaders throughout the U.K. believe that churches have a prime opportunity during the 17-day global event to not only communicate the gospel through words, but also through service-based outreach and hospitality efforts as they engage with their communities and visitors.

"The Games offer churches a multitude of ways to engage with their communities," More Than Gold CEO David Willson told Charisma. "And we are providing the resources and training that will help them, doing so by coordinating the skills and experiences of over 60 Christian agencies."

Though churches, denominations and evangelistic organizations have been involved with global sporting events for decades, the Christian community has come together under the "More Than Gold" banner since the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, when believers passed out more than 3 million cups of cold water to visitors. Since then, More Than Gold has continued to use worldwide sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, Pan American Games and Paralympics to make a life-changing impact. In the 2000 Sydney games, for example, churches ran more than 100 sports clinics for disadvantaged youth.

"There's a greater prize to have than a gold medal—wonderful though it is," says Peter Meadows, communications director at

More Than Gold. "To know the God who made you, and to be at peace with Him, is the greatest prize of all."

One way More Than Gold is involved in this year's games is through the Olympic Torch Relay. After arriving from Greece on May 18, the flame is crossing the U.K. during a 70-day run that ends July 27 at the games' opening ceremony. On a typical day, the Relay will include a team of around 370 people, and 8,000 torchbearers will carry the flame to 1,000 cities, towns and villages throughout the U.K.

"The route and dates of the Torch Relay are being used for a cascade of prayer and praise," Meadows says. "Church leaders in each town/city where the torch is stopping overnight will take prayers of blessing to church leaders in the next stopping place."

More than 8 million people are expected to line the streets to cheer on thousands of community heroes carrying the torch. Coinciding with the run will be football events, other sports disciplines and training camps taking place all around the U.K.

Jane Holloway of the World Prayer Centre, who heads up prayer for More Than Gold, sees all these events as opportunities for believers to serve the nations. "Our conviction is that prayer and mission go hand in hand as churches respond to the Games," she says. "So we are inviting every church, group and organization to explore creative ways to pray for all that will happen before, during and after the Games."

—Ginny McCabe