

RELIGION

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JEROD SMITH

missionary to Rwanda



Jerod Smith is surrounded by young people in Rwanda, where he and his family serve as missionaries. Courtesy

The road to Rwanda

Ex-drug dealer finds a path to God and helping others

BY BILL SHERMAN
World Religion Writer

Kellyville native Jerod Smith is a missionary in Rwanda, a tiny central African nation still recovering from a genocide that, 15 years ago, killed about 1 million men, women and children of the Tutsi tribe.

It took a brush with death to turn Smith away from a life of drugs in America to full-time Christian ministry in Africa.

He and his wife, Katina, were married just out of high school in 1994. Both came from broken families.

"I was heavily into the Creek County scene, making quite a bit of money as a drug dealer," Smith said.

He joined the Army to get out of that environment. After leaving the Army in 2000, he accepted a job in Butte, Montana.

"Our relationship deteriorated, and we decided to separate," Smith said of his marriage.

When Katina left him in Butte and moved in with her parents in Sapulpa, Smith sank into a deep depression.

Kneeling in a darkened hallway of

his house, he put a .45-caliber Heckler & Koch semi-automatic pistol into his mouth.

"As I began to put pressure on the trigger, it was as if God came into the room with me," he said.

"I knew God was asking me to stop what I was doing. I put the gun down and went through a huge turmoil of emotions."

He determined to do whatever he could to straighten out his life and save his marriage.

He got in his car and drove straight through to Sapulpa, a 20-hour trek.

"It was a long and miserable drive," he said.

Over the next several days, he and Katina talked and cried together.

"I didn't tell her about the encounter, I didn't want her to think I was pulling the religion card," he said.

"She called me one day, and we met at Kelly Lane Park in Sapulpa.

"We were both sobbing. She turned and looked at me, and said, 'I think all of this has happened because we didn't have Jesus in our lives.'"

Together, over time, they rebuilt

their lives and their marriage, and eventually he enrolled in Victory Bible Institute, a ministry training program of Victory Christian Church.

After graduation, they worked as youth leaders in a church in Muldrow.

The seeds of missionary work were planted when Smith was invited on a short-term mission trip to Ethiopia.

"I had never in my life seen poverty or sickness like this. It devastated me. I could barely maintain myself. I walked outside, and began to cry and cry. I could hardly eat and sleep for the rest of the trip.

"I was angry with God. ... I prayed: 'I don't understand how there can be people on the planet who may die because they don't have a enough food.'"

But he said God's response drained his anger: "Jerod, the reason it's like this is because I've called more people to get involved, and they just won't do it. There is enough food and enough money to go around."

One year ago, Smith and Katina and their son, Brice, left Sapulpa and flew to Kigali, Rwanda, as missionar-

ies with the Assemblies of God.

Battling through severe culture shock and homesickness, they have fallen in love with the people of Rwanda.

"My gifting is an evangelist," he said, but he also wants to help the Rwandan people get out of poverty.

The couple have established a "life center," where ex-prostitutes and widows produce baskets and necklaces from native materials.

"They're beautiful," Smith said of the crafts. "We're shipping them to the U.S. They sell like crazy."

They also plan to teach English and computer skills at the life center, and they hope to establish other life centers across the country.

They have two more years on their term in Rwanda.

What will they do next?

"Our thought from the beginning was that we'll stay," he said.

For more information, go to www.JerodSmith.com, or write to Jerod Smith Ministries, P.O. Box 553, Sapulpa, OK 74067.

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RELIGION

Azusa Street revival author to speak

Tommy Welchel, author of the book, "They Told Me Their Stories," will speak at 10:30 a.m. Sunday at Church on the Square, Sixth and Morton streets, Okmulgee.

Welchel, now of Yukon, interviewed years ago many of the participants in the Azusa Street revival in California, which 100 years ago launched the modern Pentecostal movement.

Over a period of six years, he met with the participants, who were living together in their retirement years at Pisgah Mission in Los Angeles.

Welchel's book is one of only a few books with first-person accounts of the revival.

Word Explosion begins Saturday

The 31st annual Word Explosion is set for Saturday through Aug. 23 at Victory Christian Center, 7700 S. Lewis Ave.

The annual conference draws some of the top speakers in the charismatic world, including this year the Revs. Rod Parsley, Patricia Bailey-Jones, John Bevere, Jentezen Franklin, Bill Winston, Christine Caine, Steve Hill and David Oyedepo.

Services will be at 9 a.m., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Sundays and 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Children and youth services will be held, as well as a women's luncheon. A nursery will be available.

For details, go to tulsaworld.com/victory.

Glory Revealed II concert here Friday

The national Glory Revealed II tour will perform at 7 p.m. Friday at The Church at Battle Creek, 3025 N. Aspen Ave., Broken Arrow.

Artists will include Mac Powell from Third Day, David Nasser, Aaron Shust, Laura Story, Shawn Lewis, Trevor Morgan and Matt Maher.

They will perform songs from the just-released album with the same name, recorded in one week at a cabin in rural Georgia.

The original 2007 Glory Revealed album won two Dove awards and had a number one best-selling song, "By His Wounds."

General admission tickets are \$10. For more, go to tulsaworld.com/tcabc. To order by phone, call (877) 840-0457.

Children's shoes going to Iraq

Tulsa-based World Compassion Terry Law Ministries will send a team to Iraq next week to help distribute 9,500 new pairs of shoes to Iraqi children. Shoes were collected Thursday at a Phillips, Craig and Dean concert at Jenks' RiverWalk.

The ministry has provided 25,000 pairs of shoes to Iraqi children since their Shoes that Save program began.

The ministry will be accepting shoes throughout August for later distribution to Iraq. Donations of new rubber-soled athletic shoes can be made at Payless shoe stores in the Tulsa area.

Church of the Nazarene elevates pastor

• "The biggest challenge will be the extended international travel," says the Oklahoma City author.

BY BILL SHERMAN
World Religion Writer

Life will be different for Oklahoma City pastor Stan Toler because of his recent election as general superintendent of the international Church of the Nazarene.

"I've spent my whole career in the local church," said Toler, 58, who preached his 10,000th sermon this year.

As one of six general superintendents, he will travel worldwide and be in a different pulpit nearly every week.

"The biggest challenge will be the extended international travel," said Toler, who is a veteran seminar speaker and author of 80 books, including several best-sellers.



GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

Stan Toler: In his first assignment with the international Church of the Nazarene, he will oversee 14 districts in the United States and Canada, in addition to South America.

He will maintain his home in Oklahoma City, where for 13 years he has pastored Trinity Church of the Nazarene, one of the largest Nazarene churches in the state with 1,000 members.

As general superintendent, Toler will be charged with casting the vision for the Church of the Nazarene worldwide, he said, and will have responsibility for the mission of the church to propagate the values and beliefs of Nazarenes worldwide.

He said the church is in the Wesleyan, Arminian tradition, making "Christ-like disciples in the nations."

In his first assignment, he will oversee 14 districts in the United States and Canada, in addition to South America. Typically, general superintendents serve three four-year terms, rotating through other North American districts and other areas of the world.

He said the 100-year-old Church of the Nazarene has 18,000 congregations with 2 million members in 155 world areas. The church has added 500,000 members in the last four years, many in Africa.

Toler was raised in a rural, mountain community in West Virginia and began to preach at age 14. He pastored his first church at age 17, when he was a junior in high school.

He travels widely, conducting seminars on strategic planning, stewardship, outreach and leadership. For years, he taught seminars with John C. Maxwell, who has been called the top leadership guru in the world.

Toler's latest book is "Rethink Your Life."

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this week

LEARNING

Financial Peace University, 13-week program taught on video by Dave Ramsey. Begins 4 p.m. Sunday, **Harvard Avenue Christian Church**, 5502 S. Harvard Ave. Also, 6 p.m. Wednesday, **Asbury United Methodist Church**, 6767 S. Mingo Road.

Alpha, 10-week course on basic Christianity. Begins 6:30 p.m. Aug. 26, **First**

United Methodist Church, 1115 S. Boulder Ave. Register at tulsaworld.com/fumctulsa, or by calling the church office at 592-FUMC, ext. 119.

OTHER

Toys and games garage sale, benefiting international missions. 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, **Redeemer Covenant Church**, 5415 E. 101st St.

Ordination and installation of Vicar Christian Tiewas as associate pastor. 4 p.m.

Sunday, **Grace Lutheran Church**, 2331 E. Fifth Place.

This Week column offers churches and other groups an opportunity to publicize news items and upcoming events that may be of interest to people outside their organization. Continuing events may be published once when they begin. All articles are subject to editing. Items must be received in writing by 5 p.m. Wednesday for Saturday publication. Mail to Bill Sherman, religion writer, P.O. Box 1770, Tulsa, OK 74102; e-mail to bill.sherman@tulsaworld.com; or fax to (918) 581-8353.

First Presbyterian Church

7th & Boston, Downtown Tulsa

918.584.4701 • www.firstchurchtulsa.org

We Welcome You in Worship!

8:00 am Kerr Chapel
9:30 am Bernsen Center (informal)
11:00 am Sanctuary

This Sunday's Sermon:

Who Cares What the Queen of Sheba Thinks?
The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgement... (Matthew 12:42)

Dr. James D. Miller, Preaching

Televised Services

Sun, 11 am (live) and 5 pm, Cox 3
Sat, 6 pm, KWHB 47/Cox 7