

Adventist World

12/2020

**From
Obstacles to
Opportunities**
Page 10

**Word,
Fellowship,
Table, and
Prayer**
Page 24

**The Gift
Keeps Giving**
Page 28

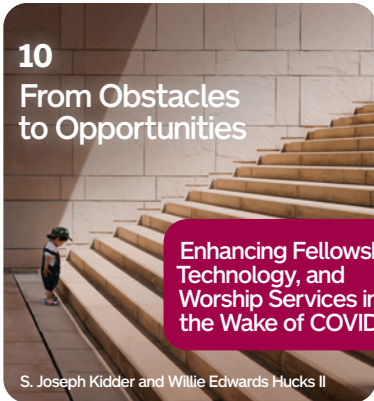
Urgent Update

ChurchOS 21.0 provides important security, stability, and usability updates for post-pandemic church life, and is recommended for all members. Would you like to install?

Yes

No





16 Global View

God Will Have a People
Ted N. C. Wilson

18 Feature

How COVID-19 Has Affected
Adventist Education
Julian Melgosa

20 Millennial Voices

Red Numbers
Carolina Ramos

21 Faith in Action

The Great Commission or
the Great Suggestion
Rachael C. Duncan

22 Discovering the Spirit of Prophecy

La Konflikto de la Epokoj
Beth Thomas



24 What We Believe

Word, Fellowship, Table, and Prayer
Alain Coralie

26 Bible Questions Answered

Crime and Punishment

27 Health & Wellness

Screen Fatigue

28 May I Tell You a Story?

The Gift Keeps Giving

30 Growing Faith

When God Turned the Plane Around

A Resilient People

BY BILL KNOTT

Within the first six weeks of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the cultural prophets began predicting how dramatically the crisis would alter the future of faith. Magazine and newspaper columns filled up with ever more dire descriptions of social structures that would be forever changed by protracted disruption, including the local church.

Sermons as we know them would disappear: the future would be dominated by informal fellowship and conversational teaching. Small groups and house churches would proliferate, leaving sanctuaries silent—monuments to an era that had disappeared. The music of the church—great hymns and stirring anthems—would succumb to choruses that could be simultaneously sung by 10 or 20 people camped on Zoom.

It sounded as though the future would declare the rightness of those who having been hoping to dismantle church life as many of us value it—in a building; singing faith in unison and harmony; quieting ourselves beneath the weekly ministry of the Word; finding joy in fellow believers we can greet, enjoy, embrace. All these would disappear, the pundits said, to be replaced with all things virtual.

It is a mercy that the future almost never unfolds as the loudest voices predict it will. Nine months along, this crisis has birthed a multitude of new ways of “doing church”—some temporary and fitted to the moment; others, long-term gains for God’s so patient people. Necessity has once again proved to be the mother of invention, and an explosion of gifted creativity has sparked unexpected growth in many churches. Other congregations struggle to survive this long gestation period, praying in the loneliness for the night to soon be over.



In truth, God’s people have been here so many times before. In every century since Jesus ascended, those who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” have endured hard and painful times—sometimes stretching into years and even decades. Their liberties have been restricted; their movements watched and regulated. “They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground” (Heb. 11:38, NRSV).^{*} Uncounted millions lost their lives to tyrannies more deadly than this pandemic ever will be.

And still the church endured, for it is in the very nature of Christ’s church to endure hardship and adversity. The apostle Peter, who knew a great deal about suffering, reminded us: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12, 13, NRSV). The Word was preached; rich hymns were sung. Disciples were still made, and witness multiplied. Men and women gathered to immerse new faith, share a holy meal together, and celebrate new life.

In grace, Christ’s church persisted. By grace, His church will persevere. The resurrection life of Christ is also in His people.

^{*} Bible texts credited to NRSV are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

We believe in the power of prayer, and we welcome prayer requests that can be shared at our weekly staff worship every Wednesday morning. Send your requests to prayer@adventistworld.org, and pray for us as we work together to advance God’s kingdom.

Prayer has become even more essential to Adventist congregations, institutions, and leaders during the current pandemic. This picture shows (from right) Leonard Johnson, executive secretary of the Inter-American Division (IAD), together with Elie Henry, president of the IAD, and Filiberto Verduzco, division treasurer, leading out in prayer during a crucial July 10, 2020, executive board meeting of the IAD via Zoom that dealt with the division's finances.

Photo credit: Libna Stevens, Inter-American Division



687,432

Number reflecting church-member increase for 2018, based on the final statistical report presented by General Conference (GC) executive secretary, G. T. Ng, on October 7, 2020, to the GC Executive Committee. World church membership stood at 21,414,779 at the end of 2018. Ng reminded church leaders that the Seventh-day Adventist Church operates in 215 of the 235 countries recognized by the United Nations.

“If we are to be truly Christlike, we must be eager to identify and take care of those who are unprotected, wounded, and without an advocate.”

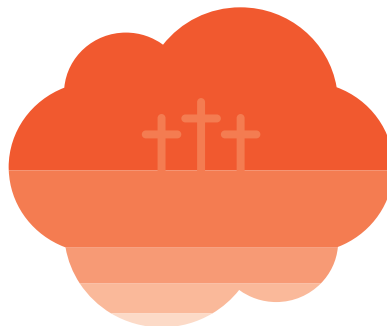
—David Williams, an Adventist Harvard University professor and researcher, during a presentation to the church’s Executive Committee on October 12, 2020. Williams focused on confronting domestic violence and abuse within the framework of the enditnow initiative.

“We will never run out of money before the Lord decides we should run out of money. We will be faithful, and we will do our best with what the Lord has entrusted us. The rest is up to Him. He will see us through.”

—Juan Prestol-Puesán, General Conference treasurer, at the conclusion of the Annual Council financial report to the Executive Committee of the General Conference, October 8, 2020, at which he acknowledged the significant financial impact of the global pandemic, including an estimated US\$26 million shortfall in the operating budget of the General Conference.

Time Spent Thinking About Jesus’ Life

In the 2017-2018 General Conference-commissioned Global Church Member Survey, researchers asked how much time members spent thinking about Jesus’ life.



- **Daily or more than once a day (50.98%)**
- **More than once a week (23.12%)**
- **About once a week (12.23%)**
- **Less than once a month (9.34%)**
- **Never (4.33%)**

Source: ASTR Research and Evaluation Team in collaboration with Meta-Analysis Research Team, Andrews University, n = 51,507

49

Number of years James Nix, recently retired Ellen G. White Estate director, served the Adventist Church in different roles. Nix was presented a Lifetime Achievement Award on October 11, 2020, capping his past 20 years of leadership as director of the White Estate. In 1981 Nix facilitated the establishment of Adventist Historic Properties, Inc., now known as Adventist Heritage Ministries.

59

Number of Adventists who passed the national physician licensure examination in the Philippines, given in March and September by the country’s Professional Regulation Commission. Philippines-based Southern Asia-Pacific Division president Saw Samuel reminded the new physicians of their special calling as missionary doctors.

“When it comes to the issue of racism and the current global demand for racial justice, more is expected from Christians. Because Christians embrace the heart of God, who loves the whole world.”

—Ganoune Diop, director of the Adventist Church’s office of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, on October 11, 2020. Diop spoke during a session of the Annual Council of the Executive Committee of the General Conference that focused on recognizing and combating racism, tribalism, ethnocentrism, casteism, clannism, classism, and any supremacist ideology and practice in society and the church.

“We feel we are paying a debt because of the assistance each of us has received from God as ‘strangers and pilgrims’ on this earth. It is something that compels us to assist others, especially the vulnerable.”

—Robert Mandache, Muntenia Conference president in Romania, during the official opening of the “Hope for Immigrants” Education Center in Bucharest on October 7, 2020. ADRA Romania, as well as several Adventist Church organizations and anonymous donors, contributed to make this project a reality. The center offers Romanian, English, and Arabic language courses, as well as classes in tailoring and music, and haircuts for men.

450

Number of families affected by the flooding in Ou Tapong, Tropeang Chorng, Metoek, and Snam Preah communes, Bakan district, Pursat province, Cambodia. The families received food assistance from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), in cooperation with the Cambodia Adventist Mission and local authorities. More than 39,000 households were affected by the sequence of tropical storms that hit the country between October 6 and October 13, 2020. ➔



Photo: ADRA Cambodia

Kiswahili Speakers Can Now Read *Adventist World* in Their Mother Tongue

By Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist World*

Adventist Review Ministries launched new WhatsApp channel app.

A new WhatsApp channel will allow millions of Kiswahili-speaking Seventh-day Adventist church members and others to read *Adventist World* magazine and related content in their mother tongue. The new resource, which will serve East and Central Africa and the African diaspora, was launched during the Adventist Church Executive Committee meetings on October 12, 2020.

Church leaders emphasized that the new development highlights the traditional importance the magazine has enjoyed as an evangelistic tool across Africa, and opens a world of possibilities, as it will reach millions with the Adventist message.

"*Adventist World* has been a tool of evangelism in our region," Blasious Ruguri, president of the church's East-Central Africa Division, said. "Our people have cherished it." Adding a Kiswahili digital option to the print English edition can reinforce this evangelistic use even more, church leaders said.

A LONG JOURNEY

Bill Knott, Adventist Review Ministries executive director responsi-

ble for the publishing of *Adventist World*, shared that as early as 2008, then-Adventist Church president Jan Paulsen gave Adventist Review Ministries the challenge of printing and distributing an edition in Kiswahili in East Africa. For various reasons it was not possible at the time, he said.

Knott explained the initiative's strategic importance. "Kiswahili-speaking and -reading Adventists account for more than 2.3 million members of the church, about 11 percent of the world total," he shared.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Adventist Review Ministries and others to reimagine how to go about mission. "We had to move some printers when others temporarily closed," Knott shared. "We moved some editions from print to digital distribution, which made us all think about new ways of delivering on our promise of a Kiswahili *Adventist World* edition."

HOW THE APP WORKS

The new application is based on the popular social media app WhatsApp, a freeware, cross-

platform messaging application that allows users to send text messages and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, documents, and other media. Once registered, users get access to a Kiswahili translation of *Adventist World* magazine articles and news published every month, church leaders explained.

Knott said that news about the WhatsApp channel delivering *Adventist World* is expected to go to 100,000 "influencers," who are then urged to share the magazine with their contacts. "We've moved from a paper, print, and logistics approach for this special edition to a human-to-human smartphone delivery that will spread virally to Adventists and those who are not yet Adventists," he said.

IMPORTANCE FOR MISSION

Church leaders emphasized that across many places in Africa, Kiswahili is becoming a *lingua franca* as increasing numbers of people communicate in that language. "It is a magnificent language," Adventist Church president Ted N. C. Wilson emphasized. "[This app] is a wonderful opportunity to give Kiswahili a huge push for presenting the worldwide work of Seventh-day Adventists."

Ruguri said he has confidence that *Adventist World* will "continue to be an evangelistic tool, a unifying factor," for the church. "Especially in those places where people think the Adventist Church is a small church, when people open the magazine they come to discover that it is a global church," he said. ©

A graphic with a red background and a black header. The header contains the text "WhatsApp Number" in white. Below the header, the phone number "+1 240 540 3000" is displayed in large white font. To the right of the number is a small circular profile picture of Bill Knott and the WhatsApp logo. Below the number is a QR code and the URL "https://bit.ly/swahiliworld" in white. At the bottom left is the "ADVENTIST REVIEW" logo, and at the bottom right is the "Powered by Zoom" logo.

Photo: Adventist Review Ministries

Adventist Leaders Call to Tackle the Mental Health Pandemic

By Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist World*

Several church departments partner to support a care initiative.



Photo: Adventist Health Ministries

“Every year about 800,000 people globally die to suicide. That is about one suicide per 40 seconds,” said Torben Bergland, Adventist Health Ministries associate director and psychiatrist in a promotional video that a group of Adventist leaders are using as a call to action to tackle mental health issues.

“For every suicide there may be more than 20 who attempt suicide. For every suicide there’s more than 1,000 who suffer from a mental illness, a total of about 1 billion, most commonly anxiety and depression. Suicide numbers are not even the tip of the vast iceberg of human suffering,” Bergland said.

The video sought to introduce what church health leaders have called the COVID-19 Mental Health Initiative, and was livestreamed to hundreds of members of the General Conference Executive Committee on October 8, 2020.

A DIRE SITUATION

Adventist Health Ministries director Peter Landless acknowledged that mental health issues have been on the radar of Adventist ministries

for years. The dire situation has been exacerbated by the prolonged lockdowns imposed in 2020 as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

For Adventist education associate director and psychologist Julian Melgosa, it is a situation that has brought dramatic increases in the levels of distress and mental illness due to the disruptions to daily life, the stress and isolation. “A recent [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] report from the U.S. indicated a tripling of anxiety disorders in the general population, and a fourfold increase of depressive disorders,” he said.

Katia Reinert, an Adventist Health Ministries associate director and family nurse practitioner, noted that among all age groups, young people seem to struggle the most. “In the age group 18 to 24, 75 percent reported struggling with mental health or substance abuse, and 25 percent reported seriously having considered suicide in the past 30 days. This is serious,” she said.

A CALL FOR ACTION

Bergland said that given the current state of affairs, Adventist

Church members and leaders need to act. “This must be a matter of utmost urgency for every leader, every pastor, every educator, every parent, every friend,” Bergland said. “If we want to reach people with present and eternal truths, we must also care for and minister to their present needs. That’s what Jesus did.”

Elaine Oliver, associate director of Family Ministries at the General Conference, shared that several departments of the world church are partnering to tackle this issue. “Health, Youth, Family, and Education are working together on this,” she said.

The actions that make up the initiative include sharing recommended resources on how to support mental health. Coordinators also hope to run a social media campaign on several relevant platforms. They also said they will host webinars, interviews, and panel talks online.

Bergland concluded by emphasizing that partnerships such as this one can start to bridge the gap. “If we can stand together and work together, we can make a difference,” he said. ©

1,138,508

Membership of the Southern Asia Division (SUD) as of June 30, 2020

“Eighty percent of church-goers in Western Jharkhand Section are worshipping in Maranatha-constructed churches. As a direct result of the churches that Maranatha built in this region, Western Jharkhand Section is the first self-supporting mission field in the Northern India Union.”

—Vinish Wilson, Maranatha’s India country director.

April 29, 2019

Date on which the Northeast Adventist College, located at Khliehtyrshi, West Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya, India, received its official university charter from the regional government of the Indian state of Meghalaya. Following receipt of the charter, the International Board of Education (IBE) of the General Conference conducted a site visit before the COVID-19 shutdown and recommended the accreditation of the institution to the IBE. Northeast Adventist University is sandwiched below the Himalayan Mountains and Bhutan to the north, China in the northeast, Myanmar to the east, Bangladesh to the south, mainland India on the other side of a narrow land bridge on the west and Sikkim to the northwest. 📍

“COVID-19 has brought many challenges to our church gatherings of study, worship, and fellowship. But those very challenges have opened before us a multitude of opportunities: for more personal study of God’s Word, for online worship, for the strengthening of family togetherness, for neighborhood sharing. Faith has the power to turn every ‘no’ into a powerful ‘yes.’”

—Ezras Lakra, president, Southern Asia Division, at a meeting of church leaders for planning and leadership.

10

Number of languages spoken in the territory of the Southern Asia Division that the Adventist World Radio digital evangelism initiative “Unlocking Bible Prophecies” was translated into. The series was held October 3-16, 2020, and languages included English, Bangla, Bhojpuri, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Mizo, Santali, Tamil, and Telugu. *Adventist World Digest*, a quarterly collection of the best from the magazine, is also published in 14 languages in the SUD.

2,000

Number of churches built since 1998 in the territory of the Southern Asia Division by Maranatha Volunteers International, a Seventh-day Adventist supporting ministry based in the United States.



The administrative team of Northeast Adventist University with members of the Adventist Accrediting Association site visit team in front row.

Photo: Lisa Beardsley-Hardy



Photo: fizkes / iStock / Getty Images Plus / Getty Images

The Touch of God When We Need It Most

In 2020 we have been reminded of our innate, human need and desire to be touched.

If I were to ask you what is the preeminent sense, how would you answer?

The gourmand may say that taste is the best sense to have. The sound engineer or someone like Graeme Clark, who invented the cochlear implant, may say hearing is the most important sense. If we could ask famous ophthalmologist Fred Hollows the same question, he would undoubtedly say that sight is the greatest of all senses. If we could have asked Helen Keller, who could neither see nor hear, what would she have said? I am quite confident that she would have said touch is the indispensable, paramount, even preeminent sense.

OUR PREEMINENT SENSE

If we should give serious thought to this question, I think we would agree with Helen Keller. Try to imagine that you have suddenly lost all sense of touch; not only hand touch, but touching by any part of your body.

You would soon be a body of bruises. But that wouldn't be the worst of it. You could not feel the stroke of a loved one's hand, nor feel anything at all when they kissed you—nor could you meaningfully respond. You would not know how much to chew your food, as your tongue would have no sensation. At the other end of that journey, you would not be able to tell when your excretory organs should be used. Now, that would be a problem, wouldn't it?

The sense of touch was given to us by our Maker for a number of reasons, including enjoyment, safety, comfort, and our emotional needs.

In the COVID-19 virus environment we have been living inside for some time, so the touches we're used to receiving from loved ones and friends are significantly reduced. We no longer shake hands, hug people, or kiss those close to us.

GOD'S TOUCH

In the Bible much is said about "touch." The gospel descriptions of the ministry of Jesus show that touch played a significant part in Christ's ministry of healing and giving life to the dead. Not only that, but imagine the joy little children had as Jesus blessed them, placed His hands upon them, and gave these little ones a loving hug.

The first warning about the improper use of touch was given by God Himself, when He warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or they would die (Gen. 2:17; 3:3). Much later Israel was warned not even to touch unclean foods or other unclean things (see Lev. 11–15). God also warned that His anointed ones and His prophets were not to be touched in a harmful way (1 Chron. 16:22). In Christ's time faith was wonderfully demonstrated when a woman found Jesus and touched the hem of His garment and was immediately healed (Luke 8:43-46).

When Myra Brooks Welch wrote the well-known poem "The Touch of the Master's Hand," little could she have guessed how popular this piece would become, right down to our day. The poem tells the story of an old, battered violin that is about to be sold at auction for just \$3. But then a violinist steps out of the audience and plays the instrument, after which it is sold for \$3,000. This poem is appealing because the author, through the figure of the old violinist, turns our attention to the Master of us all, who, with His touch, makes all the difference in our lives. ©

William Ackland is retired in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

Focus

From Obstacles

Churches rising
above the
challenges of
COVID-19

to

Opportunities



S. JOSEPH KIDDER



WILLIE EDWARD
HUCKS II

During the first week of March, I (Willie) was teaching a class in pastoral ministry in California. Although the American states along the coast of the Pacific Ocean comprised the growing epicenter of what would soon be declared a pandemic, none of the approximately 20 of us in that small classroom expressed any long-term concerns. But by the end of the second week in March, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools and churches began closing.

Welcome to life in a COVID-19 world, where remote teaching, remote learning, remote worship and Sabbath School, and remote prayer meetings are the norm. Indeed, both academic life and church life were significantly altered. At the first signs of viral spread we continued to assemble, but with the warning that we could not exist in close proximity to each other. No handshakes, no hugs, and no fellowship meals.

Weeks became months, and the impact on worship, fellowship, and mission was felt. We seminary professors had not prepared our soon-to-graduate seminarians for this eventuality. Seasoned pastors were also unprepared for the tsunami striking the shores of our churches.

As the unimaginable year that is 2020 transitions into 2021, we stand convinced that this new normal must be more than a revisiting of the old normal. Rather, it must be a *revisioning* of a better normal. And this better normal must impact five areas of church life: worship, fellowship, ministry, mission/evangelism, and prayer. According to Acts 2 and 4, these form the core of Christian life. Far from COVID-19 bringing an end to church life as we knew it, it actually serves a greater purpose: leading us into church life as God sees it.

WORSHIP IN THE COVID-19 ERA AND BEYOND

COVID-19 affected people in different ways. Some who were on the fence before became active in worship and ministry. Some seekers became spiritual, taking God very seriously.

A Pew survey¹ found that one third or more of those who had previously attended church regularly do not bother to watch online services. For those whose church affiliation was already tenuous, the disconnect may be permanent.

We found the same to be true in Adventist churches. Of those churches that have opened their doors to in-person services, their attendance is 30 to 60 percent less than their pre-COVID-19 attendance.

Clearly, the way churchgoers are reacting to the pandemic depends in large part on their past experiences and present situation. Some have had a renewal of faith, while others have had a crisis of faith. Many seekers became fully devoted followers of Jesus as they saw how God worked in their lives and the lives of their loved ones. They experienced miraculous healing, seeing the power of God and wanting more of Him. Yet others quietly moved from God because of discouragement, crises of faith, and alienation from church family.

We classify those who drifted from the church into four categories: (1) those who were weak in their faith drifted further from God; (2) people who are afraid to attend for health reasons; (3) people who are discouraged with God because of loss during the crisis, such as the death of a loved one or restrictions they have experienced; (4) those who for convenience might stay home and surf the Internet for spiritual growth.

Churches, as always, need to have a twofold emphasis, discipling believers and evangelizing the world. That is even more so today. If the church wants to be healthy and faithful to its mission, it needs to intentionally do everything it can to bring back its members and assimilate into the life of the church those who are seeking Him.

In writing this article, we reviewed the literature and scouted worldwide for inspiring stories of churches, pastors, and members during and after the shutdown. We discovered that about 10 to 15 percent of churches did little to nothing during the pandemic. On the other hand,

about 10 to 15 percent did many things, such as visiting their members, being present on social media, doing Bible studies, and conducting evangelistic meetings. The rest of the churches offered worship services and Sabbath School on Zoom.

We learned many lessons. The more the members did in touching lives and meeting the needs of others, the more the church was able to keep a higher percentage of its members and friends connected to the church. Moreover, tithe and offerings increased, sometimes even higher than prior to the advent of the pandemic. Also, more of their members became active, especially in technology and social media. We also learned that there is no substitute for old-fashioned visitation and touching lives in a personal and authentic way.

Here are several lessons that churches will do well to pay attention to.²

NEW OPPORTUNITIES: MULTIPLE WORSHIP SERVICES

Historically the church has dedicated three or four hours on Sabbath morning for its worship and ministries. The pandemic challenged us to think creatively to come up with other options, new formats, and new places.

Pastors told us that the pandemic created a new revival and spiritual awakening for many people and opportunities to be creative and innovative in communicating the gospel. Many churches had an online attendance far exceeding their church attendance prior to the crisis.

A church in Chicago that had about 150 in attendance before COVID-19 has more than 1,500 people online. Many people are becoming serious seekers of God, finding hope and comfort in Him.

Hyveth Williams, homiletics professor at the Seventh-day

Adventist Theological Seminary and pastor of the Grace Place in South Bend, Indiana, told us that since it has gone on Zoom and various digital platforms, its audience has increased dramatically. The Grace Place attendance prior to the pandemic was fewer than 100 people. Today they have about 22,000 people watching the worship services each weekend from almost every continent. "God is doing great things," says Williams. "He has blessed us richly."

This happened to many churches regardless of size. Rodney Mills, executive secretary of the Upper Columbia Conference, headquartered in Spokane, Washington, said, "When pastors confessed that their knowledge of technology is very limited, many young people stepped up to the challenge and created many presences for the church on the various social media. Many of those young people who were inactive in the churches are now very active."

Many churches started lives-treaming. But this is the minimum the church can do. We see churches present on all social media all the time. Others are offering worship services at multiple times, such as during Sabbath morning, afternoon, and evening. They also are repeating the cycle on Sunday and other days of the week.

NEW FORMAT: FOCUS ON GOD

The consensus, after speaking with many pastors, is that worship services today must be simple, focused, and shorter. Simple worship is better. Focused and shorter services leave the audience wanting more.

Kevin Smith told us, "We have only a short song service, about five to seven minutes, short children's story; about five to seven minutes, and a short and focused sermon; about 25 to 35 minutes in length."

Smith continued: "Shorten the sermon and focus it. If you do that, you increase the possibilities of remembering the main points of the sermon."

Worship is by definition connecting with God and experiencing Him in a personal, intimate way. Worship takes place when our hearts are touched by the heart of God. Therefore, why would we include anything that doesn't focus on God and the gospel?

Ask of every element of the worship service: "Does this focus on God?" If not, either remove that element or place it toward the beginning of the worship gathering. Such items as announcements, the welcoming of guests, and greeting one another may have a legitimate place, but they should be accomplished in a way that won't break people's focus on the Lord and the logical flow of the worship experience.

Streamline elements in the worship experience, thus creating the added benefit of more focused and impactful time spent together. This worship experience should be uplifting, positive, and full of

hope. "If there is any time in which people need hope, it is today," said Moise Ratsara, a pastor in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Organizing a worship committee can help to keep you on track. This committee should include not only musically talented people but people savvy in technology as well.

NEW PLACES: DIFFERENT LOCATIONS

Because of space limitations, churches are finding creative ways to bring their members back to church and attract new ones. Some are converting their parking lot into a drive-in church; others are converting the parking lot into a church that manages to uphold social distancing guidelines; others are using their school playground for a meeting place; others offer multiple services in church buildings to maximize the number of people who come.

There's no limit to creativity if we are humble and willing to be guided by God and release the creative power of the congregation.

PRAY A LOT

A worship service's effectiveness does not come from the excellent manner in which the service is conducted, or the talents of the worship leaders, or the effectiveness of the sermons. It comes from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Spirit convicts hearts and changes lives.

We discovered from research, observation, and interviews that churches where God is worshipped and glorified, and people are changed and transformed, are churches that pray a lot. They pray before, during, and after worship services. Pastors, leaders, and members take time before Sabbath School and worship to pray over every one of the pews for everyone who comes to church, asking God to show up and do something amazing in their midst. To improve your worship service, pray a lot.

FELLOWSHIP DURING COVID-19

In February 2020 the church I (Willie) attend added a second



Photo: Ian Flores

Enhancing Fellowship in the Wake of COVID-19

- Use e-mails, text messages, and e-newsletters more than normal to communicate the life of the church, emphasizing that the congregation is still family and that the church will always be more than a building.
- Create excuses to have drive-by events. Celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, bridal showers, etc.
- Maximize Zoom and its breakout rooms for creative ways to experience social interaction. Don't limit Zoom to Sabbath School, divine worship, prayer meeting, and board and business meetings.
- Make Zoom and other interactive platforms your colleague in *koinonia*, thus replacing the novel coronavirus with something else novel that proves attractive for members young and old alike.

worship service, which was preceded by a 30-minute interlude dedicated to fellowship. During that half hour those who had just finished Sabbath School could meet with those who were arriving for the second service and enjoy fruit juices, hot beverages (February in Michigan is still cold), fruit, and bite-sized pastries. Tasty treats notwithstanding, the highlight of the time spent in the dining facility was the *koinonia*, the fellowship, the getting-to-know-you opportunities afforded—especially for visiting with guests and community friends.

After March 7 it all came to a sudden and unexpected halt. Far from seeing this new reality as permanent, we now had to engage in revisioning the concept of *koinonia* (fellowship). In doing so, we were forced to reexamine our theology of the church in an effort to redefine the meaning of *church*. And it's not just our church. Looking at the concept of *church* may be the best thing to happen to

congregations in a long time.

In the short term, churches resorted to Zoom technology. Pastors and others quickly discovered the versatility offered through this platform. Its breakout rooms allow anywhere from one-on-one engagement to larger-group interaction.

Its shortcomings, however, were evident as well. Participants could retain relative anonymity by turning off their video. So prior to March 2020 a person could avoid fellowship simply by making a conscious decision not to attend congregational events, be they worship, prayer meeting, or social activities. Post-March 2020, parishioners can treat church events as they would a buffet: entering in and out of church life (theirs or others), sampling what they want—while minimizing visual or auditory contact. They can enter into the world of other participants while exercising autonomy in determining their own exposure.

COVID-19 has positioned today's church to innovate as it relates to creating an environment for fellowship, to provide unique avenues for face-to-face communion that affirms God's *church*, His body of believers.

The church is uniquely positioned to minister to people as never before. Being locked down for months created a yearning and desire to connect with others. Christians can be instruments to alleviate the loneliness and isolation of others. The Sabbath School class that I (Joseph) attend went online in early March; soon people from outside our church began joining us. They found us on the Internet. They were lonely, and our small group brought God's presence and love to them.

Early Christians clearly emphasized the importance of fellowship (Acts 2:42).

The New Testament concept of *koinonia* expresses the idea of being together for mutual benefit. "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,



Photo: Luis Quintero

Enhancing Worship Services in the Wake of COVID-19

- Every worship experience should be positive. People should leave feeling hopeful and inspired.
- Intentionally educate your congregation about how to worship and why we worship.
- Keep the children's story about five minutes long. Make sure the presenter has enthusiasm and can relate to kids.
- Ask for feedback on a regular basis from the members and leadership team. This will help define the areas in the service that are beneficial and those that still need to be worked on.
- Practice all elements of the worship service, not just the music. Ellen White wrote: "[Worship leaders] should devote some time to practice, that they may employ this talent to the glory of God."* It is by mindful practice that we are able to hone our God-given talents for the purpose of giving glory to Him.

* Ellen G. White, *The Voice in Speech and Song* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1988), p. 434.

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24, 25).

Countless individuals have shared with us during the past several months that they realize that just because the church doors have been closed for health reasons, that doesn't mean the church has closed. *Intellectually* they realized that the church isn't a building. But now they *practically* realize that the church is a community committed to worship and fellowship. Creativity brings them closer to one another as they anticipate a brighter future.

The churches we attend represent countless others worldwide that have engaged in unique ways to celebrate biblical communion. In our bulletins we recognize birthdays and wedding anniversaries for the week or month; but bulletins don't exist in many churches during a pandemic. Technology bridges the gap, as churches turn to text alerts and voice messages to share the latest announcements. The same works during graduation season. How excited are young people to know that the pastor and others remember them during their special moments.

Many churches have discovered new ways to express the biblical concept of fellowship, *koinonia*: church members gather to caravan by the home of someone celebrating a birthday, graduating from high school, or those who depend on Sabbath worship service and a meal for fellowship to assuage their loneliness. On a few occasions we have even had drive-by bridal showers in the church parking lot, where physical distancing was maintained and designated individuals collected gifts from those who drove through, placing them on tables. My (Willie's) daughter and her husband, who married in May 2020, were surprised with an

impromptu parking lot reception, complete with honking horns upon their exiting the building. Many of them were members from the church we attended years ago.

The novel coronavirus has accomplished for many what was deemed impossible by some. It has shown us the true definition of *church*, of *fellowship*. Fellowship need not take place exclusively in a church building or in someone's home. Fellowship is a lifestyle that affirms each individual and strengthens the participating body, creating a lifetime of memories and the bonding of saints to one another.

BEGINNING AGAIN

The fear that existed in the minds of many was that worship and fellowship would grind to a halt as a result of COVID-19. These examples prove quite the opposite, as every challenge provides opportunities to revisit how we approach church life. Not only have pastors and other leaders discovered fresh ways to reinvent how they deliver Sabbath School, prayer meeting, youth programming, etc.—they have realized growth in attendance to degrees they never imagined, expanding the reach of their ministries.

May the same be said of your church as well. ☺

¹ www.pewforum.org/2020/08/07/attending-and-watching-religious-services-in-the-age-of-the-coronavirus/, accessed September 8, 2020.

² We do not deal with what churches need to do to increase the safety of their members and visitors. This information is available through the local, county, and state health departments.

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What's Needed?

Effective post-COVID-19 ministry does not necessarily need high-tech equipment to reach members. Here are some suggestions to connect digitally with members during a pandemic on a low budget:

- Churches all around the world have used smartphones to livestream worship services, music concerts, weddings, funerals, and more. Livestreaming on YouTube and Facebook is relatively easy to set up.
- Few churches have a budget for expensive HD or 4K cameras, but low-cost alternatives beyond a smartphone camera are becoming more and more available, offering good quality.
- Invite your teenagers and young adults to help set up a viable communication strategy for your church in your particular context. This will also help them find their vital role in your congregation.
- Establish group chats on free social communication apps, such as Google Hangouts, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. Many members are already familiar with these tools.
- Don't forget those members who don't own a smartphone, computer, or tablet.



God Will Have a People

Characteristics of a last-day movement

God's people in the last days will give up selfish, human devising. They will be humble and loyal to God, not exhibiting a spirit of rebellion or self-centeredness but submitting to the love of Christ. This people will plead for the falling of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. They will lift up the Word of God and believe every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. They will proclaim the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 and the fourth angel of Revelation 18, calling people out of confusion and back to the true worship of God. They will recognize the seventh-day Sabbath as the special seal of God in opposition to the mark of the beast, which will manifest itself in the future as acceptance of Sunday—or any other day—as the day of worship advocated by the beast.

This people will not be swayed by cultural deviations from biblical truth. They will not be deterred or distracted by anything deemed politically correct in the social, cultural, religious, economic, or political arenas. They will be completely aligned with God's biblical plans, His prophetic revelations, His saving power, His holy Word, His Spirit of prophecy instructions, His overriding love, His commandments, and His plans for His church.

God's people will preach, live, and witness to others of His eternal love, His grace, His righteousness, His salvation, His three angels' messages, and Christ's soon coming. God will have a people of whom He will say, "You are My people!" And they will respond by saying, "You are my God!" (Hosea 2:23).

God will have a people who love Him so much they connect with Him daily. Regardless of what is thrown at them, they are resilient and make the Lord their refuge and strength. They stand stalwart

This article is abridged from a sermon delivered at Annual Council on October 10, 2020. Elements of the oral style have been retained. The full sermon is available at www.pastortedwilson.org/news/god-will-have-a-people/.—Editors.

At the end of time God will, however, have a people, a people who will remain true to pure truth, to a full biblical message, to the mission entrusted to them by God Himself. They will lean on Christ for all their needs. They will fully accept Christ's righteousness and His indwelling power to develop their characters through His leading as they hasten His second coming.

Ellen White wrote: "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.' Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain."¹

through the power of the Holy Spirit before the agencies and forces of evil who will never conquer them. God is on the side of His faithful people.

All through the ages God has had His people. Hebrews 11 outlines some of God's amazingly faithful people, who overcame tremendous challenges by faith reflected in God's people to the end of time.

TRYING TIMES

During the past eight months this world has been thrown into confusion and disarray. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought physical destruction and great confusion. Many people have died. The world has been drastically affected by the economic downturn, resulting in financial turmoil and loss of employment. Racial and human relations tensions have strained the fabric of society and challenged people to show Christian respect and dignity to sons and daughters of God, regardless of where they come from, or their educational or socioeconomic background. Natural calamities have wreaked havoc. The devil has attacked biblical marriage as outlined in the Holy Scriptures. His attacks will become much stronger against the seventh-day Sabbath. Religious liberty and freedom of conscience will be in jeopardy all over this globe.

This is now the world in which we live: a world in which God has people who will point others to the only One who can provide stability, understanding, hope, and a complete change of heart. Our actions toward each other will be a heaven-directed witness that we are truly God's people.

The prophecies of Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation are unfolding right on time. My brothers and sisters, let's prepare for the future by placing ourselves in God's hands completely by adhering to the

Word of God as it reads, by reading and being instructed through the Spirit of Prophecy, by earnest prayer and supplication to God, and by letting the Holy Spirit guide our words and actions.

As we look at events transpiring, we also see that faithful members in the church could be tempted to head in various directions dictated by society. Some would align themselves with skeptical approaches to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, preferring to focus on philosophical, academic, and political correctness, centered on humanistic ideas. Some are tempted to align themselves with earthly structures, thinking they will solve the cultural, societal, economic, and educational problems of the world. There are those who wish to decentralize the church and focus only on the local congregation, forgetting that this is a worldwide Advent movement.

GOD'S PEOPLE

The devil tempts people to take many directions. God will, however, have people who recognize their great need of His transforming power in their lives; who will fall on their knees and humble themselves before the Lord and His Word; who accept the last-day message of hope and warning they are asked to proclaim; who show dignity and respect to all people, reflecting their love for the Master and His transforming work in their lives as they submit to revival and reformation.

These are God's people at the end of time, described in these words: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17). We are further told, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). God has blessed His last-day people with

This is now the world in which we live: a world in which God has a people who will point others to the only One who can provide stability, understanding, hope, and a complete change of heart.

invaluable instruction in the Spirit of Prophecy as understood in the writings of Ellen G. White.

Ellen White wrote: "In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."²

The Lord is calling us to be part of His people, those who in the final days, regardless of what the devil throws at us—pandemic, tensions, unrest, natural disasters, apostasy, wars, persecution, or whatever may come our way—will be God's people who stand for Him as we lean completely on Jesus. ©

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941), p. 69.

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 19.

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Feature

How COVID-19 Has Affected Adventist Education

Challenges and opportunities



Everyone has, at one time or another, lived through a crisis that touches a country or group of countries involving a natural disaster or sociopolitical turmoil. We sometimes witness how an entire continent suffers from significant changes affecting economies and ways of life for some time. The disastrous effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, are unique in their worldwide consequences to virtually every aspect of life. This includes Adventist education.

The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist education system serves nearly 2 million students and employs more than 100,000 teachers, providing Christian instruction from kindergarten to graduate levels. Adventist schools faced many challenges but also found new opportunities in the midst of COVID-19. We explore some of these here.

CHALLENGES

During the period of March and April 2020, depending on when COVID-19 struck various regions, Adventist education began the lockdown. This included the closure of schools, colleges, and universities, and the transition from face-to-face to distance instruction. All institutions had to face the rigors of this unexpected, unprecedented change when both Northern and Southern Hemisphere schools were in session. Many higher education institutions managed well, for they had been offering some distance learning in the past. Others faced insufficient infrastructure and limited expertise of both professors and students. Elementary and secondary schools were, by and large, unprepared for the new modality and also faced financial struggle.

Many Seventh-day Adventist schools in European countries continued to receive government funds (normally to pay for teachers' salaries). In other locations, such as New Zealand, students were given laptops and iPads, which would become school property after the pandemic. In less-affluent regions, schools simply had to suspend instruction. Some attempted to use hard-copy materials physically delivered by teachers to students' homes and picked up again for assessment. Unfortunately, a few small, mostly rural schools had to close by the third month of the pandemic.

These are perhaps the most common challenges faced by Adventist education:

- Implementing online instruction when teachers were inexperienced in this approach.
- Finding valid and reliable assessment alternatives to evaluate from a distance.
- Teaching students who lacked devices or did not have Internet connections.
- Suffering heavy financial losses because of decreased income from parents who had lost their jobs and could not afford to pay school tuition.
- Closing dormitories and sending students home with room-and-board refunds.
- Losing church appropriations because of lack of member contribution.

- Reducing teacher and staff salaries to half or reducing staff through furloughing or permanent dismissal.

- Being unable to plan financially because of an anticipated but unknown reduction of enrollment.

- Attempting to preserve spiritual life online (as much as possible) while foregoing mission trips, vespers programs, or outreach activities to the community.

Adventist schools everywhere have faced significant challenges, but the situation for some schools is dire. Take, for example, schools in the West-Central Africa Division, where education director, Juvenal Balisasa, estimates that 30 percent of elementary and secondary schools will be permanently closed if things continue unchanged over the next months. This would mean the loss of 400 institutions in that part of the world. To a lesser extent, the situation is similar in other regions.

OPPORTUNITIES

Apart from the struggles, Adventist institutions are developing new strengths. Practically every area of the world reported unprecedented creativity and adaptability on the part of teachers, parents, and students to continue to provide quality education under the circumstances.

After witnessing the schools' efforts, many parents now have a higher appreciation of Adventist education. One parent with a child in a South Pacific Division school wrote to the teachers: "You are deeply appreciated. Thanks for redeveloping material and platforms for remote learning. You are more than teachers; you love and mentor our young men and women."

Several regions reported additional students joining Adventist education because, by contrast, it was a better option under the pandemic. Their enrollment expectations are higher because of the public's perceived enhanced quality.

This has been the case in schools in Central America, Australia, Samoa, Tonga, and East-Central Africa.

These adverse times have brought closeness to each other, closeness to God, and overall revival and reformation. Most families have enjoyed more time together, more Bible reading, and more prayer, according to reports from Africa. An increase in volunteers for various outreach and community services has been observed in Asia and the Americas (North, Central, and South), in which students have participated in food distribution and Internet-based health education in their respective communities.

Karla León, a teacher at an Adventist school in Costa Rica, designed Bible classes with music for her class using Zoom. The mother of one little girl became interested and participated in the Bible activities. Soon after, she and her family, including her husband, accepted the beauty of the Sabbath truth and are now keeping the Sabbath regularly.

Online teaching has become the predominant mode where available. Technologically advanced institutions often collaborate by sharing resources with other schools with fewer assets. Furthermore, administrators have reevaluated their attitude toward online learning and digital communication and are likely to further promote and invest in it in the near future. Certain countries have already set themselves goals to incorporate more hybrid education once the pandemic is over. Brazil has decided to have at least 20 percent online teaching across all its schools.

In many cases Adventist schools have gone to extraordinary lengths to accomplish their mission, and these efforts have been recognized publicly. For example, a school in Korea was recognized as best online learning school in the province of Gangwon. Students from Northern Caribbean University won the United Nations contest entitled

Adventist schools faced many challenges but also found new opportunities in the midst of COVID-19.

"Reducing Inequalities in Education," which consisted of educating youth and the public on reducing inequalities. Its thrust was to do it with Christ-centered education.

Even the financial burden caused by the pandemic has prompted institutions to develop innovative ideas and practices. Schools in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division and in the South American Division have been raising funds by manufacturing masks, sanitizers, and other commodities needed at this time. Many around the world are discovering that some face-to-face meetings can easily be conducted with similar results via video conferencing, thus saving time, money, and energy.

We can never know if the growth resulting from the experience will outweigh the losses—they cannot be compared. But we can hold on to God's many promises, such as this one: "The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore" (Ps. 121:7, 8, NIV).

Please pray for Adventist schools all over the world, especially in areas the pandemic has hit hardest. We can support educational personnel and students with our words and provide moral and financial support according to our ability. ©

Julian Melgosa, a native of Spain, serves as an associate director of the Education Department at the General Conference.

Millennial Voices

Red Numbers



Two numbers that matter: His kingdom comes first, and one day at a time.

All we see is numbers these days. Our TV screens and electronic devices report numerous statistics. The year 2020 was the year of infections, lockdowns, disappointments, shattered dreams, some hopeful thoughts, uncertainty, and fear.

It's hard not to wonder what will happen next. When I asked my teenage students about their fears, they told me about their concerns for the future, their decisions in view of this uncertain future, and how these decisions would affect them. They didn't respond to a formal survey. These were just spontaneous expressions of their worried hearts when I asked about their prayer requests for my faith notebook.

It seems that everything this year revolved around a few numbers going up or down.

In my home, numbers mattered as well. Papers holding records of temperature, oxygen saturation levels, and increased heart rate used numbers. For me, the pandemic hit close—so close it hit home.

Newspapers reported the inflation rate in red numbers. Debts taken on by a large part of the world population were also reflected in red numbers in their household accounts.

Can we really understand something based on these numbers? Can we actually plan on what will happen next? Should we just hope for the best?

The Bible I've had since I turned 9 has the words of Jesus printed in red. In Sabbath School, when I was still a child, I underlined verses 33 and 34 of Matthew 6 in red since I had to memorize them: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow

will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

That looks like an answer to me. Two answers, actually. Two numbers that matter: His kingdom comes first, and one day at a time.

I remember going to an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting with a friend, listening as everyone repeated their motto: "One day at a time."

I remember singing songs about these two numbers in church.

These are concepts long instilled, yet sometimes a little forgotten.

It doesn't matter how many followers we have on our social media channels or how well we have used them to share the gospel with others online. It also doesn't matter how many publications have been downloaded or how many people joined an evangelistic livestream. At the end of the day and at the end of the year we are accountable for how *we personally* responded to these two numbers—His kingdom first and one day at a time.

We are thankful for mission advances and continue to do our best to reach as many as possible with the gospel. We have seen miracles in the midst of dire circumstances.

But we don't have all the answers, and we will have to continue making adjustments along the way. In these moments it's good to know that we can connect to our heavenly Father daily, that we can trust Him and hang on to Him in the midst of uncertainty—in spite of all the red numbers. After all, He painted the assurance of His promise in crimson red on the cross. The fulfillment of His promises is what happens next. ☺

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The Great Commission or the Great Suggestion?

What do our actions show?

The book of Acts is more than just a fascinating read—indeed, it contains stories, amazing stories, describing a thriving and successful church body. The members of the early church were filled with the Holy Spirit and on fire for the Lord. Their desire? To fulfill the Great Commission. They knew that the Great Commission was exactly that: a *commission*. It certainly wasn't the Great Suggestion.

Some 2,000 years have come and gone since then, when thousands were added to the church daily. These kind of results aren't always immediately obvious today, so why that staggering early success?

It was the *behavior* of the early church, motivated by the infilling of the Holy Spirit, that encouraged countless others to commit their lives to Christ. The example of the followers of the Way led others to seek both physical and spiritual healing in the name of Jesus Christ.

A CRUCIAL QUESTION

As a modern church, what example are we setting? Does our close relationship with Jesus result in behavior that encourages others to join the church? Do our lives draw others to Christ, persuading them to find healing in His name? If not, what can we do to rekindle the ebbing embers of that first love and effectively witness to this watching world?

Scripture provides several principles that will, if incorporated, transform the church from the inside out.

Walk the talk. We've all heard the refrain: "I refuse to go to church with a bunch of hypocrites." Unfortunately, they won't be impressed if we glibly remind them that there's always room for one more. While we can't expect perfection from anyone, we can strive to intentionally practice what we preach (see Rom. 2:21-24). Just as our positive witness can encourage others to make a decision for Christ, we can just as easily discourage others from joining the church when we neglect to "let love be without hypocrisy" (Rom. 12:9).

Meet the needs. In a world abounding in poverty and need, it can be tempting to follow in the footsteps of the priest and Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and look the other way. But the Scriptures exhort us to be vigilant in meeting needs (see

James 2:14-16). How does our faith manifest itself through works? Are we quick to notice the single mother of three who sits on the back pew each Sabbath? Do we offer a box of diapers or a gift card to treat her struggling family to dinner? What about that impossible neighbor whose car broke down? Do we graciously offer him a ride to work? Needs are all around us—some more drastic than others. What can we do to meet those needs and draw others into communion with Christ?

Fulfill the purpose of the body of Christ. The church comprises a diverse group of individuals and is called the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). So if we're the body of Christ, then we're His hands and feet. How did Christ use His earthly body to further the kingdom of God? He saw those the world had overlooked, neglected, or ignored and ministered to them. As a church, we have the privilege of ministering to others in the same way.

BE LIKE JESUS

If we intentionally institute these guiding principles and become a beacon of hope to others, imagine the appeal to the outside world.

We'd best be prepared to reap a harvest of blessing! ©

Rachael C. Duncan is a member of the Stonehill Adventist Church in Pflugerville, Texas.

La Konflikto de la Epokoj

The work of
a lifetime

Edwin de Kock became acquainted with the Adventist message at the tender age of 5, when his mother discovered the seventh-day Sabbath while reading the Ten Commandments. A South African native, de Kock graduated with a theology degree from Helderberg College near Cape Town, then went on to obtain a speech teacher's license, a bachelor's degree and master's degree in languages, and a degree in education. For more than 40 years he served in both denominational and nondenominational high schools, colleges, and universities in South Africa, Korea, and the United States, where he and his wife became citizens in 2000.

While a student at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, de Kock met Nico van der Merwe, who introduced him to Esperanto—a language developed by Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, a polyglot Polish Jew.

Zamenhof published a booklet in 1887 in which he presented Esperanto grammar, basic vocabulary, exercises, and several poems that he

had written in it. It is a constructed language. Its vocabulary was assembled from elements common to English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French, together with classical Greek and Latin. All these elements are tied together with a grammar that, according to de Kock, is a masterpiece of both simplicity and flexibility.

By means of Esperanto, de Kock says, “Zamenhof wanted to enable everybody on earth to communicate with everybody else. It was never intended to take the place of any existing language.” The idea was that if people learned their mother tongues plus Esperanto, it would solve communication problems in the world and promote international unity.

When van der Merwe loaned de Kock an Esperanto Bible, he became intrigued with the language, especially the high-quality writings being produced by those who spoke Esperanto. He worked toward fluency in this rare language, understood by approximately 2 million people.

De Kock wrote his first poem in Esperanto five months after learning it. As he communicated with other authors around the world, his poetry soon found its way into magazines and books. This led to his lifework, an epic titled *La Konflikto de la Epokoj* (*The Conflict of the Ages*).

CLASSICAL LITERATURE

An epic is an ambitious book-length poem, sometimes running hundreds of pages, on a theme of great importance. Often underlying the theme is the worldview of its writer, even of the nation or special people group to which he or she belongs. The epic form is not a new literary device. Some well-known epics include the *Iliad and Odyssey*, ascribed to Homer, an ancient Greek who lived about 750 B.C. or earlier;

the *Aeneid*, by Virgil (70-19 B.C.), a Roman who wrote in Latin; *La Divina Commedia*, in Italian by Dante Alighieri (c. 1265-1321); *Os Lusíadas*, in Portuguese by Luís Vaz de Camões (c. 1525-1580); and *Paradise Lost*, in English by John Milton (1608-1674).

De Kock began work on his epic poem in 1959. Because of various interruptions, by 1992 he had finished only a little more than a third of his book. Not until 2015 was he inspired to tackle the daunting task again. He finished it in 2018 at the age of 88.

De Kock’s work, while sharing a name with Ellen White’s *The Conflict of the Ages*, is not a translation of the five-volume series, but a depiction of the great controversy theme that runs throughout Scripture, meshed with an exposition of several prophecies. Theologically, de Kock asserts, this epic is purely Seventh-day Adventist, containing all its fundamental doctrines.

Strongly influenced by Ellen White’s writings and Scripture, the epic highlights how law and love are reconciled through God’s incomparable gift of His Son to save a fallen world. It also emphasizes the value of even a single human being from the Lord’s point of view.

De Kock is the protagonist in *La Konflikto de la Epokoj*, but his character represents every person who struggles with a burden of sin and sorrow, doubt and uncertainty. Everyone needs enlightenment, guidance, and salvation.

In his poem de Kock takes readers on an imaginative journey through time and space, beginning with the fall of Lucifer, followed by that of Adam and Eve, and ending with the earth made new, where sin and sinners are no more.

While on his trek he meets four biblical characters who act as his companions and interpreters: Enoch, who never died; Moses, who was

De Kock aspired to create a poetic masterpiece in Esperanto.

resurrected sometime after dying; and Ezra and Isaiah, who are represented as being part of the multitude who were raised from the dead at Christ’s resurrection. De Kock is also accompanied by his guardian angel throughout his expedition.

De Kock aspired to create a poetic masterpiece in Esperanto, but more than that, he wanted to counter the ideological influence of unbelievers such as the Esperanto poet William Auld. Auld wrote *La Infana Raso* (*The Infant Race*) in 1956, and in 169 pages seductively presented the worldview of atheist evolution. “As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I wanted to stand up for my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, with the hope that some of my readers would be drawn to Him and saved eternally,” de Kock says.

La Konflikto de la Epokoj is, to de Kock’s knowledge, the only printed work in Esperanto that reflects both Ellen White’s ideas and scriptural roots for the great controversy theme. He is considered by some of the world’s leading Esperanto poet. De Kock may never know the impact his poem and subsequent works has had on the nearly 2 million Esperanto speakers, but his contribution to Esperanto literature lends a necessary Adventist voice and worldview to this specialized niche. ©

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What We Believe

The Church



Word, Fellowship, Table, and Prayer

The church as a worshipping community

If there is one great lesson I have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, it's that for most of us Sabbath morning worship is not a luxury but a necessity. Despite the important role of modern technology, we must admit that Zoom, Facebook Live, or other digital platforms cannot replace the physical gathering of God's people. Getting ready, dressing up, and leaving home to meet God and fellow believers is not simply a matter of form. It is an affirmation of our belief that Jesus is Lord and that we belong to the household of God.

The act of gathering together expresses a leading characteristic regarding the nature of the church—the church as a worshipping community. It is important to remember that when God calls out a people, it is for the primary purpose of worship. God made the purpose of the exodus clear to Moses thus: “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain” (Ex. 3:12, NIV). He repeated the same to Pharaoh: “Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness” (Ex. 7:16, NIV).

Likewise, the New Testament suggests that worship is the ultimate goal of salvation. At Pentecost, for instance, apostolic preaching led to mass baptisms, which were immediately followed by regular corporate worship (Acts 2:41-47).

Faith in Christ is personal, but the Christian faith is not individualistic. New Testament believers delighted in assembling together. As the community called out by God, we, too, “declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). Therefore, we can say that the church is the result of God's redeeming activity with worship as its ultimate purpose.

KEY ELEMENTS OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

The question is: How does the church manifest its nature in corporate worship? Acts 2:42 is often regarded as laying down the four characteristics or four pillars of the church: “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (NIV). This verse encapsulates four important aspects concerning the life and worship of the early church. As such, it provides an essential model for us to follow.

The Word: Through the proclamation of the gospel, God is gathering for Himself a people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue, to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:3-14; Rev. 14:6, 7; 7:9-17). It is through the Bible that God most distinctly speaks to us. It is no surprise, then, that the



life and worship of the church is to be shaped by the Word of God. Early disciples “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”

Similarly, it is essential for us today to understand God’s truth by giving keen attention to the Word. The primacy of the Word unites us in Christ, preserving us from error and discord. For this reason, the Reformers insisted that worship should be “according to Scripture.” The life and worship of the church must be thoroughly Word-centered, Christ-focused, and Spirit-led.

The Fellowship: The church is not a building but a body of believers. Similarly, worship is more than a mere social gathering. Rather, it is the special sphere of God’s action on earth. God’s presence builds, fashions, and animates the church. Ellen White pointed out that

“where Christ is, even among the humble few, this is Christ’s church, for the presence of the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity can alone constitute a church.”

Early Christians devoted themselves to the fellowship, and so must we. As God’s people, we now have access to the Father in one Spirit through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:18). Our fellowship with one another is tied to our fellowship with God (1 John 1:3). This commonality must lead to mutual edification. We minister to one another through preaching, singing, a word of encouragement, or simply with a smile, a hug, or a helping hand. God is glorified when we care and share, thereby revealing His power to save and to transform.

The Table: The breaking of the bread by early Christians probably refers to regular meals they had in common; the “Lord’s Supper” was celebrated as part of that larger meal. Gathered at the Lord’s table, the church expresses something of its true self as a community. The Lord’s table is a shared experience in which the church celebrates the command to take the bread and cup as it proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:23-26). During the Lord’s Supper we are reminded that as God’s people, we are part of salvation history that is moving toward its glorious climax.

Yet we should not limit the sharing of a meal to the Lord’s Supper. Acts 2:46 describes how the early Christians were continually “breaking bread from house to house.” Social contact around table fellowship deeply expresses our family ties, especially in an increasingly individualistic age. In this mutual communion we are reminded and reassured that we are one in Christ. For this reason regular common meals should be a priority for church members.


The Prayer: Corporate worship is more than mutual edification. When the church assembles for communal worship, it does what it has been called to do—it turns to God. The early church was a praying church because it was fully focused and dependent upon God. Paul encouraged the church to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:18, NIV). Furthermore, he encouraged Timothy to lead the church in “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 2:1, NIV). Every worship service is a declaration that God deserves all the praise and glory. It is also when we confess our sin and brokenness in front of a holy and compassionate God. This vertical dimension must always predominate when we gather; otherwise the worship service degenerates into a purely human activity.

CONCLUSION

Corporate worship embodies the nature of the church. Every gathering of believers is a true manifestation of the church on earth. Assembling together is a vital necessity. We are admonished in Hebrews 10:25 not to give up “meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (NIV). Strengthened in corporate worship, we become witnesses to the power of the gospel (Acts 2:47). ©

* Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1993), vol. 17, p. 81.

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Crime and Punishment

Q

What is the “hell fire” mentioned in Matthew 5:22?

A

My short answer: something we do not want! The literal reading of the Greek is “Gehenna of fire,” not “hell,” for which the Greek word would be *hadēs*. The trajectory of the use of the noun Gehenna shows how a geographical term came to designate a place of judgment for the wicked.

1. GEHENNA AS A GEOGRAPHICAL TERM

The Greek term *geenna*, from which we get Gehenna, is a transliteration of the Hebrew *gê hannôm*, meaning “Valley of Hinnom.” This was a literal valley located in the southern part of Jerusalem that served as the border between the lands of Judah and Benjamin. In that valley the Israelites built a place of worship, called the Tophet, where pagan deities were worshipped and where Ahaz and Manasseh worshipped Canaanite Baals and offered child sacrifices to Molech (2 Chron. 28:2, 3; 33:6; cf. Jer. 32:35). The valley was associated with rebellion against God with its burning of children as sacrifices. Jeremiah announced that the Valley of Hinnom will become the “Valley of the Slaughter,” a place of punishment for God’s rebellious people, a cemetery (Jer. 7:30-34; 19:1-9). Isaiah, though not specifically mentioning the valley, uses the concepts associated with it to refer to God’s universal last-day judgment against the wicked. God comes with fire to “judge all flesh” (Isa. 66:16). The Israelites, when coming out of the city, will see the corpses: “their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched” (verse 24).

2. GEHENNA AS THE FINAL FATE OF THE WICKED

Jesus brings together the messages of Jeremiah and Isaiah when He speaks about the destruction of the wicked in the final judgment, called by Him “the judgment of Gehenna,” that is, those condemned to Gehenna

(Matt. 23:33; literal translation; cf. Matt. 5:22), from which the wicked would not be able to escape. Gehenna is the fire that after their resurrection will permanently and totally destroy the wicked—life and body (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4, 5). In human sacrifices the child was first killed/sacrificed, then the body was thrown into the fire so it would be with the wicked. In fact, Jesus often speaks about the whole body thrown into Gehenna—the fire of God’s judgment (e.g., Matt. 5:29, 30; Mark 9:43-48). The wicked are described as being *thrown* into Gehenna, implying the use of force (Greek: *ballo*, “throw, put” [Matt. 5:29; 18:8]) or as *departing* to Gehenna, emphasizing separation (*aperchomai*, “go away, depart” [Mark 9:43]). The idea that the immortal soul, separated from the body, goes to hell/Gehenna to burn forever is not found in any of the passages where this noun is used. While the wicked go into the fire of eternal death, the righteous enter into life with the Lord (Mark 9:43, 49; Matt. 19:8).

3. GEHENNA AND UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

We have already observed that Gehenna designates judgment by fire, and it is consequently called the “fire of hell/Gehenna” (Matt. 18:9). What has confused some people is that this “fire . . . shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43; cf. Luke 3:17). This phrase simply means that humans have no control over it; it will keep burning until there’s nothing left to burn. Jesus explains by quoting Isaiah 66:24. The Gehenna is the place where “their [the sinner’s] worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched.” The language is figurative in the sense that the two descriptions seem to be incompatible. Is the corpse being eaten by worms, or has it been burned? The idea is that of total annihilation. The worm and the fire will keep working until nothing is left.

Thank You, Jesus, for delivering us from Gehenna (eternal death)! ©

Angel Manuel Rodríguez is retired after serving as director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.



Health & Wellness

Screen Fatigue

Is it something to be concerned about?

Because of the pandemic, I've been working from home. I'm a healthy 38-year-old, enjoy work, and have many Internet telemeetings. I feel more exhausted, even isolated, at the end of the day than during average days at the office. Should I be worried?

So many changes have occurred during the pandemic—the ways we work, worship, socialize, and play. These influence our total well-being. We are multidimensional beings—physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and relational. Lockdowns and social distancing have increased isolation and loneliness. Social distancing, along with handwashing, wearing masks, and living a healthy lifestyle are all essential to staying well at times like this. However, the social distancing has sadly become literal, even in our relationships, and loneliness has escalated. We can stay socially connected through the same technology that facilitates telemeetings for our work. Remaining socially connected helps us stay wholistically healthy, and also those with whom we connect!

Teleworking has been key to the response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Social distancing has made it necessary to meet using technology that enables us to see and hear each other. Our days are filled with Zoom, Skype, StreamYard, Teams, and other helpful tools. We move from one online conference or conversation to the next. Although we can mute our microphones and even cut the video feed, we don't take breaks as frequently as is healthy for either our bodies or our minds.

Our tiredness and exhaustion at the end of the workday are increased by the following factors:

- Days are filled with more meetings as commute times are often eliminated with teleworking.
- Breaks are less manageable because meetings are not necessarily centrally scheduled, and we often move directly from one to the next.
- We focus for longer periods on our device screens, not only as we do our normal writing, e-mails, planning, and scheduling, but for the duration of our meetings and conversations.
- Extended screen time may increase the occurrence of dry eyes. This may be more of a problem in older age groups, but not exclusively. Drinking lots of water helps prevent this.
- Via the Internet, we miss the “ancillary” yet rich components of face-to-face communication—such as body language and communication with our eyes (just a look or glance)—which increases stress.
- We are “distanced,” and the biochemistry of communication may be less pleasurable with decreased dopamine production and less of the hormone oxytocin generated, which is believed to facilitate synchrony/communication.

We each need to make the intentional decision to exercise and move the equivalent of 250 steps each hour. We may take quick walks around our home or yard in between meetings, roughly on the hour. We need to hydrate well to stay healthy (this also ensures additional walks to the restroom—extra steps, sometimes with speed!). We need balance in our life and work, and we must heed the counsel that whatever we do, we should do it all to the glory of God (see 1 Cor. 10:31)—and at the same time, stay healthy! ☺

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“May I Tell
You a Story?”

BY DICK DUERKSEN



Advertising Sky Chef Bakery on the streets of Livingstone, Zambia

The Gift Keeps Giving

Hungry for learning and hopeful about their future, the children asked if they could attend a nearby private school, a place known for the number of graduates who went on to university.

“We’re sorry,” Stain and Gladys Musungaila told their children. “We don’t have enough money to send you to the private school.”

“Let’s pray for the money,” the children responded. “God has always provided what we needed before; we’re sure He will provide again.”

So began the adventure. Parents and children praying morning and evening and throughout the day, reminding God about school, hopes, and funds.

A few mornings later father Stain’s morning prayer-walk was interrupted by a stranger carrying a bulky package. “Mr. Stain,” the stranger called, “I have a gift for you.”

Stain stopped, greeted the man, and accepted the odd-shaped package.

“It’s broken, but I hear you are the kind of person who can fix things. My wife and I thought that maybe you could get it going again and use it somehow. Maybe.”

“What is it?” Stain asked, hefting the package, testing its bulk and weight and imagining what might be inside.

“It’s a mixer for making bread, a very old one,” the man said. “The bowl is dented, and the motor has stopped spinning, but it makes excellent bread. You can make it work again. I know you can.”

Stain wasn’t so sure. He liked bread but knew nothing about making it. And though Gladys was a marvelous cook, she had always bought their bread, not baked it. But the problem with the motor? That was a problem he might be able to fix.

“Thank you, friend,” Stain said, and turned to take the gift home to Gladys.

Gladys laughed, and so did the children. Stain set the package out back and rushed off to work. On the way home he stopped at a store and bought several pounds of flour, just in case. That night he worked long over the bulky motor. It took chipping off red rust and rewinding and attaching frayed wires, along with some beating, pounding, and urgent praying. By morning the motor was spluttering the ancient bowl to a wobbly spin. Bread was a possibility!

Gladys laughed, and so did the children. But this time the laughter was tinged with hope. Stain was dreaming of a bakery, shelves filled with loaves, rolls, maybe even croissants.

“We’ll call it Sky Chef Bakery,” Stain announced. “It will send you to university.”

Everyone worked and the dreams began to show promise. Customers began telling others about the “wonderful rolls” at Sky Chef Bakery. The girls attended the new school.

Stain and Gladys struggled to keep their bakery on its feet while their two girls, Chibale and Kunda, applied to attend Copperbelt University some 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from Livingstone. Despite the bakery’s growing success, the family had only enough money to cover the fuel to take their girls to the university. There was no money for fees.

The need sent them back to praying as a family, this time including the urgency

that university was opening in two days! Sensing hope, the family left for Copperbelt with no money in their pockets for fees, just the good scholastic records both girls had earned, hoping those would be good enough for bursaries at the university. They stayed one night at Stain's younger brother's home near the university and applied for scholarships the following morning.

"Don't worry," the girls said. "God has provided for us this far. He will not give up on us now."

The whole family prayed for Chibale and Kunda; then Stain and Gladys left Copperbelt for their home in Livingstone. "We left the girls in the hands of the living God," Stain remembers. "Whatever He decides, let it be so." Three days later they received a message that both girls had been accepted and given full scholarships in the school of sciences. There was much celebrating!

God continued to bless the breadmakers, and before long the "first-ever" Sky Chef Bakery birthed a second bakery, then a third and fourth in Sesheke, 200 kilometers (125 miles) from Livingstone, until



The original bread kneading machine that started everything

"the best rolls" were available everywhere.

"I noticed that there were many small hungry-looking children gathering around the bakeries," remembers Stain. "I asked them why they were here, and they all told me the same story. They were orphans, and they were hungry."

Stain went into the nearest Sky Chef Bakery and came out with several large bags filled with fresh rolls. "One for each," he said. Though he had made a few kids happy "for the moment," Stain realized that he needed to do something more.

Orphans need more than a few rolls, thought Stain, so he and Gladys began talking with their friends, meeting with local service groups, and bringing impossible dreams to life. New schools for the orphans opened up beside the bakeries.

"We did a lot of praying," says Gladys. "We knew we couldn't do much for the children ourselves, but we also knew that since God had given us the bakeries, maybe He was ready to help us do something special for the orphan kids."

"That rusty old bread mixer was God's gift to our family," they say. "Now it's a gift to hundreds of lonely orphaned kids!"

After the girls graduated from university, Stain and Gladys gave three of the four bakeries to the managers. "These bakeries were God's gift to us," Stain told the amazed managers. "Now they are our gift to you. But the deed comes with one small requirement. You must agree to make sure that the orphans in the school beside your bakery always have enough rolls—and a chicken every Friday."

There were cheers, high-fives, and promises all around.

Sky Chef Bakeries still operate in Livingstone and Sesheke, along with multiple gardens that produce food for underprivileged, orphaned children. Beneath the counter of the first bakery, in a place of honorable rest, there is a very dented but shiny old bread mixer. A gift that keeps on giving. ©

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When God Turned the Plane Around

Ratna was brushing her teeth, preparing for work. Her little girls, ages 9 and 4, were still sleeping, and her husband would soon wake up and drive her to work.

She suddenly heard something like thunder. The Samuel family lived in Kuwait, where they never heard thunder. In fact, they never heard any scary noises. It was a safe place to live.

At work that day Ratna, a nurse, noticed something strange. The patients were all talking in whispers in the corner. At first she didn't pay attention. Then she asked, "What's going

on today? Why are people whispering?"

"Iraq is here," someone said. It was August 2, 1990. Iraq had just invaded Kuwait.

Kuwait was a tiny, wealthy country. Many people from India came to live and work there. The Samuels had a good life—Pushparaj, Ratna, and their little girls, Veena and Tina.

But things had changed. At 2:00 that morning, Iraq had come with their tanks and army.

The next few weeks were frightening. Pushparaj continued to go to work. While he and other men worked, the women and children would stay together

during the night to be safe.

Tina remembers when they were home alone without their dad. There were tanks on the street outside and they could hear shooting. Ratna was praying and praying. Then someone started banging on the door. Whoever was banging was trying to get in! They kept praying. Soon they realized it was Pushparaj, not soldiers. It was scary!

They decided they needed to go back to India. They tried to drive, but soldiers stopped them. They tried two more times. Again, they were stopped.

Then the Indian government stepped in to help. They



Bible Treasure

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know”

(Jeremiah 33:3).



brought in planes to fly people out. The Samuels were told they could bring 15 pounds of luggage (think how many suitcases you might take when you travel—usually 40-50 pounds each!). So into a small black carry-on bag went their money, important papers, photos, food for the girls, and gold.

There were supposed to be several planes, but only one showed up for the people. In order to make room for everyone they told the people to leave their luggage behind.

Ratna forgot the important things in the little black suitcase

and left it on the airport runway. With minutes to go before the plane took off, she realized her mistake. She quickly sent Pushparaj racing off the plane to the piles of luggage for the precious bag. But he got the wrong one.

Ratna sat on the plane and cried. “How can we go home with nothing, Jesus?” she prayed.

One hour into the flight the pilot announced a problem. He turned the plane around and headed back to Kuwait. Jesus had answered Ratna’s prayer!

When they arrived, all the luggage was safe. More planes had arrived. Not only did they

get their important black bag, but everyone else got their luggage too.

A year later the Samuel family returned to Kuwait. It was safe again. They stayed several more years, then they moved to the United States. Veena and Tina now have children of their own.

They never forgot the story of when God turned the plane around. It is a reminder that God loves us very much. He keeps us safe. ©

This story is from *KidsView*, March 2017.

10 DAYS OF
PRAYER

SEEKING REVIVAL

January 6–16, 2021

“Not by might, nor
by power, but by
My Spirit, says the
Lord of hosts.”

ZECHARIAH 4:6, ESV

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