

Prayers answered as conference draws more than 5,000 youth

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GARLAND—More than a year ago, Texas Baptists youth evangelism staff began to pray for an outpouring of God’s Spirit on students who would attend the 2010 [Youth Evangelism Conference](#) .

They saw their prayers answered when more than 5,000 students and youth leaders filled the Garland Special Events Center and about 450 made professions of faith in Christ at the conference.



Organizers of the Youth Evangelism Conference saw their prayers answered when more than 5,000 students and youth leaders filled the Garland Special Events Center and about 450 made professions of faith in Christ at the conference. (BGCT PHOTOS)

“I’ve been a part of YEC for years, and I haven’t seen anything like this,” said Mandy Meeker, coordinator of the conference for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“We have been praying for a harvest for a year, and to see that in the flesh was just amazing. It was really wonderful to see students not drawn into an emotional decision but to see them respond to a straight-forward gospel presentation.”

In addition to a year of prayer, the youth evangelism team partnered with First Baptist Church in Wylie and [Real Encounter](#) , a Christian extreme sports outreach group, to engage students in Wylie and Sachse middle and high schools the last week of May before classes dismissed.

The Real Encounter athletes spent three days with 4,000 students at school assemblies talking about building character while performing skateboard and BMX bike stunts.

“We desired to get into places that students would be unreached otherwise,” said Leighton Flowers, BGCT director of youth evangelism.

“Often times as churches, we focus on our youth groups, and when we have an event like See You at the Pole or a DiscipleNow, they are pulling in the church kids. Real Encounter is focused on plugging in unchurched kids, and that has been our focus to reach out to unreached students.”

At the school assemblies, the students were invited to attend an event held at Wylie High School the last night of the assemblies. Students encountered more extreme sports but also heard the athletes share about ways Christ had transformed their lives and ways that the students too could have the same hope.

More than 1,000 people attended the event, and 55 students made first-time decisions to follow Christ during the harvest night. At the end of the night, every person received a free ticket to the Youth Evangelism Conference to see Real Encounter again and hear other speakers a month later.

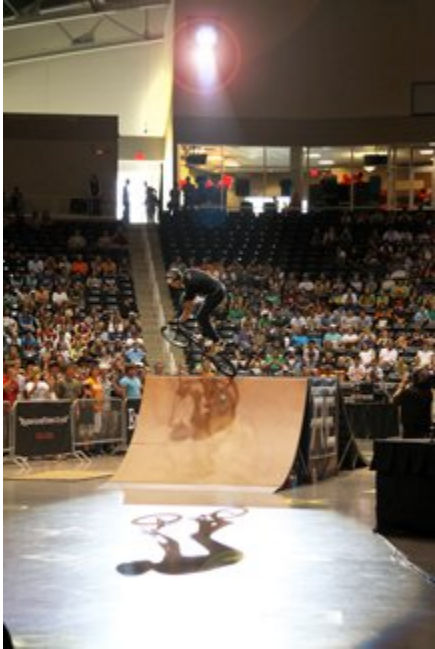
“We had a real desire to reach lost students and not just the youth groups,” Flowers said. “The youth groups occasionally bring some lost students, but we were thinking that there were some ways to reach students in the local area.”

The students who accepted Christ at the high school harvest night were then contacted by Sam Hallman, student pastor at First Baptist Church of Wylie, and other youth leaders in the church. Hallman said being part of the event has helped the church reach out and connect with students they otherwise couldn't engage.

“I got involved with Real Encounter as an opportunity to reach some kids we normally couldn't reach,” Hallman said.

“We had some kids show up at our event—the style and type of kid that normally wouldn't come into a church. I think the biggest benefit through this ministry was the relationship built (with) ... the administration at the schools. I see that continuing to hopefully begin to minister to clubs and groups within the school this next year.”

Several of the students attended the youth group after the harvest night, Hallman noted, some even going to youth camp with the church and a few coming back to Youth Evangelism Conference. More than 100 people indicated they attended the conference because of the involvement in the Garland-area schools by First Baptist Church of Wylie and Real Encounter.



Real Encounter athletes performed skateboard and BMX bike stunts at Youth Evangelism Conference.

When Real Encountered returned to Youth Evangelism Conference, they again drew a group that typically wouldn't attend the conference because they spent time at a local skate park before the event, building relationships with the skaters and letting them know they were welcome at the event.

One man accepted the invitation, attending the event and staying close to the Real Encounter team as they performed their flips and jumps. During the Friday night session, the man was touched by the gospel and accepted Christ as his Savior.

As many youth pastors heard the story of prayer for Youth Evangelism Conference and saw the group of students respond, many were encouraged to look for new ways to engage students in their local schools, reaching out to a group that may not walk through the doors of their church.

“YEC opened up some opportunities for youth pastors to see ways to reach their communities,” Flowers said. “That was a pleasant surprise that I hadn’t thought about that will have some future impact in our state. If we get people in our schools, then you will start to see students come to Christ. If you get towns and cities in Texas to do that, we will get a huge harvest. I think that there can be a good future harvest take place because (youth pastors) are being exposed to a new idea of reaching lost students.”



Real Encounter athletes appeared in school assemblies prior to the event to draw unchurched youth. (BGCT PHOTOS)

Speakers at the conference challenged students to see God as enough to fulfill them. Afshin Ziafat and Clayton King talked to students about not living life in a way where they focus on Jesus plus something else in order to be happy and fulfilled. Jesus is enough, Ziafat said.

“In 2 Corinthians 12, Christ is asking, ‘Am I enough for you?’ God has designed us to be men and women content with him,” he said. “God wants to know, ‘Am I more important to you than that one indispensable thing you

hold to in your life?' Jesus very clearly says you have to lay down your life for me, and then you will find it."

In addition to seeing God work through the number of students who professed faith in Christ, Meeker said she saw God's hand in sustaining the event. During the first night, thunderstorms knocked out power in the Garland area, but the Special Events Center remained unaffected. Meeker attributes this to God and to the prayer teams who prayed constantly throughout the weekend event.

Before the end of the conference, students also were encouraged to get involved with sharing their faith in Christ—locally and even internationally. On Saturday morning, 218 students who will serve with Super Summer Global and Super Summer Extreme were commissioned to serve this summer in Asia.