

New Life Annual Vision Meeting 2012 Rich Villodas

My Story

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, the oldest of 5 siblings. While I didn't grow up in a Christian home, when I was an 18 year-old student, I came to experience the power and grace of Jesus. On one night, myself and 14 other family members decided to follow Christ during a revival in a small Spanish church in Brooklyn. After this radical conversion, I sensed that God was calling me to pastoral ministry, and so, I began to pursue studies in Theology and Pastoral Ministry at Nyack College. Upon graduating from Nyack, I continued theological studies, and earned a Masters of Divinity degree from Alliance Theological Seminary.

During my time in seminary, I joined the ministry staff at Brooklyn Tabernacle. At Brooklyn Tab, I pastored the College and Young Adult ministry, as well as gave leadership to the Evangelism ministry. After nearly 5 years serving there, Rosie (my wife) and I transitioned to Queens where I joined the pastoral staff at New Life.

Coming to New Life has helped me realize how God has uniquely prepared me to exercise leadership in this context. Firstly, New Life is a church community that is quite eclectic as it pertains to whom we draw from. We actively glean and learn from people from various Christian traditions, and believe that the Holy Spirit has given gifts and unique insights to churches and leaders throughout the Body of Christ. As a result, New Life is literally a convergence of Christian traditions in one place. This is a significant reason why we transitioned to New Life. For example, New Life has drawn from the riches of **monasticism and the Desert Fathers**. When I was a college student, I spent a significant amount of time reading through the sayings of Desert Fathers and monastic writers. The commitment to prayer, silence and solitude has shaped me throughout the years.

I also think about the **social justice tradition** and New Life's commitment to the poor and marginalized. This too, has been a value in my life since I became a follower of Jesus. The church that I became a Christian at was situated in a very poor neighborhood, and the leaders and church community would be very intentional in serving the poor among us. Moreover, when I attended seminary, I caught a vision of social justice and its place in the church. These experiences have formed me greatly.

New Life has also been formed by the **Charismatic/Pentecostal tradition**. We believe that God longs to change people through his Spirit in significant, life-altering ways. New Life was birthed through a series of prophetic words and has carried a hunger to see God pour out His gifts and power to the church. As I look at my life, this tradition has impacted me similarly. Throughout the years, I have been shaped by leaders, churches and movements that have instilled in me a deep desire to see God transform people through the power of the Spirit.

The Gospel and the Grace of God: New Life has always had an understanding that it is the gospel of grace through Christ that changes people. Faith in Christ's death and resurrection serves as the basis on our justification. I believe that unless people see that Christianity is antithetical to moralism and works-righteousness, deep transformation is not possible.

Reconciliation across racial and cultural barriers

I believe that God, throughout the years was preparing me to lead a church as diverse as New Life. Since my first year as a follower of Christ, I had a sense that God would lead me to pastor a multi-ethnic, socio-economically diverse community. Part of this preparation came in the form of me speaking at churches far different from my culture. From the time I was 19, God opened doors for me to speak at Chinese, Korean, African, Indian, Black, White and Latino churches (among others). These experiences have given me a panoramic view of the mosaic, which is the Church and I remain deeply committed to intentionally bridge racial, culture, economic and gender barriers.

Succeeding Pastor Pete

For the last year and a half, I have slowly come to see the magnitude of this transition. While it is a daunting role that I'm entering into, I feel confident that God is covering our church. Over the last year, Pete has intentionally mentored me, and our time spent together has deeply challenged and formed me into who I am today. It's been great working with him! I'm entering my 5th year on staff at New Life, and every year the New Life values and culture has deepened me.

As I think about the future, and my new role, there are three words that capture what I'm feeling.

Humbled. Anxious. Hopeful.

I'm humbled because I recognize New Life's unique presence in NYC. This is a church that has impacted thousands throughout the years. I also realize that God has done extraordinary things over the past 25 years through our church that can't go unnoticed. I'm humbled because I recognize that I'm succeeding a man who has poured out his life for this community and has impacted thousands of leaders throughout the world. With all this in mind, I'm incredibly humbled that I get to follow Pete's legacy.

I'm also anxious. New Life has never been down this road before. I've never entered into a role like this. These is uncharted waters for us, so, there is a sense of healthy anxiety that I'm feeling.

But, I'm incredibly hopeful. I'm hopeful because we have a great church. So many men and women have been rock solid throughout the years. I'm excited that I get to serve along side them. I'm hopeful because we have a great staff. The staff has been

incredibly supportive to Rosie and I throughout this process. This has made this transition so much easier. I'm hopeful because we have a great elder board. As I have gotten to know them more over the last year, they have modeled godliness, wisdom and prayerful lives that is quite admirable. We have great elders! Above all, I'm hopeful because the God who brought New Life to where she's is over the last 25 years, is the same God who will bring us forward. I'm hopeful because Jesus Christ is building his Church.

Redd Sevilla – As I step into this role, I'm comforted because Redd Sevilla has emerged over the last year as someone whom I've connected extremely well with. Redd, who functions as our Exec Director for our Community Development Corp., has recently stepped into the role as my right hand man, or "number 2." We are still figuring out what this all means, but his presence, wisdom, business acumen and servant's heart has brought incredible stability to our staff. I'm looking forward to seeing how Redd continues to flourish at New Life.

Rosie and Karis - Finally, I want to acknowledge my wife Rosie and daughter Karis. Rosie has been my rock and source of encouragement on so many levels. We both realize (not fully) the level of intensity that this role entails. We understand that the health of our marriage will determine in many respects the health of our church. So, we enter into this season fully dependent on the power of God, and coveting your prayers for our family.

New Life Fellowship – Glimpses of the Future

As I think about the future of New Life Fellowship, here are 3 areas that I believe we are to work through. These are very large issues, and we in the very early stages of discussion, but these 3 areas are glimpses of the future.

1. New Life's throughout New York City

I believe that NYC needs more church communities that witness to the power and love of Jesus. Moreover, NYC is in need of a robust spiritual formation strategy that goes beneath the "icebergs" of our lives. When I think of these two things, it becomes apparent that New Life could serve the Kingdom by launching new church communities that are connected to the vision, values and leadership of NLF. Over the years, we have become clearer as it pertains to crafting and communicating our spiritual formation distinctives (our 5 M's), and I believe that NLF is uniquely positioned to bring these distinctives to other parts of NYC in ways that could bear tremendous kingdom fruit.

The training and releasing of preachers, with a heart to lead missional churches is another significant contributing factor that serves as motivation to launch NLF communities throughout NYC. One of my great passions is preaching and training preacher/leaders to communicate the message of the gospel. As a result, I hope to spend a set amount of time each year in

developing and mentoring emerging leaders to lead NLF communities throughout NYC.

2. Leadership Development Culture

We have 1,250-1,400 people that are attending New Life regularly. With that amount of people in our community, I realize that there needs to be a greater intentionality to develop and release leaders throughout New Life. One of our goals is to move beyond being a staff-driven church. One of the ways I see us realizing this is through the creation of a robust leadership development plan. We realize that as the leaders go, so goes the church. With that in mind, we are in the early stages of crafting a leadership development process that would create an intentional leadership culture at New Life. We believe that there are men and women that are incredibly capable of bringing their leadership gifts to bear at NLF. Towards that end, we want to establish an environment where leaders can grow in spiritual development and skill development. In the fall, we will have a leadership conference for those in significant leadership at New Life. This is one of the ways we are looking to create a leadership “identity” among our leaders at New Life.

3. Building Renovation for Greater Ministry

We have come a long way with our building since purchasing it nearly 10 years ago. As a result of the work that has gone into renovations, we've been able to do significant ministry through our New Life Community Development Corporation. We've been able to reach many people through our Health Center, our Food and Clothing Pantry as well as through the other CDC programs we offer. We realize, however, that there is so much more that we can be doing to serve the poor and under-resourced in our community. Currently, our building is still in the process of being fully code compliant. There is 10,000 square feet of space that is not being used in our building. If we could finish the building, this would give us an opportunity to serve our neighbors in Elmhurst like never before. We would be able to launch more programs for kids, youth and families, as well as continue to serve the poor and marginalized in greater ways. The renovation of our building is not an end, but a means to an end. The end goal is to practically love and serve our neighbors through the power of Christ. Completing the renovation process would allow us to realize this goal in unprecedented ways.

New Life, I'm grateful to serve you and pray that God's kingdom would come and his will be done.

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