

Personal Ministries and Sabbath School Departments

“After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was lightened with his glory.” (Revelation 18:1)

Overview and Analysis

This report seeks to highlight the mighty work of the Lord through the Personal Ministries and Sabbath School Departments of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GNYC), including the Disabilities Ministries, from 2014 to 2017. Driven by the common Motto to; “*Light NY with the Loud Cry*,” and under the banner of Prince Emmanuel, this last message of grace and warning has been sounding loud and clear in the Big Apple and beyond. This report will also provide insights into our Church Planting initiative.

We kicked off on June 1, 2014 with the aim of empowering every church member to engage in the vision, and adopt the Mission Statement; “To inspire, equip, and mobilize our members to make disciples using Christ’s successful method, improving their ability to mingle with all people, minister to their needs, win their confidence; and finally, invite them to follow Jesus.” The Mission Statement exemplified and embodied discipleship, personal and public evangelism, disabilities ministries, small groups, church planting, Sabbath School and other related aspects of the ministry.

The GNYC territory was strategically divided in four areas: Upstate; Bronx, Manhattan; Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island; and Long Island, to facilitate optimum attendance and emersion training in all aspects of the mission and vision. Conference-wide Rallies, covering training for hundreds with departmental calendar review, and Q & A, occur in January and February of each year. Quick Start Guides for Sabbath School, Personal Ministries, and Disabilities Ministries enabled the process, along with materials sourced from other divisions to bolster the resource pool

Acknowledgements

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Personal Ministries Church Planting Initiative

An audacious church planting initiative was launched under the Vision, “Every Disciple Making a Disciple and Every Church Planting a Church,” based on the growth principles of the early church as

recorded in Acts 9:31; 16:5; Titus 1:5 and the prophetic word, “Upon all who believe, God has placed a burden of raising up churches.”¹ Our goal is 50 new church plants by December 2018 and 100 new churches by December 2020, moving on toward a culture of multiplication.

The GNYC church planting strategic plan is grounded in ‘Ten Principles’ of which three are here highlighted: 1.) A key role in the Loud Cry prophesied in Rev. 18:1 is the church planting component. “Adventism began as a church-planting movement and needs to regain that focus.”² 2.) The continual planting of new congregations is the most productive evangelistic strategy for the growth of the body of Christ; 3.) Small Groups and Sabbath School Units are key in the church planting process.

The church planting initiative owes special thanks to the former GNYC president Dr. G. Earl Knight for his vision and encouragement at the inception, and to Pastor Henry Beras for his continued support in its development. Thanks to our Pastors and members who embraced the vision as God made it work. Ellen White clearly stated that we should establish memorials for God in every city and village.³

By the grace of God we are on target in our goal to plant 50 new churches by December 2018 since we have over 40 new church plants initiatives as of December 2017, including: **2 New churches:** Pelham Parkway Sp. SDA church, NY Filipino SDA Church; **10 New companies:** Maranatha Sp., Misericordia Sp., Manantial de Vida Sp., Mount Sinai Sp., Oasis de Esperanza Sp., La Paz Sp., Shirley Fr., Bronx Fr., Apocalypse Fr., and MYGEN; **8 New mission groups with the potential to be voted as companies within six months:** Bethel Sp., Luz y Esperanza Sp., 138th St. Sp., Morningside Sp., Gun Hill Sp., Bethany, Long Island Korean, and Throgs Neck. There are **9 new mission groups with the potential to be voted as companies within a year:** Living Waters, Richmond Hill Southern Asian, Croton Falls, Ambassadors, Park Hill Sp., Wappinger Sp., Renacer Sp., Hyde Park Sp., and Green Port Sp.; **7 new mother churches with strong on-going initiatives:** Weeks Sp. (Looking for a place), Dyckman (Looking for a place), Richmond Hill, Delancey, Yonkers, Advent Hope, and Corona Queens Sp.; **4 other initiatives:** Long Island Multhi Ethnic, Manhattan Chinese, City of Refuge and Filipino Church in Manhattan. There are a few more new projects that are in discussions now.

Special recognition to the Publishing Department, under the leadership of pr. Biana Lara, which has planted 6 new churches. Praise the Lord! Each church plant is supported by a onetime allotment of five thousand dollars to be used for property rental. Some lay church planters were given up to \$400 to help defray expenses. To date, 29 new temples of different denominations have been rented in the last 3 years to serve as houses of worship for these new church plants, some of our new plants are worshipping in borrowed spaces. These new church plants have welcomed over 200 new members and thousands in tithe and offerings.

Mapping Greater New York

At every meeting we displayed maps of the five Boroughs of New York City: The Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island; and of Long Island, and Upstate with the locations of Adventist churches pinned with color coded pins. This gave a visual reference to the locations and clustering of our churches to identify new locations for plants.

¹ Ellen White, Medical Ministry, 315

² Russel Burriel, Rekindling A Lost Passion (Fallbrook, Calif.: Hart Research Center, 1999), 245-246)

³ Testimonies for the Church 9:28, 29. - {ChS 112.2}

Church Planting Events and First Meeting of Disciples and Church Planters

On November 8th, 2014, over 350 persons attended the *First Meeting of Disciples and Church Planters* held at the Thessalonica Baptist Church in the Bronx. Presenters included Dr. Gerson Santos, former Director of the Global Mission Urban Center of the Seventh-day Adventist world church, and church planters Kevin Sears and Steve Leddy. Dr. G. Earl Knight, former President of the Greater New York Conference, delivered the mid-day message, entitled “Go and Make Disciples!” Church planters left the venue inspired and committed to plant churches and make disciples.⁴

Church Planting Battle Cry

On March 11, 2016 at the Grand Concourse SDA Church and on the 12th at First Thessalonian Baptist Church in the South Bronx, more than 500 people came to learn more about the vision of planting 100 churches in GNYC by the year 2020. Present were various members of the Executive Leadership Team who offered prayers, praise, words of encouragement, and exhortations. Presenters were from the North American Division Evangelism Institute (NADEI). A ‘first fruits’ parade of 15 churches that were planted from the 2014 ‘Meeting of Disciples and Church Planters’ were heralded by a trumpet blast by Dionisio Sosa. The music of Frank Valdez, Hope Montana and Kay Fray provided a high spiritual accent.

GNYC’s Church Planting Festival Celebrates 35 New Churches

Sabbath, March 11th, 2017, *The Battle Cry Continues* with nearly 700 people at the First Thessalonian Baptist Church to celebrate the 35 new church plants, and to thank God for his guidance. Pastor Beras acknowledged the efforts of the Multi-Ethnic, Korean, English, Spanish, and the Franco-Haitian in working to further the gospel in New York, reflecting the wider goal of the Greater New York Conference’s church planting as instilling a culture of discipleship, by adopting the Vision: “Every Disciple Making a Disciple and Every Church Planting a Church.” This Vision, I believe, perfectly reflected Christ’s method.

Coaching and Planting Team Assessment

We used the Assessment, Coaching, Training, and Sending (ACTS), strategy to equip lay leaders with the department’s vision. The first session of Spiritual Leadership Development Coaching took place June 23, 2015. Session two occurred June 24 and 25, 2015, and on November 9 and 10, 2015 the third was conducted. These were designed to help leaders reach their full potential as they equip others. Training was conducted by: Gerson P. Santos, Steve Leddy, Erlo Braun, Pr. Manuel Rosario, Greg & Bonnie Schaller, Rick McEdward, Anthony WagenerSmith and Samuel Peguero. Participants explored their Leadership Styles, Personality Types and diverse approaches to mentor and coach others. About 30 Pastors and lay leaders completed the program.

A three-day Evaluation and Assessment retreat was held from March 13-15, 2015 at Camp Berkshire, Wingdale, with representation by 50 leaders from all the Ethnic Directors, church planters, and Pastors. Spiritual life assessments were conducted with the elder questionnaires and with the APEST questionnaire based on Ephesians 4; Apostle, Pastor, Evangelist, Shepherd, and Teacher. The principle is that strong spiritual leaders can duplicate and multiply, creating healthy churches that then can plant new ones on the continuum. Another assessment event was later held September 2016. From March 30

⁴ This original report of this first event was written by former Advisory Member, brother Leslie William

to April 1st, 2017 a fifty-nine-person delegation of Pastors and key persons attended the sponsored NAD Church Planting Summit in Camp Kulaqua, Florida. GNYC participants paid only their airfares to attend and NAD covered the other costs. We have intentionally nurtured our existing congregations throughout GNYC by equipping our pastors in increasing the health of the existing churches with seminars and books on creating healthy Seventh-day Adventist churches through natural church development.

Church Planter’s Institute (CPI), Church Planting Intensive, and Master Group

In 2017 we launched CPI to give in-depth training on how to start and launch effective new churches. This was one of the most detailed, time-intensive training on church planting offered in this Conference. This was offered to all our members and Pastors. Conference-wide training included Pastor Steve Leddy’s, *Ten Steps to Building Healthy New Churches*, which encourages a community survey, needs assessment, and careful observation to remain sensitive to the population served. Church Planting Intensive is a condensed version of the CPI training, to facilitate those starting a new church or intending to do so within a short timeframe. Its portability aspect is also ideal for a wide reach in our Conference. On March 25-27, 2017 a group of about 30 leaders from over 10 nationalities completed the first training.

The Master Group is a type of think-tank for church planting. Conference leaders and Pastors from various departments spend time learning new approaches and purposes of church planting; exploring ideas to share in training, and determining the best ways to disseminate and support the church planting goals of our Conference.

Church Planting External Impact

This initiative has served as inspiration for a visiting delegation from the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. It also has generated invitations from the Northeastern Conference, USA, and of the Southeastern Conference in the Dominican Republic.

Sabbath School

Our Vision Statement reads: “Each Sabbath School will develop into a center of Christian Discipleship that emphasizes the Study of the Bible, Fellowship, Community Outreach and the Global Mission of the Church.” The initiative “I love Sabbath School” was launched as a comprehensive approach to make disciples through Sabbath School. Ellen G. White affirmed: “The Sabbath school should be one of the greatest instrumentalities, and the most effectual, in bringing souls to Christ.”⁵ To this end, we have placed great emphasis in turning our Sabbath School classes into Discipleship Units. Discipleship Units were introduced in 1990 as Actions Units⁶ with the goal of the complete involvement of each Sabbath School member in the outreach program of the church while increasing fellowship and spiritual nurture. There are 6 key elements of a Discipleship Unit: 1.) Units should be of six to eight members; 2.) 50 minutes are allotted for the units each Sabbath morning; 3.) Each with a leadership team composed of a discipleship leader, a care coordinator and a SS facilitator; 4.) An outreach plan must be developed; 5.) A monthly corporate sharing for evaluation and fellowship; 6.) At least a monthly evangelism or community outreach program planned. The allotted time of each unit in utilizing the fifty (50) Minutes⁷

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 10

⁶ Calvin Smith, in Michigan and other conferences in North America, piloted action Units before they were successfully implemented on a worldwide basis.

⁷ The Sabbath School program is 1 hour and 10 minutes.

should be used in the following manner: 5 minutes – Care for missing class members, 15 minutes – Outreach plan, 30 minutes – Lesson review.

To expand this vision, we distributed a simplified version of the Discipleship Units under the name “I love Sabbath School” while carefully explaining the Vision to Pastors and promoting the concept conference-wide at the Rallies. Dozens of training have been conducted in the churches with hundreds of books distributed. We also distributed 1200 “I love Sabbath School” pins at these events.

Major training events for the quadrennial included two Sabbath School Boot Camps that averaged over 200 attendees each in 2015 and 2017 in the city, and a long weekend at Camp Berkshire in 2016 that had over 55 resident participants for the three-day event. In 2015, at First Thessalonian Baptist Church, among the speakers were Pr. Hermes Tavera, Dr. Oriel Thomas, and Dr. Milton Gregory. June 10-12, 2016 Pastor Dionisio Olivo of Atlantic Union and Pr. Hermes Tavera-Bueno addressed ‘Sabbath School and the Mission of the Church’, and how to be a ‘Great Sabbath School Facilitator’, respectively. June 10, 2017 Curtis Hall presented his “Hit the Mark” training. The department also led Sabbath School at the English and United Camps over this period featuring speakers Mr. Charlie Pettit, Pr. Jeff Jordan, Dr. Ricardo Bain, Dr. Steve Cassimy, Dr. G. Earl Knight and Pr. Bert Williams, among others.

Disabilities Ministries

Conference-wide Disabilities Workshops, sponsored events, and support of local church activities provided comprehensive training. Workshops from 2015 to 2017 covered awareness and ministry tools for deaf, blind, psychiatric, and developmental disabilities. Speakers were Dr. Charlotte Thoms and Cheryl Silvera in 2015. Bert Williams, Anthony Mazzella, and Darinka Vlahek, were the 2016 speakers. Pastor Jeff Jordan and Mayra Pichardo, were the speakers in 2017. Supported and sponsored events include an Annual Disabilities Expo since 2015 of over 70 Service Providers and 500 visitors each year hosted by the Co-Op City Seventh-day Adventist Church, Bronx. The Ambassador Mission Group under Pastor Everett Samuel hosted a “Different Perspective; A Look into the World of Autism” on April 8, 2016 and April 8, 2017 respectively. Also supported were various Disabilities Day events at many churches across the conference where Cheryl Silvera gave the address. Hundreds of training materials were distributed at these events and at the Rallies.

At the 2016 United Camp Meeting Pr. Bert Williams participated in Sabbath School and at the 2017 Urban Camp Meeting Pr. Jeff Jordan was interviewed. The Disabilities ministries had presence at the English and United Camp meetings with Lobby Displays and literature distribution serving to widen the base of awareness. Short presentations were also made at Church Planting and Sabbath School Boot Camps to further promote evangelism to persons with disabilities. On September 26, 2015, approximately 35 persons participated in training at the Bible Institute weekend at Camp Berkshire.

If you desire more information on the Personal Ministries and Sabbath School Initiatives please tune in to our YouTube Channel at ‘GNYC Sabbath School Personal Ministries,’ or to read our strategic plans and other reports please view our web page at GNYC.org under ‘ministries’ to find ‘Sabbath School & Personal Ministries’ then click on ‘strategic plans’ or ‘reports.’

We ask God’s forgiveness for our shortcomings, and give Him the glory for all His accomplishments.