

NEW YORK CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

A Project

Presented to

Dr. Edward J. Stetzer

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for 33820

by

Jay Anderson

Steve Knell

Bryan Sims

Yuri Zozulya

November 2001

Church Planting Strategic Plan: Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City

The Purpose of the Biblical Church

The purpose of a Biblical church is to bring glory to God by making disciples of all the nations according to Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20. We feel that this is also the purpose of Riverdale Community Church.

Our Vision

The vision of Riverdale Community Church is to see the entire community of Riverdale know Jesus as Savior and Lord and take this message of salvation to the lost of the entire world. We have a vision of a community coming together for worship of the Living God and growing in the knowledge of His Word. We have a vision of thousands serving God.

Our Mission

The mission of Riverdale Community Church describes how we will carry out our vision. The ultimate task for this church or any church is to bring glory and honor to God. To accomplish our ultimate task, we feel that God has commanded us to make disciples of all the nations. This task demands total commitment. To make disciples of the Riverdale community, we are committed to the following actions:

Prayer

Prayer is foundational to the health of the church as well as the lost or unchurched community. First Thessalonians 5:17 says to "pray without ceasing."

Similarly, Paul tells the Colossian church in Colossians 4:2-4 to:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the

word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Riverdale Community Church will hold weekly prayer services and will require staff and small groups to spend time each week in prayer for the church and the lost. We want to be a church full of believers who clearly speak the mystery of Christ to a lost world and so we acknowledge that the church will not survive without prayer.

Evangelism

Jesus commands every Christian to take the gospel message into the entire world. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus tells us to “Go.” While it is God who saves people, He has chosen humans as a means to communicate His Word to the World. Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Paul also confesses in Romans 1:16 that he is “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

It is Paul’s faith in the saving power of the Word of God that we at Riverdale Community Church profess. In order to be intentionally evangelistic, all members in leadership will be required to submit monthly witnessing reports. All members will also go through extensive discipleship classes to prepare them to share God’s Word with the lost world.

Discipleship (Preaching, Community Groups, LIFE Classes)

Jesus also commands every Christian to make disciples or followers of all the nations in Matthew 28:18-20, but He goes further by telling us to teach those who have become followers. While God’s saving power is manifested through evangelism using God’s Word, His sanctifying power is manifested through diligent teaching and study of His Word. This will happen in three ways.

First, the expository preaching of the Bible will occur each Sunday. There is no substitute for the body of believers to come together in worship and hear the Word of the Lord proclaimed. Second, community groups will meet once per week. Community groups will allow smaller groups of people to get together for prayer and Bible study. Last, LIFE classes will be offered for all those interested in membership at Riverdale Community Church.

Riverdale Community Church Assimilation

There are three areas of involvement at Riverdale Community Church, which are designed to help individuals become fully involved members of the church.

Newcomers Class

The Newcomers Class is a one-session informational class that is intended to give a visitor to the church knowledge about our vision, mission, membership requirements, LIFE classes, and Community Groups. It is also designed to plug the visitor in with a Community Group where he or she can meet and make new friends within the church.

Community Groups

Community Groups are small groups that meet once a week in the home of the leader of the group. Participation in Community Groups is required of all members. These groups are also open to others in the community who are seeking a church home or just seeking to learn more about Christianity. The purpose of Community Groups is to train members of the church in the Bible as well as reach out to the community. They are to function in much the same evangelistic way as Sunday School once did while at the same time training the body of believers.

LIFE Classes

LIFE Classes are required for membership. The classes are taught over a four-week period with each of the four sessions lasting for four hours. The sessions are meant to give the prospective member more information about the expectations of Riverdale Community Church as well as help them to evaluate where they can best serve the church. The sessions and topics proceed as follows:

- Session 1: 101 – Salvation, Lord’s Supper, Baptism, and Denomination (4 hours)
- Session 2: 201 – Bible Study, Prayer, Community Groups, Tithing (4 hours)
- Session 3: 301 – Ministry Placement: Spiritual Gifts, Heart/ Passion, Abilities, Personality Type, Experiences (4 hours)
- Session 4: 401 – Evangelism and Mission Statement (4 hours)

At the conclusion of the LIFE Classes, those who wish to continue with membership will meet with a staff member or lay leader. This meeting will involve the candidate for membership giving his or her personal testimony of salvation. Those who are approved for membership will be presented before the church at a special service of baptism for new believers or a special service of membership for those transferring membership. Riverdale Community Church has high expectations for its members in order to bolster a sense of commitment and to keep the congregation pure.

Church Planting Strategic Plan: Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City

Introduction

In the wake of the horrific terrorist acts perpetrated on the World Trade Towers in downtown New York City, a sober and circumspect atmosphere has settled upon many of the inhabitants of this great city. The events of that tragic day forced many residents to reevaluate their priorities and attitudes toward life. Stories have abounded about complete strangers engaging in spontaneous and protracted conversations or lending a helping hand to someone in need. These benevolent actions would have appeared unthinkable just a short period of time ago.

With this new sober and reflective mindset in view, our church planting team ventured to New York City to assist in the groundwork for a possible church plant in the Bronx. In particular, our group focused on a community in the northwest tip of the borough known as “Riverdale.” Although this community is located at the very edge of the borough, it still lies within the greater New York City metropolitan area.

History

The Riverdale community enjoys a rich heritage dating back hundreds of years. Here is one synopsis of its history:

Throughout the 19th century and up until the 1950's, Riverdale was a bastion of America's Anglo-Protestant elite. Many of the great banking, business, and political families of the country lived there in mansions and estates. Wave Hill, the sprawling estate that looks out onto the Hudson River, was the home of Teddy Roosevelt as a teenager and later was lived in by Arturo Toscanini, the great conductor, before being turned into a museum in 1960. Three old graceful Protestant churches are found in Riverdale, built in English Gothic style by their upper class founders in the mid-19th century. Their congregations have dwindled as the neighborhood changed, but their continuing and conspicuous presence is a reminder that this neighborhood is not only old and historic, but also a place where wealth and

taste went hand in hand. Stately homes, mostly built in the early years of the 20th century, make up the Fieldston section of Riverdale.

Starting in the 1950's, as the population of the city grew, high rise apartment buildings were built and the population of Riverdale grew substantially. Much of this influx until today has been comprised of Jews moving in mainly from Manhattan, looking for a neighborhood community that is accessible to Manhattan's jobs, shopping, and culture, but is less crowded, more suburban-looking and less expensive.¹

Setting

The Hudson River outlines the western border of the community while the Harlem River touches upon its southern border. In the area itself, towering apartment complexes dominate the skyline. The community consists of narrow roadways that are known for their potholes.

The area is also known for its prestigious private schools, which draw students from all over the metropolitan area. Shopping areas are limited, as one will have to travel elsewhere for supermarket shopping. The area has a great deal of trees and greenery as is typical of much of the borough.²

Religious Background

The urban strategist for New York City, Larry Holcomb, indicated that the Riverdale community contained a strong Roman Catholic and Jewish presence. The results of our survey confirmed this notion as we encountered numerous persons of these religious preferences. Moreover, the Roman Catholic presence is bolstered by the thousands of students who attend Manhattan College, a Catholic institution.³

¹ Ellen S. Shnidman, "Neighborhoods of New York: Riverdale," *Reality Times* (March 24, 1999), accessed 19 November 2001; available from http://realitytimes.com/rtnews/rtcpages/19990324_riverdale.htm; Internet.

² This description comes from the "Newcomer's Handbook for New York," 57-58.

³ This assertion is made without tangible information regarding the religious preferences of the students at Manhattan College. However, it seems safe to deduce that a sizeable number of Catholic students attend the school given its affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church.

Population

According to statistics compiled by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention, approximately 23,722 residents live in the zip code 10471 of the Riverdale community.⁴ Of these residents, 21,196 occupy households while the rest live in group quarters. This report noted that the community has grown by only 571 residents (2.5%) since 1990. Moreover, the area does not hold much potential for growth in the next 5 years as only a marginal increase is projected over the next five years (0.9%).⁵

Age

At present, the most populous age bracket is the 40-44 range. This group consists of 1,979 persons (8.3%). The next highest grouping is the 35-39 bracket, which comprises 1,854 individuals (7.8%). The median age for the entire zip code is 43.2 years of age. According to five-year projections, the area will become increasingly older. The median age will rise to 45.0 years of age.⁶ Moreover, the two most populous age brackets will be the 55-59 and 60-64 age groupings, respectively.

Race

The population currently consists of a predominantly white racial makeup (80.6%). Among other races, only Hispanic, black (8.0%) and Asian and Pacific Islanders boast significant population groupings (6.8%). For 2005, the white population will

⁴ In talking with Larry Holcomb, the urban strategist for New York City, he indicated that the Riverdale community consisted of a larger area than this particular zip code. Thus, Riverdale contained a population of approximately 40,000 people.

⁵ The following figures are from the North American Mission Board Demographic Report for the State of New York, ZIP 10471-Bronx.

⁶ Holcomb noted the increasing influx of younger adults into the Riverdale area.

experience no noticeable increase, while the aforementioned minority groups will enjoy noticeable gains. Also, races designated as “other” will experience some population growth. The diversity index rose from 39.2 to 53.6 over the last decade.

Income

In this zip code, the per capita income is \$31,443. This figure towers over the national average by nearly 50%. The median household income jumps to \$52,057, revealing the great wealth some households enjoy. In this respect as well, the Riverdale community far exceeds the national average (\$41,914).

Household Types

With regard to the makeup of the household, a little over half of the homes are “family” households (57.3%). This figure falls significantly below national averages (68.4%). The average “family” household consists of 2.9 persons compared to 3.1 persons nationally. Overall, the average household size, consisting of both “family” and “non-family” units, is 2.2 persons in contrast to 2.6 persons across the nation. Thus, it appears the Riverdale community does not have as strong an emphasis on families as in other parts of the country. According to the ACORN Profile, two-thirds of the area’s households are occupied by “High-Rise Renters.” The next highest category was those households known as “East Coast Immigrants.”

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Community Needs

Of the people interviewed, there appeared to be no *pressing* perceived needs that the community faced. Many residents asserted that the community was a safe neighborhood with little crime. Also, these individuals thought the community offered a good job market.

Of the perceived needs mentioned, education, the environment, more activities, and financial investment were cited most frequently. With regard to education, one woman believed that more teachers should be hired to alleviate over-crowded conditions in the school system. With regard to the environment, people noted the need for cleaner streets and more parks. With regard to activities, one man desired the construction of more community centers for kids while another individual thought Riverdale lacked entertainment, thus causing him to travel to other areas for entertainment. Finally, some individuals believed there could be greater financial investment in the community.

Church Planting Strategic Plan: Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City

10 Ways to Meet Community Needs

Education

- After-school tutorial services
- ESL classes

Activities

- Home Bible studies
- Neighborhood block parties
- Athletic events such as a 3-on-3 basketball tournament
- Holiday events (Fall festival, Christmas/Easter play)

Environment

- Neighborhood trash pickup
- Sponsor a street for cleanup and maintenance

Ministry (to a local Catholic college)

- Christmas care package
- Weekly breakfast served

Church Planting Strategic Plan: Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City

Interview Summaries

Our survey consisted of four questions (Appendix). Of these inquiries, two questions related to the needs of the community and how these needs might be met. The findings of these particular questions are summarized elsewhere.

The other two questions dealt with spiritual matters. The first question asked for a general description of the person's spiritual or religious beliefs with a follow-up inquiry about the afterlife. Not surprisingly, we received a variety of responses.

The most prominent group was adherents to the Roman Catholic Church. This group seemed to be religious, some noting regular church attendance. In particular, one woman questioned indicated that the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers caused her to attend church more regularly. Another woman claimed to read the Bible on a daily basis. One individual identified himself as an "Anglo-Catholic" who held to liberal Protestant beliefs. For example, he believed that the Bible was a collection of personal experiences and should not be taken literally. In regard to the afterlife, there was not a clear perception by these Catholic responders, but several persons believed in the afterlife.

Another group of persons grew up in the Catholic Church but maintained no serious ties with it at present. Two of these individuals informed our team that this was the first time religious people had ever approached them. In another case, a respondent claimed that she was not a devotee of a specific religion but affirmed the existence of a greater being. This individual was afraid of the afterlife but believed she would go to purgatory. In addition, she asserted that a post-mortem existence would be better.

Two persons identified themselves as Jewish, although both of these individuals were not practicing their religion. In fact, one person labeled himself as an “atheist-plus” who no longer believed in the afterlife. The other person desired to live by the Golden Rule (Matt 7:12), and she hoped for something better after this life. However, she remained unsure as to her fate.

Some individuals refused to answer this question while one individual identified himself as an agnostic. Another person claimed to be very spiritual but did not attend church anymore. One woman was a non-practicing Hindu who possessed no opinion of the afterlife. Two individuals were possibly Christians. In particular, one woman identified herself as a Christian and attended church regularly. The other person rejected the notion of reincarnation in favor of the biblical doctrine of eternal bliss or punishment for all of mankind.

The second spiritual question from our survey pertained to the identity of Jesus Christ. Regardless of the person’s religious or non-religious preference, people believed that Jesus was the Son of God. This particular response was clearly the most prevalent. Beside this answer, people asserted that Jesus was God, the second person of the Trinity, the son of Mary and Joseph, the way to salvation, a spiritual leader, and that he died for our sins. Another person believed that the Bible’s teachings about Jesus were accurate while another person said that Jesus came to show humanity the way, namely love.

Among the other responses, both of the Jewish individuals viewed him positively. Of this group, one person recognized Jesus’ Jewish ancestry and his ability to attract followers. Interestingly, prior to our conversation, he never knew that Jesus

claimed to be divine. The other person was not sure Jesus was meant to be the Messiah. The non-practicing Hindu had heard of Jesus but did not know anything else about him.

Conclusion

In summary, the Riverdale community seemed very open to discuss spiritual matters. The persons in our survey, for the most part, were not reluctant to talk about their beliefs, which were quite diverse. As expected, we encountered a good number of Roman Catholic and Jewish individuals. In regard to the gospel, there appeared to be gross ignorance about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Fortunately, this ignorance was balanced with an openness to listen to a gospel presentation.

Church Planting Strategic Plan: Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City

Developing a Core Group

A church planter with a seminary degree and a financial support from NAMB does not guarantee yet that the new work can be established. Every place in the world and the people who live there are unique and “unless God builds the house they labor in vain who build it” (Ps.127:1). In talking with other church planters and my own experience at least three things are always essential in starting a new work and should be a part of any strategy in developing a core group.

Ongoing Prayer

Nothing ever happens by accident. There is nothing wrong with starting and dreaming big. God always seems to help in our weakness that we might see and experience His power. The Riverdale community in Bronx, NY is no exception. God cares for the people there more than anyone anywhere. He understands their needs and prepares their hearts to receive the Gospel. It is our duty to go by faith and expect God to do great things. Anyone with any amount of resources available to him can work and build a crowd but it is only God who builds the Church. To plant a new church is not to make it happen on one’s own terms, through one’s own strength and abilities but to be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Therefore before we can walk in the spirit we must learn to walk on our knees. There is just no shortcut to this. No new methods and full financial support will do unless right people doing it right way.

Ongoing Prayer

So first, the most important thing we are to do is to pray. If we fail in this, it will be impossible to develop a strong group of believers to serve as the core group for

the church. This must be the substance of all our strategy, its engine and its progress. It is easier said than done but prayer and fasting is the key to a successful church start. The situation in New York is already different than it was even two months ago. Since the events of September 11, 2001, God has already poured His grace abundantly on the people there and sent many of His people from the churches across the country to help in one way or the other. Volunteers are distributing all sorts of Christian tracts on the streets of New York City everywhere. People are very kind and open to talk to you. Just as the dust after the tragedy is still unsettled, folks have many unsettled questions in their lives for which they are searching for answers. Christians already in some parts of the country are praying and searching God as how to respond. All of this is a clear indication that He is at work there. The time to seek the Lord is now. So we must respond and get on our knees before the Sovereign of the universe and ask Him for help to raise people to serve as a core for a new church in Riverdale area of Bronx, NY.

Specific and ongoing prayer for:

- a. God to mobilize Christians in already established churches of New York area and beyond to pray for the people in Riverdale.
- b. God to impart the similar vision and strategy to local pastors that they would be supportive of the new work.
- c. God to begin to gather the lost sheep of Riverdale community and dealing with them according to His mercy and grace that they may have the opportunity and desire to hear the Gospel.
- d. God to bring the new contacts and people in church planter's life who are searching desperately for answers on their spiritual questions.
- e. God to ignite a new Bible study in a home of a church planter or at a rented facility.
- f. God to grant repentance and faith to at least some in the group

- g. God to preserve and maintain the work and eventually to expand the group

Ongoing Evangelism

For the church planter to be where the people are is the must for it is impossible to develop a group of believers if the planter is not intentionally seeking out people. In Riverdale besides common marketplace, community parks and playgrounds are some of the places where he and his wife can meet people. Some time ago somehow some one met us in a similar way. Also the tendency is that those who had been awaked to the spiritual things somehow search for answers in the established churches or other places of worship. Without a doubt, this could be a great place to meet new people and develop new relationships. Local neighbors and people in transition very well can be new contacts. It is always pays to be honest about yourself and your work with new people you meet. In my experience, when I first came in contact with a church planter he simply introduced himself as a pastor and teacher of the Bible. Meeting all kinds of people and praying to God about how they can be gathered into a home based Bible study is an ongoing prayer for a planter.

Ongoing Bible Study

The Bible study begins in a very informal format where church planter assumes that most of the involved have no pre-existent knowledge of Scripture, theology etc. No church language is to be used in discussing the various Biblical subjects. The whole setting is to be in a conversational form, which would allow the planter to ask everyday life questions. At the end of each study, occasionally refreshments can be served where group members can fellowship with one another. If God is behind what has

been happening, people will share with their friends about the Bible study and invite some of them to come. As the work slowly grows, the planter begins to share the vision of a new church, which is to be planted in Riverdale. This now becomes the number one priority for the whole group as they began to see that what has been happening in their lives. It is God who is at work and they are simply the part of what He wants to do in their community. Some of them will respond willingly to help in the launch of a new community church. Other churches from the local associations can be involved as their volunteer members help with worship and music.

Church Planting Strategic Plan: Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City

Naming

Riverdale Community Church will voluntarily affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention. We understand the importance of denominational affiliation for the purpose of doctrinal accountability, prayer support and cooperation in world missions.

Even though we are choosing to affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention, we have chosen not to include our denominational title in our name. We are very proud of what the Southern Baptist Convention is doing in our country and abroad; however, we have found that many people in the community associate Baptists with a "black church" or a "snake handling church." Since our focus group is predominately Caucasian and do not like snakes, we feel that it would be better in this situation to leave Baptist out of our name. Likewise, Riverdale is a suburb of New York City located in the northern most portions of our country and like the title Baptist, Southern does not describe the people we wish to reach. As stated prior, we are very proud of the Southern Baptist Convention and it's doctrinal stands; however, in the spirit of being, "all things to all [people], so that we might by all means save some," we have chosen to leave this title out of our name.

Worship Style

It is our sincere hope and desire that our first service be a labor of love through excellence. For this first service we are going to seek to rent a portion of the local Catholic University; however, we also see the possibility of meeting at public schools or storefront building.

Our demographics show that our target group falls between the ages of 35-50 and earns an average of \$31,000. Though our demographics suggest that this community is not growing, research gained from local pastors indicates that this community is in fact growing and broadening in its constituency. It is though both our demographic reports as well as our local research that we have determined that our target group will be to reach "Baby Boomers." With this in mind, we are going to seek to present our worship in a very contemporary and up-beat fashion.

Children

Though we do understand that most people in our target group do not have nursery age children of their own, we recognize the existence of single parent families who rely on grandparents for support. Similarly, we understand that many working families are waiting longer to have children. It is with this understanding that we will plan to provide a clean and safe nursery service for those who do bring children in the age range of 1-4 years of age. Likewise, it is our hope to have the ability to provide a quality extended session for children ages 4-6 within 2 months of our first service.

Pre-Worship

As people are arriving to Sunday morning worship, we will have greeters located in the parking lot, the front door, and the auditorium to help people to feel welcome and to find their way in and out of our service with as little stress as possible. Prior to the worship we will also be playing very contemporary music over the sound system that will allow our visitors to feel comfortable.

Praise Music

We do understand that many of our visitors are not accustomed to singing hymns and praise choruses in their everyday life. With this in mind, we will continue to use many of the theologically tried and true hymns and praise choruses known to many Christians; however, we intend to infuse them into a instrumental sound that would be familiar to many of our visitors. Though we do feel it important to use many of these songs, we will also be extremely careful to only use songs that contain language easily understood by the unchurched. A well-rehearsed and polished praise team consisting of 2-3 singers, drums, guitars, and an electric keyboard will lead this praise music. The music will be projected onto a viewing screen through power point or an overhead projector. The volume of the music will also be relatively loud to allow our new comers to feel comfortable singing anonymously.

Preaching

The message presented by our pastor will be based not only on the Biblical text, but it will also be set on a topic that will be current and contemporary. Such messages could include, *Where is God in the midst of Disaster*, *What would God say to Bin Laudin*, *What would God Say to President Bush*, *What would God Say to Michael Jordan*. Likewise, these messages may be prefaced with drama or a video clip to help the audience relate it back to their life. Even though the preaching will be contemporary and focused on current events, it will also and most importantly be Biblically based and expositional.

Post-Worship

As with the pre-worship, it is our hope to allow our visitors to feel as comfortable as possible in our service. At the conclusion of our service, we will provide

coffee and doughnuts (or cookies) for people to mingle and talk. We will also make it clear that counselors will be available to anyone interested in speaking anonymously. Though we will provide an avenue for people to stay and fellowship, we do understand that many of our visitors will be interested only in departing the building. Our ushers will again be available to make our visitors departure as simple and uneventful as possible.

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Letter to an Unchurched Person

Dear Neighbor,

Greetings! On behalf of Riverdale Community Church, I would like to extend a cordial invitation to attend our church's first public worship service on December 5th, 2001. We will be meeting in the gymnasium of St. Patrick's Catholic School located on 817 Longview Street in downtown Riverdale. Service begins at 10:30.

Riverdale Community Church wants to be a powerful source of truth and love in our community. To accomplish this goal, our church offers

- ◆ clear, biblical messages that help us understand God better as well as provide wisdom and guidance for daily living
- ◆ rich, celebrative worship that blends contemporary and traditional music
- ◆ warm, friendly atmosphere
- ◆ trained and dedicated nursery workers
- ◆ strong commitment to serve the surrounding community

If you have any questions or if we can be of any service, please call (212) RCC-HOPE.

We look forward to seeing you there!!

May God Bless You,

Pastor, Riverdale Community Church

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Letter to a Partner Church

Dear New Life Church,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We hope all things are going well for your church as you labor to advance God's kingdom in the state of New Jersey. I am a church planter who has a similar vision—reaching the unchurched masses who reside in the great cities of America. The Lord has placed a burden on my heart to reach the unchurched in the Bronx of New York City. In particular, I desire to work in the Riverdale community, which is located in the northern tip of the Bronx.

This church-planting endeavor will be undertaken by a marvelous team that God has assembled. We have two other planters who will be assisting on a part-time basis. Both persons have a seminary education and training as well as church planting experience through the Nehemiah Project internship program. We are extremely enthusiastic about the vision of reaching many persons with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I would like your church to pray about the possibility of forming a partnership with our church planting team. We desire support in the area of intercessory prayer, mission projects, and financial assistance. Any help in these areas would greatly boost the effectiveness of achieving our vision.

If your church wants to partner with our team in this endeavor or has any questions, please contact me at (212) RCC-HOPE. We are greatly indebted to you for your consideration in this matter.

May God Bless You,

Pastor, Riverdale Community Church

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

New Homeowners/ Renters Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear _____,

Riverdale Community Church would like to be one of the first to welcome you to the Riverdale community. Our church would like to invite you to our programs and activities in the event that you do not already have a church to attend. My name is _____ and I am the pastor of Riverdale Community Church. Whether you have been a regular church member in the past or have never attended church before, we would love to have you visit.

Riverdale Community Church is a brand new church. Currently, we are meeting in homes for Bible studies, which has provided for a warm and caring atmosphere to learn. Our home Bible studies allow for a casual atmosphere for people to find answers to life questions in addition to providing newcomers in the community with a place to meet new people. It is our utmost desire to meet the needs of the Riverdale community and we are confident that you will feel welcome at Riverdale Community Church.

I have enclosed a reply card that I want to encourage you to fill out so you can receive more information about Riverdale Community Church. The postage has already been paid so your reply will be free. You are also very welcome to call the church for more information at _____.

May God Bless You,

Pastor, Riverdale Community Church

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Direct Mail Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear Friend,

I believe that new beginnings are coming to the Riverdale community. When people are drawn into a vital relationship with God, stronger lives, families, and communities result. **Riverdale Community Church** is a new church seeking to meet the needs of the all the people in the Riverdale area. We are a diverse group with a common commitment to growing in the Christian faith.

At **Riverdale Community Church** you can

- Find people like you
- Hear understandable and practical messages from the Bible
- Trust your children to the care of dedicated nursery and childcare workers
- Find programs to meet the needs of every member of your family

We here at **Riverdale Community Church** have a vision for a church were people of all ages and backgrounds can join together in a casual family atmosphere to learn about the Bible and worship God in a contemporary and exciting way. Please help us to realize this vision by joining us at our grand opening service on _____. The church will meet at _____.

May God Bless You,

Pastor, Riverdale Community Church

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

First Time Visitor Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear _____,

It was wonderful to have you visit our service last Sunday. I sincerely hope you enjoyed the worship and felt welcome. At Riverdale Community Church, we feel every person is important and want you to know that we care.

Each month, we offer a “Newcomers Class” that is designed to tell people about Riverdale Community Church and to answer any questions that you might have. The “Newcomer’s Class” also allows us to get to know each other and will give you an opportunity to meet people who are similar to you. We would love to have you attend the next session on _____ at _____.

Thank you again for attending and we very much look forward to seeing you again soon. Also, as a first time visitor, we would love to give you a free Bible. Please stop by our information desk next Sunday to receive this gift.

May God Bless You,

Pastor, Riverdale Community Church

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Second Time Visitor Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear _____,

We here at Riverdale Community Church are so happy that you have continued to join us for church on Sunday. It is our desire that you feel at home and comfortable in our church and it is for this reason that I am sending you this letter. Again, I want to remind you of our “Newcomers Class” and encourage you to check it out.

I also want to encourage you to begin attending our LIFE classes. These are ongoing to allow people like you to join at any time. LIFE classes provide great information about our church’s beliefs as well as how you can become a member of Riverdale Community Church. The LIFE classes will also help you know where and how to get involved with many of the great programs going on here at the church.

Please call the church at _____ for more information on dates and times of the LIFE classes or stop by the information table on Sunday to check things out. Again, we want you to know that you are welcome at Riverdale Community Church.

May God Bless You,

Pastor, Riverdale Community Church

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Local Church Pastor Interview

Rolly Esabillo,
Pastor of Brooklyn Evangelical Church in Brooklyn, NY.
Home phone number: (201)-433-2915

November 8, 2001

1. How old is Brooklyn Evangelical Church?

13 years old.

2. How long have you been a pastor there?

Less than a year.

3. What are religious backgrounds of the majority of the people who come to Church?

Mostly Catholic but also we have people who come from all sorts religious backgrounds.
So it is a mixed congregation of people not only different religious but also cultural backgrounds.

4. How would you describe your experience as a pastor there?

So far, it has been a very positive experience.

5. What are some of the challenges that you encounter in the ministry?

Not many at this point, but the greatest probably would be to continue to encourage the people in the church to be involved in evangelizing people all around us and to start new Bible studies wherever possible.

6. What is the response of the people to the Gospel?

Right now people are very open and responsive.

7. Did you notice the difference in attendance since recent September 11, 2001 events?

Not really, just a few new people visited the church.

8. Do you think there is a need to start new churches in New York City?

Definitely. There is a great need.

9. Do you think Brooklyn Evangelical Church would be willing to help in any capacity with that?

Yes, of course. If a new group or Bible study would be started we can help with music and maybe other things.

10. Can you recommend another pastor in the area that would be willing to discuss the same things?

Pastor Ariel Pollentino of City Chapel in Jersey City, NJ
Home phone number (201)- 823-4434.

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Interview with David Dean

Executive Director of the New York Metropolitan Baptist Association

1. How long have you held this position?
11 years
2. What is your experience and background in church planting?
David has 25 years of experience in pastoral ministry. During this time, he spent 13 years as a pastor of a church in Boston, Massachusetts that planted 10 missions in 5 different languages.
3. What is your vision for church planting in New York City?
David envisions 50 church plants in the next 5 years. Moreover, he would like to see these churches be comprised of 10 previously unreached language groups.
4. How will New York City being a Strategic Focus City affect and improve your future plans?
David expects more prayer, attention, church starts, and partnerships along with a higher level of excellence in ministry.
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge or obstacle to church planting in the future?
The greatest obstacle is getting strong local churches to sponsor new church plants.
6. What have been some of your successes and failures thus far?
Successes--getting others involved, including staff people
Failures--some church planters have not succeeded because they were not called; need sharper discernment in determining whether or not individuals are truly called to plant churches in New York City
7. If you could say one thing to a Southern Seminary student interested in church planting, what would it be?
David thinks a planter should be ready. In addition, he should be able to earn his own way either through bi-vocational ministry and/outside support (even outside denominational lines).

**Church Planting Strategic Plan:
Riverdale (The Bronx), New York City**

Interview with Romy Manansala
State Church Extension Coordinator

1. How long have you held this position?
October, 1998
2. What is your experience and background in church planting?
In addition to planting other churches, Romy served as a pastor in New Jersey that started new churches. He was the Multilanguage Church Extension Director for the New York Metropolitan Baptist Association.
3. What is your vision for church planting in New York City?
Romy would like to see healthier, church-planting starts. Of recent church plants, only a few have survived and planted other churches. This phenomenon has occurred in both ethnic and non-ethnic churches. In short, there needs to be a stronger emphasis on the quality, not the quantity, of new church starts.
4. How will New York City being a Strategic Focus City affect and improve your future plans?
According to Romy, being a Strategic Focus City should greatly improve the plans for New York City because of additional resources, promotion, and partnerships.
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge or obstacle to church planting in the future?
The greatest challenge is getting the right planters who are committed to stay in the area. Also, these planters need the proper training. Romy indicated the need for more Anglo-American planters. The high cost of real estate remains a formidable obstacle.
6. What have been some of your successes and failures thus far?
Successes--some church plants have experienced numerical growth
Failures--not reaching people from Middle Eastern and Central Asian ethnic groups, church plants not multiplying themselves, and not properly assessing potential church planting areas
7. If you could say one thing to a Southern Seminary student interested in church planting, what would it be?
According to Romy, if that person is interested in New York City, he should be sure that he is called. Also, the planter needs to have the right make-up for the task. Romy would ask that person 2 questions: Do you love Jesus? Do you love New York City? Also, doing an internship in New York City would benefit the planter.