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Inter-American Division  >  Communication Department

Libna Stevens

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Mar. 09, 2012 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States...Ansel Oliver/ANN

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In 2001, pastors A. Allan Martin and Jeff Gang found themselves in charge of the young adult break-out groups at Florida Camp Meeting and wondered what they could do to reach beyond the paltry attendance. Most of the attendees were in their 40s and simply wanted air-conditioning while waiting for their kids to be let out of Sabbath School.

Martin and Gang met with local young adults to pray and seek out what could be done with the opportunity to better reach younger generations.

That spawned the next year what has now become GODencounters, a weekend series of spiritual gatherings designed for young adults, challenging them to have a 24/7 encounter with Jesus.

The series addresses young adult themes such as relationships, worship and service, drawing life lessons from successful biblical characters who encountered challenges similar to those often faced by those out of high school through pre-parenthood.

“We asked, ‘what might we do with young adults, to challenge them to have an ongoing relationship with the living God, not just spiritually entertain them in a program,’” said Martin, who now serves as pastor of the Younger Generation Church, which meets at Arlington Seventh-day Adventist Church in Texas.

Martin said that ministry events are too often about “loyalty to the institution” or creating a “spiritual high” moment. “Rarely do they intentionally plan for the process that follows long after the event is over.”

The series is typically preceded and followed by several weeks of prayer and discussion, using online social networks, blogs and recommended readings to connect young adults with each other and facilitate an ongoing relationship with God.

There are several GODencounters series held around the United States each year. They often meet Friday night, Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon.

One GODencounters event was held during General Conference Session in Atlanta in 2010. More than 3,000 attended, making it one of the largest events in the ongoing series.

“GODencounters is a continuous growing experience for young adults who are serious about ministry in their churches,” said James Black, Youth & Young Adult Ministry Director for the denomination’s North American Division. “We’re very passionate and serious about getting this out.”

Black says he gets requests for the series worldwide. GODencounters was recently held in New Zealand and Ghana, and organizers are planning events for Canada and the Philippines next year.

On a recent Friday night, visiting pastor Roger Hernandez led a GODencounters series in Fulton, Maryland, drawing life experiences from the biblical character of David.

"Like many of you," Hernandez told the audience, "he had been promised big things - he was to become king. But he had to go through a lot and didn't understand why bad things were happening even though he was living faithfully."

Hernandez said David was on the road to becoming king but lost his spouse, job, spiritual leader, house, best friend and even his dignity.

"But what David learned can speak to us today in three ways," Hernandez said. "One, you attract the type of person you are. Two, be and give your best even when you’re at your worst. And three, God is enough. David wrote the classic Psalm 142 while in a cave."

One attendee said it was as if all three of the weekend’s messages had been created just for him.

"Don't you love it when God does that?" Martin said. "When we pursue an encounter with God, we are often delighted to find our God has been pursing us all along."