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“We must expand our vision to include educating every Adventist child in every situation to prepare them to be citizens of God’s kingdom.”

Reformation and open Communion

As a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am a regular recipient and reader of *Ministry* magazine. The published articles are timely, enlightening, and refreshing.

I read the article titled “Reformation Principles for an End-Time Ministry” by Dr. Ganoune Diop in your October 2017 issue. I noticed that on page 7 the article says, “For Catholics, the prerequisites for Communion are baptism and confirmation. Protestants, on the other hand, practice open Communion and come to the Lord’s table as sinners, not saints.”

I come from an Anglican (Protestant) family. And in the Anglican (Protestant) Church, both baptism and confirmation are prerequisites for Communion. We were required to have *both* before we were allowed to receive Communion. Therefore, *all* Protestants do not necessarily practice open Communion.

Nevertheless, while I have always reminded the worshipers of the warning of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 11:27–29, I fully agree with the principles of open and

inclusive Communion expounded both in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. During my last 37 years of both part-time and full-time ministry in several parts of the world, it has been my habit almost always to remind the congregation that the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes in and practices open, inclusive Communion.

Whoever believes in Jesus and wishes to avail themselves of His salvation is invited to participate. In some of our Communion services, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and other non-Adventists with sincere desires have participated and testified that they have been blessed and inspired to learn more about Jesus. God bless.

—Walter John, senior pastor, Seventh-day Adventist church in Pohnpei

Christian education—a collaboration

I could not be in stronger agreement that we must do a better job of preparing our children for heaven (June 2017 issue). However, I wish to share some observations after reading this issue.

All of the writers were connected with larger churches or large church educational institutions. The majority of our churches no longer have schools. I can’t help but observe a void in our vision for Adventist Christian education—the small churches that are a majority. Let me suggest some answers to our church’s educational challenges.

We must expand our vision to include educating every Adventist child in every situation to prepare them to be citizens of God’s kingdom. Ella Simmons mentioned the need for partnership, and that partnership was directed to pastors and schools. Clearly, we need to expand our vision to include all efforts to add support for homeschoolers, self-supporting schools, and the provision of online resources that are freely available to every parent who desires to educate their children for God’s kingdom.

—Bud Schermerhorn, pastor, Graysville, Tennessee, United States

I am writing to express our delight in the June 2017 issue of *Ministry* magazine. One of our office’s great goals this year is to enhance the collaborative ministries of our teachers and schools with our Australian pastors.

Our objective is to promote conversations on ministry between pastors and school leaders so that each can assist the other in making the most of opportunities to minister to school students and their families. In Australian Adventist schools, this is more important than ever, given the relatively high levels of non-Adventist family engagement with our program.

Your magazine hit the spot, and we are keen to ensure that every school leader receives a hard copy of the June 2017 issue, “Adventist Education.”

—Lyndon Chapman, associate national director, Adventist Schools Australia, Victoria, Australia

Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is associate editor, *Ministry*.



“Them” and us

February is known in the United States and Canada as Black History Month, celebrating victories gained in the African diaspora. Australia celebrates July as Black History Month; England and the Netherlands celebrate in October; and “in Brazil, Black Awareness Day or Black Consciousness Day (Portuguese: *Dia da Consciência Negra*) is observed annually on November 20 as a day ‘to celebrate a regained awareness by the black community about their great worth and contribution to the country.’”¹

For me, the benefit of Black History Month has come, not from rejoicing in isolation but from celebrating in collaboration. Coming close to someone forces you to learn; as I discovered one summer at Andrews University.

I was engaged to be married. All that stood between me and the altar was a month of doctoral comprehensive exams. I had to study, but I also had to live. So I looked for a job that would give maximum pay for minimum work. After all, I would already be working by studying for my comprehensives. I scanned the notice board at Andrews University’s Apple Valley supermarket, and my eyes fell on an advertisement: “Wanted: live-in roommate for wheelchair-bound young man. Pay: \$XYZ.” *Whoa, that’s not for me!* I thought. *I’m about to get my own live-in roommate. I’m about to get married.* I read on. “Duties: shopping, cooking, cleaning.” There was more. “Occupant will be required to take care of Gary’s bathroom and toiletry needs.” *No way!* Then it seemed as if a Voice said to me, “*You are about to get married, but you have no idea what two becoming one is all about. Here is Gary. He needs someone who will give him 100 percent care and attention. Aside from the pay, there’s no guarantee what you will get in return.*”

But instead of calculating what you will get, can you focus on what you can give?”

I met Gary; he was a large, white young man, awkwardly seated in his wheelchair, with a lovely, if rather apprehensive, smile. I think he wondered how long I would stay; so did I. I moved into Gary’s apartment. I shopped for Gary. I cooked for Gary. He told me his previous roommate had only given him rice and beans—every day. I immediately looked up some recipes. Gary told me he enjoyed my food; but I struggled to enjoy my stay. I wanted to be free—free to hang out with my friends and free to play my music. But I stayed. I listened to his music, and he listened to mine.

A friendship started to grow; a bond began to form. I washed Gary’s body from head to toe. He was heavy. You see, he didn’t exercise much; well, he couldn’t really. I bathed Gary in the bathroom, and I wiped Gary in the toilet. Some duties I liked, and some I didn’t; but I did them all.

I can’t say the summer went by quickly. But a tear was in my eye when it was time for me to fly to Bermuda and get married. When my wife and I returned to set up our student home at Andrews, I took Pattiejean to see Gary. He was so excited to meet her. They hugged. Little did I know that would be a last embrace. We got word that Gary’s condition worsened dramatically. At the age of 28, he died.

Gospel artist Hezekiah Walker sings, “I need you, you need me. We’re all a part of God’s body. It is His will, that every need be supplied. You are important to me, I need you to survive.” I think Gary may have needed me; I certainly needed him. I will never forget when Elder Charles E. Bradford, a beloved former North American Division president, spoke at Andrews University. He

Sometimes I think the Lord says, “You cannot live with Me until you have lived with them.”

told the students that black religion (the vehicle for overcoming oppression) is a survival religion. He said that all of us, as part of the remnant, will need the black experience. He quoted Ellen White: “Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of the slaves in America, who have suffered.”² He commented that Ellen White thus made black history part of *heilsgeschichte*—salvation history. Finally, he added (with a twinkle in his eye), “So there’s your justification for Black History Month—Sister White said!”³

Dr. Sikhumbuzo Ndlovu’s lead article maintains that the cross of Jesus transforms us to love and embrace others from different races. Sometimes I think the Lord says, “You cannot live with Me until you have lived with them.” And at different seasons in our lives, God brings along a “them.” Sometimes they are persons with differing abilities. Sometimes they are persons with differing sexualities. Sometimes they are persons with differing ethnicities. Who is your “them” right now? My experience with Gary has taught me that if you obey God’s still, small Voice, you will discover that soon your “them” will be *us*. 🙏

1 Wikipedia, s.v. “Black Awareness Day,” last modified November 19, 2017, 02:02, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Awareness_Day.

2 Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), 42.

3 cf. also Charles E. Bradford, *The King Is In Residence: A Beloved Leader Shares His Vision for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2017), 9.

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The church in Antioch of Syria: *A model for multicultural ministries*

The world is fast becoming a global village. Monoculturalism is giving way to multiculturalism. In any setup, people of diverse languages, classes, tribes, and cultural and racial backgrounds interact more frequently than ever before. The interactions occur both by default and design, and so human beings are confronted by the reality of diversity. This is also true in the church. As a result, the church in the twenty-first century needs to actively embrace the idea of a diverse membership. Church leaders at various levels need to espouse vital multicultural leadership skills in order to remain effective and relevant to the dynamics and demographics of the church.

In this context, the church in Antioch of Syria, which comprised a diverse membership, has lessons for the twenty-first century church. This church could be used as a model of multiculturalism. What I will call the “Antiochian model” stems from the church in Antioch of Syria (Acts 13:1). The outstanding characteristic of the church of Antioch in Syria is that it managed to break down the middle wall of partition (Eph. 2:14–16), proving that multiculturalism is possible. The church has much to learn from the Antiochian model, a model which presupposes a

church without walls as the major basis for multicultural ministry.

Why Antioch?

There are many reasons for choosing the church of Antioch in Syria as a model for multicultural ministry. First, Antioch marks a radical paradigm shift for Christianity, which was almost exclusively Jewish, to a Gentile-inclusive faith. Geoge Arthur Buttrick et al. confirm that “Christianity in Jerusalem was not destroyed, it was dispersed.”¹ Therefore, Antioch was a confluence of both Hellenistic and Jewish culture. Bosch observes, “Antioch was the third largest city in the ancient world, after Rome and Alexandria, and capital of the combined Roman province of Syria and Cilicia during this period.”²

Second, the fact that the church in Antioch of Syria could harmoniously harness the energies of these ethnic groups and manage them in unity, is incredible. Joel Musvosvi extrapolates on the transformation that had occurred: “Different ethnicities scaled the walls that had divided them and came into one fellowship. The common citizens were taken aback by this flagrant disregard of long-standing socio-cultural norms. In cultural shock

and consternation, they hurled scorn at the believers, mockingly referring to them as *Christians* [Gr. *Christianous*], people without boundaries.”³

The church in Antioch, at least, managed to break down the natural barriers across different ethnic groups and produced a society that was “neither Jewish nor ‘traditionally’ Gentile, but it constituted a third entity.”⁴ Even Luke is careful to note that at Antioch “the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26, NKJV). This renders the characteristics of the church of Antioch both outstanding and instructive.

A missional church

One wonders how long it would have taken for the gospel to reach the entire Roman Empire if persecution had lingered. As persecution intensified after the death of Stephen, the gospel spread like a wildfire. The scattered believers went “as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word to no one but the Jews only” (verse 19, NKJV). Luke also records that “some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus” (verse 20, NIV). This is probably the most radical paradigm shift in the execution

of the gospel commission so far. The gospel had broken through the Jewish barriers and entered the Greco-Roman world. As such, Antioch marks a major and notable breakthrough of a missional church. The innovation of these unnamed missionaries in the book of Acts is most probably unparalleled in the history of their time.

A missional church, as demonstrated by the church of Antioch, does not erect racial barriers; it breaks them. Douglass L. Rutt correctly notes that “by far the biggest wall was that which divided the Jews and Gentiles.”⁵ That middle wall of partition, which had stubbornly stood years and years, crumbled down as the church of Antioch pursued its mission. Therefore, one is not surprised by the fact that Antioch became the gravitational center for missions in the first century. Arnold Airhart rightly describes the church of Antioch as a “product of missionary evangelism.”⁶ Consequently, Antioch was not only a product of missionary endeavors but also became the first church to embrace a mission focus beyond the shadows of Jerusalem (Acts 13:2, 3).

A life-transforming church

The early church began its mission in Jerusalem and enlarged its concentric circles accordingly (Acts 1:8). Ajith Fernando confirms that Antioch was known for its moral degradation. The moral rot was typified by the worship at a shrine in Daphne “owing to the cult prostitution.”⁷ In concord, William Barclay acknowledges that “‘the morals of Daphne’ was a phrase that all the world recognized as indicating loose living. It seems incredible, but nonetheless it is true that it was in a city like this that Christianity took the great stride forward to becoming the religion of the world.”⁸

Therefore, for Christianity to take such deep roots outside a Jewish cultural context distinguishes Antioch as a new center of mission with a radical paradigm shift in the transformation of lives. Again, Luke’s record that it was at

Antioch of Syria, and not elsewhere, that the followers of Christ were first called Christians, bears much weight. As demonstrated, when these Gentile converts joined the church at Antioch, none of the former names would embrace the cosmopolitan body. They were no longer all Nazarenes or Galileans or Greek Jews, and in the eyes of the people of Antioch, they must have seemed a strange mixture.

Evidently, the transformed lives of the Antiochenes left the community with no option other than giving a new name to these believers. Such a transformation could no longer remain a private matter, and the society acknowledged the radical change. In the expansion of the gospel from Jerusalem to the other parts of the Roman Empire, Antioch presented a new face of what the ideal multicultural church should look like. For the first time in the history of the Christian church, a crucial breakthrough was made.

A diverse membership

For that reason, church members in Antioch learned to mix and mingle across racial lines. As Bosch observes, “There was to begin with, no church apartheid in Antioch. Jews and Gentiles ate together—something unparalleled in the ancient world, particularly since those Gentiles were not circumcised.”⁹ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, when the leadership in Jerusalem heard about what God was doing in Antioch, they sent Barnabas, probably to investigate (Acts 11:22). The integration of the church at Antioch was so real, and so deep, that even Peter, who needed God’s intervention before embracing Gentiles, was taken aback—only to later retrogress in fear of the circumcision party (Gal. 2:11–15).

The membership at Antioch, unlike the one at Jerusalem, was more heterogeneous than homogeneous.¹⁰ Therefore, it could be safely argued that Antioch would correctly represent a model for multicultural churches even today.

A diverse leadership

Another breakthrough for the church in Antioch of Syria is shown by the diverse and dynamic leadership profile. Luke is deliberate in profiling the leaders of the church in Antioch. The “new Christian church in Antioch . . . was served by prophets and teachers. . . : ‘Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul.’ ”¹¹ “Thorsten Prill states, “By listing listing the names of these church leaders Luke highlights the wide range of both their social and cultural backgrounds.”¹²

This is a very useful characteristic of a multicultural church. The leadership team represents the diverse races, cultures, languages, and ethnic groupings of the society. The church at Antioch represents the cosmopolitan outlook of the third largest city after Rome and Alexandria. Barclay further highlights the qualities of these church leaders when he observes that “it has been pointed out that this very list of prophets is symbolic of the universal appeal of the gospel. Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus; Lucius from Cyrene in North Africa; Simeon was also a Jew but his other name Niger is given and, since this a Roman name, it shows that he must have moved in Roman circles; Manaen was a man with aristocratic connections, and Paul himself a Jew from Tarsus of Cilicia and a trained rabbi.”¹³

With such a diversity of leadership, one would expect disharmony based on tribal, racial, or ethnic affiliation. However, the church of Antioch demonstrates maturity and unity among its own leaders. Again, Barclay proposes, “That little group is an example of the unifying influence of Christianity. Individuals from many lands and many backgrounds had discovered the secret of ‘togetherness’ because they had discovered the secret of Christ.”¹⁴

An empowered church

While the Holy Spirit plays a major and significant role in the inception and growth of the early church in general, the church of Antioch seemed

to rely on the direction and instruction of the Spirit more often than did others (Acts 11:24, 28; 13:2, 4). Otherwise, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, how else does one explain the mission impetus and the unity of this unique church? The church at Antioch in Syria demonstrates the effective

of self-indulgence and an attitude of exclusivism, Antioch embraced others with both open hands and open hearts.

In a similar fashion, the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission, an area that needs so much assistance from around the world to help with their massive challenges, nevertheless takes

church to be innovative and operate outside the box.

The major bone of contention for the early church was participation with the uncircumcised Gentile believers around the Communion or fellowship table. The apostle Peter, who had received a vision and confessed, “I now



A missional church, as demonstrated by the church of Antioch, does not erect racial barriers; it breaks them.

and transformational role played by the Holy Spirit in a multicultural context. Such a transformation cannot be achieved by human craftiness, intelligence, force, or wisdom—but only by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

A benevolent church

It was this church that sent relief to their fellow Christian brothers and sisters in Judea (Acts 11:26–30; Gal. 2:1–10). Apparently, the Antiochenes were not just inward looking; they considered and cared about the plight of others. Instead of adopting a policy

up a quarterly offering throughout its territory for its “adopted area” in the Euro-Asia Division, which also has great needs! This is a powerfully relevant model for a contemporary Laodicean church.¹⁵

Effective conflict resolution

As the church in Antioch grew, it encountered new challenges. While a multicultural church presents opportunities for the church to explore its mission capacity and expand, once such growth is experienced, tension is inevitable. Yet such pressure invites the

realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism,” capitulated to the circumcision party when they put him in the spotlight (Acts 10:34, NIV; Gal. 2:11–14). Paul could not countenance the behavior of the senior apostle; he rebuked him together with Barnabas for what he thought was hypocrisy. Luke notes that “some men came down from Judea [to Antioch] and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the law handed down by Moses, you cannot be saved’ ” (Acts 15:1, ESV).

Was it necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised before they could

fully participate in the fellowship meal? After much debate, it was agreed not to burden the Gentiles with unnecessary Jewish customs but, rather, that they should “abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (Acts 15:19, 20, NIV). Interestingly, the church at Antioch did not raise theological arguments with the circumcision party. Instead, the church sent a delegation led by Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss this matter with the church leadership (Acts 15:2, 3).

A model for today

While the situation at Antioch and that in the world today are removed from each other by centuries, some lessons can still be gleaned for both contextualization and adaptation.

First, the church needs much innovation to break through the fog of minority seclusion. If the church maintains the same old method of monoculturalism, it may not succeed in this pluralistic society.

Second, the church should seek transformation of lives. Rather than focusing on the external differences presented by each racial group, the sole purpose of the body of Christ—the church—is to change the lives of believers so that they become faithful and loving disciples. Once lives are transformed, the Communion table allows for fellowship and mutual sharing without any barriers.

Another strong characteristic of the church of Antioch was the diversity of its leadership and membership. It is clear that such a combination of various gifts and abilities was not a liability to the church but a very strong asset. The church can tap into the wisdom of an Antiochian model, multiracial church, and use it in a very positive manner.

Above all, the church of Antioch was openhearted and liberal in giving assistance to brothers and sisters of another race. Such an attitude makes the church a place of *shalom*, whereby the needs of others become the very needs of the church.

Finally, the church would do well to learn from the Antiochenes what Paul means when he states, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20, NIV). Conflict resolution in a multiracial society and church is a critical tool for peace and harmony to prevail. Anger, bitterness, strife, hatred, and war are consequences of a failure in conflict resolution skills. The Antiochian church is a good model for a church to follow in a society bruised and fractured by political, racial, religious, tribal, and ethnic divisions.

The church in Antioch, with its diversity in membership and leadership, was very mature; and the Jerusalem Council amicably resolved any challenges (Acts 15:22–32). The same model can be applied in a multicultural situation. Gelder surmises, “God invites redeemed humanity into a oneness that is to reflect fully the oneness of the Godhead.”¹⁶ When different races meet at the foot of the cross, that encounter itself should make a vast difference. The cross of Jesus transforms their former hostile attitudes and helps them love and embrace “others” from a different race. Consequently, “the Christian’s encounter with Christ creates both a cross-cultural and a countercultural community. At the cross, the church is a repentant community. It is a community that is oriented around the mission of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

The model presented by the Antiochian church is centripetal, which is heterogeneous in nature, as opposed to a centrifugal approach, represented by the homogeneous unit principle. As seen in the Antioch church, a multicultural church was not necessarily a hindrance to missionary agility. On the contrary, Luke showed that the multicultural church in Antioch was growing even faster than the Jewish church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:21, 24). However, the magnetic center that attracts and unites different races is Jesus Christ. This is precisely what Ellen White meant by stating

that “Christ is the center to which all should be attracted; for the nearer we approach the center, the closer we shall come together in feeling, in sympathy, in love, growing into the character and image of Jesus.”¹⁸ Therefore, the Antiochian model suggests that Christ should be the center around which all people gather, regardless of race, tribe, gender, creed, class, or background. 

- 1 George Arthur Buttrick, et al., eds., *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 9: *Acts, Romans* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 146.
- 2 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 44.
- 3 Joel Musvosvi, “Race, Ethnicity, and Tribal Conflicts,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 48, published by Digital Commons at Andrews University, digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?&httpsredir=1&article=1045&context=jams.
- 4 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 44.
- 5 Douglas L. Rutt, “Antioch as a Paradigmatic of the Urban Center of Mission,” 4, lutheranmissiology.org/Antioch.pdf.
- 6 Arnold E. Airhart, *Beacon Bible Expositions*, vol. 5, *Acts* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1977).
- 7 Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 300.
- 8 William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 104.
- 9 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 43, 44.
- 10 F. F. Bruce, “The Church of Jerusalem,” *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* 4 (April 1964), 5–14.
- 11 Thorsten Prill, “Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (2009), 332–346, www.researchgate.net/publication/283118771_Migration_mission_and_the_multi-ethnic_church.
- 12 Prill, “Migration,” 36.
- 13 Barclay, *Acts of the Apostles*, 114, 115.
- 14 Barclay, *Acts of the Apostles*, 115.
- 15 cf. also “the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations” (2 Cor. 8:1–5, NIV).
- 16 V. C. Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 2000), 122.
- 17 Leslie Pollard, *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of All Cultures* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), 20.
- 18 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 259.

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Unity *and* collaboration in urban ministry

Can people from different races get along? Can those with different skin colors understand each other? Can individuals from different cultures and backgrounds learn to listen to, accept, and interact with one another? The human heart says, “No!” The gospel gives a resounding “Yes!” This answer is possible through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The world is desperate for this unity. Our cities need to see a picture of unity and collaboration between ethnic groups. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a grand opportunity to paint this picture and be a conduit that shows the world what love will do.

I would like to share with you the story of Saint Louis.¹ I want to take you on a journey of unity and collaboration that has been taking place in the Seventh-day Adventist churches of the Saint Louis metropolitan area. I will also offer some practical ways that churches can begin that journey. My hope is that this story will inspire pastors and churches in other cities to embark on a similar journey.

Saint Louis is a metropolitan city of 2.8 million people in the US state of Missouri. There are 15 Seventh-day Adventist churches scattered throughout the city—all different and unique. Some are predominantly African

American. Some are predominantly Caucasian. Some are multicultural. Others are Spanish, Korean, Haitian, and some are other ethnicities. They are filled with people as diverse as the snowflakes that fall from the heavens. Among these 15 churches, there are 11 pastors.

Organizationally, the Saint Louis metropolitan area comprises four conferences: Central States Conference, Iowa-Missouri Conference, Lake Region Conference, and Illinois Conference. Typically, in a large metro area, churches may rarely fellowship together. And if they are from different conferences or cultures, the walls can be even higher in some places. Many times the first step toward unity and collaboration is simply spending time together.

Unity and collaboration: the first steps

The first step for Saint Louis began around 2011. I was working in the Saint Louis metropolitan area and had a Sabbath where I was not scheduled to preach anywhere. So my family and I decided to visit one of our sister churches from the Central States Conference and worship with them. We chose the Berean church. This church was in a different conference from our own. The membership was predominantly African American,

ethnically different from our own. The location was a different part of the city from our own. The worship style was different from our own. The songs were not familiar to me, and I did not know anyone there. Located in the same city, this was a peculiar place to me and my family—but we had a wonderful experience. We were warmly greeted and welcomed with open arms. The church did not make us feel different or uncomfortable. I met the pastor, and so began a cross-cultural friendship that continues to this day.

Not long after this experience, the Iowa-Missouri pastors were considering bringing an initiative called Equipping University to the Saint Louis area.² So it was decided to ask the pastors from the Central States Conference whether they would be interested in partnering to make this a city-wide initiative. They agreed.

So we all started meeting together on a monthly basis to get to know each other and plan for this initiative. The first session of Equipping University was a huge blessing. More than 220 members from ten different churches and four different conferences attended the first weekend. It was extremely moving to see people from different churches, races, and cultures meeting, worshipping, praying, and being trained for outreach together. There

were African Americans, Caucasians, Latinos, Koreans, Haitians, Caribbeans, and other ethnicities in attendance. The comment we heard over and over again was how much the people enjoyed fellowshiping with those of other churches. It was stressed that we must do this again.

Even when the first module of Equipping University was complete, the pastors decided to keep meeting together monthly. As these city-wide pastors' meetings progressed, and we continued praying together, a strong bond began to develop between us. Over time, a vision began to form within us—a vision to work together to impact the city for Christ. Yes, each church had its individual mission and territory, but if we were going to make a difference in a large city like Saint Louis, we knew we had to collaborate in city-wide initiatives and ministries. So this vision was twofold: (1) to begin developing unity by creating avenues where these ethnically diverse churches could start meeting and fellowshiping together regularly, and (2) to start working together in collaborative initiatives to minister to the city of Saint Louis.

Out of this vision grew the following activities:

1. Monthly city-wide pastors' meetings. The pastors formed a cross-conference, cross-cultural ministerial association called AMPS (Adventist Ministers and Pastors of Saint Louis). They meet on a monthly basis to share, pray, and plan city-wide events and outreach.

2. Quarterly city-wide prayer meetings. Once every quarter, all the Saint Louis area churches come together for a city-wide prayer meeting. This includes singing and worship—but mostly praying: individually, corporately, and in small groups. We know there can be no unity, indeed nothing of significance, without the working of the Holy Spirit. Our first city-wide prayer service was attended by more than 200 people, with diverse churches and ethnicities represented from throughout the city. Seeing people of various ethnicities and cultures praying together has a

powerful impact on the human soul. It was a moving experience.

3. Metro camp meetings. Just as every conference has a yearly camp meeting where all the churches in the conference are invited to gather together, the pastors felt it was important for the Saint Louis area churches to come together for a camp meeting as well. So we developed a yearly city-wide camp meeting where all Saint Louis churches are invited to come for a special weekend of worship. They select a theme, invite powerful speakers, and promote it heavily.

from being inward-focused to being outward-focused. Imagine the city of Saint Louis seeing believers of all ethnicities working side by side to minister to others and make the city a better place!

You too can begin the journey

This journey of unity and collaboration continues in Saint Louis today. But perhaps this same journey can happen in other large cities throughout the world. There may be a vision welling up inside your heart to see this journey

Many times the first step toward unity and collaboration is simply spending time together.

4. Saint Louis Lay Mission Committee. We knew that in order for this unity and collaboration to continue on a permanent basis, we had to get lay people involved. The purpose of coming together is not just for the sake of unity by itself. The fruit of unity should be evangelism, working together to fulfill the gospel commission, and not just standing around singing “Kum-ba-yah,” boasting that we are unified. True unity should propel us to work side by side to minister to the city. So we developed a unique lay mission committee made up of church members from all area churches.

The committee's task is to find and/or develop within Saint Louis one or two mission projects a year in which members from all area churches can participate. At some point, unity has to leave the walls of the church and be seen on the street. It has to transition

happen in your city and church. Maybe you are a pastor or a lay leader, and God wants to use you as a catalyst to bring the churches and ethnicities of your city together. Here are some steps you can take to begin the journey.

1. Pray for a vision. Ask God to give you a vision of unity and collaboration between the different churches in your city. Ask Him to place this passion on your heart and to plant this seed in the hearts of other pastors or lay leaders in the city. Working together with other cultures is not an easy task. There will be challenges and obstacles. The devil will try to erect strongholds of obstruction and cause misunderstandings. So you need a passion and determination that is willing to work patiently with people and move beyond the difficulties. However, the blessings of unity and collaboration far outweigh the challenges.

2. *Start visiting with other pastors.* Make contact with the pastors in other conferences in your city. Connect with the churches of other ethnicities. Visit them one at a time and begin a friendship with the pastors or lay leaders. This could be on a Sabbath or sometime during another event they may be hosting, like concerts and other social events. Invite the pastors to preach at your church. When possible, take a Sabbath off and worship at their church and become acquainted with them. If you cannot break free from your Sabbath responsibilities at your own church, then visit one of their functions during the week, like a prayer meeting. Be willing to meet them on their turf, and watch the walls come down.

3. *Begin a city-wide pastors' meeting.* After you have visited with them and shared your vision for unity and collaboration, invite the pastors to form a ministerial group and begin meeting together on a monthly basis. In your meetings, get to know each other. Pray together. Dream together. Vision together on what unity and collaboration would look like in your city. Write out your vision and create a mission statement. Choose a chairperson and vice-chairperson, preferably from two different conferences or ethnic groups. Begin planning city-wide activities and ministries. Organize so that the movement continues long after you are gone.

Do not worry if some pastors do not initially come to the meetings. As the group gains momentum and positive results are seen, they will come. Give them time. Stay in touch and have the other pastors continue to invite them. Give God a chance to move on their hearts.

4. *Plan some city-wide events where people from different churches can fellowship and mingle with each other.* If the pastors are fellowshiping together in the monthly pastors' meetings, then members need to have the opportunity to experience the same. Fellowshiping enables them to develop friendships and bonds with members of other churches and ethnicities. If you want the members

to adopt the same vision of unity and collaboration, this step is critical.

These city-wide activities may include socials, picnics, international food fests, a parade of nations, or any number of creative events. Be focused. Be intentional. Hundreds of possibilities beckon you.

You might want to consider something that they do in Saint Louis—a quarterly, city-wide prayer meeting. Each quarter, plan a prayer service to which members of all the area churches are invited. Take turns hosting it in different churches. It may start small, but remember God's promises: "For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6) and "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).³

5. *Start an annual metro camp meeting.* Set aside a special weekend once a year where all the metro churches can come together for a joint worship. In Saint Louis, this involves Friday night, Sabbath morning and afternoon, a Sunday morning prayer breakfast, and even a parade of nations. This takes much planning, but it is well worth it. Try to have programming and music that represents the diversity of ethnicities in the churches. Invite the area churches to close for this special Sabbath so that all members can come to the joint Sabbath morning worship. Some churches will do this; some will not. All the area pastors should commit to being present at the camp meeting. They should not preach in their own churches that Sabbath. By attending, they communicate that the camp meeting is important and meeting together is a priority.

6. *Find a mission project in your city in which members from all the area churches can participate.* It could be a one-day project like an extreme home makeover or cleaning up a park. It could be a seasonal event like a community Vacation Bible School in a deprived neighborhood. Or it could be an ongoing

project like after-school tutoring, assisting refugees, or establishing some kind of community center.

When members of different churches and ethnicities are working side by side in collaborative ministry, the natural result is unity. Conversation happens. Friendships are formed. Experiences are shared. Understanding takes place. God is there. The Holy Spirit creates a tie that cannot easily be broken.

Imagine what the city will see—church members of different races, ethnicities, and cultures working together to make a positive difference in their city; a picture of Christ shining through in all the people. This is unity in action. It is a picture not soon forgotten, and it is a picture your city desperately needs to see.

All it takes is one person with a God-given vision—one person to be a catalyst. Are you that person? Is God calling you to begin a journey of unity and collaboration among the churches in your city? Is God calling the churches of your city to be a light upon a hill?

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" (Isa. 6:8).⁴

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- 1 At the time of writing, David Klinedinst served as resident evangelist for the Saint Louis Metro Area, in the Iowa-Missouri Conference.
 - 2 Equipping University is a lay training and discipleship program designed to activate and mobilize members for ministry and outreach. www.nadei.org/article/385/evangelism-services/equipping-university
 - 3 All Scripture passages in this article are from the New King James Version.
 - 4 I 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 the Berean church; Charles Osborne III, pastor of the Berean church; Fred Montgomery, pastor of the Agape church; Claval Hunter, pastor of the Lighthouse and Tabernacle of Praise churches; Jae Wook Lee, pastor of the Korean church; Rob Alfalah, pastor of the Saint Louis Central and Mid-Rivers churches; Vic Van Shaik, former pastor of the Saint Louis Central church; Robb Long, associate pastor of the Saint Louis Central and Mid-Rivers churches; Ken Olin, pastor of the West County and Southside churches; Robb Lechner, former pastor of the West and Southside churches; and Tony LaPorte, former pastor of the Mid-Rivers and Spanish churches.

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Recovery *of the* biblical narrative

My grandmother was illiterate. But her biblical literacy, acquired through my father's recitation of Bible stories, was truly remarkable. I used to credit her knowledge of the Bible to her memory and my father's vivid storytelling ability—until recently when I came to appreciate the narrative form of the Bible itself. The Bible is *essentially a story*, a narration of God's gracious activities in the lives of patriarchs and prophets, the nation of Israel, the life of Jesus, and of the church.

To be sure, this is how my father presented it. Paralleling Ellen White's Conflict of the Ages series,¹ he told the story from Genesis to Revelation, in the context of the great controversy between good and evil. For him, the great controversy was not simply a doctrine or fundamental belief—but an existential reality. It was something taking place in his own heart. God and the devil were real spiritual powers contending for supremacy over his life. Indeed, what I remember most about my father is how he saw everything in his life and around him, small or large, in light of the cosmic war between God and the devil.

My grandmother, too, saw things in the same light. For both of them, what made “the great controversy” so immediate and fundamental was their experience with African traditional

religions. As anyone who has observed them firsthand would attest, real and pungent spiritual forces suffuse traditional religions. When individuals become possessed, spirit mediums perform strange acts. They speak in voices of dead relatives or shriek and howl like animals. The divine and the demonic, religion and magic, are not differentiated in African religions, indeed in all traditional religions.

This lack of differentiation, especially between the divine and the demonic, explains the ambivalence of the primitive sacred: how it was regarded as beneficent, yet also dreaded as malevolent. Indeed, as my father told me, his first prayer, before he knew anything about the God of the Bible or the gospel, was after a night encounter with a witch, at the tender age of ten. Greatly terrified and hallucinating, he mumbled a prayer. The deliverance he experienced that night was the reason why, a few years later, when he went to Nyazura Adventist Mission School, the revelation of the great war between God and Satan made such a deep impression on him. As he put it himself in the words of Colossians 1:13, God “rescued [me] from the dominion of darkness and brought [me] into the kingdom of [His] Son.”²

The experience of being “rescued from the dominion of darkness” polarized and changed my father's

worldview. As a result, he experienced a thoroughly radical change in how he perceived life from its origin to its ultimate culmination. That radical change led him to reject the traditional concept of his ancestral religious culture, rituals, and magic. From the realm of the demonic, he moved to a spiritual discovery of a God of love, the Almighty Creator and Redeemer that the Bible reveals. This discovery led him to embrace Jesus as his deliverer and Savior from sin to righteousness.

To him, being a Christian meant moving from one view of life to another. It was the adoption of a new identity. In Abraham, my father saw his paradigmatic example. The great patriarch, Abraham, was called by God from his country, people, and family to become the founder of a new nation: Israel. As my father used to say, “There is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the *call* of God and *claims* of country, tribe, and family.” He was right. Put together these *claims* and you have a new identity, a new culture. Indeed, etymologically the word *culture*, from the Latin *cultus*, means adoration or worship.

Who is to be worshipped?

The adoption of this new culture raises a new question: Who is to be worshipped, God or Satan? Due to the devil's masquerades, the issue comes in

confusingly diverse modes and guises, and this is one reason why my father placed such a high premium on the life stories of Bible characters. Those characters provided radical role models and practical answers to the question of who should be worshipped. As Paul put it to the Corinthians, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11). My father’s existential quest to imitate the “examples” and heed the “warnings” made his own life a living example, a powerful witness for Christ. All his neighbors became Seventh-day Adventists, and the people he personally brought to Christ number in hundreds. His lessons and sermons were always spiced with personal examples of his own spiritual struggles and victories.

This personal witness made my dad’s Bible storytelling and witnessing vivid, memorable, and inspiring. To be sure, the inspiration came from the Holy Spirit. One of my earliest memories is of being deeply moved as I enjoyed listening to my father. I also recall the consciousness I had of an inner battle between good and evil whenever I disobeyed my parents. This early experience of the Spirit moving on me is the bedrock on which my faith in God and His Word is based. Incidentally, my grandmother also spoke of being moved by the Spirit. Indeed, according to her, the movement of the Spirit in the depths of her inmost soul enabled her to discard the folklores and pungent superstitions and become a devout Christian.

Her devotion was a result of sympathetic imitation. She strove to imitate the examples of Bible characters, especially the life of Jesus, as evidenced by her long conversation-like prayers. Here, let me underscore that human beings from earliest childhood learn by imitating significant others: parents, teachers, peers, pastors, celebrities, and so on. That is how we acquire the language, habits, customs, and values of our culture. Often the Scripture underscores the significance

of *imitation* in learning: “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children” (Eph. 5:1); “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1); “We did this . . . in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate” (2 Thess. 3:9); “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7).

I could cite more texts, but the crux is that only life stories or examples provide “models” for imitation. Indeed, that is why, among the ancient peoples, only Israel “purposely nurtured and developed prose narration to take the place of the epic genre.”³ That narrative is the essence of the Bible. This cannot be stressed enough, “because it tends to be eclipsed by the assumption that the Bible consists of a set of doctrinal propositions, with illustrative stories.”⁴ While doctrines and theology may be teachings derived from the biblical narrative, the narrative itself seeks to describe and make explicit a spiritual experience and to portray the divine-human encounter or relationships. But neither doctrine nor experience can fully capture the modalities of spiritual life. For this we need an experiential depth.

Experiential depth

While seeking this experiential depth, we need to remember that there are elements that escape narration, exegesis, and hermeneutics. That is why prayer and humility are indispensable to the understanding of Scripture. Only “the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). In fact, the main obstacle to understanding the Scripture is our inner resistance to the Word of God. “The mind governed by the flesh,” said Paul, “is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Rom. 8:7). As such, one of the principal aims of the Spirit is to reveal to us our inner resistance, which is rooted in our pride, the most pungent and devious of all human passions.

This pride in the Pharisees, along with their dogma and theological

obstructionism, led Jesus to teach great truths in parables. “The secret of the kingdom of God,” He told the disciples, “has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables” (Mark 4:11). Parables served as decoys. By eliciting imaginative and sympathetic participation, they lured the hearers from their bastions of pride and tradition. As Ellen White rightly noted, “Jesus desired to awaken inquiry. He sought to arouse the careless, and impress truth upon the heart.”⁵ Indeed, that is why He “did not deal in abstract theories, but in that which is essential to the development of character, that which will enlarge man’s capacity for knowing God, and increase his efficiency to do good.”⁶

Here is a lesson for us today. Seventh-day Adventism has been encapsulated into 28 fundamental beliefs. Lost is the rich biblical narrative, the varied divine-human experiences, from which the beliefs are based. We must recover these biblical stories. Indeed, unlike direct doctrinal formulations, they depict and elicit a broad range of human actions, emotions, and decisions, along with their consequences. Above all, they provide concrete models for imitation.

I saw their efficacy in my illiterate grandmother’s life. ☞

1 Ellen G. White’s *Conflict of the Ages* series traces the history of God’s action from before Creation to the new heavens and the new earth through five books, published by the Pacific Press Publishing Association: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890), *Prophets and Kings* (1917), *The Desire of Ages* (1898), *The Acts of the Apostles* (1911), and *The Great Controversy* (1907).

2 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are from the New International Version.

3 S. Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” *Göttengen Congress Volume* (Leiden, 1978), 354, quoted in Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 25.

4 Herbert N. Schneidau, “Biblical Narrative and Modern Consciousness,” in *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*, ed. Frank McConnell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 132.

5 Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 20, 21.

6 White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 23.

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Life together *and* conflict resolution

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown a great deal in the last 100 years. We now have a presence in almost all countries on earth, even if, in some places, this presence seems quite small. We are a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial group of people. And such a diversity is a beautiful gift of God.

Yet, at times we must admit that this diversity is not as appreciated as it should be—even causing some tensions to arise. All cultures have beautiful attributes of rich linguistic heritage, colorful clothing, delicious foods, joyous music and singing, thought-provoking literature, and deep spiritual and religious roots. Each culture has its heroes, its defining historical moments, and its memory of the “good old days.”

While we celebrate and are proud of the heritage we personally own and cherish, no cultural group or ethnic group is perfect. Human history teaches us that every culture is sinful, in need of God’s grace, for the harm done to the different person, the immigrant, the poor and powerless, the neighboring cultural or ethnic group. Each culture has its history of violence done in the name of some value or historical reason, if not in the name of God. No culture is sinless and perfect, and all are in need of the grace of God.

God invites us to live together and share the blessings of the gospel, to live

in harmony and prepare for the coming kingdom of God. What a challenge! But with that commission also comes the grace.

The New Testament speaks of a new reality of people of different cultures and ethnic heritage living together in harmony, despite dissimilar memories, to accomplish a common mission. The concept, called in Greek, *koinonia*, and translated, usually, by the word “fellowship,” creates this reality.

Just before His ascension, Jesus said to His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit so they could spread the good news of salvation to all places (Acts 1:8). Such a commission had its unforeseen consequence: the people of God would no longer be made up of one ethnic group.

The book of Acts tells us that as the good news was shared in Jerusalem and Judea, the disciples of Jesus created a community, a fellowship, a *koinonia*. Observe three important characteristics of this community.

A together community

The early community of Jesus’ followers was described as “joining together in prayer” (Acts 1:14; 2:42), fellowshiping together (Acts 2:1, 44, 46), being “of one heart and mind” (Acts 4:32), having “everything in common” (Acts 2:44), and sharing their possessions with those who had less (Acts 2:45; 4:32, 34).

Luke used two expressions to describe this early Christian community in Jerusalem: they were of “one accord” or of “one mind” (Acts 1:14; 4:32) and they were together “in one place” (Acts 2:1).

This idea of togetherness stands out and gives us crucial insights into what Christian life together was like then.

At the end of Acts 2, Luke describes the early church soon after the experience of Pentecost, which likely created the togetherness of this community.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to “fellowship” (*koinonia*), to the “breaking of bread,” and to “prayer.” Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42–47, NIV).

What a beautiful *koinonia* they experienced.

This *koinonia*, however, was not without its stresses and challenges. And here, again, the book of Acts gives us a beautiful insight into how to work out challenges to unity and fellowship.

A challenged community

Sometime later, Luke tells us, quite candidly, that this *koinonia* was deeply challenged and its survival threatened. Acts 6:1–6 indicates a deep concern arising within the community about the daily distribution of food to widows in the community. It appears that the twelve apostles, who were responsible for this food distribution, most likely unintentionally favored some widows over others. By then, the Jerusalem community had grown to include Jews who believed in Jesus the Messiah from two ethnic groups: some were from Hebrew heritage and others from Greek heritage. A complaint arose among the Greek Jews that the apostles were either giving more to the Hebrew widows or giving food to them first and whatever was left over to the others.

Now, it is interesting to note that the apostles themselves were responsible for this perceived wrong and favoritism. The top leadership, even in this early Christian community, was not immune to making a mistake. And more accurately, the Hebrew heritage of the apostles may have blinded them to this wrong. The lesson from this episode is obvious: even the most blessed of leaders can make mistakes when it comes to relationships with people of other ethnic groups. Unknowingly and unconsciously one's own ethnic culture can create an unfortunate set of circumstances and unintentionally hurt people of a different culture. We are not to be surprised by this, as it is the bane of sinful humanity for all of us. Different ethnic cultures have different sets of values, customs, and preferences, and these values, customs, and preferences, blind people to what may hurt others.

What is phenomenal, in my opinion, is what comes next.

When the apostles were confronted with what they had been doing unintentionally, their response was a most magnanimous moment in this early community.

The apostles did not attempt to give any excuse for their mistake. They forthrightly and sincerely owned the mistake.

And then they did something absolutely amazing, they invited the group who had been wronged to participate in finding a solution to the problem.

The apostles believed that those who had been wronged were the best people in the community to solve the problem. The apostles suggested that seven men be selected who would take over the distribution of food to the widows—to all the widows, both Hebrew and Greek. The apostles gave up one function of their ministry in order to concentrate on the others.

surprising is the fact that all seven men appointed for the distribution of food are from the Greek ethnic group. The apostles trusted their Greek brothers because they believed that they, too, had received the grace of the Holy Spirit and were just as committed to the welfare of the Lord's people as the apostles were. What a beautiful and genuine respect of each other's gifts.

I wonder, sometimes, if that is the pathway to find an adequate resolution to some ethnic strains in our own church community—and to the ethnic and

What if we said sincerely to each other: "We are sorry for the prejudice we have repeatedly shown toward you and ask for your forgiveness..."

The insight was amazing and surprising but may hold the key to any successful resolution of conflicts between ethnic groups within a community of believers. When a wrong is done to one group, the group that did the wrong ought to own the mistake immediately and then approach the group that has been wronged and invite them to participate in finding the solution to the problem and then help implement the solution.

A problem-solving community

There was a great deal of trust, grace, and love in this story. The Hebrew apostles had made a mistake, and they owned their mistake. They trusted their Greek brothers to help find the right solution, suggest the appointment of the right persons, and then let them implement the solution. What is just as

racial separation that we experience. What if we said sincerely to each other: "We are sorry for the prejudice we have repeatedly shown toward you and ask for your forgiveness. We also ask you to suggest how to solve what has happened and to propose tangible steps to follow to remedy the situation. [And now the hard part:] We commit ourselves to try to implement what you suggest."

This early Christian community shared a beautiful fellowship, a *koinonia*. Their common bonds created this *koinonia*. They shared the same gospel message, prayed and worshiped together, ate together, hoped in the return of Jesus together. This fellowship and common life allowed them to have the fortitude to find an amazing solution for the ethnic tension they experienced later.

I do not think it is a pipe dream to have the same vision for our community today. 🙏

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My sermon assistant:

Help for today's preachers

Every pastor knows the feeling. The weekend is coming—and the sermon is not ready. That experience can be uneasy, disturbing, and anxiety-ridden. To add to the situation, you face unexpected, legitimate demands. And, before you know it, it is evening, you are tired, and the sermon is to be preached tomorrow morning.

As one who has been there, I thought to share from my own experience, coupled with those of others, a method which has helped turn around my approach to sermon preparation. I am talking about a sermon-preparation and Bible-study tool that is accessible and easy to use: Logos Bible software. For the record: I have no shares with the Logos Bible software company, nor have I ever worked for them. It is, however, a God-sent tool that, for more than 15 years, has aided my study and sermon preparation.

The need for preparation

Benjamin Franklin clearly stated, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”¹ Essentially, Franklin advocates the necessity of preparation in any assignment. Jesus employed the principle of preparation. In Luke 14:28–33, He said that one ought to consider the cost before building a tower. Likewise, one charged with the pastoral duties, such as regular preaching, must make the requisite plans to ensure that he or

she is equipped with the “what” and the “know how” to produce fresh and biblical messages.

Of course, there are times when one may use prepared sermons, such as when starting out in ministry or involved in an evangelistic campaign, particularly when home and library are far away. However, a Bible software containing various Bible versions, commentaries, journals, concordances, dictionaries, and other resource books in one platform, can be accessed even while mobile. These advantages have been made possible through Logos.

Spiritual preparation

Spiritual preparation is paramount because it involves more than tools or software. The preacher seeks to communicate the mind of God. H. M. S. Richards, a powerful preacher and founder of the *Voice of Prophecy* radio program, explained that preaching is “God’s message, from God’s Book, by God’s man, in God’s house, on God’s day—that’s preaching!”²

Additionally, preaching involves being in touch with God to speak His word with a sense of confidence and boldness, notwithstanding the audience, place, or circumstance. Evangelist Billy Graham had such an experience when he visited the former Soviet Union in 1982. He states, “I knew that we were entering the very center of Soviet power, but the thought did not alarm

me or make me nervous. I had the feeling that God was with me, and I knew the Lord was going to give me the words to say and the boldness to speak about Christ.”³

Without argument, the secret to such public manifestations is in personal and private time with God. Dr. Roland Hill asserts, “Your devotional life is always on public display.”⁴ That speaks to the importance of personal and private time with God that manifests itself publicly.

The preacher must spend time in prayer and reading God’s Word to understand what God would have him or her say so that he or she may communicate it with authority. After all, Scripture states of Peter and John that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31, NKJV).

A mobile library

I have heard speakers say, “I don’t need preparation, just the anointing of the Holy Spirit.” I believe such a statement constitutes an excuse for lack of preparation and discipline because sermon preparation involves the discipline of removing self from everything else and devoting quality time to being equipped to speak in behalf of God.

I have deliberately focused, first, on the spiritual groundwork because I do not want to give the impression that

Logos is a “eureka” moment that is all we need, overlooking what is basic and fundamental, namely being spiritually prepared. Nevertheless, I have come to appreciate Logos Bible software. Acquiring this software years ago, and having upgraded over the years to the latest release, I am reminded of a friend who works as a building contractor. He would inform me of new tools on the market to assist with his work. Then I thought, “If my friend can upgrade his building skills, what about me in the pulpit? Should I not equip myself with the best tools to enhance my sermon preparation?”

Remember the days of parallel Bibles? Those large books that gave access to just a few Bible versions for parallel reading? With Logos, I choose my preferred version, the New King James, or any other one I want at the time.

I received upgrades as Logos grew, developed, and expanded. I became so impressed that I invited an official Logos trainer to come to my church conference in the Bahamas, to train

pastors and elders on the use of the software. The conference invested in the software for each pastor and supplemented the cost of a smaller version for elders. Later, the biggest gratification came with news that the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* set, which had been placed on CD, was now compatible for Logos, accessible via the software. In addition, all books by Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneer Ellen White were integrated into the Logos format. It did not stop there.

In 2013, Logos introduced a Seventh-day Adventist version of the software.⁵ That meant that most of the books produced by Seventh-day Adventist authors were being integrated into Logos. Principally, I had my library with me, and it was now mobile—I could access my books and do research via my laptop, smartphone, or iPad.

Benefits of the software

Apart from mobility, I could do research virtually anywhere once I had access to the internet. For instance, with

Logos in hand, if I wanted to check the original meaning of a word just before I spoke, the Hebrew or Greek root was at my disposal via my smartphone. Also, I could determine the usage of a word (for example, the number of times a given word was used in a chapter, book, or the entire Bible). Bible students know the value of an exhaustive concordance. And there was more: I could look up biblical terms using the best biblical dictionaries.

Is it any wonder that Logos has been called “the Cadillac of Bible software”?⁶ Reviewer Jim Erwin adds that the program’s power lies in its ability to link “every word so that one can make comprehensive searches in seconds. The good: The library of resources are enormous, the software is cross-platform (Mac, PC, Android, iPad, iPhone). When you sign-in, all of the resources for the program are synced. The search capabilities are fast.”⁷ Additionally, Logos is rated “the most powerful Bible software” and “the most-easy to use”⁸ for preaching, teaching, and studying.



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Without a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, one can now look up the original meaning of any Bible word. Bible maps can be accessed to view the passages of the children of Israel in the Old Testament or the ministry of Jesus in the New. Measurements can be ascertained to determine the distance from one place to another. Without technology, this process would be

I would encourage pastors to use whatever they can access that will enhance their Bible study and sermon preparation.

tedious and time-consuming. With the technology, there is so much one can access pertaining to the Word of God, so that no preacher need be deprived of materials to build sound and solid biblical sermons.

Taking the plunge

While I reference the Logos Bible software, many other products are available: e-Sword (Windows), Eloquent (Mac), Accordance Bible Software (Mac), Bible Works (Windows and Mac), iLumina Gold (Mac and Windows), PC Study Bible (Windows), QuickVerse Bible Software (Windows), SwordSearcher Bible Software (Windows), and Wordsearch Preaching Library (Windows). I would encourage pastors to use whatever they can access that will enhance their Bible study and sermon preparation.

Tom Gill explains, regarding the referenced software products, “Without exception, all the products reviewed loaded easily and worked right out of the box. They all performed well, and no bugs or glitches were discovered. All the products were presented in a visually consistent manner; however, each was developed around the particular strengths inherent in the software. We found all of them to be very useful and find it difficult to rate any one a clear ‘top choice.’”⁹ However, Gill pointed out, “As with all the products reviewed, the software engine is what determines the ease of use and portability of the software. For example, Logos Library System (LLS) is the engine used to drive the Logos Scholar Edition and also serves as the engine for other software libraries, including Jack Hayford’s Spirit-Filled Life Library, Thomas Nelson Electronic Reference, Josh McDowell Library, Word Biblical Commentaries, John MacArthur’s, Charles Stanley’s and more. Users can mix and match from various sources and create a custom library that suits them best.”¹⁰

Mary Fairchild, while comparing the top ten Bible software products listed above, observed, “Logos Bible Software is my number one choice for paid Bible study software. Logos is designed for anyone from the beginner Bible software user to the most serious Bible scholar. I’ve been using the software since 2008. Logos has radically simplified the task of Bible study for me. It’s given depth and breadth to my research I never imagined possible.”¹¹

Keep the bell ringing

Having made the case for the best in Bible software products, I still urge that one should never believe that software, no matter how well put together, will suffice for study and personal time with the Author of the Bible. Bible software is a means to an end. To think otherwise is to make an unfortunate mistake. What good is it to come across impressively in the pulpit, yet be lacking the Holy Spirit? However, after you dedicate your life to God and spend quality time with

Him, I believe that this technology will greatly enhance the impact you make from the pulpit.

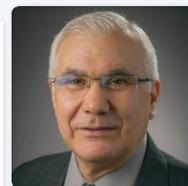
While a young preacher in his humble home in Ottawa, Canada, H. M. S. Richards was visited by William A. Spicer, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Richards remembers specifically that Spicer admired his library. Today, technology affords us access to far more material. Nevertheless, more important than the admiration of Richards’s library is what Elder Spicer later said to him, when Richards visited Spicer’s sickbed a few weeks before he died: “Keep the bell ringing! Keep the bell ringing!” To which Richards responded, “I hope I do, as long as I live.”¹² To all sons and daughters of Issachar, men and women with an “understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32), I employ the same expression: “Keep the bell ringing!” And with the advantages of technology literally at our fingertips, I believe we can keep it ringing louder and clearer than ever. 📖

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Innovative evangelism

part 2: *An opportunity to be creative*

The core of evangelism is making connections with people for Jesus. As ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), we would do well to look to His example. Ellen White reminds us that “during His ministry Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy but to save. . . . As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy wherever He went.

“The followers of Christ are to labor as He did. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing, and inspire hope in the hopeless.”¹

The suffering, afflicted, and hopeless do not wander into our churches looking for relief. Therefore, we must find innovative and creative ways by which to reach out and get to know those in the community who are hurting and allow them to see the genuine care churches have for the well-being of the community and the individuals that comprise it. We need to seek to know them personally before we earn the right to be heard, when sharing the gospel with them. When people see and feel that you care, they will want to know why.

The best evangelistic strategies are those that promote innovations, foster belonging and ownership, and celebrate community relationships. This second part of the article will discuss these strategies.²

Strategy 1: Promote innovations

There is as much potential for innovative ideas as there are people in your church. Church leaders should encourage members not to wait for someone to tell them what to do in regard to ministry, evangelism, and relationship building. Believers are to be encouraged to pray earnestly that God will lead them to opportunities, big or small, through which they can be a blessing to others. “God will surely help those who seek Him for wisdom. We are not to wait until opportunities come to us; we are to seek for opportunities, and we are to be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in us. If the worker keeps his heart uplifted in prayer, God will help him to speak the right word at the right time.”³

Give permission to be creative! When we think of evangelism, we often think of large public programs provided by the denomination or churches. However, the most effective programs

and opportunities come from individual members. “It is not the dramatic and the grandiose of large programs of evangelism that get the work done. It is the mysterious chemistry of countless ordinary Christians faithfully living out their kingdom lives.”⁴ The collective ideas and synergy of mobilized members can have a much greater impact in reaching lives for Christ.

Pastor David Jamieson had an idea for putting ministry into the hands of his members after he read Denny and Leesa Bellesi’s *Kingdom Assignment*.⁵ He asked the church board to let him have \$3,000 from the community services Acts of Kindness program fund. The church board agreed, even though the church budget was behind by \$90,000. After a sermon on the parable of the talents, Pastor Jamieson handed out thirty \$100 bills. He told the recipients to take the money, pray over it, and take it outside the church walls. They would have 90 days to multiply the money and then use it to do an act of kindness anywhere in the world. By the end of 90 days, they had multiplied the original \$3,000 to more than \$100,000. The Young Adult Sabbath School class took \$100 and wanted to help a two-year-old girl, Emily, who was battling leukemia. Her family had to drive eight

hours for treatment, often missing work. The Young Adult class decided to hold a 24-hour soccer-a-thon and used the \$100 for a website and marketing. The event attracted about 100 people to play soccer in the cold for 24 hours. The Aldergrove church⁶ and community raised more than \$21,000 for little Emily and gained extensive media coverage.⁷ This is just one of the many stories of how the members multiplied the money given to them.

The Kingdom Assignment project was a success. By the end of the year, Aldergrove Adventist Church gave away \$125,000. The Kingdom Assignment Association found out and gave them a Kingdom Assignment award recognition.⁸ When the members took on the role of creating and implementing ways in which to reach the community, God blessed financially, and a stronger bond was formed between the church and the community they served. Pastor Jamieson noted that because of their Kingdom outreach, several community

members began attending church and have given their lives to God.

Strategy 2: Foster belonging and ownership

Growing churches provide a variety of low-pressure volunteer options for attendees in order to foster a sense of belonging and ownership. Ownership leads to loyalty. “And by volunteering to serve the Lord, they [people] develop and mature spiritually.”⁹ Have places for everyone to help, regardless of age or status. Low-commitment and nonthreatening teams are good for new members. Andy Stanley and Ed Young “found that getting them on a team prevents them from coming in the front door and going out the back; if they’re involved in a ministry from the beginning, they’re much less likely to fade away and never do anything.”¹⁰

Encourage total involvement. Olivia came across a flyer for an upcoming evangelistic series at the local Seventh-day Adventist church. She had fond

memories of her neighbors bringing her to Sabbath School as a child and decided to check out the series. Once there, she accepted the gospel and decided to get baptized. Her husband, Mark, while supportive of her decision, did not feel the same way himself. When Mark started coming to church with Olivia, the congregation took the initiative to get to know and welcome him. Friendships developed, and one couple in particular mentored Olivia and Mark. Because he no longer felt like a visitor, Mark wanted to become involved and volunteered as a greeter. Through their interactions, the pastor and leadership team noticed that he had a gift for teaching. As Mark began to learn more about God and grow in his understanding of Scripture, he was occasionally asked to help teach the Sabbath School class. After a little while, Mark realized that his beliefs were the same as those of the church members’ and asked to be baptized. He and the pastor studied together, and Mark officially joined the church that had already become his



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family. When asked why he wanted to join the church, Mark credited the love and acceptance of the congregation and their willingness to let him be involved. Meaningful relationships formed within the church brought about a feeling of belonging and ownership. Healthy churches understand that fostering relationships between members and attendees are a significant part of a thriving community.¹¹

In order for evangelism to make an impact, there needs to be a commitment from the members to be involved. Relationships must be built.¹² Multiple friendships from within the church must be maintained in order for a new convert to stay in church. It has even been shown that some nonbelievers attend church because of the relationships they have there.¹³ In fact, in a study released in 2013, the Barna Group noted that millennials credit friends and family as the number two reason why their faith has grown.¹⁴ Prayer was number one, and reading the Bible was number three.

When meeting new people, look for ways in which to connect genuinely with them. “Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. . . . Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus.”¹⁵ It is essential that we speak to the hearts of people.

Strategy 3: Celebrate community relationships

Have a missionary mentality. “Missionaries see people as unique and valuable. Jesus saw people as individuals and in groups. The crowds were important to Jesus because of the people in them. Crowds are not trophies to be won. Neither are the crowds ‘projects’ to be completed. Influencing masses of people is not for the leader’s affirmation or self-worth. Crowds are important because of the incredible

worth of people.”¹⁶ Therefore, it is important to engage with individuals in the community through intentional relationships. This will lead to discernment regarding the needs of the community, which will lead to more opportunities to embrace them, which in turn will lead to more engagement. Thus is formed a missional transformational cycle.¹⁷

Be aware of community needs. Tom walked into Costco on their annual community day. Noticing booths from local charities and businesses promoting their products and services, he began thinking about how God could use an opportunity like this for his church to connect with the community. He ran back to the church to ask the pastor why they did not have a booth. The pastor encouraged him to go ahead and arrange for one. He called two other members who were doctors to help. The church-sponsored booth provided free blood pressure readings, cholesterol checks, and magazines, and had a sign-up for a kid’s soccer team, which quickly filled up. So many people came to visit their booth that focused on free services for the community that Costco rewarded the church with a year’s supply of cakes for their weekly potlucks. They asked the doctors to provide analysis for their employees and offered a free booth for the next community day. The following year, the church’s booth not only shared about health but also provided literature and information about upcoming seminars for the community. With time, people began visiting the church and attending seminars. Many joined the church as new members.

This is just one example of creative outreach that worked. Some churches host block parties, Vacation Bible Schools, Financial Peace University, divorce care, cooking classes, concerts, and English as a Second Language classes. Of course not everything will succeed in building bridges in the community; however, aim for innovation and excellence, and keep trying until you find something that works for you and your community. The more you know your community, the better you are able to find areas of need. Check

new ideas and ministries against your vision: “The catalyst for introducing and facilitating change in the local church is a God-honoring, mouthwatering, unambiguously clear vision.”¹⁸ Encourage your members to undertake “a level of involvement that stretches them and calls them to take up the basin and towel and wash feet just as Jesus has called us to do.”¹⁹

Long ago, Ellen White saw the need for building relationships outside of the church for the purpose of evangelism. “We are not to renounce social communion. We should not seclude ourselves from others. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are. They will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men touched by divine truth. There is another field of labor, humbler, it may be, but fully as promising. It is found in the home of the lowly, and in the mansion of the great; at the hospital board and in gatherings for innocent social enjoyment.”²⁰

Conclusion

Most evangelistic ventures that have lasting results take time—months and maybe even years before you see the fruits of your investment. This is consistent with any type of relationship—they take time and effort to mature. “Relationships are like bank accounts: They don’t just happen.”²¹ All evangelism takes intentionality and should be done out of love for God and humanity and a desire to connect the two. The lack of an immediate result is not a sign of failure because evangelism is not about us—but about God. Many of us have, no doubt, heard stories of people who have been prayed over for years before finally deciding to come to Christ. Kristy is finishing up Bible studies with Jane, who first heard and rejected the gospel from a coworker 40 years ago but recently came into the church through the local community services program. Jane and her former coworker have rekindled their relationship and will be reunited at Jane’s baptism.

What is your passion? Where can God use you and your passion to connect with

people? Pray for God to reveal to you how He works in the lives of your non-Christian colleagues and friends. Where might you have a chance to impact people as you go about your day?²²

If you feel that you cannot come up with a way to connect with people, a simple evangelistic method would be

to invite someone to your church. It may sound simple, but research has shown that 82 percent of unchurched people are likely to come to church if they are invited. But the invitations are not being made. “Only 21 percent of active churchgoers invite *anyone* to church services in the course of a year. But only

two percent of church members invite any unchurched person to church.”²³

You do not have to be an evangelist or have that spiritual gift in order to share your personal experiences with Christ. When you let your relationship and journey with Christ show in your life, then “everything is outreach!”²⁴

Six creative ways for witnessing

1. Creative community care

In the past, effective community services were stop-smoking plans, clothes and food distribution, and so on. But today, Monte Sahlin²⁵ notes, effective ministries include job finding and training, family counseling, substance abuse programs, potty training geared to help new mothers, reading for new immigrants, and budgeting and financial planning. The new programs not only deal with the physical aspect of ministry but also include emotional, social, and spiritual ministries.

Study the demographic needs of your community and devise your ministries accordingly. There are many organizations that specialize in trends, demographic data, and the specific needs of the community. Build a database matching skill sets with members, and from this, members can be called upon for needed service. A mechanic maybe willing to donate labor costs, or a dentist could provide free cleanings for those without insurance.

2. Sports ministries

One of the fastest-growing ministries today is “sport ministry.” This does not require a budget or many people. If you have a gym, open it once or twice a week and invite the community to come. When I (Joe) was a pastor, we opened our gym twice a week to the community. The people came, sometimes as many as 50 or 60. The event lasted about two hours. Right in the middle of these two hours, our youth pastor had a short devotion for about five to seven minutes.

One of our members started a soccer program for the kids on Sunday afternoons. Because soccer is rising in

popularity, we had no problem attracting about 40 to 50 children from the community. We always ended with refreshments and an invitation to join our youth group. Each week one or two joined.

We also started several teams for baseball, soccer, or basketball. These teams attracted people from the community and significantly increased the number of active young members. Also, many of the previously inactive youth now felt connected and became involved in the church.

3. Community Bible study group

Start a community Bible study to be held outside of the church building. Advertise this class in the same places that advertise other short courses or classes. A newspaper’s religious editor once told me that “if you want seekers to come to your church activities, do not advertise in the religious postings. Therefore, use the Sports or Lifestyle section to advertise. Use anything you can—such as visual aids, music, film, dramas—to make the Bible come alive to the un-churched.” A businessman started a breakfast Bible study for his coworkers in a conference room at work. Others used the common room of their apartment complex for Bible study.

You would be amazed how many people from a nonchurch background are actually interested in learning about the Bible.

4. Park ministry

Take the gospel to the parks. This kind of witnessing is effective, especially during the summer. One church goes

to the park every Sabbath afternoon in the summer. They invite people to come and join them for songs and a devotional thought. They had a special program, with gifts for the kids and refreshments for everyone at the end. This is a great way to get the youth and young adults involved in church ministry. Make sure the program is presented as professionally as possible because this may be the only image of Christianity that some people get to see.

5. Community choir

Starting a community choir is a great way to bring new people into your church. You can advertise in the local newspaper, hand out flyers, and hold auditions. One of the churches that I pastored tried this, and it was very effective in bringing many talented people into our church. We started with big Christmas and Easter programs and then moved to once a quarter, with even more programs for special days like Mother’s Day and Thanksgiving. Six families joined our church over the course of five years because of the community choir.

6. Children’s ministry

Ed Young shares, “On a regular basis (at least six times a year), the life-changing message of Christ is presented. If any children make a decision for Christ, their parents are contacted and invited to attend a class entitled KidFaith. Everything the kids have been taught about Christ is presented again to the parents and the kids. Attending KidFaith gives parents the opportunity to be involved in their children’s decision to accept Christ.”²⁶ 

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- 25 Monte Sahlin, *Adventist Congregations Today: New Evidence for Equipping Healthy Churches* (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 2003), 19, 20.
- 26 Stanley and Young, *Can We Do That?* 9.

No longer a shrine

Two pioneer missionaries ventured out into the community from their 165-square-foot home, which doubled as a house church. The prospect of sharing Jesus filled them with joy.

One day a neighborhood couple, Mr. and Mrs. Guo,* invited the missionaries along with a small band of Adventists to worship in their home. The group gratefully accepted the offer and gathered for Bible study and church services in a room that had previously been used as a shrine—a place where the family worshiped and prayed for dead relatives.

Shortly afterward, the couple became very sick. Mr. Guo was hospitalized from a severe stroke and could no longer walk, talk, eat, or drink. The same week Mrs. Guo became feverish and very ill. Neighbors believed the gods were angry and were punishing

them for allowing the Christians into their home and worshipping their God. How dare Christians who honored a "Western god" be allowed to worship in a place as sacred as a shrine room!

The pioneer team and the rest of the church family did all they could to love and care for the family. Although Mrs. Guo improved, her husband did not. The doctors sent him home to die, and with heavy hearts, the family made funeral preparations.

Taunts and jeers from the neighbors were plentiful, yet the small group of Adventists faithfully continued to worship God in the former shrine room. One Sabbath afternoon, as they earnestly prayed together for the dying man, a voice was heard from his room. Everyone scurried to his bedside. Mr. Guo was awake and alert! Miraculously, he was walking again, within a month.

Revival & REFORMATION

This group of faith-sharing, praying believers continues to see God work miracles. With a membership of 100, they have outgrown the shrine room and are worshipping in an actual church of their own. They have even received legal permission to worship in their new church. God is blessing their commitment to sharing Jesus! Please pray for the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel in China. 🙏

—This story was shared by a staff writer for the Chinese Union Mission.

* Names have been changed to protect the identity of believers.

► First indigenous pastor named Aboriginal ministries leader in Australia

Ringwood, Victoria, Australia— Pastor **Darren Garlett** has been named the new director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries (ATSIM) for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia (AUC).

Garlett is a Whadjuk/Mineng Nyoongar from the southern region of Western Australia and is the first indigenous minister to be appointed as ATSIM director in Australia.

“ATSIM is a dynamic ministry that covers this vast continent of diverse first nations people,” said Garlett. “It’s an exciting ministry, and we are looking forward to the new role. Sure, we have big shoes to fill, but it’s always been God’s work, and we will

be faithful to the task He has called us to do.”

Garlett’s appointment comes after **Steve Piez**, who served the church in the ATSIM department for 18 years, including 11 as director, announced he was taking personal leave.

“I am very pleased with the appointment of Pastor Garlett as our new national ATSIM director,” said Piez. “Darren has become well known and is loved and respected by the Australia-wide ATSIM community.”

Garlett has ministered in various locations around Australia and was most recently a ministry coordinator at Mamarapha College and a national ATSIM advisor.



Photo: Adventist Record

“ATSIM work in Australia is a strong and vibrant ministry, and is growing rapidly right across the land,” said **Jorge Munoz**, the president of the Australian Union Conference. “It is a historic time in the work of ATSIM in Australia, and we are excited to see what God will do through the leadership of Pastor Garlett. We invite our church to pray for him, his wife Cathy, and their family as they begin this new ministry.” [Maritza Brunt, *Adventist Record*]

► Outreach brings churches together in Nashville

Columbia, Maryland, United States—The 2017 North American Division (NAD) year-end meeting focused on developing “New Perspectives” to best accomplish the mission of the Adventist Church in the NAD, which is to reach others with the church’s distinctive, Christ-centered message of hope and wholeness. NAD officers, ministry departments, institutions, and entities gave presentations throughout the six-day meeting. Stories of pastor- and member-led initiatives were also shared. Here is a brief summary of one of the many presentations. Pastors **Furman Fordham II** and **Ken Wetmore** talked about their joint evangelistic effort “Imagine Nashville” [Tennessee]. With passion, the pastors described how they have had similar experiences growing up in the church and attending Adventist schools, marrying, and so on, and how they currently share many of the same situations as pastors working in churches geographically close to one



Photo: Pieter Damsteegt

another with one major difference—Fordham works for a regional conference and Wetmore does not. Providentially,

they connected through text messages and developed a collegial relationship with accountability.



Both shared that the more they cared about each other, the more they cared about each other's congregations. They decided to try something new: hold outreach activities together. Five hundred

people attended their first joint-church event; 800 showed up at the second event, which was based on a workshop model. "People are hungry for this," said Fordham. "And we're starting to see

ourselves as one body of Christ working in action.... What can your city become?"

To view the presentation, visit vimeo.com/241369357. [North American Division Communications]

▶ Adventist pastor admitted to the Jamaican Supreme Court bar

Kingston, Jamaica—Omar Oliphant made history in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica by becoming the first ordained minister to become an attorney-at-law. He was admitted to the Jamaican Bar Association on December 7, 2017, in a ceremony held at the Jamaican Supreme Court in Kingston.

Oliphant, who pastors a district of five churches, with a membership of more than 1,000, is also the communication and youth director of the church's northern region, comprising the Saint Ann and Trelawny Parishes. He completed all levels of his legal training at the Norman Manley Law School. His area of specialization is civil law.

"God supplied my every need. I am truly amazed at how beautifully the Lord Himself provided and placed the pieces together. . . . It was certainly not by might," said Oliphant, who also serves on several denominational and civic boards.

During the period of his study, Oliphant was able to baptize approximately 400 individuals and was recognized by the church in Jamaica in 2015 for his outstanding evangelistic achievements.

"[Pastor Oliphant's] success is an indication of the church's support for the personal development of its workers, which we are sure will lead to significant benefits in the advancement of God's mission through the church. We wish him success in all his endeavors as together we continue to labor for the Master," said Pastor **Karl Archer**, the president of the North Jamaica Conference.

Pastor **Carlington Hylton**, the ministerial secretary for the church in North Jamaica, stated, "During his studies, he has accomplished his goals as a youth and communication director serving two parishes. His achievement will serve as an inspiration to the young people whom he leads. I am proud of him."

"Given the vast and varied makeup of the church, its ownership of numerous institutions; its involvement in transactions relating to the law of the land, I see my studies and training as an additional plus, on top of my personal growth," said Oliphant. "Ministry has become integrated with legal interests



Photo: Jon Saleen Oliphant

and the church may have challenges meeting its objectives if we don't have proper legal guidance in some of our decision-making, policy directions."

He thanked God for His mighty hand in his life, the support of his family and the executive committee of the North Jamaica Conference, the support of the Jamaica Union leadership, and church elders at the five churches he pastors as well as the many who have invested time, effort, and means in creating this historic feat. [Nigel Coke/IAD]  

▶ United prayer infuses Connecticut church with fresh life

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—A church near Hartford in the state of Connecticut, United States, experienced an infusion of fresh life and passion for ministry through an emphasis on united prayer and small groups.

Tom Dombrowski, the pastor of the Connecticut Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church, shares that while their congregation was busily involved in church activities, personal connection was lacking. As a commuter

church, where many of the members drive 20 minutes or more to attend services, most of the social networking took place only on Sabbath.

Continued on page 29



S. N. Haskell: Adventist Pioneer, Evangelist, Missionary, and Editor

by Gerald Wheeler, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2017.

This is the latest volume in the Seventh-day Adventist biography series. Gerald Wheeler does a masterful job—with perhaps the strongest volume in the series so far—of helping to provide the rich context for the life of Stephen Nelson Haskell, who was one of the stalwart pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism.

Church members, and especially pastors, will want to take note of this volume for several significant reasons: one of the most obvious is Haskell's love of print and his conviction that personal Bible studies were just as important, if not more important, than public evangelism for converting others. This belief may be due in part to his own conversion. William Saxby shared an Adventist tract with Haskell in 1853, and Joseph Bates followed up afterward for ten days with intensive Bible studies (53–55). After that, Haskell was sold on the power of print and adapted Adventist evangelism to its various forms during his lifetime. It is therefore especially significant that Haskell and his first wife, Mary, were the primary catalysts in the organization of Seventh-day Adventist tract and missionary societies. Later on, he and his second wife, Hetty, were instrumental in city missions (113). During his lifetime, he witnessed America change from an agrarian and rural society to one oriented around large urban metropolises.

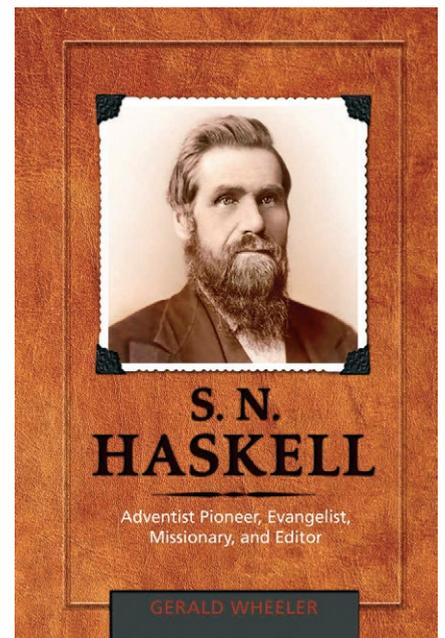
Another significant theme garnered from this book was Haskell's vision for a global church. Haskell was a man on the move. He traveled to Europe several times and, most significant of all, participated in a worldwide survey of missions. As part of this, he advocated that schools should be one of the most effective means for missionary work (143). He believed that church workers should be trained in their home countries so that they could address

the unique challenges in their part of the world. Haskell was a stalwart proponent of Adventist education, which may be due, at least in part, to his own lack of a formal education but having a desire to learn. While Haskell claims to have baptized the very first Seventh-day Adventists in China and Japan (148), this book will challenge some traditional narratives of Adventist mission history.

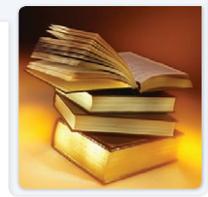
Another major interpretative theme concerns Haskell's connection to the Adventist prophetess Ellen G. White. White wrote more letters to him than to any other individual outside her family (71, 191). At times, she admonished him, but he always showed resilience by believing her counsels were divinely inspired and working to implement them in his life. He considered her, apart from his first wife, to be his closest friend (310). At one point, he proposed to Ellen G. White, but she turned him down, creating the most famous failed marriage proposal in Adventist history (Wheeler goes into some depth on what I consider to be a very balanced treatment of the topic in chapter 18, "Proposing to a Prophet"). Haskell also considered himself her spokesperson (206), although he could go too far at times by advocating for a rigid view of Inspiration that placed Ellen G. White as an infallible interpreter of Scripture (208, 255). By appearing to elevate her writings above the Bible (337, 338), Haskell was inadvertently pushing Adventism in a fundamentalist direction. Despite such challenges, Ellen G. White showed great respect for his leadership, a fact that is evident when she placed his name on a short list in an early version of her will (189).

Pastors will find this to be an inspiring biography. By all accounts, Haskell was not the most dynamic pulpiteer, but his ministry was effective due to his

sincerity, consistency, and dedication. During his lifetime, he implemented cutting-edge marketing techniques. He also exhibited a stubborn streak of self-determination and worked creatively to solve a wide plethora of challenges that came his way. He was so effective that even in his later years he was often



sought after for his advice and worked in some of the most challenging urban environments in the country (including New York City [235]). Although he had a very limited education, Haskell was unrelenting in seeking opportunities to grow. He read widely and had a large library, which contained some of the latest biblical resources by non-Adventist scholars. He did not know Greek or Hebrew but sought out nuances of biblical texts by reading various translations and taking advantage of every opening for learning available to him (35). In this respect, church leaders can appreciate his unrelenting push to educate pastors during his lifetime (101, 102).



The fact that Haskell was a stalwart defender of the faith did not make him inflexible. One of his most remarkable traits was his willingness to adapt to changing needs and situations around the globe. As the denomination grew into a global church, he was a major proponent behind the reorganization of the denomination in 1901 (184). At one point, he noted that he wished A. T. Jones, the noted Adventist revivalist of 1888 fame, could have more experience outside of North America so that he could become less rigid and narrow in facing church issues. This can be seen in the Solusi Mission controversy of 1893 (172–175). Jones advocated an extreme interpretation

that the denomination should not accept tax exemptions or gifts of land from the government. This resulted in an extensive controversy, and the vote by the 1893 General Conference Session that rejected tax exemptions for all Adventist Church property. Haskell and other leaders quickly realized the gravity of this mistake, even as he and Ellen G. White continued to labor with Jones's extreme tendencies, which contributed to Haskell's counsel to disfellowship Jones (289, 290).

Altogether Wheeler has made a significant contribution to Adventist studies, and anyone interested in Adventist history and theology will benefit by reading this volume.

Meticulously researched (with 791 references), it is particularly rich in providing the historical context of Haskell's life and the development of Adventism. Many readers will likely be surprised to discover that many of the same kinds of issues continue to face the Seventh-day Adventist Church today, even if the people and circumstances have changed. Similarly, the church today would do well to remember many of the solutions Haskell proposed.

—Reviewed by Michael W. Campbell, PhD, associate professor of theological-historical studies, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines. 

DATELINE *continued*



Seeing a weak link, **Sandy Sergeant**, long-time small-group leader and church clerk, organized a small-group ministry using the Ten Days of Prayer materials provided by the General Conference Ministerial Association. Sergeant says that they planned different methods of involvement: call-in times throughout the day, a small-group meeting at the church, and regional small groups for those who lived too far from the church. “Meeting together for ten days, studying and sharing together what God had done, sparked a different level of experience and community that the church had not had before.”

Members came together, dug deeper, and prayed together for specific things. Member **Fitzroy Anderson** feels he had a taste of what the disciples experienced in the upper room. He felt for some time that his prayer life was stagnant and he needed something more—something deeper. Anderson says, “[For] anyone who is looking for a recharge, this is a perfect opportunity to jump-start your prayer life. And, if you already have one, it’s [a] great way to keep the momentum going.”

This story is not unique. Since the Ten Days of Prayer initiative began, hundreds of churches around the world

have been spiritually impacted each year by the emphasis on united prayer and personal revival. Undeniable miracles have taken place: members have experienced healing, restoration, and unity like never before. It is proof that, as Dombrowski shares, “prayer in the local church is the oil. It is what makes all the machinery run properly. It can run without prayer, but not as effectively.”

Although the official dates of January 10–20, 2018, have passed, you may find materials for the Ten Days of Prayer, available in multiple languages, at tendaysofprayer.org. [Beth Thomas, Adventist News Network] 

The Ministry

January 1928

Making the Contact

BY G. R. WEST

FOR years there has rested heavily upon me a sense of responsibility for teaching our people to go forth with their Bibles and give God's message to the world; for through the spirit of prophecy we are told that this is the work which the lay members are to do. So at various times I have organized Bible classes in connection with other lines of home missionary work, and have trained the members to give Bible readings. I have observed that other ministers in other churches have followed the same plan.

But I have also observed that, after all the training is received, very few of the members of these training classes ever really give Bible studies. I was led to conclude that the weak link in the chain was due to the fact that we had not developed a method of contact between the would-be Bible worker and the would-be student of the Bible. And so I set about thinking and praying, and I believe that God has answered my prayers. As the result of different experiments, God has helped me to find a plan whereby I can secure more names of interested people than I can get Bible workers to care for. I could keep fifty full-time Bible workers busy all the time in the city of Denver.

We do not follow the old method of going out with literature, and working a section of the city for weeks, in the hope of finally getting a few names of people who desire Bible studies. We train special workers to go to the homes of the people and make appointments for Bible studies. One of these workers will go into territory in which no work has been done, and secure from ten to fifteen names a day for Bible studies.

Our method is very simple. For example, we sent out one of our lay members, a sister, to accompany an

experienced solicitor. After they had visited three or four homes, the sister said to the more experienced worker, "I think I understand how it is done, and now I will work alone." During the few hours in which they worked that day, the experienced worker made nine appointments for Bible studies, while the sister just beginning the work made eight appointments. We thought that: was very good.

Of course, it is sometimes difficult to interest the lay members in preparing themselves for this Bible work. They have different excuses, and it requires some tact and persistency to get them to realize that they can secure the necessary time for a systematic series of studies. But the Lord has greatly blessed us in this.

As an example of how the lay members are taking hold of this work, I call attention to the report of last week, which shows that seventy Bible readings were given during the week by the members of one church which has a membership of 275, representing about 150 adult members. Another church in the city, with a membership of less than 200 and possibly not more than 100 adult members, reported between thirty and forty Bible studies given during the week. We feel that this is an encouraging start, although the number is not nearly so large as we would like to see.

It is also encouraging to see that, although we are really just getting started, a number of persons have become deeply interested in the truth, and some are already keeping the Sabbath. In fact, I have baptized a number who have been reached wholly through the efforts of the lay members in giving Bible studies. I am therefore very enthusiastic regarding this every-member evangelism. I believe that in the long run it will do more for the spiritual uplift of the churches and the advancement of the message than all the preaching I could ever do.

Editor's note: In recognition of 90 years of continuous publication for *Ministry*, throughout 2018 we are celebrating our rich legacy with articles from our founding year. Hope you enjoy.

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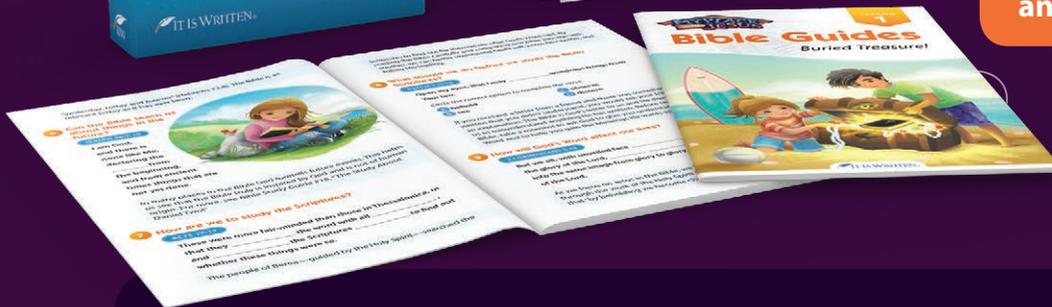

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