

JUNE/JULY 2022



# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS



The harvest is great  
—the workers are few

10

IMPLEMENTING  
EVANGELISM IN THE  
LOCAL CHURCH

30

SEEKING GOD'S HEART  
FOR OUR COMMUNITY

46

LEADING OUR CHILDREN  
TO CHRIST

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10

## Implementing evangelism in the local church

DAVID HARTMAN

Be inspired by these practical ways for your members to actively reach their neighbors for Christ—and then implement them!

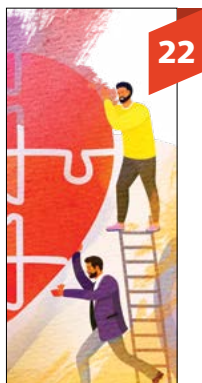


16

## Change your church culture with baby steps

DAN SERNS AND JACOB SERNS

Glean from these stories and tips inspiration on how to celebrate and strengthen your current and future members.



22

## How to organize your church for evangelism

RON E. M. CLOUZET

Evangelism is crucial, but is there a more comprehensive way to do it? A seasoned evangelist offers four steps to effectively prepare your church.



26

## When young people say, "Count me in."

MICHEAL GOETZ

Have we viewed our young people as a mission field rather than as missionaries? How can this change in mindset change your church?



30

## Seeking God's heart for our community

ZAC PAGE

How can your church minister beyond its four walls? Read one church's process to realize God's plan for their community.



34

## A transformed church

MARIUS SERBAN

Has your church ever undergone turmoil? Read what one church went through to love God and each other again.



38

## No longer orphans

LUIS DURAN AND KAREN GLASSFORD

God so loved the world . . . Do we?





42

## Family and the gospel

DREW COONS

Let your marriage so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

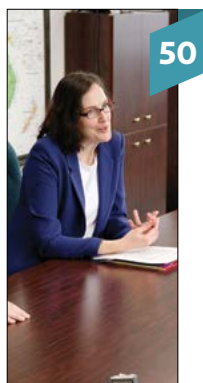


46

## Leading our children to Christ: Christian education and discipleship

SCOTT R. WARD

Is the school operated by your church a discipleship field that you are harvesting? Are the students given the opportunity to be disciples?



50

## A new resource for a new world: An interview with two ESDA editors

MINISTRY EDITORS

Learn about a new encyclopedia, online and free, that will enrich your study, enliven your sermons, and inspire your members.



EDITORIAL | 6  
PAVEL GOIA



EDITORIAL | 8  
JEFFREY O. BROWN



REVIVAL & REFORMATION | 15  
PASSMORE HACHALINGA



RESOURCES | 21  
RODNEY ANTHONY PALMER



DATELINE | 55



PRACTICAL POINTERS | 58  
PHIL MILLS



PRACTICAL POINTERS | 60  
MICHAEL ZIGARELLI



RESOURCES | 62  
S. JOSEPH KIDDER

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## What is our job?

**M**oving into a new district, a pastor started a series of sermons based on our call to reach the lost. Again and again he emphasized that we *all* have to serve. Using Bible verses such as Ephesians 6, the pastor preached that all parts of the body of Christ must use their God-given talents to share the good news of salvation.

The church had wonderful people, including two brothers with intellectual disabilities. Looking into the pastor's eyes, smiling, they spoke slowly, "Pastor, . . . we . . . like . . . you."

"I like you too," he responded.

They spoke again, "Pastor, . . . we . . . like . . . you," while clinging to the pastor's arm. Sad to say, the pastor faced a continual temptation to just avoid them. He started to prepare the church for evangelism. Members were asked to be greeters or deacons, others to be part of registration or parking, still others to be children's room supervisors or in the music group, and so on.

At the end of the final service, the two brothers approached the pastor. Slowly they asked, "Pastor, you said *all* have a job. You didn't give us an assignment. What do we do?"

"Ummm. You don't need to do anything," he replied.

"But you said *all* get a job."

The pastor thought, *How can I get rid of them? They cannot serve or do anything; they will embarrass the church and most likely bother visitors.* Then he got an idea. "You pray."

"OK, we pray, OK, we pray, we pray, we pray . . ."

They went home, repeating, "We pray, we pray," and then suddenly, they stopped.

"But who do we pray for?"

Their father suggested, "Well, you pray for those from the community who don't know Jesus."

"Oh, we pray for the community. But the community doesn't know that we pray for them." So, one of the two brothers suggested, "I think he means we need to pray *with* the community."

So, they decided they would go to the community. Roughly 16,000 people lived in the town of 500 to 600 households. They knocked at the first door. "The pastor said we should pray for you; what do you want us to pray for?"

"Well, my cow is sick."

"OK. Lord, please heal the cow. Bye." A short, simple prayer.





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*Ministry.*



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Next house: “The pastor said we should pray for you; what do you want us to pray for?”

“My wife left me.”

“OK. Lord, please bring her back. Bye.”

House by house they went, and after about one month they blanketed the whole town with prayer.

“We prayed,” they told the pastor, back at the church. “What do we do next?”

*I had peace for a month*, the pastor thought. *Another month of peace would be nice.* “You need to pray more.”

“Oh, OK.” So, they went home, thought about it, and decided that he meant they needed to go back to the community. So, they went again, street by street, to every house.

“The pastor said we should pray more for you. What do you want us to pray for?”

“You know, my cow got well after you prayed.”

“OK. Lord, thank You for healing the cow. Bye.”

Next house: “You know, my wife and I got back together.”

“Lord, thank You for bringing her back. Bye.”

They circled the whole town again. “Pastor,” they said, “we prayed more; what should we do next?”

“Just go; I am busy now. Keep praying; pray without ceasing.”

“OK.” By now, they knew their duty. So, they just went back house by house. After another month, they had prayed with every household a third time.

The time for the meetings came. The members were trained and organized, but not many invited somebody to the meetings. The two brothers brought 46 visitors, and 42 of them decided to commit their life to Jesus, get baptized, and become disciples.

When asked what made them decide, most answered, “We can see Jesus’ love in this church. Our friends and families never visit us, let alone pray for us. You, on the other hand, you care. You sent somebody to come to us, listen to us, and pray for us—and not just once but consistently.”

It was a lesson for the pastor. Jesus is coming soon! There is no more time to waste. As leaders, we have the high responsibility of preparing every single person who has experienced God’s amazing grace to be a disciple to their families, friends, neighbors, and the world. Each person is to minister according to the gifts given to him or her by God. God can use literally anyone who is willing to work with Him in saving precious souls. 📻



# All hands on deck

**C**urrent General Conference ministerial secretary Jerry N. Page said it succinctly: “The 1922 General Conference Session did not begin well for Arthur G. Daniells. On Sunday he was voted out of the presidency of the world church. . . .

“Daniells was no longer the official head of the church, but he continued to lead by establishing the Ministerial Association and directing it with a signature emphasis on prayer and spiritual revival.”<sup>1</sup>

So, the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is celebrating 100 years—1922–2022. And it has one mission: “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).<sup>2</sup> This one mission has three goals: spread the Word, multiply disciples, and develop ministers who are obedient to the faith.

Multiplying disciples can be an overwhelming task. Church leadership expert Richard Krejcir says, “Pastors are in a dangerous occupation! We are perhaps the single most stressful and

frustrating working profession, more than medical doctors, lawyers, or politicians.”<sup>3</sup>

But God does not leave us to battle alone. Old Testament scholar Roy Gane comments: “To ordain the male descendants of Aaron as God’s elite servants within the community, Moses put blood from the ordination sacrifice on their right ears, thumbs, and big toes. This showed that each priest received divine grace, ultimately flowing from Christ’s sacrifice, that enabled him to fulfill his life-and-death responsibility to serve God for the benefit of His people. Today there is no divinely sanctioned elite Christian priesthood, apart from the priesthood of Christ Himself, through which God’s people must approach Him (Heb 4; 7–10). The human ‘royal priesthood’ includes all Christians as God’s ministers (1 Pet 2:9–10). Amazing grace equips men and women to obey Christ’s commission by ministering for the salvation of others (compare Matt 28:19–20).”<sup>4</sup>

“Saved to serve” means that all who experience salvation are called to minister. Ted N. C. Wilson says, “No matter your age, nationality,





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SCAN FOR AUDIO



or gender, God is calling you to be part of His mission.”<sup>5</sup> The Ministerial Association seeks to be a resource for pastors of all denominations because God calls all clergy to be involved in the same mission: “Having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6). It’s not about joining my church; it’s about spreading God’s Word. It’s not about preference; it’s about obedience.

In its description of the last-day people of God, Scripture says, “Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (v. 12). God asks ministers of all denominations to hold themselves not to the subjective standard of personal partiality but to the objective standard of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).

Previous General Conference Ministerial secretary James Cress maintained that A. G. Daniells “had consistently been concerned with the development of a spiritual ministry among clergy and had personally led in a number of Bible Conferences and

spiritual revivals.”<sup>6</sup> Because of Daniells’s reassigned leadership, we can celebrate 100 years of bearing “witness to the word of God” and holding to “the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:2).

God is still looking for pastors who will spread the Word, multiply disciples, and be obedient to the faith, because “He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain.”<sup>7</sup>



- 1 Jerry Page, “Ministerial Association Report for 2010–2015,” accessed April 25, 2022, <https://ministerial.adventist.org/legacy-content/2015report>.
- 2 Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 3 Richard J. Krejcir, “What Is Going on With the Pastors in America?” Into Thy Word: Teaching People How to Study the Bible, <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562>.
- 4 Roy Gane, “Leviticus 8,” Believe His Prophets Daily Bible Reading, April 21, 2022, <https://www.revivalandreformation.org/bhp/en/bible/lev/8>.
- 5 Ted N. C. Wilson, “Everyone a Missionary,” *Adventist World*, September 2016, 5.
- 6 James A. Cress, back cover of A. G. Daniells, *The Church and Ministry: Addresses Before the Los Angeles, California, Ministerial Institute, March 1912*.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992), 179.

# Implementing evangelism in the local church

One day, a pastor had a startling vision that changed the trajectory of his ministry. He saw a multitude of drowning victims struggling in a frigid ocean while another group of rescued people sat securely on a giant rock. Most of the safe ones seemed oblivious to those perishing. The vision propelled William Booth to launch the Salvation Army.<sup>1</sup>

One of the challenges of pastoral ministry is to engage members in evangelism. Here is a simple plan for implementing a culture of evangelism in the local church so that members will actively reach their neighbors for Christ. It involves seven simple steps.

## 1. Fuel passionate spirituality through a daily personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

During the evening of the resurrection, Jesus met with two

disciples on the road to Emmaus. As He later broke bread in their home, their “eyes were opened,” and they recognized the living Christ. With burning hearts and uncontainable joy, they burst from the table to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive (Luke 24:13–35).

Likewise, only as we experience fresh encounters with the living Christ at the table of grace can we, too, burst forth and tell others the good news. Otherwise, all the coaxing and cajoling by church leadership will do no good in awakening a sleeping church and inspiring members to witness. As pastors, our first order of business is to encourage a living experience with Jesus through the keys to revitalization found in Ezekiel 37: Bible study (verse 4), prayer (verse 9), and witnessing (verse 10—the bones became an exceedingly great gospel army). Especially encourage members to pray for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.





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SCAN FOR AUDIO

## 2. Appoint an outreach leadership team (OLT) that will champion evangelism in the local church.

When I served as the ministerial director and evangelism coordinator for the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, I worked with a dedicated task force of pastors, laypeople, and administrators to grow evangelism in our conference. We met every six to eight weeks to plan creative initiatives, such as the master plan of discipleship, an evangelism funding policy, a church revitalization process, and a vision for church planting.

It would have been a daunting task to advance such causes by myself, but a team of leaders created synergy and momentum. The pastor can use a similar approach in the local church. Utilize the OLT to brainstorm evangelistic strategies and then make recommendations to the church board.

Such a team should also oversee the remaining action steps (steps 3 to 7).

## 3. Involve church members in a mission action plan.

Conduct an annual vision-planning weekend during which the church body breaks into table groups and brainstorms evangelistic objectives and goals for the coming year. Then prioritize those goals and appoint a ministry leader/team to champion each one. Also, create concrete action steps, a target date, and a budget for each objective. When I pastored the Highland Church in Portland, Tennessee, we held a “Shoot for the Stars” vision-planning weekend every year. I noticed that a higher percentage of members in ministry afterward got involved because they had helped formulate the plans.



#### 4. Address community needs.

First, assess real needs in the community by interviewing community officials, surveying local neighborhoods, or using a demographic tool such as MissionInsite.<sup>2</sup> The MissionInsite tool identifies the top 15 life concerns in your community in prioritized order so that you know how to focus your church's outreach efforts. Based on this information, you can plan monthly community service projects as well as quarterly church-sponsored seminars that meet those needs.

The North American Division encourages each church to designate the second weekend of every month as a "compassion weekend"<sup>3</sup> for intentional community outreach. Several years ago, the Adventist pastors from three adjoining conferences in Memphis, Tennessee, visited with then-mayor A. C. Wharton and inquired, "How can we help you fulfill your dreams for this city?" After the mayor recovered from his initial shock, he responded, "I would like for local churches to adopt a hundred homeless families."

In addition, churches should plan an annual prophecy series so that members can invite their friends and neighbors to hear the proclamation of God's end-time truths.

#### 5. Recruit volunteers for service.

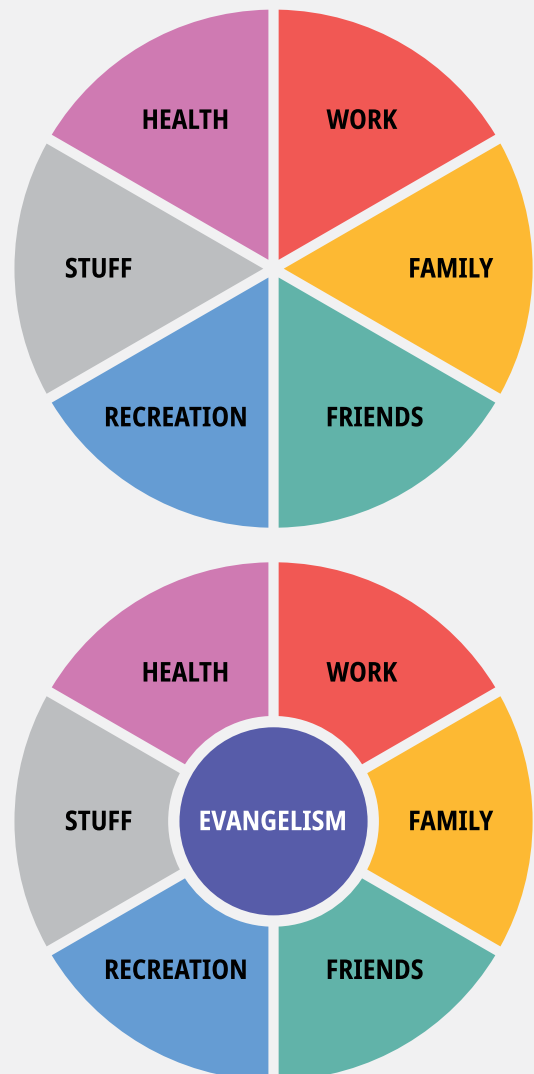
Once you have established steps 1 through 4, then market those ministry opportunities and solicit volunteers for them through the following actions: post community service projects and seminars on an attractive display table in the church foyer, on bulletin boards and websites, and in the church newsletter. At the Highland Church, we conducted a "parade of ministries Sabbath," during which I preached on the joy of service and highlighted the church's top ministry goals for the coming year. After the service, members had an opportunity to browse ministry booths in the foyer, talk with ministry leaders, and sign up for volunteer positions.

#### 6. Become an Evangelism Training Center.

Author Ellen White admonishes, "Every church should be a training school for Christian workers. . . . There should not only be teaching, but actual work under experienced instructors. . . . One example is worth more than many precepts."<sup>4</sup> Convert your church into an evangelism training center that shows members how to share their faith. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Emphasize that evangelism is not just something we "do" but is also something we "are." People often view witnessing as part of a pie diagram with work, family, friends, domestic chores, recreation, and material possessions wedged into the circle. In reality, we should view evangelism more as a wheel with all the busy activities like spokes and evangelism as the hub (see diagram 1). This means that evangelism should be at the heart and core of everything we do. Hence, while working out at the fitness center or checking out at the grocery store, one can positively influence others for Christ.
- Show members how to exercise their witnessing styles and engage in intercessory prayer,

Diagram 1





friendship evangelism, and service-oriented evangelism; share their personal testimony; invite people to church outreach events; and strike up a spiritual conversation. Teach them how to be “digital missionaries” by utilizing social media to advance God’s cause.<sup>5</sup>

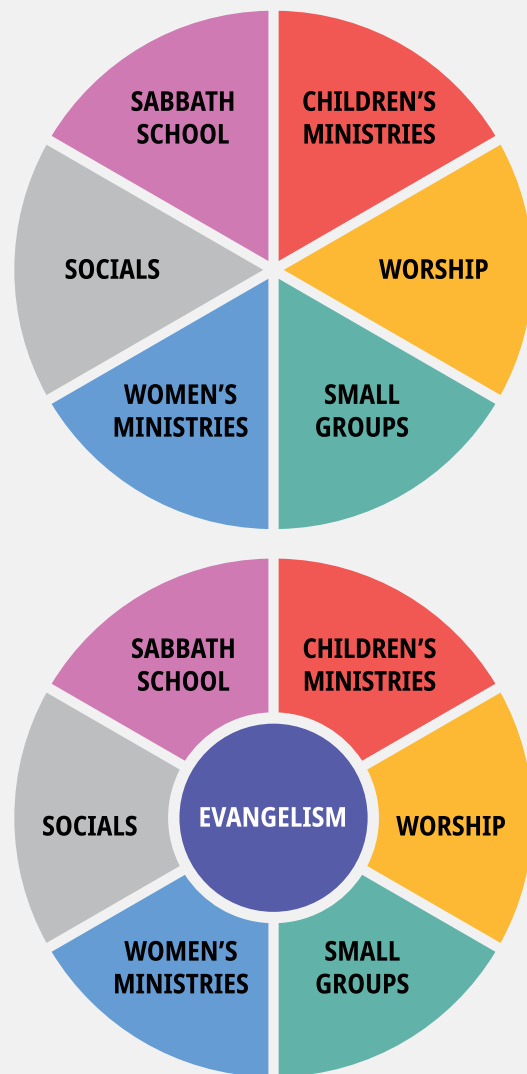
- Train those 10 percent in the congregation who have the gift of proclamation evangelism to give Bible studies to interests, friends, and relatives of church members. Use training resources, such as Gary Gibbs’s, *Winsome Witnessing*,<sup>6</sup> Kurt Johnson’s, *How to Give a Bible Study*,<sup>7</sup> or my own book, *Winning Ways to Witness*.<sup>8</sup> Launch a Discover Bible School (or something similar) in the local church that facilitates members giving Bible studies. Mail out Bible-study interest cards and show members how to follow up with those interested.
- Stock the church foyer with GLOW tracts,<sup>9</sup> literature, and Bible-study guides so that members can share these resources with their friends and work associates.
- Establish a discipling-mentoring system in which seasoned lay evangelists apprentice other individuals.
- Sponsor individuals to evangelism training centers (such as Amazing Facts Center of Evangelism, Southern Adventist University’s SALT program, or Mark Finley’s Living Hope Training Center) so that they can use their newly acquired skills to reach people and disciple others to do the same.
- Take members on a mission trip that combines humanitarian and evangelism components.

## 7. Transition to an evangelism-centered church.

Focus every phase of church life on evangelism through the following actions:

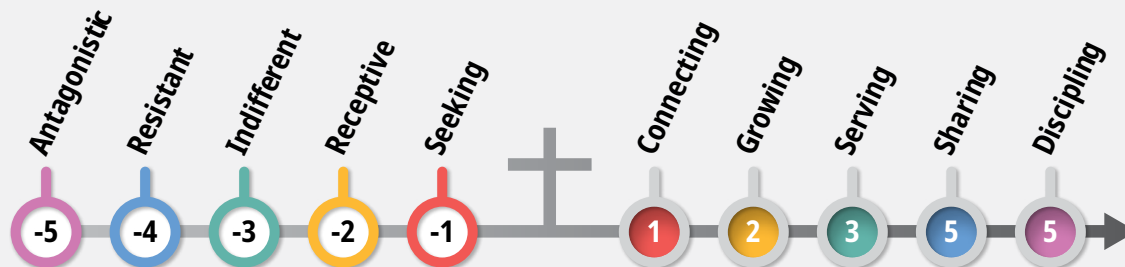
- Pass out the evangelism-centered church diagram<sup>10</sup> (see diagram 2) to all department heads and ministry leaders and ask them to generate ways that their department or ministry can contribute to the evangelistic goals of the church.
- Encourage each Sabbath School class, small group, ministry, and church department to have an evangelism coordinator who will keep the group outwardly focused. Such coordinators can serve on the outreach leadership team.
- Increase the church budget allocation for evangelism to at least 10 percent.

Diagram 2



- Implement biblical hospitality and a guest-retention process so that the church is ready to warmly receive and hold the guests that God is drawing each week. Maintain the church facilities, grounds, and signage to attract guests.
- Create an inspiring worship setting in which participants encounter God’s presence and respond with heartfelt acknowledgment of His goodness. Authentic worship will result in transformed lives, which will lead even the unbelieving guests to exclaim, “God is truly among you!” (1 Cor. 14:25, NKJV).
- Emphasize some aspect of evangelism once a month during the sermon. Feature testimonies during the worship service of people who are finding joy in sharing their faith. Also, create

Diagram 3



a weekly “faith in action” period between Sabbath School and church to highlight evangelism.

- Evaluate every church-board decision in light of the Engel Scale,<sup>11</sup> the spiritual pathway from -5 to +5 (see diagram 3). Ask, “Will this board action assist individuals in progressing to the next faith stage on the continuum?” If not, then scrap the proposed action or idea.
- Authorize members to launch outreach events and activities without getting permission from the church board, as long as such activities are in harmony with the vision, mission, and goals of the church. In lieu of church-board approval, they should secure a member of the church board to sponsor their project (offer support and advice). This way, the various sponsors can inform the church board of the various outreach activities through reports at the monthly board meetings.<sup>12</sup>
- The pastor and church leaders should constantly model an evangelism-centered life, in which they personally engage in the witnessing styles and share testimonies of how God is working through them to reach others. A pastoral example of “evangelizing” is worth far more than a thousand sermons.
- Simplify the schedules of the church. We keep our most mature and faithful church members so busy in programs, committee meetings, and church work that they have no time to minister and witness outside the building.<sup>13</sup>

Will McRaney Jr. said, “Ron Hutchcraft reminded us that ‘people are drowning while we have lifeguard meetings, sing lifeguard songs, and go to lifeguard committee meetings.’ His exhortation is ‘to get off the beach and into the water and there are more in the water than there are on the beach by far.’”<sup>14</sup> May God’s church not

be oblivious to the hurts and needs in the community but be a source of hope and light.



- 1 William Booth, “A Vision of the Lost,” What Saith the Scripture?, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Stories/A.Vision.of.the.Lost.html>.
- 2 For more information, visit the MissionInSite website at <https://www.missioninsite.com>.
- 3 You can learn more about compassion weekends, compassion tips, and how to join the compassion movement at <http://compassionmovement.org>.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 149.
- 5 An excellent resource for digital evangelism is Jamie Domm, *Digital Discipleship & Evangelism* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2020).
- 6 Gary D. Gibbs, *Winsome Witnessing: Dynamic Ways to Share Your Faith*, rev. ed. (self-pub., 2011).
- 7 Kurt Johnson, *How to Give a Bible Study: Suggestions for Finding Bible Study Interests and Effective Tips for Leading Them to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2007).
- 8 David L. Hartman, *Winning Ways to Witness: Seven Witnessing Styles That Attract People to Christ* (Collegedale, TN: College Press, 2018).
- 9 To order GLOW tracts for your members to share, visit the Giving Light to Our World website at <https://buyglow.org/glow-tracts>.
- 10 I am indebted to Bill McClendon, vice president for administration at North Pacific Union Conference, for the original concept of this diagram.
- 11 See revised scale at Thom S. Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 20, 21.
- 12 I got this idea from Dan Serns, president of the Central California Conference.
- 13 For more on the topic, see David L. Hartman, *Winning Ways to Witness: Seven Witnessing Styles That Attract People to Christ* (Collegedale, TN: College Press, 2018).
- 14 Will McRaney Jr., *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2003), 199.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to **ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org**.





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SCAN FOR AUDIO

## The secret prayer life of Jesus

**D**o you pray in secret? To properly appreciate the importance of prayer, especially praying in secret, we have to look to Jesus, our great Example. Although public prayer has its rightful place and purpose, Jesus denounced public, hypocritical prayers. Rather, He encouraged praying in secret, saying: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt. 6:6, NKJV).

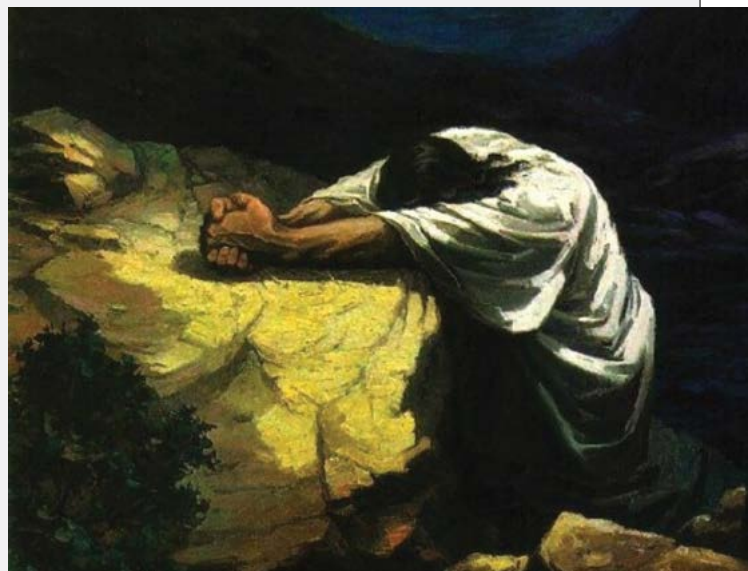
As a demonstration of the importance of praying in secret, we see that before commencing His public ministry, Jesus spent forty days and forty nights fasting and praying alone in the wilderness and being tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13). Later, before He appointed His 12 disciples, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Throughout the years of His earthly ministry, He carried on the practice of rising early in the morning and going up into the mountain to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16).

One morning when His disciples found Him praying, they said to Him, “Everyone is looking for You!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth” (Mark 1:37, 38, NKJV). Thus, Jesus did not divorce His prayer life from His preaching work. Regarding this, author Ellen White cautions: “The life must be like Christ’s life—between the mountain and the multitude. He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine.”<sup>1</sup>

Evidently, Jesus’ secret prayer life was the backbone of His healing ministry. Consequently, one day when He was teaching in a synagogue, “the power of the Lord was present to heal the sick” (Luke 5:17, MEV). Then, on another occasion, “the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all” (Luke 6:19, NIV).

Jesus’ secret prayer life did not degenerate into a daily routine, but it served as a vital protective armor as well as an offensive weapon. After feeding the five thousand, Jesus noted that they



intended to take Him and make Him king by force. Immediately He sent off His disciples and dismissed the crowd, after which He withdrew to the mountain to pray (Mark 6:46; John 6:15). Prayer gave Him strength to resist temptations. When Jesus observed Satan’s plea to sift the disciples, He prayed for them, especially for Peter (Luke 22:31, 32). Thereafter, Jesus prayed for Himself, His disciples, and for those who would later believe through their ministry of the Word (John 17:1–5, 6–19, 20).

Also, during His ministry, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray (Matt. 6:5–15). Jesus urged them to be bold in prayer in order to receive (Luke 11:1–13). To give them a practical example, Jesus often took Peter, James, and John with Him when He went to pray. During such crucial moments, He encouraged them to watch and pray, but they often fell asleep (Matt. 26:37–46; Mark 9:28; 14:32–41). In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus emphasized that they “always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1–8). I believe we, too, should implore Jesus to teach us how to pray, as He Himself prayed.



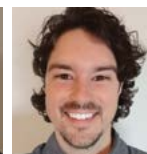
<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), 101.







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SCAN FOR AUDIO

# Change your church culture with baby steps

## Dan: Celebrating changed lives

During our church worship service, I always had a Celebrating Changed Lives feature. In it, I interviewed those joining the church that month through baptism, profession of faith, and transfer.

"I had a really tough life growing up and got onto drugs early," Melinda said. "Because I needed money for drugs, I became a prostitute. That's when I became really hard-hearted." Her two teenaged daughters standing beside her nodded their heads. "But there was this lady who was always so nice to me when I was mean to her, and I couldn't figure out why. She kept inviting me to a women's Bible-study group and told me some of them had had a really tough life too. When I finally came with her, I knew I had found a spiritual home. Now everything is changing in our life. Our words. Our music. Our pictures. What we watch."

"Praise the Lord!" I said. "And all three of you are telling the world today that you belong to Jesus and are uniting with His final movement! We are not perfect people, but we want to let the world know that Jesus loves them, that He's coming again soon, that He has a good plan for their lives, and that it's time to take Him seriously. Welcome to the family!"

Not all our Celebrating Changed Lives interviews were so dramatic. But all of them showed how God is at work transforming lives. Some testimonies have featured victories in Sabbath work issues, relationships healed, decisions for baptism, and stories about returning from a mission trip or spiritual retreat. Other times, we

have interviewed longtime members about a turning point in their lives.

If you want an evangelistic culture in your church, one of the simplest ways is to add brief (one to three minutes) interviews to your worship service. "And they [believers] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb [Jesus] and *by the word of their testimony*, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11, NKJV; emphasis added).

## Jacob: Baptismal Celebration Sabbaths

"Would it be OK if I said a prayer for you right now?" I almost surprised myself with my own question to Verna, the older woman cutting my hair. After wandering through the usual small talk, the conversation gradually drifted toward more spiritual things. She told me that she was going through a tough time, and seeing the tears forming in her eyes, I felt compelled to ask if I could pray for her. "Yes!" she blurted out. After we prayed, exchanged contact info, and went our separate ways, months passed.

Then one day, I felt impressed to text her and ask if she wanted Bible studies. I had no clue whether she would even remember who I was, but I asked. When she accepted, we began a Bible-study journey that eventually led her to a crossroads of choosing either to follow Jesus or to continue working on the Sabbath cutting hair. Her boss was relentless in pushing for her to work Sabbaths. I remember Verna breaking down and crying on many occasions as we talked about God's faithfulness to those who choose to be faithful to Him. On one occasion, I mentioned that our church had a Baptismal Celebration Sabbath

scheduled in just three weeks. I told her I was praying God would give her the strength to be baptized then.

A week later, Verna stood her ground and refused to show up to work on Sabbath, even though her boss had scheduled her for that day. Instead, she chose to worship with her church family. Two weeks later, at her baptism, she shared her powerful testimony of faith. Because we are a newly planted church, renting a building with no baptistry, I baptized her in the bed of a pickup truck just outside the church entrance.

I can't help wondering what would have happened if we had not scheduled a Baptismal Celebration Sabbath date in advance by faith. After all, at the time, we had no one ready for baptism, let alone a baptistry!

It can seem like a crazy idea to schedule a baptism before having any candidates ready, but Jesus tells us that the harvest is plentiful (Luke 10:2). One of the most effective baby steps a pastor can take toward adding to the church daily (Acts 2:47) is to regularly schedule Baptismal Celebration Sabbaths. Our Savior pursues lost sheep with reckless abandon! Those seeking a place where God is actively working will then see a church committed to the harvest. Those needing a nudge of encouragement will find the motivation they need. God's mighty works will excite church members and leaders, and they will be more likely to take an active role in bringing others to a public commitment to Christ!

Take a step of faith and schedule a Baptismal Celebration Sabbath at your church soon, whether or not you know of anyone ready. Some pastors may choose to schedule Baptismal Celebration Sabbaths monthly, quarterly, or at some other interval that works best in their situation. Even in the worst-case scenario, if no one ends up being ready when the date arrives, you will be shifting the focus of your church to the harvest fields.

### Jacob: Baptism coaches

"No, Jacob! Not my shrimp!" Harold whined in a shrill, half-joking tone. I was seven

weeks into an eight-week Bible study preparing him for baptism, and the lesson on a healthy lifestyle threatened to thwart what had been a joyous journey in getting to know Jesus. Harold had nodded agreeably when the lesson covered abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and pork, but it was obvious that we had struck a nerve when dealing with one of his favorite foods.

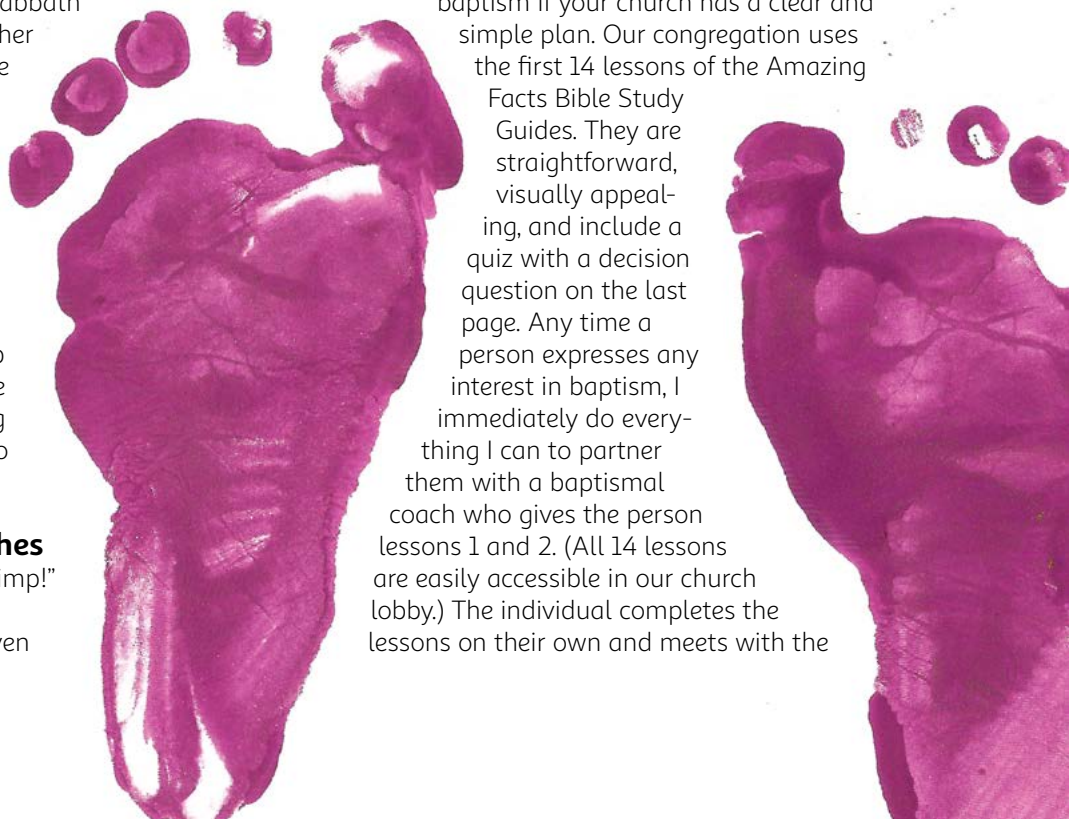
I smiled back at the man I now considered a good friend and gently replied, "It's not me, Harold. I'm not trying to take anything from you. But God is telling you in His Word that you'll be better off without this in your life." He silently stared at me with a look I can best describe as horror. I saw him wrestling with what to him surely seemed to be a monstrous decision. Who would it be? Jesus, or his shrimp?

After what felt like several minutes, Harold lifted his head and looked at me with determination in his eyes. "I guess," he said quietly, "if Jesus wants me to give up my shrimp . . . then I guess . . . I guess I'll have to give up shrimp."

"Let's go, Harold!" I shouted, jarring him from his somber expression, "You got this, brother! Jesus will give you the power to let shrimp go completely!"

Harold and I completed our Bible-study plan, and I had the privilege of seeing him baptized and watching him grow into a mighty worker for God's kingdom!

Preparing someone for baptism does not have to be complicated or take forever. In fact, you will often find more people ready to prepare for baptism if your church has a clear and simple plan. Our congregation uses the first 14 lessons of the Amazing Facts Bible Study Guides. They are straightforward, visually appealing, and include a quiz with a decision question on the last page. Any time a person expresses any interest in baptism, I immediately do everything I can to partner them with a baptismal coach who gives the person lessons 1 and 2. (All 14 lessons are easily accessible in our church lobby.) The individual completes the lessons on their own and meets with the



baptismal coach the next week. The baptismal coach goes over the quiz on each lesson together with the person, answers any questions they might have, and hands them lessons 3 and 4. The process continues and takes a total of eight weeks. By the end, both the baptismal coach and interested person are stronger in their walks with God, and the candidate is ready for the pastor to meet with them and clear them for baptism!

Every minister wants their members to experience the same joy that we have had in bringing people to Jesus and seeing Him transform lives. By utilizing a clear plan, such as the eight-week Bible-study plan, we can rapidly multiply the number of church members involved in real discipleship. More participation in mission will lead to more excitement and more lives transformed! Jesus told all His followers to make disciples.

### **Jacob: New Member Orientation class**

Our New Member Orientation class happens on the Friday night before a New Member (or Baptism) Celebration Sabbath. We want to give those joining our church a strong start, including members transferring from another church. The meeting has four 30-minute segments: Our Stories, Our Beliefs, Our Hopes, Our Worldwide Movement.

Our Stories is a chance to highlight the testimony of each person joining by asking them, "How has God brought you to this place in your life?" Celebrating what God is doing invigorates all those in the class, and we also have each new member share a two-minute version of it during our church worship service.

Our Beliefs gives people a chance to review the 28 fundamental doctrines of the Adventist Church, or as we like to call them: the 28 fundamental ways of following Jesus. We encourage participants to pick out a favorite belief or two and to ask for clarification on a belief they would like to be able to explain better to a stranger.

Our Hopes involve the four hopes that we have for every new member in their first six months:

1. That they have a regular personal Bible reading plan, strengthened by a Sabbath School class
2. That they join or start a ministry group, serving in a way they enjoy
3. That they have the joy of leading someone else to Jesus and seeing them baptized
4. That they make at least seven good friends in their new church family

Our Worldwide Movement segment helps new members see the big picture of the Adventist Church around the globe. We highlight aspects such as the Adventist educational system, hospital systems, and publishing centers and show how each member can be involved in the worldwide movement, even in our local context.

Building culture happens one conversation, one meeting, one person at a time. New Member Orientation classes provide an opportunity to accelerate a cultural shift by giving new members a strong start.

### **Dan: Start groups easily**

Five minutes before I was to preach, Amanda, one of our young adults, tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, "Pastor, we need a young adult choir." In my early pastoring days, I would have replied with "Make a proposal for the church board" or "Come see me about it sometime." But in time, I had learned the power of groups when they are put together in a simple, biblical way.

Turning and smiling at her, I said, "Why do you think God gave *you* that idea instead of *me*?"

"But what do I do?"

"You need to make sure of the four connections. Do this with me," I whispered. I said "God" as I held my hand up as if grasping the hand of the Almighty. She did what I did. "Partners," I continued as I extended my arms out to either side as if giving shoulder hugs to those beside me. She followed. "Mentor." I cupped my hand to one ear as if listening carefully to someone. Again, she imitated my actions. "Flock," I added as I extended both hands forward and down as if serving someone." Amanda did the same.

"What does that mean?"

"First, make sure you are connected with God. You can't do true ministry without that. If you've become disconnected, it only takes two minutes to get reconnected by saying, 'Lord, I'm a great sinner, but You are a greater Savior. Take me, cleanse me, use me to bless others in spite of my flaws.'"

"Got it!"

"Next, find a couple of friends who like your ministry idea. Sit down together and brainstorm what you want to do, then when, how, and where to do it. Remember, our church has a lot of musical talent, so most of your ministry will be outside the four walls of the church building, maybe parks, nursing homes, street corners, et cetera. Plan all that with your partners."

"I can already think of some friends who will do this with me."



“Great! Third, find any member of the church board to be your mentor. Your mentor doesn’t do your ministry for you or even with you. But they listen to your plans, make suggestions, connect you with helpful people, touch base with you from time to time, and report to the church board what God is doing through your lives and ministry. Choose one you can relate to best and ask them if they’ll be your mentor for this ministry.

“Finally, go after your flock, the people you are ministering to, and lead them to Jesus! How does that sound?”

“Great! We’ll go for it!” Smiling and giving her a thumbs up, I got up to preach.

To start or grow an evangelistic culture in a church family, we need to provide an easy way to form groups. No long proposals, detailed budgets, lengthy committee meetings. Just a simple four connections approach.

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them” (Rom. 12:5, 6, NKJV).

Jesus is coming again soon! Do not allow yourself to get distracted by the critics, cynics,

skeptics, or scoffers. Keep your eyes on Him. Fill your mind with His Word. Activate those in the church who are most receptive. And let the Holy Spirit start a fire that blazes through your whole community and beyond until Jesus breaks through the sky and declares, “ ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’ ” (Matt. 25:23, NKJV). 🙌

For more information on this topic, including a version of this article as a chapter, read José H. Cortes Jr. and Ivan L. Williams Sr., eds., *Baptize: A Collective Vision of Pastors, Members, and Administrators to Multiply the Kingdom of God in North America Through Baptizing, Equipping, Planting, and Revitalizing* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2022).



## WORLD CHURCH QUARTERLY DAYS OF PRAYER

JULY 2, 2022  
OCTOBER 1, 2022  
JANUARY 7, 2023  
APRIL 1, 2024



SCAN ME

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## ***A Practical Guide to Evangelism: How to Win and Keep New Members***

2nd ed., by Balvin B. Braham, Jersey City, NJ: ProBook Publishers, 2021.

**T**he revised and updated version of *A Practical Guide to Evangelism: How to Win and Keep New Members* by Balvin Braham is a hands-on tool designed to aid churches in effectively fulfilling the Great Commission through intentional “nurturing ministries, outreach, church growth, and discipleship” (14). The volume comprises four sections: (1) “Mobilizing Your Church for Evangelism,” (2) “Strategies for Successful Evangelism,” (3) “Evangelism Context,” and (4) “Discipleship and Nurture.” These parts combine to form a balanced and comprehensive approach to evangelism.


Section 1 focuses on “how to get the local church engaged and ready for soul-winning endeavors and how to plan a continuous cycle of evangelism” (14). In section 2, readers gain insight into “specific strategies for reaching people and gaining decisions for Christ, including how to plan, prepare and execute a public evangelistic campaign” (14). Section 3 applies different evangelistic strategies to the “departments and ministries of the church, suggesting ways in which every church member can be involved in sharing the gospel with all classes of people” (14). Section 4 focuses on membership conservation and nurturing new believers into “firmly committed disciples of Christ” (14).

This book is strong in several areas. Its emphasis on community action-oriented evangelism is phenomenal. This emphasis is necessary for a climate wherein so many churches lack an outreach and missional presence in their communities. Its nontechnical nature, organized layout, and illustrative diagrams and tables make it an easy read.

Furthermore, the author includes helpful resources in the appendices that readers can utilize in their evangelistic endeavors. These supplementary materials cover various topics, including planting new churches, reaching non-Christians, prayer breakfasts for former believers, fundraising for evangelism, Bible surfing, Bible search engines, and other Bible study methods.

The chapter that stands out most among the newly included ones in the book’s second edition is “Digital Evangelism.” It is a helpful step-by-step resource to assist churches in communicating the gospel more effectively in a digital culture. Herein, Braham reminds readers that “the effective utility of practical technological means

to reach, equip, rescue, retain and disciple people in the faith of Jesus, will greatly help the church to become a larger and more dynamic community of faithful Christian believers” (79).

In sum, *A Practical Guide to Evangelism* provides innovative ideas that church leaders and members can use to increase witnessing and enhance discipleship. Readers are sure to benefit from Braham’s invitation to think deeply about the delicate balance that must exist between evangelism, discipleship, and retention, as well as quantitative and qualitative church growth. 





How to organize  
your church for

# *evangelism*

RON E. M. CLOUZET






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SCAN FOR AUDIO



**E**very pastor knows the Great Commission, but not every pastor or church has had a great experience partaking in it. Some churches do evangelism because it is expected, but either their heart is not in it, their planning is inadequate, or the sermons are so bland and uninteresting that church members do not wish to do evangelism again, at least for a while. They might have a few converts despite the church's efforts—but not because of them.

In contrast, prayerfully thought-through plans for evangelism in the local church can bring good results: a respectable harvest of souls (baptisms), an energized membership, and a desire by the pastor(s) and key leaders to do it again, and better, next time.

So, how do you organize your church for evangelism? Here are four steps.

### **1. Prepare members spiritually**

Soul winning is an art and a science learned and practiced by the converted. Not everyone in our churches is converted. Sometimes even lay leaders may make a pretense of holiness, but the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–24) is lacking. Nor is every lifelong church member in love with the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6), so any effort a pastor puts forth to revive members spiritually and help them catch a vision for soul winning will be worthwhile.

This effort can be made in several ways. One way is for the pastor to give a series of four to seven sermons on loving the lost and fulfilling the Great Commission. The aim is to come to the point of loving our neighbor as ourselves, possible only by falling in love with Jesus.

Another way would be to plan a week of prayer at the church. If a critical mass of church members would come (especially all the leaders),

holding these meetings at the church is better than through Zoom. Singing, testimonies, and praying together are best in person. If few are likely to come, consider doing it through Zoom. One key objective is to have as many of the church members involved as possible. As they grow together spiritually, they will develop a greater desire to reach out to others.

An important follow-up would be to set up regular times for corporate prayer after the week of prayer or the sermon series is over. In my current church, we did the week of prayer in January, and ever since, we pray together, via Zoom, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at six in the morning. Twenty percent of our active membership participates, and this is keeping the revival embers alive.

## 2. Design an evangelistic countdown

Next, focus on the actual evangelistic plan. First, choose the dates for the evangelistic meetings. Spring and fall are good seasons in many parts of the world. Decide how many important Bible topics you will share. Do not confuse a series on parenting or on health with evangelistic meetings. The unfolding of Bible teachings is what the Lord will clearly bless. Parenting or health topics are good for preparing the soil but not for reaping a harvest.

My preference has been to cover 28 to 32 topics in a full-message evangelistic series. That may sound like a lot. A series of 10 or so topics may be sufficient *only* when you have interests who have already been coming to church for some time and are already fairly convicted of a number of Bible truths. In that case, focus on sermons that will lead people to surrender and to decisions for baptism and joining your church.

Once you set the dates for the harvest meetings, plan the work backward from the beginning of the event. What must you do a few weeks before these meetings? Are all the advertising and the public-meeting volunteers in place? What about two months before? Promoting the series to church interests? And so on.

You may also need to include some evangelistic training to help your members engage with persons outside the church. My church is currently in the midst of this process. We trained them in successful friendship evangelism and then in how to pray for lost people. A month later, we trained them for missional small groups, then about how to reach missing members. A month after that, we gave training on how to give Bible

studies and arranged with our conference to send a mailout offering our neighbors Bible studies. All of this took place between January and April, and more training is coming in the fall, just before our public evangelistic meetings in October. You may not have the human resources for all these training events, but you should do some. You can contact the local conference and ask for help with training. Many reliable sources are available online as well.

The other thing you should include in your countdown is community events. Plan at least three relevant and beneficial seminars, such as a stop-smoking clinic, a vegetarian cooking school, a finance or stress-reduction seminar, or a Vacation Bible School. We plan to do eight seminars in our church this year, and at each seminar we will invite participants to the next. This creates momentum for the fall evangelistic meetings.

Be sure to keep one thing in mind: pacing. Know your church's limitations. An evangelistic pastor may be tempted to push members harder than they can take. They may still lack the broad and clear vision for evangelism that the pastor has, so be gentle. If the church can do only two community events well instead of three, or if they can only handle three training plans instead of five, go with the smaller commitment and bathe it with prayer.

## 3. Set up for public meetings

The weeks before the harvest meetings begin are critical. You should have a full slate of interested people from Bible studies, community events, small groups, and other outreach plans on a spreadsheet that includes names, contact information, and other information. The church must earnestly pray for each of these people now. I like to call the church to 40 days of special prayer, ending on the first night of the meetings. This prayer focuses on three areas: (1) uplifting each name on the interest list and the upcoming evangelistic meetings, (2) asking the Holy Spirit to impress the hearts of additional people from the community who should attend these meetings, and (3) calling on God to limit the devil's work of discouragement over members as well as interests. These daily prayer gatherings are critical to the success or failure of the harvest meetings.

I have found that having a short preharvest series two or three weeks before the main series can also be very helpful. I have done a five-night series on archaeology and the Bible, Christian apologetics, the debate between Creation and

evolution, and even on more obscure prophecies in Revelation, such as the seals and the trumpets. The series on archaeology helps draw more educated yet secular people. The one on apologetics (which should be held in a public conference room, not in the church) is best for areas with no Christian or a post-Christian background.

These miniseries can accomplish three important goals: (1) lend credibility to the speaker, help the guests to want to come again, and provide a longer series on prophecy (which they may not normally consider attending); (2) allow good practice for members to learn what to do for public meetings (registration, greeting, refreshments, row hosting, attendance incentives, etc.); and (3) create excitement and anticipation among members as they see guests attend whom they did not know before.

#### 4. Harvest the souls

No evangelistic plan should be made without climaxing it with public evangelistic meetings. More people make decisions for baptism and membership during evangelistic meetings than due to friendship evangelism or one-on-one Bible studies. That is why sufficient exposure to God's Word during evangelistic meetings is important. We want guests to choose Jesus and His truth, and for that to happen, we must prioritize God's Word over music, fellowship, attendance incentives, children's meetings, and other important items.

There is a trend in some countries to hold evangelistic meetings only on weekends due to the resistance of busy members to taking time during the week. But the exposure to Scripture that the guests need must be *sustained*, not sporadic. If they hear God's Word Friday through Sunday only, what they have gained spiritually over the weekend easily may be lost during the five-day gap. Evangelistic meetings should be held, therefore, at least four times a week—five is better—over multiple weeks. This surely is an intense time for the members volunteering to help; however, we are not doing this for ourselves but for those in need of Christ.

As people decide to be baptized and join the church, do not wait to baptize them (Acts 9:17, 18; 22:16). Baptism is the initiation of the Christian life, not the graduation of the new Christian. It is better to have four baptisms of two or three people each than to wait until the last night of the meetings. True, the optics are better when we baptize 10 people at once than over four baptisms. But in

*More people make  
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each baptism, the Holy Spirit is at work to impress upon others their need for surrender.

#### When the meetings are over

When the evangelistic meetings are over, evangelism is not. In every series of evangelistic meetings, some make decisions while others are not yet ready. Therefore, follow-up plans should be made for the new believers as well as those still uncommitted. Keep in mind that people came because they learned the Bible. So, make follow-up plans to continue studying God's Word. Also, those newly baptized will need mentoring. I have trained churches for years on how to mentor new believers, leading those churches to have a retention rate of 90 percent or better a year after their baptism. Make sure you choose good, seasoned, happy believers to mentor those newly baptized.

There are many important things we do as pastors, but none are as important as being faithful to the Great Commission. For this objective, we should spend time praying, planning, and doing what angels would long to do in our place. 🙏

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org).



# When young people say, “Count me in.”

**A**s a 15-year-old student on a Christian school campus, I was invited to be part of a team led by two teachers<sup>1</sup> from SOY Ministries.

This name often elicits chuckles from those familiar with my community of faith, known for using soy-based substitutes for meat and dairy. The catchy name SOY was an acronym for Serving Other Youth. Its mission was to share testimonies and music in churches and schools, letting young people know that God wanted to use them. This awesome reality makes young people respond, “Count me in.”

Having now pastored for 13 years on educational campuses with young people, I can see that what SOY accomplished for me remains with me, even to today. Being part of this ministry was a life changer for me, a country boy from the Pacific Northwest. Here are three tasks, humbly submitted as a colleague to other colleagues, that I believe will bring revival to young people and engage them in their churches.

## **1. Make them missionaries, not the mission field**

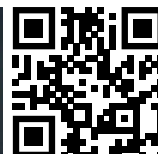
I have just returned from traveling with college and high school students who each preached an evangelistic series in Central America. Visiting, planning, calling for decisions, and socially engaged, we debriefed each other at the end of each day and, almost without fail, the reports were like this: “I am spending more time in prayer and Bible reading.” Or “I have the best church, it’s perfect for me.” My mission field, young adults, was reached by mobilizing them to be missionaries.

No one, especially young adults, wants to be the object of our mission; rather, they want to be part of it instead. Two weeks on the mission trip accomplished





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more than the two-hour Sabbath-afternoon seminar on outreach that some of us prefer. According to research by S. Joseph Kidder on church growth, “pastors of healthy and growing churches spend 10–15 hours a week in equipping their laity in effective, efficient, and skillful ministry.”<sup>2</sup> This is nearly a quarter of our professional work. While his studies did not target different demographics for growth, it hit the bull’s-eye for young adults.

Seminars have their place, but it is often the same group who comes to training seminars in our churches year after year. We are good at seminars and committees, but we need our people and, specifically, our youth to get involved. The bread and butter of engaging young people is inviting (and it often takes a lot of inviting) them to partner with us.

Partnering with the North American Division Ministerial team and the NextGen Pastor initiative, each year on our campus, we host a dinner for young people who feel the possible call to ministry. We connect them to a pastor/mentor who will listen to, encourage, and work with them. Then, together, these young people serve as a student advisory to the campus church board. They become the very thing that the seminars talk about.

This illustration, shared by author Ellen White, highlights how critical this principle is: “In some respects the pastor occupies a position similar to that of the foreman of a gang of laboring men or the captain of a ship’s crew. They are expected to see that the men over whom they are set, do the work assigned to them correctly and promptly. . . .

“The owner of a large mill once found his superintendent in a wheel-pit, making some simple repairs, while a half-dozen workmen in that line were standing by, idly looking on. The proprietor, after learning the facts so as to be sure that no injustice be done, called the foreman to his office, and handed him his discharge and full pay. In surprise the foreman asked for an explanation. It was given in these words: “I employed you to keep six men at work. I found the six idle, and you doing the work

of but one, and your work could have been done just as well by any one of the six. I cannot afford to pay the wages of seven for you to teach the six how to be idle.”’<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Hold high spiritual expectations

Picture Daniel Burnham, the famous architect with vision, standing before a turn-of-the-century Chicago City Council, challenging his Windy City leaders to live up to his dream. In our pastoral staff meetings, we often repeat the challenge he is credited with: “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work. . . Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us.”<sup>4</sup>

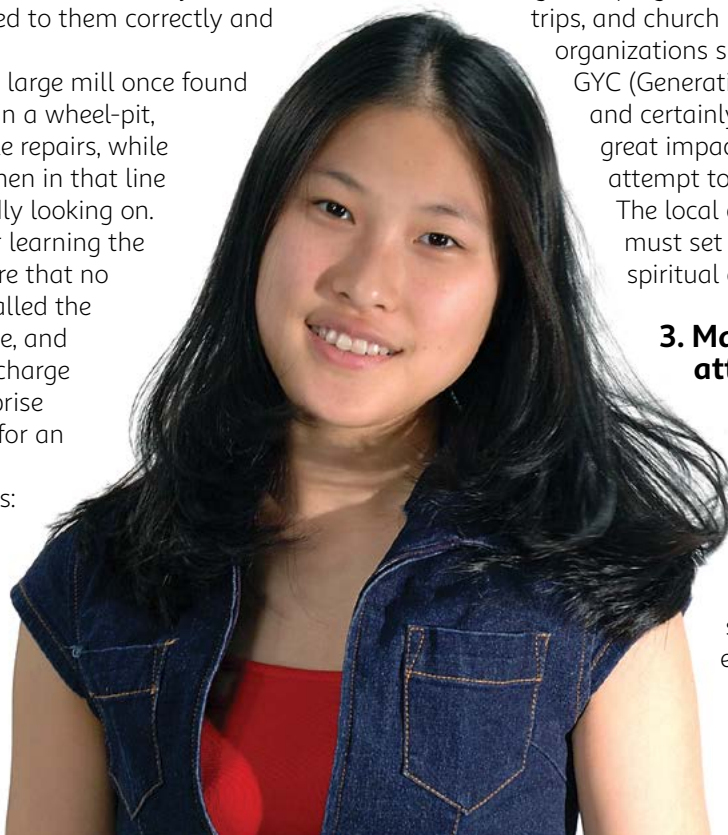
Recently, I grabbed Mark Batterson’s book *All In* to read on a flight. The book begins with the lessons we learn from what some have called the “one-way” or “coffin” missionaries. These men and women would purchase one-way tickets and pack their belongings in wooden coffins. When they waved goodbye, it was a final wave. Men like A. W. Milne brought light to the headhunters of New Hebrides in the South Pacific, and women like Amy Carmichael worked in India for 55 years without furlough. Batterson challenges, “Jesus didn’t die to keep us safe. He died to make us dangerous.

“Faithfulness is not holding the fort. It’s storming the gates of hell.”<sup>5</sup>

Opportunities such as summer literature evangelism programs, evangelistic mission trips, and church board advisories and organizations such as Pathfinders, GYC (Generation. Youth. Christ.), and certainly others have had great impact because they attempt to do something great. The local church and pastor must set a high standard of spiritual expectations.

## 3. Make your church attractive

Gyms and athletic centers sell their memberships with the image of a chiseled man or woman. Grocery stores call for your eyes to feast on their





brightest colored produce. And the church? If young adults hear of a divided administration, a frustrated pastorate, and a disgruntled leadership, who blames them for their disinterest? The often-voiced and published complaints; the “stories” told to compete to see which church or members are the worst; the social media posts denigrating the leadership of an administrative body in the church cause people to lose their enthusiasm—especially our youth. What better ways to feed disinterest in the church! Nobody wants to be a part of something bad. Could it be that by complaining or jesting about various concerns, we have played the devil’s game and caused our young leaders to lose interest and leave the church?

Paul, speaking of the church, says, “Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*” (Eph. 3:8–10, NIV, emphasis added).

Through the church, God is showing unfallen beings the depths and heights of who He is. They, the rulers in heavenly realms, get to know God better by looking at the church. This is sacred. Pastor, speaker, and church planter Francis Chan shares his conviction that our complaining about the church is “taking a sledgehammer to the temple.”<sup>6</sup>

Kidder’s research points to this concept as true. “A positive, healthy attitude based on hope and faith is the number one human ingredient in church growth.”<sup>7</sup> That is, faith-based enthusiasm for and about the church from the leaders and pastors will be the number one human ingredient for drawing in and engaging our young adults. “With the Holy Spirit we have every reason for optimism and enthusiasm for the future. Of the factors that our research study identified as contributing to church growth—including effective leadership, enthusiastic involvement of the members, utilizing the power of prayer, and inspiring and dynamic worship—none was more important than faith-based optimism.”<sup>8</sup>

## Contagious courage

They get their directions from us. Leadership is leading, being the front person to go in the

direction that the rest are to follow. Every couple of months, to hold my leadership accountable, I take 12 minutes to review Captain “Sully” Sullenberger recounting his experience landing US Airways flight 1549. After striking birds on takeoff out of LaGuardia Airport, which caused the loss of all engine power on the Airbus A320, he, along with copilot Jeffrey Skiles, glided the plane into the Hudson River. All 155 people on board were rescued.

Of all the lessons that Captain Sullenberger shares, one that routinely catches my attention is when he explains, “I took an extravagant amount of time, three or four seconds, to choose my words very carefully” before communicating over the audio to the passengers about what they faced: a landing in the Hudson River. Why the delay? Because what we say matters, and how we say it is important. As Captain Sullenberger shares, “Courage can be contagious.”<sup>9</sup> If we, or better said, *when* we communicate high spiritual expectations, the beauty and sacred position of the church, and the plans God has for the church, young people will catch it. Courage is contagious.

Courage is galvanizing, and our young adults are looking for a community and movement that believes in itself. Confidence in our mission and identity can lead to a revival of purpose, what Kidder might call faith-based enthusiasm, and an army of a young adult missionaries saying, “Count me in.”



- 1 With appreciation and respect to the leaders Jed and Jodi Genson.
- 2 S. Joseph Kidder, *The Big Four* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2011), 54.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, Pub. Assn., 1892), 101.
- 4 Patrick T. Reardon, “Burnham Quote: Well, It May Be,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 1, 1992, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1992-01-01-9201010041-story.html>.
- 5 Mark Batterson, *All In* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 13.
- 6 Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2018), 39.
- 7 Kidder, *Big Four*, 29.
- 8 Kidder, 31.
- 9 “Sully” Sullenberger, “Captain Sully’s Minute-by-Minute Description of the Miracle on the Hudson,” Inc., YouTube video, 12:22, March 6, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6EblErBjqw>.

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# Seeking God's heart for our community



was in the back office preparing for a baptism when Bruce came looking for me. It was his first time attending our church, he had just finished listening to a guest presenter, and I had wondered how he would react. I could not help but be nervous about whether he would ever return. When Bruce found me, he let me know how he had appreciated the presentation and then excitedly informed me that he and his wife considered themselves “de facto members” of our church! It hadn’t always been this way.

Seven years before I began pastoring the Templeton Hills Seventh-day Adventist church, our congregation had been challenged with the thought, “If your church burned down, would the community notice?” Our leadership team knew we could do far better. We wanted our church to become engaged with the community and make a positive impact!

The church sits on about 15 acres. Through the years, members and pastors had dreamed of various ways of using the property. One pastor pursued a health and wellness center. A member suggested a community center. Another member thought we should turn the open space into a soccer field. None of the ideas had come to fruition for reasons ranging from finances to county requirements.

Our church leadership realized that it is essential that we let the Holy Spirit lead us in

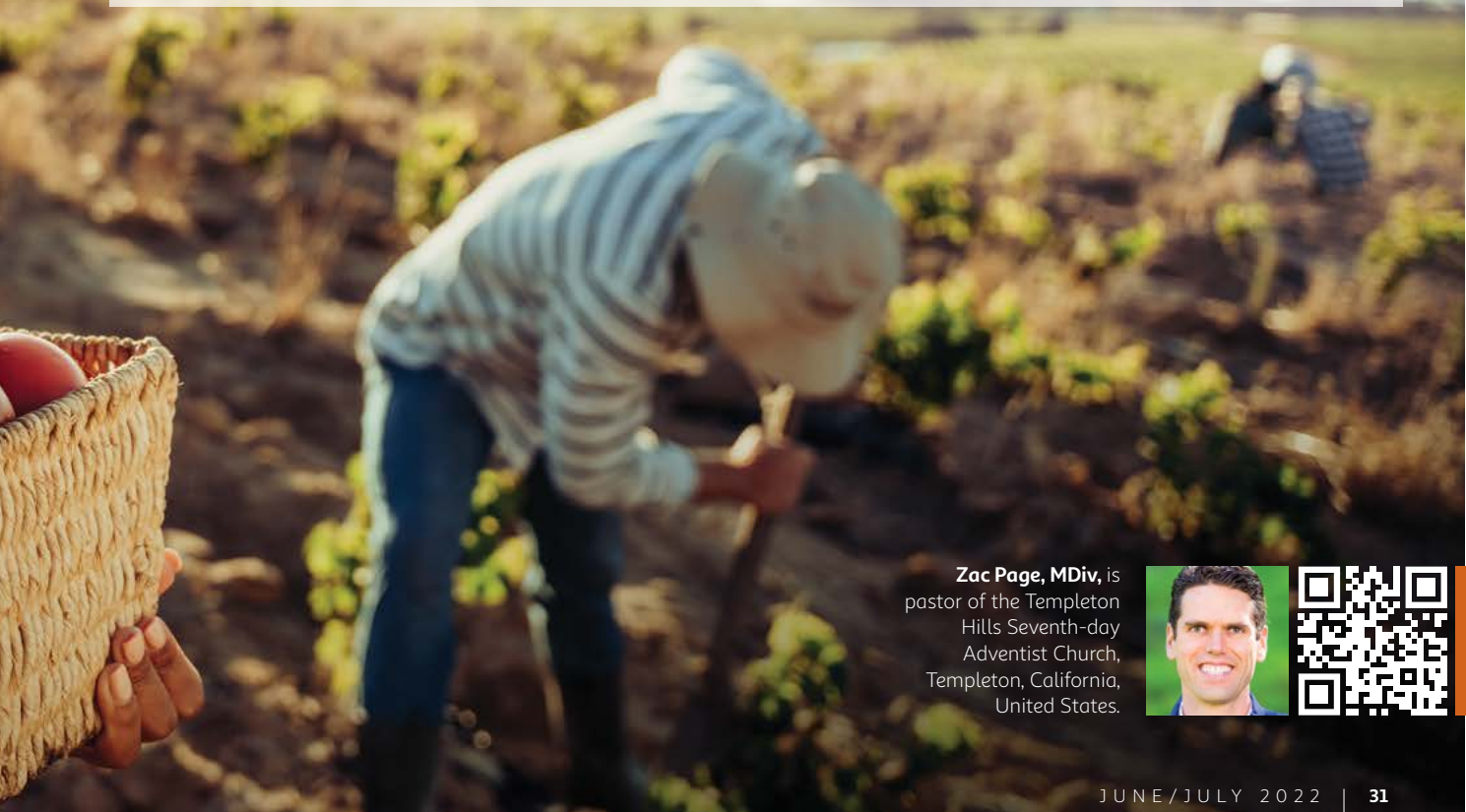
ministering to the needs of our community. He knows what it is that people need most.

Jesus characterized His ministry as one of mingling with people, meeting them where they were in order to reach them. “He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38).<sup>1</sup> No one could walk away from an encounter with Him without realizing that He sympathized with their needs and wanted to benefit their lives. His benevolence was attractive! Could it be that when our ministry follows His model of drawing close to the people in our communities, we, too, will experience true success?

### Begin with prayer

Paul challenged the Colossian church to “devote” themselves to prayer, “praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:2, 3). When we pray together as leaders for God to open the right doors and then move forward as the Holy Spirit directs, He often guides us in an entirely different direction than we ever expected.

Our church prayed and prayed. One day, as I drove through our parking lot, I glanced toward the big, empty field above our church. Suddenly it hit me. What if we started a community farm right here on our property? I ran the idea past my wife, Leah, who thought it would be great. Our



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community has a lot of farmers' markets, and local, organic produce is a hot commodity.

A newly baptized young-adult couple, Matt and Sabrina, had shared with us that they had a dream to find a piece of land on which they could start a farm to support their family. As Leah and I prayed and talked about the idea of a community farm, we thought that maybe God was opening a door in bringing to our church a family passionate about farming.

## Trust others to help

I decided to see if Matt would have any interest. He was mowing the church lawn. When I asked him what he thought about starting a community farm on the church property, he jumped off his tractor and told me that he and Sabrina had just been talking and praying about the same exact idea.

Excited about the concept, we told our special projects team about it. That led to further interest and planning, but then things seemed to hit a standstill. Matt had taken a traveling job and was out of town for a couple of months. Was this really God's plan?

Then one day, our school principal called to tell me about an evangelism endowment available for funding creative evangelistic projects. The catch was that the application was due the next day. Quickly, I contacted various leaders in the church, and the collective response they gave was to move forward with a community farms. We immediately created our proposal and were surprised to be awarded \$20,000 for the project.

As we began looking for the necessary materials, God began opening doors. Matt knew we needed a hoop house to keep the plants from freezing in the winter and shaded in the summer. He figured out that the metal tubing and connections and the work of bending all the tubing were going to be very expensive.

Then he decided to see what he could find on Craigslist. That very day, a woman who had stored hoop houses in her backyard for 10 years had posted them for sale. It turned out to be enough materials for four times the size of Matt's original hoop-house plan and was already in the right shape with all of the necessary connections. Furthermore, she was selling all of it, easily worth far more than \$12,000 in materials, for just \$700!

Matt then told us that we really needed a tractor. Before long, a family from a neighboring church that was leaving to be missionaries offered to sell us their nice John Deere tractor at

a reduced price. Community members and church members donated attachments for the tractor.

## Step through the doors

Still, we continued to experience plenty of obstacles along the way. As the project continued to grow, it seemed we would need to hire Matt to manage the farm and volunteers. It would involve a big financial commitment. I am thankful our church simply kept stepping through the doors, even when we did not know how we would find the resources. God continued to provide in surprising ways.

We finally set a date for the grand opening in February 2020. The timing was miraculous. We had no idea that our church's physical building would be closed March–June because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the farm is an essential service to the community and grew into a thriving ministry in the midst of the pandemic. In fact, we made more friends in our area during 2020 than we had in the previous five years I had served at the church. Only God could have known that this was exactly what our community needed. The level of impact that this ministry has created in two years is something only He could have arranged.

One of our church members had been reading the Bible with a neighbor. The neighbor reported that another elderly neighbor was being treated for cancer and had excitedly talked about our farm, where she was now getting wonderfully fresh produce to help fight her cancer.

Another community friend, Kate, had come to the plant-based cooking classes hosted by our church for several years. She became so excited about the farm that when Matt went to a local repair shop to get our weed eater fixed, her husband, Jeff, who owns the business, repaired it for free. He has since offered to loan us any equipment we need for the farm and wants to sponsor the farm financially.

Mike, a local beekeeper, offered to place several hives on the farm in exchange for some produce. When the hives produced enough honey, he hosted all of our farm friends at the church for a honey extraction, giving everyone a free jar of local honey. The level of excitement it generated in the community surprised us.

We began with only field crops. Then a local nursery approached us, offering to donate 60 fruit trees. Soon the farm will have an abundance of fresh fruit to add to the items visitors can pick on a donation basis.

Previously, we had attempted to get news organizations to cover big events at the church,

with limited success. Since we started the farm, we have had reporters contact us without any solicitation. We also had our County District Supervisor visit the farm and present a certificate of appreciation from the county.

## Pray with people

Matt often tells me with amazement about how many people call him asking for prayer or about how people come up to the farm when they are facing a family crisis in order to have him pray for them! God has definitely used the farm in a major way in Matt and Sabrina's life. They, along with their three children, have become actively involved at the church and school. Rather than simply trying to provide for their own future, they now live to serve others. God has also opened opportunities for them to speak with other churches and ministry groups interested in starting their own community farm.

In addition, Matt started a weekly Bible study that began by looking at Jesus' parables on farming. Aurora, one of our farm friends, recently told me how it has helped her as she has dealt with challenges, and she has found the Bible study to be a place where she can talk about real-life issues. She has a vast amount of experience in helping people through addiction, mental-health crises, and homelessness. Her connections to community resources are something I have come to lean on heavily as a pastor when aiding community people. God has used the farm to create many such connections that have broadened our ability to serve others.

Steve, a doctor in our church, retired and has since volunteered at the farm on an almost daily basis. Steve got the idea to hold a vegan blueberry pancake breakfast on the first Sunday of each month. It has provided an incredible opportunity to mingle with our community, letting them know we believe that the love of God compels us to do everything we can do to benefit their lives.

## Inspire the community to help

A couple who lives a few doors down from the church became inspired by Steve's efforts and offered to throw a free Indian feast. The RSVP list for the event quickly filled with people from the community, many of whom we had not met previously. At the feast, I met a local pastor and his family. His wife commented on how difficult the pandemic had been for them, with many of their members leaving the church. It has opened an opportunity to minister to a fellow pastor who I did not know was struggling.

Such stories are just a taste of the way God has opened doors for us to minister to the needs of our community. Steve, our retired doctor turned farmer, summarized the difference he has seen the farm make: "Bruce, our next-door neighbor for many years; Sue, a dear friend from work; and Skye, our daughter's close friend, all visited the farm today. These friends have known of our church, known of the programs, but never visited the church property before. Each one of them was thrilled at what was happening. Jenny, our daughter, who hasn't come to church in a long time, said, 'This is the best thing the church has ever done.' "

Yes, Steve's neighbor is the same Bruce who informed me during his first visit to our church that he and his wife consider themselves *de facto* members! He regularly volunteers at the farm on Sundays, and his wife is a musician who has provided live music for our honey extraction and recent two-year farm anniversary event. As I sit here writing this, Bruce just texted me, asking to get together next week to talk more about the Bible and what it has to say about current events; praise the Lord!

## Allow God to open the doors

This is not about brilliant planning, wise leadership, or inviting other churches to duplicate a similar ministry. I believe we are far too quick to attempt to franchise ministry models, hoping the same program will work in our community and produce the same results that it did elsewhere. Ministry is not about operating the right model but connecting with God and letting Him open the right doors to minister to our community in the way He knows they need it most. We must let God open our eyes to what people around us require, allow Him to show us ways to meet those needs, and let the Holy Spirit work through our efforts as God calls and leads people to Himself. The Lord has an infinite variety of ways to do His work of reaching people. Heaven will be a place of eternal relationships. God wants us to begin learning how to have them with others in this life through service to them. Ask Him to reveal the right ministry for every situation.



1 Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible.

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# A *transformed* CHURCH



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States.



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**M**any pastors and ministry leaders would erase the years 2020 and 2021 from history if it were possible. Middletown Seventh-day Adventist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, however, could not be more grateful for what those past two years have brought to their congregation. Through a series of divinely orchestrated events, my wife, Pam, and I, with our church members, experienced a spiritual transformation by allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us every day. It is my humble desire to share our experience as encouragement for others who may be struggling to find hope amid arduous spiritual battles.

### **A divided church**

During twenty years of pastoral ministry, God has allowed me to experience the shadow of spiritual valleys, yet this past one seemed the darkest. By mid-2020, our congregation was experiencing unprecedented dissension and turmoil. A faction from within the church was actively seeking to change its nature, a young member was vocally challenging leadership and biblical standards of marriage and family, and in early March 2020, COVID-19 shut us down, forcing us to find alternative ways to worship and maintain fellowship. Around the same time, social and racial unrest erupted in Louisville, eventually seeping into our church and creating more tension and discord in a congregation comprising 26 nationalities.

By June 2020, I felt overworked and overwhelmed. I knew that if God did not intervene, my ministry and the spiritual lives of my congregants would be forever damaged.

### **A desperate prayer**

In my distress, I cried to the Lord for help. Our elders and I gathered to pray together. Pleading with God from the depths of our hearts, we acknowledged our powerlessness and inability to find any lasting solution and claimed the promise that wherever two or three gather, the Lord will be present (Matt. 18:20).

One evening as I was praying with Pam, I felt prompted to call my cousin, Dorina Green. I had not spoken with her directly for more than a decade, but it occurred to me that she and her husband, Ed, an interracial couple, might offer insight on how to navigate the escalating social and racial tensions in our congregation. Rather than giving me political or civic suggestions, Dorina boldly implored me to

call upon the Holy Spirit, both in my life and on behalf of my church. With desperate and eager ears, I listened, and my cousin “preached” to me, the pastor, for forty minutes on the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and ministry. She also shared her testimony of healing through the power of the Holy Spirit a decade prior and how she has lived her life walking in the Spirit ever since. Her conviction broke through to my battered heart, and I began to feel hope again.

After closing our conversation with prayer, I decided to immediately follow her advice, surrendering all my life and ministry and asking for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. While I knew that true spiritual success did not come through power or might but by God’s Spirit (Zech. 4:6), so many times, I had tried to solve such issues with my own wisdom and methods.

With renewed hope, I excitedly shared with Pam what I had just learned. My enthusiasm and conviction were contagious, and she jumped at the opportunity to join me. The following day, I prayed again and called Pastor Dennis Smith, whose writings and ministry had been the foundation of my cousin’s transforming spiritual experience. That divinely orchestrated conversation with Smith led to buying the whole series of his books, and at his counsel, Pam and I began reading *10 Days: Prayers and Devotions to Experience the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*.

## A divine intervention

At first, our initiative met with increased tensions and attacks from Satan in our personal and spiritual lives. Were it not for the support of Pam, I would have quit completely. Yet we persisted in prayer and daily surrender, receiving divine peace and victory by allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us every morning. We knew we needed revival and God’s power, and that comes only through prayer and by the presence of the Holy Spirit. As our excitement grew, our joy began to spill over into every sermon and conversation we had. One Sabbath morning, we invited members and friends to join us on our spiritual journey, and to our astonishment, more than 50 people signed up for small groups. At the end of one full year, we still had 43 active participants engaged in small-group Bible studies on revival and the role of the Holy Spirit. In all my pastoral experience, we had never maintained such a percentage of retention.

I had always dreamed that my church would experience revival and the outpouring of the latter rain and that we would all come to know

God and each other in an intimate way through unconditional love. Now the Holy Spirit made it happen. The small-group participants vowed commitment and confidentiality. Our people flourished in this safe space, openly sharing their struggles, and a sincere vulnerability bonded them to one another. As a result of such spiritual intimacy, judgment and criticisms diminished and empathy increased, eventually spreading through the whole congregation and uniting them.

This new safe and unified atmosphere attracted newcomers, and during the pandemic, when other churches shut their doors, Middletown, though a small church, remained open and had an average of 10 to 15 nonmembers attending every week. Visitors streamed through our doors from all kinds of places and circumstances. One cancer patient I had met on a hospital visit attended for several months with her husband until she was too sick and closed her eyes in Jesus with His love and peace in her heart.

## A deepening experience

We added more small groups in January 2021. Our aim was prayer, revival, and the outpouring of Jesus’ promise of the Comforter. More and more, the fruit of the Spirit began manifesting itself in the Christian experience of the members, resulting in numerical church growth. In 2021, Middletown added nine individuals through baptism during a time of pandemic restrictions.

In August 2021, we invited all revival group participants to the first-ever “Hope-Healing-Commitment-Holy” retreat for the purpose of deeply experiencing the holiness of God and His divine healing. The retreat began Friday night as Pastor Dennis Smith joined us virtually to introduce the concepts of emotional healing and spiritual deliverance. Sabbath morning’s messages included “Experiencing God’s Love,” “Emotional Oppressions,” and “God’s Will to Heal.” Later, in small breakout groups, participants shared their deepest failures, frustrations, and fears. A beautiful footwashing and Communion service preceded an awe-inspiring personal testimony of healing and deliverance by my cousin, Dorina. We then guided participants through prayers of forgiveness and how to claim deliverance from emotional pain and besetting sins. The Holy Spirit moved 16 of the 20 attendees to come forward for healing, and we anointed them in a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led service.

Praises for deliverance and emotional healing lasted for nearly an hour amid spontaneous prayers and songs to the Lord! Everyone present



testified that it was by far the most moving spiritual experience they had ever been a part of in any church setting. Instead of conflicts, tension, and division, there was now peace, unity, and a sense of God's presence working among us.

The following week, the church conducted its first-ever Revival and the Holy Spirit Sabbath, with the entire Sabbath service dedicated to teachings and testimonies about the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life. The small group and retreat participants shared what they had learned during the past 14 months, told of their miraculous transformations, and recounted the blessings of living a life filled and led by the Holy Spirit. Pastor Stephen Farr, the guest speaker, related his congregation's transforming experience with the Holy Spirit.

At the end of the service, he extended an invitation to the whole church to take part in the revival experience. This new season of the revival groups would be based on the study of Pastor Dennis Smith's *40 Days: Prayers and Devotions to Prepare for the Second Coming*. Seven new groups formed that day, with a total of 63 people, of whom about one-third were nonmembers. God's presence and power showed us that He knows no boundaries and can prevail over any challenges we might face.

Author Ellen White reminds us, "Since this [the Holy Spirit] is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it? The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his petition to God. Companies of Christian workers should gather to ask for special help, for heavenly wisdom, that they may know how to plan and execute wisely. Especially should they pray that God will baptize His chosen ambassadors . . . with a rich measure of His Spirit. The presence of the Spirit with God's workers will give the proclamation of truth a power that not all the honor or glory of the world could give."<sup>1</sup>

## A transformed church

The Holy Spirit irrefutably has transformed our church and is still healing many believers in our



*The Holy Spirit  
irrefutably has  
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believers in our community.*

community. He has led us to an intensive study of the book of Acts to learn from the post-Pentecost early church. New small groups have formed to study all aspects of Holy Spirit living. I felt inspired to start small groups for men committed to living life with integrity to the fullest, called Oxygen Fellowship for Men. In it, they learn from each other, support each other, and pray with each other as in no other church group. The only requirement for participation is a desire to be daily filled by God's presence—spiritual oxygen for their souls—and revived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

During our second year of walking in the Spirit and studying the book of Acts, we employed a guide adapted from Mark Finley's *Ten Days in the Upper Room*. We concluded the ten-day study with a midweek Pentecost prayer service in which more than half of our Sabbath service attendance showed up for a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Members and friends of Middletown will forever testify to the power of daily Holy Spirit baptism. It has transformed their lives—and our church—from the inside out. We thank God not only for His divine deliverance through trials but also for giving us a new Holy Spirit-filled church that is spiritually alive and eager to take the gospel message to all the world.



1 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 50.

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# No longer orphans

**A** hurting child lay in his bed, quivering from cold and fear. Pedro's father had beat up his mother again.<sup>1</sup> And there was never enough food because his father drank away nearly all his earnings. With his dirty little hands, Pedro wiped at an endless stream of tears for at least an hour. Finally, he clenched his fingers and whispered with determination, "One day, I will leave this miserable house and never come back. No one pays attention to me here, anyway. I will make my own way in the world."

As soon as he could fend for himself, Pedro left home and never returned. He lived on the streets and became what he hated in his father. The scared little boy grew up to become an alcoholic and drug addict. No one would ever see any value in him; he was worthless. Eventually, he cut back a little on his drinking and began to sell little bottles of perfume in airports. Twenty years had gone by since he was that scared little boy at home. He was doing better but had no purpose in life or hope of a better future.

A pastor arrived at the airport where Pedro was selling his perfume. Pedro approached the pastor, trying to sell some perfume. He bought a small bottle and asked Pedro about his life. The whole sorry story poured out of Pedro's heart, ending with, "So, you see, I am an orphan that no one wants."

The pastor began to tell Pedro about Someone who would never abuse or abandon him. A new light entered Pedro's eyes. Suddenly, he jumped up and said, "Don't go anywhere. I will be right back."

Like the Samaritan woman at the well, he could not help but share the good news. He ran to get his friends—other peddlers—and they sat in a circle talking about Jesus, who could change their lives.

The pastor then offered to send audio presentations of hope to their cell phones. They all eagerly signed up. The pastor kept in close contact with Pedro and the others, creating a community for nurture and support. However, the

power of drugs and alcohol seemed to overwhelm Pedro, and communication became less frequent. The pastor never gave up. Little by little, Pedro came to believe that God's promises were meant for him, and he surrendered his heart, becoming a new man in Jesus, free from all substance abuse.

Pedro was baptized in the local Seventh-day Adventist church, a new creation made by Jesus! He could not stop texting the pastor who helped him, "Thank you for telling me about Jesus!"

Pedro now walks with a spring in his step because he knows who he is. He is no longer an orphan but the son of the King of kings, who will never leave or forsake him. He is wanted. He is valuable. He does not just sell perfume; he himself is now a "sweet fragrance of Christ . . . among those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:15, AMP). Pedro is passing on the good news of the gospel to all those around him.

This is not just a story of cell-phone evangelism and how effective it can be.<sup>2</sup> This is a story of how a Spirit-filled church can be a sweet fragrance to the world that Jesus loves. It's an example of how we, today, can be like Jesus, ministering to the downtrodden and those in need and leading them into the kingdom of God.

What are the characteristics of what we have been called to do?

## 1. Testimony

Disciples are called to be global witnesses, a feat possible only through the power of the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:8). Theologian Frank Hasel states, "As Christians, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Without Him, our witness will be powerless and our Christian lives nothing but a burden. We might have learning, talent, and eloquence, but without the Spirit, we . . . will not have the assurance of salvation and will not know the joy that comes from serving our Lord. We will be Christians in name only, and a Christian in name only is not really a Christian at all."<sup>3</sup>

So, what does it mean to be a witness? A witness is one who testifies about what he or she has seen or heard. A credible witness may even put his or her life on the line for truth. The word *witness* is translated from *μάρτυς* (martyr). A witness may die physically because he or she is faithful to God, but all true martyrs must first die to self. Their death reveals that they are genuine witnesses. All true witnesses love God to the degree that they are willing even to die for His mission.

Witnessing is not a church program it is a lifestyle. A witness is deeply surrendered and committed to God's mission. To be witnesses, we must know Him by experience. Without such an experience, our words are empty and without power.

## 2. Longevity

The second characteristic is that the church is an immortal movement because its Owner is immortal (Acts 1:9, 10). You may go to Egypt and see the body of Tutankhamun; in Rome is the body of John Paul II; in the United States are the remains of Abraham Lincoln; in China, there is the tomb of Mao Tse-tung; in Russia, the body of Lenin.

But if you go to Jerusalem, the tomb of Christ is empty.

The message of Christianity is based on an empty tomb. Evangelist Billy Graham expressed it this way: "There is more evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than there is that Julius Caesar ever lived or that Alexander the Great died at the age of thirty-three."<sup>4</sup> The destiny of God's church is an assured destiny because the Creator God is our immortal Founder.

The message of God's church answers our deepest questions. We were meant for more than this life could ever offer. We were created to live eternally with our heavenly Father.

## 3. Urgency

When Jesus left His tomb empty and ascended to heaven, the angels asked the disciples, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11, NKJV). To live in the time of the prophets and the apostles must have been a privilege; to know the Reformers would have been an inspiring and enriching experience. However, we live in the best time, the time of the end. It is imperative to understand the urgency of the time. We are called to make the same decision that Pedro made, to rely on God's power to change our lives and give us a new identity as children

of God. We are called to be ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven because Jesus is coming.

## 4. Legacy

The fourth characteristic of the church is that it is part of the end time. We must not give up. We must not grow weary. Despite any personal cost, we must illuminate the world with the good news of salvation. We must call our members to put God to the test as they walk in the full power of God in this dark world. We must be an active part of the great movement that will illuminate the whole earth with the light of the gospel (Rev. 18:1).

The mission and legacy of the church are found in people whose lives have been rescued from Satan's grasp. As we pass through the narrowest part of the earth's hourglass, our members must experience the joy of being used by God to reach others. When they become true disciples of Jesus, they will receive the needed power for the daily surrender of their hearts and active ministry to others who will soon proclaim, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9, NKJV).

## A status change

Jesus said, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18, NKJV). Our status has changed from orphans to ambassadors. We are the much-loved children of the King, and He has called us to involve all of God's children in the precious mission of making disciples of a world He died to save. Jesus is coming, according to His promise. This is the hope of all generations. May the passion of our lives be to prepare the world for this amazing event and to see heaven filled with precious redeemed sinners saved by the power and grace of God.



- 1 Pedro is a pseudonym.
- 2 For more on cell-phone ministry see Karen Glassford, "Even God Uses Cell Phones," *Ministry*, June 2020, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2020/06/Even-God-uses-cell-phones>, visit <http://awr.org/cpe>, or email [cpe@awr.org](mailto:cpe@awr.org).
- 3 Frank M. Hasel, "The Baptism and Filling of the Holy Spirit." Adult Bible Study Guide, January 28, 2017, 57. [https://absq.adventist.org/pdf.php?file=2017:1Q:TE:PDFs:ETQ117\\_05.pdf](https://absq.adventist.org/pdf.php?file=2017:1Q:TE:PDFs:ETQ117_05.pdf)
- 4 Billy Graham, *The Reason for My Hope: Salvation* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2013), 82.

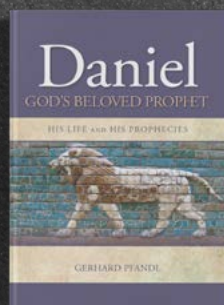
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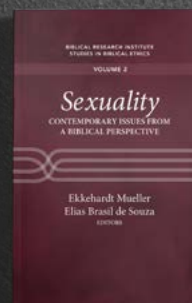
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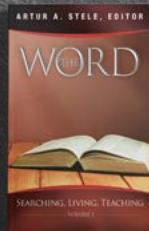
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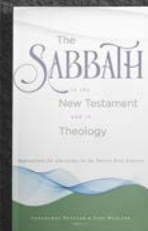


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# Family and the gospel

**H**ow many grooms do you know of who have shared the gospel of Christ with the guests at his own wedding? I did, because when you understand the gospel, you cannot help but use any opportunity to promote it.

Several years later, my wife, Kit, and I started a biblically based marriage enrichment ministry as unpaid laypeople. Our intention was to share the gospel. Nonbelievers came because they felt a need for better marital relationships. Their marriages improved as they applied scriptural principles, and that experience gave them confidence in the Bible. They then believed what the Bible says about Jesus. Hundreds came to understand the gospel and trusted Christ for salvation. Others were renewed in their childhood faith.

The felt need for family relationships attracted nearly 20,000 believers and nonbelievers to our activities in eight years. At first, we felt frustrated when Christians took spaces we had planned for nonbelievers. *Our attitude was wrong.* Christians came because they had needs in their families too. Christians who experienced improved relationships readily became volunteers in the ministry.

We learned that Christian marriages are also important to evangelism. Things that work get noticed. Nonbelievers are frequently drawn to Christian couples who enjoy rewarding relationships. We have heard nonbelievers ask, “What makes their marriage so good?” Godly marriages are a key part of God’s plan. Conversely, Christian marriages that fare poorly discredit Christ and the church. The relationship between a husband and wife is compared to Christ and the church in Ephesians 5, and this is not an accident. Verse 32 refers to it as a mystery, but we can be certain that godly marriages are a key part of God’s plan. Conversely, Christian marriages that fare poorly discredit Christ and the church.

After learning that selfishness adversely affects a relationship, I determined to become an unselfish husband. Then one day, an engineer with whom I worked came into my office. “Drew,” he said, “what you did for those guys was unselfish!” *Whoa, I*

*thought. My marriage has spilled into my life! As I tried to be an unselfish husband, God used that decision to make me an unselfish person.*

## Jesus’ example

Jesus demonstrated a pattern for effective ministry. His strategy included events, small groups, and training. Jesus frequently taught in front of gatherings of people or at events: “He was teaching in their synagogues” (Luke 4:15).<sup>1</sup> And so “the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God” (Luke 5:1). Jesus’ public teaching is what initially drew disciples to Him. His miracles authenticated His messages. In the same manner, changed marriages authenticate our source, the Bible.

In addition to speaking to crowds, Jesus frequently met with smaller groups of seekers, talked to them, and answered their questions (Matt. 9:35; 19:16–22; Luke 10:38–42; John 1:45–51; 4:1–30). Later, Jesus spent private time training the disciples. Jesus’ example of events, small groups, and training is what the disciples understood they were to do when He gave them the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, 20.

Jesus’ example works particularly well revolving around the felt needs of couples and parents. We used an ongoing cycle of events, small groups, and training to mobilize hundreds of laypeople whom God used to change people’s lives.

Churches follow Jesus’ example—but with different words and forms. Nearly all emphasize events, mostly worship services. Many utilize small groups or community groups. Some deliberately use seeker groups and train laypeople (Eph. 4:12) to be effective ministers within their community.

## The example of Joe

Joe does not want to participate in marriage ministry. He is afraid he will be forced to publicly acknowledge deficiencies. More threatening, his wife will publicly share his shortcomings. Joe is wary that you will create high expectations in his wife or subject him to unachievable standards. He



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SCAN FOR AUDIO



is afraid you will open issues he and his spouse have been avoiding, thereby making their relationship worse, not better. In many cases, Joe and those like him have not put their faith in Christ.

Joe does not characterize every husband. Sometimes the wife is the reluctant one. Either way, you must keep participants from feeling threatened. Presenting God's truth with "gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15, 16) will help nonbelievers consider the gospel more carefully.

## Events

Church worship services are events. Some are seeker-friendly, but most are oriented toward the faithful, which is needed. However, events focused on felt needs and designed for people like Joe can be more effective at reaching nonregular churchgoers. Such events can include a gospel message and expose attendees to biblical marriage principles, leading them to join a small group.

We want Joe and his wife to feel as comfortable as possible, regardless of their religious background, and even if they are not married. In 1 Corinthians 9:19–22, Paul says that he accommodates the values of others "so that [he] might save some." This means avoiding religious jargon and trappings. Staying away from divisive political issues is necessary, and it can be done by keeping the focus on improving each couple's marriage or parenting.

Also, nonbelievers will have ideas that are not biblical. Do not correct them in subsequent discussions. Give God's Spirit and Scripture time to work.

Even meeting in a church facility can turn some off. A pastor once asked us to conduct a marriage event for his community. I suggested that we would probably get a better response outside the church building. The pastor engaged a local tavern as our venue. In the afternoon, the regular patrons began arriving. Some, surreptitiously, were listening to our program, and some who attended in that venue came to Christ. We once led a seminar on a United States military base where 50 percent of those attending indicated a decision for Christ. On another occasion, our pastor asked us to conduct a seminar in our church building. Visitors—mostly from other churches—filled our fellowship hall. A few Joes attended, and nobody received Christ. That does not mean our pastor's seminar was a failure. Strengthening Christian marriages is also a worthy objective.

Events need to be both meaningful and entertaining. The speakers—preferably a

husband-and-wife team—should speak with humor. Speakers can establish a relationship with the audience by sharing personal mistakes. This creates an atmosphere of, "We've all made mistakes." Joe is comfortable with that.

## Small groups

I had explained to a dedicated pastor how his large, already-successful suburban church could utilize family outreach concepts. He turned us down, but later, having met with a couple who had been helped by our seminars, he called me back and said, "If you can get couples like that involved, I want to be part of it."

"I'll mail some materials to you," I promised and coached him a bit over the phone. "The best groups are discussion oriented. And husband-and-wife teams make the best leaders."

"Got it," he replied. A few months later, the pastor called again. The group had gone very well—I could hear his enthusiasm. But much of his excitement was about his own wife. "We never ministered together before," he explained. "I found out that my wife is great."

Also, putting all one hears at a marriage seminar into practice can be like trying to swallow an elephant. Small-group studies are like cutting the elephant up into bite-sized pieces. Participants usually have an entire week to apply just one principle to their lives.

Small-group leaders, usually lay couples, do not need to have perfect marriages or be expert Bible teachers. God can use their prior failures more than He can an elegant teacher who impresses them from a distance. Try Googling "small-group marriage study" to find a selection of resources. The best materials are biblically based and foster discussion among the participants. Discussion is better than a lecture because the participants take more ownership of the applications.

What about expert guidance? Good materials gently lead participants to biblical principles. And although nobody knows all there is to know about marriage, everybody knows something that has or has not worked. Together, we can be the equivalent of an expert.

Kit and I have helped to start over 450 marriage discussion groups. Each was unique, based on the participants' needs. Ministry leaders should not attempt to force groups into a standard form.

Our church Sunday School teacher typically lectured while we all listened quietly. Between



topics, Kit and I proposed trying a seven-week marriage curriculum. As it progressed, discussion enlivened the group. Attendance climbed. After the seventh week, the class considered the next course of study. One young woman said, “We’ve covered a lot of materials in this class. But this time, our lives are different.” So, the class did another marriage course. Eventually, the class studied other materials but never returned to being passive listeners. The class doubled in size. The class doubled again and had to be split into two classes.

Strong friendships between couples develop in small groups. This trust relationship is the best context in which to share the gospel. We recommend waiting to share the gospel until the group has bonded and respect for Scripture has been nurtured. Then the leader can simply take a few minutes before a session to present the good news. In some cases, we shared with a couple privately outside the group. Many leaders simply invite the couples to an event where the gospel will be shared.

I have often seen individuals profess Christ but never go through follow-up or get connected to mature Christians. A joyous advantage of using small groups is that when individuals trust Christ, they are already in a Bible study. Christians in the group invariably invite them to church.

One warning, however, about church attendance and Joe-oriented small groups: sometimes a church is disappointed when unchurched couples come to their group and then attend a different church, often because a spiritual awakening will first lead them to their childhood denomination. I can offer no guarantees regarding new church members. Having said that, I also know of a smaller church whose marriage groups tripled the church in a year. Treat participants with love and respect, help them build relationships, and rejoice that God is using your small group to change lives. Leave church growth to God.

## Training

Training is essential. Yet it is more than listening to Bible teaching. Training means developing how-to skills—sharing the gospel, leading small groups, speaking effectively, organizing events, and more—that God can use to change lives. Good training is systematic with repetition, exercises, and practice. In marriage ministry, training begins with learning about and then

# Discussion is better than a lecture because the participants take more ownership of the applications.

applying biblical principles to your own marriage. But it must continue with skills to help others.

Another warning: Satan will attack those God can use. Training makes the difference for football players when the game is on the line. Training makes the difference for soldiers on a battlefield. Training makes the difference for lay ministers when Satan attacks.

In Luke 10, Jesus instructed 72 disciples and then sent them out. This was part of their training. They came back excited about what they had seen God do. Verse 21 describes Jesus as being “full of joy.” I have been privileged to experience such joy when I have seen the excitement of trainees after God uses them to change lives.

## Excitement and joy

Kit and I were a churchgoing lay couple without any special training in marriage and family relationships. But by using this biblical strategy of events, small groups, and training with biblical materials, we saw thousands of marriages restored and hundreds of people come to Christ.<sup>2</sup> God also took our marriage and personal growth in Christ to higher levels than we had realized possible. If you are a layperson, God can use you to change many lives and eternal destinies in the family, church, neighborhood, and community. And you will experience excitement and joy from those you lead when God uses them to change lives.



<sup>1</sup> Scripture is from the New International Version.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, write to us at [kitanddrew@gmail.com](mailto:kitanddrew@gmail.com).

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# Leading our children to Christ:

## Christian education and discipleship

**V**eteran religious educator Lawrence Richards once asked, “Where do we begin in our thinking about Christian education?” He then concluded, “For me the starting point is found in these words of Jesus: ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’”<sup>1</sup>

That is what drives my love of Christian education and burning desire for pastors to be passionately involved in it. But is this a ministry that all pastors choose to invest their time in? G. M. Baker surveyed more than 300 pastors and concluded, “The tangible effort and action put forth by ministers in support of church schools is at a lower level than their verbal statements affirming intellectual belief in the importance and value of church schools.”<sup>2</sup> Simply put, pastors say Christian education is important and may believe it, but if one were to examine their weekly schedule, we would find little evidence that the school operated by the church is truly a priority for them.





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## Pastoral participation

I discovered the power of pastoral participation in schools operated by the church when, as a young minister, I found myself filling in as the Bible teacher. It amazed me to discover the close relationships I could develop with the youth by having the opportunity to spend time with them studying the Bible five days per week rather than just once a week at Sabbath School and perhaps another hour Wednesday evenings with those who chose to attend prayer meeting. At school, I had daily opportunities to interact in the classroom as well as in chapels and during lunch. Being on a school campus was a way to stay in touch with all the kids from my congregation enrolled there,

and it was also a great way to find out what was happening in the lives of their families and how I could more effectively minister to them.

When I accepted a call to Lodi, California, I determined to get involved at Lodi Academy. Almost 90 percent of the children from my new church attended the school. I asked the principal if I could sit in on the art class since my bachelor's degree was in fine arts, thinking it would be a good way to get to know the kids. When the principal told me that the academy currently had no art class, he invited me to



start one. I ended up serving as the academy art teacher for the entire 14 years I pastored there. It proved to be a great way to encounter youth in a fun, nonthreatening environment.

## Discipleship

Because of the classroom relationships I was able to build, more kids became interested in going on both the inner-city homeless ministry trips and the out-of-country trips. More kids became interested in participating in Bible study groups and other activities. As I had the opportunity to interact with parents as they would drop off and pick up their children, they also became extremely supportive.

Pastors, use your hobbies and passions as points of contact to build relationships with the young people at the school your church operates. One pastoral colleague with a passion for auto mechanics hosted a “shop night” at his local academy every week, helping youth work on their own cars. The relationships built with young people will open the doors for further spiritual conversations and activities. It is all a part of the discipleship process.

Christian education has proven over the years to be a significant factor in helping children born into Christian homes survive and thrive in church. Religious educator John Wesley Taylor’s research demonstrated that years of Christian education positively correlate with the likelihood for those children to get baptized, return a consistent tithe, marry a fellow believer, and develop into faithful disciples.<sup>3</sup>

## Pastoral support and involvement

Seminary dean Jiří Moskala discussed five problems related to ministry through schools operated by a church:<sup>4</sup>

1. Many pastors did not grow up in a Christian home or were not products of Christian education.
2. Pastoral effectiveness is usually evaluated by the number of baptisms, financial growth (tithes and offerings), and preaching rather than results related to Christian education.
3. Pastors and members may have a limited understanding of the symbiotic relationship that should exist between churches and the schools those churches operate.
4. Pastors, members, and the church board may perceive the school as a financial burden and a time-consuming enterprise.
5. No seminary class deals with religious education and how to facilitate collaboration between the church and the school.<sup>5</sup>

One of author Ellen White’s most powerful statements on education is, “In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one.”<sup>6</sup> If we want to take her words seriously, we need to make an extra special effort to lead our children to Christ when they are at the age when they learn the best and when they are in a place where they can practice the lessons. That would be during the elementary and academy school years in a school operated by the church.

A person’s worldview becomes established very early on. That is why it is critically important to take the lead in helping shape our children’s outlook within the walls of gospel-oriented and mission-minded schools run by the church, whether that be in the Bible class, science class, history class, or even math class.

Drawing on published research and my own youth-ministry experience, I have developed a four-step process for helping pastors partner with teachers in making Christian schools thriving centers of discipleship and outreach to the community.<sup>7</sup>

*1. Pastoral involvement on-campus.* For pastors to get involved in their schools, the first step is to regularly come to the school and be willing to participate in what happens there. You can develop caring and supportive relationships with faculty, staff, and students by simply showing up. Your presence at the school will open doors for conversations and shared meals. You may have the opportunity to participate in work bees or teach baptismal classes. As a result, you will have the privilege of becoming a spiritual companion and mentor for faculty, staff, and students.

Attending school board and committee meetings is vital, as are frequently expressing support for the school and sharing good on-campus experiences at church services on Sabbath. Make sure church members know and understand the tremendous benefits of Christian education, as demonstrated by all the in-depth studies that indicate their importance.<sup>8</sup> Simply living life together throughout the week, as suggested by the Shema, is the beginning of the discipleship process.<sup>9</sup>

*2. Community care and involvement.* Work with the school principal and staff to help teach the students how to get involved in community outreach activities. Those activities can be humanitarian or spiritual in nature, such activities include cleaning up a local park or highway, helping in a homeless ministry, visiting shut-ins with the pastor or an elder, or assisting in giving Bible



studies. Going door-to-door in the community around the school and sharing simple holiday greetings or baked goods, taking prayer requests, or offering to help needy neighbors with yard cleanup or other chores are excellent ways to let the community know the students care.

It's all about breaking out of the fortress mentality and being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world around us. When pastors, teachers, and other caring adults engage in such outreach activities with our students, it builds these kinds of activities into the children's lifestyles and becomes a vital part of their worldview.

3. *Become a community center.* The third step I encourage is to invite the community to the campus to experience nonthreatening events. I call them events without a "hook"; that is, there is no catch at the end. Instead, we just help people where they are in life. They can include such things as hosting cooking schools and Financial Peace seminars. In most cases, a school campus is a less threatening and more welcoming environment for secular people than a church building.

Other on-campus activities to invite your school neighbors to might be gym nights, softball games, craft fairs, or even a 5K charity run benefiting a local community nonprofit group. Such activities also help our students begin to understand how to reach out to those new to the faith and thus give them an opportunity to be involved in being a witness in a variety of ways, both humanitarian and spiritual.

4. *Worshipping together.* The fourth step is to develop a spiritual worship experience that you can invite your newly found community friends to as a part of the discipleship process. Hosting a worship experience on campus is an effective way to take the next step in your relationship with those who are now familiar with your school and are comfortable being there. As your relationships deepen, newcomers will be more interested in learning about what motivates you to live "the abundant life" (see John 10:10). Such worship experiences can happen any night of the week or on weekends. Once again, give students the opportunity to be involved in outreach to others. In some instances, a youth or family-oriented church plant may even be something to consider.

Always move forward carefully with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Once the community members you are engaging with on campus become more interested in the spiritual gatherings you offer at the school, the next step is

to begin inviting them to events hosted at the church where they can be embraced by the church community at large.

## Solidifying the gospel commission

Getting involved in nonthreatening forms of friendship evangelism helps young people develop an outreach orientation that can last a lifetime and assist them in becoming fruitful disciples of Jesus themselves. I know because I have experienced it. I always make a point to support and be involved with the school operated by my local Adventist church, sometimes leading short-term mission trips to help young people see the worldwide church and learn the joy of service.

Some pastors are already involved in supporting the schools run by their church, but my prayer is that every pastor will feel energized and equipped to get on campus, partner with our educators and parents, participate in leading outreach with our children, and help make our schools centers of influence in their communities, places where people can come together to worship our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I believe that when our children become involved in such vibrant, gospel-oriented schools, they will be inspired to become and remain active followers of Jesus.



- 1 Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 11.
- 2 G. M. Baker, "Attitudes and Support of Adventist Ministers Towards Denominational K-12 Schools," abstract (unpublished research paper, La Sierra University, 1996), <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=11028>.
- 3 John Wesley Taylor V, "Joining and Remaining: A Look at the Data on the Role of Adventist Education," *Journal of Adventist Education* 79, no. 2, April–June 2017, 39–46.
- 4 Jiří Moskala, "The Church School: Where Churches and Schools Collaborate in Mission," *Journal of Adventist Education* 80, no. 2 (April–June 2018): 4–8. Available at <https://jae.adventist.org/en/2018.2.2>.
- 5 Cf. Circle, "Valuegenesis Studies," <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/252>; Martin Doblmeier, "The Blueprint: The Story of Adventist Education," <http://the-blueprint-film.com>.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), 30.
- 7 For more information, see "Pastors and Educators Working Together: Helping Your Church School Thrive," [collaborativeministry.org](http://collaborativeministry.org).
- 8 Taylor, "Joining and Remaining," 39–46.
- 9 Cf. Pamela Consuegra, "We Is More Powerful Than I," *Ministry*, June 2017, 25–27.

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# A new resource for a new world:

An interview with two ESDA editors

**Editor's note:** The editors of *Ministry* interviewed David Trim, PhD, the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research director and the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (ESDA) editor, and Dragoslava Santrac, PhD, the ESDA managing editor.

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**Pavel Goia (PG):** We've seen ESDA—it looks tremendous! Please tell our readers exactly what ESDA is and how it is different from anything we've had before.

**David Trim (DT):** The *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, or the ESDA Online, is the Adventist Church's first online reference work. It is a global church project that includes an estimated seven thousand entries accompanied by photographs, media, and original documents in an online portal accessible to anyone. The ESDA Online is a great tool for those seeking to do research and learn more about the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA)





Church around the world. But it is also full of inspiring stories that everyone will enjoy about how God has led the SDA Church in the past.

The first encyclopedia came out in 1966 and was revised in 1996. It was decided that the SDA Church needed a new reference work that embodies the diverse Adventist Church of the twenty-first century, reflecting the tremendous growth in the church in the last fifty years and the shifts in global membership. It also needs an online encyclopedia in this digital age, capable of interactive engagement by visitors. Available to the public since July 1, 2020, this free website will be continually updated and expanded.

**Dragoslava Santrac (DS):** Yes, and the ESDA draws on the expertise of over fifteen hundred authors worldwide. About fifty-five assistant and consultant editors from the church's thirteen world divisions, the General Conference-attached union missions, and the General Conference headquarters work together on the encyclopedia.

This worldwide assistance is bringing about a beautiful, well-rounded perspective of work carried out by local people and loyal missionaries.

**PG: Is [encyclopedia.adventist.org](https://encyclopedia.adventist.org) easy to use?**

**DT:** Yes—and it's free! The search field is prominently displayed, where users can type a name or term they want to explore. The search results page will immediately list all the relevant published articles and also show if some related articles are still in progress and upcoming. In addition to this simple search option, users can choose advanced search options and search topics by world division, country, or article categories. Thus, for example, one can search for missionary biographies pertaining to China only or the Inter-American Division, and so on. Finally, one can choose to simply browse all articles from the left side menu and access the entire article list. The main menu is always displayed on the left side of the page, and it provides information

on the editors, authors, useful links, how to get involved, videos, et cetera.

**DS:** Also, on the right side of various articles, there are two sections: one called “More Photos” that is a photo gallery and one called “Related Content” that may have videos or PDFs of books and readings that go with the topic of the article being read. There is also a whole section called “Videos” that is constantly being populated. We also want to collect audio pieces for the ESDA.

**Jeffrey Brown (JB):** The ESDA has been live for almost two years now; how has the response been? What are the more popular categories?

**DS:** Our visitors have been very enthusiastic! They have been motivated to go through their own photos, letters, and other historical documents, and they call us and want to donate what they find. The ESDA had nearly twenty-eight thousand unique visitors during the month of March 2022. That’s almost three times more than in March 2021. However, we want more people to be aware of and use [encyclopedia.adventist.org](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org).

As expected, given that the ESDA articles are mostly in English right now, most visitors are from North America, Australia, Western Europe, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and the Caribbean, but many visitors also come from South America, especially Brazil, and the Philippines. In fact, I am excited to see visitors from almost every country in the world!

**DT:** The beauty of the ESDA being online is that we have been contacted about changes that are needed. Before, with a print encyclopedia, changes would have been impossible until another reprint. With this fluid online format, we can make necessary changes easily.

**DS:** The most popular category is biographies, especially life stories of missionaries. The next most popular category is country articles that tell the history of how the church developed and grew in certain parts of the world. Issue articles also attract many visitors (e.g., Adventist views on science and religion).

**PG:** How does the ESDA team make sure that we have an accurate picture of what happened?

**DT:** We have very strong quality assurance measures in place. All ESDA articles are signed and include notes and sources. They have been carefully peer reviewed. The goal of each ESDA article is to be primary source-based, honest, comprehensive, and thoroughly researched. Our “History of Theology” articles, which are about our beliefs and the way they developed, are scrutinized by a special committee of theologians and historians.

It takes a lot of time to find proper peer reviewers. So, if there’s a pastoral professional reading this that has expertise in a certain subject and wants to be a peer reviewer, please reach out to us. That would be very helpful to us.

All that is important because the ESDA seeks to supply reliable information on Adventist history. At the same time, the goal of each article is to be fully understandable to both church members and the public.

**JB:** As you know, pastors are busy with many tasks. So tell us, why should the pastor stop and take the time to look at the ESDA?

**DS:** First, use the ESDA as part of nurture and retention. Many ESDA





stories showcase God's deep care for us and can lead someone to trust God for the first time or anew. Reminding members of God's personal interest in His people in the more recent past can rekindle a love for God. The ESDA shows how God led His church through challenging times and helped His people correct and learn from their mistakes, and all that can ignite hope and reconciliation.

Second, the ESDA provides fantastic materials for sermon illustrations, mission stories, youth and children's programs, and prayer meetings. It can be especially useful in narrative preaching. Go through the ESDA and find a story that can be used to strengthen the theme of the sermon. Hang your point on a story from Adventist history!

Teachers and pastors can have a week of prayer about God's wonderful leading of His people in recent history and base their sermons on the ESDA articles from their territories and use many photographs on the ESDA website for visual presentations. Do you have the next children's story? Visit the ESDA for an abundance of motivational and captivating stories!

Third, church administrators, evangelists, and others who minister to people worldwide can use the ESDA to learn about the regions that they visit. Articles in PDF format can be downloaded from the ESDA website and shared in places with no internet access.

**DT:** We've heard reports of many local churches being revived because they now are reassured that what was done or happened in their part of the world matters to the world church.

Use the ESDA to encourage people to get involved in preserving their Adventist heritage and local church history. Get your young people excited about what happened in their area and be inspired to share God's love like others have in the past. Have them talk to the elders in the church, write their church's history, and collect photos, old bulletins, and other materials to tell their church's story. It will not be something for the ESDA, but it will bring the church together.

**DS:** Yes, we have over nine thousand photographs on the ESDA and counting. Many of them have never been seen before as they were found in the archives of various institutions or belonged to families who recently shared them. So, there's a lot there that can be used as literal illustrations for preaching and teaching.



**ESDA** ENCYCLOPEDIA  
OF SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTISTS

More than 3,500 articles and 9,000 photographs featuring Adventist missionaries, evangelists, institutions, events, and beliefs.

[encyclopedia.adventist.org](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org)

**JB: Would the ESDA be helpful for non-Adventist visitors as well?**

**DT:** Yes, we believe so. For those who have met an Adventist, encountered an Adventist institution, seen an Adventist TV show, or tuned into an Adventist radio station, and have asked the question, "Who are these Adventists?" one of our hopes is that a Google search would show at the top the result from [encyclopedia.adventist.org](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org) so that they get authoritative, balanced, reliable information. It also shows that we have nothing to hide.

**PG: I believe stories are important. Can you share a specific story or quote from the ESDA that you think will appeal to our readers?**

**DT:** Of particular relevance to your readers, the ESDA has many articles on pastors, evangelists, and administrators, like E. E. Cleveland, an exceptionally gifted preacher who trained thousands of pastors and ministerial students in evangelistic methods. It also has unsung heroes of pastoral ministry, such as David Sibley, who gave forty-one years of service as an evangelist and deeply respected administrator for the church in the South Pacific. These stories are insightful and encouraging.

**DS:** When E. E. Cleveland conducted his first series of evangelistic tent meetings in Fayetteville, North Carolina, storms blew the tent down twice, forcing



the postponement of opening night, and only fifteen people showed up when it finally arrived. But Cleveland refused to lower either the fervor of his preaching or his expectation of success. With no funds available, he reserved airtime for a radio broadcast live at nine-fifteen Sunday mornings on WNCP in Fayetteville, promising to pay when he arrived for the first broadcast. His church members responded enthusiastically with the funds needed for the broadcast. By the end of the three-month series, eighty-four people were baptized.

Then we have a special poem, “Miracle” by Alfonso Anderson, who, with his wife Mayte, devoted more than thirty years to pioneering mission work in Japan and in the Philippines, where they survived three years in the harsh conditions of World War II internment camps. In the first stanza, it says, “I ask for neither name nor niche in corridor of fame, . . . nor laurels in earth’s game.” Read the rest of Alfonso’s poem by visiting [encyclopedia.adventist.org](http://encyclopedia.adventist.org).

To honor their legacies, the ESDA must not be seen as the Adventist “hall of fame.” If we want to truly honor our pioneers and past missionaries, we should let their stories, of forgotten heroes, inspire us to action, unity, and faithfulness in the Lord’s work.

**JB: You have mentioned that this is really a worldwide project with over fifteen hundred participants. But what about your visitors who do not speak English?**

**DS:** As one of the main goals of this encyclopedia is to be a missional tool to “reach the world,” it becomes necessary to make the ESDA available in as many languages as possible, not just in English. I am happy to say that we’ve made progress with this and already have articles available in Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Korean. We are still looking for ways to add more translated articles and include more languages.

**DT:** If there are pastors or church members who are translators out there who are willing to volunteer their time for the church, please contact us! We would especially like to have articles about a particular part of the world available in the language they understand.

**PG: God said, “Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others” (Hab. 2:2, NLT). Thank you, Drs. Trim and Santrac, for giving our contemporary readers such an accessible resource for accurately conveying God’s message. Is there anything else you want our readers to know?**

**DT:** Yes. We ask that our pastors read the ESDA and recommend it to others. Also, we invite researchers, teachers, students, and members with expertise on many given subjects—not only historians and theologians—to contribute articles on many available topics. Email us at [encyclopedia@gc.adventist.org](mailto:encyclopedia@gc.adventist.org), and we will connect you with the regional editor in your part of the world where you can become part of this reference work.

We welcome help in other areas, too, including peer reviewing, proofreading, conducting interviews to collect historical information based on overall traditions, and submitting historical documents and photographs. We are also open to considering unplanned articles.

Above all, we invite your readers to use this resource in their ministry. We pray the ESDA will be a blessing to them and their members. 📖

*Follow the ESDA on Twitter @EncyclopediaSDA. ESDA tweets are in English, Portuguese, and Spanish.*

*Share your thoughts on this article by writing to [ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org).*





## Ongoing crises worldwide

**T**he Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is the international humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, serving in 118 countries. Churches, schools, and other groups have organized fundraisers and held special services for those affected by the conflict in Eastern Europe. The ADRA family has been overwhelmed with prayers, donations, and other support from people all around the world! Thanks to this support, the ADRA team in Ukraine has been able to provide essential items and cash assistance to the refugees from Ukraine receiving vital support in countries throughout Europe.

While the world's attention is on the continuing Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, others living in crisis conditions cannot be forgotten. Here are seven more countries where pastors and church members work with ADRA to help refugees.



**1. Yemen.** Yemen has passed the seven-year mark for conflict, with more than 20 million in need of humanitarian aid. More than four million people have been internally displaced, with nearly 140,000 more crossing into other countries. Yemen relies on Ukraine and Russia for 20 percent of their wheat supply, so hunger in the country will be affected by the Ukrainian crisis. ADRA is providing life-changing support for health, nutrition, livelihoods, protection, water, sanitation, and hygiene.



**2. Afghanistan.** In Afghanistan, 24 million people need humanitarian relief as they have endured repeated humanitarian crises. Women and girls are the most vulnerable in the country, facing restrictions around livelihood and education. While ADRA can share only limited information, urgent support is being provided.



**3. Venezuela.** Political and human rights issues, as well as lack of food, medicine, and services, have forced more than six million refugees and migrants to flee Venezuela. In addition, 8.4 million people affected by the crisis now require humanitarian assistance with medical care, food, and other urgent needs. The United Nations reports that this crisis is now the second-largest external crisis in the world. ADRA is serving those displaced from this crisis in multiple countries, including Colombia and Brazil, providing access



to medical care and other essential services and resources.



**4. Haiti.** Political and economic conditions have caused years of unrest within Haiti. Haiti's geographic location makes the country's people vulnerable to earthquakes, tropical storms, and hurricanes, which destroy food sources, livelihoods, and more. Those who flee Haiti are at risk of being targeted by smugglers, face extreme weather conditions as they travel, and experience discrimination. ADRA has been serving Haitian refugees in Colombia, Mexico, and Honduras with cash assistance, access to health services, clean water, and more.

**5. Ethiopia.** Escalating violence in the Tigray region caused by civil war has caused a full-scale humanitarian crisis. More than two million have been displaced by the violence in Tigray. In addition, hunger is on the rise in Ethiopia as four years of inadequate rainfall have left the country facing one of the worst droughts in decades. Ethiopia



depends on Ukraine and Russia for 90 percent of the country's imported wheat, so the Ukrainian conflict will have a further impact on hunger within the country. ADRA is serving those affected by the Tigray crisis in Ethiopia by providing cash for work opportunities and essential resources.



**6. Syria.** More than 10 years of conflict within Syria has led to destroyed cities and infrastructure, displacement for about half of the country's population, and an unprecedented poverty rate of 90 percent, according to the United Nations. The Syrian conflict has created 6.6 million refugees, most of whom have taken refuge in neighboring countries. Many Syrian children have only known war in their lifetime, and more than three million children are missing out on their education. ADRA has been actively responding since the beginning, providing urgent assistance and long-term solutions for education and more for those within the country and for persons displaced in multiple countries.

**7. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).** Unrest and cycles of violence within DRC have left its people with the effects of a complex, years-long humanitarian crisis. Close to a million have fled DRC and are being hosted in other African countries. Five million more have been displaced





within the country. Women and girls face increased risk of sexual violence, trafficking, forced and early marriage, and intimate partner violence. ADRA provides urgent support to those affected by this crisis within DRC and in other countries, including

Uganda, where care for refugees includes a focus on women and girls. [ADRA]

To learn more and assist those in need around the world, visit [ADRA.org](http://ADRA.org).

## The Great Commission alive and well

As the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (IAD), in 2022, celebrates its centennial anniversary, IAD vice president **Balvin Braham**, coordinator of evangelism and the centennial celebrations, reported that five regions, created and specifically tasked to deepen their focus on mission, have reached millions through in-person and online evangelism.

“The Holy Spirit has broken the evangelistic glass ceiling in many ways through intercessory prayer, the finest technical team, a global audience, and the baptism of souls,” said **Samuel Telemaque**, Sabbath School and Adventist Mission director for the IAD and the main coordinator of the online evangelistic series *Footprints of Hope*. Featuring **Glen O. Samuels**, the series was uplinked from the island of Jamaica and conducted throughout the Caribbean, Atlantic Caribbean, Dutch Caribbean, and Belize union territories. After six weeks, 4,213 persons joined the family of God. Baptisms from that region have totaled 5,219.

Numerous lay and pastoral campaigns were simultaneously conducted throughout the region of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Venezuela. A seven-day evangelistic reaping series, *Esperanza para un Mundo Enfermo* (Hope for a Sick World) was conducted by **Araldo Cruz** of the Southeastern Conference in Florida, United States. Baptisms from that region have totaled over 17,000.

The region of Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, also saw hundreds of lay and pastoral campaigns in small groups and other modes of public evangelism, concluding with a two-week series held in that region by **Melchor Ferreyra**,

IAD Personal Ministries director. “Don’t give up, there is still hope,” was the resounding message from the speaker. Baptisms from that region have totaled over 21,000.

Ahead of an evangelistic campaign for the five unions of the Mexican region, featuring **Edgar Benitez Gutierrez**, personal ministries director for the Central Mexican Union, thorough preparatory work has been conducted by pastors, lay preachers, and small group leaders. Baptisms from that region have totaled over 25,000.

Hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists gathered at the Béthanie Adventist Church in Pétion-Ville, Haiti, to hear **Vanel Louissaint** launch two weeks of online evangelistic meetings across the French-speaking regions of the IAD, including Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French-Guiana. A follow-up series will feature **Pierre-Maurel Fleurantin**. Baptisms from that region have totaled 8,663.

Baptisms for the division have totaled 76,086. “God continues to save those who each day are joining the church,” said IAD president **Elie Henry**, “and we say amen to that! Keep firm and constant in the work of the Lord Jesus, knowing that your labor is not in vain.”


[Nigel Coke and Libna Stevens, Inter-American Division News; Miqueas Fortunato, Gustavo Menéndez, Fabricio Rivera, Kayc James, and Balvin Braham] 



Photo: South Haiti Mission



## Life lessons of a preacher's kid

I am a “PK” (preacher’s kid) and, as is the case for many minister’s families, my family moved from time to time. Whenever my father accepted a call to pastor a different church, we would always have a special time of prayer that God would lead us to a house with neighbors to whom we could bring a blessing. And God always answered that prayer.

When we moved to Tennessee, my parents found a little house in the country. We had three neighbors. Within two weeks, my mom had gotten acquainted with all three of the neighbor women. And every day in worship, we prayed that we could bring a blessing to these neighbors.

Shortly after we moved there, I noticed a boy in the backyard of the house across the street. I saw him at a distance playing. But I was not able to meet him.

A few days later, a church member brought me a small bicycle, too small for his children but just my size. I was sure it was the best gift I had ever received. In the front of our house was a quiet, dead-end street without traffic where I could safely ride the bike. My mom stood

watching as I took the maiden ride down the sloping road to the cul-de-sac at the end of the street and then rode back home.

Mother gave me permission to repeat the ride, but this ride was unexpectedly interrupted by shouts, insults, and a shower of rocks from the neighbor boy. Surprised and frightened, I immediately turned my bike around and rushed home.

Disappointed and angry at having my fun spoiled, I blurted out an account of my mistreatment, but Mom already knew every detail, for she had watched the entire episode. I expected her to be upset, too, but she calmly replied that the Bible tells us just what to do under such circumstances. She reminded me that she had been praying for opportunities to get better acquainted with our neighbors so we could be a blessing, and she surprised me with the suggestion that this might be God providing an answer to our prayers.

We prayed together, and then she opened her well-worn Bible and read from Proverbs. “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD





**Phil Mills, MD**, is board chairman of Weimar University and resides in Hixson, Tennessee, United States.



shall reward thee” (Prov. 25:21, 22).<sup>1</sup> Mom then turned to the gospels and showed me how Jesus explained what this verse meant. “Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Luke 6:27, 28).


While I was thinking about what the Bible said, Mom told me about her visit with that neighbor boy’s mother earlier in the week. His father was an alcoholic and would yell and scream and beat the family members when he was drunk. The boy’s mother worked very hard for little pay, and often, the family had little food. While Mother was talking, my anger began to drain away, and I wondered if this family could be one of the reasons God had moved us to our new house.

Mother suggested that I give the neighbor boy some small gift. She had a pack of gum hidden away for a special occasion and thought this might be the right time to use it. With my mom, I walked across the street to the neighbor’s house. As we approached their property, the boy tried to hide in the backyard, but I called a greeting and told him I was bringing him a gift. Slowly he

walked toward us, appearing frightened. When he was close enough, I gave him the pack of gum.

That pack of gum brought about a friendship, and my parents were able to study the Bible with his family. That boy never again yelled or threw rocks when I rode my bike past his house. I learned that coals, warmed by the fire of God’s love, can change enemies into friends.

When my father got home and he and I went over the highlights of the day, I excitedly told him about how God had answered our prayers to have neighbors to whom we could bring a blessing. That prayer changed my perspective.

Over the years, I have thought about the daily family worship prayer to bring a blessing to our neighbors. That prayer was just as important for our family as it was for the neighbors. It shaped our perspective and focused our interactions. And it gave me a lifelong habit of praying to bring blessing to my neighbors. I have found it is a prayer God always answers. 



<sup>1</sup> Scripture is from the King James Version.



## “Head, heart, and hands”: Curriculum ideas for the local church

**H**ead, heart, hands. The alliteration is attractive to churches. So is the implied claim to complete Christianity. Fully-formed disciples are marked by what they know, love, and do.

In fact, the framing may be the most pervasive description by churches of their mission, particularly in my American context. But how does a church take that from rhetoric to reality? Here's my humble proposal to help good churches deliver on their great mission.

### Curriculum for developing the head

To be specific about developing the head, the target is greater knowledge of God. One way to make progress is to teach the congregation, primarily from the pulpit, much of the same subject matter that one would learn in a seminary or Bible college, though taught at a lay level.

So besides full coverage of the Old and New Testament, other sermon series would examine systematic theology, apologetics, hermeneutics, church history, worldviews, and world religions. A second pass at each message during the rest of the week might entail summary notes and sermon video highlights shared with the congregation via email and social media. “Read ahead” and “dig deeper” materials could also be valuable adjuncts for learning.

However, *engagement* is a key to education and retention, so how about two opportunities for interactive engagement with the topic each week? One, not surprisingly, would be the now-ubiquitous small group, where trained leaders (not just well-intentioned leaders) adeptly facilitate a discussion about the week's message. The other could be a weekly after-service meal where the only price of admission is that attendees discuss the pulpit message with those at their table. The church leadership team could also be available during this meal to respond to questions and illuminate the lessons. This is

among the most favorable moments each week to reinforce learning.

The intention is to bring a thorough understanding of Scripture and theology so that they are “always . . . prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give the reason for the hope that [they] have” (1 Pet. 3:15, NIV).

### Curriculum for developing the heart

People do what they *love*, not just what they know to be wise or right. In fact, sometimes we do what we love *despite* what we know, following our heart more than our head. That's why love for God, culminating in greater virtue, such as the fruit of the Spirit characteristics (Gal. 5:22, 23), is the aim of this second curriculum.

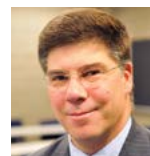
Among the discipleship models, Dallas Willard, in a paradigm that he calls “The Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth,”<sup>1</sup> postulates three interconnected pathways to growth: the action of the Holy Spirit (whose primacy is highlighted by placement atop the triangle), habitual devotional practices, and the perseverance through temptations and trials in ordinary life. To quote Willard, these are “the factors that can certainly lead to the transformation of the inner self into Christlikeness.”<sup>2</sup>

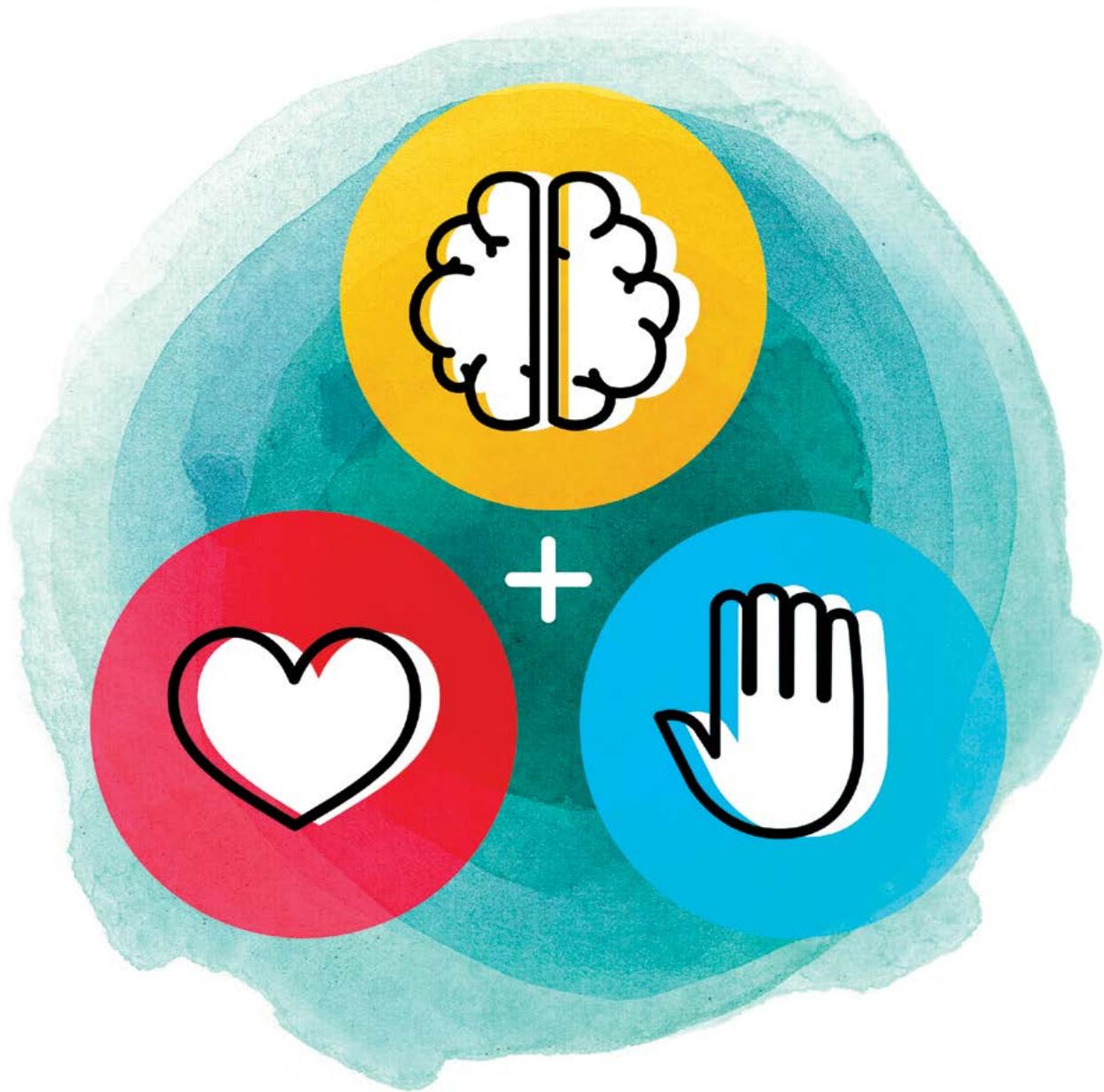
Willard's golden triangle offers practical direction to any church or any believer seeking a trustworthy process for spiritual growth. Moreover, rather than a process pursued in isolation, a small group can be an accelerator in this regard, as can the training workshops discussed next.

### Curriculum for developing the hands

In addition to curricula for knowledge and virtue, a third strand develops specific *skills* necessary to be disciples and make disciples. The delivery method might best entail church-sponsored workshops or Christian education classes that equip people to learn by doing.

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Pennsylvania, United States.





A nonexhaustive list of skills might include conflict resolution, marriage and parenting, faithful leadership, evangelism strategies, faith in the workplace, intercultural communication, and public theology (i.e., addressing contemporary issues). Also, within this curriculum could be skills training to reach specific segments of society (e.g., youth, ethnic groups, divorcees, refugees, the homeless, atheists, agnostics) as well as deep small-group leader deep training to ensure expertise in discussion facilitation.

Cumulatively, the vision for developing skilled disciples is to cultivate ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) capable of modeling the Christian way of life and pointing people to the God whom they boldly and winsomely represent.

### Total training

Imagine a congregation with so much knowledge of God that their insights win the day in

workplaces, schools, and even family gatherings. Imagine a congregation with so much love for God that they eliminate poverty in their community. Imagine a congregation so skilled in peacemaking that they bring reconciliation between disparate people and between people and God.

This holistic, total training of disciples need not be merely aspirational in our churches or patchy in its execution. Reframing each element as a learning objective and pursuing it through a rigorous, systematic curriculum may be wise stewardship, ultimately building better churches for boundless witness.



<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998), 347.

<sup>2</sup> Willard, 347.





## True North: A Prophetic Call to Faithfulness

Mark Finley, Clinton Wahlen, Ken McFarland, and Phyllis McFarland, eds.,  
Fallbrook, CA: Hart Books, 2022.

**T** rue *North*, written by 13 prominent Adventist pastors, evangelists, and scholars, is a strong, soul-convicting, heartwarming appeal to return to biblical teaching, values, and principles. The book covers fifteen subjects, including the great controversy; the relevancy of the sanctuary; faithfulness in mission; spiritualism; biblical standards; and the Second Coming, to name a few.

The aim of the book is to present biblical truth in the light of the Second Coming and make this truth relevant for our time. The book emphasizes that those who are grounded in these truths will not be surprised by events that shock our world in these last days. Instead, they will be empowered to help others to be joyfully ready to meet Jesus when He comes.

Each chapter presents the reader with powerful, heart-searching calls to faithfulness in the various doctrines covered, such as faithfulness to Scripture, faithfulness to Christ, faithfulness to His church, and faithfulness to His end-time mission. The authors were effective in convicting me of my need for strong faithfulness to Christ and His truths as revealed in Scripture.

I agree strongly with the words printed on the back of the book that summarize its ultimate aim: “As you read these pages, your confidence in God’s Word will increase, and your commitment to Christ and His mission will grow stronger.” After I read the book, my mind was challenged, my heart was thrilled by the love of God and the hope of the Second Coming, and I felt a strong desire to examine my life and ask God to mold me more and more in His image.

There is a tendency for most of us to grow cold in

**S. Joseph Kidder, DMin**, is a professor of applied theology and discipleship at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



our fervor for the Second Coming. I have felt that way, too, sometimes. This book helped rekindle my love for the Second Coming and urged me to prepare for heaven in the short time remaining.

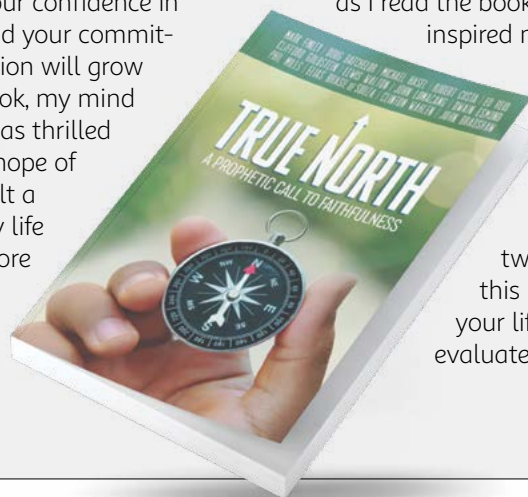
*True North* is easy to read and is logical in its flow, with solid biblical support and arguments. I do wish the book had more stories to illustrate the points and bring them home. However, Christ’s love is clearly revealed in every chapter. This emphasis on love drives the heart to move closer to the throne of grace and helps the reader make choices that will have an eternal impact.

One of the parts of the book I enjoyed was the “As You Begin the Next Chapter” feature. This page, which comes at the beginning of each chapter, provides provocative reflections and questions that set the stage for the chapter and prepare the reader for its content.

I asked two of my master of divinity students to read at least one chapter from the book and tell me how they felt about it. Their evaluation was that the book is beautifully written, easy to read, and could be used as the basis of a series of sermons on the doctrines of the church.

Even though I am familiar with all the subjects covered in the book, I felt that the presentations were fresh in their approach, challenging in their content, and heartwarming in their appeal. We are living at the edge of eternity, and our greatest need today is to prepare people to be ready for the Second Coming. *True North* does this effectively by moving the reader from a half-hearted, shallow experience with Christ to an all-out, solid commitment to Him and His mission.

I felt the need for deeper commitment in my life as I read the book. The chapters challenged and inspired me to move to higher ground spiritually. I highly recommend this book to everyone who wants a fresh look at what the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches, presented in a way that is relevant to the twenty-first century. Ultimately, this book will encourage you to live your life in the context of eternity and evaluate everything accordingly. 📖





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