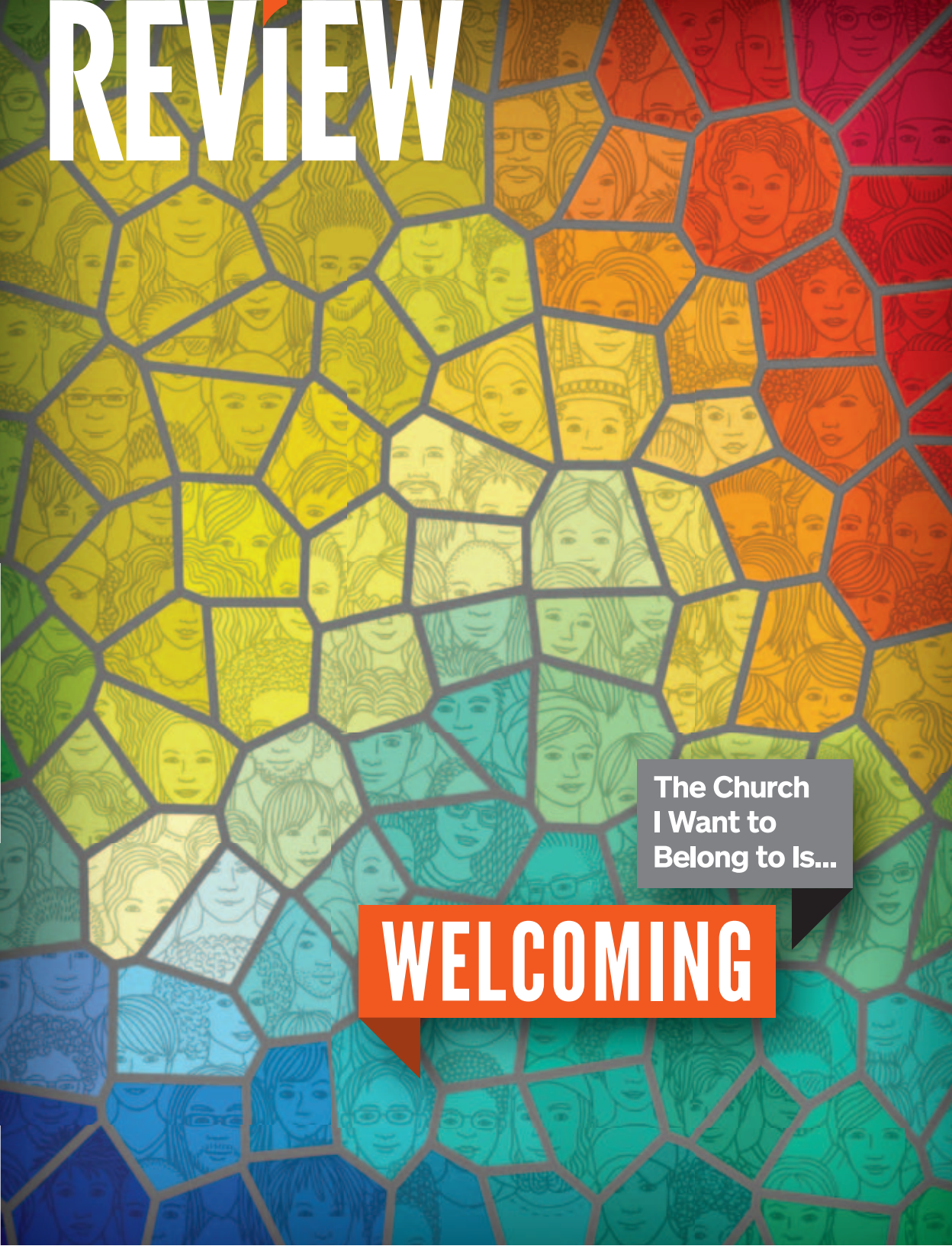


ADVENTIST REVIEW

JUNE 2020: THINKING “ADVENTISTLY” ABOUT POLITICS + DON’T PUT ME ON HOLD! + TITHING IN A CRISIS + YOUR MARRIAGE CAN SURVIVE COVID-19 + FORECAST: HEAVY RAIN + TIME CAPSULE 2020



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I Want to
Belong to Is...

WELCOMING

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THE MOST SHARED STORIES ON ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG LAST MONTH:



- 1 Adventist Leaders Move Toward Greater Compliance with Core Policies
- 2 When Will This Be Over?
- 3 What Ellen White Did During a Pandemic
- 4 Three Great Temptations of the End Times
- 5 Six Lessons From the Coronavirus



In the November 4, 1993, Adventist Review, Penny Estes Wheeler wrote an article called "How to Become a Welcoming Church." This is excerpted from her experience visiting a small church with two active, noisy children.—Editors.

After church something happened that I'll never forget. We were surrounded by people who pumped our hands and hugged our children. "What are your little girls' names? Oh, they are wonderful, aren't they? We love children. You must bring them back."

My apologies were brushed aside. "It's so good to have you with us. And we'll help you with the girls next Sabbath. You all must come back."

And so we did.

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None come to ride the hobbyhorses of rigid members who patrol the foyer.

The Frozen Foyer

It's still one of the oddest welcomes I've ever had at church.

After weekends of intense speaking appointments, I had settled into what was supposed to be a quiet Sabbath attending a "family church"—one of the congregations in New England where relatives regularly worship. There was no heightened sense of tension as the sun declined on Friday; no leaping out of bed to study sermon notes when birdsongs woke me in the morning. This was a Sabbath "off."

As I walked from the parking lot to the front door of the church, however, I met the pastor hurrying toward his car. "They're going to ask you to preach this morning," he laughed as he swept past.

A joke, I thought—a harmless tease from a colleague who knew I had no plans to be "on duty."

At the door, however, I stopped grinning. The local elder gripped my hand with all-too-earnest sincerity.

"We need you to preach this morning, Pastor," he said, staring deeply into my relaxed soul. "The pastor has to go to another congregation."

Still uncomprehending, I stammered through my questions. "But I just saw the pastor: why isn't he preaching? What emergency called him away?"

Moments passed as I grappled with the unwelcome news. I could feel the tension climbing up my spine and settling in my shoulders. A glance at my watch spun me back toward my car, mind racing, irritated, losing all my "Sabbath blessing."

Twenty minutes to drive to where I was staying; 20 minutes to find and print notes from a sermon I had preached two weeks earlier; 20 minutes back to church.

And so an hour later I was seated where I didn't want to be—on the platform—staring out at dozens of smiling people who never knew about the drama.

I sputtered all that afternoon to any family member who would listen, and told the story twice to colleagues in my office. The episode "rattled" me far more than many other times when I've been asked to preach on little or no notice.

It all comes down to expectations, I concluded—mine, and yours, and those of every person walking through the doors of an Adventist church. It was the mismatch between what I had imagined would happen and what actually unfolded that enhanced my "irritation quotient."

And so it is for many others who find their moments in the remnant church off-putting and uncomfortable. Some come seeking a sanctuary—a quiet,

uninterrupted hour of reflection and devotion after days of conflict and commotion. Others come from homes where television and the cat are all the company they have. None come to ride the hobbyhorses of rigid members who patrol the foyer, offering agendas.

There's never just one type of "visitor," nor just one way to make them feel welcome. It takes the best we have—wise, warm, and loving people—to identify what guests may need, and show the grace of thoughtful hospitality. Some greetings require many words; others need only a few. Those we ask to be the face of our fellowship must be the other-centered, mature Christians who match their welcome to the need. Just as the cover of this magazine is designed to make you glad to open it, so those who are the "cover" of our congregations must be believers with high "EQ"—emotional intelligence—and not just those who volunteer.

Our mission to become a safe and healing community for those whom the Spirit is calling begins with a plan to prioritize the role of those who first meet the public for us.

That's why the church I want to belong to is . . . *welcoming.*

Bill Knott



MISSION-MINDED

Thanks for the recent emphasis about missions. As a young lad recently converted, I was inspired by the missionaries who came to Brazil. They made commitments for life and brought the message to our country.

I think of the Halliwells, who for 25 years sailed with the *Luzeiro* medical boats, risking their health and ministering to people in the Amazon. Names such as the Websters, Wilcoxes, Christmans, Nelsons, and many others not only learned our languages but helped sow the seeds of growth. Many perished in the mission field.

Later, while working for the General Conference Secretariat, recruiting missionaries for Latin America, I was impressed with the dedication of men and women who wanted to serve the Lord overseas. They were motivated by love. As Bill Knott wrote: "No obligation ever made a real missionary of anyone. Duty may get us to the door, but only love will make us choose to sacrifice."

Let's pray that the coronavirus may not stop our mission to make disciples and prepare people for the soon coming of Jesus.

Leo Ranzolin Sr.

Estero, Florida

The word "mission" does not appear in Scripture. Having been to other countries on "mission trips," I returned underwhelmed, embarrassed, and discouraged. I felt that I had wasted time, money, and resources—ours and theirs. Jesus was never the focal point of our endeavors; it was our culture and way of doing church in North America. This haunts me to this day!

We take pride in and effectively hide behind "mission." Personal

friends take trips and volunteer in programs, but do not know the name of the teller at their bank. We flaunt our involvement and high-five ourselves through our publications to the point of embarrassment.

Jesus was the master of the personal interview, the knowing touch, the real connection, being-to-being. We don't need metrics on viability and success in missions, nor should we brag about it. How about a church that

is "human-minded"? Social distancing has been an integral part of Adventist culture for far too long.

We each have a sphere of influence; let's use it.

Clif Freese

Glendive, Montana

INSIGHTFUL ISSUE

Thank you for the insightful March issue of *Adventist Review*.

Because Lowell Cooper and I were together in classes back in his college days, it was especially pleasing to read his fine, well-reasoned article.

The interview with the General Conference's chief legal counsel is one of the centerpieces of the issue. You presented some very timely, searching questions for him to address.

In view of recent developments in the church, the article by Gerald Winslow is perhaps the most valuable of all. I hope that every General Conference delegate will read it carefully and follow its wisdom. Not only is the message of the article clear and convincing, but also the quality of the writing is exceptionally good. He has an extraordinary ability to choose just the right word in passage after passage.

As always, there are other delectable fruits on the same tree. It's always a privilege, for

Lowell Cooper's "The Live Option," along with Gerald Winslow's "When Cultures Clash" and Costin Jordache's "Why Journalism Matters to Adventists," are right on target.

—JOHN LOOR, JR., SURPRISE, ARIZONA

example, to read the inspiring columns of Dixil Rodríguez.

A reader from New England

Lowell Cooper's "The Live Option," along with Gerald Winslow's "When Cultures Clash" and Costin Jordache's "Why Journalism Matters to Adventists," are right on target. As Jesus said: "For God called you to do good. . . . He is your example, and you must follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21, NLT).^{*} This issue is one I will keep in my files.

John Loor, Jr.

Surprise, Arizona

I appreciated the short, direct, ethical stories in the March 2020 *Adventist Review*. Jesus spoke in stories so that everyone could understand the point He was making.

I was a little confused by Ricardo Bacchus's article "Mr. Unethical Goes to Church." To me, calling a person "Mr. Unethical" is judgmental. Perhaps "Mr. Different" would have been better. The string of negative behaviors Bacchus listed as being practiced by church members on one visit was so improbable that the story did not hold up for me and would definitely discourage anyone from returning to church.

Our church leaders sometimes

pontificate as to who is "ethical" and who is "unethical," and some church boards blindly follow their recommendations, preferring not to dig deeply for themselves. I ask that we carefully evaluate

how we treat others, and do what is Spirit-driven and right, rather than follow what others have deemed appropriate for us.

Tabitha Abel

via e-mail

COMMENTS FROM ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG

ADVENTIST CHURCH PRESIDENT CALLS MEMBERS TO REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

Thank you for these words of encouragement during this time of crisis.

Delta Harris

via web

THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND

We thank God that His church continues to meet online, despite the physical barriers orchestrated by COVID-19. Here in Zambia, even though the government has permitted places of worship to resume meetings, our church leaders advised that members should continue meeting online until the situation has improved. Our church promotes health principles as espoused in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. So it makes sense that we should be in the forefront, encouraging everyone to avoid as much physical contact as possible during this period.

Masiye Tembo

via web

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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.

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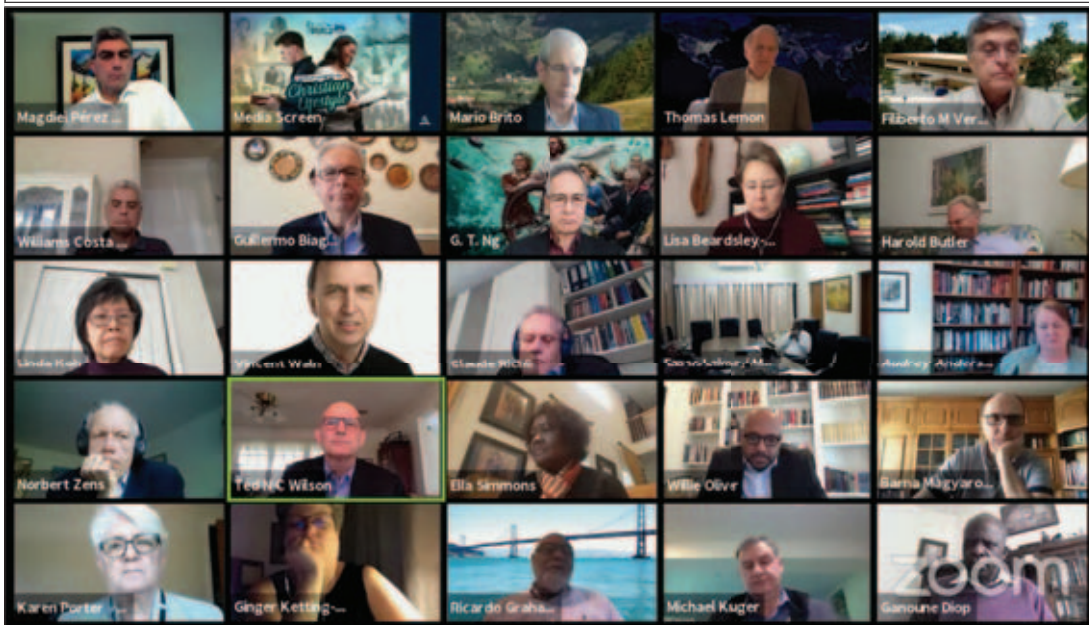
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“This yearly report helps us understand changing patterns of religious freedom violations and to identify current ‘hotspots’ of persecution or repression.”

Bettina Krause, page 15

NEWS



ADVENTIST LEADERS AGREE ON CONCRETE STEPS TO PREVENT, TREAT SEXUAL ABUSE

CHURCH REGION LEADERS WORK ON DEVELOPING PROTOCOLS FOR SUPPORTING VICTIMS, DEALING WITH PERPETRATORS.

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

Time and again, experts in sexual abuse remind us that one of the worst fears of victims is being ignored when seeking help. It is something, experts say, that can lead to extremely harmful and long-term health consequences.

In the context of church life and faith-based organizations, that breach of trust can be devastating.

Against this backdrop, leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church recently provided evidence that church regions (or divisions) are taking concrete steps to make sure

church organizations and institutions will work unapologetically to prevent sexual abuse. At the same time, regional leaders pledged to keep working to craft detailed protocols to prevent or respond to any complaint of sexual abuse in the church.

The move came at the end of a lively Zoom-mediated discussion and vote on April 15, 2020, the second day of the Adventist Church’s Spring Meeting, one of the two annual business meetings of the world church. Because of the COVID-19 pan-

dem, this year’s sessions with dozens of leaders from around the world were held entirely online.

SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH

“Sadly, our church is not immune to incidents of sexual abuse,” said Gary Krause, General Conference associate secretary, who introduced the agenda item for discussion. Krause explained that the inclusion of this agenda item came after reports from church divisions and discussions that took place at

a meeting of the General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO). This body includes top administrators from the world church and the 13 church regions. Krause said that at that session, “a large amount of time was taken to listen to [regional] leaders. [The goal was to report on] what they are doing to prevent sexual abuse within the church setting in their territories.”

Adventist Church president, Ted N. C. Wilson, participates in the Zoom discussion on ways to alleviate sexual abuse.



Krause said he was happy to report that evidence indicates that every church division is working on the issue and is moving to roll out measures designed to implement long-standing voted principles. “Protocols are being put in place,” he said.

Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson concurred, noting that regional leaders have worked with local union regions, helping members to become sensitized to sexual abuse prevention for both children and adults.

It is the way to go, he emphasized. “We need to give strong lead-

ership [on this issue],” Wilson said. “We must help people understand and show them a better way.”

A LONG HISTORY OF ADVOCACY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a decades-old history of advocating against sexual abuse in the church, even years before it was common to find the topic in newspaper headlines, according

to leaders. As far back as 1987, church leaders voted a Statement on Sexual Behavior, and added a Statement on Pornography in 1990.

As years passed, official statements focused more on specifics, such as the 1995 Statement on Abuse and Family Violence, the 1996 Statement on Family Violence, and the 1997 Statement on Child Sexual Abuse. In 2000, church leaders voted a Statement on Female Genital Mutilation, and in 2010, a document on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

According to church leaders, multiple Adventist departments and

entities have joined the effort to combat abuse. For years the Women’s Ministries Department at the General Conference, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and others have fought against violence and abuse inside and outside the church through various initiatives, leaders pointed out.

“The Health Ministries Department is intentionally engaged in this specific area,” said Peter Landless, who leads that department of the world church. “We teach our division counterparts the importance of addressing sexual abuse, sexual violence, and domestic violence,” Landless said.

Adventist Church Children’s Ministries director Linda Koh concurred. “For years we have been working with leaders on behalf of child safety,” said Koh, who asked church regions to be aware of the child abuse component when discussing sexual abuse.

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries director Mario Ceballos also reminded leaders of one of the few counseling centers for clergy, run by Adventist health-care organization Kettering Health Network, based in Ohio, United States. The center provides an essential service, he said, as “some wives of our ministers are victims of sexual and physical abuse.”

The Adventist Church also has a history of partnering with organizations such as the United Nations to fight against abuse, violence, and human trafficking, said Ganoune

The Adventist Church has a history of partnering with organizations such as the United Nations to fight against abuse, violence, and human trafficking.

Diop, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) director. “We have been involved for years. Adventists are taking this topic very seriously,” Diop said.

Despite what has been done, leaders acknowledge that more work needs to be done and believe that current developments will help to add concrete, concerted measures and protocols to tackle the specific issue of sexual abuse in the church. “We are giving this the highest priority possible,” Wilson said.

A LIVELY DISCUSSION

Discussion on the “virtual floor” seemed to reflect a consensus of support about the direction the church is going, even as several leaders stressed that the church can do much more.

“Thank you for the report,” said David Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR). “It’s very pleasing to know that the church is acknowledging and confronting the problem. But it’s a spiritual problem, and there is much more to do,” he added.

Adventist Church Families Ministries codirector Willie Oliver seconded this thought. “I thank the committee for dealing with this issue,” Oliver said. “The fact we are voting it at this level helps us in our work. Thanks for this forward-thinking reality, as we keep praying that this cancer may be rooted out from our church.”

Heather Dawn-Small, who, as director of the Women’s Ministries Department for the world church,

has advocated against violence toward women and children for years, said this adds to her department’s initiatives. “I am happy to see that this initiative is being taken. To see our church leadership taking that kind of step is encouraging and an affirmation of all the work we have already done,” Small said.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE DONE?

During the discussion several leaders emphasized further steps the church could take.

Neil Nedley, Weimar Institute president and a lay member of the General Conference Executive Committee, said it all starts with the biblical foundations of the topic. He noted that in ancient Israel, the Bible chapter of Leviticus 18 (dealing with sexual immorality) was read every year to every man, woman, and child after the Day of the Atonement. “Their goal was to let children know what was right and what was wrong,” he said. “This is probably more applicable today than ever before.”

Wilson noted that administrators everywhere should know that they can’t keep employing or working with employees who abuse or victimize individuals. “There is no reason to provide employment to people [guilty of abuse],” he advised committee members.

Small also emphasized the need for improving communication with church members in the pews. “A lot is going on in the church, but we may not know what is happening. People are asking, ‘What is my

church leadership doing to deal with this problem?’ After so many years, the word is not going out as it should,” she suggested.

Ginger Ketting-Weller, president of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines, said that the church should move beyond “taking the pulse” of church regions. “If we don’t give training about best practices, they won’t know what to do,” she said.

Several leaders who are privy to regional protocols being written assured committee members that church regions are moving decidedly in that direction. “Having heard the reports from the divisions, I am very pleased with the direction divisions are going,” Tom Lemon, a world church vice president, said.

Ella Simmons, another world church vice president, agreed. “I am greatly relieved and encouraged by what has been brought forth as a first step of a comprehensive approach. I have the benefit of the supporting details reported by division leaders, even if what was presented is not all we want to hear at this time,” she said.

Wilson concluded that this discussion marked the beginning of a process. “It’s a work in progress,” he said, assuring committee members that the topic would be included in future agendas. “Is this the end? No, but it’s a good beginning,” he said.

Committee members then voted to accept the progress report. The motion passed by a vote of 95 to 1. ▀



According to It Is Written speaker/director John Bradshaw, the April 13 tornado caused destruction around both sides of the ministry's building, but the building itself was spared. PHOTOS: IT IS WRITTEN

IT IS WRITTEN SPARED FROM TORNADO DAYS BEFORE GLOBAL EVANGELISM INITIATIVE

STRONG WINDS CAUSED DESTRUCTION AROUND BOTH SIDES OF THE MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS.

BY ELLEN HOSTETLER, IT IS WRITTEN

A tornado touched down just feet away from the It Is Written ministry headquarters in Collegedale, Tennessee, United States, early on Monday, April 13, 2020. Reports of power outages, missing persons, and deaths filled local news reports that morning.

The It Is Written offices were running on generator power Monday.

When staff arrived to check on the building, they were met with debris across the parking lot and scores of trees snapped in half around the building. Power was restored to the building on Tuesday, April 14.

"Miraculously, the building was spared," said John Bradshaw, It Is Written speaker and director. "It became clear when we looked at drone footage that tornadoes had come through on either side of our ministry home. They flattened trees along two distinct paths before lifting just yards short of a nursing home and a dental practice. We're extremely grateful to God, and we are praying for those families and businesses that have experienced devastating loss. We were spared from what would have been a disaster. Literally, a few feet in either direction, and things

would be very different today."

The storm came just days before It Is Written was set to begin *Hope Awakens*, an online evangelistic series. More than 24,000 people have registered for the live event, which began Friday, April 17.

Bradshaw said, "God knows how urgent it is that people hear hope and certainty when there is so little in the world right now."

Bradshaw was the featured speaker during *Hope Awakens*, which was livestreamed online and on mobile apps. 📌

Drone footage shows the extent of damage to trees surrounding the It Is Written ministry headquarters in Collegedale, Tennessee, United States, after tornadoes passed through the area in the early hours of April 13, 2020.





ADVENTIST LEADERS MOVE TOWARD GREATER COMPLIANCE WITH CORE GOVERNANCE POLICIES

AT SPRING MEETING, LEADERS REPORT AND VOTE MEASURES TO REDUCE NONCOMPLIANCE LEVELS.

BY ADVENTIST REVIEW AND ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK

What could go wrong if Seventh-day Adventist Church entities and organizations do not adhere to working policies currently in force? Many things, said General Conference Auditing Services (GCAS) director Paul Douglas on April 14, 2020. For one, noncompliance often pushes church leaders to make uninformed decisions, which can ultimately put the non-compliant church organization in jeopardy, he explained.

Douglas' remarks were part of his presentation to dozens of leaders attending the first day of Spring Meeting, one of the two annual business meetings of the world church. The meetings usually take place at the Adventist Church headquarters building in Silver Spring, Maryland, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic this year's sessions were held entirely online.

In discussing the current state of compliance, Douglas referred specifically to the S90 core policy from the *General Conference Working Policy (GCWP)* handbook. According to Adventist Church treasurer Juan Prestol-Puesán, the S90 lists 26 denominational policies

that have been selected to define good governance.

“Good governance, true stewardship, and showing transparency; integrity . . . following better business practices, [and] demonstrating accountability—that’s what the S90 policy is all about,” Prestol-Puesán said in introducing Douglas’ presentation. “In that regard, we are making a significant effort and commitment.”

According to Prestol-Puesán, he and Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson have been spearheading the effort to address governance and financial compliance, providing the foundation and framework for engaging with entities around the world. Prestol-Puesán emphasized that the current process to specifically address noncompliance in these areas is directly related to past votes and ongoing efforts of the Adventist Church to increase transparency and integrity in governance.

“It is important that Adventist members know that the church has policies in place and that church leaders consider these governance policies both crucial and

best practices,” explained Prestol-Puesán following the meeting. “The problem is not that we don’t have the policies, but that we’re not adhering to all of them.”

WHY NOW?

Douglas explained that based on findings in various church entities and organizations, church leaders expect every region, including the General Conference, to review and adjust their compliance to core policies as needed. Previous reporting on compliance with core policies tested in 2018 indicated that 79 percent of church organizations had at least one violation enumerated in the *GCWP*.

Looking at compliance to core policies from another perspective showed that 34 percent of those church organizations had a violation related to their financial reports; 32 percent to audit committees; and 31 percent to insurance coverage. It also showed that 31 percent had a violation pertaining to the signing and collecting of conflict of interest forms; 14 percent to the updating and signing of service records; and 11 percent to operating deficits.

“If we were to address these top-six violations, overall noncompliance could decrease from 79 to just 8 percent,” Douglas said. Decreasing to 8 percent and below is something church leaders say they are committed to.

Prestol-Puesán emphasized: “Many of these matters of governance that have been skipped are routine tasks.”

“We will do everything we need to do to comply with the policies as they are stated, and we are encouraging every division and institution to comply as well.”

—Juan Prestol-Puesán

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

Douglas provided some examples to show that noncompliance with church policies for good governance is much more than a theoretical or philosophical proposition. It may have, he said, concrete effects and consequences on church entities and organizations.

“For instance, if financial reports are not compliant, management decisions may be irrelevant, uninformed, and tardy in correcting problems,” Douglas explained. In the area of insurance coverages, he added, “an organization could experience significant uncovered losses, could become bankrupt, and affect higher organizations.”

Conflicts of interest is another area that should not be overlooked, according to Douglas. Noncompliance in that field may push the organization to “experience an increased risk of fraudulent activity because governance is not aware of potential conflicts,” he said.

Also, accuracy in service records will provide an organization with defense and protection from employees’ claims in the future, Douglas said. Finally, it is essential that church entities and organizations comply with policies on operating deficits. Otherwise “the organization could go bankrupt because of inadequate planning and impact higher organizations,” he said.

DIVISIONS COMMITTED TO ACT

In the second part of his presentation, Douglas shared what the General Conference and church

regions around the world have pledged to do to work toward compliance with core church policies. Given that the focus and scope may differ from region to region, church divisions shared concrete actions they are planning to introduce in their territories.

Suggestions were as varied as the regions themselves. From creating greater awareness and strengthening compliance across all levels to creating steps for addressing noncompliance and providing quarterly progress reports, church region leaders showed they understand it is time to act.

Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson agreed. “We have had very strong support from the divisions,” he said.

Some regions suggested utilizing a checklist to review the implementation of core policies and incorporating technology into routine processes to minimize errors leading to noncompliance. Other church regions said they plan to discuss substandard audit results and even impose financial penalties for noncompliance.

According to Wilson, these suggestions show an increased burden by leaders of church entities and organizations to comply with core policies. He thanked division leaders for their commitment to reducing noncompliance in their territories.

“I have to express . . . deep appreciation to the divisions,” Wilson said. “They have done remarkably well.”

A COMPREHENSIVE WORK IN PROGRESS

Wilson emphasized that this process toward higher compliance transcends geographical or church organizational borders.

“Every region and heads of every institution and entity must take a direct interest in making sure we comply with these . . . processes. If we do not, we are derelict in our responsibility.”

Prestol-Puesán agreed, explaining that the move toward greater compliance includes every church entity and organization, including the General Conference, which oversees the work of the church around the world.

“We will do everything we need to do to comply with the policies as they are stated, and we are encouraging every division and institution to comply as well,” he said.

Wilson also emphasized the scope and importance of working toward greater compliance.

“It does not involve only financial aspects but spiritual accountability as well,” he said. According to Wilson, “it involves the integrity of our financial system and our spiritual system.”

At the same time, when answering a comment from lay committee member Neil Nedley about differences in suggestions between one church region and another, Wilson pointed out that this is just an initial step of many.

“This is a work in progress. . . . We will not let this item go,” Wilson said. 🍌



WHILE ATTENTION IS FOCUSED ELSEWHERE, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ABUSES CONTINUE

TWENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT BY A U.S. WATCHDOG AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS TROUBLING TRENDS, SAY ADVENTIST ADVOCATES.

BY GENERAL CONFERENCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY STAFF

Even as the global COVID-19 pandemic dominates news headlines, a major report on religious freedom released in Washington, D.C., provided a sobering reminder that religious persecution and restrictions continue unabated in many parts of the world.

The annual report, which tracks both positive and negative trends in religious freedom, was issued April 30, 2020, by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent watchdog agency that helps inform U.S. foreign policy.

While the report pointed to improvements in religious freedom protections made recently by some governments, including Uzbekistan and Sudan, it also noted a sharp deterioration in the status of religious minorities in India, and increasing religious atrocities committed by militant groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in Somalia.

According to Nadine Maenza, a vice chair of USCIRF, recent social and legal developments in India, the world's most populous democracy, have been worrying. During

the USCIRF launch event, held online because of COVID-19 restrictions, she pointed to India's 2019 amendment of its Citizenship Act, which specifically excluded Muslims from a program designed to fast-track Indian citizenship for migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan already residing in India.

Maenza said this move by the Hindu nationalist government of India was both "startling and disturbing" and could potentially leave millions of Muslims in India vulnerable to "detention, deportation, and statelessness." The report notes that the national and various state governments of India have increasingly tolerated campaigns of harassment and hate speech against other religious minorities.

The role of so-called nonstate actors in religious violence around the globe was also a strong theme in this year's report. These non-government groups wield control over territory through military power or terrorism and engage in what USCIRF calls "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations of religious freedom. The commission singled out six groups as particu-

larly serious offenders: al-Shabaab in Somalia; Boko Haram in Nigeria; the Houthis in Yemen; Islamic State in Khorasan Province (IS-KP) in Iran; the Taliban in Afghanistan; and the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria.

Fourteen nations were identified as "countries of particular concern"—Myanmar (Burma), China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India, Nigeria, Russia, Syria, Vietnam, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. These countries, according to USCIRF, engage in "ongoing, systematic, and egregious religious liberty violations."

Bettina Krause, an associate in the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, who represents the Adventist Church at the U.S. Congress, said the annual USCIRF report provides an important perspective on religious freedom trends.

"This yearly report helps us understand changing patterns of religious freedom violations and to identify current 'hotspots' of persecution or repression," she said.

One key aspect of this year's report, Krause noted, was its focus on increasing rates of anti-Semitic rhetoric and violence in many countries, including Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Argentina.

"Another alarming development highlighted by the report," Krause said, "is the growing indication that China is not only deploying high-tech surveillance technology, including facial recognition ability,

to monitor religious groups, but is also exporting this technology to other countries, including those with repressive policies against religious minorities.”

The USCIRF report also underscored the continuing concern of the U.S. and the international community regarding the detention of an estimated 900,000 to 1.8 million Uighur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in more than 1,300 camps in China’s northwest autonomous region of Xinjiang.

Ganoune Diop, director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) Department for the Adventist world church, said the USCIRF report confirms that even as the attention of the world is focused on other pressing concerns, such as the COVID-19 emergency, it is imperative not to lose sight of the continuing abuses being committed against religious minorities in so many places.

“Countless men, women, and children continue to live each day with the fear of violence or harassment simply because they choose to stay true to their deeply held convictions,” Diop said. “As a church, we will continue to speak out for these vulnerable minorities, regardless of where they live, or the faith tradition to which they belong.”

The commission that produced the full 2020 USCIRF report is a bipartisan, independent government agency created in 1998 to advise the United States’ executive and legislative branches on how best to promote religious freedom internationally. 🦋

ADVENTIST HEALTH ACQUIRES BLUE ZONES TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

BY ADVENTIST HEALTH NEWS

Adventist Health, based in Roseville, California, announced on April 8, 2020, that it has acquired Blue Zones, an organization that is a pioneer in taking a systemic and environmental approach to improving the health of entire cities and communities.

The organization’s work in more than 50 communities across the United States has been credited with double-digit drops in obesity, smoking, and body mass index (BMI), achieving millions of dollars of savings in health-care costs.

This move by Adventist Health comes as public attention is especially focused on the interconnectedness of individuals’ health to that of friends and neighbors in the face of the coronavirus crisis. Postpandemic, a focus on improving and strengthening community and public health will be more critical than ever as communities across the nation and globe navigate recovery.

“Adventist Health has always believed in creating environments of belonging and easy access to healthy lifestyles. The future of health care goes beyond the role of traditional hospitals by investing in our communities to improve people’s overall well-being,” said Scott Reiner, Adventist Health president and CEO. “Adventist Health’s work with Blue Zones represents the future of health care.”

According to sources at Blue Zones, the organization infuses healthy choices, enhances connections, instills purpose, and fuels hope to impact communities where people live, work, and play. This includes use of the Blue Zones Power 9 lessons of longevity through a comprehensive model for transformational change called the Life Radius—a focus on people, places, and policy. Rather than relying solely on individual behavior change, Blue Zones focuses on optimizing environments to improve health by design.

“Blue Zones is proud to pioneer the advancement of the health of entire cities by systematically improving living environments, so the healthy choice is the easy choice,” said Dan Buettner, Blue Zones founder and National Geographic Fellow and explorer. “Adventist Health shares our values,” Buettner added. “Its vision for community well-being aligns perfectly with our work.”

Since its inception in the 1860s, Seventh-day Adventists have encouraged a lifestyle of health and wellness. These practices are infused into Adventist communities across the country, including Loma Linda, California. The average life expectancy in the United States is roughly 78 years, but in Loma Linda the average male lives to 89 and female to 91 years. Buettner identified Loma Linda as one of the world’s five so-called blue zones—longevity hotspots—in a *National Geographic* cover story in November 2005.

Reiner added, “In addition to our acquisition news, through Blue Zones we have also completed an early renewal to continue collaborating to provide the Blue Zones Project by Sharecare.”

Jeff Arnold, founder, chair, and CEO of Sharecare, commented, “We are excited to extend our partnership with Blue Zones, and now Adventist Health, to advance and grow our market-leading solution for community-driven health.” 🦋



VISIONARY MINISTERIAL EDUCATOR DIES. Werner Vyhmeister, a renowned and visionary educator whose service to the Adventist Church spanned almost seven decades in several continents, died in California on March 21, 2020. He was 88. Among other assignments, Vyhmeister served as dean of theology at River Plate Adventist College, education director for the South American Division, and dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He is credited with the development of graduate schools of theology on several continents.



YOUNG PEOPLE CAMP AT HOME FOR VIRTUAL CAMPOREES ACROSS INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION. The lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic didn't stop hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists from pitching their tents at home to take part in online Pathfinder camporee events across the Inter-American Division (IAD) in April 2020. Campers and their families connected to each other to witness historic online camporees from their living rooms and backyards, worship together, take part in interactive activities, gain skills, compete in sports activities, and witness to friends during a week traditionally spent in outdoor camping. PHOTO: EAST VENEZUELA UNION



MUSIC FESTIVAL MOVES SUCCESSFULLY FROM CONCERT HALL TO CYBERSPACE. The Hosanna Festival in Poland should have been canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but organizers of the annual music festival turned a potential coronavirus disaster into a creative solution. Originally scheduled at the prestigious Częstochowa Philharmonic concert hall, the Adventist-organized concert was moved to the web and called Hosanna Online. In the end, approximately a dozen performers sang from apartments, houses, and even gardens scattered across Poland.



ADVENTHEALTH OFFERS DRIVE-UP COVID-19 TESTING. In an effort to increase availability of COVID-19 testing in Florida, AdventHealth offered hundreds of drive-up tests at the Daytona International Speedway starting on April 10, 2020. The effort was led by the health-care system and AdventHealth Centra Care. The tests were made available to anyone who met the criteria for testing as set by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. AdventHealth leaders were evaluating additional locations in other communities with the hope of expanding testing locations.



CAMPUS FACULTY AND STUDENTS TEAM UP TO MAKE FACE SHIELDS AND MASKS. Administrators and staff from the Adventist-owned University of Montemorelos in Mexico recently joined efforts to make hundreds of cloth masks and different types of face shields, to assist those in the local hospital and sanitation workers across the Montemorelos region in the state of Nuevo Leon. The initiative was part of an effort to help in the fight against the coronavirus and mitigate the shortage of protective gear for essential workers. PHOTO: RUSBEL DOMÍNGUEZ



ADVENTIST YOUTH REACH OUT TO STRUGGLING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. Adventist young people in South Australia are working to supply food hampers to a demographic largely overlooked in the COVID-19 crisis: international university students. Young people involved with South Australia Youth Ministries (SAYM) have been collecting food in hampers to be sent to an international dormitory in Adelaide, home to mostly doctoral students from the city's three major universities.



ADVENTIST YOUTH SUPPLY BLOOD BANKS. In Brazil, because of shelter-in-place orders, blood donations began decreasing in early April. Regional health officials reported that Rio de Janeiro saw a 50 percent drop in blood donations. São Paulo reported a 30 percent drop, and a 25 percent drop was reported in the capital city of Brasilia. Responding to the need, young Adventist church members organized volunteers for blood donations, and in São Paulo created schedules for effectively donating to various centers across the area.

JESUS SAID, “COME”

STEPHEN CHAVEZ

When I’m not disguised as a mild-mannered assistant editor of *Adventist Review*, I disguise myself as chair of the administrative board of Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Maryland (actually, it’s the same costume).

I usually call our monthly meetings to order with some kind of group activity designed to get board members primed to engage in the rest of the evening’s agenda.

Not long ago I wrote on the whiteboard: “Sligo church is *not* a welcoming church.” Then I said, “True or false: This is a true statement.”

Those present replied nearly in unison, “False!”

“What would make it a true?” I asked.

“Remove the word ‘not’” was the unanimous response.

“So Sligo church *is* a welcoming church,” I pressed. “Who is welcome at Sligo church?” I provided markers and asked people to come to the board and list one group or segment of the community that would be welcome at Sligo church.

One person, with John 3:16 on his mind, wrote: “Everybody!”

“Not so fast,” I interrupted. “Be specific. For whom does Sligo church have ministries or activities that would make them feel welcome?”

Soon individuals migrated to the whiteboard

and began writing: “seniors,” “youth,” “immigrants,” “children,” “single parents,” “widows,” “unemployed,” “university students,” etc.

WHAT IT MEANS

The church is Christ’s body on earth. As Christ embodied the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit when He lived on earth, today’s church—thanks to the Holy Spirit—reflects Christ’s character to its members and its community. On that we can all agree.

But what, exactly, is the character of the church?

In the two millennia since Christ ascended to heaven, His followers have used different images to describe the church’s essential characteristics. The apostle Peter set the bar pretty high when he said of the church: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession. . . . Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9, 10).

Let’s see: “a chosen people,” “a royal priesthood,” “a holy nation,” “God’s special possession,” “people of God.” At the same time, it’s popular to refer to the church as “a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints.” So which is it? Are we a hotel or a hospital? Are we saints or sinners?

Jesus welcomed sinners (Luke 19:7), yet He demanded a righteousness that surpassed that of



Does your church have a welcome sign?

the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). How do we, as Christ's body on earth, demonstrate both acceptance and high standards?

THE VIEW FROM THE PEW

The home page of the Toledo (Ohio) First Seventh-day Adventist Church has this description under "Who We Are": "Our multiethnic congregation reminds people that God loves them like crazy by proclaiming Jesus' everlasting gospel to 'every nation, tribe, language, and people' (Rev. 14:6). . . . We have become known for living and consistently emphasizing grace more unapologetically and creatively than any Adventist church in southeast Michigan or northwest Ohio."

So Toledo First's introduction to its community begins by linking gospel and grace. And that, theoretically, is how it should be.

But the reality is often different; and depending where, quite different. Daniel Xisto, pastor of church operations and community engagement for the Takoma Park (Maryland) Seventh-day Adventist Church, admits: "There are many people for whom our church is not a safe place." He cites examples such as teens who show up to services wearing "Black Lives Matter" T-shirts; single parents who attend with unruly and disruptive children; homeless people with shabby clothes and offensive body odor.

Church members are sometimes tempted to justify exclusion with a faulty logic. "The logic usually goes something like this," says Xisto. "If we welcome [them] . . . they might assume that we accept their behavior. And if they assume we accept their behavior, they may assume that God accepts them just the way they are. And we just cannot let that happen."

Ron Hessel, lead pastor of Summit Northwest Ministries in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, observes: "Some of the saints see it as a badge of honor to 'uphold the standards.'"

He tells about a deacon in one of his former parishes who told a young woman visitor that she needed to "wipe the blood off her face," referring to her lipstick. "We never saw her again," says Hessel. Yet the deacon often repeated the story, as if it were something of which to be proud.

Horror stories such as this are common. Begin a conversation about Adventists behaving badly, and everyone will have at least one tale to tell.

OUR CHURCH, OUR WORLD

Adventist congregations throughout North America are increasingly appreciating that if they truly want to represent Christ to their communities, they have to elevate the perception that most people have of Christianity.

Adventist congregations are increasingly appreciating that they have to elevate the perception that most people have of Christianity.

A survey by the Pew Research Center* shows that since 2007 the percentage of Christians in the United States has dropped from 78 percent to 65 percent in 2018/2019, while those who profess no religious affiliation (the nones) have increased from 16 percent to 26 percent. As a group, Christians seem to be declining in their influence on society.

The book *UnChristian*, by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, begins with the words: “Christianity has an image problem.” Then it catalogs six characteristics that people use to dismiss Christianity: hypocrisy, a narrow view of salvation, intolerance of homosexuality, too sheltered, too political, too judgmental. And while we may be comfortable with those characterizations as evidence that Jesus has changed our lives and values, we still have to ask: Would people see Him as they see us?

This sometimes presents a challenge to those of us who identify as Adventists. Some suppose that emphasizing Christ’s character of grace and inclusiveness will somehow lessen their commitment to the church’s doctrines. They have to address these priorities intentionally as they attempt to engage their communities.

“We started by taking action where we had broad agreement,” says Nicholas Zork, a church leader in New York City. That action affirmed: “Everyone should be given the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our community.”

Zork continues: “While we didn’t all hold identical views, we could agree on what mattered most: our mission to love, affirm, and include all people.”

The trend in society to categorize people—liberal, conservative, believers, nonbelievers, etc.—is nothing new. Tribalism has been part of the human experience almost as long as there have been humans. Indeed, the New Testament church comprised both genders, all economic classes, ages, and ethnic backgrounds. Those differences were real, and they had to be addressed (Acts 6:1-4). The Roman Empire, in which the early Christian church gestated, was remarkably diverse. The climate in which today’s Adventist Church exists is not unique.

“Welcoming is just the beginning of a discipleship

process,” says Zork, “in which we all—despite our differences—are people who share most things in common, have similar needs and challenges, and can learn from one another about . . . spirituality and life.”

WALKING A NEW PATH

Under the heading “Who We Are,” Summit Northwest Ministries describes the dream that led to its formation 16 years ago: “This dream was of a church where hurting, confused, depressed, and disenfranchised people could find hope, encouragement, love, acceptance, and salvation.

“This desire to ‘share our loving God with hurting people so that they can experience His transforming power in their lives’ has become . . . the driving force behind what we do.”

Ron Hessel, senior pastor, said that one of his members got a phone call from someone who asked if the church’s intention to be more welcoming and inclusive meant that they were “lowering their standards.”

Hessel observes: “The church was planted with the goal of being more welcoming. It is part of the congregation’s DNA.” He acknowledges that for congregations that rigidly enforce a code of what is acceptable or unacceptable, resistance to being more welcoming and inclusive may be more pronounced. “People are afraid that welcoming means accepting.”

Mike Fortune, pastor of Toledo First, puts it succinctly: “Acceptance does not equal agreement.”

Nicholas Zork uses Matthew 25 to justify welcoming marginalized populations. “By welcoming and including those we’ve wrongly pushed away, we are welcoming Jesus.” He adds, “In that process we experience more grace than we offer; we learn more than we teach; we receive more than we give.”

For more than 30 years the Glendale city church in southern California has developed an intentional ministry to marginalized individuals. At first its reputation suffered among those who saw it as heretical at worst, unorthodox at best. But those who felt unwelcome in their own congregations began gravitating to this place where they felt accepted. One of the individuals thus embraced bequeathed

PUTTING OUT THE WELCOME MAT

A growing number of Seventh-day Adventist churches are asking how their presence in the community can be enhanced by being more intentionally welcoming. Some congregations have found it helpful to develop a welcoming statement. Here are five suggestions about how to begin:

- 1 Decide whether you want to create a welcoming church. This means more than saying, “Yes, sign me up.” You’re pledging to create a climate in which everyone who walks through your door is welcomed unconditionally. If you can’t do that, don’t pretend that you can.
- 2 Ask: “Does our church welcome everyone—regardless?” If the answer is yes, move forward.
- 3 Is your church prepared to see people who come to your church as individuals, not as “immigrants,” “divorced,” or “disabled”?
- 4 Does your church welcome people from marginalized populations without judgment?
- 5 Are youth and young adults a significant, valued, and utilized part of your church’s program?

One of Jesus’ most challenging parables ends with these words: “Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests” (Matt. 22:9, 10).

Jesus knew a thing or two about being a welcoming church.

his modest estate to the church when he died. His donation became seed money for an endowment that now amounts to more than \$2 million.

In his ministry, Daniel Xisto makes a point of developing relationships with people in his community. “Half the battle,” he says, “is that we don’t know people outside our own circle.” He says it’s harder to dismiss people when we know them as individuals, not just as members of a stereotypical group: “those people.”

WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED

As we know, society has reached a point in which people of different religious or political convictions can sometimes hardly be in the same room with each other, let alone carry on a civil conversation. In such a climate the church has to be a refuge, where love, grace, and inclusion punctuate every conversation and all behaviors.

We sometimes have to confess that some Adventist churches have been exclusive cliques, and have repelled people rather than embraced them. We have closed our doors to people who didn’t behave like us, think like us, or look like us. We have cared more about being right than about being kind. We have confused acceptance with agreement. We have turned away thirsty seekers of the free water of life. Yet Jesus’ invitation remains: “Come to me” (Matt. 11:28).

So the question: how do we create in our congregations places where people can find true sanctuary? Places where they are both forgiven sinners and aspiring saints? Where they can worship and fellowship without being judged on the basis of race, sex, ethnicity, appearance, etc.?

And isn’t living like Jesus the highest standard to which we can aspire?

Daniel Xisto wonders, “Wouldn’t it be something if not only the well-to-do but the marginalized, disenfranchised, and excluded groups could find refuge in any Seventh-day Adventist Church? That’s what I’m fighting for.”

* Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center surveys conducted 2009–July 2019 on the telephone.

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





HIS TEAM

How one church learned
how to be welcoming

CHAD STUART

I have been amazed

how, in the past five years, a few simple gestures helped change the reputation of a church.

In the process of considering an invitation to serve as senior pastor of the Spencerville Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, I began to ask those I knew of their perceptions of the church. I routinely heard three answers: beautiful music; healthy adult Sabbath School classes; great children's program. They all sounded wonderful. But the fourth response I consistently heard worried me: "But they aren't friendly."

When my wife and I visited to assess the church for ourselves, we went incognito to get a real picture of the church and its culture. This meant that most of the members didn't know who we were or why we were there. We were simply guests, something Spencerville frequently has. As we walked in, we were handed a bulletin with a friendly smile, but no words. We found a seat and sat down. Someone from the front asked everyone to stand and greet one another. The search committee members who knew why we were there

came and said hello, but no one else. A woman two rows in front of us stood. People walked by her. A couple even reached around her to shake hands of people in the same row. “I can’t take this,” my wife said, and walked up to welcome her. We now understood the reports we had received. It didn’t seem friendly. Or was it?

BIG PICTURE PLANNING

Perception is reality, but it’s not always the truth. I accepted the call, and we’ve now been members of the Spencerville church for five years. It didn’t take long for us to realize the truth. The Spencerville church family has some of the warmest, most supportive people we’ve ever served. So why did everyone, or nearly everyone, outside of the Spencerville church, and even a few of the members themselves, have the perception that Spencerville was unfriendly?

We did some studying, even posing the question to members themselves. Why does everyone think this church is unfriendly? What can we do about it? There was lots of speculation, but we needed more than that. We needed action. We needed to address what our members seem to have forgotten (or per-

“welcome desk” to answer questions. The list goes on. One of the things that was happening was that while a member came and did their job, they didn’t do anything else. So if the bulletin person was called away, the greeter didn’t pick up the slack. There wasn’t anything wrong with the system; it just wasn’t contributing toward welcoming members or guests.

The new system eliminated all the individual jobs, and created HIS teams in their place. HIS is an acronym that stands for help, inform, support, and reminds us whom we really work for. Spencerville is a large church, so each team was made of 30 people (or more). Initially, there were five teams (we’ve since grown to six, plus an academy team and a Pathfinders/Adventurer team).

Anyone, member or other, could be on a team if they wanted to. There were adults, senior citizens, teenagers, children, and those with disabilities. Each team was given one responsibility: make the Sabbath you are on duty the best Sabbath anyone has ever seen. Each team had to contribute whatever they thought would make that Sabbath great.

Minimally they provided: greeters at the door and in the parking lot (with umbrellas on rainy



haps never learned)—how to welcome people.

I engaged one of our members who, I was told, had the gift of “seeing the big picture.” I laid out the problem and the principles I wanted to embrace. She said she’d pray about it and see what she could create. What developed was a new way to “do church.”

In our church, and probably yours, too, members have jobs to do on Sabbath morning. Some are greeters. Some distribute bulletins. Some sit at the

days); people at doors so that no one ever opens a door for themselves into the church or the sanctuary; someone to answer questions, offer directions, and escort people where they need to go; not just handing a bulletin, but offering friendly words as well. But there’s more.

We asked the HIS teams to be creative. They soon set up a welcome table in the foyer that provided water. Sometimes on cold days there’d be hot chocolate or juice. Occasionally a cookie



ITALIO OSORIO

or mint might be available. They planned themes about seasons, special Sabbaths; they honored veterans, graduates, or teachers. Decorations around and on the table added warmth to the foyer. Members began to look forward to what they would find. We soon found the foyer a place where conversation flowed and smiles were seen.

A GOOD PLAN GETS BETTER

As we shared these principles with our church family and our new system of welcoming, our greeting team grew from being the burden of two or three people to a family of 200 people all working together with one goal: to welcome everyone who drives onto the campus of the Spencerville church. Everyone worked together. Our senior citizens who might not be able to stand worked as schedulers or greeted at the table. Our preschoolers stood at doors with their parents and learned to say hello. We had teens and young adults who said, "Someone at church needs me!"

I'll be the first to admit that we still have strides to make to become the warmest church one can find. Yet, I know God has used this simple plan to move the reputation of the Spencerville church out of the unfriendly zone into the inviting.

This is evident when a fellow pastor tells me,

"I've been in this community for more than 20 years, and never attended Spencerville before. But I had so many members tell me, 'Spencerville has changed,' I had to come check it out for myself."

The change is evident when a couple stands up and says, "When we came to this community 18 years ago, this is the church we wanted to attend, because we loved the music. But no one even looked at us when we walked into the church. Recently, a friend said to give it another try. That first Sabbath, after not attending for 18 years, we were greeted by four different people before we even got to our seats."

We know the culture has changed when a millennial says, "When I was a child, we used to be able to leave church 15 or 20 minutes after the service ended. Now people are still mingling in the foyer up to an hour after the service."

We know it has changed because our fellowship meal is no longer limited to the fellowship hall, but in the hallway, and primary and junior rooms.

This didn't happen because people changed, or because they became more friendly. They were always friendly. We just needed to be reminded how to give a proper hello. 🍀

Chad Stuart has been senior pastor of the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church for nearly five years.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

How well do you know the people who attend your church?

When we as a staff spoke about an issue dedicated to welcoming churches, one person came to mind almost immediately: Steven Willsey, former pastor of nurture and visitation at the Spencerville, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church. Not only did Bill Knott reference him in his editorial, we also decided to interview him. Now retired, he shared with us his philosophy of connecting with people and connecting them with the local congregation. What follows is a portion of our conversation.—Editors.

How did you develop a burden for welcoming people? Did it come naturally, or is it something that developed over time?

I'm an extrovert; I like being with people. I grew up in an Adventist home. I remember hearing from my family, as well as others, that good pastors were often those who did a lot of visiting. That was in the back of my mind as I began my own ministry.

When I went to Spencerville, my responsibility as an associate pastor was pastoral ministry and pastoral care. It was quite a large congregation, so in order to meet the needs of everyone, I had to look for ways of finding people who were most in need.

I soon found that if I stood in the foyer, I could meet most of the people. I came to ask open-ended questions. "How was the week for you?" If I discovered some special need, I made an appointment or called them.

When I asked how things were going, they'd always say, "Fine, Pastor; everything is fine."

Then I would often ask, "What does that mean?"

I asked one man, and he said, "Oh, everything's good."

"What does that mean?"

He said, "Well, Pastor, the truth is that my wife and I have decided to separate." They did eventually divorce, but it was important for me to know that from him rather than follow up a rumor. I tried to meet people who were especially in need, talk to them about whatever they were going through, and support them as best I could.



MERLE POIRIER

Steven Willsey (right) has an impromptu conversation with one of his parishioners. PHOTO: MERLE POIRIER

Did you think of yourself as an institution at Spencerville church?

Well, yes. Friends would later say, "You're the reason I'm here." That was very fulfilling.

Because we had Sabbath Schools for toddlers and younger children, young couples would come to church after they had children. Many times they would kind of dare you to say anything to them. They didn't want to be noticed.

So I didn't spend a lot of time trying to talk to them. But I did go to the Sabbath School teachers afterward and find out if they had the names of those individuals. The next time they came I would call them by name, and gradually they became more friendly. I became close to many of them.

Did you use any other churches as role models for the type of ministry you did, or was it something you developed on your own?

It was something that I felt was my role as a pastoral-care minister. It came naturally out of who I am.

Besides ministry during the period between Sabbath School and the worship service as people were gathering in the sanctuary, I made a point of going up and down the aisles and greeting people after they had found their pew, greeting people I had not had a chance to touch in the foyer. That seemed to have a big impact on people. I found it to be a lot of fun.

We heard about one person in particular. Apparently, he got used to you greeting him, and he tested you by coming in through different doors. We heard that one time he slipped in, sat down, and thought that he'd escaped. Then you showed up to greet him in spite of his efforts to slip in unnoticed.

He wasn't the only one I did that to. I made a point to find them and tie them as closely [to the church] as I could. He became a really great friend.

How effective do you think most Adventist churches are in making people feel welcome?

I've had the occasion to visit a number of churches, and most of them aren't very effective. You can go to some churches, go out, and nobody speaks to you.

But I remember once when with my family went on vacation in northern New York state. We went to church, and they were very welcoming. They made sure we signed the guest register. Somebody invited us home for lunch. When we were back in our cabin on the lake, we had a knock at the door. Some church member and his family came and brought us a quart of freshly picked strawberries from their garden.

I asked, "How in the world did you find us?"

They said they just drove around until they found a place where they thought an Adventist pastor would be. That church really knew how to welcome people.

If you could give a piece of advice to those who greet on Sabbath mornings, handing out bulletins, what would you say?

I would say be as persistent as you can in welcoming people. It's an important part of what you

do, and people remember you for how you support them, not only when they worship, but how you support them through the crises in their lives.

I was in Spencerville for 15 years as associate pastor, so I was able to accompany people through various high points and low points in their lives, from the time a child is born, to the time the child is baptized, hospitalizations of various family members, even deaths in the family.

Our culture seems to thrive to some degree on anonymity. In some large churches they come, they sit, they leave. What would you say in view of the social climate we live in?

You have to be diligent and purposeful. Make sure that people don't leave the sanctuary without some kind of contact with other people.

It has to be something you set out to do. People, even though they seem to desire anonymity, appreciate it once they have gotten acquainted, and they will remember if they have been touched by somebody. In fact, they'll complain if nobody spoke to them, even though it was difficult because of their own attitude.

You see welcoming as a ministry?

It was the most fulfilling of any part of my ministry. I discovered that my visiting and welcoming ministry really prepared me for preaching.

Before that, my preaching was more doctrinally focused. But as I grew in my ministry and began my visiting, I discovered that it was easier, more appropriate, and more meaningful for people when my preaching grew out of the needs of the congregation. Most of them knew the doctrines; they didn't need to hear that again and again. They did need to have their needs cared for, and you did that for them individually, personally, in their homes or in the foyer.

What would you like members to know about making their churches welcoming places?

If their church is going to grow, and if they're going to have the [right] kind of meaningful experience in the church themselves, it means reaching out to one another and caring for one another.

Caring for one another is not just saying hello, but also having meaningful relationships, inviting others home for lunch or dinner, social occasions, social events. Get acquainted with people. Just determine that you're going to be friendly regardless. 🍷

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BIG, BAD, AND BOUGIE?

Another way of looking at community

JARED THURMON

You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

—Inigo Montoya.

Would the word “community” qualify as a word that doesn’t mean what we think it means? If you’re around young whippersnappers these days, you know that even “bad” can be used to describe something good. Words are powerful, as long as we know what they mean.

Jesus wants to show His friend, His disciple John, what the church would look like just before His return. Unfortunately for those of us it describes, Jesus holds nothing back. “You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Rev. 3:17, NLT).*

In our modern vernacular, the word “bougie” or “boujee” is very apropos in this moment.

Why do I say that? If we use Jesus’ words as a springboard, could it be possible that the things



we flaunt, glory in, and celebrate are not the real essence of who we are?

Bougie actually has a centuries-long history, going all the way back to revolutionary France, before it spun off into variations of the slang word we know today.

So *bougie*, *boujee*, and *bourgie* all stem from *bourgeoisie*, a French word that simply means “middle class.” Today we use it to describe those we know are in one condition, yet act better than they are in reality. Laodicea is the 2,000-year-old term that means pretty much the same thing.

What if we took a real close look at all our accoutrements and asked what things are leading us to build stronger relationships—truly mingling—truly getting all our members involved in outreach?

COMMUNITY IN REAL TIME

For me, community looks like what our little church is doing in northwest rural Georgia. Based on the stats I see, we are like most churches in

North America, and by most, I mean the churches scattered around the suburbs and rural communities. Those churches have 100 or fewer members, and often don’t have paid staff to handle all the church responsibilities.

Our church started a tradition: we prize time together outside the church sanctuary. As with Jesus and His disciples, we often find our most enjoyable moments around the dinner table.

We make time for all to meet at one church member’s home for a social that’s not just for us but also for our friends and family who may not be members of our church. Recent social distancing has forced us to take a hiatus, but it has become our tradition over the past year. We go all out; it’s an event. We have lots of food, we sing songs, we read Scripture, and we just get to know each other.

When we aren’t doing this at someone’s home, we enjoy meals after church. (By the way, some people come just for those. They don’t have to listen to me preach to get admission to the best potluck in town.)

In these moments, when we eat our fill with chips and guacamole, real conversation takes place, real community.

It’s not our fancy sanctuary; it’s not our bougie marketing; it’s not our Laodicean suits and ties. We put all those away and just enjoy time with each other, mingling with each other, getting involved in each other’s lives one bite at a time.

As many of us haven’t been able to be inside the church sanctuary for the past few months, I don’t hear people say, “I can’t wait to sit in a pew again.” But I do hear, “I can’t wait to fellowship, spend time together, enjoy our meals together again.”

The church is not a machine of information dissemination; it’s a movement created to build relationships and create experiences that are so genuine that the community becomes magnetic and begins to attract more people than one bowl of guacamole can handle. 🍷

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Jarod Thurmon coordinates marketing for Adventist Review Ministries.



WHY I STAYED

As a father of a teenager and two young adults I'm concerned about the increasing number of young adults leaving our congregations. As a faith community, we've struggled with this issue for many decades. Data suggest that nearly half of Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North America leave the church by their mid-20s.¹ The *2012-2013 Twenty-first Century Adventist Connection Study Report* engaged with 1,153 young adults who graduated between 2001 and 2012 from three major Adventist universities.² A large majority of these graduates had gone fully or partially through the Adventist educational system. Some of the findings of this important research are encouraging; others are troubling and disturbing.

Here are some insights straight from the executive summary of the report.

The study showed that there is a large group of connected and active young adults in the Adventist Church. I'm glad to know that. There's also a clear correlation between one's devotional life and one's acceptance of Adventist

doctrines and lifestyle. Adventist young adults also prefer to attend medium- to large-sized churches.³

The next insight is more troubling. The authors of the study reported that a number of key Adventist doctrines (including a literal six-day creation, the heavenly sanctuary, the pre-Advent judgment, the remnant identity, and the inspiration of Ellen White) lacked strong support in this age group.

The study's insights are helpful. But we need to remember that it did not represent the reality and perceptions of a growing majority of Adventist teenagers and young adults who never attend an Adventist secondary or tertiary educational institution. How would they respond to the questions asked in the research? Whether we like it or not, the graying of Adventism in North America (and increasingly in other parts of the world) represents a major challenge.

LOOKING BACK

I grew up in an Adventist family in Germany. In fact, both of my grandfathers were Adventist pastors, and prior to a health challenge, my dad also served for nearly a decade as a pastor.

I spent my formative teenage years in a small town in southern Germany. The nearest Adventist church of our four-church district was located about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from home. These were small churches, ranging from 25 to 120 members—on the books. Sabbath afternoons we met as district youth in the largest church.

In the entire country of Germany there was one Adventist boarding academy, about 100 miles (160

kilometers) from home, but my parents didn't want to send their two sons to a boarding academy at such an early age. Besides, finances were tight. Consequently, I went through the public school system. I had great teachers, but always knew that I was different, for I didn't go to school on Sabbath on the two out of four Sabbaths when public high schools scheduled classes.

When I think back, I realize that I was a prime candidate for leaving the church during my late teen and early young adult years. Right at that crucial period, my parents separated (and later divorced). That experience shook my world, and I wondered about the God of my parents. What made me stay? What kept me coming back week after week? Here are four key elements that stand out as I look back.

First, *my church cared*. Two pastors served our four-church district. One was considered the "youth pastor." I remember his weekly visits to our home and his ability to help me work through topics that challenged my faith. These were not just typical Bible studies in which we read a number of Bible texts and reached a firm theological conclusion. We talked about evolution and worldviews, world religions and ethics. We read apologetics. We prayed together. He took time and became a mentor.

But there was more. Our youth group leadership was very active. Church members knew my name and greeted me on Sabbath morning. A caring church goes a long way to help keep young adults in our congregations. And just in case you think that we had the perfect church—we didn't. I remember sitting through boring sermons, and occasionally a member would weaponize Ellen White. But my church experience wasn't reduced to these more negative experiences.

Second, *I was a member of a small Bible study group in our home*. Early in my teenage years my mother started a small-group Bible study at our home that helped me navigate the storms and tempests of those years. Intriguingly, many of its members were not Adventists, but classmates from school, mixed together with older church members who lived nearby. I played guitar or piano when we sang together, and our weekly deep dive into God's Word offered a viable balance to other influences in my life. This was a truly priesthood-of-all-believers affair. Every member was able to contribute. I was introduced to prayer journaling during this time—and have continued that practice until today.

Third, *I was engaged—and stayed engaged—in mission*. Mission helped me stay connected with Jesus, especially considering the strong secular influences in my life. As a family, we were involved in a weekly café-like outreach, inviting people to sample dozens of healthy herbal tea options and enjoy an evening of conversations, music, art, or focused discussions.


Later my brother and I, together with some friends, began a music ministry geared toward the non-churched that lasted for nearly 10 years. We wrote our own songs, created advertising packages, and spent 15 to 20 weekends each year touring and doing concerts. The German Voice of Prophecy offered us sponsorship, and we were able to record several albums (first in vinyl and cassette, later moving into the brave new world of digital media and CDs). Engagement with mission kept me in the church.

Finally, *I was blessed with a number of important mentors who offered support, wisdom, at times critique, but always lots of love*. These mentors continue to enrich and bless my life—even today. Mentors are real-life influencers whose commitment and concern offer a window into God's love for us.

WRAP-UP

I am grateful for the creative, engaged, and God-fearing young adults who have found a home in our congregations. But my heart bleeds for the many who have left for one reason or another—and for their parents and families who daily plead for God's Spirit to do the seemingly impossible.

I stayed because I was blessed with a local congregation that cared about me—warts and all—and for a mother who fed many hungry teenagers during our weekly Bible study, offering a way to connect personally and deeply with God's Word. I also stayed because I was needed and was allowed to participate creatively in God's mission. I was blessed with mentors who influenced me in ways my parents or family could not.

Looking back, I have one wish: I want to be part of the reason that helped someone to stay. 

¹ See R. L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From a 10-Year Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), p. 35.

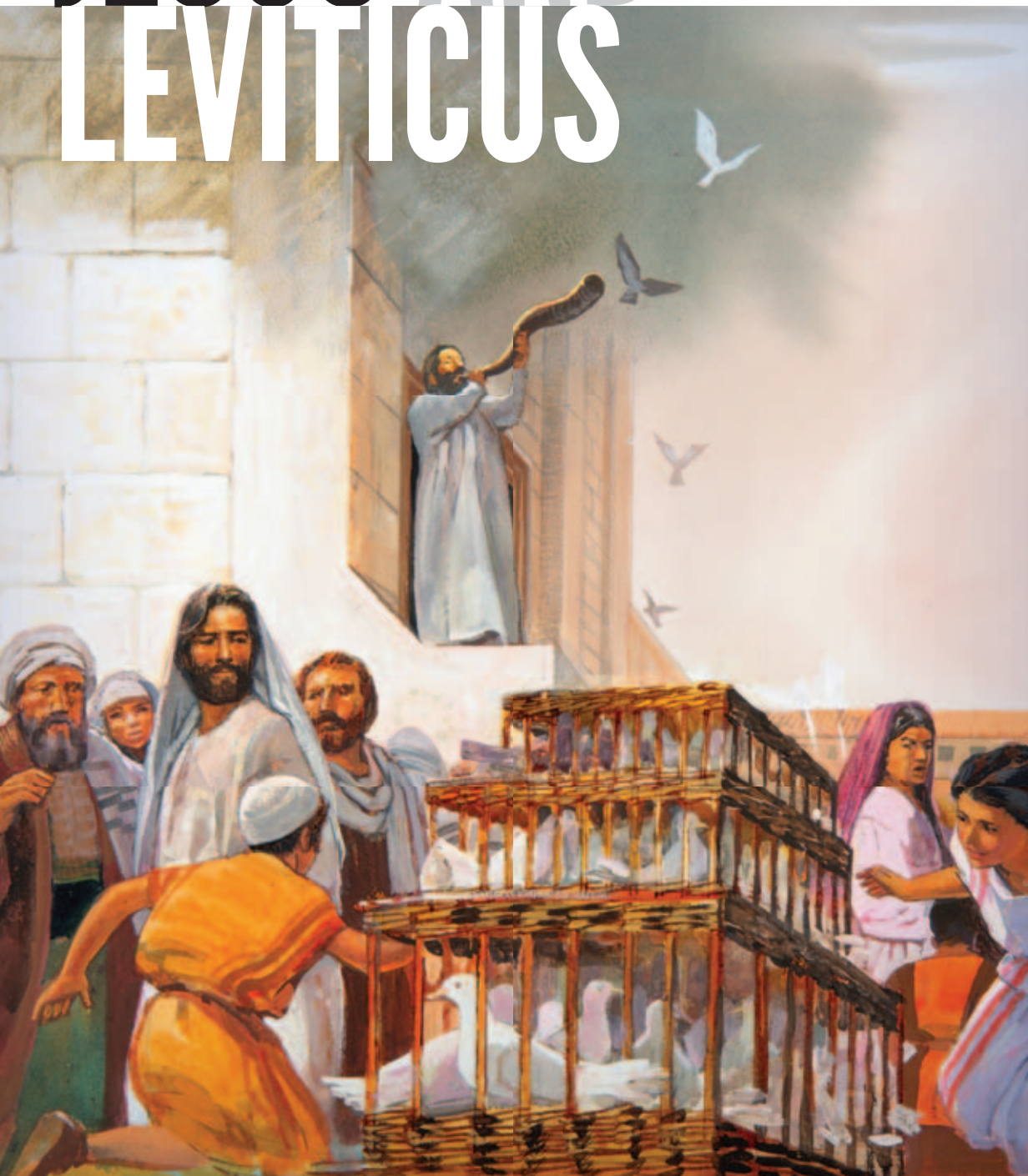
² Available online at https://southern.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=26011451.

³ The executive summary can be found at https://southern.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=25035776.

Gerald A. Klingbeil serves as an associate editor of *Adventist Review*.

JESUS AND LEVITICUS

*Choosing
between rituals
and ethics*



The Bible's first five books are a unit called the Pentateuch. The third of those five has the Hebrew name *Wayyiqra* (the text's first word). Its English name, derived from the Greek (*Leuitikon*), comes to us as a direct transliteration of the Latin *Leviticus*, and means "Levitical service" or "things about Levites." So what might a book about Levites have to do with Jesus?

WHO IS JESUS?

The Levites were descendants of Jacob's third son, Levi. Jesus was no descendant of Levi. He was a Judahite, something the Gospels of Matthew and Luke explain from the outset. Their genealogies, the New Testament's most extended, both detail Jesus' Judahite ancestry. Matthew's first word establishes Him as David's and Abraham's Son (Matt. 1:1). Then, beginning with Abraham, he traces Jesus' lineage all the way to "Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, . . . [who] was the mother of Jesus" (Matt. 1:16).

Was Matthew introducing Jesus as Joseph's biological son? Of course not. He chose his words to avoid any such misunderstanding: unlike standard genealogical linkage (e.g., Judah is Perez' father, or Jesse is King David's father), Joseph is not anybody's father. He is the husband of Jesus' mother.

Matthew knew the difference better than others; he got it from an angel of the Lord! The angel told Joseph (speaking of Mary, the baby's mother), "What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (verse 20). But Matthew's Spirit-guided Gospel genealogy served social and supernatural objectives in tracing Jesus through Judah. His genealogy ensures that Mary's baby will stand forever as the ultimate challenge of all human conception. Mary's baby is the unfathomable mystery in flesh and blood of the Lion born to Judah's tribe, who is God's own sacrificial Lamb slain

from the world's foundation; David's and his father Jesse's Root, who is also David's Offspring; the priest forever, but of Melchizedek's order; the Maker and Sustainer of all things, visible and invisible, material and logical, who is Creator God, the Word made flesh to save the world.¹

AND LEVITICUS?

When this unfathomable Jesus lived among us, God Incarnate, He sometimes pointed people to Leviticus. Some students of His life find it more hostile to, than supportive of, things about Levites. They may acknowledge that Leviticus includes much besides slit animal throats and roasted grain. It includes ethical teachings consistent with Jesus' own elevated moral values. But they find the book's elaborate ritual systems undesirable and dispensable. These scholars read Jesus' fierce criticism of the ritualists of His day as denouncing everything such people stood for.

Their critique would make them authorities on what may stay in or be cut out of the book. But the location of this book at the heart of the Bible's foundation unit hardly supports claims of even its partial dispensability or piecemeal application. Instead, its central location suggests its crucial importance to the God who authored the book.

Abraham's descendants, the book's first recipients, were God's chosen vehicle to channel His salvation history to all humanity, a history that climaxes with the life and passion of Jesus, the seed promised to Abraham who would bless the whole world (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:16). Much of God's original purpose for His people, and about the kind of character He meant for them to develop as individuals and as a nation, is laid out in Leviticus.

One simple way of appreciating that purpose and character is comparing two names given to the five-book grouping to which Leviticus belongs:



The Israelites were mostly stuck on rituals and void of morals. They needed more lessons on integrity than they did on ritual process.

“Pentateuch” simply means “five scrolls.” “The Torah,” an older identification, states something meaningful about the books: they are “the teaching” or “the instruction.” The Torah is God’s unique instruction manual to His people Israel, provided to them through His genius servant Moses. Leviticus, its central teaching book, instructs on what, how, and who Israel was supposed to be, and why: “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2). “Be holy, because I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 20:7).

God selected the Levites to lead out in His drama of holy being. There was hardly a thing they weren’t running: Moses—unique leader; Miriam—prophet and celebration leader; Aaron and his descendants—the priests; Kohath, Gershon, Merari, and their families—managing transport of the portable church called the tabernacle (*mishkan*), or sanctuary (*miqdash*). Church, work, peace, and even war: it was Levites all the way.² The tribe’s link to all of Israel’s sacred rituals bestowed on them yet another honor: they are the only one of Israel’s 12 tribes to give its name to one of the Bible’s 66 books, namely, Leviticus, “things about Levites.”

REALLY ABOUT LEVITES?

Leviticus includes a lot of description of Levites’ work, which some have attempted to use, as mentioned before, to set the book against itself: setting ritual material against ethical material—chapters 1-16, more or less, against chapters 17-26. But the opposition of ritual to ethics makes a loser of both: ritual that is ethically void is no more rewarding than ethics that is practically irrelevant. The book of Leviticus includes both didactic rituals and practical ethics: witness, supremely, the life, ministry, and passion of their original Lawgiver, Jesus

Himself, a fact worth emphasizing. For “it was He [Christ] who gave the law to Israel.”³

He who presented the instructions of Leviticus to Moses during a month of lectures at their meeting tent later came to Earth to magnify those teachings.⁴ Through 33 and a half years of love and inexhaustible service, sacrifice and singular passion, life and undeserving death, resurrection from hell and guarantee of soon return, Jesus, Author of Israel’s teaching, fulfilled its potential infinitely—surprising, delighting, dismaying, frustrating the eyes and ears, hearts, and minds that were privileged to witness His incarnation of Torah meaning.

As often as He could, He pointed to Leviticus to validate His actions and arguments, drawing as much on Levitical ritual systems as He did on Levitical ethics. Altogether, the four Gospels contain 40 references that produce 44 evocations of the book⁵—some brief, some extended—that connect Jesus’ life and teaching with words, ideas, rituals, and morals from Leviticus. In 23 of those 44 instances, Jesus actually quotes Leviticus. He needed to go back there for the sake of His people who had lost their way and needed His help in redirecting their steps through repairing their thinking.

The book itself never leaves any doubt as to the gloriously exalted status God intended for His people. Having extracted them from the clutches of their slave masters, He settled them in around the base of a desert mountain for a yearlong tête-à-tête, giving them some space to appreciate how much He cared about them; to reflect on what had just happened; to understand how, and why: “You yourselves have seen what I did . . . and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Ex. 19:4).

He shared with them what He was about to do for them: “Out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (verse 5). This was the beginning of their training toward unimprovable ends: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (verse 6). He would maintain the same level of interest and effort He had already invested to see them through to stellar success.

Everything depended on their willingness: “if you obey me fully and keep my covenant” (verse 5). God was interested in their perspective, in cooperation and mutuality; nothing would be by force or intimidation.

Recently liberated slaves found it hard to believe, but their God was insistent. Even before

He gave Moses the material contained in Leviticus, He described their splendid future: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (verse 6). He was giving them the gospel: “The gospel is given in precept in Leviticus.”⁶

But it hadn't quite worked out. They had become convinced that their best option would be mimicking their neighbors. They lodged a petition with their God-appointed leader: permission to mimic their neighbors (see 1 Sam. 8:4, 5). Something better than the gospel. By the time Jesus arrived, being like the neighbors had dragged them back into subjugation, so that their overriding fantasy was of a Moses who would liberate them again, and restore their independence and status (Matt. 20:20, 21). Jesus had come about an exodus too (Luke 9:28-31); He was the fulfillment of a prophecy Moses had given them (Deut. 18:15). But it wasn't one that caught the leaders' interests.

They were mostly stuck on rituals and void of morals. They needed more lessons on integrity than they did on ritual process. They must have known how to reinstate lepers to society once the skin disease that had shut them out of society had disappeared. So Jesus sent them lepers He healed, respecting procedures He had set up with Moses a millennium and a half before: “Show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them” (Mark 1:44; see also Luke 17:14).

The ritual of cleansing mattered. He Himself had prescribed it. But its lessons about purity were always supposed to have gone beyond the surface and skin diseases. Jesus could teach, as no one else ever could, about the depth of cleansing available beyond skin deep, cleansing He Himself could provide, and only He, the “washing of rebirth” (Titus 3:5), the new start, the truly clean and flawless life that ritual systems could graphically symbolize but never actually accomplish, because, though “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins,” nothing is impossible with God (Heb. 10:4; Matt. 19:26): His touch gave life and healing to the untouchable, but never brought defilement to Himself, because even becoming sin itself does not taint His righteousness (Mark 6:56; Luke 5:13; 2 Cor. 5:17). Indeed, it is only because of His sinlessness, while numbered with the transgressors, that He may intercede for us transgressors (Isa. 53:12).

IS IT REALLY ABOUT LEVITICUS?

God did not mind “sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings”; after all, “they were offered in accordance with the law” (Heb. 10:8). But they were not enough (verses 1-5). The sacrifices taught the horrible carnage sin causes. The instructions for lepers taught the repugnance to God that sin provokes. And the sacrifices taught humanity's need for help from beyond ourselves: “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). More expensive sacrifices make no difference; nor does roasting adorable babies (Micah 6:7)—this is neither show and tell, nor pity party extraordinaire. Leviticus taught our need for a substitute that is perfect.

On the other hand, Levitical ethics was too much: Jesus' exegesis of Mosaic ethical positions was both noble and overboard: “Love your neighbor as yourself” was Levitical, all right (Lev. 19:18). But would you do it the way your Father in heaven does it? That's your reference point; or as Jesus put it just before His passion, would you love as I love you (John 13:34)? It seems, in the end, that everything about Leviticus, from sacrifice to ethical pronouncement, leads to the same conclusion: the book is fine, after all. Why? Because it teaches our true need.

The book “about Levites” says we need more than an Aaron or Moses, or a Levitical priesthood: we need one to intercede for us, “not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16). We need Jesus. ❖

¹ See, inter alia, Isa. 11; Rom. 15:7-12; Rev. 5:5; 13:8; Col. 1:16, 17; John 1:1-14; Heb. 5:1-10; John 3:16.

² Num. 18:1-7; Ex. 15:20; Num. 4; Deut. 34:1; Joshua 6:6-9. In the gift of the priesthood the Lord also acknowledged the Levites' faithfulness at a time of national apostasy: the Levites were willing to do His bidding even at the expense of their loss of kin. Seeing the people's scandalous behavior (“running wild”) in the very place where they had listened to God speak, Moses saw that the reassertion of moral integrity demanded the most drastic measures. Only the Levites showed the courage to destroy their own as necessary in order to cleanse the camp of the vileness that had overrun it. Their assault on their own people for the cause of holiness cost about three thousand lives. Then Moses announced to them, “You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day” (Ex. 32:25-29).

³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), p. 366.

⁴ Ex. 40:17; Lev. 1:1; Num. 1:1; Isa. 42:18-21.

⁵ Numbers cited here derive from studying the thousands of notes of the *New American Standard Bible* [NASB], copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. The notes in the Gospels evoke everything from a single meaningful OT word—e.g., “doves” as part of an offering—to longer passages of up to 32 verses.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 392.



THINKING “ADVENTISTLY” ABOUT POLITICS

It first came across the unusual but useful adverb “Christianly” in an article published in 2019 about the role of faith in politics. In an interview, Michael Wear, a former director of President Obama’s White House faith-based initiative, said Christians have a special responsibility to speak up about issues of public policy.

“That doesn’t mean that we need pastors speaking on Sunday morning about what they think the marginal tax rate should be,” he said. “What it does mean is that we should be insisting that Christians are thinking ‘Christianly’ about politics.”

So, what exactly does a “Christianly” approach to politics look like? And could we perhaps go even further and try to describe an “Adventistly” way of engaging with politics?

As a worldwide church of more than 21 million members, Seventh-day Adventists are present in some 200 countries, living and worshipping under governments that span the spectrum

from authoritarian regimes to well-established democracies and every form of government in between. Each country has its own unique political dynamics and grapples with its own burning questions of public policy.

Given this reality, is it even feasible to try to discover some shared principles that could somehow portray an “Adventistly” approach to politics?

Much has already been written about the way Adventists in North America historically charted the treacherous waters of political engagement. Ellen White, through her writings and her example, helped early Adventists develop a balanced, careful approach, which affirmed that church members could, in good conscience, vote in elections and even advocate enthusiastically for issues of public policy while maintaining careful guards on their independence and integrity.¹

As you read through this guidance, some of it is clearly directed toward specific situations of her day. A common thread does seem to emerge, however, and it’s a simple, practical idea. It’s that while we, as individual church members, have the freedom and responsibility to engage in the civic affairs of our nation, our participation should never be dictated by the collective say-so of a political party and its agenda.² Rather, our participation should be guided by individual, prayerful consideration of public issues, looking at them through the more nuanced and authoritative lens of our faith and biblical values.

NO BLIND ALLEGIANCE

This key idea—the wholesale rejection of uncritical party loyalty,

and all the trappings of partisanship that come with it—should be at the heart of any attempt to define an “Adventistly” approach to politics.

Social scientists have a name for this strong tendency we humans have for “picking a team” in politics and rooting for it, come what may. “Partyism,” as defined by a 2017 Stanford University study, is an ingroup bias. It motivates you, as a supporter of a particular political party, to identify so strongly with your chosen “team” that you reflexively support it. And you do so even when some of its policies may actually run counter to some of your other deeply held values. This fascinating study, conducted in the United States, concluded that often a sense of political affiliation will trump other social identifiers such as gender, race, religion, language, and ethnicity.³

In other words, our political engagement begins to feel more like a game of football, in which the prime objective is to score goals and beat the other team. Even worse, our subjective sense of belonging to one side or the other in politics can actually erode our commitment to our spiritual values.

This kind of blind allegiance to a specific political party is dangerous enough, but for Christians, there’s an even more insidious form of “partyism.”

THE “CHRISTIAN VOTE”

One of the most unsettling concepts in today’s political discourse is the idea of “the Christian vote.” Pollsters and media commentators invoke this phrase in electorates around the world. I’ve come across it recently in news articles from the United Kingdom, the United States, Nigeria, Australia, Canada, and Egypt, where, in different ways, the so-called Christian vote has some significance within each local political context.

It’s a phrase that implies the marriage of one’s religious identity with that of a specific political agenda. It suggests that Christians can be treated as a voting bloc, with political candidates courting their favor and pandering to their perceived interests. It assumes that Christians can, by and large, be factored into political equations and relied on to help advance political interests. In some cases, this is a reality. Consider, for instance, a report by the Barna Group, an independent research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture, which traced the pivotal impact of Evangelical Christians in a recent U.S. election.⁴

I’ve recently attended a number of events for reli-

gious leaders and advocates hosted by politicians, and at times have had an uncomfortable sense that a line was being crossed. The overall tone of these occasions has sometimes carried a sense of *quid pro quo*, with the faith community giving their tacit blessing to a political leader, while he or she, in turn, declares, “Don’t forget I’m looking out for you.” At one such event, after a politician had talked about his commitment to care for the interests of faith communities, a staffer then urged pastors to use their pulpits to share the message. “Remember, Sunday is coming!” she said. “Sunday is coming, and you’ll have a chance to talk about all this with your members.”

This is an especially seductive form of “partyism.” We like to be “in the room.” We like to be acknowledged. We like to feel that we have visibility and respect. We can even justify this by feeling that our goals are worthy ones and our purpose is pure. But the desire for political influence and access—even if it is in support of important issues that align with our faith values—can sometimes corrupt in the same way as blind allegiance to a political party. It can blunt our moral acuity and lead us to divide our loyalties in ways that Ellen White clearly saw when she warned against Adventists as a people being “unequally yoked together with unbelievers in political strife.”⁵

The political machinery and public policy debates of your country may look vastly different from those of the country where I live and work. As we each consider our participation in the civic realm—whether as a voter, an advocate, or even as an elected public official—let’s remember to “think Adventistly.” That means rejecting blind partisanship and working instead to reflect Christ and the values of His kingdom in the public space.


¹ See Jared Miller’s account of the outspoken involvement of early Adventist pioneers in issues of temperance in “Adventists, Prohibition, and Political Involvement.” *Liberty Magazine*, Nov/Dec 2011.

² “The Lord would have His people bury political questions.” “We cannot with safety vote for political parties.” “It is a mistake for you to link your interests with any political party, to cast your vote with them or for them.” Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), pp. 391-393.

³ Milenko Martinovich, “Americans’ Partisan Identities Are Stronger Than Race and Ethnicity, Stanford Scholar Finds.” *Stanford News*, August 31, 2017.

⁴ Barna Group, “Notional Christians: The Big Election Story in 2016.” Research release, Dec. 1, 2016.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), vol. 2, pp. 336, 337.

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WHEN GOD WOULDN'T LEAVE

God knows which prayers to answer.

EDEN LEEPER

Richard woke up, confused. *Where am I?* he wondered. Looking around, he noticed that he was in a hospital room. *What happened to me?* All he could remember was the race.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Richard Leeper was in the prime of his life. He had a loving wife, two beautiful daughters, and a good job. He and his family lived in Loma Linda, California. But the true love of his life was motorcycles. He loved

everything about them, especially racing them.

For six years racing had become the biggest part of Richard's life. He used every spare moment to race or work on his bike.

Richard had been raised in a conservative Adventist family. His father was a pastor and teacher. Richard grew up keeping Sabbath and attending church every week. But the more Richard became enveloped by the racing world, the

less he went to church. Races were always on Sundays, so he began to spend Saturdays working on his bike and preparing for races, while his family attended church. As his love for racing grew, he felt more guilty about leaving the church. The guilt made him angry and bitter.

Richard clearly remembers one Saturday night in particular. He was in the Midway Cycle Shop working on his bike. His thoughts were reeling, and frustration was growing. In a fit of anger he stormed outside, shook his fist at the sky, and yelled, “God, get out of my life! Leave me alone and don’t bother me anymore!”

A SPLIT SECOND CHANGES EVERYTHING

Not long afterward, on a typical Sunday at the races, Richard was gearing up. That week’s course in Perris, California, was particularly treacherous, with rough terrain.

The competitors lined up their bikes at the starting line, revving their powerful engines. The gun blasted, and they tore off over the course. Suddenly, the front wheel of Richard’s motorcycle spun out. He crashed, hitting the ground hard. He was out cold.

Immediately Richard’s brother-in-law picked up his mangled body and called an ambulance. The EMT rushed him to a doctor near the raceway. The doctor said that because of the type of crash Richard was in, he needed to be taken to an emergency room right away.

Once there, Richard was tested and observed by neurologists. They discovered that he had sustained a traumatic brain injury that had paralyzed the right side of his body.

Three days later the neurologists told Richard’s family that he might not live through the rest of the day. They said that later that day they were going to perform a risky surgery that might give him a fighting chance. The surgery involved boring a hole in his skull to relieve pressure that had built up around his brain. It wasn’t a guaranteed success, but it could help.

The family’s pastor was asked to come and have a service of prayer and anointing for Richard.

A few hours later, when the doctors came to take Richard for surgery, they noticed significant changes. The reflexes on his right side had returned, and they could tell the pressure in his skull had diminished. With such a drastic and

**In a fit of anger he yelled,
“God, get out of my life!
Leave me alone and don’t
bother me anymore!”**

surprising improvement, doctors decided to wait to see what would happen.

The following Sunday Richard woke up.

His wife and the doctors told him about the accident. He’d been unconscious for a week.

“I kept remembering my conversation with God just a few weeks earlier,” Richard said. “I kept thinking, *If everything the doctors are telling me about what happened is true, and if God really saved me after I had rejected Him, then He certainly is a merciful God. I need to find out more about Him.*”

In the following weeks Richard began to notice that he was a completely changed man. His attitude was different, and he had a strong desire to go to church and learn about God. Every area of his life seemed to have improved, from his family life to his work life. He noticed that he was enjoying it all so much more. God had saved him and given him a second chance.

“God is good,” he says. “He loves us and cares for us even when we refuse to accept that love.”

PRAYERS: ANSWERED AND UNANSWERED

Today Richard lives in Loma Linda, enjoying retirement with his wife, Earlene. Richard has four daughters, two sons, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He fills his life with family, God, church, and the occasional round of golf.

He knows from experience the truth of this promise: “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:15, 16). ♣

Eden Leeper lives in Georgia.

20 QUESTIONS

How
Adventist
are you?



You know the 28 fundamental beliefs, Adventist history, the names of the General Conference president, secretary, and treasurer. But how well do you know the culture that makes us truly Adventist? Take this quiz (no using Google) and check your answers with those at the bottom of the page to see how you compare with others in your congregation.—Editors.

1. ___ First Adventist media ministry (radio or TV)
2. ___ General Conference presidents born outside North America
3. ___ First speaker of the It Is Written television ministry
4. ___ Editor of both *Our Little Friend* and *Signs of the Times* (at separate times)
5. ___ First General Conference president
6. ___ Only father and son to serve as presidents of the General Conference
7. ___ Site of the first Adventist college in the United States west of the Rockies
8. ___ First speaker of the Breath of Life television ministry
9. ___ Instrumental in founding the first Adventist school of nursing
10. ___ First African American president of the North American Division
11. ___ First African American to serve on the staff of *Adventist Review*
12. ___ Where Ellen White received her first vision about the great controversy
13. ___ Where the Seventh-day Adventist Church was first chartered
14. ___ First (and only) woman to serve as treasurer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
15. ___ First Adventist to serve as chaplain of the United States Senate
16. ___ Where the first Hispanic Adventists were baptized
17. ___ First Adventist school to offer higher education to African Americans
18. ___ First speaker of *La Voz de la Esperanza* radio ministry
19. ___ Missionary and author of best-selling children's books
20. ___ Where James and Ellen White were married

ANSWERS

(Some questions have more than one answer.)

- A Milton Peverini
- B Katherine "Kate" Lindsay
- C Healdsburg, California
- D Roy Adams
- E Sanchez, Arizona
- F John Byington
- G Lawrence Maxwell
- H Jan Paulsen
- I Eric B. Hare
- J Charles E. Bradford
- K Neal C. and Ted N. C. Wilson
- L Battle Creek, Michigan
- M Voice of Prophecy
- N Portland, Maine
- O Charles D. Brooks
- P Ole Olsen
- Q Ted N. C. Wilson
- R Minerva Jane Chapman
- S Barry C. Black
- T H.M.S. Richards
- U Oakwood Industrial School
- V Lovett's Grove, Ohio
- W George Vandeman
- X Healdsburg College
- Y Charles H. Watson
- Z Carlos Medley

SCORE

- 17-20 You're an Adventist alright.
- 12-16 Nice effort!.
- 6-11 Not bad. You knew half of them!.
- 0-5 Bet you learned a few things!

TIME CAPSULE 2020: WHAT WE WANTED BACK/DIDN'T WANT BACK

During the COVID-19 lockdown, what did you want back? What did you not want back?

Forty days into the lockdown, that's the question I posed to people in my circles—Facebook friends, church members, students. Someday it will be interesting to look back on this period and see where our minds and hearts were—and whether our lives truly changed.

WHAT WE WANTED BACK

- » Hugs
- » The laughter and joy of families together
- » Church together
- » Potlucks
- » Taking my kids to the library without fear
- » Singing with others
- » Family closeness
- » Friends in my home
- » Sports
- » Eating out
- » My hairstylist
- » Freedom to travel
- » The innocence of movement
- » My classroom of students
- » Playing Uno with friends
- » Refills

WHAT WE DIDN'T WANT BACK

- » The rat race
- » Traffic
- » Alarms
- » Having to work in an office
- » Ministry without innovative media

- » My uprooted areas of spiritual negligence
- » Program-based stress-filled ministry
- » A calendar packed with appointments
- » Time away from our newborn son
- » Easy access to gambling
- » Pollution
- » Endless bickering between media and friends about how to handle the crisis
- » Wearing shoes

So that's how we felt after 40 days, just as some lockdown restrictions were being eased. How much will these 40 days change us? Will more people keep working from home? Will people remember "how isolation has brought community within my community"? Will we reembrace the "the ability to show up for people," as one busy mom wrote, without "not having the time to show up for people"?

For me as a pastor, the lockdown has opened my eyes to the repeated longings of another pastor: "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:8).

Then in a wistful moment I realized: Is this how Christ feels about us all the time? 🍂

Andy Nash (andynash5@gmail.com) is a pastor in Denver, Colorado. He leads a study tour to Israel each summer. He wants it back next summer.

THE LIFE
OF FAITH
ANDY
NASH



SOMEDAY IT WILL BE
INTERESTING TO
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WHERE OUR MINDS
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WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

YOUR MARRIAGE CAN SURVIVE COVID-19

Here's how.

Some experts are finding that six or seven weeks of pressure is as much as human relationships can last before they crack. Here's a piece we all should read right now.—Editors

CCOVID-19 has dramatically and drastically changed life in our homes. Many of us are feeling anxious, uncertain, and stressed while trying to adjust to a new and hopefully temporary normal. Marriage and family life are already full of challenges, where we inevitably have conflict and hurt one another. But now the virus has added another layer to regular stressors. It's easy during this time for tensions to rise, tempers to



flare, and to get on each other's nerves. Initially, the time together seemed like a blessing, but extra time has created more opportunity for misunderstandings and dysfunctional interactions. This is especially true for husbands and wives where previous relational struggles may have become magnified.

Keeping your marriage healthy during the COVID-19 quarantine needs to be a high priority for all couples. There are no easy answers and quick fixes, and we don't know how long we'll be living under these conditions. So, while we can't control the virus and our current circumstances, we can take control and change our response to what's happening around us. Here are some tips to help your marriage survive and thrive during COVID-19 and beyond.

PRAYER

As people of faith, now is the time to use our spiritual disciplines, especially prayer. We're constantly being reminded during this pandemic to protect ourselves by washing our hands, not touching our face, and practicing social distancing. These tasks, however, don't necessarily protect us from the emotional, mental, and spiritual distress we're encountering. This is the reason prayer is so critical at this time. Prayer takes us outside of ourselves and reminds us that our reliance is on God and not ourselves. Paul reminds us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6, 7).¹

Prayer has to be the first protection for our marriage and family. With tensions rising and tempers flaring, we need a sense of calm and peace in our homes. From a physiological perspective, prayer is highly effective in reducing our reaction to trauma and crises. Prayer takes us out of the fight, flight, or freeze mode and pushes us into a more thoughtful and reflective mode.

When we pray, God speaks to our hearts and transforms our minds. We've witnessed miraculous healing in marriages where one or both spouses commit to praying earnestly for the marriage.

Ellen White says: "When we come to ask mercy and blessing from God we should have a spirit of love and forgiveness in our own hearts."²

PRACTICE THE PPC MODEL

Throughout this pandemic, we've heard the term PPE (personal protective equipment), which includes items to defend against the virus such as face masks, gloves, and other protective gear. The PPC Model (pause, pray, and choose), however, is a defense strategy to protect your relationship. Using this skill will help you create and ensure a safe environment for your marriage and family.

Pause—when tensions are rising, pause and breathe. Taking deep breaths will activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which conserves energy and slows the heart rate, relaxes the body, and allows the brain to think more clearly.

Pray—say a quick prayer and ask God to help you calm down and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), despite feeling stressed, anxious, and frustrated.

Choose—choose a response that will create a safe space and foster peace in your home.

BE KIND

Are little things about your spouse beginning to irritate you? You've started noticing some things that were probably there before, but all of a sudden they seem more magnified. Don't sweat the small stuff—it's all small stuff! You'll naturally get a little snippy with each other unintentionally, so practice being kind and nice. Give each other lots of grace, and remember that you're on the same team.

ASK YOUR SPOUSE WHAT HE OR SHE NEEDS

Set aside at least 10 minutes every day for a checkup with each other. The simple act of asking and responding as needed validates and supports each partner and sends a message of caring. There might be some things that seem obvious and maybe even things that you normally do to support each other, but now they've become more important. It's easy during this crisis to take each other for granted. Taking the time to communicate your thoughts, fears, needs, and desires will help you to remain in tune with each other.

BE WARM AND AFFECTIONATE

Social distancing rules don't apply to your marriage unless you've tested positive for COVID-19. Make time in your relationship to connect and to be warm and affectionate in your daily interactions. Develop a habit of hugging and kissing each

It's more than OK to take at least 20 to 30 minutes of uninterrupted time alone every day for the health and well-being of your relationship.

other in the morning when you wake up and before you go to sleep at night, or even in the middle of the day. This will help relieve tension and connect you to each other emotionally. Schedule a weekly date night for just the two of you. Be creative, have fun, and laugh a lot.

TAKE BREAKS FROM EACH OTHER

While marriage is designed to bring out the best in us, it also tends to bring out the worst in us. That's what makes this forced togetherness so difficult. Therefore, it's more than OK to take at least 20 to 30 minutes of uninterrupted time alone every day for the health and well-being of your relationship. Of course, we're not talking about silent treatment or ignoring each other. So talk about it and agree together when you will carve out some personal time each day. Then respect those boundaries going forward.

KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Having a positive attitude about your spouse and your marriage directly impacts the quality of your relationship. Rather than thinking your problems can't be solved, change your self-talk and the way you view your relationship. If you think your marriage is relatively good with some challenges, you'll tend to focus on how you can survive this crisis together and even thrive on the other side. Positive thinking will give you hope about the future and about your marriage. "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Connecting with friends and family through FaceTime, Zoom, SMS, or a simple telephone call will help to lessen the tension and strain on your marriage. In this way, your spouse or children are not the only people you interact with. If allowed, you can even go outside and say hello to your neighbors while practicing social distancing. Be sure, however, not to connect clandestinely with

anyone. This will only invite additional problems into your marriage during this stressful time.

FORGIVE QUICKLY

Because you're human, it's inevitable that at some point during these tension-filled days you may say something or do something that might hurt your spouse, or vice-versa. As soon as someone conveys being hurt, the one causing the pain should be quick to apologize. For this to work, the offended party should also be swift to forgive. This will help your relationship to get back on track and keep the evil one from further damaging your oneness. The Bible says: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another*, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, emphasis supplied).

IF NECESSARY, REACH OUT FOR HELP

If you're having problems that you're unable to resolve on your own, seek help from a qualified Christian counselor who shares your values about marriage. Most therapists are offering telehealth for individuals and couples these days. So, talking to a counselor about the challenges you're having can be invaluable during and after the lockdown.

By responding to your challenges in constructive ways, your marriage will survive and thrive during COVID-19. "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). 🦋

¹ All Bible texts are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), p. 97.

For more marriage and family resources to help you through COVID-19, visit family.adventist.org. If you're afraid that your spouse might hurt you or your children, or if you're already experiencing some form of domestic violence, reach out for help now. In the United States, you can contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline anytime by calling 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or online at <https://www.thehotline.org/help/>. They offer help in more than 200 languages. If you're outside the United States, look for hotlines that are available in your country.

Willie Oliver, a family sociologist, pastoral counselor, and certified family life educator, is director of Adventist Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. **Elaine P. Oliver**, a licensed clinical professional counselor and certified family life educator, is associate director.

I WILL GO

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I WILL GO

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2020-2025



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WE WILL GO





FORECAST: HEAVY RAIN

Every journey has surprises, not all of them pleasant.

DIXIL RODRÍGUEZ

One of the most difficult aspects of moving to a new place and setting up “home” is finding those spiritual and emotional havens. For which community projects will I volunteer? Who needs my help? Where will my spiritual gifts be of service? Where is my new church located? What will my new religious and spiritual family be like? Of all the necessary questions for adjustment, I can always rely on two constants: God’s leading and unknown weather forecasts.

God always leads and makes the necessary introductions for us to serve where He needs us. I volunteer in places where family and friends honestly express: "I would never have seen you participating in that project!" That's part of saying, "Send me": you never know where God needs ambassadors.

The second constant I know for sure: God's introductions do not come with a weather warning. Whether it's physical or emotional, we can't predict if our location of service will experience sunshine, rain, or heavy storms. The best I can do is prepare by praying that I will have the heavenly "gear" to get through whatever comes. In that preparation I'm not alone.

Plenty of women and men have prayed "Send me," but it always begins with a recalled admission: "Here am I." It's not that God needs to know where our geographical location is in order to put us to work—it's a willingness to admit that we're ready for service, regardless of the weather. That's not an easy task. Think on it: ready for service, *regardless of weather*. Imagine all the pictures and images of "what's left" after a hurricane, tornado, or storm. Are we still willing to serve?

Would you rescind your offer to serve because the sun is too hot or the air too humid? Would you rescind your offer to serve because of the possibility that you may end up in a place that's unfriendly or dangerous?

God willing, we simply serve and rely on Him to help us through any weather. The forecast uncertain, we may be fortunate enough to receive a warning of any impending storm. What do we do with the very real possibility of a forecast of dangerous weather? When we hear it coming, how do we prepare for a storm?

SHARED STORIES

It was a week of good news. A physical checkup had demonstrated that I was in "good health." Actually, my physician said: "Everything still looks perfect. You're a miracle and a blessing. Go and continue enjoying life!"

Anyone who knows my personal story can attribute "miracle and blessing" only to God, not to science. Continued good health? That's a blessing I never take for granted. Yes, it was a day of good news! Also, the news was right on time, as I prepared to take on new responsibilities in my professional life:

more time as a chaplain and less time as a professor.

Yet in my sunshine I heard the faint sound of thunder and heavy rain.

That evening, as I served a new volunteer community, I found myself going through a familiar routine of donning a mask, gloves, and gown before entering a room to visit a patient, Emory. It was a pleasant visit. A man of faith, he shared a brief synopsis of his life and thanked me for my visit. He suffered no delusion that he would recover from illness, but he was at peace. As with many people, he had outlived family and friends. He was on his own, but he was quick to say: "I'm not alone, no matter what it looks like."

With a bit of time before beginning my new job, I decided to visit Emory again. On my second visit I heard more details of his life. He had served as a missionary, a doctor on a different continent. He had to learn to speak a different language. We spoke of cultural differences, ministering to the sick, the poor, everyone we often call "the least of these," when in reality we're just as least as they are, all alike, fulfilling the call to love one another, labor with one another. His words inspired me, and I promised to visit again.

A day later I go through the routine again: mask, gloves, and gown before entering the room. As I say a quick prayer before opening the door, I hear the voice of a nurse behind me whisper: "He's not well, Chaplain. This will happen quickly."

I sit with Emory for a while. This time I tell him the stories. I tell him about relocating, moving to a new place, preparing to begin a different ministry. He listens, smiles, laughs. His green eyes look cloudier than the day before, but he tells me he's not in pain.

In a moment of silence he reaches for my hand and says: "I, too, told God, 'Send me'; then it all changed. I rescinded my willingness to serve." A tear runs down his cheek. *I hold my breath and don't move lest his next words are not ready to meet the air we share.* "I said, 'God, I wanted to serve; I just didn't think it would be like this! So hard! My family struggled. Even after we returned, my wife suffered with chronic pain from repeated malaria acquired during that time I had said 'Send me,' but . . ." he stops to catch his breath. I see him labor, and I nod. *There is no need to finish the sentence.*

I know.

We embrace the words "God will never give us

In our service, during our ministry, there may be collateral damage, loss, struggles.

more than we can handle” and “All things are possible through Jesus Christ”; then we realize that in our service, during our ministry, there may be collateral damage, loss, struggles. We remember we are still human, fragile. We doubt. What was once a distant sound of thunder gets closer, and we remember that sound precedes a mighty storm.

As I conclude my visit, he asks me to pray. I hold his hand, and once my prayer is finished, I feel a gentle squeeze to my hand as he begins to pray. It’s not often that this happens during visits, and I’m humbled to hear his voice lift up words of gratitude and praise to God for all the kindness and joy of the day. His voice is strong, determined, but his words demonstrate that God has been not only a Father but a patient Friend to him. The honest words make tears pool in my eyes. Just as the prayer nears a close, I hear my new friend share a weather forecast:

“God, keep this young woman on this path. Help her stay the course, so that when the storm comes, You will give her strength to run ahead of chariots, creating a path through heavy rain, where You lead. Send your angels to sustain her.”

I hold his hand as he falls asleep.

RUNNING WITH ANOTHER

Hours later, in the safety and comfort of my home, I read the story of Elijah and Ahab for the eighth time. In my mind’s eye I imagine the scene. As a child growing up in the Caribbean, I remember the sight of rain so thick you couldn’t see more than a few inches ahead. *How thick was that heavy rain for Elijah? Is it possible to imagine that same heavy rain as not just physical but emotional? How many times have I asked God for guidance through a storm? How many times has He sent someone to help me through a storm?*

My “good news week” ends with prayers of gratitude, prayers of comfort for my new friend, and prayers for purpose: “Here I am. As You have

blessed me for so long and kept me for so long, send me. Even if it storms.”

Throughout the hours of the night, the sound of thunder grows, and the winds change.

CRISIS CONDITIONS

Several weeks later, a new morning, a new reality. *Thunder is loud, rain is heavy, visibility is poor.*

The early hours of the day find me sitting in my car, dialing a familiar phone number: my parents. I’m calling to ask for continued prayers. I’m headed to work through a heavy storm, and I’m not the only one. As I begin the journey, I remember the prayer of my friend: “Help her stay the course.” My “good news week” is now a reminder of how much I must rely on God to run with me through any storm. To be in the trenches means to serve in faith, running ahead of the heavy rain, ahead into the unseen and unpredictable. Yet, as Emory reminded me: “I am not alone, no matter what it looks like.”

The request, so obvious to me now, is that all of us “stay the course.” That we run together with the purpose of ministry and mission, true light bearers in the deep dark, listening to the one still voice that can be used to calm and bring peace among the noise. In every capacity we are prepared, secured, comforted with God’s promises; words so clear we should not fear to stumble in our capacity to share the strength and peace they bring. *Here we are; send us.*

As I stand in line to be screened for temperature checks and answer questions, a familiar nurse I work with recognizes me and walks over to clear me for entry into the hospital. “Tell me, Chaplain, what’s the weather like?”

“Forecast? Heavy rain,” I say with a smile. *Yet here we are, still willing to serve. No rescinding. No left, no right, just forward.*

“Are we ready?” she asks as she jots down numbers on a clipboard.

Yes, we are.

And just like that, following the footsteps of the One who faced a deadly storm for me, I step into the heavy rain.

“The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over many waters. . . .

The Lord blesses his people with peace” (Ps. 29:3-11).

Dixil Rodríguez has served as a university professor and hospital chaplain.



PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

HOARDING

It involves more than meets the eye!

Q: We recently moved close to my husband’s elderly aunt, whom he hadn’t seen since he was a teenager. Her house was filled with moldy newspapers and just “stuff.” There was literally no place to sit. This couldn’t be healthy, could it?

A: You describe a well-developed case of hoarding—and, no, it’s *not* healthy, on several levels.

Hoarding is a subtype of obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which affected individuals stockpile and have emotional attachments to items—regardless of the objects’ real value—that others view as worthless. Hoarders have a compulsive need to constantly acquire “stuff” and have difficulty in getting rid of possessions. The thought and process of discarding brings significant stress and distress, often because of fear of losing something valuable, important, or useful. This appears to be the driving force of the disorder. Hoarding is estimated to affect between 2 and 5 percent of the U.S. population, is more common in Western countries, and, unfortunately, is a growing problem.

As in the case you described, accumulated possessions grow to the point of blocking off living spaces (bathroom, kitchen, utility and clothes closets) and appliances (stove, refrigerator), thus affecting the ease of doing everyday household tasks, such as cleaning and cooking. As a result, sanitation and hygiene become challenging, and personal safety becomes compromised.

Interestingly, the situation is often not perceived by the affected individual as a “problem.” Clutter inhibits free passage, thereby increasing falls and injuries. It poses a fire hazard and impedes access by emergency personnel. Clutter invites and shelters pests, mold, and structural damage, increasing the risk of respiratory, allergic, and infectious conditions.

Genetics, brain functioning, and stressful life events are all being scientifically evaluated as

Health Risks of Hoarding

- Sanitation
- Mold
- Indoor air quality
- Pest infestations
- Increased falls
- Fire hazard
- Collapsing clutter
- Structural damage to house
- Cleaning-related injuries
- Psychosocial problems
- Financial problems
- Legal problems
- Social “shunning”
- Social isolation
- Depression

contributors to this derangement. Although elderly people exhibit more extreme examples, most can trace telltale behaviors as far back as childhood or adolescence. Despite being more prevalent than anxiety, hoarding hasn’t received much attention. The main treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, is highly successful but requires time, often six to 12 months. The goal is to help hoarders think through and “see” the situation; stop the acquisition; acquire new, effective, organizational skills; and begin the act of discarding the accumulated items. Hoarders often know that they can’t find things and realize they prize things that are of dubious potential usefulness, are spending unnecessarily, and are placing themselves at risk; but they have an inner script that overrides corrective action.

In a way, many of us have some tendency toward accumulating “stuff,” even knowing that our value isn’t based on our possessions and that discarding what isn’t useful may not necessarily be wasteful. But even our spiritual understanding may not fix this psychological problem, which is best attended to professionally and with Christlike compassion. ▀

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



PHOTO BY DAIGA ELLABY ON UNSPLASH

FATHERS ARE FOREVER

Having an influence in this life and the next

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Eph. 6:4.”

VALUABLE TIME

“Fathers should . . . mingle with the children, sympathizing with them in their little troubles, binding them to their hearts by the strong bonds of love, and establishing such an influence over their expanding minds that their counsel will be regarded as sacred. . . .

“Parents may do much to connect their children with God by encouraging them to love the things of nature which He has given them, and to recognize the hand of the Giver in all they

receive. The soil of the heart may thus early be prepared for casting in the precious seeds of truth, which in due time will spring up and bear a rich harvest.

“Fathers, the golden hours which you might spend in getting a thorough knowledge of the temperament and character of your children, and the best methods of dealing with their young minds, are . . . precious.”

“The father’s duty to his children should be one of his first interests. It should not be set aside for the sake of acquiring a fortune, or of gaining a high position in the world. In fact, those very conditions of affluence and honor frequently separate a man from his family, and cut off his

influence from them more than anything else. If the father would have his children develop harmonious characters, and be an honor to him and a blessing to the world, he has a special work to do.”

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Ps. 127:1.”

AN ENORMOUS RESPONSIBILITY

“We would solemnly impress upon fathers, as well as mothers, the grave responsibility they have assumed in bringing children into the world. It is a responsibility from which nothing but death can free them. True, the chief care and burden rests upon the mother during the first years of her children’s lives, yet even then the father should be her stay and counsel, encouraging her to lean upon his large affections, and assisting her as much as possible. . . .

“In that great day of reckoning it will be asked him: Where are the children that I entrusted to your care to educate for Me, that their lips might speak My praise, and their lives be as a diadem of beauty in the world, and they live to honor Me through all eternity?

“In some children the moral powers strongly predominate. They have power of will to control their minds and actions. In others the animal passions are almost irresistible. To meet these diverse temperaments, which frequently appear in the same family, fathers, as well as mothers, need patience and wisdom from the divine Helper. . . .

“The father should frequently gather his children around him, and lead their minds into channels of moral and religious light. He should study their different tendencies and susceptibilities and reach them through the plainest avenues.

“Some may be best influenced through veneration and the fear of God; others through the manifestation of His benevolence and wise providence, calling forth their deep gratitude; others may be more deeply impressed by opening before them the wonders and mysteries of the natural world, with all its delicate harmony and beauty, which speak to their souls of Him who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and all the beautiful things therein.

“Children who are gifted with the talent or love of music may receive impressions that will be lifelong, by the judicious use of those susceptibilities as the medium for religious instruction. . . . Many may be reached best through sacred pictures, illustrating scenes in the life and mission of Christ. . . .

Parents may do much to connect their children with God by encouraging them to love the things of nature.

“While there should be a uniformity in the family discipline, it should be varied to meet the wants of different members of the family. It should be the parents’ study . . . to . . . inspire them with a desire to attend to the highest intelligence and perfection of character.”

*“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and reject not your mother’s teaching. Prov. 1:8, RSV.”**

FATHER AS PRIEST

“The father is the priest and house-band of the home. The mother is the teacher of the little ones from their babyhood, and the queen of the household. Never is she to be slighted. Never are careless, indifferent words to be spoken to her before the children. She is their teacher. In thought and word and deed the father is to reveal the religion of Christ, that his children may see plainly that he has a knowledge of what it means to be a Christian. . . .

“In our work we are not to strive to make an appearance. We are to look upon Christ, beholding what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. And what a joy, what a power, will be with us as we do this! It will not be merely the excitement of feeling, but a deep abiding joy. We are to present the solid truths of the Word of God, that these truths may be impressed on the hearts of the people, and that men and women may be led to walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer. . . .

“I pray that your eyes may be anointed with the heavenly eyesalve, that you may discern what is truth and what is error. We need to put on the white garments of Christ’s righteousness. We need to walk and talk with God.”[¶]

*Bible texts credited to RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

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 passage was excerpted from *Reflecting Christ* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985). pp 174-178.

MY EVER-PRESENT DADDY

*Father's Day isn't
the same for everyone.*

BETTY KOSSICK

Most, but not all, American kids grow up celebrating Mother's Day and Father's Day. I happen to be one of those "not all"s. My father just wasn't around. Liquor wooed and crazed him. After too many altercations of abuse to my mother (with her screams and his curses), my mother and I left when I was age 5. I don't have any good memories.

Within a matter of weeks after bunking with a single-mother friend of Mom's, I became a ward of Family and Children's Services because my mother had no financial means to take care of me. Most of the other children in the care home were like me. I actually dreaded Father's Day. I felt glad that it occurred each year during school vacation, because teachers would always make a big thing about Mother's Day; and if Father's Day celebration had come during school months, surely we'd be expected to participate in the making of little gifts for them, too. I wasn't alone in my dread.

We kids weren't blind. We spied other children whose daddies played with them; and best of all, they got lifted up onto their daddy's laps. We saw lots of hugs and kisses going between. It looked like such fun, what love was surely supposed to be.

MAKING AN EFFORT

When I turned 10, I really tried to be my dad's daughter—even walking a few miles and visiting him on Saturdays while he was jailed for six months for the robbery of a cigarette machine while on a drunken spree with a friend. By this time, I was newly back

living with my mother. But she had to be at work, so I was on my own and lonely, and I thought he must be lonely. After his release, he wanted to reconcile, but Mom figured she wasn't going to risk it. So he continued to be an absent dad. It was as if my jailhouse visits hadn't mattered.


A HEAVENLY FATHER

But the day came when his role was filled for me by the most wonderful Father a kid could ever want, even though I was now a young woman of 18. His name is Father God. I first discovered Him by studying the Lord's Prayer. From the time I was age 12 I'd been searching for God, although I hadn't known that He was my Father. I found my real Dad was full of compassion, strength, kindness, and love. He was always there for me. I talked to Him every day in prayer. I asked Him to give me something to do for Him to bless others. He did, and writing became a ministry. And I forgave my dad.

Now I'm at an advanced old age, and I look back at the fathering my husband, our son, and his sons have done and are doing to be good dads. None of them is perfect, but all of them love Jesus, and they know about the Sonship between Jesus and His Father, our Father God.

The spiritual family connection is vital to truly appreciate fatherhood at its best with our ever-present Daddy. ✍️

Betty Kossick and her husband, Johnny, live in Apopka, Florida, where Betty continues her work as a freelance writer. You can contact Betty at bkwrites4u@hotmail.com.

A young girl with dark hair pulled back, wearing a light purple hoodie, is shown from the chest up. She has her arms crossed and is looking upwards and to the left with a thoughtful expression. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The text is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, enclosed in an orange L-shaped border.

**I found my real
Dad was full of
compassion,
strength, kindness,
and love. He was
always there for me.**



CHILDIMPACT INTERNATIONAL

Hi! I'm from Bangladesh and my school is Kellogg-Mookerjee Memorial Seminary, also called KMMS.

My dad died 2 years ago and my mom struggles to find work in the fields. The Pastor told her about this school and we are very happy that I can come here. It scared me when 2 girls were trafficked from my village last year. But in this school I feel safe, I am fed and get an education with a future.

As you can see below we badly needed a new building! I am so thankful for people like you who care – even when you are far away.



Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. Kellogg-Mookerjee Memorial Seminary is a key Adventist mission school in Bangladesh with over 450 children in the school, more than 50 are orphans.

The main building was over 40 years old and condemned because it was badly built, very dangerous and had to be pulled down. Child Impact has started the construction of a new building (shown opposite).

We are blessed to be here and thank you for making this project possible.

We love this school, but we didn't feel safe in the old building. It was really dangerous and one of our friends was hit by falling concrete.

We were excited to see it pulled down and surprised how quickly they did it.

Our new building will have eight classrooms, a science lab, library and administration offices.

A pre-school will be at the front for younger kids, and will help to bring in extra money for the school.

We can hardly wait for this to happen!



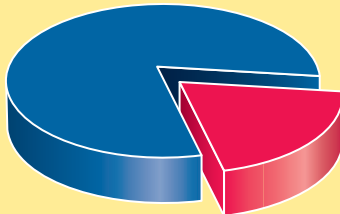
CHILDIMPACT
INTERNATIONAL



Here is the part where we need your help! Please.

OUR OBJECTIVE
IS TO RAISE

\$590,000



\$460,000

GENEROUS
DONATIONS
TO DATE

\$130,000

NEEDED TO
COMPLETE
THIS APPEAL

Donate Online
childimpact.org

by Mail: Child Impact, PO Box 763,
Ooltewah, TN 37363

or Phone: (423) 910-0667



TITHING DURING A CRISIS

We can afford to be faithful, because God is.

The coronavirus pandemic has swept the world, leaving physical, emotional, and financial devastation. This is no time to panic, but to remember God's leading in the past. The history of tithing in the Adventist Church includes three aspects: theology, concerns for funding the spread of the gospel, and how a crisis affects the way the church handles the tithing principle.

From our beginning, the question was "How can we finance the spread of the gospel and care for workers who devote their lives to the cause?" The theology was set since the mid-1800s, but how the church has responded to crises and implemented this principle has been part of an

ongoing discussion. Through it all, God's work progresses, funded by tithe and offerings.

THE PANIC OF 1857

The Advent movement was very young during the Panic of 1857. Most believe it started with the failure of the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company. It was a "confidence crisis"¹ that spread across the United States and Europe. Banks collapsed, land prices fell, wheat prices crashed, railroad securities lost their value and went bankrupt, businesses failed, and factories shut down as the economy's "speculative house of cards came crashing down in September 1857."²

Hundreds of thousands of workers were laid off. Some

believe that the economic difference between the North and South was one of the triggers for the American Civil War.³

Prior to 1859, no regular giving plan supported the Advent movement. The “preaching brethren,” as they were called, were discouraged, in poverty, and in poor health. For their labor they received room and board, a little travel expense, and very little pay, if anything. Advent preachers worked other jobs to survive and advanced the Advent message as they could.

How could the Advent movement be sustained organizationally and advance mission? In 1859, a committee of three was chosen to find an answer. They opposed the concept of tithing, assuming it had ceased at the cross. Since the movement was starting to organize under the pattern of “gospel order,” their study of New Testament financial support was applied to this concept.

Their proposal was based on 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:12-14; 9:5-7, which the church adopted and called “the systematic benevolence plan (Sister Betsey).” Members set aside offerings each week as the church treasurer came by each home. Throughout the 1860s, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* published many articles on the topic, for leaders saw it as a plan from God to save and protect the church from bankruptcy. The Sister Betsey plan continued to develop for the next 20 years, but the system had a theological flaw.

THE PANIC OF 1873

Ulysses S. Grant was president. Bank reserves were strained from his policies, inflation from investing in railroads, the economic dislocation of the Franco-Prussian War, and disastrous fires in Boston and Chicago.

But the major impact to the economy came from the United States passing the Coinage Act, known as the “Crime of 1873.” It reduced the money supply, raised interest rates, and hurt farmers and anyone who carried heavy debt. Along with the United States, Germany demonetized silver. Investors shied away from long-term obligations. Banks failed.

This financial panic affected the church. Leaders revisited “the systematic benevolence plan” of financial support. While the underlying principle of the plan was biblically solid, it was no longer able to finance the Advent movement. In 1876, a series of *Review* articles laid out “The Bible Plan

for Supporting the Ministry” based on Malachi 3:8-11. They emphasized the divine blessing of returning to God what was His.

The young church fixed the theological flaw. It shifted “from approximately one percent per year of the total valuation of property to ten percent of the actual income,”⁵ and suggested that avoiding the many bad habits of the day could free up funds that could be used for one’s tithe.

During the 1880s, Adventists accepted this new understanding and refinement of the tithe principle. It answered the question, “How much ought I to give for the support of the gospel? . . . We answer, ‘A tithe of all our income.’”⁶

Following “the storehouse” principle of the temple in the Old Testament, Adventist leaders considered it God’s ordained method of support for ministry and mission. In the 1890s, Ellen White wrote: “The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women,”⁷ and “tithe and liberal offerings” were to finance the different facets of the church.⁸

THE 1930 PANIC

The United States stock market crashed on “Black Thursday,” October 24, 1929, eventually losing 90 percent of its 1929 value. This triggered mass unemployment, homelessness, bank closures, breadlines, and hunger marches. There was no welfare system. This failure, plus an expansionary monetary policy of the Federal Reserve, brought about what is called the “Great Depression” and lasted through the 1930s.⁹

The unprecedented conditions in society brought a major financial contraction for the support of worldwide church mission and its workers. The theology of the tithe and offering system had been well established, but in 1932 its importance was noted. For the first time, tithing was listed as one of the church’s fundamental beliefs. The *Church Manual* noted that “all church officers should be tithe payers,” and elders should set an example in returning tithe or not hold the office.

The commitment to faithful tithing was added to the baptismal vows in 1951, where it is still listed. As the Great Depression faded, the *Church Manual* of the 1950s mentioned that a worker who does not tithe should not continue in denominational employment or be moved to another conference (this has since been deleted).

Society changes in crises. People change in crises. The church changes in crises. Money is the common denominator.

The church continues to refine and implement its understanding of the tithing system, learning that it should not just consist of tithe, but be regarded as the tithe *and* offering system. Some study has given rise to the idea that offerings are of unique spiritual importance, in that tithe is required, but offerings come from a grateful heart.

Then there are discussions that offerings should be based on a percentage, and that much more tithe should be kept at local churches for ministry. Needless to say, the application and distribution of tithe and offerings is still evolving.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The coronavirus has brought about a worldwide health crisis, which has caused a financial catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. The worldwide lockdown is unlike any other crisis the church has encountered. Church members are quarantined, worship services transpire online, social distancing is instituted and travel restricted. All of these will impact the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the gospel commission.

My neighbor, a pastor of another faith, said, “The church is changing. The pastor talks to a camera and his church online. More than ever, preaching must keep a watcher’s attention.” Pausing, he said, “We spend so much money on buildings that can’t be supported. The money needs to be spent on people. We are headed toward an unknown, new way of doing church.”

Society changes in crises. People change in crises. The church changes in crises. Money is the common denominator that ties these entities together. Some believe that culture will never be the same. It may be that the Adventist Church around the world will have to function more locally and use more technology for communication.

Every financial crisis results in less tithe, but the three angels’ messages will be lived out in the lives of believers. COVID-19 is no respecter of persons, culture, race, rich, or poor. But this crisis,

just like others that faced the church, will change neither the mission of the church nor its scriptural understanding of tithe and offerings.

The finances of the church may suffer, but God will give us new ways to minister, corporately and individually. Tithe and offerings have the same intent now as when James White stated, in 1864, that they are to “support the proclamation of the third angel’s message.”

The tithe and offering system requires a spiritual commitment, and is part of our unique Adventist worldview. What will change, and has changed, is how we implement that principle as faithful members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As my preacher neighbor said: “We are headed for an unknown, new way of doing church.” This new way will be determined by how the church can finance doing church, doing school, and doing mission.

“God expects His people to press together spiritually and pull together financially to accomplish His objectives. The global task of the church is many times greater than ancient Israel’s in underwriting the Temple. With so large a challenge before us, let every minister and member enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of Nehemiah: ‘We will not neglect the house of our God’” (Neh. 10:39, RSV).¹⁰

¹ Johnny Fuller, economic-historian.com/2018/07/financial-instability-and-the-panic-of-1857/, accessed Apr. 7, 2020.

² John M. Murrin et al., eds., *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1999), vol. 1, p. 488, accessed Apr. 3, 2020.

³ www.historynet.com/causes-of-the-civil-war, accessed Apr. 3, 2020.
⁴ conversation.spectrummagazine.org/t/the-untold-tale-of-the-tenth-a-brief-history-of-adventist-benevolence-in-historical-context/15382, accessed Apr. 7, 2020.

⁵ Arthur L. White, *The History and Use of the Tithe: Highlights of the Beginning of the Tithing System*, https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-tithe-h_u-html/.

⁶ Statement prepared by committee appointed at General Conference, October 2-13, 1878 (committee as follows: James White, D. M. Canright, S. N. Haskell, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith): *Systematic Benevolence: The Bible Plan supporting the Ministry* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1878).

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 492.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 4, pp. 462-476.

⁹ David Hamilton, “The Causes of the Banking Panic of 1930: Another View,” *Journal of Southern History* 51, no. 4 (1985): 581-608.

¹⁰ Frank B. Holbrook, “Gospel Finance: Pulling Together,” *Adventist Review*, Mar. 3, 1988, p. 11. Bible texts credited to RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

John Mathews, now retired, is former director of Stewardship Ministries for the North American Division.

PERFECT LOVE AND COVID-19

We're now well into the COVID-19 pandemic and its continued dominance of almost every aspect of life.

At first it felt as though everyone was generally in agreement that a cautious approach was best, especially as we saw sports figures, celebrities, and people we know contract the illness. Schools closed, restaurants and retail shut down, and Tik Tok videos of puppies riding unicycles exploded through the clouds of quarantine boredom.

As things have progressed, the unity that appeared in those first days and weeks has dissipated. Many believe that we should stay the course, no matter the limits to our personal freedom and long-term effects on the economy. Others have started to wonder whether this whole thing has been a giant overreaction, a conspiracy to enhance our comfort level with governmental control. Perhaps you fall firmly into one of these camps; or maybe you're squarely in the middle. No matter your opinions, one word is at the center of it all: fear.

A DIFFERENT VIEW

As a Seventh-day Adventist living in 2020, I view everything through a biblical lens. Most Christians would probably say the same, so let me be a little more specific.

I believe that we are living in the feet of iron and clay (Dan. 2:41-43), which, when we consider the entirety of earth's history, puts us much closer to the end than the beginning.

As things come to a close, pestilences, epidemics, and pandemics are only going to increase in both frequency and intensity (Matt. 24:7, 8, 32).

One day things will progress far

enough that people's basic livelihood through the ability to buy and sell will be stripped, unless they conform to the will of the masses (Rev. 13:17).

When we have a proper understanding of God's Word, nothing that has happened in the first months of 2020 should come as a surprise. There will be more COVID-19s, government will continue to peel away our rights, and in general, everything is just going to get a whole lot worse (before it gets much, much better).

What emotions or feelings does this evoke? If we're honest, fear pops up at least once in a while. The vital question is: How do we respond when that happens?

We've seen throughout this pandemic how the world responds. But no amount of toilet-paper hoarding, stocking up on canned food, or burying gold in the backyard will provide a level of security that permanently dispels fear.

When I am gripped by fear, I go back to something else I believe: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Fear isn't necessarily a bad thing if it prompts us to run into the arms of Jesus and experience the depths of His love afresh. When we choose that course, One greater than our worst nightmares will take over our hearts, putting fear in its place.

Regardless whether you believe we should stay at home or open back up, COVID-19 should serve as a reminder that this world will continue to come apart at the seams until it breaks. When it does, our strength to endure will be determined by the power of our personal relationship with Jesus.

Maybe it's time to get off Tik Tok and have a bit more Jesus talk. 🍷

Jimmy Phillips is network marketing director for Kettering Health Network.

INTRODUCING
THE WHY
JIMMY
PHILLIPS



AS A SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST LIVING IN
2020, I VIEW
EVERYTHING
THROUGH A
BIBLICAL LENS.



DON'T PUT ME ON HOLD!

*Redeeming the irritations
of customer service*

ERIN POLL

Have you ever had to do a task that you dreaded? You know, the kind of chore you put off until the very last moment.

Mine was calling AT&T to correct a billing issue. The price we paid for the church's phone service had been changed to a substantially higher rate. As the church's administrative assistant, I was assigned to negotiate a lower price.

So after completing all my other jobs for the morning, I settled in for what I knew would be a long call. In my experience, a call to AT&T could involve lengthy wait times.

After a couple rings I was greeted by a computerized operator. I tried to ask for a billing agent. The computer asked about my billing issue. Again, I said, "Agent." On the third attempt I was transferred to a billing specialist.

FINALLY, A LIVE PERSON

A pleasant woman came on the line and asked me to verify our account, etc. I provided the information and began to explain the issue. She responded, "Oh, I'm not the person you need to speak to. I'll transfer you."

I was placed on hold for several minutes. The next person, a kind-sounding man, was patient and attentive to my situation. After going through all my information, he too said, "I'm so sorry. I'm not the person you need to talk to. But I'll be happy to transfer you." I was placed on hold.

By that point I was frustrated. I had other things to do, and I could feel my patience waning. Knowing that I didn't want to take my bad mood out on another person, I said a quick prayer for patience. As I finished, a brusque young man with a heavy accent came on the phone. I sometimes find it difficult to understand accents on the phone, so this did not bode well.

Again I explained our billing issue. The young man reviewed our account and proceeded to ask me several questions.

"So, you're a Seventh-day Adventist," he said in a voice that sounded almost hostile.

"Yes, yes, I am," I replied somewhat hesitantly. I didn't see the relevance to my request.

"Do you believe Jesus is coming again?"

"Yes."

I was a little perplexed at this point. Weren't

The young man dropped his voice a little and asked, "Do you know what a backslider is?"

they trained not to have personal conversations? Why was he so angry? Why was he asking me about Jesus and His return?

The young man dropped his voice a little and asked, "Do you know what a backslider is?"

"I do," I said softly. "It's someone who has left the Lord and gone back to a worldly life." Somehow I knew this was an important moment for this young man, and I tried to tread softly.

"What would you say if I told you I was a backslider?" he asked.

"I'd say, Praise the Lord!" I exclaimed.


"Wait, what? Why would you say that?"

"Because you recognize that you're a backslider. That means you can come back to Jesus!" I told him that Jesus would welcome him with open arms.

We shared several minutes of conversation. I knew that my words were not mine, but those of a loving Savior. I was just the mouthpiece to present a loving message. I believe I will see this young man in heaven because when we finished our conversation he said, "Erin Poll, I will never forget you. Because of this conversation, I will be attending church this Sabbath. Thank you."

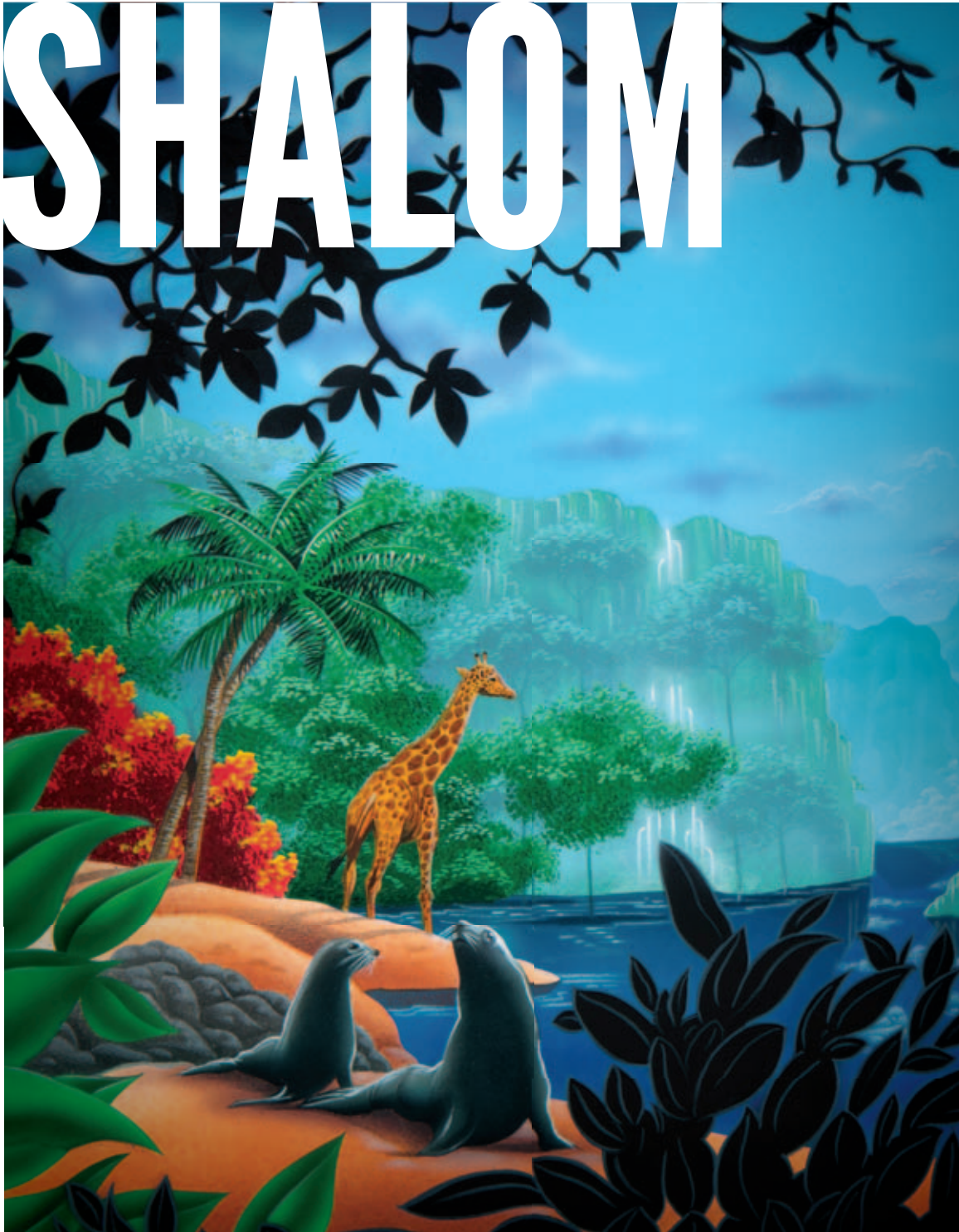
GOD'S VOICE

"Father, thank You!" was my quick prayer of praise. I was nearly bursting with joy and gratitude that God had used me to help someone who was searching for answers.

I have felt the joy of marriage, motherhood, life, and now, the joy of seeing Jesus working through me. I cannot describe the feelings of awe and elevation at witnessing someone returning to Jesus. Try it for yourself! 

Erin Poll is clerk of the Magalia-Upper Ridge Seventh-day Adventist Church in northern California.

SHALOM



The intersection of physical health and spiritual renewal

ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

You're on death row. You've been diagnosed with a fatal illness that you may not have realized you have. And you've only been making the situation worse by your attitudes and actions.

As a matter of fact, we're all in the same boat. Try as we might, there's nothing, absolutely nothing, we can do to reverse our condition or save ourselves. Regardless of our rank, position, socioeconomic or even ecclesiastical status, none of us is able to save ourselves.

"But," you may protest, "it's not that simple; there's more to consider."

Really? Even those engaged in the God-appointed work of organizing a denomination were not placed in "exempt status."

AN HISTORICAL CASE STUDY

Taking on an exaggerated workload, failing to mend fragile human relationships, or attending to the heart work that is high on God's priority list serves only to hasten the progress toward the inevitable end. God has more in store for us than we have time to do, because we are doing what others should be doing, even as He is preparing them to do so. We have a sacred duty to attend to our well-being and arouse others to do this as well, but reject the notion and practice of imbalanced work, appetite, and self-reliance.

We must learn what God really requires of us, how to enjoy His Sabbath, to spend time with those in our care, to be tender and compassionate with our children and treat them as well as our associates with the spirit of forgiveness



The Hebrew term that best describes that Edenic perfection, completeness, and harmony is *shalom*. It is the profound, absolute peace that is exclusively of divine origin.

that Jesus possessed. We have to let our children find their highest pleasure with us, just as we find and lead them to find the unsurpassed pleasure of the Lord's company.

And do not neglect to grow in intimacy with your marriage partner . . . both of you have peculiarly sensitive hearts. Yes, external problems will arise, but God wants us to have such a strong love for each other and to be in such harmony together and with Him that united in doing His assigned work, you can stand nobly, faithfully, and successfully. This will move us from saddening thoughts and saddening subjects to a place of cheerfulness, happiness, gratefulness, to greater reliance on God and unshakable confidence in Him who alone can do something about our diseased, terminal condition.

We must surrender ourselves to God so that He is in control of our mind, for that's where our sense of well-being comes from.

The preceding narrative paraphrases some of the facets of a historic vision experienced by Ellen White on Friday, June 5, 1863, during Sabbath vespers at the home of Aaron Hilliard in Otsego, Michigan. Her comment about this is found in "Testimony Regarding James and Ellen White."¹ The vision came just 15 days after the successful incorporation of the General Conference. The Whites were to attend an evangelistic event. They were staying in the home of Aaron Hilliard when she went into vision for about 45 minutes. Sometime during the next day she wrote that she was shown some issues regarding her husband and herself, and she wrote a message to the church in Monterey.

Ellen White remarked that her experience on that day was a special blessing. Perhaps the tumult

of church organization and wearying travel and her husband's health were suspended for 24 hours but resumed later when she was able to write about the event and the insight shared with some of the members of the Monterey church, a church embroiled in issues of marital infidelity and misguided judgments. The family, specifically its integrity and protection, was a clear theme throughout. She perceived that God saw what we do, and that using our own distorted judgments was at odds with what He desires for us and the harmonious life we could have in Him.

Not until August 1864² did Ellen White describe more fully the content of the vision in Otsego, but she wrote many letters and gave local and personal testimonies in the interim, including expressing the pain of the loss of their eldest son, Henry, in December 1863. The tone of her concerns appeared to be centered on integrity, Christlike attitude, mental health, and the spiritual component of well-being. Interestingly, the context within which "the great subject of health reform"³ was placed, as elaborated in the Otsego vision, is in the perfect origin of our species (and every other earthly creation) in the Garden in Eden.

"Adam and Eve in Eden were noble in stature, and perfect in symmetry and beauty. They were sinless, and in perfect health. What a contrast to the human race now! Beauty is gone. Perfect health is not known. Everywhere we look we see disease, deformity and imbecility. I inquired the cause of this wonderful degeneracy, and was pointed back to Eden."⁴

This perfection, symmetry, and beauty, with all that is good and complete, in perfect harmony and everything at peace, is God's ideal for us. When Eve and Adam fell, the entire order of things became distorted, and degeneration, decay, disease, and death entered the human sphere. But God, being love, mercy, and grace personified, had laid contingency plans from "the foundation of the world."

The Hebrew term that best describes that Edenic perfection, completeness, and harmony is *shalom*. It is the profound, absolute peace that is exclusively of divine origin. Only God possesses this in Himself. He bestowed this upon our world at Creation, and we lost it with the Fall. But God promised to restore this to our first parents, and in the fullness of time He made good on that

promise. God sent His Son in the flesh to reconcile humanity to Himself. “It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give health and peace and perfection of character.”⁵ That is *shalom*!

IMPLEMENTATION

While specific attention was directed toward the practical activities of daily life that contribute to or detract from our wholistic well-being, Ellen White’s 1863 vision placed the care of our health as a religious duty, and control of the mind as an essential component of overall health through His grace.

Even though disease prevention is prominent, when we position health practices within the framework of reforms and remedies, a presupposed “norm” already exists. Remedies are not used to prevent disease. The term inherently indicates treatment of a problem that already exists. When we place the practice of health reform as a preventive measure, people often mistakenly assume we are preventing death. This perverse aberration of the truth often leads to the idea of health being only a reflection of an individual’s ability to practice certain healthy behaviors. Then we set up a system of judgment and spiritual hierarchy based on health practices, and, even more sinisterly, health outcomes. Even the term *self-control* may distort the reality that this attribute is really a gift imparted by God through His Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23).

Christians do not engage in healthful practices in order to be saved, but rather because we are saved. We live healthfully in response to God’s desire and invitation for us to be one with Him, to be complete in Him, and to be the best version of ourselves for His glory. We are called to be ambassadors of *shalom*, and we should do everything in our power to remove all impediments that can interfere with our connection with God and our relations with each other as we run the race of this earthly life (Heb. 12:1-3).

We were created to be in harmony with God’s plan, and that required obedience to His laws. While we may focus on God’s moral law as divine, we shouldn’t forget that the physical laws that govern our universe from atoms to galaxies are also divine. Some of these natural laws govern our physiology and anatomy, ecology and personal

hygiene; cooperation with these laws is consistent with health. Ignoring the laws of health fosters sickness and disease. When we cooperate with God in His effort to re-create us, we are beneficiaries of a measure of *shalom*.

We do not belong to ourselves; we are not our own; we have been bought and paid for by God Himself. So in love and appreciation we honor God, not only in our minds but also with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:20). The kingdom of God is more than just what we eat and drink (Rom. 14:17); we should also appreciate God by caring about our total health and well-being. The lifestyle choices we make are important to Him. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we should do it to honor God (1 Cor. 10:31). We live by His grace, in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

There’s no question that healthful habits promote better physical health and longevity in general. But we must be careful to note that while the risks of unnecessary disease, suffering, and premature death are reduced, we still live in a fallen world, damaged by sin and to be restored only when the new heavens and new earth are created as promised.

So healthy living is a necessity for all who can do so. But that will neither save us nor immunize us against all sickness and suffering. That will come when Jesus returns, and we become full partakers of His *shalom* and see Him face to face.

Meanwhile, we are counseled to preserve ourselves completely, body, mind, and spirit, until He returns and completes His promise (1 Thess. 5:23). A healthy body favors a clear mind that is better able to understand God’s truth, resist temptation, and face the spiritual onslaught of our daily existence by accessing God’s strength through His Holy Spirit.

We are all on death row. Ellen and James White had to deal with this reality personally in 1863, as we do now. Only God can change that. He gives *shalom*, and all honor and praise is His.

¹ Ellen G. White, manuscript 1, 1863.

² Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1864), vol. 4a.

³ Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1867.

⁴ E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a, p. 120.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 17.

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

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HIS GRACE

The day started normally. Time with God in the morning. The sweet peace of His presence. It was a busy week at work, as we were recording an entire quarter's lessons for our Three Angels Broadcasting Sabbath School panel. Those weeks are always intense. Hours spent on the set, learning from the panelists, digging deep into God's Word. It's refreshing—and inspiring.

Yet it's a tremendous responsibility to share the Word of God with others. I feel it every time the lights turn on and the cameras begin recording. Sharing something from myself is one thing. When it's from God's Word, however, it takes on a whole new meaning.

By late morning several things had gone wrong. We waited for our production crew to adjust the lights. An audio glitch caused an edit, which took more time. One of our panelists needed to restart one of their sections. Normal, everyday production issues. Nothing major, but I could feel myself begin to feel rushed and anxious. E-mails kept rolling through on my phone. Issues needed attention, mail was piling up on my desk, voice mails needed to be returned. Just because we were recording a good portion of the day, that didn't mean that work stopped in the office. I needed to somehow juggle it all.

We changed for the next program, determined to press on and finish another one before lunch. The audio technician came out and put my mic on, along with several others. In fact, we were all ready to go, except for one person. Suddenly I heard my voice, more sharply than I'd intended, "Where is he? We need to start!" The other panelists and crew smiled. *Jill's starting to crack the whip.*

Five minutes passed. I could feel my irritation grow. *I don't have time for this. Too many other things are demanding my attention. Don't people realize that? My mouth opened, and more words tumbled out. "Come on! We need to start. Can you get so-and-so? Let's get moving!"*

One of the panelists looked at me and laughed. "Whoa, Nellie," he chuckled. He meant it as a joke, but his words cut to my heart. Another person turned on his iPad. As worship music filled the room, I struggled to keep my tears in check. *What had I just done? Yes, we needed to start. But I could've said the same words with a vastly different spirit.*

The missing panelist appeared, and we were ready to start. Except that I couldn't speak. I couldn't pray. I definitely couldn't record. *Who was I?* I was supposed to be sharing the Word of God with people lost and alone, people who needed our Savior. Yet I was the biggest hypocrite of all. How could I speak what I hadn't experienced? How could I share when I had stepped into sin? *How could God use me?*

I finally found my voice. "If you all don't mind, I'd like to pray first. I need forgiveness from our Father and from you for my attitude. I'm sorry." I bowed my head, and the words tumbled out: "God, would You cleanse me? Forgive my sin and enable me to stand before Your people and share a message from You. I am so unworthy."

Have you ever experienced His grace? Have you ever tasted His mercy? Have you touched His forgiveness?

I have. And I, for one, am forever grateful. ♣

Jill Morikone is vice president and chief operations officer for Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN), a supporting Adventist television network. She and her husband, Greg, live in southern Illinois and enjoy ministering together for Jesus.

JOURNEYS
WITH JESUS
JILL
MORIKONE



HAVE YOU EVER
EXPERIENCED
GOD'S GRACE?
HAVE YOU EVER
TASTED HIS MERCY?

Sabbath was fast approaching. A whole week swiftly passing, yet I wasn't ready to face the coming Sabbath.

It had been a month since the request came to take the Sabbath sermon. Not sure about what to share, I thought of subjects that were dear to my heart, subjects through which I'd had a personal encounter with God. Situations in which He had guided me through the thick and thin of life, as well as through the joys and bliss of personal witness and faithfulness to Him.

As the Friday evening sun spread its crimson rays across the serene western sky, my heart missed a beat every so often. I knew I wasn't ready. I'd been waiting for God to speak. He hadn't spoken yet, and tomorrow was the day. "God," I prayed, "please give me a word for Your people," a prayer I had prayed often as I eagerly waited to hear His voice.

THOSE WAITING

I thought of the large congregation, more than 2,000: a mixed multitude of Adventists and non-Adventists; mainly students, faculty, and staff of my university church. I thought of the bias some would have on account of their beliefs. Most of all, I thought about what to speak about. "Lord, when will You speak?"

No answer.

One thing was certain: I dared not go without His command. I remembered Moses' experience as he led the children of Israel. His words "unless you go with us" (Ex. 33:16) resonated with me.

How would God speak? I didn't know. I only believed, somewhat innocently, that He would. Because I had asked. I had prayed. I had fasted.

As the day of the presentation drew closer, it seemed that God and I were not very good friends. He had directed me to two of my favorite subjects, through multiple ways, over the past two weeks. But that was not enough. I needed Him to choose one of the two.

FINALLY

I seriously thought of not attending Friday evening vespers. I wanted to prepare for the following day, for God had still not spoken.

I decided to attend the Friday service anyway. But I kept thinking, *Tomorrow I'll be up there. Lord, I don't want to go without Your blessing. I've come into Your sanctuary, so Lord, please choose one of the two subjects for me.*

It was only a matter of hours until Sabbath morning. I so urgently needed to get God's direction. *After all, I thought, it's not about me; it's about God.* No sooner had I said amen to my own prayer than the preacher introduced his topic: prayer.

Amazing. It was one of the two subjects on my list! That was how God spoke: He eliminated one for me on Friday, so I could use the other on Sabbath morning. God had spoken; I knew it!

A couple days after that Sabbath, one of the faculty members from overseas came for a chat. She was in tears, barely able to talk. All she could say was "Glory to God." That Sabbath the Lord had ministered to her so directly, so personally, just at her point of despair.

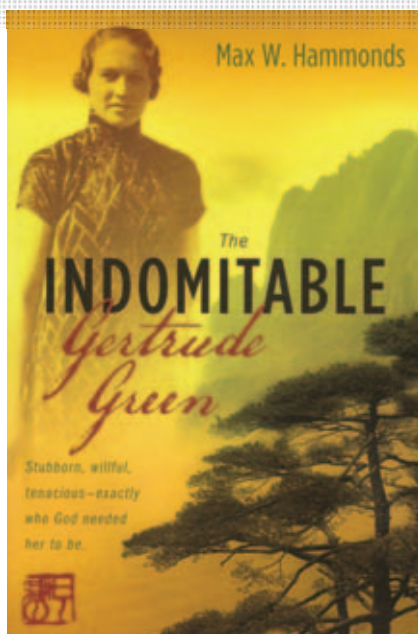
We praised the Lord together, for He had indeed spoken. ♣

Martha Mambo is a lecturer at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, in Kenya.

WHEN GOD SPOKE

Both choices were good.

CLOSER LOOK



An Indomitable Epic

The indomitable Gertrude Green, by Max W. Hammonds, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2010, 701 pages. Softcover, US\$24.99 (Kindle \$9.99). Reviewed by Stephen Chavez, *Adventist Review*.

Days and weeks of self-isolation have provided an environment conducive to becoming reacquainted with one's collections of books.

One book that I came across recently is the biography of Gertrude Green, a missionary nurse who spent most of her career in China before, during, and after World War II. *The Indomitable Gertrude Green* was written by Max W. Hammonds, who served with Green in mission service in Thailand.

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

Although the book was published 10 years ago, its story is timeless. It's the story of a woman who offered her life in service and faithfully followed God's lead as she was guided in ways she never could have imagined. And because the author had access to Green's diaries and letters, it's a comprehensive telling.

Gertrude Green grew up nurturing the dream of becoming a professional ballerina. That dream was interrupted when her mother began attending Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic meetings. Gertrude was soon attending an Adventist elementary school, which led her to Union Springs Academy.

The rest of the story is predictable insofar as readers know that it's going to lead to mission service. But the details of that journey are as fascinating and unpredictable as any work of fiction. Part of that is because much of the story takes place in China. Before World War II, the country was ripe for medical missionary work. But the war and its aftermath provide several twists and plot changes to the story as military forces vied for power.

The book is wonderful, telling of those events by someone who had a front-row seat. The author uses Green's letters to her mother, friends, and mission and church leaders to move the narrative. The author's style is powerful and dynamic, something unusual for this kind of book. Reading a 700-page book might seem daunting, but the narrative is written in a style that makes it a real page-turner.

The Indomitable Gertrude Green provides a portrait of mission service that is no longer a reality. With today's mission fields accessible by a few hours of air travel and nearly instantaneous communication with digital media, this book reminds us of the sacrifice of those who left homes and families for years. Thanks to the letters exchanged between home and mission field, we can get a taste of a bygone era and wonder whether what we think of as sacrifice even comes close.

I had to go no further than my bookshelf to be reacquainted with *The Indomitable Gertrude Green*. Others may have to go to the library, used bookstore, or Internet bookseller. It will be worth the trip. 📖

BY INVITATION OF JESUS

One of the hallmarks of our time with God is the fellowship we enjoy with other humans. God's saving grace that floods our lives overflows into the lives of the people with whom we interact. They experience Jesus' welcoming, all-embracing love in us as a genuine interest in their well-being, sensitivity to their needs, and a thoroughgoing commitment to their success in life. In us they receive their own invitation to God's family. By our acts of welcoming and hospitality we expand the kingdom of heaven.—Editors

"[Abraham] said, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.'

"'Very well,' they answered, 'do as you say.'"

GENESIS 18:3-5

"Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day."

JOSHUA 6:25

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare."

ISAIAH 55:1, 2

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

ISAIAH 55:6, 7

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

JESUS (MATTHEW 11:28-30)

"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him."

LUKE 10:38

"This man [Jesus] welcomes sinners and eats with them."

LUKE 15:2

"When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'"

JOHN 4:7



“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

LUKE (ACTS 2:44-47)

“Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: . . . When I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”

APOSTLE PAUL (1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-3)

“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

APOSTLE PAUL (ROMANS 12:13)

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

—Jesus (Mark 9:37).



“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.”

APOSTLE PAUL (ROMANS 16:1, 2)

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

APOSTLE PAUL (2 CORINTHIANS 9:6, 7)

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

APOSTLE PAUL (HEBREWS 13:2)

“Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.”

APOSTLE PAUL (PHILEMON 22)

“Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.”

APOSTLE JOHN (3 JOHN 5-8)

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.”

JESUS (REVELATION 22:17)

FREAK NOT

By now you've had scores of people (friends, family, talking heads, and online commentators) tell you what to think about the COVID-19 pandemic.

But you don't have to be told how hugely it has interrupted society on almost every level. The simple pleasures we enjoyed until a few weeks ago—going to church, meals in restaurants, shopping without looking like doctors dressed for surgery—have all been taken from us.

Those simple pleasures have been replaced by fear, isolation, suspicion, and curiosity about whether life will ever again be “normal.”

As one who has tried to play by the rules (maintained social distancing, worked from home), I can't help thinking of those who have it much worse than I do. I live in a comfortable home with a woman who loves me. I have friends and family who are only a computer click away. Even without hoarding, my wife and I have enough food in our pantry to survive on a desert island until help arrives.

But the number of those without jobs is steadily climbing. And it isn't hard to imagine people who live in crowded homes and apartments whose cupboards are bare and the aroma of desperation hangs in the air. The sad reality is that this will last for months.

Perhaps you've noticed an interesting evolution among the screen images you've seen since the pandemic hijacked our normal lives. At first, sports and media figures showed themselves self-isolating in homes that often featured decorations and furnishings inspired by photo spreads in *Home Beau-*


tiful. Then within a few days we saw them entertaining themselves, often performing with their peers and the assistance of Internet technology.

Then entertainers began working to raise money for various humanitarian causes: health-care supplies, meals for medical providers, support for food banks, relief for those who are unemployed.

I find comfort in these latter images. For while our lives have all been disrupted, many of us are suffering more than others. These demonstrations of awareness and support reinforce the reality of our common humanity. While some have used the current situation to sow suspicion and disunity, a greater number have joined hearts and resources to reflect our heritage as daughters and sons of God.

This is a good time to remember and put into practice Jesus' words: “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42). And because we live in a moment when people in need don't always carry cardboard signs that say “Homeless. Please Help,” we should search out agencies in our neighborhoods where we can donate food, diapers, and money to help people until this crisis is over (or at least manageable).

The past couple months have reminded us that, while there are things we can control, many things are beyond our control. We don't know what will happen tomorrow, let alone a month from now. People have every reason to be anxious.

But this is no time to be discouraged. Caring for others is the best cure for anxiety. 

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

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THINK OF THOSE
WHO HAVE IT MUCH
WORSE THAN I DO.**



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