

Director Seeks to 'Honor Christ' With New Film

✖ Like most filmmakers, director Rich Christiano hopes to see theaters packed out when his latest project, *The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry*, opens Friday. But he expects those moviegoers to be mostly churchgoers, and he has no problems with that.

"What I'm trying to do is reach the core Christian audience," said Christiano, co-owner of Five & Two Pictures and founder of . "I'm very content to minister in the church."

He said his goal is to make Christ-honoring films, and those don't always have crossover appeal.

"A lot of people making films are trying to get them sold first, not reach souls," said Christiano, who with his brother, Dave, has been making Christian films such as *Time Changer* since 1985.

"God has led us to first try to please Him with our films," Christiano added. "That's what we want to do."

Sperry is rated PG and stars Gavin MacLeod (*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Love Boat*) as an elderly man who befriends three neighborhood boys and teaches them biblical lessons. There are bullies and Bible studies against a 1970s backdrop.

"It's a simple story," Christiano admits. "It's not an action film." (See a trailer below.)

But Tom Saab, founder of Christian Film Festivals, said more than 500 people came to Christ after he screened the film at three of his evangelistic festivals in Florida and Massachusetts in October and April. And he believes that's the purpose of Christian movies.

"We'd like people to bring unsaved people with them to watch

this,” Saab said. “That’s the idea of Christian filmmaking. It’s not just to entertain Christians; it’s to lead people to Christ.”

Jansen Panettiere, younger brother of *Heroes* actress Hayden Panettiere, and Robert Guillaume also star in the film that MacLeod, a Christian, called “the most meaningful project I have ever done.”

Christiano expects the \$900,000 movie to open in 150 cities, thanks to partnerships with local churches that are paying roughly \$2,000 to sponsor the film in their communities. A portion of the film proceeds will be donated back to the churches.

“I believe this: Everybody’s that’s sponsoring this film is going to make money doing it,” Christiano said.

He believes the churches will also make a statement. Calling entertainment “the god of this country,” Christiano says films with overt Christian content can help impact the culture for good.

“The church normally plays defense; my suggestion is we have to go on the offense,” he said. “If the Christians would support the Christ-honoring films, you’d see more of them.”