

APRIL 2025, VOLUME 6, ISSUE 3

# FRESH Start

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT CHARLOTTE SDA CHURCH



*Welcome*  
**Advent Health**



# Welcome Advent Health!



by Laura Dancek



On March 1, Pastor Ben prayed for the AdventHealth team

Photo credit: Laura Dancek

## A New Era Has Begun

On March 1, 2025, a new chapter began for our church and our community: AdventHealth officially became the owner of the two ShorePoint hospitals in Charlotte County. Whether

you've realized it yet or not, this is a significant milestone—one that will shape our church, our outreach, and the healthcare in our community.

## Why is it a big deal?

Healthcare is a cornerstone of life in Charlotte County—and we just gained one of the nation's largest and best healthcare organizations. With the close

connection between our church and AdventHealth, their strong reputation reflects on us, and ours on them. The synergistic relationship we can develop has enormous potential for God's work in our community.



I am absolutely thrilled that AdventHealth has joined our community. I am impressed with the leadership I have met with and am eager to partner as much as we can to further the healing ministry of Christ in our community. Pray earnestly for great things and let's see where this exciting element of our journey takes us!

**Ben Shurtliff**  
**Senior Pastor**

The careful observer realizes that God has been preparing us for something greater ever since the return of our Senior Pastor, Ben Shurtliff. Our finances are strong. Our school is thriving. Our ministries are led by passionate, committed leaders. Our prayer meetings have had a significant boost in participation. Membership has steadily increased—not just through transfers, but also through people in our community responding to the Spirit's call. Since January 2023, we've gained 72 members. At one point, our 12-month total for new members exceeded 70—something that's never happened before. Today, our membership stands at 728 and continues to climb. Something has definitely been going on! God clearly has been orchestrating something in our midst for a purpose, and this latest happening is a major one. It is no coincidence. It's thrilling to imagine what lies ahead – and to be part of it at this moment in our church's history.

### **Looking Back**

Members who joined our church before 1994 will remember the changes that followed Adventist Health's sale of the Punta Gorda hospital—then called Medical Center Hospital. Fewer families moved here for hospital work, and over time, our church aged. Our school felt the shift most keenly.

When my husband Ed and I arrived in 1984 for him to serve as principal, the student body was made up almost entirely of children from our church or other local Adventist churches. We remained the majority for years, but after the hospital sale, the demographics slowly changed. Around 2012, students from the wider community began to outnumber those from Adventist homes. Our school transitioned into a mission school. Until recently, the percentage of church families continued to decline.

The hospital also used to attract strong leaders—people who brought their experience and vision into



our church family. For example, Medical Center Hospital hired Jack Price, formerly with the Southern Union. Because Jack was here, others came too: his friend Al McClure, then President of the North American Division, Don and Ruthie Jacobsen from the North American Division, Floyd Greenleaf, Academic Vice-President of Southern Adventist University (SAU), and Marvin “Doc” Robertson, SAU’s Dean of Music. They all retired here. These were gifted people who enriched our church’s life in lasting ways. They shared their great knowledge, wisdom, and talent.

We were blessed to have ministers of music like Wretha Lang and Doc Robertson—both professional musicians. Wretha also led *Liberty Singers*, a choral group sponsored by the hospital. The musical talent in our church during that time was extraordinary!

For those of us who remember that era, even as our church grows stronger today, we recognize the difference. That’s why we may be the most excited to welcome AdventHealth. While the majority of our church is welcoming them, we are welcoming them back. We have a deep sense of anticipation, based on our past experiences when they were here 30 years ago, for what God will do next.



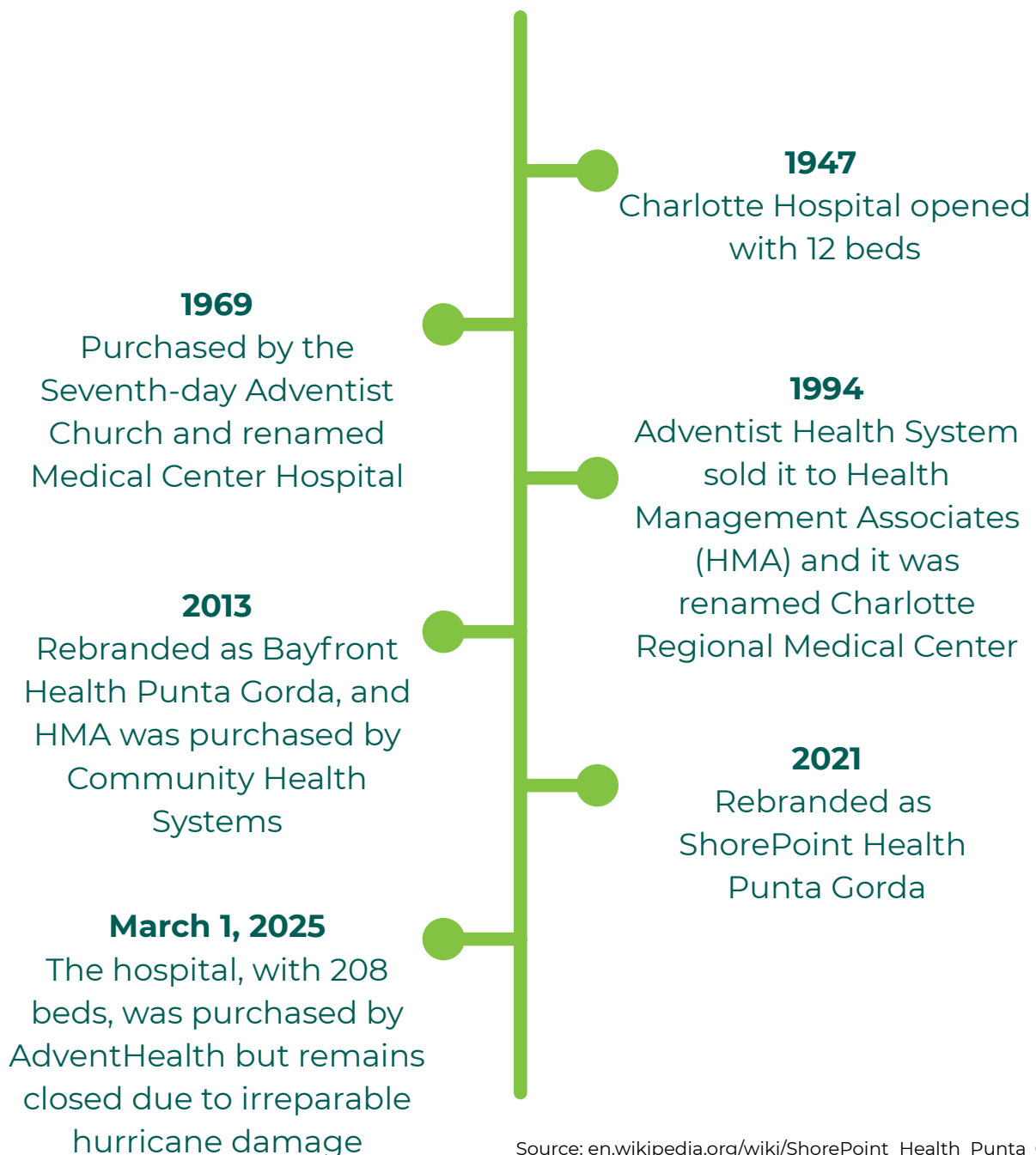
Although we have had people move to the church from up north, the majority of those individuals were retiring to FL and not coming to work in our community and it created a challenge to keep the school vibrant. I am looking forward to a viable option for healthcare, and to attracting families to our area, which will in turn enhance the age diversity within our church. It helps keep our church active and young.

**Ed Dancek**

**728 members  
and growing!**



# The Punta Gorda Hospital Timeline





I missed having an Adventist presence in the county. Our church membership went through a decline somewhat but then it started to increase again. Having an Adventist hospital here again means we can look forward to improved, better medical care, and definitely a growing Adventist community once again

**Flora Ashley**



Families moved away that were in leadership positions at the hospital, leaving a void in our church and school family. I'm looking forward to meeting families that are associated with AdventHealth. Both new employees and employees that have been living in our community are exploring the positive changes occurring in their workplace.

**Donna Judy**

***"In their own words:"***





When Roy and I moved here in 1987 the Adventist presence in this county was widespread with the health and educational ministries both well-recognized. There was even a choral group known as *Liberty Singers* sponsored by the hospital and accepted as a good music group in the community. When it became known a few months ago that AdventHealth was returning, one of my former community music students called to praise this return.

Additional “professional families” to our church membership and school enrollment will bring back a return of ministry opportunities for all of us. No doubt about it, this is broadening Christ’s ministry of healing in our church and community.

**Adell Claypool**



I began teaching at PCAS in 1986. When I arrived, the Adventist Hospital, in Punta Gorda, was very involved in our church and school community. The parents were an integral part of classroom support, whether by being a homeroom parent, driving for field trips, or volunteering for extra help with students that needed it. The Food Service Department provided an opportunity for hot lunch once a week. Parents would go over to get it and deliver it to the school. It was a favorite!

*Liberty Singers*, a nondenominational choral group, was supported by the hospital and we practiced at the hospital for many years. We are looking forward to working together again!

**Sandee Lawrence**





I was excited to learn that AdventHealth was returning to Charlotte county. This community was sorely lacking good quality, Christian care and a hospital committed to reinvesting profits back into the facility and community instead of stockholders. My daughter works for an AdventHealth hospital in Orlando and brags about how she likes working for them.

**Harry Selent**  
**Former Director of Marketing**  
**and Strategic Planning**  
**Medical Center Hospital**



In 1985 I was recruited from Michigan where I had established a community-based home health agency and hospice. I came here to be the Administrator for Home Health at Medical Center Hospital. A goal was established to have a home health agency for every hospital in the Adventist Health System. When we grew to be multi-state I was made President of Home Care and Hospice for Adventist Health. When I learned that AdventHealth is returning to our area, I was thrilled! After Medical Center Hospital was sold many of our God-loving, good, faithful friends had to move away to pick up their careers elsewhere. We were left with a core, but not as large. It stymied the growth in our church. We had a challenge with losing many of our health professionals. My position was unique, because even after the hospital was sold I continued to work for AdventHealth from here. I knew it was much more than a job. I was here to be a witness. There is nothing quite like having a career working for God. A special closeness occurs when your work supports integrating your faith in your everyday work. Healthcare provides a vehicle to save both heart and soul. I am looking forward to having more healthcare providers come to this area. It strengthens the church. We are here to light the world. I witnessed multiple, profound miracles in my 40-year career in Adventist healthcare.

**La Donna Blom-Antonio**  
**Retired President, Home Care and Hospice for AdventHealth**



AdventHealth has been a very special part of my life's journey. I began working for the organization at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in the mid 1970's as a nursing assistant and medical records technician, and retired in 2014 as one of the directors at AdventHealth Hendersonville, in North Carolina. AdventHealth places the highest priority in following the healing ministry of Jesus, and strives to treat both its employees and patients alike in a respectful and compassionate way in every situation. I was surprised and a bit saddened when they left Punta Gorda, where I had worked for 8 years. It took only a very few years for the church and the school to recognize the true losses, not only in school enrollment but also in the very important age group of young and middle-aged adults in our church. But God is always faithful and He blessed us with stability throughout those nearly 30 subsequent years. He has now brought back the double blessing of AdventHealth at two locations in Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. I can hardly wait to see His kingdom continue to grow with AdventHealth's extraordinary care and Christ-like love among us again!

**Diane Sedgwick**  
**Retired, Director AdventHealth Hendersonville**

I worked at Medical Center from 1981 as a respiratory therapist until they moved the heart program to Port Charlotte. What I missed after they sold the hospital was the lack of dedicated chaplains available during a crisis to sit with families who were going through a terrible time. Just to be with them and pray for them. I'm hoping they will bring that back to the hospital again.

**Mark Miller**  
**Retired Cath Lab Technician**





I was very excited when I heard the news.

For several years, there had been rumors that AdventHealth would acquire the hospital.

Although it took a while for this to happen, when it finally did, it felt amazing. Their excellent reputation and my belief in their faith-based mission made it a win-win for me. I look forward to continuing to change the culture at the hospital and to improving the overall quality of care here in Port Charlotte. It will be a blessing in this community.

**David Molina, MD FCAP**  
**Pathologist**  
**Medical Lab Director**  
**AdventHealth Port**  
**Charlotte**

## Looking Even Further Back: The Seventh-day Adventist Church History of Health Reform

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has emphasized preventative health and whole-person care for over 150 years. As early as 1866, church founders opened the Western Health Reform Institute, the first SDA health facility. A decade later it was renamed the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan. This institute became world-renowned, attracting many notable patients. In the late 1880's and early 1990's similar SDA sanitariums had been established across the country, all grounded in the same philosophy of care. One of these ultimately became Loma Linda University Health, now home to one of the most distinguished medical schools in the United States.

SDA beliefs are often associated with healthful living, particularly vegetarian and plant-based diets. Loma Linda, California—home to a large SDA population—has been recognized as one of the world's Blue Zones, where people live significantly longer and healthier lives. These outcomes are often credited to the health principles promoted by church co-founder Ellen G. White. Today, several major healthcare systems are affiliated with the SDA Church, including AdventHealth, Adventist Health (California), Kettering Health, Loma Linda University Health, and Adventist Healthcare.

## The History of AdventHealth

AdventHealth's roots trace back to the establishment of the Florida Sanitarium in 1908—a modest facility with just 20 beds. It steadily expanded and, in 1970, was renamed Florida Hospital Orlando. Three years later, Southern Adventist Health and Hospital Systems was formed within that hospital. Over time, it evolved into Adventist Health System/Sunbelt. In 2019, the organization rebranded as AdventHealth.



## AdventHealth in Charlotte County

The Port Charlotte Seventh-day Adventist Church was chartered in 1964. Four years later, the broader SDA organization purchased the hospital in Punta Gorda, renaming it Medical Center Hospital. In 1970, our church school was established. All three—church, school, and hospital—grew over the following decades, until the hospital was eventually sold in 1994.

Meanwhile, what is now AdventHealth Port Charlotte began as Saint Joseph's Hospital, a Catholic-owned facility. It changed ownership multiple times: to Bon Secours in 1987 (retaining its name), to Health Management Associates in 2005 (renamed Peace River Regional Medical Center), and later renamed Bayfront Health Port Charlotte in 2014. In 2021, it became ShorePoint Health Port Charlotte.

Today, AdventHealth Port Charlotte has 254 beds and employs over 1,300 people. Leading the charge is the hospital's new President/CEO, Adam Johnson, a Southern Adventist University graduate and former COO of AdventHealth Ocala. Adam, his wife Emily, and their young son recently moved to the area and plan to transfer their membership to our church soon—you may have already had the pleasure of meeting them!

***“To extend the  
healing ministry  
of Christ.”***



Adam Johnson  
President/CEO, AdventHealth Port Charlotte



# AdventHealth

## Facts

Established  
in

**1973**

**12th**

Largest  
hospital  
system in  
the U.S.

Facilities in

**9**

States



With

**2,247**

beds

AdventHealth Orlando  
is the largest hospital  
in the United States.



**11**



AdventHealth hospitals won the 2024 prestigious Leapfrog Top Hospital Award. Known for its focus on patient safety, this award is given to hospitals that scored "A" in the most recent surveys.

**55**

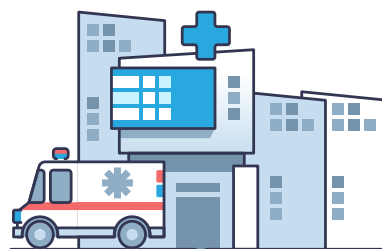
Hospitals



More than

**2000**

care sites including hospitals, urgent care centers, home health and hospice agencies, and physician practices





I was super thrilled to hear about AdventHealth coming to our community. I have wanted to work with this company since I became a nurse and had repeatedly heard rumors about them looking to buy our hospital. This has been an answer to my prayers. Working for them is a dream come true and I am looking most forward to it being a true asset to our community, from quality staff and doctors to state-of-the-art equipment and community outreach, clinics and education. Amazing and fantastic things are on the horizon with God at the helm.

**Evelyn Sanford, RN**  
**Quality Improvement**  
**AdventHealth Port**  
**Charlotte**

AdventHealth Port Charlotte is part of the West Division. On March 1, they made their first acquisitions in the Southwest Florida Region, including:

- AdventHealth Port Charlotte
- AdventHealth Cape Coral ER
- AdventHealth Sports Med and Rehab North Port
- AdventHealth Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine (Punta Gorda and Venice)
- The ShorePoint Hospital grounds in Punta Gorda (closed due to hurricane damage)

Before making decisions about the future of the Punta Gorda facility, AdventHealth has committed to “intentional listening conversations with local leaders, physicians, and community members” to identify the most needed services. Given their growth patterns elsewhere, it’s likely we’ll see continued expansion here in our region.







When I heard the news, I was ecstatic. This was an answer to our collective prayers. Going to work for a company grounded in Christ was welcomed by most, if not all, our employees. Each one of the AdventHealth employees with whom I interacted in the days leading to this transition were genuinely happy, positive, wholesome, helpful people that were excited to bring us into the fold. Not one individual showed a hint of dissatisfaction. In my book, that says a lot about an organization. There is a lot to be learned. But even though it has only been six weeks we are already seeing improvements in equipment, the physical environment and the care we provide. More importantly, I can say without hesitation that AdventHealth follows biblical values in their decision making, how they treat their employees, their patients and the community. The values of love, integrity and compassionate care are tangible and at the forefront of all they (now WE) do. I'm looking forward to being propelled into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with new technology!!! I'm eager for technology to make our patients and processes safer, easier, and less cumbersome, doing work that supports a mission that I care about and that inspires motivation to be better, and to have pride even in the smallest of tasks. I can't wait to see what we will be able to accomplish in the years to come under this new leadership.

**Lyam B. Agosto, RT, MSW**  
**Wound Management Program Director**  
**AdventHealth Port Charlotte**

I was very excited when I found out that we were bought by AdventHealth! Working for them, I feel as though I'm working for the Lord!! I'm looking forward to having more opportunities to witness.

**Geri Yarzab**  
**Admitting Clerk**  
**AdventHealth Port Charlotte**



AdventHealth is deeply mission- and values-driven. Even though the transition is still recent, team members at AdventHealth Port Charlotte already feel a significant shift in workplace culture—one that supports their faith and encourages whole-person care.

Their mission: To extend the healing ministry of Christ.

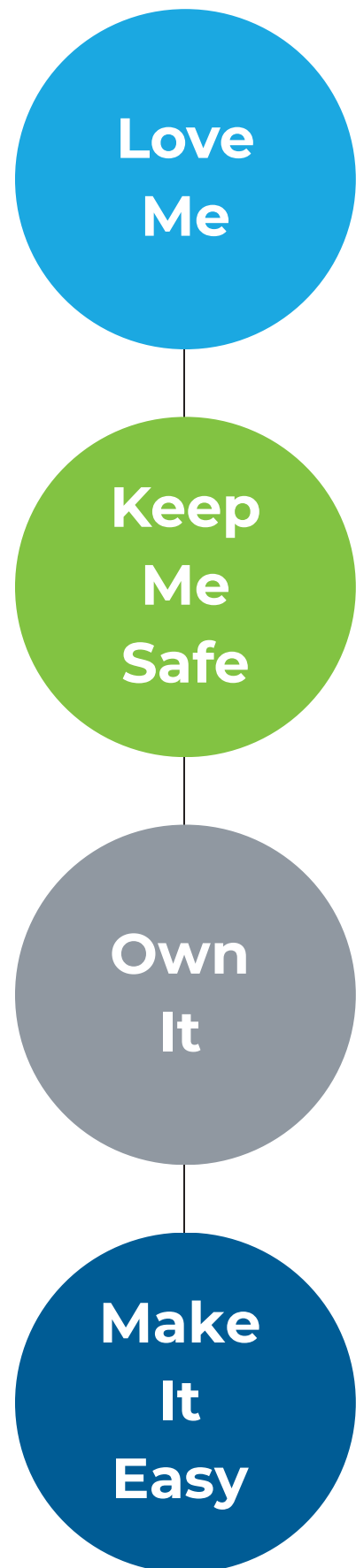
Their core values:

- Quality and Service Excellence
- Community Well-being
- High Ethical Standards
- Stewardship
- Inclusiveness

AdventHealth is being intentional to instill their culture and whole-person approach in their employees. As Adam Johnson explained in a recent interview with *Becker's Hospital Review*, "We're going to do that by first educating our team members about what it means to be a part of AdventHealth. All our team members go through what we call the Whole Care Experience, which really aligns them to our service standards of 'Love Me, Keep Me Safe, Own It, and Make It Easy.' That's the lens through which we want our team members to express our mission to our patients."

### **How Our Church Can Support**

Raising the standard of care will take time and effort, but AdventHealth is committed to this community. It will also take God's continued blessings. As a church family, we can support this journey through our prayers. Let us partner with the team at AdventHealth Port Charlotte by lifting them up as they work to fulfill their mission and share God's love through healing and service.



## **Pray for AdventHealth**

Adam Johnson, and his family

The administrative team

The current physicians

The current medical staff

All other staff

The recruitment of excellent  
physicians

The recruitment of other  
excellent medical workers

The patients in their care

The staff's transition into the  
AdventHealth culture

Improved healthcare in our  
county

God's presence in all spaces of  
the hospital and other facilities

Plans to replace the  
Punta Gorda hospital



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# Wisdom from Bill Payne

by Laura Dancek

Photo credits: Laura Dancek



On March 10, several of our church members were given the opportunity to enjoy a dinner with Bill Payne, the new North American Division Director (NAD) of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries. This occasion was made possible by Cleveland and Marcia Bloomfield. Elder Payne was in Florida for other events and came to visit his cousin, Cleveland. He also knows the St. Cloud, having officiated Sarah and Emmanuel's wedding. During our dinner the cousins shared memories of growing up together in Jamaica, which amused us. The rest of the evening was filled with gems of wisdom that Elder Payne shared.

Building our church through small groups is Elder Payne's passion, which fits well with the new position he was elected to last year. Prior to that, he was the director of the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) Bible School. He was offered this role at the NAD earlier, but felt it was not

the right time to leave the VOP Bible School, as they had plans for evangelistic campaigns in which he was an integral part. He knows it was God's hand and timing that held the NAD position open until he was ready to leave the VOP.

In our conversation regarding evangelism, Elder Payne stated, "I believe that the Sabbath School (SS) and Personal Ministries (PM) Department and what Pentacost 2025 represents in terms of evangelism being done, is that if SS and PM are not firing on all eight cylinders then these folks are going to come in for a few months and then leave."



Pictured left to right: Cleveland and Marcia Bloomfield, and Bill Payne

He has been practicing small groups for over 25 years. “The SS was designed to be a natural small group, and when we go back to the original objectives of SS, one of them, which was very key, says that ‘SS teachers should do spiritual care for every pupil.’ It was meant to be a small group of people.” Elder Payne follows Jesus’ model and considers twelve people the ideal number for a small group.

“The largest churches in the world are small group ministry based.” He travelled to Seoul, Korea to visit the 850,000 member church there. “One of the things they emphasize is prayer.” They have “prayer mountains” which are literal mountains where people go to pray. “That church began in 1958 under a little, makeshift tent with a handful of people and it grew and grew and grew and the method he used was small groups.”

Elder Payne is a strong supporter of equipping ministries. “If we aren’t in the habit of equipping, from the conference level, from the pastoral level, the spiritual gifts in the church, such as pastor, evangelist, teacher, are to equip the saints for the work of ministry. If we’re not equipping then we’re stagnating our leadership.”

“My job is to look at our website at the division level and to assess our current resources.” People don’t always know that information is there to access. “It’s impossible for people at the division level to do the frontline work.” The challenge is that our pastors

already have so much on their plates. How do they take the time to train and equip? Yet, Bill believes that “if there are enough people trained, you can take the work load off of the pastor.”

He is in the midst of creating a manual. When completed, it will be available at AdventSource. “I am looking at the four objectives of Sabbath School:

1. Study the Word
2. Fellowship
3. Community Outreach
4. World Mission Emphasis

Coupled with the five objectives of wholistic, small groups, which are:

1. Community
2. Evangelism
3. Leadership
4. Accountability
5. Equipping

I’m going to write about all those, and how the SS teacher, by exercising those pieces, is going to be able to make the SS more dynamic, engaging and connecting people more.”

“We’ve lost community. The church needs to go back to the principles that built it,” stated Payne. He believes “the SS is the discipleship model of the church. We’re trying to find different ways to disciple when the SS is right there. The SS slogan is ‘Win, Hold, and Train,’ and when we can accomplish that in SS it’s where we need to be.” But attendance at SS classes is low.

“It doesn’t matter what culture or socioeconomic status you are, small groups work.”

“Through Christ’s death, we have all the pieces that we need for small group ministry, but we have to die ourselves.”

“It is said that with small groups ‘You form, you storm, you norm, then you perform.’ You come together and form as a group. Then you begin to storm, trying to figure out if you like what others are saying. You have to be able to come together and ask ‘what did you mean when you said ...?’ That’s when you become vulnerable. That little storm isn’t really a fight it’s getting to know each other. Then you’ll begin to normalize because now you’ve accepted each other. Then you perform ministry together. Sometimes you go up then come back down, and up and down again, before you get to the point that you are doing ministry together.”



Regarding the benefit of small groups, Pastor Ben shared, “I have excellent relationships to this day as a result of the small group I had years ago--there’s power in it,” when then Senior Pastor Tim Goff placed a strong emphasis on it in our church while Ben was our associate. Ben states “it’s hard to change Adventist church’s culture.”

For us to reimplement small groups in our church, Elder Payne suggested that it takes a leader with a vision, and someone to carry the vision.

At Pastor Ben’s request, Elder Payne is happily willing to come to our church to do a weekend training event.

Elder Payne also teaches SWOT analysis, and recommends this to churches. This type of analysis considers what we do well, what we are weak in, what opportunities are available to us that we are not taking advantage of, and what the threats are to this church in accomplishing its goals. “Out of that will come a gamut of goals you can set to reach, for things to get better at.”

*“You don’t form community,  
you enter into community,  
because God the Father, Son and Holy  
Spirit exists in perfect community.”*

*“It’s a beautiful journey.”*

Bill Payne

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# Welcome to the Family

by Don Byard

**Jeni Leitz** grew up in Port Charlotte from the age of seven. She lived in the Orlando area for the past 15 years but returned home to care for her parents. Having Pastor Brian Cassell as a pastor at the Spring Meadows Church after his transfer from here prompted her to choose the PCSDA Church. She was voted into membership on March 8, 2025.

Jeni enjoys pickleball, billiards, puzzles, working out, and the pool.




**Todd and Dawn Tritch** are excited to join the PCSDA Church after visiting several churches in the area as they prayerfully sought the right fit for them. They were voted into membership on March 8, 2025 and are committed to serving in the church as God leads.

Todd enjoys playing the saxophone, woodworking, and hiking. Dawn's interests include playing the piano, the arts, reading, and swimming. Hobbies they find joy in doing together include: playing music, riding their trikes, boating, painting, and traveling, which includes short mission trips with Maranatha Volunteers International as well as traveling to other countries on their own, visiting family, old friends, and making new friends.



# Upcoming Events



**THE *Story*  
OF THE BIBLE**

APRIL 12-19, 2025

2036 LOVELAND BLVD  
PORT CHARLOTTE, FL

FROM CREATION TO REVELATION, THERE IS A STORY OF *Redemption*  
WOVEN THROUGH EVERY BOOK, EVERY CHAPTER, AND EVERY VERSE.  
JOIN US AS WE EXPLORE THE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE IN JUST 8 DAYS.

APRIL 12-18  
6 PM\*

APRIL 19  
11 AM

\*FREE CHILDCARE PROVIDED AND  
FREE FOOD SERVED AT 5 PM

**THE *Story*  
OF THE BIBLE**

SCAN ME



**KID'S J.A.M.**

**April 26th at 9:30 am on the PCAS field.**

**Be sure to bring a beach chair or blanket for seating.**





# Social Committee Outing

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## March 9

The social committee arranged a group outing to the Port Charlotte Sports Park Stadium. Although not all pictured, 30-40 people attended and enjoyed a baseball game which was followed by "Faith Night."

Charlotte Rays players Josh Lowe, Johnny DeLuca, and Drew Rassmussen shared their testimony.





# Earliteen Outing

**April 6**

The Earliteens enjoyed an outing to Avon Park to watch a live production of *The Shepherd King* at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts at South Florida State College.



Port Charlotte  
Seventh-day Adventist  
Church

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