

Adventist
Journey
INSPIRATION & INFORMATION
FOR NORTH AMERICA



Adventist Journey

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I received an anonymous note one time at Southwestern Adventist University saying that [my] song saved their life, and I don't think that person realized it also saved mine. When the worship leader is ministered to by his own songs, you realize "that can't be from me, it has to only be from God."

—ALEXANDER CORTÉS,
musician, and digital media and
marketing agency owner, in Dallas, Texas

Alexander Cortés



Visit nadadventist.org/ajalexandercortes for the video, and check out pages 24-25 for more of Cortés' story.

Cover photo by Art Brondo



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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Living Faith

There is a difference between a thermometer and a thermostat. A thermometer simply reflects the temperature around it. If the room is cold, it registers a lower reading. If the room is hot, it reflects that warmth. A thermostat, however, has the power to change the environment. It can bring warmth to a cold room and calm to an overheated one.

As followers of Jesus, we face a choice every day: Will we merely reflect the world around us, or will we help change it?

We live in a world in which trust in many of society's institutions has eroded. Governments, businesses, media organizations, religious institutions, and humanitarian agencies have all faced scrutiny. Financial scandals, abuses of power, moral failures, and broken promises have left many people skeptical, cynical, and disillusioned.

How does faith make a difference in such a murky environment of critics and amid a constant bombardment of the worst of humanity even among professed Christians? It can be tempting to become cynical. We can find reasons to criticize, complain, or withdraw. Yet Jesus offers a different response.

In the Sermon on the Mount He said, "Let your light shine before others" (Matt. 5:16). He also declared that His followers are "the salt of the earth" (verse 13). These two simple but powerful statements remind us that God never intended for His people merely to observe the world's problems.

Living faith is more than believing the right things. It is allowing the presence of Christ to shape our demeanor, our words, and our deeds. It is faith that becomes visible.

One of the clearest examples of living faith is found in Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Along a dangerous road, a wounded man lay helpless while others passed by. The Samaritan stopped. He cared. He gave his time, his resources, and his attention to someone in need. His act of compassion changed the story.

Imagine the relief of the injured traveler when someone finally stopped to help. Imagine the innkeeper watching a stranger willingly pay the cost to care for someone he did not even know. Imagine travelers who may have witnessed the scene and carried that story home to their families.

We cannot know all the lives touched by that single act of kindness, but we do know this: Jesus told the story more than 2,000 years ago, and it continues to inspire people today. The compassion shown created a ripple effect that has reached across centuries.

That is what living faith does. It changes the atmosphere around us. Like a thermostat, it introduces warmth into cold places, hope into discouraging situations, and light into moments of darkness.



The same principle remains true today. A kind word can bring encouragement to someone who is discouraged. A listening ear can bring comfort to someone carrying a heavy burden.

We often underestimate the impact of small actions. Yet many of us have heard stories of a person quietly paying for a stranger's meal, helping a family in need, or extending unexpected grace. Those moments inspire others to do the same. Kindness has a way of multiplying.

Even in an environment in which people are losing faith in institutions, a follower of Jesus living their faith is an unstoppable force for good. We can be that salt of the earth without the vote of a board, without a degree in theology, and even without holding a position in the church. God calls us to be that light on the hill and the salt of the earth.

Our faith matters. We can change the temperature in the room with a smile, a kind word, or a simple act of kindness. Let's live out our faith every day and help change the atmosphere in our families, our churches, our communities, and our world.

Living faith matters!

G. Alexander Bryant is president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

PATHFINDER BIBLE EXPERIENCE GROUNDS YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCRIPTURE, COMMUNITY, AND MISSION

Record-breaking participation at the 2026 NAD PBE finals reflected growing family involvement, international interest, and shared commitment to God's Word

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA,
NAD NEWS WRITER/NEWS PRODUCER

On Sabbath, April 18, 2026, several minutes before the start of the North American Division's (NAD) 2026 Pathfinder Bible Experience (PBE), 239 teams, along with runners, judges, volunteers, and support staff, filled every corner of the conference center at Camp Hawthorne in northern Florida. Additional supporters and volunteers spread across three buildings, including two overflow rooms, brought the in-person total to roughly 4,300 attendees.

While traffic and connection issues delayed the start time from 9:00 to nearly 10:00 a.m., Pathfinders appeared undeterred. They chatted, laughed, prayed, flipped through activity books or played with stress toys from their goody bags, and reviewed Bible passages one last time as they waited to put their yearlong study of the Old Testament book of Isaiah to the test.

"Looking at all of them coming into the campground, seeing the faces of the Pathfinders, [they were] happy to be there and very confident," reflected Armando Miranda, Jr., PBE organizer and NAD associate director for Youth and Young Adult Ministries. "They were ready."

Organizers initially prepared to welcome 200 teams—215 at most—to the division finals, a fair estimate given the total of 189 teams in 2025. However, as registration surged in the weeks leading up to PBE, it became clear that the record of 211 teams set in 2019 would be shattered. This year a total of 259 teams from across North America, South Korea, and the United Kingdom



A Pathfinder confidently submits her team's answer on paper during testing at the 2026 North American Division Pathfinder Bible Experience. Teams submit answers both online and on paper to help ensure accuracy. *Ronald Pollard*

participated: 239 in person and 20 virtually. With creative layout design and much prayer, they were able to accommodate everyone.

"We had an increase of about 44 percent from last year," Miranda told an enthusiastic crowd.

Participation extended beyond Camp Hawthorne, with up to 1,000 viewers watching live on the NAD Pathfinders and NAD Adventist YouTube channels. Livestream hosts Eric Chavez, Texico Conference Youth Ministries director; Stacey DePluzer, Illinois Conference associate Youth Ministries director; and Naomi Ann Martinez, a theology student at Southern Adventist University, kept online viewers engaged through interviews with Pathfinders and leaders.

PBE Brings Families Together Through the Word

Miranda credited much of this year's historic turnout to the commitment of parents and leaders, many of whom spend hours studying Scripture with their Pathfinders. Their support was especially critical, he said, given that "Isaiah is a book of a lot of prophecies, a lot of warnings . . . and very hard to comprehend without the context."

"I believe that the reason we're seeing incremental growth has to do with the power of the

Word of God [and] parents realizing that this is one of the best ways to help their children be grounded in the Bible," Miranda said.

Parents such as Kisha Richards, a PBE coach, and husband Paul Richards, a drill coach, from the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, echoed Miranda's sentiments. Kisha coached two PBE teams this year, one including their son, helping them memorize Scripture, quizzing them, and keeping them on track through regular check-ins several times a week. Paul added that he and Kisha incorporated Isaiah into family worship so they could support their son and learn together.

The entire family, including their six children, has been involved in Pathfinders for decades. Kisha emphasized that for them, "Pathfinders is a lifestyle. It's part of who we are."

She noted that as a teacher at Harbert Hills Academy, she has come to value PBE as a creative way for children to engage with the Bible through study and memoriza-

tion. "Our children, they're not just memorizing, but they're able to ... really see what it means," Kisha concluded. "If you attach it to meaning, now the Word becomes alive."

Journey to the Finals

The journey to the PBE finals is a four-step process requiring months of Bible study and memorization. Teams of up to six people, selected by their clubs, compete in their local districts. Teams scoring within 90 percent of the highest score advance to the next level, from the conference, to the union, and to the division.

Testing for the 2026 PBE finals began at 10:10 a.m., following a brief ceremony featuring prayer, a color guard, and a drum corps composed of local Pathfinders. Teams answered 90 questions, earning points from one to eight, with 30- to 60-second time limits based on difficulty. Testing was conducted in English, French, Spanish, and Korean, with questions read from the stage in English and Spanish.

When Gene Clapp, NAD PBE coordinator and a Texas Conference pastor, shouted, "Let the testing begin!" Pathfinders sprang into action. At the halfway point, question 45, the room erupted in cheers and applause, with many Pathfinders exchanging fist bumps and high fives.

The cheering grew louder when they reached question 90: "For eight points, fill in the blanks: Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Ultimately, 90 percent of the teams earned first place by scoring within 90 percent of the highest score.

Here Am I, Send Me: The Spiritual Heart of PBE

PBE was grounded in worship, with Sabbath morning testing preceded by vespers on Friday, April 17, and followed by a Sab-

bath afternoon worship service on April 18, highlighting key lessons from Isaiah.

Friday vespers felt like a reunion, with old friends greeting one another before joining their voices in praise and worship. Adventist universities and other ministries took the stage throughout both the Friday and Sabbath services, with exhibits where parents and Pathfinders could learn more about the church's academic and mission opportunities.

Also on Friday, Pathfinders laid hands on parents and other supporters as Vandeon Griffin, NAD associate director for Youth and Young Adults, prayed over them, emphasizing PBE's spiritual focus and the critical role families play in supporting their Pathfinders.

Friday evening speaker Pedro Perez, Florida Conference Pathfinder and Adventurer director, delivered a message titled "It Doesn't Match," challenging Pathfinders to ensure that their words and actions reflected a sincere heart for God. Referencing Isaiah 29:13, Perez warned against "going through the motions" spiritually while allowing their hearts to drift away from God.

He also spoke from personal experience, such as a period in middle school when, despite being raised Seventh-day Adventist, he began using language he learned from classmates that did not match his faith.



Friday evening vespers speaker Pedro Perez, Florida Conference Pathfinder and Adventurer director, charges listeners to ensure that their words and actions align with their faith. *Neat Randriamialison*



Pathfinders gather on the testing floor before the start of the 2026 NAD PBE finals in Hawthorne, Florida. A record 259 teams participated in this year's competition, which focused on the book of Isaiah. *Ronald Pollard*

Perez encouraged Pathfinders to live out their faith in practical ways, including standing up for others, apologizing when wrong, and avoiding hurtful words. Later he cited God's call to mission in Isaiah 6:8, and challenged listeners to respond like the prophet: "Here am I! Send me."

On Sabbath Danny Verdugo, a youth pastor from Keene, Texas, continued the theme by reminding Pathfinders they were called to something greater than competition or badges. He urged young people to answer God's call to "learn the Word, live out the Word, and love like the Word."

Katie O'Ffill, from the Chesapeake Conference, was among the Pathfinders who took these pastors' words to heart. She realized that "if God calls you, you should go wherever He's calling. It will be amazing no matter what you do if you're with Him."

PBE's Impact in North America and Beyond

One of the clearest markers of PBE's growth is its expanding international reach. Pathfinders from the South England Conference (SEC) first began participating in the NAD PBE 14 years ago under the leadership of then-SEC Pathfinder director Kevin Johns.

In 2017 then-Youth Ministries director Dejan Stojkovic began leading teams from across the British Union Conference to participate in the NAD PBE, virtually and in person. Since 2021, British teams have also been able to compete closer to home through the Trans-European Division's (TED) own PBE finals.

This year Isaac Chia, Pathfinder specialist for the Inter-European Division (IED), based in Switzerland, attended the NAD event to observe its logistics and organizational chart. Introduced to the NAD PBE through the TED, Chia presented a report on the 2024 NAD PBE to his division's youth advisory, and they voted to host an IED PBE.

Chia shared his motivation to help young people develop a lifelong love of Scripture. "When you are a Pathfinder, it's easier to absorb things, like a sponge. You are directly absorbing the Word of God, and memorizing these Bible texts will help you [as] an adult to know God better," he said.



Pathfinders from the Irish Mission, part of the British Union Conference, participate in the 2026 North American Division Pathfinder Bible Experience in Hawthorne, Florida, reflecting the event's growing international reach. *Ronald Pollard*

Throughout the weekend Chia attended volunteer meetings, interviewed coordinators, and observed behind-the-scenes operations. He said he was especially impressed by the professionalism, excellence, and spirit of service displayed by the NAD PBE team, and keen to report back to his colleagues.

In a full-circle moment, Pathfinders from North America visited the TED PBE for the first time this year. The Berrien Springs Spanish Golden Eagles Club, from the Lake Union Conference, connected with TED leader Kevin Johns and his team at the 2025 NAD PBE. There Johns invited them to the 2026 TED PBE finals in Poland. After a year of studying, planning, and fundraising, they flew to Poland the weekend before the NAD event and, days later, traveled to Florida.

Team members said they would most fondly remember the kindness and hospitality they experienced in Poland. Participating in two PBE finals also deepened their appreciation for Scripture, fellowship, and the sense of accomplishment that comes after months of hard work.

Team member Itzel Fajardo added, "We're the first [NAD] team to go to TED, and I wanted to be the first team from North America to win first place."

Notably, the team earned first place at the TED PBE finals, and later, at the finals in Florida.

The 2026 North American Division Pathfinder Bible Experience concluded with a jubilant awards ceremony, where Pathfinders celebrated the culmination of their yearlong journey with teammates, coaches, family members, and other supporters.

Miranda shared that he and other organizers hope participants will carry the memories and lessons of PBE with them long after the competition, especially in moments of uncertainty.

"We pray that when they go home, when they face trials or temptations, when they face things that are discouraging, they may remember those words that they have memorized," he said.

"Pathfinder Bible Experience is life-changing," Miranda concluded. "Life-changing for the Pathfinders, life-changing for the families, life-changing for the churches."

A STORY WORTH TELLING: Adventist Historians Publish First Global Church History in a Generation

BY HEIDI STRAW CAMARGO,
FREELANCE WRITER/CONTRACTOR

It started with a seat assignment. In November 2019 Edward Martin Allen boarded a flight from Omaha, Nebraska, to San Diego, California, settled in, and realized his seatmate happened to work for major Christian publisher William B. Eerdmans. Two and a half hours later Allen had a business card and an invitation to bring his coauthor, Michael W. Campbell, Ph.D., to discuss publishing a book on the history of Seventh-day Adventists.

Close to a decade of research, writing, and collaboration later, *A Global History of Seventh-day Adventists* is now available worldwide at major online book sellers, such as Amazon, and in assorted local bookstores. It is designed to be engaging and understandable to multiple audiences, including church members curious about their own heritage, readers with no prior knowledge of Adventism, and university students studying religious history. The book contains almost 100 photographs, text boxes on a wide range of topics, and discussion questions designed for classroom use.

A Global History was launched in February by the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in a special livestreamed evening program hosted by Adventist pastor Dwight K. Nelson and attended by numerous scholars, church leaders, Eerdmans' publishing staff, and other interested persons.

Campbell is director of the North American Division Department of Archives, Statistics, and Research, an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister, prolific author, and previous teacher at the college and university level. Coauthor Edward Martin Allen is professor emeritus of religion at Union Adventist University in Lincoln, Nebraska. During his career at Union he served as academic dean and director of the school's religion program.

What distinguishes this volume from previous Adventist histories, according to Campbell and Allen and the scholars who reviewed it, is its genuinely global scope. Earlier comprehensive histories of the church

The newly released book on the global history of Seventh-day Adventists
William B. Eerdmans Publishing



have largely centered on North American origins. This book follows Adventism across centuries and continents, setting the denomination within the broader currents of world history.

Allen illustrated this with the story of Fernando Stahl, a missionary whose educational work among Indigenous communities around Lake Titicaca in Peru ultimately helped transform the country's separation of local people from wider participation in their society. Today Stahl is the only North American with a statue in Peru.

The book also examines how the world has shaped Adventism. Allen described how the early twentieth-century Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (an interdenominational initiative that sent 20,000 missionaries overseas between 1890 and 1920) inspired many Adventists and even shaped the church's practice of morning devotions.

"Putting Adventism in context and showing how events happening around it shaped it is very helpful," said Rodney Palmer, chair of the Andrews University Department of Religion and Biblical Languages, during the panel discussion that followed the launch presentations.

Campbell noted that the book does not shy away from difficult topics. "We write the history that we actually did find in the archives," Campbell said, "not the history that we wish we had found."

The book also makes a deliberate effort to tell the stories of ordinary believers and underrepresented voices, including women whose contributions to Adventist mission have rarely appeared in historical accounts.

Campbell reflected on what he hopes the book represents beyond its own pages. "I sense a nice spirit among a new generation of Adventist historians . . . who are working hard to just lift each other up and celebrate and look for the best in each other's work," he said. "We need to do that more."

He observed how the project changed him personally. As he wrote about race relations and social justice in Adventist history, he said, he felt challenged to live out those values in the present, including joining peaceful marches alongside African American colleagues while teaching in Texas.

"The stories we tell and how we tell them . . . they matter," Campbell said.



Maryland Lt. Governor Aruna Miller and Ivan Williams, Sr., NAD vice president, pose for a photo. In his address Williams challenged the audience to reflect on the true cost of preserving religious freedom. *Pieter Damsteegt*

“LET IT BEGIN WITH ME”

Faith, Freedom, and the Power of Conscience at the 2026 Religious Freedom Prayer Breakfast

BY RONNIE MILLS, NAD PENTECOST AND BEYOND INITIATIVE COORDINATOR

We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. . . . Let there be more earnest prayer; and then let us work in harmony with our prayers.”— *Ellen G. White**

These words framed the spirit of the Seventh Annual North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists’ (NAD) Religious Freedom Prayer Breakfast, held on January 14, 2026, at the NAD headquarters, in honor of National Religious Freedom Day. The gathering was not simply a ceremonial observance—it was a living response to the call to move beyond “quietude” and actively defend the right of conscience.

The spirit of the morning was captured through music, including the timeless anthem “Let There Be Peace on Earth,” sung by alto Sharon Hodges. Its lyrics—“Let it begin with me” and “Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony”—echoed through every prayer, every reflection, and every moment of the event.

In his welcome, Orlan M. Johnson, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) for the NAD, reminded the audience that Thomas Jefferson considered religious liberty so central that he chose it as part of his legacy, inscribed on his tombstone. Johnson reflected that religious freedom is not just a historical principle but a “living promise” that protects “those who actually are of faith and those who have no faith at all.”

That promise has deep roots within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In 1906 the church founded *Liberty* magazine, now celebrating its 120th anniversary as the oldest continuously published journal on religious liberty in the United States—a testament to a century of advocacy for freedom of conscience.

Among the distinguished guests was Maryland lieutenant governor Aruna Miller, who chairs the state’s first Interfaith Outreach Council. Raised in a home shaped by Hindu and Catholic traditions, Miller spoke personally about the importance of faith in public life.

Despite the opening session of the Maryland General Assembly, she made time to attend. She shared one of her favorite reflections from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: “We are not human beings having this spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Speaking to the emotional weight many people are carrying today, she added, “It’s faith that [is] gonna give them hope about the next day . . . and that’s why your voices, your leadership, and the present matter so much.”

Prayer Time

One of the most moving aspects of the breakfast was the series of interfaith prayers. Each one was a sacred plea for dignity, justice, peace, and freedom.

Andy Im, associate director of PARL for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC), offered the prayer for religious freedom: “True devotion cannot be manufactured. You seek no forced tribute, only the unforced response of a heart that is free. Remind us, please, Lord, that a yes has no meaning without the freedom to say no. Make us tireless defenders of our neighbor’s conscience, recognizing that the liberty we claim for ourselves is only as sacred as the liberty we ensure for others.”

Fr. Mel Portula, St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church, prayed for communities: “We pray for our communities in a time of stress. Our immigrant families cry out for help. Rain down Your mercy, O Lord, and hear us [so] we can form new bonds of community and a deeper sense of Your compassionate sense of justice.”

Lt. Col. Yorlando Wortham, state chaplain for the Maryland National Guard, lifted the nation before God: “We pray for all of those that You have placed in position for such a time as this. If You’ve called America to a

Rev. Galen Carey greets guests Allison Chard, Paul Monteiro, Lance Walker, Carmela Monk-Crawford, and Father Mel Portula. *Pieter Damsteegt*



The prayer breakfast was a living response to the call to move beyond “quietude” and actively defend the right of conscience.

time of reprimand, we say thank You. If You’ve called us to a time of judgment, we say thank You. . . . We lift up our country to You, and we ask, dear Lord, that You would rule and reign supreme.”

Rev. Luis Landaverde, of the Hagerstown Spanish church, prayed for elected leaders: “We thank you for the gift of this nation and for the men and women who have answered the call to public service. Remind all who live that true power is found in service, and that leadership is best exercised with humility, compassion, and justice.”

Hasan Hammad, president of the Islamic Society of Baltimore, reflected on the urgency of peace: “Unfortunately, we are in times where the people that we serve are losing their lives because they are standing up for their neighbors. The factions that are being created, the division that’s happening. . . . There is no faith that wants anything but peace. We need peace.”

His imam, Yaseen Shaikh, prayed: “Guide us all to the correct path, the path of justice, the path of peace. Allow us to see each other as neighbors, as fellow human beings.”

A Call to Defend Religious Liberty for All

The keynote address by Ivan Williams, vice president of NAD Strategy and Leadership, opened with Patrick Henry’s bold challenge: “Give me liberty, or give me death.”

Williams asked, “Does this statement equal or reflect the determination of your own faith? Or are you willing to die for your faith?”

He reminded the audience that religious freedom, though God-given, has not always been government-protected. “As long as one’s religious freedom is not free, then my religious freedom is not free,” he said. “As long as a postal worker cannot take Sabbath off . . . a Buddhist is forced to walk in the picket line . . . a Muslim is denied a place to pray . . . then we are not free.”

Williams quoted Pastor Martin Niemöller’s haunting statement to demonstrate what happens when we don’t speak up for others: “First, they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.”

He reinforced his call to responsibility by invoking Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

* *Christian Service* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1925), p. 162.

NAD RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DINNER HIGHLIGHTS SHARED COMMITMENT TO FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

The North American Division's (NAD) nineteenth annual Religious Liberty Dinner, held on April 22, 2026, in the James Madison Memorial Building at the Library of Congress, championed freedom of conscience as a core human right. Overlooking the gathering, a statue honoring Madison, the fourth U.S. president and key architect of constitutional religious freedom rights, visually reinforced the evening's theme.

Hosted by NAD Public Affairs and Religious Liberty and *Liberty* magazine, the dinner brought together 90 religious liberty advocates, faith representatives, government officials, academics, Washington Adventist University honors students, Adventist Church leaders, and other guests.

In his welcome, Orlan M. Johnson, NAD PARL director, underscored the significance of the gathering. "For nearly two decades this event has served as a space where people of diverse beliefs, backgrounds, and perspectives can come together in unity," he said.

Johnson reminded attendees that, globally, many people do not have the freedom to worship—or not worship—as they see fit, ending with an appeal for ongoing advocacy: "Let tonight be more than a dinner."

Celebrating 120 Years of *Liberty* Magazine

A highlight of the evening was the official recognition of the 120-year anniversary of *Liberty* magazine by U.S. representative Jamie Raskin, who represents Maryland's Eighth Congressional District. Notably, the magazine was founded in Takoma Park, Raskin's hometown and part of his congressional district.

In brief remarks, Raskin praised *Liberty* magazine for helping keep alive what he called "the founding and most revolutionary principle of our Constitu-

tion"—the separation of church and state. He then presented Bettina Krause, *Liberty* editor and NAD PARL associate director, with a certificate honoring the magazine's "120 years of zealously championing the separation of church and state, the precondition for freedom and progress in American life."

Accepting the citation on behalf of the PARL team, Krause shared that when she came into the role in 2021, she "made a rash and naive vow" to read every issue of the magazine ever published. She made it to 1940. Nonetheless, Krause discovered a lasting statement written by the editor in the very first issue: "We believe that there is no power but the power of love that can rightly compel the human conscience."

More than a century later Krause said, those words still reflected the shared commitment to freedom of conscience and human dignity that had brought the group together that night. "We are proud to continue the legacy . . . as together, we defend and promote religious freedom for all people," she concluded.

Honoring Advocates Across Faith Traditions

Organizers also honored two religious liberty advocates whose work and partnership with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other faith groups exemplify the interfaith collaboration NAD PARL espouses.

Melissa Reid, NAD PARL associate director and associate editor of *Liberty* magazine, first presented a Religious Freedom Advocacy Award to Galen Carey, vice president of government relations for the National Association of Evangelicals. Reid noted his advocacy on religious freedom and other public policy issues. She also highlighted his work in refugee resettlement, including supporting individuals fleeing religious persecution and, at times, hosting refugees in his own home.



Orlan Johnson, NAD Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director, addresses guests at the 19th annual Religious Liberty Dinner on April 22, 2026, in the Library of Congress' James Madison Memorial Building in Washington, D.C. *Art Brondo*

In his acceptance speech, Carey cited religious freedom as "a very precious gift from God." He added, "God does not force us to believe," asserting that when one power dominates, whether religious or secular, persecution often follows.

He then thanked fellow advocates for their shared work in defending freedom of conscience worldwide and urged them to "lead by example and friendly persuasion, never by force or persecution."

Reid later presented Lance Walker, director of the Washington, D.C., Office of Public and International Affairs for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with the same award. Among his contributions, she highlighted extensive religious freedom policy work with other faith groups, including the 2019 Fairness for All effort and the 2022 Respect for Marriage Act.

She closed by sharing what Walker considered the best career advice he had ever received while working in an often-divisive Capitol Hill environment: "It's hard to hate up close."

Walker, in turn, expressed gratitude for his close association with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Drawing from the tenets of his own faith tradition and Adventism, he emphasized shared values such as freedom of conscience, respect for others, and limited government interference in religion.

Finally, Walker noted the apt choice of venue, given Madison's legacy as a religious liberty hero. Quoting Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments" (1785), he stated: "Religion . . . can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence."

Keynote A Call for Perseverance

The evening concluded with a keynote address by Hakeem Jeffries, U.S. representative for the Eighth Congressional District of New York and Democratic leader of the House of Representatives.

Jeffries began by thanking the Seventh-day Adventist Church for its "tremendous tradition of protecting religious freedom and liberty for people of every faith and for the secular community."

Citing the nation's founders, Jeffries referenced the First Amendment's protections for religious liberty: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." He encouraged attendees to continue upholding those fundamental values.

Finally, while acknowledging ongoing threats to religious and other fundamental freedoms, Jeffries closed with a call for perseverance: "You can't get from your point of departure to your point of destination without at some moment along the way encountering turbulence."

Reflecting on the evening, NAD president G. Alexander Bryant praised the PARL team and added that religious liberty is "not only important to our church" but also "important for humanity," noting that God created human beings with freedom of choice.

Bryant concluded with a sentiment that affirmed the evening's broader message: "We have to stand on the wall to protect those rights."



Attendees greet one another during the North American Division's nineteenth annual Religious Liberty Dinner. *Art Brondo*

Freedom for Everyone

Inside the Adventist Church's Work Defending Religious Freedom

COMPILED BY KRISTINA P. BUSCH

Freedom of belief for all people. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has promoted and defended this position for more than 170 years. The worldwide church's Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) Department was established in 1901, and in 1906 the department began publishing *Liberty: A Magazine of Religious Freedom*. The North American Division (NAD) PARL Department's mission is "to proclaim and defend the God-given gift of religious freedom which is integral to our identity as Seventh-day Adventist Christians." This is accomplished through building relationships with civic leaders, religious groups and community leaders throughout North America.

Faith and Politics

In 2008 Samantha Elauf, a Muslim teenager, applied to a job at the

clothing store Abercrombie & Fitch, but was not hired because she wore a hijab (headscarf) as part of her religious faith, which conflicted with the company's dress code known as the "Look Policy." This case made it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Abercrombie & Fitch argued that Elauf had not explicitly requested a religious accommodation. However, the Supreme Court ruled 8-1 in Elauf's favor in 2015, holding that an employer cannot refuse to hire someone based on a religious practice—even if the applicant did not formally request an accommodation—so long as that practice was a motivating factor in the decision (*EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc.*, 575 U.S. 768 [2015]).

"I loved the fact that we worked with a group of religious liberty advocates on amicus briefs in support of someone who was not

Adventist," shared Orlan M. Johnson, NAD PARL director. "This decision strengthened protections for religious liberty in the workplace by making clear that employers must consider and accommodate religious practices rather than avoid hiring individuals because of them."

Prior to his appointment to NAD PARL director, Johnson was a partner at Saul Ewing, and cochair of the Securities Transactions & Regulations Practice Group. In addition to his legal practice, Johnson was appointed by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate to be the chair of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC), the lead organization responsible for the investigation and recovery process for account holders of failed brokerage firms such as Lehman, Madoff Securities, and MF Global. Under his leader-

Left: Orlan Johnson introduces Maryland Governor Wes Moore to Adventist leaders who attended an event at the Takoma Park Adventist church on July 22, 2023. At the event, Moore thanked the church for supporting his family when he was a child. Right: In November 2022, Orlan Johnson explains to volunteers how the NAD Thanksgiving food giveaway will flow. All photos by Art Brondo

ship, during the Madoff proceeding, the agency was able to recover the largest single asset forfeiture in United States history of \$7.2 billion.

"PARL is a vital ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that represents the church in the public square by promoting and protecting religious freedom for all people, building relationships with government leaders, and advocating for freedom of conscience. I call this 'making friends before we need friends,'" Johnson shared. "This work matters because religious liberty is not guaranteed and can erode without active voices defending it, and because the church has a responsibility to uphold the principle that faith must be freely chosen, not forced."

Why is it important to make friends before we need friends? According to Johnson, this means building genuine relationships before a crisis or need arises, engaging with community leaders, elected officials, and neighbors consistently over time—through respect, service, and meaningful connection. "This matters because influence doesn't begin in moments of conflict—it begins in moments of connection," Johnson shared. "If the church shows up only when it needs something, it can appear self-interested; but when it shows up regularly as a positive presence in the community, it earns credibility. This approach opens doors for mutual understanding, protects religious freedom, and allows the church to represent Christ's character in the public square."

Religion and politics can be hot-button items, and navigating these conversations can be tricky. In response to that reality, Johnson and the PARL Department released a new weekly show on YouTube called *Faith and Politics* to create a thoughtful, balanced space where



"Religious liberty is not guaranteed and can erode without active voices defending it."

faith and civic responsibility could be discussed clearly, respectfully, and biblically. "We wanted to create a media offering that would help people of faith understand how to engage the public square without compromising their values or their witness," Johnson said. "Within the church there was a growing recognition that many members either avoided conversations about politics entirely or engaged them in ways that created more division than impact."

Since its launch in 2021, *Faith and Politics* has produced more than 175 episodes and is currently in its fourth season. "The goal isn't to tell people what to think politically, but to help them understand how to think faithfully and responsibly," Johnson says. The show may especially be valuable for church members, young adults, ministry leaders, and anyone navigating today's complex social climate. "It's for those who want to be informed without being polarized, engaged without becoming combative, and faithful without being silent. Simply put, it equips people to live out their faith with wisdom, confidence, and Christlike character—not just inside the church, but wherever faith and public life intersect."

Broadly, PARL helps safeguard the ability to worship, witness, and live out biblical convictions at the local and national level. Members play an important supporting role, according to Johnson, "Every believer interacting with their community plays a role in advocating respectfully, modeling Christlike character, and helping preserve the freedoms that allow the church to exist and grow both now and in the future."

Public Affairs

Each year, the Religious Liberty Campaign raises awareness and funds for public affairs and religious liberty. The campaign videos often feature the story of someone whom the church has assisted with a religious liberty challenge. "Often they are in the midst of a lengthy court battle, living without employment, health insurance, or a clear path forward. But they are at peace in the midst of the turmoil, grateful for their church's support and guidance," shares Melissa Reid, PARL associate director. "Person after person has testified as to how the experience strengthened their faith in God. Some of the stories that are highlighted end up resulting in legal victories that strengthened conscience protections for years to come."

As associate director Reid advocates for the religious interests of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its members on Capitol Hill, as well as serving as associate editor of *Liberty*. Her primary responsibility is the church's domestic government affairs portfolio,

which includes advocating on the religious freedom interests of people of faith, monitoring federal legislation and administration policies, observing federal agency hearings, partnering with fellow faith groups and religious freedom organizations, and submitting letters of support or concern to Congress and federal agencies.

“Public affairs is the bridge-building component of PARL’s work. Our goal is to build key relationships in the community in order to position the Seventh-day Adventist Church to a standing of credibility, trust, and relevance in the public space,” Reid shared. “We often say that the PA enables the RL. We work with Adventist Church administration to identify opportunities for collaboration, exposure, networking, and engagement to further our institutional purpose.”

Reid began working with PARL in 2003. She recalls that at the time religious liberty public policy was broadly viewed as a fundamental American principle without much attention from either lawmakers or the general public. Today, however, religious freedom is much higher on the public radar and is often considered a partisan or controversial issue.

“One thing I’m particularly proud of is that we advocate for the religious freedom rights of everyone,” said Reid. “Yes, the church works to ensure that members are able to honor their conscience by observing the holy Sabbath. But it also advocates for the rights of individuals who believe very differently than we do. That is not the norm on Capitol Hill, and it’s something our denomination is known for within the religious liberty advocacy community. We are so humbled and grateful for God’s gift of free will that we work to ensure that it is available to others.”



NAD PARL associate directors Melissa Reid (left) and Bettina Krause (fourth from the left) pose at the 2026 religious liberty dinner with Washington Adventist University Honors College director Jonathan Scriven and three students. Art Brondo

Liberty Magazine

The oldest religious liberty journal in the world is produced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Liberty* has been published continuously since April 1906, and this year marks its 120th anniversary. Today *Liberty* is published by the North American Division while continuing a historic partnership with the General Conference PARL Department.

“I recently received an email from a federal judge thanking me for the magazine,” shared Bettina Krause, *Liberty* editor. “He wrote, ‘*Liberty* does an excellent job taking difficult topics—often political topics that affect religion and government—and addressing them in an even-handed, politically neutral way. I don’t know anyone else who does that.’”

Bettina Krause has served the church for more than 30 years in both communications and religious freedom advocacy. Before becoming *Liberty* editor five years ago, the native Australian represented the world church as government affairs director on Capitol Hill.

Krause explains that on a global level, religious liberty simply means the right to live out your faith without fear, discrimination, or violence, which some church members have experienced. But the idea is more complicated in North America, where culture wars and political polarization now exist. “What I appreciate about *Liberty* magazine is that it offers a perspective grounded in our church’s prophetic message,” she said. “Because of that, it refuses to buy into political extremes and instead tries to look at current debates and challenges through an eternal lens.”

Since its inception *Liberty* has relied on the support of local congregations and individual church members. Through its annual campaign, church members contribute names and addresses of public officials in their communities and sponsor subscriptions for them. This helps raise the visibility of the church among elected leaders and establishes a constructive presence in the community. With a circulation of nearly 200,000 per issue, more than 1 million copies go out each year to lawmakers, judges, academics, and community leaders across the North American Division.

“Not long ago a federal judge from another state sent me a copy of his ruling in a religious liberty case,” Krause said. “When I read the opinion, I was delighted to see that he had actually cited articles from *Liberty* magazine.”

The message of *Liberty* has remained the same through the years. “It reflects Christ’s words ‘My kingdom is not of this world,’” shared Krause. “It reflects our understanding of the character of God—who created every human being in His image and endowed each of us with dignity and freedom of conscience. That understanding has led Adventists to defend religious freedom not only for ourselves but for every person.”

Kristina P. Busch writes from Arlington, Texas.

LEGACY OF LIBERTY, Advocacy in Action

Defending religious freedom and upholding the importance of separation of church and state happens on both a local level and national level. Representatives for the Seventh-day Adventist Church play key roles ensuring everyone, not only church members, have religious liberty protections. Their advocacy and representation position the church to a standing of credibility, trust, and relevance to the public. While often working behind the scenes, the impact of the Religious Liberty and Public Affairs Departments are felt throughout the world.



over the last five years to the U.S. Supreme Court by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Amicus curiae is a legal term meaning “friend of the court.” This ‘friend’ is a person or organization offering the court a written document making legal arguments from a person or organization that is not a party to a case, but may have a strong interest, additional information, or perspective in the issue being considered.

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

Established 1893



The International Religious Liberty Association was instituted in 1893 by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Since then, it has been an institution for advocating and promoting religious liberty all over the world.

*Facts and figures from NAD Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department; National Archives; Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists.

1st Amendment

Ratified
December 15, 1791

- ✓ Freedom of Religion
- ✓ Freedom of Press
- ✓ Freedom of Speech
- ✓ Right to Assemble
- ✓ Right to Petition



CORPORAL DESMOND DOSS

was the most famous Adventist conscientious objector. He served as an unarmed combat medic in World War II and, despite intense enemy fire during the Battle of Okinawa, he singlehandedly rescued approximately 75 wounded men. Doss became the first conscientious objector to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Liberty Magazine

Established 1906



episodes of the Just Liberty podcast: on YouTube and ReligiousLiberty.info

1,000,000+

Magazines distributed each year

BY ORLAN M. JOHNSON

When Freedom Meets Uncertainty

Most of us prefer certainty. We are more comfortable when things are either black or white. We appreciate plans that unfold as expected, goals that can be achieved through diligence, and routines that provide a sense of stability. Yet life often reminds us that some of our greatest opportunities emerge, not from carefully designed plans, but from unexpected detours.

A few years ago I experienced one of those moments. A community food giveaway project that had consumed much of my time and energy came to an abrupt end when the truck bringing the food got into an accident and all the food had to be confiscated and destroyed. The disappointment for the 250 persons waiting for this donation was real, and I focused on what had been lost rather than what might still be possible.

Only later did I begin to see that the interruption had created space for something new. Instead of engaging in a food giveaway, we ended up handing out morning watch books, doing outside

exercise classes, buying gas for individuals in need, and participating in numerous prayer circles for parents and their children. What seemed like a closed door was actually an invitation to walk a different path with the 250 souls who came looking for food but went home learning more about Jesus, the Bread of Life.

The same principle applies not only to our personal lives but also to our role as citizens and people of faith.

Throughout history, communities have faced unexpected challenges that required courage, perseverance, and a willingness to engage rather than retreat. In moments when public policies shift, cultural values change, or difficult questions arise in society, it can be tempting to feel discouraged. Religious liberty in America, for

example, is a principle many people assume will always exist without effort. However, the freedoms we enjoy today have been preserved through the dedication of individuals who understood that faith and public life are not isolated from one another. They recognized that religious liberty is more than a constitutional protection; it is the freedom to live according to one's convictions while respecting the rights and dignity of others.

Consider how your voice, your values, and your faith might make a difference in the lives of others.

Like any valuable gift, liberty requires stewardship.

That stewardship does not necessarily involve standing behind a podium or serving in elected office. More often it begins in everyday conversations, acts of service, and engagement with the issues affecting our communities. It involves listening respectfully, speaking thoughtfully, and demonstrating the values we profess through our actions.

The challenges we face personally often strengthen our resilience and deepen our trust in God. In a similar way, the challenges facing our communities can inspire us to become more engaged, compassionate, and committed to the common good.

That shift in perspective can make all the difference. Sometimes it is not about who *you think* you are, but who *they say* you are. Knowing the answer will often shape your ministry going forward.

Instead of asking, "Why is this happening to me?" we might ask, "How can I contribute to others?" Instead of dwelling on obstacles, we can look for opportunities to serve, advocate, and encourage. Instead of retreating from difficult conversations, we can enter them with grace, conviction, and humility.

While the future may feel uncertain at times, it also presents opportunities for people of faith to engage thoughtfully in public affairs, to champion religious liberty, and to contribute positively to the society we share.

I encourage you to consider a challenge or detour that ultimately led to unexpected growth. Then consider how your voice, your values, and your faith might make a difference in the lives of others. Always remember that the path ahead may not be the one you planned, but it may be exactly where you are needed most.

Orlan M. Johnson is director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the North American Division.



Nito Gil

From NICU "Miracle Baby" to Nurse:

Nito Gil's Full-Circle Journey at Loma Linda University Health

BY LINDA HA, SENIOR PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECIALIST FOR LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY HEALTH

After surviving a life-threatening infection as a newborn, Nito Gil returned to the very hospital that saved him. This time as a student in its School of Nursing, where he recently graduated. On the day he was born, Gil spent just a few hours in his parents' arms before doctors rushed him into the neonatal intensive-care unit (NICU) at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital, where he would remain for more than two weeks, surrounded by wires, machines, and uncertainty.

"I still remember the social worker coming and trying to prepare us that he wasn't going to make it," said his mother, Patricia Larios-Gil.

Sixteen days later he went home.

Years later he returned. This time in scrubs.

Full-Circle Moment

Now a newly graduated nurse, Gil traces his path into medicine back to those first fragile days of life, when infection and suspected seizures left his future unclear.

Gil was born on September 13, 2003, after what his mother described as a high-risk pregnancy. Within hours complications emerged. "They said that he had been taken to NICU," Mrs. Larios-Gil said. Doctors placed him on medication and monitored him closely. Nito remained on medication for several months.

Growing up, Gil often heard stories of the infection, the uncertainty, and the nurses who cared for him. Among them was Sara Dunn, his primary NICU nurse, with whom his family remained in touch over the years. At his March pinning ceremony, Dunn was the one who pinned him.

"Sara played a large part in talking to me about her nursing journey, and her words were inspirational," he said.

When he began clinical rotations, the hospital felt familiar in an unexpected way. But it was his time in the NICU, the very place where his life began, that carried a different weight.

Photos provided by Loma Linda University Health

"Seeing some of the parents come and visit their kids, I could kind of imagine seeing my mom or my dad at some points," Gil said.

Meaningful Experiences

Though many might expect him to return to the NICU as a nurse, Gil chose a different path, applying instead to adult units where he found meaningful experiences during training.

"I actually ended up really enjoying it," he said of his practicum. Still, the lessons from his earliest days, and the care he received, continue to guide him.

"I think part of it is having some sort of faith, you know, and having trust, as far as the medical team goes," he said.

He hopes to carry forward the kind of care that once helped him. "I think here there's a clear sense of community," he said. "Everyone here really cares deeper than just the superficial level."

For his mother, each milestone, from kindergarten to graduation, has been marked by the memory of what nearly was not. "Every time we see him it's a reminder that he is indeed our miracle baby," she said.

And now, as they watch their son step into the profession that once saved him, that reminder

has taken on new meaning, not just of survival, but of purpose.

↓ Newborn Nito Gil's parents spend time with him in the neonatal intensive-care unit (NICU) at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital.



Sara Dunn poses with Nito Gil after his pinning ceremony.



In Mid-America Union, Adventist Presence Renewed in Grand County

In the early 2000s the Seventh-day Adventist church in Granby, Colorado, officially closed. But in the years since, church members from various places moved there for work, retirement, or other reasons. They came from different parts of Colorado and other states, even other continents, with one member coming from Nigeria to make a life for himself in the Rockies.

Being so remote from the nearest churches, they tended to worship at home, viewing services on Hope Channel or other providers. None of them knew much about other Adventists nearby.

That began to change in the past few years.

As members such as Tad and Michelle Long made occasional trips to distant churches, they learned that other Adventists might be living in Grand County. While visiting the Estes Park church, the Longs connected with Pastor Rex Bell, whose parents helped establish the old Granby church.

With Bell's encouragement, they distributed flyers across the county, inviting people to a study of the book of Revelation. Their efforts helped them discover five other local Adventists, in addition to a couple they already knew who lived there part-time.

Tad's brother, Robb Long, a pastor and current Ministerial Association director of the Indiana Conference, agreed to come to Granby and lead meetings as part of the North American Division's Pentecost 2025 initiative.

"The first blessing to come out of the meetings was that it brought together about a dozen Seventh-day Adventists who live in the area," commented Doug English, Rocky Mountain Conference (RMC) vice president for administration. "They are meeting regularly for church services and getting to know one another."

← Adventists who comprise the "new" congregation in Grand County, Colorado, meet together. *Provided by Mid-America Union Outlook magazine*

The meetings also drew interest beyond the Adventist community. "Seven people who knew nothing of our church came the first night," English continued. "Not only do all seven continue to come, but they have also been joined by three more!"

The momentum continued on December 6, when, after worship and a shared meal, English spoke to attendees about officially forming as a group within the Rocky Mountain Conference. That day they chose the name Grand Valley Seventh-day Adventist Church, reflecting their desire to reach the entire region. They also identified a group leader, treasurer, and communication leader.

For Tad and Michelle, the shift from making the four-hour round-trip journey a few times a month to attend church to worshipping locally with others has been significant.

"We are beyond excited to see where our God leads with this endeavor!" said Tad.

English reflected, "Though the church closed a couple decades ago, it is clear that the Lord's work did not end in Granby and the surrounding area. He always had believers there, and He always had a plan."

Bell concluded that the renewed congregation builds on the legacy of those who first established Adventist work in Grand County. "What a joy it will be when we get to the kingdom and tell those who built the previous church that the work was reestablished," he said. "The light never went out in Grand County."

— *Information provided by Doug English, RMC vice president for administration; the original article was published online by Mid-America Union Outlook magazine.*

In Pacific Union, Bakersfield Family Finds New Life in Christ Through Pentecost 2025 Series

A 12-year spiritual journey reached its climax on June 28, 2025, when Michael Stitt, Sr., and Michael Stitt, Jr., were baptized at Bakersfield Central Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their transformation from skeptical Bible students to committed Adventists—with Michael, Jr., now pursuing pastoral ministry—illustrates the impact of the North American Division's Pentecost 2025 evangelistic initiative.

The story began years ago when Maritza Cartagena met Michael, Sr., at work. After they married, the couple faced a religious divide: he was a devoted member of the Church of Christ, serving as a deacon, while she was a faithful Adventist.

Rather than let faith separate them, they made a unique commitment. On Sabbaths they would attend her church; on Sundays, his church. But Maritza prayed for years that God would develop an interest in Adventist truth in both her husband and stepson.

"She didn't want to impose it upon them," said Central California Conference evangelist Eddie Perez, who worked closely with the family. "She wanted God to open their hearts."

When Pastor Christian Hodet arrived at Bakersfield Central, he developed a relationship with the family and offered to have Bible studies. Both Michaels agreed, not out of genuine interest but to prove Adventism wrong.

Michael, Sr., an experienced Bible student, came prepared. During their first study he presented Hodet with a list of challenging theological questions.

For the next year and a half Hodet and the two Michaels met weekly,

methodically addressing each question and exploring biblical harmony. Gradually they began recognizing the solid foundation of Adventist theology, even as they struggled with the decision to leave their church.

The breakthrough came during a February Pentecost 2025 evangelistic series in Bakersfield. The Stitt family attended every night, finding answers to lingering questions through the messages.

During the final Sabbath appeal on February 8, Michael, Jr., took a first step toward baptism. "With fear and trembling and tears, he got up and came to the front," said Perez. His journey took another unexpected turn. After planning for Air Force service for 20 years, he began sensing God's call to pastoral ministry and has since started training through Souls West, a program offering hands-on experience in literature ministry and Bible work.

The Stitt family's transformation is already influencing others. Michael,

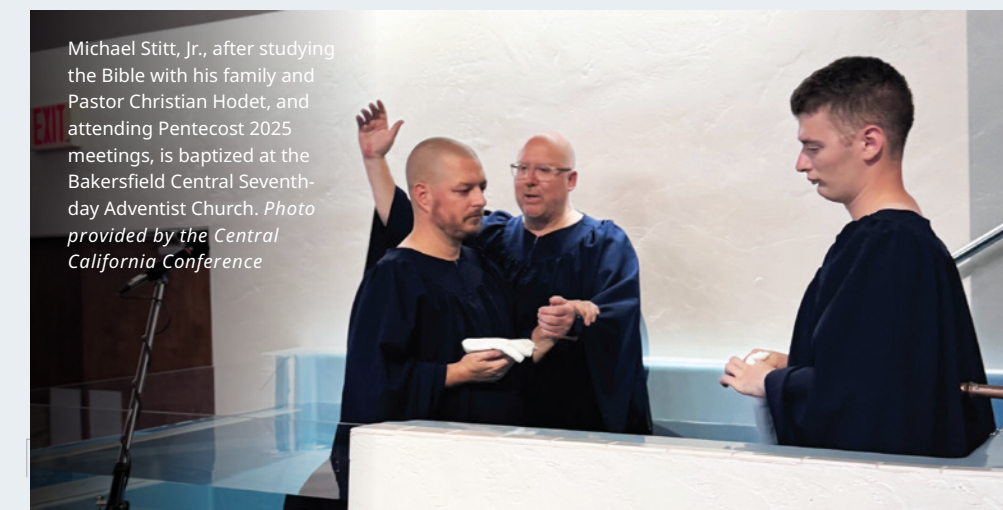
Jr.'s response in February led to multiple other baptismal decisions, Perez said, adding that extended family members from the Church of Christ are now asking questions about the Sabbath and other Adventist beliefs.

"This is really proving to be an unfolding story with many factors," Perez said. "I believe there are more family members who will be interested."

For Maritza, the baptisms marked the fulfillment of decades of prayer for her non-Adventist family members.

"This is truly a story where you see the blessing that can come when someone commits to prayer and lets God work," Perez concluded.

—*Justin JH Kim, associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association, former director of Communication and Digital Evangelism for the Central California Conference. This article was originally published on the Central California Conference website.*



Michael Stitt, Jr., after studying the Bible with his family and Pastor Christian Hodet, and attending Pentecost 2025 meetings, is baptized at the Bakersfield Central Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Photo provided by the Central California Conference*

A Life of Service, Faith, and Unwavering Love

On November 9, 2025, more than 100 people gathered on East 22nd Street in Paterson, New Jersey, to witness a rare honor: the unveiling of Ora Jane Bell Way. The red-and-white street sign, inscribed with “Charity Sees the Need, Not the Cause,” stands as a testament to a woman whose life has been defined by compassion, resilience, and faith.

Born in New Jersey to parents from the South, Ora Jane Bell was raised with a strong sense of community and responsibility. Her mother’s roots in South Carolina shaped her values early on, instilling in her the belief that helping others is not optional—it’s essential. Paterson itself has transformed dramatically, shifting from an industrial hub to a diverse city with significant Latino and Palestinian populations. Through these changes Bell has remained a constant source of compassion and service.

When asked about the street renaming, Bell’s response was heartfelt: “It was . . . something that you can’t imagine. And the best part is I’m still alive. Usually they name streets after people once they expire.”

Her joy was shared by her family, including her four children, all of whom attended the ceremony and testified to her lifetime of service. Also in attendance were several civic leaders, church and community members, and North American Division Adventist Community Services director W. Derrick Lea. Guests wore buttons designed by her daughter, Rhonda, that read “East 22nd Street” and “Ora Jane Bell Way.”

Guided by God

In his opening remarks, André Sayegh, Paterson mayor and lifelong resident, expressed, “We could have called this street Ora Jane Bell Boulevard. We could have called it Ora J Bell Street. But we called it Ora Jane Bell Way because her way is guided by God, and her way is to serve those who are most vulnerable, who may not have a voice.” As Sayegh noted, her journey of faith underpins her legacy of service.

A first-generation Seventh-day Adventist, Bell recalls always being aware of the fourth commandment but never receiving clarity on this theological question in her previous denomination. “The Bible says, ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,’” Bell explained. “So if your mother says remember something, it means you can’t forget. Then why can God say remember and you forget?”

Her search for answers eventually led her to the Adventist Church after filling out a card for *The Bible Story* children’s books, by Arthur Maxwell. Bell hoped to use the books to teach children from her church on Saturday mornings while their parents ran errands. After more than a year of Bible studies with three dedicated colporteurs, she was baptized in 1978 at the age of 25.

Longtime Adventist Community Services worker Ora Jane Bell has a street named after her.

**BY RONNIE MILLS,
WITH ADDITIONAL
REPORTING BY
CHRISTELLE AGBOKA**

“We called it Ora Jane Bell Way because her way is guided by God.”

Joining the church deepened her commitment to service. “When I came into the church back in the seventies, everybody had something to do. You didn’t come to church and sit down,” she explained, noting that she got involved with community service from day one.

Caring About People

Bell’s remarkable service record spans church ministries and community organizations. For 18 years Bell has volunteered at Eva’s Soup Kitchen, and since retiring, she spends every Monday there. She also plays a key role in the Adventist Community Food Pantry, which distributed 400 bags of food weekly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. “It’s only through the grace of God that we made it,” she recalled, describing the laborious

process of renting U-Haul trucks to collect food before the Food Bank of Hillside began delivering. The pantry still serves roughly 350 people on the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

Behind her decades of service were seasons of personal and professional struggle. Bell endured years of economic instability, sometimes relying on public assistance—experiences that eventually drove her to become the first in her family to complete a bachelor’s degree. She also later lost a job in the criminal justice system because she refused to work on the Sabbath, yet Bell views those struggles as formative. “God has plans for you that you don’t even know,” she reflected. Those experiences later deepened her empathy while working at the Passaic County Board of Social Services and expanded her ability to advocate for

families facing food, housing, and mental health challenges.

Bell’s advice to young people aspiring to serve is frank and practical: “Be kind to people. Don’t look down on somebody; it could have been you.” Over the years that kindness often meant opening her own home to people in need, offering shelter when they had no one to turn to. She also speaks candidly about the growing challenges of service in an unsafe world, sharing a sobering story of someone she helped who was breaking into her home.

When asked what legacy she hopes Ora Jane Bell Way will carry for children growing up there, her answer was simple yet profound: “That they care about people, that they don’t look at what somebody’s done, and that they volunteer.” And if Paterson could hear one message from her today? “First of all, love yourself. And if you can love yourself, you can love others.”

Ora Jane Bell Way is more than a street. It’s a symbol of what one life, rooted in faith and love, can accomplish. And for Paterson, it’s a reminder that true greatness lies not in wealth or status, but in service.

Ronnie Mills is the NAD Pentecost and Beyond coordinator. Christelle Agboka is the NAD news writer/news producer.



Ora Jane Bell (white shirt) poses with Paterson mayor André Sayegh, community members, and NAD Adventist Community Services director W. Derrick Lea at a ceremony renaming a street in her honor in Paterson, New Jersey. *Art Brondo*



Ora Jane Bell embraces Paterson councilwoman Ruby Cotton as council president Lilisa Mimms looks on. *Art Brondo*

Faith, Struggle, and Surrender

The Adventist Journey of Alexander Cortes

EDITED BY ART BRONDO

My Adventist journey actually started generations before I was born.

One day my great-grandfather in Puerto Rico opened his door to a colporteur who sold him a book titled *Cristo Nuestro Salvador* (*Christ Our Savior*). That encounter changed everything. He learned to read using that book alongside the Bible, and what began as curiosity became a lifelong commitment to faith. He eventually planted a church, influencing both his community and generations of our family.

That legacy didn't stop with him. It reached my mother.

I come from a broken home. My mom raised four kids on her own, and while we didn't have everything, we had something far more important—her unwavering faith. She had a fire for the Lord that was impossible to ignore. Her faith shaped the way she lived and raised us. She wanted us to know Jesus as a real and present hope.

I'm the youngest of four: my sister; twins, a boy and a girl; and then me. Growing up, I didn't fully realize the weight of what my mom was carrying, but I felt the impact of her devotion. Looking back now, I can honestly say that so much of who I am, including my love for God, my desire for ministry, and my hope for something greater, is rooted in her example.

Growing Up in Ministry and Music

I grew up in Keene, Texas, in a small Adventist community near Southwestern Adventist University. It was the kind of place where faith and life blended seamlessly. Church wasn't just something we did on Saturdays. It was part of our daily rhythm.

My mom homeschooled us, and she made sure that music was central in our lives. From a young age my siblings and I were learning instruments, practicing harmonies, and preparing to serve. Eventually we formed a quartet and began traveling around our community, sharing music and participating in ministry.

Through music we learned what it meant to serve and share our faith. Standing alongside my siblings in a sup-



Alexander Cortes Art Brondo

Through it all God was teaching me who I am, not based on what I do, but on whom I belong to.

portive community remains one of my most treasured memories. But I was 14 when my faith became personal.

During a Week of Prayer at church, I felt a deep conviction. Something I couldn't ignore. It wasn't just about growing up in the church anymore; it was about choosing God for myself. That weekend I made the decision to be baptized.

And that same weekend my emotions shifted unexpectedly.

My brother, a couple of friends, and I started playing music together more intentionally. What began as casual jam sessions in basements turned into something more. We formed a group that would eventually be called Contagious Faith, and the weekend of my

baptism, we led worship for the first time.

That moment would shape the trajectory of my life. It was the beginning of a journey during which faith and music became deeply intertwined—during which I would begin to discover God not just in church, but in creativity, community, and purpose.

Building Something That Matters

Through high school and into college, Contagious Faith continued to grow. What began as a group of friends who loved music gradually became a ministry.

I picked up the guitar and poured myself into learning it. My brother began playing bass, and together with others we started shaping a sound and a vision.

The group changed over time. Friends came and went as life took them in different directions. Each new member brought something unique, and eventually we found a group that shared the same passion.

By the time we reached college, we were writing original music, leading worship regularly, and even beginning to record albums. People started connecting with what we were doing, and we could sense that something meaningful was happening.

At the same time, I was attending Southwestern Adventist University, pursuing a nursing degree. I was also working in digital media for the university's Marketing Department. My life became a constant balancing act—school, work, travel, ministry.

It was busy. It was exciting. And for a while it felt as though everything was falling into place.

But during my senior year everything began to unravel.

From the outside, it looked as though I was thriving. Contagious Faith was at its peak. We were traveling almost every weekend, spending long hours in the studio

recording music, and gaining recognition across our community.

Internally, however, I was struggling in ways I had never experienced before.

Relationships that I valued deeply began to break down. I felt disconnected from friends, family, myself, and eventually my faith. I questioned my beliefs, my identity, even the existence of God.

The hardest part was that I was still actively leading worship. I would stand on stage, leading songs I had written, watching people engage in worship, while inside I felt completely empty. I felt as though I was living a double life.

I remember nights I would cry out to God, unsure if anyone was listening. It was one of the darkest seasons of my life.

Carried by Grace

I don't have a neat explanation for how I made it through that time. All I know is that it was by the grace of God.

The songs I wrote during that season became the very thing that sustained me. People would tell me that my music reflected a deep connection with God, and I would quietly think, *If only you knew how I really feel.*

One song in particular, "Past the Sun," holds a special place in my heart. Inspired by the hymn "Más Allá del Sol," it captures both the hope of eternity and the struggle of life here on earth. It tells the story of longing—of holding on to faith while wrestling with pain and uncertainty. I once received an anonymous note from someone who said that the song saved their life. What they didn't know is that it saved mine, too.

Surrender and Transformation

After graduation I moved to Dallas and stepped into a new chapter of life.

I had a stable job and a plan for the future. I considered going back to school to become a nurse anes-

thetist, driven in part by a desire to succeed and prove myself.

But deep down I was exhausted.

Then I met Lexa at a church retreat.

There was something about her faith that stood out to me. She had a genuine passion for God—a kind of joy and conviction that I felt I had lost. Being around her stirred something in me. At a turning point, I chose to stay in ministry. To stay on the journey with God.

The next three years were some of the most transformative of my life. During the slow process of rebuilding, I spent countless nights reading Scripture, praying, questioning, and wrestling with God.

There were tears. There were doubts. But there was also growth.

During that time Lexa and I grew closer, and eventually we got married. And through it all God was shaping me—teaching me who I am, not based on what I do, but on whom I belong to.

Today I understand that at my core, I am a creative.

For a long time I struggled with that identity, especially because it's easy to tie your worth to what you produce. But I've come to see creativity differently.

I now run a digital media company, working in photography, videography, design, and marketing. And while it's my career, every act of creation is a reflection of the Creator. It reminds me that my identity isn't in my work—it's in God.

What gives me joy is being part of a community in which I am fully known and fully loved. It's using my gifts to serve others and uplift the church—not as a building, but as a people. And through that, I've fallen in love with Christ all over again.

That's my journey—not one of perfection, but one of surrender.

Art Brondo is a media producer for the North American Division.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

100 Years of Adventist Summer Camps in the NAD

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

Close your mind's eye and imagine: The smell of campfire smoke. The giddy squeals and then the splash of a group of kids jumping off the dock together. The snick of an arrow hitting the target. Biscuits and gravy. The smell of horses. Wind whipping through your hair out on the lake. Guitars and cowboy hats and "Let Us Come Together" with all the hand motions.

Now open your mind's eye. Where are you right now?

If you answered "summer camp," you have likely been among one of the lucky 34,000 young people who attend Adventist summer camps in North America every single year. Or perhaps you've been counted among one of the 2,700 young adult summer camp staffers who are some of the most passionate seasonal workers you'll find. Or maybe you're even one of the 150 full-time staff who have dedicated their careers and hearts to camp.

"Summer camp affords what I would call sacred space," commented A. Allan Martin, pastor of Younger Generation Church at Arlington Adventist Church in Texas, who both camped and worked at Camp Kulaqua in Florida for many years throughout his life. "It's a place where, despite all the things going on, time slows down enough so you can actually live. When we're in those natural spaces, there's a wonderful rhythm of grace and reflection."

Summer camps introduce young people from all backgrounds to Jesus. Here, campers and staff worship at Camp Alamisco in Tallapoosa County, Alabama. *Camp Alamisco*

↓ For 100 years Adventist summer camps in North America have been spaces offering fun, learning, and growth. Pictured is a 1950s archery class at Camp Wawona. *Camp Wawona*, published in the Pacific Union Recorder



It's a rhythm that has been beating for an entire century. The year 2026 marks the 100th anniversary of the first Adventist summer camp in the North American Division (NAD)—Camp Idyllwild in southern California (predecessor to Pine Springs Ranch). This was soon followed by Camp Wawona near Yosemite National Park in northern California, the oldest camp still currently in operation.

In 1925 W. J. Gilson opened the first-ever Adventist summer camp in Yarra Doon, Australia. The following year Grover Fattic, youth director for East Michigan Conference, held an all-boys camp in Michigan, and around that same time, Harriet Holt, junior secretary for the Missionary Volunteer Department of the General Conference, led a camp for girls in Wisconsin.

Today there are more than 60 Adventist summer camps across the NAD, covering upwards of 14,600 acres of natural land, and dozens more camps around the world.

"There's an intentionality about being placed in that environment," said Jason Perkins, director of Camp Frenda in Ontario, Canada. "When they're in nature, hiking from their cabin down to the horse barn or the swim dock, and they're not on their devices, they're conversing. Many of them are seeing things for the first time, and even at night, when campfire is over and they head back to their cabin, they can see stars they would never see at home. It's just them and the Creator."

Every year hundreds of campers choose to be baptized—many right there at camp. Roughly one third to one half of campers are non-Adventist or from families who do not regularly attend church.

"Summer camp evangelism works in several different ways," explained Shelina Bonjour, director of Indian Creek Camp in Tennessee, who started her summer camp experience as an 8-year-old at Sunset Lake Camp in Washington State. "For the kids like me, a PK (also known as a pastor's kid) who was always solid in my love for Jesus, camp is a place to reaffirm that relationship. For kids who feel unsure, camp is where they can explore their feelings and make their own decision for Christ. And for kids who have never heard a word about Jesus before, camp is a powerful introduction to Him."

A perhaps overlooked or at least undercredited part of that encounter with the divine is the camp staff.

"I remember with great surprise and awe that there were young adults who would pay attention to us as kids," Martin shared.

Bonjour said her first summer camp counselor was as impactful to her as her first-grade teacher. "I remember feeling very loved and safe with her," she added.

Brandon Grentz, counseling services coordinator at Southern Adventist University, who worked for a time at North Star Camp in Minnesota, said that possibility gave him pause as a staffer.

"The influence you have on the kids and the trust they instantly place in you makes you quite self-reflective," he shared. "It made me really think about how I was acting, because you so quickly see they imitate whatever you do and take everything you say very seriously."

And while campers are finding new role models and developing new skills, camp staff are often discovering their calling and getting a glimpse of their future. Some estimates place the percentage of former summer camp staff who eventually work for the church in different areas—such as ministry, education, and health care—at more than 80 percent.

"Summer camp significantly influenced me," said Martin. "I had always loved being involved in youth ministries. I thrived in those environments and felt I understood the pulse of young people at the time. The Adventist influence on the next generation was something I knew I wanted to be part of."

Grentz had already switched his focus in college from pastoral ministry to counseling when he spent his first

A camper is baptized at Leoni Meadows Camp, with supporters looking on. *Terry Bolton*



Sunset Lake Camp, located in Wilkeson, Washington, is one of more than 60 Adventist summer camps in North America. *Sunset Lake Camp*



summer working at North Star Camp. During junior camp one camper consistently frustrated the staff with his behavior choices and his disinterest in listening or participating. “I had to talk to him over and over,” Grentz recalled. On Sabbath, the last day of camp, Grentz was called to that camper’s cabin because the camper was sobbing inconsolably.

“I sat down next to him, and he just cried, ‘I’ve had a hard life!’ ” Grentz said. Grentz sat with the camper for two hours, listening to him pour his heart out. “He shared heartbreaking things happening in his life, and I cried alongside him. What I heard God saying to me was ‘Be careful how you see people, because you don’t know what’s going on in their lives.’ ” It was in that moment Grentz knew he was headed in the right direction. Bonjour spent four summers as camp staff and recalls how honored she felt that so much faith was placed in her. “People let me dream and grow, and I couldn’t wait to encourage other people and help them experience what I did,” she said. “So I became a camp director!”

Perkins recalls a young man who, after a particularly impactful summer working at Camp Frenda, felt called to enter pastoral ministry. “The Holy Spirit used summer camp to show this man his path,” Perkins said.

One staffer at Indian Creek Camp started at teen camp, where he made his decision for Jesus. “The year after that, I invited him to come work here,” Bonjour said. “He told me camp changed his life, and he couldn’t wait to be involved. He was trusted with more responsibility than he was prepared for, but he was supported in such a way that he was able to meet those expectations. That’s my goal as director—to let people stretch their wings while they look at what it means to grow in leadership.”

The opportunity to foster leadership skills in young adults at summer camp is unmatched. As 18- or 20-year-olds they are entrusted with putting kids on large animals or motorbikes, keeping them safe as they jump off a zip line or shoot a bow and arrow. They drive camp trucks and tractors and motorboats and jet skis and backhoes—usually for the first time. And they always rise to the occasion.



Lone Star Camp
Southwest Region Conference



Paddle boarding at Camp MiVoden
Camp MiVoden

DID YOU KNOW...?

With more than 60 summer camps across the North American Division, it’s likely there are at least one or two you’ve never heard of, let alone know anything about. Well, that’s about to change! Check out these fast facts about a few of our NAD camps.

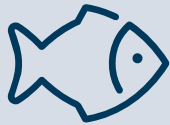
At almost 9,000 feet, Glacier View Ranch in Colorado sits at the highest elevation of any NAD summer camp.



700

Indian Creek Camp in Tennessee is situated along a river and boasts 700 miles of shoreline.

Camp Cedar Falls in California was originally used as a fish hatchery.



Though it wasn’t an Adventist camp at the time, the location of Camp Daniel L. Davis in Pennsylvania was used as a stopping point on the Underground Railroad.

Located on the shores of Tuttle Creek Lake, Broken Arrow Ranch in Kansas is said to have the only sandy beach in the entire state.



Bing Crosby once sang from a boat during a special program at Camp MiVoden in Idaho.

Camp Lorraine in Alaska can be accessed only by boating nine miles.



The original lodge at Camp Sagola in Michigan was built of materials from a disassembled hotel on a nearby island.

“My sneaking suspicion is if we allowed summer camp to become an on-ramp into vibrant local church leadership, we could use it as a succession plan for leadership at various managerial levels of the church,” Martin stated. “We give those young people enormous responsibility, and despite our failures and hijinks and foibles, at the end of the summer hundreds of kids have given their lives to Jesus. We should keep that momentum going even when summer camp isn’t in session. Why would we want that to stop?”

“You live up to what people expect of you,” commented Grentz. “The administration pouring their trust, confidence, and high expectations into staff is a huge ministry in and of itself.”

Though camp is designed to minister to campers, the very act of fulfilling that purpose changes the hearts of the staff members, too.

“It’s an environment where you can’t help encountering God in some way,” Grentz said. “I haven’t met anyone who worked at camp, even if they were resisting it, who didn’t interact with God while there.”

Before the 2025 summer camps at Camp Frenda officially began, Perkins started a staff Bible study. “It became such a fantastic open discussion forum that even when camp got busy, many of the staffers continued their small group studies throughout the summer,” he shared. “It was a safe space to talk about school, family, relationships, and life, and it became a fantastic outlet for them.”

Whether they choose to remain in camp ministry or become pastors, teachers, nurses, counselors, doctors, or other church employees, the path between camper, camp staff, and service to the church is clear.

“Camp staff are so impacted because they’re not merely asked to be disciples, they’re asked to be disciple-makers,” commented

Campers at Big Lake Youth Camp, located in the Willamette National Forest in Oregon, enjoy varied water activities. *Big Lake Youth Camp*



Martin. “They’re asked to audaciously introduce people to the kingdom, and invite them to take a step of faith. It wonderfully replicates the method, the mission, and the heart of how Jesus made disciples.”

And it’s more than just singing a few songs to start and end the day; it’s about connection and influence.

“We can do worship all day long, but if the staff are not showing what Jesus looks like and loving it, our worships are minimally effective,” commented Bonjour. “These kids come to go rock climbing and waterskiing, and as they do that, they discover a God who loves them.”

Generations of campers, camp staff, and camp directors have walked the trails and docks of Adventist camps across the NAD over the past century. Much has changed—technology, of course, types of classes offered, songs sung around the campfire, what the campers wear—but the core of summer camp remains the same.

“Kids are full of wonder and curiosity,” Bonjour said with a smile. “If they can catch the joy of what a life in God is like, you’ve got them hooked for life. Ministry to kids is the best job there is. Whether it’s 100 years ago or now, I think every camp director would agree on that.”

In a video about the 100th anniversary of Adventist summer camps in North America, Terry Bolton, business manager at Leoni Meadows in northern California and summer camp historian, comments, “Blessed by God, Adventist camp ministry has become one of the most effective evangelistic tools for reaching children and young adults.”

Though we as Adventists carry the hope that Christ will return before another 100 years go by, for as long as we remain on this earth summer camp directors and their staff will do everything they can to continue bringing the hearts of children to Jesus.

“If we’re going to move this into the future, should the Lord require it, it should be like the past 100 years,” Martin stated, “where summer camp had us relying on one another for faith, community, and being the body of Christ. We’re better together.”

And there’s no better place to be together than at camp—where it feels like a little piece of heaven here on earth.

For a complete list of NAD summer camps and for information about the upcoming 100th anniversary celebration at Camp Kulaqua, visit adventistcamps.org.

Becky St. Clair writes from Angwin, California.

NAD NEWS BRIEFS



Sonscreen 2026: Where Storytelling Becomes a Calling

One of the most striking sequences in the experimental short “Melting Pot”—which opened the 2026 Sonscreen Film Festival—is a series of close-ups of filmmaker Kayli Pascal-Martinez, her parents, and siblings, their mouths covered in red, white, and blue paint. Silenced.

With “Melting Pot,” Pascal-Martinez was intentional about using her voice to encourage others to use theirs and raise awareness of the realities of life in Hawaii. “There are so many stories that are not told . . . communities that deserve to have their voices heard,” she said.

This focus on amplifying untold stories was at the heart of the North American Division’s twenty-fourth annual film festival for young creatives. Held April 9-11 at the Loma Linda University church in California, Sonscreen brought together 222 students, professional filmmakers,

and guests. The jam-packed program showcased 56 student films and several professional projects, interspersed with workshops and networking opportunities with faith-based film professionals.

The event culminated in a pitch competition with cash prizes and a rooftop awards ceremony recognizing and celebrating emerging filmmakers.

On opening night Sonscreen executive director Julio C. Muñoz said, “What brings us together is something so deeply human, and that is storytelling.”

He underscored the power of story to foster empathy and build community, adding, “This is a space where your voice matters. Creator God placed the impulse in us . . . to tell stories that reflect truth, struggle, beauty, and hope.”

A total of 72 entries—one of the highest numbers post-COVID—were

← Sydney Tooley, filmmaker and Sonscreen alum, shares her “audacious” journey from student filmmaker to feature director.
Pieter Damsteegt

submitted for this year’s festival. Official selections were grouped into seven themed blocks, followed by Q&A sessions led by Adventist film faculty and professionals. Categories encompassed drama, documentary, comedy, art/experimental, and animation, with themes including faith, relationships, shared histories, identity, growing pains, and grief. A block of films focused on music, including music videos of different genres, and others touched on the surreal or comedic.

Participating schools included four Adventist academies; five Adventist colleges/universities; and four non-Adventist colleges/universities. Additional schools, including two more academies, submitted films in absentia.

—Christelle Agboka, North American Division



Rachel “Rynn” Scribner and Julio Muñoz welcome attendees to the 2026 festival.

Adventist Health Volunteers Serve Thousands During Philippines Mission Trip

A team of 27 Adventist Health volunteers partnered with local medical providers to care for 2,366 patients on the Philippine island of Mindoro during an Adventist Health Global Mission trip in late February 2026. By the time the last patient was seen, the impact was measured not only in numbers of patients served but in the abundance of prayer, laughter, and high-fives.

“God really blessed this trip,” said John Schroer, director for Global Mission at Adventist Health. “Every individual brought a 2,000 percent dose of Jesus. The trip was a spiritual high point for all of us.”

Volunteers saw close to 500 people a day. Services ranged from routine care to complex needs, including more than 600 minor surgeries, more than 1,000 dental procedures, hearing tests with hearing aid fittings, and ENT procedures. Adventist Health volunteers took with them more than 2,600 pounds of medical supplies, including dental equipment, surgical tools, an autoclave for sterilization, hearing aids, and vision supplies.

A team of 79 medical providers from the Philippines, many of whom work in Manila, joined the effort. The clinic was held at Adventist World Radio headquar-



This spring, Adventist Health volunteers serve thousands on mission trip.
Provided by Adventist Health

ters on Mindoro and was supported by local Adventist churches and the Adventist Church Mission of Mindoro.

“One of the keys to our success, in addition to continual prayer, was authenticity. When you’re real with people, they respond positively,” Schroer said. “Our volunteers were so open about their love for God, and we were wonderfully blessed by the Filipino community. God is working!”

—Adventist Health

Christian Record Services Awarded Grant; Funds to Help Bridge the “Quiet Crisis” Vision Loss Gap

Christian Record Services (CRS) has announced the launch of the nationwide First Response initiative to address a critical gap in the medical system: the “Quiet Crisis” of vision loss. Supported by a newly awarded \$43,436 grant from the North American Division Resource Development Committee, the initiative provides a tangible road map for the 8 million North Americans navigating irreversible vision loss because of such diseases as glaucoma, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy.

While modern medicine is world-class at treating the pathology of the eye, clinical settings are often ill-equipped to treat the crushing isolation that follows an irreversible diagnosis. CRS calls this the “Quiet Crisis”—the terrifying gap between a medical diagnosis and a life of hope. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one in four adults with vision loss suf-

fer from anxiety or depression as they grieve the loss of their autonomy.

The First Response initiative was born from a direct call for help from the medical community. Eye-care specialists have consistently reported that when sight-saving measures are exhausted, they have nothing tangible to hand a patient to help them navigate their new reality.

“The First Response initiative ensures that where the medical chart ends, a road map for life begins,” said Dexter Thomas, president of Christian Record Services. “We are partnering with eye-care professionals to provide a lifeline at the exact moment a patient feels that their independence is slipping away.”

The grant is dedicated entirely to the production of two distinct resource tools:

Lifeline kits: These kits are placed directly in waiting rooms and exam

rooms of eye-care clinics. They serve as an immediate “hand-off” for doctors to give patients at the moment of diagnosis, providing an instant bridge to support.

New member kits: Once a patient connects with CRS, they receive a comprehensive kit designed to walk with them through their journey, offering specialized resources to ensure that life flourishes even as sight fades.

The launch is part of a broader strategy called “Reach 2026,” which aims to establish active partnerships with 2,026 eye-care facilities across the nation. By equipping these offices with frontline materials, CRS transforms the hardest conversation in a patient’s life into a pathway forward.

—Christian Record Services



↑ Christian Record Services materials for individuals with low vision

HE SAID GO!

At Missions Conference, a Generation Responds to the Call to Mission

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA,
NAD NEWS WRITER/
NEWS PRODUCER

I will go. I will go.
Hey, watch me. Watch me go.
I will go. I will go.
He said, 'Go.' So I will go!

During the North American Division's HeSaidGoXP Conference on March 12 to 14, 2026, at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, these words were more than a refrain—they became a commitment. With "XP" short for "experience," more than 200 attendees were invited to "come and see" mission firsthand, then respond to Jesus' call to go.

The first conference hosted by the NAD Office of Volunteer Ministries (OVM) since 2016, HeSaidGoXP focused on motivating members of Generation Z to engage in missions. The program featured praise and worship, storytelling, a prayer room inviting participants to say yes to mission, workshops, and interactive experiences such as arts and crafts,

ukulele lessons, and nature-based virtual reality. Additionally, outreach projects, from serving meals to the homeless to packing more than 13,000 pounds of food at a county food bank, allowed participants to serve in real time.

Throughout the program, mission videos from around the world—including the Guam-Micronesia Mission, Middle East and North Africa Union, North Peru Union Mission, South American Division, and Southern Asia-Pacific Division, supporting ministries, and Adventist colleges and universities—highlighted service initiatives and opportunities.

Representatives from these organizations, as well as the NAD missions and volunteer departments and the General Conference's Adventist Volunteer Services Department, provided exhibits where attendees could learn more.

All photos by Pieter Damsteegt

Through OVM they could also sign up for volunteer opportunities on site. University presidents from schools across the NAD also attended, sharing their personal mission experiences and commitment to graduating mission-minded students.

Exploring Pathways to Mission

Workshops and presentations explored various pathways to mission. One session introduced the NAD's STARS Tutoring and Mentoring program. Coordinator Gladys Guerrero told the story of Elsa May Gordon Whitfield, a retired teacher from St. Louis, Missouri, who now helps children learn to read through an online curriculum. With more than 40 percent of U.S. students¹ unable to read at a basic level, Guerrero urged attendees to consider serving in this critical mission field.

An Adventist Christian Fellowship seminar highlighted North American public campuses as a fertile mission field, with 5,700 campuses serving 25 million students. John Weis, Washington Conference's Public Campus Ministry director, shared that a 2025 pilot project placing student missionaries on campuses for a year was expanding to five sites, and invited attendees to join.

Orna Garnett, NAD associate secretary for missionary services, outlined a career missionary pathway for those interested in serving for three to five years, emphasizing how it differs from yet complements volunteer missions.

For Shanah Euraoba, a third-year elementary education student and student chaplain for missions at Burman University in Alberta, Canada, Garnett's workshop affirmed a calling to career missions that she has sensed since childhood. She noted that she has aligned her education and extracurricular experiences, including mission trips, toward this goal.

She added that HeSaidGoXP helped her connect with peers from other campuses and gather ideas to help rebuild her school's student missionary program.

A Renewed Culture of Volunteer Service

For Ernest Hernandez, OVM director, the event marked the fulfillment of a long-held dream: reigniting a passion for mission among young people, particularly college and university students. Whereas the office once sent more than 1,000 students annually to 65-70 countries, today it deploys an average of 550 individuals to roughly 15 nations. Hernandez attributed the loss of momentum to COVID-19, leadership turnover, and the church's struggle to reach this generation.

Hernandez and Leah Jordache, associate director of OVM and event coordinator, see HeSaidGoXP as a launching pad to reestablish a culture of volunteer service. They plan to host this event every few years with that objective in mind.

Hernandez was especially pleased by the mix of students, mission leaders, and stakeholders present. "We had a network of people coming together [who] represented a microcosm of missions, both domestic and around the world," he reflected later.

Student Missions Changed My Life

At HeSaidGoXP, attendees could also interact with returned student missionaries, including Lauren Fenwick, a 2024 Southern Adventist University alum. She accepted an opportunity to serve as a volunteer communication director in Guam last year when her plans to kickstart her career and life after graduating a year early fell through.

While initially hesitant about missions, Fenwick experienced unexpected spiritual, personal, and professional growth, as well as a changed perspective. The experience later helped open the door to a dream job in her field, but more important, her time in Guam taught her that "nothing you do for God is ever a waste," and that "what really matters is people, not things."

On opening night NAD president G. Alexander Bryant reflected on his mission story.

In his first year at Oakwood University, Bryant had been inspired to serve by the testimonies of returned student missionaries. While his application was initially turned down because he was a freshman, he said yes when asked to be a last-minute replacement.

When he learned he would be teaching conversational English and Bible classes to top Japanese executives, Bryant nearly declined because of a severe stutter that worsened when speaking in public. He persisted, and miraculously, he said, "It was in Japan, teaching English, that I lost my stutter." Since then, he has preached to tens of thousands globally—stutter-free.

Bryant ended with an appeal, stating, "God doesn't look at our weaknesses. He doesn't look at our insufficiencies. God looks at our heart. He says, Give me your heart, and I can transform the world."

As the event continued, participants were led to respond in tangible ways. On Friday morning Steve Case, pastor and president of Involve Youth, guided participants to pair up, discuss their faith journey and heart for mission, then anoint one another with oil.

Later Jordache recalled meeting a woman at an airport who had lost everything to addiction. After Jordache bought her a meal from McDonald's, the woman took a bite and said, "I was hungry."

ESAI
SAID
GOXP



Leah Jordache (left), NAD Office of Volunteer Ministries associate director, speaks during the HeSaidGoXP conference. Joining her are other OVM team members: Elizabeth Mills (processor/administrative professional), Gladys Guerrero (tutoring and mentoring coordinator), and Ernest Hernandez (OVM director).

The moment humbled Jordache. “I didn’t know that I was hungry. I didn’t know that I was starving for a real understanding of God’s love and of the gospel,” she said.

She realized that blessings are meant to be shared. “God’s people look like a people who understand that every privilege and every opportunity in their lives is for sharing, for the blessing of another person.”

Her message hit home with students such as Melquisedec, a biology premed student at Washington Adventist University (WAU). “Sometimes we think we have to do something big,” he reflected. “But even something simple—like giving food to someone—that’s mission too.”

Merchan was among a group of WAU students involved in “Gideon 300,” a student-led initiative to revive a spirit of mission on campus. To date, the group has grown to 70 members and has engaged in short-term missions, leading to a Pentecost 2025 tent series that resulted in two students getting baptized.

Adeline Malaguit, a psychology major baptized during Pentecost 2025, now views mission as an expression of her love for God. Raised Adventist, she once felt “not good enough” to be baptized, and served out of obligation.

A young adult class at camp meeting called “Only Jesus” helped change that. “I remember sitting up at night, staring at the tent ceiling, and feeling this deep gratitude that I could come to God as I am,” she said. The messages and connections at HeSaidGoXP affirmed her commitment to mission. “Hearing all these stories of miracles and spiritual growth, I can’t see a reason not to [go].”

He Said Go, So I Will Go

During the Sabbath divine hour, Abner Sanchez, pastor at the Keene Seventh-day Adventist Church, shared his testimony of spiritual growth as a student missionary, then as a career missionary with his wife, in Palau. “Service is one of the main keys that unlocks a life of spiritual fulfillment,” he said.

Using the example of Dorcas, a believer who made clothes for widows and others in need, he also reminded attendees that God uses ordinary abilities to do extraordinary things.

As the final speaker on Sabbath evening, Benjamin Lundquist, associate Pastoral Ministries director for the Oregon Conference, shared a simple message: “One yes can change your life. And one yes can change generations. Every yes matters.”

Lundquist’s yes was accepting a call to serve as a missionary in Pohnpei after years of changing majors in college and uncertainty about his future. While teaching fourth graders there, he discovered a passion for talking about Jesus and surprised himself by volunteering to teach and preach at church. As others encouraged him to consider pastoral ministry, he eventually accepted God’s call.

Just 18 hours after making that commitment, he survived, without lasting injury, a 50-foot fall while hiking, an experience that affirmed God’s hand on his life.

Years later his yes continues to influence others, including his teenage son, who hopes to serve as a student missionary.

He closed with a final reminder: “Your yes can become the motivation for somebody else’s yes.”

Lundquist called Hernandez and Jordache forward to lead a final altar call. They offered prayers of thanksgiving for the event and asked that God would give participants courage to say yes to Jesus and His call to mission, wherever it might be.

Hernandez then asked everyone to rise from their seats, and as participants gathered en masse, he had them repeat, quietly at first, then louder, until their voices filled the room:

I will go! I will go! I will go!

He then concluded, simply, “I will go because He said go. So go in the name of Jesus.”

¹ Literacy data taken from research by the National Assessment of Education Progress: <https://www.nagb.gov/news-and-events/news-releases/2025/nations-report-card-decline-in-reading-progress-in-math.html>.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Visit hesaidgo.org/en/site/index for resources and current OVM volunteer opportunities.

Visit communityservices.org/stars/ to learn more about the STARS Tutoring and Mentoring program.

Visit nadadventist.org/departments/missionary-services/ to learn more about NAD Missionary Services.

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Adeline Malaguit connects with another attendee during the Office of Volunteer Ministries’ HeSaidGoXP conference, where young adults explored mission and built community.

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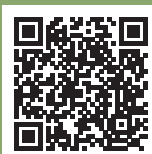
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OTHER BIBLICAL TOURS

- Egypt & Exodus
- New Testament Alive: Greece/Greek Islands
- Revelation's 7 Churches
- German Reformation
- British Reformation
- Thailand: Land of Smiles (Plus, Service Project)



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ADVENTIST REVIEW

Please enjoy the following pages 37-46, which feature content curated by *Adventist Journey* from the magazine, *Adventist Review*.

ABOUT 3,000

The number of children, parents, staff, and volunteers who gathered in Katowice, Poland, this year for the annual Trans-European Division Adventurer and Pathfinder Bible Experience finals. The program encouraged children and teenagers to deepen their understanding of Scripture through team-based study and Bible testing, with participants competing in Adventurer and Pathfinder categories focused on the Bible book of Isaiah.

“God has placed powerful tools within our reach. Whether through digital ministry, traditional outreach, or personal witness, every method can become a channel of hope.”

—Eliezer T. Barlizo, Jr., president of the East Central Philippine Union Conference of the Adventist Church, in a recent ceremony in the Philippines where attendees dedicated their mobile devices for evangelism as part of the upcoming OneVoice27 initiative. Promoted by the world church, OneVoice27 calls church members to share the gospel “as never before” in preparation for September 2027, when Adventists will highlight the anniversary of 2,000 years since Jesus’ baptism and beginning of His earthly ministry.

“Assumptions about secular people kill effective mission.”

—Johann De Dier, during a presentation at the recent Intercultural Mission Church Planting Summit in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. De Dier, a layperson with a corporate background who recently became an Adventist pastor, shared his experience in reaching out to secular populations in Panama City, Panama. Together with his wife, they opened a family counseling and center of influence—an urban missional church—which so far has provided more than 400 hours of counseling and resulted in a new Adventist congregation.

“If we are better prepared, we could make a huge difference in the lives of people affected by emergencies. I have no doubt that this is a meaningful way to show the love of Christ to people when they need it most.”

—Gabriel Villarreal, ADRA Europe Emergency Response coordinator, during a training in Lisbon, Portugal, that sought to assist local church representatives so they can help their congregations to be ready before disaster strikes. Preparation cannot start when the crisis arrives, but it must begin before, he emphasized.

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The record number of mission trips planned by AdventHealth Global Missions for 2026, including to such countries as Peru, Nepal, Ecuador, and many others. It is the largest group of global mission opportunities AdventHealth has ever planned. These trips are projected to engage more than 800 AdventHealth volunteers, with most teams consisting of 20 to 25 caregivers, clinicians, and support staff serving together in communities with limited access to care and resources.

COMMITMENT TO MISSION, BAPTISMS CROWN IMPACT MOZAMBIQUE 2026

GC president calls for every Adventist to use their social media to share hope.

Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*

Cheerful worship songs, rousing biblical messages, and hundreds of commitments to God and His mission through baptism marked the closing day of Impact Mozambique 2026 in Maputo, Mozambique, May 23. Thousands of church members and regional church leaders gathered at the Zimpeto National Stadium to welcome the new members, listen to General Conference (GC) president Erton Köhler and other church leaders, and commit to get involved in sharing hope with relatives, colleagues, and friends.

“We would like to thank the government of Mozambique,” said Harrington Akombwa, president of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, in the opening greeting to the crowd attending the day of celebration. “Thank you for creating the conditions and embracing us.”

At the beginning of the worship service, Pathfinders entered the stadium holding the Mozambican and Pathfinder flags. Hundreds of women who support Women’s Ministries at local levels across the country also walked into the stadium singing joyfully, as church leaders acknowledged their support and commitment to mission.

A Culture of Hope

A few minutes later Eduardo Joaquim Mulémbwè, minister in the Presidency for Parliamentary, Local Government, and Provincial Assembly Affairs in Mozambique, walked onto the stage to deliver a special message on behalf of Mozambican president Daniel Chapo.

“The government of the Republic of Mozambique fully acknowledges the role of religious organizations in promoting peace, fostering social cohesion, and advocating for ethical and moral values,” Mulémbwè said. He highlighted the commitment of the Adventist Church to “areas of public interest,” including education, health, social assistance, and moral development.

“IMPACT MOZAMBIQUE HAS BEEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE SAVED. THAT’S WHY WE ADVENTISTS KEEP PREACHING—BECAUSE WE WANT EVERYONE TO COME TO JESUS AND BE SAVED.”

Mulémbwè also emphasized what he called the Adventist Church’s “culture of hope, active responsibility, and commitment to one’s neighbor.” In that regard, Impact Mozambique inspires the country’s citizens, Mulémbwè said, “to project themselves to a better future through concrete initiatives which support human development and solidarity.”

Only One Family

At the beginning of his May 23 message Köhler acknowledged the government’s

support, “so that the Adventist Church may be able to serve and fulfill its mission.” He noted that Mozambique is “a young country, formed by young people,” a clear similarity, according to him, to the origins of the Adventist Church.

Köhler brought the approximately 398,000 baptized Adventist members in Mozambique at the time a special greeting on behalf of the global Adventist family. “I like seeing this church as a family, under one Father, purchased by the same blood, and belonging to the same nation—the heavenly kingdom,” he said. “We have the same message, the same mission, and the same hope of seeing Jesus’ soon return.”

Joining God’s Mission

In his worship message Köhler called on listeners to embrace and become part of God’s mission. “The gospel will be preached with or without us,” he reminded church leaders and members. “But I believe miracles will be more striking if we join the effort.”

Calling members and visitors to reflect on the sad state of the world, Köhler provided the wider context of what he defined as God’s forbearance. “God is waiting for humans to respond to His love,” he explained. “Jesus says, ‘Satan will do evil and keep doing evil, but I’ll keep waiting because I want everyone to have the opportunity to be saved.’ ”

On those grounds, Köhler emphasized, “Impact Mozambique has been an opportu-

nity to be saved. That’s why we Adventists keep preaching—because we want everyone to come to Jesus and be saved.”

Köhler closed by reminding every undecided person that “heaven is waiting for you. . . . Jesus is waiting for you before He returns.”

Not a One-Site Event

A subsequent baptismal ceremony saw hundreds of young and old commit to God through baptism. A dozen pastors, including Köhler and Akombwa, baptized the candidates who waited under the sun in long lines for their turn.

The massive ceremony at the Zimpeto National Stadium in Maputo, however, was only one site of more than 660 across the country, as local pastors and regional church leaders conducted baptismal ceremonies in the ocean, rivers, lakes, baptismal pools, and even plastic bathtubs.

During the celebration at the stadium, Akombwa mentioned that many regional church leaders were not present there that day. “They are not here because they have been preaching for two weeks at various sites and are today leading baptismal ceremonies across Mozambique,” he explained.

Regional church leaders, including Mozambique Union Mission president José Moreira, said they expected to reach a membership milestone. “We believe that with God’s blessing we will cross the 400,000-membership mark today,” he said on May 23.

Working Together for Mission

The afternoon program focused on OneVoice27, an initiative of the world church to engage every member and leader to share Jesus through 2027 and beyond. “Our church was created for evangelism,” Akombwa reminded church members.

The initiative will culminate in September 2027 in commemoration of 2,000 years since Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of His ministry on this earth. “In September 2027 every church member, every pastor, every leader, every media outlet—everyone together, in their own way—will speak about the Jesus who already came and the Jesus who will come back,” Köhler said.



General Conference president Erton Köhler and a young man embrace after the former baptized him at the closing of Impact Mozambique in Maputo May 23. Photo: GC Presidential

Köhler celebrated that the Adventist Church in Mozambique worked seamlessly together during the Impact Mozambique initiative. “But it was just a beginning,” he said, “because now Mozambique will join the whole world to proclaim Jesus concurrently.”

He explained that the initiative will combine media messages with small group ministry. Others will lead evangelistic series. “Every place will find the best way to implement OneVoice27 locally,” Köhler explained.

How OneVoice27 Will Be Implemented

To that point, Odailson Fonseca, communication coordinator for GC Presidential, explained that OneVoice27 will be based in communication, which implies proclaiming the same truth, continuously changing the way that truth is shared. “Truth does not

change,” Fonseca reminded church members, “but the way we share it certainly does.”

Against that background, Adventist leaders called on every church member and leader to use the easiest available tool at hand—their cell phones—to share the hope that is in Jesus. “Dedicate your social network channels to God,” Fonseca challenged listeners. “Consecrate your media consumption. Place all your media channels to the service of Jesus.”

Köhler agreed, as he called attendees to raise their cell phones with their hand held high. “OneVoice27 has already started,” he said, seeing thousands of cell phones across the stadium. “We are ready to launch a mass movement from the palm of our hands.” He added, “I call you to use your social media not just for fun; use it as a means to proclaim salvation.”

SUMMIT SPARKS RENEWED PUSH FOR GLOBAL MISSION AND CHURCH PLANTING

In Trinidad and Tobago more than 20 delegates answer a call to mission service.



More than 20 people stand on stage after responding to an appeal by GC president Erton Köhler (center) to serve as missionaries and volunteers, in Trinidad and Tobago, May 30. Photo: Curtis Henry/IAD

Libna Stevens, Inter-American Division, and *Adventist Review*

A renewed call for global mission, intercultural evangelism, and church planting marked the closing of the Intercultural Mission Church Planting Summit on May 30 as Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders, pastors, missionaries, students, and lay members gathered at the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC), outside Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

More than 300 delegates from across the Inter-American Division (IAD) attended the four-day summit to strengthen outreach among urban, secular, indigenous, and unreached people groups around the world through seminars, workshops, worship services, and mission-focused discussions.

The summit culminated with a passionate appeal from General Conference president Erton Köhler, who urged delegates to become active participants in the church’s Mission Refocus initiative. “The gospel is the last sign before the second coming of Jesus,” Köhler said. “Those who love the second coming of Jesus will preach the gospel.”

A Call to Mission Beyond Borders

Köhler reminded delegates that the church’s mission extends beyond local territories. “Our mission is not only for Trinidad,” Köhler said. “Our mission is global.”

He said Mission Refocus aims to strengthen global collaboration by encouraging stronger mission territories to support regions with little or no Adventist presence. “Mission Refocus is a movement calling

those who are strong in mission to support those who are weak in mission,” Köhler said. Near the close of his presentation Köhler invited individuals and families willing to serve as missionaries or volunteers in challenging mission territories to stand and come forward. More than 20 people responded publicly to the appeal.

Church Planting and Mission Expansion

Samuel Telemaque, IAD Adventist Mission director and main organizer of the summit, reinforced the urgency of multiplication and intercultural church planting. “That’s a very challenging vision, a very uncomfortable vision,” Telemaque said while describing an IAD initiative for every church, district, conference, and union to reproduce within five years.

Telemaque said the summit’s training tracks were intentionally designed to equip delegates with practical skills for urban mission, secular outreach, indigenous ministries, evangelism among diverse people groups, and volunteer missionary service.

As the summit concluded Sabbath evening, leaders prayed over the volunteers who responded to the missionary appeal, expressing hope that a new generation of missionaries would emerge from the IAD to serve unreached communities around the world.

A report presented by IAD executive secretary Pierre Caporal during one of the May 30 presentations showed that more

than 3,000 churches were planted across the IAD between 2010 and 2025. “The ripple effects of the initiative Every Church, One Church in Five Years are enormous and may be beyond our imagination at this time,” Telemaque said. “The multiplication of new churches will create a need for more pastors, schools, universities, church leaders, and church buildings.”

Expanding Mission Training and Global Partnerships

During a Festival of Mission Refocus on Sabbath afternoon, unions across the IAD expressed their commitment to supporting missionary outreach around the world through testimonies, mission partnerships, and reports on church planting efforts across the territory.

On May 30, Adventist leaders also signed a memorandum of understanding establishing the Intercultural Mission Training Institute at USC. The initiative, launched in collaboration with the IAD, the Caribbean Union, the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission, and other church entities, aims to prepare missionaries for cross-cultural service and strengthen global mission engagement and intercultural ministry training.

Leaders encouraged pastors, young professionals, and mission-minded members to pursue advanced missiology training. “Understanding culture and cross-cultural ministry is essential to preparing future missionaries and strengthening the church’s global mission impact,” they said. 𐤀

PRAYER

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.

When Jesus was upon the earth, He taught His disciples how to pray. He directed them to present their daily needs before God, and to cast all their care upon Him. And the assurance He gave them that their petitions should be heard is assurance also to us. . . .

Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little! God is ready and willing to hear the sincere prayer of the humblest of His children, and yet there is much manifest reluctance on our part to make known our wants to God. What can the angels of heaven think of poor helpless human beings, who are subject to temptation, when God’s heart of infinite love yearns toward them, ready to give them more than they can ask or think, and yet they pray so little and have so little faith? The angels love to bow before God; they love to be near Him. They regard communion with God as their highest joy; and yet the children of earth, who need so much the help that God only can give, seem satisfied to walk without the light of His Spirit, the companionship of His presence. . . .

The opening of the heart to God as to a friend

Ellen G. White

Why should the sons and daughters of God be reluctant to pray, when prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven’s storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of

Satan cannot overcome him whose heart is thus stayed upon God.

There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer. In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God and plead for divine guidance, as did Nehemiah when he made his request before King Artaxerxes. A closet of communion may be found wherever we are. . . .

If we would but think of God as often as we have evidence of His care for us we should keep Him ever in our thoughts and should delight to talk of Him and to praise Him. 𐤀

There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. There is nothing that can prevent us from lifting up our hearts in the spirit of earnest prayer.

Omnipotence? Without unceasing prayer and diligent watching we are in danger of growing careless and of deviating from the right path. . . .

We should pray in the family circle, and above all we must not neglect prayer, for this is the life of the soul. It is impossible for the soul to flourish while prayer is neglected. . . .

Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of ministry. This excerpt is taken from *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93-102.

Setbacks

The journey is too great for us alone.

Natalie Lilly

My wedding day was beautiful. Like many starry-eyed engaged couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, Devin and I didn't want to wait until social distancing restrictions were lifted to make our commitment to each other before God. We were eager to start our life together, so after some prayer we elected to get married in the backyard of a beautiful property in the rolling green hills of the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, United States. Our mothers prepared the food and made me a grocery store bouquet. Surrounded by just a few close friends and family, we made our vows to love one another, in sickness and health, no matter what may come. It was quaint, elegant, and the perfect picture of heaven on earth.

About two weeks later I woke up on a Sunday morning with a sharp pain in the lower left side of my abdomen. I attributed it to the stress of the festivities a couple weeks prior, or maybe even some bad food the night before. As the day went on, the pain intensified, and I realized it wouldn't quell with at-home remedies. Eventually my new husband and I made the trip to our local walk-in medical clinic.

I had an eight-centimeter cyst on my left ovary, the nurse informed me, and I would be referred to the emergency room right away. The ob-gyn, Dr. Bennett, chose not to operate that day, but asked me to come back in a few weeks. The words "screen for cancer" and "oncologist" came out of his mouth, but I was too dizzy with worry to be sure if I really heard them. Just a few weeks after our picturesque wedding, Devin and I faced one of life's hardest questions together: *How will I respond to pain when it crosses my path?*

When Pain Shapes the Path Forward

I wish I could tell you that I faced this particular setback with grace and courage. Ideally, I would have recalled the lessons of my youth, and turned to God for comfort, putting my trust in the ultimate Healer to be near me. Instead, I became bitter and unhappy. I turned myself inward, instead of upward toward God. For almost a year I hardly recognized the young woman in the mirror. I was mad at God, mad at my circumstances, and angry with myself for what I thought

was a deep personal lack. To be honest, I sank into a season of depression, and while it was certainly understandable given the circumstances, the hope I found next would've been beneficial to my spiritual journey if I had turned myself toward God's tender voice sooner.

Just a few months after my initial visit, Dr. Bennett recommended that we remove my ovarian cyst laparoscopically, a fairly minor operation, all things considered. He assured me that there was almost no chance the cyst was cancerous, but he would need to do a biopsy while I was under just to be sure. I was so angry that this was how the first few months of my marriage had gone. It felt like social media mocked me with pictures of happy, healthy couples and women who weren't grappling with potential cancer or fertility scares mere weeks after college graduation. The weight of my situation felt too adult, too big, too much to bring to the feet of Jesus with vulnerability and hope.

Depression can put the mind and body into a cruel cycle. The body is so fatigued that it can't convince the mind to do even such basic things as get up out of bed when the alarm rings in the morning. I had many mornings when I decided that unkempt hair and pajamas were good enough to report to my off-camera remote job. Food, which was once a source of nutrition, energy, and connection with loved ones, became a menial task. And when I didn't have to force myself to eat, I ate entirely too much sugar and processed food with the hopes that it would comfort me. I looked for comfort everywhere: in long nights in front of the television, in other people's affirmations, and all the short-term places that didn't bring the sustained fulfillment that Jesus pours out on us when we simply ask.

A Cry From the Wilderness

The operation was successful, and I can still see the relief wash over Devin's face as the ob-gyn assured us that there was no possibility of cancer. We were through the worst of it, but I was exhausted. It felt as if I had fought 20 wars in two months. As the pain started to dull, I felt ready to face God again. Just as the disciples asked Jesus, in Mark 4, "Don't You care about me, God?" I cried out to God in that same desperate tone, angry that He wouldn't hear my cries. I assumed that a setback was evidence that God wasn't near me.

Have you ever felt angry with God when life didn't go your way? Elijah sure did. In 1 Kings 19:4, after a long day's journey in the wilderness to flee Jezebel, he declared to God, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no

better than my fathers!" Elijah fell asleep, only to be awoken by an angel of God twice.

"And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you' " (1 Kings 19:7).

The journey is too great for you. When I read that verse for the first time, it struck me like lightning. The journey was too great for Elijah on his own, and my setback was too much for me to handle all on my own, too. Finally, after almost a full year of neglect, I reignited my personal time with the Lord. I understood what He needed to tell me in Elijah's story. God doesn't promise that we won't have setbacks. The world is full of sin and cruelty, and people have the freedom to choose to hurt us. I can't explain the genocides, pandemics, loss, and devastation that seem to run rampant across our globe. What I do know, though, for certain, is that we have a Father who loves us, and wants to draw near to us when the inevitable setbacks of life occur.

The One Who Holds Us Through Setbacks

Our setbacks don't define who we are, but they can speak volumes about who we will become. Sometimes in our faith communi-

ties I hear the words "God won't give you more than you can handle." I think these folks mean well, but I vehemently disagree. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul urges the early church to rely on *God* when the burdens of life are too difficult to bear.

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8, 9).

We will always face more than we can handle. That's the whole point of the gospel—we are not enough on our own. We need a Savior, and if we didn't experience setbacks, we wouldn't always rely on Jesus' death on the cross. God is not the author of our pain and setbacks. He isn't cruel or vindictive. God doesn't haphazardly dole out punishments just so we will have no choice but to turn to Him. In fact, it's the very opposite. He's a loving Father, waiting for us to ask for help when the storms of life surge and we're left in the middle of the sea with no life raft. He is the ultimate helper, comforter, and friend. He holds our pain delicately in His hands, and there is always room for us to choose Him openly.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

To read more Sabbath School Reflections, visit AdventistReview.org. 

Natalie Lilly, an intern mental health therapist, and her husband, Devin, a United States Army chaplain, share a passion for supporting God's children through life's setbacks.

The journey was too great for Elijah on his own, and my setback was too much for me to handle all on my own, too.





THE REMNANT IN SCRIPTURE

Does Revelation 12:17 really identify the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant?

Nowhere does the Bible identify a specific church by name. Several clues are given to help identify “the remnant” (Greek *loiapos*), however. To find these clues, it is helpful to look at the context.

In Scripture God’s people are frequently likened to a woman (Isa. 54:6; Jer. 3:20; Zeph. 3:14; 2 Cor. 11:2). In Revelation 12:1 we see a pure woman clothed with the sun. This contrasts with a harlot woman dressed in purple, scarlet, and decked with jewelry (Rev. 17:4). The two women of Revelation are opposites: The pure woman is faithful to God; the harlot is unfaithful. The pure woman symbolizes God’s true people and a faithful Christian church, the harlot an apostate church.

Revelation 12 describes God’s faithful church through history. The pure woman flees into the wilderness to escape persecution; there she is nourished by God for 1,260 prophetic “days,” or years (Rev. 12:6, 14; cf. Dan. 7:25). The harlot, also in the wilderness, is “drunk with the blood of the saints” (Rev. 17:6), showing that millions of faithful Christians would be martyred through the centuries from A.D. 538 to 1798. This is symbolically described as the serpent pouring “water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away” (Rev. 12:15, ESV). This flood of water is later identified as “peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues,” representing the persecuting powers of Europe (Rev. 17:15). “But

the earth helped the woman . . . and swallowed up the flood” (Rev. 12:16), symbolizing a more sparsely populated area of the earth. Toward the end of this long period of persecution, in the seventeenth century, Christians began fleeing to America, eventually establishing a government that would uphold religious liberty.

Revelation 12:17 describes what happens next: “the dragon was enraged with the

spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). There is only one Christian group that arose at the right time (after 1798), in the right place (America), who keep the Sabbath, and have received the gift of prophecy (through the prophetic ministry and writings of Ellen G. White)—the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This is not an arrogant claim, because *God* raised up the remnant—not because they were better Christians, but to fulfill prophecy and

There is only one Christian group who arose at the right time, in the right place, who keep the Sabbath, and have received the gift of prophecy.

woman [faithful Christians], and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The “rest of her offspring” refers to an end-time group of Christians having two characteristics. First, they keep all God’s commandments, including the fourth, which identifies the seventh day (Saturday) as the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11; cf. Gen. 2:1-3; Heb. 4:4, 9-11). Second, they have “the testimony of Jesus,” which is “the

complete the gospel commission (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20). Further, the remnant church is also described as the flawed church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). But prophecy will be fulfilled, and “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12) will be ready for that day. ❧

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THE NEUROSCIENCE OF FORGIVENESS

Where Scripture meets science

I’ve been concerned about my broken relationship with friends from childhood that ended years ago because of silly disagreements. Recently I started reading about what science says about forgiveness, and I would love to get your take on it.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32),¹ he was issuing more than a moral directive. Modern neuroscience suggests he was prescribing a pathway to psychological liberation and relational healing that literally rewires our brains.

The Brain on Unforgiveness
When we experience betrayal or hurt, our brains respond with a cascade of stress hormones. The amygdala, our brain’s threat-detection center, fires up and sounds the alarm. Cortisol floods our system. Our bodies enter a state of chronic stress when we rehearse grievances and nurture resentment. Neuroimaging studies show that recalling offenses activates the same neural pathways associated with physical pain—the anterior cingulate cortex and the insula light up as though we’re experiencing the wound all over again.

This isn’t just metaphorical suffering. Research published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* demonstrates that chronic unforgiveness correlates with elevated blood pressure, increased cardiovascular problems, compromised immune function, and higher rates of anxiety and depression. When we hold grudges, we’re essentially poisoning our neurochemistry, bathing our brains in stress hormones designed for only short-term threats.

The Healing Chemistry of Forgiveness
Forgiveness triggers a dramatically different neurological response. Studies using

functional MRI scans reveal that when people engage in genuine forgiveness, activity decreases in areas associated with rumination and emotional pain while increasing in regions linked to empathy and perspective-taking—particularly the prefrontal cortex and the precuneus—often considered a hub for the brain’s default mode network (DMN).

The act of forgiveness releases oxytocin, often called the “bonding hormone,” which promotes feelings of trust and connection. It also triggers the release of endorphins and dopamine, creating a sense of relief and even pleasure. Fred Luskin’s groundbreaking forgiveness research at Stanford University² shows that people who practice forgiveness experience measurable reductions in anger, stress, and hurt, alongside increases in optimism and hopefulness.

Perhaps most remarkably, forgiveness strengthens the prefrontal cortex’s regulatory control over the amygdala. In practical terms this means that the more we practice forgiveness, the better our brains become at managing emotional reactivity and choosing thoughtful responses over impulsive reactions. We’re literally building neural pathways that make grace more automatic and resentment less reflexive.

Forgiveness and Relational Restoration
The neurological benefits extend beyond individual healing into relational transformation. When we forgive, we activate what neuroscientists call “mentalizing networks”—brain regions that help us understand others’ mental and emotional

states. This increased empathic capacity creates space for genuine reconciliation. Interestingly, the neural benefits of forgiveness don’t require the offender’s repentance or even presence. Studies show that unilateral forgiveness—the kind Jesus modeled from the cross—still produces psychological and physiological benefits for the forgiver. This validates Christ’s teaching that forgiveness liberates the forgiver even more than the forgiven.

Biblical Wisdom, Biological Design
The biblical mandate to forgive “just as God through Christ has forgiven you” connects divine grace with human neurobiology. As we receive God’s forgiveness, we’re experiencing not just spiritual renewal but also neurological recalibration—our brains literally learning a new pattern of grace. Forgiveness isn’t weakness or denial. It’s a courageous choice to rewire our neural circuitry toward peace rather than perpetuating cycles of pain. When Jesus taught us to forgive, He was showing us the pathway home to ourselves, to each other, and ultimately to God. ❧

¹ All Scripture references are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.
² See Fred Luskin’s *Forgive for Good*.

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A LOUD VOICE, ONE VOICE

Not just another church initiative

Erton Köhler

One question continues to surface quietly but persistently. In a world filled with constant noise, how will the message of Christ be clearly heard? The issue is not how loud we speak, but whether we are speaking together. Repetition goes only so far. What gives weight to our witness is alignment. Multiple voices in a room sound confusing. The world needs one voice that is clear, steady, and true.

We find our direction in Scripture. The final proclamation in Revelation is described as a message given “with a loud voice” (Rev. 14:9). But the emphasis is not on sound, but on clarity—one voice that speaks with authority. It is a message shaped by Scripture and centered in Christ, expressed through a church that understands why it exists and what it has been called to do.

This is how OneVoice27 should be understood at its core. This is not simply an organized effort—another church initiative. It is a moment in history that calls us forward, to move together. OneVoice27 marks 2,000 years since the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry. Our focused emphasis will be in September 2027. The invitation is simple and direct—use every available means to lead people back to the Bible as we announce Jesus’ soon return. The strength of this movement will come more from the purpose that guides us and less from the tools we use.

What is needed now is a church that recognizes the moment it is living in. Not waiting for ideal conditions. Not divided in effort. But moving forward, because it trusts the Word it proclaims.

The world needs not more content but more meaning. Jesus made the mission clear: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). The promise stands—the responsibility remains.

Movements such as these must be born out of consecration instead of relying on business as usual. Before anything reaches the public space, it must take root in the private life. Ellen White expressed this directly: “We must do something out of the common course of things. We must arrest the attention. We must be deady in earnest.”* This is a call for creativity, but even more, it is a call for seriousness before God.

What is needed now is a church that recognizes the moment it is living in. Not waiting for ideal conditions. Not divided in effort. But moving forward, because it trusts the Word it proclaims. A loud voice will be heard only when it becomes *one voice*.

The message is ready. The world is waiting.

Are we prepared to speak as one? Are you in? **31**

* Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 122.

Erton C. Köhler is the president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Mariah

travels the world

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