

# Ministry<sup>®</sup>

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS



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# A POWER STRONGER THAN WITCHCRAFT

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## The last word of the book of Daniel: A grammatical mistake or a conscious choice?

ARTUR STELE

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### Ministry

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## “Where there is a church, schools should be established if there are no more than six children to attend.”

### Human plans, God's intervention

**A**n October 2020 article, “Demographics and the Future of the Church” (Claude Richli), links church growth to population growth and decline. That may be good science but does not reflect a good understanding of prophecy. “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. . . . God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 300). God bless your good work.

—Lee Roy Holmes, retired SDA pastor, College Place, Washington, United States

### Seek ye first

**I**am writing to respond to “What the Church Needs to Effectively Evangelize the World” (October 2020). Three needs were listed: spiritual revival, evangelistic training, and resources and volunteers. Why was there not a number 4, *acknowledge and understand*

*the Gospel?* Actually, it should have been number one, ahead of the other three listed. It seems to me that “this Gospel of the Kingdom” hardly gets a look-in.

—Sgd. (Pastor) Angus McPhee, Rathmines, NSW, Australia

**Editor's note:** “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world” (Matt. 24:14, NKJV). Thank you for this timely reminder, Pastor McPhee!

### I still believe

**I**very much appreciated the article in the August 2020 *Ministry* by Denton Rhone (“To Believe Again—A Plea for Adventist Christian Education”). For me, Rhone’s most impressive words were near the end, where he said, “Adventist Christian education [ACE] saved my life.” I would like to know more about those experiences of his, since those (and eternal life) are the greatest reasons for having church schools!

Coming from a non-Adventist home, knowing nothing of the church, I only had opportunity to attend our schools from college, at

age 20, through to seminary, but I’ve certainly seen the value of ACE in my 50 years of Adventist ministry. I was blessed to be able to afford to send my daughter to our schools from first grade through college.

It wasn’t easy, however. I’ve mostly pastored small, country churches of way less than 100 members, with a church school often 100 miles away. What did we do? Some of the members in these very small churches were dedicated and brave enough to start up a school with a parent, grandparent, or retired teacher as the one-room school instructor. In one place in Oklahoma, we had three retired teachers who we found from a General Conference retirees list who each taught one year for free. Yes, free! Another teacher in that same school only asked for expenses per month. She was an excellent teacher and taught for five years that way.

There are ways for every church to have a school so the children may be blessed, and the members can be faithful to follow the counsel of Ellen White: “Where there is a church, schools should be established if there are no more than six children to attend” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 199). I had the privilege of helping start three small schools such as these—and so can you!

—Ertis L. Johnson, MDiv, Elk City, Oklahoma, United States



## A rescue plan

**A**t the precise time in the heavenly chronometer, a message is proclaimed with such fervor that it becomes a crescendo resonating throughout the world, “Saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV).

It is the first of the three most solemn messages ever given to mortals. It is a call to worship the One who created everything in six days and rested on the seventh. It is an invitation to rest in Christ’s finished work, both in Creation and on the cross.

It’s a solemn message, but it’s a love message, for as soon as we fell into sin, God activated His rescue plan. An emergency hospital—the heavenly sanctuary—was established as the center of operations for the universe. There our sins would be forgiven, our wounds would be bound, and our hurts would be healed. When would this happen?

For centuries, it was announced through the ceremonies of the earthly sanctuary. With pinpoint precision, prophets such as Daniel outlined the sanctuary’s salvific celebrations. The good news announced at the gates of Eden came true in Bethlehem: “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4, KJV). The good news reached its climax on Golgotha’s hill and in an empty tomb. But that’s not how the story ends.

Somewhere beyond the stars and out of the reach of human vision, something was about to happen in heaven, something “as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross.”<sup>1</sup> According to Daniel 8:14, the Bible’s longest time prophecy expired the autumn of 1844. The time for God’s judgment had come. Now the heavenly sanctuary was being cleansed which meant the world had to know that we have a High Priest who is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25, NKJV).

In these last days, God calls people out of traditionalism and formalism. “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. . . . They have been given a work of the most solemn

**Robert Costa** is an associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance.”<sup>2</sup>

The Bible calls these messages “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6). Why good news? In part, because the message of the first angel gives hope and certainty that judgment will be made

*The good news reached its climax on Golgotha’s hill and in an empty tomb. But that’s not how the story ends.*

in favor of the saints. It is good news for all of God’s oppressed people. Nicholas Miller declares, “If you go back to our pioneers and their emphasis on the first angel’s message, which focuses on ministering to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that is a fundamental foundation for racial and ethnic equality. If we’re trying to reach everyone, and we’re not opposing inequality, then what kind of gospel do we have?”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NKJV). Law and love went hand in hand with Jesus—they must go hand in hand with us. “With the work of advocating the commandments of God and repairing the breach that has been made in the law of God, we are to mingle compassion for suffering humanity.”<sup>4</sup> That’s God’s rescue plan.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 489.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 19.
- 3 Nicholas P. Miller, in “Biblical Justice in a World of Social Unrest,” *Adventist Review*, November 16, 2020.
- 4 Ellen White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 32.

# THE LAST WORD OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

הַפֶּמֶן

A grammatical  
mistake or a  
conscious choice?

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

It is not news to students of the Bible that the book of Daniel was written in two ancient languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. Daniel starts the book in Hebrew but, beginning with Daniel 2:4, he shifts to Aramaic and continues in it until the end of chapter 7. Then, beginning with chapter 8, he resumes in Hebrew. However, when it comes to the very last word of the book, we discover something interesting. Daniel starts the last word in Hebrew but adds to it an Aramaic ending. It appears as if in the last word, he tries to connect the two languages employed in the book. Some scholars have argued that Daniel was probably tired and just by mistake connected the two languages, something easily done by people proficient in two or more languages. However, the big question remains: Could it be that Daniel intentionally added an Aramaic plural ending to a Hebrew word?

This article will try to demonstrate that this was a deliberate and intelligent choice which has highly significant theological implications for the interpretation of the time references of the twelfth chapter of Daniel.

## Why the two languages?

Before considering the very last word of Daniel's book, we need to try to answer the question regarding why he needed to use two languages in the same book and determine whether we, today, can learn practical lessons from it.

The bilingualism of the book of Daniel is not unique in the Old Testament. The same phenomenon is found in the book of Ezra. Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26 are written in Aramaic, while the rest of the book is written in Hebrew. However, the explanation of the usage of two languages in Ezra is much more obvious and has not generated a bulk of different views. The Aramaic portions of the book of Ezra mainly contain letters and documents that were originally written in Aramaic, and the author decided

not to translate them but, rather, presented them in the original language. Since most of those returning from the Babylonian captivity understood the Aramaic language, it was very appropriate to cite letters and documents in the original language.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to the book of Daniel, the explanation of the use of two languages is much more complicated. The transition in Daniel 2:4 from Hebrew to Aramaic seems very natural: "Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, 'O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation'" (ESV). At the first gaze, it seems that Daniel uses the same approach Ezra was using, namely providing the direct speech in the language it was originally spoken. One would expect that Daniel, after actually quoting the words of the Chaldeans, would return to Hebrew. However, Daniel continues in Aramaic all the way to the end of chapter 7, even after the topic has completely changed, transitioning to the Hebrew language only at the beginning of chapter 8.

## Possible and plausible explanations

Since there is not a simple, obvious way of explaining the usage of the two languages, many explanations have been offered.<sup>2</sup> For example, some have suggested that the book naturally falls into two parts: part one is a narrative, mostly consisting of stories, and the second part is a prophetic section. Consequently, Daniel chose to write the two sections in two different languages. However, this argument does not work at all because both sections employ both languages. The narrative section starts in Hebrew but ends in Aramaic, and the prophetic section starts in Aramaic but continues in Hebrew.

Others have suggested that the entire book of Daniel was originally composed in Aramaic and then translated into Hebrew. Based on this theory, what we have today in Aramaic is the original language, and what we have in Hebrew

has survived only in translation. However, the discovery of the Daniel manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls argues strongly against such a theory. The Qumran Scrolls 1QDana, 4QDana, and 4QDanb contain the same shift from Hebrew to Aramaic and back to Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> In these scrolls, more than 1,000 years older than the Masoretic text, the transition from one language to the other and back occurs exactly in the places where it does in the Masoretic text.<sup>4</sup>

Interpreters have suggested additional explanations for the existence of the two languages. Mainly, they try to point to different authors who wrote parts of the book later compiled by an editor. However, a number of scholars have convincingly argued for the book's unity.<sup>5</sup> They have persuasively demonstrated a unified structure of the whole book as well as a definite thematic unity.

The most reasonable explanation of the bilingualism is the fact that the Aramaic language was the lingua franca of Daniel's time. It was the official language of the Babylonian and Persian Empires, while Hebrew was Daniel's native language as well as that of the people of Israel. Daniel used the Hebrew language for the message that was directed more to God's covenant people, and for the one intended for the whole world, he employed the common international language of the era. As Gleason Archer states, "A careful study of the subject matter yields fairly obvious answers: The Aramaic chapters deal with matters pertaining to the entire citizenry of the Babylonian and the Persian empires, whereas the other six chapters relate to peculiarly Jewish concerns and God's special plans for the future of his covenant people."<sup>6</sup>

If this reasoning is right, it provides us with insight as we proclaim God's truth to the world. We should let the Lord guide us in what topics we should choose to broadcast to the whole world using all available modern media and what topics we should emphasize when we speak to those who are already Christ's followers.

### Why an Aramaic plural ending?

The very last Hebrew word of the book of Daniel is unique because of its Aramaic plural ending and because of its strong eschatological context. Naturally, it puzzles students of the book. Why does Daniel add to a Hebrew word an Aramaic ending? As noted previously, some have interpreted it as simply a copyist's mistake. However, we have to keep in mind the following

two facts: First, the Aramaic plural ending has the full support of the Hebrew textual tradition. Second, "the commonest cause of copyists' errors" is an interchange of letters that look alike, but the final Hebrew letters "nun" and "mem" are quite different.<sup>7</sup>

The remaining option for understanding the phenomenon of the last word in the book of Daniel is to conclude that Daniel intentionally created a word that combines both the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. If that is the case, what purpose would Daniel achieve, and what significance would it have for his readers?

### Two possibilities

I would like to suggest two possibilities. First of all, since Daniel used the two languages throughout the book, the combination of the two languages in the very final word would send a signal to the readers that it was one writer who authored both parts of the book. The final word, in a way, underlines the unity of the Hebrew and Aramaic sections of Daniel.

Second, but no less important, the prophet attempts, through the last word, to safeguard the readers from a wrong interpretation of the text. If Daniel would use a normal and expected Hebrew ending to the Hebrew word for "days," it would significantly alter the meaning. One naturally asks, when will the promised resurrection of Daniel actually occur? At the end of which days? Looking at the context of Daniel 12:13, the reader will quickly realize that the text immediately preceding (v. 12) refers to the blessing given those who will reach the 1,335 days. Here, for "days" Daniel employs a Hebrew word with a Hebrew plural ending.

If, in the very next verse, Daniel used the same Hebrew word with the same Hebrew plural ending that he used in Daniel 12:12, the reader would conclude that the phrase which follows—"at the end of the days" (referring to the 1,335 days)—points to the very end of the 1,335 days. It would mean that the promised resurrection will occur at the end of the 1,335 days. That would seem to support those advocating a futuristic approach to the interpretation of the eschatological prophecies. However, the usage of an Aramaic ending to the Hebrew word for "days" differentiates it from the 1,335 days. It is also significant to note that in verse 13, Daniel adds to the word "days" a definite article, which additionally points to the special "end" of the days and supports a differentiation from the 1,335 days.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Daniel may have chosen an Aramaic ending to the otherwise Hebrew word to direct our attention to the Aramaic portion of the book for a better understanding of the final phrase “at the end of the days.” In fact, in several instances in the Aramaic portion of the book, the word “days” appears in the masculine, plural, and emphatic form, similar to the usage in Daniel 12:13<sup>9</sup> (for example, Daniel 2:28 and 2:44). The emphatic state in Daniel 2:28 is expressed through a definite article and in Daniel 2:44 through the pronominal suffix. The context of both passages clearly refers to the “days” when the God of heaven will destroy all earthly kingdoms and establish His own, one that will last forever. The “days” of Daniel 2:44 refer to the very last period of the “latter days” of Daniel 2:28.

Significantly, we observe a further connection between Daniel 2:44 and Daniel 12:13 through the double usage in Daniel 2:44 of the key resurrection term of Daniel 12:13. The technical term for resurrection in Daniel 12:13 is the Hebrew word *amad*, which means “to stand, to rise.” The Aramaic equivalent for the Hebrew *amad* is *qum*, which has the same meaning: “to stand, to rise.” Thus, it seems highly probable that there is indeed a relationship between Daniel 12:13 and Daniel 2:44. Consequently, it seems evident that “the end of the days” of Daniel 12:13 refers not back to the 1,335 days in Daniel 12:12 but to the very last period of the “latter days,” namely to the time period when the Lord of heaven will establish His own kingdom.

## Two audiences and a distinct intention

The usage of two languages in the book of Daniel is best explained as Daniel’s attempt to speak to two different audiences. He wrote the message primarily addressed to the people of Israel in the Hebrew language and the one intended for the entire world in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the day. Thus, learning from Daniel, as we preach today, we should give careful consideration to what we should primarily present to those already inside the church and what message will be best understood by the people outside it. If we preach in a language not well comprehended and present a message not well understood, we might miss the mark.

The last word in the book of Daniel that starts in the Hebrew language but ends with an Aramaic plural ending is also best understood as a conscious choice on the author’s part. Thus, what at first glance seemingly appears to be

a grammatical mistake, in reality, after careful consideration of all nuances, points to a deliberate and carefully thought-through decision by the author with significant theological implications. It suggests that the book of Daniel represents unity, the work of one author, and, at the same time, differentiates the event of the resurrection mentioned in Daniel 12:13 from the reference to the time period of 1,335 days in Daniel 12:12. Thus, the resurrection of Daniel<sup>10</sup> will occur not at the end of 1,335 days but at the time when the God of heaven will destroy all the earthly kingdoms and establish His own kingdom, one that will last forever.



- 1 Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 4, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 586, 587.
- 2 For different views, see Anatheia E. Portier-Young, “Languages of Identity and Obligation: Daniel as Bilingual Book,” *VT* 60 (2010), 98–115.
- 3 Gerhard F. Hasel, “New Light on the Book of Daniel From the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Ministry*, January 1992, 10–13.
- 4 Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Book of Daniel Confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/2 (1990): 43. See also J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, ed. H. W. House and W. D. Barrick (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 5.
- 5 Gleason L. Archer, *Daniel*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 4–6; Tanner, *Daniel*, 1–5; Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 3–6; William H. Shea, “Unity of Daniel,” in *Symposium on Daniel, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 2, ed. F. B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 165–255.
- 6 Archer, *Daniel*, 7: 6. See also Tanner, *Daniel*, 4.
- 7 Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to Kittel-Kahle’s Biblia Hebraica*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1957), 72.
- 8 Artur A. Stele, “Resurrection in Daniel 12 and Its Contribution to the Theology of the Book of Daniel” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1996), 180–182; Bruce William Jones, “Ideas of History in the Book of Daniel” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, 1972), 210. See also Gerhard Pfandl, “The Time of the End in the Book of Daniel,” *Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series*, no. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 255, 314.
- 9 Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Hildesheim, Germany: Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), 84; Hans Bauer and Pontus Leander, *Kurzgefasste Biblisch-Aramäische Grammatik mit Texten und Glossar* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1929), 9; Alger F. Johns, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, Andrews University Monographs, no. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1966), 9, 10; Stanislav Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik mit Bibliographie, Chrestomathie und Glossar* (Leipzig, Germany: VEB Verlag Enzyklopadie, 1975), 188–192; Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 23.
- 10 Stele argues that the prophet in Daniel 12:13 stands as a representative for a general resurrection. “Resurrection in Daniel 12,” 201–212.

# Losing lives—but keeping **HOPE**

Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* presents life as an alternation: “the best of times” and “the worst of times.”<sup>1</sup> With our planet held hostage by a deadly coronavirus that reared its head at the beginning of 2020 and roared like a lion at the year's close, we are witnesses to the worst of times.

Opinion columnist Kristin Clark Taylor wrote, “Farewell, 2020. Adieu. Goodbye. Lots of folks would say good riddance. I'm not at all sorry to see you leave. . . . You haven't played fair, 2020, and you know it. You've been the most horrendously cruel Backyard Bully on the playground—except you didn't just pinch an arm and pull a pigtail. You didn't just kick up dust and cause a ruckus. No, you snuffed out lots of lives. . . .

“You placed a knee on the neck of a man lying helplessly on the street until he cried out for his mama then finally stopped breathing. . . . You showed us hatred and tried to separate us from love. You forced us to find a new language filled with pandemic-inspired phrases like ‘social distancing,’ ‘herd immunity,’ ‘Do-Not-Enter-Without-A-Mask,’ and the oh-so-often used, ‘You're still on mute!’

“Worse, you silenced the heartbeats of hundreds of thousands of innocent souls—loved ones who once laughed with us and protected us and gave us good advice but whose hands we can no longer hold and whose presence we can no longer feel. Their hearts stopped beating in 2020. They will not be stepping with us into 2021. They are gone.”<sup>2</sup>

## The worst of times

Unlike anything that most of us have ever seen, this pandemic has been pervasive and invasive, touching young and old, from the humblest

to the most royal. It has rendered millions jobless and disrupted the daily practice of school, work, and sports. The call to remain home and social distance has changed our lives. It is frustrating to no longer greet with a handshake or an embrace. It is disheartening to see churches whose doors are closed and, in places where they have been allowed to reopen, whose attendance is smaller and scattered.

In many places, the rise of COVID-19 cases has spiked beyond previous levels, producing trepidation and anxiety and creating financial stresses for church institutions, such as hospitals, schools, universities, and publishing houses. So disconcerting is the current situation that many are prompted to inquire, *When will life get back to normal? Or, Will it ever be normal again?* Many wonder, *Is there a realistic way out of this dilemma?*

Scripture presents a story that may offer us some reference points, and something to cling to amid what is, for many of us, the worst of times. Upon returning to the city of Ziklag, David and his 600 men encountered the unimaginable: their city had been burned by invading Amalekites. The Bible describes them as sobbing uncontrollably (1 Sam. 30:4). In addition, their wives and children, along with their possessions, had been detained by unknown individuals. It was the worst of times.

Consider David's response in confronting the unexpected.

## 1. Elevate your thoughts

The first step he took was to elevate his thoughts. The Bible says, “David strengthened himself in the LORD” (1 Sam. 30:6).<sup>3</sup> That suggests a determined response to counteract negative and difficult situations by turning to God. David, I

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believe, recalled past difficulties and deliverances, such as the defeat of Goliath. “In this hour of utmost extremity David, instead of permitting his mind to dwell upon these painful circumstances, looked earnestly to God for help. He ‘encouraged himself in the Lord.’ He reviewed his past eventful life. Wherein had the Lord ever forsaken him? His soul was refreshed in recalling the many evidences of God’s favor.”<sup>4</sup> It is critical to fight off the temptation of allowing self to become weighed down by problems. Instead, focus on God.

## 2. Seek after God

Second, seek after God. The Bible says, David “inquired of the LORD” (1 Sam. 30:7, 8). He asked the priest for the ephod so as to seek God’s will or, more directly, God’s direction. To his inquiry, “Should I pursue them [enemies]?” came the answer, “Go after them, and you shall recover all.” How many would wish for God to answer us like that in every situation? We all would. However, while God does not answer all our prayers alike, He does answer prayer.

The reality is that many of us have lost much. The promise, “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes” (Mal. 3:11) seems to have passed us by. Yet in spite of our experiences, faith demands that we cling to the promise, “So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).

## 3. Follow His instructions

Third, follow God’s instructions. Following the definite answer from God that David and his men would recover all they lost, David acted on the counsel of God “pursue, for you shall . . . recover all” (1 Sam. 30:8). Could it be that when God provides the direction, we decline the action? David recovers everything that was taken away from him and his men (v. 19).

Having recovered all, 400 of David’s men manifest selfishness in deciding not to share the spoils with 200 of their colleagues who could not make the full journey. David states emphatically, “My brethren, you shall not do so with what the LORD has given us, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us” (v. 23). The reaction of David is a remarkable display of grace to those who were undeserving. Is that not what grace is all about? Max Lucado says, “A ‘crazy, holy grace’ it has been called. A type of grace that doesn’t hold up to logic. But then I guess grace doesn’t have to be logical. If it did, it wouldn’t be grace.”<sup>5</sup>

In our situation today with the pandemic, I see great manifestations of God’s grace toward His people. I see glimpses of goodness that have resulted. Though many people have become unemployed, new business opportunities have been created. We have learned to cook, sew, educate children, and use technology in unbelievable ways, and we are witnessing a remarkable attitude of magnanimity and creativity in response to the challenges of the day.

Who would have thought that technology, such as Zoom teleconferencing would enable churches to conduct services and board meetings and engage in social activities? Who would have known that churches would be able to access preachers from throughout the world without requiring visas, airplane tickets, car rentals, and hotels? Who would have imagined that in many places, through online giving, church tithes and offerings have eclipsed previous totals? Who would have believed that thousands of people who would not normally attend church would do so through electronic platforms?

While God is at work in definite ways, it is clear that “His ways [are] past finding out” (Rom 11:33). Ellen White wrote, “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. . . . God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands.”<sup>6</sup> We are not left to fend for ourselves, God is acting on behalf of His people.

## The best of times

Perhaps the candle of hope burns brightest amid the darkness. We are told, “God calls upon His faithful ones, who believe in Him, to talk courage to those who are unbelieving and hopeless. Turn to the Lord, ye prisoners of hope. Seek strength from God, the living God. Show an unwavering, humble faith in His power and His willingness to save. When in faith we take hold of His strength, He will change, wonderfully change, the most hopeless, discouraging outlook. He will do this for the glory of His name.”<sup>7</sup> What a privilege it is to communicate a word of encouragement even in times like these. Kristin Taylor ends her opinion piece with these words:

“But guess what, 2020? We made it through you. We fortified our strength. We found our courage. We came together. We tapped into a resilience we never even knew we had. . . .

"We held each other up. We refused to back down. We made it through you, 2020, and because we did, we will step into 2021 stronger. . . .

"Yes, you certainly brought the bad and you definitely delivered many dark moments, but what will keep us strong and focused as we say goodbye to you—most folks would say good riddance instead of goodbye—is the knowledge that the darkest moments eventually give way to the brightest light. As we say goodbye to you, 2020, we will strike a big old match and create a collective light that will carry us forward into 2021, and we'll call it the light of hope. This hope is not to be messed with. This hope cannot be snuffed out. It is unsnuffable."<sup>8</sup>

We understand how contemporary society may label our current crises as the worst of times. Every day sees us journeying through the valley of the shadow of death. But we hear our Lord Christ constantly whispering, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Hope is the fuel that keeps us going and the Bible promises, "hope does not disappoint" (Rom. 5:5).

Now, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19). But "We have this hope that burns within our

hearts, hope in the coming of the Lord."<sup>9</sup> Hope makes us go one more mile. Hope makes us help one more person. "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37, KJV). It is the best of times.



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# The gift of continuing pastoral education

SHARON AKA





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**L**ifelong learning, a natural human drive, leads to increasing knowledge, self-improvement, productivity, professional and personal ability, and social relevance.<sup>1</sup> Lifelong learning for pastors helps pastors as well as those they serve.<sup>2</sup> In many professions, learning occurs through intentional continuing education (CE).<sup>3</sup> In a world that continually asks professionals to learn more, do more, and accept more responsibility, professional learning may be the only way to remain relevant.<sup>4</sup>

In the realm of ministry, pastors understand that learning should align with God's design and call on their life. Scripture declares, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance" (Proverbs 1:5).<sup>5</sup> "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). Thus, the true measure of a person is their eagerness to continually improve.

## Lifelong learning

Pastors are charged with their own professional and spiritual growth but also must foster church member learning and spiritual development. Ellen G. White writes that "the gospel is not properly taught and represented . . . by men who have ceased to be students."<sup>6</sup> Although current studies do not yet include members of the Adventist denomination, multiple researchers have explored the issue of CE in professional ministry, suggesting that learning and professional engagement appear to be interconnected in pastoral development.<sup>7</sup>

Strangway discovered that intentional learning and challenging experiences are key components in developing pastoral leadership.<sup>8</sup> Meyers and Johnstone suggest that learning while on the job benefits the church, the student minister, and the supervisor and that it is best when the professional development plan integrates both CE and applied opportunities.<sup>9</sup> Jividen noted that pastors participating in CE were more likely to serve in growing congregations, suggesting a link between learning and pastoral impact on members.<sup>10</sup> Carlson-Johnson underlines the importance of CE in retaining actively serving lieutenants within the Salvation Army church.<sup>11</sup> Regarding CE's possibly central role for lifelong pastoral learning, P. A. Kenney proposes that clergy career and life development happens throughout the lifetime and

suggests that CE is necessary to address emerging needs in a rapidly changing world.<sup>12</sup>

## Employee engagement

Employee engagement may be another indicator of individual dedication to the call of ministry. Research shows the benefits of an engaged workforce. “[Engaged employees] bring their hearts, hands, and minds into their jobs”<sup>13</sup> and display such traits as “knowledge sharing, creativity, proactivity, and adaptivity.”<sup>14</sup> They know how to reach their desired outcomes and protect themselves from becoming stressed in difficult situations.<sup>15</sup> In addition, they demonstrate high levels of energy and enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup>

The Adventist denomination continues to advance efforts to create an engaged pastoral workforce utilizing several strategies, including two annual continuing education units comprising 20 hours of learning.

## Adventist CE history

Extending back to the beginning of the denomination, Adventists have repeatedly sought to launch a successful CE program. In 1870, James White began the “Ministers Lecture Association of Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>17</sup> Although the General Conference (GC) adopted the program in 1881, it was deemed unsustainable. From 1889 to 1896, W. W. Prescott ran the GC Bible School in Battle Creek.<sup>18</sup> Then in 1896, Prescott and A. T. Jones shifted biblical studies to Adventist institutions of higher education.<sup>19</sup> While no formal pastoral CE program continued, for the next several decades, Ellen White and others often spoke about the importance of pastoral CE.<sup>20</sup> In 1919 and 1922, the GC president also highlighted the need for pastoral CE.<sup>21</sup>

The GC launched a formal pastoral internship program during 1926 called “A Ministerial Internship Plan,” detailing 24 pastoral skills in an attempt to tie formal education to on-the-job practice. A. G. Daniells, as secretary of the newly created GC Ministerial Association, led the program.<sup>22</sup> In 1964, leadership created a Ministerial Internship Guide to support pastors in the field.<sup>23</sup> But while other denominations were increasing

collaborative pastoral learning engagement during the 1960s, the Adventist denomination held back.<sup>24</sup>

The church established the short-lived Academy of Adventist Ministers in 1972. It required 50 annual hours of learning.<sup>25</sup> In 1980, the GC indicated the importance of pastoral CE, and in 1981, the Center for Continuing Education for Ministry (CCEM) was organized at Andrews University with Raoul Dederen as salaried director.<sup>26</sup> That same year, North American Division (NAD) president Charles Bradford commissioned a research study on pastoral CE by Penny Shell.<sup>27</sup> A year later, the GC appointed Floyd Bresee director of CE

for pastors. Seminary research revealed the critical importance of ongoing pastoral intern support.<sup>28</sup> By 1985, the CCEM had created a tracking booklet for pastoral CE.<sup>29</sup>

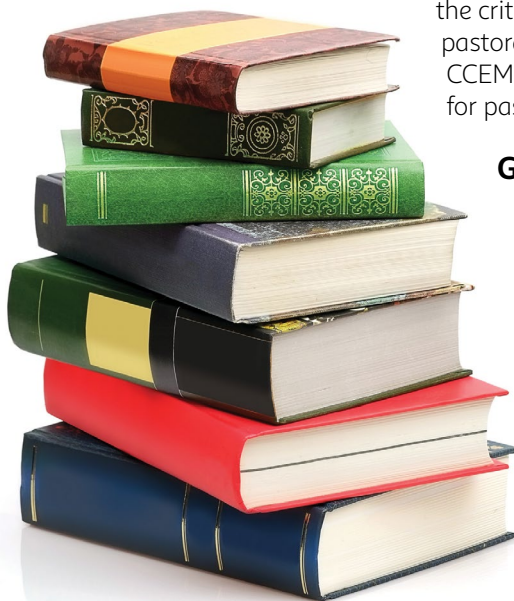
## Gaining momentum in the world

Pastoral CE gained momentum when the GC Ministerial department developed a system to tether pastoral employment to participation in CE. It advised divisions on how to develop their own tracking system.<sup>30</sup> The church’s largest ministerial convention, the World Ministers Council, a CE event, convened in 1985. The

GC assigned Rex Edwards with pastoral CE oversight and a subsequent World Ministers Council took place five years later.<sup>31</sup>

In 1988, leadership defined the role of ministerial director. The position’s 10 job responsibilities included supporting the completion of 20 hours annually of pastoral CE.<sup>32</sup> Between 1970 and the early 1990s, the church launched the successful CE program PREACH<sup>33</sup> to a multid denominational audience.<sup>34</sup> In 1990, the GC ministerial department created a pastoral manual for interns outlining 50 skills/functions. Unfortunately, it received limited acceptance.<sup>35</sup> From 1996 to 2005, Nikolaus Satelmajer produced highly successful CE seminars for pastors.<sup>36</sup>

During 1995, the South German Union implemented a formal pastoral CE program.<sup>37</sup> Recognizing a void in pastoral CE efforts, the NAD began delivering digital CE in collaboration with the Hope Channel and Adventist Media



Productions.<sup>38</sup> In 2000, more than 7,500 pastors attended a ministerial CE event during the GC session in Toronto, Ontario.<sup>39</sup> In 2001, leaders appointed Walt Williams as associate ministerial director and off-campus coordinator of CE for the NAD. In addition, the division established the InMinistry competency/proficiency-based seminary master's degree through both in-person and online delivery.<sup>40</sup>

During this time, the GC Ministerial Association developed and delivered more than 100 CE seminars.<sup>41</sup> In 2006, the GC appointed Anthony Kent as an associate Ministerial secretary, with one of his responsibilities being CE. He focused on providing professional development for pastors around the world, coordinating *Ministry Professional Growth Seminars*. This was succeeded by *Ministry-in-Motion*, a weekly video series exploring best practices in ministry, hosted by Kent along with cohost Derek Morris, and later Ivan Williams.<sup>42</sup>

From 2014 to 2016, Adam Fenner and I, while part of the Adventist Learning Center (ALC), worked with the NAD Ministerial department to establish CE standards and structures to be integrated into the ALC platform. They then began helping create dozens of digital pastoral CE courses. In May of 2015, ALC was launched (including a tracking program for pastoral CE).

In July 2015, the NAD Ministerial department, led by Ivan Williams, held the CALLED convention, attended by over 6,000 NAD and international pastors. The church presented a renewed CE focus, along with a document outlining the seven core qualities of a pastor. Between 2014 and 2018, the NAD worked to integrate the seven core qualities and proficiencies of the NAD pastor across the span of pastoral professional development, from undergraduate to seasoned professional.<sup>43</sup> During this period, the South Pacific Division established a similar seven-pastoral-competencies structure.<sup>44</sup>

At the 2017 NAD year-end meetings, Jiří Moskala, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, announced the integration of the seven core qualities into the Master of Divinity program.<sup>45</sup> In addition, an updating of the NAD working policy handbook incorporates the pastoral CE policy of 20 hours, or two CEUs, annually.<sup>46</sup> In 2018, the seminary implemented new admission standards based on the completion of undergraduate programs containing the seven core qualities of a pastor.<sup>47</sup>

In November 2019, Patrick Johnson, Trans-European Division (TED) Ministerial director, presented a new seven-competencies framework for pastors at the TED year-end meetings.<sup>48</sup> The GC Ministerial department continues to lead pastoral support for all divisions and is a major provider of professional growth for ministers of all denominations. Unions and conferences come under the purview of the division ministerial departments.<sup>49</sup>

## Fostering learning in church members

Pastors are entrusted with awesome responsibilities. Not only must they maintain their own professional and spiritual growth, but they are also charged with fostering church members' spiritual development. Consistently, they should model a learning culture that nurtures continuous growth for members within their congregations and communities. Research suggests, "As the major technological, economic, and social currents change, so must citizens adapt by never ceasing to learn throughout their lifetimes."<sup>50</sup>

Now, more than ever, pastors face unprecedented complexities in a rapidly changing world. Pastoral CE is a critical cornerstone in supporting pastors as they grow their faith communities and remains an invaluable gift offered to the global faith community by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.



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## RESOURCES

# A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics

by Matthew D. Kim, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2020.




**A** *Little Book for New Preachers* is the sixth volume in the IVP Academic's Little Books series, wherein career scholars sum up their time-tested wisdom and pass it on to a new generation. Cognizant of the fact that preaching is one of the most daunting tasks faced by a pastor, Matthew D. Kim, associate professor of preaching and ministry and the director of the Haddon W. Robinson Center for Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, provides young preachers with salient insights that assist them in mitigating their fear of preaching while rekindling their enthusiasm for preaching (15).

The book consists of nine chapters subdivided into three main parts. In part one, captioned "Why Study Preaching?" Kim provides three rationales for studying preaching. First, although preaching is often treated as the forgotten discipline that is relegated to the back seat of society, the academy, and the church, it still remains the focal point of biblical and theological studies. Preaching continues to play a pivotal role in leading "congregations in living out kingdom values in a messy world" (29). Second, although preaching can feel like an onerous task, "it is actually God's great legacy for us to enjoy and pass down from generation to generation" (43). Third, preaching is important because of the vital role it plays in fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

In part 2, the author discusses three "characteristics of faithful preaching," which are faithful interpretation, cultural exegesis, and application. With regard to sound biblical interpretation, he recommends a five-step process represented by "the acronym HABIT: historical, grammatical, and literary study; author's cultural context; big

idea of the text; interpret in your context; and theological presuppositions" (65). On the note of cultural exegesis, the author maintains that great preaching "requires specialized knowledge of one's congregational culture" (72). In obtaining this specialized knowledge, preachers must be intentional in exegeting seven broad groups of listeners: (1) a biblically illiterate culture, (2) generational cultures, (3) secular cultures, (4) ethnic and racial cultures, (5) socioeconomic cultures, (6) educational cultures, and (7) the "least of these" cultures (74–81). Finally, faithful application of Scripture necessitates applying the original author's purpose, applying the actual passage being preached, and for preachers to apply the sermon to themselves before doing so to their listeners.

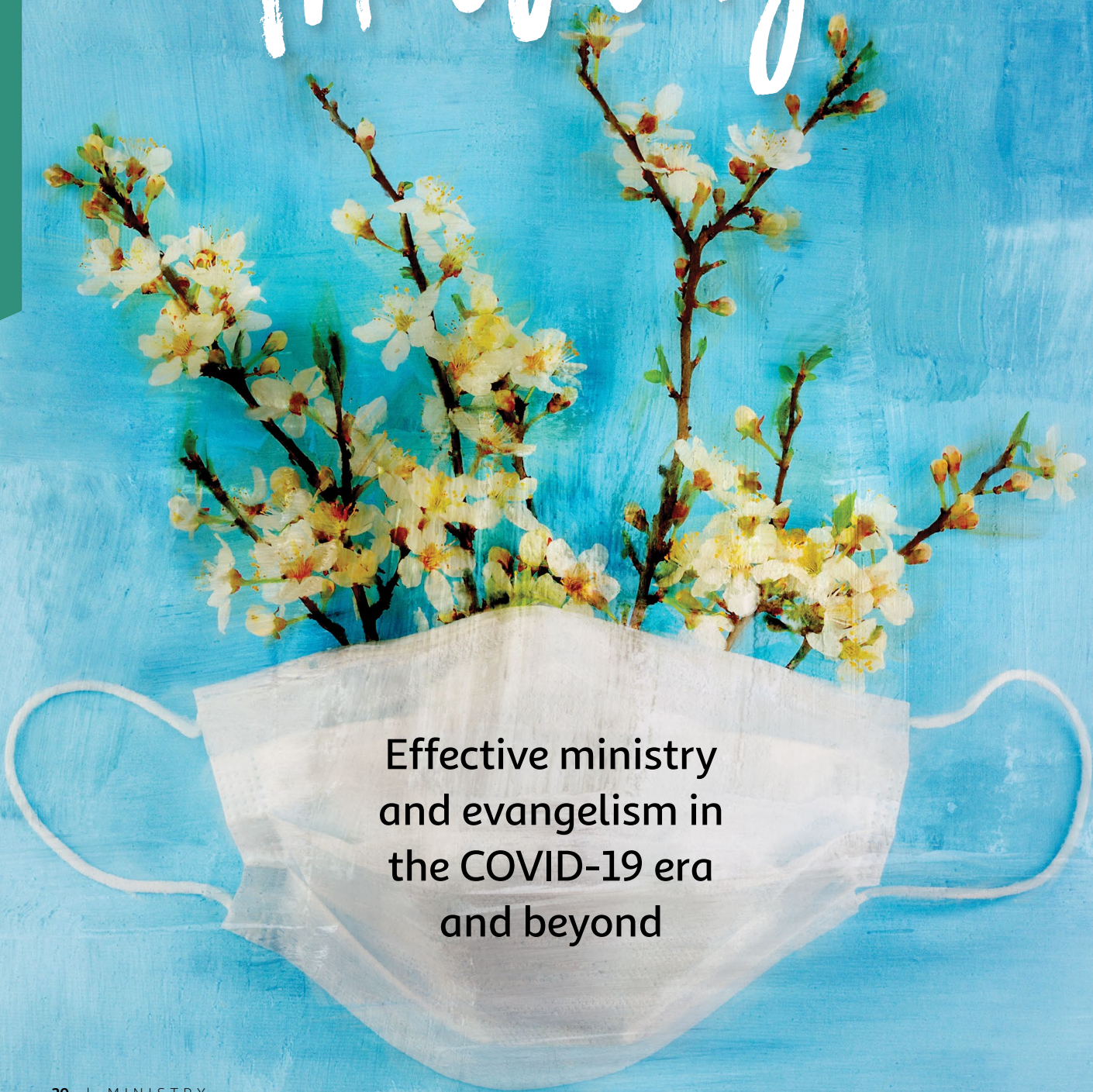
The final part of the book examines three "characteristics of faithful preachers." The first characteristic is that of being pastoral and loving. Simply put, a preacher must "preach as a pastor, and pastor as a preacher" (105). Preachers must be intentional in "shepherding and loving God's people" (97) both in and outside the pulpit. Second, preachers must be persons of "character and integrity." They must be deliberate in maintaining their ethos, delegating ministry tasks, practicing self-care, and finding their center in Christ. Kim admonishes his readers to "preach out of who you are: be yourself and especially like yourself" (112). Third, faithful preachers are "prayerful and Spirit-led." Preachers who are cognizant of the indispensable role that prayer plays in preaching are far more intentional in dedicating quality time to praying for the Holy Spirit's power, the transformation of lives, and congregational intentionality.

This succinct and practical volume on preaching is a rich resource for both new and experienced preachers who desire to faithfully declare the truths of Scripture from a pastoral heart. This book lays a solid foundation for young preachers and is also an excellent refresher course for veteran preachers on the basic tenets of preaching. *A Little Book for New Preachers* proves the old adage right, that "good things come in small packages." 

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# FROM **SURVIVING** • TO • *Thriving*



Effective ministry  
and evangelism in  
the COVID-19 era  
and beyond

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

**N**ew Year's Day 2020 dawned with the hope of a brand-new year. Many churches held a clear vision for what would transpire for the next 12 months. Then COVID-19 struck.

While some have bemoaned this as an unwelcome disruption of church life, others have grasped this as an unprecedented opportunity for ministry. Pastors and other dedicated Christians have navigated these uncharted waters to successfully conduct ministry and mission in a COVID-19 world. How has this been accomplished? We discovered seven ways.

### 1. Expand the ministry base

Many churches expanded ministry to their members. Healthy and young parishioners volunteered to buy food for elderly people and those with preexisting health conditions. Some churches contacted every member by phone, through Zoom, or in person with social distancing while wearing a mask.

Many churches also intensified their ministry to the community. Fio and Sofia Oudri, two young girls from Berrien Springs, Michigan, made beautiful cards and went to every house in their community, handing them to the people or placing them on doors. They told the people that they love them and are praying for them, and that if they need anything—such as buying groceries or a ride to the doctor—their parents would be happy to help.

A church in Auburn, Washington, offered COVID-19 testing free of charge to the community. The mayor of the city was so impressed by this gesture, she went to the church twice to thank them for their love and kindness. Other churches offered food, clothes, diapers, and other necessary items to community residents in need.

### 2. Reach out and touch someone

Churches discovered that it is essential to connect with members and friends in any way possible. Pastor Rayssan Guimaraes Cruz, from Nanuque in Brazil, visited every member in his church, active and inactive, giving them flowers and praying with them. One inactive member was so impressed by the care the pastor showed, he gave enough money to send the missionary book of the year to every home in the city. Rayssan's church experienced life-changing revival, heightened spiritual life, increased giving, and greater attendance via live streaming before eventually coming back to in-person church services.

Pastor David Morgan from Hayden Lake, Idaho, saw his attendance increase from 170 to 350 per week after the lockdown was lifted. He stated, "It is the desire for fellowship after several months of being locked down and the personal touch of the members that is driving people to come."

### 3. Release the potential of the laity

For churches to be effective today, they need to apply Paul's admonition that everyone in the body of Christ contribute to the well-being of others in the church or the community, just as the various parts of the human body contribute to other parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:27–30).

Even if you are not creative, you can still be curious and become part of the synergy of everyone working together. Ellen G. White reminds us, "The perfection of the church depends not on each member being fashioned exactly alike. God calls for each one to take his proper place, to stand in his lot, to do his appointed work according to the ability which has been given him."<sup>1</sup> Let us rely on each other, especially when faced with unprecedented challenges.

#### 4. Serve the community

Far from COVID-19 slowing our outreach, does it provide a clarion call for us to redefine our outreach? The Highland Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in Benton Harbor, Michigan, conducts an annual back-to-school event every August. Children in the adjacent community come to the church grounds for food, fun, and backpacks filled with school supplies to get them started for the upcoming year.

In 2020, with physical distancing orders in place, the members left the church and took their back-to-school ministry to the community. In conjunction with the community property manager, collaboration became the key that opened the door to community engagement. Pastor Eric Bell even engaged with governmental agencies to secure the church's facilities to benefit the community as a location for COVID-19 testing. Seeds of comity were sown between the church and its community, seeds that are continually being nurtured.

#### 5. Preach in and out of season

Creativity in worship and ministry attracts people. During the pandemic, people learned to surf the internet and find many options for speakers. What will keep them connected to the local church is a personal touch, warmth, and offering hope and creativity in the worship service.

Pastor Winston Taylor in Knoxville, Tennessee, shared that he learned to minister in season and out of season (see 2 Tim. 4:2). The gist of Paul's sentiment speaks to preaching in good times and in the absence

thereof. Taylor put his worship services on various social media to be played multiple times. He conducted a Bible study at ten o'clock every morning and an evangelistic meeting at noon and seven o'clock in the evening every day for two months during the pandemic. Taylor told us that to be effective today, you need to redefine *church* from being a building to being a community of believers who can gather together under any kind of circumstance, time, and condition. Several people expressed interest in knowing about God. They have since been baptized.

Some pastors advertised on social media for Bible study, evangelistic meetings, and worship services. The more the pastors and members were intentional, the more the people were connected to the local church. Pastor Rodney Mills, executive secretary of the Upper Columbia Conference, noted that, in spite of total lockdown in Washington State, several Spanish-speaking pastors conducted virtual evangelic meetings that resulted in several baptisms. He stated, "Pastors and members partnered together to reach their communities with great impact and result. Such may not have ever transpired had it not been for new opportunities afforded as a result of the novel coronavirus."

Jim John, pastor of the Anchorage Northside church, demonstrates that if we depend on the Holy Spirit, asking God for guidance, there is no limit to what He can do through us. Jim and his wife, Darla, felt impressed by God to convert the Anchorage Junior Academy parking area into a church. They built a stage, found some old radio equipment at the Alaska Conference office, put some signs up, and advertised the start of worship services on the first Sabbath in May. Approximately 50 cars were coming to the

*What will keep them  
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worship service with about 150 people (up from an attendance of 120). Over time, the number grew to about 70 cars with about 200 people in attendance.

Jim and Darla would greet the people after the worship service and, practicing social distancing and wearing masks, pray with those who requested it. One day, Jim saw a new car and made it a point to get to know the people inside of it. They were nominal Christians who wanted to study the Bible during the lockdown. They discovered the Sabbath, started coming to the drive-in church, and eventually were baptized. So far, the church has baptized eight people. We may sit and do nothing or be used by God to do great things.

## 6. Utilize the influence of young and old

Sue Fattic from Niles, Michigan, started a ministry to reach out to elderly persons afraid to leave their homes for fear of catching COVID-19. She provided financial assistance or rides and purchased necessary groceries or anything else they needed.

Zoey Shiu, a dorm student at Andrews University, asked one of her friends in the community to open their home for her to conduct a Bible study on Sabbath mornings. The friends also offered to provide breakfast. Today about 10–20 university students attend her Bible study.

## 7. Pray as if your life depends on it

Prayer is the essential key ingredient for releasing God's power on behalf of His people. We came across many churches that took prayer seriously and moved their prayer meetings to the Zoom platform—only to experience growth in attendance. We suspect that using the remote platform will lend itself to greater increases in attendance, especially in colder climates, as people appreciate that the prayer ministry has been brought to them rather than their having to leave the house to attend prayer service.

Victor Jaeger, a pastor in Columbia, South Carolina, arrived at a church where, before the pandemic struck, the attendance was 60 people. Its church school was struggling. But through prayer and total dependence on God, the attendance today is 80 people, and 23 new students are coming to school this year.

Winston Taylor started multiple prayer meetings throughout the week to pray for healing and for spiritual strength. He called it “Comfort My People,” based on Isaiah 40:1. He saw amazing

miracles take place, including the healing of his wife and sister from COVID-19. I (Joseph) participated in one of his prayer meetings, and I can attest to the powerful, life-changing elements of these worship experiences.

Heartfelt and earnest intercession is the key to breakthrough in our churches and effecting revival. By living a life connected to God and standing strong in God's truth, we work together with Him to determine our churches' futures. We should fervently pray for our neighborhoods and cities, especially during these unprecedented times, and rest in the assurance that positive change will transpire.

## Greater things

Among Jesus' final words to His disciples were what we refer to as the Great Commission (see Matt. 28:19), His command to make disciples of all people groups. Curiously overlooked in this divine directive is the first of several Greek participles, simplistically translated as “Go.” It would be better translated as “After you have gone . . .” Rather than to wait for the right time for people to come to us, is this biblically and practically the right time for us to go to them? Would Jesus allow social distancing to hinder His ministry? Would He redefine His approach in light of the need for physical distancing? We noticed that the more the church reached out to touch lives, the more the people became receptive to church attendance and giving of their funds and time.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many challenges on us but also created many possibilities and opportunities. Pastors and members got together and unleashed the God-given creativity of their members. They figured out ways to do things that they never dreamed were possible. Synergy, innovation, and thinking outside the box have led to creating new ways to reach people with the grace of Jesus. Greater things remain for God's people to accomplish because we have the promise that God is faithful, and He will not leave us alone.

“So do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”  
(Isa. 41:10, NIV).

The pandemic serves as a reminder that God remains in control.



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1 Ellen G. White, Letter 19, 1901.

A close-up photograph of a hand placing a white puzzle piece with two red dots into a larger assembly of white puzzle pieces on a light blue surface. The other puzzle pieces already in place have two black dots each. The hand is visible in the bottom left corner, with the thumb and index finger holding the piece.

## Three ways to ensure a healthy pastoral placement

**Peter  
Iwankiw**  
pastors in the  
Washington  
Conference,  
United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

I knew it couldn't work. It was an obvious mismatch—and it was stressing me out. I felt impressed to start praying for two things: *momentum* or a *move*.

When you feel as if you are just stuck because of a poorly matched church district, you hope that, beyond all apparent roadblocks, God can still provide some momentum. But if you find yourself continually running against walls, perhaps it is time for a move. Little did I know that was what God was planning for me.

### Ministerial placement in a church district

In my part of the world, when a congregation needs a pastor, the conference forms a search committee to find possible candidates. After weeks, or even months, of prayerful searching, the chosen candidates undergo interviews to determine whether they will be the right fit. If they answer questions to the satisfaction of the committee, they get placed on a short list until one individual is selected. The method seems to work well enough. A pastor is searching for an opportunity to serve, and a church is looking for the right candidate to lead.

Throughout the whole process, one question lurks in the back of each mind: *Is this going to be a good fit?* Churches want to know that a pastor lines up with their vision, and pastors want assurance that the members are open to theirs. What sometimes happens during the first interactions is that both parties overlook glaring red flags of an incompatible relationship. It is not until sometime later that they may realize it was not a good fit after all.

Since pastors learn to be content in all situations while being all things to all people, they struggle through that relationship for a while longer, praying it will get better. The reality most often is that unless the pastor and congregation change their philosophy of ministry, there will continue to be a mismatch.

I have pastored churches where what was important to me was inconvenient to them. When

we tried the dance of give and take, they insisted on leading or leaving. With every criticism and refusal to change, I would ask myself, *Is it me?* Now recognizing that my first duty should have been to submit the decision to God in prayer, I realized I was in a bad fit. Do not be anxious about a specific church or district. Instead, pray, ask for God's leading, and then be willing to accept it.

As pastors, we often assume that given enough time, we can rebrand, revive, and rebuild any congregation. I would love for this to be true, but when it is a bad fit from the onset, a pastor can become discouraged and deflated from stifled creativity and ministry paralysis. For those who have been or currently find themselves in similar situations, I would like to recommend three ways to ensure a healthy pastoral placement.

### 1. Ask difficult questions

In the early stages of conversation, we talk about outreach, discipleship, and other ministry concepts but often fail to flesh out what that entails in practice. To say you believe in a Christ-centered, Bible-based, uplifting service does not reveal much about what that looks like weekly. I would speculate that all churches want those things. It is when you start specifically discussing the atmosphere and culture of the service that you see both sides. Does the church have a visitor assimilation system in place? Is the membership open to receiving visitors or is the service simply tailored to the specific needs of the members? Does the congregation intentionally focus on those they are hoping to reach? What do they consider good preaching? Who gets to participate? What is acceptable music? What is the focus for outreach and how uncomfortable is the church willing to become for the sake of those they are hoping to reach?

Some conferences have the church and pastor fill out a survey that reveals on which side of the spectrum their philosophy of ministry lands. Sometimes questions are avoided for the sake of

politeness, or we do not think of them while we are being wooed. Asking the right questions can help prevent the regret of a mismatched relationship down the road.

## 2. Confirm a majority vision

Occasionally, a few elders or a small committee from the church take part in the interview process. Future plans are shared outlining the direction they would like the church moved in, but later, the pastor discovers this is the passion of a few, not the vision of the majority. Sadly, this realization may only surface once you begin to teach specific topics or attempt to vote certain changes. At this point, you realize that the vision you were sold on went no further than that first meeting.

To have a better understanding of the church's direction requires both a survey and a discussion that will clearly reveal a majority vision. With this information, pastors will know precisely what most members are open to and thus they are more likely to have support as they move forward with their plans. Do not hurry to transform the church. Rather, spend time to listen to their proposals, understand their viewpoints, grow relationships, and build trust. Pray for and with your members. Show them that you care. Make changes one step at a time, breaking them into small, incremental steps. Even though it may go slower than desired, it is better to accomplish a few things gradually than to do everything faster—and alone.

## 3. Align for success

What can also happen is that a church and conference concerned about filling a position may move too quickly. The conference feels good about filling the position, the church can breathe a little easier, and everyone feels satisfied. Some time passes, and the congregation and pastor realize that a wrong fit is keeping the church from forward movement, and most of the time is spent putting out fires. When placing a candidate, it is better to take a little longer to ensure the right match that will bring success to both the pastor and the church. If we are placing just to fill a vacancy, then it will provide only a temporary fix. But if we are aligning for success, we will see both a pastor's ministry and the church grow exponentially in a short time.

So, what was God planning for me? A few weeks after putting my initial thoughts together for this article, an unexpected ministry opportunity came my way. As I reflected on this


possibility, I knew that I would have a chance to implement the ideas I had just put together.

The time for the first interview finally arrived. They began with soft underhand pitches with an occasional changeup. I knew it would be my turn soon. While I wanted to raise the "uncomfortable questions," I also desired to make a good impression. Finally, I had to ask myself, "Is the possibility of offending them worse than getting stuck in another mismatched district?" It was not. Because I asked, I better understood what they were for and what they were against. So far, so good. Next, I had to find out if the things they were sharing were the thoughts of a minority in that room or a majority vision of the church. They answered, and I was two for two.

When it comes to alignment for success, there isn't just one specific question to ask at the interview. Among other things, the conference determines placement based on the culture and philosophy of ministry of the church and the pastor. This decision was made prior to the interview. At some point, the leaders of this church were interviewed about their culture and mission, and this information was presented to me beforehand. As I shared these points with my wife, she responded in amazement, "They're pretty much describing us and our vision." It was a difficult decision to make because it would involve so much change for us. Yet, we could not overlook the fact that since we were not gaining momentum where we were, here was the move we had been longing and praying for. We accepted the invitation.

We had a somewhat seamless transition. What made the most significant difference in the process was the fact that we were willing to ask difficult questions and confirm a majority vision, and we were privileged to be aligned for success.

## Momentum and impact

I am not naive enough to promise that if you consider these three steps, you will never have a mismatched ministry, but maybe they can minimize that possibility. You should not have to just survive ministry in a particular context when you could thrive in another. Some of the greatest achievements in life have taken place because a proper fit generated momentum for individuals and organizations. Such steps may take a little bit more work and feel a little uncomfortable, but they will ultimately allow our pastors and churches to have the greatest impact for God's kingdom. 



## Media evangelism leads to 34,000 baptisms in East-Central Africa Division

NAIROBI, KENYA

**M**ore than 34,000 people have been baptized in the East-Central Africa Division (ECD) due to virtual evangelism in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

East-Central Africa Division (ECD) leaders decided to leverage media opportunities for evangelism at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic when it became apparent that physical gatherings were becoming impossible. The first evangelistic series was conducted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other French-speaking countries, followed by evangelistic efforts conducted through Adventist media in the English-speaking countries of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. Although English was the primary language, the message was translated into various dialects to reach as many people as possible.

The theme of the campaign was “More Than Conquerors.” Speakers were the ECD executive secretary, **Alain Coralie**, and his wife, **Caroline**. “We must rise above the challenges of this life and the limitations that the world is trying to put on us,” Coralie said. “I urge everybody to find their identity in Christ, who enables His children to be overcomers.” According to Coralie, the COVID-19 pandemic has helped shake God’s people from their spiritual lethargy, inviting them to get involved in preaching the gospel.

Speaking of nurture and retention of new members, Coralie reminded listeners of the division motto: *Win one and lose none*. “Baptism is not the final goal; our call is to make disciples, true followers of Christ,” he emphasized as he invited every local church to ground the new believers in Christ through serious Bible studies and active service.

In the past five years, ECD has grown exponentially, crossing the mark of 4.5 million members. ECD president **Blasious Ruguri** called it “a miracle from God,” saying he attributes such growth to following Christ’s method of meeting people’s needs. “I have seen that church members are thirsty for serving others,” he said.

**Joel Okindoh**, ECD evangelism coordinator, said about media, “I praise God for leading the division to this new method of evangelism during the COVID-19 pandemic.” [Prince Bahati, East-Central Africa Division, and *Adventist Review*]



## New educational center caters to immigrants' needs

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

**T**he Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Romania inaugurated the new Hope for Immigrants Educational Center in

Bucharest. The center will cater to refugees’ needs, especially those coming from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, and Ethiopia, leaders reported.

The ADRA center offers Romanian, English, and Arabic language courses, as well as classes in tailoring and music, along with haircuts for men. The center is open for seminars, receptions, and family celebrations as allowed, all



free of charge. Construction of the center took place despite pandemic restrictions. Several Seventh-day Adventist Church organizations and anonymous donors contributed to make this project a reality.

"We found joy in the opportunity to support this new ADRA project," Muntenia Conference president **Robert Mandache** said. "We feel we are paying a debt due to the assistance each one of us has received from God as 'strangers and pilgrims' on this earth. It is something that compels us to assist others, especially the vulnerable."

By setting up this educational center, ADRA continues with an initiative launched in 2015 to assist families and young immigrants in Romania. "The inauguration of this new center proves to us, once again, that empathy and care for our fellow man should be our default setting, something that transcends geographical, cultural, ethnic, religious, or gender boundaries," ADRA Romania executive director **Robert Georgescu** said.

For ADRA volunteers assistant manager **Mihai Braşov**, who coordinated the project, this is a dream come true. "I am glad to inaugurate this center, where our friends can discover our hospitable nation, our language, and become friends with ADRA's volunteers."

**Mohaned Alkorejee**, a radiologist who immigrated from Iraq, stated, "It was a wonderful day when I met good people, wonderful people who work in ADRA. I have heard about this organization, but I felt the difference between what I read and what I saw. From the first moment of the meeting, you feel like you are at home with your family."

Through Hope for Immigrants, ADRA Romania recognizes the human side of the current refugee crisis and the value of each person involved. By respecting human rights and acting with compassion, ADRA aims to minimize the impact of such overwhelming and unbearable situations for as many men, women, and children as possible. [ADRA Romania and *Adventist Review*]



## The dance of joy— baptism in Switzerland

LIGNON, SWITZERLAND

**L**ourdes found Jesus in a most unusual way. “At a wedding, I noticed a young man dancing very well. I didn’t speak to him, but he spoke to my sister. She told me he liked singing with the young people of his church. The word ‘church’ had a surprising effect on my heart. It was the starting point of my journey to real life.” Lourdes recalls searching the young man’s Facebook profile the very next day.

“I asked to be his friend on the social network and we started to talk. I asked him questions about God . . . until the day he invited me to go to his church, the Hispanic Adventist Church in Lignon (Switzerland). It was my first contact with the Adventist Church.

“I went there on August 3, 2019. I was stressed because I didn’t know anyone except this young man. But I felt very good because people welcomed me warmly. They were interested in me.

“I also met Pastor Leo, who that day preached on the theme ‘there is no blind man worse than the one who does not want to see.’ And without a pun, I opened my eyes to my life.

“I realized that I was unhappy and that I had a problem with alcohol. That was the turning point. I went back to church the following Saturday because I had found the experience of this Sabbath really cool. There I heard a message that described our value before God. Again, God spoke to me, and I felt that I had value in God’s eyes.

“I naturally started Bible studies with Pastor Leo. At the end of the first Bible study, on my


way home, I experienced something crazy. I felt like dancing for joy and had peace all over! I felt a sense of well-being that I had never felt before. I was so amazed that I wrote to Leo, asking him what was going on inside me. And he said, ‘This is the work of the Holy Spirit in you.’

“I had been drinking every day; I was freed from it; I didn’t want to drink alcohol anymore. My thirst that was now overflowing was a thirst for God, to know Him, to praise Him.

“During the quarantine, alone with my God,



I began to want to meet Him every day, every moment. My thoughts evolved in relation to baptism. I felt ready and had no reason to wait. I gave my life to Jesus and got baptized.

“Confined alone at home, I was afraid at one point to fall back to alcohol because the temptation was greater. But Jesus was there with me, and that is the strongest. I didn’t fall back into alcohol. I’ve experienced my strength in God. I know I need God in my life. And I know that even if I have problems, Jesus is the solution. He’s part of my life. He won’t let go of me, and I won’t let Him go either!” [Adventiste Magazine] 



## How to overcome loneliness and anxiety

I was a single minister and the annual graduate school Valentine's banquet was rapidly approaching. I asked a young lady to accompany me. She said no; but later she changed her mind.

We arrived at the banquet hall and exchanged the usual colloquial pleasantries with those at the table around us. Then my date glimpsed her friends at another table. She bolted to converse with them—the whole evening.

The emcee asked everyone to name one thing nice about the person you were sitting with at your table. The mic was passed around. When it came to her, the young lady said, "I could be studying right now or doing something else. Instead, alas, I am here."

### The challenge

Have you ever felt hurt, confused, and lonely? According to NPR, health insurer Cigna took a nationwide survey in the United States of 20,000 adults. Fifty-four percent stated "they feel like no one actually knows them well. . . . Approximately 40% said they 'lack companionship,' their 'relationships aren't meaningful,' and that they feel 'isolated from others.'" Cigna chief executive David Cordani concluded, "Half of Americans view themselves as lonely. . . . I can't help but be surprised."<sup>1</sup>

### The steps needed

For many single pastors and lay leaders, it can be challenging to face issues of anxiety and loneliness in a world where "two is better than one" and many church events are geared toward families and/or the elderly.

I would like to suggest seven steps to overcome loneliness and anxiety:

1. *R—Recognize* that you are not alone in feeling this way. Acknowledge the One who is always there to listen. Jesus says to us, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, NKJV). It is OK to pull away and take a break from social media and other things to reflect on your life's purpose and calling in ministry.
2. *E—Expect* to receive God's favor and blessings because you are unique in His creation. "I am

fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, KJV). Nobody else on earth can do things or affect people's lives like you can. Prepare to be blessed, either tangibly or intangibly, ahead of time, making room for the Spirit of God to move.

3. *J—Just pray* for others who are lonely and anxious in this world. "And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10, NKJV). Sometimes praying on behalf of others can change our own outlook.
4. *O—Open* your heart to all possibilities of meeting people. "For I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and . . . give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). Be fearless by making a list of opportunities God has given you and be willing to follow Him.
5. *I—Invest* in using your gifts and talents anywhere that you can—from public events to family events. "A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men" (Prov 18:16, NKJV). The more you use what God has naturally given you, the more others appreciate you, and you begin to gain confidence.
6. *C—Cut out* negative thoughts and people in your life. "Finally, brothers, whatever is pure, . . . lovely, . . . commendable, if there is any excellence, . . . think about these things" (Phil 4:8, ESV). Some people are just a sounding board of negativity to stop your dreams.
7. *E—Exhale* all the stress away with laughter and relaxation with family, friends, a pet, or doing a favorite hobby. Jesus calls you in, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Rest, knowing that Jesus is working with you to help you be all you can be.

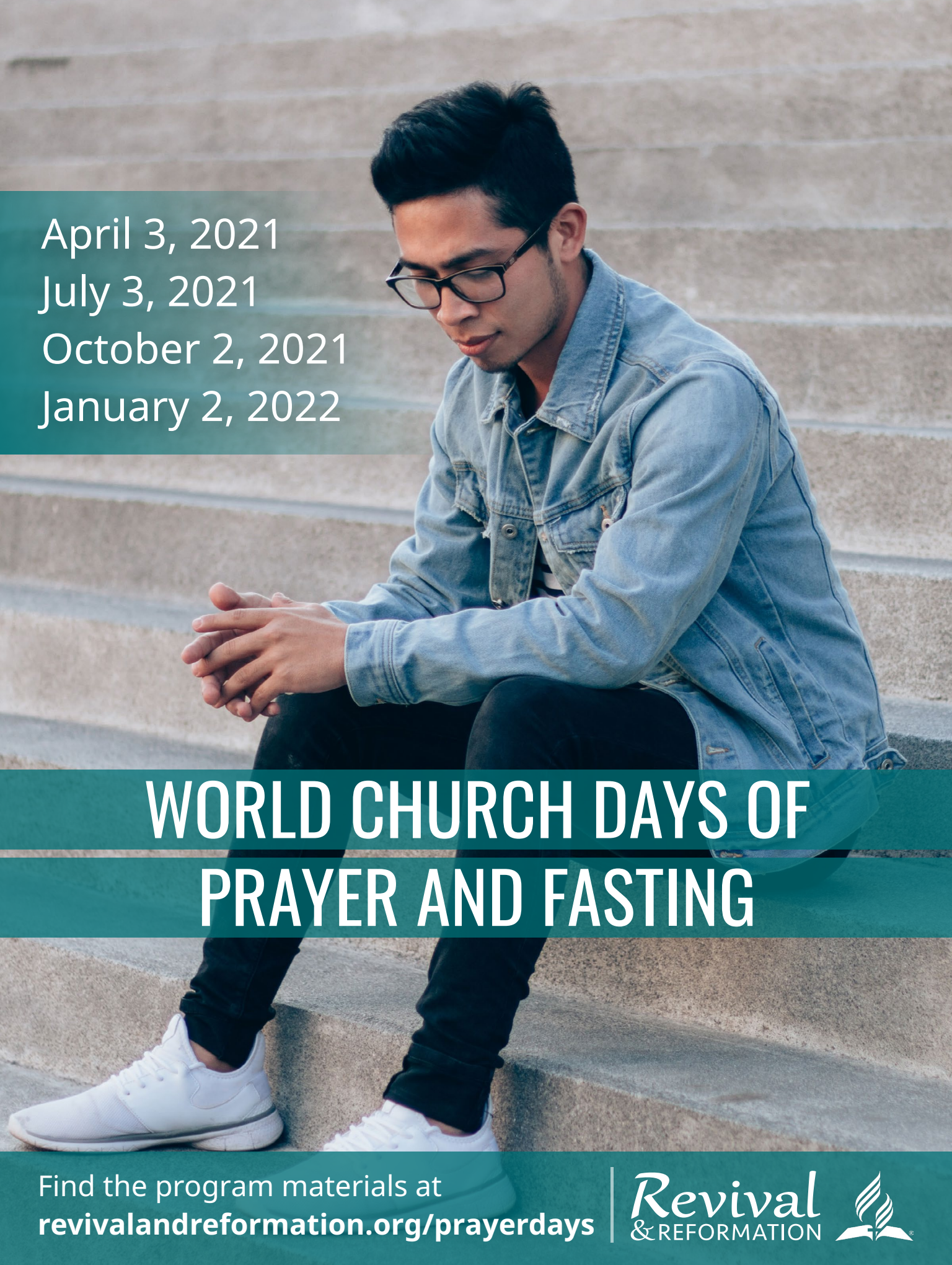
How many members of your congregation are suffering from anxiety and loneliness right now? What about yourself? Do not suffer in silence or find solace in vices. Do not drown in the abyss of superficial social media. God and the people He places in your path are standing by to help you sing a song of joy and fulfillment.

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<sup>1</sup> Aric Jenkins, "Study Finds That Half of Americans—Especially Young People—Feel Lonely," *Fortune*, May 1, 2018, <https://fortune.com/2018/05/01/americans-lonely-cigna-study/>.



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