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“Hope for the Hurting Heart” Evangelistic Series Yields 33 Baptisms

FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS, BEREAN TRANSFORMATION CENTER'S (FORMERLY BEREAN SDA CHURCH) PASTOR CLAVAL HUNTER AND HIS MINISTRY TEAM HAVE SOWN INTO THE LIVES OF RESIDENTS OF SOUTH BEND, INDIANA, THROUGH A VARIETY OF OUTREACH INITIATIVES MINISTERING TO BOTH ADULTS AND CHILDREN.

For the past three years, Berean Transformation Center's (formerly Berean SDA Church) Pastor Claval Hunter and his ministry team have sowed into the lives of residents of South Bend, Indiana, through a variety of outreach initiatives ministering to both adults and children. The response from community members has been tremendous and a total of 33 souls were baptized in September after the “Hope for the Hurting Heart” evangelistic series led by Chicago's Shiloh Church Pastor John Boston II.

Every second Sabbath, Berean members engage in a compassion outreach in the South Bend community in lieu of a traditional worship service. Fanning out into the neighborhood in blue T-shirts emblazoned with the words, “Here 2 Serve” or “Touch 10K Challenge,” Berean members feed the homeless, visit and pray with community members, lead out in various children's ministries activities and engage in various other felt needs ministries.

“We've built a ministry that is consistent, a ministry that is pouring into the needs of the community, and we've built healthy relationships,” Hunter says. “So, way before the series, it took those types of programs or intentionality to win the hearts of the people.”

And night after night of the series, Boston delved deep into his personal testimony and related some of the traumatic experiences of his own life, bringing an emotionally impactful dynamic to his presentations.

“I have faced some trauma and some of you here today have experienced trauma,” Boston told the crowd on opening night. “But what I want to assure you of tonight is that there is no trauma that God is not aware of and there is no trauma that does not have a healing factor. ... The pain that you've experienced, the hurt, it all has a purpose.”

Hunter says that Boston's approach went beyond a focus on the 2,300-day prophecy or other topics usually addressed at evangelistic

meetings. Rather, his focus was on speaking “to the needs of the people. ... And so, him adding his own story into the messages every night really appealed to the person saying, ‘I was adopted’ or ‘I felt abandoned’ or ‘I went through a traumatic situation, and I wanted to give up.’” Boston's willingness to share his story and be vulnerable “made people feel comfortable to want to listen and be open to the gospel message of Jesus's love,” Hunter added.

Hunter said the message that resonated with the South Bend community was, “Yes, I've been broken but God is making me whole. Yes, I've been perhaps raped and felt ridiculed, but it is God who is comforting my heart. The alcohol wouldn't do it, all of the money in the world or the puppy love that I've been experiencing cannot fill that void. It's only Jesus, His love, His compassion.”

Abraham Henry, vice president for administration for the Lake Region Conference, was present for the final day of the evangelistic series and said he was moved by what he saw.

“Pastor John Boston and Pastor Claval Hunter did a phenomenal job,” Henry said. “Pastor John Boston, we want to thank you for preaching the Word each and every day throughout this meeting. Today, what we saw was something amazing. We saw [many] people give their lives to God, and we are so grateful. We believe that this is going to transform this community and transform lives.”

Hunter said he believes that the many baptisms following the series is evidence that the work he and his ministry team continue to do in the South Bend community is not in vain.

“It's so beautiful to see what the Bible says, ‘You reap what you sow,’” Hunter said. “And with evangelism, if you're not going, and being consistent with it ... you cannot reach” people. “And so, the reason why we are reaping at this time is because we've been going. We've been sowing.” ■

David Pluiose is a master of divinity student at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He also serves as connect pastor at the Berean Transformation Center in South Bend, Indiana.