



Reviving North America
through the Young Harvest

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Workshop Presentation



**“Evangelizing
Communities
in the
Young Harvest”**

Bishop Shelton Beneby



[Profile of Bishop Shelton Beneby](#)

Bishop Shelton L. Beneby is pastor of Toronto New Covenant Cathedral. He was born in Nassau, The Bahamas, on July 21, 1955, to Bishop Nathaniel and Victoria Beneby and is the fifth child in a family of nine boys and one girl.

Shelton Beneby is a third generation Church of God of Prophecy Pastor. He began his spiritual journey at the age of 14 years when he committed his heart to the Lord Jesus and recognized that he was called by God to work with young people. He sought to answer this call in 1974, as a Trained Teacher in The Bahamas Public Service. He spent more than a decade as a teacher, and in 1982 was appointed Director of Youth Affairs in The Bahamas Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, where for fourteen (14) years he steered the introduction and development of key national youth programs such as Junior Achievement, Youth in Parliament, National Youth Month and the Youth Summer Program. Bishop Beneby also served as Chairman of the National Youth Council, Co-chairman of the National Drug Council, Chairman of the Caribbean Youth Program and Chairman of the Commonwealth Youth Program. In 1996, he was appointed to the senior administrative post of Deputy Permanent Secretary and served in the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Prime Minister and finally in the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation.

Pastor Beneby commenced his pastoral ministry as a Community Mission Pastor in 1994, when he decided to “take the church to the community” and established a not-for-profit organization called Project TIME (Training Institute for Men Elect) to reach at-risk boys and young men in low-income urban communities. Project TIME soon was expanded to include girls and young women, and its mission became to convert, to console and to challenge young men and women to discover their fullest potential and make wise choices. Meetings took place weekly on basketball courts and in public school classrooms and the Project’s curriculum

included Spiritual Formation, Discipline Training, Time Management, Learning Life Skills through Sports and Games, After-School Classes for homework assistance and computer training, Drum Corps and Flagettes. Hundreds of Bahamian young people were mentored through Project TIME during the three (3) years Pastor Beneby was its leader and many of them are now contributing members and leaders in their communities.

In 2001, Pastor Beneby was appointed Senior Pastor of the Baillou Hill Road Church of God of Prophecy in Nassau, The Bahamas, and immediately worked with the congregation to make the church relevant again in its community. The church's name was changed to Baillou Hill Road *Community* Church and an early morning (0800 hours) Sunday Worship service in Haitian Creole was instituted to integrate the Haitian residents in the church's locale into the life of the church. Under his eight (8) years of servant-leadership, this congregation served as a model of how the church can be used to break down racial, cultural and socioeconomic barriers in an urban community.

Pastor Beneby also served as District Overseer for 10 years and at the International Church as a member of the Board of Trustees for Tomlinson College, Cleveland, Tennessee, for seven (7) years.

Bishop Beneby holds a Teacher's Certificate from The Bahamas Teachers College, a Master of Science Degree in Community Education from the University of Minnesota at Mankato, and a Diploma from the Bible Training Institute of the Church of God of Prophecy. He has completed the Center for Biblical Leadership Training and Leadership Development courses, and is presently a student at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, Massachusetts, pursuing a Masters of Arts Degree. His vision for ministry is a church in which all members, according to their gifts, participate fully in sharing the timeless Gospel of Jesus Christ to meet the holistic needs of the community it serves.

He is married to Shelly nee Ricketts of Canada and they are the parents of three children, Shea Ashlee, Sherod and Shalah. *

Synopsis of Workshop

The needs of people in the 21st Century cry out to the Church to find real solutions to real problems. Our society suffers from a rapid increase in moral bankruptcy and dysfunctional relationships. Divorce now lays claim to one in every two marriages (Christian and non-Christian) families. Which was once considered a sacred and safe entity has been relegated to a blend of options and lifestyles.

People are ravaged with insatiable appetites for money, sex and power. Violent crime has risen in the past years. Murder, rape, drugs, alcohol and violence have invaded our schools... communities... and families.

Our traditional values are challenged by the weakening of the family ties and breakdown of child-parent relationships. Our homes are being impacted as never before with the introduction of modern-day technology. Today's young people are "facebookers," "youtubers," and "twitterers," and have no reservation in sharing their opinions with anyone. This is a generation that needs to be evangelized through technology. The greatest need in North America among the many challenges is to be able to reach, teach, shape and raise up our most valuable resource our children and young people. We must take a holistic approach in meeting their educational, physical, social, economic and spiritual needs.

This workshop will highlight the need to specifically evangelize our children and young people especially at the community level. It is this generation that we as leaders must invest our time and resources in reaching. This is that generation I believe, who are strategically positioned, called and assigned, to share and live out their faith in light of the Great Commission.

Key areas for discussion will focus on the need for community evangelism and the master-plan presented by Jesus, to

provide an understanding of our youth and the ever changing environment that is impacting them, the role of the family and church especially in spiritual disciplines and the need for the entire community to be engaged in evangelizing a ripe youth harvest.

Introduction

On January 31st, 1996, God gave me a passion to reach our boys and young men at the community level within the city of Nassau in The Bahamas. This happened as I was driving to church on a Sunday Morning and recognized the many young men on the community basketball courts and with no concern for worship.

The communities in which these young men live was characterized by drugs and drug trafficking, alcohol drinking, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and the movement of residents out of this community and the movement of people of different ethnic background into the neighborhood. There was a constant cry from residents as to who was involved in criminal activities in the community.

What I saw were so many young people caught up in a dangerous lifestyle, placing their health and even their life at risk, and it was time to do something. I was upset as to what I saw happening and thought it was time for the church to be more engaged within the community. The next Sunday I left the confines of the Sunday morning church service and went to the community park to play ball with the young men and to minister to them.

This journey led to the establishment of Project Time, a Christ-centered training program for youth at the community level. I was able to target two additional urban areas where I found young men challenged in so many ways:

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- Failing grades and high drop-out rates;
 - Rebellion against parents;
 - Trouble with the law;
 - Uncontrollable behavior;
 - Fights;
 - Lack of self-confidence;
 - Peer pressure;
 - Stealing and lying;
 - Smoking marijuana;

I saw a youth harvest destined for greatness but not fulfilling their purpose. While governments were attempting to provide various programs and services along with the many youth and community organizations, I was of the view that for this generation to transform this world the church must be at the front of the battle. Our greatest challenge still is to — go where people are.

I, therefore, wish to share with you the lessons I learned from the strategies I used to engage young people in the harvest.

Challenge for the Church

How do you survive and grow as a church in a rapidly changing environment when the majority of members are driving to church from suburbs and those who are within our church locale are not being reached? What about an aging membership and the challenge of reaching the children and young people who are not attending church? How do we strategize to encourage the many who have left home for whatever reasons to return home? Will they meet the “same old-same old”?

Many of them see the church as not relevant and meeting the needs of people. Do they just see the church as that black church, white church, Hispanic church, Caribbean Church? and the list goes on. Or do they see a church meeting the need of the most vulnerable amongst us the poor, the elderly the children and our youth?

The **21st century church** must be **transformational**, with an open door which no one can shut. That embraces people of all races, colors and ethnic backgrounds. The methods may change. I used sports and recreation to reach the young men in particular, but the message never changed.

Our mission must be to Convert, Console and to Challenge.

Vision

To reach our children and young people at the community level, the church must be engaged in community transformation which is rooted in the good news of the kingdom that says if we seek Him first, everything and all aspects of our life that is personal, social, emotional, spiritual, educational, economical and political will be fulfilled.

Key to the Great Commission

Focused attention must be given to children and young people aged 5-15 years, as they are keys to the Great Commission. This will require that we mobilize them **now** to make a difference. Now is the time to **Reach, Invest, Equip** and **Empower** this generation. I believe this is the generation the prophet Joel was referring to in Acts 2: 'Your sons and daughters will prophesy and your young men will see visions.' Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see Jesus using children and young people such as David, Esther, Timothy and Josiah to transform their world.

Use the Master's Master-Plan

The strategies we employ to evangelize the young harvest in the 21st century should reflect of Jesus' Master-Plan for evangelism. That is, our strategies should be

- ***Sustainable***: Holy Spirit and discipling
- ***Christ-centric***: unequivocal Gospel
- ***Motivated by love and compassion***: the mark of discipleship
- ***Proactive***: "Go!" to them
- ***Results oriented***: Focused - the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of God
- ***Consistent with the Lifestyle of the church in the community***: practice what you preach

These characteristics can be present only when the Holy Spirit is at work in our individual lives and in the life of the church.

Understand the Harvest

Know your Community:

The rural, urban or suburban challenges, the social challenges, the economic and political challenges, the people challenges and the spiritual challenges.

Understand the times in which we live:

We are living in a post-modern age in which the spirit of deconstructionism is eroding values, affecting self-identity, and changing the views of the home, church, family, school and society. Young people are riding a technological wave into the future. More than any generation they are engaged in a world of communication and information. The internet

provides our youth with instant access to a wide variety of lifestyles. Our long held values are being threatened and I see a weakening of family ties and the deterioration of parent-child relationship being of grave concern. No children and youth program can be successful without the involvement of parents.

Know your Youth

This knowledge requires a scientific approach so that we might meet the needs of our youth during the various stages of their development. It takes a community to raise a child and everyone has a role to play to ensure the holistic development of our youth. One child at a time. Discipling them. The problem is not this generation but the one before. What kind of examples have we been setting. Young people know whether we are for real. We are required to make disciples. This means that the Great commission is not merely to go to the ends of the earth preaching the gospel (Mark 16:15), nor to baptize a lot of converts into the name of the triune God, nor to teach them the precepts of Christ — but to make disciples — to build people like themselves who are so constrained by the commission of Christ that they not only follow Him but also lead others to follow Christ’s way. Only as disciples were made could the other activities of the commission be fulfilled.

Empower Parents & Families

The power and authority of parents to teach their children is being usurped by the media, public institutions and “special interest groups with agendas.” The church must empower Christian parents to become the first agents of evangelism to their children. Christian homes need to become the first place of evangelism.

Provide training in parenting skills for all prospective and existing parents. In addition to representing the best scholarship in parenting, this training should also:

- **Encourage families to incorporate spiritual disciplines in the raising of children:**
 - Prayer;
 - Fasting;
 - Giving;
 - Fellowship and church attendance;
 - Scripture reading and Bible study;
 - Evangelism and sharing of the gospel;

Children who are raised to love, trust and fear God, will not desert Him when they become adults nor will He leave them. They will 'grow in grace.'

Make known to young people at each stage of their development their responsibilities to God, self, family and community.

Take Ownership of the Harvest

To take ownership of the harvest is to claim it for God's glory and to fight for it. The congregation and its leaders must buy into the goal of evangelizing the youth and must work together to achieve the goal.

- Identify people to be trained to reach the youth;
- Include pastors early in the evangelism program;
- Coordinate outreach activities with all ministries in order to encourage cooperation, to utilize resources

of the church in the best ways, and to avoid duplication of activities;

- Strengthen the congregation in the Christian discipline of hospitality so that newcomers and the un-churched may know that they 'belong' when they join the body of Christ;
- Pastors, ministry leaders and congregation must agree on the vision for the harvest. This vision should include:
 - Young people who confess faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord;
 - Young people who become members of the church;
 - Young people who are living according to Christian principles even before they profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Make a Plan

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide us and the church as we develop strategies to reach His harvest. Be obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- Take another look at the community where your church is located and get to know it; get to know the leaders – the legitimate and illegitimate leaders in the community;
- Does your church visit or make contact with the community;
- How does your church get the word out regarding your presence and work in the community?

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- Assess what you have been doing as a church to reach the youth harvest;
 - Assess the effectiveness of your children's ministry;
 - Assess the effectiveness of your youth Ministry;
 - Assess the effectiveness of your Sunday School;
 - Assess how you have been reaching out to the un-churched youth;
 - What have you been doing to reach out to the community?
 - What services do you provide for the community?
 - Does your church network with other churches and key community organizations?
 - How have we been reaching, investing, equipping and empowering our Youth Leaders and Youth?

After the review and assessment exercise, I recommend that each local church put in place a three-year strategic plan to reach our children and young people:

- Establish a Task Force in the local church for a coordinated effort with all ministries that impact youth harvest. Identify other strategic partners in the community;
- Hold a church-wide conference to discuss the issues;
- Develop a sustained and comprehensive outreach weekly program for children and young people;
- Establish a Research Team to design programs and services to achieve the desired goals;
- Pray!