

# HEART AFLAME

The story of how God saved a boy,  
called him into His service,  
and has burdened him to reach  
young people with the gospel.

*Rev. David DiCanio*



*Recently the editor asked David DiCanio, a Free Presbyterian licentiate minister in Colorado, to tell us the story of his conversion, call, and service.*

**LTBS:** David, thank you for sharing your testimony with us. You are from New Jersey, I believe.

**DD:** Yes, I was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, on May 21, 1966, the third of five children. I had a good upbringing. My mother had become a Christian after her marriage and though my father remained unsaved, she was faithful to teach all her children the things of the Lord and to bring them to a good, Bible-believing church. Every Sunday morning and evening we drove for an hour and fifteen minutes to worship in Dr. Carl McIntire's church in Collingswood. When I was thirteen, my dad left home and divorced my mother. It was a rough time for us all, especially for my mother who was understandably very distraught for some time. Three years later we moved to the Collingswood area and our family became very active in the church there.

**LTBS:** When were you saved?

**DD:** When I was just a child of about four my aunt led me to the Lord one afternoon when I was at her home.

**LTBS:** How were you called to preach?

**DD:** After our family moved to Collingswood, I began attending a Christian school and soon the Lord began to deal with me about being a preacher. I was fifteen or so. It was one of the most difficult times of my life. I can remember that every message from the church pulpit or from the Christian school chapel seemed to speak to me about giving my life to the Lord as a preacher. For a long time I ran from this call because the thought of being called to preach terrified me. By the age of seventeen, I could run no longer, and on June 10, 1983, I submitted to the Lord's call to preach. That night I had an

overwhelming experience of the presence and conviction of the Lord. I felt that I had no choice in the matter and that the Lord had brought me into His kingdom to be a vessel in the preaching ministry.

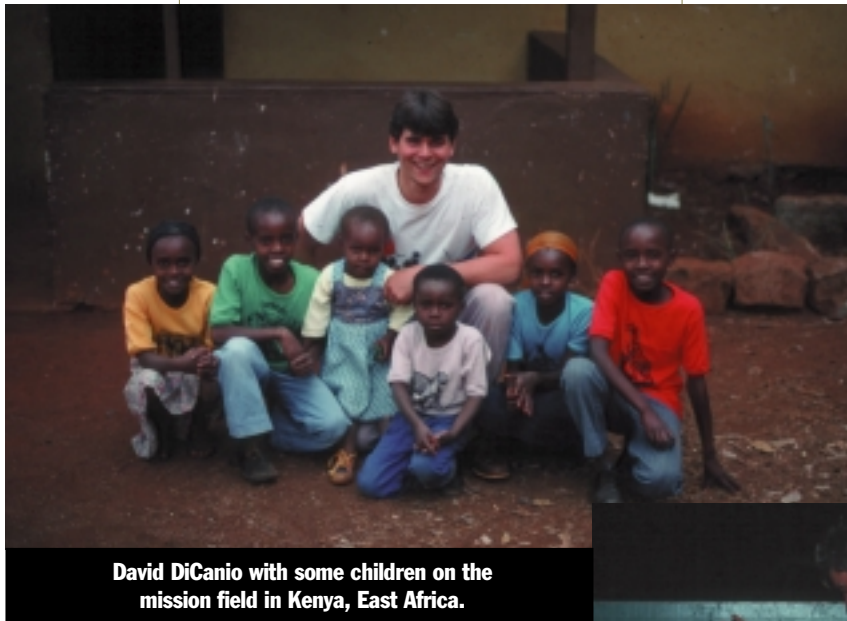
**LTBS:** How were you introduced to youth evangelism?

**DD:** Soon after I was called to preach I had the opportunity to go on mission teams to Kenya, Australia, and Chile under the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. The visit to Kenya made a lasting impression on me, particularly in regard to reaching youth. I was struck with how many children and teenagers lived in the villages of the country without a home life and I felt strongly moved towards evangelism.

The following year when I entered Shelton College in Cape May, New Jersey, my burden for youth evangelism really increased. It was a Friday night. I had finished my studies for the day and so my sister and I went down the street to the boardwalk. As we sat and ate ice cream we were somewhat entertained by several hundred young people. I had never really seen kids like them. They were Surfer Punks. Many of them had purple hair. Some of the guys wore eyeliner and make-up, and others had black fingernail polish. As we sat looking at them, I felt a strong impression to share the gospel, but because of fear I immediately dismissed the idea. I thought, "There's no way I could ever approach one of these kids with the gospel. They would laugh at me. How would I even start into a conversation?" It was certainly a lot different from Africa.

In Africa I was a foreigner and something of a celebrity, but I knew that that would not be the case in Cape May. So we left the boardwalk to return to the school dormitory.

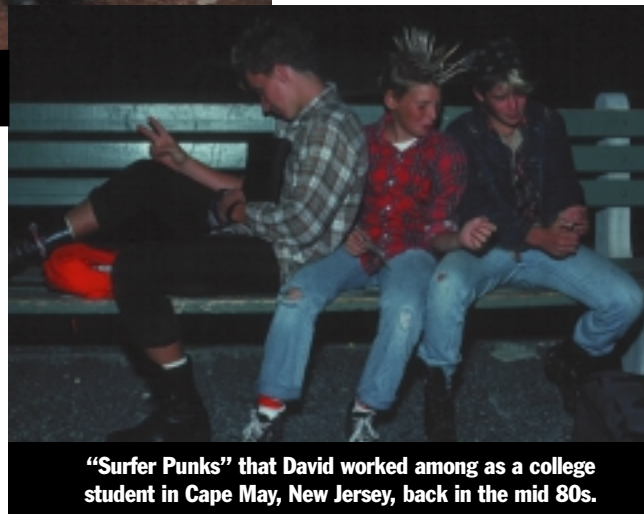
When I got into bed that night the Lord began to work upon my heart. I was on the verge of tears thinking how much these kids needed the Lord. After about a half hour of arguing with the



**David DiCanio with some children on the mission field in Kenya, East Africa.**

Lord I got out of bed, got dressed, and returned to the boardwalk with a handful of gospel tracts to reach those kids. As I walked I prayed and quoted Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not." I hoped that the kids would all have left, but when I arrived it seemed that even more had congregated. After standing back for a while, I finally decided that I would just quietly sneak up to one guy who was off to the side of a crowd of teens and slip him a gospel tract. Well, that guy did something that the Lord used to begin a three-year ministry among these kids. It was an odd thing, but the Lord used it. I came up to him and handed him a tract and

asked, "Have you ever gotten one of these?" He immediately screamed at the top of his lungs, "He's got a gun!" Every one of the youths turned and looked at me to see what I had. I quickly said, "No, it's not a gun; these are pamphlets." "What kind of pamphlets?" someone asked. "Gospel pamphlets about Jesus Christ and how He can save you from sin," I said. I started to share the gospel and more kids gathered around. I had to keep raising my voice because more and more were gathering around. Finally, there were between thirty and fifty young people standing there listening, so I decided to stand up on a ledge against the convention center and preach a little sermon to them. To this day, I can say that it was only the



**"Surfer Punks" that David worked among as a college student in Cape May, New Jersey, back in the mid 80s.**

Lord who gave me the courage to do that. A few of those young people professed faith in Christ that night, including a high school football player who was very affected by the gospel message. We began having weekly Bible studies on the beach at night and also holding other events for the kids. I even rented an hour on local radio and hosted a youth call-in program



During David DiCano's early years of training for the ministry he held Bible studies on the beach in Cape May, New Jersey, for local teens.

called "Youth Talk Cape May." By the end of the three years I had become good friends with over one thousand teenagers and had regular opportunities to share the gospel of Christ with all of them.

This Cape May work with the teenagers helped me see the great need to reach young people for Christ. I like working with teens because they listen to you. It often appears to me that children believe everything you say, teenagers debate everything you say, and adults ignore everything you say. I remember in those early days at Shelton College, crying to the Lord with a real burden that He would use me to rescue troubled teens from lives of great sin. Today the Lord is answering that prayer in a wonderful way.

**LTBS:** How did you become a Free Presbyterian?

**DD:** After I left college, I trained for a short time at Faith Theological Seminary near Philadelphia and then transferred to Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, where I completed my Master of Divinity degree in 1993. My roommate at Bob Jones was attending Faith Free Presbyterian Church. I had heard of the

Free Church through my pastor, Dr. McIntire, who had been a close friend of Dr. Paisley. When I first arrived at a service at Faith Free Church I understood very little of the preaching. I remember thinking that the preacher was too theological. However, the atmosphere was so much like my home church that I really felt at home. I felt immediately that this was the place I wanted to be. People were friendly and they were down-to-earth, normal types, not "strange children." It was not long before the preaching started to warm my heart. I began understanding some of the truths of Christ and his love for me. I didn't realize how much bondage I was under in much of the preaching I had been used to, preaching that constantly had me searching out all my sins, running up to the altar, and trying to "get it right." I would always do that and just feel that I had never got it right enough with the Lord. Then my heart was moved with the fact that I am right with God because of Christ's righteousness imputed to me. The Lord smiles upon me and loves me, and chastens

only out of His great love for my soul.

Believing that the Lord would have me serve Him as a Free Presbyterian I joined the Greenville congregation and applied to be accepted as a student for the ministry, with special emphasis on youth evangelism. I was accepted, completed the course of study, and in 1999 moved to Colorado to serve the Lord.

**LTBS:** What led you to work in Colorado?

**DD:** Watching the news reports of the shootings at Columbine High School, I noticed that there was quite a bit of talk about the gospel. I also noticed the anguish on so many of the young people's faces. Having dealt with teens for nearly fifteen years I felt that if someone would get the gospel to them they would surely listen, especially when they were so distraught and faced with the reality of death. The Lord gave me a burden to travel to Denver and engage in youth evangelism. Many teenagers had made professions of faith during and after the shootings, but when I arrived in the area I found that the Columbine kids were not so open as I thought they would be. Some were willing to talk, but most didn't really want to listen. During the past year and a half I have spoken to many students from Columbine and from other local schools. I have spent a lot of time at the shopping mall where many teens congregate and have had hundreds of opportunities to give them the gospel. I have been somewhat overwhelmed by how many of the young people I meet have a drug problem. However, the Lord has given me a hearing and I have had the joy of seeing some of the young people won for Christ.

**LTBS:** Some of those you have led to Christ are facing great troubles, are they not?

**DD:** Some who have been saved are facing prison terms and some are having great battles to keep clear of drugs and

evil influences. Some of the others to whom I witness in the mall have heard that I recently led one of their friends in prison to the Lord and it is causing some irritation. However, the young man himself is making great progress in the things of Christ and his testimony is having an effect on others. Indeed, he has been instrumental in leading another young prisoner to the Lord.

**LTBS:** Do you feel that the Lord is leading you to become more involved in youth prison ministry?

**DD:** The work does seem to be heading in that direction. I have been working with teens that I know from the streets, attending their court hearings, and visiting them in three different prisons. I am trying to obtain clearance to visit in the youth detention centers. If I become a volunteer I will be able to work right in the facility among the kids. The young man I

The director of the facility where the newly saved young man is imprisoned has been very helpful and cooperative. He said, "We don't normally have people come so frequently to visit on a professional basis. But we are seeing a good change in this

attend. Recently, some local Christians who desire the Christ-centered ministry of the Free Presbyterian Church have requested that I start a local congregation. Right now we are temporarily meeting in a hotel conference room as Columbine Free



**David DiCano and some of the young people at one of the Sunday evening meetings (left to right): Zach, Christina, Brad, Joe, Jason, and Kevin.**



**Columbine High after the shootings.**

led to Christ in prison told me that other prisoners wanted me to visit them. However, as my frequent visits to him are already extending to the limit the prison's time restraints, I cannot get permission for further visits. But it is a branch of the work that may open up a lot more in the future.

kid. He's attending all the Bible and church activities." One of the staff recently said to me, "He's doing really well. Keep working with him!"

**LTBS:** In addition to all your evangelistic outreach I believe you also conduct regular church services.

**DD:** I have used my apartment for Sunday services and Bible studies for the young people who have come to know the Lord and for other kids who are willing to

Presbyterian Church. The long-term goals for the work here in Colorado are, therefore, to keep reaching youth and to pray for the Lord to establish a strong local church. By God's help, I will continue to do what I have been doing witnessing, praying, preaching, and staying busy in the mall witness.

**LTBS:** Thank you, David. Working with troubled young people is hard work, and the additional task of church planting makes it even more challenging.

We will pray for you that the Lord will sustain you and give you great success in His service. ■