



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Tax Credits and Energy Efficiency Lead Savings Discussion at Clergy Breakfast

JAMES SANDERS JR. January 29, 2016



Starting the new year with savings was the theme at this month's Community Clergy Breakfast held by State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village) today at Calvary Baptist Church in Jamaica. It featured information on tax credits and energy efficiency.

"We all know the importance of saving money, but we don't always know how to accumulate those dollars, and that is the significance of today's training," Senator Sanders said. "Every little bit adds up and that's money that can go to funding a church's food pantry, making

repairs or conducting social service programs."

This month's guest speakers were Margaret Neri, deputy commissioner and taxpayer rights advocate with the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, and Ian Harris and Keith Kinch of BlocPower, a group that assists faith-based centers and other groups implement cost-saving energy efficiency retrofit projects.

Neri spoke about the importance of the Earned Income Tax Credit and facilitated self assessment. Last year, New York State paid out over a billion dollars in earned income tax credits, benefiting 1.5 million New Yorkers. In some cases that meant over \$8,000 for a family with three children, Neri noted.

"That's a substantial amount of money that families can use for groceries, to pay debt, to pay rent or to save for a rainy day," Neri said. "It makes a difference."

She added that New York State has one of the most generous Earned Income Tax Credits in the nation, however one in five people who are eligible for the EITC do not file for it. "That means in New York City 35,000 taxpayers are not getting the credit that they deserve," Neri explained.

In order to make tax filing and getting an EITC easier, the Department of Taxation and Finance, is sponsoring tax preparation sites that are outfitted with computers and staffed by tax department volunteers who will help those earning under \$62,000 annually file an electronic return for free.

There are 26 locations in the five boroughs and another 85 across the rest of the state. Most are in libraries, some are in community centers, while others are in church basements.

Electronic returns are easy to file, 20 times more accurate than a paper tax return and payout refunds twice as fast, Neri said.

"The best part is, if you are owed a credit, the software will automatically prompt you to put in the information that will get you the full amount of the credit that you deserve," Neri said.

In the second presentation at the event, Harris and Kinch explained how BlocPower, a Department of Energy-supported public benefits corporation, could help houses of worship reduce their carbon footprint and save money on their current energy bills, by providing a free physical assessment of their building and making recommendations as to cost cutting measures.

"For the last 20 years, as clients of ConEdison we have all have been paying a surcharge on our bill. These are the funds that are being utilized to pay for these assessments," Harris said. "So you have already paid for your assessment, it's about time that you cash in that token."

In order to qualify for the program, a client's building must not exceed 50,000 square feet, and must have ten or fewer full-time or equivalent employees.

Also at the clergy breakfast were representatives from Soul Group, a company that manufactures health drinks and dietary supplements. They expressed interest in bringing Healthy Churches 2020 to New York. It is a training program for faith leaders and others that helps them address chronic diseases in at-risk populations as: diabetes, obesity, heart disease, hepatitis, and cancer.

Senator Sanders' Community Clergy Breakfasts are held monthly with a new topic each time, but always aimed at educating clergy and giving them the tools and information they

need to help themselves and their congregations.

We would like to thank BlocPower for sponsoring the breakfast, and Calvary Baptist Church for allowing us to use their space.