CELEBRATING 70 YEARS OF YOUTH FOR CHRIST

YFC’s History by Dr. Art Deyo

PRE-YFC DAYS

The Bible depicts history as very important. All of Psalm 78 looks on Israel’s past. Job 8:8 says, “Ask the former generations, and find out what their fathers learned…” In 1 Chron. 12:32, the men of Issachar “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” Youth for Christ has a rich history, and we must NOT forget the past as we plan ahead for a great future!

The grueling years of World War 2 had taken its toll. The world was ready for a change. Even before the war, the signs were there. God was stirring the world of youth. Youth workers in the church were few and far between. Probably the first youth rally director in America was fiery Lloyd Bryant. He organized weekly rallies for youth in the heart of Manhattan during the early 1930s.

Others also jumped on-board early on. Theodore Elsner began the Philadelphia Youth Center in 1933, and Evon Hedley began a youth fellowship called Brantford’s Youth for Christ in 1937. In 1938 Oscar Gillan initiated the “Voice of Christian Youth” in Detroit. Jim Rayburn started Young Life in 1937.

God was doing something very profound. Through the uncertain and even chaotic conditions in the world, He was causing pastors all over the world to see the need to reach youth – not just adults - with the Gospel. A converted dance-band trombonist, Jack Wyrtzen, launched a radio broadcast in Manhattan called “Word of Life Hour” and then linked it with Bryant’s rallies on Times Square. His first rally was broadcast on October 25, 1941. George Beverly Shea teamed up with Jack, and they had to move to Carnegie Hall. On April 1, 1944 they packed Madison Square Garden in New York City with more than 20,000 people while 10,000 more were turned away. It was the middle of the war, and many people were in desperate need of hope.

By the fall of 1942, Lacy Hall was challenging Torrey Johnson, pastor of the Midwest Bible Church, to start Youth for Christ in Chicago. Soon after that Bev Shea was on the staff of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He and a few friends urged Torrey to take the leadership of a Chicago rally.
In May, 1943, Roger Malsbary organized a rally in Danville, Indiana and later moved the rallies to the English Theater in downtown Indianapolis. Torrey Johnson was the first speaker and Dick Harvey was the second. The following February Dick began Saturday night rallies in the Municipal Auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri with over 1000 people. It is not an overstatement to say that God started the youth evangelism movement that became Youth for Christ.

**YOUTH FOR CHRIST BEGINS**

On April 17, 1944 Torrey Johnson called Doug Fisher, hired him, and plans for Chicagoland YFC were begun. The opening rally for Chicagoland YFC was held in Orchestra Hall on May 27, 1944 with Billy Graham speaking to over 2000 people. They packed that hall out every Saturday night for 21 weeks after that with an average of 2500 people. Preachers that summer included Harry Ironside, Jim Rayburn, Walter Wilson, Wendell Loveless, V. R. Edman, and R. G. LeTourneau. On October 21, 1944 a Victory Rally was held in the Chicago Stadium with over 20,000 people.

That summer of 1944 inquiries came to Chicagoland YFC about starting YFC in Tampa, Miami, Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Toledo, LaCrosse, Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, Rockford, Belvidere, Chicago Heights, Gary, Sunnyside, WA, Los Angeles and Bermuda. What started as a spark was rapidly becoming a wildfire! By January, 1945, Hubie Mitchell had started rallies in Los Angeles and the fire had spread to Kansas City, Grand Rapids, St. Petersburg, Charlotte, Shanghai, Paris, Norfolk, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Rio de Janeiro, Manila, Tokyo, Frankfurt, London, Seoul, Caracas and many others.

As many souls were being saved, it was obvious that this movement was of God. In an all-night prayer meeting, Torrey Johnson proclaimed, “O God, we want this kept on a miracle basis. We want everyone to know that God’s hand is on this movement. We want folks to see that this is too big and too great for any man or group of men to accomplish by themselves. We want folks to say, ‘GOD DID IT!’”

Torrey Johnson mortgaged his house to get the money to rent Chicago’s Soldier Field. On May 30, 1945, just three weeks after V-E Day in Europe, a huge Memorial Day rally with at least 70,000 people was held in Soldier Field featuring 500-uniformed nurses, a 5,000 voice choir, a 300-piece band, and eight grand pianos. Gil Dodds ran the track, soldier Bob Evans gave his
testimony, Percy Crawford preached, and hundreds came forward to accept Christ. During the course of the huge rallies in Chicago, the Hearst newspapers carried a full-page story of the new youth movement now reaching half a million young lives world-wide every Saturday night.

It was only seven weeks after that Chicago Soldier Field rally that 42 delegates met at the founding YFCI Convention at Winona Lake, Indiana, to hammer out a constitution and elect Torrey Johnson President. And Torrey, with his fiery personality, became the flag-bearer for the movement. They chose the seven point Statement of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals and came up with the slogan “Geared to the Times, Anchored to the Rock,” which still lives today.

**BILLY GRAHAM HIRED**

In August, 1945 he hired 27-year-old Wheaton College graduate, Billy Graham, as the first full-time YFC staff member. He was “on demand” to speak at rallies all over the country. That first year United Airlines cited Billy as their top civilian passenger after he traveled 135,000 miles with them. When Billy came to the one-room Chicago office, there was only one desk. Billy asked, “Where’s my desk?” Torrey told him, “You sit on one side of the desk, and I’ll sit on the other side!”

Charles Neville, writing for the Saturday Home Magazine on August 18, 1945, said, “A million and more teenage girls and boys have decided that boogie-woogie is old stuff and definitely on the way out….Youth for Christ is drawing the bobbysoxers and their boyfriends away from the jukeboxes and dark-boothed hideaways to a streamlined revival of that indestructible thing – the human soul….Youth for Christ talks turkey to its young audiences, and they love it!”
On September 20, 1945, Youth for Christ International incorporated in the state of Illinois. Three weeks later on October 7, 1945, 18,000 people packed out the Hollywood Bowl for a rally with Jack Shuler preaching. There were 1,000 decisions for Christ. In March, 1946, Ken Anderson began as Managing Editor of Youth for Christ Magazine, a monthly publication.

On May 30, 1946, Johnson organized a second Soldier Field rally with 75,000 attending. This time the rains came, but the speaker, Dr. Charles E. Fuller, stood up and asked calmly, “Please close your umbrellas. We’re going to ask God to stop the rain.” He prayed, and the rain stopped.

YFC SPREADS OVERSEAS

It was in March, 1946, that Torrey Johnson, Billy Graham, Chuck Templeton, Stratton Shufelt and Hearst reporter, Wes Hartzell, formed the first overseas team to Europe. Other nations for the first time heard the name “Youth for Christ” and decided to use that name for their growing youth ministries.

It was that same year that missionary, Dave Morken, began YFC in and around Shanghai, China. German-born Werner Burklin, who lived in China with his parents at the time, attended many of the rallies throughout 1947-48. Dave and his team preached all over South China with as many as 30,000 attending rallies every night in Xian. In the dramatic days of 1947 alone at least 30,000 people were won to Christ. It was in 1949 that Mao Zedong and the Communist takeover forced most of the missionaries and other foreigners out of China. YFC held rallies as long as possible to encourage the local people in the crisis. Morken was the last man out of China after being held by the Communists for several weeks. Then he and Dick Hillis and others won an estimated thousand converts a week in Formosa (Taiwan) over several months. At one time at least 30,000 Taiwanese were enrolled in follow-up Bible studies.

On April 7, 1947, missionaries Cyril Thomson and Walter Corlett held a rally in the Tiger Theater in Calcutta, India. They decided to call it “Youth for Christ” without knowing about YFC in America. They invited Hubert Mitchell to be the speaker. Hubert had had contacts with YFC in Chicago and
suggested that they join the movement out of the USA. They did so, and on that day, India Youth for Christ was born.

Boris Besmertny founded France YFC in 1946 and registered it in 1947. In August, 1948, a Super Rally of 22,000 was held in Nimes. Gene McGee was the next national Director. Jean Jacques Weiler came into YFC in 1963 and immediately took Gene’s place.

Holland YFC began in 1946 when a Chicago businessman was so grateful that his son returned from the war that he paid to have three Americans travel to Holland to stay for several years. Crowds jammed venues in Holland as thousands of young people came to hear visiting YFC speakers.

It was in 1947 that Jimmy Ferguson and Des Riley began Youth for Christ in South Africa. And it wasn’t long before they were pioneering YFC in North Africa.

Rallies appeared around the globe. At the YFC Convention at Winona Lake in 1948, Torrey Johnson reported that the international office was in touch with 800 rallies in North America. Billy Graham announced that YFC teams had gone to 46 countries the previous year. By 1951 Youth for Christ Magazine printed a list of 75 countries that YFC was in. But according to Bob Cook, that figure meant that YFC was in countries where a team had visited at least once a year.

**JACK HAMILTON ORGANIZES BIBLE CLUBS**

In 1946 Jack Hamilton felt the need to minister to kids in the local Kansas City schools by organizing Bible Clubs. They needed more personal discipleship than the rallies could provide. By early summer, 1948, Bob Cook, who succeeded Torrey Johnson as President, said, “The rally idea is sound, but in most places the rally is just the show window. Let’s get something on the counters the rest of the week.” What went on “the counter” were Bible Clubs. The idea spread quickly when Hamilton left Kansas City to promote the Clubs in other cities. By March, 1952 YFC clubs passed the 1000 mark, and by 1955 Jack Hamilton reported 1956 clubs in 41 U.S. states and 7 other countries. Clearly, YFC Bible Clubs had become for the 50s what Saturday night rallies had been for the 40s.

There was criticism from both the liberal theologians and the fundamentalists. But Frank Mead, a strong denominational man, rebuffed the critics in a strongly worded article in the *Christian Herald*: 

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Image 1: Huge Choir on stage at Billy Sunday Tabernacle

Image 2: Jack Daniel, Bob Cook, Ted Engstrom and Gene McGee

Image 3: Jack Hamilton,Organizes Bible Clubs

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“We in the church have offered youth everything from the Golden Gate Bridge to a 15c box of candy at Christmas….we’ve made it ridiculously easy to join the church….we’ve made a lot of our churches 90% country club and 10% Gospel Hall – and along come Youth for Christ leaders, offering nothing but the unvarnished Gospel we thought they didn’t want, asking them only that they change their whole way of thinking and their whole way of living. And youth goes for it, not in dribbles, not by twos and threes, but by thousands. Something goes on here that cannot be laughed off.”

**THE BEATENBERG WORLD CONGRESS**

In the summer of 1948 YFC held its first of 12 World Congresses in Beatenberg, Switzerland. The list of 230 delegates from all parts of the world looked like a World Evangelical “Who’s Who.” Many prominent pastors and mission leaders were there to talk about the worldwide impact and revival they wanted for Youth for Christ. The iron curtain wasn’t strong enough to keep out delegates from Poland and Hungary.

After Beatenberg, teams fanned out to many nations in Western Europe. This resulted in YFC beginning in Germany, Spain, England, Holland, Northern Ireland, Belgium, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, and Cyprus. Others journeyed to the Far East, Africa, Latin America and back to the U.S. and Canada. Citywide rallies in Ethiopia attracted up to 1500 people. Overflowing rallies were held in Yokohama, Japan and five nearby towns. The Palermo Brothers held meetings in a dozen cities in Italy. Paul Fried traveled to Spain and saw hundreds of conversions in Barcelona. In 13 days in January, 1949, John Huffman and 10 other New England YFC leaders invaded Cuba and held more than 30 indoor and open-air rallies, distributed 28,000 Gospel tracts, and conducted many radio broadcasts.

Everywhere the YFC people went, they filled halls, churches, tents, and saw decisions for Jesus Christ – 50, 100, 150 – night after night. It was true in the Far East as well as Europe. People who had lost confidence in man’s ability to chart his own course, who were both physically and spiritually hungry, responded to the Gospel.

World Congresses were held in successive years in Brussels, Belfast, Tokyo, Caracas, Sao Paulo, Copenhagen, Madras, Mexico City, and finally Bristol, England in 1960. These congresses
spurred on the ministry in the country in which it was held, and caused many delegates to desire to become missionaries.

**REVIVAL UNDER PRESIDENT BOB COOK**

As Bob Cook took the Presidency, the financial load from so many new obligations across the world became much heavier. In 1949 YFC Magazine reported, “The amazing thing is that Cook never talks in terms of dollars and cents without first emphasizing, ‘Let’s be sure we know God’s will in this matter. If we do His will, He’ll take care of the finances…. If our leadership stays on its knees and emphasizes evangelism, I feel that God may have many years of glorious harvest in store for us.’”

Evangelistic fires continued to blanket the globe. 1950 was a significant milestone, and scores of Mid-Century Evangelistic Campaigns erupted across the world. YFC was calling for revival, and revival happened as tens of thousands gave their lives to Christ that year. 12,500 made commitments to Christ in a 22-day crusade in Columbia, South Carolina. A four-week crusade in Boston with a total attendance of 162,000 resulted in 6,000 converts. A *Boston Post* reporter...
compared this event to the Great Awakening Revival with George Whitfield on the same Boston Common October 12, 1740. That same year 100 teams went overseas and in 1951 170 teams went overseas in YFC’s “Million Souls Crusade.” Bob Cook called these overseas teams the spiritual equivalent of the Marshall Plan.

**SPIN-OFF MINISTRIES OF YFC**

By 1951, however, Cook, was convinced that the one-shot rally approach was in serious trouble in many cities. Many felt that even the Bible clubs by themselves were inadequate. So Jack Hamilton and Al Metsker in Kansas City began “Bible quizzing” in all of their clubs. Within two years they had taken almost every club member through the New Testament in a series of quizzes. At Winona ’49 they sold quizzing to the nation, and by 1950 national quiz and talent contests were held at the Winona Convention. Many students memorized up to seven or eight books of the New Testament. Before long 20,000 teens a year were involved in quizzing.

Cook and others noticed that YFC was mainly reaching the happy kids and not the ones on the “seamy side of town.” Oakland picked up on this and in 1948 held a summer camp for troubled youth. Interest greatly increased when a 17-year old from British Columbia won two teenage murderers to Christ. Los Angeles YFC Director, Roy McKeown, organized six summer camps for delinquent boys. Impetus for a Youth Guidance Department came in 1952 when a Gary, Indiana, gang member, Ralph Cavanaugh, was converted under the ministry of Bruce Love. His conversion won the heart of the Governor of Indiana, who then provided and renovated Camp Muskatatuck for 100 troubled boys to attend camp every week for 10 weeks each summer.

During this time YFCI established the role of Youth Guidance Director to steer this outreach to troubled youth. Wendy Collins from Wyoming was one of the earliest directors. He changed the name to Lifeline and set up a sponsorship program for people to sponsor a boy for $5 per month. Lifeline ministries sprung up in many YFC programs.

**YFCI MOVES TO WHEATON AND MATURES**

Meanwhile, Bob Cook moved the YFCI headquarters to Carol Stream, Illinois, and built a president’s “cabinet.” The character of his staff indicated, as he put it, that “the flamboyance of the past was giving way to animated dignity.” It was Cook’s answer to the perpetual complaint that YFC was frothy, superficial, sensational, and unstable.
Less than ten years after the YFC movement became an organization, most of the key founders had moved on. Torrey, except for occasional rallies and anniversaries, had moved into general evangelism. Roger Malsbary and Richard Harvey had returned to ministries within the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Bob Pierce eventually started World Vision. Bob Evans founded Greater Europe Mission. Paul Freed began TransWorld Radio. Dick Hillis started Overseas Crusades, and Bob Finley organized International Students, Inc.

Many of the people who initially jumped on the opportunity to be involved in YFC were young men who never thought about making it a career. Understandably, many spun off to start other ministries closely related to what they had been doing in YFC. Well over 100 non-profit organizations and mission agencies were founded by former YFC staff. Of these, Billy Graham is the most famous. He built his own evangelistic team from some of the best people in YFCI. He got business manager George Wilson from Minneapolis YFC. Crusade organizer Walter Smyth came from Philadelphia. T.W. Wilson and Cliff Barrows came from the YFCI field staff. T.W.’s brother, Grady, was a regular YFC speaker. Associate evangelist, Leighton Ford and pianist Ted Smith, came from YFC in Canada. Soloist George Beverly Shea, though never a YFC staff member, had sung for many rallies.

Billy’s team also got from YFC much of the expertise for holding successful evangelistic crusades. In a sense, Billy Graham never left YFC. He continued as a board member of YFCI, and until his schedule became too tight, spoke almost every summer at the Winona Lake Convention.

Kelly Bihl conducted the first YFC Director’s School in September, 1954 in Kansas City. The first Midwinter Convention was held in Chicago in 1956.

By 1955, so many of the veterans had left that Bob Cook wailed “Everybody’s bailing out except me!” But at the 1956 Winona Convention, he reported that YFC had more maturity, more humility, and not so much grabbing for position and power. “We are no longer a group of evangelical gadgeteers. The money situation is better. The statistics are thrilling – 33,000 decisions in the rallies and 20,000 more in the clubs last year.”

**BOB PIERCE CHALLENGES YFC TO SPECIALIZE IN HIGH SCHOOL EVANGELISM**

But at that same 1956 Winona Lake Convention, Bob Pierce accused YFC of trying to do too much. He wanted YFC to do like World Vision – specialize
in what you do best – high school evangelism. Pierce’s blunt talk first shook, then challenged the staff. Men began saying, “He’s right. We’d better start pruning the tree.” Seven months later, on Valentine’s Day, 1957, Bob Cook resigned as YFCI President. Although he consented to step up to become chairman of the board, many felt he had deserted the ship. The directors met in a lengthy emergency session and accepted Bob’s choice, Ted Engstrom, to be acting president until the full convention of delegates met at Winona in July.

Ted had been Executive Director since 1951 and, according to Bob, knew more about YFC than anybody else. Serious internal problems faced Dr. Ted, as he was called. Despite many difficulties, YFC continued on a miracle basis.

Club work continued to expand under Bill Eakin and reached an all-time high in 1960 with 2,763 clubs in the U.S., Canada and overseas. YFC leaders dubbed the 60s as the “Decade of Destiny,” and to kick it off the last week of 1959, they asked Chicago staff man, Jack Daniel, to organize the first Capital Teen Convention in Washington D.C. 10,000 teenagers, flew, rode the bus or train or drove into D.C. and surprised the politicians by their orderly behavior. A second Capital Teen Convention in December, 1962, drew another 10,000 students.

FROM TED ENGSTROM TO KELLY BIHL TO SAM WOLGEMUTH

A few weeks after that, YFC leaders were faced with Ted Engstrom’s resignation. That threw the Midwinter Convention in Denver into a frantic effort by many to push their favorite personalities. Finally, after two days of wrangling, they elected a compromise candidate, Carl “Kelly” Bihl, who was “a good preacher,” and “a man of prayer.”

In February, 1961, Wendy Collins led the first Teen Team to the Middle East and Southern Europe. Teen Teams consisted of a group of young adult musicians 18-20 years old committed to take a summer, a semester or a year out to travel overseas and minister for YFC. With Paul Robbins assisting, they generated tremendous
statistics over the next nine years. 37 teams; 70 countries; 1,169,000 miles; 14,800 meetings; 2,900,000 attendance; 25,700 first time decisions. Many of the team members continued full-time in YFC or other ministries.

Characteristic of this time was television, which started to consume much of teenagers’ time. Newspaper and magazine circulation increased, church attendance began to wane, and tourism increased. Kelly Bihl presided over a stormy sea of dissatisfaction. There was an exodus of older directors as rally/chapter standards were raised. The conflicts tore deep into Kelly’s heart, as he was used to calling prayer meetings to solve problems, but he saw that more than prayer was needed to pilot this ship. In March, 1965, he resigned to join the staff of John Brown University.

The delegates to the January, 1965, Midwinter Convention unanimously elected Sam Wolgemuth, a Pennsylvania farmer’s son and Bishop in his small Brethren in Christ denomination, as the fifth President of YFCI. Nine years as Director of YFCI Overseas Ministries and two years (1952-54) in Japan gave him a worldwide perspective that none of his predecessors had.

Sam Wolgemuth was the man of the hour for an organization that had long struggled to become a cohesive team. He was flexible and open to change. He was admired for relating well to his teenagers at home. He moved quickly to assume leadership of the five division heads in the headquarters office: Bill Eakin, Campus Life High School Ministry; Wendy Collins, Overseas Ministries; Bruce Love, Lifeline; Harold Myra, Literature; and Jay Kesler, Leadership Development. He soon added a sixth cabinet member, Paul Van Oss, as Executive Director.

Up until the early 60s Youth for Christ Magazine had been overseen by Warren Wiersbe, mainly as a “house organ.” Harold Myra decided to change that. In October, 1965 the name of the magazine was changed to Campus Life, with splashy colors and provocative articles geared to the swinging sixties. The circulation of the magazine increased from 30,000 to 160,000 in just a short time – especially with local chapters participating in magazine sales contests. Christian colleges began advertising in the magazine, and many Campus Life kids began to enroll in those colleges. At
some of them up to half of their students stated that they first heard of the college through *Campus Life* magazine.

Campus Life radically changed the YFC club ministry, which had been run mostly by students or volunteer staff. In 1963-64 chapters such as North Area and San Diego instigated a huge shift in ministry philosophy and approach, resulting in the “Insight/Impact” concept. Insight was designed for the spiritual growth of Christian students while Impact was geared to reach non-Christian students through their Christian peers. Most often a full-time staff person would be assigned to one or two school clubs, and they would spend much of their time at those schools doing contacting, attending sports events, having 1:1 appointments, conducting retreats and following up on club meetings. Field staff with the best ideas funneled those concepts to the national office, which published them in manuals and distributed them nationally.

Youth for Christ worldwide by that time was quite ethnically diverse. But not so in the U.S. Jay Kesler and other men such as Jack Daniel in Chicago began a program to develop black leadership. Jack recruited Russ Knight in 1969 to become the first full-time black staff member in YFC/USA. Before long Russ was running clubs in nine high schools in downtown Chicago, where the whites of the 40s and 50s had fled to the suburbs. With the help of the “world’s largest banana split” and other attractions, up to 500 students attended Russ’s clubs. Black pastor Bill Pannell became Associate Director of Leadership Training, but he resigned three years later when he realized how reluctant young blacks were to join a “lily white” organization.

For six years Bill Eakin spent more time on the road than at home, living every possible minute with teenagers and directors - collecting ideas for clubs. Gradually his philosophy of youth work sharpened into what he called “the balanced life,” which was based on Luke 2:52, the only biblical reference to Christ’s days as a teenager. It stated that “The Balanced Life is the philosophy that strives to develop a spiritual, physical, mental and social balance in the life of a Christian teenager that will enable him to properly and successfully communicate in action and word his personal faith in Jesus Christ to his friends, his campus and his world.”

Gary Dausey launched a totally new training ministry to church youth leaders and volunteers called “Seminars on Teen Dynamics.” This became an international model called the Youth...
Leaders Training School (YLTS). Bill and Ellen Spade were the first couple to participate in the Y-2 program in the U.S. – to send qualified college graduates overseas for two years to work under national YFC leadership. This was a precursor to the Y-1 and Y-2 International programs.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FORMED

In 1964, the year before Sam became president, YFC leaders from around the world met in Switzerland and outlined an International Council. They met again in 1966; then in 1968 they put together a constitution and by-laws, and the U.S. organization, which had claimed the international title for so long, became one more equal partner in a world-wide council. New Zealander, Ray Harrison, was elected Executive Secretary, and a year later set up an International Office in Geneva, Switzerland. Sam was elected President of YFCI but continued to preside over the U.S. program. The constitution stated that there would be two official delegates from each nation to the YFCI General Assembly – the National Director and the Board Chairperson or their approved representatives.

International Convocations continued every three years: Cyprus in 1971; Les Diablerets, Switzerland in 1974; Rio de Janeiro in 1977; Birmingham, England in 1980; Hong Kong in 1984; Manila in 1987; Nairobi, Kenya in 1990; Chicago in 1993; Taiwan in 1996; Denver in 2000; Belo Horizonte, Brazil in 2003; Denver in 2005; Magaliesburg, South Africa in 2008; and Denver in 2011. Starting in 2000 the convocation name was changed to GA (General Assembly).

On May 5, 1980 YFC in the U.S. officially dropped the “I” from its name and became YFC/USA, registering with the IRS on that date. In 1983 the International Office was moved from Switzerland to Singapore because it was cheaper and because the majority of the world’s young people live in Asia.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF YFC/USA

The thousand rallies in big and small towns around North America in the 40s and 50s began to shrink as the realities of follow-up and finances took their toll on YFC leadership. YFC in the USA began to consolidate into chapters with a Board of Directors governing each chapter. At the same
time the national office laid down certain requirements for training and credentialing of staff, reporting of ministry results, and financial integrity.

When the U.S. National Office in the early 70s imposed a 0.5% service fee on all local chapters in order to pay for some of its services to the field, there was some opposition. Because of the change of name from Youth for Christ magazine to Campus Life and some of the new Campus Life club methodology, about 15 chapters, including Kansas City, had had enough. They certainly didn’t want to pay ½% of their income to (in their view) a “liberal-leaning” organization, so they left YFC in 1973 and formed the Youth Evangelism Association (YEA). That year Jay Kesler became President of YFC/USA and had to deal with the fallout from that exodus.

When Jay became president, YFC/USA was about $1.5 million in debt. Sam felt bad leaving Jay with that burden, so he suggested they go see one of the men Sam had led to Christ, Bob Stranahan, CEO of Champion Spark Plug. When Bob offered them $1 million worth of stock, Sam and Jay both went out to their car and wept for joy over God’s great provision.

Later in Jay’s presidency YFC/USA ran the three-hour Johnny Cash Youth Special on local TV stations all over the country. Besides Johnny Cash, a number of Hollywood actors assisted in this project, including Bill Cosby, Barbara Mandrell, and Andy Griffith. The first night it aired, the TV program grossed over $400,000. Most of the chapters who ran the special made enough money to hire several new staff.

The 70s and early 80s were the pinnacle of the success of the Summer Institute in Rockford, Illinois. Bruce Barton, Art Deyo, Jim Galvin and Bill Eakin ran the three-week long training program for new incoming staff. Art also ran the week-long School of Theological Studies (STS).

For most of the years of his presidency, Jay led a very successful Family Forum
radio broadcast on many stations across the country. Most of the time he would answer questions that people would write in to ask him.

In 1980 Earl Schultz was named the Director of World Outreach for YFC/USA. This began a serious and systematic recruitment and training of Americans to send overseas to help our national programs. Earl teamed with Bud Sparling, Jim Meredith and Bob Broyles to found Military Community Youth Ministry (MCYM) in Europe. The U.S. Military even provided some contract money for Americans to work with “military brats” on U.S. bases all over the world.

In the early 80s Bruce Barton, Dave Veerman, Jim Galvin and Ron Beers formed a Publishing arm of YFC/USA. Several books such as *Husbands and Wives*, *Youth Evangelism*, *Parents and Children*, *Parents and Teenagers*, and *Practical Christianity* were published. Jay approached Tyndale and Ken Taylor for an advance to publish a Bible commentary for teenagers, but finally Tyndale agreed to publish *The Life Application Bible* if it would be geared to both youth and adults. Today it is the #1 selling study Bible in the world, having sold over 40 million copies in 44 languages. But later when YFC ran into financial problems, they sold *The Life Application Bible* and the Publishing Division was disbanded.

In 1985 Jay Kesler resigned the Presidency of YFC/USA to become President of Taylor University, where he served for 12 years. That same year YFC/USA combined with Campus Crusade for Christ to put on a large youth conference in Washington, D.C. Most of the 13,000 youth who attended were Christians who were trained in how to share their faith.
But as many as 300+ came to faith in Christ for the first time. The staff of YFC/USA put on another conference in D.C. by themselves in 1988 and 1991. Then in 1994, 1997 and 2000 the conference was run both in D.C. and Los Angeles back to back. In 2003 it was held in DC, Sacramento and Cincinnati. Many overseas staff came to be trained in how to have such conferences in their own nations. 15,000 students pledged abstinence until marriage at DC94. The DC/LA 2006 was sold to and run by Youth Specialties.

In 1986 Dick Wynn was elected President of YFC/USA. In 1987 he organized an Alumni gathering in Chicago that drew all the former presidents and a host of other staff in what was called “A Celebration of Hope.”

THE STABILIZATION AND GROWTH OF YFCI

Sam Wolgemuth remained President until the August, 1980, International Convocation in Birmingham, England elected Jim Groen as President and Jim Wilson as General Director. Jim Wilson had served as the Training Director since 1974. At that time Jim Groen presented the new YFC logo, which has lasted to this day. When Jim Wilson was elected General Director in 1977, Jim Groen asked Art Deyo to serve as Training Director.

In the 1980 Convocation delegates voted that all International Staff had to live outside the United States. Several Americans on the YFCI staff then resigned since they felt they couldn’t move their families overseas. Jim Groen traveled all over the world during the 80s to visit and encourage our national programs.

The sixth Triennial YFCI Convocation was held in Hong Kong in the summer of 1984 with the theme “Touching One Young Billion.” For better
effectiveness and efficiency the number of world areas was reduced from ten to five. A program of “strategic shifts” was adopted, and organizational chartering of each country was begun.

In August, 1987 the Seventh Triennial YFCI convocation was held in Manila, Philippines. Again the theme was “One Young Billion,” the number of youth in the world at that time. The focus was on unreached youth, mobilizing the church and developing ministry models.

At the Eighth Triennial YFCI Convocation in Nairobi, Kenya in 1990, Gerry Gallimore of Jamaica was elected as President and Jim Groen was elected as Chairman of the YFCI Board. But in 1991 Jim resigned to start his own organization, the Worldwide Leadership Council. The next year, “YFCI Ministries” was formed in Denver, Colorado, USA with Ernie Taylor directing. The YFCI offices still were located in Singapore, but YFCI Ministries provided a convenient office in Denver from which to raise money and provide other services for the global movement.

In 1990 Larry Russell had become the head of World Outreach for YFC/USA. In 1992 he began the concept of Liaison Directors for each of the five areas of the world. These consisted of Art Deyo, Eric Burklin, Dave Bidwell, Bill Housley and Phil Kruger. These men provided a valuable link between the U.S. programs and the national programs in the areas they were assigned. Dick Wynn went on to become the Asia-Pacific Area Director living in Singapore.

The 1993 YFCI Convocation was held in Chicago, with Gerry Gallimore being re-elected as President. More than 70 countries were represented by the 800 delegates. There were 54 chartered nations when the week began, but 11 more were added for a total of 65. Four white papers were given to challenge the staff to begin reaching four kinds of youth that YFCI was reaching very little: young people of different cultures, displaced communities, poor communities, and those of a younger age (10-13).

YFC/USA’S MOVE TO DENVER AND ENSUING MINISTRY

In 1990 YFC/USA moved their offices from Wheaton, Illinois to Denver. This caused a great crisis and a $4.5 million debt. Dick Wynn resigned in 1991 and Roger Cross was asked by the Board to
take the Presidency. Jim Groen and several local board members consulted about whether the U.S. ministry should close down. Against the advice of several local businessmen, Jim and Roger decided to keep it open, and within a short time God provided the medical group, Copic Trust, to buy the building and all the furniture and rent their old 20,000 square foot facility with all the furniture provided. Within three or four years the debt was paid off, and YFC/USA moved into their current facility in Englewood, Colorado. This building is now called the “June Thompson Building” in honor of the woman who has served six YFC/USA presidents. Besides YFC/USA it houses the offices for both YFCI and Denver Area YFC.

In 1993, 3Story™ Evangelism was written by Bill Muir and introduced at Southwest States Regional Conference. An early form of it was taught at DC/LA ‘97 and the entire program was taught at DC/LA 2000. Students learned to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in the timing of sharing “My Story, Your Story, and God’s Story.”

In 2004 Roger Cross resigned as President of YFC/USA and the Board Chairman, Jim DeKryter, was asked to become the interim CEO. In April 2005, Dan Wolgemuth, son of Sam Wolgemuth, was elected President of YFC/USA by the Board of Directors. Dan left his job at HNTB in Kansas City and moved to Denver with his wife, Mary. Under Dan’s leadership YFC/USA became stronger and more unified than ever before.

For the past 10 years Molly Ramseyer has grown the YFC/USA Summer Camping ministry from one camp in 2004 to 11 camps in 2014 with 2750+ youth, 5 paid staff and 400+ volunteers.
In 2012 the Cabinet of YFC/USA implemented a “United Focus” program, with a goal to put 20,000 leaders in Christ-sharing relationships with 100,000 lost kids by 2015. Dan Wolgemuth reported that this goal was actually reached in October, 2013. Then in 2014 the YFC/USA Board began “The Campaign for America’s Cities.” Phase 1 of this campaign covers three years, four cities and 1.5 million kids – in Houston, Chicago, Miami, and New York, with a financial goal of $6,000,000.

Also, in 2012, Art Deyo was commissioned to conduct a History Project for YFC/USA, with the goal of videoing powerful God-stories from older staff and former staff to put on the YFC/USA website. This project is still ongoing and is meant to fill in the history of YFC after 1953, which was the stopping point of Earl Schultz’s excellent video, *A Step Ahead of Time*.

**A CRISIS DEVELOPS IN YFCI**

In 1996 the YFCI General Assembly was held in Taipei, Taiwan, with the theme, *Their Future, Our Passion!* Sam Sherrard was elected President. Sam was originally from Sri Lanka but had pastored and run YFC in Hawaii for years. Dick Wynn presented a two-year “Organizational Development Study” (ODS) that suggested some structural changes to YFCI and a strategy for the way forward. This Organizational Development Study was accepted in Taiwan but never implemented under Sam Sherrard’s leadership. Sam did provide a very useful *YFCI Handbook* in 1998, but he resigned that year for health reasons, and the Board installed Jean Jacques Weiler, from France as Interim YFCI President. It was a great concern that YFCI had a crisis of leadership.

Jean Jacques had come into YFC in 1963 as the National Director for France YFC. He served in that capacity for 24 years and then replaced George Brucks as European Area Director in 1987. In 1989 the Berlin Wall was taken down, and Eastern Europe opened up to YFCI. Under Jean-Jacques’ leadership, and with help from Bob Tanner and others, YFC was able to open ministries in Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova, Belarus and the Czech Republic.

In 1997 the leaders of Africa YFC, led by Area Director, Don Osman, met in Ghana and were asking “Where are the results of our labors in Africa after these 50 years?” After several days of discussion,
reflection and prayer, the Holy Spirit gave them the directive called Generation 21. It states that the staff are “to be God’s catalyst in faithfully developing a pan-African generation of young people who will be characterized by prowess in spiritual warfare, boldness in evangelism, passion in social involvement, godliness in leadership and reflecting an exemplary Christian life.” Out of Generation 21 several social programs were developed.

The G 21 statement became the model for a Strategic Focus Statement for the movement when the Global Ministry Plan was developed at a meeting in Hungary in 2002 (see picture on page 21). The YFCI Strategic focus statement is: YFC reaches young people everywhere, working together with the local church and other like-minded partners to raise up lifelong followers of Jesus who lead by their godliness in lifestyle, devotion to the Word of God and prayer, boldness in evangelism and commitment to social involvement.

**JEAN JACQUES LEADS YFCI THROUGH THE CRISIS**

As Jean Jacques took the reins of the organization, he realized that although YFC was facing some significant structural, relational and financial problems, the heart of our problem was spiritual, and that all of YFC needed to get on their knees and confess sin. He read that God had told Jeremiah that if the people confessed their sins, God would bless them. For the first year, Jean Jacques traveled the world confronting issues and seeking reconciliation within the movement. The entire leadership team met at The Cove and asked for forgiveness. While God was doing some wonderful things through some healthy YFC nations, the YFCI Headquarters was very broken; it was a weak and ineffective organization.

In March, 2000, a Prayer Conference was held in Multahl, Germany for three days. About 35 people attended, and the only agenda was prayer. On the first day people confessed personal sin and had a three-hour “discipline of silence.” The second day they confessed corporate sins and talked about YFCI’s future. God showed them that many leaders were building “their own kingdoms,” and that many staff people over the years had been seriously
injured by YFC. On the last day when communion was served, reconciliation began to happen. Long distance calls were made seeking reconciliation with former YFC staff who had left injured. The prayer gathering in Multahl was a turning point for the movement. From that point forward the leadership team was committed to work together and saw hope for the future.

Jean-Jacques was an instrument of God to bring healing and health to the YFC movement. His clarion call at the General Assembly in Denver, Colorado, in 2000 was “Kingdom Mentality,” putting the values of God’s Kingdom and the advancement of God’s Kingdom ahead of any personal agendas.

In June, 2001, 35 International leaders met in Valence, France, to make some key decisions about the future of YFCI. It was a time of great praise, worship, and prayer. The major outcome of this gathering was The Valence Covenant, which committed those who signed it to not let the past dictate the future, to choose to believe the best about each other and to move from mistrust to trust. Copies were sent to the National Directors and Board Chairs. God created a new spirit in YFCI at this gathering.

In September, 2001, the world changed. People all over the world were affected by “9-11.” With increased terrorist threats, YFC knew the ministry to young people was needed more than ever. People frequented church and sought the Lord more, but, unfortunately, it didn’t last.

In May, 2002, a YFCI Strategy Meeting was held in Budapest, Hungary. The leadership was asked, “What kind of organization do you want?” In response to an earlier mandate God had given the leadership, it was decided to “give the ministry back to young people.” In other words, YFCI needed to do youth evangelism through young trained leaders. There was an emphasis on leadership development.
Out of this meeting Jean Jacques asked Linda Stershic to become the Global Prayer Coordinator, taking the place of Ron Berger, who had been in that position for two years. In the last 12 years Linda has developed this prayer ministry to the point that she sends out four devotional messages every day and sends prayer requests to 13 different groups every week. This includes the weekly epray, which goes all over the world. The fact that YFCI survived this crisis is a testimony to God’s grace in response to people who humbled themselves before Him, and a testimony that God had raised YFC up to reach youth with the Gospel, and the He is not finished with YFC yet!

YOUNG LEADERS AND PIONEERING UNDER DAVID WRAIGHT

In September, 2003, a YFCI General Assembly was held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. More than 80 young leaders were invited to attend from many different countries. They were mostly full-time staff considered to be the up-and-coming leaders of their respective national YFC programs. A Global Ministry Plan called for pioneering YFC in 30 countries in the next ten years. David Wraight, of Melbourne, Australia, who had previously been the Area Director for Asia-Pacific, was ratified as the new YFCI president by the 80 nations present. Jean Jacques Weiler was to remain on for one more year to make a smooth transition.

In July, 2005, the triennial General Assembly was held in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It began with an extended Concert of Prayer in the World Prayer Center. 80 countries were represented. A highlight of GA 2005 was the presentation of many ministry resources that had been developed by a global Ministry Team under the leadership of Don Osman, who served as Vice President of International Ministries at the time.

In 2007 YFCI President, David Wraight published his first book entitled *The Next Wave*, which described “empowering the generation that will change the world.” David’s conclusion was, “I sincerely believe that living authentic, revolutionary lives for Jesus, and reaching, teaching, mentoring, and empowering young people to impact the
world is the most strategic thing we can do to ensure as many as possible join us in that great gathering in the heavens with our Lord and Savior.”

The September, 2008, Triennial General Assembly was held in Magaliesburg, South Africa. 750 YFC leaders from 80 nations attended. 323 of those attending were young leaders who were beginning a two-year “Young Leader Development and Empowerment Process.” The young leaders were symbolically given the keys to the organization and allowed to give a great deal of input and leadership. A large percentage of those youth are still involved in the movement, and many of them were the driving force behind the pioneering of new YFC nations during a time of explosive growth from 2008 to 2013.

The theme of the 2011 Triennial General Assembly held in Denver was “Your Kingdom Come.” The purpose was to explore what it means for the Kingdom to come in the lives of YFC staff and how they could better characterize Jesus and reach, love and empower young people to advance the Kingdom of God. Dr. Ajith Fernando, of Sri Lanka, challenged the 320 staff from 81 countries with the importance of Biblical truth in our life and ministry. Dr. Mike Treneer, President of the Navigators, warned the staff of the dangers of syncretism, pluralism and universalism.

Evidence of the amazing growth we experienced during this time is that after adding six new full YFC charters, we had a total of 71 nations with full charters at the 2011 General Assembly. In addition, we had 25 target nations and were actively pioneering in 35 nations - 8 in Africa, 11 in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, 6 in the Americas and 10 in the Asia-Pacific Area.

In 2011 David Wraight published his second book, Kingdom Come – in my Life, in the Church, in The World. Through compelling stories and biblical investigation, he takes his readers on a journey from complacency and religiosity to radical, world-changing, Kingdom living. He concludes his book, “Sowing the seeds of the Kingdom in one life has the power to transform whole communities. Many of the
young people to whom I have introduced Jesus over the years have gone on to share their experience of the Kingdom with others. Whole families, communities, churches, and in some cases nations have been impacted through the sowing of the seeds of the Kingdom in these young peoples’ lives.”

Since David Wraight had committed to be President for 10 years, the Board of Directors began searching for his successor in July, 2012. Geordon Rendle was confirmed as David’s successor in March, 2013, with a plan for them to work together until Geordon became President January 1, 2014. Geordon is Canadian, and grew up as a missionary kid in Colombia where his parents served with Prison Fellowship. His mother’s family were the “Musical Neals,” a family music team that was active in the early days of YFC all over North America. He and his wife, Marilyn, have served in YFC for 20 years, beginning in Victoria, but mostly in Venezuela and Argentina. He became the Area Director for the Americas in January, 2010.

As of October 14, 2013 there were 83 chartered nations, 56 pioneering nations, and 23 target nations in YFCI. We could legitimately say that we are in 139 nations. If we count target nations, we will soon be in 162 nations, which is 83% of the total countries in the world. For the fiscal year, 2012-13, with 95 nations reporting, there were 3.9 million young people impacted by direct ministry and 700,891 impacted by media ministry. There were 194,179 young people who responded to the Gospel, and 133,249 in follow-up and discipleship. There were 709 local ministry centers, 27,881 full-time, part-time and volunteer staff, and 10,995 churches partnering with YFC in ministry. Total worldwide income was $141,965,031.

2014 is the 70th Anniversary of YFC, which was founded in 1944. YFC/USA returned to its roots in Chicago in January, 2014 for their Midwinter Convention and celebration with the theme, More…. A powerful prayer team had been organized for Midwinter, and at the end of the meetings more than 60 people participated in a prayer walk through Soldier Field where it all started 70 years ago. In 2012, with 95 nations reporting, YFC had 237,376 registered prayer
intercessors. Today YFC has much more prayer coverage than at any time in its history, including the early days of the all-night prayer meetings at Winona Lake.

YFCI held its 70th Anniversary celebration in September, 2014 at the triennial General Assembly near Bangkok, Thailand. The theme, “Boldness in Evangelism,” continued the premise on which YFC was founded 70 years ago.

When Lloyd Bryant organized weekly youth rallies in the heart of Manhattan in the early 1930s, he had no idea what his efforts would lead to. Little did he dream that this movement would catch fire and inflame 71-83% of the globe. Torrey Johnson and Bob Cook and the godly leaders at Beatenberg dreamed of worldwide revival, but not in this way. This way was God’s way, and it still is! The world has totally changed since the 1940s, but the message has stayed the same. Through thousands of innovative programs and methods, millions of teens and adults have come to Christ in YFC’s 70 years.

The population of the world has nearly doubled in these 70 years, and there are so many more young people who need Jesus. But people still receive Christ in the same way as always. According to Acts 4:12 in *The Message:* “Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been or will be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one.”

We have some great memories of the miracles God has wrought. But we have even bigger dreams and visions for what God is yet going to do. As we celebrate this milestone, thank God that YFC has been faithful to the original purposes for which God raised it up, and to which the founders were committed. Now…on into the future, trusting in God’s leading and provision – still “Geared to the Times, Anchored to the Rock.” Come, Lord Jesus!