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SOCIAL MEDIA—
FRIEND OR FOE?

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A plan to mentor new believers

RON E. M. CLOUZET

You will want to begin using this excellent plan for assimilating new believers into your church as soon as possible.



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Todd R. McFarland

ADVERTISING

advertising@ministrymagazine.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS/

RENEWALS/ADDRESS CHANGES

subscriptions@ministrymagazine.org

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Ministry in Motion

Host: Anthony Kent

Cohost: Ivan Williams

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Ramon J.Canals

ASSOCIATE MINISTERIAL SECRETARIES

Jeffrey O. Brown, Aurora Canals, Robert

Costa, Pavel Goia, Anthony Kent

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Tomorrow never comes



The greatest hope of all generations of Christians and the climax of the gospel is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both the Old and New Testaments talk about it. Isaiah the prophet depicts the event in powerful words:

“Behold, this is our God;
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
This is the LORD;
We have waited for Him;
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation”
(Isa. 25:9).¹

There are prophecies all over the Bible pointing to it, and all, except a few final ones, have been fulfilled.

While on Earth, Jesus Himself promised to come again (e.g., Matt. 24:30; John 14:2, 3). The Bible ends by repeating this greatest hope in Revelation 21 and 22: “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:12).

It would make no sense to be called a Christian and yet not believe in these promises. Neither would it make sense to believe in Jesus’ second coming and yet not prepare.

Two groups

However, the Bible consistently presents two groups: one that is waiting, preparing, and ready, and another that is not ready. How do you specifically “wait”; how do you get ready?

In all of Jesus’ parables referring to the Second Coming, He consistently underlines a good relationship with God and a good relationship with our neighbor. That relationship is proved by service, using your talents for others, caring for others, being a witness—by real love.

It is absolutely important—and necessary—to pray, study the Word, lead your church, preach the doctrines, and eat healthily. These are essential things, but they are not enough. The Pharisees in Jesus’ time performed these, yet many of them were not ready for Him.

At the Second Coming, Jesus divides the crowd into two groups: the sheep and the goats. Service is the litmus test of Christianity! The servant whom the Master finds serving is considered faithful; the fruit-producing tree remains standing; and the talents used and multiplied are the proof of Christianity.

Service is not based on money, health, or position but on using whatever God has put in your hand for His kingdom. It is all based on

The servant whom the Master finds serving is considered faithful; the fruit-producing tree remains standing; and the talents used and multiplied are the proof of Christianity.

Pavel Goia, DMin, is the editor of *Ministry*.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Him alone, not relying on self. Jesus, in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20), commands His followers to go and work and promises His presence. This is not a suggestion but a command.

Am I willing now?

To procrastinate in dedicating your energy, time, talents, and resources to serving God with all your heart is to say to Him, “I will do it tomorrow.” Yet, if you mean it and really want to do it, then why not do it now? The Bible says, “‘Today, if you hear His voice, / Do not harden your hearts as in a rebellion’” (Hebrews 3:15). To harden your heart is to become insensitive to the voice of the Spirit, deaf and blind to the opportunities God gives you to serve. It is to resist the Holy Spirit’s call to service.

The question that comes to mind is, Am I really serving? Do I commit all of myself or just what I am comfortable with? Am I surrendering all to God—my energy, time, and resources? Self-centeredness is an attribute specific to Satan and his character. Jesus came to serve and sacrificed Self. He calls us to do the same.

Whatever you do not surrender, that is what you love more than God. Am I ready to joyfully sacrifice self for Jesus as He sacrificed Self for me?

Am I willing to do it *now*? So many say yes but never get to it. If not now, then when? Today is the day if you hear His voice!

When I was a child walking to school and back, I passed by a Turkish man selling ice cream. He would constantly scream, “Today you pay; tomorrow is free.” I believed him. I paid and got ice cream and then went back the next day to get my free ice cream. He calmly told me, “*Today* you pay; *tomorrow* is free.”

And I said, “Well, yesterday was today, and today is tomorrow.”

He answered, “No, today is today, and tomorrow is tomorrow; today, you pay!”

So, I asked, “Then when is tomorrow?”

He answered, “Son, tomorrow never comes.”

Jesus is coming! It is time for us to fully consecrate ourselves to God and His kingdom, to train our members and send them out, to finish the work. God is calling you now; do not respond to Him, “Yes, but tomorrow.” Tomorrow never comes. Today is the day to fully dedicate everything you do to God’s service.



1 Scripture is from the New King James Version.

A plan to mentor new believers



Ron E. M. Clouzet,
DMin, pastors the East
Ridge Seventh-day
Adventist Church,
East Ridge, Tennessee,
United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

There is a general thought that most believers baptized at evangelistic meetings do not stay in the church. The truth is that those born in the church leave at much higher rates than converts from direct evangelism.

Nevertheless, it is imperative for a local church holding evangelistic meetings to have a viable plan for the assimilation of new converts. It is the church's responsibility not only to call sinners to Christ but also to disciple them as new Christians in the faith.

I will share with you a plan I have implemented with dozens of churches over a number of years. Three of these churches supplied viable data regarding their new believers' retention rates: 90 percent, 95 percent, and 96 percent.

Basic principles and objectives

There are three overarching objectives when it comes to assimilating newly baptized believers into the church. The first is to grow each new member in their spiritual experience. The second is to help them associate with and befriend other Adventist members. The third is to facilitate their integration into the mission and subculture of the church.

Spiritual mentors should be assigned to the newly baptized. With rare exceptions, spiritual mentors should be experienced church members who love people and allow time for new members to grow in Christ, not expecting them to be perfect upon their baptism. Spiritual mentors are not always in abundance, but if they are faithful to this plan, they will *also* experience personal spiritual growth. I ask mentors to commit for 12 months after the baptism of their mentee and follow a specific visitation plan for the first eight weeks of the new convert's life.

The mentors must prepare for each weekly visit by reviewing, at least one week ahead of time, the objectives, activities, and materials to give away during the visit. Sometimes, they may need to prepare a Bible study before visiting the new believer. Of course, spiritual mentors should not stop visiting after the initial eight weeks and ought to continue periodically contacting the new believer.

In what follows, I will write as if you were the spiritual mentor.

The first three weeks

Make *the first visit* within three or, at the most, four days after your mentee's baptism—not a week or two later. Make the appointment for this visit at the time of their baptism. The objective is to get them acquainted or reacquainted with the body of Christ, the local church. Think of Hebrews 10:25.

What do you do on this visit? Assure the new believer about the rightness and wisdom of their decision to be baptized and join the church. Use the Bible. Bring a copy of the vows received at their baptism, and reread it with them.

Explain the various services and ministries of the local church, inviting them to church for the upcoming Sabbath. Also, invite them to your home for lunch, making sure to invite other members who might become good friends with them.

Every well-run evangelistic series should have follow-up meetings at the church. As the mentor, remind the new believer about the meetings and attend also. Tell them that you plan to visit them each week for the next few weeks to (1) encourage them, (2) help their Christian growth, (3) answer their questions, and (4) help them integrate into the body of Christ.

Each week take resources to the new believer to help their spiritual growth and church assimilation. The items that follow are suggestions and

can be adapted based on available budgets and new-member needs.

I suggest three things to give them on that *first visit*: the baptismal certificate (a good excuse to visit them to begin with) or a personal card, congratulating them for their decision, the *Welcome Church Family* album, and the booklet *Your Friends, the Seventh-day Adventists*.¹ New believers tend to be eager to share their new faith with family and friends, so encourage it.

Before leaving every visit, ask for specific prayer requests and pray for them and their family.

The second visit's objective is to encourage and guide their personal spiritual growth (2 Pet. 3:18).

Ask about their courage. Reassure them that God has led them to this point and will continue to do so (Matt. 11:28–30; John 6:37; 1 John 5:12). Keep in mind that the enemy of souls finds effective ways to discourage those who have given their hearts to Jesus. Know they may be facing that right now in their lives.

If they have problems with things they have given up, like smoking or jewelry, gently deal with those issues, always using the Bible. You may use a handout on smoking and sermon outlines on those topics as references for your study. Focus on the power that comes from trusting in God (John 6:28, 29; Phil. 4:19; 1 John 5:4).

Suggest ways to carry on a meaningful daily devotional life. Give personal examples or examples from others, and provide a reading plan or devotional book that has been especially helpful to you. Encourage them to keep attending meetings at the church.

Give them *The Bible Promise Book* and a small devotional book, such as *Steps to Christ*, telling them that you will ask next week about what they read. Some people are not readers. Point them, then, to audiobooks. But they must feed their souls with wholesome food on a regular basis, or they will not grow.

The third visit is intended to reaffirm and clarify the truth and blessing of the Sabbath (Ezek. 20:20).

Review the teaching and blessing of the Sabbath (use evangelistic sermon outlines or Bible study lessons, if needed). Help them understand this is the seal of God in contradistinction with the mark of the beast of Revelation (Rev. 7; 13).

Focus on the principles already shared about how to keep the Sabbath, and invite them on a Sabbath afternoon activity with you, such as a trip to a natural environment or visiting the sick.

Remember that keeping the Sabbath calls for a lifestyle change they need to get used to.

Ask them whether they are having any difficulty keeping the Sabbath. If so, help them find specific ways to face these challenges. Encourage them to trust God with all their needs as they seek to honor God's commandment (Matt. 6:33), and help them identify a variety of activities suitable to do on the Sabbath (Phil. 4:8).

If they have difficulties getting Sabbaths off from work, contact the local conference and assure the new members that help is on the way. The local or union conference may have a form letter that the new member could use to assist with getting Sabbaths off. The law is on the side of religious liberty.

Offer to call them the next few Friday afternoons to remind them of the upcoming Sabbath. Suggest ways to handle preparation day so they can be ready to keep the Sabbath holy starting at sunset.

As far as resources are concerned, Mark Finley's *When God Said Remember* (formerly known as *The Almost Forgotten Day*) or Danny Shelton and Shelley Quinn's *The Ten Commandments Twice Removed* could be good options.

The next three visits

The fourth visit is meant to provide a fuller picture of the mission and scope of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Rev. 10:11) and the practice of Communion.

Access the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research website at adventiststatistics.org to see the number of Adventists around the world. Visit the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* online at encyclopedia.adventist.org to show the breadth and length of the Adventist work and its mission. Share with them that this is a prophetic movement: the remnant of God in the last days before Christ comes (Rev. 12:17). God gave birth to this church to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus!

Take copies of Adventist magazines (e.g., *Adventist Review*, *Signs of the Times*), and point out stories that might be enlightening.

Review the rise of the church from Millerism (early 1840s) to post-Disappointment study and prayer (late 1840s), church organization (1860s), institutional expansion (1870s–1900s), worldwide mission coverage (early twentieth century), and global complexity today (22 million members; 94 percent outside of the US).

Explain that a *conference* is an area's sisterhood of churches, a *union* is a regional group

of conferences, and the General Conference (GC) oversees the worldwide church by regions called world divisions.

Take a tithe envelope with you, and explain how giving takes place; give examples of blessings received as God's people have been faithful. Read Malachi 3:8–11 as a promise of God's faithfulness.

Also, explain the New Testament rites of baptism and Communion, with an emphasis on Communion. Help them understand that the practice of foot-washing (John 13:1–17) is a constant reminder of our baptism and that the Lord's Supper reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf (Matt. 26:26–29; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

Share with them when the next Communion Sabbath is scheduled at the church, and invite them to partner in the rite of humility with you or someone else they know then. Make sure you set up this first experience before it comes.

Good resources to bring to them would be George R. Knight's *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* and *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, explaining our 28 fundamental beliefs.

The fifth visit is made to review and confirm the biblical teaching on health and clean foods found in 1 Corinthians 10:31.


Review with them what the Bible says about our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Expand on the implications of such truth. Share how important it is for our bodies and minds to function at their best to be more responsive to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Review the teaching of clean and unclean foods (Lev. 11; Deut. 14), and mention by name, if deemed helpful, which foods the Lord has called unclean for our system.

Access the Adventist Health Study website at adventisthealthstudy.org/studies/AHS-1 to share statistics regarding Adventist health and longevity.

Makes plans to cook a vegetarian meal with them *in their home*, if possible. The reason is that they will absorb it all much better in their kitchen. Offer that option during the visit prior to this week's visit.

What can you give them on this visit? One of several excellent vegetarian cookbooks available



**They must feed
their souls with
wholesome food
on a regular
basis, or they
will not
grow.**

at most Adventist Book Centers and, perhaps, a copy of *The Adventists* DVD, an exceptional telling of the Adventist health message from an outsider's eyes.

In your *sixth visit*, you want to focus on the role of Ellen White in the church. The biblical reference is 2 Chronicles 20:20.

Review the biblical teaching on the Spirit of prophecy, emphasizing the fact that the way God has communicated with His people has always been through prophets and that such ministry would be characteristic of the last-day remnant church of God (Rev. 12:17; 19:10).

Bring with you three or four books written by Ellen White, including *Steps to Christ*, if you have not previously, and either *The Desire of Ages* or *The Great Controversy*.

Retell a bit of Adventist history and the role of young Ellen in that history. Tell the stories: the first vision, the heavy burden she carried for the church while also a mother and wife, and so on. For helpful information to help you prepare before your visit, visit the White Estate website at whiteestate.org.

Share the huge blessings Ellen White's writings have been to Adventist education, health care, and mission expansion.² Let them know that believing in Ellen White's prophetic ministry is not

a test of faith but that Adventists have accepted her in a prophetic role after reading her writings.

Read one or two paragraphs from a couple of her books with them. Examples? *Steps to Christ*, page 12: “Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love”; page 100: “Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him.” Another could be from *The Desire of Ages*, page 25: “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves”; page 83: “It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ.”

Encourage them to read *The Great Controversy*, the one book Ellen White considered most vital for all to read, especially in view of the times in which we live today.

Warn them about vicious websites attacking Ellen White and her ministry. Finish your visit with a story of faith from Ellen White’s life. Make sure you do your research.

As a pastor, I have always sought to gift new believers with a nice set of The Conflict of the Ages series. You may consider doing the same. In addition, you may want to give them a copy of Roger W. Coon’s *A Gift of Light* and of George R. Knight’s *Meeting Ellen White*.

The last two visits

The last two visits are transitional and very practical. They are meant to move the new believer to regular fellowship with others—aside from church attendance—as well as to mission engagement.

On *the seventh visit*, your objective is to help them join a small group or group Bible study (Acts 2:41–47).

Talk about the privilege of being in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). Share how new believers in Acts kept studying and fellowshiping together (Acts 2:41–47).

Invite them to join a mission-minded small group or a Bible study group. If there are not any viable groups to join, consider starting one, along with one or two other families in the church.

This is best done after the follow-up meetings end at the church.

At the risk of sounding self-serving, I have recommended one or two of my books for this: *Adventism’s Greatest Need: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* and *In the Name of Jesus: Power to Pray for People and Places*. Both books are mission focused, with questions for group discussion at the end of each chapter.

For *the eighth visit*, the objective is to teach and encourage personal ministry and outreach to others (Matt. 28:18–20).

Review with them the Great Commission and what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Help them understand what *witnessing* means: sharing what one has seen or heard firsthand (such as someone testifying at the witness stand in a court of law). Share the point that witnessing is not mentioned in the Bible as a special gift but as the normal activity of a converted person!

Ask them how their sharing with family and friends is going. Provide encouragement and tips for them.

Notify them of upcoming training events to help members witness more effectively or church events to which family and friends could be invited.

Take a Bible study set with you. Show them how to use it and where to find more (such as AdventistBookCenter.com). Other resources to give them may be Mark Finley’s little book *Studying Together*, as well as Ruthie Jacobsen’s *Bridges 101* or Don Gray’s *You Are My Witnesses*.

Solidifying the new believer

These eight visits, done well, help a great deal in solidifying the new believer in the church. In some ways, the new believer will be better grounded than members who have been in the church for years. And that is what you want, a solid disciple of Christ who not only understands the mission and message of the Adventist Church but also engages in living that message.



- 1 Many resources are suggested in this article. You can look for them at your local Adventist Book Center or go online to sites, such as AdventistBookCenter.com or AdventSource.com.
- 2 “I was getting acquainted with new students at the Walla Walla University School of Nursing. As Allison and I chatted, I discovered that she was not an Adventist and had no Seventh-day Adventist ties, that her father was a theology professor at another church’s university, and that her brother was attending Loma Linda University’s School of Medicine. I said, ‘That’s strange that you and your brother, with no Adventist ties, would end up in Adventist schools at the same time.’ I will never forget Allison’s reply: ‘That’s not strange at all, Mr. McClay. You folks happen to have the best Protestant private school system in the world.’ Sometimes we, who are inside the system, do not value the gift we have been given.” Bruce McClay, “Valuing the Gift,” *Inbox, Adventist Review*, August 2022, 6.

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.

10 DAYS OF
PRAYER

BACK TO THE ALTAR

January 11-21, 2023

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

JOHN 4:23, NKJV

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Angel plays basketball in Queens, New York City, to reach people for Christ.

SIDEWALK EVANGELISM:

Three angels' messages for the city

When the City Sidewalk Evangelism (CSE) project rolled out in New York City, evangelists Haram Kim and Angel Smith, from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, could be found playing Ping-Pong with strangers, eating at restaurants with newfound friends, striking up conversations while exercising at a public gym, playing basketball, or strolling through a park.¹ One might think they were taking a break or enjoying a day off, but it was sidewalk evangelism in action, intentional and incarnational.²

The population

City Sidewalk Evangelism³ was designed to engage young people in total immersion urban ministry, creating a learning experience that will embed the urgency and importance of Christ's great love for people and the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6) into the hearts and minds of future pastors and church leaders. CSE provides one

more way to present this message of the three angels specifically to large urban populations, a top priority as the population continues to shift from rural to urban areas.⁴

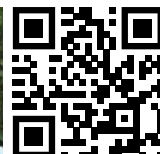
The phrase *sidewalk or street evangelism* may conjure up images of an evangelist preaching at a busy street corner, oblivious to the needs or interests of the crowd or passersby. But by following Christ's method, CSE takes street evangelism beyond the initial contact.

"It's relevant for our young people today," E. Douglas Venn, director of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Global Mission Urban Center and Mission to the Cities initiative, observes, "because when they get out on the streets . . . , they see firsthand how this message affects people's lives. That's something you can't teach in a classroom or learn from a sermon."

The project

The premise is simple. Working with a participating pastor and local church or church plant in

Sandra Dombrowski, MA, is a freelance writer and editor residing in Coventry, Connecticut, United States.



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an urban locale, evangelists commit to a short-term engagement. Using Christ's method, they spend two weeks seeking out those interested in studying the three angels' messages of Revelation 14, then study with them for two weeks using Mark Finley's *Three Cosmic Messages* Bible study guide, or one with similar content. Evangelists introduce their Bible study interests to the local pastor and church members and the next set of evangelists to ensure that the discipling process continues when they leave.

Kim and Smith, the seminary students from Andrews University, implemented the following five principles as they navigated the pilot project for CSE.

1. *Prepare.* Corporate and individual prayer is the foundation for every step of CSE. Local pastor, church planter, and CSE mentor Wayne Jamel matter-of-factly told the evangelists at the end of each weekly coaching session, "We pray and go."

In preparing to share with people of any age or background, both evangelists studied the three angels' messages thoroughly and creatively. Kim spent part of his CSE experience

studying and reviewing the three angels' messages Bible studies, knowing he would meet educated young adults from many different faith backgrounds in Midtown Manhattan where he was stationed. Smith worked creatively to modify the Bible study guide into a two-week online evangelistic series for youth, complete with games, to reach a group of local non-Adventist young people.

2. *Begin* with Christ's incarnational method. Kim and Smith learned experientially that Christ's method is the best answer to every one of their evangelism dilemmas. Kim, who describes himself as shy, struggled with ways to approach strangers. After much prayer and mentoring from Wayne Jamel, Kim started connecting with people over games of Ping-Pong in the park and other purely divine encounters, mingling with people, and taking part in their daily activities, just as Christ did.

Smith, stationed in a residential area of Queens, thought she could make the most contacts by going door to door, using skills she had learned from years of literature evangelism.





Angel gives a parting hug to her new friend Tahmina.

But as she prayed, she sensed God had a different plan. She, too, changed to a more incarnational method, mingling with people while playing basketball and exercising at a public gym. She also joined the local sponsoring Adventist church when members performed music in a park, mixing with the onlookers and engaging them in conversation. This created opportunities for natural encounters with people that could be developed into authentic relationships.

3. *Continue* with Christ's relational method. Kim and Smith developed friendships with those they met by sharing meals at restaurants, listening, and sympathizing, just as Christ did. This gave them opportunities to invite their new acquaintances to Bible studies and offer God's answers to their questions and difficulties. Beyond the CSE framework of two weeks of inviting and two weeks of studying, they also offered Bible studies when people were ready and showed interest and they had gained their confidence. Kim once shared an entire Bible study on Daniel 2 with a gentleman during their first conversation. He was so thirsty for spiritual knowledge that Kim studied the *Three Cosmic Messages* Bible study guide with him for the next three days.

Smith developed a friendship with a young non-Christian woman who had never been exposed to religions other than her own. "Although I never once conducted a formal Bible study with her," Smith said, "I shared with her

more Bible truths in conversation than I would teach a regular Bible study contact."

4. *Adapt* your methods. This could mean adjusting a small detail in your approach. When Kim started out, he approached people by asking whether he could pray for them but met with little success. Even if they accepted his offer, once he finished praying, he found little opportunity to establish a relationship and invite them to a Bible study. So he changed his initial approach: offering prayer after he became acquainted with them.

Adapting your methods might mean rethinking your entire evangelism plan. As Smith pondered the great needs of the people and the opportunities that came from eating and exercising with people and listening to them, she concluded, "We need to be planting centers of influence *first*, with vegetarian cafés and restaurants, gyms and exercise centers, mental health clinics, and more. The churches will follow."

5. *Allow* yourself to be changed. Before CSE, Kim enjoyed living in the quiet, rural town surrounding Andrews University. For him, cities were only centers of worldliness, places to avoid. But during CSE, his heart was touched by the needs of the millions of people who live or work in New York City and the overwhelming realization that God loves them all. Now he invites others to participate in urban mission—he is no longer shy or hesitant to approach people! His goal is to work full time in urban ministry when he graduates, perhaps in the 10/40 Window.

The plan

In CSE's pilot project in New York City, God blessed Kim and Smith with both quantitative and qualitative success. Before they returned to Andrews University, Kim and Smith gave over 50 contacts to local pastors and church members for follow-up. Smith conducted two online evangelistic series—one for non-Adventist young people and one for adults. At the conclusion of the series, every one of the young people expressed an interest in baptism, and the Sabbath School teachers at the local Adventist church are following up with them. Despite their busy academic schedules, both Kim and Smith keep in touch with several people they have introduced to Jesus and the three angels' messages, extending their friendship for spiritual and emotional support.

The goal of CSE is to send evangelists to 100 cities worldwide, sharing the three angels' messages around the globe while developing evangelists and leaders who will not soon forget the urgent needs of large urban populations and Christ's method for reaching them.

"God has designed a cosmic plan by which every person on the planet will have the chance to hear the good news and accept His plan of salvation. This is through His people. City Sidewalk Evangelism is an amazing opportunity to preach the three angels' messages and introduce people to Jesus in the cities," explains Ramon J. Canals, ministerial secretary of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Do you want to be on the cutting edge of God's end-time mission, sharing the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 with the world? Are you sensing the need to sharpen or develop your urban ministry skills? Then perhaps City Sidewalk Evangelism is for you.⁵



- 1 *Editor's note:* We regularly read articles on urban ministry from practitioners in the church or in the classroom, such as R. Clifford Jones, "Urbanization and Christianity: Reaching the Urban Community for Christ," in *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, ed. Rudi Maier (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University), 187–203. We also deem it a privilege to feature practitioners in the field. Bettina Krause, ed., *It's Time: Voices From the Front Lines of Urban Mission* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015) is one such valuable contribution. Following divine counsel, we trust this article will be another. See John Luppens, *New York City: A Symbol* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990).
- 2 Sandra Dombrowski, "Sidewalk Evangelism Pilot Project Enters New York City," *News, Adventist Review*, August 26, 2022.
- 3 CSE is an initiative of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It is directed by the Ministerial Association.
- 4 "Find Your KPIs," *Seventh-day Adventist Church Strategic Plan—I Will Go*, accessed March 18, 2022, https://iwillgo2020.org/kpis/?_ministries=mission-to-the-cities,4; "It's Time: The Urgency of Urban Mission," accessed March 18, 2022, <https://missiontothecities.org/assets/public/files/pdf/It's%20Time%20Document.pdf,1>.
- 5 For more information on how you can get involved or how CSE can come to your church, conference, or division, visit www.sabbathschoolpersonalministries.org/forms.

Haram in Bryant
Park, New York City.



Can Christians use **TikTok** for **evangelism**?

Because video content has dominated social media for some time now, the church has been able to harness the power of the web through regular lives streaming and uploaded videos on Facebook and YouTube. However, since 2018, a different type of video content has dominated the landscape—TikTok.

The top three social media giants (YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram) have all incorporated TikTok-like videos through YouTube Shorts, Facebook Stories, and Instagram Reels. Companies such as Meta (owner of Facebook and Instagram) and Google (owner of YouTube) highly regard the TikTok trend. TikTok has surpassed 2,000,000,000 downloads¹ and is now the fourth most popular social media platform. In 2020 alone, it grew by 87.1 percent.² TikTok culture appears to be here to stay.

What is it?

According to Wikipedia, TikTok “hosts a variety of short-form user videos, from genres like pranks, stunts, tricks, jokes, dance, and entertainment with durations from 15 seconds to ten minutes.”³ According to one commentator, its style and length make it very addictive.⁴

In 2020, I opened a TikTok account but soon closed it because I felt (at the time) that the content was useless and nonproductive. Based on the description of the genre given by Wikipedia, the content is purely for entertainment purposes that are, for the most part, not wholesome for Christians. When I realized that this style of video presentation was here to stay, in early 2022, I reactivated my TikTok account and researched whether Bible-based content could thrive in the TikTok environment.

The first thing I observed was that TikTok did have some Christian content. However, 90 percent

of the Bible-based content was not gaining much traction. Those videos that did sometimes went too far or trivialized the gospel. Still, I wondered, *Is it possible to do evangelism on platforms such as TikTok or Instagram Reels?*

Problems

First, I must highlight some problems associated with the rise and dominance of TikTok video culture.

Trivialized content. Due to its entertainment-based nature, TikTok culture faces the danger of making light of everything. In his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, media theorist and cultural critic Neil Postman posited that the transition from a typographic society (print based) to a television (video based) culture would bring about a situation in which 90 percent of the content would be trivial. He felt that way because video-based content was, by nature, entertaining and, therefore, could not be taken seriously.⁵ While I may not agree with Postman’s doomsday outlook toward this culture, I believe he has precisely pinpointed the nature of entertainment-based content. TikTok culture fulfills Postman’s prophecy far more than television ever did.

Difficulty filtering content. Unlike YouTube or Facebook, which indicate a video’s content before you start viewing it, TikTok and Instagram Reels present their content in a “reel” that shows one video at a time. So, the best thing to do is to stop the video or move to the next one if you encounter something inappropriate.

Addictive content. As mentioned previously, the TikTok video style is addictive. Part of the reason is the highly effective use of background music. As *The Atlantic’s* Taylor Lorenz put it, “‘Watching too many in a row can feel like you’re about to have a brain freeze. They’re incredibly addictive.’”⁶



Damian Chambers, MA, is an assistant professor in the School of Religion and Theology, Northern Caribbean University, Mandeville, Jamaica.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Insufficient content. While you can make an impact using short content, you cannot nurture spiritual life in such a brief time.

Opportunities

I nevertheless believe that TikTok offers incredible opportunities for evangelism. Though TikTok is meant to be trivial, it is not merely trivial content that is gaining traction. Creative educational content also has a wide impact. Christians should not feel that the only way to evangelize is by sharing Bible texts or sermons. The greatest need of the human heart is for a relationship with God, so Christ dealt with felt needs first. By doing so, He gained a person's attention in such a way that He could minister to his or her deeper need for God.

People's felt needs relate to what they are going through right now—the problems that are immediate to them. On social media—including TikTok—if you can help others solve their problems or connect with them based on what they are actually experiencing, you can harness an incredible following, whether related to health, family life, education, practical wisdom, or spirituality.⁷

Practical tips

Here are some practical tips for evangelism on TikTok and similar platforms:

1. Identify a niche and stick with it. It could be educational, health, parenting tips, Bible study, or anything else.

2. Know your audience. According to one article, "on Instagram, 60% of users in the United States are younger than 34, and on TikTok, nearly 40% of users are teenagers between 10 and 19 years."⁸ That still leaves a sizable number of older users. Do not underestimate their capabilities.⁹

3. Involve your audience. Brainstorm with them on content, locations, Bible verses, and catch-phrases. Have them tape the videos, post them, and monitor reactions.

4. Get to the point. Your audience should be able to figure out what your video is about from the first second. Remember, you have only about 15 seconds to engage and maintain the attention of your audience on TikTok.

5. Avoid formal greetings and welcome. While they are important to the longer formats, TikTok is not the place for them.

6. Use all media, whether audio, video, or text, to make your point. Nonverbal communication is extremely valuable in a video format that gives you only seconds to make an impression.

7. Provide the opportunity for persons to connect with you outside of TikTok. TikTok is more for connecting with individuals, not the place for preaching a full sermon. Therefore, to complete the process of evangelism, you will need to create means to interact with your viewers outside of TikTok.

8. Study successful videos reflecting your particular niche. They will show you ways to improve your own.

9. Ensure that your gear your Bible-based content to minister to the felt needs of individuals or to answer questions that people are really asking. A good source for understanding the type of questions that people are asking about the Bible is a website called AnswerThePublic.¹⁰

Through careful study and preparation, TikTok can become an additional tool to present the gospel to those living in today's fast-paced and often hectic world. It may be a great way to get some of your younger parishioners involved in mission work.¹¹ And it may be the only way of reaching some people, especially those who would tune out traditional presentations of the gospel.



- 1 Wikipedia, s.v. "TikTok," last modified March 11, 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TikTok>.
- 2 Jennifer Wagner, "The Most Popular Social Networks of 2021," *Ignite Social Media*, September 28, 2021, <https://www.ignitesocialmedia.com/social-media-trends/the-most-popular-social-networks-of-2021/>.
- 3 Wikipedia, s.v. "TikTok," last modified September 5, 2022, 16:39.
- 4 John Herrman, "How TikTok Is Rewriting the World," *New York Times*, March 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/10/style/what-is-tik-tok.html>.
- 5 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 20th Anniversary ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 64.
- 6 Taylor Lorenz, "TikTok Is Cringey and That's Fine," *Atlantic*, October 25, 2018, quoted in Herrman, "Rewriting the World."
- 7 See Damian R. Chambers, *The Online Bible Instructor: A Guide to Personal Evangelism in the Digital Age* (Mandeville, Jamaica: self-pub., 2022).
- 8 Michael Haenlein et al., "Navigating the New Era of Influencer Marketing: How to Be Successful on Instagram, TikTok, & Co.," *California Management Review* 63, no. 1 (October 13, 2020): 7.
- 9 Gustavo Menéndez, "'TikTok Grandma' Grows Bible Study Ministry to Nearly 30,000 Followers," *Adventist Review*, January 31, 2022.
- 10 AnswerThePublic, <https://answerthepublic.com/>.
- 11 Paulo Ribeiro, "Young Woman Teaches the Bible to 45,000 Followers on TikTok," *News, Adventist Review*, May 9, 2020.

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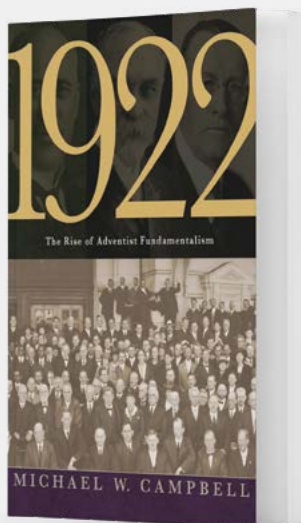
1922: The Rise of Adventist Fundamentalism

by Michael Campbell, Nampa, ID:
Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2022.

The author of this book, Michael W. Campbell, previously a professor and pastor, serves as director of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. His PhD, from Andrews University, focuses on the 1919 Bible Conference.

Campbell begins by saying the book is about “the story of *Adventist* fundamentalism—how Adventism engaged with the historical *fundamentalist* movement from the time of Ellen White’s death to the early 1920s.” Fundamentalism arose in reaction to modernism, which questioned the inspiration of Scripture. Fundamentalism sought to rebuild the biblical foundation of spiritual and moral truth. How *did* Adventism engage? It sided with evangelical churches under the modernist attack (chap. 1). It was influenced by a movement that idealized strong masculine traits over feminine contributions to church life (chap. 2). It followed fundamentalism in creating statements of doctrinal beliefs (chap. 3). And it defended literal creationism by arguing that true science was not equipped to speak definitively on the question of origins (chap. 4).

Chapters 5–8 focus on developments unique to Adventism. In the wake of the 1919 Bible Conference, voices within the church criticized leaders who did not accept the inerrancy of Ellen G. White’s writings (chap. 5). There followed a trend to use the new *Index* as an authoritative commentary on the Bible, which functioned as a “canonization” of her writings (chap. 6). In chapter 7, Campbell describes four characteristics of “Adventist fundamentalism”: the inspiration of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, the historical and literal fulfillment of Bible prophecy, Creation and the affirmation of the seventh-day Sabbath, and the use of archaeology to defend the historicity of the Bible.



Doug Matacio, PhD, is a professor emeritus, Burman University, Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.



In chapter 8, the author tells the story of the 1922 General Conference Session as a turning point in the history of Adventist fundamentalism. Arthur G. Daniells, General Conference president for 21 years, was replaced by William A. Spicer, who

oversaw a “gentler, and less militant, variety of Adventist fundamentalism.”

The epilogue speaks of fundamentalism as a “temptation.” Campbell apparently does so because of the influence of inerrancy. There continues to be “somewhat of a divide about how to specifically interpret inspired writings” (111). He also cites longtime *Review* editor F. M. Wilcox in an appeal to avoid “shibboleths” (see Judg. 12)—the tendency to make some detail of belief or practice a litmus test for salvation.

Perhaps the fundamentalist movement got off track on the issues of race and gender because it failed to arrive at a mature understanding of inspiration and biblical hermeneutics. Adventism, with the help of Ellen G. White, eschewed inerrancy and developed a hermeneutic that understands the Bible to be “an indivisible blend of the divine and the human.”¹

Perhaps Adventism still struggles to apply its hermeneutic to the issues of race and gender, being influenced by evangelical fundamentalists on those issues, even though Adventism’s understanding of inspiration and hermeneutics is distinct from theirs. Today, the church faces the additional challenge of relating inspired writings to other concerns, such as vaccination for COVID-19 and the relationship between vaccination and religious liberty.

This book should be welcomed by pastors and other church leaders because it contributes a historical understanding to current diverse thinking found in many local congregations and even in the corporate church.



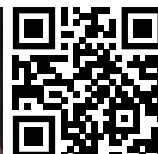
¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, “Methods of Bible Study,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, <https://www.adventist.org/documents/methods-of-bible-study/>.



Our currency— **INFLUENCE**



Roy E. Gane, PhD, is a professor of Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern languages, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

The currency in which we deal with the world around us is influence. Although not transactional like cash, credit, stocks, bonds, commodities, or bitcoin, influence is the most powerful of all currencies because it affects how people make their choices to do what they do. Such influence is not coercion, which bypasses free choice and thus loses any motivational power. When forced choices cease, coercion loses its power, but influence in a free environment grows, flourishes, and spreads.

By humanity's standards

The ultimate example of the triumph of influence is the case of a Carpenter who became a Teacher and Healer but was brutally executed under a totalitarian regime. When He died, He was "cut off" and had nothing (Dan. 9:26). Without any physical children, any possible line of descendants ended. He had no possessions, wealth, or institutional position. Even lacking clothes, He died naked. And yet, He is the most influential person in human history because He embodied the most powerful source of influence in the universe: the love of our Creator and Redeemer God, who is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

By humanity's standards, Jesus of Nazareth was an utter failure. But history proves that the world was wrong. Good influence that is not of this world overcomes the world. Joseph and Daniel exemplified the same principle. The excellent influence of their godly spirit, service, and integrity countered evil influences and moved superpowers. No doubt they were highly intelligent, but it was their reliance on wisdom from God, the ultimate Genius, that gave them an overwhelming advantage over the smartest thinkers of their times.

Solomon, an influencer

God used Joseph and Daniel for evangelism, and He did the same with the astonishing wisdom that He gave to Solomon. The highest point in the entire history of God's people in the Old Testament is an account of evangelism through excellence.

"Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions" (1 Kings 10:1, ESV). She came from Sheba (or Saba) in the southwestern peninsula of Arabia, now Yemen. Today, the shortest route between Yemen and Jerusalem is more than 1,800 miles. Even if the queen had a shorter route of only 1,500 miles, at 20 miles per day on a camel, her trip would have taken about two and a half months each way. How is that for motivation!

"And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built . . . , and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her.

"And she said to the king, 'The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. . . . Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness'" (vv. 2-9, ESV).

How is that for a teacher evaluation! She did not just praise Solomon but glorified the Lord because she understood that He was the source of the king's success. Thus, God's influence reached far to Yemen through Solomon.

How much did the queen of Sheba value what Solomon had taught her? "Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones" (v. 10, ESV). Just the 120 talents of gold were staggeringly valuable, worth more than US\$228 million at the current price of gold. How is that for voluntary tuition from one student?

The story of Solomon and the queen of Sheba was one fulfillment of the Lord's covenant

promise that He had given to Israel through Moses: “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. . . .

“ . . . And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God” (Deut. 28:1, 2, 13, ESV).

Promise of blessing

Unfortunately, Solomon departed from God's wisdom, and his negative influence set his nation on a downward trajectory from which it never recovered. But God's promise of blessing for excellence that draws seekers to Himself remains. Isaiah expressed it like this:

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the
mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore
(Isa. 2:2–4, ESV).

If ever the world needed fulfillment of this vision, it is now. A wall outside the United Nations building in New York City quotes Isaiah 2:4. Inside that building, the shrine and headquarters of world peace, ambassadors from many nations attempt to negotiate the end of conflicts and other problems around the globe. But only full acceptance of the influence of the Prince of Peace will achieve any lasting solutions. Selfish humans have proven our inability to govern ourselves, so He is coming back soon to restore the tranquility that He designed for us in the beginning.

Christian influence

Christian men and women have the privilege of glorifying God through the gifts that He has given them to carry out His evangelistic mission. To all of us, here are a few pieces of advice.

First, focus on personally spreading the influence of biblical concepts as effectively and efficiently as possible. A position in the church can be a good platform from which to work. But we can exponentially expand our influence through other avenues, such as academic and social media. We may have wondered how God's end-time messages could quickly reach the whole world, but now we see that they can go “viral” through the internet as they address the concerns that billions of people face.


Second, notice where God is working, and join Him in restoring the “priesthood of all believers” in the church. Encourage all men, women, girls, and boys to identify, develop, and use the capabilities for service that God has bestowed on them. All true Christians are to be ministers in a wide variety of ways.

Third, stay humble and rely on God, not allowing human obstacles to deter or discourage us. As God leads us to reach out in creative, and perhaps unprecedented, ways and gives us success, some people may want to limit us by keeping us within the “boxes” of their own comfort zones. Our success may threaten the egos of some. Everyone knows that competition and professional jealousy and pride are out of place in God's work, but they can still flourish in destructive covert or subconscious ways that must be countered with humble firmness and divine wisdom. At times we may pray, “Lord, please send me an extra angel to protect me from my enemies and extra angels to protect me from my friends.”

Fourth, maintain integrity and balance in our spoken and written communications. Affirm faith in established truth, but explore fresh ways to understand it and pursue its implications. Rigorously test ideas before presenting them, making sure that they hold up to real scrutiny. Do not try to back up a priori conclusions with apologetic pseudoexegesis that may convince only those who already hold the same conclusions. We are trying to reach the world by God's grace—we are not just preaching to the choir.

Fifth, always keep in mind that our mission is for people, not just for ideas. Biblical concepts are all about relationships, not just material for discourse. All of us can find many opportunities to enrich our understanding and strengthen our influence by networking not only with

colleagues in our own faith tradition but also with others whom we meet in venues such as ministerium groups and through media. They are not just minds but whole people with real needs. Although they may seem confident and secure, they may require and deeply appreciate personal support, encouragement, and prayer as they go through difficult times in their lives.

Remember: the currency in which we deal is influence. If we fully unite with God, it will be His influence channeled through us. 

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.



LETTERS

Thank you, Jerry Page

I would just like to express my appreciation for the honesty and encouragement of Jerry Page's article "No Limits! The Power and Joys of Unselfish Ministry" (May 2022).¹ All other articles in the May issue were also very good.

The June/July double issue, with what I think is a nice "follow-up" to the story of Jerry Page by his son Zac ("Seeking God's Heart for Our Community"), was also excellent! Just wish all churches had so much land!

—Elizabeth Ostring, PhD, MD, Avondale University, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

When I come across an article by Jerry Page, I take time to read it. He seems to always cut to the bottom line for Adventist pastors and leaders. His article in *Ministry* (May 2022) is no exception. I appreciate the fact that he has an uncanny way of reaching us where we are. He reminds us that no matter who we are and what our accomplishments have been, we are all totally helpless sinners with only the grace

of Christ as the solution. It's good to have godly individuals bring our feet back to the ground from time to time and remind us that Christ is our only Sufficiency.

—Ron Bentzinger, Altamonte Springs, Florida, USA.

Self-distrust

I found the article by Orathai (Saw) Chureson titled "Choosing Leadership," which appeared in the February 2022 issue, very timely and eye-opening. Indeed, we all have been caught consciously or unconsciously in Performance Bias, Affinity Bias, or Confirmation Bias. Chureson rightly notes that even Bible characters we highly esteem were not immune from these biases. This is a call to all of us to self-distrust in our perceptions of personalities when it comes to choosing leaders for God's cause. This article is a must-read for all pastors and leaders who are tasked with overseeing elections for church leaders.

—Erick Were, PhD (cand.), Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.



1 Jerry Page served as General Conference ministerial secretary from 2010–2022. This was his parting message to the pastors he loved.

Dear Fellow Workers in Christ,

Because you are a pastor whose ministry is currently in a local church or group of churches, the General Conference would like to invite you to participate in a survey.

The questions in the survey inquire about how you are experiencing

- your role as a pastor
- about your personal spirituality
- and about your beliefs

Your answers will be important in helping the General Conference understand how to better support your work as a pastor in fulfilling the mission of the Church, in lifting up Christ, His three angels' messages, and His soon second coming.

Thank you for helping us to help you.

With kind Christian regards,

Ted N.C. Wilson, President
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

An email will be sent to pastors of local Seventh-day Adventist churches inviting them to participate in the survey. This email will have a link that they can click which will take them to the survey on SurveyMonkey.

Social media— friend or foe?

I was pastoring several churches when social media became prominent. It changed the job for me in a number of ways; some good, some not so good. As an introvert, for me, the same rules apply to social media as to crowds. I enjoy being around people, but it drains me, and I recharge by being alone. I find myself relating to social media in much the same way. I am tempted to cancel all my social media accounts and seclude myself in my own world. And it would be remarkably easy to do so because, at least currently, it is fashionable to take vacations from social media. I say bravo to everyone who flees the temptation to allow social media to dominate life. But I have a different problem. My temptation is to hide from social media altogether. When I consider doing that, though, a voice in my mind tells me that I need to be where the people are because I have been called to be a minister of the gospel. So, I stay on social media because I feel I must.

All of that said, I recognize that we all face different temptations. Social media can be a friend or a foe, depending on how one uses it or is used by it.



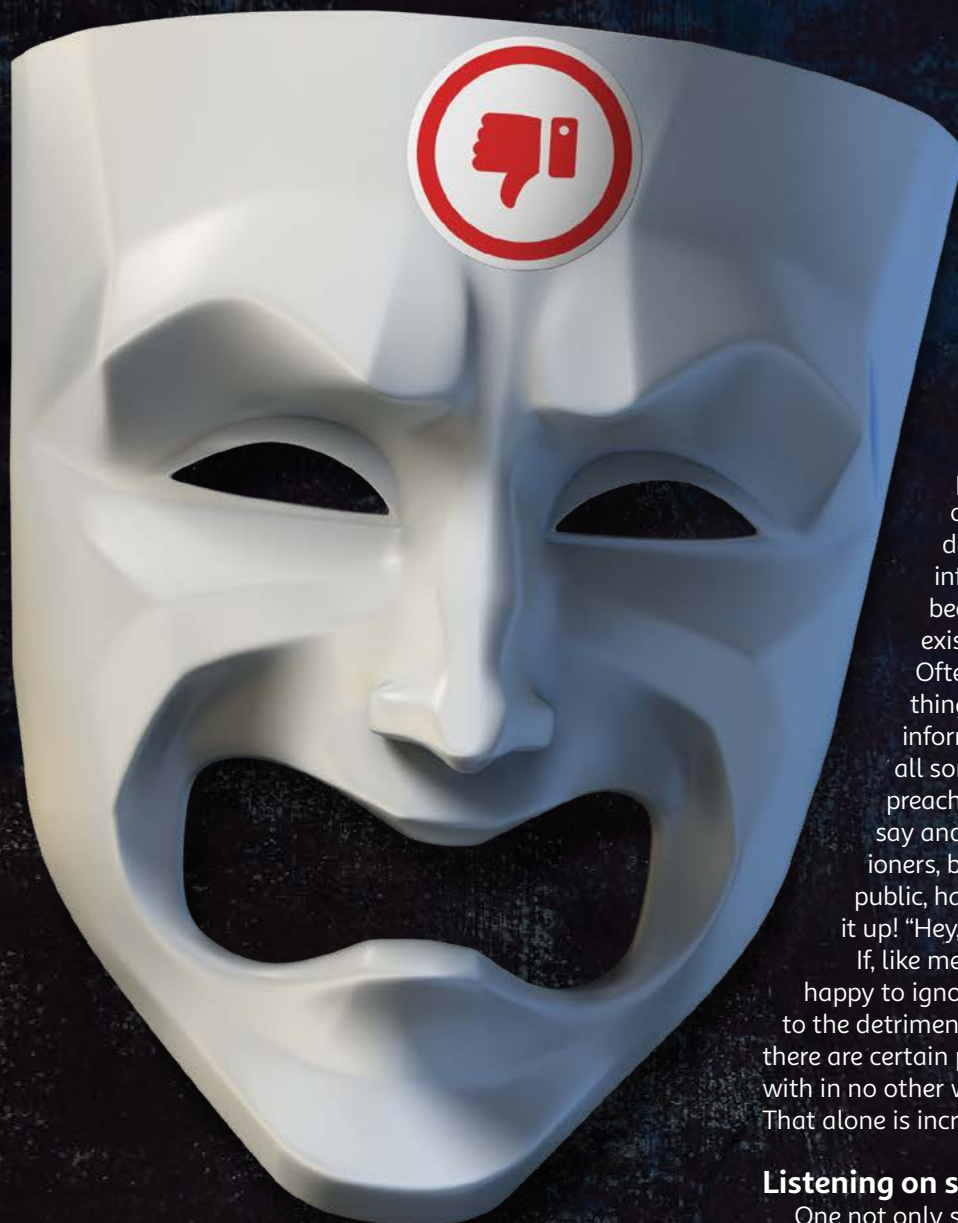
The time ditches

For a pastor, there are two ditches—one on each side of the social media road—in terms of time: the too-much-time ditch and the not-enough-time ditch. The too-much-time ditch gets a fair amount of attention in both secular and religious settings, so I will make only one point. While it is true that a pastor may waste too much time watching television or doing something else just as easily as spending too much time on social media, social media carries the added “benefit” that your parishioners know about it if you are

Jeff Scoggins, MAPM, is planning director for the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



actively posting and reacting. Therefore, perhaps your members will point out your problem and give you the opportunity to cut back. Others, like me, tend toward the not-enough-time ditch. The reality is that whether we like it or not, people's lives are happening online. On our phones, we receive a steady stream of up close and personal glimpses into the lives of our people at any time of day or night. What is more, the information is often unfiltered because they forget that the pastor exists among their online friends. Often, I wish I did not know some things about people. But this kind of information can help a pastor make all sorts of decisions, from what to preach to whom to visit to things to say and avoid saying. And your parishioners, by putting the information out in public, have given you permission to bring it up! "Hey, I saw your post . . ."

If, like me, you are a pastor who would be happy to ignore social media, I think we do so to the detriment of our congregations. Besides, there are certain parishioners whom I interact with in no other way than through social media. That alone is incredibly valuable.

Listening on social media

One not only speaks to others on social media but also listens, although listening has a different dynamic when the other person cannot be sure that we are listening. As in personal communications, pastors on social media probably ought

to do more listening than talking, mostly for the reasons I shared above. Therefore, listening more than speaking is required.

Of course, pastoral care does involve speaking, including on social media. But just as we can talk too much in face-to-face interaction, so the same danger exists in social media. The pastor who comments on everything, “likes” everything, is constantly sharing stuff, and so on runs the risk of a number of pitfalls, not the least of which is that people get tired of seeing so much of you online and learn to ignore your posts.

On the other hand, if you have not turned people away by overexposure, carefully chosen “likes,” responses, and posts are likely to gain special attention just because you are a pastor. So, I do not want to distract from the value of communicating on social media. It can and should be done. But for me, listening is where it’s at. Some people call it social media stalking, but that is hardly fair when people are throwing their lives out there for all to see and comment on.

By quickly scrolling through your feed from time to time, you get much of the value that you normally get only from an in-home visit. The other person does not get the benefit of your personal presence, so social media cannot become a substitute for visiting, but it can certainly enhance visiting and guide you in a plethora of important ways. Besides, listening is always safer than speaking—in any context.

Posting: It all depends

Speaking of safety, a pastor of all people must consider carefully what he or she posts online. In spite of the constant stream of warnings to be careful what you post, the ease of posting has trapped many a pastor into posting ill-advised material. And that is just on the surface. There is another level of caution a pastor must pay attention to because what constitutes ill-advised material varies from pastor to pastor. Of course, some material is always ill-advised for any pastor, but some pastors are able to post things that others cannot, based on their relationship with their congregation. For instance, it is a given that a pastor will post spiritual material. But what about personal information, like what I am eating for dinner, doing on vacation, or doing after work?

On the one hand, posting personal activities can serve to connect the pastor to the congregation in positive ways, provided the congregation is more or less satisfied with the pastor’s work.

On the other hand, if the relationship between the pastor and some parishioners is tense, posting personal activities can backfire spectacularly. The pastor may post something completely innocent, like the fact that she just returned from an exhilarating bike ride. For the pastor fortunate enough to have a good relationship with her church, this post causes her people to smile and appreciate that their pastor is getting exercise. But for the pastor with a tense relationship with his church, his members may see the post and think to themselves, *Does he ever work? Shouldn’t he be writing his sermon? How can he afford such a nice bicycle? His outfit looks ridiculous.* Naturally, they share their discontent with someone else, and we all know what happens in that cycle.

I realize that pastoral life is fraught with opportunities for this sort of criticism, and often it is unavoidable—no matter how careful one is. But still, a pastor must consider the wisdom of posting certain items based on the current dynamics in his or her church. What one cannot post today may be posted tomorrow without any problem.

COVID game changer

I wrote the first draft of this article before COVID-19. And while COVID has not changed what I wrote above, it certainly has increased the necessity of pastoral social media presence. Social media has become even more of a lifeline for many people in their isolation, which likely means they depend on it less for entertainment and more for dealing with their loneliness, fears, and stress. By its nature, though, social media seems to bring out the worst in people, which in turn increases people’s loneliness, fears, and stress. Therefore, a calming, encouraging pastoral presence is even more crucial than before to counteract the negative influence of social media. However, one relatively new development that is a game changer is the social responsibility, or lack of it, on the part of social media gatekeepers. COVID itself has not brought about this sensitive and difficult problem, but it certainly has exacerbated the issue. Some of the biggest social media platforms are capitalizing on the misinformation spread through their networks. Misinformation causes users to become emotionally engaged in a divisive topic. That engagement drives up social media advertising leverage, and the money pours in. The unfortunate long-term effects of this business model on the general population are only beginning to manifest themselves. And the questions are not easy to answer. When do censorship and free speech cross

the line into soul-destroying damage? What is the social media platform's responsibility? Who gets to decide what is misinformation? For the pastor, these emotionally charged issues make it even more critical to maintain a certain detachment (or a great deal of good judgment and self-control) from social media, even while engaging with it. A one-word post or a single emoji can instantly alienate half of your congregation. Lean one way on an emotional hot topic, and you lose one group. Lean the other way, and you lose the other group. It is a no-win situation for any church leader, paid or unpaid. The only way to avoid alienating people is not to commit yourself to one side or the other on any issue that is not salvific.

The reality is that social media has become dangerous. Just how dangerous is still being discovered. But it is not the fault of social media in and of itself. Social media is only revealing and spotlighting what is and has been lurking in the human heart since Satan began corrupting it. Therefore, pastors are needed on social media now more than ever. But only pastors who can rise above the fray and avoid contributing to its negative aspects will be effective in ministry on that battlefield.

A few suggestions

Despite the inherent negative social media realities, social media is where the people are. It is not a new idea to pastoral ministry that the people most in need of pastoral influence are usually found in less-than-ideal places. Despite that (and because of it), the pastor has always needed to find ways to meet people in their native environments. We would be foolish to believe that, as pastors, we can ignore social media and be just as effective in our work. For the sake of ministry, we have been sent online just as much as offline; therefore, we must work in that context also. Consequently, I offer a few suggestions for helping mitigate negative factors and increase positive factors in a pastor's social media presence.

1. If there is someone in your congregation whom you trust enough, ask them to monitor the pulse of your church in regard to your social media activity. Give them permission to relay their or others' impressions concerning your online activity. Trustworthy people who can monitor the gossip grapevine can be valuable. Just be sure that you are prepared to appropriately handle negative feedback when they deliver it.

If you relate to social media as your personal "off-duty" community, stop already. Relate to it

Social media is only revealing and spotlighting what is and has been lurking in the human heart since Satan began corrupting it. Therefore, pastors are needed on social media now more than ever.

instead as "on-duty" pastoral time, weighing every interaction in that light—and with the knowledge that everything you ever write online will probably live forever, no matter how much you might wish it would disappear.

If, like me, you are a reluctant social media user, consider posting something daily from your personal devotional study time. I created a special public page specifically for this kind of posting. That way people can follow or subscribe who want to be notified of these posts specifically.

2. Consider making an informal social media strategy with a few trusted others in your congregation to focus on specific people who need special attention. "It is Sarah's birthday this week, and I know she has been discouraged lately. Let's take the opportunity not just to post 'Happy Birthday' but to write thoughtful and encouraging notes on her wall."

3. Even though it is not an official position listed in the *Church Manual*, consider creating a social media ministry team of people who seem gifted in that area—both for internal church ministry and community ministry.

Pray through your feed! 🙏

Share your thoughts on this article by writing to ministrymagazine@gc.adventist.org.



Adventist women getting support to lead in South Korea

JEJU ISLAND, SOUTH KOREA

In South Korea, Seventh-day Adventist women have served in many essential positions at local congregations for years. To respond to the growing need to train those women leaders further, the Korean Union Conference (KUC) has provided various training programs.

One such event this year was the Women's Leadership Training School at the Mission Leadership Training Center of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) on Jeju Island. The training event was attended by members of the Korean Adventist Women's Association, leaders of missionary groups, Women's and Family Ministries leaders, and Sabbath School coordinators. Forty-two women leaders recommended by five local conferences in the KUC gathered to enjoy fellowship and benefit from helpful lectures.

"It was a time to encourage and motivate them to renew their commitment and dedicate themselves to the Korean church's mission initiative, which is 'I Will Go Reach My World,'" leaders said.

Speakers included **Raquel Arrais**, NSD Women's Ministries director; **Si Young Kim**, then-NSD president; **Jae Soon An**, professor of counseling psychology at Sahmyook University in Korea; **Hak Bong Lee**, former president of Yeosu Sanitarium

and Hospital; **Cheong Sil Yu**, KUC Women's Ministries director; and **Jae Sung Yoon**, director of the Mission Leadership Training Center on Jeju.

"We will continue to run the leadership school so that more women can benefit by educational opportunities," Yoon said. "We also plan to produce and distribute video lectures that allow women to train themselves to be God's servants wherever they are." [Northern Asia-Pacific Division News and *Adventist Review*]



Photo: Northern Asia-Pacific Division News

Native American camp meeting seeks to bridge a gap

HOLBROOK, ARIZONA, UNITED STATES

The North American Division's Native American Ministries comprises three pastoral teams which, along with Holbrook Indian School, work in a region that resembles more of a mission field than a traditional church district. The Navajo Nation is a large rural geographic area, leaving the pastoral teams very isolated.

Recently, the Native population held a camp meeting on the campus of Holbrook Indian School. More than 120 people participated in the camp meeting program on Sabbath.

"Most Native American Adventists worship in very small congregations, and some live where there is no Adventist church," **Dale Wolcott**, Arizona Conference Native American Ministries director, said. "General gatherings bring believers together and reinforce the reality that we are a part of a global family," he continued.

One of the spiritual challenges of the work in the Native community is bridging the gap between Christianity and Native culture. Part of the celebration of the weekend took place

when a US\$20,000 matching campaign was met for the Diné Adventist Radio station. Pastor **Jonathan Chitwood** illustrated the impact radio can have as he told the congregation about driving far out into the reservation to visit a home with no electricity or running water. “As I got out of the car, I heard the unmistakable sounds of a radio playing from inside the house,” he said.

Throughout the weekend, individuals expressed a feeling of loss. They live in a community that faces ongoing issues with alcohol and drugs, serious health issues, and the loss of life experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Native American camp meeting was a time to weep, rejoice, and strengthen belief and faith. [Jeff Rogers, *Pacific Union Recorder*]



Photo: Holbrook Indian School

Inter-American Division’s lay members challenged to minister to others

PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

At this year’s Inter-American Division (IAD) Festival of the Laity, 500 lay Bible instructors, preachers, and evangelists, handpicked by regional leaders for leading hundreds to Christ, were challenged to intensify their evangelism efforts.

“There are intense fires taking place; flooding is more intense; wars are more intense; hunger is more intense; hate is more intense; divorces are more intense; everything is so intense today that the preaching of the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ should be more intense than ever before,” said **Ramon Canals**, ministerial secretary for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. “It will only happen if there are more members involved in this mission of sharing the gospel. In order to be more involved, one must put self aside, be consecrated to God continually, and be more intentional about evangelism.”

Melchor Ferreyra, IAD personal ministries director and main organizer of the festival,

stated, “The proclamation of the good news of salvation has been and will always be our goal as Seventh-day Adventists and we praise God for the opportunity to celebrate so many of our lay evangelists, lay preachers and lay bible instructors who faithfully fulfill the mission of the church every day throughout their communities.”


Jamilia Joseph-Nicolls, Tobago Mission women’s ministries director, said Jesus’ style of leadership was always culturally relevant and lived by practical example, stunning listeners and making people’s lives better. “It’s all about what Jesus did when He was on earth.” [Libna Stevens, Inter-American Division] 



Photo: Ramon Canals, Panama City [Anel Morales/IAD]



Anthony Chandler, MDiv, MPA, is a chaplain residing in Stewartstown, Pennsylvania, United States.



How to deal with spiritual bullies in the church

What happens when we are betrayed by the very church people we trust? We become deeply wounded, jaded, and confused. This is true in any family when abuse goes unchecked. Perpetrators in the church hide behind spirituality and can blindside us. Even the pastor at times is victim to this.¹ So writes Rich Kirkpatrick, author of *The Six Hats of the Worship Leader*.

Church leader Bill Faris affirms, “There are few things more disheartening and infuriating than to come across spiritual demagoguery, manipulation, and the mixed messages sent by religious bullies who abuse spiritual authority and the sacred call to Christian leadership.”²

So how should we deal with spiritual bullies who attempt to hijack our ministry or service? What should be the standard, basic plan for managing a physical or ideological bully? What are the signs of spiritual abuse?³ Often, these situations lead to more copycat scenarios and stress on the church if not dealt with immediately in a firm and fair manner. Here are four suggestions for dealing with a spiritual bully situation.

1. Set your precedents

One of the main practices employed is to take the spotlight off the individual as they come with the aim of gaining power, attention, support, and sympathy from the audience while continuing down the wrong path. Let the spotlight fall on your sermon and ground it in the Word of God. If the bullies have any questions about your sermon, proceed to answer them directly. If their questions are not related to the message, point them back to the sermon.

2. Establish your boundaries

Realize that not everyone in your congregation is going to have the same level of respect for peoples’ beliefs, ideologies, or spiritual practices. Inform your congregation that we can share relevant topical dialogue related to church missions, programs, or liturgical matters in town hall meetings or after prayer meetings. Alert and train your elders or deacons to be on the lookout every

week for those who could disrupt the service or those who are passing out false information to people in your church. “A cord of three strands is not easily broken” (Eccl. 4:12, CSB).

3. Stand your ground

Stand on biblical principles, remembering that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). Bullies typically do not like to use facts and scripture to verify or justify disputes or discrepancies they claim are true. It is not about you; this is spiritual warfare against our King, Jesus, whom you represent.

4. Reassure your congregation

Inform your congregation that spiritual bullying, whether in Sabbath School, the church service or during special activities, will not be tolerated. Make members aware that they can report these issues to you or the elders—anonynously if they so desire.

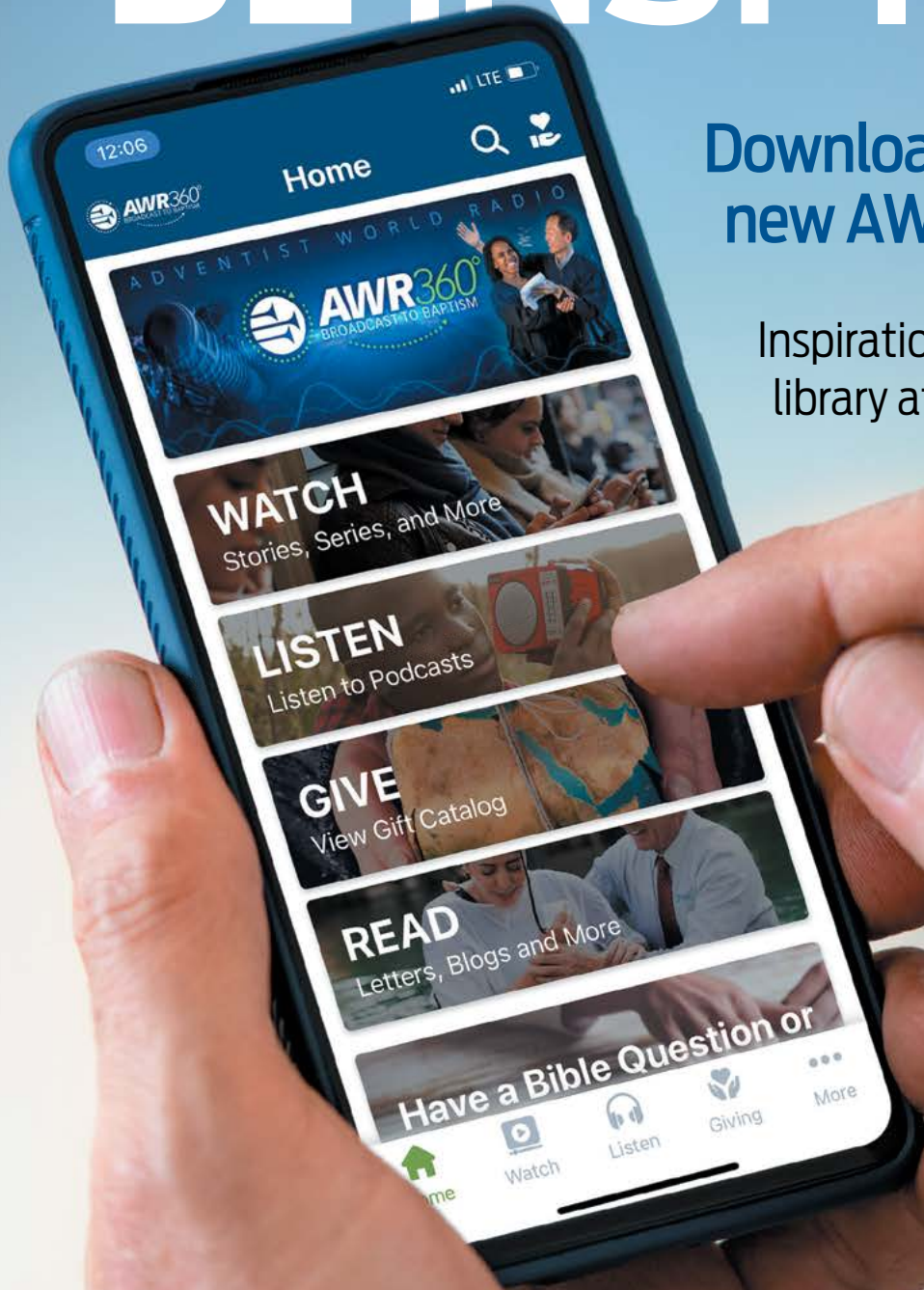
First and last

We can deal with bullies in a firm, fair, and factual way in the church. While everything will not be perfect all of the time in your church, God promises that His Word and mission will shine through if you cut issues off at the root right from the start. Through our Alpha and Omega, God has given us all we need to stand against the bullies of this world. Jesus was the first to blaze the trail for us in the wilderness with Satan, and He will be the last when He comes back again to take us home and banish Satan. Let us faithfully and boldly uplift Christ until that day.



- 1 Rich Kirkpatrick, “How to Deal With Spiritual Bullies at Church,” *ShareFaith Magazine*, September 30, 2015, <https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2015/09/deal-spiritual-bullies-church/>.
- 2 Bill Faris, “Spiritual ‘Bullying’: The Signs and Symptoms of Religious Abuse,” *Gracelets*, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/SPIRITUAL-BULLYING--The-Signs-and-Symptoms-of-Religious-Abuse.html?soid=1108537923764&aid=1vttaqxdAUQ>.
- 3 WebMD Editorial Contributors, “Signs of Spiritual Abuse,” WebMD, December 1, 2020, <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/signs-spiritual-abuse>.

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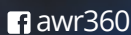
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