

**DECEMBER 2020: A MUSICIAN'S COMEBACK+ REVELING  
IN CHRISTMAS SERVICE + OUR PRICELESS INSTRUMENTS  
+ CELEBRATE WITH LIGHT + OUR IDENTITY AND  
DESTINATION + THE HUMANITY OF ADVENTISTS**

# ADVENTIST REVIEW



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## FEATURES



18

18 **ANGEL MUSIC SEASON** | LAEL CAESAR

Music and angels together in the Bible always means something special.



22

22 **OUR PRICELESS INSTRUMENTS** | MARK WILLEY

The mystery of voices joined—in unison; in harmony!



37

28 **ADVENTIST REVIEW CHRISTMAS CONCERT**

Who's This Girl?  
The Little [Steel] Drummer Boy  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
For the Glory of God  
A Cross, A Crown  
Thinking of Mary Knowing  
Meeting Jesus Again  
O Holy Night  
A Day Will Come

**“We stand on the verge of a most unusual Christmas, the first for more than 1,000 years when, around the world churches will not be full of people singing carols together and choirs will not be preparing and singing concerts of festive music.”**

# 22

## ARTICLES

**38 ANCIENT AND SUBLIME SONGS OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY**

DANIEL OSCAR PLENC  
Christians have celebrated Christ's birth in song for centuries.

**42 UNTO YOU A SAVIOR**

ELLEN G. WHITE  
Why were shepherds the first to hear the angels' song?

**44 THE PANDEMIC IS HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

WILONA KARIMABADI  
We can't do everything we did last year. But we can still celebrate Christ's birth.

**46 REVELING IN CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

MARCOS PASEGGI  
The Weiss family has a unique way to celebrate the holidays.

**48 CELEBRATE WITH LIGHT**

STEPHEN CHAVEZ  
How can we celebrate with so much suffering? How can we not?

**52 CHRISTMAS IN OUR ADVENTIST PAST**

MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL  
Everything in moderation

**56 A MUSICIAN'S COMEBACK**

ED GUTHERO  
A story you may not know about Handel's Messiah

**60 THE HUMANITY OF ADVENTISTS**

WILONA KARIMABADI  
Kaleb Eisele wants to know your story. Yes, yours.

**62 YOU WILL FIND A BABY**

HEATHER CREWS  
The pandemic has forced us to adapt our holiday traditions.

**64 THE DAY THE WALL CAME DOWN**

GERALD A. KLINGBEIL  
Walls may fall, but only God's love conquers all.



## NEWS | OPINION

- » NAD Treasurer's Report Reflects God's Providence
- » Steady Membership Growth Reported in North America
- » Max Mace Dies: Founded Heritage Singers
- » Maranatha Drills Nearly 2,000 Wells in Zambia
- » Drone Delivers Adventist Literature in Brazil
- » Adventist Health Launches Community Health Initiative



### EDITORIAL

- 5 BILL KNOTT**  
WORDS FAIL ME

### DEPARTMENTS

- 6 LETTERS**  
**59 HOUSE CALL**  
**66 CLOSER LOOK**  
**70 VOICES**

### COLUMNS

- 27 TIPS FOR TRANSFORMATION**  
DELBERT W. BAKER  
**55 THE LIFE OF FAITH**  
ANDY NASH  
**67 INTRODUCING THE WHY**  
JIMMY PHILLIPS  
**72 IN OTHER WORDS**  
STEPHEN CHAVEZ

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# TRENDING

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

- 1 Week of Prayer Readings
- 2 Max Mace Dies, Founded Heritage Singers
- 3 Adventists Provide Hurricane Relief in Honduras
- 4 How Discipleship Training Transforms Us
- 5 Murals in Pacific Northwest Celebrate Creation

## 100 YEARS AGO



Jasper Wayne died February 5, 1920. He was known as the “father of harvest ingathering.” In the early 1900s, Wayne passed out literature to individuals. Many gave him coins in return, which he, in turn, gave toward missions. From this came his idea of a systematic effort in a well-ordered campaign to distribute literature in return for contributions for mission. Persistently he set forth the plan before leaders of the Adventist Church. As a result, Ingathering became something that members around the world engaged in during the Christmas season. More than \$136 million was collected during the first 55 years following the official adoption of Jasper Wayne’s idea.

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BILL KNOTT



## Words Fail Me

At the very edge of language, well beyond the verbs and adjectives we use to win our daily bread and tell our daily stories, there are ideas so sublime that we must stretch to find the words.

Such is our fascination with the Incarnation that even two articulate apostles groped for language to describe the wonder of it all. Twenty centuries later, we have found no better words:

*“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory”* (1 Tim. 3:16, RSV).<sup>1</sup>

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”* (John 1:1-5, RSV).

And yet, because it is in the heart of every follower of Jesus to say the finest thing we know of Him, each Christmas we sing our anthems, write our hymns: we release whatever poetry we have in us to bring still greater glory to the One deserving of it all. The latest expression of our praise, the fullest heart from

which we sing, is never quite the final word, for love and gratitude require unlimited vocabularies.

A grateful tongue, suffused with love, is in Christ’s mind as great a monument to grace as Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus,” or any carol sung for centuries.

This Christmas, for the first time in a century, too many of us will not be able to gather in the places where we worship for the music that we love. We will turn to Alexa, albums, and to YouTube to hear again the words and tunes that are the cradle of our faith. We will gather at pianos and on Zoom to sing the music we dare not skip—not any year, especially not this year.

This remarkable edition of *Adventist Review* is itself a testament to the power of the music that we sing. It also represents a growing synergy of technologies: print is no longer two-dimensional, and symbols happily can lead to song. Within these pages, you can access prose and video, art and song, reflection and the soaring voice of hope.

No fewer than 10 remarkable songs are available to you as you read this edition by simply using the QR code app from your mobile phone, or by entering this URL on a website: [www.special.adventistreview.tv](http://www.special.adventistreview.tv). Recordings by solo artists, choral groups, and small ensembles

*“Love and gratitude require unlimited vocabularies.”*

present a uniquely Adventist understanding of the wonder of Christmas, for we celebrate the love that brought a Baby down to us and will ultimately bring Him back as King of kings.

Begin your musical journey here, with the QR code and the URL below, to witness one of my own attempts to celebrate the wonder and glory of our Saviour. This hymn, “The Light of Christ,” was written in 2016, and fitted to a marvelous tune composed by Mark Willey. His article, “Our Priceless Instruments” (pp. 22-25), also enriches this special edition.

*You came once to save Your people;  
You were born to break our chains;  
Come again, O great Redeemer;  
Be the end of death and pain.*



<sup>1</sup> Texts credited RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, by Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

*Bill Knott*

Culture is established by those in a group who have risen in significance, influence, or strength.

CLIF FREESE, GLENDIVE, MONTANA

## OCTOBER EDITION

"I was inspired by the excellent articles about the three angels' messages as they relate to the tumultuous times in which we live. I agree that the key message that permeates them all is to worship the Lamb and proclaim it to the world before the soon coming of our Savior.

I was impressed by the messages of young and old, men and women, faithful members, and their understanding of the basic doctrines of our church. Thanks to our leaders in all levels, they believe in the firm foundation.

**Leo Ranzolin, Sr.**  
Estero, Florida

The October *Review* was great, and the many contributors were appreciated.

"Me and the Angels" provided food for thought. Some on the Internet have asked help to identify the last-day church—they are, and is it a specific denomination? Are angels going about proclaiming the three messages of Revelation 14? Some cannot accept that we, not literal angels, are these messengers.

As pointed out in "Three Angels'



Messages: the Basics," by Lael Caesar: "Human beings are the angel messengers of God's good news." Since 1844, time is short.

As to the point of the last-day church, I can identify them with certainty as, "Those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). Does that verse identify a specific denomination, or does it indicate who they really are? Whatever the denomination, I know that they keep the commandments of God

and the faith of Jesus. They proclaim the judgment hour of Daniel 8:14 and the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-8.

I rest my case.

**Robert Rouillard**  
Lakewood, Washington

Maybe it's me, but I found 20 pages of the three angels' messages a bit much. We all know the significant role those messages play in our denominational history and ethos, but there's only so much that can be said before we start repeating ourselves.

The three angels' messages may strike a chord with our established members, but I challenge them to translate the gospel into terms that our modern, mostly secular society can identify with. We risk seeming irrelevant if we can't tie the everlasting gospel to issues important to our neighbors.

**J. J. Aragon**  
Chicago, Illinois

## CULTURE

In response to Andy Nash's "Fonzie, Sea World, and Siamese Twins" (October 2020): what an incredible paragraph on culture!

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## We risk seeming irrelevant if we can't tie the everlasting gospel to issues important to our neighbors.

J. J. ARAGON, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Thank you from a heart that must “wait with quietness and faith.”

Culture’s interesting elements include (1) everything I do not question out of ignorance; (2) everything I will not question by choice or fear; (3) everything I will not allow you to question by pain of force.

A culture may become established by those in a group who have risen in significance, influence, or strength. The “significants” create the rules and maintain them with shame. Fear and hierarchy are two components of culture that will not be present in an eternal kingdom. How can there be either when all are loved equally beyond comprehension in the infinite absence of shame?

Sometimes the greatest threat to culture is growth.

**Clif Freese**

*Glendive, Montana*

### THE SANCTUARY DOCTRINE

I felt as if I had discovered a priceless treasure after reading the concise, practical, insightful, brief article “The Sanctuary Doctrine,” by Richard Davidson (September 2020). Thank you very much.

**Helmuth Fritz**

### COMMENTS FROM ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG

#### WHAT YOU SHOULD REMEMBER BEFORE YOU VOTE

This is well written and clearly thought out. We need God to direct our political ideas and decisions and not allow politics to control our faith and our God.

**Mark Bugbee**

We are not warring against flesh and blood. We must pray without ceasing; human instruments such as the vote are insufficient when one stands in opposition to an antichrist. We should all be sober: we are living in the final moments of earth’s history.

**Phillip Brantley**

#### HOW I FOUND HOPE AND MEANING THROUGH SABBATH SCHOOL

What a beautiful testimony! Praise God for using Hope Sabbath School to share the truth about His immeasurable, unending love!

**Derek Morris**

Mr. Leno’s letter (October 2020) noted that my article, “God’s Hand in History” (August 2020), needed a better focus on God’s intervention in all history. I deal with that important truth in *Jud Lake, A Nation in God’s Hands*, pp. 156, 157. My August article was specifically focused on God’s involvement with America’s history.

**Jud Lake, Southern Adventist University**

### 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](mailto:letters@adventistreview.org).



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**“One of the joys in presenting the membership report is to show how many new members joined the church each year.”**

**Kyoshin Ahn, executive secretary, NAD, p. 13**



## NAD TREASURER'S REPORT CREDITS RESULTS TO GOD AND MEMBERS' FAITHFULNESS

**“GOD PROVIDES EVERYTHING WE HAVE,” RANDY ROBINSON EMPHASIZES.**

**KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN, NORTH AMERICA DIVISION, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW**

**A**s the North American Division (NAD) executive committee watched on Zoom, Randy Robinson, NAD treasurer, introduced the 2020 treasury report on November 2, 2020, by recognizing General Conference treasurer Juan Prestol-Puesán. Rob-

inson asked Prestol-Puesán to share a few words.

Prestol-Puesán gave his affirmation to the NAD treasurer for a report that is “comprehensive, well put together, and—in the middle of a difficult time—optimistic.”

He thanked Robinson, adding, “Thank you, officers of the North American Division, for keeping a steady hand and moving things along in a wise and careful manner.”

### FINANCIAL BACKDROP

Before diving into his report, Robinson provided a framework for the financial state of the division against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and political issues. “We started out 2020 very strong financially, with double-digit tithe increases through January and February,” he started. “But then in March the COVID-19 crisis arrived. Businesses began to close. There was significant and sudden unemployment, as well as extreme marketplace volatility. There was some social isolation and an unprecedented rise in virtual communication. Similarly, churches and schools were closing, and tithes and offerings began to decline.”

“There was a lot of speculation among the financial leadership in the church,” Robinson said. “We were talking about the potential of very significant decreases because our churches were closing; we wondered how we were all going to survive. Most of us sent our employees home to comply with social distancing mandates that were provided by our local governments.”

But, said Robinson, the church in North America responded well. “By God’s grace, I stand on this side of the process in amazement, and I want to preach a sermon because of the awesome response by our

## “Our members have continued their faithful giving of tithe and offerings in North America.”

God and our people,” he said. Robinson first talked about the division’s response of implementing virtual functionality with the pandemic shutdown. He highlighted the “tremendous” institutional innovation, citing It Is Written, Vacation Bible School, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, and other ministries, services, and institutions for being able to pivot and take advantage of the situation, providing programs, content, and resources virtually. “God really blessed. We basically [became] the North American digital division.”

The use of online giving also soared. “Before COVID-19, the percentage of total tithe received through Adventist Giving was about 22 percent,” said Robinson. “Now it is almost 60 percent. That’s a tremendous increase in the use of online giving, and my thanks go to that team for putting it together and keeping it running.”

Robinson also thanked members, “who really found a way to continue their tithe and offering giving to the church in North America. What a blessing!”

Robinson shared that during the spring, the NAD treasury team, along with union conference treasurers, developed “a US\$10 million stimulus package from the North American Division that was virtually matched dollar for dollar by our unions to provide approximately \$20 million to our local fields.” Said Robinson, “I feel blessed that we were able to come together to provide those dollars,

[which were] mostly for our local conferences. Employees at almost all levels were retained and ministry continued.”

“We had to do business from home, and the ministry continued,” he shared. “We adjusted our budgets and discovered, in hindsight, where we were really concerned about how far things might decline, that God had been (and still is) amazingly wonderful in His providence through the membership of the North American Division. I’m grateful to our members who have continued to support us!”

### FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Robinson shared highlights from the 2019 audited financial statement, including operating and plant fund trends, recommended working capital, and tithe. He also shared the 2021 proposed budget. Robinson reported that although the operating fund total net assets dipped in 2017 after the NAD purchased its headquarters building, it trended up in 2018. From that point NAD total net assets have steadily increased again. Combined operating and plant total net assets have steadily increased during the past several years.

Working capital, explained Robinson, climbed from 78 percent of the recommendation in 2017 to 85 percent in 2018, ending with 92 percent in 2019. According to Robinson, a recommended working capital of 100 percent is optimal, as defined in NAD working policy.

He shared that the NAD had 234

days of cash available at the end of 2019. It was 194 at the end of 2017 and 209 at the end of 2018. “Recommended working capital is a North American Division policy that suggests a certain level of liquid assets that should be available to do business. I use an additional financial metric of ‘days of cash available’ to help define our financial health. That number should be between 180 and 210 days of cash as I calculate it. We are at 234 per our 2019 audit,” he repeated. “However,” he continued, “the calculation I use to compute days of cash available is a little more conservative than the calculation used in the audit. I remove certain obligations from the total cash figure before I do the final calculation. That reduces the number of days from what the audit calculation computes. Using my calculation, the figure through September 2020 that we have is 168 days of cash.”

Gross tithe in 2019, Robinson reported, was almost US\$1.1 billion. Tithe annually from 2016 to 2019 reached US\$1 billion and was on trend to do the same in 2020 until COVID-19 hit. Because of the pandemic and subsequent economic downturn, there was speculation that tithe might be down 15 or even 20 percent. But, said Robinson, through September of this year, “we find ourselves only down by less than 1 percent [0.74 percent], year over year. Four of our nine unions actually have gains year over year, and the North Pacific Union Conference is up 4.23 percent

through September. Our members have continued their faithful giving of tithe and offerings in North America! Praise God!"

Robinson also presented the Year-to-Date 2020 actual financial performance compared to budget. He shared how the 2021 budget proposes less spending than the 2020 budget and is based on 96 percent of the actual 2019 tithe. In addition, 2020 division spending shrank, mostly because of the halt in travel and a decrease in project spending. "The 2021 budget includes an approximately 40 percent reduction in travel from 2020 levels, and approximately a 10 percent reduction in overall project spending. There is still a hiring freeze in place."

### IN GRATITUDE

The executive committee voted to receive each of the reports presented. At the conclusion of his report, Robinson thanked the treasury team for their hard work throughout the year.

He finished with a heartfelt comment. "I would be negligent if I didn't recognize the God who provides everything we have. He says in Philippians 4:19 that He will, *He shall* supply all our needs. There is no equivocation there: *He shall*. And He did, and He is supplying *all* our needs. Not some, not a little, not partial—He will supply all our needs according to His riches and His glory. I'm grateful to our Father in heaven for all that He has provided." 🍀

## MAX MACE, 82, ADVENTIST MUSIC LEGEND, PASSES TO HIS REST

HERITAGE SINGERS' MUSIC BROUGHT HOPE TO MILLIONS.

MARK A. KELLNER

**F**ollowing a battle with cancer, Seventh-day Adventist music legend Max Mace passed to his rest November 4, 2020, one day before his eighty-third birthday. His family said Mace was at home in Placerville, California, when he died.

In 1971, Mace and his wife, Lucy, who survives, formed the Heritage Singers, devoted to Christian music. Both Seventh-day Adventists, the Maces wanted to bring contemporary harmonies to their fellow believers. Over the next five decades, the Heritage Singers employed an aggregate of 300 singers—generally eight at a time—and held concerts in more than 80 nations. The number of people who saw them in person likely numbers in the millions, a figure multiplied exponentially by those who have heard their recordings.

"He knew his calling was just music ministry, and just loving people," said John Lomacang, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, evangelist, and singer who sang full-time with the group from 1984 to 1986 and continued part-time for 20 years beginning in 1989. "He had an ear for the 'Heritage sound,'" Lomacang added. "Although the group's roster changed throughout the years, it still has a sound that is unmatched."

That sound was always upbeat, accessible, and aimed, as Lomacang said, "at the heart." He was happy to incorporate contemporary Christian tunes and arrangements into the group's repertoire. Even overseas crowds sang along as Heritage presented music that praised Jesus.

### SOUGHT DECISIONS FOR CHRIST AT EVERY CONCERT

Each concert ended with Max making an appeal to audience members for a commitment to Jesus as Savior. Mace, or one of the singers, would pray with each person who came forward.

Mace, the youngest of three brothers from Eagle, Idaho, was a singer from his youth, forming a trio with brothers Jerry and Ron. At Idaho's Gem State Adventist Academy, he sang in quartets, something he continued at Walla Walla College, now Walla Walla University.

While in college, Mace met Lucy Hatley, a musically gifted young



Max Mace  
PHOTO: LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY CHURCH

## The music of the Heritage Singers found an audience within Adventism and other Christian churches.

woman. The couple eventually married, marking 62 years of marriage early in 2020.

The Maces worked at United Medical Labs in Portland, Oregon, where they also led a singing group called the Rose City Singers the company sponsored. This experience led the Maces to form a full-time touring group, presenting Christian music.

Those early days weren't always easy. Son Greg Mace—a sound engineer for the group—recalled the story of Heritage's visit to the Soquel, California, camp meeting in 1971. Singing music to which some were unaccustomed, the congregation fell quiet during the performance. In 2019, Heritage returned to a far more enthusiastic reception at Soquel, even from some who were at the 1971 meeting.

### FROM BUSES TO OVERSEAS TOURS

Requests came in, and soon the Maces and their singers plied America's highways traveling to concerts. At that point, Max and Lucy sold their house and bought an old, rusted Greyhound Scenicruiser bus and hit the road. With a paint job and lettering reading "Heritage Singers U.S.A.," the bus became a rolling billboard for the group, featuring on at least one album cover. Record sales at concerts and free-will offerings were often the only means of support for the traveling musicians, and sometimes those offerings were slim. As Lomacang recalled, Mace was undeterred.

"There were times when we didn't

cut it financially because of offerings. Max had endurance. He would say, 'That wasn't that great, but let's keep going,'" Lomacang said.

Eventually, the music of the Heritage Singers found an audience within Adventism and other Christian churches, expanding overseas. One overseas church member who saw Heritage in the U.S. came away impressed with the music and its results.

"The first time I heard the Heritage Singers I was working on my master's degree in music at Andrews University," said Williams Costa, Jr., a Brazilian pastor, composer, and arranger who today directs communication for the General Conference. "In 1975 they gave a concert at the Pioneer Memorial Church. It was unforgettable. That ministry touched me deeply."

Costa credited Heritage's positive reception in Brazil with creating opportunity for local musicians to expand their own services within the church in South America. "I will forever be grateful to Max for his vision, passion, and dedication presenting Jesus and the message of salvation through music in such an inspiring way," he added.

The group regularly toured in Europe and had planned 2020 concerts before the global pandemic made such travel impossible. For 35 years, Heritage had an annual post-Thanksgiving concert at the Loma Linda University Church featuring a packed auditorium of enthusiastic listeners.

Daughter Val Mace-Mapa noted

the group has more than 200,000 Facebook followers, and that news of Max's passing brought more than 1 million comments on the Heritage page in the first few hours after the notice of his passing. She remembered her father as her "best friend" and someone who was "most forgiving. He always wanted to make sure that if there was a wrong, it was made right."

### MORE THAN 140 SINGERS ONSTAGE

Perhaps the highlight of the group's decades-long existence was a 2016 concert in Ontario, California. More than 140 of the group's singers through the years—including Magdiel Pérez Schulz, assistant to General Conference president Ted N. C. Wilson—gathered on stage for three hours of singing and praise. The concert still streams on many popular services, including Apple Music and Amazon Music.

According to Tony Anobile, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and a vice president of the church's North American Division, Mace's impact was immeasurable. "We won't know this side of heaven the lives of people he touched, brought to the Lord, or kept in the Lord. Max had a unique style, and people loved it," he said.

Along with Lucy Mace, survivors include a brother, Jerry; son, Greg; daughter, Val Mapa; and two grandchildren. A private interment took place in Placerville, California, with a public memorial service anticipated for a future date at the Loma Linda University Church. 🍀



Kyoshin Ahn, executive secretary of the North American Division, delivers his first report in his newly-elected role on Sunday, November 1, 2020.

PHOTO: PIETER DAMSTEEGT, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

## STEADY GROWTH, CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

**SECRETARY'S REPORT FOCUSES ON MEMBERSHIP, MISSIONARIES, TRAINING, AND COVID-19.**

MYLON MEDLEY, NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

**N**orth American Division (NAD) executive secretary Kyoshin Ahn delivered his first report in his new role at the regional year-end meetings on Sunday, November 1, 2020. Ahn's report centered on membership within the NAD territory. As of December 31, 2019, there are more than 1.2 million Seventh-day Adventists in the North American Division worshipping in 5,621 churches and 880 companies. In 2019 there were 28,011 baptisms. In addition, 6,372 joined the church through profession of faith.

"One of the joys in presenting the membership report is to show how many new members joined the church each year," said Ahn. "All together 34,383 new members were added to our churches here in North America. In 2019, our acquisition rate was 2.73 percent. This means that we have added 2.73 members for every hundred members. In each of the past eight years, we had an acquisition rate of around 3 percent."

Figures from 2019 indicate a net increase from 2018 of 5,734 members. Ahn noted this is considered steady growth versus exponential

growth. While Ahn celebrates the growth, he noted the number of "missing" members from last year reached 7,191. Members are considered missing when their church cannot locate them or they have not officially transferred from their church.

"My prayer is that we find them and have many of them return to our local churches," said Ahn.

### COORDINATED MISSION PLANNING

Under the umbrella of the secretary's report, Ernest Hernandez, director of the NAD Office of Volunteer Missions (OVM), shared progress the office has made during the past five years and discussed how COVID-19 has impacted the ministry's operations.

"We have witnessed the deployment of nearly 3,000 long-term missionaries from the NAD, as well as more than 250,000 short-term volunteers. Since March of this year, our missionaries have experienced an unprecedented challenge from COVID-19," said Hernandez.

In response to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, OVM evac-

uated 126 volunteers from 28 countries. Hernandez also reported that 101 volunteers serving in 15 countries decided to remain in their roles.

Hernandez announced the launch of the "Mission Trip Connector" online tool designed to help streamline mission efforts. No system now allows various entities of the church to coordinate mission trips. The platform will enable groups to schedule and manage trips, share reports, and connect trip organizers to engage in joint projects.

"We estimate there are more than 100,000 volunteers in the U.S. alone engaging in missionary work. Imagine if these groups could talk together to share their visions and find common ground. Tithe money would be used more efficiently, resources could be shared, and the movement of large groups could be coordinated to address places where the gospel has had limited access," said Hernandez. "The organized movement of members, churches, academies, and conferences could revolutionize how we engage in mission work."

### HUMAN RELATIONS

Following Hernandez, a report was given by Carolyn Forrest, associate secretary of the division who serves as the director of human relations, inter-division/international service employee resources, and archives and statistics.

Forrest spoke on the support human relations gives at the NAD headquarters and across the division. Training programs including an

## Where should we go from here? We're not sure what new normal we may end up experiencing when this is over."

annual human resources conference; orientation for newly elected secretaries with a focus on policy, prevention of harassment, sexual misconduct, and locally funded employees; and a new presidents orientation that includes training on ethics and diversity. Forrest hopes

to incorporate equity and inclusion in future training events.

Another area that Forrest addressed is the work she's done with the NAD Women in Pastoral Ministry initiative. "We rolled this out in 2015. We said that what we would like to do in this area is to promote

the hiring of more female pastors. That was our goal. We also recognized that there needed to be some education taking place in some of our local churches. We provided information in that area because we wanted to emphasize that God calls both men and women."



A person reaches out to get the book *The Greatest Hope* from a drone on a beach promenade area in Fortaleza, Brazil. PHOTO:

JOSEPH REDFIELD, SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

## DRONE BOLSTERS DISTRIBUTION OF ADVENTIST LITERATURE IN BRAZILIAN CITY

AT BEACH LOCATION, INITIATIVE DRAWS ADULTS AND CHILDREN.

CIDA SOUZA, SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

Imagine that you are strolling on a beach and suddenly receive a gift that came from the sky. It seems like the kind of thing only seen on television.

But tourists and locals on a beach

promenade in the city of Fortaleza in northern Brazil were pleasantly surprised when a gift literally reached out to them from up in the sky. The Adventist literature distribution initiative was carried out by Seventh-day Adventist Church members who resorted to a drone to give away copies of the Portuguese-language edition of the book *The Greatest Hope*, by Adventist authors Diogo Cavalcanti and Luís Gonçalves.

As curious eyes looked up to see a drone approaching, an Adventist volunteer would approach them and ask, "Would you like to receive a gift?" If the person approved, another volunteer would maneuver the drone to get closer and deliver the sharing book to the astonished passerby.

It was a move that brought smiles and even tears to some of those who received the free book, the initiative coordinators said.

Regional church leaders shared that children,

youth, and adults took part in the distribution initiative. They also emphasized that the feedback was very positive.

"I just received hope, and I think at the moment I need it," said educational counselor Ivane Diógenes. "I just arrived here, and I have already received a gift from the sky. Since March, we have been experiencing difficult days. But I believe we will overcome this. Hope never dies," she added.

All safety measures of the National Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC) were respected, including the drone operation carried out by a certified pilot.

"Given that I have been working with a drone for some time now, I realized that many find it interesting to see the drone flying overhead," said pilot Antonio Souza. "Many people have never had the opportunity to see a drone up close. So we thought: *Imagine a drone flying over with a book! It would attract people's attention even more.*" That's what happened. It was a pleasure for me to use what I know to share hope."

*The Greatest Hope* is one of the titles distributed by the Hope Impact initiative, which includes an annual distribution of Adventist books across eight countries in South America. Because of the 2020 pandemic's impact, program coordinators are using creative ways to distribute the books. 📖



Contractors drill one of the almost 200 water wells Maranatha has provided in Zambia during the first ten months of 2020. PHOTO: MARANATHA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL

## MARANATHA DRILLS ALMOST 200 WELLS IN ZAMBIA IN 2020

CONSTRAINTS AND LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES CAN'T STOP MISSION, LEADERS SAY.

JULIE Z. LEE, MARANATHA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL

### COVID-19 AND THE FUTURE

Ahn then pivoted the secretary's report to discuss how COVID-19 has affected local churches in reporting attendance—in-person and virtual—and conducting baptisms. According to preliminary findings, baptisms and additions through professions of faith took a drastic dip in the second quarter of this year from 3,658 baptisms to 1,565; and 1,342 members added through profession of faith dropped to 425, which reflects the timeline of state and local enforcement of house of worship closures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease. But figures rose in the third quarter back to consistent patterns exhibited in previous years—3,893 baptisms and 773 additions through profession of faith.

Ahn said while deaths of members reported for the third quarter of this year are higher than deaths in a similar timeframe in years past, at this time there is no clear correlation between the deaths and COVID-19.

"What then shall we do? Where should we go from here? We're not sure what new normal we may end up experiencing when this is over," said Ahn. "Yet, one thing remains unchanged—we need to keep loving God and loving our neighbors. We place our future in His hands, with absolute confidence that He will lead us home safely." 🍌

As in many countries around the world, Zambia's COVID-19 outbreak brought an abrupt halt to all activity earlier this year, as local governments scrambled to assess the potential risks from the virus. But Maranatha's local crew was able to start working once more in only a matter of weeks.

In the more than six months since the start of the pandemic, the team in Zambia has been one of the most productive, working on a school campus and constructing 52 One-Day Churches. The team also oversaw the drilling of 186 water wells in the first 10 months of 2020.

The wells and churches have already been making a profound difference for hundreds of people in rural Zambia. Samuel Sinyangwe, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in northern Zambia, said the wells have drawn a great deal of attention from government officials and local village leadership.

"Pastor Sinyangwe shared that tribal chiefs and village leaders were reaching out to the Adventist Church, expressing their gratitude for the water program that Maranatha is helping to implement throughout the country," says Kyle Fiess, vice president of projects. "Their gratitude was coming from not only providing water for the people in the villages, but also for their cattle."

While clean drinking water for humans is vital, water for animals is also an integral part of a healthy

community. Often, water—clean or dirty—is so scarce that families will lose their cattle, their source of income, during dry seasons.

"With water, they're not only able to provide water for their community, but they are able to sustain their livelihood and keep their livestock alive," says Fiess. "It's something they're really grateful for. They're expressing their gratitude to the Adventist Church, saying that the church really cares about the physical needs of the people."

According to Sinyangwe, the local government is also grateful for Maranatha's work in strengthening Zambia's infrastructure through the construction of schools. Last year, Maranatha completed construction on a large campus called Kabwe Adventist School. This year, crews have been expanding Emmanuel Adventist Secondary School in Chisamba. The boarding school has an enrollment of about 300 students in grades 8 through 12, with a long waiting list. The addition of new dormitories and classrooms will provide space for more students.

As for the One-Day Churches, the structures provide strong, efficient places of worship for the growing Adventist Church. Zambia has more than 1.3 million members, and many congregations, particularly in northern Zambia, where Maranatha is focused, have no proper places of worship. 🍌



## ADVENTIST HEALTH MOVES TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

ORGANIZATION LAUNCHES A 10-YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL STRATEGY.

### ADVENTIST HEALTH, AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

On October 20, 2020, Adventist Health, the church-affiliated health-care system in the western United States, announced the launch of its Well-Being Division, solidifying its commitment to lead a twenty-first-century well-being transformation movement. With this far-reaching change, Adventist Health is further demonstrating its commitment to inspire health, wholeness, and hope within the communities it serves, health leaders of the organization said.

In keeping with its goals, Adventist Health acquired Blue Zones in early 2020, marking the first step in the creation of its Well-Being Division, and appointed Ben Leedle, Blue Zones CEO, as division president. This month, the organizations began their first partnership with Blue Zones Project, a transformational community-led well-being initiative, in Walla Walla, Washington.

“Adventist Health’s launch of the Well-Being Division is an important part of our 10-year transformation strategy to move from a health-care company to a health company,” Adventist Health CEO Scott Reiner said. “Our mission to live God’s love calls us to care for communities in ways that measurably and sustainably improve well-being.”

This move marks Adventist Health’s commitment from deliver-

ing care to improving well-being and quality of life for entire communities, which in turn improves health outcomes for individuals. It comes at a critical time during the COVID-19 pandemic and is essential to help communities and individuals recover and build long-term resiliency.

The Well-Being Division will identify and impact the root causes of well-being. It will collectively address needs related to individuals, communities, and organizations, and will impact all dimensions of well-being. These will include health, a sense of purpose, security, and prosperity to deliver results through direct interventions and by fostering change to human-made surroundings. This model is designed to improve the health of individuals and communities, and in turn, lower overall health-care costs.

“I was drawn to Adventist Health’s bold vision to reimagine the future of health care, and I am thrilled to be a part of Adventist Health,” Leedle said. “I look forward to championing this vision and working together to further strengthen communities and empower individuals to lead healthier lives. Never before in our lifetimes has there been a greater focus on the behaviors that keep us well. Our faith-based company is poised to elevate this conversation and lead our industry.”

Adventist Health’s strategic vision to improve individual, organizational, and community well-being is rooted in Seventh-day Adventist cultural heritage. Since its inception in the 1840s, the Adventist movement has encouraged a lifestyle of health and wellness. Additionally, Adventist Health recently acquired Blue Zones, whose proven, research-based solution improves community well-being by design. The Blue Zones model lifts well-being at the population level by making healthy choices easier in all places where people live, work, learn, pray, and play. Working with Blue Zones, the Well-Being Division will empower everyone, everywhere to live longer, better lives.

### ABOUT BLUE ZONES

Blue Zones uses evidence-based ways to help people live longer, better lives. The company’s work is based on explorations and research done by founder and *National Geographic* Fellow Dan Buettner, who identified the blue zones regions around the world where people live extraordinarily long and happy lives. Using original Blue Zones research, Blue Zones Project works with cities and counties to make healthy choices easier. Participating communities have experienced double-digit drops in obesity and tobacco use and have saved millions of dollars in health-care costs. 



### ELDEN RAMIREZ NAMED NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION UNDERSECRETARY.

Elden Ramirez, most recently president of the Montana Conference, was elected undersecretary of the North American Division (NAD) by the division executive committee on October 29. Ramirez succeeds Kyoshin Ahn, elected division secretary on August 20. “Elden has a heart for mission,” division president G. Alexander Bryant said, and is an “outstanding communicator.” Ramirez has served as district pastor, departmental director, and director of the NAD’s Office of Volunteer Ministries.



### KIDNAPPED ADRA WORKERS RELEASED.

Captors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) released two ADRA workers and another unidentified person after kidnapping and holding them for four days. ADRA president Michael Kruger said, “We are very grateful to God for His safeguard over them.” Kruger thanked local authorities and others assisting the release effort. ADRA in the DRC cares for refugees, helps fight Ebola, and cooperates with the government to build health clinics and schools.



### MARANATHA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL HELPS REALIZE A VISION.

In 1998, Ron Watts, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in India, told Maranatha Volunteers International president Don Noble of his vision to have 1 million new Adventists in India. They would require 10,000 church buildings. Maranatha has now erected 2,000 church buildings. Watts’s vision of 1 million members is more than fulfilled, and the COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped gospel advance in India. Maranatha has drilled 90 water wells there in the first 10 months of 2020.



### JACQUELINE MARCHES ON WASHINGTON—AGAIN! 57 YEARS LATER.

In 1963, 15-year old New Yorker Jacqueline Galloway Blake joined the March to Washington for civil rights. Fifty-seven years later, she joined the March again to peacefully protest against injustice, aware that though there are no segregation signs, covert segregation still comes—from a person wearing a suit and sitting in Congress; from a judge’s bench; from a prosecutor’s table. Christians bear the responsibility to oppose brutality and injustice.



### FOUR-YEAR-OLD BREAKS HIKING RECORD.

Her name is Juniper Netteburg, but her trail name is “Beast.” She may be the youngest to complete the 2,195-mile (3,529 kilometer) Appalachian Trail, traversed completely or in part by some 2 million people every year. The trail runs through 14 of the states in the United States, from Georgia to Maine. Juniper completed the entire trail on her own, carrying her own backpack. Her parents, Olen and Danae, are missionary doctors and have served at the Bere Adventist Hospital in Chad since 2010.



### ADVENTIST PHYSICIAN TO LEAD COLORADO MEDICAL SOCIETY.

In August 2020, Seventh-day Adventist physician Mark B. Johnson was elected the next president of the Colorado Medical Society (CMS), a more than 7,500-member society, including all specialties and employment fields. Johnson’s appointment takes effect September 2021. A three-decade member of CMS, Johnson has served as executive director of Jefferson County Public Health since 1990. He is chair of the Vision Board of the Boulder Seventh-day Adventist church in Boulder, Colorado.



### GLEN WAHLMAN’S ART IS PART OF HIS SCIENCE.

Glen Wahlman, Gem State Adventist Academy (GSAA) science teacher, has painted nature across many walls, including classrooms—in Kansas, Oregon, California, and now at GSAA in Idaho. The art serves a major teaching purpose for this 25-year veteran of the classroom as his students survey the Creation Week mural designed by his wife and painted by his entire family. “The center of all sciences is God, and praise to His creation is fundamental for my teaching,” Wahlman said.



## LAEL CAESAR

**A**ha! It's angel music season again—the season when we give them access, when we attend their recitals and write reviews; the season when we won't be forgetful to entertain angels, lest we fail to play host to some stranger unawares. Isn't that what Hebrews 13:2 speaks about?

### ANGEL UBIQUITY

Cherubs, then, all over the house. Cherubs atop our Christmas pines; cherubs—clasped palms—upon our front doors, anchored in holly; cherubs on guard at the creche in the yard, their synthetic imitations filling up the countryside, insistent on blessing your reluctant neighborhood. Cherubs cute and by the handful, never mind the vastness of the difference between them and cherubim—the ancient thing. Outrageous marvel: we now control our better angels by the host, and as easily as we do pine forests.

It's part of the Christmas miracle: our houses sprout trees, and their owners harness rosy-jowled, winged trinkets onto their branches. Cheeky cherubs for decoration, now readily confused with hea-

*Why don't angels sing more?*

then cupids, glow among the rhythmic blinks of variegated lights, savoring the music of their own season as it wafts through rooms, homes, supermarkets, and shopping malls. Our worse angels we feed to the trash, ordering new ones that will cooperate better when we set them dangling.

And yes, you do remember rightly, that on yesterdays millenia ago, angels were no way as simply handled, manipulated, and controlled. Even when they were rendering "Joy to the World" they were striking dread into the souls of their audience. Angels once made dread-full songsters!

### ANGEL SINGING IN THE BIBLE LONG AGO

Looking through the Bible, you may be challenged to draw the correct conclusion about angels and music. Their fame as songsters attaches in great part to their breakout Bethlehem performance back around the birth of the first of our past two millennia. The individuals who told it report being confronted by a huge crowd of them, calculated to overwhelm; a mighty army that suddenly showed up, tore away the darkness of a quiet



Neither their lack  
of status nor the  
utter unlikeliness  
of their account  
has suppressed  
the story.

night, and shattered the meek serenity of its mood.

At first there was only one. But people informed about angels, say, Samson's mother, Samson's simple father, Assyria's King Sennacherib, the Roman brigade at Jesus' tomb,<sup>1</sup> people who know anything about angels will understand both the shepherds' horrible fright and the holy kindness that staged the night's concert. First, the sight of a single angel terrified the audience (Luke 2:9); then the kindness of his declamation, powerful as it was, helped calm their nerves somewhat (verses 10-12); then the full chorus of the celestial choir, impossible to be restrained any longer, burst into view, belting out lyrics about glory to God (verses 13, 14) to the jarring consternation and indescribable rapture of the sheep watchers so vastly outnumbered and thoroughly shaken, and never to be the same again after the night of the angel concert.

Rank and file, even below, in their society's standing, neither their lack of status nor the utter unlikeliness of their account has suppressed the story. Indeed, once the shepherds had recovered enough from the shock of their unprecedented encounter with a horde from glory, they knew

immediately what they would do next: they would go and confirm what the singers had said—that the Lord Messiah born that night, was lying in a feeding trough in town.

They went—"straight to Bethlehem," moving "in a hurry"; they saw—"Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger"; and they conquered—blessed the ages with the story they told and retold ever after (Luke 2:15, 16). Beyond the cow barn visit that unrepeatable night they had no agenda but returning to their sheep-minding duties. But even as they did, and long after they had, the story of angels singing was on their lips; the angels' songs were in their hearts; and the dedication to its propagation drove their lives: they could not stop praising the God who had wrought the miracle of the babe in the manger who was Christ, the Lord, and who had gifted them the thrill of hearing angels sing. They bore their testimony everywhere they went. It was impossible to silence them. And it was impossible to look down or away, to yawn and shrug shoulders, to be any way distracted when they told you their story.

Their riveting credibility was not their stature

in the ranks of the literati. They were not, nor would they in future, be numbered among the leadership, Judea's men of responsibility, scholar scribes, the Sadducean priesthood, or their enemies, the Torah-devouring Pharisees. The Sadducees commanded the heights of status; the Pharisees draped themselves in unparalleled and highly persuadable religious credibility. The shepherds minded sheep, for which they were looked down upon. Their unusual story, incredible in all its dimensions, was not persuasive because of their status or its fantasy—hearing angels, seeing angels, seeing a great army of angels, taking instructions from angels, finding a baby in a barn based on angel guidance, finding God Messiah in a barn having been directed there by angels.

Indeed, all things considered, being shepherds and selected by God to experience and tell the story may well have been their narrative's least-credible dimension. Not because they were shepherds, but because they claimed to have attended an angel concert. Samson's mother can tell of an angel's "very awesome" appearance, and recall Samson's father's fear, "We will surely die"; Sennacherib can sorrow for his 185,000 slaughtered soldiers, and the Roman guard at Jesus' tomb, if disposed to candor, may admit that at the sight of one they "became like dead men." However caring angels may be, they frighten people. Add Daniel to your list: "I was frightened and fell on my face" (Dan. 8:17). Or Zacharias: "troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him" (Luke 1:12). But angelic choral music? That seems another matter.

## ANGEL CV

It should not be. Angel caring and fright inspiring are natural elements of any heavenly angel's day (and night) job: they frighten us because sin has degraded our morals and distorted our receptors. We do not naturally know right (Jer. 10:23; 2 Cor. 4:4), cannot hear right on our own (Ps. 53:3), and cannot stand pure, unmodified right (Ex. 33:18-23). But God, for love, comes anyway, muting His glory—as fire in desert shrubbery (Ex. 3:1, 2), a presence behind the second veil (Ex. 25:17-22; 26:31-33), in a tent of human flesh (John 1:14)—any way that lets Him come without destroying us instantly.

And His angels strive for our sake unrelentingly. Their resumé indicates that they are "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those

who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14). Read of their solicitude toward an exhausted man—one of God's spokespersons: they prepare food for him, and awaken him to quench his hunger (1 Kings 19:7); they awaken another one to set him free (Acts 12:1-17); they show up in dreams to give lifesaving instructions (Matt. 2:13), or give the "All clear!" when a threat has passed (verses 19, 20). They are so completely identified with their Master's business that He is comfortable wearing their title Himself in pre-Incarnation theophanies, appearing as a created being before He is born to Mary: to encourage runaway slave woman Hagar (Gen. 16); to surprise Abraham and soon-to-be-pregnant Sarah (Gen. 18).

"Angel" means "messenger." And maybe that's the catch here. When Trinidadians say they are going to "make a message" they mean that they've got something to do, maybe to purchase something at the store. Angel message makers are messengers on assignment. And all assignments are not created equal. Feeding hungry ministers, liberating jailed preachers—those are repeat assignments. Announcing the birth of Messiah God is not. And treating it as such would not do justice to their message. This was the big deal, the prime assignment, with implications of new life for lost sinners, resembling no other charge ever given them, except perhaps at God's first creation of life and humanity here on earth. And on that occasion they had sung (Job 38:7).

Bethlehem was time to sing again, of God come to earth to give humans life again, and restore us all to heaven again, where angels sing in season and out, more like a year-round matter (e.g., Rev. 5:11-13; 7:11, 12). No more trite human manipulations, nor any more exhausted prophets to feed; no more need to frighten shepherds or soldiers; and where, because of their unrelenting service to God for our salvation, they may now listen to us echo their Bethlehem chorus at last, sharing our own as we "sing the song of Moses and the Lamb by and by, and dwell with Jesus evermore."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For their insights on angels, see Judges 13:6, "very awesome"—Samson's mother; verse 22, "we will surely die"—Samson's father; 2 Kings 18:13-19:27, particularly 19:35: 185,000 soldiers slain in one soundless night—Sennacherib; Matthew 27:62-28:4, "the guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men"—the Roman soldiers. Scripture quotations in this article are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Stennett, "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," *The Church Hymnal* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), no. 553.

Lael Caesar is an associate editor of *Adventist Review*.



# 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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# OUR PRICELESS

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*The making of great music is a group activity.*

In December 2019, through a series of wonderful and unexpected circumstances, I was hired by the National Symphony Orchestra to play the organ for its annual performances of Handel's *Messiah*. It was truly the dream gig, the kind I dreamed of doing but never imagined I actually would.

On the night of the first performance, walking through the backstage orchestra locker rooms, I looked at the black-and-white photographs lining the walls; signed pictures of some of the world-renowned soloists and conductors who had made music on that stage.

Members of the orchestra were engaged in their own preconcert ritual. Well-practiced instruments lovingly removed from their cases, bowstring tension checked, horn valves oiled, oboe reeds selected and wetted. I wound my way past the double bassists filing toward the stage doors and sat in a chair in a dark corner near the right stage door.

My own preperformance ritual is considerably more pedestrian than checking the string tension on a Stradivarius. Unzipping my backpack, I pulled out a pair of well-worn, black leather shoes. If I was a character in *Downton Abbey*, my valet would definitely not recommend these shoes, given the pinnacle of formal wear my white tie and tails represented. But then, I'm no lord of the manor; I'm an organist, and these are organ shoes, built for toe-heel gliding across the wooden pedal keys, not for striding into elegant dining halls.

My shoes tied securely, I stepped through the stage door and out under the full lights and view of the capacity audience of the Kennedy Center Concert Hall stage. Sliding across the polished mahogany bench I tried to put on a facade of coolness, as if this were something I did all the time. But inside I could barely contain my excitement.

**MARK WILLEY**



# INSTRUMENTS

Reaching under the console, I turned the key that switched on power to the instrument and gave me full control over the 5,000 pipes speaking from chambers over the orchestra. I checked my preset combinations, refined over the rehearsals I'd played the week before. Everything was as it should be.

A few minutes before the concert, the choir began to file into place. Looking up into the choir loft, I recognized the expression on many of their faces. They were as thrilled to be there as I was. We were ready for the downbeat.

## OUR INSTRUMENTS

Being a small part of these performances was truly the thrill of a lifetime, something I will never forget. Sitting there at the console of this amazing organ in this incredible concert hall, I was in awe of all the players, the conductor, and the singers who made it happen.

As incredible as all the instrumental players were, one instrument eclipsed them all: the humble, yet extraordinary, human voice. From the soaring lyric lines of the soprano singing "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" to the homophonic pulses of the choir belting the "Hallelujah Chorus," the voices carried that music into the hearts of the audiences at those performances. The rest of us, playing instruments of wood, string, and metal,

could only dimly imitate the glory of the voice.

We all have them, two small bands of smooth muscle tissue, little more than the size of a dime, that vibrate as exhaling air passes from our lungs and into the air. This rushing air creates a wave motion in the vocal cords as they slam into one another and then are blown apart again, which happens between 55 and 1,047 times per second, for the low A of a basso to the high C of a soprano, respectively.

If you were to hear this buzz directly at its source, it would not be a very flattering sound, but more of a fleshy, annoying, squeaky buzz, like a full balloon leaking air through a semi-squeezed opening. But from their origins in the larynx, these thin little sound waves undergo a remarkable transformation, resonating through the throat, mouth, and nasal cavities and over the tongue before emerging as a sound with pitch, articulation, and shape. Singing comes naturally to humans, but like all natural skills, with practice the human voice can be refined into an instrument of staggering beauty, one that reaches into the soul and communicates in ways that every other human-made instrument can only attempt to emulate.

As if this weren't miraculous enough, each of our individual voices can, singing as a combined single voice, when done with experience and exuberance, produce a sound that is much greater

## Singing as a combined single voice can, when done with experience and exuberance, produce a sound that is much greater than its individual parts.

than its individual parts. In the best of ensemble singing, our shortcomings are made up for by the strengths of others, and vice versa.

To do it well means reaching out with our ears to truly listen to the singers around us, all as we make minute and subconscious adjustments to the musculature of our diaphragm, tongue, nose, and throat, all while those around us are doing the same thing. It is extraordinary collaboration on practically a metaphysical level, the results of which lift our minds and hearts to the heavens. When it comes together, voices sync up and “ping,” finding power and depth much greater than the sum of their parts. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in “The Singers”:

“God sent His singers upon earth  
With songs of sadness and of mirth,  
That they might touch the hearts of men,  
And bring them back to heaven again.”

### AN ENSEMBLE TO GOD’S GLORY

When I first arrived in Maryland in the early 1990s and began attending the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church, I marveled at the power and exuberance of the congregation’s singing. They had recently installed a new organ and renovated the sanctuary to create a better acoustic space for hymn singing. The congregation, still taking joy in their new space, would send their voices to the absolute pinnacle of the roof, at times burying the 4,600 pipes of the organ with the dynamic power of their combined voices.

As glorious as much of the solo organ repertoire is to play, particularly on a great instrument in a large, resonant room, nothing is more soul-satisfying for an organist than to accompany an enthusiastic congregation singing one of Christianity’s great hymns. At its best, accompanying a congregation from the organ is a perfect symbiosis of leading and accompanying; following, while pointing the way. It is a subtle craft. Lift a little here at a comma and 500 people will breathe together, prompted by the

small silence you created, ready for the next phrase. Make a wrong note, create an unexpected dissonance, and those same 500 people will falter and lose their confidence for the rest of the hymn. It’s an awesome privilege and a sacred responsibility.

In 1994 I started to accompany the Spencerville church congregation, first as assistant during the first worship service, then as organist and director of music in 1996. During the course of those 25 or so years, I accompanied more than 5,000 hymns, every one of them an amazing privilege.

On festival days (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter [branded “Resurrection Sabbath” for some of our Adventist brothers and sisters]) we hired some of the best brass players in the world, working in the District of Columbia with our nation’s military ensembles, and the sanctuary would absolutely resonate with the sounds of singing, brass, and organ. Those experiences live on in my mind as the ultimate expression of humans striving to respond to the mystery and wonder of the divine, giving everything they can to make sound lift in worship.

### THE PERIL OF UNINSPIRATION

During the past decade or so, I had begun to sense a kind of complacency, even at times boredom, in the congregational singing I accompanied. Even in some of the festival services, I often felt a disconnectedness from the act of corporate worship and singing. Perhaps some of it was my fault, jaded from accompanying so many worship services, so many hymns. For many people, congregational singing seems old fashioned, a relic of the past.

True, it can be earthy, sometimes faltering and unrefined. We can become used to consuming music and increasingly less accustomed to making it. In our modern world, with highly edited and processed audio and video recordings at our fingertips, maybe we’d become bored with the sounds we made together, taking for granted the miracle of connectedness that singing together represents.

Such was the scene in January and February of this year as we began to hear of a mysterious virus that was ravaging distant parts of the globe. As it drew closer to our shores, we could not know what was coming for us, or what changes it would bring to our lives.

In March the rapidly spreading pandemic forced the closing of practically every church across the globe. Synagogues, temples, mosques, cathedrals,

parish churches—all emptied and became silent. Some, like Spencerville Adventist Church, blessed with technology and resources, continued their worship through the marvels of livestream. But no matter how refined the video picture or how well put together, the musical offerings of those virtual services, the congregations, once standing shoulder to shoulder and raising their voices together in song, now sat silent, watching screens large and small as worship services were conducted without them. An eternal optimist, I thought it would last a couple months perhaps. Yet as I write, the quarantine continues.

Last month, for a wedding that featured just the couple, a pastor, and me in the organ loft, I played the hymn “How Great Thou Art” that the couple had envisioned, prepandemic, would be sung by a full congregation of their friends and family. Nobody sang as I played. There was no collaboration, no phrasing to point out the punctuation, no shades of stop selection to bring out nuances in the text. It was empty and strange. I missed the congregation, longed for the sound of their voices with which to blend the notes and chords of the organ I played.

### **OUR CONNECTEDNESS**

On a late summer afternoon mountain bike ride with a friend of mine, we stopped to revel in a particularly beautiful stretch of trail we’d just experienced. As my friend talked, I was mesmerized by a little light show of tiny droplets that floated over his shoulder, revealed by the setting sun at his back. They seemed weightless, sparkling as they rose on the breeze. It was the first time I’d ever seen with my own eyes this phenomenon of respiratory droplets that is suspected as the primary transmission vehicle for COVID-19. I realized I was probably seeing only the largest of them, that there were in fact many more I couldn’t see.

Remember that bit about singing together requiring the mutual extending of our ears and the synchronization of our vocal folds to create unified, blended sound? Well, it turns out that we’re sharing a lot more than just a shared sense of pitch and tone. While some may find it gross to imagine a mist of tiny droplets floating around, generated by the synchronized breathing of a choir full of singers, I find it beautiful; more evidence that we are all connected, our lives threaded together in a physical, viral manifestation of the blending of our sound waves.

This interaction, on the sonic and the viral level, has been a part of singing from the first notes humans sang together. That we are discovering it only now is the only surprise. Singing is risky. Do it right, and we create something of such beauty as to move another’s soul. At the same time, as our respiratory droplets sparkle and drift, we might spread or contract a deadly virus. We are connected in strange and frightening ways, our sound waves and viral fates woven inextricably together.

### **REMEMBERING THE IDEAL**

We stand on the verge of a most unusual Christmas, the first for more than 1,000 years when, around the world churches will not be full of people singing carols together and choirs will not be preparing and singing concerts of festive music. Organists around the world will miss accompanying their congregations in the singing of the great carols of Advent and Christmas. I never imagined I would not play that three half-diminished seventh chord that punctuates the start of the line “Word of the Father” in the David Willcocks arrangement of the final verse of “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” but this year I doubt I will.

Every church I know wants desperately to gather together once again. Some are ready to do it now, their need for corporate worship outweighing their fear of the virus, while others are more cautious. Yet there is value in this time when we can’t worship the way we once did, and value even in not being able to sing together.

In the silence of the empty churches where we once sang and worshipped, the walls now wait quietly for our return and for our voices to sound together again. We will eventually return. What that return sounds like is up to us. My hope is that in this vacuum of silence, when singing together is dangerous, when we feel the pangs of longing for something we once took for granted, we will rediscover the exuberant joy we once felt when singing together. That we will always remember when we couldn’t sing, and always treasure the connection to one another that comes through the coordination of sound waves from those wonderful little folds of muscle vibrating in the larynx as the breath of life emerges in a universe of sound and tiny twinkling stars. ♣

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**Mark Willey** has served as an organist, choir director, and minister of music at Spencerville Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, since 1996.

# FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE. MATTHEW 10:8

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# OUR IDENTITY AND DESTINATION

**B**illy Graham was fond of telling a story about Albert Einstein. Einstein was traveling but couldn't find his train ticket when the conductor asked for it. After looking through all his belongings, Einstein couldn't find the ticket. Finally the conductor said, "We know who you are, Dr. Einstein. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it."

Before the conductor moved to the next car, he saw Einstein down on his hands and knees trying to find his ticket. He gently said, "Dr. Einstein, please don't worry about it. I know who you are."

Einstein looked up and said, "I, too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going!"

Many of us, in our serious moments, may be afflicted with what some refer to as the imposter syndrome, the internal belief that we are not as capable and competent as people think we are. It's the nagging feeling that we're really fakes. We tend to put ourselves down in comparison to others and believe that it's only a matter of time before people discover that we are, in fact, frauds.

The late Maya Angelou said, "I have written 11 books, but each time I think, *Uh-oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out.*"

Many believers struggle with doubt and experience the imposter syndrome in their relationship with Christ. A study conducted by the Institute of World Mission some time ago discovered that fewer than 70 percent of Adventists worldwide are confident about their salvation.\*

Some believers read these beautiful and assuring words, but doubt that they apply to them: "And this is the testimony:

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13).

How can we be confident of our salvation?

First, we have to recognize in the providence of God and circumstances of life that God loves us and has a plan for our lives.

Second, we have to admit our undone state right up front; no excuses, no cover-ups, no rationalizations. We have to admit we cannot save ourselves (see Rom. 3:23).

Third, we have to understand that Jesus is the only solution to our sin-guilt problem. He loved and died for us (Rom. 5:8; John 14:6).

Finally, we have to accept Jesus as Redeemer, Savior, and Lord. As long as we commit to Christ and His righteousness, we have the assurance of salvation (see John 1:12; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8, 9).

Let's grasp His promise: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

This is the time to be sure. Let's invite Christ every day to run the affairs of our lives. Let's commune with Him through prayer and read the Bible for strength. Let's serve devotedly, meeting with other believers and serving others.

This is who we are, and it will take us where we want to be. ♣

\* "Three Strategic Issues: A World Survey" (Institute of World Mission, Andrews University, 2002).

**Delbert W. Baker**, a former vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, was until 2020, vice chancellor of the Adventist University of Africa near Nairobi, Kenya.

**TRANSFORMATION TIPS**  
**DELBERT W. BAKER**



**MANY BELIEVERS STRUGGLE WITH DOUBT AND EXPERIENCE THE IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST.**

Introduction to

# ADVENTIST REVIEW CHRISTMAS CONCERT

**A**cross the ages and climes of Christmas celebration, one thing, more than any other, holds us all and is held by us in common. So it is whether we live in Caribbean or South Pacific islands; whether across the island continent down under or across grand Asia's continental time zones; whether we steam in earth's equatorial forests or freeze in earth's ice-bound regions; whether ours are giddy dreams of stocking-loads of goodies for the palate and ingenuous new packages of fun, or dreams dashed by poverty's perplexity and the unique challenge it brings in the holiday season;

whether hedonism is the only inspiration or we are numbered among the faithful who worship the Christ as their Savior and Lord.

That one thing is music, from the absurdity of "Jingle Bells" as sung by South American children who have never seen snow or sleigh, through the hypnotizing plainchant that calls, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" to Handel's unconquerable chorus of hallelujahs, music is where Christmas is.

Christmas may be many other things, but Christmas is music.

This time around, the music of Christmas that you hear on *Adventist Review* television (at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv)) is reflected in program notes in the pages of your magazine's December edition.

The concert opens with John Millea's question, "Who's This Girl?" You know the answer: she is the mother of the Baby, the Baby whose advent birthed the joy of eternal salvation. Then 12-year-old Alex strums out on steel pans (steel drums) the melody of the holy night of the birth of Messiah, and Heidi invites Emmanuel, a capella, to come. Then follows more music of children reminding us of home, before Anwar reminds us of what it cost the Baby to bring us salvation: it's the cross, "The Old, Rugged Cross." Marguerite wonders out loud if Mary knew what she was doing, knew what the implications were, of Christ's virgin birth.

As Anwar reminds of the cross, so do others remind us of the crown. Conductor Jonathan Wall leads the excitement as the choir of Southwestern Adventist University recognizes God's agent for declaring the news of the glorious end of all, "John, the Revelator."

As Wintley sings we think again of the holy night that made everything possible and close our concert with a final reminder, on the wings of music from Kerron Hislop and the choir and orchestra of the University of the Southern Caribbean, that our faith in the Baby and our celebration of joy are not in vain: the day of blissful forever that He promised will come.



Scan to experience the *Adventist Review* Christmas Concert right now.



# WHO'S THIS GIRL?

JOHN MILLEA AND JENNIFER JILL SCHWIRZER

Who's this girl who looks forth like the morning  
 Clothed with the sun?  
 Bright crown of stars adorning  
 Beauty is undone. . . .  
 How did the prince become a dragon  
 Throw God's stars down with his tail?  
 She's been faithful to her one true Lover  
 Through pain and joy  
 They gave their hearts to each other  
 Now she bears His boy  
 But the dragon, . . .

John's Revelation 12 vision features a mother giving birth. The name "Christmas" is supposed to be all about that. We see the Madonna-and-child theme everywhere, don't we? It touches our hearts to know that Jesus entered the human race the way we all do—through a human womb.

What makes both Revelation 12 and the story of the first advent of Jesus unique is the conflict boiling around this simple act of childbearing. It requires much pain and turmoil for the average woman to bear a child—much more so for both Revelation's woman and the mother of Jesus.

In Revelation 12 the luminescent woman screams in labor pains while a hideous dragon licks his chops, waiting to devour the baby. She gives birth anyway, and flees into the wilderness for 1,260 days.

In the story of the first advent, a glowing young virgin wearily lays herself down in a Bethlehem stable to bear a child, after which the enemy incites King Herod to take that child's life by murdering all the baby boys in town. Warned by an angel, Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt.

The stories follow the same basic arc—a lovely woman bears a precious baby, then a murderous tyrant drives them into hiding.

There's another birth the mur-

derous tyrant would love to prevent—the new birth, Jesus born in us today. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) opposes his agenda and inflames his rage. Behind the soft lights, good cheer, and glorious music of Christmas, storms a cosmic conflict intense enough to scare us into hiding. When we receive God's life-transforming Spirit, experiencing that labor, struggle, and birth of a changed heart, we place Jesus on display before the universe, something His archnemesis hates.

As we struggle through the experience of bearing the image of Jesus in an ungodly world, we receive strength from the witness of the little virgin of Bethlehem who risked her all to answer God's calling on her life. She witnesses to us of the awesome narrative of the woman, God's Church, birthing the image of His Son in the sight of a dragon. Courageous Christmas, children of God.

John Millea's song, "Who's This Girl?" is part of *Adventist Review's* Christmas concert. You may hear it now at special.adventistreview.tv.

Poem by **John Millea** of The Lesser Light Collective, creators of *The King Dreams* and *The Lamb Wins*; learn more at [www.thelesserlightcollective.com](http://www.thelesserlightcollective.com). Writeup by **Jennifer Jill Schwirzer**, author, counselor, musician.



# LITTLE [STEEL] DRUMMER BOY



## NEVILLA OTTLEY

One of the great anthems of Christmas is Placide Cappeau's lyrics, "Cantique de Noël," ("O Holy Night"). This rigorous translation brings out Cappeau's message well\*:

Midnight, Christians, it is the solemn hour  
When God as man descended among us  
To expunge the stain of original sin,  
And to put an end to the wrath of his Father.  
The entire world thrills with hope  
On this night which gives us a Savior.  
People, on your knees, attend your deliverance.  
Christmas! Christmas! Here is the Redeemer!  
Christmas! Christmas! Here is the Redeemer!  
The ardent light of our faith,  
Guides us all to the cradle of the Infant,  
As in ancient times a brilliant star  
Conducted the Magi there from the Orient.  
The King of kings was born in a humble manger;  
O mighty ones of today, proud of your grandeur,  
It is to your pride that God preaches.  
Bow your heads before the Redeemer!  
Bow your heads before the Redeemer!  
The Redeemer has broken all shackles.  
The earth is free and heaven is open.  
He sees a brother where there was once but a slave;  
Love unites those who restrain the sword.  
Who will tell Him our gratitude?  
It is for us all that He was born, that He suffered and died.  
People, stand up, sing your deliverance!  
Christmas! Christmas! Let us sing the Redeemer!  
Christmas! Christmas! Let us sing the Redeemer!

In 2007 the William Killebrew Foundation was founded to support victims of abuse and gun violence. As a child Killibrew was raped, saw his mother and sister shot, and saw his grandfather shoot someone over a parking lot



ALEXANDER  
DAVON ADJAHOE

dispute. Every Christmas the William Killebrew Foundation invites various musicians to gather for a holiday concert to raise funds for this foundation. In 2019 it invited 12-year-old Alexander Davon Adjahoe to play Adolphe Adam's melody, "O Holy Night" on steel drums, his double seconds pans. In context of personal experience and the occasion that produced this music, the Christmas hymn's most significant lines for me, as heard in its modern English translation, are the words "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother."

Adjahoe's solo, playing an arrangement of Mark Hayes's "O Holy Night," is part of the *Adventist Review's* Christmas concert. You may hear it now at [special.adventist-review.tv](http://special.adventist-review.tv).

\*Translated from the French.

**Nevilla E. Ottley** is founder and principal of the Ottley Music School in Hyattsville, Maryland, United States.

# REJOICE! REJOICE!

HEIDI MENDOZA MURPHY

**H**ope is a powerful thing. It can completely change our hearts and minds. To be able to rejoice in the unseen is a power given only by God Himself. Being able to experience reality with all its bumps and bruises is easier when we are protected by hope. We are living in unpredictable times. To equip ourselves with the divine power to rejoice, regardless of our situation, is something attainable. It is possible with Emmanuel, God with us.

Something about this hymn makes me take a breath—it's tone, it's choice of musical notes, it's words of desperation mixed with hope—that gives me pause. This is one of those hymns that is played at the end of a Christmas service under the glow of soft golden lights. We've heard it countless times.

But have you listened to the words of this hymn? It has a reverence that is felt immediately. There is no doubt of the emotions expressed from the first line: "O come, O come, Emmanuel." Can we feel the intensity in the calling? He doesn't say it once, he says it twice. Please, please, come Emmanuel. He then goes on to explain his emotions about why he needs Emmanuel.

"And ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here"

Have you ever felt captive? Captive by fear, captive by the unknown, captive by the lack of finances, captive by a broken relationship or captive by loneliness, or maybe even literally captive? We've all had moments of captivity. Yet that's when we need to call on Emmanuel. He says, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). We can find our hope in Him. Our key is in that next line, "Until the Son of God appears." The word "until" is key. Without God there is no hope. If you

**If you ask God to fill your spirit with hope, that's when the chains of captivity fall away. When the Son of God appears we can do only one thing: rejoice.**



ask God to fill your spirit with hope, that's when the chains of captivity fall away. When the Son of God appears we can do only one thing: rejoice.

"Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel."

No doubt is expressed in these lines! Read them again. It says "shall come...." That means He hasn't come yet. The ones singing are rejoicing in the unseen, rejoicing in the fact that they know that Emmanuel will come. Emmanuel will change everything. He will rescue them. He will release them from captivity. He brings hope when there is no hope.

The command to rejoice and the assurance that He will come are unquestionable. The word "shall" shows no doubt. And when we have no doubt, we can't help but rejoice. So let's not lose our confidence now. We need to rejoice now more than ever and hope in the unseen. We need to strengthen our faith and sing loudly: "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O, Israel." He is coming soon. Rejoice! Rejoice!

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**Heidi Mendoza Murphy**, a senior art director at Johnson-Rauhoff Agency, is a singing Sabbath School teacher and single mom dedicated to God and to her children.

# FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Come home. Christmas at home elicits thoughts of love, family, and acceptance.



“Softly and Tenderly,” a hymn written by Will L. Thompson in 1880, is probably not a hymn requested during the Christmas season. Perhaps it should be.

“Come home, come home,  
Ye who are weary, come home:  
Earnestly, tenderly Jesus is calling,  
Calling, ‘O sinner, come home!’”

Come home. Christmas at home elicits thoughts of love, family, and acceptance. In these days of strife, tension, and unrest, it is well for us to be reminded of the promise of rest and an eternal home prepared for us by the One who was first laid in a manger.

The Adventist Children’s Choir sings under the direction of Jane Lanning. Lanning founded the choir in 2010 primarily to expose young singers to sacred music, particularly hymns. This elementary choir consists of 95 members in grades 4 through 8, primarily attending Spencerville Adventist Academy, in Silver Spring, Maryland, but it also includes children from the surrounding community. The choir performs regularly for church services, has placed first in several music festivals, and recorded for Hope Channel. 🎵

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A performance of Thompson’s arrangement by the Adventist Children’s Choir, under the direction of Jane Lanning, is part of the *Adventist Review’s* Christmas concert. You may hear it now at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv).

## ADVENTIST CHILDREN’S CHOIR



# A CROSS, A CROWN



ANWAR OTTLEY

When contemporary worship music tends to highlight declarations of praise toward God, celebrating His nature, attributes, and promises, congregations often overlook the opportunity to employ musical content reflective of other perspectives associated with the Christian experience. There are songs that address our spiritual dependence or our yearning for closeness with God. But few in the canon of Adventist hymnody allow room for perspectives on pain, struggle, or humility.

“The Old Rugged Cross,” written in 1912 by George Bennard, a Methodist evangelist, expresses his fascination with the theology surrounding Christ’s humility, His sacrifice on the cross, and the humility His cross-bearing followers must possess. In the chorus of the hymn Bennard penned, “So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down.” The implication is that in order to fully embrace Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, we must first lay aside the things in our lives that we have allowed to determine our worth. Jesus makes this clear when He said that “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Cross bearing is an unavoidable feature of the Christian journey, and always involves humility.

This is perhaps why the hymn experienced immediate success shortly following its publication in 1913. When it was written, evangelical revivals were sweeping across the United States, and this gospel song struck a chord with congregations everywhere. The song was part of a shifting trend in worship music, whose lyrical content focused on the Christian experience, portraying God as a personable deity—one who walks with us and knows our struggles.

Here is the paradox of the Christian experience: in following Christ, we must humble ourselves and embrace seasons of hardship along the way while also delighting in His love. Bennard’s hymn reflects this tug-of-war, or healthy tension. In the first stanza he labels the cross an “emblem of suffering and shame,” yet the singer loves “that



old cross.” The cross is “despised by the world,” yet it “has a wondrous attraction for me.” We cannot have one without the other.

Not long ago, using the benefits of technology and multilayered recording tools, I “performed” my father’s eight-part male vocal arrangement of “The Old Rugged Cross” for a COVID-19-imposed virtual Communion service at Takoma Park Seventh-day Adventist Church. The arrangement was posted on social media the next day. Within 24 hours it had more than 20,000 views. Days later the count surpassed 40,000.

As I searched for some explanation of its short-term success, it seemed to me that songs like this provide perspective and resolution of faith when so much is uncertain in our country and society. When all is stripped away—the bells, whistles, and ornate presentations of worship our culture embraces—we are left with the bare essentials of what can bring us through life’s hardest struggles.

Fortunately, Jesus is with us during those moments, and promises to remain with us through the process. We may bear the cross of injustice, classism, sickness, suffering, and more, but as Bennard writes, we look forward to the day we will exchange our crosses for eternal crowns.

You may hear Anwar’s eight-part harmony now, part of *Adventist Review’s* Christmas concert, at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv). 🎧

A link to the recording can be found here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRAS8hOsb0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRAS8hOsb0s).

**Anwar Ottley** is associate pastor of worship at the Takoma Park Seventh-day Adventist Church and an assistant professor of music at Washington Adventist University.

# THINKING OF MARY KNOWING

## How much did she really know?

Most mothers worldwide can identify with the sentiments of the song “Mary, Did You Know?”\* I certainly do. Mark Lowry, who finished penning these lyrics in 1991, did an outstanding job of capturing the depth and magnitude of the most extraordinary story of all time—the birth of the Savior of the world. As a mother of two children, each question posed in these lyrics takes me deeper into the heart of what Mary could have been feeling as she watched Jesus live.

### MARY, YOUNG MOTHER: WHAT DID SHE KNOW?

“Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?” And “did you know that . . . [He] will save our sons and daughters?” Put yourself in her shoes and imagine that the boy child you labored over from your womb into stable grass would be the One to save humanity. Then visualize how Mary must have felt each time she saw Jesus do something extraordinary, such as turn water into wine. Yes, she knew who He was—the Christ—but that head knowledge didn’t necessarily cancel out the maternal instincts, yearnings, and labors of this loving mother.

“Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?” and “calm a storm with His hand?” Living

## MARGUERITE SAMUEL

through the heart of a mother, I feel the weight of all sorts of emotions at once. I feel joy at the sight of a beautiful and healthy baby boy cuddled in my arms. Only a parent can know that type of joy. I feel wonder and awe that I am now responsible for another human life, let alone the world’s Savior.

I tremble as I listen to my child—not yet a teenager—tell me that He “had to be in [His] Father’s house.” All I think is “The only place You need to be is in Your mother’s house!”

### MOTHER OF GRIEF AND OMNIPOTENCE

Agony overtakes me when I think of how Mary’s Son was nailed to two pieces of wood and dangled on a hill for all to see. Sorrow permeates me as I see Jesus miraculously restore life, then be viciously rejected by His very own for not being the miracle they hoped He would be.

“Mary, did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod? When you kissed your little baby, you’ve kissed the face of God.” Wait? What? What do you mean (hand on hip)? My Bahamian culture comes out as I think, *Who? This sweet little innocent child of mine? He’s God?* Even though Mary had seen and heard from an angel, I imagine that Jesus’ destiny could not undo the intimate connection that occurs only between mother and child. She was, after all, still human and a doting mother.

Mark Lowry helps us understand just a little bit better the gravity of Mary’s predicament as the mother of God’s Son. Buddy Green brilliantly put this poignant poem to music and brings to life this unequivocal declaration of Jesus’ sovereignty. “This sleeping child you’re holding is the great ‘I Am.’ ”

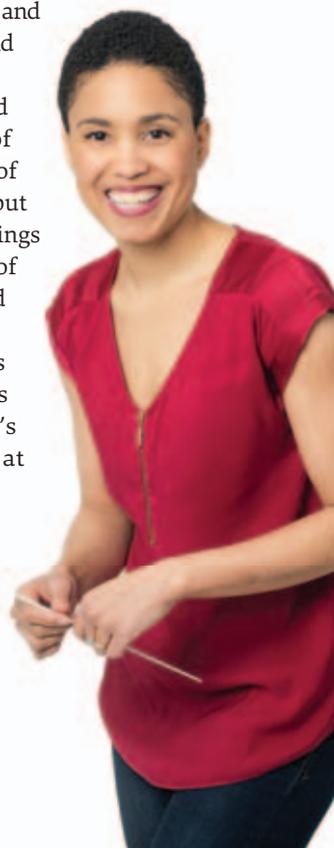
Marguerite sings Mark Lowry’s poignant lyrics to Buddy Green’s music as part of *Adventist Review’s* Christmas concert. Hear her now at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv). 🎶

\* Words and music by Mark Lowry and Buddy Green, © Word Music, Inc.

Link to the music video: [drive.google.com/file/d/1x0NFZlpU7eHyTMUZX6gZRuppUhlj0FzL/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x0NFZlpU7eHyTMUZX6gZRuppUhlj0FzL/view?usp=sharing).

**Marguerite Samuel**, vocal coach and clinician, is artistic director, Women’s Ensemble of Plant City Community Chorale, in Florida, United States.

Scan to listen.





# MEETING JESUS AGAIN



## This world is not our home.

Every year in Keene, Texas, the music faculty of Southwestern Adventist University hosts a music festival that is the highlight of the academic schedule for musicians and many others. Over the past decade the festival has featured thousands of performers, providing an outlet for choral and instrumental masterworks, while exploring and premiering new music. The past four years the festival has hosted award-winning composers Ēriks Ešenvalds, Kim André Arnesen, Craig Courtney, and Brandon A. Boyd. This distinguished list of composers was commissioned to write music specifically for SWAU's ensemble, the University Singers, while also assisting in helping the musicians prepare for the premieres. Over the past eight years the University

**JONATHAN WALL /  
SOUTHWESTERN ADVENTIST  
UNIVERSITY CHOIR**

Singers have traveled the globe, taking the gospel in music to 16 countries, sharing love, compassion, and inspiration through passionate and finessed performance.

Among the classics they have performed is a spirited, traditional call-and-response song, "John the Revelator." The singers sustain an arresting dialogue as "Who's that writin'?" is answered with "John, the revelator." As they question and answer we may ourselves reflect on what we have read of the revelator's writin': of the land and time where God will dry all our tears, "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Rev. 21:4, KJV). That'll be the day!

A performance of "John, the Revelator," by the Southwestern Adventist University Choir under the direction of Jonathan Wall, is part of the *Adventist Review's* Christmas concert. You may hear it now at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv).

**Jonathan Wall** is associate professor of Music and director of choral and vocal studies at Southwestern Adventist University, Keene, Texas, United States.

# O HOLY NIGHT

WINTLEY PHIPPS

## What it meant and means



It has been my humble privilege to sing the Christmas hymn “O Holy Night” in many venues around the world. None more memorable than the morning I sang that song in a prison in Slovenia. It was the first time the prison authorities had allowed families of the prisoners to join them inside the prison for a Christmas concert. Seeing children and wives holding their dads and husbands at Christmas in that prison was a moving experience for me.

This song inspires within me a holy optimism, an adoring faith.

It reminds me that Christmas is about a tiny Prince, arriving on the wings of prophecy, carrying in His heart a transformative vision, to redeem and restore the likeness of God in humanity.

This song reminds me that He came from outside our earthly realm, entered our reality, and conquered death with the kiss of love.

That holy night, in that small town of Bethlehem, angels were heard on high, singing, praising, and glorifying God.

A young Mary gave birth to humanity’s greatest miracle, the Supreme Monarch of the universe, veiled in the form of a child.

His name, chosen by right of paternal prerogative, still fills

the earth with beauty and the air with song.

This song reminds me that the first time, He came veiled in the form of a child.

The next time He comes in majesty, magnificence, and splendor.

The first time a star marked His arrival.

The next time every star, in reverence, will fall out of its place.

The first time Wise Men and shepherds brought Him gifts.

The next time He comes with His rewards, crowns and diadems, garlands and scepters.

The first time there was no room for Him in the inn.

The next time the cosmos will be unable to contain His glory.

The first time only a few attended His arrival.

The next time every eye shall see Him and every knee shall bow, and tongue confess His Lordship.

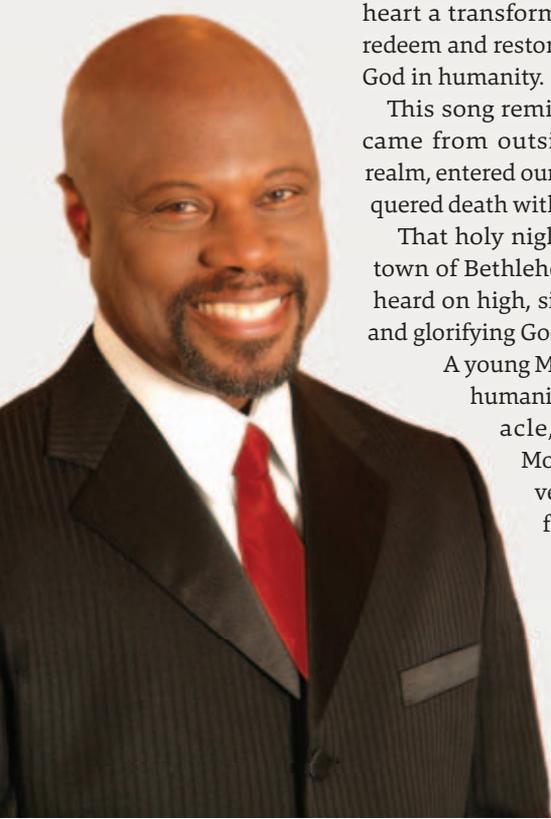
How fitting that the final chorus ends on a soaring, triumphant note of sovereignty.

“Christ is the Lord, Oh, praise His name forever!

His power and glory evermore proclaim!”

Wintley Phipps’s solo, “O Holy Night,” is part of the *Adventist Review’s* Christmas concert. You may hear it now at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv).

**Wintley Phipps**, pastor, founder of the U.S. Dream Academy and two recording companies, has sung for six United States presidents.





## KERRON HISLOP/UNIVERSITY CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN

# A DAY WILL COME

Christians look forward to joy.



**T**he song performed virtually by our university choir and orchestra is called “A Day Will Come.” This piece encourages us that in these uncertain times, when it seems as if the challenges of each new day are greater than those of the days gone before, it can be difficult to see light at the end of the tunnel.

“A Day Will Come” offers hope that despite the fact that it may seem as if we are “seeing through a glass darkly,” one day the hope of our faith will be realized and everything will make sense when all is revealed at the end of time. We hope that this song is as much of a blessing to you as it is to us. We pray that your spirits will be uplifted by its inspiring message.

The performing ensemble, the university choir

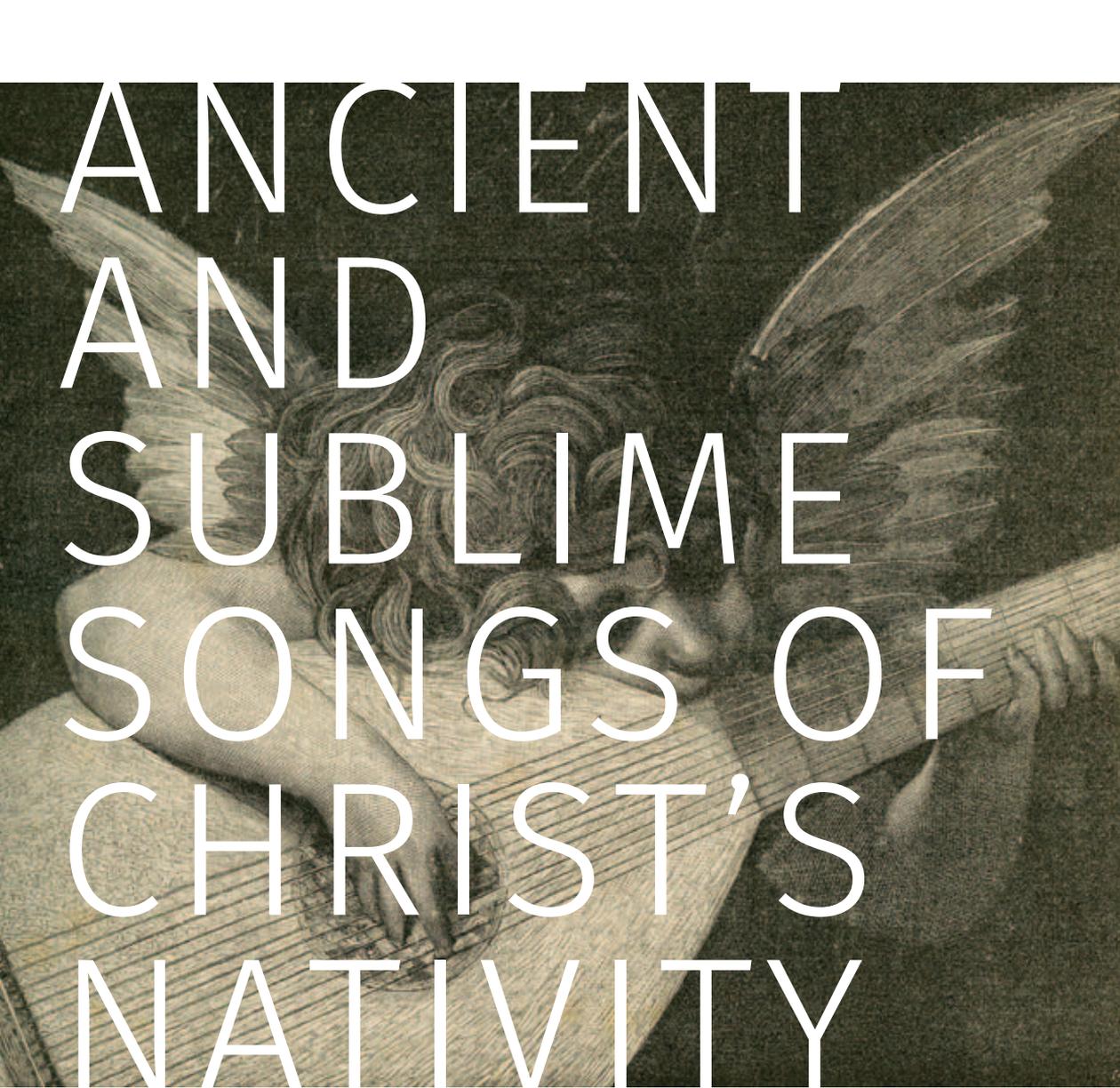
and orchestra (UCO) of the University of the Southern Caribbean, is our Music Department’s largest ensemble, featuring a blend of voices and instruments. The group was awarded the “Choir of the Year” title in 2019 and 2020 at the Gospel Music Awards of Trinidad and Tobago (GMAT).

USC mUSiC is delighted to have an opportunity to share our music and be a part of this *Adventist Review* multimedia Christmas special.

The USC Choir, singing “A Day Will Come” under the direction of Kerron Hislop, is part of the *Adventist Review*’s Christmas concert. You may hear it now at [special.adventistreview.tv](http://special.adventistreview.tv)

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**Kerron Hislop** is coordinator of the music program at the University of the Southern Caribbean, Maracas, Trinidad and Tobago.

A classical painting of an angel playing a harp, with large white text overlaid. The angel is shown from the waist up, with large, feathered wings. The harp is a large, wooden instrument with many strings. The background is dark and textured.

# ANCIENT AND SUBLIME SONGS OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

Singing our way through the Gospel narrative

**DANIEL OSCAR PLENC**

**M**any of the songs that we sing to commemorate the birth of Christ (and we could not imagine the season without doing so) are inspired by the so-called Nativity songs of Luke 1 and 2. These texts, in highly poetic language, contain profound spiritual and theological concepts. The four hymns mentioned are traditionally identified by the first words of the Latin translation of Scripture used by Christians in the first millennium. These

hymns pre-date any Christian denomination, and belong to all believers through the centuries: *Magnificat*, or song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55); *Benedictus*, or song of Zacharias (verses 68-79); *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, or song of the angels (Luke 2:13, 14); and *Nunc dimittis*, or song of Simeon (verses 28-32). The style of the four songs recorded in the first two chapters of Luke reminds us of the psalms and has sometimes been called “major canticles.”

## MAGNIFICAT

Mary's song was sung before the birth of Jesus. Elizabeth, Mary's cousin and friend, listened carefully to the words of Mary's song.

"And Mary said:

'My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost  
thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors' "

(Luke 1:46-55).

What are some of the reasons for praise that appear in this song? Mary expresses concrete qualities and activities of God: (1) He is the Savior; (2) He uses humble instruments; (3) He is powerful and holy and does great things; (4) He is merciful and keeps His promises. They all point to the recognition of the Lord, who had called her to the unprecedented service of being the mother of the Messiah. The words of Mary, a humble and consecrated young woman, were a vehicle of praise. But beyond words, her own life of surrender, submission, and sacrifice showed a deep understanding of what authentic worship means. We have a video of an Adventist composition based on the song of Mary: [www.adventistreview.org/the-song-of-mary](http://www.adventistreview.org/the-song-of-mary).

## BENEDICTUS

Zacharias' song is reported following the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. It's possible that the neighbors and relatives of the pious priest heard this meaningful hymn, spoken with heartfelt devotion (Luke 1:67).

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed  
them.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David  
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),  
salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—  
to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:  
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the  
Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way  
for him,

to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,

because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven  
to shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace"

(Luke 1:68-79).

Some of the reasons for praising God, as reflected in the song of Zacharias, include the following: (1) God has drawn near to His people to redeem them; (2) He has sent a mighty Savior; (3) He visited His children with mercy. Zacharias, a priest serving in the temple, lists concrete evidences of God's saving power, His providence, and God's affection for His children in need.

## GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO

That's the title of the song of the angels on the occasion of the birth of Jesus. This short and magnificent angelic song was heard by the astonished shepherds working in the vicinity of Bethlehem.

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host  
appeared with the angel,

praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor  
rests' " (Luke 2:13, 14).

The foundation of this song is found in the exalted Lord of glory, who brought good will and peace to humanity. It's understood, at the same time, that the incarnation of Jesus reunites God with humanity, shortens the distance between heaven and earth, and contributes to the glory of God and the peace of humankind.

## NUNC DIMITTIS

The song of Simeon was pronounced when Baby Jesus was presented in the temple on the occasion of His circumcision. Simeon, an old man described by Luke as "righteous and devout" (Luke 2:25), took Jesus in his arms and blessed God, as Joseph and Mary listened in amazement, without understanding the full significance of his words.

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel"  
(Luke 2:29-32).

What new reasons for praise can be found in Simeon's song? Let me suggest two: (1) The hymn assures that with the arrival of Jesus salvation became visible; (2) His coming also ensures that salvation is offered to all humanity.

Revisiting these ancient New Testament songs recorded in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, has highlighted their depth and enduring importance. They continue to remind us of some of the many reasons we, too, have to praise and worship God.

What further elements can we discern in these songs that help us better understand what it means to praise and worship the Lord? Let me suggest four. First, there is a note of joy (Luke 1:47) in all of them, and they have their center in the wonderful gift of the Lord given in the person of Jesus. Second, each song references God's salvation (verses 47, 68, 69, 71, 77; Luke 2:11, 30). Third, all of them highlight divine qualities, such as the power of God (Luke 1:49, 69) and His mercy (verses 50, 54, 72, 78). Finally, they present the idea that Christ came to bring peace to humanity (verse 79; Luke 2:14, 29).

While it may not always be easy to include all

of these elements in each and every act of worship, we need to find ways to consciously include them. Joy, the assurance of salvation, and peace are invaluable characteristics of all positive, vital, engaging, and inspiring worship. These elements are not to be forgotten and should not be underestimated by worship leaders, musicians, and preachers, or even parents as they think about family worship. The songs linked with the incarnation of Christ in Luke's Gospel offer us a vivid illustration of their importance.

### A FINAL COMMENT ON PRAISE

As seen in Luke's Nativity songs, praise is an ever-present response in biblical moments of personal or congregational worship. On such occasions, praise comes in response to some revelation or manifestation of God, as a positive and joyous reaction. By definition, praise is an audible response through the use of words, spoken or sung. There are abundant examples of these words of praise to the Lord in the Bible. In the Psalms, for example, we are told to praise God in songs, with the mouth, with the deepest emotions, with our whole life, be it alone or as part of a larger community. Praise is, by all accounts, a pleasant and vibrant practice in which everyone, angels and human beings, should participate.

That festive and joyful sense of appreciation and gratitude was experienced for a few moments during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:37, 38). In the same way, the New Testament associates praise with the offering of spiritual sacrifices (Heb. 13:15). As shown in Scripture, praise is a response to *who* God is and *what* He has done—and is doing—for His children. We praise God because He is worthy of it. In the Psalms God is praised for His goodness, mercy, faithfulness, justice, greatness, and sovereignty. Therefore, when planning personal, family, or congregational moments of worship, we do well to take these indispensable components into account.

Luke's Nativity songs offer a magnificent illustration of the response of praise to the great news of the arrival of Jesus, the divine Savior, to a world in dire need of redemption. ♣

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**Daniel Oscar Plenc** is a professor of systematic and historical theology at Universidad Adventista del Plata and also director of the White Research Center. He lives with his wife, Lissie, in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina; they have three adult children.



*"...that they may have life more abundantly"*  
 Jesus in John 10:10

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## UNTO YOU A SAVIOUR

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### *Heralding His arrival*

**T**he King of glory stooped low to take humanity. Rude and forbidding were His earthly surroundings. His glory was veiled, that the majesty of His outward form might not become an object of attraction. He shunned all outward display. . . . Jesus purposed that no attraction of an earthly nature should call men to His side. Only the beauty of heavenly truth must draw those who would follow Him. . . . He desired men to accept Him upon the testimony of the Word of God.

#### **KEEN OBSERVERS**

The angels had wondered at the glorious plan of redemption. They watched to see how the people of God would receive His Son, clothed in the garb of humanity. Angels came to the land of the chosen people. . . . To the land where the glory of God had been revealed, and the light of prophecy had shone, the angels came.

**ELLEN G. WHITE**

They came unseen to Jerusalem, to the appointed expositors of the Sacred Oracles, and the ministers of God's house. Already to Zacharias the priest, as he ministered before the altar, the nearness of Christ's coming had been announced. Already the forerunner was born, his mission attested by miracle and prophecy. The tidings of his birth and the wonderful significance of his mission had been spread abroad. Yet Jerusalem was not preparing to welcome her Redeemer.

With amazement the heavenly messengers beheld the indifference of that people whom God had called to communicate to the world the light of sacred truth. The Jewish nation . . . knew not that His coming was now at hand. In the temple the morning and the evening sacrifice daily pointed to the Lamb of God; yet even here was no preparation to receive Him. The priests and teachers of the nation knew not that the greatest event of the ages was about to take place. . . . In their strife for riches and worldly honor they were not prepared for the revelation of the Messiah.

The same indifference pervaded the land of Israel. Hearts selfish and world-engrossed were untouched by the joy that thrilled all heaven. Only a few were longing to behold the Unseen. To these heaven's embassy was sent.

#### **A HUMBLE BIRTH**

Angels attend Joseph and Mary as they journey from their home in Nazareth to the city of David. . . . She is of the lineage of David, and the Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet,

“shall He come forth . . . that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” Micah 5:2, margin. But in the city of their royal line, Joseph and Mary are unrecognized and unhonored.

Wearied and homeless, they traverse the entire length of the narrow street, from the gate of the city to the eastern extremity of the town, vainly seeking a resting place for the night. There is no room for them at the crowded inn. In a rude building where the beasts are sheltered, they at last find refuge, and here the Redeemer of the world is born.

Men know it not, but the tidings fill heaven with rejoicing. . . . The whole world is brighter for His presence. Above the hills of Bethlehem are gathered an innumerable throng of angels. They wait the signal to declare the glad news to the world. Had the leaders in Israel been true to their trust, they might have shared the joy of heralding the birth of Jesus. But now they are passed by. . . .

### A JOYFUL SONG MADE KNOWN

In the fields where the boy David had led his flock, shepherds were still keeping watch by night. Through the silent hours they talked together of the promised Saviour, and prayed for the coming of the King to David’s throne. “And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

At these words, visions of glory fill the minds of the listening shepherds. The Deliverer has come to Israel! Power, exaltation, triumph, are associated with His coming. But the angel must prepare them to recognize their Saviour in poverty and humiliation. “This shall be a sign unto you,” he says; “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

### HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS

The heavenly messenger had quieted their fears. He had told them how to find Jesus. With tender regard for their human weakness, he had given them time to become accustomed to the divine radiance. Then the joy and glory could no longer be hidden. The whole plain was lighted up with the bright shining of the hosts of God. Earth was

## Heaven and earth are no wider apart today than when shepherds listened to the angels’ song.

hushed, and heaven stooped to listen to the song,—  
“Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Oh that today the human family could recognize that song! The declaration then made, the note then struck, will swell to the close of time, and resound to the ends of the earth. When the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, with healing in His wings, that song will be re-echoed by the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, saying, “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

As the angels disappeared, the light faded away, and the shadows of night once more fell on the hills of Bethlehem. But the brightest picture ever beheld by human eyes remained in the memory of the shepherds. “And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”

### CONFIRMATION

Departing with great joy, they made known the things they had seen and heard. “And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.”

Heaven and earth are no wider apart today than when shepherds listened to the angels’ song. Humanity is still as much the object of heaven’s solicitude as when common men of common occupations met angels at noonday and talked with the heavenly messengers in the vineyards and the fields. To us in the common walks of life, heaven may be very near. Angels from the courts above will attend the steps of those who come and go at God’s command. ♣

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Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt is taken from *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), pp. 43-48.



TikTok right now—you can do that later! OK, now we're ready. Merry Christmas, everyone!

Christmas 2020. Who could have imagined it?

### NEVER BEFORE

Almost no one today who was alive during the 1918 pandemic was old enough at the time to offer us any current counsel. Instead, as we have been doing for the past nine months, we are figuring this out as we go. First it was botched spring break plans, which then gave way to greatly modified summer vacations (or none), which floated into back-to-school on Zoom or in person with a great many restrictions. The holiday season, which caps off each year before blending into the next one, is decidedly different now.

But rather than melt into puddles of tears over family traditions and holiday plans gone awry, it's important to put positivity first. Honestly, we've actually gotten pretty good at adapting, and this Christmas will further prove just how resilient we are. So how do we do the Christmas season in a pandemic? Here are some ideas.

First of all, some of you might have spent the past several months in bubbles of family only, family and a few close relatives, or family and one or two close family groups. If you have done that, and the numbers are small, you can still have some semblance of together time, provided everyone is healthy, and that such gatherings are allowable in the state and county where you live. If in doubt, please get tested. And please take into account members of your group, including the people they have come into contact with. As always, err on the

## THE PANDEMIC IS HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

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*Doing the Christmas season in quarantine*

The house is decorated, sweet smells waft through the kitchen, and the fireplace (or Netflix fireplace) is giving off a warm, rosy glow. All the cooking and baking is done, presents are wrapped and ready, and the special family Bible, turned to the Christmas story, is poised for the evening read.

Are we missing anything? Ah, yes. Everyone put your phones on data, so you don't hog the WI-FI! The correct Zoom link went out to the gang, right? Will someone please make sure your grandparents know how to unmute themselves when they want to talk? And oh, yes, get the cousins to fix their camera—it's focusing on the ceiling again. And quit it with filming your holiday

**WILONA KARIMABADI**

side of caution, especially if you have those who are elderly or have suppressed immune systems.

My family spent the summer having very small, socially distanced gatherings outdoors on our deck. If possible, you can still do outdoor gatherings with the addition of patio and space heaters and lots of cozy blankets and warm drinks for all. Keep “pods” of families in their own spaces, set your buffet meal indoors, and dismiss each pod to get their food and drinks one at a time. If it’s just too arctic where you live, it’s your decision, again, staying conscious of health and government regulations in your region, as to how you might host a small gathering indoors. We advise a large room, small group, space between people, and in all scenarios, please wear your masks.

### **ALL THOSE HOLIDAY “THINGS”**

You know what? Not being able to rush to concert after concert just might be a blessing in disguise. While we adore watching small children, dressed as angels and shepherds, yodel out “The First Noel,” these events often compound an already hectic schedule of work, Christmas shopping, community service, and family/friend commitments. This might be the year we don’t go absolutely bonkers trying to do it all. But you don’t have to skip out on the blessings of a Christmas concert entirely. Many beautiful Christmas concert events from previous years can be found on YouTube. Several artists have filmed their own Christmas specials streaming on Prime or Netflix, and there will likely be more of that this year. For programs of this nature, check your local listings for concerts on your PBS and network channels.

If you are a musical family who enjoys playing and singing together (I’m looking at you, Klingbeils\*), why not stage your own Christmas concert on Zoom? Select your music and readings, practice, and send your invites out to family and friends. This is a great way to bring a holiday musical blessing to an even larger audience that could really use it.

As with any holiday season, don’t neglect the elderly and homebound members of your church and community. Dropping off a small gift and food is as necessary and cherished as ever.

No girlfriend cookie swaps this year? Bake cookies anyway. Make little boxes featuring your specialty and arrange for a time you might meet up in a parking lot or cul-de-sac for a quick exchange.

## **Christmas 2020. Who could have imagined it?**

Come back home and Zoom while you all taste them. Pick a winner if you wish. You could still do holiday baking and drive around doing surprise drop-offs for neighbors, family, and friends. What a great way to spread some cheer.

The beauty of avoiding people this year? No crazed last-minute mall shopping! As online shopping has become more prevalent over the years, this season it’s not just convenient but necessary. So hopefully you’ve done it ahead of time and freed up some precious downtime for the actual holidays.

Since we’ve all gone video viral for church, school, friend and family get-togethers, even dating, why not save postage on Christmas cards and film a Christmas video greeting? You can either e-mail it to your contacts or send via social media.

When it comes to the main event of Christmas Day and gift-giving, you can most likely carry on as normal with your immediate family and a set of grandparents. But as it’s still important to avoid larger gatherings, it’s best to keep the celebrations small. Greet people on Zoom and spend time talking. For family and friends nearby, spread the joy with drive-by deliveries of gifts/food. Sending nonperishable care packages to those far away is always appreciated as well.

On Zoom it’s possible to host family talent shows, games, story times, etc. It just requires a tiny bit of thought and organization. Early in the summer we attended a virtual birthday party for our 6-year-old nephew. His parents had thoughtfully purchased the game Pie Face (Google it, it’s hilarious) for his small group of friends and delivered it the night before. At party time all the children were able to play together with an adult moderating the game. This game is fun for all members of the family.

Yes, it’s not going to be the same this year. But that certainly doesn’t mean that the holiday season is a total bust. While keeping our focus on the true and everlasting “reason for the season,” let’s use the love of our Savior, Jesus, to spur ideas for connecting with and bringing joy to others. ♣

\*Gerald Klingbeil is associate editor of *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World*, and a colleague of the author.

**Wilona Karimabadi** is an assistant editor of *Adventist Review*.



RON KEDAS

Brenda, Kenneth, Corbin, Ashton, and Adrienne Weiss wall-sitting their safari-weary bodies at the Tanzania border by the Masai Mara, Kenya, in August 2016.

that first mission trip over Christmas. “For us, it was an opportunity to see what Dad does and better understand why he was constantly traveling. It was also an opportunity to expand our world even as young as we were,” she says.

But it was not all work. Following the Galapagos project, the family visited tortoises and blue-footed boobies, albatross nests, and curious seals. Back on the mainland near Guayaquil, they visited Maranatha’s worksites in poor communities and saw open markets and shantytowns that looked nothing like home. “When we returned from Galapagos, our children looked around our house and said, ‘Mom, we’re rich,’” she shares.

Brenda says that they were right. “We may live in the smallest house on our block, but we are so blessed with material things—clothes, a roof over our heads, bicycles, cars, more than enough food, shelves full of books, computers, the Internet, and hot running water,” she says. “We decided that to take our children on mission trips was a good thing and that we would be doing more.”

#### CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

That experience of service changed the Weiss family approach to Christmas. They began to see the season with new eyes.

“We had so much fun serving together over the holidays that

## REVELING IN CHRISTMAS SERVICE

*An Adventist family shares how service changed their approach to Christmas, and life.*

The end of 2007 was fast approaching. Kenneth Weiss, Maranatha Volunteers International vice president, was supposed to close the year running a project building an education and evangelism center in Galapagos, Ecuador, over the holidays.

But this time would be different.

“We decided it would be good to go as a family,” remembers Kenneth’s wife, Brenda. The Weiss’s eldest daughter, Adrienne, was 9 at the time, and twins Ashton and Corbin were just 4. “We also invited my mom and dad to join,” Brenda explains, “and decided 4-year-olds could put in four hours a day on the job site. Part of their work was refilling water bottles for volunteers.”

Adrienne, now 22 and a chemistry major at Pacific Union College in California, still remembers

a traditional Christmas with mounds of presents did not fit,” Brenda explains. “We worked as a family to figure out how to make Christmas about service and celebrating Jesus’ birth instead of about gifts and busyness. We tried leaving out the decorations and have settled on less.”

Brenda says their new approach helped them to look less inward and to reach out more.

“We have gone through our neighborhood ringing doorbells and playing instruments for neighbors on Christmas Day. We bake cookies and give them out. A few years we provided music, food, and cleanup services for friends’ Christmas Day celebrations. We host a family dinner and invite friends who don’t have somewhere else to go, making our own new Christmas family of friends who join us when they and we are in town.”

### COUNTING YOUR BLESSINGS

The Weiss family also started a Christmas Day tradition. They make lists of their blessings. On Maranatha’s 2019 Christmas Family Project in Peru, volunteers made paper chains of things they were thankful for. Then they strung them from the ceiling.

“We read the Nativity story and act it out if we have children visiting. We create costumes from lengths of fabric and have used a Frisbee for an angel’s halo,” Brenda shares. “Instead of shopping for presents in all the Christmas madness, we find pictures of the things we will spend time selecting during the next year. We wrap pictures and exchange them as promissory notes.”

The family’s conscious decision has changed their approach to Christmas. “We have chosen to play games and enjoy each other’s company instead of purchasing, wrapping, and unwrapping presents,” explains Brenda. “We have become more focused on others and less self-centered through service and through changing our celebration. We make it a point to go on mission trips regularly to help us keep life in perspective. On our mission trips we have seen people without many things who are happy and willing to share their lives and what they have with us. When we set out to help other people, we find that we are the ones who are blessed.”

### FAMILY MEMORIES

Through the years mission trips have left a mark on the Weiss family history. This includes not only

social adventures but spiritual ones as well. Adrienne was baptized during one project in Nicaragua by Kenneth’s father in 2012. Ashton and Corbin were baptized during a project in Kenya in 2016. “It was in a tank of water we couldn’t see through, although the truck was labeled ‘clean water,’” Brenda remembers with a smile.

Their last Christmas Family Project—so far—was in Peru in 2019. Ashton, now 17, remembers how their perspective changed while serving over Christmas that year. “We saw people living in tiny houses mostly made out of tin and cardboard scraps,” he shares. “The pure joy and happiness they had when you gave them anything and just prayed with them; it makes you realize how blessed all of us are.”

“We had 150 bags of panettone and toys to give to families living in [a slum],” Corbin adds. “On Christmas Day, volunteers were driven up the mountain in buses too wide for the streets, and my family’s bus stopped around halfway up. We got out, and as I handed over the panettone, I suddenly realized what we were doing. We were showing these people Christ’s character,” he emphasizes.

### IT’S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

For Brenda, spending time with volunteers and locals is a joy as they connect with others who make service a priority. “We revel in the work because we can see how it changes people.”

For Kenneth, this is much more than just about money. “It’s not the money but the relationships; it’s not the money—it’s the changed hearts. When people go on a mission trip, they have their values realigned, they have a closer relationship with God, they’re not as materialistic,” he emphasizes.

Brenda agrees. “After returning from Zimbabwe in 2011, I wrote about how I went for my kids, but I was the one who returned changed. We decided as a family that we needed to go on mission trips regularly as an inoculation against our culture of materialism.”

She believes it is an inoculation that transforms lives for good. Brenda quotes what Adrienne wrote after a mission trip to Zambia, where she helped coordinate activities for children some years ago. “Throughout that trip I learned about myself,” she confessed. “When I got back to the United States, I missed Africa so much that it hurt.”

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**Marcos Paseggi** is senior news correspondent for *Adventist Review*.

# CELEBRATE WITH LIGHT

*Past bathrobes  
and stage  
lighting*



## STEPHEN CHAVEZ

It's a story we hear so often (once a year at Christmas, albeit several times during the season), that all we imagine is a baby in a manger, properly lit, with characters provided by Central Casting: proud parents, generous Wise Men, humble shepherds, and animals procured from a local petting zoo.

And no matter how often we're reminded of the danger, the unhygienic atmosphere, the putrid aromas of such a setting, we tend to romanticize the scene with fluffy sheep, bright stars, and angel choirs.

### WHAT ROMANCE?

The reality of that extraordinary moment in earth's history was anything but romantic. After all, when did anyone think of a government mandate as being romantic? "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. . . . And everyone went to their own town to register" (Luke 2:1-3).

Let's be clear: Joseph and Mary weren't on some romantic, prefamily holiday when Jesus was born. They were on their way to register, along with countless other travelers. No wonder there was no room at the inn; Bethlehem was already packed with people doing their civic duty. Joseph and Mary were lucky to find shelter in a stable. Had they arrived a little later, they might have ended up having their baby in a field, perhaps under a tree.

And just as every good story has a villain, in this story that role is played by Herod the Great. He heard that strangers from the east had come searching for a king. "When Herod heard this he was disturbed" (Matt. 2:3). Herod was likely "disturbed" before the arrival of the travelers; however, he demonstrated his caprice, violence, and insecurity when he "gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under" (verse 16).

So now we have the very unromantic notion of a young family—mother, father, and baby—having to flee for their lives, and becoming refugees in the process.

With so much in the news about refugees recently, how many of us see anything romantic about a young couple having to take a dangerous journey with only the clothes on their backs and whatever they could carry? What would they do once they got to their destination? Could they depend on the kindness of strangers? How

long would it take for them to get settled?

These and many other questions remain unanswered. But knowing human nature, we can say with certainty that the time Mary, Joseph, and Jesus spent in Egypt was not some carefree cross-cultural experience. If current situations are any indication, they must, at one time or another, have experienced hunger, isolation, insecurity, and discrimination.

### AS REAL AS IT GETS

With that context, it's not hard to imagine how similar are the stories we hear today about the plights of immigrants and refugees.

Their stories are often told on network and cable radio and television broadcasts: how today's refugees have to flee repressive and violent dictators; how religious and political persecution forces them to leave everything they've known with only what they can wear and carry; how often children are born on their journeys in some field or ruined building; how some refugees arrive at their destination with one, two, or all their family members dead or missing.

The Bible is universally appreciated because it accurately reflects the human experience in almost any age, in almost every particular.

Read this way, we can never read the story about the Baby born in a manger as something sterile and romantic. There's a hard edge to the story of Bethlehem, the reality of which we still live today.

### LIGHT AND DARKNESS

The story of Christ's birth is actually a testament to God's bravery in providing His only Son as the means by which He brought light to this dark world. Jesus arrived as a defenseless Baby, homeless, and for several months (years?) a refugee.

But we celebrate the season with lights, gifts, and feasting, because Jesus brings light, grace, and spiritual nourishment.

We can't help celebrating. Instead of darkness, we have light; instead of death, life; instead of poverty, riches that are eternal; instead of no place to call home, we have a place prepared for us.

The fact remains, however, that for all the holiday pageants, carols, choirs, gifts, and lights, the world is still a dark place. Maybe not where we live, but in far too many places in the world more people go to bed hungry than go to bed full. In many parts of the world, clean, healthy, drinkable water is rare,

## If Jesus came to fill darkness with light, shouldn't we also make life brighter for those around us?

and often hard to obtain. In far too many parts of the world people fall asleep to the sound of explosions and gunfire (even in the United States).

### **CELEBRATE? YES!**

So should we celebrate Jesus' birth even though countless millions suffer from hunger, sickness, violence, and human disasters? By all means!

As we celebrate Christ's birth, we're honoring the One who left glory so He could inhabit this world with all its violence, poverty, disease, and social and economic inequities. We're saying that this world will not always be as it is. We're taking seriously Jesus' promise: "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

The question is not: Should we celebrate? The question is rather: Should we limit our observance of Christ's birth to just a few weeks a year?

If Jesus came to fill darkness with light, shouldn't we also use the blessings we enjoy to make life brighter for those around us? Can we do nothing in the presence of so much suffering?

### **IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S BIRTH TODAY**

Let's imagine some slightly different Christmas stories:

A young couple travels to a city far from home in hopes of finding better living conditions for themselves and their unborn child. On their way to find shelter they are robbed, their cash and credit cards stolen.

Now alone in a strange city, they have to find shelter that costs nothing. As the two scrounge alleyways and dumpsters for something they can use to stay warm through the night, a minivan cruises suspiciously nearby. The van's passenger window rolls down and someone shines a flashlight in the couple's faces.

"Do you have someplace to spend the night?" asks someone in their native language.

Clutching their few belongings closer to their bodies, they shake their heads no.

The van's side door slides open and two people exit. Holding coats, blankets, and warm drinks they say, "We know where you can spend the night. Tomorrow we'll help you get settled."

Or how about this: A public elementary school in an impoverished community serves breakfast and lunch to its students when school is in session. But during the pandemic food is available only on school days. But on weekends and on the first day of Christmas break, two cars pull into the school's parking lot. The six people who get out unload folding tables and boxes of food, which they begin serving as neighborhood kids show up. This continues every day until Christmas.

On Christmas Day the school's multipurpose room has been commandeered (with the school district's permission), decorated with Christmas lights, and tables and chairs set up. A few minutes before noon, people start entering the room, wearing masks, practicing social distancing, carrying plates, bowls, and pots full of food from their native countries: from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Notices have been handed out throughout the community before Christmas, so that everyone—rich or poor, young or old, native or immigrant—could share a warm meal and enjoy socially-distant fellowship.

Whenever school begins again, families and individuals who formed relationships over Christmas dinner will continue meeting once a month to make sure that no one in their community goes hungry or friendless.

These two scenarios, although fictitious, represent countless individuals and communities where real needs are met by real people who reflect Christian compassion, even when it isn't Christmas.

### **LIGHT AND LIGHT**

Celebrating the true spirit of Christmas does not mean forsaking the lights, carols, gifts, and pageants of the season in favor of focusing on the suffering, violence, and poverty that surround us. We celebrate the birth of a singular Baby so that we can see the world as He saw it. He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Jesus also told His followers, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Who would have known we'd have so much in common with a Baby born in a manger? 🕯

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**Stephen Chavez** is an assistant editor of *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines.

# Into All the World

55 Years of **AMAZING FACTS**



In 1965, a pair of passionate clergymen founded a regional radio program called *Amazing Facts*. They had no idea that over the next 55 years, their small ministry, located in a basement in Maryland, would soon grow to become an international evangelism center.

Today, Amazing Facts International is headquartered at the all-new W.O.R.D. Center campus outside Sacramento—and while it has changed in size and scope, its Christ-centered mission remains the same: to proclaim a distinct last-day message of hope and salvation to every corner of the globe.

Every facet of ministry is designed to introduce people to Jesus in a way that speaks directly to their lives and needs ...



**Television and Radio:** 24/7, worldwide programming on AFTV.com, as well as through TV and radio broadcasts like *Amazing Facts with Doug Batchelor* and *Bible Answers Live*.



**Center of Evangelism:** Online (afcoe.org) and in-person outreach training for church members who want to become bold and effective soul-winners.



**Internet:** From amazingfacts.org to helltruth.com, Amazing Facts offers thousands of online articles, books, and video and audio resources to help surfing seekers discover Bible truth.



**Bible School:** More than 100,000 students have enrolled in our Internet and mail-based Bible course (amazingbiblestudies.com).



**Publishing:** From sharing magazines and books to DVDs and digital downloads, Amazing Facts publishes hundreds of resources and distributes them worldwide (afbookstore.com).



**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.

## God's Message Is Our Mission

Every day, through the grace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and our faithful donors, Amazing Facts is giving people around the world the biblical answers they need to make an intelligent and heartfelt decision for Christ—and to equip them to help others do the same.

In honor of 55 years of ministry, the Amazing Facts International leadership and staff want to thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for your continued support and prayers!





This illustration by H. B. Pierce is of the Convis Meeting House in Convis County, Michigan. It was dedicated on Christmas Day, 1869, by John Nevins Andrews.

## CHRISTMAS IN OUR ADVENTIST PAST

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*Was it good or bad, kosher or anathema?*

**MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL**

**A**s I walked into the mall wearing a T-shirt and shorts, I was startled to hear strains of “Let It Snow” followed by “Frosty the Snowman.” It was still September.

While living as missionaries in the Philippines, we rapidly learned that not only was Christmas a global holiday but also that the Philippines officially claims the longest holiday season in the world. Christmas decorations begin going up in malls and on city streets as early as August. Countries far removed from stereotypical snow-covered scenes of Christmas movies love to celebrate the holiday with palm trees waving in the breeze on the beach just as much as those in frosty climes. Even countries



that are not Christian have embraced the holiday.

From holiday parties at work to Christmas trees at home, the question is often asked: Should Adventists celebrate Christmas? Or, to take it a step further, how did the early Adventist pioneers, including Ellen White, view Christmas? Were they full of holiday cheer? Or were they simply scrooges?

### EARLY CHRISTIAN OBSERVANCE

The Christmas holiday has a rich tradition dating back to the early Christian church. January 6 was initially “a celebration of the birth and/or baptism of Christ and known as the Epiphany or Theophany. The church at Rome did not adopt this festival but later instituted a celebration of the Nativity of Christ” on December 25, which eclipsed the January 6 date.<sup>1</sup> During the medieval period the Western church (based in Rome) emphasized December 25; the Eastern Orthodox Church focused on January 6. The celebration of one holiday did not necessarily mean the exclusion of the other; many religious groups observe both holidays.

Two major competing theories exist among scholars about why December 25 was accepted eventually as the date of Christ’s birth. One theory posits that such festivals “were influenced by—or intended to supplant—pagan feast days that were being celebrated on those particular dates.” Recent scholarship questions this oft-stated theory. Indeed, little credible evidence supports December 25 as a consistently celebrated pagan holiday.

Another theory suggests that the date is based on Christ’s conception April 6 (Artemisios 14) from the Julian calendar as the equivalent of Passover (Nisan 14), meaning that exactly nine months later (January 6) marks Christ’s birth. Once again, scholars question both theories, leaving the origins of the Christmas date shrouded in mystery.<sup>2</sup>

### NINETEENTH-CENTURY OBSERVANCE

“While Christmas was already a popular feast day at the start of the nineteenth century,” writes historian Timothy Larsen, “the holiday was transformed and greatly expanded over the course of the Victorian age.” As society changed, the Christmas holiday became domesticated. In other words, it went from being a public event to something celebrated in the home with a focus on children. Many popular legends, such as Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, or Saint Nicholas, combined

myths and legends across cultures and faiths.

The German Protestant tradition popularized the Christmas tree. In the United States the Christmas tree was first represented in popular print in a woman’s magazine, *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, in December 1850. This image was an adaptation of the popular image of Queen Victoria and her family from the *Illustrated London News*. The American fondness for Queen Victoria helped spread the Christmas tree inside American homes. Victorian Christmas decorations tended to be minimal and often not put up until Christmas Eve.

Popular decorations in the 1850s and 1860s included poinsettias and “forcing” spring bulbs to bloom for the holiday. As this holiday grew in popularity, early Adventists critiqued and responded to the holiday. So how did early Adventists celebrate Christmas?

### EARLY ADVENTIST PIONEERS

During the American Civil War, Adventists first mentioned Christmas in *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. The earliest references were celebratory. In bold letters J. M. Aldrich, a leader of the Adventist publishing work at the time, noted “CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR’S COMING!” He added that “the little folks of course must be remembered on these occasions.” In the midst of filling stockings with candy, sugar birds, and rubber dogs, *Review* readers were urged to give them “valuable books.” Such seeds can “grow” into a love for the truth.<sup>3</sup>

Years later the *Review* carried a “Christmas Time” poem written by Mary Ann Davis—later one of Ellen White’s trusted editorial assistants. She opined: “Tis Christmas Time, gladdest festal time of all the year; happy songs arise, and joy-bells chime; thou dost greet with gifts the friends most dear.”<sup>4</sup>

As Christmas became more popular in the United States during the latter part of the 1870s through the 1880s, it became an increasingly frequent topic of discussion. One person queried the *Review* staff, asking if there was any evidence for Christ actually being born on December 25, along with how to celebrate this holiday. In an unsigned article, presumably written by Uriah Smith, the editor noted that scholars disagree about the origins of Christmas and the date for the holiday, highlighting the split between West (December 25) and East (January 7).

A more in-depth discussion about Christmas and

## If Jesus came to fill darkness with light, shouldn't we also make life brighter for those around us?

Christmas trees occurred in 1879 with a flurry of articles in church periodicals. Ultimately, the General Conference Committee recommended that churches “provide a Christmas tree, and suspend thereon their gifts for the cause.” The Battle Creek congregation led the way “with alacrity” with a beautiful tree donated by a sister with “appropriate exercises” prepared for the evening of December 25. In the earliest recorded description of an Adventist Christmas service, the report noted that they sang “choice and select hymns and pieces of music.”

In follow-up questions, church leaders were clear to differentiate the Adventist use of Christmas trees from other festivals. From their viewpoint, this was a great opportunity to raise funds to further the mission of the church.

Ellen White, the prophetic founding voice of Adventism, wrote some of her strongest statements about Christmas during this same time period (1878-1879). In an 1878 article titled “Holiday Presents,” she urged Adventists to remember “how much money is expended yearly in making presents.”<sup>5</sup> The claims of Jesus, “our kind . . . Benefactor,” mean that we have a higher duty to present our offerings to God. “Let us remember that Christmas is celebrated in commemoration of the birth of the world’s Redeemer.”<sup>6</sup>

Ellen White wasn’t against giving gifts, but rather, she challenged Adventists to become counter-cultural by prioritizing the lifting up of Jesus and the need to sacrificially give to advance the gospel. When the denomination was sending its earliest missionaries (J. N. Andrews, with his children, Charles and Mary, had left for Europe only four years earlier in 1874), this was an opportunity to practice “self-denial.” She urged Adventists to “stand clear” of all “church corruptions, dissipations, and festivals, which have a demoralizing influence upon young and old.”<sup>7</sup> Adventists had a duty to keep Christ at the center of Christmas.

The following holiday season (1879) Ellen White wrote another article, “The Holidays.”<sup>8</sup> Once again she urged Adventists to shun all “frivolity and extravagance, gluttony and display.” “Thousands of dollars” will be wasted “in needless indulgence.”

How much better it would be if “we may make the coming holiday an occasion in which to honor and glorify God.” Once again Ellen White reminded Adventists that “Christmas day” is a “precious reminder of the sacrifice made in man’s behalf.”

She challenged church members to consider more worthwhile gifts, such as Adventist books and periodicals, if one wants to give presents. A personal favorite was the *Life of Joseph Bates* with enticing adventure stories. As a biblical precedent, she referred Adventists back to ancient Israel, who gathered for spiritual feasts several times each year. When some Adventists challenged Ellen White about the merits of a Christmas tree, she responded: “You can make it like the world if you have a disposition to do so, or you can make it as unlike the world as possible. There is no particular sin in selecting a fragrant evergreen.” What mattered most was the motive behind it all.

### WRAPPING UP

Should Adventists observe Christmas? From the early Christian church up to the more recent early Adventist pioneers, the holiday has deep roots in honoring the birth of Jesus Christ. Although scholars debate the origins of this holiday, early Adventist pioneers disassociated themselves from such traditions, or even presumed pagan origins, holding that Seventh-day Adventists have a unique opportunity to celebrate this holiday in a way that uplifts Jesus Christ.

Christmas is a holiday with unique opportunities to share our faith. When done with the right motive, it can be an opportunity to bond closer together, both as a family and as a church, to strengthen faith and advance the Lord’s work. 🍀

<sup>1</sup> Paul B. Bradshaw, *The Oxford Handbook of Christmas*, ed. Timothy Larsen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> For the serious student of Christmas, read the historical chapters in the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Christmas*, for a comparison of both views with a summary of the latest scholarship on the topic.

<sup>3</sup> See the editorial notice found at *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 5, 1865, p. 8. It should be noted that earlier in the Civil War several even earlier references contrast Christmas as a tradition to the Sabbath as commanded by God.

<sup>4</sup> In *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 20, 1877, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, “Holiday Presents,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 21, 1878, pp. 161, 162.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> E. G. White, “The Holidays,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 11, 1879, p. 189. All quotes in the next two paragraphs are taken from this article.

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# OUR DAUGHTER'S FAMILY

Recently on Facebook we joyfully shared the news that our daughter, Morgan, had gotten her first job out of college—at AdventHealth in Orlando, Florida.

Immediately the likes and comments began pouring in from Morgan's relatives, classmates, and friends she'd grown up with.

But intermingled with this circle of voices was another circle of voices that rejoiced with our rejoicing.

These voices were not those of relatives, classmates, or childhood friends. Instead, they were Morgan's church family: people of all ages and backgrounds who had watched our daughter grow up Sabbath after Sabbath.

"That's amazing! Congratulations!" wrote Samantha, a recently retired church member.

"Way to go . . . so happy for her," wrote Elizabeth, a mom of two younger children.

"I was praying for her! I'm so happy she got it!" wrote Lizzy, a former college student who watched Morgan grow up.

"Well done, Morgan!" wrote Angela, another former college student who did two Christmas plays with Morgan as a little girl.

"Awesome, so proud of Morgan!" wrote Volker, an elder who never misses a Sabbath.

"Morgan flip flop, you make me so proud," wrote Kendra, a mom of two who remembers absolutely everything, including Morgan's childhood e-mail address: "morganflipflop."

"Exciting!" wrote Carmella.

"So awesome!" wrote Brooke.

"I'll be working for her pretty soon,"

wrote Victor, dermatologist and church lobby comedian.

"Congratulations, Morgan, well done!" wrote Steve, head elder.

"How exciting! Congratulations!" wrote Ashley, church ministry coordinator.

"Such wonderful news and sooo deserved! Anyone working with Morgan will be very blessed indeed!" wrote Carole, children's pastor.

"Wow, Morgan! I remember when you were so small . . . and now look at you!" wrote Sarah, another former college student.

"So proud of her! I can't wait to see what God has planned for her!" wrote Tammy, a professional who reminds me of Morgan.

Outside of church, Morgan would not have known most of these people. She wouldn't have done Christmas plays with Angela or been teased by Victor or been hugged by Tammy or been encouraged by Volker.

As Morgan's parents we're particularly grateful to the young adult mentors in Morgan's life—the collegians and young professionals who came to church faithfully and cared about our three girls. Often within modern church culture there's a trend toward separating worshippers by age, but the church Jesus invented wasn't separated. They were together (Acts 2:42-47).

Jesus Himself once turned to a circle of people seated around Him and announced that they were his "brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).

Apparently being part of the family of Jesus isn't about our blood; it's about His. ♣

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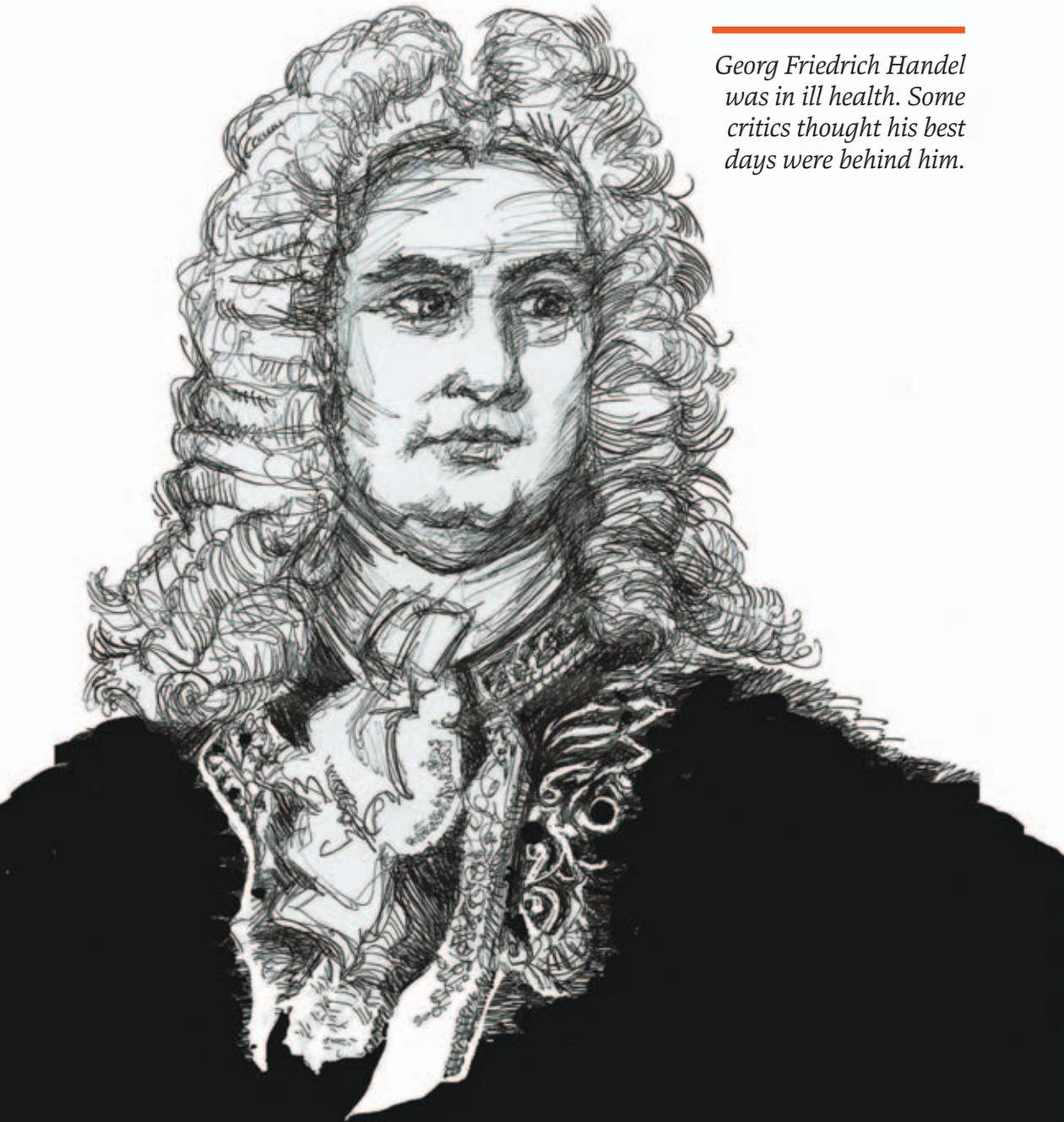
THE LIFE OF FAITH  
ANDY NASH



THERE'S A TREND TOWARD SEPARATING WORSHIPPERS BY AGE, BUT THE CHURCH JESUS INVENTED WASN'T SEPARATED.

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*Georg Friedrich Handel  
was in ill health. Some  
critics thought his best  
days were behind him.*



**W**e may be able to save the man, but Handel the musician is lost forever.” Those were the solemn words of the concerned doctor when asked about the health of his patient—acclaimed baroque composer Georg Friederich Handel.

Before anyone used the term *star* in the music business, Handel was one—playing concerts throughout Europe to enthusiastic audiences. Born in Germany, Handel had found major success in England and now called that country home.

Handel had suffered an apparent stroke and partial paralysis with rheumatism that affected his right hand. The exact diagnosis was uncertain, but it was obvious the popular musician was broken down. He had overworked himself, pushing the limits while trying to regain momentum after some recent negative reviews of his productions.

Handel’s compositions had been popular for years, particularly his operas sung in Italian and German. But public tastes were changing, and Handel was in financial debt.

In the 1700s composers often had to pay the orchestra, singers, and costume and set designers. Any unsuccessful productions and debt could pile up quickly. These troubles, combined with the composer’s health concerns, made it appear to some that regardless of his previous successes, Handel was “washed up.”

#### A MUSICAL LIFE

Handel’s life was music. As a child he was forbidden to study music by his father, who wanted his son to study law. But he obtained a small clavichord

(keyboard) and hid it in the upper room of his parents’ house. He would sneak upstairs to quietly practice whenever he could. His mother helped the young musician keep the secret from his father.

He had achieved great success over the years, but now his musical journey appeared finished. Handel sought treatments at health spas in Aix-la-Chapelle or Aachen, where a temperate diet and waters of the hot springs seemed to have a relaxing, healing effect.

One afternoon the nuns at the spa heard beautiful music coming from the chapel. They were amazed to see their patient, Handel, at the keyboard. Soon the grateful musician returned to London.

The new musical trend was the “oratorio”—musical dramas with dialogue sung in English. Handel readily adapted, eventually becoming a master of the English oratorio style.

The Irish government approached Handel about composing music for poems and lyrics written by Charles Jennens about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The project was designed to be a charitable performance for Irish orphans, the poor, and those in debtors’ prison.

Handel accepted the challenge and locked himself away to concentrate fully on his work. A servant would leave meals outside the door so the determined composer would not be disturbed. Handel was more than 50 years old, but he threw himself into the project at a feverish pace. Completely absorbed and emotionally awed by the power, love, and sacrifice in the life of Christ, Handel would be brought to tears as he composed the music. So intense was his focus that he completed the massive 260-page oratorio in 23 days—

# A Musician’s Comeback

## Charitable performances of *Messiah* continued for two decades. Thousands of women and abandoned children had hope and were helped.

an accomplishment that still astounds musicians today.

This landmark oratorio—*Messiah*—soon changed Handel's life and consequently the lives of thousands of others.

### FOR CHARITY

The premiere performance of *Messiah* was in Dublin, Ireland, in April 1742. Handel specified that his portion of the proceeds from the fully orchestrated performance should be donated to prisoners, orphans, and the sick. "I myself have been a very sick man," the veteran composer said. "Now I am cured; I was a prisoner and have been set free."

The Dublin premiere was a big hit, received rave reviews, and had a huge charitable impact as 142 prisoners were freed from debtors' prison by the proceeds. There was much rejoicing among Dublin's poor families that day.

Strangely, when *Messiah* was introduced to influential audiences in London it was a different story. Some critics were uncomfortable with a religious theme being presented in an opera house. Even so, *Messiah's* powerful emotional impact could not be denied. Based on dubious tradition about King George II rising from his seat to stand at attention audiences today rise in admiration every time *Messiah* is performed.

Momentum for Handel's masterwork slowed, and for a time the great oratorio seemed to have peaked. But *Messiah* was still destined to have its greatest impact.

In the 1700s life for London's destitute women, unwed mothers, and orphans was bleak. Shunned by society, they were often left to survive on the streets. A pioneering children's charity, the Foundling Hospital, was trying to address the plight of these orphans and destitute women. Their efforts caught the attention of philanthropist Thomas Coran, painter William Hogarth, and composer Handel. The concern and action that followed offer a blueprint for how creative arts can impact a community for good.

Hogarth rallied fellow artists and established England's first public art gallery at Foundling Hospital. Handel donated an organ, and his cherished oratorio *Messiah* was again presented to the British public as a charitable fundraiser for Foundling. Per-

formed at the hospital, the public was awed by the majesty of *Messiah* in concert. In the context of an orphans' hospital and the reality that children are the hope of the world, *Messiah's* impact was doubly powerful. This charitable performance became a much anticipated and beloved annual tradition.

Large sums of money were raised to support Foundling Hospital in its capacity to aid London's neglected women and orphans. Word spread quickly that help was available. Seemingly overnight, women by the hundreds sought refuge at the gates of the hospital. Charitable performances of *Messiah* continued for two decades. Thousands of women and abandoned children had hope and were helped.

Besides his musical triumphs Handel had his valleys. His career was long, with both ups and downs, commercial successes and setbacks. He struggled with overeating and could be short-tempered as a musical director. He persevered through it all and his musical brilliance shone through.

His compositions, operas, and oratorios brought him fame and wealth, yet he had a generous heart. Besides the charitable performances that impacted huge numbers of people for good, Handel also established a charity to help ailing musicians and their families.

Along with his other health issues, Handel's vision was seriously damaged after a carriage accident. By 1752 the acclaimed musician was totally blind. He died seven years later, at age 74, and was buried in London's Westminster Abbey.

So esteemed was the beloved musician that 3,000 people attended his funeral. Classical music legends Bach and Beethoven openly acknowledged Handel as the greatest composer.

With *Messiah*, the oratorio that moved him to tears as he composed the music, Handel created his most enduring masterwork, a musical message for the ages on the power and grace of Christ.

Every time a symphony orchestra performs *Messiah*, with violins and cellos soaring together alongside jubilant choral voices in the spine-tingling "Hallelujah Chorus," listeners are stunned again by the grandeur of *Messiah*. It is a joyful reminder of the priceless gift of salvation in Jesus. ♣

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Ed Guthero is an award-winning art director and graphic designer.



PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

## A VERY COVID CHRISTMAS

*Preparing for the holidays*

**Q:** The upcoming holiday season is already causing stress. My husband's mother died, and my husband lost his job because of COVID-19. He has become withdrawn, has trouble sleeping, and is becoming irritable. We feel overwhelmed by turmoil and uncertainty and know that it's affecting our 5- and 7-year-old kids.<sup>1</sup> What can we do to face the holidays without losing our sanity?

**A:** Your husband's symptoms—irritability, insomnia, anxiety, and withdrawal—may mean that he would benefit from urgent psychological intervention.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, your situation is all too common. Mental stress has reached a record high worldwide, and itself is a pandemic of grave proportions. This is of serious concern for all ages, but especially for 18- to 24-year-olds. Even before COVID-19 the holiday season presented two faces in Western countries: the "most wonderful time of the year" for some, and one filled with loneliness, laments, anxiety, and sadness for others. The holidays may carry high expectations, and with high expectations can come grave disappointments. This can be compounded by family issues. In your husband's case, economic burdens, grief from his loved one's passing, and the ever-present threat of COVID-19 have each amplified his stress and anxiety beyond each one's individual impact on your family's mental well-being.

While we're not in a position to diagnose or treat, we offer here some practical ideas that may help. But professional help and assistance should be sought. Connect with the National Council for Behavioral Health ([www.thenationalcouncil.org/](http://www.thenationalcouncil.org/)) to find suitable help close to your home. Also, the website [www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists) can assist you with finding a professional counselor or support group where you live. The website [youthaliveportal.org/mentalhealth/en](http://youthaliveportal.org/mentalhealth/en) may also provide useful information for you and your family. Mental health concerns are of such importance that there's

now a new U.S. national crisis and suicide prevention line, 9-8-8, which works much like 9-1-1.

Here are some ideas that may help you make the holiday season memorable and meaningful despite the difficulties:

- » Pray; God has not abandoned you.
- » Control what you can.
- » Get appropriate, reliable advice and social support.
- » Manage expectations, especially with children.
- » Focus on Jesus, the reason for the season.
- » Prioritize health and well-being, self-care, and family care.
- » Stick to a budget within your means.
- » Do not use alcohol or harmful drugs.
- » Spend time doing pleasant things together as a family (reading, hiking, home-repair projects, helping neighbors, living room camping, in-home treasure hunts, stargazing, etc.).
- » Make a "gratitude list" every night (a whole-family activity).
- » Plan a telephone or digital-video "party."

Remember, families change over time. Traditions and family rituals evolve as children grow and circumstances change. Choose a few traditions that are still doable despite the COVID-induced stresses, and look for ways to make new ones this year. Life is going to be different, and this holiday season will be like no other in the past.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart . . . and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NKJV).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is a composite question based on case histories and conversations with several individuals.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/warning-signs-of-mental-illness](http://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/warning-signs-of-mental-illness).

<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.

**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.



# THE HUMANITY OF ADVENTISTS

*Storytelling is an integral part  
of the human experience.*

JUSTIN KHOE

I love introducing people to the concept that when you read a story, it uses the same part of your brain that memory does," says Kaleb Eisele, creator of *Humans of Adventism* ([www.adventisthumans.com](http://www.adventisthumans.com)). "What you're doing is simulating a kind of memory, a created, imagined memory, that creates an emotional bond to the person in the story. When you think about evangelism, when you think about loving your neighbor, when you think about connecting with other human beings, our capacity to love is increased by our capacity to listen to their stories."

Eisele, a 29-year-old content developer, storyteller, and social media manager for the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, found a unique niche missing within the church—that of forging connections through storytelling.

An English graduate of the College of Charleston, Eisele initially had a hard time finding a good opportunity that fit his skills and passions. He was also at a crossroads in his life about remaining in the church. It was during a job for a pest control company (which gave him time to write) that he developed the concept of *Humans of Adventism*.

Modeled after *Humans of New York*, of which Eisele is a fan, *Humans of Adventism* is all about hearing the stories, in their voices, of regular, ordinary Seventh-day Adventists, as they are, in whatever spaces they are in. "*Humans of New York* was something I followed like I read every single post every day when I was in college. I was following this during the time I had left the church and was looking for something community-oriented, very empathetic, very diverse. And *Humans of New York* was that," says Eisele.

"I wanted to find *Humans of Adventism* as a reader. I didn't want to start something," Eisele adds. "I was just like, *Hey, where can I read stories about Adventists that's just about life and experiences?* When I didn't find it, I thought, *How hard would it be to do this?*" The idea seemed daunting at first—flying all over the world, taking photographs of everyone interviewed, etc. But then he realized he didn't need to do it that way. What if he interviewed people by phone or videoconferencing and worked with whatever photographs they already had? The idea took off from there.

"Around the time I started *Humans of Adventism*, I was coming back to the church. But I came back to a [local] church with a mindset of viewing the church itself as a mission field," says Eisele. "I got involved with my local church, and that was kind

of separate from *Humans of Adventism*, but it was very much on my mind. What does my church need, and what does the denomination as a whole need? A lot of the answers were very similar—as in we can be very bad at connecting with each other and very bad at connecting with the world around us, from my perspective."

In gathering stories from the diversity that is represented within Adventism, Eisele sees a common thread: "how little we know about each other."

"There are a lot of different walls that we've built up, despite being a diverse church," he adds. "Like our theology, our hymns, a lot of things that were sourced are still very Eurocentric, very male-dominated. *Humans of Adventism* has taught me how limited our perspective is, even across the same doctrines."

*Humans of Adventism* as a project still has many things left to accomplish. Eisele has recently wrapped interviews with 41 people for a 30-part docuseries in production. Much like *Humans of New York*, its Adventist counterpart may be transformed into a coffee table book soon. "I don't have an end plan for *Humans of Adventism*. Whether it takes on a new name or whatever, I believe I've been called to sit with people and listen and help tell their life stories, whatever that looks like."

Loving your neighbor involves knowing their stories. "It's a godly thing and a crucial part of loving your neighbors. Whether you're trying to share your faith, whether you're trying to connect with another person, listening to their stories is absolutely a crucial part of that," Eisele says.

An integral part of this work involves the ability to challenge someone. Through that, Eisele believes that light can be shed on problems the collective church body struggles with. "My heart is not to tear down the church, but actually, through these painful conversations and owning up to them, we heal stronger."

*Humans of Adventism* is all about hearing the stories in their voices, of regular, ordinary Seventh-day Adventists.

Meridian, Idaho church members Katie and Lloyd McClusky play Mary and Joseph with Baby Jesus (a lifelike baby doll) in the stable.



## YOU WILL FIND A BABY

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*Creative ways to celebrate the birth of Christ*

**C**hrist is born! It's the same message in a COVID-19 world as before, but how we celebrate it looks different this year. Our communities are uniquely open to spiritual conversations during this season, making it a prime time for our churches to reach out.

Here at Courthouse Road church, we've had to change our annual lessons and carols service. In the past, members of the church community took turns either reading a scripture or singing a song. The journey in Word and music begins with sin's entrance into the world,

highlights the promise of our coming Messiah, and celebrates the promise fulfilled with the Christ child. Picture caroling in the church with scriptures and songs being read and performed aloud. This year participants will record their parts in the safety of their homes. Then the media team will stitch them together for a video feed streamed on Facebook and YouTube.

The Solid Rock Seventh-day Adventist Church community used to celebrate the birth of the Savior with a concert and presents. With the need for physical distance, the usual refreshments are being set aside, and the event is going virtual. The pastor, Vince MacIsaac, is working with his leadership team to adapt the tradition. This year local musicians will highlight the story of Christ's birth and how it brings redemption. When leaders gather in the sanctuary, the audience will be online instead of in the pews. The church community can invite their friends and neighbors already part of their quarantine bubble for a shared viewing party. When the concert wraps up, they plan an exciting addition: a drive-through gift line. With kids snuggled safe in their cars, parents can drive by the church to pick up a special gift and greeting from their masked pastor.

According to David Livergood, pastor of the Martinsburg, West Virginia, Seventh-day Adventist Church, this is an opportunity to try something they've never done before. In coordination with its Rocky Knoll School, it plans to create a drive-through

Nativity. Families will be able to sit in their cars with their cups of hot cocoa, tune their car radios to a designated station, and drive through the Nativity to hear musical numbers and the words to short plays. Groups will hear the angel's message to Mary, experience the journey to Bethlehem, meet the Christ child in the manger, and celebrate with the Wise Men.

The Holy Spirit is inspiring church communities to find ways to repeat the story of the One who is the reason for the season. Some are hosting caroling on the lawn. Others are choosing a bonfire with s'mores and telling the story of Jesus. Another church community is packing blessing boxes to give to community members that include all the ingredients for a fine holiday dinner. Another church will read the Gospel of Luke, beginning at chapter 1 and reading each day through to Christmas Eve, to complete the story in Luke 24. This will keep the meaning of the season focused on Christ.

One church will participate in a reverse Advent calendar. Each day they will put a specific food item in a box. Then on Christmas Eve they will bring the filled box to the church's food pantry. Day one is a box of cereal, day two is peanut butter, and on through each day of December. One church will throw a Happy Birthday, Jesus party, complete with drive-by craft pickup before the day of the big event.

The Christ message remains constant in a world changed by COVID-19. The message of Jesus' birth brings a message of hope that touches our world where it is right now. 🦋

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**Heather Crews** pastors the Courthouse Road Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Richmond, Virginia.

## No Room at the Inn

During the past 2,000 years, commemorating Christ's birth has become quite the production. Great works of art, music, and literature try to envision the magnificent understatement of God becoming human. As we try to imagine the unimaginable, we've come up with traditions that remind us of a God who gave the greatest gift.

But a global pandemic has a way of derailing traditions assembled over the years.

The Seventh-day Adventist church in Meridian, Idaho, has a tradition developed over 20 years called Journey to Bethlehem (see "Small Church Big Outreach," *Adventist Review*, March 2020). In their telling of the story of Christ's birth, people from their community dress as characters from the Bible narrative, engaging visitors to imagine the sacrifice Christ made to be born as a baby.

"Every year the responses are great," says Cheri Gatton, this year's coordinator and volunteer assistant pastor. "They feel as if they're actually in a real city." She acknowledged that the social distancing required during a pandemic would require masks, face shields, and amplification. "We decided that people would understand if we're going to be a little out of character."

When the *Review* spoke to her in October, Gatton said they were taking precautions to make a production COVID-safe by holding the event outdoors and limiting the number of people who attend. But a spike of COVID-19 cases in the state required them to cancel this year's event.

Meanwhile, the Church of the Advent Hope in Manhattan, New York, has an annual lessons and carols service that will be held live on Zoom this year because of the pandemic.

The church also has a holiday benefit concert. Over several years, donations received at the concert have raised more than \$250,000 for local charitable organizations with whom the church partners. In October the church had applied with the New York City mayor's office for a permit to close a portion of 87<sup>th</sup> Street near the church to have a socially distant outdoor event.

Nicholas Zork, minister for worship and the arts, said, "By holding it outside, we intend to make the concert even more of a celebration with and for our neighbors."

After noting that New York seemed to be the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States earlier this year, Zork observed: "Our members are resilient and hopeful that the worst of the pandemic is behind us."

He also spoke about the nature of the church during a crisis: "The Christian faith was born in the tension between the 'already' of Jesus' death and resurrection and the 'not yet' of a world in which the kingdom work of healing, justice, and reconciliation is not yet finished. It's important to be honest about the challenges we face."—*Stephen Chavez*



SUE REAM, CC BY 3.0

## THE DAY THE WALL CAME DOWN

*What does the fall of the Berlin Wall tell us 31 years later?*

**GERALD A. KLINGBEIL**

**W**e remember minute details when we think of key moments in our lives.

I remember what I was doing on November 10, 1989, the day after the Berlin Wall came down. I was sitting in the cafeteria of Helderberg College in Somerset West, South Africa, enjoying a pleasant lunch with some friends when my girlfriend, Chantal (who happens to be my wife now), rushed into the dining room declaring that the Berlin Wall had come down the

previous night. It was front-page news in all the major South African newspapers.

My brother, Martin, and I looked at each other. “Impossible,” I said to her with a benign smile. “Someone must have thought this a funny joke, even though it isn’t April 1.”

Chantal wasn’t taking it. “I read the news story,” she said. “Go to the library and read it yourself.” Years later, she told me that she had felt like Mary Magdalene, rushing to share the news of the empty tomb with the disciples—only to recognize that nobody seemed to believe her.

My brother and I had left Germany to continue our studies in South Africa at the end of January that year. The Berlin Wall stood firm and unmovable at that time. In fact, I couldn’t imagine Berlin, my birthplace, without a wall. Nobody could.

Yet the political changes leading to the toppling of the wall were swift, unexpected, at times surreal, yet transformative. Less than a year later, Germans celebrated the unification of their country.

### OUR WALLS

There are many walls around us. North Koreans are separated from South Koreans by a demilitarized zone (DMZ) dividing a once united country. The name doesn’t do this location justice, for the DMZ is one of the most dangerous places on earth. In many parts of the world, high walls separate countries from each other.

Walls have been part of the human experience for thousands of years. From the Great Wall of China, built to keep marauding Mongolian raiders out of China, to strong city walls

protecting people in biblical times or later periods, walls were an ever-present and often much-needed reality.

We can see remains of some of these walls, including the Berlin Wall, even today. Archaeological remains of crumbled walls can be found all over the world.

Most of us, however, aren't too concerned about these walls. We struggle more with the walls that we tend to build in our minds. Race, gender, caste, culture, income (or lack thereof), education, or religion continue to separate us from one another. We often divide the world into "they" and "them" and "we" and "us." We focus on the differences without paying attention to the similarities. Clear demarcations promise a false sense of security and safety.

So the walls keep growing—and we continue to stay in our neighborhoods (geographically or on social media). The less we know about the "others," the scarier they tend to become.

### **JESUS TEARS DOWN WALLS**

Tearing down walls isn't easy. The demolition of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany didn't resolve many of the underlying issues. In fact, most Germans recognize that even in a united Germany, there is a lack of unity. Walls, now present in the minds of people, still separate East and West. Sociologists tell us that this change will need generational transformation.

Realities established over generations take generations to undo. Taking down walls in our minds and hearts involves dimensions beyond race, gender, caste, culture, income, education, or religion. Walls can be confronted only by a change of heart.

Jesus Himself faced many walls as He sought to minister to God's people—and beyond. "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathaniel asked" (John 1:46). Pharisees and Sadducees quickly categorized Him as "too liberal," "too literal," "too radical," or "too unholy." Those working for liberation from Roman suppression were disappointed when they realized that His kingdom was not like their dreams. Yet Jesus kept reaching out to Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees, the proud, the prejudiced, the self-righteous. Jesus was (and still is) in the business of breaking down walls that separate people from people, and us from God. His love was wide enough to include

**“Walls have been part of the human experience for thousands of years.”**

Romans, a Canaanite woman, people caught in adultery, even those who daily showcased their holiness. He met Nicodemus under the protection of darkness. He paid attention to those who were considered outcasts or of less importance—including children, women, lepers, the poor, or the sick.

### **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

We are called to imitate Jesus as we recognize the walls that separate us—in our cultures, in our neighborhoods, even in our churches. When Jesus sent off His disciples, He told them to "make disciples of *all* nations" (Matt. 28:19, italics supplied). Later, He told them that this meant not only Jerusalem or Judea or Samaria, but also "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It took the early church a while to comprehend the implications of this command. Paul later described this divine ideal in his letter to the church in Galatia: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). We are still trying to put into practice Paul's radical statement, for walls have no place among God's people.

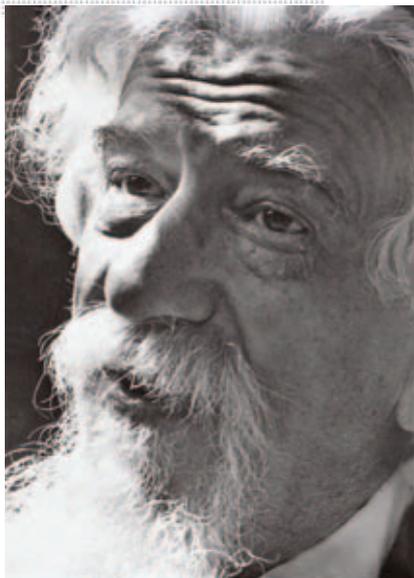
A couple of years ago I visited part of the Berlin Wall that's still standing today. It's part of an open-air memorial reminding visitors of the pain, hardship, and loss of life this wall once meant to people living on both sides. It's a popular selfie spot for many tourists visiting the capital of Germany. It's also a reminder that in spite of our best efforts to break down walls, there will always be pieces standing around that remind us that we live in a world that is not our home and that we wait for a kingdom where " 'there will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

To that I can only say: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).<sup>1</sup>

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**Gerald A. Klingbeil**, a native of Germany, serves as an associate editor of *Adventist Review Ministries*.

# CLOSER LOOK



## Spiritual Audacity

*Spiritual Audacity: The Abraham Joshua Heschel Story*, a film by Martin Doblmeier, Journey Films, 56 minutes, 2021. Reviewed by Stephen Chavez, *Adventist Review*.

**T**he twentieth century saw some remarkable religious persons whose influence is still felt and cited in conversations now taking place regarding race, justice, and the role spirituality plays in helping us navigate our future as a society.

Martin Doblmeier, award-winning documentarian, has chosen Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) as the latest example of people of faith whose influence began in the twentieth century and continues into the twenty-first. His film, *Spiritual Audacity: The Abraham Joshua Heschel Story*, is set for release in January to coincide with Jewish Heritage Month.

Those who know and appreciate Heschel likely have on their bookshelves a copy of his book, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (1951). Those who knew of Heschel's status as a civil rights icon are doubtless familiar with his statement: "When I marched in Selma [Alabama],

I felt my legs were praying."

How Heschel, born in Warsaw, Poland, had to flee Nazi Germany (where he had gone to study), and how he became one of the premier religious scholars of the twentieth century is the kind of story Doblmeier excels in telling. Interspersed with archival audio and video interviews with Heschel himself are commentaries by those who knew him, those who have made social justice their lifework.

As a victim of the Holocaust (his mother was murdered by Nazis and two of his sisters died in Nazi concentration camps), Heschel well understood humanity's propensity for evil. But as a descendant of Hasidic rabbis on both his mother's and father's side of the family, he was grounded in the reality of a God who understands suffering humanity, and often, in fact, suffers with it.

In 1962 Heschel's book *The Prophets* became one of the books most often read by leaders of the civil rights movement in the United States. In it he reminded readers that prophets not only spoke for God, but became God's voice on behalf of the voiceless, the poor, and those who are oppressed.

Doblmeier, whose documentaries have profiled several notable Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, has a genius for highlighting characters who not only left their mark, but whose lives continue to influence society. They represented Judeo-Christianity in their writing, preaching, and public appearances and embodied the principles so valuable to those of us who take the Bible seriously. Doblmeier has found a sterling example of that in the life of Abraham Joshua Heschel.

*Spiritual Audacity: The Abraham Joshua Heschel Story* will appear on public television in January and is available for purchase from [JourneyFilms.com](http://JourneyFilms.com). 🍀

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Reviews and commentaries about books, films, or other items do not constitute endorsement by the editorial staff of *Adventist Review Ministries*.

# THOSE ON THE LEFT

**W**hen Jesus returns with tens of thousands of angels, He'll take His rightful place in the universe on the only throne that matters. Everyone who has ever lived will be present, waiting to discover their forever fate. As shepherds divide their flocks, Christ will put them into two groups, because there's no such thing as partial followers; we're either all in or not. Then the King will gather His people on the right, while those who have taken their own path will be set aside to the left.

The King will say to those on His left, "It's time for you to reap what you have sown; you have no place among the righteous. Your fate is destruction. In the millennia to come, it will be as if you never existed. This was not My plan for you; it was the route you chose for yourself."

*It was rainy and cold. But I know it didn't affect you that much. All you had to do was flip on the windshield wipers and turn a dial for warm air. Judging by the make of your car, I'm guessing you even had seat heaters. But it's much different when you're on the outside. I didn't have an umbrella; my coat was worn and thin. I didn't ask for a ride, just a few dollars for a bus ticket or something hot to drink. But really, I would've taken anything, because I had nothing. You looked toward me, but never at me—as if I were less than human.*

*There wasn't much hope left. The cancer had riddled my body down to a shadow of its former vibrancy. The worst part was being alone. I know there was a pandemic going on, but there's nothing worse than*

*dying by yourself. I couldn't talk much, but to have a friend there—even just at the window—would have meant more than I can describe.*

*There's certainly a stigma that comes with being on death row—even if you're innocent. I know, everyone says they didn't do it, but I really didn't. Finally, a judge agreed. Unfortunately, I'll never get that time back. The worst part was never having a single visitor; even my family disowned me. That came closer to killing me than the electric chair did.*

"And that brings us to today. You had so many chances to make a difference, but all you cared about was yourself." Shocked and appalled at this accusation, the wicked are incredulous, racking their brains to recall these scenes.

"Lord, there must be a mistake. We never saw *You*. Besides, you're God—how could you have been hungry, sick, or imprisoned?"

Then those fateful words will ring out—and with them a firestorm of regret, what-ifs, and second guessing. "If you had read My words and followed My example, you would have understood the principles of My kingdom. More than anything else, it's this: When human beings suffer, I suffer with them and feel the pain as if it were My own. I felt it every day since sin entered the world. You did nothing to relieve their pain, and as such, you did nothing to take away Mine." ♣

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

**INTRODUCING  
THE WHY  
JIMMY  
PHILLIPS**



**THERE'S NO SUCH  
THING AS PARTIAL  
FOLLOWERS; WE'RE  
EITHER ALL IN OR  
NOT.**



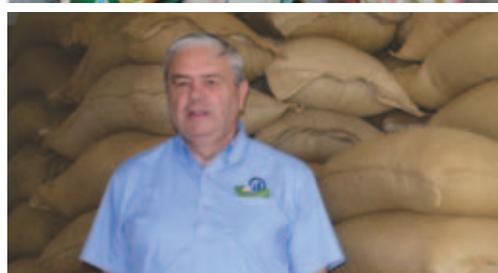
# Children, families, teachers, pastors and villagers say **Thank you!**



The Covid-19 crisis has had a huge impact in the countries that Child Impact serves. Emergency funding has been sent to India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal.

The 'Rice & Health' appeal that Child Impact donors supported so generously has helped those in dire need. This includes food to hundreds of teachers and pastors who have not been paid for more than three months, rice to the thousands of sponsored children who could be contacted, emergency distribution to villagers near our schools, then building a year's supply for needy boarding and special needs schools so that children will be fed when they are able to return to their schools.

Other funds are ensuring church mission schools will be ready to open when their students can safely return and ensure food supplies are available.



I just want to thank our supporters and sponsors for their support in this difficult time . We do not understand the struggle many face on a day to day basis.

We thank you.

**Jim Rennie**  
CEO Child Impact International



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## CELEBRATE? **YES!** No matter what anyone says, the season is about Jesus.

Christians have commemorated the birth of Christ for centuries, always interpreting the circumstances of that singular event through their own lenses. Sadly, our sin-stultified imagination manages only an impoverished representation of the reality of God becoming human. Until Jesus returns we will always have to rely on imperfect speech and images to describe the genuineness of “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).—Editors.

“Bethlehem is not the end of our journey but only the beginning—not home, but the place through which we must pass if ever we are to reach home at last.”

**FREDERICK BUECHNER**

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“And in despair I bowed my head:  
 ‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said,  
 ‘For hate is strong  
 And mocks the song  
 Of peace on earth, good will to men!’”

“Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
 ‘God is not dead, nor doth he sleep,  
 The Wrong shall fail,  
 the Right prevail,  
 With peace on earth, good will to men!’”

**HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW**

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“Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.”

**HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE**

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“When purchasing gifts becomes the focal point of the season, we lose focus on what’s truly important.”

**JOSHUA FIELDS MILLBURN**

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“Mary knew God loved her. From the moment Gabriel appeared to her, Mary had a distinct sense that God’s presence was with her and His hand upon her. She didn’t understand everything that was happening, but she was certain that God would be with her through it all.”

**STORMIE OMARTIAN**

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“Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children; to remember the weaknesses and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and to ask yourself if you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear on their hearts; to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open? Are you willing to do these things for a day? Then you are ready to keep Christmas!”

**HENRY VAN DYKE**

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“Mary did not understand Christ’s mission. Simeon had prophesied of Him as a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as a glory to Israel. Thus the angels had announced the Saviour’s birth as tidings of joy to all peoples. God was seeking to correct the narrow, Jewish conception of the Messiah’s work. He desired men to behold Him, not merely as a deliverer of Israel, but as the Redeemer of the world. But many years must pass before even the mother of Jesus would understand His mission.”

**ELLEN WHITE (THE DESIRE OF AGES, P. 56).**

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“As I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog.”

**PHILIP YANCEY**

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## CALL ME SERVANT

One September morning in 1993 I came home from my run and my wife, Linda, said, “Someone named Manny Vasquez called from the NAD. He wants you to call him.”

I knew Vasquez when we were both members of the Pacific Union Conference executive committee, but I had no idea why he wanted to talk to me.

Long story short, there was an opening at *Adventist Review*. I had been published a few times in the *Pacific Union Recorder*,

and Vasquez had pushed my name forward as a candidate for assistant editor. Within a few days I traveled from Reno, Nevada, to the General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland, to interview. The rest, as they say, is history.

I’ll never forget walking into the General Conference building for the first time and meeting William Johnsson, editor (one of my former seminary professors), and associate editors Roy Adams and Myron Widmer (a seminary classmate). In the department’s conference room we chatted about this and that. Then someone asked, “Steve, what are your hopes and dreams for the future?”

At the time I was lead pastor of the Adventist church in Reno, one of the two largest congregations in the conference. I had been there about two years and was just beginning to “hit my stride.” *What are my hopes and dreams?*

After a moment I said, “I’m a servant. I know that God can use me in pastoral ministry—He already has. If you think I

can do something useful for God’s kingdom here, I’m willing to give it a try. (I had no experience as an editor.) I intend to serve God, whether here or in Reno.”

Later, over lunch in the building’s cafeteria, Johnsson said, “You better start planning your first editorial.”

My wife and kids weren’t crazy about moving across country and starting over where we didn’t have that many friends and contacts. I promised them that we’d stay at least four years, so our kids could get through high school in one place. That was 27 years ago.

By the time you read this I’ll have started another chapter in my life. For the first time in 45 years I won’t have a title next to my name. Many of the contacts I’ve cultivated during the past quarter century will be of little value. Thanks to the pandemic, the volunteer activities I’ve participated in over the years have dried up (except those on Zoom).

But I expect I’ll find plenty to do. As I read the Bible, I see that not many of the heroes in God’s Hall of Faith (Heb. 11) set out to change the world. More than one—Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah, Daniel, Paul—had to be “persuaded” by situations and circumstances beyond their control. Yet they each found themselves in situations in which God used their particular talents and gifts.

So when I hear a voice asking, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

I expect to respond like Isaiah: “Here am I. Send me!” (Isa. 6:8).

It’s what servants do. ✍

**Stephen Chavez** is an assistant editor of *Adventist Review*.

**SOMEONE ASKED,  
“STEVE, WHAT ARE  
YOUR HOPES AND  
DREAMS FOR THE  
FUTURE?”**

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