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ARTICLE

A Different Type Of Race: Evangelicals Take The Gospel To The Winter Games



BY PNW STAFF FEBRUARY 16, 2026

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The headlines coming out of this year's Winter Games have been as predictable as they are revealing. Reports that Olympic organizers quickly ran through a massive supply of condoms -- a recurring storyline at global sporting events -- underscore the party atmosphere that often surrounds the world's biggest athletic stage. The spectacle is dazzling, the crowds euphoric, and the nightlife legendary. Yet beneath the glitter lies a deeper question: in a culture primed for celebration, indulgence, and spectacle, is anyone still listening for truth?

That is precisely the tension facing Christians on the ground at the Winter Games. While the world parties, they preach. While the crowds chase pleasure, they offer purpose. And at the heart of it all is a conviction that even in the loudest arenas on earth, the Gospel can still be heard.

The event itself -- the Milano Cortina 2026 -- is historic in scale. Running Feb. 6-22 and spanning 15 venues across northern Italy, it has drawn roughly 2,900 athletes from 92 nations and an estimated two million spectators. Into that sea of humanity have stepped hundreds of volunteers and missionaries working alongside the International Mission Board, determined to use the once-in-a-lifetime global gathering as a mission field. Their presence is not accidental. For them, the Olympics are not merely a sporting event; they are a convergence of nations that might otherwise never hear the message they carry.



New Tai Chi Walking Plan

Much of their outreach centers in Milan, a city steeped in centuries of religious tradition and artistic heritage, home to landmarks such as the Duomo di Milano and the refectory that houses da Vinci's masterpiece at Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Mission teams are continuing an evangelistic strategy first used during the Paris Summer Games: conversation-starter cards asking philosophical questions

about identity, purpose, and meaning. The goal is not confrontation but curiosity -- a gentle invitation into dialogue that can lead to deeper conversations about Christ. Bibles and Gospel of John booklets are distributed at hospitality points, and even the Olympic tradition of pin-trading has become an unexpected tool for ministry.

Mission coordinator Charlie Worthy described Italy as a culture devoted to what many call "the good life" -- friendship, beauty, and comfort. Yet he believes the Games offer a rare chance to reach people from around the globe in one place. Italy, he notes, is one of the oldest mission fields for Southern Baptists, meaning the work happening now is part of a story more than a century in the making. To volunteers, the Olympics are not a temporary outreach but a spark for long-term impact.



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Music has become another bridge. The worship collective The Rock Music has partnered with Youth With A Mission and local churches to perform concerts in fan zones and venues across Milan and nearby cities. Their founder, Steele Croswright, says the strategy is simple: melody transcends language. Even when words fail, a song can open hearts. From large outdoor performances to intimate coffee-house sets, the aim is to create moments where faith conversations can begin naturally. In a world of flashing lights and roaring crowds, a worship song can sound almost rebellious -- a quiet reminder that celebration does not have to be empty.

Publicly outspoken believers among winter athletes are relatively few, especially in 2026 coverage so far. One widely known example from recent Winter Olympic history is David Wise, the American freestyle skiing champion who has repeatedly said his sport is an act of worship and that he strives to use his platform to glorify God rather than himself. His testimony illustrates how elite sport and explicit faith can coexist -- and why many missionaries believe athletes themselves can become powerful witnesses.

That scarcity of outspoken believers is part of what motivates evangelistic teams. They see the Olympics as a crossroads of cultures, ideologies, and spiritual hunger. The same crowds that line up for medals and music may also be quietly wrestling with questions about meaning. Mission workers say they have already encountered spectators eager to talk about faith, proof that beneath the surface excitement lies a deeper curiosity.

Critics sometimes dismiss these outreach efforts as intrusive or naïve. Yet historically, global events have often sparked spiritual movements precisely because they gather diverse people in one place. From world fairs to international expos to past Olympics, evangelists have long viewed such moments as rare windows when the nations literally come to them. Whether one agrees with their message or not, their persistence is undeniable.

And that is what makes the contrast so striking. On one side are headlines about shortages of party supplies and stories of nightlife excess. On the other are volunteers handing out Scripture, musicians singing worship songs, and missionaries asking strangers what they believe about life's biggest questions. The Olympics, in other words, become a mirror reflecting two visions of celebration: one fleeting, one eternal.

The real story of these Winter Games may not ultimately be who wins gold, but which message lingers after the closing ceremony. When the crowds go home and the stadium lights fade, medals will tarnish, records will fall, and headlines will be forgotten. But if even a handful of conversations sparked in Milan lead someone toward faith, the missionaries here would say they witnessed a victory far greater than any podium finish.

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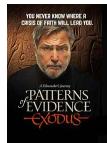
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