

THANKSGIVING

It is my honor to give my fifth Annual Pastor's Report of my tenure here at Bronx Bethany Church of the Nazarene. I am honored to pastor this special community of faith. I thank the Lord for His leading, His goodness, and His mercy toward us. The Lord has done great things! The Psalmist says, "*The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you.*" (Psalms 145:9-10 NIV)

I echo the declaration of the hymn, "To God Be the Glory" ...

*Praise to the Lord, Praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!*

REMEMBERANCE

In 2023, we experienced great loss as a faith community. The Pastoral Staff formally officiated twelve (12) funerals (three more than 2022). We continue to be present with numerous families in their continued times of bereavement. I must mention the two (2) members of Bronx Bethany who we have transitioned to glory, Bro. Errol Mantack and Sis. Greta Lobban. We thank God for their commitments to Christ and to the people of God. We will continue to stand with these families who are mourning. Let us have a moment of silence now to remember those who have transitioned to glory and are now safe in the hands of our Lord.

Our leaders and members have gone to great lengths to stand with the bereaved and to serve families during their most difficult times. Whether it was through funeral planning, hosting, ministry in music, valet parking, cards, phone calls or financial support, numerous people have attested to an experience of the unbridled love of God through this congregation. A special thank you to the hospitality team. The service you have provided speaks volumes. You have served with excellence, exhibiting kindness, humility, and compassion. Countless families have stood in awe of your willingness and have joined the fellowship because of your ministry. I must recognize Charmaine Wagstaffe, Claudette Joseph, Claudette Daley, Deon Rowe, Doreen Atherton, Jacqueline Drummond, Janet Kirlew, Judithann Henry-Brathwaite, Lana Charles, Marcella Brown, Marie Stern, Maureen Thompson, Nadia Getfield, Barrington Tugman, Cheryl Tugman, Beverly Shields, Sharon Forbes, Sharon Lewis, Sharon Samuels, Stacy-Ann Hibbert, Susan Bailey, and Yvonne Wildman. God bless you. I am certain that the Lord will not forget your sacrifices and labors of love.

OUR THEME

In 2023 we gathered around the theme, "*Forming to Serve.*" It was (and is) a commitment to God's intentional process for our personal renewal and our reshaping as a body so that we would prosper and be experienced as agents of God's blessing and appeal. In many ways, we received confirmation that this was the Lord's particular direction for us.

WORSHIP

We give thanks to God for the ability to gather corporately. 2023 was our second full year of in-person worship services since 2019. Many have come to value the hybrid worship experience as we organized

each week for in-person, live, and on-demand worship. We have seen the importance and impact of an intentional ethnic blend as we gather as *One Church*. Our attempt to follow the Spirit's leading as we press through this challenging equitable experience is God-honoring work. In-person adult worship averaged **272** people in 2023 (*Up from average 229 attendees in 2022, and 106 attendees in 2021*) with a live on-line average of **120** people. Our largest weekly in-person attendance totaled **545** attendees. It is also noteworthy that we dedicated **31** babies to the Lord in 2023. I believe our worship times together were experiential, participatory, image-rich, and connective (*Leonard Sweet*). Many have testified to an extraordinary experience of transformation within our times of corporate worship. Alongside the sound preaching of the Pastoral staff, we benefited from special guest preaching that was deeply formative. We are eternally thankful for the willingness and preparedness of each special guest.

Online worship still served as a key component of outreach and connectivity. *Here are some highlights...*

- Total of 58.1k views on YouTube with an average of 159 daily views.
- Average of 1458 total unique viewers for adult worship per month (866 avg. return viewers and 574 new viewers).
- Viewership extended from New York to Jamaica, Kenya, South Africa, and London.
- Avg. age groups: 18-24 (1.5%), 25-34 (moved up to 11.8% from 3% in 2022), 35-44 (11.4%), 45-54 (17%), 55-64 (23%), 65+ (27%)
- Duration: 18-24 (4 min), 25-34 (13 min), 35-44 (27 min), 45-54 (26.28 min), 55-64 (36 min), 65+ (36 min)
- Female (72%), Male (28%)

In-person Children's Church each Sunday was rich and effective. There was an increase in average attendance from approximately twenty (20) students to just over thirty (30) students weekly. Our virtual on-demand offering has been a major success for us as well. Students were able to participate and revisit lessons throughout the week providing a great way to reinforce curriculum and grant access to families who have dynamic schedules. Children's content averaged 100 views per week. The children are learning and growing in Christ as they engage the interactive lessons. The feedback from children and parents have been very encouraging.

Important to note is growth of the team. The Children's Ministry team increased from four (4) members in 2022 to a dedicated group of sixteen (16) in 2023. This is something worth stopping and giving God thanks for. Special thanks to our Children's Ministry Director, Roodlyne (Woods) Altidor and the committed team; Asanya Hanson, Merlene Ferguson, Melvin Reyes, Patricia Gherzi, Dionabella Pearce, Deidre Ottey, Caryl Trocard, Anastasia Brown, Caryl Blackwood, Sis. Erma Small, Jahaira Arthur, Jordan Williams, Lloydine Mills, Maureen Griffiths, Tania Agee, and Tracy-Ann Johnson.

Thank you to all who made our worship experiences both possible and dynamic. The entire Pastoral Staff faithfully and consistently preached the Gospel. Our Praise and Worship team dedicated countless hours to prayer, preparation, and execution, leading us each Sunday. The Chapel, Chosen, and the Children's choirs prioritized worship and committed themselves to exuberant praise. The Production and Communication teams were stellar in recruiting, developing, and envisioning new ways forward to connect the community and provide avenues for congregational onboarding.

Special thanks to Odane Whilby, Arlene Nembhard, Nichelle Maynard-Elliott, Devon Bennett, David Mendes, Nicholas Burt-Miller, and Cemoy Clarke who have led Worship, Music, and Production teams. To Carol Pitter, Junior Bowen, Kyle James, Jusani Morris, Rhiannon Rerrie, Stephon Martin, Jude Arthur, Brian Pucci, Daniel Joseph, Genise Reid, Nehemah McQueen, Fatima McClellan, Noelani Getfield, Othniel Mitchell and Sandy Murdock, thank you. To Musicians, Jermaine Collins, Clive "Ricky" Joseph, David Wilson Jr, and Josiah Barton you have served the Lord and his church with consistency and excellence. Thank you to Glendalys Whilby, Ann-Marie Joseph, Brianna Bogle, Ashley Gil, LaToya Jones-Herbert, Sharon Francis, and other guest ministers. Special thanks to the hosting team that ensures of people are welcomed, registered, and ushered each Sunday. Your commitments must

never go unnoticed as you ensured week after week, that persons could engage the Lord without fewer impediments.

A very special thank you to the public safety and parking ministry teams. They have been critical to the experience of worship and all corporate gatherings. Thank you, Pastor Andy Rubin, Curtis Dale, Owen Dyer, Michael Hylton, Gerald Wayne Elliott, Alfie Lloyd, Aston Wilson, Desroy Jeffrey, and Elorene Miller. We must mention our brothers, Wayne Smith Sr., Richard Ashmeade, Noel Davis, Leon Heyward, Karl Burrell, and Dexter Arthur. May the Lord bless you beyond measure.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

It is my responsibility to curate a congregational curriculum that is formative, connective, and directional. Each individual offering is designed to be a critical piece in the road towards God's vision for this faith community. Each offering is designed to assist in discipleship processes no matter the stage or maturity of each believer. Each member should view the offerings as spiritual pavers that tile the road towards God's preferred future personally and congregationally and not as arbitrary seasonal offerings that are isolated or disconnected events.

Deeper Life Classes

The continuous spiritual formation of our community remained a great priority and happened in various ways throughout the year. Our *Deeper Life Classes* (Fresh Start, Bridge, and Spirit-Filled Life) continued and were accessible to new believers, persons desiring to be baptized, those wanting to become members, and grow in the knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit. Through these classes a cadre of people were prepared for the spiritual markers in their journey with Christ. We baptized eleven (11) people (4 children) and received ten (10) new persons into membership. Additionally, nineteen (19) people enrolled in and completed both the Fresh Start and Bridge Classes. Twenty (20) people enrolled in the Spirit-Filled Life classes and eleven (11) completed the class. Praise the Lord! Many thanks to Shyrill Powell, Francine Mullings, and the entire group of willing and proficient teachers who ensured people were guided in their faith journey.

Prayer

We engaged in twenty-one (21) days of fasting and prayer. This All-Church prayer time was held January 8 – 28 under the theme, “*Reshaped.*” As we set the tone for the year, our community prayed for Personal Revival, Corporate Revival, and the Reshaping of a Missional Heart. We culminated our time of prayer with an in-person corporate gathering. Over seventy (70) persons were gathered in a rich time of worship and prayer. Amazingly, one of our 2023 prayer points was for a reshaped missional heart in which we asked God to lead us toward our missional priorities. I believe the Lord opened the door and our hearts to respond to the immigrant crisis by serving a Muslim community in our area facing great immigration-related challenges.

The 24-hour continuous prayer line continued to affirm our community's prayer priority while third Saturday prayer invited more people to seek the Lord together. Additionally, Latino ministries led in three (3) daily prayer times while convening a monthly half-night prayer vigil where men, women, children and youth, and marriage groups took turns leading. Thanks to Sharon Davis and other faithful men and women who have committed to leading throughout the days. Thanks also to Francine Mullings and Jaden Hylton who provided technological support to make the online gathering possible. Let's take a moment to celebrate this amazing work.

Men & Women (English-speaking & Spanish-speaking)

Through our men's and women's gatherings, small groups, 24-hour prayer line, and Children's Church, we engaged in a Lenten study called, "*Water for the Way*" by Dr. Gabriel Benjiman. It was a powerful reminder that we do not journey alone in the wilderness, but that God sustains us. We were grateful to have the author, Dr. Benjiman, start the study for us which climbed to over (100) participants.

In the year's second quarter, Men, Women, and other small groups gathered around the Study – "*Lessons from Philippians: A Guide to Joy*" by Max Lucado. In the summer, our *Missional* foundations continued with sessions from Rev. Dr. David McDonald on, "*How to Tell Your Story*;" helping us to think critically and intentionally about how to exemplify Christ and practically share our faith.

In the tradition of our annual Anniversary celebration in October, we were blessed to have Dr. Jerren Rowel, (President of Nazarene Theological Seminary) as our symposium speaker. He spoke on, "*When everything Is Unsure, Sanctify Christ*" and "*Holiness as Reconciliation and Peace*." The event was well attended, and our leaders notably enriched. Dr. Jerren Rowell was also the guest speaker for our 59th Anniversary Worship Service.

From September through November 2023, we engaged in a church-wide Generosity Focus (which included the children). Through our sermon series and gathering around the study – "*A Generous Life*" (Lifeway), we were inspired and certainly challenged. Though some were unable to attend the structured study-groups, many have attested to being stirred and encouraged by the series of sermons to engage the studies on their own and with their families. A congregant (relatively new to our worshiping community) testified in our women's gathering about how much the study opened her eyes to the joy of tithing and living a generous life. She expressed gratitude that our church made this study available.

Additional Highlights:

- Men and women (English and Spanish speaking) gathered virtually each week in their respective sessions with their corresponding pastors to foster community, to find encouragement, and to mature in Christ.
- Small Groups meetings continued led by Terry Stevens, Paulo Tenant, Lana Ho-Shing (Pearls), Pastor Caselin Lopez, Pastor Martha, Pastor Amalia, Shubert Jacobs and Loisen Jacobs.
- Frances Williams led the online Adult Sunday School which averaged an attendance of fifteen (15) people.
- We co-designed and participated in the Ecumenical Services during Holy Week as an expression of our corporate collaborative responsibility and connectivity to the universal body of Christ.
- Arlene Nembhard taught and encouraged children using contemporary songs and classic hymnody to reinforce the faith we profess and tradition we steward.
- Fifteen (15) student leaders (high school & college-bound) participated in the Nazarene Youth Conference (NYC 2023) in Tampa, FL. Special thanks to Judith Clarke, Caleb Peddie, Patrick Drummond, Abigail Drummond, Jacqueline Drummond who prayed through, encouraged, chaperoned, and supported these students in this deeply formative time.
- Fifteen students (and parents) attended the Church of the General Assembly and participated in world quiz in Indianapolis, ID. Our students did exceptionally well and were inspired to continue hiding the word of God in their hearts. Sharon Davis (Director), assisted by Garnet Burey, Veronica Maxwell, and Andrea Gray- Robinson must be recognized for their outstanding and consistent work.
- Pastoral Counseling was readily offered to individuals and couples, in-person and virtually. We facilitated premarital counseling, crisis intervention, mental and emotional support, and attended to a myriad of socio-emotional challenges.
- Facilitated two (2) six-week Church-in-Action small group trainings (Communities on Mission training) with small group leaders and with Pastoral Staff
- Hosted the Metro New York's Thrive Conference for pastors and church leaders.

A special thanks to the women who gave of their time on Tuesdays to ensure that Women's Gathering was made possible: Sisters: Donna Marie Williams, Veronica Burt-Miller, Francine Palmer Mullings, Coleen Mendes, Maureen Griffiths, Loisen Harris-Jacobs, Stephnie Hoilett, Yvette Phillips, Janette St. Hill, Nadia Getfield, Jahaira Arthur, Treacher Ottey, Cheryl Baker, Cheryl Tugman. Special thanks to men who also gave of themselves to ensure of ministry to men, Brothers: Curtis Dale, Owen Dyer, Dave Sharpe, David Mendes, Stelton Syblis, Brian Charles, Stephon Martin, and Devon Bennett.

MISSIONS

In lieu of a separate Missions report, I want to offer the following update. We continued to participate in the global missionary agenda through our denominational commitments and have additionally partnered with persons and ministries in the Caribbean, South America, and Africa. In 2022, we gave over 170k to engage missional efforts and in 2023 we gave over 20k more. Throughout this season, our community has ministered to shelters, assisted in visitation to hospitals, sick and shut-ins, and much more.

Here are some additional highlights...

- Provided resources for the continued church planting work of Rev. Amalia Henao in Colombia.
- Provided resources for Pastor Racquel Cruz and her work in Nicaragua.
- Hosted the Metro NY District's Annual Thrive Conference
- Gave resources to New Life Fellowship Kampala, Uganda (Rev. Lugize Paddy).
- Supported a pastoral family in South Africa. Paddy (Hope City Church, Cape Town South Africa)
- Supported the missionary work of the Rev. Dr. Gabe Benjiman and family.
- Contributed to the Vine Church plant.
- Contributed over (110k) to District Missions, World Evangelism Fund, ENC, and Pensions and Benefits. (*See Finance Report*)
- Contributed over (28k) to local and foreign missions.
- Responded practically to needs locally through local benevolence (44.5k)
- Men contributed over (3k) additionally to brothers experiencing challenges.
- Served our neighbors by feeding over 7,000 individuals monthly (100% growth since May 2020) with a dedicated volunteer staff of thirty (30) people.
- Engaged with the Bronx-wide People's Platform to continue relationships with community-based organizations. Hosted two (2) community meetings that yielded the highest attendance and participation thus far.
- Partnered with the Latino Commission on Aids for support services for Pantry clients.
- Partnered with the Federal Department of Health & Human Services Faith-Based Partnerships participating with other faith-based initiatives in mental health preparedness.
- Connected directly with our State Assembly, State Senate, and City Council toward resourcing for community development strategies.
- Signed youth ministry Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with YoungLife to become the Youth Ministry hub church for the North Bronx. YoungLife is an active para-church ministry that seeks to build relationships so as to disciple junior high and high school students in partnership with the local church.
- Partnered w/ Dr. Steven Lindo's Springboard Incubators to launch the Bronx Technology and Engineering Program where fifty (50) of our junior high and high school students participated at no cost.
- Served west African immigrants in partnership with a local Mosque. Provided weekly meals, clothes, and renovation resources to ensure a safe and habitable environment.
- 500 average weekly meals cooked, packaged, and delivered to migrant shelter.

- Offered counseling services both virtually and in-person.
- Provided premarital, marital, and crisis intervention counseling including referrals.
- Established the Marriage and family team with couples and singles who are heads of households to provide resources so that families are supported, and relationships are enhanced. This team facilitated a needs assessment that provided important information regarding community needs.
- Visitation increased with Latino ministry leaders, and we onboarded Richard Davis to join the work.

Many thanks to David Vassel, Loisen Jacobs, and the teams for their availability to the Lord. I continue to be encouraged by our church's desire to be bearers of God's presence in the world.

2024... A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

This year we are celebrating 60 years of ministry here at Bronx Bethany. Year sixty (60) is our "Diamond Jubilee." Over this year we will be recognizing and celebrating all that the Lord has done through the ministry of Bronx Bethany. My hope is that the immediate and extended Bronx Bethany family will participate in our great times of celebration.

I have been led to the theme, *Living Legacy*. We have been entrusted with a special heritage that will require us to both steward and release. This next season of ministry will require greater faith and greater sacrifice. *Living Legacy* is a call for us to intentionally join God's redemptive plan for a people we may never see. We stand on the shoulders of a people who have persevered in faith...elders, pillars, stalwarts, and ancestors who have carried the faith. It is our time to be carriers of God's grace.

Living legacy is a call to the physical generations and the spiritual generations to a radical and countercultural faith. When we live with legacy in mind, we live on purpose, intentional, expectant, and hopeful. When we live with legacy in mind, we become more aware of generational realities, generational implications, and generational opportunities. When we live Legacy, we don't plan to hoard, but plan to give away. The Bible says, "*freely you have received; freely give.*" (Matthew 10:8b)

A major initiative that will begin April 2024, and end April 2025, is a church-wide Legacy Stewardship Project. We have critical ministry needs for the future and an opportunity to participate in intentional, strategic, and creative sacrificial giving and revenue generation. The goal of the Legacy Stewardship Project is to yield a value of at least 5 million dollars (cash, assets, wills, and other estate gifts, etc). The 5 million dollars will support:

- Debt Servicing (e.g., current mortgage indebtedness \$4+ million)
- Human Resources Development (*caring for those who have answered the call to serve the ministry of Bronx Bethany*)
- Facility-Campus Development (*& strategy*)
- Investments for Financial Viability (*securing the future for BBCN generations to come*)

This is an audacious goal. In fact, it is bigger than some can imagine. However, I echo the sentiments of the Apostle Paul, "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*" (Eph. 3:20) We should remember that it was the "All-In" Stewardship Campaign that helped us to weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis. I believe the Lord is positioning us for substantial, effective, and God-honoring ministry now and we must move toward that end.

ADDITIONAL 2024 PRIORITIES

We must always remember that busyness does not always mean that we are effective. Sometime, less is more. This year in particular, we will be looking to consolidate, streamline, and find ministry synergies to be the most effective tools in the Lord's hand. We honor the Lord when we toil in the areas the Lord has called us to.

In addition to the points outlined in the Stewardship Project, we will focus on the following...

1. Prayer. Prayer is our bedrock. It is important to interrogate and critique the current prayer avenues and systems so that more people (particularly men) are encouraged to engage.
2. Harmony. There is still much work to do in the work of congregational unity. I whole-heartedly believe in the unity that the Holy Spirit brings and am trusting the Lord for a unique and beautiful expression in this community of faith. We will work to ensure that each area of ministry is ethnically equitable and inclusive.
3. I maintain that the Lord has called us to drill down into our missional priorities of Student Education, Health & Wellness, Food Sovereignty, Housing, and Immigration. This year we will identify, engage, and solidify more strategic local compassionate ministry partners in keeping with our priorities.
4. Increase and develop our student ministry leadership teams (Adult youth leaders and student leaders) toward junior high, high, and emerging adults (College-aged). We have a tremendous opportunity to support and creatively resource students who are seeking to engage and grow in their faith.
5. Development and expansion of small groups to become, "*communities on mission.*" (Small groups that are avenues for consistent compassionate engagement.)
6. Leadership Development. Providing specific opportunities for leaders to be enriched and better resourced as disciple-makers.
7. Foundations for church-planting. Intentionally looking for opportunities in new/existing ministry support, identifying potential leaders/partners while identifying new areas for intentional planting and sowing.

RECOGNITION

The staff of Bronx Bethany have preached, taught, counseled, served, cleaned, administrated, prayed, admonished, and comforted. Throughout this year they have shouldered much, and I give thanks for their partnership and friendship. Special thanks to Rev. Carlene "Joy" Reynolds, Rev. Andy Rubin, Rev. Martha Fajardo, Rev. Lilly Porter-Bennett, Rev. Haughton Brown, David Vassel, Coleen Mendes, Pansy Thomas, Arlene Nembhard, Nicholas Burt-Miller, Melanie Blackwood, Everith Palmer, Roodlyn Altidore, Cliff Turner, Jocelyn Turner, David Blackwood, Toshi Hamilton, and Rick Ferguson.

It is important to recognize and celebrate Bro. David Blackwood. David leaves the staff this year after nine (9) years of exemplary service. He senses the Lord's leading in new directions, and we pray that the Lord's guiding hand would lead him. David has cared for the Lord's house with intentionality and excellence. Let us take a moment to recognize and honor him for his commitment to the Lord, the house of God, and the Lord's beloved people.

I thank God for the church board that has led us faithfully. Their prayers, encouragement, commitment, leadership, and counsel have proved invaluable to me. They have served the Lord and His church well. May God bless you and provide for your households in abundance!

I am deeply grateful for my wife and thought partner Yanique who has played a vital role in ministry. She has served humbly and faithfully by encouraging, loving, and counseling others while ensuring that I stay the course. The demands of both family and church are heavy. Yanique continues to be the engine of our family, committed to facilitating atmospheres of hard work, rest, vision, imagination, expectation, interdependence, and celebration. Thank you to our wonderful children Seth and Hannah, who too have served. They have participated in ministry and sacrificed as well. Thanks for refreshing me, praying for me, encouraging me, laughing at me, and reminding me that all will be well.

Bronx Bethany, I thank the Lord for the opportunity to serve you.

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 [NIV])

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Dr. Richard Griffiths, *Lead Pastor*