

Holy Spirit Drenches Baltic Youth

Edgars knew that smell anywhere. In fact, he knew it just a little too well.

The 22-year-old counselor at Saturday's Baltic Youth Festival had struggled with an alcohol problem for years before finding Christ and overcoming the addiction.

So when Matis, 34, approached him during Saturday afternoon's invitation from Franklin Graham to accept Jesus inside Arena Riga, he didn't even have to ask.

Edgars caught a whiff.

"I'm pretty sure it was beer," Edgars said, diagnosing the situation. "I was going to clubs three times a week so I know how it looks."

But Edgars wasn't interested in casting stones—or even raising an eyebrow—at Matis, for he remembers just "two years and two months ago," he was rescued from an alcohol bondage when he accepted Christ in his life.

In fact, he welcomed this very chance to share that same love of Jesus with Matis.

"For me, it is easy to speak to people who used to be the way I was," Edgars said. "I had a connection with him."

And thanks to a powerful gospel message by Franklin Graham and some blue-collar counseling from Edgars, Matis made a decision to give his life to the Lord. Edgars was convinced Matis was serious about making changes.

"I think so," Edgars said. "He was really excited about this when I talked to him."

Conversations mirroring that of Matis and Edgars were happening all over the arena, where one end was packed so tightly, you could barely make it through.

Youth by the hundreds flooded the stage area, designated for five different languages—English, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Russian—to talk to counselors about beginning a new life in Christ.

Some were coming forward to get a fresh start on their relationship.

Gatis, 27, made his way to the front and found another Edgars—a name quite popular in Latvia—who made sure Gatis knew, as Franklin Graham reminded the crowd that prayed: “You have just been forgiven.”

“That’s right, you’ve been forgiven,” Franklin Graham said, with the Arena Riga crowd erupting in applause. “Not only have you been forgiven, but God has forgotten. He’s hit the delete button.”

Gatis responded to the 11 p.m. invitation, according to Edgars, because “he wanted to reclaim his relationship with God.”

Gatis told Edgars, “I have turned my back on God.”

The one-day, two-session, 10-hour Baltic Youth Festival was a first in so many ways on Saturday. Not only was it the first time a Billy Graham Evangelistic Association youth-specific event was held outside North America, but it was the first mass evangelism effort anywhere close to this scope geared specifically toward the youth in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

“God already knows you’re a sinner,” said Franklin Graham, who has preached in all three countries since 2009. “But he wants you to say it.”

In many ways, Saturday's Festival was not unlike so many in BGEA history. There was an amazing array of music, from regional bands like Rebecca Kontus (Estonia) and the Gyvai Band (Lithuania) to New Zealand's Parachute band to U.S. Christian favorites, Michael W. Smith and the Newsboys.

Franklin Graham shared his heart, speaking out of Luke 19 about the story of Zacheus, and the Tommy Coomes Band passionately closed up each Festival session just like they have done more than 150 times now.

But there was one striking difference on this Saturday and it only took one short lap around Riga Arena to realize the potential in this place. A majority of the attendance appeared under 25 years of age, with very few past their 30s.

The power of reaching a generation could be seen on the faces, many etched in hopelessness. Yet two sessions on the same day both nearly reached capacity.

Saturday's Baltic Youth Festival was originally tapped for just a one-night show, but when the event booked up online nearly two months in advance, it was expanded. The result was twin four-hour shows, one at 2 p.m., one at 8 p.m., with two hours in between to shuttle more than 10,000 people in and out.

And as spontaneously as the youth responded to the Holy Spirit knocking on their heart, the changeover was structured and smooth. The first session ended precisely on time and the arena was cleaned and reset for another 9,000 people who packed the late show.

But as late as it ran—the Newsboys' nine-song set ended with the Revelation Song just after midnight—the energy levels remained high as the Holy Spirit continued to work.

And God worked mightily, just like He did in November of 2010 at the Festival of Hope in Riga. It's become a common

watershed moment and reference point for many of the Christians involved in this year's Youth Festival.

"Previously, in the Hope Festival, I was in the praying room upstairs," Janis, 31, said, pointing to the skybox between sections 107 and 108. "I could only hear what was going on."

This time, Janis wanted to make sure he got to experience the Festival as a counselor and was involved in several soul-winning decisions for Christ on Saturday.

"I love seeing people's faces change," he said. "When they start to believe, they start to smile."

[Click here to read the original story at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.](#)