

youth ministry  
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# accent

THE RESOURCE FOR ADVENTIST YOUTH LEADERS



**RECLAIMING OUR**  
**PLUS:**

**YOUTH**

New Millennial AY  
*and* Small Group Ministry



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Cover Photo: Cubestock

# 14 *Reclaiming Our Youth*

Being born into an Adventist family doesn't make conversion or baptism automatic. Our own young people need conversion and retention. Today there is an eerie sense that the youth are leaving the church. It's time to face up to the reality and take significant steps to reclaim our lost youth.



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## An Overview

Dear Youth Leader:

The theme for 2006 is Connecting. Connecting with Jesus through discipleship, leadership training, mission work, evangelism, and empowering the youth to live victorious lives through Jesus' grace.

Whether you have two weeks to plan the program or someone just informed you at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour that they are not able to show up, the 1-Page Program Planners on pages 26–31 will give you quality programs that are safe for any audience.

Let's take a quick glance at what's in this issue.

### *My Soul's Destination*

Dr. A. Allan Martin, coach/pastor for the Celebration SDA Church, shares his longing to know "God's desired destination" for his soul.

### *New Millennium A Y*

Baraka G. Muganda examines the foundation for youth ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and the need to give ample emphasis to the role of our denominational history and the Spirit of Prophecy in our church.

### *Breathe*

Elder Lynell LaMountain, founder of Life Ignited, shares his memories of GO-Dencounters retreat—Unstoppable 24/7 Prayer.

### *Reclaiming Our Youth*

As we travel around the world the cry is the same: *Youth apostasy and backsliding among young people is on the rise.* In this article Dr. Barry Gane not only sees the problem, but offers ways to help close the back door and keep the youth connected to Christ and the church.

### *Standard of Efficiency*

Let's revisit Ellen White's advise to not settle with low attainments, but instead to have a high standard of efficiency.

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# CELEBRATION: MY SOUL'S DESTINATION

by A. Allan Martin, PhD

On my way to work, I see a well-placed realty billboard along the road. Every time I drive past the billboard, I am intrigued if not amused. Bordered with white picket paint and lit with old-fashioned lamps it reads, "The destination your soul has been searching for. . . Celebration, Florida."

Centered on the advertisement is a home of yesteryear with the inviting front porch seeming to say "Come on in."

Without fail, each time I drive by it, I have pleasant thoughts, remembering the small hometown of my youth, friendly neighbors . . . the whole apple-pie-4th-of-July bit. I smile, then I begin to wonder about today's destination; What is my soul searching for? What am I really looking for, and where can I find it? Then that song comes to mind. . .

## To Know and Be Known

These days, it's rare to catch the syndicated reruns of the sit-com Cheers, but the words to their theme song frequently ring in my head, "a place where everyone knows your name." When I pass the billboard, the melody may not always be quite right, but those words still come to mind. Or sometimes, I find myself whistling the tune to the Andy Griffith Show, thinking about what the 21<sup>st</sup> century Mayberry would be like.

It's not that I want to live in a TV show, but I like the idea of being known by name. I long for places where my Seinfeldish quirks are accepted, and my clumsy Barney Fife moments embraced.

It would be so nice to have a "be human" zone, where the laughable pace of life can slow enough to have an honest conversation.

Maybe that's why our small groups are so vital to me. We call them growth groups, a place to be real, to relax, to be human. In an informal, safe atmosphere, there is space to converse about the things that are important and build authentic relationships. It's a destination where my soul can be honest enough to laugh and cry with those interested to listen to the laughter and the tears. Small group gatherings like growth group reconnect me with God and others who are breaking through to God-size living. To hear others share about their blessings and life-expanding experiences affirms my soul. To be known by God is a powerful thing.>>



A. Allan Martin, PhD, is the coach/pastor for the Celebration Seventh-day Adventist Church, a church plant in the heart of the Central Florida tourism district. To learn more about their adventure visit them at <http://www.Join-TheCelebration.net>

Actor Michael J. Fox, referred to his life now with Parkinson's disease saying, "I could not be still until I could not be still." It reminded me of Psalms 46:10a, "Be still and know that I am God. . ."

Growth group gives me a place to be still long enough for others to learn my name. It gives me a place to be still and hear the family name God calls me by. Growth group lets me know the person behind the name. For me, to know and be known is a definite soul destination.

## To Live Close To God's Heart

A couple of Easters ago, my daughter's program, Kingdom Kidz, had an intriguing twist to the crucifixion story, taking it from the viewpoint of Peter. Told in first person, Peter's account of Christ's passion had the kids' attention, and me wide-eyed.

The most poignant part of the story for me was captured in John 21 {The Message}:

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Like Peter, I want to express my love for God. My soul is searching for

a destination where I am closest to God's heart. That Easter, I relearned that at the very heart of God, loving Christ and caring for others are one in the same.

I guess that explains the thrill I experience when I join in serving at Give Kids The World (GKTW), a home away from home for terminally-ill children and their families. As a teen, I busied tables many a summer at my uncle's oriental restaurant, and joy was not an emotion I ever remember associating with the task. But cleaning tables, pouring juice, or serving breakfast, indeed bring me great joy as our group serves these precious families. I see that joy not only in the faces of the children, but I see it beaming from our group members.

Serving others is a destination my soul has found in places like GKTW. No matter how many families we serve at GKTW, I get more than my helping of joy when I participate.

## To Worship Jesus

I've rambled on about the destinations my soul's found. But my heart asks a question that brings me to a screeching halt, "What about God's desired destination?"

If God is along for this ride; If Christ is traveling with me, what is the place the Holy Spirit is searching for? One word comes clear—Worship.

That's why Sabbath Celebration is so central to my life. Not that God is somehow absent from the rest of my week, but on that holy week-iversary, God's Sabbath, we gather to focus on bringing worship to Jesus. We express our adoration of the Holy Spirit, and communicate our praise to God. It's a sacred party, a righteous celebration, filled with spiritual family and friends.

Although the gathering has grown, at times overflowing our chapel, Sabbath Celebration has kept an intimate, family feel to it. Everyone is involved, newcomers are treated like family, and the program is far from the focus. We just enjoy celebrations; God setting the day aside seems like a pretty good reason to have a spiritual family get-together.

Sabbath Celebrations bring us together; Many different cultures: Indian, Puerto Rican, Filipino, German, Chinese, African, Brazilian; Many different ages from Gen Xers to Empty Nesters.

Regardless of race, creed, or class, Sabbath reminds us to rest the labels and be unified as God's children. Diversity is embraced.

The drama, the music, the speaker, and even creative sign language serve to express our love for Christ. The Word of God is expressed in many forms, but for one purpose, to worship Jesus in Spirit and Truth. Sabbath Celebration is a satisfying soul destination.



Allan Martin with his wife and daughter

The destination my soul has been searching for? *To know and be known. To live close to God's heart. To worship Jesus.* Some have spent a lifetime searching. My search has come to an end. I've found that destination while here in Celebration, Florida. The search has concluded, but the adventure has just begun.

<http://www.JoinTheCelebration.net>

## New Millennium AY



### FOUNDATION STONES FOR FUTURE YOUTH MINISTRY

FOUNDATION STONES FOR FUTURE YOUTH MINISTRY IS FOUND ON PAGES 97-106 OF THE AY STORY: A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.

FOR ONLY USD\$2.50 THIS IS A MUST-HAVE FOR ALL ADVENTIST YOUTH LEADERS. TO PURCHASE THIS BOOK CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ABC OR GO ONLINE TO [YOUTH.GC.ADVENTIST.ORG](http://YOUTH.GC.ADVENTIST.ORG)

As we look ahead to the future, my vision for Seventh-day Adventist youth ministry is challenging and yet very promising “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past [youth ministry] history.” Testimonies to Ministers by Ellen G White, page 31. Youth Ministry can be a huge blessing to the church and society, a catalyst for change, and a refuge fortress for young people who are looking for some help other than the dying world. The challenges demand a degree of openness and risk taking not seen in the church for years.

Looking into the future of Seventh-day Adventist youth ministry we need to be inspired by the past to shape a stronger future ministry for our youth. The Same vision that inspired Harry Fenner (17) and Luther Warren (14) in 1879 must continue to guide youth ministry in the future. Our challenge now, is to build on what these pioneers started to meet the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s generations. The approaches may be different but Biblical principles should never be compromised, and the main reasons for having youth ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church must always remain the same.

Youth Ministry today in some quarters of the church face a great shake up. Some churches have questioned the need and purpose for youth ministry. Some churches have completely done away with it or made some radical changes to accommodate the few youth who do not like to be challenged. Churches have turned youth ministry into a program to baby sit youth in the church. But it should be remembered that the future belongs to our youth. It is time for the elderly to step aside, with our deepest gratitude and thanks. We must keep on asking ourselves, how might our youth organize for the future while handing on the best of the past? >>



## IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH MINISTRY

If the church believes in its youth, and that they are the church today and tomorrow, then a top priority in how we lead Senior Youth, Pathfinder and Adventurer ministries must be seen. We must walk the talk. Youth Directors should be given only one assignment of taking care of youth. Youth Leaders at all level will need to be given maximum support from administrators. The Youth Department should not be an appendix to other assignments. Professional youth leaders must be provided to serve as spiritual youth leaders.



## “INCARNATIONAL” MINISTRY

As we face the future, young people will be fully secularized, personal experiences will be their sole measure of reality. They will all have little sense of what’s holy, but its absence will drive them toward what’s spiritual.



photo: Baraka Muganda location: Lisbon Youth Congress, Euro Africa Division

**Adventist Youth Ministers who successfully reach these kids will be trustworthy and accepting. And they must prove these graces in concrete, everyday experiences. Communicating the gospel will mean risking oneself – ones’ dignity and ones’ comfort.** You will have to let go of some familiar faith symbols and traditions and use youth symbols, issues, challenges and schedules to reach them. But in the midst of it, Je-

sus Christ – his story, his life, his work – must continue as your ministry’s focal point. Salvation and Service will continue to be the motivating force in Youth Ministry! No compromise.



## RELATIONAL MINISTRY

Young people will live in a world which does not trust any relationship. Most of the youth will be psychological orphans. In their short life they would have seen their parents divorce and living with single parents. These will, need caring, listening, stable people and communities to help ease their “adoption” into Gods’ family.

Youth Alive (Youth to Youth) ministry will be the most important vehicle that helps youth stick with the church as they mature. Youth who model positive values, attitudes and behaviors will create a counter-culture community for their spiritually hungry peers.

*Meanwhile adult faith-mentors will be more important than ever. When youth go to a youth group, they must receive significant contact with adults. Every church will need to appoint>>*



photo: Baraka Muganda location: Romanian Youth Congress, Euro Africa Division

mentors for young people growing up in a world of no guidance. Youth Ministry will be the father and mother of these youth.

## 4 MUSIC MINISTRY

The church will continue to face the issue of music in the local churches especially among young people, with the introduction of “non-traditional” Seventh-day Adventist music within the church. The only way the church can help its youth discriminate between good Christian music and destructive music is to be informed. This is how the church will help them learn how to think about what they listen to—to evaluate it against the values they cling to as Seventh-day Adventists.

The church will need to give youth the chance to use contemporary Christian music to share their faith with their peers but will need guidance from the church as a whole. In all programs and events the traditional hymns and contemporary songs should have a place in worship.

Youth will need to be reminded where the church has been, and how the Lord has led us, and where the church is now. Youth Ministry will need to help youth appreciate the breadth of church music and to avoid the limitations provided by some contemporary chorus styles. Youth Leaders themselves will need to be knowledgeable in *good Adventist music*. Principle guidelines that have been deliberated on and voted on by the church must always be referred to.

## 5 YOUTH AND FAMILY MINISTRY

Families in the future will still be critical to our youth’s psychological, social, moral and spiritual development. And since facilities will be more exhausted, overextended and fragmented than they are today, successful youth workers will have to draw families under their ministry umbrellas.

For some young people, friendly congregations will be the only real “family” or intergenerational community they will ever know. Caring adult church members and peers can become surrogate grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, sisters and brothers.

Though difficult, one of the most important tasks in ministering to Seventh-day Adventist youth will be equipping their parents for parenting. Nothing will shape the faith and attitudes of young people more than their parents’ self-esteem, parenting styles, moral stances and faith. Youth ministries can offer events and programs that strengthen family well-being, marriage relationships, family communication, discipline, faith-sharing and moral values.



photo: Allan Martin division: North America  
Musicians from Sea of Glass and One Accord together in worship at the 2005 GODencounters Retreat, UNSTOPPABLE 24/7 Prayer.

## 6 YOUTH-FRIENDLY CHURCHES

Churches will need to be “youth-friendly”. Youth will either experience life in a church’s worship and mission or, as one teenager I know put it, “do that which doesn’t matter, using language and activities we don’t understand.” Youth-friendly churches will have a conspicuous youth presence. Young people will both lead and participate in worship, using their music and their symbols and addressing their concerns. They will get involved in intergenerational Bible Studies, life-issue seminars and community events.

Youth-friendly congregations will value young people. They will listen to them and support them with prayers, time, facilities and money. These congregations will respond to youth’s needs and see them as a critical component in the body of Christ.>>





## 7 DISCIPLESHIP

This word has become an icon in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And in the future it will be more and more used than ever before. Un-churched, secularized young people will need youth ministries that focus on the basics of the Christian faith and the fundamentals of leadership.

Young men and women will be seekers. And the gospel message will be foreign and intriguing. So small group Bible studies, life-support groups, issues research or skills training seminars, outreach activities and public advocacy will give kids the chance to care for one another, mature in their faith and prepare for leadership. Youth emphasis must underscore the importance of developing youth in the image of Jesus Christ. A CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER MUST BE THE FOCUS OF DISCIPLESHIP. Youth should not only know about God but experience Him in their daily walk. This must be a balanced combination—experience and knowledge.

## 8 SERVICE

Many young people will desire to participate in service oriented programs within their communities or even beyond. More and more youth will find joy in serving others. Youth Ministry at the local church will need to make service one of its top priorities. *Salvation* and *Service* go hand in hand. In the future a youth ministry without this component to augment the component of *Salvation* will be seen as a ministry not for the youth. Youth will be challenged to take part in service events, some will set aside time to teach their friends basic life skills while telling them about Jesus Christ. The future will witness the deep satisfaction of serving others filling up empty places in the hearts of youth. Youth Ministry will become more and more community based.

## 9 DIGITAL AGE

The pace of technology will continue to move very fast in future. Mobile phones, PDA, e-mail, web, wireless gadgets, iPods, mp3s and digital cameras are just

some of the tools that youth leaders will have to be aware of. Despite the technology advancements of our world, young people will always need relationships. This is crucial and may be enabled by technology but will never replace face to face connection with another human being.

But as youth leaders for the future, we need to be aware of the changes and embrace them in a meaningful and positive way. The future will certainly be fast and visual and media will be extremely accessible to everyone, so leaders better start thinking about how they can engage effectively with it. High technology will occupy a great part in Youth Ministry. Young people naturally engage with visuality, this is their time, their culture and the present and near future is and will be very visual. Youth Leaders will need to spend time with high tech to get acquainted with today's ever changing gadgets in this area. A youth leader without a clue in high tech will be lost in working with young people. High tech will be the future language for youth within and without the church.

## 10 CULTURAL TRENDS

The church will be called to minister to youth with an awareness of cultural trends and their effect on youth. The driving forces in our society will look much like they do today, only magnified. We will live in a secular, materialistic, relativistic and self-absorbed culture. Adventism as we know it will be an alien world to them, and they won't know much about the Bible's story or message. *Our denominational history and the place of the Spirit of Prophecy within the Seventh-day Adventist church will need to be given ample emphasis in Youth Ministry.>>*

Life will grow even more complex, fast paced, desperate and violent. Because of this, the transition from childhood to adulthood will be longer, more treacherous and full of risk. The church is under attack and the only way we can confront that is by way of building a strong youth ministry to face the cultural trends that will threaten to destroy the church. Seventh-day Adventist Youth Ministry must be the vehicle to assist the church to produce strong Adventists with a strong Biblical foundation.

If you don't give youth a "road map" to help them find their way in life, someone else will. And there is a good chance that "someone else," will not lead youth "in the way they should go" (Proverbs 22:6).



## MOLDING VS. ENTERTAINING

With the fear of losing the youth of the church, some churches will be tempted to introduce into the Youth Ministry entertaining approaches to hold youth in the church and not to rock the boat too much. This fear will create dangerous inroads into the Youth Ministry that this church has enjoyed in the last 100 years. In the future Youth Ministry must not be seen as an entertaining ministry or baby sitting. Youth Ministry in the future should continue to challenge youth to be like Jesus. Molding the character of young people into the image of Jesus must be the key reason of having an Adventurer Club, Pathfinder Club, Senior Youth or Young Adult programs in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. To achieve this objective, dedicated and Bible based youth leaders and youth ministers will be needed to lead the way, who will keep the focus of youth ministry on recreating the image of God in

Seventh-day Adventist Youth. Youth will need to be challenged continuously to love God and be like Him.



## REAFFIRMATION

Youth Ministry in the future will continue to reaffirm the basic reasons why Youth Ministry was founded in the Seventh-day Adventist Church—saving youth and involving them in the mission of the church. Every church youth ministry program must be a refuge place for saving our youth and challenge them to participate in the mission of the church. The church must create opportunities for the youth in which they can share the love of God to the dying world. The mission of "proclaiming the third angel's message to every kindred, tongue, and people", must be given much emphasis.

We have taken a short glimpse of our past. We have opened our present for assessment by the future. We have tried to see ahead through the fog of finite eyes. What will Jesus find when He comes? "The Lord has appointed the youth to be His helping hand." T7 64

"With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world! How soon might the end come.—the end of suffering and sorrow and sin! How soon, in place of a possession here, with its blight of sin and pain, our children might receive their inheritance where "the righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever"; where the "inhabitant shall not say, I am sick," and "the voice of weeping shall be no more heard." MYP 196

"Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.'" Isa. 35:3, 4

Gain a broader understanding of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Youth Movement with this 129-page book.

**Available at youth.  
gc.adventist.org**

**THE AY STORY**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH



# B R E A T H E

Ever held your breath until you were so desperate for air that your toes twitched; your cheeks became balloons and your eyes bugged out? Overpowered by deprivation, did you sip air in all proper like, or did you swig down big gulps like a scorched vagabond at a thirst-quenching oasis?

Our lungs crave air. Our soul craves God—Fresh, life-giving. . . God. We ache for an encounter with Him. Do you know what it feels like to yearn for, to long for, to covet God?

Early in November I drove into Camp Kulaqua, just outside of High Springs, Florida, for the GODencounters Retreat. I had been asked to teach a seminar on prayer. Although I had taught many times on the subject of prayer, I didn't know what to expect from this "GODencounters" thing. Being a movie buff, Spielberg's *Close Encounters*, with flashing UFO lights was all I could picture.

Friday night began with, curriculum coach, Allan Martin's preface, "If you've come here to be entertained, you've come to the wrong place. We're not here to entertain you or make you feel good. We're not offering you a showy religious program. We're here because of a sacred discontent. We're here to encounter God because we're dissatisfied with what was good enough before. We want to live in His presence 24/7."

The room was still—the kind of stillness you feel before an approaching storm. As the reality of the statement settled into people's minds, the storm came. There was a cacophony of unsolicited "Amen's," and applause. Worship started and hundreds of young adults shook God's house with their breaths of praise. Deep breaths. Long breaths. Cherished breaths. Eternal breaths.

The meeting may have ended, but worship continued into the night in various prayers rooms, including an A-framed lodge which had been transformed into a living, prayer sanctuary, with 10 interactive prayer stations guiding you in your holy encounter with your Father. Tea lights and scented candles flickered throughout the room, as soft music added to the warm ambiance. The first thing I saw was a sign, "Take off your shoes because you are standing on holy ground." So I did. And then I inhaled—not the proper, image-conscious breaths I take at religious programs, but deep breaths—filling up on God's crisp, energizing presence.>>



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I was in a mall not long ago and passed by an oxygen bar. People sat on stools along a counter that was topped with shampoo-sized cylinders that were bubbling with different colors of liquid—yellow, green, red, blue. Maybe you’ve seen them. Covering the nose and mouth of each customer was a mask. Attached to the mask was a tube. Being piped through the tube was crisp oxygen. It’s called the “oxygen experience,” and it promises to “pick you up” and energize you.

At the GODencounters Retreat, I experienced how Elijah must have felt when God told him, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass you by.”<sup>1</sup> I knew I was in the presence of God. Hallelujah! And I didn’t want to leave. I yearned to remain within this Oxygen Experience—I coveted it, because the breath of God was reviving my soul.

My soul was not alone; others were being revived too. Covering the prayer room wallpaper were etchings in crayon, markers, and pen. Scribbles and sentences from other breath-taking souls.

“[I give You] My life, totally. My weakness, my fears.”

“Lord, please allow my family and I to see You face-to-face in the clouds of glory and to hear You say, ‘Well done thou good and faithful servant.’”

“May I worship You forever! Your praises are my life!”

“I offer my life to You. Take control of it and lead me to You. Let my vision be Jesus.”

“Dear God, I’m sorry for leaving You. I miss your presence and I want to be with You and You with me. . . please



Sebastian Zaldibar, with Sea of Glass, leads the worship experience at the 2005 GODencounters Retreat for the over 270 attendees at Camp Kulaqua.

be present again in my life. I’m coming back to You. Help me. Your child.”

His children breathe in His presence. Pastor Minner Labrador along with praise band, *Sea of Glass*, and music group, *OneAccord*, facilitated worship that endorsed our royal relationship with God as His sons and daughters. Practical seminars, creative communion and anointing services refreshed our practice of being in His presence. Just being with over 270 other young adult GODfollowers through the weekend—at praise, at play, at prayer, at peace—was CPR for the soul.

Sebastian Zaldibar, a 28-year-old social work major, concurred, “Throughout the entire weekend, I felt the Spirit tugging constantly at my heart and impressing upon me to realize who I am, that I am a Son of God. That fact completely changed my perspective on myself and how I view others around me. . . The most important aspect of GODencounters

was understanding who I am, realizing that the only way to go to God in complete surrender is to know who I am and Who I need in my life.”

“[At GODencounters] I finally accepted Jesus personally,” said Rebecca Sarah Ali of Miami, Florida. “I learned that God is my Dad. I can actually develop a relationship with Him. . . a relationship full of truth—no secrets—and He will literally forgive me and hold nothing against me!”

Biology major, Christina Jimenez shared the impact of GODencounters, “I got to see a lot of people cry out to God for love and peace in their lives. . . It impacted my relationship with Jesus in a very good way.”

“I was prayed over. . . and felt the power of the Holy Spirit. . . like I was dancing with Jesus, I just stayed in silence—enjoying this time—and had a conversation with Him,” recalled Nicki Carleton, a 31-year-old missionary from Australia, “It was so nice, like getting a beautiful hug.”

To ache for God’s presence. To desire His embrace 24/7. To have our souls oxygenated with the Holy Spirit! To simply fall into the arms of grace when your soul is too weary to stand, and be carried for a few steps on your journey home. To live like you are His child. Oxygen for the soul—this is GODencounters.

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.”<sup>2</sup>

Breathe!

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 19:11, (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 37:5, (NIV)

## MOUNT AETNA CAMP FINDS NEW WAY TO WITNESS

A DREAM CAME TRUE when in 1996 a new nature center opened at Mt. Aetna Youth Camp. It was the dream of Dr. Floyd Murdoch, an educator and naturalist living in Maryland. He shared his dream with Chesapeake Conference Administrators and with potential donors and supporters and after some years of designing, getting local government permits, finding the necessary funding, the project became reality. Dr. Frank Damazo, a local resident also caught the vision of what the center could do and has been instrumental in finding both funding and displays. So far nearly three quarters of a million dollars have been invested, all from private funding sources. Now for the last nine years the center has carried on a specialized mission by motivating young and old alike to learn more about God's great outdoors.

Donations of wildlife for the displays have come from all over the country. The center houses over one million sea shells along with hundreds of fossils, rocks and minerals, insects, bird eggs, and stuffed animals. Among the animals are a large collection of African mammals even including a Leopard. A collection of birds was recently received that had belonged to the well known preacher, Dwight L. Moody a hundred years ago.

While the camp functions primarily as a summer camp for kids and as a retreat center for groups that rent it during the off-season, it was felt for some time that there might be potential for further outreach, especially to the surrounding communities, churches and schools. The nature center especially could be a tool to provide an alternative understanding of the origins of nature by making a very clear intentional focus on God as Creator. Hence the main display room on the second level is lit primarily by a beautiful set of 7 tall stained-glass windows each depicting one of the days of creation. The center now advertizes locally that they are open to the public on Saturday afternoons and volunteer naturalists are on hand to serve as guides, story-tellers, and to answer questions that visitors may have about anything ranging from birds at their backyard feeders to the giant Alaskan Brown Bear standing in the hallway, the delicate butterflies from Togo or the poisonous Copperhead Snake.

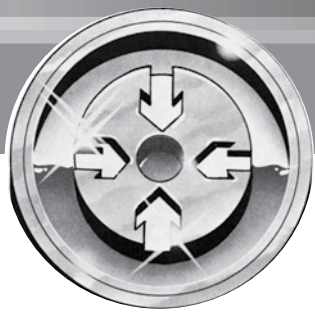
A series of a half dozen checklists of the wildlife (from birds and dragonflies to fungi and trees) found at the camp are also available for those wishing to walk the camp trails. And there are some free short article brochures on creation/evolution to help explain "the other side of the coin". On most Saturday afternoons anywhere from a dozen to several dozens of young and old enjoy wandering the various rooms, listening to interesting stories and about natural history curiosities and marveling at God's handiworks. One recent visitor commented "I've lived in the area for nearly 50 years and never knew this place was here!" Another said, "I like this place better than the Smithsonian because here I don't have to filter out man's godless ideas." Numerous school groups and kid's clubs take advantage of the opportunity and make it a field trip full of fun and learning all in one.



International Wildlife displays at Mt. Aetna Camp, Maryland, United States of America



Robert Holbrook serves as Pathfinder Director of the Oklahoma Conference



# DISCIPLESHIP



## RECLAIMING OUR YOUTH

YOUTH APOSTASY AND RECOVERY OF BACKSLIDDEN YOUTH

by *Barry Gane*

### YOUTH, THE CHURCH OF TODAY

THE YOUTH OF THE SEVENTH-DAY Adventist Church are its greatest asset and its hope. Consider Ellen White's perspective regarding young people:

"With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!"<sup>1</sup>

"Preachers, or laymen advanced in years, cannot have one-half the influence upon the young that the youth, devoted to God, can have upon their associates."<sup>2</sup>

"The church is languishing for the help of [young men and young women] who will bear a courageous testimony, who will with their ardent zeal stir up the sluggish energies of God's people, and so increase the power of the church in the world."<sup>3</sup>

It seems obvious that a church so committed to the Great Commission would put youth at the center of its evangelistic endeavors. Yet most evangelism in the Western church focuses on adults, not young people. As a result, instead of being one generation from the kingdom, we are one generation from extinction.<sup>4</sup>

Being born into an Adventist family doesn't make conversion or baptism automatic. Our own young people need conversion and retention. Today there is an eerie sense that the youth are leaving the church. It's time to face up to the reality and take significant steps to reclaim our lost youth. Determining how many youth really leave the church is difficult. We are hesitant to drop the name of an inactive or missing youth, and the name won't even be recorded until the young person has been baptized—a decision a growing number of youth postpone until late teens.

The first serious attempt to discover how many youth are inactive was a 10-year longitudinal study undertaken by Roger Dudley at the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University. Funded by the North American Division, Dudley obtained names and addresses of 1,523 baptized young people, ages 15 and 16. Approximately half attended Adventist academies, with the other half attending public schools.

At the midpoint of the longitudinal study, when the original 15- and 16-year-olds were 20 and 21 years old, self-perceived standing with the Adventist Church showed approximately one fourth as enthusiastic members, one half as so-so members, and the remaining one fourth divided between being on the books but not in heart (16 percent) and dropped out (10 percent).<sup>5</sup> Add to this "inactive" one fourth an estimated half of those who dropped out of the study after the first year. This results in a "guesstimate" of 38 percent dropout during the five years between ages 15-16 to 20-21.<sup>6</sup> (This most accurate statistic to date is still quite nebulous.)<sup>7</sup>

The Valuegenesis study included a projection of one's intention for future church participation. The results indicate that 27 percent of today's 12 to 18-year-olds are not planning to be in the church when they are 40 years old.

Figures for those who leave the church in many congregations and conferences range between 35 and 65 percent. One congregation claimed that generating a list of youth who had left the church would be easy, since they didn't lose many of their youth. After two meetings the youth committee had compiled a list of 135 names of youth who no longer attended church. In this church 40 percent of the youth had left over a five-year period. The time that a young person leaves varies from culture to culture and country to country, but some believe the critical period is at the end of high school, as youth either enter the work force or begin tertiary study.<sup>8</sup> As young people assert their independence, one of the ways they do it is by questioning and often rejecting the values and beliefs of their parents.

## REASONS FOR YOUTH LEAVING THE CHURCH

In just the past five years a number of studies have given us an insight into what it is that induces, drives, or just encourages youth to sever their connection with the church. The young adult Valuegenesis results from the South Pacific Division gave us the following reasons (these are in descending order, with the reason most often given at the top and the response that occurred the least at the bottom):

- Adult members are living phony lives.
- The church places too much emphasis on nonessentials.
- The attitudes of older members are critical and uncaring.
- Church leaders are preoccupied with organization and not concerned with people.
- Worship services are dull and meaningless.
- I do not want to be a hypocrite.
- The church is too restrictive.
- I'm attracted to a different lifestyle.
- I do not have any real friends at church.
- The church does not allow me to think for myself.

A simple factor analysis of the data revealed five main factors:

- control: not allowed to think for self, problem with the doctrines, and emphasis on nonessentials
- lack of caring
- lack of meaning and purpose
- personal integrity
- control: discipline, family problems, too restrictive

In 1973 Ila Zbaraschuk's research estimated that 50 percent of Adventist adolescents sever their connection with the church for such reasons as:

- church membership without personal conversion
- impersonal, uncaring attitude on the part of older members
- phony-appearing lives of adult members
- no sense of relevance to needs
- religion not making a difference in own life and not wanting to be a hypocrite
- absence of thinking for oneself
- misplaced emphasis with nonessentials too important
- academy (church school) disciplinary methods
- preoccupation with organization on the part of leaders
- quality of sermons

A comparison between the two sets of results shows that many of the same reasons are given, but there are some major shifts. Many youth cite the fact of a lack of friends at church as a major reason for not wanting to attend—an emphasis on the importance of relationships.

Others speak of the irrelevance of the church to their daily lives and also of the meaningless worship rituals. Others experienced trauma or crisis and felt that the church did not respond to their needs. Still others cite the family as being such that they do not want to belong to the church. Many use any or a number of these reasons as an excuse to experiment with the world.

Some studies highlight the family as a key in understanding why young people leave or stay in the church. Brad Strahan has surveyed more than 200 college students in an attempt to see if there is a connection between the relationship that young people have with their parents and their images of God. He is convinced that the quality of the parent-child bond is a more powerful predictor of whether or not there will be a positive faith in the child than the religiosity of the parent. The young person's understanding of God is greatly enhanced when>>

they have a model of God's love demonstrated to them.

## **THE MOST EFFECTIVE PARENTING STYLE FOR BUILDING THE FAITH AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF THE YOUTH IS ONE THAT IS HIGH ON CARE (SHOWS AFFECTION AND WARMTH) AND AT THE SAME TIME ALLOWS FREEDOM AND EMPOWERS YOUTH TO BE INDEPENDENT.**

Many Adventist homes are seen by young people as restrictive and not caring. They feel that their parents view faith as more important than they, the children. Even the temptation to be protective or overly protective, if balanced with warmth and love, can make youth more dependent and less able to make decisions, and affects sons more than daughters. Strahan is convinced that if the parents use religion to control, the young person will use religion to assert his/her independence.

### **THE ATTITUDE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

John Savage has studied what happens in the church when someone leaves. Out of the youth's personal anxiety, and perhaps from events even separate from the church, there comes a "cry for help." This can be obvious and audible, but it is often indirect. If the church fails to recognize and respond to the cry for help, the hurting youth begins a predictable dropout track that ultimately leads to a self-protective decision to leave the church. If the church responds at this stage, it may avert the loss; however, the church frequently screens out the cry and the young person. Because of this rejection, the young person stops coming to church.

The church begins to feel the pain of rejection when the young person continues to skip church. In reaction, the church may punish the young person for rejecting it. When this occurs, the young person becomes angry as she/he feels further rejected, hurt, and misunderstood. In the next step, the young person goes into denial, saying that it doesn't matter and acting as if she/he doesn't care.

This whole process can happen in as quickly as six weeks and end in permanent withdrawal or apostasy. If the young person is not visited or if the problem remains unresolved during this time, she/he will feel that the decision to leave the church is a correct one. Savage has shown convincingly that visitation by a person with good listening skills any time in this first six weeks can facilitate the return of the youth to the church family.

### **BUILDING A PROFILE OF MISSING YOUTH**

To reach and reclaim missing youth it is necessary to know who they are! Youth who have not attended for five years or more may prove harder to reach. Start with a list of youth who have left the church in the past five years.

If you have been in a particular youth ministry setting for a number of years, you may already have a good idea of who these people are. However, most local church youth leaders are in the position for only a short period of time, and so the following steps may be useful.

- **STEP 1.** Consult the church clerk's records—these should have the names of all baptized youth. Sabbath school record cards may include the names of youth who may not have been baptized. You will need to construct a list of the missing youth. Remember that all youth are not the same and must be seen as individuals.

- **STEP 2.** Sell the reclamation concept to your youth team and let them know how many youth already have left. Brainstorm to recall other names that may have been missed.

- **STEP 3.** Involve your youth group leadership team in prayer and strategy for contact with missing youth.

- **STEP 4.** Contact each missing young person—personal contact is best. Let them know that you are interested in them. Invite them to a fellowship activity first so that relationship can be established. Ensure that their friends at church make contact as well.

The record blank at the end of this chapter will help your leadership team keep up with what is happening and who is being visited.

### **HOW DO YOU MAKE A FRIENDSHIP VISIT?**

Roger Dudley's study has revealed that only about 15 percent of youth who stop coming to church ever receive a follow-up visit or even a call from anyone at church. That means that 85 percent never have anyone visit or say that they cared. Some who decide to return to church find it difficult, if not impossible, to break in.<sup>9</sup>

Before your visit, spend time in prayer for the person you are visiting.<sup>10</sup> Explain that you have missed the person at church and that you and the youth team have decided to visit all the youth who haven't been at church for a while. Your approach may not make much difference if you are praying for the person and if you are sincerely friendly. One important step: before leaving, let the person know that you have enjoyed the visit and that you will be back. Try to work out the best time to get together.



The visit at first should never be more than 30 minutes; 20 minutes is better. Do not do all the talking yourself. Discuss what she/he is interested in, and you will be surprised how soon she/he will bring the conversation to things that have to do with Christ. This isn't a "green light" to initiate a Bible study. The purpose of your visit is to create an interest by your friendship so that she/he will want to come back to church for consistent spiritual involvement.

## DEVELOPMENT THEORY

There has been considerable research in recent years into the developmental stages of adolescence, providing an understanding of what is happening in the lives of young people.

An adolescent<sup>11</sup> has been described as a person who is no longer a child but not yet an adult.

She/he is caught developmentally between the two stages, with all the confusion of not really belonging to either, sometimes wishing to return to childhood and at the same time struggling for independence as an adult.

Erik Erikson, a pioneer in psychosocial development, saw life developing through a series of crises that one must master before progressing to the next. He identified the crisis of identity as being the major issue for adolescents. Erikson saw adolescents as being caught between the sense of competence and achievement of childhood and the crisis of intimacy faced by the young adult.<sup>12</sup>

"Identity" as described by Erikson would give rise to a feeling of inner firmness or of "being together" as a self. It communicates to others a sense of integration or personal unity.<sup>13</sup> The crisis of identity formation involves the adolescent in a number of issues, from gaining a perspective of his/her uniqueness, to a commitment to a sexual orientation and its associated roles, to a primitive ideological position or basic philosophy of life, to a vocational direction.<sup>14</sup> It is part of finding one's own identity that pushes young people to challenge the values of the parents and seek to incorporate a value system of their own. It is clear, however, that many youth who question their parents' values and beliefs ultimately accept them as their own.

John Westerhoff lists four stages of faith, and the primary one that adolescents work through is the third, which he calls "searching faith." This is characterized by doubt and questioning, experimentation with alternate views, and the concept of the need for commitment to people or causes. It comes as no surprise that young people question everything. This can be a particularly hard time for parents and church leaders if they do not understand what is happening.

The young person needs room to move and stretch, to question and challenge, and the church and the home should work in concert to create an atmosphere that will enable this. The young person should feel safe as she/he asks questions and seeks answers. Part of the leader's role is to let youth know that they do not have answers to every question and that sometimes there are no answers, but faith hangs on to the evidence it has.

Religious educator Sharon Parks provides a model that demonstrates cognitive development for higher education that goes beyond the general field of formal operational thinking (à la Piaget). This model presents four stages.<sup>15</sup> Because higher education is driven by a search for truth, questioning is the norm. The model by Parks may not be relevant or helpful for those outside of higher education, but many find it quite descriptive of the higher education experience.

The four stages move from external authority to internal authority. The first stage can be described as "dualistic"—yes and no, right and wrong—with no ambiguity. Truth can always be defined, explained, and applied to every situation. If there are any questions beyond your understanding, a higher (external) authority can provide the correct answer (truth).

Most idealistic college freshmen that hold to this stage soon find their world attacked on all sides. Almost any professor can (and should) challenge such thinking. Most fellow students can provide exceptional situations in which the "correct answers" become inadequate.

For example, consider many of the Adventist lifestyle issues. Nonattendance at movie theaters hardly stands up to video usage (sometimes in college classes), campus entertainment, and even evangelistic series conducted in the local theater. Dancing is verboten, but the grand marches and skating sponsored by the college seem similar to some dance forms; gymnastics is a physical education class, plus, the school does recruiting and witnessing with its gymnastic team; and cultural events at the school include folk dances from various countries.

Some try to contort their comfortable dualistic world to meet every exception, but reality soon exceeds the flexibility available. It's no wonder that most collegiates move into the second stage before the end of their first year of school, if not sooner.

The second stage can be described as "questioning." It's a world of relativism. Knowing that exceptions abound, the budding young adult is gun-shy of being certain about anything. The higher education zeitgeist of questioning everything seems far more advanced than the simplistic world of dualism. In fact, answers are no longer important. What really matters is questions. The best way to >>

respond to a question is with another question. The annoying adjective “sophomoric” aptly describes this stage. The inductive method of education has clever appeal.

Looking back to the first stage, a stage-two person has a certain fondness for the “good ol’ days” of childhood simplicity mixed with a sense of maturity for shedding that immature skin.

Unfortunately, looking ahead gives a distorted view of reality. Clear perception is only possible looking back. As a result, those still in stage one perceive those in stage two as rebellious humanists who have abandoned the absolutes of the church, Scripture, and even God. From the way they talk and question everything, it appears that they have no faith and already have left the church, or at least the church would be better if they did. It’s a major challenge to keep stage-two people involved in the church. They’re not looking for answers, only questions. And the questions they ask make everyone in the comforts of dualism uncomfortable. The only Sabbath school class that would welcome them would be the skeptics, if a particular church has such a class. This is the world of the typical collegiate.

After spending a good deal of time wallowing in relativism, real truth seekers eventually tire of the tossing about and instability incumbent to relativism. Having crossed many cognitive seas, they are ready to set anchor in an area in which they can place some confidence, although not to the degree of being absolutely certain. They are aware of other perspectives, but they have enough evidence upon which to make at least some type of commitment. This third stage can be termed “commitment within relativism.” From here a stage-three person can look back with a sense of loss to the simple days of childhood in which dualism was adequate. Just thinking of relativism can nauseate them, provided they are fed up enough with it. Yet, they are also grateful that relativism has prepared them to live in the real world rather than denying so much in order to maintain dualism. They appreciate the current peace of making a commitment with the understanding that much is still relative.

For those in stage one the person in stage three seems to be somewhat correct but slipping toward unbelief. If only they wouldn’t allow for exceptions they could be “true believers.” For those in stage two the person in stage three seems to be in-between stages one and two. They aren’t willing to go with each new thought or possibility. Could it be fear rather than exasperation? But neither the stage-one nor the stage-two person realizes that the stage-three person is more mature than either of them.

As the anchor of commitment continues to settle, a person can enter the fourth stage of “conviction within

commitment.” Here a certainty develops somewhat akin to the stage one dualism. The marked difference is the understanding and appreciation of relativism and the corresponding tolerance for having passed through those stages. There is also an embracing of paradoxes rather than an explaining away of them. It is only by giving a person the opportunity to disagree that they can truly agree. The stage-four person seems at times, a little bit like a mystic. Looking back to stage one, the stage-four person now understands the difference between being childlike and childish. A look to the stage-two person brings reminiscing of self-absorption in counterpoint. The view of stage three seems to signal the possibility of discovering real truth for the heart and soul.

The person in stage one views the stage-four person as a lot like them, only not evangelistic enough and too ethereal. The stage-two person knows a stage-four person has to be wrong, because no intelligent person could be so certain; yet this seemingly unintelligent person always can tease a question beyond the relativist’s capabilities. The stage-three person isn’t sure if the stage-four person is simply a smart stage-one person or possibly a similar stage-three traveler with greater security.

Sharon Parks’ model provides understanding and a clear mandate for significant changes within Adventism. Either we should discourage or discontinue higher education of our young people or else make the concomitant makeover for new wine in new wineskins.

## LISTENING SKILLS

Because parents and church leaders do not always understand what is happening, youth feel rejected and take their questions elsewhere to be answered. For those involved in reclaiming youth, one of the major skills needed is the ability to listen, and to listen with empathy.

The place to begin is where the young person is. You will need to understand his/her thinking, world, and dilemmas. Tony Campolo warns, “There is no single youth culture in the technological urban industrialized societies of the Western world. Instead, there are a variety of sub-cultures existing side by side, each with its own language, value system, and worldview.”<sup>16</sup> It is best to meet them on neutral ground, and this may mean away from the home or the church. Joseph Aldrich said, “If you are pursuing lost sheep, you must go where they are. You cannot avoid every appearance of evil. Our Lord didn’t either. Because of His close proximity to the beer cans and potato chips of His day He was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton. Professional ‘weaker brothers,’ suffering from hardening of the categories, delight to criticize those who take the Great Commission seriously.”<sup>17</sup> >>

Good communication is dialogue. Often youth leaders want to do all the talking. To reach youth that have severed their connection with the church, you must:

- have a genuine desire to LISTEN
- be willing to read and accept feelings and emotions
- not have the need to always be right
- be accepting, noncritical, and nonjudgmental
- let the young people know that you feel honored to share their story
- be open enough to share some of your journey and even some of your struggles
- be prepared to keep in touch and sacrifice enough to support

It is essential to build a relationship, and this will take time and commitment on your part.

Relationships are built on understanding, empathy, and nonjudgmental attitudes. Warm, kind, genuine, and trustworthy people build relationships.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How warm and kind am I?
- How respectful am I of those who act and think in ways that I consider illegal, immoral, or unspiritual?
- How genuine am I?
- Do I feel free to be myself?
- How much of who I am do I hide?
- How trustworthy am I?
- Do I keep confidences?
- How well do I listen?
- Does the other person feel listened to and understood?
- Do I check to see that I understand what is being said and felt?<sup>18</sup>

Empathy is of extreme importance in seeking to understand what is being said. Empathy is not sympathy. "Empathy is the capacity to imagine the teen's experiences...as well as to express those experiences to show understanding."<sup>19</sup> <sup>9</sup> In seeking to read the feelings rather than just reflect the words, the acronym SASHET may help, as it stands for the major feelings experienced by youth:

**S** cared

**A**ngry

**S**ad

**H**appy

**E**xcited

**T**ender<sup>20</sup>

You must be prepared to speak the language of the young person and deal with areas of interest to him/her. Listen to his/her concerns and be prepared to explore them a little. Demonstrate that you have higher esteem for people, and don't put anyone or any faith down. At the same time, don't be afraid to challenge the young person's thinking.

When you win trust and youth place confidence in you, they will begin to share, and this sharing will become deeper and more intimate as the relationship grows. Keep a high level of confidentiality, for if you break the person's confidence, you may destroy the relationship and hinder the process of his/her return to the church.

## FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

All young people are searching for meaning or endeavoring to make sense of the world in some way. For some it is the pursuit of pleasure. But for many there is the desire for relationships and spirituality. They want to know where they fit in the scheme of things.

The atmosphere and the attitude of the church are important in bringing youth back to church. There must be a spirit of inclusion as opposed to exclusion. You must be willing to take a risk and know that sometimes these young people will let you down. You must be willing to meet their needs.

## INCLUSION

Too often our churches appear to be exclusive clubs where those on the inside are looked after and those on the outside are not really welcome and at best only tolerated. This spirit can be seen in such areas as dress and financial support for members. Does your church budget include items to support youth who have not been to church for a while? Are these youth welcome at all events of the church? Is the church and youth hall/center a place in which youth feel comfortable and to which they feel they could invite their friends? Does your church actively seek the return of missing youth through its policies? Is your church actively building a program that will be attractive to missing youth?

## WILLING TO RISK

Are you willing to risk the church facilities and its reputation, or even your own, in an attempt to reach these youth? Think about the people that Jesus mixed with. Ian Thomas makes this powerful appeal:

"I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of >>

the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles but on a cross between two thieves, on the town garbage heap, at a crossroad so cosmopolitan that they had to write His title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died, and that is what he died about. And that is where churchmen ought to be, and what churchmen should be about.”<sup>21</sup>

Is it possible that we are so involved in church work that we forget the work of the church?

## MEETING THE NEEDS

What are some of the youth needs that we already know? David Stone highlights what he regards as the five major needs:

- **1 . SELF-ESTEEM.** An innate need to be important in the eyes of others, especially peers and parents.
- **2. SELF-CONFIDENCE.** A need to know that “I can handle it; you don’t have to wipe my nose for me.” A sense of knowing that he/she can use his/her ability well.
- **3 . SELF-REGARD.** A need to care about how one looks, feels, and thinks in relation to others.
- **4. SELF-WORTH.** A need to know that one’s comment, feelings, and thoughts really do count and can make a difference.
- **5. GOD AWARENESS.** A need to have a power, a force or authority, that is ever present or available to eliminate the caustic, inevitable encroachment of loneliness; a need to believe in a God who is loving and forgiving and always with him/her. Youth need a God who is not a magician but a constant companion whom they can turn to in an emergency situation and who walks beside them or dwells within them as a friend, confidant, and guide.<sup>22</sup> Individual needs will be discovered only in a relationship in which youth trust you enough to tell you what is happening with them.

## CHURCH CLIMATE

Because of the challenges young people bring to the Adventist Church, our identity and corresponding church climate must be renovated. Currently it seems that our perspective of being the true church results in a purity-preserving climate. We eliminate questioning, especially outside of acceptable avenues. One needn’t be concerned if it hurts or destroys the person, for people who question are destined to hell anyway. They simply had been serving as instruments for the devil to infiltrate the bastion of

truth. Some have a perverted sense that as long as the investigative judgment is proceeding in heaven, we might as well keep up-to-date on earth, so that when Jesus comes He will find that judgment already is complete.

The bastion of truth and the hotel for saints are poor models for the church today. Not only are they irrelevant; more important, they are heretically anti-Christian. Organized religion has served more as a citadel for tradition than for truth. And even Jesus, who continues His ministry on earth through His body, the church, came not for the righteous but for sinners. By implementing Christ’s attitude, the church will be characterized by the divine characteristics of love, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Unfortunately young people don’t perceive it that way yet. Valuegenesis results showed that with academy teens, only 54 percent considered their churches to have an atmosphere of warmth and caring, significantly lower than all six other Protestant denominations that conducted similar studies. When Roger Dudley used the same questions with the 20 and 21-year-olds in his study, the number dropped to 41 percent. The issue of a warm and caring environment is problematic not only of adult attitudes to youth but also of the way young people relate to each other. The cliques among Adventist youth isolate them from caring for people, including their peers.

A similar negative trend could be noted in regard to a church-thinking climate from the teens into the 20s. Valugenessis showed that a paltry 34 percent of Adventist teens consider their congregations to have thinking climates. With Dudley’s 20- and 21-year-olds, the number again dropped, this time to 28 percent. This means that while a questioning mind characterizes the collegiate-age category, less than 30 percent of Adventist young people find their churches to be a place conducive for their approach to truth. When they question existing truth, they easily could encounter reactionary insecurity. In reality, they are beginning to internalize their faith, not to give it up. But a remnant theology doesn’t permit the luxury of developing faith or processing truth. Questioning is misunderstood as unbelief rather than the pathway to belief. Faced with such options, most young people opt for the integrity of growing in their faith and discovery of truth, even if they are squeezed out of their religion.

## PROGRAMS TO ATTRACT AND INCORPORATE YOUNG PEOPLE

Many seek that all-encompassing program that will attract and keep young people in their church. No such universal program exists. In fact, what works with one church or one community may fall flat with another. It.>>

would be wise to program variety for those within the church and to attract those outside of the church.

Overtly religious programming such as Friday evening vesper programs and weekend retreats will reach some. In North America recreation in the form of volleyball and basketball seem like favorite activities for many, including those wary of religious activities. The need for social activities continues to be strong, especially when young people graduate from Adventist school programming and an increasing number marry later. Service activities are “in,” and will continue to have appeal to a number of youth, since these are years of heightened horizontal expressions of spirituality.

Have the young people provide input on specific programming ideas. Be prepared to do something traditional or something totally out of the ordinary. In general, the “three F’s”—friends, food, and fun—tend to attract people. Involvement is a key to maintaining interest, but remember that young people, especially collegiate-age, flee commitment. That means that their involvement must be in manageable amounts and backed up by more stable leadership.

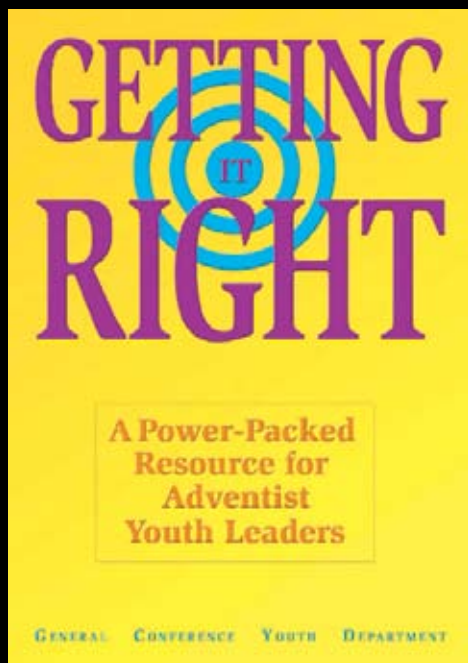
## A FINAL WORD

If a person has been inactive for a while, realize that to get involved again requires battling a number of fears. Of course, there will be a fear of acceptance. If their current lifestyle isn’t completely in harmony with Adventist practices, there may be a fear of behavioral changes, which the person may or may not want to be changed. There is also a fear that should they become involved with the church again, there will be a loss of most of the friends they’ve made outside the church. At the same time, being fearful that the church hasn’t changed much since they left, they probably expect a fair amount of criticism for being away, as well as possibly not fitting in if and when they return.

While no environment is germ-free, a congregation’s overall attitude and behavior toward returning young people must be primed periodically. Featuring young people, including returning inactives in the church newsletter or on the platform for various duties or sharing church life can serve as reminders of the church’s ongoing ministry to young people. Frequently some of the young people remain in contact with inactive youth. Knowing the church will welcome them back and having something to invite them to equips them to restore the inactive back to the life of the church.

## REFERENCES:

- <sup>1</sup> E. G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 555.
- <sup>2</sup> White, *Messages to Young People*, p. 204.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>4</sup> Some of this material was originally prepared by Barry Gane and Steve Case for publication in *Ministry* magazine.
- <sup>5</sup> Actual numbers are: enthusiastic member, 27 percent; so-so member, 47 percent; officially a member but not in heart, 16 percent; have dropped out, 10 percent (Roger Dudley, “Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church” [Berrien Springs, Mich.: Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, 2000], p. 122).
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- <sup>7</sup> For a more complete review of the first two years of this 10-year longitudinal study, see Roger Dudley and Janet Kangas, *The World of the Adventist Teenager*. Reports for each subsequent year may be obtained from the Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.
- <sup>8</sup> Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), sees this period as crucial in the development of a faith that is owned and lived by.
- <sup>9</sup> Roger Dudley shared part of a letter with me that illustrates this point on visitation: “I wanted to write and thank you for allowing me to participate in this survey. I think it is wonderful that people at Andrews are concerned about Seventh-day Adventist youth. Being a participant in this study has meant a lot to me, and I look forward to filling out the questionnaires. So far, you are the only person who has responded to me and my decision to leave the church. I have never been visited by a single person from my SDA church here, nor have I ever been encouraged to return.”
- <sup>10</sup> The missing youth should be an ongoing part of your prayer list.
- <sup>11</sup> Adolescence was identified as a distinct stage of development comparatively recently with the publication of G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).
- <sup>12</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).
- <sup>13</sup> See James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, p. 77.
- <sup>14</sup> See Doug Stevens, *Called to Care* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), pp. 55, 56.
- <sup>15</sup> For a complete presentation, see Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years*. Besides cognitive development, affective and community development are also presented in corresponding stages.
- <sup>16</sup> Anthony Campolo, “The Youth Culture in Sociological Perspective,” p. 37.
- <sup>17</sup> Joseph Aldrich, “You Are a Message,” *Moody Monthly*, 1982, cited in Stevens, *Called to Care*, p. 119.
- <sup>18</sup> Questions based on those used by David E. Carlson, “Principles of Student Counseling,” in *The Complete Book of Youth Ministry*, p. 409.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 409, 410.
- <sup>21</sup> Ian Thomas, cited in Stevens, *Called to Care*, p. 116.
- <sup>22</sup> J. David Stone, “Youth Ministry Today; Overview and Concept,” in *Complete Youth Ministries Handbook*, ed. J. David Stone (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), vol. 1, p. 9.



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by Maria Dunchie

## KEEPING IT REAL THROUGH *Connecting*

Not only had this Woman lost all her monies; but now she had become a social outcast. The doctors avoid her; the church folks avoid her; and who knows, maybe even family members avoided her. No one wanted to come in contact with her. She was unclean.

They say you can see the soul through the eyes.

She heard the news! Jesus was going to be passing by. "This time it will be different," she told herself.

Have you ever wanted something so bad, you just lived for the day when you would get it? Imagine how she must feel. Finally she will see Jesus. Finally she will look in eyes and tell Him her story...the doctors said there is nothing else they can do... Twelve years of running from one person to the next...now the money was all gone, and so were the friends. She could hear his voice in the distance.

Pandemonium broke out. Everyone was there—the curious, the indifferent, and those who love him— wanted to get close to Jesus, the crowd was too thick...she walked, she ran...still she could not get to Jesus. "If only I could touch Him" she thought. "If only I could connect with Him." Manouvering the crowd, she crawled on her knees until she was close enough...or so she thought. She tried to touch Him, but she was still too far off...she touched the hem of his garment. He knew! She knew he knew. He sought her out. He asked for her. He healed her.

Consider what would happen if like this Woman we wanted that connection badly enough. Badly enough to not care what the crowd thought. Enough to become undignified and crawl on our hands and knees to get a glimpse of him. Sure we can hear his voice in the distance, but are we connected?

Imagine the mystery and delight this Woman must have felt when she actually got close enough to touch Him and then hear him speak to her directly. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. She knew. He knew. The connection was made.

Imagine what it would mean to our youth if like this woman they saw us fully worshipping God. Doing everything we have to do to connect and stay connected. Miracles happen when we do. Didn't Solomon say "this is the whole duty of man...to glorify God."? Imagine a church where people actually connect with God and enjoy doing it.

Keeping it real through Connecting!

**PROGRAM TARGET:** To help each young person think about either starting a relationship with God, or moving that relationship to a higher level.

## *beginning a relationship with God*



### **Getting Ready**

- Copy the character sketches (page 16) and give to your four actors well ahead of time, a week or two in advance, and encourage them to also look up relevant Bible passages about that character.
- Choose people who can speak well in public and have some acting ability so they can really bring the character to life.
- Set up your meeting as a testimony meeting, with plenty of singing and perhaps some Bible readings. Have your four characters sitting in the audience, but perhaps wearing a token Bible-times costume item (e.g. a headdress or something similar) to indicate that they are playing a role and not speaking as themselves. When you invite people to share what God has done in their lives, have each of the characters stand up in turn and tell his/her story. If others in your group follow with genuine testimonies of their own, that's great!

### **Bible Text**

- Thief on the cross: Luke 23:39-43
- Mary Magdalene: Luke 8:1-3; John 20:1-18
- Peter: Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 26:69-75; Acts 2:36-41
- Thomas: John 20:24-29

**Praise Time** (These are only suggestions, feel free to use modern/contemporary songs)

- “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (*Advent Youth Sing*, 93)
- “I’m So Glad I’m a Part of the Family of God”

### **Discussion Time**

After all four characters have told their stories, lead the group in a discussion of how each of these people came to Jesus, what kinds of Christians in modern life they might resemble, and how their experiences can apply to us today.

### **Closing Out**

Wrap up tonight’s meeting with an appeal, along these lines: “Each of these Bible characters came from different backgrounds, had different needs and different problems. Yet each of them came to a point where they admitted they needed Jesus and wanted to follow Him. The story was different for each one, but they all followed Jesus. It’s the same for us. We have different backgrounds, different needs, different problems. But every one of us needs Jesus, and every one of us can have a relationship with Him. All we need to do is what these people did—admit we need Him, and let Him into our lives. We’ll still have problems. We’ll still have doubts. But everything will change. If you’ve never taken that step to let Jesus into your life, now’s the time to do it. And if you have a relationship with Jesus but you know that He’s calling you to go farther, to take a new step in following and serving Him, maybe it’s the time to do that too. Let’s pray.”

### **C O N S I D E R ...**

- evaluating your typical weekly calendar. How much time do you regularly set aside to focus on Jesus and spiritual things?
- memorizing a portion of Scripture that helps you concentrate on Jesus and His love.

**Copy these character sketches and give to your four actors ahead of time, a week or two in advance. Encourage them to also look up relevant Bible passages about THEIR character.**

## Character Sketches

### ●THIEF ON THE CROSS

He was only fighting for what he believed was right. In a society where the oppressive foreign government reduced many of the people to homeless poverty, the only way to fight back was to live outside the law. Stealing from the rich, keeping it for the poor—himself. He joined a band of rebel bandits and learned not only theft but violence. But what's wrong with violence when you're living under military rule and you have no rights? Eventually his lifestyle led where that kind of lifestyle always ended up—brutal torture and a painful, humiliating public execution. But in the moments before he died, he caught a glimpse of a Man who lived a different kind of life: someone who fought evil with the power of love instead of violence. He wanted to be part of this Man's kingdom, and with his dying words he asked for mercy—and got it. He didn't have time to change his life or clean up his act—just to ask for help.

### ●MARY MAGDALENE

She was possessed by seven demons—maybe all at once, or maybe one after another. Some Bible students also believe she was a woman who lived a life of loose morals—perhaps as a prostitute. We know for sure that by the time she met Jesus, she was outcast and desperate. She had reached the end of her rope. All she could do was throw herself on His mercy—but it was good enough. He cast out her demons. She responded by becoming one of His followers, giving up her old life to go wherever He led.

### ●PETER

He wasn't a bad guy. Maybe not too religious, but he lived a good life and went to the synagogue regularly. When this traveling preacher named Jesus burst onto the scene, Peter was curious. Intrigued. He was drawn by Jesus' powerful personality and, in his impulsive way, Peter committed himself to following Jesus all the way, even though it meant giving up his business and leaving his family with no means of support. He wasn't perfect. He kept messing up, making mistakes, and misunderstanding Jesus. But he was growing. Then, suddenly, everything shattered around him. His faith was put to the test, and he flunked. He denied he even knew Jesus—a slap in the fact to his Lord on the worst night of Jesus' life. Peter was torn apart by his own failure—but when Jesus came back from the dead, he took Peter aside and let him know he was forgiven, and gave him a special mission.

### ●THOMAS

We don't know where or how he met Jesus. But somehow he got drawn into Jesus' inner circle—the disciples who went with Him everywhere, worked with Him, knew Him best. It was a strange life—following a traveling preacher around from town to town—strange for a man who usually didn't commit himself too deeply to anything. Thomas was cautious. Thomas thought things threw. He held back. Even as he followed Jesus around, his naturally pessimistic nature made him wonder when it was all going to come crashing down. On the day Jesus was crucified, it seemed Thomas' worst fears had been realized, and his caution had been justified. When Jesus appeared to them again, it was only natural for Thomas to think his eyes were playing tricks on him. How could a man rise from the dead? Thomas asked for hard evidence—and Jesus gave it to him.



**PROGRAM TARGET:** To help youth better understand the different offices of the church and consider what their roles in helping the church might be.

## *church* --- *leadership*



### **GETTING READY**

• Invite the church officers at least a month in advance and stress the importance of their being there. Let them know what will happen at the meeting and what your focus is—to inform the youth about the roles of different church officers, but also to answer questions the youth may have and talk about ways to make the church leadership more youth-oriented (if your youth feel it isn't already).

### **BIBLE TEXT**

• Ephesians 4:11-13

### **Praise Time**

Use modern/contemporary songs)

### **WHAT TO DO**

At least a month ahead of time, invite as many of your church's officers as possible to come and be involved in this meeting. If your church uses young people as church officers, make sure they are involved as well.

● The week before this meeting, tell your group you will be talking to the church officers about what they do and how things are run in the church. Discuss with them any questions they might have about how the church works, things they would like to see done differently, why things happen in certain ways, etc. Encourage them to write down questions that can be discussed with the church officers at the next meeting.

### **DISCUSSION TIME**

Have each church officer introduce him/herself to the group in terms of what his/her job within the church is. You could either bring the officers up front as a panel or, if your group is quite small, have everyone, youth and officers, sit in a circle. Some questions to ask the church officers during this brief introduction time might include:

- What is your role in running this church?
- What qualities and interests do you have that suit you for this role?
- What do you like best about your job?
- What is the most difficult part?

● Allow about 5 minutes for each church officer to give his/her introduction—how long this takes will depend, of course, on how many church officers you have present.

● Following the introductions, use the questions you have collected from the group, and any questions the youth pose from the floor, to lead a discussion with the church officers. Allow the discussion to flow both ways: if any of the church officers have questions for the young people, have them pose those questions too. If it doesn't arise naturally, make sure you bring in questions about how youth can be more involved in the affairs of the church, decision-making, etc.

● Try to bring the meeting to a point where everyone feels that both the youth and the church officers understand each other better, and the youth feel more "ownership" of the church.

### **CLOSING OUT**

Ask your pastor or head elder, and one member of the youth group, to each have a short closing prayer, asking God's blessing on your church, the church officers, and the youth.

**PROGRAM TARGET:** Get the youth to think about their relationships with others and see every relationship as having eternal significance.

## relationship



### Getting Ready

- As long as it takes you to type up the scenarios—no more than ten minutes.

### Bible Text

- “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12, NIV)

**Praise Time** (These are only suggestions, feel free to use modern/contemporary songs)

- “Side by Side”

### What to do

Write out or type up the following scenarios on slips of paper to give to your group at the beginning of the program:

- A 16-year-old guy and girl have been dating for several months. He thinks she is “the one” for him and is starting to talk about love and about getting married in a few years. But at the same time, she is feeling the relationship is too close and she would like to just be friends.
- A 17-year-old girl wants to go on a weekend camping trip with her friends. But her parents say no, because there will be a mixed group of boys and girls with no adult supervision.
- Two 18-year-old guys have been best friends since they were children. One of the guys broke up with his girlfriend a year ago but still cares about her. Now the other guy wants to go date her.

•A young man who has just finished his first year of college comes home to tell his father that he no longer plans to study medicine. His father, a doctor, has always wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. The son wants to be a musician instead and has failed all his first-year pre-med courses.

•Divide into groups and give each group one of the scenarios (if you have a very large group, you can add more scenarios from your own imagination). Allow the groups about twenty minutes to discuss their scenario and think of different ways the people involved could handle the situation. Then have each group prepare a role-play based on the scenario and act it out for the others. After each role play, discuss the issues involved. Ask: How does being a Christian make a difference to the way you would handle this situation?

### Closing Out

As you close the program, share the following thought: As Christians, we face the many of the same struggles in our friendships, our families, our dating relationships, that others do. Yet having Jesus in our hearts should change the way we relate to people. His Golden Rule tells us to treat others as we want to be treated. That’s not always easy, but it will revolutionize our relationships with the people in our lives.

### C O N S I D E R ...

- making a list of changes you feel you need to make to show genuine confession.
- working on one specific change this week. Ask God to give you the strength. Ask a trusted friend or family member to pray for you.

**PROGRAM TARGET:** To help youth recognize the potential of small groups for spiritual growth and explore the possibility of using small groups in their own lives.



## ***small groups***



### **Getting Ready**

•Give some thought to dividing your youth into small groups. It may be best if you select groups for them ahead of time to avoid the situation in which someone is left out and excluded when they select their own groups. But since you want this to be a meaningful and enjoyable experience, make sure everyone you place in a group is good friends with at least one other person in that group. Mix it up a bit though—try to break youth out of the “comfort zone” of meeting only with their best friends, but by the same token don’t put people you know won’t get along (such as a dating couple who have recently had a nasty breakup!) in the same small group.

### **Bible Text**

•Thief on the cross: Luke 23:39-43

### **Praise Time**

•Use modern/contemporary songs.

### **What to do**

Begin your meeting by explaining that you’re going to allow group members to explore the potential of a small-group prayer and Bible study, which many people have found to be a powerful aid to spiritual growth. Explain that they will

be divided into small groups, given a worksheet of activities to go through for about an hour together, and then given an opportunity to decide whether this small-group experience is something they would like to consider doing on a long-term basis.

•Divide your group into smaller groups of from 6-10 people each and give each group the worksheet on page 31. Send each group to a separate, private meeting space. Depending on the age and maturity level of your group you may want an adult leader to go with each group, but if your youth are sufficiently mature, the experience may be more powerful if the group is entirely peer-led.

### **Discussion Time**

See Small Group Worksheet on page 31

### **Closing Out**

Take 10 minutes together to discuss the small group experience—did you get anything out of it? Was it good? Is it something you’d like to do regularly with this group of people? If so, when and where could you meet? (Meeting once a week or once every two weeks, at a consistent time and place, works well). What sorts of things would you like to study and discuss in your Bible study time? If your group decides to make this a regular thing, or even to try it a few more times, make a commitment to the time, place, and study topic for your next meeting. You may want to set a limit on it for now (i.e., “We’ll try this once a week for the next six weeks and see how it goes”) so that it doesn’t seem like too major a commitment initially. After that trial time, you can discuss again and decide whether to continue meeting.

## SMALL GROUPS IN YOUTH MINISTRY

by Hiskia I. Missah, Editor, Youth Ministry Accent

The Strength and effectiveness of our youth ministry can be tested through the small Group in it. As Eliot Porter, an American photographer, said: "Sometimes you can tell a large story with a tiny subject."

A student of accounting in one of our universities committed suicide by hanging himself in his dormitory room. He was a devoted Seventh-day Adventist youth who read his Bible, attended church services regularly, and had a good outlook on life. What drove him to this untimely death? Apparently he had not found someone to share his problems with. Perhaps if he had found a friend, someone who would pray with him when everything seemed overwhelming, he could have been spared from this tragedy. Loneliness has become an epidemic in this modern society, contributing to the feeling that life is not worth living after all. This can lead someone to end his/her life.

In 1993 a study was done by the Commission on Youth of the Far Eastern Division, together with the theological seminary of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies AIIAS). For the years 1990-1995, 446,000 out of a total of 892,000 Seventh-day Adventist young people were projected to leave the church, while for the years 1995-2000, 612,500 out of 1,225,000 Seventh-day Adventist youth were declared lost. These were declared lost. These figures are very alarming. Some of the reasons for the loss are:

- lack of fellowship in the church
- lack of involvement in the church
- non-SDA friends
- non-SDA fiancé or spouse
- lack of attention

If the above reasons were reversed, they would be as follows:

- lots of fellowship in the church
- lots of involvement in the church
- SDA friends
- SDA fiancé/spouse
- lots of attention.

The question now is how to facilitate those better pictures into reality. The answer is through the small group, where friendship and fellowship are formed—a vital tool to make people feel loved and needed.

## Handout

### SMALL GROUP WORKSHEET

●**Opening activity:** Go around the circle and ask each group member: what was the best thing that happened to you this week? What was the worst thing? (5-10 mins)

●**Go around the circle once** for each of the following questions. Try to get everyone to participate, but don't force or pressure anyone: (15-20 mins)

- What was your favorite place to hang out when you were a little kid?
- Where was the place you felt safest as a child?
- Where do you go now when you need to feel safe?
- What kinds of situations make you feel unsafe, or scared?

●**Read Psalm 46 together as a group** and discuss the following questions, giving anyone who has anything to say a chance to speak: (20-25 mins)

- Was there anything you particularly liked, didn't like, felt strongly about, or didn't understand, in this psalm?
- What kind of situation do you think the psalmist was facing when he wrote this psalm?
- How can it be relevant to our lives today?
- In what situations do you feel like you need a refuge and a source of help?
- How can God provide us with strength and refuge—in a practical sense? Give an example or two.

●After the discussion has finished, move into prayer time by asking each person if they have personal needs or needs for anyone they know that should be remembered in prayer.

●Make a group prayer list, then pray together. You can choose one of several different ways to pray: select a few group members who are comfortable praying aloud to pray for everyone, remembering the requests on the list. Or, go around the circle and have everyone who feels comfortable doing so say a short prayer in turn. Or break off into pairs and pray with partners. Do what works well for your group. (10-15 minutes)



## STANDARD OF EFFICIENCY

*by Ellen G. White*

Grave responsibilities rest upon the youth. God expects much from the young men who live in this generation of increased light and knowledge. He expects them to impart this light and knowledge. He desires to use them in dispelling the error and superstition that cloud the minds of many. They are to discipline themselves by gathering up every jot and tittle of the opportunities and privileges given them. The work before them is waiting for their earnest effort, that it may be carried forward from point to point, as the time demands.

If the youth will consecrate their minds and hearts to God's service, they will reach a high standard of efficiency and usefulness. This is the standard that the Lord expects the youth to attain. To do less than this is to refuse to make the most of God-given opportunities. This will be looked upon as treason against God, a failure to work for the good of humanity.

### QUALIFYING FOR SERVICE

Those who strive to become laborers for God, who seek earnestly to acquire in order to impart, will constantly receive light from God that they may

be channels of communication. If, like Daniel, young men and young women will bring all their habits, appetites, and passions into conformity to the requirements of God, they will qualify themselves for higher work. They should put from their minds all that is cheap and frivolous. Nonsense and amusement-loving propensities should be discarded, as out of place in the life and experience of those who are living by faith in the Son of God, eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

They should realize that though all the advantages of learning may be within their reach, they may yet fail of obtaining that education which will fit them for work in some part of the Lord's vineyard. They cannot engage in God's service without the requisite qualifications of intelligent piety. If they give to pleasure and amusement the precious mind that should be strengthened by high and noble purposes, they degrade the powers that God has given them, and are guilty before Him, because they fail to improve their talents by wise use.

Their dwarfed spirituality is an offence to God. They taint and corrupt the minds of those with whom they

associate. By their words and actions they encourage a careless inattention to sacred things. Not only do they imperil their own souls, but their example is detrimental to all with whom they come in contact. They are utterly incompetent to represent Christ. Servants of sin, careless, reckless, and foolish, they scatter away from Him.

Those who are satisfied with low attainments fail of being workers together with God. To those who let the mind drift where it will drift if not guarded, Satan makes suggestions which so fill the mind that they are trained in his army to decoy other souls. They may make a profession of religion, they may have a form of godliness; but they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

### CLEVERNESS NOT PIETY

There are youth who have a certain kind of cleverness, which is acknowledged and admired by their associates, but their ability is not sanctified. It is not strengthened and solidified by the graces and trials of experience, and God cannot use it to benefit humanity and glorify His name. Under the guise of godliness, their powers are >>

being used to erect false standards, and the unconverted look to them as an excuse for their wrong course of action. Satan leads them to amuse their associates by their nonsense and so-called wit. Everything that they undertake is cheapening; for they are under the control of the tempter, who directs and fashions their characters, that they may do his work.

They have ability, but it is untrained; they have capacity, but it is unimproved. Talents have been given them; but they misuse and degrade them by folly, and drag others down to their own low level. Christ paid the ransom for their souls by self-denial, self-sacrifice, humiliation, by the shame and reproach He endured. This He did that He might rescue them from the bondage of sin, from the slavery of a master who cares for them only as he can use them to ruin souls. But they make the love of the Redeemer in their behalf of no avail to them, and He looks with sadness on their work.

Such youth meet with eternal loss. How will their fun and frolic appear to them in the day when every man shall receive from the Judge of all the earth according to the deeds done in the body? They have brought to the foundation wood, hay, and stubble, and all their life work will perish. What a loss!

O, how much better is the condition of those who act their part in God's service, looking to Jesus for His approval, writing daily in their account book their mistakes, their er-

rors, their sorrow, the victories they have gained over temptation, their joy and peace in Christ! Such youth will not have to meet their life record with shame and dismay. *Youth's Instructor*, June 22, 1899

## THE CHOSEN AGENCY

Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We

are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascent to Him, marked with out own individuality. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 100.

Taken from *Messages to Young People* by Ellen G. White: Chapter 7

## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION STARTERS

(*Messages to Young People*, chapter 7)

- ❶ What did Jesus mean when He said, "You, therefore, must be perfect [growing in complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity], as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48, 49 AMP)
- ❷ Give your opinion of these two statements,
  - (a) "If the youth will consecrate their minds and hearts to God's service, they will reach a high standard of efficiency and usefulness."
  - (b) "Nonsense and amusement-loving propensities should be discarded, as out of place in the life and experience of those who are living by faith in the Son of God..."
- ❸ Do you think Jesus had a sense of humor? Why or why not?
- ❹ What is this chapter saying about idle words (see the section Cleverness not Piety)?
- ❺ Discuss the following Bible texts, 2 Timothy 2: 16; 2 Peter 1:8; and Titus 3:14

# STARTER KIT

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter – Connecting with Family

●**LOVE PICNIC** Hold monthly, church-wide or area-wide family picnics complete with games, contests, and lots of good food and fun. During the happy gathering, have each young person in attendance give a short testimony (written in advance) telling what they like most about their family.

●**FAMILY POWER** Find specific needs within the church (maintenance, letter writing, visiting shut-ins, children leadership) and assign individual families to address those needs. Make sure that every member in the family is involved, working together toward a goal. Ask them to report results to the church.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – Connecting with Peers

●**PEER PRESSURE** Ask groups of young people to design a community project based on a single Bible passage. Have them use that text as their motto as they work the project, making sure that those who benefit from their efforts realize what's motivating them. Finally, invite each individual to report to the whole group how working with other young people drew them closer to God.

●**SERIES** Launch a one-week series of meetings in your church completely organized and presented by youth. The theme for each night should center on a specific opportunity for connecting with others. Include lots of music, skits, and short talks on the subject.

### BIBLE READER'S CHECKLIST:

Encourage your youth to read the AY Bible Year and Encounter Plans as part of their daily devotion.

Use this checklist of the AY Encounter Plan readings from the Bible and Prophets and Kings for your youth group, and for your personal spiritual enrichment. Give each young person a copy of this checklist. You may choose to give them a month at a time, a number of readings per week, or the entire list. Set goals and reward youth who have diligently completed the list with a certificate of achievement. Plan a special social activity for dedicated readers.

#### JULY

- 1. PK 392-394
- 2. PK 395-397
- 3. PK 398-401
- 4. PK 402-406
- 5. Jer. 1, 2, 3
- 6. Jer. 4, 5, 6
- 7. Jer. 7, 8, 9
- 8. Jer. 10, 11, 12, 13
- 9. Jer. 14, 15, 16, 17
- 10. Jer. 18, 19, 20
- 11. Jer. 21, 26
- 12. Lam. 3; PK 407, 408
- 13. PK 409-411
- 14. PK 412-414
- 15. PK 415-417
- 16. PK 418-421
- 17. Jer. 22, 23, 25
- 18. Jer. 34, 35, 36
- 19. Jer. 45, 46, 47, 48
- 20. Jer. 49; Ps. 9
- 21. 2 Kings 24; PK 422, 423
- 22. PK 424-426
- 23. PK 427-429
- 24. PK 430-432
- 25. PK 433-435
- 26. PK 436-439
- 27. Jer. 27, 28, 29, 52
- 28. Eze. 1, 2, 3, 4
- 29. Eze. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
- 30. Eze. 10, 11, 12, 13
- 31. Eze. 14, 15, 16

#### AUGUST

- 1. Eze. 17, 18, 19
- 2. Eze. 21, 23, 24, 25
- 3. PK 440-442
- 4. PK 443-445
- 5. PK 446-448
- 6. PK 449-451
- 7. 2 Kings 25; Eze. 29, 30; 2 Chron. 36;
- 8. Jer. 24, 37, 38
- 9. Jer. 39, 40, 41
- 10. Jer. 42, 43, 44
- 11. Lam. 1, 2, 4, 5
- 12. PK 452-454
- 13. PK 455-457
- 14. PK 458-460
- 15. PK 461-463
- 16. Jer. 30, 31, 32
- 17. Jer. 33; PK 464, 465
- 18. PK 466-470
- 19. PK 471-473
- 20. PK 474-476
- 21. Dan. 1; PK 479, 480
- 22. PK 481-483
- 23. PK 484-486
- 24. PK 487-490
- 25. Dan. 2; PK 491
- 26. PK 492-494
- 27. PK 495-497
- 28. PK 498-500
- 29. PK 501, 502; Dan. 3
- 30. PK 503-505
- 31. PK 506-508

#### SEPTEMBER

- 1. PK 509-511
- 2. PK 512, 513; Dan. 4
- 3. Eze. 26, 27, 28
- 4. PK 514-516
- 5. PK 517-519
- 6. PK 520, 521
- 7. Dan. 5
- 8. Jer. 50, 51
- 9. Isa. 13, 24, 47
- 10. Joel 1; Micah 4; Ps. 91
- 11. PK 522-524
- 12. PK 527-529
- 13. PK 530-532
- 14. PK 533-535
- 15. PK 536-538
- 16. Dan. 6, 12; PK 539
- 17. PK 540-542
- 18. PK 543-545
- 19. PK 546-548
- 20. Dan. 7, 8, 9
- 21. Dan. 11; Ezra 1, 2, 3
- 22. Ps. 105, 107, 126
- 23. PK 551-553
- 24. PK 554-556
- 25. PK 557-559
- 26. PK 560-564
- 27. PK 565, 566
- 28. Ezra 4, 5, 6; Dan. 10
- 29. Hag. 1, 2; Zech. 1, 2
- 30. PK 567-569

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