

## Outreach Conference in Simi Valley

Brother Bob McDonnell expressed in his opening remarks on Sunday at the “Come and See” outreach/mini-conference held in Simi Valley on November 3 and 4, 2007, “God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.” Brother Bob shared an experience of one of the young brothers, Brother Frankie, as they were driving to Simi. He was deeply touched by God’s spirit as he saw rays of light coming down from heaven in front of the van. Indeed, God’s holy spirit remained with the saints this entire weekend.

On Saturday, November 3, 2007, 25 Youth in Action and MBA representatives met in the Simi Valley branch to extend this invitation of “come and see” to the surrounding community. After singing several selections from the Songs of Zion, Brother Bob McDonnell opened in prayer. Brother Stacey Light read some scripture about the four sons of Mosiah going about spreading the Gospel. Then Brother Bob, Brother Stacey and Brother Sal Azzinaro divided the young people into groups. Brother Carlos Martinez offered a prayer and then the groups went out, going door to door, inviting people in the surrounding neighborhood to attend our service. Brother Ryan McDonnell led the canvassing effort.

In the Saturday evening service, Brother Stacey Light spoke about the joys of witnessing. We enjoyed several selections from our Hispanic brothers and sisters, including a duet. Brother Jim Huttenberger read and expounded on the pamphlet that was being handed out to the neighbors. He said that we would attract people to the church by showing the love of God. Then the meeting was opened for testimony. Many of the young people spoke about the reactions of the neighbors as they went canvassing. Brother Bob McDonnell shared that he had been leery of the canvassing, but once he made the effort to get out there, he was blessed.

In the Sunday service following Brother Bob’s opening remarks and prayer by Brother Justin Paxon, Brother Stacey Light relayed that he had awakened early Sunday morning to read some scripture and was captivated by the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. In this compelling story of obedience, healing and conversion, a formerly blind young man, his sight restored, looks into the eyes of Jesus and says, “*I believe,*” for the Lord removed both his natural and spiritual blindness. In paraphrasing and summarizing the story, Brother Stacey shared how someone in this situation – having been blind from birth – was consigned to be a beggar, a second class citizen. The disciples asked Jesus, “What sin caused his blindness?” The Lord responded that no sin had caused it, “...but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:3) He then anointed this man’s eyes with clay and told him to “go wash in the pool of Siloam.” (John 9:7)

The young man obeyed and his eyes were made whole – imagine his overwhelming joy to be able to see for the first time in his life! He declared this miracle to everyone! His neighbors didn’t quite believe this was the same man. When they asked him what had happened, he relayed his story of healing by Jesus. Then they took him to the Pharisees for questioning. The Pharisees disputed and murmured, “How can this be? How can he

have healed him on the Sabbath?" They were oblivious – spiritually blind – to this wondrous miracle that had occurred in their very midst.

So the Jewish leaders called in the young man's parents for questioning. At this time, if one pledged allegiance to Jesus Christ, one would be cast out of the temple. Fearful, they would not admit that Jesus healed him and suggested they ask him directly because he was old enough to speak for himself. They were not willing to fully commit like their son did. The Pharisees brought in the son a second time for questioning and accused Jesus of being a sinner. The young man declared in John 9:25, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: *one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*" Still not satisfied, the Pharisees asked him yet again what had transpired. Probably exasperated, the young man in essence asked, "If I tell you again, will you believe?" Remaining spiritually blind, the Jewish leaders angrily cast him out of the temple because he claimed that Jesus performed this miracle.

When Jesus learned of this, he asked the young man, "Doest thou believe on the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" And Jesus said unto him, "Thou has both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." And he said, "*Lord, I believe.*" And he worshipped him. And Jesus said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." (John 9:35-39) In other words, Jesus came into the world to give sight to those who are spiritually blind and to show those who think they see that they are, in fact, blind.

Brother Stacey asked, "How do we relate this to our lives today?" We can extend the invitation of "*Come and see* – come and see what I have found when Jesus Christ came into our homes, our lives, our family." He gave several examples of healing and transformation when the Lord intervenes: children with hatred toward their parents and how Jesus changed their hearts; how the Lord has extended the life of his father-in-law, Brother Russ Martorana, who was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer six months ago, but continues to preach the Gospel wherever he goes; how the Lord spared his nephews in a serious automobile accident; how prayers were answered on behalf of Michael Buccellato, who was not expected to live past his teen-age years.

In conclusion, Brother Stacey urged us to share our testimonies and invite others to "come and see" because the Gospel has a blessing for each and everyone of us who can look in the Lord's eyes and say, "*I believe.*"

The gift of music and singing was shared throughout the Sunday service. Originally, Sister Christina Paxon had planned to sing a different song, but felt led by the spirit to sing the beautiful "I Believe in a Hill Called Mount Calvary." The words of the chorus are powerful:

I believe in a hill called mount calvary  
I believe whatever the cost  
And when time has surrendered

And earth is no more  
I'll still cling to the old rugged cross.

Brother Bob remarked that there is nothing greater than what was accomplished on that hill. Jesus died for us because it was his mission, so that we might live life more abundantly. Regarding the young man from the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, Brother Bob reminded us that this young man – via his blindness, healing and subsequent conversion – was used as a tool to show the power and glory of God. Jesus came for those who can't see and to give them sight – if they would only believe. Like this bold young man, Alma, Joseph of Arimethaea and others sought out Jesus, their eyes and hearts were opened and they believed. “Don't make your salvation complex,” exhorted Brother Bob. “It's *not*. God chose His only begotten son to pay the debt, the price of sin. Let's not deny the gift of salvation... God isn't asking us to be blind, just to break your heart before him – a broken heart and a contrite spirit are all that's required.”

Following the Bell choir's stirring renditions of “Una Vez Mas” and “Yo Se Que Cristo Vendro,” Brother Jim Huttenberger delivered a message of hope and encouragement, punctuated with an exuberant “hang in there” as he emphasized each point. He began by stating that “God takes the messes and difficulties in our lives, God is glorified, our faith is increased and we are more reliant on His spirit.” Jesus makes many invitations throughout the word of God; for example, Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

When the disciples caught no fish all night, Jesus told them to cast their nets on the right side and their nets came up full, almost ready to burst. So *obedience* is most important to the Lord. The blind man in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of John exercised obedience when Jesus told him to wash in the pool after applying the clay to his eyes. Similarly, Abraham obeyed when he was told to sacrifice his son Isaac. In the end, God was glorified, so “hang in there” – God will be glorified if you are obedient to Him. Trials refine us as God molds and shapes us into instruments He can use. Romans 5:19 reinforces the importance of obedience: “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Using a kite analogy, Brother Jim said that sometimes our lives crash and burn, but let the wind of His spirit carry you and make you soar – “hang in there.”

After sacrament was administered to the saints, Sister Erin Light then sang a song she composed entitled “Masterpiece” and prefaced it with a brief testimony that “God is in charge of all creation and in charge of my life.” As the lyrics convey, the moon doesn't rise nor does the sun set without God controlling it. The uplifting hymn, “One Day at a Time,” was sung by Dominick Todaro.

The fruits of the spirit had been manifested on this joyous day and as Brother Bob brought the meeting to a close, he urged us to out in the world tomorrow, serve Him better and invite others to “come and see.”. In the closing prayer offered by Brother

David Ariola, he thanked the Lord for the message that was given and petitioned him to remove the veil from our eyes so we can see clearly. Brother Justin's opening prayer in which he asked the Lord to "remain with us this day" was beautifully answered. It was good to be in the house of the Lord this day!