

# Times Square prayer impacts Big Apple

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
PETER K. JOHNSON IN NEW YORK



Master's Commission students hit the streets of New York.

*An AG 15-second video message flashed across New York's News Astrovision electronic billboard 480 times from Nov. 13-26.*



Responding within 24 hours to an unprecedented opportunity, the Assemblies of God advertised the God Gives Hope prayer hotline message on Times Square in Manhattan during the 2006 Thanksgiving season.

"It's the first time we have ever done something like this, and it just dropped into our lap," Communications Director Juleen Turnage says of the offer to advertise for a greatly reduced rate. "It snowballed into a massive effort in evangelism and prayer."

The 15-second video message flashed across the News Astrovision electronic billboard (formerly the NBC Jumbotron) 480 times from Nov. 13-26. The giant screen sits high above the street on Times Square, home of the New Year's Eve ball drop. Millions in the viewing audience eyed extra showings during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

The video ad displayed a trio of eye-catching spots on addiction,

terminal illness and marital conflict. Each one faded into the tagline "Life is never hopeless, call 1-800-4-PRAYER," linking callers to the AG National Prayer Center (NPC) and offering information about the [www.Godgiveshope.org](http://www.Godgiveshope.org) Web site.

NPC Director John T. Maempa reports more than 200 satellite prayer centers took part in the outreach. This included 28 congregations plus more than 100 volunteers in homes who joined the special prayer effort. An average of 1,000 calls came in daily to the prayer lines during the two-week period.

"The majority of callers got through the first time," Maempa says. The NPC hotline gained a new level of national recognition, and 10 new churches have asked to remain on the satellite response system, Maempa says.

Maempa notes this is the first time in NPC's 12-year history that phone lines were staffed around the clock. "Callers were able to pray with volunteers all hours of

the day and night." Maempa is encouraged that congregations plan to stay engaged at satellite prayer centers and says maintaining 24/7 coverage is a vital goal of the NPC.

Teams of U.S. missionaries, 100 Master's Commission International Network (MCIN) students from seven states, and more than 500 AG pastors and church members from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut shared the gospel in Times Square and throughout New York City's five boroughs. The outreach team distributed 90,600 *Stories of Hope*. New York City's largest Christian Radio station, WMCA-AM, aired testimonies in a live broadcast.

Robert Specter, an AG U.S. missionary, handed out the 20-page *Stories of Hope's* life-changing testimonies to a flood of pedestrians spilling onto Columbus Circle in Manhattan. A man standing nearby collecting donations for the homeless accepted a Bible like a piece of gold.

Specter is president of Rock of Israel ministries and traveled from Cincinnati to minister. "I came here because my heart is evangelism," Specter said. "I want people to know Jesus as Messiah."

Enthusiastic MCIN students evangelized passers-by and distributed thousands of booklets.

"Young people want to be part of something big," says MCIN President Eric Hunsberger. "We want to do anything we can to help the Fellowship."

During an outreach near a high school in the South Bronx, an area known for violence and crime, an MCIN team ministered to a gathering crowd of students. They led several teenagers to make salvation decisions.

"Inner-city kids need to know about the love of Jesus," said team member Phillip Hall of Evansville, Ind.

Master's Commission team member Madison Nedreberg confronted one teenage boy. Asking, "Do

you know Jesus as your personal Savior?" she led him to the Lord. The boy's mother appeared suddenly on the scene and began to cry when she heard what had happened.

Near Times Square, another MCIN team met a homeless man sitting by a building. After sharing the hope of Christ, they bought him two slices of pizza and prayed for him. They also witnessed to a fashion model who requested prayer. A homeless woman contemplating suicide prayed to receive Christ as Savior.

Not everyone responded so favorably. Several people jeered and cursed.

Initially, AG Intercultural Ministries Director Scott Temple ordered 50,000 copies of *Stories of Hope* for the outreach.

"I thought it was a big step of faith to order so many," Temple says.

However, in just the first two days more than 20,000 were given away, prompting Temple to call for a rush shipment of 65,000 additional copies from Gospel Publishing House.

"It says a lot about the receptivity of the people on the streets of New York," Temple says. "God has softened their hearts to receive the gospel."

AG U.S. missionaries Steve Kulish and Jeremy Sweeten coordinated community outreaches with AG churches. Veteran U.S. missionary Phil Goble, who coordinated the literature evangelism, said he had never seen such responsiveness in 27 years of New York street ministry. Don Geraci, U.S. missionary to the Jewish community in Brooklyn, prayed with local AG church members for two weeks from his post at Times Square Church. **tpe**

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