



The Center for Community Change

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
at Andrews University

**IMPROVING THE COMMUNITY'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING:
THE URBAN LIFE CENTER**

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The Community

Highlandtown, Baltimore, MD

- It is an Urban Life Center, serving a diverse community primarily consisting of single young professionals from various ethnic backgrounds.
- The community was selected due to its strong interest in health and wellness.



The Church

Establishment and Partnership:

- The Urban Life Center was founded through a partnership between Ellicott City Seventh-day Adventist Church and Baltimore-White Marsh Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Both churches are multicultural, with members from diverse backgrounds and many employed in the healthcare sector, reflecting Baltimore's healthcare industry.



The Need

The center identified three main needs:

- Fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20), establishing **small centers of influence** in cities, and **addressing healthcare** and **health education** needs in the community.

- Ellen White emphasized the importance of small centers of influence in cities rather than large buildings, supporting the mission of the Urban Life Center.
- A demographic study using MissionInsite revealed a high demand for healthcare and health education in the community.

The Response

Creation of the Urban Life Center:

- The center was designed to cater to busy young professionals who prioritize health and well-being.
- Traditional approaches like soup kitchens and thrift stores were deemed less effective for this demographic, so the center introduced a Juice Bar offering healthy options in a welcoming atmosphere.
- The center also offered a variety of classes, including plant-based diet instruction and Spanish as a Second Language, to engage the community.

God will protect His followers dwelling in Babylon:

- Jesus prayed for His followers to be protected from evil while living in cities like Babylon (John 17:15-18).
- Christians are called to serve in cities without adopting Babylonian ways.

God has a message for Babylonians:

- The eternal gospel and the Three Angels' Message (Rev 14:6-13) offer redemption to those in Babylon.
- God calls His people out of Babylon to avoid sharing in its sins and judgment (Rev 18:4-10).

The Impact

Community and Church:

- Initially, the impact was felt at the local church level, with partner churches appreciating the innovative outreach.
- Over time, the Urban Life Center gained wider recognition in the community, attracting patrons from further away and increasing participation in classes and events.
- The center became an integral part of Highlandtown, fostering relationships and partnerships within the community.



Lessons Learned

Strategic Intentionality:

- Building trust and attracting repeat visitors requires strategic planning and intentional efforts to create memorable experiences.

Trust Development:

- Trust takes time to build; patrons will not immediately engage with the center just because it is open. Earning their trust is essential for having a spiritual influence.

Funding Necessities:

- Long-term funding is crucial as centers of influence may not be profitable or self-sustaining immediately. Adequate financial support is needed to keep the center operational.

Importance of Conference Support:

- The success of the Urban Life Center was largely due to support from the Chesapeake Conference and partner churches, including financial backing for rent and staff salaries.
- The leadership of a committed and visionary manager, such as Cristina Macena, was critical to the center's success.

Focus on Central Purpose:

- The primary focus of a center of influence is to make disciples for Christ, not profitability. Maintaining focus on the mission is crucial to avoid getting sidetracked by operational demands.
- The center's effectiveness is enhanced when implemented with a church-planting mindset, fostering new communities of believers and expanding God's kingdom.

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