

November 8th was a high, holy day at the Thessalonica Baptist Church in the Bronx; where the First Meeting of Disciples and Church Planters was hosted by the Greater New York Conference (GNYC) under the auspices of Pr. Manuel Rosario, Director of the Personal Ministry and Sabbath School Departments. Over 350 “disciples and church planters” packed the auditorium for a day-long series of inspirational presentations designed to familiarize lay leadership with the departments’ vision and mission for this quadrennium - a four-year period of conference-wide growth propelled by the efforts of highly-motivated disciples who have been trained to “make disciples,” sustainably, using Christ’s Method alone.

The Revelation 18:1-themed, “Light New York with the Loud Cry,” introduced the assembled personal ministries leaders and pastors to the depth and breadth of the Spirit-led vision Pr. Rosario and his team are promoting conference-wide to inspire, equip, and mobilize churches and their members to employ the only means that “will give true success in reaching the people” - Christ’s Method. Presentations highlighting successful church planting models, lay evangelist training programs, small group/“center of influence” development, and effective, one-on-one techniques for engaging non-believers, all stressed the importance of “showing sympathy for them, ministering to their needs, and winning their confidence. Then bidding them, Follow Jesus (MH 143).”

Christ’s Method, encourages organized, well-trained laymen to first meet the physical needs of our neighbors, then, in love, minister to the Whole Man – mind, body, and spirit – a divinely-inspired process that prepares hearts for the acceptance of Present Truth and, one day, the ability to stand, justified, before God in Judgment. The Greater New York Conference has been tasked to preach the everlasting Gospel to 13.5M+ souls living/working within its territorial footprint, a task that can only be accomplished when laymen are trained to “go, teach, and make disciples of all nations” as a unified front - espousing the principles of Christ’s, hands-on, interpersonal Method – values embraced by Rosario’s two departments: **Love – Unity – Respect – Integrity – Empathy – Courage – Innovation – Excellence – Perseverance – Commitment.**

In the morning, presenters included Dr. Gerson Santos, Director of the Global Mission Urban Center of the Seventh-day Adventist world church and church planters Kevin Sears and Steve Leddy. Sears of New England Training School (NETS), based at Atlantic Union College in Lancaster, Massachusetts, shared many practical strategies associated with the successful methods and techniques taught in NETS’s dynamic, lay evangelistic training programs that prepare soul-winners who are cross-trained in Bible work, health evangelism, and public evangelism. With 18 years of church planting experience under his belt, Steve Leddy, pastor of the Connections Community congregation, a new Chesapeake Conference church plant in Laurel, Md., followed up with an engaging, church planting-focused presentation that ended with a rousing appeal for all leaders to respond to GNYC’s call-to-action and mobilize entire churches to enter unworked communities within their reach. Pr. Leddy’s message dovetailed perfectly with Dr. Santos’ talk, which delved into the importance of church planting in the long-term growth strategy for Seventh-day Adventist churches across North America; and the Greater New York Conference, specifically. The many thoughtful observations and poignant questions, posed by participants during the Q & A session that followed, were a testament to the great interest and zeal piqued by these presentations.

President of the Greater New York Conference, G. Earl Knight, brought the mid-day message, “Go and Make Disciples!” Like a general, he recounted the evangelistic success the Lord had brought to GNYC in 2013 – twenty (20) church plants... with at least twenty (20) more to come at the end of 2015, by the power and grace of God! Throughout, he reiterated his/the conference’s commitment to both the vision and mission of Pr. Rosario’s departments and to the fostering of an inter-departmental spirit of collaboration that intuitively harmonizes efforts to inspire, equip, and mobilize “disciples and church planters.” The “Amen!” reverberated throughout the cavernous edifice. President Knight’s message in a nutshell: WE are ALL members of Prince Emmanuel’s Army, WE are using his “blueprint” alone for evangelistic success - without compromise – and God will use us in a mighty way... to light New York!

The First Meeting of Disciples and Church Planters’ afternoon session was as engaging and informative as the morning session. Steve Leddy took the podium first and discussed one of the newest, small groups methods, the free market approach, where group leaders choose what type of small group to start and the church helps group leaders advertise their groups, but leaders are responsible for growing them. Seán K. Robinson, Adventist Community Services’ Director of Disaster Response, then introduced the audience to Life Hope Centers, community-based meeting places, where Seventh-day Adventist mingle with their neighbors, get to know them better, learn about their needs, and eventually introduce them to Jesus and the wonderful “birthright of truths” we have been endowed. The General Conference would like to see such centers in cities all over the world. It’s a concept that comes from Ellen White, who had a vision to “establish in all our cities small plants which shall be centers of influence (7T 115)”

The day’s events and participants were showered with copious amounts of prayer and many invocations for the power of the Holy Spirit, to fall upon those in attendance, and lead, guide, and bless the plans presented by Pr. Rosario and the presenters for preparing GNYC Lightbearers to prepare themselves to effectively minister to the needs of their un-churched neighbors and the successful implementation of evidence-based strategies for sustainable church planting. In between presenters, attendees were also blessed by the musical virtuosity of harpist/pianist/vocalist Martha Jhoana de Luna, who traveled from Nogadoches, Texas; to praise God with her pristine, angelic voice. Sometimes accompanied by violinist, XXXXX XXXXXX, from the XXXXXX Church in XXXXXXX; she offered sacrifices of praise that wafted to heaven like sweet smelling incense.

Pr. Rosario ended the proceedings by emphatically and convincingly reiterating the important, collaborative role conference and lay workers must play if Greater New York is to become a “symbol of the work the Lord would like to see done in the world” today (7T 38). With his invitation to “arise and build,” the entire body of believers moved toward the altar where President Knight pronounced a blessing on all the “disciples and church planters” who had presented themselves before the Lord as living sacrifices – human instrumentalities consecrated to work with heavenly agencies to proclaim the Three Angels’ Message with power, Lighting New York with the Loud Cry!

Now, the real work begins...

Three Messages to Be Combined—The three angels’ messages are to be combined, giving their threefold light to the world. In the Revelation, John says, “I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.” [Revelation 18:2-5 quoted.] This represents the giving of the last and threefold message of warning to the world (Manuscript 52, 1900).

November 8th, 2014 First Meeting of Disciples and Church Planters

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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. Santos explained the importance to follow the ACTS process (Assessment, coaching, training and sending) at the moment of planting and Sears of New England Training School (NETS), based at Atlantic Union College in Lancaster, Massachusetts, shared many practical strategies associated with the successful methods and techniques taught in NETS’s, lay evangelistic training programs that prepare soul-winners who are cross-trained in Bible work, health evangelism, and public evangelism. With 18 years of church planting experience under his belt, Steve Leddy, former pastor of the Connections Community congregation, a new Chesapeake Conference church plant in Laurel, Md., followed up with an engaging, church planting-focused presentation that ended with a rousing appeal for all leaders to respond to GNYC’s call-to-action and mobilize entire churches to enter unworked communities within their reach.

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¹ This original report of this first event was written by former Advisory Member, brother Leslie William