

Experiencing 50 years of Teen Challenge

David and Don Wilkerson, Nicky Cruz, Steve Hill and Sonny Arguinzoni — all "headliner" names associated with Teen Challenge, the Assemblies of God affiliated ministry offering hope and healing for those in life-controlling problems. But what about Daniel Chesshir, Jerry Ireland, Rachel Ruiz, Kyle Randleman, John Melendez, Bobby Ilaria or Jennifer, Shirley, Tommy, Scotty, Cindy...multiplied thousands of men and women of all ages who have found Teen Challenge and Christ as the solution for their addictions?

Teen Challenge will celebrate tens of thousands of lives transformed when it hosts its 50th anniversary event, June 25-28, 2008, in New York City. Starting off with an opening rally at Times Square Church on Wednesday evening, June 25, this landmark seven-service celebration will continue through the week at the church, concluding with a massive gathering at Brooklyn Tabernacle on Friday evening.

According to Teen Challenge USA Director Mike Hodges, all 1600 seats are sold out for all the services at Times Square Church, but they are currently attempting to acquire an annex for overflow seating. Plenty of seats are still available at the culminating 7pm service on Friday, at the 3,500-seat Brooklyn Tabernacle (see <http://TeenChallengeUSA/50th> for more information).

Hodges says he and his team have been overwhelmed and pleased by the incredible response to the event.

Hodges and Product & Promotions Manager, Patty Baker, agree that, just like so many miracles in the history of Teen Challenge, the preparations for the 50th anniversary has seen an abundance of miracles as well.

"Everybody we asked to speak or lead worship at the event is willing," Baker says, ". . . no one turned us down."

"We also have people from over 35 countries attending," adds George Thomas, Business Manager. "One-third of those attending the celebration are from outside the United States."

Hodges says the event has served as a unifier, bringing together Teen Challenge USA and Global Teen Challenge like never before. He also lists free gifts given by both host churches, such as sanctuary space, staff, technology, and instruments, as a tremendous encouragement for which the ministry is grateful.

"The churches have rolled out the red carpet for us," Hodges says. "New York is an incredibly expensive city, but because of the churches' generosity, the celebration registration fee is only \$25." Echoing Bakers' comment, Hodges adds that the fact that all the key Teen Challenge leaders will be in attendance at the event, with the incredibly tight ministry schedules they have, was nothing short of amazing.

Hodges says that along with recognizing the multitude of miracles Teen Challenge represents over the past half-century, the event will also serve a secondary, but vital, purpose.

"When I met with David Wilkerson about the celebration, he asked me, "Why do this?" " Hodges recalls. "I told him that I believe that since the first generation of TC leaders is still alive, the history needs to be written down and documented. When this generation goes, the history is up for grabs unless we write it down."

Hodges says part of the historical record will include the Wednesday through Friday afternoon services being streamed live over the Internet (at <http://www.TeenChallengeUSA.com>) with the final service on Friday evening being available online about three hours after its conclusion. These services will also be preserved on DVD for documentation and purchase.

However, Hodges then tells of another miracle. Desiring to put together a documentary on Teen Challenge, to insure things were "put in order," Hodges was stymied at the prospect of educating a production company to the point where they could grasp the heart of Teen Challenge — not just report on it. But then, Hodges was linked up with a production company familiar with the ministry in Newport Beach, California. God had opened another door.

"I was put in touch with a production company called Lambert & Timmons," Hodges says. "I soon learned that Glenn Timmons was not only an award-winning producer, but he was a former director of the Southern California Teen Challenge!"

According to Hodges, Timmons not only agreed to do the project, but it was easy to see his heart was in it.

"He put a lot of his own money and time into the film," Hodges says. "He was really passionate about it — he even shot some of it in Europe."

Timmons produced five different videos for Teen Challenge: A 7-minute version that provides an overview of Teen Challenge; 20- and 22-minute versions that include the overview, specialty programs and history; a 28-minute version developed specifically for television; and a 35-minute full documentary with Nicky Cruz. All of the versions come on the one DVD.

In addition to the DVD being available, Teen Challenge is also producing a large, 190-page coffee table book featuring the history of the organization and a collection of some of the thousands of testimonies of Teen Challenge graduates. Baker says the preorders for the book are being taken already, with the book release set to coincide with the anniversary.

Even though Hodges says thousands of hours and dollars have been poured into the 50th anniversary event — and will likely be the largest Teen Challenge gathering ever — he believes Teen Challenge is still a well kept secret. Two new programs being introduced by Teen Challenge include a junior high/high school drug

prevention program (designed for church use also) called *Stay Sharp* (<http://StaySharp.us>) and a student and staff training program called *Emerging Leaders*.

However, Hodges and his staff anticipate a historic anniversary as well as look forward to upcoming opportunities to make the ministry synonymous with "overcoming addiction".

"We are already making preparations for a National Strategic Planning meeting, where many Teen Challenge leaders will gather in Riverside, California, this October," Hodges says. "With the government releasing figures that there are 20 million illicit drug users in the United States today, we have to determine how we are going to help meet the need."

Although the challenges are plentiful, Hodges is optimistic about God's continuing plans to work through the ministry.

"I've never been in anything that has so much blue sky than Teen Challenge," Hodges says. "There's so much you can do to develop this ministry — the sky is the limit!"

For more information on Teen Challenge, including details on its 50th anniversary celebration, visit <http://TeenChallengeUSA.com/>.