

Seeing What God Sees
by Rev. Dr. Victor J. Belton

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Very often, in the process of planting missions, God surprises the planter and all involved with an outpouring of grace and joy that far exceeds all expectations. We have our desires, plans, goals and objectives, but very often they fall woefully short of God's intent and outcomes. Such was a recent experience that I had with Pastors Ramdat Sarran and Art Downing in Schenectady, New York, during a week of revival.

Earlier, Pastor Ram asked us about getting together the first week of July to do a street revival in a troubled section of Schenectady. It would require both of us to be busy on the 4th of July and would take an entire week of time and energy, a significant commitment. What could we expect for outcomes?

As Pastor Ram and I prayed and talked about potential outcomes, we decided that the time would be well invested if perhaps we could get five or six new members for the existing ministry in Schenectady. Perhaps we would be able to engage a few new families in Bible Study and at least talk to some people about Baptism for their children. With those outcomes, we would consider the street revival a success and a worthwhile investment of time and energy.

Those were our plans. But what God saw and did far exceeded the desires of our hearts. First, God provided the ministry with the gift an auto repair shop on the far side of town. Here, men will receive training as they work, and the shop's proceeds, after paying the bills, will help seed the ministry. This gift came from plowing the ground in the weeks before the revival.

For reflection: What gift would be a most gracious blessing from God to take you forward in mission and ministry? Once you have identified it, begin praying for God to release it.

Second, the door was opened for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the local Schenectady congregation to begin and expand work in the South American nation of Guyana. One of the men we met during the revival has connections in Guyana. He had been praying and asking God for someone to come alongside and assist him in the ministry. He does not need money as much as support: the knowledge that he is not working alone and that others care for the people in this small nation and their need to hear the Gospel of Jesus.

In your community, identify areas where opportunities exist for expansion and revival. Are there people with whom you can partner to see the mission of God go forward in your area?

Third, we used the *Ablaze!* logo and emphasis as a handle for the revival. We met on the parking lot of a Roman Catholic ministry, with drug dealers, prostitutes, young people, and others who would rejoice to hear “the good news of Jesus proclaimed to the poor.” By the middle of the revival, people began asking, “When are you going to begin the *Ablaze!* church?” From the sign on the house across from the parking lot, they assumed that a new church was going to begin. Some were anxious to be a part of it.

What would it take for you to give God the opportunity to do something great through and for your mission? Is there an area in your context where ‘no Christian has gone before’ and into which you would be strong and courageous to go and share the Gospel? This would give the Lord an opportunity to go beyond, into the unseen, on your behalf.

On the final day of the revival, Pastor Ram decided to convene the *Ablaze!* church at 7 p.m. on the coming Sunday evening. To his surprise, 30 people came for worship and praise. Pastor Ram was amazed, as were we all, at the grace of God and how the plan and intention of God so far exceeded our thoughts and expectations. Not only was the Kingdom of God expanded by the few new members we anticipated, but the ministry that existed in the heart of God was established. Hallelu-Jah!

Pastor Ram and I hope to be able to duplicate this type of revival in other places around the United States and in the Synod. The Lord has exceeded our expectations. Perhaps a new way of planting ministries is being inaugurated in the LCMS.

Our prayer is: “Lord, help us to see what you see, to desire what you desire and to seek what you seek. Bless us with God-sized dreams, and goals that reflect your greatness and your sovereignty in the world. Continue to bless us to be *Ablaze!* for your glory and to reach that 100 million critical event goal by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Lord, bless us to be strong and courageous to do your will and proclaim your goodness in sending Jesus to bear our sin and be our Savior, especially in those places where your people are most helpless, most hopeless and oppressed. Make it so in the matchless name of Jesus!” Amen.

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