

My Hope Haiti Counts 77,000 Decisions for Christ

It's happened so many times, Bill Conard has lost count.

The vice president of International Ministries for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association comes to a nation to cast the initial vision of the *My Hope* project.

And while it varies from country to country, the initial response to using a television network as a means for evangelism is about the same: It can't be done.

"In most countries, when we come and say we want to put evangelistic programs on television, they say, 'that's impossible,' " Conard said.

But then, praying begins in earnest. Negotiations start taking place. And God begins to move.

"Somehow the doors open," Conard said, "God moves in miraculous ways."

For Conard, it's a continual reminder of the power of prayer. "In the end, when we see thousands of people come to Christ, we leave the country and say 'Wow, only God could make that possible.' All this is God's work," he said. "All this is an answer to prayer."

HAITI (JULY 21-23)

The *My Hope* Haiti initiative will continue until Nov. 10, when the Grand Celebration will close down operations. But already, tens of thousands have come to Christ after the July broadcast covered this Caribbean island nation through TV, radio and portable projector screenings.

Each program lasts 30 minutes and contains music videos, testimonies and classic sermons from Billy Graham or Franklin

Graham.

With 57 percent of the churches reporting, over 77,000 decisions have been made for Christ.

"The Council of Evangelical Churches of Haiti had figured there were 3,000 churches in the country," Conard said. "But we registered 5,288. That brought a very strong response for the project."

In a country where the average church has about 80 members, the *My Hope* project has thus far seen about 20 new decisions per involved church.

The response was particularly refreshing considering the technological difficulties. A majority of the country heard the program on radio on 20 different national and local stations. The program was also shown on seven national and local TV stations, but most homes do not have a TV set and only about 25 percent have electricity (with an unpredictable power supply), creating a demand for small generators.

The program was also shown in some of the remote areas, using a total of 39 mini-projectors, which are about the size of a smart phone, can be recharged with a 12-volt battery, and are suitable for an audience of 50-75 people.

"God has worked in magnificent ways, far beyond our expectations and hopes," Conard said. "The project became larger than we had anticipated very soon after we got going."

Sept. 15 has been set as the deadline for churches to report their results. From then until Nov. 10, the mini-projectors will continue to be used by two-person teams who will travel to even the most remote corners and mountain valleys of Haiti.

ZAMBIA (DEC. 1-3)

With about 100 days left until the national broadcast, 1,824 churches have been trained in Zambia, nearly one-third of the

project goal.

"There are 6,000 churches, and the goal is to involve every church," Conard said. "There is a very strong church presence in Zambia."

TV programs are currently being produced and will be translated into the three main languages: English, Bemba and Nyanja. There are 72 different spoken languages throughout Zambia.

"People sometimes think this is a TV project," Conard said. "It is not. TV is the medium, but what gives life to the project is the life and personal witness of the Christians."

The emphasis in *My Hope* Zambia, just like the other 54 countries *My Hope* has covered since 2002, has always been on the Matthews. These hosts are trained people from involved churches who invite friends, family and neighbors over to watch the program and then share their own testimony before inviting people to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.

"These Matthews are people like the Apostle Matthew who invited his friends, family and neighbors into his home after he met Jesus, and Jesus shared the Gospel," Conard said. "These Matthews are the ones who really make the difference."

The size of the country – Zambia is larger than the state of Texas – makes it a challenge to reach every church in every corner, but the 43 district coordinators are eager to ensure every church hears about *My Hope*.

"Across Zambia, there are thousands and thousands of people being trained," Conard said. "One of the things they can do is start praying for their friends, family and neighbors, and that usually opens doors immediately."

PORTUGAL (DEC. 8-10)

The financial peril facing Portugal has created instability

but also a climate where people seem more open to hearing about the Gospel.

"The Portuguese Christians are very excited about this," Conard said. "There's a lot of bad news coming out of Portugal financially and yet the Portuguese are accepting their responsibilities better than other countries are. They can no longer trust in their job, in their social or economic situation, so there's a greater openness to God."

Approximately 1,600 churches are known in Portugal and the *My Hope* goal is to train 1,000 of these churches and 10,000 Matthews. So far, 716 churches have been trained.

"A spiritual awakening is taking place," Conard said. "Nearly every church is seeing people coming to Christ. We believe there's going to be a powerful movement of God."

In the early 1970s, a Billy Graham Crusade in the capital of Lisbon had to be cancelled because of the political climate. The idea that Billy Graham is now coming, in the form of the *My Hope* TV programs, has many excited.

"When we held the official launch of *My Hope* Portugal, it was thrilling to have some of the committee members from the 1973 aborted crusade effort present among our elder committee," Conard said. "They are thanking God that this time it's going to happen."

SPAIN (DEC. 15-17)

The final *My Hope* project this year may also be the most challenging. Spain has often times been called "the graveyard of missionaries," because of its secularization and resistance to the Gospel, causing many missionaries to return to their country after just a few years.

"Spain has always been a difficult country for the Gospel," Conard said. "The Apostle Paul saw Spain during his own lifetime. It's believed he landed in Tarragona, which is south

of Barcelona. Rome ruled Spain at the time and it's a probability that he and other Christians helped start the Christian church in Spain."

Another key catalyst for spreading the Gospel is the five Gypsy men in Spain who went to France to help with the grape harvest, heard the Gospel message, were converted and came back to Spain and started a countrywide revival.

The Gypsy Evangelical Movement, also called Philadelphia Church, is the largest denomination in Spain, with over 500 churches.

"This is a very lively community," Conard said. "The music is incredible."

An estimated 2,400 churches exist in Spain and the *My Hope* goal is to train 1,500. Thus far, over 1,000 have expressed interest, and almost 600 have received training.

"They are seeing answers to their prayers," Conard said. "They are beginning to see people coming to Christ. Pastors are seeing responses when they preach evangelistic messages."

One woman who is working in the *My Hope* office in Madrid has said her church, which normally has just one baptism a year, has already had three this year.

"She feels the current is changing," Conard said.

Like Portugal, the economy is on almost everyone's mind. Unemployment continues to plague this country, with 21 percent of Spaniards without a job. The number of unemployed between the ages of 20-35 spikes to 45 percent.

"It's absolutely enormous," Conard said. "But the believers are functioning. They are reaching out to neighbors and churches and starting to turn around evangelistically. They see this as God's time for Spain. To feel that Billy Graham has come to preach Christ's Gospel through the *My Hope* project

is thrilling to Spanish Christian leaders.”

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