

Urban Mission and Ministry Congress

Attracts a wide cross-section of people to learn about transforming urban communities through Christ's love

SOME 535 PASTORS, LAY MINISTRY LEADERS, church planters, community service managers, Bible workers and seminarians gathered September 6–8 at Andrews University for the 2018 Urban Mission and Ministry Congress. The theme was “God’s City, My City—Transforming Community through Christ’s Love,” and the tagline was “Re-set. Re-frame.”

Skip Bell, professor of church leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and coordinator for the event, shared the meaning of that tagline: “The words re-set and re-frame suggest change is necessary. We—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—were born in the context of New England, the second wave of the Great Awakening in the mid-nineteenth century, where the issues in Christianity were identified with that historical framework, that point in time.” Despite the need to recognize and value these historical roots, Bell emphatically noted the difference between roots and foundation. “The foundation of our church is not that history. The foundation of our church is Jesus and how He lives in this world today through His church. We are a movement of people empowered by the Spirit, filled with a joyful relationship with Jesus, sharing Him not through argument but through life and deed. So re-set, re-frame.”

Dan Jackson, president of the Adventist denomination in North America, kicked off the event by stressing the importance of urban ministry. Jackson emphasized the weekend’s primary theme—the need to serve in the cities rather than distance ourselves from the urban context. Tiffany Brown, from REACH Philadelphia, later addressed the same point saying, “Our cities are important because that’s where the people are.”

Other Adventists who spoke during the plenary sessions included Will James from the Paradise Valley Adventist Church in San Diego, Roger Hernandez from the Southern Union Conference staff, Carlton Byrd from the Oakwood University Church, Peter Bath from Kettering Health Network in Dayton, and Ty Gibson from Storyline Adventist Church in Oregon.

For a broader perspective, a number of presenters were from other Christian denominations—Noel Castellanos, director of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA); Tim Wise, a Christian activist for racial justice; Congressman Emanuel Cleaver, member of the United States Congress from Missouri; and Richard Perry, professor of urban ministry at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

In addition to the need for Adventists to live and serve in cities, three additional

themes that emerged in the presentations, panel discussions and workshops were the importance of service, social justice and relationships. Regarding service, short interviews with urban pastors headlined each plenary session.

The root causes of poverty and other society-wide problems were also given significant attention and the centrality of building relationships emerged as a prominent theme. In his plenary presentation, James argued that a refugee’s greatest need is a mentor. “We all need someone who genuinely cares and meets us where we are,” he said. In the context of trauma, Ingrid Slikkers, social work professor at Andrews University, stated, “Programs don’t heal people. People heal people.”

Commenting on what he hopes participants take away from the 2018 event, Bell listed four desires. He hopes pastors and lay people understand they are called to relate to people, to serve people, to show compassion for people over the long-term, and to build relationships with people where the connection is not only about religion.

To conclude the weekend events, Bell gave a rousing appeal for attendees to embody the teachings that had been presented.

 Visit “Urban Mission and Ministry Congress” on YouTube to view plenary sessions

Excerpted from an article by Jeff Boyd, research support specialist, Andrews University. Used with permission from Adventist Today. To read the entire article, go to andrews.edu/agenda.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: Moderator Sung Kwon addresses a panel consisting of Emanuel Cleaver II, Joshua Nelson, Taurus Montgomery, Desiree Davis and Tim Wise on Saturday, Sept. 8, in the Howard Performing Arts Center ■ Erica Ford presents “Engaging Christians in Addressing Issues of Community Violence” at a breakout session ■ Todd Stout (right) speaks with a participant after his breakout session ■ Skip Bell, coordinator of the Urban Mission & Ministry Congress, welcomes attendees