

'Reflections of Ruth'

'Spiritually fulfilling!' This was the overwhelming view that summed up the experience of the attendees at the North England Conference Women's Ministries annual retreat held in October last year. The women arrived in their numbers from across the NEC. Among them were pastors' wives, including our president's wife, who always supports our events. A number of our sisters brought their friends and neighbours too, and this made the event even richer. The theme for this year was 'Reflections of Ruth' and the key aim was to explore and experience how to build relationships for eternity by reflecting on the life of Ruth and her relationship with her mother-in-law, Naomi. We wanted the women to take note of how, amid great challenges and loss, they forged a relationship that has stood as an example for all women of God since then.

Our main speaker for the weekend was Dr Nadine Collins (PhD), who came to us from the USA via the Caribbean. She is an international speaker who, from pre-school to PhD, has been educated in Adventist schools, colleges and universities. She has an impressive range of topics that she preaches and teaches on, particularly that of prayer. She has authored several books on prayer and we were delighted as she shared them with us.

Dr Collins inspired the women to dig deeper into the book of Ruth, helping them to see how much more there was to learn from Ruth and Naomi.

Some attendees were amazed at the depth in the book of Ruth and its significance for mother-daughter relationships and our spiritual development. Dr Collins' presentations met the objectives that were set by Beulah Plunkett, NEC Women's Ministries and Sabbath School Director, who wanted the women to:

1. Learn from Ruth how to build good, godly, sisterly relationships with each other and fulfil the laws of God.
2. Examine how to move forwards in Christian growth, as Naomi and Ruth did – despite their many struggles – to find what God had prepared for them.
3. Experience how to let God lead in every moment of their lives, by deciding never to face our experiences without Him to call on.
4. Get to know God's purpose for our lives, as Ruth did when she accepted Naomi's God.
5. Embark upon or continue our personal change programmes, which take time and effort at each stage. It is helpful to be aware of how you are progressing towards your goal and fulfilling your purpose.

The attendees were also blessed with a 'prayer room' in which Joan Saunders and her team created a real space where they could pray individually or as groups. They could ask for prayer or pray for themselves. A 'prayer tree' was created by the prayer team for the women to place their requests on; then prayers were said for all those requests over the weekend. It was a very moving experience.

The hymn says, 'There is singing up in heaven.' Well, we had singing here on earth and were truly blessed by Zena Taylor, our soloist for the weekend. She has been singing since childhood, and her depth of love for God is evident in the way she sings and praises Him.

We were also blessed by JoAnne Sibanda's beautiful clarinet music pieces and the support of her husband, Lungani, who is the NEC Communications Director. He and his team are always ready to provide excellent audio-visual services when required.

We had a banquet and mini-concert to end the Sabbath evening. The women dressed up and made the most of the occasion. We had our soloist, our clarinettist and volunteers singing, reciting poetry, playing music and making us laugh until we cried. There is great joy in the Lord, and we made sure of that!

So many women came to me and said what a blessing the retreat had been. We have too many lonely people in our

churches and we need to work extra hard to make them into places where people find real friendships and the reality of God's love. To help them do this we had workshops, stalls, a photographer, exercise, time to share and care, walks, discussion time, etc., all of which enabled the women to get the most out of the weekend at Forest Pine Hotel and Golf Resort in Scunthorpe. The facilities were excellent and the staff were truly exceptional. Some of the women ministered to the hotel staff, some of whom asked about our faith and were interested in how we worship. Two guests at the hotel were even invited to our banquet and they were very happy to spend the evening with us.

Some of the women who attended had left church, but came to the retreat to see if they could find their faith again. I spoke to two who said they will be going back to church.

I thank God for His goodness, my secretary Voahangy for her hard work, and all who helped.

BEULAH A. PLUNKETT



Joan Saunders, prayer leader



Singer, Zena Taylor



Beulah Plunkett with two attendees

