

"Free at last" sing former addicts

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Special to ChristianWeek

Former addicts now clean, some for the first time in years, give God all the credit. The Teen Challenge Choir inspires thousands of Canadians. Everywhere the choir goes, toes tap, hands are lifted up and God is praised.

Teen Challenge is a one-year residential, faith-based drug and alcohol rehabilitation program with 15 locations nationwide. All program participants (referred to as students) have the option of choosing the choir as their area of ministry while working through the program.

The full 40-member choir tours nationally, but is often broken up into smaller outreach teams that visit churches, groups and clubs weekly. With a mix of cover songs and original pieces, performances are always message-driven and full of enthusiastic worship and praise.

After the choir's tour through the Atlantic provinces in October 2009, Gary Andrews, senior pastor at Full Gospel Church in Halifax, said, "Awesome, energetic, full of life. These guys aren't just great singers; they've been set free—[you can] see it on their faces."

Students also share their own stories of addiction, faith and recovery. Their stories are raw and gritty, but always powerful.

The choir's redemptive message



Recent Teen Challenge graduate Jonathan Tapley says the choir is a place where program members can grow together.

is, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!"

"I found myself in tears listening to these guys," says Matt Fitzgerald, youth pastor at Hartland Wesleyan Church in Hartland, New Brunswick. "They're not telling stories that have been written in books, but they're telling stories that are true in their own lives, stories of deliverance."

Stephen Prendergast is a Teen

Challenge graduate and choir volunteer. He decided to enter Teen Challenge after attending a choir event.

"When we go out ministering with Teen Challenge, it's all about opening up our hurts—the hurts we've caused our family—to show that there's hope and a future outside of drug and alcohol addiction," he says.

Jonathan Tapley (nicknamed Johnny Miracle) is a recent Teen Challenge grad. "The Choir is a place where we grow," he says. "We get to go through tough times together and good times together. It's absolutely essential for us to learn how to deal with things outside of this program."

After a performance, addicts in the audience often come forward. Choir members take time to pray, encourage and inspire those seeking help. The national choir will tour Alberta in April 2010.



Above: Teen Challenge choir members performing.

Below: The Teen Challenge choir, in front of a bridge in New Brunswick.



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