

# Hip-Hop Ministry Attracts Youth

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**H**IP-HOP MUSIC, in the popular imagination, often conjures up gang wars, crass language, and disrespect toward women. The deaths of prominent Hip-Hop individuals show the need to illustrate the positive side of Hip-Hop. So it is that hundreds of young Christians around the country are proving a point that even a music genre tarred with such a rep (reputation) can be used for the greater glory of God.

They are using Hip-Hop, with the assistance of the American Bible Society, as an evangelizing tool. That message is beginning to sink into the consciousness of Christian leaders as well.

The American Bible Society was a sponsor and participant in a conference in Tampa held late last year that brought together Christian youth music leaders from around the country in a summit to explore how Hip-Hop can make an impact in spreading the gospel. The Bible Society also held a meeting of church leaders to discuss how to use this genre in Christian outreach. Enthusiasm marked this exploration of using a culturally visible medium for conveying the gospel to youth who are searching for that which will define their lives in a more fruitful way.

The summit was part of the Fla.vorFest 2002 at Crossover Church in Tampa, Florida. Crossover has become internationally known for its unique style of reaching the Hip-Hop culture. The model provided by Crossover Church is one that is easily transferable to other locations.

Here is the blueprint for that event. The weekend included workshops:

drama ministry and how to reach youth through such activities

break dancing and reaching youth interested in dancing

Skateboarding ministry

Hip-Hop praise and worship reaching the music industry

hands-on ministry outreach in Tampa housing projects

concerts each evening

Performers with strange-sounding names, such as elle r.o.c., jah word, tre 9, rize, and legacy, among many others, proclaimed their love for the Lord. Joining them were Sean Slaughter, Knowdaverbs, Mars ILL, and Pettidee. The youth pastor of Crossover Church, Tommy Kyllonen, is known as a proponent of using Hip-Hop music to reach youth with a religious message. When he performs his raps, he goes by the name of Urban D. Joining him in planning the event was Brady Goodwin, also known as Phanatik of the Cross Movement Ministries.

Through the American Bible Society's (ABS) Elementz of Life Program, churches are assisted to present the gospel in formats relevant to youth and young adults affected by contemporary urban culture. The ABS leadership team suggests that several churches cooperate in creating such an event by putting together a task force in order to share responsibilities for workshop leaders and to attract a wide variety of participants.

"In the next five years Elementz will bring evangelism, discipleship and leadership to the Christian Hip-Hop movement," said Liana Roa, project director for the American Bible Society. The first outreach efforts will focus on bringing the gospel to nonbelievers in detention centers, gangs, and American Indian reservations.

This blend of Hip-Hop and the gospel is having an impact.

Jose Ramirez traveled all the way from Montreal to attend the Fla.vor Fest. He was impressed by the conference organizers. “They put God before anyone else,” he said.

Pastor Kyllonen of Crossover Church said the beat of the music and the camaraderie of like-minded music fans can attract a crowd. But he’s adamant about what keeps these young people returning to church: “It’s not the Hip-Hop. Because after a while, they would get bored and go somewhere else.” What draws the young, he says, is “the Spirit of God here. It’s the Word getting invested in their lives.”

Christian leaders who met at the American Bible Society headquarters in New York agreed that Hip-Hop is a necessary link to congregations seeking to reach youth. “As the world changes, the church has to respond or we will lose the world,” said Paul Risser of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in Los Angeles.

Some participants at the Bible Society meeting noted that initially they were reluctant but are now eager to incorporate Hip-Hop elements into their worship services. Simon Barnes of the Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools, said that

Hip-Hop Christian music needs to be of such high quality that it could attract ordinary fans of the genre. “Why should the devil have the best tunes?” he asked.

Conference participants agreed that Hip-Hop culture—despite the baggage it carries from some of its proponents who have promoted violence and other anti-Christian values—could still be used by churches to bring young people the gospel.

One participant, responding to critics who say that Hip-Hop culture is beyond redemption and that the church should ignore it or simply condemn it wholesale, asked, “How many of us take clean laundry to the laundromat?”

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*More information about the American Bible Society’s Elementz of Style Hip-Hop ministry can be obtained by contacting Liana Roa at 212.408.8759 or through the American Bible Society Web page at <[www.americanbible.org](http://www.americanbible.org)>.*



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