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+ THE SPICE YOU NEED + "TO WHOM IT  
MAY CONCERN" + AN INTERNATIONAL LOVE  
STORY + ARE RURAL CHURCHES DONE FOR?**

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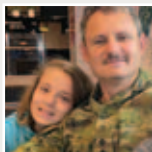
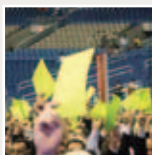
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# TRENDING

## THE MOST SHARED STORIES ON ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG LAST MONTH:

- 1 Adventist Chaplain Leads Closing Prayer  
at U.S. Senate's Momentous Session
- 2 COVID-19 Vaccines: Addressing  
Concerns, Offering Counsel
- 3 Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine—  
First-Person Accounts
- 4 What Ellen White Did During a Pandemic
- 5 North American Division Leadership  
Responds to Events at the U.S. Capitol

## 119 YEARS AGO



An interesting account by John Harvey Kellogg, superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium, was featured in the February 25, 1902, *Review*. Just one week earlier most of the sanitarium had burned to the ground. In his first paragraph, Kellogg related that he had heard the news of the fire while traveling to Michigan from California. At the completion of that trip, as his train pulled into the Battle Creek station, he was already making plans for a "new and better structure to take the place of the old one."

The fire broke out early in the morning of February 18, 1902. The flames spread rapidly throughout the building. All of the staff survived. Only one of the estimated 400 patients died: an elderly man who ran back into the burning building to rescue his life savings.

Kellogg did rebuild the sanitarium much grander and larger than he was advised to do by church leaders and Ellen White. Some years later, in 1907, after much political and theological debate, Kellogg was disfellowshipped from the church. When he left, he took the rebuilt sanitarium with him.

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**Advent Health**

BILL KNOTT



*It's a time, like never before,  
when believers need each other.*

## That Dangerous Miasma

As American missionary Hannah More waved farewell to her surviving colleagues from the banks of West Africa's Boom River in August 1851, she pondered the mysterious "miasma" that had already claimed the lives of five female colleagues in six months and was now causing their husbands to quickly retreat to the safer precincts of the coast. Of 10 missionaries sent out by the American Missionary Association to work among the repatriated survivors of the *Amistad* mutiny, she alone was left to operate the large inland mission station—as cook, preacher, teacher, and mother to nearly 200 orphaned children.

"The causes of fever are doubtless generated from marshes, swamps, and decaying vegetable matter, especially the poisonous Mangroves which line the banks of many of the rivers," she wrote to a wealthy patron of the AMA. "The miasma seems to exhale at the commencement & close of the rains, rendering it more sickly at those periods."<sup>1</sup>

Hannah, who later became the first Seventh-day Adventist in Africa in 1863 and planted several Adventist congregations on the West African coast in the 1860s, was reflecting the commonly held belief of her era that infectious diseases were spread through dank "night air" emanating from rotting organic material. Her own survival can now be traced to the likelihood that she had developed an immunity to the mosquito-borne malaria of Sierra Leone by contracting malaria herself a decade earlier while a missionary in the Missis-

sippi delta of the United States.

Before the development of the "germ theory" of infectious disease in the 1880s, much of the world's population believed in the presence of dark clouds of "miasma" that spread cholera, malaria, smallpox, and dysentery to tens of millions annually. Early comments of Ellen White also reflected this commonly held belief. Ellen White's later writings, however, largely use the term as a metaphor for a dark, morally poisonous atmosphere surrounding unwary believers.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the term *miasma* is almost always used to refer to a clouded, even befuddled state of mind brought on by difficult, unexplained circumstances.

Which is why we should consider resurrecting the word.

As I listen to dozens of friends in phone and Zoom conversations from six continents, I've noted a pervasive pandemic-related malaise caused by the uncertainties of this public health moment, as well as a sense of confusion and angst fueled by apparent stagnation of the church's mission in many regions. Many describe their increasing doubts about their call to ministry or service. Others decry the ineffectiveness of their efforts to reach populations psychologically and spiritually traumatized by a stubborn and deadly disease. In front of many, there seems to be a dangerous fog of personal anxiety, professional restlessness, and spiritual uncertainty.

The miasma seems real enough.

It's not likely to be waved away by cheery bromides about personal discipline, increased activity, or

even deeper devotional experience. The friends of whom I write are doing all these things, but still are battling a keen and unrelenting sense of discouragement and loss. The "norms" of their experience cannot be grasped in the dark cloud of uncertainty and unpredictability before them.

It's a time, like never before, when believers need each other, even while opportunities to be physically present with each other are more restricted than ever. The apostle counseled, "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24, 25, NKJV).<sup>3</sup> This isn't, as some insist, a declaration of an inalienable right to physically assemble in church buildings during a public health crisis, but an insistence that spiritual support and care for each other is the vital core of Christian community.

Every soul needs encouragement, and in the Lord's providence, He gives each of us the words—and the silences—to share through phone or Zoom conversations, in text messages and e-mails, the hope by which His Spirit is sustaining us. This we owe each other, even as we wait for brighter days and warm embraces.

<sup>1</sup> Hannah More to Lewis Tappan, Aug. 28, 1851.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, Mich.: International Tract Society, 1893), p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



## FRIDAY NIGHT DISCOVERY

I usually don't send out e-mails to my faculty friends on Friday night. After all, it's the Sabbath, but I had set aside the November 2020 issue of *Adventist Review* for my Sabbath evening reading tonight. In making my way through the issue I discovered a one-page news commentary (p. 18), by Liona Archer and Jason Hines, entitled "Three Lessons: Living, Loving, and Learning as Rivals." The short piece offers three positive lessons from the life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg concerning (1) her friendship with a colleague holding diametrically different views; (2) the mutual sacrifices made in her long and remarkable marriage to Martin Ginsburg; and (3) her contribution to securing equal rights and respect for women. My summary doesn't do the well-written article justice with its kind application to the place of women in the Adventist Church. Kudos to Jason and Liona, and to Bill Knott, editor of *Adventist Review*.

**Ernest J. Burse**  
Florida

"Three Lessons: Living, Loving, and Learning as Rivals," in November 2020, by Liona Archer and Jason Hines. Of Ruth B. Ginsberg they wrote that her legal career was distinguished by "her sustained advocacy for the rights of women." This was also true for men. Her first case presented the rights of a man not married, who was taking care of his invalid mother and who employed a

woman caregiver to assist him. The IRS did not favor his claim to deductions on his taxes of that of the woman caregiver he hired. She won the argument with the help of her husband, a tax lawyer. "The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18, KJV).

**Robert Rouillard**  
Washington

## STAYING ABOVE THE FRAY

Partyism, the devotion to a specific political party, is running rampant and is leading large groups of people to gullibly believe whatever their political leaders say, no matter how far from the truth or how close to false conspiracy theories their words may be. So it is not too hard to see how, in the last days, large groups of people will gullibly wonder after religious leaders who will promote false positions that are far from plain biblical truth.

**Erin Stone**  
California

## SHARE HIM LIKE PASTORS

I'm thankful and blessed for all the well-written articles in the magazine. Education has driven many of us away from the title "Pastor." Where have all the pastors gone? But here in *Adventist Review*, we write about and share the Lord as pastors!

**Willy Aronsen**  
Norway

## PART OF A MASTER PLAN

How delighted I was to read Ronny Nalin's story! He spoke of his father's influence and being raised by parents who loved the Lord. I had the privilege of seeing some of that firsthand. My friend,



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“Partyism is running rampant and leading people to gullibly believe whatever their political leaders say.”

ERIN STONE, CALIFORNIA

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Annie, and I were two of those Ronny mentioned who visited the Padua Adventist Church from Vicenza, Italy about once a month. Everyone was so friendly and welcoming. Annie and I enjoyed the hospitality of the Nalin family at least one Sabbath afternoon. Ronnie’s father was always full of joy that was contagious. At that time, in the early 90’s, Ronnie was a teenager. It was inspiring to read his story and his spiritual growth in a country where it’s not easy to live out one’s faith. I praise the Lord for how He has led Ronnie to become the new director of the Geoscience Research Institute.

**Tina Thomsen**  
Washington

## YOUR TURN

We welcome your letters, noting, as always, that inclusion of a letter in this section does not imply that the ideas expressed are endorsed by either the editors of the *Adventist Review* or the General Conference. Short, specific, timely letters have the best chance at being published (please include your complete address and phone number—even with e-mail messages). Letters will be edited for space and clarity only. Send correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Review*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; Internet: letters@adventistreview.org.

## COMMENTS FROM ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG

### COVID-19 VACCINES: ADDRESSING CONCERNS, OFFERING COUNSEL

First, the half-life of mRNA in cells is only a few minutes, as the cell chops it up and recycles it for other protein production. Second, while the foreign protein does trigger a response of CD8+ killer cells, the first few cells to be destroyed release chemical messengers called interferons, which cause the surrounding cells to recognize that mRNA sequence and destroy it, preventing viral replication. The mRNA vaccine works the same as attenuated live virus vaccine works (you still get mRNA entering the cells), but since it isn’t the entire virus, it won’t produce more viruses and is thus far safer than an attenuated virus vaccine.—**Jonathan Bleeker**

Well-written, balanced, politically and legally correct article. However, since the *Adventist Review* covers the entire church, it would be beneficial to address other brands of vaccines besides Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna. There are many countries where the aforementioned brands of vaccines won’t be available, because of political, financial, and other reasons.—**Maxim Safonov**

In order to make wise decisions, one must have two sides of information from the plaintiff and the defendant so that the judge may execute a wise judgment. That’s why God gave human beings the freedom to choose between life and death. He advocated for us to choose life, though that free gift is ours indeed.—**Selma T. Glasgow**

### INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION PRESIDENT RELEASED AFTER FOUR DAYS OF CAPTIVITY

We celebrate God’s protection of His servant, Pastor Henry, and pray for his recuperation from such a terrible ordeal.—**France Chambers**

### THE MAGI AND THE DRUMMER BOY

Consider the moral of this story, which is to ask, “What can I give?” The fictional drummer boy, who (like Jesus) was born into poverty, had nothing to “gift” to a king except his talent. Unlike the unwise servant in Matthew 25, the little drummer boy wisely chose not to hide his talent, but instead presented it as a love offering to the Gifter.—**M. Ross Nearon**

### UNTO YOU A SAVIOR

Thank God for the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ to save us from the condemnation of sin.—**D. A. Kyllileh**

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**The Executive Committee of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church have voted to postpone the quinquennial session of the denomination, originally scheduled for late June of 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

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# NEWS



General Conference Session delegates vote an item at the 2015 session in San Antonio, Texas. The 2020 Session has been postponed to June 2022.

PHOTO: PETER DAMSTEEGT, ADVENTIST REVIEW

## **LEADERS VOTE TO POSTPONE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION 2020 FOR A SECOND TIME**

**DUE TO COVID-19, WORLD CHURCH QUINQUENNIAL EVENT  
NOW SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 6-11, 2022.**

BY ANN AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

**F**or the second time in 10 months, members of the Executive Committee of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church have voted to postpone the quinquennial session of the denomination, originally scheduled for late June of 2020, due to challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members of the Executive Committee (EXCOM) from around the world attended the January 12, 2021 virtual Zoom session, where they listened to reports from world church administration, health officers of the church, logistics coordinators, and legal counsel. Leaders discussed the feasibility of adher-

ing to the planned business session dates of May 20-25, 2021, in Indianapolis, Indiana, United States, that had been previously approved by the same body.

The persistence of the deadly global COVID-19 pandemic and its enduring impacts on public health, travel, and the availability of inter-



**“We have been brought to this point, not because it is something we would like to do, but something we have to do.”  
—Peter Landless.**

national visas persuaded the international body to postpone the session until June 6-11, 2022, also in Indianapolis. The new plan voted by church leaders and laypersons now postpones the date for the denomination’s quinquennial business session for nearly two years from its originally scheduled dates, as allowed by the Adventist Church’s constitution.

General Conference (GC) president Ted N. C. Wilson, who chaired the EXCOM committee, began the two-hour meeting by outlining the process of data collection and discussion that brought the recommendations to the governing body of the church. “A team of workers has been working diligently,” Wilson said. “We have been carefully reviewing things, especially with those in session management and planning.”

Wilson added that recommendations are coming from a consensus approach from various groups, including world division officers, health professionals, Adventist Risk Management, the Office of General Counsel, and other Adventist Church leaders. “This is not a recommendation directly coming from the three senior officers of the GC,” he said. “This is something that has come from a plethora of information and counselors.”

#### **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Wilson introduced those who would provide background and context to the current and projected

challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic.

Peter Landless, director of Health Ministries for the global Adventist Church, shared current COVID-19 statistics and concerns of moving forward with such a large gathering. Given the rising infection numbers, along with a new, more infectious and aggressive strain, Landless said the Health Ministries department had to recommend delaying the GC Session.

“We’ve been consulting with international experts, and taking into account the needs and concerns. The GC Health Ministries department believes it is prudent and practical stewardship to postpone the GC Session to 2022, given this difficult time,” Landless said. “And it is with a heavy heart one makes this recommendation. However, it is a recommendation that comes because it appears there is no alternative.”

GC meeting planner Sheri Clemmer outlined some of the current challenges to a large meeting of delegates from around the world. She mentioned visitor visa difficulties and quarantine requirements, especially for those who use public transportation and transportation hubs. She also explained standard COVID protocols surrounding mass gatherings in Indianapolis.

G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the global Adventist Church, reported data collected from the division leadership about the likelihood of delegates being able to

attend the May 2021 GC Session. Major challenges to achieving a large portion of delegates that were expressed by division leadership included travel bans, quarantine restrictions, and problems obtaining visas to the United States. The General Conference constitution does not currently allow for electronic participation at a General Conference Session.

Tim Northrop, president of Adventist Risk Management, outlined various liability risks that could follow if EXCOM voted to not delay the 2021 Session.

“We have an important meeting for our church. What we have heard is that there are potential exposures and potential risks,” Northrop said. “We have also heard our constitution allows us to weigh those risks and to consider moving the meeting to a later date. This business continuity plan we have as leaders is important. It allows us to be more nimble and allows us to continue the ministry of our church.”

Following the presentations and discussion, the recommendation to move the dates of the General Conference to June 2022 was put to a vote by electronic polling. The motion passed with a vote of 185 to 9.

Following the vote, Landless concluded the discussion with a serious observation: “We have been brought to this point, not because it is something we would like to do, but something we have to do.”





United States Senate chaplain Barry Black

PHOTO: HOUSELIVE SCREENGRAB, JAN 7, 2021

## U.S. SENATE CHAPLAIN SHARES ILLUMINATING TESTIMONY AT CNN INTERVIEW

**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST BARRY BLACK QUOTES SCRIPTURE, HIGHLIGHTS THE POWER OF PRAYER.**

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

United States Senate chaplain Barry Black believes that divine Providence can work on behalf of those who love God no matter what happens in our lives. In a January 7, 2021, interview by CNN's Anderson Cooper, Black, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, quoted Scripture profusely as he recalled his experience when protestors broke into the U.S. Capitol a day before.

"I view what happened as having an element of Providence in it," Black said. "I subscribe to the notion that if you believe in the transcendent . . . God is able to take a negative and turn it into a positive." Black then quoted Romans 8:28 and Isaiah 55:8, 9, and added, "Always suspect a providential movement."

Cooper, who acknowledged he has always been "fascinated by people of very deep faith who are able to live that day in and day out in moments of crisis," asked Black if his belief in divine Providence

applies to what had transpired a day before, even when many, including Black, had to be suddenly moved to a safe underground location. "Can you feel Providence at work even in those moments when you were evacuated from your office?"

Black explained that his faith journey involves a daily relationship with God, something that includes a constant spirit of prayer.

"I am so fortunate that one of my responsibilities is to pray for the nation," Black said. "I literally talk to God for hours a day. . . . And I believe there is a God-shaped void in each of us that only He can fill. . . . I believe there is a level of fulfillment that comes from the transcendent. . . . [It gives you] an equanimity of spirit that is a blessing for your life."

In that sense, Black shared how in the middle of the break-in a day before, a big and tall Capitol police officer sought him out of his office.

"He came and got me, telling me, 'I am not leaving you in this office. Follow me.'"

As senators were evacuated and did not know what would happen, a group of them gathered to pray, led by Black. "We have nothing to fear for the future except we forget how You have led us in the past," Black prayed.

The long ordeal of January 6 day, Cooper reminded, ended in the early hours of January 7, after senators reconvened to finish the November election's certification. At the end of the session, Black offered the closing prayer.

**"HE CAME AND GOT ME, TELLING ME, 'I AM NOT LEAVING YOU IN THIS OFFICE. FOLLOW ME.'"**

"These tragedies have reminded us that words matter and that the power of life and death is in the tongue," Black prayed. "Lord, You have helped us remember that we need to see in each other a common humanity that reflects Your image."

Black also asked God to use everyone to "bring healing and unity to our hurting and divided nation and world."

"Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to do Your will, and guide our feet on the path of peace," he said. ▀



PHOTO: ADVENTIST HEALTH

## ADVENTIST HEALTH ST. HELENA CELEBRATES REOPENING AFTER THE GLASS FIRE

AFTER TWO MONTHS OF BEING CLOSED, THE FACILITIES ARE UP AND RUNNING.

BY ADVENTIST HEALTH AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

**A**dventist Health St. Helena in St. Helena, California, United States, invited the community to join in a virtual celebration on December 8, 2020, to commemorate the reopening of the hospital after being temporarily closed for more than two months, following the devastation caused by the Glass fire.

The virtual event included remarks from hospital president Steven Herber, chief medical officer Timothy Lyons, and admitting hospitalist and community member Debby Hobbs. Presentations included a glimpse into who was behind the reopening efforts and how Adventist Health is prepared to face COVID-19.

The virtual ceremony was followed by celebratory events on the campus, according to leaders, to honor the team and recognize the power of everyone working together toward the goal of reopening and resuming patient care.

Herber commented on how important it is for doctors, nurses, and staff to celebrate this mile-

stone, because everyone worked very hard and they were motivated by one common goal: getting back to the patients.

“After thousands of hours of planning, hard work, and a long, arduous process that would make even the most patient person take a deep breath, this team deserves to be recognized. It feels great knowing that tomorrow the staff will be back together to stand ready to help our patients and community, especially during this critical time as we all face the crisis of COVID-19.”

Operations executive Hoda Asadian added that this process was all-consuming.

“Our teams have been working 24/7 to make the necessary repairs to our systems, deep cleaning the entire facility from top to bottom, replacing all supplies, flushing out the water system, and removing debris. Getting all of the intricate systems and equipment cleaned, tested, retested, and calibrated were onerous tasks critical to the reopening plan. We’re happy to

report this hospital is now better than ever, and it’s been certified by officials that we’re safe and ready to reopen.”

Despite the extensive resources required to reopen the hospital, Adventist Health hasn’t stopped there. The team has been taking care of the needs of the community with its clinics in Napa, St. Helena, and Calistoga, and its mobile health program. Mobi, the mobile health unit, provides access to primary care and COVID-19 testing via a van that travels to various locations throughout the Napa Valley.

Adventist Health also launched free counseling to help residents deal with the stress of COVID-19 and the wildfire. Together with SyncTALK, by Synchronous Health, the counseling service connects participants to a licensed counselor who can help residents deal with the stress and anxiety they might be feeling. The offer includes four free sessions, each 30 minutes long, and they’re held virtually by phone or video.

Adventist Health St. Helena is part of Adventist Health, a faith-based, nonprofit, integrated health system serving more than 80 communities on the West Coast of the United States and in Hawaii. Founded on Seventh-day Adventist heritage and values, Adventist Health provides care in hospitals, clinics, home-care agencies, hospice agencies, and joint-venture retirement centers in both rural and urban communities. 🍀



Church members and visitors enjoy the dedication of a new church structure sponsored by Maranatha Volunteers International in Côte d'Ivoire. PHOTO: MARANATHA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL

## CÔTE D'IVOIRE ADVENTISTS REJOICE IN NEW CHURCH STRUCTURES DESPITE PANDEMIC

MARANATHA TEAMS ADAPT TO THE NEW NORMAL TO RAMP UP THEIR SUPPORT AND CONTRIBUTION.

BY DUSTIN COMM, MARANATHA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL

**W**ith only 10,000 Seventh-day Adventists in the entire country of Côte d'Ivoire, Adventist leadership in that country had been waiting for September 12, 2020, to arrive. Two new churches were dedicated on one Sabbath, built by Maranatha's volunteers and devoted crews.

The anticipation of this moment had been building for a long time. Even before Maranatha's team in Côte d'Ivoire began pouring concrete, fabricating steel, or laying blocks, Adventist leaders were referring to their church history as "Before Maranatha" and "After Maranatha."

With the completion of the Anan and Abbehoukoi Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Abidjan area, the reality of this new chapter has now begun to sink in. Leaders know there is a long way to go to reach their goals for church

growth, but seeing the start of their dreams being accomplished is a breath of fresh air, they said. This was true especially because, for a while, it seemed as though the buildings might never come to fruition.

Volunteer groups successfully served during the first couple of months of 2020 as Maranatha was ramping up activity in Côte d'Ivoire. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, canceling future volunteer projects and bringing Maranatha's local team to a temporary standstill. Soon, with approval from local authorities, Maranatha's country director, Gilberto Araujo, implemented a plan for crews to resume the work at the construction sites.

"First, we reduced our team so that we'd give enough space for social distancing," Araujo said. "Then we gave them meals here.

We provided them with some mattresses where they could sleep here. We gave them gloves. They used masks. They also used gel to clean their hands. And this was how we were able to work here for months."

Steadily the work continued, and each week brought more progress and attention to the projects. By the time the buildings were completed in September, local news stations wanted to cover the ribbon-cutting ceremonies and learn about this organization providing new buildings in Côte d'Ivoire.

The day of dedications began at the Anan church, Maranatha's first completed project in the country. Here Araujo and Adventist leaders, including the president of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD) of the Adventist Church, thanked everyone involved in the project.

Later that day a ceremony took place at the Abbehoukoi church, where members expressed their gratefulness to the Maranatha team for their tireless work, even through the pandemic. The transformation of the property there was so stunning that members now want to

add “Eden” to the official church name.

It was a high Sabbath for all who participated in both of the joyous celebrations. Within weeks there would also be happy squeals coming from new classrooms next to the Abbebroukoi church. In October kindergartners flooded the school building that Maranatha also constructed there, starting a new Adventist primary school. Because of the strong reputation of Adventist education in Côte d’Ivoire, an Adventist school is a welcome addition to the neighborhood. The kindergarten class has 31 students enrolled so far, with plans to expand to more grades.

Charles Assandé, education director for the Adventist Church in Côte d’Ivoire, knows how important schools are in reaching more souls with God’s love. “School is a powerful factor of evangelism,” Assandé said. “Education and redemption are one and the same. When you have a school with six classrooms, you have six churches. So the more classrooms we have, the more churches we have. And it will boost our missionary work. That’s why it is extremely important to have many schools here in Côte d’Ivoire.”

Since completing the structures at Anan and Abbebroukoi, Maranatha has turned its

attention to constructing a new secondary school in Niangon.

The local Adventist church has about 170 members, but they want to grow. Niangon is the largest and most populated suburb of the metropolis of Abidjan, with more than 1.5 million residents. “We have not grown as we should according to the population of this area,” local pastor Paul Baka said. “We think that with a school we will grow faster. People will know the church.”

Maranatha will be constructing five classrooms and two labs next to the Niangon church. (Land is very expensive in Côte d’Ivoire, so most of the school projects will be built on church property.) It will be the only secondary school in the neighborhood, fulfilling an urgent need while introducing the community to the Adventist Church.

These churches and schools are just the beginning of a new point in history for the Adventist Church in Côte d’Ivoire. Each completed structure will serve as a beacon for the gospel in every neighborhood and city where they are erected. The dedication ceremonies at Anan and Abbebroukoi celebrated two specific sites, but they also mark a new era for the church. Slowly but surely, the gospel will continue to advance in this “After Maranatha” Côte d’Ivoire. 🍀

## IN A FIRST, ADVENTIST CHAPLAINS APPOINTED TO AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

PASTORS MILIJAN POPVIC AND GYS SEEGERS WILL PROVIDE SPIRITUAL SUPPORT TO MILITARY FAMILIES.

BY LORRAINE ATCHIA, ADVENTIST RECORD, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

**F**or the first time in its history, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has appointed two Seventh-day Adventists as chaplains to provide pastoral support for members and their families.

After an extensive recruitment process, which took more than 12 months, Milijan Popvic was assigned as an Air Force chaplain and Gys Seegers as an Army Reserve chaplain earlier this year.

A Defence spokesperson stated that, on average, the ADF receives 70,000 applications each year for all available positions in the Navy, Army, and Air Force. In the current financial year they are looking to recruit only 22 chaplains across the ADF. Applicants need to undergo the full ADF officer recruitment process, which includes several interviews, a medical exam, aptitude testing, psychological testing, and grueling physical training.

The first two years in a chaplaincy position are considered an induction period, as there are academic requirements to learn about the ADF and chaplaincy. Both Popvic and Seegers are undertaking professional development to enhance their skills and knowledge of leadership, teamwork, ethics, psychology, counseling, and other courses and training programs. All these skills will assist them in their new roles as they care for members of the





Newly appointed Australian Defence Force chaplain Gys Seegers with his children PHOTO: ADVENTIST RECORD

ADF, and they will also be able to bring these skills to their local church ministry.

Popvic is currently posted at RAAF Base Amberley in Ipswich, Queensland, where he provides assistance for spiritual health and well-being, pastoral support, advocacy, and personal guidance to Air Force members and their families. He also provides advice to commanders on pastoral, religious, ethical, and cultural issues of members.

When asked what it meant to be the first Seventh-day Adventist chaplain in the ADF, Popvic reflected on watching the ADF's response to the Queensland floods in 2011 and how they lifted the bar by providing help and support to those in need. This reignited his childhood desire to be part of the Defence Force culture, so when he was given an opportunity to apply to become an ADF chaplain, he readily accepted. He sees this as a "great privilege, honor, and responsibility." Popvic said he understands that "this is not a job. This is a call, and it is a passion. A passion for connecting, support, and walking with people who serve our country and their families."

Seegers is based at the Australian Army Cadet headquarters in

Perth, Western Australia, where he provides chaplaincy support to full-time and reserve personnel. He is also the coordinating chaplain for the chaplains who support 33 cadet units throughout Western Australia.

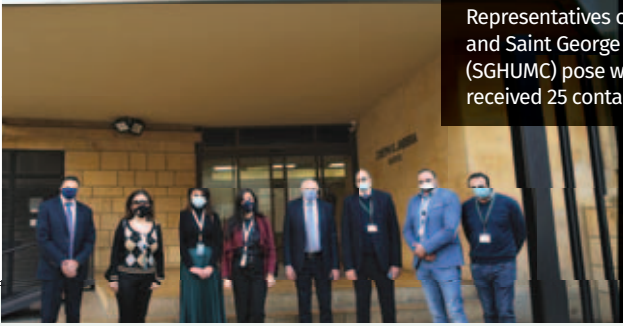
Originally from South Africa, Seegers said that he and his family have come to love the people of Australia and that serving the men and women who serve the country is his small way of saying thank you. He said he also feels it is a blessing and privilege to enter into a new mission field on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He explained, "I am humbled by this opportunity to help raise the banner for Christ's kingdom within the ADF and the beautiful people who I'm getting to know—men and women of courage and respect who understand order and what it means to serve and sacrifice themselves for others."

Michael Worker, general secretary of the Australian Union Conference of the Adventist Church and the church's representative on the Associated Protestant Churches Chaplaincy Board (APCCB), said that "it's important as the Seventh-day Adventist Church that we are involved in all facets of ministry. Being part of

the Defence Force chaplaincy gives us a chance to interact with and provide a positive point of contact for many Australians who would never otherwise come into contact with Adventists. It gives our pastors opportunities to have spiritual conversations with our service personnel."

**"I AM HUMBLLED BY THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HELP RAISE THE BANNER FOR CHRIST'S KINGDOM WITHIN THE ADF AND THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE WHO I'M GETTING TO KNOW."**

Being a military chaplain is a strong ministry, and the Adventist world church has had a proud history of pastors serving as chaplains, Adventist leaders pointed out. "We are honored to have Pastor Popvic and Pastor Seegers as the first Seventh-day Adventist ADF chaplains in Australia, and we look forward to having many more in the future," they said. ▀



Representatives of the LAU Medical Center-Rizk Hospital and Saint George Hospital University Medical Center (SGHUMC) pose with ADRA outside one of the hospitals that received 25 containers of medical supplies. PHOTO: ADRA IN LEBANON

## IN LEBANON, ADRA DELIVERS MORE THAN US\$1 MILLION IN MEDICAL SUPPLIES

BEIRUT HOSPITALS BENEFIT WHILE STRUGGLING WITH COVID-19 AND THE PORT EXPLOSION FALLOUT.

IRIS ARGUETA, ADVENTIST DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF AGENCY

**T**he Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) shipped more than a million dollars' worth of medical supplies to aid LAU Medical Center-Rizk Hospital and Saint George Hospital University Medical Center (SGHUMC) in Beirut, Lebanon.

According to local authorities, the medical facilities that were severely damaged by the massive Port of Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020, are overwhelmed by the surge of new coronavirus cases. Lebanon is also reporting about 2,000 daily infections; hospitals are reaching full capacity and lack equipment to treat COVID-19 patients, the critically ill, and those suffering from other chronic illnesses.

"The speed and scale of the outbreak in recent weeks are posing countless challenges for hospitals and health-care workers in the nation. ADRA is committed to continuing COVID-19 relief efforts to protect medical professionals, aid survivors, and safeguard families and children," said Frank Reimann, ADRA's emergency response coordinator in Beirut. "We must continue to pray for the people in Lebanon and support ADRA to ensure humanitarian aid reaches those in need as quickly as possible."

ADRA donated 50 pallets of medical supplies containing thousands

of PPEs, gloves, face shields, surgical devices, and essential lifesaving equipment to help LAU Medical Center-Rizk Hospital and Saint George Hospital University Medical Center provide high-quality care to the most vulnerable communities.

"On behalf of the LAU Medical Center-Rizk Hospital Management, we convey our utmost gratitude for ADRA's contribution and generous donation. Following the massive and horrible Beirut explosion in August, donors such as ADRA paved the way to help us rebuild our medical centers and support many patients," said Saad El Zein, assistant to the president for special projects at the hospital. "With patriotic, socially responsible donors and dedicated, compassionate medical teams, we are reassured that we will come out of this disaster stronger than ever before."

The Lebanese health-care system was already struggling with the pandemic and the country's ongoing financial crisis before the massive explosion severely impacted the medical facilities. At SGHUMC, located a little more than a mile away from the blast site, several people were killed, and hundreds of nurses, doctors, and patients were injured. The medical institution also reported more than

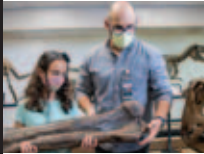
US\$50 million in damages. Hospital officials say they will use ADRA's medical supplies to restore services and create a community clinic for families and children.

"It is a great endeavor, what ADRA has done to support the Lebanese health-care sector and namely our two hospitals, which suffered more than many others and are still struggling in the aftermath of the explosion of August 4. The consequences of this disaster with the difficult economic and financial complications we are experiencing represent a serious threat to the crash of the national health-care system," said Dimitri Haddad, chief administrative officer for SGHUMC. "We will use ADRA's donated items to support our community and population who seek care at our medical center and will extend special care and attention to the most indigent among our patients. We highly appreciate ADRA's contribution."

ADRA's medical supply shipment is the latest relief effort to support the Lebanese nation. The humanitarian agency scaled up emergency operations the day the deadly explosion killed more than 200 people, injured at least 6,000, and left more than 300,000 homeless. ADRA's emergency response teams, working in conjunction with the Adventist Church and other partners, have been on the ground providing emergency food, water, and cash vouchers for shelter repairs. It has also been supporting first responders and assessing health-care facilities to meet their needs. ▀



**SHOPPING MALL IN BRAZIL HOSTS SANCTUARY EXHIBITION.** In November 2020 the Santa Maria Shopping Center in Brazil's capital city of Brasilia featured "Expo Santuário," a traveling display of the structure and operation of ancient Israel's wilderness sanctuary. Program coordinators offered to pray with, and pronounce a blessing on, the more than 1,500 people who walked through the exhibition. Pastor Rúben Freitas said, "We also discussed our relationship to Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and His work of salvation on our behalf."



**ADVENTIST RESEARCHERS PUBLISH MAJOR PAPER ON DINOSAURS.**

A team of Adventist scholars, led by Jared Wood of Southwestern Adventist University (SWAU), along with Arthur Chadwick, also of SWAU, and Keith Snyder of Southern Adventist University, recently published a refereed article on two decades of paleontological research. The paper, "Over 13,000 Elements From a Single Bonebed Help Elucidate Disarticulation and Transport of an *Edmontosaurus thanatocoenosis*," appeared in *PLOS One*, a peer-reviewed, open-access scientific journal published by the Public Library of Science (PLOS).



**IMPACTFUL HOSPICE MINISTRY IN HUNGARY.** Erzsébet Feketéné Trankusz, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Hungary, is chaplain coordinator for the Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Central and University Teaching Hospital in Miskolc. According to the hospice ward's chief medical officer (CMO), Erzsébet's work is "extremely important." Chaplain Erzsébet was invited to be an employee in 2020, after serving as a volunteer. The CMO said that her listening presence helps patients accept "a seemingly hopeless future—in many cases, achieving a reduction in anxiety and fear of death."



**ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY OUTREACH PROGRAM CAPTIVATES INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE.**

Southern Adventist University's (SAU) noncredit Soul-winning and Leadership Training (SALT) program included attendees for fall 2020, from as far away as Nepal, New Zealand, and Thailand. Twenty-year-old China Williams told God that she "wanted to be able to teach people." Then she saw her fellow New Zealander, Douglas Na'a, functioning as SALT director and thought, *OK, that's it. I'm coming.* SALT is a SAU initiative in partnership with It Is Written media ministry.



**UNION COLLEGE EVALUATED AS HIGH VALUE SCHOOL.** *U.S. News and World Report* has again ranked Union College (UC), a Seventh-day Adventist college in Lincoln, Nebraska, United States, as one of America's best in 2021. Rank and ratings rise in relation to high quality and low cost of education. UC also ranked high for social mobility and diversity. Behind her school's high public ratings, UC president Vinita Sauder sees private sacrifices and miracles "working together to keep a world-class education accessible to students from many economic backgrounds."



**LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY VIRTUAL ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE ATTRACTS GLOBAL AUDIENCE.**

November 14, 2020, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, La Sierra University's Center for Near Eastern Archaeology (CNEA) conducted their twelfth annual Archeology Discovery Weekend, condensed into a three-hour Webinar-style Zoom conference entitled "A Passion for Preserving the Past: Showcasing Archaeology at La Sierra University." The new format still drew more than 200 attendees from around the United States and a half dozen other countries—Canada, Australia, Germany, Portugal, Brazil, and Jordan.



**FIJI ADVENTISTS MOBILIZED TO HELP CYCLONE SURVIVORS.**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) have teamed up to bring relief to survivors of category 5 Cyclone Yasa, which struck the nation of Fiji December 17, 2020. Storm damage may reach FJD\$128 million (\$62 million). ADRA Fiji became immediately operational, planning, packing, and acquiring stocks, and is due to start delivering necessities to affected communities in early January.

What's in your luggage?





## EFRAÍN VELÁZQUEZ

“What’s in your luggage?” asked the police officer at recently inaugurated Idlewild Airport (today JFK) in New York. For Arcadio it was one more question in the long history of Puerto Ricans and their complicated relation to more than one colonial power.

### GOING INTO EXILE

In those bags he and Adelaida carried their earthly belongings, the ones they chose to bring as they left their Caribbean colony. Ironically, Arcadio had opted for the metropole, the Empire State, the “Babylon” he had rejected until now. He and Adelaida were reliving a tragedy of millennia before them, that generations after would follow, by ones and by thousands, on their own feet and yet against their will, a new wave of tears flowing away from the place they know as home. Arcadio and Adelaida were American citizens, neither refugees nor migrants. But in their hearts, moving to the United States was not just moving abroad; it was marching into exile.

What would the prophet Ezekiel say to Arcadio, my grandfather, a child of the countryside brought up with stories of how his kin had lost lands after their homeland was invaded in 1898. Gone was the autonomy Spain had granted the previous year. With the new rulers came a devalued currency, extravagant interest rates affixed to farm loans, and a series of natural disasters that ravaged the crops that powered the national economy. As the new century unfolded, half of the smallholding arable land turned into industrial-size sugarcane plantations. Utilities and railroads laid down on private lands profited at the expense of the impoverished population. Puerto Ricans experienced the fate of other former Spanish colonies and tributary states before and since, oppressed by economies of extraction even as they had fought for their independence. Like Judah to Babylon or Assyria or Egypt, Latin America had turned into somebody else’s backyard, its land, resources, and revenues in the hands of foreign and local elites.

On the island of Puerto Rico local hostility to overlords boiled over into armed protest. The climax came when a handful of Arcadio’s countrymen attempted to assassinate the American president, among other acts of violence. “What’s in your luggage?” was an appropriate question for this imposingly tall and muscular man. But his

kind eyes and disarming smile helped to soothe away the officer’s suspicions.

### SETTLING INTO EMPIRE HQ

Ezekiel did not fly to his Tel Abib destination in today’s southern Iraq. Nor did he volunteer. He didn’t inspire suspicion, either; only indifference. Settling next to the Kebar River (Eze. 1:1), he faced a bleak future. Abram had left this region centuries before, pursuing God’s call to the Promised Land, the same country Ezekiel had now been forced to abandon, reversing his ancestor’s memorable footsteps.

His luggage may have included a scroll fragment—a very rare artifact, perhaps a treasured text hanging from his neck, as with the Ketef Hinnom scroll.<sup>1</sup> Or his amulet may have been the seal of his clan. He may have possessed a generational incense shovel or even a portable incensary. Pentateuchal instructions forbade the burning of the special ketoret (incense) outside the sanctuary (see Ex. 30:34-38), a rule violated often. A temple to Yahweh in Arad evidences that they burned incense (with cannabis) during monarchical times; it was likely destroyed during Ezekiel’s childhood, with Josiah’s reformations (see 2 Kings 22). Unauthorized high priests must have faced expulsion or death, as faithful King Josiah’s reforms raised Judahites’ expectations.

Ezekiel carried the implements he had expected to use in priestly ministry, but circumstances would work against carrying out his priestly calling. Those with him on this forced march, Babylon-bound, were traversing their own trail of tears.

### HAPPY EXILES

But not everyone. Often enough, too often indeed, two humans will represent three perspectives. Against Ezekiel, some Judahites bore no qualms about switching fringy Judah for metropolitan Babylon. During the previous regime, Mesopotamian sympathizers in the Judahite court had enjoyed Assyria’s favor and profited from the prevailing market. The political stability of the Pax Assyrica (Assyrian Peace) had stimulated the mass production of staples such as oil and wine, even if the resultant trade favored the foreigners and their local lackeys more than ever.

Before Ezekiel’s days, Hezekiah and his allies had pursued an African superpower, Egypt’s twenty-fifth dynasty “Black Pharaohs.” These

## The Lord alone can provide guaranteed hope and a new heart.

rulers had provided military assistance to Judah and other Levantine kingdoms against Assyria (see Isa. 30, 31; 2 Kings 24:7), but not because of altruistic concerns. Kushites had implemented an economy of extraction over local Egyptians and sought revenue from their client states. Once Assyria conquered the Levant and Egypt, however, they brought the region under their hegemony and reestablished local pharaohs.

The biblical texts reflect these imperial shifts, always emphasizing Yahweh's sovereignty and lordship. Yahweh's eighth-century prophets thundered against the ruling classes for their social injustices among other disgraces. Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah advocated for the oppressed and denounced skewed interpretations and trampling of God's covenant. But after that high point of Hebrew propheticism, Judah succumbed under Manasseh, who ruled as an Assyrian vassal.

Then Josiah appeared, promising Judah a new day. Anointed king after decades of militarization and heavy taxation, he chose reformation and resistance. His reformation in 622 B.C. (2 Kings 22:8-20) exposed the book of the Law in the rubble of the Temple the very year of Ezekiel's birth. Ezekiel grew with sermons of fiery prophets ringing in his ears as he lived through the national disintegration that had been foretold. Josiah's reforms motivated him and inspired high expectations for Judah's future. But hardly anything changed in the exploited lives of corvé laborers, widows, and aliens. Well-meaning King Josiah was unable to curb oppression and marginalization. Neglect of the core of Yahweh's covenant yielded nothing in the way of relief for new or older sufferers.

In his optimism, Josiah turned to political maneuvers: he rebuffed Assyria and Egypt's native pharaohs of the twenty-sixth dynasty to back the emerging Medo-Babylonian coalition. His political miscalculation against the voice of God through an Egyptian monarch (2 Chron. 35:21, 22) drove him to premature death in Megiddo, an Armageddon for Judah that shattered all hopes for Ezekiel's generation. Nebu-

chadnezzar's Babylonian invasion crushed Judah's short-lived autonomy. And yet there were Judahites glad to move to Mesopotamia and the metropolis.

### CALL AND BAGGAGE

Ezekiel left Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Five years later God called him to prophesy on the day he should have been installed as a priest (Eze. 1:1, 2). Judah's dystopic reality, the Macondo of his days,<sup>2</sup> replaced the ideal reign Ezekiel would have expected from Josiah's reforms. The Hebrews had been warned about the consequences of having kings ruling over them (Deut. 17:14-20). Stories of judges and kings, bearing matching names and enduring similar fates, seemed like a pathetic merry-go-round of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Biblical history testifies that hierarchical monarchy and, before it, judge-led, egalitarian theocracy worked only sporadically and with limits. By contrast, Ezekiel's call envisioned the Spirit of God showing order in the midst of chaos (Eze. 1:4-28). Ezekiel's visions offered assurance of Yahweh's sovereignty, character, and glory (Eze. 20:9, 14, 22; 36:20-23). Yahweh's commitment was not to a building, city, or nation, or even a political or economic system.

Ezekiel saw that Yahweh transcended everything. That transcending power was present with him even in exile. God instructed him to become a *mophet*—a “sign” or “show”—call him the Muppet man and Lego player of his era: eating a book, building a model of Jerusalem, cooking over manure, etc., a “show and tell” that went on for a year. Then he was instructed to pack again (Eze. 12:3), this time with minimum baggage and for a more solemn performance. His audience expected economic and political change. Their hopes were on ideologies—the empire, or the monarchy, or theocracy. None of these was it. The Temple would be destroyed. Many would be uprooted. Many would die. Their focus should be on the covenant and packing an “exile's luggage,” Ezekiel warned.

### TRAVELING LIGHT

Ezekiel's *mophet* show presents the paradigm of Arcadio and Adelaida, life travelers who are “pilgrims and strangers” (see 1 Peter 2:11, 12). In his book we may recognize allusions to earth's original creation and loss of original perfection. Adam and Eve, humanity's first refugees, had to exit with exiles' luggage, leaving everything behind. And so it continued: Noah left his house, Abram departed

from Ur, the patriarchs wandered, as did the Israelites after leaving Egypt. Victims of oppression, from long ago to now, understand about traveling light.

Ezekiel's most dramatic, most agonizing "show and tell" came at the loss of the love of his life. He had depicted God's glory, mercy, and judgment before people who kept looking for hope in human proposals. So often the optimism of those who seek justice in the human realm finds disappointment and emptiness. Our sinful nature taints human efforts that often climax with seeking power. God is different: His character and the restoration of His image in His creation are what drive His justice.

Ezekiel's death-march depiction at God's command (Eze. 12:1-6) was no romance.<sup>3</sup> Its brutality has been repeated enough through human history, reaching to our day: Africans on the Zanzibar and Atlantic slave routes; First Nations of the Americas; Armenians, Greeks, and Turks marching toward exile and death during World War I; Jews, Soviets, Germans, Chinese, Koreans, and more during the second world conflict; Congolese, Palestinian Arabs, the forced Aliyah, the Vietnamese and Cambodians. More recently: Bosnians, Azeris, Tutsis, Hutus, Kurds, Iraqis, Syrians, Yazidis, Rohingya. Forgive if I omitted your pain—my list is not exhaustive.

Leaving home with little or no luggage, victims of oppression and prejudice read Ezekiel and identify personally with the message of exile.

Prophetic oracles were not really intended to bolster national pride and expectation of an earthly utopia. Such never took place, and Jesus knows it cannot (Mark 10:42, 43). God's children, in exile and on pilgrimage, encounter wonderful systems theory and flawed, failed, and failing human practice. The ideal of our ideas may flourish for a while and yield delectable fruit. But none will provide forever the justice and peace we all need. The Lord alone can provide guaranteed hope and a new heart to live in that reality (Deut. 30:1-6). Meanwhile we live with "exile's luggage," focusing on the essentials and being aware that our God will show His glory through us.

## EXILE HOPE

Arcadio knew he must travel light; knew that he was a pilgrim. He arrived in New York City penniless, worked hard, and succeeded, surrounded by prejudice and racism. But alcohol enslaved him, along with gambling, and promiscuity. His heart


grew cold amid oppression; he came to care for nothing but his family and his tyrant vices. Then, miraculously, God gave him a heart of compassion and obedience (see Eze. 36:26). He accepted Christ. It cost him his business. He returned to his island, a poor mechanic with eight mouths to feed.

He never made the history books. At the end of his pilgrimage he left little of earthly belongings. But he left a heritage of love and kindness. Arcadio knew that the fight he had chosen to lead in his youthful days was of limited scope. He was disappointed by those who promised change and never delivered. To the age of 90+, he followed the political experiences of Latin America closely. He never saw his oppressed people achieve prosperity or the promised liberation. He reminded everybody to pack light because we are pilgrims, we are exiles. Our hope is Ezekiel's hope.

Ezekiel knew, and taught, better than "Grandpa Cayo," the doom of hopes anchored in economic systems, political parties, educational agendas, or ecclesiastical plans. Only God could perform the miracle of restoring the valley of the dry bones (see Eze. 37; cf. Gen. 1). Hence his skepticism of prophets who promised what he knew they could not deliver, given their basis of human effort.

Those who listen and hear the prophet well will not expend their energy on lifting heavy bags of personal possessions this side of eternity. They will be on the side of biblical justice, peace, and hope. But they understand Ezekiel's mind-boggling vision of the glory of God returning to Jerusalem, retracing Abram's steps all over again, headed, not for a geographical or political Zion, but an eschatological arrival in the New Jerusalem.

Ezekiel and the company of biblical prophets were mostly exiles, detached from triumphalist national expectations, oppressive manifest destiny, or narratives of self-victimization. They were actively campaigning on behalf of the needy of their world. And we may join our voices and actions to theirs, committed to biblical justice but clear eyed about the possibilities. We are exiles, and we mean to go home soon; home to Zion.

And you, what's in your luggage? 

<sup>1</sup> A small silver scroll with the priestly benediction, found in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez's fictional town, in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, that grows and thrives, only to disintegrate.

<sup>3</sup> For insight into its impact on victims, see Ps. 137.


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**Efraín Velázquez** is president of the Inter-American Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.



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*Diversity and the gospel:  
an African perspective*



**CHURCH,  
CULTURE,  
IDENTITY**



**“Multicultural”:** of, relating to, or representing several different cultures or cultural elements.\*

I can't say how often I've been asked the question “Do you know this person from Africa?” Perhaps you've heard it too. *Many people* means many—and often diverse—perspectives, and as the question suggests, many are uncertain and more when it comes to Africa's continent, a body of land larger than Canada, China and the United States combined; one that numbers 54 countries, diverse peoples and languages, and complex cultures. Thankfully, the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be seen to be prospering in many of its nations and regions despite the diversity and complex cultural challenges that confront us. The statistics in the adjacent box<sup>1</sup> show that three African divisions of the Adventist Church may soon comprise half of the world church's population. Understanding and sustaining their progress involves much more than African color, stature, language, norms, or taboos: for the Christian it must be about the intentional engagement of cultures.<sup>2</sup>

<b>WORLD TOTAL</b>	<b>21,556,837</b>
ECD	4,395,892
SID	4,307,726
WAD	862,027
AFRICAN % OF THE WORLD IS 44.37%	

As the Bible states: “There is one body and one Spirit” (Eph. 4:4, NKJV),<sup>3</sup> on which Ellen G. White comments that “unity in diversity is God's plan. Among the followers of Christ there is to be the blending of diverse elements, one adapted to the other, and each to do its special work for God.”<sup>4</sup> The world's interconnectedness makes it increasingly clear that believers in the church need to work together for a common purpose. There is unique gospel power in a diversity of people—different races, cultures, religions, nationalities, and communities—coming together for the one and singular mission of preaching the good news.

Global success in such a venture will largely depend on positive and dynamic commitments to engagement “across cultural boundaries beyond the mere tolerance and appreciation associated with multiculturalism.”<sup>5</sup> In fulfilling the gospel commission the Adventist Church continually confronts the challenge of providing worship that is biblically sound and culturally relevant to worshipers everywhere. This article asks the question, how does the church in sub-Saharan Africa accomplish that?

### EARLY DAYS OF ADVENTISM IN AFRICA

According to the best records I know of, Seventh-day Adventism was first introduced to sub-Saharan Africa in South Africa in 1887.<sup>6</sup> The church since then has made huge and significant strides in membership growth. Today, after 133 years of presence in the continent, the Adventist Church claims a membership of more than 9,565,645 as of December 31, 2019.<sup>7</sup> It now has established congregations in most parts of the region and is still growing faster than many other Christian denominations, with congregations large and small, in areas urban and rural, all stimulating further question: How does Adventism in Africa spread as rapidly as it has, despite the challenges that confront it?

One significant answer, I believe, is family. Individuals in this part of the world generally view the church as an extension of the immediate family. So believers tend to spend much time with each other. I allow for both of these possibilities, and perhaps others not here suggested, because despite the significant data on African Adventism already collected, none has as yet settled this “chicken and egg” question on African Adventist fellowship patterns: Is it because we're a family that we spend so much time together? Or is it because the business of the church brings us together? What seems safe to hold is that “doing it the African way” in Africa has helped believers stick together in the church, especially the youth, despite the continent's diverse cultural environment.

Many believers virtually spend the whole Sabbath together. Longer hours spent together at church and in church activities, including eating together, certainly help members bond in a more meaningful way. Bonds wrought through faith and fellowship may turn out to be stronger than those wrought by attending political rallies, sports events, or other gatherings to which attendees come or go because of already known, established, and diverse allegiances. Adventist believers, though, understand, practice, and deepen the concept and feeling of family and community irrespective of individual cultural orientation.

The varied cultural backgrounds of African Adventists prescribe individual elements of the

\*<https://www.dictionary.com>.

## Our witness is not primarily about us and our needs, but about the love of God and the salvation of others.

Adventist family as individually strong units each having its own intricate role to play during moments of joy and times of sorrow.

Africa's Adventists have a deep commitment to, and a profound sense of ownership of, the church. They perform a substantial portion of the work of evangelism and other outreach activities for the church on their own initiative without waiting for the larger church—the “higher organizations”—to introduce its latest program.

African Adventists view life wholistically; therefore, religion and faith must speak to all aspects of life. They consider themselves Adventists just as much at home in their villages, or at work in the farm, office, or city, as they do when on their way to, and actually attending, church programs and services.

Adventism thrives within the complex cultural environment because, across many different contexts, local societies can see that Adventists are seeking to address their communities' practical problems. This may mean public health, access to clean water, improved farm yields (often through ADRA's contributions), or ways to involve the youth by developing their character and increasing their self-esteem. Pathfinder clubs, uniforms, parades (often done before local and national political dignitaries), and other Pathfinder activities contribute much in this regard. Pathfinder honors develop abilities in everything from reading the starry skies to cultural diversity training.

Most important, though culturally diverse, African Adventists have often, though not always, believed that all they have is each other, and will stick with each other in spite of cultural background. Spending time in the church all Sabbath day from morning to evening immerses them into a deeper level of common hope and common courage, so that by the time the Sabbath is over, they emerge reconstituted and attuned to embrace the next day's tasks, united and aware of each other's support as they face those new tasks.

Some African challenges are common to the

world everywhere—simple and pervasive matters of individual preference or temperament; some are not common to the Western world—established ethnic groups with their long-entrenched tribal practices; some are creations of the Western world from a time when our independence was a parody of borders imposed to define us by division across ethnic groups. African Adventists see the blunders of our earlier years and the tragedies that sometimes followed. We are resolved to learn from those times of clash and confrontation that led to deeper crisis. But we act not only to avoid. We also clearly see the beauty in cultural diversity and wish to let it shine and make us shine for the glory of God.

### HOW DID THE MULTICULTURAL CHURCH GET TO ITS CURRENT STATE?

Like any other people in the world, Africans' perceptions, convictions, and attitudes are shaped by their African experiences and histories, including those linked to colonization. Africans believe in worship that is deeply embedded with the society and addresses elements of survival. Being an African often means living on the edge, and one crucial identifying mark of believers in Africa, which has also brought the church to its current state, is resilience.

Resilience in the various facets of life contributes appropriate adaptation in the face of adversity and hardship, allowing Africans to bounce back from difficult experiences and empowering them to grow and improve their personal lives. Demanding situations of drought, famine, and civil war have not in the past determined the outcome of the life of an African. The external input of food and development aid is usually welcomed. Bureaucracy, corruption, and logistics have prevented that from always being as helpful as possible. Beyond that, many survive and achieve through positive coping with limited means, resiliency in the face of adversity, support from brethren, and other possibilities, including already mentioned development initiatives either home-based or supported by international agencies and entrepreneurs.

Given the diversity of language, people, culture, and other challenges, the church in Africa gives testimony to God's grace in how it has turned the potential obstacle of a multiplicity of diverse and even hostile cultural environments into an instru-

ment for mission: when a Tutsi woman forgives the Hutu who murdered her husband,<sup>8</sup> it is a testimony to God's grace and illustrates how the potential obstacle becomes the preaching platform. Through witness such as this, the multicultural church's current standing in Africa is such that congregations have sometimes transcended cultural divides to attract and nurture members into an inclusive Adventist identity.

### HOW WILL THE MULTICULTURAL CHURCH GET TO ITS FINAL DESTINATION?

ADRA digging wells, Pathfinders marching in smart salute past a dais where the country's president stands—these are evidences of the modern Seventh-day Adventist Church meeting its society's wholistic needs. The church must be consistent and intentional about this. There must be inclusivity, belongingness, and respect for all believers and church entities, and equal respect for those whom we hope to win to the Lord. The full potential of diversity can be realized only when all Seventh-day Adventist members as well as their friends and neighbors feel included and respected for who and what they are in the sight of God in spite of their cultural background.<sup>9</sup> Today's world is becoming more complicated than ever, so the multicultural church will seek to celebrate, encourage, accommodate, and engage as best it can according to Scripture's guidance.

We must also be aware of the challenges, and be sober-minded about the barriers to multicultural calling. It requires humility and Christlikeness to pursue unity among diverse cultures. It means experiencing discomfort as we face the complexity relating to multiculturalism. Still, we are reminded that it is a means to grow in more profound empathy for others, as our witness is not primarily about us and our needs, but about the love of God and the salvation of others. In moving the multicultural church to its final destination, we must know that a reconciling church calls people to die to themselves for the love of God and others. This surrender will give us the power to point people to Jesus, the only hope we have. There is diversity around God's throne, and He wants us to welcome our cultural diversity as believers and use it as a blessing and asset for His church. The question is personal to every Adventist: Am I willing to do what it takes to move my church in a more winsome direction?

### CONCLUSION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is called to become a symbol and instrument of God's kingdom for spreading the good news to a broken and hurting world. It is God's agent on earth to witness to the love of God to the world. When people look at the church, they must see the kingdom of God. It is appropriate, desirable, and pleasing to God that our multicultural church, from international and intercontinental institution to pastoral district and local congregation, be a sign of the kingdom of God today in an increasingly complicated, multicultural environment. As Adventists our goal is to propagate the gospel to all nations, tribes, tongues, and people. Culture is an inevitable medium, and we will be most useful in the hands of God if we embrace it intelligently. A multicultural church is a foretaste of the family of God that we will experience in eternity. The first angel in Revelation 14:6 has "the everlasting gospel to preach . . . to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (NKJV). This involves a diverse multicultural group working together, tied together, respecting and validating each other's contribution to advancing God's global mission as we await the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 📌

<sup>1</sup> Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, *Annual Statistical Report: Advance Release of Membership Statistics by Division for 2019 Seventh-day Adventist Church*, Dec. 31, 2019, p. 20, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2020.pdf>, accessed Dec. 24, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer, "Thinking Through the Multicultural Church: Just Because Your Church Looks Diverse Doesn't Mean It Is Diverse," *Christianity Today*, Dec. 3, 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/december/thinking-through-multicultural-church.html>, accessed Dec. 24, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1961), p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> Katalina Tahaafe-William, "A Multicultural Church? Multicultural Ministry as a Tool for Building the Multicultural Church" (unpublished dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2012), p. 13, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/18614333.pdf>, accessed Dec. 23, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1962), vol. 4, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Statistical Report: Advance Release of Membership Statistics by Division for 2019 Seventh-day Adventist Church*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.adventistreview.org/remembering-rwanda/2014-04-06-%E2%80%8BReconciliation-is-the-only-way-forward>, accessed Dec. 31, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Garrett, "Four Keys to Unlocking the Power of Diversity," *World Economic Forum*, Sept. 4, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/why-diversity-is-about-much-more-than-numbers/>, accessed Dec. 24, 2020.

**Daniel Ganu** is the dean of the School of Postgraduate Studies, Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

# SCHEDULE

# A VISIT

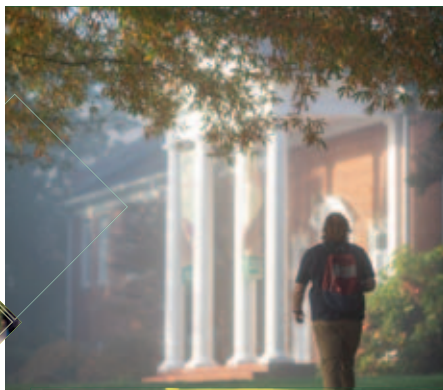
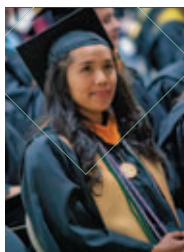
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# YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN

If Jesus came back today, would you be saved?

Deep in your heart, how do you answer this question? If you struggled to say yes, it might be helpful to remember something: Jesus already came to earth once. Let's see what Jesus had to say about our salvation when He came the first time.

On His way to Jerusalem about six months before He died on the cross, Jesus said this to His followers: "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

Among Jesus' followers were the brothers James and John. Let's go back to Luke 9, and peek into the lives of James and John and see how impressive these guys were—that their names were already written in heaven.

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village" (Luke 9:51-56).

Wow! Did you catch how loving these brothers were?

What does it say about Jesus that just after James and John melt down, Jesus says, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven"? Does it say that James and John were perfect people? Does it say that they were Jesus' people anyway?

Yes, they were still His people because they still desired to be with Him.

We cannot desire Christ without the spirit of Christ. And if we have the spirit of Christ, we have salvation. That's how uncomplicated it is. My daughters have a good day—they go to bed my daughters. My daughters have a bad day—they go to bed my daughters. Is it any different in the family of Jesus?

We've seen what James and John were like before Jesus told them their names were written in heaven. What were they like afterward? Let's zoom over to Mark 10 (which comes after Luke 10 chronologically) and see:

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to [Jesus]. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'

"What do you want me to do for you?' he asked.

"They replied, 'Let one of us sit at Your right and the other at your left in your glory.' . . .

"When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John" (Mark 10:35-41).

Again, an impressive group, aren't they? After being three full years with Jesus, the Son of God, His closest followers are still vying among themselves about who's the greatest.

How patient and gentle is Christ our Savior! Even when we struggle, He still covers us. Because the real question when Jesus returns isn't "Am I worthy to be saved?" It's "Is He worthy to save me?"

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**Andy Nash** (andynash5@gmail.com) is a pastor and author in Denver, Colorado. He leads a study tour to Israel each summer.

THE LIFE OF FAITH  
ANDY NASH



IF WE HAVE  
THE SPIRIT OF  
CHRIST, WE HAVE  
SALVATION.



# CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

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*Insights and experiences from  
PRESENCE kulturlounge*

**P**RESENCE *kulturlounge* is a cultural center located in the metropolitan city of Frankfurt, Germany, supported by the local conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and run by a team of individuals who come from various cultural and religious backgrounds.

The center has offered various regular cultural activities, such as concerts, art exhibitions, poetry nights, cooking experiences, topical reflections, etc., in a warm and cozy atmosphere since it was founded in 2014.

## **CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS**

The essence of the cultural center is found in three core areas: First, offering cultural activities that create room for inspiration, reflection, and positive encounters. Second, opening up space for personal expression and artistic development. And third, engaging in appreciative, mutual relationships, which make room for personal, communal, and spiritual growth.

From a spiritual perspective, PRESENCE is about sharing from the fullness of God's gifts as being reflectors of His image in this world. God's blessings and realm of action for human beings are broad and manifold. They are expressed in the reality of living and engaging with the world in many



SVEN FOCKNER



SVEN FOCKNER



HUREYRE KAM

ways, including culture. At the *kulturlounge*, we create room for individuals by saying, “Come and share.” Share your art, your music, your poetry, your cuisine, your talent, your thoughts with us. And together we exercise the joy of giving by receiving. By letting what others share resonate with us, we are not only enriched ourselves, but also help the givers share in the rewarding experience of being a blessing to others. That, in return, creates a safe space for all to share, flourish, and grow.

The communal experience of culture is not an end in itself, but can also be experienced as an impetus for further conversations, acquaintances, and friendships, in which life stories and spiritual journeys are shared.

As that happens, testimonies are given, burdens are shared, and trust is established. The other becomes part of our own journey and vice versa. Thus, while life takes us to places both high and low, we share them with each other. We let the “other” participate in our journey and capture a real-life sense of what our relationship with God looks like.

We make ourselves vulnerable. And to the extent to which our journey is truthfully grounded in life, the other gains space to relate to our experiences and be inspired, as we grow together in our paths.

#### WHO IS THE “OTHER”?

The other is any individual to whom we can relate and whose story and identity unfolds in the course of an encounter, a conversation, and time spent together. It’s not the label that comes first—nationality, skin color, religion, etc., with all the notions that go with such labels. Rather, the person stands at the center, with his or her unique identity and story, which unfolds, just like ours, in the sacred space of relationship.

Instead of “othering” the counterpart with preconceived or apparently perceived differences, he or she is perceived as one of us, with common needs for affection, dignity, safety, and a sense of peace and acceptance. We are the other, and the other is us, though we may appear different at first sight. We are all trying to make sense of things and make a contribution in our respective

# Together we exercise the joy of giving by receiving.



journeys. And since our paths have crossed, we can engage with one another and see where it leads us, as we discover each other, listen, overcome barriers of communication, learn from one another, and respect our differences. While that happens, the Spirit works among us, if we are open, to teach us all what we need to learn and help us grow as we should.

All of this becomes difficult, if not impossible, if cultural, racial, religious, and other labels are disproportionately highlighted in our human encounters and conversations. All the more so if these notions grow from a distance and are fed by preconceived ideas and prejudices, without the reality check of encountering and engaging with each other firsthand and openly.

Cross-cultural encounters are first and foremost interhuman encounters. When we start from there, we can see everything else in better perspective with a spirit of humility and acknowledgment that we are all formed by what made us who we are today. When that is recognized, growth and wholesome change become possible.

## LIKE COMING HOME

I feel blessed that we have been able to experience some of that at PRESENCE *kulturounge*. Here are some testimonies by our friends, who come from various backgrounds, and have become part of our journey:

“For me, the PRESENCE lounge is first and foremost a place to meet people. Through the lounge I have met new friends that I would not want to do without today” (S.A.).

“For me, the *kulturounge* is a wonderful place to be surprised by new things every time [and] to go home enriched with good and positive energy, and a lot of input” (S.M.).

“It is a place of warmth, inspiration, love, belonging, and creativity” (S.A.).

“PRESENCE is the place that supported and encouraged me in my artistic creation” (H.K.).

“It is like ‘coming home’” (P.A.).

What a blessing when our churches, institutions, and various centers of influence around the world are experienced as such spaces. Places where we come, share, and feel like coming home. 🍀

**Simret Mahary** is pastor and founder of PRESENCE *kulturounge* in Frankfurt, Germany. You can visit them at [presence-kulturounge.de](http://presence-kulturounge.de).

HUREVRE KAM



# THE SPICE YOU NEED



Thai spring rolls with peanut sauce, one of the many tasty results of the St. Albans Seventh-day Adventist Church's All Nations Cook Along group.

*How my local church diversity is enriching my worship and social experience*

## SHARON TENNYSON

Some time ago I read about Akiko Iwasaki, a well-known Yale University immunologist whose lab team has published nearly two dozen papers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the years she's deliberately put together a diverse team, including scientists from more than a dozen countries with different education levels, and some who haven't followed the typical career path. More than half are women. She says, "From a selfish standpoint, if we want to do the best science we can, we need a diverse set of people."<sup>1</sup>

When I read Iwasaki's comments, I thought of my diverse Adventist congregation in St. Albans, United Kingdom. I remembered how we creatively managed to worship and interact during the long months of 2020.

## A SECRET BINDING INGREDIENT

Early in the pandemic we were delighted to connect via Zoom to sing, worship God, visit, and support each other virtually. We have talented teams that host the Zoom meetings, alternating music teams that creatively organize ways for our

church family to sing and learn new songs. We've done a couple of the now pretty familiar YouTube singing sessions that took Roger Gietzmann hours to put together and that included many individuals singing.<sup>2</sup>

As we all hesitated to "leave" our Zoom time together one Sabbath early in the lockdown, church member Sharon Milanović said she was making eggplant curry for lunch and asked what everyone else was cooking. That launched the All Nations Cook Along (ANCA) group!<sup>3</sup> On Sunday mornings we virtually "cooked together" in one another's kitchens. There was spanakopita and later moussaka made by Margarita from Greece, pea and dumpling soup by Melita from Serbia, and palak paneer with Rose from India. There was also tofu in red sauce by Jay from the Philippines; Thai spring rolls with peanut sauce by Sharon, who has daughters from China; and tahinopita with carob molasses by Elle from Cyprus.

We tried cornbread by Brandon from Canada during the following weeks; a lentil version of the very British shepherd's pie by Emma; and mince

## “Church should reflect who God is, and God loves diversity.”

curry with peas, a South African Cape Malay recipe shared by Vera. We even tried Trinidadian corn pie by Helyn-Jo, black bean empanadas by Johanna from Venezuela, and the always impressive French apple tarte tatin by Ben.<sup>4</sup>

My mouth is watering thinking of these international dishes. After a quick upload of pictures of our finished dishes to our WhatsApp group, we dug in for tea time. When asked about the Zoom cooking “chats,” Sarah, a born-and-bred Brit going back many generations, said she loved the time spent cooking with her daughter and felt as though she’d gone on an outing with the women from church. “I feel I’ve had a tea morning out with friends and had a good chat,” she confessed. Others agreed, as everyone felt enriched by the experience.

### AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE

I think of the multicultural church we were when we met in person before the pandemic. Anne from Romania with her South African husband and beautiful three young boys lying all over her during church and running their hands through her hair as the middle one would suck his thumb. I remember the first time Delores and her husband, Darren, came to church. I didn’t realize at the time that it was their first visit because of their friendly, comfortable way of settling into their seats with baby Luanne, again as kids always do, holding on to her parents, walking all over them.

Gibson and Faithful Taruwinga’s sons would draw and color detailed pictures of people during the church service. It was no surprise, since both their parents are in finance and accounting. Their family had moved to the United Kingdom from Zimbabwe just two years ago for professional jobs in London. We even have a family with two young girls from Lithuania who drive an hour from London to St. Albans to attend church each week.

I remember seeing Delores and Darren’s 17-year-old son, Jordan, up front, effortlessly playing a beautiful piece on the piano, after their first church service ended. They already felt part

of the St. Albans church! Delores, whose mother had emigrated from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom decades ago, told me that what had attracted her to the St. Albans church was the striking diversity. Every row had a different nationality in it. “This is how it’s supposed to be! Church should reflect who God is, and God loves diversity,” she told me. “He didn’t create just one tree—an oak, for example. He created many variations of the same things!”

Delores thinks that if we all segregate into our own comfortable churches, we may inadvertently set up a barrier to inviting new people to church. She tells me, “I can invite anyone in the world to the St. Albans church, and they will find themselves reflected here.”

### SURPRISES EVERYWHERE

During a recent Zoom service the Grices’ 4-year-old triplets shared their father’s creative recording from their back garden. They had each memorized two verses from Psalm 1, reciting the chapter in its entirety. It made me think of their mother growing up in Jamaica, probably doing the same thing at a young age.

Septuagenarian Rosemary told me the St. Albans church is nothing like the church she grew up attending. As a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist in England growing up attending the Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church (the second-oldest Adventist congregation in the country), her father was the only man in the congregation. There were very few children in her church. Now she is delighted to see the many children in our church and the families from around the world.

I asked Rosemary what she thought of the variety of music each Sabbath, not always from the hymnal.

“You never know what to expect!” she said. “I love it!”

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statnews.com/2020/10/27/>

akiko-iwasaki-profile-covid19-research-fighting-sexism-power-imbalance-science.

<sup>2</sup> You can listen to the St. Albans Adventist Church Lockdown Choir at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-kEvsipgJQ>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOwGS1AgYMY>, or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh7eVfoIRmQ>.

<sup>3</sup> You can watch the ANCA group at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goDS1roIMrQ>.

<sup>4</sup> You can find some of the recipes of the St. Alban’s cooking group at <https://www.adventistreview.org/quarantine-cuisine-part-2>.

**Sharon Tennyson** is an England-based distribution coordinator for Adventist Review Ministries.

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# NOT LOST, JUST

**TIMOTHY FLOYD**

I'm going to start by saying something controversial. I don't think we should evangelize people who have chosen to leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I know that might ruffle some feathers, but hear me out.

In Luke 15 Jesus tells three brief stories in response to grumblings by the Pharisees and scribes, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (verse 2): the parable of the lost sheep (verses 3-7); the parable of the lost coin (verses 8-10), and the parable of the lost son (verses 11-32). We know these stories well.

The value of the lost item increases with each story; so does its scarcity. The sheep is one of 100; the coin is one of 10; the son is one of two. The rarer the lost item, the more it is cherished. The sheep may have wandered off or suffered an injury beyond its control; the coin became lost because of the owner's neglect; the son made a calculated choice.

Some of our church's "lost" have become so because of things outside their control. Abuse, neglect, or trying life circumstances were just too overwhelming, so they left. Others make a calculated choice to leave. In some cases we have a spiritual and familial obligation to search for them, to tend to their wounds, to help them find their way back. But sometimes we need to let them have their journey.

The real challenge as a pastor, parent, sibling, and friend is to know which type of lost person

we're dealing with. As caretakers and protectors of the first two, the shepherd and woman go in search of that which was lost. The father in the third parable waits. When the son finally comes to his senses, knowing who his father is and where home is, he turns his life around. The father sees him coming from a long way off because he has been waiting, ready to embrace him.

## **OUR EXPERIENCE WITH PRODIGALS**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has an embarrassing amount of data on this issue. We know who is leaving, for what reasons, at what point in life they choose to leave, and what the church's/pastor's responses were. Our church has been studying the phenomenon of people leaving the church since at least 1965.

During the past 55 years, 40 million people have become members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Of the 40 million new Adventists since 1965, 16 million (40.1 percent) chose to leave the church, and 63 percent were young adults when they left. One study indicates two primary reasons for leaving: (1) "I just drifted away" (28 percent); and (2) a "lack of compassion for those hurting" (25 percent). While most (56 percent) have happy





# SEARCHING

*Do you know what young adults think about the church?*

memories of being a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, only 8 percent of those who left claim to be active in any congregation.<sup>1</sup>

The Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape study in 2014 took an in-depth look at the change of demographics in what they call "nones," those with no religious affiliation.<sup>2</sup> When Pew first began looking at this segment of religion in the United States in 2007, the "nones" made up 16 percent of the population. The revised 2016 study saw an increase to 26 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Pew describes the situation: "The Christian share of the population is down, and religious 'nones' have grown across multiple demographic groups. . . . And although the religiously unaffiliated are on the rise among younger people and most groups of older adults, their growth is most pronounced among young adults."

The increase in the number of people with no religious affiliation does not mean that they are outsiders to religion. In fact, the "vast majority of these religious 'nones' (78 percent) say they were raised as a member of a particular religion before shedding their religious identity in adulthood."<sup>4</sup> This group of former members has become disenchanted with their religious tradition. They dislike organized religion; they are anti-institutional but highly educated regarding religious traditions and spiritual things.

If someone has left the church, they did it for a reason. They already know who we (Adventists) are, what we believe, what we stand for. It's not the depiction of a crimson-clad woman riding on

a sea monster that's most likely to change their mind. The question has to be asked: Do we have anything new to offer?

As a pastor, "Don't chase after the 'nones'" is a difficult thing to say. My initial impulse is to try to drag prodigals home, convince them that this is where they belong, and reassure them that this body and building is what Jesus wants for them. But I also must acknowledge that individual spiritual journeys are far more complicated than that.

In a Barna report, researcher David Kinnaman observes: "Younger Christians tend to be more personally aware of the cultural temperature around spiritual conversations." When it comes to younger generations, "the data show enormous ambivalence among Millennials, in particular, about the calling to share their faith with others."

Kinnaman goes on to say that almost half of Millennials (47 percent) agree at least somewhat that it is inadvisable to share one's personal beliefs

**No one usually comes to Jesus because they lost an argument; they come because His love draws them.**

with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith. This is compared to a little more than one quarter of Gen Xers (27 percent), one in five Boomers (19 percent) and seniors (20 percent). Though Gen Z teens were not included in this study, their thoroughly post-Christian posture will likely amplify this stance about evangelism.<sup>5</sup>

## A CAREFUL APPROACH

As a pastor, what I get wrong about evangelism nine times out of 10 is the desire to make another person more like me, instead of helping them develop a deeper relationship with Christ. In Barna's report "Reviving Evangelism," Craig Springer and David Kinnaman point out that 71 percent of "nones" say they're not on a quest for spiritual truth, but they are open to spiritual conversations *if* their conversation partner "listens without judgment" (62 percent) and "does not force a conclusion" on them (50 percent). Their research stresses the importance of one-on-one relationships that lead to spiritual conversations.<sup>6</sup> This makes sense, because no one usually comes to Jesus because they lost an argument; they come because His love draws them into a relationship.

Barna's "Reviving Evangelism" points out that the common barriers for evangelizing "nones" are things such as their knowledge of religious beliefs, their prior negative experiences with religious people and institutions, their skepticism of one's motives to change them, and their fear of not being heard or respected in a mutual conversation. All of which is best resolved with nonjudgmental, knowledgeable, and sincere friends or family members willing to engage them in conversations and support them.

Back to Luke 15: the older brother grumbles with judgment and distances himself from his brother—"this son of yours," he says to the father. The story concludes with the older brother standing outside to savor his own good works. It's easy for faithful Seventh-day Adventists to sit in their favorite pews, pay their tithe and offerings, and reflect on how faithful they are to God's Word, while neglecting to be the types of people lost sons and daughters need if they ever decide to return home.

One of the takeaways I've witnessed firsthand from the Growing Young Adventists initiative<sup>7</sup> is the sincere desire to change local church culture into places that people never want to leave in the

first place. To transform churches into warm and empathetic church families that prioritize young people and their families. To cultivate church families that give young people actual leadership opportunities and an authoritative role at crafting church culture. A church family that has an impact on its local community and the world around it. These are churches to which lost sons and daughters want to belong. These types of churches don't see their young people leave in the first place.

Lost sheep and lost coins are out there, people we've neglected and hurt. They are our responsibility to help heal.

But I don't think we should try to evangelize people who have made calculated choices to leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We need to let them journey at their own pace, knowing that Jesus is in control still. We can be listeners. We can mourn when they mourn; celebrate when they celebrate; cheer them on from where we are. We can be consistent and safe for them to fall back on. We can make "church" places they want to call home when they're ready. But it must be in their time; we do not dictate the pace of their journey.

The last thing we want is for older brothers to meet them at the edge of the property, prohibiting their entry into the father's house. We must rally safe church family members to engage in dependable relationships with our lost, to be that force of the Father's love. 🍌

<sup>1</sup> David Trim, "Building Healthy Relationships With Members and Former Members," Nurture and Retention Summit, Silver Spring, Maryland, 2019, [www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/Compressed%20N%26R%20Summit%202019%20presentationcompressed.pdf](http://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/Compressed%20N%26R%20Summit%202019%20presentationcompressed.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> "Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics, and Statistics," Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, last modified Sept. 19, 2018, [www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/](http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/).

<sup>3</sup> "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, last modified June 9, 2020, [www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/](http://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Lipka, "Why Some Americans Left Religion Behind," Pew Research Center, last modified May 30, 2020, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/).

<sup>5</sup> Barna Group, "Almost Half of Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong," last modified May 2018, [barna.gloo.us/loc/efad870c-abf0-11ea-ab98-97fb25274c3/article/premium/almost-half-of-practicing-christian-millennials-say](http://barna.gloo.us/loc/efad870c-abf0-11ea-ab98-97fb25274c3/article/premium/almost-half-of-practicing-christian-millennials-say).

<sup>6</sup> Barna Group, "Reviving Evangelism: Current Realities That Demand a New Vision for Sharing Faith," lecture, Ventura, Calif., 2019.

<sup>7</sup> [growingyoungadventists.com/](http://growingyoungadventists.com/).

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**Timothy Floyd** is director of youth and young adult ministries for the Kansas-Nebraska Conference. He is one of the certified Growing Young speakers/trainers for the North American Division.

# Into All the World

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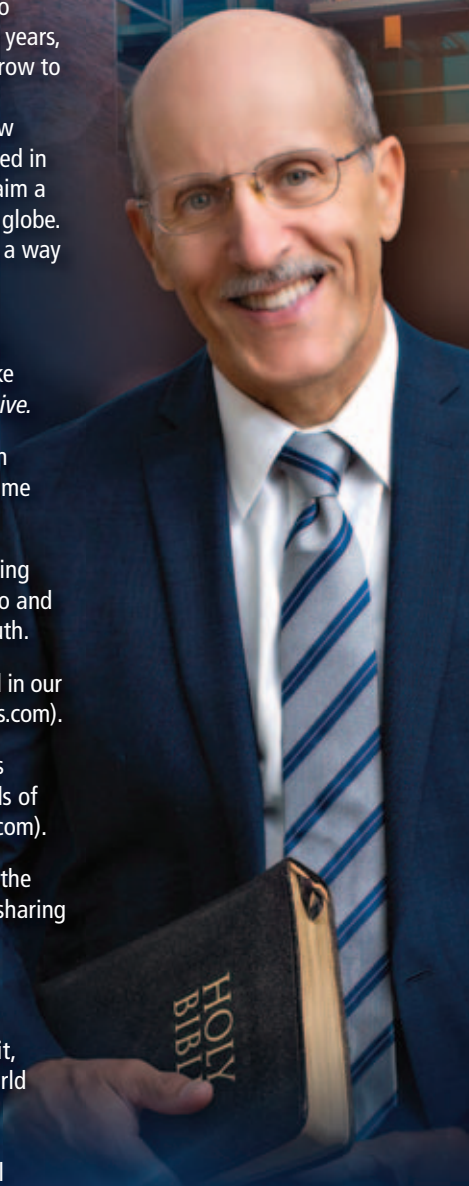


**Global Evangelism:** From India and China to all across the United States, our team of evangelists travels the globe sharing Christ through live local and televised events.

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**ELLEN G. WHITE**

**C**hrist's life on earth was meek and lowly. He did not take his place upon a throne as commander of the earth. He attached to his name no high titles, to make his position understood. He took not on him the nature of angels. For our sake he stepped down from his royal throne, and clothed his divinity with humanity. He laid aside his royal robe, his kingly crown, that he might be one with us. He resigned his position as commander in the heavenly courts, and for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He hid his glory under the guise of humanity, that his divine, transforming power might touch humanity.

**A LIFE OF TOIL AND HUMILITY**

While on earth, Christ lived in the home of a peasant. He wore the best garments his parents could provide, but they were the humble garments of the peasants. He walked the rough

*Jesus' life on earth is inspiration for us today.*

# OUR EXAMPLE





paths of Nazareth, and climbed the steep slopes of its hillsides and mountains. In his home he was a constant worker, and left on record a life filled with useful deeds. Had Christ passed his life among the grand and the rich, the world of toilers would have been deprived of the inspiration that the Lord intended they should have. But Christ knew that his work must begin in consecrating the humble trade of the craftsmen who toil for their daily bread. He learned the trade of a carpenter, that he might stamp honest labor as honorable and ennobling to all who work with an eye single to the glory of God. And angels were his attendants; for Christ was just as truly doing his Father's business when toiling at the carpenter's bench, as when working miracles for the multitude. He held his commission and authority from the highest power, the Sovereign of heaven.

Christ descended to poverty that he might teach how closely in our daily life we may walk with God. He took human nature that he might be able to sympathize with all hearts. He was capable of sympathizing with all. He could engage in toil, bear his part in sustaining the family in their necessity, become accustomed to weariness, and yet show no impatience. His spirit was never so full of worldly cares as to leave no time nor thought for heavenly things. He often held communion with heaven in song. The men of Nazareth often heard his voice raised in prayer and thanksgiving to God; and those who associated with him, who often complained of their weariness, were cheered by the sweet melody that fell from his lips.

### COMMUNING WITH GOD

Christ knew that it required much patience and spirituality to bring Bible religion into the home life, into the workshop, to bear all the strain of practical life, and yet keep the eye single to the glory of God; and this is where he was a helper. In elevated song he would speak his parables, and carry the minds of his hearers with him. A fragrant influence was diffused to those around him, and they were blessed. His praises seemed to drive away the evil angels, and fill the place with sweet fragrance. He carried the minds of his hearers away from their earthly exile to their future, eternal home.

All this has its lesson for us. We also may commune with God in words of holy song. Our house of worship may be very humble, but it is none the less

acknowledged by God. If we worship in spirit, and in truth, and in the beauty of holiness, it will be to us the very gate of heaven. As lessons of the wondrous works of God are repeated, and as the heart's gratitude is expressed in prayer and song, angels from heaven take up the strain, and unite in praise and thanksgiving to God. These exercises drive back the power of Satan. They expel murmurings and complainings, and Satan loses ground.

### A NEED OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

God teaches us that we should assemble in his house to cultivate the attributes of perfect love. This will fit the dwellers of earth for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those who love him, where, from Sabbath to Sabbath, from one new moon to another, they will assemble in the sanctuary to unite in loftier strains of song, in thanksgiving and praise to him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.

Christ would have us realize that our interests are one. A divine Saviour died for all, that all might find in him their divine source. In Christ Jesus we are one. By the utterance of one name, "Our Father," we are lifted to the same rank. We become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. His principles of truth bind heart to heart, be they rich or poor, high or low.

### LIVING IN PERFECT HARMONY

When the Holy Spirit moves upon human minds, all petty complaints and accusations between man and his fellow man will be put away. The bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness will shine into the chambers of the mind and heart. In our worship of God there will be no distinction between rich and poor, white and black. All prejudice will be melted away. When we approach God, it will be as one brotherhood. We are pilgrims and strangers, bound for a better country, even a heavenly. There all pride, all accusation, all self-deception, will forever have an end. Every mask will be laid aside, and we shall "see him as he is." There our songs will catch the inspiring theme, and praise and thanksgiving will go up to God.

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This first appeared in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 24, 1899. Seventh-day Adventists believe **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.



PEARL / LIGHTSTOCK

## MULTICULTURAL CHURCH: MY JOURNEY

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*Unity should be more interesting than terrifying.*

Isaiah envisioned the millennial kingdom as the place where the Lord would be revealed in all His glory, with His unique splendor ubiquitously evident. Messiah would suffer but the glory of the Lord would also be seen (Isa. 53; 66:18, 19, etc.). Though the disciples witnessed Jesus' glory (John 1:14), not all humanity has seen it yet; however, they will observe it at the Second Coming. Meanwhile, Isaiah 40:5 plaintively calls for all believers to be united. Unfortunately, we sometimes fall short of this goal when unity tries to work things out for multiple cultures.

### FIRST STEPS

My immigrant parents brought me to the United States when I was 4 years old. When I was 10, they bought a home in a small

suburb north of Syracuse, glad to move away from the Bronx in New York. It did not occur to us, however, that our new elementary school had only four African American students—three from my family. Years later, when people asked me if my elementary school was integrated, I would say, “After we arrived.”

On our first Sabbath in Syracuse, my father used a map to find the closest Adventist church. I cannot tell you what we learned that day at church—I was 10; but my father's conversation with the helpful pastor has remained clear in my family's memory ever since. The pastor gave my father the same explanation that has been given many thousands of times to Adventist newcomers in many American cities about finding a congregation where we would worship more comfortably.

Soon after this, my family joined the Mount Carmel Seventh-day Adventist Church. We understood later that we had become part of a regional conference, an organization that is part of the Adventist Church's structure in the United States. I have long tried to square the practice of worship prevalent in most American Christian communities with Isaiah's theology of unity. I also believe strongly that our freedom to choose how we express our religion is one hallmark of religious liberty.

As Kyle Haselden wrote, “Everyone knows that 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in American life.”\* It would appear that this is also true for Seventh-day Adventists on Sabbath. My question is: How comfortable is

our Adventist family in our current worship arrangements?

### ALONG THE ROAD

This article neither exhaustively describes, nor seeks to denounce, nor proposes to defend, regional conferences. I simply comment that in the years since the establishment of this system a calcification of thoughts and actions has led to introductions like mine even as far back as 1976.

The interactions my family had with other churchgoers were not unusual in the mid-1970s. Many people can share similar experiences. The 1940s' arrangements we still maintain were undertaken for the good of all. Today it is still not unusual for morning groups of Adventists to greet some strangers and ignore others based largely on differences in appearance (attire, race, class), suggesting deeper realities: like us, not like us.

Much of it is unconscious behavior, vetting the stranger by inquiring about where she works or where he went to college; asking such questions as "Is your husband home today?" or "Do you live far from here?" At a benign level, people seek connection. But at another level, the group is replicating itself. It is freezing out unwanted futures. It is attempting to control what few things can be controlled in a rapidly changing world. It is rejecting unpleasant, "uncomfortable" realities.

The truth is that anyone who feels out of place experiences some level of discomfort when they're the "other." That discomfort, however, can actually benefit a congregation sometimes. It can force us to seek our true identity in Christ, an identity formed on much more than the color of our skin. It can compel us to take inventory of the people we've chosen to surround ourselves with. And that inventory can be beautiful.

Many if not most Christians have been taught that race, class, and ethnicity are dimensions of identity that must be left behind after becoming a Christian. Biblical unity and the celebration of diversity, however, are not mutually exclusive.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul shows that ethnicity and other aspects of diversity can be redeemed and presented as mission resources rather than barriers. As he discusses the missional use of redeemed cultural and ethnic particularity, he writes, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the

## Biblical unity and the celebration of diversity are not mutually exclusive.

Jews" (verse 20). With this statement Paul affirms to the Corinthians that his ethnicity and cultural awareness did not disappear when he became a Christian. It is Paul on the flip side of Galatians 3:28, where ethnicity, class, and gender are not to be exploited to establish cultural and religious superiority: "There is neither Jew nor Greek" (KJV). It is his transformation of pre-Christian history, culture, race, and class into a mission-usable resource, deployed to reach other Jews with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. It is his establishment of points of missional contact rooted in important aspects of the ethnic and cultural identity that he shared with other Jewish people. It is his empowerment to speak the cultural language of his people to benefit his community.


### GOING FORWARD

My hope for the Adventist Church is that congregations and communities choose to become more challenged—more uncomfortable—in wrestling with the idea of welcoming not just color but culture. Ideally, expressions of worship, teaching, evangelism, and discipleship will be so richly influenced by multiculturalism that Christ in all of His beauty may be known more fully by many.

When a new job brought me to Atlanta, Georgia, more than 17 years ago, I joined the Atlanta North Seventh-day Adventist Church in Dunwoody, Georgia. Atlanta North has gathered us from many corners of the globe: from South America to the American South, from Canada to Jamaica and Nigeria, from Ireland to Korea. Our greatest aspiration is to endorse, embrace, and celebrate our uniqueness, empowering us to establish the ultimate culture: the kingdom of heaven. That way everyone, regardless of ethnicity, finds their comfortable worship home together.

\* Kyle Haselden, in *New York Times*, Aug. 2, 1964.

**Chukwuma I. Onyeije**, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist in Atlanta, Georgia, is an elder at his church. He has been married to Chichi Onyeije for 28 years. They have three sons.



*A hospital chaplain  
responds to a  
poignant prayer request*

**“TO WHOM IT  
MAY CONCERN”**



## DIXIL RODRIGUEZ

The small Post-it note was stuck to the bottom of the box. Its presence immediately noted as I collected the card stock of prayer requests from the hospital's chapel prayer box: "To Whom It May Concern: Who are you? What do you do? What do you know about COVID? about people dying? Do *you* read my prayers? I am scared. Thank you."

A small piece of paper with enormous requests from a stranger asking for my identity, purpose, job description, theology, and objectives for the day. I lock the box and place the note in my pocket, out of sight, for now. Yet in my mind all day, I write.

\* \* \*

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a hospital chaplain. I am not called a first responder, although I am part of the team that stands on the front lines of triage, greets the ambulance, is present at intake, walks with the agony of humanity and the unexplainable into the hospital; traversing the same halls EMTs run, where clinical teams chart, patients are transported, and "recovery" is a descriptor used to evaluate and treat the pain that weighs heavily on a gurney. I am among the first three people called when someone is in physical or emotional distress; the person called when life is in the balance, the hospital room is too quiet, or when fear of the moment or surroundings brings into clarity the hazy questions we all have in our life review: *Did I do it all? Did I get it right? What happens now? How will I know if this is it?* And a rather common question right now: *"Is this truly God's will?"* Sometimes all patients need is a little grace, a reminder of divine mercy, a prayer to help move past this present point in life. Whatever hope you bring to the hospital, it will be nurtured.

My work schedule is often determined by you. If something goes wrong in the middle of the night, I will show up. There will be an urgent page, and I will travel down the dark, lonely highway back to the hospital, with its bright lights, a city all its own. If I am already in the hospital, resting in an on-call room, I will find you. I will be your

advocate, a voice among many that will encourage you, be honest with you, participate in your care, sit with you until calm brings rest from pain. I will stay until you say what needs to be heard in the moment, until you share what is in your mind and heart, until your stories are completely told, or until your silence finally lets you rest again. I used to have a "set" schedule. Now I am just here most of the time. See, I care for patients, their families, but also for the staff—my colleagues.

Most days are spent nodding and waving at colleagues. The emotional space is crowded, but the hallways are vast, quickly emptied; but seldom is the day I do not walk quietly past someone staring out the floor-to-ceiling windows in the lobby, captivated in thought, in emotions, watching and waiting for the world to turn from inside. Some days I am fortunate to catch a friend boarding the same elevator (only two of us allowed at a time). There are so many conversations left hanging in our hospital halls, no frames, unanswered questions, suspended as if we are coming back to them someday to "hang them up properly" and not just leave a hole in the wall, in our hearts. For in the midst of a conversation we are called away, reminded that the daily is not about us; it never is. The daily is about others, service to others, always. For this "ministry of healing" I belong to is all about mission. Right now that mission requires the crossing of a gauntlet I have never seen, full of decisive, defining moments, both in crawling the dark trenches or traversing the cloudy fields.

I have met COVID-19 up close. The introduction was brief, and then pieces of me had to adjust. Now I wear scrubs under all the PPE and recognize different-color markers on the floor that lead to decontamination, emergency, exit. A picture of me without the PPE is laminated and attached to my trauma badge, signed, so you will know who is under the mask, know my smile. I want you to realize that even though we are in a difficult moment right now, we are not alone. I believe we remember days of smiles, hugs, and camaraderie with our family, loved ones, our dear friends. So when I read prayer cards, truly there is no doubt

## Prayer is a necessity; air to thirsty lungs.

that it is God's will that we *will* smile, sing, laugh, hug again.

Your prayers are on my mind and on my lips all day long. Even when the faces of those whose names are signed on a prayer card elude me, there is something about the penmanship, the tear-stained lines, the drawings of a flower or a heart in mindful marginalia, that makes my heart ache and reminds me of one fact that grounds me during the longest of days and nights: we are not irrelevant to God. The prayer of those before me: "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen. 32:26), is one God answers with strong, mighty, delicate care. I pray all day long. I stand aside during codes, pray, observing, until the body can no longer sustain and the limitations of human effort are recognized. When the blood is on the floor, physicians shake their heads, they step aside for me, for prayer. I may be the one who delivers the last words of comfort, the final precious message to a beloved family, child, friend, so I must pray all day long. Prayer is a necessity; air to thirsty lungs.

Even with technology, COVID-19 has designated me a lonely survivor, often the last person your loved one will see. Amid despair, when loved ones cannot be together, I am allowed through the doors. I coordinate televisits and do my best to ensure that if your loved one is inside the hospital, separated from you, they will see, hear, feel you close. I will hold the medium of communication, sit with the family in this way as a most intrusive and welcome guest. I listen to words of encouragement, regret, love, forgiveness, words light with emotion, heavy with desire to be where I am. Often, no matter history or dynamics, there is not one family member who would think twice about trading places with me at a moment of loss, for the privilege of holding the hand of a loved one is priceless. I feel the loss too, and will care for your loved one as they are transported out of the hospital.

There appears to be no shelter for our breaking hearts, no comfort for our bodies in the elements

as we all engage in bereavement outdoors. At a distance from the hospital I see families gather, waiting for news, waiting to know what happens next: sun, rain, wind, cold morning temperatures—the elements do not deter the necessity for comfort. From a distance I talk to the family, ask about their loved one. I hear stories about traditions kept, unexpected life moments. For a while families will rejoice in the color that those memories bring to their present monochromatic existence, a lackluster future that feels impossible without the one who has died. Between these emotional wars we laugh. But the "rest" has not happened yet. Eventually someone's voice will crack, tearing the seamless ribbon of memories we have managed to carefully tug at; we remember why we are together. Closure is a resting place that alludes us right now.

I bear no judgment for anyone. Instead, as I write, there is a conscious recognition that this pandemic has forged a strong common denominator in relationships among strangers. Do you see it? Hope. The Holy Spirit nurtures that in us. In prayers, every day, there is a reminder of hope. It arrives as an unexpected gift: time. It moves us from one day to the next, offering opportunities to serve others.

Life is so fragile. I am scared too. My solace comes from Scripture, prayer. I don't know if you have a Bible, but I included a list of my favorite psalms for you, knowing they will comfort you, praying they will bless you. I do believe we are meant to be a blessing toward one another.

\* \* \*

A small package with a Bible, a business card, and a personal pager number was addressed and left in the chapel with only a prayer to guarantee "To Whom It May Concern" would pick it up. It was 2:00 a.m., a quiet time in the chapel, when, if you stand at the left corner of the room, the stained-glass windows create a faint shadow of a cross, visible through the "busy" carpet. Fourteen hours later my day has ended. I am home, safe, on call with three pagers on the table. As I cry my day out, narrating the losses, gains, and exhaustion to God, the familiar sound of my pager fills the quiet apartment. There, in a text: "Thank U, chaplain. Prayers 4 U.—Psalm 23."

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**Dixie Rodriguez** is an assistant editor of *Adventist Review*. She previously served as a hospital chaplain in Texas, Ohio, and California.

# #MindBodySoul



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# MEMORIALIZING AGAIN: VIEWING BLACK HISTORY MONTH IN THE WAKE OF 2020

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**LEESA THOMAS-BANKS**

**G**rowing up as a Black Seventh-day Adventist in a rural Adventist university community, Black History Weekend was one of very few times a Black person was invited to speak on Sabbath morning or participate in the day's program. Under most circumstances Black people were not invited as program participants at the main university church. At that time, to see or hear a Black person in any official capacity on Sabbath morning, one had to go to the Black conference church or the international church, both of which were located a few miles away.

## **ONCE A YEAR**

During Black History Weekend, however, the university church would transform from the quiet, mostly White congregation to a colorful, enthusiastic, vocal community of believers. I would excitedly watch as the divine service

PHOTO BY CLAY BANKS ON UNSPLASH





## Black History Month was created to raise awareness about the vast contributions of Black people in American society.

speaker would change, the music would change, and the church would change to one filled with melodic voices saying such things as “Amen”; “Yes”; “Thank you, Jesus”; “Um-hum”; and “Preach!” during the service! It was something to behold, and I looked forward to it every year.

Like traveling actors in a Broadway play, people of color from far and near would descend upon the campus, while some portion of the regular membership seemed to practically disappear, choosing to visit another church or stay at home. From all appearances, Black History Weekend was for Black people and bothersome to the majority congregation. For those who stayed, this was evidenced by their shaking heads as they walked out of the sanctuary, the called-in bomb threats designed to intimidate the guests, and the heated debates questioning the minister’s theological assertions that simmered for weeks afterward. As a child, I always had the impression that if they could, they would have those in charge eliminate the weekend altogether.

### BEYOND TOLERANCE

Now decades away from the practices and prejudices of the 1970s and 1980s, and with that small rural university community largely integrated when compared to the way it was in my youth, I am also aware that as a larger Adventist family we have not much expanded our attitudes about what Black History Month is all about. Instead of a universal celebration of the accomplishments of Black people, an opportunity for open discussion, and a recognition of the struggles Black people have suffered in secular and Adventist society, there are still those who take offense at even the idea of the month or view it as a time for Black people to have a free pass to celebrate themselves while everyone else grants them forbearance. In the wake of the tragedies of 2020 that caused many of us to wake

up and think, even if only for a moment, shouldn’t Adventists see the month of February as something more than a time to be endured? Or a Black History Sabbath as more than a day to sing Negro spirituals or “Lift Every Voice and Sing”?

Black History Month was created to raise widespread awareness about the vast contributions of Black people in American society in an effort to dispel prejudice and misinformation. In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford designated it as an “opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” In practice, however, we spend our time concentrating on only four or five characters in Black history and miss the greater opportunity referred to by President Ford.

Open discourse contributes to better understanding. It may help us to move beyond somewhat begrudging attitudes toward Black History Month. The consequential social events of 2020 have caused some Adventists and other Christians to align themselves with those who would change the predicament of Black people in our society. They also revealed that far too many of my fellow Adventists would rather ignore, avoid, or criticize those who desire true change.

The reality is that this is not cause for total surprise. Our Savior reminded us that “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt. 24:12, KJV). But Jesus also reminded us that He did not come to maintain the status quo and ignore the legalized mistreatment or slanderous mischaracterization of others by the people who call themselves by His name. He shows us that inequity requires some action from each of us because our attitude toward the mistreated mirrors our attitude toward Him (see Matt. 25:40). He asks us to examine ourselves and discern His body. This is not strictly a quiet, contemplative activity. It should involve a discussion throughout the diverse collective body of believers and call us all to make a decision regarding what we are willing to do in answer to His invitation to attend His feast. The questions remain: Do we care enough to do something? Do we recognize this as an issue relevant to our salvation, or are we satisfied with our current lukewarm existence? 🍷

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**Leesa Thomas-Banks, J.D.**, is a licensed attorney, currently serving as department chair and assistant professor in the Department of Business, Management, and Accounting at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

# MASKS: WHO NEEDS THEM?

As the deadly pandemic rages, masks are more plentiful and controversial than at any other time in human history.

The origin of masks is intriguing. Masks have been worn in nearly all cultures since the first couple sewed fig leaves to disguise their sin and cover their shame. Face masks have been associated with ceremonies of religious and social significance for funerals, fertility rites, and the curing of sickness.

As time passed, masks were used on festive occasions or to portray characters in dramatic performances, especially reenactments of mythological events by ancient Greek “*hupocrateis*,” or “actors.” Our word “hypocrite” describes a person who pretends to be something or someone else. Many memorable iconic characters on television and movies are identifiable purely by the masks used to disguise their true identities. The visual graphic of “drama” is a pair of masks denoting “comedy” and “tragedy.”

Today’s masks fit over our noses and mouths to protect against the coronavirus, but they also cover important facial features. They hide whether a person is smiling or frowning. It’s almost impossible to recognize others unless they are close enough, and their voices, gestures, and movements are familiar.

Many times in Scripture characters disguised themselves, usually to facilitate some purpose that seemed justified. An Israelite prophet disguised himself as a bondman with “his headband . . . over his eyes” so he could gain access to King Ahab and speak God’s word of warning to him (1 Kings 20:38-40).

Not every disguise was used for noble

purposes, such as the one used by King Saul when he inquired of the spirit of Endor (1 Sam. 28:7-10).

Masks are unnecessary when it comes to our relationship with God. The Bible promises: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:31).

In this setting wearing a mask of self-sufficiency might cause us to miss divine opportunities for greater wisdom and incur irreparable damage to heart, soul, and mind. We can grow weary by pretending to cruise through daily routines on our own. Masks disguise the truth that we’re so busy (“being under Satan’s yoke”), we don’t see the pitfalls or traps he sets for us.

We have to reflect on God’s grace and be grateful for His blessings. We don’t have to hide behind masks. Wrote the apostle Paul: “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). By God’s grace we never have to wear masks, because God knows us inside and out and loves us just the same.

So away with the disguises we use to appear “other” than what we are, trying to justify ourselves. We don’t have to wear masks of caring, sincerity, presence, worship, and love, because these attitudes are studied, learned, purposeful, and intentional in lives informed by God’s Word and transformed by His love.

This year may feature more of the chaos that characterized 2020—pandemic, panic, and political rancor. But Jesus looks behind and beyond our masks into our hearts. He knows our true identity as God’s children.

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**Hyveth Williams** is a professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

CURE FOR THE  
COMMON LIFE  
HYVETH  
WILLIAMS



WE DON'T HAVE TO  
WEAR MASKS OF  
CARING, SINCERITY,  
PRESENCE,  
WORSHIP, AND LOVE.





## WHAT'S UNDER THE RUG?

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*Sometimes the Word of God goes literally underground.*

**SUSIE HAMU**

The warm morning sunlight poured into the hallway of our little mountain mission hospital. *What a wonderful day lies ahead!* I thought as I looked at the brilliant blue sky that reached down to evergreen trees and grass still studded with jewels of morning dew.

"Sister," a man from down in the desert country broke the silence as he addressed me. "I'm so very glad you are caring for my wife. She is much better. But I want her to stay for another week so that she can have a good rest."

"That's fine," I replied. "We'll do all we can to make her stay a pleasant one."

"Oh, yes, may I show you a wonderful book?" I asked as we walked toward the office where we kept a supply of Bibles printed in Arabic. I picked up one and showed him that in it were stories of Moses and David, and psalms written by David, whom Muslims appreciate.

My friend backed away uneasily as he shook his head. "I don't want it. I have the Quran, the most sacred of all books," he stated kindly.

"I just thought I'd give you a free copy. Feel free to ask for one if you wish."

"Thank you, but I'll leave it for someone else." He bowed as he said, "*Salam.*"

We've had 25 Arabic Bibles on our shelf for months. Not one has been accepted! "Lord," I prayed, "please show us how to get people to accept the Bibles."

### **MORE THAN A GIFT**

The next morning was another sparkling day. Once more I was walking the hall when a man approached. "The doctor says I may take my wife home today," he said with a smile.

"Yes," I answered. "Allah has heard our prayers."

I wanted to offer him a Bible, but it seemed so futile. *God, what can I do?* I prayed silently. Then I remembered that some-



one had told me that Muslims (at least in some places) do not refuse gifts if the giver writes the recipient's name in it, along with one's own.

"Just a minute," I said. "I want to give you a little gift to remember me by." I stepped into the office and brought out a Bible. "This is a sacred Arabic book," I said. "If you would be so kind as to let me use your pen, I'd like to write your name in it."

He smiled, took his pen from his pocket, and handed it to me.

"Would you kindly spell your name for me so that I get it just right?" I asked.

I wrote it, along with a brief message. Then I signed my name and handed the book to him along with the pen. "Always pray to Allah before you read it. You will find that it speaks to you," I said.

He clasped the Bible in both his hands and placed it over his heart as he bowed and thanked me. "May Allah give you peace," he said.

Soon he was on his way to his desert home with his wife—and a Bible.

After that I used this simple approach. No one ever turned me down. It was my personal project, and a thrilling one indeed.

### WHISPERED CONVERSATIONS

Fast-forward about two years: I was down on the desert with two students. We were selling Arabic health books in the little shops that formed a hollow square around a dusty unpaved plaza where camels with their burdens came and went. The blazing heat seemed to govern the number of persons who strolled in and out of the shops.

One of the students and I went into a shop where we explained to the owner that I wanted to buy a book with blank pages for a diary.

"I'm sorry; we don't have what you are looking for," the man said. We thanked him and turned to leave. He followed us out the door. "I want to talk to her," he whispered to the student who translated for me. "Let's move away from these people."

"Please don't tell anyone what I'm telling you, sister," the man began. "Do you remember when I was at your hospital? [I really didn't; I had seen too many.] You gave me a black book. I buried it in the ground beside my bed. It's covered with a little rug. In the middle of the night when I know my family is asleep, I take it out, unwrap it, and

**"Please don't tell anyone.  
No one must know my secret."**

read it with my flashlight. It's a wonderful book! I read it every night. Please don't tell anyone," he said with quiet intensity. "No one must know my secret."

"Thank you for telling me," I replied quietly. "I know Allah is giving you peace." We shook hands and parted after I assured him that I would keep his secret.

The student and I went into the next shop. After our visit the owner followed us out the door. As I thanked him he whispered to my translator, "Please, I need to go to a private place to talk with sister." We found a place around a corner of the mud-brick building.

Again I heard him whisper, "Please don't tell anyone. You gave me a black book. I buried it in the ground beside my bed. I keep it covered with a little rug. When my family is asleep, I read it with a flashlight. Each night it makes my heart glad."

The student and I went into the next shop. The owner followed us out the door and whispered, "Please, we need to go to a private place." It was the same story again! "Nobody knows what I am doing except you and Allah," the man said.

### A SILENT WITNESS

That night I lay on my cot looking out at the stars. My thoughts drifted to three humble one-room mud-brick homes where angels loved to explain the Bible to three men who would bring out their precious copies of the Word of God.

Could angels be keeping the families asleep so that these men might search for truth? Might it be that these same angels prevented curious family members from asking, "I wonder, what's under that rug?"

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Susie Hamu is a pseudonym.



JACK HOLLINGSWORTH/STOCKBYTE/GETTY IMAGES

# MENTORSHIP

*The gift that keeps on giving*

Is retirement biblical? What would happen if retirement started at age 50? Are Baby Boomers taking jobs that otherwise would go to their kids—Generation X and Millennials? Is there, in fact, a healthy time to transition to mentoring, instead of forging ahead alone?

## THE GOLDEN YEARS

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, fill the role of the persons I’m describing, a generation of individuals in the midst of, or on the verge of, retirement. But retirement, even if desired, is not as easy as they would like. Why? Basic economics.

America leaves the gold standard in 1971. Fiat currency takes off, money backed by nothing but

the government’s word. With it come loans, credit cards, Madison Avenue, a new station wagon, a home in the suburbs, college, travel, or some other variation on the theme of the good life we all long for, whether affordable or not. And we want it cheap.

Today, the debt load for most North Americans is out of control. Boomers can hardly afford to retire. Some say it’s because they’re workaholics. They identify too much with their work; take that away and they have nothing to live for. Also, they’re competitive and often look down on those who are younger. They worked hard for what they have, and this standard of living is what they deserve.

Nearly half of Boomers (47 percent) are already retired. An estimated 10,000 Boomers retire each day in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Yet one third of employed Boomers ages 67 to 72 have postponed retirement.<sup>2</sup> The Insured Retirement Institute, which represents the annuity industry, recently shared a report: “Boomer Expectations for Retirement.” It highlights the problems preventing more Boomers from retiring: too little in savings, underestimating health-care costs, and unrealistic expectations about how much retirement income they will need.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, older Americans in the workforce tend to earn more than their younger counterparts. On average, workers 65 and older earn \$78,000 a year, compared with \$55,000 for those under the age of 65. The last time 20 percent of those 65 and older were working was in 1962, the AARP report says. Compared with 1985, adults aged 65 and older are twice as likely to be employed today.<sup>4</sup>

JARED THURMON

It is projected that in five years 33 percent of the workforce will be over the age of 65. An estimated 62 percent of those between the ages of 50 and 64 have at least one chronic condition as a result of obesity (high cholesterol or heart disease).<sup>5</sup> Medicare and Medicaid costs are drastically increasing.

According to the Social Security Administration, the United States is within a decade of running out of money to finance Social Security. Complete insolvency and tax income from the budget will be enough to fund only a portion of its benefits. Without any other solutions, benefits will be lowered. This is the same budget that is inflating the national debt and stressing health-care costs.

One wonders now, in light of all the threatening debts, shortfalls, and financial inadequacies we face, how many retirees' lives still reflect Solomon's statement that "a good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children" (Prov. 13:22).

### IN THE CHURCH

Adventist Church leadership faces its own crisis in the next few years. Significant levels of retirement will set the stage for an unprecedented turnover of leadership.

So why do we have such an aging workforce inside the Adventist Church? There are certainly multiple reasons, including a lack of comparative growth, itself primarily an issue of spiritual dimensions that goes beyond mere numbers and statistics. Major corporations grow by hiring, even if it means going into debt. We aren't likely to. But how different would it be if a grand cohort of Generation Z, caring with heart and soul for their Adventist Christian faith, cared also about the fact that their parents would retire at age 50? How would their plans for the future be different?

A few years ago Dan Jackson, who has since retired from being president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, shared his thoughts when asked how young people can contribute to a church that often seems unwilling to welcome them into leadership roles. "God's work on this earth is not going to be finished by my generation. It will be finished by yours," he said. "That means you should ask, 'How do I get involved in the local church?'"<sup>6</sup> And there are other questions that Millennials, Gen Zers, and other ages of dedicated youth may pose, with reason: How do we show that we are willing to be held accountable for

## Imagine if a generation knew that their parents would retire at age 50.

our part in our church's growth, advance, and mission completion? Again, are our elders, our church's current leaders, themselves willing to be held to account by the youth who come behind them? For mentoring what is exemplary will always include modeling of transparent accountability.

### IN THE END

We're told that "Ellen White did not believe in 'retirement by rust.' To her, retirement was 'by wear and tear.' But she was not a hard taskmaster; rather, a mentor graced with an understanding heart and the merciful attitudes she had gained by intimate acquaintance with a kind heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. For example, she counseled a workaholic preacher in his sunset years to be temperate in his labors, for he was killing himself by overwork. She encouraged him to grasp the thought that he had earned the privilege to relax, to ripen for heaven, and to enjoy some of the restful and peaceful moments of a happy retirement."<sup>7</sup>

I do not doubt that Adventist Millennials and their subsequent generations would welcome with open arms the privilege of fellowship and leadership maturation that would come from extended collaboration with their church's vets—veterans of the Lord's battles. We need our X-ers, our Boomers and Busters; we crave your mentorship; we know that with you, by the grace of God, we can complete the great work you've started. ▀

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research and the Social Security Administration.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research and the Social Security Administration.

<sup>3</sup> [www.google.com/amp/s/www.cnbc.com/amp/2019/04/09/baby-boomers-face-retirement-crisis-little-savings-high-health-costs-and-unrealistic-expectations.html](https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.cnbc.com/amp/2019/04/09/baby-boomers-face-retirement-crisis-little-savings-high-health-costs-and-unrealistic-expectations.html).

<sup>4</sup> [https://feeds.aarp.org/work/employers/info-2019/americans-working-past-65.html?\\_amp=true](https://feeds.aarp.org/work/employers/info-2019/americans-working-past-65.html?_amp=true).

<sup>5</sup> Trust for America's Health.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nadadventist.org/news/new-audience-new-format-nads-fourth-thing>.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Retirement Years* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1990), p. 9.

**Jared Thurmon** lives in Georgia with his wife, Annette, and daughter, Ava. He is a lay pastor of the Adairsville Church.



ADVENTISTDATING.COM

## THE ONE GOD HAS (REMOTELY) PREPARED FOR ME

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*An online ministry is connecting Adventists in search of life-lasting relationships.*

**STAN JENSEN**

**C**an God use online dating to help two prayerful Adventists find a lifelong companion? For an increasing number of church members that seems to be the case, according to the site AdventistDating.com, which I manage.<sup>1</sup>

Online dating has become a norm all over the world. According to some estimations, about 20 percent of current serious relationships were formed online

AdventistDating.com currently has a database of about 27,000 Seventh-day Adventists interested in meeting and dating other church members online.

to some extent. A 2019 Stanford University study found out that in the United States, online dating accounted for 39 percent of relationships.<sup>2</sup> It's a trend, experts believe, that has gained even greater prevalence given COVID-19-related restrictions.

Established in the mid-2000s, AdventistDating.com has created a way for Adventist singles who long for something more than their local church friendships to connect with the larger Adventist world. One of the several advantages of online dating is that people can get to know each other through conversations and video chat before they meet. It's easier to say goodbye online than in person. Users can ask meaningful questions and give thought-out responses.

Adventist Dating has some innovative profile-matching options. Our matching system is such that if one member does not meet another member's criteria or vice versa, the two profiles will not even show up in each other's searches.

For some people the thought of signing up for online dating can feel demoralizing, but even though there has traditionally been a stigma to saying "We met online," that sentiment has largely gone away. Members quickly learn that online dating through an Adventist network enlarges their scope of the world. It is especially vital to



those who live in more isolated areas or communities with a minimal Adventist presence—which often means that single Adventists are an extremely small sliver of the Adventist population there. The site is also proving helpful for busy professionals seeking a committed relationship in hopes of establishing an Adventist home.

We regularly receive requests from members to have their accounts removed because they're now engaged or married to someone they had met on AdventistDating.com. This includes pastors, other professionals, and one 85-year-old "Adam" who has met his "Eve."

In 2016 we decided to do a complete revamp of the Adventist Dating website and helped our existing members migrate to the new platform. We included additional screening procedures—for example, some basic test questions that most members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church would know. These knowledge tests help our moderators process user account requests and ensure that the dating site remains exclusive to Adventists. While the test questions and detailed profile setup do not completely eliminate "cat-fish" (a colloquial term used to describe those who are not who they claim to be), they do add effective layers to the screening process. Each user's review and approval are done by a live Adventist Dating administrator and can take several hours.

Since our 2016 launch on the new platform, more than 25,000 additional members have joined. The total number of active profiles, including those who migrated to the new site plus brand-new members, is currently more than 27,000.

We get stories of happy matches all over the world. Here is what one couple said:

*We met at the AdventistDating.com site four years down the line. It took God's arm to make our dream a reality, since he thought I was a scammer. We faced lots of challenges, but we kept faith in God. Hebrews 11 was the [Bible chapter] we clung to until the sun shone on us on October 9, when he came to my arms. He left all for me! We thanked God!*

*We were later united in a church wedding on December 8, in the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! Great thanks to the Lord and the AdventistDating.com service team. I share this story to inspire other Adventist singles worldwide who are looking for Adventist marriage partners.*



ADVENTISTDATING.COM

Mel and Shane Linden. Both Seventh-day Adventists, they met online thanks to AdventistDating.com.

Here is another story from Shane Linden, the lead counselor at PostumCafe.com:

*I am Shane, and this is Mel, and we met on AdventistDating.com. We dated for 19 months before we got married, and we used online dating to chat. This allowed me to take Mel to the store with me, to take her to church, and [we] even went on a virtual vacation [together] to the Grand Canyon with my kids.*

Shane was in Texas, United States, and Mel was in Lebanon when they got to know each other on Adventist Dating. Before they were married, they made sure to meet each other's children and receive their support.<sup>3</sup>

We provide tips on how to be safe online. Just as there are people with ulterior motives in our physical communities, they exist in our online communities as well.

I'm delighted to report that the vast majority of users have a very positive experience. Many members have established an Adventist home and are more involved than ever in the mission of our church. We hear success stories every day and remain committed to providing our users with a fun, fulfilling, and thoroughly Christian experience in the world of online dating. 🍌

<sup>1</sup> AdventistDating.com is a private ministry initiative managed by the author and not an official site endorsed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

<sup>2</sup> [www.pnas.org/content/pnas/116/36/17753.full.pdf](http://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/116/36/17753.full.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> You can watch a short video testimonial at <https://youtu.be/7tCfus2l8so>.

**Stan Jensen** is communication director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada.



## AN INTERNATIONAL LOVE STORY

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*When it isn't  
love at first sight*

**CALLIE BURUCHARA**

I never grow tired of telling *our* story. It's a question I look forward to every time we make new friends. When we're asked, my husband will glance at me, saying, "She tells it way better than I do." He's referring to my obsession with details—but there are many aspects I still leave out so as not to bore anyone. You, dear reader, are not so fortunate.

Our story is my favorite because of how remarkable and unremarkable it is: our origins, our friendship, and our compatibility.

### OUR ORIGINS

It amuses me how tactfully (or not) people will ask how David and I met. Our differences are on full display in our skin tones and our accents. He was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and raised throughout East Africa. I was born in Roanoke, Virginia, United States, and raised in next-door Maryland. Nearly 8,000 miles separated our upbringings, our homes, and our communities. On paper there's a shortage of evidence to support a thriving friendship between us, let alone a wonderful marriage. How we came to know and love each other is remarkable.

What people don't see, though, are aspects of our childhoods that mirror one another: we both grew up with two siblings, attended boarding school, went to public universities, grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, had conversion experiences around the same time, struggled with people pleasing, and were immensely and positively impacted by CAMPUS (Center for Adventist Ministry to Public University Students). In fact, that's how we met.

### OUR FRIENDSHIP

After graduating from CAMPUS's nine-month program in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I returned to Maryland to continue my studies. I still frequently visited the CAMPUS group to see the people I had grown to love and to preach to them in the student-led church. One brisk March I came to preach and found there was someone I didn't know: a new guy named David. I'd seen his reminders in

the group chat for a weekly Bible study he'd started, as well as random Bible texts he sent out periodically. My main interest in meeting him was simply to know everyone in the group.

We joke that it was love at first sight, but it was decidedly *not* that. What I remember the most about meeting him was how little I remember. It was unremarkable. Did I say hello first? Did he? What did I think of him? I haven't the faintest idea.

I do remember about four months later when he sent out a 20-page testimony of his time serving in the leper colonies in China. I remember our first Skype conversation during which I'd requested to learn more about this mission work. I remember that we talked for two hours, and none of it was about China. He was kind, friendly, attentive, and a wonderful conversationalist. I remember being taken aback by how much I enjoyed talking with him. I remember making a mental note to be careful.

Our friendship grew in the most innocuous way. We shared book synopses when we learned that we loved the same genres. We discussed divisive shifts that were happening in the church at the time. We shared funny stories from our day. As our conversations progressed, so did our feelings. He became my friend, my best friend, and then someone I contemplated a future with. That's when, independent of each other, we started to wonder if the feelings were mutual.

I remember asking (begging?) God to convict David's heart inescapably to talk to me if he had feelings for me. And the next time I saw him, he did share his feelings. We had grabbed breakfast together; because of nerves, I had eaten nothing, and he had eaten both of our meals. That conversation led to mutual relief and giddiness—then to much prayer, sharing with our parents and mentors, and time to think through the idea. We started officially dating December 13, 2015. We were married nearly four years later on November 24, 2019.

### **OUR COMPATIBILITY**

As many people do, I had a list of attributes for the person I wanted to marry. I laugh about it now, because I didn't realize what I needed. For example, I prayed for someone who was strong-willed and assertive, mostly because that's how I am and figured I'd need a husband like that. David is strong, but I wouldn't call him stubborn; he can

## **I'm constantly surprised by how compatible we really are—in both our differences and our similarities.**

be assertive if he needs to be, but he isn't naturally so. His gentleness and calm demeanor disarm my wielded stubbornness and harrowing anxiety. His swift forgiveness and abundant patience make me feel safe to grow and share my heart.

I didn't have a certain hometown or vocal lilt on my list, but I likely expected someone who grew up near me. Interestingly enough, a few months before David and I started courting, a loved one introduced me to someone in hopes of us being together. It made sense: this young man and I looked the same, talked the same, had similar interests, and even grew up in the same community. Yet within 30 seconds it was abundantly clear we would never grow beyond friendship. The differences were too vast in the cornerstones of who we were.

Despite our very real cultural and racial differences, I have never felt more at home with someone in my entire life than I do with David. As our marriage continues, I'm constantly surprised by how compatible we really are—in both our differences and our similarities.

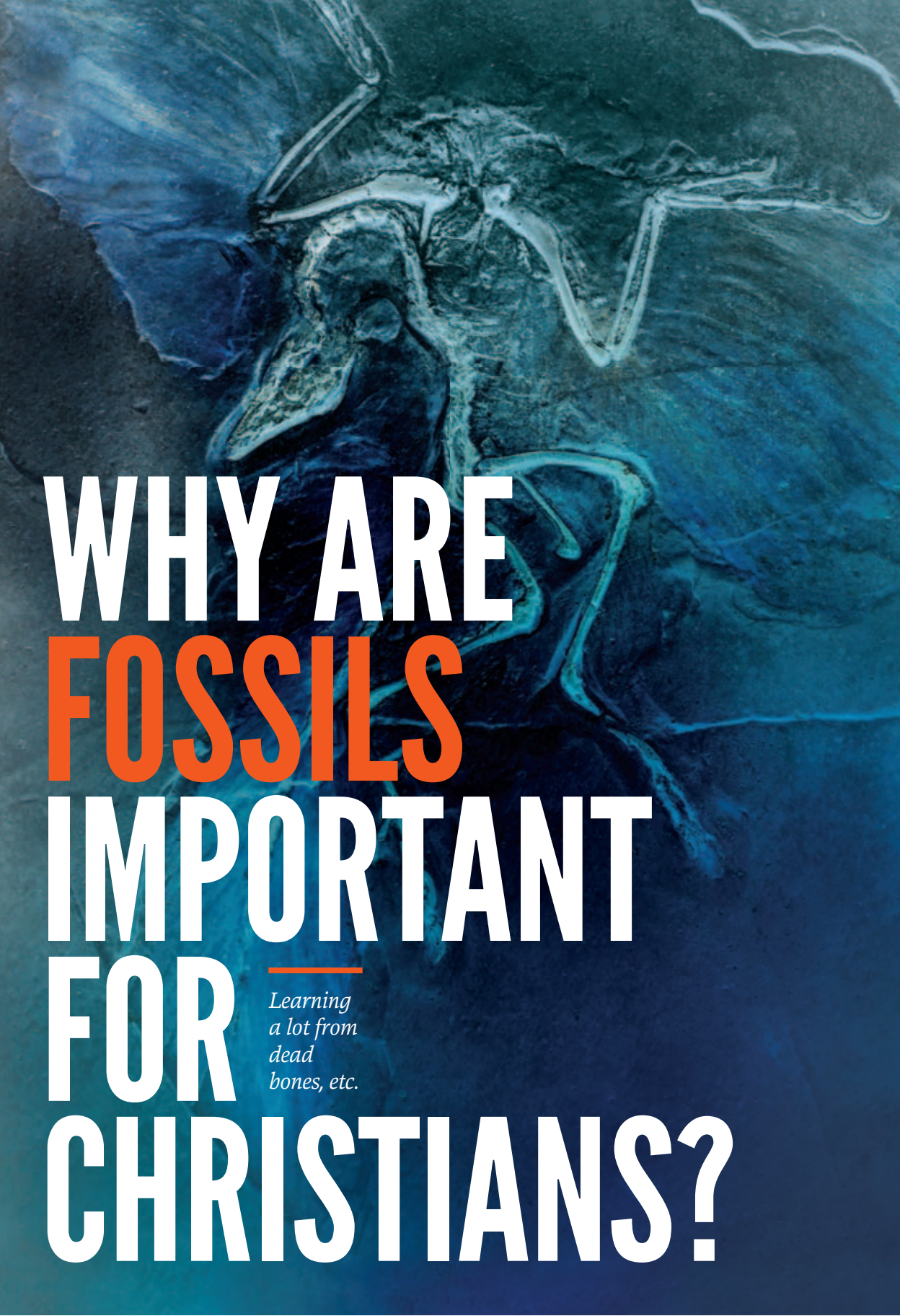
### **OUR GOD**

David and I don't believe in soulmates. We don't even find the idea romantic. We instead believe in a loving God who will guide us to good choices, even in choosing a life partner. He knows what we need even when we don't know what to ask for. He can fashion the character of someone who will enrich your life, draw you heavenward, and increase your love of Him—even from 8,000 miles away. 🍌

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**Callie Buruchara** and her husband, David, live in Nairobi, Kenya. Callie has led service projects, taught high school, and preached throughout parts of the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East. She works as a software developer and writes at [worriedsapling.com](http://worriedsapling.com).





**WHY ARE  
FOSSILS  
IMPORTANT  
FOR  
CHRISTIANS?**

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*Learning  
a lot from  
dead  
bones, etc.*



**W**hen we think of the importance of nature for Christians, major ideas that come to mind include caring for the environment (for example, by reducing/recycling/reusing or through prevention of natural disasters, such as fires) and learning about the life of plants and animals, the structure of the earth, or other aspects of the creation. But what about fossils? Do we ever think that the study of fossils is important for Christians?

**FOSSILS: WHAT THEY ARE AND DO**

Fossils are organisms of the past, or remains of their activities that have been preserved in the rocks. How can petrified plants, bones, or shells be important for a Christian believer?

First, Christians, as most other people, are curious. Finding a fossil shell, bone, teeth, or leaf in a rock immediately draws our attention. Children are especially captivated by fossils, and some of them carry that interest on into their adult lives and become paleontologists.

God reveals Himself in the Bible, and most significantly in the life of His Son, Jesus. But the Bible’s revelation indicates that nature is also full of lessons that can point to the wisdom and qualities of its Creator. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the psalmist claims, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1); and the patriarch Job asserts, “But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you” (Job 12:7, 8, NKJV).<sup>1</sup> How do we speak to the earth? How does the earth teach, and what does it teach us? How do we speak to the fish, and what do we learn from them? Paleontologists “speak” to the earth through scientific study of the fossils and the rocks that contain them. The fossils and rocks speak to us through analysis of their attributes, such as mineral content and physical structure.

Indeed, we even speak to fossil fish, which are some of the most abundant fossils found in the rocks, millions of them in sedimentary rocks, often showing excellent preservation. By the study of their preservation and characteristics we ascertain what these organisms of the past were like, how they lived, and the qualities of the environment they inhabited. This applies to all kinds of fossils. Paleontologists also compare fossils with living counterparts in order to understand how the former lived, died, and were preserved. For example, multiple studies in

modern habitats show that dead fish do not last long on the sea floor or the bottom of a lake.<sup>2</sup> They are quickly scavenged by other animals or destroyed by microbial decay. If that also was the case in ancient environments, how then are there any fossil fish at all? For many paleontologists, the existence of fossil fish in the rock record is an indication that in the past some environments were different from what we observe in the present, or that some geological processes occurred differently and favored preservation over destruction of many specimens.

**FOSSILS AND FAITH**

People of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths believe that many of the fossils now found in the rocks were organisms living before or during Noah’s flood, the global catastrophe by water recounted in the Bible. Rapid and massive deposition of sediments must have occurred during that global catastrophic event, and millions of fish must have been buried, resulting in fossilization. The same may be said for many other aquatic organisms, as well as for terrestrial organisms such as reptiles, mammals, birds, and plants.

Destruction and decay after death is the norm in modern and ancient times, and yet millions of fossils are in the rock record, strongly suggesting that most of those fossils might have been formed during a global catastrophe that brought about sudden death and burial. Some species survived, while others went extinct. Thus, the global Flood described in the Bible provides a good model for the occurrence of millions of fossils in the fossil record, and the study of the fossils gives us clues as to how the Flood must have occurred in terms of geological processes. This is one reason Christians believe that fossils are important.

Fossils also tell us what ancient organisms looked like, at least from what can be inferred from their hard parts (shells, bones, teeth, wood, etc.). By carefully studying the characteristics of fossils, paleontologists learn that some of the organisms of the past were morphologically different from ones living today, whereas others were similar or equivalent to modern ones. People who believe that life arose on earth during millions of years beginning from simple forms and evolving into more complex and diverse organisms invoke these differences in the fossils and their occurrence at different levels of the rock layers to support their

BARASHENKOVANTON/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

## Paleontologists believe that *Archaeopteryx* is in reality a bird with “mosaic” traits.

theory. If that theory is true, there should be millions of intermediate fossil forms as well as living intermediates among animals and plants.

An informed Christian who has studied the fossil record knows that such is not the case: fossils do not show the gradual morphological variations expected in a slow, long pace of gradual change over long geological time. When paleontologists find a fossil frog, a fossil turtle, or a fossil fern, they clearly discern what kinds of organisms they are. There are no obvious intermediate or transitional forms in the fossil record. Some may argue that the bird *Archaeopteryx*, with a mixture of reptilian and avian characteristics, could qualify as an intermediate form in the evolution of birds from reptiles. However, paleontologists believe that *Archaeopteryx* is in reality a bird with “mosaic” traits, not necessarily indicating an evolutionary lineage.

This understanding is in harmony with the biblical statement that God created every living creature “according to their kinds” (Gen. 1:21, 24, 25). In the original creation there were no intermediate or transitional forms like those expected in the evolutionary model of gradual appearance of life. Instead, distinct forms of plant and animal life were differentiated into kinds that Adam could name without confusion. The same pattern of clarity is found in fossils. Christian researchers with a high view of the Bible find that the fossil record confirms the pattern of distinctiveness of life forms that Genesis asserts, and this is another important reason the study of fossils is relevant.

In recent years several scientists have reported the occurrence of soft tissue and organic molecules in fossils that in some cases have been assigned ages of tens or hundreds of millions of years, based on radiometric dating. Examples are proteins, lipids, DNA, and vascular tissue found in dinosaur bones, shells, teeth, amber, and plants. Even functional bacteria have been found in sediments purportedly millions of years old. Yet scientists know that it is impossible for complex organic molecules to be preserved and survive for millions of years.

These molecules become unstable and degrade, especially in the presence of water. How are they then preserved in fossils that allegedly are millions of years old? There are good reasons to believe that these fossils are only a few thousand years old, not millions. The discovery of preserved organic molecules in fossils is a strong indication that fossils are not as old as radiometric dating and the evolutionary theory suggest. This is another excellent reason for Christians to study fossils.

### LEARNING MORE ABOUT FOSSILS

Some Seventh-day Adventist institutions have realized that fossils provide an excellent resource for teaching about the history of life, earth history, the biblical account of Creation, and the Flood. Universities in many countries—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, South Korea, the United States—as well as many schools, have prepared displays in which aspects of the fossil record are interpreted in light of the biblical worldview of Creation and the Flood. Other Christian institutions have also built museums and displays that feature fossils. Through these displays many students, teachers, and visitors can not only appreciate the beauty of fossils, but also explain them in a way consistent with the teachings of Scripture regarding Creation and the Flood. Many Christian students realize that the modern study of fossils yields quality information that challenges evolutionary theory and long ages for life on earth, and provides an excellent way to share their faith in God’s revelation.

Fossils and the rocks in which they are contained are an excellent platform for discussing origins from a biblical perspective, especially in relation to the design and complexity of ancient life and the worldwide destruction caused by Noah’s Flood. Many questions regarding fossils, origins, Creation, and the Flood are still there for us to investigate, and the Geoscience Research Institute, where I serve as a scientist, is committed to supporting our students and institutions as they engage in the scientific study of the creation within a biblical worldview. 🦋

<sup>1</sup> Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. Valleryntyne, “On Fish Remains in Lacustrine Sediments,” *American Journal of Science* 258 (1960): pp. 344–349; J. C. Schneider, “Fate of Dead Fish in a Small Lake,” *American Midland Naturalist* 140 (1998): pp. 192–196.

**Raúl Esperante** is a research scientist at the Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, in the United States.



# HIS Impact On Me

Jerena is a 2012 graduate and a remarkable testament to God's impact through our school on each one of our students. For Jerena, the effect was so significant that she felt drawn to come back to help us in a time of need. Here is her story.

Growing up, I went to school on the Navajo Reservation. It was going OK for me until I started getting into fights. It got so bad to the point where it would spill over to my home. Students would come to my house just to start trouble. Since this was happening, my mom and I decided I needed to go to school off the reservation at Holbrook Indian School (HIS).

I started going to HIS in 2007 for junior high before they had any special art classes. I was physically absent from the reservation, so I was away from the fights, but things were still rough for me emotionally. I thought suicide was the way out. I would blow up on the staff, and I would always get sent to the principal's office. I remember a staff member handing me a pen and paper and told me to write whatever I wanted to lash out at her. I took the pen, and I actually started drawing. The staff noticed what calmed me down was arts and crafts.

When I came to register for classes the following year, I noticed all the new classes, like drawing and other art classes. In my mind, I wondered why they were adding these. When I started taking the classes that year, I noticed some supplies that were not there before. I saw drawing stands and drawing pencils, which I was told were donated. If it wasn't for those donations, which helped to start the art classes, I think I would have gone crazy.

I have since grown and graduated. Eight years later, I returned to help with the staff situation, assisting a teacher with physical tasks that he could not do because of injuries from a recent accident. I am helping him in his Welding and Mechanics classes and by taking care of the horses.

At Holbrook Indian School, we are dedicated to meeting the needs of a highly at-risk population of youth, academically, emotionally, and physically. Help other Native American youth by giving to HIS today, at

[HolbrookIndianSchool.org](http://HolbrookIndianSchool.org)



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[Development@hissda.org](mailto:Development@hissda.org)



THREE COSMIC MESSAGES



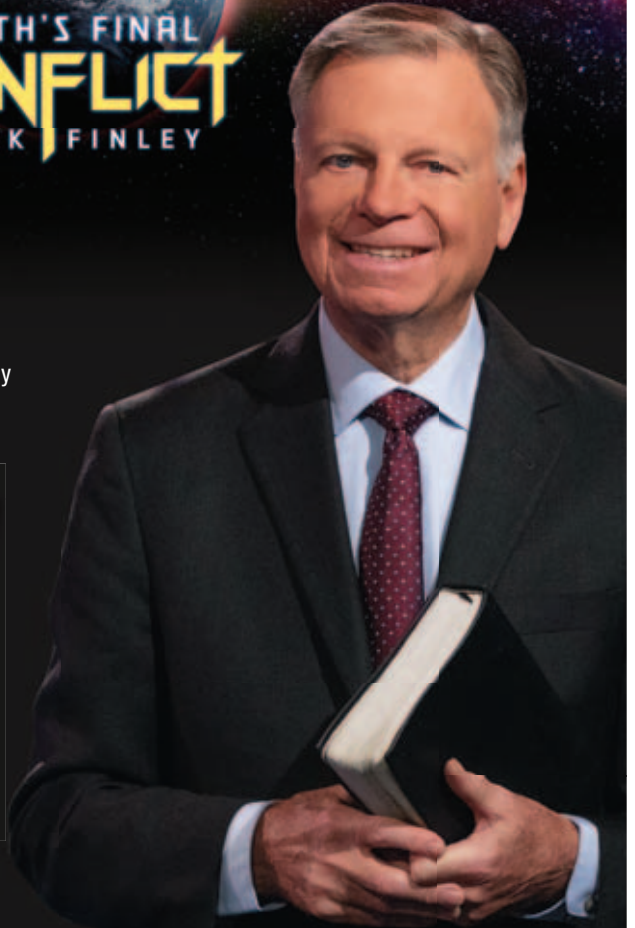
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# CHOOSE YOUR HARD

This pandemic has been *hard*. Have you found yourself wondering when “all this” will be over? Regardless of your situation, I’m guessing that thought has crossed your mind at least a few times during the past few months.

I was thumbing through Facebook a couple weeks ago when I ran across a quote that stuck with me and reframed my thinking about hard times.

*Marriage is hard. Divorce is hard.*

*Choose your hard.*

*Obesity is hard. Being fit is hard.*

*Choose your hard.*

*Being in debt is hard. Being financially disciplined is hard. Choose your hard.*

*Communication is hard. Not communicating is hard. Choose your hard.*

*Life will never be easy.*

*It will always be hard.*

*But we can choose our hard. Pick wisely.*

Yes, it might be way easier to slog through on a diet of social media, DoorDash, and Netflix. But I’m convicted that we shouldn’t be focused on merely getting by. We should be wrestling with God now, so that we are prepared for whatever comes next.

## WRESTLING WITH GOD

A story about wrestling with God is found in Genesis 32 (“The Night of Wrestling” in *Patriarchs and Prophets* is worth a read). To summarize: Jacob has no chance, no plan, and no hope as he prepares to be reunited with his brother, Esau, who—20 years later—is still bent on revenge.

Letting Esau have the birthright was hard. But instead of doing the hard thing, Jacob took the easy way out. And now the hard thing was coming for him, ready or not.

Alone in the desert, Jacob gets down on his knees and begs God to intervene. And God does, but in a most unconventional way. That night Jacob wrestled with God.

It has occurred to me that this pandemic—complete with social distancing—is the perfect time to get on our knees, dig deep into our Bibles, and “wrestle” with God.

In considering Jacob’s story, we can apply these principles to our own night of wrestling.

It begins with repentance and prayer. Jacob was truly sorry for his past.

Persevere when deliverance doesn’t come immediately. It might take all night.

Don’t let go until God blesses. His promises never fail.

The Bible is clear that we’re much closer to the end than to the beginning. If we look closely, there’s a lot about this pandemic that will repeat itself in the final days of earth’s history.

Inconvenienced by stores closing? One day we won’t be able to buy or sell.

Social distancing got you down? One day we’ll have to flee to the mountains.

And forget going to church. One day church will be wherever we are.

Here’s the thing about hard things: It’s almost always better to choose the hard thing *now*. That doesn’t mean everything then becomes easy. Saving money doesn’t make losing a job less scary. Getting up to exercise at 6:00 a.m. doesn’t mean never getting sick. Communicating well with our spouses doesn’t mean we won’t encounter crises in our marriages.

But when we choose the hard things now, we’ll be prepared for whatever comes next.

Choose wisely. 📌

INTRODUCING  
THE WHY  
JIMMY  
PHILLIPS



IT’S ALMOST  
ALWAYS  
BETTER  
TO CHOOSE  
THE HARD  
THING NOW.

**Jimmy Phillips** is network marketing director for Kettering Health Network.



BRANWIS/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

## SHAPING UP

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*A painful process is just that—a process.*

I'd always seen myself as twisted. I was born with infantile scoliosis, an s-shaped curvature of the spine.

As I grew, my hips became misaligned, causing half of my rib cage to protrude more than the other, making my waist asymmetrical. At the age of 10 a teacher noticed that I ran differently. The result was two years of x-rays, physiotherapy sessions, even a nightmare MRI.

The culmination occurred on a spring day in seventh grade. As I sat in a small examination room in the pediatric ward of McMaster Research Hospital, my specialist, Ellen Barrett, uttered the words I dreaded: "Curvature of 33 degrees; immediate bracing strongly recommended."

"I'm going to be a freak!" I cried. "Everyone's going to hate

me," I sobbed into my dad's shoulder. He rubbed my back and reassured me that everything was going to be OK. I didn't believe him.

### GETTING PLASTERED

Several months later we were in the office of Dr. Paul Richardson, a specialist at Chedoke Medical Centre in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. As I quavered in my chair, answering questions in a tiny whisper, my dad joked with the specialist and asked questions about the brace I was going to wear. "How many hours a day? For how long?"

"Two or three years?" I could be as old as 15 when it was finally removed.

The day of the brace molding was the same day as eighth-grade graduation. That morning, as everyone else in my class was in the school library making corsages, I was in Dr. Richardson's office donning a massive two-layer tube of ribbed jersey with armholes. It was itchy and banana-cream-pie yellow and looked like a gym sock. I was alone, so I took the opportunity to model this snug knit cocoon in front of the full-length mirror. I looked scared.

Dr. Richardson put wax paper on his exam table, then had me lie down. "My assistant is heating up the plaster," he explained. "We'll be wrapping strips of plaster-covered gauze around you. They'll be quite warm. Tell me if you're uncomfortable."

To call them warm was an understatement—they were hot. I didn't say anything, though. I had promised myself I would be brave so Daddy wouldn't be disappointed.

"I'm going to apply some pressure in different places now," he said. "These are the pressure points where the brace will push your spine straight." Again he said, "Tell me if you're uncomfortable." They pressed hard with blocks of rubber. It felt like they were rearranging my whole body. Tears started to fall. I covered my face with my hair so no one would see.

After a half hour the plaster was dry, and the doctor helped me roll to a standing position. The plaster mold covered my entire torso and was immensely heavy. Dr. Richardson cut through the plaster and jersey alike until he could pull the plaster cast off me.

Later that night, as I wore my new blue dress and smiled at the eighth graders marching and receiving their diplomas, my red, tender skin itched from stubborn flecks of plaster that clung to it still.

#### **BODY, MEET BRACE**

Two weeks later, on a blazing morning in early July, Dr. Richardson fitted this milky off-white plastic thing around my camisole. It was heavy—about five pounds—and extended in back from my shoulder blades to two inches below my hips, and in front from right below the bust to an inch below my navel.

The doctor had me practice pulling it on and taking it off, gave us a few sheets of instructions, and wished me luck. I walked out of the medical center nervous about what was to come.

Most changes were small, incremental. Wearing a brace was inconvenient, not earth-shattering. It was sometimes uncomfortable, such as at Thanksgiving dinner when I had to take it off so that I could eat more. On hot days the sun would beat down through two layers of clothing and one layer of hard plastic, and my skin started to tingle as if I were being poked by needles. I often felt ugly and awkward since I had to buy pants two sizes too large so they would fit over the contoured plastic hips.

My family helped me make the best of my temporary confinement. We nicknamed the brace "Ethel," because my mother said it had more curves than I did, and because it was made of polyethylene plastic. We pretended it was a Victorian corset, or body armor. My cousins asked if they could shoot me to see if it was bulletproof.

**"I'm going to be a freak!" I cried.  
"Everyone's going to hate me."**

No one at school, to my knowledge, ever called me names behind my back.

I wore my brace for almost two years. My specialist said that my pelvic growth plate had fused—I was finished growing—so the brace was no longer necessary. It had been preventative, not corrective; when I finished growing, my curve wouldn't get any worse; neither would it be much better unless I underwent an unnecessary operation.

#### **CLAY, MEET THE POTTER**

I will have scoliosis for the rest of my life. I have been brace-free for many years, but my journey is far from over. I still struggle with self-esteem. I walk with a limp when I'm tired. My wardrobe is limited because I feel self-conscious in certain clothes. My scoliosis does not define me, but it's still a struggle.

Wearing a brace helped me avoid vanity and build my identity around my mind and relationships, not my looks. It also taught me an important lesson about God working in my life. The brace was often uncomfortable, and I didn't understand why I had to go through this ordeal, which in reality prevented my condition from getting worse.

Now when I encounter situations that I don't understand, I know that God, the Master Physician, will skillfully use them to shape me into someone who is more like Him. Having scoliosis is just one of the results of sin that God has used to make me closer to His image.

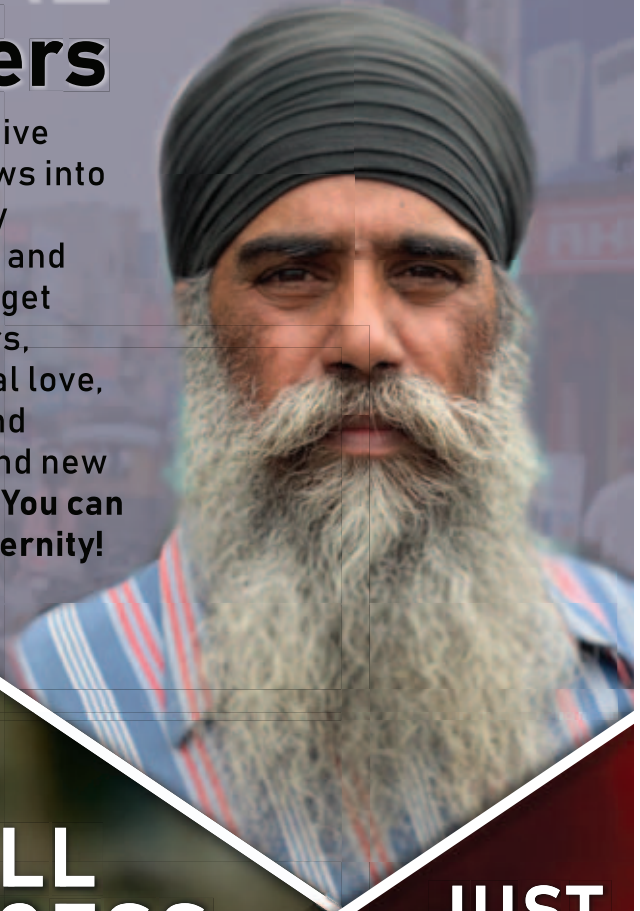
I don't understand why I was born with this. I see through a glass darkly. But I've made it my goal to praise God and trust Him, even when it's hard ("Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?'" [Isa. 45:9]). Clearly, God worked through scoliosis, and in spite of that, He made something beautiful out of me. 🍀

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**Melodie Roschman**, a graduate of Andrews University, lives in Broomfield, Colorado.

# NATIONAL Bible Workers

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## THE “MYSTERIOUS” MRNA

*A simple explanation*

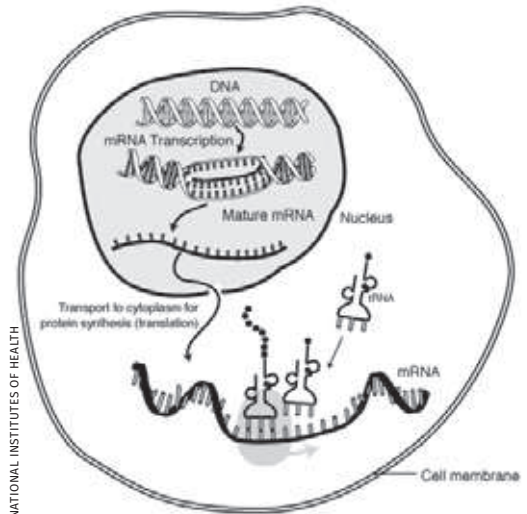
**Q:** There’s a lot of talk about mRNA vaccines. I don’t even remember this stuff from school. Can you explain using easy-to-understand terminology what mRNA is and what it does?

**A:** There is a lot of conversation about this today. We will try to answer simply and in nontechnical language whenever possible.

Each regular cell in our body has a nucleus and a cytoplasm. The nucleus is like a vault that has the encoded blueprint for the life of the cell, **DNA** (deoxyribonucleic acid). DNA never leaves the nucleus. The nucleus is surrounded by a highly selective membrane that controls what leaves and enters through its pores.

One of the most important ways that the nucleus directs what happens in our cells is through the instructions sent by a courier called **mRNA** (messenger ribonucleic acid). Actually, mRNA is a transcript, or copy, of the encoded instructions from the DNA and is able to leave the nucleus and travel to one of the many protein factories in the cytoplasm called ribosomes. The mRNA information, in addition to its code for making the protein, has instructional tags that determine when, where, and how much of the protein is to be made, for example, how many times the specific mRNA message is to be translated. The ribosomes read, or translate, the code on the mRNA and produce the protein that it’s instructed to make and in the quantity that’s required. After the mRNA strand is translated the required number of times, it’s destroyed. This allows the ribosome factories to make other proteins according to the other “mRNA couriers” that get to the factory. There are other kinds of RNA; all are important because without them we can’t make the proteins essential for life.

Specially coated mRNAs in modern, high-tech vaccines are taken up by cells at the site of inoculation. The vaccine’s mRNA code instructs these



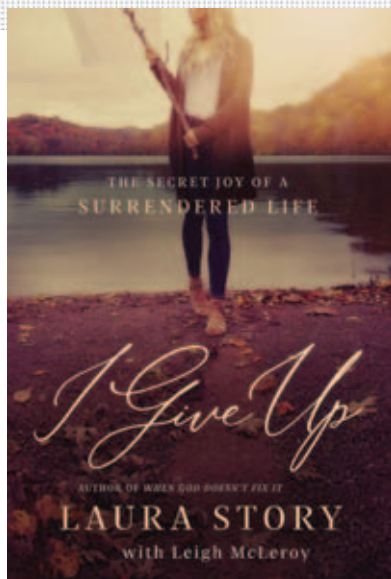
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

cells to produce *viral* surface proteins, which in themselves don’t cause disease. The immune system processes these cell-fabricated viral proteins as “foreign” and launches a response against them with antibodies and virus-killing immune cells. When the real virus presents itself, the primed immune system recognizes it by the same protein on its surface and unleashes an arsenal of weapons (including antibodies) to fight against it and protect the body from or reduce the effect of the viral invader. Currently available information indicates that vaccine-derived mRNA acts in the cytoplasm and neither enters the nucleus of cells nor interacts with or affects the person’s DNA (blueprint in the vault). Certain viruses (e.g., retroviruses such as HIV) and DNA vaccines, however, may incorporate their genetic material into a cell’s nucleus. We can discuss this in a future column.

God, our God, the Creator, is God of true science.

**Peter N. Landless**, a board-certified nuclear cardiologist, is director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference. **Zeno L. Charles-Marcel**, a board-certified internist, is an associate director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference.

# CLOSER LOOK



## Advocating for Surrender

*I Give Up*, Laura Story with Leigh McLeRoy, W Publishing, 2019, softcover, 227 pages, US\$17.99. Reviewed by Lael Caesar, *Adventist Review*.

**T**he epigraph that opens Laura Story's 2019 book, *I Give Up*, is the lyrics of a song of hers that gives this book its name. The lyrics are a testimony to the blessedness of soul surrender to God and a sustained note on the struggle to arrive at surrender. Her final stanza captures the paradox: "So here's my life to take, though you've heard this prayer a thousand other days. . . ."

The title of Story's opening section—"Surrender . . . Who, Me?"—then sounds like a vote for continuing resistance, a note that questions the book's idea. But Story is not in search of an answer: she writes as one who has found joy in living the lessons learned with pain. And in the course of sharing them, beginning with her very first chapter, she shows herself to be a credible commentator on living real

## The Light That Emerges

*Beautifully Broken: A Memoir*, Reema Sukumaran, Self-Published, 2020, softcover, 181 pages, US \$16.99. Reviewed by Wilona Karimabadi

**R**eliving past trauma is never easy. Reliving past trauma that lays your heartache bare for strangers to read is almost impossible. Yet Reema Sukumaran has done just that.

Her story, the child of Indian immigrants trying to find a place to fit in and flourish while living in an unstable and abusive home, is one that will resonate with many regardless of ethnic background. In her book, Sukumaran recounts a personal history filled with witnessing the physical and emotional abuse her mother and brothers at the hands of her father, enduring her own abuse, the rampant instability of her family life, the pressures of fitting in with church and school environments that were at times indifferent, and her journey of finding the peaceful, loving family life she'd craved since childhood.

Sukumaran also bares her truth about being sexually assaulted by a well-respected youth

life—not the dazzling fantasy of big-screen fairy tales, but the day-to-day humdrum of coping with a new life demand before the previous challenge has had any chance to grow old: still newlyweds, just taking up her first job, she and her husband, Martin, learn that he has a brain tumor. Later they must decide how to explain to the kids, Josie and the twins, Ben and Griffin, that their coming baby brother was going to have "a funny lip" (p. 15).

The book repeatedly references biblical characters whose stories are used to illustrate a given argument being developed through the book: Abraham—chapter three; Naomi—chapter four; Peter—chap-



ministry professional and the mental and emotional toll it took on her life.

*Beautifully Broken* is not an easy read. Sukumaran's story is heartbreakingly raw and emotional. But even within passages recounting unimaginable abuse, she is still able to pull out moments of hope that carried her forward. We see resilience in her ability to delve into dark places in order to speak out. The path her life has taken from a scared child afraid of a volatile father to blossoming in university, finding her life partner, and raising six sons is testament to a God who delivers the oppressed to better days—a hope that so many of us cling to.

ter five; God, the Promise-Keeper—chapter six. Story's handling of these biblical episodes demonstrates admirable spiritual, not to mention theological, understanding of their import. Moreover, her continued reliance on the Bible stories is itself commentary on her sense that Scripture is relevant here and now; that it works for people who want to know how to live the winning life today, and taste what the book's cover promises: "the secret joy of a surrendered life."

*I Give Up* may not be Story's autobiography, but she shares enough to teach her reader that her writing is distinctly more than mere theory. It took her no time at all to realize, as a confident worship leader at the Perimeter church in Atlanta, that a brand-new music degree and four guitar chords were not enough to qualify one as a worship

In 2021 the conversation about abuse against women—especially within the church—must continue. This is a book that brings ugly truths about the topic into the light to confront it. It causes the reader to ask the hard questions: "What would I do? Who around me has gone through this and how should I have helped? What can I do now?"

Sukumaran's story is about bravery, courage, and the internal strength God has placed within all of us. She writes the following in a passage about her mother's terminal illness: "Now, I listened as my mom shared her happiness, her hurts, her belief in God, her love for her children, and her pure unconditional love for her grandchildren. I realized that there is another definition of 'strong' that I had not considered before." Indeed, within all of God's creation lies a strength He has placed that we may have never realized was there.

This is a book with an important and necessary story for church book clubs—especially for women's and family ministries, as the message is equally important for men to take in as well. As a solo read, *Beautifully Broken* will hurt your heart but take you on a journey that shows the goodness of a Savior who never leaves. ♣

leader. Chris Tomlin had already sung Story's "Indescribable" ["From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea . . ."]. She had already made a mark. But now, as a church worship leader with life to deal with, e.g., her newlywed husband's newly diagnosed brain tumor, she was learning that worship was "a deeper, conscious choice to praise" the true God (p. 208), He who is always worthy of our praise.

Worship leaders, church administrators, Christians who organize anything—if nothing more than their daily walk with Christ—need the truths of Laura Story's story in our lives. The more we get and keep what she here shares with us, the truer will ring her thirteenth chapter title: "When I Surrender, I Leave a Legacy." ♣

## LET US MARCH ON

Hope—because, in the night, God

*This month's voices may be more readily heard in February. This may not be anyone's ideal. But it is our opportunity to savor the timbre of their notes, sense the range of their interests, feel the passion of their truth, and more closely attend to the humanity of their wisdom: Listen, then, to voices that find hope because, in the night, God . . . Listen to the voices of a handful of Black people.—Editors.*

"Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of Liberty."

**JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, 1899**

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"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"

**SOJOURNER TRUTH, 1851**

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"Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the day that hope unborn had died; yet . . ."

**JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, 1899**

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"My log schoolhouse was gone. In its place stood progress; and progress, I understand, is necessarily ugly."

**W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903**

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"For every social ill, the panacea of wealth has been urged—wealth to overthrow the remains of the slave feudalism; wealth to raise the 'cracker' Third Estate; wealth to employ the black serfs, and the prospect of wealth to keep them working; wealth as the end and aim of politics, and as the legal tender for law

and order; and, finally, instead of truth, beauty, and goodness, wealth as the ideal of the public school!"

**W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903**

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"No . . ."

**ROSA PARKS, 1955**

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"Tell them about the dream, Martin."

**MAHALIA JACKSON, 1963**

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"We cannot walk alone,  
 . . . we shall always march ahead.  
 We cannot turn back. . .  
 I have a dream."

**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1963**

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"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

**JAMES A. BALDWIN, 1962**

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"You know, Barry, there are people in the world who think only about themselves. They don't care what happens to other people so long as they get what they want. . ."

"Then there are people who do the opposite, who are able to imagine how others must feel, and make sure that they don't do things that hurt people.

"So which kind of person do you want to be?"

**ANN DUNHAM,**

**QUOTED BY HER SON BARACK OBAMA, 2020**

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"Let us march on . . ."

**JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, 1899**

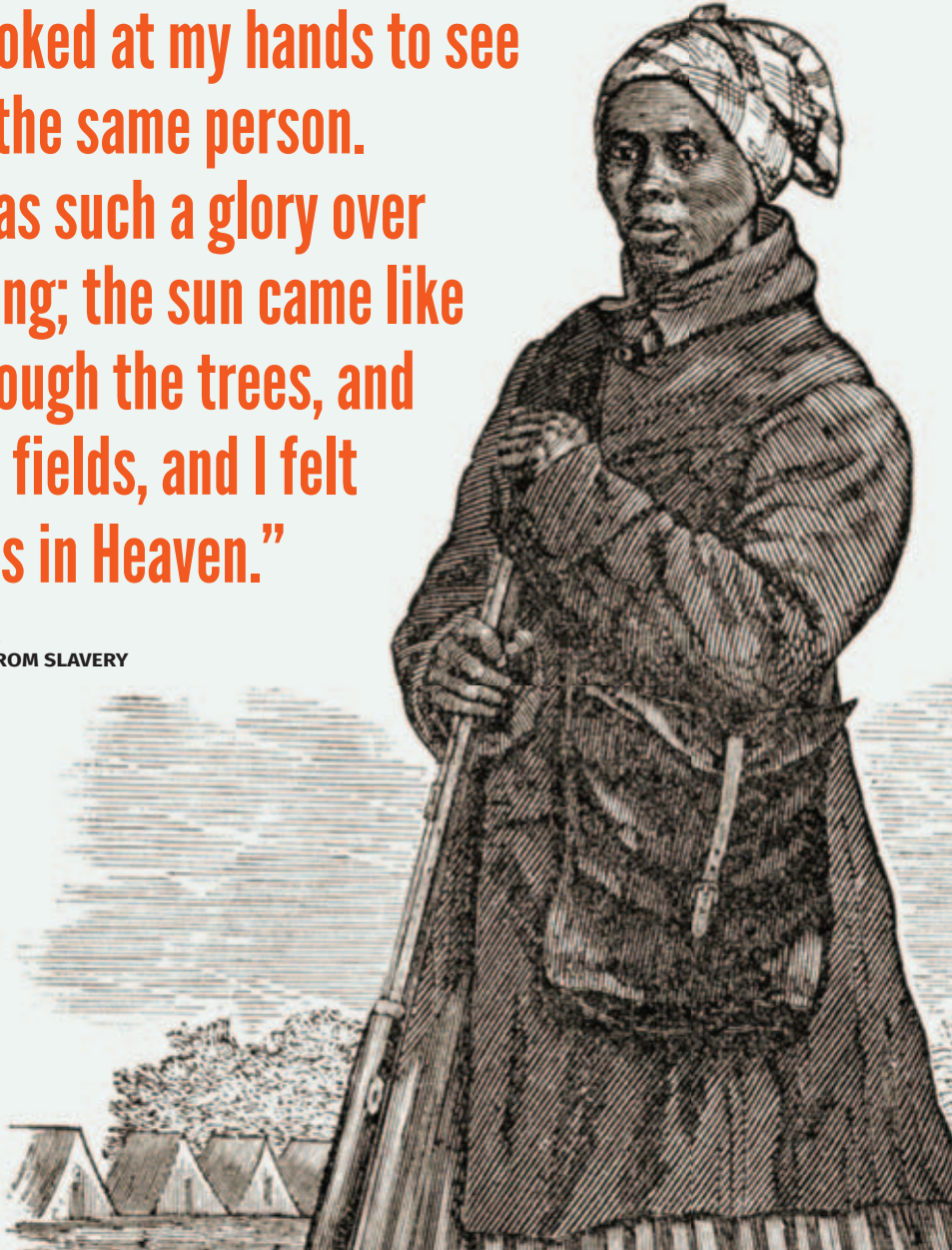
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**“When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.”**

**HARRIET TUBMAN,  
RE 1849 ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY**



## ARE RURAL CHURCHES DONE FOR?

**L**et me be quick to answer: I don't think so.

Not long before a pandemic swept the world, I had started pastoring my local church. It's your typical rural North American church. Fewer than 100 members; quaint; horses visible across the street during the service. But here's what has happened in my little church during the past year.

As COVID-19 crept in, we realized we weren't going to be meeting for church as before. So we decided to do all we could to take our messages online, but in a new, creative way. I pivoted with the way I prepared my messages and began writing every sermon as if it were the last sermon I would ever write.

During the past eight months we have seen more than 1 million individuals view and/or listen to our content, almost 500,000 of whom engaged with us in some way—liking, sharing, commenting, e-mailing, or joining a virtual Bible study. We continue to retarget these individuals on a monthly basis with ads, hoping to continue to build relationships with them.

We hired two Bible workers as it all got going, and we have a team of volunteers who spend 10 to 20 hours per week engaging with incoming questions and Bible study interests.

As soon as we started meeting again in person, I began to share some of the testimonies coming in. They have been a real encouragement to our local congregation. This has been an amazing exper-

iment in how to bring about revival to a little church, and I've been thrilled to have played a small part. We are generating nearly 100 new Bible studies each week, with a rate of about 5 percent that progress into one-on-one Bible studies with one of our Bible workers.

I'm proud to say that we aren't doing anything really novel, except that each message given by me or a guest speaker is created with the intent of reaching someone who may be hearing Adventist teaching for the first time. Our efforts have resulted in much higher sharing among our church members to their friends and families.

I share all this because we believe this is a strong seed-sowing moment. I hope all churches, large and small, can take courage from our experiment. God has blessed our local church with a 50 percent year-to-date increase in tithe (more than \$100,000 so far). The last time I checked, we had the highest per member tithe ratio in the conference, and our local giving was up 60 percent as well. This is a direct result of the individuals we are reaching.

Our attendance pre-COVID-19 was about 75 each week. Now it's 120 and growing. The average age of our congregation pre-COVID-19 was 58. With young families now attending, and students driving to join us, I would say that our demographic is around 40, and getting younger all the time.

I hope this testimony encourages other small churches to be willing to try new things. 🍀

**Jared Thurmon** is liaison for strategic partnerships at Adventist Review Ministries.

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