



The Christian Connection™



A Quarterly Newsletter from Christian Resource Network, Inc.

SOARING COMMUNICATION FOR CHRIST

Sowing and Reaping

By: Joan M. Blake



Don't you feel a sense of fulfillment when you reap a harvest of beautiful flowers and vegetables from your garden that were started from seeds or small plants? You sowed and reaped.

Sowing connotes planting and scattering while reaping suggests gathering and acquiring results. The terms sowing and reaping were frequently used in both Old and New Testament times. The Old Testament psalmist makes reference to sowing and planting vineyards and yielding (reaping) a fruitful harvest (Ps.107:37). Exodus 23: 19 describes (reaping) the first fruits of the land, or what we refer today as tithing, as belonging to the Lord.

There are other ways to view sowing and reaping. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus referred to Himself as the Sower, the One who plants the seed or the word of God in our hearts. Some of us receive the seed or the word, but are weak, do not understand the word and therefore, do not realize or reap righteousness. Others are happy when they hear the word but do not have a firm foundation and succumb to the devil's scheme, bowing out when persecution and trouble enter their lives. Still, others receive the word in the midst of their cares for riches and the things of this world, and they too, fall to temptations and are not fruitful. But those who receive the word on good ground understand the word and bear fruit (Matt. 13:3-23).

CUME graduates, receive the word on good ground. They have sown time and energy to learn sound biblical truths, wisdom and understanding, that they can impart to others and reap a harvest for God. I want to encourage them not to be "weary while doing good" for in "due time" they will reap if they do not become discouraged (Gal.6:8-9). The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few (Matt.9:37).

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan M. Blake".

Editor/Publisher

The Christian Connection

The Christian Connection is published by the Christian Resource Network Inc., a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization whose main mission is to provide support to those who are experiencing emotional pain. Other related services include women's small group training and mentoring services.

If you would like to become a member of Christian Resource Network, Inc., make contributions, advertise in *The Christian Connection Newsletter*, or be on our email list, please contact the editor or visit our website.

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Christian Resource Network Breakfast

Summary: By Joan M. Blake

On April 12, 2008, Christian Resource Network, Inc. began by kicking off a fund-raising network breakfast. The proceeds of the breakfast will benefit a cultural program for women ages 22-30 who have been mentally ill and/or homeless.

The breakfast was held at Eastern Nazarene College's elegant President's Room with close to forty people in attendance. The mistress of ceremony was Leah M. Blake, vice-president of Christian Resource Network, Inc. The atmosphere was one of joy, encouragement, enthusiasm, hope and opportunity.

There was joy as Lisa Masotta, MDiv. and Virine Morris, Soprano, led the group in worship and song, encouragement, as people formed small groups to discuss relevant issues surrounding their lives. There was enthusiasm as others corporately shared their testimonies about God's goodness. There was hope as individuals met one-on-one to learn from one another and make connections. Finally, the network event gave opportunities for individuals to market their goods and services.

The key-note speaker for the event was Joan M. Blake, President of Christian Resource Network, Inc. and Editor of *The Christian Connection Newsletter*. The message was entitled: "Rise Up In the face of Adversity." The scripture verses were taken from the book of Nehemiah Chapter 2:18 and Chapter 6:3.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to king Artaxerses 1. He was a member of the Judean exile community with the fall of Jerusalem in 722BC. Under Persian rule, 538-537BC, the Jews were able to return to their homeland. Nehemiah learned that the Jews were in "great affliction" (Neh.1:2-3) and therefore, was faced with the awesome mission to rebuild the Jerusalem walls.

He fasted and went to God in prayer: confessing, asking forgiveness on behalf of his people, reminding God of the covenant he made with them, and requesting favor be granted him from the king (Neh. 1:4-11).

After consulting with the king, Nehemiah made preparation for the task ahead. He got the time to do God's will, received letters from the king to give to governors and other people in authority, so he can secure the resources he needed for building the walls (Neh.2:3-8). When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he went by night and surveyed the walls to see what needed to be done and later, received the support of the people to build the walls (Neh.2:11-18).

He continually faced opposition from Sanbalat, Tobias, and others who wanted him to stop the work (Neh.2:19-20), but he continued the work until it was completed (Neh.4:6), organizing his work crews in such a way that some worked, while others held swords in readiness for battle (Neh.4:16). Nehemiah had a mission which he completed in the face of adversity.

You, also, will face an important mission. When you seek God, He will prepare you for the task ahead and fight your battles for you so you can accomplish your task, for "the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chron. 20:15 KJV).

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HIGHLIGHTS OF CUME BANQUET

Summary By Joan M. Blake



Rev. Dr. Jesse Miranda

As customary, in a spirit of love, encouragement and excitement, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Center for Urban Ministerial Education, (CUME) celebrated its unity, oneness, and uniqueness, at their 32nd graduation banquet held on May 3, 2008 at Saint Paul's A.M.E Church Conference Center, located at 55 Bishop Allen Drive, Cambridge MA. Teen Challenge of Brockton catered the dinner.

Dr. Alvin Padilla, Academic Dean, gave the welcome address, Dr. William Spencer, Professor of Theology, said the opening prayer and Rev. Dr. Haddon Robinson, interim President, gave the greetings. The invocation was led by four students who prayed in their native languages of Spanish, French/Creole, Portuguese, and English and later, other students shared inspiring testimonies of how CUME changed their lives. Dr. Jann McMurry led the attendees in worship to "How Great Thou Art," and other hymns. Linda Germain, Yolaine Rosarion, and Linda Williams, M.Div. graduates, were recognized for their receipts of the Robert J Lamont and Phi Alpha Chi Awards respectively. Staff personnel prayed for participating churches, presented diplomas and certificates to degree and doctoral candidates, and welcomed the Alumni Association.

The key-note speaker was Rev. Dr. Jesse Miranda who was graciously introduced by Rev. Dr. Eldin Villafane, Founding Director of CUME. Rev. Dr. Miranda is known for his leadership and great work in a number of arenas.

Rev. Miranda addressed the graduates by stating that, "Going to, and serving in the city, is the destiny and goal of the Christian. Cities cannot reflect the 'New Jerusalem' until the Church has gone into the city." He asked the graduates the following question: "Do you know where you are going?" Going to the city will involve "**learning,**" "**vision,**" and "**identification.**"

"**Learning** is an act of cognition and helps to build community" explained Dr. Miranda. The first step in learning is to understand the city's "monopoly, power, control, and the great potential that it possesses." This will contribute to the "building blocks needed for one to create community action and bring a lasting hope to the city."

The second step is having a "**vision**" for the city. Just as the prophet Jeremiah measured the city, a vision for the city will involve: "researching" it, "evaluating" it, "accessing" it and "seeking" it. Dr. Miranda encouraged the graduates to know their mission to become "world changers, transformers, teachers, watchmen in the house of virtue, godly persons of righteousness and justice, seeking peace."

The third step is "**identifying**" oneself as a true "follower of Christ," with a mission to be "salt of the earth" and denying societal traditions of success based on performance. Dr. Miranda reminded graduates that to be followers of Christ is to "connect to Jesus, experience Him, practice Him, know one's tasks, know oneself, and guard one's heart." Because Jesus is our victor, we can conquer the "painful ills of society" and the "many voices" of power that are present. We are to "view the city, not as a place, but as the 'New Jerusalem,' where God is present." He concluded by challenging the graduates to: "Run, the city needs your presence. Let God's will be done."

Rev. Dr. Jesse Miranda is the Director of the Miranda center for Hispanic Leadership at Vanguard University, Costa Mesa, California.

LAYER BY LAYER: BUILD UP OR TEAR DOWN



Dr. Jean Dimock

Receiving an informal or formal education requires continually adding to our knowledge by building layer upon layer those bits and pieces of information related to the subject matter at hand. A pre-school child learns numbers before learning how to add and subtract, which is learned before solving geometry theorems, which is learned before applying for a job as a civil engineer.

Similarly, a seminary student learns the Hebrew alphabet before learning Hebrew tenses, which is learned before translating Isaiah from Hebrew to English. Those courses we take in seminary are meant to prepare us for living our lives and engaging in ministry in a redemptive and practical manner. As we continually study and learn more about God's Word and what it reveals to us about our Lord, ourselves, each other, our community, and our world, we personally grow in our faith and become better prepared for God's work and continual learning.

There are many things that can tear down our walk with the Lord, our ministry intentions, and hard work, but this article speaks only of one: gossip. What we built, layer upon layer, in our life experiences, in our seminary studies, and in our ministries can be destroyed in a moment of weakness with a verbal indiscretion.

Proverbs contains many references to gossip and how it often betrays a confidence (11:13). We are told not to "associate with a babblers" (20:19). Gossip "separates close friends" and the gossiper "spreads strife" (16:28). Romans 1:29 tells us that to gossip is to do something wicked.

We do not need brilliant exegesis to convince us that gossip is problematic and provides terrible personal and ministerial problems, both for the gossiper and the gossipee. Our words need to reflect who we are in Christ.

James tells us that, "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless" (1:26). As if that were not enough, he goes on to say, "So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell" (3:5,6). Those are mighty strong words and imagery! We have probably all been guilty of inserting our foot (or even both of them) into our mouths at one time or another. But we need to think first before speaking.

When we speak inappropriately concerning others or make snap judgments we tear down those educational and experiential layers we spent so much time learning from, developing, and working through. Gossip hurts others, hurts our ministry, and hurts us.

God is the helmsman of our life, which means he is the helmsman of our tongue. With his help we can better align our thoughts to His and help prevent sinful attitudes and speech. When we feel disagreeable, disappointed, frustrated, angry, betrayed, we can, with God's help, keep our tongue from sinning.

God's grace is amazing. If we are caught in the terrible snag of gossip, we can repent and know that God's grace is bigger than our sin. Be quick to repent and when the one offended by gossip, be quick to forgive. Repentance and forgiveness will put those damaged layers back together. When done well, another layer of learning and wisdom may even form.

NRSV References

Jean Dimock received her D.Min. in Ministry in Complex Urban Systems from Gordon-Conwell in 2005. She and her husband presently live in Newfields, NH, but their house is on the market as they look forward to moving from NH's seacoast to MA in the near future.

CUME'S IMPACT IN, AND BEYOND THE CITY



Jonatan Toledo

The Center for Urban Ministerial Education (CUME), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Boston Campus has been impacting the City of Boston and its surrounding communities for over 30 years. This impact has not been limited to reaching out to their very own urban population, but has also embraced suburban and a small but broad diversity of internationals as well. For me, as an international student from the Dominican Republic, (an island boy is how I love to introduce myself), it has been a blessing and I have experienced great joy throughout my involvement at CUME; not only as an international, but through my participation in its Diploma program.

When thinking about a strong, accessible and affordable Theological education, at a solid Christian institution, the idea of a nearly-impossible dream to be accomplished probably crosses the minds of many. It crossed mine when I looked at all the limitations I had, coming from a humble family in the Dominican Republic. Everything was a matter of resources, perhaps "academic" background, cultural and language barriers. . . you name it. However, God has used CUME to show me that he could break all of those barriers in my life to bless me beyond my expectations. He has provided me with the marvelous opportunity of gaining access to a place where I could benefit from a solid Theological education, and experience tremendous spiritual growth. I enrolled in CUME's Diploma program; a program that perhaps before the eyes of an academic society might not fit the already established standards of "accreditation" to get one into a "masters" level, but nevertheless, provides me with what I need to engage in a Christ-like ministry while allowing me to enroll in a master's level education.

CUME's Diploma program highlights the uniqueness of Gordon-Conwell's Boston Campus. Through the sacrifice of

many people with an effort that goes against "standards" of what is expected regarding educational matters, God has blessed the lives of many students including myself who otherwise would not have had a chance to grow, be blessed, through being involved in solid theological studies. Therefore, I believe that CUME's Diploma program constitutes a bridge that spans the "limited" lives of many into a highway of growth, blessings, and multiple opportunities. I enjoy the fact that following a Christ-like model, goes against "the normal" things to do "according to the law," in order to bless us even on "Sabbath."

As an international student, I've enjoyed the embracing of a Christian community who adopted me, and has walked with me through my adaptation into a new culture. At CUME I've never felt as an outsider, I feel at home. Much appreciation will always be on my heart for those faculty and staff members who lovingly have proof-read my papers, helped me as I develop my English skills, shared their insights, and so much more, contributing to my spiritual formation. They have been aware not only of my academic and spiritual needs, but of my personal and material needs as well. Details such as a plate of food, a few hours of fellowship outside of school setting, have been of much value. They have indeed seen me hungry and fed me, as a stranger and welcomed me, in need of clothes and clothed me, sick and looked after me; they have loved me in a Christ-like manner. Names are not needed for those individuals know who they are, and their reward is in Heaven, for sure.

Flexibility, tolerance, and Christ-like love, are just some of the words used to describe and summarize the role of CUME in the City of Boston and how its ministry is impacting the city, and providing everyone with the same grace, love, and mercy. They have taught me that ministry can be a messy job, and sure enough, I've found that CUME has not been ashamed of getting messy through the empowering of messy people willing to engage messy ministry. I've learned about what a practical Christianity looks like, through their example of a Christ-like ministry that serves the poor, the broken, the outcast, and strangers within this society. I've learned to live what I preach.

I will always be thankful for CUME's Diploma program; not a bachelor's degree, neither a masters, but a program that bridges limited lives into a highway of multiple blessings and a deeper understanding of God's truth. I will always be thankful for an institution that loves its very own Bostonians, but also the several countries represented within its diverse student body. **CUME is loving the City, CUME is empowering the poor.**

Jonatan Toledo

M.Div. Student, Sp.08

ANNUAL ATHANASIUS MEETING



Dr. Alvin Padilla

The annual Athanasius meeting was held on June 2, at the home of Drs' William and Aida Spencer, South Hamilton, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was two-fold: First, to introduce new scholars who will be assisting Dr. Spencer in his Theology classes, to honor the outgoing scholars with certificates, and listen to the testimonies of past scholars in their dealings with students.

Second, to encourage past and current scholars in the many ways they can meet the challenge to extend their studies by pursuing the Doctor of Ministry program here at CUME, a Master of Theology program, or a PHD program in London.

The meeting began with an opening prayer by guest speaker, Dr. Alvin Padilla, Academic Dean of CUME, followed by a pot luck dinner. The subject of Dr. Padilla's discussion was: "What qualities does the search committee look for in a faculty, team member, or person applying to work at CUME."

Dr. Padilla lists the following qualities that the person should possess to be an effective teacher at CUME.

a) A man or woman with sound theological precepts that longs to fulfill the great commission of Jesus, regardless of his or her cultural background and the color of his or her skin

b) One who is called to ministry who will train other men and women to continue in this task, one who is committed to the church and to the kingdom of God globally, and who is willing to embrace the diversity of the CUME environment

c) One who loves the teaching experience rather than dispensing of information

This involves loving a student and being passionate about teaching anything the student wants to learn; taking a student who doesn't have the capability, training him or her, and not being afraid of being surpassed by that very student.

d) One whose gifts are utilized for the greater good: to prepare students and ensure that they will succeed. For example, a

teacher sees obstacles as opportunities to help students by offering them extra tutoring, connecting them to other students to receive help and support

e) One who is willing to be creative in teaching while knowing that students come from different countries on the continents of Asia, India, and South America

f) One who will focus on accomplishing his or her mission; often, a faculty member who is afraid of becoming vulnerable ignores a student who wants to speak or ask a question during his or her lecture

g) One who is committed to serve and identify with students as Jesus did by going outside the city gates to associate with a seminary like CUME, rather than going through the mainstream

h) One who has a good understanding of the concept of marginalization and will help marginalized students succeed

i) One who will identify with Christ rather than the glory of the city

After the message, Dr. William Spencer introduced the new Athanasius' scholars and invited past scholars to offer them words of advice and encouragement. The meeting ended with a closing prayer by Dr. Alvin Padilla, Dean.

Women's Support Group

Are you experiencing emotional pain from the stress of life or feel mentally drained from caring for a loved one? Please email me if you are interested in being part of our monthly support group.

Email: JBlake@christianresourcenetwork.org

Do you need prayer?

Email

Jblake@christianresourcenetwork.org

or call

617.282.6182

Interested in Having a Seminar at Your Church or Organization?

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PRAYER FOR STRENGTH

Holy God, God of all comfort (2.Co.1:4)
I come to You, Almighty God,
You are so good, kind, and
Loving (Eph.2:4)
I am not deserving of Your love
But You said to come just as I am (Matt.11-28-30)
For Your blood washes away my sin, (Rom.5:8-9)
And Your strength is made perfect
In my weakness (2 Co.12:9)
Thank You for your grace that is sufficient for me
I confess my failure to depend on you for strength
Forgive me Lord for this sin
I pray now for strength, to
Even go another day,
In Jesus' name, Amen

**For God so loved the world
that He gave His only begotten
Son, that whoever believes in
Him should not perish but have
eternal life (John 3:16 NKJV)**

Letters To The Editor

If you were blessed by the articles published in this volume, we want to hear from you.

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