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INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS



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HEART FOR IMMIGRANTS
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Ministry

International Journal for Pastors
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Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA
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Vol. 92, No. 10 © 2020

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COVER

316 Creative

LAYOUT

316 Creative

SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99;
Canada and overseas US\$47.00.
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Ministry® has been published
monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial
Association, General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists®. Ministry is a

peer-reviewed journal.

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Printed by Pacific Press® Pub. Assn.,
1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687
Standard mail postage paid at Nampa,
Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

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We Adventists have much to share. But we can't do it if we take "social distancing" to extremes.

Too late

Thank you, Pastor Arthur Edwin Gibb, for your well-written, inspiring column in the June 2020 *Ministry* magazine ("It's Not Over When It's Over"). I also traveled with my husband following his diagnosis of Alzheimer's. He, too, was happy and content when we were together. I love the method you are using to teach your friends who are not familiar with the Bible stories. It surely is "not over when it's over" as we continue moving forward with God's plans for our lives.

—Judy Crabb, MD, retired director of spiritual care, Adventist Health, Saint Helena, California, United States

Too far

Thank you for the article "Social Distancing: New Normal or Old Habit?" (Dave Livermore, June 2020). We lose much by refusing to fellowship with people whose "meat is not our meat," whose "cake is not our cake," and whose "drink is not our drink." After

more than 40 years in pastoral and institutional ministry, I can honestly say that some of my closest friends are those I've associated with in service organizations, professional associations, and ministerial fellowships.

When we hold back from associating with people who don't share our beliefs, not only do we lose important contacts in our communities, but they miss opportunities to know us as individuals and are more likely to repeat inaccuracies about Seventh-day Adventists. In decades of ministry, I've had the opportunity to visit in homes and hospital rooms, officiate in weddings and funerals, and generally be involved in community activities that I wouldn't have had otherwise. I regret none of it; in fact, I treasure it.

We Adventists have much to share. But we can't do it if we take "social distancing" to extremes.

—Stephen Chavez, president, Associated Church Press, and managing editor, *Adventist Review*, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Too harsh

I did not experience an Adventist childhood. In my 40 years in the church, I have seen and heard many "our Adventist childhood was harsh" comments and articles. Sometimes these comments are used to justify a lowering of the standards and a more worldly way of living in the church. As children, we have sinful natures and find any form of parental discipline irksome. The true Adventist way of living is, by the world's standards, conservative. There would be temptation for any Adventist kid to compare their life to the life of their worldly peers and to consider their parents to be over-the-top repressive.

However, on the other hand, I find strong evidence there were some parents who administered a very harsh and unloving version of our beliefs (Anne Fergusson, "Understanding Childhood Spiritual Abuse," August 2020). The church needs to find the right balance of maintaining Christian standards but in such a way that our children see and experience the love that God intended should infuse our principles and standards. 📧

—Tony Rigden, Ministry magazine website.



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associate editor
of *Ministry*.



Reform us again

The year 1863 is significant. Slavery in America officially ended. The Seventh-day Adventist Church officially began. And William Mackay penned the rousing hymn “Revive Us Again.”¹

As Protestants, our church pioneers recognized that we were heirs of the Reformation. With biblical justification, they suggested that reformation was a prerequisite for the outpouring of the latter rain. “Reform ye, therefore, and turn back, for your sins being blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19, YLT). “So change the way you think and act, and turn to God to have your sins removed” (v. 19, GW). This led to a definition and a departure.

A definition

Ellen White stated, “Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. *Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices.*”²

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently placed great emphasis on revival,³ its 2020-2025 strategic plan, *I Will Go*, encourages a corresponding emphasis on reformation. One of the plan’s objectives—“To enhance the transparency, accountability, and credibility of denominational organization, operations, and mission initiatives”⁴—parallels Mark Finley’s statement that, “Heaven’s call to reformation is a call to reevaluate every personal and corporate practice in the blazing light of God’s Word.”⁵

Our church pioneers humbly acknowledged that the unflattering letter to the church in Laodicea was describing God’s last-day church (Rev. 3:17). They saw spiritual blindness as both a legacy and a label—a label describing the church and a legacy describing Israel. “The minds of the Jews had become narrowed by their unreasoning bigotry.”⁶

A departure

The Spirit of God left Israel because of her

unwillingness to reform. Ellen White almost left the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a similar reason.

“I was confirmed in all I had stated in Minneapolis, that a reformation must go through the churches. Reforms must be made, for spiritual weakness and blindness were upon the people who had been blessed with great light and precious opportunities and privileges. . . . We hoped that there would not be the necessity for another coming out. While we will endeavor to keep the ‘unity of the Spirit’ in the bonds of peace, we will not with pen or voice cease to protest against bigotry.”⁷

For *I Will Go* to be successful, courageous reformation is needed.⁸ Mark Finley says, “The spirit of revival and reformation will lead every institutional leader and administrative committee to reevaluate the practices of the institution they lead in the light of biblical principles and the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy. They will ask, Does the institution I administer genuinely reflect the God-given principles and values of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?”⁹ I say, “Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Hallelujah, Amen! Hallelujah, Thine the glory!” Reform us again.”



- 1 William P. Mackay, “Revive Us Again,” 1867.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 128; emphasis added.
- 3 See this issue, p. 13.
- 4 *I Will Go* Strategic Focus 2020-2025, p. 19. <https://iwillgo2020.org/>.
- 5 Mark A. Finley, “Is ‘Reformation’ a Confusing Term?” *Adventist Review*, May 17, 2011, 6.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), 242.
- 7 *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 356, 357. The editors state: “This is the only known statement from the pen of Ellen White indicating that she might have lost confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization. The doubt which she expressed here was never repeated during the remaining twenty-six years of her life.”
- 8 Cf. www.adventist.org/articles/one-humanity-a-human-relations-statement-addressing-racism-casteism-tribalism-and-ethnocentrism. General Conference Administrative Committee, September 15, 2020.
- 9 Finley, “Is ‘Reformation’ a Confusing Term?”

JESUS



KPI 1.1

Increased number of church members participating in both personal and public evangelistic outreach initiatives with a goal of Total Member Involvement (TMI).

What the church needs to effectively evangelize the world

With the second decade of the twenty-first century being engulfed in crises, a key question is, what do people want or need from the church? Recently I wrote about “the evangelism diamond.”¹ In this model, the church first must pray for the Holy Spirit to lead in the lives of those who do not know God. Second, people desire practical help on their behalf. Third, people want friends from the church. And last, people need the Lord—to know Him and follow Him—something usually accomplished through personal Bible study and participation in a full series of evangelistic meetings.

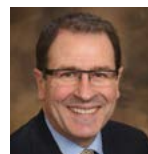
That is what people in the world must have to become people in the church. The big question now is, what do people in the church require in order to effectively offer these four things to the world? The answer to this question is just as crucial as that to the first question.

The church needs spiritual revival

I have spent years teaching pastors at undergraduate and graduate levels in different continents, and the first thing I tell them about evangelism is that the greatest challenge we face is not the condition of the world, the availability of resources, or the priorities of the church at large—it has to do with the spirituality of the members.²

We find the greatest secret in evangelism in Jesus’ own maxim: “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17, NKJV). When one sincerely analyzes the state of some

Ron E. M. Clouzet, DMin, is the ministerial secretary for the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, Gyeonggi-do, Republic of Korea.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Seventh-day Adventist local congregations today and the reason they win so few converts every year, it usually falls back on the members’ lack of spiritual commitment. They are too busy, too pre-occupied with living, and not interested enough in leading strangers to Jesus. If witnessing is sharing what we have seen and heard firsthand, the lack of Christian witnessing results from the fact that many may have not experienced much of Jesus firsthand recently. A casual relationship with God will yield only occasional opportunities for successful outreach. In that case, God will work mostly in spite of us. But a true, abiding relationship with Jesus will bring others to Jesus.

Ellen White asks: “Have you so deep an appreciation of the sacrifice made on Calvary that you are willing to make every other interest subordinate to the work of saving souls? The same intensity of desire to save sinners that marked the life of the Saviour marks the life of His true follower.”³ When members genuinely experience the love of God, they cannot contain it, and it will surely spill out to others. Didn’t the Lord Himself say: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38, NKJV)?

The apostle Paul once gave a long recitation of the incredible sacrifices he and his associates were willing to make so that the Corinthians could come to know Jesus (see 2 Cor. 6:1–11). He also revealed the key to accomplishing such sacrifices: “For the love of Christ compels us” (2 Cor. 5:14). That word translated “compel” means “to drive, to power on to a course of action.” The love of Christ is the engine that powers the Christian. It is what makes him or her willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary for the salvation of the lost. Our number one need to reach others is to know Christ as it is our privilege to behold Him—to experience His great love for us on a day-to-day basis. Then, it will be most natural for us to be soul winners for Jesus.

And from a practical perspective, how does that happen? By prioritizing a daily devotional

time with the Lord, time that leads to the assurance of His love and power. By participating in fellowship and small groups that help members come closer to Jesus. By belonging to an active intercessory prayer group and other ministries on behalf of others. And by enjoying clear pastoral spiritual leadership. While space prevents us from expanding on each of those points, I will say one thing about pastoral leadership. The Adventist Church participated in a research project, the largest study ever done on the spiritual and numeral health of Christian churches.⁴ Interestingly, it discovered that the single most important factor influencing the well-being of an *Adventist* congregation was the spirituality of the pastor.⁵ If the pastor is truly in love with Jesus, that fact will help the church significantly in its capacity to love outsiders.⁶ But the church must experience three other factors to be successful in offering the world what it lacks. They are subsets of the one we just talked about. If the first one becomes a true priority and reality in the church, the next three factors will naturally fall into place.

The church needs an outreach mindset

In speaking of an outreach mindset, we are talking about having a strategic plan, a blueprint of action. For example, I once pastored a congregation in California that offered about a dozen community events every year, such as stop-smoking clinics or stress-reduction seminars. By the previous December, they had published the dates, cost (if any), and how to prepare for each program. That required the organization of ministry teams to conduct each service: presenters, materials, media, advertising, resource development, helpers, and others. The church understood itself to be in the community primarily for the sake of outsiders, not for the sake of the faithful. It took time, prayer, and careful thought to reach that point, but when the congregation understood and accepted its missionary purpose, such planning to reach others effectively became much more of a natural process.

The key person in the process is the senior pastor or, in a small church, a lay director. Such leaders must be unequivocally evangelistic, otherwise the missional nature of the congregation will sputter along instead of running efficiently. Clearly portrayed in its vision and mission statements, mission must be foundational in the goals and objectives that the congregation sets out to accomplish every year. It must be the theme of the church board meetings and the primary

conversation topic of the elders. As the focus of the church's prayer warriors, it must be present in every Sabbath School class and it must be front and center every Sabbath from the pulpit.

The church needs evangelistic training

What else does the church need to successfully evangelize the lost? In many Adventist churches, evangelism simply does not take place and, if it does, it is mostly done by a visiting evangelist, who soon leaves. However, every church should offer a string of training events on a continual and consistent basis. For example, training on how to lead missional small groups. Many congregations have groups that consist of people with similar interests: painting, studying the book of Romans, or mothers of toddlers. What is lacking in many of them is the *missional* component. How does that group interest nonmembers to join it? Training to accomplish that goal is necessary and worthwhile.

Another example is training members how to make friends with nonmembers at community seminars. If a church offers a stop-smoking clinic for the community, often you will see a medical professional or another person leading the seminar with resources made available by the conference or an Adventist hospital. Members set up the sessions, promote them, and provide assistance. What they are often not trained to do is to make friends with the people who attend—and that is key to soul winning! How do you organize seating so that members can mingle with nonmembers? How do you start a conversation with a nonmember? What should you avoid saying that may create uncertainty or troublesome questions in the minds of the nonmember? How do you start a genuine friendship in just five short sessions?

You may say, "That's pretty sophisticated evangelistic training! Who does that?" Good question. But that kind of training is necessary. An option is to contact the conference or mission's personal evangelism department or check out Adventist resources on the topic.⁷ If all else fails, why not do it yourself? Reading, praying, checking what Ellen White may say about these topics, testing ideas with others, and using a good dose of common sense can become the foundation for a good class on how to train others. Someone has to start somewhere. God will be with the person with the right motivation to reach others.

Of course, other tried-and-true evangelistic training topics include how to give Bible studies,

how to reach missing members, how to pray for unbelievers, how to do evangelistic visitation, or how to mentor new converts. The key here is always the word *how*. Such training must involve theory and principles and must also lead to practical, doable steps.

The church needs resources and volunteers

In one of our churches, several hundred cards were sent by mail to the neighbors around the church, offering them the opportunity to study the Bible. Within a week, we received 54 requests. Dozens more came later. Unfortunately, we had not anticipated our next move, for we were still learning the art and science of outreach.

So, knowing that it is critical to follow up Bible study requests immediately, on Sabbath morning I held up all the requests. After making a simple appeal for members to follow up with those cards *that week*, I offered prayer. Then, I started reading the name and address of each card and said, “Who would like to give Bible studies to this soul for whom Jesus died?” Little by little, one here, another there, a couple from the back, people rose from the pews and came forward to take the cards. The members took all 54 cards in just a few minutes. Each soul winner pledged to follow up the people’s request that very week. We then prayed again, a prayer of thanksgiving.

The fourth and last requirement for church members to do effective evangelism in their community is adequate resources and volunteers. While that is rather obvious, note that it is not the first essential element, but the last. If the previously mentioned imperatives are met, this one will become automatic. People will give generously to fund the evangelistic ministry of the church and, perhaps surprisingly, will find the time for the personal effort fundamental for outreach. In one evangelistic church I pastored, the evangelism budget rose more than 5,000 percent in only two years because the first three factors already existed in the congregation. By the time we left to serve elsewhere, members were annually giving very substantial amounts. Spiritual renewal thus affected the members’ pocketbooks. In addition, nearly 80 percent of the book membership—not the Sabbath attendance average—became *involved* in some type of ministry. The Spirit of God surely was at work in that place.

The world needs four things from the church. But the church also requires four things—four

The church understood itself to be in the community primarily for the sake of outsiders, not for the sake of the faithful.

different things—to reach to the world effectively. Our most valuable resource to accomplish God’s mission is people. Members who are consecrated to Jesus and who have experienced the love of God will be powerful tools in the hands of the Holy Spirit to lead others to Christ.

This is God’s way.



- 1 Ron E. M. Clouzet, “The Evangelism Diamond: A Model for Successful Evangelism,” *Ministry*, August 2020, 10–13.
- 2 “The Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear?” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 6:370.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 7:10.
- 4 Begun in the 1990s, the initial study was massive, involving more than 1,000 churches in 32 countries, leading to the analysis of over 4.2 billion member responses. It surveyed many Christian denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. See Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington, MN: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), and Christian A. Schwarz, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (Bloomington, MN: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998).
- 5 See Russell Burrill and Tom L. Evans, *Creating Healthy Adventist Churches Through Natural Church Development* (Berrien Springs, MI: NADEI, 2003).
- 6 I choose here the term *outsiders* as used in the works of David Kinnaman, such as in *UnChristian: What a New Generation Thinks About Christianity . . . And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007). The word is more significant than the milder term *nonmembers*. Implying much more than simply not belonging to a particular Christian denomination, it underscores the considerable gap between what Christians regard as “the lost” and those who have accepted the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.
- 7 One consistently good source of materials for training is AdventSource (see adventsource.org). Another, of course, is the Adventist Book Center (see adventistbookcenter.com). A third one is contacting a ministry director from your local conference or mission. That person should be able to help with recommended materials, referrals, or even with leading the training intended.

OUT OF THE BLOCKS!

Inter-American Division responds to strategic plan

KPI 6.1

Increased church member involvement in fellowship and service, both in the church and in the local community.

Jeffrey O. Brown (JB): I have the privilege of interviewing Balvin B. Braham, D. Ed, who is assistant to the president of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (IAD), with responsibilities for evangelism and leadership development. Thank you, Dr. Braham, for spending some time with me.

Balvin B. Braham (BB): Greetings, Dr. Brown. And I bring greetings to *Ministry* readers from our president, Dr. Elie Henry.

JB: You came to IAD from a presidential role within the Jamaica Union. Dr. Trevor O'Reggio, prominent church historian from Andrews University, stated, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of the strongest religious organizations in the tropical paradise of Jamaica . . .

making Jamaica one of the highest per capita areas in the world for Adventist membership."¹ That was in 2008. Is this still true?

BB: At the end of 2019, the Jamaica Union had 322,666 members in a population of 2,811,000, which means that 1 in 9 Jamaicans is a Seventh-day Adventist. To God be the glory. But the territory of the Inter-American Division comprises Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and the five northernmost countries of South America. I say with pride in my heart, wherever you go across the IAD territory, you will find beautiful countries and wonderful people. We have over 3.5 million baptized believers, making it the division with the most church members.

JB: Tell us the secret of successfully sharing Jesus in the Inter-American Division!

BB: The secret? Ellen White said, "The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

those of ministers and church officers.”² Members are willing to be involved, the leadership of the church wants them to be involved, and they are counseled to do so by the Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. However, they need answers to “What?”, “How?”, “Why?”, and “Where?”

JB: Have you found any answers in the church’s *I Will Go* strategic plan for 2020-2025?

BB: Oh, yes! For us, *I Will Go* is not just a slogan. It is a package of strategic initiatives that answer questions that members have. It provides them with tools, resources, training, motivation, and inspiration, packaged to their individual context. Pastors, in dialogue with their local church board, may select from the menu of objectives and also develop their own initiatives to address issues unique to their local context.

JB: Ellen White states, “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, and only in case of emergency are they to execute in detail.”³ To what extent is the pastor key to the success of *I Will Go*?

BB: The local church pastor’s leadership role—to motivate, plan, organize, supervise, delegate, coordinate, assess, handle reports, and make appropriate determination—is critically important to the effectiveness of *I Will Go*. We have designed Action Plan Forms that allow pastors, working with the administration and the ministerial secretary of their local fields, to have their own *I Will Go* plan. Resources are provided through the local fields and other organizational levels to (1) recruit, train, and deploy persons to implement the initiatives, and (2) evaluate the processes and projects and take relevant action.⁴

JB: Employees are often fearful of evaluations. What kinds of assessment will you engage in?

BB: An evaluation is done for each proposed strategy simply to see if it fulfills the KPI. Each project is evaluated for short, medium, or long-term effectiveness. The division, unions, local fields, institutions, and churches should each make their own assessment or evaluation instrument and process to determine the extent to which initiatives. We believe that pastors should be evaluated, not based on somebody else’s program but based on the menu of objectives that they have chosen and developed, with the blessing of the local field administration.

JB: Let’s back up just a little. How did you get your various fields involved in the planning?

BB: We conducted a four-day strategic planning workshop. Titled, “Defining the Future of the Inter-American Division,” the more than 200 participants were divided into 15 focus groups to (a) listen to the Lord through prayer, Scripture readings, Spirit of Prophecy counsels, and sermons; (b) evaluate surveys conducted by the General Conference; and (c) adopt the *I Will Go* General Conference Strategic Planning document. This workshop was followed by meetings in the different fields with division officers and departmental leaders. A menu of objectives, KPIs, and initiatives for action plans were developed, processed, and adopted.

JB: Did you find *I Will Go* overwhelming?

BB: Not at all, because in IAD, we decided to focus on just three things: education, evangelism, and service.⁵

JB: Thinking of our colleagues in other divisions, just walk me through this. How did you decide on these three specific foci: education, evangelism, and service?

BB: IAD administration dialogued with church leaders in the unions across the Division territory regarding the needs and mission objectives in their local context. Those discussions resulted in the three priorities or focus areas as vehicles through which to package and dispense initiatives to fulfill and evaluate strategic objectives.

JB: Show me what this looks like with, let's say, evangelism.

BB: The emphasis of this focus is **inclusive evangelism** (see diagram below). It has clearly defined projects or action plans to reach, equip, rescue, retain and disciple people of all classes and is intentional to reach the upper and middle classes as well as traditionalists, millennials, adolescents, children, people of other faiths, and unreached people groups.



JB: From there you came up with specific initiatives or action plans?

BB: The action plans of *I Will Go – Inter-America* have been developed within the context of eight matrices: (a) strategic priorities; (b) specific objectives; (c) specific initiatives (names); (d) initiative implementation plan (including personnel and process: who and how); (e) time frame for the execution; (f) collaborating ministries involved in executing the specific initiative; (g) key performance indicator (KPI) alignment; and (h) budget implications.

JB: You mentioned listening to the Lord through prayer. Ellen White says, “Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning.”⁶ Is it possible to plan too much? And will this fire up young people?

BB: The General Conference has surveyed almost every demographic group within the organization—including young people—giving them the opportunity to share. Nevertheless, I love the section in *I Will Go* called, “Holy Spirit Objectives: To be defined as the Holy Spirit leads.” Amen! In IAD, we are driven by gifted, visionary young people (Acts 2:17). We believe they are fired up, and ready to go.

JB: Franky, I am amazed at the depth of your processes. Thank you, Dr. Braham. And, on behalf of our world church, thank you, IAD. Let me end with this: What propels IAD to so consistently push for greater heights of soulwinning?

BB: We find this statement truly motivational for mission: “Had the purpose of God been carried out in giving the message of mercy to the world, Christ would have come, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God.”⁷ Most of us are careless in managing the physical, mental, and social assets acquired through divine providence. But to go home to live with God requires that we plan strategically. Jesus wants volunteers in His service—Adventists must not hesitate to embrace the opportunity, and declare, “Here am I; send me” or, in other words, “I will go.”



- 1 Trevor O'Reggio, “Exploring the Factors That Shaped the Early Adventist Mission to Jamaica.” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 19/1-2 (2008): 230.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 352.
- 3 White, *Gospel Workers*, 197.
- 4 See Balvin Braham, *A Practical Guide to Evangelism how to Win and Keep New Members* (Columbia: Inter-American Division Publishing Association, 2014).
- 5 See Libna Stevens, “Inter America to Double Efforts in Evangelism, Community Outreach and Evangelism.” *Inter-American Division News*, November 18, 2018. <https://www.interamerica.org/2018/11/inter-america-to-double-efforts-in-evangelism-community-outreach-and-education/>.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992), 203.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1940), 36.

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by power, but by
My Spirit, says the
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ZECHARIAH 4:6, ESV

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KPI 6.5

All members and yet-to-be-baptized young people embrace and practice stewardship principles regarding time, spiritual gifts, and tithes and offerings.



True or false—Giving is better than getting

My family came to the United States as refugees with almost no worldly goods. Growing up for some years in South America, I observed my parents, outfitted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, sharing what little they had with people in the Andes who had even less. I learned early in life, as a pastor's daughter, that it really is more blessed to give than to receive.

In my teen years, life began to improve. But I noticed my parents as selflessly serving immigrants in a notoriously poor and crime-ridden part of Brooklyn, New York. I saw that giving involved the full surrender and joyful stewardship of the whole being: time, talents, and heart.

Such an example led me to focus on facilitating acts of asking, giving, and receiving. I have been blessed to have those efforts supported through a multitude of experiences, making me reflect on that most familiar of Bible texts memorized from childhood, one that has taken on the air of an aphorism. Jesus says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, KJV).¹

The statement engenders a variety of reactions, ranging from "Of course it's true—I've experienced it" to "You can't be serious!" Therefore, reactions to Doug Lawson's *Give to Live* did not completely surprise me.² While I resonated with the virtues of generosity, Lawson's admonitions did not receive a warm reception in all quarters, particularly

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among those who required research proof before they believed. In the ensuing years, such evidence has been forthcoming with head-turning results:

1. *Generosity results in better health.* Human beings appear to be genetically disposed to be happiest when they are selflessly giving to others. People who emphasize service to others and connection to community show a pattern of gene expression that results in less inflammation and stronger immunity.³ People tend to be unhealthy when they devote themselves to self-gratification. This is not surprising when we depend on God for all that we are, receiving anything we have as a blessing and a gift from God.

2. *Generosity rather than acquisition promotes happiness.* There is a strong link between the donation of money and happiness. Happy people are more likely than wealthy people to give to charity.⁴ A survey of 30,000 American households showed that persons who gave were 43 percent more likely to say they were “very happy” about their lives. The authors concluded that giving frees people from the acquisitive treadmill to find new meaning.⁵

Research demonstrates that sustained generosity—spending money to benefit others—promotes true happiness. “The study showed that generosity changed the activity in people’s brains in ways that increase feelings of happiness.”⁶

3. *Giving time has similar benefits to giving money.* A *Harvard Business Review* study showed that people who contribute time to something feel happier and more effective.⁷ A longitudinal study from the UK indicated that those who volunteered regularly appeared to experience higher levels of mental well-being than those who did not.⁸

4. *Altruism is a basic human motivation.* Neuroscientists at the National Institutes of Health scanned the brains of volunteers whom they asked to think about scenarios involving donating money versus keeping it for themselves. They discovered that altruism is not a superior moral faculty that suppresses basic selfish urges but is actually fundamental to the brain, hardwired in it and pleasurable.⁹ Research further revealed that altruism offers some personal perks

in terms of happiness and contentment. It does not matter how much money we have but rather what we do with it.¹⁰ Russell James, concludes, “In the end, brain science seems to be showing us that fundraising [or charitable giving] is, after all, a matter of the heart.”¹¹

Living in a pastoral household, my heart was touched by the blessings of giving. Pastors, we are looking forward to the second coming of Jesus. But don’t deprive your church, your community, or your children of the experience of full trust in God, with His graceful provisions, and the blessing of sacrifice. Researcher Philippe Tobler, from the University of Zurich, stated, “You don’t need to become a self-sacrificing martyr to feel happier. Just being a little more generous will suffice.”¹² God so loved the world that He gave... Can we give a little more?



1 A version of this article was published as, Lilya Wagner, “Today’s Major Donors: Preferences and Behaviors,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, October 15, 2015.

2 Douglas M. Lawson, *Give to Live: How Giving Can Change Your Life* (ALTI Publishing, 1991).

3 “[A] Genetic Guide to True Happiness,” *The Week*, Sept. 13, 2013, 24.

4 “Giving Tied More to Happiness Than Wealth,” *Philanthropy Journal*, Sept. 13, 2010.

5 P. Singer, “The Science Behind Our Generosity: How Psychology Affects What We Give Charities,” *Newsweek* 153, no. 10 (March 9, 2009): 48.

6 Research News, “Study: Spending Money on Others Makes Us Happy,” *All Things Considered*, March 20, 2008; Gretchen Reynolds, “Giving Proof,” *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 14, 2017, nytimes.com/2017/09/14/magazine/giving-proof.html.

7 “You’ll Feel Less Rushed If You Give Time Away,” *Harvard Business Review*, Sept. 2012, 28, 29.

8 “Benefits of Volunteering,” Northern Devon Healthcare, ndhtjobs.com/volunteering/benefits-of-volunteering/.

9 S. Vedantam, “If It Feels Good, It Might Only Be Natural,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2007, A1, A9.

10 “Generosity Breeds Contentment,” *The Week*, July 28, 2017.

11 Russell N. James III, “Brain Studies and Donor Decision Making: What Do We Know?” *Advancing Philanthropy*, Winter 2014. <https://afpglobal.org/advancing-philanthropy/advancing-philanthropy-winter-2014>

12 “[A] Genetic Guide to True Happiness,” 24.

Demographics and the future of the church

I was recently standing on the 50th floor of a downtown hotel in Bangkok, contemplating with astonishment the mass of buildings below. I had visited Bangkok for the first time in the 90s and, while it was not a small city by any means, I remember Bangkok as being distinctly less dense, with far fewer high-rises and highways crisscrossing it in every direction. This I can say for most cities I visit.

The fact is that explosive population growth is *the* defining reality of our generation. It has impacted the growth of travel, entertainment, businesses, pollution, technologies, wealth, and poverty all around the world. According to a United Nations projection, this growth will continue for

a few more decades to eventually peak at 11.2 billion toward the end of the century.

For the disciples of Christ, reaching out to these growing masses presents an ongoing challenge as we seek to fulfill the gospel commission. For even as we say that the ratio of Seventh-day Adventist members to the general population keeps declining from year to year, the reality is that every year, many more millions are born and die without getting the chance to hear about their Savior.

An empty planet

Given this paradigm of uninterrupted growth, great was my surprise when I came across the book *“Empty Planet: The Shock*

KPI 2.6

Each division, with the assistance of the Office of Adventist Mission, identifies and acknowledges all major unreached or under-reached majority populations in evangelized countries in their territories, and reports annually to the Global Mission Issues Committee on efforts to reach them.

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*of Global Population Decline.*¹ Authors Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson argue that far from having another 80 years or so of uninterrupted growth ahead of us, we are quickly entering into a stage where populations are set to level off and diminish, and in some regions of the world, implode. If so, it will have massive implications not just for the world in which we live but also for the church and its mission. But how could that be?

The laws of demographics are now well understood; population statistics can be projected well into the future with a high degree of probability. After all, we know how many of us are around now; what life expectancy can be expected in every country; and increasingly, we understand what makes people decide to have babies or not.

We also know that every country follows a similar pattern that can be defined in five stages, which are like waves that wash over the world in what is called the demographic transition. All societies go from “high birth rates and high death rates” to “low birth rates and low death rates” over time. Some have done so over two hundred years, and others are doing it in a few short decades. The population boom we have witnessed in the last hundred years was due to advances in sanitation and health that lowered the death rate faster than it did the birth rate.

This was noticeable in terms of an increase in the life span and a decrease in infant mortality. More children survived, who, in turn, produced more children who survived as they grew up, and so on. But eventually, with an increase in the standard of living and a few other factors that came into play, this dynamic is being reversed in more and more countries to the point where we now have aging populations producing fewer children, who, in turn,

produce fewer children, until the population declines as a whole. This dynamic is already at work in much of Europe, while more and more countries of Asia are also caught in that downward spiral. For a society to sustain itself, it needs a fertility rate of 2.1 (called replacement rate), meaning that, on average, every woman needs to give birth to 2.1 children, taking into consideration that some die prematurely while others cannot have children. But in several countries, that replacement rate has plummeted in the last decade.

A graying Europe

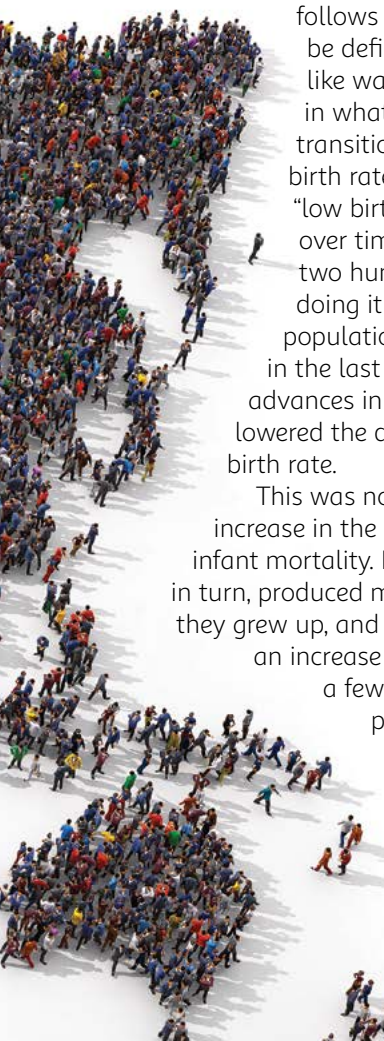
Demographers and social planners are sounding a warning about the future of Europe. The United Kingdom has a fertility rate of 1.8, and many countries are below that average, such as Greece (1.3), Italy (1.4), Romania (1.3), and Slovakia (1.4). Germany is expected to lose 19 percent of its population by 2050,² while Russia’s population is expected to drop from 143 million to 107 million. Bulgaria has already shed 2 million of its people since 1989 (-23 percent).

As church leaders, we can already picture the impact it has on the church. It is much harder to grow the church in a declining society. Older people are more set in their ways, more conservative, and more difficult to win to Jesus. Our aging churches also have fewer children and are therefore less attractive, less dynamic, and less likely to be successful in winning people for Christ.

But there are two illuminating stories from the research conducted by Bricker and Ibbitson that make for interesting reading.

A faltering Asia

The first story concerns population decline in Asia. Japan’s population has already started to decline and is currently the oldest on earth. More than a quarter of all Japanese alive today are seniors. This is unfortunately already playing out in the church to the point where the local leadership, in partnership with the General Conference (GC) Secretariat, has embarked on a



careful and ambitious church-planting program called *Mission Unusual Tokyo*. Its goal is to start 300 small groups and plant 30 house churches and 2 centers of influence in the central part of Tokyo with the help of GC-placed mission teams working in cooperation with the local leadership in a disciple-making format.

This is not a short-term evangelistic effort but a long-term undertaking stretching over a decade. Then, in 10 years' time, Korea is predicted to take over Japan as the world's oldest society. This too will have a high impact on our seven hundred churches there and their ability to reach out and grow. But where things will be interesting to watch is in China.

Until 2013, China enforced a one-child policy to curb its billion-plus population. But realizing its negative impact on the future, the government rescinded the law in 2015 in the hope of seeing an uptick in the number of births. Instead, the number kept plunging. Why? The reasons are multiple, but three of them play an important role in China as well as around the world, and they make a reversal almost impossible.

The first one is urbanization. While children are an asset in the countryside (more hands to help with the chores), they become a liability when the parents move to the city, where the children need to be educated at great cost. The world is urbanizing rapidly, and this is not likely to change. The second reason is that women are getting better educated, and the more educated women are, the more control they have over their lives, bodies, and reproductive choices. Again, this is not going to change. The third reason is the waning influence of family and religion. Both have been powerful factors to encourage large families. But with secularization and greater economic mobility and independence, the influence of both has diminished and, therefore, also the urge to have large families.

So, while the government can try to implement policies that help families, these do not produce lasting change in the overall trend and will not produce drastic improvements in the fertility rate. Cities such as Shanghai and Beijing have a fertility rate of 1.0 or less, and this is now baked into society and its structures: small apartments, high cost of living, two-earner families, and the love of personal indulgences make it almost impossible for the Chinese to reverse this trend. As a result, "the Middle Kingdom will have a population of just 560 million by the end of the century," according to Bricker and Ibbitson.³

China has had a tremendous impact on the world through its astounding growth, leading some to say that "the number of Christians in Communist China is growing so steadily that by 2030 it could have more churchgoers than America."⁴ Fenggang Yang, professor of sociology at Purdue University and author of *Religion in China: Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule*, says, "By my calculations China is destined to become the largest Christian country in the world very soon."⁵ How China and the world will be impacted when China's population declines may be too early to tell, but if these calculations hold in spite of the loss of population, it may mean that in a few decades, China could be mostly Christian—an astounding triumph for the gospel!

A surging Africa

The second story is that Africa's population will continue to grow until the end of the century. Its population could go from 1.3 billion today to 2.5 billion in 2050 and 4.3 billion by the end of the century! It means that Christianity will be black, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church will largely be African, not unsurprising when we consider that already in 2015, greater than one out of two Seventh-day Adventist baptisms worldwide took place in Africa. Based on current trend lines, one out of two Seventh-day Adventist members will live in Africa as early as 2033.⁶ The implications are that African membership will assume greater responsibilities in the world church, both in financial support and in the provision of well-trained, world-class leadership. Because there is a high correlation between population growth and church growth, we can expect church growth in Africa to continue well into the future, while other parts of the world will be retrenching—including North America.

A diversifying North America

At 1.9, the reproductive rate in the U.S. is short of the replacement rate, but the country makes up for it through immigration. Immigration has always been an engine for growth in the past, contributing to both economic and church growth. Were it not for that factor, membership would have already leveled off a couple decades ago. The question is, how long is immigration going to remain a factor for growth in general, and for U.S. church growth in particular? Starting with the economic crisis of 2008, "more people have gone back to Mexico and Latin America than have come north to the U.S. Researchers

studying the phenomenon cite a weakening American economy, greater availability of jobs in Mexico, and the declining Latino fertility rate.”⁷ Policies coming out of the U.S. administration further cloud the prospect for immigration into the U.S., legal or illegal. This is presumably a short-term issue, for the strength of America relies in large part on the strength of its population. Bricker and Ibbitson write, “Even at current levels, it is expected to grow from 345 million today to 389 million by 2050 and 450 million in 2100, a solid 100 million more than today, and closing in on a much-diminished China. Whatever else might be added to the geopolitical calculations, demographically the American advantage is decisive.”⁸

While the U.S. church still has opportunities to reach all those who are first-generation immigrants, from the Christian perspective it remains to be seen how much of America will still claim denominational affiliation. But assuming that immigration to the U.S. (and Canada) can continue unimpeded in the future, the church in North America will continue to grow, reflecting

the diversity of its population and honing its approach to cross-cultural issues.

The church adopting as its motto “I Will Go” may mean fewer overseas missionary assignments and more willingness to reach across cultural divides—across the neighborhood—or even across the street.



- 1 Darrell Jay Bricker and John Ibbitson, *Empty Planet: The Shock of Global Population Decline* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2019).
- 2 “Europe Population 2020,” World Population Review, accessed August 3, 2020, worldpopulationreview.com/continents/europe-population/.
- 3 Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 163.
- 4 Tom Phillips, “China on Course to Become ‘World’s Most Christian Nation’ Within 15 Years,” *The Telegraph*, April 19, 2014, telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html.
- 5 Phillips.
- 6 See ASTR: Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, adventistarchives.org/.
- 7 Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 149.
- 8 Bricker and Ibbitson, *Empty Planet*, 189.

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Embracing God's heart for immigrants and refugees

Several years ago, my [Joseph's] brother and his family came to the United States from Iraq as refugees. I contacted the pastor of the Adventist church near where my brother and family settled. The pastor went to visit them, along with two church members. The purpose of the visit was to get to know them and offer any kind of service the family might need.

The two church members continued to see them almost every week. They helped the immigrants open a bank account, get driver's licenses, and obtain health insurance. They showed them where different shops were in the community, took them to the doctor and dentist, and offered any other assistance they required. They also started English classes with them. By doing so, they won their confidence and started to study the Bible with them. Later on, they invited them to various church activities.

The Bible speaks about the "stranger that is within thy gates" (Exod. 20:10). It presents clear principles regarding the treatment of foreigners, the basis for practical suggestions regarding how the church or individual believers can effectively minister to immigrants and refugees.

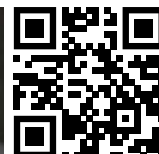
Prayerful self-examination

We cannot really minister to any group of people without first freeing ourselves from stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination toward them. Because of the widespread presence of so much prejudice (preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience; dislike, hostility, or unjust behavior deriving from unfounded opinions), we need to pray for God to liberate us from any such prejudice toward the immigrants and

KPI 2.7

Each division identifies all significant immigrant/refugee populations in their territories, has initiatives in place to reach them, and reports annually to the Global Mission Issues Committee on progress in reaching them.

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refugees around us. He desires that we be open to loving and helping every such person, irrespective of religious affiliation, race, or cultural background.

Once we have sincerely prayed for God to reveal to us a ministry to immigrants and refugees and asked Him to search our hearts and heal us of any prejudice, we must next pray that God will put us in contact with an immigrant or a group of them.

Courageous participation

Since several ways exist through which one could become involved in this ministry, we need to specifically pray for God to show us how He wants to use us. Because He has a big heart for the foreigner, He will definitely reveal to us how He would like us to minister in particular contexts. As we pray for God's revelation, we need to be prepared to obey His biddings.

We also need to pray for governments and lawmakers, that God would give them the wisdom to balance compassion with security concerns and justice with grace as they draft policies on immigration.

Lastly, the church must also pray for God to put an end to whatever has caused the worldwide refugee crisis. If Christians spent more time praying for God's intervention in the world's politics than they do posting on social media, they would make a far greater impact.

Compassionate education

Before we establish any preliminary contact with immigrants, we must learn about them from reliable sources. Because so much misinformation about immigrants and refugees fills the press and social media, the church needs to intentionally educate itself on immigration facts from trustworthy experts and agencies.

Then, as God helps us establish contacts with immigrants, we must be open to learning from them, listening to their stories. In listening to their stories, we will get glimpses of God's prevenient grace in their lives that we can then build on.

When God opens the door for us to share our faith, it is better to shift from the mindset of only

talking at them to that of learning and growing with them. At times, we can be so focused on being right about our religious positions that we fail to discover how and where God is already at work in their lives. We will have greater success if we learn to team up with God in His work of redemption.

Loving incarnation

According to the parable of the lost sheep, it is Christians, not the non-Christians, who are supposed to be the "seekers" (Luke 15:1–7). As such, "we are not to wait for souls to come to us; we must seek them out where they are. . . . There are multitudes who will never be reached by the gospel unless it is carried to them."¹

For that to happen, we should frequent those places that immigrants often visit, such as ethnic restaurants, shops, and other meeting places. As we mingle and interact with them, we will be able to build relationships as a springboard to sharing the love of God with them and, eventually, the gospel at an appropriate time.

Supportive organizations

Coming to live in the United States, for example, is a very stressful process for the vast majority of immigrants and refugees. Upon arrival, they most often encounter financial problems, language barriers, and cultural dislocation. To make that moment of transition less stressful, many community-based organizations have dedicated themselves to aiding immigrants. We can volunteer with such organizations and assist immigrants with such administrative procedures as going to the Social Security office, opening a bank account, finding affordable housing, enrolling children in school, and beginning a citizenship course.

Many organizations offer English as a second language (ESL) classes for immigrants. It is a practical and proven way to meet and establish friendships with them in our communities—volunteer at such organizations. If your community has no ESL program, start one at your church. Friendship is the first step in crossing the barriers separating us from people who do not look like

us or do not have the same religious beliefs and cultural practices that we do. One of the great things about a church-run ESL class is that the Bible becomes a great textbook. Such classes will strengthen friendships that can eventually lead to religious conversations.

Tactful conversation

When immigrants show interest in our faith, study with them in a small group. Do not be in a hurry to take them to church yet. Members of some religions are shocked when they come into Seventh-day Adventist churches because it is a different way of expressing religion than they are used to.

Tactful conversation will help us to be cautious about the timing of presenting biblical truth. Ellen White warns that “while the teacher of truth should be faithful in presenting the gospel, let him never pour out a mass of matter which the people cannot comprehend because it is new to them and hard to understand.”²

More than words and arguments, our way of life is the best testimony we have to convince others that we are religious people. Our prayer life and handling of the Bible and other religions’ sacred writings show our love for God and respect for others. Furthermore, our conduct toward the opposite sex, our unselfish and unconditional care for people in need, and the inclusion of religious topics in our conversations are all part of a package that people from other religious backgrounds see as marks of being a truly religious person. Ellen G. White reminds us that “the strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”³

Empowering conversion

Immigrants and refugees encounter a great deal of loneliness since they have lost their previous support system. In their loneliness, many of them may feel that God has forgotten them.⁴ They also often lose hope for a brighter future. Church members can serve as social and spiritual support to them either by visiting them or inviting them to the social and spiritual activities of the church. Ellen White rightly admonishes that “a Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts, which elevate and ennoble the most sacred message that has come to our world.”⁵

The goal of outreach is not dependency but empowerment. Converts from immigrant

communities know their own people better than we do. They are best equipped to speak to them in their heart language and culture. Many vibrant Seventh-day Adventist immigrant congregations started this way in the United States. The North American Division Adventist immigrant and refugee ministries has identified, recruited, trained, and equipped potential immigrant leaders. Such training will often result in a branch Sabbath School that eventually will grow into a church. This has been a very successful method of reaching the Karen people in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Indiana. Church leadership is using the same strategy with other immigrant groups.

Equip missionaries

Finally, what about those who arrive from overseas with the intension of going back to their homelands, such as students and businesspersons? Ellen White connects our work among the temporary dwellers on our shores to evangelism.

“Many of these foreigners are here in the providence of God, that they may have opportunity to hear the truth for this time, and receive a preparation that will fit them to return to their own lands as bearers of precious light shining direct from the throne of God. . . .

“Great benefits would come to the cause of God in the regions beyond, if faithful effort were put forth in behalf of the foreigners in the cities of our homeland. Among these men and women are some who, upon accepting the truth, could soon be fitted to labor for their own people in this country and in other countries. Many might return to the places from which they came, in the hope of winning their friends to the truth. They could search out their kinsfolk and neighbors, and communicate to them a knowledge of the third angel’s message.”⁶

In many countries, such as Yemen, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, Christians cannot freely preach the gospel. It is therefore vital that we meaningfully connect with all foreigners from such restrictive countries in the hope of making disciples who will then be able to do missionary work in their homelands when they return to places where very often no Christian missionaries are able to go.

Many immigrants come as international students, businesspeople, or refugees. By having a loving, selfless, and intentional ministry, we will surely see how God fulfills His plan as He leads such individuals to our neighborhoods and doorsteps.

Christ's hands

My [Joseph's] brother repeatedly told me how much my family appreciated the care and love the Adventist church showed them. It is an example of what a church can do to alleviate the difficulties of refugees and immigrants in various contexts. According to Ephesians 2:10, Christians are "God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (NIV). As followers of Christ, we pass on His love and compassion when we show concern and hospitality to others, especially to strangers and the less fortunate.

Proverbs 14:31 and 19:17 state that we honor God whenever we extend kindness to the needy. That may be one of the reasons why Jesus said that when we give a banquet, we should focus on those who cannot repay us (Luke 14:13). Let us never forget the following biblical teaching in our dealing with strangers: first and foremost, we need to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39), and our "neighbor" is any human being in need of a helping hand no matter what that person's citizenship, race, or gender (Luke 10:25–37).

This is the heart of our judgment-hour message. Ellen White states, "When the nations are gathered before Him, there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering."⁷ The essence of Christian hospitality is to be Christ's hands wherever and whenever we encounter people.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 229.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 202.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), 470.
- 4 White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 232, 233.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teaching* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1922), 74.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1925), 200.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 637.

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Crossing the world— or crossing the street?

The killing by police of George Floyd, an unarmed black person in the United States, has caused the flag of racial awareness to be raised all over the world.

Some years ago, a similar death caused pastors in the Saint Louis metropolitan area in the United States to take some unprecedented steps to foster empathy and promote unity.¹ Often when the news cycle shifts and the spotlight goes away, enthusiasm wanes and programs die. Not so with the Adventist Ministers and Pastors of St. Louis (AMPS—a play on words addressing a power that comes from doing things together that does not exist alone).

Some seven years later, 15-plus churches of different ethnicities still find fulfillment in fellowshiping and serving together. What has sustained the momentum and are there lessons that can benefit the global church?

Barriers come down

The Saint Louis metropolitan area is home to 2.8 million people. Some churches are Caucasian; some are predominantly African American; some are of Spanish, Korean,

Haitian, or other ethnicity; and others are multicultural. The 15 Seventh-day Adventist churches are cared for by 11 pastors working in four conferences: Iowa-Missouri, Central States, Lake Region, and Illinois.

While Scripture acknowledges “diversities of operations” and “differences of administrations” (1 Cor. 12:5, 6), we saw that Scripture does not uphold diversities of unity or differences in love. We recognized that love and unity were not problems of the organizational structure; they were problems of the human heart. For barriers between races to come down, it became clear that Christians should begin with dialogue, follow up with fellowship, and continue with cooperation in reaching others for Christ. That is what we did in Saint Louis—and that is what continues to happen.

All over the world, people congregate according to proximity, worship style, age, ethnicity, or relevance to their own experience. Some persons comprising a recent immigrant population may venture to integrate with the majority population. Others, after a hard week, often in unfriendly environments, may find solace worshiping with persons having similar stories, led by a pastor who understands their experience.

We maintain that “their” story must also be “our” story. Scripture says, “But God has harmonized the

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

whole body by giving importance of function to the parts which lack apparent importance, that the body should work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another. So it happens that if one member suffers all the other members suffer with it, and if one member is honored all the members share a common joy" (1 Cor. 12:26, Phillips). We understood that Isaiah 58 requires us to enter into the pain of the oppressed. But how can the hand know the foot when opportunities for fellowship are undesired or untried?

From streets to homes

After the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, at the hands of police, Adventists of differing ethnicities in the Saint Louis area came together to walk the streets of Ferguson, knock on doors, and pray with people. What a glorious sight it was for us to see black, white, and other ethnicities, walking hand in hand. What people did not see was fellowship that extended from walking together in streets, to walking together in parks. From parks into churches, from churches into restaurants, and from restaurants into homes. For over seven years, we have been

blessed to fellowship with the following menu of activities:

1. Monthly pastors' meetings (Relationships are enhanced by fellowship.)
2. Pastors' prayer meetings (Be prepared to work hard at synchronizing schedules!)
3. Quarterly citywide prayer meetings for all church members
4. Citywide camp meetings and evangelism conferences
5. A lay-led, cross-cultural mission committee initiating mission projects within the area

A sustained effort

How can I (David) ask society to change its values if we in the church are not modeling change by demonstrating that people from different ethnicities can come together in loving fellowship and service? Ask yourself, to what extent does my congregation minister with believers who are different from our own?

With AMPS, we are not talking about uniting around a one-time

KPI 6.6
Church members exhibit cross-cultural understanding and respect for all people.

event—or even just coming together for fellowship, though it started that way. We are talking about a sustained effort of not only pastors but the members of those churches coming together to build relationships, know each other, and—this is the difference—do ministry in the community together. Not a one-time event, but ministering side by side on a regular basis.

The first step is coming together. After relationships are built, then comes doing ministry and evangelism together. Before we go into all the world, let's go to the congregation next door. We will go into all the world, but will we cross town to minister alongside the church with a different cultural makeup from our own?²

Taboo subjects

What I (Bryan) have taken to heart from being a pioneer of the AMPS movement has followed me to the Kansas City area, where the pastors are working, fellowshiping, supporting each other, and uniting our churches in ministry. It takes a relationship to talk about the taboo subjects that our society is dealing with; therefore, we need to stop talking and start doing. We had open and sometimes uncomfortable conversations about prejudice, protests, and privilege. Sometimes God has to bring us to the point of opening our eyes to baggage that we carry, blind spots in our Christian experience that could possibly keep us out of heaven.

The people are ready for this type of leadership. How do I know? I know because, as an African American pastor graduating from a predominantly white school, I was told by a conference president that his constituents were not ready for a black pastor. What he did not know was that I was the student pastor of one of his churches, and they loved my wife and me so much that they requested us to continue our ministry after school was out. We did continue our ministry there, and the relationship was fantastic. People are not looking for a pastor with or without color; they are looking for a good pastor! This cross-cultural church movement gives our churches a chance, irrespective of organizational structures, to establish the unity that Jesus prayed for in order to execute the ministry Jesus yearned for.³

Third angel's message

It became clear to us that this was present truth: "I have no fears of workers who are engaged in the work represented in the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. This chapter is explicit, and is enough to enlighten anyone who wishes to do the will of

God. There is plenty of opportunity for everyone to be a blessing to humanity. The third angel's message is not to be given a second place in this work, but is to be one with it. . . . This work is to be to the message what the hand is to the body."⁴

If pastors are to lead, members are to follow: "I cannot too strongly urge all our church members, all who are true missionaries, all who believe the third angel's message, all who turn away their feet from the Sabbath, to consider the message of the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah. The work of beneficence enjoined in this chapter is the work that God requires His people to do at this time . . . the nearer we approach the end, the more urgent this work becomes."⁵

The temptation is to believe that you have done enough; do more. Stop sitting down, expecting someone else to do it. Do not wait for the conference to organize something. Strike while the iron is hot. The work will not be easy—get up and do what God is calling you to do.

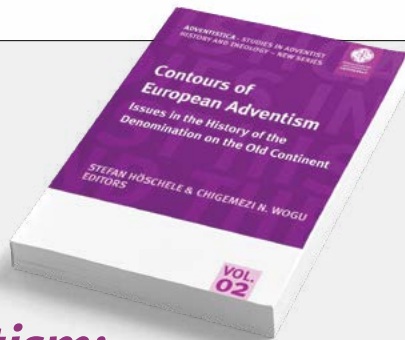
We close with the words of the beloved Elder Charles Bradford: "And when we with pen and voice and loving example, condemn every practice that smacks of prejudice and racial superiority, the world will have demonstration here and now (not by and by in the Kingdom of heaven) that the third angel's message breaks down every barrier and creates the new man in Christ who is neither Jew nor Greek, black or white. It is in our power as leaders of the flock, to not only look forward to but hasten that day."⁶



- 1 See David Klinedinst, "Unity and Collaboration in Urban Ministry," *Ministry*, February 2018, 10–12.
- 2 See an interview on 3ABN TV at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FikImyEt0_Y&list=PLeFIDisZ08E2kqPfhztz7GpWUFu7ag&fbclid=IwAR1mf01QET_9nP2jrT7KpdlBWXqSUdoWuMBxBNSVSxHyFCwsbgKQ05-5-QE.
- 3 We would like to recognize the following pastors, past and present, who inspired this article and were part of Saint Louis's journey toward unity and collaboration: Bryan Mann, pastor of Northside church; Joseph Ikner, former pastor of Berean church; Charles Osborne III, pastor of the Berean church; Fred Montgomery, pastor of Agape church; Claval Hunter, pastor of Lighthouse and Tabernacle of Praise churches; Jae Wook Lee, pastor of Korean church; Rob Alfalah, pastor of Saint Louis Central and Mid Rivers churches; Vic Van Shaik, former pastor of Saint Louis Central church; Robb Long, associate pastor of Saint Louis Central and Mid Rivers churches; Ken Olin, pastor of West County and Southside churches; Robb Lechner, former pastor of West and Southside churches; and Tony LaPorte, former pastor of Mid Rivers and Spanish churches.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 33.
- 5 White, *Welfare Ministry*, 30.
- 6 Charles E. Bradford, letter to General Conference president R.R. Figuhr, 1964.



RESOURCES



Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination on the Old Continent

edited by Stefan Hörschele and Chigemezi N. Wogu (Möckern-Friedensau: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020).

Steeped in the valleys of secularism, pluralism, relativism, humanism, intellectualism, and unbridled dictatorship, European Adventism has survived—but not unscathed. Stefan Hörschele and Chigemezi Wogu have collated impressive essays from 21 contributors highlighting the missional, violent, and public service contours that Adventism on the Old Continent has encountered.

All but 3 of the 21 contributors are originally from Europe, making this a history of a people told by its people. Denis Fortin introduces the volume by noting how this minority and largely unpopular denomination has positively influenced other Christian groups, governments, and global Adventism.

Part one thoroughly examines the triumphs and challenges of the advancement of Adventist mission in Europe. Gilbert Valentine reappraises John N. Andrews's incipient European missionary service vis-à-vis its success and fallouts. Yvonne Öster evaluates the impact of early Scandinavian missionaries and the application of their methodological insights in contemporary contexts. Sergo Namoradze documents the dogged determination of pioneer Adventist missionary efforts in Georgia. Wogu demonstrates how some European Adventists missionaries developed their own contextual methods.

Petr Činčala advances the plausible argument that to reach the secular and unchurched in Europe, workers should employ an emergent, need-oriented lifestyle, or organic evangelistic method, especially in European territories where Adventism is


experiencing declension. Ronald Lawson discusses the dynamic impact on Adventism of immigrants in England, France, and the Netherlands. Part one ends with Jón Stefánsson's unique country-by-country study of European Adventist hymnology.

Part two reenacts the colossal violence and persecution that enveloped European Adventism. Adrian Neagu and Eugene Zaitsev recount the ordeals of Adventists in Romania during the interwar period and in the USSR during World War II, respectively. Michal Balcar and Gheorghe Modoran examine the experiences of Adventists during totalitarian regimes in Czechoslovakia and that of Romanian Adventists under the communist regime, respectively. Daniel Heinz recounts the legacies of Adventist martyrs in Europe.

In part three, Bruinsma, Pearson, Thieme, Rimoldi, Sauvagnat, and Hörschele show how Adventism has significantly impacted the European public, governments, institutions, and other faith groups.

Rolf Pöhler argues convincingly and conclusively, in part four, that European Adventism has significantly enriched the global Adventist community, especially through its "cultural sensitivity," "Protestant identity," "conscientious adaptability," and "critical loyalty." Part four ends with Jón Stefánsson and Eudritch Jean's exhaustive and unprecedented working bibliography of European Adventism.

In this age of unequaled emphasis on gender parity, one wonders why at least one chapter was not devoted to appraising the role women have played in European Adventism. This would have expanded the reading circle of *Contours of European Adventism* and served as a source of encouragement to the many European Adventist women who have faithfully supported—and led—the church. This volume may serve as a springboard for future research and documentation in the aforementioned area.

This well-researched volume is recommended unreservedly as a major reference source in the discussion of European Adventism. The editors of this irresistible piece of history deserve commendation for their painstaking contribution to Adventist history. 

John C. Okpechi, a pastor from Nigeria, is a graduate student at Friedensau Adventist University, Möckern, Germany.





Seventh-day Adventist Church unveils global strategic focus

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES

In a live-streamed event on July 3 and 4, 2020, the Seventh-day Adventist Church unveiled its strategic focus for 2020–2025, entitled *Reach the World: I Will Go*.

Initially set to launch at the 2020 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, plans for presenting the initiative to the world church had to be adjusted due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Adventist Church president **Ted N. C. Wilson** said that, through this focus, church leaders hope to see “a worldwide, massive involvement of all our church members in their evangelistic and witnessing commitment during these last days of earth’s history.”

I Will Go, according to the plan’s website (iwillgo2020.org), is “a tool to help the church be more focused and effective in performing critical tasks. This strategic plan is rooted in the Great Commission found in Matthew 28, which calls Jesus’ followers to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ (v. 19, NIV).” The planning committee was chaired by **Michael Ryan**, assistant to the

president of the General Conference, in consultation with divisions of the world church. The plan’s name came from River Plate Adventist University in Argentina. Staff and students at the university were thrilled for the world church to use the name of its mission program, as well as its program’s student-designed logo.

Office of Adventist Mission director **Gary Krause** stated: “The plan is summarized in ten key objectives—four mission objectives, three spiritual growth objectives, and three leadership objectives. But another key objective has been added: ‘Holy Spirit Objectives: To be defined as the Holy Spirit leads.’ This is an acknowledgment that although we have made plans as good stewards, we need to be open to the Holy Spirit fine-tuning or adding to our mission priorities.”

According to the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research director **David Trim**, almost unprecedented research from all 13 world divisions informed the direction for this new initiative, including “The Adventist Pastor: A World Survey,” conducted by **Roger Dudley** and **Petr Cincala** of the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University.

Research efforts will continue through the next five years to evaluate the plan’s effectiveness and inform the focus for the next quinquennium. [Adventist News Network]

Historic baptism in Breath of Life evangelistic campaign in Tanzania

CHATO, TANZANIA

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania gained 16,706 new believers after a revival conducted by **Carlton Byrd**, speaker/director of the Breath of Life television ministry, the largest baptism in the ministry’s history.

“This revival is another testament to God’s miraculous power!” remarked Byrd. “The Spirit of God knows no limits and reaches far beyond our

ability and imagination. This revival far exceeded what I could’ve ever imagined was possible. I am very grateful for what God has done.”

East-Central Africa Division (ECD) executive secretary **Alain Coralie** and **Emanuel Pelote**, ASI director and assistant to ECD president **Blasious M. Ruguri**, worked to facilitate contact with Breath of Life for the campaign. ECD communications director **Prince Bahati** and the ECD Media Center supported the Breath of Life nightly meetings, broadcasted to more than three thousand satellite locations across the country via internet livestream, Hope Channel Africa TV, and Morning Star radio. The ministry team included sign language interpreters and Swahili

translators, with French available through audio devices. Assistance was also provided by **Musa Mitekaro**, ECD ministerial secretary.

In the week leading up to the revival, a health clinic provided free health services to more than two thousand in Chato and surrounding areas. At the first baptism of 256 persons in Chato, anxious new believers walked to the lake, home to many crocodiles. Safety nets were placed in the water with lookouts stationed alongside. Undeterred by the danger, the new believers were baptized. Utilizing the Swahili theme “Mungu Kwanza,” meaning “God First,” evangelist Byrd admonished listeners that when God is first, nothing is impossible. The twentieth Breath of Life Seventh-day Adventist church in the world was organized, the first Breath of Life church on the continent of Africa, to be constructed by Global Vessels Inc., based in Huntsville, Alabama, United States.

Success was due to the efforts of the North Tanzania Union Conference, the South Tanzania Union Mission, the Association of Tanzanian




Adventist Professionals and Entrepreneurs, and the Tanzanian Adventists in the United States (TAUS). **Michael Mwasumbi**, president of TAUS, enthused, “The fact that this was done in a small town proves that technology works. It also shows that the people are ready and willing to respond to the Word. . . . I’ve never seen anything like this before.” [NAD News/Regional Voice]

Thousands make decisions for baptism through Escrito Está

In April and May 2020, **Robert Costa**, associate ministerial secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and speaker/director for the It Is Written Spanish ministry Escrito Está, held eight different one-week, online evangelistic reaping series aired in over 16 million homes. Filming from his living room using his computer, a lapel mic, an iPhone, two lights, and a Bible, Costa spoke nightly to people in Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Guatemala, who viewed the program on YouTube, Facebook, and the Escrito Está website. The series was also viewed in other countries of Central America, South America, and North America, as well as in Western Europe.

Most meetings opened with a 5-to-10-minute health topic, with translation into sign language.

Prayer was an essential part of these meetings’ success. In one area, more than 80,000 members prayed 24/7 for two weeks. In another area, six church groups joined forces, and almost one million members invited their friends to the meetings. Church members were motivated to reach their friends even if they could only connect with them by phone. As a result, more than 1,500 were baptized, with thousands waiting to be baptized when churches open. [NAD News/It Is Written] 





Curing the “one-sermon wonder”

I was a young pastor, just beginning my ministry, when I invited a conference official to preach in my church. His musty sermon notes revealed their age. It was a message he had preached on numerous occasions. Unfortunately, that Sabbath, he served stale, spiritual leftovers to my congregation. My members were gracious but disappointed in the lack of spiritual depth in the message.

His sermon reminded me of a story I had read about the “One-Sermon Wonder.” It seems the preacher had only one sermon, so he tried to spread out his appointments in order to preach the same sermon in a different church each week. The problem with “one-sermon-wonder” preachers is that their thoughts become stale. They lack the excitement of new discovery. They present worn-out, tired ideas with little freshness, vitality, and creativity. They fail, as Jesus said, to bring from the storehouse of truth “things old and new.”

The key

What we share with others is the overflow of our own experience in the Word.

Growth in the Christian life requires a disciplined mind saturated with the Word of God. Before the Holy Spirit speaks through us, He must speak to us. Before we speak for God, we must speak to God. Before other hearts are moved by our witness, our heart must be moved by the Spirit’s witness. All genuine authentic witness is the result of an authentic experience with Jesus.

Although I have been in the gospel ministry for over 50 years, I constantly ask God to expand my thinking to give me new, fresh, deeply spiritual thoughts to present to His people. I am reminded of the apostle Paul’s words to his young protégé, Timothy, “Study to yourself approved by God” (2 Tim. 2:15). Typically, it takes me 12-15 hours of research, writing, and review to prepare a new sermon. The guidance of the Holy Spirit in my study prepares me to preach with the power of the Holy Spirit in the pulpit.

Let me share with you one of the resources that we have developed at the Living Hope School

Mark A. Finley, DDiv, is the founder and president of the Living Hope School of Evangelism in Haymarket, Virginia, United States. He also serves as an assistant to the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



of Evangelism to help pastors, elders, and lay leaders broaden their horizons and become more effective spiritual leaders in the cause of Christ.

A new resource

It’s called Hopelives365 online university, and I am excited about it! The university offers 115 courses for pastors, elders, and lay leaders to enhance their knowledge of God’s Word and their ability to serve their congregations more successfully. The university has 1,000 regular students with 2,500 enrollments. Many of the courses are free of charge, while others have a moderate charge.

The preaching course is one of the most popular. Here you discover how to prepare a biblical sermon, see the biblical text with Holy Spirit-anointed eyes, use powerful illustrations to make your key points, and make life-changing appeals. Hundreds have testified to the difference this is making in their preaching.

You will also enjoy the course on principles of godly leadership. This course shares how effective leaders cast vision and motivate their congregations to look beyond what is to what can be. You will learn how to transform your church board into a mission-centered dynamic body of leaders passionate about developing evangelistic strategies in each department and ministry of the church. The health courses will benefit your personal health as well as equip your team to reach out in redemptive ways to your community, and our Bible Study and prophetic courses will enhance your knowledge of the Word of God.

These courses allow you to enjoy what has been my privilege, alongside other Adventist leaders, namely, to share what God has taught me about preaching, ministry, leadership, and evangelism over the last 50-plus years.

If this can be a blessing to you, feel free to log in to Hopelives365biblestudy.com. You may be thrilled at how quickly you learn in this online environment, and assistance is always available to help you become everything heaven desires you to be as you keep growing for the glory of God. 🙏

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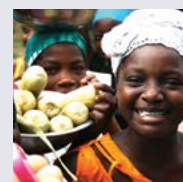
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