Take the Gift

Millions in New York City offered the Gift of Grace

Everybody likes to receive gifts! Well, almost everybody. … With the long lines in the malls last December and the rush for sales that comes with the Christmas season, it would appear that a lot of people were out shopping for a gift for someone. Many of us were out there too, maybe not shopping, but this time giving a gift.

Take the Gift New York Initiative

Take the Gift was launched on November 28, 2011, as a public relations campaign for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in New York City as we prepare for NY13. The target audience was primarily non-Adventist. When church members mention to some of the more than eight million people living in New York City that “I am a Seventh-day Adventist,” they ask, “What is that?” A sad reality, but a reality just the same! New York City is home to a large international community and there is a need to raise the awareness of not just our name, but who we are as a church.

Garret Caldwell, GC communication associate director in the General Conference Communication Department’s Office of Public Relations, developed a 30-second video that expresses visually how it feels to be a recipient of God’s grace. Joy, peace, and liberation are just a few of the concepts conveyed to the viewer about the power of God’s grace through The Gift.

The administrations of the Greater New York and Northeastern Conferences invested in a plan to air the television spot on CNN and FOX news, Time Warner Cable, Cablevision, and Verizon FIOS in New York City, and on Verizon FIOS and Cablevision on Long Island.

Extended Outreach

The commercial was designed as an awareness campaign, but the conferences decided to not just raise awareness, but give a call to action.

Large posters, measuring 2.5 feet by 4 feet, were printed and displayed in 30 New York City subway stations and 25 Long Island railroad stations. Damali Boston, AY leader from the Dunamis Adventist Church and chaplain at Greater New York Academy, was so excited when she saw the poster in the Nostrand Avenue train station in Brooklyn that she took a picture with her cell phone and posted it on her Facebook page.

A Web site was developed specifically for the New York City initiative: www.takethegiftnewyork.org.

At this site, visitors who responded to
the television commercial, subway posters, or posters in the churches and schools by filling out the online request form for the gift, received *The Gift* by mail. *The Gift* is a multimedia DVD with the following contents:

- A video welcome message by Mark Finley, international speaker.
- Bible study lessons in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.
- Sixteen thousand DVDs were prepared for church members to give to their neighbors as a special seasonal gift.

Many people responded through the Web site requesting the gift. A gentleman whose name is Ken said when he requested his gift: “Life has been, and still is, a major challenge. A healthy dose of inspiration is certainly welcomed. Thank you.”

G. Earl Knight, Greater New York Conference president, says, “This is just the first step in raising awareness of who we are as Seventh-day Adventists in New York City. [The year] 2013 is coming and, no doubt, there is much more work to be done as we prepare for this great evangelistic thrust in this city.”

A comprehensive public relations plan is being developed for NY13. Already there is a Web site at www.ny13.org and a facebook page, www.facebook.com/ny13.org. As we get closer to 2013, a more intense media and social network campaign will be launched to raise awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Look for our mobile app this summer.

In preparation for NY13, about 16,000 seeds have been planted. Will you join us in praying that these DVDs will not sit in DVD players or in computer drives, but will be viewed and studied and that the hearts of the recipients will be receptive to the Word of God?

By Rohann D. Wellington—Greater New York Conference Communication director, Berean church pastor, and NY13 Communication Committee chair.

Now accepting submissions for the 2012 Society of Adventist Communicators Awards!

If you, or someone you know, has excelled in some area of communication this past year, nominate them or submit your own work. Nominations must be received by July 2.

Go to www.adventistcommunicator.org/article/51/accreditation/sac-awards for submission guidelines.

Note the following 2012 SAC Award categories:

**Corporate Communication**

- Best Constituency or Annual Report Video
- Best Constituency Report (Print) or Best Special Event
- Best Annual Report (Print)
- Best Web site

**New Media**

- Best App
- Best Email Newsletter
- Best Blog/Best Student Blog
- Best Use of Social Media

**Print**

- Best Newsletter (Print)
- Best Magazine
- Best Editorial
- Best Feature
- Best Devotional

SAC Board members and President Kimberly Luste Maran host Awards Banquet, Chicago 2011.
Planning Your City-Wide Campaign

A city-wide evangelistic meeting requires tremendous planning. One key to success is the marketing of your event. Most advertising for Adventist events seems limited to the traditional handbills, posters, and radio ads. As you consider planning a major event in your metro area, here are some unconventional ways to gain attention:

Post Your Calendar of Events on Patch.com.
This popular online newspaper (owned by AOL) has gained major momentum, especially in urban areas. The appeal of this communication medium is it is “hyper local” news generated for your community. You can post all of your events on their community calendar. In addition, you can blog for the Patch. They welcome cross-posting from your own blog to their site. This gives you a wider audience and allows you to connect with your local audience about your upcoming event. Read my blog posts on the Patch to give you a better idea—http://columbia.patch.com/users/kumar-dixit/blog_posts.

Plaster your QR Code on everything. A Quick Response Code allows the busy traveler who has seen your poster on the train to take a snapshot now, and read the Web site later. QR codes should be placed on all of your handbills, posters, signs, and social media sites.

Use a sentence-friendly domain for your campaign. Remember, your potential seeker may engage with your propaganda for only 2-3 seconds before they put it in the trash or drive past it. A sentence-friendly domain should be easy enough to remember. Avoid using domains with abbreviations, (such as SDA) that non-Christians will not be familiar with. As a suggestion, here are some Web domains that are available for sale: InSearchofHope.com, AreYouReadyCanada.com, InSearchOfAnswers.com, and BringPeace.com.

Rajkumar Dixit is a pastor at New Hope Adventist Church, Md. He is the author of Branded Faith: Contextualizing the Gospel in a Post-Christian World.

From the pool of winners, the awards committee will chose an overall Award of Excellence and the Reger Cutting Smith Award for innovation and creativity.
Nominations for Lifetime Achievement, Student, and Young Professional awards are also being accepted. Email nominations or questions to info@adventistcommunicator.org.

We will announce the nominees and award winners at the SAC Awards Banquet, Saturday, October 20, in Albuquerque, NM. (Visit www.adventistcommunicator.org/article/152/accreditation/sac-awards/2011-award-winners for a list of the 2011 winners.)

Thank you for helping us honor those who continue to model excellence among Adventist communicators.
The greatest extreme Volunteer that walked on this planet was described in the Spirit of Prophecy as “The God of heaven has revealed His self-denying, self-sacrificing love in giving ‘His only begotten Son.’ We are to be representatives of Jesus, in the family, in the workshop, in our place of business, in social gatherings—everywhere on every occasion.” (WM 1952 p174 EGW)

This selfless voluntary contribution assures us our place for eternity. When we volunteer to engage in alleviating the suffering around us or just making a contribution to make this world a better place, we will be more effective if the “self-sacrificing” model we know is the standard and philosophy we follow in accomplishing our mission of public engagement.

How do we effectively communicate this message? What will mobilize faith-based congregations to be more proactive in advocating community initiatives?

Faith communities will only thrive when they invest in social capital. A humanitarian agenda should be in the evangelism toolbox. We cannot continue scaring people with the monsters of Daniel and Revelation in the end times and with the morbid consequences of an animal-based diet and just ignore the suffering community around us. Truth seekers would rather look at their smartphones and Ipads for the “perceived” truth. They only relate and open up to faith communities if they are real, kind, and compassionate. They know us by observing us.

The early Christian church built social capital by practicing interpersonal relationships and social services. The rise of Christianity appears to rest primarily on the strong commitments that the early Christians maintained to the community of believers and to showing love and care to outsiders. “The primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the good news.” (The Rise of Christianity R Stark)

Civic engagement requires a commitment of community services and volunteerism. Ellen G. White shared, “Those who have united with the Lord in the covenant of service are under bonds to unite with Him in the great and grand work of soul saving.” (Testimonies V7 p19)

Hartford Study/FACT argued, “Congregations with strong commitment to social justice and with direct participation in community outreach ministries are more likely to be growing than other fellowships.” The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” This profound statement reminds us that selfishness and not helping others is a violation of the law.

Richard Stearns in his book, Hole in the Gospel, said, “We are His representatives, to demonstrate His unfailing love.” This is the time to plug this hole. We have to step forward as a faith community to assess existing gaps and respond to those who are vulnerable to suffering and humiliation.

Ephraim Palmero, MD—Director, Communication and Media Ministries, Health Ministries, Alaska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.